



MYSTERIES OF

# ANCIENT AMERICA

INVESTIGATING AFRICAN, ASIAN, AND  
EUROPEAN VISITS TO THE PREHISTORIC NEW WORLD



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## **Mysteries of Ancient America**

*Investigating African, Asian, and European Visits to the  
Prehistoric New World*

By Jason Colavito

ALSO BY JASON COLAVITO

*The Cult of Alien Gods: H. P. Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture* (Prometheus, 2005)

*Knowing Fear: Science, Knowledge, and the Development of the Horror Genre* (McFarland, 2008)

*“A Hideous Bit of Morbidity”: An Anthology of Horror Criticism from the Enlightenment to World War I* (McFarland, 2009)

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Cover images: Grand Canyon south rim, 1870 (Library of Congress) and detail from 1796 map of North and South America by C. Mannert (Wikimedia Commons).

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## Introduction

**E**VER SINCE CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS landed in the New World in 1492, claims have arisen that other people (besides the Native Americans, of course) arrived first. Science tells us that at least one of these claims, that of the Vikings around 1000 CE, is true. But nearly every ancient people of the Old World has been proposed as a possible visitor to ancient America and originator of its many native cultures. These groups have included (in no particular order), stone age Europeans, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, medieval Welsh, Egyptians, Nubians, Chinese, and Polynesians, as well as fictional groups such as Atlanteans, Muvians, Lemurians, and space aliens.

This eBook explores four claims about prehistoric visitors to North America. Chapter 1 examines claims that prehistoric Spaniards came to America thousands of years ago and brought specific types of stone weapons with them. Chapter 2 looks at the spread of an early twentieth century hoax that claimed ancient Egyptians or Buddhists came to America and founded a civilization in the Grand Canyon. Chapter 3 explores the way ancient Mexican and Chinese history have been distorted to provide “evidence” for Chinese voyages to pre-Columbian America. Chapter 4 takes a broader view and surveys the many extreme theories for the “true” origins of the Olmec and Mayan civilizations—from Africa to Atlantis to outer space and beyond.

What nearly all of these theories have in common is a desire to attribute the developments of native North America, including the building of native mounds and Mayan pyramids as well as native

mythology, writing, and art, to outside forces. These theories suggest that the Native peoples of the Americas, unlike Old World peoples, were somehow incapable of developing the elements of civilization on their own. This is wrong and it is, in the final analysis, a racist theory—even when the people proposing the theories are not themselves racists and may be unaware of the racist implications of their theories.



## I. Who Really Discovered America?

**P**ITY POOR NORTH AMERICA, a land whose history can never be her own. For centuries scholars, prophets, and cranks have tried to prove that the continent did not belong to the native peoples who populated it when the European explorers first arrived. Instead, America's ancient monuments were assigned to a "lost race," her people declared a lost tribe of Israel, and the continent's first discovery credited to ancient Europeans, Atlanteans, or space aliens—anyone but the native Americans themselves.

Today, two archaeologists believe that they have found evidence that links ancient North America to Stone Age Europe. Since 1999, Dennis Stanford of the Smithsonian Institution has been the most prominent spokesperson for the "Solutrean hypothesis," a theory that claims the first people to arrive in the New World came from prehistoric Spain and brought with them a distinctive way of making stone tools. In a paper presented in 2004, Stanford and his colleague Bruce Bradley outlined the proposed route the Spaniards took on their trek to the Americas (Bradley and Stanford 459-478). However, a closer look at the Solutrean hypothesis shows that the idea does not prove what its authors claim.

### *The Traditional View*

The peopling of the Americas has been a controversial subject since Columbus. But scholars reached a rough consensus in the 20th century that nomadic hunters from eastern Siberia came to Alaska across the Bering Strait some 14,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age, a

time when sea levels were low enough to create a land bridge. These hunters followed herds of woolly mammoths and other large prehistoric animals (the wonderfully-named paleomegafauna). They traveled through an ice-free corridor in the Canadian Shield, between massive glaciers, into the heart of North America. From there they spread out across the unpeopled landscape and thereafter gave rise to the people we know as the American Indians.

Support for this idea came from an unexpected place—Clovis, New Mexico. In that out-of-the way corner of the desert in the 1930s, archaeologists discovered a distinctive type of stone point, known afterward as the “Clovis point.” It was a spear tip, worked on both sides (“bifacial”). Clovis points had very distinctive characteristics. They were much taller than they were wide, had a concave base, and a long groove carved up the middle of both sides, called “fluting.” This fluting allowed the point to be wedged into a slit in a wooden or bone shaft to create a spear. This innovation separated the Clovis point from nearly all other contemporary stone tool technologies, a magnificent accomplishment for the people who used these points between 10,500 and 9,000 BCE.

Clovis points were found throughout North America, although more often in the east. For over a millennium, it seems much of the continent used the same tools and hunted the same way. This became known as the Clovis culture, though whether it represented an actual cultural homogenization or just a sharing of a useful toolkit is not known. Because in the early 20th century Clovis points were the oldest artifacts discovered, it was argued that the Clovis people were first to inhabit the New World and that America’s first human inhabitants were big game hunters—exactly what the Bering crossing hypothesis suggested.

### *The Solutrean Hypothesis*

“Clovis-first” was the default position for most of the 20th century, and it still has supporters today, though discoveries in 2011 of

apparently indisputably pre-Clovis artifacts have led archaeologists to proclaim the need for a new paradigm for the peopling of the Americas. But as early as the 1930s, some began to propose that Clovis technology was not an American development. Archaeologist Frank Hibben noticed the similarities between Clovis points and the stone points made by prehistoric European people called the Solutreans. They had arisen in modern France and Spain around 25,000 years ago, during the Upper Paleolithic, and were famous for their finely-worked flint tools and their art. They were replaced by the Magdalenian culture, whose stone tools were less sophisticated.

While other cultures simply hit one stone with another to chip away flakes by percussion, the Solutrean and Clovis peoples manufactured stone tools by a distinctive technique called “pressure flaking,” which used a sharp instrument for precision knapping of the stone. The Solutreans developed this technology around 20,000 BCE and spread across Western Europe before disappearing around 14,500 BCE (the dates vary slightly depending on whom you ask). Hibben believed the similarities with the later Clovis points showed that the Solutreans had peopled North America and brought their tools with them (Holden 1467-1468). Strangely, however, little else of the Solutrean lifestyle, such as their art, came to the Americas with them.

Not long after the Solutrean hypothesis was proposed, however, archaeologists dismissed the idea with three arguments: (1) though both cultures used pressure flaking, Solutrean points were not fluted like the Clovis points—many Solutrean tools had a roughly diamond shape while Clovis points often had a concave bottom; (2) the Solutreans, who had no boats, had no way to get to North America; (3) most important, there was a gap of thousands of years between the latest Solutrean points and the earliest Clovis points—it seemed chronologically impossible for the Solutreans to have given rise to Clovis.

By the late 1930s, anthropologist Theodore McCown further noted that linguistic ambiguity created a false similarity to those trained only in the archaeology of North America or that of Europe. The very word Solutrean had come to mean both the pressure flaking technique and the culture of prehistoric Spain. Since the word now had two meanings, it was sometimes hard for non-specialists to know in which sense the word was being used. Clovis points may very well have used a Solutrean pressure-flaking technique, but that did not necessarily make them a relative of the Spanish points (McCown 150-152). (There are only so many ways to make a stone tool, so perhaps it is inevitable that some techniques will resemble one another.) Only later was the term Solutrean restricted to a specific culture.

Lacking any firm evidence, the hypothesis died a quick death.

### *New Challenges to Clovis-First*

In the second half of the 20th century, new challenges to the Clovis-first theory began to undermine archaeology's traditional view of ancient America. Sites with anomalous findings began to appear with dates older than the oldest known Clovis sites. Although the media would often hype these findings as overturning the established theory about the peopling of the Americas, many archaeologists rejected the sites out of hand while others cautioned that more work was needed before abandoning the Clovis-first paradigm.

Though several of the ancient sites would later turn out to be younger than first thought, a few made a compelling case for a peopling of the New World before Clovis. Meadowcroft Rock Shelter, in Pennsylvania, seemed to show continual use stretching from the colonial period back to 18,000 BCE or earlier. Many archaeologists accept the Meadowcroft site as valid, but others claim contamination has tainted the dating.

The site of Monte Verde, Chile, however, offered the best proof for a pre-Clovis settlement in America. Radiocarbon dated to

around 10,500 BCE or earlier, the site was older by a thousand years than Clovis sites in the Americas. As archaeologist Brian Fagan told *Archaeology* magazine, the age of the site was “so unexpected that some archaeologists, this reviewer among them, wondered if the site really was an undisturbed cultural layer. We were wrong. Dillehay (the excavator) has proved Monte Verde is a settlement, probably at the threshold of colonization of the Americas” (“Monte Verde”).

For people to be in South America that early implied that they must have been in North America even earlier. This pushed back the likely date for human arrival in the New World by millennia. After heated debate, a blue-ribbon panel declared the Monte Verde site valid (“Monte Verde”). In another blow to the Clovis-first theory, Monte Verde’s evidence indicated that plant-based foods were more important than big game hunting to the early peoples, an indication that the first Americans may not have followed big game to the New World.

These challenges to Clovis-first created a rush of new theories about how and when the first people came to the Americas. A new batch of ideas proposed numerous routes from Asia to America. Many of these new theories favored some type of Pacific crossing by boat anywhere from 15,000 to 50,000 years ago. A plausible alternative to the ice corridor migration is that the first migrants arrived by hugging the coasts and sailing from Asia to America. This theory predicted the oldest sites would be found on the coast instead of the interior of North America. Ironically, this helped explain why Monte Verde was found along the coast of South America. After the end of the Ice Age, ocean levels rose, drowning coastal sites in North America, but preserving those in South America, where coasts eroded less.

By the end of the 20th century it was generally believed that the New World was populated by waves of immigrants from Asia to America, traveling at intervals from the remote past to the very recent present. The last wave before the European conquest—the Inuit and Eskimos of the Arctic—arrived around 1000 CE. There was no one

migration but instead a series of migrations over millennia. However, new controversies arose over whether at least one of those migrations came from Europe.

### *The New Solutrean Solution*

The Solutrean connection lay dormant for almost six decades, until Stanford resurrected it at a 1999 conference. With the acceptance of Monte Verde, the time was right for challenging old theories about the peopling of the Americas. Moreover, in July 1996, a skeleton uncovered in Kennewick, WA, raised anew the idea that Europeans had colonized the continent before the ancestors of today's Native Americans.

Initial reports said Kennewick Man, as the bones became known, had "Caucasoid" features. Confusing an obsolete technical term for skull shape for the racial category "Caucasian," some commentators and activists said Kennewick Man proved white Europeans were "really" the first Americans. These commentators were unaware that skull shapes vary greatly both among individuals and through time. A U.S. government investigation determined that the Kennewick remains were Native American and around 7,000 to 9,000 years old (National Park Service).

The controversy did not die down, and today several groups ranging from scholars to neo-Norse Pagans to Aryan supremacists still cite Kennewick as proof for prehistoric European colonization of America. Though the bones were dated to around 7200 BCE and were too young to be even Clovis, the door was open for new claims about Paleolithic European voyages to the New World. The Smithsonian's Dennis Stanford and his colleague Bruce Bradley seized the moment to propose the long-abandoned Solutrean solution anew.

Essentially, the two researchers repeated and expanded Hibben's claims about the similarity between Solutrean and Clovis technologies. First, they noted that no Siberian tools had fluting like the

Clovis technology, ruling out Asia as a source for the Clovis culture. “Years of research in eastern Asia and Alaska have produced little evidence of any historical or technological connection between the Asian Paleolithic (Stone Age) and Clovis peoples,” they wrote (Stanford and Bradley). That the Solutreans lacked fluting posed fewer challenges, however, since other morphological evidence would serve to connect them to Clovis.

They also cited the similarity in tool kits—the scrapers and knives prehistoric hunters used to chop up big game. They argued that the Solutreans must have originated these points and tools and bequeathed them to the Clovis people. Though the Solutreans had a greater variety of tools, the Clovis people had nothing that was not paralleled in Solutrean finds. In short, because they looked alike, there must be a connection (Stanford and Bradley).

To do Hibben one better, Stanford and Bradley incorporated the new pre-Clovis sites into their hypothesis. They claimed these new sites proved the relationship by showing that pre-Clovis technology was even closer to the Solutrean and “could represent transitional technology between Solutrean and Clovis” (Holden 1468). The fluting seen in Clovis points was therefore an American development from stone tools even more similar to the Solutrean. Thus, Clovis was not a copy of the Solutrean but an outgrowth from it (Holden 1468). Why the fluting could not be a development from earlier Asian technologies is less clear.

The Solutrean hypothesis met with immediate criticism from experts like G. L. Straus and G. A. Clark, who found it lacking, just as an earlier generation discarded it after its first proposal. But even accepting the idea on its face presented logical problems that were difficult to overcome.

### *Factual Problems*

First, the evidence seems weighted against a European origin for early Americans. There is not a single artifact or set of human

remains from the time period that is unambiguously European. Remember, Kennewick Man, even if he were European, was thousands of years too late.

Also, today's native North Americans have clear genetic origins in Asia, not in Europe. Stanford and Bradley attempt to refute this by pointing to research on a type of mitochondrial DNA called haplogroup X, a genetic marker, which is found in a higher frequency in Asian populations than either Native American or European populations (Stanford and Bradley). Superficially, this would seem to show a link between Native Americans and Europeans.

However, since the first migrants to the Americas were likely few in number, well-known evolutionary mechanisms like the founder effect and other forms of genetic bottlenecks could have easily affected the frequency of haplogroup X. In fact, after examining the mitochondrial DNA code instead of its relative frequency, a 2002 study linked the Native American haplogroup X genetically to that found in Siberia. This clearly tied Native Americans to Asia and not Europe (Malhi and Smith 84-86). All other genetic data to date have confirmed the Asian link.

Second, the old questions from the 1930s about the Solutrean connection still remain unanswered. Why were Clovis points fluted when the Solutrean points were not? What were they doing for the thousands of years that separate the Solutrean and Clovis cultures? How did the Solutreans come to North America if they are not known to have boats? Bradley and Stanford propose that the Solutreans arrived by traveling along the edge of the great Ice Age glaciers (Bradley and Stanford). Their boats, if they had them, simply failed to survive in the archaeological record.

For the other questions, Stanford and Bradley have a convoluted explanation. Essentially, they concede that Clovis was not the first North American culture. Earlier cultures, such as that represented at Meadowcroft Rock Shelter, had unfluted points that may



be transitional from Solutrean to Clovis (Bradley and Stanford). Thus, for thousands of years the Solutreans hung out in the Americas gradually developing Clovis technology.

This raises an obvious logical problem. If Stanford and Bradley admit that there were cultures in America before Clovis, and if they concede that Clovis points may have developed from previous stone tools used in the Americas, why bother with a Solutrean origin at all? Weren't the ancient inhabitants of the Americas, known to scholars as Paleoindians, intelligent enough to invent their own tools? Unfortunately, since there are so few pre-Clovis sites, it is difficult to say how closely the earlier stone tools matched their alleged Solutrean counterparts, so a true test of this still awaits the proverbial turn of the spade.

### *Logical Problems*

But let us accept for a moment, as a thought experiment, that Stanford and Bradley are right that Clovis stone tools are clearly derived from Solutrean predecessors. Would this prove that prehistoric Spaniards migrated to the New World and made a new life on a new continent, as the authors claim? Even accepting the identification of Clovis and Solutrean stone tools, one cannot logically deduce this conclusion.

First, technology is not identical with culture, and culture is not identical with genetic or geographic origins. To take a slightly exaggerated example, one can travel into the Amazon rain forest or the Kalahari Desert and find tribes whose members wear Nike merchandise. Does this mean that these people are from the United States? That is what the cultural origins of their clothing would tell us. But since the labels on their clothes tell us the garments were made in China, does that make these people Chinese?

Following Stanford's and Bradley's logic, we must conclude that these people are Chinese since for them cultural indicators like stone

tools or Nike sneakers must travel with the people who invented them. Their logic precludes handing these indicators from person to person across a great chain of interaction, commerce, and trade. In short, if the Clovis people did use Solutrean technology, it does not necessarily make them Spaniards.

However, since there is no likely Atlantic trade route from Spain to America until the Arctic was peopled around 3000 BCE, our thought experiment forces us to consider that Solutreans did come to America. But again, assuming a Clovis-Solutrean connection does not prove that these people were one and the same.

Let us imagine Stanford's and Bradley's hearty band of Solutreans traveling along the edge of the glaciers and arriving in the Americas. These Solutreans discover a thriving population of Paleoindians and share their technology with them. The Paleoindians jump for joy that the Spaniards have brought their benighted people pressure-flaked stone tools and eagerly share the new technology with all their friends. The Solutreans, disillusioned that there are so many Paleoindians to share in the mammoths and mastodons, turn around and go home. Thus technology, but not people or genes, has traveled to the New World.

It is because of this possibility that Stanford and Bradley indirectly expose the weakness of their argument in the abstract of their recent paper: "Evidence has accumulated over the past two decades indicating that the earliest origin of people in Noah America may have been from south-western Europe during the last glacial maximum. In this summary we outline a theory of a Solutrean origin for Clovis culture and briefly present the archaeological data supporting this assertion" (Bradley and Stanford).

Notice the misdirection: impersonal "evidence" shows the first North Americans came from Europe, but the authors merely suggest Clovis "culture" came from the Solutrean. The two are not the same, and the authors know that one does not prove the other, however much

they wish to imply it. But since the authors previously admitted, and archaeology accepts, that Clovis was not the first North American culture, even a Solutrean origin for Clovis does not contribute to the claim that the “earliest origin” people in the New World came from Spain.

Under the most favorable interpretation, they can prove little more than diffusion. Under no interpretation does the theory make Europeans America’s first colonists.

### *A More Likely Story*

For the moment there is no clear evidence relating Solutreans to the Clovis people—or any earlier people of North America. Anthropologist G. A. Clark makes a compelling case that the similarities between the two cultures are coincidental, the result of two independent peoples stumbling across similar solutions when faced with similar problems in hunting ancient big game (Clark 16). It has happened before. The bow and arrow were developed independently in the Americas and in the Old World. Writing developed on its own in the ancient Near East, in the ancient Far East, and in Mesoamerica. Witness, too, the mountains of paper devoted to supposed connections between Old and New World pyramid building and mummification.

As anthropologist Lawrence Guy Straus told National Geographic, “One of the great failings of archaeology ... is a continuous falling back on the notion that if a couple of things resemble one another, they have to have the same source. But these similarities appear and reappear time and again in different places” (Parfit 61).

The Solutrean hypothesis is simply the latest in a long string of ideas that have sought the ultimate origins of American history in other lands. Since the first explorations of the New World, researchers have tried to tie the continent’s history back to Europe, as if to fulfill a need to own America’s most distant past as well as its present.

The Clovis culture was likely an indigenous creation, a product of some very clever people working with what they had thousands of years ago. Until there is physical evidence that ties the ancient Americas to Europe, there can be no justification for continuing to deny Native Americans their history, their culture, and their accomplishments.

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## II. An Archaeological Cover-Up in the Grand Canyon?

ON APRIL 5, 1909 A PHOENIX newspaper called the *Arizona Gazette* published an article in its evening edition which claimed that an Egypto-Tibetan culture lived in the Grand Canyon. Running on the front page under the headline “Explorations in the Grand Canyon” (see Appendix for article text), the anonymous story claimed that the find was “not only the oldest archaeological discovery in the United States, but one of the most valuable in the world.” Furthermore, the article claimed the project was “under the direction of Prof. S. A. Jordan” with Smithsonian-backed adventurer G. E. Kinkaid. The duration of the article is an account of the find by G. E. Kinkaid.

In his narrative Kinkaid described a series of tunnels and passages with a cross chamber near the entrance in which stood a statue: “The idol almost resembles Buddha, though the scientists are not certain as to what religious worship it represents. Taking into consideration everything found thus far, it is possible that this worship most resembles the ancient people of Tibet.” Kinkaid allegedly says that he found an unknown gray metal resembling platinum in the cave, and tiny carved heads were scattered on the floor. Urns bore “mysterious hieroglyphics, the key to which the Smithsonian Institute hopes yet to discover.” In

another room he said he found mummies: “Some of the mummies are covered with clay, and all are wrapped in a bark fabric.” Then we take leave of Kinkaid, and the anonymous reporter offers an epilogue: “The discoveries in the Grand Canyon may throw further light on human evolution and prehistoric ages.”

From this strange story written at the dawn of the twentieth century came a web of intrigue and deception that alternative historians say they have uncovered. This is but one aspect of a growing paranoia among alternative authors that sees conspiracies threatening to destroy the “true” history of man’s past. Let us examine several aspects of this alleged cover-up.

### *The Grand Canyon Hoax*

Off the bat, there are a few signs that point to a hoax on the part of the paper or Mr. Kinkaid. First, this is a one-source story without comment from Prof. Jordan or any other person, the kind of story a teller of tall tales would write. On March 12 of that same year, the *Gazette* had reported on an earlier phase of Kincaid’s adventure. However, there is no documentary evidence to back up Mr. Kincaid’s existence.

Second, the Smithsonian is an Institution, not an Institute. Anyone who really worked for them would know that. Third, when the article is read in full, it seems like a regurgitation of the 19th and early 20th century stories about Lemuria and Atlantis. In fact, even if the paper were blameless in the affair, the alleged Mr. Kinkaid, for whom no Smithsonian record exists, could easily have been a local liar who read all about the lost continent of Atlantis or Lemuria and spun it into a local tale bought by the yellow press still reeling from the Pulitzer-Hearst tabloid fever. How could the paper pass on a story that seemed so good? Remember, this was an age when running newspaper hoaxes was commonplace, with Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain prominent contributors to the genre. The most famous hoax, the *New York Sun’s*

1835 moon hoax, asked readers to believe that aliens on the moon could be observed from earth. And they did.

Third, the facts of the story make little sense, freely mixing Buddhist and Egyptian motifs, despite thousands of years and miles separating the two cultures.

However, many people ignore this history, and the story has a sinister aspect. The belief in this lost Egyptian/Tibetan temple has consequences today. Ever since unorthodox researcher David Hatcher Childress published the newspaper hoax as fact in his book *Lost Cities of North and Central America*, the story took on the trappings of truth, without regard for actual facts. In an *Atlantis Rising* article about maverick archaeologist John Ora Kinnaman's attempts in the 1950s to prove a 35,000-year-old date for the Great Pyramid, Stephen Mehler writes:

By virtue of the huge crystal stored in a chamber 1,100 feet below the bedrock of the Giza Plateau, Egyptian priests could send telepathic messages around the world! According to [Dr. Albert J.] McDonald, one of the places Dr. Kinnaman said these messages were sent was the Grand Canyon! Dr. Kinnaman may have known about the find in the Grand Canyon in 1909 and even known Professor S.A. Jordan, but we have no documentation of this as of yet.

For his part, Kinnaman claimed to have found the Atlantean Hall of Records beneath the Sphinx, where he said the Ark of the Covenant rested. Obviously, there is no truth to this, and Kinnaman sought to validate the Atlantis prophesies of alleged psychic Edgar Cayce.

The evidence suggests the Grand Canyon story is a complete fabrication. There once was a Prof. S. A. Jordon, with an 'o' not an 'a', but this Jordon was a European archaeologist, not an American one.



Jordon did not work the Grand Canyon. On the *Cyber Space Orbit* website (now closed), John Winston commented:

Several professional inquiries into this matter ten years ago made it clear that to Smithsonian authorities, this was indeed a hoax, and that the fact there is no record of any Professor S. A. Jordan ever existing, or ever being associated with the Smithsonian.

He then paradoxically cites the existence of Prof. Jordan as proof of a Smithsonian cover-up of the information in the *Gazette* article. More likely is the idea that Jordan with an 'a' never existed. As for the Smithsonian itself, when asked by Peter Hay of the *Sightings* website, a representative for the Institution had the following comment:

From: Smithsonian Information <Info@info.si.edu To:  
<pmh@direct.ca  
Sent: Thursday, January 13, 2000 8:16 AM  
Subject: Re: Fw: SIGHTINGS

Peter Hay

Your e-mail of January 11 has been received.

The Smithsonian Institution has received many questions about an article in the April 5, 1909 Phoenix Gazette about G. E. Kincaid and his discovery of a 'great underground citadel' in the Grand Canyon, hewn by an ancient race 'of oriental origin, possibly from Egypt.' According to the article, Prof. Jordan directed a major investigation of the 'citadel' that was mounted by the Smithsonian.

The Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology, has searched its files without finding any mention of a Professor Jordan, Kincaid, or a lost Egyptian civilization in Arizona. Nevertheless, the story continues to be repeated in books and articles.

We appreciate your interest in the Smithsonian Institution.

*How the Story Grew*

Nevertheless, many continue to believe faithfully in the story of the prehistoric cave, a story that has grown and metamorphosed into a subterranean city as the story is told and retold again and again. Author David Icke is typical of the true believers. From his book *The Biggest Secret*:

In 1909 a subterranean city which was built with the precision of the Great Pyramid was found by G. E. Kincaid near the Grand Canyon in Arizona. It was big enough to accommodate 50,000 people and mummified bodies found were of oriental or possibly Egyptian origin, according to the expedition leader Professor S. A. Jordan. [...] My own research suggests that it is from another dimension, the lower fourth dimension, that the reptilian control and manipulation is primarily orchestrated. (25-26)

In Icke's telling, the cavern tomb of legend becomes a precise city with a sizable population. Icke also names its inhabitants as reptiles from the fourth dimension, a concept first put forward in H. P. Lovecraft's fictional story "The Nameless City," where a hapless traveler discovers a subterranean city in Arabia populated by the mummies of prehistoric reptiles. Except for a difference in location, Icke's version of the myth reads like Lovecraft warmed over, with a good dose of Robert

Temple: “There were other extraterrestrial races at large on the Earth, and still are, as well as the extraterrestrial race which the Sumerians called the Anunnaki and other ancient texts called the serpent race” (19-20). Of course, Icke also believes that Princess Diana died as a result of an extraterrestrial cover-up.

The common thread running through alternative claims about the Grand Canyon is a common source: The David Hatcher Childress book hinting at a vast archaeological conspiracy to cover up Egyptian relics. Let us take a quick look at Childress and his ideas. Childress calls himself a “lost science scholar,” and claimed in his book *Extraterrestrial Archaeology* that the moon and nearby planets contain pyramids, domes and spaceports visible by telescope and satellite. In *Technology of the Gods* (2000), he claimed that ancient cultures possessed advanced technology far beyond what humanity can achieve today.

Childress also wrote a series of *Lost Cities* books in which he compiled anomalous, questionable and apocryphal stories to prove his thesis that extraterrestrials influenced early man and current governments are suppressing this fact. It appears that Childress discovered the story of the *Gazette* article while researching *Lost Cities of North and Central America*, in which he repeated apocryphal stories of pterodactyls alive in Texas. He took the official denials of the *Gazette* story as proof of a cover-up. He included the story and the denials in a chapter of *Lost Cities*, and he excerpted that chapter for the alternative and conspiracy magazine *Nexus* in 1993.

After publication in *Nexus* (volume 2 number 13), the article was posted on KeelyNet BBS on May 8, 1993 under the inauspicious heading of CANYON.ASC. KeelyNet issued the disclaimer that anything it published was free to copy, and an internet revolution was born. Soon the Childress article appeared all over the internet and hundreds of websites carried the news that ancient Egyptians lived in the Grand Canyon. Today, despite repeated debunking, the story is firmly

embedded in the alternative community as proof that the Smithsonian covered up parts of history.

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### III. The China Syndrome

**I**N 2002, BRITAIN SUFFERED through another of its periodic spasms of eccentric historical theorizing. Every so often someone over there comes up with a new location for Atlantis or a new theory about who really wrote Shakespeare's plays, and all of that contributes mightily to the charms of America's more civilized cousin. This time it was a former Royal Navy officer named Gavin Menzies who announced to the world that the Chinese and not Columbus had actually discovered America, notwithstanding the fact that the American Indians had "discovered" the continents tens of thousands of years earlier. But we know what he meant.

The crux of his thesis is presented in his book *1421: The Year China Discovered the World*, a bestseller in both Britain and the United States. Simply put, Menzies believes that in 1421 the Chinese sent out a fleet of boats sailing west. While mainstream scholars believe they turned back after reaching Kenya, Menzies says they kept going, eventually reaching America. There they engaged in peaceful trade with the Natives and founded Peruvian civilization as a Chinese outpost. They charted all the seven continents and even mapped the North Pole. Then, in 1423, they scrapped their junks and turned inward not to emerge from their slumber until the modern day. All of that was quite an accomplishment, for it would take Europeans hundreds of years to match what the Chinese did in but two.

Menzies is not the first to claim that Asian people arrived in the Americas long before the Europeans (see next chapter, "Atlantis, Mu,

and the Maya”), but he is one of the first to receive such widespread media attention. In January 2003, the *New York Times Magazine* presented a 2,600-word profile of the man and his ideas. Reporter Jack Hitt rightly noted that much of what Menzies says in his book is untrue: “Given the gossamer strength of Menzies’ evidence, however, it is unlikely that history departments will soon be dressing him in ... garlands.” Hitt exposes the lack of documentation and proof that characterizes Menzies’ scholarship, elegantly refuting claims of Chinese towers in Rhode Island and Chinese maps of San Francisco Bay, but crediting him for providing a “seductive read.”

### *Investigating the Evidence*

I read the *Times* article and I became intrigued by this strange idea, so I went to Menzies’ website because, quite frankly, I was not about to pay good money for an idea that seemed to lack proof. At the site, I was astounded to see that the *Times* actually seemed to have portrayed Menzies’ scholarship in a more positive way than the evidence belies. The site makes garish claims about the import of what the reader is about to discover: “Gavin Menzies’ discovery was many years in the making, yet given the time scale in which he has been able to expand and further fortify his hypotheses, the concept of Chinese maritime supremacy has been exposed and supported in a way which can only lead many to reconsider accepted history.”

I believe that it will suffice to examine what Menzies gleefully claimed was a great piece of evidence supporting his claim. As published on the news page of his *1421* website in 2003:

Our recent research has revealed the finding of a ‘Chinese’ body in the ruins of a tomb in Teotihuacán, Mexico. The skeletal corpse, discovered by William Niven in 1911, was found on an altar-like structure, but was so old that the bones were to disintegrate on touch. The skull was of a Mongolian

type and the body no taller than 5 ft., with long arms. It wore around its neck a necklace of pearls of green jade, a substance that was alien to Mexico at the time. Beside the corpse was a 7 inch high earthen statue, known as ‘The Little Chinaman’ for obvious reasons: the figure was clothed and decorated in a Chinese style, the visage had slit eyes, and had huge rings in his ears similar to those worn by the Chinese today. On his head he wore a skullcap with a tiny button in the centre, which almost exactly corresponds to the caps worn by the Mandarins of the Empire. The find appears to be another strong indicator of China’s pre-Columbian contact with Mexico.

Taking the evidence from the top down, we can see that Menzies here relies on a 1911 report and not upon the actual evidence itself. He confuses the old trifold skeletal classification system of Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid types with perceived racial groups (which have no genetic basis). He refers to the “Mongoloid” skull type as “Mongolian,” inadvertently equating a morphological characteristic with a geographic location. That location is then conveniently used to link the skull back to Mongolia and therefore to its neighbor China.

But this is a chimera, for the native peoples of the Americas are the genetic progeny of Asians who first populated the Americas sometime between 50,000 and 25,000 years ago. Their skulls are considered “Mongoloid” because they fit the morphological characteristics that evolved in East Asia, just as the peoples of India are considered Caucasoid because their skulls share similar measurements with Europeans. Skull shape, of course, has little to do with skin color or ethnic heritage and much to do with genetic relationships. It is no surprise then that American Indians share many of the same genes (and therefore skulls) as their East Asian cousins since in the grand scheme of human development, they did not diverge that long ago.



Next Menzies makes several elementary errors about Mexican prehistory, which he distorts to attempt to fit this skeleton into his preconceived framework. He states that the skeleton's necklace is made of jade, a "substance that was alien to Mexico at this time." He does not say what "time" this was, but we must presume that it was around the 1421 date he gives for the Chinese venture. We will address the problem of dating later. Nevertheless, even the most rudimentary research into Mexican prehistory finds endless reams of jade. The Olmecs made statues of jade, exquisitely carved, and used the material for jewelry, practices taken up by the Maya. All across ancient Mexico, jade was not just an important material, it was a sacred material of only the highest quality. The index of Michael Coe's textbook *Mexico: From the Olmec to the Aztecs* has twenty-four entries for jade. Most germane to our discussion is Coe's observation that at Teotihuacan, "sculpture is best represented in the austere stone masks, fashioned from greenstone, basalt, jade, andesite and other materials" (*Mexico* 116). Jade was also used for jewelry like that found on the corpse.

He next concludes from the description of the earthen statue found beside the skeleton that it depicts a Chinese person because of the "slit eyes" and "huge rings in his ears." Both of these characteristics are not only not Chinese but are evident in the earliest art of ancient Mexico. Around 1500 BCE, the Tlatilco figurines began to show the distinctive slit-eyes. Beginning around 1200 BCE, the Olmec, the first high civilization of Mexico, consistently depicted the eyes of their sculptures as slits or with the characteristic eye fold now associated with people of Asian extraction. This is not surprising because Native Americans *are* of Asian extraction, and the native people who continue to live in the Olmec heartland still have eyes of the same shape to this day. In fact, the Olmec made small jade figures with slit eyes to place at the site of offerings. With the decline of the Olmec after 400 BCE, their traditions passed on to other Mexican peoples who built upon the Olmec legacy. The people of Teotihuacan created their own style of art

in the centuries before the city's destruction in 650 CE, but it was a style that used many Olmec stylistic conventions. The somewhat famous Teotihuacan stone mask shows a life-size human face with the same distinctive slit-like eyes that were both derivative of the Olmec style and representative of the people who used the masks.

As for the earrings, they too are a Mexican innovation. Olmec masks show large holes in extended earlobes that represented the large ear-spools that the Olmec probably wore. The Teotihuacan stone mask also shows holes for earrings, and a statue of Chalchiuhtlicue, the water goddess, depicts her actually wearing the large ear spools, as do mural paintings. Perhaps the most famous ear-spool wearers were the Maya, whose class structure dictated larger spools for higher ranking individuals. In fact, throughout the Americas, the elaborately large ear-spools were used as a sign of high status.

### *The Facts behind the Myth*

Of course, the obvious objection Menzies could make to all of the counter-evidence here provided is that I have not proved that the Chinese did not give all of these innovations to the Mexicans. But here we can rely on science to show us the Menzies' cultural theories are in error. The first slit-eyed statues date to 1500 BCE. The Olmec flourished from 1200-400 BCE, and Teotihuacan was destroyed around 650 CE. Geology and radiocarbon dating tell us this, and even if they were off by centuries, it still puts us well before the proposed date of China's discovery of America, 1421 CE. Quite simply, the Mexicans had been developing all of the so-called Chinese characteristics all by themselves for centuries before the alleged Chinese mission.

In 1421 CE, the Chinese, if they came, would have discovered the Aztec civilization in the Valley of Mexico, but they were already a fully-developed civilization drawing on thousands of years of cultural history. They had no need to adopt jade from the Chinese; it had been used in Mexico for 3,000 years or more. And to the Aztecs, Teotihuacan

was the place of the gods, a holy ruin, and one not to be disturbed by the burials of foreigners. It was a place where the Aztec Emperor came to do homage.

None of this, of course, positively rejects the notion that the skeleton may have been a Chinese missionary, but until each of the points presented above is fully explored and refuted, this skeleton cannot be considered “another strong indicator of China’s pre-Columbian contact with Mexico.” Nevertheless, Menzies is gleefully convinced that this body is the smoking gun proving Chinese contact with Mexico. He told the *New York Times Magazine* that he has sent his assistants looking for pieces of the body he believes are secreted away in Switzerland and Sweden to “get DNA on it” (Hitt). Funny, but didn’t his website report that it turned to dust? Ah, well.

The famed Mesoamerican scholar Michael Coe has said that it is quite possible that at one time China and Mexico did have some fleeting contact (see next chapter). The use of a particular technique for the manufacture of bark paper, common to China, Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Mesoamerica seems to indicate this. Coe says that knowledge of this paper-making method “was diffused from eastern Indonesia to Mesoamerica at a very early date” (*Maya* 58). Some argue that Chinese records hint at a voyage to Mexico in the fifth century CE. Yet even if true, this would provide no evidence for Asian influence, since Olmec civilization sprang into being around 1500 BCE.

But in his zeal to prove a specific Chinese voyage in 1421, Menzies has destroyed any chance his theory had of trying to tie together the scant evidence of trans-Pacific voyages. Nevertheless, Menzies is bravely pushing ahead, offering his latest insights into the China-centric worldview to his loyal internet readers, for a small fee, of course. But if his evidence is all of the same quality as this “exciting” discovery in Mexico, I don’t know why people would pay money for it. Nevertheless, I somehow ended up on mailing list for this strange belief, perhaps in the vain hope that a constant flood of “evidence” like that

noted below would make up in quantity what it lacked in quality and make me change my mind.

*Misinterpreting Eastern Cultures*

By the first part of 2004, Gavin Menzies claimed that the Chinese had visited not just America but the Roman Empire, Australia, and Antarctica (!). Once again his evidence consisted of “wrecked Chinese junks” that no one else seems to have seen, the presence of rice in Italy, recent Chinese reports, and of course the ever-important “official histories” written for the Chinese emperors.

The official 1421 website claimed that “Re-evaluation of Ming accounts, several navigation charts, as well as the discovery of one of Zheng He’s passage charts, has provided solid proof that his fleets sailed to the Antarctic and Australia, years before Cook and his cohorts.” The claims, by Prof. Zhiqiang Zhang, and repeated on Menzies’ site as evidence, “decoded” Zheng’s map to “find” Australia and Oceania. Menzies additionally used the Chinese records to link China to European countries based ambiguous accounts of places that might be European or at least travelers’ tales of what Europe might be. Naturally, he believed it meant a Chinese expedition to the continent.

Menzies placed an uncritical faith in the Chinese records, blissfully unaware that the Chinese imperial sense of history demanded that the records be altered to present China in harmony with imperial ideology. For that purpose, the “official histories” record Britain’s King George III paying tribute to the Manchu emperor, something he never did. Similarly each successive dynasty recast those before it in their own terms.

Consequently, any history recorded in the imperial papers must be taken in context with the ideological inclinations of the Celestial Court. According to many Sinologists, such rewriting of history continues in China today, especially in the realm of prehistory, where China teaches that humanity evolved in China along with the world’s

oldest civilizations. Therefore, “discoveries” by Chinese archaeologists, which are not ordinarily subject to international scrutiny, are likely suspect. To rely upon such teachings without verification is roughly akin to watching a movie to learn history.

In the final analysis, Menzies’ claims are far-reaching and far outstrip reality. Even if everything claimed for Admiral Zheng He’s fleet were true, from his alleged distribution of “Dene-Caucasian” languages to his distribution of his own DNA worldwide (not bad for a two-year trip!), it would seem that Zheng left little lasting impression on the people he met. That they remember nothing of him and saw no lasting affects to their way of life hardly befits the image of greatness the Celestial Court wished to project. It seems the admiral’s voyage was but a paper tiger.

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## IV. Atlantis, Mu, and the Maya

**T**HE EARLY HISTORY OF Mesoamerican studies is characterized by a grave dispute over the origins of Mesoamerican civilization. In many ways, this dispute is an argument over two lost continents, Atlantis and Mu, and where their survivors may have settled. Proponents of the Atlantis hypothesis argued that survivors of that lost continent spread to Africa and to Central America, giving rise to advanced civilizations like Egypt and the Maya (Orser), while followers of Mu claimed that refugees from the lost Pacific continent ventured to China and Central America, giving rise to advanced civilizations (Tompkins). That Mesoamerican civilization began in situ is never contemplated.

The two leading advocates of their respective theories were Ignatius Donnelly and Col. James Churchward. According to Prof. Charles Orser, Donnelly, a former vice-presidential candidate, built upon the myth of Atlantis laid down by Plato and created a vision of the island-continent that would last for a century after his book, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* ceased to be remembered: “It is, quite simply, the most significant pseudo-archaeology book ever written, and it has provided a roadmap for the flood of pseudo-archaeology that has come after it.”

On the other end of the spectrum, Col. Churchward believed in an island civilization located in the Pacific Ocean, whose remains he believed can still be seen in the cyclopean ruins of the Polynesian islands, most notably the statues of Easter Island. Alternative historian Peter

Tompkins says that Churchward's Mu was the origin of civilization with "one branch of colonization [which] ran from Mu to Central America, thence to Atlantis" (364). In this scheme, civilization arrived in ancient Mesoamerica by a Pacific route, and Atlantis is downgraded to a colony of the greater Mu.

The conflict among these pre-modern diffusionist theories would lead generations of diffusionists to claim external origins for Mesoamerican civilization, much to the dismay of archaeologists, who tried to stop the robbing of indigenous cultures (see Haslip-Viera et al.).

### *The Atlantic Crossing Hypothesis*

Donnelly placed Atlantis in the Atlantic Ocean and had its descendants populate the Atlantic rim, bringing culture to the ignorant natives after the fall of the great island. This theory was eagerly adopted among the diffusionists of the nineteenth century because, as Tompkins recounts, "the similarity between Mexican and Egyptian pyramids, hieroglyphs, and calendars was too strongly indicative of the existence in the Atlantic of an intervening continent or group of islands, for which Plato's account of Atlantis fit the bill" (36). Of course, having the side-effect of denying the native peoples a culture on par with that of the Europeans did nothing to retard the spread of diffusionism.

After the twentieth century rejection of the Atlantis hypothesis, speculation transformed the Atlantis hypothesis into transoceanic contact. However, even under this scenario, the connection is tenuous at best. The Egyptian and Mesoamerican pyramids bear no relation to each other in either form or function. As Haslip-Viera, Montellano and Barbour point out, the Mexican pyramids were step-pyramids with wide, accessible stairs topped with temples while the Egyptian were regular pyramids with no access or temple-top (427). Furthermore, if the Egyptians did come to the New World, why should they have taught the Olmec of 1500 BCE the pyramid-building techniques they themselves had stopped using hundreds of years earlier?



The same year that Tompkins wrote his alternative history of Mexican pyramid investigation, another researcher was using the old nineteenth century theories to formulate a different view of the origins of ancient Mexican civilization. As Gabriel Haslip-Viera, Bernard Ortiz de Montellano and Warren Barbour discuss, Ivan van Sertima proposed that ancient Mesoamerica derived its civilization from transatlantic voyages by Africans. Van Sertima was on the forefront of the Afrocentric movement, and firmly believed that African (black) people were responsible for all of the ancient civilizations of earth: “In the case of the Americas, a more complicated scenario had to be advanced in order to account for the relative isolation of these continents and the geographic obstacles posed by the Atlantic and Pacific” (Haslip-Viera et al. 420).

Van Sertima laid out a complex scenario of transatlantic voyages that relied upon two basic pieces of evidence: African plants in the New World, and African faces carved in ancient Olmec stones. The botanical evidence may be disposed of in a few sentences, but the stone heads will take a longer, more circuitous route to understand.

The botanical evidence for transoceanic contact basically boils down to the African bottle-gourd, which, Michael Coe points out, was the first domesticate of Mesoamerican peoples, cultivated around 6500 BCE (*Mexico* 34). Van Sertima had argued that African voyagers brought the plant to the New World, the oldest African bottle gourds cultivated in the Old World date only to 3000 BCE: “Thus gourds were first cultivated in the New World much earlier than in Egypt” (Haslip-Viera et al. 429). For knowledge of gourd cultivation to travel from Africa to Mexico, it would be necessary for the Africans to have been growing the gourd *before* the Mexicans, to whom they supposedly gave it. Furthermore, since the gourd is capable of traveling across the ocean unharmed, Haslip-Viera, Montellano and Barbour argue that “there is no need to posit human transport to the New World” because there is no other evidence of introduced African species before Columbus (429).

On the other hand, the evidence for Africans immortalized in ancient Mexican stonework requires deeper and more complex treatment.

Jacques Soustelle reports that the Olmec culture first became known in 1862 with the discovery of the first colossal stone head, but the culture was not identified as something apart from the Maya until 1926 (10, 14). Thus, the first report of an Olmec head was tinged not just with the racial attitudes of the day but also with a complete void in the archaeological understanding of the region.

When nineteenth-century traveler José María Melgar y Serrano ventured deep into the Mexican jungle to investigate rumors of colossal stone statuary hidden amidst the verdant green forests, he had no way of knowing that he would set off more than a century of speculation into the transcontinental origins of Mesoamerican civilization. For Melgar y Serrano had discovered the first signs of the oldest high civilization in the Americas, the Olmec, and he was shocked by one of their colossal stone heads which seemed to him to bear an uncanny resemblance to African peoples: “As a work of art, it is, without exaggeration, a magnificent sculpture... but what most amazed me was that the type it represents is Ethiopian. I concluded that there had doubtless been blacks in this region, and from the very earliest stages of the world” (Soustelle 9).

Over the course of the next hundred and forty years, scores of authors would write about the African appearance of the Olmec and hold up these colossal stone heads as proof that voyagers from Africa had given the Olmec the boon of civilization.

In 1995, alternative historian Graham Hancock released his massive tome, *Fingerprints of the Gods*, in which he expanded on the old diffusionist theories for the origin of the Olmec. In claiming that the Olmec heads were of African origin, Hancock argued that “It would probably be impossible . . . for a sculptor to *invent* the different combined characteristics of an authentic racial type (131). The

portrayal of an authentic combination of racial characteristics therefore implied strongly that a human model had been used.” These traits referred to were apparently the broad noses and thick lips of the Olmec heads, which van Sertima, Hancock and others link to Africans.

However, as any biological anthropologist could demonstrate, phenotypes have virtually nothing to do with race. As Jurmain, Nelson, Kilgore and Trevathan note, race is not a biological concept: “the amount of genetic variation accounted for by differences *between* groups is vastly exceeded by the variation that exists *within* groups.” As a result, “race is a meaningless concept” (108). So having thus established that there are no races to be depicted on the Olmec heads, next it must be shown that the heads do not share the same characteristics with their supposed models.

Haslip-Viera, Montellano and Barbour spend a considerable amount of space discussing the evolutionary history of flat noses and wide lips as adaptations to the Mexican tropical climate (423). The old argument that Egyptians gave civilization to the Olmec is untenable by these heads because “Nubians and Egyptians have longer, thinner noses because they have lived in a desert” (423). That the heads were of West African (stereotypically black) origin is also refuted by noting that West Africans are prognathic (jutting jawed), while the Olmec heads are markedly not. Also, the Olmec heads have epicanthic eye-folds like Asians, while African populations do not. In other words, the Olmec heads show Mexican people: “they resembled people who still live in the tropical lowlands of Mexico” (Haslip-Viera et al. 423).

The African-origins hypothesis seemed initially to accord well with the hyperdiffusionist movement of the late nineteenth century. It was then assumed that civilization began in Egypt and spread from there to all corners of the world, and that the peoples of the Americas had to have received their civilization from outside sources because of their biological inferiority (Haslip-Viera et al. 420).

Of course, the late nineteenth century thinkers were troubled by the seemingly African features of the Olmec sculptures, since the Egyptians, whose civilization was the antecedent of all, were believed then to be Caucasian people. The so-called Negroid type was thought to be biologically inferior, as well. The genius of van Sertima's hypothesis was that it made the African phenotype the biologically superior one, and thus "established" that the old views were correct, but in the wrong color: "It is curious that this hypothesis has resurfaced in the late 20th century in revised form, with the biologically superior people now being identified as blacks" (Haslip-Viera et al. 420).

The African origins hypothesis has been refuted successfully on purely scientific grounds. Nevertheless, the manifold theories of African origins, in the words of Jacques Sostelle, "continue to haunt Mexican archaeology like unsuccessfully exorcised ghosts" (10).

### *The Pacific Crossing Hypothesis*

If the Africa-origins thinkers traced the beginning of their theory to the fiery demise of Atlantis, so do the Asian-origins speculators find their own lost continent had a hand in shaping the rise of Mesoamerican civilization. Writing after the demise of Donnelly's Atlantis theories, Col. James Churchward declared in 1930 the fabulous land of Mu was a Pacific continent greater than Atlantis, and that Central America was but a colony of this great land. While Tompkins believes that the Mu myth could explain the origins of Mesoamerican civilization, Churchward's "word can only be taken by those who wish to believe him" (372). Without evidence to back up his claims, Churchward's theory of a lost continent fell to the dustbin of history, though the idea of trans-Pacific voyages did not.

Michael Coe mentions that "the possibility of some trans-Pacific influence on Mesoamerican cultures cannot, however, be so easily dismissed" (*Maya* 57). The Asian-influence hypothesis has a

stronger basis in fact than its African competitor, though there is still precious little to go on.

The strongest, and indeed only hard piece of evidence for trans-Pacific contact is the use of a particular technique for the manufacture of bark paper, common to China, Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Mesoamerica. Coe says that knowledge of this paper-making method “was diffused from eastern Indonesia to Mesoamerica at a very early date” (*Maya* 58). He further argues that since bark paper was used to make books, information may have been exchanged between Pacific and Mesoamerican peoples. This seems to accord with Tompkins’s version of ancient Chinese records, which he claims document a transoceanic voyage between China and Mesoamerica in the fifth century CE (353). Yet even if true, this would provide no evidence for Asian influence, since Olmec civilization sprang into being around 1500 BCE (Soustelle 31) and Maya civilization was well into its Classic Period greatness centuries before the supposed voyage (Coe *Mexico* 82). However, Tompkins claimed earlier connection between China and Mesoamerica around the twenty-third century BCE (353). He was forced to concede, however, that since “there are no known historical records for such early periods... these stories float in a limbo between fact and fiction” (Tompkins 354).

Another attempt to relate Mesoamerican cosmology to the Chinese involved the calendar system. Coe states that the 260-day Mesoamerican calendar cycle, with its animal symbolism, is a near-perfect analog to the Southeast Asian lunar calendar: “Furthermore, Asian and Mesoamerican cosmological systems, which emphasize a quadripartite universe of four cardinal points associated with specific colors, plants, animals, and even gods, are amazingly similar” (*Maya* 57). Balaji Mundkur challenged this idea decades ago, arguing that the comparison was faulty: “These comparisons seem feeble not only because they are superficial and intrinsically contradictory, but also because they are opposed by a vast body of [Asian] religious symbolism.

Furthermore, they are chronologically incompatible with historical events” (541). For Mundkur, the differences between Asian and Mesoamerican art far outweigh the superficial resemblances, and art analysis can only provide a subjective connection between the Old and New Worlds, especially since so much of the Asian culture supposedly borrowed by Mesoamericans actually arose hundreds of years *after* the rise of the Maya and Mexican civilizations (542).

But the superficial similarity in artistic styles has given rise to another line of argument. Among the most common arguments for trans-Pacific contact with Mesoamerica is a shared cult of the serpent, based on the presumed similarity of Chinese, Hindu and Mayan depictions. Both Asia and Mesoamerica dedicated shrines to serpents, and the cult of the serpent is seen in the most ancient civilized sites of Mesoamerica, including the Olmec occupation of Chalcatzingo (Coe *Mexico* 77) and La Venta (Hancock 131) as well as in ancient China and India (Mundkur 429). However, the similarities appear to stop there. Mundkur successfully casts doubt on diffusionist claims when he notes that “the characteristics of the serpent cult in pre-Columbian civilized Mesoamerica... differ fundamentally from the serpent lore of India and Southeast Asia” (429). Further, he notes that serpent worship is common not just to Asia and America but to nearly every known ancient culture and survived hunter-gatherers, from North America to Australia (Mundkur 429). Something so universal cannot be taken to indicate common origin in historical times, though could conceivably point still further back to the Jungian archetypes that Victor Mansfield identified in the Mesoamerican pecked circles.

Both Asia and America seemed to share a penchant for making mandalas, the drawn or carved circles of divine meditation favored by Hindus and Buddhists. Mansfield says that the Mesoamerican mandalas were of Teotihuacan origin and shared a similar shape and placement in temples to their Asian counterparts (274). He offers an explanation for the superficial similarity of Mesoamerican “pecked circles” to Asian

mandalas: “the pecked circles may serve as calendars” because they have a cross within the circle whose arms tend to point to the direction of solstices and equinoxes (274). While Mansfield goes on to offer an Jungian interpretation of the way universal psychic forces influenced mandala (and Christian labyrinth) designs, the calendar representation is the most likely, especially when one remembers that the Mesoamericans envisioned the universe in four parts, thus the cross divides the pecked circle into four sections (274-275). Of course, to the Asian-origin hypothesis’s credit, Asian (especially Chinese) cosmology emphasized a quadripartite universe.

Yet, despite the stories and rumors surrounding Asian influence in Central America, there is very little hard evidence beyond the bark paper manufacturing technique. Coe makes the point more succinctly: “[I]t should be categorically emphasized that *no* objects manufactured in the Old World have been identified in any Maya site” (iMaya 57). However, Coe did agree that the Maya may have received Asian ideas “at a few times in their early history,” though in no sense are they “derivative from Old World prototypes” (*Maya* 58).

### *Beyond Hyperdiffusionism*

Thus far we have examined hypotheses that, while routed in old ideas of lost continents, dealt specifically with trans-oceanic origins for Mesoamerican civilization in an attempt to prove an Old World origin for New World civilization. The logical extension of this line of diffusionist thinking was a return to the nineteenth-century vision of a lost motherland for human civilization, this time with a space-age twist.

Swiss author Erich von Däniken caused a sensation when he claimed “that our forefathers received visits from the universe in the remote past” (viii, see my eBook *The Origins of the Space Gods*). Part obfuscation and part wild speculation, Däniken claimed that the Mesoamerican Feathered Serpent deity was a space alien because in his world, space aliens flew across the sky in rocket-ships, and these rockets

seemed like snakes to the ancient Maya, who were presumably too stupid to understand much of anything: “How could anyone worship this repulsive creature as a god, and why could it fly as well? Among the Maya it could” (von Däniken 104). Therefore, the Feathered Serpent must have been a rocket ship.

For von Däniken, the famed sarcophagus lid of Lord Pacal of Palenque shows not the “gigantic fleshless jaws ... the World Tree [and] the bird-monster Wuqub’ Kaqix” (Coe *Maya* 137) but machinery: “today any child would identify his vehicle as a rocket” (von Däniken 100). Almost thirty years later, Hancock argued after this line of reasoning that the tomb of Pacal “resembled a technological device much more strongly than it did... the king falling back into the fleshless jaws of the earth-monster” (151). Only for Hancock, the agent responsible for this technology was not extraterrestrials, but “an older and a higher civilization” (155), not unlike the legendary Atlantis or Mu, long ago dismissed as improbable and unsupported by evidence. Thus the circle that began a century ago with Donnelly and then Churchward closes with more of the same.

Despite criticism from the scientific establishment, including famed scientist Carl Sagan, the ancient astronaut and lost civilization hypothesis remains popular. According to *Omni* “One of Sagan’s original objections was the underlying assumption that our ancestors were apparently too stupid to create the monumental architecture of our past” (77). And indeed, this is the theme that cuts across all the diffusionist ideas about the origins of Mesoamerican civilization. Each of these authors argues that the Mesoamericans were incapable of creating a unique, vital and exciting civilization on their own, and that they needed outside agents to help them overcome their mental handicaps.

This view is not only wrong, it is also racist. It is racist whether it comes from supporters of the Caucasian refugees of a lost continent (see Hancock 102-104) or the Afrocentrists who see Africans as the



superior race (see Haslip-Viera et al. 420). What these belief systems fail to understand is that humanity has no biological determinism, that intelligence and the ability to create and to understand are not characteristics belonging to races, but individuals (Jurmain et al. 109). Mesoamericans had a long tradition of civilization and culture before the Spanish conquest, and no attempt to rewrite history can deny the ancient peoples of Mexico their cultural heritage.

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## Appendix: 1909 Grand Canyon Article

*Arizona Gazette*

April 5, 1909

### EXPLORATIONS IN GRAND CANYON

Mysteries of Immense High  
Cavern Being Brought  
to Light

### JORDAN IS ENTHUSED

Remarkable Finds Indicate  
Ancient People Migrated  
From Orient

**T**HE LATEST NEWS of the progress of the explorations or what is now regarded by scientists as not only the oldest archaeological discovery in the United States, but one of the most valuable in the world, which was mentioned some time ago in the Gazette (see photo at left), was brought to the city yesterday by G.E. Kincaid, the explorer who found the great underground citadel of the Grand Canyon during a trip from Green River, Wyoming, down the Colorado, in a wooden boat, to Yuma, several months ago.

According to the story related to the Gazette by Mr. Kincaid, the archaeologists of the Smithsonian Institute, which is financing the expeditions, have made discoveries which almost conclusively prove that the race which inhabited this mysterious cavern, hewn in solid rock by

human hands, was of oriental origin, possibly from Egypt, tracing back to Ramses. If their theories are borne out by the translation of the tablets engraved with hieroglyphics, the mystery of the prehistoric peoples of North America, their ancient arts, who they were and whence they came will be solved.

Egypt and the Nile, and Arizona and the Colorado will be linked by a historical chain running back to ages, which staggers the wildest fancy of the fictionist. Under the direction of Professor S.A. Jordan, the Smithsonian Institute is now prosecuting the most thorough explorations, which will be continued until the last link in the chain is forged.

Nearly a mile underground, about 1480 feet below the surface, the long main passage has been delved into, to find another mammoth chamber from which radiates scores of passageways, like the spokes of a wheel. Several hundred rooms have been discovered, reached by passageways running from the main passage, one of them having been explored are 854 feet and another 634 feet. The recent finds include articles, which have never been known as native to this country and doubtless they had their origin in the orient.

War weapons, copper instruments, sharp - edged and hard as steel, indicate the high state of civilization reached by these strange people. So interested have the scientists become that preparations are being made to equip the camp for extensive studies, and the force will be increased to thirty or forty persons.

“Before going further into the cavern, better facilities for lighting will have to be installed, for the darkness is dense and quite impenetrable for the average flashlight. In order to avoid being lost, wires are being strung from the entrance to all passageways leading directly to large chambers. How far this cavern extends no one can guess, but it is now the belief of many that what has already been explored is merely the “barracks”, to use an American term, for the soldiers, and that far into the underworld will be found the main

communal dwellings of the families. The perfect ventilation of the cavern, the steady draught that blows through, indicates that it has another outlet to the surface.”

Mr. Kincaid was the first white child born in Idaho and has been an explorer and hunter all his life, thirty years having been in the service of the Smithsonian Institute. Even briefly recounted, his history sounds fabulous, almost grotesque:

“First, I would impress that the cavern is nearly inaccessible. The entrance is 1,486 feet down the sheer canyon wall. It is located on government land and no visitor will be allowed there under penalty of trespass.”

The scientist’s wish to work unmolested, without fear of the archaeological discoveries being disturbed by curio or relic hunters. A trip there would be fruitless, and the visitor would be sent on his way.

“The story of how I found the cavern has been related, but in a paragraph: I was journeying down the Colorado River in a boat, alone, looking for minerals. Some forty two miles up the river from the El Tovar Crystal canyon, I saw on the east wall, stains in the sedimentary formation about 2,000 feet above the river bed. There was no trail to this point, but I finally reached it with great difficulty. Above a shelf, which hid it from view from the river, was the mouth of the cave.”

“There are steps leading from this entrance some thirty yards to what was, at the time the cavern was inhabited, the level of the river. When I saw the chisel marks on the wall inside the entrance, I became interested, securing my gun and went in.”

“During that trip, I went back several hundred feet along the main passage till I came to the crypt in which I discovered the mummies. One of these I stood up and photographed by flashlight. I gathered a number of relics, which I carried down the Colorado to Yuma, from whence I shipped them to Washington with details of the discovery. Following this, the explorations were undertaken.”

“The main passageway is about 12 feet wide, narrowing to nine feet toward the farther end. About 57 feet from the entrance, the first side-passages branch off to the right and left, along which, on both sides, are a number of rooms about the size of ordinary living rooms of today, though some are 30 by 40 feet square. These are entered by oval-shaped doors and are ventilated by round air spaces through the walls into the passages. The walls are about three feet six inches in thickness. The passages are chiseled or hewn as straight as could be laid out by an engineer. The ceilings of many of the rooms converge to a center.”

“The side-passages near the entrance run at a sharp angle from the main hall, but toward the rear, they gradually reach a right angle in direction.”

### *The Shrine*

“Over a hundred feet from the entrance is the cross-hall, several hundred feet long in which is found the idol, or image, of the people’s god, sitting cross-legged, with lotus flower or lily in each hand. The cast of the face is oriental, the carving shows a skillful hand, and the entire object is remarkably well preserved, as is everything in this cavern.”

“The idol almost resembles Buddha, though the scientists are not certain as to what religious worship it represents. Taking into consideration everything found thus far, it is possible that this worship most resembles the ancient people of Tibet.”

“Surrounding this idol are smaller images, some very beautiful in form; others crooked-necked and distorted shapes, symbolical probably, of good and evil. There are two large cactus with protruding arms, one on each side of the dais on which the God squats. All this is carved out of hard rock resembling marble. In the opposite corner of this cross-hall were found tools of all descriptions, made of copper.”

“These people undoubtedly knew the lost art of hardening this metal, which has been sought by chemists for centuries without result.

On a bench running around the workroom was some charcoal and other material probably used in the process. There is also slag and stuff similar to matte, showing that these ancients smelted ores, but so far, no trace of where or how this was done has been discovered, nor the origin of the ore.”

“Among the other finds are vases or urns and cups of copper and gold, made very artistic in design. The pottery work includes enameled ware and glazed vessels. Another passageway leads to granaries such as are found in the oriental temples. They contain seeds of various kinds. One very large storehouse has not yet been entered, as it is twelve feet high and can be reached only from above. Two copper hooks extend on the edge, which indicates that some sort of ladder was attached. These grannies are rounded, as the materials of which they are constructed, I think is a very hard cement. A Gray metal is also found in this cavern, which puzzles the scientists, for its identity has not been established. It resembles platinum.”

“Strewn promiscuously over the floor everywhere are what people call ‘cats eyes,’ a yellow stone of no great value. Each one is engraved with the head of the Malay type.”

### *The Hieroglyphics*

“On all the urns, or walls over doorways, and tablets of stone which were found by the image are the mysterious hieroglyphics, the key to which the Smithsonian Institute hopes yet to discover. The engraving on the tablets probably has something to do with the religion of the people. Similar hieroglyphics have been found in southern Arizona. Among the pictorial writings, only two animals are found. One is of prehistoric type.”

### *The Crypt*

“The tomb or crypt in which the mummies were found is one of the largest of the chambers, the walls slanting back at an angle of



about 35 degrees. On these are tiers of mummies, each one occupying a separate hewn shelf. At the head of each is a small bench, on which is found copper cups and pieces of broken swords. Some of the mummies are covered with clay, and all are wrapped in a bark fabric. The urns or cups on the lower tiers are crude, while as the higher shelves are reached, the urns are finer in design, showing a later stage of civilization.”

“It is worthy of note that all the mummies examined so far have proved to be male, no children or females being buried here. This leads to the belief that this exterior section was the warriors’ barracks. Among the discoveries, no bones of animals have been found, no skins, no clothing, no bedding. Many of the rooms are bare but for water vessels. One room, about 40 by 700 feet, was probably the main dining hall, for cooking utensils are found here.”

“What these people lived on is a problem, though it is presumed that they came south in the winter and farmed in the valleys, going back north in the summer. Upwards of 50,000 people could have lived in the caverns comfortably. One theory is that the present Indian tribes found in Arizona are descendants of the serfs or slaves of the people, which inhabited the cave. Undoubtedly a good many thousand of years before the Christian era a people lived here which reached a high stage of civilization. The chronology of human history is full of gaps.”

Professor Jordan much enthused over the discoveries and believes that the find will prove of incalculable value in archaeological work.

“One thing I have not spoken of, may be of interest. There is one chamber, the passageway to which is not ventilated, and when we approached it a deadly, snaky smell struck us. Our light would not penetrate the gloom, and until stronger ones are available, we will not know what the chamber contains. Some say snakes, but other boo-hoo’d this idea and think it may contain a deadly gas or chemicals used by the ancients. No sounds are heard, but it smells snaky just the same.”

“The whole underground installation gives one of shaky nerves the creeps. The gloom is like a weight on one’s shoulders, and our flashlights and candles only make the darkness blacker. Imagination can revel in conjectures and ungodly daydreams back through the ages that have elapsed till the mind reels dizzily in space.”

### *An Indian Legend*

In connection with this story, it is notable that among the Hopi Indians the tradition is told that their ancestors once lived in an underworld in the Grand Canyon till dissension arose between the good and the bad, the people of one heart and people of two hearts.

Machetto, who was their chief, counseled them to leave the under world, but there was no way out. The chief then caused a tree to grow up and pierce the roof of the underworld, and then the people of one heart climbed out. They tarried by Paisisvai (Red River), which is the Colorado, and grew grain and corn. They sent out a message to the Temple of the Sun, asking the blessing of peace, good will and rain for people of one heart. That messenger never returned, but today at the Hopi villages at sundown can be seen the old men of the tribe out on the housetops gazing toward the sun, looking for the messenger. When he returns, their lands and ancient dwelling place will be restored to them. That is the tradition.

Among the engravings of animals in the cave is seen the image of a heart over the spot where it is located. The legend was learned by W.E. Rollins the artist, during a year spent with the Hopi Indians. There are two theories of the origin of the Egyptians. One is that they came from Asia; another that the racial cradle was in the upper Nile region. Heeren, an Egyptologist, believed in the Indian origin of the Egyptians. The discoveries in the Grand Canyon may throw further light on human evolution and prehistoric ages.

## About the Author

**Jason Colavito** is an author and editor based in Albany, NY. His books include *The Cult of Alien Gods: H.P. Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture* (Prometheus Books, 2005); *Knowing Fear: Science, Knowledge, and the Development of the Horror Genre* (McFarland, 2008); and more. His research on extraterrestrials in ancient history has been featured on the History Channel. Colavito is internationally recognized by scholars, literary theorists, and scientists for his pioneering work exploring the connections between science, pseudoscience, and speculative fiction. His investigations examine the way human beings create and employ the supernatural to alter and understand our reality and our world.

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