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LANGUAGE
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The Tower of Babel
& Scattering of Languages: Truth Or Myth?

Revival of Elfdalian
The Ancient Viking Forest Language

Rosetta Stones of the World
The Keys to Deciphering Lost Languages

PLUS
Death by Wallpaper: Hidden Killer in the Walls!

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THE American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson summed it all up in 1844, when he said: "We infer the spirit of the nation in great measure from the language, which is a sort of monument to which each individual in a course of many hundred years has contributed a stone."

Languages are indeed a monument to our past. History is embedded in the content and structure of the 6,500+ languages spoken in the world today. Even when unwritten, language is the most powerful tool we have as humans to preserve our past knowledge, making possible both the living of a common history and the telling of it.

The emergence of language, a powerful engine of intellect and creativity, was a defining moment in the evolution of modern humans. Yet, how, when, and where it came into being is still unknown and has intrigued many great minds over the centuries. They are questions for which we may never hold the answers.

The annals of history are also full of languages that have died out; cultures and societies that have come to an end, leaving no speakers at all. As many as half of the world's tongues are expected to be extinct by the end of this century, erasing living documents of history. There is hope, however, as many nations are working hard to keep alive their critically endangered languages.

In this issue, we celebrate the wonder of words and explore the fascinating history of mankind's most incredible creation. Language is, after all, at the very heart of human nature. ■

JOANNA GILLAN
Chief Editor, Ancient Origins Magazine

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Petros Koutoupis is an author and an independent historical researcher. Fluent in modern Greek, Petros also holds knowledge of ancient and Biblical Greek, Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Akkadian.

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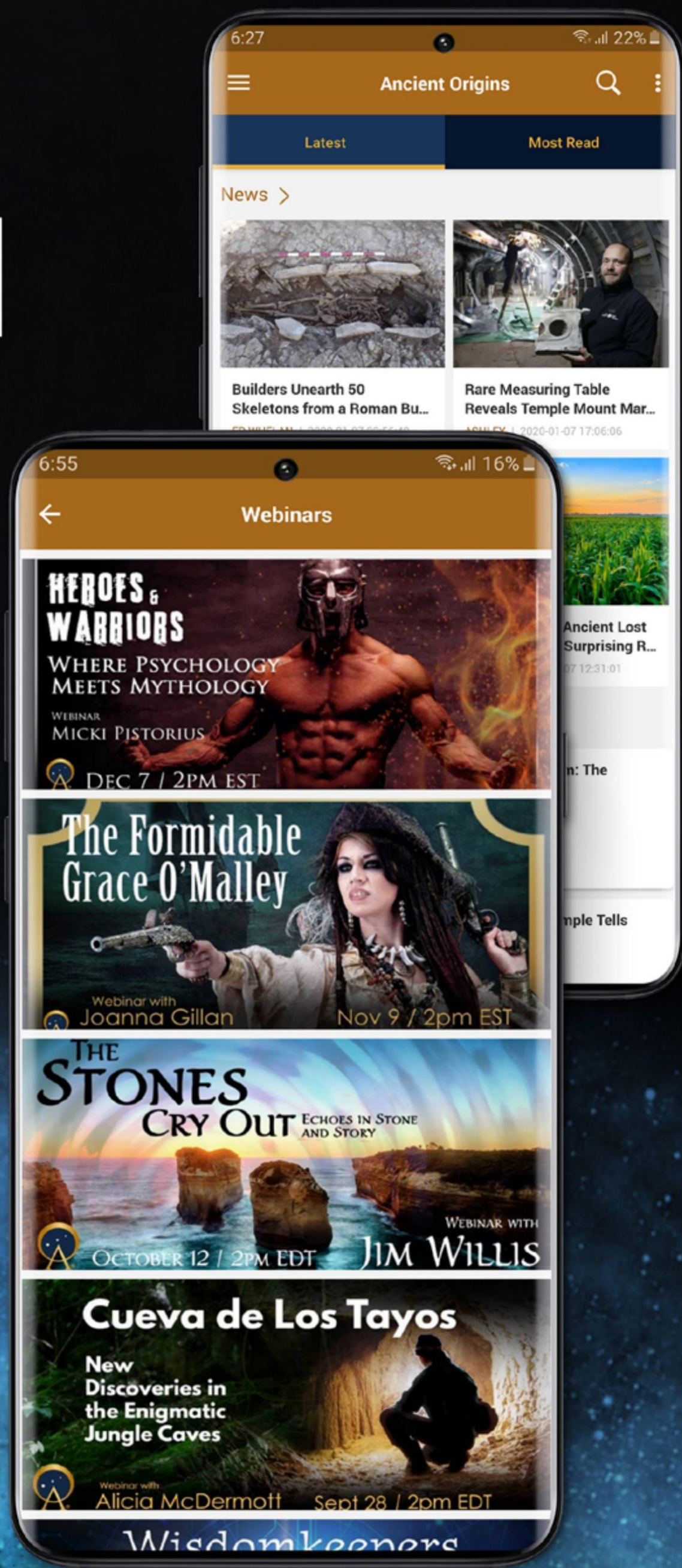

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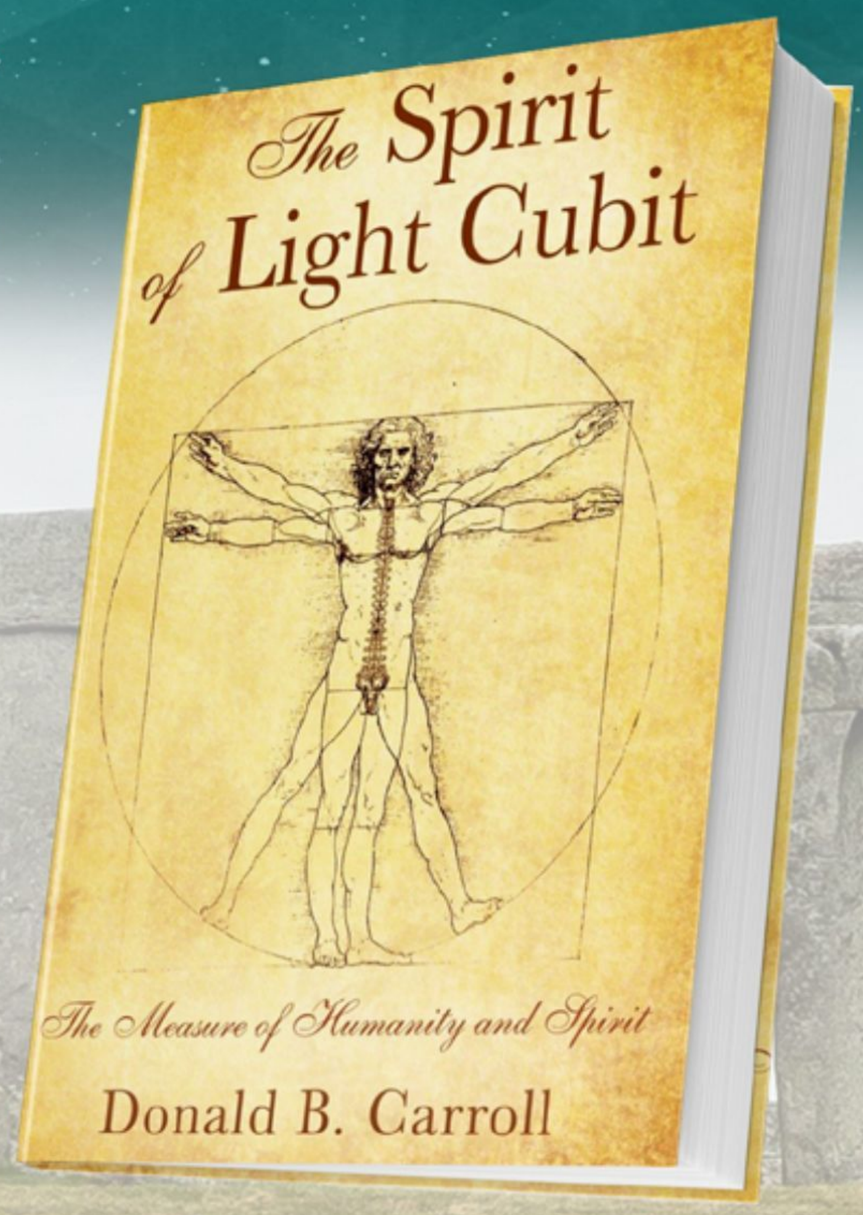

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ll By Micki Pistorius

Oldest And Largest Pre-Maya Sacred Site Found in Mexico

The largest and oldest monumental pre-Maya structure has been identified in Mexico revealing an ancient culture that thrived without a centralized government or elite classes. A team of archaeologists, led by Professor Takeshi Inomata from the University of Arizona created a high-resolution 3D map of Aguada Fénix, that revealed a massive elevated ancient platform. Measuring 4,635 feet north to south and 1,310 feet on its east to west axis, the ritual site is raised 32-50 feet above the surrounding area and the scans also plotted no less than nine sacred causeways extending from the structure. Construction of this newly discovered ceremonial platform was conducted over a natural rise of bedrock in an ambitious project that began around 1000 BC and ceased soon after 800 BC.

Professor Inomata's team of researchers radiocarbon dated 69 charcoal samples and determined that the earliest deposits at Aguada Fénix dated to around 750 BC and it was discovered that people of this region began using ceramics by 1200 BC, which is almost two centuries earlier than ceramic use at comparative sites. These new discoveries have tipped everything on its head, as until today, archaeologists had incorrectly thought that the Maya civilization had emerged from small villages during the Middle Pre-classic period (1000–350 BC).

Ancient Pre-Maya culture altar

Ancient ceramic pieces excavated from the Caribbean

Origins of Caribbean Populations Revealed

The Caribbean has one of the most culturally diverse mixes of human beings on the planet, but it was one of the last places in the Americas to be occupied by people between 8,000 and 5,000 years ago. The latest DNA study of genome-wide data from 184 individuals predating European contact from the Bahamas, Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Curaçao, and north-western Venezuela reveal that a ceramic-using population, related to modern Arawak speaking groups, had originated in north-eastern South America and they spread throughout the Caribbean islands at least 1,800 years ago.

The researchers, led by Dr. Kathrin Nägele from the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Germany, also determined that ceramic-associated groups avoided close kin unions, despite limited mate pools, to promote cultural mingling. It is thought that this represents low effective population sizes, even on the larger Caribbean islands.

The Ancient Business of Embalming

A hidden burial chamber was recently uncovered at the 26th Dynasty Mummification Workshop Complex in Saqqara. Dr. Ramadan Badri Hussein, the Director of the mission of the University of Tübingen at Saqqara, said that one of the four discovered coffins belonged to a woman called Didibastett. She was buried with six canopic jars, which contradicts the tradition that was practiced in ancient Egypt to embalm the lungs, stomach, intestines, and the liver of the deceased, and then to store them in four jars under the protection of four gods, known as the Four Sons of Horus. After studying the texts on the coffins and sarcophagi in the burial chambers, the mission identified priests and priestesses of a mysterious snake goddess, known as Niut-shaes.

Dr. Hussein revealed that studies at the Mummification Workshop have led to new insights into the business of embalming. “Mummification was essentially a business transaction between a person and an embalmer, in which the embalmer was a professional, a priest, and a business person,” said Dr. Hussein in a press statement. “We learn from several papyri that there was a class of priests and embalmers who were paid to arrange for the funeral of a deceased including the mummification of her/his body and the purchase of a grave or a coffin." ■

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J. DOUGLAS KENYON

For a quarter century, J. Douglas Kenyon was editor and publisher of Atlantis Rising Magazine. For more information visit the web site AtlantisRising.com

PAYBACK FOR POMPEII

The late John Anthony West—a maverick Egyptologist himself—often complained that mainstream Egyptologists were more interested in unraveling secrets of Tutankhamun's underwear than anything truly significant about ancient Egypt. A similar argument might be made about current archaeology for ancient Rome, especially at Pompeii and Herculaneum. In April 2020, breathless headlines proclaimed that the esteemed modern practice of recycling garbage was invented in Pompeii. Nearly forgotten in all the 'trash talk', was something more significant – the tragic history of a doomed city.

Utterly destroyed by the volcanic eruption of nearby Mt. Vesuvius in 79 AD, Pompeii has, nonetheless, for centuries, proved a fountain of drama. Few places do more to conjure up the image of sudden catastrophe of biblical proportions than this one, that still haunts us with the specter of twisted bodies turned to statues of volcanic ash. We can see what the end must have been like, and it was not pretty. From Sodom and Gomorrah to Plato's Atlantis, ancient chronicles are full of cautionary tales, but 'the last days of Pompeii' seem especially poignant. And even though academic archaeology might be interested more in trash collection than grisly details, it would be a mistake to conclude that the terrifying lessons have been completely learned.

While visiting an art exhibition in Milan in 1833, British aristocrat Edward Bulwer-Lytton was so moved by Russian Karl Bryullov's new painting that, within a year, he had written a novel and named it after the painting. *The Last Days of Pompeii* was destined to become one of the best-selling novels of all time. The book, and the historical events it described, would subsequently inspire at least 15 plays, operas, and films. This past January, a documentary on the *Science Channel* used state-of-the-art 3D technology to present a virtual tour of Pompeii just before its destruction.

Bulwer-Lytton found deep meaning in the story and set out to contrast first-century Roman decadence and debauchery with early Christian ideals. From the city's cataclysmic doom, he thought, came poetic retribution for its bad behavior. A member of both the British parliament and the English Rosicrucian Society, the novelist was much interested in the 'hidden' (i.e. 'occult') influence of ancient secret societies. In the Pompeii story, he saw an opportunity to bring up issues of powerful secret knowledge that he would explore more completely in later works. A common thread in both Christian and occult doctrine–often called 'karma'–means essentially: 'you reap what you sow.' Pompeii, Bulwer-Lytton believed, made the point, and, he was not the last to think that he saw evidence there of consequences for human misdeeds delivered from higher levels.

Recently, a very interesting take on the idea came from a Canadian-Israeli film director, best known for the *Discovery Channel* documentary *The Jesus Family Tomb*. Simcha Jacobovici is also creator of the popular *History Channel* series, *The Naked Archaeologist*. In *Secrets of Christianity,* a documentary series now available on YouTube, he took on, in 2013, the implications for Christianity of the Vesuvius eruption. Jacobovici believes the disaster inadvertently elevated early Christianity to the status of a world religion by convincing

The Last Day of Pompeii, by Karl Bryullov

paranoid Roman leaders that the Judaeo-Christian God could settle a score.

Just nine years before the eruption of Vesuvius, the Roman emperor Titus had been the general in charge of putting down a Jewish revolt in Palestine. In April of 70 AD, his soldiers launched the terrifying siege of Jerusalem, culminating, four months later, in the destruction, desecration, and sacking of the Temple of Solomon. The Arch of Titus, celebrating that event, still stands in Rome. The last of the Jewish resistance fell in 73 AD at Masada.

Pompeii was populated by the elites of Roman society, involuntarily served by many Jewish and Christian slaves captured in the Palestinian campaigns. Jacobovici believes that among the slaves were some of the original followers of Jesus, who had been crucified less than 40 years prior. For evidence, the filmmaker points mostly to first-century graffiti, still visible in Pompeii and Herculaneum, containing proper Hebrew names like “Martha”; and words like “Sodom and Gomorrah”; and “Cherem” (a Hebrew term meaning “Marked for destruction”). “The first archaeological attestation of the word ‘Christian’ is on a wall in Pompeii,” he says. “What all this means is that the Jews and the so-called Judaeo-Christians warned their Roman masters that the ‘God of Israel’ would avenge them—that fire and brimstone would rain from heaven and that, like Lot’s biblical wife, they would turn into human statues.”

There can be little doubt, asserts Jacobovici, that the eruption of Vesuvius was taken by many, including the Romans, to be punishment for the sacking of Jerusalem. The common view was that the Romans had it coming, and Vesuvius was the instrument.

Could the terrible events of 79 AD – even more than the missionary journeys of St. Paul – have catalyzed the successful birth of a new religion, that would, like a long-dormant volcano, soon erupt on the world stage?

The recycling of history books can also be explosive. ■

WOODWOSE: THE WILDMAN OF THE WOODS

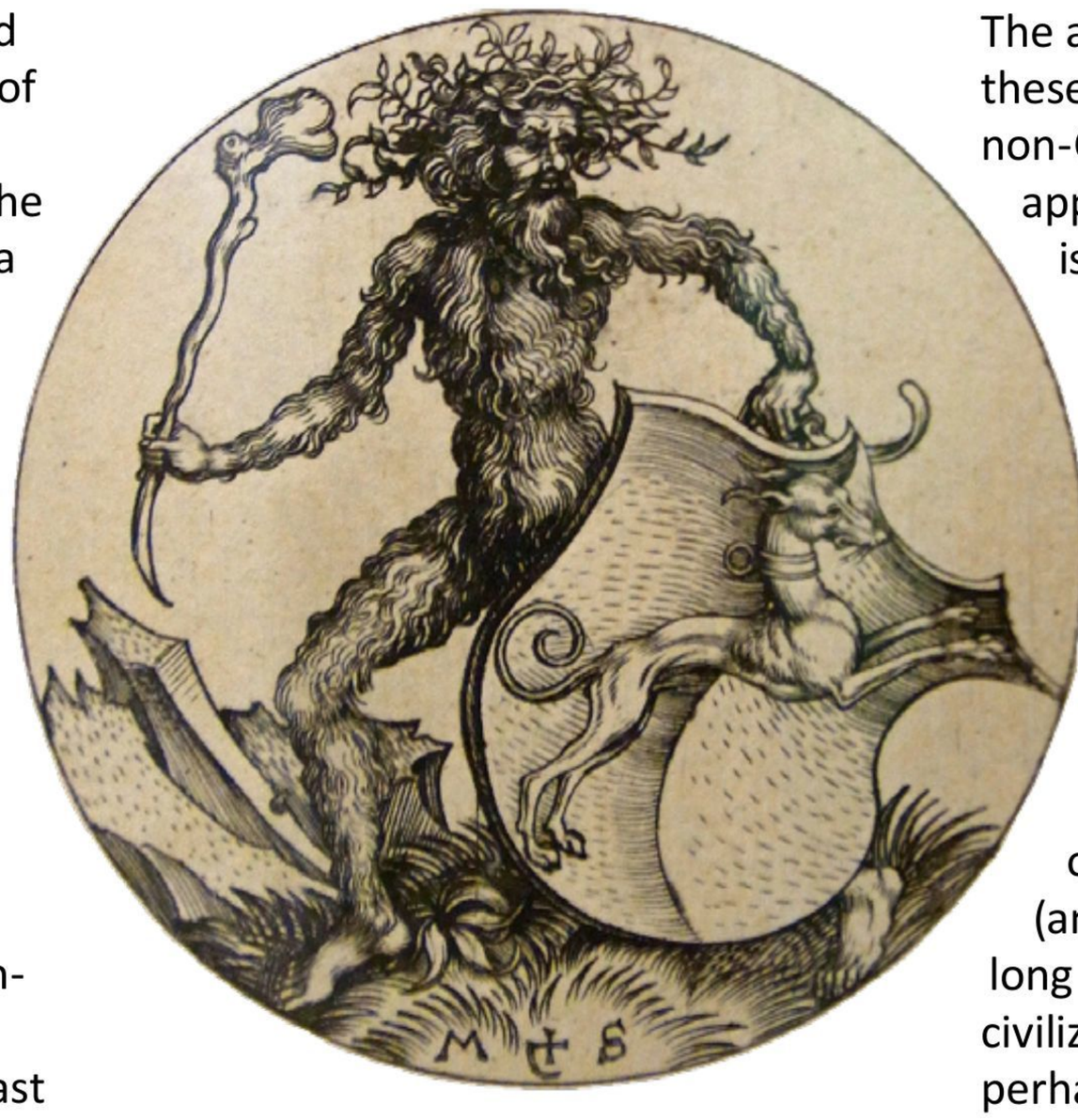
CHARLES CHRISTIAN

Charles Christian is a barrister and Reuters correspondent turned writer, award-winning tech journalist, radio presenter, podcaster, blogger, storyteller, and sometime werewolf-hunter who presents a weekly podcast: the Weird Tales Radio Show

While we are all familiar with the idea of some kind of missing link, primitive hominid, human-like creatures still living in the Himalayas (the Yeti aka the Abominable Snowman) and in the forests of the American North West (the Sasquatch, aka Bigfoot), we need recall that throughout the Medieval period there were rumors of comparable creatures living in the forests of Europe.

In England, these creatures were called the Woodwose (or Wodewose – from the Anglo-Saxon *Wuduwasa* – literally 'wild men of the woods') and said to be human-like except their bodies were covered in thick hair. In contrast to the Yeti and Sasquatch, which are always depicted as possessing more ape-like facial features, the Woodwose all have fine heads of hair and full beards.

Theories as to their origin vary from them being dispossessed peoples driven out to live in the forests and wild places by later invaders, through to their being late surviving communities of Neanderthals or other similar ancient cousins of *Homo Sapiens* (or 'relict hominids' to use the technical term). As such, they occupy an interesting midpoint between the worlds of legend and cryptozoology. But, whatever their origins, they made a sufficient impact upon the Medieval mindset that wildmen (and the rarer wildwomen) are regularly depicted in European heraldry on coats-of-arms, typically depicted as bearded, naked men (with just a wreath of leaves on their heads and a circle of leaves around their waists to protect their dignity) wielding large wooden clubs.



Curiously, the Woodwose/ wildman is also a popular ornamentation, either above doorways on porches or as supports for baptism fonts in Medieval churches particularly across the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk in England. In fact, back in the days before the coronavirus lockdown, the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich (which covers Suffolk) even used to organize occasional 'Woodwose bike routes' that covered some of the 'Woodwose churches'.

The apparent explanation for all these mythical – and distinctly non-Christian – creatures appearing in church carvings is that during the Medieval period, a number of Flemish stonemasons came over to eastern counties of England, bringing with them their stone-carving traditions and associated heraldry.

So, are Woodwoses just a Medieval remembrance of even earlier wildmen (and women) who lived long ago on the margins of civilization? Perhaps. But perhaps not as there have been numerous reports over the years of wildmen or 'British Bigfoots' being sighted across the United Kingdom, particularly in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, the latter as recently as 2011 and 2017.

Best be on your guard: one legend says Woodwose will eat children! ■

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Death by Wallpaper!

Hidden Killer in the Walls

|| By Veronica Parkes

Wallpaper isn't as popular as it once was, and perhaps the reason for this falling out of fashion was its tendency to kill!

In 1778, a Swedish Chemist named Carl Scheele created a brilliant green-colored pigment called "Scheele's Green," which was composed of copper arsenite. This color was particularly popular among artists and home designers in the Pre-Raphaelite movement. As its name would suggest, copper arsenite contains the deadly element arsenic. Not all commercially available green paints contained arsenic, but many of the prominent ones did, such as Emerald Green, Paris Green, and Schweinfurt Green.

Many families of the Victorian era grew mysteriously ill for no apparent reason. The water

supplies were untainted, and the houses were clean, but there remained one common factor: the green wallpaper. Although the dangers associated with ingesting arsenic were well known, the people of the 19th century did not realize just how deadly their arsenic-laden wall coverings really were.

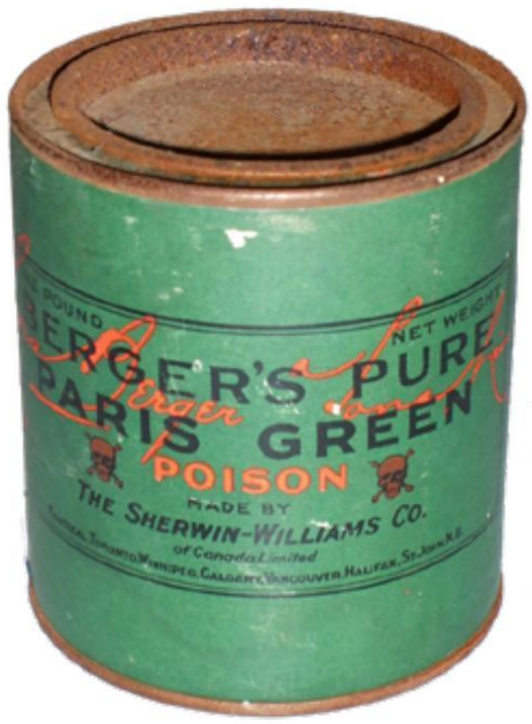
AN UNPOPULAR DIAGNOSIS

In 1850, Dr. Letheby, a renowned chemist working at the London Hospital, confirmed that the cause of death for a girl was arsenic poisoning. The newspapers were quick to publicize the doctor's theory: that the arsenic-filled paints used in the wallpaper covering the family home had killed a child. Letheby's theory went further to claim that one did not need to eat the paint, nor even sleep in the same room as it, but it would only take a few hours of exposure to the paint within the wallpaper to kill a child.

This theory did not convince everyone. Letters appeared in local newspapers for nearly a decade claiming that the theory was impossible and that no one could be killed by wallpaper. Doctors Letheby and Thomas Orton led the charge against the skeptics, responding to the letters with personal experiences of deaths caused by the arsenic-filled wallpaper. Dr. Thomas Orton recounted some of the cases of poisoning that he saw:

"I have known a family of children sickening for a while; they have been sent into the country and got well. They have been brought home again, and again taken ill. The paper has been removed, and the sickness has ceased. A few days ago, in my own neighborhood, a person, in cleaning her house, gently brushed over the green paper on the walls. In an hour or two she and her husband were seized with pains in the eyes and head, irritation about the upper lip and nostrils, and a sense of suffocation so that they could not sleep all night. With these warnings, the matter now rests with the public."

A can of deadly Paris Green pigment



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RESISTANCE FROM BIG BUSINESS

Due to the popularity of the color, the businesses were reluctant to give up such a large source of income. So, they continued to claim that there was nothing wrong with their product and it remained quite fashionable. However, in 1859 the first arsenic-free wallpaper in Britain was produced by William Woollams & Co. This was followed by the famous wallpaper company Morris & Co. ceding to public demand and producing their own arsenic-free green wallpaper.

Many years later, William Morris, the company's founder, remained a skeptic of the charges laid against arsenical wallpaper. In 1885, he wrote to his friend Thomas Wardle:

"As to the arsenic scare a greater folly it is hardly possible to imagine: the doctors were bitten as people were bitten by the witch fever. My belief about it all is that doctors find their patients ailing, don't know what's the matter with them, and in despair put it down to the wallpapers when they probably ought to put it down to the water closet, which I believe to be the source of all illness."

Of course, this was met with further suspicion as Morris' family wealth had come from copper mining, which is a primary source of arsenic.

ARSENIC POISONING PROOF

It is easy to understand the skepticism of the era since many houses had this wallpaper and yet only some seemed to be affected.

Poet Thomas Chatterton's death by arsenic, 1856

William Morris & Co., Wallpaper Sample, circa 1915

Wellcome Images/CC BY 4.0

Though highly poisonous, arsenic was used in a range of medical treatments for many centuries. Like the similarly toxic chemical mercury, arsenic was a popular treatment for syphilis

Of course, modern studies show that an identical level of arsenic poisoning can prove fatal to children, the sick, or the elderly, and yet have barely any effect on a healthy adult. Studies have also shown that those with a higher level of protein in their diet were able to cope with a higher level of arsenic in their system.

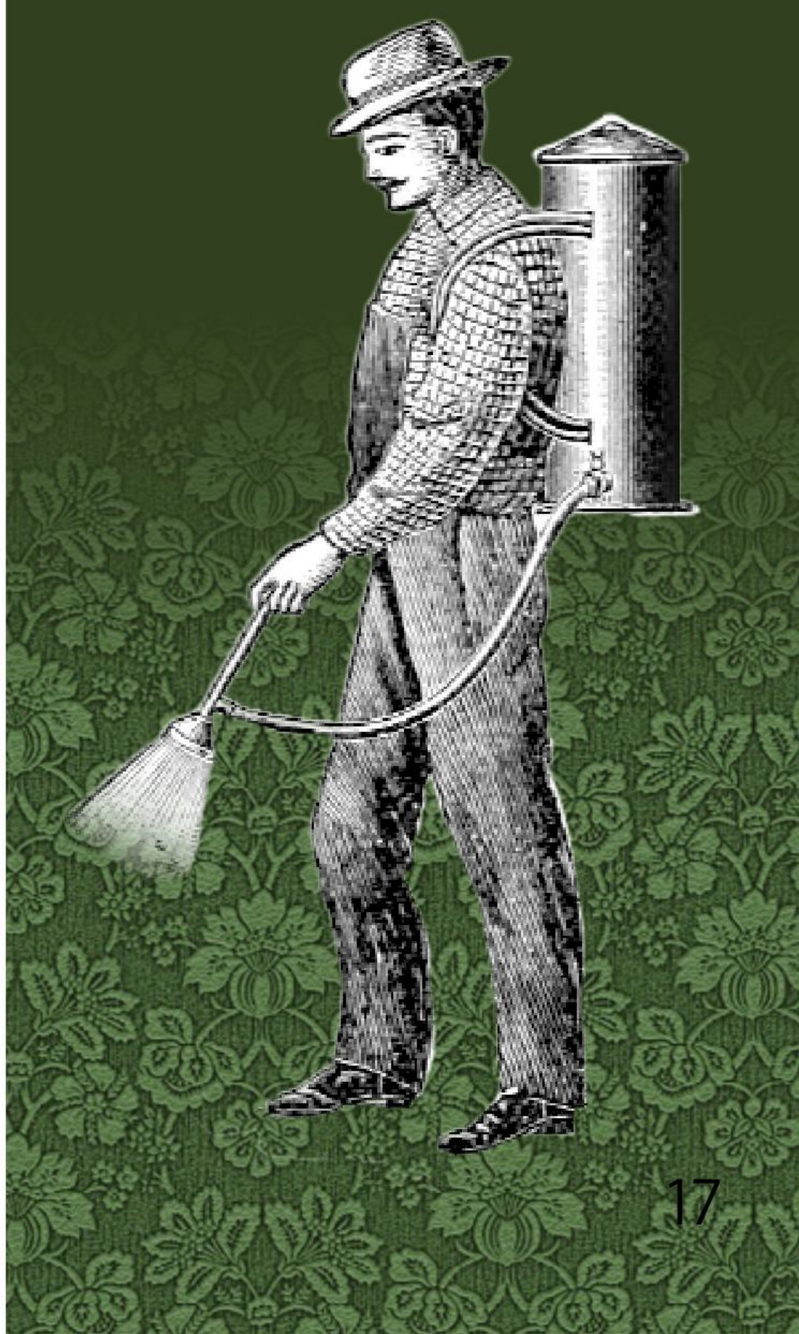
Many healthy people increased their chances of poisoning as wallpaper and paint were not the only places that arsenic could be found in the Victorian era. Ladies applied arsenic-filled cosmetics while they wore arsenical green dresses and artificial wreaths in their hair. Men wore green waistcoats and neckties, all colored with arsenical dyes. Vegetables were sprayed with insecticides containing arsenic and meat was dipped in arsenic to deter flies. Even lickable postage stamps were found to have arsenic in their green dyes.

It wasn't until 1879, when Queen Victoria had all of the green wallpaper torn out of Buckingham Palace after a visiting dignitary became ill, that legislation finally passed to prohibit the use of arsenical green in wallpaper. Then, in 1903, a Royal Commission recommended safe levels of arsenic in food and drink.

As the garish green fell out of favor in the fashion world, so too did the arsenic. Today, it is highly unlikely that one would find this type of green wallpaper in their home. Even in historic homes, the poisonous wall coverings have been removed for the safety of the public.

What mysteries are hiding in your walls? And are they trying to kill you? ■

Paris Green wasn't just a paint pigment - it was also used as a rat poison and insecticide. People would spray it on their gardens, vegetables, and food.



Abandoned Dovecotes

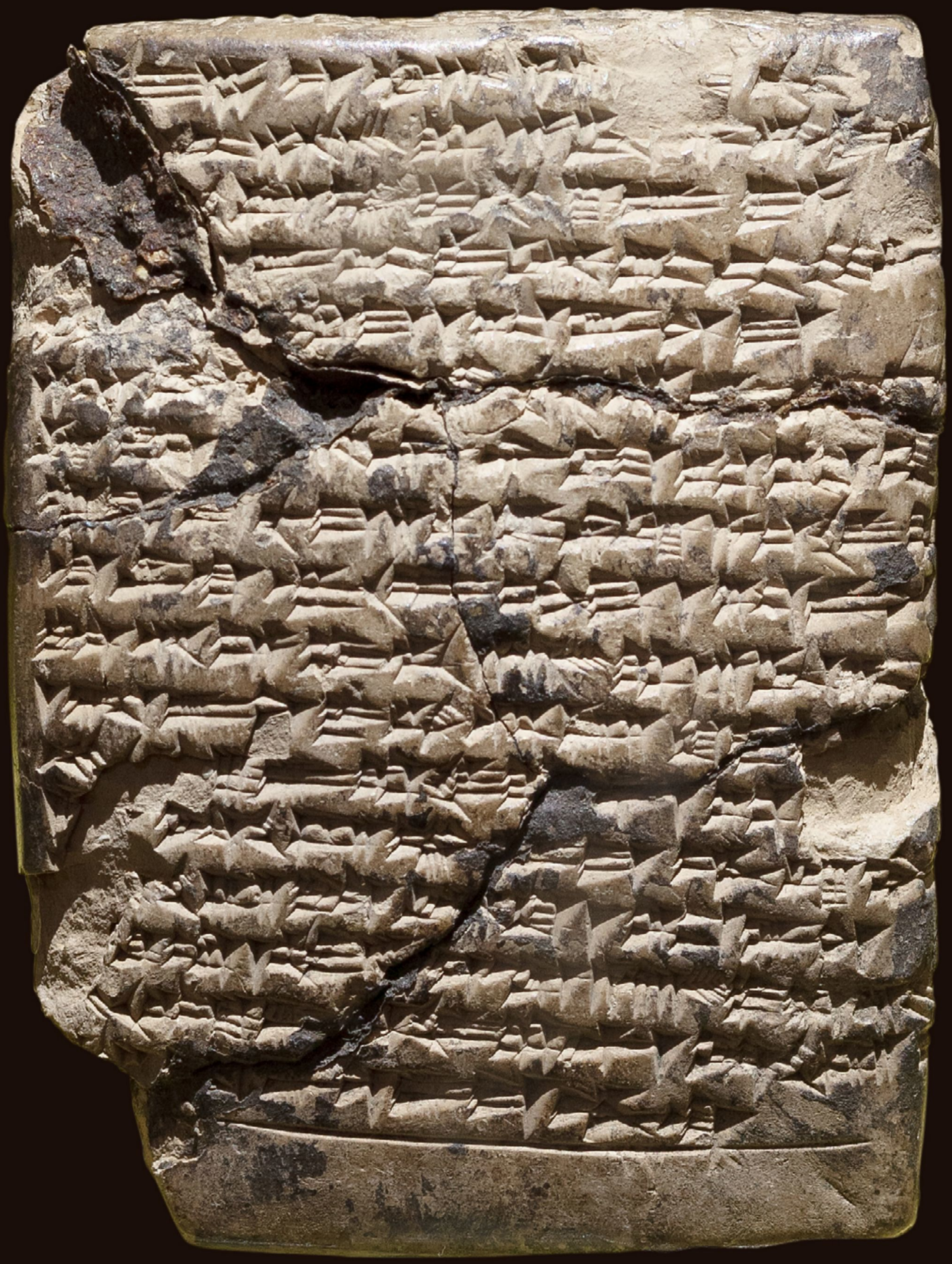
Just south of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, the ruins of a cluster of tall mud-brick towers create a strange skyline against the desert backdrop. The wooden pegs and holes identify them as deserted dovecotes. Pigeons were not kept for a food source, but rather for their guano. The walls were slanted to allow for the manure to collect on the ground. Pigeon manure was used as fertilizer and even for gunpowder when mixed with ash, lime, and soil, as it has a high content of phosphorus and nitrogen. Although abandoned by humans, pigeons still find these towers attractive enough to nest in and raise their chicks. ■

Walter D|AdobeStock

Spotlight

LANGUAGE

The Voice of Mankind



Cuneiform tablets

From Speaking to Script

The Development of *Written Language*

Interview with Professor Fanie Vermaak

By Dr. Micki Pistorius

In ancient times, merchants had to find common means of communicating with buyers and sellers, so trade became the catalyst for converting language into writing, as a means of record keeping. Rivers and seas were the most convenient way of transporting goods, so ports and docks became a hub for multi-lingual commerce and markets. Writing, therefore, originated more or less at the same time and in the same manner by approximately the middle of the fourth century BC, all along the great rivers of the world, with the Chinese script along the Wuang-Ho river; Indian script along the Indus river; Egyptian hieroglyphs along the Nile, and Mesopotamian cuneiform along the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Dr. Fanie Vermaak is a professor in Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of South Africa. He studied several Semitic Languages at various South African Universities, specializing in the cuneiform (Sumerian) studies of the Ur III period (2100-2000 BC). He is the chairperson of the Ancient Egypt and Near Eastern Society (AENES) and is a founding member of the International Society of Cuneiform Studies.

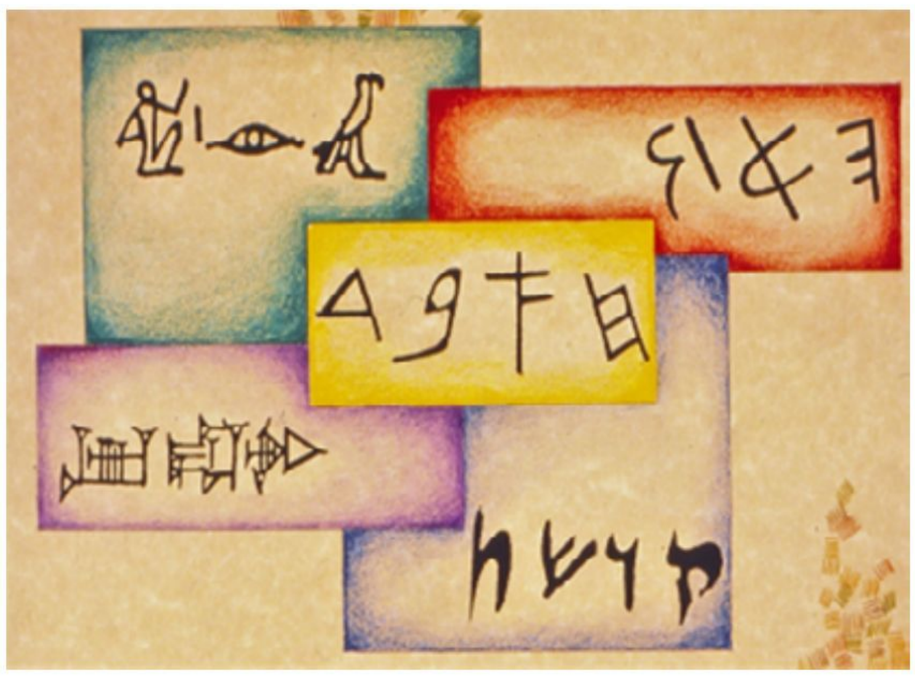
MP: What form of record keeping existed before actual alphabets came into use?

FV: Initially, traders scratched marks on stones to indicate numbers of items, much like ancient stock-keeping. Cuneiform originated in ancient Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers, where Iraq is situated today. Certain signs initially represented fixed objects and later ideas, called logograms, around the end of the fourth millennium BC. The logograms developed into syllabaries, where words were built up from syllables like 'pa', 'ba', 'sa', and so on. However, it was a complicated writing system that contained about 600 cuneiform signs. The first evidence of the cuneiform alphabet was found at Ugarit (modern-day Ras Shamra in Syria). It consists of 22 alphabet letters and dates from around 1400 BC. However, this cuneiform alphabet system disappeared around 1200 BC.

Farther south, the Egyptian hieroglyphs developed as an attractive script system along the Nile river that was in use for about 3,000 years. This pictorial script depicted signs for objects, ideas, or movements. From these phonetic values for signs, a combination of syllables, ideograms (signs representing ideas, concepts or objects), determinatives (signs representing categories such as animals, birds, or people) and even alphabetical letters, developed. Many Egyptian signs give an indication of the probable origins of the alphabetical letters. It is therefore accepted that most forms of Greek letters can be traced to Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Images courtesy author

LANGUAGES AND SCRIPTS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST



Egyptian hieroglyphics could be written in any direction – top to bottom, left to right, or right to left. The reader would figure out which way to read it by the direction of the symbols. For example, if an animal hieroglyph was looking to the left, the text would be read from left to right.

Where did the first form of an alphabet originate and why?

At some stage, the more complicated writing systems of the Ancient Near East, such as Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs, could no longer effectively serve the trade industry and it required a simpler alphabetical system. The eastern part of the Mediterranean (modern-day Syria and Lebanon) is generally accepted as the most probable area for the origin of the alphabet, as it was a metropolitan environment where merchants from all over the world met and traded.

The first signs of our present alphabet are to be found in the ancient-Canaanite alphabet used approximately 1200 BC on the eastern Mediterranean seaboard, namely in Byblos – (modern-day Lebanon). The north-western Semitic linguistic group occupied this area as the Canaanites and the languages in the area are still referred to as the Canaanite dialects, such as Hebrew, that eventually achieved full language status. The same applies to the different Canaanite alphabetical systems, known respectively as the Phoenician, Aramaic, and Hebrew alphabets. It is fairly consistently written from left to right.

Why is it called the Phoenician alphabet and not the Canaanite?

As the Phoenicians dominated the sea trade in the area of ancient Canaan, it is generally called the Phoenician alphabet, from which all other alphabetical systems developed. From the Phoenician alphabet, consisting of 22 letters, developed the Aramaic and the Hebrew alphabets, still in use in Israel today.

Tell us about the Aramaic and Hebrew variants of the alphabet. How did language influence the changes?

The Aramaic script that flowed from the Phoenician alphabet spread all over the ancient Near East and was in use for about 1,000 years. It was also the official script for the later Babylonian, Assyrian, and Persian empires, replacing cuneiform. The Aramaic language was also in common use and was the colloquial language during the time of Christ. It was the chief language of the merchants of Egypt and Asia minor, even as far as India. From here, Aramaic script spread to the East and was influential there for many centuries. In certain parts of Syria and Iraq, there are still communities that speak Aramaic.

The Phoenician script was initially unchanged by the Hebrews when they settled in Palestine. The first evidence of Hebrew script is found in the Gezer calendar, which is really an ancient agricultural calendar. However, the Phoenician script did not meet all the requirements for the Hebrew language, and slight amendments were made to certain letters. A cursive Hebrew alphabet developed from this. When the Hebrews were carried off to Babylon, this script almost completely died out in the Jewish community in favor of the Aramaic script. A new Jewish script called the 'square Hebrew' developed after their return to the province of Judah, especially from the third century AD, which is still commonly used in modern Israel.

The ancient city of Apamea, Syria was an important trading center

Tags: Paul Hudson/CC BY 2.0

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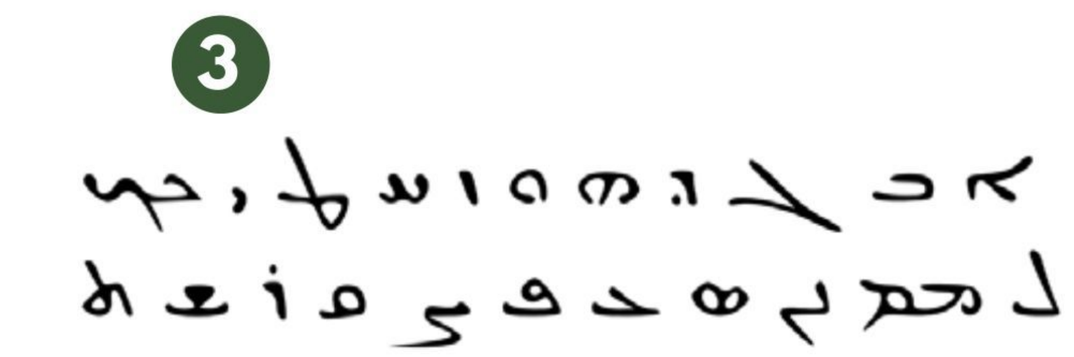
1 - Pre-cuneiform clay tags from Sumer

2 - Plate with cuneiform Sumerian text at the ruins of Processional Street of ancient Babylon, Hillah, Iraq

3 - Syriac-Aramaic alphabet

Script: Achayan/CC BY SA 4.0



10 Oldest Languages Still Used Today

Basque

The oldest Old European language pre-dating the Indo-European languages. Basque Country straddles the border of Spain and France.

Kartvelian Languages

Native to the Southern Caucasus Mountains region, the Kartvelian languages consist of Georgian, Svan, Zan, Mingrelian, and Laz. Influenced by Proto-Indo-European.

Tamil

Tamil is part of the Dravidian languages, native to the southernmost part of the Indian subcontinent. It has no connection 'genetically' to the dominant Hindi language of India, which is Indo-European.

Paleo-Siberian Languages

Spoken by remote tribes of Siberia and the Far East of Russia, it includes the Ket language, Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages, Nivkh and Yukaghir.

Ainu

Ainu is native to Northern Japan and predates the modern Japanese people who settled on the islands. Ainu is a language isolate, having no connections to Japanese.

Arabic

Arabic belongs to the group of Semitic languages. It has sub-groups but is unified in a standardized form of Classical Arabic - a lingua franca of the Arab world.

Aramaic

Part of the Northwest Semitic group of the Afro-Asiatic languages, Aramaic is certainly among the oldest languages in the world. It boasts roughly 3,100 years of written history.

Chinese

The Chinese language is ancient, and also among the most unique languages of the world. Its writing system can consist of up to 100,000 different symbols.

Persian

Persian, also known as Farsi, is a widely used, very old Indo-European language, belonging to the Indo-Iranian subdivision. Old Persian was the language of the Achaemenid Empire.

Irish Gaelic

Gaeilge is the Irish branch of the Goidelic languages, a part of the Celtic family of Indo-European languages.

How did the Greek language influence the alphabet?

Greek merchants who traded there probably transmitted the Phoenician alphabetical script to the Greeks in this part of the Mediterranean. It is commonly accepted that the Greeks used this alphabet on the Greek isles during the seventh century BC. The Greek letter order is the same as the Phoenician order, but the Greeks added five extra letters to suit their language needs.

However, various forms of earlier Greek still occurred. The early Greek script was sometimes written from left to right and sometimes from right to left. Certain Greek letters were also regularly used as vowels, a common practice in the Phoenician script. The letter 'A' is a good example of a letter's significant meaning in the Canaanite linguistic group, while it was without meaning in the Greek language. The reversed 'A' depicted the bull with horns, and also had the meaning of 'bull' in the Semitic languages, while the Greek 'alpha' depicted nothing in particular.

Our current alphabet is based on the Latin or Roman alphabet. What changes occurred then?

The Romans also obtained their alphabet from the Greeks and transformed it into their own script. With the world domination of the Romans, the alphabet came into common use throughout their empire and was consequently used in the greater part of the western world. The Latin alphabet, of course, became our alphabet. It was written from right to left and gradually a system of small and capital letters developed.

Gradually, certain styles such as cursive handwriting developed as well as the Gothic script that was used by German printers in particular.

With the emergence of Islam in the eighth century AD, large parts of the Ancient Near East were taken over by the Arabic script, still in use today.

How did Arabic influence the alphabet?

The Aramaic alphabet underwent certain developments in the Middle East, and Arabic was the most prominent script. Arabic has a wide variety of consonantal sounds and needs 28 consonants compared to the 22 of the Semitic alphabet. Arabic uses various diacritical dots to distinguish between letters, as well as to create new consonants. The letters also have different forms depending on the position of the letter within the word.

In conclusion, the first traces of writing are markers on tokens – like scratches on stones – to indicate numbers of items for trade, developed into pictorial script and complicated cuneiform, which was eventually simplified into alphabets, adjusted to suit the requirements of the different languages of the world. ■

aenes

ANCIENT EGYPT AND NEAR EASTERN SOCIETY

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1 - Woodtrade: Phoenician ships (hippoi). Relief from the palace of Sargon II at Dur-Sharrukin (now Khorsabad)

2 - The Phoenician alphabet. Note ’ and ‘ were originally full consonants in the Phoenician language

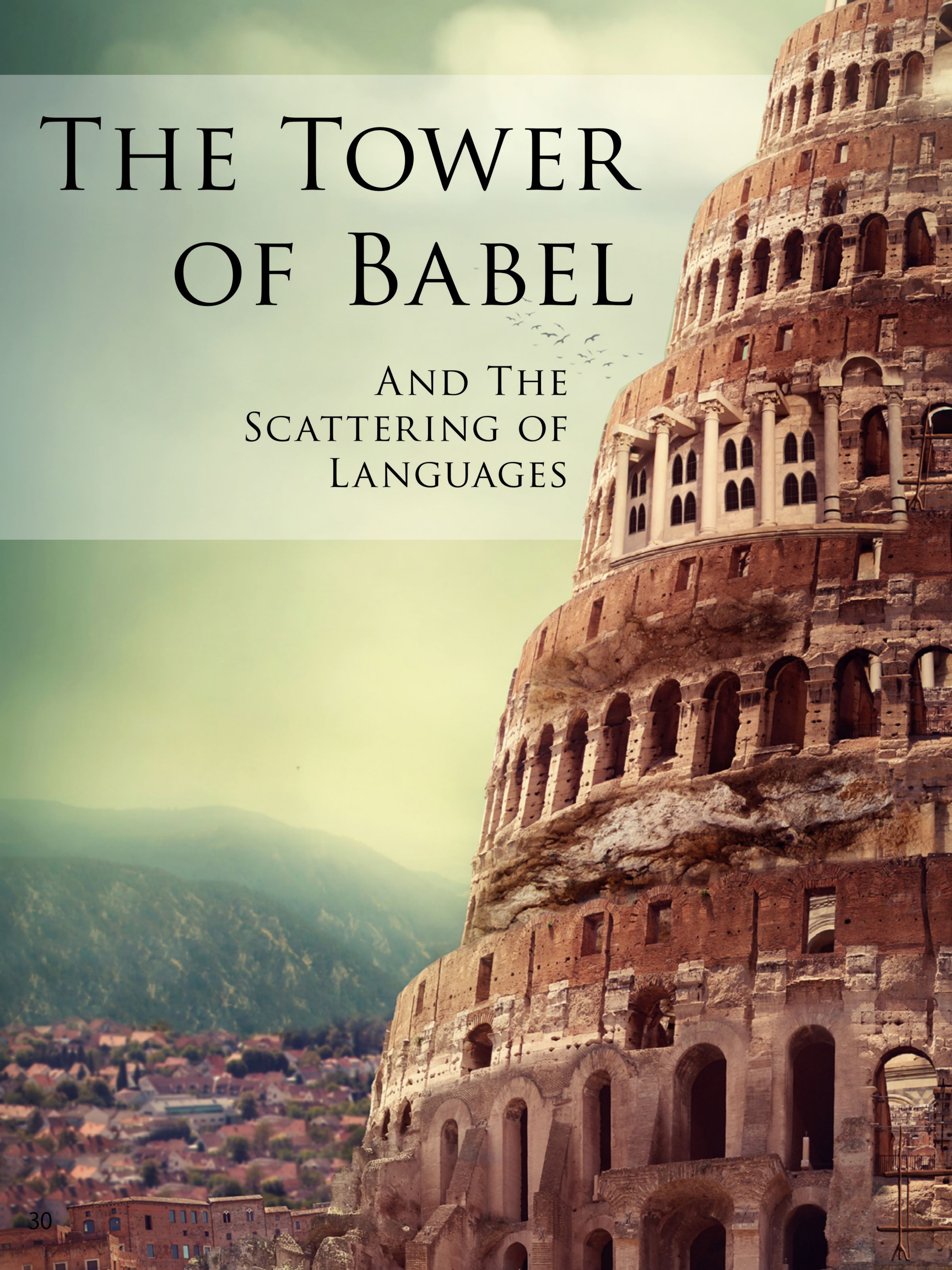
3 - Early Greek alphabet painted on the body of an Attic black-figure cup

3

Marsayas/CC BY 2.5

The Tower of Babel

And The Scattering of Languages



The Tower of BABEL

Truth or Myth?

Interview with Professor Andrew George

By Joanna Gillan

The Tower of Babel, 17th Century

THE BIBLE tells the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1. In this account, people built a great tower to make a name for themselves but God responded by giving them different languages to confuse them and then scattered them.

Biblical scholars have long debated whether the Tower of Babel really existed. One remarkable stone tablet discovered more than a century ago in the remains of the ancient city of Babylon appears to suggest that the great Tower of Babel was no myth.

The tablet, which has been part of the private collection of Norwegian businessman Martin Schøyen was examined and deciphered by Andrew George, a Professor of Babylonian at the University of London, who has been teaching Akkadian and Sumerian language and literature for over 35 years. He shares with us exactly what the tablet reveals.

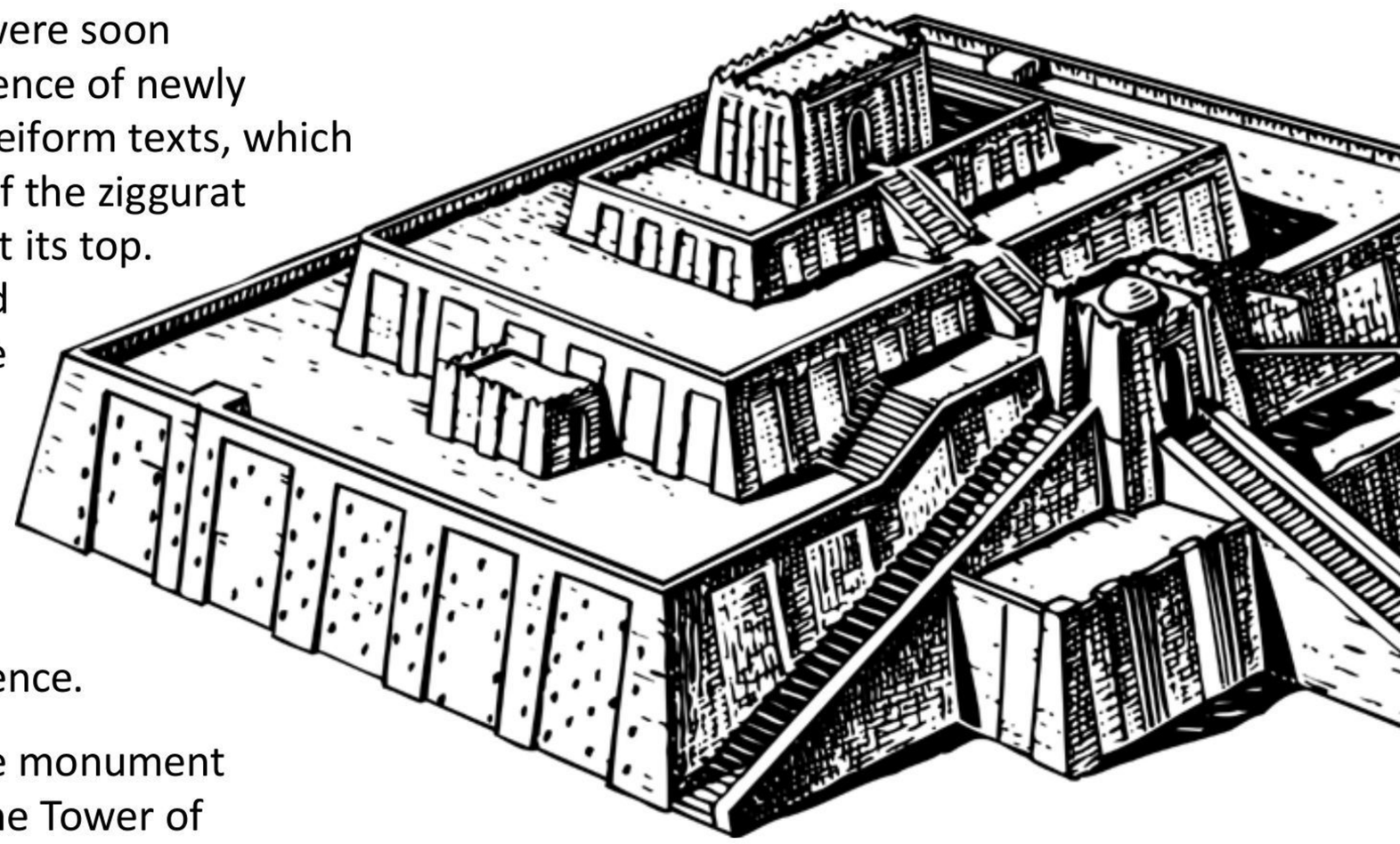
One remarkable stone tablet discovered more than a century ago in the remains of the ancient city of Babylon appears to suggest that the great Tower of Babel was no myth

JG: The account of the Tower of Babel in Genesis tells of the construction of an enormous tower "with its top in the heavens". In 2017, you revealed compelling evidence in the form of an image on a baked clay tablet found in Iraq, that the Tower of Babel may have really existed. Could you please explain how the depictions on the tablet suggest the story in Genesis may have been based on a real building?

AG: The Babylonians built huge square towers, like step-pyramids, in their cities. These towers, called ziggurats, were a prominent part of temple complexes. Since the remains of several such ziggurats were described by medieval and later travelers in what is now Iraq, it has long been supposed by most people that the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis was inspired by knowledge of such a ziggurat. In short, the view arose already long ago that the Tower of Babel had once really existed. People argued over which ruins still visible in the countryside west and south of Baghdad might be the tower.

Then in 1913 archaeologists excavated the foundations of a ziggurat at Babylon, and for the first time, it became possible to locate the exact site of the building which inspired the story of the Tower of Babel.

Restored ziggurat in ancient Ur, Sumerian Temple in Iraq



The architectural remains were soon complemented by the evidence of newly deciphered Babylonian cuneiform texts, which described the dimensions of the ziggurat of Babylon and the shrine at its top. Both the archaeological and documentary sources agree that it was an immense structure, 970 square feet at its base. There have been many attempts at making scale models of the ziggurat based on this evidence.

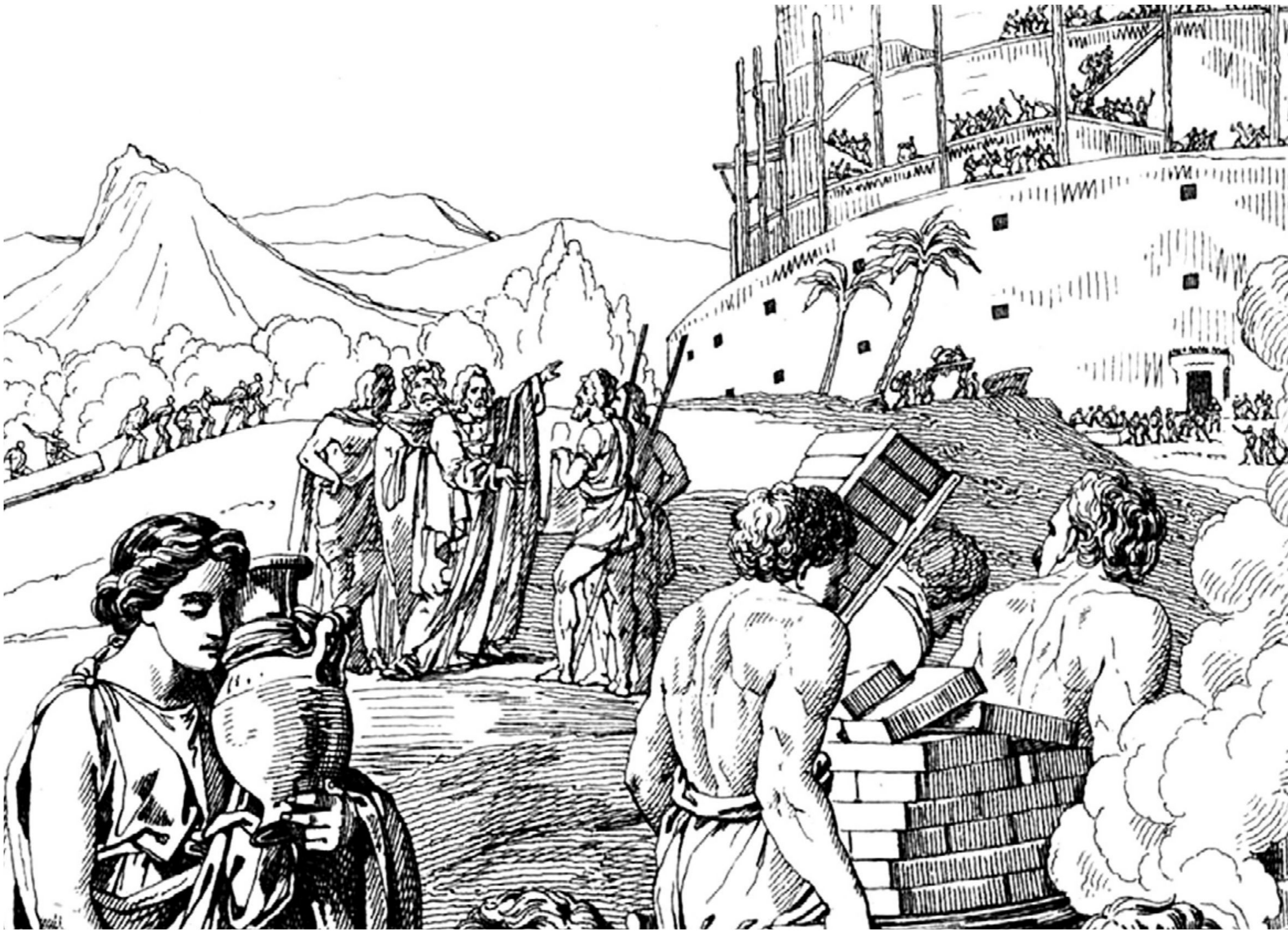
Then, in 2001, a black stone monument came to light that we call the Tower of Babel stele, and in 2017 I published the first academic study of it. The stele is shaped somewhat like a tombstone and stands a little short of 20 inches tall. Depicted in bas-relief on its face is the figure of a Babylonian king and the profile of a ziggurat, with the epigraph "E-temen-anki, the ziggurat of Babylon". Below this relief is the remains of a cuneiform inscription in which King Nebuchadnezzar described how he rebuilt the ziggurats of Babylon and of Borsippa, a nearby town. So, the new monument depicted the ziggurat of Babylon alongside its royal builder. This is one of the very few surviving images of Nebuchadnezzar, the king who took the Jews into exile in 597 BC, and the first-ever image of the building that inspired the idea of the Tower of Babel.

Your decipherment of the text on the tablet revealed that the builders of this tower hailed from "far-flung lands", presumably bringing with them a multitude of languages.

Do you believe there is a connection between that, and the Biblical account, in which Mankind's language was confused by God?

The text on the Tower of Babel stele is only one of many inscriptions of Assyrian and Babylonian kings that hold evidence for the history of Babylon's ziggurat. Several of Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions give accounts of his building work, and the text on the Tower of Babel stele is only the most recently discovered of several very similar texts. The striking passage which describes the mobilization of the workforce in terms of the mustering of people from all over the known world, including "far-flung islands", has been known since 1893. It is no doubt partly hyperbole, but does suggest that different languages would have been in use on the building site. It seems quite plausible that the detail in Genesis of the confusion of languages arose as a response to that situation.

Tower of Babel Stele
MS 2063, courtesy of the Schøyen Collection, Oslo and London

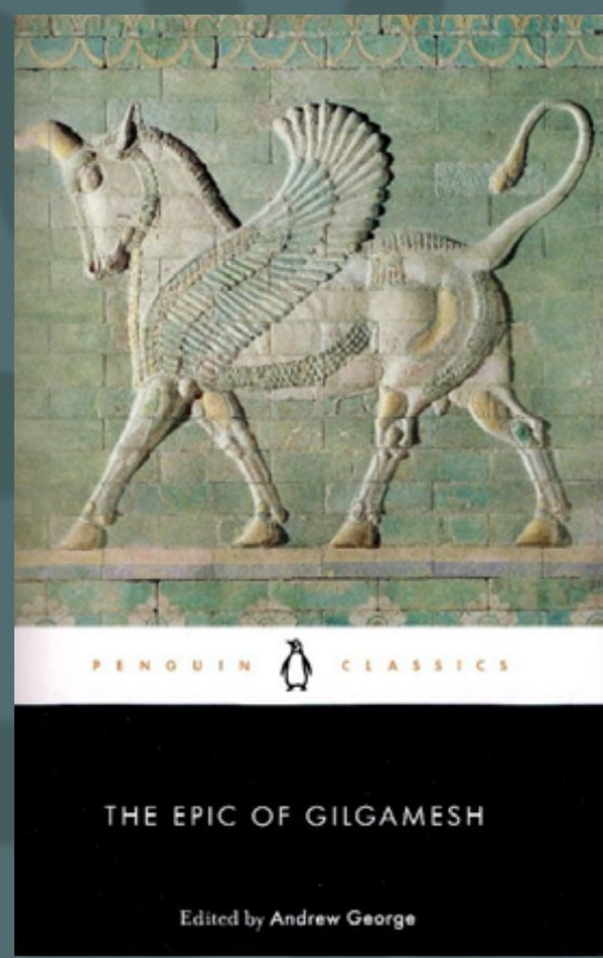


The Genesis account indicates that everyone on Earth once spoke the same language. This belief is also seen in other religious and mythological traditions around the world. Is there any linguistic evidence to suggest that may have been the case?

Research in that field of human languages is necessarily theoretical. When the first written records begin to appear, they already indicate the presence of very distinct languages of different families, so they are not *prima facie* evidence for a prehistoric linguistic unity. However, these records come from only six thousand years ago, very recently in the huge span of human history. The common idea that there was once only a single human language is the product of the same kind of thinking that tells descent of all human beings from a single man and woman. It is nevertheless quite plausible. After all, some modern scholars of human prehistory and genetics theorize that all human beings do indeed have a single ancestor. The question then is, when did these human beings develop language? That I cannot answer.

Does the tablet reveal anything about what the tower looked like, and is there any indication about whether it was completed – or, was it left unfinished as the Bible indicates?

The image on the stele depicts a six-stage tower, with exterior staircases running across the face from ground level to the top of the first stage. The sixth stage is the platform for the seventh stage, which is a religious building with a central doorway. This is the shrine known from other sources to have been at the top of the ziggurat. However, it is almost certainly the case that the stele itself was embedded in the lower part of the structure, as a foundation deposit. It would thus have been created and interred before the building was finished, and the images on it cannot be assumed as taken from life. Images in ancient art are often idealized, so we must bring a skeptical eye to what we see.



The Epic of Gilgamesh

Translated with an introduction by Andrew George

Penguin Classics, 2nd edition, 2019

Miraculously preserved on clay tablets dating back as far as four thousand years, the poem of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, predates Homer by many centuries. The story tells of Gilgamesh's adventures with the wild man Enkidu, and of his arduous journey to the ends of the earth in quest of the Babylonian Noah and the secret of immortality. Alongside its themes of family, friendship, and the duties of kings, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is, above all, about humanity's eternal struggle with the fear of death. This new edition of Andrew George's translation has been extensively revised to include recently discovered fragments and new sources.

The same can be said of the building inscriptions. When they report the completion of a building, they are making assumptions about the future of what can very well be a work in progress. So the texts which report the completion of the structure also have to be read critically, and not taken at face value. Accordingly, it remains possible, despite what Nebuchadnezzar's scribes wrote, and despite the image on the stele, that the ziggurat was not finished to the ideal specification of seven stages. However, it was such a prestigious and important monument, that it is hard to accept that Nebuchadnezzar and his successors left the structure in such a state that it looked unfinished. A more plausible explanation for the note in Genesis is perhaps that the construction work took such a long time that it seemed to any onlooker that it would never end.

Any theories about the final fate of the Tower of Babel?

Archaeological evidence suggests that between the time of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great, the ziggurat at Babylon was deliberately damaged, and the staircases disabled at ground level. The finger of blame points at Xerxes, king of Persia. In the early fifth century BC, when Babylon was part of the Persian empire, the city staged several revolts against the Persian occupiers. The damage to its ziggurat may have been the consequence of one of them, for the destruction of the staircases rendered the tower less accessible as a military vantage point. Babylonian chronicles of 327–281 BC report that the ruins of the ziggurat at Babylon were leveled to the ground in the time of Alexander the Great and his immediate successors, in preparation for a rebuilding that never took place. An enormous mound of bricks in north-east Babylon is the dump where the would-be rebuilders put the remains of the old structure. That is why at the ziggurat's original site in the city's center the archaeologists found only its foundations. ■

Of One Language

In Search of Our Mother Tongue

|| By Petros Koutoupis

Mankind is familiar with the narrative surrounding the construction of the Tower of Babel, passed down through the generations and across multiple cultures. The most well-known version is chapter 11 of the Book of Genesis: "And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there." Not pleased with the progress humans were making in the constructions of this tower to the heavens, the Biblical account quotes God in which he states: "'Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' And He took it upon himself to end what He deemed to be sacrilege.

So, the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city. Therefore, was the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

> Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech

Language Families

Was there, at one point in human history, a common language or mother tongue shared by humans? Can we go far enough back in time to answer this question and if this mother tongue did exist, are we able to reconstruct it from what we do know?

Scenes from Genesis. 14th-century miniature: the building of the tower of Babel, the builders attacking each other as a consequence of losing their common language

The study of language and its evolution requires familiarization with the concept of language families. Modern languages are broken up into families or categories. Several hundred modern and obsolete languages or dialects may exist within a single family and in many cases, one family of languages will be completely unrelated to another.

A group of languages within this family will share a common ancestor - or parental - language from which it would have evolved. This is often referred to as a proto-language, proto being the Greek word for 'the first'. An entire tree can be reconstructed within this family, each branch will continue to split, showcasing each subcategory of languages and until we arrive at the present day. The two families I am most familiar with are the Indo-European and the Afroasiatic subcategory of Semitic. Each is completely unrelated to the other, at least by today's standards.

SEMITIC LANGUAGE FAMILY

In investigating various Semitic languages, commonalities across each are observable. Modern derivations such as Arabic, Amharic (Ethiopian), Hebrew, Aramaic (adopted by today's Assyrians) and more, are spoken across the globe. The Semitic subfamily is further divided into east, west, central, and south sub-subcategories. Each sub-subcategory shares a common parent or proto-Semitic tongue, although this proto-language is too far gone, lost to time, with little physical evidence of its existence. That being the case, it is impossible to know how it would have sounded or how it may have been spoken and exactly where. But what evidence is there that this proto-language existed?

Bronze head of an Akkadian ruler, discovered in Nineveh in 1931, presumably Sargon of Akkad

It all boils down to the many commonalities shared across all of these derivations. Taking the most common features - for example roots, grammatical structure - and stripping them down to their most basic forms, will lead to the reconstruction of this proto-language.

The Semitic languages are very unique in that their roots are not themselves syllables or words but instead are isolated sets of triliteral consonants. These same Semitic root consonants will be shared across most, if not all, of the Semitic languages. The evidence for this approach can be traced as early as 3000 BC and with the East Semitic Akkadian language. It can also be observed in the oldest West Semitic language preserved in the ancient Canaanite - which includes ancient Phoenician - Ugaritic, and later Old Hebrew dialects circa 1600 to 1200 BC. These ancient languages of both sub-subcategories would have evolved from a single source probably spoken around 5000 BC - some scholars place this date later - and long before the invention of writing. Without written examples, we are left in the dark with regards to this parental language.

These same Semitic root consonants will be shared across most, if not all, of the Semitic languages

Where this parental or proto-language originated is still being debated. Linguists have placed the prehistoric origins of Semitic-speaking peoples in Mesopotamia, the Levant, Mediterranean, the Arabian Peninsula, and northern Africa. As these Semitic speaking peoples migrated further away, the language evolved. Much of this evolution may even stem from one group isolating itself from the other or one clan not being as connected with the others outside of trade.

INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE FAMILY

As the name implies, languages found in the Indo-European family span across both Europe and Asia - all the way to India. Much of the same logic discussed earlier with the Afroasiatic Semitic languages can also be applied to the Indo-European family of languages. While Greek and Hindu seem to be worlds apart, they do share a common - and yet still hypothetical - proto-Indo-European ancestor. Unlike its Semitic counterpart, Indo-European languages are inflected languages, which means that they will share a common root word and through the use of prefixes and suffixes, the overall meaning of that same word will be altered.

It is generally believed that this ancestor language originated from somewhere in the Caucasus region to the north of modern-day Turkey. As migrants moved further away from their proverbial motherland, the language evolved. Some of the oldest surviving written examples hint at the existence of this parental language, referring to the ancient Hittite, Mycenaean Greek, and the barely translated Minoan languages, which were spoken in the Eastern Mediterranean region between 3000 to 1200 BC. Using these written sources, it is possible to reconstruct a more accurate proto-Indo-European tongue. As for how it may have looked or sounded spoken, remains a mystery.

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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Cheap constant access to piping hot media
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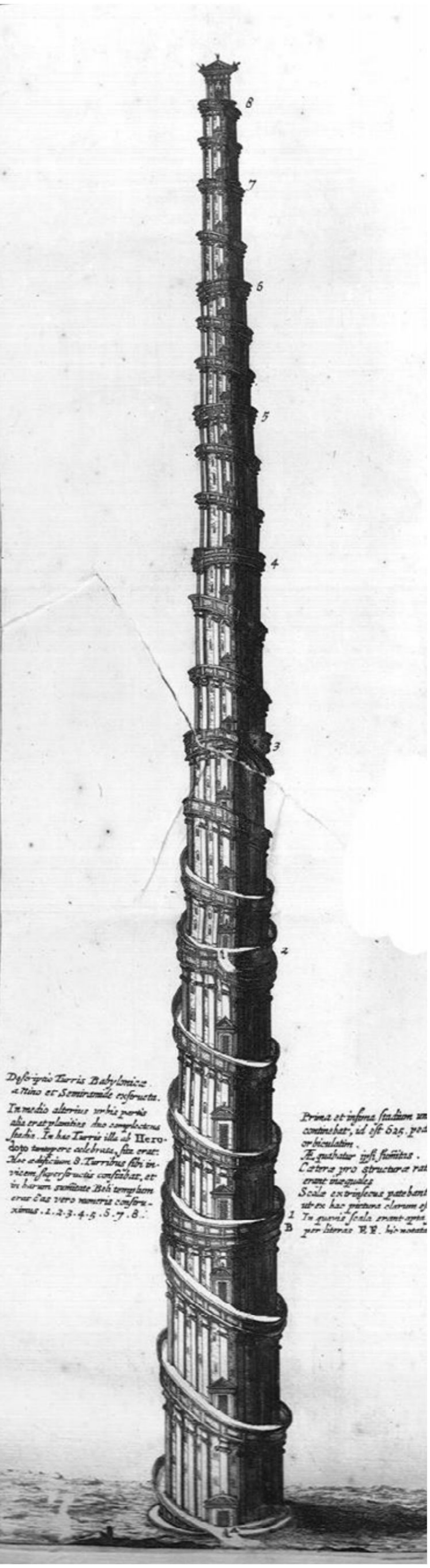


Athanasius Kircher, 1679

THE MOTHER OF ALL TONGUES?

Now that a general understanding of how languages are broken up and the components that help tie them together are established, the more important question remains: Was there ever an origin of original languages or a mother of all tongues? There are a few challenges to this. The first of which is the fact that the physical evidence can only reach as far back as the written record and writing is not a very old technology.

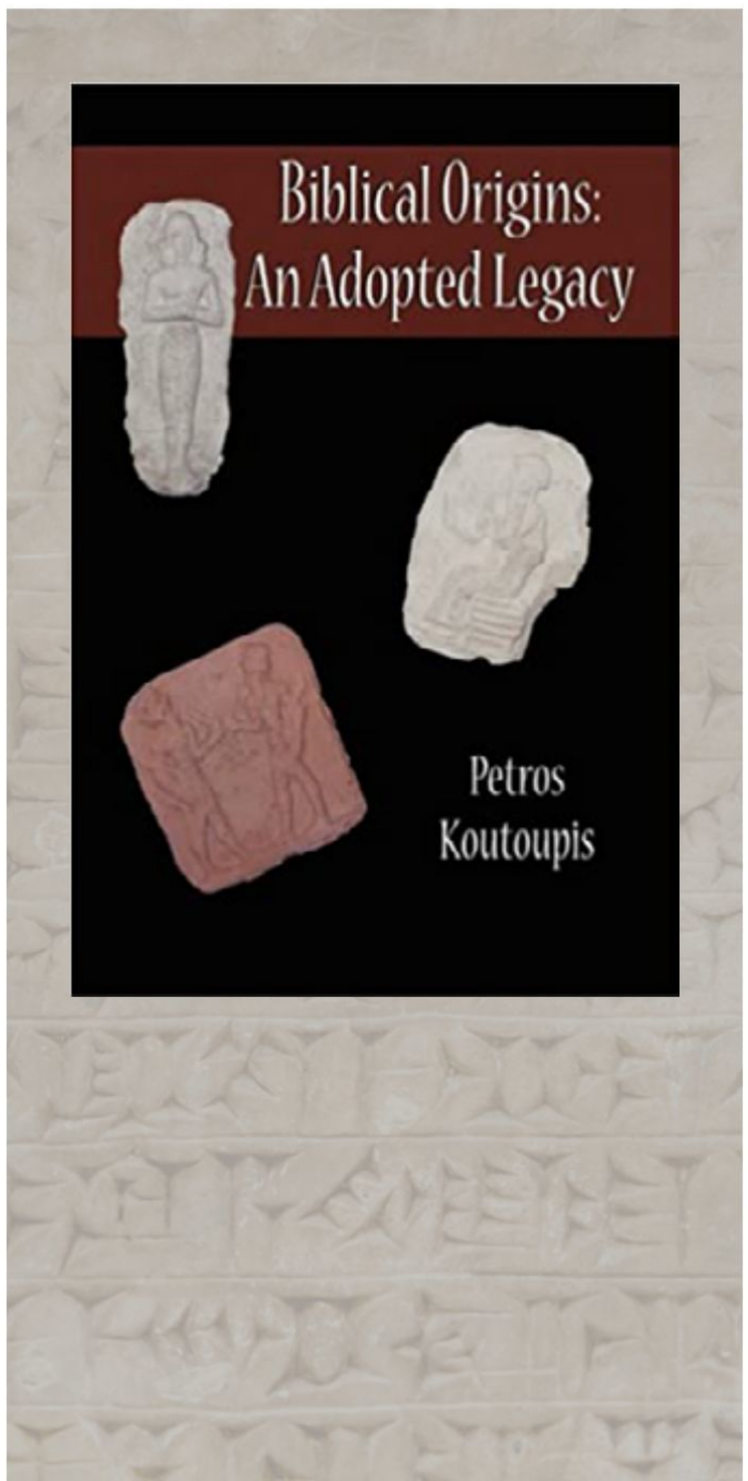
There are still many modern and ancient languages that belong to their very own category. Two such examples are ancient Sumerian and ancient Etruscan. So far it has been impossible to tie these languages into anything relatable. Where did they come from? How did they just appear out of nowhere? Even after a particular language within a subgroup—for example Akkadian or Hittite—has been identified and honed in on, it requires not only identifying the cultures which originally spoke the language, but also the need to dig deeper in order to archaeologically go back in time and follow the migration patterns of that same culture.

Can those cultures be placed anywhere before the time they eventually settled in their respective regions? Using migration history, it is possible to bring each branch from a particular family back together and to its point of origin.

Languages often become tainted by both time and external influences. Even within each spoken language, its oldest form will look and sound like a whole new language hundreds of years later; for example, English. Words will fall out of use or change in form, loanwords will be adopted, and spellings will change. Sometimes the environment itself may contribute to such things. In ancient times, these external influences would have been a result of trading between two distinct cultures or the expulsion or exile of one group from their homeland, forcing their resettlement into foreign territory.

Was there ever a common origin language spoken by our ancestors as indicated in the Tower of Babel account in Genesis? Until we are able to unearth new evidence indicating as such, the answer will continue to elude us. ■

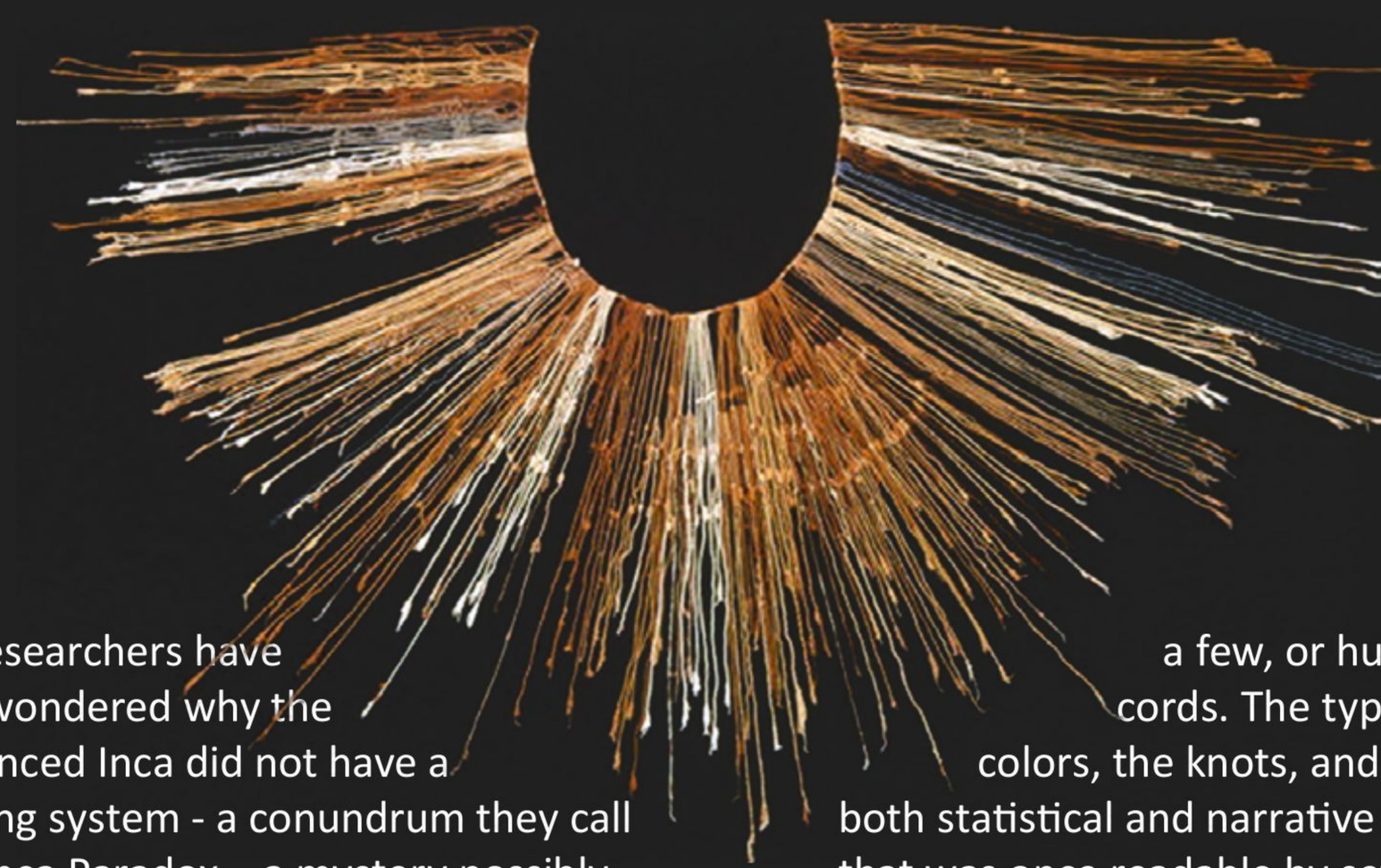
Petros Koutoupis is the author of *Biblical Origins: An Adopted Legacy.*



Quipus

The 'Talking Knots' of the Inca

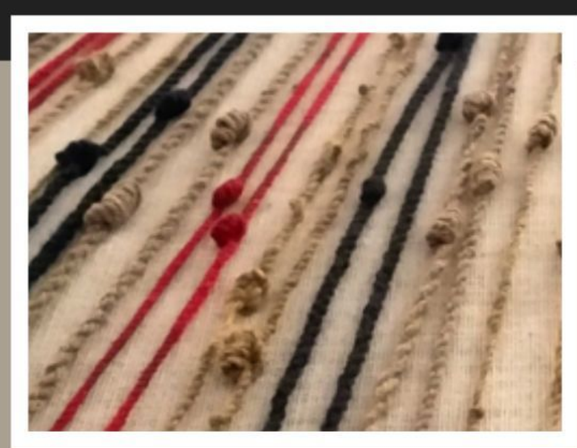
ll By Joanna Gillan



Claus Ableiter/CC BY SA 3.0

An Inca quipu, from the Larco Museum in Lima

Researchers have wondered why the advanced Inca did not have a writing system - a conundrum they call the Inca Paradox – a mystery possibly solved when considering the *quipus*, sometimes called 'talking knots'. A quipu usually consisted of colored, spun, and plied thread or strings from llama or alpaca hair or made of cotton cords, and was a recording device historically used in the region of Andean South America.



Pi3.124/CC BY SA 4.0

An Inca chasqui (messenger) playing a conch and carrying a quipu. Chasquis were trained to be able to read and translate the quipus to each other and higher authorities

For the Inca, the system aided in collecting data and keeping records, ranging from monitoring tax obligations, properly collecting census records, calendrical information, and military organization. Even in cases of land disputes, people would take a quipu to court and use it to justify land ownership claims. Scribes read the quipu and court clerks recorded the information during both the pre-contact and colonial eras.

The cords contained numeric and other values encoded by knots in a base-ten positional system. A quipu could have only a few, or hundreds, of cords. The type of wool, the colors, the knots, and the joins held both statistical and narrative information that was once readable by several South American societies. A single quipu could record and display as many as 1,500 units of information. That compares to the capacity of Egyptian hieroglyphs to record 800 bits of information and fewer than 1,500 for Sumerian cuneiform.

In some villages, quipus were important items for the local community, and took on ritual rather than a recording use. Approximately 200 quipus dating no earlier than about 650 AD have been found, despite many being destroyed by the Spanish conquistadors, who were attempting to convert the indigenous people to Roman Catholicism. Anything representing the Inca religion was considered idolatry and an attempt to disregard Catholic conversion.

Besides being used for bookkeeping and censuses, quipus were also used as a historical narrative. There is a legend of an old man who had a quipu containing a record of everything the conquistadors had done, 'both the good and the bad.' The Spanish burned the quipu and punished the man. No narrative quipu has ever been decrypted but efforts continue. Mathematicians and cryptographers at Havard University have applied pattern-recognition algorithms to quipus and have identified sequences of knots that repeat, which could indicate words or phrases. ■

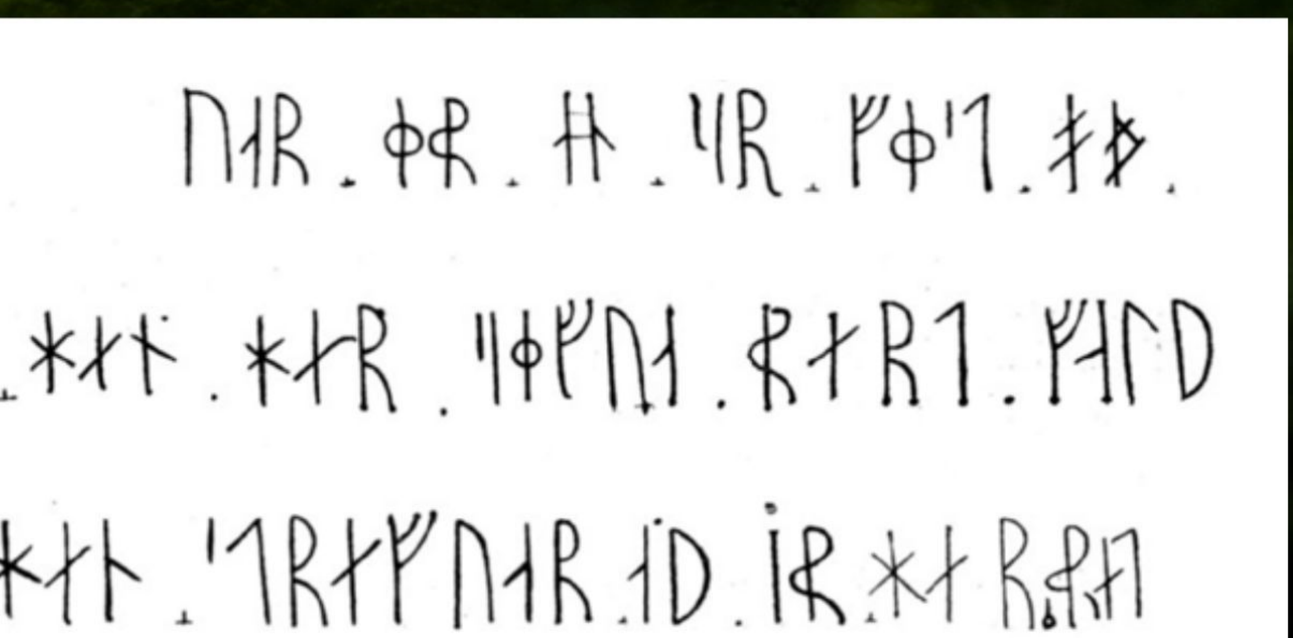
The Revival of Elfdalian

The Ancient Viking Forest Language

|| By Liz Leafloor

The ancient Viking language of Elfdalian has almost been entirely wiped out, with an estimate of only 3,000 people in a tiny forest community in Sweden currently keeping it alive. But people have been fighting to revive the historic tongue by bringing it back to schools and online before it vanishes completely.

The ancient dialect of Elfdalian (*älvdalska* in Swedish and *övdalsk* in the language itself) was a vigorous language until well into the 20th century. Sounding to listeners like a beautiful and complex language as spoken by the Elven race in fantasy epics, Elfdalian is actually derived from Old Norse, the language of the Vikings.



A runic alphabet known as Dalecarlian Runes, or dalrunes, was used to write Elfdalian until 1900. The Latin alphabet was also used to write Elfdalian from the 17th century. In Älvdalen, Germanic runes survived in use longer than anywhere else.

However, according to the University of Copenhagen linguist Dr. Guus Kroonen, it is radically different from Swedish.

He explains that it "sounds like something you would more likely encounter in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* rather than in a remote Swedish forest."

Elfdalian is unique among Nordic languages, expressing itself with different tones and sounds. Even the grammar and vocabulary are unlike Swedish. So, while speakers of Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish are able to have simple conversations and understand each other, it is not so with Elfdalian. It is so far removed from Swedish, (even while originating from the same region), that it is completely unintelligible to non-local Swedes.

The language originated in the forested region of Älvdalen, Sweden, and remained robust for centuries. Elfdalian served the people of Älvdalen as trade and economic networks were mostly local, and no other languages were necessary.

Reviving Elfdalian

In the last century, the dynamic shifted. As mobility, mass communication, and even mass media increased, the Swedish language became more widespread, crowding out Elfdalian. Soon it was actively suppressed.

"Speakers of the language were stigmatized, and children were actively discouraged to use it at school. As a result, speakers of Elfdalian shifted to Swedish in droves, especially in the

past couple of decades. At present, only half of the inhabitants of Älvdalen speak it," Dr. Kroonen writes.

In order to save the swiftly disappearing language, activists started a campaign of awareness and preservation. The group of language activists, called Ulum Dalska ("We need to speak Elfdalian") have seen some success in attempts to revive the language. Several children's books have been translated into Elfdalian, and programs have been introduced in schools encouraging and incentivizing the learning of the language.

Elfdalian has been taught in Älvdalen's schools since 2015, and that year an international conference on the language was held in Copenhagen, raising awareness of the language that serves as a window into history. Dr. Kroonen and other Elfdalian supporters are seeking a path through the Council of Europe to grant it the status of a regional or minority language. For years, campaigners have been pushing to preserve Elfdalian for future generations and to have it recognized as an official language in Sweden. It's necessary, as only around 60 people under the age of 18 are believed to speak the language, which means there's a very real danger it could die out completely.

With that in mind, in 2016, Elfdalian received a boost when it was assigned an ISO language code, classifying it a language on the internet. This gives it at least some level of international recognition.

Progress accelerated with two events in 2017. First, a course was offered in the Älvdalen area of Dalarna County in Western Sweden to a group of international participants from the USA, Czech Republic, Germany, Norway, and Denmark. And second, Elfdalian reached an even wider audience when it was introduced to the popular gaming world of *Minecraft*, through the creation of the village of Älvdalen. In that area, all text and speech in the game are in Elfdalian.

The preservation of ancient languages is of importance not only to the Älvdalen locals who risk losing their heritage, but also the global community, which benefits from the wealth of historical information old languages provide.

Language historian Bjarne Simmelkjær Sandsgaard Hansen, co-organizer of the Copenhagen University conference said, "Elfdalian is a goldmine. It works almost like a linguistic deep freeze, where one can get a glimpse of Old Norse traits that have long since vanished in the other Nordic languages". ■

Who's a clever boy?

During his five years of exploring North and South America during the late 18th-century, adventurer Alexander von Humbolt, a naturalist and ecologist, collected an astonishing quantity of zoological data, but perhaps his most interesting find, by the Orinoco River, was a parrot in the Venezuelan jungle which was the last remaining speaker of the Ature tribe's language.

The tribe had been completely vanquished by the Carib tribe, but among the spoils of war was the parrot. When Von Humbolt arrived at the isolated village of Maypures, there were several parrots, but he realized one parrot spoke a different language. The Carib tribe informed him that it was a pet of the Ature's who had fled after the attack. The last families of the Atures existed until 1767, but then they vanished along with their language.

In 1799, Humboldt brought the parrot back to Europe and phonetically transcribed 40 words from the parrot's vocabulary in his notebook. Two hundred years later, in 1997, his work inspired American artist Rachel Berwick, who spent nearly two years researching Von Humboldt's phonetic transcriptions, and finally succeeded in training two more parrots to speak the Ature's language as part of an on-going art installation.

New Language Spawns in Remote Australian Town and Only 350 People Can Speak It!

ll By Joanna Gillan

It is not every day that a new and unique language is discovered, but one particular finding really had anthropologists stumped. In a tiny, remote Aboriginal community in outback Australia, an American linguist discovered that a new language emerged among the young people in the community and is now spoken by around 350 individuals, all under the age of 35. The new language spawned even though they were already perfectly able to communicate with each other without it.

The new language is known as Light Warlpiri. It has six vowels and 18 consonants. It refers to the past and present but does not have a future tense. English grammar sets rules that a sequence of words must be put in for the sentences to make sense. However, in Light Warlpiri, there is no order in the placement of words. Taken together, these features make it distinct from other related languages and allow it to be classified as its own language and not just a variation of an existing language.

Photo: DJ_Mun

The discovery of the new language was made by American linguist, Carmel O'Shannessy in 2013. She was working at a small school for indigenous children in the tiny, isolated town of Lajamanu in the desert of Australia, and documented her findings in the journal *Language*. She was particularly interested in how a new language could develop among the younger generation when they were already able to speak to each other in their local Aboriginal tongue, Warlpiri, which is spoken by approximately 5,000 to 6,000 individuals across several settlements and towns in central Australia.

The language is believed to have emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, when children went from switching between English, Kriol, and Warlpiri, to primarily speaking the mixed Light Warlpiri language. Kriol is a language that was developed when the British colonized Australia in order for the English, the Chinese, and the Aboriginals to communicate in the first years of their settlement in Australia.

Message Sticks

An Ancient Method of Communication

GordonMakryllos/CC BY SA 4.0

For thousands of years, message sticks were a form of communication for transmitting messages between indigenous groups with different languages and dialects across the massive landmass of Australia.

Traditional message sticks were made and crafted from wood and were generally small and easy to carry. They were carved or painted with symbols that conveyed messages. There were always marks that were distinctive to the particular group or nation sending the message and often marks identifying the relationship of the carrier to their group. This way it could be identified and authenticated by neighboring groups and by translators when the message stick was taken long distances and passed by hand from one tribe to another.

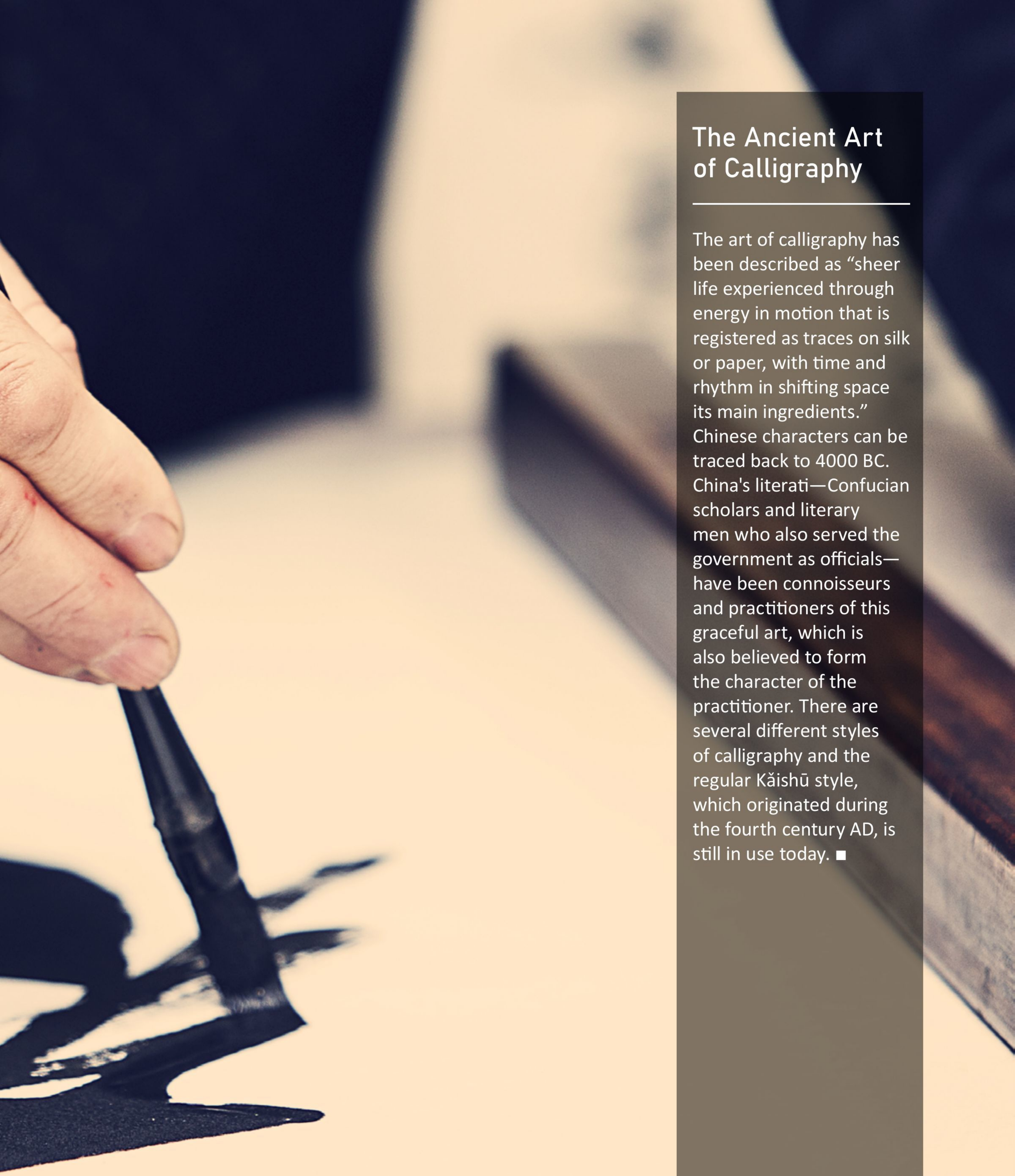
Message sticks were regarded as objects that granted its carrier a kind of diplomatic immunity, as it guaranteed safe passage and entry into the lands of other tribes, even when entering 'enemy territory'. When someone carrying a message stick entered another group's country, they announced themselves with smoke signals and were then accompanied safely with the message stick to the elders so that they may speak their verbal message. The messenger would then be accompanied back to the border with a reply to pass back to their tribe.

The messages transmitted by these message sticks included announcements of ceremonies, invitations to corroborees, notices, requests, disputes, warnings, meetings, marriage arrangements, notification of a family member passing, requests for objects, and trade negotiations. Remarkably, the message contained in these tools of communication could be understood by Aboriginals from many different regions of Australia, despite the fact that they had different languages and dialects.

Dr. O'Shannessy explained that most of the verbs in Light Warlpiri come from English or Kriol, but most of the other grammatical elements in the sentence come from Warlpiri.

The creation of the new language is associated with its remoteness. It receives supplies from a truck just once every week and is 350 miles from the nearest city (Katherine).

Linguists continue to be fascinated by the emergence and growth of Light Warlpiri as it is the first time that researchers have been able to document the development of a young, new language. ■



The Ancient Art of Calligraphy

The art of calligraphy has been described as “sheer life experienced through energy in motion that is registered as traces on silk or paper, with time and rhythm in shifting space its main ingredients.” Chinese characters can be traced back to 4000 BC. China's literati—Confucian scholars and literary men who also served the government as officials—have been connoisseurs and practitioners of this graceful art, which is also believed to form the character of the practitioner. There are several different styles of calligraphy and the regular Kǎishū style, which originated during the fourth century AD, is still in use today. ■

Whistling Island of La Gomera

|| By Wu Mingren

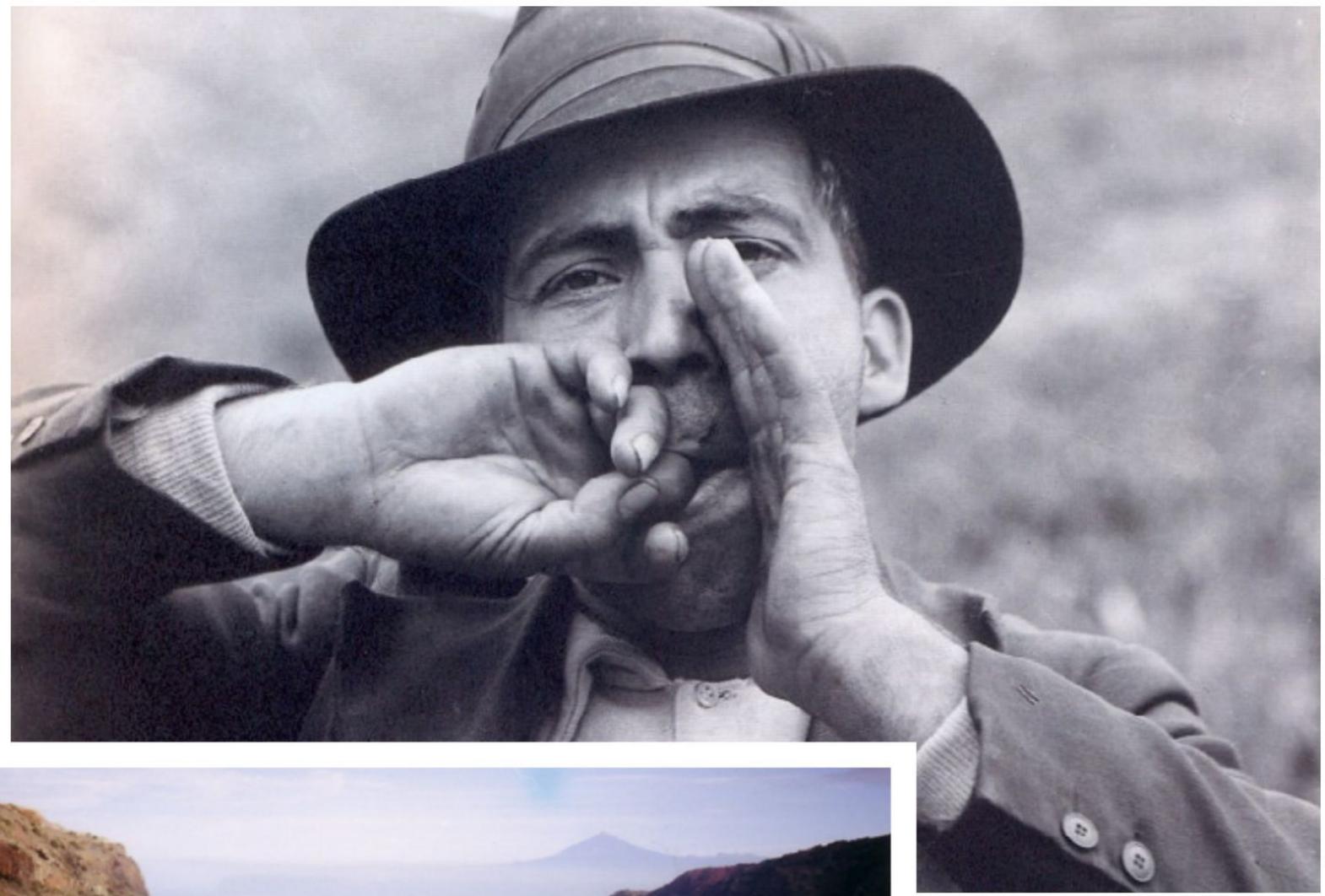


Photo: Gouvernement des Canaries

Above: The special hand positioning of the Silbo Gomero whistle

Left: The narrow valleys of La Gomera carry the sound perfectly

ON La Gomera in the Spanish Canary Islands, a need arose among its inhabitants, the Guanches, to communicate with each other over the island's natural landscape of deep valleys and steep ravines, resulting in the invention of a language known as *Silbo Gomero* or *el silbo*, meaning 'Gomeran Whistle' and 'the whistle' respectively. The Guanche language had a simple phonetic system that allowed it to be adapted into a whistling language. By the 17th century, however, the Guanche language died out, and little is known about this language apart from the few words recorded in travelers' journals.

After the colonization of the Canary Islands in the 15th century, the people of La Gomera began to adapt Spanish into a whistling language. Each vowel or consonant is replaced with a whistling sound – two distinct whistles replace the five Spanish vowels, and four whistles replace the consonants. Based on variations in pitch and whether they are interrupted or continuous, the whistles can be distinguished.

The whistling language was passed down within the family ensuring its survival over the centuries. Between the 1930s and 1950s, the whistling language was a means of resistance against the authorities. Some from the older generation relate that during those decades, the Guardia Civil would often pick locals up in trucks and drive them to places on the island to help fight wildfires. This forced fire-fighting was not welcomed by the island's inhabitants (who incidentally were not paid for their hard work, even though the council and mayor had received the funds to pay them), and so they would warn each other using the whistling language. Since the Guardia Civil did not understand the whistling language, they were frequently unable to find the locals, as they had already gone into hiding by the time the Guardia arrived in their villages.

By the 1950s, however, economic difficulties forced many locals of La Gomera to emigrate from their homes to neighboring Tenerife and even Venezuela. As a result, whistling began to decline. The growing road network on La Gomera and the subsequent invention of the mobile phone further decreased the need for the whistling language among the island's inhabitants. By the end of the 20th century, there were so few speakers that the whistling language became nearly extinct. Fortunately, in 1999, *Silbo Gomero* was introduced as a mandatory subject in grade schools across the island. In 2009, the whistling language was inscribed in UNESCO's List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, thus providing international recognition due to this unique heritage of the islanders of La Gomera. ■

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The Keys to Deciphering Lost Ancient Texts

Lesser-Known 'Rosetta Stones'

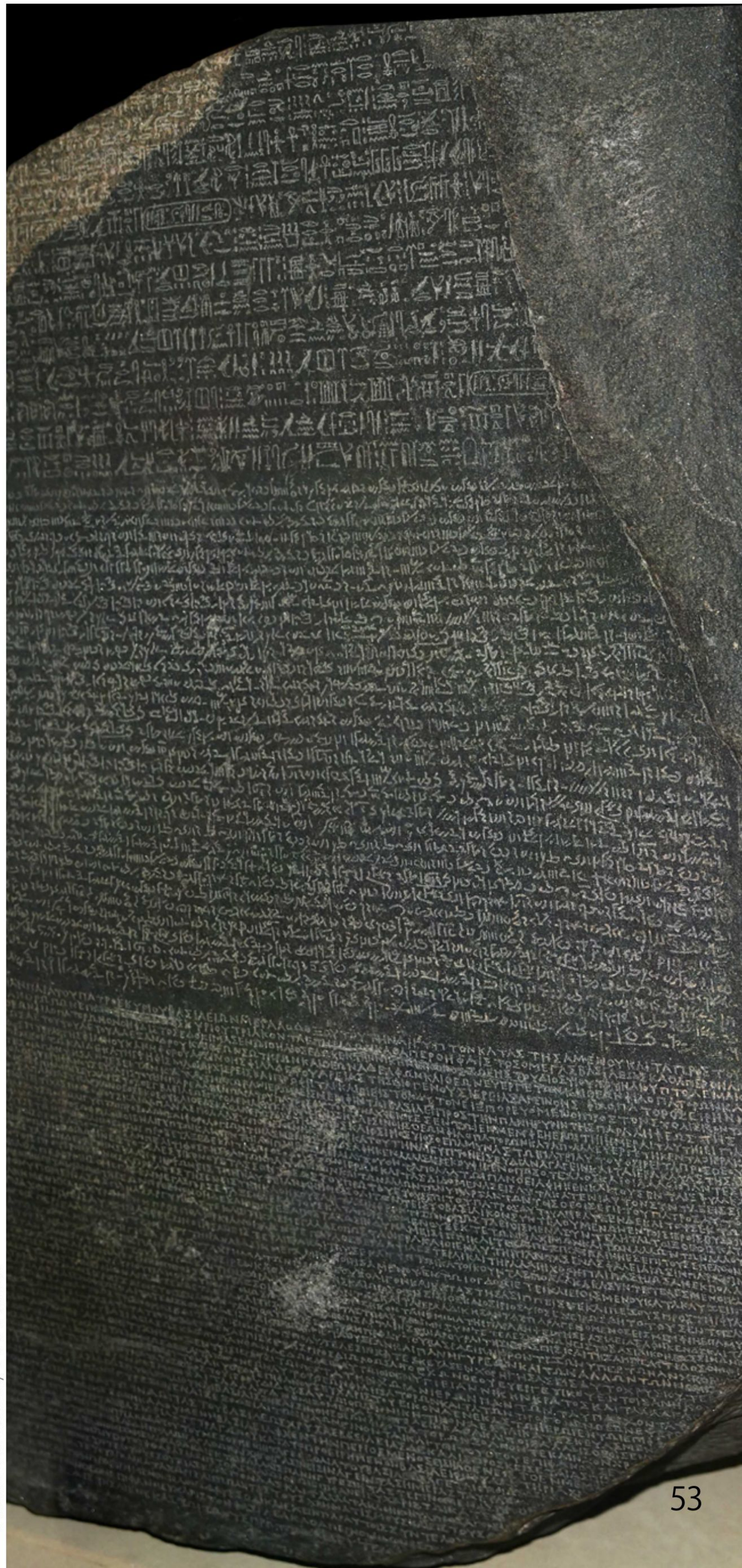
THE Rosetta Stone is probably the most famous artifact linked with ancient languages. When experts discovered that this large black stone held the secret to deciphering ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, the archaeological world was filled with excitement. But it is not the only object archaeologists have encountered to decode seemingly undecipherable ancient texts. Thankfully, our ancestors left behind other 'primers' with more than one language on them, amplifying our chances of understanding their precious words.

The Rosetta Stone

The Rosetta Stone is one of the most significant discoveries in the history of archaeology. This artifact was created during the Ptolemaic Period and was rediscovered in 1798 near the port city of Rashid, on Egypt's north coast. The French referred to the city as Rosetta, thus the artifact's name. The Rosetta Stone is housed in the British Museum in London, however, there have been calls by the Egyptian government for its repatriation.

It's a block of black-colored granodiorite with an irregular shape. The Rosetta Stone is thought to be a fragment of a larger stele which was broken in antiquity, but the other parts have yet to be found. This artifact measures about 3 feet tall by 2.5 feet wide and contains three different scripts – ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs (top), Demotic (middle), and Greek (bottom). All three texts tell the same story; therefore understanding one script enabled a scholar to decipher the others. The Rosetta Stone is basically a decree confirming the cult of Ptolemy V. Based on the text, Egyptologists were able to determine that the decree was issued in 196 BC, on the first anniversary of the pharaoh's coronation.

The Greek inscription was the starting point for most scholars. Once it was translated, they were able to work on the hieroglyphs and Demotic script. The first person to make any real progress in the study of the Rosetta Stone was the British polymath Thomas Young. He actually focused on the Demotic script but also discovered the direction in which the hieroglyphs should be read. During the 1820s, Jean-François Champollion found that some of the hieroglyphic symbols contained phonetic value, others an ideographic one, and yet others served as determinatives. He also showed that the hieroglyphic script was a translation of the Greek one, rather than the opposite, as was widely believed at the time. This earned Champollion the title 'Father of Egyptology'.



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The Behistun Inscription

The Behistun Inscription is an engraving located on the cliff of Mount Behistun in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah. It is for the field of Assyriology what the Rosetta Stone is for Egyptology. Apart from playing a crucial role in deciphering cuneiform script, it is valued because it is the only known monumental text created by the Achaemenids that documents a specific historical event. The translation of the text was only attained during the 19th century. Prior to that, the carvings had been interpreted as a teacher punishing his students, or Christ and his Twelve Apostles, or as Shalmaneser of Assyria and the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

The inscription measures about 49 feet in height and 82 feet in width and was created by the Achaemenid king, Darius I in 521 BC. It is divided into four separate parts. The first of these is a large relief in which various figures are represented, the most prominent being King Darius. He is shown with a bow in his hand and one of his feet on the chest of an unidentified individual lying on his back, a sign of his sovereignty and power. Before the king are nine individuals tied together with a rope around their necks and with their hands bound behind their backs. These are the nine rebels recorded to have been defeated by Darius. Finally, there is a representation of the god Ahura Mazda above the mortals.

The other three parts of the inscription are the texts, which were written in three different cuneiform script languages: Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian (a variety of Akkadian), and tell (more or less) the same story. It begins with Darius introducing himself and listing the countries that are under the control of the empire. He attributes his possession of them to Ahura Mazda. Then Darius provides his version of events leading to his attainment of the Achaemenid throne. Finally, the text describes the rebellions that broke out across the empire during Darius' reign and the king's ability to put these down and defeat nine kings in the process.

The translation of the Old Persian sections of the inscription paved the way for the subsequent decipherment of the Elamite and Babylonian parts of the text, which greatly promoted the development of modern Assyriology.

The Cippi of Malta

The Cippi of Malta are two ornamental flat-topped pillars praising the Phoenician god Malqart. The engravings also held the secrets to understanding the Phoenician language and all the incredible works written with it. It is believed that the cippi were unearthed at a temple to the deity at Tas-Silg.

The Cippi of Malta are carved into white marble and measure 3 feet 5 inches in height. In 1782, one of the two cippi was presented to King Louis XVI by the Grand Master of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller, Fra Emmanuel de Rohan-Polduc. Today, it sits in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Its twin is held by the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, Malta.

The bases of the Cippi of Malta are incised with three lines of Greek script and four lines of Phoenician script. Although found in 1694, it was not until 1758 that the French archaeologist Father Jean-Jacques Barthlemy was able to decipher the Phoenician writing by using the Greek one.

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Left: A Cippus of Malta at the Louvre

Above: Double inscription in Phoenecian and ancient Greek, found on the pedestal of the cippus found in Malta, which allowed the translation of Phoenecian

The Fuente Magna Vessel

The Fuente Magna artifact is a large stone vessel, resembling a libation bowl, that was found in 1958 near Lake Titicaca in Bolivia. It features beautifully engraved anthropomorphic characters, zoological motifs characteristic of the local culture, and, more surprisingly, two types of scripts —a proto-Sumerian one and a local language of the ancient Pukara, forerunner of the Tiahuanaco civilization.

This strange artifact sat in the Museo de los Metales Preciosos ("Museum of Precious Metals") for 40 years until two Bolivian researchers, Argentine Bernardo Biados and archaeologist Freddy Arce, sought to investigate the origins of the mysterious relic. They sent photos of the artifact to the epigraphist Dr. Clyde Ahmed Winters in the hope that he could decipher the inscriptions. Dr. Winters concluded that the writing on the bowl "was probably Proto-Sumerian," and offered the following translation:

"Approach in the future (one) endowed with great protection the Great Nia. [The Divine One Nia(sh) to] establish purity, establish gladness, establish character. (This favorable oracle of the people to establish purity and to establish character [for all who seek it]). [Use this talisman (the Fuente bowl)] To sprout [oh] diviner the unique advice [at] the temple. The righteous shrine, anoint (this) shrine, anoint (this) shrine; The leader takes an oath [to] establish purity, a favorable oracle (and to) establish character. [Oh leader of the cult,] open up a unique light [for all], [who] wish for a noble life."

This translation suggests that the Fuente Magna bowl may have been used to make libations to the Goddess Nia to request fertility. The figure on the Fuente Magna, which appears to be in a "Goddess pose," with open arms and legs spread, is believed to support Dr. Winters' translation.

The Fuente Magna vessel is one of the most controversial artifacts in South America as it raises questions about whether there may have been a connection between the Sumerians and the ancient inhabitants of the Andes, located thousands of miles away.

Although the Fuente Magna bowl remains a matter of contention between academics, it also reminds us that there are still artifacts out there which may help us compare ancient languages and perhaps even decipher some of the writings which have eluded us for centuries. Finding and deciphering these artifacts can expand our understanding of the great civilizations of our past and their influence throughout the world. ■

With new technology available to us, we're inching closer to the end of the days when deciphering ancient languages is a painstaking task filled with frustration and confusion.

By using computing and linguistics advancements, the project is making headway in creating algorithms that will help other researchers decipher ancient texts.

A new AI project may be part of the answer to deciphering the writing of ancient languages

AI Deciphers Long Lost Languages

ll By Alicia McDermott

Nifty machines following complex algorithms are helping researchers around the globe as they take on the monumental task of understanding ancient texts and lost languages.

Linguistic experts estimate there have been approximately 31,000 languages spoken throughout human history. Many of them are now dead and forgotten, but a new AI project may be part of the answer in how to decipher the writing of ancient languages.

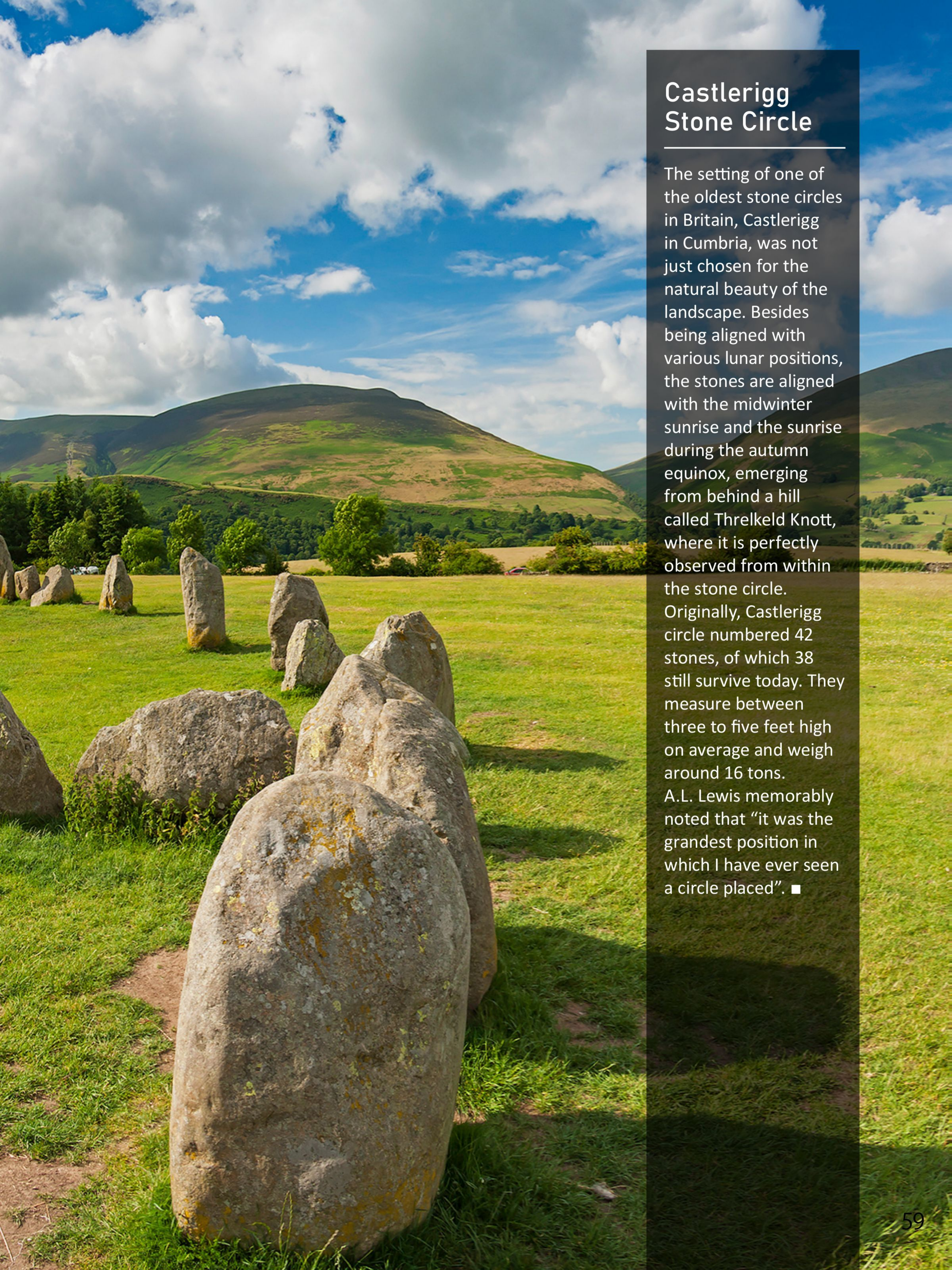
A joint team of researchers from MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab and the AI project called Google Brain has devised an algorithm that can begin to match words from unknown languages to related words, or cognates, in languages that share the same root.

So far their work has focused on training the system with Linear B, a script that was used by the Mycenaean civilization in the Late Bronze Age, and Ugaritic, an early Hebrew cuneiform language that also dates back some 3000 years.

When the AI tool was applied to the decipherment of Ugaritic, a 5.5% improvement was made over current results, while with Linear B, the tool correctly translated 67.3% of known cognates.

That's not to say that AI is anywhere near ready to take over the good old-fashioned human creativity and social understanding that's needed for making sense of old writing. But it is making serious headway in aiding humans with the arduous but vitally important task of decoding the scripts of our ancient ancestors. ■

 Andras | AdobeStock



Castlerigg Stone Circle

The setting of one of the oldest stone circles in Britain, Castlerigg in Cumbria, was not just chosen for the natural beauty of the landscape. Besides being aligned with various lunar positions, the stones are aligned with the midwinter sunrise and the sunrise during the autumn equinox, emerging from behind a hill called Threlkeld Knott, where it is perfectly observed from within the stone circle. Originally, Castlerigg circle numbered 42 stones, of which 38 still survive today. They measure between three to five feet high on average and weigh around 16 tons.
A.L. Lewis memorably noted that "it was the grandest position in which I have ever seen a circle placed". ■

THE Māori, the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand, have a special word - *Matariki*, which identifies the cluster of stars known to astronomers as the Pleiades, and to mythologists and folklorists as the Seven Sisters. Observed rising in mid-winter, the Pleiades heralded the Māori New Year, which was a time of remembrance for those who had died during the previous year. Because crops had just been harvested, and seafood and birds had been collected, the storehouses were full and Matariki was also a time for singing, dancing, feasting and celebrating.

The Matariki period for 2020 falls on the week of July 13, but celebrations began on June 8 with Matariki flags going up around towns, and community activities and celebrations building up towards this special time in the Māori calendar.

The word Matariki means both: *mata ariki* "eyes of god" and *mata riki* "little eyes". The reference to "god's eyes" serves as a cosmic conduit into Māori creation mythology in which Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatūānuku, the earth mother, were separated by their children. It was a cosmic battle during which Tāwhirimātea the wind god was so angry that he "tore out his eyes" and threw them into the heavens.

The Mythology, Astronomy, and Warring Gods of The Māori Matariki

|| By Ashley Cowie

The primal couple, Ranginui and Papatūānuku, are more popularly known as "Rangi" and "Papa," and these two mythical creators of the universe represent the sky-father and earth-mother in an eternal cosmic embrace. According to mythologist B.G. Biggs' excellent 1966 book *Maori Myths and Traditions*, the great cosmic-couple generated an all-male brood who were "entrapped in the darkness between the sky and the Earth" until the fiercest of the children, Tūmatauenga, planned to kill his parents.

Historian A. Smith's 1993 compilation, *He Tuhituhinga Tai Hau-a-uru* (Songs and Stories of Taranaki), says Tūmatauenga's brother, Tāne, the god of forests and birds, suggested it was better to push their parents apart than to kill them, but nothing the brothers could muster threatened the loving embrace of their parents (sky and Earth). Finally, Tāne, instead of copying his brother's failed tactics, using their arms and hands to push, lay on his back and used his much stronger legs to push, and he eventually tore his parents Rangi and Papa apart.

Rangi and Papa

THE MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES OF MĀORI FOLKLORE

The sons of Ranginui and Papatūanuku had finally won space in which to move for the first time, but Tāwhirimātea, the god of storms and winds, missed his parents so he flew away and joined his father. Enraged at his brothers, he sent winds, storms, and hurricanes to the four quarters of the compass, destroying the great forests of his brother Tāne. According to E.R.Tregear's 1891 University of Michigan *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary,* he "fell to the earth and became food for insects".

Then, Tāwhirimātea attacked his brother Tangaroa, god of the oceans, causing huge waves and whirlpools, and he attacked his brothers Rongo and Haumia-tiketike, the gods of cultivated and uncultivated foods, until finally Tū (humankind) stood fast, and the anger of the god of winds and storms subsided, allowing peace to spread across the earth.

It is said that an unborn child, Rūaumoko, god of earthquakes and volcanoes, remains inside Papatūanuku, causing earthquakes and volcanic events every time it kicks.

According to M. Orbell's 1998 *The Concise Encyclopedia of Māori Myth and Legend,* it was the god Tāne who threw the stars, the moon, and the Sun into the sky making the principal creator god Ranginui, "look handsome." But because Ranginui and Papatūanuku still grieve each other, to this day, when Ranginui's tears (rain) fall on Papatūanuku she almost breaks herself apart trying to embrace her cosmic partner, and her sighs of yearning cause mists to rise from Tāne's forests.

Many readers will have noticed that this entire creation myth is loaded with classic archetypes of mythology, which Professor Carl Jung described as "manifestations from the collective unconscious," universal symbolic patterns and motifs found in world mythology, stories, and folklore. For example, the separated gods, the trickster, sons murdering their parents, and the sorting of the elements during creation are common themes in mythology. And the story of Rangi and Papa is greatly structured around the 'Great Earth Mother and Spiritual Heavenly father' archetypes. The Great Mother pertains to material aspects of universal design and feminine principals of creation, like the Earth, nature, and fertility, while the Great Father archetype correlates with the masculine principles of higher consciousness, symbolized by heavenly realms, light, and spirit.

ANCIENT MĀORI ASTRONOMY IS VEILED IN MYTHS

Like most myths, an entire hidden layer of astronomical significance lies beneath the story of the warring gods, which is indicated by a special feature of *Matariki* celebrations: the flying of kites, which according to ancient customs is undertaken because they soar in the skies close to the stars. According to Richard Hall and Ian Cooper, President and Vice President of the Phoenix Astronomical Society respectively, because of "a quirk of New Zealand's latitude" observers can see both the star Puanga and the Pleiades constellation, Matariki, rising just before the new year and that to some *iwi* (the largest social units in Māori society), the star Puanga was the harbinger of the Māori New Year, instead of Matariki (the Pleiades).

Answering why *iwi* used the star Puanga to celebrate the arrival of the New Year, Ian Cooper said, "it was first magnitude," meaning it is among the brightest objects in the night sky and Matariki, by comparison, is a faint cluster of stars of the sixth magnitude, so it's far easier to see Puanga in the north sky than it is to see Matariki. What's more, the scientists explain that as observers travel south, Puanga rises earlier and earlier than Matariki, and at the latitude of the Southland Puanga the star rises "45 minutes before Matariki rises." And speaking of the local terrain Mr. Cooper pointed out that it is no coincidence that Puanga is celebrated in the Whanganui River valley "because mountains block the view toward Matariki in the northeast" but the valley opens up enough for ancient astronomers to more easily show Puanga.

Clare Bows, 1988. Archives New Zealand/CC BY SA 2.0

The reappearance of the Matariki star cluster and the star Puanga marked the ending of the Māori calendar in June, and the beginning of a new cycle in the traditional sacred Maramataka, an indigenous word meaning "the moon turning," representing the Māori lunar calendar in which movements of the moon were acted upon greatly because the tides affected fishing more than the Sun. Each phase of the moon was named, and each typical year was marked by the passage of 12 or 13 lunar months, and with the moon being closely linked with prophecy and fate, under certain lunar conditions ritual consultation of the Maramataka was undertaken. ■

Nga Tamariki Iti o Aotearoa - Te Taitama
The Boy from the Sea

For Māori, the atua (gods) were the first guardians. They included Tāne, guardian of the forests and birds, and Tangaroa, guardian of the sea and all its abundant life forms.

Observers can see both the star Puanga and the Pleiades constellation, Matariki, rising just before the new year

"Essential Greeks has been a very entertaining, edifying, and--as whenever one engages that culture--inspiring on-line course. Thanks for the enjoyable and motivating experience." - Bill V

"Thanks so much! Learned a ton and above all, I am now motivated—rather than intimidated—to pursue further knowledge on the ancient Greeks." - Marie G.

"I enjoyed the course immensely and found it most intellectually thought-provoking and enlightening. Many thanks to you for offering such an educational and stimulating experience." - Steven S.

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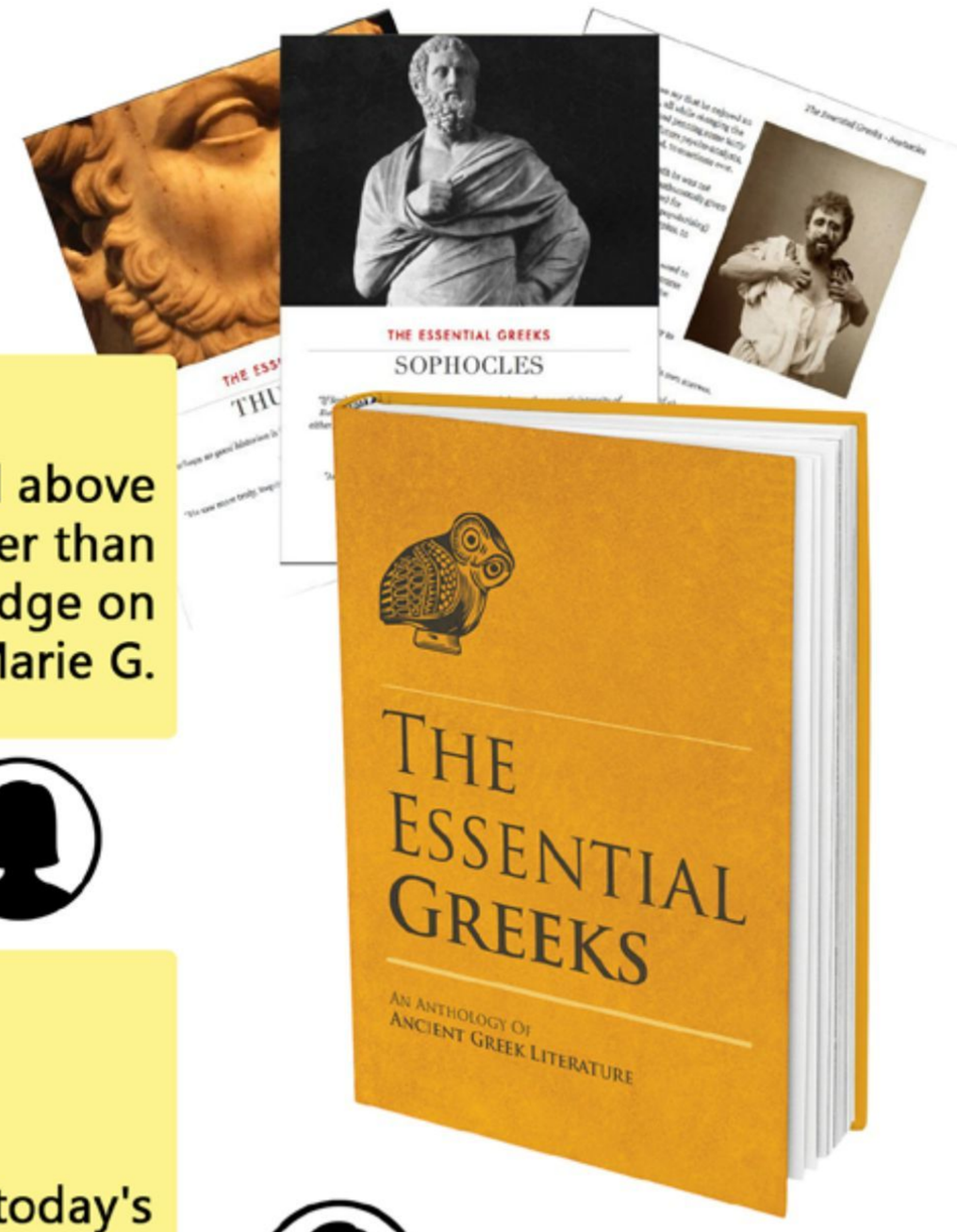

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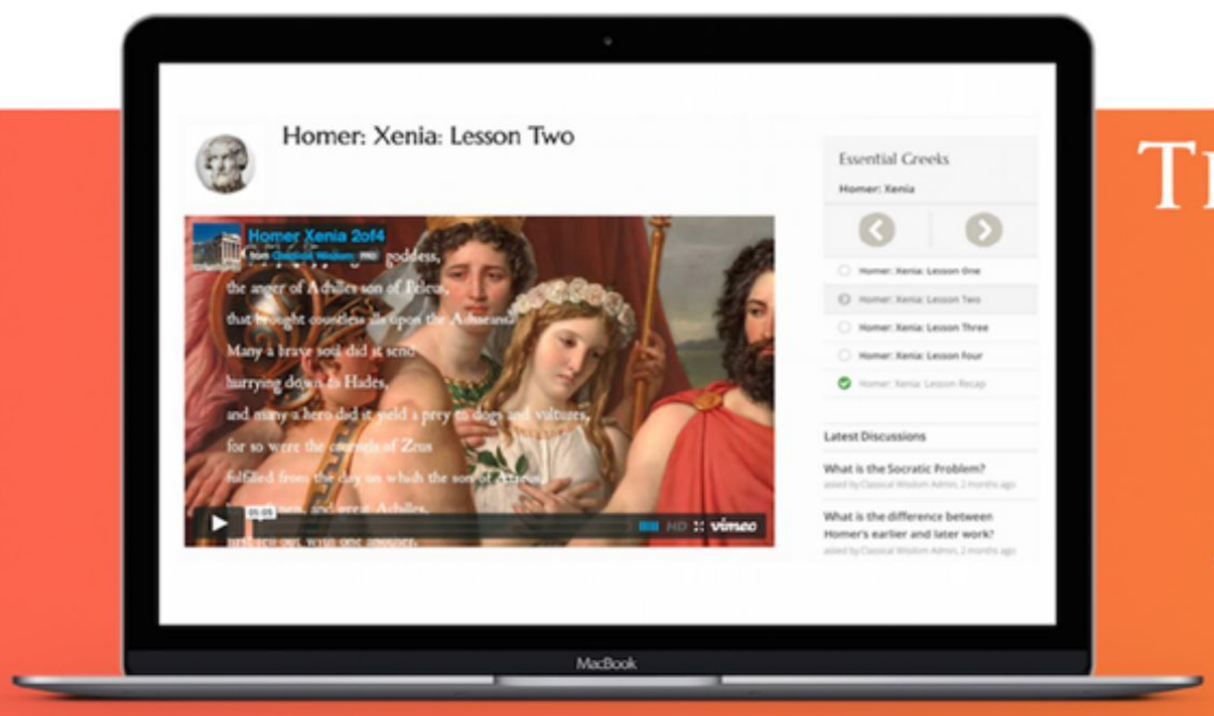

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Classical Wisdom

The Gundestrup Cauldron

The Most Exquisite Iron Age Silver Vessel in Europe

|| By Wu Mingren

The Gundestrup Cauldron is an ancient silver vessel found in Denmark, which is notable for being the largest known piece of European Iron Age silver work. It also displays highly unique and complex iconography and was produced with exquisite craftsmanship.

The cauldron was discovered in 1891 AD, while peat cutting was being carried out at Raevenose, a small peat bog located near the village of Gundestrup in Jutland. When the Gundestrup Cauldron was discovered, it was in a dismantled state, with five long rectangular plates, seven shorter ones, a round plate, and two fragments of tubing. It was later reassembled by a Danish archaeologist.

It is generally accepted that the Gundestrup Cauldron was made at some point in time during the first or second century BC. Its origin, however, is a debatable matter. It is known that the cauldron was not made locally and that it was brought to the area from abroad. But there are two main theories regarding where this 'somewhere abroad' actually was.

The first theory is that the cauldron was of Gaulish origin, and that it came from somewhere in the Celtic world. Proponents of this theory argue that the iconography of the cauldron is typically Celtic. Such images include torques, carnyx (a type of ancient musical instrument), and a horned figure. Some historians maintain that the horned figure on the artifact is Cernunnos, a Celtic deity.

Based on this, it has been suggested that the cauldron is from northern Gaul, as such depictions have also been found in that area.

The second theory is that it is of Thracian origin, and was made somewhere in the Lower Danube in southeastern Europe. This argument is said to be supported by the style and workmanship of the vessel. For example, it has been asserted that certain silver-smithing techniques that were used to make the cauldron, including high repoussé, pattern punches, tracers, and partial gilding, were not used in the Celtic world when the vessel is thought to have been produced.

It is still unknown how the vessel found its way to Denmark, and why. Popular theories include that the cauldron was a gift to a chief, a trade object, or war booty. ■

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CLASSICAL WISDOM WEEKLY

ALICIA MCDERMOTT

Alicia is a researcher, editor, and writer with Ancient Origins. She's a lifelong learner and has worked in education, tourism, and anthropology. Traveling throughout Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, Alicia has increased her knowledge of Pre-Colombian sites as well as life in modern Andean cultures.

Parsnips and Fish Sauce

Ancient Rome's Answer to Fries and Ketchup!

When you think of ancient Roman cuisine you might imagine luxurious feasts where people went on hedonistic binges in which they consumed as much rich food and drink as they possibly could. At least that's the reputation the wealthier section of society has been given, right?

There are stories, some mythical (for example, the *vomitorium* wasn't the location where people went to purge decadent dishes) and some historically sound (ancient Romans *did* drink toxic 'sugar of lead' wine because it was tasty to them), that seem to support the idea that ancient Roman eating habits were based on decadence. While the story could be somewhat true for the upper echelons of ancient Roman society, the common folk had a much simpler diet than many people would expect.

Unlike the wealthiest Romans, regular people mostly filled their stomachs with vegetables. For the rich, foods like beets, cabbage, carrots, parsnips, and cucumbers could be included as appetizers on their menus. Another bonus to eating like a richer Roman was the ability to dress up those veggies with some tasty sauces.

For this simple and tasty recipe, we're going to take the humble parsnip (which was actually considered an aphrodisiac back then thanks to its shape) and enhance it the ancient Roman way – with one of their all-time favorite sauces.

The recipe comes from an ancient Roman cookbook called *Apicius* and will provide you with an alternative starchy veg to the ever-popular modern variation - French fries with ketchup.

A couple of things to note about adapting this recipe to the modern kitchen: first, the ancient Romans would have made and used a sauce called *garum* (made of fermented fish innards) but you're more likely to be able to find a bottle of fish sauce already prepared for you in the Asian section of the grocery store. Second, the ancient Roman cook didn't have access to cornstarch, instead, they had *tracta,* a thickener made of barley or spelt. It would have had a similar effect on cooking as the cornstarch you'll use. Again, the swap has been made for your convenience! ■

> The humble parsnip was considered an aphrodisiac, thanks to its shape

Parsnips & Fish Sauce

INGREDIENTS

3 large Parsnips

Enough Olive Oil to fill a pot about two inches deep

2 cups Red Wine

1/3 cup Fish Sauce

2 teaspoons ground Black Pepper

1 tablespoon Cornstarch

METHOD

1. Bring the red wine to a low boil in a pot. When it has reduced by about one-third, add the fish sauce and pepper.

Mix the cornstarch and about half a cup of cold water into a slurry in a separate bowl. Slowly add this to the pot, stirring it in with a whisk or fork to prevent clumping.

2. Reduce the mixture another third. The end result should have the consistency of barbecue sauce, i.e. thicker than water but runny enough to pour.

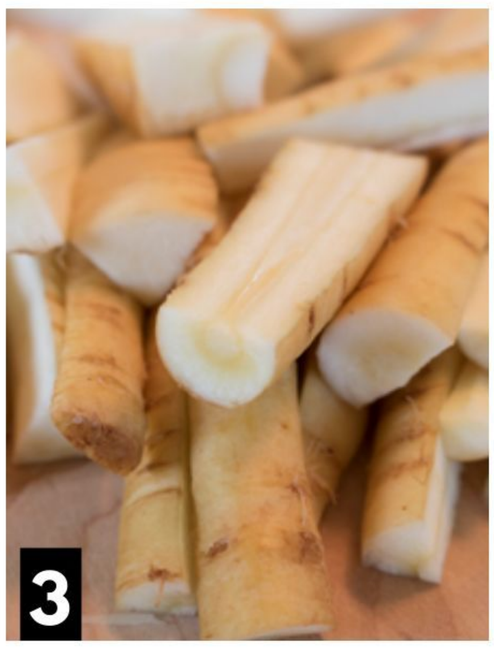
Turn off the heat and set the sauce aside while you make the parsnip fries.

3. Wash and peel the parsnips and cut them into small pieces, such as in a French fry shape. Dry the parsnip pieces thoroughly with a paper towel.

4. Fill another pot with olive oil up to around two inches and raise the heat to medium-high. After a few minutes, drop a small piece of parsnip in to test if the oil is hot enough to fry. When the oil is ready, fry the parsnips a few pieces at a time (they are moist and will produce a lot of bubbles, so be careful). Move the parsnips around with a long-handled spoon to prevent them from sticking.

5. When the parsnips are golden brown on the outside remove them from the oil and drain them on a wire rack over paper towels.

6. Serve as you would French fries and ketchup, with the wine-sauce drizzled on top of the parsnips or on the side for dipping. ■



NOTES

The sauce, while cooking, could smell a little strange, pungent, and fishy to you, but it has a savory, umami flavor and makes a delicious addition to the fried parsnips.

These fries need the salty wine and fish sauce, but don't add any actual salt to the recipe or it could be way too much.

If you've tried any of our ancient recipes, drop us a line and tell us all about it! We're excited to hear how it went for you.

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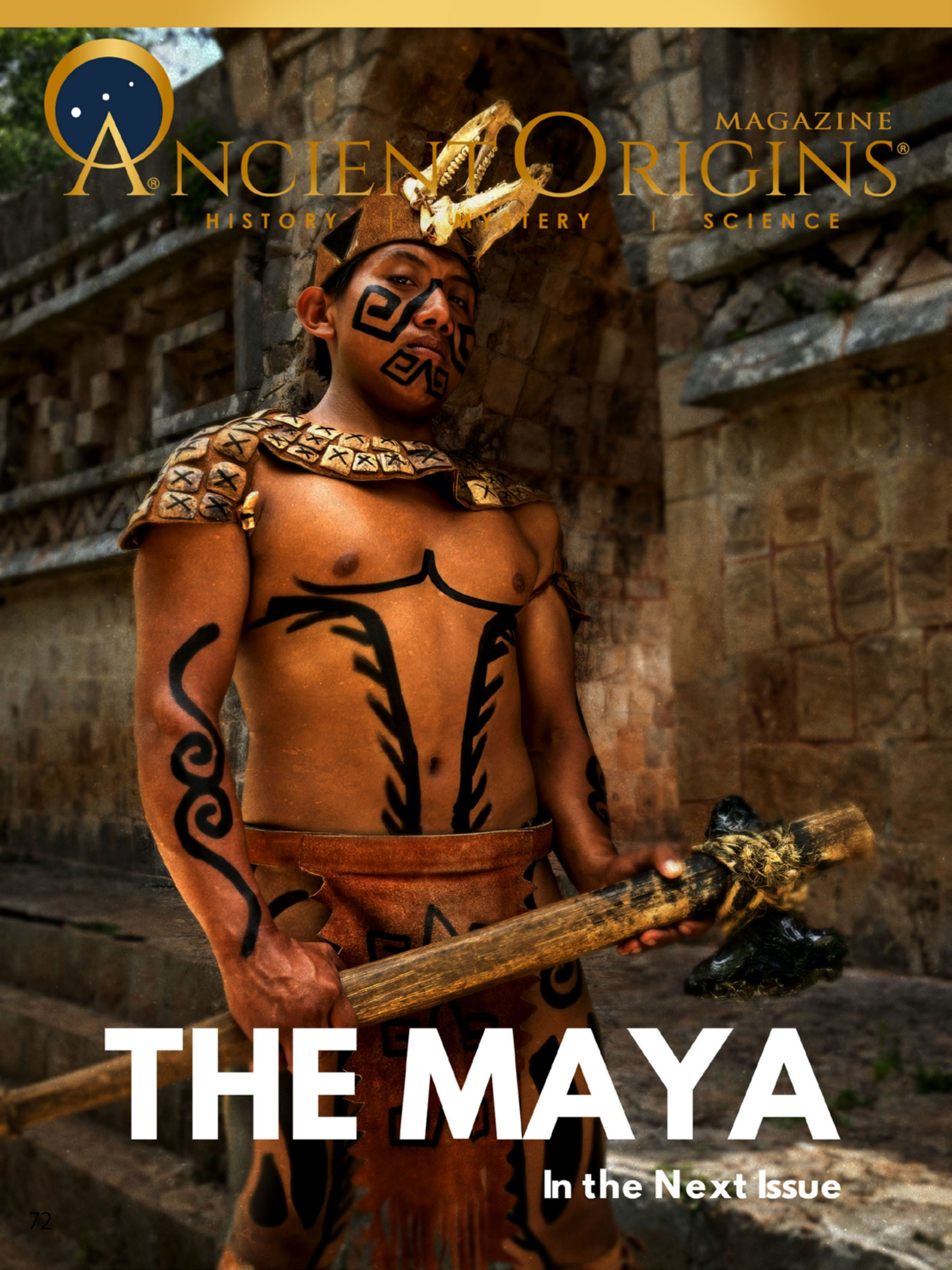
GARUM

The Ketchup of Ancient Rome

Garum was easily the most popular sauce in ancient Rome. Their cooks saw it as a perfect salty addition to a recipe when they wanted to add or maintain moisture in a dish. But like ketchup today, garum wasn't meant to be consumed on its own – it was a way to enhance a simpler food, such as a cooked vegetable.

To make the sauce, a person would have to crush the insides of fish such as tuna, eel, anchovies, and mackerel, add some salt, and then place the mix in a pot to ferment until all the liquid seeped out. This process could take months. The finished product (the liquid) could be used alone, but it was more often mixed with wine, vinegar, pepper, oil, or water.

Since the production of garum created such an unpleasant smell, its fermentation was relegated to the outskirts of cities. Archaeologists have found garum factories from Spain to Portugal to northern Africa. But Pompeii was especially famous throughout the Roman world for producing and exporting garum. Some of these factories employed more than 50 people.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