Lex Fridman Podcast #449 - Graham Hancock: Lost Civilization of the Ice Age & Ancient Human History

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Lex Fridman
The following is a conversation with Graham Hancock, a journalist and author who for over 30 years has explored the controversial possibility that there existed a lost civilization during the last ice age and that it was destroyed in a global cataclysm some 12,000 years ago. He is the presenter of the Netflix documentary series, Ancient Apocalypse, the second season of which has just been released and it's focused on the distant past of the Americas. A topic I recently discussed with the archeologist Ed Barnhart. Let me say that Ed represents the kind of archeologist scholar I love talking to on the podcast, extremely knowledgeable, humble, open minded, and respectful in disagreement. I'll do many more podcasts on history, including ancient history. Our distant past is full of mysteries, and I find it truly exciting to explore those mysteries with people both on the inside and the outside of the mainstream in the various disciplines involved. This is the Lex Fridman podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Graham Hancock. Let's start with a big foundational idea that you have about human history. That there was an advanced Ice Age civilization that came before and perhaps seeded what people now call the sixth cradles of Civilization, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Indies, and Mesoamerica. So let's talk about this idea that you have. Can you at the highest possible level describe it?

Graham Hancock
It would be better to describe it as a foundational sense of puzzlement and incompleteness in the story that we are taught about our past, which envisages more or less, there have been a few ups and downs, but more or less a straightforward evolutionary progress. We start out as hunter-foragers, then we become agriculturalists. The hunter-forager phase could go back hundreds of thousands of years. I mean, this is where it is also important to mention that anatomically modern humans, and we're not the only humans. We had Neanderthals from, I don't know, 400,000 years ago to about 40,000 years ago. They were certainly human because anatomically modern humans interbred with them. And we carry Neanderthal genes. There were the Denisovans maybe 300,000 to perhaps even as recently as 30,000 years ago. And again, interbreeding took place. They're obviously a human species. So we've got this background of humans who didn't look quite like us. And then we have anatomically modern humans. And I think the earliest anatomically modern human skeletal remains are from Jebel Irhoud in Morocco and date to about 310,000 years ago. So the question is what were our ancestors doing after that? And I think we can include the Neanderthals and the Denisovans in that general picture. And why did it take so long? This is one of the puzzles, one of the questions that bother me. Why did it take so long? When we have creatures who are physically identical to us, we cannot actually weigh and measure their brains. But from the work that's been done on the crania, it looks like they had the same brains that we do with the same wiring. So if we've been around for 300,000 plus years at least, and if ultimately in our future was the process to create civilization or civilizations, why didn't it happen sooner? Why did it take so long? Why was it such a long time? Even the story of anatomically modern humans has kept on changing. I remember a

time when it was said that there hadn't been anatomically modern humans before 50,000 years ago, and then it became 196,000 years ago with the findings in Ethiopia and then 310,000 years ago. There's a lot of missing pieces in the puzzle there. But the big question for me in that timeline is why didn't we do it sooner? Why did it take so long? Why did we wait until after 12,000 years ago, really after 10,000 years ago to start seeing what are selected as the beginnings of civilization in places like Turkey, for example. And then there's a relatively slow process of adopting agriculture. And by 6,000 years ago, we see ancient Sumer emerging as a civilization. And we're then in the pre-dynastic period in ancient Egypt as well 6,000 years ago, beginning to see definite signs of what will become the dynastic civilization of Egypt about 5,000 years ago. And interestingly round about the same time, you have the Indus Valley civilization popping up out of nowhere. And by the way, the Indus Valley civilization was a lost civilization until the 1920s when railway workers accidentally stumbled across some ruins. I've been to Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, and these are extraordinarily beautifully centrally planned cities. Clearly they're the work of an already sophisticated civilization. One of the things that strikes me about the Indus Valley Civilization is that we find a steatite seal of an individual seated in a recognizable yoga posture. And that seal is 5,000 years old, and the yoga posture is Mulabandhasana, which involves a real contortion of the ankles and twisting the feet back. It's an advanced yoga posture. So there it is, 5,000 years ago. And that then raises the question, well, how long did yoga take to get to that place when it was already so advanced 5,000 years ago? What's the background to this? China, the Yellow River Civilization again, it's around about the same period, five to 6,000 years ago. You get these first signs of something happening. So it's very odd that all around the world we have this sudden upsurge of civilization about 6,000 years ago, preceded by what seems like a natural evolutionary process that would lead to a civilization. And yet certain ideas being carried down and manifested and expressed in many of these different civilizations. I just find that that whole idea very puzzling and very disturbing, especially when I look at this radical break that takes place in not just the human story, but the story of all life on Earth, which was the last great cataclysm that the Earth went through, which was the Younger Dryas event. It was an extinction level event. That's when all the great megafauna of the Ice Age went extinct. It's after that. It's after event that we start seeing this what had taken to be the beginnings of the first gradual steps towards civilization, we come out of the upper Paleolithic as it's defined the end of the old Stone Age and into the Neolithic. And that's when the wheels are supposedly set in motion to start civilization rolling. But what happened before that and why did that suddenly happen then? And I can't help feeling, and I've felt this for a very long while, that there are major missing pieces in our story. It's often said that I'm claiming to have proved that there was an advanced lost civilization in the Ice Age. And I am not claiming to have proved that. That is a hypothesis that I'm putting forward to answer some of the questions that I have about prehistory. And I think it's worthwhile to inquire into those possibilities because the Younger Dryas event was a massive global cataclysm, whatever caused it. And it's strange that just after it we start seeing these first signs.

Lex Fridman
So the current understanding in mainstream archeology is that after the Younger Dryas is when the civilizations popped up in different places of the globe with a lot of similarities, but they popped up independently.

Graham Hancock
Independently. And by coincidence. And by coincidence, those big civilizations that we all remember as the first civilizations, Sumer, Egypt, the Indus Valley Civilization, China, they all pop up at pretty much the same time. That is the mainstream view.

Lex Fridman
And they don't just pop up, they kind of build up gradually. First there's some settlements.

Graham Hancock
Oh, definitely, yes.

Lex Fridman
And then there's different dynamics of how they build up and the role of agriculture. And that is also non-obvious, but it's just there's first a kind of settlement, a stabilization of where the people are living. Then they start using agriculture, then they start getting urban centers and that kind of stuff.

Graham Hancock
It seems like an entirely reasonable argument. Everything about that makes sense. There is no doubt that you're seeing evolutionary progress, social evolution taking place in those thousands of years before Sumer emerges. But what's happening now, really, I spent much of the nineties and the late 1980s investigating this issue of a lost civilization. I wrote a series of books about it. But by 2002 when I published a book called Underworld, which was the most massive and most heavy book that I've ever written, because I was writing very defensively at the time. By the time I finished that book, my wife Santha and I spent seven years scuba diving all around the world looking for structures underwater, often led by local fishermen or local divers to anomalies that they'd seen underwater. By the time that book was finished, I thought, actually, I've done this story. I've walked the walk. I really don't have much more to say about it. And I turned in another direction and I wrote a book called Supernatural Meetings With the Ancient Teachers of Mankind recently retitled Visionary. And that was about the role of fundamentally about the role of psychedelics in the evolution of human culture. And I didn't think that I would go back to the lost civilization issue, but Göbekli Tepe in Turkey kept on forcing itself upon me the more and more discoveries there, the 11,600 year date from Enclosure D, which is the two largest megalithic pillars. And I reached a point where I realized I have to get back in the water and I have to investigate this again. And Göbekli Tepe was a game changer, but I think it's a game changer for everything because Göbekli Tepe, the extraordinary nature of it. We are looking at a major megalithic

site, which is at least five and a half thousand years older than Ġgantija in Malta, which was previously considered to be the oldest megalithic site in the world. And this led of course to a huge amount of interest and attention, both from the Turkish government who see the potential tourism potential of having the world's oldest megalithic site and from archeologists. And this in turn has led to exploration and excavation throughout the region. And what they're finding throughout that whole region around Göbekli Tepe and going down into Syria and further down into the Jordan Valley as far as Jericho and even across a bit of the Mediterranean into Cyprus, is what Turkish archeologists are now calling the Taş Tepeler civilization. They're calling it a civilization, the Stone Hills Civilization with very definite identifying characteristics, semi-subterranean circular structures, the use of T-shaped megalithic pillars, sometimes not anywhere near as big as those at Göbekli Tepe. It's clear that Göbekli Tepe now was not the beginning of this process. It was actually in a way, the end of this process. It was the summation of everything that Stone Hills Civilization had achieved. But what is becoming clear is that this is a period between before the foundation of Göbekli Tepe, as far as we know, that date of 11,600 years ago is the oldest date for Göbekli Tepe. But of course there's a lot of Göbekli Tepe still underground, so we can't say for sure that that's the oldest, but it's the oldest so far excavated. What we're seeing is that in that whole region around there, there was something was in motion and it began to go into motion round about the beginning of the Younger Dryas. And this is where these two dates are really important. The Younger Dryas, I'll round the figures off, begins around 12,800 years ago, and it ends around 11,600 years ago. So Göbekli Tepe's construction date, if it is 11,600 years ago, if they don't find older materials, marks the end of the Younger Dryas, but the beginning of the Younger Dryas, we are already seeing the stirrings of the kind of culture that manifests in full form at Göbekli Tepe and after the construction of Göbekli Tepe, in fact, even during the construction of Göbekli Tepe, we see agriculture beginning to be adopted. The people who created Göbekli Tepe were all hunter-foragers at the beginning. But by the time Göbekli Tepe was finished, and it was definitely deliberately finished, closed off, closed down, deliberately buried, covered with earth, covered with rubble, and then topped off with a hill, which is why Göbekli Tepe is called what it is, Göbekli Tepe means pot-bellied hill or the hill of the navel. For a long time, Göbekli Tepe was thought to be just a hill that looked a bit like a pot belly.

Lex Fridman
You say how it was discovered, I think this is one of the most fascinating things on Earth, period. So maybe can you say what it is and how it was discovered?

Graham Hancock
Well, Göbekli Tepe is first of all the oldest fully elaborated megalithic site that we know of anywhere in the world. It doesn't mean that older ones won't be found, but it is the oldest so far found. The part of the site that's been excavated, which is a tiny percentage of the whole site. We do know. My first visit to Göbekli Tepe was in 2013, and Dr. Klaus Schmidt, the late Dr. Klaus Schmidt, who died a year later, was very generous to me and showed me around

the site for over a period of three days. And he explained to me that they've already used ground penetrating radar on the site, and they know that there's much more Göbekli Tepe still underground. So anything is possible in terms of the dating of Göbekli Tepe. But what we have at the moment is a series of almost circular, but not quite circular enclosures, which are walled with relatively small stones. And then inside them you have pairs of megalithic pillars. And the archetypal part of that site is Enclosure D, which contains the two largest upright megaliths, about 18 feet tall and reckoned to weigh somewhere in the range of 20 tons, if I have my memory correct, they're substantial hefty pieces of stone. It isn't some kind of extraordinary feat to create a 20 foot tall or 20 ton megalith, nor is it an extraordinary feat to move it. There's nothing magical or really weird about that. Human beings can do that and always have, besides the quarry for the megaliths is right there. It's within 200 meters of the main enclosures. So that's not a mystery, but the mystery is, the mystery is why suddenly this new form of architecture, this massive, massive megalithic pillars appear, and the pillars, one of the things that interests me about the pillars is their alignment. And there is good work that's been done, which suggests that Enclosure D aligns to the rising of the star Sirius. And the rising points of the star Sirius appear to be mapped by the other enclosures, which are all oriented in slightly different directions. It was the work entirely of hunter-foragers. But by the time Göbekli Tepe was completed, agriculture was being introduced and was taking place there. Now you asked how Göbekli Tepe was found. The answer to that is that there was a survey of that pot-bellied hill in the 1960s by some American archeologists, and they were looking absolutely looking for Stone Age material, for material from the Paleolithic. And they had found some Paleolithic flints, upper Paleolithic flints around there. So it looked like a good place to look. But then they noticed sticking out of the side of the hill, some very finely cut stone, bits of very large and very finely cut stone. And looking at that, the workmanship was so good that those archeologists were confident that it had nothing to do with the Stone Age, and they thought they were looking at perhaps some Byzantine remains, and they abandoned the site and never looked at it further. And it wasn't until the German Archaeological Institute got involved, and particularly Klaus Schmidt, who I think was a genius, had real insight into this and started to dig at Göbekli Tepe that they'd realized what they'd found, that they'd found potentially the oldest megalithic site in the world. And they'd found it at a place where agriculture, according to the established historical timeline, that's where agriculture, at any rate in Europe and Western Asia begins. It begins in Anatolia, in Turkey, and then it gradually disseminates westward from there.

Lex Fridman
And yet the understanding is it was created by hunter-gatherers.

Graham Hancock
It was created by hunter-gatherers. Yeah, there was no agriculture 11,600 years ago in Göbekli Tepe. But by the time Göbekli Tepe was decommissioned, and I use that word

deliberately, was closed down and buried. Agriculture was all around it. And this was agriculture of people who knew how to cultivate plants.

Lex Fridman
Do we have an understanding when it was turned into a, if I could say a time capsule so protected by forming a mound around it?

Graham Hancock
Yes.

Lex Fridman
Is it around that similar time?

Graham Hancock
It stood from roughly 11,600 years ago to about 10,400 years ago to about 8,400 BC. So around 1200 years it was there, and it continued to be elaborated as a site. And while it was being elaborated as a site, we see agriculture, I'm going to use the word being introduced, there'd been no sign of it before, and suddenly it's there. And to me, that's another of the mysteries about Göbekli Tepe. And then with the new work that's being done, we realize that it's part of a much wider phenomenon which spreads across an enormous distance. And the puzzling thing is that after Göbekli Tepe there almost seems to be a decline. Things fall down again, and then we enter this long, slow process of the Neolithic, thousands of years, gradual developments until we come to ancient Sumer and Mesopotamia. But agriculture has taken a firm root by then. Actually, one other thing, I'll just say this in passing. When I talk about a lost civilization introducing ideas to people, I'm often accused of stealing credit from the indigenous people who had those ideas in the first place. So I do find it slightly hypocritical that archeology fully accepts that the idea of agriculture was introduced to Western Europe from Turkey, and that Western Europeans didn't invent agriculture. It was absolutely introduced by Anatolian farmers who traveled west. So the notion of dissemination of ideas perhaps shouldn't be so annoying to archeologists as it is.

Lex Fridman
And perhaps we should also state, if we look at the entirety of history of hominids, humans or hominids have been explorers. I didn't even know this when I was preparing for this. Looking at Homo erectus 1. 9 million years ago.

Graham Hancock
Absolutely.

Lex Fridman
Almost right away they spread out through the whole world and we, Homo sapiens evolved from them. And we should also mention, since we're talking about controversial debates

going on, as I understand there's still debates about the dynamics of all that was going on there. Like we mentioned in Africa that I think the current understanding, we didn't come from one particular point of Africa, that there's multiple locations.

Graham Hancock
This is the Out of Africa theory. I think it's more than a theory. It's really strongly evidenced. Why? Because we're part of the Great Ape family and it's an African family. There's no doubt that human beings, our deep origins are in Africa. But then as you rightly say, there were these very early migrations out of Africa by species that are likely ancestral to anatomically modern humans, including definitely Homo erectus and the astonishingly distant travels that they undertook. Yes, I think there is an urge to explore in all of humanity. I think there is an urge to find out what's around the next corner, what's over the brow of the next hill. And I think that goes very deep into human character. And I think it was being manifested in those early adventures of people who left Africa and traveled all around the world and then settling in different parts of the world. I think a lot of anatomically modern human evolution took place outside Africa as well, not only in Africa.

Lex Fridman
So I guess the general puzzlement that you're filled with is given that these creatures explore and spread and try out different environments, why did it take hundreds of thousands of years for them to develop complicated society settlements?

Graham Hancock
That's the first big question. Why did it take so long? And that raises in my mind a hypothesis, a possibility. Maybe it didn't take so long. Maybe things were happening that we haven't yet got hold of in the archeological record, which await to be discovered. And of course, there are huge parts of the world that have not been studied at all by archeology, but the fact that huge parts of the world have not been studied at all by archeology is not on its own enough to suggest that we're missing a chapter in the human story. The reason that I come to that isn't only puzzlement about that 300,000 year gap. It's also to do with the fact that there's common iconography. There's common myths and traditions, and there's common spiritual ideas that are found all around the world, and they're found amongst cultures that are geographically distant from one another and that are also distant from one another in time. They don't necessarily occur at the same time. And this is where I think that archeology is perhaps desperately needing a history of ideas as well as just a history of things. Because an idea can manifest again and again throughout the human story. So there are particular issues, for example, the notion of the afterlife, destiny of the soul, what happens to us when we die? And believe me, when you reach my age, that's something you do think about what happens. I used to feel immortal when I was in my forties, but now that I'm 74, I definitely know that I'm not. Well, it would be natural for human beings all around the world to have that same feeling, that same idea. But why would they all decide that what happens to the soul after death is that it makes a leap to the heavens, to the Milky Way, that

it makes a journey along the Milky Way, that there it is confronted by challenges, by monsters, by closed gates. The course of the life that that person has lived will determine their destiny in that afterlife journey. And this idea, the path of souls, the Milky Way is called the path of souls. It's very strongly found in the Americas right from South America through Mexico, through into North America. But it's also found in ancient Egypt, in ancient India, in ancient Mesopotamia, the same idea. And I don't feel that that can be a coincidence. I feel that what we are looking at is an inheritance of an idea, a legacy that's been passed down from a remote common source to cultures all around the world, and that has taken on a life of its own within those cultures. So the remote common source would explain both the similarities and the differences in the expression of these ideas. The other thing, very puzzling thing, is the sequence of numbers that are a result of the precession of the equinoxes. At least I think that's the best theory to explain them. Here, I think it's important to pay tribute to the work of Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend. Giorgio de Santillana was professor of history of science actually at MIT, where you are based, back in the sixties. And Hertha von Dechend was professor of the history of science at Frankfurt University, and they wrote an immense book in the 1960s called Hamlet's Mill, and Hamlet's Mill differs very strongly from established opinion on the issue of the phenomenon of precession. And I'll explain what precession is in a moment. Generally, it's held that it was the Greeks who discovered the precession and the dating on that is put back not very far, maybe 2,300 years ago or so. Santillana and von Dechend are pointing out that knowledge of precession is much, much older than that, thousands of years older than that. And they do actually trace it. I think I'm quoting them pretty much correctly to some almost unbelievable ancestor civilization. Reading that book was one of the several reasons that I got into this mystery in the first place. Okay, now, the precession of the equinoxes, to give it its full name, results from the fact that our planet is the viewing platform from which we observe the stars. And our planet, of course, is rotating on its own axis at roughly a thousand miles an hour at the equator. But what's less obvious is that it's also wobbling on its axis. So if you imagine the extended North Pole of the earth pointing up at the sky in our time, it's pointing at the star Polaris, and that is our pole star. But Polaris has not always been the pole star precisely because of this wobble on the axis of the Earth. Other stars have occupied the pole position, and sometimes the extended North Pole of the earth points at empty space. There is no pole star. That's one of the obvious results of the wobble on the Earth's axis. The other one is that there are 12 well-known constellations in our time, the 12 constellations of the zodiac that lie along what is referred to as the path of the sun. The earth is orbiting the sun, and we are seeing what's behind it, what's in direct line with the sun in our view. And the zodiacal constellations all lie along the path of the sun. So at different times of the year, the sun will rise against the background of a particular zodiacal constellation. Today we live in the age of Pisces, and it's definitely not an accident that the early Christians used the fish as their symbol. This is another area where I differ from archeology. Think the constellations of the zodiac were recognized as such much earlier than we suppose. Anyway, to get to the point, the key marker of the year, certainly in the northern hemisphere, was the spring equinox. The question was, what constellation is

rising behind the sun? What constellation is housing the sun at dawn on the spring equinox? Right now it's Pisces. In another 150 years or so, it'll be Aquarius. We do live in the dawning of the age of Aquarius. Back in the time of the late ancient Egyptians, it was Aries going back to the time of Ramesses or before. Before that it was Taurus and so on and so forth. It's backwards through the zodiac until 12,500 years ago. You come to the age of Leo when the constellation of Leo houses the sun on the spring equinox. Now this process unfolds very, very, very, very slowly, the whole cycle, and it is a cycle. It repeats itself roughly every 26,000 years. Put a more exact figure on it, 25,920 years. That may be a convention. Some scholars would say it was a bit less than that, a bit more. But you're talking fractions. It's in that area, 25,920 years. And to observe it, you really need more than one human lifetime because it unfolds very, very slowly at a rate of one degree every 72 years. And the parallel that I often give is hold your finger up to the horizon, the distant horizon. The movement in one lifetime, in a period of 72 years is about the width of your finger. It's not impossible to notice in a lifetime, but it's difficult. You've got to pass it on. And what seems to have happened is that some ancient culture, the culture that Santillana and von Dechend call some almost unbelievable ancestor culture, worked out the entire process of precession and selected the key numbers of precession, of which the most important number, the governing number is the number 72. But we also have numbers related to the number 72. 72 plus 36 is 108, 108 divided by two. ... 36 is 108. 108 divided by two is 54. These numbers are also found in mythology all around the world. There were 72 conspirators who were involved in killing the god Osiris in Ancient Egypt and nailing him up in a wooden coffer and dumping him in the Nile. There are 432,000 in the Rigveda. 432,000 is a multiple of 72. And at Angkor, in Cambodia, for example, you have the bridge to Angkor Thom. And on that bridge you have figures on both sides, sculpted figures, which are holding the body of a serpent. That serpent is Vasuki, and what they're doing is they're churning the milky ocean. It's the same metaphor of churning and turning that's defined in the story of Hamlet's Mill, of Amlodhi's mill. There are 54 on each side. 54 plus 54 is 108. 108 is 72 plus 36. It's a precessional number according to the work that Santillana and von Dechend did. And the fascination with this numbers system and its discovery all around the world is one of the puzzles that intrigue me. And suggest to me that we are looking at ancestral knowledge that was passed down, and probably was passed down from a specific single common source at one time, but then was spread out very widely around the world.

Lex Fridman
One of the defining ways that you approach the study of human history that I think contrasts with mainstream archeology is that you take this astronomical symbolism and the relationship between humans and the stars very seriously.

Graham Hancock
I do, as I believe the ancients did.

Lex Fridman
I think it's important to consider what humans would've thought about back then. Now we have a lot of distractions. We have social media, we can watch videos on YouTube and whatever. But back then, especially before electricity, the stars is the sexiest thing to talk about.

Graham Hancock
There's no light pollution.

Lex Fridman
There's no light pollution so, I mean, you're [inaudible 00:33:21]-

Graham Hancock
That's the majesty of the heavens.

Lex Fridman
Every single night you're spending looking up at the stars. And you can imagine there's a lot of status value to be the guy who's very good at studying the stars, as the scientists of the day. And I'm sure there's going to be these geniuses that emerge. They're able to do two things. One, tell stories about the gods of whatever, based on the stars. And then also, as we'll probably talk about, use the stars practically for navigation, for example.

Graham Hancock
Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Lex Fridman
So it makes sense that the stars had a primal importance for the ideas of the times, for the status, for religious explorations.

Graham Hancock
It was an ever-present reality, and it was bright and it was brilliant, and it was full of lights. It's inconceivable that the ancients would not have paid attention to it. It was an overwhelming presence. And that's one of the reasons why I'm really confident that the constellations that we now recognize as the constellations of the zodiac were recognized much earlier, because it's hard to miss when you pay attention to the sky, that the sun over the course of the solar year is month by month rising against the background of different constellations. And then there's a much longer process, the process of precession, which takes that journey backwards and where we have a period of 2,160 years for each sign of the zodiac. I think it would've been hard for the ancients to have missed that. They might not have identified the constellations in exactly the same way we do today. That may well be a Babylonian or Greek convention, but that the constellations were there I think was very

clear. And that they were special constellations, unlike other ones higher up in the sky which were not on the path of the sun, that people paid attention to.

Lex Fridman
Well, but detecting the procession of the equinox is hard because especially they don't have any writing systems, they don't have any mathematical systems. So everything is told through words.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. Let's not underestimate oral traditions. Oral traditions, that's something we've lost in our culture today. One of the things that happens with the written word is that you gradually lose your memory. Actually, there's a nice story from Ancient Egypt about the god Thoth, the god of wisdom, who is very proud of himself because he has invented writing. "Look at this gift," he says to a mythical pharaoh of that time, "Look at the gift that I'm giving humanity, writing. This is a wonderful thing. It'll enable you to preserve so much that you would otherwise lose." And the pharaoh in this story replies to him, "No, you have not given us a wonderful gift. You have destroyed the art of memory. We will forget everything. Words will roam free around the world, not accompanied by any wise advice to set them into context." And actually that's a very interesting point. And we do know that cultures that still do have oral traditions are able to preserve information for very long periods of time. One thing I think is clear in any time, in any period of history, is human beings love stories. We love great stories. And one way to preserve information is to encode it, embed it in a great story. And so carefully done that actually, it doesn't matter whether the storyteller knows that they're passing on that information or not. The story itself is the vehicle. And as long as it's repeated faithfully, the information contained within it will be passed on. And I do think this is part of the story of the preservation of knowledge.

Lex Fridman
That's one of the reasons that you take myths seriously.

Graham Hancock
I take them very seriously. There's many reasons, but I can't help being deeply impressed and deeply puzzled by the worldwide tradition of a global cataclysm within human memory. I mean, we know scientifically that there have been many, many cataclysms in the past going back millions of years. I mean, the best-known one of course is the KPG event as it's now called, that made the dinosaurs extinct 65 million or 66 million years ago. But has there been such a cataclysm in the lifetime of the human species? Yeah, the Mount Toba eruption about 70,000 years ago was pretty bad. But a global cataclysm, the Younger Dryas really ticks all the boxes as a worldwide disaster, which definitely involved sea level rise, both at the beginning and at the end of the Younger Dryas. It definitely involved the swallowing up of lands that previously had been above water. And I think it's an excellent candidate for this worldwide tradition of a global cataclysm, of which one of, but not the only, distinguishing

characteristics was a flood, an enormous flood, and the submergence of lands that had previously been above water, underwater. The fact that this story is found all around the world suggests to me that the archeological explanation is, look, people suffer local floods all the time. I mean, as we're talking, there's flooding in Florida, but I don't think anybody in Florida is going to make the mistake of believing that that's a global flood. They know it's local. But that's the argument largely of archeology, dealing with the flood myths, or that some local population experienced a nasty local flooding event and they decided to say that it affected the whole world. I'm not persuaded by that, particularly since we know there was a nasty epoch, the Younger Dryas, when flooding did occur, and when the Earth was subjected to events cataclysmic enough to extinguish entirely the megafauna of the ice age.

Lex Fridman
There is the Younger Dryas impact hypothesis that provides an explanation of what happened during this period that resulted in such rapid environmental change. So can you explain this hypothesis?

Graham Hancock
Yes. The Younger Dryas impact hypothesis, YDIH for short, is not a lunatic fringe theory as its opponents often attempt to write it off. It's the work of more than 60 major scientists working across many different disciplines, including archeology and including oceanography as well. And they are collectively puzzled by the sudden onset of the Younger Dryas, and by the fact that it is accompanied 12,800 years ago by a distinct layer in the Earth. You can see it most clearly at Murray Springs in Arizona, for example. You can see, it's about the width of a human hand, and there's a draw there that's been cut by flash flooding at some time. And that draw has revealed the sides of the draw. And you can see the cross-section. And in the cross-section is this distinct dark layer that runs through the Earth. And it contains evidence of wildfires, there is a lot of soot in it. There are also nanodiamonds in it. There is shocked quartz in it. There is quartz that's been melted at temperatures in excess of 2,200 degrees centigrade. There are carbon microspherules. All of these are proxies for some kind of cosmic impact. I talked a moment ago about the extinction of the dinosaurs. Luis and Walter Alvarez, who made that incredible discovery, initially their discovery was based entirely on impact proxies, just as the Younger Dryas is. There was no crater. And for a long time they were disbelieved because they couldn't produce a crater. But when they finally did produce that deeply buried Chicxulub crater, that's when people started to say, "Yeah, they have to be right." But they weren't relying on the crater, they were relying on the impact proxies. And they're the same impact proxies that we find in what's called the Younger Dryas boundary layer all around the world. So it's the fact that at the moment when the Earth tips into a radical climate shift, it's been warming up for at least 2,000 years before 12,800 years ago, people at the time must have been feeling a great sense of relief. "We've been living through this really cold time, but it's getting better. Things are getting better." And then suddenly, around 12,800 years ago,

some might say 12, 860 years ago, there's a massive global plunge in global temperatures, and the world suddenly gets as cold as it was at the peak of the ice age. And it's almost literally overnight. It's very, very, very rapid. Normally in an epoch, when the Earth is going into a freeze, you would not expect sea levels to rise. But there is a sea level rise, a sudden one, right at the beginning of the Younger Dryas. And then you have this long frozen period from 12,800 to 11,600 years ago. And then equally, dramatically and equally suddenly the Younger Dryas comes to an end and the world very rapidly warms up. And you have a recognized pulse of meltwater at that time as the last of the glaciers collapse into the sea, called meltwater pulse 1B, around about 11,600 years ago. This is a period which is very tightly defined, it's a period when we know that human populations were grievously disturbed. That's when the so-called Clovis culture of North America vanished entirely from the record during the Younger Dryas. And it's the time when the mammoths and the saber-toothed tigers vanished from the record as well.

Lex Fridman
Is there a good understanding of what happened geologically, whether there was an impact or not? What explains this huge dip in temperature and then rise in temperature?

Graham Hancock
The abrupt cessation of the global meridional overturning circulation, of which the Gulf Stream is the best-known part, the main theory that's been put forward up to now, and I don't dispute that theory at all, is that the sudden freeze was caused by the cutting off of the Gulf Stream basically, which is part of the central heating system of our planet. So no wonder it became cold. But what's not really been addressed before is why that happened, why the Gulf Stream was cut, why a sudden pulse of meltwater went into the world ocean, and it was so much of it and it was so cold that it actually stopped the Gulf Stream in its tracks. And that's where the Younger Dryas impact hypothesis offers a very elegant and very satisfactory solution to the problem. Now, the hypothesis, of course, is broader than that. Amongst the scientists working on it are, for example, Bill Napier, an astrophysicist and astronomer. They have assembled a great deal of evidence, which suggests that the culprit in the Younger Dryas impact event or events was what we now call the Taurid meteor stream, which the Earth still passes through twice a year. It's now about 30 million kilometers wide, takes the Earth a couple of days to pass through it on its orbit. It passes through it in June, and it passes through it at the end of October. The suggestion is that the Taurid meteor stream is the end product of a very large comet that entered the solar system round about 20,000 years ago. Came in from the Oort cloud, got trapped by the gravity of the Sun, and went into orbit around the Sun, an orbit that crossed the orbit of the Earth. However, when it was one object, the likelihood of a collision with the Earth was extremely small. But as it started to do what all comets do, which was to break up into multiple fragments because these are chunks of rock held together by ice, and as they warm up, they split and disintegrate and break into pieces, as it passed through that its debris stream became larger and larger and wider and wider. And the theory is that 12,800

years ago, the Earth passed through a particularly dense part of the Taurid meteor stream and was hit by multiple impacts all around the planet, certainly from the west of North America, as far east as Syria. And that we are by and large not talking about impacts that would've caused craters, although there certainly were some, we are talking about air bursts. When an object is 100 or 150 meters in diameter and it's coming in very fast into the Earth's atmosphere, it is very unlikely to reach the earth, it's going to blow up in the sky. And the best known recent example of that is the Tunguska event in Siberia, which took place on the 30th of June 1908. The Tunguska event was, nobody disputes, it was definitely an air burst of a cometary fragment. And the date is interesting because the 30th of June is the height of the Beta Taurids. It's one of the two times when the Earth is going through the Taurid meteor stream. Well, luckily that part of Siberia wasn't inhabited, but 2,000 square miles of forest were destroyed. If that had happened over a major city, we would all be thinking very hard about objects out of the Taurid meteor stream and about the risk of cosmic impact. So the suggestion is that it wasn't one impact, it wasn't two impacts, it wasn't three impacts, it was hundreds of air bursts all around the planet. Coupled with a number of bigger objects, which the scientists working on this think hit the North American ice cap largely. Some of them may also have hit the Northern European ice cap, resulting in that sudden otherwise unexplained flood of meltwater that went into the world ocean and caused the cooling that then took place. But this was a disaster for life all over the planet. And it's interesting that one of the sites where they find the Younger Dryas boundary and where they find overwhelming evidence of an air burst and where they find all the shocked quartz, the carbon microspherules, the nanodiamonds, the trinitite, and so on and so forth, all of those impact proxies are found at Abu Hureyra. That was a settlement within 150 miles of Gobekli Tepe, and it was hit 12,800 years ago and it was obliterated. Interestingly, it was re-inhabited by human beings within probably five years, but it was completely obliterated at that time. And it is difficult to imagine that the people who lived in that area would not have been very impressed by what they saw happening by these massive explosions in the sky and the obliteration of Abu Hureyra. Now this is a theory, the Younger Dryas impact. It's a hypothesis actually, it's not even a theory. A theory is, I think, considered a higher level than a hypothesis. That's why it's the Younger Dryas impact hypothesis. And of course it has many opponents and there are many who disagree with it. And there have been a series of peer-reviewed papers that have been published supposedly debunking the Younger Dryas impact hypothesis. One, I think was in 2011, it was called a Requiem for the Younger Dryas Impact Hypothesis. And there's one just been published a few months ago or a year ago called a Complete Refutation of the Younger Dryas Impact Hypothesis, something like that, some lengthy title. So it's a hypothesis that has its opponents, and even within those of us who are looking at the alternative side of history, there are different points of view. Robert Schoch from Boston University, the geologist who demonstrated that the erosion on the Sphinx may well have been caused by exposure to a long period of very heavy rainfall, he doesn't go for the Younger Dryas impact hypothesis. He fully accepts that the Younger Dryas was a global cataclysm and that the extinctions took place, but he thinks it was caused by some kind of massive solar outburst. What everybody's agreed on is the Younger

Dryas was bad, but there is dispute about what caused it. I personally have found the Younger Dryas impact hypothesis to be the most persuasive, which most effectively explains all the evidence.

Lex Fridman
How important is the impact hypothesis to your understanding of the ice age advanced civilizations? Is it possible to have another explanation for environmental factors that could have erased most of an advanced civilization during this period?

Graham Hancock
In a sense, it's not the impact hypothesis that is central to what I'm saying, it's the Younger Dryas that's central to what I'm saying. And the Younger Dryas required a trigger, something caused it. I think the Younger Dryas impact hypothesis, the notion that we're looking at a debris stream of a fragmenting comet, and we can still see that debris stream because it's still up there and we still pass through it twice a year, is the best explanation. But I don't mind other explanations. It's good that there are other explanations. The Younger Dryas is a big mystery, and it's not a mystery that's been solved yet. And that word, advanced civilization, this is another word that is easily misunderstood. And I've tried to make clear many, many times that when we consider the possibility of something like a civilization in the past, we shouldn't imagine that it's us, that it's something like us. We should expect it to be completely different from us, but that it would've achieved certain things. Amongst the clues that intrigue me are those precessional numbers that are found all around the world, and are a category of ancient maps called Portolanos, which suddenly started to appear just after the crusade that entered Constantinople and sacked Constantinople, the Portolanos suddenly start to appear. And they're extremely accurate maps. The most of the ones that have survived are extremely accurate maps of the Mediterranean alone, but some of them show much wider areas. For example, on these Portolano-style maps, you do find a depiction of Antarctica again and again. And another thing that these maps have in common is that many of the mapmakers state that they base their maps on multiple older source maps, which have not survived. These maps are intriguing because they have very accurate relative longitudes. Our civilization did not crack the longitude problem until the mid-18th century with Harrison's chronometer, which was able to keep accurate time at sea so you could have the time in London and you could have the local time at sea at the same time. And then you could work out your longitude. There might be other ways of working out longitude as well, but there it is. The fact is these Portolanos have extremely accurate relative longitudes. Secondly, some of them show the world, to my eye, as it looked during the ice age. They show a much extended Indonesia and Malaysian peninsula and the series of islands that make up Indonesia today are all grouped together into one landmass. And that was the case during the ice age. That was the Sunda Shelf. And the presence of Antarctica on some of these maps also puzzles and intrigues me and is not satisfactorily explained in my view by archeology, which says, "Oh, those mapmakers, they felt that the world needed something underneath it to balance it so they put a fictional landmass there."

I don't think that makes sense. I think somebody was mapping the world during the last ice age, but that doesn't mean that they had our kind of tech. It means that they were following that exploration instinct. That they knew how to navigate. They'd been watching the stars for thousands of years before, they knew how to navigate and they knew how to build seagoing ships. And they explored the world and they mapped the world. Those maps were made a very, very long time ago. Some of them, I believe, were likely preserved in the Library of Alexandria. I think even then they were being copied and recopied. We don't know exactly what happened to the Library of Alexandria, except that it was destroyed. I suggest it's likely this was during the period of the Roman Empire. I suggest it's likely that some of those maps were taken out of the library and taken to Constantinople, and that's where they were liberated during the crusade and entered world culture again and started to be copied and recopied.

Lex Fridman
From this perspective, when we talk about advanced ice age civilization, it could have been a relatively small group of people with the technology of their scholars of the stars and their expert seafaring navigators.

Graham Hancock
Yes, that's about as far as I would take it. And when I say that, as I have said on a number of occasions, that it had technology equivalent to ours in the 18th century, I'm referring specifically to the ability to calculate longitude. I'm not saying that they were building steam engines. I don't see any evidence for that.

Lex Fridman
And perhaps some building tricks and skills of how to [inaudible 00:55:03].

Graham Hancock
Well, definitely. And this, again, is where you come to a series of mysteries, which are perhaps best expressed on the Giza Plateau in Egypt with the three Great Pyramids. And the extraordinary megalithic temples that many people don't pay much attention to on the Giza Plateau and the Great Sphinx itself. This is an area of particular importance in understanding this issue.

Lex Fridman
Well, can you actually describe the Sphinx and the Great Pyramids and what you find most mysterious and interesting about them?

Graham Hancock
Well, first of all, the astronomy. And here I must pay tribute to two individuals, actually three individuals in particular. One of them is John Anthony West, passed away in 2018. He was the first person in our era to begin to wonder if the Sphinx was much older than it had been.

Actually, he got that idea from a philosopher called Schwaller de Lubicz, who'd noticed what he thought was water erosion on the body of the Sphinx. John West picked that up, and he was a great amateur Egyptologist himself. He spent most of his life in Egypt and he was hugely versed in Ancient Egypt. And when he looked at the Sphinx and at the strange scalloped erosion patterns and the vertical fissures, particularly in the trench around the Sphinx, he began to think maybe Schwaller was right, maybe there was some of some sort of flooding here. And that's when he brought Robert Shoch, second person I'd like to recognize, geologist at Boston University. He brought Shoch to Giza, and Shock was the first geologist to stick his neck out, risk the ire of Egyptologists, and say, "Well, it looks to me like the Sphinx was exposed to at least a thousand years of heavy rainfall." And as Shoch's calculations have continued, as he's continued to be immersed in this mystery, he's continuously pushed that back. And he's now, again, looking at the date of around 12,000, 12,500 years ago during the Younger Dryas for the creation of the Great Sphinx. And then, of course, this is the period of the wet Sahara, the humid Sahara. The Sahara was a completely different place during the ice age. There were rivers in it, there were lakes in it, it was fertile, it was possibly densely populated, and there was a lot of rain. There's not no rain in Giza today, but there's relatively little rain. Not enough rain to cause that erosion damage on the Sphinx. The next person who needs to be mentioned in this context is Robert Bauval. Robert and I have co-authored a number of books together. Unfortunately, Robert has been very ill for the last seven years. He's got a very bad chest infection. And I think also that Robert became very demoralized by the attacks of Egyptologists on his work. But Robert is the genius, and it does take a genius sometime to make these connections because nobody noticed it before, that the three pyramids of Giza are laid out on the ground in the pattern of the three stars of Orion's belt. And skeptics will say, "Well, you can find any buildings and line them up with any stars you want," but Orion actually isn't any old constellation. Orion was the god Osiris in the sky. The ancient Egyptians called the Orion constellation Sahu, and they recognized it as the celestial image of the god Osiris. So what's being copied on the ground is the belt of a deity, of a celestial deity. It's not just a random constellation. And then when we take precession into account, you find something else very intriguing happening. First of all, you find that the exact orientation of the pyramids as it is today, and pretty much as it was when they're supposed to have been built 4,500 years ago, it's not precisely related to how Orion's Belt looked at that time. There's a bit of a twist, they're not quite right. But as you precess the stars backwards, as you go back and back and back and you come to around 10,500 BC, 12,500 years ago in the Younger Dryas, you find that suddenly they lock perfectly. They match perfectly with the three pyramids on the ground. And that's the same moment that the Great Sphinx, an equinoctial monument, aligned perfectly to the rising sun on the spring equinox. Anybody can test this through themselves. Just go to Giza on the 21st of March, be there before dawn, stand behind the Sphinx, and you will see the sun rising directly in line with the gaze of the Sphinx. But the question is what constellation was behind the Sphinx? And 12,500 years ago it was the constellation of Leo. And actually the constellation of Leo has a very Sphinx-like look. And I and my colleagues are pretty sure that the Sphinx was originally a lion entirely. And that over the thousands of

years, it became damaged, it became eroded, particularly the part of it that sticks out the head. There were periods when the Sphinx was completely covered in sand, but still the head stuck out. By the time you come to the Fourth Dynasty, when the Great Pyramids are supposedly built, by the time you come to the Fourth Dynasty, the lion, original lion head, would've been a complete mess. And we suggest that it was then re-carved into a pharaonic head. Egyptologists think it was the pharaoh Khafre, but there's no real strong resemblance, but it's definitely wearing the nemes headdress of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh. And we think that that's a result of a recarving of what was originally not only a lion-bodied, but also a lion-headed monument. It wouldn't make sense if you create an equinoctial marker in the time of Khafre 4,500 years ago, and the Sphinx is an equinoctial marker. I mean, it's 270 feet long and 70 feet high and it's looking directly at the rising sun on the equinox. If you create it then, you'd be more likely to create it in the shape of a bull, because that was the age of Taurus, when the constellation of Taurus housed the sun on the spring equinox. So why is it a lion? And again, we think that's because of that observation of the skies and putting on the ground as above, so below, putting on the ground an image of the sky at a particular time. Now, the fact that the Giza Plateau, it's a fact, of course, that Egyptologists completely dispute, but the fact that the principle monuments of the Giza Plateau, the three Great Pyramids and the Great Sphinx, all lock astronomically on the date of around 10,500 BC, to me, is most unlikely to be an accident. And actually, if you look at computer software at the sky at that time, you'll see that the Milky Way is very prominent and seems to be mirrored on the ground by the river Nile- ...prominent and seems to be mirrored on the ground by the river Nile. I suggest that may be one of the reasons amongst many why Giza was chosen as the site for this very special place. The point I want to make is that an astronomical design on the ground, which memorializes a very ancient date, does not have to have been done 12,500 years ago. If, from the ancient Egyptian point of view, you're there 4, 500 years ago, and there's a time 8,000 years before that, which is very, very, very important to you, you could use astronomical language and megalithic architecture to memorialize that date on the Giza Plateau, which is what we think we're looking at, except for one thing, and that's the erosion patterns on the Sphinx. We are pretty sure that the Sphinx, at least, does date back to 12 and a half thousand years ago and with it, the megalithic temples, the so-called Valley Temple, which stands just to the east and just to the south of the Sphinx and the Sphinx temple, which stands directly in front of the Sphinx. The Sphinx temple has largely been destroyed. But the Valley Temple, attributed to Khafre on no good grounds whatsoever, is a huge megalithic construction with blocks of limestone that weigh up to 100 tons each. Yet, it has been remodeled/refaced with granite. There are granite blocks that are placed on top of the core limestone blocks. Those core limestone blocks were already eroded when the granite blocks were put there. Why? Because the granite blocks have actually been purposefully and deliberately cut to fit into the erosion marks on the, we believe, much older megalithic blocks there. I think Giza is a very complicated site. I would never seek to divorce the dynastic ancient Egyptians from the Great Pyramids. They were closely involved in the construction of the Great Pyramids as we see them today. But what I do suggest is that there were very low platforms on the Giza Plateau that are much older and that when

we look at the three Great Pyramids, we are looking at a renovation and a restoration and a enhancement of much older structures that had existed on the Giza Plateau for a much longer period before that. Actually, the Great Pyramid is built around a natural hill. That natural hill might've been seen as the original primeval mound to the ancient Egyptians.

Lex Fridman
So the idea is that the Sphinx was there long before the pyramids, and the pyramids were built by the Egyptians to celebrate further an already holy place.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. There were platforms in place where the pyramids stand, not the pyramids as we see them today, but the base of those pyramids was already in place at that time.

Lex Fridman
What's the evidence that the Egyptologists use to make the attributions that they do for the dating of the pyramids and the Sphinx?

Graham Hancock
Well, the three great pyramids of Giza are different from later pyramids. This is another problem that I have with the whole thing is the story of pyramid building. When did it really begin? The timeline that we get from Egyptology is the first pyramid is the pyramid of the Pharaoh, Djoser, the Step Pyramid at Saqqara, about 100 years or so before the Giza pyramids were built. Then, we have this explosion in the fourth dynasty of true pyramids. We have three of them attributed to a single Pharaoh, Sneferu, who built, supposedly, the pyramid at Meidum and the two pyramids at Dahshur, the Bent and the Red Pyramid. Then, within that same 100-year span, we have the Giza pyramids being built. This is according to the Orthodox chronology. Then, suddenly, once the Giza project is finished, pyramid building goes into a massive slump in Ancient Egypt. The pyramids of the Fifth Dynasty are, frankly speaking, a mess outside. They're very inferior constructions. You can hardly recognize them as pyramids at all. But what happens when you go inside them is you find that they're extensively covered in hieroglyphs and imagery, repeating the name of the king who was supposedly buried in that place. Whereas, the Giza pyramids have no internal inscriptions whatsoever. What we do have is one piece of graffiti about which there is some controversy. Basic statistics: it's a 6 million-ton structure. Each side is about 750 feet long. It's aligned almost perfectly to true north, south, east, and west within 3/60ths of a single degree, the 06ths, because degrees are divided into 60s. It's the precision of the orientation and the absolute massive size of the thing plus its very complicated internal passageways that are involved in it. In the ninth century, the Great Pyramid still had its facing stones in place, but there was an Arab Caliph, Khalifa al-Mamun, who had already realized that other pyramids did have their entrances in the north face. Nobody knew where the entrance to the Great Pyramid was. But he figured if there's an entrance to this thing, it's going to be in the north face somewhere. He put together a team of workers. They went in with

sledgehammers. They started smashing where he thought would be the entrance. They cut their way into the Great Pyramid for a distance of maybe 100 feet. Then, the hammering that they did dislodged something. They heard a little bit further away, something big falling, and they realized there was a cavity there. They started heading in that direction. Then, they joined the internal passageway of the Great Pyramid, the descending and the ascending corridors that go up. When you go up the ascending corridor, every one of the internal passageways in the Great Pyramid that people can walk in slopes at an angle of 26 degrees. That's interesting because the angle of slope of the exterior of the Great Pyramid is 52 degrees. We know mathematicians were at work as well as geometers in the creation of the Great Pyramid. If you go up the Grand Gallery, which is at the end of the so-called ascending corridor, and it's above the so-called Queen's Chamber... You go up the Grand Gallery. You're eventually going to come to what is known as the King's Chamber in which there is a sarcophagus. That sarcophagus is a little bit too big to have been got in through the narrow entrance passageway. It's almost as though the so-called King's Chamber was built around the sarcophagus, already in place. Above the King's Chamber are five other chambers. These are known as relieving chambers. The theory was that they were built to relieve the pressure on the King's Chamber of the weight of the monument. But I think what makes that theory dubious is the fact that even lower down, where more weight was involved, you have the Queen's Chamber, and there are no such relieving chambers above that. In the top of these five chambers, a British adventurer and vandal called Howard Vyse, who dynamited his way into those chambers in the first place, allegedly found... Well, he claims he found a piece of graffiti left by a work-gang naming the Pharaoh Khufu. It's true. I've been in that chamber, and there is the cartouche of Khufu there. Quite recognizable. But the dispute around it is whether that is a genuine piece of graffiti dating from the Old Kingdom or whether Howard Vyse actually put it there himself because he was in desperate need of money at the time. I'm not sure what the answer to that question is. But it's one of the reasons that Egyptologists feel confident in saying that the pyramid is the work of Khufu. Another is what is called the Wadi al-Jarf Papyri, where, on the Red Sea, the diary of an individual Merer was found. He talks about bringing highly polished limestone to the Great Pyramid. It's clear that what he's talking about is the facing stones of the Great Pyramid. He's not talking about the body of the Great Pyramid. He's talking about the facing stones of the Great Pyramid during the reign of Khufu. That's another reason why the Great Pyramid is attributed to Khufu. But I think that Khufu was undoubtedly involved in the Great Pyramid and in a big way. But I think he was building upon and elaborating a much older structure. I think the heart of that structure is the subterranean chamber, which is 100 feet vertically beneath the base of the Great Pyramid. Anybody who suffers from claustrophobia will not enjoy being down there. You've got to go down a 26-degree sloping corridor until a distance of about 300 feet. It's 100 feet vertically, but the slope means you're going to walk a distance of... Not walk. You've got to ape walk. You're almost going to have to crawl. I've learned from long experience that the best way to go down these corridors is actually backwards. If you go forward, you keep bumping your head on them because they're only three feet five inches high. You get down to the bottom. You have a short horizontal passage, and then you

get into the subterranean chamber. The theory of Egyptology is that this was supposed to be the burial place of Khufu, but after cutting out that 300-foot long, 26-degree sloping passage, a lot of which passes through bedrock, and having cut the subterranean chamber out of bedrock, gone to all that trouble, they decided they wouldn't bury him there. They built what's now known as the Queen's Chamber as his burial chamber. But then they decided that wouldn't do either. They then built the King's chamber, and that's where the Pharaoh is supposed to have been buried. Those Arab raiders under Khalifa al-Mamun didn't find anything in the Great Pyramid at all.

Lex Fridman
Your idea is that the Sphinx and maybe some aspects of the pyramid were much earlier. Why that's important is, in that case, it would be evidence of some transfer of technology-

Graham Hancock
Yes.

Lex Fridman
...from a much older civilization. The idea is that during the Younger Dryas, most of that civilization was either destroyed or damaged, and they desperately scattered across the globe.

Graham Hancock
Seeking refuge.

Lex Fridman
Seeking refuge and telling stories of maybe, one, the importance of the stars, their knowledge about the stars, and their knowledge about building and knowledge about navigation.

Graham Hancock
That's roughly the idea. It's interesting that the ancient Egyptians have a notion of an epoch that they call Zep Tepi, which is the first time. It means the first time. This is when the gods walk the earth. This is when seven sages brought wisdom to Ancient Egypt. That is seen as the origin of ancient Egyptian civilization. There are king lists... by the ancient Egyptians themselves. There are king lists that go back way beyond the First Dynasty/go back 30,000 years into the past in Ancient Egypt, considered to be entirely mythical by Egyptologists. But nevertheless, it's interesting that there's that reference to remote time. Now, what you also have in Egypt are what might almost be described as secret societies. The followers of Horus are one of those specifically tasked with bringing forward the knowledge from the first time into later periods. The souls of Pe and Nekhen are another one of these mysterious secret society groups who are possessors of knowledge that they transmit to the future. What I'm broadly suggesting is that those survivors of the Younger Dryas

cataclysm, who settled in Giza may have been relatively small in number. It's interesting that they're referred to in the Edfu Building Texts as seven sages because that repeats again and again. It's also in Mesopotamia. It's seven sages, seven Apkallu, who come out of the waters of the Persian Gulf and teach people all the skills of agriculture and of architecture and of astronomy. It's found all around the world that there was a relatively small number of people who took refuge in Giza, who benefited from the survival skills of the hunter-foragers who lived at Giza at that time, and who also passed on their knowledge to those hunter-foragers. But it was not knowledge that was ready to be put into shape at that time. That knowledge was then preserved and kept and handled within very secretive groups that passed it down over thousands of years. Finally, it burst into full form in the fourth dynasty in Ancient Egypt. The notion that knowledge might be transferred over thousands of years shouldn't be absurd. We know, for example, in the case of ancient Israel... It goes back to the time of Abraham, which is pretty much, I think, around 2000 BC. Knowledge has been preserved from that time right up to the present day. If you can preserve knowledge for 4,000 years, you can probably preserve it for eight.

Lex Fridman
Now, of course, the air bars on this are quite large, but if an advanced ice-age civilization existed, where do you think it was? Where do you think we might find it one day if it existed, and how big do you think it might have been?

Graham Hancock
Well, this is where I'm often accused of presenting a God-of-the-gaps argument, that I think there was a lost civilization because there's lots of the earth that archeologists have never looked at. Of course, I'm not thinking that. These are very special gaps that I'm interested in. I'm interested in them because of all the curiosities and the puzzlement that I've expressed to you before. It's not just because they're gaps in the archeological record. It's because those gaps involve places that were very interesting places to live during the ice age. They specifically include the Sahara Desert, which was not a desert during the ice age and went through this warm wet period when it was very, very fertile. Certainly, some archeology has been done in the Sahara, but it's fractional. It's tiny. I think if we want to get into the true origins of Ancient Egyptian civilization, of the peoples of Ancient Egypt, we need to be looking in the Sahara for that. The Amazon rainforest is another example of this. I think the Sahara is about 9 million square kilometers. The Amazon that's left under dense canopy rainforest is about 5 million square kilometers, maybe closer to six. Then, you have the continental shelves that were submerged by sea level rise at the end of the ice age. Now, it's well established that sea level rose by 400 feet, but it didn't rise by 400 feet overnight. It came in dribs and drabs. There were periods of very rapid, quite significant sea level rise, and there were periods when the sea level was rising much more slowly. That 400-foot sea level rise is spread out over a period of about 10,000 years. But there are episodes within it like meltwater pulse 1B like meltwater pulse 1A when the flooding was really immense.

Lex Fridman
How big do you think it might've been? Do you think it was spread across the globe? If there were expert navigators, do you think they spread across the globe?

Graham Hancock
Well, the reason that I'm talking about the gaps is I don't know where this civilization started or where it was based. All I'm seeing are clues and mysteries and puzzles that intrigue me and which suggest to me that something is missing from our past. I'm not inclined to look for that missing something in, for example, Northern Europe, because Northern Europe was not a very nice place to live during the ice age. I mean, nobody smart would build a civilization in Northern Europe 12,000 years ago. It was a hideous, frozen wasteland. The places to look are places that were hospitable and welcoming to human beings during the ice age. That, of course, includes the coastlines that are now underwater. Of course, it includes the Sahara Desert. Of course, it includes the Amazon rainforest as well. All of these places, I think, are candidates for "my lost civilization." Because I think, largely from those ancient maps, that it was a navigating seafaring civilization, I suspect that it wasn't only in one place. It was probably in a number of places. Then, I can only speculate. Maybe there was a cultural value where it was felt that it was not appropriate to interfere with the lives of hunter-foragers at that time. Maybe it was felt that they should keep their distance from them, just as, even today, there is a feeling that we shouldn't be interfering too much with the uncontacted tribes in the Amazon rainforest. Although interestingly, some of those tribes are now using cell phones. That possibility may have been there in the past. Only when we come to a global cataclysm does it become essential to have outreach and, actually, to take refuge amongst those hunter-forager populations. That is the hypothesis that I'm putting forward. I'm not claiming that it's a fact. But, for me, it helps to explain the evidence.

Lex Fridman
That speaks to one of the challenges that archeologists provide to this idea, is that there is a lot of evidence of humans in the ice age and they appear to be all hunter-gatherers. But, like you said, only a small percent of areas where humans have lived have been studied by archeologists.

Graham Hancock
That's right. Very tiny percent. Even a tiny percent of every archeological site has been studied by archeologists, too. Typically, one to 5% of any archeological site is excavated.

Lex Fridman
I mean, that's why Göbekli Tepe fills my mind with imagination, especially seeing it as a time capsule. It's almost certain that there is places on earth we haven't discovered that, once we do, even if it's after the ice age, will change our view of human history. What would be

your dream thing to discover, like Göbekli Tepe, that says a definitive perturbation to our understanding of ice age history?

Graham Hancock
Some archive. Some hall of records. There's both mystical associations with the Hall of Records at Giza from people like the Edgar Cayce organization. There's also ancient Egyptian traditions which suggest that something was concealed beneath the Sphinx. This is not an idea that is alien to Ancient Egypt. It's quite present in Ancient Egypt. So far, as far as I know, nobody has some dug down beneath the Sphinx. Of course, there's very good reasons for that. You don't want to damage the place too much. But let's call it the Hall of Records. I'd love to find that. But I think in a way that's what Göbekli Tepe is. Göbekli Tepe is a hall of records. It's interesting that just as I've tried to outline, I hope reasonably clearly, that the three great pyramids of Giza match Orion's belt in 10,500 BC just as the Sphinx matches Leo in 10,500 BC, 12,500 years ago or so. Pillar 43 in Enclosure D at Göbekli Tepe contains what a number of researchers, myself included, regard as an astronomical diagram. Martin Sweatman of Edinburgh University has brought forward the best work in this field. But it was initially started by a gentleman called Paul Burley who noticed that one of the figures on Pillar 43 is a scorpion, very much like we represent the constellation of Scorpio today and that above it is a vulture with outstretched wings, which is in a posture very similar to the constellation that we call Sagittarius. On that outstretched wing is a circular object, and the suggestion is that it's marking the time when the sun was at the center of the dark rift in the Milky Way at the summer solstice 12 and a half thousand years ago. That's what it's marking. It's interesting that the same date can be deduced from Pillar... Of course, it's controversial. Martin Sweatman's ideas are by no means accepted by archeology. But he's done very, very thorough, detailed, statistical work on this. I'm personally convinced. We have a time capsule at Göbekli Tepe, which is memorializing a date that is at least 1,200 years before Göbekli Tepe was built if that dating of 11,600 years ago proves to be absolutely the oldest date as it is at present. The date memorialized on Pillar 43 is 12,800 years ago, the beginning of the Younger Dryas, the beginning of the impact event. Then, Giza does the same thing but in much larger scale. It uses massive megalithic architecture, which is very difficult to destroy, and a profound knowledge of astronomy to encode a date in a language that any culture which is sufficiently literate in astronomy will be able to decode. We don't have to have a script that we can't read like we do with the Indus Valley civilization or with the Easter Island script. We don't have to have a script that can't be interpreted. If you use astronomical language, then any astronomical literate civilization will be able to give you a date. Hoover Dam has a star map built into it. That star map is part of an exhibition that was put there at the founding of the Hoover Dam. What it does is it freezes the sky above the Hoover Dam at the moment of its completion. Oscar Hansen, the artist who created that piece said so specifically that this would be so that any future culture would be able to know the time of the dam's construction. You can use astronomy and architecture to memorialize a particular date.

Lex Fridman
Quick pause. Bathroom break.

Graham Hancock
Sounds good.

Lex Fridman
To me, the story that we've been talking about... It is both exciting if the mainstream archeology narrative is correct and the one you're constructing is correct. Both are super interesting because the mainstream archeology perspective means that there's something about the human mind from which the pyramids/these ideas spring naturally. You place humans anywhere. You place them on Mars. It's going to come out that way. That's an interesting story of human psychology that then becomes even more interesting when you evolve out of Africa with homo sapiens, how they think about the world. That's super interesting. Then, if there's an ancient civilization/advanced civilization that explains why there's so many similar types of ideas that spread, that means that there's so much undiscovered still about the spring of these ideas of civilization that come. To me, they're both fascinating. I don't know why there's so much infighting.

Graham Hancock
I think it's partly territorial. I cannot speak of all archeologists, but some archeologists feel very territorial about their profession. They do not feel happy about outsiders entering their realm, especially if those outsiders have a large platform. I've found that the attacks on me by archeologists have increased step-by-step with the increase of my exposure. I wasn't very interesting to them when I just had one minor bestseller in 1992 with a book called The Sign and the Seal. But when Fingerprints of the Gods was published in 1995 and became a global bestseller, then I started to attract their attention and appear to have been regarded as a threat to them. That is the case today. That is why Ancient Apocalypse Season 1 was defined as the most dangerous show on Netflix. It's why the Society for American Archeology wrote an open letter to Netflix asking Netflix to reclassify the series of science fiction. It's why they accused the series of antisemitism, misogyny, white supremacism, and... I don't know, a whole bunch of other things like that, that have nothing to do with anything that's in the series. It was like, "We must shut this down. This is so dangerous to us." There are many more dangerous things in the world than a television series going on right now. But maybe it was seen as a danger to archeology, that this non-archeologist was in archeological terrain and being viewed and seen and read by large numbers of people. Maybe that was part of the problem. Human nature being what it is, I noticed that two of my principal critics, John Hoopes from the University of Kansas and Flint Dibble, who's now teaching at the University of Cardiff in Wales in the UK, are both people who like to have media exposure. John Hoopes has just recently started a YouTube channel. Flint Dibble has had one for quite a while. A pretty small number of followers. I think that they feel that they should be the ones who are getting the global attention and that it's not right that I am and

that the best way to stop that is to stop me, to shut me down, to get me canceled and basically requiring Netflix to relabel my series from a documentary to a science fiction, which is what they actually had the temerity to suggest to Netflix. If that had gone through, if Netflix had listened to them, that would've effectively been the cancellation of my documentary series. It would no longer have been ranked under documentaries. It was a deliberate attempt to shut me down. I see that going on again and again, and it's so unfortunate and so unnecessary. I've become very defensive towards archeology. I hit back. After 30 years of these attacks on my work, I'm tired of it. I do defend myself. Sometimes, I'm perhaps over-vigorous in that defense. Maybe I was a little bit too strong in my critique of archeology in the first season of Ancient Apocalypse. Maybe I should have been a bit gentler and a bit kinder. I've tried to reflect that in the second season and to bring also many more Indigenous voices into the second season, as well as the voices of many more archeologists.

Lex Fridman
Yeah. In general, I got a chance to get a glimpse of the archeology community. In archeology/in science, in general, I don't have much patience for this arrogance or snark or dismissal of general human curiosity that I think your work inspires in people. That's why people like Ed Barnhart, who I recently had a conversation with... He radiates kindness and curiosity as well. It's like that kind of approach to ideas, especially about human history, it inspires people.

Graham Hancock
Exactly.

Lex Fridman
Inspires millions of people to ask questions.

Graham Hancock
Exactly. Exactly.

Lex Fridman
I mean, that's why you had Keanu Reeves on the new season. He's basically coming to the show from that same perspective of curiosity.

Graham Hancock
Keanu is genuinely curious about the past and very, very interested in it. He's bringing to it questions that everybody brings to the past. He's speaking for every man in the series.

Lex Fridman
Given that, can you maybe steelman the case that archeologists make about this period that we've been talking about? Can make the case that that is indeed what happened; is it

was hunter-gatherers for a long time, and then there was a cataclysm, a very difficult period in human history with the Younger Dryas, and that changed the environment and then led to the springing up of civilizations at different places on earth? Can you make the case for that?

Graham Hancock
No, I completely understand why that is the position of archeology because that's what they've found. Archeology is very much wishing to define itself as a science. The techniques of weighing, and measuring, and counting are very key to what archeology does. In what they've found and what they've studied around the world, they don't see any traces of a lost civilization. We live in a very politically correct world today. The idea that some lost civilization brought knowledge to other cultures around the world is seen as almost racist or colonialist in some way. It triggers that aspect as well. But basically, I think majority of archeologists are in complete good faith on this. I don't think that anybody's really seeking to frame me. I think that what we are hearing from most archeologists... some much more vicious than others. But what we're hearing from most archeologists is this is what we found, and we don't see evidence for a lost civilization in it. To that, I... ... civilization in it. And to that, I must reply, "Please look at the myths. Please consider the implications of the Younger Dryas. Please look at the ancient astronomy. Please look at those ancient maps and don't just dismiss them and sneer at them. And for God's sake, please look more deeply at the parts of the world that were immensely habitable and attractive during the ice age and that have hardly been studied by archaeology at all, before you tell us that your theory is the only one that can possibly be correct." In fact, it's a very arrogant and silly position of archeology, because archaeological theories are always being overthrown. It can take years, it can take decades. It took decades in the case of the Clovis-First hypothesis for the settlement of the Americas. But sooner or later a bad idea will be kicked out by a preponderance of evidence that that idea does not explain.

Lex Fridman
If we can just look back at your debate with Flint Dibble on Joe Rogan Experience, what are some takeaways from that? What have you learned? Maybe what are some things you like about Flint? You said that he's one of your big critics, but what do you like about his ideas? And what were you maybe bothered by?

Graham Hancock
First of all, just very recently, and it can be found on my YouTube channel and it's signaled on my website, I have made a video. Runs about an hour, which looks at a series of statements that Flint made during the debate, which I was not prepared to answer. And it turns out that some of those statements are not correct. The notion, for example, that there were three million shipwrecks that have been mapped, Flint actually uses the word "mapped." Three million shipwrecks that have been mapped at one point in the debate. And I've put that clip into the video that I brought out. That is not a fact, that is an estimate, a UNESCO estimate.

And actually in the small print on one of the slides that he has on the screen, you can see the word "estimate," but he never expresses that word out loud. So those who are listening to the podcast rather than watching it wouldn't even have a chance to see that. And I, sitting there in the studio didn't see that word estimate either. And I didn't know that. I thought, "My God. If Flint has a point here. If there'd been three million shipwrecks found and mapped, if that's the case, the absence of any shipwreck from a lost civilization of the ice age is a problem." But then I discovered that it isn't three million shipwrecks that have been mapped. It's much, much less than that. And maybe it's 250,000. Still a large number, but most of them from the last 1,000 years. And unfortunately, what Flint didn't go into, and perhaps he should have shared with the audience ... And again I go into this in the video, is that there is indisputable evidence that human beings were seafarers as much as 50 or 60,000 years ago. The peopling of Australia involved a relatively short 90 kilometers, 100-kilometer ocean voyage. But nevertheless, it was an ocean voyage. And it must have involved a large enough people, a large enough number of people to create a permanent population that wouldn't go extinct. The settlement of Cyprus is the same thing. It was always an island even during the ice age. And no ships have survived that speak to the settlement of Australia, and no ships have survived that speak to the settlement of Cyprus either. But that doesn't mean that that thing didn't happen.

Lex Fridman
I [inaudible 01:36:33] linger on this, because for me it was, the shipwrecks thing was convincing. And then looking back, first of all, watching your video, but also just realizing the peopling of Australia part, that's mind boggling. 50,000 years ago. Just imagine being the person standing on the shore, looking out into the ocean. Standing on the shore of a harsh environment, looking out the ocean, a harsh environment and deciding that, "You know what? I'm going to go towards near certain death and explore-

Graham Hancock
You don't know what's on the other side of that water. You can't see 90 kilometers-

Lex Fridman
And humans did it.

Graham Hancock
Yeah.

Lex Fridman
I love humans so much.

Graham Hancock
Again, it's that urge to explore. And I suggest that it probably began with a few pioneers who made the journey there and back. They ventured into the water. They definitely had boats.

And lo and behold, after a two- or three-day voyage, they ended up on a coastline. You're an individual. You've got by relatively straightforward island- hopping, where each island is within sight of each other as far as Timor. And when you get to Timor, suddenly you can't island hop anymore. There's an expansive ocean that you can't see across. But that urge to explore, that curiosity, that is central to the human condition would undoubtedly have led some adventurous individuals to want to find out more and even be willing to risk their lives. And that first reconnoitering of what lay beyond that strait would've undoubtedly been undertaken by very few individuals. Not enough to create a permanent population in Australia, but when they came back with the good news that there's a whole land there, that's the land that geographers call Sahul, which just as Sunda was the Ice age Indonesian and Malaysian Peninsula all joined together into one landmass. So Sahul was New Guinea joined to Australia. So they would've made landfall in New Guinea. And then they think, "Well, here is this vast open, incredible land. We need to bring more people here." And that would've involved larger craft. You need to bring people with resources and you need to bring enough of them, both men and women in order to produce a population that will not rapidly become extinct. And it's the same in Cyprus. There the work that's been done suggests very strongly that we're looking at planned migrations of groups of people in excess of 1,000 at a time, bringing animals with them. And this certainly would've involved multiple boats and boats of a significant size.

Lex Fridman
And there's no archaeological evidence of those boats?

Graham Hancock
None whatsoever. The oldest boat that's ever been found in the world is the Dokos shipwreck off Greece, which is around 5,000 years old if, I recall correctly.

Lex Fridman
So everything that makes a boat is lost at the time?

Graham Hancock
Yes. Boats can be preserved under certain circumstances. There's a wreck at the bottom of the Black Sea, almost two miles deep. I didn't know the Black Sea was that deep. But there's a wreck and there's no oxygen down there that is more than 2000 years old and is still in pretty much perfect condition. But in other conditions, the structure of the ship evaporates. Sometimes what you're left with is the cargo of the ship. And you could say there was a ship that sank here, but the ship itself has gone. The fact is we know that our ancestors were seafarers as much as 50,000 years ago. And no ship has survived to testify to that, yet we accept that they were.

Lex Fridman
Do you think you one day we'll find a ship that's 10, 20, 30, 40, 50,000 years old?

Graham Hancock
It's not impossible. I think it's quite unlikely, given the very thin survival of ships the further back you go in time, with the oldest, as I say, being about 6,000 years old now. And then the other thing to take into account is the Younger Dryas event itself and the cataclysmic circumstances of that event. And the roiling of the seas that would've taken place then, how much would've survived in a boat accident at that time, would've survived for thousands of years afterwards, I'm not sure. But I don't give up hope, it's possible.

Lex Fridman
Okay. So that's back to the three million shipwrecks.

Graham Hancock
Yeah.

Lex Fridman
So what's your takeaway from that debate?

Graham Hancock
Well, my takeaway from that debate is that I should have been better prepared and I should have been less angry. I have to say that Flint had really disturbed me with these constant snide, not quite exact, references to racism and white supremacism in my work. I detest such things, and to have those labels stuck on me ... He's always avoided taking direct responsibility, pretty much always avoided. There's one example that I include in the video I've made, where he really hasn't successfully avoided it. But in most cases he's trying to say that I rely on sources that were racist, but that he's not saying that I myself am a racist. But the end result of those statements is that people all around the world came to the conclusion that Graham Hancock is a racist and a white supremacist. And that really got under my skin and it really upset me. And I felt angry about it and I felt that I was there to defend Ancient Apocalypse, season one, whereas in fact, what I was there to do was to listen to a series of lectures where an archaeologist tells me what archaeologists have found. And that somehow I'm to deduce that from what they have found, they're not going to find anything else. At least not anything to do with the lost civilization.

Lex Fridman
Listen, I feel you. I've seen the intensity of the attacks and the whole racism label is the one that can get under your skin. And it's a toolbox that's been prevalent over the past, let's say decade, maybe a little bit more, as a method of cancellation. When a person is the opposite of racist, very often it's hilarious to watch. But it can get under your skin, especially when you have certain dynamics that happen on the internet, where it seeps into a Wikipedia page and then other people read that Wikipedia page and you get to hear it from friends, "Oh, I didn't know you're ... " whatever. And you realize that Wikipedia description of who you

are is actually has a lot of power, not by people that know you well, but people that just are learning about you for the first time-

Graham Hancock
Definitely.

Lex Fridman
And they can really start to annoy you and get onto your skin, when people are indirectly injecting ... They're writing articles about you. They can then be cited by Wikipedia. It can really bother a person who's actually trying to do good science, or just trying to inspire people with different ideas.

Graham Hancock
I felt that my work was being deliberately misrepresented and I felt that I, as a human being, was being insulted and wronged in ways that are deeply hurtful. My wife and I have six children between us and we have nine grandchildren. And of those nine grandchildren, seven are of mixed race. And this is my family, and these are kids who are going to grow up and read Wikipedia and learn from reading Wikipedia that Grandpa was some kind of racist. This is a personal issue for me, and I'm afraid I carried that personal anger into the debate and it made me less effective than I should have been. But ultimately I do want to pay tribute to Flint. He is an excellent debater. He's got a very sharp mind. He's a very clever man and he's very fast on his feet. And I recognize that. I was definitely up against a superior debater in that debate. I'm not sure that I have those debating skills and I certainly didn't have them on that particular day. I also admire about Flint something else, which is that he was willing to be there. Most archaeologists don't want to talk to me at all. They want to insult me from the sidelines. They want to make sure that Wikipedia keeps on calling me a pseudo-archaeologist, or a purveyor of pseudo-archaeological theories. They want to make sure that the hints of racism are there, but they actually don't want to sit down and confront me. At least Flint was willing to do that and I'm grateful to him for that. And I think in that sense it is an important encounter between people with, let's say, an alternative view of history and those with the very much mainstream view of history that archaeology gives us. And he's also a very determined character. He doesn't give up. So all of those things about him I admire and respect. But, I think he fought dirty during the debate, and I've said exactly why in this video that I now have up on YouTube.

Lex Fridman
To say a positive thing that I enjoyed, I think towards the end and him speaking about agriculture was pretty interesting. So the techniques of archaeology are pretty interesting, where you can get some insights through the fog of time about what people were doing, how they were living. That's pretty interesting.

Graham Hancock
It's very interesting. It's a very important discipline. And I've said many times before, publicly, I couldn't do any of my work without the work that archaeologists do. I emphasize very strongly in this video that I don't study what archaeologists study. But nevertheless, the data that archaeologists have generated over the last century or so has been incredibly valuable to me in the work that I do. But, when I look at the Great Sphinx and the studies of archaeology saying that this is the work of the pharaoh Khafre, despite the absence of any single contemporary inscription that describes it to Khafre, and in fact the presence of other inscriptions that say that it was already there in the time of Khufu, I am not looking at what egyptologists study. They just dismiss all of that and lock into the Khafre connection. At Gobekli Tepe, I'm not really looking at what archaeologists look at, I'm looking at the alignments of the megaliths and how they seem to track precession of the star Sirius over a period of time. Archaeologists aren't interested in any of that. So I value and respect archeology. I think it's an incredible tool for investigating our past, but I wish archaeologists would bring a slightly gentler frame of mind to it and a slightly opener perspective. And also that archaeologists would be willing to trust the general public to make up their own minds. It's as though certain archaeologists are afraid of the public being presented with an alternative point of view, which they regard as quote, unquote, "dangerous," because they somehow underestimate the intelligence of the general public and think the general public are just going to accept that. Actually by condemning those alternative point of view, archaeologists make it much more likely that the general public will accept those alternative point of view, because there is a great distrust of experts in our society today. And behaving in a snobbish arrogant way, we archaeologists are the only people who are really qualified to speak about the past and anybody else who speaks about the past is dangerous. That actually is not helpful to archaeology in the long term. There could be a much more positive and a much more cooperative relationship. And I can see that relationship with a gentleman like Ed Barnhart. Was very much the case with archaeologist Martti Parssinen from the University of Helsinki and with geographer Alcio Arranzi, Brazilian geographer. Very, very senior figure who I worked with in the Amazon for season two of Ancient Apocalypse, looking at these astonishing earthworks that have emerged from the Amazon jungle and which more and more are now being found with LiDAR. Indeed, we found some of them ourselves with LiDAR while we were there.

Lex Fridman
Yeah. That was an incredible part of the show that I got a chance to preview. It's like there's all this earthworks. Yeah. The traces of things built on the ground that probably you can only really appreciate when you look from up above.

Graham Hancock
That's right.

Lex Fridman
So the idea that they built stuff that you can only appreciate when viewed from up above means they had a very deep relationship with the sky.

Graham Hancock
With the sky. And a very good knowledge of geometry as well, because these are geometrical structures and some of them even seem to incorporate geometrical games, almost like squaring the circle. It's not quite that, but you have a lovely square earthwork with a lovely circle earthwork right in the middle of it. Whatever else they were, they were geometers. They were not just builders of fantastically huge earthworks that nobody expected in the Amazon. Not just builders of cities that we now know existed in the Amazon. But, that they were astronomers and mathematicians as well.

Lex Fridman
Everything we're talking about is so full of mystery. It's just fascinating, especially the farther back we go.

Graham Hancock
That's what I love about the past, is the mystery that's there. And that's another thing that I regret about some archeologists is that their mission seems to drain all mystery out of the past, to suck it dry like some vampire sucking the blood out of the past and to reduce it to a series of numbers that appear to be scientific. I think that's most unfortunate. The past is deeply mysterious. The whole story of life on earth is deeply mysterious. We were talking about the timeline of human beings, but if you go back to the formation of the earth itself, if I've got the figures right, it's about four-and-a-half billion years ago that the Earth supposedly formed. It was then incredibly hot and inhospitable to life for the next several hundred million years. But it was actually Francis Crick who pointed out something odd, that within 100 million years of the earth being cool enough to support life, there's bacterial life all over the planet. And Crick wrote a book called Life Itself that was published in 1981, and he suggested that life had been brought here by a process of panspermia. Now that's an idea that's around in circulation that comets may carry bacteria, which can seed life on planets. But, Crick actually in Life Itself was talking about directed panspermia. He envisaged ... This is Crick, not me. He envisaged an alien civilization far away across the galaxy, which faced extinction. Perhaps a supernova was going to go off in the neighborhood. They were highly advanced. Their first thought it might've been, "Let's get ourselves off the planet and go and populate some other planet," but the distances of interstellar space were so great. So their second thought was, "Let's preserve our DNA. Let's put genetically engineered bacteria into cryogenic chambers and fire them off into the universe in all directions." And bottom line of Crick's theory in Life Itself is one of those cryogenic containers containing bacterial life from another solar system crashed into the early Earth. And that's why life began so suddenly here on Earth.

Lex Fridman
If we as a human civilization continue, I think that is a one way to create backups of us elsewhere in the universe, given the space is to do a life gun and shoot it everywhere and it just plants. And you hope that whatever is the magic that makes up human consciousness ... And if that magic was already there in the initial DNA of the bacteria-

Graham Hancock
The potential for that magic is there.

Lex Fridman
The potential is there.

Graham Hancock
And evolutionary forces will work upon it in different ways in different environments. But the potential is there. Yes. It's something that we would do. If we were facing a complete extinction of life on planet Earth, a major global effort would be made to preserve it somehow. And that might well include firing off cryogenic chambers into the universe and hoping that some of them would land somewhere hospitable.

Lex Fridman
And as you were mentioning, there's just so many interesting mysteries along the way here. For example, I think like three billion years it was single-cell organisms. So it seems like life was pretty good for single-cell organisms, that there was no need for multicellularity that for animals, for any of this kind of stuff. So why is that? It seems like you could adapt much better if you are a more complicated organism. It took a really long time to take that leap. Is it because it's really hard to do? And what was the forcing function to do that kind of leap? And the same. For us to be selfish and self-obsessed for us humans, what was the magic leap to Homo sapiens from the other hominids? And why did Homo sapiens win out against the Neanderthals and the other competitors? Why are they not around anymore? So those are all fascinating mysteries and it feels like the more we propose radical ideas about our past and take it seriously and explore the more we'll be able to figure out that puzzle that leads all the way back to Homo sapiens and maybe all the way back to the origin of life on Earth.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. Yeah. I think that Homo sapiens is the tail end of a very long, deep series of mysteries that goes back right to the beginning of life on this planet. And probably long before actually, because this planet is part of the universe. And God knows what else is out there in the universe.

Lex Fridman
Why do you think Homo sapiens evolved? What was the magic thing? There's a bunch of theories about fire leading to meat, to cooking, which can fuel the brain. That's one. The other is social interaction. We're able to use our imagination to construct ideas and share those ideas and tell great stories and that is somehow an evolutionary advantage. Do you have any favorite conceptions of-

Graham Hancock
Well, it's interesting. There's no doubt that anatomically modern humans and Neanderthals coexisted in Europe for at least 10,000 years, probably more than that. And yet one of the popular views is that anatomically modern humans wiped out the Neanderthals, that we killed them off. But, at the same time we were into breeding with the Neanderthals. In a sense, the Neanderthals are not gone. They're still within us today. We are part Neanderthal. There's another theory that I've read about. There is some evidence that Neanderthals were cannibals, that there was ritual cannibalism took place amongst Neanderthals and particularly the eating of human brains. And this can cause Kuru, which can kill off whole populations. That's another suggestion of why the Neanderthals died out. There's lots of possibilities that have been put forward. Maybe we just out-competed them. Maybe anatomically modern humans had some brain connections that they didn't have. Even though the Neanderthal brain was bigger than the brain of anatomically modern human beings, as the old saying goes, size isn't everything. Maybe we just had a more compact, more efficient brain. The fact of the matter is that Neanderthals and Denisovans did not survive the rise of Homo sapiens.

Lex Fridman
For our discussion, though, what is interesting is all the hominids seem to be explorers.

Graham Hancock
Yes.

Lex Fridman
They spread. I didn't know this.

Graham Hancock
The fact that Homo erectus was all over the planet more than a million years ago is testament to that. And I do think that exploration urge is fundamental to humanity. And I would like to say that's what I think I'm doing. I'm exercising my urge to explore the past in my own way, making my own path and defining my own route.

Lex Fridman
That's the leap from non-human to human. One of the things you've discussed is your idea of what was the leap to human civilization? What is the driver? What is the inspiration for humans to form civilizations? And for you, that's shamanism.

Graham Hancock
Definitely.

Lex Fridman
Can you explain what that means?

Graham Hancock
I think that shamanism is the origin of everything of value in humanity. I think it was the earliest form of science. When I spend time with shamans in the Amazon, I observe people who are constantly experimenting with plants in a very scientific way. They're always trying a pinch of this and a pinch of that in different forms, for example, of the ayahuasca brew, to see if it enhances it or makes it different in any way. The invention of curare is a remarkable scientific feat, which is entirely down to shamans in the Amazon. They are the scientists of the hunter-forager state of society and they were the ancient leaders of human civilization. So I think all civilization arises out of shamanism. And shamanism is a naturally scientific endeavor, where experimentation is undertaken an exploration and investigation of the environment around us. And what I'm suggesting is that one group, perhaps more than one group, went a bit further than other groups did, and used that study of the skies and developed navigational techniques and we're able to sail and explore the Earth. But that ultimately what lies behind it is the same curiosity and investigative skill that shamans are still using in the Amazon to this day. And I do see them as scientists in a very proper use of the word.

Lex Fridman
But do you think something like ayahuasca was a part of that process?

Graham Hancock
Yes. Ayahuasca is the result of shamanistic investigation of what's available in the Amazon. Of course, ayahuasca is all the fad in Western industrialized societies today. And some people see it as a miracle cure for all kinds of ailments and problems. And perhaps it is, perhaps it can be in certain ways. The ayahuasca itself is not an Amazonian word. It comes from the Quechuan language and it means the vine of souls or the vine of the dead. But the ayahuasca vine is only one of two principle ingredients in the ayahuasca brew. And the other ingredient are leaves that contain dimethyltryptamine. And there are two sources of that. One is a bush called Psychotria viridis, that's its botanical name. They call it Chacruna in the Amazon. And its leaves are rich in dimethyltryptamine DMT, which is arguably the most powerful psychedelic known to science. And the other source comes from another

vine, Diplopterys cabrerana, which the leaves of that vine also contain DMT. So the ayahuasca vine on its own is not going to give you a visionary journey. And the leaves that contain DMT on their own, whether they come from Diplopterys or whether they come from Chacruna, are not going to give you a visionary journey. And the reason they're not going to give you the visionary journey, is because of the enzyme monoamine oxidase in the gut that shuts down DMT when absorbed orally. Basically, DMT is not accessible orally, unless you combine it with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor. And that's what I mean when I'm talking about science in the Amazon, because there's so many tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands different species of plants and trees in the Amazon. And they've gone around and they've found just two or three of them that put together can produce these extraordinary visionary experiences.

Lex Fridman
Just imagine the number of plants they had to have eaten, consumed and smoked or all kinds of combinations to arrive at that.

Graham Hancock
Exactly. Exactly. To realize that this is something very special. And then to use the principles there to find another form of it. So ayahuasca is the form that is made with the ayahuasca vine and the leaves of the Chacruna plant. But Yage is made from the ayahuasca vine and the leaves of another vine the ploparis caapiano, which contain not only, which is the DMT that everybody's pretty much familiar with these days, but also 5-MeO-DMT. And the Yage experience, which I have also had, in my view is more intense and more powerful almost to the point of being overwhelming than the ayahuasca experience. But what the result of this sophisticated chemistry that we find taking place here is a brew which is hideous to drink. The taste, I find it quite repulsive. I almost retched just smelling it in the cup. But then unleashes these extraordinary experiences. And it isn't just pretty visuals. It's the sense of encounters with sentient others, that there are sentient beings, that somehow we are surrounded by a realm of sentience that is not normally accessible to us. And that what the ayahuasca brew and certain other psychedelics, like some psilocybin mushrooms in a high enough dose can do it as well. LSD can do it. But Ayahuasca is the master in this of lowering the veil to what appears to be a seamlessly convincing other realm, other world. And of course the hard line, rational scientists will say that's just all fantasies of your brain. But I don't think we fully understand, Or even close to understanding exactly what consciousness is. And I remain open to two possibilities that consciousness is generated by the brain, is made by the brain in the way that a factory makes cars. But I also am open to the possibility that the brain is a receiver of consciousness, just as a television set is the receiver of television signals. And that if that is the case, then we locked into the physical realm. We need our everyday alert, problem-solving state of consciousness, and that's the state of consciousness that western civilization values and highly encourages. But these other states of consciousness that allow us to access alternative realities are possibly more important. It may be apocryphal, but it was reported after Francis Crick's role- But it was

reported after Francis Crick's role and his Nobel Prize for the discovery of the double helix that he finally got it under the influence of LSD. There's the classic example of Kary Mullis and the polymerase chain reaction. He said he got that under the influence of LSD. So the notion that the alert problem-solving state of consciousness is the only valuable state of consciousness is disproved by valuable experiences that people have had in a visionary state. But the question that remains unresolved is those entities that we encounter, and not everybody encounters them, and you're certainly not going to encounter them on every ayahuasca trip. There are ayahuasca journeys where nothing seems to happen. I suspect something does happen, but it happens at a subconscious level. I know that shamans in the Amazon regard those trips where actually you don't see visions as amongst the most valuable, and they say you are learning stuff that you're not remembering, but you're learning it anyway. These sentient others that are encountered, what are they? Are they just figments of our brain on drugs or are we actually gaining access to a parallel reality, which is inhabited by consciousness which is in a non-physical form? And I'm equally open to that idea. I think that may be what is going on here with ayahuasca. But the other thing is that there is a presence within the ayahuasca brew, and she is present both in ayahuasca and in yachay. And that's one of the reasons why the shamans say that actually the master of the process is the ayahuasca vine, not the leaves. It's as though the vine has harnessed the leaves to gain access to human consciousness. And there, if you have sufficient exposure to ayahuasca or yachay, you drink it enough times, I've had maybe 75 or 80 journeys with ayahuasca, you definitely start to feel an intelligent presence with a definite personality, which I interpret as feminine, and which most people in the West interpret it as feminine and they call her Mother Ayahuasca. There are some tribes in the Amazon who interpret the spirit of ayahuasca as male, but in all cases, that spirit is seen as a teacher. That's fundamentally what ayahuasca is. It's a teacher. And it teaches moral lessons. And that's fascinating, that a mixture of two plants should cause us to reflect on our own behavior and how it may have hurt and damaged and affected others and fill us with a powerful wish not to repeat that negative behavior again in the future. The more baggage you carry in your life, the harder the beating the ayahuasca is going to give you, until it forces you to confront and take responsibility for your own behavior. And that is an extraordinary thing to come from a plant brew in that way. And I think yes, I think ayahuasca is the most powerful of all the plant medicines for accessing these mysterious realms. But there's no doubt you can access them. They're all tryptamines. They're all related to one another in one way. You can access them through LSD and you certainly can access them through psilocyb mushrooms as well in large enough dose.

Lex Fridman

Both possibilities, as you describe, are interesting. And to me, they're kind of akin to each other. I wonder what the limit of the brain's capacity is to create imaginary worlds and treat them seriously and make them real, and in those worlds, explore and have real moral, deep brainstorming sessions with those entities. So it's almost like the power of the human mind to imagine taken to its limit.

Graham Hancock

It is. And the curious thing is that the same iconography... People paint their visions after ayahuasca sessions. People were painting in Europe in the cave of Lascaux, for example, and of course they had access to psilocyb mushrooms in prehistoric Europe. There's a remarkable commonality in the imagery that is painted. I like to give credit where credit is due, and there are two names that need to be mentioned here. One is the late, great Terence McKenna and his book Food of the Gods, where he proposed the idea very strongly that it was our ancestral encounters with psychedelics that made us fully human. That's what switched on the modern human mind. And very much the same idea began to be explored a bit earlier by Professor David Lewis-Williams at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa, fabulous book called The Mind in the Cave, where he is again arguing that these astonishing similarities in cave art and rock art all around the world can only be properly explained by people in deeply altered states of consciousness attempting to remember, when they return to a normal everyday state of consciousness, attempting to remember their visions and document them on permanent media like the wall of a cave. So, typically you get a lot of geometric patterns, but you also got entities. And those entities often are therianthropes, part animal, part human in form. Might have the head of a wolf and the body of a human being, might have the head of a bird and the body of a human being, and so on and so forth. And that they communicate with us in the visionary state. Interestingly, although this sounds like woo-woo, and it is an area that most scientists would steer clear of at risk of their careers, there is very serious work now being done at Imperial College in London and at the University of California at San Diego, where volunteers are being given extended DMT. There's a new technology, DMTx, where the DMT is fed directly into the bloodstream by drip, and it's possible to keep the individual in the peak DMT state. Which normally when you smoke or vape DMT, you're looking, if you're lucky, at 10 minutes, or if you're unlucky, if it's a bad journey, because those 10 minutes can seem like forever. But with DMTx, with the drip-feeding of DMT into the bloodstream, these volunteers actually could be kept in the peak state for hours. And unlike LSD where you rapidly build up tolerance, nobody ever builds up tolerance to DMT. It always hits you with the same power. Even if you took it yesterday and the day before and you're taking it tomorrow as well, it's still going to have that same power. There's no tolerance there. So that's how they can use that lack of tolerance to keep volunteers in this state. And then when they debrief those volunteers... They're also putting them in MRI scanners and looking at what's happening in the brain. But when they debrief them, they're all talking about encounters with sentient others. There's even a group now called Sentient Others, where volunteers are now exchanging their experiences. They weren't allowed to do so at the beginning of the experiment, but now that most of them have left it, they're exchanging their experiences, and it's all about encounters with sentient others who wish to teach them moral lessons. Now, to me, that's wild. What is going on here? How do we account for this? Yeah, I get the notion of hallucinations and brightly colored visuals, but the moral lessons that come with it, those are very odd.

Lex Fridman
Yeah. And would you say that the reason that could give birth to a civilization, is it because such visions can help create myths, and especially religious myths, that would be a cohesive thing for a large group of people to get around?

Graham Hancock
Yes. And can help us to be better members of our own community.

Lex Fridman
Right, with moral lessons.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. More contributing members of our community. More caring, more nurturing members of our community. That's got to be good for any community. I've said this a dozen times, but I'll say it again. If I had the power to do so, I would make it a law, an absolute law, that anybody running for a powerful political position, particularly if that position is president or head of state in any kind of way, that that person has to undergo the ayahuasca ordeal first. They have to have 10 or 12 sessions of ayahuasca as a condition for applying for the job. I suspect that most who had had those experiences wouldn't want to apply for the job anymore. They would want to live a different kind of life. And those who did want to carry on being a leader of a nation would be very different people from the people who are leading the nations of the earth into chaos and destruction today.

Lex Fridman
Yeah, they would be doing it for the right reasons. I mentioned to you, I recently interviewed Donald Trump, and I actually brought up this same idea that it would be a much better world if most of Congress and most politicians would take some form of psychedelic, at the very least.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. I have no doubt that it would be a better world. I mean, this raises an interesting point, which is the role of government in controlling our consciousness. And in my opinion, the so-called War on Drugs is one of the fundamental abuses of human rights that have been undertaken in the past 60 years. It should be a Republican issue. If I understand the Republican Party correctly, the Republican Party believes in individual freedom for adults as much as possible, and particularly the freedom to make choices over their own bodies. But in the case of even cannabis, I know, this is one of the great things that's happening in America. It's happening state by state where cannabis is being legalized and that draconian hand of government is being taken off the back of people who are consuming a medicine that is far less harmful than alcohol, which is glorified in our society. We cannot say that we are free if we allow our government to dictate to us what experiences we may or may not have in our inner consciousness, while doing no harm to others. And the point there is we

already have a whole raft of laws that deal with us when we do harm to others. Do we really need laws that tell us what we may or may not experience in the inner sanctum of our own consciousness? I think it's a fundamental violation of adult sovereignty. And we would have much less drug problems if these drugs were all legalized and made available to people without shaming them, without punishing them in any way, but just part of normal social life. And then you could be sure that you were getting good product rather than really shitty product, which has been cut with all sorts of other things. Ultimately, the way forward is for adults to take responsibility for their own behavior, and for society to allow that to happen, and not to have big government taking responsibility for decisions that should be in the hands of individuals.

Lex Fridman
And for me also, it's exciting. Some of these substances like psilocybin are being integrated into scientific studies in large scales. It's really interesting.

Graham Hancock
We've seen a revolution in the way science looks at psychedelics in the last 20, 25 years. They were in that highly demonized category. But again, it's one of those paradigms which gets overwhelmed by new evidence, and it began to be realized that psilocybin and other psychedelics are very helpful in a range of conditions from which people suffer. Post-traumatic stress disorder. The fear of death when you're suffering from terminal cancer can be overwhelming, and it's been found that psilocybin can remove that. Deep depressions can be evaporated with one single massive psilocybin journey. They just go away. There's really good science on this. And they are being integrated into conventional medicine more and more. We'll see it happening. I'm not sure if it'll happen as fast as I would like to see it happen in my lifetime, but it is going to happen.

Lex Fridman
Yeah, I actually just recently found out that you had a TED Talk, War on Consciousness, that was taken down, and that was just part of just the general resistance. Because it was a pretty... It wasn't radical. It wasn't really a radical-

Graham Hancock
I was talking about ayahuasca and I was talking about the view that I hold very strongly that as long as we do no harm to others, sovereign adults should be allowed to make decisions about their own bodies and not face a jail sentence or shaming as the result. So it was a TEDx Talk, not a TED Talk, organized by a local TED group. They called them TEDx Talks. And I gave this talk about the war on consciousness, and it was immediately pulled down from TED's main channel with all kinds of bizarre reasons being given. But unfortunately, it was too late because a number of people had already downloaded the talk and then uploaded it onto other YouTube channels. And actually, their banning of it made it go viral in a way that would not have happened otherwise. But again, it's a sign that points of view that

are not acceptable to those in positions of power are simply dismissed and shut down, or at least attempts are made to do so.

Lex Fridman
In general, just along that line of thinking, I'm pretty sure that what we understand about consciousness today will seem silly to humans from a hundred years from now.

Graham Hancock
You bet it will. Especially if we harness psychedelics to investigate consciousness. And that is what is happening at Imperial College right now is the investigation of the experience. They're not looking... There are other trials that are looking for the therapeutic potential of DMT, but in this case, they're looking entirely at the experiences that people have and why they're so similar from people from different age groups and different genders and different parts of the world, they're all having the same experiences.

Lex Fridman
And for me, from an engineer perspective, it's interesting if it's possible to engineer consciousness in artificial beings. It's another way to approach the question of how special is human consciousness. From where does it arise? Is it something that permeates all of life? And then in that case, what is the thing that makes life special? What is life? What is these living organisms that we have here that evolve to create humans? And what is truly special about humans? It's both scary and exciting to consider the possibility that we can create something like this.

Graham Hancock
But why not? We are a vehicle for consciousness, in my view. I think consciousness is present in all life on earth. I don't think it's limited to human beings. We have the equipment to manifest and express that consciousness in the way that a dog, for example, doesn't have or a snail doesn't have or a pigeon doesn't have. But when I look at two pigeons sitting on my garden fence and rubbing up close to each other and enjoying each other's company and taking off together and hanging out together, I think they're conscious beings. And I think consciousness is everywhere. I think it's the basis of everything. And I suspect that fundamentally, consciousness is non-physical, and that it can manifest in physical forms where it can then have experiences that would not be available in the non-physical state. That's a guess.

Lex Fridman
That'd be a fascinating... Because then you can construct all kinds of physical forms to manifest the consciousness.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. And see if consciousness enters, if they become conscious. Isn't there some suggestion that artificial intelligence is already becoming conscious?

Lex Fridman
That makes humans really uncomfortable, because we are at the top of the food chain, we consider ourselves truly special, and to consider that there's other things that could be special is scary.

Graham Hancock
Well, look how other people make us uncomfortable too. I mean, look at the state of the world today. All the conflicts that are raging. That's because we're afraid. When I say we, I'm speaking nation by nation, we are afraid of other people. We fear that they're going to hurt us or damage us in some way. And so we seek to stop that. It's the root of many, many conflicts, this fear. And so fear of AI may not be such a good idea after all. It might be very interesting to go down that route and see where it comes. Certainly in terms of exploring consciousness, it is very interesting.

Lex Fridman
Yeah, fear is a useful thing, but it can also be destructive.

Graham Hancock
Well, it can be destructive and it can shut you down completely.

Lex Fridman
If you look into the future, maybe the next a hundred years, what do you hope are the interesting discoveries in archeology that we'll find?

Graham Hancock
Well, I'd really like to know how the Great Pyramid was built. And we now have, with new tech, with scanning technology, it's now become apparent that there are many major voids within the Great Pyramid. Right above the Grand Gallery, there's what looks like a second Grand Gallery that has been identified with remote scanning. And new chambers, one of them has even been opened up already, are being found as a result of this. So it may be that the Great Pyramid will ultimately give up its secrets. I often think that the Great Pyramid is partly designed to do that. It's designed to invite its own initiates. Some people aren't interested in the Great Pyramid at all, but some people are fascinated by it and they're drawn towards it. And when they're drawn towards it, it immediately starts raising questions in their minds, and they seek answers to their questions. So it's like saying, " Here I stand. Investigate me. Find out about me. Figure out what I am. Why have I got these two shafts cut into the side of the so-called Queen's Chamber?" Why do they slope up through the body of the Great Pyramid? Why do they not exit on the outside of the Great Pyramid?

Why, when we send a robot up those shafts, do we find them after about 160 feet blocked by a door with metal handles. Why when we drill through that door to see what's beyond it, three or four feet away, we see another door. It's very frustrating. But it's saying to us, "Keep on exploring. If you're persistent enough, we'll eventually give you the answer." So I'm hoping that that answer will come as to how this most mysterious of monuments was actually built and the inspiration that lay behind it. Certainly, I'm sure it was never a tomb, or a tomb only. The later pyramids might've been. Actually no pharaonic burial has been discovered in any pyramid. But nevertheless, it's pretty clear that the later pyramids with the pyramid texts written on the walls, like the pyramid of Unas, Fifth Dynasty pyramid at Saqqara, were tombs. But the Great Pyramid, to go to that length to create a tomb, to make it a scale model of the earth, to orient it perfectly to true north, to make it 6 million tons. This is not a tomb. This is something else. This is a curiosity device. This is something that is asking us to understand it. And I hope we will understand it. And I hope Egyptologists will be willing to set aside that prejudice that they're only looking at a tomb and consider other possibilities. And as new tech is revealing these previously unknown inner spaces within the Great Pyramid, I think that's going to become more and more likely.

Lex Fridman
So not just the how it was built, but the why.

Graham Hancock
But the why.

Lex Fridman
And to you, it seems obvious that there would be a cosmic motivation.

Graham Hancock
Yeah, very, very much so. As above, so below. Which is an idea in the Hermetica. The God Hermes for the Greeks was the Greek version of Thoth, the wisdom God of Ancient Egypt. And that's where that saying comes from. It comes from the Hermetica. But it's expressing an ancient Egyptian idea, to mirror the perfection of the heavens on earth.

Lex Fridman
So you think there's something interesting to be discovered about the how it was built? You mean beyond the ideas of using ramps and wet sand.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. Ramps won't do it. Ramps won't do it. Nor will wet sand. It's true that the ancient Egyptians did haul big objects on sleds on wet sand. There are even reliefs that show the process where an individual is standing on the front of the sledge pouring water down to lubricate the sand underneath. And that's a perfectly respectable way to move a 200 ton block of stone across sand, flat sand, if you have enough people to pull it. But that is not

going to help you get dozens of 70 ton granite blocks 300 feet in the air to form the roof of the King's Chamber and the floor of the chamber above it, and the roof of that chamber, and the floor of the chamber above that, and so on and so forth. Wet sand never got those objects up there. Somehow they were lifted up there. Now, yeah, ramps are proposed as the solution, but where are the remains of those ramps? If you're going to carry blocks weighing up to two or three tons right to the top of the Great Pyramid to complete your work, you're going to need a ramp that's going to extend out into the desert for more than a mile at a 10 degree slope. And it's calculated that a 10 degree slope is about the maximum slope that human labor can haul objects up a ramp. And that ramp can't just be compacted sand, since heavy objects are being hauled up. It's going to have to be made of very solid material, almost as solid as the pyramid itself. Where is it? We don't see any trace of those so-called ramps that are supposed to have been involved in the construction of the pyramid. I think we don't know. I think we have no idea it's built. That's why there's so many different theories. We haven't got the answer yet. But the how of it is one of the big mysteries from our past.

Lex Fridman
I love the Great Pyramids as a kind of puzzle that was created by the ancient peoples to be solved by later peoples. I don't know if you're aware of the 10,000-year clock that was built by Jeff Bezos and Danny Hillis in Sierra Diablo mountains in Texas. They're building a clock that ticks once a year for 10,000 years.

Graham Hancock
Oh, wow.

Lex Fridman
So it's talking about... And it's supposed to sort of run, if there's a nuclear apocalypse, it just runs.

Graham Hancock
It'll keep running.

Lex Fridman
It's an example of modern humans thinking like, okay, if 10,000 years from now and beyond, if something goes wrong or the future humans that are way different come back and they analyze what happened here, how can we create monuments that they could then analyze, and in that way be curious about. In their curiosity, discover some deep truths about this current time. It's an interesting kind of notion of what can we build now.

Graham Hancock
That would last. And the answer is that the majority of what we build now wouldn't last.

Lex Fridman
It wouldn't.

Graham Hancock
It would be gone within a few thousand years. But what would last is massive megalithic structures like the Great Pyramid. That would last. And it could be used to send a message to the future. I think Göbekli Tepe serves a similar function. I mean, there it was, it was buried 10,400 years ago. And then for the next 10,000 years, nobody touched it. Nobody knew it was there. It took the genius of Klaus Schmidt, the original excavator, to realize what he'd found and what it was. But the great thing about the ceiling of Göbekli Tepe, the deliberate burial of Göbekli Tepe, is it means that no later culture trod over it and imposed their organic materials on it and messed up the dating sequences and so on and so forth, or vandalized it or used it as a quarry. It's all there intact.

Lex Fridman
So you mentioned that the pyramids, and some of the other amazing things that humans have built, was the result of us humans struggling with our mortality.

Graham Hancock
That's the ultimate goal. That seems to me what's at the heart of many pyramids around the world is that they're connected in one way or another to the notion of death and to the notion of the exploration of the afterlife. And this is of course, the fundamental mystery that all human beings face. We may wish to ignore it, we may wish to pretend that it's not going to happen, but we are of course, all mortal. Every one of us, all 8 billion or however many of us that are on the planet right now, we're all going to face death sooner or later. And the question is what happens? And there are a few cultures that really intensely, deeply studied that mystery. We are not one of them. The general view of science, I think, is that we're accidents of evolution. When we die, the light blinks out. There's no more of us. There's no such thing as the soul. But that's not a proven point. There's no experiment that proves that's the case. We know we die, but we don't know whether there's such a thing as a soul or not.

Lex Fridman
Yeah, it's the great mystery.

Graham Hancock
It's a great mystery that we all share, and those cultures that have investigated it, and Ancient Egypt is the best example, have investigated it thoroughly and map out the journey that we make after death. But that notion of a journey after death and of hazards and challenges along the way and ultimately of a judgment, that notion is found right around the world, and it even manifests into the three monotheistic faiths that are still present in the world today.

Lex Fridman
Well, you're one such human, and you said you contemplate your own death.

Graham Hancock
Yeah.

Lex Fridman
Are you afraid of it?

Graham Hancock
No. I'm not afraid of death at all. I'm curious about death. I think it could be very interesting. I think it's the beginning of the next great adventure. So I don't fear it. And I would like to live as long as my body is healthy enough to make living worthwhile. But I don't fear death. What I do fear is pain. I do fear the humiliation that old age and the collapse of the faculties can bring. I do fear the cancers that can strike us down and riddle us with pain and agony. That I fear very, very much indeed. But death is going to come to all of us. I accept it. It's going to come to me. I'm not going to say I'm looking forward to it, but when it happens, I'm going to approach it, I hope, with a sense of curiosity and a sense of adventure, that there's something beyond this life. It isn't heaven, it isn't hell, but there's something. The soul goes on. I think reincarnation is a very plausible idea. Again, modern science would reject that. But there's the excellent work of Ian Stevenson, Children Who Remember Past Lives, who found that children up to the age of seven often have memories of past lives. And in cultures where memories of past lives are discouraged, they tend not to express that much. But in cultures where memories of past lives are encouraged, like India, they do express it. And he found several subjects, children under the age of seven in India, who were able to remember specific details of a past life, and he was able to go to the place where that past life unfolded and validate those details. So if consciousness is the basis of everything, if it's the essence of everything, and consciousness benefits in some way from being incarnated in physical form, then reincarnation makes a lot of sense. All the investment that the universe has put into creating this home for life may have a much bigger purpose than just accident.

Lex Fridman
What a beautiful mystery this whole thing is.

Graham Hancock
Yeah. We are immersed in mystery. We live in the midst of mystery. We're surrounded by mystery. And if we pretend otherwise, we're deluding ourselves.

Lex Fridman
And Graham, thank you so much for inspiring the world to explore that mystery. Thank you for talking today.

Graham Hancock
Thank you, Lex. It's been a pleasure.

Lex Fridman
Thanks for listening to this conversation with Graham Hancock. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Charles Darwin. "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.