

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:14,739

This series presents information based in part on theory and conjecture.

2

00:00:14,739 --> 00:00:19,274

The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanations but not necessarily

3

00:00:19,274 --> 00:00:27,662

the only ones to the mysteries we will examine.

4

00:00:27,662 --> 00:00:40,185

A long ago on the Midwestern plain, men and women gathered to watch the skies.

5

00:00:40,185 --> 00:00:54,835

In a sacred ritual led by a priest of the sun, these people made the ultimate sacrifice.

6

00:00:54,835 --> 00:01:19,880

All that is left of these earthen mounds, they may conceal the secret of a Mayan legacy.

7

00:01:19,880 --> 00:01:28,028

Long before the first explorers came to America, an extraordinary civilization arose in southern Illinois.

8

00:01:28,028 --> 00:01:34,730

The people had no metal tools, no written language, but their lives were ordered by a profound

9

00:01:34,730 --> 00:01:50,825

understanding of nature and the universe.

10

00:01:50,825 --> 00:02:00,337

On these mounds once stood the temples of a great metropolis, home to 40,000 men and women.

11

00:02:00,337 --> 00:02:07,120

The Indians flourished for 500 years, then they disappeared.

12

00:02:07,120 --> 00:02:16,954

Beneath the mounds, scientists uncovered a fascinating clue to the origins of a lost city of Cahokia.

13

00:02:16,954 --> 00:02:26,506

In 1961, Dr. Warren Wittry of the University of Illinois began an excavation on the outskirts of

the mounds.

14

00:02:26,506 --> 00:02:31,724

In a series of deep pits, he found remnants of wooden posts.

15

00:02:31,724 --> 00:02:38,106

At first he thought they were part of a giant stockade surrounding the city.

16

00:02:38,106 --> 00:02:44,809

As more poles were unearthed, Wittry became convinced that a grand design lay behind their arrangement.

17

00:02:44,809 --> 00:02:53,077

He began to reconstruct the ancient site, sinking new posts in the original holes.

18

00:02:53,077 --> 00:03:01,385

What anthropologists knew about the Indians of Cahokia did not prepare him for what would be revealed.

19

00:03:01,385 --> 00:03:10,135

The posts seemed to form a giant circle, like a circle of stone erected 3,000 years before at

Stonehenge.

20

00:03:10,135 --> 00:03:20,811

We believe that the American woodhenge functioned in somewhat the same way as the famous site in England known as Stonehenge.

21

00:03:20,811 --> 00:03:29,561

These sites were used by ancient people to observe sunrise at various times of the year.

22

00:03:29,561 --> 00:03:35,300

And the observation of sunrise served as a kind of calendar.

23

00:03:35,300 --> 00:03:40,678

Woodhenge was built with a precision that is astonishing even today.

24

00:03:40,678 --> 00:03:50,472

It was analyzed on the same computer used for Stonehenge, and the circle at Cahokia proved more accurately aligned to the sun.

25

00:03:50,913 --> 00:04:00,706

From Wittry's discovery, anthropologists were able to reconstruct the pattern of Cahokian life.

26

00:04:00,706 --> 00:04:06,085

They found that here was a culture different from other tribes of North America.

27

00:04:06,085 --> 00:04:16,922

Their society revolved around a calendar that linked men on earth with the gods who ruled the skies.

28

00:04:16,922 --> 00:04:24,467

Before beginning any new enterprise, the people sought the guidance of the sun.

29

00:04:24,467 --> 00:04:29,043

Each morning, a priest of the sun went out to greet the dawn.

30

00:04:29,043 --> 00:04:36,588

Like the chiefs of other tribes, his power was absolute, for only a priest could communicate with the gods.

31

00:04:36,588 --> 00:04:42,488

Inside the mounds was evidence that the sun priest was even more powerful than other chiefs.

32

00:04:42,488 --> 00:04:49,191

His death carried great import for the whole of Cahokian society.

33

00:04:49,191 --> 00:04:55,091

A team of archaeologists made an astonishing discovery that set Cahokia apart.

34

00:04:55,091 --> 00:05:00,791

Fifty-three young women were buried in a mass grave. They had all been strangled.

35

00:05:00,791 --> 00:05:04,323

Nearby were the partial remains of four young men.

36

00:05:04,323 --> 00:05:09,661

It appeared that their heads and hands had been deliberately severed.

37

00:05:09,741 --> 00:05:17,247

The key to these mysterious deaths lay in yet another tomb where a priest had been buried with a horde of possessions.

38

00:05:17,247 --> 00:05:26,438

The lavish burial told of men and women sacrificed to ensure their priest a safe journey to the gods.

39

00:05:26,438 --> 00:05:33,863

Nowhere in the story of the ancient Americas was there ever such a massive ritual sacrifice.

40

00:05:33,903 --> 00:05:39,924

Were the Cahokians inspired by ideas from another place and time?

41

00:05:44,941 --> 00:05:55,376

Deep in the Mexican jungle, La Teotihuacan, a remarkable culture whose religion required such sacrifices was flourishing by 500 AD.

42

00:05:55,376 --> 00:06:01,196

They were the Mayans. Their society was the most advanced on the entire continent.

43

00:06:01,236 --> 00:06:05,852

Their cities reveal a surprising knowledge of architecture and engineering.

44

00:06:05,852 --> 00:06:11,872

Their tower observatories map the skies as accurately as the telescopes of today.

45

00:06:14,682 --> 00:06:21,706

The Mayans developed the earliest written language and a system of mathematics and geometry that had no equal.

46

00:06:22,709 --> 00:06:30,736

While it is difficult to imagine a relationship between their culture and the early Indians of America, thousands of miles to the north,

47

00:06:30,736 --> 00:06:37,760

beneath the mounds there may lie the connection between Cahokia and the ancient cities of Mexico.

48

00:06:39,767 --> 00:06:42,777

Dr. Witri explains,

49

00:06:42,777 --> 00:06:53,815

We have identified a tentative Cahokia yard, a unit of measurement that was used over and over again in even multiples.

50

00:06:55,822 --> 00:07:01,842

The Cahokia yard is nearly identical to the standard measurement used by the Mayans throughout their empire.

51

00:07:02,845 --> 00:07:08,866

An intriguing correspondence in time may connect their societies.

52

00:07:08,866 --> 00:07:21,910

The turning point in Cahokia's development came around the year 900, precisely as the Mayan civilization was drawing to an end in Mexico.

53

00:07:22,914 --> 00:07:31,944

The Mayans have vanished. No one knows where they fled when their cities began to die.

54

00:07:35,958 --> 00:07:40,975

Do the similarities in religion and astronomy tell us the Mayans went far to the north?

55

00:07:42,982 --> 00:07:50,006

Could they have traveled 5,000 miles to the Indians of Cahokia with their ideas and culture intact?

56

00:07:53,016 --> 00:08:01,043

It's incredible to imagine that the ideas of one culture could be transferred across an entire

continent in a single century.

57

00:08:01,043 --> 00:08:05,057

How can we account for the mysterious parallels that seem to exist?

58

00:08:05,057 --> 00:08:11,077

Was there a bridge between the jungle strongholds of the Mayans and the mounds in Illinois?

59

00:08:11,077 --> 00:08:16,094

We may find an answer in the southwestern desert that lies between them.

60

00:08:17,098 --> 00:08:27,132

A thousand years ago, a desert tribe called Anasazi erected a city of stone towers unlike anything else seen in this country.

61

00:08:27,132 --> 00:08:34,156

The secret of these strange towers in Utah has eluded scientists for many centuries.

62

00:08:34,156 --> 00:08:38,169

If they were storehouses, why do they have windows?

63

00:08:40,176 --> 00:08:44,190

If they were watchtowers, why are the windows so small?

64

00:08:46,197 --> 00:08:51,214

Recently, an astronomer from the Smithsonian Institution has advanced a new theory.

65

00:08:54,224 --> 00:08:58,238

Dr. Ray Williamson thinks they were built to observe the heavens.

66

00:08:58,238 --> 00:09:04,258

What's particularly exciting about this room is that there are three sun alignments in it.

67

00:09:04,258 --> 00:09:12,285

Now we consider this combination of three alignments to be an excellent calendar room.

68

00:09:12,285 --> 00:09:18,306

It's an excellent place even today where we could, if we stayed here long enough throughout the year,

69

00:09:18,306 --> 00:09:26,333

actually put marks on the walls to tell us what day it is and to be very accurately determined

70

00:09:26,333 --> 00:09:31,350

the summer solstice, the winter solstice and the equinox.

71

00:09:32,353 --> 00:09:37,371

Several of the towers have strategic windows that line up with the rising moon.

72

00:09:38,374 --> 00:09:43,391

It would have taken many generations of careful study to make them so accurate.

73

00:09:45,398 --> 00:09:51,418

Dr. Williamson believes the alignments would provide the basis for predicting eclipses,

74

00:09:51,418 --> 00:09:56,435

a complex procedure understood by only a few cultures.

75

00:09:57,439 --> 00:10:04,463

We have indications here that they were going in the direction of developing a calendar

76

00:10:04,463 --> 00:10:07,473

that was as complicated as a Mayan calendar.

77

00:10:07,473 --> 00:10:12,490

That's a guess, that's a hypothesis. It's one that we're working on right now.

78

00:10:13,493 --> 00:10:16,504

These towers have been mysteries for years.

79

00:10:16,504 --> 00:10:22,524

Some people have suggested that these towers are reminiscent of the Mayan towers.

80

00:10:22,524 --> 00:10:24,531

I'm not sure.

81

00:10:26,538 --> 00:10:33,561

Mayan observatories took a circular form, an expression in stone of the wind and the cosmos.

82

00:10:33,561 --> 00:10:37,575

Did they inspire the tower observatories of the Southwest?

83

00:10:44,599 --> 00:10:50,619

We found recently some small evidence of Mexican influence up in this area.

84

00:10:51,623 --> 00:10:55,637

And perhaps that's associated with the towers that are here, I don't know.

85

00:10:55,637 --> 00:10:57,643

I think there's still mysteries.

86

00:10:58,647 --> 00:11:07,677

300 miles from the Anasazi and other ancient people erected a temple to the skies.

87

00:11:07,677 --> 00:11:12,694

They too have disappeared, but they left behind an important clue.

88

00:11:15,705 --> 00:11:22,729

The observatory at Casa Grande, Arizona remains as evidence that these Indians sought to understand the universe.

89

00:11:23,732 --> 00:11:30,756

Of an entire Pueblo, only a few walls have survived the centuries.

90

00:11:35,773 --> 00:11:41,793

Despite the protection of its sheltering roof, the observatory may not last for another 50 years.

91

00:11:43,800 --> 00:11:49,821

Robert Hicks of the University of Arizona has been investigating Casa Grande.

92

00:11:50,824 --> 00:11:58,851

The alignments are very similar to Mayan astronomical alignments at the Cotacol Observatory in Mexico.

93

00:11:58,851 --> 00:12:05,875

We find the same alignments here as we do in the Cotacol, and we feel that there was an influence from Central America.

94

00:12:05,875 --> 00:12:12,899

We feel that a representative of this Mayan elite, somebody with a specialized knowledge about astronomy and also site planning,

95

00:12:12,899 --> 00:12:15,909

may have come up to direct the construction of this building.

96

00:12:16,913 --> 00:12:19,923

Most anthropologists do not accept this theory.

97

00:12:19,923 --> 00:12:26,947

But recently, scientists have uncovered new evidence that may redefine the extent of the Mayan legacy.

98

00:12:26,947 --> 00:12:33,971

In the deserts of the Southwest, this country's prehistoric astronomy reached its greatest heights.

99

00:12:33,971 --> 00:12:40,995

If there was a link between the ancient Mayans and the Indians of Cahokia, a continent away, perhaps we will find it here.

100

00:12:40,995 --> 00:12:48,018

A Pueblo in New Mexico, the Indian Ocean, is the largest and most important place in the world.

101

00:12:48,018 --> 00:12:55,042

If there was a link between the ancient Mayans and the Indians of Cahokia, a continent away, perhaps we will find it here.

102

00:12:55,042 --> 00:13:01,063

A Pueblo in New Mexico may well be the crossroads in that ancient connection.

103

00:13:01,063 --> 00:13:10,093

It is Chaco Canyon, built out of stone and brick by the Anasazi, architects of the mysterious towers in Utah.

104

00:13:11,097 --> 00:13:20,128

In a massive ceremonial structure called the Great Kiva, astronomers found evidence of a scientific knowledge that rivals anything we know today.

105

00:13:23,138 --> 00:13:28,155

At the summer solstice, Dr. Williamson has come to observe the dawn.

106

00:13:28,155 --> 00:13:34,175

Every year on the 21st of June, the sun repeats a timeless pattern.

107

00:13:34,175 --> 00:13:40,196

Now that will just about get the sun coming over.

108

00:13:40,196 --> 00:13:42,203

There it comes.

109

00:13:44,209 --> 00:13:58,257

We're here in Chaco Canyon in a Great Kiva, Casarine, Canada, to determine the astronomical alignments of this building that we're in.

110

00:13:58,257 --> 00:14:12,305

We're here on the solstice because on the solstice the sun comes through this port that you see and falls on that low niche over there.

111

00:14:14,312 --> 00:14:19,329

The solstice was a special time for the Indians who constructed this building.

112

00:14:19,329 --> 00:14:25,349

They needed to know when the solstice occurred to set their calendar.

113

00:14:29,363 --> 00:14:37,390

At the winter solstice, a ritual of fire ushered in the new year.

114

00:14:40,400 --> 00:14:44,414

In December, the sun seemed to stop in its winter house.

115

00:14:44,414 --> 00:14:52,441

The Indians mounted an elaborate display of fire and light to prompt their god, the sun, and set the year in motion.

116

00:14:53,445 --> 00:14:57,458

The ceremony of fire can be traced to the ancient cities of Mexico.

117

00:14:57,458 --> 00:15:00,469

How did it come to the Anasazi?

118

00:15:03,479 --> 00:15:07,492

A thousand years ago, the dwellings at Chaco were dug into the ground.

119

00:15:07,492 --> 00:15:13,513

Then, quite suddenly, an extraordinary chain swept the canyon.

120

00:15:16,523 --> 00:15:20,537

The Anasazi began to build a city of towering pueblos.

121

00:15:21,540 --> 00:15:27,561

Almost overnight, Chaco became an active center of agriculture and trade.

122

00:15:27,561 --> 00:15:32,578

Its wealth based on the rich deposits of turquoise that lay nearby.

123

00:15:32,578 --> 00:15:39,601

The population grew to 25,000 men and women as the Indians learned to mine the stone.

124

00:15:40,605 --> 00:15:45,622

The turquoise attracted merchants from far away.

125

00:15:45,622 --> 00:15:52,646

Some believe that Mexican traders came north seeking the sacred stone for the worship of their god, Quetzalcoatl.

126

00:15:54,653 --> 00:15:59,670

Turquoise is the godstone for Quetzalcoatl. It was also important to some of the other Mexican...

127

00:15:59,670 --> 00:16:02,680

Dr. Jonathan Raymond of Illinois State University.

128

00:16:02,680 --> 00:16:06,694

Quetzalcoatl is going to be the first to be built in the world.

129

00:16:06,694 --> 00:16:10,707

He's got to have the turquoise that he demands.

130

00:16:10,707 --> 00:16:13,717

Mexico had turquoise, but not enough.

131

00:16:13,717 --> 00:16:18,734

The southwest had abundant turquoise, and so the merchants of Quetzalcoatl and the other deity cults...

132

00:16:18,734 --> 00:16:23,752

came out of north Mexico into the southwest looking for turquoise.

133

00:16:23,752 --> 00:16:27,765

The merchants were men of high status called Pochteca,

134

00:16:27,765 --> 00:16:32,782

employed by the courts of Mexico to supply their temples with turquoise.

135

00:16:33,786 --> 00:16:38,803

To Chaco they brought new crops, more productive corn.

136

00:16:38,803 --> 00:16:41,813

Was it simple trade or something more?

137

00:16:41,813 --> 00:16:46,830

For here were the peoples of two distant cultures speaking different languages.

138

00:16:46,830 --> 00:16:51,847

Did they achieve a deeper communication that reached beyond trade?

139

00:16:51,847 --> 00:16:54,857

Was information part of the exchange?

140

00:16:54,857 --> 00:16:59,874

At the head of the canyon, the Indians came to the port of Chaco.

141

00:16:59,874 --> 00:17:06,898

At the head of the canyon, the Indians constructed an elaborate road system stretching for 300 miles.

142

00:17:06,898 --> 00:17:11,915

Was it built to welcome travelers from the south?

143

00:17:11,915 --> 00:17:16,932

Did the merchants also receive more than the sacred stone itself?

144

00:17:16,932 --> 00:17:21,949

Raymond believes the Anasazi not only supplied the raw turquoise,

145

00:17:21,949 --> 00:17:25,963

but actually worked it into finished products.

146

00:17:25,963 --> 00:17:31,983

The beads and ritual mosaics used by the Mexican culture thousands of miles away.

147

00:17:31,983 --> 00:17:39,007

And in time Chaco and the other areas around it came under the heavy influence of Mexican exploitation,

148

00:17:39,007 --> 00:17:47,035

economic exploitation for the betterment of these religious cults of north Mexico.

149

00:17:47,035 --> 00:17:51,048

In an excavation for the National Science Foundation,

150

00:17:51,048 --> 00:17:56,065

Raymond unearthed dramatic evidence to support his claim.

151

00:17:56,065 --> 00:18:03,089

He discovered two tombs that were like no others seen in this country.

152

00:18:03,089 --> 00:18:13,123

Two skeletons were found, laid out on thousands of turquoise beads.

153

00:18:13,123 --> 00:18:20,147

Twelve men had been beheaded to accompany them in death.

154

00:18:20,147 --> 00:18:24,161

To Raymond, the implications were clear.

155

00:18:24,161 --> 00:18:28,174

These were the graves of important visitors from another land.

156

00:18:28,174 --> 00:18:35,198

They're not your ordinary Pueblo people. These are someone special. I think Pocheteca.

157

00:18:35,198 --> 00:18:42,222

If the Pocheteca did bring new crops to the north, they undoubtedly would have taught the Indians how to grow them.

158

00:18:42,222 --> 00:18:47,239

Passing along the astronomical knowledge necessary for a seasonal calendar.

159

00:18:47,239 --> 00:18:51,253

Knowledge not only of the sun and the moon, but of the stars as well.

160

00:18:51,253 --> 00:18:57,273

Using the computer, Dr. Raymond has found evidence to substantiate his theory.

161

00:18:57,273 --> 00:19:04,297

What we think the Anasazi watched is based on what we know the historic Pueblos,

162

00:19:04,297 --> 00:19:08,311

like the Zuni and the Hopi watch. We have good historic records for this.

163

00:19:08,311 --> 00:19:14,331

We know that they watched Orion. We know they watched the Pleiades. We know that they watched Gemini twins.

164

00:19:14,331 --> 00:19:20,352

If you take the stars that are used in the southwest and the stars that are used in Mexico,

165

00:19:20,352 --> 00:19:23,362

we find that they are using many...