

Pas's gammadion and the voided cross

The Urth list — 14 messages, 8 voices, 22 Jan 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4784>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Matthew Groves — 22 Jan 2007, 00:09

This is my first post to the list. Having discovered The Book of the New Sun and developed an almost fanatical devotion to Wolfe, I quickly gobbled up The Urth of the New Sun and then The book of the Long Sun. I read too quickly, paying too little attention to detail, and so I am left with many questions about all these books, with which I won't inundate the list all at once. But until Powell's ships me my Short Sun trilogy, I hope to be able to pick the list's brain on a couple points. First:

The pateras carry the "voided cross" and make the "sign of addition." They also carry a "gammadion" (whose gammas detach to become tools for the sacred windows). Each of these symbols is highly suggestive for the Whorl and its culture in ways that I'm sure have occurred to you. Are "cross" and the "gammadion" supposed to be the same thing, or are they separate symbols?

In my too-fast reading of the series, the impression I got is that the "voided cross" and the "gammadion" were one and the same. But this simply can't be right -- a cross is not a gammadion. (I can make a rather clumsy voided cross out of *two* voided gammas by rotating one 180 degrees and then aligning their stems vertically, but this would not be truly "voided," and it is certainly not what anyone would really call a "gammadion.") If someone can reassure me that there are two separate symbols carried by the pateras, then I'll be most grateful.

Transient — 22 Jan 2007, 02:26 · in reply to Matthew Groves

On Jan 21, 2007, at 7:09 PM, Matthew Groves wrote:

The pateras carry the "voided cross" and make the "sign of addition." They also carry a "gammadion" (whose gammas detach to become tools for the sacred windows). Each of these symbols is highly suggestive for the Whorl and its culture in ways that I'm sure have occurred to you. Are "cross" and the "gammadion" supposed to be the same thing, or are they separate symbols?

In my too-fast reading of the series, the impression I got is that the "voided cross" and the "gammadion" were one and the same. But this simply can't be right -- a cross is not a gammadion. (I can make a rather clumsy voided cross out of *two* voided gammas by rotating one 180 degrees and then aligning their stems vertically, but this would not be truly "voided," and it is certainly not what anyone would really call a "gammadion.") If someone can reassure me that there are two separate symbols carried by the pateras, then I'll be most grateful.

Seems to me that you can make something of a voided cross out of four gammas, if you don't mind the arms of the cross being open at the ends.

Now unfold each gamma, one northward, pivoting around its northernmost point, one eastward, one southward, one westward. You've got something that looks like a manji or a swastika.

That's a gammadion, right? Now suppose it's a little four-in-one pocket tool where each "gamma" is one of the tools, and it folds out if you want to use it.

Give your IT staff these tools wear around their neck, then have them set up as clergy for interacting with the simulacrums of you and your family. Erase their memory of the lives they had before the ship embarked on its voyage and voila.

Matthew Groves — 22 Jan 2007, 02:27 · follows Transient

Well, it turns out the answer was right in front of me if I'd had a little more imagination or more knowledge of heraldic crosses. I just started leafing through the Long Sun novels in search of the first mention of the gammadion. The "voided cross" and the "gammadion" are indeed the same thing, as proved in this passage (on p. 172 in the omnibus edition "Litany of the Long Sun") when Silk is warding Teasel's window from the return of the creature that had preyed upon her in the night. Silk leans out the window to reach outside wall above it, and...

"With the pointed corner of the one of the four gammadions that made up the cross, he scratched the sign of addition on the bricks."

When I first read this, I struggled to imagine a voided cross each of whose four arms was itself a swastika, and I was more confused than ever. But it's much simpler than this, as I learned after a little poking around on the internet:

If you take a Greek cross (whose arms are of equal length) and you void it *all the way through the ends*, then you end up with four gammas in four different orientations. (I wish I could draw this for you, but no doubt you all know this already and are wondering why it ever puzzled me in the first place; but I was imagining an outline drawing of a cross (i.e., with *closed* ends), and so I couldn't pick out any satisfactory gammas.) Apparently, any such symbol, being made up of gammas, may be called a "gammadion," not just those that are pinwheel-like (although I'm guessing it has to be symmetrical).

Matthew Groves — 22 Jan 2007, 02:41 · follows Matthew Groves

transient wrote:

"Seems to me that you can make something of a voided cross out of four gammas, if you don't mind the arms of the cross being open at the ends."

Yeah, this is the conclusion I came to belatedly.

"Now unfold each gamma, one northward, pivoting around its northernmost point, one eastward, one southward, one westward. You've got something that looks like a manji or a swastika."

Ah, *now* I get it! Talk about an epiphany! Thanks bunches!

Chris Mulder — 22 Jan 2007, 04:31 · in reply to Matthew Groves

Well, the more I read, the less of a firm idea I have of what it looks like. I guess the sign of addition is a plus-type cross, but a voided cross? what does it mean to void a cross? Like a null sign through a cross? or like the four 90 degree angles of a maltese cross? A photo would be most illuminating.

Welcome, Groves, I'm a reader and lurker who rarely posts too. Though I have read about 40% of the entire archive, in order.

And it was very informative. Keep after it.

cm

Matthew Groves <matthewalangroves at gmail.com> wrote:

Well, it turns out the answer was right in front of me if I'd had a little more imagination or more knowledge of heraldic crosses. I just started leafing through the Long Sun novels in search of the first mention of the gammadion. The "voided cross" and the "gammadion" are indeed the same thing, as proved in this passage (on p. 172 in the omnibus edition "Litany of the Long Sun") when Silk is warding Teasel's window from the return of the creature that had preyed upon her in the night. Silk leans out the window to reach outside wall above it, and...

"With the pointed corner of the one of the four gammadions that made up the cross, he scratched the sign of addition on the bricks."

When I first read this, I struggled to imagine a voided cross each of whose four arms was itself a swastika, and I was more confused than ever. But it's much simpler than this, as I learned after a little poking around on the internet:

If you take a Greek cross (whose arms are of equal length) and you void it *all the way through the ends*, then you end up with four gammas in four different orientations. (I wish I could draw this for you, but no doubt you all know this already and are wondering why it ever puzzled me in the first place; but I was imagining an outline drawing of a cross (i.e., with *closed* ends), and so I couldn't pick out any satisfactory gammas.) Apparently, any such symbol, being made up of gammas, may be called a "gammadion," not just those that are pinwheel-like (although I'm guessing it has to be symmetrical).

Matthew King — 22 Jan 2007, 05:03 · in reply to Chris Mulder

On Jan 21, 2007, at 9:31 PM, Chris Mulder wrote:

Well, the more I read, the less of a firm idea I have of what it looks like. I guess the sign of addition is a plus-type cross, but a voided cross? what does it mean to void a cross? Like a null sign through a cross? or like the four 90 degree angles of a maltese cross? A photo would be most illuminating.

Some of the interesting posts on this topic in the archive:

Referencing a Wolfe Q&A session:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0528.shtml>

The full Q&A post, since I have trouble finding it when I want it:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0511.shtml>

Older:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0059.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0063.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0005/0312.shtml>

Chris Mulder — 22 Jan 2007, 05:26 · in reply to Matthew King

I guess that's sort of what I pictured - but I smile to think that Wolfe had in mind an arrangement of Allen Wrenches. Though they would be most handy to work on computers.

cm

Matthew King <automatthew at gmail.com> wrote:

On Jan 21, 2007, at 9:31 PM, Chris Mulder wrote:
Well, the more I read, the less of a firm idea I have of what it looks like. I guess the sign of addition is a plus-type cross, but a voided cross? what does it mean to void a cross? Like a null sign through a cross? or like the four 90 degree angles of a maltese cross? A photo would be most illuminating.

Some of the interesting posts on this topic in the archive:

Referencing a Wolfe Q&A session:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0528.shtml>

The full Q&A post, since I have trouble finding it when I want it:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0511.shtml>

Older:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0059.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0063.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0005/0312.shtml>

Chris Mulder — 22 Jan 2007, 05:27 · in reply to Chris Mulder

Oops. Here's a link I forgot.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allen_wrench

cm

Chris Mulder <chris_mulder at sbcglobal.net> wrote:

I guess that's sort of what I pictured - but I smile to think that Wolfe had in mind an arrangement of Allen Wrenches. Though they would be most handy to work on computers.

cm

Matthew King <automatthew at gmail.com> wrote:

On Jan 21, 2007, at 9:31 PM, Chris Mulder wrote:
Well, the more I read, the less of a firm idea I have of what it looks like. I guess the sign of addition is a plus-type cross, but a voided cross? what does it mean to void a cross? Like a null sign through a cross? or like the four 90 degree angles of a maltese cross? A photo would be most illuminating.

Some of the interesting posts on this topic in the archive:

Referencing a Wolfe Q&A session:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0528.shtml>

The full Q&A post, since I have trouble finding it when I want it:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0511.shtml>

Older:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0059.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0063.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0005/0312.shtml>

aramini1 at cox.net — 22 Jan 2007, 07:30 · follows Chris Mulder

I do agree with the old idea that the voided cross has been voided by taking away the crucifixion imagery and the body of christ from it and assimilating it into Typhon's family totem, representationally. However, the gammadions could very well bisect a point that would resemble a slash through the cross. Uggh.

Marc Aramini

---- Matthew King <automatthew at gmail.com> wrote:

On Jan 21, 2007, at 9:31 PM, Chris Mulder wrote:

Well, the more I read, the less of a firm idea I have of what it looks like. I guess the sign of addition is a plus-type cross, but a voided cross? what does it mean to void a cross? Like a null sign through a cross? or like the four 90 degree angles of a maltese cross? A photo would be most illuminating.

Some of the interesting posts on this topic in the archive:

Referencing a Wolfe Q&A session:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0528.shtml>

The full Q&A post, since I have trouble finding it when I want it:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0007/0511.shtml>

Older:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0059.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0002/0063.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0005/0312.shtml>

brunians at brunians.org — 22 Jan 2007, 09:16 · in reply to aramini1 at cox.net

Enough.

<http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&q=gammadion&btnG=Search+Images>

.

brunians at brunians.org — 22 Jan 2007, 09:19 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Enough.

<http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&q=gammadion&btnG=Search+Images>

I should add: top row, second from the left.

.

Matthew King — 22 Jan 2007, 16:23 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Jan 22, 2007, at 2:19 AM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Enough.

<http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&q=gammadion&btnG=Search+Images>

I should add: top row, second from the left.

That does seem to be what Wolfe described in the Q&A. If a gamma can be considered to have _a_ point, then I take that to be the right angle.

Matthew

Jon Capps — 22 Jan 2007, 21:45 · in reply to aramini1 at cox.net

aramini1 at cox.net wrote:

However, the gammadions could very well bisect a point that would resemble a slash through the cross. Uggh.

I seriously doubt Wolfe intended the voided cross to be interpreted as one with a slash through it. See:

<http://www.seiyaku.com/customs/crosses/voided.html>

which says: [The Voided Cross] is simply a heraldic term for when only the edge of the cross is traced. It can be any shape or form of cross.

So, a voided cross is just the outline of a cross, which can be approximated quite closely with four gammas.

jon

James Wynn — 27 Feb 2007, 16:07 · follows Jon Capps

I'm coming to this late but I'm fairly certain this is the cross Wolfe described in his Q&A:

http://www.urth.org/whorlmap/voided_cross.htm