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The New Age of alternative archaeology in Australia

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ABSTRACT

A review of unconventional views of the chronology of humans in Australia reveals something of the structure and diversity of alternative archaeology. Alternative ideas on Australian prehistory are increasingly brought to the public through high volume sales of magazines and books, and there are indications that such views currently have a surprising level of popularity. Increasingly these views are being rephrased to be mystical or 'New Age' in nature rather than pseudo-scientific. Some of the complexity of any response by conventional archaeology is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

As we approach the new millennium debates about the origin and antiquity of humans intensify. Many popular discussions concern the immediate future, ranging from disagreements about which year marks the new millennium to the magnitude of social change that will accompany the Age of Aquarius that is now dawning. As one section of the community anticipates the emergence of a new social order centred on spiritual values, another expects the beginning of the destruction of the world. And just as the approaching millennium raises these concerns for the future, it also serves to focus interest on the chronology of humans generally, including our knowledge of humanity in the distant past. For some discussants the conceivable time depth of humanity is remarkably long, while for others the span of human existence is extremely short. Each vision of chronology is accompanied by a different notion of the nature of human society in the past. These are old interests, long-standing myths, which have re-emerged because our calendar registers a particular number. This count-down to the end of the millennium is marked in 1996 by the 6,000 anniversary of the world according to the calculations of James Ussher and other scholars in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This anniversary is recognised not only by conventional archaeologists but also by many people with an unconventional view of human chronology. It is the diversity of these unconventional views that is the subject of this paper.

As an intrinsic need in our discipline archaeologists pursue an interest in the establishment of sequence and antiquity. In the years since Ussher offered his estimate for human antiquity archaeologists have greatly altered and refined their best estimates for events, to such an extent that Ussher's statements look so wildly improbable as to be irrational (but see Gould 1993). However many people are engaged in the construction of images of the past, and a number of these images make Ussher's chronological calculations look conservative. These endeavours, sometimes collectively labelled as 'cult archaeology', have been periodically examined by archaeologists because they claim a knowledge of the past and that their construction is more 'real' than the image

presented by conventional archaeological research.

On the anniversary of the world, according to one calculation, it is an appropriate opportunity to examine the current structure and diversity of unconventional archaeology in Australia and its implications for any response by conventional archaeology. In keeping with this theme, the following discussion centres on the unconventional constructions of chronology, the alternative means by which knowledge of the past is acquired and the unusual stories of the past that result. This is a useful device for portraying the variation in unconventional depictions of the past since the time depth of different frameworks underpins other aspects of the historical construction, including the nature and rate of social and environmental change, and the characters that participate in the historical dramas that are imagined.

SOME RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

Defining a number of terms can assist in the task of characterising unconventional views of Australian prehistory. Several authors of those unconventional views claim to be describing what they label as the 'hidden history' of Australia. From their view hidden history is a very different view of the past that conventional science refuses to acknowledge and hides from the public. It is useful to separate this inferred past from 'unconventional archaeology' or 'alternative archaeology' which we can see as the unconventional approaches to obtaining information about that past. Using this terminology alternative archaeology is the mechanisms of acquiring the knowledge from which hidden history is constructed; a dichotomy between approach and inference sometimes seen amongst conventional archaeologists who choose to separate the concepts of prehistory and archaeology. This paper deals with alternative archaeology in Australia and the hidden history it yields.

With this distinction in mind it is clear that there are not only a number of different versions of hidden histories in Australia but also different versions of alternative archaeology. When archaeologists think of alternative (or 'cult') archaeology we often think of those patterns of argument that imitate conventional archaeological process and language but arrive at outlandish conclusions. Such 'pseudo-science' phrasing has often been seen in publications advancing the notion that alien beings visited earth to influence human development, and the proposition that Ussher was correct in estimating the history of the earth at a mere 6,000 years as demonstrated by the text of the Bible. However these pseudo-science forms are only a fraction of the range of alternative archaeology. Of course other forms of alternative archaeology have been recognised by conventional archaeologists, but they have often been labelled as 'psychic archaeology' (eg. Cole 1980:14-15) or something similar, even though such terms fail to adequately characterise the nature of those arguments. These arguments that do not ape conventional science are better described as a New Age form of alternative archaeology.

Technically the term 'New Age' refers to a form of thought and behaviour rather than a particular time period, and while the adherents of New Age perspectives expect their views to become dominant in the zodiacal Age of Aquarius (began 1987) the New Age is not synonymous with that astrological phase. This principle can be seen in the hidden history that is often cited by New Age thinkers, in which New Age consciousness was once more widespread than it is now. For example, one explanation offered for the current abundance of 'channeling' (information reception by trance mediums) is that many people acquired the skill in past lives. Vywamus (1993:50) suggests that

Many of you who are really drawn to channeling have had earlier training in other times. Perhaps you began in Atlantis or Lemuria or even before that, and certainly many of you had really quite sophisticated training in ancient Egypt.

Reference to hidden history in which New Age notions were once common is often phrased in terms <http://www.arts.anu.edu.au/arcworld/resources/cult/aocult.htm>

of cycles of feminine and masculine 'forces' (or energies or powers or principles). Devotees to New Age thinking, such as Edwards (1993:215) claim that the recent past has been dominated by 'masculine forces' leading to patriarchy, materialism and other evils (in which she includes nuclear weapons, child abuse and capitalism). In much earlier times it is believed that 'feminine forces' (sometimes referred to as the "Goddess") were dominant, allowing a life of cooperation and spiritual awareness. Hence Edwards (1993:216) suggests that "...the New Age invites us to celebrate the re-emergence of the Goddess..." Discussions of Australian prehistory in terms of cycles of these mystical forces are now found in the literature produced by unconventional archaeologists (see below).

New Age thinking is characterised by the quest for synthesis of all knowledge, incorporating material phenomena but extending to the non-material, accompanied by growth of personal awareness of what is perceived to be the intrinsically spiritual and unitary nature of humans and their environment. These occult truths are, according to Parrish-Harra (1994:132), "Realities that lie behind the apparent and are comprehended only gradually as we continue to see the 'cause' side of life." Because this New Age perspective begins with the presumption that a deeper non-physical reality (the 'cause') exists behind any physical entity, reference to theory testing by close inspection of material objects is seen as superficial and misleading. Instead the 'real' nature of the world is typically sought through direct contact with the non-physical phenomena (via revelation of many forms including psychic ones such as channeling), rather than indirectly through an understanding of the material world. In an Australian context an excellent example is provided in the article by O'Grady (1995), who discusses the mystical nature of spiral rock art motifs that she believes designate localities where electromagnetic energy collects. Discussing art sites in the Flinders Ranges she writes,

Chakras are spirals in the human energy field (Sanskrit, meaning "wheels"). Little wonder then that our group's chakras attracted meditation and vision experiences that were rich and mystical. They included massive "reception" of symbols, and inexplicable feelings of familiarity with formerly unseen rock carvings, which researchers are now connecting with similar carvings in ancient China, Pakistan and Easter Island. Perhaps the oldest in the world, these are believed by some sources to be pre-aboriginal, carbon-dated at around 50,000 years old. The group also reported spirit interaction and even communication with beings in other dimensions. They seemed to be agreeing with ancient artists who often depicted the spiral as the key which opens the door into the next world. (O'Grady 1995:22).

This approach to archaeological materials in Australia, while perhaps extreme, is not isolated, and is seen in other recent publications (eg. Buchanan 1995; Gavanga 1995; Lind 1995). Such New Age interpretations of the world are based on the belief that knowledgeable/aware individuals can be active participants in the magic that permeates the world and can employ it to interact with the past. Since this view requires a permanent suspension of scientifically derived laws, it creates a very different process of knowing the past, in which time travel or mental communication with star beings may be equally as important as the recovery of archaeological objects. As the quote above shows, there is continued reference to material such as rock engravings and materials analysis such as radiometric dating, but the sources of knowledge for this alternative archaeology extend far beyond the mundane approach of science.

Conventional archaeologists have sometimes implied that New Age arguments of this kind are unpopular and relatively marginal (eg. Cole 1980:14). While that may have been the case in the 1970's, in Australia in 1996 it is not clear that such arguments are either unpopular or uncommon. As the millennium nears, publications on alternative archaeology appear to display a trend away from pseudo-science approaches and phrasings, towards New Age forms of investigations and explanations. Indeed, hidden histories that were previously phrased as pseudo-science, such as recent creation or alien intervention models, are increasingly being rephrased using New Age approaches.

Examples are provided below. Consequently a mixture of versions of alternative archaeology is currently being published, and present a variety of challenges to conventional archaeology.

PUBLISHING IN ALTERNATIVE ARCHAEOLOGY

In the 1970's Australian audiences flocked to read and listen to von Daniken (1971, 1972) explain archaeological debris as the product of human contact with alien astronauts. In recent years the Australian public has proved a ready market for not only a string of ancient astronaut books, but a range of other stories of hidden (pre-)history. A thriving local community of alternative researchers now exists, producing unconventional interpretations of the past for international as well as Australian consumption.

One reason for the increased output of alternative researchers, and hence their higher visibility, is the effective use they have made of new publishing technology. For example, Stan Deyo advertises his books about the real meaning of the New Testament and other hidden history on the World Wide Web (see Appendix 1), apparently with some success, since 6-9,000 people look at that Web page each month according to Deyo. Desktop publishing has been employed to produce cheap books while circumventing any conventional refereeing and the strictures of traditional publishing houses (eg. West 1995). However, such efforts would fail if not for the existence of a distribution network provided by a series of popular journals available through most newsagents.

While researchers into alternative archaeology often portray themselves as independent and anti-establishment, there are many instances in which the search for hidden history has been institutionalised. In these cases specially constructed societies or foundations serve as the institutional framework for these activities. For example, the American Ancient Astronaut Society (through its journal *Ancient skies*), acts as a focus for the adherents of the extra-terrestrial intervention model. In Australia the most prominent institution of this kind is the Creation Science Foundation Limited, based in Queensland and connected to the Institute of Creation Research in San Diego (see Plimer 1994). Through its books and glossy journals, such as *Creation ex nihilo*, the Creation Science Foundation pursues its message of the falsity of evolution. Other institutions, such as the Temple of Yahweh also based in Queensland, also pursue anti-evolutionary and/or apocalyptic visions of the past.

However, facilitated by the advent of cheap desktop publishing, a number of popular journals have emerged that are apparently independent of any such institutions and have also become a central focus for the construction of hidden histories. The Queensland magazine *NEXUS* illustrates this pattern. Billing itself as the 'New Times', the editors expressly state that "Nexus is not linked to any religious, philosophical or political ideology or organisation". But while it may be true that there is no obvious link to particular organisations, the content of each volume focuses on miraculous technologies suppressed by governments (eg. cancer cures, free energy generators), UFO's and aliens, hidden histories covered up by science, and the like. In fact these themes reflect a definite political and philosophical orientation embodied in a second editorial statement:

Nexus recognises that humanity is undergoing a massive transformation. With this in mind, Nexus seeks to provide 'hard-to-get' information, so as to assist people through these changes.

This statement reveals two underlying propositions, presumably held by both contributors and readers. Firstly that the information is generally reliable and of practical value in charting a course through inevitable social changes. These social changes must be based on a less materialist, and more spiritual and metaphysical view of the world in which psychic communication is as accepted as

telephones. The second proposition is that this more accurate depiction of the workings of the world is suppressed by existing power structures such as governments and educational/scientific establishments. One result of this suppression is the idea that hidden information is hard to obtain, making a journal such as *NEXUS* a rare entrance into the true events of the world.

Similar orientations can be found in editorial statements of other 'alternative' journals. For instance the Queensland magazine *Exposure* claims to be a publication of independent authors providing the 'facts' not presented by the Establishment, the Melbourne-based *New Dawn* announces itself as a "journal of conspiracies and metaphysics", and the Adelaide-based *Golden Age* magazine aims to offer "...a 360° perspective on Truth".

Whatever the philosophical underpinning of such magazines, they appear popular with the public. While this is not the place in which to discuss the popularity of these publications, their distribution can be gauged in two ways. Firstly, sales of these magazines are high, both on an absolute scale and relative to the circulation of conventional archaeology journals. For example *NEXUS* claims to have sales of 75,000 every two months. A second indication of the popularity of these magazines is the growth of international outlets for them. For example, *NEXUS* has established offices in the UK, the USA, Italy, and New Zealand, while *Exposure* has offices in Germany and the Netherlands. These may be suggestions of popularity, but they are also indications of the potential market reach of alternative archaeology, and must serve to encourage the study of the unconventional views being presented.

CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

As a simple device to give order to the large range of chronological constructions in alternative archaeology I have defined three categories of argument visible in publications discussing an unconventional Australian past. These categories can be labelled according to their advocacy of 1) a very long chronology for modern humans, 2) a very short chronology for humans, and 3) time travel as negating conventional archaeological concerns with chronology. All three constructions share some features, such a belief that conventional archaeology is close-minded about the deep truth of the world, and a tendency to be concerned with the existence of modern humans rather than the mechanisms by which hominids developed to that state. Nevertheless, while they share those features they differ in their basic conception of the length and nature of human antiquity, and they display some of the variety of approaches to knowledge acquisition that can be found in current alternative archaeology.

1. Long Chronology

In this framework anatomically and culturally modern humans have existed for an extended period of time. The most obvious example of this view is the ubiquitous belief that early 'high' civilisations such as Atlantis existed in time periods that are unacceptably old according to the evidence of conventional archaeology. However the recognition of Atlantis in the terminal Pleistocene is almost conservative in comparison to other claims of modern humans as present on earth many tens of millions of years ago.

Acceptance of a high antiquity for technologically advanced and politically hierarchical societies facilitates images of the past in which those societies acted out great dramas and settled all parts of the globe. Much of this hidden history is seen to be part of a succession of 'lost civilisations' in which survivors of one civilisation retain much advanced knowledge and gave rise to further civilisations, eventually leading to the historically known 'high' societies (in Egypt, China, Mesoamerica etc).

Alternative archaeologists see this extended history of conventionally unrecognised societies incorporating prehistoric Australia, as revealed in the kind of evidence described by Paul White (1994:17):

The non-Aboriginal writing and hieroglyphs he found, carbon dated at forty thousand years, displayed the pilgrimage of other ancient cultures to this major Power Place on the Grid, that used writing forms tracing back to the Mother culture through Vedic, Mayan, Easter Island, etc.

A variant of this notion of the presence of early civilisations in Sahul is the claim that those societies originated here. An example of such claims is Gilroy's (1995:284) discussion of the stonehenges and other astronomical stone arrangements he reports from Australia:

By their very appearance, the ancient megalithic formations of Australia are remarkably similar to but far older than any megalithic sites of the old European/Asian Earth-worshipping peoples found beyond our shores. This leads us to the proposition that in dim antiquity the megalithic civilisation (the earliest known to mankind), together with its Earth Mother/ Sky Father/Sun God religion (mankind's first religion), began here in Australia from where its originators spread out across the Earth.

These and other depictions of a long history for humans insist that the deep past was remarkably similar to human life in the recent historical period. These similarities can be expressed in a number of ways, such as the continued existence of hidden hominids (evolution may occur, but extinction never does and so all species continue) or the presence of anatomically modern humans in early geological strata (evolution, for at least humans, does not occur). Within this concept of a long chronology at least two distinctive sub-types can be seen in the alternative archaeology literature:

1. **GEOLOGICAL CHRONOLOGY** in which the radiometric timescale for earth history, as established by geologists, is accepted. This time scale, expressed either in years BP or geological epochs, is employed as the framework in which to discuss change and/or antiquity of events. However, while the geological time scale for the environment is accepted the conventional archaeological time scale for modern humans is explicitly rejected in favour of claims for astounding dates for modern (often urban, western) humans. Some of these notions of human antiquity appeal directly to evidence that is at least phrased in conventional archaeological terms, while extending known chronology for humans in Australia beyond that accepted by professional archaeologists. For example, the general style and tone of presentation used by Gilroy (1995:173) is very close to that employed by conventional texts, even though he is arguing for the presence of *Meganthropus* or *Homo erectus* in Australia. Writing of sites near Bathurst he concludes,

A comparison of the megatools from the six occupation sites soon showed considerable stylisation in the hand-axes, knives, adzes and other tools, forming two distinct tool-type culture periods. These have since been named the "Late" and "Early Phase", the "Early Phase" being the oldest and most primitive, the "Late Phase" showing more advanced styles of workmanship. ...the strata in which the "Early Phase" tools are found date from around 60,000 back to 180,000 years BP. Aboriginal occupation of the Bathurst region itself dates back at least 50,000 years, so it is obvious that Aborigines lived side by side with the megatool people.

While this conclusion may seem radical, even more dramatic interpretations of prehistory are forthcoming from those who deny evolutionary processes in humans but allow for a geological time scale (not to be confused with the biblical creationists discussed below). An outstanding example of this framework is provided by West (1995:54) in his book, *What really caused the Dinosaurs' demise?*, in which he writes,

The reproduced pictures in this book, and many more too numerous to include, demonstrate that evolution is a fantasy and fake, carefully protected and promoted by those whose interests are best served. One picture shows a sandal footprint fossil of Cambrian origin, about 500 to 600 million years old, with a small Trilobite embedded in the heel!

Trilobites are primitive scavengers of ancient seas of Lower Palaeozoic and Upper Palaeozoic. See picture of the specimen owned by the authors, of a fossil found at Mt Isa, about 3 inches long.

There is quite strong evidence that intelligent man lived during very earliest times, many millions of years ago.

Any fossils which are unearthed and are in direct contradiction to the evolution theory are rejected solely because they don't fit in with the beliefs of many scientists.

In these examples, and many other books and articles in the alternative press, it is humans that depart from the natural processes of change established by science. Continents move, sea levels rise and fall, but modern humans remain unchanged throughout. In that sense the hidden histories that use geological time scales are often anti-evolutionary, shown by the unwillingness of their supporters to accept the reality of even local extinctions (thylacines still roam New South Wales, *Meganthropus* still lives in the southern highlands, and so on).

2. CELESTIAL CHRONOLOGY focuses on cycles of terrestrial change reflecting astronomical cycles. In this framework the absolute antiquity of the earth or humanity is often less important than the point in the cycle at which an event happened. In addition the nature of the cyclical change induces patterning into cultural change, as human affairs follow astronomical events. A commonly used celestial framework involves the 25,800 year cycle of precession, in which the earth's rotation axis moves relative to the plane of the Earth's orbit. Within this cycle events are seen to occur 24-26,000 years ago (eg. destruction of Lemuria), 12-13,000 years ago (eg. sinking of Atlantis), or 5-6,000 years ago (eg. change from matriarchy to patriarchy); representing full-, half-, and quarter-cycles respectively.

Two examples are sufficient to illustrate the kinds of hidden histories that use this celestial chronology. The first example explicitly invokes astronomical processes because a star composed of light-beings (sometimes celestial beings or 'angels') is said to circle the earth causing cycles of change. For example, Scallion (1995b) writes that "Prior to major Earth changes and major shifts in consciousness, spiritual forces send guidance to prepare us for these changes... a Blue Star, that moves through the heavens in regular cycles, such as a comet, except this celestial object is pure spiritual forces... This same star also visited Earth 12,000 years ago, to warn the world of the coming of the Flood - the sinking of Atlantis." Some versions of this model have the light-beings descending to earth to create humanity, and invoke Aboriginal stories as evidence for these events:

My Aboriginal teachers relate the extraordinary tale of their origins as free-living 'Light beings' beyond this dimension, who materialised onto a Paradise World that was somehow corrupted and destroyed by 'Dark Forces'. (White 1994:16)

The second example comes from Lawlor's (1991) *Voices of the first day*, in which the human occupation of Australia reflects the larger cycles of glaciations, magnetism and the flows of 'Universal feminine and masculine forces'. According to Lawlor (1991:92) the occupation of Australia is far longer than allowed by conventional archaeology, and is tied to the intrinsic rhythms of the earth. He summarises this prehistory as follows:

The 120,000 years of the Ice Epoch is concurrent with the approximate 120,000 years of Aboriginal culture in Australia. Both of these are in harmony with the 60,000 years of cultural oscillation that the ancient Dravidians called the Yugas, a period that extended from the Golden Age to the Age of Kali.

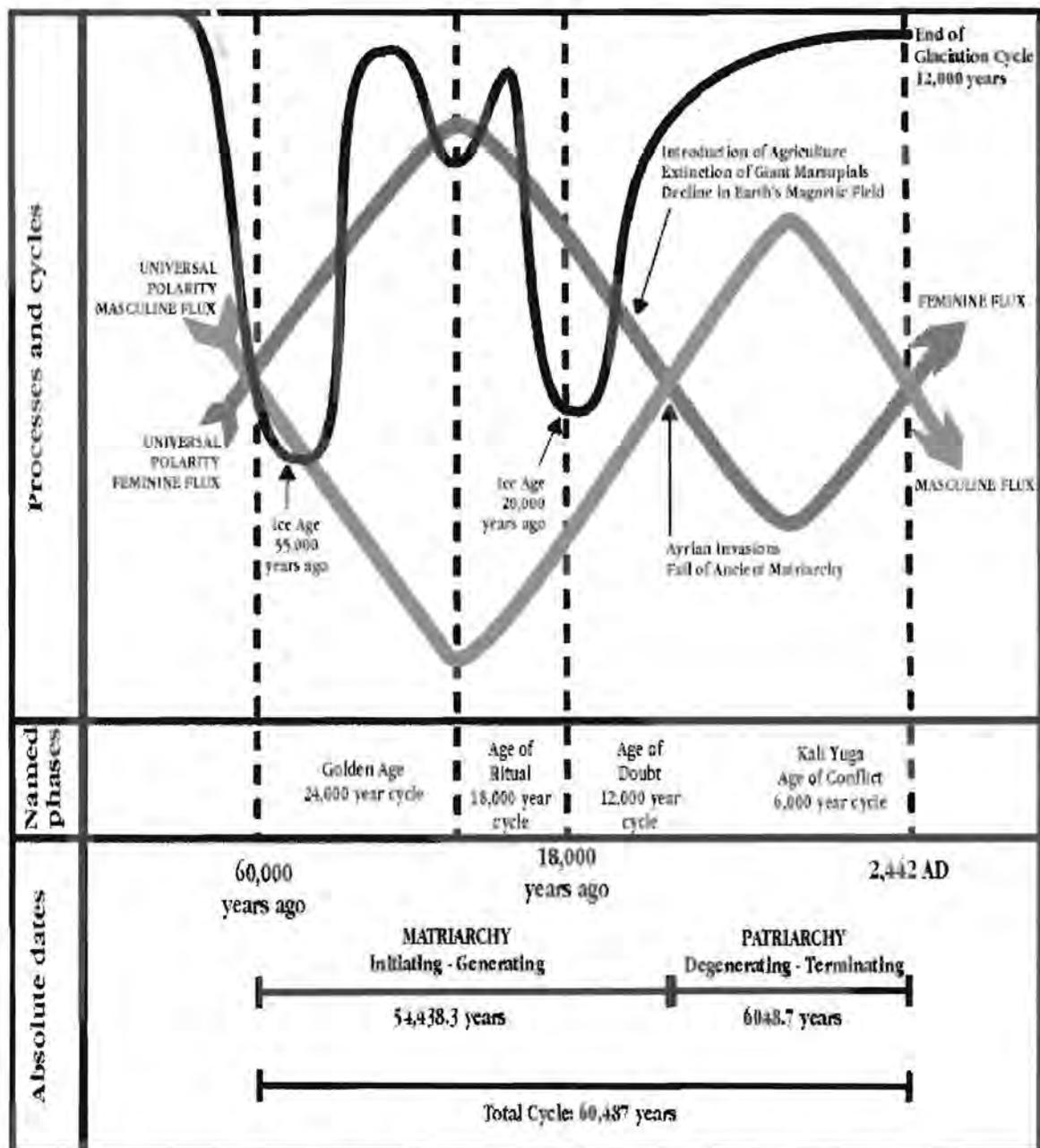


Figure 1 Illustration of Lawlor's (1991:91) 'cycle of activity' with which he claims to describe trends in Australian prehistory over the last 60,000 years.

Figure 1 presents a redrawn version of Lawlor's (1991:92) illustration of his story about the last 60,000 years of this period, showing not only his dating of events in prehistory but also the underlying cycles of the 'Universal Feminine' and 'Universal Masculine' which influence both humanity and nature. In this model he sees the historic period (the last 6,000 years) as a relatively short-lived and atypical phase in the cycles of human affairs, which was preceded by a golden age of creativity in which Aboriginals harnessed the crystalline substances found in the cells of their bodies to provide energy fields that enhanced their view of spiritual conditions (Lawlor 1991:376). Nevertheless, amid these cycles of change Lawlor sees many of the critical aspects of Aboriginal life as unchanging for more than 100,000 years, including tribal law, respect for women, ritual and spiritual values.

In many instances these celestial chronologies are also seen as an indicator of the falsity of evolution as a depiction of change. For example, Lawlor (1991:91) argues that evolution has been perceived because only a portion of a larger 'cycle of activity' has been analysed, thereby creating an illusion of directionality and progress. As shown in Figure 1 Lawlor's model accepts social change, but only as

part of a cycle, and anticipates the return to the 'generating' social values of the ancient matriarchy in the near future. Almost identical views of a long-lasting matriarchy replaced by an aggressive patriarchy during the period of recorded history, and an inevitable return to the matriarchy in the near future, are described in a number of sources, such as Sellman (1995:8), who writes,

Extensive archaeological research has verified that 38,000 years ago humanity worshipped the feminine principle which was personified in the symbolism of the Goddess...They displayed respect for the natural cycles of women, and women held exalted roles as priestesses, leaders, healers, midwives and diviners...All of this began to change about 5000 years ago when warring tribes from northern Europe and central Asia descended into western Europe, the near east and India. They invaded, conquered and destroyed the indigenous Goddess cultures.

Although these hidden histories may cite archaeological material they rely more on revelation than on any examination of physical evidence. As noted earlier, this emphasis on metaphysical explanations and sources of information are typical of the New Age thinking reflected in this alternative archaeology.

2. Short Chronology

Since its inception Judeo-Christian mythology has often been tied to the perception of a short chronology for the world, and the anticipation of an imminent Armageddon (see Theiring 1993, 1995). Thus although there is no logical requirement for supporters of a short chronology to follow that intellectual tradition it is the dominant pattern. Consequently it is common for the construction of a short chronology for humans to also be a 'biblical chronology' in which the true time span of the earth is said to be reflected in biblical genealogies. In this framework anatomically and culturally modern humans have existed for only the last few thousand years, usually about 6,000 years and often with precision as that period since 4,004 BC. This scale, while deriving ultimately from a particular interpretation of the Old Testament, owes much to the formulation of James Ussher and other Enlightenment scholars, and has now been entrenched as a fixed and unassailable time scale by many of the adherents of a biblical chronology.

For a chronological framework of this brevity to account for visible geological, palaeontological and archaeological evidence a number of related arguments are required. Events must be compressed into a small amount of time (6,000 years), necessitating a rate of environmental change so rapid that the development of the modern world must involve catastrophic events (the Flood), and preventing any form of gradual or long-term change (such as organic evolution). Taken together, and tied to the unswerving acceptance of literal interpretations of the Old Testament, these propositions form the view we may label 'Biblical Creationism'.

Time compression is often achieved by rejecting conventional geological measurements of antiquity, and arguing that the only reliable record of the past is the historic literature. This enables radiometric age-estimates to be replaced by dates derived from the Bible. An example of this procedure is Snelling's (1984) argument that the silver-lead-zinc and copper orebodies at Mount Isa, normally thought to be 1,650 million years old, are in fact only 4,000 years old. His reasons were given as follows,

...Noah's Flood (approximately 4,300 years ago) was the event responsible for most of the fossils in the earth's crust. Thus... wherever fossils or organic matter representing fossil remains are found in the geological column the rocks containing the fossils were deposited either by or after Noah's Flood regardless of their assumed evolutionary

geological : ge. (Snelling 1984:42).

Using this principle Snelling reduces the age of the ore bodies to a mere 4,000 years because he can show life to have been present during the formation of those deposits. In this view the story told by conventional archaeology is unacceptable: human occupation of this continent began only 4,000 years ago when Noah's descendants settled, bringing the distinctive Australian fauna such as kangaroos with them (eg. Ham 1996). To the supporters of biblical creationism there is no question of how Sahul was colonised, no investigation of the long struggle for adaptive success throughout the glacial maximum, no concern for the human contribution to megafaunal extinctions (they died in the Flood), and no examination of issues of emerging social complexity. A drastically shortened history of the world offers no opportunity to examine any of these issues being pursued in conventional Australian archaeology, and since there is barely time for miraculous creation and the catastrophic geomorphic change associated with the flood there is also no opportunity for evolutionary change.

Advocacy of a short chronology in Biblical Creationism is so strongly pseudo-scientific in its phrasing and structure that its adherents insist, rather misleadingly, on calling it 'Creation Science'. Although Biblical Creationists accept miraculous events in the distant past, their adherence to orthodox Christian denial of magic makes them comparatively immune to encroachment by New Age thinking. Consequently, against the trend toward New Age views in unconventional archaeology, the form of alternative archaeology found in Biblical Creationism continues to pursue pseudo-scientific investigations of material evidence as a key means of illustrating its literal interpretation of the Bible.

3. Temporal travel

A third chronological framework is distinctive because it claims that direct, observational knowledge of the human past remains available, irrespective of the antiquity of humans being studied. This view believes reliable knowledge of the past can derive from dreams, past life therapy, or psychic experiences (eg. Buchanan 1994). In some instances this knowledge is claimed to come indirectly, such as information related by some alien or higher being; while in other instances the authors claim to have actually travelled in time (physically or psychically) and to be an observer of past events.

In this framework material evidence is often considered both unattainable and unnecessary, since there are personal observations that are taken to be inherently superior. These non-material revelations are typical of the more extreme examples of New Age investigations in which information about the world is regularly derived from mystical experiences that transcend material phenomena to give direct access to the thoughts, actions, and energies of absent individuals. As an example, in describing a visit to British ruins she asserts to be King Arthur's castle, Buchanan (1995:45) identifies the location of Arthur's birth, because

...I felt a particular pull of energy to one spot. It felt like a vortex of force, with quietness in its centre, as if at that point heaven and earth were joined, making possible continuous intercommunication between humans and angels. It was similar to the feeling I experienced when I sat in a perfectly symmetrical crop circle. A sense of being in a place where peaceful, powerful communication between humans and extra terrestrials could occur.

Beliefs such as these relate to a notion that time is bidirectional and, as in the case of Buchanan's (1995) writings, that at least certain individuals from the distant past, who might be 'Ascended

Masters' still exist and may return physically or 'energetically'. Removed from the limitations of studying physical material preserved from the past, the interpretations of the past presented with this chronological perspective are often both vivid and bizarre from a conventional viewpoint.

Another manifestation of this perceived bidirectionality of time is the notion that it is possible to accurately know the future, and that since ancient people knew the future they created prophetic messages embedded in objects that have been preserved in the archaeological record. These messages may be direct and obvious, such as White's (1994, 1996) claims that Egyptian hieroglyphs exist in the Hunter Valley and are a prophecy. Alternatively, some writers see prophecies more subtly represented in archaeological objects, such as Jeffrey's (1993) claim that the dimensions of the passages within the Great Pyramid accurately record the history of the world to the present day and into the future.

EGYPTIANS IN AUSTRALIA: AN EXAMPLE OF HIDDEN HISTORY

As an example of the different images of the past that are constructed within each of these chronological conventions I have selected a series of quotes that relate to alternative visions of ancient Egypt and ancient Egyptians in Australia. This not only provides a common theme, to highlight contrasts between these views, but reflects the consistent obsession, mentioned above, with the lost civilisations. These examples also illustrate some of the broader consequences of these unconventional chronological frameworks.

With a long chronology for known and early unknown civilisations there is endless opportunity for alternative archaeology to develop a picture of migration and diffusion of ideas, including the occupation of Australia by 'lost civilisations' before and during a period of Aboriginal occupation (eg. Childress 1995). For example, with authors variously assigning the Sphinx at Giza to the refugees from Atlantis over 10,000 years ago or to Neandertals at even earlier times the chronology of Egypt becomes long and complex (eg. Percy 1996). It is therefore not surprising that books and articles describe the presence of dynastic Egyptians in Australia. Indeed, self proclaimed alternative archaeologists discuss apparently abundant evidence for Egyptians that they say conventional archaeology has refused to acknowledge. For example, Paul White (1994, 1996) has reported on a panel of hieroglyphic engravings on a sandstone rock face in the Hunter Valley. He and other alternative researchers have no doubt the engravings are genuine, and see them as consistent with a range of other evidence including coins, statuary, pyramids and other engravings (see Childress 1995; Gilroy 1995:246-263). White (1994:18) describes the Hunter Valley engravings as follows,

I turned on the video camera and walked the last short distance to the top of the vault. Turning the camera to the wall, there was a half life-size carving of the Egyptian god Anubis!....The entire wall was covered with a phonetic script. Even to the uninitiated, this was clearly Egyptian writing, with many universally recognised symbols, ranging through ankhs, sphinxes, scarabs, birds and pyramids - including complete cartouche panels, naming the reigning Pharaoh of that time period as Khufu, or Cheops, circa 2,600 B.C.

I had been prepared for a few Egyptian characters and had been thinking about the giant Eye of Horus I had filmed in the desert the previous year - but nothing like this!

Interpretations of sites such as this, by White and others, occur at two levels. There is usually a discussion of the objects in a fairly straight-forward way that mimics conventional archaeological, but rarely involves any detailed examination of site formation and instead concentrates on the circumstances of the purported diffusion. White (1994, 1996) speculates that a mixture of priests, Hebrew and Egyptian, explored the world more than 5,000 years ago in search of Mu, the lost

Motherland of the Pacific (but known to the Egyptians, of course). A second level of interpretation is often more metaphysical and concerned with what is seen to be the 'deeper' reasons for events. For example White (1994) not only interprets the Hunter Valley engravings as a historical record, but suggests that their position in the landscape relates to points of earth energy (known to the Egyptians, of course) and/or as prophecies left to inform the knowledgeable (such as alternative archaeologists?). This dual level of interpretation is typical of New Age influences in alternative archaeology, but it is the more material interpretation that is worth discussing at this point. Hidden histories which involve early non-aboriginal civilisations in Australia imply that some, and perhaps much of the history and archaeology of Australia relates to those civilisations. This implication is not lost on many alternative archaeologists, and notions such as Gilroy's (1995:284) create an Australian prehistory that gives priority to those lost (and invariably Caucasian) groups of people:

...the first modern *Homo sapiens* evolved in Australia, eventually spreading out across the Earth. These humans, it appears, were our mysterious megalith-builders who developed the earliest form of civilisation right here in Australia - the pale-skinned (i.e., white) "culture heroes", the "old ones" whom the Aboriginal traditions say preceded them on this continent.

As remarked above the opposite extreme to those long time scales is the Biblical Creationists insistence on a 6,000 year history of the world. One of the most remarkable examples of unconventional short chronology is the temporal shortening of Egyptian history provided by Osgood (1986:89). He offers a detailed alternative chronology for the Egyptian region consistent with the tenets of Biblical Creationism. His construction is founded on two propositions. Firstly, he concludes that fluctuation through time in the concentration of radiocarbon in the atmosphere invalidates radiocarbon (and by implication other radiometric) age estimates. Secondly, while broadly accepting the conventional culture-history sequence, Osgood constructs a drastically shorter chronology by reinterpreting the archaeological record in terms of dramatic spatial variation as well as change through time. Consequently, he interprets the archaeological record as showing variation in past socio-economic structure because he argues the distinctive settlement-subsistence systems (eg. foraging or urbanism, stone using or metal using) that conventional archaeology would assign to two or more different phases were actually contemporary but found in different localities (eg. different valleys). Using this argument Osgood constructs a rapid succession of cultural phases, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Osgood's (1986) comparison of 'Evolutionary' and Biblical chronology for Egypt.

Cultural phase	'Evolutionary' chronology	Osgood's chronology
Dynastic (historic)	<3,000 B.C.	<1,870 B.C.
Chalcolithic	5,000-3,000 B.C.	1,950-1,870 B.C.

Neolithic	8,000-5,000 B.C.	2,100-1,950 B.C.
Mesolithic	10,000-8,000 B.C.	-----
Palaeolithic	2,000,000-10,000 B.C.	2,150-2,100 B.C.
	-----	FLOOD
Pre-diluvial	-----	4,000 B.C.???

Conventional archaeologists will immediately see the scale of the time compression represented in this framework. At one end of this sequence Egyptian history is reduced to half its known length (the whole of the Old Kingdom now missing), while at the other end of this sequence the entire Palaeolithic period is compressed into a mere 50 years (ie. one or two generations). This abbreviated Palaeolithic makes sense to Biblical Creationists because it represents only the period in which humans rebuilt their social and material world after the catastrophe of the Flood. A rapid and dramatic rise of historically recorded urban centres and complex social systems is often seen to be a consequence of the new capacities of the survivors of the Flood, who were intelligent in contrast to their predecessors. For example, Yahweh (1993:37) writes in this vein that,

All the evidence shows that the expeditious appearance of high civilisation was synonymous with the spreading of the Adamites on the earth. Adamic man is conscious man, thinking man, spirit man or human.

Such an 'Adam theory' of Biblical Creationists (providing a remarkable contrast with the 'Eve theory' of conventional archaeology) is directly related to the constraints of the short time scale on which they operate.

However the more important implication of this view is that with a vision of such a short chronology there is no possibility that humans gradually evolved or colonised and lived in Australia in the distant past. Instead it is held that historical residents of Australia must have been brought here after the Flood. Hence, while this Biblical Creationism is not inherently opposed to the visitation of Australia by Egyptians or other people from 'high civilisations' it is automatically opposed to the conventional reconstruction of Australian prehistory. For example, Plimer (1994:208) quotes a typical Biblical Creationism statement that

...the Aborigines are not and never have been evolutionist. It also demonstrates that they have not been in the land for 40,000 or more years, that they came here after the time of Noah's Flood and brought with them their memories of Creation and the Tower of Babel. These memories are vividly preserved in their Dreamtime stories.

Quite different images of the past are presented by advocates of the time travel framework. One of the better examples of this framework is the recent article by Scallion (1995b), in which he claims to travel through time at will and communicate with an all-knowing creature called the 'monad' that resides within him. Scallion's purported ability to visit the past provides him with descriptions of events in the past, while he uses his internal dialogue with the all-knowing entity to obtain a deep understanding of the reasons behind historical events. In one of his temporal travels Scallion (1995a) described the construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza thus:

I found myself being drawn into the vision, so that instead of it being an optical experience where I was viewing an event, I had become part of the scene I was watching. I had travelled back to the time of construction. I was there!

...In the air was a large cigar-shaped flying machine which resembled a hot air balloon. Cables hung down from the craft to anchor-points below. Workers dressed in white kilts, with cloth hats extending down to shoulder length, were removing stones from cradles that were housed below the craft. The activity reminded me of today's helicopters that can transport heavy materials in cradles supported by cables.

The noteworthy point about propositions such as this is not that an unconventional past is imagined, for this can be readily tested by conventional archaeology, but the concept of a reliable body of knowledge based upon dreams, visions and internal dialogues. As noted above, such an approach to knowledge acquisition is intensely personal and often used to describe unusual and minor events that are not easily examined by conventional archaeology. More importantly, within this conceptual system priority is given to spiritually/psychically derived information, and typically there is a rejection of any suggestion that examination of material evidence would constitute a valid or adequate test of the more metaphysical descriptions or explanations that have been obtained. For instance, a common theme linking Egypt and Australia is the claim that Australian archaeological sites (including the purported buried pyramids/stonehenges) and locations of significance to contemporary Aborigines are positioned on 'Power Places on the Earth's biomagnetic energy grid', as are Egyptian monuments such as the Giza pyramids. White (1994:16) describes this pattern thus,

All over the world we find the remains of pyramids and temples sprawled across the landscape like some ancient scientific instrument, placed on a precise geometric Grid pattern worldwide. This invisible energy web also ties in with known areas of anomalies in gravity and space-time, like the Bermuda Triangle, the Four Corners area in Nevada, Maralinga in South Australia, etc.

For New Age investigators an understanding of this sort of invisible causal force is necessary for comprehending both archaeological materials and what they perceive to be the 'real' human past. Information about these metaphysical patterns can only be obtained through unconventional means, as explained by White (1994:17),

Stone circles and standing stones litter the Australian country-side, as much as England and Europe, marking the interconnecting energy pathways that undulate snake-like through the landscape. Local researchers can locate such structures in the forest using simple dowsing rods. Aboriginal shamans smear their hands with metallic-oxide red ochre, to feel the invisible flows that define special energy points, portals and sacred places.

The clear implication of these notions is that past humans, and the materials they left behind, were responding to metaphysical forces such as 'power grids', and that since these forces are recognised by alternative archaeology it is therefore superior to the limited materialistic version of the past offered by conventional archaeology. Hence, this framework, even more than the long and short chronologies, constitutes a challenge to the method of conventional science-based archaeology.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE OF CONVENTIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY?

To conventional archaeologists these alternative images of the past may seem bizarre at best and deranged at worst. However, it would be a mistake to assume that non-professionals will necessarily dismiss hidden history, even though those ideas might seem obviously ludicrous to trained scientists. It is well known that faith in science is often based on unscientific, even irrational, arguments (see Feder 1984; Gray 1987; Kehoe 1987). Such arguments can equally be used to reject scientific thought and to bolster notions of alternative archaeology. Cole (1980) and others have explored the parallels between alternative archaeology and cargo-cults or other religious movements. These parallels are perhaps stronger now with the increased prominence of New Age notions than they were in the early 1980's. And the imperative for a response to these notions of hidden history is all the stronger because of their apparent popularity. As described above it is clear that the Australian audience for hidden history is enormous, and while it is hard to gauge the depth of belief all indications suggest that many people find one or more of the unconventional constructions both attractive and plausible.

Although Cole (1980:16-17) has presented an elaborate classification of reactions to hidden histories, there are only three different responses (oppose, support, do nothing) and in practice silence (do nothing) may be tantamount to support in the public view (cf. Feder 1984:536). Again our inability to measure the level of cult belief in the Australian community means that the success or failure of past responses cannot be determined. Nevertheless, to not respond at all would be to surrender the opportunity to limit the impact of the massive publication output and related marketing programs of alternative researchers, publishers and institutions. As noted above the utilisation of new modes of information delivery (internet, desktop production and so on - see Appendix 1 for a selection of Web sites), together with an aggressive marketing strategy, allow alternative archaeology to be more influential than it may have been previously. In this context the default option of ignoring the creation of hidden history may facilitate its passage into public acceptability, and there is an obvious advantage in the active opposition to these alternative stories.

Indeed archaeologists have often opposed the proliferation of unconventional images of the past. For example, when Erik von Daniken's chariot of popularity drove through the 1970's, archaeologists were quick to combat the misunderstandings and false statements he propounded. This was done by using the same mass media mechanisms, books, radio and television that von Daniken used to proliferate his fanciful notions. Australian audiences flocked to read and listen to von Daniken explain archaeological debris as the product of human contact with alien astronauts; and in reply Australian archaeologists played a public role in combating these unscientific views (eg. Hennessy 1973; White 1974).

More recently scientists have focussed their attention on Biblical Creationists and the creationists' efforts to destroy acceptance of evolutionary theory (eg. Plimer 1994; Price 1987, 1990; Ritchie 1991, 1992a, 1992b). Researchers leading this counter-attack have been geologists and physical anthropologists, although archaeologists have continued to play a less prominent role, such as combating creationist views in undergraduate courses. While Plimer's (1994) successful and intensely personal attack on the leading figures in Australian Biblical Creationism has probably been influential, its strategy may be difficult to apply to all unconventional archaeology. A common explanation for the persistence of creationism is that the public is hoodwinked by a small number of individuals who are skilled in misinformation and keen to make a profit (eg. Plimer 1994; Price 1990). This may well be the case, as Plimer so persuasively argues, but accusations of self-interest could be leveled at many parties including scientists and a theory of manipulative leaders seems incapable of explaining the totality of alternative archaeology. While such a criticism may explain the motives of some popularisers of unconventional ideas it cannot account for the adherents to alternative archaeology (although some might claim gullibility and ignorance of science can) and fails to recognise that even though the hidden history may be erroneous it can be a component of genuinely held views by both Christians and non-Christians, leaders and followers alike. If these notions of alternative archaeology are part of a broader belief system, then debunking individuals may have little impact on the system of thought.

Critiques of both the alien astronaut and the creationist versions of the past have shared a number of features, including a sophisticated and informed evaluation of the material evidence cited, an examination of the logical connection of propositions in their arguments, a rigorous comparison with competing explanations, and an appreciation of the wider implications of the arguments. This reference to the scientific method has generally been effective because of the way alien astronaut and Biblical Creationist arguments have feigned scientific approaches. By showing that those hidden histories are not based on the empiricist/positivist, rational methodology of science, their claims to a reliable insight into the past can be convincingly denied.

As effective as this approach has been on pseudo-scientific reconstructions of the past it will be less successful in combating New Age versions of the past, including variants of both creationist and extra-terrestrial models which have often repositioned themselves with a non-scientific orientation. Many alternative images of the past, as depicted above, are less susceptible to the conventional line of attack because both the process by which knowledge is acquired and the explanations for the perceived past are purposefully non-scientific. This follows from the New Age belief that science is an inadequate way of knowing a world in which magical events exist. Consequently arguments that an application of the scientific method offers an improved understanding of the world may not be persuasive unless those arguments are accompanied by an attack on notions of metaphysical processes of the like of magic. Hence the strategy used by conventional archaeologists to debunk alternative images of the past will need to be integrated with wider program that deals with a broad range of extra-ordinary means by which alternative archaeologists claim to know the past. Predictably many archaeologists may be unprepared to engage in debate about non-archaeological issues of this kind, but neither can archaeologists presume that scientific archaeology will maintain its level of public support without a strong and vigorous response to the claims of alternative archaeology.

In contrast to a response that strongly opposes the approach and claims of alternative archaeology, there is a response which explicitly or implicitly supports the construction of such views of the past. Support may be expressed in a variety of ways, including opinions that we should be open minded, that it impossible to combat alternative archaeology, that alternative archaeology in correct in its opposition to establishment science, and that we cannot condemn the thinking of people using different cultural frameworks (see Cole 1980:17). While few, if any, professional archaeologists in Australia express belief in the types of unconventional archaeology dealt with in this paper, the published rhetoric of post-processual archaeology has sometimes included both an explicit condemnation of science and an advocacy of extreme cultural relativism. This conjunction of a post-modern ethic of anti-science and extreme relativism has normally been used to argue in favour of a diversity of depictions of the past, and its power to argue for a diminution of depictions is less clear. Certainly post-processual researchers cannot oppose hidden histories using the strategy of processual archaeology described above, since their own investigations are not always constrained to '...the rules of empiricist/positivist discourse, rational method...' (Shanks and Tilley 1987:23). Indeed, post-processual condemnation of the scientific establishment, rejection of scientific method and adoption of a 'value-committed archaeology', in which archaeologists should question the established socio-political order, are all points of similarity with alternative archaeology itself.

In particular, a strong criticism of all these forms of alternative archaeology may be difficult for at least some Australian post-processual researchers because of their emphasis on an extreme form of cultural relativism. For example, this emphasis has yielded statements such as the one from Burke, Lovell-Jones and Smith (1994:17) that

...some aspects of archaeology may well remain irrelevant to Aboriginal people (especially the traditionally-oriented) who have their own perfectly valid view of how the world is constructed. And why should Aboriginal people be badgered to accept a 'scientific' interpretation of their own cultural material? As Morphy (in prep:5) argues, a multiplicity of indigenous views only presents a problem if it is assumed that there is an ultimate need for a single correct position to emerge. In our view, consensus is often nothing more than a contemporary variant of habitual European appropriation.

Applied uniformly to all views espousing a non-scientific reconstruction of the past this position may make it impossible to reject, and persuade others to reject, those which conventional archaeological investigations show to be an incorrect reading of the evidence.

If that is the case, and a large range of folk mythologies are to be accepted as depictions of the past equal to that of conventional science, this will exaggerate the challenge to Aboriginal views that at least some post-processual researchers perceive to emanate from scientific research. Many unscientific views will be not only mutually untranslatable, but also mutually exclusive. In particular, many of the views of the hidden histories dealt with in this paper deny not only scientific interpretations of the past, but also some current Aboriginal ones. In addition to the earlier descriptions one further example can illustrate the claims for non-Aboriginal and pre-Aboriginal occupation in early times:

Modern archaeological dating techniques demonstrate that our aborigines have occupied Australia for at least 50,000 years, and evidence is coming to light of even earlier stone-age people who preceded them! (Gilroy 1991:28).

Furthermore, many forms of alternative archaeology contain opinions that are antithetic to the pluralist ideal of the post-processual position. For instance, Biblical Creationism cannot permit non-biblical views to prevail, on the grounds that such views are the work of evil. Presumably this places adherents of extreme cultural relativism in the position of having to accept these views as valid and justifiable within their social context, or else develop criteria by which various models of the past can be selectively rejected. It is at least partly for this reason that recent theorising in archaeology has refocussed on the need to go beyond plausible or appealing stories about the past, or even an appreciation of their derivation in contemporary society, and to assess those constructions in light of our understanding of the archaeological record (e.g. Kohl 1993:15; Stark 1993:98-99; Murray 1993:112-113; Sherratt 1993:127). To the extent that reference to a detailed and sophisticated description of the archaeological record constrains our interpretations, it also prevents conventional archaeologists accepting all views of the past and the development of radical relativism (Wylie 1993). In this view, and contrary to the premise of radical relativism, it is reference to the archaeological record that serves as at least one of the criteria by which models of the past can be selectively rejected. For that reason it remains necessary to critique views of the past, including the hidden history produced by alternative archaeology, in terms of both their social context and conformity with archaeological evidence.

CONCLUSION

In recent years Australian archaeologists have been occupied with a number of pressing political issues. Amid the numerous debates in which conventional archaeologists have been engaged there has been comparatively little discussion of unconventional archaeology and the degree to which it may have increasingly encroached on the public understanding of archaeology. Alternative archaeology has presented to the public a wide range of hidden histories, arguing that these are the real stories of the Australian past and that science intentionally denies these histories the acknowledgement they deserve. While some of these hidden histories result from research that imitates the process of science, increasingly they are a product of mysticism embedded in New Age thinking. Significantly, this paper has noted that alternative archaeology of all kinds has an increased publication output and that there are indications of significant popularity of some of these visions. In view of these circumstances it may be that in the longer term archaeologists will benefit from greater consideration of the nature of alternative archaeology, the hidden histories it produces, and the social context in

which it is generated.

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