

CULTURAL DIFFUSION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW
OF
POPULAR EXTREMES,
Some Conceptions and Misconceptions

by
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Best Wishes

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It is an accepted fact that cultural diffusion exists, and has existed. But in the last two centuries, the defining and re-defining of "Cultural Diffusion" has caused several theories which captured the public's attention, much to the majority of the sciences' disparagement. By observing a few of these examples of "extreme diffusionism", an extremist lineage becomes apparent, as well as several similarities in methodological and technical approach.

It should be noted that this work is only a surface probe into extreme diffusionist thought, it has no pretensions for the school of cultural diffusionism as a whole, and is not even intended to be a detailed, in-depth study of the extremist view, (which is, after all, a relatively small area to begin with).

The creative mind in science is often described as a "luxurious necessity". But only when properly disciplined. If unchecked, any attempt at the scientific process is virtually doomed, usually resulting in fanciful flights, grounded only in poor interpretations of the facts used.

Sadly, many useful inquiring minds were closed in the trap of extreme diffusionism. But this is not to say that all such studies were useless. In general, it is only the interpretations of facts that the extremists are censurable for. They are rightfully commended for their research methods and results. The catalogue of traits and other aspects

uncovered by the extremists' in their quests to find evidence that would support their claims and ideas is immeasurable. If for nothing else, they should at least be thanked for these worthwhile accomplishments.

Perhaps the biggest complaint against the extremist (outside of their theories) is their use of aspectual data. By this term it is meant that only certain aspects of the data are used, and only certain data are considered for use. If a fact doesn't fit, it is thrown out. If possible, it is adapted to the overall theoretical scheme, in almost any fashion possible. Again, this is an example of immense enthusiasm and a lack of discretionary thought. It is also noteworthy that this stylistic approach can seduce the unwary reader into accepting the views as proposed. Also, archaeological evidence can be used or discarded as seen fit.

In this paper, two main types of extreme cultural diffusionist thought shall be examined. The "Unqualified Extremism", such as the works of Ignatius Donnelly, and Erich von Daniken; and, "Qualified Extremism", like the studies of Thor Heyerdahl.

There seem to have been three basic unqualified viewpoints. They are:

- 1) All "civilization" (In the context of these writings, civilization can be taken as interchangeable with "culture") diffused from Atlantis.
- 2) All "civilization" diffused from Mu (also called Lemuria).
- 3) All "civilization" diffused from Extra-terrestrials.

The contention that all culture diffused from Egypt is

perhaps best termed as "Semi-Qualified", and shall be discussed later.

All three aspects of Unqualified Extremism share striking general similarities. Among them:

- 1) None were originally proposed by professional Anthropologists.
- 2) All used selective data.
- 3) All were scoffed at by professionals.
- 4) All were best sellers.
- 5) All use artifacts and folklore accounts as supportive evidence.
- 6) All are extensively cross-culturally comparative.
- 7) All were initially successful in times of mass strife, i. e., Atlantis, Late 1800's: Industrialization, Recession, "Panics"; Mu: The Great Depression; Extra-terrestrials: The Cultural Upheaval of the Late 1960's-early 1970's. (Could it be that these works fill a psychological need to either think of better times, or be aware that even the great lands of the past are no more?)
- 8) All are written in an easy, questioning style, perfectly logical based upon the facts as presented.
- 9) All take the defensive, and chide the scientific community for not taking them seriously.
- 10) Each exploits an increasing amount of technological fantasy, according to their Chronology ("Mu" theory has more technological aspects than Atlantis theory, and Extra-terrestrial theory have more than Mu).
- 11) Extensive use of accredited sources, authors, etc.

Ignatius Donnelly was the first to attempt a scholarly

work on the Lost Continent of Atlantis. In his book, Atlantis: The Antediluvian World, he compares everything from alphabets to body types, from myths to building structures. Cultural evolution was the most widely accepted theory at the time, and Donnely attempted to show "that Atlantis was the region where men first rose from a state of barbarism to civilization" (Donnely, 1971: 1). He also contends that the Egyptians, Mayans, the Phonecians, Babylonians, and Greeks were all "colonies" of Atlantis, and their "gods" were really rememberances of Atlantian rulers. Deluge stories were survivor accounts of its sinking, etc.

The two other theories amount to little more than modifications and expansions of Donnely's work, which shall be referred to as we progress.

The detail of Donnely's book is amazing. It would seem that every aspect imaginable is not only touched on, but significantly probed. Any similarities between any peoples is painstakingly traced back to its Atlantian origin, and the point-proposals mentioned at the beginning of the book are beautifully supported, in a well formalized and enticingly written work. The following point-proposal comparison is of great importance, because it can be seen that the prime directives of Extreme Cultural Diffusion have not changed over time.

Point Proposals of Unqualified Cultural Diffusionism:
A Comparison

Key: A: Atlantis.
M: Mu.
E: Extra-terrestrials.

- Point 1 A: Atlantis once existed, opposite the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea.
M: Mu once existed, in the Pacific Ocean.
E: Extra-terrestrials have visited earth many times, and are still doing so.
- Point 2 A: The History of Atlantis is Verifiable.
M: The Story of the Land of Mu is Verifiable.
E: This Proposition is easily proven.
- Point 3 A: The Rise of Human Civilization is Atlantian Based.
M: Mu was the center of Human Civilization.
E: The Extra-terrestrials taught man the ways of civilized life.
- Point 4 A: Atlantis founded all other ancient cultures.
M: Mu founded all other ancient cultures.
E: The Extra-terrestrials left colonies behind, to found cultures.
- Point 5 A: The Atlantian Age was one of peace and prosperity.
M: The Land of Mu was devoid of strife.
E: While under the Extra-terrestrials control, life for man was idyllic.
- Point 6 A: The Myths of ancient civilizations are stories and recollections of Atlantean Royalty and Heroes.
M: The same as "A", but substitute Mu for Atlantis.
E: Same, except Extra-terrestrial activities instead of Royalty and Heroes.
- Point 7 A: Atlanteans were Sun worshipers.
M: Muvians were Sun worshipers.
E: Primitives believed the Extra-terrestrials were gods, since they came from and returned to the skys, this resulted in the reverence of heavenly bodies, particularly the sun.
- Point 8 A: Atlantis' First Colony was Egypt.
M: Mu's first Colony was Atlantis.
E: Egypt was a by product of Extra-terrestrial Colonization and contact.

- Point 9 A: Atlantis was the first place of Metallurgy.
 M: Mu was the first place of Metallurgy.
 E: The Extra-terrestrial taught men Metallurgy.
- Point 10 A: Alphabets and Language are of Atlantian origin.
 M: Mu was the seat of literacy.
 E: Extra-terrestrials instructed the human animal
 in language and writing.
- Point 11 A: Atlanteans were caucasoid.
 M: Muvians were caucasoid.
 E: There were many races of Extra-terrestrials, hence,
 today's racial diversity is to some extent a
 result of their contact.
- Point 12 A: Atlantis perished in a terrible convulsion of
 nature.
 M: Mu was destroyed by natural disasters.
 E: Unhappy with the human species, the Extra-
 terrestrials used all means at their disposal
 to wipe them out, and used survivors to gene-
 tically rebuild the species.
- Point 13 A: This catastrophe resulted in the Deluge Myths.
 M: This catastrophe resulted in the Deluge Myths.
 E: This catastrophe resulted in the Deluge Myths.
- Point 14 A: Since all Mankind had central origins, it is no
 surprise that even today there are many similar-
 ities among peoples and their beliefs.
 M: Same.
 E: Same.

As should be evident from the proposal comparisons the Mu theories are little more than rehashings of the Atlantis beliefs. The main differences spring from the contention that Atlantis was a colony of Mu. Many ancient writings have been "translated" to "historical accounts" of Mu and its rulers. From this fundamental difference, many diversities are incurred, but their relevancy to this paper is negligible.

The most successful (on the popular level) of the extremists of our time has been Erich von Daniken. Through at least five books, he has championed the cause of "extra-terrestrial

visitation." And he uses the exact same style and technique that was used first by Donnelly, and then by Churchward, of Lemurian fame and notoriety.

The financial success of von Daniken's books has spawned a deluge (sorry) of followers and imitators. Not only has there been a rash of books on lost Spanish (Portuguese, etc.,) galleons, Oriental seafarers, Phoenician excursions, etc., but an extensive rebirth of Atlantis books. Fearful of imitators who would stain, poison, and taint his own work, von Daniken himself even refutes several of his own followers, for their "unjustified" hypotheses! (von Daniken, 1974: 115-169).

Apparently von Daniken believes that the best defense is a good offense, or has enough of his own detractors to contend with. As with the Atlantis and Mu schools, von Daniken is very good at taking facts out of natural context and re-interpreting them in a context all his own, and draws upon the points made by his predecessors.

The "Qualified Extremist" school exhibits two particular beliefs of interest: the theories of Grafton Eliot Smith (None of his books are now readily available, as a consequence most information on this subject has been taken from Perry) with W. J. Perry, and the hypothesis of Thor Heyerdahl.

It is Perry's contention that the bulk of civilization diffused from ancient Egypt. By the use of trait "clusters", he postulates his theory. Many maps, with extensive markings and keys are used to show the diffusion of Egyptian culture. Unlike the unqualified extremists, Perry doesn't maintain

that all traits have passed down basically unaltered. Throughout the book he explains how various aspects have been modified and changed, until they often seem very alien to their point of origin (Egypt).

It is interesting to note that the primary "tracer" used by Perry is evidence of sun-worship, which is also the first aspect followed by the Unqualified school.

Aside from supporting his theory, Perry attacks the concept of geographical determinism, and he does so quite well (Perry, 1923: 1-5). Unfortunately, Perry continually bases his assumptions upon the fact that complex cultures cannot spring-up overnight, and no evidence of previous cultures exists. With improvements in archaeological techniques and artifact dating the base of his theoretical pyramid has been ripped away, and the rest of his hypothesis collapses with it.

The clearest example of Qualified extremism is the work of Thor Heyerdahl. He has taken a defined conceptualization (early navigation by primitive peoples) and attempted to prove not only its possibility, but its probability as well. He uses the same variety of supportive data as the unqualified extremists, but he restrains from the over-use of aspectual factualization, although he does engage in this too frequently for most of the scientific communities comfort.

His book Early Man and The Ocean is his best, in every respect. But it too suffers from a little "tunnel vision." Heyerdahl attempts to prove an oceo-graphic network that interconnects all Atlantic societies together, and another

that interconnects all Pacific groups. As stated earlier, he uses the tools and methods supplied to him by earlier extreme diffusionists, and as such inherits their crippling deficiencies.

Throughout the history of Anthropology, extreme diffusionist thought has generally plagued the scene. While achieving popular notoriety, it has come close to disgracing its associated field. By the use of indiscriminating thought processes, practitioners of this school have fooled and thrilled not only a mass of unquestioning followers, but themselves as well. It is a sorrowful happening when bright, inquisitive minds are tethered by the desire to prove a single unsubstantiated idea. Extreme cultural diffusionism is such an idea. And the tragedy of its proponents lies not in the narrow patterns that they fell into, but in the wider ones which they did not.

Not surprisingly, the same means (to different ends) are used by almost all of the extremists. And it is their shoddy method that fails the extremists. But it is perhaps as Churchward said after all, "the facts are there. The theories will have to take care of themselves." (Churchward, 1931: 16).

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