

# Ancient Aliens

***Ancient Aliens*** is an American television series produced by Prometheus Entertainment that explores the pseudoscientific hypothesis of ancient astronauts in a non-critical, documentary format. Episodes also explore related pseudoscientific and pseudohistoric topics, such as: Atlantis and other lost ancient civilizations, extraterrestrial contact and ufology, and popular conspiracy theories.<sup>[1][2]</sup> The series, which has aired on History since 2010, has been a target for criticism of History's channel drift, as well as criticism for promoting unorthodox or unproven hypotheses as fact.<sup>[3]</sup> According to *Smithsonian*, episodes of the series overwhelm the viewer with "fictions and distortions" by using a Gish gallop.<sup>[4]</sup>

Originally broadcast as two-hour documentary special in 2009, *Ancient Aliens: The Series* aired for three seasons as a flagship series on History from 2010 to 2012.<sup>[5]</sup> The series moved to H2 from 2012 to 2014, with frequent re-airings of episodes on History and other A&E services. In 2015, the series returned to History after H2 was relaunched as Vice on TV. A nineteenth season began in 2023.<sup>[6][1][7]</sup> All episodes are narrated by Robert Clotworthy.

The series is inspired by the works of Erich von Däniken, Zecharia Sitchin, Graham Hancock, Robert Bauval, Brinsley Le Poer Trench, Charles Hapgood, and Edgar Cayce. Producer Giorgio Tsoukalos, writer David Childress and journalist Nick Pope are featured guests.

In 2011, the series was parodied in *South Park*'s "A History Channel Thanksgiving". Several episodes were featured in *Traveling the Stars: Action Bronson and Friends Watch Ancient Aliens*. Brian Dunning debunked the series as "a slap in the face to the ingenuity of the human race".<sup>[8]</sup>

## Production

Executive producer of the series was Kevin Burns from 2009 until 2021. Giorgio Tsoukalos serves as consulting producer, and is a featured guest, appearing in every episode.<sup>[9]</sup> UFO researcher C. Scott Littleton served as a producing consultant during the series development until his death in 2010.<sup>[10]</sup>

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <i><b>Ancient Aliens</b></i> |   |
| <b>ANCIENT ALIENS</b>        |   |
| <b>Genre</b>                 | <u>Pseudoscience</u><br><u>Pseudohistory</u><br><u>Ufology</u><br><u>Conspiracy theory</u>  |
| <b>Narrated by</b>           | <u>Robert Clotworthy</u>  |
| <b>Country of origin</b>     | United States   |
| <b>Original language</b>     | English   |
| <b>No. of seasons</b>        | 20  |
| <b>No. of episodes</b>       | 250<br>( <u>list of episodes</u> )  |
| <b>Production</b>            |   |
| <b>Executive producers</b>   | <u>Kevin Burns</u> (2009–2021)<br><u>David Silver</u> (2010–present)<br><u>Susan Leventhal</u> (2010–present)<br><u>Giorgio A. Tsoukalos</u> (2016–present) |
| <b>Camera setup</b>          | <u>Multiple</u>   |
| <b>Running time</b>          | 90 minutes (season 1)<br>60 minutes (season 2–present)  |
| <b>Production company</b>    | <u>Prometheus Entertainment</u>   |

*Ancient Aliens* originally aired a two-hour documentary special for the History Channel on March 8, 2009. The special was re-run several times, and is now packaged with the series as its pilot episode. *Ancient Aliens: The Series* aired on History from 2010 to 2011, then moved to H2 where it was promoted as one of the network's flagship series until 2014.

Frequent re-airings of episodes continued on the History channel, with highlights and repackaged episodes airing on A&E and Lifetime. A selection of thirteen episodes which focused on the 2012 phenomenon was made available for syndication in the United States and Canada during the 2011–12 television season. In some foreign markets, the series still carries the *Ancient Aliens: The Series* title card.

In 2015, the series returned to History after H2 was relaunched as Vice on TV. In response to complaints from disgruntled fans, Vice on TV created *Action Bronson Watches Ancient Aliens*.<sup>[11]</sup> History renewed *Ancient Aliens* for a fifteenth which premiered on January 24, 2020.<sup>[6]</sup> Due to COVID-19 disrupting production, the season ended after the twelve completed episodes were broadcast. Production was soon restarted, and a sixteenth season began on November 13, 2020.<sup>[1][7]</sup> A nineteenth season began broadcast in 2023.

| Original release |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Network</b>   | <u>History</u>          |
| <b>Release</b>   | March 8, 2009 – present |

## Premise and cosmology

The series is based on and inspired by the pseudoscientific ancient astronauts hypothesis popularized in *Chariots of the Gods?*, by Erich von Däniken, and *The 12th Planet*, by Zecharia Sitchin. According to von Däniken, Sitchin, and others, extraterrestrial beings visited Earth in the distant past and introduced civilization, architecture, and high technology to pre-historic humans. Many, if not all, of ancient man's achievements in language, mathematics, science, technology and architecture, such as Egyptian pyramids, Pumapunku, Teotihuacan, and Stonehenge, are attributed to the influence of extraterrestrials. Remnants of extraterrestrial visitations are claimed to be found in religious texts, ancient myths and legendary histories, in addition to fragments found in the texts and practices of Hinduism, Ancient Egyptian religion, Gnostic Christianity, and more recent religious movements such as Mormonism. The hypothesis also holds that ancient visitations left etymological remnants in many of the world's languages, such as the root words for "Dagon", "dragon", "dog", and "Danann", or the frequent occurrence of the prefix *anu-* meaning "friend" or "visitor." Additionally, anatomically modern humans are the result of genetic modification and or modern humans are somehow biologically descended from ancient astronauts.

There is little use of precise dates in many episodes. Guests use terms such as "the remote past", "prehistoric times", "ancient times", or they refer to "our ancient ancestors" in the abstract, when discussing hypothetical historical events. There is a frequent demarcation of pre-history from the modern era used by guests: "before or after 'The Ice Age'", or approximately 12,000 years ago. Many guests featured on the series, including Graham Hancock, and Robert Schoch, have claimed a sophisticated human civilization was destroyed at the end of the Ice Age.

Many of the guests who appear in the series support and have expanded on these claims in their own work creating a shared cosmology.

## Presentation style

The series presents all claims made by guests in an uncritical, fast-paced format. The narration frequently frames claims made by guests or their responses as rhetorical questions which are answered with "ancient alien theorists say yes," or a variation thereof. After a particular claim is introduced, and explored in some detail, the narration cuts away with, "Perhaps more evidence can be found..." Another location, archeological find, or event, with a hypothetical connection to the previous claim is introduced. *Chariots of the Gods?* used a similar framing device. Smithsonian Magazine described this presentation style as a Gish gallop.<sup>[4]</sup>

When comments are made by guests in each episode, there is no indication made (either by the narration or on-screen) whether they are speculating on the rhetorical question made by the interviewer or narration, or if they are repeating claims made by other researchers, or if they are speaking of their own work or expertise. Geologist Robert Schoch said portions of his own interviews for the series are sometimes inserted into the finished episodes in a manner which is out of context, or wholly disconnected from the questions asked of him on and off camera.<sup>[12]</sup>

Writer David Childress, who appears in every episode, frequently concludes his comments with the exclamation, "—probably extraterrestrials!" Both Childress and Giorgio Tsoukalos repeatedly assert pre-historic peoples lacked the vocabulary to describe "technological" or "high-tech" devices (such as rockets or missiles, advanced weapons, aircraft, powered land vehicles, and medical instruments) that they supposedly witnessed, and thus referred to extraterrestrial visitors using such technology as gods.

Terms such as "ancient astronauts", "ancient aliens", "alien visitors", "extra-terrestrial beings", "ancient gods", and "otherworldly beings", are used interchangeably by guests and the narration. Guests frequently conflate the meaning of "theory" and "hypothesis", or they frequently obscure or ignore the difference between mythology and legendary history, and verifiable archaeology, anthropology, or documented history.

## Frequent guests

Erich von Däniken is the featured guest in the pilot episode, in addition to being the focus of two biographical episodes: "The Von Däniken Legacy", in Season 5, and "The Alien Phenomena", in Season 13.

In the first season, credentialed scientists and professionals, such as Sara Seager and Michael Denning, respond to claims made by other guests, but their rebuttals were not rigorous. In subsequent episodes, scientists and professionals offer explanations of scientific phenomena or historical events without endorsing claims made by other guests, or they offer personal commentary. Psychologist Jonathan Young appears in 123 episodes, providing explanations of myths and legends, and legendary history. Boston University associate professor Robert Schoch presents his Sphinx water erosion hypothesis, as well as his hypothesis concerning the age and purpose of Göbekli Tepe, in several episodes.

Radio talk show host George Noory appears in more than 80 episodes, including the pilot episode. Reverend Barry Downing, known for describing angels in the Bible as ancient astronauts, appears in the pilot episode, and his comments are repeated in several other episodes. Writers Robert Bauval and Graham Hancock appear in many episodes. They both express skepticism of ancient astronauts, instead discussing their own theories of ancient civilizations. Hancock repeats the statement from his work that "There is a forgotten episode in human history." Nick Pope and Travis S. Taylor are also frequent guests.<sup>[13]</sup>

Segments and highlights from all first-season episodes, including the pilot, were edited into later episodes as late as Season 12, so that guests who appeared in Season 1 ostensibly appear in later seasons, although footage of their original interviews was re-used.

## Evidence

In many episodes, little empirical evidence is offered to support the presented claims. Episodes or episode segments focus on out-of-place artifacts, such as: the London Hammer, Antikythera mechanism, or the Aiud object; or segments focus on alleged inconsistencies in the historical record. Guests discuss evidence which supports their claims in general or abstract terms. Some guests have alleged professionals and government have suppressed evidence of ancient mysteries, such as the in episode "The Prototypes" during which guests alleged that the Smithsonian Institution suppressed findings of "giant humanoids" found alongside American Indian remains in the Kanawha Valley.

From Season 12 onward, some episodes have included segments in which evidence that potentially supports the ancient astronauts hypothesis is subjected to testing by credentialed scientists and medical professionals on-camera. In the episode "The Science Wars", an elongated skull was subject to an MRI examination, and DNA was extracted and tested. In the episode "The Star Gods of Sirius" blue, porous, nitrogen-rich stones, were examined by geologists. However, none of the results produced—from the skull, the stones, or other objects examined in later episodes—proved conclusive.

## Other claims

Other claims linked to the ancient astronauts hypothesis, such as UFOs, alien abductions, the Roswell incident and Rendlesham Forest incident, panspermia, and human space exploration, feature prominently in many episodes. Guests have presented other unproven historical and pseudoscientific hypotheses related to, or dependent upon an understanding of: Atlantis and other lost civilizations, as described in works by Brinsley Le Poer Trench and Edgar Cayce; or ley lines as originally described by Alfred Watkins, or more recent interpretations; cataclysmic pole shifts as promoted by Charles Hapgood; various forms of Christian and Hindu creationism, or pseudohistory promoted by various religious movements; mythical elements of the Kabbalah, Zohar, and Book of Enoch; and various new religious movements.

Other concepts explored include: faith healing, remote viewing, and various psychic phenomena. Guests discuss various forms of catastrophism, and refer to other featured guests or historical figures as catastrophists. In various episodes, guests have claimed prominent historical figures were either influenced by or were possibly "extra-terrestrial" or "otherworldly beings."

Guests have also discussed unrelated pseudoscientific claims, such as: dinosaurs coexisting with humans until a recent extinction event, crystal healing and crystal skulls, as well as Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, and the New World Order. Linda Moulton Howe appears in several episodes which explore alien abduction, animal mutilation, and conspiracies involving military installations on Antarctica. The 2013 Citizen Hearing on Disclosure features prominently in numerous episodes, such as Season 14's "The Nuclear Agenda".

Prior to December 2012, several episodes explored facets of the 2012 Mayan doomsday prophecy. The episodes "The Maya Conspiracy" and "The Doomsday Prophecies", which aired in February 2012, explored the Maya calendar and its relation to the construction of Palenque, the god

Kukulcan, in addition to links between the Maya civilization and the ancient astronaut hypothesis. Episodes focusing on Mesoamerica broadcast after 2012 make no mention of the 2012 phenomenon. In the episode "The God Particle", guests linked the Mayan long count to the discovery of the Higgs boson.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Episodes

| Season    | Episodes     | Originally aired   |                    |
|-----------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|           |              | First aired        | Last aired         |
|           | <u>Pilot</u> | March 8, 2009      |                    |
| <u>1</u>  | 5            | April 20, 2010     | May 25, 2010       |
| <u>2</u>  | 10           | October 28, 2010   | December 30, 2010  |
| <u>3</u>  | 16           | July 28, 2011      | November 23, 2011  |
| <u>4</u>  | 10           | February 17, 2012  | May 4, 2012        |
| <u>5</u>  | 12           | December 21, 2012  | April 19, 2013     |
| <u>6</u>  | 11           | September 30, 2013 | December 13, 2013  |
| <u>7</u>  | 8            | January 24, 2014   | March 14, 2014     |
| <u>8</u>  | 9            | June 13, 2014      | August 22, 2014    |
| <u>9</u>  | 12           | October 31, 2014   | May 1, 2015        |
| <u>10</u> | 10           | July 24, 2015      | October 9, 2015    |
| <u>11</u> | 15           | May 6, 2016        | September 2, 2016  |
| <u>12</u> | 16           | April 28, 2017     | September 15, 2017 |
| <u>13</u> | 15           | April 27, 2018     | January 7, 2019    |
| <u>14</u> | 22           | May 31, 2019       | November 29, 2019  |
| <u>15</u> | 12           | January 24, 2020   | April 18, 2020     |
| <u>16</u> | 10           | November 13, 2020  | March 12, 2021     |
| <u>17</u> | 7            | August 6, 2021     | October 8, 2021    |
| <u>18</u> | 20           | January 7, 2022    | September 16, 2022 |
| <u>19</u> | 20           | January 6, 2023    | September 15, 2023 |
| <u>20</u> | TBA          | January 5, 2024    | TBA                |

## Reception

The program had 1.676 million viewers in late October 2010,<sup>[15]</sup> 2.034 million viewers in mid-December (for the "Unexplained Structures" episode),<sup>[16]</sup> and in late-January 2011 the series had 1.309 million viewers.<sup>[17][18]</sup>

## Critical response

The series has been criticized by historians, cosmologists, archaeologists and other scientists for presenting and promoting pseudoscience, pseudohistory and pseudoarchaeology as fact. Episodes are frequently characterized as "far-fetched",<sup>[19]</sup> "hugely speculative",<sup>[20]</sup> and "expound[ing] wildly

on theories suggesting that astronauts wandered the Earth freely in ancient times."<sup>[21]</sup> Many of the claims made by guests are not commonly accepted as fact by the scientific community.<sup>[22]</sup> In 2009, History professor Ronald H. Fritze observed that pseudoscience has a periodic popularity in the U.S.:<sup>[22][23]</sup>

In a pop culture with a short memory and a voracious appetite, aliens and pyramids and lost civilizations are recycled like fashions.

Brad Lockwood of *Forbes* characterized *Ancient Aliens* as an example of History's channel drift toward "programs devoted to monsters, aliens, and conspiracies". He added that, "*Ancient Aliens* defies all ability to suspend disbelief for the sake of entertainment."<sup>[3]</sup> Alex Knapp, also of *Forbes*, cited archaeologist Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews' rebuke of History for treating "nonsense as though it were fact."<sup>[24]</sup>

In 2011, *South Park* parodied the series in the episode "A History Channel Thanksgiving". Ramsey Isler of IGN commented, "The aim is placed squarely on *Ancient Aliens* specifically."<sup>[25]</sup> *South Park's* animation style created "a perfect satire of all the ridiculousness of this series, including the black and white art with aliens photoshopped in, and interviews with people of dubious authority".

Science writer Riley Black was critical of the series—particularly an episode that suggested "aliens exterminated dinosaurs to make way for our species"—which she characterized as "some of the most noxious sludge in television's bottomless chum bucket." Black accused the series of employing a Gish gallop technique to overwhelm the viewer with many "fictions and distortions."<sup>[4]</sup>

Others have called attention to a paucity of opposing viewpoints, such as Kenneth Feder, Professor of Archaeology at Central Connecticut State University and author of *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology*. He was approached by producers with requests to appear in several episodes: "My response was, I'd be happy to be on your show, but you should know that I think that the ancient astronaut hypothesis is execrable bullshit."<sup>[26]</sup> He added, "I haven't heard back from them, rather remarkably. So, I guess maybe they're not interested in the other point of view."<sup>[27]</sup> In 2016, Vice on TV producer Jordan Kinley said of *Ancient Aliens* claims:<sup>[11]</sup>

You feel kind of lost when someone questions the historical narrative you've been taught. I don't believe much of what's talked about ... but I think it's a good time for people to realize that some of our history is manufactured. Some of it is manufactured to be accurate, and some of it is manufactured to excuse horrible things that have happened.

In the 2019 issue of *Public Archaeology*, Franco D. Rossi of Johns Hopkins University published a retrospective of his experience at the 2018 Boston Alien Con. He characterized *Ancient Aliens* and its fans as a "science fiction fandom" which also trafficked in "misinformation" and "conspiracies."<sup>[28]</sup> He warned professionals in various history fields will have to reckon with ancient astronaut hypothesis and its adherents. In March 2020, podcaster Brian Dunning challenged and debunked many of the claims featured on *Ancient Aliens*. At the conclusion of the third episode, Dunning quoted Kenneth Feder's *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology*:<sup>[29]</sup>

I realize that for some of you I'm being mean, snarky, and inflexible on this topic. And you'd be right. But in the face of a program and, at its core, a philosophy that is based on assumptions that degrade and diminish the inherent human capacity to invent, create, build, cooperate, and rise to the occasion to solve great technological challenges, both in the present and in the past [...]

Dunning emphasized Feder's conclusion: "I maintain that meanness and inflexibility are entirely appropriate responses."<sup>[29]</sup>

## Critical response by guests

Many guests featured in episodes of the series have publicly expressed skepticism of the series' premise or of the ancient astronaut hypothesis. In the pilot episode, Sister Ilia Delio of the Washington Theological Union repeated comments made previously about the predilection for literalism common among supporters of the ancient astronaut hypothesis:<sup>[30]</sup>

Can we liken Ezekiel's chariot to a UFO? The ancients used myth and metaphor and images to describe their experience of God. I think what we don't want to fall to is a type of 'fundamental literalism'. The stories of the Old Testament emerge out of the people of that time, out of their own context, to make sense of their experience of God. We can gain insight by reading the Old Testament and reading about Ezekiel's chariot, but it's not to draw a strict analogy between his chariot and a UFO.

At a 2014 hearing of the House Committee on Science, Seth Shostak said, "The public is fascinated with the idea that we may be being visited now, or maybe in the past," but there is not any evidence which has convinced him "that we were visited in [historical] times."<sup>[31]</sup> Shostak has appeared in twelve episodes. In a 2018 episode of *The Joe Rogan Experience*, Robert Schoch said promoters of the ancient astronaut hypothesis "want everything to be 'ancient aliens'", which in his view was "sort of a cop-out". He added those same promoters are often motivated to sell books, DVDs, and conference tickets instead of presenting facts.<sup>[12]</sup> Belief in the ancient alien hypothesis and other ancient mysteries "fills a void" for some people, according to Schoch, but he "tries to fill that void with something real."<sup>[12]</sup>

William Shatner, who appeared in the Season 16 episode "William Shatner Meets *Ancient Aliens*", told *Inverse*: "I had some spirited discussions with these experts who believe aliens were here, and like most people, I was dubious about the whole thing." He added, "They intrigued me enough to think something's going on."<sup>[32]</sup>

## Related media

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Many guests featured on *Ancient Aliens* appear in other History channel series and specials, such as *The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch*, *America's Book of Secrets*, and *The Curse of Oak Island*. Segments from those series have appeared in *Ancient Aliens*. William Shatner, who appears in two

episodes of *Ancient Aliens*, presents *The UnXplained* which explores many of the topics featured in episodes *Ancient Aliens*. Shatner narrated the English-language version of *Mystery of the Gods* (1976) which was based on von Däniken's books published after *Chariots of the Gods?*.

## Ancient Aliens meme

Tsoukalos's appearances in *Ancient Aliens* inspired a meme highlighting his unusual hairstyle overlaid with the caption: "I'm not saying it was aliens ... but ..." <sup>[33]</sup> Variations of the meme were uploaded by users as early as November 2010. <sup>[33][34]</sup> According to [Dictionary.com](#), the meme mimicked "the tone of conviction used by Tsoukalos to present unfounded far-fetched pseudo-logic as fact." <sup>[34]</sup>



The original meme's screenshot depicting [Giorgio A. Tsoukalos](#)

## Alien Con

From 2016 to 2018, [A&E Networks](#) co-produced several installments of Alien Con, a fan convention inspired by the series. <sup>[35][36]</sup> Footage from the 2016 and 2017 conventions appeared in several episodes which aired during Seasons 11 and 12. Highlights from the November 2018 convention in Baltimore were included in several episodes that aired in 2019, most prominently the episode "Project Hybrid". <sup>[37]</sup>

## Action Bronson Watches Ancient Aliens

In April 2016, [Vice on TV](#) released *Action Bronson Watches Ancient Aliens*, which was followed by a ten-episode series, later retitled *Traveling the Stars*. Each episode features rapper [Action Bronson](#) and celebrity guests watching episodes of *Ancient Aliens* while intoxicated by [cannabis](#). The series is presented in a [comedy-documentary](#) format which parodies *Ancient Aliens*'s presentation style.

Bronson praised *Ancient Aliens*, saying it is "the best thing that was ever created by man." <sup>[38]</sup> According to producers Jordan Kinley and Hannah Gregg, *Traveling the Stars* was developed as a response to complaints by disgruntled viewers of H2 which Vice on TV's programming replaced. <sup>[11]</sup> *Traveling the Stars* was renewed for a second season in 2019.

## Illustrated companion and game

A companion to the series, *Ancient Aliens: The Official Companion Book* (ISBN 978-0-06-245541-3) was published in November 2016. Included was an overview of the ancient astronaut hypothesis, and introductions to a number of topics explored by the television series up to Season 11. The audiobook adaptation, which is no longer available, featured the voices of [Giorgio A. Tsoukalos](#), [Angela Cartwright](#), [Bill Mumy](#), [Robert Clotworthy](#), and producer [Kevin Burns](#).

*Ancient Aliens: The Game* is a [city-building game](#) developed by Fifth Column Games. The user plays as an alien-human hybrid who must oversee the construction of the [Great Pyramid of Giza](#). The game was released in 2016 as a [free-to-play](#) mobile and [Facebook game](#). A [PC port](#) was released by [Legacy Games](#) in September 2022. <sup>[39]</sup>

## Film adaptation

In April 2021, Counterbalance Entertainment announced they had closed a deal with Legendary Entertainment to produce a film adaptation of *Ancient Aliens*. Josh Heald, creator of *Cobra Kai*, will direct a script written by Luke Ryan who will also executive produce.<sup>[40]</sup> In July 2022, Legendary announced Craig Titley would write the feature script with Josh Heald to direct in partnership with Counterbalance Entertainment.<sup>[41]</sup>

## See also

- List of topics characterized as pseudoscience
- Ancient Astronauts

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