



ANCIENT SKIES

"Come Search With Us!"

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THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BIOASTRONOMY

BY ULRICH DOPATKA*

"If anything can happen in the cosmos - it does happen!" This statement by the astrophysicist Frank Drake was made at the 5th International Conference on Bioastronomy, a scientific conference on the subject of the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). Way back in the 1960s Drake had already attempted to calculate the possible existence of intelligent extraterrestrial beings (ET) with the help of the famous "Green Bank formula" (the existence of planets similar to Earth). Not only did Drake formulate the generally accepted opinion that there must be "some others" out there, but also that science is about to prove it. It is for this purpose that selected scientists from around the world have been meeting every three years to report on their research in the field and to initiate new research programs for future study. (1)

About 250 international experts - representatives of various university faculties and state research institutions - met on the island of Capri, in the Tyrrhenian Sea, off the west coast of Italy south of the Bay of Naples on July 1-5, 1996 at the 5th SETI Conference. I was privileged to attend the Conference because of my position as Library Automation Coordinator of the University Library of Bern, Switzerland. In addition to Frank Drake, other outstanding personages included Philip Morrison, Jean Heidmann, Marvin Minsky and Nobel Prize winners Manfred Eigen, Charles Townes and Christian DeDuve. The Conference theme was explosive; the community gathering there, top-flight and interdisciplinary. It was apparent that science is approaching SETI with great care, but with immense expenditures. Radioastronomy has been trying to catch signals of artificial origin; laboratory experiments are being conducted to attempt to prove that the origin of life is a cosmic matter of course; and molecular tracks of primitive life are searched for in our solar system and beyond.

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Anyone looking for "ancient astronauts", "UFOs" or "Paleo-SETI" in the Conference papers would be disappointed; however, subliminally these "hot potatoes" were not totally excluded in the papers and discussions, especially not during the unofficial coffee breaks and evening talks. Why the official attitude of reserve? It is well known that these subjects are unfortunately charged with sensationalism. Also, it is simply a fact that no sponsor of Conferences such as this one would spend money on research to prove the existence of ancient astronauts. The sponsors are primarily state-owned institutions, universities or large corporations, none of which wants to "tarnish" their reputations; hence from the very beginning the SETI Conferences policies of research have excluded any theories concerning a physical presence of ETs in our solar system. Thus a Conference could not risk their financial support by torpedoing their own policies. Therefore, it must be unthinkable that the results of their research work would confirm the existence of UFOs or ancient astronauts!

There were plenty of results at the 5th SETI Conference, even loads of it and most of it is unknown to the general public. Here are some highlights in brief:

- Apart from the planet Mars, Jupiter's moon, Europa, has become the outstanding candidate in the search for extraterrestrial life in our solar system. On the ground below Europa's ice-shell there should be an ocean, and similar to Earth, volcanism is said to be the energy source of life.

- Titanium, the moon of Saturn, allows for the development of life despite its extremely low temperatures. Although its chemistry and pressure conditions are different from those on Earth, they could create life evolving more slowly but more constant.

- Manfred Eigen reported on his "evolution apparatus", in which the basic components of life (in this case RNA-molecular chains) are exposed to different artificially changed environments within thousandfold parallel running set-ups. In fact these "germs of life" do react and so prove the flexibility of these structures. The evaluation of the changing dynamics leads to the supposition that the beginning of life on Earth must have been up to 25% older than previously thought (in Precambrian fossilizations 3.5 billion years ago). Life is supposed to "find its feet" on a planet immediately after it was formed, in the case of Earth, 4.5 billion years ago.

- Molecular chains of earthly life (for example, the double helix of the DNA) are formed like a spiral and dextrorotatory. A lately developed tool the size of a cigar for use in space probes is able to prove this so-called "chirality" on alien planets.

- Louis Nares, of the University of California,
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looked for cognitive common features of cosmic civilizations. Is there a "cosmic consciousness" in addition to logical thinking, such as mathematics, which we are taught is the common denominator. No one less than Marvin Minsky of MIT has so well analyzed and described this convergence. There was also discussion of the effects of the evidence that "we are not alone in the cosmos" - consequences are to be expected not only for science, but also for society, philosophy and religion. (2)

- The new discoveries of various radioastronomy projects were the contents of many papers. (3) The main problems of these projects are well known. If signals from alien civilizations arrive we don't know on which wavelength and from which starsystem they are broadcast. As endless as the ocean of stars is also the "salad of waves". Besides, who can tell if the "mail" being sent has not already reached us in the past and passing our solar system unheard because there was no technological civilization on Earth to receive it? Or, that this "mail" will arrive someday in the future when - what a pity - nobody is listening? There is a way out of this dilemma with the help of automated analysis of cosmic signals. Current projects are listening in at the same time on millions of channels for sequences supposed to be of artificial origin. Where project PHOENIX dealt with 56 million "channels", SERENDIB uses 168 million, BETA 250 has 250 million and further projects like ARGUS, META, etc. will deal with far more in the future. The results? In fact, 37 "oddly artificial" looking temporary sequences have been noticed to date. The "Wauh" signal (the uninterrupted flow of artificial sequences) checked by independent researchers and only then reported to the secretary-general of the UNO was not counted in that number. According to Jill Tarter of the NASA Ames Research Center these signals counted only as so-called "interferences", which means nothing but disturbances during the reception (for example, through reflection of earthly signals). A project introduced in detail at the Conference is planning to construct a radiotelescope on the back side of the Moon to avoid these interferences totally. Even "umpteenth" times stronger radioantennas and reconstructions the size of a soccer field are already being built. If it turns out that the basic idea of the radioastronomers - to receive one continuous flow of signals from an alien civilization - is wrong, then who knows? Maybe the comparative analysis of the cast "fragments" does make some sense.

- After the cancelling of funding for NASA and similar state institutions, private sponsors surprisingly filled the gap, especially in the USA where support of scientific research is common. Today a lot of pioneer spirit can be found. The Mars Rover, a vehicle automatically equipped with a wide investigation radius, is expected to be sent on its mission in December of this year. More probes to the moons of the outer planets are to follow. Earth's Moon is on the front burner again. Detailed plans for exploration of the Moon have been developed during a NASA Conference in Beatenberg, Switzerland. (4) A feasible, but still visionary, project aims at discovering not only planets the size of Earth, but also the visualization of their surfaces. This could be achieved by "gravitational lenses" and installed in probes reaching far behind the orbit of the planet Pluto, using our own Sun as a "lens" (Project Quasat). Albert Einstein's diversion of light by gravitation, similar to the refraction of light in a normal telescope, can be used in elaborate techniques, as was illustrated by Claudio Naccone of the Turin (Italy) Center for Astronomy. Again hanging in the air was the question of whether a different civilization is likely to control this sort of technology and has thus

been observing our Earth.

- Also the search for extraterrestrial tracks of life is going on in the direct vicinity of Earth. The Lagrange points within the Earth-Moon system (where gravity fields neutralize) have captured material which can be investigated. At the moment space travel is not yet able to reach these points, either by space ships or space shuttles. Within reach and already under way is another aim - to classify and call attention to unknown objects, such as meteorites, approaching Earth or about to do so. ("Near Earth Objects", or "NEOs"). Thus the Spaceguard Foundation was founded to protect life on Earth. (5) Andrea Carusi, who initiated this project, represented the Union of Italian Research Institutions at the SETI Conference. He illustrated the close but difficult cooperation with military organizations which possess systems for surveillance of the area close to Earth. At the moment the military organizations reserve the right to examine possible observations before passing them over to the Spaceguard Foundation; however, this concern is incomprehensible because there are about 100,000 NEOs under the size of 100 meters in diameter and about 100 with diameters up to 1 kilometer. I asked the question if that surveillance did not shed some light on the existence or non-existence of UFOs (in the sense of artificial, extraterrestrial objects) but it was not answered. Apparently Spaceguard does not keep track of near-Earth atmospherical objects and they are therefore not taken into consideration. We must wait and see the results of this NEO research during the next few years.

Strangely, all the participants at the Conference agreed that extraterrestrial civilizations were likely to exist! During the past few years some parameters of the famous Green Bank formula to calculate the likelihood of the existence of planets similar to Earth could be estimated much higher. There was also agreement that technology of civilizations is advancing, so long as the civilization does not "stagnate", as has the culture of the dolphins. According to the distances in light years interstellar space travel is unthinkable now, although this statement must be put into the context of the nature of the space travel. What is meant is space travel allowing people from Earth to visit different planetary systems and return to the home planet within short periods of time. But of course, it is possible to travel through space by generation space ships, which could have been the method by which a former civilization seeded our galaxy with "offshoots", perhaps millions of years ago. At least there are enough theoretical reasons for the revival of the project SETA (Search for Extraterrestrial Artifacts), but these initiatives need financial sponsors.

But maybe this sort of research work gets pushed forward in a more subtle, indirect way. For example, Gregory Matloff of the City University New York, suggested that we track down "migrating civilizations which had to leave their home planet because their sun was dying (and an imminent nova, etc.)". It might be possible to localize stellar fleets of generation space ships. Such a proposal shows that many scientists officially approach ancient astronaut related ideas indirectly. As the readiness to think about such ideas is strengthened, the dislike of the hypothesis of extraterrestrials having once been present on Earth will be neutralized. At the 5th SETI Conference in Capri, I got the impression that science is experiencing an awakening in this area of research. (6) Whether this means a state of flux, the coming years will show. In his closing comments to the Conference delegates, Frank Drake made an appeal to flexibility, richness of ideas and an open mind for new ways. Was he thinking only of new methods and techniques of research, or also of unconventional hypotheses?

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MAYAN WHEELS

BY PATRIK PAULIS*

During my recent trip to Mexico and Central America, I visited the Carlos Pellicer Cámara Regional Museum of Anthropology in Villahermosa in the State of Tabasco in southern Mexico. Having read that the Maya had never discovered the wheel, I was quite surprised to see a small wheeled object on display in a glass enclosed case. The caption informed me that it was a "Toy jaguar on wheels" from the Region of Veracruz, about 300 BC-400 AD. (See photo below by the author) This was incredible! How can the anthropologists continue to maintain that the Mayans never invented the wheel, when we have archaeological proof to the contrary?

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MODEL OF ANCIENT COLOMBIAN ARTIFACT REALLY FLIES!

BY DR. ALGUND EENBOOM**

Among the burial objects of the native Indians in the area of Colombia, South America were found isolated instances of mysterious golden "amulets". The form and styling of these objects give reason for the most varied interpretations. In the opinion of the archeologists, they represent religious decorations in the shape of bird or insect deities. This view is not one of undivided agreement.

Not wanting to remain silent, a group of nonconformists, among these also experts of air and space-flight engineering, believe that these objects are the formal expression of unknown engineering of the then living population in Colombia. They also believe that the originals seem to have a great similarity with the most modern structural designs found in today's aeronautical technology. Successful wind tunnel tests with these mysterious objects at the Aeronautical Institute in New York have impressively supported this thesis.



Figure 1.

Peter Belting, a flight lieutenant and commanding officer of radar in the German Air Force, succeeded in a worldwide and until now unique experiment. The "amulet" shown in Figure 1, whose golden original is kept at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., USA, was reconstructed as a radio-controlled model at a scale of exactly 1:16. The model was made of lightweight styrofoam, with a high-performance electric motor serving as the drive. The energy is supplied by rechargeable batteries located in the tail of the model aircraft. The controls are in the fuselage.

In actual tests, the model proved to be reliable and maneuverable in all flight situations. Of particular interest is the astonishing flight stability in the turns as well as the impressive gliding characteristics with the motor switched off. The model proved itself to be stable in its landing approach and trouble-free to maneuver. Its form proved to be so aerodynamically designed that a movable rudder could be dispensed with - all aerial maneuvers were steered only with elevators and ailerons! There were no problems of any kind for the pilots even though the wind became fresh on the day of the test flight.

Questions concerning these ancient artifacts should be discussed and pursued in an appropriate and interdisciplinary scientific manner.

**Dr. Eenboom is a dentist in Leer, Germany where he has specialized in periodontics for the past 18 years in his own practice. An avid scholar and researcher of ancient flight techniques, he has teamed up with Peter Belting and Conrad Lübbbers to develop and test models of ancient craft. The trio will present an exciting lecture on the subject, complete with slides, video tape and flight demonstrations at the Society's 24th Anniversary World Conference at the Sheraton Plaza Hotel at the Florida Mall in Orlando, Florida August 3-8, 1997. Dr. Eenboom's address is Kleenfahrnjeg Weg 34, 26817 Rhaderfehn, GERMANY.

27/11-96
PASSAGEWAYS OF THE GODS

BY KERRY P. GANZA*

The gods came to Earth in antiquity. They created, then mated with, humankind. They also founded civilization and bestowed upon humankind the "gifts" of science and the arts. Scriptures, legends, hieroglyphs and petroglyphs have documented the arrivals, feats, miracles and departures of the gods. The gods have been here - there is no doubt - but how did they get here?

Contemporary, Earth-based, physical law places a cosmic speed limit on space travel at, or just below, the speed of light. In other words, nothing can travel faster than the speed of light, that is, 186,000 miles per second. If space travel is constrained by the speed of light, then it is impossible, or at best, extremely difficult for a space-faring civilization to travel very far beyond its own solar system. Therefore, distance and time preclude long-distance space travel, if the speed of light cannot be exceeded. The gods physically came to Earth, but how did they get here if it is impossible to travel the vast distances of space in a relatively expedient amount of time? The answer may lie in alternative modes of travel which get around the problem of a cosmic speed limit, such as blackholes and wormholes.

Exploring possible "loopholes" in Einstein's theory of general relativity, Sagan suggested, "Blackholes may be apertures to elsewhere. For all we know, blackholes are the transportation conduits of advanced technological civilizations - conceivably, conduits in time as well as space." (1) Therefore, regardless of destructive tidal forces, a spacecraft and its crew may pass safely through blackholes, or passageways in space.

Nicolson stated that a massive spinning black hole of greater than 30,000 solar masses would produce tidal forces equivalent to body mass; therefore, ship and crew would enter the blackhole and emerge from a white hole - intact - on the other side. (2) But where are such enormous black holes located? Nicolson suggests that these promising passageways may be located at the center of our galaxy, as well as others. If this is the case, then the problem of long-distance space travel from the galactic core to Earth comes into play. To further complicate the situation, if a ship manages to safely traverse the blackhole, it cannot enter the white hole. Another massive blackhole must be located and used for the return voyage to the homeworld, provided it took ship and crew home and not somewhere else, or to another time dimension. These inherent problems in traveling via blackholes may eliminate them as passageways of the gods.

Then what about wormholes? Theoretically, wormholes may provide passageways in space. Bennette pictures the universe as a four dimensional sheet of paper and potential spacefarers are constrained by its boundaries. (3) Bennette also suggests that if the paper universe is folded in such a way that two points are connected, a wormhole is created. Instead of having to travel from one end of the paper universe to the other, all the spacefarers need to do is sail across the gap between the two connecting points. Conversely, they are able to travel back the way they came, thus eliminating the problems confronted by traveling through blackholes. However, Bennette also states that once a wormhole is found, modified, or created, keeping it open for passage will be an extensive engineering challenge.

In spite of engineering concerns wormholes appear to provide round-trip passage between the homes of the gods and Earth. And if, as Bennette suggests, wormholes can be constructed, there is no reason to doubt that enterprising, highly advanced, extra-terrestrial civilizations, could - and did - easily

construct wormholes in their sectors of space to access Earth space, thus creating stargates - the passageways of the gods - and bypassing the cosmic speed limit and the barriers of vast distances and endless time.

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ERICH VON DANIKEN's new television special "Chariots of the Gods?-The Mysteries Continue" was shown on the ABC Television Network in the United States and Canada on September 26, 1996. To purchase a copy of the video tape, telephone: 1-800-650-4ABC.