

ANCIENT SKIES

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CHAVIN DE HUANTAR - JERUSALEM OF THE ANDES?

BY ERICH VON DANIKEN*

It was raining cats and dogs on that April day in 1980 when two young missionaries, soaked to the skin, stood outside the door of our home in Feldbrunnen, Switzerland. The older one, about 30 years old, was an American called Charlie; the younger man's name was Paul and he came from Berne. My visitors from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints made me a present of the German version of the Book of Mormon (I had seven other translations in my library already) I invited the missionaries to come inside to warm up with a cup of coffee.

My fellow countryman, Paul, asked what I thought of the Book of Mormon. I said that the plates of Ether and Nephi were exciting and informative, and I did not think they were forgeries, but I felt that it was unfortunate that some rather crude prophecies about Jesus were added to the original text.

Naturally the young missionaries disagreed with me. To them, either the complete Book of Mormon was inspired by the Holy Ghost and therefore "genuine," or the whole Book was worthless. Being well up in the subject, I showed my disinclination for a discussion that would lead to nowhere, a hint that was very quickly taken by Paul, belying the reputation the Bernese have for being slow-witted. He asked, "You know many ruins in South America, have you found any that resemble Solomon's temple in Jerusalem?" I told him truthfully that I had not.

The missionaries said goodbye without trying to make a hopeless conversion, although it was such a terrible day that they would have found a willing victim if they could have promised me blue skies.

Whether or not the temple mentioned in the Mormon Book of Nephi existed in South America seemed far less important to me than the question of whether the temple which Ezekiel described in detail in the Old Testament existed - a temple built like the temple of Solomon on a high mountain in a land far distant from Jerusalem. If there were a temple in South America that fit Ezekiel's description, that would be a thrilling story.

What has the Nephi of the Book of Mormon to do with the Ezekiel of the Bible? Well, both of them lived at the same time in the same geographical zone. Both of them wrote about a flying god who came down and gave instructions. On this god's orders,

Nephi had a temple built in South America. Ezekiel was flown by the same god to a distant land where he was shown a temple on the Solomonic model on a "very high mountain."

So my search for a Solomonic temple in South America was by no means purely inspired by the Book of Mormon. I was also looking for Ezekiel's temple and the trail of the "flying god" who was behind it all. I realized only much later that both trails would meet in the most fascinating way.

My eyes were aching from viewing an endless procession of temples in 39 lavishly illustrated books on archaeology. One by one the various temples were eliminated from consideration because essential details were missing or they were too new or too old. But one site kept reappearing in each of the books - which could not be eliminated - the ruins of Chavin de Huantar in northern Peru. I decided to visit the site, take accurate measurements and get a first hand look at its surroundings.

In 1981, Europe was once again "enjoying" a cold, wet spring, but it was autumn in Peru. When I arrived in the capital city of Lima, I rented a kind of Russian Jeep, a Lada Niva, and soon was driving northward on the Panamerican Highway through an endless sandy desert bordering the Pacific coast. At the town of Pativilca I left the Panamerican Highway and drove northeasterly through sugar cane plantations which then gave way to a stony desert. In the distance I could see the ruins of a fortress from the time of the Chimu Indians before reaching the God-forsaken village of Chasquitambo, an ancient hand-off point for the Inca relay runners, called chasquis. Since leaving Pativilca, the road had begun to climb gradually and I was now at 780 m, but now the road began to climb in earnest in a series of acute hairpin turns. Near Cajacay, at a height of 2600 m, my Lada Niva was completely out of breath. Automobile asthma. I removed the top from the air cleaner and removed the filter, which felt like the remains of a plaster cast. I threw it away, replaced the top and the old jalopy came to life again.

After an endless succession of hairpin bends up one mountain after another and down the steep sides into the valleys beyond, I finally reached the cloud-filled pass at a height of 4100 m. In European latitudes this would have been a zone of permanent ice and snow, but in Peru, being closer to the Equator, even at this dizzying height the landscape was dry with grass and stunted bushes.

At the town of Catac in the Rio Santa valley, the road forks, the left fork proceeds northward to the town of Huaraz and the right one leads to Chavin de Huantar. At the only petrol station, I took on three Israelis, Ruth, Uri and Isaac, who had decided to roam the world for a whole year with no fixed destination in mind, although they wanted to visit archaeological sites, such as Chavin de Huantar An-

*This article is based upon a chapter in the author's latest book in English, The Gods and Their Grand Design, published in hardcover by Souvenir Press, London and by G P Putnam's Sons, New York. Mr von Daniken's latest book, The Day the Gods Arrived: August 11, 3114 BC, will be available in English in 1985. His address is Baselstrasse 10, 4532 Feldbrunnen/SO, SWITZERLAND

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swering their questions as to why I was going there, I made vague remarks about a Solomonic temple connected with the prophet Ezekiel. I did not want to shock them with details in case they might be fanatically orthodox. After learning that I was Swiss, Uri said "Then you must know Erich von Daniken's books. I am not sure if his ideas are crazy or rational." Instead of answering I bit my lip.

Beyond Catac the road was unpaved and led in tortuous curves to the picturesque icy lake of Quericocha at a height of 3980 m. The snowclad summit of Yanamarey (5260 m) caught my eye.

Next came the tunnel through the Cahuish Pass at 4510 m. The word "tunnel" is really a misnomer because this 500 m long specimen is hacked roughly out of the rock with a dirt, pothole-filled road running through it. Icy water drips from the ceiling and walls of this dark, cave-like tube. The road is wide enough for only one vehicle and if the lights of an oncoming car appear, the driver nearest the exit or entrance must back out.

If the uphill drive had been taxing, the steep descent on the other side of the tunnel into the Mosna valley proved really frightening, even for a veteran driver like me. The narrow dirt road winds like an endless snake clinging to the steep mountain sides in curve after curve. With no guard rails, a sheer abyss threatens one side of the road. Finally we reached the bottom and the little village of Machac (3180 m) where the ruins of Chavin de Huantar are clearly visible, close to the road.

The Hotel Turistas was full to the last bed, not with tourists, but with the *creme de la creme* of Peruvian and German archaeologists, including Professors Udo Oberem and Henning Bischof. To the Germans I am an unpredictable outsider, always up to some new trick, but the Peruvians have a different opinion of me. When I was honored by the aldermen of the town of Nazca some years ago, the Mayor said in his speech that there were many theories about the lines on the Plain of Nazca. He could not say whether they are a calendar, a take-off point for hot-air balloons, the remains of Inca roads, magical signs, marking lines for a sportsground or landmarks for extraterrestrials, but the Mayor said, "As for those of us who live and work here, we are not primarily interested in which theory is correct, but one thing is certain: Herr von Daniken has brought the most tourists to our region!"

At dinner, the Israelis offered to assist me in taking measurements of the site, having found out in the meantime who had given them a lift. I accepted their offer gratefully. The next morning, they were waiting for me at the site of the ruins, laden with cameras and measuring apparatus.

The section of Chavin de Huantar still preserved is called "El Castillo," the castle, although it was never a castle. It is a rectangular building 72.90 m long and 70 m wide. Large granite blocks, fitting together to the millimeter, form the rectangular facades. The lower monoliths nearest to the ground are the best preserved. The higher the walls rise, sloping slightly inward, the more clearly visible are the ravages of time - just like the Jerusalem temple, which suffered through 36 wars and 17 destructions. At Chavin, as at Jerusalem, new walls were built each time on the remaining lower blocks.

The main portal of El Castillo faces the east, the direction of the sunrise (and Jerusalem). Two columns, topped by a monolith nine meters long, are flanked by square and rectangular granite slabs. The squat columns are decorated with incomprehensible patterns in relief, as are the crowning monolith and the adjacent slabs. Through the ages weathering has worn down the reliefs and unfortunately man has damaged the delicate work. When El Castillo was first built, the massive structure must have looked like a huge, single, almost seamless block of stone, even from a short distance. Today a rubbish heap

overgrown with clumps of grass is concealed behind the main portal.

A few steps down from the main structure lies a square which occupies the entire width of El Castillo - the forecourt of the sanctuary. Some 36 m away from the building more steps lead down to another gigantic courtyard (70 by 42 m), from which still more steps lead to the so-called "sunken square," whose sides measure 49.70 m.

To the north and south of the sunken square rise platforms which have not yet been excavated, but the artificial hill can be recognized by the scattered monoliths protruding from it. The entire site covers an area of some 13 hectares (over 30 acres), but so far only the temple complex has been excavated. It is known that the whole layout stood on a man-made stone platform.

Four flights of steps lead up from the sunken square to the four cardinal points of the compass with absolute accuracy, as I checked with my own compass. The side of the plateau descends 80 m to the bed of the River Mosna, which flows past the temple in a south-easterly direction.

The temple complex measures 228 m from the western wall of El Castillo to the south-east corner. The section excavated to date is about 175 m wide. These measurements do not include the wall that once enclosed the area. Remains of this wall are visible on the west side. A huge rectangular complex was here with outer and inner courtyards and the still-extant, ten meter high Holy of Holies, with its own outer and inner courtyards. The rectangle is aligned on the four cardinal points of the compass with its steps, doors and main portal facing east, exactly like the temple in Jerusalem.

Today Solomon's Temple no longer forms an exact rectangle. It is now an irregular trapezoid, with sides of 315 m to the north, 280 m to the south, 485 m to the west and 470 m to the east. The original temple was strictly rectangular, but King Herod distorted the shape when he enlarged the area.

While I was taking photographs from every possible angle, Ruth, Uri and Isaac were busy measuring the courtyards, walls and monoliths. When we stopped for a rest, Ruth showed me her notepad. What professional work! With delicate lines she had drawn a site plan that was ready for the printer. All the walls, monoliths, steps and sunken squares were sketched in, with all the measurements shown just as an engineer would do. She then admitted to me that she was a road and land surveyor.

The four of us explored the network of passages and galleries under Chavin de Huantar. One passage on the east side of the main square was only 1.10 m high and 67 cm wide, impossible to stand upright in. The reason was that on January 17, 1945, Chavin de Huantar was swamped by a massive flood, which covered the low-lying parts of the site with a dark brown layer of mud which penetrated the underground passages. When the water subsided, scree and silt were left behind.

But the site had been flooded before. In 1919, the Peruvian archaeologist Julio C. Tello carried out extensive excavations at the site. When he returned in 1934, the river had destroyed part of the main wing. Tello writes that a third of the complex which had been intact in 1919 had been destroyed and that many subterranean passages had been flushed out. Tello found stone, metal and pottery artifacts on a sandbank in the river miles from the temple, which had been swept out of the ruins by the flood waters.

The next day my Israeli friends boarded a local bus which was packed with passengers like sardines in a can. I promised to send them each a copy of my book in Hebrew, with a personal dedication. We had spent only two days together, yet I missed them as I drove the Lada Niva back to the ruins for another look at the underground passages. Two tunnels on the

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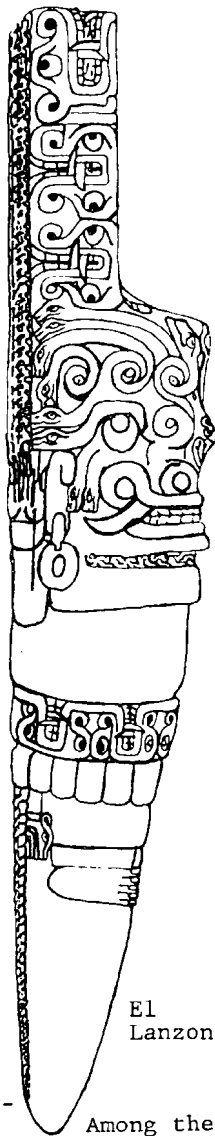
(Continued from previous page) north side of El Castillo lead into a dark labyrinth. Inside, at the intersection of two passageways, a giant stele is still in place. "El Lanzon," the lance, is more than 4 m high, yet the passageways are only 3 m high. It is obvious that the stele was lowered into the intersection from an opening in the ceiling and then the temple complex was built above it.

I continued to explore the various passages, most of which led to dead ends, until finally I came to a stairway with seven steps leading upwards. I felt a current of air coming into the tunnel and soon found myself on the outside near the center of El Castillo, high above the east-facing main entrance. The huge rectangle of the temple complex was spread out below. I clambered down and sat under the main gate for a rest, when I looked up and saw strange flying creatures engraved on the underside of the monolith lying across the columns. They consisted of 14 cherubs, as the Bible calls the watchers of the heavens. Seven figures were facing northwards and seven southwards. It then occurred to me that all the stairways I had used had seven steps. Down below one sunken square stands the "Altar of the Seven Goats."

The number seven has traditions which are not confined to the seven-year itch. Its magic is involved in our seven-day week, in the seven celestial bodies - Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn - in which the Babylonians saw the whole cosmic order. Jews, the seven days of creation and the seven-branched menorah of the tabernacle testify to the importance of the sacred seven. In the Revelation of St. John we find the "book of the seven seals." In ancient Greece seven days of grace were common. Thebes had its famous seven gates, there were seven wise men, and then there were the seven wonders of the world. The wretched figure seven crops up everywhere. Is seven a key to the messages hidden at Chavin de Huantar? Where is the master spy 007? Perhaps we need a code breaker.

Below another sunken square, an associate of Tello found an obelisk which he named the "Tello Obelisk." Now in the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in Lima, Peru, the Tello Obelisk still awaits an interpretation of its sign language. I spent a lot of time taking photographs and copying the engravings on the obelisk. When I asked Peruvian archaeologists for a possible meaning of the designs, I soon realized that they knew nothing definite when they struck up the familiar cult aria: the jaguar cult, the bird of prey cult, etc.

Every visitor to the Museum in Lima walks past the Raimondi stele, also found at Chavin de Huantar. Antonio Raimondi discovered the diorite stele and had it brought to Lima in 1873. The stele measures 1.75 m high, 73 cm wide and only 17 cm thick. Archaeological interpretations of the design on the Raimondi stele range from a jaguar man, to a feline monster, to a multi-headed multi-faced monster, to a half-human half-animal figure, to a religious leader or shaman. One archaeologist has described the design



El Lanzon

Among the

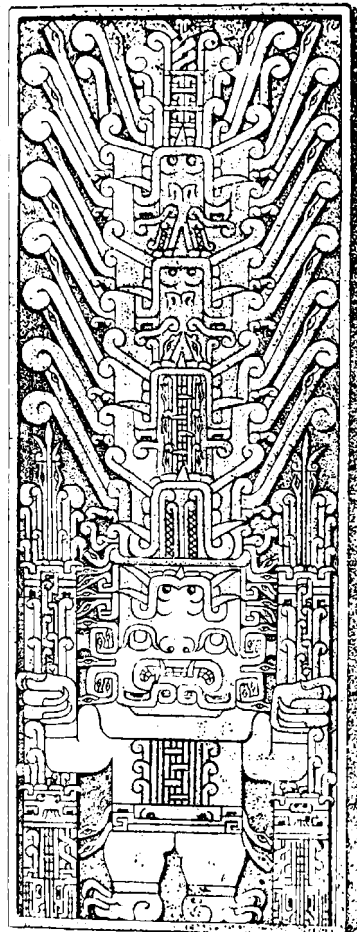
as "the consummate image of the highest incarnation of the god of creation, Viracocha." If such contradictory interpretations of the relief can be given, there should also be room for my speculative questions. Does the peculiar scepter have a very technical look? Is it a question not of jaguars or stunted jaguar men but of a diagram of a car engine with fuel injectors and many feed pipes? Is it a picture puzzle of some future technology that we can understand only when we have developed enough?

I do not know what the Raimondi stele means, but one thing is obvious. The archaeological tap dance on the spot will never get us anywhere. People are not brave enough for unorthodox thinking. Arthur Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, said that "to ignore stems from ignorance." I have nothing more to add.

Chavin de Huantar plays a dirty trick on academics by the mere fact of its existence. The temple has no model and so cannot be fitted into a chronological development. It emerges without warning. This sudden appearance brings out the sweat of doubt on academic foreheads and confuses the well-trained grey cells. Celebrated scholars echo this confusion as follows: the Chavin culture is a remarkable phenomenon which can be satisfactorily explained only if we postulate one or more external impulses, and, the appearance of the Chavin culture is more like an explosion, the effects and consequences of which were felt throughout Peru; and, a yet unexplained external influence prevailed when the Chavin culture originated.

Chavin de Huantar astonishes everyone who visits it. Nearly 50,000 square meters of rocky terrain were levelled. It could not have been built without technical know-how. Since all scholars agree that such know-how did not exist on the American continent, it must have been imported. First-class stonemasons were at work, not hastily trained Indians. There were tools which had been developed down through the ages by practical use. There were architects experienced in building above and below the ground, who planned as a team. When the bare stonework was finished, artists with special skills decorated the hundreds of stone slabs with their abstract art. Did they create the Chavin style out of the blue? In the opinion of all the academics, this style has no model. Was it just there, in all its perfection? Is it a work of genius, an achievement unique in all the world, insofar as it has no prototype. Or was the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem its model?

"Winged gods" proliferate in the Mesopotamian zone. They hovered over the portals of palaces, decorated throne-rooms and tombs and small-scale versions of them were found on the Babylonian, Assyrian and Hittite cylinder seals. Such "winged gods" also fluttered and hovered in the consummate artistic abstractions at Chavin de Huantar. The Peruvian archaeolo-



The Raimondi Stele

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gist, Julio C Tello, still the most important excavator of Chavin de Huantar, characterized the works of art as the products of an "extraordinary race"

We should not make too much fuss about the man-animal combination of the Chavin artistic style - they occur in all ancient civilizations - were it not for the fact that the delicate style of the ornamentation at Chavin de Huantar is adhered to uniformly and so has more to tell us than we think. The visitor is forced to suspect that the artists did not know what they were depicting, in spite of their absolute mastery of shape and form. Did someone "dictate" what they had to engrave? Were they using their own imaginative capacity when they immortalized the unknown something that came from heaven in their drawings and adumbrations of jaguars and condors? When they drew their stone portraits, were they remembering the helmeted gods who gave them autocratic commands and hostile looks?

When the biblical Enoch and Elijah ascended into heaven, tradition has it that they departed on fire-breathing horses. Our ancestors knew that horses cannot breathe fire or fly. They were more familiar with the four-legged creatures than we are. They probably symbolized or described the unintelligible by invoking the power of the horse as a symbol of the explosive energy of an alien phenomenon. The winged jaguars and condors meant the same to the artists at Chavin de Huantar as the winged fire-breathing horses did to the Mesopotamians and the intricate pictorial compositions originated because of the beings resembling humans who careered through the sky. In other words, they were not surreal in the artistic sense of the word, but rather were attempts to reproduce what they had experienced.

Earlier researchers dated the building of the temple complex at Chavin de Huantar between 1000 and 700 BC. Recently, however, scholars consider the culture to be far more recent. Peruvian archaeologists assume that it began between 800 and 500 BC. Nothing is certain, but all the dating methods in use today allow 200 years' latitude either way. Present day physics offers eleven modern techniques of dating ancient ruins, but doubts remain about the datings because each method has its faults.

On his plates in the Book of Mormon, Nephi tells us that he brought the record of his people's past from overseas. Nephi is supposed to have reached South America around 590 BC. He had the temple built 30 years later. The complex at Chavin de Huantar is dated to between 800 and 500 BC, or at least between 1000 and 600 BC.

Nephi knew Solomon's temple from personal observation. There were some highly educated families among his followers, as he mentions in 1 Nephi. Perhaps among them there were architects familiar with the Jerusalem temple plans.

When Nephi left Jerusalem, the city was presumably occupied by the Babylonians. In 586 BC Solomon's temple was completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers. A speculation that is not too far-fetched is that the plans of the sacred temple were smuggled out of the country so that it could be rebuilt in all its glory on a new site - as a memorial to the ancient homeland and symbol of the ancient faith.

The temple complex at Chavin de Huantar can certainly have been a copy of Solomon's temple:

- Chavin de Huantar has outer and inner courtyards, consecrated areas, a sanctuary (El Castillo), separate sections for pilgrims, priests and high priests, a temple wall with external rooms for the "unclean" and even the little brook mentioned in the Bible. Everything as it was in Solomon's temple.

- Chavin de Huantar was orientated towards the four cardinal points of the compass, like Solomon's temple.

- In Chavin de Huantar the number seven was considered sacred, as it was in Solomon's temple.

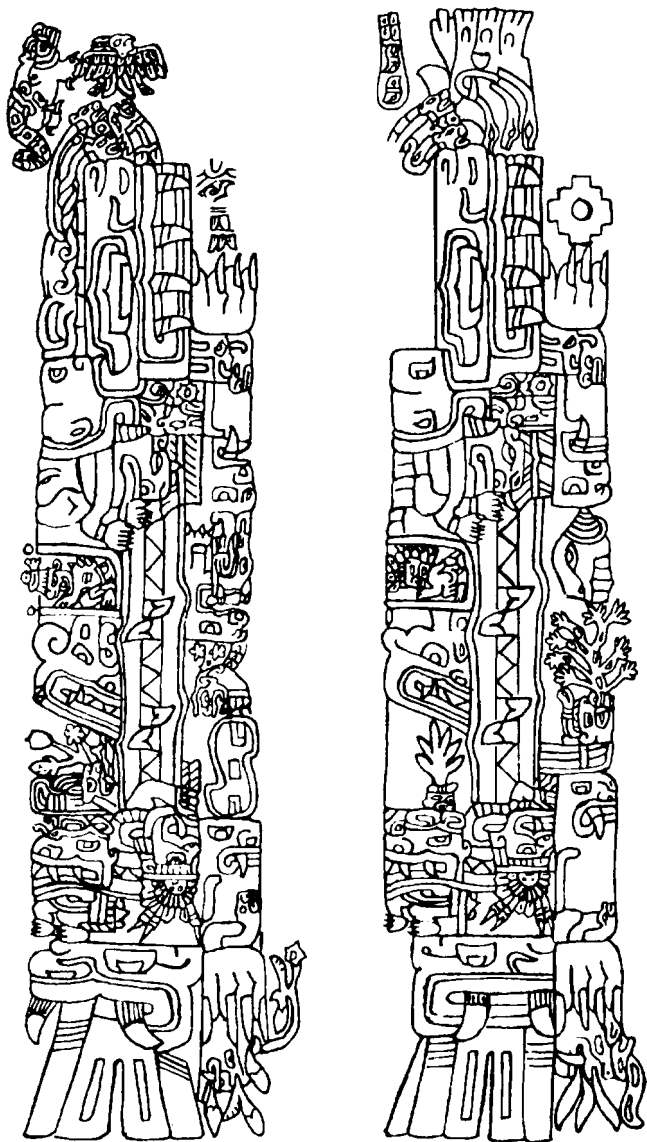
- Chavin de Huantar was a sanctuary, religious centre, and place of pilgrimage, as was Solomon's temple.

- Chavin de Huantar had a ventilation system in its windowless shrine (El Castillo) and its inner rooms had artificial lighting, as did the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple.

- Chavin de Huantar is built over underground galleries and water conduits, like Solomon's temple.

- The builders of Chavin de Huantar worshipped a flying god, like the Israelites did.

As a candidate for Nephi's temple, Chavin de Huantar has more similarities to the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem than can be explained as mere coincidence. I found them on my excursion which was intended to put me on the trail of Ezekiel's temple, but that is another story.



Designs on the Tello Obelisk

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