

Research Project into the Cyclic Nature of Civilizations

Initial Essay

Written by Viktória Duda for inspiration and to start discussion

Our human past holds many intrigues, which remain concealed only because we do not dare to look. I always found it suspicious how history is portrayed in schools and textbooks, according to which the pyramids emerged without much of a transition straight from a primitive prehistoric age.

THE IDEA OF CYCLICAL VERSUS LINEAR HISTORY

In the current mainstream understanding, the human adventure is portrayed as a one-time occurrence, which started in the animal kingdom some 2.8 million years ago, when carnivorous scavengers began to use their brains excessively and made tools. **Anatomically modern humans were around in the last 200.000 years.** Yet, civilisation is supposed to have only begun ca 5.000 years ago. That accounts for less than 0.3% (!) of all the time in which human consciousness was present on the planet.¹ Were we doing nothing else than chipping flint-stones for all these years? There seems to be evidence which suggests otherwise: humans must have exhibited previous cultural cycles in the past.

Linearity is a distinctly materialist concept. It is the paradigmatic equivalent of individual life seen as a linear occurrence, beginning with birth, ending with death, with nothing before and nothing after. As opposed to that, **various spiritual and indigenous traditions hold that civilisation occurs in a serial (cyclical) fashion**, just as life itself. Day follows night, life follows death, decline follows creation.

Cycles of creation were known as the great cosmic *yugas* in Sanskrit literature, cycles of civilisation set the basis for the Mayan calendar and were advocated in various forms by classic Greek philosophers, such as Polybius, Aristotle and Plato.² The Aztecs held that various Suns had appeared and vanished in the past; in fact, they became so obsessed about 'impeding or at least postponing the cataclysm which was to put an end to their Sun' that they conducted extensive rituals of blood sacrifice to keep their era going.³

The idea that there have been civilisations before our present one is deeply rooted in our **racial memory**. In Thomas Mann's words, the well of the past is deep, and perhaps deeper still. We have legends of Atlantis and other sunken continents,⁴ and the most universal of all myths is that of the great flood.⁵

Do we, however, have evidence that these ancient legends contain a kernel of truth? We certainly have indications to start with:

SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE FROM PREHISTORIC TIMES¹

The acquisition of **specialised knowledge**, for example medical knowledge, goes much further back than commonly assumed. At the Shanidar Cave in Northern Iraq skeletons of Neanderthals were found, including that of a 40-year man, who had suffered serious injuries. At one point in his life he received a serious blow to the left side of his face. His right arm was amputated, while his whole right side was withered and underdeveloped. Yet, all his injuries were treated and healed. The Shanidar find shows that around 60.000 years ago our Neanderthal relatives had some form of medicine as well as a sense of social concern for the sick.⁶ By the time written history – as we know it – began, successful brain surgeries (involving the opening and closing of the skull) were already being carried out.⁷

Australia was colonised about 55.000 years ago, which means that humans by then must have been developed enough to sail across the ocean.⁸ Recent archaeological theories also support that Columbus was the *last* to discover the American continent. According to Dr Stanford of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., even the Vikings were latecomers in crossing the Atlantic: Neolithic fisherman and (supposed) hunter-gatherers sailed across the ocean and settled in the East-Coast of North-America 18.000 years ago.⁹

Coming across all these indications, the question immediately arises: if our ancestors were indeed more sophisticated than would have thought, why have they not built anything lasting? If there really were prehistoric civilisations, where are the ruins of their cities? If we want to find an answer to this type of question, as a preliminary we need to ask: how much can we expect to find after such long time? Indeed, **what would survive** 10.000 or 100.000 years?

ON THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

In 2010, a crew of scientists and structural engineers created an eye-opening experimental documentary, in which they speculated what would remain of *our* civilisation if humanity suddenly became extinct.¹⁰ Their results were rather sobering. They postulated that within a hundred years virtually the whole visual record of our civilisation in form of books and digital data would be gone. Cities – with all the iron structures corroded, the concrete decayed, overgrown by dense vegetation and midst a thriving animal kingdom – would become invisible in 500 years. Great buildings: modern sky-scrapers and historic monuments (such as the Coliseum, the Hagia Sophia and the Taj Mahal or the Cathedral of Notre Dame) would survive another 2-3000 years. In about 10.000 years from now on, however, most traces of our civilisation would be gone, except some of the greatest and most robust buildings such as the Hoover Dam and the presidents' heads carved into Mount Rushmore.

If we follow the same logic in search of civilisations predating our own, we must ask the question: do we have, anywhere on the planet, colossal relicts of the similar kind, which we cannot attribute to any known culture? Are there any **remains of grand buildings** of unknown age? If so, we would possibly have found the types of remains which can be expected, of previous civilisations. Surprisingly, we do have such relicts.

¹ This essay is based on the idea that civilized history might be a lot older than commonly assumed. However, the term *prehistoric times* is used in its mainstream meaning, e.g referring to the time before our written records.

In the Andes Mountains in Peru, 9,000 feet above sea level, stands the ancient city of Ollantaytambo. It is an important archaeological site, featuring a royal town of the Inca Empire. Locals still inhabit the town: they live among the walls erected by the Incas 1,500 BC. These were built of rough stones held together by adobe mud used as mortar. However, on site another – much more sophisticated – architecture can be found: hard stone blocks weighing many tonnes, which were engineered so precisely together that not a single sheet of paper can be inserted between them. We have no sufficient explanation how this technology (which can also be found in Cuzco, the Inca capital, and other Peruvian settlements) was mastered and especially by whom.¹¹

On the other side of the world, at Baalbek in the Lebanon, stands a similar enigmatic ruin. Baalbek is a standard Roman archaeological site, just as Ollantaytambo and Cuzco are standard Inca sites. However, Baalbek was built on a massive megalithic ruin mound. According to some archaeologists, this older layer dates back to 9,000 years or more. Each of the megalithic blocks weighs up to 1,200 tons. No known technology exists from that time which could have helped to erect them.

Most important about these stone edifices is that *we do not know anything about them*. We do not even know their age, as stone edifices cannot be dated scientifically (as opposed to organic material which can be carbon dated). There can be nothing but speculations. But it is exactly this impossibility to allocate these artefacts to a specific era which makes them so extraordinarily interesting. All we have is the mere fact that they exist and that it must have required sophisticated precision technology to erect them – anything more gets lost in the mists of time. They open up the **possibility for a discussion of prehistoric civilisations**.

EVIDENCE FOR HISTORY BEING OLDER THEN ASSUMED

According to orthodox archaeology, 9,000 years ago humanity consisted of primitive hunter-gatherers, who had no more sophisticated tools than chisels – absolutely inadequate to work through blocks of the size found in Peru and the Lebanon. Leading-edge research, however, suggests that the world 9,000 years ago was not quite as primitive as previously thought:

One of the oldest statues in the world, the **Great Sphinx**, standing on the Giza Plateau in Egypt, has traditionally been dated back to 2,500 BC, the reign of the Pharaoh Khafre. Yet, geological testing conducted by Schoch has shown **rain water erosion** marks on the oldest parts of the Sphinx. The anomaly is that there was no prolonged rainfall in Egypt during the dynastic period. Therefore, according to geological evidence in accordance with climatological history, the statue must date back at least to the 5-6th millennium BC. This re-dating of the sphinx before the actual Egyptian civilisation has begun, has tremendous consequences, as it suggests the existence of a pre-historic civilisation. It is of no surprise that it ignited a most heated, even hateful debate between geologists and archaeologists, who vehemently denied the possibility. The most weighty argument of the archaeological establishment against the new theory was the lack of any other evidence for a hitherto unknown civilisation. This argument stood firm, but only until 1996, when German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt unearthed a previously barely mentioned archaeological site at Göbekli Tepe in Turkey.

Göbekli Tepe emerged as the greatest archaeological discovery of the century, if not all times. It features a complex temple structure, complete with precision masonry and developed artwork, dating back 8-10,000 years BC! (Carbon-dating, which allows for scientifically precise dating, was possible at Göbekli Tepe.) Assuming that primitive hunter-gatherer people could have

constructed Göbekli Tepe, would be like finding that someone built a Boeing 747 airliner in a basement with a model making knife.¹² The site ‘changed everything’ of what we know about human prehistory,¹³ and still puzzles the academic world with more questions than answers. Curiously, the site remains relatively unknown. That is more because the evidence is ‘too strong, not too weak.’¹⁴ Studying the site forces requires re-thinking the past, something not many academics yet have dared to undertake.

MORE PIECES OF A PUZZLE

The question of prehistoric civilisations is less a problem of lacking evidence, rather of failing to put the pieces of the puzzle to be put together. People have been finding dinosaur fossils for thousands of years,¹⁵ yet it was not until the 19th century that a scientific theory was proposed around their existence.

Similarly, people have found remains of (mostly circular) **megalithic buildings** throughout the globe, which show remarkable similarities. Public and academic attention has been held by Stonehenge, which became an icon of prehistory. Stonehenge, however, is not unique or particularly remarkable among megalithic architecture: it is famous because it happens to be located in a highly developed country which allocated resources for its restoration. However, there is an astonishing number of similar buildings all throughout the world, some of which considerably more complex than a single stone circle (see e.g. the Temples of Malta). These ruins all attest to the existence of a long gone megalithic culture, which in reality we know nothing about. It would require an entire book to demonstrate their varieties and sophistication. Table 1 shows a selection of them from all over the world.

ASIA	
Rujm el-Hiri (Golan Heights)	Enormous megalithic monument made up of over 42.000 basalt rocks, arranged in concentric circles
Megaliths of the Ural (Russia)	More than 200 dolmens, menhirs and enclosed structures, the greatest of which is on Vera Island in Lake Turgoyak
Megaliths of the Caucasus (Russia)	Hundreds of stone structures, covering 12.000 km ² : precisely dressed large stone blocks, shaped into 90° angles to be used for corners or curved to make a circle, precisely cut circular holes and even a dolmen pyramid
Asuka Megaliths (Nara, Japan)	Largest megalithic site in Japan, consisting of 300-500 t blocks
Plain of Jars (Xieng Khouang, Laos)	Thousands of stone jars – standing 1-3 m in height and without exception hewn out of rock – scattered over 90 sites; no conclusive evidence either about the culture they once belonged to nor how they were made
Bada Valley Megaliths (Lore Lindu National Park, Indonesia)	Hundreds of finely carved megaliths and statues and dotted cisterns, scattered across the valley from a culture we know nothing about
<i>Gunung Padang</i> (West Java, Indonesia)	<i>Possibly the largest and oldest of all South-East Asian megalithic sites: carbon radiometric dating below the surface indicates an age of 12.500 years</i>
EUROPE	
Newgrange (Ireland)	Best known among dozens of famous megalithic sites in Ireland; one of the finest European prehistoric passage-tombs
Coddu Vecchiu (Sardinia, Italy)	A huge, most dramatic site, among other similar ‘giant’s tombs’ and <i>nuraghi</i> (megalithic towers)

Kokino Megalithic Observatory (Macedonia)	Recently discovered, the summit is regarded as a sacred observatory, which is part of a wider archaeological site
Hypogeum of Hal-Saflieni (Malta)	An extensive prehistoric underground temple, reaching three levels down into the ground; Malta also has some of the oldest, most impressive megalithic temples, situated all across the island
AFRICA	
Tiya Archeological Site (Ethiopia)	One out of nine megalithic pillar sites of the region, it consists of huge blocks, built together with amazing precision and enigmatic, symbolic artwork; considered to be relatively recent, but built on a very ancient megalithic tradition
Wasu Town Circles (Senegal, The Gambia)	2.000 individual sites in the Gambia, altogether consisting of 17.000 monuments and 29.000 stones
Stone Circles (South-Africa)	Flying over South-Africa in a helicopter 100s of complex looking stone circles can be detected, the age and purpose of which is largely unknown
OCEANIA AND THE PACIFIC	
Nan Madol (Pohnpei, Micronesia)	Enormous megalithic structures part under water
Tiki Statues (Hiva Oa, French Polynesia)	Mysterious prehistoric statues, up to 2.6 m high
Moai Sculptures (Easter Islands)	The iconic statues of the Easter Islands are known worldwide, but their origins are still disputed
Megalithic Gate (Ha'amonga'a Maui, Tonga)	Said to have been built a mere 800 years ago by the king of the time, the origin of the three stones (the two upright stones are almost 6 m tall and their visible parts weigh 30-30 tonnes) is still debated
MEGALITHIC UNDERWATER RUINS	
Bay of Cambia (India)	An underwater, 9.500 years old city ruin featuring intact architecture and human remains; predates everything in the area by 5.000 years, forcing historians to re-evaluate local history
<i>Bimini Road (Wall) (Bimini)</i>	<i>An underwater megalithic site at a location, where Edgar Cayce predicted they might find 'pyramids from Atlantis'</i>
Yucatan Channel (Cuba)	Scientists are exploring the evidence suggestive of an extensive urban environment stretching for miles along the ocean shore; this civilisation might predate all known ancient American cultures
<i>Yonaguni (Yaeyama Islands and Okinawa, Japan)</i>	<i>Even though official archaeology considers these structures natural, Masaki Kimura conducted research and concluded that these are ruins, dating back at least thousands of years: there are altogether 10 structures, a stadium with seat-rows, big, perfect stairs, castle, triumphal arch, and 5 temples</i>

Table 1: Planet of the Megaliths

Please note that in the table the age of the buildings is not often given. The reason for this omission is the scientific impossibility to date stone artefacts. While organic materials can be dated precisely with radiocarbon dating, stone buildings can only be dated indirectly, using artefacts found on or nearby the building. This method can be notoriously misleading, like dating the age of the pyramids by dating the rubbish left in its proximity by tourists. The dating of megaliths given in literature is therefore always a speculation. We present the only known *fact*, namely that these buildings exist – some of which might date very old, some younger. Sometimes because of possibly extreme antiquity it remains *disputed whether these structures are man-made at all*, the disputed cases are set in *italics*.

THE YOUNGER DRYAS IMPACT EVENT

The majority of the megalithic buildings world-wide originate from a time about which we don't know anything. We do have indications, however, that something significant and devastating occurred around 12.000 years ago. According to Schoch it was a series of powerful solar outbursts at the end of the last ice age, which unleashed cataclysmic events, causing volcanos to erupt and earthquakes to shake the ground, fires and floods as glaciers melted.¹⁶ Such events had the potential to eradicate a civilisation which would have been set up by that time, and set human development back thousands of years.

Schoch also points out that around that time Göbekli Tepe was intentionally buried. Could it be that the people who used the complex wanted to protect it from the natural destruction they were witnessing? There is a curious type of evidence which supports this hypothesis. It seems it was not only at Göbekli Tepe that people went underground. Austrian pre-historians Heinrich and Ingrid Kusch found an extensive network of prehistoric **underground tunnels**, built with a technology unknown to us.¹⁷ The tunnels, first explored by them in the Steiermark, Austria, appear to be part of a once enormous underground tunnel system reaching from Turkey all the way to Scotland. In the Derinkuyu District, in Turkey an entire underground city was found, the origin of which goes back into unknown times. The underground city reaches into a depth of about 60m, built with ventilation shafts it was able to accommodate up to 20.000 people. Could all this underground hiding have occurred in order to escape from surface cataclysmic effects, to allow survivors of a past civilisation to bridge dark times until the Earth became more habitable again?

OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE AT THE DAWN OF HISTORY

Buildings of unknown origin, megaliths and tunnels spread all over the planet, the Sphinx and Göbekli Tepe... all these *physical* artefacts give us some indication, if not evidence that something great must have been going on, even before written history has began.

However, there is also another type of evidence, which is not physical, but rather cognitive in its nature (the mental-logical kind). We must look at the *culture* which existed at the dawn of our history. Could the level of cultural development which we find in early high civilisations (such as the Babylonian and Egyptian) be coming directly from primitive hunters and gathers?

Culture always pre-dates civilisation. There must be a level of sophistication in thinking and cooperation, before buildings and cities can be erected to last over many generations. Culture manifests in many non-physical achievements: science and philosophy, religion and art, law and politics, or perishable artefacts like books and paintings. For a civilisation to emerge, a high level of culture is required. In order to build something, the thought has to come first. North and Thomas (1973) have pointed out that in order for agriculture to develop (which again lead to surplus production and the development of cities), society had to first invent the idea of private property. There is no incentive for a farmer to work and develop his land, if anyone was permitted to raid it.¹⁸

There is an immaterial achievement before every material achievement: there must be mathematics before a pyramid can be built. There must be writing and accountancy before the project can be organised. There must be a religious philosophy before a temple is erected. There must be chemistry before a mummy can be preserved. There must be engineering before the desert can be irrigated.

At the beginning of our civilisation, we can find **highly evolved culture**, which might be a lot older than civilisation. Therefore, even if we *do not* presuppose the existence of prehistoric civilisations, we must not rule out the existence of prehistoric high culture.

The distinction between culture and civilisation is important because the evolution of human consciousness requires culture, but it does not necessarily require civilisation. Culture is the level of evolution on which science, arts, socio-political organisation and multi-dimensional awareness arise. Civilisation, on the other hand, is a specific type of culture, which produces lasting artefacts (notably cities and great buildings), the existence of which transcends generations, even centuries or millennia, giving the existence of that society a sense of permanence. Within the current materialist paradigm civilisation and culture are often equated, assuming where there is no civilisation, there is no, or only little culture. That is because our current paradigm focuses on the manipulation of matter; but culture does not need to be directed towards material achievements. Culture might not even leave traces. An eco-friendly tribal culture can flourish and accumulate scientific knowledge (for instance about medicinal use of herbs), create arts (cave paintings, body paints, music and dances etc.), have a meaningful social order, within which certain individuals are supported to explore the non-physical realms (the tribal shaman) – without leaving any artefacts for future archaeologists to find. Such a culture can constitute an important cycle in the evolution of consciousness, without leaving a single piece of physical evidence behind. In fact, the more eco-friendly a society is, the less likely it is that it leaves any traces behind. Some even argue¹⁹ that civilisation (in a sense of leaving a lasting impact on the environment) is a distorted form of culture, a kind of evolutionary regress, since it constitutes a failure to function in natural harmony with the planet.

An example of a people who created relatively little of (material) civilisation, but an enormous culture, is that of Tibet. Apart from building monasteries (almost all of which were destroyed during the Chinese communist invasion) and the Potala Palace, this Himalayan nation was much more focused on cultivating the mind than manipulating matter. All the topics which today's consciousness researchers are interested in, notably altered states of consciousness, lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences, the seriality of existence and the evolution of consciousness, Tibet developed a sophisticated science for. The system, albeit rooting in Buddhist religion, fulfils the criteria of systematic study and model-making based on critical observation, and can therefore be classified as science, rather than a mere belief system. The Chinese occupation of Tibet practically equals a natural cataclysm, as little as remained from Tibetan civilisation in Tibet. However, their culture remains, as it was carried over to India, and subsequently to the West, where Tibetan Buddhism is now becoming part of the world's cultural and mental heritage.

Taking the immaterial nature of culture into account, one can only guess its immense age. The oldest book left behind for us from antiquity, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tells the story of King Gilgamesh of Uruk, who awakens to the awareness of his own mortality. It propels him to leave behind his fortune and his people and travel to the end of the world. There, he finds Utnapishtim, the wise old man and his wife, the only humans who survived the great flood and who possess the secret of eternal life. The modern reader cannot escape to be touched by his profound story, which is neither anachronistic nor primitive, but a deep artistic portrayal of human consciousness. The story testifies that modern self-awareness existed at the dawn of history, inherited from a past now lost in legend.

ARTEFACTS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In 1879, the Altamira cave paintings were discovered by the little daughter of Sautola, who carried out routine archaeological diggings in the ground of the caves.²⁰ The most recent dating of Altamira indicates that the paintings were completed over a period of up to 20.000 years, and reach back to approximately 40.000 BC.²¹

For generations to come, the extreme antiquity of the paintings did not remain the only puzzle. All around the world, scholars gazed at cave paintings, without being able to guess their meaning. Prehistoric humans painted not only bison, but some other mysterious images: humans shape-shifting into animals (*therianthropes*),²² wounded humans pierced by spears,²³ colourful prints of hands, which radiate power and seem to reach into eternity,²⁴ enigmatic spirals and zig-zag lines. There seemed to be a yet undeciphered message from the past²⁵ – and the riddles were not only in the caves.

Mesolithic tools from the Howieson's Poort industry in South Africa, included spear heads made of *quartz*, a material less suited than better and more abundantly available material.²⁶ At the excavation of the biblical town of Jericho, it was found the eyes of the dead were replaced by fragments of *shells*.²⁷

When compared to anthropologic finds, it turns out that the use of quartz as well as significance of eyes, shapeshifting as well as seeing spirals and zig-zag lines show up in the context of **altered states of consciousness**. The work of Lewis-Williams has an astonishing implication: the historic proof that *at least 40.000 years ago* humanity already had a culture exploring altered states.

CLOSING REMARKS

Proving the pre-existence of civilization might be a daunting, if not impossible task academically. However, coming across all the above mentioned potential evidence allows us to expand our horizon significantly and certainly makes the topic worth of investigation. The old materialist paradigm leaves the world a cold, soulless place devoid of meaning. Why shall we resign to that when one of the greatest mysteries are still waiting for us to be explored...

Some resources (relevant people and institutions we might want to contact):

- Robert Schoch <http://www.robertschoch.com/>

- <https://cometresearchgroup.org>

- Institute for the Study of the Origins of Civilization

<https://www.bu.edu/cgs/citl/institute-for-the-study-of-the-origins-of-civilization/>

¹ C.f. Wunderlich, 1977: 9-14.

² Greek philosophers, notably Polybius, Aristotle and Plato observed governmental forms coming and going in cyclical ways, but they saw no evolution in this process, only danger, which they attempted to bring to a halt by stabilising socio-political structures or mixing governmental forms. However, later cyclical theories, arising during the Enlightenment period in the 17-18th centuries in Europe, already emphasise the evolutionary nature of human consciousness: Herder warned against treating the products of past thoughts and actions as manifestations of an unchanging human consciousness. G Vico writes in his 1925 *Scienza Nuove* (New Science) that human capacities are not fixed in some static patterns, but change and develop over the course of time (see Vico, 1999). Thus the cyclic understanding of history can involve the idea of evolution. At the end of an evolutionary cycle consciousness does not return to where it began, but spirals upwards: it reaches the same point but on a level above.

³ León-Portilla, 1990: 36.

⁴ Most prominently, for the story of Atlantis from Plato's Republic see Plato/Lee, 2008.

⁵ Dundes, 1988: 1-3.

⁶ Rudgley, 2000: 154.

⁷ Walker, 1997.

⁸ Bednarik, 1998; Bednarik, 2014; Rudley, 2000: 177-178; Wals, 2006.

⁹ Bradley/Stanford, 2004.

¹⁰ Life After People. History Channel, 22 February 2010 (USA).

¹¹ Verrill & Verrill, 1953.

¹² Mann, 2011: 48.

¹³ Hodder cited by Symmes, 2010.

¹⁴ Patrick Symmes, Newsweek, 2010.

¹⁵ The first description of a dinosaur bone was written over 1.700 years ago by the Chinese scholar Chang Qu from Sichuan, who interpreted them as dragon bones (Milner in Whybrow, 2000: 138). When in 1676, a huge femur bone was found, Reverend Plot described it as the bone of a giant (Brookes, 1763).

¹⁶ Schoch, 2012.

¹⁷ Kusch/Kusch, 2009.

¹⁸ North/Thomas, 1973.

¹⁹ E.g. Manitonquat, also c.f. Quinn, 1995.

²⁰ Wunderlich, 1977: 232.

²¹ Bruxelles, 2012.

²² See, for example, the famous 'Sorcerer' in the Trois-Frères cave in France (Lewis-Williams/Clottes, 1998), or the therianthrope-rhebuick in the Drakensberg Park, South Africa (Swart, 2004).

²³ See, for instance, the 'Wounded Men' from Cougnac and Pech-Merle (van Huyssteen, 2006, p. 254)

²⁴ See, for instance, in the Llonin and La Garma caves in Spain (Schabereiter-Gurtner et al, 2006) or the South-Western Cape, South Africa (Manhire, 1998).

²⁵ See, for instance, a wide range of geometric designs in the rock art of Northern Cape and Karoo, South Africa (Morris, 1988) or the symbolic patterns of cave art in Western North America (Whitley, 1992).

²⁶ Lewis-Williams/Pearce, 2004: 5-13.

²⁷ Lewis-Williams/Pearce, 2009: 17.