

The Evidence of Earth's Lost Civilization

FINGER
PRINTS
OF THE
GDS



BY THE AUTHOR OF *THE SIGN AND THE SEAL*

GRAHAM
HANCOCK

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

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1

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Fingerprints

of the Gods

Graham Hancock

Photographs by Santha Faiia

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2

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3

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For Santha ... for being there.

With all my love.

4

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Contents

Contents

.....5

Acknowledgements.....10

Part I
.....12

Chapter 1
.....13

Ancient sources
.....14

A man ahead of his time
.....19

Piri Reis and his
sources.....21

Legacy of a lost civilization?
.....21

Chapter 2
.....23

Ross Sea
.....24

Mercator and
Buache.....25

The epoch of the map-makers
.....27

South
America.....31

Sea levels and ice ages32

Chapter 3
.....
...35

The mysteries of
longitude.....35

Precision
instruments.....
38

The lost mathematicians
.....39

Part II
.....
.....42

Chapter 4
.....
...43

The riddle of the lines
.....43

Linemakers, map-makers
.....48

Chapter 5
.....
...50

'Foam of the Sea'
.....50

Citadel of Viracocha51

The bearded stranger.....52

Chapter 6
.....54

Civilizing mission.....56

The work of demons?57

Chapter 7
.....60

Casting down the giants.....60

Ancient traditions62

Time capsule.....63

Machu Picchu dreaming64

Jigsaw puzzle.....66

Chapter 8

.....
...68

Rumours of a cataclysm
.....69

Chapter 9

.....
...73

Boats, water and
salvation.....73

Reed boats of Suriqui
.....75

Road to Tiahuanaco ...
.....76

Chapter 10

.....
.77

Sunken temple
.....78

Pyramid

.....
..79

Gateway of the Sun
.....81

Chapter 11

.....
.83

Fish-garbed figures	85
.....	
Images of extinct species	87
.....	
Chapter 12	
.....	
.92	
5	
Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS	
Struggle and abandonment	94
.....	
An artificial language	97
.....	
Mexico.....	
.....97	
Part	
III.....	
.....99	
Chapter 13	
.....	
100	
Slaughterhouses	101
.....	
Children of the Fifth Sun	103
.....	

Lightbringer.....105

Chapter 14
.....
107

Viracocha’s Mexican twin
.....107

Cosmic struggle
.....110

Fire serpents
.....111

Serpent Sanctuary
.....112

Chapter 15
.....1
14

Tears for the
past.....115

Gigantic men of deformed stature
.....117

Remnants.....
.....118

Pyramids upon pyramids
.....120

Chapter 16
.....

122

Santiago

Tuxtla.....1

24

Tres Zapotes

.....124

Chapter 17

.....

127

San Lorenzo

.....127

La

Venta.....

.....128

Deus ex

machina.....

133

Whispers of ancient secrets

.....134

Chapter 18

.....

136

Hypothetical third party

.....138

Villahermosa to

Oaxaca.....141

Chapter 19

.....
143

Monte Alban: the downfall of masterful men
.....148

Legacy

.....
..149

Chapter 20

.....
151

Pacal's tomb
.....152

Pyramid of the Magician
.....154

A science of prophecy
.....157

Chapter 21

.....
158

Knowledge out of
place.....160

Someone else's
science?.....161

Chapter 22

.....
165

The Citadel, the Temple and the Map of Heaven
.....166

Egypt and Mexico—more
coincidences?.....168

Hints of forgotten
wisdom.....171

Chapter 23
.....
174

Erasing messages from the past
.....175

Eternal
numbers.....
..176

Mathematical city
.....180

Part IV
.....
.....183

Chapter 24
.....
184

And the ark went upon the face of the
waters.....184

Central America
.....187

South
America.....
....188

North
America.....
....190

Water water everywhere
.....190

Greece, India and
Egypt.....192

6

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

On the trail of a
mystery.....194

Chapter 25
.....
197

Indescribable cold, fire, earthquakes and derangement of the skies
.....199

A monster chased the
sun.....201

Chapter 26
.....
203

Cinderella's slipper
.....205

Chapter 27

.....
207

Alaska and Siberia: the sudden freeze

.....208

A thousand Krakatoas, all at once

.....211

Global flooding

.....212

A token of good faith

.....217

Part V

.....
.....219

Chapter 28

.....
222

The wild celestial dance

.....222

Recondite influences

.....224

The wobble of a deformed planet

.....226

A great secret of the past

.....230

Chapter 29

.....
232

When did the ancients first work out
precession?.....235

Chapter 30

.....
240

At the mill with slaves
.....242

Openers of the way
.....246

Chapter 31

.....
250

Computing the Great Return
.....251

Better than
Hipparchus.....25
2

Times of
decay.....
253

Dogs, uncles and revenge
.....258

Scientists with something to
say.....260

Chapter 32

.....
262

A message in the bottle of
time.....263

Mill of
pain.....
..264

Part VI
.....
.....267

Chapter 33
.....
268

Inexplicable precision
.....269

Black hole in
history.....271

Ships in the desert
.....272

Chapter 34
.....
274

Time and
motion.....2
74

Rampant
stupidity.....2
76

The guardian and the vision
.....278

Under Egyptian
skies.....279

Thinking like giants
.....281

Chapter 35
.....
283

Trivializing the
mystery.....284

The cupboard was bare
.....286

Bottlenecks in the well-
shaft.....290

Not like other tombs
.....291

A certain smell ...
.....292

Overview.....
.....295

Chapter 36
.....

297

A singular oppression ...
.....297

The moving finger writes and having writ it moves on
.....300

Pandora's Box
.....303

Chapter 37
.....
305

The Beacon
.....30
5

7

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Mind games of the pyramid builders
.....307

Unknown dark
distance.....309

The Queen's
Chamber.....312

Instrument
.....31
3

Chapter 38
.....

316

Antechamber
.....317

Stone enigmas
.....319

Ceremony of the sarcophagus
.....322

The game-master
.....324

Chapter 39
.....
328

Temple of the giants
.....329

Lord of Rostau
.....332

Vastly, remotely, fabulously ancient
.....333

Whose Sphinx is it anyway?
.....335

Part VII
.....
.....339

Chapter 40
.....
340

Bauval's Stars and West's Stones	341
.....	
The way of the jackal	345
.....	
Chapter 41	
.....	
347	
Connections and similarities	349
.....	
Gift of the Gods?	350
.....	
Chapter 42	
.....	
354	
Broken images of a lost technology?	355
.....	
Repositories of a lost science?	356
.....	
The train of the Sun and the dweller in Sirius	359
.....	
Millions of years and the movements of the stars	361
.....	
Copies, or translations?	3
63	

Last records of the First Time?.....364

Chapter 43

.....
367

Records of prehistory367

Gods, Demigods and Spirits of the Dead369

Diodorus Siculus and Herodotus.....370

The Turin Papyrus and the Palermo Stone.....372

Chapter 44

.....
375

Breath of the divine serpent376

Osiris and the Lords of Eternity378

Serene stability381

Chapter 45

.....
383

Atef Crown.....	383
Seventeen centuries of kings	385
Hypogeum	38
5	
The most ancient stone building in Egypt	387
Frankfort's facts.....	39
1	
Setting sail across seas of sand and time.....	393
Chapter 46	397
Kick-start	3
98	
Climate Change.....	399
Unseen connections?.....	400
..	

'Where is the rest of this civilization?'400

Chapter 47

.....
402

John West.....
.....402

Robert Schoch's geology: Unriddling the Sphinx.....404

Legendary civilizations407

Magellan and the first dinosaur bone408

The problem of transmission.....410

8

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Second opinion411

Chapter 48

.....
413

Geodetic marker414

Doing things by degrees	416
The Pyramid/Earth ratio	417
Matching fingerprints?	419
Navigators in the Boat of Millions of Years	420
The signature of a distant date	423
Chapter 49	
425	
The Orion Mystery	4
26	
The First Time	4
28	
The platform	
.....430	
The cult	
431	
The machine	
.....434	

The second signature.....	436
Forcing the question.....	440
Part VIII.....	441
Chapter 50.....	442
Geophysical impossibilities.....	442
Library angels.....	444
The missing piece of the puzzle.....	444
Gravitational influences.....	447
The lost continent.....	448
Chapter 51.....	450
A lifeless polar desert.....	452

Exhibit 1

.....
453

Exhibit 2

.....
454

Exhibit 3

.....
455

Exhibit 4

.....
455

Exhibit 5

.....
455

Exhibit 6

.....
455

Exhibit 7

.....
455

Exhibit 8

.....
456

Exhibit 9

.....
456

Exhibit 104
57

The icy executioner.....
.458

Mars and earth.....4
60

Memories of the polar dawn?.....461

An epoch of turmoil and darkness.....462

Exhibit 114
63

Exhibit 124
63

Exhibit 134
64

Exhibit 144
64

Chapter 52
466

For the benefit of future generations of mankind	468
More than just Kilroy was here	470
The civilizers.....	472
Transmitting the essence	473
An urgent mission.....	475
Walking in the last days.....	479
The end of the world.....	480
At the millstone grinding	482
Selected Bibliography.....	483

9

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

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of my previous book, *The Sign and the Seal*. Like a guardian angel he

volunteered to devote a hefty chunk of his spare time to helping me out

in the US with research, contacts and the collection of documentary resources of relevance to *Fingerprints of the Gods*. He did a brilliant job,

always sending me the right books just when I needed them and finding

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to Arizona, to the Hopi Nation, it was Ed who came with us and who opened the way.

Ed's initial letter was part of an overwhelming deluge of mail that I received from around the world after writing *The Sign and the Seal*. For a

while I tried to answer all the letters individually. Eventually, however, I

got swamped with the new work on *Fingerprints* and had to stop replying. I feel bad about this, and would like to take this opportunity to

thank everybody who wrote to me and to whom I did not write back. I'm

intending to be more systematic in the future because I enormously value

this correspondence and appreciate the high-quality information that it

frequently turns out to contain ...

Other researchers who have helped me on *Fingerprints of the Gods* have

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10

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

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11

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Part I

Introduction

The Mystery of the Maps

12

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Chapter 1

A Map of Hidden Places

8 RECONNAISSANCE TECHNICAL SQUADRON (SAC)

UNITED STATES AIRFORCE

Westover Airforce Base

Massachusetts

6 July 1960

SUBJECT: Admiral Piri Reis World Map

To: Professor Charles H. Hapgood,

Keene College,

Keene, New Hampshire.

Dear Professor Hapgood,

Your request for evaluation of certain unusual features of the Piri Reis World Map of

1513 by this organization has been reviewed.

The claim that the lower part of the map portrays the Princess Martha Coast of Queen

Maud Land Antarctica, and the Palmer Peninsula, is reasonable. We find this is the most

logical and in all probability the correct interpretation of the map.

The geographical detail shown in the lower part of the map agrees very remarkably

with the results of the seismic profile made across the top of the ice-cap by the Swedish-

British Antarctic Expedition of 1949.

This indicates *the coastline had been mapped before it was covered by the ice-cap.*

The ice-cap in this region is now about a mile thick.

We have no idea how the data on this map can be reconciled with the supposed state

of geographical knowledge in 1513.

HAROLD Z. OHLMEYER

Lt Colonel, USAF

Commander

Despite the deadpan language, Ohlmeyer's letter¹ is a bombshell. If

Queen Maud Land was mapped before it was covered by ice, the original

cartography must have been done an extraordinarily long time ago.

How long ago exactly?

Conventional wisdom has it that the Antarctic ice-cap, in its present extent and form, is millions of years old. On closer examination, this

notion turns out to be seriously flawed—so seriously that we need not

assume the map drawn by Admiral Piri Reis depicts Queen Maud Land as

1 Letter reproduced in Charles H. Hapgood FRGS, *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*, Chilton

Books, Philadelphia and New York, 1966, p. 243.

13

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it looked millions of years in the past. The best recent evidence suggests

that Queen Maud Land, and the neighbouring regions shown on the map,

passed through a long ice-free period which may not have come

completely to an end until about six thousand years ago.² This evidence,

which we shall touch upon again in the next chapter, liberates us from

the burdensome task of explaining who (or what) had the technology to

undertake an accurate geographical survey of Antarctica in, say, two

million BC, long before our own species came into existence. By the same

token, since map-making is a complex and *civilized* activity, it compels us

to explain how such a task could have been accomplished even six thousand years ago, well before the development of the first true civilizations recognized by historians.

Ancient sources

In attempting that explanation it is worth reminding ourselves of the basic historical and geological facts:

1 The Piri Reis Map, which is a genuine document, not a hoax of any kind, was made at Constantinople in AD 1513.³

2 It focuses on the western coast of Africa, the eastern coast of South

America and the northern coast of Antarctica.

3 Piri Reis could not have acquired his information on this latter region

from contemporary explorers because Antarctica remained

undiscovered until AD 1818,⁴ more than 300 years after he drew the map.

4 The ice-free coast of Queen Maud Land shown in the map is a colossal

puzzle because the geological evidence confirms that the latest date it

could have been surveyed and charted in an ice-free condition is 4000

BC.5

5 It is not possible to pinpoint the *earliest* date that such a task could have been accomplished, but it seems that the Queen Maud Land littoral may have remained in a stable, unglaciated condition for at least 9000 years before the spreading ice-cap swallowed it entirely.6

2 Ibid., pp. 93-98, 235. The period lasted from about 13000 BC to 4000 BC according, for

example, to the findings of Dr Jack Hough of Illinois University, supported by experts at

the Carnegie Institution, Washington DC. John G. Weiphaupt, a University of Colorado

specialist in seismology and gravity and planetary geology, is another who supports the

view of a relatively late ice-free period in at least parts of Antarctica. Together with a

number of other geologists, he places that period in a narrower band than Hough et

al.—from 7000 BC to 4000 BC.

3 Ibid., preface, pp. 1, 209-211.

4 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, I:440.

5 *Maps of The Ancient Sea Kings*, p. 235.

6 Ibid.

14

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6 There is no civilization known to history that had the capacity or need

to survey that coastline in the relevant period: between 13,000 BC and

4000 BC.⁷

In other words, the true enigma of this 1513 map is not so much its inclusion of a continent not discovered until 1818 but its portrayal of part

of the coastline of that continent under ice-free conditions which came to

an end 6000 years ago and have not since recurred.

How can this be explained? Piri Reis obligingly gives us the answer in a

series of notes written in his own hand on the map itself. He tells us that

he was not responsible for the original surveying and cartography. On the

contrary, he admits that his role was merely that of compiler and copyist

and that the map was derived from a large number of source maps.⁸

Some of these had been drawn by contemporary or near-contemporary

explorers (including Christopher Columbus), who had by then reached

South America and the Caribbean, but others were documents dating

back to the fourth century BC or earlier.⁹

Piri Reis did not venture any suggestion as to the identity of the cartographers who had produced the earlier maps. In 1963, however,

Professor Hapgood proposed a novel and thought-provoking solution to

the problem. He argued that some of the source maps the admiral had

made use of, in particular those said to date back to the fourth century

BC, had themselves been based on even *older* sources, which in turn had

been based on sources originating in the furthest antiquity. There was, he

asserted, irrefutable evidence that the earth had been comprehensively

mapped before 4000 BC by a hitherto unknown and undiscovered civilization which had achieved a high level of technological

advancement:10

It appears [he concluded] that accurate information has been passed down from

people to people. It appears that the charts must have originated with a people

unknown and they were passed on, perhaps by the Minoans and the Phoenicians,

who were, for a thousand years and more, the greatest sailors of the ancient

world. We have evidence that they were collected and studied in the great library

of Alexandria [Egypt] and that compilations of them were made by the

geographers who worked there.¹¹

7 Historians recognize no 'civilizations' as such prior to 4000 BC.

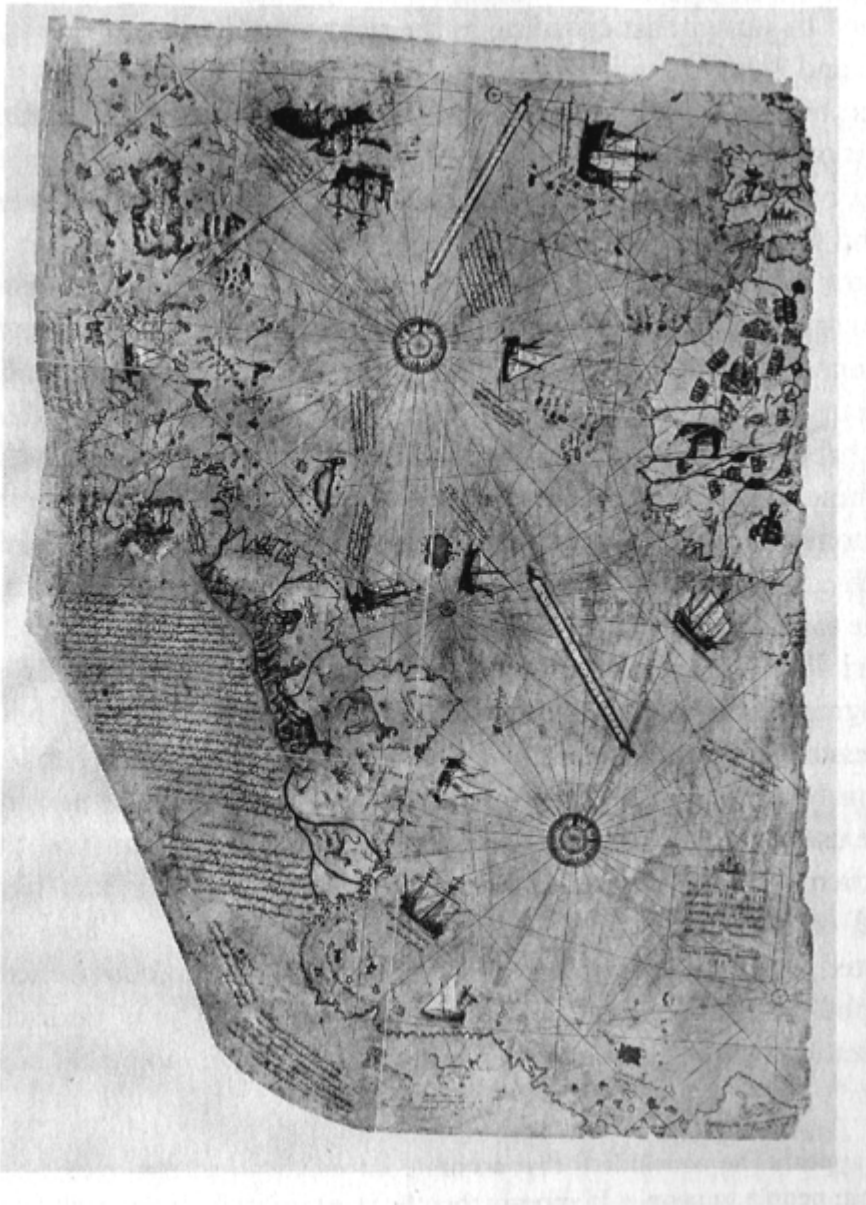
8 *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*, pp. 220-4.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 193

11 *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings* (revised edition), Turnstone Books, London, 1979,

preface.



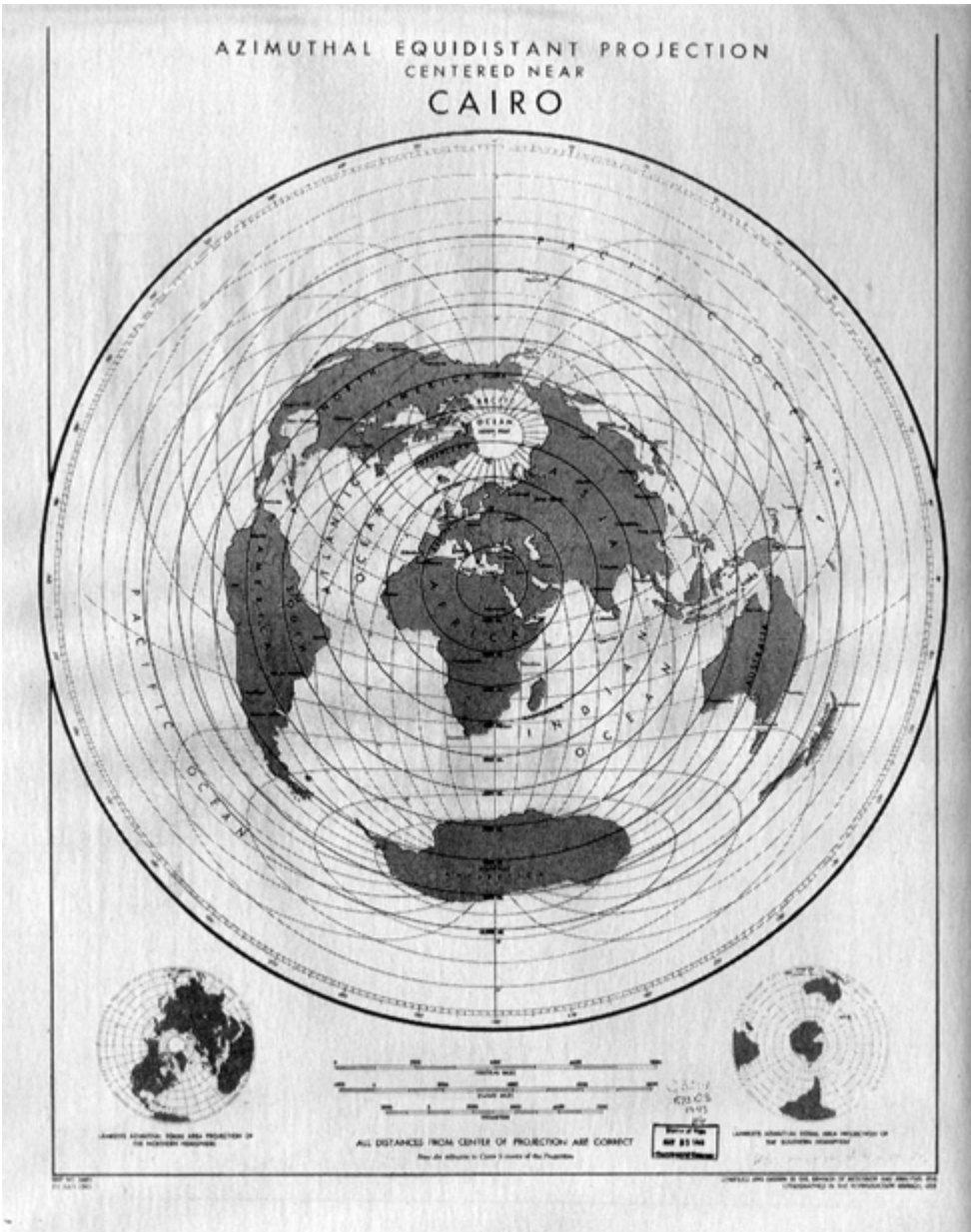
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Piri Reis map (original)



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Redrawing to show detail



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The US Airforce map shows the probable projection that governed the layout of the ancient Piri Reis map.

From Alexandria, according to Hapgood's reconstruction, copies of these

compilations and of some of the original source maps were transferred to

other centres of learning—notably Constantinople. Finally, when

Constantinople was seized by the Venetians during the Fourth Crusade in

1204, the maps began to find their way into the hands of European sailors and adventurers:

Most of these maps were of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. But maps of

other areas survived. These included maps of the Americas and maps of the Arctic

and Antarctic Oceans. It becomes clear that the ancient voyagers travelled from

pole to pole. Unbelievable as it may appear, the evidence nevertheless indicates

that some ancient people explored Antarctica when its coasts were free of ice. It is

clear, too, that they had an instrument of navigation for accurately determining

longitudes that was far superior to anything possessed by the peoples of ancient,

medieval or modern times until the second half of the eighteenth century.

This evidence of a lost technology will support and give credence to many of the

other hypotheses that have been brought forward of a lost civilization in remote

times. Scholars have been able to dismiss most of that evidence as mere myth, but

here we have evidence that cannot be dismissed. The evidence requires that all the

18

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other evidence that has been brought forward in the past should be re-examined

with an open mind.¹²

Despite a ringing endorsement from Albert Einstein (see below), and despite the later admission of John Wright, president of the American

Geographical Society, that Hapgood had ‘posed hypotheses that cry aloud

for further testing’, no further scientific research has ever been

undertaken into these anomalous early maps. Moreover, far from being

applauded for making a serious new contribution to the debate about the

antiquity of human civilization, Hapgood until his death was cold-

shouldered by the majority of his professional peers, who couched their

discussion of his work in what has accurately been described as
'thick

and unwarranted sarcasm, selecting trivia and factors not subject to
verification as the bases for condemnation, seeking in this way to
avoid

the basic issues'.¹³

A man ahead of his time

The late Charles Hapgood taught the history of science at Keene
College,

New Hampshire, USA. He wasn't a geologist, or an ancient historian.
It is

possible, however, that future generations will remember him as the
man

whose work undermined the foundations of world history—and a
large

chunk of world geology as well.

Albert Einstein was among the first to realize this when he took the
unprecedented step of contributing the foreword to a book Hapgood
wrote in 1953, some years before he began his investigation of the
Piri

Reis Map:

I frequently receive communications from people who wish to consult
me

concerning their unpublished ideas [Einstein observed]. It goes without saying that

these ideas are very seldom possessed of scientific validity. The very first

communication, however, that I received from Mr. Hapgood electrified me. His

idea is original, of great simplicity, and—if it continues to prove itself—of great

importance to everything that is related to the history of the earth's surface.¹⁴

The 'idea' expressed in Hapgood's 1953 book is a global geological

theory which elegantly explains how and why large parts of Antarctica

could have remained ice-free until 4000 BC, together with many other

anomalies of earth science. In brief the argument is:

1 Antarctica was not always covered with ice and was at one time much

warmer than it is today.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., foreword. See also F. N. Earll, foreword to C. H. Hapgood, *Path of the Pole*,

Chilton Books, New York, 1970, p. viii.

14 From Einstein's foreword (written in 1953) to Charles H. Hapgood, *Earth's Shifting*

Crust: A Key to Some Basic Problems of Earth Science, Pantheon Books, New York, 1958,

pp. 1-2.

19

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

2 It was warm because it was not physically located at the South Pole in

that period. Instead it was approximately 2000 miles farther north.

This 'would have put it outside the Antarctic Circle in a temperate or cold temperate climate'.¹⁵

3 The continent moved to its present position inside the Antarctic Circle

as a result of a mechanism known as 'earth-crust displacement'. This

mechanism, in no sense to be confused with plate-tectonics or 'continental drift', is one whereby the lithosphere, the whole outer crust of the earth, 'may be displaced at times, moving over the soft inner body, much as the skin of an orange, if it were loose, might shift

over the inner part of the orange all in one piece'.¹⁶

4 During the envisaged southwards movement of Antarctica brought about by earth-crust displacement, the continent would gradually have grown colder, an ice-cap forming and remorselessly expanding over several thousands of years until it attained its present dimensions.'¹⁷

Further details of the evidence supporting these radical proposals are

set out in Part VIII of this book. Orthodox geologists, however, remain

reluctant to accept Hapgood's theory (although none has succeeded in

proving it incorrect). It raises many questions.

Of these by far the most important is: what conceivable mechanism

would be able to exert sufficient thrust on the lithosphere to precipitate a

phenomenon of such magnitude as a crustal displacement?

We have no better guide than Einstein to summarize Hapgood's findings:

In a polar region there is continual deposition of ice, which is not symmetrically

distributed about the pole. The earth's rotation acts on these unsymmetrically

deposited masses, and produces centrifugal momentum that is transmitted to the

rigid crust of the earth. The constantly increasing centrifugal momentum

produced in this way will, when it has reached a certain point, produce a

movement of the earth's crust over the rest of the earth's body ..."18

The Piri Reis Map seems to contain surprising collateral evidence in

support of the thesis of a geologically recent glaciation of parts of

Antarctica following a sudden southward displacement of the earth's

crust. Moreover since such a map could only have been drawn *prior* to

4000 BC, its implications for the history of human civilization are

staggering. Prior to 4000 BC there are supposed to have been no

civilizations at all.

At some risk of over-simplification, the academic consensus is broadly:

- Civilization first developed in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East.

15 *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*, 1966 ed., p. 189.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

18 Einstein's foreword to *Earth's Shifting Crust*, p. 1

20

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- This development began after 4000 BC, and culminated in the emergence of the earliest true civilizations (Sumer and Egypt) around

3000 BC, soon followed by the Indus Valley and China.

- About 1500 years later, civilization took off spontaneously and independently in the Americas.

- Since 3000 BC in the Old World (and about 1500 BC in the New) civilization has steadily 'evolved' in the direction of ever more refined, complex and productive forms.

- In consequence, and particularly by comparison with ourselves, all ancient civilizations (and all their works) are to be understood as essentially primitive (the Sumerian astronomers regarded the heavens with unscientific awe, and even the pyramids of Egypt were built by 'technological primitives').

The evidence of the Piri Reis Map appears to contradict all this.

Piri Reis and his sources

In his day, Piri Reis was a well-known figure; his historical identity is firmly established. An admiral in the navy of the Ottoman Turks, he was

involved, often on the winning side, in numerous sea battles around the

mid-sixteenth century. He was, in addition, considered an expert on the

lands of the Mediterranean, and was the author of a famous sailing book,

the *Kitabi Bahriye*, which provided a comprehensive description of the

coasts, harbours, currents, shallows, landing places, bays and straits of

the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. Despite this illustrious career he fell

foul of his masters and was beheaded in AD 1554 or 1555.¹⁹

The source maps Piri Reis used to draw up his 1513 map were in all probability lodged originally in the Imperial Library at Constantinople, to

which the admiral is known to have enjoyed privileged access. Those

sources (which may have been transferred or copied from even more

ancient centres of learning) no longer exist, or, at any rate, have not been

found. It was, however, in the library of the old Imperial Palace at Constantinople that the Piri Reis Map was rediscovered, painted on a

gazelle skin and rolled up on a dusty shelf, as recently as 1929.²⁰

Legacy of a lost civilization?

As the baffled Ohlmeyer admitted in his letter to Hapgood in 1960, the

Piri Reis Map depicts the *subglacial topography*, the true profile of Queen

Maud Land Antarctica *beneath* the ice. This profile remained completely

19 *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*, pp. 209-11.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

21

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hidden from view from 4000 BC (when the advancing ice sheet covered it)

until it was revealed again as a result of the comprehensive seismic

survey of Queen Maud Land carried out during 1949 by a joint British-

Swedish scientific reconnaissance team.²¹

If Piri Reis had been the only cartographer with access to such

anomalous information, it would be wrong to place any great weight on

his map. At the most one might say, 'Perhaps it is significant but, then

again, perhaps it is just a coincidence.' However, the Turkish admiral was

by no means alone in the possession of seemingly impossible and inexplicable geographical knowledge. It would be futile to speculate

further than Hapgood has already done as to what 'underground stream'

could have carried and preserved such knowledge through the ages, transmitting fragments of it from culture to culture and from epoch to epoch. Whatever the mechanism, the fact is that a number of other cartographers seem to have been privy to the same curious secrets.

Is it possible that all these map-makers could have partaken, perhaps

unknowingly, in the bountiful scientific legacy of a vanished civilization?

21 Ibid., pp. 76-7 and 231-2.

22

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Chapter 2

Rivers in the Southern Continent

In the Christmas recess of 1959-60 Charles Hapgood was looking for

Antarctica in the Reference Room of the Library of Congress, Washington

DC. For several consecutive weeks he worked there, lost in the search,

surrounded by literally hundreds of medieval maps and charts.

I found [he reported] many fascinating things I had not expected to find, and a

number of charts showing the southern continent. Then, one day, I turned a page

and sat transfixed. As my eyes fell upon the southern hemisphere of a world map

drawn by Oronteus Finaeus in 1531, I had the instant conviction that I had found

here a truly authentic map of the real Antarctica.

The general shape of the continent was startlingly like the outline of the continent

on our modern maps. The position of the South Pole, nearly in the center of the

continent, seemed about right. The mountain ranges that skirted the coasts

suggested the numerous ranges that have been discovered in Antarctica in recent

years. It was obvious, too, that this was no slapdash creation of somebody's

imagination. The mountain ranges were individualized, some definitely coastal

and some not. From most of them rivers were shown flowing into the sea,

following in every case what looked like very natural and very convincing drainage

patterns. This suggested, of course, that the coasts may have been ice-free when

the original map was drawn. The deep interior, however, was free entirely of rivers

and mountains, suggesting that the ice might have been present there.¹

Closer investigation of the Oronteus Finaeus Map by Hapgood, and by Dr

Richard Strachan of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, confirmed

the following:

1 It had been copied and compiled from several earlier source maps

drawn up according to a number of different projections.²

2 It did indeed show non-glacial conditions in coastal regions of Antarctica, notably Queen Maud Land, Enderby Land, Wilkes Land, Victoria Land (the east coast of the Ross Sea), and Marie Byrd Land.³

3 As in the case of the Piri Reis Map, the general profile of the terrain, and the visible physical features, matched closely seismic survey maps of the *subglacial* land surfaces of Antarctica.⁴

The Oronteus Finaeus Map, Hapgood concluded, appeared to document

‘the surprising proposition that Antarctica was visited and perhaps

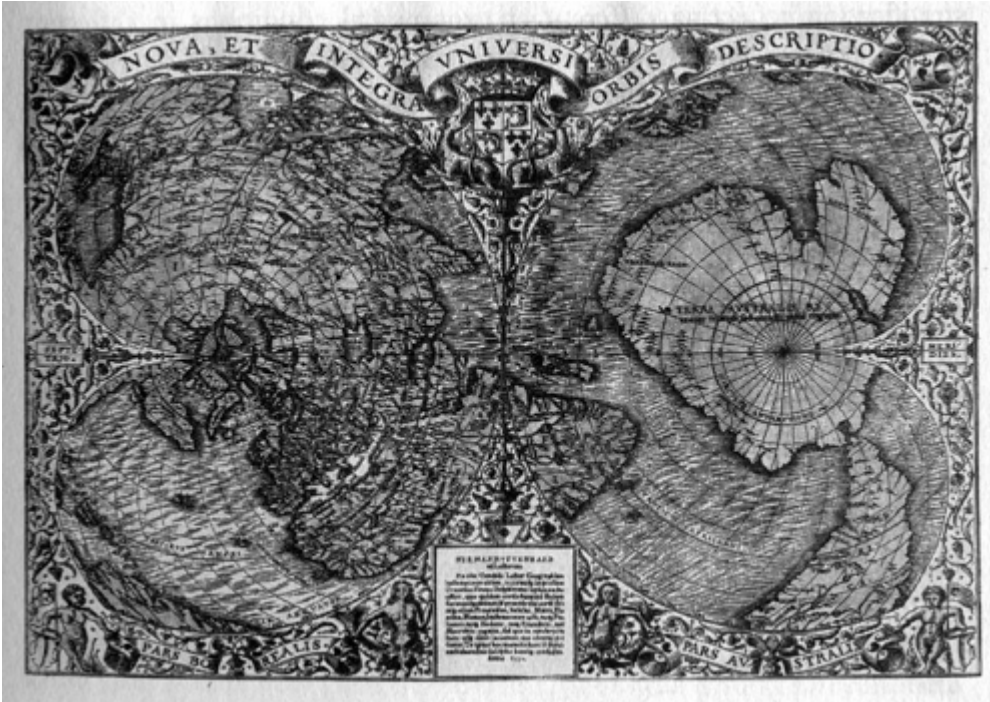
1 *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings* (henceforth *Maps*), p. 79.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 90. These maps were made in 1958, International Geophysical Year, by survey

teams from several different nations.



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settled by men when it was largely if not entirely non-glacial. It goes without saying that this implies a very great antiquity ... [Indeed] the Oronteus Finaeus Map takes the civilization of the original map-makers

back to a time contemporary with the end of the last Ice Age in the northern hemisphere.'⁵

The Oronteus Finaeus map, showing Antarctica with ice-free coasts, mountains and rivers.

Ross Sea

Further evidence in support of this view arises from the manner in which

the Ross Sea was shown by Oronteus Finaeus. Where today great glaciers

like the Beardmore and the Scott discharge themselves into the sea, the

1531 map shows estuaries, broad inlets and indications of rivers. The

unmistakable implication of these features is that there was no ice on the

Ross Sea or its coasts when the source maps used by Oronteus Finaeus

were made: 'There also had to be a considerable hinterland free of ice to

feed the rivers. At the present time all these coasts and their hinterlands

are deeply buried in the mile-thick ice-cap, while on the Ross Sea itself

there is a floating ice-shelf hundreds of feet thick.'

The Ross Sea evidence provides strong corroboration for the notion that

Antarctica must have been mapped by some unknown civilization during

the extensively ice-free period which ended around 4000 BC. This is

5 Ibid., p. 149.

6 Ibid., p. 93-6.

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emphasized by the coring tubes used, in 1949, by one of the Byrd

Antarctic Expeditions to take samples of sediment from the bottom of the

Ross Sea. The sediments showed numerous clearly demarcated layers of

stratification reflecting different environmental conditions in different

epochs: 'coarse glacial marine', 'medium glacial marine', 'fine glacial

marine', and so on. The most surprising discovery, however, 'was that a

number of the layers were formed of fine-grained, well-assorted

sediments, such as are brought down to the sea by rivers flowing from

temperate (that is, ice-free) lands ...'⁷

Using the ionium-dating method developed by Dr W. D. Urry (which

makes use of three different radioactive elements found in sea water⁸),

researchers at the Carnegie Institute in Washington DC were able to

establish beyond any reasonable doubt that great rivers carrying fine-

grained well-assorted sediments had indeed flowed in Antarctica until

about 6000 years ago, as the Oronteus Finaeus Map showed. It was only

after that date, around 4000 BC, 'that the glacial kind of sediment began

to be deposited on the Ross Sea bottom ... The cores indicate that warm

conditions had prevailed for a long period before that.'⁹

Mercator and Buache

The Piri Reis and Oronteus Finaeus Maps therefore provide us with a

glimpse of Antarctica as no cartographer in historical times could

possibly have seen it. On their own, of course, these two pieces of

evidence should not be sufficient to persuade us that we might be gazing

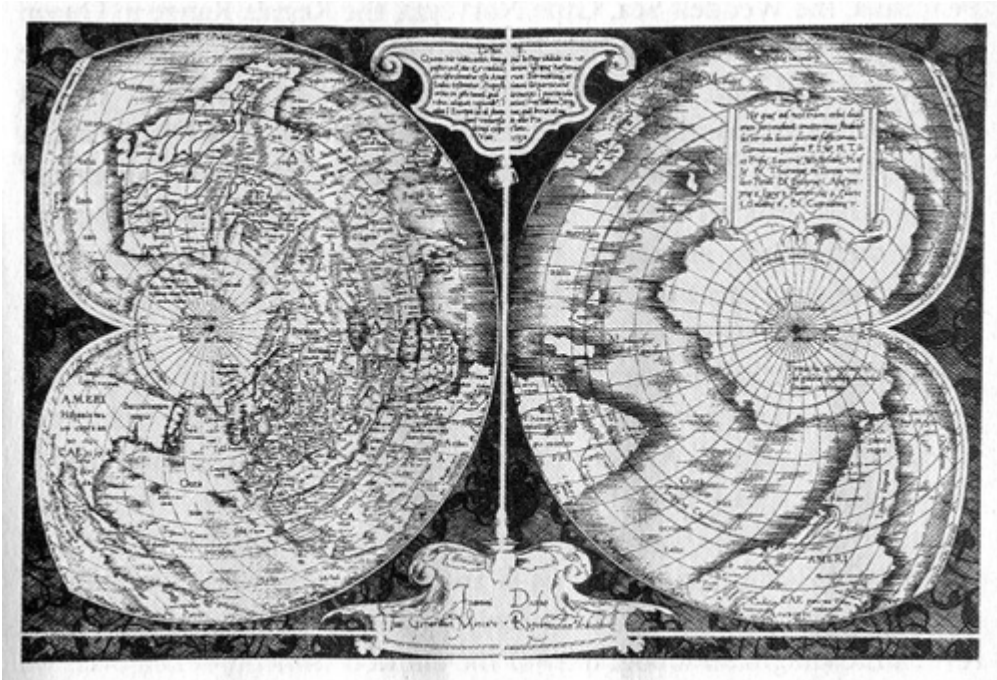
at the fingerprints of a lost civilization. Can three, or four, or six such

maps, however, be dismissed with equal justification?

⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

⁸ For a detailed description of the process see *Maps*, P. 96.

⁹ Ibid., page 98.



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The Mercator map, showing Antarctica's mountains and rivers covered by ice.

Is it safe, or reasonable, for example, for us to continue to ignore the historical implications of some of the maps made by the sixteenth-century's most famous cartographer: Gerard Kremer, otherwise known as

Mercator? Best remembered for the Mercator projection, still used on most world maps today, this enigmatic individual (who paid an unexplained visit to the Great Pyramid of Egypt in 1563/10) was reportedly

'indefatigable in searching out ... the learning of long ago', and spent

many years diligently accumulating a vast and eclectic reference library of

ancient source maps.¹¹

Significantly, Mercator included the Oronteus Finaeus map in his *Atlas*

of 1569 and also depicted the Antarctic on several he himself drew in the

same year. Identifiable parts of the then undiscovered southern continent

on these maps are Cape Dart and Cape Herlacher in Marie Byrd Land, the

Amundsen Sea, Thurston Island in Ellsworth Land, the Fletcher Islands in

the Bellinghausen Sea, Alexander I Island, the Antarctic (Palmer)

Peninsula, the Weddell Sea, Cape Norvegia, the Regula Range in Queen

Maud Land (as islands), the Muhlig-Hoffman Mountains (as islands), the

Prince Harald Coast, the Shirase Glacier as an estuary on Prince Harald

Coast, Padda Island in Lutzow-Holm Bay, and the Prince Olaf Coast in

Enderby Land. 'In some cases these features are more distinctly

recognisable than on the Oronteus Finaeus Map,' observed Hapgood,

‘and it seems clear, in general, that Mercator had at his disposal source

10 He left his graffito there. See Peter Tompkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, Harper &

Row Publishers, New York, p. 38, 285.

11 *Maps*, p. 102.

26

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maps other than those used by Oronteus Finaeus.’¹²

And not only Mercator.

Philippe Buache, the eighteenth-century French geographer, was also

able to publish a map of Antarctica long before the southern continent

was officially ‘discovered’. And the extraordinary feature of Buache’s map

is that it seems to have been based on source maps made earlier,

perhaps *thousands of years earlier*, than those used by Oronteus Finaeus

and Mercator. What Buache gives us is an eerily precise representation of

Antarctica as it must have looked *when there was no ice on it at all*.¹³ His

map reveals the subglacial topography of the entire continent, which even

we did not have full knowledge of until 1958, International Geophysical

Year, when a comprehensive seismic survey was carried out.

That survey only confirmed what Buache had already proclaimed when

he published his map of Antarctica in 1737. Basing his cartography on

ancient sources now lost, the French academician depicted a *clear waterway* across the southern continent dividing it into two principal

landmasses lying east and west of the line now marked by the Trans-

Antarctic Mountains.

Such a waterway, connecting the Ross, Weddell and Bellinghausen Seas,

would indeed exist if Antarctica were free of ice. As the 1958 IGY Survey

shows, the continent (which appears on modern maps as one continuous

landmass) consists of an archipelago of large islands with mile-thick ice

packed between them and rising above sea level.

The epoch of the map-makers

As we have seen, many orthodox geologists believe that the last time any

waterway existed in these ice-filled basins was millions of years ago.

From the scholarly point of view, however, it is equally orthodox to affirm

that no human beings had evolved in those remote times, let alone

human beings capable of accurately mapping the landmasses of the

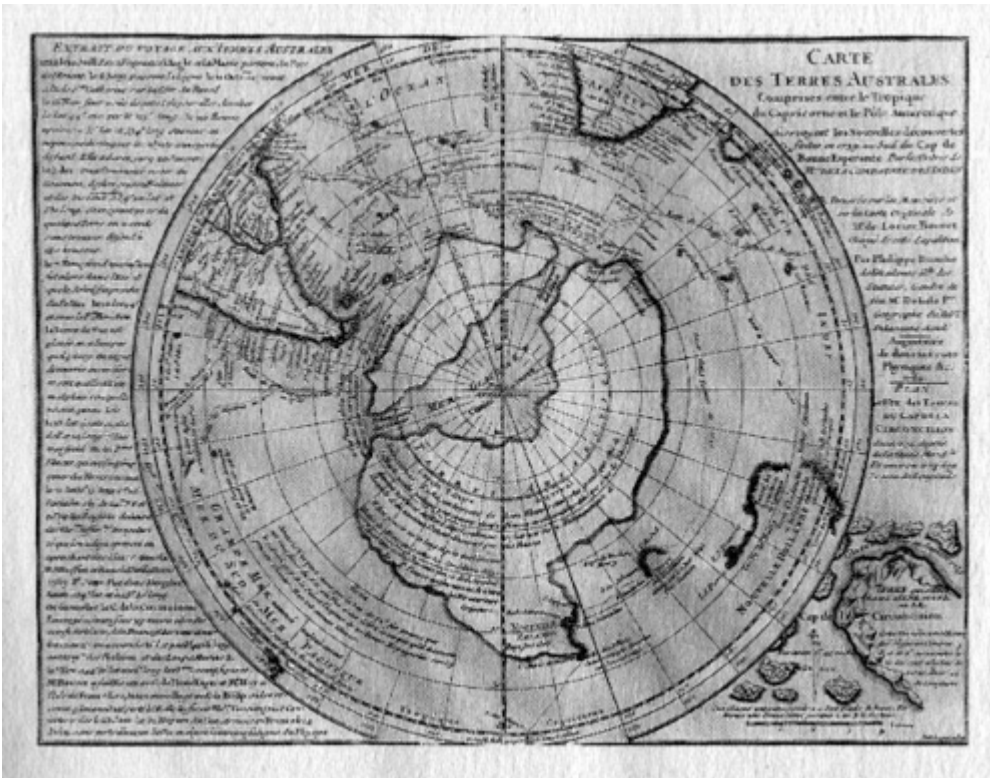
Antarctic. The big problem raised by the Buache/IGY evidence is that

those landmasses *do* seem to have been mapped when they were free of

ice. This confronts scholars with two mutually contradictory propositions.

12 Ibid., pp. 103-4.

13 Ibid., p. 93.



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The Buache map, with landmasses which show Antarctica very much

as it would have looked before it became covered by ice.

Which one is correct?

If we are to go along with orthodox geologists and accept that millions

of years have indeed elapsed since Antarctica was last completely free of

ice, then all the evidence of human evolution, painstakingly accumulated

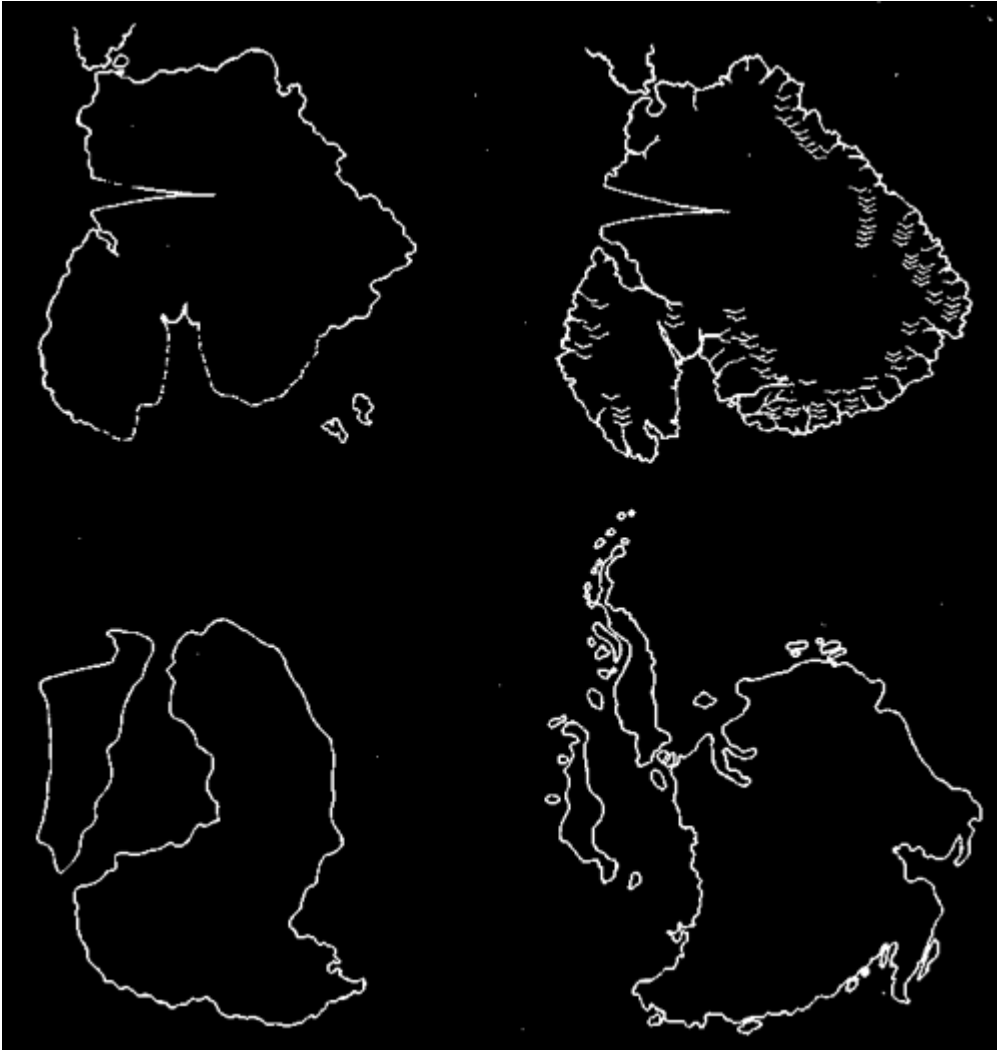
by distinguished scientists from Darwin on, must be wrong. It seems

inconceivable that this could be the case: the fossil record makes it abundantly clear that only the unevolved ancestors of humanity existed millions of years ago—low-browed knuckle-dragging hominids incapable of advanced intellectual tasks like map-making.

Are we therefore to assume the intervention of alien cartographers in orbiting spaceships to explain the existence of sophisticated maps of an ice-free Antarctica? Or shall we think again about the implications of Hapgood's theory of earth-crust displacement which allows the southern continent to have been in the ice-free condition depicted by Buache as little as 15,000 years ago?¹⁴

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of the evidence behind this theory see Part VIII of this book and

Hapgood's *Earth's Shifting Crust*.

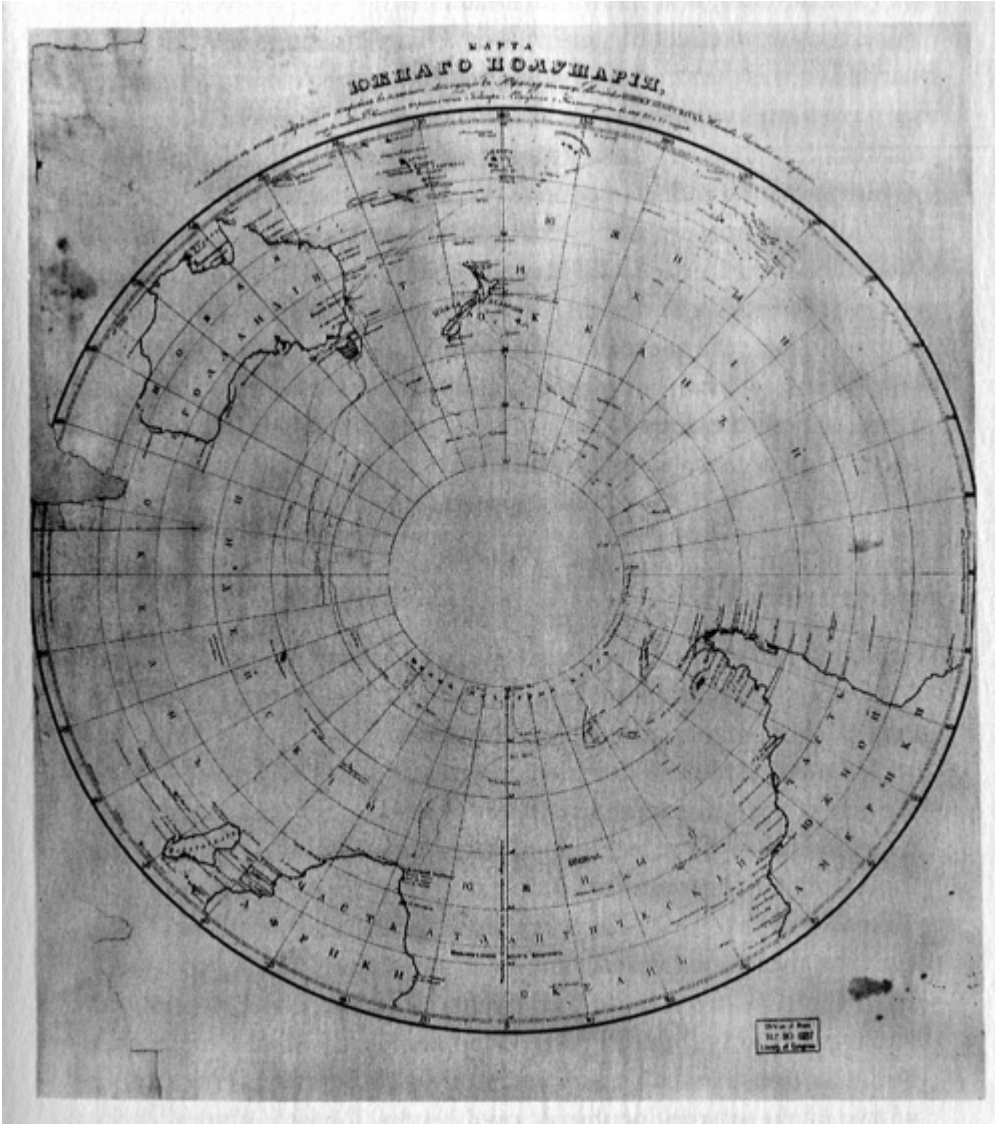


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Above left and right Redrawings of the Mercator and Oronteus

Finæus maps showing the progressive glaciation of Antarctica.
Below

left Redrawing of the Buache map. *Below right* The subglacial
topography of Antarctica, according to modern seismic surveys.



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An early nineteenth-century Russian map showing that the existence of Antarctica was at that time unknown. The continent was 'discovered' in AD 1818. But could it have been mapped thousands of years earlier than that by the cartographers of an as yet unidentified high civilization of prehistory?

Is it possible that a human civilization, sufficiently advanced to have mapped Antarctica, could have developed by 13,000 BC and later disappeared? And, if so, how much later?

The combined effect of the Piri Reis, Oronteus Finaeus, Mercator and

Buache Maps is the strong, though disturbing, impression that Antarctica

may have been *continuously surveyed* over a period of several thousands

of years as the ice-cap gradually spread outwards from the interior, increasing its grip with every passing millennium but not engulfing all the

coasts of the southern continent until around 4000 BC. The original

sources for the Piri Reis and Mercator Maps must therefore have been

prepared towards the end of this period, when only the coasts of

30

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Antarctica were free of ice; the source for the Oronteus Finaeus Map, on

the other hand, seems to have been considerably earlier, when the ice-

cap was present only in the deep interior of the continent; and the source

for the Buache Map appears to originate in even earlier period (around

13,000 BC), when there may have been no ice in Antarctica at all.

South America

Were other parts of the world surveyed and accurately charted at widely

separated intervals during this same epoch; roughly from 13,000 BC to

4000 BC? The answer may lie once again in the Piri Reis Map, which

contains more mysteries than just Antarctica:

- Drawn in 1513, the map demonstrates an uncanny knowledge of South

America—and not only of its eastern coast but of the Andes mountains

on the western side of the continent, which were of course unknown at

that time. The map correctly shows the Amazon River rising in these unexplored mountains and thence flowing eastwards.¹⁵

- Itself compiled from more than twenty different source documents of

varying antiquity,¹⁶ the Piri Reis Map depicts the Amazon not once but

twice (most probably as a result of the unintentional overlapping of two of the source documents used by the Turkish admiral¹⁷). In the first

of these the Amazon's course is shown down to its Para River mouth,

but the important island of Marajo does not appear. According to Hapgood, this suggests that the relevant source map must have dated

from a time, perhaps as much as 15,000 years ago, when the Para River was the main or only mouth of the Amazon and when Marajo Island was part of the mainland on the northern side of the river.¹⁸ The

second depiction of the Amazon, on the other hand, *does* show Marajo

(and in fantastically accurate detail) despite the fact that this island was

not discovered until 1543.¹⁹ Again, the possibility is raised of an unknown civilization which undertook continuous surveying and mapping operations of the changing face of the earth over a period of

many thousands of years, with Piri Reis making use of earlier and later

source maps left behind by this civilization.

- Neither the Orinoco River nor its present delta is represented on the

Piri Reis Map. Instead, as Hapgood proved, ‘two estuaries extending far

inland (for a distance of about 100 miles) are shown close to the site of

the present river. The longitude on the grid would be correct for the

15 *Maps*, p. 68.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

31

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Orinoco, and the latitude is also quite accurate. Is it possible that these

estuaries have been filled in, and the delta extended this much, since

the source maps were made?’²⁰

- Although they remained undiscovered until 1592, the Falkland Islands

appear on the 1513 map at their correct latitude.²¹

- The library of ancient sources incorporated in the Piri Reis Map may

also account for the fact that it convincingly portrays a large island in the Atlantic Ocean to the east of the South American coast where no such island now exists. Is it pure coincidence that this 'imaginary' island turns out to be located right over the sub-oceanic Mid-Atlantic Ridge just north of the equator and 700 miles east of the coast of Brazil, where the tiny Rocks of Sts. Peter and Paul now jut above the waves?²² Or was the relevant source map drawn deep in the last Ice

Age, when sea levels were far lower than they are today and a large island could indeed have been exposed at this spot?

Sea levels and ice ages

Other sixteenth-century maps also look as though they could have been

based on accurate world surveys conducted during the last Ice Age. One

was compiled by the Turk Hadji Ahmed in 1559, a cartographer, as

Hapgood puts it, who must have had access to some 'most extraordinary'

source maps.²³

The strangest and most immediately striking feature of Hadji Ahmed's

compilation is that it shows quite plainly a strip of territory, almost 1000

miles wide, connecting Alaska and Siberia. Such a 'land-bridge', as

geologists refer to it, did once exist (where the Bering Strait is now) but

was submerged beneath the waves by rising sea levels at the end of the

last Ice Age.²⁴

The rising sea levels were caused by the tumultuous melting of the ice-

cap which was rapidly retreating everywhere in the northern hemisphere

by around 10,000 BC.²⁵ It is therefore interesting that at least one ancient

map appears to show southern Sweden covered with remnant glaciers of

the kind that must indeed have been prevalent then in these latitudes.

The remnant glaciers are on Claudius Ptolemy's famous Map of the North.

Originally compiled in the second century AD, this remarkable work from

the last great geographer of classical antiquity was lost for hundreds of

20 Ibid., p. 69.

21 Ibid., p. 72.

22 Ibid., p. 65.

23 Ibid., p. 99.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 164.

32

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years and rediscovered in the fifteenth century.²⁶

Ptolemy was custodian of the library at Alexandria, which contained the

greatest manuscript collection of ancient times,²⁷ and it was there that he

consulted the archaic source documents that enabled him to compile his

own map.²⁸ Acceptance of the possibility that the original version of

at least one of the charts he referred to could have been made around

10,000 BC helps us to explain why he shows glaciers, characteristic of

that exact epoch, together with 'lakes ... suggesting the shapes of present-day lakes, and streams very much suggesting glacial streams ...

flowing from the glaciers into the lakes.'²⁹

It is probably unnecessary to add that no one on earth in Roman times,

when Ptolemy drew his map, had the slightest suspicion that ice ages

could once have existed in northern Europe. Nor did anyone in the fifteenth century (when the map was rediscovered) possess such

knowledge. Indeed, it is impossible to see how the remnant glaciers and

other features shown on Ptolemy's map could have been surveyed, imagined or invented by any known civilization prior to our own.

The implications of this are obvious. So, too, are the implications of another map, the 'Portolano' of Jehudi Ibn Ben Zara, drawn in the year

1487.³⁰ This chart of Europe and North Africa may have been based on a

source even earlier than Ptolemy's, for it seems to show glaciers much

farther south than Sweden (roughly on the same latitude as England in

fact)³¹ and to depict the Mediterranean, Adriatic and Aegean Seas as they

might have looked before the melting of the European ice-cap.³² Sea level

would, of course, have been significantly lower than it is today. It is

therefore interesting, in the case for instance of the Aegean section of the

map, to note that a great many more islands are shown than currently

exist.³³ At first sight this seems odd. However, if ten or twelve thousand

years have indeed elapsed since the era when Ibn Ben Zara's source map

was made, the discrepancy can be simply explained: the missing islands

26 Ibid., p. 159.

27 See Luciano Canfora, *The Vanished Library*, Hutchinson Radius, London, 1989

28 *Maps*, p. 159.

29 Ibid., p. 164.

30 Ibid., p. 171

31 Ibid., pp. 171-2.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., pp. 176-7.

33

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must have been submerged by rising sea levels at the end of the last Ice

Age.

Once again we seem to be looking at the fingerprints of a vanished civilization—one capable of drawing impressively accurate maps of widely

separated parts of the earth.

What kind of technology, and what state of science and culture, would

have been required to do a job like that?

34

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Chapter 3

Fingerprints of a Lost Science

We saw that the Mercator World Map of 1569 included an accurate portrayal of the coasts of Antarctica as they would have looked thousands

of years ago when they were free of ice. Interestingly enough, this same

map is considerably *less* accurate in its portrayal of another region, the

west coast of South America, than an earlier (1538) map also drawn by

Mercator.¹

The reason for this appears to be that the sixteenth-century geographer

based the earlier map on the ancient sources which we know he had at

his disposal, whereas for the later map he relied upon the observations

and measurements of the first Spanish explorers of western South

America. Since those explorers had supposedly brought the latest

information back to Europe, Mercator can hardly be blamed for following

them. In so doing the accuracy of his work declined: instruments capable

of finding longitude did not exist in 1569, but appear to have been used

to prepare the ancient source documents Mercator consulted to produce

his 1538 map.²

The mysteries of longitude

Let us consider the problem of longitude, defined as the distance in degrees east or west of the prime meridian. The current internationally

accepted prime meridian is an imaginary curve drawn from the North Pole

to the South Pole passing through the Royal Observatory at Greenwich,

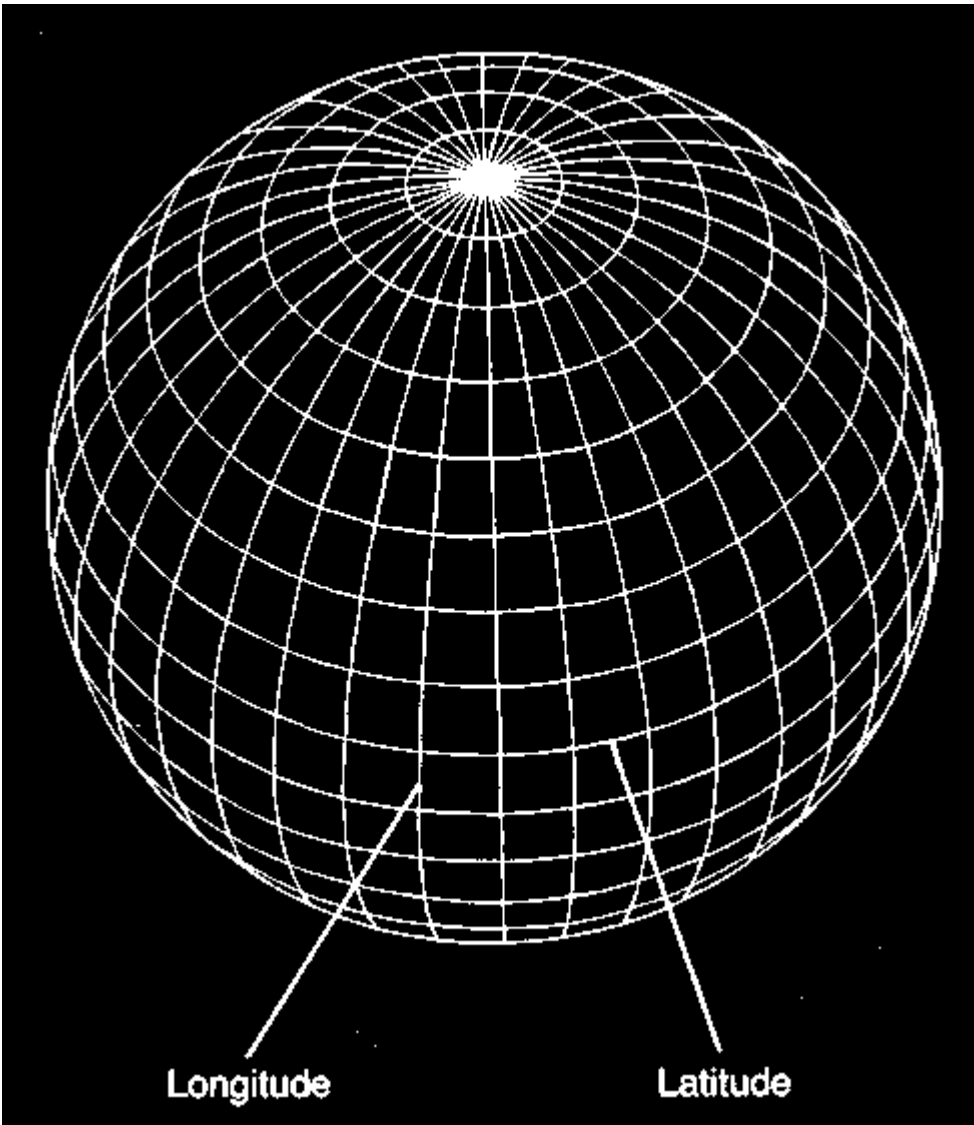
London. Greenwich therefore stands at 0° longitude while New York, for

example, stands at around 74° west, and Canberra, Australia, at roughly

150° east.

¹ *Maps*, p. 107.

² *Ibid.*



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It would be possible to write an elaborate explanation of longitude and

of what needs to be done to fix it precisely for any given point on the earth's surface. What we are concerned with here, however, is not so

much technical detail as the accepted *historical* facts about humanity's

growing knowledge of the mysteries of longitude. Among these facts, this

is the most important: *until a breakthrough invention in the eighteenth*

century, cartographers and navigators were unable to fix longitude with

any kind of precision. They could only make guesses which were usually

inaccurate by many hundreds of miles, because the technology had not

yet been developed to allow them to do the job properly.

Latitude north or south of the equator did not pose such a problem: it

could be worked out by means of angular measurements of the sun and

stars taken with relatively simple instruments. But to find longitude

equipment of an altogether different and superior calibre was needed,

which could combine position measurements with time measurements.

Throughout the span of known history the invention of such equipment

had remained beyond the capacities of scientists, but by the beginning of

the eighteenth century, with rapidly increasing sea traffic, a mood of

impatience and urgency had set in. In the words of an authority on the

period, 'The search for longitude overshadowed the life of every man afloat, and the safety of every ship and cargo. Accurate measurement

seemed an impossible dream and "discovering the longitude" had become

a stock phrase in the press like "pigs might fly".'³

³ Simon Bethon and Andrew Robinson, *The Shape of the World: The Mapping and*

Discovery of the Earth, Guild Publishing, London, 1991, p. 117.

36

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What was needed, above all else, was an instrument that would keep

the time (at the place of departure) with perfect accuracy during long sea

journeys despite the motion of the ship and despite the adverse

conditions of alternating heat and cold, wet and dry. 'Such a Watch', as

Isaac Newton told the members of the British government's official Board

of Longitude in 1714, 'hath not yet been made'.⁴

Indeed not. The timepieces of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were crude devices which typically lost or gained as much as a

quarter of an hour *per day*. By contrast, an effective marine chronometer

could afford to lose or gain that much only over several years.⁵

It was not until the 1720s that the talented English clockmaker John

Harrison began work on the first of a series of designs which resulted in

the manufacture of such a chronometer. His objective was to win the

prize of £20,000 offered by the Board of Longitude 'for the inventor of

any means of determining a ship's longitude within 30 nautical miles at

the end of a six weeks' voyage'.⁶ A chronometer capable of fulfilling this

condition would have to keep time to within three seconds per day. It

took almost forty years, during which several prototypes were completed

and tested, before Harrison was able to meet these standards. Finally, in

1761, his elegant Chronometer No. 4 left Britain on board HMS *Deptford*

bound for Jamaica, accompanied by Harrison's son William. Nine days

into the voyage, on the basis of longitude calculations made possible by

the chronometer, William advised the captain that they would sight the

Madeira Islands the following morning. The captain offered five to one

that he was wrong but agreed to hold the course. William won the bet.

Two months later, at Jamaica, the instrument was found to have lost just

five seconds.⁷

Harrison had surpassed the conditions set by the Board of Longitude.

Thanks to the British government's bureaucratic dithering, however, he

was not awarded the £20,000 prize money until three years before his

death in 1776. Understandably, it was only when he had the funds in his

hands that he divulged the secrets of his design. As a result of this delay,

Captain James Cook did not have the benefit of a chronometer when he

made his first voyage of discovery in 1768.⁸ By the time of his third voyage, however (1778-9), he was able to map the Pacific with impressive

accuracy, fixing not only the correct latitude but the correct longitude of

every island and coastline.⁹ Henceforward, 'thanks to Cook's care and

Harrison's chronometer ... no navigator could have an excuse for failing

to find a Pacific island ... or for being wrecked on a coastline appearing

4 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

6 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 3:289.

7 *Shape of the World*, pp. 123-4.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

37

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

from nowhere.¹⁰

Indeed, with their accurate longitudes, Cook's Pacific maps must be

ranked among the very first examples of the precise cartography of our

modern era. They remind us, moreover, that the making of really good

maps requires at least three key ingredients: great journeys of discovery;

first-class mathematical and cartographic skills; sophisticated chronometers.

It was not until Harrison's chronometer became generally available in the 1770s that the third of these preconditions was fulfilled. This brilliant

invention made it possible for cartographers to fix longitude precisely,

something that the Sumerians, the Ancient Egyptians, the Greeks and the

Romans, and indeed all other known civilizations before the eighteenth

century were supposedly unable to do. It is therefore surprising and unsettling to come across vastly older maps which give latitudes and longitudes with modern precision.

Precision instruments

These inexplicably precise latitudes and longitudes are found in the same

general category of documents that contain the advanced geographical

knowledge I have outlined.

The Piri Reis Map of 1513, for example, places South America and Africa in *the correct relative longitudes*,¹¹ theoretically an impossible feat

for the science of the time. But Piri Reis was candid in admitting that his

map was based on far earlier sources. Could it have been from one of

these sources that he derived his accurate longitudes?

Also of great interest is the so-called 'Dulcert Portulano' of AD 1339 which focuses on Europe and North Africa. Here latitude is perfect across

huge distances and the total longitude of the Mediterranean and Black

Seas is correct to within half a degree.¹²

Professor Hapgood comments that the maker of the original source from which the Dulcert Portulano was copied had 'achieved highly scientific accuracy in finding the ratio of latitude to longitude. He could

only have done this if he had precise information on the relative

longitudes of a great many places scattered all the way from Galway in

Ireland to the eastern bend of the Don in Russia.’¹³

The Zeno Map¹⁴ of AD 1380 is another enigma. Covering a vast area of

the north as far as Greenland, it locates a great many widely scattered

places at latitudes and longitudes which are ‘amazingly correct’.¹⁵ It is

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Maps*, pp. 1, 41.

¹² Ibid., p. 116.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 149-58.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 152.

38

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

‘unbelievable’, asserts Hapgood, ‘that anyone in the fourteenth century

could have found accurate latitudes for these places, to say nothing of

accurate longitudes’.¹⁶

The Oronteus Finaeus World Map also commands attention: it successfully places the coasts of Antarctica in correct latitudes and relative longitudes and finds a remarkably accurate area for the continent

as a whole. This reflects a level of geographical knowledge not available

until the twentieth century.¹⁷

The Portolano of Iehudi Ibn Ben Zara is another map notable for its accuracy where relative latitudes and longitudes are concerned.¹⁸
Total

longitude between Gibraltar and the Sea of Azov is accurate to half a degree, while across the map as a whole average errors of longitude are

less than a degree.¹⁹

These examples represent only a small fraction of the large and challenging dossier of evidence presented by Hapgood. Layer upon layer,

the cumulative effect of his painstaking and detailed analysis is to suggest that we are deluding ourselves when we suppose that accurate

instruments for measuring longitude were not invented until the eighteenth century. On the contrary, the Piri Reis and other maps appear

to indicate very strongly that such instruments were *re-discovered* then,

that they had existed long ages before and had been used by a civilized

people, now lost to history, who had explored and charted the entire

earth. Furthermore, it seems that these people were capable not only of

designing and manufacturing precise and technically advanced

mechanical instruments but were masters of a precocious mathematical

science.

The lost mathematicians

To understand why, we should first remind ourselves of the obvious: the

earth is a sphere. When it comes to mapping it, therefore, only a globe

can represent it in correct proportion. Transferring cartographic data

from a globe to flat sheets of paper inevitably involves distortions and

can be accomplished only by means of an artificial and complex

mechanical and mathematical device known as map projection.

There are many different kinds of projection. Mercator's, still used in

atlases today, is perhaps the most familiar. Others are dauntingly

referred to as Azimuthal, Stereographic, Gnomonic, Azimuthal Equidistant, Cordiform, and so on, but it is unnecessary to go into this

any further here. We need only note that *all successful projections require*

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 98.

18 Ibid., p. 170.

19 Ibid., p. 173.

39

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the use of sophisticated mathematical techniques of a kind supposedly

unknown in the ancient world 20 (particularly in the deepest antiquity

before 4000 BC when there was allegedly no human civilization at all, let

alone one capable of developing and using advanced mathematics and

geometry).

Charles Hapgood submitted his collection of ancient maps to the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology for evaluation by Professor Richard

Strachan. The general conclusion was obvious, but he wanted to know

precisely what level of mathematics would have been required to draw up

the original source documents. On 18 April 1965 Strachan replied that a

very high level of mathematics indeed would have been necessary. Some

of the maps, for example, seemed to express 'a Mercator type projection'

long before the time of Mercator himself. The relative complexity of this

projection (involving latitude expansion) meant that a trigonometric coordinate transformation method must have been used.

Other reasons for deducing that the ancient map-makers must have been skilled mathematicians were as follows:

1 The determination of place locations on a continent requires at least geometric

triangulation methods. Over large distances (of the order of 1000 miles) corrections

must be made for the curvature of the earth, which requires some understanding of

spherical trigonometry.

2 The location of continents with respect to one another requires an understanding of

the earth's sphericity, and the use of spherical trigonometry.

3 Cultures with this knowledge, plus the precision instruments to make the required

measurements to determine location, would most certainly use their mathematical

technology in creating maps and charts.'21

Strachan's impression that the maps, through generations of copyists,

revealed the handiwork of an ancient, mysterious and technologically

advanced civilization, was shared by reconnaissance experts from the US

Airforce to whom Hapgood submitted the evidence. Lorenzo Burroughs,

chief of the 8th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron's Cartographic

Section at Westover Air Base, made a particularly close study of the

Oronteus Finaeus Map. He concluded that some of the sources upon

which it was based must have been drawn up by means of a projection

similar to the modern Cordiform Projection. This, said Burroughs:

suggests the use of advanced mathematics. Further, the shape given to the

Antarctic Continent suggests the possibility, if not the probability, that the original

source maps were compiled on a stereographic or gnomonic type of projection

involving the use of spherical trigonometry.

We are convinced that the findings made by you and your associates are valid, and

that they raise extremely important questions affecting geology and ancient

20 Ibid., p. 225ff.

21 Ibid., p. 228.

40

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

history ...'22

Hapgood was to make one more important discovery: a Chinese map

copied from an earlier original on to a stone pillar in AD 1137.²³ This map

incorporates precisely the same kind of high quality information about

longitudes as the others. It has a similar grid and was drawn up with the

benefit of spherical trigonometry. Indeed, on close examination, it shares

so many features with the European and Middle Eastern maps that only

one explanation seems adequate: it and they must have stemmed from a

common source.²⁴

We seem to be confronted once again by a surviving fragment of the scientific knowledge of a lost civilization. More than that, it appears that

this civilization must have been at least in some respects as advanced as

our own and that its cartographers had 'mapped virtually the entire globe

with a uniform general level of technology, with similar methods, equal

knowledge of mathematics, and probably the same sorts of instruments'.²⁵

The Chinese map also indicates something else: a *global legacy* must

have been handed down—a legacy of inestimable value, in all probability

incorporating much more than sophisticated geographical knowledge.

Could it have been some portion of this legacy that was distributed in prehistoric Peru by the so-called 'Viracochas', mysterious bearded

strangers said to have come from across the seas, in a 'time of darkness',

to restore civilization after a great upheaval of the earth?

I decided to go to Peru to see what I could find.

22 Ibid., pp. 244-5.

23 Ibid., p. 135.

24 Ibid., p. 139.

25 Ibid., pp. 139, 145.

41

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Part II

Foam of the Sea

Peru and Bolivia

42

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 4

Flight of the Condor

I'm in southern Peru, flying over the Nazca lines.

Below me, after the whale and the monkey, the hummingbird comes

into view, flutters and unfolds her wings, stretches forward her delicate

beak towards some imaginary flower. Then we turn hard right, pursued

by our own tiny shadow as we cross the bleak scar of the Pan-American

highway, and follow a trajectory that brings us over the fabulous snake-

necked 'Alcatraz': a heron 900 feet long conceived in the mind of a

master geometer. We circle around, cross the highway for a second time,

pass an astonishing arrangement of fish and triangles laid out beside a

pelican, turn left and find ourselves floating over the sublime image of a

giant condor with feathers extended in stylized flight.

Just as I try to catch my breath, another condor almost close enough to

touch materializes out of nowhere, a real condor this time, haughty
as a

fallen angel riding a thermal back to heaven. My pilot gasps and tries
to

follow him. For a moment I catch a glimpse of a bright, dispassionate
eye

that seems to weigh us up and find us wanting. Then, like a vision
from

some ancient myth, the creature banks and glides contemptuously

backwards into the sun leaving our single-engined Cessna
floundering in

the lower air.

Below us now there's a pair of parallel lines almost two miles long,
arrow straight all the way to vanishing point. And there, off to the
right, a

series of abstract shapes on a scale so vast—and yet so precisely
executed—that it seems inconceivable they could have been the
work of

men.

The people around here say that they were not the work of men, but
of

demigods, the Viracochas,¹ who also left their fingerprints elsewhere
in

the Andean region many thousands of years ago.

The riddle of the lines

The Nazca plateau in southern Peru is a desolate place, sere and unwelcoming, barren and profitless. Human populations have never concentrated here, nor will they do so in the future: the surface of the moon seems hardly less hospitable.

If you happen to be an artist with grand designs, however, these high

1 Tony Morrison with Professor Gerald S. Hawkins, *Pathways to the Gods*, Book Club

Associates, London, 1979, p. 21. See also *The Atlas of Mysterious Places*, (ed. Jennifer

Westwood), Guild Publishing, London, 1987, p. 100.

43

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

and daunting plains look like a very promising canvas, with 200 square

miles of uninterrupted tableland and the certainty that your masterwork

won't be carried away on the desert breeze or covered by drifting sand.

It's true that high winds do blow here, but by a happy accident of physics they are robbed of their sting at ground level: the pebbles that

litter the pampa absorb and retain the sun's heat, throwing up a protective force-field of warm air. In addition, the soil contains enough

gypsum to glue small stones to the subsurface, an adhesive regularly

renewed by the moistening effect of early morning dews. Once things are

drawn here, therefore, they tend to stay drawn. There's hardly any rain;

indeed, with less than half an hour of miserly drizzle every decade, Nazca

is among the driest places on earth.

If you are an artist, therefore, if you have something grand and important to express, and if you want it to be visible for ever, these strange and lonely flatlands could look like the answer to your prayers.

Experts have pronounced upon the antiquity of Nazca, basing their opinions on fragments of pottery found embedded in the lines and on radiocarbon results from various organic remains unearthed here. The

dates conjectured range between 350 BC and AD 600.2 Realistically, they

tell us nothing about the age of the lines themselves, which are

inherently as undatable as the stones cleared to make them. All we can

say for sure is that the most recent are at least 1400 years old, but it is

theoretically possible that they could be far more ancient than that—for

the simple reason that the artefacts from which such dates are derived

could have been brought to Nazca by later peoples.

2 Pathways to the Gods, p. 21.



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The principal figures of the Nazca plateau.

The majority of the designs are spread out across a clearly defined area

of southern Peru bounded by the Rio Ingenio to the north and the Rio

Nazca to the south, a roughly square canvas of dun-coloured desert with

forty-six kilometres of the Pan-American highway running obliquely through it from top-centre to bottom right. Here, scattered apparently at

random, are literally hundreds of different figures. Some depict animals

and birds (a total of eighteen different birds). But far more take the form

of geometrical devices in the form of trapezoids, rectangles, triangles and

straight lines. Viewed from above, these latter resemble to the modern

eye a jumble of runways, as though some megalomaniac civil engineer

had been licensed to act out his most flamboyant fantasies of airfield design.

It therefore comes as no surprise, since humans are not supposed to have been able to fly until the beginning of the twentieth century, that the Nazca lines have been identified by a number of observers as landing

strips for alien spaceships. This is a seductive notion, but Nazca is perhaps not the best place to seek evidence for it. For example, it is difficult to understand why extra-terrestrials advanced enough to have

crossed hundreds of light years of interstellar space should have needed

45

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

landing strips at all. Surely such beings would have mastered the technology of setting their flying saucers down vertically?

Besides, there is really no question of the Nazca lines ever having been

used as runways—by flying saucers or anything else—although some of

them look like that from above. Viewed at ground-level they are little more than grazes on the surface made by scraping away thousands of

tons of black volcanic pebbles to expose the desert's paler base of yellow

sand and clay. None of the cleared areas is more than a few inches deep

and all are much too soft to have permitted the landing of wheeled flying

vehicles. The German mathematician Maria Reiche, who devoted half a

century to the study of the lines, was only being logical when she

dismissed the extraterrestrial theory with a single pithy sentence a few

years ago: 'I'm afraid the spacemen would have gotten stuck.'

If not runways for the chariots of alien 'gods', therefore, what else might the Nazca lines be? The truth is that no one knows their purpose,

just as no one really knows their age; they are a genuine mystery of the

past. And the closer you look at them the more baffling they become.

It's clear, for example, that the animals and birds antedate the geometry of the 'runways', because many of the trapezoids, rectangles

and straight lines bisect (and thus partly obliterate) the more complex

figures. The obvious deduction is that the final artwork of the desert as

we view it today must have been produced in two phases. Moreover, though it seems contrary to the normal laws of technical progress, we

must concede that the *earlier* of the two phases was the more advanced.

The execution of the zoomorphic figures called for far higher levels of

skill and technology than the etching of the straight lines. But how widely

separated in time were the earlier and later artists?

Scholars do not address themselves to this question. Instead they lump

both cultures together as ‘the Nazcans’ and depict them as primitive tribesmen who unaccountably developed sophisticated techniques of artistic self-expression, and then vanished from the Peruvian scene, many

hundreds of years before the appearance of their better-known successors, the Incas.

How sophisticated were these Nazcan ‘primitives’? What kind of knowledge must they have possessed to inscribe their gigantic signatures

on the plateau? It seems, for a start, that they were pretty good observational astronomers—at least according to Dr Phillis Pitluga, an

astronomer with the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. After making an intensive computer-aided study of stellar alignments at Nazca, she has

concluded that *the famous spider figure was devised as a terrestrial diagram of the giant constellation of Orion*, and that the arrow-straight

lines linked to the figure appear to have been set out to track through the

ages the changing declinations of the three stars of Orion’s Belt.³

The real significance of Dr Pitluga's discovery will become apparent in

3 Personal communications with Dr Pitluga.

46

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

due course. Meanwhile, let us note that the Nazca spider also accurately

depicts a member of a known spider genus— *Ricinulei*.⁴ This, as it happens, is one of the rarest spider genera in the world, so rare indeed

that it has only been found in remote and inaccessible parts of the Amazon rainforest.⁵ How did the supposedly primitive Nazcan artists travel so far from their homeland, crossing the formidable barrier of the

Andes, to obtain a specimen? More to the point, why should they have

wanted to do such a thing and how were they able to duplicate minute

details of *Ricinulei*'s anatomy normally visible only under a microscope,⁶

notably the reproductive organ positioned on the end of its extended right leg?

Such mysteries multiply at Nazca and none of the designs, except

perhaps the condor, really seems quite at home here. The whale and the

monkey are, after all, as out of place in this desert environment as the

Amazonian spider. A curious figure of a man, his right arm raised as though in greeting, heavy boots on his feet and round eyes staring owlishly forward, cannot be said to belong to any known era or culture.

And other drawings depicting the human form are equally peculiar: their

heads enclosed in halos of radiance, they do indeed look like visitors from another planet. Their sheer size is equally noteworthy and bizarre.

The hummingbird is 165 feet long, the spider 150 feet long, the condor

stretches nearly 400 feet from beak to tail-feathers (as does the pelican),

and a lizard, whose tail is now divided by the Pan-American highway, is

617 feet in length. Almost every design is executed on the same cyclopean scale and in the same difficult manner, by the careful contouring of a single continuous line.

Similar attention to detail is to be found in the geometrical devices.

Some of these take the form of straight lines *more than five miles long,*

marching like Roman roads across the desert, dropping into dried-out

river beds, surmounting rocky outcrops, and never once deviating from

true.

This kind of precision is hard, but not impossible, to explain in

conventional commonsense terms. More puzzling by far are the

zoomorphic figures. How could they have been so perfectly made when,

without aircraft, their creators could not have checked the progress of

their work by viewing it in its proper perspective? None of the designs is

small enough to be seen from ground level, where they appear merely as

a series of shapeless ruts in the desert. They show their true form only

when seen from an altitude of several hundred feet. There is no elevation

nearby that provides such a vantage point.

4 Firm identification of the Nazca spider with *Ricinulei* was first made by Professor

Gerald S. Hawkins. See Gerald S. Hawkins, *Beyond Stonehenge*, Arrow Books, London,

1977, p. 143-4.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 144.

47

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Linemakers, map-makers

I'm flying over the lines, trying to make sense of it all.

My pilot is Rodolfo Arias, lately of the Peruvian Airforce. After a career

in jet fighters he finds the little Cessna slow and uninspiring and treats it

like a taxi with wings. Once already we've been back to the airstrip at

Nazca to remove a window so that my partner Santha can point her

cameras vertically down at the alluring glyphs. Now we're experimenting

with the view from different altitudes. At a couple of hundred feet above

the plain Ricinulei, the Amazonian spider, looks like he's going to rear up

and snatch us in his jaws. At 500 feet we can see several of the figures at

once: a dog, a tree, a weird pair of hands, the condor, and some of the

triangles and trapezoids. When we ascend to 1500 feet, the zoomorphs,

hitherto predominant, are revealed merely as small scattered units

surrounded by an astonishing scribble of vast geometric forms.

These

forms now look less like runways and more like pathways made by

giants—pathways that crisscross the plateau in what seems at first a

bewildering variety of shapes, angles and sizes.

As the ground continues to recede, however, and as the widening

perspective on the lines permits more of an eagle's-eye view, I begin to

wonder whether there might not after all be some *method* to the

cuneiform slashes and scratches spread out below me. I am reminded of

an observation made by Maria Reiche, the mathematician who has lived at

Nazca and studied the lines since 1946. In her view

The geometric drawings give the impression of a cipher-script in which the same

words are sometimes written in huge letters, at another time in minute characters.

There are line arrangements which appear in a great variety of size categories

together with very similar shapes. All the drawings are composed of a certain

number of basic elements ...7

As the Cessna bumps and heaves across the heavens, I also remember it

is no accident that the Nazca lines were only properly identified in the

twentieth century, after the era of flight had begun. In the late sixteenth

century a magistrate named Luis de Monzon was the first Spanish traveller to bring back eyewitness reports concerning these mysterious

'marks on the desert' and to collect the strange local traditions that linked them to the Viracochas.⁸ However, until commercial airlines began

to operate regularly between Lima and Arequipa in the 1930s no one seems to have grasped that the largest piece of graphic art in the world

lay here in southern Peru. It was the development of aviation that made

the difference, giving men and women the godlike ability to take to the

skies and see beautiful and puzzling things that had hitherto been hidden from them.

7 Maria Reiche, *Mystery on the Desert*, Nazca, Peru, 1989, p. 58.

8 Luis de Monzon was the *corregidor*, or magistrate, of Rucanas and Soras, near Nazca,

in 1586. *Pathways to the Gods*, p. 36; *Atlas of Mysterious Places*, p. 100.

48

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Rodolfo is steering the Cessna in a gentle circle over the figure of the

monkey—a big monkey tied in a riddle of geometric forms. It's not easy

to describe the eerie, hypnotic feeling this design gives me: it's very complicated and absorbing to look at, and slightly sinister in an abstract,

indefinable way. The monkey's body is defined by a continuous unbroken

line. And, without ever being interrupted, this same line winds up stairs,

over pyramids, into a series of zig-zags, through a spiral labyrinth (the

tail), and then back around a number of star-like hairpin bends. It would

be a real *tour de force* of draughtsmanship and artistic skill on a sheet of

notepaper, but this is the Nazca desert (where they do things on a grand

scale) and the monkey is at least 400 feet long and 300 feet wide ...

Were the linemakers map-makers too?

And why were they called the Viracochas?

49

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 5

The Inca Trail to the Past

No artefacts or monuments, no cities or temples, have endured in recognizable form for longer than the most resilient religious traditions.

Whether expressed in the Pyramid Texts of Ancient Egypt, or the Hebrew

Bible, or the Vedas, such traditions are among the most imperishable of

all human creations: they are vehicles of knowledge voyaging through

time.

The last custodians of the ancient religious heritage of Peru were the

Incas, whose beliefs and 'idolatry' were 'extirpated' and whose treasures

were ransacked during the thirty terrible years that followed the Spanish

conquest in AD 1532.¹ Providentially, however, a number of early Spanish

travellers made sincere efforts to document Inca traditions before they

were entirely forgotten.

Though little attention was paid at the time, some of these traditions speak strikingly of a great civilization that was believed to have existed in

Peru many thousands of years earlier.² Powerful memories were preserved

of this civilization, said to have been founded by the Viracochas, the same mysterious beings credited with the making of the Nazca lines.

'Foam of the Sea'

When the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived, the Inca empire extended along

the Pacific coast and Andean highlands of South America from the northern border of modern Ecuador, through the whole of Peru, and as

far south as the Maule River in central Chile. Connecting the far-flung

corners of this empire was a vast and sophisticated road system: two

parallel north-south highways, for example, one running for 3600

kilometres along the coast and the other for a similar distance through

the Andes. Both these great thoroughfares were paved and connected by

frequent links. In addition, they exhibited an interesting range of design

and engineering features such as suspension bridges and tunnels cut

through solid rock. They were clearly the work of an evolved, disciplined

and ambitious society. Ironically, they played a significant part in its

downfall: the Spanish forces, led by Francisco Pizarro, used them to great

1 See, for example, Father Pablo Joseph, *The Extirpation of Idolatry in Peru* (translated

from the Spanish by L. Clark Keating), University of Kentucky Press, 1968.

2 This is the view of Fernando Montesinos, expressed in his *Memorias Antiguas*

Historiales del Peru (written in the seventeenth century). English edition translated and

edited by P. A. Means, Hakluyt Society, London, 1920.

50

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

effect to speed up their ruthless advance into the Inca heartland.³

The capital of the Inca empire was the city of Cuzco, a name meaning

‘the earth’s navel’ in the local Quechua language.⁴ According to legend it

was established by Manco Capac and Mama Occlo, two children of the

Sun. Here, though the Incas worshipped the sun god, whom they knew as

Inti, quite another deity was venerated as the Most Holy of all. This was

Viracocha, whose namesakes were said to “have made the Nazca lines

and whose own name meant ‘Foam of the Sea.’⁵

No doubt it is just a coincidence that the Greek goddess Aphrodite, who

was born of the sea, received her name because of ‘the foam [*aphros*] out

of which she was formed’.⁶ Besides, Viracocha was always depicted uncompromisingly as a *male* by the peoples of the Andes. That much

about him is known for certain. No historian, however, is able to say how

ancient was the cult of this deity before the Spanish arrived to put a stop

to it. This is because the cult seemed always to have been around;

indeed, long before the Incas incorporated him into their cosmogony and

built a magnificent temple for him at Cuzco, the evidence suggests that

the high god Viracocha had been worshipped by *all* the civilizations that

had ever existed in the long history of Peru.

Citadel of Viracocha

A few days after leaving Nazca, Santha and I arrived in Cuzco and made

our way to the site of the Coricancha, the great temple dedicated to

Viracocha in the pre-Colombian era. The Coricancha was of course long

gone. Or, to be more exact, it was not so much gone as *buried* beneath

layers of later architecture. The Spanish had kept its superb Inca

foundations, and the lower parts of its fabulously strong walls, and had

erected their own grandiose colonial cathedral on top.

Walking towards the front entrance of this cathedral, I remembered that

the Inca temple that had once stood here had been covered with more

than 700 sheets of pure gold (each weighing around two kilograms) and

that its spacious courtyard had been planted with 'fields' of replica corn

also fashioned out of gold.⁷ I could not help but be reminded of

Solomon's temple in far-off Jerusalem, also reputed to have been adorned

3 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 6:276-7.

4 Paul Devereux, *Secrets of Ancient and Sacred Places*, Blandford Books, London, 1992,

p. 76. See also *Peru*, Lonely Planet Publications, Hawthorne, Australia, 1991, p. 168.

5 *The Facts on File Encyclopaedia of World Mythology and Legend*, London and Oxford,

1988, p. 657.

6 Macrobius, cited in Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill*, David

R. Godine, Publisher, Boston, 1992, p. 134. See also A. R. Hope Moncreiff, *The*

Illustrated Guide to Classical Mythology, BCA, London, 1992, p. 153.

7 *Peru*, p. 181.

51

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

with sheets of gold and a marvellous orchard of golden trees.⁸

Earthquakes in 1650 and again in 1950 had largely demolished the

Spanish cathedral of Santo Domingo which stood on the site of the

temple of Viracocha, and it had been necessary to rebuild it on both

occasions. Its Inca foundations and lower walls survived these natural

disasters intact, thanks to their characteristic design which made use of

an elegant system of interlocking polygonal blocks. These blocks, and the

general layout of the place, were almost all that was now left of the original structure, apart from an octagonal grey stone platform at the

centre of the vast rectangular courtyard which had once been covered

with 55 kilograms of solid gold.⁹ On either side of the courtyard were

ante-chambers, also from the Inca temple, with refined architectural features such as walls that tapered upwards and beautifully-carved niches

hewn out of single pieces of granite.

We took a walk through the narrow, cobbled streets of Cuzco. Looking

around, I realized it was not just the cathedral that reflected Spanish

imposition on top of an earlier culture: the whole town was slightly

schizophrenic. Spacious, balconied, pastel-shaded colonial homes and

palaces towered above me but almost all of them stood on Inca

foundations or incorporated complete Inca structures of the same

beautiful polygonal architecture used in the Coricancha. In one alleyway,

known as Hatunrumiyoc, I paused to examine an intricate jigsaw puzzle

of a wall made of countless drystone blocks all perfectly fitted together,

all of different sizes and shapes, interlocking in a bewildering array of angles. The carving of the individual blocks, and their arrangement into

so complicated a structure could only have been achieved by master craftsmen possessed of very high levels of skill, with untold centuries of

architectural experimentation behind them. On one block I counted twelve angles and sides in a single plane, and I could not slip even the

edge of a piece of thin paper into the joints that connected it to the surrounding blocks.

The bearded stranger

It seemed that in the early sixteenth century, before the Spanish began to

demolish Peruvian culture in earnest, an idol of Viracocha had stood in

the Holy of Holies of the Coricancha. According to a contemporary text,

the *Relacion anonyma de los costumbres antiguos de los naturales del*

Piru, this idol took the form of a marble statue of the god—a statue described ‘as to the hair, complexion, features, raiment and sandals, just

8 *Tan. Terumah*, XI; also, with slight variations, *Yoma* 39b. Cited in *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Funk and Wagnell, New York, 1925, vol. II, p. 105.

9 *Peru*, p. 182.

52

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

as painters represent the apostle Saint Bartholomew’.¹⁰ Other accounts of

Viracocha likened his appearance to that of the Saint Thomas.¹¹ I

examined a number of illustrated ecclesiastical manuscripts in which these two saints appeared; both were routinely depicted as lean, bearded

white men, past middle age, wearing sandals and dressed in long, flowing

cloaks. As we shall see, the records confirmed this was exactly the appearance ascribed to Viracocha by those who worshipped him. Whoever

he was, therefore, he could not have been an American Indian: they are

relatively dark-skinned people with sparse facial hair.¹² Viracocha's bushy

beard and pale complexion made him sound like a Caucasian.

Back in the sixteenth century the Incas had thought so too. Indeed their

legends and religious beliefs made them so certain of his physical type

that they initially mistook the white and bearded Spaniards who arrived

on their shores for the returning Viracocha and his demigods,¹³ an event

long prophesied and which Viracocha was said in all the legends to have

promised. This happy coincidence gave Pizarro's *conquistadores* the

decisive strategic and psychological edge that they needed to overcome

the numerically superior Inca forces in the battles that followed.

Who had provided the model for the Viracochas?

10 *The Facts on File Encyclopaedia* ..., p. 658.

11 See, for example, H. Osborne, *South American Mythology*, Paul Hamlyn, London, 1968,

p. 81.

12 For further evidence and argument in this regard, see Constance Irwin, *Fair Gods and*

Stone Faces, W. H. Allen, London, 1964, pp. 31-2.

13 J. Alden Mason, *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p.

135. See also Garcilaso de la Vega, *The Royal Commentaries of the Incas*, Orion Press,

New York, 1961, pp. 132-3, 147-8.

53

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 6

He Came in a Time of Chaos

Through all the ancient legends of the peoples of the Andes stalked a tall,

bearded, pale-skinned figure wrapped in a cloak of secrecy. And though

he was known by many different names in many different places he was

always recognizably the *same* figure: Viracocha, Foam of the Sea, a master of science and magic who wielded terrible weapons and who came

in a time of chaos to set the world to rights.

The same basic story was shared in many variants by all the peoples of

the Andean region. It began with a vivid description of a terrifying period

when the earth had been inundated by a great flood and plunged into

darkness by the disappearance of the sun. Society had fallen into disorder, and the people suffered much hardship. Then

there suddenly appeared, coming from the south, a white man of large stature and

authoritative demeanour. This man had such great power that he changed the hills

into valleys and from the valleys made great hills, causing streams to flow from

the living stone ...1

The early Spanish chronicler who recorded this tradition explained that it

had been told to him by the Indians he had travelled among on his journeys in the Andes:

And they heard it from their fathers, who in their turn had it from the old songs

which were handed down from very ancient times ... They say that this man

travelled along the highland route to the north, working marvels as he went and

that they never saw him again. They say that in many places he gave men

instructions how they should live, speaking to them with great love and kindness

and admonishing them to be good and to do no damage or injury one to another,

but to love one another and show charity to all. In most places they name him

Ticci Viracocha ...2

Other names applied to the same figure included Huaracocha, Con, Con

Ticci or Kon Tiki, Thunupa, Taapac, Tupaca and Illa.³ He was a scientist,

an architect of surpassing skills, a sculptor and an engineer: 'He caused

terraces and fields to be formed on the steep sides of ravines, and sustaining walls to rise up and support them. He also made irrigating

channels to flow ... and he went in various directions, arranging many

things.'⁴

1 *South American Mythology*, p. 74.

2 Ibid.

3 Arthur Cotterell, *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends*, Guild Publishing,

London, 1989, p. 174. See also *South American Mythology*, p. 69-88.

4 Francisco de Avila, 'A Narrative of the Errors, False Gods, and Other Superstitions and

Diabolical Rites in Which the Indians of the Province of Huarochiri Lived in Ancient

Times', in *Narratives of the Rites and Laws of the Yncas* (trans, and ed. Clemens R.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Viracocha was also a teacher and a healer and made himself helpful to

people in need. It was said that ‘wherever he passed, he healed all that

were sick and restored sight to the blind.’⁵

This gentle, civilizing, ‘superhuman’, Samaritan had another side to his

nature, however. If his life were threatened, as it seems to have been on

several occasions, he had the weapon of heavenly fire at his disposal:

Working great miracles by his words, he came to the district of the Canas and

there, near a village called Cacha ... the people rose up against him and

threatened to stone him. They saw him sink to his knees and raise his hands to

heaven as if beseeching aid in the peril which beset him. The Indians declare that

thereupon they saw fire in the sky which seemed all around them. Full of fear, they

approached him whom they had intended to kill and besought him to forgive them

... Presently they saw that the fire was extinguished at his command, though

stones were consumed by fire in such wise that large blocks could be lifted by

hand as if they were cork. They narrate further that, leaving the place where this

occurred, he came to the coast and there, holding his mantle, he went forth

amidst the waves and was seen no more. And as he went they gave him the name

Viracocha, which means 'Foam of the Sea'.⁶

The legends were unanimous in their physical description of Viracocha. In

his *Suma y Narracion de los Incas*, for example, Juan de Betanzos, a

sixteenth-century Spanish chronicler, stated that according to the Indians,

he had been 'a bearded man of tall stature clothed in a white robe which

came down to his feet and which he wore belted at the waist'.⁷

Other descriptions, collected from many different and widely separated

Andean peoples, all seemed to identify the same enigmatic individual.

According to one he was:

A bearded man of medium height dressed in a rather long cloak ...
He was past his

prime, with grey hair, and lean. He walked with a staff and addressed
the natives

with love, calling them his sons and daughters. As he traversed all
the land he

worked miracles. He healed the sick by touch. He spoke every
tongue even better

than the natives. They called him Thunupa or Tarpaca, Viracocha-
rapacha or

Pachaccan ...⁸

In one legend Thunupa-Viracocha was said to have been a 'white
man of

large stature, whose air and person aroused great respect and

veneration'.⁹ In another he was described as 'a white man of august

appearance, blue-eyed, bearded, without headgear and wearing a
cusma,

a jerkin or sleeveless shirt reaching to the knees'. In yet another,
which

seemed to refer to a later phase of his life, he was revered as 'a wise

counsellor in matters of state' and depicted as 'an old man with a
beard

and long hair wearing a long tunic'.¹⁰

Markhem), Hakluyt Society, London, 1873, vol. XLVIII, p. 124.

5 *South American Mythology*, p. 74.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 74-6.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

9 John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas*, Macmillan, London, 1993, p. 97.

10 *South American Mythology*, p. 87.

55

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Civilizing mission

Above all else, Viracocha was remembered in the legends as a teacher.

Before his coming, it was said, 'men lived in a condition of disorder,

many went naked like savages; they had no houses or other dwellings

than caves, and from these they went forth to gather whatever they could

find to eat in the countryside.'¹¹

Viracocha was credited with changing all this and with initiating the

long-lost golden age which later generations looked back on with

nostalgia. All the legends agreed, furthermore, that he had carried out his

civilizing mission with great kindness and as far as possible had abjured

the use of force: careful instruction and personal example had been the

main methods used to equip the people with the techniques and

knowledge necessary for a cultured and productive life. In particular, he

was remembered for bringing to Peru such varied skills as medicine,

metallurgy, farming, animal husbandry, the art of writing (said by the

Incas to have been introduced by Viracocha but later forgotten), and a

sophisticated understanding of the principles of engineering and

architecture.

I had already been impressed by the quality of Inca stonework in Cuzco.

As my research in the old town continued, however, I was surprised to

discover that by no means all the so-called Inca masonry could be

attributed with any degree of archaeological certainty to the Incas. It was

true that they had been masters in the manipulation of stone, and many

monuments in the Cuzco area were indisputably their work. It seemed,

however, that some of the more remarkable structures routinely attributed to them could have been erected by earlier civilizations; the

evidence suggested that the Incas had often functioned as the restorers

of these structures rather than their original builders.

The same appeared to be true of the highly developed system of roads

connecting the far-flung parts of the Inca empire. The reader will recall

that these roads took the form of parallel highways running north to south, one along the coast and the other through the Andes. All in all more than 15,000 miles of surfaced tracks had been in regular and efficient use before the time of the Spanish conquest, and I had assumed

that the Incas had been responsible for all of them. I now learned that it

was much more likely that they had inherited the system. Their role had

been to restore, maintain and unify a pre-existing network. Indeed, though it was not often admitted, no expert could safely estimate how

old these incredible highways were or who had built them.¹²

The mystery was deepened by local traditions which stated not only that the road system and the sophisticated architecture had been 'ancient

in the time of the Incas', but that both 'were the work of white, auburn-

11 Ibid., p. 72.

12 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 26:42.

56

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

haired men' who had lived thousands of years earlier.¹³

One legend described Viracocha as being accompanied by 'messengers'

of two kinds, 'faithful soldiers' (*huaminca*) and 'shining ones' (*hayhuay-*

panti). Their role was to carry their lord's message 'to every part of the

world'.¹⁴

Elsewhere there were phrases such as: 'Con Ticci returned ... with a number of attendants'; 'Con Ticci then summoned his followers, who were called viracocha'; 'Con Ticci commanded all but two of the viracocha

to go east ...'¹⁵; 'There came forth from a lake a Lord named Con Ticci

Viracocha bringing with him a certain number of people ...'16; 'Thus those

viracochas went off to the various districts which Viracocha had indicated

for them ...'.17

The work of demons?

The ancient citadel of Sacsayhuaman lies just north of Cuzco. We reached

it late one afternoon under a sky almost occluded by heavy clouds of tarnished silver. A cold grey breeze was blowing across the high-altitude

tundra as I clambered up stairways, through lintelled stone gates built for

giants, and walked along the mammoth rows of zig-zag walls.

I craned my neck and looked up at a big granite boulder that my route

now passed under. Twelve feet high, seven feet across, and weighing

considerably more than 100 tons, it was a work of man, not nature. It had

been cut and shaped into a symphonic harmony of angles, manipulated

with apparent ease (as though it were made of wax or putty) and stood

on its end in a wall of other huge and problematic polygonal blocks,
some of them positioned above it, some below it, some to each side,
and

all in perfectly balanced and well-ordered juxtaposition.

Since one of these astonishing pieces of carefully hewn stone had a
height of twenty-eight feet and was calculated to weigh 361 tons¹⁸
(roughly the equivalent of *five hundred* family-sized automobiles), it
seemed to me that a number of fundamental questions were crying
out

for answers.

How had the Incas, or their predecessors, been able to work stone
on

such a gargantuan scale? How had they cut and shaped these
Cyclopean

boulders so precisely? How had they transported them tens of miles
from

¹³ Ignatius Donnelly, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, Harper &
Brothers, New York,

1882, p. 394.

¹⁴ From the 'Relacion anonyma de los costumbres antiguos de los
naturales del Piru',

reported in *The Facts on File Encyclopaedia . . .*, p. 657.

15 Pears *Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends: Oceania, Australia and the Americas*, (ed.

Sheila Savill), Pelham Books, London, 1978, pp. 179-80.

16 *South American Mythology*, p. 76.

17 Ibid.

18 *The Conquest of the Incas*, p. 191.

57

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

distant quarries? By what means had they made walls of them, shuffling

the individual blocks around and raising them high above the ground

with such apparent ease? These people weren't even supposed to have

had the wheel, let alone machinery capable of lifting and manipulating

dozens of irregularly shaped 100-ton blocks, and sorting them into three-

dimensional jigsaw puzzles.

I knew that the chroniclers of the early colonial period had been as

perplexed as I was by what they had seen. The respected Garcilaso de la

Vega, for example, who came here in the sixteenth century, had spoken

with awe about the fortress of Sacsayhuaman:

Its proportions are inconceivable when one has not actually seen it; and when one

has looked at it closely and examined it attentively, they appear to be so

extraordinary that it seems as though some magic had presided over its

construction; that it must be the work of demons instead of human beings. It is

made of such great stones, and in such great number, that one wonders

simultaneously how the Indians were able to quarry them, how they transported

them ... and how they hewed them and set them one on top of the other with such

precision. For they disposed of neither iron nor steel with which to penetrate the

rock and cut and polish the stones; they had neither wagon nor oxen to transport

them, and, in fact, there exist neither wagons nor oxen throughout the world that

would have sufficed for this task, so enormous are these stones and so rude the

mountain paths over which they were conveyed ...19

Garcilaso also reported something else interesting. In his *Royal*

Commentaries of the Incas he gave an account of how, in historical times,

an Inca king had tried to emulate the achievements of his predecessors

who had built Sacsayhuaman. The attempt had involved bringing just one

immense boulder from several miles away to add to the existing

fortifications: 'This boulder was hauled across the mountain by more than

20,000 Indians, going up and down very steep hills ... At a certain spot, it

fell from their hands over a precipice crushing more than 3000 men.'²⁰ In

all the histories I surveyed, this was the only report which described the

Incas actually building, or trying to build, with huge blocks like those

employed at Sacsayhuaman. The report suggested that they possessed no

experience of the techniques involved and that their attempt had ended

in disaster.

This, of course, proved nothing in itself. But Garcilaso's story did

intensify my doubts about the great fortifications which towered above

me. As I looked at them I felt that they could, indeed, have been erected

before the age of the Incas and by some infinitely older and more technically advanced race.

Not for the first time I was reminded of how difficult archaeologists found it to provide accurate dates for engineering works like roads and

drystone walls which contained no organic compounds. Radiocarbon was

redundant in such circumstances; thermo-luminescence, too, was useless.

19 *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*, p. 233.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

58

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

And while promising new tests such as Chlorine-36 rock-exposure dating

were now being developed their implementation was still some way off.

Pending further advances in the latter field, therefore, 'expert'

chronology was still largely the result of guesswork and subjective

assumptions. Since it was known that the Incas had made intensive use of

Sacsayhuaman I could easily understand why it had been assumed that

they had *built* it. But there was no obvious or necessary connection between these two propositions. The Incas could just as well have found

the structures already in place and moved into them.

If so, who had the original builders been?

The Viracochas, said the ancient myths, the bearded, white-skinned strangers, the 'shining ones', the 'faithful soldiers.'

As we travelled I continued to study the accounts of the Spanish adventurers and ethnographers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who had faithfully recorded the ancient, pre-contact traditions

of the Peruvian Indians. What was particularly noticeable about these

traditions was the repeated emphasis that the coming of the Viracochas

had been associated with a terrible deluge which had overwhelmed the

earth and destroyed the greater part of humanity.

59

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 7

Were There Giants Then?

Just after six in the morning the little train jerked into motion and began

its slow climb up the steep sides of the valley of Cuzco. The narrow-

gauge tracks were laid out in a series of Z shapes. We chugged along the

lower horizontal of the first Z, then shunted and went backwards up the

oblique, shunted again and went forward along the upper horizontal —

and so on, with numerous stops and starts, following a route that

eventually took us high above the ancient city. The Inca walls and colonial

palaces, the narrow streets, the cathedral of Santo Domingo squatting

atop the ruins of Viracocha's temple, all looked spectral and surreal in

the pearl-grey light of a dawn sky. A fairy pattern of electric lamps still

decorated the streets, a thin mist seeped across the ground, and the

smoke of domestic fires rose from the chimneys over the tiled roofs of

countless small houses.

Eventually the train turned its back on Cuzco and we proceeded for a

while in a straight north-westerly direction towards our destination:

Machu Picchu, the lost city of the Incas, some three hours and 130

kilometres away. I had intended to read, but lulled by the rocking motion

of the carriage, I dropped off to sleep instead. Fifty minutes later I awoke

to find that we were passing through a painting. The foreground, brightly

sunlit, consisted of flat green meadows sprinkled with little patches of

thawing frost, distributed on either side of a stream across a long, wide

valley.

In the middle of my view, dotted with bushes, was a large field on which

a handful of black and white dairy cows grazed. Nearby was a scattered

settlement of houses outside which stood small, dark-skinned Quechua

Indians dressed in ponchos, balaclavas and colourful woollen hats. More

distant were slopes canopied in fir trees and exotic eucalyptus. My eye

followed the rising contours of a pair of high green mountains, which then parted to reveal folded and even more lofty uplands. Beyond these

soared a far horizon surmounted by a jagged range of radiant and snowy

peaks.

Casting down the giants

It was with understandable reluctance that I turned at last to my reading.

I wanted to look more closely at some of the curious links I thought I had

identified connecting the sudden appearance of Viracocha to the deluge

legends of the Incas and other Andean peoples.

60

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Before me was a passage from Fr. Jose de Acosta's *Natural and Moral*

History of the Indies, in which the learned priest set out 'what the Indians

themselves report of their beginning':

They make great mention of a deluge, which happened in their country ... The

Indians say that all men were drowned in the deluge, and they report that out of

Lake Titicaca came one Viracocha, who stayed in Tiahuanaco, where at this day

there are to be seen the ruins of ancient and very strange buildings, and from

thence came to Cuzco, and so began mankind to multiply ...1

Making a mental note to find out more about Lake Titicaca, and the mysterious Tiahuanaco, I read the following passage summarizing a legend from the Cuzco area:

For some crime unstated the people who lived in the most ancient times were

destroyed by the creator ... in a deluge. After the deluge the creator appeared in

human form from Lake Titicaca. He then created the sun and moon and stars.

After that he renewed the human population of the earth ...2

In another myth

The great Creator God, Viracocha, decided to make a world for men to live in. First

he made the earth and sky. Then he began to make people to live in it, carving

great stone figures of giants which he brought to life. At first all went well but

after a time the giants began to fight among themselves and refused to work.

Viracocha decided that he must destroy them. Some he turned back into stone ...

the rest he overwhelmed with a great flood.³

Very similar notions were, of course, found in other, quite unconnected,

sources, such as the Jewish Old Testament. In Chapter six of the *Book of*

Genesis, for example, which describes the Hebrew God's displeasure with

his creation and his decision to destroy it, I had long been intrigued by

one of the few descriptive statements made about the forgotten era

before the Flood. According to the enigmatic language of that statement,

'There were giants in the earth in those days ...'.⁴ Could the 'giants'

buried in the biblical sands of the Middle East be connected in some

unseen way to the 'giants' woven into the fabric of pre-Colombian native

American legends? Adding considerably to the mystery was the fact that

the Jewish and Peruvian sources both went on, with many further details

in common, to depict an angry deity unleashing a catastrophic flood upon

a wicked and disobedient world.

On the next page of the sheaf of documents I had assembled was this

Inca account of the deluge handed down by a certain Father Molina in his

Relacion de las fabulas y ritos de los Yngas:

In the life of Manco Capac, who was the first Inca, and from whom they began to

1 José de Acosta, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, Book I, Chapter four, in

South American Mythology, p. 61.

2 Ibid., p. 82.

3 D. Gifford and J. Sibbick, *Warriors, Gods and Spirits from South American Mythology*,

Eurobook Limited, 1983, p. 54.

4 *Genesis* 6:4.

61

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

boast themselves children of the Sun and from whom they derived their idolatrous

worship of the Sun, they had an ample account of the deluge. They say that in it

perished all races of men and created things insomuch that the waters rose above

the highest mountain peaks in the world. No living thing survived except a man

and a woman who remained in a box and, when the waters subsided, the wind

carried them ... to Tiahuanaco [where] the creator began to raise up the people

and the nations that are in that region ...5

Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of a Spanish nobleman and an Inca royal

woman, was already familiar to me from his *Royal Commentaries of the*

Incas. He was regarded as one of the most reliable chroniclers of the

traditions of his mother's people and had done his work in the sixteenth

century, soon after the conquest, when those traditions had not yet been

contaminated by foreign influences. He, too, confirmed what had

obviously been a universal and deeply impressed belief: 'After the waters

of the deluge had subsided, a certain man appeared in the country of Tiahuanaco ...'6

That man had been Viracocha. Wrapped in his cloak, he was strong and

august of countenance' and walked with unassailable confidence through

the most dangerous badlands. He worked miracles of healing and could

call down fire from heaven. To the Indians it must have seemed that he

had materialized from nowhere.

Ancient traditions

We were now more than two hours into our journey to Machu Picchu and

the panorama had changed. Huge black mountains, upon which not a

trace of snow remained to reflect the sunlight, towered darkly above us

and we seemed to be running through a rocky defile at the end of a narrow valley filled with sombre shadows. The air was cold and so were

my feet. I shivered and resumed reading.

One thing was obvious amid the confused web of legends I had

reviewed, legends which supplemented one another but also at times

conflicted. All the scholars agreed that the Incas had borrowed, absorbed

and passed on the traditions of many of the different civilized peoples

over whom they had extended their control during the centuries of expansion of their vast empire. In this sense, whatever the outcome of

the historical debate over the antiquity of the Incas themselves, nobody

could seriously dispute their role as transmitters of the ancient belief systems of all the great archaic cultures—coastal and highland, known

and unknown—that had preceded them in this land.

And who could say just *what* civilizations might have existed in Peru in

the unexplored regions of the past? Every year archaeologists come up

5 Fr.. Molina, 'Relacion de las fabulas y ritos de los Yngas', in *South American Mythology*,

p. 61.

6 *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*.

62

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

with new finds which extend the horizons further and further back in time. So why shouldn't they one day discover evidence of the penetration

into the Andes, in remote antiquity, of a race of civilizers who had come

from overseas and gone away again after completing their work? That

was what the legends seemed to me to be suggesting, legends that most

of all, and most clearly, had immortalized the memory of the man/god

Viracocha striding the high windswept byways of the Andes working miracles wherever he went:

Viracocha himself, with his two assistants, journeyed north ... He travelled up the

cordillera, one assistant went along the coast, and the other up the edge of the

eastern forests ... The Creator proceeded to Urcos, near Cuzco, where he

commanded the future population to emerge from a mountain. He visited Cuzco,

and then continued north to Ecuador. There, in the coastal province of Manta, he

took leave of his people and, walking on the waves, disappeared across the

ocean.⁷

There was always this poignant moment of goodbye at the end of every

folk memory featuring the remarkable stranger whose name meant 'Foam

of the Sea':

Viracocha went on his way, calling forth the races of men ... When he came to the

district of Puerto Viejo he was joined by his followers whom he had sent on

before, and when they had joined him he put to sea in their company and they say

that he and his people went by water as easily as they had traversed the land.⁸

Always this poignant goodbye ... and often a hint of science or magic.

Time capsule

Outside the window of the train things were happening. To my left,

swollen with dark water, I could see the Urubamba, a tributary of the

Amazon and a river sacred to the Incas. The air temperature had warmed-

up noticeably: we had descended into a relatively low-lying valley with its

own tropical micro-climate. The mountain slopes rising on either side of

the tracks were densely covered in green forests and I was reminded that

this was truly a region of vast and virtually insuperable obstacles.

Whoever had ventured all this way into the middle of nowhere to build

Machu Picchu must have had a very strong motive for doing so.

Whatever the reason had been, the choice of such a remote location had

at least one beneficial side-effect: Machu Picchu was never found by the

conquistadores and friars during their days of destructive zeal. Indeed, it

was not until 1911, when the fabulous heritage of older races was

beginning to be treated with greater respect, that a young American

explorer, Hiram Bingham, revealed Machu Picchu to the world. It was

realized at once that this incredible site opened a unique window on pre-

7 *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru*, p. 237.

8 Juan de Batanzos, 'Suma y Narracion de los Incas', in *South American Mythology*, p. 79.

63

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Colombian civilization; in consequence the ruins were protected from looters and souvenir hunters and an important chunk of the enigmatic past was preserved to amaze future generations.

Having passed through a one-horse town named Agua Caliente (Hot Water), where a few broken-down restaurants and cheap bars leered at

travellers from beside the tracks, we reached Machu Picchu Puentas Ruinas station at ten minutes past nine in the morning. From here a half-

hour bus ride on a winding dirt road up the side of a steep and forbidding mountain brought us to Machu Picchu itself, to the ruins, and

to a bad hotel which charged us a nonsensical amount of money for a not

very clean room. We were the only guests. Though it had been years since

the local guerrilla movement had last bombed the Machu Picchu train, not

many foreigners were keen to come here any more.

Machu Picchu dreaming

It was two in the afternoon. I stood on a high point at the southern end of

the site. The ruins stretched out northwards in lichen-enshrouded terraces before me. Thick clouds were wrapped in a ring around the mountain tops but the sunlight still occasionally burst through here and

there.

Way down on the valley floor I could see the sacred river curled in a hairpin loop right around the central formation on which Machu Picchu

was based, like a moat surrounding a giant castle. The river showed deep

green from this vantage point, reflecting the greenness of the steep jungle slopes. And there were patches of white water and wonderful sparkling gleams of light.

I gazed across the ruins towards the dominant peak. Its name is Huana

Picchu and it used to feature in all the classic travel agency posters of this

site. To my astonishment I now observed that for a hundred metres or so

below its summit it had been neatly terraced and sculpted:
somebody had

been up there and had carefully raked the near-vertical cliffs into a graceful hanging garden which had perhaps in ancient times been planted with bright flowers.

It seemed to me that the entire site, together with its setting, was a monumental work of sculpture composed in part of mountains, in part of

rock, in part of trees, in part of stones—and also in part of water. It was a

heartachingly beautiful place, certainly one of the most beautiful places I

have ever seen.

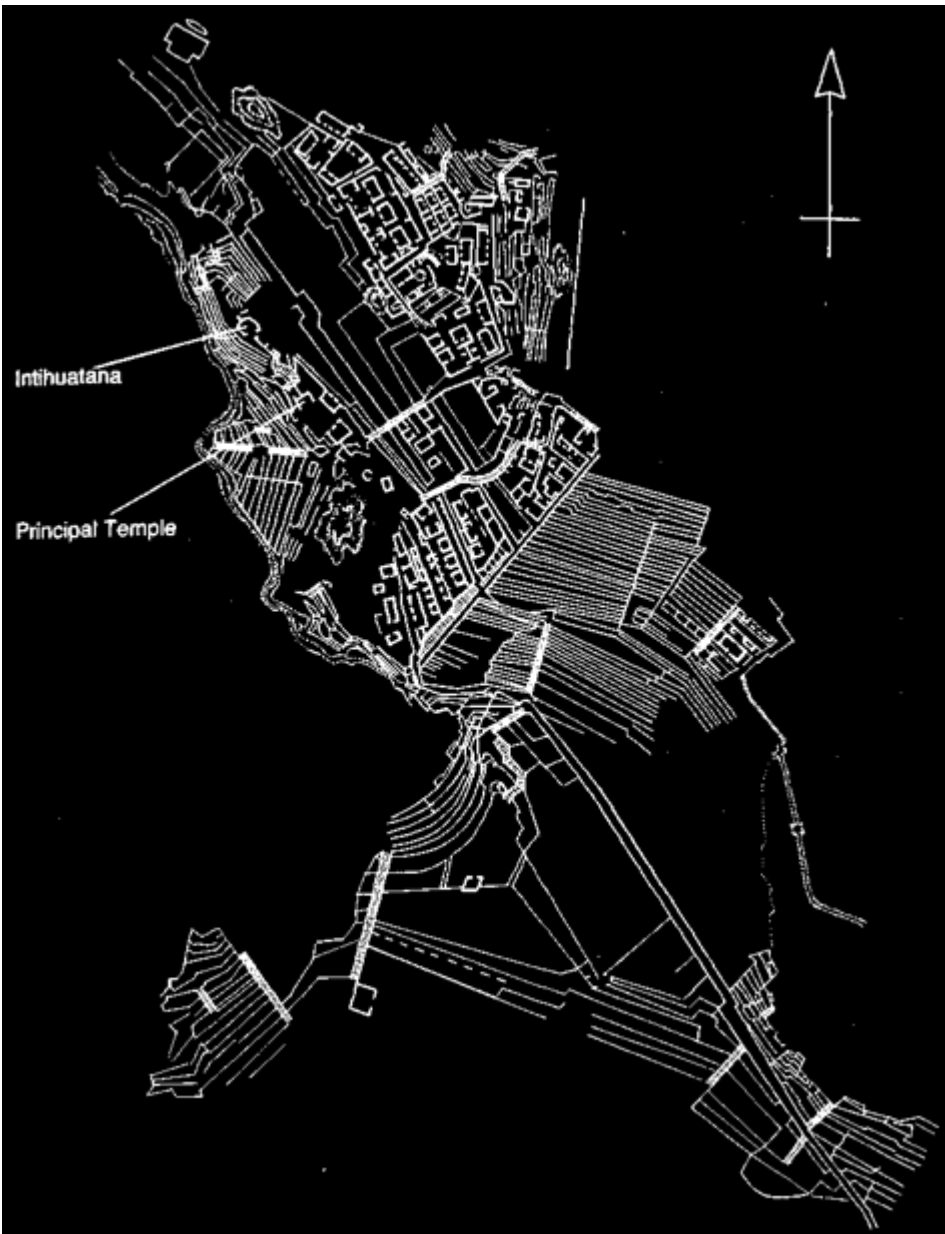
Despite its luminous brilliance, however, I felt that I was gazing down on to a city of ghosts. It was like the wreck of the *Marie Celeste*, deserted

and restless. The houses were arranged in long terraces. Each house was

tiny, with just one room fronting directly on to the narrow street, and the

architecture was solid and functional but by no means ornate. By way of

contrast certain ceremonial areas were engineered to an infinitely higher



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standard and incorporated giant blocks similar to those I had seen at Sacsayhuaman. One smoothly polished polygonal monolith was around

twelve feet long by five feet wide by five feet thick and could not have

weighed less than 200 tons. How had the ancient builders managed to

get it up here?

Machu Picchu.

There were dozens of others like it too, and they were all arranged in the familiar jigsaw puzzle walls of interlocking angles. On one block I was

65

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

able to count a total of thirty-three angles, every one intermeshed faultlessly with a matching angle on an adjoining block. There were massive polygons and perfect ashlar with razor-sharp edges. There were

also natural, unhewn boulders integrated into the overall design at a number of points. And there were strange and unusual devices such as

the Intihuatana, the 'hitching post of the sun'. This remarkable artefact

consisted of an elemental chunk of bedrock, grey and crystalline, carved

into a complex geometrical form of curves and angles, incised niches and

external buttresses, surmounted at the centre by a stubby vertical prong.

Jigsaw puzzle

How old is Machu Picchu? The academic consensus is that the city could

not have been built much earlier than the fifteenth century AD.⁹

Dissenting opinions, however, have from time to time been expressed by

a number of more daring but respectable scholars. In the 1930s, for

example, Rolf Muller, professor of Astronomy at the University of

Potsdam, found convincing evidence to suggest that the most important

features of Machu Picchu possessed significant astronomical alignments.

From these, through the use of detailed mathematical computations

concerning star positions in the sky in previous millennia (which

gradually alter down the epochs as the result of a phenomenon known as

precession of the equinoxes), Muller concluded that the original layout of

the site could only have been accomplished during 'the era of 4000 BC to

2000 BC'.¹⁰

In terms of orthodox history, this was a heresy of audacious proportions. If Muller was right, Machu Picchu was not a mere 500 but

could be as much as 6000 years old. This would make it significantly older than the Great Pyramid of Egypt (assuming, of course, that one accepted the Great Pyramid's own orthodox dating of around 2500 BC).

There were other dissenting voices concerning the antiquity of Machu

Picchu, and most, like Muller, were convinced that parts of the site were

thousands of years older than the date favoured by orthodox historians.¹¹

Like the big polygonal blocks that made up the walls, this was a notion

⁹ *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru*, p. 163.

¹⁰ Cited in Zecharia Sitchin, *The Lost Realms*, Avon Books, New York, 1990, p. 164.

¹¹ Another scholar, Maria Schulten de D'Ebneth, also worked with mathematical methods

(as opposed to historical methods which are heavily speculative and interpretive). Her

objective was to rediscover the ancient grid used to determine Machu Picchu's layout in

relation to the cardinal points. She did this after first establishing the existence of a

central 45° line. In the process she stumbled across something else: 'The sub-angles

that she calculated between the central 45° line and sites located away from it ...

indicated to her that the earth's tilt ("obliquity") at the time this grid was laid out was

close to 24° 0'. This means that the grid was planned (according to her) 5125 years

before her measurements were done in 1953; in other words in 3172 BC.' *The Last*

Realms, pp. 204-5.

66

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

that looked as though it might fit with other pieces of a jigsaw puzzle—in

this case the jigsaw puzzle of a past that didn't quite make sense any

more. Viracocha was part of that same puzzle. All the legends said his

capital had been at Tiahuanaco. The ruins of this great and ancient city

lay across the border in Bolivia, in an area known as the Collao,
twelve

miles south of Lake Titicaca.

We could get there, I calculated, in a couple of days, via Lima and La
Paz.

67

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 8

The Lake at the Roof of the World

La Paz, the capital city of Bolivia, nestles in the uneven bottom of a spectacular hole in the ground more than two miles above sea level.

This

plunging ravine, thousands of feet deep, was carved in some primeval

age by a tremendous downrush of water that carried with it an abrasive

tide of loose rocks and rubble.

Provided by nature with such an apocalyptic setting, La Paz possesses a

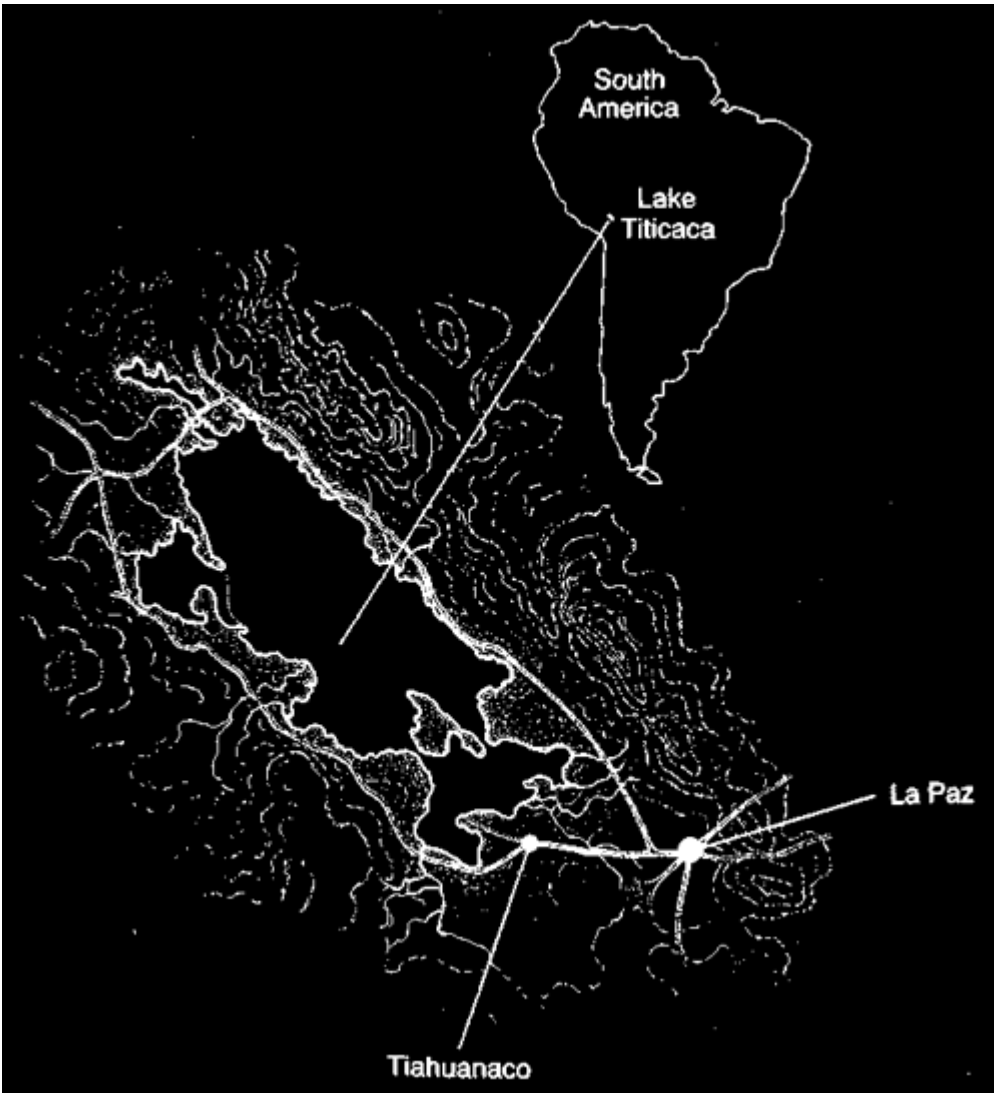
unique though slightly sleazy charm. With its narrow streets, dark-walled

tenements, imposing cathedrals, garish cinemas and hamburger bars

open till late, it generates an atmosphere of quirky intrigue which is oddly intoxicating. It's hard going for the pedestrian, however, unless equipped with lungs like bellows, because the whole of the central district is built up and down the sides of precipitous hills.

La Paz airport is almost 5000 feet higher than the city itself on the edge

of the Altiplano—the cold, rolling uplands that are the dominant topographical feature of this region. Santha and I landed there well after midnight on a delayed flight from Lima. In the draughty arrivals hall we were offered coca tea in little plastic cups as a prophylactic against altitude sickness. After considerable delay and exertion, we extracted our luggage from customs, hailed an ancient American-made taxi, and clanked and rattled down towards the dim yellow lights of the city far below.



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Lake Titicaca.

Rumours of a cataclysm

Around four o'clock the next afternoon we set off for Lake Titicaca in a

rented jeep, fought our way through the capital's incomprehensible

permanent rush-hour traffic-jams, then drove up out of the skyscrapers

and slums into the wide, clear horizons of the Altiplano.

At first, still close to the city, our route took us through a zone of bleak

suburbs and sprawling shantytowns where the sidewalks were lined with

auto-repair shops and scrap yards. The more distance we put between

ourselves and La Paz, however, the more attenuated the settlements

became, until almost all signs of human habitation ceased. The empty,

treeless, undulating savannahs, distantly bordered by the snow-covered

peaks of the Cordillera Real, created an unforgettable spectacle of natural

beauty and power. But there was also a feeling of otherworldliness about

this place, which seemed to float above the clouds like an enchanted kingdom.

69

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Although our ultimate destination was Tiahuanaco, we were aiming that

night for the town of Copacabana on a promontory near the southern end

of Lake Titicaca. To reach it we had to cross a neck of water by improvised car ferry at the fishing town of Tiquine. Then, with dusk descending, we followed the main highway, now little more than a narrow and uneven track, up a series of steep hairpin bends and on to the shoulder of a mountain spur. From this point a contrasting panorama unfolded: the dark, dark waters of the lake below appeared to lie at the edge of a limitless ocean drowned in sombre shadows, and yet the jagged peaks of the snowcapped mountains in the distance were still drenched in dazzling sunlight.

From the very beginning Lake Titicaca seemed to me a special place. I

knew that it lay some 12,500 feet above sea level, that the frontier between Peru and Bolivia passed through it, that it covered an area of

3200 square miles and was 138 miles long by about 70 miles wide. I also

knew it was deep, reaching almost 1000 feet in places, and had a puzzling geological history.

Here are the mysteries, and some of the solutions that have been proposed:

1 Though now more than two miles above sea level, the area around Lake Titicaca is littered with millions upon millions of fossilized sea shells. This suggests that at some stage the whole of the Altiplano was

forced upwards from the sea-bed, perhaps as part of the general terrestrial rising that formed South America as a whole. In the process

great quantities of ocean water, together with countless myriads of living marine creatures, were scooped up and suspended among the

Andean ranges.¹ This is thought to have happened not more recently

than about 100 million years ago.²

2 Paradoxically, despite the mighty antiquity of this event, Lake Titicaca

has retained, until the present day, 'a marine ichthyofauna'³, in other words, though now located hundreds of miles from any ocean, its fish

and crustacea feature many oceanic (rather than freshwater) types.

Surprising creatures brought to the surface in fishermen's nets have

¹ Professor Arthur Posnansky, *Tiahuanacu: The Cradle of American Man*, Ministry of

Education, La Paz, Bolivia, 1957, volume III p. 192. See also Immanuel Velikovsky, *Earth*

in Upheaval, Pocket Books, New York, 1977, pp. 77-8: 'Investigation into the topography

of the Andes and the fauna of Lake Titicaca, together with a chemical analysis of this

lake and others on the same plateau, has established that the plateau was at one time at

sea level, 12,500 feet lower than it is today ... and that its lakes were originally part of a

sea-gulf ... Sometime in the past the entire Altiplano, with its lakes, rose from the

bottom of the ocean ...'

2 Personal communication with Richard Ellison of the British Geological Survey, 17

September 1993. Ellison is the author of the BGS Overseas Geology and Mineral

Resources Paper (No. 65) entitled *The Geology of the Western Corriera and Altiplano*.

3 *Tiahuanacu*, III, p. 192.

70

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

included examples of *Hippocampus* (the seahorse).⁴ In addition, as one

authority has pointed out, 'The various species of *Allorquestes*

(*hyalella inermis*, etc.) and other examples of marine fauna leave no

doubt that this lake in other periods was much saltier than today, or, more accurately, that the water which formed it was from the sea and that it was damned up and locked in the Andes when the continent rose.’⁵

3 So much, then, for the events which may have created Lake Titicaca in

the first place. Since its formation this great ‘interior sea’, and the Altiplano itself, has undergone several other drastic and dramatic changes. Of these by far the most notable is that the lake’s extent appears to have fluctuated enormously, indicated by the existence of an ancient strandline visible on much of the surrounding terrain.

Puzzlingly, this strandline is not level but *slopes* markedly from north to south over a considerable horizontal distance. At the northernmost point surveyed it is as much as 295 feet higher than Titicaca; some 400 miles farther south, it is 274 feet lower than the present level of the lake.⁶ From this, and much other evidence, geologists have deduced that the Altiplano is still gradually rising, but in an unbalanced manner with greater altitudes being attained in the northern part and lesser in the southern. The process involved here is

thought to have less to do with changes in the level of Titicaca’s

waters themselves (although such changes have certainly occurred) than with changes in the level of the whole terrain in which the lake is situated.⁷

⁴ Much harder to explain in such terms, however, given the very long time periods major geological transformations are supposed to require, is irrefutable evidence that *the city of Tiahuanaco was once a port, complete with extensive docks, positioned right on the shore of Lake Titicaca*.⁸ The problem is that Tiahuanaco's ruins are now marooned about twelve miles south of the lake and *more than 100 feet higher* than the present shoreline.⁹ In the period since the city was built, it therefore follows that one of two things must have happened: either the level of lake has fallen greatly or the land on which Tiahuanaco stands has risen comparably.

⁵ Either way it is obvious that there have been massive and traumatic

⁴ *Tiahuanacu*, J. J. Augustin, New York, 1945, volume I, p. 28.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See, for example, H.S. Bellamy, *Built Before the Flood: The Problem of the Tiahuanaco*

Ruins, Faber & Faber, London, 1943, p. 57.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

8 *Tiahuanacu*, III, pp. 192-6. See also *Bolivia*, Lonely Planet Publications, Hawthorne, Australia, 1992, p. 156.

9 *Ibid.* See also Harold Osborne, *Indians of the Andes: Aymaras and Quechuas*,

Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1952, p. 55.

71

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

physical changes. Some of these, such as the rise of the Altiplano from

the floor of the ocean, certainly took place in remote geological ages,

before the advent of human civilization. Others are not nearly so

ancient and must have occurred after the construction of

Tiahuanaco.¹⁰ The question, therefore, is this: *when* was Tiahuanaco

built?

The orthodox historical view is that the ruins cannot possibly be

dated much earlier than AD 500.¹¹ An alternative chronology also

exists, however, which, although not accepted by the majority of

scholars, seems more in tune with the scale of the geological

upheavals that have occurred in this region. Based on the mathematical/astronomical calculations of Professor Arthur Posnansky of the University of La Paz, and of Professor Rolf Muller (who also challenged the official dating of Machu Picchu), it pushes the main phase of construction at Tiahuanaco back to *15,000 BC*. This chronology also indicates that the city later suffered immense destruction in a phenomenal natural catastrophe around the eleventh millennium BC, and thereafter rapidly became separated from the lakeshore.¹²

We shall be reviewing Posnansky's and Muller's findings in Chapter Eleven, findings which suggest that the great Andean city of Tiahuanaco

flourished during the last Ice Age in the deep, dark, moonless midnight

of prehistory.

10 *Earth In Upheaval*, p. 76: 'The conservative view among evolutionists and geologists is

that mountain-making is a slow process, observable in minute changes, and that

because it is a continuous process there never could have been spontaneous upliftings

on a large scale. *In the case of Tiahuanaco, however, the change in altitude apparently*

occurred after the city was built, and this could not have been the result of a slow

process ...'

11 See, for example, Ian Cameron, *Kingdom of the Sun God: A History of the Andes and*

Their People, Guild Publishing, London, 1990, pp. 48-9.

12 *Tiahuanacu* II, p. 91 and I, p. 39.

72

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 9

Once and Future King

During my travels in the Andes I had several times re-read a curious variant of the mainstream tradition of Viracocha. In this variant, which

was from the area around Lake Titicaca known as the Collao, the deity

civilizing-hero had been named Thunupa:

Thunupa appeared on the Altiplano in ancient times, coming from the north with

five disciples. A white man of august presence, blue-eyed, and bearded, he was

sober, puritanical and preached against drunkenness, polygamy and war.¹

After travelling great distances through the Andes, where he created a

peaceful kingdom and taught men all the arts of civilization,² Thunupa

was struck down and grievously wounded by a group of jealous conspirators:

They put his blessed body in a boat of totora rush and set it adrift on Lake

Titicaca. There ... he sailed away with such speed that those who had tried so

cruelly to kill him were left behind in terror and astonishment—for this lake has no

current ... The boat came to the shore at Cochamarca, where today is the river

Desguadero. Indian tradition asserts that the boat struck the land with such force

it created the river Desguadero, which before then did not exist. And on the water

so released the holy body was carried many leagues away to the sea coast at Africa

...3

Boats, water and salvation

There are curious parallels here to the story of Osiris, the ancient

Egyptian high god of death and resurrection. The fullest account of the

original myth defining this mysterious figure is given by Plutarch⁴ and

says that, after bringing the gifts of civilization to his people, teaching

them all manner of useful skills, abolishing cannibalism and human

sacrifice, and providing them with their first legal code, Osiris left Egypt

and travelled about the world to spread the benefits of civilization to

other nations as well. He never forced the barbarians he encountered to

accept his laws, preferring instead to argue with them and to appeal to

their reason. It is also recorded that he passed on his teachings to them

1 *South American Mythology*, p. 87.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

3 Antonio de la Calancha, *Cronica Moralizada del Orden de San Augustin en el Peru*,

1638, in *South American Mythology*, p. 87.

4 Good summaries of the Plutarch account are given in M. V. Seton-Williams, *Egyptian*

Legends and Stories, Rubicon Press, London, 1990, pp. 24-9; and in E. A. Wallis Budge,

From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt, Oxford University Press, 1934, pp. 178-83.

73

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

by means of hymns and songs accompanied by musical instruments.

While he was gone, however, he was plotted against by seventy-two

members of his court, led by his brother-in-law Set. On his return the

conspirators invited him to a banquet where a splendid coffer of wood

and gold was offered as a prize to any guest who could fit into it exactly.

Osiris did not know that the coffer had been constructed precisely to his

body measurements. As a result, when the assembled guests tried one by

one to get into it they failed. Osiris lay down comfortably inside. Before

he had time to get out the conspirators rushed forward, nailed the lid

tightly closed and sealed even the cracks with molten lead so that there

would be no air. The coffer was then thrown into the Nile. It had been intended that it should sink, but it floated rapidly away, drifting for a considerable distance until it reached the sea coast.

At this point the goddess Isis, wife of Osiris, intervened. Using all the great magic for which she was renowned, she found the coffer and concealed it in a secret place. However, her evil brother Set, out hunting

in the marshes, discovered the coffer, opened it and, in a mad fury, cut

the royal corpse into fourteen pieces which he scattered throughout the

land.

Once more Isis set off to save her husband. She made a small boat of

papyrus reeds, coated with pitch, and embarked on the Nile in search of

the remains. When she had found them she worked powerful spells to

reunite the dismembered parts of the body so that it resumed its old form. Thereafter, in an intact and perfect state, Osiris went through a process of stellar rebirth to become god of the dead and king of the underworld—from which place, legend had it, he occasionally returned to

earth in the guise of a mortal man.⁵

Although there are huge differences between the traditions it is bizarre

that Osiris in Egypt and Thunupa-Viracocha in South America should have

had all of the following points in common:

- both were great civilizers;
- both were conspired against;
- both were struck down;
- both were sealed inside a container or vessel of some kind;

- both were then cast into water;
- both drifted away on a river;
- both eventually reached the sea.

Are such parallels to be dismissed as coincidences? or could there be

some underlying connection?

5 From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt, p. 180.

74

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Reed boats of Suriqui

The air was Alpine cold and I was sitting on the front of a motor launch

doing about twenty knots across the icy waters of Lake Titicaca. The sky

above was clear blue, reflecting aquamarine and turquoise tints inshore,

and the vast body of the lake, glinting in copper and silver tones, seemed

to stretch away for ever ...

The passages in the legends that spoke of vessels made of reeds

needed to be followed up because I knew that 'boats of totora rush' were

a traditional form of transport on this lake. However, the ancient skills required to build craft of this type had atrophied in recent years and we were now headed towards Suriqui, the one place where they were still properly made.

On Suriqui Island, in a small village close to the lakeshore, I found two

elderly Indians making a boat from bundled totora rushes. The elegant

craft, which appeared to be nearly complete, was approximately fifteen

feet long. It was wide amidships, but narrow at either end with a high curving prow and stern.

I sat down for a while to watch. The more senior of the two builders, who wore a brown felt hat over a curious peaked woollen cap, repeatedly

braced his bare left foot against the side of the vessel to give additional

leverage as he pulled and tightened the cords that held the bundles of

reeds in place. From time to time I noticed that he rubbed a length of cord against his own perspiring brow—thus moistening it to increase its

adhesion.

The boat, surrounded by chickens and occasionally investigated by a shy, browsing alpaca, stood amid a litter of discarded rushes in the backyard of a ramshackle farmhouse. It was one of several I was able to

study over the next few hours and, though the setting was unmistakably

Andean, I found myself repeatedly overtaken by a sense of *déjà vu* from

another place and another time. The reason was that the totora vessels of

Suriqui were virtually identical, both in the method of construction and in

finished appearance, to the beautiful craft fashioned from papyrus reeds

in which the Pharaohs had sailed the Nile thousands of years previously.

In my travels in Egypt I had examined the images of many such vessels

painted on the walls of ancient tombs. It sent a tingle down my spine to

see them now so colourfully brought to life on an obscure island on Lake

Titicaca—even though my research had partially prepared me for this

coincidence. I knew that no satisfactory explanation had ever been given

for how such close and richly detailed similarities of boat design could

occur in two such widely separated places. Nevertheless, in the words of

one authority in ancient navigation who had addressed himself to this

conundrum:

Here was the same compact shape, peaked and raised at both ends with rope

lashings running from the deck right round the bottom of the boat all in one piece

75

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

... Each straw was placed with maximum precision to achieve perfect symmetry

and streamlined elegance, while the bundles were so tightly lashed that they

looked like ... gilded logs bent into a clog-shaped peak fore and aft.⁶

The reed boats of the ancient Nile, and the reed boats of Lake Titicaca

(the original design of which, local Indians insisted, had been given to

them by 'the Viracocha people'⁷), had other points in common. Both, for

example, were equipped with sails mounted on peculiar two-legged straddled masts.⁸ Both had also been used for the long-distance transport

of exceptionally heavy building materials: obelisks and gargantuan blocks

of stone bound for the temples at Giza and Luxor and Abydos on the one

hand and for the mysterious edifices of Tiahuanaco on the other.

In those far-off days, before Lake Titicaca became more than one hundred feet shallower, Tiahuanaco had stood at the water's edge overlooking a vista of awesome and sacred beauty. Now the great port,

capital city of Viracocha himself, lay lost amid eroded hills and empty windswept plains.

Road to Tiahuanaco ...

After returning from Suriqui to the mainland we drove our hired jeep across those plains, raising a cloud of dust. Our route took us through

the towns of Puccarani and Laha, populated by stolid Aymara Indians who

walked slowly in the narrow cobbled streets and sat placidly in the little

sunlit plazas.

Were these people the descendants of the builders of Tiahuanaco, as

the scholars insisted? Or were the legends right? Had the ancient city

been the work of foreigners with godlike powers who had settled here,

long ages ago?

6 Thor Heyerdahl, *The Ra Expeditions*, Book Club Associates, London, 1972, pp. 43, 295.

7 Ibid., p. 43.

8 Ibid., p. 295.

76

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 10

The City at the Gate of the Sun

The early Spanish travellers who visited the ruined Bolivian city of Tiahuanaco at around the time of the conquest were impressed by the

sheer size of its buildings and by the atmosphere of mystery that clung

to them. 'I asked the natives whether these edifices were built in the time

of the Inca,' wrote the chronicler Pedro Cieza de Leon, 'They laughed at

the question, affirming that they were made long before the Inca reign

and ... that they had heard from their forebears that everything to be seen there appeared suddenly in the course of a single night ...'¹

Meanwhile another Spanish visitor of the same period recorded a tradition which said that the stones had been lifted miraculously off the

ground, 'They were carried through the air to the sound of a trumpet.'²

Not long after the conquest a detailed description of the city was

written by the historian Garcilaso de la Vega. No looting for treasure or

for building materials had yet taken place and, though ravaged by the

tooth of time, the site was still magnificent enough to take his breath away:

We must now say something about the large and almost incredible buildings of

Tiahuanaco. There is an artificial hill, of great height, built on stone foundations

so that the earth will not slide. There are gigantic figures carved in stone ... these

are much worn which shows their great antiquity. There are walls, the stones of

which are so enormous it is difficult to imagine what human force could have put

them in place. And there are the remains of strange buildings, the most

remarkable being stone portals, hewn out of solid rock; these stand on bases

anything up to 30 feet long, 15 feet wide and 6 feet thick, base and portal being

all of one piece ... How, and with the use of what tools or implements, massive

works of such size could be achieved are questions which we are unable to answer

... Nor can it be imagined how such enormous stones could have been brought

here ...3

1 Pedro Cieza de Leon, *Chronicle of Peru*, Hakluyt Society, London, 1864 and 1883, Part

I, Chapter 87.

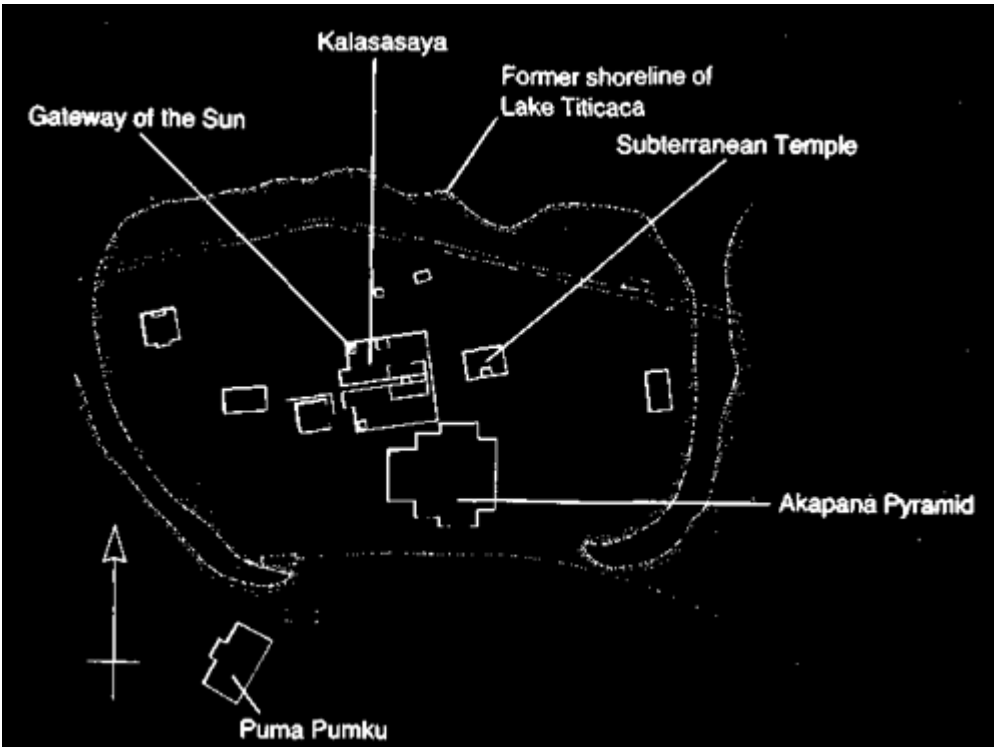
2 *Indians of the Andes: Aymaras and Quechuas*, p. 64. See also *Feats and Wisdom of the*

Ancients, Time-Life Books, Alexandria, Virginia, 1990, p. 55.

3 *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*, Book Three, Chapter one. See, for example, version

published by Orion Press, New York, 1961 (translated by Maria Jolas from the critical

annotated French edition of Alain Gheerbrant), pp. 49-50.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Tiahuanaco.

That was in the sixteenth century. More than 400 years later, at the end

of the twentieth century, I shared Garcilaso's puzzlement. Scattered around Tiahuanaco, in defiance of the looters who had robbed the site of

so much in recent years, were monoliths so big and cumbersome yet so

well cut that they almost seemed to be the work of super-beings.

Sunken temple

Like a disciple at the feet of his master, I sat on the floor of the sunken

temple and looked up at the enigmatic face which all the scholars of

Tiahuanaco believed was intended to represent Viracocha. Untold

centuries ago, unknown hands had carved this likeness into a tall pillar of

red rock. Though now much eroded, it was the likeness of a man at peace

with himself. It was the likeness of a man of power ...

He had a high forehead, and large, round eyes. His nose was straight,

narrow at the bridge but flaring towards the nostrils. His lips were full.

His distinguishing feature, however, was his stylish and imposing beard,

which had the effect of making his face broader at the jaws than at the

temples. Looking more closely, I could see that the sculptor had

portrayed a man whose skin was shaved all around his lips with the result

that his moustache began high on his cheeks, roughly parallel with the

end of his nose. From there it curved extravagantly down beside the

corners of his mouth, forming an exaggerated goatee at the chin, and

then followed his jawline back to his ears.

Above and below the ears, on the side of the head, were carved odd

78

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

representations of animals. Or perhaps it would be better to describe

these carvings as representations of *odd* animals, because they looked

like big, clumsy, prehistoric mammals with fat tails and club feet.

There were other points of interest. For example, the stone figure of

Viracocha had been sculpted with the hands and arms folded, one below

the other, over the front of a long, flowing robe. On each side of this robe

appeared the sinuous form of a snake coiling upwards from ground to

shoulder level. And as I looked at this beautiful design (the original of

which had perhaps been embroidered on rich cloth) the picture that came

into my mind was of Viracocha as a wizard or a sorcerer, a bearded,

Merlin-like figure dressed in weird and wonderful clothes, calling down

fire from heaven.

The 'temple' in which the Viracocha pillar stood was open to the sky and consisted of a large, rectangular pit, like a swimming pool, dug out

six feet below ground level. Its floor, about 40 feet long by 30 feet wide,

was composed of hard, flat gravel. Its strong vertical walls were formed

from precisely dressed ashlar blocks of varying sizes laid closely against

one another without mortar in the joints and interspersed with taller, rough-hewn stelae. A set of steps was let into the southern wall and it

was down these I had come when I had entered the structure.

I walked several times around the figure of Viracocha, resting my fingers on the sun-warmed stone pillar, trying to guess its purpose. It was

perhaps seven feet tall and it faced south, with its back to the old shoreline of Lake Titicaca (originally less than six hundred feet away).⁴

Ranged out behind this central obelisk, furthermore, there were two others, of smaller stature, possibly intended to represent Viracocha's legendary companions. All three figures, being severely, functionally

vertical, cast clean-edged shadows as I gazed at them, for the sun was

past its zenith.

I sat down on the ground again and looked slowly all around the temple. Viracocha dominated it, like the conductor of an orchestra, and

yet its most striking feature undoubtedly lay elsewhere: lining the walls,

at various points and heights, were dozens and dozens of human heads

sculpted in stone. These were complete heads, protruding three dimensionally out of the walls. There were several different (and contradictory) scholarly opinions as to their function.

Pyramid

From the floor of the sunken temple, looking west, I could see an immense wall into which was set an impressive geometrical gateway made of large stone slabs. Silhouetted in this gateway by the afternoon

sun was the figure of a giant. The wall, I knew, enclosed a parade-ground-

4 *Bolivia*, p. 156 (map).

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

sized area called the Kalasasaya (a word in the local Aymara language

meaning simply 'Place of the Upright Standing Stones'⁵). And the giant

was one of the huge time-worn pieces of sculpture referred to by Garcilaso de la Vega.

I was eager to take a look at it, but for the moment my attention was diverted southwards towards an artificial hill, 50 feet high, which lay almost directly ahead of me as I climbed the steps out of the sunken temple. The hill, which had also been mentioned by Garcilaso, was known

as the Akapana Pyramid. Like the pyramids at Giza in Egypt, it was oriented with surprising precision towards the cardinal points. Unlike those pyramids its ground-plan was somewhat irregular. Nonetheless, it

measured roughly 690 feet on each side which meant that it was a hulking piece of architecture and the dominant edifice of Tiahuanaco.

I walked towards it now, and spent some time strolling around it and clambering over it. Originally it had been a clean-sided step-pyramid of

earth faced with large andesite blocks. In the centuries since the

conquest, however, it had been used as a quarry by builders from as far

away as La Paz, with the result that only about ten per cent of its superb

facing blocks now remained.

What clues, what evidence, had those nameless thieves carried off with

them? As I climbed up the broken sides and around the deep grassy

troughs in the top of the Akapana, I realized that the true function of the

pyramid was probably never going to be understood. All that was certain

was that it had not been merely decorative or ceremonial. On the

contrary, it seemed almost as though it might have functioned as some

kind of arcane 'device' or machine. Deep within its bowels, archaeologists

had discovered a complex network of zig-zagging stone channels, lined

with fine ashlar. These had been meticulously angled and jointed (to a

tolerance of one-fiftieth of an inch), and had served to sluice water down

from a large reservoir at the top of the structure, through a series of

descending levels, to a moat that encircled the entire site, washing against the pyramid's base on its southern side.⁶

So much care and attention had been lavished on all this plumbing, so

many man-hours of highly skilled and patient labour, that the Akapana

made no sense unless it had been endowed with a significant purpose. A

number of archaeologists, I knew, had speculated that this purpose might

have been connected with a rain or river cult involving a primitive veneration of the powers and attributes of fast-flowing water.

One sinister suggestion, which implied that the unknown 'technology' of the pyramid might have had a lethal purpose, was derived from the

meaning of the words *Hake* and *Apana* in the ancient Aymara language

5 H. S. Bellamy and P. Allan, *The Calendar of Tiahuanaco: The Measuring System of the*

Oldest Civilization, Faber & Faber, London, 1956, p. 16.

6 For a detailed discussion of the hydraulic system of the Akapana see *Tiahuanacu: II*,

pp. 69-79.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

still spoken hereabouts: '*Hake* means "people" or "men"; *Apana* means

"to perish" (probably by water). Thus *Akapana* is a place where people

perish ...'⁷

Another commentator, however, after making a careful assessment of

all the characteristics of the hydraulic system, proposed a different solution, namely that the sluices had most probably been part of 'a processing technique—the use of flowing water for washing ores, perhaps?'⁸

Gateway of the Sun

Leaving the western side of the enigmatic pyramid, I made my way towards the south-west corner of the enclosure known as the Kalassaya. I

could now see why it had been called the Place of the Upright Standing

Stones for this was precisely what it was. At regular intervals in a wall

composed of bulky trapezoidal blocks, huge dagger-like monoliths more

than twelve feet high had been sunk hilt-first into the red earth of the Altiplano. The effect was of a giant stockade, almost 500 feet square,

rising about twice as far above the ground as the sunken temple had been interred beneath it.

Had the Kalasasaya been a fortress then? Apparently not. Scholars now

generally accept that it functioned as a sophisticated celestial

observatory. Rather than keeping enemies at bay, its purpose had been to

fix the equinoxes and the solstices and to predict, with mathematical precision, the various seasons of the year. Certain structures within its

walls, (and, indeed, the walls themselves), appeared to have been lined

up to particular star groups and designed to facilitate measurement of

the amplitude of the sun in summer, winter, autumn and spring.⁹ In

addition, the famous 'Gateway of the Sun', which stood in the north-west

corner of the enclosure, was not only a world-class work of art but was

thought by those who had studied it to be a complex and accurate

calendar carved in stone:

The more one gets acquainted with the sculpture the greater becomes one's

conviction that the peculiar lay-out and pictorialism of this Calendar cannot

possibly have been the result merely of the ultimately unfathomable whim of an

artist, but that its glyphs, deeply senseful, constitute the eloquent record of the

observations and calculations of a *scientist* ... The Calendar could not have been

drawn up and laid out in any other way than this.¹⁰

My background research had made me especially curious about the Gateway of the Sun and, indeed, about the Kalasasaya as a whole. This

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 78.

⁸ *The Lost Realms*, p. 215.

⁹ *Tiahuanacu*, II, pp. 44-105.

¹⁰ *The Calendar of Tiahuanaco*, pp. 17-18.

81

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

was so because certain astronomical and solar alignments which we

review in the next chapter had made it possible to calculate the approximate period when the Kalasasaya must originally have been laid out. These alignments suggested the controversial date of 15,000 BC— about seventeen thousand years ago.

82

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 11

Intimations of Antiquity

In his voluminous work *Tiahuanacu: the Cradle of American Man*, the late

Professor Arthur Posnansky (a formidable German-Bolivian scholar whose

investigations at the ruins lasted for almost fifty years) explains the archaeo-astronomical calculations which led to his controversial re-dating

of Tiahuanaco. These, he says, were based 'solely and exclusively on the

difference in the obliquity of the ecliptic of the period in which the Kalasasaya was built and that which it is today'.¹

What exactly is 'the obliquity of the ecliptic', and why does it make Tiahuanaco 17,000 years old?

According to the dictionary definition it is 'the angle between the plane

of the earth's orbit and that of the celestial equator, equal to approximately 23° 27' at present'.²

To clarify this obscure astronomical notion, it helps to picture the earth

as a ship, sailing on the vast ocean of the heavens. Like all such vessels

(be they planets or schooners), it *rolls* slightly with the swell that flows

beneath it. Picture yourself on board that ship as it rolls, standing on the

deck, gazing out to sea. You rise up on the crest of a wave and your visible horizon increases; you fall back into a trough and it decreases.

The process is regular, mathematical, like the tick-tock of a great metronome: a constant, almost imperceptible, nodding, perpetually changing the angle between yourself and the horizon.

Now picture the earth again. Floating in space, as every schoolchild knows, the axis of daily rotation of our beautiful blue planet lies slightly

tilted away from the vertical in its orbit around the sun. From this it follows that the terrestrial equator, and hence the 'celestial equator' (which is merely an imaginary extension of the earth's equator into the

celestial sphere) must also lie at an angle to the orbital plane. That angle,

at any one time, *is* the obliquity of the ecliptic. But because the earth is a

ship that rolls, its obliquity *changes* in a cyclical manner over very long

periods. During each cycle of 41,000 years the obliquity varies, with the

precision and predictability of a Swiss chronograph, between 22.1° and

1 *Tiahuanacu*, II, p. 89.

2 *Collins English Dictionary*, London, 1982, p. 1015. In addition, Dr John Mason of the

British Astronomical Association defined obliquity of the ecliptic in a telephone interview

on 7 October 1993: 'The earth spins about an axis which goes through its centre and its

north and south poles. This axis is inclined to the plane of the earth's orbit around the

sun. This tilt is called the obliquity of the ecliptic. The current value for the obliquity of

the ecliptic is 23.44 degrees.'

83

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

24.5°.3 The sequence in which one angle will follow another, as well as the

sequence of all previous angles (at any period of history) can be

calculated by means of a few straightforward equations. These have been

expressed as a curve on a graph (originally plotted out in Paris in 1911 by

the International Conference of Ephemerids) and from this graph it is

possible to match angles and precise historical dates with confidence and

accuracy.

Posnansky was able to date the Kalasasaya because the obliquity cycle

gradually alters the azimuth position of sunrise and sunset from century

to century.⁴ By establishing the solar alignments of certain key structures

that now looked 'out of true', he convincingly demonstrated that the

obliquity of the ecliptic at the time of the building of the Kalasasaya had

been $23^{\circ} 8' 48''$. When that angle was plotted on the graph drawn up by

the International Conference of Ephemerids it was found to correspond to

a date of 15,000 BC.⁵

Of course, not a single orthodox historian or archaeologist was

prepared to accept such an early origin for Tiahuanaco preferring, as

noted in Chapter Eight, to agree on the safe estimate of AD 500.
During

the years 1927-30, however, several scientists from other disciplines
checked carefully Posnansky's 'astronomic-archaeological
investigations'.

These scientists, members of a high-powered team which also
studied

many other archaeological sites in the Andes, were Dr Hans
Ludendorff

(then director of the Astronomical Observatory of Potsdam), Dr
Friedrich

Becker of the *Specula Vaticana*, and two other astronomers:
Professor

Dr Arnold Kohlschutter of the University of Bonn and Dr Rolf Muller
of the

Astrophysical Institute of Potsdam.⁶

At the end of their three years of work the scientists concluded that

Posnansky was basically right. They didn't concern themselves with
the

implications of their findings for the prevailing paradigm of history;
they

simply stated the observable facts about the astronomical
alignments of

various structures at Tiahuanaco. Of these, the most important by far
was

that the Kalasasaya had been laid out to conform with observations of the

heavens made a very long time ago—much, much further back than AD

500. Posnansky's figure of 15,000 BC was pronounced to be well within

the bounds of possibility.⁷

If Tiahuanaco had indeed flourished so long before the dawn of history,

what sort of people had built it, and for what purpose?

3 J. D. Hays, John Imbrie, N. J. Shackleton, 'Variations in the Earth's Orbit: Pacemaker of

the Ice Ages', in *Science*, vol. 194, No. 4270, 10 December 1976, p. 1125.

4 Anthony F. Aveni, *Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico*, University of Texas Press, Iago, p.

103.

5 *Tiahuanacu*, II, p. 90-1.

6 *Tiahuanacu*, II, p. 47.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

84

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Fish-garbed figures

There were two massive pieces of statuary inside the Kalasasaya. One, a

figure nicknamed *El Fraile* (The Friar) stood in the south-west corner; the

other, towards the centre of the eastern end of the enclosure, was the

giant that I had observed from the sunken temple.

Carved in red sandstone, worn and ancient beyond reckoning, El Fraile

stood about six feet high, and portrayed a humanoid, androgenous being

with massive eyes and lips. In its right hand it clutched something

resembling a knife with a wavy blade like an Indonesian kris. In its left

hand was an object like a hinged and case-bound book. From the top of

this 'book', however, protruded a device which had been inserted into it

as though into a sheath.

From the waist down the figure appeared to be clad in a garment of fish

scales, and, as though to confirm this perception, the sculptor had

formed the individual scales out of rows and rows of small, highly-

stylized fish-heads. This sign had been persuasively interpreted by

Posnansky as meaning fish in general.⁸ It seemed, therefore, that El Fraile

was a portrayal of an imaginary or symbolic 'fish man'. The figure was

also equipped with a belt sculpted with the images of several large crustaceans, so this notion seemed all the more probable. What had been

intended?

I had learned of one local tradition I thought might shed light on the matter. It was very ancient and spoke of 'gods of the lake, with fish tails,

called Chullua and Umantua'.⁹ In this, and in the fish-garbed figures, it

seemed that there was a curious out-of-place echo of Mesopotamian myths, which spoke strangely, and at length, about amphibious beings,

'endowed with reason' who had visited the land of Sumer in remote prehistory. The leader of these beings was named Oannes (or *Uan*).¹⁰

According to the Chaldean scribe, Berosus:

The whole body of [Oannes] was like that of a fish; and had under a fish's head

another head, and also feet below, similar to those of a man, subjoined to the

fish's tail. His voice too, and language, was articulate and human;
and a

representation of him is preserved even to this day ... When the sun
set, it was the

custom of this Being to plunge again into the sea, and abide all night
in the deep;

for he was amphibious.¹¹

According to the traditions reported by Berosus, Oannes was, above
all, a

civilizer:

In the day-time he used to converse with men; but took no food at
that season;

8 Ibid., I, p. 119.

9 Ibid., II, p. 183.

10 *Myths from Mesopotamia*, (trans, and ed. Stephanie Dalley),
Oxford University Press,

1990, p. 326.

11 Fragments of Berossus, from Alexander Polyhistor, reprinted as
Appendix 2 in Robert

K. G. Temple, *The Sirius Mystery*, Destiny Books, Rochester,
Vermont, 1987, pp. 250-1.

85

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

and he gave them an insight into letters and sciences, and every kind of art. He

taught them to construct houses, to found temples, to compile laws, and

explained to them the principles of geometrical knowledge. He made them

distinguish the seeds of the earth, and showed them how to collect fruits; in short,

he instructed them in every thing which could tend to soften manners and to

humanise mankind. From that time, so universal were his instructions, nothing

has been added materially by way of improvement ...12

Surviving images of the Oannes creatures I had seen on Babylonian and

Assyrian reliefs clearly portrayed *fish-garbed men*. Fish-scales formed the

dominant motif on their garments, just as they did on those worn by El

Fraile. Another similarity was that the Babylonian figures held

unidentified objects in both their hands. If my memory served me right

(and I later confirmed that it did) these objects were by no means

identical to those carried by El Fraile. They were, however, similar enough

to be worthy of note.¹³

The other great 'idol' of the Kalasasaya was positioned towards the eastern end of the platform, facing the main gateway, and was an imposing monolith of grey andesite, hugely thick and standing about nine feet tall. Its broad head rose straight up out of its hulking shoulders

and its slab-like face stared expressionlessly into the distance. It was wearing a crown, or head-band of some kind, and its hair was braided

into orderly rows of long vertical ringlets which were most clearly visible

at the back.

The figure was also intricately carved and decorated across much of its

surface almost as though it were tattooed. Like El Fraile, it was clad below

the waist in a garment composed of fish-scales and fish symbols. And,

also like El Fraile, it held two unidentifiable objects in its hands. This time

the left-hand object looked more like a sheath than a case-bound book,

and from it protruded a forked handle. The right-hand object was roughly

cylindrical, narrow in the centre where it was held, wider at the shoulders

and at the base, and then narrowing again towards the top. It appeared to

have several different sections, or parts, fitted over and into one another,

but it was impossible to guess what it might represent.

12 Ibid.

13 Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*,

British Museum Press, 1992, pp. 46, 82-3.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Assyrian relief of fish-garbed figure.

Images of extinct species

Leaving the fish-garbed figures, I came at last to the Gateway of the Sun,

located in the north-west corner of the Kalasasaya.

It proved to be a freestanding monolith of grey-green andesite about 12½ feet wide, 10 feet high and 18 inches thick, weighing an estimated

10 tons.¹⁴ Perhaps best envisaged as a sort of Arc de Triomphe, though

on a much smaller scale, it looked in this setting like a door connecting

14 Figures and measurements from *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru*, p. 92.

87

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

two invisible dimensions—a door between nowhere and nothing. The stonework was of exceptionally high quality and authorities agreed that it

was ‘one of the archaeological wonders of the Americas’.¹⁵ Its most enigmatic feature was the so-called ‘calendar frieze’ carved into its eastern façade along the top of the portal.

At its centre, in an elevated position, this frieze was dominated by what

scholars took to be another representation of Viracocha,¹⁶ but this time in

his more terrifying aspect as the god-king who could call down fire from

heaven. His gentle, fatherly side was still expressed: tears of compassion

were running down his cheeks. But his face was set stern and hard, his

tiara was regal and imposing, and in either hand he grasped a

thunderbolt.¹⁷ In the interpretation given by Joseph Campbell, one of the

twentieth century's best-known students of myth, 'The meaning is that

the grace that pours into the universe through the sun door is the same

as the energy of the bolt that annihilates and is itself indestructible ...'¹⁸

I turned my head to right and left, slowly studying the remainder of the

frieze. It was a beautifully balanced piece of sculpture with three rows of

eight figures, twenty-four in all, lined up on either side of the elevated

central image. Many attempts, none of them particularly convincing, have

been made to explain the assumed calendrical function of these figures.¹⁹

All that could really be said for sure was that they had a peculiar, bloodless, cartoon-like quality, and that there was something coldly

mathematical, almost machinelike, about the way they seemed to march

in regimented lines towards Viracocha. Some apparently wore bird masks,

others had sharply pointed noses, and each had in his hand an implement of the type the high god was himself carrying.

The base of the frieze was filled with a design known as the 'Meander'—a geometrical series of step-pyramid forms set in a continuous line, and arranged alternately upside down and right side up,

which was also thought to have had a calendrical function. On the third

column from the right-hand side (and, more faintly, on the third column

from the left-hand side too) I could make out a clear carving of an elephant's head, ears, tusks and trunk. This was unexpected since there

are no elephants anywhere in the New World. There had been, however,

in prehistoric times, as I was able to confirm much later. Particularly numerous in the southern Andes, until their sudden extinction around

10,000 BC,²⁰ had been the members of a species called *Cuvieronius*, an

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Paladin Books, London, 1988,

p. 145.

18 Ibid., p. 146.

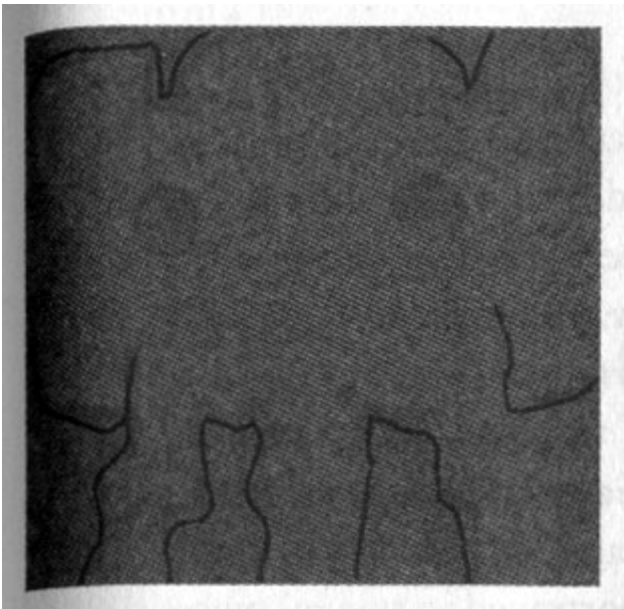
19 The calendrical function of the Gateway of the Sun is fully described and analysed by

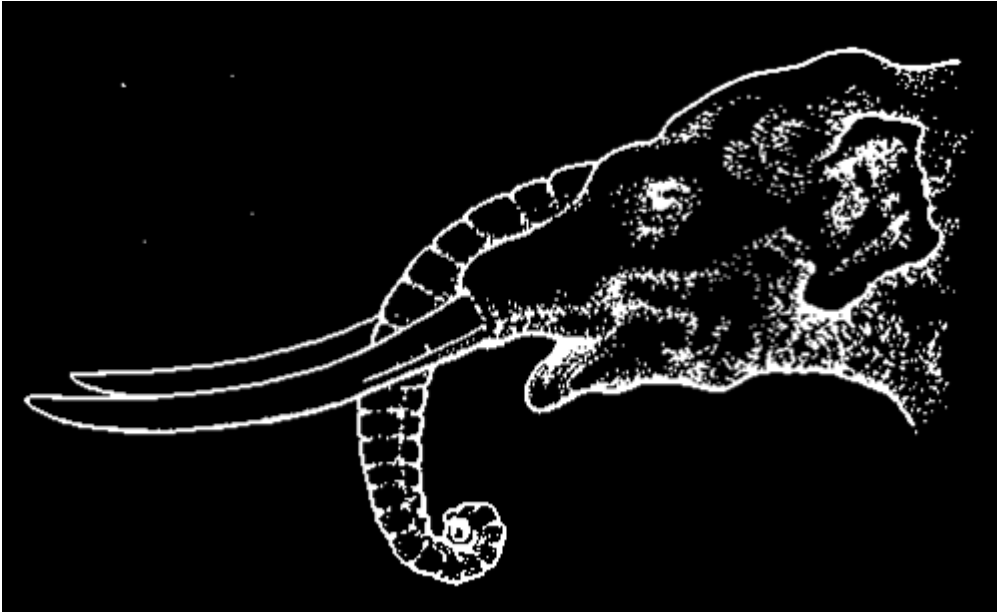
Posnansky in *Tiahuanacu: The Cradle of American Man*, volumes I-IV.

20 *Quaternary Extinctions: A Prehistoric Revolution*, Paul S. Martin, Richard G. Klein, eds.

The University of Arizona Press, 1984, p. 85.

88





Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

elephant-like proboscidean complete with tusks and a trunk, uncannily similar in appearance to the ‘elephants’ of the Gateway of the Sun.²¹

I stepped forward a few paces to take a closer look at these elephants.

Each turned out to be composed of the heads of two crested condors,

placed throat to throat (the crests constituting the ‘ears’ and the upper

part of the necks the ‘tusks’). The creatures thus formed still looked like

elephants to me, perhaps because a characteristic visual trick the

sculptors of Tiahuanaco had employed again and again in their subtle

and otherworldly art had been to use one thing to depict another. Thus

an apparently human ear on an apparently human face might turn out to

be a bird's wing. Likewise an ornate crown might be composed of alternate fishes' and condors' heads, an eyebrow a bird's neck and head,

the toe of a slipper an animal's head, and so on. Members of the elephant

family formed out of condors' heads, therefore, need not necessarily be

optical illusions; on the contrary, such inventive composites would be perfectly in keeping with the overall artistic character of the frieze.

Among the riot of stylized animal figures carved into the Gateway of the

Sun were a number of other extinct species as well. I knew from my research that one of these had been convincingly identified by several

observers as *Toxodon*²²—a three-toed amphibious mammal about nine

feet long and five feet high at the shoulder, resembling a short, stubby

cross between a rhino and a hippo.²³ Like *Cuvieronius*, *Toxodon* had

flourished in South America in the late Pliocene (1.6 million years ago)

and had died out at the end of the Pleistocene, about 12,000 years ago.²⁴

21 Ibid.

22 See *The Calendar of Tiahuanaco*, p. 47. Posnansky's work is also replete with

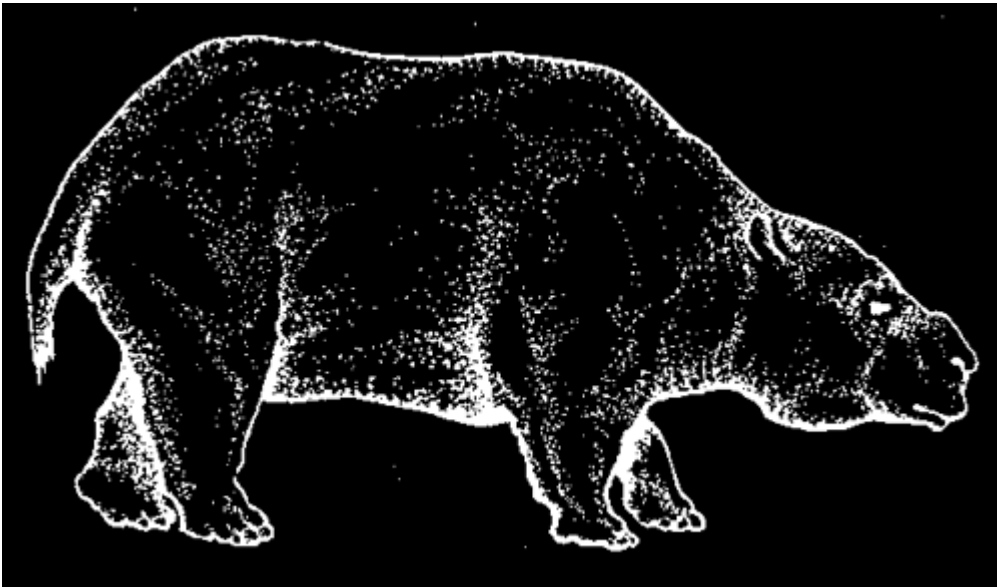
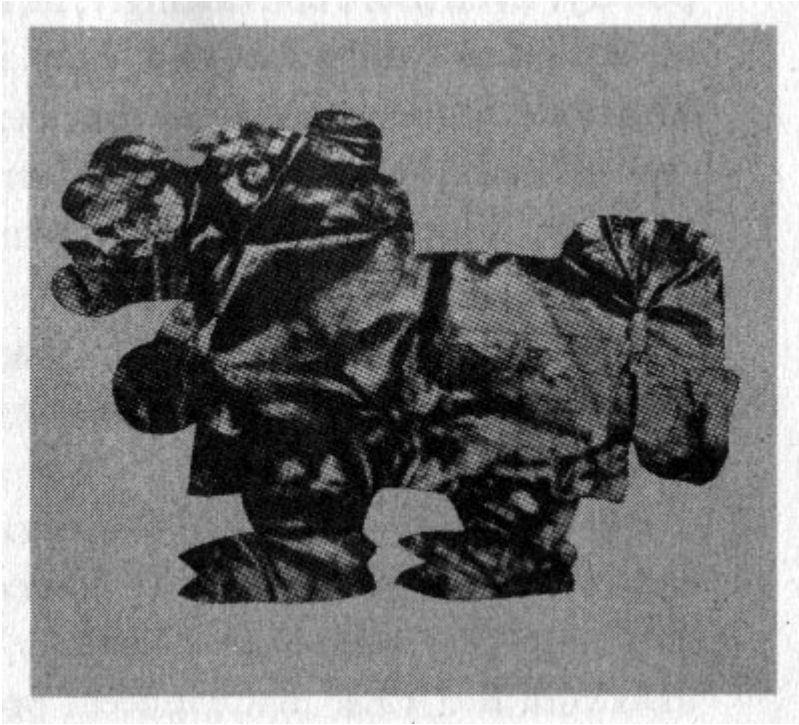
references to Toxodon.

23 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 11:878.

24 Ibid., 9:516. See also *Quaternary Extinctions*, pp. 64-5.

89





Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Top left: Detail from Tiahuanaco's Gateway of the Sun showing proboscidean, tusked elephant-like figure. *Top right:* Biological reconstruction-drawing of *Cuverionius*, a South American proboscidean,

once common in the Tiahuanaco area but extinct since approximately

10,000 BC. *Above left:* Unidentified animal, possibly *Toxodon*, carved

on the side of the Viracocha figure in the Subterranean Temple.

Above right: Another possible representation of *Toxodon* from Tiahuanaco. The raised nostrils are indicative of a semi-aquatic animal, somewhat like a modern hippopotamus in its habits, which is what *Toxodon* is known to have been.

Reconstruction-drawing of *Toxodon*, a South American species that became extinct in the eleventh millennium BC.

To my eye this looked like striking corroboration for the astro-archaeological evidence that dated Tiahuanaco to the end of the Pleistocene, and further undermined the orthodox historical chronology

which made the city only 1500 years old, since *Toxodon*, presumably,

could only have been modelled from life. It was therefore obviously a matter of some importance that *no fewer than forty-six Toxodon heads*

had been carved into the frieze of the Gateway of the Sun.²⁵ Nor was this

25 *The Calendar of Tiahuanaco*, pp. 47-8.

90

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

creature's ugly caricature confined only to the Gateway. On the contrary,

Toxodon had been identified on numerous fragments of Tiahuanacan pottery. Even more convincingly, he had been portrayed in several pieces

of sculpture which showed him in full three-dimensional glory.²⁶ Moreover

representations of other extinct species had been found: the species included *Shelidoterium*, a diurnal quadruped, and *Macrauchenia*, an animal somewhat larger than the modern horse, with distinctive three-

toed feet.²⁷

Such images meant that Tiahuanaco was a kind of picture-book from the past, a record of bizarre animals, now deader than the dodo, expressed in everlasting stone.

But the record-taking had come to an abrupt halt one day and darkness

had descended. This, too, was recorded in stone—the Gateway of the

Sun, that surpassing work of art, had never been completed. Certain unfinished aspects of the frieze made it seem probable that something

sudden and dreadful had happened which had caused the sculptor, in the

words of Posnansky, 'to drop his chisel for ever' at the moment when he

was 'putting the final touches to his work'.²⁸

²⁶ *Tiahuanacu*, III, p. 57, 133-4, and plate XCII.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 137-9; *Quaternary Extinctions*, pp. 64-5.

²⁸ *Tiahuanacu*, II, p. 4.

91

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 12

The End of the Viracochas

We saw in Chapter Ten that Tiahuanaco was originally built as a port on

the shores of Lake Titicaca, when that lake was far wider *and more than*

100 feet deeper than it is today. Vast harbour constructions, piers and

dykes (and even dumped cargoes of quarried stone at points beneath the

old waterline), leave no doubt that this must have been the case.¹ Indeed,

according to the unorthodox estimates of Professor Posnansky,

Tiahuanaco had been in active use as a port as early as 15,000 BC, the

date he proposed for the construction of the Kalasasaya, and had

continued to serve as such for approximately another five thousand

years, during which great expanse of time its position in relation to the

shore of Lake Titicaca hardly changed.²

Throughout this epoch the principal harbour of the port city was

located several hundred metres south-west of the Kalasasaya at a site

now known as *Puma Punku* (literally, the Puma Gate). Here Posnansky's

excavations revealed two artificially dredged docks on either side of: 'a

true and magnificent pier or wharf ... where hundreds of ships could at

the same time take on and unload their heavy burdens'.³

One of the construction blocks from which the pier had been fashioned

still lay on site and weighed an estimated *440 tons*.⁴ Numerous others

weighed between 100 and 150 tons.⁵ Furthermore, many of the biggest

monoliths had clearly been joined to each other by I-shaped metal

clamps. In the whole of South America, I knew, this masonry technique

had been found only on Tiahuanacan structures.⁶ The last time I had seen

the characteristic notched depressions which proved its use had been on

ruins on the island of Elephantine in the Nile in Upper Egypt.⁷

1 *Tiahuanacu*, II, p. 156ff; III, p. 196.

2 Ibid., I, p. 39: 'An extensive series of canals and hydraulic works, dry at present, but

which are all in communication with the former lake bed, are just so many more proofs

of the extension of the lake as far as Tiahuanacu in this period.'

3 Ibid., II, p. 156.

4 *Bolivia*, p. 158.

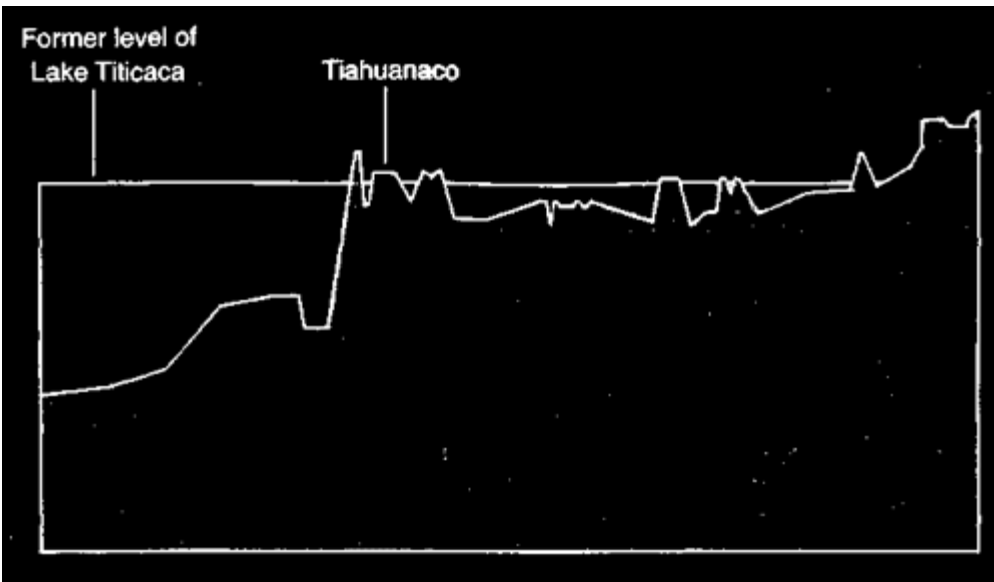
5 *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru*, p. 93.

6 Ibid.

7 For example on the paving blocks above the Nilometer at Elephantine Island, Aswan. I

am indebted to US film maker Robert Gardner for pointing this similarity out to me.

92



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

12,000 years ago, when Lake Titicaca was more than 100 feet deeper

than it is today, Tiahuanaco would have been an island, as shown above.

Equally thought-provoking was the appearance of the symbol of the cross on many of these ancient blocks. Recurring again and again, particularly at the northern approach to Puma Punku, this symbol always

took the same form: a double crucifix with pure clean lines, perfectly balanced and harmonious, deeply recessed into the hard grey stone. Even

according to orthodox historical chronology these crosses were not less

than 1500 years old. In other words, they had been carved here, by a

people with absolutely no knowledge of Christianity, a full millennium before the arrival of the first Spanish missionaries on the Altiplano.

Where, come to that, had the Christians obtained their crosses? Not only from the shape of the structure to which Jesus Christ was nailed, I

thought, but from some much older source as well. Hadn't the Ancient

Egyptians, for example, used a hieroglyph very like a cross (the *ankh*, or

crux ansata) to symbolize life ... the breath of life ... eternal life itself?
8

Had that symbol originated in Egypt, or had it perhaps occurred elsewhere, earlier still?

With such ideas chasing one another around my head, I walked slowly

around Puma Punku. The extensive perimeter, which formed a rectangle

several hundred feet long, outlined a low pyramidal hill, much overgrown

with tall grass. Dozens and dozens of hulking blocks lay scattered in all

directions, tossed like matchsticks, Posnansky argued, in the terrible natural disaster that had overtaken Tiahuanaco during the eleventh millennium BC:

This catastrophe was caused by seismic movements which resulted in an overflow

of the waters of Lake Titicaca and in volcanic eruptions ... It is also possible that

8 *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* ed. Margaret Burson), Facts on File, New York and

Oxford, 1991, p. 23.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the temporary increase in the level of the lake may have been caused in part by

the breaking of the bulwarks on some of the lakes further to the north and

situated at a greater altitude ... thus releasing the waters which descended toward

Lake Titicaca in onrushing and unrestrainable torrents.⁹

Posnansky's evidence that a flood had been the agent of the destruction

of Tiahuanaco included

The discovery of lacustrine flora, *Palustrina culminea*, and *Palustrina*

andecola, *Ancylus titicacensis*, *Planorbis titicacensis*, etc., mixed in the alluvia with

the skeletons of human beings who perished in the cataclysm ... and the discovery

of various skeletons of *Orestias*, fish of the family of the present *bogas*, in the

same alluvia which contain the human remains ...¹⁰

In addition, fragments of human and animal skeletons had been found

lying

in chaotic disorder among wrought stones, utensils, tools and an endless variety

of other things. All of this has been moved, broken and accumulated in a confused

heap. Anyone who would dig a trench here two metres deep could not deny that

the destructive force of water, in combination with brusque movements of the

earth, must have accumulated those different kinds of bones, mixing them with

pottery, jewels, tools and utensils ... Layers of alluvium cover the whole field of the

ruins and lacustrine sand mixed with shells from Titicaca, decomposed feldspar

and volcanic ashes have accumulated in the places surrounded by walls ...¹¹

It had been a terrible catastrophe indeed that had overwhelmed

Tiahuanaco. And if Posnansky was right, it took place more than 12,000

years ago. Thereafter, though the flood waters subsided, 'the culture of

the Altiplano did not again attain a high point of development but fell rather into a total and definitive decadence'.¹²

Struggle and abandonment

This process was hastened by the fact that the earthquakes which had

caused Lake Titicaca to engulf Tiahuanaco were only the first of many

upheavals in the area. These initially resulted in the lake swelling and

overflowing its banks but they soon began to have the opposite effect,

slowly reducing Titicaca's depth and surface area. As the years passed,

the lake continued to drain inch by inch, marooning the great city,

remorselessly separating it from the waters which had previously played

such a vital role in its economic life.

At the same time, there was evidence that the climate of the Tihuanaco

area had become colder and much less favourable for the growing of

crops than had previously been the case,¹³ so much less favourable that

9 *Tiahuanacu*, I, p. 55.

10 *Ibid.*, I, p. 39.

11 *Ibid.*, III, pp. 142-3.

12 *Ibid.*, I, p. 57.

13 Ibid., I, p. 56, and II, p. 96.

94

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

today staples such as maize cannot ripen properly and even potatoes

come out of the ground stunted.¹⁴

Although it was difficult to piece together all the different elements of the complex chain of events that had occurred, it seemed that ‘a period

of calm had followed the critical moment of seismic disturbance’ which

had temporarily flooded Tiahuanaco.¹⁵ Then, slowly but surely, ‘the climate worsened and became inclement. Finally there ensued mass emigrations of the Andean peoples towards locations where the struggle

for life would not be so arduous.’¹⁶

It seems that the highly civilized inhabitants of Tiahuanaco,

remembered in local traditions as ‘the Viracocha people’, had not gone

without a struggle. There was puzzling evidence from all over the

Altiplano that agricultural experiments of an advanced and scientific

nature had been carried out, with great ingenuity and dedication, to try to

compensate for the deterioration of the climate. For example, recent research has demonstrated that astonishingly sophisticated analyses of

the chemical compositions of many poisonous high-altitude plants and

tubers had been undertaken by *somebody* in this region in the furthest

antiquity. Such analyses, furthermore, had been coupled with the invention of detoxification techniques which had rendered these

otherwise nutritious vegetables harmless and edible.¹⁷ There was as yet

'no satisfactory explanation for the development of these detoxification

processes', admitted David Browman, associate professor of

Anthropology at Washington University.¹⁸

¹⁴ Quoted in *Earth in Upheaval*, citing Sir Clemens Markham, pp. 75-6.

¹⁵ *Tiahuanacu*, III, p. 147.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ David L. Browman, 'New Light on Andean Tiahuanaco', in *American Scientist*, volume

69, 1981, pp. 410-12.

18 Ibid., p. 410. According to Browman: 'Plant domestication in the Altiplano required the

simultaneous development of detoxifying techniques. The majority of the plants [which

were in regular use in ancient Tiahuanaco] contain significant levels of toxins in an

untreated state. For example, the potato species that are most resistant to frost and that

grow best at high altitudes also contain the highest levels of glycoalkaloid solanine. In

addition, the potato contains an inhibitor for a wide range of digestive enzymes

necessary for breaking down proteins—a particularly unfortunate trait at high altitudes

where differential partial oxygen pressure already impairs the chemistry of protein

breakdown ...'

The detoxification technique developed at Tiahuanaco to make these potatoes edible

also had a preservative effect. Indeed, each of these two important qualities was a by-

product of the other. 'Altiplano farmers', explains Browman, 'have, for several thousand

years produced the freeze-dried potato, or *ch'uno*, by a process of freezing, leaching,

and sun drying. The initial explanation for this process was that it produced a food

product that could be stored for long periods of time ... six years or more ... But we can

now suggest another rationale. Leaching and sun-drying are necessary to remove the

majority of the solanine and to lower excessive nitrate levels, and the subsequent

cooking of freeze-dried products destroys the inhibitors of digestive enzymes. Rather

than arguing that freeze-drying was motivated only by a desire to produce a secure food

base, one could hold that this technology was mandatory to make the potato available

95

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Likewise, in the same ancient period, *somebody* as yet unidentified by

scholarship went to great lengths to build raised fields on the newly exposed lands that had so recently been under the waters of the lake—a

procedure which created characteristic corrugated strips of alternately

high and low ground. It was not until the 1960s that the original function

of these undulating patterns of earthen platforms and shallow canals was

correctly worked out. Still visible today, and known as *waru waru* by the

local Indians, they proved to be part of a complex agricultural design, perfected in prehistoric times, which had the ability 'to out-perform modern farming techniques'.¹⁹

In recent years some of the raised fields were reconstructed by archaeologists and agronomists. These experimental plots consistently

yielded three times more potatoes than even the most productive conventional plots. Likewise, during one particularly cold spell, a severe

frost 'did little damage to the experimental fields'. The following year the

crops on the elevated platforms survived an equally ruinous drought:

'then later rode high and dry through a flood that swamped surrounding

farmlands'. Indeed this simple but effective agricultural technique,

invented by a culture so ancient that no one today could even remember

its name, had proved such a success in rural Bolivia that it had attracted

as a usable nutritive source. Both factors are clearly present.

'The other plants identified as early domesticates at the Titicaca sites have similar

levels of toxins, and all require the use of various detoxification techniques to make

them suitable for human consumption. *Oca* has significant amounts of oxalates; *quinoa*

and *canihua* have high levels of hydrocyanic acid and the alkaloid saponin; *amaranth* is a nitrate accumulator and has high levels of oxalates; *tarwi* contains the poisonous

alkaloid lupinine; beans contain varying levels of the cyanogenetic glycoside

phaseolunatin; and so on ... In some cases the detoxifying procedures serendipitously

result in an end-product that has excellent storage features, multiplying the beneficial

effects of the technology. Where the detoxification technology does not have this added

effect—for example, in the case of *quinoa*, *amaranth* and *tarwi*—the plants generally

already have excellent natural storage characteristics. There is as yet no satisfactory

explanation for the development of these detoxification processes ...'
'New Light on

Andean Tiahuanaco’.

19 At the heart of the system were ‘the earthen platforms about 3 feet high, 30-300 feet

long and 10-30 feet wide. These elevated earthworks are separated by canals of similar

dimensions and built out of the excavated soil. Over time the platforms were

periodically fertilized with organic silt and nitrogen-rich algae scooped from the bottom

of the canals during the dry season. Even today ... the sediment in the old canals is

much richer in nutrients than the soil of the surrounding plains.

‘But the platform-canal system was not merely a way of enriching infertile ground. It

also appears to have created a climate that both extended the high-altitude growing

season and helped crops survive hard times. During the area’s frequent periods of

drought, for example, the canals provided vital moisture, while the higher level of the

platforms raised plants above the worst effects of the region’s frequent floods.

Moreover the canal water may have acted as a kind of thermal storage battery absorbing

the sun's heat during the day and radiating it back into the freezing night, to create a

blanket of relatively warm air over the growing plants.' *Feats and Wisdom of the*

Ancients, pp. 56-7.

96

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the attention of governmental and international development agencies

and was now under test in several other parts of the world as well.²⁰

An artificial language

Another possible legacy of Tiahuanaco, and of the Viracochas, lay embedded in the language spoken by the local Aymara Indians—a language regarded by some specialists as the oldest in the world.²¹

In the 1980s Ivan Guzman de Rojas, a Bolivian computer scientist, accidentally demonstrated that Aymara might be not only very ancient

but, significantly, that it might be a 'made-up' language—something deliberately and skillfully *designed*. Of particular note was the seemingly

artificial character of its syntax, which was rigidly structured and unambiguous to an extent thought inconceivable in normal 'organic'

speech.²² This synthetic and highly organized structure meant that Aymara could easily be transformed into a computer algorithm to be used

to translate one language into another: 'The Aymara Algorithm is used as

a bridge language. The language of an original document is translated

into Aymara and then into any number of other languages.'²³

Was it just coincidence that an apparently artificial language governed

by a computer-friendly syntax should be spoken today in the environs of

Tiahuanaco? Or could Aymara be a legacy of the high learning that legend

attributed to the Viracochas? If so, what other legacies might there be?

What other incomplete fragments of an old and forgotten wisdom might

be lying scattered around—fragments which had perhaps contributed to

the richness and diversity of many of the cultures that had evolved in this

region during the 10,000 years before the conquest? Perhaps it was the

possession of fragments like these that had made possible the drawing of

the Nazca lines and enabled the predecessors of the Incas to build the

'impossible' stone walls at Machu Picchu and Sacsayhuaman?

Mexico

The image I could not get out of my mind was of the Viracocha people

leaving, 'walking on the waters' of the Pacific Ocean, or 'going

20 Ibid.

21 Evan Hadingham, *Lines to the Mountain Gods*, Harrap, London, 1987, p. 34.

22 'Aymara is rigorous and simple—which means that its syntactical rules always apply,

and can be written out concisely in the sort of algebraic shorthand that computers

understand. Indeed, such is its purity that some historians think it did not just evolve,

like other languages, but was actually constructed from scratch.' *Sunday Times*, London,

4 November 1984.

23 M. Belts, 'Ancient Language may Prove Key to Translation System', *Computerworld*,

vol. IX, No. 8, 25 February 1985, p. 30.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

miraculously' by sea as so many of the legends told.

Where had these seafarers been going? What had their objective been?

And why, come to think of it, had they made such dogged efforts to stay

in Tiahuanaco for so long before admitting defeat and moving on? What

had they been trying to achieve there that had been so important to them?

After several weeks work on the Altiplano, travelling back and forth between La Paz and Tiahuanaco, it became clear that neither the otherworldly ruins nor the libraries of the capital were going to provide

me with any further answers. Indeed, in Bolivia at least, the trail seemed

to have gone cold.

It was not until I reached Mexico, 2000 miles north, that I picked up its

traces again.

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Part III

Plumed Serpent

Central America

99

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Chapter 13

Blood and Time at the End of the World

Chicken Itza, northern Yucatan, Mexico

Behind me, towering almost 100 feet into the air, was a perfect ziggurat,

the Temple of Kukulkan. Its four stairways had 91 steps each. Taken together with the top platform, which counted as a further step, the total

was 365. This gave the number of complete days in a solar year. In addition, the geometric design and orientation of the ancient structure

had been calibrated with Swiss-watch precision to achieve an objective as

dramatic as it was esoteric: on the spring and autumn equinoxes, regular

as clockwork, triangular patterns of light and shadow combined to create

the illusion of a giant serpent undulating on the northern staircase. On

each occasion the illusion lasted for 3 hours and 22 minutes exactly.¹

I walked away from the Temple of Kukulkan in an easterly direction.

Ahead of me, starkly refuting the oft-repeated fallacy that the peoples of

Central America had never succeeded in developing the column as an

architectural feature, stood a forest of white stone columns which must at

one time have supported a massive roof. The sun was beating down harshly through the translucent blue of a cloudless sky and the cool, deep shadows this area offered were alluring. I passed by and made my

way to the foot of the steep steps that led up to the adjacent Temple of

the Warriors.

At the top of these steps, becoming fully visible only after I had begun

to ascend them, was a giant figure. This was the idol of Chacmool. It half-

lay, half-sat in an oddly stiff and expectant posture, bent knees

protruding upwards, thick calves drawn back to touch its thighs, ankles

tucked in against its buttocks, elbows planted on the ground, hands

folded across its belly encircling an empty plate, and its back set at an

awkward angle as though it were just about to lever itself upright.
Had it

done so, I calculated, it would have stood about eight feet tall. Even
reclining, coiled and tightly sprung, it seemed to overflow with a
fierce

and pitiless energy. Its square features were thin-lipped and
implacable,

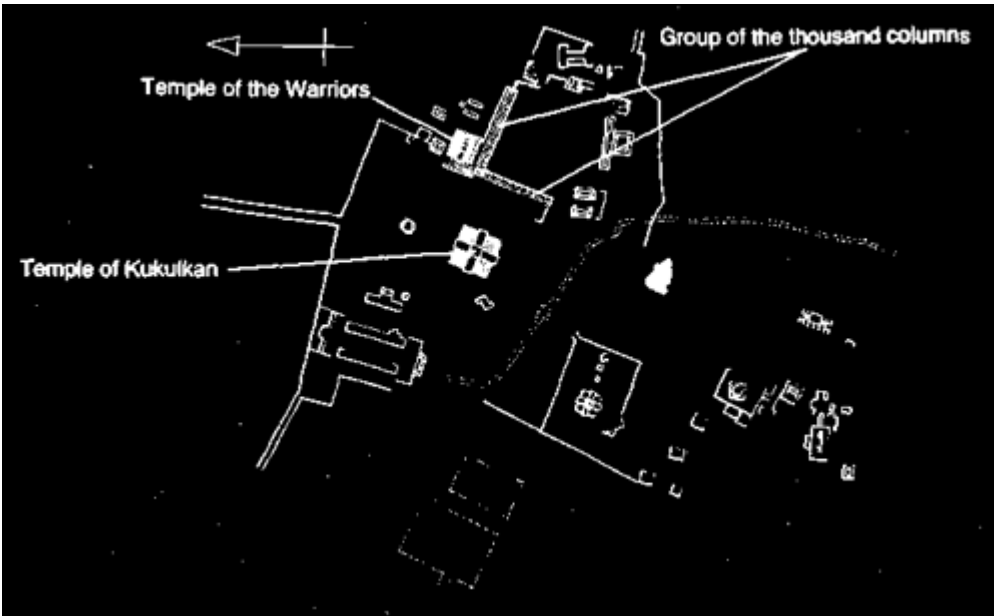
as hard and indifferent as the stone from which they were carved,
and its

eyes gazed westwards, traditionally the direction of darkness, death
and

the colour black.²

1 *Mexico*, Lonely Planet Publications, Hawthorne, Australia, 1992,
pp. 839.

2 Ronald Wright, *Time Among the Maya*, Futura Publications,
London, 1991, pp. 343.



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Chichen Itza.

Rather lugubriously, I continued to climb the steps of the Temple of the

Warriors. Weighing on my mind was the unforgettable fact that the ritual

of human sacrifice had been routinely practised here in pre-Colombian

times. The empty plate that Chacmool held across his stomach had once

served as a receptacle for freshly extracted hearts. 'If the victim's heart

was to be taken out,' reported one Spanish observer in the sixteenth century,

they conducted him with great display ... and placed him on the sacrificial stone.

Four of them took hold of his arms and legs, spreading them out. Then the

executioner came, with a flint knife in his hand, and with great skill made an

incision between the ribs on the left side, below the nipple; then he plunged in his

hand and like a ravenous tiger tore out the living heart, which he laid on the plate

...3

What kind of culture could have nourished and celebrated such demonic

behaviour? Here, in Chichen Itza, amid ruins dating back more than 1200

years, a hybrid society had formed out of intermingled Maya and Toltec

elements. This society was by no means exceptional in its addiction to

cruel and barbaric ceremonies. On the contrary, *all* the great indigenous

civilizations known to have flourished in Mexico had indulged in the ritualized slaughter of human beings.

Slaughterhouses

Villahermosa, Tabasco Province

I stood looking at the Altar of Infant Sacrifice. It was the creation of the

3 Friar Diego de Landa, *Yucatan before and after the Conquest*
(trans, with notes by

William Gates), Producción Editorial Dante, Merida, Mexico, 1990, p.
71.

101

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Olmecs, the so-called ‘mother-culture’ of Central America, and it was
more than 3000 years old. A block of solid granite about four feet
thick,

its sides bore reliefs of four men wearing curious head-dresses.
Each man

carried a healthy, chubby, struggling infant, whose desperate fear
was

clearly visible. The back of the altar was undecorated; at the front
another

figure was portrayed, holding in his arms, as though it were an
offering,

the slumped body of a dead child.

The Olmecs are the earliest recognized high civilization of Ancient
Mexico, and human sacrifice was well established with them. Two
and a

half thousand years later, at the time of the Spanish conquest, the Aztecs

were the last (but by no means the least) of the peoples of this region to

continue an extremely old and deeply ingrained tradition.

They did so with fanatical zeal.

It is recorded, for example, that Ahuitzotl, the eighth and most

powerful emperor of the Aztec royal dynasty, 'celebrated the dedication

of the temple of Huitzilopochtli in Tenochitlan by marshalling four lines

of prisoners past teams of priests who worked four days to dispatch them. On this occasion as many as 80,000 were slain during a single ceremonial rite.'⁴

The Aztecs liked to dress up in the flayed skins of sacrificial victims.

Bernardino de Sahagun, a Spanish missionary, attended one such ceremony soon after the conquest:

The celebrants flayed and dismembered the captives; they then lubricated their

own naked bodies with grease and slipped into the skin ... Trailing blood and

grease, the gruesomely clad men ran through the city, thus terrifying those they

followed ... The second-day's rite also included a cannibal feast for each warrior's

family.⁵

Another mass sacrifice was witnessed by the Spanish chronicler Diego de

Duran. In this instance the victims were so numerous that when the streams of blood running down the temple steps 'reached bottom and

cooled they formed fat clots, enough to terrify anyone'.⁶ All in all, it has

been estimated that the number of sacrificial victims in the Aztec empire

as a whole had risen to around 250,000 a year by the beginning of the

sixteenth century.⁷

What was this manic destruction of human life for? According to the Aztecs themselves, it was done to delay the coming of the end of the world.⁸

⁴ Joyce Milton, Robert A. Orsi and Norman Harrison, *The Feathered Serpent and the*

Cross: The Pre-Colombian God-Kings and the Papal States, Cassell, London, 1980, p. 64.

⁵ Reported in *Aztecs: Reign of Blood and Splendour*, Time-Life Books, Alexandria,

Virginia, 1992, p. 105.

6 Ibid., p. 103.

7 *The Feathered Serpent and the Cross*, p. 55.

8 Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*,

Thames & Hudson, London, 1993, pp. 96.

102

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Children of the Fifth Sun

Like the many different peoples and cultures that had preceded them in

Mexico, the Aztecs believed that the universe operated in great cycles.

The priests stated as a matter of simple fact that there had been four such cycles, or 'Suns', since the creation of the human race. At the time

of the conquest, it was the Fifth Sun that prevailed. And it is within that

same Fifth Sun, or epoch, that humankind still lives today. This account is

taken from a rare collection of Aztec documents known as the *Vaticano-*

Latin Codex:

First Sun, *Matlactli Atl*: duration 4008 years. Those who lived then ate water maize

called atzitzintli. In this age lived the giants ... The First Sun was destroyed by

water in the sign *Matlactli Atl* (Ten Water). It was called *Apachiohualiztli* (flood,

deluge), the art of sorcery of the permanent rain. Men were turned into fish. Some

say that only one couple escaped, protected by an old tree living near the water.

Others say that there were seven couples who hid in a cave until the flood was

over and the waters had gone down. They repopulated the earth and were

worshipped as gods in their nations ...

Second Sun, *Ehecoatli*: duration 4010 years. Those who lived then ate wild fruit

known as *acotzintli*. This Sun was destroyed by *Ehecoatli* (Wind Serpent) and men

were turned into monkeys ... One man and one woman, standing on a rock, were

saved from destruction ...

Third Sun, *Tleyquiyahuillo*: duration 4081 years. Men, the descendants of the

couple who were saved from the Second Sun, ate a fruit called *tzincoacoc*. This

Third Sun was destroyed by fire ...

Fourth Sun, *Tzontlilic*: duration 5026 years ... Men died of starvation after a deluge

of blood and fire ...9

Another 'cultural document' of the Aztecs that has survived the ravages

of the conquest is the 'Sun Stone' of Axayacatl, the sixth emperor of the

royal dynasty. This huge monolith was hewn out of solid basalt in AD

1479. It weighs 24.5 tons and consists of a series of concentrically inscribed circles, each bearing intricate symbolic statements. As in the

codex, these statements focus attention on the belief that the world has

already passed through four epochs, or Suns. The first and most remote

of these is represented by *Ocelotonatiuh*, the jaguar god: 'During that

Sun lived the giants that had been created by the gods but were finally

attacked and devoured by jaguars.' The Second Sun is represented by the

serpent head of *Ehecoatl*, the god of the air: 'During that period the human race was destroyed by high winds and hurricanes and men were

converted into monkeys.' The symbol of the Third Sun is a head of rain

and celestial fire: 'In this epoch everything was destroyed by a rain of fire

from the sky and the forming of lava. All the houses were burnt. Men

9 From the *Vaticano-Latin Codex 3738*, cited in Adela Fernandez, *Pre-Hispanic Gods of*

Mexico, Panorama Editorial, Mexico City, 1992, pp. 21-2.

103

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

were converted into birds to survive the catastrophe.' The Fourth Sun is

represented by the head of the water-goddess *Chalchiuhtlicue*:

'Destruction came in the form of torrential rains and floods. The mountains disappeared and men were transformed into fish.'¹⁰

The symbol of the Fifth Sun, our current epoch, is the face of *Tonatiuh*,

the sun god himself. His tongue, fittingly depicted as an obsidian knife,

juts out hungrily, signalling his need for the nourishment of human blood

and hearts. His features are wrinkled to indicate his advanced age and he

appears within the symbol *Ollin* which signifies Movement.¹¹

Why is the Fifth Sun known as 'The Sun of Movement'? Because, 'the

elders say: in it there will be a movement of the earth and from this we

shall all perish.'¹²

And when will this catastrophe strike? Soon, according to the Aztec

priests. They believed that the Fifth Sun was already very old and

approaching the end of its cycle (hence the wrinkles on the face of

Tonatiuh). Ancient meso-American traditions dated the birth of this epoch

to a remote period corresponding to the fourth millennium BC of the

Christian calendar.¹³ The method of calculating its end, however, had

been forgotten by the time of Aztecs.¹⁴ In the absence of this essential

information, human sacrifices were apparently carried out in the hope

that the impending catastrophe might be postponed. Indeed, the Aztecs

came to regard themselves as a chosen people; they were convinced that

they had been charged with a divine mission to wage war and offer the

blood of their captives to feed Tonatiuh, thereby preserving the life of the

Fifth Sun.¹⁵

Stuart Fiedel, an authority on the prehistory of the Americas, summed

up the whole issue in these words: 'The Aztecs believed that to prevent

the destruction of the universe, which had already occurred four times in

the past, the gods must be supplied with a steady diet of human hearts

and blood.'¹⁶ This same belief, with remarkably few variations, was shared

by all the great civilizations of Central America. Unlike the Aztecs,

however, some of the earlier peoples had calculated *exactly* when a great

movement of the earth could be expected to bring the Fifth Sun to an end.

¹⁰ Eric S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1990, p.

332. See also *Aztec Calendar: History and Symbolism*, Garcia y Valades Editores, Mexico

City, 1992.

11 Ibid.

12 *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, p. 24.

13 Peter Tompkins, *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1987,

p. 286.

14 John Bierhorst, *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*, William Morrow & Co.,

New York, 1990, p. 134.

15 *World Mythology*, (ed. Roy Willis, BCA, London, 1993, p. 243.

16 Stuart J. Fiedel, *The Prehistory of the Americas*, (second edition), Cambridge University

Press, 1992, pp. 312-13.

104

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Lightbringer

No documents, only dark and menacing sculptures, have come down to

us from the Olmec era. But the Mayas, justifiably regarded as the greatest

ancient civilization to have arisen in the New World, left behind a wealth

of calendrical records. Expressed in terms of the modern dating system,

these enigmatic inscriptions convey a rather curious message: the Fifth

Sun, it seems, is going to come to an end on 23 December, AD 2012.¹⁷

In the rational intellectual climate of the late twentieth century it is unfashionable to take doomsday prophecies seriously. The general consensus is that they are the products of superstitious minds and can

safely be ignored. As I travelled around Mexico, however, I was from time

to time bothered by a nagging intuition that the voices of the ancient sages might deserve a hearing after all. I mean, suppose by some crazy

offchance they weren't the superstitious savages we'd always believed

them to be. Suppose they knew something we didn't? Most pertinent of

all, suppose that their projected date for the end of the Fifth Sun turned

out to be correct? Suppose, in other words, that some truly awful

geological catastrophe is already unfolding, deep in the bowels of the

earth, as the wise men of the Maya predicted?

In Peru and Bolivia I had become aware of the obsessive concern with

the calculation of time shown by the Incas and their predecessors. Now,

in Mexico, I discovered that the Maya, who believed that they had worked

out the date of the end of the world, had been possessed by the same

compulsion. Indeed, for these people, just about everything boiled down

to numbers, the passage of the years and the manifestations of events.

The belief was that if the numbers which lay beneath the manifestations

could be properly understood, it would be possible to predict successfully

the timing of the events themselves.¹⁸ I felt disinclined to ignore the

obvious implications of the recurrent destructions of humanity depicted

so vividly in the Central American traditions. Coming complete with

giants and floods, these traditions were eerily similar to those of the far-

off Andean region.

Meanwhile, however, I was keen to pursue another, related line of

inquiry. This concerned the bearded white-skinned deity named

Quetzalcoatl, who was believed to have sailed to Mexico from across the

seas in remote antiquity. Quetzalcoatl was credited with the invention of

the advanced mathematical and calendrical formulae that the Maya were

later to use to calculate the date of doomsday.¹⁹ He also bore a striking

¹⁷ Professor Michael D. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1992,

pp. 275-6. Herbert Joseph Spinden's correlation gives a slightly earlier date of 24

December, AD 2011. See *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 286.

¹⁸ *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 286.

¹⁹ *World Mythology*, p. 240. See also *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 9:855, and Lewis Spence, *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico*, Rider, London, 1922, pp. 49-50.

105

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

resemblance to Viracocha, the pale god of the Andes, who came to

Tiahuanaco 'in the time of darkness' bearing the gifts of light and civilization.

106

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 14

People of the Serpent

After spending so long immersed in the traditions of Viracocha, the bearded god of the distant Andes, I was intrigued to discover that Quetzalcoatl, the principal deity of the ancient Mexican pantheon, was

described in terms that were extremely familiar.

For example, one pre-Columbian myth collected in Mexico by the sixteenth-century Spanish chronicler Juan de Torquemada asserted that

Quetzalcoatl was ‘a fair and ruddy complexioned man with a long beard’.

Another spoke of him as, ‘*era Hombre blanco*; a large man, broad browed, with huge eyes, long hair, and a great, rounded beard— *la barba*

grande y redonda.’¹ Another still described him as

a mysterious person ... a white man with strong formation of body, broad

forehead, large eyes, and a flowing beard. He was dressed in a long, white robe

reaching to his feet. He condemned sacrifices, except of fruits and flowers, and

was known as the god of peace ... When addressed on the subject of war he is

reported to have stopped up his ears with his fingers.²

According to a particularly striking Central American tradition, this 'wise

instructor ...'

came from across the sea in a boat that moved by itself without paddles. He was a

tall, bearded white man who taught people to use fire for cooking. He also built

houses and showed couples that they could live together as husband and wife;

and since people often quarreled in those days, he taught them to live in peace.³

Viracocha's Mexican twin

The reader will recall that Viracocha, in his journeys through the Andes,

went by several different aliases. Quetzalcoatl did this too. In some parts

of Central America (notably among the Quiche Maya) he was called

Gucumatz. Elsewhere, at Chichen Itza for example, he was known as

Kukulcan. When both these words were translated into English, they

turned out to mean exactly the same thing: Plumed (or Feathered)

Serpent. This, also, was the meaning of Quetzalcoatl.⁴

There were other deities, among the Maya in particular, whose

1 Juan de Torquemada, *Monarchichia indiana*, volume I, cited in *Fair Gods and Stone*

Faces, pp. 37-8.

2 *North America of Antiquity*, p. 268, cited in *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, p. 165.

3 *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*, p. 161.

4 See Nigel Davis, *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, Penguin Books, London, 1990, p.

152; *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, pp. 141-2.

107

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

identities seemed to merge closely with those of Quetzalcoatl. One was

Votan, a great civilizer, who was also described as pale-skinned, bearded

and wearing a long robe. Scholars could offer no translation for his name

but his principal symbol, like that of Quetzalcoatl, was a serpent.⁵

Another closely related figure was Itzamana, the Mayan god of healing,

who was a robed and bearded individual; his symbol, too, was the rattlesnake.⁶

What emerged from all this, as the leading authorities agreed, was that

the Mexican legends collected and passed on by Spanish chroniclers at

the time of the conquest were often the confused and conflated products

of extremely long oral traditions. Behind them all, however, it seemed that there must lie some solid historical reality. In the judgement of

Sylvanus Griswold Morley, the doyen of Maya studies:

The great god Kukulcan, or Feathered Serpent, was the Mayan counterpart of the

Aztec Quetzalcoatl, the Mexican god of light, learning and culture. In the Maya

pantheon he was regarded as having been the great organizer, the founder of

cities, the former of laws and the teacher of the calendar. Indeed his attributes

and life history are so human that it is not improbable that he may have been an

actual historical character, some great lawgiver and organizer, the memory of

whose benefactions lingered long after death, and whose personality was

eventually deified.⁷

All the legends stated unambiguously that

Quetzalcoatl/Kukulcan/Gucumatz/Votan/Itzamana had arrived in Central

America from somewhere very far away (across the 'Eastern Sea') and that

amid great sadness he had eventually sailed off again in the direction

whence he had come.⁸ The legends added that he had promised solemnly

that he would return one day⁹—a clear echo of Viracocha it would be

almost perverse to ascribe to coincidence. In addition, it will be recalled

that Viracocha's departure across the waves of the Pacific Ocean had

been portrayed in the Andean traditions as a miraculous event.

Quetzalcoatl's departure from Mexico also had a strange feel about it: he

was said to have sailed away 'on a raft of serpents'.¹⁰

All in all, I felt Morley was right in looking for a factual historical

background behind the Mayan and Mexican myths. What the traditions

seemed to indicate was that the bearded pale-skinned foreigner called

Quetzalcoatl (or Kukulcan or whatever) had been not just one person but

probably several people who had come from the same place and had

belonged to the same distinctively non-Indian ethnic type (bearded, white-skinned, etc.). This wasn't only suggested by the existence of a

5 *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, pp. 98-9.

6 *Ibid*, p. 100.

7 Sylvanus Griswold Morley, *An Introduction to the Study of Maya Hieroglyphs*

(introduction by Eric S. Thompson), Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1975, pp. 16-17.

8 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, Paul Hamlyn, London, 1989, pp. 437, 439.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 437.

10 *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, p. 62.

108

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

'family' of obviously related¹¹ but slightly different gods sharing the symbol of the snake. Quetzalcoatl/Kukulcan/Itzamana was quite explicitly portrayed in many of the Mexican and Mayan accounts as having been accompanied by 'attendants' or 'assistants'.

Certain myths set out in the Ancient Mayan religious texts known as the

Books of Chilam Balam, for instance, reported that 'the first inhabitants

of Yucatan were the "People of the Serpent". They came from the east in

boats across the water with their leader Itzamana, "Serpent of the East", a

healer who could cure by laying on hands, and who revived the dead.'¹²

'Kukulcan,' stated another tradition, 'came with nineteen companions,

two of whom were gods of fish, two others gods of agriculture, and a god

of thunder ... They stayed ten years in Yucatan. Kukulcan made wise laws

and then set sail and disappeared in the direction of the rising sun ...'¹³

According to the Spanish chronicler Las Casas: 'The natives affirmed

that in ancient times there came to Mexico twenty men, the chief of whom was called Kukulcan ... They wore flowing robes and sandals on

their feet, they had long beards and their heads were bare ... Kukulcan

instructed the people in the arts of peace, and caused various important

edifices to be built ...'14

Meanwhile Juan de Torquemada recorded this very specific pre-conquest tradition concerning the imposing strangers who had entered

Mexico with Quetzalcoatl:

They were men of good carriage, well-dressed, in long robes of black linen, open

in front, and without capes, cut low at the neck, with short sleeves that did not

come to the elbow ... These followers of Quetzalcoatl were men of great

knowledge and cunning artists in all kinds of fine work.¹⁵

Like some long-lost twin of Viracocha, the white and bearded Andean

deity, Quetzalcoatl was depicted as having brought to Mexico all the skills and sciences necessary to create a civilized life, thus ushering in a

golden age.¹⁶ He was believed, for example, to have introduced the knowledge of writing to Central America, to have invented the calendar,

and to have been a master builder who taught the people the secrets of

¹¹ Not only obviously related but specifically related. Votan, for example, was often

referred to as the grandson of Quetzalcoatl. Itzamana and Kukulcan were sometimes

confused by the Indians who transmitted their legends to Spanish chroniclers shortly

after the conquest. See *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, p. 100.

¹² *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 347.

¹³ *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 439.

¹⁴ James Bailey, *The God-Kings and the Titans*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1972, p.

206.

¹⁵ *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, pp. 37-8.

¹⁶ According to the sixteenth century chronicler Bernardino de Sahagun: 'Quetzalcoatl

was a great civilizing agent who entered Mexico at the head of a band of strangers. He

imported the arts into the country and especially fostered agriculture. In his time maize

was so large in the head that a man might not carry more than one stalk at a time and

cotton grew in all colours without having to be dyed. He built spacious and elegant

houses, and inculcated a type of religion which fostered peace.'

109

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

masonry and architecture. He was the father of mathematics, metallurgy,

and astronomy and was said to have 'measured the earth'. He also

founded productive agriculture, and was reported to have discovered and

introduced corn—literally the staff of life in these ancient lands. A great

doctor and master of medicines, he was the patron of healers and

diviners 'and disclosed to the people the mysteries of the properties of

plants'. In addition, he was revered as a lawgiver, as a protector of

craftsmen, and as a patron of all the arts.

As might be expected of such a refined and cultured individual he

forbade the grisly practice of human sacrifice during the period of his

ascendancy in Mexico. After his departure the blood-spattered rituals

were reintroduced with a vengeance. Nevertheless, even the Aztecs, the

most vehement sacrificers ever to have existed in the long history of

Central America, remembered 'the time of Quetzalcoatl' with a kind of

nostalgia. 'He was a teacher,' recalled one legend, 'who taught that no

living thing was to be harmed and that sacrifices were to be made not of

human beings but of birds and butterflies.¹⁷

Cosmic struggle

Why did Quetzalcoatl go away? What went wrong?

Mexican legends provided answers to these questions. They said that

the enlightened and benevolent rule of the Plumed Serpent had been

brought to an end by Tezcatilpoca, a malevolent god whose name meant

'Smoking Mirror' and whose cult demanded human sacrifice. It seemed

that a near-cosmic struggle between the forces of light and darkness had

taken place in Ancient Mexico, and that the forces of darkness had

triumphed ...

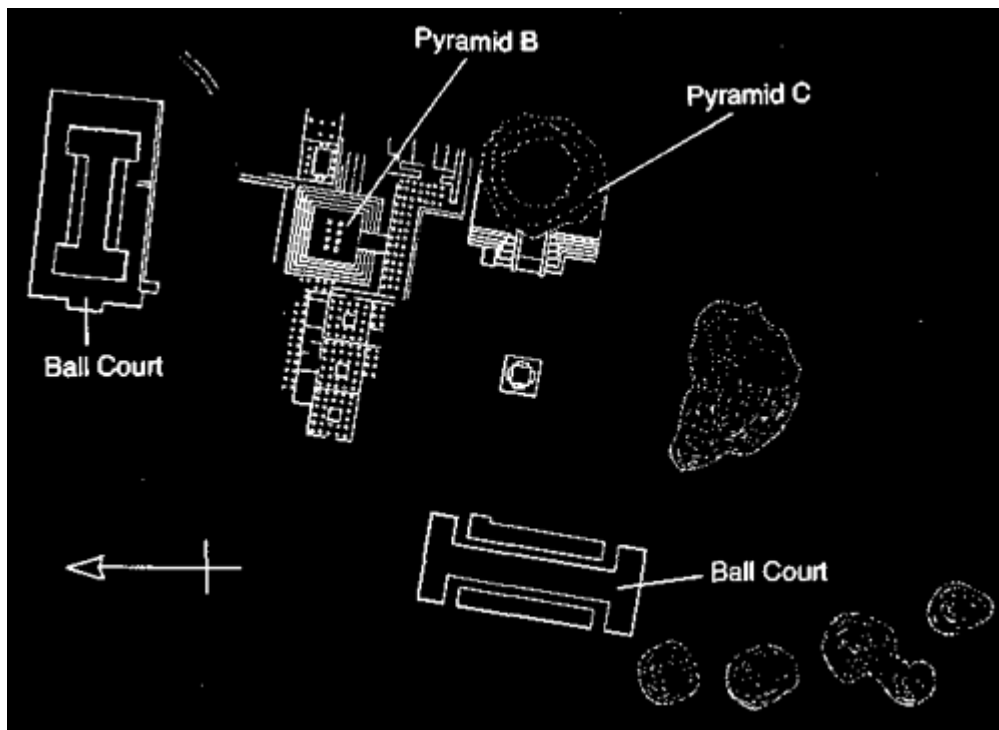
The supposed stage for these events, now known as Tula, was not believed to be particularly old—not much more than 1000 years anyway—

but the legends surrounding it linked it to an infinitely more distant epoch. In those times, outside history, it had been known as Tollan. All

the traditions agreed that it had been at Tollan that Tezcatilpoca had vanquished Quetzalcoatl and forced him to quit Mexico.

17 *The God-Kings and the Titans*, p. 57.

110



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Tula

Fire serpents

Tula, Hidalgo Province

I was sitting on the flat square summit of the unimaginatively named Pyramid B. The late-afternoon sun was beating down out of a clear blue

sky, and I was facing south, looking around.

At the base of the pyramid, to the north and east, were murals depicting jaguars and eagles feasting on human hearts. Immediately behind me were ranged four pillars and four fearsome granite idols each

nine feet tall. Ahead and, to my left lay the partially unexcavated Pyramid

C, a cactus-covered mound about 40 feet high, and farther away were

more mounds not yet investigated by archaeologists. To my right was a

ball court. In that long, I-shaped arena, terrible gladiatorial games had been staged in ancient times. Teams, or sometimes just two individuals

pitted against each other, would compete for possession of a rubber ball;

the losers were decapitated.

The idols on the platform behind me had a solemn and intimidating

aura. I stood up to look at them more closely. Their sculptor had given them hard, implacable faces, hooked noses and hollow eyes and they seemed without sympathy or emotion. What interested me most, however, was not so much their ferocious appearance as the objects that they clutched in their hands. Archaeologists admitted that they didn't really know what these objects were but had tentatively identified them anyway. This identification had stuck and it was now received wisdom that spearthrowers called *atl-atls* were held in the right hands of the idols

111

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

and 'spears or arrows and incense bags' in the left hands.¹⁸ It didn't seem

to matter that the objects did not in any way resemble *atl-atls*, spears,

arrows, or incense bags.

Santha Faiia's photographs will help the reader to form his or her own

impression of these peculiar objects. As I studied the objects themselves I

had the distinct sense that they were meant to represent devices which

had originally been made out of metal. The right-hand device, which seemed to emerge from a sheath or hand-guard, was lozenge-shaped

with a curved lower edge. The left-hand device could have been an instrument or weapon of some kind.

I remembered legends which related that the gods of ancient Mexico had armed themselves with *xiuhcoatl*, 'fire serpents'.¹⁹ These apparently

emitted burning rays capable of piercing and dismembering human

bodies.²⁰ Was it 'fire serpents' that the Tula idols were holding? What, for

that matter, were fire serpents?

Whatever they were, both devices looked like pieces of technology. And

both in certain ways resembled the equally mysterious objects in the hands of the idols in the Kalasasaya at Tiahuanaco.

Serpent Sanctuary

Santha and I had come to Tula/Tollan because it had been closely

associated both with Quetzalcoatl and with his arch-enemy Tezcatilpoca,

the Smoking Mirror.²¹ Ever-young, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, Tezcatilpoca was associated in the legends with night, darkness and the sacred jaguar.²² He was 'invisible and implacable, appearing to men sometimes as a flying shadow, sometimes as a dreadful monster'.²³ Often depicted as a glaring skull, he was said to have

been the owner of a mysterious object, the Smoking Mirror after which he

was named, which he made use of to observe from afar the activities of

men and gods. Scholars quite reasonably suppose that it must have been

a primitive obsidian scrying stone: 'Obsidian had an especial sanctity for

the Mexicans, as it provided the sacrificial knives employed by the priests

... Bernal Diaz [Spanish chronicler] states that they called this stone "Tezcat". From it mirrors were also manufactured as divinatory media to

be used by wizards.'²⁴

Representing the forces of darkness and rapacious evil, Tezcatilpoca

was said in the legends to have been locked in a conflict with

18 *Mexico*, pp. 194-5.

19 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, pp. 185, 188-9.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 437.

22 *The Feathered Serpent and the Cross*, pp. 52-3.

23 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 436.

24 *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico*, p. 51.

112

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Quetzalcoatl that had continued over an immense span of years.²⁵
At

certain times one seemed to be gaining the upper hand, at certain times

the other. Finally the cosmic struggle came to an end when good was

vanquished by evil and Quetzalcoatl driven out from Tollan.²⁶
Thereafter,

under the influence of Tezcatilpoca's nightmarish cult, human sacrifice

was reintroduced throughout Central America.

As we have seen, Quetzalcoatl was believed to have fled to the coast

and to have been carried away on a raft of serpents. One legend says, 'He

burned his houses, built of silver and shells, buried his treasure, and set

sail on the Eastern Sea preceded by his attendants who had been changed

into bright birds.'²⁷

This poignant moment of departure was supposedly staged at a place

called Coatzacoalcos, meaning 'Serpent Sanctuary'.²⁸ There, before taking

his leave, Quetzalcoatl promised his followers he would return one day to

overthrow the cult of Tezcatilpoca and to inaugurate an era when the

gods would again 'accept sacrifices of flowers' and cease their clamour

for human blood.²⁹

²⁵ *World Mythology*, p. 237.

²⁶ *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 437.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, pp. 139-40.

29 *The Feathered Serpent and the Cross*, pp. 35, 66.

113

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 15

Mexican Babel

We drove south-east from Tula, by-passing Mexico City on an anarchic

series of fast freeways that dragged us through the creeping edge of the

capital's eye-watering, lung-searing pollution. Our route then took us up

over pine-covered mountains, past the snowy peak of Popocatepetl and

thence along tree-lined lanes amid fields and farmsteads.

In the late afternoon we arrived at Cholula, a sleepy town with 11,000

inhabitants and a spacious main square. After turning east through the

narrow streets, we crossed a railway line and pulled to a halt in the

shadow of *tlahchialtepetl*, the 'man-made mountain' we had come here

to see.

Once sacred to the peaceful cult of Quetzalcoatl, but now surmounted

by an ornate Catholic church, this immense edifice was ranked among the

most extensive and ambitious engineering projects ever undertaken anywhere in the ancient world. Indeed, with a base area of 45 acres and a

height of 210 feet, it was three times more massive than the Great Pyramid of Egypt.¹ Though its contours were now blurred by age and its

sides overgrown with grass, it was still possible to recognize that it had

once been an imposing ziggurat which had risen up towards the heavens

in four clean-angled 'steps'. Measuring almost half a kilometre along each

side at its base, it had also succeeded in preserving a dignified but violated beauty.

The past, though often dry and dusty, is rarely dumb. Sometimes it can

speak with passion. It seemed to me that it did so here, bearing witness

to the physical and psychological degradation visited upon the native peoples of Mexico when the Spanish *conquistador* Hernan Cortez almost

casually 'beheaded a culture as a passer-by might sweep off the head of a

sunflower'.² In Cholula, a great centre of pilgrimage with a population of

around 100,000 at the time of the conquest, this decapitation of ancient

traditions and ways of life required that something particularly

humiliating be done to the man-made mountain of Quetzalcoatl. The

solution was to smash and desecrate the temple which had once stood on

the summit of the ziggurat and replace it with a church.

Cortez and his men were few, the Cholulans were many. When they

marched into town, however, the Spaniards had one major advantage:

bearded and pale-skinned, dressed in shining armour, they looked like

the fulfillment of a prophecy—had it not always been promised that

¹ Figures from *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

114

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, would return 'from across the Eastern

Sea' with his band of followers?³

Because of this expectation, the naive and trusting Cholulans permitted

the *conquistadores* to climb the steps of the ziggurat and enter the great

courtyard of the temple. There troupes of gaily bedecked dancing girls

greeted them, singing and playing on instruments, while stewards moved

back and forth with heaped platters of bread and delicate cooked meats.

One of the Spanish chroniclers, an eyewitness to the events that followed, reported that adoring townsfolk of all ranks 'unarmed, with eager and happy faces, crowded in to hear what the white men would

say'. Realizing from this incredible reception that their intentions were

not suspected, the Spaniards closed and guarded all the entrances, drew

their weapons of steel and murdered their hosts.⁴ Six thousand died in

this horrible massacre⁵ which matched, in its savagery, the most bloodstained rituals of the Aztecs: 'Those of Cholula were caught

unawares. With neither arrows nor shields did they meet the Spaniards.

Just so they were slain without warning. They were killed by pure treachery.'6

It was ironic, I thought, that the *conquistadores* in both Peru and Mexico should have benefited in the same way from local legends that

prophesied the return of a pale, bearded god. If that god was indeed a

deified human, as seemed likely, he must have been a person of high

civilization and exemplary character—or more probably two different

people from the same background, one working in Mexico and providing

the model for Quetzalcoatl, the other in Peru being the model for

Viracocha. The superficial resemblance that the Spanish bore to those

earlier fair-skinned foreigners opened many doors that would otherwise

certainly have been closed. Unlike their wise and benevolent

predecessors, however, Pizarro in the Andes and Cortez in Central

America were ravaging wolves. They ate up the lands and the peoples and

the cultures they had seized upon. They destroyed almost everything

...

Tears for the past

Their eyes scaled with ignorance, bigotry and greed, the Spanish erased a

precious heritage of mankind when they arrived in Mexico. In so doing

they deprived the future of any detailed knowledge concerning the

brilliant and remarkable civilizations which once flourished in Central

America.

What, for example, was the true history of the glowing 'idol' that rested

3 Ibid., pp. 3-4.

4 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 6.

5 *Mexico*, p. 224.

6 Contemporary account cited in *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 6.

115

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

in a sacred sanctuary in the Mixtec capital Achiotlan? We know of this

curious object through the writings of a sixteenth-century eyewitness,

Father Burgoa:

The material was of marvellous value, for it was an emerald of the size of a thick

pepper-pod [capsicum], upon which a small bird was engraved with the greatest

skill, and, with the same skill, a small serpent coiled ready to strike. The stone was

so transparent that it shone from its interior with the brightness of a candle flame.

It was a very old jewel, and there is no tradition extant concerning the origin of its

veneration and worship.⁷

What might we learn if we could examine this 'very old' jewel today? And

how *old* was it really? We shall never find out because Fr. Benito, the first

missionary of Achiotlan, seized the stone from the Indians: 'He had it ground up, although a Spaniard offered three thousand ducats for it, stirred the powder in water, poured it upon the earth and trod upon it ...'⁸

Equally typical of the profligate squandering of the intellectual riches concealed in the Mexican past was the shared fate of two gifts given to

Cortez by the Aztec emperor Montezuma. These were circular calendars,

as big as cartwheels, one of solid silver, and the other of solid gold. Both

were elaborately engraved with beautiful hieroglyphs which may have

contained material of great interest. Cortez had them melted down for

ingots on the spot.⁹

More systematically, all over Central America, vast repositories of

knowledge accumulated since ancient times were painstakingly gathered,

heaped up and burned by zealous friars. In July 1562, for example, in the

main square of Mani (just south of modern Merida in Yucatan Province)

Fr. Diego de Landa burned thousands of Maya codices, story paintings

and hieroglyphs inscribed on rolled-up deer skins. He also destroyed

countless 'idols' and 'altars', all of which he described as 'works of the

devil, designed by the evil one to delude the Indians and to prevent them

from accepting Christianity ...'¹⁰ Elsewhere he elaborated on the same

theme:

We found great numbers of books [written in the characters of the Indians] but as

they contained nothing but superstitions and falsehoods of the devil we burned

them all, which the natives took most grievously, and which gave them great

pain.¹¹

Not only the 'natives' should have felt this pain but anyone and

everyone—then and now—who would like to know the truth about the

past.

Many other 'men of God', some even more ruthlessly efficient than

7 *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico*, pp. 228-9.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 7.

10 *Yucatan before and after the Conquest*, p. 9. See also *Mysteries of the Mexican*

Pyramids, p. 20.

11 *Yucatan before and after the Conquest*, p. 104.

116

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Diego de Landa, participated in Spain's satanic mission to wipe clear the

memory banks of Central America. Notable among these was Juan de

Zumarraga, Bishop of Mexico, who boasted of having destroyed 20,000

idols and 500 Indian temples. In November 1530 he burned a

Christianized Aztec aristocrat at the stake for having allegedly reverted to

worship of the 'rain-god' and later, in the market-place at Texcoco, built a

vast bonfire of astronomical documents, paintings, manuscripts and hieroglyphic texts which the *conquistadores* had forcibly extracted from

the Aztecs during the previous eleven years.¹² As this irreplaceable storehouse of knowledge and history went up in flames, a chance to shake off at least some of the collective amnesia that clouds our understanding was lost to mankind for ever.

What remains to us of the written records of the ancient peoples of Central America? The answer, thanks to the Spanish, is less than twenty

original codices and scrolls.¹³

We know from hearsay that many of the documents which the friars

reduced to ashes contained 'records of ages past'.¹⁴

What did those lost records say? what secrets did they hold?

Gigantic men of deformed stature

Even while the orgy of book-burning was still going on, some Spaniards

began to realize that 'a truly great civilization had once existed in Mexico

prior to the Aztecs'.¹⁵ Oddly enough, one of the first to act on this

realization was Diego de Landa. He appears to have undergone

'Damascus-road experience' after staging his *auto-da-fé* at Mani. In later

years, determined to save what he could of the ancient wisdom he had

once played such a large part in destroying, he became an assiduous

gatherer of the traditions and oral histories of the native peoples of the

Yucatan.¹⁶

Bernardino de Sahagun, a Franciscan friar, was a chronicler to whom we

owe much. A great linguist, he is reported to have 'sought out the most

learned and often the oldest natives, and asked each to paint in his Aztec

picture writing as much as he could clearly remember of Aztec history,

religion and legend'.¹⁷ In this way Sahagun was able to accumulate

detailed information on the anthropology, mythology and social history

of ancient Mexico, which he later set down in a learned twelve-volume

work. This was suppressed by the Spanish authorities. Fortunately one

copy has survived, though it is incomplete.

12 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 21.

13 *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, p. 34.

14 Ibid.

15 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 23.

16 *Yucatan before and after the Conquest*.

17 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 24.

117

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Diego de Duran, a conscientious and courageous collector of

indigenous traditions, was yet another Franciscan who fought to recover

the lost knowledge of the past. He visited Cholula in AD 1585, a time of

rapid and catastrophic change. There he interviewed a venerated elder of

the town, said to have been more than one hundred years old, who told

him this story about the making of the great ziggurat:

In the beginning, before the light of the sun had been created, this place, Cholula,

was in obscurity and darkness; all was a plain, without hill or elevation, encircled

in every part by water, without tree or created thing. Immediately after the light

and the sun arose in the east there appeared gigantic men of deformed stature

who possessed the land. Enamoured of the light and beauty of the sun they

determined to build a tower so high that its summit should reach the sky. Having

collected materials for the purpose they found a very adhesive clay and bitumen

with which they speedily commenced to build the tower ... And having reared it to

the greatest possible altitude, so that it reached the sky, the Lord of the Heavens,

enraged, said to the inhabitants of the sky, 'Have you observed how they of the

earth have built a high and haughty tower to mount hither, being enamoured of

the light of the sun and his beauty? Come and confound them, because it is not

right that they of the earth, living in the flesh, should mingle with us.' Immediately

the inhabitants of the sky sallied forth like flashes of lightning; they destroyed the

edifice and divided and scattered its builders to all parts of the earth.¹⁸

It was this story, almost but not quite the biblical account of the Tower of

Babel (which was itself a reworking of a far older Mesopotamian tradition), that had brought me to Cholula.

The Central American and Middle Eastern tales were obviously closely

related. Indeed, the similarities were unmissable, but there were also differences far too significant to be ignored. Of course, the similarities

could be due to unrecorded pre-Colombian contacts between the cultures

of the Middle East and the New World, but there was one way to explain

the similarities *and* the differences in a single theory. Suppose that the

two versions of the legend had evolved separately for several thousands

of years, but prior to that both had descended from the same remotely

ancient ancestor?

Remnants

Here's what the *Book of Genesis* says about the 'tower that reached to

heaven':

Throughout the earth men spoke the same language, with the same vocabulary.

Now as they moved eastwards they found a plain in the land of Shinar, where they

settled. There they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them

in the fire.' For stone they used bricks and for mortar they used bitumen. 'Come,'

they said, 'let us build ourselves a town and a tower with its top reaching heaven.

Let us make a name for ourselves, so that we may not be scattered about the

18 Diego de Duran, 'Historia antiqua de la Nueva Espana', (1585), in Ignatius Donnelly,

Atlantis: The Antediluvian World, p. 200.

118

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

entire earth.'

Now Yahewh [the Hebrew God] came down to see the town and the tower that the

sons of man had built. 'So they are all a single people with a single language!' said

Yahweh. 'This is but the start of their undertakings! There will be nothing too hard

for them to do. Come, let us go down and confuse their language on the spot so

that they can no longer understand one another.'

Yahweh scattered them thence over the whole face of the earth, and they stopped

building the tower. It was named Babel, therefore, because there Yahweh confused

the language of the whole earth. It was from there that Yahweh scattered them

over the whole face of the earth.¹⁹

The verse which most interested me suggested very clearly that the ancient builders of the Tower of Babel had set out to create a lasting

monument to themselves so that their name would not be forgotten
—

even if their civilization and language were. Was it possible that the same

considerations could have applied at Cholula?

Only a handful of monuments in Mexico were thought by archaeologists

to be more than 2000 years old. Cholula was definitely one of them.

Indeed no one could say for sure in what distant age its ramparts had

first begun to be heaped up. For thousands of years before development

and extension of the site began in earnest around 300 BC, it looked as

though some other, older structure might have been positioned at the spot over which the great ziggurat of Quetzalcoatl now rose.

There was a precedent for this which further strengthened the intriguing possibility that the remnants of a truly ancient civilization might still be lying around in Central America waiting to be recognized.

For example, just south of the university campus of Mexico City, off the

main road connecting the capital to Cuernavaca, stands a circular step

pyramid of great complexity (with four galleries and a central staircase). It

was partially excavated in the 1920s from beneath a mantle of lava.

Geologists were called to the site to help date the lava, and carried out a

detailed examination. To everyone's surprise, they concluded that the

volcanic eruption which had completely buried three sides of this pyramid

(and had then gone on to cover about sixty square miles of the surrounding territory) must have taken place *at least seven thousand years ago*.²⁰

This geological evidence seems to have been ignored by historians and

archaeologists, who do not believe that any civilization capable of building a pyramid could have existed in Mexico at such an early date. It

is worth noting, however, that Byron Cummings, the American archaeologist who originally excavated the site for the National Geographical Society, was convinced by clearly demarcated stratification

19 *Genesis* 11:1-9.

20 Reported in *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*, p. 199. See also *The God-Kings and the*

Titans, p. 54, and *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 207.

119

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

layers above and below the pyramid (laid down both before and after the

volcanic eruption) that it was ‘the oldest temple yet uncovered on the American continent’. He went further than the geologists and stated categorically that this temple ‘fell into ruins some 8500 years ago’.²¹

Pyramids upon pyramids

Going inside the Cholula pyramid really did feel like entering a man-made

mountain. The tunnels (and there were more than six miles of them) were

not old: they had been left behind by the teams of archaeologists who

had burrowed here diligently from 1931 until funds ran out in 1966.

Somehow, these narrow, low-ceilinged corridors had borrowed an atmosphere of antiquity from the vast structure all around them.

Moist

and cool, they offered an inviting and secretive darkness.

Following a ribbon of torchlight we walked deeper inside the pyramid.

The archaeological excavations had revealed that it was not the product

of one dynasty (as was thought to have been the case with the pyramids

at Giza in Egypt), but that it had been built up over a very long period of

time—two thousand years or so, at a conservative estimate. In other

words it was a collective project, created by an inter-generational labour

force drawn from the many different cultures, Olmec, Teotihuacan,

Toltec, Zapotec, Mixtec, Cholulan and Aztec, that had passed through

Cholula since the dawn of civilization in Mexico.²²

Though it was not known who had been the first builders here, as far as

it had been possible to establish the earliest major edifice on the site

consisted of a tall conical pyramid, shaped like an upturned bucket,

flattened at the summit where a temple had stood. Much later a second,

similar structure was imposed on top of this primordial mound, i.e. a

second inverted bucket of clay, and compacted stone was placed directly

over the first, raising the temple platform to more than 200 feet above

the surrounding plain. Thereafter, during the next fifteen hundred years

or so, an estimated four or five other cultures contributed to the final appearance of the monument. This they did by extending its base in several stages, but never again by increasing its maximum height. In this

way, almost as though a master plan were being implemented, the man-

made mountain of Cholula gradually attained its characteristic, four-tier

ziggurat shape. Today, its sides at the base are each almost 1500 feet

long—about twice the length of the sides of the Great Pyramid at Giza—

and its total volume has been estimated at a staggering three million

21 Byron S. Cummings, ' *Cuicuilco and the Archaic Culture of Mexico*', *University of*

Arizona Bulletin, volume IV:8, 15 November 1933.

22 *Mexico*, p. 223. See also Kurt Mendelssohn, *The Riddle of the Pyramids*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1986, p. 190.

120

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

cubic metres.²³ This makes it, as one authority succinctly states, 'the

largest building ever erected on earth.'²⁴

Why?

Why go to all that trouble?

What sort of name for themselves were the peoples of Central America

trying to make?

Walking through the network of corridors and passageways, inhaling

the cool, loamy air, I was uncomfortably conscious of the great weight

and mass of the pyramid pressing down upon me. It was *the largest*

building in the world and it had been placed here in honour of a Central

American deity of whom almost nothing was known.

We had the *conquistadores* and the Catholic Church to thank for leaving

us so deeply in the dark about the true story of Quetzalcoatl and his

followers. The smashing and desecration of his ancient temple at Cholula,

the destruction of idols, altars and calendars, and the great bonfires

made out of codices, paintings and hieroglyphic scrolls, had succeeded

almost completely in silencing the voices of the past. But the legends did

offer us one graphic and powerful piece of imagery: a memory of the 'gigantic men of deformed stature' who were said to have been the original builders.

23 *The Riddle of the Pyramids*, p. 190.

24 Ibid.

121

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 16

Serpent Sanctuary

From Cholula we drove east, past the prosperous cities of Puebla, Orizaba

and Cordoba, towards Veracruz and the Gulf of Mexico. We crossed the

mist-enshrouded peaks of the Sierra Madre Oriental, where the air was

thin and cold, and then descended towards sea level on to tropical plains

overgrown with lush plantations of palms and bananas. We were heading

into the heartlands of Mexico's oldest and most mysterious civilization:

that of the so-called Olmecs, whose name meant 'rubber people'.

Dating back to the second millennium BC, the Olmecs had ceased to

exist fifteen hundred years before the rise of the Aztec empire. The

Aztecs, however, had preserved haunting traditions concerning them and

were even responsible for naming them after the rubber-producing area

of Mexico's gulf coast where they were believed to have lived.¹ This area

lies between modern Veracruz in the west and Ciudad del Carmen in the

east. In it the Aztecs found a number of ancient ritual objects produced

by the Olmecs and for reasons unknown they collected these objects and

placed them in positions of importance in their own temples.²

Looking at my map, I could see the blue line of the Coatzacoalcos River

running into the Gulf of Mexico more or less at the midpoint of the

legendary Olmec homeland. The oil industry proliferates here now, where

rubber trees once flourished, transforming a tropical paradise into

something resembling the lowest circle of Dante's Inferno. Since the oil

boom of 1973 the town of Coatzacoalcos, once easy-going but not very

prosperous, had mushroomed into a transport and refining centre with

air-conditioned hotels and a population of half a million. It lay close to

the black heart of an industrial wasteland in which virtually everything of

archaeological interest that had escaped the depredations of the Spanish

at the time of the conquest had been destroyed by the voracious expansion of the oil business. It was therefore no longer possible, on the

basis of hard evidence, to confirm or deny the intriguing suggestion that

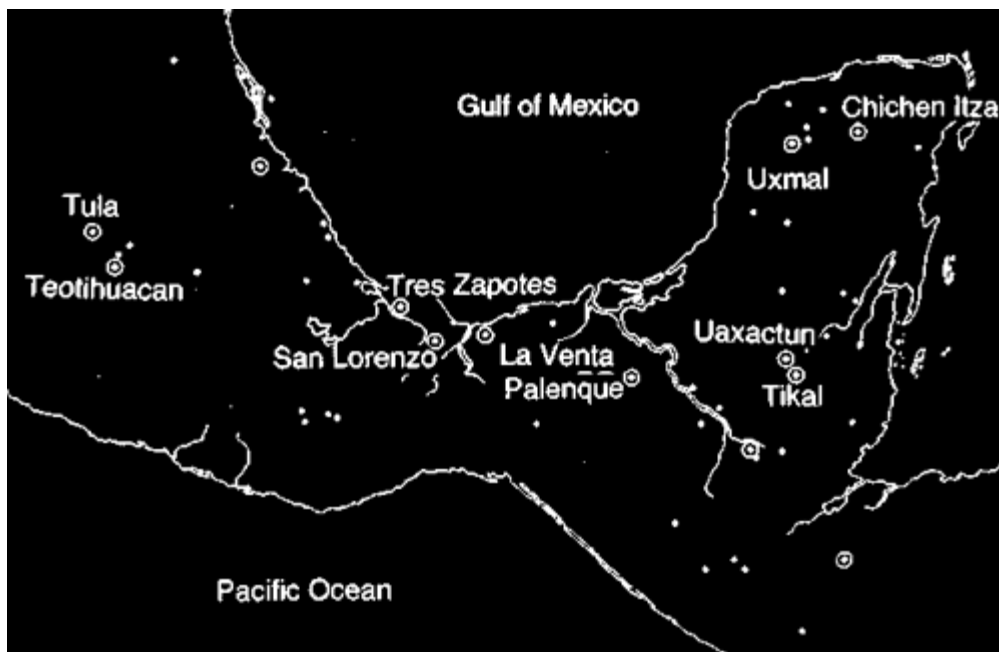
the legends seemed to make: that something of great importance must

once have occurred here.

1 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, p. 126.

2 *Aztecs: Reign of Blood and Splendour*, p. 50.

122



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Olmec sites of Tres Zapotes, San Lorenzo and La Venta along the

Gulf of Mexico, with other Central American archaeological sites.

I remembered that Coatzacoalcos meant 'Serpent Sanctuary'. It was here, in remote antiquity, that Quetzalcoatl and his companions were said

to have landed when they first reached Mexico, arriving from across the

sea in vessels 'with sides that shone like the scales of serpents' skins'.³

And it was from here too that Quetzalcoatl was believed to have sailed

(on his raft of serpents) when he left Central America. Serpent Sanctuary,

moreover, was beginning to look like the *name* for the Olmec homeland,

which had included not only Coatzacoalcos but several other sites in areas less blighted by development.

First at Tres Zapotes, west of Coatzacoalcos, and then at San Lorenzo

and La Venta, south and east of it, numerous pieces of characteristically

Olmec sculpture had been unearthed. All were monoliths carved out of

basalt and similarly durable materials. Some took the form of gigantic

heads weighing up to thirty tons. Others were massive stelae engraved

with encounter scenes apparently involving two distinct races of mankind,

neither of them American-Indian.

Whoever had produced these outstanding works of art had obviously

belonged to a refined, well organized, prosperous and technologically

advanced civilization. The problem was that absolutely nothing remained,

except the works of art, from which anything could be deduced about the

character and origins of that civilization. All that seemed clear was that

'the Olmecs' (the archaeologists were happy to accept the Aztec

designation) had materialized in Central America around 1500 BC with

their sophisticated culture fully evolved.

3 *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, pp. 139-40.

123

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Santiago Tuxtla

We passed the night at the fishing port of Alvarado and continued our

journey east the next day. The road we were following wound in and out

of fertile hills and valleys, giving us occasional views of the Gulf of

Mexico before turning inland. We passed green meadows filled with flame

trees, and little villages nestled in grassy hollows. Here and there we saw

private gardens where hulking pigs grubbed amongst piles of domestic

refuse. Then we crested the brow of a hill and looked out across a giant

vista of fields and forests bound only by the morning haze and the faint

outlines of distant mountains.

Some miles farther on we dropped into a hollow; at its bottom lay the

old colonial town of Santiago Tuxtla. The place was a riot of colour:

garish shop-fronts, red-tile roofs, yellow straw hats, coconut palms,

banana trees, kids in bright clothes. Several of the shops and cafés were

playing music from loudspeakers. In the Zocalo, the main square, the air

was thick with humidity and the fluttering wings and songs of bright-eyed

tropical birds. A leafy little park occupied the centre of this square, and in

the centre of the park, like some magic talisman, stood an enormous grey

boulder, almost ten feet tall, carved in the shape of a helmeted African

head. Full-lipped and strong-nosed, its eyes serenely closed and its lower

jaw resting squarely on the ground, this head had a sombre and patient

gravity.

Here, then, was the first mystery of the Olmecs: a monumental piece of

sculpture, more than 2000 years old, which portrayed a subject with

unmistakable negroid features. There were, of course, no African blacks

in the New World 2000 years ago, nor did any arrive until the slave trade

began, well after the conquest. There is, however, firm

palaeoanthropological evidence that one of the many different migrations

into the Americas during the last Ice Age *did* consist of peoples of

negroid stock. This migration occurred around 15,000 BC.⁴

Known as the 'Cobata' head after the estate on which it was found, the

huge monolith in the Zocalo was the largest of sixteen similar Olmec sculptures so far excavated in Mexico. It was thought to have been carved

not long before the time of Christ and weighed more than thirty tons.

Tres Zapotes

From Santiago Tuxtla we drove twenty-five kilometres south-west through

wild and lush countryside to Tres Zapotes, a substantial late Olmec centre

believed to have flourished between 500 BC and AD 100. Now reduced to a

series of mounds scattered across maize fields, the site had been extensively excavated in 1939-40 by the American archaeologist Matthew

⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

124

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Stirling.

Historical dogmatists of that period, I remembered, had held

tenaciously to the view that the civilization of the Mayas was the oldest in

Central America. One could be precise about this, they argued, because

the Mayan dot-and-bar calendrical system (which had recently been decoded) made possible accurate dating of huge numbers of ceremonial

inscriptions. The earliest date ever found on a Mayan site corresponded

to AD 228 of the Christian calendar.⁵ It therefore came as quite a jolt to

the academic status quo when Stirling unearthed a stela at Tres Zapotes

which bore an earlier date. Written in the familiar bar-and-dot calendrical

code used by the Maya, it corresponded to 3 September 32 BC.⁶

What was shocking about this was that Tres Zapotes was not a Maya

site—not in any way at all. It was entirely, exclusively, unambiguously

Olmec. This suggested that the Olmecs, not the Maya, must have been

the inventors of the calendar, and that the Olmecs, not the Maya, ought

to be recognized as ‘the mother culture’ of Central America. Despite

determined opposition from gangs of furious Mayanists the truth which

Stirling's spade had unearthed at Tres Zapotes gradually came out. The

Olmecs were much, *much* older than the Maya. They'd been a smart,

civilized, technologically advanced people and they did, indeed, appear to

have invented the bar-and-dot system of calendrical notation, with the

enigmatic starting date of 13 August 3114 BC, which predicted the end of

the world in AD 2012.

Lying close to the calendar stela at Tres Zapotes, Stirling also unearthed

a giant head. I sat in front of that head now. Dated to around 100 BC,⁷ it

was approximately six feet high, 18 feet in circumference and weighed

over 10 tons. Like its counterpart in Santiago Tuxtla, it was unmistakably

the head of an African man wearing a close-fitting helmet with long chin-

straps. The lobes of the ears were pierced by plugs; the pronounced

negroid features were furrowed by deep frown lines on either side of the

nose, and the entire face was concentrated forwards above thick, down-

curving lips. The eyes were open and watchful, almond-shaped and cold.

Beneath the curious helmet, the heavy brows appeared beetling and angry.

Stirling was amazed by this discovery and reported,

The head was a head only, carved from a single massive block of basalt, and it

rested on a prepared foundation of unworked slabs of stone ... Cleared of the

surrounding earth it presented an awe-inspiring spectacle. Despite its great size

the workmanship is delicate and sure, the proportions perfect. Unique in character

among aboriginal American sculptures, it is remarkable for its realistic treatment.

The features are bold and amazingly negroid in character ...⁸

⁵ *Mexico*, p. 637. See also *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Mexico*, p. 638.

8 Matthew W. Stirling, 'Discovering the New World's Oldest Dated Work of Man', *National*

125

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Soon afterwards the American archaeologist made a second unsettling

discovery at Tres Zapotes: children's toys in the form of little wheeled

dogs.⁹ These cute artefacts conflicted head-on with prevailing

archaeological opinion, which held that the wheel had remained

undiscovered in Central America until the time of the conquest. The

'dogmobiles' proved, at the very least, that the *principle* of the wheel had

been known to the Olmecs, Central America's earliest civilization.

And if a

people as resourceful as the Olmecs had worked out the principle of the

wheel, it seemed highly unlikely that they would have used it just for

children's toys.

Geographic Magazine, volume 76, August 1939, pp. 183-218 *passim*

9 Matthew W. Stirling, 'Great Stone Faces of the Mexican Jungle', *National Geographic*

Magazine, volume 78, September 1940, pp. 314, 310.

Chapter 17

The Olmec Enigma

After Tres Zapotes our next stop was San Lorenzo, an Olmec site lying

south-west of Coatzacoalcos in the heart of the 'Serpent Sanctuary' the

legends of Quetzalcoatl made reference to. It was at San Lorenzo that the

earliest carbon-dates for an Olmec site (around 1500 BC) had been recorded by archaeologists.¹ However, Olmec culture appeared to have

been fully evolved by that epoch and there was no evidence that the evolution had taken place in the vicinity of San Lorenzo.²

In this there lay a mystery.

The Olmecs, after all, had built a significant civilization which had carried out prodigious engineering works and had developed the capacity

to carve and manipulate vast blocks of stone (several of the huge monolithic heads, weighing twenty tons or more, had been moved as far

as 60 miles overland after being quarried in the Tuxtla mountains).³ So

where, if not at ancient San Lorenzo, had their technological expertise

and sophisticated organization been experimented with, evolved and refined?

Strangely, despite the best efforts of archaeologists, not a single, solitary sign of anything that could be described as the 'developmental

phase' of Olmec society had been unearthed anywhere in Mexico (or, for

that matter, anywhere in the New World). These people, whose

characteristic form of artistic expression was the carving of huge negroid

heads, appeared to have come from nowhere.⁴

San Lorenzo

We reached San Lorenzo late in the afternoon. Here, at the dawn of history in Central America, the Olmecs had heaped up an artificial mound

more than 100 feet high as part of an immense structure some 4000 feet

¹ *The Prehistory of the Americas*, pp. 268-71. See also Jeremy A. Sabloff, *The Cities of*

Ancient Mexico: Reconstructing a Lost World, Thames and Hudson, London, 1990, p. 35.

Breaking the Maya Code, p. 61.

2 *The Prehistory of the Americas*, p. 268.

3 *Aztecs: Reign of Blood and Splendour*, p. 158.

4 'Olmec stone sculpture achieved a high, naturalistic plasticity, yet it has no surviving

prototypes, as if this powerful ability to represent both nature and abstract concepts

was a native invention of this early civilization.' *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico*

and the Maya, p. 15; *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 55: 'The proto-Olmec phase

remains an enigma ... it is not really known at what time, or in what place, Olmec culture

took on its very distinctive form.'

127

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

in length and 2000 feet in width. We climbed the dominant mound, now

heavily overgrown with thick tropical vegetation, and from the summit we

could see for miles across the surrounding countryside. A great many

lesser mounds were also visible and around about were several of the

deep trenches the archaeologist Michael Coe had dug when he had excavated the site in 1966.

Coe's team made a number of finds here, which included more than twenty artificial reservoirs, linked by a highly sophisticated network of basalt-lined troughs. Part of this system was built into a ridge; when it

was rediscovered water still gushed forth from it during heavy rains, as it

had done for more than 3000 years. The main line of the drainage ran

from east to west. Into it, linked by joints made to an advanced design,

three subsidiary lines were channelled.⁵ After surveying the site

thoroughly, the archaeologists admitted that they could not understand

the purpose of this elaborate system of sluices and water-works.⁶

Nor were they able to come up with an explanation for another enigma.

This was the deliberate burial, along specific alignments, of five of the

massive pieces of sculpture, showing negroid features, now widely

identified as 'Olmec heads'. These peculiar and apparently ritualistic

graves also yielded more than sixty precious objects and artefacts,

including beautiful instruments made of jade and exquisitely carved statuettes. Some of the statuettes had been systematically mutilated before burial.

The way the San Lorenzo sculptures had been interred made it extremely difficult to fix their true age, even though fragments of charcoal were found in the same strata as some of the buried objects.

Unlike the sculptures, these charcoal pieces could be carbon-dated. They

were, and produced readings in the range of 1200 BC.⁷ This did not mean,

however, that the sculptures had been carved in 1200 BC. They could

have been. But they could have originated in a period hundreds or even

thousands of years earlier than that. It was by no means impossible that

these great works of art, with their intrinsic beauty and an indefinable numinous power, could have been preserved and venerated by many

different cultures before being buried at San Lorenzo. The charcoal associated with them proved only that the sculptures were *at least as old*

as 1200 BC; it did not set any upper limit on their antiquity.

La Venta

We left San Lorenzo as the sun was going down, heading for the city of

Villahermosa, more than 150 kilometres to the east in the province of

5 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 36.

6 *The Prehistory of the Americas*, p. 268.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 267-8. *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 55.

128

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Tabasco. To get there we rejoined the main road running from Acayucan

to Villahermosa and by-passed the port of Coatzacoalcos in a zone of oil

refineries, towering pylons and ultra-modern suspension bridges. The

change of pace between the sleepy rural backwater where San Lorenzo

was located and the pockmarked industrial landscape around

Coatzacoalcos was almost shocking. Moreover, the only reason that the

timeworn outlines of the Olmec site could still be seen at San Lorenzo

was that oil had not yet been found there.

It had, however, been found at La Venta—to the eternal loss of archaeology ...

We were now passing La Venta.

Due north, off a slip-road from the freeway, this sodium-lit petroleum city glowed in the dark like a vision of nuclear disaster. Since the 1940s it

had been extensively 'developed' by the oil industry: an airstrip now bisected the site where a most unusual pyramid had once stood, and flaring smokestacks darkened the sky which Olmec star-gazers must once

have searched for the rising of the planets. Lamentably, the bulldozers of

the developers had flattened virtually everything of interest before proper

excavations could be conducted, with the result that many of the ancient

structures had not been explored at all.⁸ We will never know what they

could have said about the people who built and used them.

Matthew Stirling, who excavated Tres Zapotes, carried out the bulk of

the archaeological work done at La Venta before progress and oil money

erased it. Carbon-dating suggested that the Olmecs had established themselves here between 1500 and 1100 BC and had continued to occupy

the site—which consisted of an island lying in marshes to the east of the

Tonala river—until about 400 BC.⁹ Then construction was suddenly abandoned, all existing buildings were ceremonially defaced or demolished, and several huge stone heads and other smaller pieces of

sculpture were ritually buried in peculiar graves, just as had happened at

San Lorenzo. The La Venta graves were elaborate and carefully prepared,

lined with thousands of tiny blue tiles and filled up with layers of multicoloured clay.¹⁰ At one spot some 15,000 cubic feet of earth had

been dug out of the ground to make a deep pit; its floor had been carefully covered with serpentine blocks, and all the earth put back.

Three mosaic pavements were also found, intentionally buried beneath

several alternating layers of clay and adobe.¹¹

La Venta's principal pyramid stood at the southern end of the site. Roughly circular at ground level, it took the form of a fluted cone, the rounded sides consisting of ten vertical ridges with gullies between. The pyramid was 100 feet tall, almost 200 feet in diameter and had an overall

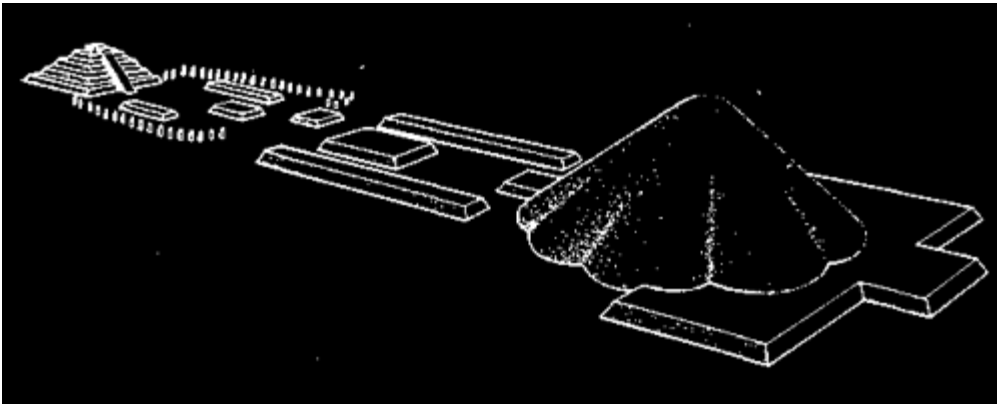
8 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 30.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

10 *The Prehistory of the Americas*, pp. 268-9.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 269.

129



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

mass in the region of 300,000 cubic feet—an impressive monument by

any standards. The remainder of the site stretched for almost half a

kilometre along an axis that pointed precisely 8° west of north.
Centred

on this axis, with every structure in flawless alignment, were several smaller pyramids and plazas, platforms and mounds, covering a total area of more than three square miles.

There was something detached and odd about La Venta, a sense that its

original function had not been properly understood. Archaeologists referred to it as a 'ceremonial centre', and very probably that is what it

was. If one were honest, however, one would admit that it could also have

been several other things. The truth is that nothing is known about the

social organization, ceremonies and belief systems of the Olmecs. We do

not know what language they spoke, or what traditions they passed to

their children. We don't even know what ethnic group they belonged to.

The exceptionally humid conditions of the Gulf of Mexico mean that not a

single Olmec skeleton has survived.¹² In reality, despite the names we

have given them and the views we've formed about them, these people

are completely obscure to us.

It is even possible that the enigmatic sculptures 'they' left behind, which we presume depicted them, were not 'their' work at all, but the work of a far earlier and forgotten people. Not for the first time I found

myself wondering whether some of the great heads other remarkable artefacts attributed to the Olmecs might not have been handed down like

heirlooms, perhaps over many millennia, to the cultures which eventually

began to build the mounds and pyramids at San Lorenzo and La Venta.

Reconstruction of La Venta. Note the unusual fluted-cone pyramid that dominates the site.

If so, then who are we speaking of when we use the label 'Olmec'? The

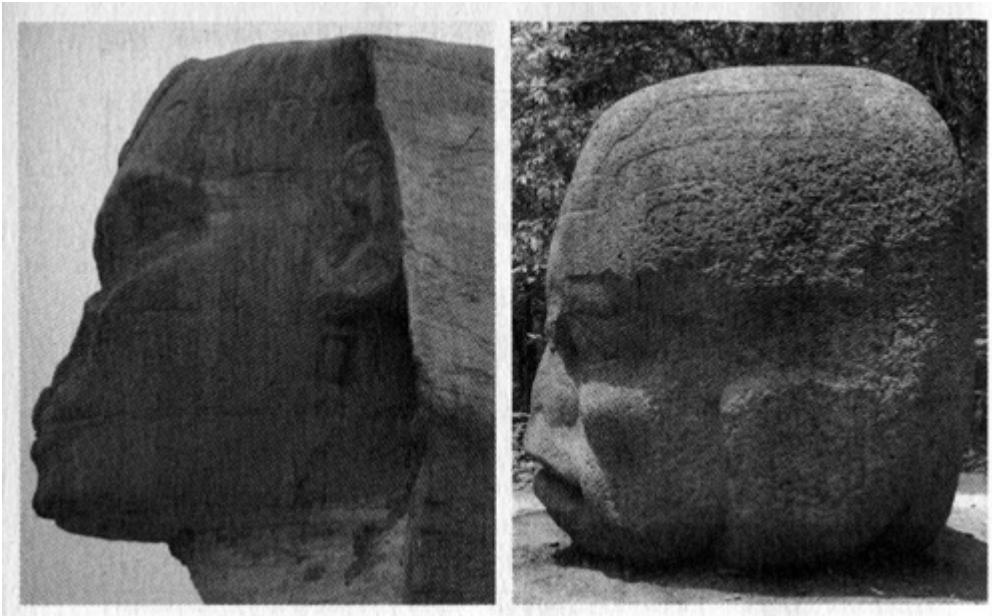
mound-builders? Or the powerful and imposing men with negroid features who provided the models for the monolithic heads?

Fortunately some fifty pieces of 'Olmec' monumental sculpture, including three of the giant heads, were rescued from La Venta by Carlos

Pellicer Camara, a local poet and historian who intervened forcefully when

12 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 28.

130



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

he discovered that oil-drilling by the PEMEX company jeopardized the

ruins. By determined lobbying of the politicians of Tabasco (within which

La Venta lies), he arranged to have the significant finds moved to a park

on the outskirts of the regional capital Villahermosa.

Taken together these finds constitute a precious and irreplaceable

cultural record—or rather a whole library of cultural records—left behind

by a vanished civilization. But nobody knows how to read the language of

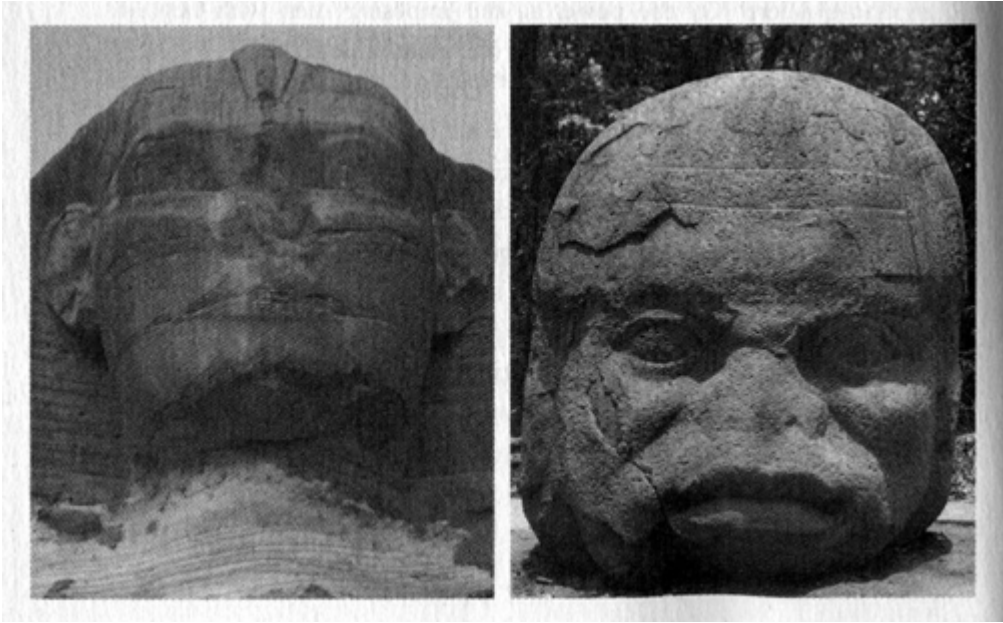
these records.

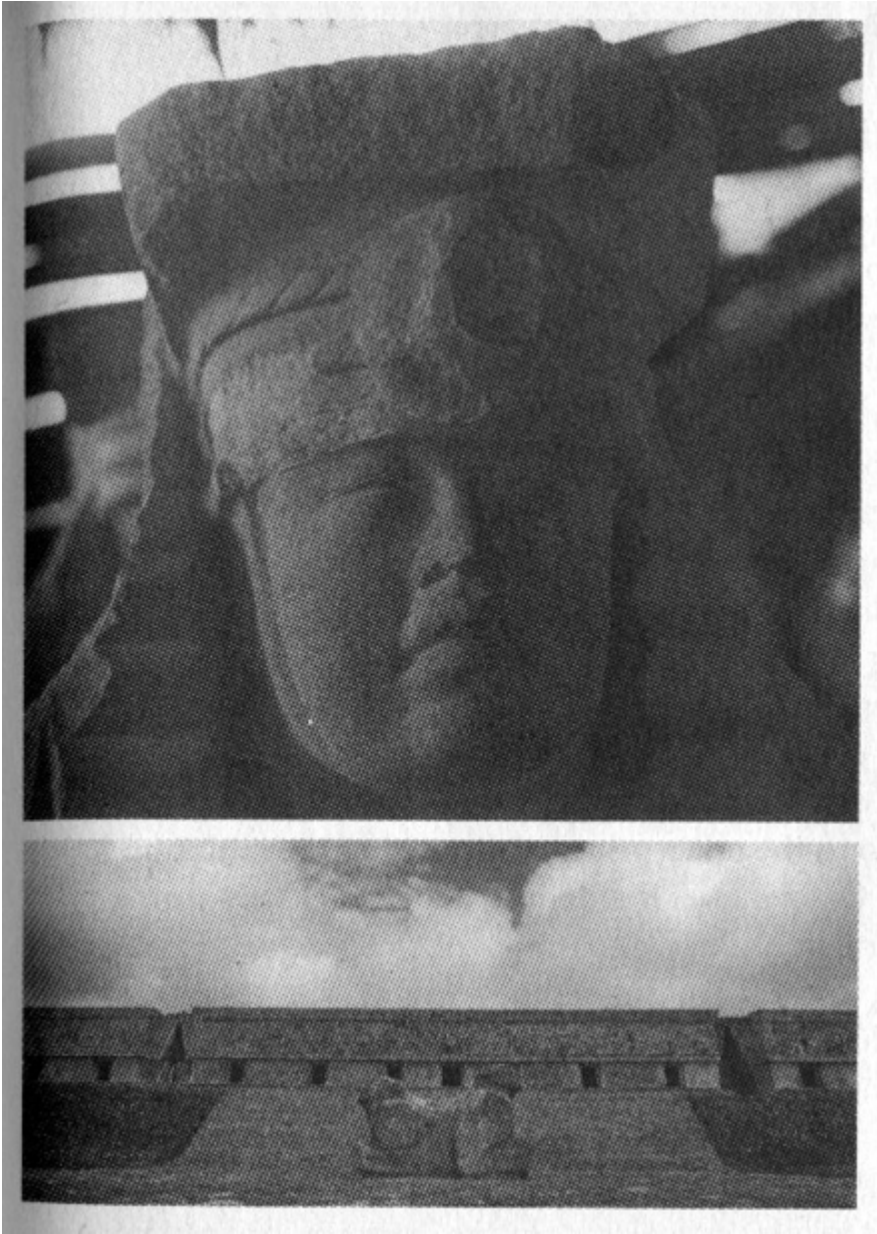
Above left: Profile view of the head of the Great Sphinx at Giza, Egypt.

Above right: Profile view of Olmec Head from La Venta, Mexico.
Below

left: Front view of the head of the Sphinx. *Below right:* Front view of Olmec Head. Compare also *opposite page, top left:* Sphinx-like Olmec

sculpture from San Lorenzo, Mexico. Is it possible that the many similarities between the cultures of pre-Columbian Central America and Ancient Egypt could have stemmed from an as-yet-unidentified ‘third-party’ civilization that influenced both widely separated regions at a remote and early date?



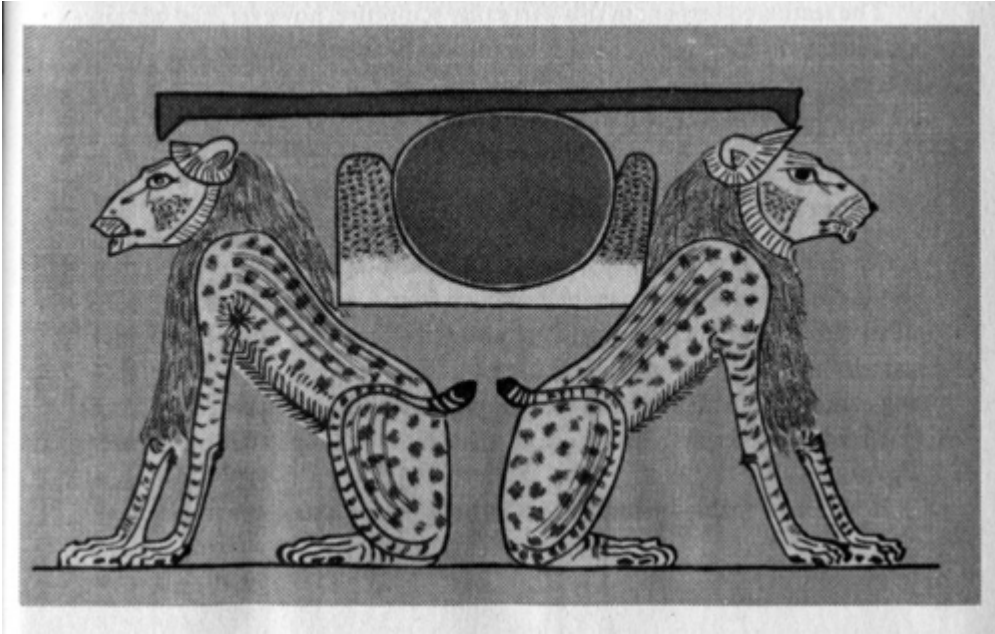


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Centre: Double-puma statue at Uxtnal, Mexico. *Bottom:* Double-lion

132





Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

symbolism from Ancient Egypt, depicting the *Akeru*, lion gods of yesterday and today (*Akeru* was written in hieroglyphs as). The

religions of both regions share many other common images and ideas. Also noteworthy is the fact that *p'achi*, the Central American word for 'human sacrifice', means, literally 'to open the mouth'—which calls to mind a strange Ancient Egyptian funerary ritual known as 'the opening of the mouth'. Likewise it was believed in both regions that the souls of dead kings were reborn as stars.

Deus ex machina

Villahermosa, Tabasco province

I was looking at an elaborate relief that had been dubbed 'Man in Serpent' by the archaeologists who found it at La Venta. According to

expert opinion it showed 'an Olmec, wearing a head-dress and holding an

incense bag, enveloped by a feathered serpent'.¹³

The relief was carved into a slab of solid granite measuring about four

feet wide by five feet high and showed a man sitting with his legs

stretched out in front of him as though he were reaching for pedals with

his feet. He held a small, bucket-shaped object in his right hand. With his

left he appeared to be raising or lowering a lever. The 'head-dress' he

wore was an odd and complicated garment. To my eye it seemed more

functional than ceremonial, although I could not imagine what its

function might have been. On it, or perhaps on a console above it, were

two x-shaped crosses.

I turned my attention to the other principal element of the sculpture,

¹³ *The Cities of Ancient Mexico*, p. 37.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the 'feathered serpent'. On one level it did, indeed, depict exactly that: a

plumed or feathered serpent, the age-old symbol of Quetzalcoatl, whom

the Olmecs, therefore, must have worshipped (or at the very least recognized). Scholars do not dispute this interpretation.¹⁴ It is generally

accepted that Quetzalcoatl's cult was immensely ancient, originating in

prehistoric times in Central America and thereafter receiving the devotion

of many cultures during the historic period.

The feathered serpent in this particular sculpture, however, had certain

characteristics that set it apart. It seemed to be more than just a religious

symbol; indeed, there was something rigid and structured about it that

made it look almost like a piece of machinery.

Whispers of ancient secrets

Later that day I took shelter in the giant shadow cast by one of the Olmec

heads Carlos Pellicer Camara had rescued from La Venta. It was the head

of an old man with a broad flat nose and thick lips. The lips were slightly

parted, exposing strong, square teeth. The expression on the face suggested an ancient, patient wisdom, and the eyes seemed to gaze unafraid into eternity, like those of the Great Sphinx at Giza in lower Egypt.

It would probably be impossible, I thought, for a sculptor to *invent* all the different combined characteristics of an authentic racial type. The portrayal of an authentic combination of racial characteristics therefore

implied strongly that a human model had been used.

I walked around the great head a couple of times. It was 22 feet in circumference, weighed 19.8 tons, stood almost 8 feet high, had been

carved out of solid basalt, and displayed clearly 'an authentic combination of racial characteristics'. Indeed, like the other pieces I had

seen at Santiago Tuxtla and at Tres Zapotes, it unmistakably and unambiguously showed a negro.

The reader can form his or her own opinion after examining the

relevant photographs in this book. My own view is that the Olmec heads

present us with physiologically accurate images of *real* individuals of negroid stock—charismatic and powerful African men whose presence in

Central America 3000 years ago has not yet been explained by scholars.

Nor is there any certainty that the heads were actually carved in that epoch. Carbon-dating of fragments of charcoal found in the same pits

tells us only the age of the charcoal. Calculating the true antiquity of the

heads themselves is a much more complex matter.

It was with such thoughts that I continued my slow walk among the strange and wonderful monuments of La Venta. They whispered of ancient secrets—the secret of the man in the machine ... the secret of the

14 *The Prehistory of the Americas*, p. 270.

134

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

negro heads ... and, last but not least, the secret of a legend brought to

life. For it seemed that flesh might indeed have been put on the mythical

bones of Quetzalcoatl when I found that several of the La Venta sculptures contained realistic likenesses not only of negroes but of tall,

thin-featured, long-nosed, apparently Caucasian men with straight hair

and full beards, wearing flowing robes ...

135

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Chapter 18

Conspicuous Strangers

Matthew Stirling, the American archaeologist who excavated La Venta in

the 1940s, made a number of spectacular discoveries there. The most

spectacular of all was the Stele of the Bearded Man.

The plan of the ancient Olmec site, as I have said, lay along an axis pointing 8° west of north. At the southern end of this axis, 100 feet tall,

loomed the fluted cone of the great pyramid. Next to it, at ground level,

was what looked like a curb about a foot high enclosing a spacious

rectangular area one-quarter the size of an average city block. When the

archaeologists began to uncover this curb they found, to their surprise,

that it consisted of the upper parts of a wall of columns. Further

excavation through the undisturbed layers of stratification that had

accumulated revealed that the columns were ten feet tall. There were

more than 600 of them and they had been set together so closely that

they formed a near-impregnable stockade. Hewn out of solid basalt and

transported to La Venta from quarries more than sixty miles distant, the

columns weighed approximately two tons each.

Why all this trouble? What had the stockade been built to contain?

Even before excavation began, the tip of a massive chunk of rock had

been visible jutting out of the ground in the centre of the enclosed area,

about four feet higher than the illusory 'curb' and leaning steeply

forward. It was covered with carvings. These extended down, out of sight,

beneath the layers of soil that filled the ancient stockade to a height of

about nine feet.

Stirling and his team worked for two days to free the great rock. When

exposed it proved to be an imposing stele fourteen feet high, seven feet

wide and almost three feet thick. The carvings showed an encounter

between two tall men, both dressed in elaborate robes and wearing

elegant shoes with turned-up toes. Either erosion or deliberate mutilation

(quite commonly practised on Olmec monuments) had resulted in the

complete defacement of one of the figures. The other was intact. It so

obviously depicted a Caucasian male with a high-bridged nose and a long, flowing beard that the bemused archaeologists promptly christened

it 'Uncle Sam'.¹

I walked slowly around the twenty-ton stele, remembering as I did so that it had lain buried in the earth for more than 3000 years. Only in the

brief half century or so since Stirling's excavations had it seen the light of

day again. What would its fate be now? Would it stand here for another

¹ *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, p. 144.

136

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

thirty centuries as an object of awe and splendour for future generations

to gawp at and revere? Or, in such a great expanse of time, was it

possible that circumstances might change so much that it would
once

again be buried and concealed?

Perhaps neither would happen. I remembered the ancient
calendrical

system of Central America, which the Olmecs had initiated.
According to

them, and to their more famous successors the Mayas, there just
weren't

any great expanses of time left, let alone three millennia. The Fifth
Sun

was all used up and a tremendous earthquake was building to
destroy

humanity two days before Christmas in AD 2012.

I turned my attention back to the stele. Two things seemed to be
clear:

the encounter scene it portrayed must, for some reason, have been
of

immense importance to the Olmecs, hence the grandeur of the stele
itself, and the construction of the remarkable stockade of columns
built

to contain it. And, as was the case with the negro heads, it was
obvious

that the face of the bearded Caucasian man could only have been

sculpted from a human model. The racial verisimilitude was too good for

an artist to have invented it.

The same went for two other Caucasian figures I was able to identify among the surviving monuments from La Venta. One was carved in low

relief on a heavy and roughly circular slab of stone about three feet in

diameter. Dressed in what looked like tight-fitting leggings, his features

were those of an Anglo-Saxon. He had a full pointed beard and wore a

curious floppy cap on his head. In his left hand he extended a flag, or perhaps a weapon of some kind. His right hand, which he held across the

middle of his chest, appeared to be empty. Around his slim waist was tied

a flamboyant sash. The other Caucasian figure, this time carved on the

side of a narrow pillar, was similarly bearded and attired.

Who were these conspicuous strangers? What were they doing in

Central America? When did they come? And what relationship did they

have with those other strangers who had settled in this steamy rubber

jungle—the ones who had provided the models for the great negro heads?

Some radical researchers, who rejected the dogma concerning the isolation of the New World prior to 1492, had proposed what looked like

a viable solution to the problem: the bearded, thin-featured individuals

could have been Phoenicians from the Mediterranean who had sailed

through the Pillars of Hercules and across the Atlantic Ocean as early as

the second millennium BC. Advocates of this theory went on to suggest

that the negroes shown at the same sites were the ‘slaves’ of the Phoenicians, picked up on the coast of West Africa prior to the trans-

Atlantic run.²

The more consideration I gave to the strange character of the La Venta

sculptures, the more dissatisfied I became with these ideas. Probably the

² Ibid., p. 141-42.

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Phoenicians and other Old World peoples *had* crossed the Atlantic ages

before Columbus. There was compelling evidence for that, although it is

outside the scope of this book.³ The problem was that the Phoenicians,

who had left unmistakable examples of their distinctive handiwork in many parts of the ancient world,⁴ had *not* done so at the Olmec sites in

Central America. Neither the negro heads, nor the reliefs portraying bearded Caucasian men showed any signs of anything remotely

Phoenician in their style, handiwork or character.⁵ Indeed, from a stylistic

point of view, these powerful works of art seemed to belong to no known

culture, tradition or genre. They seemed to be without antecedents either

in the New World or in the Old.

They seemed rootless ... and that, of course, was impossible, because

all forms of artistic expression have roots somewhere.

Hypothetical third party

It occurred to me that one plausible explanation might lie in a variant of

the 'hypothetical third party' theory originally put forward by a number of

leading Egyptologists to explain one of the great puzzles of Egyptian history and chronology.

The archaeological evidence suggested that rather than developing slowly and painfully, as is normal with human societies, the civilization of

Ancient Egypt, like that of the Olmecs, emerged *all at once and fully formed*. Indeed, the period of transition from primitive to advanced society appears to have been so short that it makes no kind of historical

sense. Technological skills that should have taken hundreds or even thousands of years to evolve were brought into use almost overnight —

and with no apparent antecedents whatever.

For example, remains from the pre-dynastic period around 3500 BC show no trace of writing. Soon after that date, quite suddenly and inexplicably, the hieroglyphs familiar from so many of the ruins of

Ancient Egypt begin to appear in a complete and perfect state. Far from

being mere pictures of objects or actions, this written language was complex and structured at the outset, with signs that represented sounds

only and a detailed system of numerical symbols. Even the very earliest

hieroglyphs were stylized and conventionalized; and it is clear that an

advanced cursive script was in common usage by the dawn of the First

Dynasty.⁶

³ *Fair Gods and Store Faces, passim*. See also Cyrus H. Gordon, *Before Columbus: Links*

Between the Old World and Ancient America, Crown Publishers Inc, New York, 1971.

⁴ See, for example, (a) Maria Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West*, Cambridge

University Press, 1993; (b) Gerhard Herm, *The Phoenicians*, BCA, London, 1975; (c)

Sabatino Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians*, Cardinal, London, 1973.

⁵ This can be confirmed in any of the works cited in note 4.

⁶ W. B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, Penguin Books, London, 1987, p. 192.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

What is remarkable is that there are no traces of evolution from simple

to sophisticated, and the same is true of mathematics, medicine,

astronomy and architecture and of Egypt's amazingly rich and convoluted

religio-mythological system (even the central content of such refined

works as the *Book of the Dead* existed *right at the start* of the dynastic

period).⁷

The majority of Egyptologists will not consider the implications of

Egypt's early sophistication. These implications are startling, according to

a number of more daring thinkers. John Anthony West, an expert on the

early dynastic period, asks:

How does a complex civilization spring full-blown into being? Look at a 1905

automobile and compare it to a modern one. There is no mistaking the process of

'development'. But in Egypt there are no parallels. Everything is right there at the

start.

The answer to the mystery is of course obvious but, because it is repellent to the

prevailing cast of modern thinking, it is seldom considered. *Egyptian civilization*

*was not a 'development', it was a legacy.*⁸

West has been a thorn in the flesh of the Egyptological establishment

for many years. But other more mainstream figures have also confessed

puzzlement at the suddenness with which Egyptian civilization appeared.

Walter Emery, late Edwards Professor of Egyptology at the University of

London, summed up the problem:

At a period approximately 3400 years before Christ, a great change took place in

Egypt, and the country passed rapidly from a state of neolithic culture with a

complex tribal character to one of well-organized monarchy ...

At the same time the art of writing appears, monumental architecture and the arts

and crafts develop to an astonishing degree, and all the evidence points to the

existence of a luxurious civilization. All this was achieved within a comparatively

short period of time, *for there appears to be little or no background to these*

*fundamental developments in writing and architecture.*⁹

One explanation could simply be that Egypt received its sudden and decisive cultural boost from some other known civilization of the ancient

world. Sumer, on the Lower Euphrates in Mesopotamia, is the most likely

contender. Despite many basic differences, a variety of shared building

techniques and architectural styles¹⁰ does suggest a link between the two

regions. But none of these similarities is strong enough to infer that the

connection could have been in any way causal, with one society directly

influencing the other. On the contrary, as Professor Emery writes:

The impression we get is of an *indirect* connection, and perhaps the existence of a

third party, whose influence spread to both the Euphrates and the Nile ... Modern

⁷ Ibid., p. 38. See also *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (trans. E.A. Wallis Budge), British

Museum, 1895, Introduction, pp. xii, xiii.

8 John Anthony West, *Serpent in the Sky*, Harper and Row, New York, 1979, p. 13.

9 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 38.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 175-91.

139

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

scholars have tended to ignore the possibility of immigration to both regions from

some hypothetical and as yet undiscovered area. [However] a third party whose

cultural achievements were passed on independently to Egypt and Mesopotamia

would best explain the common features and fundamental differences between

the two civilizations.¹¹

Among other things, this theory sheds light on the mysterious fact that

the Egyptians and Sumerian people of Mesopotamia appear to have

worshipped virtually identical lunar deities who were among the *oldest* in

their respective pantheons (*Thoth* in the case of the Egyptians, *Sin* in the

case of the Sumerians).¹² According to the eminent Egyptologist Sir E.A.

Wallis Budge, 'The similarity between the two gods is too close to be accidental ... It would be wrong to say that the Egyptians borrowed from

the Sumerians or the Sumerians from the Egyptians, but it may be submitted that the literati of both peoples borrowed their theological systems from some common but exceedingly ancient source.'¹³

The question, therefore, is this: what was that 'common but exceedingly ancient source', that 'hypothetical and as yet undiscovered

area', that advanced 'third party' to which both Budge and Emery refer?

And if it left a legacy of high culture in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, why

shouldn't it have done so in Central America?

It's not good enough to argue that civilization 'took off' much later in Mexico than it had in the Middle East. It is possible that the initial impulse could have been felt at the same time in both places but that the

subsequent outcome could have been completely different.

On this scenario, the civiliziers would have succeeded brilliantly in Egypt

and in Sumer, creating lasting and remarkable cultures there. In Mexico,

on the other hand (as also seems to have been the case in Peru), they

suffered some serious setback—perhaps getting off to a good start, when

the gigantic stone heads and reliefs of bearded men were made, but going rapidly downhill. The light of civilization would never quite have been lost, but perhaps things didn't pick up again until around 1500 BC,

the so-called 'Olmec horizon'. By then the great sculptures would have

been hoary with age, ancient relics of immense spiritual power, their all-

but-forgotten origins wrapped in myths of giants and bearded civilizers.

If so, we may be gazing at faces from a much more remote past than

we imagine when we stare into the almond eyes of one of the negro

heads or into the angular, chiselled Caucasian features of 'Uncle Sam'. It

is by no means impossible that these great works preserve the images of

peoples from a vanished civilization which embraced several different

ethnic groups.

That, in a nutshell, is the 'hypothetical third party' theory as applied to

11 Ibid., pp. 31, 177.

12 Ibid., p. 126.

13 E. A. Wallis Budge, *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 1934,

p. 155.

140

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Central America: the civilization of Ancient Mexico did not emerge

without external influence, and it did not emerge as a result of influence

from the Old World; instead certain cultures in the Old World and in the

New World may both have received a legacy of influence and ideas from a

third party at some exceedingly remote date.

Villahermosa to Oaxaca

Before leaving Villahermosa I visited CICOM, the Centre for Investigation

of the Cultures of the Olmecs and Maya. I wanted to find out from the

scholars there whether there were any other significant Olmec sites in the

region. To my surprise, they suggested that I should look farther afield.

At Monte Alban, in Oaxaca province hundreds of kilometres to the southwest, archaeologists had apparently unearthed 'Olmecoid' artefacts

and a number of reliefs thought to represent the Olmecs themselves.

Santha and I had intended to drive straight on from Villahermosa into the Yucatan Peninsula, which lay north-east. The journey to Monte Alban

would involve a huge detour, but we decided to make it, in the hope that

it might shed further light on the Olmecs. Besides, it promised to be a

spectacular drive over immense mountains and into the heart of the hidden valley where the city of Oaxaca lies.

We drove almost due west past the lost site of La Venta, past

Coatzacoalcos once again, and on past Sayula and Loma Bonita to the

road-junction town of Tuxtepec. In so doing, by degrees we left behind

countryside scarred and blackened by the oil industry, crossed long

gentle hillsides carpeted in lush green grass, and ran between fields ripe

with crops.

At Tuxtepec, where the sierras really began, we turned sharply south following Highway 175 to Oaxaca. On the map it looked barely half the

distance that we had driven from Villahermosa. The road, however, proved to be a complicated, nerve-racking, muscle-wrenching, apparently

endless zig-zag of hairpin bends—narrow, winding and precipitous—

which went up into the clouds like a stairway to heaven. It took us

through many different layers of alpine vegetation, each occupying a

specialized climatological niche, until it brought us out above the clouds

in a place where familiar plants flourished in giant forms, like John

Wyndham's triffids, creating a surreal and alien landscape. It took twelve

hours to drive the 700 kilometres from Villahermosa to Oaxaca. By the

time the journey was over, my hands were blistered from gripping the

steering-wheel too tight for too long around too many hairpin bends.

My

eyes were blurred and I kept having mental retrospectives of the

vertiginous chasms we had skirted on Highway 175, in the mountains,

where the triffids grew.

The city of Oaxaca is famous for magic mushrooms, marijuana and D.H.

Lawrence (who wrote and set part of his novel *The Plumed Serpent* here in

141

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the 1920s). There is still a bohemian feel about the place and until late at

night a current of excitement seems to ripple among the crowds filling its

bars and cafés, narrow cobbled streets, old buildings and spacious plazas.

We checked into a room overlooking one of the three open courtyards

in the Hotel Las Golondrinas. The bed was comfortable. There were starry

skies overhead. But, tired as I was, I couldn't sleep.

What kept me awake was the idea of the civiliziers ... the bearded gods

and their companions. In Mexico, as in Peru, they seemed to have

confronted failure. That was what the legends implied, and not only the

legends, as I discovered when we reached Monte Alban the next morning.

142

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 19

Adventures in the Underworld, Journeys to the Stars

The 'hypothetical third party' theory explains the similarities and fundamental differences between Ancient Egypt and Ancient Mesopotamia by proposing that both received a common legacy of civilization from the same remote ancestor. No serious suggestions have

been made as to where that ancestral civilization might have been located, its nature, or when it flourished. Like a black hole in space, it cannot be seen. Yet its presence can be deduced from its effects on things that can be seen—in this case the civilizations of Sumer and Egypt.

Is it possible that the same mysterious ancestor, the same invisible source of influence, could also have left its mark in Mexico? If so, we would expect to find certain cultural similarities between Mexico's ancient civilizations and those of Sumer and Egypt. We would also expect

to be confronted by immense differences resulting from the long period

of divergent evolution which separated all these areas in historical times.

We would, however, expect the differences to be less between Sumer and

Egypt, which were in regular contact with each other during the historical

period, than between the two Middle Eastern cultures and the cultures of

far-off Central America, which enjoyed at most only haphazard, slight and

intermittent contacts prior to the 'discovery' of the New World by Columbus in AD 1492.

Eaters of the dead, earth monsters,

star kings, dwarves and other relatives

For some curious reason that has not been explained, the Ancient

Egyptians had a special liking and reverence for dwarves.¹ So, too, did the

civilized peoples of ancient Central America, right back to Olmec times.²

In both cases it was believed that dwarves were directly connected to the

gods.³ And in both cases dwarves were favoured as dancers and were

shown as such in works of art.⁴

In Egypt's early dynastic period, more than 4500 years ago, an 'Ennead'

of nine omnipotent deities was particularly adored by the priesthood at

Heliopolis.⁵ Likewise, in Central America, both the Aztecs and the Mayas

1 See, for example, *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 69-70; also Jean-Pierre

Hallet, *Pygmy Kitabu*, BCA, London, 1974, pp. 84-106.

2 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, p. 82.

3 Ibid., *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 69-70, and *Pygmy Kitabu*, pp. 84-106.

4 Ibid.

5 *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 85.

143

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

believed in an all-powerful system of nine deities.⁶

The *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the ancient Quiche Maya of Mexico

and Guatemala, contains several passages which clearly indicate a belief

in 'stellar rebirth'—the reincarnation of the dead as stars. After they had

been killed, for example, the Hero Twins named Hunahpu and Xbalanque

'rose up in the midst of the light, and instantly they were lifted into the

sky ... Then the arch of heaven and the face of the earth were lighted.

And they dwelt in heaven.'⁷ At the same time ascended the Twins'
400

companions who had also been killed, 'and so they again became the

companions of Hunahpu and Xbalanque and were changed into stars in

the sky.'⁸

The majority of the traditions of the God-King Quetzalcoatl, as we have

seen, focus on his deeds and teachings as a civilizer. His followers in ancient Mexico, however, also believed that his human manifestation had

experienced death and that *afterwards he was reborn as a star*.⁹

It is therefore curious, at the very least, to discover that in Egypt, in the

Pyramid Age, more than 4000 years ago, the state religion revolved

around the belief that the deceased pharaoh was reborn as a star.¹⁰
Ritual

incantations were chanted, the purpose of which was to facilitate the

dead monarch's rapid rebirth in the heavens: 'Oh king, you are this Great

Star, the Companion of Orion, who traverses the sky with Orion ... you

ascend from the east of the sky, being renewed in your due season, and

rejuvenated in your due time ...'¹¹ We have encountered the Orion constellation before, on the plains of Nazca, and we shall encounter it

again ...

Meanwhile, let us consider the *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Parts

of its contents are as old as the civilization of Egypt itself and it serves as

a sort of Baedeker for the transmigration of the soul. It instructs the deceased on how to overcome the dangers of the afterlife, enables him to

assume the form of several mythical creatures, and equips him with the

passwords necessary for admission to the various stages, or levels, of the

underworld.¹²

Is it a coincidence that the peoples of Ancient Central America preserved a parallel vision of the perils of the afterlife? There it was

6 *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*, p. 148.

7 *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya*, (English version by Delia

Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley from the translation by Adrian Recinos), University of

Oklahoma Press, 1991, p. 163.

8 *Ibid.*, 164.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 181; *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*, p. 147.

10 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, (trans. R. O. Faulkner), Oxford University Press,

1969. Numerous Utterances refer directly to the stellar rebirth of the King, e.g. 248,

264, 265, 268, and 570 ('I am a star which illumines the sky'), etc.

11 *Ibid.*, Utt. 466, p. 155.

12 *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, (trans. R. O. Faulkner), British Museum

Publications, 1989.

144

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

widely believed that the underworld consisted of nine strata through which the deceased would journey for four years, overcoming obstacles

and dangers on the way.¹³ The strata had self-explanatory names like

'place where the mountains crash together', 'place where the arrows are

fired', 'mountain of knives', and so on. In both Ancient Central America

and Ancient Egypt, it was believed that the deceased's voyage through

the underworld was made in a boat, accompanied by 'paddler gods' who

ferried him from stage to stage.¹⁴ The tomb of 'Double Comb', an eighth-

century ruler of the Mayan city of Tikal, was found to contain a

representation of this scene.¹⁵ Similar images appear throughout the

Valley of the Kings in Upper Egypt, notably in the tomb of Thutmose III,

an Eighteenth Dynasty pharaoh.¹⁶ Is it a coincidence that the passengers

in the barque of the dead pharaoh, and in the canoe in which Double Comb makes his final journey, include (in both cases) a dog or dog-

headed deity, a bird or bird-headed deity, and an ape or ape-headed deity?¹⁷

The seventh stratum of the Ancient Mexican underworld was called *Teocoyolcualloya*: 'place where beasts devour hearts'.¹⁸

Is it a coincidence that one of the stages of the Ancient Egyptian underworld, 'the Hall of Judgement', involved an almost identical series

of symbols? At this crucial juncture the deceased's heart was weighed

against a feather. If the heart was heavy with sin it would tip the balance.

The god Thoth would note the judgement on his palette and the heart

would immediately be devoured by a fearsome beast, part crocodile, part

hippopotamus, part lion, that was called 'the Eater of the Dead'.¹⁹

Finally, let us turn again to Egypt of the Pyramid Age and the privileged

status of the pharaoh, which enabled him to circumvent the trials of the

underworld and to be reborn as a star. Ritual incantations were part of

the process. Equally important was a mysterious ceremony known as 'the

opening of the mouth', always conducted after the death of the pharaoh

13 *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, p. 37.

14 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, pp. 128-9.

15 Reproduced in *National Geographic Magazine*, volume 176, Number 4, Washington

DC, October 1989, p. 468: 'Double Comb is being taken to the underworld in a canoe

guided by the "paddler twins", gods who appear prominently in Maya mythology. Other

figures—an iguana, a monkey, a parrot, and a dog—accompany the dead ruler.' We learn

more of the mythological significance of dogs in Part V of this book.

16 Details are reproduced in John Romer, *Valley of the Kings*, Michael O'Mara Books

Limited, London, 1988, p. 167, and in J. A. West, *The Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*,

Harrap Columbus, London, 1989, pp. 282-97.

17 In the case of Ancient Egypt the dog represents *Upuaut*, 'the Opener of the Ways', the

bird (a hawk) represents Horus, and the ape, Thoth. See *The Traveller's Key To Ancient*

Egypt, p. 284, and *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, pp. 116-30. For Ancient

Central America see note 15.

18 *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, p. 40.

19 *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (trans. E. A. Wallis Budge),
Arkana, London and New

York, 1986, p. 21.

145

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

and believed by archaeologists to date back to pre-dynastic times.²⁰
The

high priest and four assistants participated, wielding the *peshenkhef*,
a

ceremonial cutting instrument. This was used ‘to open the mouth’ of
the

deceased God-King, an action thought necessary to ensure his

resurrection in the heavens. Surviving reliefs and vignettes showing
this

ceremony leave no doubt that the mummified corpse was struck a
hard

physical blow with the *peshenkhef*.²¹ In addition, evidence has
recently

emerged which indicates that one of the chambers within the Great

Pyramid at Giza may have served as the location for the
ceremony.²²

All this finds a strange, distorted twin in Mexico. We have seen the prevalence of human sacrifice there in pre-conquest times. Is it coincidental that the sacrificial venue was a pyramid, that the ceremony was conducted by a high priest and four assistants, that a cutting instrument, the sacrificial knife, was used to strike a hard physical blow to the body of the victim, and that the victim's soul was believed to ascend directly to the heavens, sidestepping the perils of the underworld?²³

As such 'coincidences' continue to multiply, it is reasonable to wonder

whether there may not be some underlying connection. This is certainly

the case when we learn that the general term for 'sacrifice' throughout

Ancient Central America was *p'achi*, meaning 'to open the mouth'.²⁴

Could it be, therefore, that what confronts us here, in widely separated

geographical areas, and at different periods of history, is not just a series

of startling coincidences but some faint and garbled common memory

originating in the most distant antiquity? It doesn't seem that the Egyptian ceremony of the opening of the mouth influenced directly the Mexican ceremony of the same name (or vice versa, for that matter). The fundamental differences between the two cases rule that out. What does seem possible, however, is that their similarities may be the remnants of a shared legacy received from a common ancestor. The peoples of Central America did one thing with that legacy and the Egyptians another, but some common symbolism and nomenclature was retained by both.

This is not the place to expand on the sense of an ancient and elusive connectedness that emerges from the Egyptian and Central American evidence. Before moving on, however, it is worth noting that a similar 'connectedness' links the belief systems of pre-Colombian Mexico with those of Sumer in Mesopotamia. Again the evidence is more suggestive of an ancient common ancestor than of any direct influence.

20 See, for example, R. T. Rundle-Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, Thames &

Hudson, London, 1991, p. 29.

21 Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 134. *The*

Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, e. g. Utts. 20, 21.

22 Robert Bauval and Adrian Gilbert, *The Orion Mystery*, Wm. Heinemann, London, 1994,

pp. 208-10, 270.

23 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, pp. 40, 177.

24 *Maya History and Religion*, p. 175.

146

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Take the case of Oannes, for example.

‘Oannes’ is the Greek rendering of the Sumerian Uan, the name of the

amphibious being, described in Part II, believed to have brought the arts

and skills of civilization to Mesopotamia.²⁵ Legends dating back at least

5000 years relate that Uan lived under the sea, emerging from the waters

of the Persian Gulf every morning to civilize and tutor mankind.²⁶ Is it a

coincidence that *uaana*, in the Mayan language, means 'he who has his

residence in water'?²⁷

Let us also consider Tiamat, the Sumerian goddess of the oceans and of

the forces of primitive chaos, always shown as a ravaging monster. In

Mesopotamian tradition, Tiamat turned against the other deities and

unleashed a holocaust of destruction before she was eventually destroyed

by the celestial hero Marduk:

She opened her mouth, Tiamat, to swallow him.

He drove in the evil wind so that she could not close her lips.

The terrible winds filled her belly. Her heart was seized,

She held her mouth wide open,

He let fly an arrow, it pierced her belly,

Her inner parts he clove, he split her heart,

He rendered her powerless and destroyed her life,

He felled her body and stood upright on it.²⁸

How do you follow an act like that?

Marduk could. Contemplating his adversary's monstrous corpse, 'he conceived works of art',²⁹ and a great plan of world creation began to

take shape in his mind. His first move was to split Tiamat's skull and cut

her arteries. Then he broke her into two parts 'like a dried fish', using one half to roof the heavens and the other to surface the earth. From her

breasts he made mountains, from her spittle, clouds, and he directed the

rivers Tigris and Euphrates to flow from her eyes.³⁰

A strange and violent legend, and a very old one.

The ancient civilizations of Central America had their own version of this story. Here Quetzalcoatl, in his incarnation as the creator deity, took

the role of Marduk while the part of Tiamat was played by Cipactli, the

'Great Earth Monster'. Quetzalcoatl seized Cipactli's limbs 'as she swam

in the primeval waters and wrenched her body in half, one part forming

the sky and the other the earth'. From her hair and skin he created grass,

flowers and herbs; 'from her eyes, wells and springs; from her shoulders,

25 Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 326;

Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*,

British Museum Press, 1992, pp. 163-4.

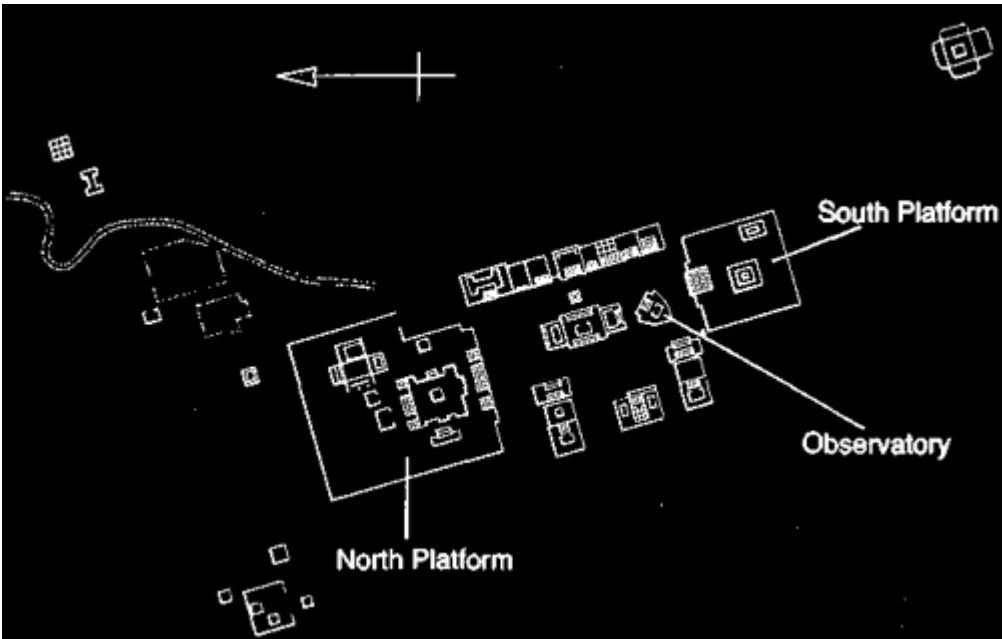
26 *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 41.

27 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 169; *The God-Kings and the Titans*, p. 234.

28 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, pp. 53-4.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

30 *Ibid.* See also *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 177.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

mountains'.31

Are the peculiar parallels between the Sumerian and Mexican myths pure coincidence or could both have been marked by the cultural fingerprints of a lost civilization? If so, the faces of the heroes of that ancestral culture may indeed have been carved in stone and passed down

as heirlooms through thousands of years, sometimes in full view, sometimes buried, until they were dug up for the last time by

archaeologists in our era and given labels like 'Olmec Head' and 'Uncle

Sam'.

The faces of those heroes also appear at Monte Alban, where they seem

to tell a sad story.

Monte Alban.

Monte Alban: the downfall of masterful men

A site thought to be about 3000 years old,³² Monte Alban stands on a vast

artificially flattened hilltop overlooking Oaxaca. It consists of a huge rectangular area, the Grand Plaza, which is enclosed by groups of pyramids and other buildings laid out in precise geometrical relationships

to one another. The overall feel of the place is one of harmony and proportion emerging from a well-ordered and symmetrical plan.

Following the advice of CICOM, whom I had spoken to before leaving

Villahermosa, I made my way first to the extreme south-west corner of

the Monte Alban site. There, stacked loosely against the side of a low

³¹ *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, p. 59; Inga Glendinnen, *Aztecs*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 177. See also *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, p.

144.

32 *Mexico*, p. 669.

148

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

pyramid, were the objects I had come all this way to see: several dozen

engraved stelae depicting negroes and Caucasians ... equal in life ... equal in death.

If a great civilization had indeed been lost to history, and if these sculptures told part of its story, the message conveyed was one of racial

equality. No one who has seen the pride, or felt the charisma, of the great

negro heads from La Venta could seriously imagine that the original subjects of these magisterial sculptures could have been slaves. Neither

did the lean-faced, bearded men look as if they would have bent their

knees to anyone. They, too, had an aristocratic demeanour.

At Monte Alban, however, there seemed to be carved in stone a record

of the downfall of these masterful men. It did not look as if this could have been the work of the same people who made the La Venta

sculptures. The standard of craftsmanship was far too low for that.
But

what was certain—whoever they were, and however inferior their
work—

was that these artists had attempted to portray the same negroid
subjects and the same goatee-bearded Caucasians as I had seen at
La

Venta. There the sculptures had reflected strength, power and
vitality.

Here at Monte Alban the remarkable strangers were corpses. All
were

naked, most were castrated, some were curled up in foetal positions
as

though to avoid showers of blows, others lay sprawled slackly.

Archaeologists said the sculptures showed ‘the corpses of prisoners
captured in battle’.³³

What prisoners? From where?

The location, after all, was Central America, the New World,
thousands

of years before Columbus, so wasn’t it odd that these images of

battlefield casualties showed not a single native American but only
and

exclusively Old World racial types?

For some reason, orthodox academics did not find this puzzling, even

though, by their reckoning, the carvings were extremely old (dating to

somewhere between 1000 and 600 BC³⁴). As at other sites, this time-frame

had been derived from tests on associated organic matter, not on the carvings themselves, which were incised on granite stele and therefore

hard to date objectively.

Legacy

An as yet undeciphered but fully elaborated hieroglyphic script had been

found at Monte Alban,³⁵ much of it carved on to the same stele as the

crude Caucasian and negro figures. Experts accepted that it was ‘the

³³ *The Cities of Ancient Mexico*, p. 53.

³⁴ *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 53; *Mexico*, p. 671.

³⁵ *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, pp. 53-4; *The Cities of Ancient Mexico*, p. 50.

149

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

earliest-known writing in Mexico'.³⁶ It was also clear that the people who

had lived here had been accomplished builders and more than usually

preoccupied with astronomy. An observatory, consisting of a strange arrowhead-shaped structure, lay at an angle of 45° to the main axis (which was deliberately tilted several degrees from north-south).³⁷

Crawling into this observatory, I found it to be a warren of tiny, narrow

tunnels and steep internal stairways, giving sightlines to different regions

of the sky.³⁸

The people of Monte Alban, like the people of Tres Zapotes, left definite

evidence of their knowledge of mathematics, in the form of bar-and-dot

computations.³⁹ They had also used the remarkable calendar,⁴⁰ introduced

by the Olmecs and much associated with the later Maya,⁴¹ which predicted

the end of the world on 23 December AD 2012.

If the calendar, and the preoccupation with time, had been part of the legacy of an ancient and forgotten civilization, the Maya must be ranked

as the most faithful and inspired inheritors of that legacy. 'Time' as the

archaeologist Eric Thompson put it in 1950, 'was the supreme mystery of

Maya religion, a subject which pervaded Maya thought to an extent without parallel in the history of mankind.'⁴²

As I continued my journey through Central America I felt myself drawn

ever more deeply into the labyrinths of that strange and awesome riddle.

36 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, pp. 54.

37 *Mexico*, pp. 669-71.

38 For further details, see *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, p. 17:

'These buildings probably confirm knowledge of a large body of star lore.'

39 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 53.

40 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 350.

41 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, pp. 44-5.

42 J. Eric Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*, Carnegie Institution, Washington DC,

1950, p. 155.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 20

Children of the First Men

Palenque, Chiapas Province

Evening was settling in. I sat just beneath the north-east corner of the

Mayan Temple of the Inscriptions and gazed north over the darkening

jungle where the land dropped away towards the flood plain of the Usumacinta.

The Temple consisted of three chambers and rested on top of a nine-

stage pyramid almost 100 feet tall. The clean and harmonious lines of

this structure gave it a sense of delicacy, but not of weakness. It felt strong, rooted into the earth, enduring—a creature of pure geometry and

imagination.

Looking to my right I could see the Palace, a spacious rectangular complex on a pyramidal base, dominated by a narrow, four-storied tower,

thought to have been used as an observatory by Maya priests.

Around about me, where bright-feathered parrots and macaws skimmed

the treetops, a number of other spectacular buildings lay half swallowed

by the encroaching forest. These were the Temple of the Foliated Cross,

the Temple of the Sun, the Temple of the Count, and the Temple of the

Lion—all names made up by archaeologists. So much of what the Maya

had stood for, cared about, believed in and remembered from earlier

times was irretrievably lost. Though we'd long ago learned to read their

dates, we were only just beginning to make headway with the deciphering

of their intricate hieroglyphs.

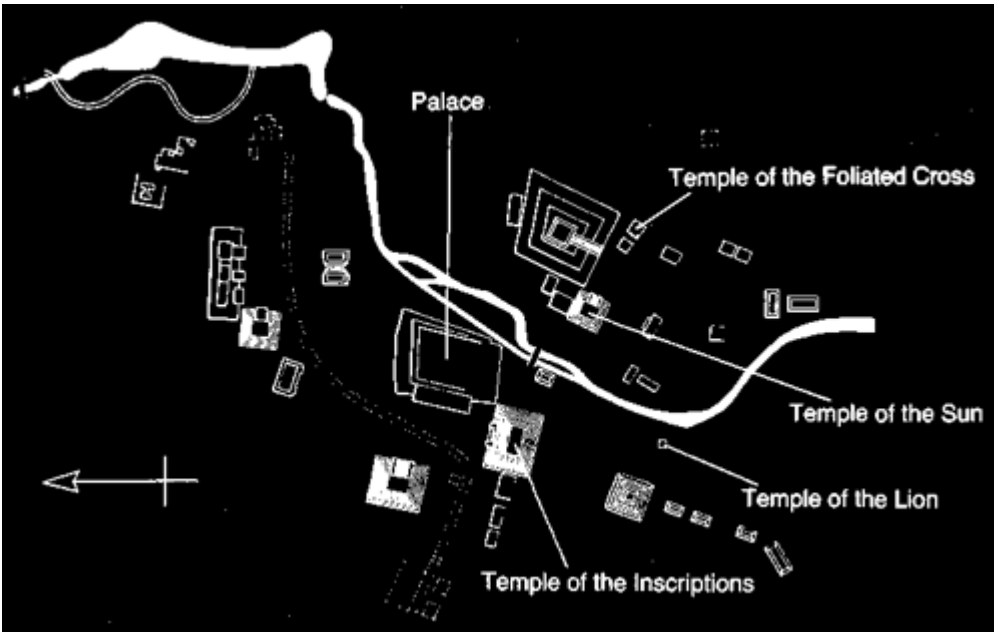
I stood and climbed the last few steps into the central chamber of the

Temple. Set into the rear wall were two great grey slabs, and inscribed on

them, in regimented rows like pieces on a chequerboard, were 620

separate Mayan glyphs. These took the form of faces, monstrous and

human, together with a writhing bestiary of mythical creatures.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Palenque.

What was being said here? No one knew for sure because the inscriptions, a mixture of word pictures and phonetic symbols, had not yet been fully decoded. It was evident, however, that a number of the glyphs referred to epochs thousands of years in the past, and spoke of people and gods who had played their parts in prehistoric events.¹

Pacal's tomb

To the left of the hieroglyphs, let into the huge flagstones of the temple

floor, was a steep descending internal stairway. This led to a room buried

deep in the bowels of the pyramid, where the tomb of Lord Pacal lay.
The

stairs, of highly polished limestone blocks, were narrow and
surprisingly

slippery and moist. Adopting a crabbed, sideways stance, I switched
on

my torch and stepped gingerly down into the gloom, steadying
myself

against the southern wall as I did so.

This damp stairway had been a secret place from the date when it
was

originally sealed, in AD 683, until June 1952 when the Mexican
archaeologist Alberto Ruz lifted the flagstones in the temple floor.

Although a second such tomb was found at Palenque in 1994,² Ruz
had

the honour of being the first man to discover such a feature inside a
New

World pyramid. The stairway had been intentionally filled with rubble
by

its builders, and it took four more years before the archaeologists
cleared

it out completely and reached the bottom.

1 *The Atlas of Mysterious Places* (ed. Jennifer Westwood), Guild
Publishing, London,

1987, p. 70.

2 *The Times*, London, 4 June 1994.

152

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

When they had done so they entered a narrow corbel-vaulted chamber.

Spread out on the floor in front of them were the mouldering skeletons of

five or possibly six young victims of sacrifice. A huge triangular slab of

stone was visible at the far end of the chamber. When it was removed,

Ruz was confronted by a remarkable tomb. He described it as ‘an enormous room that appeared to be graven in ice, a kind of grotto whose

walls and roof seemed to have been planed in perfect surfaces, or an

abandoned chapel whose cupola was draped with curtains of stalactites,

and from whose floor arose thick stalagmites like the dripping of a candle.’³

The room, also roofed with a corbel vault, was 30 feet long and 23 feet

high. Around the walls, in stucco relief, could be seen the striding figures

of the Lords of the Night—the ‘Ennead’ of nine deities who ruled over the

hours of darkness. Centre-stage, and overlooked by these figures, was a

huge monolithic sarcophagus lidded with a five-ton slab of richly carved

stone. Inside the sarcophagus was a tall skeleton draped with a treasure

trove of jade ornaments. A mosaic death mask of 200 fragments of jade

was affixed to the front of the skull. These, supposedly, were the remains

of Pacal, a ruler of Palenque in the seventh century AD. The inscriptions

stated that this monarch had been eighty years old at the time of his

death, but the jade-draped skeleton the archaeologists found in the

sarcophagus appeared to belong to a man half that age.⁴

Having reached the bottom of the stairway, some eighty-five feet below

the floor of the temple, I crossed the chamber where the sacrificial

victims had lain and gazed directly into Pacal’s tomb. The air was dank,

full of mildew and damp-rot, and surprisingly cold. The sarcophagus, set

into the floor of the tomb, had a curious shape, flared strikingly at the feet like an Ancient Egyptian mummy case. These were made of wood

and were equipped with wide bases since they were frequently stood upright. But Pacal's coffin was made of solid stone and was

uncompromisingly horizontal. Why, then, had the Mayan artificers gone

to so much trouble to widen its base when they must have known that it

served no useful purpose? Could they have been slavishly copying a design-feature from some ancient model long after the *raison d'être* for

the design had been forgotten? Like the beliefs concerning the perils of

the afterlife, might Pacal's sarcophagus not be an expression of a common legacy linking Ancient Egypt with the ancient cultures of Central

America?

Rectangular in shape, the heavy stone lid of the sarcophagus was ten

inches thick, three feet wide and twelve and a half feet long. It, too,

seemed to have been modelled on the same original as the magnificent

engraved blocks the Ancient Egyptians had used for this exact purpose.

3 Quoted in *The Atlas of Mysterious Places*, pp. 68-9.

4 Ibid. Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1991, pp. 108-9.

5 *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, pp. 94-5.

153

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Indeed, it would not have looked out of place in the Valley of the Kings.

But there was one major difference. The scene carved on top of the sarcophagus lid was unlike anything that ever came out of Egypt. Lit in

my torch beam, it showed a clean-shaven man dressed in what looked

like a tight-fitting body-suit, the sleeves and leggings of which were gathered into elaborate cuffs at the wrists and ankles. The man lay semi-

reclined in a bucket seat which supported his lower back and thighs, the

nape of his neck resting comfortably against some kind of headrest, and

he was peering forward intently. His hands seemed to be in motion, as

though they were operating levers and controls, and his feet were bare,

tucked up loosely in front of him.

Was this supposed to be Pacal, the Maya king?

If so, why was he shown operating some kind of machine? The Maya

weren't supposed to have had machines. They weren't even supposed to

have discovered the wheel. Yet with its side panels, rivets, tubes and other gadgets, the structure Pacal reclined in resembled a technological

device much more strongly than it did 'the transition of one man's living

soul to the realms of the dead',⁶ as one authority claimed, or the king

'falling back into the fleshless jaws of the earth monster',⁷ as another

argued.

I remembered 'Man in Snake', the Olmec relief described in Chapter Seventeen. It, too, had looked like a naïve depiction of a piece of technology. Furthermore, 'Man in Snake' had come from La Venta, where

it had been associated with several bearded figures, apparently Caucasians. Pacal's tomb was at least a thousand years younger than any of the La Venta treasures. Nevertheless, a tiny jade statuette was found lying close to the skeleton inside the sarcophagus, and it appeared to be much older than the other grave-goods also placed there. It depicted an elderly Caucasian, dressed in long robes, with a goatee beard.⁸

Pyramid of the Magician

Uxmal, Yucatan

On a stormy afternoon, 700 kilometres north of Palenque, I began to climb the steps of yet another pyramid. It was a steep building, oval rather than square in plan, 240 feet long at the base and 120 feet wide. It was, moreover, very high, rising 120 feet above the surrounding plain.

Since time out of mind this edifice, which did look like the castle of a necromancer, had been known as the 'Pyramid of the Magician' and also as the 'House of the Dwarf'. These names were derived from a Maya

legend which asserted that a dwarf with supernatural powers had raised

6 *The Atlas of Mysterious Places*, p. 70.

7 *Time Among the Maya*, p. 298.

8 *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, pp. 95-6.

154

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the entire building in just one night.⁹

The steps, as I climbed them, seemed more and more perversely narrow. My instinct was to lean forward, flatten myself against the side of

the pyramid, and cling on for dear life. Instead I looked up at the angry,

overcast sky above me. Flocks of birds circled, screeching wildly as though seeking refuge from some impending disaster, and the thick mass of low-lying cloud that had blotted out the sun a few hours earlier

was now so agitated by high winds that it seemed to boil.

The Pyramid of the Magician was by no means unique in being associated with the supernatural powers of dwarves, whose architectural

and masonry skills were widely renowned in Central America.

‘Construction work was easy for them,’ asserted one typical Maya legend,

‘all they had to do was whistle and heavy rocks would move into place.’¹⁰

A very similar tradition, as the reader may recall, claimed that the gigantic stone blocks of the mysterious Andean city of Tiahuanaco had

been ‘carried through the air to the sound of a trumpet’.¹¹

In both Central America and in the far-off regions of the Andes, therefore, strange sounds had been associated with the miraculous levitation of massive rocks.

What was I to make of this? Maybe, through some fluke, two almost identical ‘fantasies’ could have been independently invented in both these geographically remote areas. But that didn’t seem very likely.

Equally worthy of consideration was the possibility that common recollections of an ancient building technology could have been preserved in stories such as these, a technology capable of lifting huge

blocks of stone off the ground with ‘miraculous’ ease. Could it be relevant that memories of almost identical miracles were preserved in

Ancient Egypt? There, in one typical tradition, a magician was said to have

raised into the air 'a huge vault of stone 200 cubits long and 50 cubits

broad'?¹²

9 *Mexico: Rough Guide*, Harrap-Columbus, London, 1989, p. 354.

10 *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*, p. 8. *Maya History and Religion*, p.

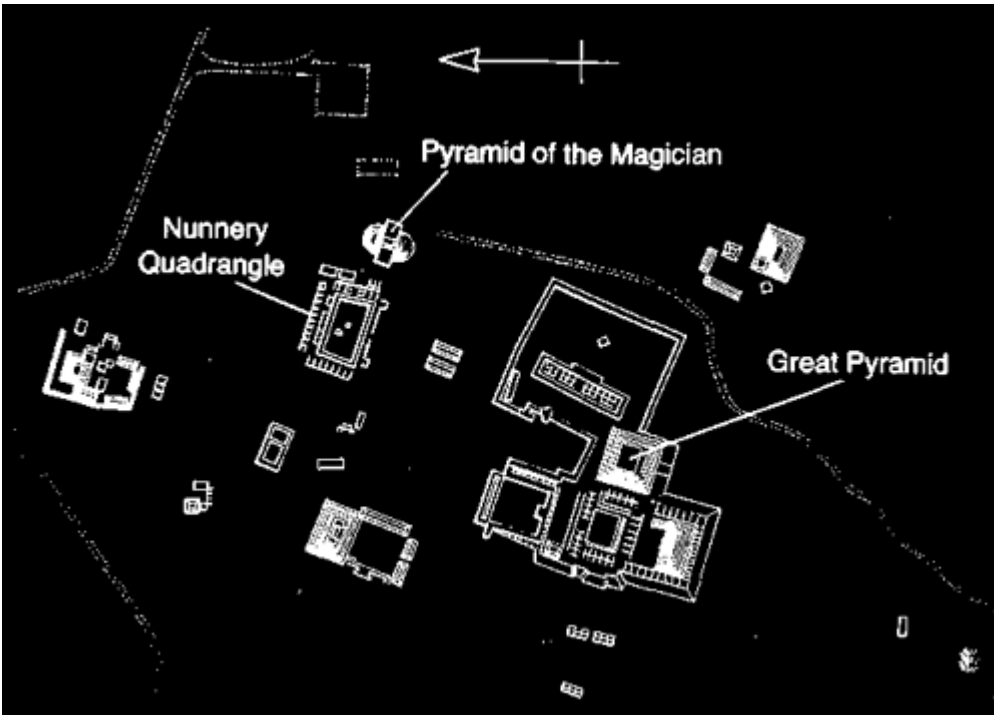
340.

11 See Chapter Ten.

12 E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, The Medici Society Ltd.,

1911, volume II, p. 180.

155



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Uxmal.

The sides of the stairway I was climbing were richly decorated with what

the nineteenth-century American explorer John Lloyd Stephens described

as ‘a species of sculptured mosaic’.¹³ Oddly, although the Pyramid of the

Magician had been built long centuries before the Conquest, the symbol

most frequently featured in these mosaics was a close approximation of

the Christian cross. Indeed there were two distinct kinds of ‘Christian’

crosses: one the wide-pawed *croix-patte* favoured by the Knights Templar

and other crusading orders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; the other the x-shaped Saint Andrew's cross.

After climbing a further shorter flight of steps I reached the temple at the very top of the Magician's pyramid. It consisted of a single corbel-

vaulted chamber from the ceiling of which large numbers of bats hung

suspended. Like the birds and the clouds, they were visibly distressed by

the sense of a huge storm brewing. In a furry mass they shuffled restlessly upside down, folding and unfolding their small leathery wings.

I took a rest on the high platform that surrounded the chamber. From here, looking down, I could see many more crosses. They were everywhere, literally all over this bizarre and ancient structure. I

remembered the Andean city of Tiahuanaco and the crosses that had

been carved there, in distant pre-Colombian times, on some of the great

blocks of stone lying scattered around the building known as Puma

Punku.14 'Man in Snake', the Olmec sculpture from La Venta, had also

been engraved with two Saint Andrew's crosses long before the birth of

Christ. And now, here at the Pyramid of the Magician in the Mayan site of

13 John. L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan,*

Harper and Brothers, New York, 1841, vol. II, p. 422.

14 See Chapter Twelve.

156

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Uxmal, I was confronted by crosses yet again.

Bearded men ...

Serpents ...

Crosses ...

How likely was it to be an accident that symbols as distinctive as these

should repeat themselves in widely separated cultures and at different

periods of history? Why were they so often built into the fabric of sophisticated works of art and architecture?

A science of prophecy

Not for the first time I suspected that I might be looking at signs and icons left behind by some cult or secret society which had sought to keep

the light of civilization burning in Central America (and perhaps elsewhere) through long ages of darkness. I thought it notable that the

motifs of the bearded man, the Plumed Serpent, and the cross all tended

to crop up whenever and wherever there were hints that a technologically

advanced and as yet unidentified civilization might once have been in

contact with the native cultures. And there was a sense of great age about this contact, as though it took place at such an early date that it

had been almost forgotten. I thought again about the sudden way the Olmecs had emerged, around the middle of the second millennium BC,

out of the swirling mists of opaque prehistory. All the archaeological evidence indicated that from the beginning they had venerated huge stone heads and stele showing bearded men. I found myself increasingly

drawn to the possibility that some of those remarkable pieces of sculpture could have been part of a vast inheritance of civilization handed

down to the peoples of Central America many thousands of years *before*

the second millennium BC, and thereafter entrusted to the safekeeping of

a secret wisdom cult, perhaps the cult of Quetzalcoatl.

Much had been lost. Nevertheless the tribes of this region—in particular

the Maya, the builders of Palenque and Uxmal—had preserved something

even more mysterious and wonderful than the enigmatic monoliths, something which declared itself even more persistently to be the legacy

of an older and a higher civilization. We see in the next chapter that it

was the mystical science of an ancient star-gazing folk, a science of time

and measurement and prediction—a science of prophecy even—that the

Maya had preserved most perfectly from the past. With it they inherited

memories of a terrible, earth-destroying flood and an idiosyncratic legacy

of empirical knowledge, knowledge of a high order which they shouldn't

really have possessed, knowledge that we have only reacquired very recently ...

157

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 21

A Computer for Calculating the End of the World

The Maya knew where their advanced learning originated. It was handed

down to them, they said, from the First Men, the creatures of

Quetzalcoatl, whose names had been Balam-Quitze (Jaguar with the Sweet

Smile), Balam-Acab (Jaguar of the Night), Mahucutah (The Distinguished

Name) and Iqui-Balam (Jaguar of the Moon).¹ According to the *Popol Vuh*,

these forefathers:

were endowed with intelligence; they saw and instantly they could see far; they

succeeded in seeing; they succeeded in knowing all that there is in the world. The

things hidden in the distance they saw without first having to move ... Great was

their wisdom; their sight reached to the forests, the rocks, the lakes, the seas, the

mountains, and the valleys. In truth, they were admirable men ... They were able

to know all, and they examined the four corners, the four points of the arch of the

sky, and the round face of the earth.²

The achievements of this race aroused the envy of several of the most

powerful deities. 'It is not well that our creatures should know all,' opined

these gods, 'Must they perchance be the equals of ourselves, their

Makers, who can see afar, who know all and see all? ... Must they also be

gods?'³

Obviously such a state of affairs could not be allowed to continue. After

some deliberation an order was given and appropriate action taken:

Let their sight reach only to that which is near; let them see only a little of the face

of the earth ... Then the Heart of Heaven blew mist into their eyes which clouded

their sight as when a mirror is breathed upon. Their eyes were covered and they

could only see what was close, only that was clear to them ... In this way the

wisdom and all the knowledge of the First Men were destroyed.⁴

Anyone familiar with the Old Testament will remember that the reason for

the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden had to do with

similar divine concerns. After the First Man had eaten of the fruit of the

tree of the knowledge of good and evil,

The Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and

evil. Now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and

live for ever, [let us] send him forth from the Garden of Eden ...'⁵

The *Popol Vuh* is accepted by scholars as a great reservoir of

1 *Popol Vuh*, p. 167.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Genesis*, 4:22-4

158

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

uncontaminated, pre-Colombian tradition.⁶ It is therefore puzzling to find

such similarities between these traditions and those recorded in the *Genesis* story. Moreover, like so many of the other Old World/New World

links we have identified, the character of the similarities is not suggestive

of any kind of direct influence of one region on the other but of two different interpretations of the same set of events. Thus, for example:

- The biblical Garden of Eden looks like a metaphor for the state of blissful, almost 'godlike', knowledge that the 'First Men' of the *Popol Vuh* enjoyed.

- The essence of this knowledge was the ability to 'see all' and to 'know

all'. Was this not precisely the ability Adam and Eve acquired after eating the forbidden fruit, which grew on the branches of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'?

- Finally, just as Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden, so were

the four First Men of the *Popol Vuh* deprived of their ability to 'see far'.

Thereafter 'their eyes were covered and they could only see what was

close ...'

Both the *Popol Vuh* and *Genesis* therefore tell the story of mankind's fall

from grace. In both cases, this state of grace was closely associated with

knowledge, and the reader is left in no doubt that the knowledge in

question was so remarkable that it conferred godlike powers on those

who possessed it.

The Bible, adopting a dark and muttering tone of voice, calls it 'the

knowledge of good and evil' and has nothing further to add. The *Popol*

Vuh is much more informative. It tells us that the knowledge of the First

Men consisted of the ability to see 'things hidden in the distance', that

they were astronomers who 'examined the four corners, the four points

of the arch of the sky', and that they were geographers who succeeded in

measuring 'the round face of the earth'.⁷

Geography is about maps. In Part I we saw evidence suggesting that the

cartographers of an as yet unidentified civilization might have mapped

the planet with great thoroughness at an early date. Could the *Popol Vuh*

be transmitting some garbled memory of that same civilization when it

speaks nostalgically of the First Men and of the miraculous geographical

knowledge they possessed?

Geography is about maps, and astronomy is about stars. Very often the

two disciplines go hand in hand because stars are essential for navigation

on long sea-going voyages of discovery (and long sea-going voyages of

discovery are essential for the production of accurate maps).

Is it accidental that the First Men of the *Popol Vuh* were remembered

not only for studying 'the round face of the earth' but for their

contemplation of 'the arch of heaven'?⁸ And is it a coincidence that the

⁶ *Popol Vuh*, Introduction, p. 16. See also *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico*, p. 250ff.

⁷ *Popol Vuh*, pp. 168-9.

⁸ Ibid.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

outstanding achievement of Mayan society was its observational

astronomy, upon which, through the medium of advanced mathematical

calculations, was based a clever, complex, sophisticated and very

accurate calendar?

Knowledge out of place

In 1954 J. Eric Thompson, a leading authority on the archaeology of

Central America, confessed to a deep sense of puzzlement at a number

of glaring disparities he had identified between the generally

unremarkable achievements of the Mayas, as a whole and the advanced

state of their astro-calendrical knowledge, 'What mental quirks,' he

asked, 'led the Maya intelligentsia to chart the heavens, yet fail to grasp

the principle of the wheel; to visualize eternity, as no other semi-civilized

people has ever done, yet ignore the short step from corbelled to true

arch; to count in millions, yet never to learn to weigh a sack of corn?'9

Perhaps the answer to these questions is much simpler than Thompson

realized. Perhaps the astronomy, the deep understanding of time, and the

long-term mathematical calculations, were not 'quirks' at all. Perhaps

they were the constituent parts of a coherent *but very specific body of*

knowledge that the Maya had inherited, more or less intact, from an older

and wiser civilization. Such an inheritance would explain the

contradictions observed by Thompson, and there is no need for any

dispute on the point. We already know that the Maya received their

calendar as a legacy from the Olmecs (a thousand years earlier, the

Olmecs were using exactly the same system). The real question, should

be, where did the Olmecs get it? What kind of level of technological and

scientific development was required for a civilization to devise a calendar

as good as this?

Take the case of the solar year. In modern Western society we still make

use of a solar calendar which was introduced in Europe in 1582 and is

based on the best scientific knowledge then available: the famous
Gregorian calendar. The Julian calendar, which it replaced,
computed the

period of the earth's orbit around the sun at 365.25 days. Pope
Gregory

XIII's reform substituted a finer and more accurate calculation:
365.2425

days. Thanks to scientific advances since 1582 we now know that
the

exact length of the solar year is 365.2422 days. The Gregorian
calendar

therefore incorporates a very small plus error, just 0.0003 of a day—
pretty impressive accuracy for the sixteenth century.

Strangely enough, though its origins are wrapped in the mists of
antiquity far deeper than the sixteenth century, the Mayan calendar
achieved even greater accuracy. It calculated the solar year at
365.2420

9 J. Eric Thompson, *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, Pimlico,
London, 1993, p. 13.

160

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

days, a minus error of only 0.0002 of a day.¹⁰

Similarly, the Maya knew the time taken by the moon to orbit the earth.

Their estimate of this period was 29.528395 days—extremely close to the

true figure of 29.530588 days computed by the finest modern methods.¹¹

The Mayan priests also had in their possession very accurate tables for

the prediction of solar and lunar eclipses and were aware that these could

occur only within plus or minus eighteen days of the node (when the

moon's path crosses the apparent path of the sun).¹² Finally, the Maya

were remarkably accomplished mathematicians. They possessed an

advanced technique of metrical calculation by means of a chequerboard

device we ourselves have only discovered (or rediscovered?) in the last

century.¹³ They also understood perfectly and used the abstract concept

of zero¹⁴ and were acquainted with place numerations.

These are esoteric fields. As Thompson observed,

The cipher (nought) and place numerations are so much parts of our cultural

heritage and seem such obvious conveniences that it is difficult to comprehend

how their invention could have been long delayed. Yet neither ancient Greece with

its great mathematicians, nor ancient Rome, had any inkling of either nought or

place numeration. To write 1848 in Roman numerals requires eleven letters:

MDCCLXXXVIII. Yet the Maya had a system of place-value notation very much like

our own at a time when the Romans were still using their clumsy method.¹⁵

Isn't it a bit odd that this otherwise unremarkable Central American tribe

should, at such an early date, have stumbled upon an innovation which

Otto Neugebauer, the historian of science, has described as 'one of the

most fertile inventions of humanity'.¹⁶

Someone else's science?

Let us now consider the question of Venus, a planet that was of immense

symbolic importance to all the ancient peoples of Central America, who

identified it strongly with Quetzalcoatl (or Gucumatz or Kukulcan, as the

Plumed Serpent was known in the Maya dialects).¹⁷

Unlike the Ancient Greeks, but like the Ancient Egyptians, the Maya understood that Venus was both ‘the morning star’ and ‘the evening

¹⁰ William Gates’s notes (p. 81) to Diego de Landa’s *Yucatan before and after the*

Conquest.

¹¹ This is evident from the Dresden Codex. See, for example, *An Introduction to the*

Study of Maya Hieroglyphs, p. 32.

¹² *The Maya*, p. 176; *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 291; *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, p. 173.

¹³ *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 287.

¹⁴ *The Maya*, p. 173.

¹⁵ *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, pp. 178-9.

¹⁶ Cited in *The Maya*, p. 173.

¹⁷ *World Mythology*, p. 241.

161

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

star’.¹⁸ They understood other things about it as well. The ‘synodical

revolution' of a planet is the period of time it takes to return to any given

point in the sky—as viewed from earth. Venus revolves around the sun

every 224.7 days, while the earth follows its own slightly wider orbit. The

composite result of these two motions is that Venus rises in exactly the

same place in the earth's sky approximately every 584 days.

Whoever invented the sophisticated calendrical system inherited by the

Maya had been aware of this and had found ingenious ways to integrate it

with other interlocking cycles. Moreover, it is clear from the mathematics

which brought these cycles together that the ancient calendar masters

had understood that 584 days was only an *approximation* and that the

movements of Venus are by no means regular. They had therefore

worked out the exact figure established by today's science for the

average synodical revolution of Venus over very long periods of time.¹⁹

That figure is 583.92 days and it was knitted into the fabric of the Mayan

calendar in numerous intricate and complex ways.²⁰ For example, to reconcile it with the so-called 'sacred year' (the *tzolkin* of 260 days, which

was divided into 13 months of 20 days each) the calendar called for a

correction of four days to be made every 61 Venus years. In addition, during every fifth cycle, a correction of eight days was made at the end of

the 57th revolution. Once these steps were taken, the *tzolkin* and the synodical revolution of Venus were intermeshed so tightly that the degree

of error to which the equation was subject was staggeringly small—one

day in 6000 years.²¹ And what made this all the more remarkable was that

a further series of precisely calculated adjustments kept the Venus cycle

and the *tzolkin* not only in harmony with each other but in exact

relationship with the solar year. Again this was achieved in a manner

which ensured that the calendar was capable of doing its job, virtually

error-free, over vast expanses of time.²²

Why did the 'semi-civilized' Maya *need* this kind of high-tech precision?

Or did they inherit, in good working order, a calendar engineered to fit

the needs of a much earlier and far more advanced civilization?

Consider the crowning jewel of Maya calendrics, the so-called 'Long

Count'. This system of calculating dates also expressed beliefs about the

past—notably, the widely held belief that time operated in Great Cycles

which witnessed recurrent creations and destructions of the world.

According to the Maya, the current Great Cycle began in darkness on 4

Ahau 8 Cumku, a date corresponding to 13 August 3114 BC in our own

calendar.²³ As we have seen, it was also believed that the cycle will come

18 *The Maya*, p. 176.

19 *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, p. 170; *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p.

290.

20 *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, p. 170.

21 *Ibid.*, 170-1.

22 *Ibid.*, 169.

23 *Breaking The Maya Code*, p. 275.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

to an end, amid global destruction, on 4 *Ahau 3 Kankin*: 23
December AD

2012 in our calendar. The function of the Long Count was to record
the

elapse of time since the beginning of the current Great Cycle, literally
to

count off, one by one, the 5125 years allotted to our present
creation.²⁴

The Long Count is perhaps best envisaged as a sort of celestial
adding

machine, constantly calculating and recalculating the scale of our

growing debt to the universe. Every last penny of that debt is going
to be

called in when the figure on the meter reads 5125.

So, at any rate, thought the Maya.

Calculations on the Long Count computer were not, of course, done
in

our numbers. The Maya used their own notation, which they had
derived

from the Olmecs, who had derived it from ... nobody knows. This

notation was a combination of dots (signifying ones or units or
multiples

of twenty), bars (signifying fives or multiples of five times twenty), and a

shell glyph signifying zero. Spans of time were counted by days (*kin*),

periods of twenty days (*uinat*), 'computing years' of 360 days (*tun*),

periods of 20 *tuns* (known as *katun*), and periods of 20 *katuns* (known as

bactun). There were also 8000- *tun* periods (*pictun*) and 160,000-*tun*

periods (*calabtun*) to mop up even larger calculations.²⁵

All this should make clear that although the Maya believed themselves

to be living in one Great Cycle that would surely come to a violent end

they also knew that time was infinite and that it proceeded with its

mysterious revolutions regardless of individual lives or civilizations.

As

Thompson summed up in his great study on the subject:

In the Maya scheme the road over which time had marched stretched into a past

so distant that the mind of man cannot comprehend its remoteness. Yet the Maya

undauntedly retraced that road seeking its starting point. A fresh view, leading

further backward, unfolded at every stage; the mellowed centuries blended into

millennia, and they into tens of thousands of years, as those tireless inquirers

explored deeper and still deeper into the eternity of the past. On a stela at Quirigua

in Guatemala a date over 90 million years ago is computed; on another a date over

300 million years before that is given. These are actual computations, stating

correctly day and month positions, and are comparable to calculations in our

calendar giving the month positions on which Easter would have fallen at

equivalent distances in the past. The brain reels at such astronomical figures ...26

Isn't all this a bit *avant-garde* for a civilization that didn't otherwise

distinguish itself in many ways? It's true that Mayan architecture was

good within its limits. But there was precious little else that these jungle-

dwelling Indians did which suggested they might have had the capacity

(or the need) to conceive of really *long* periods of time.

It's been a good deal less than two centuries since the majority of

24 Ibid., pp. g, 275.

25 José Arguelles, *The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology*, Bear and Co., Santa Fe,

New Mexico, 1987, pp. 26; *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, p.

50.

26 *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, pp. 13-14, 165.

163

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Western intellectuals abandoned Bishop Usher's opinion that the world

was created in 4004 BC and accepted that it must be infinitely older than

that.²⁷ In plain English this means that the ancient Maya had a far more

accurate understanding of the true immensity of geological time, and of

the vast antiquity of our planet, than did anyone in Britain, Europe or North America until Darwin propounded the theory of evolution.

So how come the Maya got handy with big periods like hundreds of millions of years? Was it a freak of cultural development? Or did they inherit the calendrical and mathematical tools which facilitated, and

enabled them to develop, this sophisticated understanding? If an inheritance was involved, it is legitimate to ask what the original inventors of the Mayan calendar's computer-like circuitry had intended it

to do. What had they designed it for? Had they simply conceived of all its

complexities to concoct 'a challenge to the intellect, a sort of tremendous

anagram', as one authority claimed?²⁸ Or could they have had a more

pragmatic and important objective in mind?

We have seen that the obsessive concern of Mayan society, and indeed

of all the ancient cultures of Central America, was with calculating—and if

possible postponing—the end of the world. Could this be the purpose the

mysterious calendar was designed to fulfill? Could it have been a

mechanism for predicting some terrible cosmic or geological catastrophe?

²⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 12:214.

²⁸ *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, p. 168.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 22

City of the Gods

The overwhelming message of a large number of Central American legends is that the Fourth Age of the world ended very badly. A catastrophic deluge was followed by a long period during which the light

of the sun vanished from the sky and the air was filled with a tenebrous

darkness. Then:

The gods gathered together at Teotihuacan [‘the place of the gods’] and wondered

anxiously who was to be the next Sun. Only the sacred fire [the material

representation of Huehuetēotl, the god who gave life its beginning] could be seen

in the darkness, still quaking following the recent chaos. ‘Someone will have to

sacrifice himself, throw himself into the fire,’ they cried, ‘only then will there be a

Sun.’¹

A drama ensued in which two deities (Nanahuatzin and Tecciztecatl)

immolated themselves for the common good. One burned quickly in the

centre of the sacred fire; the other roasted slowly on the embers at its

edge 'The gods waited for a long time until eventually the sky started to

glow red as at dawn. In the east appeared the great sphere of the sun,

life-giving and incandescent ...'²

It was at this moment of cosmic rebirth that Quetzalcoatl manifested himself. His mission was with humanity of the Fifth Age. He therefore took the form of a human being—a bearded white man, just like Viracocha.

In the Andes, Viracocha's capital was Tiahuanaco. In Central America,

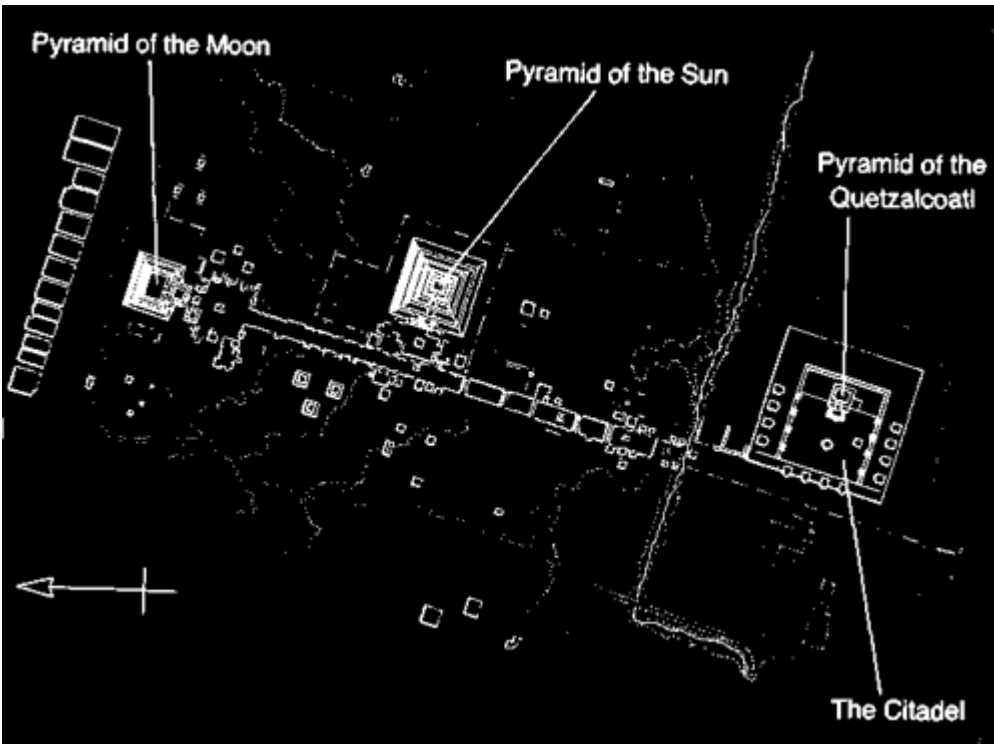
Quetzalcoatl's was the supposed birth-place of the Fifth Sun, Teotihuacan, the city of the gods.³

¹ *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, pp. 25-6.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

³ *Ancient America*, Time-Life International, 1970, p. 45; *Aztecs: Reign of Blood and*

Splendour, p. 54; *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, p. 24.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Teotihuacan.

The Citadel, the Temple and the Map of Heaven

Teotihuacan, 50 kilometres north-east of Mexico City

I stood in the airy enclosure of the Citadel and looked north across the

morning haze towards the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon. Set amid

grey-green scrub country, and ringed by distant mountains, these two

great monuments played their parts in a symphony of ruins strung out

along the axis of the so-called 'Street of the Dead'. The Citadel lay at the

approximate mid point of this wide avenue which ran perfectly straight

for more than four kilometres. The Pyramid of the Moon was at its

northern extreme, the Pyramid of the Sun offset somewhat to its east.

In the context of such a geometric site, an exact north-south or east-

west orientation might have been expected. It was therefore surprising

that the architects who had planned Teotihuacan had deliberately chosen

to incline the Street of the Dead $15^{\circ} 30'$ east of north. There were several

theories as to why this eccentric orientation had been selected, but none

was especially convincing. Growing numbers of scholars, however, were

beginning to wonder whether astronomical alignments might have been

involved. One, for example, had proposed that the Street of the Dead

might have been 'built to face the setting of the Pleiades at the time when

it was constructed'.⁴ Another, Professor Gerald Hawkins, had suggested

4 The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico, p. 67.

166

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

that a 'Sirius-Pleides axis' could also have played a part.⁵ And Stansbury

Hagar (secretary of the Department of Ethnology at the Brooklyn Institute

of the Arts and Sciences), had suggested that the street might represent

the Milky Way.⁶

Indeed Hagar went further than this, seeing the portrayal of specific

planets and stars in many of the pyramids, mounds and other structures

that hovered like fixed satellites around the axis of the Street of the

Dead. His complete thesis was that Teotihuacan had been designed as a

kind of 'map of heaven': 'It reproduced on earth a supposed celestial plan

of the sky-world where dwelt the deities and spirits of the dead.'⁷

During the 1960s and 1970s Hagar's intuitions were tested in the field

by Hugh Harleston Jr., an American engineer resident in Mexico, who

carried out a comprehensive mathematical survey at Teotihuacan.

Harleston reported his findings in October 1974 at the International

Congress of Americanists.⁸ His paper, which was full of daring and

innovative ideas, contained some particularly curious information about

the Citadel and about the Temple of Quetzalcoatl located at the eastern

extreme of this great square compound.

The Temple was regarded by scholars as one of the best-preserved

archaeological monuments in Central America.⁹ This was because the

original, prehistoric structure had been partially buried beneath another

much later mound immediately in front of it to the west. Excavation of

that mound had revealed the elegant six-stage pyramid that now

confronted me. It stood 72 feet high and its base covered an area of

82,000 square feet.

Still bearing traces of the original multicoloured paints which had

coated it in antiquity, the exposed Temple was a beautiful and strange

sight. The predominant sculptural motif was a series of huge serpent heads protruding three-dimensionally out of the facing blocks and lining

the sides of the massive central stairway. The elongated jaws of these

oddly humanoid reptiles were heavily endowed with fangs, and the upper

lips with a sort of handlebar moustache. Each serpent's thick neck was

ringed by an elaborate plume of feathers—the unmistakable symbol of

Quetzalcoatl.¹⁰

What Harleston's investigations had shown was that a complex mathematical relationship appeared to exist among the principal structures lined up along the Street of the Dead (and indeed beyond it).

This relationship suggested something extraordinary, namely that Teotihuacan might originally have been designed as a precise scale-

⁵ *Beyond Stonehenge*, pp. 187-8.

⁶ Cited in *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, pp. 220-1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Hugh Harleston Jr., 'A Mathematical Analysis of Teotihuacan', XLI International

Congress of Americanists, 3 October 1974.

9 Richard Bloomgarden, *The Pyramids of Teotihuacan*, Editor S. A. Mexico, 1993, p. 14.

10 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 215.

167

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

model of the solar system. At any rate, if the centre line of the Temple of

Quetzalcoatl were taken as denoting the position of the sun, markers laid

out northwards from it along the axis of the Street of the Dead seemed to

indicate the correct orbital distances of the inner planets, the asteroid

belt, Jupiter, Saturn (represented by the so-called 'Sun' Pyramid), Uranus

(by the 'Moon' Pyramid), and Neptune and Pluto by as yet unexcavated

mounds some kilometres farther north.¹¹

If these correlations were more than coincidental, then, at the very

least, they indicated the presence at Teotihuacan of an advanced

observational astronomy, one not surpassed by modern science until a

relatively late date. Uranus remained unknown to our own astronomers

until 1787, Neptune until 1846 and Pluto until 1930. Even the most conservative estimate of Teotihuacan's antiquity, by contrast, suggested

that the principal ingredients of the site-plan (including the Citadel, the

Street of the Dead and the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon) must date

back *at least* to the time of Christ.¹² No known civilization of that epoch,

either in the Old World or in the New, is supposed to have had any knowledge at all of the outer planets—let alone to have possessed accurate information concerning their orbital distances from each other

and from the sun.

Egypt and Mexico—more coincidences?

After completing his studies of the pyramids and avenues of Teotihuacan,

Stansbury Hagar concluded: 'We have not yet realized either the importance or the refinement, or the widespread distribution throughout

ancient America, of the astronomical cult of which the celestial plan was a

feature, and of which Teotihuacan was one of the principal centres.'¹³

But was this just an astronomical 'cult'? Or was it something approximating more closely to what we might call a science? And whether

cult or science, was it realistic to suppose that it had enjoyed 'widespread

distribution' only in the Americas when there was so much evidence linking it to other parts of the ancient world?

For example, archaeo-astronomers making use of the latest star-mapping computer programmes had recently demonstrated that the three world-famous pyramids on Egypt's Giza plateau formed an exact

terrestrial diagram of the three belt stars in the constellation of Orion.¹⁴

Nor was this the limit of the celestial map the Ancient Egyptian priests

had created in the sands on the west bank of the Nile. Included in their

overall vision, as we shall see in Parts VI and VII, there was a natural

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 266-9.

¹² *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 67.

13 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 221.

14 *The Orion Mystery*.

168

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

feature—the river Nile—which was exactly where it should be had it been

designed to represent the Milky Way.¹⁵

The incorporation of a ‘celestial plan’ into key sites in Egypt and Mexico

did not by any means exclude religious functions. On the contrary, whatever else they may have been intended for it is certain that the monuments of Teotihuacan, like those of the Giza plateau, played important religious roles in the lives of the communities they served.

Thus Central American traditions collected in the sixteenth century by

Father Bernardino de Sahagun gave eloquent expression to a widespread

belief that Teotihuacan had fulfilled at least one specific and important

religious function in ancient times. According to these legends the City of

the Gods was so known because ‘the Lords therein buried, after their

deaths, did not perish but turned into gods ...'16 In other words, it was

'the place where men became gods'.17 It was additionally known as 'the

place of those who had the road of the gods',18 and 'the place where gods

were made'.19

Was it a coincidence, I wondered, that this seemed to have been the

religious purpose of the three pyramids at Giza? The archaic hieroglyphs

of the Pyramid Texts, the oldest coherent body of writing in the world,

left little room for doubt that the ultimate objective of the rituals carried

out within those colossal structures was to bring about the deceased

pharaoh's transfiguration—to 'throw open the doors of the firmament

and to make a road' so that he might 'ascend into the company of the

gods'.20

The notion of pyramids as devices designed (presumably in some

metaphysical sense) 'to turn men into gods' was, it seemed to me, too

idiosyncratic and peculiar to have been arrived at independently in both

Ancient Egypt and Mexico. So, too, was the idea of using the layout of

sacred sites to incorporate a celestial plan.

Moreover, there were other strange similarities that deserved to be considered.

Just as at Giza, three principal pyramids had been built at Teotihuacan:

the Pyramid/Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon. Just as at Giza, the site plan was not symmetrical,

as one might have expected, but involved two structures in direct alignment with each other while the third appeared to have been deliberately offset to one side. Finally, at Giza, the summits of the Great

Pyramid and the Pyramid of Khafre were level, even though the former

was a taller building than the latter. Likewise, at Teotihuacan, the
15 Ibid.

16 Bernardino de Sahagun, cited in *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 23.

17 *Mexico: Rough Guide*, p. 216.

18 *The Atlas of Mysterious Places*, p. 158.

19 *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, p. 24.

20 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Utt. 667A, p. 281.

169

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

summits of the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon were level even though

the former was taller. The reason was the same in both cases: the Great

Pyramid was built on lower ground than the Pyramid of Cephren, and the

Pyramid of the Sun on lower ground than the Pyramid of the Moon.²¹

Could all this be coincidence? Was it not more logical to conclude that

there was an ancient connection between Mexico and Egypt?

For reasons I have outlined in Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen I

doubted whether any direct, causal link was involved—at any rate within

historic times. Once again, however, as with the Mayan calendar, and as

with the early maps of Antarctica, was it not worth keeping an open mind

to the possibility that we might be dealing with a legacy: that the

pyramids of Egypt and the ruins of Teotihuacan might express the technology, the geographical knowledge, the observational astronomy

(and perhaps also the religion) of a forgotten civilization of the past which had once, as the *Popul Vuh* claimed, 'examined the four corners,

the four points of the arch of the sky, and the round face of the earth'?

There was widespread agreement among academics concerning the antiquity of the Giza pyramids, thought to be about 4500 years old.²² No

such unanimity existed with regard to Teotihuacan. Neither the Street of

the Dead, nor the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, nor the Pyramids of the Sun

and the Moon had ever been definitively dated.²³ The majority of scholars

believed that the city had flourished between 100 BC and AD 600, but

others argued strongly that it must have risen to prominence much earlier, between 1500 and 1000 BC. There were others still who sought,

largely on geological grounds, to push the foundation date back to 4000

BC before the eruption of the nearby volcano Xitli.²⁴

Amid all this uncertainty about the age of Teotihuacan, I had not been

surprised to discover that no one had the faintest idea of the identity of

those who had actually built the largest and most remarkable metropolis

ever to have existed in the pre-Colombian New World.²⁵ All that could be

said for sure was this: when the Aztecs, on their march to imperial power,

first stumbled upon the mysterious city in the twelfth century AD, its

colossal edifices and avenues were already old beyond imagining and so

densely overgrown that they seemed more like natural features than

works of man.²⁶ Attached to them, however, was a thread of local legend,

passed down from generation to generation, which asserted that they had

been built by giants²⁷ and that their purpose had been to transform men

into gods.

21 The Ancient Kingdoms Of Mexico, p. 74; The Traveller's Key To Ancient Egypt, pp. 110-35.

22 See, for example, Ahmed Fakhry, *The Pyramids*, University of Chicago Press, 1969.

23 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, pp. 230-3.

24 Ibid.

25 *The Prehistory of the Americas*, p. 282.

26 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, pp. 11-12.

27 Ibid.

170

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Hints of forgotten wisdom

Leaving the Temple of Quetzalcoatl behind me, I recrossed the Citadel in

a westerly direction.

There was no archaeological evidence that this enormous enclosure had

ever served as a citadel—or, for that matter, that it had any kind of

military or defensive function at all. Like so much else about Teotihuacan

it had clearly been planned with painstaking care, and executed with

enormous effort, but its true purpose remained unidentified by modern

scholarship.²⁸ Even the Aztecs, who had been responsible for naming the

Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon (an attribution which had stuck though

no one had any idea what the original builders had called them) had

failed to invent a name for the Citadel. It had been left to the Spaniards to

label it as they did—an understandable conceit since the 30-acre central

patio of La Ciudadela was surrounded by massively thick embankments

more than 23 feet high and some 1500 feet long on each side.²⁹

My walk had now brought me to the western extreme of the patio. I

climbed a steep set of stairs that led to the top of the embankment and

turned north on to the Street of the Dead. Once again I had to remind

myself that this was almost certainly not what the Teotihuacanos

(whoever they were) had called the immense and impressive avenue. The

Spanish name Calle de los Muertos was of Aztec origin, apparently based

on speculation that the numerous mounds on either side of the Street

were graves (which, as it happened, they were not).³⁰

We have already considered the possibility that the Way of the Dead may have served as a terrestrial counterpart of the Milky Way. Of interest

in this regard is the work of another American, Alfred E. Schlemmer, who—like Hugh Harleston Jr.—was an engineer. Schlemmer's field was

technological forecasting, with specific reference to the prediction of earthquakes,³¹ on which he presented a paper at the Eleventh National

Convention of Chemical Engineers (in Mexico City in October 1971).

Schlemmer's argument was that the Street of the Dead might never have been a street at all. Instead, it might originally have been laid out as

a row of linked reflecting pools, filled with water which had descended

through a series of locks from the Pyramid of the Moon, at the northern

extreme, to the Citadel in the south.

As I walked steadily northward towards the still-distant Moon Pyramid,

it seemed to me that this theory had several points in its favour. For a

start the 'Street' was blocked at regular intervals by high partition walls,

at the foot of which the remains of well-made sluices could clearly be seen. Moreover, the lie of the land would have facilitated a north-south

28 Ibid., p. 213.

29 Ibid.

30 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 72.

31 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, pp. 271-2.

171

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

hydraulic flow since the base of the Moon Pyramid stood on ground that

was approximately 100 feet higher than the area in front of the Citadel.

The partitioned sections could easily have been filled with water and might indeed have served as reflecting pools, creating a spectacle far

more dramatic than those offered by the Taj Mahal or the fabled Shalimar

Gardens. Finally, the Teotihuacan Mapping Project (financed by the National Science Foundation in Washington DC and led by Professor Rene

Millon of the University of Rochester) had demonstrated conclusively that

the ancient city had possessed 'many carefully laid-out canals and systems of branching waterways, artificially dredged into straightened

portions of a river, which formed a network within Teotihuacan and ran

all the way to [Lake Texcoco], now ten miles distant but perhaps closer in

antiquity'.³²

There was much argument about what this vast hydraulic system had

been designed to do. Schlemmer's contention was that the particular waterway he had identified had been built to serve a pragmatic purpose

as 'a long-range seismic monitor'—part of 'an ancient science, no longer

understood'.³³ He pointed out that remote earthquakes 'can cause standing waves to form on a liquid surface right across the planet' and

suggested that the carefully graded and spaced reflecting pools of the

Street of the Dead might have been designed 'to enable Teotihuacanos to

read from the standing waves formed there the location and strength of

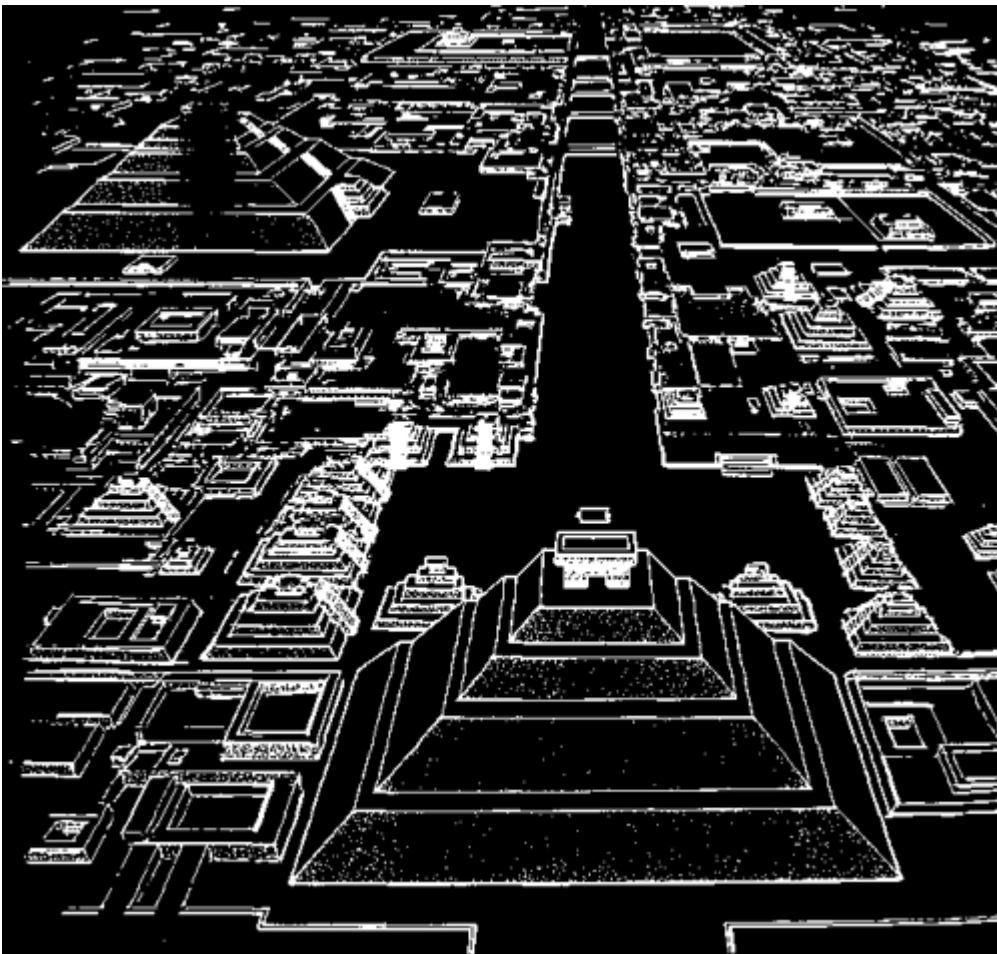
earthquakes around the globe, thus allowing them to predict such an occurrence in their own area'.³⁴

32 Ibid., p. 232.

33 Ibid., p. 272.

34 Ibid.

172



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Reconstruction of Teotihuacan, looking down the Way of the Dead from behind the Pyramid of the Moon. The Pyramid of the Sun lies to the left of the Way of the Dead. Visible in the distance beyond it is the pyramid-temple of Quetzalcoatl inside the large compound of the citadel.

There was, of course, no proof of Schlemmer's theory. However, when I

remembered the fixation with earthquakes and floods apparent everywhere in Mexican mythology, and the equally obsessive concern

with forecasting future events evident in the Maya calendar, I felt less inclined to dismiss the apparently far-fetched conclusions of the

American engineer. If Schlemmer were right, if the ancient Teotihuacanos

had indeed understood the principles of resonant vibration and had put

them into practice in seismic forecasting, the implication was that they

were the possessors of an advanced science. And if people like Hagar and

Harleston were right—if, for example, a scale-model of the solar system

had also been built into the basic geometry of Teotihuacan—this too

suggested that the city was founded by a scientifically evolved civilization

not yet identified.

I continued to walk northwards along the Street of the Dead and turned

east towards the Pyramid of the Sun. Before reaching this great

monument, however, I paused to examine a ruined patio, the principal

feature of which was an ancient 'temple' which concealed a perplexing

mystery beneath its rock floor.

173

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 23

The Sun and the Moon and the Way of the Dead

Some archaeological discoveries are heralded with much fanfare; others,

for various reasons, are not. Among this latter category must be included

the thick and extensive layer of sheet mica found sandwiched between

two of the upper levels of the Teotihuacan Pyramid of the Sun when it

was being probed for restoration in 1906. The lack of interest which greeted this discovery, and the absence of any follow-up studies to determine its possible function is quite understandable because the mica,

which had a considerable commercial value, was removed and sold as

soon as it had been excavated. The culprit was apparently Leopoldo

Bartres, who had been commissioned to restore the time-worn pyramid

by the Mexican government.¹

There has also been a much more recent discovery of mica at

Teotihuacan (in the 'Mica Temple') and this too has passed almost

without notice. Here the reason is harder to explain because there has

been no looting and the mica remains on site.²

One of a group of buildings, the Mica Temple is situated around a patio

about 1000 feet south of the west face of the Pyramid of the Sun. Directly

under a floor paved with heavy rock slabs, archaeologists financed by the

Viking Foundation excavated two massive sheets of mica which had been

carefully and purposively installed at some extremely remote date by a

people who must have been skilled in cutting and handling this material.

The sheets are ninety feet square and form two layers, one laid directly

on top of the other.³

Mica is not a uniform substance but contains trace elements of different

metals depending on the kind of rock formation in which it is found.

Typically these metals include potassium and aluminum and also, in

varying quantities, ferrous and ferric iron, magnesium, lithium,

manganese and titanium. The trace elements in Teotihuacan's Mica

Temple indicate that the underfloor sheets belong to a type which occurs

only in Brazil, some 2000 miles away.⁴ Clearly, therefore, the builders of

the Temple must have had a specific need for this particular kind of mica

and were prepared to go to considerable lengths to obtain it, otherwise

they could have used the locally available variety more cheaply and simply.

Mica does not leap to mind as an obvious general-purpose flooring

1 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 202.

2 *Ibid. The Pyramids of Teotihuacan*, p. 16.

3 *The Pyramids of Teotihuacan*, p. 16.

4 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 8:90, and *The Lost Realms*, p. 53.

174

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

material. Its use to form layers *underneath* a floor, and thus completely

out of sight, seems especially bizarre when we remember that no other

ancient structure in the Americas, or anywhere else in the world, has

been found to contain a feature like this.⁵

It is frustrating that we will never be able to establish the exact position, let alone the purpose, of the large sheet that Bartres excavated

and removed from the Pyramid of the Sun in 1906. The two intact layers

in the Mica Temple, on the other hand, resting as they do in a place where they had no decorative function, look as though they were designed to do a particular job. Let us note in passing that mica possesses characteristics which suit it especially well for a range of technological applications. In modern industry, it is used in the construction of capacitors and is valued as a thermal and electric insulator. It is also opaque to fast neutrons and can act as a moderator in nuclear reactions.

Erasing messages from the past

Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacan

Having climbed more than 200 feet up a series of flights of stone stairs I

reached the summit and looked towards the zenith. It was midday 19

May, and the sun was directly overhead, as it would be again on 25 July.

On these two dates, and not by accident, the west face of the pyramid

was oriented precisely to the position of the setting sun.⁶

A more curious but equally deliberate effect could be observed on the

equinoxes, 20 March and 22 September. Then the passage of the sun's

rays from south to north resulted at noon in the progressive obliteration

of a perfectly straight shadow that ran along one of the lower stages of

the western façade. The whole process, from complete shadow to

complete illumination, took exactly 66.6 seconds. It had done so without

fail, year-in year-out, ever since the pyramid had been built and would

continue to do so until the giant edifice crumbled into dust.⁷

What this meant, of course, was that at least one of the many functions

of the pyramid had been to serve as a 'perennial clock', precisely

signalling the equinoxes and thus facilitating calendar corrections as and

when necessary for a people apparently obsessed, like the Maya, with the

elapse and measuring of time. Another implication was that the master-

builders of Teotihuacan must have possessed an enormous body of astronomic and geodetic data and referred to this data to set the Sun Pyramid at the precise orientation necessary to achieve the desired equinoctial effects.

5 *The Pyramids of Teotihuacan*, p. 16.

6 *Mexico: Rough Guide*, p. 217.

7 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 252.

175

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

This was planning and architecture of a high order. It had survived the

passage of the millennia and it had survived the wholesale remodelling of

much of the pyramid's outer shell conducted in the first decade of the twentieth century by the self-styled restorer, Leopoldo Bartres. In addition

to plundering precious evidence that might have helped us towards a better understanding of the purposes for which the enigmatic structure

had been built, this repulsive lackey of Mexico's corrupt dictator Porfirio

Diaz had removed the outer layer of stone, mortar and plaster *to a depth*

of more than twenty feet from the entire northern, eastern and southern

faces. The result was catastrophic: the underlying adobe surface began to

dissolve in heavy rains and to exhibit plastic flow which threatened to destroy the whole edifice. Although the slippage was halted with hasty

remedial measures, nothing could change the fact that the Sun Pyramid

had been deprived of almost all its original surface features.

By modern archaeological standards this was, of course, an

unforgivable act of desecration. Because of it, we will never learn the significance of the many sculptures, inscriptions, reliefs and artefacts that

had almost certainly been removed with those twenty feet of the outer

shell. Nor was this the only or even the most regrettable consequence of

Bartres's grotesque vandalism. There was startling evidence which

suggested that the unknown architects of the Pyramid of the Sun might

have intentionally incorporated scientific data into many of the key dimensions of the great structure. This evidence had been gathered and

extrapolated from the intact west face (which, not accidentally, was also

the face where the intended equinoctial effects could still be seen), but

thanks to Bartres, no similar information was likely to be forthcoming from the other three faces because of the arbitrary alterations imposed

upon them. Indeed, by drastically distorting the original shape and size of

so much of the pyramid, the Mexican 'restorer' had possibly deprived posterity of some of the most important lessons Teotihuacan had to teach.

Eternal numbers

The transcendental number known as π is fundamental to advanced mathematics. With a value slightly in excess of 3.14 it is the ratio of the

diameter of a circle to its circumference. In other words if the diameter of

a circle is 12 inches, the circumference of that circle will be 12 inches
x

3.14 = 37.68 inches. Likewise, since the diameter of a circle is
exactly

double the radius, we can use π to calculate the circumference of
any

circle from its radius. In this case, however, the formula is the length
of

the radius multiplied by 2π . As an illustration let us take again a
circle of

12 inches diameter. Its radius will be 6 inches and its circumference
can

be obtained as follows: 6 inches x 2 x 3.14 = 37.68 inches. Similarly
a

circle with a radius of 10 inches will have a circumference of 67.8
inches

176

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

(10 inches x 2 x 3.14) and a circle with a radius of 7 inches will have
a

circumference of 43.96 inches (7 inches x 2 x 3.14).

These formulae using the value of π for calculating circumference
from

either diameter or radius apply to all circles, no matter how large or
how

small, and also, of course, to all spheres and hemispheres. They seem

relatively simple—with hindsight. Yet their discovery, which represented a

revolutionary breakthrough in mathematics, is thought to have been

made late in human history. The orthodox view is that Archimedes in the

third century BC was the first man to calculate π correctly at 3.14.8

Scholars do not accept that any of the mathematicians of the New World

ever got anywhere near π before the arrival of the Europeans in the

sixteenth century. It is therefore disorienting to discover that the Great

Pyramid at Giza (built more than 2000 years before the birth of

Archimedes) and the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, which vastly

predates the conquest, both incorporate the value of π . They do so,

moreover, in much the same way, and in a manner which leaves no doubt

that the ancient builders on both sides of the Atlantic were thoroughly

conversant with this transcendental number.

The principal factors involved in the geometry of any pyramid are (1)

the height of the summit above the ground, and (2) the perimeter of the

monument at ground level. Where the Great Pyramid is concerned, the

ratio between the original height (481.3949 feet⁹) and the perimeter

(3023.16 feet¹⁰) turns out to be the same as the ratio between the radius

and the circumference of a circle, i.e. 2π .¹¹ Thus, if we take the pyramid's

height and multiply it by 2π (as we would with a circle's radius to

calculate its circumference) we get an accurate read-out of the

monument's perimeter (481.3949 feet $\times 2 \times 3.14 = 3023.16$ feet).

Alternatively, if we turn the equation around and start with the

circumference at ground level, we get an equally accurate read-out of the

height of the summit (3023.16 feet divided by 2 divided by 3.14 =

481.3949 feet).

Since it is almost inconceivable that such a precise mathematical

correlation could have come about by chance, we are obliged to conclude

that the builders of the Great Pyramid were indeed conversant with π and

that they deliberately incorporated its value into the dimensions of their

monument.

Now let us consider the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan. The angle of

its sides is 43.5° ¹² (as opposed to 52° in the case of the Great Pyramid¹³).

The Mexican monument has the gentler slope because the perimeter of

8 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9:415.

9 I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, Penguin, London, 1949, p. 87.

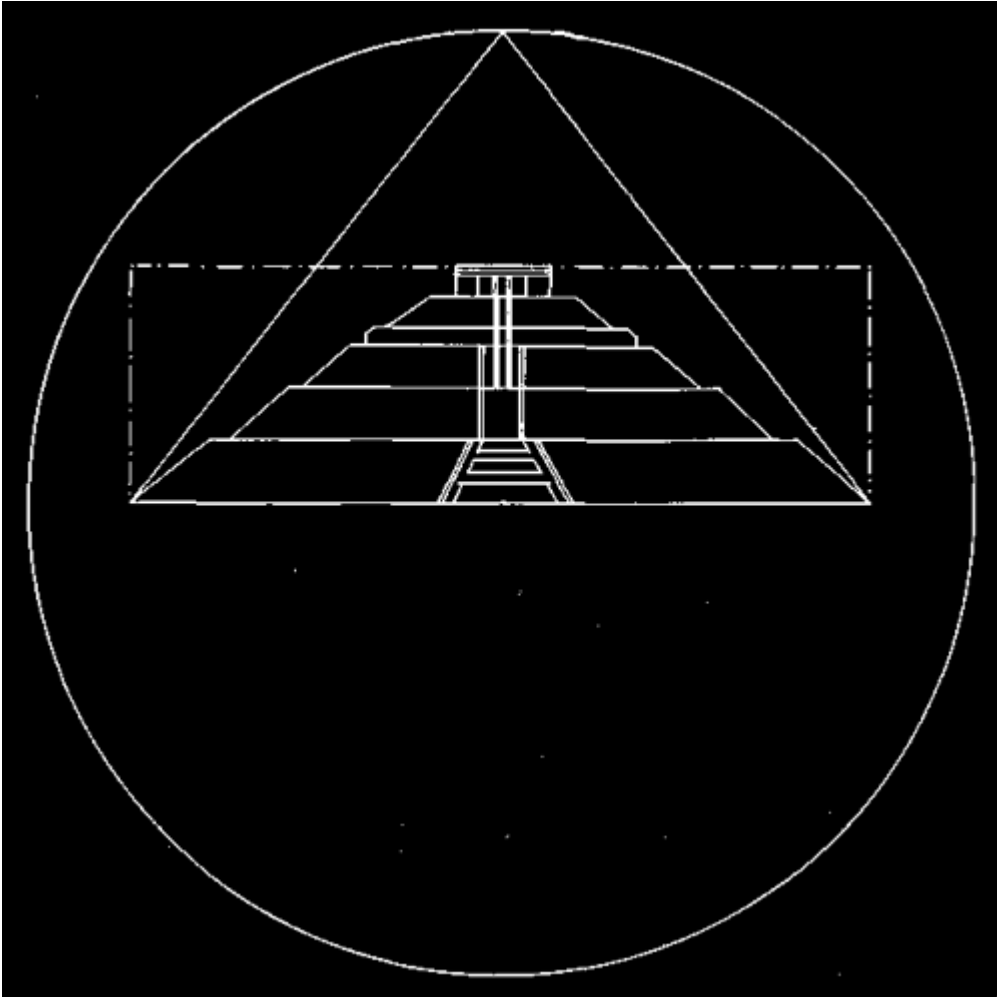
10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 219.

12 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, p. 55.

13 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 87, 219.

177



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

its base, at 2932.8 feet, is not much smaller than that of its Egyptian

counterpart while its summit is considerably lower (approximately 233.5

feet prior to Bartres's, 'restoration' 15).

The 2π formula that worked at the Great Pyramid does not work with these measurements. A 4π formula does. Thus if we take the height of

the Pyramid of the Sun (233.5 feet) and multiply it by 4π we once again

obtain a very accurate read-out of the perimeter: $233.5 \text{ feet} \times 4 \times 3.14 =$

2932.76 feet (a discrepancy of less than half an inch from the true figure

of 2932.8 feet).

This, surely, can no more be a coincidence than the π relationship

extrapolated from the dimensions of the Egyptian monument.

Moreover,

the very fact that both structures incorporate π relationships (when none

of the other pyramids on either side of the Atlantic does) strongly

suggests not only the existence of advanced mathematical knowledge in

antiquity but some sort of underlying *common purpose*.

The height of the Pyramid of the Sun $\times 4\pi =$ the perimeter of its

base. The height of the Great Pyramid at Giza $\times 2\pi =$ the perimeter of

its base.

As we have seen the desired height/perimeter ratio of the Great

14 *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico*, p. 74.

15 *Mexico*, p. 201; *The Atlas of Mysterious Places*, p. 156.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Pyramid (2π) called for the specification of a tricky and idiosyncratic angle of slope for its sides: 52° . Likewise, the desired height/perimeter

ratio of the Pyramid of the Sun (4π) called for the specification of an equally eccentric angle of slope: 43.5° . If there had been no ulterior motive, it would surely have been simpler for the Ancient Egyptian and

Mexican architects to have opted for 45° (which they could easily have

obtained and checked by bisecting a right angle).

What could have been the common purpose that led the pyramid builders on both sides of the Atlantic to such lengths to structure the value of π so precisely into these two remarkable monuments? Since

there seems to have been no direct contact between the civilizations of

Mexico and Egypt in the periods when the pyramids were built, is it not

reasonable to deduce that both, at some remote date, inherited certain

ideas from a common source?

Is it possible that the shared idea expressed in the Great Pyramid and

the Pyramid of the Sun could have to do with *spheres*, since these, like

the pyramids, are three-dimensional objects (while circles, for example,

have only two dimensions)? The desire to symbolize spheres in three-

dimensional monuments with flat surfaces would explain why so much

trouble was taken to ensure that both incorporated unmistakable *pi*

relationships. Furthermore it seems likely that the intention of the

builders of both of these monuments was not to symbolize spheres in

general but to focus attention on one sphere in particular: the planet earth.

It will be a long while before orthodox archaeologists are prepared to

accept that some peoples of the ancient world were advanced enough in

science to have possessed good information about the shape and size of

the earth. However, according to the calculations of Livio Catullo

Stecchini, an American professor of the History of Science and an

acknowledged expert on ancient measurement, the evidence for the existence of such anomalous knowledge in antiquity is irrefutable.¹⁶ Stecchini's conclusions, which relate mainly to Egypt, are particularly impressive because they are drawn from mathematical and astronomical

data which, by common consent, are beyond serious dispute.¹⁷ A fuller

examination of these conclusions, and of the nature of the data on which

they rest, is presented in Part VII. At this point, however, a few words from Stecchini may shed further light on the mystery that confronts us:

The basic idea of the Great Pyramid was that it should be a representation of the

northern hemisphere of the earth, a hemisphere projected on flat-surfaces as is

done in map-making ... The Great Pyramid was a projection on four triangular

surfaces. The apex represented the pole and the perimeter represented the

equator. This is the reason why the perimeter is in relation 2π to the height. The

¹⁶ The most accessible presentation of Stecchini's work is in the appendix he wrote for

Peter Tompkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, pp. 287-382.

17 See *The Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 95.

179

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Great Pyramid represents the northern hemisphere in a scale of 1:43,200.18

In Part VII we shall see why this scale was chosen.

Mathematical city

Rising up ahead of me as I walked towards the northern end of the Street

of the Dead, the Pyramid of the Moon, mercifully undamaged by restorers, had kept its original form as a four-stage ziggurat. The Pyramid

of the Sun, too, had consisted of four stages but Bartres had whimsically

sculpted in a fifth stage between the original third and fourth levels.

There was, however, one original feature of the Pyramid of the Sun that

Bartres had been unable to despoil: a subterranean passageway leading

from a natural cave under the west face. After its accidental discovery in

1971 this passageway was thoroughly explored. Seven feet high, it was

found to run eastwards for more than 300 feet until it reached a point close to the pyramid's geometrical centre.¹⁹ Here it debouched into a

second cave, of spacious dimensions, which had been artificially enlarged

into a shape very similar to that of a four-leaf clover. The 'leaves' were

chambers, each about sixty feet in circumference, containing a variety of

artefacts such as beautifully engraved slate discs and highly polished

mirrors. There was also a complex drainage system of interlocking segments of carved rock pipes.²⁰

This last feature was particularly puzzling because there was no known

source of water within the pyramid.²¹ The sluices, however, left little doubt that water must have been present in antiquity, most probably in

large quantities. This brought to mind the evidence for water having once

run in the Street of the Dead, the sluices and partition walls I had seen

earlier to the north of the Citadel, and Schlemmer's theory of reflecting

pools and seismic forecasting.

Indeed, the more I thought about it the more it seemed that water had

been the dominant motif at Teotihuacan. Though I had hardly registered

it that morning, the Temple of Quetzalcoatl had been decorated not only

with effigies of the Plumed Serpent but with unmistakable aquatic symbolism, notably an undulating design suggestive of waves and large

numbers of beautiful carvings of seashells. With these images in my mind, I reached the wide plaza at the base of the Pyramid of the Moon

and imagined it filled with water, as it might have been, to a depth of about ten feet. It would have looked magnificent: majestic, powerful and

18 Stecchini, in appendix to *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 378. The perimeter of the

Great Pyramid equals exactly one-half minute of arc—see *Mysteries of the Mexican*

Pyramids, p. 279.

19 *The Pyramids of Teotihuacan*, p. 20.

20 *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, pp. 335-9.

21 Ibid.

180

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

serene.

The Akapana Pyramid in far-off Tiahuanaco had also been surrounded

by water, which had been the dominant motif there—just as I now found

it to be at Teotihuacan.

I began to climb the Pyramid of the Moon. It was smaller than the

Pyramid of the Sun, indeed less than half the size, and was estimated to

be made up of about one million tons of stone and earth, as against two

and a half million tons in the case of the Pyramid of the Sun. The two

monuments, in other words, had a combined weight of three and a half

million tons. It was thought unlikely that this quantity of material could

have been manipulated by fewer than 15,000 men and it was calculated

that such a workforce would have taken at least thirty years to complete

such an enormous task.²²

Sufficient labourers would certainly have been available in the vicinity:

the Teotihuacan Mapping Project had demonstrated that the population

of the city in its heyday could have been as large as 200,000, making it a

bigger metropolis than Imperial Rome of the Caesars. The Project had

also established that the main monuments visible today covered just a

small part of the overall area of ancient Teotihuacan. At its peak the city

had extended across more than twelve square miles and had

incorporated some 50,000 individual dwellings in 2000 apartment

compounds, 600 subsidiary pyramids and temples, and 500 'factory'

areas specializing in ceramic, figurine, lapidary, shell, basalt, slate and

ground-stone work.²³

At the top level of the Pyramid of the Moon I paused and turned slowly

around. Across the valley floor, which sloped gently downhill to the

south, the whole of Teotihuacan now stretched before me—a geometrical

city, designed and built by unknown architects in the time before history

began. In the east, overlooking the arrow-straight Street of the Dead,

loomed the Pyramid of the Sun, eternally 'printing out' the mathematical

message it had been programmed with long ages ago, a message which

seemed to direct our attention to the shape of the earth. It almost looked

as though the civilization that had built Teotihuacan had made a

deliberate choice to encode complex information in enduring monuments

and to do it using a mathematical language.

Why a mathematical language?

Perhaps because, no matter what extreme changes and transformations

human civilization might go through, the radius of a circle multiplied by

2π (or half the radius multiplied by 4π) would always give the correct

figure for that circle's circumference. In other words, a mathematical

language could have been chosen for practical reasons: unlike any verbal

tongue, such a code could always be deciphered, even by people from

22 *The Riddle of the Pyramids*, pp. 188-93.

23 *The Prehistory of the Americas*, p. 281. See also *The Cities of Ancient Mexico*, p. 178

and *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids*, pp. 226-36.

181

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

unrelated cultures living thousands of years in the future.

Not for the first time I felt myself confronted by the dizzying possibility

that an entire episode in the story of mankind might have been forgotten.

Indeed it seemed to me then, as I overlooked the mathematical city of the

gods from the summit of the Pyramid of the Moon, that our species could

have been afflicted with some terrible amnesia and that the dark period

so blithely and dismissively referred to as ‘prehistory’ might turn out to

conceal unimagined truths about our own past.

What is prehistory, after all, if not a time forgotten—a time for which we

have no records? What is prehistory if not an epoch of impenetrable
obscurity through which our ancestors passed but about which we
have

no conscious remembrance? It was out of this epoch of obscurity,
configured in mathematical code along astronomical and geodetic
lines,

that Teotihuacan with all its riddles was sent down to us. And out of
that

same epoch came the great Olmec sculptures, the inexplicably
precise

and accurate calendar the Mayans inherited from their predecessors,
the

inscrutable geoglyphs of Nazca, the mysterious Andean city of

Tiahuanaco ... and so many other marvels of which we do not know
the

provenance.

It is almost as though we have awakened into the daylight of history

from a long and troubled sleep, and yet continue to be disturbed by
the

faint but haunting echoes of our dreams ...

182

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Part IV

The Mystery of the Myths

1. A Species with Amnesia

183

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 24

Echoes of Our Dreams

In some of the most powerful and enduring myths that we have inherited

from ancient times, our species seems to have retained a confused but

resonant memory of a terrifying global catastrophe.

Where do these myths come from?

Why, though they derive from unrelated cultures, are their storylines so

similar? why are they laden with common symbolism? and why do they so

often share the same stock characters and plots? If they are indeed

memories, why are there no historical records of the planetary disaster

they seem to refer to?

Could it be that *the myths themselves* are historical records? Could it be

that these cunning and immortal stories, composed by anonymous

geniuses, were the medium used to record such information and pass it

on in the time before history began?

And the ark went upon the face of the waters

There was a king, in ancient Sumer, who sought eternal life. His name

was Gilgamesh. We know of his exploits because the myths and traditions

of Mesopotamia, inscribed in cuneiform script upon tablets of baked clay,

have survived. Many thousands of these tablets, some dating back to the

beginning of the third millennium BC, have been excavated from the

sands of modern Iraq. They transmit a unique picture of a vanished

culture and remind us that even in those days of lofty antiquity human

beings preserved memories of times still more remote—times from which

they were separated by the interval of a great and terrible deluge:

I will proclaim to the world the deeds of Gilgamesh. This was the man to whom all

things were known; this was the king who knew the countries of the world. He was

wise, he saw mysteries and knew secret things, he brought us a tale of the days

before the flood. He went on a long journey, was weary, worn-out with labour,

returning he rested, he engraved on a stone the whole story.¹

The story that Gilgamesh brought back had been told to him by a certain

Utnapishtim, a king who had ruled thousands of years earlier, who had

survived the great flood, and who had been rewarded with the gift of immortality because he had preserved the seeds of humanity and of all

living things.

It was long, long ago, said Utnapishtim, when the gods dwelt on earth:

Anu, lord of the firmament, Enlil, the enforcer of divine decisions, Ishtar,

¹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Penguin Classics, London, 1988, p. 61.

184

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

goddess of war and sexual love and Ea, lord of the waters, man's natural

friend and protector.

In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a

wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour

and he said to the gods in council, 'The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep

is no longer possible by reason of the babel.' So the gods agreed to exterminate

mankind.'²

Ea, however, took pity on Utnapishtim. Speaking through the reed wall of

the king's house he told him of the imminent catastrophe and instructed

him to build a boat in which he and his family could survive:

Tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life,

despise wordly goods and save your soul ... Tear down your house, I say, and

build a boat with her dimensions in proportion—her width and length in harmony.

Put aboard the seed of all living things, into the boat.³

In the nick of time Utnapishtim built the boat as ordered. 'I loaded into

her all that I had,' he said, 'loaded her with the seed of all living things':

I put on board all my kith and kin, put on board cattle, wild beasts from open

country, all kinds of craftsmen ... The time was fulfilled. When the first light of

dawn appeared a black cloud came up from the base of the sky; it thundered

within where Adad, lord of the storm was riding ... A stupor of despair went up to

heaven when the god of the storm turned daylight to darkness, when he smashed

the land like a cup ...

On the first day the tempest blew swiftly and brought the flood ... No man could

see his fellow. Nor could the people be distinguished from the sky. Even the gods

were afraid of the flood. They withdrew; they went up to the heaven of Anu and

crouched in the outskirts. The gods cowered like curs while Ishtar cried, shrieking

aloud, 'Have I given birth unto these mine own people only to glut with their

bodies the sea as though they were fish?'⁴

Meanwhile, continued Utnapishtim:

For six days and nights the wind blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world, tempest and flood raged together like warring hosts.

When the seventh day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew

calm, the flood was stilled. I looked at the face of the world and there was silence.

The surface of the sea stretched as flat as a roof-top. All mankind had returned to

clay ... I opened a hatch and light fell on my face. Then I bowed low, I sat down

and I wept, the tears streamed down my face, for on every side was the waste of

water ... Fourteen leagues distant there appeared a mountain, and there the boat

grounded; on the mountain of Nisir the boat held fast, she held fast and did not

budge ... When the seventh day dawned I loosed a dove and let her go. She flew

away, but finding no resting place she returned. Then I loosed a swallow, and she

flew away but finding no resting place she returned. I loosed a raven, she saw that

the waters had retreated, she ate, she flew around, she cawed, and she did not

2 Ibid., p. 108.

3 Ibid., and *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 110.

4 *Myths from Mesopotamia*, pp. 112-13; *Gilgamesh*, pp. 109-11; Edmund Sollberger, *The Babylonian Legend of the Flood*, British Museum Publications, 1984, p. 26.

185

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

come back.⁵

Utnapishtim knew that it was now safe to disembark:

I poured out a libation on the mountain top ... I heaped up wood and
cane and

cedar and myrtle ... When the gods smelled the sweet savour they
gathered like

flies over the sacrifice ...⁶

These texts are not by any means the only ones to come down to us
from

the ancient land of Sumer. In other tablets—some almost 5000 years
old,

others less than 3000 years old—the ‘Noah figure’ of Utnapishtim is

known variously as Zisudra, Xisuthros or Atrahasis. Even so, he is
always

instantly recognizable as the same patriarchal character, forewarned
by

the same merciful god, who rides out the same universal flood in the

same storm-tossed ark and whose descendants repopulate the
world.

There are many obvious resemblances between the Mesopotamian

flood myth and the famous biblical story of Noah and the deluge⁷
(see

5 *Gilgamesh*, p. 111.

6 Ibid.

7 Extracts from the *Book of Genesis*, Chapters Six, Seven and Eight:

God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination

of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he

had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart ... And God said, The end of

all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence ... And behold I, even I,

do bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life

from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die.

Saving only Noah and his family (whom he instructed to build a great survival ship 450

feet long x 75 feet wide x 45 feet high), and ordering the Hebrew patriarch to gather

together breeding pairs of every living creature so that they too might be saved, the

Lord then sent the flood:

In the selfsame day entered Noah and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's

wife, and the wives of his sons with them, into the Ark—they and every beast after his

kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the

earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went

in unto Noah into the Ark, two and two of all flesh wherein is the breath of life. And they

that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded, and the Lord

shut them in.

And the flood was upon the earth; and the waters increased and bare up the ark, and it

was lifted up above the earth. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly

upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the high hills that

were under the whole heaven were covered ... And every man was destroyed, all in

whose nostrils was the breath of life, and Noah only remained alive, and they that were

with him in the ark.

In due course, 'in the seventh month in the seventeenth day of the month, the Ark

came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until

the tenth month':

And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark

which he had made: And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro until the

waters were dried up from the earth. Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the

waters were abated from off the face of the ground; but the dove found no rest for the

sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face

of the whole earth.

And he stayed yet another seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark.

186

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

note). Scholars argue endlessly about the nature of these resemblances.

What really matters, however, is that in each sphere of influence the same

solemn tradition has been preserved for posterity—a tradition which tells,

in graphic language, of a global catastrophe and of the near-total annihilation of mankind.

Central America

The identical message was preserved in the Valley of Mexico, far away

across the world from Mounts Ararat and Nisir. There, culturally and geographically isolated from Judaeo-Christian influences, long ages before the arrival of the Spaniards, stories were told of a great deluge. As

the reader will recall from Part III, it was believed that this deluge had swept over the entire earth at the end of the Fourth Sun: 'Destruction came in the form of torrential rain and floods. The mountains disappeared and men were transformed into fish ...'⁸

According to Aztec mythology only two human beings survived: a man,

Coxcoxtli, and his wife, Xochiquetzal, who had been forewarned of the

cataclysm by a god. They escaped in a huge boat they had been instructed to build and came to ground on the peak of a tall mountain.

There they descended and afterwards had many children who were dumb

until the time when a dove on top of a tree gave them the gift of

languages. These languages differed so much that the children could not

understand one another.⁹

A related Central American tradition, that of the Mechoacanese, is in

even more striking conformity with the story as we have it in *Genesis* and

in the Mesopotamian sources. According to this tradition, the god

Tezcatlipoca determined to destroy all mankind with a flood, saving only

a certain Tezpi who embarked in a spacious vessel with his wife, his

children and large numbers of animals and birds, as well as supplies of

grains and seeds, the preservation of which were essential to the future

subsistence of the human race. The vessel came to rest on an exposed

mountain top after Tezcatlipoca had decreed that the waters of the flood

should retire. Wishing to find out whether it was now safe for him to

disembark, Tezpi sent out a vulture which, feeding on the carcasses with

which the earth was now strewn, did not return. The man then sent out

other birds, of which only the hummingbird came back, with a leafy

branch in its beak. With this sign that the land had begun to renew itself,

And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf

plucked off; so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth ... And Noah

went forth ... and builded an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings on the

altar. And the Lord smelled the sweet savour ...

8 *Maya History and Religion*, p. 332.

9 Sir J. G. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend*

and Law (Abridged Edition), Macmillan, London, 1923, p. 107.

187

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Tezpi and his family went forth from their ark, multiplied and

repopulated the earth. 10

Memories of a terrible flood resulting from divine displeasure are also

preserved in the *Popol Vuh*. According to this archaic text, the Great God

decided to create humanity soon after the beginning of time. It was an

experiment and he began it with 'figures made of wood that looked like

men and talked like men'. These creatures fell out of favour because

'they did not remember their Creator':

And so a flood was brought about by the Heart of Heaven; a great flood was

formed which fell on the heads of the wooden creatures ... A heavy resin fell from

the sky ... the face of the earth was darkened and a black rain began to fall by day

and by night ... The wooden figures were annihilated, destroyed, broken up and

killed.'¹¹

Not everyone perished, however. Like the Aztecs and the

Mechoacanese, the Maya of the Yucatan and Guatemala believed that a

Noah figure and his wife, 'the Great Father and the Great Mother', had

survived the flood to populate the land anew, thus becoming the ancestors of all subsequent generations of humanity.¹²

South America

Moving to South America, we encounter the Chibchas of central Colombia.

According to their myths, they had originally lived as savages, without

laws, agriculture or religion. Then one day there appeared among them

an old man of a different race. He wore a thick long beard and his name

was Bochica. He taught the Chibchas how to build huts and live together in

society.

His wife, who was very beautiful and named Chia, appeared after him,

but she was wicked and enjoyed thwarting her husband's altruistic

efforts. Since she could not overcome his power directly, she used

magical means to cause a great flood in which the majority of the

population died. Bochica was very angry and exiled Chia from the earth to

the sky, where she became the moon given the task of lighting the

nights. He also caused the waters of the flood to dissipate and brought

down the few survivors from the mountains where they had taken refuge.

Thereafter he gave them laws, taught them to cultivate the land and instituted the worship of the sun with periodic festivals, sacrifices and pilgrimages. He then divided the power to govern among two chiefs and

spent the remainder of his days on earth living in quiet contemplation as

10 Lenormant, writing in *Contemporary Review*, cited in *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*,

p. 99.

11 *Popol Vuh*, p. 90.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

188

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

an ascetic. When he ascended to heaven he became a god.¹³

Farther south still, the Canarians, an Indian tribe of Ecuador, relate an

ancient story of a flood from which two brothers escaped by going to the

top of a high mountain. As the water rose the mountain grew higher, so

that the two brothers survived the disaster.¹⁴

When they were discovered, the Tupinamba Indians of Brazil venerated

a series of civilizing or creator heroes. The first of these heroes was

Monan (ancient, old) who was said to have been the creator of mankind

but who then destroyed the world with flood and fire ...¹⁵

Peru, as we saw in Part II, is particularly rich in flood legends. A typical

story tells of an Indian who was warned by a llama of a deluge. Together

man and llama fled to a high mountain called Vilca-Coto:

When they reached the top of the mountain they saw that all kinds of birds and

animals had already taken refuge there. The sea began to rise, and covered all the

plains and mountains except the top of Vilca-Coto; and even there the waves

dashed up so high that the animals were forced to crowd into a narrow area ...

Five days later the water ebbed, and the sea returned to its bed. But all human

beings except one were drowned, and from him are descended all the nations on

earth.¹⁶

The Araucnians of pre-Colombian Chile preserved a tradition that there

was once a flood which very few Indians escaped. The survivors took

refuge on a high mountain called Thegtheg ('the thundering' or 'the glittering') which had three peaks and the ability to float on water.¹⁷

In the far south of the continent a Yamana legend from Tierra del Fuego

states: 'The moon woman caused the flood. This was at the time of the

great upheaval ... Moon was filled with hatred towards human beings ...

At that time everybody drowned with the exception of those few who were able to escape to the five mountain peaks that the water did not cover.'¹⁸

Another Tierra del Fuegan tribe, the Pehuenche, associate the flood with a prolonged period of darkness: 'The sun and the moon fell from the

sky and the world stayed that way, without light, until finally two giant condors carried both the sun and the moon back up to the sky.'¹⁹

13 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 440; *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World*, p.

105.

14 *Folklore in the Old Testament*, p. 104.

15 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 445.

16 *Folklore in the Old Testament*, p. 105.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

18 John Bierhorst, *The Mythology of South America*, William Morrow & Co., New York, 1988, p. 165.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 165-6.

189

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

North America

Meanwhile, at the other end of the Americas, among the Inuit of Alaska,

there existed the tradition of a terrible flood, accompanied by an

earthquake, which swept so rapidly over the face of the earth that only a

few people managed to escape in their canoes or take refuge on the tops

of the highest mountains, petrified with terror.²⁰

The Luiseno of lower California had a legend that a flood covered the mountains and destroyed most of mankind. Only a few were saved because they fled to the highest peaks which were spared when all the rest of the world was inundated. The survivors remained there until the flood ended.²¹ Farther north similar flood myths were recorded amongst the Hurons.²² And a legend of the Montagnais, belonging to the Algonquin family, related how Michabo, or the Great Hare, re-established the world after the flood with the help of a raven, an otter and a muskrat.²³

Lynd's *History of the Dakotas*, an authoritative work of the nineteenth century which preserved many indigenous traditions that would otherwise have been lost, reports an Iroquois myth that 'the sea and waters had at one time infringed upon the land, so that all human life was destroyed'.

The Chickasaws asserted that the world had been destroyed by water 'but

that one family was saved and two animals of every kind'. The Sioux also

spoke of a time when there was no dry land and when all men disappeared from existence.²⁴

Water water everywhere

How far and how widely across the myth memories of mankind do the

ripples of the great flood spread?

Very widely indeed. More than 500 deluge legends are known around

the world and, in a survey of 86 of these (20 Asiatic, 3 European, 7

African, 46 American and 10 from Australia and the Pacific), the specialist

researcher Dr Richard Andree concluded that 62 were entirely independent of the Mesopotamian and Hebrew accounts.²⁵

²⁰ *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 426.

²¹ *Folklore in the Old Testament*, pp. 111-12.

²² *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 431.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 428-9; *Folklore in the Old Testament*, p. 115. In this version the character of

Michabo is called Messou.

24 From Lynd's *History of the Dakotas*, cited in *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World*, p. 117.

25 Frederick A. Filby, *The Flood Reconsidered: A Review of the Evidences of Geology*,

Archaeology, Ancient Literature and the Bible, Pickering and Inglis Ltd., London, 1970,

p. 58. Andree was an eminent German geographer and anthropologist. His monograph

on diluvial traditions is described by J. G. Frazer (in *Folklore in the Old Testament*, pp.

46-7) as 'a model of sound learning and good sense set forth with the utmost clearness

and conciseness ...'

190

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

For example, early Jesuit scholars who were among the first Europeans

to visit China had the opportunity in the Imperial Library to study a vast

work, consisting of 4320 volumes, said to have been handed down from

ancient times and to contain 'all knowledge'. This great book included a

number of traditions which told of the consequences that followed 'when

mankind rebelled against the high gods and the system of the universe

fell into disorder': 'The planets altered their courses. The sky sank lower

towards the north. The sun, moon and stars changed their motions. The

earth fell to pieces and the waters in its bosom rushed upwards with violence and overflowed the earth.'²⁶

In the Malaysian tropical forest the Chewong people believe that every

so often their own world, which they call Earth Seven, turns upside down

so that everything is flooded and destroyed. However, through the agency of the Creator God Tohan, the flat new surface of what had previously been the underside of Earth Seven is moulded into mountains,

valleys and plains. New trees are planted, and new humans born.²⁷

A flood myth of Laos and northern Thailand has it that beings called the

Thens lived in the upper kingdom long ages ago, while the masters of the

lower world were three great men, Pu Leng Seung, Khun K'an and Khun

K'et. One day the Thens announced that before eating any meal people

should give them a part of their food as a sign of respect. The people refused and in a rage the Thens created a flood which devastated the

whole earth. The three great men built a raft, on top of which they made

a small house, and embarked with a number of women and children. In

this way they and their descendants survived the deluge.²⁸

In similar fashion the Karens of Burma have traditions of a global deluge from which two brothers were saved on a raft.²⁹ Such a deluge is

also part of the mythology of Viet Nam, where a brother and a sister are

said to have survived in a great wooden chest which also contained two

of every kind of animal.³⁰

Several aboriginal Australian peoples, especially those whose traditional

homelands are along the tropical northern coast, ascribe their origins to a

great flood which swept away the previous landscape and society.

Meanwhile, in the origin myths of a number of other tribes, the cosmic

serpent Yurlunggur (associated with the rainbow) is held responsible for

the deluge.³¹

There are Japanese traditions according to which the Pacific islands of

Oceania were formed after the waters of a great deluge had receded.³² In

Oceania itself a myth of the native inhabitants of Hawaii tells how the

²⁶ Reported in Charles Berlitz, *The Lost Ship of Noah*, W. H. Allen, London, 1989, p. 126.

²⁷ *World Mythology*, pp. 26-7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

²⁹ *Folklore in the Old Testament*, p. 81.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *World Mythology*, p. 280.

³² E. Sykes, *Dictionary Of Non-Classical Mythology*, London, 1961, p. 119.

191

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

world was destroyed by a flood and later recreated by a god named

Tangaloa. The Samoans believe that there was once an inundation that

wiped out almost all mankind. It was survived only by two human beings

who put to sea in a boat which eventually came to rest in the Samoan

archipelago.³³

Greece, India and Egypt

On the other side of the world, Greek mythology too is haunted by

memories of a deluge. Here, however (as in Central America) the

inundation is not viewed as an isolated event but as one of a series of

destructions and remakings of the world. The Aztecs and the Maya spoke

in terms of successive 'Suns' or epochs (of which our own was thought to

be the Fifth and last). In similar fashion the oral traditions of Ancient

Greece, collected and set down in writing by Hesiod in the eighth century

BC, related that prior to the present creation there had been four earlier

races of men on earth. Each of these was thought more advanced than

the one that followed it. And each, at the appointed hour, had been

‘swallowed up’ in a geological cataclysm.

The first and most ancient creation had been mankind’s ‘golden race’ who had ‘lived like the gods, free from care, without trouble or woe ...

With ageless limbs they revelled at their banquets ... When they died it

was as men overcome by sleep.’ With the passing of time, and at the command of Zeus, this golden race eventually ‘sank into the depths of

the earth’. It was succeeded by the ‘silver race’ which was supplanted by

the ‘bronze race’, which was replaced by the race of ‘heroes’, which was

followed by the ‘iron’ race—our own—the fifth and most recent creation.³⁴

It is the fate of the bronze race that is of particular interest to us here.

Described in the myths as having ‘the strength of giants, and mighty

hands on their mighty limbs’,³⁵ these formidable men were exterminated

by Zeus, king of the gods, as a punishment for the misdeeds of

Prometheus, the rebellious Titan who had presented humanity with the

gift of fire.³⁶ The mechanism the vengeful deity used to sweep the earth

clean was an overwhelming flood.

In the most widespread version of the story Prometheus impregnated a

human female. She bore him a son named Deucalion, who ruled over the

country of Phthia, in Thessaly, and took to wife Pyrrha, 'the red-blonde',

daughter of Epimetheus and Pandora. When Zeus reached his fateful

decision to destroy the bronze race, Deucalion, forewarned by

Prometheus, made a wooden box, stored in it 'all that was necessary',

33 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, pp. 460, 466.

34 C. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1974, pp. 226-9.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *World Mythology*, pp. 130-1.

192

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

and climbed into it with Pyrrha. The king of the gods caused mighty rains

to pour from heaven, flooding the greater part of the earth. All mankind

perished in this deluge, save a few who had fled to the highest mountains. 'It also happened at this time that the mountains of Thessaly

were split asunder, and the whole country as far as the Isthmus and the

Peloponnese became a single sheet of water.'

Deucalion and Pyrrha floated over this sea in their box for nine days

and nights, finally landing on Mount Parnassus. There, after the rains had

ceased, they disembarked and sacrificed to the gods. In response Zeus

sent Hermes to Deucalion with permission to ask for whatever he wished.

He wished for human beings. Zeus then bade him take stones and throw

them over his shoulder. The stones Deucalion threw became men, and

those that Pyrrha threw became women.³⁷

As the Hebrews looked back on Noah, so the Greeks of ancient

historical times looked back upon Deucalion—as the ancestor of their

nation and as the founder of numerous towns and temples.³⁸

A similar figure was revered in Vedic India more than 3000 years ago.

One day (the story goes)

when a certain wise man named Manu was making his ablutions, he found in the

hollow of his hand a tiny little fish which begged him to allow it to live. Taking pity

on it he put it in a jar. The next day, however, it had grown so much bigger that

he had to carry it to a lake. Soon the lake was too small. 'Throw me into the sea,'

said the fish [which was in reality a manifestation of the god Vishnu] 'and I shall

be more comfortable.' Then he warned Manu of a coming deluge. He sent him a

large ship, with orders to load it with two of every living species and the seeds of

every plant, and then to go on board himself.'³⁹

Manu had only just carried out these orders when the ocean rose and

submerged everything, and nothing was to be seen but Vishnu in his fish

form—now a huge, one-horned creature with golden scales. Manu

moored his ark to the horn of the fish and Vishnu towed it across the

brimming waters until it came to rest on the exposed peak of 'the

Mountain of the North':⁴⁰

The fish said, 'I have saved thee; fasten the vessel to a tree, that the water may not

sweep it away while thou art on the mountain; and in proportion as the waters

decrease thou shalt descend.' Manu descended with the waters. The Deluge had

carried away all creatures and Manu remained alone.⁴¹

With him, and with the animals and plants he had saved from destruction,

began a new age of the world. After a year there emerged from the waters a woman who announced herself as 'the daughter of Manu'. The

couple married and produced children, thus becoming the ancestors of

³⁷ *The Gods of the Greeks*, pp. 226-9.

³⁸ *World Mythology*, pp. 130-1.

³⁹ *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 362.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *Satapatha Brahmana*, (trans. Max Muller), cited in *Atlantis: the Antediluvian*

World, p. 87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* See also *Folklore in the Old Testament*, pp. 78-9.

193

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the present race of mankind.⁴²

Last but by no means least, Ancient Egyptian traditions also refer to a

great flood. A funerary text discovered in the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I, for

example, tells of the destruction of sinful humanity by a deluge.⁴³ The

reasons for this catastrophe are set out in Chapter CLXXV of the *Book of*

the Dead, which attributes the following speech to the Moon God Thoth:

They have fought fights, they have upheld strifes, they have done evil, they have

created hostilities, they have made slaughter, they have caused trouble and

oppression ... [Therefore] I am going to blot out everything which I have made.

This earth shall enter into the watery abyss by means of a raging flood, and will

become even as it was in primeval time.⁴⁴

On the trail of a mystery

With the words of Thoth we have come full circle to the Sumerian and

biblical floods. 'The earth was filled with violence', says *Genesis*:

And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had

corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, 'The end of all flesh is

come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold I

will destroy them with the earth.'⁴⁵

Like the flood of Deucalion, the flood of Manu, and the flood that

destroyed the Aztecs' 'Fourth Sun', the biblical deluge was the end of a

world age. A new age succeeded it: our own, populated by the

descendants of Noah. From the very beginning, however, it was

understood that this age too would in due course come to a catastrophic

end. As the old song puts it, 'God gave Noah the rainbow sign; no more

water, the fire next time.'

The Scriptural source for this prophecy of world destruction is to be

found in 2 Peter 3:

We must be careful to remember that during the last days there are bound to be

people who will be scornful and [who will say], 'Everything goes on as it has since

it began at the creation'. They are choosing to forget that there were heavens at

the beginning, and that the earth was formed by the word of God out of water and

between the waters, so that the world of that time was destroyed by being flooded

by water. But by the same word, the present sky and earth are destined for fire,

and are only being reserved until Judgement Day so that all sinners may be

destroyed ... The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, and then with a

roar the sky will vanish, the elements will catch fire and fall apart, and the earth

42 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 7:798. *The Rig Veda*, Penguin Classics, London, 1981, pp. 100-1.

43 *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 48.

44 From the Theban Recension of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, quoted in *From Fetish*

to God in Ancient Egypt, p. 198.

45 *Genesis*, 6:11-13.

194

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

and all that it contains will be burnt up.⁴⁶

The Bible, therefore, envisages two ages of the world, our own being the

second and last. Elsewhere, in other cultures, different numbers of creations and destructions are recorded. In China, for instance, the perished ages are called *kis*, ten of which are said to have elapsed from

the beginning of time until Confucius. At the end of each *kis*, 'in a general convulsion of nature, the sea is carried out of its bed, mountains

spring up out of the ground, rivers change their course, human beings

and everything are ruined, and the ancient traces effaced ...'47

Buddhist scriptures speak of 'Seven Suns', each brought to an end by

water, fire or wind.⁴⁸ At the end of the Seventh Sun, the current 'world

cycle', it is expected that the 'earth will break into flames'.⁴⁹ Aboriginal

traditions of Sarawak and Sabah recall that the sky was once 'low' and tell

us that 'six Suns perished ... at present the world is illuminated by the

seventh Sun'.⁵⁰ Similarly, the Sibylline Books speak of nine Suns that are

nine ages' and prophesy two ages yet to come—those of the eighth and

the ninth Sun.'⁵¹

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the Hopi Indians of Arizona (who are distant relatives of the Aztecs⁵²) record three previous Suns,

each culminating in a great annihilation followed by the gradual re-emergence of mankind. In Aztec cosmology, of course, there were four

Suns prior to our own. Such minor differences concerning the precise

number of destructions and creations envisaged in this or that mythology

should not distract us from the remarkable convergence of ancient traditions evident here. All over the world these traditions appear to commemorate a widespread series of catastrophes. In many cases the

character of each successive cataclysm is obscured by the use of poetic

language and the piling up of metaphor and symbols. Quite frequently,

also, at least two different kinds of disaster may be portrayed as having

occurred simultaneously (most frequently floods and earthquakes, but

sometimes fire and a terrifying darkness).

All this contributes to the creation of a confused and jumbled picture.

The myths of the Hopi, however, stand out for their straightforwardness

and simplicity. What they tell us is this:

The first world was destroyed, as a punishment for human misdemeanours, by an

all-consuming *fire* that came from above and below. The second world ended

when the terrestrial globe toppled from its axis and everything was covered with

46 2 *Peter* 3:3-10.

47 See H. Murray, J. Crawford et al., *An Historical and Descriptive Account of China*, 2nd

edition, 1836, volume I, p. 40. See also G. Schlegel, *Uranographie chinoise*, 1875, p.

740.

48 Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, p. 322.

49 Ibid.

50 Dixon, *Oceanic Mythology*, p. 178.

51 *Worlds in Collision*, p. 35.

52 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 6:53.

195

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

ice. The third world ended in a universal *flood*. The present world is the fourth. Its fate will depend on whether or not its inhabitants behave in accordance with the

Creator's plans.⁵³

We are on the trail of a mystery here. And while we may never hope to

fathom the plans of the Creator we should be able to reach a judgement

concerning the riddle of our converging myths of global destruction.

Through these myths the voices of the ancients speak to us directly.

What are they trying to say?

⁵³ *World Mythology*, p. 26. Details of the Hopi world destruction myths are in Frank

Waters, *The Book of the Hopi*, Penguin, London, 1977.

196

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 25

The Many Masks of the Apocalypse

Like the Hopi Indians of North America, the Avestic Aryans of pre-Islamic

Iran believed that there were three epochs of creation prior to our own. In

the first epoch men were pure and sinless, tall and long lived, but at its

close the Evil One declared war against Ahura Mazda, the holy god, and a

tumultuous cataclysm ensued. During the second epoch the Evil One was

unsuccessful. In the third good and evil were exactly balanced. In the

fourth epoch (the present age of the world), evil triumphed at the outset

and has maintained its supremacy ever since.¹

The end of the fourth epoch is predicted soon, but it is the cataclysm at

the end of the first epoch that interests us here. It is not a flood, and yet

it converges in so many ways with so many global flood traditions that

some connection is strongly suggested.

The Avestic scriptures take us back to a time of paradise on earth, when

the remote ancestors of the ancient Iranian people lived in the fabled

Airyana Vaejo, the first good and happy creation of Ahura Mazda that

flourished in the first age of the world: the mythical birthplace and original home of the Aryan race.

In those days Airyana Vaejo enjoyed a mild and productive climate with

seven months of summer and five of winter. Rich in wildlife and in crops,

its meadows flowing with streams, this garden of delights was converted

into an uninhabitable wasteland of ten months' winter and only two

months summer as a result of the onslaught of Angra Mainyu, the Evil

One:

The first of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created was the

Airyana Vaejo ... Then Angra Mainyu, who is full of death, created an opposition to

the same, a mighty serpent and snow. Ten months of winter are there now, two

months of summer, and these are cold as to the water, cold as to the earth, cold

as to the trees ... There all around falls deep snow; that is the direst of plagues ...'²

The reader will agree that a sudden and drastic change in the climate of

Airyana Vaejo is indicated. The Avestic scriptures leave us in no doubt

about this. Earlier they describe a meeting of the celestial gods called by

Ahura Mazda, and tell us that 'the fair Yima, the good shepherd of high

renown in the Airyana Vaejo', attended this meeting with all his excellent

mortals.

¹ *The Bundahish* Chapters I, XXXI, XXXIV, cited in William F. Warren, *Paradise Found: The*

Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole, Houghton, Mifflin and Co., Boston, 1885, p.

282.

² *Vendidad*, Fargard I, cited in Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *The Arctic Home in the*

Vedas, Tilak Publishers, Poona, 1956, pp. 340-1.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

It is at this point that the strange parallels with the traditions of the biblical flood begin to crop up, for Ahura Mazda takes advantage of the

meeting to warn Yima of what is about to happen as a result of the powers of the Evil One:

And Ahura Mazda spake unto Yima saying: 'Yima the fair ... Upon the material

world a fatal winter is about to descend, that shall bring a vehement, destroying

frost. Upon the corporeal world will the evil of winter come, wherefore snow will

fall in great abundance. ...

'And all three sorts of beasts shall perish, those that live in the wilderness, and

those that live on the tops of the mountains, and those that live in the depths of

the valleys under the shelter of stables.

'Therefore make thee a *var* [a hypogeum or underground enclosure] the length of

a riding ground to all four corners. Thither bring thou the representatives of every

kind of beast, great and small, of the cattle, of the beasts of burden, and of men,

of dogs, of birds, and of the red burning fires.³

'There shalt thou make water flow. Thou shalt put birds in the trees along the

water's edge, in verdure which is everlasting. There put specimens of all plants,

the loveliest and most fragrant, and of all fruits the most succulent. All these

kinds of things and creatures shall not perish as long as they are in the *var*. But

put there no deformed creature, nor impotent, nor mad, neither wicked, nor

deceitful, nor rancorous, nor jealous; nor a man with irregular teeth, nor a leper

...'4

Apart from the scale of the enterprise there is only one real difference

between Yima's divinely inspired *var* and Noah's divinely inspired ark: the

ark is a means of surviving a terrible and devastating flood which will destroy every living creature by drowning the world in water; the *var* is a

means of surviving a terrible and devastating 'winter' which will destroy

every living creature by covering the earth with a freezing blanket of ice

and snow.

In the *Bundahish*, another of the Zoroastrian scriptures (believed to incorporate ancient material from a lost part of the original *Avesta*), more

information is provided on the cataclysm of glaciation that overwhelmed

Airyana Vaejo. When Angra Mainyu sent the 'vehement destroying frost',

he also 'assaulted and deranged the sky'.⁵ The *Bundahish* tells us that

this assault enabled the Evil One to master 'one third of the sky and overspread it with darkness' as the encroaching ice sheets tightened their

grip.⁶

³ *Vendidad*, Fargard II, cited in *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, pp. 300, 353-4.

⁴ *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 320.

⁵ West, *Pahlavi Texts Part I*, p. 17, London, 1880.

⁶ *Ibid.*; Justi, *Der Bundahish*, Leipzig, 1868, p. 5.

198

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Indescribable cold, fire, earthquakes and derangement of

the skies

The Avestic Aryans of Iran, who are known to have migrated to western

Asia from some other, distant homeland,⁷ are not the only possessors of

archaic traditions which echo the basic setting of the great flood in ways

unlikely to be coincidental. Indeed, though these are most commonly associated with the deluge, the familiar themes of the divine warning, and of the salvation of a remnant of mankind from a universal disaster,

are also found in many different parts of the world in connection with the

sudden onset of glacial conditions.

In South America, for example, Toba Indians of the Gran Chaco region

that sprawls across the modern borders of Paraguay, Argentina and Chile,

still repeat an ancient myth concerning the advent of what they call 'the

Great Cold'. Forewarning comes from a semi-divine hero figure named

Asin:

Asin told a man to gather as much wood as he could and to cover his hut with a

thick layer of thatch, because a time of great cold was coming. As soon as the hut

had been prepared Asin and the man shut themselves inside and waited. When the

great cold set in, shivering people arrived to beg a firebrand from them. Asin was

hard and gave embers only to those who had been his friends. The people were

freezing, and they cried the whole night. At midnight they were all dead, young

and old, men and women ... this period of ice and sleet lasted for a long time and

all the fires were put out. Frost was as thick as leather.⁸

As in the Avestic traditions it seems that the great cold was accompanied

by great darkness. In the words of one Toba elder, these afflictions were

sent 'because when the earth is full of people it has to change. The

population has to be thinned out to save the world ... In the case of the

long darkness the sun simply disappeared and the people starved. As

they ran out of food, they began eating their children. Eventually they all

died ...⁹

The Mayan *Popol Vuh* associates the flood, with 'much hail, black rain

and mist, and indescribable cold'.¹⁰ It also says that this was a period

when 'it was cloudy and twilight all over the world ... the faces of the sun

and the moon were covered.'¹¹ Other Maya sources confirm that these

strange and terrible phenomena were experienced by mankind, 'in the

time of the ancients. The earth darkened ... It happened that the sun was

still bright and clear. Then, at midday, it got dark ...¹² Sunlight did not

return till the twenty-sixth year after the flood.'¹³

⁷ *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, p. 390ff.

⁸ *The Mythology of South America*, pp. 143-4

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁰ *Popol Vuh*, p. 178.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

12 *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*, p. 41.

13 *Maya History and Religion*, p. 333.

199

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The reader may recall that many deluge and catastrophe myths contain

references not only to the onset of a great darkness but to other changes

in the appearance of the heavens. In Tierra del Fuego, for instance, it was

said that the sun and the moon 'fell from the sky'¹⁴ and in China that 'the

planets altered their courses. The sun, moon and stars changed their

motions.'¹⁵ The Incas believed that 'in ancient times the Andes were split

apart when the sky made war on the earth.'¹⁶ The Tarahumara of northern

Mexico have preserved world destruction legends based on a change in

the sun's path.¹⁷ An African myth from the lower Congo states that 'long

ago the sun met the moon and threw mud at it, which made it less bright.

When this meeting happened there was a great flood ...'18 The Cahto

Indians of California say simply that 'the sky fell'.¹⁹ And ancient Graeco-

Roman myths tell that the flood of Deucalion was immediately preceded

by awesome celestial events.²⁰ These events are graphically symbolized in

the story of how Phaeton, child of the sun, harnessed his father's chariot

but was unable to guide it along his father's course:

Soon the fiery horses felt how their reins were in an unpractised hand. Rearing and

swerving aside, they left their wonted way; then all the earth was amazed to see

that the glorious Sun, instead of holding his stately, beneficent course across the

sky, seemed to speed crookedly overhead and to rush down in wrath like a

meteor.'²¹

This is not the place to speculate on what may have caused the alarming

disturbances in the patterns of the heavens that are linked with cataclysm

legends from all over the world. For our purposes at present, it is

sufficient to note that such traditions seem to refer to the same 'derangement of the sky' that accompanied the fatal winter and spreading ice sheets described in the Iranian *Avesta*.²² Other linkages

occur. Fire, for example, often follows or precedes the flood. In the case

of Phaeton's adventure with the Sun, 'the grass withered; the crops were

scorched; the woods went up in fire and smoke; then beneath them the

bare earth cracked and crumbled and the blackened rocks burst asunder

under the heat.'²³

Volcanism and earthquakes are also mentioned frequently in

association with the flood, particularly in the Americas. The Araucanians

14 See Chapter Twenty-four.

15 Ibid.

16 *National Geographic Magazine*, June 1962, p. 87.

17 *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*, p. 79.

18 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 481.

19 *The Mythology of all Races*, Cooper Square Publishers Inc., New York, 1964, volume X,

p. 222.

20 See particularly the writings of Hyginus, cited in *Paradise Found*, p. 195. See also *The Gods of the Greeks*, p. 195.

21 *The Illustrated Guide to Classical Mythology*, p. 15-17.

22 The Iranian *Bundahish* tells us that the planets ran against the sky and created

confusion in the entire cosmos.

23 *The Illustrated Guide to Classical Mythology*, p. 17.

200

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

of Chile say quite explicitly that ‘the flood was the result of volcanic eruptions accompanied by violent earthquakes.’²⁴ The Mam Maya of

Santiago Chimaltenango in the western highlands of Guatemala retain

memories of ‘a flood of burning pitch’ which, they say, was one of the instruments of world destruction.²⁵ And in the Gran Chaco of Argentina,

the Mataco Indians tell of ‘a black cloud that came from the south at the

time of the flood and covered the whole sky. Lightning struck and thunder was heard. Yet the drops that fell were not like rain. They were

like fire ...'26

A monster chased the sun

There is one ancient culture that perhaps preserves more vivid memories

in its myths than any other; that of the so-called Teutonic tribes of

Germany and Scandinavia, a culture best remembered through the songs

of the Norse scalds and sages. The stories those songs retell have their

roots in a past which may be much older than scholars imagine and

which combine familiar images with strange symbolic devices and

allegorical language to recall a cataclysm of awesome magnitude:

In a distant forest in the east an aged giantess brought into the world a whole

brood of young wolves whose father was Fenrir. One of these monsters chased the

sun to take possession of it. The chase was for long in vain, but each season the

wolf grew in strength, and at last he reached the sun. Its bright rays were one by

one extinguished. It took on a blood red hue, then entirely disappeared.

Thereafter the world was enveloped in hideous winter. Snow-storms descended

from all points of the horizon. War broke out all over the earth.
Brother slew

brother, children no longer respected the ties of blood. It was a time
when men

were no better than wolves, eager to destroy each other. Soon the
world was going

to sink into the abyss of nothingness.

Meanwhile the wolf Fenrir, whom the gods had long ago so carefully
chained up,

broke his bonds at last and escaped. He shook himself and the world
trembled.

The ash tree Yggdrasil [envisaged as the axis of the earth] was
shaken from its

roots to its topmost branches. Mountains crumbled or split from top
to bottom,

and the dwarfs who had their subterranean dwellings in them sought
desperately

and in vain for entrances so long familiar but now disappeared.

Abandoned by the gods, men were driven from their hearths and the
human race

was swept from the surface of the earth. The earth itself was
beginning to lose its

shape. Already the stars were coming adrift from the sky and falling
into the

gaping void. They were like swallows, weary from too long a voyage,
who drop

and sink into the waves.

The giant Surt set the entire earth on fire; the universe was no longer
more than

24 *Folklore in the Old Testament*, p. 101.

25 *Maya History and Religion*, p. 336.

26 *The Mythology of South America*, pp. 140-2.

201

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

an immense furnace. Flames spurted from fissures in the rocks;
everywhere there

was the hissing of steam. All living things, all plant life, were blotted
out. Only the

naked soil remained, but like the sky itself the earth was no more
than cracks and

crevasses.

And now all the rivers, all the seas, rose and overflowed. From every
side waves

lashed against waves. They swelled and boiled slowly over all
things. The earth

sank beneath the sea ...

Yet not all men perished in the great catastrophe. Enclosed in the wood itself of

the ash tree Yggdrasil—which the devouring flames of the universal conflagration

had been unable to consume—the ancestors of a future race of men had escaped

death. In this asylum they had found that their only nourishment had been the

morning dew.

Thus it was that from the wreckage of the ancient world a new world was born.

Slowly the earth emerged from the waves. Mountains rose again and from them

streamed cataracts of singing waters.²⁷

The new world this Teutonic myth announces is our own. Needless to say,

like the Fifth Sun of the Aztecs and the Maya, it was created long ago and

is new no longer. Can it be a coincidence that one of the many Central

American flood myths about the fourth epoch, 4 *Atl* ('water'), does not

install the Noah couple in an ark but places them instead in a great tree

just like Yggdrasil? ' 4 *Atl* was ended by floods. The mountains

disappeared ... Two persons survived because they were ordered by one

of the gods to bore a hole in the trunk of a very large tree and to crawl

inside when the skies fell. The pair entered and survived. Their offspring

repopulated the world.'28

Isn't it odd that the same symbolic language keeps cropping up in ancient traditions from so many widely scattered regions of the world?

How can this be explained? Are we talking about some vast, subconscious

wave of intercultural telepathy, or could elements of these remarkable

universal myths have been engineered, long ages ago, by clever and purposeful people? Which of these improbable propositions is the more

likely to be true? Or are there other possible explanations for the enigma

of the myths?

We shall return to these questions in due course. Meanwhile, what are

we to conclude about the apocalyptic visions of fire and ice, floods,

volcanism and earthquakes, which the myths contain? They have about

them a haunting and familiar realism. Could this be because they speak

to us of a past we suspect to be our own but can neither remember clearly nor forget completely?

27 New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology, pp. 275-7.

28 Maya History and Religion, p. 332.

202

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 26

A Species Born in the Earth's Long Winter

In all that we call 'history'—everything we clearly remember about ourselves as a species—humanity has not once come close to total annihilation. In various regions at various times there have been terrible

natural disasters. But there has not been a single occasion in the past

5000 years when mankind as a whole can be said to have faced extinction.

Has this always been so? Or is it possible, if we go back far enough, that we might discover an epoch when our ancestors were nearly wiped

out? It is just such an epoch that seems to be the focus of the great myths of cataclysm. Scholars normally attribute these myths to the fantasies of ancient poets. But what if the scholars are wrong? What if

some terrible series of natural catastrophes did reduce our prehistoric

ancestors to a handful of individuals scattered here and there across the

face of the earth, far apart, and out of touch with one another?

We are looking for an epoch that will fit the myths as snugly as the

slipper on Cinderella's foot. In this search, however, there is obviously no

point in investigating any period prior to the emergence on the planet of

recognizably modern human beings. We're not interested here in *Homo*

habilis or *Homo erectus* or even *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*. We're

interested only in *Homo sapiens sapiens*, our own species, and we haven't

been around very long.

Students of early Man disagree to some extent over how long we have

been around. Some researchers, as we shall see, claim that partial human

remains in excess of 100,000 years old may be 'fully modern'. Others

argue for a reduced antiquity in the range of 35-40,000 years, and yet

others propose a compromise of 50,000 years. But no one knows for

sure. 'The origin of fully modern humans denoted by the subspecies

name *Homo sapiens sapiens* remains one of the great puzzles of

palaeoanthropology,' admits one authority.¹

About three and a half million years of more or less relevant evolution

are indicated in the fossil record. For all practical purposes, that record

starts with a small, bipedal hominid (nicknamed Lucy) whose remains

were discovered in 1974 in the Ethiopian section of East Africa's Great

Rift Valley. With a brain capacity of 400cc (less than a third of the modern

average) Lucy definitely wasn't human. But she wasn't an ape either and

she had some remarkably 'human-like' features, notably her upright gait,

and the shape of her pelvis and back teeth. For these and other reasons,

¹ Roger Lewin, *Human Evolution*, Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, 1984, p. 74.

203

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

her species—classified as *Australopithecus afarensis*—has been accepted

by the majority of palaeoanthropologists as our earliest direct ancestor.²

About two million years ago representatives of *Homo habilis*, the founder members of the *Homo* line to which we ourselves belong, began to leave their fossilized skulls and skeletons behind. As time went by this species showed clear signs of evolution towards an ever more 'gracile' and refined form, and towards a larger and more versatile brain. *Homo erectus*, who overlapped with and then succeeded *Homo habilis*, appeared about 1.6 million years ago with a brain capacity in the region of 900cc (as against 700cc in the case of *habilis*).³ The million or so years after that, down to about 400,000 years ago, saw no significant evolutionary changes—or none attested to by surviving fossils. Then *Homo erectus* passed through the gates of extinction into hominid heaven and slowly—very, very slowly—what the palaeoanthropologists call 'the sapient grade' began to appear: Exactly when the transition to a more sapient form began is difficult to establish. Some believe the transition, which involved an increase in brain size and a

decrease in the robustness of the skull bones, began as early as 400,000 years

ago. Unfortunately, there are simply not enough fossils from this important period

to be sure about what was happening.’⁴

What was definitely *not* happening 400,000 years ago was the emergence

of anything identifiable as our own story-telling, myth-making subspecies

Homo sapiens sapiens. The consensus is that ‘sapient humans must have

evolved from *Homo erectus*’,⁵ and it is true that a number of ‘archaic

sapient’ populations did come into existence between 400,000 and

100,000 years ago. Unfortunately, the relationship of these transitional

species to ourselves is far from clear. As noted, the first contenders for

membership of the exclusive club of *Homo sapiens sapiens* have been

dated by some researchers to the latter part of this period. But these

remains are all partial and their identification is by no means universally

accepted. The oldest, part of a skullcap, is a putative modern human

specimen from about 113,000 BC.⁶ Around this date, too, *Homo sapiens*

neanderthalensis first appears, a quite distinct subspecies which most of

us know as 'Neanderthal Man'.

Tall, heavily muscled, with prominent brow ridges and a protruding face, Neanderthal Man had a bigger average brain size than modern humans (1400cc as against our 1360cc).⁷ The possession of such a big

brain was no doubt an asset to these 'intelligent, spiritually sensitive,

² Donald C. Johanson and Maitland C. Eddy, *Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind*,

Paladin, London, 1982, in particular, pp. 28, 259-310.

³ Roger Lewin, *Human Evolution*, pp. 47-49, 53-6; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 6:27-8.

⁴ *Human Evolution*, p. 76.

⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 18:831.

⁶ *Human Evolution*, p. 76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

204

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

resourceful creatures'⁸ and the fossil record suggests that they were the

dominant species on the planet from about 100,000 years ago until

40,000 years ago. At some point during this lengthy and poorly

understood period, *Homo sapiens sapiens* established itself, leaving

behind fossil remains from about 40,000 years ago that are undisputably

those of modern humans, and supplanting the Neanderthals completely

by about 35,000 years ago.⁹

In summary, human beings like ourselves, whom we could pass in the

street without blinking an eyelid if they were shaved and dressed in

modern clothes, are creatures of the last 115,000 years at the very

most—and more probably of only the last 50,000 years. It follows that if

the myths of cataclysm we have reviewed do reflect an epoch of

geological upheaval experienced by humanity, these upheavals took place

within the last 115,000 years, and more probably within the last 50,000

years.

Cinderella's slipper

It is a curious coincidence of geology and palaeoanthropology that the

onset and progress of the last Ice Age, and the emergence and proliferation of modern Man, more or less shadow each other. Curious

too is the fact that so little is known about either.

In North America the last Ice Age is called the Wisconsin Glaciation (named for rock deposits studied in the state of Wisconsin) and its early

phase has been dated by geologists to 115,000 years ago.¹⁰ There were

various advances and retreats of the ice-cap after that, with the fastest

rate of accumulation taking place between 60,000 years ago and 17,000

years ago—a process culminating in the Tazewell Advance, which saw the

glaciation reach its maximum extent around 15,000 BC.¹¹ By 13,000 BC,

however, millions of square miles of ice had melted, for reasons that have

never properly been explained, and by 8000 BC the Wisconsin had withdrawn completely.¹²

The Ice Age was a global phenomenon, affecting both the northern and

the southern hemispheres; similar climatic and geological conditions therefore prevailed in many other parts of the world as well (notably in

eastern Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and South America). There was

massive glaciation in Europe, where the ice reached outward from Scandinavia and Scotland to cover most of Great Britain, Denmark, Poland, Russia, large parts of Germany, all of Switzerland, and big chunks

8 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 73, 77.

10 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 12:712.

11 *Path of the Pole*, p. 146.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 152; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 12:712.

205

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

of Austria, Italy and France.¹³ (Known technically as the Wurm Glaciation,

this European Ice Age started about 70,000 years ago, a little later than

its American counterpart, but attained its maximum extent at the same

time, 17,000 years ago, and then experienced the same rapid withdrawal,

and shared the same terminal date).¹⁴

The crucial stages of Ice Age chronology thus appear to be:

1 around 60,000 years ago, when the Wurm, the Wisconsin and other

glaciations were well under way;

2 around 17,000 years ago, when the ice sheets had reached their maximum extent in both the Old World and the New;

3 the 7000 years of deglaciation that followed.

The emergence of *Homo sapiens sapiens* thus coincided with a lengthy

period of geological and climatic turbulence, a period marked, above all

else, by ferocious freezing and flooding. The many millennia during

which the ice was remorselessly expanding must have been terrifying and

awful for our ancestors. But those final 7000 years of deglaciation,

particularly the episodes of very rapid and extensive melting, must have

been worse.

Let us not jump to conclusions about the state of social, or religious, or

scientific, or intellectual development of the human beings who lived

through the sustained collapse of that tumultuous epoch. The popular

stereotype may be wrong in assuming that they were all primitive cave

dwellers. In reality little is known about them and almost the only thing

that can be said is that they were men and women *exactly like ourselves*

physiologically and psychologically.

It is possible that they came close to total extinction on several

occasions during the upheavals they experienced; it is also possible that

the great myths of cataclysm, to which scholars attribute no historical

value, may contain accurate records and eyewitness accounts of real

events. As we see in the next chapter, if we are looking for an epoch that

fits those myths as snugly as the slipper on Cinderella's foot, it would seem that the last Ice Age is it.

13 John Imbrie and Katherine Palmer Imbrie, *Ice Ages: Solving the Mystery*, Enslow

Publishers, New Jersey, 1979, p. 11.

14 Ibid., p. 120; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 12:783; *Human Evolution*, p. 73.

206

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 27

The Face of the Earth was Darkened

and a Black Rain Began to Fall

Terrible forces were unleashed on all living creatures during the last Ice

Age. We may deduce how these afflicted humanity from the firm evidence

of their consequences for other large species. Often this evidence looks

puzzling. As Charles Darwin observed after visiting South America:

No one I think can have marvelled more at the extinction of species than I have

done. When I found in La Plata [Argentina] the tooth of a horse embedded with the

remains of Mastodon, Megatherium, Toxodon, and other extinct monsters, which

all co-existed at a very late geological period, I was filled with astonishment; for

seeing that the horse, since its introduction by the Spaniards in South America,

has run wild over the whole country and has increased its numbers at an

unparalleled rate, I asked myself what could have so recently exterminated the

former horse under conditions of life apparently so favourable?¹

The answer, of course, was the Ice Age. That was what exterminated the

former horses of the Americas, and a number of other previously successful mammals. Nor were extinctions limited to the New World. On

the contrary, in different parts of the earth (for different reasons and at

different times) the long epoch of glaciation witnessed several quite distinct *episodes* of extinction. In all areas, the vast majority of the many

destroyed species were lost in the final seven thousand years from about

15,000 BC down to 8000 BC.²

At this stage of our investigation is it not necessary to establish the specific nature of the climatic, seismic and geological events linked to the

various advances and retreats of the ice sheets which killed off the animals. We might reasonably guess that tidal waves, earthquakes, gigantic windstorms and the sudden onset and remission of glacial

conditions played their parts. But more important—whatever the actual

agencies involved—is the stark empirical reality that mass extinctions of

animals *did* take place as a result of the turmoil of the last Ice Age.

This turmoil, as Darwin concluded in his *Journal*, must have shaken 'the

entire framework of the globe'.³ In the New World, for example, more

than seventy genera of large mammals became extinct between 15,000

BC and 8000 BC, including all North American members of seven families,

and one complete order, the Proboscidea.⁴ These staggering losses,

1 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, Penguin, London, 1985, p. 322.

2 *Quaternary Extinctions*, pp. 360-1, 394.

3 Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of*

Countries Visited during the Voyage of HMS Beagle Round the World; entry for 9 January 1834.

4 *Quaternary Extinctions*, pp. 360-1, 394.

207

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

involving the violent obliteration of more than forty million animals, were

not spread out evenly over the whole period; on the contrary, the vast

majority of the extinctions occurred in just two thousand years, between

11,000 BC and 9000 BC.⁵ To put this in perspective, during the previous

300,000 years only about twenty genera had disappeared.⁶

The same pattern of late and massive extinctions was repeated across

Europe and Asia. Even far-off Australia was not exempt, losing perhaps

nineteen genera of large vertebrates, not all of them mammals, in a relatively short period of time.⁷

Alaska and Siberia: the sudden freeze

The northern regions of Alaska and Siberia appear to have been the worst

hit by the murderous upheavals between 13,000 and 11,000 years ago.

In a great swathe of death around the edge of the Arctic Circle the remains of uncountable numbers of large animals have been found —

including many carcasses with the flesh still intact, and astonishing

quantities of perfectly preserved mammoth tusks. Indeed, in both regions, mammoth carcasses have been thawed to feed to sled dogs and

mammoth steaks have featured on restaurant menus in Fairbanks.⁸ One

authority has commented, 'Hundreds of thousands of individuals must

have been frozen immediately after death and remained frozen, otherwise the meat and ivory would have spoiled ... Some powerful general force was certainly at work to bring this catastrophe about.'⁹

Dr Dale Guthrie of the Institute of Arctic Biology has made an interesting point about the sheer *variety* of animals that flourished in Alaska before the eleventh millennium BC:

When learning of this exotic mixture of sabre-tooth cats, camels, horses, rhinos,

asses, deer with gigantic antlers, lions, ferrets, and saiga, one cannot help

wondering about the world in which they lived. This great diversity of species, so

different from that encountered today, raises the most obvious question: is it not

likely that the rest of the environment was also different?¹⁰

The Alaskan muck in which the remains are embedded is like a fine, dark-

grey sand. Frozen solid within this mass, in the words of Professor

Hibben of the University of New Mexico:

lie the twisted parts of animals and trees intermingled with lenses of ice and layers

of peat and mosses ... Bison, horses, wolves, bears, lions ... Whole herds of

5 Ibid., pp. 360-1; *The Path of the Pole*, p. 250.

6 *Quaternary Extinctions*, p. 360-1.

7 Ibid., p. 358.

8 Donald W. Patten, *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch: A Study in Scientific History*,

Pacific Meridian Publishing Co., Seattle, 1966, p. 194.

9 *The Path of the Pole*, p. 258.

10 David M. Hopkins et al., *The Palaeoecology of Beringia*, Academic Press, New York,

1982, p. 309.

208

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

animals were apparently killed together, overcome by some common power ...

Such piles of bodies of animals or men simply do not occur by any ordinary

natural means ...'11

At various levels stone artefacts have been found 'frozen in situ at great

depths, and in association with Ice Age fauna, which confirms that men

were contemporary with extinct animals in Alaska'.¹² Throughout the

Alaskan mucks, also there is:

evidence of atmospheric disturbances of unparalleled violence. Mammoth and

bison alike were torn and twisted as though by a cosmic hand in Godly rage. In

one place we can find the foreleg and shoulder of a mammoth with portions of the

flesh and toenails and hair still clinging to the blackened bones. Close by is the

neck and skull of a bison with the vertebrae clinging together with tendons and

ligaments and the chitinous covering of the horns intact. There is no mark of knife

or cutting instrument [as there would be if human hunters, for example, had been

involved]. The animals were simply torn apart and scattered over the landscape

like things of straw and string, even though some of them weighed several tons.

Mixed with piles of bones are trees, also twisted and torn and piled in tangled

groups; and the whole is covered with a fine sifting muck, then frozen solid.¹³

Much the same picture emerges in Siberia where catastrophic climatic

changes and geological upheavals occurred at around the same time.

Here the frozen mammoth graveyards, 'mined' for their ivory since the

Roman era, were still yielding an estimated 20,000 pairs of tusks every

decade at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁴

Once again, some mysterious factor appears to have been at work in bringing about these mass extinctions. With their woolly coats and thick

skins, mammoths are generally considered adapted to cold weather, and

we are not surprised to come across their remains in Siberia. Harder to

explain is the fact that human beings perished alongside them,¹⁵ as well

as many other animals that in no sense can be described as cold-adapted

species:

The northern Siberian plains supported vast numbers of rhinoceroses, antelope,

horses, bison, and other herbivorous creatures, while a variety of carnivores,

including the sabertooth cat, preyed upon them ... Like the mammoths, these

other animals ranged to the extreme north of Siberia, to the shores of the Arctic

Ocean, and yet further north to the Lyakhov and New Siberian Islands, only a very

short distance from the North Pole.¹⁶

Researchers have confirmed that of the thirty-four animal species living in

Siberia prior to the catastrophes of the eleventh millennium BC—including

Ossip's mammoth, giant deer, cave hyena and cave lions—no less than

¹¹ Professor Frank C. Hibben, *The Lost Americans*, cited in *The Path of the Pole*, p. 275ff.

¹² F. Rainey, 'Archaeological Investigations in Central Alaska', *American Antiquity*,

volume V, 1940, page 307.

13 *Path of the Pole*, p. 275ff.

14 *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 107-8.

15 A. P. Okladnikov, 'Excavations in the North' in *Vestiges of Ancient Cultures*, Soviet

Union, 1951.

16 *The Path of the Pole*, p. 255.

209

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

twenty-eight were adapted *only to temperate conditions*.¹⁷ In this context,

one of the most puzzling aspects of the extinctions, which runs quite contrary to what today's geographical and climatic conditions lead us to

expect, is that the farther north one goes, the more the mammoth and

other remains *increase* in number.¹⁸ Indeed some of the New Siberian

Islands, well within the Arctic Circle, were described by the explorers who

first discovered them as being made up almost entirely of mammoth

bones and tusks.¹⁹ The only logical conclusion, as the nineteenth-century

French zoologist Georges Cuvier put it, is that 'this eternal frost did not

previously exist in those parts in which the animals were frozen, for they

could not have survived in such a temperature. The same instant that

these creatures were bereft of life, the country which they inhabited became frozen.'²⁰

There is a great deal of other evidence which suggests that a sudden

freeze took place in Siberia during the eleventh millennium BC. In his survey of the New Siberian Islands, the Arctic explorer Baron Eduard von

Toll found the remains 'of a sabre-tooth tiger, and a fruit tree that had been 90 feet tall when it was standing. The tree was well preserved in the

permafrost, with its roots and seeds. Green leaves and ripe fruit still clung to its branches ... At the present time the only representative of tree vegetation on the islands is a willow that grows one inch high'.²¹

Equally indicative of the cataclysmic change that took place at the onset

of the great cold in Siberia is the food the extinct animals were eating

when they perished: 'The mammoths died suddenly, in intense cold, and

in great numbers. Death came so quickly that the swallowed vegetation is

yet undigested ... Grasses, bluebells, buttercups, tender sedges, and wild

beans have been found, yet identifiable and undeteriorated, in their mouths and stomachs.'²²

Needless to say, such flora does not grow anywhere in Siberia today. Its

presence there in the eleventh millennium BC compels us to accept that

the region had a pleasant and productive climate—one that was

temperate or even warm.²³ Why the *end* of the last Ice Age in other parts

of the world should have been the *beginning* of fatal winter in this former

paradise is a question we shall postpone until Part VIII. What is certain,

17 A. P. Okladnikov, *Yakutia before its Incorporation into the Russian State*, McGill-

Queens University Press, Montreal, 1970.

18 *The Path of the Pole*, p. 250.

19 *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 107. Wragnell, the explorer, observed on Bear

Island (Medvizhi Ostrova) that the soil consisted of only sand, ice and such a quantity of

mammoth bones that they seemed to be the chief substance of the island. On the

Siberian mainland he observed that the tundra was dotted with mammoth tusks rather

than Arctic shrubbery.

20 Georges Cuvier, *Revolutions and Catastrophes in the History of the Earth*, 1829.

21 Cited in *Path of the Pole*, p. 256.

22 Ivan T. Sanderson, 'Riddle of the Quick-Frozen Giants', *Saturday Evening Post*, 16

January 1960, p. 82.

23 *Path of the Pole*, p. 256.

210

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

however, is that at some point between 12-13,000 years ago a destroying

frost descended with horrifying speed upon Siberia and has never relaxed

its grip. In an eerie echo of the Avestic traditions, a land which had

previously enjoyed seven months of summer was converted almost overnight into a land of ice and snow with ten months of harsh and frozen winter.²⁴

A thousand Krakatoas, all at once

Many of the myths of cataclysm speak of times of terrible cold, of darkened skies, of black, burning, bituminous rain. For centuries it must

have been like that all the way across the arc of death incorporating immense tracts of Siberia, the Yukon and Alaska. Here, 'Interspersed in

the muck depths, and sometimes through the very piles of bones and

tusks themselves, are layers of volcanic ash. There is no doubt that coincidental with the [extinctions] there were volcanic eruptions of tremendous proportions.'²⁵

There is a remarkable amount of evidence of excessive volcanism during the decline of the Wisconsin ice cap.²⁶ Far to the south of the frozen Alaskan mucks, thousands of prehistoric animals and plants were

mired, all at once, in the famous La Brea tar pits of Los Angeles. Among

the creatures unearthed were bison, horses, camels, sloths, mammoths,

mastodons and at least *seven hundred* sabre-toothed tigers.²⁷ A

disarticulated human skeleton was also found, completely enveloped in

bitumen, mingled with the bones of an extinct species of vulture. In

general, the La Brea remains ('broken, mashed, contorted, and mixed in a

most heterogeneous mass'²⁸) speak eloquently of a sudden and dreadful

volcanic cataclysm.²⁹

Similar finds of typical late Ice Age birds and mammals have been

unearthed from asphalt at two other locations in California (Carpinteria

and McKittrick). In the San Pedro Valley, mastodon skeletons were

discovered still standing upright, ungnawed in great heaps of volcanic ash

and sand. Fossils from the glacial Lake Floristan in Colorado, and from

Oregon's John Day Basin, were also excavated from tombs of volcanic

ash.³⁰

Although the tremendous eruptions that created such mass graves may

have been at their most intense during the last days of the Wisconsin,

they appear to have been recurrent throughout much of the Ice Age, not

24 Ibid., p. 256. Winter temperatures fall to 56 degrees below zero.

25 Ibid., p. 277.

26 Ibid., p. 132.

27 R. S. Luss, *Fossils*, 1931, p. 28.

28 G. M. Price, *The New Geology*, 1923, p. 579.

29 Ibid.

30 *Earth In Upheaval*, p. 63

211

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

only in North America but in Central and South America, in the North Atlantic, in continental Asia, and in Japan.³¹

It is difficult to imagine what this widespread volcanism might have meant for people living in those strange and terrible times. But those who

recall the cauliflower-shaped clouds of dust, smoke and ash ejected into

the upper atmosphere by the eruption of Mount Saint Helens in 1980 will

appreciate that a large number of such explosions (occurring sequentially

over a sustained period at different points around the globe) would not

only have had devastating local effects but would have caused a severe

deterioration in the world's climate.

Mount Saint Helens spat out an estimated one cubic kilometre of rock

and was small-scale by comparison with the typical volcanism of the Ice

Age.³² A more representative impression would be the Indonesian volcano

Krakatoa, which erupted in 1883 with such violence that more than 36,000 people were killed and the explosion was heard 3000 miles away.

From the epicentre in the Sunda Strait, *tsunamis* 100 feet high roared

across the Java Sea and the Indian Ocean, carrying steamships miles

inland and causing flooding as far away as East Africa and the western

coasts of the Americas. Eighteen cubic kilometres of rock and vast quantities of ash and dust were pumped into the upper atmosphere;

skies all over the world were noticeably darker for more than two years

and sunsets notably redder. Average global temperatures fell measurably

during this period because volcanic dust-particles reflect the sun's rays

back into space.³³

During the episodes of intense volcanism which characterized the Ice

Age, we must envisage not one but many Krakatoas. The combined effect

would at first have been a great intensification of glacial conditions, as

the light of the sun was cut by the boiling dust clouds, and as already low

temperatures plummeted even further. Volcanoes also inject enormous

volumes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and carbon dioxide is a

'greenhouse gas', so it is reasonable to suppose, as the dust began to

settle during periods of relative calm, that a degree of global warming

would have occurred. A number of authorities attribute the repeated

advances and retreats of the great ice sheets to precisely this see-saw

interaction between volcanism and climate.³⁴

Global flooding

Geologists agree that by 8000 BC the great Wisconsin and Wurm ice-caps

had retreated. The Ice Age was over. However, the seven thousand years

³¹ *Path of the Pole*, p. 133, 176.

³² *The Evolving Earth*, Guild Publishing, London, 1989, p. 30.

³³ *Ice Ages: Solving the Mystery*, p. 64.

³⁴ *Path of the Pole*, pp. 132-5.

212

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

prior to that date had witnessed climatic and geological turbulence on a

scale that was almost unimaginable. Lurching from cataclysm to disaster

and from misfortune to calamity, the few scattered tribes of surviving

humans must have led lives of constant terror and confusion: there would

have been periods of quiescence, when they might have hoped that the

worst was over. While the melting of the giant glaciers continued, however, these episodes of tranquillity would have been punctuated again and again by violent floods. Moreover, sections of the earth's crust hitherto pressed down into the asthenosphere by billions of tons of ice would have been liberated by the thaw and begun to rise again, sometimes rapidly, causing devastating earthquakes and filling the air with terrible noise.

Some times were much worse than others. The bulk of the animal extinctions took place between 11,000 BC and 9000 BC when there were violent and unexplained fluctuations of climate.³⁵ (In the words of geologist John Imbrie, 'a climatic revolution took place around 11,000 years ago.'³⁶) There were also greatly increased rates of sedimentation³⁷

and an abrupt temperature increase of 6-10 degrees Centigrade in the surface waters of the Atlantic Ocean.³⁸

Another turbulent episode, again accompanied by mass extinctions,

took place between 15,000 BC and 13,000 BC. We saw in the previous

chapter that the Tazewell Advance brought the ice sheets to their maximum extent around 17,000 years ago and that a dramatic and prolonged thaw then ensued, completely deglaciating millions of square

miles of North America and Europe in less than two thousand years.

There were some anomalies: all of western Alaska, the Yukon territory

in Canada, and most of Siberia including the New Siberian Islands (now

among the coldest parts of the world), remained unglaciated until the Ice

Age was near its end. They acquired their present climate only about

35 Ibid., p. 137. A major change from glacial to post-glacial conditions occurred about

11,000 years ago. This temperature change was 'sharp and abrupt' (*Polar Wandering*

and Continental Drift, Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists, Special

Publication No. 10, Tulsa, 1953, p. 159). Dramatic climate change around 12,000 years

ago is also reported in C.C. Langway and B. Lyle Hansen, *The Frozen Future: A Prophetic*

Report from Antarctica, Quadrangle, New York, 1973, p. 202. See also *Ice Ages*, pp.

129, 142; see also *Quaternary Extinctions*, p. 357: 'The last 100,000 years of glacial

expansion, as recorded by oxygen-isotope ratios in deep-sea cores from the Atlantic and

the Equatorial Pacific, terminated ABRUPTLY around 12,000 years ago. A very rapid ice

melt caused a rapid rise in sea level... Detailed land fossils show a major movement of

plant and animal species at the time, especially into formerly glaciated terrain. American

megafaunal extinctions occurred during a time of rapid climatic change as seen in fossil

pollen and small animal records.'

36 *Ice Ages*, p. 129.

37 *Path of the Pole*, p. 137.

38 'The relative change is shown by the change in the relative abundance of cold and

warm water planktonic foraminifera, and the absolute change is given by oxygen isotope

ratio determinations on the fauna.' *Polar Wandering*, p. 96.

213

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

12,000 years ago, apparently very abruptly, when the mammoths and

other large mammals were frozen in their tracks.³⁹

Elsewhere the picture was different. Most of Europe was buried under

ice two miles thick.⁴⁰ So too was most of North America where the ice-cap

had spread from centres near Hudson Bay to enshroud all of eastern Canada, New England and much of the Midwest down to the 37th parallel—well to the south of Cincinnati in the Mississippi Valley and more than halfway to the equator.⁴¹

At its peak 17,000 years ago, it is calculated that the total ice volume covering the northern hemisphere was in the region of six million cubic

miles, and of course there were extensive glaciations in the southern hemisphere too as we noted. The surplus water flow from which these

numerous ice-caps were formed had been provided by the world's seas

and oceans which were then about 400 feet lower than they are today.⁴²

It was at this moment that the pendulum of climate swung violently in

the opposite direction. The great meltdown began so suddenly and over

such vast areas that it has been described 'as a sort of miracle'.⁴³

Geologists refer to it as the Bolling phase of warm climate in Europe and

as the Brady interstadial in North America. In both regions:

An ice-cap that may have taken 40,000 years to develop disappeared for the most

part, in 2000. It must be obvious that this could not have been the result of

gradually acting climatic factors usually called upon to explain ice ages ... The

rapidity of the deglaciation suggests that some extraordinary factor was affecting

the climate. The dates suggest that this factor first made itself felt about 16,500

years ago, that it had destroyed most, perhaps three-quarters of the glaciers by

2000 years later, and that [the vast bulk of these dramatic developments took

place] in a millennium or less.'⁴⁴

39 The reader may recall that inexplicably warm conditions prevailed in the New Siberian

Islands until this time, and it is worth noting that many other islands in the Arctic Ocean

were also unaffected for a long while by the widespread glaciations elsewhere (e.g. on

Baffin Island the remains of alder and birch trees preserved in peat indicate a relatively

warm climate extending at least from 30,000 to 17,000 years ago. It is also certain that

large parts of Greenland remained enigmatically ice-free during the Ice Age. *Path of the*

Pole, p. 93, 96.

40 *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 114; *Path of the Pole*, pp. 47-8.

41 *Ice Ages*, p. 11. *Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 117; *Path of the Pole*, p. 47.

42 *Ice Ages*, p. 11; *Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 114.

43 *Path of the Pole*, p. 150.

44 *Path of the Pole*, pp. 148-9, 152, 162-3. In North America, where the ice reached its

maximum extent between 17,000 and 16,500 years ago, geologists have made the

following discoveries: 'Leaves, needles and fruits' that flourished around 15,300 years

ago in Massachusetts; 'A bog which developed over glacial material in New Jersey at

least 16,280 years ago, immediately after the interruption of the ice advance.'; 'In Ohio

we have a postglacial sample dated about 14,000 years ago. And that was spruce wood,

suggesting a forest that must have taken a few thousand years, by conservative

estimate, to get established. What, indeed, does this mean? Does it not clearly suggest

that the ice cap, estimated to have been at its maximum at least a mile thick in Ohio,

disappeared from Delaware County in that state within only a few centuries?’

Likewise, ‘in the Soviet Union, in the Irkutsk area, deglaciation was complete and

214

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Inevitably the first consequence was a precipitous rise in sea levels,

perhaps as much as 350 feet.⁴⁵ Islands and land bridges disappeared and

vast sections of low-lying continental coastline were submerged. From

time to time great tidal waves rose up to engulf higher land as well. They

ebbed away, but in the process left unmistakable traces of their presence.

In the United States, ‘Ice Age marine features are present along the Gulf

coast east of the Mississippi River, in some places at altitudes that may

exceed 200 feet.⁴⁶ In bogs covering glacial deposits in Michigan, skeletons of two whales were discovered. In Georgia marine deposits

occur at altitudes of 160 feet, and in northern Florida at altitudes of at least 240 feet. In Texas, well to the south of the farthest extent of the Wisconsin Glaciation, the remains of Ice Age land mammals are found in

marine deposits. Another marine deposit, containing walrus, seals and at

least five genera of whales, overlies the seaboard of the north-eastern

states and the Arctic coast of Canada. In many areas along the Pacific

coast of North America Ice Age marine deposits extend 'more than 200

miles inland.'⁴⁷ The bones of a whale have been found north of Lake

Ontario, about 440 feet above sea level, a skeleton of another whale in

Vermont, more than 500 feet above sea level, and another in the Montreal-Quebec area about 600 feet above sea level.⁴⁸

Flood myths from all over the world characteristically and recurrently

describe scenes when humans and animals flee the rising tides and take

refuge on mountain tops. The fossil record confirms that this did indeed

happen during the melting of the ice sheets and that the mountains were

not always high enough to save the refugees from disaster. For example,

fissures in the rocks on the tops of isolated hills in central France are filled with what is known as 'osseous breccia', consisting of the splintered bones of mammoths, woolly rhinoceroses and other animals.

The 1430 feet peak of Mount Genay in Burgundy 'is capped by a breccia

containing remains of mammoth, reindeer, horse and other animals'.⁴⁹

Much farther south, so too is the Rock of Gibraltar where 'a human molar

and some flints worked by Paleolithic man were discovered among the

animal bones.'⁵⁰

Hippo remains, together with mammoth, rhinoceros, horse, bear, bison,

postglacial life fully established by 14,500 years ago. In Lithuania another bog

developed as early as 15,620 years ago. These two dates taken together are rather

suggestive. A bog can develop much faster than a forest. First, however, the ice must

disappear. And let us not forget that there was a great deal of ice.'

45 *Ice Ages*, p. 11, *Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 117, *Path of the Pole*, p. 47.

46 R. F. Flint, *Glacial Geology and the Pleistocene Epoch*, 1947, pp. 294-5.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 362.

48 *Earth in Upheaval*, p. 43; in general, pp. 42-4.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 47. Joseph Prestwich, *On Certain Phenomena Belonging to the Close of the*

Last Geological Period and on their Bearing upon the Tradition of the Flood, Macmillan,

London, 1895, p. 36.

50 *On Certain Phenomena*, p. 48.

215

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

wolf and lion, have been found in England, in the neighbourhood of

Plymouth on the Channel.⁵¹ The hills around Palermo in Sicily disclosed an

'extraordinary quantity of bones of hippopotami—in complete

hecatombs'.⁵² On the basis of this and other evidence, Joseph Prestwich,

formerly professor of Geology at Oxford University, concluded that Central Europe, England, and the Mediterranean islands of Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily were all completely submerged on several occasions

during the rapid melting of the ice sheets:

The animals naturally retreated, as the waters advanced, deeper into the hills until

they found themselves embayed ... They thronged together in vast multitudes,

crushing into the more accessible caves, until overtaken by the waters and

destroyed ... Rocky debris and large blocks from the sides of the hills were hurled

down by the currents of water, crushing and smashing the bones ... Certain

communities of early man must have suffered in this general catastrophe.⁵³

It is probable that similar flood disasters occurred in China at much the

same time. In caves near Peking, bones of mammoths and buffaloes have

been found in association with human skeletal remains.⁵⁴ A number of

authorities attribute the violent intermingling of mammoth carcasses with

splintered and broken trees in Siberia 'to a great tidal wave that uprooted

forests and buried the tangled carnage in a flood of mud. In the polar region this froze solid and has preserved the evidence in permafrost to

the present.'⁵⁵

All over South America, too, Ice-Age fossils have been unearthed, 'in which incongruous animal types (carnivores and herbivores) are mixed

promiscuously with human bones. No less significant is the association,

over truly widespread areas, of fossilized land and sea creatures mingled

in no order and yet entombed in the same geological horizon.'⁵⁶

North America was also badly affected by flooding. As the great

Wisconsin ice sheets melted they created huge but temporary lakes which

filled up with incredible speed, drowning everything in their paths, then

drained away in a few hundred years. Lake Agassiz, for example, the

largest glacial lake in the New World, once occupied an area of 110,000

square miles, covering large parts of what are now Manitoba, Ontario and

Saskatchewan in Canada, and North Dakota and Minnesota in the United

States.⁵⁷ Remarkably, it endured for less than a millennium, indicating a

catastrophically sudden episode of melting and flooding followed by a

period of quiescence.⁵⁸

51 Ibid., p. 25-6.

52 Ibid., p. 50.

53 Ibid., p. 51-2.

54 J. S. Lee, *The Geology of China*, London, 1939, p. 370.

55 *Polar Wandering*, p. 165.

56 J. B. Delair and E.F. Oppe, 'The Evidence of Violent Extinction in South America', in *Path of the Pole* p. 292.

57 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1:141.

58 Warren Upham, *The Glacial Lake Agassiz*, 1895, p. 240.

216

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

A token of good faith

It was long believed that human beings did not reach the New World until

around 11,000 years ago, but recent finds have steadily pushed that horizon back. Stone implements dating to 25,000 BC have been identified

by Canadian researchers in the Old Crow Basin in the Yukon Territory of

Alaska.⁵⁹ In South America (as far south as Peru and Tierra del Fuego)

human remains and artefacts have been found which have been reliably

dated to 12,000 BC—with another group between 19,000 BC and 23,000

BC.⁶⁰ With this and other evidence taken into account, ‘a very reasonable

conclusion on the peopling of the Americas is that it began at least

35,000 years ago, but may well have included waves of immigrants at

later dates too.’⁶¹

Those newly arriving Ice Age Americans, trekking in from Siberia across

the Bering land bridge, would have faced the most appalling conditions

between 17,000 and 10,000 years ago. It was then that the Wisconsin

glaciers, all at once, went into their ferocious meltdown, forcing a 350-

foot rise in global sea levels amid scenes of unprecedented climatic and

geological turmoil. For *seven thousand years of human experience*,

earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and immense floods, interspersed with

eerie periods of peace, must have dominated the day-to-day lives of the

New World peoples. Perhaps this is why so many of their myths speak

with such conviction of fire and floods and times of darkness and of the

creation and destruction of Suns.

Moreover, as we have seen, the myths of the New World are not in this

respect isolated from those of the Old. All around the globe, a

remarkable uniformity reveals itself over issues such as 'the great flood'

and 'the great cold' and 'the time of the great upheaval'. It is not just that

the same experiences are being recounted again and again; that, on its

own, would be quite understandable since the Ice Age and its after-effects were global phenomena. More curious by far is the way in which

the same symbolic motifs keep recurring: the one good man and his family, the warning given by a god, the seeds of all living things saved,

the survival ship, the enclosure against the cold, the trunk of a tree in which the progenitors of future humanity hide themselves, the birds and

other creatures released after the flood to find land ... and so on.

Isn't it also odd that so many of the myths turn out to contain

descriptions of figures like Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha, said to have come

in the time of darkness, after the flood, to teach architecture, astronomy,

science and the rule of law to the scattered and devastated tribes of survivors.

Who were these civilizing heroes? Were they figments of the primitive

59 *Human Evolution*, p. 92.

60 *Ibid.*; see also *Quaternary Extinctions*, p. 375.

61 *Human Evolution*, p. 92.

217

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

imagination? Or gods? Or men? If they were men, could they have tampered with the myths in some way, turning them into vehicles for transporting knowledge through time?

Such notions seem fanciful. But, as we shall see in Part V, astronomical

data of a disturbingly accurate and scientific nature turns up repeatedly

in certain myths, as time-worn and as universal in their distribution as

those of the great flood.

Where did their scientific content come from?

218

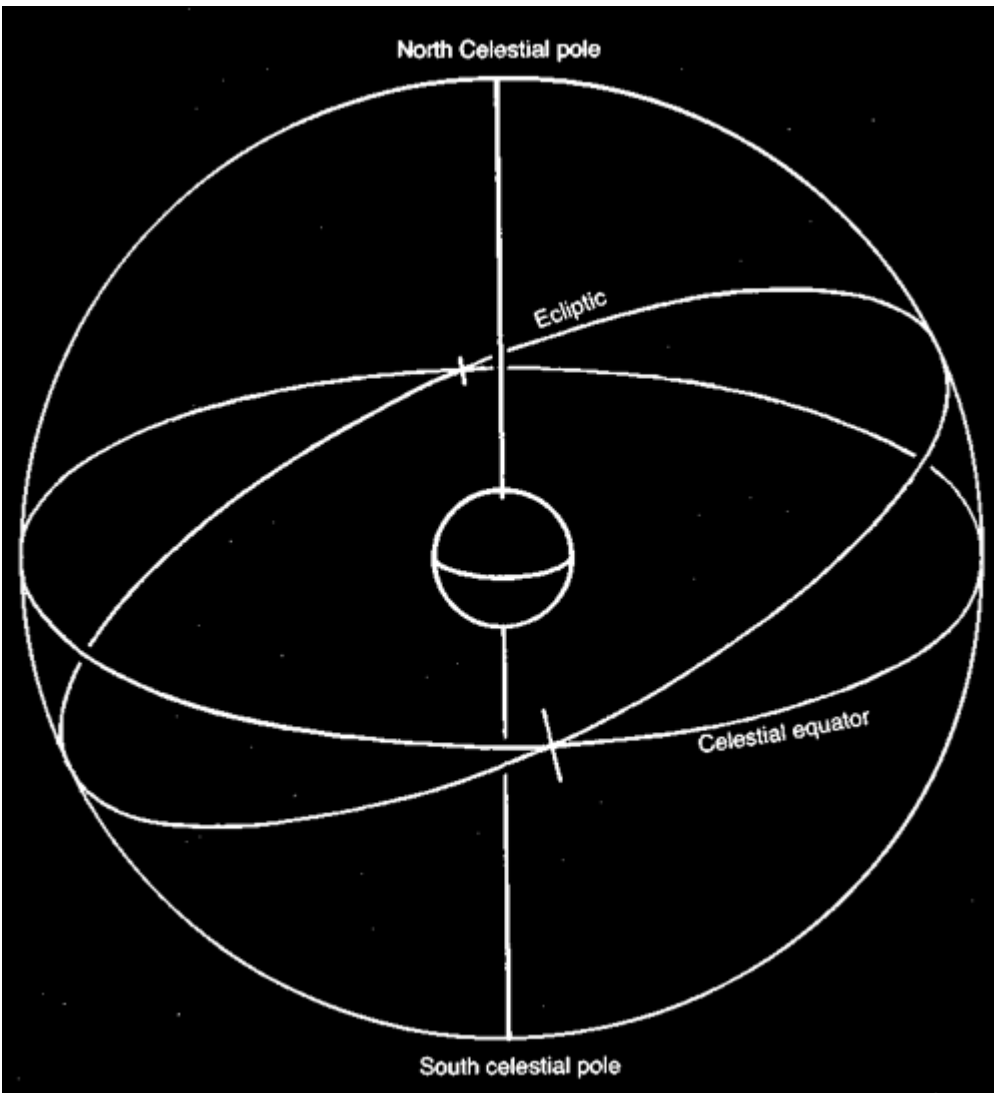
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Part V

The Mystery of the Myths

2. The Precessional Code

219



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Celestial Sphere.

220

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

221

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 28

The Machinery of Heaven

Although a modern reader does not expect a text on celestial mechanics to read

like a lullaby, he insists on his capacity to understand mythical 'images' instantly,

because he can respect as 'scientific' only page-long approximation formulas, and

the like.

He does not think of the possibility that equally relevant knowledge might once

have been expressed in everyday language. He never suspects such a possibility,

although the visible accomplishments of ancient cultures—to mention only the

pyramids or metallurgy—should be a cogent reason for concluding that serious

and intelligent men were at work behind the stage, men who were bound to have

used a technical language ...1

The quotation is from the late Giorgio de Santillana, professor of the

History of Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In the

chapters that follow, we shall be learning about his revolutionary investigations into ancient mythology. In brief, however, his proposition

is this: long ages ago, serious and intelligent people devised a system for

veiling the technical terminology of an advanced astronomical science

behind the everyday language of myth.

Is Santillana right? And if he is right, who were these serious and intelligent people—these astronomers, these ancient scientists—who worked behind the stage of prehistory?

Let us start with some basics.

The wild celestial dance

The earth makes a complete circuit around its own axis once every twenty-four hours and has an equatorial circumference of 24,902.45 miles. It follows, therefore, that a man standing still on the equator is in

fact in motion, revolving with the planet at just over 1000 miles per hour.² Viewed from outer space, looking down on the North Pole, the direction of rotation is anti-clockwise.

While spinning daily on its own axis, the earth also orbits the sun (again

in an anti-clockwise direction) on a path which is slightly elliptical rather

than completely circular. It pursues this orbit at truly breakneck speed,

travelling as far along it in an hour—66,600 miles—as the average

motorist will drive in six years. To bring the calculations down in scale,

this means that we are hurtling through space much faster than any

1 *Hamlet's Mill*, pp. 57-8.

2 Figures from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 27:530.

222

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

bullet, at the rate of 18.5 miles *every second*. In the time that it has taken

you to read this paragraph, we have voyaged about 550 miles farther along earth's path around the sun.³

With a year required to complete a full circuit, the only evidence we have of the tremendous orbital race we are participating in is the slow

march of the seasons. And in the operations of the seasons themselves it

is possible to see a wondrous and impartial mechanism at work

distributing spring, summer, autumn and winter fairly around the globe,

across the northern and southern hemispheres, year in and year out, with

absolute regularity.

The earth's axis of rotation is tilted in relation to the plane of its orbit

(at about 23.5° to the vertical). This tilt, which causes the seasons,

'points' the North Pole, and the entire northern hemisphere away from

the sun for six months a year (while the southern hemisphere enjoys its

summer) and points the South Pole and the southern hemisphere away

from the sun for the remaining six months (while the northern

hemisphere enjoys its summer). The seasons result from the annual

variation in the angle at which the sun's rays reach any particular point

on the earth's surface and from the annual variation in the number of

hours of sunlight received there at different times of the year.

The earth's tilt is referred to in technical language as its 'obliquity', and

the plane of its orbit, extended outwards to form a great circle in the

celestial sphere, is known as the 'ecliptic'. Astronomers also speak of the

'celestial equator', which is an extension of the earth's equator into the

celestial sphere. The celestial equator is today inclined at about 23.5° to

the ecliptic, because the earth's axis is inclined at 23.5° to the vertical.

This angle, termed the 'obliquity of the ecliptic', is not fixed and immutable for all time. On the contrary (as we saw in Chapter Eleven in

relation to the dating of the Andean city of Tiahuanaco) it is subject to

constant, though very slow, oscillations. These occur across a range of

slightly less than 3° , rising closest to the vertical at 22.1° and falling

farthest away at 24.5° . A full cycle, from 24.5° to 22.1° , and back again to

24.5° , takes approximately 41,000 years to complete.⁴

So our fragile planet nods and spins while soaring along its orbital path.

The orbit takes a year and the spin takes a day and the nod has a cycle of

41,000 years. A wild celestial dance seems to be going on as we skip and

skim and dive through eternity, and we feel the tug of contradictory urges: to fall into the sun on the one hand; to make a break for the outer darkness on the other.

3 Ibid.

4 J. D. Hays, John Imbrie, N.J. Shackleton, 'Variations in the Earth's Orbit, Pacemaker of

the Ice Ages', *Science*, volume 194, No. 4270, 10 December 1976, p. 1125.

223

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Recondite influences

The sun's gravitational domain, in the inner circles of which the earth is

held captive, is now known to extend more than fifteen *trillion* miles into

space, almost halfway to the nearest star.⁵ Its pull upon our planet is

therefore immense. Also affecting us is the gravity of the other planets

with which we share the solar system. Each of these exerts an attraction

which tends to draw the earth out of its regular orbit around the sun. The

planets are of different sizes, however, and revolve around the sun at

different speeds. The combined gravitational influence they are able to

exert thus changes over time in complex but predictable ways, and the

orbit changes its shape constantly in response. Since the orbit is an

ellipse these changes affect its degree of elongation, known technically

as its 'eccentricity'. This varies from a low value close to zero (when the

orbit approaches the form of a perfect circle) to a high value of about six

per cent when it is at its most elongated and elliptical.⁶

There are other forms of planetary influence too. Thus, though no

explanation has yet been forthcoming, it is known that shortwave radio

frequencies are disturbed when Jupiter, Saturn and Mars line up.⁷

And in

this connection evidence has also emerged

of a strange and unexpected correlation between the positions of Jupiter, Saturn

and Mars, in their orbits around the sun, and violent electrical disturbances in the

earth's upper atmosphere. This would seem to indicate that the planets and the

sun share in a cosmic-electrical balance mechanism that extends a billion miles

from the centre of our solar system. Such an electrical balance is not accounted

for in current astrophysical theories.⁸

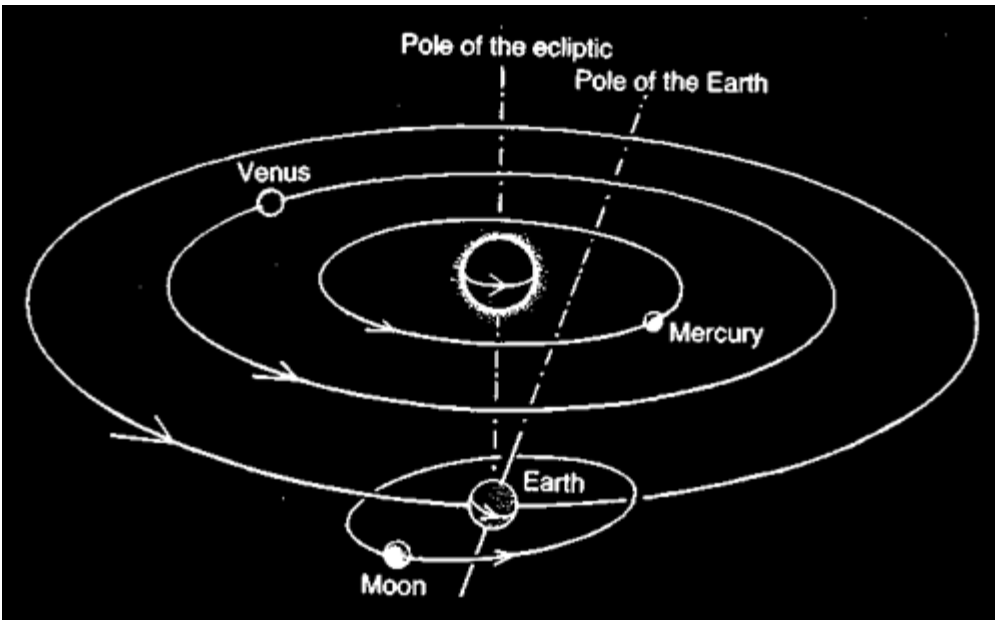
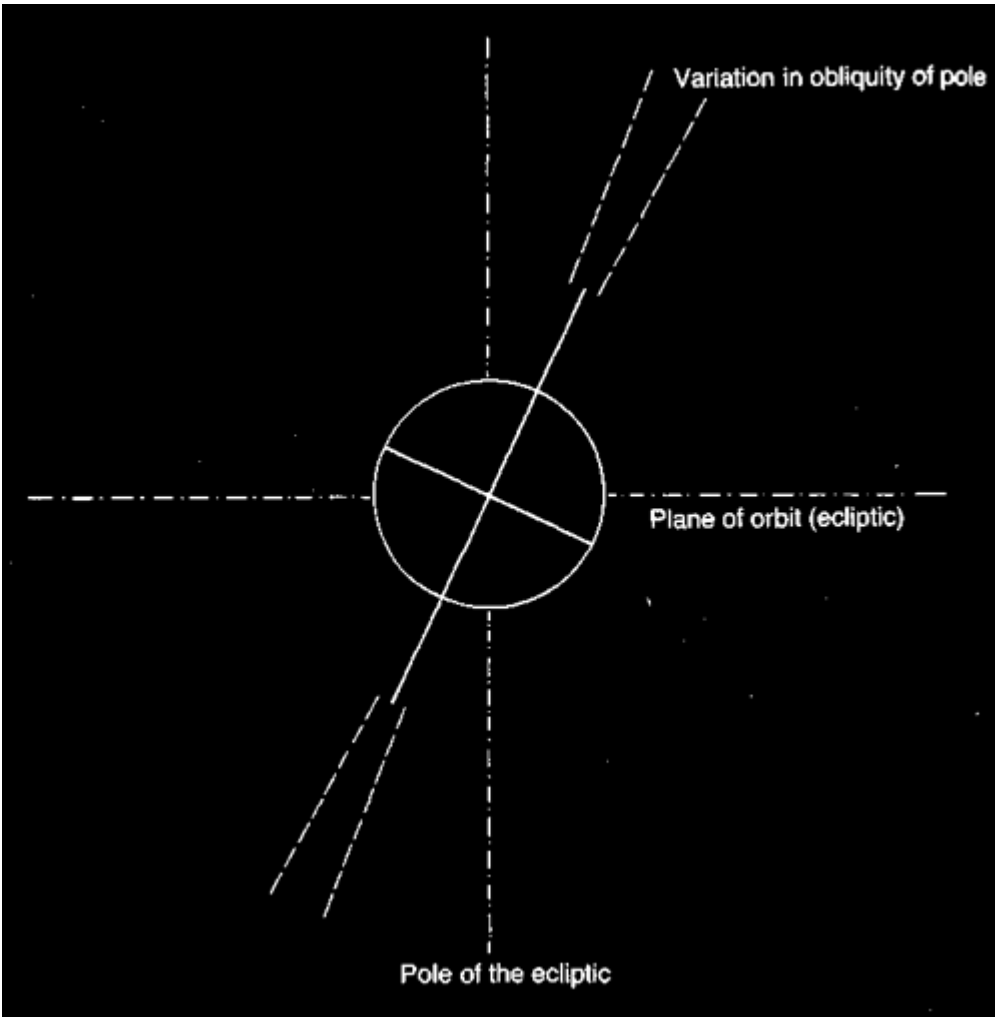
5 The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch, pp. 288-9. Fifteen trillion miles is equivalent to

fifteen thousand billion miles.

6 Ice Ages, pp. 80-1.

7 Earth in Upheaval, p. 266.

8 New York Times, 15 April 1951.



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The obliquity of the ecliptic varies from 22.1° to 24.5° over a cycle of 41,000 years.

Inner planets of the solar system.

225

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The *New York Times*, from which the above report is taken, does not attempt to clarify matters further. Its writers are probably unaware of just

how much they sound like Berosus, the Chaldean historian, astronomer

and seer of the third century BC, who made a deep study of the omens he

believed would presage the final destruction of the world. He concluded,

'I Berosus, interpreter of Bellus, affirm that all the earth inherits will be

consigned to flame when the five planets assemble in Cancer, so

arranged in one row that a straight line may pass through their spheres.'⁹

A conjunction of five planets that can be expected to have profound gravitational effects will take place on 5 May in the year 2000 when

Neptune, Uranus, Venus, Mercury and Mars will align with earth on the

other side of the sun, setting up a sort of cosmic tug-of-war.¹⁰ Let us also

note that modern astrologers who have charted the Mayan date for the

end of the Fifth Sun calculate that there will be a most peculiar

arrangement of planets at that time, indeed an arrangement so peculiar

that 'it can only occur once in 45,200 years ... From this extraordinary

pattern we might well expect an extraordinary effect.'¹¹

No one in his or her right mind would rush to accept such a

proposition. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that multiple influences,

many of which we do not fully understand, appear to be at work within

our solar system. Among these influences, that of our own satellite, the

moon, is particularly strong. Earthquakes, for example, occur more often

when the moon is full or when the earth is between the sun and the

moon; when the moon is new or between the sun and the earth; when the

moon crosses the meridian of the affected locality; and when the moon is

closest to the earth on its orbit.¹² Indeed, when the moon reaches this

latter point (technically referred to as its 'perigee'), its gravitational attraction increases by about six per cent. This happens once every twenty-seven and one-third days. The tidal pull that it exerts on these occasions affects not only the great movements of our oceans but those

of the reservoirs of hot magma penned within the earth's thin crust (which has been described as resembling 'a paper bag filled with honey

or molasses swinging along at a rate of more than 1000 miles an hour in

equatorial rotation, and more than 66,000 miles an hour in orbit'¹³).

The wobble of a deformed planet

All this circular motion, of course, generates immense centrifugal forces

and these, as Sir Isaac Newton demonstrated in the seventeenth century,

9 Berossus, Fragments.

10 Skyglobe 3.6.

11 Roberta S. Sklower, 'Predicting Planetary Positions', appendix to Frank Waters, *Mexico*

Mystique, Sage Books, Chicago, 1975, p. 285ff.

12 *Earth in Upheaval*, p. 138.

13 *Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 49.

226

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

cause the earth's 'paper bag' to bulge outwards at the equator. The corollary is a flattening at the poles. In consequence, our planet deviates

slightly from the form of a perfect sphere and is more accurately described as an 'oblate spheroid'. Its radius at the equator (3963.374 miles) is about fourteen miles longer than its polar radius (3949.921 miles).¹⁴

For billions of years the flattened poles and the bulging equator have been engaged in a covert mathematical interaction with the recondite influence of gravity. 'Because the Earth is flattened,' explains one authority, 'the Moon's gravity tends to tilt the Earth's axis so that it becomes perpendicular to the Moon's orbit, and to a lesser extent the

same is true for the Sun.'¹⁵

At the same time the equatorial bulge—the extra mass distributed around the equator—acts like the rim of a gyroscope to keep the earth steady on its axis.¹⁶

Year in, year out, on a planetary scale, it is this gyroscopic effect that prevents the tug of the sun and the moon from radically altering the earth's axis of rotation. The pull these two bodies jointly exert is, however, sufficiently strong to force the axis to 'precess', which means that it wobbles slowly in a clockwise direction opposite to that of the earth's spin.

This important motion is our planet's characteristic signature within the

solar system. Anyone who has ever set a top spinning should be able to

understand it without much difficulty; a top, after all, is simply another type of gyroscope. In full uninterrupted spin it stands upright. But the moment its axis is deflected from the vertical it begins to exhibit a second behaviour: a slow and obstinate reverse wobble around a great

circle. This wobble, which *is* precession, changes the direction in which

the axis points while keeping constant its newly tilted angle.

A second analogy, somewhat different in approach, may help to clarify

matters a little further:

1 Envisage the earth, floating in space, inclined at approximately 23.5°

to the vertical and spinning around on its axis once every 24 hours.

2 Envisage this axis as a massively strong pivot, or axle, passing through the centre of the earth, exiting via the North and South Poles and extending outwards from there in both directions.

3 Imagine that you are a giant, striding through the solar system, with

orders to carry out a specific task.

4 Imagine approaching the tilted earth (which, because of your great size, now looks no bigger to you than a millwheel).

5 Imagine reaching out and grasping the two ends of the extended axis.

6 And imagine yourself slowly beginning to inter-rotate them, pushing

14 Figures from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 27:530.

15 Ibid.

16 *Path of the Pole*, p. 3.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

one end, pulling the other.

7 The earth was already spinning when you arrived.

8 Your orders, therefore, are not to get involved in its axial rotation, but

rather to impart to it its *other* motion: that slow clockwise wobble called precession.

9 To fulfill this commission you will have to push the northern tip of the

extended axis up and around a great circle in the northern celestial hemisphere while at the same time pulling the southern tip around an

equally large circle in the southern celestial hemisphere. This will involve a slow swivelling pedalling motion with your hands and shoulders.

10 Be warned, however. The 'millwheel' of the earth is heavier than it looks, so much heavier, in fact, that it's going to take you 25,776 years¹⁷ to turn the two tips of its axis through one full precessional cycle (at the end of which they will be aiming at the same points in the

celestial sphere as when you arrived).

11 Oh, and by the way, now that you've started the job we may as well

tell you that you're never going to be allowed to leave. As soon as one

precessional cycle is over another must begin. And another ... and

another ... and another ... and so on, endlessly, for ever and ever and

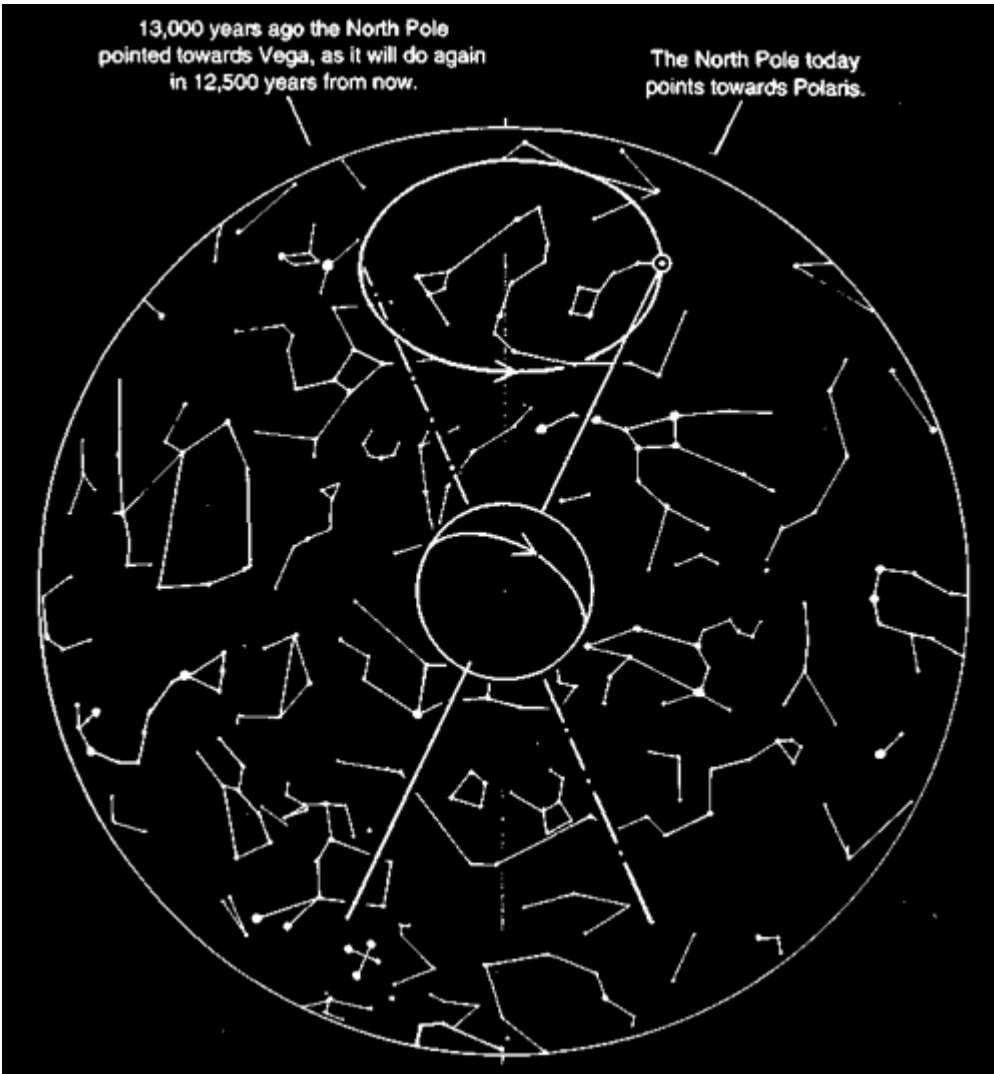
ever.

12 You can think of this, if you like, as one of the basic mechanisms of

the solar system, or, if you prefer, as one of the fundamental

commandments of the divine will.

17 Jane B. Sellers, *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, Penguin, London, 1992, p. 205.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Precession.

In the process, little by little, as you slowly sweep the extended axis around the heavens, its two tips will point to one star after another in the

polar latitudes of the southern celestial hemisphere (and sometimes, of

course, to empty space), and to one star after another in the polar

latitudes of the northern celestial hemisphere. We are talking here, about

a kind of musical chairs among the circumpolar stars. And what keeps

everything in motion is the earth's axial precession—a motion driven by

giant gravitational and gyroscopic forces, that is regular, predictable and

relatively easy to work out with the aid of modern equipment. Thus, for

example, the northern pole star is presently alpha Ursae Minoris (which

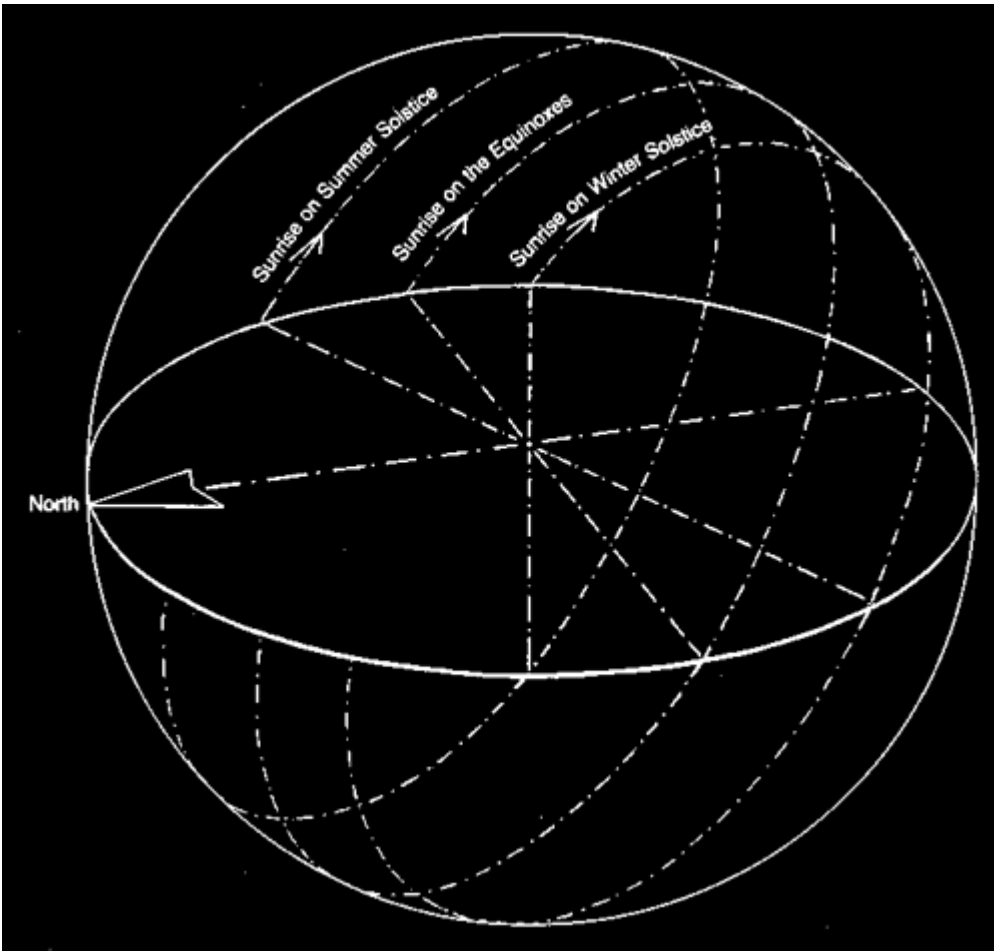
we know as Polaris). But computer calculations enable us to state with

certainty that in 3000 BC alpha Draconis occupied the pole position; at

the time of the Greeks the northern pole star was beta Ursae Minoris; and

in AD 14,000 it will be Vega.¹⁸

¹⁸ Skyglobe 3.6.



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A great secret of the past

It will not hurt to remind ourselves of some of the fundamental data concerning the movements of the earth and its orientation in space:

- It tilts at about 23.5° to the vertical, an angle from which it can vary by as much as 1.5° on either side over periods of 41,000 years.
- It completes a full precessional cycle once every 25,776 years.¹⁹
- It spins on its own axis once every twenty-four hours.

- It orbits the sun once every 365 days (actually 365.2422 days).
- The most important influence on its seasons is the angle at which the rays of the sun strike it at various points on its orbital path.

Equinoxes and solstices.

Let us also note that there are four crucial astronomical moments in the

year, marking the official beginning of each of the four seasons. These

moments (or cardinal points), which were of immense importance to the

ancients, are the winter and the summer solstices and the spring and autumn equinoxes. In the northern hemisphere the winter solstice, the

shortest day, falls on 21 December, and the summer solstice, the longest

day, on 21 June. In the southern hemisphere, on the other hand,

19 Precise figure from *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 205.

230

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

everything is literally upside down: there winter begins on 21 June and

summer on 21 December.

The equinoxes, by contrast, are the two points in the year on which night and day are of equal length all over the planet. Once again, however, as with the solstices, the date that marks the onset of spring in

the northern hemisphere (20 March) marks that of autumn in the southern hemisphere, and the date for the onset of autumn in the northern hemisphere (22 September) marks the onset of spring in the southern hemisphere.

Like the subtler variations of the seasons, all this is brought about by the benevolent obliquity of the planet. The northern hemisphere's summer solstice falls at that point in the orbit when the North Pole is aimed most directly *towards* the sun; six months later the winter solstice

marks that point when the North Pole is aimed most directly *away* from

the sun. And, logically enough, the reason that day and night are of exactly equal length all over the planet on the spring and autumn equinoxes is that these mark the two points when the earth's axis of rotation lies broadside-on to the sun.

Let us now take a look at a strange and beautiful phenomenon of

celestial mechanics.

This phenomenon is known as ‘the precession of the equinoxes’. It has

rigid and repetitive mathematical qualities that can be analysed and predicted precisely. It is, however, extremely difficult to observe, and even harder to measure accurately, without sophisticated instrumentation.

In this, there may lie a clue to one of the great mysteries of the past.

231

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 29

The First Crack in an Ancient Code

The plane of the earth's orbit, projected outwards to form a great circle

in the celestial sphere, is known as the ecliptic. Ringed around the

ecliptic, in a starry belt that extends approximately 7° north and south,

are the twelve constellations of the zodiac: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer,

Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpius, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Aquarius and Pisces.

These constellations are irregular in size, shape and distribution.

Nevertheless (and one assumes by chance!) their spacing around the rim

of the ecliptic is sufficiently even to bestow a sense of cosmic order upon

the diurnal risings and settings of the sun.

To picture what is involved here, do the following: (1) mark a dot in the

centre of a blank sheet of paper; (2) draw a circle around the dot, about

half an inch away from it; (3) enclose that circle in a second, larger, circle.

The dot represents the sun. The smaller of the two concentric circles represents the earth's orbit. The larger circle represents the rim of the

ecliptic. Around the perimeter of this larger circle, therefore, you should

now draw twelve boxes, spacing them evenly, to represent the constellations of the zodiac. Since there are 360° in a circle, each constellation can be considered to occupy a space of 30° along the ecliptic. The dot is the sun. The inner of the two concentric circles is the

earth's orbit. We know that the earth travels on this orbit in an anti-clockwise direction, from the west towards the east, and that every twenty-four hours it also makes one complete rotation around its own axis (again from the west towards the east).

From these two movements two illusions result:

1 Each day as the planet turns from west to east, the sun (which is of course a fixed point) appears to 'move' across the sky from east to west.

2 Roughly every thirty days, as the spinning earth journeys along its orbital path around the sun, the sun itself slowly appears to 'pass'

through one after another of the twelve zodiacal constellations (which are also fixed points), and again it appears to be 'moving' in an east-west direction.

On any particular day of the year, in other words, (corresponding on our

diagram to any point we care to choose around the inner concentric circle

marking the earth's orbit), it is obvious that the sun will lie *between* an

observer on the earth and one of the twelve zodiacal constellations. On

that day what the observer will see, so long as he or she is up and about

well before dawn, is the sun rising in the east in the portion of the sky occupied by that particular constellation.

232

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Beneath the clear and unpolluted heavens of the ancient world, it is easy to understand how human beings might have felt reassured by regular celestial motions such as these. It is equally easy to understand

why the four cardinal points of the year—the spring and autumn

equinoxes, the winter and summer solstices—should everywhere have

been accorded immense significance. Even greater significance was accorded to the conjunction of these cardinal points with the zodiacal constellations. But most significant of all was the constellation in which

the sun was observed to rise on the morning of the spring (or vernal) equinox. Because of the earth's axial precession, the ancients discovered

that this constellation was *not* fixed or permanent for all time but that the

honour of 'housing' or 'carrying' the sun on the day of the vernal equinox

circulated— *very, very slowly*— among all the constellations of the zodiac.

In the words of Giorgio de Santillana: 'The sun's position amongst the

constellations at the vernal equinox was the pointer that indicated the

"hours" of the precessional cycle—very long hours indeed, the equinoctial

sun occupying each zodiacal constellation for almost 2200 years.¹

The *direction* of the earth's slow axial precession is clockwise (i.e., east

to west) and thus in opposition to the direction of the planet's annual path around the sun. In relation to the constellations of the zodiac, lying

fixed in space, this causes the point at which the spring equinox occurs

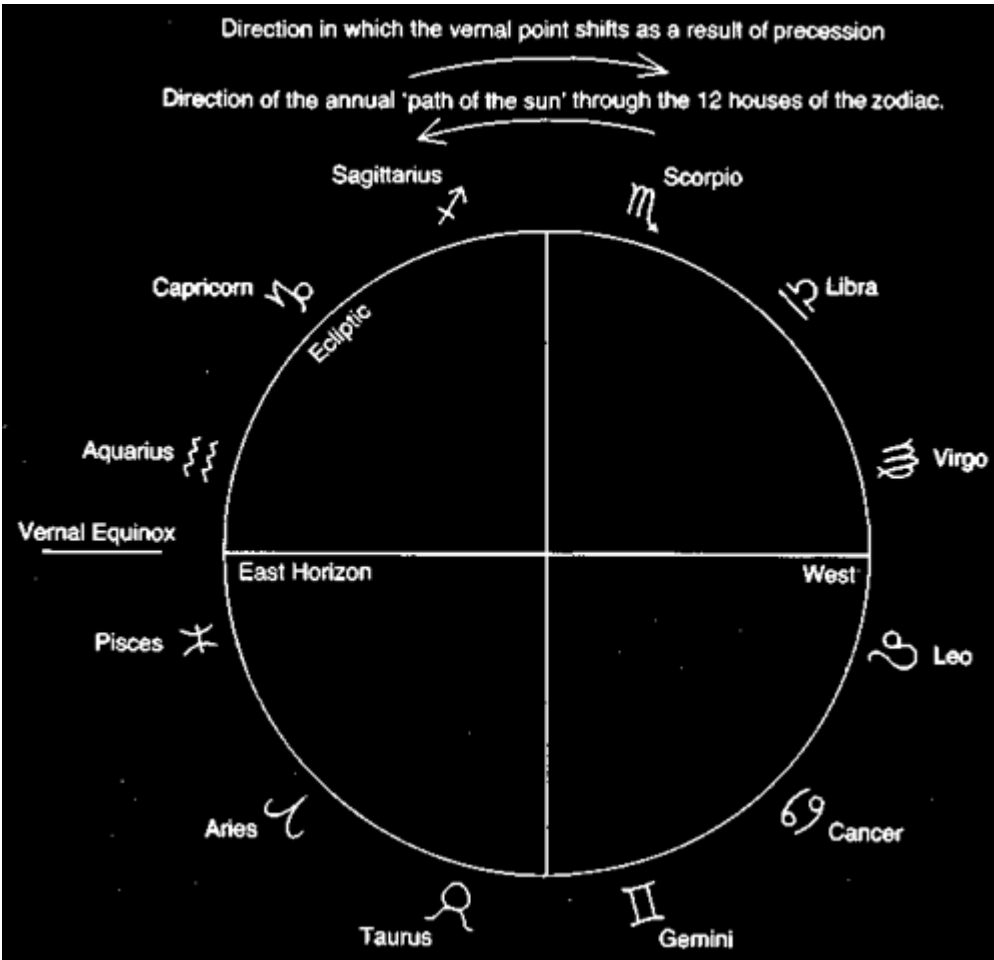
'to move stubbornly along the ecliptic in the opposite direction to the yearly course Direction in which the vernal point shifts as a result of precession of the sun, that is, against the "right" sequence of the zodiacal

signs (TaurusÆ AriesÆ PiscesÆ Aquarius, instead of AquariusÆ PiscesÆ

AriesÆ Taurus).'²

1 *Hamlet 's Mill*, p. 59.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 58.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

During the course of each year the earth's movement along its orbit causes the stellar background against which the sun is seen to rise to change from month to month: AquariusÆ PiscesÆ AriesÆ TaurusÆ GeminiÆ CancerÆ Leo, etc, etc. At present, on the vernal equinox, the sun rises due east between Pisces and Aquarius. The effect of precession is to cause the 'vernal point' to be reached fractionally earlier in the orbit each year with the result that it very

gradually shifts through all 12 houses of the zodiac, spending 2160 years 'in' each sign and making a complete circuit in 25,920 years.

The direction of this 'processional drift', in opposition to the annual 'path of the sun', is: LeoÆ CancerÆ GeminiÆ TaurusÆ AriesÆ

PiscesÆ Aquarius. To give one example, the 'Age of Leo', i.e. the 2160

years during which the sun on the vernal equinox rose against the stellar background of the constellation of Leo, lasted from 10,970 until 8810 BC. We live today in the astrological no man's land at the end of the 'Age of Pisces', on the threshold of the 'New Age' of Aquarius. Traditionally these times of transition between one age and the next have been regarded as ill-omened.

That, in a nutshell, is the meaning of 'precession of the equinoxes'. And

that is exactly what is involved in the notion of the 'dawning of the Age of

Aquarius'. The famous line from the musical *Hair* refers to the fact that

every year, for the last 2000 years or so, the sun has risen in Pisces on

the vernal equinox. The *age* of Pisces, however, is now approaching its

end and the vernal sun will soon pass out of the sector of the Fish and

begin to rise against the new background of Aquarius.

234

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The 25,776-year cycle of precession is the engine that drives this majestic celestial juggernaut along its never-ending tour of the heavens.

But the details of exactly *how* precession moves the equinoctial points

from Pisces into Aquarius—and thence onwards around the zodiac—are

also worth knowing.

Remember that the equinoxes occur on the only two occasions in the

year when the earth's tilted axis lies broadside-on to the sun. These are

when the sun rises due east all over the world and day and night are of

equal length. Because the earth's axis is slowly but surely *precessing* in a

direction opposite to that of its own orbit, the points at which it lies

broadside-on to the sun must occur fractionally earlier in the orbit each

year. These annual changes are so small as to be almost imperceptible (a

one degree shift along the ecliptic—equivalent to the width of your little

finger held up to the horizon—requires approximately seventy-two years

to complete). However, as de Santillana points out, such minute changes

add up in just under 2200 years to a 30° passage through a complete

house of the zodiac, and in just under 26,000 years to a 360° passage

through a complete cycle of precession.

When did the ancients first work out precession?

In the answer to this question lies a great secret, and mystery, of the past. Before we try to penetrate the mystery and to learn the secret, we

should acquaint ourselves with the 'official' line. The *Encyclopaedia*

Britannica is as good a repository as any of conventional historical

wisdom, and this is what it tells us about a scholar named Hipparchus,

the supposed discoverer of precession:

Hipparchus, also spelled HIPPARCHOS (b. Nicaea, Bithynia; d. after 127 BC,

Rhodes), Greek astronomer and mathematician who discovered the precession of

the equinoxes ... This notable discovery was the result of painstaking observations, worked upon by an acute mind. Hipparchus observed the positions

of the stars, and then compared his results with those of Timocharis of Alexandria

about 150 years earlier and with even earlier observations made in Babylonia. He

discovered that the celestial longitudes were different and that this difference was

of a magnitude exceeding that attributable to errors of observation. He therefore

proposed precession to account for the size of the difference and he gave a value

of 45' or 46' (seconds of arc) for annual changes. This is very close to the figure of

50.274 seconds of arc accepted today ...'3

First, a point of terminology. Seconds of arc are the smallest subdivisions

of a degree of arc. There are 60 of these arc seconds in one arc minute,

60 minutes in one degree, and 360 degrees in the full circle of earth's

path around the sun. An annual change of 50.274 seconds of arc

represents a distance somewhat under one-sixtieth of one degree so that

3 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 5:937-8. See also *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*,

p. 205, where the precise figure of 50.274 is given.

235

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

it takes roughly 72 years (an entire human lifetime) for the equinoctial

sun to migrate just one degree along the ecliptic. It is because of the

observational difficulties entailed in detecting this snails' pace rate of

change that the value worked out by Hipparchus in the second century BC

is hailed in the *Britannica* as a 'notable discovery'.

Would this discovery seem so notable if it turned out to be a

rediscovery? Would the mathematical and astronomical achievements of

the Greeks shine so brightly if we could prove that the difficult challenge

of measuring precession had been taken up thousands of years *before*

Hipparchus? What if this heavenly cycle, almost 26,000 years long, had

been made the object of precise scientific investigations long epochs before the supposed dawn of scientific thought?

In seeking answers to such questions there is much that may be relevant which would never be accepted by any court of law as concrete

proof. Let us not accept it either. We have seen that Hipparchus proposed

a value of 45 or 46 seconds of arc for one year of precessional motion.

Let us therefore not attempt to dislodge the Greek astronomer from his

pedestal as the discoverer of precession unless we can find a significantly

more accurate value recorded in a significantly more ancient source.

Of course, there are many potential sources. At this point, however, in

the interests of succinctness, we shall limit our inquiry to universal

myths. We have already examined one group of myths in detail (the

traditions of flood and cataclysm set out in Part IV) and we have seen that

they possess a range of intriguing characteristics:

1 There is no doubt that they are immensely old. Take the

Mesopotamian flood story, versions of which have been found

inscribed on tablets from the earliest strata of Sumerian history, around 3000 BC. These tablets, handed down from the dawn of the recorded past, leave no room for doubt that the tradition of a world-destroying flood was ancient even then, and therefore originated long before the dawn. We cannot say how long. The fact remains that no scholar has ever been able to establish a date for the creation of any myth, let alone for these venerable and widespread traditions. In a very real sense they seem always to have been around—part of the permanent baggage of human culture.

2 The possibility cannot be ruled out that this aura of vast antiquity is not an illusion. On the contrary, we have seen that many of the great myths of cataclysm seem to contain accurate eye-witness accounts of

real conditions experienced by humanity during the last Ice Age. In theory, therefore, these stories could have been constructed at almost

the same time as the emergence of our subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens*, perhaps as long as 50,000 years ago. The geological evidence, however, suggests a more recent provenance, and we have

identified the epoch 15,000-8000 BC as the most likely. Only then, in the whole of human experience, were there rapid climatic changes on

236

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the convulsive scale the myths so eloquently describe.

3 The Ice Age and its tumultuous demise were global phenomena. It is

therefore perhaps not surprising that the cataclysm traditions of many

different cultures, widely scattered around the globe, should be characterized by a high degree of uniformity and convergence.

4 What is surprising, however, is that the myths not only describe shared experiences but that they do so in what appears to be a shared

symbolic language. The same 'literary motifs' keep cropping up again

and again, the same stylistic 'props', the same recognizable characters, and the same plots.

According to Professor de Santillana, this type of uniformity suggests a guiding hand at work. In *Hamlet's Mill*, a seminal and original thesis

on ancient myth written in collaboration with Hertha von Dechend

(professor of the History of Science at Frankfurt University) he argues

that:

universality is in itself a test when coupled with a firm design. When something

found, say, in China, turns up also in Babylonian astrological texts, then it must be

assumed to be relevant if it reveals a complex of uncommon images which nobody

could claim had risen independently by spontaneous generation. Take the origin

of music. Orpheus and his harrowing death may be a poetic creation born in more

than one instance in diverse places. But when characters who do not play the lyre

but blow pipes get themselves flayed alive for various absurd reasons, and their

identical end is rehearsed on several continents, then we feel we have got hold of

something, for such stories cannot be linked by internal sequence. And when the

Pied Piper turns up both in the German myth of Hamelin and in Mexico long

before Columbus, and is linked in both places to certain attributes like the colour

red, it can hardly be a coincidence ... Likewise, when one finds numbers like 108,

or 9×13 reappearing under several multiples in the *Vedas*, in the temples of

Angkor, in Babylon, in Heraclitus' dark utterances, and also in the Norse Valhalla,

it is not accident ...4

Connecting the great universal myths of cataclysm, is it possible that

such coincidences that cannot be coincidences, and accidents that cannot

be accidents, could denote the global influence of an ancient, though as

yet unidentified, guiding hand? If so, could it be that same hand, during

and after the last Ice Age, which drew the series of highly accurate and

technically advanced world maps reviewed in Part I? And might not that

same hand have left its ghostly fingerprints on another body of universal

myths? those concerning the death and resurrection of gods, and great

trees around which the earth and heavens turn, and whirlpools, and

churns, and drills, and other similar revolving, grinding contrivances?

According to Santillana and von Dechend, all such images refer to celestial events⁵ and do so, furthermore, in the refined technical language

of an archaic but 'immensely sophisticated' astronomical and

mathematical science:⁶ 'This language ignores local beliefs and cults. It

⁴ *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*; *Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*.

⁶ *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 65.

237

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

concentrates on numbers, motions, measures, overall frames, schemas—

on the structure of numbers, on geometry.'⁷

Where could such a language have come from? *Hamlet's Mill* is a labyrinth of brilliant but deliberately evasive scholarship, and offers us no

straightforward answer to this question. Here and there, however, almost

with embarrassment, inconclusive hints are dropped. For example, at one

point the authors say that the scientific language or 'code' they believe

they have identified is of 'awe-inspiring antiquity'.⁸ On another occasion

they pin down the depth of this antiquity more precisely to a period at least '6000 years before Virgil'⁹—in other words 8000 years ago or more.

What civilization *known to history* could have developed and made use

of a sophisticated technical language more than 8000 years ago? The

honest answer to this question is 'none', followed by a frank admission

that what is being conjectured is nothing less than a forgotten episode of

high technological culture in prehistoric times. Once again, Santillana and

von Dechend are elusive when it comes to the crunch, speaking only of

the legacy we all owe to 'some almost unbelievable ancestor civilization'

that 'first dared to understand the world as created according to number,

measure and weight.'¹⁰

The legacy, it is clear, has to do with scientific thinking and complex

information of a mathematical nature. Because it is so extremely old, however, the passage of time has dissipated it:

When the Greeks came upon the scene the dust of centuries had already settled

upon the remains of this great world-wide archaic construction. Yet something of

it survived in traditional rites, in myths and fairy-tales no longer understood ...

These are tantalising fragments of a lost whole. They make one think of those

'mist landscapes' of which Chinese painters are masters, which show here a rock,

here a gable, there the tip of a tree, and leave the rest to imagination. Even when

the code shall have yielded, when the techniques shall be known, we cannot

expect to gauge the thought of these remote ancestors of ours, wrapped as it is in

its symbols, since the creating, ordering minds that devised the symbols have

vanished forever.'¹¹

What we have here, therefore, are two distinguished professors of the

History of Science, from esteemed universities on both sides of the

Atlantic, claiming to have discovered the remnants of a coded scientific

language *many thousands of years older* than the oldest human civilizations identified by scholarship. Moreover, though generally cautious, Santillana and von Dechend also claim to have ‘broken part of

that code’.¹²

This is an extraordinary statement for two serious academics to have

7 Ibid., p. 345.

8 Ibid., p. 418.

9 Ibid., p. 245.

10 Ibid., p. 132.

11 Ibid., pp. 4-5,348.

12 Ibid., p. 5.

238

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

made.

239

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 30

The Cosmic Tree and the Mill of the Gods

In their brilliant and far-reaching study *Hamlet's Mill*, Professors de Santillana and von Dechend present a formidable array of mythical and

iconographic evidence to demonstrate the existence of a curious phenomenon. For some inexplicable reason, and at some unknown date,

it seems that certain archaic myths from all over the world were 'co-opted' (no other word will really do) to serve as vehicles for a body of complex technical data concerning the precession of the equinoxes. The

importance of this astonishing thesis, as one leading authority on ancient

measurement has pointed out, is that it has fired the first salvo in what

may prove to be 'a Copernican revolution in current conceptions of the

development of human culture.'¹

Hamlet's Mill was published in 1969, more than a quarter of a century

ago, so the revolution has been a long time coming. During this period,

however, the book has been neither widely distributed among the general

public nor widely understood by scholars of the remote past. This state of

affairs has not come about because of any inherent problems or

weaknesses in the work. Instead, in the words of Martin Bernal, professor

of Government Studies at Cornell University, it has happened because

'few archaeologists, Egyptologists and ancient historians have the combination of time, effort and skill necessary to take on the very technical arguments of de Santillana.'²

What those arguments predominantly concern is the recurrent and persistent transmission of a 'precessional message' in a wide range of

ancient myths. And, strangely enough, many of the key images and

symbols that crop up in these myths—notably those that concern a

'derangement of the heavens'—are also to be found embedded in the

ancient traditions of worldwide cataclysm reviewed in Chapters Twenty-

four and Twenty-five.

In Norse mythology for example, we saw how the wolf Fenrir, whom the

gods had so carefully chained up, broke his bonds at last and escaped:

'He shook himself and the world trembled. The ash-tree Yggdrasil was

shaken from its roots to its topmost branches. Mountains crumbled or

split from top to bottom ... The earth began to lose its shape. Already the

stars were coming adrift in the sky.'

In the opinion of de Santillana and von Dechend, this myth mixes the

1 Livio Catullo Stecchini, 'Notes on the Relation of Ancient Measures to the Great

Pyramid', in *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, pp. 381-2.

2 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afro-asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vintage

Books, London, 1991, p. 276.

240

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

familiar theme of catastrophe with the quite separate theme of

precession. On the one hand we have an earthly disaster on a scale that

seems to dwarf even the flood of Noah. On the other we hear that ominous changes are taking place in the heavens and that the stars, which have come adrift in the sky, are 'dropping into the void.'³

Such celestial imagery, repeated again and again with only relatively minor variations in myths from many different parts of the world, belongs

to a category earmarked in *Hamlet's Mill* as 'not mere storytelling of the

kind that comes naturally'.⁴ Moreover the Norse traditions that speak of

the monstrous wolf Fenrir, and of the shaking of Yggdrasil, go on to report the final apocalypse in which the forces of Valhalla issue forth on

the side of 'order' to participate in the terrible last battle of the gods —a

battle that will end in apocalyptic destruction:

500 doors and 40 there are

I ween, in Valhalla's walls;

800 fighters through each door fare,

When to war with the Wolf they go.⁵

With a lightness of touch that is almost subliminal, this verse has encouraged us to *count* Valhalla's fighters, thus momentarily obliging us

to focus our attention on their total number ($540 \times 800 = 432,000$). This

total, as we shall see in Chapter Thirty-one is mathematically linked to the

phenomenon of precession. It is, unlikely to have found its way into

Norse mythology by accident, especially in a context that has previously

specified a 'derangement of the heavens' severe enough to have caused

the stars to come adrift from their stations in the sky.

To understand what is going on here it is essential to grasp the basic imagery of the ancient 'message' that Santillana and von Dechend claim

to have stumbled upon. This imagery transforms the luminous dome of

the celestial sphere into a vast and intricate piece of machinery. And, like

a millwheel, like a churn, like a whirlpool, like a quern, this machine turns

and turns and turns endlessly (its motions being calibrated all the time by

the sun, which rises first in one constellation of the zodiac, then in another, and so on all the year round).

The four key points of the year are the spring and summer equinoxes

and the winter and summer solstices. At each point, naturally, the sun is

3 The reader will recall from Chapter Twenty-five how Yggdrasil, the world tree itself, was

not destroyed and how the progenitors of future humanity managed to shelter within its

trunk until a new earth emerged from the ruins of the old. How likely is it to be pure

coincidence that exactly the same strategy was adopted by survivors of the universal

deluge as described in certain Central American myths? Such links and crossovers in

myth between the themes of precession and global catastrophe are extremely common.

4 *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 7.

5 *Grimnismol* 23, the Poetic *Edda*, p. 93, cited in *Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 199; *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 162; Elsa Brita Titchenell, *The Masks of Odin*, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, 1988, p. 168.

241

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

seen to rise in a different constellation (thus if the sun rises in Pisces at

the spring equinox, as it does at present, it must rise in Virgo at the

autumn equinox, in Gemini at the winter solstice and in Sagittarius at the

summer solstice). On each of these four occasions for the last 2000 years

or so, this is exactly what the sun has been doing. As we have seen,

however, precession of the equinoxes means that the vernal point will

change in the not so distant future from Pisces to Aquarius. When that

happens, the three other constellations marking the three key points will

change as well (from Virgo, Gemini and Sagittarius to Leo, Taurus and

Scorpius)—almost as though the giant mechanism of heaven has ponderously switched gears ...

Like the axle of a mill, Santillana and von Dechend explain, Yggdrasil

‘represents the world axis’ in the archaic scientific language they have

identified: an axis which extends outwards (for a viewer in the northern

hemisphere) to the North Pole of the celestial sphere:

This instinctively suggests a straight, upright post ... but that would be an

oversimplification. In the mythical context it is best not to think of the axis in

analytical terms, one line at a time, but to consider it, and the frame to which it is

connected, as a whole: ... As radius automatically calls circle to mind so axis

should invoke the two determining great circles on the surface of the sphere, the

equinoctial and solstitial colures.⁶

These colures are the imaginary hoops, intersecting at the celestial North

Pole, which connect the two equinoctial points on the earth's path around

the sun (i.e. where it stands on 20 March and 22 September) and the two

solstitial points (where it stands on 21 June and 21 December). The

implication, is that: 'The rotation of the polar axis must not be disjointed

from the great circles that shift along with it in heaven. The framework is

thought of as all one with the axis.'⁷

Santillana and von Dechend are certain that what confronts us here is

not a belief but an allegory. They insist that the notion of a spherical frame composed of two intersecting hoops suspended from an axis is not

under any circumstances to be understood as the way in which ancient

science envisaged the cosmos. Instead it is to be seen as a ‘thought tool’

designed to focus the minds of people bright enough to crack the code

upon the hard-to-detect astronomical fact of precession of the equinoxes.

It is a thought tool that keeps on cropping up, in numerous disguises, all over the myths of the ancient world.

At the mill with slaves

One example, from Central America (which also provides a further illustration of the curious symbolic ‘cross-overs’ between myths of

6 *Hamlet’s Mill*, p. 232-3.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 231.

242

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

precession and myths of catastrophe), was summarized by Diego De Landa in the sixteenth century:

Among the multitude of gods worshipped by these people [the Maya] were four

whom they called by the name *Bacab*. These were, they say, four brothers placed

by God when he created the world at its four corners to sustain the heavens lest

they fall. They also say that these Bacabs escaped when the world was destroyed

by a deluge.⁸

It is the opinion of Santillana and von Dechend that the Mayan

astronomer-priests did not subscribe for a moment to the simple-minded

notion that the earth was flat with four corners. Instead, they say, the

image of the four Bacabs is used as a technical allegory intended to shed

light on the phenomenon of precession of the equinoxes. The Bacabs

stand, in short, for the system of coordinates of an astrological age. They

represent the equinoctial and solstitial colures, binding together the four

constellations in which the sun continues to rise at the spring and

autumn equinoxes and at the winter and summer solstices for epochs of

just under 2200 years.

Of course it is understood that when the gears of heaven change, the

old age comes crashing down and a new age is born. All this, so far, is

routine precessional imagery. What stands out, however, is the explicit

linkage to an earthly disaster—in this case a flood—which the Bacabs

survive. It may also be relevant that relief carvings at Chichen Itza

unmistakably represent the Bacabs as being bearded and of European

appearance.⁹

Be that as it may, the Bacab image (linked to a number of badly

misunderstood references to ‘the four corners of heaven’, ‘the

quadrangular earth’, and so on) is only one among many that seem to

have been designed to serve as thought tools for precession.

Archetypal

among these is, of course, the ‘Mill’ of Santillana’s title—Hamlet’s Mill.

It turns out that the Shakespearean character, ‘whom the poet made

one of us, the first unhappy intellectual', conceals a past as a legendary

being, his features predetermined, preshaped by longstanding myth.¹⁰ In

all his many incarnations, this Hamlet remains strangely himself. The original Amlodhi (or sometimes Amleth) as his name was in Icelandic legend, 'shows the same characteristics of melancholy and high intellect.

He, too, is a son dedicated to avenge his father, a speaker of cryptic but

inescapable truths, an elusive carrier of Fate who must yield once his

mission is accomplished ...'¹¹

In the crude and vivid imagery of the Norse, Amlodhi was identified

8 *Yucatan before and after the Conquest*, p. 82.

9 See, for example, *The God-Kings and the Titans*, p. 64. It may also be relevant that

other versions of 'the Bacabs' myth tell us that 'their slightest movement produces an

earth tremor or even an earthquake' (*Maya History and Religion*, p. 346).

10 *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 2.

11 *Ibid.*

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

with the ownership of a fabled mill, or quern, which, in its time,
ground

out gold and peace and plenty. In many of the traditions, two giant
maidens (Fenja and Menja) were indentured to turn this great
contraption, which could not be budged by any human strength.

Something went wrong, and the two giantesses were forced to work
day

and night with no rest:

Forth to the mill bench they were brought,

To set the grey stone in motion;

He gave them no rest nor peace,

Attentive to the creak of the mill.

Their song was a howl,

Shattering silence;

‘Lower the bin and lighten the stones!’

Yet he would have them grind more.¹²

Rebellious and angry, Fenja and Menja waited until everyone was
asleep

and then began to turn the mill in a mad whirl until its great props,

though cased in iron, burst asunder.¹³ Immediately afterwards, in a confusing episode, the mill was stolen by a sea king named Mysinger and

loaded aboard his ship together with the giantesses. Mysinger ordered

the pair to grind again, but this time they ground out salt. At midnight they asked him whether he was not weary of salt; he bade them grind

longer. They had ground but a little longer when down sank the ship:

The huge props flew off the bin,

The iron rivets burst,

The shaft tree shivered,

The bin shot down.¹⁴

When it reached the bottom of the sea, the mill continued to turn, but it

ground out rock and sand, creating a vast whirlpool, the Maelstrom.¹⁵

Such images, Santillana and von Dechend assert, signify precession of

the equinoxes.¹⁶ The axis and 'iron props' of the mill stand for:

a system of coordinates in the celestial sphere and represent the frame of a world

age. Actually the frame defines a world age. Because the polar axis and the colures

form an invisible whole, the entire frame is thrown out of kilter if one part is

moved. When that happens a new Pole star with appropriate colures of its own

must replace the obsolete apparatus.¹⁷

Furthermore, the engulfing whirlpool:

12 *Grottasongr*, 'The Song of the Mill', in *The Masks of Odin*, p. 198.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

14 *Grottasongr*, cited in *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 89-90.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

244

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

belongs to the stock-in-trade of ancient fable. It appears in the *Odyssey* as

Charybdis in the Straits of Messina, and again in other cultures in the Indian Ocean

and the Pacific. It is found there, too, curiously enough, with an overhanging fig-

tree to whose boughs the hero can cling as the ship goes down,
whether it be

Satyavrata in India or Kae in Tonga ... The persistence of detail rules
out free

invention. Such stories have belonged to the cosmographical
literature since

antiquity.¹⁸

The appearance of the whirlpool in Homer's *Odyssey* (which is a
compilation of Greek myths more than 3000 years old), should not
surprise us, because the great Mill of Icelandic legend appears there
also

(and does so, moreover, in familiar circumstances). It is the last night
before the decisive confrontation. Odysseus, bent on revenge, has
landed

in Ithaca and is hiding under the magic spell of the goddess Athena,
which protects him from recognition. Odysseus prays to Zeus to
send him

an encouraging sign before the great ordeal:

Straightaway Zeus thundered from shining Olympus ... and goodly
Odysseus was

glad. Moreover, a woman, a grinder at the mill, uttered a voice of
omen from

within the house hard by, where stood the mills of the shepherd of
the people. At

these handmills twelve women in all plied their task, making meal of
barley and of

wheat the marrow of men. Now all the others were asleep, for they
had ground out

their task of grain, but this one alone rested not yet, being the
weakest of all. She

now stayed her quern and spake the word ... 'May the [enemies of
Odysseus] on

this day, for the last time make their sweet feasting in his halls. They
that have

loosened my knees with cruel toil to grind their barley meal, may
they now sup

their last!'19

Santillana and von Dechend argue that it is no accident that the
allegory

of the 'orb of heaven that turns around like a millstone and ever does
something bad'20 also makes an appearance in the biblical tradition
of

Samson, 'eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves'.21 His merciless
captors

unbind him so that he can 'make sport' for them in their temple;
instead,

with his last strength, he takes hold of the middle pillars of that great
structure and brings the whole edifice crashing down, killing
everybody.22

Like Fenja and Menja, he gets his revenge.

The theme resurfaces in Japan,²³ in Central America,²⁴ among the Maoris

18 Ibid., p. 204.

19 *Odyssey* (Rouse translation), 20:103-19.

20 Trimalcho in Petronius, cited in *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 137.

21 John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, 1:41.

22 *Judges*, 16:25-30.

23 In Japanese myth the Samson character is named Susanowo. See Post Wheeler, *The*

Sacred Scriptures of the Japanese, New York, 1952, p. 44ff.

24 In slightly distorted form in the *Popol Vuh's* account of the Twins and their 400

companions (see Chapter Nineteen). Zipcana, son of Vucub-Caquix sees the 400 youths

dragging a huge log they want as a ridgepole for their house. Zipcana carries the tree

without effort to the spot where a hole has been dug for the post to support the

ridgepole. The youths try to kill Zipcana by crushing him in the hole, but he escapes and

brings down the house on their heads, killing them all. *Popol Vuh*, pp. 99-101.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

of New Zealand,²⁵ and in the myths of Finland. There the Hamlet/Samson

figure is known as Kullervo and the mill has a peculiar name: the Sampo.

Like Fenja and Menja's mill it is ultimately stolen and loaded on board a

ship. And like their mill, it ends up being broken in pieces.²⁶

It turns out that the word 'Sampo' has its origins in the Sanskrit

skambha, meaning 'pillar or pole'.²⁷ And in the *Atharvaveda*, one of the

most ancient pieces of north Indian literature, we find an entire hymn dedicated to the Skambha:

In whom earth, atmosphere, in whom sky is set, where fire, moon, sun, wind stand

fixed ... The Skambha sustains both heaven and earth; the Skambha sustains the

wide atmosphere; the Skambha sustains the six wide directions; into the Skambha

entered all existence.

Whitney, the translator (*Atharvaveda* 10:7) comments in some perplexity:

'Skambha, lit, prop, support, pillar, strangely used in this hymn as frame

of the universe'.²⁸ Yet with an awareness of the complex of ideas linking

cosmic mills, and whirlpools and world trees and so on, the archaic Vedic

usage should not seem so strange. What is being signalled here, as in all

the other allegories, is *the frame of a world age*— that same heavenly

mechanism that turns for more than 2000 years with the sun rising always in the same four cardinal points and then slowly shifts those celestial coordinates to four new constellations for the next couple of thousand years.

This is why the mill always breaks, why the huge props always fly off the bin in one way or another, why the iron rivets burst, why the shaft-

tree shivers. Precession of the equinoxes merits such imagery because, at

widely separated intervals of time it does indeed change, or break, the

stabilizing coordinates of the entire celestial sphere.

Openers of the way

What is remarkable about all this is the way that the mill (which continues

to serve as an allegory for cosmic processes) stubbornly keeps on resurfacing, all over the world, even where the context has been jumbled

or lost. Indeed, in Santillana and von Dechend's argument, it doesn't really matter if the context is lost. 'The particular merit of mythical terminology,' they say, 'is that it can be used as a vehicle for handing down solid knowledge independently from the degree of insight of the

people who do the actual telling of stories, fables, etc.'²⁹ What matters, in

²⁵ In Maori traditions the Samson character is known as Whakatu. See Sir George Grey,

Polynesian Mythology, London, 1956 (1st ed. 1858), p. 97ff.

²⁶ Cited in *Hamlet's Mill*, pp. 104-8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 312.

246

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

other words, is that certain central imagery should survive and continue

to be passed on in retellings, however far these may drift from the original storyline.

An example of such drift (coupled with the retention of essential imagery and information) is found among the Cherokees, whose name for

the Milky Way (our own galaxy) is 'Where the Dog Ran'. In ancient times,

according to Cherokee tradition, the 'people in the South had a corn mill',

from which meal was stolen again and again. In due course the owners

discovered the thief, a dog, who 'ran off howling to his home in the

North, with the meal dropping from his mouth as he ran, and leaving

behind a white trail where now we see the Milky Way, which the Cherokee

call to this day ... "Where the Dog Ran".'30

In Central America, one of the many myths concerning Quetzalcoatl

depicts him playing a key role in the regeneration of mankind after the

all-destroying flood that ended the Fourth Sun. Together with his dog-

headed companion Xolotl, he descends into the underworld to retrieve

the skeletons of the people killed by the deluge. This he succeeds in doing, after tricking Miclantechuhtli, the god of death, and the bones are

brought to a place called Tamoanchan. There, like corn, they are milled

into a fine meal on a grindstone. Upon this ground meal the gods then

release blood, thus creating the flesh of the current age of men.³¹

Santillana and von Dechend do not think that the presence of a canine

character in both the above variants of the myth of the cosmic mill is

likely to be accidental. They point out that Kullervo, the Finnish Hamlet, is

also accompanied by 'the black dog Musti'.³² Likewise, after his return to

his estates in Ithaca, Odysseus is first recognized by his faithful dog,³³

and as anyone who has been to Sunday school will remember, Samson is

associated with foxes (300 of them to be precise³⁴), which are members

of the dog family. In the Danish version of the Amleth/Hamlet saga,

‘Amleth went on and a wolf crossed his path amid the thicket.’³⁵
Last but

not least an alternative recension of the Kullervo story from Finland
has

the hero (rather weirdly) being ‘sent to Esthonia to bark under the
fence;

he barked one year ...’³⁶

Santillana and von Dechend are confident that all this ‘doggishness’
is

purposive: another piece of the ancient code, as yet unbroken,

persistently tapping out its message from place to place. They list
these

and many other canine symbols among a series of ‘morphological

30 James Mooney, ‘Myths of the Cherokee’, Washington, 1900, cited
in *Hamlet’s Mill*, pp.

249, 389; Jean Guard Monroe and Ray A. Williamson, *They Dance
in the Sky: Native*

American Star Myths, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1987, pp. 117-
18.

31 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, p. 70.

32 Cited in *Hamlet’s Mill*, p. 33.

33 Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 17.

34 *Judges*, 15:4.

35 Saxo Grammaticus, in *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 13.

36 Ibid., p. 31.

247

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

markers' which they have identified as likely to suggest the presence, in

ancient myths, of scientific information concerning precession of the equinoxes.³⁷ These markers may have had meanings of their own or been

intended simply to alert the target audience that a piece of hard data was

coming up in the story being told. Beguilingly, sometimes they may also

have been designed to serve as 'openers of the way'—conduits to enable

initiates to follow the trail of scientific information from one myth to another.

Thus, even though none of the familiar mills and whirlpools is in sight,

we should perhaps sit up and pay attention when we learn that Orion, the

great hunter of Greek myth, was the owner of a dog. When Orion tried to

ravish the virgin goddess Artemis she produced a scorpion from the earth

which killed him and the dog. Orion was transported to the skies where

he became the constellation that bears his name today; his dog was transformed into Sirius, the Dog Star.³⁸

Precisely the same identification of Sirius was made by the ancient Egyptians,³⁹ who linked the Orion constellation specifically to their god

Osiris.⁴⁰ It is in Ancient Egypt too that the character of the faithful celestial dog achieves its fullest and most explicit mythical elaboration in

the form of Upuaut, a jackal-headed deity whose name means 'Opener of

the Ways'.⁴¹ If we follow this way opener to Egypt, turn our eyes to the

constellation of Orion, and enter the potent myth of Osiris, we find ourselves enveloped in a net of familiar symbols.

The reader will recall that the myth presents Osiris as the victim of a plot. The conspirators initially dispose of him by sealing him in a box and

casting him adrift on the waters of the Nile. In this respect does he not

resemble Utnapishtim, and Noah and Coxcoxtli and all the other deluge

heroes in their arks (or boxes, or chests) riding out the waters of the flood?

Another familiar element is the classic precessional image of the world-

tree and/or roof-pillar (in this case combined). The myth tells us how

Osiris, still sealed inside his coffer, is carried out into the sea and washed

up at Byblos. The waves lay him to rest among the branches of a tamarisk

tree, which rapidly grows to a magnificent size, enclosing the coffer within its trunk.⁴² The king of the country, who much admires the

tamarisk tree, cuts it down and fashions the part which contains Osiris

into a roof pillar for his palace. Later Isis, the wife of Osiris, removes her

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 7, 31.

³⁸ *World Mythology*, p. 139. It should also be noted that, like Samson, Orion was blind—

the only blind figure in constellation mythology. See *Hamlet's Mill*, pp. 177-8.

³⁹ Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, London, 1946, pp. 25, 112.

40 Ibid. *Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 39: ‘the ancient Egyptians are known to have

identified Orion with Osiris’.

41 Also rendered Wapwewet and Ap-uaut. See, for example, E. A. Wallis Budge, *Gods of*

the Egyptians, Methuen and Co., London, 1904, vol. II, pp. 366-7.

42 *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Introduction, p. L.

248

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

husband’s body from the pillar and takes it back to Egypt to undergo rebirth.⁴³

The Osiris myth also includes certain key numbers. Whether by accident

or by design, these numbers give access to a ‘science’ of precession, as

we shall see in the next chapter.

43 Ibid. Though a mill, as such, is nowhere to be seen, many Ancient Egyptian reliefs

depict two of the principal characters in the Osiris myth (Horus and Seth) jointly

operating a giant *drill*, again a classic symbol of precession. *Hamlet’s Mill*, p. 162: ‘This feature is continuously mislabelled the “uniting of the two countries” whether Horus and

Seth serve the churn or, as is more often the case, the so-called Nile Gods.'

249

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 31

The Osiris Numbers

Archaeo-astronomer Jane B. Sellers, who studied Egyptology at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, spends her winters in Portland,

Maine, and summers at Ripley Neck, a nineteenth-century enclave 'downcast' on Maine's rocky coast. 'There,' she says, 'the night skies can

be as clear as the desert, and no one minds if you read the Pyramid Texts

out loud to the seagulls ...¹

One of the few serious scholars to have tested the theory advanced by

Santillana and von Dechend in *Hamlet's Mill*, Sellers has been hailed for

having drawn attention to the need to use astronomy, and more particularly precession, for the proper study of ancient Egypt and its

religion.² In her words: 'Archaeologists by and large lack an understanding of precession, and this affects their conclusions

concerning ancient myths, ancient gods and ancient temple alignments ...

For astronomers precession is a well-established fact; those working in

the field of ancient man have a responsibility to attain an understanding

of it.'3

It is Sellers's contention, eloquently expressed in her recent book, *The*

Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt, that the Osiris myth may have been

deliberately encoded with a group of key numbers that are 'excess

baggage' as far as the narrative is concerned but that offer an eternal

calculus by which surprisingly exact values can be derived for the following:

1 The time required for the earth's slow precessional wobble to cause

the position of sunrise on the vernal equinox to complete a shift of one degree along the ecliptic (in relation to the stellar background);

2 The time required for the sun to pass through one full zodiacal segment of thirty degrees;

3 The time required for the sun to pass through two full zodiacal segments (totalling sixty degrees);

4 The time required to bring about the 'Great Return'⁴, i.e., for the sun

to shift three hundred and sixty degrees along the ecliptic, thus fulfilling one complete precessional cycle or 'Great Year'.

1 *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, author biography.

2 For example by Robert Bauval in *The Orion Mystery*, pp. 144-5.

3 *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 174.

4 This phrase was coined by Jane Sellers, whom also detected the precessional

calculations embedded in the Osiris myth.

250

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Computing the Great Return

The precessional numbers highlighted by Sellers in the Osiris myth are

360, 72, 30 and 12. Most of them are found in a section of the myth which provides us with biographical details of the various characters.

These have been conveniently summarized by E. A. Wallis Budge, formerly

keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum:

The goddess Nut, wife of the sun god Ra, was beloved by the god Geb. When Ra

discovered the intrigue he cursed his wife and declared that she should not be

delivered of a child in any month of any year. Then the god Thoth, who also loved

Nut, played at tables with the moon and won from her five whole days. These he

joined to the 360 days *of which the year then consisted* [emphasis added]. On the

first of these five days Osiris was brought forth; and at the moment of his birth a

voice was heard to proclaim that the lord of creation was born.⁵

Elsewhere the myth informs us that the 300-day year consists of '12

months of 30 days each'.⁶ And in general, as Sellers observes, 'phrases

are used which prompt simple mental calculations and an attention to

numbers'.⁷

Thus far we have been provided with three of Sellers's precessional numbers: 360, 12 and 30. The fourth number, which occurs later in the

text, is by far the most important. As we saw in Chapter Nine, the evil deity known as Set led a group of conspirators in a plot to kill Osiris. The

number of these conspirators was 72.

With this last number in hand, suggests Sellers, we are now in a position to boot-up and set running an ancient computer programme:

12 = the number of constellations in the zodiac;

30 = the number of degrees allocated along the ecliptic to each zodiacal constellation;

72 = the number of years required for the equinoctial sun to complete a

precessional shift of one degree along the ecliptic;

360 = the total number of degrees in the ecliptic;

$72 \times 30 = 2160$ (the number of years required for the sun to complete a

passage of 30 degrees along the ecliptic, i.e., to pass entirely through

any one of the 12 zodiacal constellations);

2160×12 (or 360×72) = 25,920 (the number of years in one complete

precessional cycle or 'Great Year', and thus the total number of years

required to bring about the 'Great Return').

5 *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Introduction, page XLIX.

6 Cited in *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 204.

7 Ibid.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Other figures and combinations of figures also emerge, for example:

36, the number of years required for the equinoctial sun to complete a

precessional shift of half a degree along the ecliptic;

4320, the number of years required for the equinoctial sun to complete

a precessional shift of 60 degrees (i.e., two zodiacal constellations).

These, Sellers believes, constitute the basic ingredients of a precessional

code which appears again and again, with eerie persistence, in ancient

myths and sacred architecture. In common with much esoteric

numerology, it is a code in which it is permissible to shift decimal points

to left or right at will and to make use of almost any conceivable

combinations, permutations, multiplications, divisions and fractions of

the *essential* numbers (all of which relate precisely to the rate of precession of the equinoxes).

The pre-eminent number in the code is 72. To this is frequently added

36, making 108, and it is permissible to multiply 108 by 100 to get 10,800 or to divide it by 2 to get 54, which may then be multiplied by 10 and expressed as 540 (or as 54,000. or as 540,000, or as 5,400,000, and so on). Also highly significant is 2160 (the number of years required for the equinoctial point to transit one zodiacal constellation), which is sometimes multiplied by 10 and by factors often (to give 216,000, 2,160,000, and so on) and sometimes by 2 to give 4320, or 43,200, or 432,000, or 4,320,000, *ad infinitum*.

Better than Hipparchus

If Sellers is correct in her hypothesis that the calculus needed to produce

these numbers was deliberately encoded into the Osiris myth to convey

precessional information to initiates, we are confronted by an intriguing

anomaly. If they are indeed about precession, the numbers are out of place in time. The science they contain is too advanced for them to have

been calculated by any known civilization of antiquity.

Let us not forget that they occur in a myth which is present at the very

dawn of writing in Egypt (indeed elements of the Osiris story are to be

found in the Pyramid Texts dating back to around 2450 BC, in a context

which suggests that they were exceedingly old even then⁸). Hipparchus,

the so-called discoverer of precession lived in the second century BC. He

proposed a value of 45 or 46 seconds of arc for one year of precessional

motion. These figures yield a one-degree shift along the ecliptic in 80

years (at 45 arc seconds per annum), and in 78.26 years (at 46 arc

⁸ Ibid., pp. 125-6ff; see also *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*.

252

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

seconds per annum). The true figure, as calculated by twentieth century

science, is 71.6 years.⁹ If Sellers's theory is correct, therefore, the 'Osiris

numbers', which give a value of 72 years, are *significantly more accurate*

than those of Hipparchus. Indeed, within the obvious confines imposed

by narrative structure, it is difficult to see how the number 72 could have

been improved upon, even if the more precise figure had been known to

the ancient myth-makers. One can hardly insert 71.6 conspirators into a

story, but 72 will fit comfortably.

Working from this rounded-up figure, the Osiris myth is capable of yielding a value of 2160 years for a precessional shift through one

complete house of the zodiac. The correct figure, according to today's

calculations, is 2148 years.¹⁰ The Hipparchus figures are 2400 years and

2347.8 years respectively. Finally, Osiris enables us to calculate 25,920

as the number of years required for the fulfillment of a complete

precessional cycle through 12 houses of the zodiac. Hipparchus gives us

either 28,800 or 28,173.6 years. The correct figure, by today's estimates,

is 25,776 years.¹¹ The Hipparchus calculations for the Great Return are

therefore around 3000 years out of kilter. The Osiris calculations miss

the true figure by only 144 years, and may well do so because the narrative context forced a rounding-up of the base number from the correct value of 71.6 to a more workable figure of 72.

All this, however, assumes that Sellers is right to suppose that the numbers 360, 72, 30 and 12 did not find their way into the Osiris myth

by chance but were placed there deliberately by people who understood—

and had accurately measured—precession.

Is Sellers right?

Times of decay

The Osiris myth is not the only one to incorporate the calculus for precession. The relevant numbers keep surfacing in various forms, multiples and combinations, all over the ancient world.

An example was given in Chapter Thirty-three—the Norse myth of the

432,000 fighters who sallied forth from Valhalla to do battle with ‘the Wolf’. A glance back at that myth shows that it contains several permutations of ‘precessional numbers’.

Likewise, as we saw in Chapter Twenty-four, ancient Chinese traditions

referring to a universal cataclysm were said to have been written down in

a great text consisting of precisely 4320 volumes.

Thousands of miles away, is it a coincidence that the Babylonian

historian Berossus (third century BC) ascribed a total reign of 432,000

9 *Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 205.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

253

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

years to the mythical kings who ruled the land of Sumer before the flood?

And is it likewise a coincidence that this same Berossus ascribed

2,160,000 years to the period 'between creation and universal

catastrophe'?¹²

Do the myths of ancient Amerindian peoples like the Maya also contain

or enable us to compute numbers such as 72, 2160, 4320, etc. We shall

probably never know, thanks to the conquistadores and zealous friars

who destroyed the traditional heritage of Central America and left us so

little to work with. What we can say, however, is that the relevant numbers do turn up, in relative profusion, in the Mayan Long Count calendar. Details of that calendar were given in Chapter Twenty-one. The

numerals necessary for calculating precession are found there in these

formulae: 1 *Katun* = 7200 days; 1 *Tun* = 360 days; 2 *Tuns* = 720 days; 5

Baktuns = 720,000 days; 5 *Katuns* = 36,000 days; 6 *Katuns* = 43,200

days; 6 *Tuns* = 2160 days; 15 *Katuns* = 2,160,000 days.¹³

Nor does it seem that Sellers's 'code' is confined to mythology. In the jungles of Kampuchea the temple complex of Angkor looks as though it

could have been purpose-built as a precessional metaphor. It has, for

example, five gates to each of which leads a road bridging the crocodile-

infested moat that surrounds the whole site. Each of these roads is

bordered by a row of gigantic stone figures, 108 per avenue, 54 on each

side (540 statues in all) and each row carries a huge Naga serpent.

Furthermore, as Santillana and von Dechend point out in *Hamlet's Mill*,

the figures do not 'carry' the serpent but are shown to 'pull' it, which indicates that these 540 statues are 'churning the Milky Ocean'. The

whole of Angkor 'thus turns out to be a colossal model set up with true

Hindu fantasy and incongruousness' to express the idea of precession.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., p. 196.

¹³ *Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico*, p. 143.

¹⁴ *Hamlet's Mill*, pp. 162-3; see also *Atlas of Mysterious Places*, pp. 168-70.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Churning the Milky Ocean, one of the several ‘thought tools’ for precession encountered in ancient myths.

The same may be true of Java’s famous temple of Borobudur, with its

72 bell-shaped stupas, and perhaps also of the megaliths of Baalbeck in

the Lebanon—which are thought to be the world’s biggest blocks of cut

stone. Long predating Roman and Greek structures on the site, the three

that make up the so-called ‘Trilithion’ are as tall as five-storey buildings

and weigh over 600 tons each. A fourth megalith is almost 80 feet in length and weighs 1100 tons. Amazingly these giant blocks were cut, perfectly-shaped and somehow transported to Baalbeck from a quarry

several miles away. In addition they were skillfully incorporated, at a considerable height above ground-level into the retaining walls of a magnificent temple. This temple was surrounded by 54 columns of immense size and height.¹⁵

¹⁵ See, for example, *Feats and Wisdom of the Ancients*, Time-Life Books, 1990, p. 65.

255

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

In the subcontinent of India (where the Orion constellation is known as

Kal-Purush, meaning Time-Man¹⁶), we find that Sellers’s Osiris numbers

are transmitted through a wide range of media in ways increasingly

difficult to ascribe to chance. There are, for instance, 10,800 bricks in the

Agnicayana, the Indian fire altar. There are 10,800 stanzas in the *Rigveda*, the most ancient of the Vedic texts and a rich repository of Indian mythology. Each stanza is made up of 40 syllables with the result

that the entire composition consists of 432,000 syllables ... no more, and

no less.¹⁷ And in *Rigveda* 1:164 (a typical stanza) we read of 'the 12-

spoked wheel in which 720 sons of Agni are established'.¹⁸

In the Hebrew Cabala there are 72 angels through whom the Sephiroth

(divine powers) may be approached, or invoked, by those who know their

names and numbers.¹⁹ Rosicrucian tradition speaks of cycles of 108 years

(72 plus 36) according to which the secret brotherhood makes its

influence felt.²⁰ Similarly the number 72 and its permutations and

subdivisions are of great significance to the Chinese secret societies

known as Triads. An ancient ritual requires that each candidate for

initiation pay a fee including '360 cash for "making clothes", 108 cash

“for the purse”, 72 cash for instruction, and 36 cash for decapitating the

“traitorous subject”.²¹ The ‘cash’ (the old universal brass coin of China

with a square hole in the centre) is of course no longer in circulation but

the *numbers* passed down in the ritual since times immemorial have

survived. Thus in modern Singapore, candidates for Triad membership

pay an entrance fee which is calculated according to their financial

circumstances but which must always consist of multiples of \$1.80,

\$3.60, \$7.20, \$10.80 (and thus, \$18, \$36, \$72, \$108.00, or \$360, \$720,

\$1,080, and so on.²²

Of all the secret societies, the most mysterious and archaic by far is

undoubtedly the Hung League, which scholars believe to be ‘the

depository of the old religion of the Chinese’.²³ In one Hung initiation

ritual the neophyte is put through a question and answer session that

goes:

Q. What did you see on your walk?

16 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita, *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*,

George G. Harrap and Company, London, 1913, p. 384.

17 *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 162.

18 *Rig Veda*, 1:164, cited in *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, p. 168.

19 Frances A. Yates, *Girodano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, the University of

Chicago Press, 1991, p. 93.

20 Personal communication from AMORC, San Jose, California, November 1994.

21 Leon Comber, *The Traditional Mysteries of the Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*,

Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 1961, p. 52.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

23 Gustav Schlegel, *The Hung League*, Tynron Press, Scotland, 1991 (first published

1866), Introduction, p. XXXVII.

256

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

A. I saw two pots with red bamboo.

Q. Do you know how many plants there were?

A. In one pot were 36 and in the other 72 plants, together 108.

Q. Did you take home some of them for your use?

A. Yes, I took home 108 plants ...

Q. How can you prove that?

A. I can prove it by a verse.

Q. How does this verse run?

A. The red bamboo from Canton is rare in the world.

In the groves are 36 and 72.

Who in the world knows the meaning of this?

When we have set to work we will know the secret.

The atmosphere of intrigue that such passages generate is accentuated

by the reticent behaviour of the Hung League itself, an organization resembling the medieval European Order of the Knights Templar (and the

higher degrees of modern Freemasonry) in many ways that are beyond

the remit of this book to describe.²⁴ It is intriguing, too, that the Chinese

character *Hung*, composed of *water and many*, signifies *inundation*, i.e.

the Flood.

Finally, returning to India, let us note the content of the sacred

scriptures known as the *Puranas*. These speak of four 'ages of the earth',

called Yugas, which together are said to extend to 12,000 'divine years'.

The respective durations of these epochs, in 'divine years', are Krita Yuga

= 4800; Treta Yuga = 3600; Davpara Yuga = 2400; Kali Yuga = 1200.²⁵

The *Puranas* also tell us that 'one year of the mortals is equal to one day of the gods'.²⁶ Furthermore, and exactly as in the Osiris myth, we

discover that the number of *days* in the years of both gods and mortals

has been artificially set at 360, so one year of the gods is equivalent to

360 mortal years.²⁷

The Kali Yuga, therefore, at 1200 years of the gods, turns out to have a

duration of 432,000 mortal years.²⁸ One Mahayuga, or Great Age (made

up of the 12,000 divine years contained in the four lesser Yugas) is

equivalent to 4,320,000 years of mortals. A thousand such Mahayugas

(which constitute a Kalpa, or Day of Brahma) extend over 4,320,000,000

24 For fuller details see *The Hung League* and J. S. M. Ward, *The Hung Society*, Baskerville Press, London, 1925 (in three volumes).

25 W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi,

1991, p. 353.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

257

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

ordinary years,²⁹ again supplying the digits for basic precessional calculations. Separately there are Manvantaras (periods of Manu) of which

we are told in the scriptures that ‘about 71 systems of four Yugas elapse

during each Manvantara.’³⁰ The reader will recall that one degree of precessional motion along the ecliptic requires 71.6 years to complete, a

number that can be rounded down to ‘about 71’ in India just as easily as

it was rounded up to 72 in Ancient Egypt.

The Kali Yuga, with a duration of 432,000 mortal years, is, by the way,

our own. 'In the Kali Age,' the scriptures say, 'shall decay flourish, until

the human race approaches annihilation.'³¹

Dogs, uncles and revenge

It was a dog that brought us to these decaying times.

We came here by way of Sirius, the Dog Star, who stands at the heel of

the giant constellation of Orion where it towers in the sky above Egypt. In

that land, as we have seen, Orion is Osiris, the god of death and

resurrection, whose numbers—perhaps by chance—are 12, 30, 72, and

360. But can chance account for the fact that these and other prime integers of precession keep cropping up in supposedly unrelated mythologies from all over the world, and in such stolid but enduring vehicles as calendar systems and works of architecture?

Santillana and von Dechend, Jane Sellers and a growing body of other

scholars rule out chance, arguing that *the persistence of detail is* indicative of a guiding hand.

If they are wrong, we need to find some other explanation for how such

specific and inter-related numbers (the only obvious function of which is

to calculate precession) could by accident have got themselves so widely

imprinted on human culture.

But suppose they are *not* wrong? Suppose that a guiding hand really was at work behind the scenes?

Sometimes, when you slip into Santillana's and von Dechend's world of

myth and mystery, you can almost feel the influence of that hand ... Take

the business of the dog ... or jackal, or wolf, or fox. The subtle way this

shadowy canine slinks from myth to myth is peculiar—stimulating, then

baffling you, always luring you onwards.

Indeed, it was this lure we followed from the Mill of Amlodhi to the myth of Osiris in Egypt. Along the way, according to the design of the ancient sages (if Sellers, Santillana and von Dechend are right) we were

first encouraged to build a clear mental picture of the celestial sphere.

Second, we were provided with a mechanistic model so that we could

29 Ibid., pp. 353-4.

30 Ibid., p. 354.

31 Ibid., p. 247.

258

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

visualize the great changes precession of the equinoxes periodically effects in all the coordinates of the sphere. Finally, after allowing the dog

Sirius to open the way for us, we were given the figures to calculate precession more or less exactly.

Nor is Sirius, in his eternal station at Orion's heel, the only doggish character around Osiris. We saw in Chapter Eleven how Isis (who was both

the wife and sister of Osiris³²) searched for her dead husband's body after

he had been murdered by Set (who, incidentally, was also her brother,

and the brother of Osiris). In this search, according to ancient tradition,

she was assisted by dogs (jackals in some versions).³³ Likewise, mythological and religious texts from all periods of Egyptian history

assert that the jackal-god Anubis ministered to the spirit of Osiris after

his death and acted as his guide through the underworld.³⁴
(Surviving

vignettes depict Anubis as virtually identical in appearance to Upuaut, the

Opener of the Ways.)

Last but not least, Osiris himself was believed to have taken the form of

a wolf when he returned from the underworld to assist his son Horus in

the final battle against Set.³⁵

Investigating this kind of material, one sometimes has the spooky sense

of being manipulated by an ancient intelligence which has found a way to

reach out to us across vast epochs of time, and for some reason has set

us a puzzle to solve in the language of myth.

If it were just dogs that kept cropping up again and again, it would be easy to brush off such weird intuitions. The dog phenomenon seems

more likely to be coincidence than anything else. But it isn't just dogs.

The ways between the two very different myths of Osiris and Amlodhi's

Mill (which nonetheless both seem to contain accurate scientific data about precession of the equinoxes) are kept open by another strange

common factor. Family relationships are involved.

Amlodhi/Amleth/Hamlet is always a son who revenges the murder of his

father by entrapping and killing the murderer. The murderer,

furthermore, is always the father's own brother, i.e., Hamlet's uncle.³⁶

This is precisely the scenario of the Osiris myth. Osiris and Seth are brothers.³⁷ Seth murders Osiris. Horus, the son of Osiris, then takes revenge upon his uncle.³⁸

Another twist is that the Hamlet character often has some sort of incestuous relationship with his sister.³⁹ In the case of Kullervo, the

³² For details of these complicated family relationships, see *Egyptian Book of the Dead*,

Introduction, p. XLVIIIff.

³³ *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume II, p. 366.

³⁴ *The Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 71.

³⁵ *Gods of the Egyptians*, II, p. 367.

36 *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 2.

37 *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Introduction, p. XLIX-LI.

38 Ibid.

39 *Hamlet's Mill*, pp. 32-4.

259

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Finnish Hamlet, there is a poignant scene in which the hero, returning

home after a long absence, meets a maiden in the woods, gathering berries. They lie together. Only later do they discover that they are brother and sister. The maiden drowns herself at once. Later, with 'the

black dog Musti' padding along at his heels, Kullervo wanders into the

forest and throws himself upon his sword.⁴⁰

There are no suicides in the Egyptian myth of Osiris, but there is the incest of Osiris and his sister Isis. Out of their union is born Horus the avenger.

So once again it seems reasonable to ask: what is going on? Why are

there all these apparent links and connections? Why do we have these

'strings' of myths, ostensibly about different subjects, all of which prove

capable in their own ways of shedding light on the phenomenon of precession of the equinoxes? And why do all these myths have dogs running through them, and characters who seem unusually inclined to

incest, fratricide and revenge? It surely drives scepticism beyond its limits

to suggest that so many identical literary devices could keep on turning

up purely by chance in so many different contexts.

If not by chance, however, then who exactly was responsible for creating this intricate and clever connecting pattern? Who were the authors and designers of the puzzle and what motives might they have

had?

Scientists with something to say

Whoever it was, they must have been smart—smart enough to have observed the infinitesimal creep of precessional motion along the ecliptic

and to have calculated its rate at a value uncannily close to that obtained

by today's advanced technology.

It therefore follows that we are talking about highly civilized people.

Indeed, we are talking about people who deserve to be called scientists.

They must, moreover, have lived in extremely remote antiquity because

we can be certain that the creation and dissemination of the common heritage of precessional myths on both sides of the Atlantic did *not* take

place in historic times. On the contrary the evidence suggests that all these myths were 'tottering with age' when what we call history began

about 5000 years ago.⁴¹

The great strength of the ancient stories was this: as well as being for

ever available for use and adaptation free of copyright, like intellectual

chameleons, subtle and ambiguous, they had the capacity to change their

colour according to their surroundings. At different times, in different continents, the ancient tales could be retold in a variety of ways, but

40 Ibid., p. 33.

41 Ibid., p. 119.

260

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

would always retain their essential symbolism and always continue to

transmit the coded precessional data they had been programmed with at

the outset.

But to what end?

As we see in the next chapter, the long slow cycles of precession are

not limited in their consequences to a changing view of the sky. This

celestial phenomenon, born of the earth's axial wobble, has direct effects

on the earth itself. In fact, it appears to be one of the principal correlates

of the sudden onset of ice ages and their equally sudden and catastrophic

decay.

261

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 32

Speaking to the Unborn

It is understandable that a huge range of myths from all over the ancient

world should describe geological catastrophes in graphic detail. Mankind

survived the horror of the last Ice Age, and the most plausible source for

our enduring traditions of flooding and freezing, massive volcanism and

devastating earthquakes is in the tumultuous upheavals unleashed during

the great meltdown of 15,000 to 8000 BC. The final retreat of the ice sheets, and the consequent 300-400 foot rise in global sea levels, took

place only a few thousand years before the beginning of the historical

period. It is therefore not surprising that all our early civilizations should

have retained vivid memories of the vast cataclysms that had terrified

their forefathers.

Much harder to explain is the peculiar but distinctive way the myths of

cataclysm seem to bear the intelligent imprint of a guiding hand.¹ Indeed

the degree of convergence between such ancient stories is frequently

remarkable enough to raise the suspicion that they must all have been

'written' by the same 'author'.

Could that author have had anything to do with the wondrous deity, or

superhuman, spoken of in so many of the myths we have reviewed, who

appears immediately after the world has been shattered by a horrifying

geological catastrophe and brings comfort and the gifts of civilization to

the shocked and demoralized survivors?

White and bearded, Osiris is the Egyptian manifestation of this universal

figure, and it may not be an accident that one of the first acts he is

remembered for in myth is the abolition of cannibalism among the

primitive inhabitants of the Nile Valley.² Viracocha, in South America, was

said to have begun his civilizing mission immediately after a great flood;

Quetzalcoatl, the discoverer of maize, brought the benefits of crops, mathematics, astronomy and a refined culture to Mexico after the Fourth

Sun had been overwhelmed by a destroying deluge.

Could these strange myths contain a record of encounters between scattered palaeolithic tribes which survived the last Ice Age and an as yet

1 See Chapter Twenty-four for details of flood myths. The same kind of convergence

among supposedly unconnected myths also occurs with regard to precession of the

equinoxes. The mills, the characters who work and own and eventually break them, the

brothers and nephews and uncles, the theme of revenge, the theme of incest, the dogs

that flit silently from story to story, and the exact *numbers* needed to calculate

precessional motion—all crop up everywhere, from culture to culture and from age to

age, propagating themselves effortlessly along the jet-stream of time.

2 *Diodorus Siculus*, Book I, 14:1-15, translated by C. H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library,

London, 1989, pp. 47-9.

262

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

unidentified high civilization which passed through the same epoch?

And could the myths be attempts to communicate?

A message in the bottle of time

‘Of all the other stupendous inventions,’ Galileo once remarked,

what sublimity of mind must have been his who conceived how to communicate

his most secret thoughts to any other person, though very distant either in time or

place, speaking with those who are in the Indies, speaking to those who are not

yet born, nor shall be this thousand or ten thousand years? And with no greater

difficulty than the various arrangements of two dozen little signs on paper? Let

this be the seal of all the admirable inventions of men.³

If the ‘precessional message’ identified by scholars like Santillana, von

Dechend and Jane Sellers is indeed a deliberate attempt at

communication by some lost civilization of antiquity, how come it wasn’t

just written down and left for us to find? Wouldn't that have been easier

than encoding it in myths? Perhaps.

Nevertheless, suppose that whatever the message was written on got

destroyed or worn away after many thousands of years? Or suppose that

the language in which it was inscribed was later forgotten utterly (like the

enigmatic Indus Valley script, which has been studied closely for more

than half a century but has so far resisted all attempts at decoding)? It

must be obvious that in such circumstances a written legacy to the future

would be of no value at all, because nobody would be able to make sense

of it.

What one would look for, therefore, would be a *universal language*, the

kind of language that would be comprehensible to any technologically

advanced society in any epoch, even a thousand or ten thousand years

into the future. Such languages are few and far between, but mathematics

is one of them—and the city of Teotihuacan may be the calling-card of a

lost civilization written in the eternal language of mathematics.

Geodetic data, related to the exact positioning of fixed geographical points and to the shape and size of the earth, would also remain valid

and recognizable for tens of thousands of years, and might be most conveniently expressed by means of cartography (or in the construction

of giant geodetic monuments like the Great Pyramid of Egypt, as we shall

see).

Another 'constant' in our solar system is the language of time: the

great but regular intervals of time calibrated by the inch-worm creep of

precessional motion. Now, or ten thousand years in the future, a message

that prints out numbers like 72 or 2160 or 4320 or 25,920 should be

instantly intelligible to any civilization that has evolved a modest talent

for mathematics and the ability to detect and measure the almost

3 Galileo, cited in *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 10.

263

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

imperceptible reverse motion that the sun appears to make along the ecliptic against the background of the fixed stars (one degree in 71.6 years, 30 degrees in 2148 years, and so on).

The sense that a correlation exists is strengthened by something else. It

is neither as firm nor as definite as the number of syllables in the

Rigveda; nevertheless, it feels relevant. Through powerful stylistic links

and shared symbolism, myths to do with global cataclysms and with

precession of the equinoxes quite frequently intermesh. A detailed

interconnectedness exists between these two categories of tradition, both

of which additionally bear what appear to be the recognizable

fingerprints of a conscious design. Quite naturally, therefore, one is

prompted to discover whether there might not *be* an important

connection between precession of the equinoxes and global

catastrophes.

Mill of pain

Although several different mechanisms of an astronomical and geological

nature seem to be involved, and although not all of these are fully understood, the fact is that the cycle of precession does correlate very

strongly *with the onset and demise of ice ages.*

Several trigger factors must coincide, which is why not every shift from

one astronomical age to another is implicated. Nevertheless, it is accepted that precession does have an impact on both glaciation and

deglaciation, at widely separated intervals. The knowledge that it does so

has only been established by our own science since the late 1970s.⁴ Yet

the evidence of the myths suggests that the same level of knowledge might have been possessed by an as yet unidentified civilization in the

depths of the last Ice Age. The clear suggestion we may be meant to grasp is that the terrible cataclysms of flood and fire and ice which the

myths describe were in some way *causally connected* to the ponderous

movements of the celestial coordinates through the great cycle of the

zodiac. In the words of Santillana and von Dechend, 'It was not a foreign

idea to the ancients that the mills of the gods grind slowly and that the

result is usually pain.'⁵

Three principal factors, all of which we have met before, are now known

to be deeply implicated in the onset and the retreat of ice ages (together,

of course, with the diverse cataclysms that ensue from sudden freezes

and thaws). These factors all have to do with variations in the earth's orbital geometry. They are:

1 The obliquity of the ecliptic (i.e., the angle of tilt of the planet's axis of

4 *Ice Ages*; John Imbrie et al., 'Variations in the Earth's Orbit: Pacemaker of the Ice Ages'

in *Science*, volume 194, No. 4270, 10 December 1976.

5 *Hamlet's Mill*, pp. 138-9.

264

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

rotation, which is also the angle between the celestial equator and the

ecliptic). This, as we have seen, varies over immensely long periods of

time between 22.1 degrees (the closest point that the axis reaches to vertical) and 24.5 degrees (the furthest it falls away from the vertical);

2 The eccentricity of the orbit (i.e., whether the earth's elliptical path around the sun is more or less elongated in any given epoch);

3 Axial precession, which causes the four cardinal points on the earth's

orbit (the two equinoxes and the winter and summer solstices) to creep backwards very, very slowly around the orbital path.

We are dipping our toes into the waters of a technical and specialized

scientific discipline here—one largely outside the scope of this book.

Readers seeking detailed information are referred to the multidisciplinary

work of the US National Science Foundation's CLIMAP Project, and to a

keynote paper by Professors J. D. Hays and John Imbrie entitled

'Variations in the Earth's Orbit: Pacemaker of the Ice Ages' (see Note 4).

Briefly, what Hays, Imbrie and others have proved is that the onset of ice ages can be predicted when the following evil and inauspicious

conjunctions of celestial cycles occur: (a) maximum eccentricity, which

takes the earth millions of miles further away from the sun at 'aphelion'

(the extremity of its orbit) than is normal; (b) minimum obliquity, which

means that the earth's axis, and consequently the North and South poles,

stand much closer to the vertical than is normal; and (c) precession of

the equinoxes which, as the great cycle continues, eventually causes

winter in one hemisphere or the other to set in when the earth is at

'perihelion' (its closest point to the sun); this in turn means that summer

occurs at aphelion and is thus relatively cold, so that ice laid down in

winter fails to melt during the following summer and a remorseless build-

up of glacial conditions occurs.⁶

Levered by the changing geometry of the orbit, 'global insolation'—the

differing amounts and intensity of sunlight received at various latitudes

in any given epoch—can thus be an important trigger factor for ice ages.

Is it possible that the ancient myth-makers were trying to *warn* us of great danger when they so intricately linked the pain of global cataclysms

to the slow grinding of the mill of heaven?

This is a question we will return to in due course, but meanwhile it is enough to observe that by identifying the significant effects of orbital geometry on the planet's climate and wellbeing, and by combining this

information with precise measurements of the rate of precessional motion, the unknown scientists of an unrecognized civilization seem to

have found a way to catch our attention, to bridge the chasm of the ages,

and to communicate with us directly.

6 'Variations in the Earth's Orbit: Pacemaker of the Ice Ages'.

265

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Whether or not we listen to what they have to say is, of course, entirely

up to us.

266

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Part VI

The Giza Invitation

Egypt 1

267

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 33

Cardinal Points

Giza, Egypt, 16 March 1993, 3:30 a.m.

We walked through the deserted lobby of our hotel and stepped into the

white Fiat waiting for us in the driveway outside. It was driven by a lean,

nervous Egyptian named Ali whose job it was to get us past the guards at

the Great Pyramid and away again before sunrise. He was nervous

because if things went wrong Santha and I would be deported from Egypt

and he would go to jail for six months.

Of course, things were not supposed to go wrong. That was why Ali was

with us. The day before we'd paid him 150 US dollars which he had

changed into Egyptian pounds and spread among the guards concerned.

They, in return, had agreed to turn a blind eye to our presence during the

next couple of hours.

We drove to within half a mile of the Pyramid, then walked the rest of

the way—around the side of the steep embankment that looms above the

village of Nazlet-el-Samaan and leads to the monument's north face.

None of us said very much as we trudged through the soft sand just out

of range of the security lights. We felt excited and apprehensive at the

same time. Ali was by no means certain that his bribes were going to work.

For a while we stood still in the shadows, gazing at the monstrous bulk

of the Pyramid reaching into the darkness above us and blotting out the

southern stars. Then a patrol of three men armed with shotguns and wrapped in blankets against the night chill came into view at the northeastern corner, about fifty yards away, where they stopped to share

a cigarette. Indicating that we should stay put, Ali stepped forward into

the light and walked over to the guards. He talked to them for several minutes, apparently arguing heatedly. Finally he beckoned to us, indicating that we should join him.

‘There’s a problem,’ he explained. ‘One of them, the captain here, [he

indicated a short, unshaven, disgruntled looking fellow] is insisting that

we pay an extra thirty dollars otherwise the deal is off. What do you want

to do?’ I fished around in my wallet, counted out thirty dollars and

handed the bills to Ali. He folded them and passed them to the captain.

With an air of aggrieved dignity, the captain stuffed the money into his

shirt pocket, and, finally, we all shook hands.

‘OK,’ said Ali, ‘let’s go.’

268

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Inexplicable precision

As the guards continued their patrol in a westerly direction along the

northern face of the Great Pyramid, we made our way around the

northeastern corner and along the base of the eastern face.

I had long ago fallen into the habit of orienting myself according to the

monument’s sides. The northern face was aligned, almost perfectly, to

true north, the eastern face almost perfectly to true east, the southern to

true south, and the western face to true west. The average error was only

around three minutes of arc (down to less than two minutes on the

southern face)¹—incredible accuracy for any building in any epoch, and

an inexplicable, almost supernatural feat here in Egypt 4500 years ago

when the Great Pyramid was supposed to have been built.

An error of three arc minutes represents an infinitesimal deviation from

true of less than 0.015 per cent. In the opinion of structural engineers,

with whom I had discussed the Great Pyramid, the need for such

precision was impossible to understand. From their point of view as

practical builders, the expense, difficulty and time spent achieving it

would not have been justified by the apparent results: even if the base of

the monument had been as much as two or three degrees out of true (an

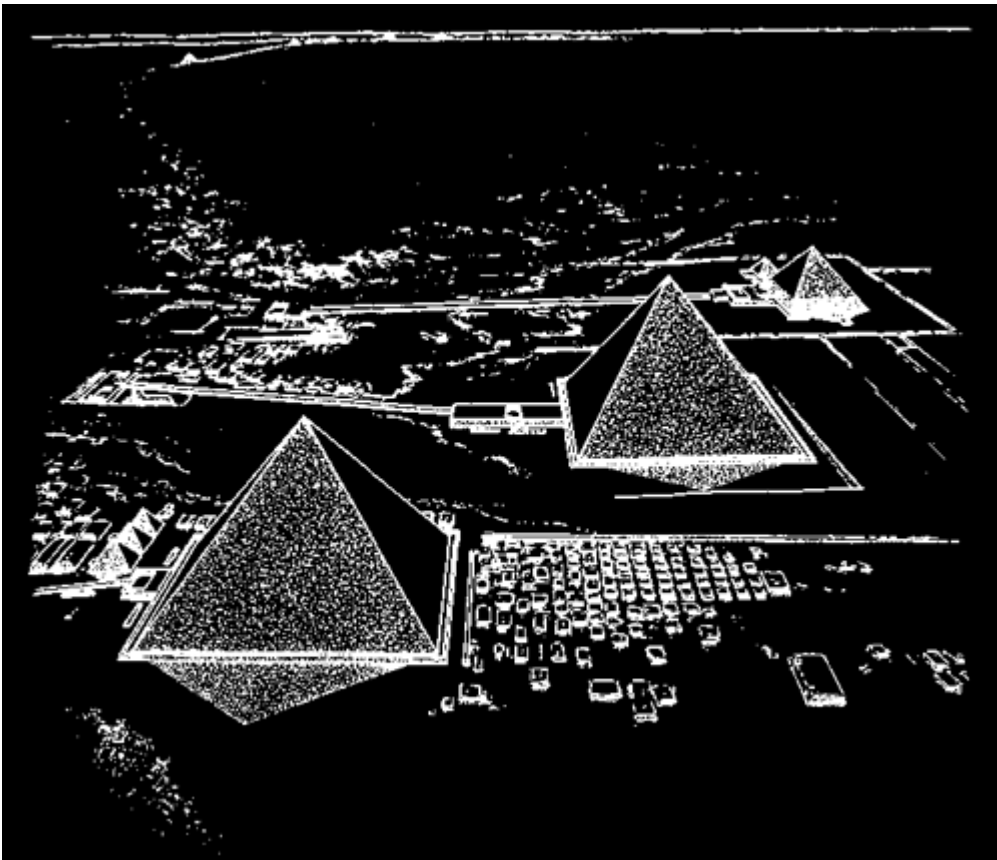
error of say 1 per cent) the difference to the naked eye would still have

been too small to be noticeable. On the other hand the difference in the

magnitude of the tasks required (to achieve accuracy within three minutes as opposed to three degrees) would have been immense.

1 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 208.

269



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Overview of Giza from the north looking south, with the Great Pyramid in the foreground.

Obviously, therefore, the ancient master-builders who had raised the

Pyramid at the very dawn of human civilization must have had powerful

motives for wanting to get the alignments with the cardinal directions just right. Moreover, since they had achieved their objective with uncanny

exactness they must have been highly skilled, knowledgeable and competent people with access to excellent surveying and setting-out equipment. This impression was confirmed by many of the monument's

other characteristics. For example, its sides at the base were all almost

exactly the same length, demonstrating a margin of error far smaller than

modern architects would be required to achieve today in the construction

of, say, an average-size office block. This was no office block, however. It

was the Great Pyramid of Egypt, one of the largest structures ever built by

man and one of the oldest. Its north side was 755 feet 4.9818 inches in

length; its west side was 755 feet 9.1551 inches in length; its east side

was 755 feet 10.4937 inches; its south side 756 feet 0.9739 inches.² This

meant that there was a difference of less than 8 inches between its shortest and longest sides: an error amounting to a tiny fraction of 1 per

cent on an average side length of over 9063 inches.

Once again, I knew from an engineering perspective that the bare

2 J. H. Cole, *Survey of Egypt*, paper no. 39: 'The Determination of the Exact Size and

Orientation of the Great Pyramid of Giza', Cairo, 1925.

270

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

figures did not do justice to the enormous care and skill required to achieve them. I knew, too, that scholars had not yet come up with a convincing explanation of exactly how the Pyramid builders had adhered

consistently to such high standards of precision.³

What really interested me, however, was the even bigger question-mark

over another issue: why had they imposed such exacting standards on

themselves? If they had permitted a margin of error of 1-2 per cent—

instead of less than one-tenth of 1 per cent—they could have simplified

their tasks with no apparent loss of quality. Why hadn't they done so?

Why had they insisted on making everything so difficult? Why, in short, in

a supposedly 'primitive' stone monument built more than 4500 years ago

were we seeing this strange, obsessional adherence to machine-age standards of precision?

Black hole in history

Our plan was to climb the Great Pyramid—something that had been strictly illegal since 1983 when the messy falls of several foolhardy tourists had forced the government of Egypt to impose a ban. I realized

that we were being foolhardy too (particularly in attempting the climb at

night) and I didn't feel good about breaking what was basically a sensible

law. By this stage, however, my intense interest in the Pyramid, and my

desire to learn everything I could about it, had over-ridden my common

sense.

Now, after parting company with the guard patrol at the north-eastern

corner of the monument, we continued to make our way surreptitiously

along the eastern face towards the south-eastern corner.

There were dense shadows among the twisted and broken paving stones that separated the Great Pyramid from the three much smaller

'subsidiary' pyramids lying immediately to its east. There were also three

deep and narrow rock-cut pits which resembled giant graves. These had

been found empty by the archaeologists who had excavated them, but

were shaped as though they had been intended to enclose the hulls of

high-prowed, streamlined boats.

Roughly halfway along the Pyramid's eastern face we encountered another patrol. This time it consisted of two guards, one of whom must

have been eighty years old. His companion, a teenager with pustulant

acne, informed us that the money Ali had paid was insufficient and that

fifty more Egyptian pounds would be required if we were to proceed.
|

already had the notes in my hand and gave them to the lad without delay.

I was past caring how much this was costing; I just wanted to make the

climb and get down and away before dawn without being arrested.

3 The conventional explanations, as given in *The Pyramids of Egypt*, for example, are

entirely unsatisfactory, as Edwards himself admits; see pp. 85-7, 206-41.

271

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

We walked on, reaching the south-eastern corner at a little after 4:15 a.m.

Very few modern buildings, even the houses we live in, have corners that consist of perfect ninety degree right angles; it is common for them

to be a degree or more out of true. It doesn't make any difference structurally and nobody notices such minute errors. In the case of the

Great Pyramid, however, I knew that the ancient master-builders had found a way to narrow the margin of error to almost nothing. Thus, while

falling short of the perfect ninety degrees, the south-eastern corner

achieved an impressive $89^{\circ} 56' 27''$. The north-eastern corner measured

$90^{\circ} 3' 2''$; the southwestern $90^{\circ} 0' 33''$, and the north-western was just two

seconds of a degree out of true at $89^{\circ} 59' 58''$.⁴

This was, of course, extraordinary. And like almost everything else

about the Great Pyramid it was also extremely difficult to explain. Such

accurate building techniques—as accurate as the best we have today—

could have evolved only after thousands of years of development and

experimentation. Yet there was no evidence that any process of this kind

had ever taken place in Egypt. The Great Pyramid and its neighbours at

Giza had emerged out of a black hole in architectural history so deep and

so wide that neither its bottom nor its far side had ever been identified.

Ships in the desert

Guided by the increasingly perspiring Ali, who had not yet explained why

it was necessary for us to circumnavigate the Pyramid before climbing it,

we now began to make our way in a westerly direction along the monument's southern side. Here there were two further boat-shaped pits,

one of which, although still sealed, had been investigated with fibre-optic

cameras and was known to contain a high-prowed sea-going vessel more

than 100 feet long. The other pit had been excavated in the 1950s. Its

contents—an even larger seagoing vessel, a full 141 feet in length⁵—had

been placed in the so-called Boat Museum, an ugly modern structure that

ganged on stilts beneath the south face of the Pyramid.

Made of cedarwood, the beautiful ship in the museum was still in

perfect condition 4500 years after it had been built. With a displacement

of around 40 tons, its design was particularly thought-provoking,

incorporating, in the words of one expert, 'all the sea-going ship's

characteristic properties, with prow and stern soaring upward, higher

than in a Viking ship, to ride out the breakers and high seas, not to

contend with the little ripples of the Nile.'⁶

⁴ Ibid., p. 87.

5 See Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seafaring in Ancient Times*, University of Texas Press,

1994, p. 17; *The Ra Expeditions*, p. 15.

6 *The Ra Expeditions*, p. 17.

272

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Another authority felt that the careful and clever design of this strange

pyramid boat could potentially have made it ‘a far more seaworthy craft

than anything available to Columbus’.⁷ Moreover, the experts agreed that

it had been built to a pattern that could only have been ‘created by shipbuilders from a people with a long, solid tradition of sailing on the open sea.’⁸

Present at the very beginning of Egypt’s 3000-year history, who had those as yet unidentified shipbuilders been? They had not accumulated

their ‘long, solid tradition of sailing on the open sea’ while ploughing the

fields of the landlocked Nile Valley. So where and when had they developed their maritime skills?

There was yet another puzzle. I knew that the Ancient Egyptians had been very good at making scale models and representations of all manner of things for symbolic purposes.⁹ I therefore found it hard to understand why they would have gone to the trouble of manufacturing

and then burying a boat as big and sophisticated as this if its only function, as the Egyptologists claimed, had been as a token of the spiritual vessel that would carry the soul of the deceased king to heaven.¹⁰ That could have been achieved as effectively with a much smaller craft, and only one would have been needed, not several. Logic

therefore suggested that these gigantic vessels might have been intended

for some other purpose altogether, or had some quite different and still

unsuspected symbolic significance ...

We had reached the rough midpoint of the southern face of the Great

Pyramid when we at last realized why we were being taken on this long

walkabout. The objective was for us to be relieved of moderate sums of

money at each of the four cardinal points. The tally thus far was 30 US

dollars at the northern face and 50 Egyptian pounds at the eastern face.

Now I shelled out a further 50 Egyptian pounds to yet another patrol Ali

was supposed to have paid off the day before.

‘Ali,’ I hissed, ‘when are we going to climb the Pyramid?’

‘Right away, Mr. Graham,’ our guide replied. He walked confidently forward, gesturing directly ahead, then added, ‘We shall ascend at the

south-west corner ...’

7 *Traveller’s Key to Ancient Egypt*, pp. 132-3.

8 *The Ra Expeditions*, p. 16.

9 See, for example, Christine Desroches-Noblecourt, *Tutankhamen*, Penguin Books,

London, 1989, pages 89, 108, 113, 283.

10 A.J. Spencer, *The Great Pyramid Fact Sheet*, P.J. Publications, 1989.

273

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 34

Mansion of Eternity

Have you ever climbed a pyramid, at night, fearful of arrest, with your nerves in shreds?

It's a surprisingly difficult thing to do, especially where the Great Pyramid is concerned. Even though its top 31 feet are no longer intact, its

presently exposed summit platform still stands more than 450 feet above

ground level.¹ It consists, moreover, of 203 separate courses of masonry,

with the average course height being about two and a quarter feet.²

Averages do not tell you everything, as I discovered soon after we began the climb. The courses turned out to be of unequal depth, some

barely reaching knee level while others came up almost to my chest and

created formidable obstacles. At the same time the horizontal ledges between each of the steps were very narrow, often only a little wider than

my foot, and many of the big limestone blocks, which had looked so solid

from below, proved to be crumbling and broken.

Somewhere around 30 courses up Santha and I began to appreciate what we had let ourselves in for. Our muscles were aching and our knees

and fingers stiff and bruised—yet we were barely one-seventh of the way

to the summit and there were still more than 170 courses to climb.

Another worry was the vertiginous drop steadily opening beneath us.

Looking down along the ruptured contours that marked the line of the southwestern corner, I was taken aback to see how far we had already

climbed and experienced a momentary, giddy presentiment of how

easy it would be for us to fall, head over heels like Jack and Jill, bouncing

and jolting over the huge layers of stone, breaking our crowns at the bottom.

Ali had permitted a pause of a few moments for us to catch our

breaths, but now he signalled that we should press on and began to

climb again. Still using the corner as a guideline, he rapidly disappeared

into the darkness above.

Somewhat less confidently, Santha and I followed.

Time and motion

The 35th course of masonry was a hard one to clamber over, being made

of particularly massive blocks, much larger than any of the others we had

1 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 8.

2 Peter Lemesurier, *The Great Pyramid: Your Personal Guide*, Element Books,

Shaftesbury, 1987, p. 225.

274

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

so far encountered (except those at the very base) and estimated to

weigh between 10 and 15 tons apiece.³ This contradicted engineering

logic and commonsense, both of which called for a progressive decrease

in the size and weight of the blocks that had to be transported to the

summit as the pyramid rose ever higher. Courses 1-18, which diminished

from a height of about 55.5 inches at ground level to just over 23 inches

at course 17, did obey this rule. Then suddenly, at course 19, the block

height rose again to almost 36 inches. At the same time the other dimensions of the blocks also increased and their weight grew from the

relatively manoeuvrable range of 2-6 tons that was common in the first

18 courses to the more ponderous and cumbersome range of 10-15

tons.⁴ These, therefore, were really *big* monoliths that had been carved

out of solid limestone and raised more than 100 feet into the air before

being placed faultlessly in position.

To have worked effectively the pyramid builders must have had nerves

of steel, the agility of mountain goats, the strength of lions and the confidence of trained steeplejacks. With the cold morning wind whipping

around my ears and threatening to launch me into flight, I tried to

imagine what it must have been like for them, poised dangerously at this

(and much higher) altitudes, lifting, manoeuvring and positioning exactly

an endless production line of chunky limestone monoliths—the smallest

of which weighed as much as two modern family cars.

How long had the pyramid taken to complete? How many men had worked on it? The consensus among Egyptologists was two decades and

100,000 men.⁵ It was also generally agreed that the construction project

had not been a year-round affair but had been confined (through labour

force availability) to the annual three-month agricultural lay-off season

imposed by the flooding of the Nile.⁶

As I continued to climb, I reminded myself of the implications of all this. It wasn't just the tens of thousands of blocks weighing 15 tons or

more that the builders would have had to worry about. Year in, year out,

the real crises would have been caused by the *millions* of 'average-sized'

blocks, weighing say 2.5 tons, that also had to be brought to the working

plane. The Pyramid has been reliably estimated to consist of a total of 2.3

million blocks.⁷ Assuming that the masons worked ten hours a day, 365

days a year, the mathematics indicate that they would have needed to

place 31 blocks in position every hour (about one block every two minutes) to complete the Pyramid in twenty years. Assuming that construction work had been confined to the annual three-month lay-off,

3 Dr. Joseph Davidovits and Margie Morris, *The Pyramids: An Enigma Solved*, Dorset

Press, New York, 1988, pp. 39-40.

4 Ibid., p. 37.

5 John Baines and Jaromir Malek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, Time-Life Books, Virginia, 1990,

p. 160; *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 229-30.

6 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 229.

7 Ibid., p. 85.

275

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the problems multiplied: four blocks a minute would have had to be delivered, about 240 every hour.

Such scenarios are, of course, the stuff construction managers'

nightmares are made of. Imagine, for example, the daunting degree of

coordination that must have been maintained between the masons and

the quarries to ensure the requisite rate of block flow across the

production site. Imagine also the havoc if even a single 2.5 ton block had

been dropped from, say, the 175th course.

The physical and managerial obstacles seemed staggering on their own,

but beyond these was the geometrical challenge represented by the

pyramid itself, which had to end up with its apex positioned exactly over

the centre of its base. Even the minutest error in the angle of incline of

any one of the sides at the base would have led to a substantial

misalignment of the edges at the apex. Incredible accuracy, therefore,

had to be maintained throughout, at every course, hundreds of feet

above the ground, with great stone blocks of killing weight.

Rampant stupidity

How had the job been done?

At the last count there were more than thirty competing and conflicting

theories attempting to answer that question. The majority of academic

Egyptologists have argued that ramps of one kind or another must have

been used. This was the opinion, for example, of Professor I.E.S Edwards,

a former keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum who

asserted categorically: 'Only one method of lifting heavy weights was

open to the ancient Egyptians, namely by means of ramps composed of

brick and earth which sloped upwards from the level of the ground to

whatever height was desired.'⁸

John Baines, professor of Egyptology at Oxford University, agreed with

Edwards's analysis and took it further: 'As the pyramid grew in height,

the length of the ramp and the width of its base were increased in order

to maintain a constant gradient (about 1 in 10) and to prevent the ramp

from collapsing. Several ramps approaching the pyramid from different

sides were probably used.⁹

To carry an inclined plane to the top of the Great Pyramid at a gradient

of 1:10 would have required a ramp 4800 feet long and more than three

times as massive as the Great Pyramid itself (with an estimated volume of

8 million cubic metres as against the Pyramid's 2.6 million cubic

metres).¹⁰ Heavy weights could not have been dragged up any gradient

⁸ Ibid., p. 220.

⁹ *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 139.

¹⁰ Peter Hodges and Julian Keable, *How the Pyramids Were Built*, Element Books,

Shaftesbury, 1989, p. 123.

276

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

steeper than this by any normal means.¹¹ If a lesser gradient had been

chosen, the ramp would have had to be even more absurdly and disproportionately massive.

The problem was that mile-long ramps reaching a height of 480 feet

could not have been made out of 'bricks and earth' as Edwards and other

Egyptologists supposed. On the contrary, modern builders and architects

had proved that such ramps would have caved in under their own weight

if they had consisted of any material less costly and less stable than the

limestone ashlar of the Pyramid itself.¹²

Since this obviously made no sense (besides, where had the 8 million

cubic metres of surplus blocks been taken after completion of the work?),

other Egyptologists had proposed the use of *spiral* ramps made of mud

brick and attached to the sides of the Pyramid. These would certainly

have required less material to build, but they would also have failed to

reach the top.¹³ They would have presented deadly and perhaps

insurmountable problems to the teams of men attempting to drag the big

blocks of stone around their hairpin corners. And they would have

crumbled under constant use. Most problematic of all, such ramps would

have cloaked the whole pyramid, thus making it impossible for the architects to check the accuracy of the setting-out during building.¹⁴

But the pyramid builders *had* checked the accuracy of the setting out,

and they *had* got it right, because the apex of the pyramid was poised

exactly over the centre of the base, its angles and its corners were true,

each block was in the correct place, and each course had been laid down

level—in near-perfect symmetry and with near-perfect alignment to the

cardinal points. Then, as though to demonstrate that such *tours-de-force*

of technique were mere trifles, the ancient master-builders had gone on

to play some clever mathematical games with the monument's

dimensions, presenting us, for example, as we saw in Chapter Twenty-

three, with an accurate use of the transcendental number *pi* in the ratio

of its height to its base perimeter.¹⁵ For some reason, too, it had taken

their fancy to place the Great Pyramid almost exactly on the 30th parallel

at latitude 29° 58' 51". This, as a former astronomer royal of Scotland

once observed, was 'a sensible defalcation from 30°', but not necessarily

in error:

For if the original designer had wished that men should see with their body, rather

than their mental eyes, the pole of the sky from the foot of the Great Pyramid, at

an altitude before them of 30°, he would have had to take account of the refraction

of the atmosphere; and that would have necessitated the building standing not at

11 Ibid., p. 11.

12 Ibid., p. 13.

13 Ibid., p. 125-6. Failure to reach the top would be because spiral ramps and linked

scaffolds overlap and exceed the space available long before arrival at the summit.

14 Ibid., p. 126.

15 See Chapter Twenty-three; *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 219; *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p.

139.

277

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

30° but at 29° 58' 22".16

Compared to the true position of 29° 58' 51", this was an error of less than half an arc minute, suggesting once again that the surveying and

geodetic skills brought to bear here must have been of the highest order.

Feeling somewhat overawed, we climbed on, past the 44th and 45th courses of the hulking and enigmatic structure. At the 40th course an angry voice hailed us in Arabic from the plaza below and we looked down

to see a tiny, turbaned man dressed in a billowing kaftan. Despite the range, he had unslung his shotgun and was preparing to take aim at us.

The guardian and the vision

He was, of course, the guardian of the Pyramid's western face, the patrolman of the fourth cardinal point, and he had not received the extra

funds dispensed to his colleagues of the north, east and south faces.

I could tell from Ali's perspiration that we were in a potentially tricky situation. The guard was ordering us to come down at once so that he

could place us under arrest. 'This, however, could probably be avoided

with a further payment,' Ali explained.

I groaned. 'Offer him 100 Egyptian pounds.'

'Too much,' Ali cautioned, 'it will make the others resentful. I shall offer

him 50.'

More words were exchanged in Arabic. Indeed, over the next few

minutes, Ali and the guard managed to have quite a sustained

conversation up and down the south-western corner of the Pyramid at

4:40 in the morning. At one point a whistle was blown. Then the guards

of the southern face put in a brief appearance and stood in conference

with the guard of the western face, who had now also been joined by the

two other members of his patrol.

Just when it seemed that Ali had lost whatever argument he was having

on our behalf, he smiled and heaved a sigh of relief. 'You will pay the

extra 50 pounds when we have returned to the ground,' he explained.

‘They’re letting us continue but they say that if any senior officer comes

along and sees us they will not be able to help us.’

We struggled upwards in silence for the next ten minutes or so until we

had reached the tooth course—roughly the halfway mark and already well

over 250 feet above the ground. We gazed over our shoulders to the

southwest, where a once-in-a-lifetime vision of staggering beauty and

power confronted us. The crescent moon, which hung low in the sky to

the south-east, had emerged from behind a scudding cloud bank and

projected its ghostly radiance directly at the northern and eastern faces

of the neighbouring Second Pyramid, supposedly built by the Fourth

16 Piazzì Smyth, *The Great Pyramid: Its Secrets and Mysteries Revealed*, Bell Publishing

Company, New York, 1990, p. 80.

278

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Dynasty Pharaoh Khafre (Chephren). This stunning monument, second

only in size and majesty to the Great Pyramid itself (being just a few feet

shorter and 48 feet narrower at the base) appeared lit up, as though energized from within, by a pale and unearthly fire. Behind it in the distance, slightly offset among the dark desert shadows, was the smaller

Pyramid of Menkaure (Mycerinus), measuring 356 feet along each side

and some 215 feet in height.¹⁷

For a moment, against the glittering backdrop of the inky sky, I experienced the illusion of being in motion, of standing at the stern of some great ship of the heavens and looking back at two other vessels

which seemed to follow in my wake, strung out in battle order behind me.

So where was this convoy going, this squadron of pyramids? And were

the prodigious structures all the work of megalomaniac pharaohs, as the

Egyptologists believed? Or had they been designed by mysterious hands

to voyage eternally through time and space towards some as yet unidentified objective?

From this altitude, though the southern sky was partially occluded by the vast bulk of the Pyramid of Khafre, I could see all the western sky as it

arched down from the celestial north pole towards the distant rim of the

revolving planet. Polaris, the Pole Star, was far to my right, in the constellation of the Little Bear. Low on the horizon, about ten degrees

north of west, Regulus, the paw-star of the imperial constellation of Leo,

was about to set.

Under Egyptian skies

Just above the 150th course, Ali hissed at us to keep our heads down. A

police car had come into view around the north-western corner of the Great Pyramid and was now proceeding along the western flank of the

monument with its blue light slowly flashing. We stayed motionless in the

shadows until the car had passed. Then we began to climb again, with a

renewed sense of urgency, heading as fast as we could towards the summit, which we now imagined we could see jutting out above the misty

predawn haze.

For what seemed like five minutes we climbed without stopping.
When I

looked up, however, the top of the Pyramid still seemed as far away
as

ever. We climbed again, panting and sweating, and once again the
summit drew back before us like some legendary Welsh peak. Then,
just

when we'd resigned ourselves to an endless succession of such
disappointments, we found ourselves at the top, under a
breathtaking

canopy of stars, more than 450 feet above the surrounding plateau
on

the most extraordinary viewing platform in the world. To our north
and

east, sprawled out across the wide, sloping valley of the River Nile,
lay the

17 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 125.

279

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

city of Cairo, a jumble of skyscrapers and flat traditional roofs
separated

by the dark defiles of narrow streets and interspersed with the
needle-

point minarets of a thousand and one mosques. A film of reflected street-

lighting shimmered over the whole scene, closing the eyes of modern

Cairenes to the wonder of the stars but at the same time creating the hallucination of a fairyland illuminated in greens and reds and blues and

sulphurous yellows.

I felt privileged to witness this strange, electronic mirage from such an

incredible vantage point, perched on the summit platform of the last surviving wonder of the ancient world, hovering in the sky over Cairo like

Aladdin on his magic carpet.

Not that the 203rd course of the Great Pyramid of Egypt could be described as a carpet! Measuring just under 30 feet on each side (as against the monument's side length of around 755 feet at the base) it consisted of several hundred waist-high limestone blocks, each of which

weighed about five tons. The course was not completely level: a few blocks were missing or broken, and rising towards the southern end there were the substantial remains of about half an additional step of

masonry. Moreover, at the very centre of the platform, someone had arranged for a triangular wooden scaffold to be erected, through the middle of which rose a thick pole, just over 31 feet long, which marked

the monument's original true height of 481.3949 feet.¹⁸ Beneath this a

scrawl of graffiti had been carved into the limestone by generations of

tourists.¹⁹

The complete ascent of the Pyramid had taken us about half an hour and it was now just after 5 a.m., the time of morning worship. Almost in

unison, the voices of a thousand and one muezzins rang out from the

balconies of the minarets of Cairo, calling the faithful to prayer and reaffirming the greatness, the indivisibility, the mercy and the

compassion of God. Behind me, to the south-west, the top 22 courses of

Khafre's Pyramid, still clad with their original facing stones, seemed to

float like an iceberg on the ocean of moonlight.

Knowing that we could not stay long in this bewitching place, I sat

down and gazed around at the heavens. Over to the west, across
limitless

desert sands, Regulus had now set beneath the horizon, and the
rest of

the lion's body was poised to follow. The constellations of Virgo and

Libra were also dropping lower in the sky and, much farther to the
north,

I could see the Great and Little Bears slowly pacing out their eternal
cycle

around the celestial pole.

I looked south-east across the Nile Valley and there was the
crescent

moon still spreading its spectral radiance from the bank of the Milky
Way.

18 Ibid., p. 87.

19 'One is irritated by the number of imbeciles' names written
everywhere,' Gustave

Flaubert commented in his *Letters From Egypt*. 'On the top of the
Great Pyramid there is

a certain Buffard, 79 rue St Martin, wallpaper manufacturer, in black
letters.'

280

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Following the course of the celestial river, I looked due south: there,

crossing the meridian, was the resplendent constellation of Scorpius dominated by the first-magnitude star Antares—a red supergiant 300 times the diameter of the sun. North-east, above Cairo, sailed Cygnus the

swan, his tail feathers marked by Deneb, a blue-white supergiant visible

to us across more than 1800 light years of interstellar space. Last but not

least, in the northern sky, the dragon Draco coiled sinuously among the

circumpolar stars. Indeed, 4500 years ago, when the Great Pyramid was

supposedly being built for the Fourth Dynasty Pharaoh Khufu (Cheops),

one of the stars of Draco had stood close to the celestial north pole and

had served as the Pole Star. This had been alpha Draconis, also known as

Thuban. With the passing of the millennia, however, it had gradually been

displaced from its position by the remorseless celestial mill of the earth's

axial precession so that the Pole Star today is Polaris in the Little Bear.²⁰

I lay back, cushioned my head in my hands and gazed directly up

towards the zenith of heaven. Through the smooth cold stones I rested

on, I thought I could sense beneath me, like a living force, the stupendous gravity and mass of the pyramid.

Thinking like giants

Covering a full 13.1 acres at the base, it weighed about six million tons—

more than all the buildings in the Square Mile of the City of London added together,²¹ and consisted, as we have seen, of roughly 2.3 million

individual blocks of limestone and granite. To these had once been added

a 22-acre, mirror-like cladding consisting of an estimated 115,000 highly

polished casing stones, each weighing 10 tons, which had originally covered all four of its faces.²²

After being shaken loose by a massive earthquake in AD 1301, the majority of the facing blocks had subsequently been removed for the construction of Cairo.²³ Here and there around the base, however, I knew

that enough had remained in position to permit the great nineteenth century archaeologist, W.M. Flinders Petrie, to carry out a detailed study

of them. He had been stunned to encounter tolerances of less than one-

hundredth of an inch and cemented joints so precise and so carefully aligned that it was impossible to slip even the fine blade of a pocket knife

between them. 'Merely to place such stones in exact contact would be

careful work', he admitted, 'but to do so with cement in the joint seems

almost impossible; it is to be compared to the finest opticians' work on a

20 Skyglobe 3.6.

21 *How the Pyramids Were Built*, p. 4-5.

22 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, pp. 232, 244.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

281

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

scale of acres.'²⁴

Of course, the jointing of the casing stones was by no means the only

'almost impossible' feature of the Great Pyramid. The alignments to true

north, south, east and west were 'almost impossible', so too were the

near- perfect ninety-degree corners, and the incredible symmetry of the

four enormous sides. And so were the engineering logistics of raising millions of huge stones hundreds of feet in the air ...

Whoever they had been, therefore, the architects, engineers and stonemasons who had designed and successfully built this stupendous

monument must indeed have 'thought like men 100 feet tall', as Jean-

François Champollion, the founder of modern Egyptology, had once observed. He had seen clearly what generations of his successors were to

close their eyes to: that the pyramid builders could only have been men

of giant intellectual stature. Beside the Egyptians of old, he had added,

'we in Europe are but Lilliputians.'²⁵

24 Cited in *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 90.

25 Ibid., p. 40. Champollion of course, deciphered the Rosetta Stone.

282

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 35

Tombs and Tombs Only?

Climbing down the Great Pyramid was more nerve wracking than climbing

up. We were no longer struggling against the force of gravity, so the

physical effort was less. But the possibilities of a fatal fall seemed greatly

magnified now that our attention was directed exclusively towards the

ground rather than the heavens. We picked our way with exaggerated

care towards the base of the enormous mountain of stone, sliding and

slithering among the treacherous masonry blocks, feeling as though we

had been reduced to ants.

By the time we had completed the descent the night was over and the

first wash of pale sunlight was filtering into the sky. We paid the 50

Egyptian pounds promised to the guard of the pyramid's western face

and then, with a tremendous sense of release and exultation, we walked

jauntily away from the monument in the direction of the Pyramid of Khafre, a few hundred metres to the south-west.

Khufu, Khafre, Menkaure ... Cheops, Chephren, Mycerinus. Whether they were referred to by their Egyptian or their Greek names, the fact remained that these three pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty (2575-2467 BC)

were universally acclaimed as the builders of the Giza pyramids. This had

been the case at least since Ancient Egyptian tour guides had told the

Greek historian Herodotus that the Great Pyramid had been built by Khufu. Herodotus had incorporated this information into the oldest surviving written description of the monuments, which continued:

Cheops, they said, reigned for fifty years, and on his death the kingship was taken

over by his brother Chephren. He also made a pyramid ... it is forty feet lower than

his brother's pyramid, but otherwise of the same greatness ... Chephren reigned

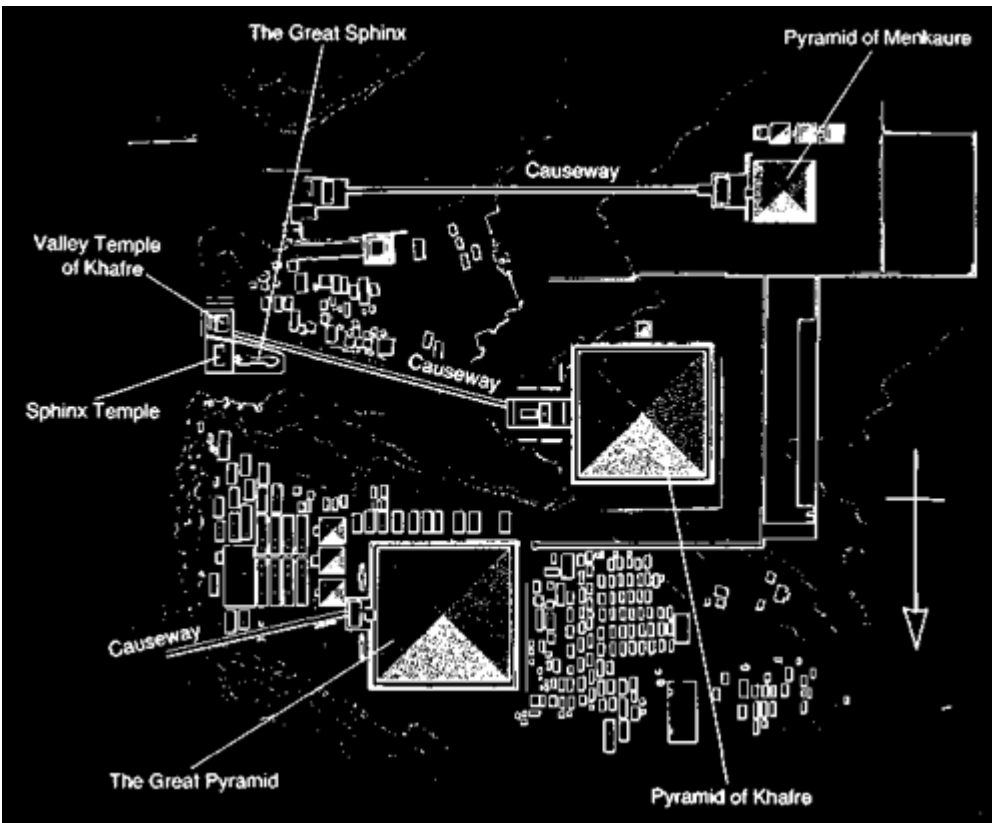
for fifty-six years ... then there succeeded Mycerinus, the son of Cheops ... This

man left a pyramid much smaller than his father's.¹

1 Herodotus, *The History* (translated by David Grene), University of Chicago Press, 1987,

pp. 187-9.

283



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Site plan of the Giza necropolis

Herodotus saw the monuments in the fifth century BC, more than 2000

years after they had been built. Nevertheless it was largely on the foundation of his testimony that the entire subsequent judgement of

history was based. All other commentators, up to the present, continued

uncritically to follow in the Greek historian's footsteps. And down the ages—although it had originally been little more than hearsay—the attribution of the Great Pyramid to Khufu, the Second Pyramid to Khafre

and the Third Pyramid to Menkaure had assumed the stature of unassailable fact.

Trivializing the mystery

Having parted company with Ali, Santha and I continued our walk into the

desert. Skirting the immense south-western corner of the Second Pyramid, our eyes were drawn towards its summit. There we noted again

the intact facing stones that still covered its top 22 courses. We also noticed that the first few courses above its base, each of which had a 'footprint' of about a dozen acres, were composed of truly massive blocks of limestone, almost too high to clamber over, which were about

20 feet long and 6 feet thick. These extraordinary monoliths, as I was later to discover, weighed 200 tons apiece and belonged to a distinct style of masonry to be found at several different and widely scattered

locations within the Giza necropolis.

284

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

On its north and west sides the Second Pyramid sat on a level platform

cut down out of the surrounding bedrock and was thus enclosed within a

wide trench more than 15 feet deep in places. Walking due south, parallel

to the monument's scarred western flank, we picked our way along the

edge of this trench towards the much smaller Third Pyramid, which lay

some 400 metres ahead of us in the desert.

Khufu ... Khafre ... Menkaure ... According to all orthodox Egyptologists

the pyramids had been built as tombs—and only as tombs—for these

three pharaohs. Yet there were some obvious difficulties with such

assertions. For example, the spacious burial chamber of the Khafre

Pyramid was empty when it was opened in 1818 by the European explorer

Giovanni Belzoni. Indeed, more than empty, the chamber was starkly,

austerely bare. The polished granite sarcophagus which lay embedded in

its floor had also been found empty, with its lid broken into two pieces

nearby.² How was this to be explained?

To Egyptologists the answer seemed obvious. At some early date, probably not many hundreds of years after Khafre's death, tomb robbers

must have penetrated the chamber and cleared all its contents including

the mummified body of the pharaoh.

Much the same thing seemed to have happened at the smaller Third Pyramid, towards which Santha and I were now walking—that attributed

to Menkaure. Here the first European to break in had been a British colonel, Howard Vyse, who had entered the burial chamber in 1837. He

found an empty basalt sarcophagus, an anthropoid coffin lid made of wood, and some bones. The natural assumption was that these were the

remains of Menkaure. Modern science had subsequently proved, however,

that the bones and coffin lid dated from the early Christian era, that is,

from 2500 years after the Pyramid Age, and thus represented the 'intrusive burial' of a much later individual (quite a common practice throughout Ancient Egyptian history). As to the basalt sarcophagus—well,

it could have belonged to Menkaure. Unfortunately, however, nobody had

the opportunity to examine it because it had been lost at sea when the

ship on which Vyse sent it to England had sunk off the coast of Spain.³

Since it was a matter of record that the sarcophagus had been found empty by Vyse, it was once again assumed that the body of the pharaoh

must have been removed by tomb robbers.

A similar assumption had been made about the body of Khufu, which was also missing. Here the scholarly consensus, expressed as well as

anyone by George Hart of the British Museum, was that 'no later than 500

years after Khufu's funeral' robbers had forced their way into the Great

Pyramid 'to steal the burial treasure'.⁴ The implication is that this incursion must have occurred by or before 2000 BC—since Khufu is

2 *The Riddle of the Pyramids*, p. 54.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

4 George Hart, *Pharaohs and Pyramids*, Guild Publishing, London, 1991, p. 91.

285

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

believed to have died in 2528 BC.⁵ Moreover it was assumed by Professor

I.E.S Edwards, a leading authority on these matters, that the burial

treasure had been removed from the famous inner sanctum now known

as the King's Chamber and that the empty 'granite sarcophagus' which

stood at the western end of that sanctum had 'once contained the King's

body, probably enclosed within an inner coffin made of wood'.⁶

All this is orthodox, mainstream, modern scholarship, which is unquestioningly accepted as historical fact and taught as such at universities everywhere.⁷

But suppose it isn't fact.

The cupboard was bare

The mystery of the missing mummy of Khufu begins with the records of

Caliph Al-Ma'mun, a Muslim governor of Cairo in the ninth century AD. He

had engaged a team of quarriers to tunnel their way into the pyramid's

northern face, urging them on with promises that they would discover

treasure. Through a series of lucky accidents 'Ma'mun's Hole', as

archaeologists now refer to it, had joined up with one of the monument's

several internal passageways, the 'descending corridor' leading

downwards from the original concealed doorway in the northern face (the

location of which, though known in classical times, had been forgotten by

Ma'mun's day). By a further lucky accident the vibrations that the Arabs

had caused with their battering rams and drills dislodged a block of

limestone from the ceiling of the descending corridor. When the socket

from which it had fallen was examined it was found to conceal the

opening to another corridor, this time *ascending* into the heart of the

pyramid.

There was a problem, however. The opening was blocked by a series of

enormous plugs of solid granite, clearly contemporaneous with the construction of the monument, which were held in place by a narrowing

of the lower end of the corridor.⁸ The quarriers were unable either to break or to cut through the plugs. They therefore tunnelled into the slightly softer limestone surrounding them and, after several weeks of

backbreaking toil, rejoined the ascending corridor higher up— *having bypassed a formidable obstacle never before breached.*

The implications were obvious. Since no previous treasure-seekers had

penetrated this far, the interior of the pyramid must still be virgin

territory. The diggers must have licked their lips with anticipation at the

5 *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.

6 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 94-5.

7 *The Pyramids of Egypt* by Professor I. E. S. Edwards is the standard text on the

pyramids.

8 W. M. Flinders Petrie, *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh* (New and Revised Edition),

Histories and Mysteries of Man Ltd., London, 1990, p. 21.

286

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

immense quantities of gold and jewels they could now expect to find.

Similarly—though perhaps for different reasons, Ma'mun must have been

impatient to be the first into any chambers that lay ahead. It was reported

that his primary motive in initiating this investigation had not been an

ambition to increase his vast personal wealth but a desire to gain access

to a storehouse of ancient wisdom and technology which he believed to

lie buried within the monument. In this repository, according to age-old

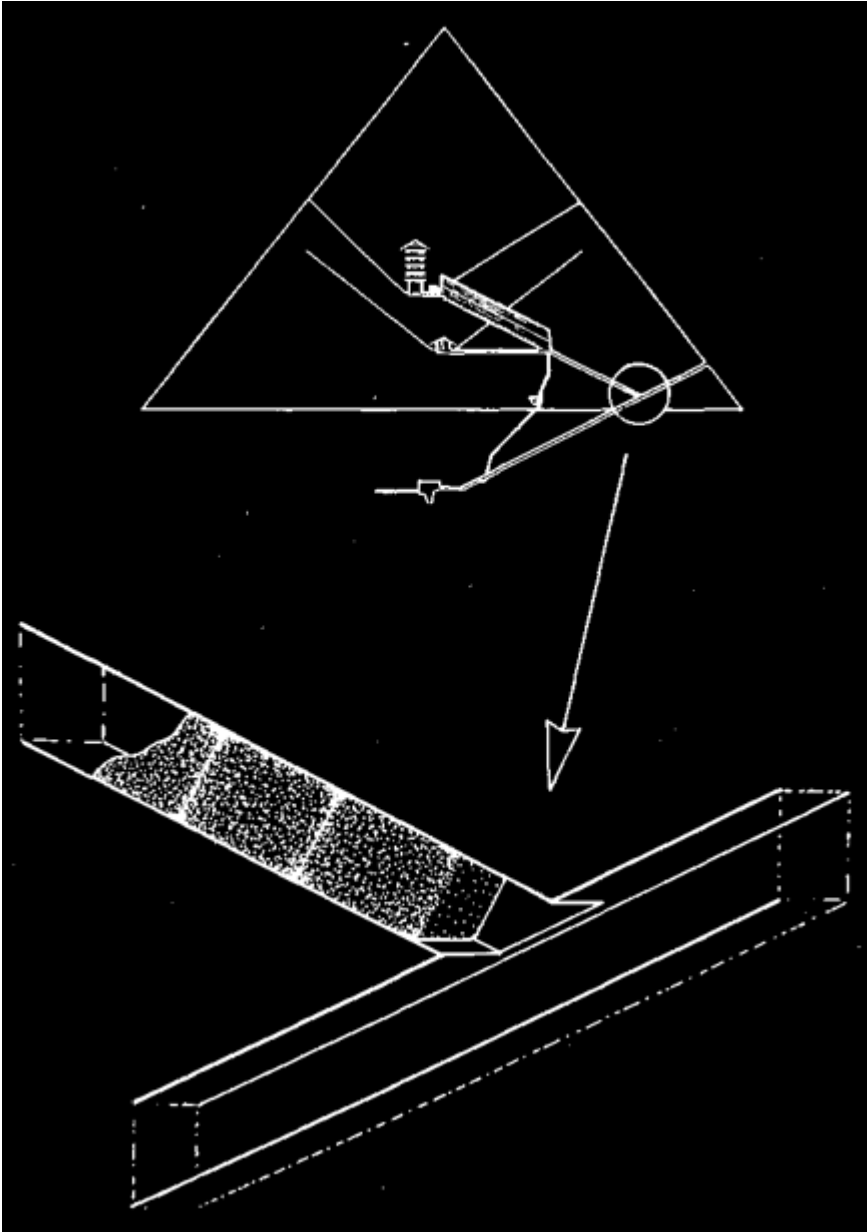
tradition, the pyramid builders had placed 'instruments of iron and arms

which rust not, and glasse which might be bended and yet not broken,

and strange spells ...'⁹

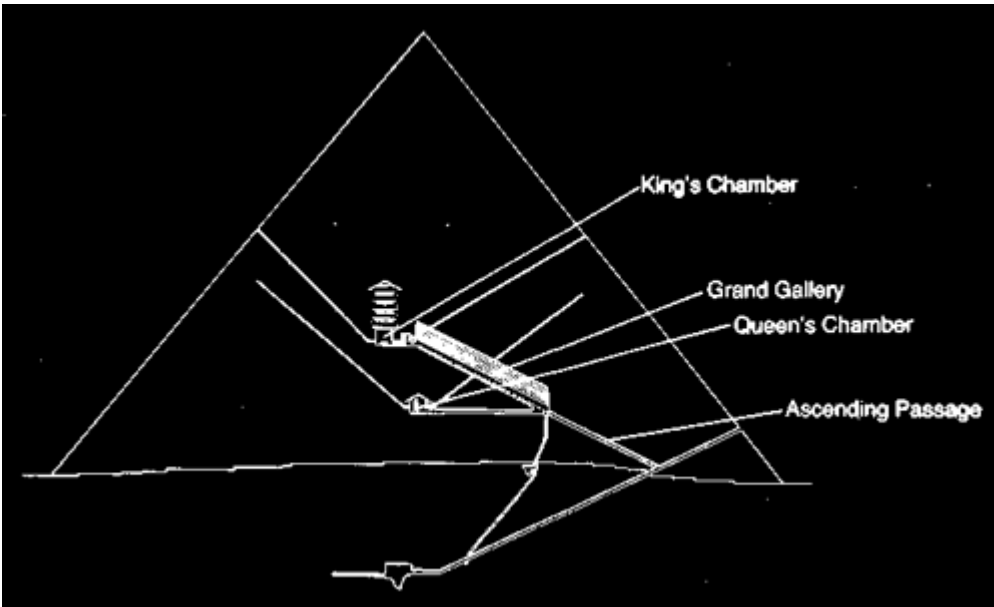
⁹ John Greaves, *Pyramidographia*, cited in *Serpent in the Sky*, p. 230.

287



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Great Pyramid: entrance and plugging blocks in the ascending corridor.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Great Pyramid: detail of corridors, shafts and chambers.

But Ma'mun and his men found nothing, not even any down-to-earth treasure—and certainly not any high-tech, anachronistic plastic or instruments of iron or rustproof weapons ... or strange spells either.

The erroneously named 'Queen's Chamber' (which lay at the end a long

horizontal passageway that branched off from the ascending corridor)

turned out to be completely empty—just a severe, geometrical room.¹⁰

More disappointing still, the King's Chamber (which the Arabs reached

after climbing the imposing Grand Gallery) also offered little of interest.

Its only furniture was a granite coffer just big enough to contain the body

of a man. Later identified, on no very good grounds, as a 'sarcophagus',

this undecorated stone box was approached with trepidation by Ma'mun

and his team, who found it to be lidless and as empty as everything else

in the pyramid.¹¹

Why, how and when exactly had the Great Pyramid been emptied of its

contents? Had it been 500 years after Khufu's death, as the Egyptologists

suggested? Or was it not more likely, as the evidence was beginning to

suggest, that the inner chambers of the pyramid had been empty all

along, from the very beginning, that is, from the day that the monument

had originally been sealed? Nobody, after all, had reached the upper part

of the ascending corridor before Ma'mun and his men. And it was certain,

too, that nobody had cut through the granite plugs blocking the entrance

to that corridor.

Commonsense ruled out the possibility of any earlier incursion—
unless

there was another way in.

10 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 11.

11 *The Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 120.

289

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Bottlenecks in the well-shaft

There was another way in.

Farther down the descending corridor, more than 200 feet beyond
the

point where the plugged end of the ascending corridor had been
found,

lies the concealed entrance to another secret passageway, deep
within

the subterranean bedrock of the Giza plateau. If Ma'mun had
discovered

this passageway, he could have saved himself a great deal of
trouble,

since it provided a readymade route around the plugs blocking the
ascending corridor. His attention, however, had been distracted by
the

challenge of tunnelling past those plugs, and he made no effort to

investigate the lower reaches of the descending corridor (which he ended

up using as a dump for the tons of stone his diggers removed from the

core of the pyramid).¹²

The full extent of the descending corridor was, however, well-known

and explored in classical times. The Graeco-Roman geographer Strabo

left quite a clear description of the large subterranean chamber it

debouched into (at a depth of almost 600 feet below the apex of the

pyramid).¹³ Graffiti from the period of the Roman occupation of Egypt was

also found inside this underground chamber, confirming that it had once

been regularly visited. Yet, because it had been so cunningly hidden in

the beginning, the secret doorway leading off to one side about two-

thirds of the way down the western wall of the descending corridor,

remained sealed and undiscovered until the nineteenth century.¹⁴

What the doorway led to was a narrow well-shaft, about 160 feet in

extent, which rose almost vertically through the bedrock and then

through more than twenty complete courses of the Great Pyramid's

limestone core blocks, until it joined up with the main internal corridor system at the base of the Grand Gallery. There is no evidence to indicate

what the purpose of this strange architectural feature might have been

(although several scholars have hazarded guesses).¹⁵ Indeed the only

thing that is clear is that it was engineered at the time of the construction

of the pyramid and was not the result of an intrusion by tunnelling tomb-

robbers.¹⁶ The question remains open, however, as to whether tomb-

robbers might have *discovered* the hidden entrance to the shaft, and

made use of it to siphon off the treasures from the King's and Queen's

Chambers.

Such a possibility cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, a review of the

12 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 58.

13 *The Geography of Strabo*, (trans. H. L. Jones), Wm. Heinemann, London, 1982, volume

VIII, pp. 91-3.

14 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 58.

15 In general, it is assumed to have been used as an escape route by workers sealed

within the pyramid above the plugging blocks in the ascending passage.

16 Because, over a distance of several hundred feet through solid masonry, it joins two

narrow corridors. This could not have been achieved by accident.

290

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

historical record indicates little in its favour.

For example, the upper end of the well-shaft was entered off the Grand

Gallery by the Oxford astronomer John Greaves in 1638. He managed to

descend to a depth of about sixty feet. In 1765 another Briton, Nathaniel

Davison, penetrated to a depth of about 150 feet but found his way

blocked by an impenetrable mass of sand and stones. Later, in the 1830s,

Captain G.B. Caviglia, an Italian adventurer, reached the same depth and

encountered the same obstacle. More enterprising than his predecessors,

he hired Arab workers to start excavating the rubble in the hope that

there might be something of interest beneath it. Several days of digging

in claustrophobic conditions followed before the connection with the descending corridor was discovered.¹⁷

Is it likely that such a cramped, blocked-up shaft could have been a viable conduit for the treasures of Khufu, supposedly the greatest pharaoh of the magnificent Fourth Dynasty?

Even if it hadn't been choked with debris and sealed at the lower end, it

could not have been used to bring out more than a tiny fraction of the treasures of a typical royal tomb. This is because the well-shaft is only

three feet in diameter and incorporates several tricky vertical sections.

At the very least, therefore, when Ma'mun and his men battered their way into the King's Chamber around the year AD 820, one would have

expected some of the bigger and heavier pieces from the original burial

to be still in place—like the statues and shrines that bulked so large in

Tutankhamen's much later and presumably inferior tomb.¹⁸ But *nothing*

was found inside Khufu's Pyramid, making this and the alleged looting of

Khafre's monument the only tomb robberies in the history of Egypt which

achieved a clean sweep, leaving not a single trace behind—not a torn

cloth, not a shard of broken pottery, not an unwanted figurine, not an overlooked piece of jewellery—just the bare floors and walls and the gaping mouths of empty sarcophagi.

Not like other tombs

It was now after six in the morning and the rising sun had bathed the summits of Khufu's and Khafre's Pyramids with a fleeting blush of pastel-

pink light. Menkaure's Pyramid, being some 200 feet lower than the other

two, was still in shadow as Santha and I skirted its north-western corner

and continued our walk into the rolling sand dunes of the surrounding

desert.

I still had the tomb robbery theory on my mind. As far as I could see the

only real 'evidence' in favour of it was the absence of grave goods and

mummies that it had been invented to explain in the first place. All the

17 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, pp. 56-8.

18 See Nicholas Reeves, *The Complete Tutankhamun*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1990.

291

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

other facts, particularly where the Great Pyramid was concerned, seemed

to speak persuasively against any robbery having occurred. It was not just

a matter of the narrowness and unsuitability of the well-shaft as an escape route for bulky treasures. The other remarkable feature of Khufu's

Pyramid was the absence of inscriptions or decorations anywhere within

its immense network of galleries, corridors, passageways and chambers,

and the same was true of Khafre's and Menkaure's Pyramids. In none of

these amazing monuments had a single word been written in praise of

the pharaohs whose bodies they were supposed to house.

This was exceptional. No other proven burial place of any Egyptian

monarch had ever been found undecorated. The fashion throughout

Egyptian history had been for the tombs of the pharaohs to be *extensively*

decorated, beautifully painted from top to bottom (as in the Valley of the

Kings at Luxor, for example) and densely inscribed with the ritual spells

and invocations required to assist the deceased on his journey towards

eternal life (as in the Fifth Dynasty pyramids at Saqqara, just twenty miles

to the south of Giza.)¹⁹

Why had Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure done things so differently? Had

they not built their monuments to serve as tombs at all, but for another

and more subtle purpose? Or was it possible, as certain Arab and esoteric

traditions maintained, that the Giza pyramids had been erected long

before the Fourth Dynasty by the architects of some earlier and more

advanced civilization?

Neither hypothesis was popular with Egyptologists for reasons that

were easy to understand. Moreover, while conceding that the Second and

Third Pyramids were completely devoid of internal inscriptions, lacking

even the *names* of Khafre and Menkaure, the scholars were able to cite

certain hieroglyphic 'quarry marks' (graffiti daubed on stone blocks before they left the quarry) found inside the Great Pyramid, which did seem to bear the name of Khufu.

A certain smell ...

The discoverer of the quarry marks was Colonel Howard Vyse, during the

destructive excavations he undertook at Giza in 1837. Extending an existing crawlway, he cut a tunnel into the series of narrow cavities, called 'relieving chambers', which lay directly above the King's Chamber.

The quarry marks were found on the walls and ceilings of the top four of

these cavities and said things like this:

THE CRAFTSMEN-GANG,

HOW POWERFUL IS THE WHITE CROWN OF KHNUM—

19 See *Valley of the Kings*; for Saqqara (Fifth and Sixth Dynasties) see *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, pp. 163-7.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

KHUFU

KHUFU

KHNUM-KHUFU

YEAR SEVENTEEN²⁰

It was all very convenient. Right at the end of a costly and otherwise fruitless digging season, just when a major archaeological discovery was

needed to legitimize the expenses he had run up, Vyse had stumbled

upon the find of the decade—the first incontrovertible proof that Khufu

had indeed been the builder of the hitherto anonymous Great Pyramid.

One would have thought that a discovery of this nature would have settled conclusively any lingering doubts over the ownership and purpose

of that enigmatic monument. But the doubts remained, largely because,

from the beginning, ‘a certain smell’ hung over Vyse’s evidence:

1 It was odd that the marks were the only signs of the name Khufu ever

found anywhere inside the Great Pyramid.²¹

2 It was odd that they had been found in such an obscure, out-of-the-

way corner of that immense building.

3 It was odd that they had been found *at all* in a monument otherwise

devoid of inscriptions of any kind.

4 And it was extremely odd that they had been found only in the top

four of the five relieving chambers. Inevitably, suspicious minds began

to wonder whether 'quarry marks' might also have appeared in the

lowest of these five chambers had that chamber, too, been discovered

by Vyse (rather than by Nathaniel Davison seventy years earlier).²²

5 Last but not least it was odd that several of the hieroglyphs in the

'quarry marks' had been painted upside down, and that some were

unrecognizable while others had been misspelt or used

ungrammatically.²³

Was Vyse a forger?

I know of one plausible case made to suggest he was exactly that,²⁴ and

although final proof will probably always be lacking, it seemed to me

incautious of academic Egyptology to have accepted the authenticity of

the quarry marks without question. Besides, there was alternative hieroglyphic evidence, arguably of purer provenance, which appeared to

indicate that Khufu could not have built the Great Pyramid. Strangely, the

same Egyptologists who readily ascribed immense importance to Vyse's

20 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 211-12; *The Great Pyramid: Your Personal Guide*, p. 71.

21 *Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 96.

22 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 35-6.

23 Zecharia Sitchin, *The Stairway To Heaven*, Avon Books, New York, 1983, pp. 253-82.

24 *Ibid.*

293

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

quarry marks were quick to downplay the significance of these other, contradictory, hieroglyphs, which appeared on a rectangular limestone

stela which now stood in the Cairo Museum.²⁵

The Inventory Stela, as it was called, had been discovered at Giza in the

nineteenth century by the French archaeologist Auguste Mariette. It was

something of a bombshell because its text clearly indicated that both the

Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid (as well as several other structures

on the plateau) were *already in existence* long before Khufu came to the

throne. The inscription also referred to Isis as the 'Mistress of the

Pyramid', implying that the monument had been dedicated to the

goddess of magic and not to Khufu at all. Finally, there was a strong

suggestion that Khufu's pyramid might have been one of the three

subsidiary structures alongside the Great Pyramid's eastern flank.²⁶

All this looked like damaging evidence against the orthodox chronology

of Ancient Egypt. It also challenged the consensus view that the Giza

pyramids had been built as tombs and only as tombs. However, rather than

investigating the anachronistic statements in the Inventory Stela,

Egyptologists chose to devalue them. In the words of the influential

American scholar James Henry Breasted, 'These references would be of

the highest importance if the stela were contemporaneous with Khufu;

but the orthographic evidences of its late date are entirely conclusive ...'²⁷

Breasted meant that the nature of the hieroglyphic writing system used

in the inscription was not consistent with that used in the Fourth Dynasty

but belonged to a more recent epoch: All Egyptologists concurred with

this analysis and the final judgement, still accepted today, was that the

stela had been carved in the Twenty-First Dynasty, about 1500 years after

Khufu's reign, and was therefore to be regarded as a work of historical

fiction.²⁸

Thus, citing orthographic evidence, an entire academic discipline found

reason to ignore the boat-rocking implications of the Inventory Stela and

at no time gave proper consideration to the possibility that it could have

been based upon a genuine Fourth Dynasty inscription (just as the New

English Bible, for example, is based on a much older original). Exactly the

same scholars, however, had accepted the authenticity of a set of dubious

'quarry marks' without demur, turning a blind eye to their orthographic

and other peculiarities.

Why the double standard? Could it have been because the information

contained in the 'quarry marks' conformed strictly to orthodox opinion

that the Great Pyramid had been built as a tomb for Khufu? whereas the

25 James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the*

Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest, reprinted by Histories and Mysteries of Man Ltd.,

London, 1988, pp. 83-5.

26 Ibid., p. 85.

27 Ibid., p. 84.

28 Ibid., and *Travellers Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 139.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

information in the Inventory Stela contradicted that opinion?

Overview

By seven in the morning Santha and I had walked far out into the desert

to the south-west of the Giza pyramids and had made ourselves comfortable in the lee of a huge dune that offered an unobstructed panorama over the entire site.

The date, 16 March, was just a few days away from the Spring Equinox,

one of the two occasions in the year when the sun rose precisely due east

of wherever you stood in the world. Ticking out the days like the pointer

of a giant metronome, it had bisected the horizon this morning at a point

a hair's breadth south of due east and had already climbed high enough

to shrug off the Nile mists which clung like a shroud to much of the city

of Cairo.

Khufu, Khafre, Menkaure ... Cheops, Chephren, Mycerinus. Whether you

called them by their Egyptian or their Greek names, there was no doubt

that the three famous pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty had been commemorated by the most splendid, the most honourable, the most beautiful and the most enormous monuments ever seen anywhere in the

world. Moreover, it was clear that these pharaohs must indeed have been

closely associated with the monuments, not only because of the folklore

passed on by Herodotus (which surely had some basis in fact) but

because inscriptions and references to Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure had

been found in moderate quantities, *outside* the three major pyramids, at

several different parts of the Giza necropolis. Such finds had been made

consistently in and around the six subsidiary pyramids, three of which lay

to the east of the Great Pyramid and the other three to the south of the

Menkaure Pyramid.

Since much of this external evidence was ambiguous and uncertain,
|

found it difficult to understand why the Egyptologists were happy to go

on citing it as confirmation of the 'tombs and tombs only' theory.

The problem was that this same evidence was capable of supporting —

as equally valid—a number of different and mutually contradictory interpretations. To give just one example, the 'close association'

observed between the three great pyramids and the three Fourth Dynasty

pharaohs could indeed have come about because these pharaohs had

built the pyramids as their tombs. But it could also have come about if

the gigantic monuments of the Giza plateau had been standing long

before the dawn of the historical civilization known as Dynastic Egypt. In

that case, it was only necessary to assume that in due course Khufu,

Khafre and Menkaure had come along and built a number of the

subsidiary structures around the three older pyramids—something that

they would have had every reason to do because in this way they could

have appropriated the high prestige of the original anonymous

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

monuments (and would, almost certainly, be viewed by posterity as their

builders).

There were other possibilities too. The point was, however, that the evidence for exactly who had built which great pyramid, when and for

what purpose was far too thin on the ground to justify the dogmatism of

the orthodox 'tombs and tombs only' theory. In all honesty, it was *not clear* who built the pyramids. It was *not* clear in what epoch they had been built. And it was *not at all clear* what their function had been.

For all these reasons they were surrounded by a wonderful, impenetrable air of mystery and as I gazed down at them out of the desert they seemed to march towards me across the dunes ...

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 36

Anomalies

Viewed from our vantage point in the desert south west of the Giza necropolis, the site plan of the three great pyramids seemed majestic but bizarre.

Menkaure's pyramid was closest to us, with Khafre's and Khufu's monuments behind it to the north-east. These two were situated along a

near perfect diagonal—a straight line connecting the south-western and

north-eastern corners of the pyramid of Khafre would, if extended to the

north-east, also pass through the south-western and north-eastern corners of the Great Pyramid. This, presumably, was not an accident.

From where we sat, however, it was easy to see that if the same imaginary straight line was extended to the south-west it would completely miss the Third Pyramid, the entire body of which was offset to the east of the principal diagonal.

Egyptologists refused to recognize any anomaly in this. Why should they? As far as they were concerned there was *no* site plan at Giza. The

pyramids were tombs and tombs only, built for three different pharaohs

over a period of about seventy-five years.¹ It made sense to assume that

each ruler would have sought to express his own personality and idiosyncrasies through his monument, and this was probably why Menkaure had ‘stepped out of line’.

The Egyptologists were wrong. Though I was unaware of it that March

morning in 1993, a breakthrough had been made proving beyond doubt

that the necropolis did have an overall site plan, which dictated the exact

positioning of the three pyramids not only in relation to one another but

in relation to the River Nile a few kilometres east of the Giza plateau. With

eerie fidelity, this immense and ambitious layout modelled a *celestial* phenomenon²—which was perhaps why Egyptologists (who pride themselves on looking exclusively at the ground beneath their feet) had

failed to spot it. On a truly giant scale, as we see in later chapters, it also

reflected the same obsessive concern with orientations and dimensions

demonstrated in each of the monuments.

A singular oppression ...

Giza, Egypt, 16 March 1993, 8 a.m.

At a little over 200 feet tall (and with a side length at the base of 356

1 *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.

2 *The Orion Mystery*.

297

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

feet) the Third Pyramid was less than half the height and well under half

the mass of the Great Pyramid. Nevertheless, it possessed a stunning and

imposing majesty of its own. As we stepped out of the desert sunlight

and into its huge geometrical shadow, I remembered what the Iraqi writer

Abdul Latif had said about it when he had visited it in the twelfth century:

'It appears small compared with the other two; but viewed at a short

distance and to the exclusion of these, it excites in the imagination a singular oppression and cannot be contemplated without painfully affecting the sight ...'3

The lower sixteen courses of the monument were still cased, as they had been since the beginning, with facing blocks quarried out of red granite ('so extremely hard', in Abdul Latif's words, 'that iron takes a long time, with difficulty, to make an impression on it').4 Some of the blocks were very large; they were also closely and cunningly fitted together in a complex interlocking jigsaw-puzzle pattern strongly reminiscent of the cyclopean masonry at Cuzco, Machu Picchu and other

locations in far-off Peru.

As was normal, the entrance to the Third Pyramid was situated in its northern face well above the ground. From here, at an angle of $26^{\circ} 2'$, a

descending corridor lanced arrow-straight down into the darkness.5

Oriented exactly north to south, this corridor was rectangular in section

and so cramped that we had to bend almost double to fit into it. Where it

passed through the masonry of the monument its ceiling and walls

consisted of well-fitted granite blocks. More surprisingly, these continued

for some distance below ground level.

At about seventy feet from the entrance, the corridor levelled off and opened out into a passageway where we could stand up. This led into a

small ante-chamber with carved panelling and grooves cut into its walls,

apparently to take portcullis slabs. Reaching the end of the chamber, we

had to crouch again to enter another corridor. Bent double, we proceeded

south for about forty feet before reaching the first of the three main burial chambers—if burial chambers they were.

These sombre, soundless rooms were all hewn out of solid bedrock.

The one that we stood in was rectangular in plan and oriented east to

west. Measuring about 30 feet long x 15 wide x 15 high, it had a flat ceiling and a complex internal structure with a large, irregular hole in its

western wall leading into a dark, cave-like space beyond. There was also

an opening near the centre of the floor which gave access to a ramp,

sloping westwards, leading down to even deeper levels. We descended

the ramp. It terminated in a short, horizontal passage to the right of which, entered through a narrow doorway, lay a small empty chamber,

Six cells, like the sleeping quarters of medieval monks, had been hewn

3 Abdul Latif, *The Eastern Key*, cited in *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 126.

4 Ibid.

5 *Blue Guide: Egypt*, A & C Black, London, 1988, p. 433.

298

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

out of its walls: four on the eastern side and two to the north. These were

presumed by Egyptologists to have functioned as 'magazines ... for storing objects which the dead king wished to have close to his body.'⁶

Coming out of this chamber, we turned right again, back into the horizontal passage. At its end lay another empty chamber,⁷ the design of

which is unique among the pyramids of Egypt. Some twelve feet long by

eight wide, and oriented north to south, its walls and extensively broken

and damaged floor were fashioned out of a peculiarly dense, chocolate-

coloured granite which seemed to absorb light and sound waves. Its

ceiling consisted of eighteen huge slabs of the same material, nine on

each side, laid in facing gables. Because they had had been hollowed

from below to form a markedly concave surface, the effect of these great

monoliths was of a perfect barrel vault, much as one might expect to find

in the crypt of a Romanesque cathedral.

Retracing our steps, we left the lower chambers and walked back up the

ramp to the large, flat-roofed, rock-hewn room above. Passing through

the ragged aperture in its western wall, we found ourselves looking

directly at the upper sides of the eighteen slabs which formed the ceiling

of the chamber below. From this perspective their true form as a pointed

gable was immediately apparent. What was less clear was how they had

been brought in here in the first place, let alone laid so perfectly in position. Each one must have weighed many tons, heavy enough to have

made them extremely difficult to handle under any circumstances. And

these were no ordinary circumstances. As though they had set out deliberately to make things more complicated for themselves (or perhaps

because they found such tasks simple?) the pyramid builders had disdained to provide an adequate working area between the slabs and the

bedrock above them. By crawling into the cavity, I was able to establish

that the clearance varied from approximately two feet at the southern end

to just a few inches at the northern end. In such a restricted space there

was no possibility that the monoliths could have been lowered into position. Logically, therefore, they must have been raised from the chamber floor, but how had that been done? The chamber was so small

that only a few men could have worked inside it at any one time—too few

to have had the muscle-power to lift the slabs by brute force. Pulleys were

not supposed to have existed in the Pyramid Age⁸ (even if they had, there

would have been insufficient room to set up block-and-tackle). Had some

unknown system of levers been used? Or might there be more substance

than scholars realized to the Ancient Egyptian legends that spoke of huge

6 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 127.

7 It was in this chamber that Vyse found the intrusive burial (of bones and a wooden

coffin lid) referred to in Chapter Thirty-Five. The basalt coffin where he also found (later

lost at sea) is believed to have been part of the same intrusive burial and to have not

been older than the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. See, for example, *Blue Guide, Egypt*, p. 433.

8 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 220.

299

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

stones being effortlessly levitated by priests or magicians through the

utterance of 'words of power'?9

Not for the first time when confronted by the mysteries of the pyramids

I knew that I was looking at an *impossible* engineering feat which had

nevertheless been carried out to astonishingly high and precise standards. Moreover, if Egyptologists were to be believed, the construction work had supposedly been undertaken at the dawn of human civilization by a people who had not accumulated any experience

of massive construction projects.

This was, of course, a startling cultural paradox, and one for to which no adequate explanation had ever been offered by an orthodox academic.

The moving finger writes and having writ it moves on

Leaving the underground chambers, which seemed to vibrate at the core

of the Third Pyramid like the convoluted, multi-valved heart of some slumbering Leviathan, we made our way along the narrow entrance corridor and into the open air.

Our objective now was the Second Pyramid. We walked along its

western flank (just under 708 feet in length), turned right and eventually

came to the point on its north side, about 40 feet east of the main north-

south axis, where the principal entrances were located. One of these was

carved directly into the bedrock at ground level about 30 feet in front of

the monument; the other was cut into the northern face at a height of just under 50 feet. From the latter a corridor sloped downwards at an

angle of $25^{\circ} 55'$.¹⁰ From the former, by which we now entered the

pyramid, another descending corridor led deeply underground then

levelled off for a short distance, giving access to a subterranean chamber,

then ascended steeply and finally levelled off again into a long horizontal

passageway, heading due south (into which also fed the upper corridor

that sloped down from the entrance in the north face).

High enough to stand up in, and lined at first with granite and then with

smoothly polished limestone, the horizontal passageway was almost at

ground level, that is, it lay directly beneath the pyramid's lowest course

of masonry. It was also extremely long, running dead straight for a further 200 feet until it debouched in the single 'burial chamber' at the heart of the monument.

As we have already noted, no mummy had ever been found in this latter

chamber, nor any inscriptions, with the result that the so-called Pyramid

of Khafre was wholly anonymous. Latter-day adventurers had, however,

carved *their* names on to its walls—notably the former circus strongman

Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823) who had forced his way into the

9 See, for example, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume II, p. 180.

10 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 117.

300

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

monument in 1818. His huge and flamboyant graffito, daubed in black

paint high on the south side of the chamber, was a reminder of basic

human nature: the desire that all of us feel to be recognized and remembered. It was clear that Khafre himself had been far from immune

from this ambition, since repeated references to him (as well as a number

of flattering statues) appeared in the surrounding funerary complex.¹¹ If

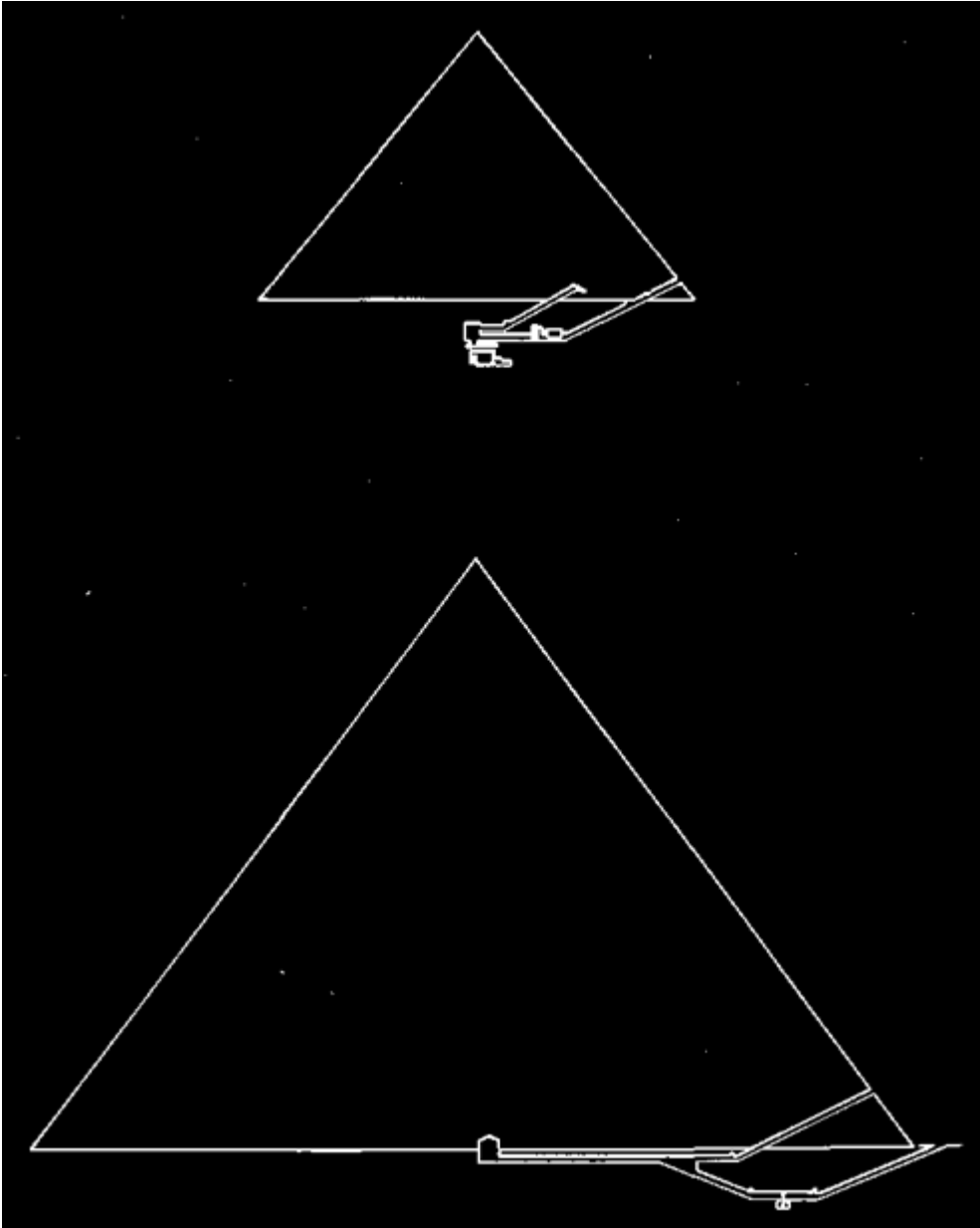
he had indeed built the pyramid as his tomb, it seemed inconceivable

that such a man would have failed to stamp his name and identity *somewhere* within its interior. I found myself wondering yet again why

Egyptologists were so unwilling to consider the possibility that the funerary complex might have been Khafre's work and the pyramid someone else's?

But *who* else's?

¹¹ *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 123.



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Above Chamber and passageway system of the Pyramid of Menkaure.

Below Chamber and passageway system of the Pyramid of Khafre.

In many ways this—rather than the absence of identifying marks—was

the central problem. Prior to the reigns of Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure

there was not a single pharaoh whose name could be put forward as a

candidate. Khufu's father Sneferu, the first king of the Fourth Dynasty,

was believed to have built the so-called 'Bent' and 'Red' Pyramids at Dahshur, about thirty miles south of Giza—an attribution that was itself

mysterious (if pyramids were indeed tombs) since it seemed strange that

one pharaoh required two pyramids to be buried in. Sneferu was also

credited by some Egyptologists with the construction of the 'Collapsed'

Pyramid at Meidum (although a number of authorities insisted that this

was the tomb of Huni, the last king of the Third Dynasty).¹² The only other

¹² *The Riddle of the Pyramids*, p. 49.

302

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

builders in the Archaic Period had been Zoser, the second pharaoh of the

Third Dynasty, to whom was attributed the construction of the 'Step Pyramid' at Saqqara,¹³ and Zoser's successor, Sekhemkhet, whose pyramid also stood at Saqqara. Therefore, despite the lack of inscriptions,

it was now assumed as obvious that the three pyramids at Giza *must* have

been built by Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure and *must* have been intended

to serve as their tombs.

We need not reiterate here the many shortcomings of the 'tombs and tombs only' theory. However, these shortcomings were not limited to the

Giza pyramids but applied to *all the other* Third and Fourth Dynasty

Pyramids listed above. Not a single one of these monuments had ever

been found to contain the body of a pharaoh, or any signs whatsoever of

a royal burial.¹⁴ Some of them were not even equipped with sarcophagi,

for example the Collapsed Pyramid at Meidum. The Pyramid of

Sekhemkhet at Saqqara (first entered in 1954 by the Egyptian Antiquities

Organization) did contain a sarcophagus—one, which had certainly

remained sealed and undisturbed since its installation in the 'tomb'.¹⁵

Grave robbers had never succeeded in finding their way to it, but when it

was opened, it was empty.¹⁶

So what was going on? How come more than twenty-five million tons of

stone had been piled up to form pyramids at Giza, Dahshur, Meidum and

Saqqara if the only point of the exercise had been to install empty

sarcophagi in empty chambers? Even admitting the hypothetical excesses

of one or two megalomaniacs, it seemed unlikely that a whole succession

of pharaohs would have sanctioned such wastefulness.

Pandora's Box

Buried beneath the five million tons of the Second Pyramid at Giza,

Santha and I now stepped into the monument's spacious inner chamber,

which might have been a tomb but might equally have served some other

as yet unidentified purpose. Measuring 46.5 feet in length from east to

west, and 16.5 in breadth from north to south, this naked and sterile

apartment was topped off with an immensely strong gabled ceiling reaching a height of 22.5 feet at its apex. The gable slabs, each a massive 20-ton limestone monolith, had been laid in position at an angle

of 53° 7' 28" (which exactly matched the angle of slope of the pyramid's

sides).¹⁷ Here there were no relieving chambers (as there were above the

King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid). Instead, for more than 4000

¹³ Ibid., pp. 36-9.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *The Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 123; *The Pyramids Of Egypt*, p. 118.

303

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

years—perhaps far more—the gabled ceiling had taken the immense weight of the second largest stone building in the world.

I looked slowly around the room, which reflected a yellowish-white radiance back at me. Quarried directly out of the living bedrock, its walls

were not at all smoothly finished, as one might have expected, but were

noticeably rough and irregular. The floor too was peculiar: of split-level

design with a step about a foot deep separating its eastern and western

halves. The supposed sarcophagus of Khafre lay near the western wall,

embedded in the floor. Measuring just over six feet in length, quite shallow, and somewhat narrow to have contained the wrapped and embalmed mummy of a noble pharaoh, its smooth red granite sides reached to about knee height.

As I gazed into its dark interior, it seemed to gape like the doorway to another dimension.

304

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 37

Made by Some God

I had climbed the Great Pyramid the night before, but as I approached it

in the full glare of midday, I experienced no sense of triumph. On the contrary, standing at its base on the north side, I felt fly-sized and puny—

an impermanent creature of flesh and blood confronted with the awe-inspiring splendour of eternity. I had the impression that it might have been here for ever, ‘made by some god and set down bodily in the surrounding sand’, as the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus commented in

the first century BC.¹ But which god had made it, if not the God-King Khufu whose name generations of Egyptians had associated with it?

For the second time in twelve hours, I began to climb the monument.

Up close in this light, indifferent to human chronologies and subject only

to the slow erosive forces of geological time, it reared above me like a

frowning, terrifying crag. Fortunately, I only had six courses to clamber

over, assisted in places by modern steps, before reaching Ma'mun's Hole,

which now served as the pyramid's principal entrance.

The *original* entrance, still well-hidden in the ninth century when

Ma'mun began tunnelling, was some ten courses higher, 55 feet above

ground level and 24 feet east of the main north-south axis. Protected by

giant limestone gables, it contained the mouth of the descending

corridor, which led downwards at an angle of $26^{\circ} 31' 23''$. Strangely,

although itself measuring only some 3 feet 5 inches x 3 feet 11 inches,

this corridor was sandwiched between roofing blocks 8 feet 6 inches

thick and 12 feet wide and a flooring slab (known as the 'Basement

Sheet') 2 feet 6 inches thick and 33 feet wide.²

Hidden structural features like these abounded in the Great Pyramid,

manifesting both incredible complexity and apparent pointlessness.

Nobody knew how blocks of this size had been successfully installed,

neither did anybody know how they had been set so carefully in

alignment with other blocks, or at such precise angles (because, as the

reader may have realized, the 26° slope of the descending corridor was

part of a deliberate and regular pattern). Nobody knew either *why* these

things had been done.

The Beacon

Entering the pyramid through Ma'mun's Hole did not feel right. It was like

1 *Diodorus Siculus*, Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 217.

2 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 88; *The Great Pyramid: Your Personal Guide*, pp. 30-1.

305

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

entering a cave or grotto cut into the side of a mountain; it lacked the sense of deliberate and geometrical purposefulness that would have been

conveyed by the original descending corridor. Worse still, the dark and

inauspicious horizontal tunnel leading inwards looked like an ugly,

deformed thing and still bore the marks of violence where the Arab

workmen had alternately heated and chilled the stones with fierce fires

and cold vinegar before attacking them with hammers and chisels,

battering rams and borers.

On the one hand, such vandalism seemed gross and irresponsible. On

the other, a startling possibility had to be considered: was there not a sense in which the pyramid seemed to have been designed to *invite* human beings of intelligence and curiosity to penetrate its mysteries?

After all, if you were a pharaoh who wanted to ensure that his deceased

body remained inviolate for eternity, would it make better sense (a) to

advertise to your own and all subsequent generations the whereabouts of

your burial place, or (b) to choose some secret and unknown location, of

which you would never speak and where you might never be found?

The answer was obvious: you would go for secrecy and seclusion, as the

vast majority of the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt had done.³

Why, then, if it was indeed a royal tomb, was the Great Pyramid so conspicuous? Why did it occupy a ground area of more than thirteen acres? Why was it almost 500 feet high? Why, in other words, if its purpose was to conceal and protect the body of Khufu, had it been

designed so that it could not fail to attract the attention—in all epochs
and under all imaginable circumstances—of treasure-crazed
adventurers

and of prying and imaginative intellectuals?

It was simply not credible that the brilliant architects, stonemasons,
surveyors and engineers who had created the Great Pyramid could
have

been ignorant of basic human psychology. The vast ambition and the
transcendent beauty, power and artistry of their handiwork spoke of
refined skills, deep insight, and a complete understanding of the
symbols

and primordial patterns by which the minds of men could be

manipulated. Logic therefore suggested that the pyramid builders
must

also have understood exactly what kind of beacon they were piling
up

(with such incredible precision) on this windswept plateau, on the
west

bank of the Nile, in those high and far away times.

They must, in short, have wanted this remarkable structure to exert a
perennial fascination: to be violated by intruders, to be measured
with

increasing degrees of exactitude, and to haunt the collective imagination

of mankind like a persistent ghost summoning intimations of a profound

and long-forgotten secret.

3 In the isolated Valley of the Kings in Luxor in upper Egypt, for example.

306

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Mind games of the pyramid builders

The point where Ma'mun's Hole intersected with the 26° descending corridor was closed off by a modern steel door. Beyond it, to the north,

that corridor sloped up until it reached the gables of the monument's original entrance. To the south, as we have seen, the corridor sloped down for almost another 350 feet into the bedrock, before opening out

into a huge subterranean chamber 600 feet beneath the apex of the pyramid. The accuracy of this corridor was astonishing. From top to bottom the average deviation from straight amounted to less than 1/4-

inch in the sides and 3/10-inch on the roof.⁴

Passing the steel door, I continued through Ma'mun's tunnel,
breathing

in its ancient air and adjusting my eyes to the gloom of the low-
wattage

bulbs that lit it. Then ducking my head I began to climb through the

steep and narrow section hacked upwards by the Arab diggers in
their

feverish thrust to by-pass the series of granite plugs blocking the
lower

part of the ascending corridor. At the top of the tunnel two of the
original

plugs could be seen, still *in situ* but partially exposed by quarrying.

Egyptologists assumed that they had been slid into their present
position

from above⁵—all the way down the lag-foot length of the ascending

corridor from the foot of the Grand Gallery.⁶ Builders and engineers,

however, whose trend of thought was perhaps more practical, had

pointed out that it was physically impossible for the plugs to have
been

installed in this way. Because of the leaf-thin clearance that
separated

them from the walls, floor and ceiling of the corridor, friction would
have

foiled any 'sliding' operation in a matter of inches, let alone 100 feet.⁷

The puzzling implication was therefore that the ascending corridor must have been plugged while the pyramid was still being built. But why

would anyone have wished to block the main entrance to the monument

at such an early stage in its construction (even while continuing to enlarge and elaborate its inner chambers)? Moreover, if the objective had

been to deny intruders admission, wouldn't it have been much easier and

more efficient to have plugged the *descending* corridor from its entrance

in the north face to a point below its junction with the ascending corridor? That would have been the most logical way to seal the pyramid

and would have made plugs unnecessary in the ascending corridor.

There was only one certainty: since the beginning of history, the single

known effect of the granite plugs had not been to prevent an intruder from gaining access; instead, like Bluebeard's locked door, the barrier

had magnetized Ma'mun's attention and inflamed his curiosity so that he

had felt compelled to tunnel his way past them, convinced that

4 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 19.

5 Discussed in *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 230ff.

6 Dimension from *The Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 114.

7 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 230ff.

307

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

something of inestimable value must lie beyond them.

Might this not have been what the pyramid builders had *intended* the first intruder who reached this far to feel? It would be premature to rule

out such a strange and unsettling possibility. At any rate, thanks to

Ma'mun (and to the predictable constants of human nature) I was now

able to insert myself into the unblocked upper section of the original

ascending corridor. A smoothly cut aperture measuring 3 feet 5 inches

wide x 3 feet 11 inches high (exactly the same dimensions as the

descending corridor), it sloped up into the darkness at an angle of 26° 2'

30"8 (as against 26° 31' 23" in the descending corridor).⁹

What was this meticulous interest in the angle of 26°, and was it a coincidence that it amounted to half of the angle of inclination of the pyramid's sides—52°. ¹⁰

The reader may recall the significance of this angle. It was a key ingredient of the sophisticated and advanced formula by which the design of the Great Pyramid had been made to correspond precisely to

the dynamics of spherical geometry. Thus the original height of the monument (481.3949 feet), and the perimeter of its base (3023.16 feet),

stood in the same ratio to each other as did the radius of a sphere to its

circumference. This ratio was 2π (2 x 3.14) and to express it the builders

had been obliged to specify the tricky and idiosyncratic angle of 52° for

the pyramid's sides (since any greater or lesser slope would have meant a

different height-to-perimeter ratio).

In Chapter Twenty-three we saw that the so-called Pyramid of the Sun at

Teotihuacan in Mexico also expressed a knowledge and deliberate use of

the transcendental number π ; in its case the height (233.5 feet) stood in

a relationship of 4π to the perimeter of its base (2932.76 feet).¹¹

The crux, therefore, was that the most remarkable monument of

Ancient Egypt and the most remarkable monument of Ancient Mexico

both incorporated π relationships long before and far away from the official 'discovery' of this transcendental number by the Greeks.¹²

Moreover, the evidence invited the conclusion that something was being

signalled by the use of π — almost certainly the *same* thing in both cases.

Not for the first time, and not for the last, I was overwhelmed by a sense of contact with an ancient intelligence, not necessarily Egyptian or

Mexican, which had found a way to reach out across the ages and draw

people towards it like a beacon. Some might look for treasure; others,

captivated by the deceptively simple manner in which the builders had

used π to demonstrate their mastery of the secrets of transcendental

numbers, might be inspired to search for further mathematical

8 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 91.

9 Ibid., p. 88.

10 Or 51° 50' 35" to be exact, Ibid., page 87; *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 112.

11 See Chapter Twenty-three.

12 Ibid.

308

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

epiphanies.

Bent almost double, my back brushing against the polished limestone

ceiling, it was with such thoughts in my mind that I began to scramble up

the 26° slope of the ascending corridor, which seemed to penetrate the

vast bulk of the six million ton building like a trigonometrical device.

After I had banged my head on its ceiling a couple of times, however, I

began to wonder why the ingenious people who'd designed it hadn't

made it two or three feet higher. If they could erect a monument like this

in the first place (which they obviously could) and equip it with corridors,

surely it would not have been beyond their capabilities to make those corridors roomy enough to stand up in? Once again I was tempted to conclude that it was the result of a deliberate decision by the pyramid

builders: they had made the ascending corridor this way because they

had wanted it this way (rather than because such a design had been forced upon them.)

Was there motive in the apparent madness of these archaic mind games?

Unknown dark distance

At the top of the ascending corridor I emerged into yet another inexplicable feature of the pyramid, 'the most celebrated architectural work to have survived from the Old Kingdom'¹³—the Grand Gallery.

Soaring upwards at the continuing majestic angle of 26°, and almost entirely vanishing into the airy gloom above, its spacious corbelled vault

made a stunning impression.

It was not my intention to climb the Grand Gallery yet. Branching off

due south at its base was a long horizontal passageway, 3 feet 9 inches

high and 127 feet in length, that led to the Queen's Chamber.¹⁴ I wanted

to revisit this room, which I had admired for its stark beauty since becoming acquainted with the Great Pyramid several years previously.

Today, however, to my considerable irritation, the passageway was barred

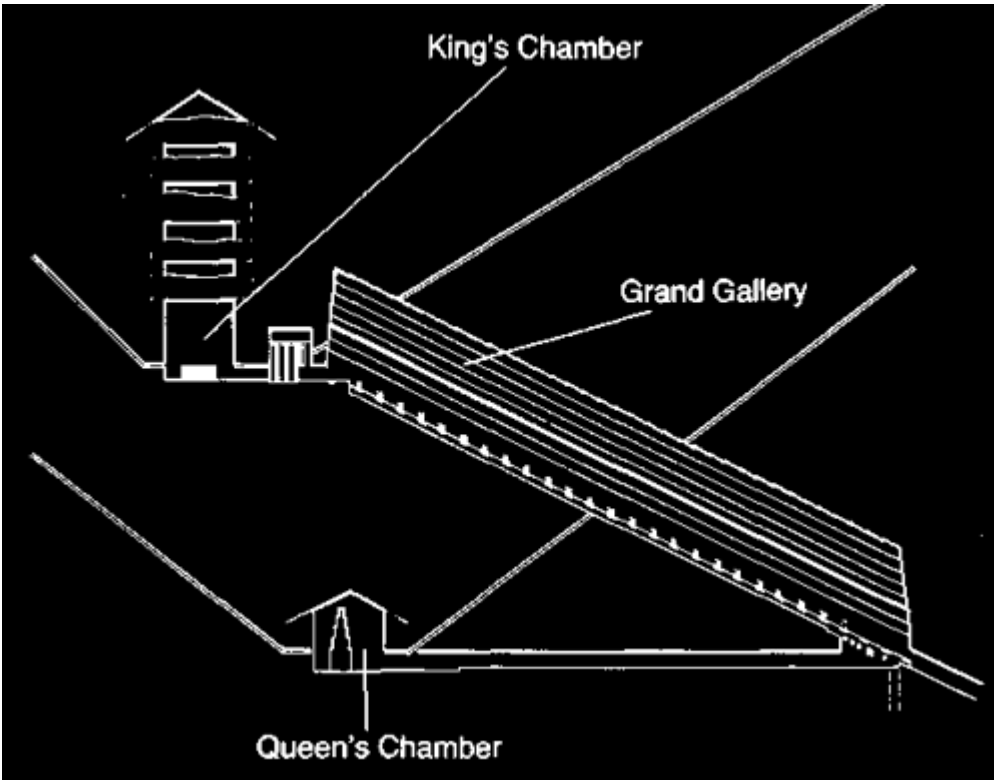
within a few feet of its entrance.

13 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 93.

14 Dimensions from *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 121, and *The Pyramids of Egypt*,

p. 93.

309



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Grand Gallery and the King's and Queen's Chambers with their northern and southern shafts.

The reason, though I was unaware of it at the time, was that a German

robotics engineer named Rudolf Gantenbrink was at work within, slowly

and painstakingly manoeuvring a \$250,000 robot up the narrow southern

shaft of the Queen's Chamber. Hired by the Egyptian Antiquities

Organization to improve the ventilation of the Great Pyramid, he had

already used his high-tech equipment to clear debris from the King's

Chamber's narrow 'southern shaft' (believed by Egyptologists to have

been designed as a ventilation shaft in the first place) and had installed

an electric fan at its mouth. At the beginning of March 1993 he

transferred his attentions to the Queen's Chamber, deploying *Upuaut*, a

miniaturized remote-controlled robot camera to explore *its* southern

shaft. On 22 March, some 200 feet along the steeply sloping shaft (which

rose at an angle of 39.5° and was only about 8 inches high x 9 inches

wide),¹⁵ the floor and walls suddenly became very smooth as *Upuaut*

crawled into a section made of fine Tura limestone, the type normally

used for lining sacred areas such as chapels or tombs. That, in itself, was

intriguing enough, but at the end of this corridor, apparently leading to a

sealed chamber deep within the pyramid's masonry, was a solid

limestone door complete with metal fittings ...

It had long been known that neither this southern shaft nor its

counterpart in the Chamber's northern wall had any exit on the outside of

the Great Pyramid. In addition, and equally inexplicably, neither had originally been fully cut through. For some reason the builders had left

the last five inches of stone intact in the last block over the mouth of each of the shafts, thus rendering them invisible and inaccessible to any

15 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 24.

310

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

casual intruder.

Why? To make sure they would never be found? Or to make sure that

they *would* be found, some day, under the right circumstances?

After all, there had from the beginning been two conspicuous shafts in

the King's Chamber, penetrating the north and south walls. It should not

have been beyond the mental powers of the pyramid builders to predict

that sooner or later some inquiring person would be tempted to look for

shafts in the Queen's Chamber as well. In the event nobody did look for

more than a thousand years after Caliph Ma'mun had opened the monument to the world in AD 820. Then in 1872 an English engineer named Waynman Dixon, a Freemason who 'had been led to suspect the

existence of the shafts by their presence in the King's Chamber above',¹⁶

went tapping around the Queen's Chamber's walls and located them. He

opened the southern shaft first, setting his 'carpenter and man-of-all-work, Bill Grundy, to jump a hole with a hammer and steel chisel at that

place. So to work the faithful fellow went, and with a will which soon began to make a way into the soft stone [limestone] at this point, when

lo! after a comparatively very few strokes, flop went the chisel right through into something or other.'¹⁷

The 'something or other' Bill Grundy's chisel had reached turned out to

be 'a rectangular, horizontal, tubular channel, about 9 inches by 8 inches

in transverse breadth and height, going back 7 feet into the wall, and then rising at an angle into an unknown, dark distance ...'¹⁸

It was up that angle, and into that 'unknown dark distance', 121 years

later, that Rudolf Gantenbrink sent his robot—the technology of our species having finally caught up with our powerful instincts to pry. Those

instincts were clearly no weaker in 1872 than in 1993; among the many

interesting things the remote-controlled camera succeeded in filming in

the Queen's Chamber shafts was the far end of a long, sectioned metal

rod of nineteenth century design which Waynman Dixon and the faithful

Bill Grundy had secretly stuffed up the intriguing channel.¹⁹ Predictably,

they had assumed that if the pyramid builders had gone to the trouble of

constructing and then concealing the shafts, then they must have hidden

something worth looking for inside them.

The notion that there might have been an *intention* from the outset to stimulate such investigations would seem quite implausible if the final

upshot of the discovery and exploration of the shafts had been a dead-

end. Instead, as we have seen, a door was found—a sliding, portcullis

door with curious metal fittings and an enticing gap at its base beneath

which the laser-spot projected by Gantenbrink's robot was seen to

16 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 92.

17 *The Great Pyramid: Its Secrets and Mysteries Revealed*, p. 428.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Presentation at the British Museum, 22 November 1993, by Rudolf Gantenbrink, of

footage shot in the shafts by the robot camera *Upuaut*.

311

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

disappear entirely ...

Once again there seemed to be a clear invitation to proceed further, the

latest in a long line of invitations which had encouraged Caliph Ma'mun

and his diggers to break into the central passageways and chambers of

the monument, which had waited for Waynman Dixon to test the

hypothesis that the walls of the Queen's Chamber might contain

concealed shafts, and which had then waited again until arousing the curiosity of Rudolf Gantenbrink, whose high-tech robot revealed the existence of the hidden door and brought within reach whatever secrets—

or disappointments, or further invitations—might lie behind it.

The Queen's Chamber

We shall hear more of Rudolf Gantenbrink and *Upuaut* in later chapters.

16 March 1993, however, knowing nothing of this, I was frustrated to find the Queen's Chamber closed, and glared resentfully through the metal grille that barred its entrance corridor.

I remembered that the height of that corridor, 3 feet 9 inches, was not

constant. Approximately 110 feet due south from where I stood, and only

about 15 feet from the entrance to the Chamber, a sudden downward

step in the floor increased the standing-room to 5 feet 8 inches.²⁰ Nobody

had come up with a convincing explanation for this peculiar feature.

The Queen's Chamber itself—apparently empty since the day it was built—measured 17 feet 2 inches from north to south and 18 feet 10

inches from east to west. It was equipped with an elegant gabled ceiling,

20 feet 5 inches in height, which lay exactly along the east-west axis of

the pyramid.²¹ Its floor, however, was the opposite of elegant and looked

unfinished. There was a constant salty emanation through its pale, rough-

hewn limestone walls, giving rise to much fruitless speculation.

In the north and south walls, still bearing the incised legend OPENED

1872, were the rectangular apertures discovered by Waynman Dixon

which led into the dark distance of the mysterious shafts. The western

wall was quite bare. Offset a little over two feet to the south of its centre

line, the eastern wall was dominated by a niche in the form of a corbel

vault 15 feet 4 inches high and 5 feet 2 inches wide at the base.

Originally 3 feet 5 inches deep, a further cavity had been cut in the back

of this niche in medieval times by Arab treasure-seekers looking for hidden chambers.²² They had found nothing.

Egyptologists had also been unable to come to any persuasive

conclusions about the original function of the niche, or, for that matter,

of the Queen's Chamber as a whole.

20 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 92-3.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 92; *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 23.

22 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 92.

312

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

All was confusion. All was paradox. All was mystery.

Instrument

The Grand Gallery had its mysteries too. Indeed it was among the most

mysterious of all the internal features of the Great Pyramid.

Measuring 6

feet 9 inches wide at the floor, its walls rose vertically to a height of 7

feet 6 inches; above that level seven further courses of masonry (each

one projecting inwards some 3 inches beyond the course immediately

below it) carried the vault to its full height of 28 feet and its culminating

width of 3 feet 5 inches.²³

Remember that structurally the Gallery was required to support, *for ever*, the multi-million ton weight of the upper three-quarters of the largest and heaviest stone monument ever built on planet earth. Was it

not quite remarkable that a group of supposed 'technological primitives'

had not only envisaged and designed such a feature but had completed it

successfully, more than 4500 years before our time?

Even if they had made the Gallery only 20 feet long, and had sought to

erect it on a level plane, the task would have been difficult enough—indeed extraordinarily difficult. But they had opted to erect this

astonishing corbel vault at a slope of 26° , and to extend its length to a

staggering 153 feet.²⁴ Moreover, they had made it with perfectly dressed

limestone megaliths throughout—huge, smoothly polished blocks carved

into sloping parallelograms and laid together so closely and with such

rigorous precision that the joints were almost invisible to the naked eye.

The pyramid builders had also included some interesting symmetries in

their work. For example, the culminating width of the Gallery at its apex

was 3 feet 5 inches while its width at the floor was 6 feet 9 inches. At the

exact centre of the floor, running the entire length of the Gallery—and

sandwiched between flat-topped masonry ramps each 1 foot 8 inches

wide—there was a sunken channel 2 feet deep and 3 feet 5 inches wide.

What could have been the purpose of this slot? And why had it been

necessary for it to mirror so precisely the width and form of the ceiling,

which also looked like a 'slot' sandwiched between the two upper courses

of masonry?

I knew that I was not the first person to have stood at the foot of the

Grand Gallery and to have been overtaken by the disorienting sense of

being 'in the inside of some enormous instrument of some sort.'²⁵ Who

was to say that such intuitions were completely wrong? Or, for that

matter, that they were right? No record as to function remained,
other

than in mystical and symbolic references in certain ancient Egyptian

23 Ibid., p. 93; *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 115.

24 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 93.

25 *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 115.

313

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

liturgical texts. These appeared to indicate that the pyramids had
been

seen as devices designed to turn dead men into immortal beings: to

'throw open the doors of the firmament and make a road', so that the

deceased pharaoh might 'ascend into the company of the gods'.²⁶

I had no difficulty accepting that such a belief system might have
been

at work here, and obviously it could have provided a motive for the
whole

enterprise. Nevertheless, I was still puzzled why more than six
million

tons of *physical* apparatus, intricately interlaced with channels and
tubes,

corridors and chambers, had been deemed necessary to achieve a

mystical, spiritual and symbolic objective.

Being inside the Grand Gallery did feel like being inside an enormous

instrument. It had an undeniable aesthetic impact upon me (admittedly a

heavy and domineering one), but it was also completely devoid of

decorative features and of anything (figures of deities, reliefs of liturgical

texts, and so on) which might be suggestive of worship or religion. The

primary impression it conveyed was one of strict functionalism and

purposefulness—as though it had been built to do a job. At the same

time I was aware of its focused solemnity of style and gravity of manner,

which seemed to demand nothing less than serious and complete attention.

By now I had climbed steadily through about half the length of the

Gallery. Ahead of me, and behind, shadows and light played tricks amid

the looming stone walls. Pausing, I turned my head, looking upwards

through the gloom towards the vaulted ceiling which supported the

crushing weight of the Great Pyramid of Egypt.

It suddenly hit me how dauntingly and disturbingly *old* it was, and how

completely my life at this moment depended on the skills of the ancient

builders. The hefty blocks that spanned the distant ceiling were examples

of those skills—every one of them laid at a slightly steeper gradient than

that of the Gallery. As the great archaeologist and surveyor Flinders Petrie

had observed, this had been done

in order that the lower edge of each stone should hitch like a pawl into a ratchet

cut into the top of the walls; hence no stone can press on the one below it, so as

to cause a cumulative pressure all down the roof; and each stone is separately

upheld by the side walls which it lies across.²⁷

And this was the work of a people whose civilization had only recently

emerged from neolithic hunter-gathering?

I began to walk up the Gallery again, using the 2-foot-deep central

flooring slot. A modern wooden covering fitted with helpful slats and side

railings made the ascent relatively easy. In antiquity, however, the floor

had been smoothly polished limestone, which, at a gradient of 26°, must

have been almost impossible to climb.

How had it been done? Had it been done at all?

26 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 281, Utt. 667A.

27 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 25.

314

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Looming ahead at the end of the Grand Gallery was the dark opening to

the King's Chamber beckoning each and every inquiring pilgrim into the

heart of the enigma.

315

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 38

Interactive Three-Dimensional Game

Reaching the top of the Grand Gallery, I clambered over a chunky granite

step about three feet high. I remembered that it lay, like the roof of the

Queen's Chamber, exactly along the east-west axis of the Great Pyramid,

And therefore marked the point of transition between the northern and

southern halves of the monument.¹ Somewhat like an altar in appearance,

the step also provided a solid horizontal platform immediately in front of

the low square tunnel that served as the entrance to the King's Chamber.

Pausing for a moment, I looked back down the Gallery, taking in once

again its lack of decoration, its lack of religious iconography, and its

absolute lack of any of the recognizable symbolism normally associated

with the archaic belief system of the Ancient Egyptians. All that registered

upon the eye, along the entire 153-foot length of this magnificent geometrical cavity, was its disinterested regularity and its stark machine-like simplicity.

Looking up, I could just make out the opening of a dark aperture, chiselled into the top of the eastern wall above my head. Nobody knew

when or by whom this foreboding hole had been cut, or how deep it had

originally penetrated. It led to the first of the five relieving chambers above the King's Chamber and had been extended in 1837 when Howard

Vyse had used it to break through to the remaining four. Looking down

again, I could just make out the point at the bottom of the Gallery's western wall where the near-vertical well-shaft began its precipitous 160

foot descent through the core of the pyramid to join the descending corridor far below ground-level.

Why would such a complicated apparatus of pipes and passageways have been required? At first sight it didn't make sense. But then nothing

about the Great Pyramid did make much sense, unless you were prepared

to devote a great deal of attention to it. In unpredictable ways, when you

did that, it would from time to time reward you.

If you were sufficiently numerate, for example, as we have seen, it

would respond to your basic inquiries into its height and base perimeter

by 'printing out' the value of π . And if you were prepared to investigate

further, as we shall see, it would download other useful mathematical tidbits, each a little more complex and abstruse than its predecessor.

There was a programmed feel about this whole process, as though it had been carefully prearranged. Not for the first time, I found myself willing to consider the possibility that the pyramid might have been

1 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 25.

316

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

designed as a gigantic challenge or learning machine—or, better still, as

an interactive three-dimensional puzzle set down in the desert for humanity to solve.

Antechamber

Just over 3 feet 6 inches high, the entry passage to the lung's Chamber

required all humans of normal stature to stoop. About four feet farther

on, however, I reached the 'Antechamber', where the roof level rose

suddenly to 12 feet above the floor. The east and west walls of the

Antechamber were composed of red granite, into which were cut four

opposing pairs of wide parallel slots, assumed by Egyptologists to have

held thick portcullis slabs.² Three of these pairs of slots extended all the

way to the floor, and were empty. The fourth (the northernmost) had

been cut down only as far as the roof level of the entry passage (that is, 3

feet 6 inches *above* floor level) and still contained a hulking sheet of

granite, perhaps nine inches thick and six feet high. There was a

horizontal space of only 21 inches between this suspended stone

portcullis and the northern end of the entry passage from which I had

just emerged. There was also a gap of a little over 4 feet deep between

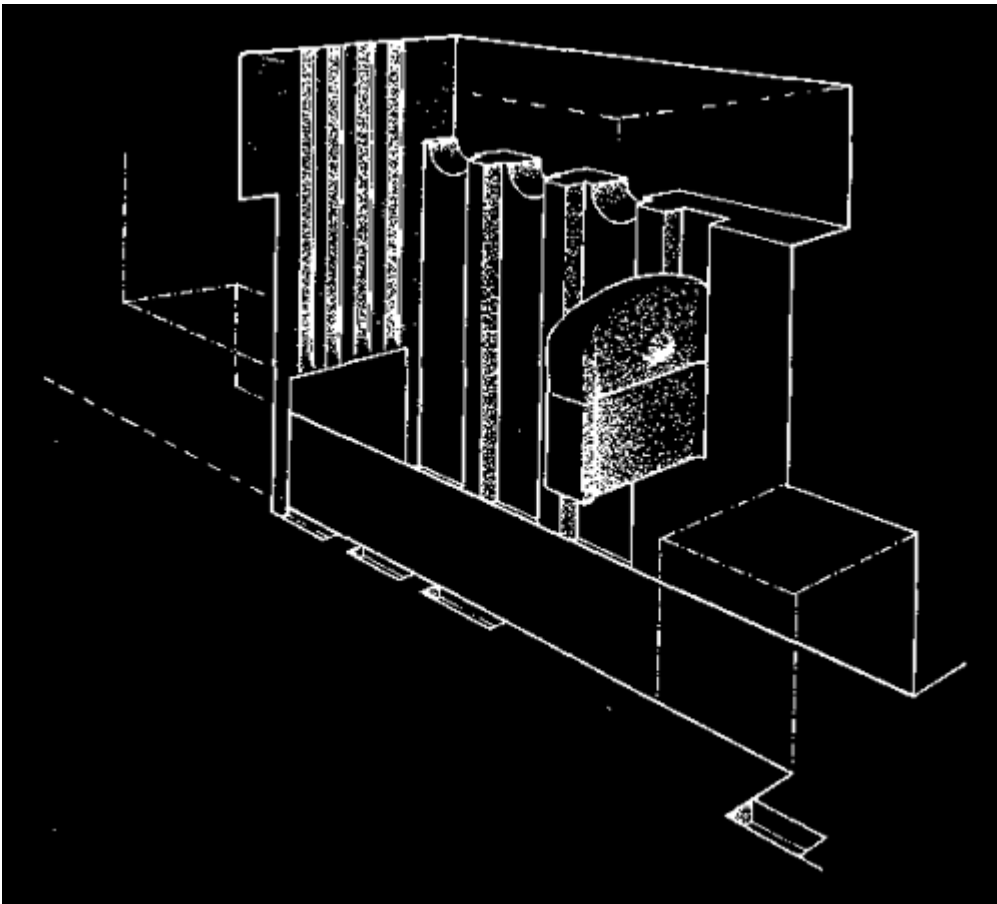
the top of the portcullis and the ceiling. Whatever function it was

designed to serve it was hard to agree with the Egyptologists that this

peculiar structure could have been intended to deny access to tomb robbers.

2 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 94.

317



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The antechamber.

Genuinely puzzled, I ducked under it and then stood up again in the

southern portion of the Antechamber, which was some 10 feet long and

maintained the same roof height of 12 feet. Though much worn, the grooves for the three further 'portcullis' slabs were still visible in the eastern and western walls. There was no sign of the slabs themselves

and, indeed, it was difficult to see how such cumbersome pieces of stone

could have been installed in so severely constricted a working space.

I remembered that Flinders Petrie, who had systematically surveyed the

entire Giza necropolis in the late nineteenth century, had commented on

a similar puzzle in the Second Pyramid: 'The granite portcullis in the lower passage shows great skill in moving masses, as it would need 40 or

60 men to lift it; yet it has been moved, and raised into place, in a narrow

passage, where only a few men could possibly reach it.'³ Exactly the same

observations applied to the portcullis slabs of the Great Pyramid. If they

were portcullis slabs—gateways capable of being raised and lowered.

The problem was that the physics of raising and lowering them required

they be shorter than the full height of the Antechamber, so that they could be drawn into the roof space to allow the entry and exit of legitimate individuals prior to the closure of the tomb. This meant, of course, that when the bottom edges of the slabs were lowered to the floor to block the Antechamber at that level, an equal and opposite space

would have opened up between the top edges of the slabs and the ceiling, through which any enterprising tomb-robber would certainly have

been able to climb.

3 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 36.

318

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Antechamber clearly qualified as another of the pyramid's many thought-provoking paradoxes, in which complexity of structure was combined with apparent pointlessness of function.

An exit tunnel, the same height and width as the entrance tunnel and lined with solid red granite, led off from the Antechamber's southern wall

(also made of granite but incorporating a 12-inch thick limestone layer at

its very top). After about a further 9 feet the tunnel debouched into the

King's Chamber, a massive sombre red room made entirely of granite,

which radiated an atmosphere of prodigious energy and power.

Stone enigmas

I moved into the centre of the King's Chamber, the long axis of which was perfectly oriented east to west while the short axis was equally perfectly oriented north to south. The room was exactly 19 feet 1 inch in

height and formed a precise two-by-one rectangle measuring 34 feet 4

inches long by 17 feet 2 inches wide. With a floor consisting of 15 massive granite paving stones, and walls composed of 100 gigantic granite blocks, each weighing 70 tons or more and laid in five courses,

and with a ceiling spanned by nine further granite blocks each weighing

approximately 50 tons,⁴ the effect was of intense and overwhelming *compression*.

At the Chamber's western end was the object which, if the

Egyptologists were to be believed, the entire Great Pyramid, had been

built to house. That object, carved out of one piece of dark chocolate-

coloured granite containing peculiarly hard granules of feldspar, quartz

and mica, was the lidless coffer presumed to have been the sarcophagus

of Khufu.⁵ Its interior measurements were 6 feet 6.6 inches in length,²

feet 10.42 inches in depth, and 2 feet 2.81 inches in width. Its exterior

measurements were 7 feet 5.62 inches in length, 3 feet 5.31 inches in

depth, and 3 feet 2.5 inches in width⁶ an inch too wide, incidentally, for it

to have been carried up through the lower (and now plugged) entrance to

the ascending corridor.⁷

Some routine mathematical games were built into the dimensions of the

sarcophagus. For example, it had an internal volume of 1166.4 litres and

an external volume of exactly twice that, 2332.8 litres.⁸ Such a precise

coincidence could not have been arrived at accidentally: the walls of the

coffer had been cut to machine-age tolerances by craftsmen of enormous

4 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 94-5; *The Great Pyramid: Your Personal Guide*, p. 64.

5 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 94-5.

6 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 30.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

8 Livio Catullo Stecchini in *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 322. Stecchini gives slightly

more accurate measures than those of Petrie (quoted) for the internal and external

dimensions of the pyramid.

319

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

skill and experience. It seemed, moreover, as Flinders Petrie admitted

with some puzzlement after completing his painstaking survey of the

Great Pyramid, that these craftsmen had access to tools 'such as we ourselves have only now reinvented ...'⁹

Petrie examined the sarcophagus particularly closely and reported that

it must have been cut out of its surrounding granite block with straight

saws '8 feet or more in length'. Since the granite was extremely hard, he

could only assume that these saws must have had bronze blades (the

hardest metal then supposedly available) inset with 'cutting points' made

of even harder jewels: 'The character of the work would certainly seem to

point to diamond as being the cutting jewel; and only the considerations

of its rarity in general, and its absence from Egypt, interfere with this conclusion ...'¹⁰

An even bigger mystery surrounded the hollowing out of the

sarcophagus, obviously a far more difficult enterprise than separating it

from a block of bedrock. Here Petrie concluded that the Egyptians must

have:

adapted their sawing principle into a circular instead of a rectilinear form, curving

the blade round into a tube, which drilled out a circular groove by its rotation;

thus by breaking away the cores left in such grooves, they were able to hollow out

large holes with a minimum of labour. These tubular drills varied from 1/4 inch to

5 inches diameter, and from 1/30 to 1/5 inch thick ...¹¹

Of course, as Petrie admitted, no actual jewelled drills or saws had ever

been found by Egyptologists.¹² The visible evidence of the kinds of drilling and sawing that had been done, however, compelled him to infer

that such instruments must have existed. He became especially interested in this and extended his study to include not only the King's

Chamber sarcophagus but many other granite artefacts and granite 'drill

cores' which he collected at Giza. The deeper his research, however, the

more puzzling the stone-cutting technology of the Ancient Egyptians became:

The amount of pressure, shown by the rapidity with which the drills and saws

pierced through the hard stones, is very surprising; probably a load of at least a

ton or two was placed on the 4-inch drills cutting in granite. On the granite core

No 7 the spiral of the cut sinks 1 inch in the circumference of 6 inches, a rate of

ploughing out which is astonishing ... These rapid spiral grooves cannot be

ascribed to anything but the descent of the drill into the granite under enormous

pressure ...¹³

Wasn't it peculiar that at the supposed dawn of human civilization, more

than 4500 years ago, the Ancient Egyptians had acquired what sounded

9 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 103.

10 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 74.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

13 *Ibid.*

320

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

like industrial-age drills packing a ton or more of punch and capable of

slicing through hard stones like hot knives through butter?

Petrie could come up with no explanation for this conundrum. Nor was

he able to explain the kind of instrument used to cut hieroglyphs into a

number of diorite bowls with Fourth Dynasty inscriptions which he found

at Giza: 'The hieroglyphs are incised with a very free-cutting point; they

are not scraped or ground out, but are ploughed through the diorite, with

rough edges to the line ...'¹⁴

This bothered the logical Petrie because he knew that diorite was one of

the hardest stones on earth, far harder even than iron.¹⁵ Yet here it was in

Ancient Egypt being cut with incredible power and precision by some as

yet unidentified graving tool:

As the lines are only $1/150$ inch wide it is evident that the cutting point must have

been much harder than quartz; and tough enough not to splinter when so fine an

edge was being employed, probably only $1/200$ inch wide. Parallel lines are graved

only $1/30$ inch apart from centre to centre.¹⁶

In other words, he was envisaging an instrument with a needle-sharp point of exceptional, unprecedented hardness capable of penetrating and

furrowing diorite with ease, and capable also of withstanding the enormous pressures required throughout the operation. What sort of instrument was that? By what means would the pressure have been applied? How could sufficient accuracy have been maintained to scour

parallel lines at intervals of just 1/30-inch?

At least it was possible to conjure a mental picture of the circular drills

with jewelled teeth which Petrie supposed must have been used to hollow

out the lung's Chamber sarcophagus. I found, however, that it was not so

easy to do the same for the unknown instrument capable of incising hieroglyphs into diorite at 2500 BC, at any rate not without assuming the

existence of a far higher level of technology than Egyptologists were prepared to consider.

Nor was it just a few hieroglyphs or a few diorite bowls. During my travels in Egypt I had examined many stone vessels—dating back in some

cases to pre-dynastic times—that had been mysteriously hollowed out of

a range of materials such as diorite, basalt, quartz crystal and metamorphic schist.¹⁷

For example, more than 30,000 such vessels had been found in the chambers beneath the Third Dynasty Step Pyramid of Zoser at Saqqara.¹⁸

That meant that they were at least as old as Zoser himself (i.e. around

2650 BC¹⁹). Theoretically, they could have been even older than that,

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 74-5.

¹⁵ *The Pyramids: An Enigma Solved*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 75.

¹⁷ *The Pyramids: An Enigma Solved*, p. 118.

¹⁸ *Egypt: Land of the Pharaohs*, Time-Life Books, 1992, p. 51.

¹⁹ *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.

321

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

because identical vessels had been found in pre-dynastic strata dated to

4000 BC and earlier,²⁰ and because the practice of handing down

treasured heirlooms from generation to generation had been deeply ingrained in Egypt since time immemorial.

Whether they were made in 2500 BC or in 4000 BC or even earlier, the

stone vessels from the Step Pyramid were remarkable for their

workmanship, which once again seemed to have been accomplished by

some as yet unimagined (and, indeed, almost unimaginable) tool.

Why unimaginable? Because many of the vessels were tall vases with

long, thin, elegant necks and widely flared interiors, often incorporating

fully hollowed-out shoulders. No instrument yet invented was capable of

carving vases into shapes like these, because such an instrument would

have had to have been narrow enough to have passed through the necks

and strong enough (and of the right shape) to have scoured out the shoulders and the rounded interiors. And how could sufficient upward

and outward pressure have been generated and applied within the vases

to achieve these effects?

The tall vases were by no means the only enigmatic vessels unearthed

from the Pyramid of Zoser, and from a number of other archaic sites.

There were monolithic urns with delicate ornamental handles left attached to their exteriors by the carvers. There were bowls, again with

extremely narrow necks like the vases, and with widely flared, pot-bellied

interiors. There were also open bowls, and almost microscopic vials, and

occasional strange wheel-shaped objects cut out of metamorphic schist

with inwardly curled edges planed down so fine that they were almost

translucent.²¹ In all cases what was really perplexing was the precision

with which the interiors and exteriors of these vessels had been made to

correspond—curve matching curve—over absolutely smooth, polished

surfaces with no tool marks visible.

There was no technology known to have been available to the Ancient

Egyptians capable of achieving such results. Nor, for that matter, would

any stone-carver today be able to match them, even if he were working

with the best tungsten-carbide tools. The implication, therefore, is that an

unknown or secret technology had been put to use in Ancient Egypt.

Ceremony of the sarcophagus

Standing in the King's Chamber, facing west—the direction of death

amongst both the Ancient Egyptians and the Maya—I rested my hands

lightly on the gnarled granite edge of the sarcophagus which

Egyptologists insist had been built to house the body of Khufu. I gazed

20 For example, see Cyril Aldred, *Egypt to the End of the Old Kingdom*, Thames &

Hudson, London, 1988, p. 25.

21 Ibid., p. 57. The relevant artefacts are in the Cairo Museum.

322

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

into its murky depths where the dim electric lighting of the chamber

seemed hardly to penetrate and saw specks of dust swirling in a golden

cloud.

It was just a trick of light and shadow, of course, but the King's Chamber was full of such illusions. I remembered that Napoleon Bonaparte had paused to spend a night alone here during his conquest of

Egypt in the late eighteenth century. The next morning he had emerged

pale and shaken, having experienced something which had profoundly

disturbed him but about which he never afterwards spoke.²²

Had he tried to sleep in the sarcophagus?

Acting on impulse, I climbed into the granite coffer and lay down, face

upwards, my feet pointed towards the south and my head to the north.

Napoleon was a little guy, so he must have fitted comfortably. There was plenty of room for me too. But had Khufu been here as well?

I relaxed and tried not to worry about the possibility of one of the pyramid guards coming in and finding me in this embarrassing and probably illegal position. Hoping that I would remain undisturbed for a

few minutes, I folded my hands across my chest and gave voice to a sustained low-pitched tone—something I had tried out several times

before at other points in the King's Chamber. On those occasions, in the

centre of the floor, I had noticed that the walls and ceiling seemed to collect the sound, to gather and to amplify it and project it back at me so

that I could sense the returning vibrations through my feet and scalp and

skin.

Now in the sarcophagus I was aware of very much the same effect, although seemingly amplified and concentrated many times over. It was

like being in the sound-box of some giant, resonant musical instrument

designed to emit for ever just one reverberating note. The sound was intense and quite disturbing. I imagined it rising out of the coffer and bouncing off the red granite walls and ceiling of the King's Chamber, shooting up through the northern and southern 'ventilation' shafts and

spreading across the Giza plateau like a sonic mushroom cloud.

With this ambitious vision in my mind, and with the sound of my low-pitched note echoing in my ears and causing the sarcophagus to vibrate

around me, I closed my eyes. When I opened them a few minutes later it

was to behold a distressing sight: six Japanese tourists of mixed ages

and sexes had congregated around the sarcophagus—two of them standing to the east, two to the west and one each to the north and south.

They all looked ... amazed. And I was amazed to see them. Because of

recent attacks by armed Islamic extremists there were now almost no

tourists at Giza and I had expected to have the King's Chamber to myself.

What does one do in a situation like this?

22 Reported in P. W. Roberts, *River in the Desert: Modern Travels in Ancient Egypt*,

Random House, New York and Toronto, 1993, p. 115.

323

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Gathering as much dignity as I could muster, I stood upright, smiling and dusting myself off. The Japanese stepped back and I climbed out of

the sarcophagus. Cultivating a businesslike manner, as though I did

things like this all the time, I strolled to the point two-thirds of the way along the northern wall of the King's Chamber where the entrance to what Egyptologists refer to as the 'northern ventilation shaft' is located, and began to examine it minutely.

Some 8 inches wide by 9 inches high, it was, I knew, more than 200 feet

in length and emerged into open air at the pyramid's 103rd course of masonry. Presumably by design rather than by accident, it pointed to the

circumpolar regions of the northern heavens at an angle of $32^{\circ} 30'$. This,

in the Pyramid Age around 2500 BC, would have meant that it was directed on the upper culmination of Alpha Draconis, a prominent star in

the constellation of Draco.²³

Much to my relief the Japanese rapidly completed their tour of the King's Chamber and left, stooping, without a backward glance. As soon

as they had gone I crossed over to the other side of the room to take a

look at the southern shaft. Since I had last been here some months

before, its appearance had changed horribly. Its mouth now contained a

massive electrical air-conditioning unit installed by Rudolf Gantenbrink,

who even now was turning his attentions to the neglected shafts of the

Queen's Chamber.

Since Egyptologists were satisfied that the King's Chamber shafts had

been built for ventilation purposes, they saw nothing untoward in using

modern technology to improve the efficiency of this task. Yet wouldn't

horizontal shafts have been more effective than sloping ones if their

primary purpose had been ventilation, and easier to build?²⁴ It was

therefore unlikely to be an accident that the southern shaft of the King's

Chamber targeted the southern heavens at 45°. During the Pyramid Age

this was the location for the meridian transit of Zeta Orionis, the lowest

of the three stars of Orion's Belt²⁵—an alignment, I was to discover in due

course, that would turn out to be of the utmost significance for future

pyramid research.

The game-master

Now that I had the Chamber to myself again, I walked over to the western

wall, on the far side of the sarcophagus, and turned to face east.

The huge room had an endless capacity to generate indications of mathematical game-playing. For example, its height (19 feet 1 inch) was

23 Robert Bauval, *Discussions in Egyptology* No. 29, 1994.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid. See also *The Orion Mystery*, p. 172.

324

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

exactly half of the length of its floor diagonal (38 feet 2 inches).²⁶

Moreover, since the King's Chamber formed a perfect 1 x 2 rectangle,

was it conceivable that the pyramid builders were unaware that they had

also made it express and exemplify the 'golden section'?

Known as *phi*, the golden section was another irrational number like *pi*

that could not be worked out arithmetically. Its value was the square root

of 5 plus 1 divided by 2, equivalent to 1.61803.²⁷ This proved to be the

'limiting value of the ratio between successive numbers in the Fibonacci

series—the series of numbers beginning 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13—in which

each term is the sum of the two previous terms.'²⁸

Phi could also be obtained schematically by dividing a line A-B at a point C in such a way that the whole line A-B was longer than the first

part, A-C, in the same proportion as the first part, A-C, was longer than

the remainder, C-B.²⁹ This proportion, which had been proven particularly

harmonious and agreeable to the eye, had supposedly been first

discovered by the Pythagorean Greeks, who incorporated it into the

Parthenon at Athens. There is absolutely no doubt, however, that *phi*

illustrated and obtained at least 2000 years previously in the King's

Chamber of the Great Pyramid at Giza.

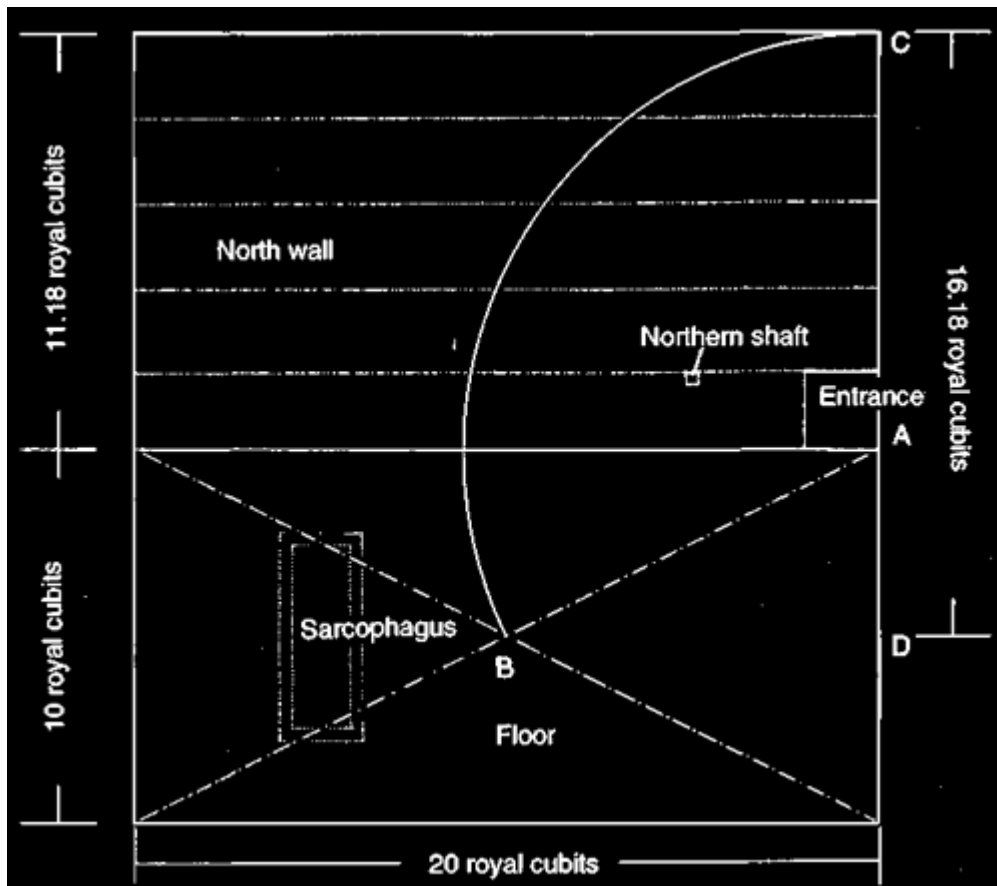
²⁶ *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 117; *The Great Pyramid: Your Personal Guide*, p.

27 John Ivimy, *The Sphinx and the Megaliths*, Abacus, London, 1976, p. 118.

28 Ibid.

29 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 191.

325



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

At the very beginning of its Dynastic history, Egypt inherited a system of measures from unknown predecessors. Expressed in these ancient measures, the floor dimensions of the King's Chamber (34 ft.

4" x 17 ft. 2") work out at exactly 20 x 10 royal cubits', while the height of the side walls to the ceiling is exactly 11.18 royal cubits. The semi-diagonal of the floor (A-B) is also exactly 11.18 royal cubits and can be 'swung up' to C to confirm the height of the chamber. *Phi* is defined mathematically as the square root of 5 + 1 + 2, i.e. 1.618.

Is it a coincidence that the distance C-D (i.e. the wall height of the King's

Chamber plus half the width of its floor) equals 16.18 royal cubits, thus incorporating the essential digits of *phi*?

To understand how it is necessary to envisage the rectangular floor of

the chamber as being divided into two imaginary squares of equal size,

with the side length of each square being given a value of 1. If either of

these two squares were then split in half, thus forming two new rectangles, and if the diagonal of the rectangle nearest to the centreline

of the King's Chamber were swung down to the base, the point where its

tip touched the base would be *phi*, or 1.618, in relation to the side length

(i.e., 1) of the original square.³⁰ (An alternative way of obtaining *phi*, also

built into the King's Chamber's dimensions, is illustrated on the previous

page.)

The Egyptologists considered all this was pure chance. Yet the pyramid

builders had done *nothing* by chance. Whoever they had been, I found it

³⁰ Ibid. See also *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, pp. 117-19.

326

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

hard to imagine more systematic and mathematically minded people.

I'd had quite enough of their mathematical games for one day. As I left

the King's Chamber, however, I could not forget that it was located in line

with the 50th course of the Great Pyramid's masonry at a height of

almost 150 feet above the ground.³¹ This meant, as Flinders Petrie

pointed out with some astonishment, that the builders had managed to

place it 'at the level where the vertical section of the Pyramid was halved,

where the area of the horizontal section was half that of the base,
where

the diagonal from corner to corner was equal to the length of the
base,

and where the width of the face was equal to half the diagonal of the
base'.³²

Confidently and efficiently fooling around with more than six million
tons of stone, creating galleries and chambers and shafts and
corridors

more or less at will, achieving near-perfect symmetry, near-perfect
right

angles, and near-perfect alignments to the cardinal points, the
mysterious

builders of the Great Pyramid had found the time to play a great
many

other tricks as well with the dimensions of the vast monument.

Why did their minds work this way? What had they been trying to say
or

do? And why, so many thousands of years after it was built, did the
monument still exert a magnetic influence upon so many people,
from so

many different walks of life, who came into contact with it?

There was a Sphinx in the neighbourhood, so I decided that I would
put

these riddles to It ...

31 *The Great Pyramid: Your Personal Guide*, p. 64.

32 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 93.

327

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 39

Place of the Beginning

Giza, Egypt, 16 March 1993, 3:30 p.m.

It was mid afternoon by the time I left the Great Pyramid. Retracing the

route that Santha and I had followed the night before when we had climbed the monument, I walked eastwards along the northern face, southwards along the flank of the eastern face, clambered over mounds

of rubble and ancient tombs that clustered closely in this part of the necropolis, and came out on to the sand-covered limestone bedrock of

the Giza plateau, which sloped down towards the south and east.

At the bottom of this long gentle slope, about half a kilometre from the

south-eastern corner of the Great Pyramid, the Sphinx crouched in his

rock-hewn pit. Sixty-six feet high and more than 240 feet long, with a head measuring 13 feet 8 inches wide, he was, by a considerable margin,

the largest single piece of sculpture in the world—and the most

renowned:

A shape with lion body and the head of a man

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun.²

Approaching the monument from the north-west I crossed the ancient

causeway that connected the Second Pyramid with the so-called Valley

Temple of Khafre, a most unusual structure located just 50 feet south of

the Sphinx itself on the eastern edge of the Giza necropolis.

This Temple had long been believed to be far older than the time of

Khafre. Indeed throughout much of the nineteenth century the consensus

among scholars was that it had been built in remote prehistory, and had

nothing to do with the architecture of dynastic Egypt.³ What changed all

that was the discovery, buried within the Temple precincts, of a number

of inscribed statues of Khafre. Most were pretty badly smashed, but one,

found upside down in a deep pit in an antechamber, was almost intact.

Life-sized, and exquisitely carved out of black, jewel-hard diorite, it

showed the Fourth Dynasty pharaoh seated on his throne and gazing with

serene indifference towards infinity.

At this point the razor-sharp reasoning of Egyptology was brought to bear, and a solution of almost awe-inspiring brilliance was worked out:

statues of Khafre had been found in the Valley Temple therefore the Valley Temple had been built by Khafre. The normally sensible Flinders

1 Measurements from *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 106.

2 W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming'.

3 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 48.

328

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Petrie summed up: 'The fact that the only dateable remains found in the

Temple were statues of Khafre shows that it is of his period; since the

idea of his appropriating an earlier building is very unlikely.'⁴

But why was the idea so unlikely?

Throughout the history of Dynastic Egypt many pharaohs appropriated

the buildings of their predecessors, sometimes deliberately striking out

the cartouches of the original builders and replacing them with their

own.⁵ There was no good reason to assume that Khafre would have been

deterred from linking himself to the Valley Temple, particularly if it had

not been associated in his mind with any previous historical ruler but with

the great 'gods' said by the Ancient Egyptians to have brought civilization

to the Nile Valley in the distant and mythical epoch they spoke of as the

First Time.⁶ In such a place of archaic and mysterious power, *which he*

does not appear to have interfered with in any other way, Khafre might

have thought that the setting up of beautiful and lifelike statues of

himself could bring eternal benefits. And if, among the gods, the Valley

Temple had been associated with Osiris (whom it was every pharaoh's

objective to join in the afterlife),⁷ Khafre's use of statues to forge a strong

symbolic link would be even more understandable.

Temple of the giants

After crossing the causeway, the route I had chosen to reach the Valley

Temple took me through the rubble of a 'mastaba' field, where lesser notables of the Fourth Dynasty had been buried in subterranean tombs

under bench-shaped platforms of stone (*mastaba* is a modern Arabic

word meaning bench, hence the name given to these tombs). I walked

along the southern wall of the Temple itself, recalling that this ancient building was almost as perfectly oriented north to south as was the Great

Pyramid (with an error of just 12 arc minutes).⁸

The Temple was square in plan, 147 feet along each side. It was built in

to the slope of the plateau, which was higher in the west than in the east.

In consequence, while its western wall stood only a little over 20 feet tall,

its eastern wall exceeded 40 feet.⁹

Viewed from the south, the impression was of a wedge-shaped structure, squat and powerful, resting firmly on bedrock. A closer

4 Ibid., p. 50.

5 Margaret A. Murray, *The Splendour that was Egypt*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1987,

pp. 160-1.

6 See Part VII, for a full discussion of the 'First Time'.

7 Discussed in Part VII; see also Part III for a comparison of the Osirian rebirth cult and of

the rebirth beliefs of Ancient Mexico.

8 *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh*, p. 47.

9 Measurements from *The Pyramids and Temples of Egypt*, p. 48, and *The Pyramids of*

Egypt, p. 108.

329

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

examination revealed that it incorporated several characteristics quite

alien and inexplicable to the modern eye, which that must have seemed

almost as alien and inexplicable to the Ancient Egyptians. For a start,

there was the stark absence, both inside and out, of inscriptions and other identifying marks. In this respect, as the reader will appreciate, the

Valley Temple could be compared with a few of the other anonymous and

frankly undatable monuments on the Giza plateau, including the great

pyramids (and also with a mysterious structure at Abydos known as the

Osireion, which we consider in detail in a later chapter) but otherwise

bore no resemblance to the typical and well-known products of Ancient

Egyptian art and architecture—all copiously decorated, embellished and

inscribed.¹⁰

Another important and unusual feature of the Valley Temple was that

its core structure was built entirely, *entirely*, of gigantic limestone

megaliths. The majority of these measured about 18 feet long x 10 feet

wide x 8 feet high and some were as large as 30 feet long x 12 feet wide

x 10 feet high.¹¹ Routinely exceeding 200 tons in weight, each was

heavier than a modern diesel locomotive—and there were hundreds of

blocks.¹²

Was this in any way mysterious?

Egyptologists did not seem to think so; indeed few of them had bothered to comment, except in the most superficial manner—either on the staggering size of these blocks or the mind-bending logistics of how they might have been put in place. As we have seen, monoliths of up to 70 tons, each about as heavy as 100 family-sized cars, had been lifted to the level of the King’s Chamber in the Great Pyramid—again without provoking much comment from the Egyptological fraternity—so the lack of curiosity about the Valley Temple was perhaps no surprise. Nevertheless, the block size was truly extraordinary, seeming to belong not just to another epoch but to another *ethic* altogether—one that reflected incomprehensible aesthetic and structural concerns and suggested a scale of priorities utterly different from our own. Why, for example, insist on using these cumbersome 200-ton monoliths when you could simply slice each of them up into 10 or 20 or 40 or 80 smaller and more manoeuvrable blocks? Why make things so difficult for yourself

when you could achieve much the same visual effect with much less effort?

And how had the builders of the Valley Temple lifted these colossal megaliths to heights of more than 40 feet?

10 In addition to the three Giza pyramids, the Mortuary Temples of Khafre and Menkaure

can be compared with the Valley Temple in terms of their absence of adornment and use

of megaliths weighing 200 tons or more.

11 *Serpent in the Sky*, p. 211; also *Mystery of the Sphinx*, NBC-TV, 1993.

12 For block weights see *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 215; *Serpent in the Sky*, p. 242; *The Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 144; *The Pyramids: An Enigma Solved*, p. 51;

Mystery of the Sphinx, NBC-TV, 1993.

330

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

At present there are only two land-based cranes in the world that could

lift weights of this magnitude. At the very frontiers of construction technology, these are both vast, industrialized machines, with booms reaching more than 220 feet into the air, which require on-board

counterweights of 160 tons to prevent them from tipping over. The preparation-time for a single lift is around six weeks and calls for the skills of specialized teams of up to 20 men.¹³

In other words, modern builders with all the advantages of high-tech engineering at their disposal, can barely hoist weights of 200 tons. Was it

not, therefore, somewhat surprising that the builders at Giza had hoisted

such weights on an almost routine basis?

Moving closer to the Temple's looming southern wall I observed something else about the huge limestone blocks: not only were they ridiculously large but, as though to complicate still further an almost impossible task, they had been cut and fitted into multi-angled jigsaw-

puzzle patterns similar to those employed in the cyclopean stone structures at Sacsayhuaman and Machu Picchu in Peru (see Part II).

Another point I noticed was that the Temple walls appeared to have been constructed in two stages. The first stage, most of which was intact

(though deeply eroded), consisted of the strong and heavy core of 200-

ton limestone blocks. On to both sides of these had been grafted a

façade of dressed granite which (as we shall see) was largely intact in the

interior of the building but had mainly fallen away on the outside. A

closer look at some of the remaining exterior facing blocks where they

had become detached from the core revealed a curious fact. When they

had been placed here in antiquity the backs of these blocks had been cut

to fit into and around the deep coves and scallops of *existing weathering*

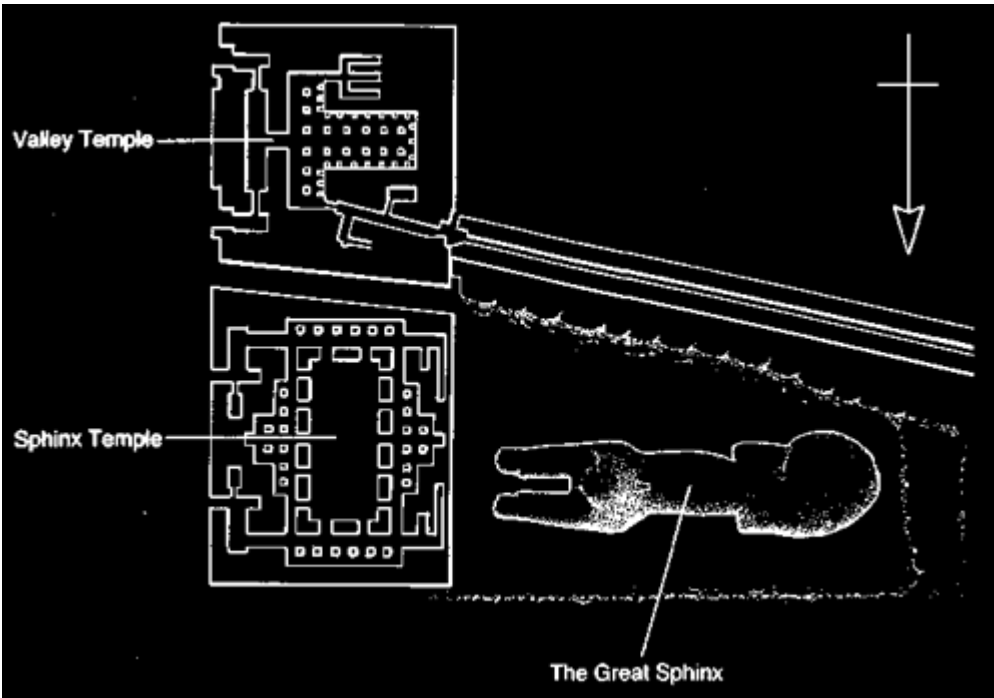
patterns on the limestone core. The presence of those patterns seemed

to imply that the core blocks must have stood here, exposed to the elements, for an immense span of time before they had been faced with

granite.

13 Personal communication from John Anthony West. See also *Mystery of the Sphinx*,

NBC-TV.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Sphinx and the Sphinx Temple with the Valley Temple of Khafre.

Lord of Rostau

I now moved around to the entrance of the Valley Temple, located near

the northern end of the 43-foot high eastern wall. Here I saw that the granite facing was still in perfect condition, consisting of huge slabs

weighing between 70 and 80 tons apiece which protected the underlying

limestone core blocks like a suit of armour. Incorporating a tall, narrow,

roofless corridor, this dark and imposing portal ran east to west at first,

then made a right-angle turn to the south, leading me into a spacious antechamber. It was here that the life-size diorite statue of Khafre had been found, upside down and apparently ritually buried, at the bottom of a deep pit.

Lining the entire interior of the antechamber was a majestic jigsaw puzzle of smoothly polished granite facing blocks (which continued through the whole building). Exactly like the blocks on some of the bigger and more bizarre pre-Inca monuments in Peru, these incorporated multiple, finely chiselled angles in the joints and presented a complex overall pattern. Of particular note was the way certain blocks wrapped around corners and were received by re-entering angles cut into other blocks.

From the antechamber I passed through an elegant corridor which led west into a spacious T-shaped hall. I found myself standing at the head of the T looking further westwards along an imposing avenue of monolithic

columns. Reaching almost 15 feet in height and measuring 41 inches on

each side, all these columns supported granite beams, which were again

332

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

41 inches square. A row of six further columns, also supporting beams,

ran along the north-south axis of the T; the overall effect was of massive

but refined simplicity.

What was this building for? According to the Egyptologists who attributed it to Khafre its purpose was obvious. It had been designed, they said, as a venue for certain of the purification and rebirth rituals required for the funeral of the pharaoh. The Ancient Egyptians themselves, however, had left no inscriptions confirming this. On the contrary, the only written evidence that has come down to us indicated

that the Valley Temple could *not* (originally at any rate) have had anything

to do with Khafre, for the simple reason that it was built before his reign.

This written evidence is the Inventory Stela, (referred to in Chapter Thirty-

five), which also indicated a much greater age for the Great Pyramid and

the Sphinx.

What the Inventory Stela had to say about the Valley Temple was that it

had been standing during the reign of Khafre's predecessor Khufu, when

it had been regarded not as a recent but as a remotely ancient building.

Moreover, it was clear from the context that it was not thought to have

been the work of any earlier pharaoh. Instead, it was believed to have

come down from the 'First Time' and to have been built by the 'gods'

who had settled in the Nile Valley in that remote epoch. It was referred to

quite explicitly as the 'House of Osiris, Lord of Rostau¹⁴ (Rostau being an

archaic name for the Giza necropolis).¹⁵

As we shall see in Part VII, Osiris was in many respects the Egyptian

counterpart of Viracocha and Quetzalcoatl, the civilizing deities of the

Andes and of Central America. With them he shared not only a common

mission but a vast heritage of common symbolism. It seemed

appropriate, therefore, that the 'House' (or sanctuary, or temple) of such

a wise teacher and lawgiver should have been established at Giza within

sight of the Great Pyramid and in the immediate vicinity of the Great Sphinx.

Vastly, remotely, fabulously ancient

Following the directions given in the Inventory Stela—which stated that

the Sphinx lay 'on the north-west of the House of Osiris'¹⁶—I made my

way to the north end of the western wall that enclosed the Valley

Temple's T-shaped hall. I passed through a monolithic doorway and

entered a long, sloping, alabaster floored corridor (also oriented north-

west) which eventually opened out on to the lower end of the causeway

¹⁴ *Ancient Records of Egypt*, volume I, p. 85.

¹⁵ See, for example, Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, University of

California Press, 1976, volume II, pp. 85-6.

16 *Ancient Records of Egypt*, volume I, p. 85.

333

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

that led up to the Second Pyramid.

From the edge of the causeway I had an unimpeded view of the Sphinx

immediately to my north. As long as a city block, as high as a six-storey

building it was *perfectly* oriented due east and thus faced the rising sun

on the two equinoctial days of the year. Man-headed, lion-bodied, crouched as though ready at last to move its slow thighs after millennia

of stony sleep, it had been carved in one piece out of a single ridge of

limestone on a site that must have been meticulously preselected. The

exceptional characteristic of this site, as well as overlooking the Valley of

the Nile, was that its geological make-up incorporated a knoll of hard rock jutting at least 30 feet above the general level of the limestone

ridge. From this knoll the head and neck of the Sphinx had been carved,

while beneath it the vast rectangle of limestone that would be shaped

into the body had been isolated from the surrounding bedrock. The builders had done this by excavating an 18-foot wide, 25-foot deep trench all around it, creating a free-standing monolith.

The first and lasting impression of the Sphinx, and of its enclosure, is that it is very, very old—not a mere handful of thousands of years, like

the Fourth Dynasty of Egyptian pharaohs, but vastly, remotely, fabulously

old. This was how the Ancient Egyptians in all periods of their history regarded the monument, which they believed guarded the ‘Splendid Place

of The Beginning of all Time’ and which they revered as the focus of ‘a

great magical power extending over the whole region’.¹⁷

This, as we have already seen, is the general message of the Inventory

Stela. More specifically, it is also the message of the ‘Sphinx Stela’

erected here in around 1400 BC by Thutmose IV, an Eighteenth Dynasty

pharaoh. Still standing between the paws of the Sphinx, this granite tablet records that prior to Thutmose's rule the monument had been covered up to its neck in sand. Thutmose liberated it by clearing all the sand, and erected the stela to commemorate his work.¹⁸

There have been no significant changes in the climate of the Giza plateau over the last 5000 years.¹⁹ It therefore follows that throughout

this entire period the Sphinx enclosure must have been as susceptible to

sand encroachment as when Thutmose cleared it—and, indeed, as it still

is today. Recent history proves that the enclosure can fill up rapidly if left

unattended. In 1818 Captain Caviglia had it cleared of sand for the purposes of his excavations, and in 1886, when Gaston Maspero came to

re-excavate the site, he was obliged to have it cleared of sand once again.

Thirty-nine years later, in 1925, the sands had returned in full force and

the Sphinx was buried to its neck when the Egyptian Service des

¹⁷ *A History of Egypt*, 1902, volume 4, p. 80ff, 'Stela of the Sphinx'.

18 Ibid.

19 Karl W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt: A Study in Cultural Ecology*,

University of Chicago Press, 1976.

334

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Antiquités undertook its clearance and restoration once more.²⁰

Does this not suggest that the climate could have been very different when the Sphinx enclosure was carved out? What would have been the

sense of creating this immense statue if its destiny were merely to be engulfed by the shifting sands of the eastern Sahara? However, since the

Sahara is a young desert, and since the Giza area in particular was wet

and relatively fertile 11,000-15,000 years ago, is it not worth considering

another scenario altogether? Is it not possible that the Sphinx enclosure

was carved out during those distant green millennia when topsoil was still

anchored to the surface of the plateau by the roots of grasses and shrubs

and when what is now a desert of wind-blown sand more closely resembled the rolling savannahs of modern Kenya and Tanzania? Under such congenial climatic conditions, the creation of a semi-subterranean monument like the Sphinx would not have outraged common sense. The builders would have had no reason to anticipate the slow desiccation and desertification of the plateau that would ultimately follow.

Yet, is it feasible to imagine that the Sphinx could have been built when

Giza was still green—long, long ago?

As we shall see, such ideas are anathema to modern Egyptologists, who

are nevertheless obliged to admit (to quote Dr Mark Lehner, director of

the Giza Mapping Project) that ‘there is no direct way to date the Sphinx

itself, because the Sphinx is carved right out of natural rock.’²¹ In the

absence of more objective tests, Lehner went on to point out,

archaeologists had ‘to date things *by context*’. And the context of the

Sphinx, that is, the Giza necropolis—a well-known Fourth Dynasty site—

made it obvious that the Sphinx belonged to the Fourth Dynasty as well.²²

Such reasoning was not regarded as axiomatic by Lehner's

distinguished predecessors in the nineteenth century, who were at one

time convinced that the Sphinx long predated the Fourth Dynasty.

Whose Sphinx is it anyway?

In his *Passing of Empires*, published in 1900, the distinguished French

Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, who made a special study of the content of

the Sphinx Stela erected by Thutmose IV, wrote:

The stela of the Sphinx bears, on line 13, the cartouche of Khafre in the middle of

a gap ... There, I believe, is an indication of [a renovation and clearance] of the

Sphinx carried out under this prince, and consequently the more or less certain

proof that the Sphinx was *already covered with sand* during the time of Khufu and

²⁰ *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 106-7.

21 Mark Lehner, 1992 AAAS Annual Meeting, Debate: How Old is the Sphinx?

22 Ibid.

335

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

his predecessors ...23

The equally distinguished Auguste Mariette agreed—naturally enough

since he had been the finder of the Inventory Stela (which, as we have

seen, asserted matter-of-factly that the Sphinx was standing on the Giza

plateau long before the time of Khufu).24 Also generally concurring were

Brugsch (*Egypt under the Pharaohs*, London, 1891), Petrie, Sayce and

many other eminent scholars of the period.25 Travel writers such as John

Ward affirmed that ‘the Great Sphinx must be numberless years older

even than the Pyramids’. And as late as 1904 Wallis Budge, the respected

keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum, had no hesitation in

making this unequivocal assertion:

The oldest and finest human-headed lion statue is the famous 'Sphinx' at Giza.

This marvellous object was in existence in the days of Khafre, the builder of the

Second Pyramid, and was, most probably, very old even at that early period ... The

Sphinx was thought to be connected in some way with foreigners or with a foreign

religion which dated from predynastic times.²⁶

Between the beginning and the end of the twentieth century, however,

Egyptologists' views about the antiquity of the Sphinx changed dramatically. Today there is not a single orthodox Egyptologist who would even discuss, let alone consider seriously, the wild and irresponsible suggestion, once a commonplace, that the Sphinx might

have been built thousands of years before Khafre's reign.

According to Dr Zahi Hawass, for example, director of Giza and Saqqara

for the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, many such theories have been

put forward but have 'gone with the wind' because 'we Egyptologists

have solid evidence to state that the Sphinx is dated to the time of Khafre.’²⁷

Likewise, Carol Redmont, an archaeologist at the University of California’s Berkeley campus, was incredulous when it was suggested to

her that the Sphinx might be thousands of years older than Khafre:

‘There’s just no way that could be true. The people of that region would

not have had the technology, the governing institutions or even the will

to build such a structure thousands of years before Khafre’s reign.’²⁸

When I first started to research this issue, I had assumed, as Hawass

appeared to claim, that some incontrovertible new evidence must have

been found which had settled the identity of the monument’s builder.

This was not the case. Indeed there are only *three* ‘contextual’ reasons

why the construction of the anonymous, uninscribed and enigmatic

²³ Gaston Maspero, *The Passing of Empires*, New York, 1900.

²⁴ See Chapter Thirty-five.

²⁵ For a general summary of these views see John Ward, *Pyramids and Progress*, London,

1900, pp. 38-42.

26 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, pp. 471-2 and volume II, p. 361.

27 Interview in *Mystery of the Sphinx*, NBC-TV, 1993.

28 Cited in *Serpent In The Sky*, p. 230.

336

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Sphinx is now so confidently attributed to Khafre:

1 Because of the cartouche of Khafre on line 13 of the Sphinx Stela erected by Thutmosis IV: Maspero gave a perfectly reasonable explanation for the presence of this cartouche: Thutmosis had been a restorer of the Sphinx and had paid due tribute to an earlier restoration of the monument—one undertaken during the Fourth Dynasty by Khafre. This explanation, which bears the obvious implication that the Sphinx must *already* have been old in Khafre's time, is rejected by modern Egyptologists. With their usual telepathic like-mindedness they now agree that Thutmosis put the cartouche on to the stela to recognize that Khafra had been the original builder (and

not a mere restorer).

Since there had only ever been this single cartouche—and since the texts on either side of it were missing when the stela was excavated, is

it not a little premature to come to such hard-and-fast conclusions?

What sort of ‘science’ is it that allows the mere presence of the cartouche of a Fourth Dynasty pharaoh (on a stele erected by an Eighteenth Dynasty pharaoh) to determine the entire identification of an otherwise anonymous monument? Besides, even that cartouche has

now flaked off and cannot be examined ...

2 Because the Valley Temple next door is also attributed to Khafre:

That attribution (based on statues which may well have been intrusive)

is shaky to say the least. It has nevertheless received the wholehearted

endorsement of the Egyptologists, who in the process decided to attribute the Sphinx to Khafre too (since the Sphinx and the Valley Temple are so obviously connected).

3 Because the face of the Sphinx is thought to resemble the intact statue of Khafre found in the pit in the Valley Temple: This, of

course, is a matter of opinion. I have never seen the slightest resemblance between the two faces. Nor for that matter had forensic artists from the New York Police Department who had recently been brought in to do an Identikit comparison between the Sphinx and the statue²⁹ (as we shall see in Part VII).

All in all, therefore, as I stood overlooking the Sphinx in the late afternoon of 16 March 1993, I considered that the jury was still very much out on the correct attribution of this monument—either to Khafre

on the one hand or to the architects of an as yet unidentified high civilization of prehistoric antiquity on the other.³⁰ No matter what the
²⁹ Ibid., pp. 230-2; *Mystery of the Sphinx*, NBC-TV.

³⁰ At least one orthodox Egyptologist, Selim Hassan, has admitted that the jury is still

out on this issue. After twenty years of excavations at Giza he wrote, 'Except for the

mutilated line on the Granite Stela of Thutmose IV, which proves nothing, there is not

one single ancient inscription which connects the Sphinx with Khafre. So, sound as it

may appear, we must treat this evidence as circumstantial until such a time as a lucky

turn of the spade will reveal to the world definite reference to the erection of this

statue.' Cited in *Conde Nast Traveller*, February 1993, pp. 168-9.

337

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

current flavour of the month (or century) happened to be with the

Egyptologists, the fact was that *both* scenarios were plausible. What was

needed, therefore, was some completely hard and unambiguous evidence

which would settle the matter one way or the other.

338

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Part VII

Lord of Eternity

Egypt 2

339

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 40

Are There Any Secrets Left in Egypt?

During the early evening of 26 November 1922 the British archaeologist

Howard Carter, together with his sponsor Lord Carnarvon, entered the

tomb of a youthful pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty who had ruled Egypt from 1352-43 BC. The name of that pharaoh, which has since resounded around the world, was Tutankhamun.

Two nights later, on 28 November, the tomb's 'Treasury' was breached.

It was filled with a huge golden shrine and gave access to another chamber beyond. Rather unusually, this chamber, although heaped with a

dazzling array of precious and beautiful artefacts, had no door: its entrance was watched over by an extraordinarily lifelike effigy of the jackal-headed mortuary god Anubis. With ears erect, the god crouched

doglike, forepaws stretched out, on the lid of a gilded wooden casket perhaps four feet long, three feet high and two feet wide.

The Egyptian Museum, Cairo, December 1993

Still perched astride his casket, but now locked away in a dusty glass display case, Anubis held my attention for a long, quiet moment. His effigy had been carved out of stuccoed wood, entirely covered with black

resin, then painstakingly inlaid with gold, alabaster, calcite, obsidian and

silver—materials used to particular effect in the eyes, which glittered watchfully with an unsettling sense of fierce and focused intelligence. At

the same time his finely etched ribs and lithe musculature gave off an

aura of understated strength, energy and grace.

Captured by the force field of this occult and powerful presence, I was

vividly reminded of the universal myths of precession I had been studying

during the past year. Canine figures moved back and forth among these

myths in a manner which at times had seemed almost plotted in the literary sense. I had begun to wonder whether the symbolism of dogs,

wolves, jackals, and so on, might have been *deliberately* employed by the

long-dead myth-makers to guide initiates through a maze of clues to

secret reservoirs of lost scientific knowledge.

Among these reservoirs, I suspected, was the myth of Osiris. Much more than a myth, it had been dramatized and performed each year in

Ancient Egypt in the form of a mystery play—a ‘plotted’ literary artefact,

passed down as a treasured tradition since prehistoric times.¹ This tradition, as we saw in Part V, contained values for the rate of

¹ See, for example, Rosalie David, *A Guide to Religious Ritual at Abydos*, Aris and Phillips,

Warminster, 1981, in particular p. 121.

340

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

precessional motion that were so accurate and so consistent it was extremely difficult to attribute them to chance. Nor did it seem likely to

be an accident that the jackal god had been assigned a role centre-stage

in the drama, serving as the spirit guide of Osiris on his journey through

the underworld.² It was tempting, too, to wonder whether there was any

significance in the fact that in ancient times Anubis had been referred to

by Egyptian priests as the 'guardian of the secret and sacred writings'.³⁾

Under the grooved edge of the gilded casket on which his effigy now crouched was found an inscription: 'initiated into the secrets'.⁴⁾

Alternative translations of the same hieroglyphic text rendered it variously as 'he who is upon the secrets', and as 'guardian of the secrets'.⁵⁾

But were there any secrets left in Egypt?

After more than a century of intensive archaeological investigations, could the sands of this antique land yield any further surprises?

Bauval's Stars and West's Stones

In 1993 there was an astonishing new discovery which suggested that

there was much still to learn about Ancient Egypt. The discoverer, moreover, was not some astigmatic archaeologist sieving his way through

the dust of ages but an outsider to the field: Robert Bauval, a Belgian construction engineer with a flair for astronomy who observed a correlation in the sky that the experts had missed in their fixation with

the ground at their feet.

What Bauval saw was this: as the three belt stars of the Orion constellation crossed the meridian at Giza they lay in a not quite straight

line high in the southern heavens. The lower two stars, *Al Nitak* and *Al*

Nilam, formed a perfect diagonal but the third star, *Mintaka*, appeared to

be offset to the observer's left, that is, towards the east.

2 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume II, pp. 262-6.

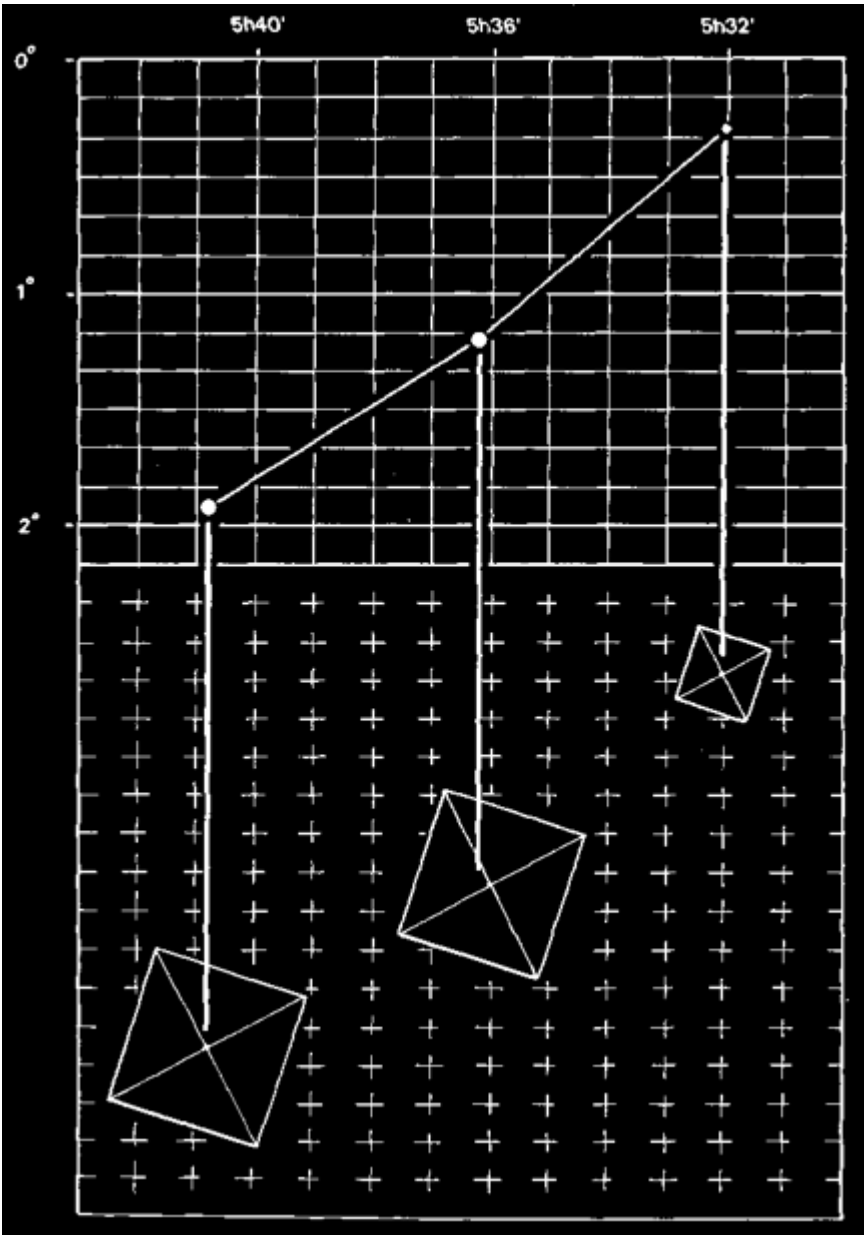
3 Lucy Lamy, *Egyptian Mysteries*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1986, p. 93.

4 Jean-Pierre Corteggiani, *The Egypt of the Pharaohs at the Cairo Museum*, Scala

Publications, London, 1987, p. 118.

5 *Ibid.*; see also R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *Sacred Science: The King of Pharaonic*

Theocracy, Inner Traditions International, Rochester, 1988, pp. 182-3.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The three pyramids of Giza plotted against the three belt stars of the Orion constellation.

Curiously enough (as we saw in Chapter Thirty-six), this was exactly the

site-plan of the three enigmatic pyramids of the Giza plateau. Bauval

realized that an aerial view of the Giza necropolis would show the Great

Pyramid of Khufu occupying the position of *Al Nitak*, and the Second

Pyramid of Khafre occupying the position of *Al Nilam*, while the Third

Pyramid of Menkaure was offset to the east of the diagonal formed by the

other two—thus completing what seemed at first to be a vast diagram of

the stars.

Was this indeed what the Giza pyramids represented? I knew that

Bauval's later work, which had been wholeheartedly endorsed by

342

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

mathematicians and astronomers, had borne out his inspired hunch. His

evidence (reviewed fully in Chapter Forty-nine) showed that the three

pyramids were an unbelievably precise terrestrial map of the three stars

of Orion's belt, accurately reflecting the angles between each of them and

even (by means of their respective sizes) providing some indication of

their individual magnitudes.⁶ Moreover, this map extended outwards to

the north and south to encompass several other structures on the Giza

plateau—once again with faultless precision.⁷ However, the real surprise

revealed by Bauval's astronomical calculations was this: despite the fact

that some aspects of the Great Pyramid did relate astronomically to the

Pyramid Age, the Giza monuments as a whole were so arranged as to

provide a picture of the skies (which alter their appearance down the ages

as a result of precession of the equinoxes) not as they had looked in the

Fourth Dynasty around 2500 BC, but as they had looked—and *only* as they

had looked—around the year 10,450 BC.⁸

I had come to Egypt to go over the Giza site with Robert Bauval and to

question him about his star-correlation theory. In addition I wanted to canvass his views on what sort of human society, if any, could have had

the technological know-how, such a very long while ago, to measure

accurately the altitudes of the stars and to devise a plan as mathematical

and ambitious as that of the Giza necropolis.

I had also come to meet another researcher who had challenged the orthodox chronology of Ancient Egypt with a well-founded claim to have

found hard evidence of a high civilization in the Nile Valley in 10,000 BC

or earlier. Like Bauval's astronomical data, the evidence had always been

available but had failed to attract the attention of established

Egyptologists. The man responsible for bringing it before the public now

was the American scholar, John Anthony West, who argued that the specialists had missed it—not because they had failed to find it, but because they had found it and had failed to interpret it properly.⁹

West's evidence focused on certain key structures, notably the Great Sphinx and the Valley Temple at Giza and, much farther south, the mysterious Osireion at Abydos. He argued that these desert monuments

showed many scientifically unmistakable signs of having been weathered

by *water*, an erosive agent they could only have been exposed to in

sufficient quantities during the damp 'pluvial' period that accompanied

the end of the last Ice Age around the eleventh millennium BC.¹⁰

The

implication of this peculiar and extremely distinctive pattern of

'precipitation induced' weathering, was that the Osireion, the Sphinx, and

6 *The Orion Mystery*.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 *Serpent in the Sky*, pp. 184-242.

10 Ibid., 186-7.

343

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

other associated structures were built before 10,000 BC.¹¹

A British investigative journalist summed up the effect:

West is really an academic's worst nightmare, because here comes somebody way

out of left-field with a thoroughly well thought out, well presented, coherently

described theory, full of data they can't refute, and it pulls the rug out from

beneath their feet. So how do they deal with it? They ignore it. They hope it'll go

away ... and it won't go away.¹²

The reason the new theory would not, under any circumstances, go away,

despite its rejection by droves of 'competent Egyptologists', was that it

had won widespread support from another scientific branch of scholarship—geology. Dr Robert Schoch, a professor of Geology at Boston University, had played a prominent role in validating West's estimates concerning the true age of the Sphinx, and his views had been

endorsed by almost 300 of his peers at the 1992 annual convention of

the Geological Society of America.¹³

Since then, most often out of the public eye, an acrimonious dispute had begun to smoulder between the geologists and the Egyptologists.¹⁴

And though very few people other than John West were prepared to say

as much, what was at stake in this dispute was a complete upheaval in

accepted views about the evolution of human civilization.

According to West:

We are told that the evolution of human civilization is a linear process—that it

goes from stupid cavemen to smart old us with our hydrogen bombs and striped

toothpaste. But the proof that the Sphinx is many, many thousands of years older

than the archaeologists think it is, that it preceded by many thousands of years

even dynastic Egypt, means that there must have been, at some distant point in

history, a high and sophisticated civilization—just as all the legends affirm.¹⁵

My own travels and research during the preceding four years had opened

my eyes to the electrifying possibility that those legends could be true,

and this was why I had come back to Egypt to meet West and Bauval. I

was struck by the way in which their hitherto disparate lines of enquiry¹⁶

had converged so convincingly on what appeared to be the astronomical

and geological fingerprints of a lost civilization, one that might or might

not have originated in the Nile Valley but that seemed to have had a presence here as far back as the eleventh millennium BC.

11 Ibid.

12 *Mystery of the Sphinx*, NBC-TV, 1993.

13 *Conde Nast Traveller*, February 1993, p. 176.

14 E.g, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Chicago, 1992, Debate:

How Old is the Sphinx?

15 *Mystery of the Sphinx*.

16 John West and Robert Bauval worked in isolation, unaware of each other's findings,

until I introduced them.

344

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The way of the jackal

Anubis, guardian of the secrets, god of the funerary chamber, jackal-headed opener of the ways of the dead, guide and companion of Osiris ...

It was around five o'clock in the afternoon, closing-time at the Cairo

Museum, when Santha pronounced herself satisfied with her photographs

of the sinister black effigy. Down below us guards were whistling and clapping their hands as they sought to herd the last few sightseers out of

the halls, but up on the second floor of the hundred-year-old building, where ancient Anubis crouched in his millennial watchfulness, all was

quiet, all was still.

We left the sombre museum and walked down into the sunlight still bathing Cairo's bustling Tahrir Square.

Anubis, I reflected, had shared his duties as spirit guide and guardian

of the secret writings with another god whose type and symbol had also

been the jackal and whose name, Upuaut, literally meant Opener of the

Ways.¹⁷ Both these canine deities had been linked since time immemorial

with the ancient town of Abydos in upper Egypt, the original god of

which, Khenti-Amentiu (the strangely named 'Foremost of the

Westerners') had also been represented as a member of the dog family,

usually lying recumbent on a black standard.¹⁸

Was there any significance in the repeated recurrence at Abydos of all

this mythical and symbolic doggishness, with its promise of high secrets

waiting to unfold? It seemed worthwhile trying to find out since the

extensive ruins there included the structure known as the Osireion, which

West's geological research had indicated might be far older than the

archaeologists thought. Besides, I had already arranged to meet West in a

few days in the upper Egyptian town of Luxor, less than 200 kilometres

south of Abydos. Rather than flying directly to Luxor from Cairo, as I had

originally planned, I now realized that it would be perfectly feasible to go

by road and to visit Abydos and a number of other sites along the way.

Our driver, Mohamed Walili, was waiting for us in an underground car-

park just off Tahrir Square. A large genial, elderly man, he owned a

battered white Peugeot taxi normally to be found standing in the rank

outside the Mena House hotel at Giza. Over the last few years, on our

frequent research trips to Cairo, we had struck up a friendship with him

and he now worked with us whenever we were in Egypt. We haggled for

some time about the appropriate daily rate for the long return journey to

Abydos and Luxor. Many matters had to be taken into account, including

the fact that some of the areas we would be passing through had recently

been targets of terrorist attacks by Islamic militants. Eventually we agreed

17 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume II, p. 264.

18 *Blue Guide, Egypt*, p. 509; see also *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 211-15; *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 31ff; *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient*

Egypt, p. 197.

345

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

on a price and arranged to set off early the following morning.

346

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 41

City of the Sun, Chamber of the Jackal

Mohamed picked us up at our hotel in Heliopolis at 6 a. m. when it was

still half dark.

We drank small cups of thick black coffee at a roadside stall and then

drove west, along dusty streets still almost deserted, towards the River

Nile. I had asked Mohamed to take us through Maydan al-Massallah

Square, which was dominated by one of the world's oldest intact Egyptian

obelisks.¹ Weighing an estimated 350 tons, this was a pink granite

monolith, 107 feet high, erected by Pharaoh Senuseret I (1971-1928 BC).

It had originally been one of a pair at the gateway of the great

Heliopolitan Temple of the Sun. In the 4000 years since then the temple

itself had entirely vanished, as had the second obelisk. Indeed, almost all

of ancient Heliopolis had now been obliterated, cannibalized for its

handsome dressed stones and ready-made building materials by

countless generations of the citizens of Cairo.²

Heliopolis (City of the Sun) was referred to in the Bible as On but was

originally known in the Egyptian language as Innu, or Innu Mehret—meaning ‘the pillar’ or ‘the northern pillar’.³ It was a district of immense

sanctity, associated with a strange group of nine solar and stellar deities,

and was old beyond reckoning when Senuseret chose it as the site for his

obelisk. Indeed, together with Giza (and the distant southern city of Abydos) Innu/Heliopolis was believed to have been part of the first land

that emerged from the primeval waters at the moment of creation, the

land of the ‘First Time’, where the gods had commenced their rule on earth.⁴

Heliopolitan theology rested on a creation-myth distinguished by a number of unique and curious features. It taught that in the beginning

the universe had been filled with a dark, watery nothingness, called the

Nun. Out of this inert cosmic ocean (described as ‘shapeless, black with

the blackness of the blackest night') rose a mound of dry land on which

Ra, the Sun God, materialized in his self-created form as Atum

(sometimes depicted as an old bearded man leaning on a staff):⁵

1 'Saqqara, Egypt: Archaeologists have discovered a green limestone obelisk, the world's

oldest-known complete obelisk, dedicated to Inty, a wife of Pharaoh Pepi I, Egypt's ruler

almost 4300 years ago, who was regarded as a goddess after her death.' *Times*, London,

9 May 1992; see also *Daily Telegraph*, London, 9 May 1992.

2 *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 173-4; Rosalie and Anthony E. David, *A Biographical*

Dictionary of Ancient Egypt, Seaby, London, 1992, pp. 133-4; *Blue Guide, Egypt*, p. 413.

3 *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 110.

4 George Hart, *Egyptian Myths*, British Museum Publications, 1990, p. 11.

5 *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 110; *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 66; 347

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The sky had not been created, the earth had not been created, the children of the

earth and the reptiles had not been fashioned in that place ... I, Atum, was one by

myself ... There existed no other who worked with me ...⁶

Conscious of being alone, this blessed and immortal being contrived to

create two divine offspring, Shu, god of the air and dryness, and Tefnut

the goddess of moisture: 'I thrust my phallus into my closed hand. I made

my seed to enter my hand. I poured it into my own mouth. I evacuated

under the form of Shu, I passed water under the form of Tefnut.'⁷

Despite such apparently inauspicious beginnings, Shu and Tefnut (who

were always described as 'Twins' and frequently depicted as lions) grew

to maturity, copulated and produced offspring of their own: Geb the god

of the earth and Nut, the goddess of the sky. These two also mated,

creating Osiris and Isis, Set and Nephthys, and so completed the Ennead,

the full company of the Nine Gods of Heliopolis. Of the nine, Ra, Shu, Geb

and Osiris were said to have ruled in Egypt as kings, followed by Horus,

and lastly—for 3226 years—by the Ibis-headed wisdom god Thoth.⁸

Who were these people—or creatures, or beings, or gods? Were they

figments of the priestly imagination, or symbols, or ciphers? Were the

stories told about them vivid myth memories of real events which had

taken place thousands of years previously? Or were they, perhaps, part of

a coded message from the ancients that had been transmitting itself over

and over again down the epochs—a message only now beginning to be

unravelling and understood?

Such notions seemed fanciful. Nevertheless I could hardly forget that

out of this very same Heliopolitan tradition the great myth of Isis and

Osiris had flowed, covertly transmitting an accurate calculus for the rate

of precessional motion. Moreover the priests of Innu, whose

responsibility it had been to guard and nurture such traditions, had been

renowned throughout Egypt for their high wisdom and their proficiency in

prophecy, astronomy, mathematics, architecture and the magic arts.
They

were also famous for their possession of a powerful and sacred
object

known as the Benben.⁹

The Egyptians called Heliopolis Innu, the pillar, because tradition had
it

that the Benben had been kept here in remote pre-dynastic times,
when it

had balanced on top of a pillar of rough-hewn stone.

The Benben was believed to have fallen from the skies.
Unfortunately, it

had been lost so long before that its appearance was no longer

From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt, p. 140.

⁶ Papyrus of Nesiamsu, cited in *Sacred Science: The King of
Pharaonic Theocracy*, pp.

188-9; see also *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 141-3.

⁷ *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 142. In other readings Shu
and Tefnut were

spat out by Ra-Atum.

⁸ *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 27. The figure 3126
is given in some

accounts.

9 *The Pyramids: An Enigma Solved*, p. 13; C. Jacq, *Egyptian Magic*, Aris and Phillips, Warminster, 1985, p. 8; *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.

348

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

remembered by the time Senuseret took the throne in 1971 BC. In that

period (the Twelfth Dynasty) all that was clearly recalled was that the

Benben had been pyramidal in form, thus providing (together with the

pillar on which it stood) a prototype for the shape of all future obelisks.

The name Benben was likewise applied to the pyramidion, or apex stone,

usually placed on top of pyramids.¹⁰ In a symbolic sense, it was also

associated closely and directly with Ra-Atum, of whom the ancient texts

said, 'You became high on the height; you rose up as the Benben stone in

the Mansion of the Phoenix ...'¹¹

Mansion of the Phoenix described the original temple at Heliopolis

where the Benben had been housed. It reflected the fact that the

mysterious object had also served as an enduring symbol for the mythical

Phoenix, the divine Bennu bird whose appearances and disappearances

were believed to be linked to violent cosmic cycles and to the destruction

and rebirth of world ages.¹²

Connections and similarities

Driving through the suburbs of Heliopolis at around 6:30 in the morning I

closed my eyes and tried to summon up a picture of the landscape as it

might have looked in the mythical First Time after the Island of

Creation¹³—the primordial mound of Ra-Atum—had risen out of the flood

waters of the Nun. It was tempting to see a connection between this

imagery and the Andean traditions that spoke of the emergence of the

civilizer god Viracocha from the waters of Lake Titicaca after an earth-

destroying flood. Moreover there was the figure of Osiris to consider—a

conspicuously *bearded* figure, like Viracocha, and like Quetzalcoatl as

well—remembered for having abolished cannibalism among the

Egyptians, for having taught them agriculture and animal husbandry, and

for introducing them to such arts as writing, architecture, and music.¹⁴

The similarities between the Old and New World traditions were hard to

miss but even harder to interpret. It was possible they were just a series

of beguiling coincidences. On the other hand, it was possible that they

might reveal the fingerprints of an ancient and unidentified global

civilization—fingerprints that were essentially the same whether they

appeared in the myths of Central America, or of the high Andes, or of

10 Kingship and the Gods, p. 153.

11 The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, p. 246.

12 For a more detailed discussion see *The Orion Mystery*, p. 17.

Bauval suggests that the

Benben may have been an oriented meteorite: 'From depictions it would seem that this

meteorite was from six to fifteen tons in mass ... the frightful spectacle of its fiery fall

would have been very impressive ...', p. 204.

13 The Penguin Dictionary of Religions, Penguin Books, London, 1988, p. 166.

14 E.g. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Introduction, p. XLIX; *Qsiris And The Egyptian*

Resurrection, volume II, pp. 1-11.

349

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Egypt. The priests of Heliopolis, after all, had taught of the creation, but

who had taught *them*? Had they sprung out of nowhere, or was it more

likely that their doctrine, with all its complex symbolism, was the product

of a long refinement of religious ideas?

If so, when and where had these ideas developed?

I looked up to discover that we had left Heliopolis behind and were winding our way through the noisy and crowded streets of downtown

Cairo. We crossed over to the west bank of the Nile by way of the 6

October Bridge and soon afterwards entered Giza. Fifteen minutes later,

passing the massive bulk of the Great Pyramid on our right, we turned

south on the road to upper Egypt, a road which followed the meridional

course of the world's longest river through a landscape of palms and green fields fringed by the encroaching red wastes of pitiless deserts.

The ideas of the Heliopolitan priesthood had influenced every aspect of

secular and religious life in Ancient Egypt, but had those ideas developed

locally, or had they been introduced to the Nile Valley from elsewhere?

The traditions of the Egyptians provided an unambiguous answer to questions such as these. All the wisdom of Heliopolis was a legacy, they

said, and this legacy had been passed to humankind by the gods.

Gift of the Gods?

About ten miles south of the Great Pyramid we pulled off the main road

to visit the necropolis of Saqqara. Rearing up on the desert's edge, the

site was dominated by a six-tier ziggurat, the step-pyramid of the Third

Dynasty Pharaoh Zoser. This imposing monument, almost 200 feet tall,

was dated to approximately 2650 BC. It stood within its own compound,

surrounded by an elegant enclosure wall, and was reckoned by archaeologists to be the earliest massive construction of stone ever attempted by humanity.¹⁵ Tradition had it that its architect was the legendary Imhotep, 'Great of Magic', a high priest of Heliopolis, whose

other titles were Sage, Sorcerer, Astronomer and Doctor.¹⁶

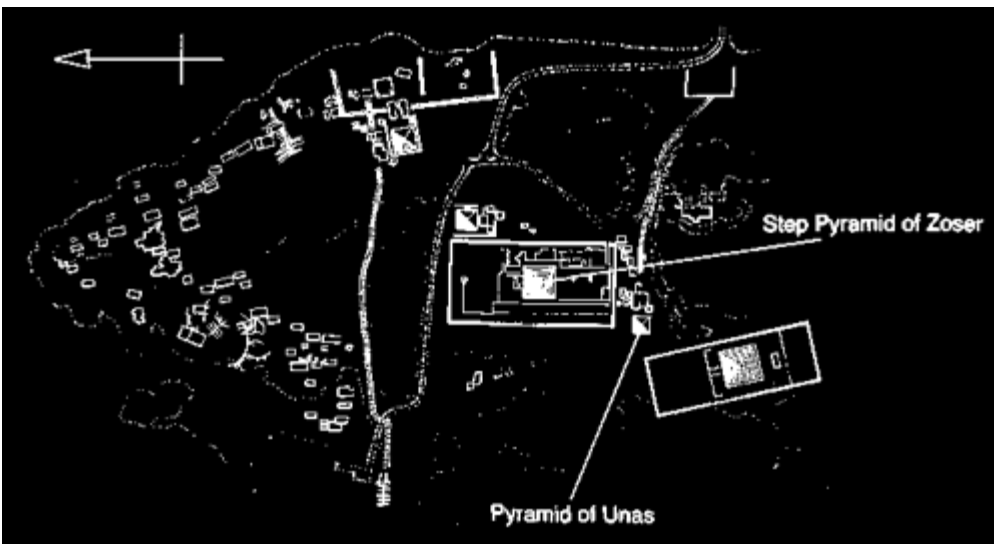
¹⁵ humanity.¹⁵ Tradition had it that its architect was the legendary Imhotep, 'Great of

Magic', a high priest of Heliopolis, whose other titles were Sage, Sorcerer, Astronomer

and Doctor.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

350



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Saqqara.

We shall have more to say about the step-pyramid and its builder in a

later chapter, but on this occasion I had not come to Saqqara to see it. My

sole objective was to spend a few moments in the burial chamber of the

nearby pyramid of Unas, a Fifth Dynasty pharaoh who had reigned from

2356 to 2323 BC.¹⁷ The walls of this chamber, which I had visited several

times before, were inscribed from floor to ceiling with the most ancient of

the Pyramid Texts, an extravaganza of hieroglyphic inscriptions giving

voice to a range of remarkable ideas—in acute contrast to the mute and

unadorned interiors of the Fourth Dynasty pyramids at Giza.

A phenomenon exclusively of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties (2465-2152

BC), the Pyramid Texts were sacred writings, parts of which were thought

to have been composed by the Heliopolitan priesthood in the late third

millennium BC, and parts of which had been received and handed down

by them from pre-dynastic times.¹⁸ It was the latter parts of these Texts,

dating to a remote and impenetrable antiquity, which had particularly

aroused my curiosity when I had begun to research them a few months

previously. I had also been amused—and a little intrigued—by the strange

way that nineteenth century French archaeologists appeared almost to

have been directed to the hidden chamber of the Pyramid Texts by a

mythological ‘opener of the ways.’ According to reasonably well-

documented reports, an Egyptian foreman of the excavations at Saqqara

had been up and about at dawn one morning and had found himself by

the side of a ruined pyramid looking into the bright amber eyes of a lone

desert jackal:

It was as if the animal were taunting his human observer ... and inviting the

puzzled man to chase him. Slowly the jackal sauntered towards the north face of

17 *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.

18 *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 147: 'Judging by the Pyramid Texts, the priests

of Heliopolis borrowed very largely from the religious beliefs of the predynastic

Egyptians ...' See also *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, p. 11.

351

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the pyramid, stopping for a moment before disappearing into a hole. The

bemused Arab decided to follow his lead. After slipping through the narrow hole,

he found himself crawling into the dark bowels of the pyramid. Soon he emerged

into a chamber and, lifting his light, saw that the walls were covered from top to

bottom with hieroglyphic inscriptions. These were carved with exquisite

craftsmanship into the solid limestone and painted over with turquoise and

gold.'¹⁹

Today the hieroglyph-lined chamber beneath the ruined pyramid of Unas

is still reached through the north face by the long descending passage

the French archaeological team excavated soon after the foreman's astonishing discovery. The chamber consists of two rectangular rooms

separated by a partition wall, into which is let a low doorway. Both rooms

are covered by a gabled ceiling painted with myriads of stars. Emerging

stooped from the cramped passage, Santha and I entered the first of the

two rooms and passed through the connecting doorway into the second.

This was the tomb chamber proper, with the massive black granite

sarcophagus of Unas at its western end and the strange utterances of the

Pyramid Texts proclaiming themselves from every wall.

Speaking to us directly (rather than through riddles and mathematical

legerdemain like the unadorned walls of the Great Pyramid), what were

the hieroglyphs saying? I knew that the answer depended to some extent

on which translation you were using, largely because the language of the

Pyramid Texts contained so many archaic forms and so many unfamiliar

mythological allusions that scholars were obliged to fill in the gaps in their knowledge with guesswork.²⁰ Nevertheless it was generally agreed

that the late R. O. Faulkner, a professor of the Ancient Egyptian Language

at University College London, had produced the most authoritative version.²¹

Faulkner, whose translation I had studied line by line, described the Texts as constituting 'the oldest corpus of Egyptian religious and funerary literature now extant' and added, 'they are the least corrupt of

all such collections and are of fundamental importance to the student of

Egyptian religion ...'²² The reason *why* the Texts were so important (as

many scholars agreed), was that they were the last completely open channel connecting the relatively short period of the past that humanity

remembers to the far longer period that has been forgotten: 'They vaguely disclose to us a vanished world of thought and speech, the last of

the unnumbered aeons through which prehistoric man has passed,
till

finally he ... enters the historic age.'²³

19 *The Orion Mystery*, pp. 57-8.

20 *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, pp. 166; *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. V:

'The Pyramid Texts ... include very ancient texts ... There are many mythological and

other allusions of which the purport is obscure to the translator of today ...'

21 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*.

22 *Ibid.*, p. v.

23 James Henry Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York,

352

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

It was hard to disagree with sentiments like these: the Texts did disclose a vanished world. But what intrigued me most about this world

was the possibility that it might have been inhabited not only by primitive

savages (as one would have expected in remote prehistory) but,

paradoxically, by men and women whose minds had been enlightened by

a scientific understanding of the cosmos. The overall picture was equivocal: there were genuinely primitive elements locked into the Pyramid Texts alongside the loftier sequences of ideas. Nevertheless,

every time I immersed myself in what Egyptologists call ‘these ancient

spells’, I was impressed by the strange glimpses they seemed to afford of

a high intelligence at work, darting from behind layers of

incomprehension, reporting on experiences that ‘prehistoric man’ should

never have had and expressing notions he should never have been able

to formulate. In short, the effect the Texts achieved through the medium

of hieroglyphs was akin to the effect the Great Pyramid achieved through

the medium of architecture. In both cases the dominant impression was

of *anachronism*— of advanced technological processes used or described

at a period in human history when there was supposed to have been no

technology at all ...

1944, p. 69.

353

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 42

Anachronisms and Enigmas

I looked around the grey-walled chamber of Unas, up and down the long

registers of hieroglyphs in which the Pyramid Texts were inscribed. They

were written in a dead language. Nevertheless, the constant affirmation,

repeated over and over again in these ancient compositions, was that of

life— eternal life—which was to be achieved through the pharaoh's rebirth

as a star in the constellation of Orion. As the reader will recall from

Chapter Nineteen, (where we compared Egyptian beliefs with those of

Ancient Mexico), there were several utterances which voiced this

aspiration explicitly:

Oh King, you are this Great Star, the Companion of Orion, who traverses the sky

with Orion ... you ascend from the east of the sky being renewed in your due

season, and rejuvenated in your due time ...'1

Though undeniably beautiful there was nothing inherently extraordinary

about these sentiments, and it was by no means impossible to attribute

them to a people assessed by the French archaeologist Gaston Maspero

as having 'always remained half savage'.² Furthermore, since Maspero

had been the first Egyptologist to enter the pyramid of Unas,³ and was

considered a great authority on the Texts, it was hardly surprising that

his opinions should have shaped all academic responses to this literature

since he began to publish translations from it in the 1880s.⁴ Maspero

(with a little help from a jackal) had brought the Pyramid Texts to the

world. Thereafter, the dominance of his particular prejudices about the

past had functioned as a filter on knowledge, inhibiting variant

interpretations of the more opaque or puzzling utterances. This seemed

to me to be unfortunate to say the least. What it meant was that, despite

the technical and scientific puzzles raised by monuments like the Great

Pyramid at Giza, scholars had ignored the implications of some striking

passages in the Texts.

These passages sounded suspiciously like attempts to express complex

technical and scientific imagery *in an entirely inappropriate idiom*. Maybe

it was coincidence, but the result resembled the outcome that we might

expect today if we were to try to translate Einstein's Theory of Relativity

into Chaucerian English or to describe a supersonic aircraft in vocabulary

derived from Middle High German.

1 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, lines 882, 883; see also, *inter alia*, lines 2115

and 2116.

2 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, p. 117.

3 He did so on 28 February 1881; see *The Orion Mystery*, p. 59.

4 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. v.

354

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Broken images of a lost technology?

Take for example some of the peculiar equipment and accessories designated for the pharaoh's use as he journeyed to his eternal resting

place among the stars:

The gods who are in the sky are brought to you, the gods who are on earth

assemble for you, they place their hands under you, they make a *ladder* for you

that you may ascend on it into the sky, the doors of the sky are thrown open to

you, the doors of the starry firmament are thrown open for you.⁵

The ascending pharaoh was identified with, and frequently referred to, as

'an Osiris'. Osiris himself, as we have seen, was frequently linked to and

associated with the constellation of Orion. Osiris-Orion was said to have

been the first to have climbed the great ladder the gods had made. And

several utterances left no doubt that this ladder had not extended

upwards from earth to heaven but downwards from heaven to earth. It

was described as a *rope-ladder* ⁶ and the belief was that it had hung from

an 'iron plate' suspended in the sky.⁷

Were we dealing here, I wondered, simply with the bizarre imaginings

of half-savage priests? Or might there be some other explanation for allusions such as these?

In Utterance 261, 'The King is a flame, moving before the wind to the end of the sky and to the end of the earth ... the King travels the air and

traverses the earth ... there is brought to him a way of ascent to the sky

...'⁸

Switching to dialogue, Utterance 310 proclaimed,

'O you whose vision is in his face and whose vision is in the back of his

head, bring this to me!'

'What ferry-boat shall be brought to you?'

'Bring me: "It-flies-and-alights".'⁹

Utterance 332, supposedly spoken by the King himself, confided, 'I am

this one who has escaped from the coiled serpent, I have ascended in a

blast of fire having turned myself about. The two skies go to me.¹⁰

And in Utterance 669 it was asked, 'Wherewith can the King be made to

fly-up?'

The reply was given: 'There shall be brought to you the *Hnw*-bark [italicized word untranslatable] and the ... [text missing] of the *hn*-bird [italicized word untranslatable]. You shall fly up therewith ... You shall fly

5 Ibid., p. 227, Utt. 572.

6 Ibid., p. 297, Utt. 688: 'Atum has done what he said he would do for this King; he ties

the rope-ladder for him.'

7 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume II, p. 241.

8 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 70, Utt. 261.

9 Ibid., p. 97.

10 Ibid., p. 107.

355

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

up and alight.'¹¹

Other passages also seemed to me worthy of more thorough investigation than they have received from scholars. Here are a few examples:

O my father, great King, the aperture of the sky-window is opened for you.12

'The door of the sky at the horizon opens to you, the gods are glad at meeting you

... May you sit on this iron throne of yours, as the Great One who is in Heliopolis.13

O King, may you ascend ... The sky reels at you, the earth quakes at you, the

Imperishable Stars are afraid of you. I have come to you, O you whose seats are

hidden, that I may embrace you in the sky ...14

The earth speaks, the gate of the earth god is open, the doors of Geb are opened

for you ... May you remove yourself to the sky upon your iron throne.15

O my father the King, such is your going when you have gone as a god, your

travelling as a celestial being ... you stand in the Conclaves of the horizon ... and

sit on this throne of iron at which the gods marvel ...16

The constant references to iron, though easy to overlook, were puzzling.

Iron, I knew, had been a rare metal in Ancient Egypt, particularly in the

Pyramid Age when it had supposedly only been available in meteoritic

form.¹⁷ Yet here, in the Pyramid Texts, there seemed to be an embarrassment of iron riches: iron plates in the sky, iron thrones, and

elsewhere an iron sceptre (Utterance 665C) and even iron bones for the

King (Utterances 325, 684 and 723).¹⁸

In the Ancient Egyptian language the name for iron had been *bja*, a word that meant literally 'metal of heaven' or 'divine metal'.¹⁹ The knowledge of iron was thus regarded as yet another gift from the gods ...

Repositories of a lost science?

What other fingerprints might these gods have left behind in the Pyramid

Texts?²⁰

11 Ibid., p. 284.

12 Ibid., p. 249, Utt. 604.

13 Ibid., pp. 253-4, Utt. 610.

14 Ibid., p. 280, Utt. 667.

15 Ibid., p. 170, Utt. 483.

16 Ibid., p. 287, Utt. 673.

17 B. Scheel, *Egyptian Metalworking and Tools*, Shire Egyptology, Aylesbury, 1989; G. A.

Wainwright, 'Iron in Egypt', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, vol. 18, 1931.

18 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, pp. 276, 105, 294, 311.

19 *Egyptian Metalworking and Tools*, p. 17; 'Iron in Egypt', p. 6ff.

20 Among the many mysterious aspects of the Pyramid Texts it is perhaps inevitable that

a fully qualified Opener of the Ways should put in an appearance.
'The doors of the sky

are opened to you, the starry sky is thrown open for you, the jackal
of upper Egypt

comes down to you as Anubis at your side.' (*The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, pp.

356

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

In my readings—here and there among the most archaic of the

Utterances—I had come across several metaphors that seemed to refer to

the passage of *epochs of precessional time*. These metaphors stood out

from the surrounding material because they were expressed in what had

become a clear and familiar terminology to me: that of the archaic

scientific language identified by Santillana and von Dechend in *Hamlet's*

Mill.21

The reader may recall that a cosmic 'diagram' of the four props of the

sky was one of the standard thought tools employed in that ancient

language. Its purpose was to assist visualisation of the four imaginary

bands conceived as framing, supporting and defining a precessional

world age. These were what astronomers call the 'equinoctial and solstitial colures' and were seen as hooping down from the celestial north

pole and marking the four constellations against the background of

which, for periods of 2160 years at a time, the sun would consistently

rise on the spring and autumn equinoxes and on the winter and summer

solstices.²²

The Pyramid Texts appear to contain several versions of this diagram.

Moreover, as is so often the case with prehistoric myths which transmit

hard astronomical data, the precessional symbolism is interwoven tightly

with violent images of terrestrial destruction—as though to suggest that

the ‘breaking of the mill of heaven’, that is the transition every 2160 years from one zodiacal age to another, could under ill-omened circumstances bring catastrophic influences to bear on terrestrial events.

Thus it was said that

Ra-Atum, the god who created himself, was originally king over gods and men

together but mankind schemed against his sovereignty, for he began to grow old,

his bones became silver, his flesh gold and his hair [as] lapis lazuli.²³

When he realized what was happening, the ageing Sun God (so reminiscent of Tonatiuh, the bloodthirsty Fifth Sun of the Aztecs)

determined that he would punish this insurrection by killing off most of

the human race. The instrument of the havoc he unleashed was

symbolized at times as a raging lioness wading in blood and at times as

the fearsome lion-headed goddess Sekhmet who ‘poured fire out of herself and savaged mankind in an ecstasy of slaughter.’²⁴

The terrible destruction continued unabated for a long period. Then at

last Ra intervened to save the lives of a 'remnant', the ancestors of present humanity. This intervention took the form of a flood which the

288-9, Utt. 675.) Here, as in other contexts, the function of the canine figure seems to

be to serve as a *guide* to secret hoards of esoteric information often linked to

mathematics and astronomy.

21 See Part V for full details.

22 Ibid.

23 *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 181.

24 The pouring fire allusion is cited in Jean-Pierre Hallet, *Pygmy Kitabu*, p. 185.

357

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

lioness thirstily lapped up and then fell asleep. When she awoke, she was

no longer interested in pursuing the destruction, and peace descended

upon the devastated world.²⁵

Meanwhile Ra had resolved to 'draw away' from what was left of his

creation: 'As I live my heart is weary of staying with Mankind. I have gone

on killing them [almost] to the very last one, so the [insignificant]

remnant is not my affair ...'26

The Sun God then rose into the sky on the back of the sky-goddess Nut

who (for the purposes of the precessional metaphor about to be delivered) had transformed herself into a cow. Before very long—in a close analogy to the 'shaft-tree' that 'shivered' on Amlodhi's wildly gyrating mill—the cow grew 'dizzy and began to shake and to tremble

because she was so high above the earth.'27 When she complained to Ra

about this precarious state of affairs he commanded, 'Let my son Shu be

put beneath Nut to keep guard for me over the heavenly supports—which

exist in the twilight. Put her above your head and keep her there.'28 As

soon as Shu had taken his place beneath the cow and had stabilized her

body, 'the heavens above and the earth beneath came into being'. At the

same moment, 'the four legs of the cow', as Egyptologist Wallis Budge

commented in his classic study *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 'became the

four props of heaven at the four cardinal points'.²⁹

Like most scholars, Budge understandably assumed that the 'cardinal

points' referred to in this Ancient Egyptian tradition had strictly terrestrial

connotations and that 'heaven' represented nothing more than the sky

above our heads. He took it for granted that the point of the metaphor

was for us to envisage the cow's four legs as positioned at the four points

of the compass—north, south, east and west. He also thought—and even

today few Egyptologists would disagree with him—that the simple-

minded priests of Heliopolis had actually *believed* that the sky had four

corners which were supported on four legs and that Shu, 'the skybearer

par excellence', had stood immobile like a pillar at the centre of the whole edifice.³⁰

Reinterpreted in the light of Santillana's and von Dechend's findings, however, Shu and the four legs of the celestial cow look much more like

the components of an archaic scientific symbol depicting the frame of a

precessional world age—the polar axis (Shu) and the colures (the four

legs or 'props' marking the equinoctial and solstitial cardinal points in the annual round of the sun).

Moreover, it is tempting to speculate *which* world age was being

25 *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 181-5.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

28 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume II, p. 94.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 92-4.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

358

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

signalled here ...

With a cow involved it could have been the Age of Taurus, although the

Egyptians knew the difference between bulls and cows as well as anyone.

But a much more likely contender—at any rate on purely symbolic grounds—is the age of Leo, from approximately 10,970 to 8810 BC.³¹ The

reason is that Sekhmet, the agent of the destruction of Mankind referred

to in the myth, was *leonine* in form. What better way to symbolize the troubled birth of the new world age of Leo than to depict its harbinger as

a rampaging lion, particularly since the Age of Leo coincided with the final ferocious meltdown of the last Ice Age, during which huge numbers

of animal species all over the earth were suddenly and violently rendered

extinct.³² Mankind survived the immense floods and earthquakes and

rapid changes of climate that took place, but very probably in much reduced numbers and much reduced circumstances.

The train of the Sun and the dweller in Sirius

Of course the ability to recognize and define precessional world ages in

myth implies that the Ancient Egyptians possessed better observational

astronomy and a more sophisticated understanding of the mechanics of

the solar system than any ancient people have hitherto been credited

with.³³ There is no doubt that knowledge of this calibre, if it existed at all,

would have been highly regarded by the Ancient Egyptians, who would

have transmitted it from generation to generation in a secretive manner.

Indeed, it would have ranked among the highest arcana entrusted to the

keeping of the priestly elite at Heliopolis and would have been passed on,

in the main, through an oral and initiatory tradition.³⁴ If, by chance it had

found its way into the Pyramid Texts, is it not likely that its form would

have been veiled by metaphors and allegories?

I walked slowly across the dusty floor of the tomb chamber of Unas,

noting the heavy stillness in the air, casting my eyes over the faded blue

and gold inscriptions. Expressed in coded language several millennia

before Copernicus and Galileo, some of the passages inscribed on these

walls seemed to offer clues to the true heliocentric nature of the solar system.

31 Skyglobe 3.6.

32 See Part IV.

33 For a detailed discussion see *Sacred Science: The King of Pharaonic Theocracy*.

34 The issue of priestly secrecy and the oral tradition is discussed at length in *From*

Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt, e.g. p. 43: 'It is impossible to think that the highest order

of the priests did not possess esoteric knowledge which they guarded with the greatest

care. Each priesthood ... possessed a "Gnosis", a "superiority of knowledge", which they

never put into writing ... It is therefore absurd to expect to find in Egyptian papyri

descriptions of the secrets which formed the esoteric knowledge of the priests.' See also

page 27, and *Sacred Science*, pp. 273-4.

359

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

In one, for example, Ra, the Sun God, was depicted as seated upon an

iron throne encircled by lesser gods who moved around him constantly

and who were said to be 'in his train'.³⁵ Likewise, in another passage, the

deceased Pharaoh was urged to 'stand at the head of the two halves of

the sky and weigh the words of the gods, the aged ones, who revolve

around Ra.'³⁶

If the 'aged ones' and the 'encircling gods' revolving around Ra should

prove to be parts of a terminology referring to the planets of our solar system, the original authors of the Pyramid Texts must have enjoyed access to some remarkably advanced astronomical data. They must have

known that the earth and the planets revolved around the sun rather than

vice versa.³⁷ The problem this raises is that neither the Ancient Egyptians

at any stage in their history, nor even their successors the Greeks, or for

that matter the Europeans until the Renaissance, are supposed to have

possessed cosmological data of anything approaching this quality.
How,

therefore, can its presence be explained in compositions which date
back

to the dawn of Egyptian civilization?

Another (and perhaps related) mystery concerns the star Sirius,
which

the Egyptians identified with Isis, the sister and consort of Osiris and
the

mother of Horus. In a passage addressed to Osiris himself, the
Pyramid

Texts state:

Thy sister Isis cometh unto thee rejoicing in her love for thee. Thou
settest her

upon thee, thy issue entereth into her, and she becometh great with
child like the

star Sept [Sirius, the Dog Star]. Horus-Sept cometh forth from thee in
the form of

Horus, dweller in Sept.38

Many interpretations of this passage are, of course, possible. What
intrigued me, however, was the clear implication that Sirius was to be
regarded as a *dual entity* in some way comparable to a woman
'great with

child'. Moreover, after the birth (or coming forth) of that child, the text

makes a special point of reminding us that Horus remained a 'dweller in

Sept', presumably suggesting that he stayed close to his mother.

Sirius is an unusual star. A sparkling point of light particularly prominent in the winter months in the night skies of the northern hemisphere, it consists of a *binary* star system, i.e. it is in fact, as the Pyramid Texts suggest, a 'dual entity'. The major component, Sirius-A, is

what we see. Sirius-B, on the other hand—the dwarf-star which revolves

around Sirius A—is absolutely invisible to the naked eye. Its existence did

not become known to Western science until 1862, when US astronomer

Alvin Clark spotted it through one of the largest and most advanced telescopes of the day.³⁹ How could the scribes who wrote the Pyramid

35 Pyramid Texts cited in *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, p. 158.

36 *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 146.

37 *Sacred Science*, pp. 22-5, 29.

38 *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 93.

39 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 10:845.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Texts possibly have obtained the information that Sirius was two stars in

one?

In *The Sirius Mystery*, an important book published in 1976, I knew that

the American author Robert Temple had offered some extraordinary answers to this question.⁴⁰ His study focused on the traditional beliefs of

the Dogon tribe of West Africa—beliefs in which the binary character of

Sirius was explicitly described and in which the correct figure of fifty years was given for the period of the orbit of Sirius-B around Sirius-A.⁴¹

Temple argued cogently that this high quality technical information had

been passed down to the Dogon from *the Ancient Egyptians* through a

process of cultural diffusion, and that it was to the Ancient Egyptians that

we should look for an answer to the Sirius mystery. He also concluded

that the Ancient Egyptians must have received the information from

intelligent beings from the region of Sirius'.⁴²

Like Temple, I had begun to suspect that the more advanced and sophisticated elements of Egyptian science made sense only if they were

understood as parts of an inheritance. Unlike Temple, I saw no urgent

reason to attribute that inheritance to extra-terrestrials. To my mind the

anomalous star knowledge the Heliopolitan priests had apparently possessed was more plausibly explained as the legacy of a lost human

civilization which, against the current of history, had achieved a high level

of technological advancement in remote antiquity. It seemed to me that

the building of an instrument capable of detecting Sirius-B might not have

been beyond the ingenuity of the unknown explorers and scientists who

originated the remarkable maps of the prehistoric world discussed in Part

I. Nor would it have daunted the unknown astronomers and measurers of

time who bequeathed to the Ancient Maya a calendar of amazing

complexity, a data-base about the movements of the heavenly bodies

which could only have been the product of thousands of years of accurately recorded observations, and a facility with very large numbers

that seemed more appropriate to the needs of a complex technological

society than to those of a 'primitive' Central American kingdom.⁴³

Millions of years and the movements of the stars

Very large numbers also appeared in the Pyramid Texts, in the symbolic

'boat of millions of years', for example, in which the Sun God was said to

navigate the dark and airless wastes of interstellar space.⁴⁴ Thoth, the

god of wisdom ('he who reckons in heaven, the counter of the stars, the

40 *The Sirius Mystery*.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

43 See Part III.

44 *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, p. cxi.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

measurer of the earth') was specifically empowered to grant a life of millions of years to the deceased pharaoh.⁴⁵ Osiris, 'king of eternity, lord

of everlasting', was described as traversing millions of years in his life.'⁴⁶

And figures like 'tens of millions of years' (as well as the more mind-boggling 'one million of millions of years')⁴⁷ occurred often enough to

suggest that some elements at least of Ancient Egyptian culture must

have evolved for the convenience of scientifically minded people with more than passing insight into the immensity of time.

Such a people would, of course, have required an excellent calendar —

one that would have facilitated complex and accurate calculations. It was

therefore not surprising to learn that the Ancient Egyptians, like the

Maya, had possessed such a calendar and that their understanding of its

workings seemed to have declined, rather than improved, as the ages

went by.⁴⁸ It was tempting to see this as the gradual erosion of a corpus

of knowledge inherited an extremely long time ago, an impression supported by the Ancient Egyptians themselves, who made no secret of

their belief that their calendar was a legacy which they had received 'from the gods'.

We consider the possible identity of these gods in more detail in the following chapters. Whoever they were, they must have spent a great deal

of their time observing the stars, and they had accumulated a fund of advanced and specialized knowledge concerning the star Sirius in particular. Further evidence for this came in the form of the most useful

calendrical gift which the gods supposedly gave to the Egyptians: the *Sothic* (or Sirian) cycle.⁴⁹

The Sothic cycle was based on what is referred to in technical jargon as

'the periodic return of the heliacal rising of Sirius', which is the first appearance of this star after a seasonal absence, rising at dawn just ahead of the sun in the eastern portion of the sky.⁵⁰ In the case of Sirius

the interval between one such rising and the next amounts to *exactly*

365.25 days—a mathematically harmonious figure, uncomplicated by

further decimal points, which is just twelve minutes longer than the duration of the solar year.⁵¹

The curious thing about Sirius is that out of an estimated 2000 stars in

the heavens visible to the naked eye it is the only one to rise heliacally at

this precise and nicely rounded interval of 365 and a quarter days—a unique product of its ‘proper motion’ (the speed of its own movement through space) combined with the effects of precession of the

45 Ibid., p. cxviii. See also *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, p. 400.

46 *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, p. 8.

47 *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume II, p. 248.

48 For a full discussion see *Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, particularly pp. 328-30.

49 *Sacred Science*, p. 27.

50 *Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*, p. 27.

51 *Sacred Science*, p. 172.

362

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

equinoxes.⁵² Moreover, it is known that the day of the heliacal rising of

Sirius—New Year's Day in the Ancient Egyptian calendar—was traditionally calculated at Heliopolis, where the Pyramid Texts were compiled, and announced ahead of time to all the other major temples up

and down the Nile.⁵³

I remembered that Sirius was referred to directly in the Pyramid Texts

by 'her name of the New Year'.⁵⁴ Together with other relevant utterances

(e.g., 66955), this confirmed that the Sothic calendar was *at least as* old as

the Texts themselves,⁵⁶ and their origins stretched back into the mists of

distant antiquity. The great enigma, therefore, is this: in such an early period, who could have possessed the necessary know-how to observe

and take note of the coincidence of the period of 365.25 days with the

heliacal rising of Sirius—a coincidence described by the French mathematician R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz as 'an entirely exceptional celestial phenomenon'?⁵⁷

We cannot but admire the greatness of a science capable of discovering such a

coincidence. The double star of Sirius was chosen because it was the only star that

moves the needed distance and in the right direction against the background of

the other stars. This fact, known four thousand years before our time and

forgotten until our day, obviously demands an extraordinary and prolonged

observation of the sky.⁵⁸

It was such a legacy—built out of long centuries of precise observational

astronomy and scientific record-keeping—that Egypt seems to have benefited from at the beginning of the historical period and that was expressed in the Pyramid Texts.

In this, too, there lies a mystery ...

Copies, or translations?

Writing in 1934, the year of his death, Wallis Budge, former Keeper of

Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum and the author of an authoritative hieroglyphic dictionary,⁵⁹ made this frank admission:

52 Ibid., p. 26-7. For numbers of stars visible to the naked eye see Ian Ridpath and Wil

Tirion, *Collins Guide to Stars and Planets*, London, 1984, p. 4.

53 *Sacred Science*, p. 173.

54 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 165, line 964. *Sacred Science*, p. 287.

55 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, pp. 165, 284; *Sacred Science*, in particular p.

287ff.

56 The established archaeological horizon of the calendar can indeed be pushed back

even further because of the recent discovery, in a First Dynasty tomb in upper Egypt, of

an inscription reading, 'Sothis, herald of the New Year' (reported in *Death of Gods in*

Ancient Egypt, p. 40.)

57 *Sacred Science*, p. 290.

58 Ibid., p. 27.

59 E. A. Wallis Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*, (2 volumes), John Murray,

London, 1920.

363

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Pyramid Texts are full of difficulties of every kind. The exact meanings of a

large number of words found in them are unknown ... The construction of the

sentence often baffles all attempts to translate it, and when it contains wholly

unknown words it becomes an unsolved riddle. It is only reasonable to suppose

that these texts were often used for funerary purposes, but it is quite clear that

their period of use in Egypt was little more than one hundred years. Why they were

suddenly brought into use at the end of the Fifth Dynasty and ceased to be used at

the end of the Sixth Dynasty is inexplicable.'60

Could the answer be that they were copies of an earlier literature which

Unas, the last pharaoh of the Fifth Dynasty, together with several of his

successors in the Sixth Dynasty, had attempted to fix for ever in stone in

the tomb chambers of their own pyramids? Budge thought so, and felt the

evidence suggested that some at least of the source documents must

have been exceedingly old:

Several passages bear evidence that the scribes who drafted the copies from which

the cutters of the inscriptions worked did not understand what they were writing

... The general impression is that the priests who drafted the copies made extracts

from several compositions of different ages and having different contents ...'61

All this assumed that the source documents, whatever they were, must

have been written in an archaic form of the Ancient Egyptian language.

There was, however, an alternative possibility which Budge failed to consider. Suppose that the task of the priests had been not only to *copy*

material but to *translate* into hieroglyphs texts originally composed in another language altogether? If that language had included a technical

terminology and references to artefacts and ideas for which no equivalent

terms existed in Ancient Egyptian, this would provide an explanation for

the strange impression given by certain of the utterances. Moreover, if

the copying and translating of the original source documents had been

completed by the end of the Sixth Dynasty, it was easy to understand why

no more 'Pyramid Texts' had ever been carved: the project would have

come to a halt when it had fulfilled its objective—which would have been

to create a permanent hieroglyphic record of a sacred literature that had

already been tottering with age when Unas had taken the throne of Egypt

in 2356 BC.

Last records of the First Time?

Because we wanted to cover as much of the distance to Abydos as was

possible before nightfall, Santha and I reluctantly decided that it was time

to get back on the road. Although we had originally intended to spend

only a few minutes, the sombre gloom and ancient voices of the Unas

tomb chamber had lulled our senses and almost two hours had passed

since our arrival. Stooping, we left the tomb and climbed the steeply

60 *From Fetish to God In Ancient Egypt*, pp. 321-2.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 322.

364

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

angled passageway to the exit, where we paused to allow our eyes to

adjust to the harsh mid-morning sunlight. As we did so, I took the opportunity to look over the pyramid itself, which had fallen into such a

crumbling and thoroughly dilapidated state that its original form was barely recognizable. The core masonry, reduced to little more than a nondescript heap of rubble, was evidently of poor quality, and even the

facing blocks—some of which were still intact—lacked the finesse and

careful workmanship demonstrated by the older pyramids at Giza.

This was hard to explain in conventional historical terms. If the normal

evolutionary processes that govern the development of architectural skills

and ideas had been at work in Egypt, one would have expected to find the

opposite to be true: the design, engineering and masonry of the Unas

Pyramid should have been superior to these of the Giza group, which,

according to orthodox chronology, had been built about two centuries previously.⁶²

The uncomfortable fact that this was not the case (i.e., Giza was 'better'

than Unas and not vice versa) created knotty challenges for Egyptologists

and raised questions to which no satisfactory answers had been supplied.

To reiterate the central problem: everything about the three stunning and

superb pyramids of Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure proclaimed that they

were the end products of hundreds, perhaps even thousands of years of

accumulated architectural and engineering experience. This was not supported by the archaeological evidence which left no doubt that they

were among the earliest pyramids ever built in Egypt—in other words,

they were not the products of the mature phase of that country's

pyramid-building experiment but, anomalously, were the creations of its

infancy.

A further mystery also cried out for a solution. In the three great pyramids at Giza, Egypt's Fourth Dynasty had reared up mansions of

eternity—unprecedented and unsurpassed masterpieces of stone, hundreds of feet high, weighing millions of tons apiece, which incorporated many extremely advanced features. No pyramids of comparable quality were ever built again. But only a little later, beneath

the smaller, shabbier superstructures of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasty pyramids, a sort of Hall of Records seemed to have been deliberately

created: a permanent exhibition of copies or translations of archaic documents which was, at the same time, an unprecedented and unsurpassed masterpiece of scribal and hieroglyphic art.

In short, like the pyramids at Giza, it seemed that the Pyramid Texts had burst upon the scene with no apparent antecedents, and had occupied centre-stage for approximately a hundred years before 'ceasing

operations', never to be bettered.

Presumably the ancient kings and sages who had arranged these things

had known what they were doing? If so, their minds must have contained

62 *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.

365

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

a plan, and they must have intended a strong connection to be seen

between the completely uninscribed (but technically brilliant)—
pyramids

at Giza, and the brilliantly inscribed (but technically slipshod)
pyramids of

the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties.

I suspected, too, that at least part of the answer to the problem might

lie in the pyramid-field of Dahshur, which we passed fifteen minutes
after

leaving Saqqara. It was here that the so-called 'Bent' and 'Red'
Pyramids

were located. Attributed to Sneferu, Khufu's father, these two
monuments

(by all accounts very well preserved) had been closed to the public
many

years ago. A military base had been built around them and they had
for a

long while been impossible to visit—under any circumstances, ever
...

As we continued our journey south, through the bright colours of that

December day, I was overtaken by a compelling sense that the Nile
Valley

had been the scene of momentous events for humanity long before
the

recorded history of mankind began. All the most ancient records and

traditions of Egypt spoke of such events and associated them with
the

epoch during which the gods had ruled on earth: the fabled First
Time,

which was called Zep Tepi.⁶³ We shall delve into these records in
the next

two chapters.

63 Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt, p. 263.

366

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 43

Looking for the First Time

Here is what the Ancient Egyptians said about the First Time, Zep Tepi,

when the gods ruled in their country: they said it was a golden age¹

during which the waters of the abyss receded, the primordial darkness

was banished, and humanity, emerging into the light, was offered the

gifts of civilization.² They spoke also of intermediaries between gods and

men—the Urshu, a category of lesser divinities whose title meant ‘the

Watchers’.³ And they preserved particularly vivid recollections of the gods

themselves, puissant and beautiful beings called the Neteru who lived on

earth with humankind and exercised their sovereignty from Heliopolis

and other sanctuaries up and down the Nile. Some of these Neteru were

male and some female but all possessed a range of supernatural powers

which included the ability to appear, at will, as men or women, or as

animals, birds, reptiles, trees or plants. Paradoxically, their words and

deeds seem to have reflected human passions and preoccupations.

Likewise, although they were portrayed as stronger and more intelligent

than humans, it was believed that they could grow sick—or even die, or

be killed—under certain circumstances.⁴

Records of prehistory

Archaeologists are adamant that the epoch of the gods, which the

Ancient Egyptians, called the First Time, is nothing more than a myth.

The Ancient Egyptians, however, who may have been better informed

about their past than we are, did not share this view. The historical

records they kept in their most venerable temples included

comprehensive lists of all the kings of Egypt: lists naming every pharaoh

of every dynasty recognized by scholars today.⁵ Some of these lists went

even further, reaching back beyond the historical horizon of the First

Dynasty into the uncharted depths of a remote and profound antiquity.

Two lists of kings in this category have survived the ravages of the ages

and, having been exported from Egypt, are now preserved in European

1 *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 263-4; see also Nicolas Grimal, *A History of*

Ancient Egypt, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1992, p. 46.

2 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 16.

3 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, pp. 84, 161; *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*,

pp. 124, 308.

4 *Osiris And The Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 352.

5 Michael Hoffman, *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, Michael O'Mara Books, 1991, pp. 12-13;

Archaic Egypt, pp. 21-3; *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 138-9.

367

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

museums. We shall consider these lists in more detail later in this

chapter. They are known respectively as the Palermo Stone (dating from

the Fifth Dynasty—around the twenty-fifth century BC), and the Turin

Papyrus, a nineteenth Dynasty temple document inscribed in a cursive

form of hieroglyphs known as hieratic and dated to the thirteenth century

BC.6

In addition, we have the testimony of a Heliopolitan priest named

Manetho. In the third century BC he compiled a comprehensive and widely

respected history of Egypt which provided extensive king lists for the entire dynastic period. Like the Turin Papyrus and the Palermo Stone,

Manetho's history also reached much further back into the past to speak

of a distant epoch when gods had ruled in the Nile Valley.

Manetho's complete text has not come down to us, although copies of

it seem to have been in circulation as late as the ninth century AD.⁷

Fortuitously, however, fragments of it were preserved in the writings of

the Jewish chronicler Josephus (AD 60) and of Christian writers such as

Africanus (AD 300), Eusebius (AD 340) and George Syncellus (AD 800).⁸

These fragments, in the words of the late Professor Michael Hoffman of

the University of South Carolina, provide the 'framework for modern approaches to the study of Egypt's past'.⁹

This is quite true.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Egyptologists are prepared to use Manetho only as a source for the historical (dynastic) period and repudiate the strange insights he provides into prehistory when he speaks of the remote golden age of the First Time. Why should we be so

selective in our reliance on Manetho? What is the logic of accepting thirty

'historical' dynasties from him and rejecting all that he has to say about

earlier epochs? Moreover, since we know that his chronology for the historical period has been vindicated by archaeology,¹¹ isn't it a bit premature for us to assume that his pre-dynastic chronology is wrong

because excavations have not yet turned up evidence confirming it?
12

⁶ *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, pp. 12-13; *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 200, 268.

⁷ *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, p. 12.

8 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 23; *Manetho*, (trans. W. G. Waddell), William Heinemann, London,

1940, Introduction pp. xvi-xvii.

9 *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, p. 11.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 11-13; *Archaic Egypt*, pp. 5, 23.

11 See, for example, *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, pp. 11-13.

12 This is a particularly important point to remember in a discipline like Egyptology

where so much of the record of the past has been lost through looting, the ravages of

time, and the activities of archaeologists and treasure hunters. Besides, vast numbers of

Ancient Egyptian sites have not been investigated at all, and many more may lie out of

our reach beneath the millennial silt of the Nile Delta (or beneath the suburbs of Cairo

for that matter), and even at well-studied locations such as the Giza necropolis there are

huge areas—the bedrock beneath the Sphinx for example—which still await the

attentions of the excavator.

368

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Gods, Demigods and Spirits of the Dead

If we are to allow Manetho to speak for himself, we have no choice but to

turn to the texts in which the fragments of his work are preserved. One of

the most important of these is the Armenian version of the *Chronica* of

Eusebius. It begins by informing us that it is extracted 'from the *Egyptian*

History of Manetho, who composed his account in three books. These

deal with the Gods, the Demigods, the Spirits of the Dead and the mortal

kings who ruled Egypt ...'¹³ Citing Manetho directly, Eusebius begins by

reeling off a list of the gods which consists, essentially, of the familiar

Ennead of Heliopolis—Ra, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Set, and so on:¹⁴

These were the first to hold sway in Egypt. Thereafter, the kingship passed from

one to another in unbroken succession ... through 13,900 years— ... After the

Gods, Demigods reigned for 1255 years; and again another line of kings held sway

for 1817 years; then came thirty more kings, reigning for 1790 years; and then

again ten kings ruling for 350 years. There followed the rule of the Spirits of the

Dead ... for 5813 years ...'15

The total of all these periods adds up to 24,925 years and takes us far

beyond the biblical date for the creation of the world (some time in the

fifth millennium BC¹⁶). Because it suggested that biblical chronology was

wrong, this created difficulties for Eusebius, a staunchly Christian commentator. But, after a moment's thought, he overcame the problem

in an inspired way: 'The year I take to be a lunar one, consisting, that is,

of 30 days: what we now call a month the Egyptians used formerly to style a year ...'17

Of course they did no such thing.¹⁸ By means of this sleight of hand,

however, Eusebius and others succeeded in boiling down Manetho's

grand pre-dynastic span of almost 25,000 years into a sanitized dollop a

bit over 2000 years which fits comfortably into the 2242 years orthodox

biblical chronology allows between Adam and the Flood.¹⁹

A different technique for downplaying the disturbing chronological implications of Manetho's evidence is employed by the monk George Syncellus (c. AD 800). This commentator, who relies entirely on invective,

writes, 'Manetho, chief priest of the accursed temples of Egypt [tells us]

of gods who never existed. These, he says, reigned for 11,895 years ...'²⁰

Several other curious and contradictory numbers crop up in the fragments. In particular, Manetho is repeatedly said to have given the

13 *Manetho*, p. 3.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

16 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 12:214-15.

17 *Manetho*, p. 5.

18 There is absolutely no evidence that the Ancient Egyptians ever confused years and

months, or styled one as the other; *ibid*, p. 4, note 2.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

enormous figure of 36,525 years for the *entire* duration of the civilization

of Egypt from the time of the gods down to the end of the thirtieth (and

last) dynasty of mortal kings.²¹ This figure of course, incorporates the

365.25 *days* of the Sothic year (the interval between two consecutive heliacal risings of Sirius, as described in the last chapter). More likely by

design than by accident, it also represents 25 cycles of 1460 Sothic years,

and 25 cycles of 1461 *calendar* years (since the ancient Egyptian civil

calendar was constructed around a ‘vague year’ of 365 days exactly).²²

What, if anything, does all this mean? It’s hard to be sure. Out of the welter of numbers and interpretations, however, there is one aspect of

Manetho’s original message that comes through loud and clear.

Irrespective of everything we have been taught about the orderly progress

of history, what he seems to be telling us is that civilized beings (either

gods or men) were present in Egypt for an immensely long period *before*

the advent of the First Dynasty around 3100 BC.

Diodorus Siculus and Herodotus

In this assertion, Manetho finds much support among classical writers.

In the first century BC, for example, the Greek historian Diodorus

Siculus visited Egypt. He is rightly described by C.H. Oldfather, his most

recent translator, as 'an uncritical compiler who used good sources and

reproduced them faithfully'.²³ In plain English, what this means is that

Diodorus did not try to impose his prejudices and preconceptions on the

material he collected. He is therefore particularly valuable to us because

his informants included Egyptian priests whom he questioned about the

mysterious past of their country. This is what they told him:

'At first gods and heroes ruled Egypt for a little less than 18,000 years, the last of

the gods to rule being Horus, the son of Isis ... Mortals have been kings of their

country, they say, for a little less than 5000 years ...²⁴

Let us review these figures 'uncritically' and see what they add up to.

Diodorus was writing in the first century BC. If we journey back from there

for the 5000 years during which the 'mortal kings' supposedly ruled, we

get to around 5100 BC. If we go even further back to the beginning of the

age of 'gods and heroes', we find that we have arrived at 23,100 BC, when

the world was still firmly in the grip of the last Ice Age.

²¹ Ibid., p. 231; see also *The Splendour that was Egypt*, p. 12.

²² Like the Maya, (see Part III), the Ancient Egyptians made use for administrative

purposes of a civil calendar year (or vague year) of 365 days exactly. See *Skywatchers of*

Ancient Mexico, p. 151, for further details on the Maya vague year. The Ancient Egyptian

civil calendar year was geared to the Sothic year so that both would coincide on the

same day/month position once every 1461 calendar years.

²³ *Diodorus Siculus*, translated by C.H. Oldfather, Harvard University Press, 1989, jacket

text.

24 Ibid., volume I, p. 157.

370

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Long before Diodorus, Egypt was visited by another and more illustrious Greek historian: the great Herodotus, who lived in the fifth

century BC. He too, it seems, consorted with priests and he too managed

to tune in to traditions that spoke of the presence of a high civilization in

the Nile Valley at some unspecified date in remote antiquity. Herodotus

outlines these traditions of an immense prehistoric period of Egyptian

civilization in Book II of his *History*. In the same document he also hands

on to us, without comment, a peculiar nugget of information which had

originated with the priests of Heliopolis:

During this time, they said, there were four occasions when the sun rose out of his

wanted place—twice rising where he now sets, and twice setting where he now

rises.²⁵

What is this all about?

According to the French mathematician Schwaller de Lubicz, what Herodotus is transmitting to us (perhaps unwittingly) is a veiled and garbled reference to a *period of time*— that is, to the time that it takes for

sunrise on the vernal equinox to precess against the stellar background

through one and a half complete cycles of the zodiac.²⁶

As we have seen, the equinoctial sun spends roughly 2160 years in each of the twelve zodiacal constellations. A full cycle of precession of

the equinoxes therefore takes almost 26,000 years to complete (12 x 2160 years). It follows that one and a half cycles takes nearly 39,000 years (18 x 2160 years).

In the time of Herodotus the sun on the vernal equinox rose due east at

dawn against the stellar background of Aries—at which moment the constellation of Libra was 'in opposition', lying due west where the sun

would set twelve hours later. If we wind the clock of precession back half

a cycle, however—six houses of the zodiac or approximately 13,000

years—we find that the reverse configuration prevails: the vernal sun now

rises due east in Libra while Aries lies due west in opposition. A further

13,000 years back, the situation reverses itself once more, with the vernal

sun rising again in Aries and with Libra in opposition.

This takes us to 26,000 years before Herodotus.

If we then step back another 13,000 years, another half precessional cycle, to 39,000 years before Herodotus, the vernal sunrise returns to

Libra, and Aries is again in opposition.

The point is this: with 39,000 years we have an expanse of time during

which the sun can be described as ‘twice rising where he now sets’, i.e. in

25 *The History*, pp. 193-4. In the first century AD a similar tradition was recorded by the

Roman scholar Pomponious Mela: ‘The Egyptians pride themselves on being the most

ancient people in the world. In their authentic annals one may read that since they have

been in existence, the course of the stars has changed direction four times, and that the

sun has set twice in the part of the sky where it rises today.’
(Pomponius Mela, *De Situ*

Orbis.)

26 *Sacred Science*, p. 87

371

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Libra in the time of Herodotus (and again at 13,000 and at 39,000
years

earlier), and as ‘twice setting where he now rises’, i.e. in Aries in the
time

of Herodotus (and again at 13,000 and 39,000 years earlier).²⁷ If

Schwaller’s interpretation is correct—and there is every reason to

suppose it is—it suggests that the Greek historian’s priestly
informants

must have had access to accurate records of the precessional
motion of

the sun going back *at least* 39,000 years before their own era.

The Turin Papyrus and the Palermo Stone

The figure of 39,000 years accords surprisingly closely with the

testimony of the Turin Papyrus (one of the two surviving Ancient
Egyptian

king lists that extends back into prehistoric times before the First

Dynasty).

Originally in the collection of the king of Sardinia, the brittle and crumbling 3000-year-old papyrus was sent in a box, without packing, to

its present home in the Museum of Turin. As any schoolchild could have

predicted, it arrived broken into countless fragments. Scholars were obliged to work for years to piece together and make sense of what remained, and they did a superb job.²⁸ Nevertheless, more than half the

contents of this precious record proved impossible to reconstruct.²⁹

What might we have learned about the First Time if the Turin Papyrus

had remained intact?

The surviving fragments are tantalizing. In one register, for example, we read the names often Neteru with each name inscribed in a cartouche

(oblong enclosure) in much the same style adopted in later periods for

the historical kings of Egypt. The number of years that each Neter was

believed to have reigned was also given, but most of these numbers are

missing from the damaged document.30

In another column there appears a list of the mortal kings who ruled in

upper and lower Egypt after the gods but prior to the supposed unification of the kingdom under Menes, the first pharaoh of the First Dynasty, in 3100 BC. From the surviving fragments it is possible to

27 As the following table makes clear:

IN OPPOSITION

VERNAL EQUINOX

SUNRISE

(DUE WEST)

AT SUNRISE

Fifth century BC (time of Herodotus)

Aries

Libra

Approx 13,000 years before Herodotus

Libra

Aries

Approx 26,000 years before Herodotus

Aries

Libra

Approx 39,000 years before Herodotus

Libra

Aries

28 See, for example, Sir A.H. Gardner, *The Royal Cannon of Turin*, Griffith Institute,

Oxford.

29 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 4.

30 For further details, *Sacred Science*, p. 86.

372

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

establish that nine ‘dynasties’ of these pre-dynastic pharaohs were

mentioned, among which were ‘the Venerables of Memphis’, ‘the

Venerables of the North’ and, lastly, the Shemsu Hor (the Companions, or

Followers, of Horus) who ruled until the time of Menes. The final two lines

of the column, which seem to represent a summing up or inventory, are

particularly provocative. They read; ‘... Venerables Shemsu-Hor, 13,420

years; Reigns before the Shemsu-Hor, 23,200 years; Total 36,620 years'.³¹

The other king list that deals with prehistoric times is the Palermo Stone, which does not take us as far back into the past as the Turin Papyrus. The earliest of its surviving registers record the reigns of 120

kings who ruled in upper and lower Egypt in the late pre-dynastic period:

the centuries immediately prior to the country's unification in 3100 BC.³²

Once again, however, we really have no idea how much *other* information,

perhaps relating to far earlier periods, might originally have been inscribed on this enigmatic slab of black basalt, because it, too, has not

come down to us intact. Since 1887 the largest single part has been preserved in the Museum of Palermo in Sicily; a second piece is on display in Egypt in the Cairo Museum; and a third much smaller fragment

is in the Petrie Collection at the University of London.³³ These are reckoned by archaeologists to have been broken out of the centre of a

monolith which would originally have measured about seven feet long by

two feet high (stood on its long side).³⁴ Furthermore, as one authority has

observed:

It is quite possible—even probable—that many more pieces of this invaluable

monument remain, if we only knew where to look. As it is we are faced with the

tantalising knowledge that a record of the name of every king of the Archaic

Period existed, together with the number of years of his reign and the chief events

which occurred during his occupation of the throne. And these events were

compiled in the Fifth Dynasty, only about 700 years after the Unification, so that

the margin of error would in all probability have been very small ...'³⁵

The late Professor Walter Emery, whose words these are, was naturally

concerned about the absence of much-needed details concerning the

Archaic Period, 3200 BC to 2900 BC,³⁶ the focus of his own specialist

interests. We should also spare a thought, however, for what an intact

³¹ Ibid., p. 86. See also *Egyptian Mysteries*, p. 68.

32 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 5; *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 200.

33 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 5; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 9:81.

34 *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 200.

35 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 5.

36 *Egypt to the End of the Old Kingdom*, p. 12.

373

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Palermo Stone might have told us about even earlier epochs,
notably Zep

Tepi—the golden age of the gods.

The deeper we penetrate into the myths and memories of Egypt's
long

past, and the closer we approach to the fabled First Time, the
stranger

the landscapes that surround us become ... as we shall see.

374

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 44

Gods of the First Time

According to Heliopolitan theology, the nine original gods who appeared

in Egypt in the First Time were Ra, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis,

Nephthys and Set. The offspring of these deities included well-known figures such as Horus and Anubis. In addition, other companies of gods

were recognized, notably at Memphis and Hermopolis, where there were

important and very ancient cults dedicated to Ptah and to Thoth.¹ These

First Time deities were all in one sense or another gods of creation who

had given shape to chaos through their divine will. Out of that chaos they

formed and populated the sacred land of Egypt,² wherein, for many thousands of years, they ruled among men as divine pharaohs.³

What was 'chaos'?

The Heliopolitan priests who spoke to the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus in the first century BC put forward the thought-provoking

suggestion that 'chaos' was a flood—identified by Diodorus with the earth-destroying flood of Deucalion, the Greek Noah figure:4

In general, they say that if in the flood which occurred in the time of Deucalion

most living things were destroyed, it is probable that the inhabitants of southern

Egypt survived rather than any others ... Or if, as some maintain, the destruction

of living things was complete and the earth then brought forth again new forms of

animals, nevertheless, even on such a supposition, the first genesis of living

things fittingly attaches to this country ...5

Why should Egypt have been so blessed? Diodorus was told that it had

something to do with its geographical situation, with the great exposure

of its southern regions to the heat of the sun, and with the vastly

increased rainfall which the myths said the world had experienced in the

aftermath of the universal deluge: 'For when the moisture from the

abundant rains which fell among other peoples was mingled with the

intense heat which prevails in Egypt itself ... the air became very well

tempered for the first generation of all living things ...'6

Curiously enough, Egypt does enjoy a special geographical situation:
as

1 *Kingship and the Gods*, pp. 181-2; *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 209, 264; *Egyptian Myths*, pp. 18-22. See also T. G. H. James, *An Introduction to Ancient Egypt*,

British Museum Publications, London, 1979, p. 125ff.

2 Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaton*, Abacus, London, 1968, p. 25: 'It was believed that the gods

had ruled in Egypt after first making it perfect.'

3 *Kingship and the Gods*, pp. 153-5; *Egyptian Myths*, pp. 18-22; *Egyptian Mysteries*, pp.

8-11; *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, pp. 10-28.

4 See Part IV.

5 *Diodorus Siculus*, volume I, p. 37.

6 Ibid.

375

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

is well known, the latitude and longitude lines which intersect just beside

the Great Pyramid (30° north and 31° east) cross more dry land than any

others.⁷ Curiously, too, at the end of the last Ice Age, when millions of

square miles of glaciation were melting in northern Europe, when rising

sea levels were flooding coastal areas all around the globe, and when the

huge volume of extra moisture released into the atmosphere through the

evaporation of the ice fields was being dumped as rain, Egypt benefited

for several thousands of years from an exceptionally humid and fertile

climate.⁸ It is not difficult to see how such a climate might indeed have

been remembered as 'well tempered for the first generation of all living

things'.

The question therefore has to be asked: whose information about the past are we receiving from Diodorus, and is the apparently accurate description of Egypt's lush climate at the end of the last Ice Age a coincidence, or is an extremely ancient tradition being transmitted to us

here—a memory, perhaps, of the First Time?

Breath of the divine serpent

Ra was believed to have been the first king of the First Time and ancient

myths say that as long as he remained young and vigorous he reigned

peacefully. The passing years took their toll on him, however, and he is

depicted at the end of his rule as an old, wrinkled, stumbling man with a

trembling mouth from which saliva ceaselessly dribbles.⁹

Shu followed Ra as king on earth, but his reign was troubled by plots and conflicts. Although he vanquished his enemies he was in the end so

ravaged by disease that even his most faithful followers revolted against

him: 'Weary of reigning, Shu abdicated in favour of his son Geb and took

refuge in the skies after a terrifying tempest which lasted nine days ...'¹⁰

Geb, the third divine pharaoh, duly succeeded Shu to the throne. His reign was also troubled and some of the myths describing what took place reflect the odd idiom of the Pyramid Texts in which a non-technical

vocabulary seems to wrestle with complex technical and scientific imagery. For example, one particularly striking tradition speaks of a

'golden box' in which Ra had deposited a number of objects—
described,

respectively, as his 'rod' (or cane), a lock of his hair, and his *uraeus*
(a

rearing cobra with its hood extended, fashioned out of gold, which
was

worn on the royal head-dress).¹¹

A powerful and dangerous talisman, this box, together with its
bizarre

7 *Mystic Places*, Time-Life Books, 1987, p. 62.

8 *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt*, p. 13; *Egypt before the
Pharaohs*, pp. 27, 261.

9 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 11.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

376

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

contents, remained enclosed in a fortress on the 'eastern frontier' of

Egypt until a great many years after Ra's ascent to heaven. When
Geb

came to power he ordered that it should be brought to him and
unsealed

in his presence. In the instant that the box was opened a bolt of fire

(described as the 'breath of the divine serpent') ushered from it, struck

dead all Geb's companions and gravely burned the god-king himself.¹²

It is tempting to wonder whether what we are confronted by here might

not be a garbled account of a malfunctioning man-made device: a

confused, awe-stricken recollection of a monstrous instrument devised by

the scientists of a lost civilization. Weight is added to such extreme

speculations when we remember that this is by no means the only golden

box in the ancient world that functioned like a deadly and unpredictable

machine. It has a number of quite unmissable similarities to the Hebrews'

enigmatic Ark of the Covenant (which also struck innocent people dead

with bolts of fiery energy, which also was 'overlaid round about with

gold', and which was said to have contained not only the two tablets of

the Ten Commandments but 'the golden pot that had manna, and

Aaron's rod.')¹³

A proper look at the implications of all these weird and wonderful

boxes (and of other 'technological' artefacts referred to in ancient traditions) is beyond the scope of this book. For our purposes here it is

sufficient to note that a peculiar atmosphere of dangerous and quasi-technological wizardry seems to surround many of the gods of the Heliopolitan Ennead.

Isis, for example (wife and sister of Osiris and mother of Horus) carries

a strong whiff of the science lab. According to the Chester Beatty Papyrus

in the British Museum she was 'a clever woman ... more intelligent than

countless gods ... She was ignorant of nothing in heaven and earth.'¹⁴

Renowned for her skilful use of witchcraft and magic, Isis was particularly

remembered by the Ancient Egyptians as 'strong of tongue', that is being

in command of words of power 'which she knew with correct pronunciation, and halted not in her speech, and was perfect both in giving the command and in saying the word'.¹⁵ In short, she was believed,

by means of her voice alone, to be capable of bending reality and

overriding the laws of physics.

These same powers, though perhaps in greater degree, were attributed

to the wisdom god Thoth who although not a member of the Heliopolitan

Ennead is recognized in the Turin Papyrus and other ancient records as

the sixth (or sometimes as the seventh) divine pharaoh of Egypt.¹⁶

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Hebrews* 9:4. For details of the Ark's baleful powers see Graham Hancock, *The Sign*

and the Seal, Mandarin, London, 1993, Chapter 12, p. 273ff.

¹⁴ Cited in *Egyptian Myths*, p. 44.

¹⁵ Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, Kegan Paul, Trench, London, 1901, p. 5; *The*

Gods of the Egyptians, volume II, p. 214.

¹⁶ *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 27. If Set's usurpation is included as a

377

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Frequently represented on temple and tomb walls as an ibis, or an ibis-

headed man, Thoth was venerated as the regulative force responsible for

all heavenly calculations and annotations, as the lord and multiplier of

time, the inventor of the alphabet and the patron of magic. He was

particularly associated with astronomy, mathematics, surveying and

geometry, and was described as 'he who reckons in heaven, the counter

of the stars and the measurer of the earth'.¹⁷ He was also regarded as a

deity who understood the mysteries of 'all that is hidden under the

heavenly vault', and who had the ability to bestow wisdom on selected

individuals. It was said that he had inscribed his knowledge in secret

books and hidden these about the earth, intending that they should be

sought for by future generations but found 'only by the worthy'—who

were to use their discoveries for the benefit of mankind.¹⁸

What stands out most clearly about Thoth, therefore, in addition to his

credentials as an ancient scientist, is his role as a benefactor and

civilizer.¹⁹ In this respect he closely resembles his predecessor Osiris, the

high god of the Pyramid Texts and the fourth divine pharaoh of Egypt,

'whose name becometh *Sah* [Orion], whose leg is long, and his stride

extended, the President of the Land of the South ...'20

Osiris and the Lords of Eternity

Occasionally referred to in the texts as a *neb tem*, or 'universal master',21

Osiris is depicted as human but also superhuman, suffering but at the

same time commanding. Moreover, he expresses his essential dualism by

ruling in heaven (as the constellation of Orion) and on earth as a king

among men. Like Viracocha in the Andes and Quetzalcoatl in Central

America, his ways are subtle and mysterious. Like them, he is

exceptionally tall and always depicted wearing the curved beard of

divinity.22 And like them too, although he has supernatural powers at his

reign, we have seven divine pharaohs up to and including Thoth (i.e., Ra, Shu, Geb,

Osiris, Set, Horus, Thoth).

17 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, p. 400; Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*,

Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 22-3. see also *From Fetish to God in Ancient*

Egypt, pp. 121-2; *Egyptian Magic*, pp. 128-9; *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, pp. 27-8.

18 Manetho, quoted by the neo-Platonist Iamblichus. See Peter Lemesurier, *The Great*

Pyramid Decoded, Element Books, 1989, p. 15; *The Egyptian Hermes*, p. 33.

19 See, for example, *Diodorus Siculus*, volume I, p. 53, where Thoth (under his Greek

name of Hermes) is described as being 'endowed with unusual ingenuity for devising

things capable of improving the social life of man'.

20 *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume II, p. 307.

21 *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 179; *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*,

p. 16.

22 *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, pp. 9-10, 16; *Encyclopaedia of Ancient*

Egypt, p. 44; *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume II, pp. 130-1; *From Fetish to God in* 378

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

disposal, he avoids the use of force wherever possible.²³

We saw in Chapter Sixteen that Quetzalcoatl, the god-king of the Mexicans, was believed to have departed from Central America by sea,

sailing away on a raft of serpents. It is therefore hard to avoid a sense of

déjà vu when we read in the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* that the abode of

Osiris also 'rested on water' and had walls made of 'living serpents'.²⁴ At

the very least, the convergence of symbolism linking these two gods and

two far-flung regions is striking.

There are other obvious parallels as well.

The central details of the story of Osiris have been recounted in earlier

chapters and we need not go over them again. The reader will not have

forgotten that this god—once again like Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha—was

remembered principally as a benefactor of mankind, as a bringer of enlightenment and as a great civilizing leader.²⁵ He was credited, for example, with having abolished cannibalism and was said to have

introduced the Egyptians to agriculture—in particular to the cultivation of

wheat and barley—and to have taught them the art of fashioning agricultural implements. Since he had an especial liking for fine wines

(the myths do not say where he acquired this taste), he made a point of

‘teaching mankind the culture of the vine, as well as the way to harvest

the grape and to store the wine ...’²⁶ In addition to the gifts of good living

he brought to his subjects, Osiris helped to wean them ‘from their miserable and barbarous manners’ by providing them with a code of laws

and inaugurating the cult of the gods in Egypt.²⁷

When he had set everything in order, he handed over the control of the

kingdom to Isis, quit Egypt for many years, and roamed about the world

with the sole intention, Diodorus Siculus was told,

of visiting all the inhabited earth and teaching the race of men how to cultivate the

vine and sow wheat and barley; for he supposed that if he made men give up their

savagery and adopt a gentle manner of life he would receive immortal honours

because of the magnitude of his benefactions ...²⁸

Osiris travelled first to Ethiopia, where he taught tillage and husbandry to

the primitive hunter-gatherers he encountered. He also undertook a

number of large-scale engineering and hydraulics works: 'He built canals,

with flood gates and regulators ... he raised the river banks and took

precautions to prevent the Nile from overflowing ...'²⁹ Later he made his

Ancient Egypt, p. 190; *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 230.

²³ *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 2.

²⁴ Chapter CXXV, cited in *ibid.*, volume II, p. 81.

²⁵ See Parts II and III for Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha. A good summary of Osiris's

civilizing attributes is the *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, p. 16. See also

Diodorus Siculus, pp. 47-9; *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, pp. 1-12.

²⁶ *Diodorus Siculus*, p. 53.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 2.

²⁸ *Diodorus Siculus*, p. 55.

29 *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 11.

379

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

way to Arabia and thence to India, where he established many cities.

Moving on to Thrace he killed a barbarian king for refusing to adopt his

system of government. This was out of character; in general, Osiris was

remembered by the Egyptians for having

forced no man to carry out his instructions, but by means of gentle persuasion

and an appeal to their reason he succeeded in inducing them to practise what he

preached. Many of his wise counsels were imparted to his listeners in hymns and

songs, which were sung to the accompaniment of instruments of music.'³⁰

Once again the parallels with Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha are hard to avoid. During a time of darkness and chaos—quite possibly linked to a

flood—a bearded god, or man, materializes in Egypt (or Bolivia, or

Mexico). He is equipped with a wealth of practical and scientific skills, of

the kind associated with mature and highly developed civilizations, which

he uses unselfishly for the benefit of humanity. He is instinctively gentle

but capable of great firmness when necessary. He is motivated by a

strong sense of purpose and, after establishing his headquarters at

Heliopolis (or Tiahuanaco, or Teotihuacan), he sets forth with a select

band of companions to impose order and to reinstate the lost balance of

the world.³¹

Leaving aside for the present the issue of whether we are dealing here

with gods or men, with figments of the primitive imagination or with

flesh-and-blood beings, the fact remains that the myths *always* speak of a

company of civilizers: Viracocha has his 'companions', as have both

Quetzalcoatl and Osiris. Sometimes there are fierce internal conflicts

within these groups, and perhaps struggles for power: the battles

between Seth and Horus, and between Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl are

obvious examples. Moreover, whether the mythical events unfold in

Central America, or in the Andes, or in Egypt, the upshot is also always

pretty much the same: the civilizer is eventually plotted against and either driven out or killed.

The myths say that Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha never came back

(although, as we have seen, their return to the Americas was expected at

the time of the Spanish conquest). Osiris, on the other hand, did come

back. Although he was murdered by Set soon after the completion of his

worldwide mission to make men 'give up their savagery', he won eternal

life through his resurrection in the constellation of Orion as the all-

powerful god of the dead. Thereafter, judging souls and providing an

immortal example of responsible and benevolent kingship, he dominated

the religion (and the culture) of Ancient Egypt for the entire span of its

known history.

30 Ibid., p. 2.

31 Ibid., 2-11. For Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha see Parts II and III. Interestingly enough,

Osiris was said to have been accompanied on his civilizing mission by two 'openers of

the way': (*Diodorus Siculus* page 57), 'Anubis and Macedo, Anubis wearing a dog's skin

and Macedo the fore-parts of a wolf ...'

380

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Serene stability

Who can guess what the civilizations of the Andes and of Mexico might

have achieved if they too had benefited from such powerful symbolic continuity. In this respect, however, Egypt is unique. Indeed, although the

Pyramid Texts and other archaic sources recognize a period of disruption

and attempted usurpation by Set (and his seventy-two 'precessional' conspirators), they also depict the transition to the reigns of Horus, Thoth

and the later divine pharaohs as being relatively smooth and inevitable.

This transition was mimicked, through thousands of years, by the mortal kings of Egypt. From the beginning to the end, they saw

themselves as the lineal descendants and living representatives of Horus,

son of Osiris. As generation succeeded generation, it was supposed that

each deceased pharaoh was reborn in the sky as 'an Osiris' and that each

successor to the throne became a 'Horus'.³²

This simple, refined, and stable scheme *was already fully evolved and*

in place at the beginning of the First Dynasty— around 3100 BC.³³ Scholars

accept this; the majority also accept that what we are dealing with here is

a highly developed and sophisticated religion.³⁴ Strangely, very few

Egyptologists or archaeologists have questioned where and when this

religion took shape.

Is it not to defy logic to suppose that well-rounded social and

metaphysical ideas like those of the Osiris cult sprung up fully formed in

3100 BC, or that they could have taken such perfect shape in the 300

years which Egyptologists sometimes grudgingly allow for them to have

done so?³⁵ There must have been a far longer period of development than

that, spread over several thousands rather than several hundreds of years. Moreover, as we have seen, every surviving record in which the

Ancient Egyptians speak directly about their past asserts that their civilization was a legacy of 'the gods' who were 'the first to hold sway in

Egypt'.³⁶

The records are not internally consistent: some attribute much greater

antiquity to the civilization of Egypt than others. All, however, clearly and

firmly direct our attention to an epoch far, far in the past—anything from

8000 to almost 40,000 years before the foundation of the First Dynasty.

Archaeologists insist that no material artefacts have ever been found in

Egypt to suggest that an evolved civilization existed at such early dates,

but this is not strictly true. As we saw in Part VI, a handful of objects and

structures exist which have not yet been conclusively dated by any

32 *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume II, p. 273. See also in general, *The*

Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts.

33 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 122; *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 98.

34 See, in general, *Kingship and the Gods*; *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*; *The Gods*

of the Egyptians.

35 *Archaic Egypt*, p. 38.

36 *Manetho*, p. 5.

381

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

scientific means.

The ancient city of Abydos conceals one of the most extraordinary of these undatable enigmas ...

382

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 45

The Works of Men and Gods

Among the numberless ruined temples of Ancient Egypt, there is one that

is unique not only for its marvellous state of preservation, which (rare indeed!) includes an intact roof, but for the fine quality of the many acres

of beautiful reliefs that decorate its towering walls. Located at Abydos,

eight miles west of the present course of the Nile, this is the Temple of

Seti I, a monarch of the illustrious nineteenth Dynasty, who ruled from

1306-1290 BC.¹

Seti is known primarily as the father of a famous son: Ramesses II

(1290-1224 BC), the pharaoh of the biblical Exodus.² In his own right,

however, he was a major historical figure who conducted extensive

military campaigns outside Egypt's borders, who was responsible for the

construction of several fine buildings and who carefully and

conscientiously refurbished and restored many older ones.³ His temple at

Abydos, which was known evocatively as 'The House of Millions of Years',

was dedicated to Osiris,⁴ the 'Lord of Eternity', of whom it was said in the

Pyramid Texts:

You have gone, but you will return, you have slept, but you will awake, you have

died, but you will live ... Betake yourself to the waterway, fare upstream ... travel

about Abydos in this spirit-form of yours which the gods commanded to belong to

you.⁵

Atef Crown

It was eight in the morning, a bright, fresh hour in these latitudes, when I

entered the hushed gloom of the Temple of Seti I. Sections of its walls

were floor-lit by low-wattage electric bulbs; otherwise the only

illumination was that which the pharaoh's architects had originally

planned: a few isolated shafts of sunlight that penetrated through slits in

the outer masonry like beams of divine radiance. Hovering among the

motes of dust dancing in those beams, and infiltrating the heavy stillness

of the air amid the great columns that held up the roof of the Hypostyle

1 *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.

2 Dates from *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*. For further data on Ramesses II as the pharaoh of

the exodus see Profuses K. A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of*

Ramesses II, Aris and Phillips, Warminster, 1982, pp. 70-1.

3 See, for example, *A Biographical Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 135-7.

4 *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 384.

5 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, pp. 285, 253.

383

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Hall, it was easy to imagine that the spirit-form of Osiris could still be present. Indeed, this was more than just imagination because Osiris was

physically present in the astonishing symphony of reliefs that adorned

the walls—reliefs that depicted the once and future civilizer-king in his

role as god of the dead, enthroned and attended by Isis, his beautiful and

mysterious sister.

In these scenes Osiris wore a variety of different and elaborate crowns

which I studied closely as I walked from relief to relief. Crowns similar to

these in many respects had been important parts of the wardrobe of all

the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt, at least on the evidence of reliefs

depicting them. Strangely, however, in all the years of intensive

excavations, archaeologists had not found a single example of a royal

crown, or a small part of one, let alone a specimen of the convoluted ceremonial headdresses associated with the gods of the First Time.⁶

Of particular interest was the Atef crown. Incorporating the *uraeus*, the

royal serpent symbol (which in Mexico was a rattlesnake but in Egypt was

a hooded cobra poised to strike), the central core of this strange

contraption was recognizable as an example of the *hedjet*, the white

skittle-shaped war helmet of upper Egypt (again known only from reliefs).

Rearing up on either side of this core were what seemed to be two thin

leaves of metal, and at the front was an attached device, consisting of

two wavy blades, which scholars normally describe as a pair of rams' horns.⁷

In several reliefs of the Seti I Temple Osiris was depicted wearing the Atef crown, which seemed to stand about two feet high. According to the

Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, it had been given to him by Ra: 'But

on the very first day that he wore it Osiris had much suffering in his head,

and when Ra returned in the evening he found Osiris with his head angry

and swollen from the heat of the Atef crown. Then Ra proceeded to let

out the pus and the blood.'⁸

All this was stated in a matter-of-fact way, but—when you stopped to think about it—what kind of crown was it that radiated heat and caused

the skin to haemorrhage and break out in pustulant sores?

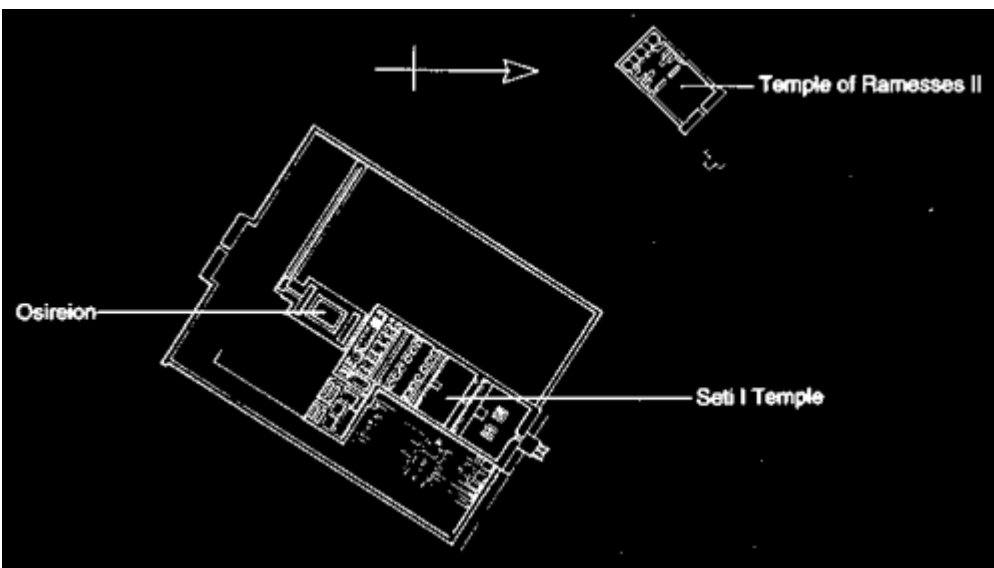
6 *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 386.

7 *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 59.

8 Chapter 175 of the *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, cited in *Myth and Symbol in*

Ancient Egypt, p. 137.

384



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Abydos.

Seventeen centuries of kings

I walked on into the deeper darkness, eventually finding my way to the

Gallery of the Kings. It led off from the eastern edge of the inner

Hypostyle Hall about 200 feet from the entrance to the temple.

To pass through the Gallery was to pass through time itself. On the wall

to my left was a list of 120 of the gods of Ancient Egypt, together with

the names of their principal sanctuaries. On my right, covering an area of

perhaps ten feet by six feet, were the names of the 76 pharaohs who had

preceded Seti I to the throne; each name was carved in hieroglyphs inside

an oval cartouche.

This tableau was known as the 'Abydos King List'. Glowing with colours

of molten gold, it was designed to be read from left to right and was

divided into five vertical and three horizontal registers. It covered a grand

expanse of almost 1700 years, beginning around 3000 BC with the reign

of Menes, first king of the First Dynasty, and ending with Seti's own reign

around 1300 BC. At the extreme left stood two figures exquisitely carved

in high relief: Seti and his young son, the future Ramesses II.

Hypogeum

Belonging to the same class of historical documents as the Turin Papyrus

and the Palermo Stone, the list spoke eloquently of the continuity of tradition. An inherent part of that tradition, was the belief or memory of a

First Time, long, long ago, when the gods had ruled in Egypt.
Principal

among those gods was Osiris, and it was therefore appropriate that the

Gallery of the Kings should provide access to a second corridor, leading

to the rear of the temple where a marvellous building was located—one

385

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

associated with Osiris from the beginning of written records in Egypt⁹ and

described by the Greek geographer Strabo (who visited Abydos in the first

century BC) as ‘a remarkable structure built of solid stone ... [containing] a

spring which lies at a great depth, so that one descends to it down

vaulted galleries made of monoliths of surpassing size and workmanship.

There is a canal leading to the place from the great river ...'¹⁰

A few hundred years after Strabo's visit, when the religion of Ancient Egypt had been supplanted by the new cult of Christianity, the silt of the

river and the sands of the desert began to drift into the Osirion, filling it

foot by foot, century by century, until its upright monoliths and huge lintels were buried and forgotten. And so it remained, out of sight and out of mind, until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the archaeologists Flinders Petrie and Margaret Murray began excavations. In

their 1903 season of digging they uncovered parts of a hall and passageway, lying in the desert about 200 feet south-west of the Seti I

Temple and built in the recognizable architectural style of the Nineteenth

Dynasty. However, sandwiched between these remains and the rear of the

Temple, they also found unmistakable signs that 'a large underground

building' lay concealed.¹¹ 'This hypogaeum', wrote Margaret Murray,

'appears to Professor Petrie to be the place that Strabo mentions, usually

called Strabo's Well.'¹² This was good guesswork on the part of Petrie and

Murray. Shortage of cash, however, meant that their theory of a buried

building was not tested until the digging season of 1912-13. Then, under

the direction of Professor Naville of the Egypt Exploration Fund, a long

transverse chamber was cleared, at the end of which, to the north-east,

was found a massive stone gateway made up of cyclopean blocks of granite and sandstone.

The next season, 1913-14, Naville and his team returned with 600 local

helpers and diligently cleared the whole of the huge underground building:

What we discovered [Naville wrote] is a gigantic construction of about 100 feet in

length and 60 in width, built with the most enormous stones that may be seen in

Egypt. In the four sides of the enclosure walls are cells, 17 in number, of the

height of a man and without ornamentation of any kind. The building itself is

divided into three naves, the middle one being wider than those of the sides; the

division is produced by two colonnades made of huge granite monoliths

supporting architraves of equal size.¹³

Naville commented with some astonishment on one block he measured in

the corner of the building's northern nave, a block more than twenty-five

⁹ See Henry Frankfort, *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, 39th Memoir of the Egypt

Exploration Society, London, 1933, p. 25.

¹⁰ *The Geography of Strabo*, volume VIII, pp. 111-13.

¹¹ Margaret A. Murray, *The Osireion at Abydos*, Egyptian Research Account, ninth year

(1903), Bernard Quaritch, London, 1904, p. 2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *The Times*, London, 17 March 1914.

386

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

feet long.¹⁴ Equally surprising was the fact that the cells cut into the enclosure walls had no floors, but turned out, as the excavations went

deeper, to be filled with increasingly moist sand and earth:

The cells are connected by a narrow ledge between two and three feet wide; there

is a ledge also on the opposite side of the nave, but no floor at all, and in digging

to a depth of 12 feet we reached infiltrated water. Even below the great gateway

there is no floor, and when there was water in front of it the cells were probably

reached with a small boat.¹⁵

The most ancient stone building in Egypt

Water, water, everywhere—this seemed to be the theme of the Osireion,

which lay at the bottom of the huge crater Naville and his men had

excavated in 1914. It was positioned some 50 feet below the level of the

floor of the Seti I Temple, almost flush with the water-table, and was

approached by a modern stairway curving down to the south-east. Having

descended this stairway, I passed under the hulking lintel slabs of the

great gateway Naville (and Strabo) had described and crossed a narrow

wooden footbridge—again modern—which brought me to a large

sandstone plinth.

Measuring about 80 feet in length by 40 in width, this plinth was composed of enormous paving blocks and was entirely surrounded by

water. Two pools, one rectangular and the other square, had been cut

into the plinth along the centre of its long axis and at either end

stairways led down to a depth of about 12 feet below the water level. The

plinth also supported the two massive colonnades Naville mentioned in

his report, each of which consisted of five chunky rose-coloured granite

monoliths about eight feet square by 12 feet high and weighing, on average, around 100 tons.¹⁶ The tops of these huge columns were

spanned by granite lintels and there was evidence that the whole building

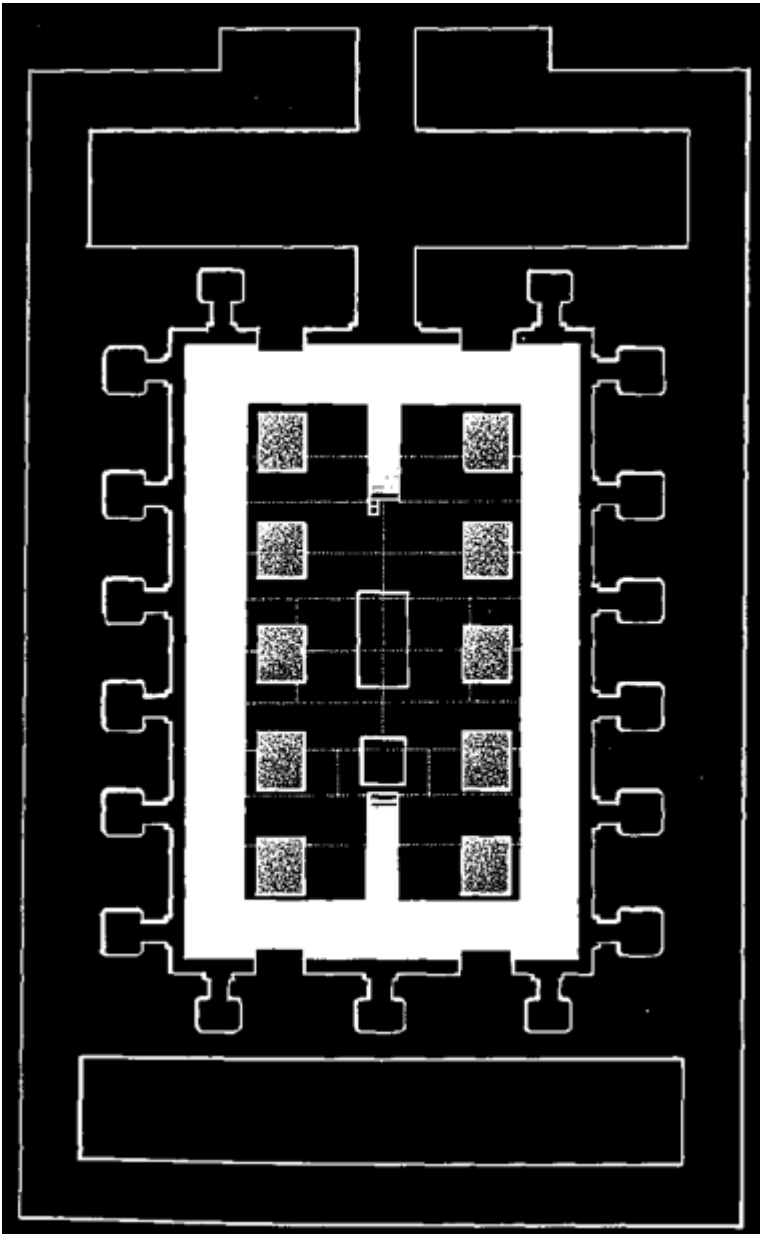
had once been roofed over with a series of even larger monolithic slabs.¹⁷

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 *Traveller's Key to Ancient Egypt*, p. 391.

17 *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, p. 18.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Plan of the Osireion.

To get a proper understanding of the structure of the Osireion, I found

it helpful to raise myself directly above it in my mind's eye, so that I

could look down on it. This exercise was assisted by the absence of the

original roof which made it easier to envisage the whole edifice in plan.

Also helpful was the fact that water had now seeped up to fill all of the

building's pools, cells and channels to a depth of a few inches below the

lip of the central plinth, as the original designers had apparently intended

388

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

it should.¹⁸

Looking down in this manner, it was immediately apparent that the plinth formed a rectangular island, surrounded on all four sides by a water-filled moat about 10 feet wide. The moat was contained by an immense, rectangular enclosure wall, no less than *20 feet thick*,¹⁹ made of

very large blocks of red sandstone disposed in polygonal jigsaw-puzzle

patterns. Into the huge thickness of this wall were set the 17 cells mentioned in Naville's report. Six lay to the east, six to the west, two to

the south and three to the north. Off the central of the three northern cells lay a long transverse chamber, roofed with and composed of limestone. A similar transverse chamber, also of limestone but no longer

with an intact roof, lay immediately south of the great gateway. Finally,

the whole structure was enclosed within an outer wall of limestone, thus

completing a sequence of inter-nested rectangles, i.e., from the outside

in, wall, wall, moat, plinth.

Another notable and outstandingly unusual feature of the Osireion was

that it was not even approximately aligned to the cardinal points. Instead,

like the Way of the Dead at Teotihuacan in Mexico, it was oriented to the

east of due north. Since Ancient Egypt had been a civilization that could

and normally did achieve precise alignments for its buildings, it seemed

to me improbable that this apparently skewed orientation was accidental.

Moreover, although 50 feet higher, the Seti I Temple was oriented along

exactly the same axis—and again not by accident. The question was:

which was the older building? Had the axis of the Osireion been predetermined by the axis of the Temple or vice versa? This, it turned

out, was an issue over which considerable controversy, now long forgotten, had once raged. In a debate which had many connections with

that surrounding the Sphinx and the Valley Temple at Giza, eminent archaeologists had initially argued that the Osireion was a building of truly immense antiquity, a view expressed by Professor Naville in the *London Times* of 17 March 1914:

This monument raises several important questions. As to its date, its great

similarity with the Temple of the Sphinx [as the Valley Temple was then known]

shows it to be of the same epoch when building was made with enormous stones

without any ornament. This is characteristic of the oldest architecture in Egypt. I

should even say that we may call it the most ancient stone building in Egypt.²⁰

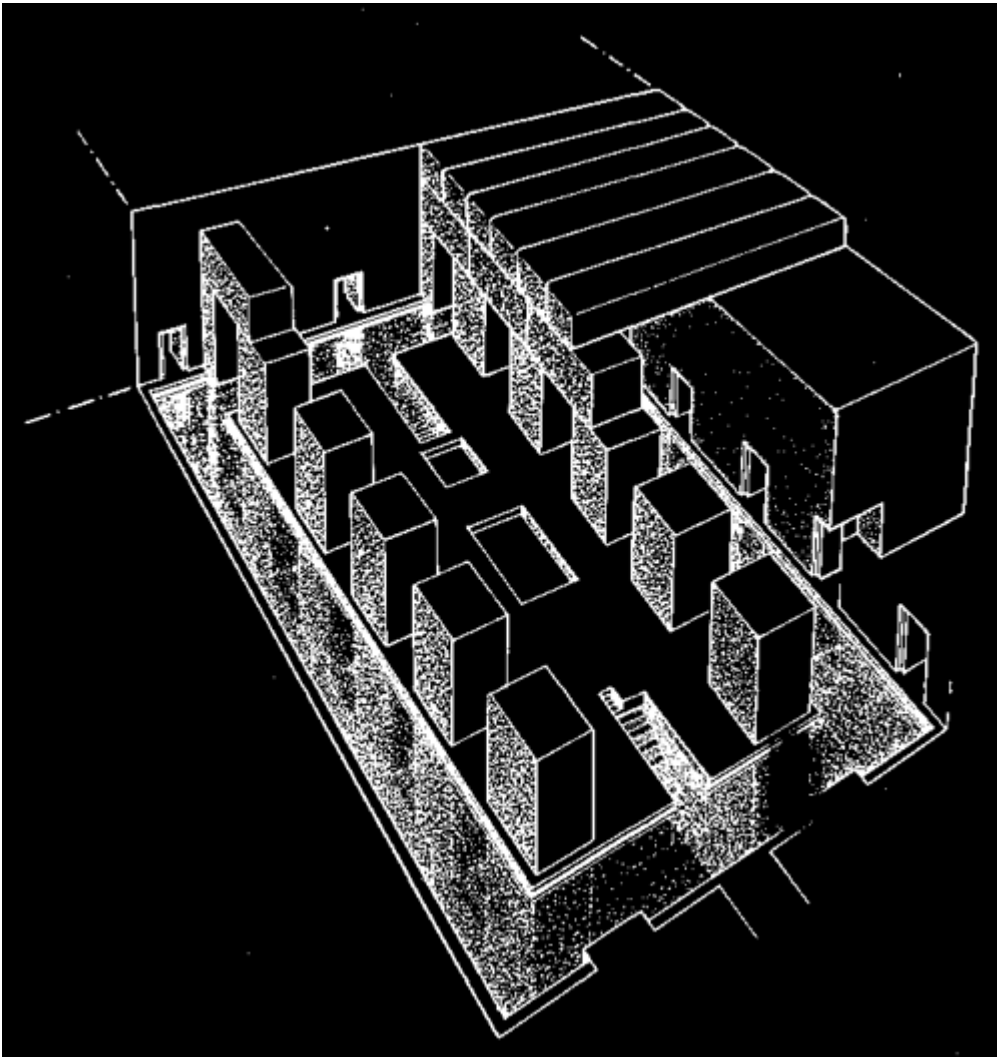
18 *Ibid.*, p. 28-9.

19 E. Naville, 'Excavations at Abydos: The Great Pool and the Tomb of Osiris', *Journal of*

Egyptian Archaeology, volume I, 1914, p. 160.

20 *The Times*, London, 17 March 1914.

389



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Reconstruction of the Osireion.

Describing himself as overawed by the 'grandeur and stern simplicity' of

the monument's central hall, with its remarkable granite monoliths, and

by 'the power of those ancients who could bring from a distance and move such gigantic blocks', Naville made a suggestion concerning the

function the Osireion might originally have been intended to serve:

'Evidently this huge construction was a large reservoir where water was

stored during the high Nile ... It is curious that what we may consider as a

beginning in architecture is neither a temple nor a tomb, but a gigantic

pool, a waterwork ...²¹

Curious indeed, and well worth investigating further; something Naville

hoped to do the following season. Unfortunately, the First World War

intervened and no archaeology could be undertaken in Egypt for several

years. As a result, it was not until 1925 that the Egypt Exploration Fund

was able to send out another mission, which was led not by Naville but by

a young Egyptologist named Henry Frankfort.

21 Ibid.

390

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Frankfort's facts

Later to enjoy great prestige and influence as professor of Pre-Classical

Antiquity at the University of London, Frankfort spent several consecutive

digging seasons re-clearing and thoroughly excavating the Osireion

between 1925 and 1930. During the course of this work he made

discoveries which, so far as he was concerned, 'settled the date of the

building':

1 A granite dovetail in position at the top of the southern side of the main entrance to the central hall, which was inscribed with the cartouche of Seti I.

2 A similar dovetail in position inside the eastern wall of the central hall.

3 Astronomical scenes and inscriptions by Seti I carved in relief on the

ceiling of the northern transverse chamber.

4 The remains of similar scenes in the southern transverse chamber.

5 An ostrakon (piece of broken potsherd) found in the entrance passage

and bearing the legend 'Seti is serviceable to Osiris'.²²

The reader will recall the lemming behaviour which led to a dramatic change of scholarly opinion about the antiquity of the Sphinx and the Valley Temple (due to the discovery of a few statues and a single cartouche which seemed to imply some sort of connection with Khafre).

Frankfort's finds at Abydos caused a similar *volte-face* over the antiquity

of the Osireion. In 1914 it was 'the most ancient stone building in Egypt'.

By 1933, it had been beamed forward in time to the reign of Seti I—around 1300 BC—whose cenotaph it was now believed to be.²³

Within a decade, the standard Egyptological texts began to print the attribution to Seti I as though it were a fact, verifiable by experience or

observation. It is not a fact, however, merely Frankfort's interpretation of

the evidence he had found.

The only facts are that certain inscriptions and decorations left by Seti

appear in an otherwise completely anonymous structure. One plausible

explanation is that the structure must have been built by Seti, as

Frankfort proposed. The other possibility is that the half-hearted and scanty decorations, cartouches and inscriptions found by Frankfort could

have been placed in the Osireion as part of a renovation and repair operation undertaken in Seti's time (implying that the structure was by

then ancient, as Naville and others had proposed).

What are the merits of these mutually contradictory propositions which

22 *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, pp. 4, 25, 68-80.

23 *Ibid.*, in general.

391

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

identify the Osireion as (a) the oldest building in Egypt, and (b) a relatively late New Kingdom structure?

Proposition (b)—that it is the cenotaph of Seti I—is the only attribution

accepted by Egyptologists. On close inspection, however, it rests on the

circumstantial evidence of the cartouches and inscriptions which prove

nothing. Indeed part of this evidence appears to contradict Frankfort's

case. The ostracon bearing the legend 'Seti is serviceable to Osiris'

sounds less like praise for the works of an original builder than praise for

a restorer who had renovated, and perhaps added to, an ancient structure

identified with the First Time god Osiris. And another awkward little

matter has also been overlooked. The south and north 'transverse

chambers', which contain Seti I's detailed decorations and inscriptions, lie

outside the twenty-foot-thick enclosure wall which so adamantly defines

the huge, undecorated megalithic core of the building. This had raised

the reasonable suspicion in Naville's mind (though Frankfort chose to

ignore it) that the two chambers concerned were 'not contemporaneous

with the rest of the building' but had been added much later during the

reign of Seti I, 'probably when he built his own temple'.²⁴

To cut a long story short, therefore, everything about proposition (b) is

based in one way or another on Frankfort's not necessarily infallible interpretation of various bits and pieces of possibly intrusive evidence.

Proposition (a)—that the core edifice of the Osireion had been built millennia before Seti's time—rests on the nature of the architecture itself.

As Naville observed, the Osireion's similarity to the Valley Temple at Giza

'showed it to be of the same epoch when building was made with enormous stones'. Likewise, until the end of her life, Margaret Murray

remained convinced that the Osireion was not a cenotaph at all (least of

all Seti's). She said,

It was made for the celebration of the mysteries of Osiris, and so far is unique

among all the surviving buildings of Egypt. It is clearly early, for the great blocks

of which it is built are of the style of the Old Kingdom; the simplicity of the actual

building also points to it being of that early date. The decoration was added by

Seti I, who in that way laid claim to the building, but seeing how often a Pharaoh

claimed the work of his predecessors by putting his name on it, this fact does not

carry much weight. It is the style of the building, the type of the masonry, the

tooling of the stone, and not the name of a king, which date a building in Egypt.²⁵

This was an admonition Frankfort might well have paid more attention to,

for as he bemusedly observed of his 'cenotaph', 'It has to be admitted

that no similar building is known from the Nineteenth Dynasty.'²⁶

Indeed it is not just a matter of the Nineteenth Dynasty. Apart from the

Valley Temple and other Cyclopean edifices on the Giza plateau, no other

building remotely resembling the Osireion is known from *any* other

²⁴ 'Excavations at Abydos', pp. 164-5.

²⁵ *The Splendour that was Egypt*, pp. 160-1.

²⁶ *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, p. 23.

392

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

epoch of Egypt's long history. This handful of supposedly Old Kingdom

structures, built out of giant megaliths, seems to belong in a unique category. They resemble one another much more than they resemble any

other known style of architecture and in all cases there are question-marks over their identity.

Isn't this precisely what one would expect of buildings not erected by any historical pharaoh but dating back to prehistoric times? Doesn't it make sense of the mysterious way in which the Sphinx and the Valley

Temple, and now the Osireion as well, seem to have become vaguely

connected with the names of particular pharaohs (Khafre and Seti I), without ever yielding a single piece of evidence that clearly and unequivocally *proves* those pharaohs built the structures concerned?

Aren't the tenuous links much more indicative of the work of restorers

seeking to attach themselves to ancient and venerable monuments than

of the original architects of those monuments—whoever they might have

been and in whatever epoch they might have lived?

Setting sail across seas of sand and time

Before leaving Abydos, there was one other puzzle that I wanted to remind myself of. It lay buried in the desert, about a kilometre north-west

of the Osireion, across sands littered with the rolling, cluttered tumuli of

ancient graveyards.

Out among these cemeteries, many of which dated back to early dynastic and pre-dynastic times, the jackal gods Anubis and Upuaut had

traditionally reigned supreme. Openers of the way, guardians of the spirits of the dead, I knew that they had played a central role in the mysteries of Osiris that had been enacted each year at Abydos—apparently throughout the span of Ancient Egyptian history.

It seemed to me that there was a sense in which they guarded the mysteries still. For what was the Osireion if was not a huge, unsolved

mystery that deserved closer scrutiny than it has received from the scholars whose job it is to look into these matters? And what was the burial in the desert of twelve high-prowed, seagoing ships if not also a

mystery that cried out, loudly, for solution?

It was the burial place of those ships I was now crossing the cemeteries

of the jackal gods to see:

The Guardian, London, 21 December 1991: A fleet of 5000-year-old royal ships

has been found buried eight miles from the Nile. American and Egyptian

archaeologists discovered the 12 large wooden boats at Abydos ... Experts said

the boats—which are 50 to 60 feet long—are about 5000 years old, making them

Egypt's earliest royal ships and among the earliest boats found anywhere ... The

experts say the ships, discovered in September, were probably meant for burial so

the souls of the pharaohs could be transported on them. 'We never expected to

find such a fleet, especially so far from the Nile,' said David O'Connor, the

expedition leader and curator of the Egyptian Section of the University Museum of

393

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the University of Pennsylvania ...27

The boats were buried in the shadow of a gigantic mud-brick enclosure,

thought to have been the mortuary temple of a Second Dynasty pharaoh

named Khasekhemwy, who had ruled Egypt in the twenty-seventh century

BC.28 O'Connor, however, was certain that they were not associated directly with Khasekhemwy but rather with the nearby (and largely ruined)

'funerary-cult enclosure built for Pharaoh Djer early in Dynasty I. The boat

graves are not likely to be earlier than this and may in fact have been built for Djer, but this remains to be proven.'²⁹

A sudden strong gust of wind blew across the desert, scattering sheets

of sand. I took refuge for a while in the lee of the looming walls of the Khasekhemwy enclosure, close to the point where the University of

Pennsylvania archaeologists had, for legitimate security reasons, reburied

the twelve mysterious boats they had stumbled on in 1991. They had hoped to return in 1992 to continue the excavations, but there had been

various hitches and, in 1993, the dig was still being postponed.

In the course of my research O'Connor had sent me the official report

of the 1991 season,³⁰ mentioning in passing that some of the boats might

have been as much as 72 feet in length.³¹ He also noted that the boat-

shaped brick graves in which they were enclosed, which would have risen

well above the level of the surrounding desert in early dynastic times, must have produced quite an extraordinary effect when they were new:

Each grave had originally been thickly coated with mud plaster and whitewash so

the impression would have been of twelve (or more) huge 'boats' moored out in

the desert, gleaming brilliantly in the Egyptian sun. The notion of their being

moored was taken so seriously that an irregularly shaped small boulder was found

placed near the 'prow' or 'stern' of several boat graves. These boulders could not

have been there naturally or by accident; their placement seems deliberate, not

random. We can think of them as 'anchors' intended to help 'moor' the boats.³²

Like the 140-foot ocean-going vessel found buried beside the Great Pyramid at Giza (see Chapter Thirty-three), one thing was immediately

clear about the Abydos boats—they were of an advanced design capable

of riding out the most powerful waves and the worst weather of the open

seas. According to Cheryl Haldane, a nautical archaeologist at Texas A-

and-M University, they showed ‘a high degree of technology combined

with grace’.³³ Exactly as was the case with the Pyramid boat, therefore

(but at least 500 years earlier) the Abydos fleet seemed to indicate that a

people able to draw upon the accumulated experiences of a long tradition

²⁷ *Guardian*, London, 21 December 1991.

²⁸ David O’Connor, ‘Boat Graves and Pyramid Origins’, in *Expedition*, volume 33, No. 3,

1991, p. 7ff.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

³⁰ Sent to me by fax 27 January 1993.

³¹ David O’Connor, ‘Boat Graves and Pyramid Origins’, p. 12.

32 Ibid., p. 11-12 .

33 *Guardian*, 21 December 1991.

394

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

of seafaring had been present in Egypt from the very beginning of its

3000 year history. Moreover I knew that the earliest wall paintings found

in the Nile Valley, dating back perhaps as much as 1500 years before the

burial of the Abydos fleet (to around 4500 BC) showed the same long,

sleek, high-prowed vessels in action.³⁴

Could an experienced race of ancient seafarers have become involved

with the indigenous inhabitants of the Nile Valley at some indeterminate

period before the official beginning of history at around 3000 BC?

Wouldn't this explain Egypt's curious and paradoxical—but nonetheless

enduring—obsession with ships in the desert (and references to what

sounded like sophisticated ships in the Pyramid Texts, including one said

to have been more than 2000 feet long)?³⁵

In raising these conjectures, I did not doubt that religious symbolism had existed in Ancient Egypt in which, as scholars endlessly pointed out,

ships had been designated as vessels for the pharaoh's soul.

Nevertheless that symbolism did not solve the problem posed by the high

level of technological achievement of the buried ships; such evolved and

sophisticated designs called for a long period of development. Wasn't it

worth looking into the possibility—even if only to rule it out—that the

Giza and Abydos vessels could have been parts of a cultural legacy, not

of a land-loving, riverside-dwelling, agricultural people like the

indigenous Ancient Egyptians but of an advanced seafaring nation?

Such seafarers could have been expected to be navigators who would

have known how to set a course by the stars and who would perhaps also

have developed the skills necessary to draw up accurate maps and charts

of the oceans they had traversed.

Might they also have been architects and stonemasons whose characteristic medium had been polygonal, megalithic blocks like those

of the Valley Temple and the Osireion?

And might they have been associated in some way with the legendary

gods of the First Time, said to have brought to Egypt not only civilization

and astronomy and architecture, and the knowledge of mathematics and

writing, but a host of other useful skills and gifts, by far the most notable

and the most significant of which had been the gift of agriculture?

There is evidence of an astonishingly early period of agricultural

advance and experimentation in the Nile Valley at about the end of the

last Ice Age in the northern hemisphere. The characteristics of this great

34 See Cairo Museum, Gallery 54, wall-painting of ships from Badarian period c. 4500 BC.

35 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 192, Utt. 519: 'O Morning Star, Horus of the

Netherworld ... you having a soul and appearing in front of your boat of 770 cubits ...

Take me with you in the cabin of your boat.'

395

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Egyptian 'leap forward' suggest that it could only have resulted from an

influx of new ideas from some as yet unidentified source.

396

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 46

The Eleventh Millennium BC

If it were not for the powerful mythology of Osiris, and if this civilizing, scientific, law-making deity was not remembered in particular for having

introduced domesticated crops into the Nile Valley in the remote and fabled epoch known as the First Time, it would probably not be a matter

of any great interest that at some point between 13,000 BC and 10,000 BC

Egypt enjoyed a period of what has been described as ‘precocious agricultural development’—possibly the earliest agricultural revolution

anywhere in the world identified with certainty by historians.¹

As we saw in recent chapters, sources such as the Palermo Stone,

Manetho and the Turin Papyrus contain several different and at times

contradictory chronologies. All these chronologies nevertheless agree on

a very ancient date for the First Time of Osiris: the golden age when the

gods were believed to have ruled in Egypt. In addition, the sources

demonstrate a striking convergence over the importance they accord to

the *eleventh millennium BC* in particular,² the precessional Age of Leo

when the great ice sheets of the northern hemisphere were undergoing

their final, ferocious meltdown.

Perhaps coincidentally, evidence unearthed since the 1970s by

geologists, archaeologists and prehistorians like Michael Hoffman, Fekri

Hassan and Professor Fred Wendorf has confirmed that the eleventh

millennium BC was indeed an important period in Egyptian prehistory,

during which immense and devastating floods swept repeatedly down the

Nile Valley.³ Fekri Hassan has speculated that this prolonged series of

natural disasters, which reached a crescendo around or just after 10,500

BC (and continued to recur periodically until about 9000 BC) might have

been responsible for snuffing out the early agricultural experiment.⁴

At any rate, that experiment *did* come to an end (for whatever reason),

and appears not to have been attempted again for at least another 5000

years.⁵

1 *Egypt before the Pharaohs.*, pp. 29, 88.

2 To give yet another example, here is Diodorus Siculus (first century BC) passing on

what he was told by Egyptian priests: 'The number of years from Osiris and Isis, they

say, to the reign of Alexander, who founded the city which bears his name in Egypt

[fourth century BC], is over ten thousand ...' *Diodorus Siculus*, volume I, p. 73.

3 *Egypt before The Pharaohs*, p. 85.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

5 *A History of Ancient Egypt*, p. 21.

397

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Kick-start

There is something mysterious about Egypt's so-called 'palaeolithic agricultural revolution'. Here, quoted from the standard texts (Hoffman's

Egypt before The Pharaohs and Wendorf and Schild's *Prehistory of the*

Nile Valley) are some key facts from the little that is known about this great leap forward that occurred so inexplicably towards the end of the

last Ice Age:

1 'Shortly after 13,000 BC, grinding stones and sickle blades with a glossy sheen on their bits (the result of silica from cut stems adhering

to a sickle's cutting edge) appear in late Palaeolithic tool kits ... It is clear that the grinding stones were used in preparing plant food.'

2 At many riverside sites, at exactly this time, fish stopped being a significant food source and became a negligible one, as evidenced by

the absence of fish remains: 'The decline in fishing as a source of food

is related to the appearance of a new food resource represented by ground grain. The associated pollen strongly suggests that this grain was barley, and significantly, this large grass-pollen, tentatively

identified as barley, makes a sudden appearance in the pollen profile just before the time when the first settlements were established in this

area ...'

3 'As apparently spectacular as the rise of protoagriculture in the late

Palaeolithic Nile Valley was its precipitous decline. No one knows exactly why, but after about 10,500 BC the early sickle blades and grinding disappear to be replaced throughout Egypt by Epipalaeolithic

hunting, fishing and gathering peoples who use stone tools.'⁸

Scanty though the evidence may be, it is clear in its general implications: Egypt enjoyed a golden age of agricultural plenty which began around 13,000 BC and was brought to an abrupt halt around the

middle of the eleventh millennium BC. A kick-start to the process appears

to have been given by the introduction of already domesticated barley

into the Nile Valley, immediately followed by the establishment of a number of farming settlements which exploited the new resource. The

settlements were equipped with simple but extremely effective

agricultural tools and accessories. After the eleventh millennium BC,

however, there was a prolonged relapse to more primitive ways of life.

The imagination is inclined to roam freely over such data in search of an explanation—and all such explanations can only be guesswork. What

6 *Egypt before The Pharaohs*, p. 88.

7 Fred Wendorf and Romuald Schild, *Prehistory of the Nile Valley*, Academic Press, New

York, 1976, p. 291.

8 *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, pp. 89-90.

398

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

is certain is that the none of the evidence suggests that palaeolithic

Egypt's 'agricultural revolution' could have been a local initiative. On the

contrary it feels in every way like a transplant. A transplant appears

suddenly, after all, and can be rejected equally fast if conditions change,

just as settled agriculture seems to have been rejected in ancient Egypt

after the great Nile floods of the eleventh millennium BC.

Climate Change

What was the weather like then?

We've noted in earlier chapters that the Sahara, a relatively young

desert, was green savannah until about the tenth millennium BC; this

savannah, brightened by lakes, boiling with game, extended across much

of upper Egypt. Farther north, the Delta area was marshy but dotted with

many large and fertile islands. Overall the climate was significantly cooler, cloudier and *rainier* than it is today.⁹ Indeed, for two or three thousand years before and about a thousand years after 10,500 BC it

rained and rained and rained. Then, as though marking an ecological turning-point, the floods came. When they were over, increasingly arid

conditions set in.¹⁰ This period of desiccation lasted until approximately

7000 BC when the 'Neolithic Subpluvial' began with a thousand years of

heavy rains, followed by 3000 years of moderate rainfall which once again proved ideal for agriculture: 'For a time the deserts bloomed and

human societies colonized areas that have been unable to support such

dense populations since.'¹¹

By the birth of dynastic Egypt around 3000 BC, however, the climate had

turned around again and a new period of desiccation had begun—one

that has continued until the present day.

This, then, in broad outline, is the environmental stage upon which the

mysteries of Egyptian civilization have been played out: rain and floods

between 13,000 BC and 9500 BC; a dry period until 7000 BC; rain again

(though increasingly less frequent) until about 3000 BC; thereafter a renewed and enduring dry period.

The expanse of years is great, but if one is looking for a First Time within it which might accord with the golden age of the gods, one's thoughts turn naturally to the mysterious epoch of early agricultural experimentation that shadowed the great rains and floods between 13,000 BC and 10,500 BC.

9 Ibid., p. 86.

10 Ibid., pp. 97-8.

11 Ibid., p. 161.

399

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Unseen connections?

This epoch was crucial not only for the Ancient Egyptians but for many

peoples in other areas. Indeed, as we saw in Part IV, it was the epoch of

dramatic climate shifts, rapidly rising sea levels, earth movements, floods, volcanic eruptions, bituminous rains and darkened skies that was

the most probable source of many of the great worldwide myths of universal cataclysm.

Could it also have been an epoch in which 'gods' really did walk among

men, as the legends said?

On the Bolivian Altiplano those gods were known as the Viracochas and

were linked to the astonishing megalithic city of Tiahuanaco, which may

have pre-existed the immense floods in the Andes in the eleventh millennium BC. Thereafter, according to Professor Arthur Posnansky, though the flood-waters subsided, 'the culture of the Altiplano did not again attain a high point of development but rather fell into a total and

definitive decadence.'¹²

Of course, Posnansky's conclusions are controversial and must be evaluated on their own merits. Nevertheless, it is interesting that both the

Bolivian Altiplano and Egypt should have been scoured by immense floods in the eleventh millennium BC. In both areas too, there are signs

that extraordinarily early agricultural experiments—apparently based on

introduced techniques—were attempted and then abandoned.¹³ And in

both areas important question-marks have been raised over the dating of

monuments: the Puma Punku and the Kalasasaya in Tiahuanaco, for example, which Posnansky argued might have been built as early as

15,000 BC,¹⁴ and, in Egypt, megalithic structures like the Osireion, the

Great Sphinx and the Valley Temple of Khafre at Giza, which John West

and the Boston University geologist Robert Schoch have dated on geological grounds to earlier than 10,000 BC.

Could there be an unseen connection linking all these beautiful, enigmatic monuments, the anomalous agricultural experiments of 13,000-10,000 BC, and the legends of civilizer gods like Osiris and Viracocha?

‘Where is the rest of this civilization?’

As we set out on the road from Abydos to Luxor, where we were to meet

John West, I realized that there was a sense in which all the connections

would look after themselves if the central issue of the antiquity of the monuments could be settled. In other words, if West's geological

12 See Chapter Twelve.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

400

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

evidence proved that the Sphinx was more than 12,000 years old, the

history of human civilization was going to have to be rewritten. As part of

that exciting process, all the other strange, anachronistic 'fingerprints of

the gods' that kept appearing around the world, and the sense of an

undercurrent of ancient connections linking apparently unrelated

civilizations, would begin to make sense ...

When West's evidence was presented in 1992 at the annual meeting of

the American Association for the Advancement of Science it had been

taken seriously enough to be publicly debated by the Chicago University

Egyptologist Mark Lehner, director of the Giza Mapping Project, who—to

the astonishment of almost everybody present—had been unable to come

up with a convincing refutation. ‘When you say something as complex as

the Sphinx dates to 9000 or 10,000 BC,’ Lehner had concluded:

it implies, of course, that there was a very high civilization that was capable of

producing the Sphinx at that period. The question an archaeologist has to ask,

therefore, is this: if the Sphinx was made at that time then where is the rest of this

civilization, where is the rest of this culture?¹⁵

Lehner, however, was missing the point.

If the Sphinx did date to 9000 or 10,000 BC, the onus was not on West

to produce other evidence for the existence of the civilization which

produced it, but on Egyptologists and archaeologists to explain how they

had got things so wrong, so consistently, for so long. So could West
prove the antiquity of the Sphinx?

15 AAAS Annual Meeting, 1992, Debate: How Old is the Sphinx?

401

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 47

Sphinx

'Egyptologists,' said John West, 'are the last people in the world to address any anomaly.'

Of course, there are many anomalies in Egypt. The one West was referring to at that moment, however, was the anomaly of the Fourth Dynasty pyramids: an anomaly because of what had happened during the

Third, Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. Zoser's Step Pyramid at Saqqara (Third

Dynasty) was an imposing edifice, but it was built with relatively small,

manageable blocks that five or six men working together could carry, and

its internal chambers were structurally unsound. The pyramids of the

Fifth and Sixth Dynasties (although adorned inside with the beautiful Pyramid Texts) were so poorly built and had collapsed so completely that

today most of them amount to little more than mounds of rubble. The

Fourth Dynasty pyramids at Giza, however, were wonderfully well made

and had endured the passage of thousands of years more or less intact.

It was this sequence of events, or rather its implications, that West felt

Egyptologists should have paid more attention to: 'There's a discrepancy

in the scenario that reads "building kind of rubbishy pyramids that are

structurally unsound, suddenly building absolutely unbelievable pyramids

that are structurally the most incredible things ever conceived of, and

then immediately afterwards going back to structurally unsound

pyramids." It doesn't make sense ... The parallel scenario in, say, the

auto-industry would be inventing and building the Model-T Ford, then

suddenly inventing and building the '93 Porsche and making a few of

those, then forgetting how to do that and going back to building Model-T

Fords again ... Civilizations don't work this way.'

'So what are you saying?' I asked. 'Are you saying that the Fourth

Dynasty pyramids weren't built by the Fourth Dynasty at all?'

'My gut feeling is that they weren't. They don't look like the mastabas

in front of them. They don't look like any other Fourth Dynasty stuff

either ... They don't seem to fit in ...'

'And nor does the Sphinx?'

'And nor does the Sphinx. But the big difference is that we don't have

to rely on gut feelings where the Sphinx is concerned. We can prove that

it was built long before the Fourth Dynasty ...'

John West

Santha and I had been fans of John Anthony West ever since we had first

402

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

started travelling in Egypt. His guide-book, *The Traveller's Key* had been

a brilliant and indispensable introduction to the mysteries of this ancient

land, and we still carried it with us. At the same time his scholarly works,

notably *Serpent in the Sky*, had opened our eyes to the revolutionary

possibility that Egyptian civilization—with its manifold glimpses of high

science apparently out of place in time—might *not* have developed

entirely within the confines of the Nile Valley but might have been a

legacy of some earlier, greater and as yet unidentified civilization
'antedating dynastic Egypt, and all other known civilizations, by
millennia'.¹

Tall and strongly built, West was in his early sixties. He had
cultivated a

neatly trimmed white beard, was dressed in a khaki safari-suit and
wore

an eccentric nineteenth-century pith helmet. His manner was
youthful and

energetic and there was a roguish sparkle in his eyes.

The three of us were sitting on the open upper deck of a Nile cruiser,
moored off the corniche in Luxor just a few yards downstream from
the

Winter Palace Hotel. To our west, across the river, a big red sun,
distorted

by atmospheric refraction, was setting behind the cliffs of the Valley
of

the Kings. To our east lay the battered but noble ruins of the Luxor
and

Karnak temples. Beneath us, transmitted through the hull of the boat,
we

could feel the lap and flow of the water as it rolled by on its
meridional

course towards the far-off Delta.

West had first presented his thesis for an older Sphinx in *Serpent in the*

Sky, a comprehensive exposition of the work of the French

mathematician R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz. Schwaller's research at the Luxor

Temple between 1937 and 1952 had unearthed mathematical evidence

which suggested that Egyptian science and culture had been far more

advanced and sophisticated than modern scholars had appreciated.

However, as West put it, this evidence had been set out in 'abstruse,

complex and uncompromising language ... Few readers seem comfortable

with raw Schwaller. It's a bit like trying to wade directly into high energy

physics without extensive prior training.'

Schwaller's principal publications, both originally in French, were the

massive three-volume *Temple de l'Homme*, which focused on Luxor, and

the more general *Roi de la théocratie Pharaonique*. In this latter work,

subsequently translated into English as *Sacred Science*, Schwaller made a

passing reference to the tremendous floods and rains which devastated

Egypt in the eleventh millennium BC. Almost as an afterthought, he added:

A great civilization must have preceded the vast movements of water that passed

over Egypt, which leads us to assume that the Sphinx already existed, sculptured

in the rock of the west cliff at Giza—that Sphinx whose leonine body, except for

the head, shows indisputable signs of water erosion.’²

1 *Traveller’s Key to Ancient Egypt; Serpent in the Sky*, p. 20.

2 *Sacred Science*, p. 96.

403

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

While working on *Serpent*, West was struck by the possible significance of

this remark and decided to follow it up: ‘I realized that if I could prove

Schwaller’s offhand observation empirically, this would be ironclad

evidence for the existence of a previously unidentified high civilization of

distant antiquity.’

‘Why?’

‘Once you’ve established that water was the agent that eroded the Sphinx the answer is almost childishly simple. It can be explained to anybody who reads the *National Enquirer* or the *News of the World*. It’s

almost moronically simple ... The Sphinx is supposed to have been built

by Khafre around 2500 BC, but since the beginning of dynastic times—say

3000 BC onwards—there just hasn’t been enough rain on the Giza plateau

to have caused the very extensive erosion that we see all over the Sphinx’s body. You really have to go back to before 10,000 BC to find a

wet enough climate in Egypt to account for weathering of this type and

on this scale. It therefore follows that the Sphinx must have been built

before 10,000 BC and since it’s a massive, sophisticated work of art it also

follows that it must have been built by a high civilization.’

‘But John,’ Santha asked, ‘how can you be so sure that the weathering

was caused by rain water? Couldn't the desert winds have done the job

just as well? After all even orthodox Egyptologists admit that the Sphinx

has existed for nearly 5000 years. Isn't that long enough for these effects

to have been caused by wind erosion?'

'Naturally that was one of the first possibilities that I had to exclude.

Only if I could show that wind-borne abrasive sand couldn't possibly have

brought the Sphinx to its present condition would there be any point in

looking further into the implications of water erosion.'

Robert Schoch's geology: Unriddling the Sphinx

A key issue turned out to be the deep trench that the monument was surrounded by on all sides: 'Because the Sphinx is set in a hollow,' West

explained, 'sand piles up to its neck within a few decades if it's left untended ... It has been left untended often during historical times. In

fact through a combination of textual references and historical

extrapolations it's possible to prove that during the 4500 years that have

elapsed since it was ostensibly built by Khafre it's been buried to its neck

for as much as 3300 years.³ That means that in all this time there has

³ West's detailed evidence is set out in *Serpent in the Sky*, pp. 184-20. Concerning the

covering of the Sphinx by sand he arrives at the following table:

Sphinx buried

Chephren-Tuthmosis IV c. 1300 years

1000 years

Thuthmosis IV-Ptolemies c. 1100 years

800 years

Ptolemies-Christianity c. 600 years

0 years

Christianity-Present day c. 1700 years

1500 years

404

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

only been a cumulative total of just over 1000 years in which its body has

been susceptible to wind-erosion; all the rest of the time it's been

protected from the desert winds by an enormous blanket of sand.
The

point is that if the Sphinx was really built by Khafre in the Old
Kingdom,

and if wind erosion was capable of inflicting such damage on it in so

short a time-span, then other Old Kingdom structures in the area,
built

out of the same limestone, ought to show similar weathering. But
none

do—you know, absolutely unmistakable Old Kingdom tombs, full of
hieroglyphs and inscriptions—none of them show the same type of
weathering as the Sphinx.’

Indeed, none did. Professor Robert Schoch, a Boston University
geologist and specialist in rock erosion who had played a key role in
validating West’s evidence, was satisfied as to the reason for this.
The

weathering of the Sphinx—and of the walls of its surrounding rock-
hewn

enclosure—had not been caused by wind-scouring at all but by
thousands

of years of heavy rainfall long ages before the Old Kingdom came
into

being.

Having won over his professional peers at the 1992 Convention of the

Geological Society of America,⁴ Schoch went on to explain his findings to

a much wider and more eclectic audience (including Egyptologists) at the

1992 Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement

of Science (AAAS). He began by pointing out to delegates that ‘the body

of the Sphinx and the walls of the Sphinx ditch are deeply weathered and

eroded ... This erosion is a couple of metres thick in places, at least on

the walls. It’s very deep, it’s very old in my opinion, and it gives a rolling

and undulating profile ...’⁵

Such undulations are easily recognizable to stratigraphers and

palaeontologists as having been caused by ‘precipitation-induced

weathering’. As Santha Faiia’s photographs of the Sphinx and the Sphinx

enclosure indicate, this weathering takes the distinctive form of a

combination of deep vertical fissures and undulating, horizontal coves—

'a classic textbook example,' in Schoch's words, 'of what happens to a

limestone structure when you have rain beating down on it for thousands

of years ... It's clearly rain precipitation that produced these erosional

Chephren-present day, c. 4700 years

3300 years

4 'An abstract of our team's work was submitted to the Geological Society of America,

and we were invited to present our findings at a poster session of at the GSA convention

in San Diego—the geological Superbowl. Geologists from all over the world thronged to

our booth, much intrigued. Dozens of experts in fields relevant to our research offered

help and advice. Shown the evidence, some geologists just laughed, astounded [as

Schoch had been initially] that in two centuries of research, no one, geologist or

Egyptologist, had noticed that the Sphinx had been weathered by water.' *Serpent in the*

Sky, p. 229; *Mystery of the Sphinx*. NBC-TV, 1993. 275 geologists endorsed Schoch's

findings.

5 AAAS, Annual Meeting 1992, Debate: How Old is the Sphinx?

405

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

features.’⁶

Wind/sand erosion presents a very different profile of sharp-edged horizontal channels selectively scoured out from the softer layers of the

affected rock. Under no circumstances can it cause the vertical fissures

particularly visible in the wall of the Sphinx enclosure. These could only

have been ‘formed by water running down the wall’,⁷ the result of rain

falling in enormous quantities, cascading over the slope of the Giza plateau and down into the Sphinx enclosure below. ‘It picked out the weak spots in the rock,’ Schoch elaborated, ‘and opened them up into

these fissures—clear evidence to me as a geologist that this erosional

feature was caused by rainfall.’⁸

Although in some places obscured by repair blocks put in place by numerous restorers over the passing millennia, the same observation

holds true for the scooped-out, undulating, scalloped coves that run the

entire length of the Sphinx's body. Again, these are characteristic of precipitation-induced weathering because only long periods of heavy rainfall beating down on the upper parts of the immense structure (and

cascading over its sides) could have produced such effects.
Confirmation

of this comes from the fact that the limestone out of which the Sphinx was carved is not uniform in its composition, but consists of a series of

hard and soft layers in which some of the more durable rocks recede farther than some of the less durable rocks.⁹ Such a profile simply could

not have been produced by wind erosion (which would have selectively

chiselled out the softer layers of rock) but 'is entirely 'consistent with precipitation-induced weathering where you have water, rain water beating down from above. The rocks higher up are the more durable ones

but they recede back farther than some of the less durable rocks lower in

the section which are more protected.'¹⁰

In his summing up at the AAAS meeting, Schoch concluded:

It's well known that the Sphinx enclosure fills with sand very quickly, in just a

matter of decades, under the desert conditions of the Sahara. And it has to be dug

out periodically. And this has been the case since ancient times. Yet you still get

this dramatic rolling, erosional profile in the Sphinx enclosure ... Simply put,

therefore, what I'm suggesting is that this rolling profile, these features seen on

the body and in the Sphinx ditch, hark back to a much earlier period when there

was more precipitation in the area, and more moisture, more rain on the Giza

plateau.¹¹

As Schoch admitted, he was not the first geologist to have noticed the

'anomalous precipitation-induced weathering features on the core body

6 *Mystery of the Sphinx.*

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 AAAS Annual Meeting 1992.

406

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

of the Sphinx'.¹² He was, however, the first to have become involved in

public debates over the immense *historical* implications of this

weathering. His attitude was that he preferred to stick to his geology:

I've been told over and over again that the peoples of Egypt, as far as we know,

did not have either the technology or the social organization to cut out the core

body of the Sphinx in pre-dynastic times ... However, I don't see it as being my

problem as a geologist. I'm not seeking to shift the burden, but it's really up to the

Egyptologists and archaeologists to figure out who carved it. If my *findings* are in

conflict with their *theory* about the rise of civilization then maybe it's time for them

to re-evaluate that theory. I'm not saying that the Sphinx was built by Atlanteans,

or people from Mars, or extra-terrestrials. I'm just following the science where it

leads me, and it leads me to conclude that the Sphinx was built much earlier than

previously thought ...'13

Legendary civilizations

How much earlier?

John West told us that he and Schoch had 'a friendly debate going'

about the age of the Sphinx: 'Schoch puts the date somewhere between

5000 BC and 7000 BC *minimum* [the epoch of the Neolithic Subpluvial]

mainly by taking the most cautious view allowed by the data to hand. As

a professor of Geology at a big university, he's almost constrained to take

a conservative view—and it's true that there were rains between 7000 BC

and 5000 BC. However, for a variety of both intuitive and scholarly

reasons, I think that the date is much, much older and that most of the

weathering of the Sphinx took place in the earlier rainy period before

10,000 BC ... Frankly, if it was as relatively recent as 5000 to 7000 BC, I

think we'd probably have found other evidence of the civilization that

carved it. A lot of evidence from that period *has* been found in Egypt.

There are some strange anomalies within it, I'll admit,¹⁴ but most of it—

the vast bulk—is really quite rudimentary.'

'So who built the Sphinx if it wasn't the pre-dynastic Egyptians?' 'My

conjecture is that the whole riddle is linked in some way to those

legendary civilizations spoken of in all the mythologies of the world.

You

know—that there were great catastrophes, that a few people survived and

went wandering around the earth and that a bit of knowledge was

preserved here, a bit there ... My hunch is that the Sphinx is linked to all

that. If I were asked to place a bet I'd say that it predates the break-up of

the last Ice Age and is probably older than 10000 BC, perhaps even older

than 15,000 BC. My conviction—actually it's more than a conviction—is

that it's *vastly old*?

¹² Ibid. The relevant geologists include Farouk El Baz, and Roth and Raffai.

¹³ Extracts from *Mystery of the Sphinx* and AAAS meeting.

14 Under the category of anomalies, West made specific reference to the bowls carved

out of diorite and other hard stones described in Part VI.

407

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

This was a conviction I increasingly shared—and, I reminded myself, that most nineteenth-century Egyptologists had shared it too.

Nevertheless the Sphinx's appearance argued against such intuitions

since there was no doubt that its head *looked* conventionally pharaonic.

'If it's as old as you think it is,' I now asked John, 'then how do you explain that the sculptors depicted it wearing the characteristic *nemes*

head-dress and *uraeus* of dynastic times?'

'I'm not bothered about that. In fact, as you know, Egyptologists contend that the face of the Sphinx resembles the face of Khafre—its one

of the reasons why they claim it must have been built by him. Schoch and

I have looked into this very carefully. We think, from the proportions of

the head relative to the rest of the body, that it's been *recarved* during

dynastic times—and that's why it looks very dynastic. But we don't think

it was ever meant to represent Khafre. As part of our ongoing research

into these issues we had Lieutenant Frank Domingo, a forensic artist with

the New York Police Department, come over and do point by point

comparisons between the face of the Sphinx and the face of Cephren's

statue in the Cairo Museum. His conclusion was that in no way was the

Sphinx ever intended to represent Khafre. It's not just a matter of it being

a different face—it's probably a different race.¹⁵ So this is a very ancient

monument that was recarved at a much later date. Originally it may not

even have had a human face. Maybe it started out with a lion's *face* as

well as a lion's body.'

Magellan and the first dinosaur bone

After my own explorations at Giza I was interested to know whether

West's research had cast doubt on the orthodox dating of any of the other monuments on the plateau—particularly the so-called Valley Temple of Khafre.

'We think there's quite a lot of stuff that may be older,' he told me. 'Not

just the Valley Temple but also the Mortuary Temple up the hill, probably

something to do with the Menkaure complex, maybe even the Pyramid of

Khafre ...'

'What in the Menkaure complex?'

'Well, the Mortuary Temple. And actually I'm only using the conventional attribution of the Pyramids for convenience here ...'

15 'After reviewing my various drawings, schematics and measurements, my final

conclusion concurs with my initial reaction: the two works represent two separate

individuals. The proportions in the frontal view and especially the angles and facial

protrusion in the lateral views, convinced me that the Sphinx is not Khafre. If the ancient

Egyptians were skilled technicians and capable of duplicating images, then these

two works cannot represent the same individual.' Frank Domingo, cited in *Serpent*

in the Sky, p. 232. See also AAAS 1992, for Schoch's views on the recarving of the

Sphinx's head.

408

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

'OK. So do you think it's possible that the pyramids are as old as the Sphinx too?'

'It's hard to say. I think something was there where those pyramids now

are—because of the geometry. The Sphinx was part of a master-plan. And

the Khafre Pyramid is maybe the most interesting in that respect because

it was definitely built in two stages. If you look at it—maybe you've

noticed—you'll see that its base consists of several courses of *gigantic*

blocks similar in style to the blocks of the core masonry of the Valley

Temple. Superimposed above the base, the rest of the pyramid is

composed of smaller, less precisely engineered stuff. But when you look

at it, knowing what you're looking for, you see instantly that it's built in

two separate bits. I mean I can't help but feel that the vast blocks on the

bottom date from the earlier period—from the time the Sphinx was

built—and that the second part was added later—but even then not

necessarily by Khafre. As you go into this you begin to realize that the

more you learn the more complex everything becomes. For example,

there may even have been an intermediate civilization, which actually

would correspond to the Egyptian texts. They talk themselves about two

long prior periods. In the first of these Egypt was supposedly ruled by the

gods—the Neteru—and in the second it was ruled by the Shemsu Hor, the

“Companions of Horus”. So, as I say, the problems just get more and

more complicated. Fortunately, however, the bottom line stays simple.

The bottom line is the Sphinx wasn't built by Khafre. The geology proves

that it's a hell of a lot older ...'

'Nevertheless the Egyptologists won't accept that it is. One of the

arguments they've used against you—Mark Lehner did so—goes something like this: “If the Sphinx was made before 10,000 BC then why

can't you show us the rest of the civilization that built it?” In other words,

why don't you have any other evidence to put forward for the presence of

your legendary lost civilization apart from a few structures on the Giza

plateau? What do you say to that?’

‘First off, there *are* structures outside Giza—for example the Osireion in

Abydos, where you've just come from. We think that amazing edifice may

relate to our work on the Sphinx. Even if the Osireion didn't exist,

however, the absence of other evidence wouldn't worry me. I mean, to

make a big deal out of the fact that further confirmatory evidence *hasn't*

been found yet and to use this to try to scuttle the arguments for an older

Sphinx is completely illogical. Analogously it's like saying to Magellan ...

“Where are the other guys who've sailed round the world? Of course it's

still flat.” Or in 1838 when the first dinosaur bone was found they would

have said, “Of course there’s no such thing as a giant extinct animal.

Where’s the rest of the skeletons? They’ve only found one bone.” But once

a few people began to realize that this bone could only be from an extinct animal, within twenty years the museums of the world were filled

up with complete dinosaur skeletons. So it’s sort of like that. Nobody’s

409

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

thought to look in the right places. I’m absolutely certain that other evidence will be found once a few people start looking in the right places—along the banks of the ancient Nile, for example, which is miles

from the present Nile, or even at the bottom of the Mediterranean, which

was dry during the last Ice Age.’

The problem of transmission

I asked John West why he thought that Egyptologists and archaeologists

were so unwilling to consider that the Sphinx might be a clue to the

existence of a forgotten episode in human history.

'The reason, I think, is that they're quite fixed in their ideas about the linear evolution of civilization. They find it hard to come to terms with the

notion that there might have been people, more than 12,000 years ago,

who were more sophisticated than we are today ... The Sphinx, and the

geology which proves its antiquity, and the fact that the technology that

was involved in making it is in many ways almost beyond our own capacities, contradicts the belief that civilization and technology have evolved in a straightforward, linear way ... Because even with the best

modern technology we almost couldn't carry out the various tasks that

were involved in the project. The Sphinx itself, that's not such a staggering feat. I mean if you get enough sculptors to cut the stone away

they could carve a statue a mile long. The *technology* was involved in

taking the stones, quarrying the stones, to free the Sphinx from its bedrock and then in moving those stones and using them to build the

Valley Temple a couple of hundred feet away ...'

This was news to me: 'You mean that the 200-ton blocks in the Valley

Temple walls were quarried right out of the Sphinx enclosure?'

'Yes, no doubt about it. Geologically they're from the identical member

of rock. They were quarried out, moved over to the site of the Temple —

God knows how—and erected into forty-foot-high walls—again God knows how. I'm talking about the huge limestone core blocks, not the granite facing. I think that the granite was added much later, quite possibly by Khafre. But if you look at the limestone core blocks you'll see

that they bear the marks of exactly the same kind of precipitation-induced weathering that are found on the Sphinx. So the Sphinx and the

core structure of the Valley Temple were made at the same time by the

same people—whoever they may have been.'

'And do you think that those people and the later dynastic Egyptians were connected to each other in some way? In *Serpent in the Sky* you

suggested that a legacy must have been passed on.'

‘It’s still just a suggestion. All that I know for sure on the basis of our work on the Sphinx is that a very, very high, sophisticated civilization capable of undertaking construction projects on a grand scale was present in Egypt in the very distant past. Then there was a lot of rain.

410

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Then, thousands of years later, in the same place, pharaonic civilization

popped up already fully formed, apparently out of nowhere, with all its

knowledge complete. That much we can be certain of. But whether or not

the knowledge that Ancient Egypt possessed was the same as the knowledge that produced the Sphinx I really can’t say.’

‘How about this,’ I speculated: ‘The civilization that produced the Sphinx wasn’t based here, at least not originally ... It wasn’t in Egypt. It

put the Sphinx here as some sort of a marker or outpost ...’

‘Perfectly possible. Could be that the Sphinx for that civilization was like, let’s say, what Abu Simbel [in Nubia] was for dynastic Egypt.’

‘Then that civilization came to an end, was extinguished by some sort

of massive catastrophe, and that's when the legacy of high knowledge

was handed on ... Because they had the Sphinx here they knew about

Egypt, they knew this place, they knew this country, they had a connection here. Maybe people survived the ending of that civilization.

Maybe they came here. ... Does that work for you?'

'Well, it's a possibility. Again, going back into the mythologies and legends of the world, many of them tell of such a catastrophe and of the

few people—the Noah story that's prevalent through endless civilizations—who somehow or other retained and passed on knowledge.

The big problem with all this, from my point of view, is the transmission

process: how exactly the knowledge does get handed on during the thousands and thousands of years between the construction of the Sphinx and the flowering of dynastic Egypt. Theoretically you're sort of

stuck—aren't you?—with this vast period in which the knowledge has to

be transmitted. This is not easy to slough off. On the other hand we do

know that those legends we're referring to were passed on word for word

over countless generations. And in fact oral transmission is a much surer

means of transmission than written transmission, because the language

may change but as long as whoever's telling the story tells it true in

whatever the language of the time is ... it surfaces some 5000 years later

in its original form. So maybe there are ways—in secret societies and

religious cults, or through mythology, for example—that the knowledge

could have been preserved and passed on before flowering again. The

point, I think, with problems as complex and important as these, is

simply not to dismiss any possibilities, no matter how outrageous they

may at first seem, without investigating them very, very thoroughly ...'

Second opinion

John West was in Luxor, leading a study group on Egypt's sacred sites.

Early the next day he and his students went south to Aswan and Abu

Simbel. Santha and I journeyed north again, back towards Giza and the

mysteries of the Sphinx and the pyramids. We were to meet there with

the archaeo-astronomer Robert Bauval. As we shall see, his stellar

411

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

correlations provided startling independent corroboration for the geological evidence of Giza's vast antiquity.

412

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 48

Earth Measurers

Follow these instructions carefully:

Draw two parallel straight lines vertically down a sheet of paper, about

seven inches long and a bit under three inches apart. Draw a third line,

also vertical, also parallel and of equal length, exactly mid-way between

the first two. Write the letter 'S'—for 'South'—at the top end of your diagram (the end farthest away from you), and the letter 'N' for 'North' at

the bottom end. Add the letters 'E' for 'East' and 'W' for 'West' in their appropriate positions at either side of the diagram, to your left for East

and to your right for West.

What you are looking at are the outlines of a geometrical map of Egypt

incorporating a perspective very different from our own (where 'North' is

always equated with 'Up'). This map where 'Up' is 'South' seems to have

been worked out an enormously long time ago by cartographers with a

scientific understanding of the shape and size of our planet.

To complete the map you should now mark a dot on the central of the

three parallel lines about an inch to the south of ('up' from) the northern

end of the diagram. Then draw two more lines diagonally down from this

point, respectively to the north-east and north-west, until they reach the

northern ends of the two outermost parallel lines. Finally link those parallel lines directly with horizontal lines running east to west at the northern and southern ends of the diagram.

The shape produced is a meridional rectangle (oriented north-south).

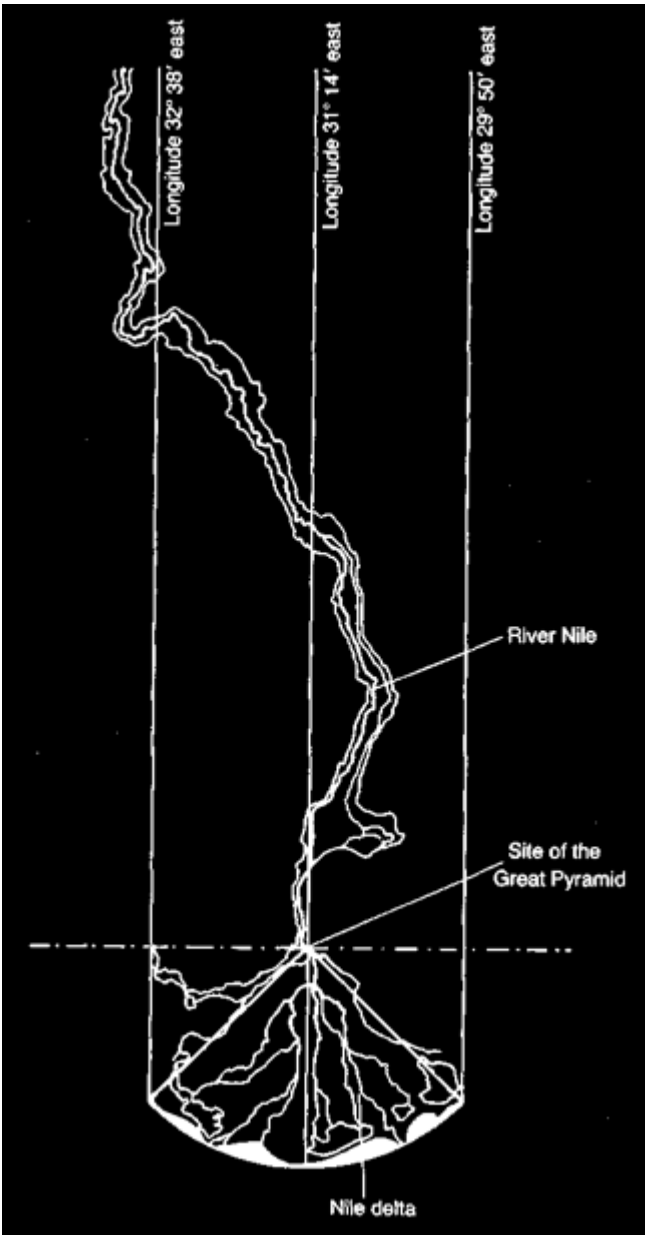
This rectangle is seven inches long by just under three inches wide and

has a triangle demarcated at its northern (lower) end. The triangle

represents the Nile Delta and the dot at the apex of the triangle

represents the apex of the Delta—a point on the ground at 30° 06' north

and 31° 14' east, very close to the location of the Great Pyramid.



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Map showing the geometric conception of Egypt, with the Great Pyramid at the apex of the Nile delta. The Egyptians traditionally thought of south as 'up'.

Geodetic marker

Whatever else it may be, it has long been understood by mathematicians

and geographers that the Great Pyramid serves the function of a geodetic

marker (geodetics being the branch of science concerned with

414

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

determining the exact position of geographical points and the shape and

size of the earth¹). This realization first dawned in the late eighteenth

century when the armies of revolutionary France, led by Napoleon

Bonaparte, invaded Egypt. Bonaparte, who had cultivated a deep interest

in the enigmas of the pyramids, brought with him a large number of

scholars, 175 in all, including several ‘greybeards’ gathered from various

universities who were reputed to have acquired ‘a profound knowledge of

Egyptian antiquities’, and, more usefully, a group of mathematicians, cartographers and surveyors.²

One of the tasks the savants were set, after the conquest was

completed, was to draw up detailed maps of Egypt. In the process of

doing this they discovered that the Great Pyramid was perfectly aligned to

true north—and of course to the south, east and west as well, as we saw

in Part VI. This meant that the mysterious structure made an excellent

reference and triangulation point, and a decision was therefore taken to

use the meridian passing through its apex as the base-line for all other

measurements and orientations. The team then proceeded to produce the

first accurate maps of Egypt drawn up in the modern age. When they had

finished, they were intrigued to note that the Great Pyramid's meridian

sliced the Nile Delta region into two equal halves. They also found that if

the diagonals running from the pyramid's apex to its north-eastern and

north-western corners were extended (forming lines on the map running

north-east and northwest until they reached the Mediterranean), the

triangle thus formed would neatly encapsulate the entire Delta area.³

Let us now return to our map, which also incorporates a triangle

representing the Delta. Its other main components are the three parallel

meridians. The eastern meridian is at longitude $32^{\circ} 38'$ east—the official

eastern border of Ancient Egypt from the beginning of dynastic times.

The western meridian is at longitude $29^{\circ} 50'$ east, the official western border of ancient Egypt. The central meridian is at longitude $31^{\circ} 14'$ east,

exactly midway between the other two ($1^{\circ} 24'$ away from each).⁴

What we now have is a representation of a strip on the surface of planet

earth that is exactly $2^{\circ} 48'$ wide. How long is this strip? Ancient Egypt's

'official' northern and southern borders (which bore no more relationship

to settlement patterns than the official eastern and western boundaries)

are marked by the horizontal lines at the top and bottom of the map and

are located respectively at $31^{\circ} 06'$ north and $24^{\circ} 06'$ north.⁵ The northern

border, $31^{\circ} 06'$ north, joins the two outer ends of the estuary of the Nile.

The southern border, 24° 06' N, marks the precise latitude of the island

1 *Collins English Dictionary*, p. 608.

2 *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 38. Much of the material in this chapter is based

directly on the work of Peter Tompkins and of Professor Livio Catullo Stecchini.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 299.

415

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

of Elephantine at Aswan (Seyne) where an important astronomical and

solar observatory was located throughout known Egyptian history.⁶ It

seems, that this archaic land, sacred since time began—the creation and

habitation of the gods—was originally conceived of as a *geometric construct* exactly seven terrestrial degrees in length.

Within this construct, the Great Pyramid appears to have been carefully

sited as a geodetic marker for the apex of the Delta. The latter, which we

have indicated on our map, is located at $30^{\circ} 06' N$ $31^{\circ} 14' E$ —a point in

the middle of the Nile at the northern edge of modern Cairo. Meanwhile

the pyramid stands at latitude of $30^{\circ}N$ (corrected for atmospheric refraction) and at longitude $31^{\circ} 09' E$, an error of just a few minutes of

terrestrial arc to the south and west. This 'error', however, does not appear to have resulted from sloppiness or inaccuracy on the part of the

pyramid builders. On the contrary, a close look at the topography of the

area suggests that the explanation should be sought in the need to find a

site suitable for all the astronomical observations that had to be taken for

accurate setting-out, and with a sufficiently stable geological structure on

which to park, for ever, a six-million-ton monument almost 500 feet high

with a footprint of over thirteen acres.

The Giza plateau fits the bill on all counts: close to the apex of the Delta, elevated above the Valley of the Nile, and equipped with an excellent foundation of solid limestone bedrock.

Doing things by degrees

We were driving north from Luxor to Giza in the back of Mohamed Walilli's Peugeot 504—a journey of just over 4 degrees of longitude, i.e.,

from 25° 42' N, to the 30th parallel. Between Asiut and El Minya, a corridor of conflict in recent months between Islamic extremists and Egyptian government forces, we were provided with an armed escort of

soldiers, one of whom wore plain clothes and sat in the passenger seat

beside Mohamed fondling an automatic pistol. The others, about a dozen

men armed with AK47 assault rifles, were distributed equally between

two pick-up trucks which sandwiched us front and rear.

'Dangerous people live here,' Mohamed had confided out of the corner

of his mouth when we had been stopped at a road-block in Asiut and ordered to wait for our escort. Now, although obviously rattled at being

obliged to match the high speed of the escorting vehicles, he seemed to

relish the kudos of being part of an impressive convoy, lights flashing

and sirens wailing, weaving in and out of the slower traffic on the main

highway from upper to lower Egypt.

I looked out of the car window for a while at the unchanging spectacle

of the Nile, at its fertile green banks and the red haze of the deserts a few

6 Ibid., pp. 179-81.

416

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

miles away to east and west. This was Egypt, the real organic Egypt of

today and yesterday, which overlapped (but spread out far beyond) the

strange 'official' Egypt of the map described, a rectangular fiction exactly

seven terrestrial degrees in length.

In the nineteenth century the renowned Egyptologist Ludwig Borchardt

expressed what is still the conventional wisdom of his colleagues when

he remarked, 'One must absolutely exclude the possibility that the

ancients may have measured by degrees.'⁷ This was a judgement that

seemed increasingly unlikely to be tenable. Whoever they may have been,

it was obvious that the original planners and architects of the Giza necropolis had belonged to a civilization which knew the earth to be a

sphere, knew its dimensions almost as well as we do ourselves, and had

divided it into 360 degrees, just as we do today.

The proof of this lay in the creation of a symbolic official 'country'

exactly seven terrestrial degrees in length, and in the admirably geodetic

location and orientation to the cardinal points of the Great Pyramid.

Equally persuasive was the fact, already touched on in Chapter Twenty-

three, that the perimeter of the pyramid's base stood in the relationship

2π to its height and that the entire monument seemed to have been

designed to serve as a *map-projection*— on a scale of 1:43,200—of the

northern hemisphere of our planet:

The Great Pyramid was a projection on four triangular surfaces. The apex

represented the pole and the perimeter represented the equator.

This is the

reason why the perimeter is in relation 2π to the height.⁸

The Pyramid/Earth ratio

We have demonstrated the use of π in the Pyramid⁹ and need not go into

this matter again; besides, the existence of the π relationship, though

interpreted as *accidental* by orthodox scholars, is not contested by

them.¹⁰ But are we seriously supposed to accept that the monument could

also be a representation of the northern hemisphere of the earth

projected on flat surfaces at a scale of 1:43,200? Let us remind ourselves

of the figures.

According to the best modern estimates, based on satellite

observations, the equatorial circumference of the earth is 24,902.45

miles and its polar radius is 3949.921 miles.¹¹ The perimeter of the Great

Pyramid's base is 3023.16 feet and its height is 481.3949 feet.¹² The

⁷ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁸ See Chapter Twenty-three, and Stecchini in *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 378.

⁹ See Chapter Twenty-three.

10 Accepted, for example, by Edwards, Petrie, Baines and Malek, and so on.

11 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 27:530.

12 *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 87.

417

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

scaling-down, as it turns out, is not *absolutely* exact, but it is very near.

Moreover, when we remember the bulge at the earth's equator (our planet being an oblate spheroid rather than a perfect sphere), the results

achieved by the pyramid builders seem even closer to 1:43,200.

How close?

If we take the earth's equatorial circumference, 24,902.45 miles, and scale it down (divide it) by 43,200 we get a result of 0.5764 of a mile.

There are 5280 feet in a mile. The next step, therefore, is to multiply 0.5764 by 5280, which produces a figure of 3043.39 feet. The earth's equatorial circumference scaled down 43,200 times is therefore 3,043.39

feet. By comparison, as we have seen, the perimeter of the Great Pyramid's base is 3,023.16 feet. This represents an 'error' of only 20

feet—or about three-quarters of 1 per cent. Given the razor-sharp accuracy of the pyramid builders, however (who normally worked to even

finer tolerances), the error is less likely to have resulted from mistakes in

the construction of the giant monument than in an underestimation of our planet's true circumference *by just 163 miles*, probably caused in part by failure to take account of the equatorial bulge.

Let us now consider the earth's polar radius of 3949.921 miles. If we scale it down 43,200 times we get 0.0914 of a mile: 482.59 feet. The earth's polar radius scaled down 43,200 times is therefore 482.59 feet.

By comparison the Great Pyramid's height is 481.3949 feet—just a foot

less than the ideal figure, an error of barely one-fifth of one per cent.

As near as makes no difference, therefore, the perimeter of the Great

Pyramid's base is indeed 1:43,200 of the equatorial circumference of the

earth. And as near as makes no difference, the height of the Great

Pyramid above that base is indeed 1:43,200 of the polar radius of the

earth. In other words, during all the centuries of darkness experienced by

Western civilization when knowledge of our planet's dimensions was lost

to us, all we ever needed to do to rediscover that knowledge was to

measure the height and base perimeter of the Great Pyramid and multiply

by 43,200!

How likely is this to be an 'accident'?

The commonsense answer is 'not very likely at all,' since it should be obvious to any reasonable person that what we are looking at could only

be the result of a deliberate and carefully calculated planning decision.

Commonsense, however, has never been a faculty held in high esteem by

Egyptologists, and it is therefore necessary to ask whether there is

anything else in the data which might confirm that the ratio of 143,200 is

a purposeful expression of intelligence and knowledge, rather than some

numerical fluke.

The ratio itself seems to provide that confirmation, for the simple

reason that 43,200 is *not* a random number (like, say, 45,000 or 47,000,

or 50,500, or 38,800). On the contrary it is one of a series of numbers,

and multiples of those numbers, which relate to the phenomenon of 418

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

precession of the equinoxes, and which have become embedded in archaic myths all around the world. As the reader can confirm by glancing

back at Part V the basic numerals of the Pyramid/Earth ratio crop up again and again in those myths, sometimes directly as 43,200 sometimes

as 432, as 4320, as 432,000, as 4,320,000, and so on.

What we appear to be confronted by are two remarkable propositions,

back-to-back, as though designed to reinforce one another. It is surely

remarkable enough that the Great Pyramid should be able to function as

an accurate scale-model of the northern hemisphere of planet earth. But

it is even more remarkable that the *scale involved* should incorporate

numbers relating precisely to one of the key planetary mechanisms of the

earth. This is the fixed and apparently eternal precession of its axis of

rotation around the pole of the ecliptic, a phenomenon which causes the

vernal point to migrate around the band of the zodiac at the rate of one

degree every 72 years, and 30 degrees (one complete zodiacal

constellation) every 2160 years. Precession through two zodiacal

constellations, or 60 degrees along the ecliptic, takes 4320 years.¹³

The constant repetition of these precessional numbers in ancient myths

could, perhaps, be a coincidence. Viewed in isolation, the appearance of

the precessional number 43,200 in the pyramid/earth ratio might also be

a coincidence (although the odds against this must be astronomical). But

when we find precessional numbers in *both* these very different media—

the ancient myths and the ancient monument—it really does strain

credulity to suppose that coincidence is all that is involved here.

Moreover, just as the Teutonic myth of Valhalla's walls leads us to the

precessional number 432,000 by inviting us to *calculate* the warriors who

'go to war with the Wolf (500 plus 40 multiplied by 800, as saw in

Chapter Thirty-three), so the Great Pyramid leads us to the precessional

number 43,200 by demonstrating through the *pi* relationship that it might be a scale-model part of the earth and then by inviting us to *calculate* that scale.

Matching fingerprints?

At El Minya our escort vehicles left us, though the plain-clothes soldier in

the front seat stayed with us until Cairo. We paused for a late lunch of

bread and felafel in a boisterous, noisy village, then motored north again.

Throughout all this, my thoughts remained focused on the Great

Pyramid. Obviously it was not an accident that so immense and

conspicuous a structure should occupy a key geographic and geodetic

location in a part of the world that appeared, bizarrely, to have been

conceived of and 'geometrized' as a rectangular, symbolic construct

exactly seven terrestrial degrees in length. But it was the pyramid's other

13 See Part V.

419

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

function as a three-dimensional map projection of the northern hemisphere that particularly interested me because it suggested a 'match' with the ancient but advanced maps of the world described in Part I. Those maps, which made use of spherical trigonometry and a range of sophisticated projections, had been claimed by Professor Charles Hapgood to provide tangible, documentary evidence that an advanced civilization with a comprehensive knowledge of the globe must

have flourished during the last Ice Age. Now here was the Great Pyramid

proving to have a cartographic function *vis-à-vis* the northern hemisphere

and also incorporating a sophisticated projection. As one expert explained:

Each flat face of the Pyramid was designed to represent one curved quarter of the

northern hemisphere, or spherical quadrant of 90 degrees. To project a spherical

quadrant on to a flat triangle correctly, the arc, or base, of the quadrant must be

the same length as the base of the triangle, and both must have the same height.

This happens to be the case *only* with a cross-section or meridian bisection of the

Great Pyramid, whose slope angle gives the *pi* relation between height and base

...14

Was it possible that surviving copies and compilations of ancient maps—

like the Piri Reis Map, for example—might in some cases go back to source documents produced by the same culture that skillfully

incorporated its knowledge of the globe into the dimensions of the Great

Pyramid (and indeed into the carefully geometrized dimensions of Ancient Egypt itself)?

I could hardly forget that Charles Hapgood and his team had spent months trying to work out where the original projection of the Piri Reis

Map had been centred. The answer they finally obtained was Egypt and

specifically Seyne (Aswan) in upper Egypt¹⁵—where, as we have seen, an

important astronomical observatory was situated at latitude 24° 06' N,

the official southern border.

Needless to say, precise astronomical observations would have been

essential for calculations of the circumference of the earth and of latitude

positions.¹⁶ But for how long *before* the historical period had the Ancient

Egyptians and their ancestors been making such observations? And had

they indeed learned this skill, as they stated forthrightly in their traditions, from the gods who had once walked among them?

Navigators in the Boat of Millions of Years

The god believed by the Ancient Egyptians to have taught the principles

of astronomy to their ancestors was Thoth: 'He who reckons in heaven,

¹⁴ *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, p. 189.

¹⁵ *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*, p. 17ff.

¹⁶ See, for example, *The Shape of the World*, p. 23.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the counter of the stars, the enumerator of the earth and of what is therein, and the measurer of the earth.’¹⁷

Normally depicted as a man wearing an ibis mask, Thoth was a leading

member of the elite company of First Time deities who dominated religious life in Ancient Egypt from the beginning to the end of its civilization. These were the great gods, the Neteru. Although they were

believed in one sense to be self-created, it was also openly acknowledged

and understood that they had a special connection of some kind with another land—a fabulous and far-off country referred to in the ancient

texts as Ta-Neteru, the ‘land of the gods’.¹⁸

Ta-Neteru was thought to have had a definite earthly location a very long way south of Ancient Egypt—seas and oceans away—farther even

than the spice country of Punt (which probably lay along East Africa’s

Somali coast).¹⁹ To confuse matters, however, Punt was also spoken of

sometimes as the 'Divine Land', or 'God's Land', and was the source of

the sweet-smelling frankincense and myrrh especially favoured by the

gods.²⁰

Another mythical paradise was also linked to the Neteru—an 'abode of

the blessed', where the best of humans were sometimes taken—which

was believed to be 'situated away beyond a large expanse of water'. As

Wallis Budge observed in his important study, *Osiris and the Egyptian*

Resurrection, 'the Egyptians believed that this land could only be reached

by means of a boat, or by the personal help of the gods who were

thought to transport their favourites thither ...'²¹ Those lucky enough to

gain entry would find themselves in a magical garden consisting of

'islands, interconnected by canals filled with running water which caused

them to be always green and fertile'.²² On the islands in this garden, 'the

wheat grew to a height of five cubits, the ears being two cubits long and

the stalks three, and the barley grew to a height of seven cubits, the ears

being three cubits long and the stalks four.’²³

Was it from a land such as this,, superbly irrigated and scientifically farmed, that the agriculture bringer Osiris, whose title was ‘President of

the Land of the South’,²⁴ had voyaged to Egypt at the dawn of the First

17 *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, p. 400.

18 *Ibid.*, volume I, p. 443; volume II, pp. 7, 287.

19 *Ibid.*, volume II, p. 7, where the deity Amen-Ra is addressed in a hymn: ‘The gods love

the smell of thee when thou comest from Punt, thou eldest-born of the dew, who comest

from the Divine Land (Ta-Neteru).’ See also volume II, p. 287. Punt is thought by many

scholars to have been located on the Somali coast of East Africa where the trees that

produce frankincense and myrrh (‘the food of the gods’) are still grown today.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume I, p. 98; Pyramid Texts of Pepi I, Mer-en-

Rah and Pepi II, translated in Ibid., volume II, p. 316, where the maritime connections of

the land of the blessed are made clear.

22 Ibid., volume I, p. 97.

23 Ibid., pp. 97-8.

24 Ibid., volume II, p. 307.

421

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Time? And was it from a land such as this, accessible only by boat, that

ibis-masked Thoth had also made his way, crossing seas and oceans to

deliver the priceless gifts of astronomy and earth-measurement to the

primitive inhabitants of the prehistoric Nile Valley?

Whatever the truth behind the tradition, Thoth was remembered and

revered by the Ancient Egyptians as the inventor of mathematics,

astronomy and engineering.²⁵ 'It was his will and power', according to

Wallis Budge, 'that were believed to keep the forces of heaven and earth

in equilibrium. It was his great skill in celestial mathematics which made

proper use of the laws upon which the foundation and maintenance of

the universe rested.²⁶ Thoth was also credited with teaching the ancestral

Egyptians the skills of geometry and land-surveying, medicine and botany. He was believed to have been the inventor 'of figures, of the letters of the alphabet, and of the arts of reading and writing'.²⁷ He was

the Great Lord of Magic²⁸ who could move objects with the power of his

voice, 'the author of every work on every branch of knowledge, both human and divine'.²⁹

It was to the teachings of Thoth—which they guarded jealously in their

temples and claimed to have been handed down from generation to generation in the form of forty-two books of instruction³⁰—that the

Ancient Egyptians ascribed their world-renowned wisdom and knowledge

of the skies. This knowledge was spoken of almost in awe, by the classical commentators who visited Egypt from the fifth century BC onwards.

Herodotus, the earliest of these travellers, noted:

The Egyptians were the first to discover the solar year, and to portion out its

course into twelve parts ... It was observation of the course of the stars which led

them to adopt this division ...³¹

Plato (fourth century BC) reported that the Egyptians had observed the

stars 'for ten thousand years'.³² And later, in the first century BC, Diodorus

Siculus left this more detailed account:

The positions and arrangements of the stars as well as their motions have always

been the subject of careful observation among the Egyptians ... From ancient

times to this day they have preserved the records concerning each of these stars

over an incredible number of years ...³³

²⁵ Veronica Ions, *Egyptian Mythology*, Newnes Books, London, 1986, p. 84.

²⁶ *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, pp. 407-8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, volume I, p. 414.

²⁸ *Egyptian Mythology*, p. 85.

²⁹ *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, p. 414.

30 Ibid., pp 414-15.

31 *The History*, 2:4.

32 Reported in E. M. Antoniadi, *L'Astronomie égyptienne*, Paris, 1934, pp. 3-4; see also

Schwaller, p. 279.

33 *Diodorus Siculus*, volume I, pp. 279-80.

422

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Why should the Ancient Egyptians have cultivated an almost
obsessional

interest in the long-term observation of the stars, and why in
particular

should they have kept records of their movements 'over an incredible
number of years'? Such detailed observations would not have been
necessary if their only interest, as a number of scholars have
seriously

suggested, had been agricultural (the need to predict the seasons,
which

any country-born person can do). There must have been some other
purpose.

Moreover, how did the Ancient Egyptians get started on astronomy in

the first place? It is not an obvious hobby for a valley-dwelling landlocked

people to develop on their own initiative. Perhaps we should take more

seriously the explanation they themselves offer: that their ancestors were

taught the study of the stars by a god. We might also pay closer attention

to the many unmistakably maritime references in the Pyramid Texts.³⁴

And there could be important new inferences to draw from ancient

Egyptian religious art in which the gods are shown travelling in beautiful,

high-prowed, streamlined boats, built to the same advanced ocean-going

specifications as the pyramid boats at Giza and the mysterious fleet moored in the desert sands at Abydos.

Landlocked people do not as rule become astronomers; seafaring

people do. Is it not possible that the maritime iconography of the Ancient

Egyptians, the design of their ships, and also their splendid obsession

with observing the stars, could have been part of an inheritance passed

on to their ancestors by an unidentified seafaring, *navigating* race, in remote prehistory? It is really only such an archaic race, such a forgotten

maritime civilization, that could have left its fingerprints behind in the form of maps which accurately depict the world as it looked before the

end of the last Ice Age. It is really only such a civilization, steering its course by the stars 'for ten thousand years' that could have observed and

accurately timed the phenomenon of equinoctial precession with the exactitude attested in the ancient myths. And, although hypothetical, it is

only such a civilization that could have measured the earth with sufficient

precision to have arrived at the dimensions scaled down in the Great Pyramid.

The signature of a distant date

It was almost midnight by the time that we reached Giza. We checked into

the Siag, a hotel with an excellent pyramid view, and sat out on our balcony as the three stars of Orion's belt tracked slowly across the southern heavens.

It was the disposition of these three stars, as archaeo-astronomer Robert Bauval had recently demonstrated, that served as the celestial

34 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, for example pp. 78, 170, 171, 290.

423

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

template for the site-plan of the three Giza pyramids. This, in itself, was a

remarkable discovery, suggesting a far higher level of observational astronomy, and of surveying and setting-out skills, than scholars had attributed to the Ancient Egyptians. Even more remarkable, however—and

the reason that I had arranged to meet him at Giza the next morning—

was Bauval's contention that the pattern traced out on the ground (in almost fifteen million tons of perfectly dressed stone) matched exactly

the pattern in the sky during the epoch of 10,450 BC.

If Bauval was correct, the pyramids had been devised, using the changes precession effects in the positions of the stars, as the permanent

architectural signature of the eleventh millennium BC.

424

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 49

The Power of the Thing

On a scale of 1:43,200 the Great Pyramid serves as a model, and map-

projection, of the northern hemisphere of the earth. What absolutely

excludes the possibility that this could be a coincidence is the fact that

the scale involved is keyed in numerically to the rate of precession of the

equinoxes—one of earth's most characteristic planetary mechanisms. It is

therefore clear that we are confronted here by the manifestation of a

deliberate planning decision: one intended to be recognizable as such by

any culture which had acquired (a) an accurate knowledge of the

dimensions of the earth and (b) an accurate knowledge of the rate of precessional motion.

Thanks to the work of Robert Bauval, we can now be certain that

another deliberate planning decision was implemented in the Great

Pyramid (which—it is increasingly apparent—must be understood as a

device designed to fulfill many different functions). In this case the plan

was a truly ambitious one involving the Second and Third Pyramids as

well, but it bears the fingerprints of the same ancient architects and

builders who conceived of the Great Pyramid as a scale model of the

earth. Their hallmark seems to have been precession—perhaps because

they liked its mathematical regularity and predictability—and they used

precession to devise a plan which could be understood properly only by a

scientifically advanced culture.

Ours is such a culture, and Robert Bauval is the first to have worked out

the basic parameters of the plan—a discovery for which he has received

public acclaim and will in due course, get the scientific recognition he

deserves.¹ Belgian by nationality, born and brought up in Alexandria, he

is tall, lean, clean-shaven, forty-something, and going a little thin on top.

His most notable feature is a stubborn lower jaw which characterizes his

tenacious, inquiring personality; he speaks with a hybrid French-Egyptian-

English accent and is decidedly oriental in manner. He has a first-class

mind and is always restlessly accumulating and analysing new data

relevant to his interests, finding new ways to look at old problems. In the

process, entirely by accident, he has succeeded in transforming himself

into a kind of magician of esoteric knowledge.

1 Robert Bauval's *The Orion Mystery* (Heinemann, London; Crown, New York; Doubleday,

Canada; List, Germany; Planeta, Spain; Pygmalion, France, etc.) was an international

bestseller when it was published in 1994. Egyptologists closed ranks against its

implications, which they refused to discuss, but many distinguished astronomers hailed

Bauval's findings as a breakthrough.

425

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The Orion Mystery

The roots of Bauval's discoveries at Giza go back to the 1960s when the

Egyptologist and architect Dr. Alexander Badawy and the American astronomer Virginia Trimble demonstrated that the southern shaft of the

King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid was targeted like a gun-barrel on

the Belt of Orion during the Pyramid Age—around 2600 to 2400 BC.²

Bauval decided to test the southern shaft of the Queen's Chamber, which Badawy and Trimble had not investigated, and established that it

had been sighted on the star Sirius during the Pyramid Age. The evidence

that proved this was provided by the German engineer Rudolf

Gantenbrink as a result of measurements taken by his robot *Upuaut* in

March 1993. This was the robot that had made the startling discovery of

a closed portcullis door blocking the shaft at a distance of about 200 feet

from the Queen's Chamber. Equipped with a high-tech on-board

clinometer, the little machine had also provided the first-ever completely

accurate reading of the shaft's angle of inclination: 39° 30'.3

As Bauval explains:

I did the calculations and these established that the shaft had been targeted on

the meridian transit of Sirius around the epoch 2400 BC. There couldn't be any

doubt about it at all. I also recalculated the Orion's Belt alignment worked out by

Badawy and Trimble with new data that Gantenbrink gave me on the inclination of

the southern shaft of the King's Chamber. He'd measured that at 45 degrees

exactly, whereas Badawy and Trimble had worked with Flinders Petrie's slightly

less accurate measurement of 44° 30'. The new data enabled me to refine

Badawy's and Trimble's date for the alignment. What I found was that the shaft

had been precisely targeted on Al Nitak, the lowest of the three belt stars, which

crossed the meridian at altitude 45 degrees around the year 2475 BC.⁴

Up to this point Bauval's conclusions had been well within the

chronological bounds set by orthodox Egyptologists, who normally dated

the construction of the Great Pyramid to around 2520 BC.⁵ If anything, the

alignments the archaeo-astronomer had come up with suggested that the

shafts had been built a little *later*, rather than earlier, than conventional

wisdom allowed.

As the reader is aware, however, Bauval had also made another discovery of an altogether more unsettling nature. Once again it involved

the stars of Orion's Belt:

They're slanted along a diagonal in a south-westerly direction relative to the axis

of the Milky Way and the pyramids are slanted along a diagonal in a southwesterly

direction relative to the axis of the Nile. If you look carefully on a clear night you'll

also see that the smallest of the three stars, the one at the top which the Arabs

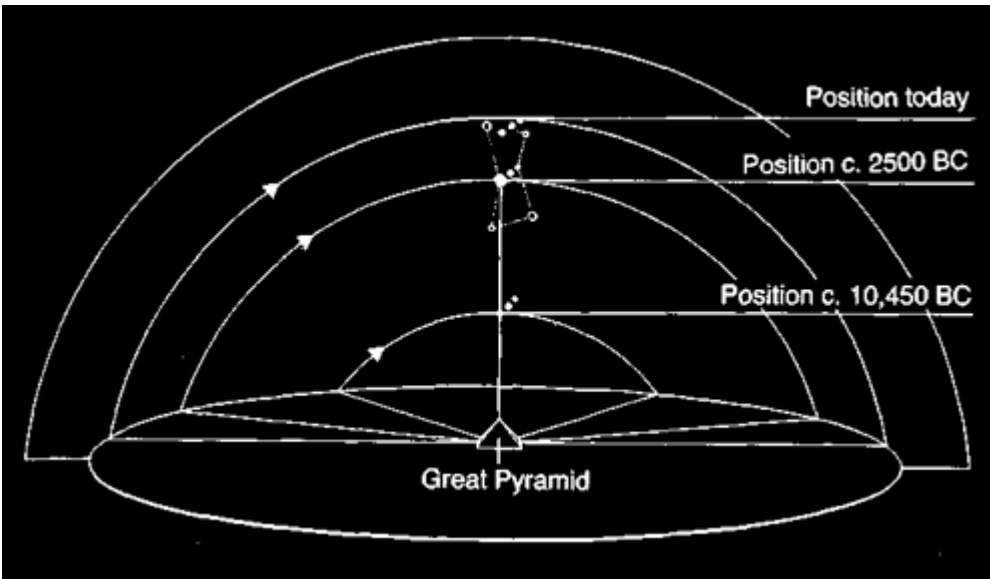
call Mintaka, is slightly offset to the east of the principal diagonal formed by the

2 Virginia Trimble, cited in *The Orion Mystery*, p. 241.

3 Ibid., p. 172.

4 Personal communications/interviews, 1993-4.

5 *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, p. 36.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

other two. This pattern is mimicked on the ground where we see that the Pyramid

of Menkaure is offset by exactly the right amount to the east of the principal

diagonal formed by the Pyramid of Khafre (which represents the middle star, Al

Nilam) and the Great Pyramid, which represents Al Nitak. It's really quite obvious

that all these monuments were laid out according to a unified site plan that was

modelled with extraordinary precision on those three stars. ... What they did at

Giza was to build Orion's Belt on the ground.'6

There was more to come. Using a sophisticated computer programme⁷

capable of plotting the precessionally induced changes in the declinations

of all the stars visible in the sky over any part of the world in any epoch,

Bauval found that the Pyramids/Orion's Belt correlation was general and

obvious in all epochs, but specific and exact in only one:

At 10,450 BC—and at that date only—we find that the pattern of the pyramids on

the ground provides a perfect reflection of the pattern of the stars in the sky. I

mean it's a *perfect* match—faultless—and it cannot be an accident because the

entire arrangement correctly depicts two very unusual celestial events that

occurred only at that time. First, and purely by chance, the Milky Way, as visible

from Giza in 10,450 BC, exactly duplicated the meridional course of the Nile

Valley; secondly, to the west of the Milky Way, the three stars of Orion's Belt were

at the lowest altitude in their precessional cycle, with Al Nitak, the star

represented by the Great Pyramid, crossing the meridian at $11^{\circ} 08'.8$

Precession and the stars of Orion's belt.

The reader is already familiar with the way the earth's axial precession

causes sunrise on the vernal equinox to migrate along the band of the

zodiac over a cycle of about 26,000 years. The same phenomenon also

affects the declination of all visible stars, producing, in the case of the

Orion constellation, very gradual but significant changes in altitude. Thus

6 Personal communications/interviews.

7 Skyglobe 3.6.

8 Personal communications/interviews.

427

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

from its highest point at meridian transit ($58^{\circ} 11'$ above the southern

horizon as viewed from Giza) it takes Al Nitak about 13,000 years to

descend to the low point, last registered in 10,450 BC, that is

immortalized in stone on the Giza plateau—i.e. $11^{\circ} 08'$. As another

13,000 years pass, the belt stars very slowly rise again until Al Nitak is

back at $58^{\circ} 11'$; then during the next 13,000 years they gradually fall once more to $11^{\circ} 08'$. This cycle is eternal: 13,000 years up, 13,000 years

down, 13,000 years up, 13,000 years down, for ever. 9

It's the precise configuration for 10,450 BC that we see on the Giza plateau—as

though a master-architect came here in that epoch and decided to lay out a huge

map on the ground using a mixture of natural and artificial features. He used the

meridional course of the Nile Valley to depict the Milky Way, as it looked then. He

built the three pyramids to represent the three stars, exactly as they looked then.

And he put the three pyramids in exactly the same relationship to the Nile Valley

as the three stars then had to the Milky Way. It was a very clever, very ambitious,

very exact way to mark an epoch—to freeze a particular date into architecture if

you like ...10

The First Time

I found the implications of the Orion correlation complicated and eerie.

On the one hand, the Great Pyramid's southern shafts 'precessionally

anchored' the monument to Al Nitak and Sirius in 2475-2400 BC, dates

which coincided comfortably with the epoch when Egyptologists said the

monument had been built.

On the other hand the disposition of all three of the pyramids in

relation to the Nile Valley eloquently signalled the much earlier date of

10,450 BC. This coincided with the controversial geological findings John

West and Robert Schoch had made at Giza, which suggested the presence

of a high civilization in Egypt in the eleventh millennium BC.

Moreover,

the disposition of the pyramids had not been arrived at by any random or

accidental process but seemed to have been deliberately chosen because

it marked a precessionally significant event: the lowest point, the

beginning, the First Time in Orion's 13,000-year 'up' cycle.

I knew that Bauval believed this astronomical event to have been linked

symbolically to the mythical First Time of Osiris—the time of the gods,

when civilization had supposedly been brought into the Nile Valley—and

that his reasoning for this derived from the mythology of Ancient Egypt

which directly associated Osiris with the Orion constellation (and Isis with

Sirius).¹¹

Had the historical archetypes for Osiris and Isis actually come here in

9 Skyglobe 3.6

10 Personal communications/interviews.

11 See Chapters Forty-two to Forty-four.

428

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the First Time, twelve and a half thousand years ago?¹² My research into

Ice Age mythologies had persuaded me that certain ideas and memories

could linger in the human psyche for many millennia, transmitted from

generation to generation by oral tradition. I could therefore see no prima

facie reasons why the Osirian mythology, with its strange and anomalous

characteristics, should not have originated as far back as 10,450 BC.

However, it was the civilization of dynastic Egypt that had elevated Osiris to the status of the high god of resurrection. That civilization was

one that had few known antecedents, and none at all recognizable in the

remote epoch of the eleventh millennium BC. If the Osirian mythology had

been transmitted across 8000 years, therefore, then what culture had

transmitted it? And had this culture also been responsible for *both* the

astronomical alignments proven to have been manifested by the pyramids: 10,450 BC and 2450 BC?

These were among the questions I planned to put to Robert Bauval in

the shadow of the pyramids. Santha and I had arranged to meet him at

dawn, at the Mortuary Temple of Khafre, so that the three of us could watch the sun come up over the Sphinx.

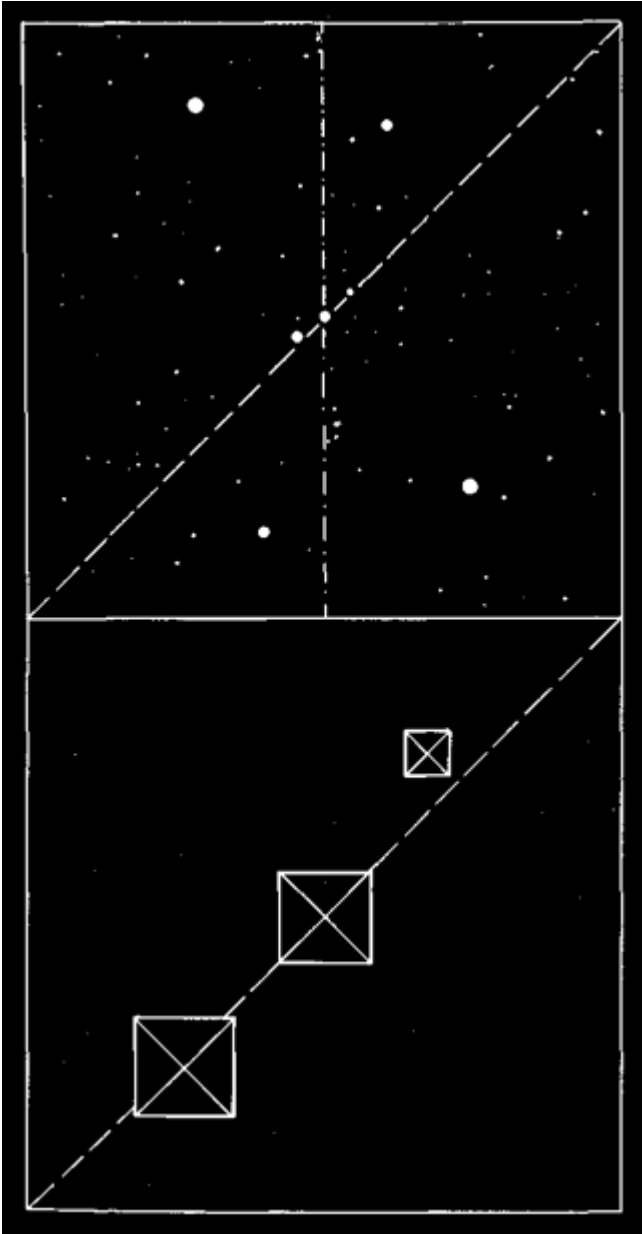
12 'The Egyptians ... believed that they were a divine nation, and that they were ruled by

kings who were themselves gods incarnate; their earliest kings, they asserted, were

actually gods, who did not disdain to live on earth, and to go about up and down

through it, and to mingle with men.' *The Gods of the Egyptians*, volume I, p. 3.

429



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The pyramids and the belt stars of Orion at 10,450 BC, meridian view.

The platform

Positioned beside the eastern face of the Second Pyramid, the largely

ruined Mortuary Temple was a spooky, grey, cold place to be at this hour.

And as John West had indicated during our conversation at Luxor, there

could be little doubt that it belonged to the same severe, imposing and

430

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

unadorned style of architecture as the better-known Valley Temple. Here,

at any rate, were the same enormous blocks, weighing 200 tons or more

each.¹³ And here too was the same intangible atmosphere of vast antiquity and awakening intelligence, as though some epiphany might be

at hand. Even in its present, much despoiled state, this anonymous structure, which Egyptologists had called a Mortuary Temple, was still a

place of power that seemed to draw its energy from an epoch far in the

past.

I looked up at the huge mass of the Second Pyramid's eastern face just

behind us in the pearl-grey dawn light. Again, as John West had pointed

out, there was much to suggest that it might have been built in two different stages. The lower courses, up to a height of perhaps thirty feet,

consisted largely of cyclopean limestone megaliths like those in the temples. Above this height, however, the remainder of the pyramid's gigantic core had been formed out of much smaller blocks weighing around two to three tons each (like the majority of the blocks in the Great

Pyramid).

Had there been a time when a twelve-acre, thirty-foot-high megalithic *platform* had stood here on the 'hill of Giza', west of the Sphinx, surrounded only by nameless square and rectangular structures such as

the Valley and Mortuary Temples? In other words, was it possible that the

Second Pyramid's lower courses might have been built *first*, before the

other pyramids—perhaps long before, in a much earlier age?

The cult

That question was still on my mind when Robert Bauval arrived. After

exchanging a few chilly pleasantries about the weather—a cold desert

wind was blowing across the plateau—I asked him, ‘How do you account

for the 8000-year gap in your correlations?’

‘Gap?’

‘Yes; shafts that seem to have been aligned in 2450 BC and a site-plan

that maps star positions in 10,450 BC.’

‘Actually, I see two explanations that both make some kind of sense,’

said Bauval, ‘and I think the answer has to be one or the other of these ...

Either the pyramids were designed as a sort of “star-clock” to mark two

particular epochs, 2450 and 10,450 BC, in which case we actually can’t

say *when* they were built. Or they were built up over ...’

‘Hang on with that first point,’ I interrupted. ‘How do you mean “star-clock”? How do you mean we can’t say when they were built?’

‘Well, let’s assume for a moment that the pyramid builders knew

13 The Mortuary Temple was excavated by von Sieglin in 1910 and was found to consist

of blocks of varying sizes weighing 'between 100 and 300 tons'. *Blue Guide: Egypt*, p.

431.

431

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

precession. Let's assume they were able to calculate the declination of

particular star-groups backwards and forwards in time, just as we can

today with computers ... Assuming they could do that then, no matter

which epoch they lived in, they'd have been able to make a model of what

the skies over Giza looked like in 10,450 BC or 2450 BC as required, just

as we could. In other words, if they'd built the pyramids in 10,450 BC they

would have had no difficulty in calculating the correct angles of

inclination for the southern shafts so that they would be sighted on Al

Nitak and Sirius around 2450 BC. Likewise, if they'd lived in 2450 BC

they'd have had no difficulty in calculating the correct site-plan to reflect

the position of Orion's Belt in 10,450 BC. Agreed?'

'Agreed.'

‘OK. That’s one explanation. But the second explanation, which I personally favour—and which I think the geological evidence also supports—is that the whole Giza necropolis was developed and built up

over an enormously long period of time. I think it’s more than possible

that the site was originally planned and laid out at around 10,450 BC, so

that its geometry would reflect the skies as they looked then, but that the

work was completed, and the shafts of the Great Pyramid aligned, around

2450 BC.’

‘So you’re saying that the *ground-plan* of the Pyramids could date back

to 10,450 BC?

‘I think it does. And I think that the geometrical centre of that plan was

located more or less where we’re standing now, right in front of the

Second Pyramid ...’

I pointed out the large blocks in the lower courses of the huge edifice:

‘It even *looks* like it was built in two stages, by two completely different

cultures ...’

Bauval shrugged. ‘Let’s speculate ... Maybe it wasn’t two different cultures, Maybe it was one culture, or *cult*— the cult of Osiris, perhaps.

Maybe it was a very long-lived, very ancient cult dedicated to Osiris that

was here in 10,450 BC and was still here in 2450 BC. Maybe what happened was that some of the ways that this cult did things changed

over time. Maybe they used huge blocks in 10,450 BC and smaller blocks

in 2450 BC ... It seems to me there’s a lot here that supports this notion, a

lot that says “very ancient cult”, a lot of evidence that has just never been

investigated ...’

‘For example?’

‘Well, obviously the astronomical alignments of the site. I’ve been among the first to start looking into those properly. And the geology: the

work that John West and Robert Schoch have been involved in at the

Sphinx. Here are two sciences—both hard, empirical, evidence-driven

sciences—that have never been applied to these problems before.
But

now that we have started to apply them, we're beginning to get a
whole

new reading on the antiquity of the necropolis. And I honestly think
we've

432

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

just scratched the surface and that much more will emerge from the
geology and the astronomy in the future. In addition, nobody's yet
made

a really detailed study of the Pyramid Texts from anything other than
the

so-called “anthropological” perspective, which means a
preconceived

notion that the priests of Heliopolis were a bunch of half-civilized
witch-

doctors who wanted to live for ever ... Actually they *did* want to live
for

ever but they certainly weren't witch-doctors ... They were highly
civilized,

highly *initiated* men and they were, in their own fashion, scientists,
as we

can judge from their works. Therefore I suggest that it's as scientific
or at

least quasi-scientific documents that the Pyramid Texts need to be read,

not as mumbo-jumbo. I'm already satisfied that they respond to precessional astronomy. There may be other keys too: mathematics, geometry—particularly geometry ... Symbolism ... What's needed is a

multi-disciplinary approach to understanding the Pyramid Texts ... and to

understanding the pyramids themselves. Astronomers, mathematicians,

geologists, engineers, architects, even philosophers to deal with the symbolism—everybody who can bring a fresh eye and fresh skills to bear

on these very important problems should be encouraged to do so.'

'Why do you feel the problems are so important?'

'Because they have a colossal bearing on our understanding of the past

of our own species. The very careful, very precise site-planning and setting-out that appears to have been done here in 10,450 BC could only

have been the work of a highly-evolved, probably technological civilization. ...'

‘Whereas no such civilization is supposed to have existed anywhere on

earth in that epoch ...’

‘Exactly. It was the Stone Age. Human society was supposed to have

been at a very primitive level, with our ancestors wearing skins, sheltering in caves, following a hunting-gathering way of life and so on

and so forth. So its rather unsettling to discover that civilized people seem to have been present in Giza in 10,450 BC, who understood the

obscure science of precession extremely well, who had the technical capacity to work out that they were witnessing the *lowest* point in Orion’s

precessional cycle—and thus the beginning of the constellation’s 13,000

year upwards journey—and who set out to create a permanent memorial

of that moment here on the plateau. By putting Orion’s Belt on the ground in the way they did they knew that they were freezing a very specific moment in time.’

A perverse thought occurred to me: ‘How can we be so sure that the

moment that they were freezing was 10,450 BC? After all, Orion's Belt

takes up that same configuration in the southern sky, west of the Milky

Way at 11-plus degrees above the horizon, once every 26,000 years. So

why shouldn't they have been immortalizing 36,450 BC or even the precessional cycle that began 26,000 years before that?

Robert was clearly ready for this question. 'Some ancient records do 433

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

suggest that Egyptian civilization had roots going back almost 40,000

years,' he mused, 'like that strange report in Herodotus that talks about

the sun rising where it once set and setting where it once rose ...'

'Which is also a precessional metaphor ...'

'Yes. Precession again. Most peculiar the way it always keeps cropping

up ... At any rate, you're right, they could have been marking the beginning of the *previous* precessional cycle ...'

'But do you think they were?'

'No. I think 10,450 BC is the more likely date. It's more within the range

of what we know about the evolution of *homo sapiens*. And although it

still leaves a lot of years to account for before the sudden emergence of

dynastic Egypt around 3000 BC, it isn't *too* long a period ...'

'Too long a period for what?'

'It's the answer to your question about the 8000-year gap between the

alignment of the site and the alignment of the shafts. Eight thousand

years is a very long time but it isn't too long for a dedicated highly

motivated cult to have preserved and nurtured and faithfully passed on

the high-knowledge of the people who invented this place in 10,450 BC.'¹⁴

The machine

How high was the knowledge of those prehistoric inventors?

'They knew their epochs,' said Bauval, 'and the clock that they used was

the natural clock of the stars. Their working language was precessional

astronomy and these monuments express that language in a very clear,

unambiguous, scientific manner. They were also highly skilled surveyors—I mean the people who originally prepared the site and laid

14 Just as any great Christian cathedral, however modern (for example the twentieth-

century gothic cathedral on Nob Hill in San Francisco), expresses the thinking,

symbolism and iconography of the Judaeo-Christian 'cult' which has roots at least 4000

years old, it should not be impossible to imagine a cult enduring for 8000 years in

Ancient Egypt and thus linking the epoch of 10450 BC to 2,450 BC. The completion of

the pyramids at that time, like the completion of a cathedral today, would therefore have

resulted in structures that expressed extremely old ideas. Plentiful evidence exists

within Ancient Egyptian tradition which seems to attest to the existence and

preservation of such ancient ideas. For example, 'King Nefer-hetep [XIIIth Dynasty] was a

loyal worshipper of Osiris and hearing that his Temple [at Abydos] was in ruins, and that

a new statue of the god was required, he went to the temple of Ra-Atum at Heliopolis,

and consulted the books in the library there, so that he might learn how to make a

statue of Osiris which should be like that which had existed in the beginning of the

world ...' (*Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, volume II, p. 14). Also *Sacred Science*;

pp. 103-4, explains that the construction of temples in the Ptolemaic and late periods of

Egyptian history continued to obey very ancient specifications: 'All the plans always refer

to a *divine book*; thus the temple of Edfu was rebuilt under the Ptolemies according to

the *book of foundation composed by Imhotep*, a book descended from heaven to the

north of Memphis. The temple of Dendera followed a *plan recorded in ancient writings*

dating from the Companions of Horus.'

434

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

out the orientations for the pyramids—because they worked to an

exacting geometry and because they knew how to align the base-

platforms, or whatever it was they built, perfectly to the cardinal points.'

'Do you think they also knew that they were marking out the site of the

Great Pyramid on latitude 30° North?'

Bauval laughed: I'm certain they knew. I think they knew everything about the shape of the earth. They knew their astronomy. They had a

good understanding of the solar system and of celestial mechanics. They

were also incredibly accurate and incredibly precise in everything they

did. So, all in all, I don't think anything really happened here by chance—

at least not between 10,450 and 2450 BC. I get the feeling that everything

was planned, intended, carefully worked out ... Indeed I get the feeling

that they were fulfilling a long-term objective—some kind of *purpose*, if

you like, and that they brought this to fruition in the third millennium BC

... 'In the form of the fully built pyramids which they then precessionally

anchored to Al Nitak and to Sirius at the time of completion?'

'Yes. And also, I think, in the form of the Pyramid Texts. My guess is

that the Pyramid Texts are part of the puzzle.'

'The software to the Pyramids' hardware?'

'Quite possibly. Why not? At any rate it's certain that there's a connection. I think what it means is that if we're going to decode the pyramids properly then we're going to have to use the Texts ...'

'What's your guess?' I asked Bauval. 'What do you think the purpose of

the pyramid builders really might have been?'

'They *didn't* do it because they wanted an eternal tomb,' he replied firmly. 'In my view, they had no doubts at all that they would eternally live. They did it—whoever did it—they have transmitted the power of their

ideas through something that is to all intents and purposes eternal. They

succeeded in creating a force that is functional in itself, provided you understand it, and that force is the *questions* it challenges you to ask. My

guess is that they knew the human mind to perfection. They knew the

game of ritual ... Right? I'm serious. They knew what they were doing.

They knew that they could initiate people far ahead in the future into

their way of thinking even though they couldn't be there themselves.

They knew that they could do this by creating an eternal machine,
the

function of which was to generate questions.'

I suppose that I must have looked puzzled.

'The machine is the pyramids!' Bauval exclaimed, 'the whole of the
Giza

necropolis really. And look at us. What are we doing? We're asking

questions. We're standing out here, shivering, at an ungodly hour,

watching the sun come up, and we're asking questions, lots and lots
of

questions just as we've been programmed to do. We're in the hands
of

real magicians here, and real magicians know that with symbols—
with the

right symbols, with the right questions—they can lead you into
initiating

435

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

yourself. Provided, that is, you are a person who asks questions.
And, if

you are, then the minute you start asking questions about the
pyramids

you begin to stumble into a whole series of answers which lead you to

other questions, and then more answers until finally you initiate yourself

...'

'Sow the seed ...'

'Yes. They were sowing the seed. Believe me, they were magicians, and

they knew the power of ideas ... They knew how to set ideas growing and

developing in people's minds. And if you start with such ideas, and follow

the process of reasoning like I did, you arrive at things like Orion, and

10,450 BC. In short, this is a process that works on its own. When it enters, when it settles into the subconscious, it is a self-willing conversion. Once it's there you can't even resist it ...'

'You're talking as though this Giza cult, whatever it was—revolving around precession, and geometry, and the pyramids, and the Pyramid

Texts—you're talking as though it still exists.'

'In a sense it does still exist,' Robert replied. 'Even if the driver is no longer at the wheel, the Giza necropolis is still a machine that was

designed to provoke questions.' He paused and pointed up to the summit

of the Great Pyramid where Santha and I had climbed, at dead of night,

nine months previously. 'Look at its power,' he continued. 'Five thousand

years on it still gets you. It involves you whether you like it or not ... It

forces you into a process of thinking ... forces you to learn. The minute

you ask a question about it you've asked a question about engineering,

you've asked a question about geometry, you've asked a question about

astronomy. So it forces you to learn about engineering and geometry and

astronomy, and gradually you begin to realize how sophisticated it is,

how incredibly clever and skilful and knowledgeable its builders must

have been, which forces you to ask questions about mankind, about

human history, eventually about yourself too. *You want to find out.* This

is the power of the thing.'

The second signature

As Robert, Santha and I sat out on the Giza plateau that cold December

morning at the end of 1993, we watched the winter sun, now very close

to solstice, rising over the right shoulder of the Sphinx, almost as far south of east as it would travel on its yearly journey before turning north

again.

The Sphinx was an equinoctial marker, with its gaze directed precisely

at the point of sunrise on the vernal equinox. Was it, too, part of the Giza

‘grand plan’?

I reminded myself that in any epoch, and at any period of history or prehistory, the Sphinx’s due east gaze would *always* have been sighted

on the equinoctial rising of the sun, at both the vernal and the autumnal

436

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

equinoxes. As the reader will recall from Part V, however, it was the vernal equinox that was considered by ancient man to be the marker of

the astronomical age. In the words of Santillana and von Dechend:

The constellation that rose in the east, just before the sun, marked the 'place'

where the sun rested ... It was known as the sun's 'carrier' and the vernal equinox

was recognised as the fiducial point of the 'system' determining the first degree of

the sun's yearly cycle ...'¹⁵

Why should an equinoctial marker have been made in the shape of a giant

lion?

In our own lifetimes, the epoch of AD 2000, a more suitable shape for

such a marker—should anyone wish to build one—would be a

representation of a fish. This is because the sun on the vernal equinox

rises against the stellar background of Pisces, as it has done for

approximately the last 2000 years. The astronomical Age of Pisces began

around the time of Christ.¹⁶ Readers must judge for themselves whether it

is a coincidence that the principal symbol used for Christ by the very early Christians was not the cross but the fish.¹⁷

During the preceding age, which broadly-speaking encompassed the

first and second millennia BC, it was the constellation of Aries—the Ram—

which had the honour of carrying the sun on the vernal equinox. Again,

readers must judge whether it is a coincidence that the religious iconography of that epoch was predominantly ram-oriented.¹⁸ Is it a coincidence, for example, that Yahweh, God of Old Testament Israel, provided a ram as a substitute for Abraham's offered sacrifice of his son

Isaac?¹⁹ (Abraham and Isaac are assumed by biblical scholars and archaeologists to have lived during the early second millennium BC²⁰). Is it

likewise coincidental that rams, in one context or another, are referred to

in almost every book of the Old Testament (entirely composed during the

Age of Aries) but in not a single book of the New Testament?²¹ And is it

an accident that the advent of the Age of Aries, shortly before the beginning of the second millennium BC, was accompanied in Ancient

Egypt by an upsurge in the worship of the god Amon whose symbol was a

ram with curled horns?22 Work on the principal sanctuary of Amon—the

Temple of Karnak at Luxor in upper Egypt—was begun at around 2000

BC23 and, as those who have visited that temple will recall, its principal

icons are rams, long rows of which guard its entrances.

The immediate predecessor to the Age of Aries was the Age of Taurus—

15 *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 59.

16 *Ibid.*; *Sacred Science*, p. 179.

17 *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 514.

18 *Sacred Science*, p. 177.

19 *Genesis*: 22:13

20 *Jerusalem Bible*, chronological table, p. 343.

21 *King James Bible*, Franklin, Computerized First Edition.

22 *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, p. 20.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

437

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the Bull—which spanned the period between 4380 and 2200 BC.²⁴
It was

during this precessional epoch, when the sun on the vernal equinox
rose

in the constellation of Taurus, that the Bull-cult of Minoan Crete

flourished.²⁵ And during this epoch, too, the civilization of dynastic
Egypt

burst upon the historical scene, fully formed, apparently without

antecedents. Readers must judge whether it is a coincidence that

Egyptians at the very beginning of the dynastic period were already

venerating the Apis and Mnevis Bulls—the former being considered a

theophany of the god Osiris and the latter, the sacred animal of

Heliopolis, a theophany of the god Ra.²⁶

Why should an equinoctial marker have been made in the form of a

lion?

I looked down the slope of the Giza plateau towards the great
leonine

body of the Sphinx.

Khafre, the Fourth Dynasty pharaoh believed by Egyptologists to
have

carved the monument out of bedrock around 2500 BC, had been a

monarch of the Age of Taurus. For almost 1800 years before his reign,

and more than 300 years after it, the sun on the vernal equinox rose unfailingly in the constellation of the Bull. It follows that if a monarch at

such a time had set out to create an equinoctial marker at Giza, he would

have had every reason to have it carved in the form of a bull, and none

whatsoever to have it carved in the form of a lion. Indeed, and it was obvious, there was only *one* epoch when the celestial symbolism of a

leonine equinoctial marker would have been appropriate. That epoch was,

of course, the Age of Leo, from 10,970 to 8810 BC.²⁷

Why, therefore, should an equinoctial marker have been made in the shape of a lion? Because it was made during the Age of Leo when the sun

on the vernal equinox rose against the stellar background of the constellation of the Lion, thus marking the coordinates of a precessional

epoch that would not experience its 'Great Return' for another 26,000

years.

Around 10,450 BC the three stars of Orion's Belt reached the lowest point in their precessional cycle: west of the Milky Way, 11° 08' above the

southern horizon at meridian transit. On the ground west of the Nile, this

event was frozen into architecture in the shape of the three pyramids of

Giza. Their layout formed the signature of an unmistakable epoch of precessional time.

Around 10,450 BC, the sun on the vernal equinox rose in the constellation of Leo. On the ground at Giza, this event was frozen into

architecture in the shape of the Sphinx, a gigantic, leonine, equinoctial

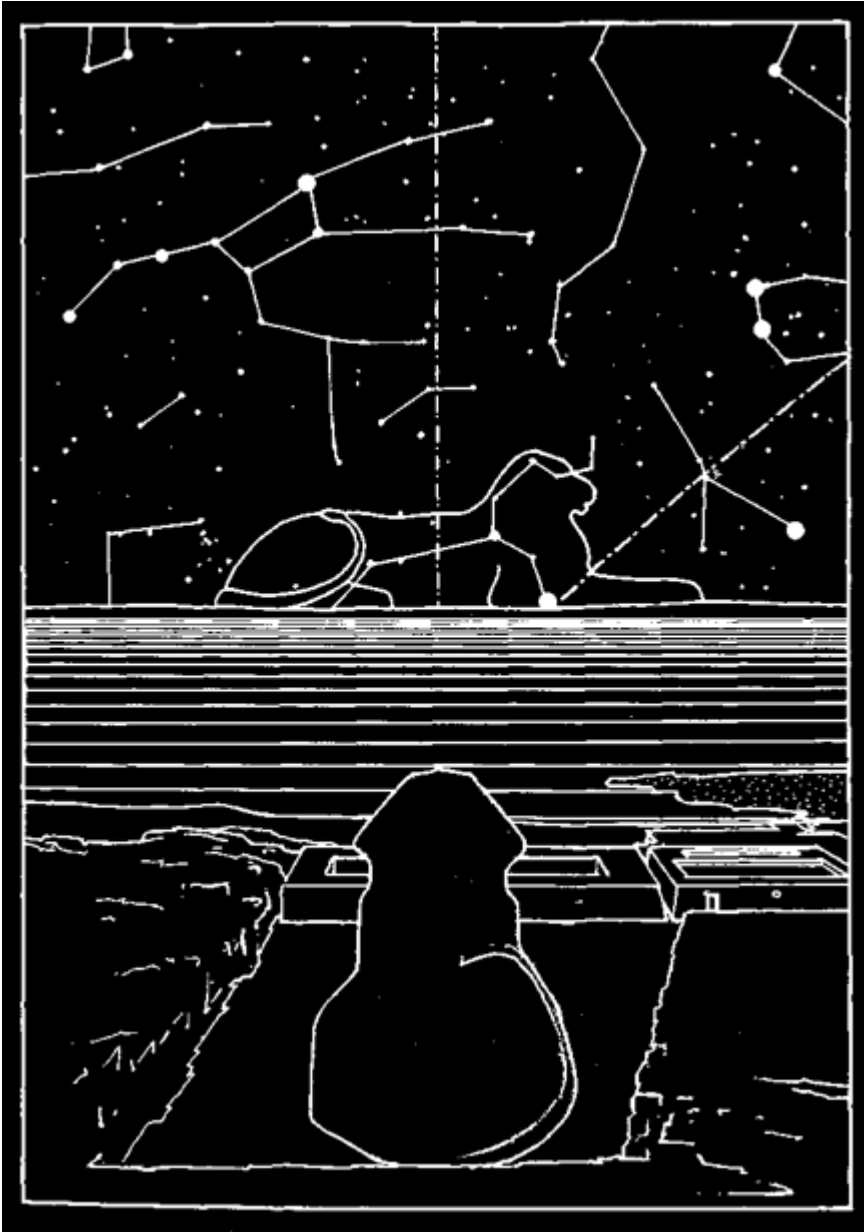
marker which, like the second signature on an official document, could

24 *Sacred Science*, p. 177.

25 As early as 3000 BC. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 3:731.

26 *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 27, 171.

27 Skyglobe 3.6.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

be taken as a confirmation of authenticity.

The eleventh millennium BC, in other words, soon after the 'Mill of Heaven' broke, shifting sunrise on the spring equinox from Virgo into the

constellation of Leo, was the only epoch in which the due east facing

Sphinx would have manifested exactly the right symbolic alignment on

exactly the right day—watching the vernal sun rising in the dawn sky against the background of his own celestial counterpart ...

Looking due east at dawn on the vernal equinox in 10,450 BC. The Sphinx and the constellation of Leo.

439

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Forcing the question

‘It can’t be a coincidence that such a perfect alignment of the terrestrial

and the celestial occurs at around 10,450 BC,’ said Robert. ‘In fact I don’t

think coincidence is any longer an issue. To me the real question is *why?*

Why was it done? Why did they go to such lengths to make this enormous

statement about the eleventh millennium BC?’

‘Obviously because it was an important time for them,’ suggested

Santha.

‘It must have been very, *very* important. You don’t do something like this, create a series of vast precessional markers like these, carve a

Sphinx, put up three pyramids weighing almost 15 million tons, unless

you have some hugely important reason. So the question is: *what was*

that reason? They've forced this question by making such a strong,

imperative statement about 10,450 BC. Really, they've forced the

question. They want to draw our attention to 10,450 BC and it's up to us

to work out why.'

We fell silent, for a long while as the sun climbed the sky south-east of

the Great Sphinx.

440

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Part VIII

Conclusion

Where's the Body?

441

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 50

Not a Needle in a Haystack

When I was only a few months into this investigation, my research assistant sent me a fifteen-page letter explaining why he had decided to

resign. At that stage I hadn't yet begun to put the pieces of the puzzle

together and I was working more on hunches than on hard evidence. I

was captivated by all the mysteries, anomalies, anachronisms and puzzles, and wanted to learn as much about them as I could. My researcher, meanwhile, had been looking into the long, slow processes by

which some *known* civilizations had come into global history.

It transpired that, in his opinion, certain significant economic, climatic,

topographical and geographical preconditions had to be met before a civilization could evolve:

So if you are looking for a hitherto undiscovered civilization of great originators

who made it on their own, separate from any of the ones we already know, *you are*

not looking for a needle in a haystack. You are looking for something more like a

city in its hinterland. What you are looking for is a vast region which occupied a

land area at least a couple of thousand miles across. This is a landmass as big as

the Gulf of Mexico, or twice the size of Madagascar. It would have had major

mountain ranges, huge river systems and a Mediterranean to sub-tropical climate

which was buffered by its latitude from the adverse effects of short-term climatic

cooling. It would have needed this relatively undisturbed climate to last for around

ten thousand years ... Then the population of several hundred thousand

sophisticated people, we are to believe, suddenly vanished, together with their

homeland, leaving very little physical trace, with only a few surviving individuals

who were shrewd enough to see the end coming, wealthy enough and in the right

place, with the resources they needed to be able to do something about escaping

the cataclysm.

So there I was without a researcher. My proposition was *a priori* impossible. There could be no lost advanced civilization because a landmass big enough to support such a civilization was too big to lose.

Geophysical impossibilities

The problem was a serious one and it continued to nag at the back of my

mind all the way through my own research and travels. It was, indeed,

this exact problem, more than any other, which had scuppered Plato's

Atlantis as a serious proposition for scholars. As one critic of the lost continent theory put it:

There never was an Atlantic landbridge since the arrival of man in the world; there

is no sunken landmass in the Atlantic: the Atlantic Ocean must have existed in its

present form for at least a million years. In fact it is a geophysical impossibility for

442

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

an Atlantis of Plato's dimensions to have existed in the Atlantic ...1

The adamant and assertive tone, I had long ago learnt, was entirely

justified. Modern oceanographers had thoroughly mapped the floor of

the Atlantic Ocean and there was definitely no lost continent lurking there.

But if the evidence that I was gathering did represent the fingerprints of

a vanished civilization, a continent had to have got lost *somewhere*,

So where? For a while I used the obvious working hypothesis that it might be under some other ocean. The Pacific was very big but the Indian

Ocean looked more promising because it was located relatively close to

the Middle East's Fertile Crescent, where several of the earliest known

historical civilizations had emerged with extreme suddenness at around

3000 BC. I had plans to go chasing rumours of ancient pyramids in the

Maldiv Islands and along the Somali coast of East Africa to see if I could

pick up any clues of a lost paradise of antiquity. I thought I might even

work in a trip to the Seychelles.

The problem was the oceanographers again. The floor of the Indian

Ocean, too, had been mapped and it didn't conceal any lost continents.

Ditto every other ocean and every other sea. There seemed to be nowhere

now under water into which a landmass big enough to have nurtured a

high civilization could have vanished.

Yet, as my research continued, the evidence kept mounting that

precisely such a civilization had once existed. I began to suspect that it

must have been a maritime civilization: a nation of navigators. In support

of this hypothesis, among other anomalies, were the remarkable ancient

maps of the world, the 'Pyramid Boats' of Egypt, the traces of advanced

astronomical knowledge in the astonishing calendar system of the Maya,

and the legends of seafaring gods like Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha.

A nation of navigators, then. And a nation of builders, too: Tiahuanaco

builders, Teotihuacan builders, pyramid builders, Sphinx builders,

builders who could lift and position 200-ton blocks of limestone with

apparent ease, builders who could align vast monuments to the cardinal

points with uncanny accuracy. Whoever they were, these builders

appeared to have left their characteristic fingerprints all over the world in

the form of cyclopean polygonal masonry, site layouts involving

astronomical alignments, mathematical and geodetic puzzles, and myths

about gods in human form. But a civilization advanced enough to build

like that—rich enough, sufficiently well organized and mature to have

explored and mapped the world from pole to pole, a civilization smart

enough to have calculated the dimensions of the earth—simply could *not*

have evolved on an insignificant landmass. Its homeland, as my

researcher had rightly pointed out, must have been blessed with major

mountain ranges, huge river systems and a congenial climate, and with

1 Galanopoulos and Bacon, *Lost Atlantis*, p. 75.

443

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

many other obvious environmental prerequisites for the development of

an advanced and prosperous economy: good agricultural lands, mineral

resources, forests, and so on.

So where could such a landmass have been located, if not under any of

the world's oceans?

Library angels

Where could it have been located and *when* might it have disappeared?

And if it had disappeared (and no other explanation would do) then *how*,

why, and *under what circumstances*?

Seriously, how do you lose a continent?

Commonsense suggested that the answer had to lie in a cataclysm of

some kind, a planetary disaster capable of wiping out almost all physical

traces of a large civilization. But if so, why were there no records of such

a cataclysm? Or perhaps there were.

As my research progressed I studied many of the great myths of flood,

fire, earthquakes and ice handed down from generation to generation

around the world. We saw in Part IV that it was difficult to resist the conclusion that the myths were describing real geological and climatic

events, quite possibly the different local effects of the *same* events in all

cases.

During the short history of mankind's presence on this planet, I found that there was only one known and documented catastrophe that fitted

the bill: the dramatic and deadly meltdown of the last Ice Age between

15000 and 8000 BC. Moreover, as was more obviously the case with architectural relics like Teotihuacan and the Egyptian pyramids, many of

the relevant myths appeared to have been designed to serve as vehicles

for encrypted scientific information, again an indication of what I was coming to think of as 'the fingerprints of the gods'.

What I had become sensitized to, although I did not properly realize its

implications at the time, was the possibility that a strong connection

might exist between the collapsing chaos of the Ice Age and the disappearance of an archaic civilization which had been the stuff of legend for millennia.

It was at this moment exactly that the library angels intervened ...

The missing piece of the puzzle

The novelist Arthur Koestler, who had a great interest in synchronicity,

coined the term 'library angel' to describe the unknown agency

responsible for the lucky breaks researchers sometimes get which lead to

exactly the right information being placed in their hands at exactly the

444

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

right moment.²

At exactly the right moment, one of those lucky breaks came my way.

The moment was the summer of 1993. I was at a low ebb physically and

spiritually after months of hard travel, and the geophysical impossibility

of actually *losing* a continent-sized landmass was beginning to undermine

my confidence in the strength of my findings. It was then that I received a

letter from the town of Nanaimo in British Columbia, Canada. The letter

referred to my previous book *The Sign and the Seal*, in which I had made

passing mention of the Atlantis theory and of traditions of civilizing heroes who had been 'saved from water':

19 July 1993

Dear Mr. Hancock,

After 17 years of research into the fate of Atlantis, my wife and I have finished a

manuscript entitled *When the Sky Fell*. Our frustration is that despite positive feedback

about the book's approach from the few publishers who have seen it, the mere mention

of Atlantis closes minds.³ In *The Sign and the Seal* you write of 'a tradition of secret

wisdom started by the survivors of a flood ...' Our work explores sites where some

survivors might have relocated. High altitude, fresh-water lakes made ideal post-deluge

bases for the survivors of Atlantis. Lake Titicaca and Lake Tana [in Ethiopia, where much

of *The Sign and the Seal* was set] fit the climatic criteria. Their stable environment

provided the raw materials for restarting agriculture.

We have taken the liberty of enclosing an outline of *When the Sky Fell*. If you are

interested we will be pleased to send you a copy of the manuscript.

Sincerely,

Rand Flem-Ath

I turned to the enclosure and there, in the first few paragraphs, found the

missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle I had been looking for. It meshed perfectly with the ancient global maps I had studied—maps which accurately depicted the *subglacial topography* of the continent of

Antarctica (see Part I). It made perfect sense of all the great worldwide

myths of cataclysm and planetary disaster, with their differing climatic

effects. It explained the enigma of the huge numbers of apparently 'flash-

frozen' mammoths in northern Siberia and Alaska, and the 90-foot tall

fruit trees locked in the permafrost deep inside the Arctic Circle at a

latitude where nothing now grows. It provided a solution to the problem

of the extreme suddenness with which the last Ice Age in the northern

hemisphere melted down after 15,000 BC. It also solved the mystery of

the exceptional worldwide volcanic activity that accompanied the meltdown. It answered the question, 'How do you lose a continent?' And

it was solidly based in Charles Hapgood's theory of 'earth-crust displacement'—a radical geological hypothesis with which I was already

familiar:

2 See, for example, Brian Inglis, *Coincidence*, Hutchinson, London, 1990, p. 48ff.

3 *When the Sky Fell*, with an Introduction by Colin Wilson and Afterword by John Anthony

West, is published by Stoddart, Canada, 1995.

445

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Antarctica is our least understood continent [wrote the Flem-Aths in their outline].

Most of us assume that this immense island has been ice-bound for millions of

years. But new discoveries prove that parts of Antarctica were free of ice

thousands of years ago, recent history by the geological clock. The theory of

'earth-crust displacement' explains the mysterious surge and ebb of Antarctica's

vast ice sheet.

What the Canadian researchers were referring to was Hapgood's

suggestion that until the end of the last Ice Age—say the eleventh

millennium BC—the landmass of Antarctica had been positioned some

2000 miles further north (at a congenial and temperate latitude) and that

it had been moved to its present position inside the Antarctic Circle as a

result of a massive displacement of the earth's crust.⁴ This displacement,

the Flem-Aths continued, had

also left other evidence of its deadly visit in a ring of death around the globe. All

the continents that experienced rapid and massive extinctions of animal species

(notably the Americas and Siberia) underwent a massive change in their latitudes

...

The consequences of a displacement are monumental. The earth's crust ripples

over its interior and the world is shaken by incredible quakes and floods. The sky

appears to fall as continents groan and shift position. Deep in the ocean,

earthquakes generate massive tidal waves which crash against coastlines, flooding

them. Some lands shift to warmer climes, while others, propelled into polar zones,

suffer the direst of winters. Melting ice caps raise the ocean's level higher and

higher. All living things must adapt, migrate or die ...

If the horror of an earth-crust displacement were to be visited upon today's

interdependent world the progress of thousands of years of civilization would be

torn away from our planet like a fine cobweb. Those who live near high mountains

might escape the global tidal waves, but they would be forced to leave behind, in

the lowlands, the slowly constructed fruits of civilization. Only among the

merchant marine and navies of the world might some evidence of civilization

remain. The rusting hulls of ships and submarines would eventually perish but the

valuable maps that are housed in them would be saved by survivors, perhaps for

hundreds, even thousands of years. Until once again mankind could use them to

sail the World Ocean in search of lost lands ...

As I read these words I remembered Charles Hapgood's account of how

the layer of the earth that geologists call the lithosphere—the thin but rigid outer crust of the planet—could at times be displaced, moving in

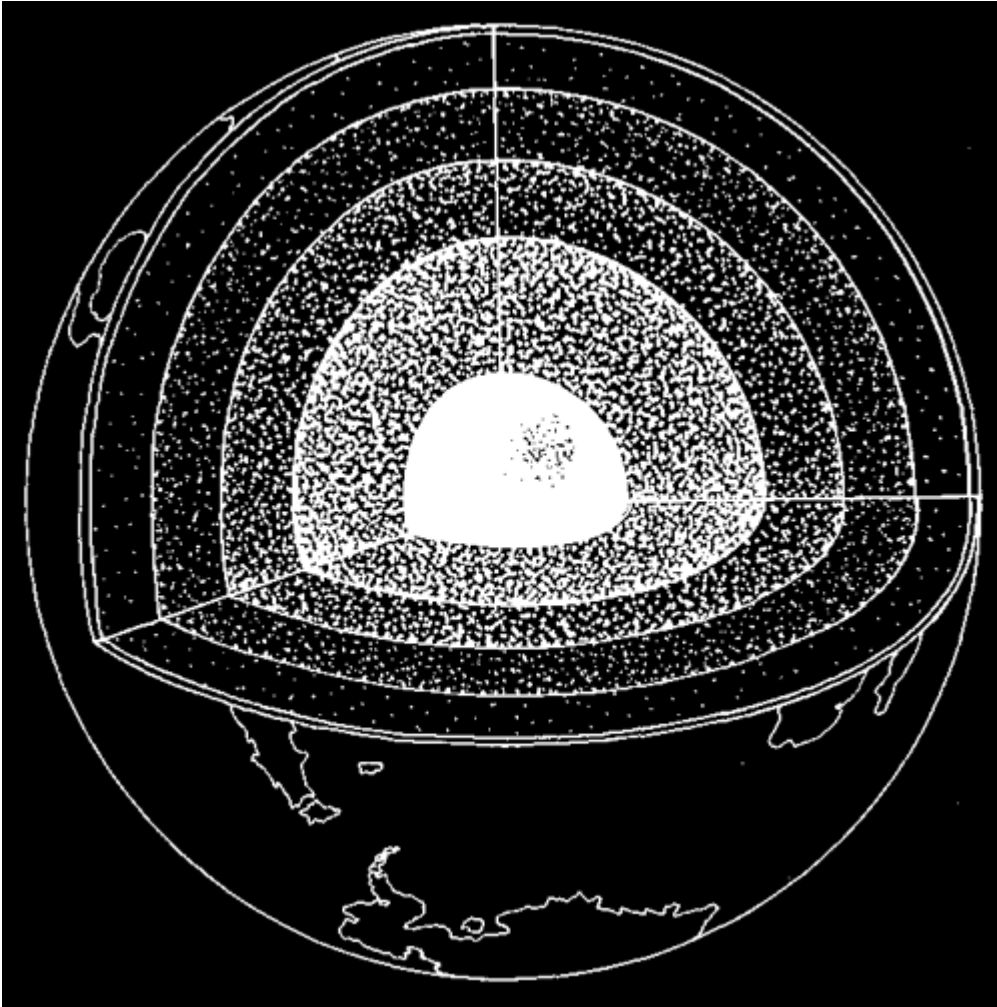
one piece 'over the soft inner body, much as the skin of an orange, if it

were loose, might shift over the inner part of the orange all in one piece.'⁵

Thus far, I felt I was on familiar ground. But then the Canadian researchers made two vital connections which I had missed.

4 See Part I.

5 Ibid.



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Section through the earth. The crustal displacement theory envisages

the possibility of periodic displacements of the entire crust in one piece. Often less than 30 miles thick, the crust rests on a lubricating layer known as the asthenosphere.

Gravitational influences

The first of these was the possibility that *gravitational* influences (as well

as the variations in the earth's orbital geometry discussed in Part V)

might, through the mechanism of earth-crust displacement, play a role in

the onset and decline of Ice Ages:

When the naturalist and geologist Louis Agassiz presented the idea of ice ages to

the scientific community in 1837 he was met with great skepticism. However, as

evidence slowly gathered in his favour, the skeptics were forced to accept that the

earth had indeed been gripped by deadly winters. But the trigger of these

paralysing ice ages remained a puzzle. It was not until 1976 that solid evidence

existed to establish the timing of ice ages. The explanation was found in various

astronomical features of the earth's orbit and the tilt of the axis. Astronomical

factors have clearly played a role in the timing of glacial epochs. But this is only

part of the problem. Of equal importance is the *geography* of glaciation. It is here

that the theory of earth-crust displacement plays its role in unravelling the

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

mystery.

Albert Einstein investigated the possibility that the weight of the ice-caps, which

are not symmetrically distributed about the pole, might cause such a

displacement. Einstein wrote: 'The earth's rotation acts on these unsymmetrically

deposited masses, and produces centrifugal momentum that is transmitted to the

rigid crust of the earth. The constantly increasing centrifugal momentum

produced this way will, when it reaches a certain point, produce a movement of

the earth's crust over the earth's body, and *this will displace the polar regions*

towards the equator.

When Einstein wrote these words [1953] the astronomical causes of ice ages were

not fully appreciated. When the shape of the earth's orbit deviates from a perfect

circle by more than one per cent, the gravitational influence of the sun increases,

exercising more pull on the planet and its massive ice sheets. Their ponderous

weight pushes against the crust and this immense pressure, combined with the

greater incline in the earth's tilt [another changing factor of the orbital geometry]

forces the crust to shift ...

The connection with the onset and decline of ice ages?

Very straightforward.

In a displacement, those parts of the earth's crust which are situated at

the North and South Poles (and which are therefore as completely

glaciated as Antarctica is today) shift suddenly into warmer latitudes and

begin to melt with extraordinary rapidity. Conversely, land that has

hitherto been located at warmer latitudes is shifted equally suddenly into

the polar zones, suffers a devastating climate change, and begins to

vanish under a rapidly expanding ice-cap.

In other words, when huge parts of northern Europe and north America

were heavily glaciated in what we think of as the last Ice Age, it was not

because of some mysterious slow-acting climatic factor, but rather

because those areas of land were then situated much closer to the North

Pole than they are today. Similarly, when the Wisconsin and Wurm glaciations described in Part IV began to go into their meltdown at around 15,000 BC the trigger was not global climate change but a shift of

the ice-caps into warmer latitudes ...

In other words: there is an Ice Age going on right now—inside the Arctic Circle and *in Antarctica*.

The lost continent

The second connection the Flem-Aths made followed logically from the

first: if there was such a recurrent, cyclical geological phenomenon as

earth-crust displacement, and if the last displacement had shifted the enormous landmass we call Antarctica out of temperate latitudes and into

the Antarctic Circle, it was possible that the substantial remains of a lost

civilization of remote antiquity might today be lying under two miles of

ice at the South Pole.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

It was suddenly clear to me how a continent-sized landmass, which had

been the home of a large and prosperous society for thousands of years,

could indeed get lost almost without trace. As the Flem-Aths concluded:

‘It is to icy Antarctica that we look to find answers to the very roots of civilization—answers which may yet be preserved in the frozen depths of the forgotten island continent.’

I hauled out my researcher’s resignation letter from the files and started to check off his preconditions for the emergence of an advanced

civilization. He wanted ‘major mountain ranges’. He wanted ‘huge river

systems’. He wanted ‘a vast region which occupied a land area at least a

couple of thousand miles across’. He also wanted a stable, congenial

climate for ten thousand years, to allow time for a developed culture to

evolve.

Antarctica is by no means a needle in a haystack. It's a huge landmass, much, much bigger than the Gulf of Mexico, about seven times larger than Madagascar—indeed roughly the size of the continental USA.

Moreover, as seismic surveys have demonstrated, there *are* major mountain ranges in Antarctica. And as several of the ancient maps seem

to prove, unknown prehistoric cartographers, who possessed a scientific

understanding of latitude and longitude, depicted these mountain ranges

before they disappeared beneath the ice-cap that covers them today.

These same ancient maps also show 'huge river systems' flowing down

from the mountains, watering the extensive valleys and plains below and

running into the surrounding ocean. And these rivers, as I already knew

from the Ross Sea cores,⁶ had left physical evidence of their presence in

the composition of ocean bottom sediments.

Last but not least, I noted that the earth-crust displacement theory did

not conflict with the requirement for 10,000 years of stable climate.
Prior

to the supposed sudden shift of the crust, at around the end of the
last

Ice Age in the northern hemisphere, the climate of Antarctica would
have

been stable, perhaps for a great deal longer than 10,000 years. And
if the

theory was right in suggesting that Antarctica's latitude in that epoch
had

been about 2000 miles (30 degrees of arc) further north than it is
today,

the northernmost parts of it would have been situated in the vicinity
of

latitude 30° South and would, indeed, have enjoyed a Mediterranean
to

sub-tropical climate.

Had the earth's crust really shifted? And could the ruins of a lost
civilization really lie beneath the ice of the southern continent?

As we see in the following chapters, it might have ... and they could.

6 Ibid. See Part I and Chapter Fifty-one for details.

449

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 51

The Hammer and the Pendulum

Although beyond the scope of this book, a detailed exposition of the earth-crust displacement theory is to be found in Rand and Rose Flem-

Ath's *When the Sky Fell* (published by Stoddart, Canada, 1995).

As noted, this geological theory was formulated by Professor Charles

Hapgood and supported by Albert Einstein. In brief, what it suggests is a

complete slippage of our planet's thirty-mile-thick lithosphere over its nearly 8000-mile-thick central core, forcing large parts of the western hemisphere southward towards the equator and thence towards the Antarctic Circle. This movement is not seen as taking place along a due

north-south meridian but on a swivelling course—pivoting, as it were, around the central plains of what is now the United States. The result is

that the north-eastern segment of North America (in which the North Pole

was formerly located in Hudson's Bay) is dragged southwards out of the

Arctic Circle and into more temperate latitudes while at the same time the

north-western segment (Alaska and the Yukon) swivels northwards into

the Arctic Circle along with large parts of northern Siberia.

In the southern hemisphere, Hapgood's model shows the landmass that

we now call Antarctica, much of which was previously at temperate or

even warm latitudes, being shifted *in its entirety* inside the Antarctic

Circle. The overall movement is seen as having been in the region of 30

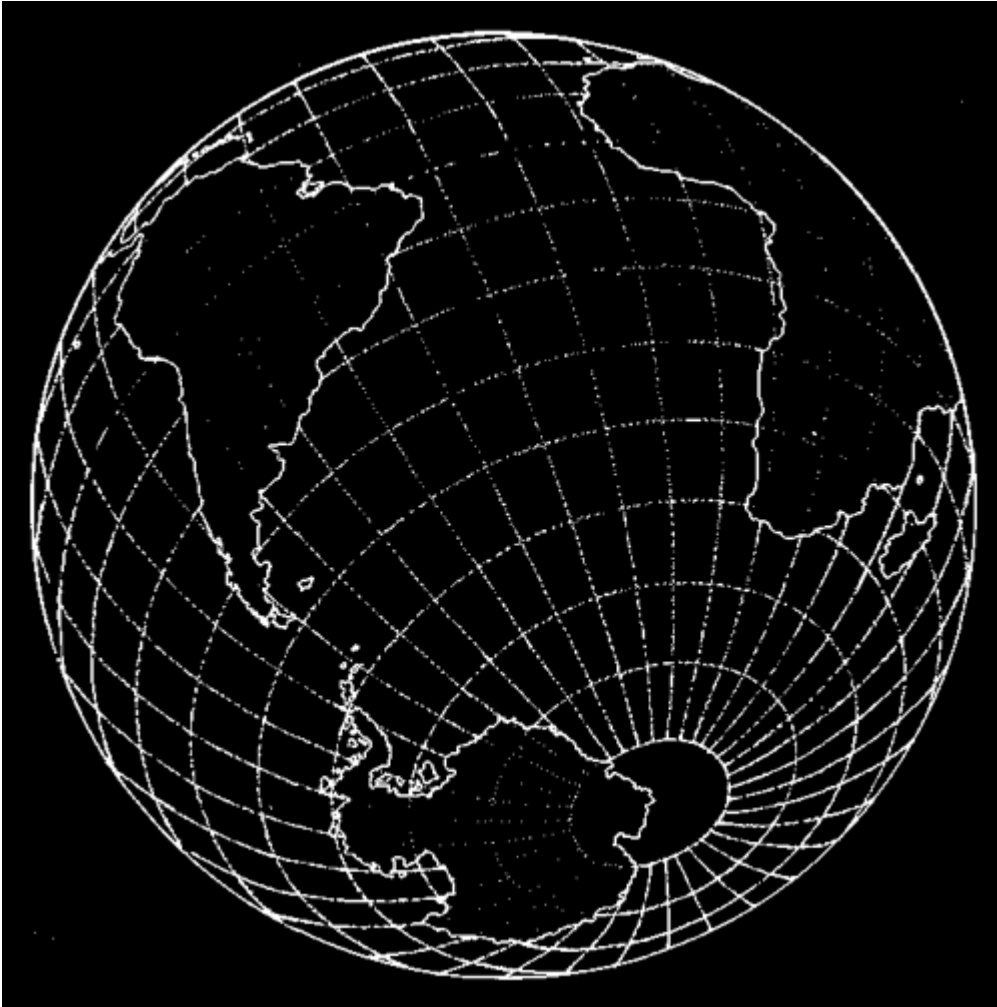
degrees (approximately 2000 miles) and as having been concentrated, in

the main, between the years 14,500 BC and 12,500 BC—but with massive

aftershocks on a planetary scale continuing at widely-separated intervals

down to about 9500 BC.

450



Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

According to the earth-crust displacement theory, large parts of Antarctica were positioned outside the Antarctic circle prior to 15,000 BC and thus could have been inhabited, with a climate and resources suitable for the development of civilization. A cataclysmic slippage of the crust then shifted the continent to the position it occupies today—dead centre within the Antarctic circle.

Suppose that, before the displacement of the earth's crust, a great civilization had grown up in Antarctica, when much of it was located at green and pleasant latitudes? If so, that civilization might easily have been destroyed by the effects of the displacement: the tidal waves, the hurricane-force winds and electric storms, the volcanic eruptions as seismic faults split open all around the planet, the darkened skies, and the remorselessly expanding ice-cap. Moreover, as the millennia passed, the ruins left behind—the cities, the monuments, the great libraries, and the engineering works of the destroyed civilization—would have been ever more deeply buried beneath the mantle of ice.

Little wonder, if the earth-crust displacement theory is correct, that all that can be found today, scattered around the world, are the tantalizing fingerprints of the gods. These would be the traces, the echoes of the works and deeds, the much misunderstood teachings and the geometrical edifices left behind by the few survivors of Antarctica's

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

former civilization who had made it across the turbulent oceans in great

ships and settled themselves in faraway lands: in the Nile Valley, for example (or perhaps, first, around Lake Tana at the headwaters of the

Blue Nile), and in the Valley of Mexico, and near Lake Titicaca in the Andes—and no doubt in several other places as well ...

Here and there around the globe, in other words, the *fingerprints* of a lost civilization remain faintly visible. The *body* is out of sight, buried under two miles of Antarctic ice and almost as inaccessible to archaeologists as if it were located on the dark side of the moon.

Fact?

Or fiction?

Possibility?

Or impossibility?

Is it a geophysical *possibility* or a geophysical *impossibility* that

Antarctica, the world's fifth-largest continent (with a surface area of almost six million square miles) could (a) previously have been located in

a more temperate zone and (b) have been shifted out of that zone and

into the Antarctic Circle within the last 20,000 years?

Is Antarctica movable?

A lifeless polar desert

'Continental drift' and/or 'plate-tectonics' are key terms used to describe

an important geological theory that has become increasingly well understood by the general public since the 1950s. It is unnecessary to go

into the basic mechanisms here. But most of us are aware that the continents in some way 'float around', relocate and change position on

the earth's surface. Common sense confirms this: if you take a look at a

map of the west coast of Africa and the east coast of South America it's

pretty obvious that these two landmasses were once joined. The time-

scale according to which continental drift operates is, however, immense:

continents can typically be expected to float apart (or together) at a rate

of no more than 2000 miles every 200 million years or so: in other words,

very, very slowly.¹

Plate-tectonics and Charles Hapgood's earth-crust displacement theory

are by no means mutually contradictory. Hapgood envisaged that both

could occur: that the earth's crust did indeed exhibit continental drift as

the geologists claimed—almost imperceptibly, over hundreds of millions

of years—but that it also occasionally experienced very rapid one-piece

displacements which had no effect on the relationships *between*

individual landmasses but which thrust entire continents (or parts of

them) into and out of the planet's two fixed polar zones (the perennially

cold and icy regions surrounding the North and South Poles of the axis of

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 3:584.

452

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

spin).

Continental drift?

Earth-crust displacement?

Both?

Some other cause?

I honestly don't know. Nevertheless, the simple facts about Antarctica

are really strange and difficult to explain without invoking some notion of

sudden, catastrophic and geologically recent change.

Before reviewing a few of these facts, let us remind ourselves that we

are referring to a landmass today oriented by the curvature of the earth

so that the sun never rises on it during the six winter months and never

sets during the six summer months (but rather, as viewed from the Pole,

remains low above the horizon, appearing to transcribe a circular path

around the sky during each twenty-four hours of daylight).

Antarctica is also by far the world's coldest continent, where

temperatures on the polar plain can fall as low as minus 89.2 degrees

centigrade. Although the coastal areas are slightly warmer (minus 60 degrees centigrade) and shelter huge numbers of seabird rookeries, there

are no native land mammals and there is only a small community of cold-

tolerant plants capable of surviving lengthy winter periods of total or near-total darkness. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* lists these plants

laconically: 'Lichens, mosses and liverworts, moulds, yeasts, other fungi,

algae and bacteria ...'²

In other words, although magnificent to behold in the long-drawn-out antipodean dawn, Antarctica is a freezing, unforgiving, almost lifeless

polar desert, as it has been throughout mankind's entire 5000-year 'historical' period.

Was it always so?

Exhibit 1

Discover The World Of Science Magazine, February 1993, page 17:

'Some 260 million years ago, during the Permian period, deciduous trees

adapted to a warm climate grew in Antarctica. This is the conclusion palaeobotanists are drawing from a stand of fossilized tree stumps

discovered at an altitude of 7000 feet on Mount Acheron in the Transantarctic mountains. The site is at 84° 22' south, some 500 miles north of the South Pole.

‘ “The interesting thing about this find is that it’s really the only forest, living or fossil, that’s been found at 80 or 85 degrees latitude,” says Ohio

State University palaeobotanist Edith Taylor, who has studied the fossil

trees. “The first thing we palaeobotanists do is look for something in the

modern records that is comparable, and there are no forests growing at

2 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 1:440.

453

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

that latitude today. We can go to the tropics and find trees growing in a

warm environment, but we can’t find trees growing in a warm

environment with the light regime these trees had: 24 hours of light in

the summer and 24 hours of dark in the winter.” ’3

Exhibit 2

Geologists have found no evidence of *any* glaciation having been present

anywhere on the Antarctic continent prior to the Eocene (about 60 million

years ago.)⁴ And if we go as far back as the Cambrian (c. 550 million

years ago) we find irrefutable evidence of a warm sea stretching nearly or

right across Antarctica, in the form of thick limestones rich in reef-

building *Archaeocyathidae*: 'Millions of years later, when these marine

formations had appeared above the sea, warm climates brought forth a

luxuriant vegetation in Antarctica. Thus Sir Ernest Shackleton found coal

beds within 200 miles of the South Pole, and later, during the Byrd

expedition of 1935, geologists made a rich discovery of fossils on the

lofty sides of Mount Weaver, in latitude 86° 58' S., about the same

distance from the Pole and about two miles above sea level. These

included leaf and stem impressions and fossilized wood. In 1952 Dr

Lyman H. Dougherty, of the Carnegie Institution of Washington,

completing a study of these fossils, identified two species of a tree fern

called *Glossopteris*, once common to the other southern continents (Africa, South America, Australia) and a giant fern tree of another species

...’5

3 *Discover The World Of Science*, February 1993, p. 17. The fifteen mineralized tree

stumps, presumably the remnant of a much larger forest, range from three and a half to

seven inches in diameter. They were saplings of a well-known genus of seed fern,

Glossopteris [found in much of the southern hemisphere’s coal]. Unlike true ferns, seed

ferns had seeds instead of spores, were often treelike, and are now extinct ... All around

the Mount Acheron tree stumps, Taylor’s colleagues found the tongue-shaped imprints

of fallen *Glossopteris* leaves.

Deciduous trees are an indicator of a warm climate, and so is the absence of ‘frost

rings’. When Taylor analysed the growth rings in samples from the stumps she found

none of the ice-swollen cells and gaps between cells that arise when the growth of a tree

is disrupted by frost. That means there wasn’t any frost in the Antarctic at that time.

'In our memory Antarctica has always been cold,' says Taylor. 'It's only by looking at

fossil floras that we can see what potential there is for plant communities. This fossil

forest, growing at 85 degrees latitude, gives us some idea of what is possible with

catastrophic climate change.' N.B. The trees were killed by a flood or mudflow—another

impossibility in Antarctica today.

4 *The Path of the Pole*, p. 61.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

454

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Exhibit 3

Admiral Byrd's own comment on the significance of the Mount Weaver

finds: 'Here at the southernmost known mountain in the world, scarcely

two hundred miles from the South Pole, was found conclusive evidence

that the climate of Antarctica was once temperate or even sub-tropical.'⁶

Exhibit 4

'Soviet scientists have reported finding evidence of tropical flora in Graham Land, another part of Antarctica, dating from the early Tertiary

Period (perhaps the Paleocene or Eocene) ... Further evidence is provided

by the discovery by British geologists of great fossil forests in Antarctica,

of the same type that grew on the Pacific coast of the United States 20

million years ago. This of course shows that after the earliest known

Antarctic glaciation in the Eocene [60 million years ago] the continent did

not remain glacial but had later episodes of warm climate.'⁷

Exhibit 5

'On 25 December 1990 geologists Barrie McKelvey and David Harwood

were working 1830 metres above sea level and 400 kilometres [250 miles] from the South Pole in Antarctica. The geologists discovered fossils

from a deciduous southern beach forest dating from between two and

three million years ago'.⁸

Exhibit 6

In 1986 the discovery of fossilized wood and plants showed that parts of

Antarctica may have been ice free as little as two and a half a million years ago. Further discoveries showed that some places on the continent

were ice-free 100,000 years ago.⁹

Exhibit 7

As we saw in Part I, sedimentary cores collected from the bottom of the

⁶ In Dolph Earl Hooker, *Those Astounding Ice Ages*, Exposition Press, New York, 1958,

page 44, *citing National Geographic Magazine*, October 1935.

⁷ *Path of the Pole*, p. 62.

⁸ Rand Flem-Ath, *Does the Earth's Crust Shift?* (MS.).

⁹ Daniel Grotta, 'Antarctica: Whose Continent Is It Anyway?', *Popular Science*, January

1992, p. 64.

455

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Ross Sea by one of the Byrd Antarctic Expeditions provide conclusive

evidence that 'great rivers, carrying down fine well grained sediments'

did flow in this part of Antarctica until perhaps as late as 4000 BC.

According to the report of Dr Jack Hough of the University of Illinois:
'The

log of core N-5 shows glacial marine sediment from the present to
6000

years ago. From 6000 to 15,000 years ago the sediment is fine-
grained

with the exception of one granule at about 12,000 years ago. This
suggests an absence of ice from the area during that period, except
perhaps for a stray iceberg 12,000 years ago.'

Exhibit 8

The Orontaeus Finnaeus World Map reviewed in Part I accurately
depicts

the Ross Sea as it would look if it were free of ice and, in addition,
shows

Antarctica's ranges of lofty coastal mountains with great rivers
flowing

from them where only mile-deep glaciers are to be found today.¹¹

Charles Hapgood, *The Path Of The Pole*, 1970, page 111ff: 'It is rare

that geological investigations receive important confirmation from

archaeology; yet in this case, it seems that the matter of the
deglaciation

of the Ross Sea can be confirmed by an old map that has somehow

survived many thousands of years ... It was discovered and published in

1531 by the French geographer Oronce Fine [Oronteus Finnaeus] and is

part of his Map of the World ...

It has been possible to establish the authenticity of this map. In several

years of research the projection of this ancient map was worked out. It

was found to have been drawn on a sophisticated map projection, with

the use of spherical trigonometry, and to be so scientific that over 50

locations on the Antarctic continent have been found to be located on it

with an accuracy that was not attained by modern cartographic science

until the 19th century. And, of course, when this map was first published,

in 1531, nothing at all was known of Antarctica. The continent was not

discovered in modern times until about 1818 and was not fully mapped

until after 1920 ...'12

Exhibit 9

The Buache Map, also reviewed in Part I, accurately depicts the *subglacial*

topography of Antarctica.¹³ Does it do so by chance or might the continent indeed have been entirely ice-free recently enough for the
10 *Path of the Pole*, p. 107.

11 See Part I.

12 *Path of the Pole*, p. 111ff.

13 See Part I for details.

456

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

cartographers of a lost civilization to have mapped it?

Exhibit 10

The reverse side of the coin. If the lands presently inside the Antarctic

Circle were once temperate or tropical, what about lands inside the *Arctic*

Circle? Were they affected by the same dramatic climate changes, suggesting that some common factor might have been at work?

- ‘On the island of Spitzbergen (Svalbard), palm leaves ten and twelve

feet long have been fossilized, along with fossilized marine

crustaceans of a type that could only inhabit tropical waters. This suggests that at one time the temperatures of the Arctic Ocean were similar to the contemporary temperatures of the Bay of Bengal or the Caribbean Sea. Spitzbergen is half way between the northern tip of Norway and the North Pole, at a latitude of 80 degrees N. Today, ships

can reach Spitzbergen through the ice only about two or at the most three months during the year.'¹⁴

- There is firm fossil evidence that stands of swamp cypress flourished

within 500 miles of the North Pole in the Miocene [between 20 million and 6 million years ago], and that water-lillies flourished in Spitzbergen

in the same period: 'The Miocene floras of Grinnell Land and Greenland, and Spitzbergen, all required temperate climatic conditions

with plentiful moisture. The water lillies of Spitzbergen would have required flowing water for the greater part of the year. In connection with the flora of Spitzbergen it should be realized that the island is in polar darkness for half the year. It lies on the Arctic Circle, as far north

of Labrador as Labrador is north of Bermuda.¹⁵

- Some of the islands in the Arctic Ocean were never covered by ice during the last Ice Age. On Baffin Island, for example, 900 miles from the North Pole, alder and birch remains found in peat suggest a much

warmer climate than today less than 30,000 years ago. These conditions prevailed until 17,000 years ago: 'During the Wisconsin ice

age there was a temperate-climate refuge in the middle of the Arctic Ocean for the flora and fauna that could not exist in Canada and the United States.'¹⁶

- Russian scientists have concluded that the Arctic Ocean was warm during most of the last Ice Age. A report by academicians Saks, Belov

and Lapina covering many phases of their oceanographic work

¹⁴ *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, pp. 109-10.

¹⁵ *Path of the Pole*, p. 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 96.

457

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

highlights the period from about 32,000 to about 18,000 years ago as

being one during which particularly warm conditions prevailed.¹⁷

- As we saw in Part IV, huge numbers of warm-blooded, temperate adapted mammal species were instantly frozen, and their bodies preserved in the permafrost, all across a vast zone of death stretching

from the Yukon, through Alaska and deep into northern Siberia. The bulk of this destruction appears to have taken place during the eleventh millennium BC, although there was an earlier episode of large-

scale extinctions around 13,500 BC.¹⁸

- We also saw (Chapter Twenty-seven) that the last Ice Age came to an

end between 15,000 and 8000 BC, but principally between 14500 and

12,500 BC, with a further outburst of extraordinarily intense activity in the eleventh millennium BC. During this geologically brief period of time, glaciation up to two miles deep covering millions of square miles

which had taken more than 40,000 years to build-up suddenly and inexplicably melted: 'It must be obvious that this could not have been the result of the gradually acting climatic factors usually called upon to

explain ice ages ... The rapidity of the deglaciation suggests that some

extraordinary factor was affecting climate ...'19

The icy executioner

Some extraordinary factor was affecting climate ...

Was it a 30° one-piece shift of the lithosphere that abruptly terminated

the Ice Age in the northern hemisphere (by pushing the most heavily glaciated areas southwards from the northern pole of the spin axis)?
If so,

why shouldn't the same 30° one-piece shift of the lithosphere have swivelled a largely deglaciated six-million-square-mile *southern hemisphere* continent from temperate latitudes to a position directly over

the southern pole of the spin axis?

On the issue of the movability of Antarctica, we now know that it *is* movable and, more to the point, that it has moved, because trees have

grown there and trees simply cannot grow at latitudes which suffer six

months of continual darkness.

What we do not know (and may never know for certain) is whether this

movement was a consequence of earth-crust displacement, or of continental drift, or of some other unguessed-at factor.

Let us consider Antarctica for a moment.

We have already seen that it is big. It has a land area of 5.5 million

17 Ibid., p. 99.

18 See Part IV.

19 Ibid.

458

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

square miles, and is presently covered by something in excess of seven

million *cubic* miles of ice weighing an estimated 19 *quadrillion* tons (19

followed by 15 zeros).²⁰ What worries the theorists of earth-crust

displacement is that this vast ice-cap is remorselessly increasing in size

and weight: 'at the rate of 293 cubic miles of ice each year—almost as

much as if Lake Ontario were frozen solid annually and added to it.'²¹

The fear is that when it is coupled with the effects of precession,

obliquity, orbital eccentricity, the earth's own centrifugal motion, and the

gravitational tug of the sun, moon and planets, Antarctica's huge, ever-

expanding burden of glaciation could provide the final trigger-factor for a

massive displacement of the crust:

The growing South Pole ice-cap [wrote Hugh Auchincloss Brown, somewhat

colourfully, in 1967] has become a stealthy, silent and relentless force of nature—

a result of the energy created by its eccentric rotation. The ice-cap is the creeping

peril, the deadly menace and the executioner of our civilization.²²

Did this 'executioner' cause the end of the last Ice Age in the northern

hemisphere by setting in motion a 7000-year shift of the crust between

15,000 BC and 8000 BC—a shift that was perhaps at its most rapid, and

would have had its most devastating effects, between 14,500 BC and

10,000 BC?²³ Or were the sudden and dramatic climate changes

experienced in the northern hemisphere during this period the result of

some other catastrophic agency simultaneously capable of melting millions of cubic miles of ice and of sparking off the worldwide increase

in volcanism that accompanied the melt-down?²⁴

Modern geologists are opposed to catastrophes, or rather to catastrophism, preferring to follow the 'uniformitarian' doctrine: 'that existing processes, *acting as at present*, are sufficient to account for all

geological changes'. Catastrophism, on the other hand, holds that 'changes in the earth's crust have generally been effected *suddenly* by

physical forces.'²⁵ Is it possible, however, that the mechanism responsible

for the traumatic earth changes which took place at the end of the last Ice

Age could have been a geological event both catastrophic and uniform?

The great biologist Sir Thomas Huxley remarked in the nineteenth century:

To my mind there appears to be no sort of theoretical antagonism between

Catastrophism and Uniformitarianism; on the contrary, it is very conceivable that

catastrophes may be part and parcel of uniformity. Let me illustrate my case by

analogy. The working of a clock is a model of uniform action. Good timekeeping

means uniformity of action. But the striking of a clock is essentially a catastrophe.

20 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991, 1:440; John White, *Pole Shift*, A.R.E. Press, Virginia Beach, 1994, p. 65.

21 *Pole Shift*, p. 77: Twenty billion tons of ice are added each year at Antarctica.

22 H. A. Brown, *Cataclysms of the Earth*, pp. 10-11.

23 See Part IV.

24 Ibid.

25 *Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, p. 228.

459

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The hammer might be made to blow up a barrel of gunpowder, or turn on a

deluge of water and, by proper arrangement, the clock, instead of marking the

hours, might strike at all sorts of irregular intervals, never twice alike in the force

or number of its blows. Nevertheless, all these irregular and apparently lawless

catastrophes would be the result of an absolutely uniformitarian action, and we

might have two schools of clock theorists, one studying the hammer and the other

the pendulum.²⁶

Could continental drift be the pendulum?

Could earth-crust displacement be the hammer?

Mars and earth

Crustal displacements are thought to have taken place on other planets.

In the December 1985 issue of *Scientific American*, Peter H. Schultz drew

attention to meteorite impact craters visible on the Martian surface.

Craters in polar areas have a distinctive 'signature' because the

meteorites land amid the thick deposits of dust and ice that accumulate

there. Outside the *present* polar circles of Mars, Schultz found two other

such areas: 'These zones are antipodal; they are on opposite faces of the

planet. The deposits show many of the processes and characteristics of

today's poles, but they lie near the present-day equator ...'

What could have caused this effect? Judging from the evidence, Shultz

put forward the theory that the mechanism appeared to have been 'the

movement of the entire lithosphere, the solid outer portion of the planet

as one plate ... [This movement seems to have taken place] in rapid spurts followed by long pauses.'²⁷

If crustal displacements can happen on Mars, why not on earth? And if

they *don't* happen on earth, how do we account for the otherwise

awkward fact that *not a single one* of the ice-caps built up around the world during previous Ice Ages seems to have occurred at—or even

near—either of the present poles.²⁸ On the contrary, land areas bearing

the marks of former glaciation are very widely distributed. If we cannot

assume crustal shifts, we must find some other way to explain why the

ice-caps appear to have reached sea level within the tropics on three continents: Asia, Africa and Australia.²⁹

Charles Hapgood's solution to this problem is simple, extremely elegant and does not affront commonsense:

The only ice age that is adequately explained is the present ice age in Antarctica.

This is excellently explained. It exists, quite obviously, because Antarctica is at the

pole, and for no other reason. No variation of the sun's heat, no galactic dust, no

volcanism, no subcrustal currents, and no arrangements of land elevations or sea

26 Thomas Huxley cited in *Path of the Pole*, p. 294.

27 *Scientific American*, December 1985.

28 *Path of the Pole*, pp. 47-9.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

460

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

currents account for the fact. We may conclude that the best theory to account for

an ice age is that the area concerned was at the pole. We thus account for the

Indian and African ice sheets, though the areas once occupied by them are now in

the tropics. We account for all ice sheets of continental size in the same way.³⁰

The logic is close to inescapable. Either we accept that the Antarctic ice

cap is the *first* continent-sized ice sheet *ever* to have been situated at a

pole—which seems improbable—or we are obliged to suppose that earth-

crust displacement, or a similar mechanism, must have been at work.

Memories of the polar dawn?

Our ancestors may have preserved in their most ancient traditions

memories of a displacement. We saw some of these memories in Part IV:

cataclysm myths that appear to be eyewitness accounts of the series of

geological disasters which accompanied the end of the last Ice-Age in the

northern hemisphere.³¹ There are other myths too, which may have come

down to us from that epoch between 15,000 and 10,000 BC. Among these

are several which speak of lands of the gods and of former paradises, all

of which are described as being in the south (for example, the Ta-Neteru

of the Egyptians) and many of which seem to have experienced polar

conditions.

The great Indian epic, *Mahabharatha*, speaks of Mount Meru, the land of

the gods:

At Meru the sun and moon go round from left to right every day, and so do all the

stars ... The mountain by its lustre, so overcomes the darkness of night, that the

night can hardly be distinguished from the day. ... The day and night are together

equal to a year to the residents of the place ...³²

Similarly, as the reader will recall from Chapter Twenty-five, Airyana

Vaejo, the mythical paradise and former homeland of the Avestic Aryans

of Iran, seems to have been rendered uninhabitable by the sudden onset

of glaciation. In later years it was spoken of as a place in which: 'the

stars, the moon and the sun are only once a year seen to rise and set, and

a year seems only as a day.'³³

In the *Surya Siddhanta*, an ancient Indian text, we read, 'The gods

behold the sun, after it has once arisen, for half a year.'³⁴ The seventh

Mandala of the *Rigveda* contains a number of 'Dawn' hymns. One of

these (VII, 76) says that the dawn has raised its banner on the horizon

with its usual splendour and reports in Verse 3 that a period of *several*

days elapsed between the first appearance of the dawn and the rising of

30 Ibid., p. 58.

31 See Part IV.

32 *The Mahabaratha*, cited in *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, pp. 64-5.

33 Ibid., pp. 66-7.

34 Cited in *Paradise Found: The Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole*, p. 199.

461

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the sun that followed it.³⁵ Another passage states, ‘many were the days

between the first beams of the dawn and actual sunrise’.³⁶

Are these eyewitness accounts of polar conditions?

Although we can never be sure, it may be relevant that in Indian

tradition the Vedas are believed to be revealed texts, passed down from

the time of the gods.³⁷ It may also be relevant that in describing the

processes of transmission, all the traditions refer to the *pralayas* (cataclysms) which occasionally overtake the world and claim that in each

of these the written scriptures are physically destroyed. After each

destruction, however, certain *Rishis* or 'wise men' survive who

repromulgate, at the beginning of the new age, the knowledge inherited by them

as a sacred trust from their forefathers in the preceding age ... Each *manvantara*

or age thus has a Veda of its own which differs only in expression and not in

sense from the antediluvian Veda.³⁸

An epoch of turmoil and darkness

As every schoolboy geographer understands, true north (the North Pole)

is not quite the same thing as magnetic north (the direction compass needles point). Indeed the magnetic north pole is presently situated in

northern Canada, about 11 degrees from the true North Pole.³⁹

Recent

advances in the study of palaeomagnetism have proved that the earth's

magnetic polarity has *reversed itself more than 170 times* during the past

80 million years ...40

What causes these field reversals?

While he was teaching at the University of Cambridge the geologist S. K.

Runcorn published an article in *Scientific American* which made a pertinent point:

There seems no doubt that the earth's magnetic field is tied up in some way to the

rotation of the planet. And this leads to a remarkable finding about the earth's

rotation itself ... [The unavoidable conclusion is that] the earth's axis of rotation

has changed also. In other words, the planet has rolled about, changing the

location of the geographical poles.41

Runcorn appears to be envisaging a complete 180-degree flip of the

poles, with the earth literally tumbling—although similar palaeomagnetic

readings would result from a slippage of the crust *over* the geographical

poles. Either way, the consequences for civilization, and indeed for all

life, would be unimaginably dreadful.

35 *Arctic Home in the Vedas*, p. 81.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 414, 417.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 420.

39 *Pole Shift*, p. 9.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

462

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Of course, Runcorn may be wrong; perhaps field reversals can occur in

the absence of any other upheavals.

But he may also be right.

According to reports published in *Nature* and *New Scientist*, the last geomagnetic reversal was completed just 12,400 years ago—during *the*

*eleventh millennium BC.*⁴²

This is of course the very millennium in which the ancient Tiahuanacan

civilization in the Andes seems to have been destroyed. The same millennium is signalled by the alignments and design of the great

astronomical monuments on the Giza plateau, and by the erosion patterns on the Sphinx. And it was in the eleventh millennium BC that

Egypt's 'precocious agricultural experiment' suddenly failed. Likewise it

was in the eleventh millennium BC that huge numbers of large mammal

species all around the world vanished into extinction. The list could continue: abrupt rises in sea level, hurricane-force winds, electrical storms, volcanic disturbances, and so on.

Scientists expect the next reversal of the earth's magnetic poles to occur around AD 2030.⁴³

Is this an intimation of planetary disaster? After 12,500 years of the pendulum, is the hammer about to strike?

Exhibit 11

Yves Rocard, Professor of the Faculty of Sciences at Paris: 'Our modern

seismographs are sensitive to the 'noise' of limited agitation at every point in the earth, even in the absence of any seismic wave. One may in

this noise discern a man-made vibration (for example, a train four

kilometers away, or a big city ten kilometers off) and also an atmospheric

effect (from changing pressure of the wind on the soil) and sometimes

one registers also the effects of great storms at a distance. Yet there

remains a continued rolling noise of cracklings in the earth which owes

nothing to any [such] cause ...'44

Exhibit 12

'The North Pole moved ten feet in the direction of Greenland along the

meridian of 45 degrees west longitude during the period from 1900 to

1960 ... a rate of six centimetres (about two and a half inches) a year.

[Between 1900 and 1968, however,] the pole moved about twenty feet.

[The pole therefore] moved ten feet between 1960 and 1968, at a rate of

42 *Nature*, volume 234, 27 December 1971, pp. 173-4; *New Scientist*, 6 January 1972, p.

7.

43 J. M. Harwood and S. C. R. Malin writing in *Nature*, 12 February 1976.

44 *The Path of the Pole*, op. cit., Appendix, pp. 325-6.

463

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

about ten centimetres (four inches) a year ... If both these observations

were accurate when made, as we have every right to expect in view of the

eminence of the scientists involved, then we have here evidence that the

lithosphere may be in motion at the present time [and that it is

experiencing] a geometrical acceleration of the *rate* of motion ...45

Exhibit 13

USA Today, Wednesday 23 November 1994, page 9D:

‘INTERACTIVE IN ANTARCTICA: Students Link With South Pole

Scientists

‘A live remote broadcast from the South Pole featuring Elizabeth Felton,

a 17-year-old graduate of Chicago public schools, will take place Jan 10.

Felton will use US Geological Survey data to reposition the copper marker

designating the Earth’s geographic South Pole to compensate for the

annual slippage of the ice sheet.'46

Is it just the ice sheet that is slipping, or is the entire crust of the earth

in motion? And was it just an 'unusual interactive education project' that

took place on 10 January 1995, or was Elizabeth Felton unknowingly documenting the continued geometrical acceleration of the rate of motion of the crust?

Scientists do not think so. As we shall see in the final chapter, however,

the coming century is signalled in a remarkable convergence of ancient

prophecies and traditional beliefs as an epoch of unprecedented turmoil

and darkness, in which iniquity will be worked in secret, and the Fifth Sun

and the Fourth World will come to an end ...

Exhibit 14

Kobe, Japan, Tuesday 17 January 1995: 'The suddenness with which the

earthquake struck was almost cruel. One moment we were fast asleep, an

instant later the floor—the entire building—had turned to jelly. But this is

no gently undulating liquid motion. This is jarring, gut-wrenching shuddering of awesome proportions ...

'You are in bed, the safest place in the world. Your bed is on the floor,

what you used to think of as solid ground. And with no warning the world

has turned into a sickening roller-coaster ride, and you want to get off.

'Possibly the most frightening part is the sound. This is not the dull rumble of thunder. This is a deafening, roaring sound, coming from everywhere and nowhere, and it sounds like the end of the world.'

(Eyewitness report on the Kobe earthquake by Dennis Kessler, *Guardian*,

45 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

46 *USA Today*, 23 November 1994, p. 9D.

464

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

London, 18 January 1995. The tremor lasted 20 seconds, registering 7.2

on the Richter scale, and killed more than 5000 people.)

465

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Chapter 52

Like a Thief in the Night

There are certain structures in the world, certain ideas, certain intellectual

treasures, that are truly mysterious. I am beginning to suspect that the

human race may have placed itself in grave jeopardy by failing to consider [the implications of these mysteries.

We have the ability, unique in the animal kingdom, to learn from the experiences of our predecessors. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for example, two generations have grown to adulthood in awareness of the

horrific destruction that nuclear weapons unleash. Our children will be

aware of this too, without experiencing it directly, and they will pass it on

to their children. Theoretically, therefore, the knowledge of what atom

bombs do has become part of the permanent historical legacy of

mankind, whether we choose to benefit from that legacy or not is up to

us. Nevertheless the knowledge is there, should we wish to use it,

because it has been preserved and transmitted in written records, in film

archives, in allegorical paintings, in war memorials, and so on.

Not all testimony from the past is accorded the same stature as the records of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On the contrary, like the Canonical

Bible, the body of knowledge that we call 'History' is an edited cultural

artefact from which much has been left out. In particular, references to

human experiences prior to the invention of writing around 5000 years

ago have been omitted *in their entirety* and myth has become a synonym

for delusion.

Suppose it is not delusion?

Suppose that a tremendous cataclysm were to overtake the earth today,

obliterating the achievements of our civilization and wiping out almost all

of us. Suppose, to paraphrase Plato, that we were forced by this

cataclysm 'to begin again like children, in complete ignorance of what

had happened in early times'.¹ Under such circumstances, ten or twelve

thousand years from now (with all written records and film archives long

since destroyed) what testimony might our descendants still preserve

concerning the events at the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in

August 1945 of the Christian era?

It is easy to imagine how they might speak in mystical terms of explosions that gave off a 'terrible glare of light' and 'immense heat'.²

Nor would we be too surprised to find that they might have formulated a

'mythical' account something like this:

1 Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, Penguin Classics, 1977, p. 36.

2 *The Bhagavata Purana*, Motilal Banardass, Delhi, 1986, Part I, pp. 59, 95.

466

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The flames of the Brahmastra-charged missiles mingled with each other and

surrounded by fiery arrows they covered the earth, heaven and space between and

increased the conflagration like the fire and the Sun at the end of the world ... All

beings who were scorched by the Brahmastras, and saw the terrible fire of their

missiles, felt that it was the fire of *Pralaya* [the cataclysm] that burns down the

world.³

And what of the *Enola Gay* which carried the Hiroshima bomb? How might

our descendants remember that strange aircraft and the squadrons of

others like it that swarmed through the skies of planet earth during the

twentieth century of the Christian era? Isn't it possible, probable even,

that they might preserve traditions of 'celestial cars' and 'heavenly

chariots' and 'spacious flying machines', and even of 'aerial cities'.⁴ If

they did, would they perhaps speak of such wonders in mythical terms a

little like these:

- 'Oh you, Uparicara Vasu, the spacious aerial flying machine will come

to you—and you alone, of all the mortals, seated on that vehicle will

look like a deity.'5

- 'Visvakarma, the architect among the Gods, built aerial vehicles for the

Gods.'6

- 'Oh you descendant of the Kurus, that wicked fellow came on that all-

traversing automatic flying vehicle known as Saubhapura and pierced

me with weapons.'7

- 'He entered into the favourite divine palace of Indra and saw thousands

of flying vehicles intended for the Gods lying at rest.'8

- 'The Gods came in their respective flying vehicles to witness the battle

between Kripacarya and Arjuna. Even Indra, the Lord of Heaven, came

with a special type of flying vehicle which could accommodate 33

divine beings.'9

All these quotations have been taken from the *Bhagavata Purana* and

from the *Mahabaratha*, two drops in the ocean of the ancient wisdom

literature of the Indian subcontinent. And such images are replicated in

many other archaic traditions. To give one example (as we saw in Chapter

Forty-two), the Pyramid Texts are replete with anachronistic images of

flight:

3 Ibid., p. 60.

4 Dileep Kumar Kanjilal, *Vimana in Ancient India*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta,

1985, p. 16.

5 Ibid., p. 17.

6 Ibid., p. 18.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 19.

467

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The King is a flame, moving before the wind to the end of the sky
and to the end

of the earth ... the King travels the air and traverses the earth ...
there is brought

to him a way of ascent to the sky ...10

Is it possible that the constant references in archaic literatures to

something like aviation could be valid historical testimony concerning the

achievements of a forgotten and remote technological age?

We will never know unless we try to find out. And so far we haven't tried because our rational, scientific culture regards myths and traditions

as 'unhistorical'.

No doubt many are unhistorical. but at the end of the investigation that

underlies this book, I am certain that many others are not ...

For the benefit of future generations of mankind

Here is a scenario:

Suppose that we had calculated, on the basis of sound evidence and beyond any shadow of a doubt, that our civilization was soon to be obliterated by a titanic geological cataclysm—a 30° displacement of the

earth's crust, for example, or a head-on collision with a ten-mile-wide nickel-iron asteroid travelling towards us at cosmic speed.

Of course there would at first be much panic and despair.

Nevertheless—if there were sufficient advance warning—steps would be

taken to ensure that there would be some survivors and that some of

what was most valuable in our high scientific knowledge would be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

Strangely enough, the Jewish historian Josephus (who wrote during the

first century AD) attributes precisely this behaviour to the clever and prosperous inhabitants of the antediluvian world who lived before the

Flood 'in a happy condition without any misfortunes falling upon them':¹¹

They also were the inventors of that peculiar sort of wisdom which is concerned

with the heavenly bodies, and their order. And that their inventions might not be

lost—upon Adam's prediction that the world was to be destroyed at one time by

the force of fire, and at another time by the violence and quantity of water—they

made two pillars, one of brick, the other of stone: they inscribed their discoveries

upon them both, that in case the pillar of brick should be destroyed by the Flood,

the pillar of stone might remain and exhibit these discoveries to mankind; and

also inform them that there was another pillar of brick erected by them ...¹²

Likewise, when the Oxford astronomer John Greaves visited Egypt in the

seventeenth century he collected ancient local traditions which attributed

the construction of the three Giza pyramids to a mythical antediluvian

king:

10 *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 70, Utt. 261.

11 *The Complete Works Of Josephus*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991,

p. 27.

12 Ibid.

468

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

The occasion of this was because he saw in his sleep that the whole earth was

turned over, with the inhabitants of it lying upon their faces and the stars falling

down and striking one another with a terrible noise ... And he awaked with great

feare, and assembled the chief priests of all the provinces of Egypt ... He related

the whole matter to them and they took the altitude of the stars, and made their

prognostication, and they foretold of a deluge. The king said, will it come to our

country? They answered yes, and will destroy it. And there remained a certain

number of years to come, and he commanded in the mean space to build the

Pyramids ... And he engraved in these Pyramids all things that were told by wise

men, as also all profound sciences—the science of Astrology, and of Arithmetick,

and of Geometry, and of Physicke. All this may be interpreted by him that knowes

their characters and language ...13

Taken at face value, the message of both of these myths seems crystal

clear: certain mysterious structures scattered around the world were built

to preserve and transmit the knowledge of an advanced civilization of

remote antiquity which was destroyed by a terrifying upheaval.

Could this be so? And what are we to make of other strange traditions

that have come to us from the dark vault of prehistory?

What are we to make, for example, of the *Popol Vuh*, which speaks in

veiled language about a great secret of the human past: a long-forgotten

golden age when everything was possible—a magical time of scientific

progress and enlightenment when the ‘First Men’ (who were ‘endowed

with intelligence’) not only ‘measured the round face of the earth’ but ‘examined the four points of the arch of the sky’.

As the reader will recall, the gods became jealous at the rapid progress

made by these upstart humans who had ‘succeeded in seeing, succeeded

in knowing, all that there is in the world.’¹⁴ Divine retribution quickly

followed: ‘The Heart of Heaven blew mist into their eyes ... In this way all

the wisdom and all the knowledge of the First Men [together with their

memory of their] origin and their beginning, were destroyed.’¹⁵

The secret of what happened was never entirely forgotten because a record of those distant First Times was preserved, until the coming of the

Spaniards, in the sacred texts of the original *Popol Vuh*. The abuses of

the conquest made it necessary for that primordial document to be

concealed from all but the most highly-initiated sages and replaced with a

watered-down substitute written 'under the law of Christianity':¹⁶ 'No

longer can be seen the book of *Popol Vuh* which the kings had in olden

times ... The original book, written long ago, existed—but now its sight is

hidden to the searcher and to the thinker ...'¹⁷

On the other side of the world, among the myths and traditions of the

Indian subcontinent, there are further tantalizing suggestions of hidden

secrets. In the *Puranic* version of the universal flood story, shortly before

¹³ John Greaves, *Pyramidographia*, cited in *Serpent in the Sky*, p. 230.

¹⁴ *Popol Vuh*, p. 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79-80.

469

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the deluge was unleashed, the fish god Vishnu warned his human

protégé that he ‘should conceal the Sacred Scriptures in a safe place’ to

preserve the knowledge of the antediluvian races from destruction.¹⁸

Likewise, in Mesopotamia, the Noah figure Utnapishtim was instructed by

the god Ea ‘to take the beginning, the middle and the end of whatever

was consigned to writing and then to bury it in the City of the Sun at

Sippara’.¹⁹ After the waters of the flood had gone, survivors were

instructed to make their way to the site of the City of the Sun ‘to search

for the writings’, which would be found to contain knowledge of benefit

to future generations of mankind.²⁰

Strangely enough, it was the City of the Sun in Egypt, Innu, known by

the Greeks as Heliopolis—which was regarded throughout the dynastic

period as the source and centre of the high wisdom handed down to

mortal men from the fabled First Time of the gods. It was at Heliopolis

that the Pyramid Texts were collated, and it was the Heliopolitan

priesthood—or rather the Heliopolitan cult—that had custody of the

monuments of the Giza necropolis.

More than just Kilroy was here

Let us return to our scenario:

1 we know that our late twentieth-century, post-industrial civilization is

about to be destroyed by an inescapable cosmic or geological

cataclysm;

2 we know—because our science is pretty good—that the destruction is

going to be *near-total*;

3 mobilizing massive technological resources, we put our best minds to

work to ensure that at least a remnant of our species will survive the

catastrophe, and that the core of our scientific, medical, astronomical,

geographical, architectural and mathematical knowledge will be

preserved;

4 we are of course aware how slim are our chances of succeeding on

both counts; nevertheless, galvanized by the prospect of extinction,

we make an almighty effort to build the Arks or Vars or strong

enclosures in which the chosen survivors can be protected, and we

focus our considerable ingenuity on ways to transmit the essence of the knowledge we have accumulated during the 5000 years of our recorded history.

18 *The Bhagavata Purana*, cited in *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, p. 88.

19 Berossus Fragments cited in *The Sirius Mystery*, p. 249.

20 Ibid.

470

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

We start by preparing for the worst. We assume that there will be survivors but that they will be blasted back into the Stone Age by the cataclysm. Realizing that it may take ten or twelve thousand years for a

civilization as advanced as our own to rise again like a phoenix from the

ashes, one of our top priorities is to find a way to communicate with that

postulated future civilization. At the least we would want to say to them:

KILROY WAS HERE! and to be sure they got the message no matter what

language they spoke or what ethical, religious, ideological, metaphysical

or philosophical leanings their society might exhibit.

I'm sure we'd want to say more than just 'Kilroy was here'. We'd want,

for example, to tell them—those distant grandchildren of ours—
when we

had lived in relation to their time.

How would we do that? How would we express, say, AD 2012 of the Christian era in a language universal enough to be worked out and understood twelve thousand years hence by a civilization that would know nothing of the Christian or of any of the other eras by which we express chronology?

One obvious solution would be to make use of the beautiful predictability of the earth's axial precession, which has the effect of slowly and regularly altering the declination of the entire star-field in relation to a viewer at a fixed point, and which equally slowly and regularly revolves the equinoctial point in relation to the twelve zodiacal

constellations. From the predictability of this motion it follows that if we

could find a way to declare: WE LIVED WHEN THE VERNAL EQUINOX WAS IN THE

CONSTELLATION OF PISCES we would provide a means of specifying our epoch

to within a single 2160-year period in every grand precessional cycle of

25,920 years.

The only drawback to this scheme would become evident if a civilization equivalent to our own failed to arise within 12,000 or even 20,000 years of the cataclysm, but took much longer—perhaps as much

as 30,000 years. In that case, a monument or calendrical device declaring

‘we lived when the vernal equinox was in the constellation of Pisces’ would no longer be unambiguous. If discovered by a high culture flourishing at the very beginning of a future Age of Sagittarius for example it could be read as meaning ‘we lived 4320 years before your

time’—that is, two full precessional ‘months’ prior to the Sagittarian Age

(the 2160-year ‘months’ of Aquarius and Capricorn). But it could also mean ‘We lived 30,240 years before your time’, that is those two ‘months’ plus the full previous precessional cycle of 25,920 years. The

Sagittarian archaeologists would not only have to use their wits to work

out the meaning of the message (i.e. WE LIVED WHEN THE VERNAL EQUINOX WAS IN

PISCES), but would need to decide from other clues *which* Age of Pisces we

had lived in: the most recent, or the one in the previous precessional cycle, or perhaps even the cycle before that.

Geology would naturally be of assistance in making such broad

471

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

judgements ...

The civilizers

If we could find a way of saying WE LIVED IN THE AGE OF PISCES, and could

specify the altitude above the horizon of certain identifiable stars in our

own epoch (say, the prominent belt stars of the Orion constellation), we

would be able to signal our dates to future generations with greater precision. Alternatively we could do as the builders of the Giza pyramids

appear to have done and lay out our monuments in a pattern on the

ground reflecting exactly the pattern of the stars in the sky in our time.

There would be several other options and combinations of options open

to us, depending on our circumstances, on the level of technology

available to us, on the extent of the early warning we were given, and on

which chronological facts we wanted to transmit.

Suppose, for example, that there was not time to make proper

preparations prior to the catastrophe. Suppose that the disaster, like 'the

Day of the Lord' in 2 Peter 3, crept up on us unseen 'as a thief in the night?'²¹ What prospects might humanity be faced with?

Whether as the result of an asteroid strike or an earth-crust

displacement or some other cosmic or geological cause, let us assume:

1 massive devastation all around the world;

2 the survival of only relatively small numbers of people, the majority of

whom rapidly revert to barbarism;

3 the presence, among this remnant, of a minority of well-organized visionaries—including master-builders, scientists, engineers,

cartographers, mathematicians, medical doctors and the like—who dedicate themselves to salvaging what they can and finding ways to transmit the knowledge to the future for the benefit of those who might eventually understand it.

Let us call these hypothetical visionaries ‘the civilisers’. As they banded

together—at first to survive, later to teach and to share ideas—they might

take on something of the manner and belief systems of a religious cult,

developing a clear sense of mission and of shared identity. No doubt they

would make use of powerful and easily recognizable symbols to

strengthen and express this sense of common purpose: the men might

wear distinctive beards, for example, or shave their heads, and certain

archetypal imagery like the cross and the serpent and the dog might be

used to link the members of the cult together as they set out on their

civilizing missions to relight the lamps of knowledge around the world.

21 2 *Peter* 3:10.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

I suspect, if the situation were bad enough after the cataclysm, that many of the civilizers would fail, or meet with only limited success. But let

us suppose that one small group had the skill and dedication sufficient to

create a lasting and stable beach-head, perhaps in a region which had

suffered relatively little damage in the disaster. Then let us suppose that

some other unexpected disaster were to occur—an aftershock or series of

aftershocks from the original catastrophe perhaps—and the beach-head

was almost totally annihilated.

What might happen next? What might be salvaged from this wreckage

of a wisdom cult which had itself been salvaged from a greater wreck?

Transmitting the essence

If the circumstances were right it seems possible that *the essence of the*

cult might survive, carried forward by a nucleus of determined men and

women. I suspect, too, with the proper motivation and indoctrination techniques, plus a means of recruiting new members from among the

half-savage local inhabitants, that such a cult might perpetuate itself

almost indefinitely. This could happen, however, only if its members (like

the Jews awaiting the Messiah) were prepared to bide their time, for thousands and thousands of years, until they felt confident that the moment had come to declare themselves.

If they did that, and if their sacred objective were indeed to preserve and transmit knowledge to some evolved future civilization, it is easy to

imagine how the cult members might be described in terms similar to

those used for the Egyptian wisdom god Thoth who was said to have

succeeded in understanding the mysteries of the heavens [and to have] revealed

them by inscribing them in sacred books which he then hid here on earth,

intending that they should be searched for by future generations but found only

by the fully worthy ...22

What might the mysterious 'books of Thoth' have been? Is it necessary to

suppose that all the information they were purported to contain should

have been transmitted in *book* form?

Is it not worth wondering, for example, whether Professors de

Santillana and von Dechend might have earned their place among the

'fully worthy' when they decoded the advanced scientific language

embedded in the great universal myths of precession? In so doing, is it

not possible that they might have stumbled upon one of the metaphorical

'books' of Thoth and read the ancient science inscribed upon its pages?

Likewise, what about Posnansky's discoveries at Tiahuanaco, and

Hapgood's maps? What about the new understanding that is dawning

concerning the geological antiquity of the Sphinx at Giza? What about the

questions raised by the gigantic blocks used in the construction of the

22 *The Egyptian Hermes*, p. 33.

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

Valley and Mortuary Temples? What about the secrets now being teased,

one by one, from the astronomical alignments and dimensions and concealed chambers of the pyramids?

If these, too, are readings from the metaphorical books of Thoth, it would seem that the numbers of the ‘fully worthy’ are increasing, and that new and even more startling revelations may soon be at hand ...

To return briefly and for the last time to our evolving scenario:

1 at the beginning of the twenty-first century of the Christian era, near

the cusp of the Age of Pisces and the Age of Aquarius, civilization as we know it is destroyed;

2 among the devastated survivors a few hundred or a few thousand individuals band together to preserve and transmit the fruits of their culture’s scientific knowledge into a distant and uncertain future;

3 these civilizers split into small groups and spread across the globe;

4 by and large they fail, and perish; nevertheless, in certain areas, some

do succeed in making a lasting cultural impression;

5 after thousands of years—and perhaps several false starts—a branch

of the original wisdom cult influences the emergence of a fully fledged

civilization ...

Of course the parallel for this last category is once again to be found in

Egypt. I would seriously propose as a hypothesis for further testing that a

scientific wisdom cult, made up of the survivors of a great, lost, *maritime*

civilization, could perhaps have established itself in the Nile Valley as

early as the fourteenth millennium BC. The cult would have been based at

Heliopolis, Giza and Abydos, and perhaps at other centres as well, and

would have initiated Egypt's early agricultural revolution. Later, however,

beaten down by the huge floods and other disturbances of the earth

which took place in the eleventh millennium BC, the cult would have been

obliged to cut its losses and withdraw until the turmoil of the Ice Age was

over—never knowing whether its message would survive the subsequent

dark epochs.

Under such circumstances, the hypothesis suggests that a huge and ambitious building project would have been one way cult members could

preserve and transmit scientific information into the future independently

of their physical survival. In other words, if the buildings were large enough, capable of enduring through immense spans of time and encoded through and through with the cult's message, there would be

hope that the message would be *decoded* at some future date even if the

cult had by then long since ceased to exist.

The hypothesis proposes that this is what the enigmatic structures on

the Giza plateau are all about:

474

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

1 that the Great Sphinx is indeed, as we have argued in previous chapters, an equinoctial marker for the Age of Leo, indicating a date in

our own chronology of between 10,970 BC and 8810 BC;

2 that the three principal pyramids are indeed laid out in relation to the

Nile Valley to mimic the precise dispositions of the three stars of Orion's Belt in relation to the course of the Milky Way in 10,450 BC.

This is a pretty effective means of 'specifying' the epoch of the eleventh

millennium BC by using the phenomenon of precession, which has been

rightly described as the 'only true clock of our planet'.²³ Confusingly,

however, we also know that the Great Pyramid incorporates star shafts

'locked in' to Orion's Belt and Sirius at around 2450 BC.²⁴ The hypothesis

resolves the anomaly of the missing years by supposing the star shafts to

be merely the later work of the same long-lived cult that originally laid

out the Giza ground-plan in 10,450 BC. Naturally, the hypothesis also

suggests that it was this same cult, towards the end of those 8000

missing years, that provided the initiating spark for the sudden and 'fully

formed' emergence of the literate historical civilization of dynastic Egypt.

What remains to be guessed at are the *motives* of the pyramid builders,

who were presumably the same people as the mysterious cartographers

who mapped the globe at the end of the last Ice Age in the northern hemisphere. If so, we might also ask why these highly civilized and technically accomplished architects and navigators were obsessed with

charting the gradual glaciation of the enigmatic southern continent of Antarctica from the fourteenth millennium BC—when Hapgood calculates

that the source map referred to by Phillippe Buache was drawn up—down

to about the end of the fifth millennium BC?

Could they have been making a permanent cartographical record of the

slow obliteration of their homeland?

And could their overwhelming desire to transmit a message to the future through a variety of different media—myths, maps, buildings, calendar systems, mathematical harmonies—have been connected to the

cataclysms and earth changes that caused this loss?

An urgent mission

The possession of a conscious, articulated history is one of the faculties

that distinguishes human beings from animals. Unlike rats, say, or sheep,

or cows, or pheasants, we have a past which is separate from ourselves.

We therefore have the opportunity, as I have said, to learn from the experiences of our predecessors.

Is it because we are perverse, or misguided, or simply stupid that we

23 By Robert Bauval, personal communication.

24 See Part VII.

475

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

refuse to recognize those experiences unless they have come down to us

in the form of *bona fide* ‘historical records’? And is it arrogance or

ignorance which leads us to draw an arbitrary line separating ‘history’

from ‘prehistory’ at about 5000 years before the present—defining the

records of ‘history’ as valid testimony and the records of ‘prehistory’ as

primitive delusions?

At this stage in a continuing investigation, my instinct is that we may have put ourselves in danger by closing our ears for so long to the disturbing ancestral voices which reach us in the form of myths. This is

more an intuitive than a rational feeling, but it is by no means unreasonable. My research has filled me with respect for the logical thinking, high science, deep psychological insights, and vast cosmographical knowledge of the ancient geniuses who composed those

myths, and who, I am now fully persuaded, descended from the same lost

civilization that produced the map-makers, pyramid builders, navigators,

astronomers and earth-measurers whose fingerprints we have been following across the continents and oceans of the earth.

Since I have learned to respect those long-forgotten and still only hazily

identified Newtons and Shakespeares and Einsteins of the last Ice Age, I

think it would be foolish to disregard what they seem to be saying. And

what they seem to be saying to us is this: that cyclical, recurrent and near-total destructions of mankind are part and parcel of life on this

planet, that such destructions have occurred many times before and that

they will certainly occur again.

What, after all, is the remarkable calendrical system of the Mayas if it is

not a medium for transmitting exactly this message? What, if not vehicles

for the same sort of bad news are the traditions of the four previous 'Suns' (or sometimes of the three previous 'Worlds') passed down in the

Americas since time immemorial? By the same token, what might be the

function of the great myths of precession which speak not just of

previous cataclysms but of cataclysms to come and which (through the

metaphor of the cosmic mill) link these earthly disasters to 'disturbances

in the heavens'? Last but by no means least, what burning motive

impelled the pyramid builders to erect, with such care, the powerful and

mysterious edifices on the Giza plateau?

Yes, they were saying, 'Kilroy was here'.

And, yes, they found an ingenious way to tell us when they were here.

Of these things I have no doubt.

I am also impressed by the enormous lengths they went to to provide us with convincing proof that theirs was a serious and scientifically advanced civilization. And I am even more impressed by the sense of

urgency—of a vitally important mission—that seems to have enlightened

all their works and deeds.

I go on intuition again, not on evidence.

It's my guess that their underlying objective could have been to

476

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

transmit a warning to the future, and that this warning could be to do

with a global cataclysm, perhaps even a recurrence of the same cataclysm

that so clearly devastated mankind at the end of the last Ice Age when

'Noah saw that the earth had tilted, and that its destruction was near, and

cried out in a bitter voice: "Tell me what is being done on the earth that

the earth is so afflicted and shaken ..." '25 These words are from the

Hebrew Book of Enoch, but similar afflictions and shakings have been

foretold in all the Central American traditions that speak of the demise of

the present epoch of the world—an epoch, as the reader will recall, in

which ‘the elders say [that] there will be a movement of the earth and from this we shall all perish.’²⁶

The reader will also not have forgotten the date calculated by the Ancient Maya calendar for the end of the world:

The day will be 4 Ahau 3 Kankin [corresponding to 23 December AD 2012], and it

will be ruled by the Sun God, the ninth Lord of the Night. The moon will be eight

days old, and it will be the third lunation in a series of six ...²⁷

In the Mayan scheme of things we are already living in the last days of the

earth.

In the Christian scheme of things too, the last days are understood to be upon us. According to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of

Pennsylvania: ‘This world will perish just as surely as did the world before

the Flood ... Many things were foretold to occur during the last days, and

all of these are being fulfilled. This means that the end of the world is near ...'28

Similarly the Christian psychic Edgar Cayce prophesied in 1934 that around the year 2000: 'There will be a shifting of the poles. There will be

upheavals in the Arctic and the Antarctic that will make for the eruption

of volcanoes in the Torrid areas ... The upper portion of Europe will be

changed in the twinkling of an eye. The earth will be broken up in the western portion of America. The greater portion of Japan must go into

the sea.'29

Curiously the epoch of the year 2000, which figures in these Christian

prophecies, also coincides with the Last Time (or highest point) in the

great upwards cycle of the belt stars of the Orion constellation, just as

the epoch of the eleventh millennium BC coincided with the First Time (or

lowest point) of that cycle.

And curiously, also, as we saw in Chapter Twenty-eight:

A conjunction of five planets that can be expected to have profound *gravitational*

25 1 *Enoch*, LXV, in *The Apockryphal Old Testament* (ed. H.F.D. Sparks), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 247.

26 *Pre-Hispanic Gods of Mexico*, p. 24.

27 *Breaking the Maya Code*, p. 275.

28 *Will The World Survive?* Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1992.

29 Circulating File, *Earth Changes*, Extracts from the Edgar Cayce Readings, Edgar Cayce

Foundation, Virginia Beach, 1994, p. 36.

477

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

effects will take place on 5 May in the year 2000, when Neptune, Uranus, Venus,

Mercury and Mars will align with the Earth on the other side of the sun, setting up

a sort of cosmic tug-of-war ... 30

Could the recondite influences of gravity, when combined with our planet's precessional wobble, the torsional effects of its axial rotation,

and the rapidly growing mass and weight of the Antarctic ice-cap, be

enough to spark off a full-scale crustal displacement?

We may never know, one way or another—unless it happens.

Meanwhile, I do not think the Egyptian scribe Manetho was being less

than literal when he spoke of a harsh and deadly cosmic power at work in

the universe:

Just as iron is likely to be attracted and led after the loadstone, but often turns

away and is repelled in the opposite direction, so the salutary, good and rational

movement of the world at one time attracts, conciliates and mollifies that harsh

power; then again, when the latter has recovered itself, it overthrows the other

and reduces it to helplessness ...31

In short, through metaphors and allegories, I suspect the ancients may

have tried to find many ways to tell us *exactly* when—and why—the

hammer of global destruction is going to strike again. I therefore think,

after 12,500 years of the pendulum, that it would only be wise for us to

devote more of our resources to studying the signs and messages that

have come down to us from that dark and terrifying period of amnesia

which our species calls prehistory.

A speeding up of physical research at the Giza plateau would also be

highly desirable—not only by Egyptologists determined to resist any threats to the scholarly status quo but by eclectic teams of investigators

who could bring some of the newer sciences to bear on the challenges of

this most enigmatic and impenetrable of sites. The Chlorine-36 rock-exposure dating technique mentioned in Chapter Six, for example, looks

like a particularly promising means of resolving the impasse over the antiquity of the Pyramids and the Sphinx.³² Likewise, if the will is there,

then a way can be found to get through to whatever lies beyond the little

door concealed in the Great Pyramid 200 feet up the southern shaft of

³⁰ See Part V.

³¹ *Manetho*, pp. 191-3.

32 The Chlorine-36 rock-exposure dating technique has been developed by Professor

David Bowen of the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Wales. In *The*

Times of London, 1 December 1994, Brown observed:

‘One way of resolving the controversy of the ages of the Sphinx and the Pyramids may

be through the application of Chlorine-36 rock-exposure dating. This provides an

estimate of the time that has elapsed since a rock was first exposed to the atmosphere.

In the case of the Sphinx and the Pyramids this would be when the rocks were first

exposed by quarrying activity ...’

In 1994 Bowen ran preliminary tests on the famous ‘bluestones’ of Stonehenge in

England, hitherto believed to date to 2250 BC. What the tests showed was that these 123

four-ton monoliths could have been quarried during the last Ice Age—perhaps as early

as 12000 BC. See *The Times*, London, 5 December.

478

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

the Queen's Chamber. At the same time serious efforts should be made

to investigate the contents of the large, square-edged and apparently

man-made cavity in the bedrock, deep beneath the paws of the Sphinx,

that was discovered when a seismic survey was carried out at the site in

1993.³³

Last but not least, far away from Giza, I suspect that our efforts might

also be repaid if we were to undertake a proper investigation of the sub-

glacial landscapes of Antarctica—much the most likely continent to hide

the complete remains of a lost civilization. If we could establish what

destroyed that civilization, then we might be in a better position to save

ourselves from a similar cataclysmic fate.

In making these latter suggestions I am, of course, fully aware that

there are many who will be scornful and will assert the uniformitarian

view that 'all things will continue as they have done since the beginning

of creation.'³⁴ But I am also aware that such 'scoffers in the last days'³⁵ are

those who for one reason or another are deaf to the testimony of our forgotten ancestors. As we have seen, this testimony appears to be trying

to tell us that a hideous calamity has indeed descended upon mankind

from time to time, that on each occasion it has afflicted us suddenly, without warning and without mercy, like a thief in the night, and that it will certainly recur at some point in the future, obliging us—unless we are

well prepared—to begin again like orphaned children in complete ignorance of our true heritage.

Walking in the last days

Hopi Indian Reservation, May 1994: Across the high plains of Arizona, for

days and days and days, a desolate wind had been blowing. As we drove

across those plains towards the tiny village of Shungopovi, I went over in

my mind all I had seen and done in the previous five years: my travels,

my research, the false starts and dead-ends I had encountered, the lucky

breaks, the moments when everything had come together, the moments

when everything seemed about to fall apart.

I had travelled a long road to get here, I realized—far longer than the 300-mile freeway that had whisked us up into these austere badlands

from Phoenix, the state capital. Nor did I expect to return with any great

degree of enlightenment.

Nevertheless, I had made this journey because the science of prophecy

is still believed to be alive among the Hopi: Pueblo Indians, distantly related to the Aztecs of Mexico, whose numbers have been reduced by

33 *Mystery of the Sphinx*, NBC-TV, 1993.

34 2 *Peter* 3:4.

35 2 *Peter* 3:3.

479

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

attrition and misery to barely 10,000.³⁶ Like the Ancient Maya whose

descendants all across the Yucatan are convinced that the end of the

world is coming in the year 2000 *y pico* (and a little),³⁷ the Hopi believe

that we are walking in the last days, with a geological sword of
Damocles

hanging over us.³⁸ According to their myths, as we saw in Chapter

Twenty-four:

The first world was destroyed, as a punishment for human
misdemeanours, by an

all-consuming fire that came from above and below. The second
world ended

when the terrestrial globe toppled from its axis and everything was
covered with

ice. The third world ended in a universal flood. The present world is
the fourth. Its

fate will depend on whether or not its inhabitants behave in
accordance with the

Creator's plans ...'³⁹

I had come to Arizona to see whether the Hopi thought we were
behaving

in accordance with the Creator's plans ...

The end of the world

The desolate wind, blowing across the high plains, shook and rattled
the

sides of the trailer-home we sat in. Beside me was Santha, who'd
been

everywhere with me, sharing the risks and the adventures, sharing the

highs and the lows. Sitting across from us was our friend Ed Ponist, a

medical-surgical nurse from Lansing, Michigan. A few years previously Ed

had worked on the reservation for a while, and it was thanks to his

contacts that we were now here. On my right was Paul Sifki, a ninety-six-

year-old Hopi elder of the Spider clan, and a leading spokesman of the

traditions of his people. Beside him was his grand-daughter Melza Sifki, a

handsome middle-aged woman who had offered to translate.

'I have heard,' I said, 'that the Hopi believe the end of the world is coming. Is this true?'

Paul Sifki was a small, wizened man, nut-brown in colour, dressed in

jeans and a cambric shirt. Throughout our conversation he never once

looked at me, but gazed intently ahead, as though he were searching for

a familiar face in a distant crowd.

Melza put my question to him and a moment later translated her

grandfather's reply: 'He says, "why do you want to know"?'

I explained that there were many reasons. The most important was that

I felt a sense of urgency: 'My research has convinced me that there was

an advanced civilization—long, long ago—that was destroyed in a terrible

cataclysm. I fear that our own civilization may be destroyed by a similar

cataclysm ...'

36 *Community Profile: Hopi Indian Reservation*, Arizona Department of Commerce.

37 *Breaking the Maya Code*, p. 275.

38 *Book of the Hopi*.

39 *World Mythology*, p. 26.

480

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

There followed a long exchange in Hopi, then this translation: 'He said

that when he was a child, in the 1900s, there was a star that exploded—a

star that had been up there in the sky for a long while ... And he went to

his grandfather and asked him to explain the meaning of this sign.
His

grandfather replied: "This is the way our own world will end—
engulfed in

flames ... If people do not change their ways then the spirit that takes
care of the world will become so frustrated with us that he will punish
the

world with flames and it will end just like that star ended." That was
what

his grandfather said to him—that the earth would explode just like
that

exploding star ...'

'So the feeling is that this world will end in fire ... And having viewed
the world for the past ninety years, does he believe that the
behaviour of

mankind has improved or worsened?'

'He says it has not improved. We're getting worse.'

'So in his opinion, then, the end is coming?'

'He said that the signs are already there to be seen ... He said that
nowadays nothing but the wind blows and that all we do is have a
weapon pointed at one another. That shows how far apart we have
drifted

and how we feel towards each other now. There are no values any more—

none at all—and people live any way they want, without morals or laws.

These are the signs that the time has come ...’

Melza paused in her translation, then added on her own account:
‘This

terrible wind. It dries things out. It brings no moisture. The way we see it,

this kind of climate is a consequence of how we’re living today—not just

us, but your people as well.’

I noticed that her eyes had filled with tears while she was talking. ‘I

have a cornfield,’ she continued, ‘that’s really dry. And I look up into the

sky and try to pray for rain, but there is no rain, no clouds even ...
When

we’re like this we don’t even know who we are.’

There was a long moment of silence and the wind rocked the trailer, blowing hard and steady across the mesa as evening fell around us.

I said quietly, ‘Please ask your grandfather if he thinks that anything can now be done for the Hopi and for the rest of mankind?’

‘The only thing he knows,’ Melza replied when she had heard his

answer, 'is that so long as the Hopi do not abandon their traditions they

may be able to help themselves and to help others. They have to hold on

to what they believed in the past. They have to preserve their memories.

These are the most important things ... But my grandfather wants to tell

you also, and for you to understand, that this earth is the work of an intelligent being, a spirit—a creative and intelligent spirit that has designed everything to be the way it is. My grandfather says that nothing

is here just by chance, that nothing happens by accident—whether good

or bad—and that there is a reason for everything that takes place ...'

481

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

At the millstone grinding

When human beings from around the globe, and from many different cultures, share a powerful and overwhelming intuition that a cataclysm is

approaching, we are within our rights to ignore them. And when the voices of our distant ancestors, descending to us through myths and

sacred architecture, speak to us of the physical obliteration of a great civilization in remote antiquity (and tell us that our own civilization is in jeopardy), we are entitled, if we wish, to stop our ears ...

So it was, the Bible says, in the antediluvian world: 'For in those days,

before the Flood, people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the moment that Noah went into the Ark, and they

suspected nothing till the flood came and swept all away.'⁴⁰

In the same manner it has been prophesied that the next global destruction will fall upon us suddenly 'at an hour we do not suspect, like

lightning striking in the east and flashing far into the west ... The sun will

be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness, the stars will fall from the

sky and the powers of heaven will be shaken ... Then of two men in the

fields, one is taken, one left; and of two women at the millstone grinding,

one is taken, one left ...'⁴¹

What has happened before can happen again. What has been done

before can be done again.

And perhaps there is, indeed, nothing new under the sun ...

40 *Matthew*, 24: 38-39.

41 *Matthew*, 24: 27-41.

482

Graham Hancock – FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS

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484

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487

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488