

# How Ancient Events Have Shaped the Modern World



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By

John M. Saul

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A truth once seen, even by a single mind,  
always ends up by imposing itself  
on the totality of human consciousness.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin  
*The Phenomenon of Man* (1955)



# CONTENTS

- 1 ASSUMPTIONS  
*“Always examine your assumptions.”* 1
  
- 2 AS ABOVE, SO BELOW  
*Ancient mythology prescribed a strategy and instructions for beating death.* 4
  
- 3 THE SHARING OF IDEAS MAKES US HUMAN  
*The myths of the world’s two oldest surviving peoples, separated from each other for tens of thousands of years, are fundamentally identical.* 7
  
- 4 MOTHS CIRCLING A FLAME  
*A single origin for all civilizations everywhere is the only way to reconcile claims by peoples worldwide that their own civilization is the oldest.* 11
  
- 5 HANDAXE FROM HEAVEN  
*The Milky Way route to heaven has two entrances, one marked by celestial animals, the other by a handaxe.* 14

- 6 THE ENDS OF THE EARTH  
*The “Ends of the Earth” were held to correspond to entrances to the Milky Way.* 37
- 7 TROY AND BEIJING  
*Beijing, located exactly 90° of latitude due east of Troy, was founded on a particular anniversary of Troy’s Fall.* 41
- 8 THE MAN BORN BLIND  
*Beijing, Jerusalem, Delphi, Tanis, and the Great Pagan Temple at Old Uppsala are all terrestrial representatives of the same stars Above.* 46
- 9 AFTER TROY  
*Ancient history is punctuated by events separated by periods of 216 years, corresponding to a tenth of a “World Age”.* 54
- 10 APHRODITE AND THE TWELVE-DEGREE SOLUTION  
*Mesopotamian and Greek traditions, myth and history, and much else appear to come together in the tales of Troy. But the mytho-logic is frayed and the world Below improperly forced to reflect the Above.* 56

## 11 DELPHI AND JERUSALEM

*The Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed and Delphic affairs reorganized at virtually the same date, apparently in accord with a calendar that has been quietly running for a very long time.*

63

## 12 AN ENTRANCE TO THE PROMISED LAND

*The Sons of Israel did not “wander” in the wilderness following the Exodus. Their movements were a purposeful tracing onto the Earth of the image of a zodiacal creature.*

68

## 13 THE CHANGING RIVERS OF MYTH

*In time, the constellation River Eridanus would replace the Milky Way as the route to heaven. It was said that amber was found in the Eridanus. But the antique word for amber had another meaning as well.*

75

## 14 ELECTRUM

*Neither Homer nor Hitler can be understood without the concept of intermediate Ages of Electrum.*

79

15 *DAS VOLK*

*The individual as an ephemeral link in an eternal chain, and the Mystery of Blood*

93

- 16 THE FOURTH REICH  
*Tracking the Precession led to schemes in which each “Age” (itself a mythological construct), should be governed on a particular “Continent” (as mythologically defined) and by a particular (undefinable) “Race”.* 96
- 17 LEGITIMACY  
*Legitimate rule was an initial component of the civilization that emerged in Sumer when history began, but it is unobtainable, even in theory.* 111
- 18 SACRED KINGSHIP AND THE SINGULAR ORIGIN OF ANTI-SEMITISM  
*Anti-Semitism is a unique one-of-a-kind phenomenon whose ultimate historical cause is also unique. Other explanations only address later developments and contributing factors.* 113
- 19 A LOST DYNASTY? – “IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL.”  
*The “lost” books of the Bible may have been purposefully destroyed.* 119
- 20 DOUBLINGS  
*The First has lost legitimacy but all will be well with the Replacement.* 123

- 21 MARY MAGDALENE  
*In exquisitely coded language centuries before The Da Vinci Code, an author proposed that Mary Magdalene had been the mother of a child or children from whom emerged a dynastic line.* 127
- 22 THE GRAIL  
*If the Grail is a bloodline, males and females must both be implicated.* 134
- 23 WOLF AND LAMB  
*Who is the Grail?*  
*Thoughts on the origin of the first kings of France* 136
- 24 THE GREAT SECRET  
*The Emperor's New Clothes* 141
- 25 JANUARY 17<sup>TH</sup>  
*Evidence from elsewhere: the Occupation of Paris and the Source of the Nile* 143
- 26 "SUDDENLIES"  
*Things that had never existed suddenly become possible, normal, and ubiquitous, and with no going back.* 153

- 27 VARIATION PRECEDES SELECTION  
*Our genetics are unique because we are human,  
not the other way around.* 155
- 28 THE CAMBRIAN EXPLOSION: CANCER AS A PRICE PAID  
FOR COMPLEX MULTICELLULARITY  
*The precursor to the Cambrian Explosion was the  
development of tissues held together by collagen.  
Cancer is a pathology of tissues, not cells.* 158
- 29 CANCER SELECTION  
*A damaged biological tissue may lose control of its  
constituent cells. If they survive, such cells will  
reproduce and vary. Unconstrained variation may  
produce cells that form metastases.* 166
- 30 SLEEP  
*What killed all the animals that did not sleep?  
Why are there no non-sleepers?* 171
- 31 CIRCULAR PATTERNS ON THE EARTH'S SURFACE  
*The Earth was deeply scarred by the bombardment that also  
scarred the Moon. These deep impact-scars established  
initial conditions that guide regional geology everywhere.* 173

32	ANCIENT IMPACT SCARS AND CRACKED CONTINENTS	
	<i>Heat trapped beneath ancient rocks that underlie continents has caused them to bulge upward and to crack. In one case, release of gasses caused a mass extinction.</i>	181
33	THE UNIQUE NORTHERN BOUNDARY BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA	
	<i>Larger lunar craters have outer rims that intersect with other crater rims to form distinctive patterns. On Earth, the northern contact of Europe and Asia produced a similar pattern.</i>	193
34	AN INFORMATIVE EARTHQUAKE	
	<i>The Turkish earthquake of February 6, 2023 provides a glimpse into the Deep Earth and suggests that the oil and gas of the Persian Gulf have a deep origin.</i>	196
35	DEEP GAS AND DEEP FRACTURES	
	<i>Evidence for a non-biological origin of gas and oil deep in the Earth is strong. Proposed mechanisms for the formation at depth of the light molecules of natural gas appear to be convincing but they can not at present be extended to explain the formation of heavier petroleum molecules.</i>	199
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	207
	INDEX	228



## ASSUMPTIONS

Always examine your assumptions.

—Ed Schmidt, 1984

The water from the farmer's well bubbled with natural gas, a puzzle because the well had been drilled in granite, not sandstone or any of the other rocks in which gas and oil are usually found.

We turned the tap to let the well-water run into a large basin covered with a plastic sheet. In a few minutes we would pierce the plastic and light the emerging gas with a cigarette lighter, verifying the farmer's account made to other geologists who had previously visited the farm.

One member of our group was Ed Schmidt, an energy expert who had been wounded during World War II and walked with a cane. While we had been holding the edges of the plastic sheet, waiting for the basin to fill, Ed had chatted with the farmer who at one point cited a verse from the bible. To my surprise, and perhaps the farmer's as well, Ed finished the verse, which dealt with Belief, and went on to recite the following verse as well.

At dinner that night, we reviewed the events of the day and confirmed to our own satisfaction that the flammable gas, methane, must have risen from great depth and had accumulated in fractured granite, meaning that it had migrated vertically, not horizontally. But contrary to the standard geological assumption, this meant that the gas might not have been of biological origin. Instead, it might have been formed by reactions deep in the Earth, unless it was actually primordial gas dating to the formation of the Earth itself, and was now rising up through the fractures. In either case, the oilman's usual assumptions would have been incorrect.

Ed's knowledge of the bible had struck me as unusual. I had assumed he was simply an energy expert. Was he also a man of the cloth, a member of the clergy? Late in the evening, my curiosity got the best of me and I asked him directly how he had been able to complete the farmer's quote.



Figure 1-1: Siljan meteorite crater, Dalarna, Sweden, December 1984. Photo: J. Saul.

Ed knew the bible well. He may have known it by heart, and it was not the first time he had been asked such a question. He had been badly injured during the Pacific Campaign and been brought to a tiny island with a mission and a dispensary in which he spent the remainder of the war recuperating. The bible was the only book on the island. Ed continued and in a professorial voice gently admonished, “Always examine your assumptions” as the lesson of the day.

∴ ∴ ∴ ∴ ∴

Many of the texts in this collection are based on unfamiliar assumptions. Among them, that,

- The human adventure began when people started to share complex ideas. The sharing of genes is of course essential, but it is not what makes us interesting, unique, and human.

The first urgently shared ideas produced a reasoned scheme to beat death. People would rise up the Milky Way to reside with “undying” or ever-returning celestial beings. The scheme does not work but it provided hope and it spread to people everywhere with great rapidity. Good ideas travel well. Vestiges of the scheme today include churches and states.

- In origin, cancer, which cannot exist in single-celled creatures, may originate as a pathology of tissues. Damaged tissues lose control of individual cells which, liberated, multiply and vary in ways that are incompatible with the workings of multi-celled animals. Parts of the underlying argument come from the fields of paleontology and geology, rather than the standard curricula followed by medical professionals.

- Understanding regional geology anywhere requires consideration of large three-dimensional impact-scars akin to those visible on the Moon, but less easy to see. Deep circular scars provide our planet's initial geological conditions. When younger near-surface rocks and soils are ignored, the perimeters of North America, South America, Asia, and eastern Europe each emerges as visibly circular.

## AS ABOVE, SO BELOW

*Ancient mythology prescribed a strategy and instructions for beating death.*

Profound problems permeate the historical record, among them, the long-standing problem faced in comparing the customs of one people with those of other continents or centuries away. James Rendel Harris (1852–1941) wrote of:

the perplexity which is caused by the appearance of what is substantially the same folk-story or folk-custom in places that are widely remote from one another on the surface of the earth. It seems impossible that such ideas or practices can have originated independently, in view of their singular coincidence in detail; and, on the other hand, it seems almost as impossible to find an explanation for their transfer from a common origin to the places where they are actually discovered”.<sup>1</sup>

Good ideas travel well, so in attempting to resolve Harris’s perplexity, let us generalize past “folk-stories” and “folk-customs” to the spread of the ideas contained in such accounts. We need to identify the ideas that were transported by myth to all peoples in all times worldwide, and with no exceptions. Such ideas must have been uniquely good, infinitely better than, say, the idea of the wheel, a very good idea indeed, that nevertheless failed to reach many peoples until modern times.

In order to have attained all peoples everywhere, the ideas that inhered to ancient mythology would have required a mechanism much stronger than Harris’s “transfer”, and also much stronger than “diffusion” or “stimulus diffusion”, as those terms are usually understood. The *ideas* must have been pumped out with urgency and conviction, and they must have been immediately accepted and then passed on with similar urgency.

*Ancient mythology prescribed a strategy and instructions for beating death.*<sup>2</sup>

The life-giving Sun and the Moon (which is monthly implicated in human affairs) were the first celestial immortals to be acknowledged. Much

later, there were the stars and constellations close to the Pole that never disappeared (“died”) at any time of the night or the year. And, still later, the planets. All of these apparently immutable or eternally returning entities Above seemed to offer a model for immortality Below.

The concept of a world organized to accord with celestial laws has been expressed in many ways. In ancient Mesopotamia, where High Culture is thought to have originated, the “informing thought of the Sumerian world feeling” was “What is above is below”.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Chinese held that “everything terrestrial” had “its prototype, its primordial cause, its ruling agency in heaven”.<sup>4</sup> In Europe the same idea prevailed in the most familiar saying of the Western alchemists: That which is above is like that which is below and that which is below is like that which is above,<sup>5</sup> and in later times, the proto-Nazi Ariosophists would proclaim as their “Great Axiom” that “The Above” was “the exact mirror image of the Below”.<sup>6</sup> Although these widely separated traditions are usually regarded as distinct entities, they in fact share a common element. Poorly understood backwaters of the Western heritage and major tributaries of Chinese culture tap the same source of inspiration as does the mainstream of Sumerian thought. The same concept appears in other cultures as well. In the Jewish Zohar, which dates to the 13th century but draws on much older sources, we find that “the inferior world is a reflection of the superior”. Similarly, the Micmac Indians of the Canadian Maritime Provinces hold that “In all things as it was and is in the sky, so it is on earth”,<sup>7</sup> while in Colombia, many Indian cultures conceptualize the sky “as a blueprint for past, present and future occurrences on earth...”.<sup>8</sup>

The domain Above might be directly attained from places where an entry to Heaven had seemingly found its way onto Earth Below, hence the sanctity of places such as Jerusalem, Delos, Delphi, and the many other mythic “Centers of the Earth”.

Or mortals might attempt to reach the undying circumpolar stars and the constellations that never set by joining the eastern horizon at dawn on the first day of spring. From there they would rise up the Milky Way to the undying circumpolar domain.

These strategies would in time be abandoned, but *not* because they failed to work. They were abandoned because the entire enterprise itself was found to be defective. For, as it turned out, the Heavens themselves were not constant. This “heavenly defect” was a consequence of the Precession of the Equinoxes, a slow astrophysical phenomenon that eventually spoils any fixed image of the Heavens. The pole star, said to be constant, would

abandon the pole. And sunrise on the first day of spring would occur far from the Milky Way, these days in *Pisces* or *Aquarius*.

In the end we are left with no more assurance than the words of the sage in the Taoist *I-Ching* who "...looking up, contemplates the brilliant phenomena of the heavens and looking down, examines the definite arrangements of the earth... He traces things to their beginning and follows them to their end... thus he knows what can be said about death and life..."<sup>9</sup>

---

1 Harris (1913) p. 180.

2 Saul (1994a, 2013, 2019b).

3 Alfred Jeremias, as cited by Campbell (1974) p. 87.

4 Eitel (1979) p. 10.

5 *The Emerald Table*, called "the bible of the alchemists"; see Yates (1978) p. 150.

6 Lanz von Liebenfels, *Bibliomystikon*, vol. 3 (1931) p. 106.

7 See Hagar (1900) p. 95.

8 Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff as cited by R. Opperman (1981) p. 5.

9 See Bulling (1952) p. 12.

## THE SHARING OF IDEAS MAKES US HUMAN

*The myths of the world's two oldest surviving peoples, separated from each other for tens of thousands of years, are fundamentally identical.*

The genetic separation between the Hadza (Hadzabe) people of northern Tanzania and the Ju|'hoansi Bushman (San) of southern Africa is the greatest measured between any pair of populations in Africa, the continent from which we all emerged. The genetic separation between these two peoples is likely to be the earliest among surviving human groups.<sup>1</sup>

Yet elements in their belief-systems—their creation-myths in particular—suggest a common past.<sup>2</sup> This is not immediately apparent, however, for whereas Hadza belief insists on the existence of three mythological generations, (1) Stick People who could not bend, (2) the People of Old, and (3) today's Hadza,<sup>3</sup> Bushman speak of two generations, (1) First Creation, when animals could talk, and (2) Second Creation, which continues into the present.<sup>4</sup>

### The Hadza

A song for children sung by the Hadza, begins:

This is not a *source* [a euphemism for that which is situated  
between a woman's thighs] that everyone can see/

It's a secret.../

Children, go to sleep! ...<sup>5</sup>

The secret in the song goes back to the times of the giraffe-like people,<sup>6</sup> the "Standers"<sup>7</sup> (*Ikhanawangu-be'e kenebe'e*), who were the Stick People "depicted in the ancient rock paintings".<sup>8</sup> These were the First People and since they could not bend, they could not light fires. And anyhow, the Earth was wet.

When the Earth had become dry, Haine (God) got a girl to collect grass<sup>9</sup> and made the first fire. On it he roasted an eland (large antelope) he had hunted, giving a woman the task of distributing the meat. That way people got to taste roasted food for the first time.<sup>10</sup> Haine then softened or broke free the people's bones so they could sit by the fire. Thus it was that the giraffe-like First People became the People of Old (*Gelanebe'e*).<sup>11</sup>

There were no children in these times, only adults. Nor could there be any children because the *Gelanebe'e* had retained the sexual habits of the giraffe-like stick people and continued to have sex between the woman's toes.<sup>12</sup> But a new Time or Creation came about when Haine divulged the secret—subject of the song cited above—to a Hadza hunter whose wife subsequently bore a child to the astonishment of all. Haine then provided another eland to the hunter who told the secret to the other men. From that time on, the Hadza had many children.<sup>13</sup>

## The Bushman

Long ago, in the paradise-like First Creation when animals could talk, the Bushman men did not know how properly to use their “rifles”.

There they were, everybody with his wife, everybody with his wife, everybody with his wife. And because they did not know what's to be done, they placed their rifles between the woman's toes. One day the women recognized the men's designs and they realized that the men did not know how to use their rifles and they said to each other: ‘One of us must go with a man and she must climb a tree and when she is high up in the tree the man must look up to see what is between her legs ... [and so was discovered] the place we men can use for intercourse.’<sup>14</sup>

Thus commenced Second Creation during which animals could no longer talk and death was present. Second Creation continues down to our own times.

The seeming discrepancy between the two-step Creation tradition of the Bushman and the three-step Creation tradition of the Hadza was resolved in 1979. For when illustrating the creation story of the Ju|'hoansi Bushman, a Ju|'hoansi artist from Botswana drew a “cattle-person”, an “eland-person”, and a “gemsbok-person”<sup>15</sup> for the ethnologist Edwin Wilmsen (1932–2023). These figures had horizontal lines at their knees that the artist, Qam Xishe, explained represented the places where the Ju|'hoansi creator had dislocated them at the time of the Second Creation in order to complete them;<sup>16</sup> Figure 3-1.

So both Bushman and Hadza have two-step Creation cosmologies. And both have the addition of knees or softening of bones as an intermediate procedure whereby people of Second Creation could bend, sit around the cooking fire, eat roasted food, and procreate.

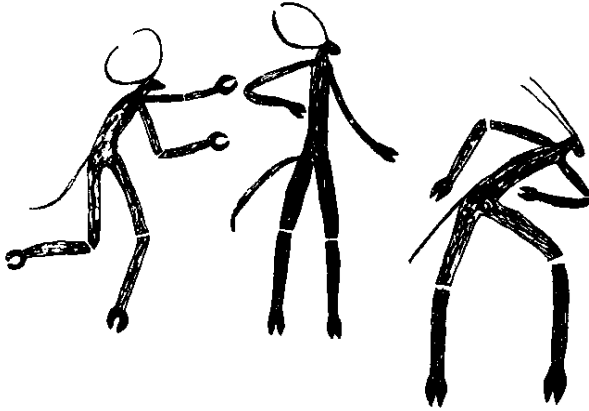


Figure 3-1: Images of “complete people” with knees. Copy of painting by the Ju|’hoansi artist Qam Xishe in 1979. Knees are depicted in this manner in rock art in places in southern Africa

## Tasmania

Hadza tradition includes stick-like Standers, and the Ju|’hoansi Bushman have kneeless people who were dislocated in order to become complete. We do not know for certain which version is older but we can be reasonably sure that one or the other or perhaps both were being told around campfires considerably more than 30,000 years ago. This is apparent from an account from far-away Tasmania, populated thirty or forty thousand years ago when it was still a peninsula on the Australian continent. In the Tasmanian myth, the Great South Star Moinee was exiled down to Earth where he made the First People to whom he gave tails like kangaroos but no knees.<sup>17</sup> These people could not sit. But Moinee’s younger brother, Droemerdeener had pity on them, came down to the Earth, cut off their tails, rubbed fat on the wounds, and added knees.<sup>18</sup> In a variant version, Moinee took some earth up to the sky and there fashioned it to make First Man. After First Man received knees by the intervention of kindly Droemerdeener, First Man walked down the Milky Way to Earth.<sup>19</sup>

Creation tales told around African campfires appear to have reached the eastern “End of the Earth” several tens of thousands of years ago.

It is the sharing of ideas, not the sharing of genes, that make us uniquely human.

- 
- 1 Schlebusch et al. (2017). Rito et al. (2019) argue for an origin of *Homo sapiens* in a glacial refuge in southern Africa with dispersal to eastern Africa when conditions improved, shortly followed by out-of-Africa migrations. From ancient genomes from southern Africa, Schlebusch et al. (2017) estimate the divergence from Bushman to other Africans to have occurred 350,000 to 260,000 years ago.
  - 2 Saul (2019b).
  - 3 Peterson (2013) pp. 9-14.
  - 4 Guenther (1989) p. 41.
  - 5 "The Music of the Hadza Bushmen of Tanzania", The Chemchem [Eternal] Spring, Buda Musique, Paris, who provide a translation along with the music.
  - 6 Peterson (2013) p. 12.
  - 7 Kirk Miller, personal communication (19 Sept. 2017).
  - 8 Peterson (2013) p. 12.
  - 9 M.G., a member of the Hadza community, replying to Shani Mangola.
  - 10 The English word “roasted” occurred many times during conversations with members of the Hadza community. Roasted food is reserved for humans; it is not for animals or for the kneeless folk of myth.
  - 11 Adapted from Peterson (2013), pp. 12-14, with additional information given to Shani Mangola by M.T., a member of the Hadza community.
  - 12 Peterson (2012) p. 13.
  - 13 See Peterson (2013) pp. 12-14.
  - 14 Adapted from Guenther (1989) citing a Nharo Bushman in southwest Africa.
  - 15 All have hoof-like feet. Gemsbok is black. (Springbok is red.)
  - 16 Le Quellec (2004), pp. 199-202, citing Wilmsen (1986).
  - 17 The great South Star Moinee is apparently neither Sirius nor Betelgeuse, both of which are identified differently in surviving fragments of Tasmanian mythology. Droemerdeener is Canopus.
  - 18 Mudrooroo (1994), p. 158, citing Wooraddi who died in 1846.
  - 19 <https://www.utas.edu.au/tasmanian-companion/biogs/E000737b.htm> (retrieved 6 Aug. 2024)  
[https://www.academia.edu/28118195/Stingray\\_in\\_the\\_sky\\_Astronomy\\_in\\_Tasmanian\\_Aboriginal\\_Culture\\_and\\_Heritage](https://www.academia.edu/28118195/Stingray_in_the_sky_Astronomy_in_Tasmanian_Aboriginal_Culture_and_Heritage) (retrieved 23 Sept. 2017).

## MOTHS CIRCLING A FLAME

*A single origin for all civilizations everywhere is the only way to reconcile claims made by peoples worldwide that their own civilization is the oldest.*

The titles of certain books suggest views that are incompatible with mainstream scholarship. Some of the works listed below are in fact by authors guilty of wishful thinking, extreme nationalism, sloppy scholarship, and error. Considered one by one, few are to be taken seriously. But a major historical problem emerges when considering them all together. The authors, it turns out, are not intellectual lightweights or butterflies. They are moths circling a flame.

*Phoenician origin of the Britons, Scots & Anglo-Saxons*  
(L.A. Waddell, 1931),

*Hebrewisms of West Africa* (J.J. Williams, S.J., 1930),

*Celtes et Hébreux* (A. Tollaie, 1900),

*Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*  
(M. Bernal, 1987).

The diversity of odd-sounding cross-cultural claims reported in print is far greater than most readers, casual or specialist, are likely to suspect. In many cases, observations have been tied to theories that assign outlandish or messianic roles to one people or another. A minute sampling of such reports includes claims for:

An origin of Finnish mythology in Mesopotamia,<sup>1</sup>

The invention of Greek astronomy in the Caucasus,<sup>2</sup>

A Swedish assertion that the great pagan religious center of Old Uppsala was Plato's Atlantis,<sup>3</sup>

A Pictish→Scottish→Swedish diffusion route to which has been prefixed the notion that the Picts may have been Algonquin in

origin,<sup>4</sup> and the opposite, a sort of Viking-Kickapoo connection, with Old Norse as the source of “the Algonquin language”,<sup>5</sup>

South Americans from Polynesia and Polynesians from South America,

“Egypt for the mouthpiece and Africa as the birthplace” of British, Hebrew, Akkado-Assyrian, and Maori civilizations (4 vols.),<sup>6</sup>

Egyptian origins from a Maya “world mother culture”,<sup>7</sup>

The foundation of China as an Egyptian colony,<sup>8</sup>

The idea that “everything, absolutely everything, is of Indian Origin”,<sup>9</sup> which may be difficult to reconcile with the notion that Belgian Gaul was “the original center and creator of civilization [with] the Flemish language [as] the world's first”,<sup>10</sup>

Citadel-builders of Mediterranean origin in the Mato Grosso,<sup>11</sup>

The Galla of the Ethiopian highlands as descendants of the Gauls,<sup>12</sup>

Tantric philosophy as “closely aligned to the law” of an Australian Aboriginal people,<sup>13</sup> and

Traces of Bushman in Indo-European languages.<sup>14</sup>

Recognition that the beliefs in any one cultural precinct are related to the beliefs in all others comes from 16<sup>th</sup>-century Peru where Father Joseph de Acosta inadvertently indicated the true nature of his ubiquitous adversary, claiming that

...whoso shall neerely looke into it shall finde this manner which the Divell hath vsed to deceive the Indians to be the same wherewith hee hath deceived the Greeks and Romans and other ancient Gentiles, giving them to vnderstand that these notable creatures, the Sunne, Moone, Starres and Elements, had power and authoritie to doe good or harme to men.<sup>15</sup>

Once supernatural explanations are excluded, the only straightforward way to accommodate the wonderful and wonderous bulky totality of interconnected elements in such claims is by attributing a single ultimate origin to all civilizations everywhere.

---

1 Howey (1989), p. 50, discussing F. Lenormant's *Chaldean Magic* (1877).

2 C.G.S[wartz] (1807).

3 Rudbeck, *Atlantica...* (1679–1686).

4 Seaholm (1974).

5 Sherwin (1940).

- 
- 6 Massey (1881, 1883).
  - 7 Augustus and Alice Le Plongeon as cited by Stuart (1989) pp. 864-865.
  - 8 Anonymous, *De inscriptione quadam Aegyptiaca Taurini inventa...* (1761).
  - 9 Friedrich Schlegel, in a letter to Ludvig Tieck (15 Dec. 1803), as cited in Bernal, vol.1 (1987) pp. 230, 479. For Schlegel, the north Indians had come to the West, motivated "*by an impulse higher than the spur of necessity*" (italics added).
  - 10 Tollaie (1900) p. 418.
  - 11 Sought by Colonel Percy Fawcett who disappeared in the attempt in 1925.
  - 12 Martial de Salviac, R.P., *Les Galla: Grande Nation Africaine* (1900), a work widely read by missionaries and colonial administrators in Rwanda, Burundi and elsewhere.
  - 13 Biggibilla, cited in *International Herald Tribune* (31 July 1995).
  - 14 Stopa (1972).
  - 15 Acosta (1880) vol. II, pp. 305-306. "Elements" here are atmospheric phenomena.

## HANDAXE FROM HEAVEN

### INITIAL CONDITIONS

*The Milky Way route to heaven has two entrances, one marked by celestial animals, the other by a handaxe.*

#### The “Handaxe” Tradition

Stone handaxes (Figure 5-1) have been described as our “first standardized tool”,<sup>1</sup> the “longest-used tool in human history” according to the Wikipedia.



Figure 5-1: Handaxe, Western Desert, Egypt. Length 13.5 cm.

Such objects are pear- or teardrop-shaped, commonly with a curved edge in the form of a scorpion’s tail. Sizes range from tiny, less than a centimeter in length, to massive objects best picked up with two hands. Most are made of resistant stone such as compact quartz-sandstone, but some have been found fashioned from friable materials unusable for chopping or cutting and in Europe some relatively recent elongate handaxes were made

of Alpine jade, beautifully polished and clearly not intended to have been used in daily tasks. This said, “the most extraordinary feature of the... handaxe tradition is its monotonous uniformity”.<sup>2</sup>

Hundreds of handaxes have been found discarded at archaeological sites.<sup>3</sup> In the Western Desert of Egypt, for example, workshops have been found where numerous seemingly finished handaxes had been left in place, abandoned as though their maker or makers, frustrated, had failed to fashion a single one that was quite right. This is consistent with the observation that a great many handaxes, wherever found, show no sign of use.<sup>4</sup> Claimed use-markings are commonly too randomly distributed to be certain which end was the “business end”, the point or the rounded edge, if either, and there are few examples of possible hafting.

Explanations for these observations must accommodate the fact that handaxes, the oldest of which has been dated approximately 1.8 million years ago, were made by peoples throughout much of Africa, and then Europe, Arabia, and India and in places farther east during a period three hundred times longer than all recorded history; Figure 5-2.

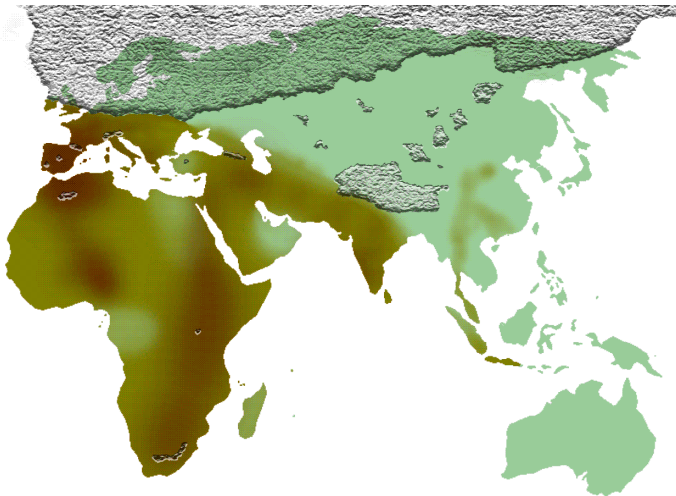


Figure 5-2: Map showing the approximate distribution of Middle Pleistocene handaxe sites. The position of the ice sheet is also shown. Map by Locutus Borg.<sup>5</sup>

Handaxes, I suggest, were not tools; they were cosmic tokens made to replicate the tail-stars in the constellation of *Scorpio*; Figures 5-1 and 5-3.

(The fact that some handaxes were actually used as tools is of no interest here, akin to the use of newspapers as packing material or bottle tops as gaming pieces.) But if this is correct, or even if not, an explanation would be required for the extraordinary longevity of the handaxe tradition. The manufacture of such objects, we might suspect, may belong among the initial conditions of our humanity. (Initial conditions commonly have long-enduring consequences as, for example, a person's genes or the educational level of his parents.)



Figure 5-3: Present-day positions of the tail-stars in the constellation of *Scorpio*.

### The Constellation of *Scorpio*

In *Amulets and Talismans* (1914), W.T. and K. Pavitt report under “Scorpio—the House of the Scorpion” that “in very ancient records, this sign has been called ‘The Oldest’; but no reason can be found for this”.<sup>6</sup> In similar manner, R.H. Allen’s authoritative *Star Names: their Lore and Meaning* (1899) has Antares, the brightest star in *Scorpio*, as “the eldest”.<sup>7</sup> Considering the antiquity of astrology and the supposed role of astronomy as the first science, this too might be an initial condition. (But of what?)

Ancient cosmology was concerned with all that was Above and all that was Below. Evidence from *Scorpio* is particularly informative but before returning to *Scorpio* and to handaxes, other regions Below and Above need to be examined.

### Eland

Images of elands, the largest of the antelopes of the African plains (Figure 5-4) dominate the rock art of the southern part of the continent ...