Did aliens build… Dunedin?

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(1042 words)

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**1 Introduction**

Proponents of the “Tartarian Empire” theory claim that the world’s pre-Modern architecture was the work of a single, global, technologically-advanced state called Tartaria which was destroyed in the 19th century due to a ‘mud-flood’ and subsequently erased from the history books (Dunning, 2021; Mortice, 2021; r*/Tartaria*, n.d.). New Zealand based believers suggest that this Empire built Dunedin’s 19th century architecture (Hypothesis A – Ha), rather than British settlers (Hypothesis B – Hb) (Jon Levi, 2019). I will evaluate both Ha and Hb with the help of the SEARCH process (Schick & Vaughn, 2014).

**2 Claim**

Much of Dunedin’s pre-Modern architecture was built by a technologically-advanced global civilization called the Tartarian Empire. The downfall of Tartaria was due to a mud-flood, which caused a loss of technology that prevents us from building new “Tartarian Architecture”–a broad category that lumps together Beaux Arts, neo/gothic, neo/classical and even Ancient Egyptian buildings—henceforth referred to as ‘TA’.

**3 Evidence**

Online proponents of Ha point to, among other evidence, the following:

(1) The significant presence of TA in Dunedin, including the Railway station, the First Church and the now demolished World's Fair building, all of which share markers of the ornate Tartarian style seen elsewhere worldwide (tartaryan, 2019). (2) YouTuber KingDave has questioned how a population of “2000” people in Dunedin in 1861 was large enough to build brick architecture of a 10-story scale (Obeda, 2021, 18:22; Obeda, 2021, 14:47). (3) Antenna-shaped structures are seen on the top of buildings in 19th century photos (Obeda, 2021, 37:09). (4) Mud is seen surrounding buildings in these photos (Obeda, 2021, 47:32). (5) Street photography from the 19th century shows streets devoid of people (Obeda, 2021, 47:32). (6) The sky in these photos is white, which could be evidence of tampering to hide advanced air technology (Obeda, 2021, 13:29).

**4 Is it admissible?**

This evidence is largely not admissible.

(1) 19th century Dunedin architecture conforming to the “Tartarian” style could as easily be explained by Hb. Dunedin was settled early out of the NZ cities, which would explain why it has a large amount of pre-Modern architecture. Additionally, the exodus North and slowing economic growth after the Gold Rush ended helps explain why so much of Dunedin’s architecture was not demolished for newer buildings as it was in other cities (“The Drift to the North,” 1916).

Likewise, the consistency of Dunedin architecture with styles found contemporaneously overseas can be easily explained by the fact Dunedin was colonised by the British. As Richardson, (1988, pp. 1–2) has written, the architectural design of colonial cities like Dunedin offered a chance for the British Empire to indicate its cultural influence.

There are also factual errors that discount some evidence. (2) Most importantly, the Otago population in 1861 was 27,163 according to the Census, not the 2000s that King Dave mentions (*STATISTICS OF NEW ZEALAND FOR 1861*, n.d.). Likewise, none of the photos King Dave provides actually show 10 story high buildings.

(3) The antennas King Dave points out in photographs are actually spires, a key part of the Gothic architectural tradition since the Middle Ages (*Spire | Architecture | Britannica*, n.d.).

(4) The claims of evidence of a mud-flood also don’t stand up. As architectural historian Robin Aitken told the Spinoff, the mud seen in such photos can be explained easily by the use of horses and the resultant feces (Adams, 2022). (5) Early photography (in the 1800s) required very long exposures, which meant moving people were not captured, explaining the empty streets (Lamb, 2017).

(6) Finally, white skies are in fact a common photographic occurrence, relating to high set exposures in outdoor photography. This is common and is not good evidence of tampering, hence is inadmissible (axelf, 2012).

**5 Alternate hypothesis**

Dunedin was built by British settlers over the mid-late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**6 Criteria of adequacy**

A section of the wider Tartarian theory is falsifiable in that we could attempt to build TA in the modern period, proving that we don’t build such buildings because of stylistic concerns, rather than lacking technological ability. Indeed, we have actually tested this claim and it has been falsified: the ‘theatre’ building in the Espaces d’Abraxas complex near Paris is in the neoclassical style, for example, and was built entirely in 1978-83 (Taylor-Foster, 2015). Hb is falsifiable—if we found remains of advanced Tartarian technology used to build Dunedin architecture then that would be evidence against Hb. No such evidence has been found so far.

Neither hypothesis is fruitful.

Both hypotheses have a wide purported scope, as the Tartarian theory purports to explain the presence of architecture all over the world. Likewise, the British colonial theory also explains the presence of such architecture all over the world, for example in Shanghai.

Hb is far more simple than Ha. Ha makes a large number of assumptions, for example that the government has covered up both Tartaria but also the fact of the coverup itself. It posits huge amounts of hidden rubble from demolished TA, as well as large amounts of missing Tartarian technology. It also assumes that an advanced world state could have been destroyed by a mud-flood when somehow a less advanced subsequent government survived. Advanced technology is profitable and thus hard to keep secret, yet Ha assumes this has been done.

Additionally, proponents of Ha still posit the arrival of British settlers in NZ, just that they found rather than built the TA seen in Dunedin. Thus, Hb is more simple as it posits *only* British settlers, whereas Ha posits both British settlers and Tartarians.

Finally, Hb is more conservative in that mainstream architectural and engineering theory holds that Dunedin’s TA could have been built with the technology of the time. Ha is less conservative in that it contradicts these established theories, requiring that the existence of advanced tech was necessary to build stone/brick architecture in the 1800s.

**7 Conclusion**

Elements of Ha are falsifiable; they have been falsified. Hb is falsifiable but has not yet been falsified. While both hypotheses have a wide scope, Hb is far more simple than Ha. Likewise, Hb is more conservative than Ha. Paired with the inadmissibility of much of the evidence put forward for Ha, this gives us good reason to reject Ha and to continue to believe Hb.

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