

ANCIENT SKIES

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ONE EASTER ISLAND MYSTERY SOLVED

BY GENE M. PHILLIPS, Founder of the Society

In February and March, 1978, a 90 minute television special was shown in the United States on Public Broadcasting Service stations as one of the Nova series. Called "The Case of the Ancient Astronauts," the program will be referred to in this article as the "Nova Program." (1)

The Nova Program had one clear and obvious purpose - to quell the phenomenal popularity of Erich von Daniken and the ancient astronaut theory. The format was to present von Daniken's "claims", first in general, then in detail with specific subjects that von Daniken had used in his books. In each case a brief statement of von Daniken's position was presented to the viewer, then the counter position was presented at length, usually with the aid of a well-known personality. In each case presented von Daniken was the loser; the accepted scientific position always prevailed.

That the Nova Program was designed to turn public opinion against von Daniken and the ancient astronaut theory is not mere speculation - it is a fact. For example, news releases were prepared and distributed to the press prior to the airing of the program to set the stage. One such release stated that von Daniken "claims" that Earth was visited by ancient astronauts; that huge crowds are drawn to his lectures which "have all the feel of religious revival meetings. Clearly, people are ready to hear him preach about gods - even if they may be false gods."

Again, in the same news release: "What can't be questioned is the enormous popularity of von Daniken's theories - in itself a phenomenon. It raises questions about the popular attitudes toward science fiction and science fact: Why have so many people adopted these blurred hypotheses on blind faith? And could such unquestioning acceptance impede rational scientific investigation?" (emphasis added) (2)

So there you have it: Erich von Daniken's theories might "impede rational scientific investigation." The usually objective Nova series became an instrument to manipulate public thinking.

Members of the press dutifully took the bait and branded von Daniken as a "fraud," a "charlatan," a "liar," and even a "professional criminal." (3)

There is more. A special "Teacher's Guide to Nova" was prepared and sent to schools in advance of the airing of the Nova Program to alert teachers to the special. (4) The Guide contained a synopsis of the Program, comments for teachers, viewing goals, suggested activities for students and discussion topics - all cleverly written to sway the teacher against von Daniken and his theories. Throughout the Guide, there is the appeal to maintain a "scientific attitude in judging evidence" and a warning

against "irrationalism in popular response to fascinating theories." The message to the teachers is clear: von Daniken's "distortions" of fact and his failure to provide "precise facts in his books" will be exposed and the Nova Program will present the scientific truth.

This article will examine only one area of discussion presented in the Nova Program - Easter Island - keeping in mind Nova's plea for insisting upon the "scientific method in validating theory" and in examining evidence, and upon the use of undistorted, precise facts.

I watched the Nova Program on the PBS station in Chicago on March 10, 1978, and having visited many of the sites which the Program examined, it was readily apparent to me that the Nova Program was not following the rules that they had established for von Daniken. They were distorting facts, being imprecise, misrepresenting, misleading and using insinuation and innuendo. I was particularly interested in the segment on Easter Island. I had not then visited the island, but I had read Aku-Aku, Thor Heyerdahl's account of his expedition to the island in 1955-56. (5) Many of the "facts" about Easter Island which the Nova Program presented so disturbed me that I obtained a transcript of the Program for further study. (6)

The Program Narrator begins the segment: "von Daniken has many questions about the statues of Easter Island. Who cut the statues out of the rock? Who carved them? How were they dressed, polished and erected? How were they moved across country for miles without rollers? And how did they manage it? The implication is that ancient astronauts were involved." (Transcript, p.13)

The Narrator then introduces the Norwegian explorer, Thor Heyerdahl, as the expert on Easter Island and asks if the statues still are an unsolved mystery. Heyerdahl answers:

"No...we actually know who made them, when they made them, why they made them, how they made them and even when they stopped making them. As a matter of fact they were made by the ancestors of the people living on the island today, and their true tradition, they remember how their ancestors did it and they did it in front of our eyes, erected and, carved and erected a statue. It looked like a slow procedure in the beginning but they poured on water as they worked and when they first got inside the hard outer shelf of the rock the work went much quicker." (Transcript, pp.13-14, emphasis added).

Thor Heyerdahl is an explorer, not a scientist; thus he can be forgiven for not using the "scientific method" in examining the evidence. When he said "we actually know" who made the statues, and "as a matter of fact" the statues were made by the islanders' ancestors, he should have said that these are theories which are commonly accepted by many archaeologists. But these are conjectures; inferences

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drawn from slight evidence. In truth, no one knows what actually happened on Easter Island thousands of years ago.

But Heyerdahl cannot be forgiven for making the two statements which are underlined for emphasis in the foregoing quotation. First, he said that he actually witnessed the islanders as they "carved and erected a statue." This is an unequivocal statement and millions of television viewers believe that Heyerdahl saw the islanders carve and erect a statue. Unfortunately, it is not true. The islanders did not carve a statue. What they carved in front of Heyerdahl's eyes was the outline of a figure in relief on a rock face in the quarry where the original statues were carved. It could not have been "erected" because it is not a statue and it is still in the quarry today.

Heyerdahl did watch the islanders erect a statue, but it was one of the original statues that had fallen, not one they had carved.

I suppose that Heyerdahl could argue that he did not mean that the islanders carved and erected the same statue, but rather that they carved one and erected another. If so, he should have been more precise in his use of the English language - especially on a program which is criticizing von Daniken for "clear distortion" and for "not providing precise facts," as the teachers were told in the Nova Teacher's Guide.

The second emphasized statement in the Heyerdahl quotation is that while the islanders were carving, the work went much quicker when they got inside the "hard outer shelf of the rock." In his book Aku-Aku, Heyerdahl discusses the hardness of the rock. He states that previous estimates of how long it would take to carve a statue were erroneously short because: "They had certainly made the same mistake as we ourselves and many others - that of judging the hardness of the rock by the outer surface of a statue. None of us had done what the first Spaniards did when they struck a figure with a pickaxe so deep that the sparks flew. The figures are as hard as bone inside the outer surface, and so is the rock where the rain has not reached it." (Aku-Aku, p.121)

So who are we to believe? The Heyerdahl of 1957 who wrote that the outer surface of the statues and rock are softer than the inside, or the Heyerdahl of the Nova Program who said that the outer shelf of the rock is harder?

The Narrator then suggests that no advanced technology was used in carving the original Easter Island statues - only crude stone picks. Heyerdahl then shows the viewer a stone hand pick and states "this is what they used for carving the statues." (Transcript, p.14) Again, this is a theory, not a fact.

At this point in the Nova Program the unknowable viewer is the victim of a cruel hoax. While the Narrator is saying "after only a few days the outline of a statue had already appeared," (Transcript, p.14) referring to the "statue" which the islanders had "carved" for Heyerdahl, the picture which was shown on the screen is of one of the original statues in an unfinished state - not the one which Heyerdahl's men were hacking at with their stone hand picks. (See Figure 1). The Narrator did not say that the statue which was being shown was the one the islanders had worked on, but the viewer could come to no other conclusion. Clearly, through clever editing, the implication was unmistakable that the statue being shown was the one Heyerdahl had commissioned.

When I watched the Nova Program, I noted that the TV picture was misleading. I remembered the picture of the statue from Aku-Aku, but not that it was the one carved for Heyerdahl. When the program was finished, I went to my copy of Aku-Aku and readily found a picture of the statue which the Nova Pro-

gram had represented as having been recently carved by stone hand picks, but the caption under the picture makes it clear that this statue is one of the originals in an unfinished state.



Figure 1. This is a photo of one of the original Easter Island statues. It is this statue which the Nova Program showed a picture of as being the one carved for Heyerdahl by the islanders during his expedition to the island in 1955-56. Photo by Gene M. Phillips.

My curiosity was now aroused. If the statue shown by the Nova Program was not the one Heyerdahl's men had carved, then what did the Heyerdahl "carving" look like? Although Aku-Aku is "lavishly illustrated with 32 pages of full-color photographs," there is none of Heyerdahl's "statue." I wondered why? I began to reread that portion of the book wherein Heyerdahl describes his "experiment" of having the islanders carve a statue for him. (Aku-Aku, pp.114-121) Heyerdahl asked the local mayor, a descendant of the "long-ears", but a known "buffoon", whether he could carve a statue using the stone hand picks found on the island. The answer: "It shall be done, Senor. How long is the statue to be?"

"Oh, medium-size, fifteen to twenty feet high." Arrangements were made for six of the long-ears' descendants to begin work on the statue. A site was selected and work begun. "On the third day the contours of the giant were clearly visible on the rock wall," Heyerdahl writes at page 120. But after the third day, the islanders came to Heyerdahl with "calloused fingers" and said they could not keep going. Work on the "experiment" ceased. Thus there was no statue carved for Heyerdahl; only the outline of a figure had been hacked into the rock face. But the mystery remained - what did it look like?

From his "experiment", Heyerdahl concluded that all the more than 1,000 statues on Easter Island had been carved by the natives using the crude stone hand picks. Von Daniken disagreed - he concluded that the "experiment" proved just the contrary: that the almost flawless statues could not have been produced with such tools. Hence, the controversy.

From Aku-Aku the reader gets the clear impression that Heyerdahl fully expected his men to be able to carve a complete statue with the primitive tools, and that only their lack of experience working in stone kept them from continuing. But on the Nova Program, Heyerdahl implies that the "experiment" was conducted only for the purpose of estimating the time it would take to complete a statue - not whether it could be done. Heyerdahl: "We went down only for three days to make an estimate and it was easy for the archaeologists to figure out that even the largest statues could be completed within the year." (Transcript, p.14)

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This statement is loaded with problems. First, the implication that there was no question that a statue could be carved with the hand tools and that the only purpose of the carving of a statue for three days was to be able to estimate how long it would take. Secondly, that the estimate was easy to arrive at, and thirdly, that the "archaeologists" made the estimate. The use of the plural form implies that more than one archaeologist had made an estimate. There were at least four archaeologists on Heyerdahl's 1955-56 expedition to Easter Island but according to Aku-Aku only one of them made an estimate (p.121). The other estimates were made by the mayor and another of the islander carvers and by Heyerdahl himself.

Now, in his statement, Heyerdahl told the Nova viewing audience that the estimates concluded that "even the largest statues could be completed within the year." But in Aku-Aku, Heyerdahl recounts that the estimates of one year is how long it would take to complete a "medium-sized statue" with two teams working all day in shifts. One begins to plead for "precise facts."

The Narrator then states that von Daniken "claims" that Easter Island is too barren to provide rope, or wood for levers. Then, "But Heyerdahl found plenty of evidence for both." (Transcript, p.14) The viewer is not let in on the secret of Heyerdahl's evidence for plenty of wood, because Heyerdahl did not comment on this point. Then the Narrator makes the following statement as fact:

"The island's forests have been destroyed by fire and agriculture, but at the time the statues were carved there was plenty of wood for levers." (Transcript, p.15).

This is incredible! By stating that the island's forests were destroyed by fire and agriculture, the viewer is given the implication that there were in fact forests on Easter Island thousands of years ago. There is absolutely no evidence on Easter Island today, nor in any of the literature, that there were forests on Easter Island in times past. And certainly there is no evidence of forest fires or of plowed fields with stumps piled up. On the contrary, the appearance of the island today leads even the casual observer to the opposite conclusion. It is a fact that the island has been used primarily for sheep grazing. The island is nothing but the tops of extinct volcanoes with a very shallow top soil, and with little vegetation except grass and the stands of eucalyptus trees, which were brought to the island about 50 years ago. It is ludicrous for the Narrator to make the bold statement that there was "plenty of wood on the island" a thousand years ago. The island was first discovered in 1722, so how can anyone "know" what was on the island when the statues were carved? Even Heyerdahl estimates that it took 1,000 years to carve the statues. But this is a prime example of the "distortion" of facts which the Nova Program freely engaged in and which made the Nova Program a masterpiece of deception and misrepresentation.

I had to wait five years to solve the mystery of the Heyerdahl "statue." In September, 1983 I visited Easter Island with a Member Expedition of the Ancient Astronaut Society. We spent three days on the island - plenty of time to see everything of importance. We roamed all over Rano Raraku, the volcanic crater where the giant statues were carved, hundreds of which are still there in various stages of incompleteness. We saw the half-finished statue which the Nova Program had represented as being the one Heyerdahl's men had carved (Figure 1). When we were about to leave, I reminded our guide that we had not seen the Heyerdahl statue. He pointed up to the outside face of the crater and said, "it's up there, but it will take 15 to 20 minutes to climb up - it's very steep. Are you sure you want to do it?" I assured him that for me, that statue was the most important thing on the island, so we began to

scramble up the loose soil and slippery grass of the crater.

We finally reached the spot where our guide had stopped and I saw two fine statues lying face up, side by side in the quarry. I was puzzled. This could not be what Heyerdahl had described in Aku-Aku. In response to my question, our guide pointed to the nearby rock face. I was looking straight at the wall and could see no statue. Then standing at an angle I could see the crude relief of a figure which had been hacked into the rock face, only faintly resembling the famous Easter Island statues. (See Figure 2). I laughed.

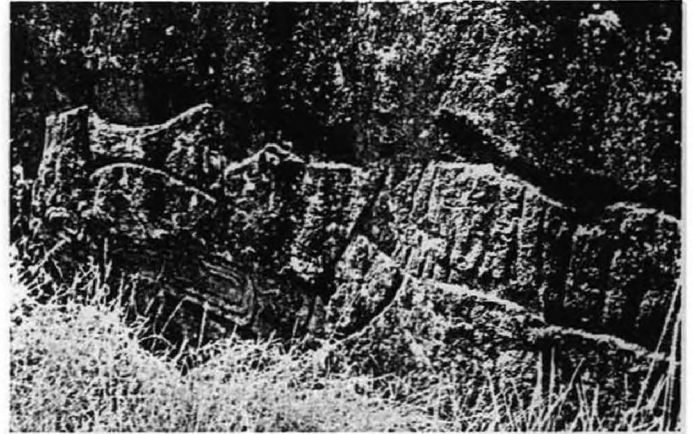


Figure 2. This is a photo of the relief carved into a rock face in the quarry at Rano Raraku by the islanders at the request of Thor Heyerdahl. Photo by Gene M. Phillips.

Few people have the opportunity to visit Easter Island, the "loneliest spot in the world." (7) And of those few, only a handful are privileged to see the result of Heyerdahl's "experiment" which has created so much controversy around the world. It is a pity, for there is no substitute for first-hand observation of the evidence. And it is more a pity that the Nova series, which holds itself out to be educational, can be so manipulated as to distort the facts and completely mislead the public.

Footnotes:

- (1) The program was shown in Great Britain and the Commonwealth countries as one of the Horizon series.
- (2) Nova News Release dated March 8, 1978.
- (3) The Boston Globe, February 28, 1978; The New York Post, March 4, 1978; The Baltimore Sun, March 8, 1978; The Indianapolis News, March 9, 1978; and The Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 16, 1978.
- (4) A Teacher's Guide to NOVA, A guide to the classroom use of the NOVA television series on PBS, February-March, 1978. Published by WGBH, Boston.
- (5) Aku-Aku was originally published in Norwegian in 1957. The English edition was published in London in 1958. The American edition was published in hardcover by Rand McNally in 1958, with a Book-of-the-Month Club edition the same year. The paperback edition was published by Pocket Books, Inc. in 1960. All page references in this article are to the paperback edition.
- (6) Transcript of NOVA, The Case of the Ancient Astronauts, published in 1978 by WGBH Educational Foundation.
- (7) See Ancient Skies, 9:5.

WERE SODOM AND GOMORRAH DESTROYED BY AN ATOMIC BOMB? MORE ON THE THIRD EYE

BY YONG CHECK YOON*

According to one theory, the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as described in the Bible was caused by a series of subterranean explosions, set off by the spontaneous combustion of natural gas or asphalt. But as we analyse the information offered in the Bible, we come to the conclusion that the holocaust was time-detonated - therefore, predictable.

The exact location of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the "cesspools of iniquity" is not known, although most archaeologists and Biblical scholars believe they were located near the south end of the Dead Sea, between Jordan and Israel, now underwater.

According to Genesis, the people of these cities were so wicked that God "rained fire and brimstone" on them, destroying their population, except for Lot and his family who were forewarned of the impending conflagration. On the evening before the destruction of the cities, Lot was visited by two "angels" who spent quite a considerable number of hours talking and dining with him and they displayed a range of emotional changes during those crucial hours before the holocaust. We can dispel any doubts that the "angels" were mythical personages or mere visions. They were of flesh and blood. (Genesis 19:1-23)

It is apparent that the "angels" knew the situation within the cities and had probably kept a constant surveillance on the activities of the inhabitants. They must have been involved in the decision to destroy the cities because they knew in advance when the impending disaster would occur.

The hectic but systematic way in which the "angels" prepared Lot and his family for evacuation conformed to such procedures today. Lot was awakened at dawn by the "angels" who urgently requested Lot to flee with his family into the mountains. (Genesis 19:15-17). They knew that the rocks of the mountains would be sufficient to shield Lot and his loved ones from the radiation, shock and heat waves which would result from the nuclear holocaust. The "angels" knew when the blast was to occur, because they pleaded with Lot: "Hurry! Escape there, because I am not able to do a thing until you arrive there!" (Genesis 19:22).

Lot had little time to escape into the mountains as initially planned, and he escaped to a city called Zo'ar, probably just outside the epicenter of the explosion. The city must have been on elevated ground, because Lot "looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the district." (Genesis 19:28)

It is doubtful if Lot personally witnessed the raining of "fire and brimstone from the heavens;" otherwise he would have shared the same fate as his wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt because she failed to obey the warning not to stop to look back. Lot probably drew his conclusions from viewing the scene the next day. He said, "Why, here thick smoke ascended from the land like the thick smoke of a kiln!" (Genesis 19:28)

The effects of an explosion of a nuclear type are clearly given in the Bible. Lot's wife was immediately killed on exposure to the direct heatwave. The "angels" urged Lot: "Escape for your soul! Do not look behind you and do not stand still in all the District! Escape to the mountainous region for fear that you may be swept away!" (Gen. 19:17) Thus, the "angels" knew that a shock wave would immediately follow the blast.

Now that we know the effects on cities and people of atomic blasts, the conclusion is inescapable that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were not destroyed by a natural disaster, but by a nuclear explosion of an unknown magnitude.

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BY ANDREW TOMAS*

I read with interest the article "The Third Eye" in Ancient Skies 10:3, and having lived in Asia for many years, I would like to point out several inaccuracies in the article. First, the name "Lobsang Rampa", used as a pseudonym by the author aroused suspicion among the philologists of Europe in 1957 when The Third Eye was first published in England. Lobsang is a common name, like "Johnny" and would not be used for a learned lama. Rampa is a Class II lama (like our Bachelor of Divinity). When the author referred to his grandmother as "Grandma Rampa" (Grandma Bachelor of Divinity!), the Tibetan-speaking scholars realized that something was wrong.

My friend, Dr. Gordon Creighton, an Honors graduate of Cambridge University and a former Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Brazil, who speaks 14 languages, including Tibetan and Chinese, decided to find out who the "Tibetan" author was. The man turned out to be an Englishman, Cyril Hoskins, born in Plympton in 1911, who spoke no Tibetan or Chinese, and who was an office clerk before turning to his literary career.

The fact that the author is English explains numerous mistakes in the text of The Third Eye, which only orientalist and scholars could detect.

The affair was complicated by the fact that the book was published as "non-fiction". Since the publishers were very angry that the "autobiography" was not "non-fiction" as marked on the book, Mr. Hoskins had to publish other books as "occult fiction". After the expose by the press in London, Mr. Hoskins claimed that although he was not a Tibetan, his body was possessed by a deceased Tibetan lama.

I had the good fortune of having an audience with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, in 1976 and while I was working at the Dalai Lama's Library in the Himalayas, the learned Tibetans told me that although "Lobsang Rampa" had stirred interest in Tibetan culture in the West, his books did not sound Tibetan or Buddhist, because he had never been to India or Tibet. "Lobsang Rampa" lives in Canada today.

The conclusion that an "abbot is next to the Dalai Lama" in rank is incorrect. There were hundreds of monasteries in Tibet before 1959, each with an abbot, so which one was "next to the Dalai Lama?"

In spite of the fictional character of "Lobsang's" books, certain things, such as the cave under the Potala Palace, giants in ancient times and an astronomical collision are quite true and they are mentioned in the books of European explorers and scholars (which Lobsang Rampa could have used) as well as in old Tibetan writings, to which he did not have access.

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