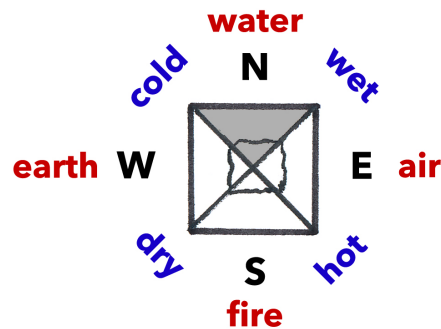




avantgarde

## The pyramids and the four elements ?

I had the idea to relate dry/wet and hot/cold to the heating and drying daily course of the sun around one of the pyramids at Giza, just like in the original image for yin-yang in China as the shady and sunny sides of a hill [1]. Eureka!



This would fit well with the fascination of the ancient Greeks with ancient Egypt, from the first philosopher Thales who reportedly measured the height of the pyramids in Giza by comparing the length of their shadows with his own shadow, via the tetractys of the Pythagoreans up to Aristotle's description of the four elements in terms of tangible properties dry/wet and hot/cold. That was already the essential; see the following page for details.

[1] Richard Wilhelm in the introduction of *I Ching or Book of Changes*.



## Sources and considerations

Richard Wilhelm [1]: “In its primary meaning yin is ‘the cloudy’, ‘the overcast’ and yang means actually ‘banners waving in the sun’<sup>15</sup>, that is, something ‘shone upon’, or bright. By transference the two concepts were applied to the light and dark sides of a mountain or of a river. In the case of a mountain the southern is the bright side and the northern the dark side, while in the case of a river seen from above, it is the northern side that is bright (yang), because it reflects the light, and the southern side that is in shadow (yin). [...] 15. Cf. the noteworthy discussions of Liang Ch’i-ch’ao in the Chinese journal *The Endeavor*, July 15 and 22, 1923, also the English Essay by B. Schindler, ‘The Development of the Chinese Conceptions of Supreme Beings’, *Asia Major*, Hirth Anniversary Volume (London: Probsthain, n.d.), pp. 298-366.”

The attribution of elements to points of the compass would also mirror later attributions of seasons (winter-north-Water, etc.) to elements. Would flipping dry-warm and cold-humid at the corners also make sense? Or assigning elements to corners instead of edges or faces? However, the today usual symbols for the elements are triangles, just like the faces of a pyramid. It would even be so that the faces that always or (at least in winter) never see the sun during the day would have a triangle without intersection (Fire  $\triangle$ , Water  $\nabla$ ), and the faces that would only see the sun during part of the day would have an intersected triangle (Air  $\triangle$ , Earth  $\nabla$ ).

Could it maybe even be so that Aristotle in *On Generation and Corruption* would not have been able to argue as freely as he may have wanted, since he was either restraining himself in face of contemporary conventions in society, or could he have been bound by something like a secret pythagorean oath? C. G. Jung in his book *Psychological Types* of 1921 (in the original German) refers implicitly also to older traditions which attribute the four temperaments to the classical elements (Fire-choleric, Air-sanguine, Water-phlegmatic, Earth-melancholic), but, as far as I could see, does not mention this with any word, even though he considers earlier works over several hundred pages.

Pity that knowledge that had been kept secret can exactly for that reason hardly be distinguished from pure fiction: In both cases, at much later times usually no artefacts remain from the time something was supposedly already known. The only other thing to do would be to argue indirectly via symbolism, but also that is difficult with regard to the elements, since in that case, because all is so “elementary”, there are not all that many essentially natural ways of how to attribute things to each other. And, yet, even today pyramids are such impressive buildings that one keeps wondering: Why exactly pyramids?

How pyramids evolved from single “floor” mastabas via stepped pyramids to their final form is well researched. Especially how Sneferu had the first three pyramids without steps built and the first two attempts failed, does not suggest that a lot of symbolism was in the minds of ancient Egyptians at the time.