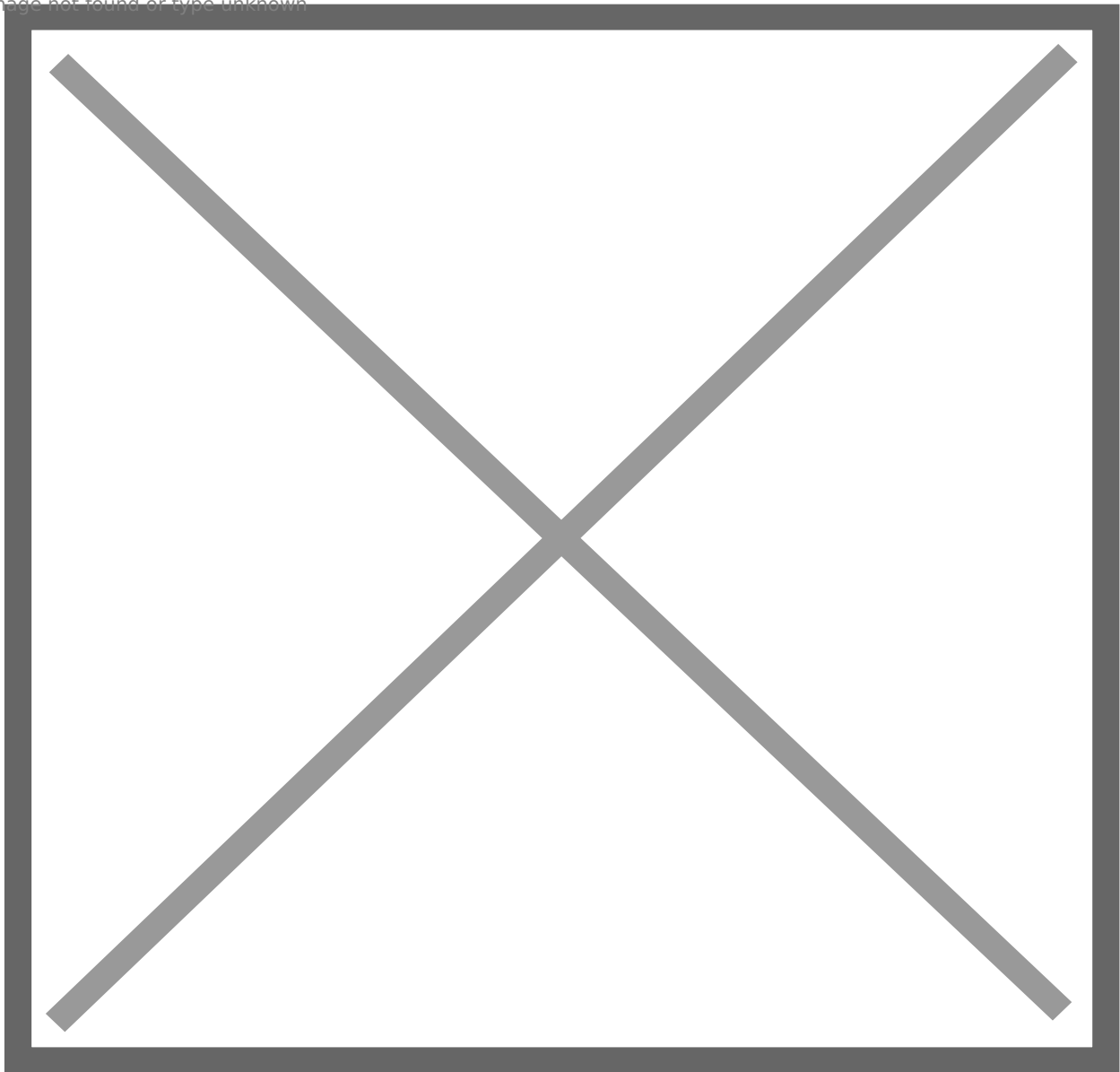


Roman Dodecahedrons

Post by "Cassius" of January 29, 2024 at 10:54 AM

This article that came across in my feed today reminded me of a subject that has interested me for years - the "mysterious" Roman dodecahedrons. I doubt they relate directly to Epicurean issues, but when something from the Roman period seems unexplainable I always wonder if there's not something interesting and significant that needs to be integrated into our thinking about the period. It's tempting to suggest that these have some kind of Pythagorean or Platonic aspect, but I've never seen any firm argument in that direction. I thought I would post this just to see if anyone else had run into any interesting explanations for these that might be relevant to us.

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[Roman Dodecahedrons: A Mystifying Archaeological Find](#)

Much about archaeology can be described as trying to figure out the context in which objects and constructions should be interpreted. A good example of this...

hackaday.com

Post by “Bryan” of January 29, 2024 at 9:01 PM

I like the idea that they were used for knitting... or for candles. You may have seen them on ebay, for about \$50.

Post by “kochiekoch” of January 30, 2024 at 11:41 AM

I remember a Cosmos episode from years ago where Carl Sagan talked about the duodecahedrons as being part of the "Platonic Solids".

Only five are possible. These he evidently saw as representing the elements of "earth, water, fire and air" and a fifth solid conforming to the material of the heavenly realm.

[Platonic solid - Wikipedia](#)

>>The Platonic solids are prominent in the philosophy of [Plato](#), their namesake. Plato wrote about them in the dialogue [Timaeus](#) c. 360 B.C. in which he associated each of the four [classical elements](#) ([earth](#), [air](#), [water](#), and [fire](#)) with a regular solid. Earth was associated with the cube, air with the octahedron, water with the icosahedron, and fire with the tetrahedron.

Of the fifth Platonic solid, the dodecahedron, Plato obscurely remarked, "...the god used [it] for arranging the constellations on the whole heaven". [Aristotle](#) added a fifth element, [aither](#) (aether in Latin, "ether" in English) and postulated that the heavens were made of this element, but he had no interest in matching it with Plato's fifth solid.^[4]<<

If you can tap into the power of the heavens, you have a heck of a lucky charm! 😊

Post by “Bryan” of February 1, 2025 at 12:04 PM

[Quote from kochiekoch](#)

If you can tap into the power of the heavens

Yes, I want to rescind my dismissiveness. If these were any other shape, it would be very tempting to think they just had a practical use. But given that the dodecahedron was an important part of the key to transcending metempsychosis, and as such was almost an object of worship in the early Academy (as Kochiekoch said), it does indeed suggest these objects were not for (some unknown) practical use.

The fact that there were also icosahedral versions seems to solidify the Platonic connection.

Post by “kochiekoch” of February 3, 2025 at 4:03 PM

Just a thought, if the dodecahedrons really did have some sort of practical use, wouldn't we have seen artworks of everyday life with them in use?

Beautiful collection of Platonic solids there. 👍

Post by “Bryan” of February 5, 2025 at 12:31 PM

It seems the tradition of keeping dodecahedrons for intellectual stimulation rather than practical use continued on, as seen in this antique "zodiac paperweight."

Post by “Cassius” of February 5, 2025 at 12:56 PM

In the same line as you're thinking, Bryan, if I were a Pythagorean or a Platonist I doubt I could think of a better paperweight for us when reading rolled-up scrolls than a couple of those brass duodecahedrons.

Post by “Don” of February 5, 2025 at 1:50 PM

Ancient fidget spinners?