

BLACK GENESIS

THE PREHISTORIC ORIGINS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

ROBERT BAUVAL & THOMAS BROPHY, Ph.D.

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For my daughter, Candice, and my son, Jonathan. May you always remember your genesis.
—Robert Bauval

To my parents, in deepest gratitude for bringing me into this amazing journey.
—Thomas Brophy

BLACK GENESIS

“*Black Genesis* offers astounding new insights as Bauval and Brophy forcefully support, with hard data, the radical idea that Egyptian civilization was the outgrowth of a sophisticated Black African culture that existed thousands of years prior to the earliest known pharaohs. Their book is a must read for anyone interested in genuinely understanding the true origins of ancient Egypt and the dynamics of how civilizations develop.”

ROBERT M. SCHOCH, PH.D., AUTHOR OF *VOYAGES OF THE PYRAMID BUILDERS* AND *PYRAMID QUEST*

“Readers of *Black Genesis* will never think of ancient Egypt in the same way again. Bauval and Brophy make the case that this venerable civilization was originated by Black Africans from the Sahara Desert and that the pyramids, the statues, and the hieroglyphs were the result of their knowledge and ingenuity. The authors trace the series of errors and misjudgments that have obscured the origins of this remarkable civilization. It is time for the record to be set straight, and *Black Genesis* is the book that may well do it. This is an authoritative, excellent, well-written book.”

STANLEY KRIPPNER, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AT SAYBROOK UNIVERSITY AND
COAUTHOR OF *PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY*

“In *Black Genesis*, Bauval and Brophy combined their investigative skills to answer an obvious but often-neglected question, “Who were the ancient Egyptians?” With new astroarchaeological evidence they build a strong case for “The African origin of the pharaohs” and have dramatically altered our understanding of the past.”

ANTHONY T. BROWDER, AUTHOR AND INDEPENDENT EGYPTOLOGIST

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was not an easy one to research and to put together due to the vast and complex issues involved as well as the need to organize and undertake deep desert expeditions to the Egyptian Sahara. Yet with perseverance, dedication, and enthusiasm, we plodded on, step-by-step, page-by-page, and we can now say that we are extremely proud and pleased with the result.

As always, our first thanks go to our respective families. Their support, love, and patience are greatly appreciated. We wish to pay special thanks and tribute to anthropologists Fred Wendorf and Romuald Schild of the Combined Prehistoric Expedition for opening the way to the study of Nabta Playa. We also thank astronomer Kim Malville for being the first to realize the importance of the megalithic alignments at Nabta Playa. Special thanks go to longtime colleague and friend Paul Rosendahl whose combination of scientific integrity and complete lack of bias or dogmatism has supplied immeasurably helpful collaboration. Thanks, too, to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory of Pasadena, California, for supporting the unusual project of further studies of Nabta Playa.

Our thanks and respect is also due to the desert explorers Mark Borda and Carlo Bergmann for their many discoveries in the Egyptian Sahara and for their kind efforts to share some of these with us. We also thank Mahmoud Marai for guiding us to the remote locations of Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat and showing us the wonderful rock-art cave and the hieroglyphic inscriptions discovered at Uwainat in 2007. We extend thanks to our friend and desert guide Mahmoud (Tiger) Nemr and geologist and desert guide Diaa Shehata for taking us safely to Nabta Playa, and we thank our friend Michael Ackroyd for delivering us to Nabta Playa in 2003 with necessary permits and with great panache. We thank Chance Gardner and Vanesse McNeil for making the fine graphic animations of the Calendar Circle.

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INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT EGYPT REBORN

No colors any more I want them to turn black . . .

MICK JAGGER AND KEITH RICHARDS, "PAINT IT BLACK," 1966

This book is the product of a deep and strong desire to use the best of our intellect, knowledge, and abilities to put right an issue that has long beleaguered historians and prehistorians alike: the vexing question of the Black African origins of the ancient Egyptian civilization. In spite of many clues that have been in place in the past few decades, which strongly favor a Black African origin for the pharaohs, many scholars and especially Egyptologists have either ignored them, confused them, or, worst of all, derided or scorned those who entertained them. It is not our business to know whether such an attitude is a form of academic racism or simply the blindered way of looking at evidence which some modern Egyptology has become accustomed, but whatever the cause, this issue has remained largely unresolved.

We first came across this inherent bias and prejudice against African origins of the Egyptian civilization in the debate—more of an auto-dafé really—against the Black African professor Cheikh Anta Diop, who, in 1954, published his thesis *Nation Nègre et Culture*, which argued a Black African origin for the Egyptian civilization. Anta Diop was both an eminent anthropologist and a highly respected physicist, and as such, he was armed with an arsenal of cutting-edge science as well as the use of the latest technology in radiocarbon dating and biochemistry to determine the skin color of ancient mummies and corpses by analyzing their content of melanin, a natural polymer that regulates pigmentation in humans. Yet in spite of his careful scientific approach, the Egyptian authorities refused to provide Anta Diop with skin samples of royal mummies, even though only minute quantities were required, and they pilloried and shunned him at a landmark symposium in Cairo in 1974 on the origins of ancient Egyptians. Diop died in 1986, his mission not fully accomplished. Fortunately, however, the debate on African origins was quickly taken up by Professor Martin Bernal, who, in 1987, published a three-volume opus, *Black Athena*, that flared even further the already-heated debate. Bernal, a professor emeritus of Near Eastern studies at Cornell University, was the grandson of the eminent Egyptologist Sir Alan Gardiner, yet this did not prevent Egyptologists from attacking him with even more vehemence than they had his Black African predecessor Anta Diop.

Even though there is still much controversy surrounding the origins of the ancient Egyptian civilization, we can now say with much evidence-driven conviction that its origins have their genesis with a Black African people who inhabited the Sahara thousands of years before the rise of the pharaonic civilization. In this book we present hard scientific evidence and cogent arguments that have been culled from the latest findings and discoveries made in the Egyptian Sahara during the past four decades. We have consulted the publications of eminent anthropologists, paleoanthropologists

paleoclimatologists, paleopathologists, genetic scientists, archaeologists, archaeoastronomers, geologists, and even reports from daring desert explorers such as Mark Borda, Carlo Bergmann, and Mahmoud Marai, who have all contributed to showing that this specific region of the world was the crucible of the ancient Egyptian civilization. In researching this book, we have used the best and latest research accredited to experts and scholars, and we have also provided extensive notes in order for the reader to trace this source material for further reading. In addition, we have specifically used our own tool kit and method, which entails the application of the science of astronomy to interpret the alignments of complex megalithic structures, pyramids, and temples, as well as extracting the astronomical content in ancient Egyptian texts and tomb drawings. To phrase it another way, we have coaxed the silent, ancient stones to reveal their secrets with the universal language of the sky.

Black Genesis is an intellectual time machine that takes you on a roller-coaster adventure into the beyond of recorded history. We have written it not for academic readership but for lay readers, those who wish to understand more regarding this debate on the origin of civilization and perhaps who wish even to be part of the restoration of Black Africa to its rightful place at the genesis of the human journey. Although, in this book specialized topics such as anthropology and precession astronomy are reviewed, we have kept the discussion as easy and as entertaining as possible in order to achieve a text that is user-friendly and well within the grasp of anyone who has a thirst for knowledge and a sense of adventure. Our wish is to interest a wider audience in this fascinating research and, we hope, encourage participation in the debate. With Internet communication and the instantaneous distribution of data and information as well as the now easy-to-use astronomy software accessible to all those with a home computer, the participation of the wider public in such debates has become a real and viable possibility, and, indeed, has quite often helped (*coerced* may be a better word!) experts to remove their blinders and look at the wider picture.

There is still much work to do in bringing to the world a new vision of the Black African origins of civilization. Yet if we buttress the theory with solid, current research and exploration, and if we look at the evidence with open minds free of prejudice and bias, progress of this notion of origins is gaining momentum. For many centuries the Black race of the world has either been exploited by its White counterpart or looked upon as inferior. Although many in the Western world have advanced a great deal in curbing such an attitude, the truth is that racial prejudice is still very much rampant in other parts of the world, and it lingers in uneducated or dark hearts in Europe and the New World. *Black Genesis* thus becomes not only a scientific thesis but also a testament of respect and admiration of a people whose skin happens to be black and who have a direct ancestral line to Black Africa.

Our research has taken us from Europe and the United States to Egypt, from the comfort of five-star hotels in Cairo to camping in the remote Sahara, and from the studious environment of public libraries to chaotic journeys along the entire stretch of the Egyptian Nile Valley. We have consulted with experts on the prehistory of the Egyptian Sahara and traveled in four-wheel-drive vehicles with intrepid explorers along large swaths of no-man's-land in southwestern Egypt. We have seen the dense, multiracial populations of large Egyptian cities as well as the sparsely inhabited oases of the Western Desert (Egyptian Sahara). In downtown Cairo we have heard the cacophony of traffic, whose din reaches the brooding pyramids of Giza and the great temples of Luxor and Karnak, and we have experienced the deafening silence of Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat. We have done all this because we believe in our cause and in our work and because we love the excitement and thrill of the chase and the challenge of the enterprise. Most of all, we have done all this because a huge intellectual dam has been breached, and we want to be part of the flood that will regenerate Egypt with a new and purer

vision of itself.

1

STRANGE STONES

In Nabta there are six megalithic alignments extending across the sediments of the playa. . . . Like the spokes on a wheel, each alignment radiates outwards from a complex structure. . . .

DR. MOSALAM SHALTOUT, NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF ASTRONOMY AND
GEOPHYSICS, EGYPT

[One of the] alignments points to the rising position of Sirius . . . the primary calibrator of the Egyptian calendar. . . .

DR. FRED WENDORF AND DR. ROMUALD SCHILD, *THE MEGALITHS OF NABTA PLAYA*

A LUCKY TURN OF THE SPADE

The phrase *a lucky turn of the spade* is well known in archaeology. It reminds us that many of the great discoveries have often been made not by intellectual ingenuity, as we would expect, but by pure chance. Moreover, it implies that the credit does not necessarily always go to the person who actually held the spade, but rather to his employer, the leader or financier of the archaeological project. For example, when, in 1873, a Turkish worker plunged his rusty spade into the soil and discovered the legendary city of Troy, this was a lucky turn of the spade—not for him—but rather for the German adventurer Heinrich Schliemann. When, in 1922, an Egyptian peasant shifted the sand with his spade and discovered the entrance to Tutankhamun’s tomb, this too was a lucky turn of the spade not for him but for the English archaeologist Howard Carter. Schliemann and Carter became legends in their own time; the workers were given a small stipend and then departed into oblivion.

So when an unnamed student from Southern Methodist University of Texas (SMU) discovered Nabta Playa, his or her name was somehow lost and forgotten in the academic verbiage that followed. Admittedly, this time there was no lucky turn of the spade. In fact, there was no spade in the hand of the unnamed student. The leader of the expedition, Fred Wendorf, and the student as well as a few others with them had by chance stopped their Jeep in order to have a comfort break—a pee—after a long and tiring drive in the Egyptian Sahara. They were 100 kilometers (about 62 miles) due west of Abu Simbel in a nondescript, empty desert spot. During their rest, as they looked down around their feet, they slowly realized they were standing in a field of numerous artifacts, the remnants of fine made stone tools and potsherds. Those artifacts alone were intriguing enough to prompt Fred Wendorf to investigate further and begin an entirely new excavation site. What the explorers did not then realize was that the strange clusters of large stones all around them, half-buried in the sand, would eventually shock the world’s concept of antiquity. At first the members of the expedition assumed the

these stones were just natural boulders sticking out of the ancient sediment—a common feature in the arid part of the world. In fact, for years, as they excavated in the midst of the boulders, searching for and finding the expected Neolithic artifacts, they assumed the large stones were natural bedrock outcrops. As they looked closer, however, it dawned on them that the stones were positioned in unnatural formations—strange geometrical clusters, ovals, circles, and straight lines—and they were sitting on the sediments of an ancient dry lake. Someone had taken the trouble to move these stones with great effort. Who had done this? When? More intriguingly, why? It would be no exaggeration to say from the outset of our story that Wendorf's findings and those of his team, which were published gradually from the mid-1970s until very recently, should have shaken to its very core the scholarly world and should have changed its perception of Egyptian history and even, perhaps, of civilization as a whole. This, however, didn't happen. Nabta Playa and its mysteries remained an undefused intellectual bomb, ticking away, remaining unexploded in the hallways of established knowledge.

Until now.

THE COMBINED PREHISTORIC EXPEDITION (CPE)

Fred Wendorf's fascination with the Egyptian Sahara started way back in 1960, when, in a desperate bid to save Egypt's ravaged economy, the Egyptian government decided to build a huge dam on the Nile just south of Aswan, 900 kilometers (about 600 miles) from Cairo. Egypt's population had burgeoned from a comfortable ten million at the turn of the nineteenth century to an unsustainable fifty million by 1960, and the country was now in dire need of cheap energy to service the ever-growing masses and sprouting agricultural and industrial projects. There were also new infrastructure projects planned for the delta region and all along the 1,000-kilometer (about 621 miles) Nile Valley—roads, pipelines, sewage plants, airports, hospitals, and schools—which President Gamal Abd Nasser had promised the people after the so-called Free Officers Revolution of 1952. Unable to obtain funds for all this from the Western powers because of ongoing anti-Semitism in Egypt and the country's hostilities with Israel, Nasser was forced to seek help from communist Russia, which was eager to introduce socialism to Egypt and to gain a foothold in the Arab world. For infrastructure projects Egypt provided cheap labor from its huge unemployed masses, while Russia provided the cash and the technology—and even threw a few Mig jet fighters and tanks into the deal.

When finished, the dam on the Nile was to form a giant lake, Lake Nasser, which not only would flood much of the inhabited Nile Valley upstream but also would submerge many ancient temples among them the great temple of Ramses II at Abu Simbel and the beautiful temple of Isis on the Island of Philae. The archaeological world communities were outraged. Not as well publicized at the time, but also slated to be lost were several prehistoric sites in the adjacent desert earmarked for new farming projects. At the eleventh hour, however, UNESCO World Heritage sounded the alarm, and funds were quickly raised from big donors across the world. A huge international rescue operation hastily worked to save the ancient temples. The effort involved experts and engineering contractors from Europe and the United States.

Yet while this sensational salvage operation grabbed all the headlines, another, more modest operation went relatively unnoticed. This was the scantily funded rescue mission started in 1962 and headed by Fred Wendorf, who was then curator of the Museum of New Mexico. Fred Wendorf had set himself the daunting task of salvaging or, at the very least, documenting in detail the prehistoric sites in the Egyptian Sahara before they were lost forever. Wendorf's rescue operation was at first funded by the National Science Foundation of America and the U.S. State Department and was made up of a

informal team of anthropologists, archaeologists, and other scientists who were given the collective name of Combined Prehistoric Expedition, or CPE. Three institutions formed the core body of the CPE: SMU, the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS), and the Geological Survey of Egypt (GSE). In view of his credentials and seniority, Wendorf remained in charge of the CPE. In 1964 Wendorf resigned from his post at the Museum of New Mexico and joined Southern Methodist University (SMU) as head of the anthropological department—a move that allowed him to devote more time to the ongoing research in the Egyptian Sahara. In 1972, however, Wendorf handed the day-to-day operations to a Polish anthropologist, Dr. Romuald Schild. At this point, both Wendorf and Schild admitted, “Only a few signs suggested that a new archaeological dreamland is there buried in the sands and clays.”¹ Barely a year later, however, in 1973, after Wendorf’s fateful pee break 100 kilometers from Abu Simbel, and after they walked around the large, shallow basin and saw all the strange stone clusters and protracted alignments as well as a plethora of tumuli and potsherds strewn all over the ground, both men started to suspect that just maybe they had hit the anthropological jackpot—for this was no ordinary prehistoric site. It was a sort of unique Stone Age theme park in which mysterious events and occult ceremonies quite obviously took place. The local modern Bedouins called the region Nabta, which apparently meant “seeds.” Borrowing this name and concluding that the wide, sandy-clay basin they stood on in the desert was the bottom of a very ancient lake, Wendorf and Schild christened the site Nabta Playa.

But what exactly is Nabta Playa, and what are the mysteries it conceals?

CIRCLE, ALIGNMENTS, AND TUMULI

The Egyptian Sahara—which is also known as the Eastern Sahara or Western Desert—is a vast rectangular region that is bracketed on its four sides by the Mediterranean Sea in the north, the Nile Valley in the east, Libya in the west, and Sudan in the south. It is almost the size of France, and, apart from the five main fertile oases that run in a line from north to south, it is considered the most arid and desolate place in the world, especially the corner in the southwest, adjacent to Sudan and Libya. Because of this terrible aridity and also because some parts of it are so remote, the Egyptian Sahara remains largely unexplored. True, some archaeological research has taken place in and around the five major oases, but few, if any, explorations have been carried out in the deep desert or in that distant southwestern corner. This is especially the case for the two highland regions known as Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat. These are composed of giant, rocky massifs that act as a natural barrier to Egypt’s southwestern frontier corner with Sudan and Libya. These almost surreal “Alps of the desert” emerge from the surrounding flat landscape like giant icebergs in a still ocean, and in daytime they loom over the haze like eerie mirages that can taunt, daunt, and terrify the most intrepid or placid of travelers.

As odd as it may seem, especially given our perspective of today’s amazing technological advances in communication, no one in modern times knew of the existence of Gilf Kebir or Jebel Uwainat until the early 1920s—or so it seemed, as we will see in chapter 2. The abnormally belated discovery of Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat coupled with their remoteness and the harsh and extremely inhospitable climate of the region are the main reasons for the almost nonexistent archaeological exploration there. In addition, there has been a strange disinterest by Egyptologists who have insisted that it was impossible for the ancient Egyptians of the Nile Valley to have reached these faraway places through vast distances of open and waterless desert. Nonetheless, this belief is somewhat odd because it has been known since 1923 that Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat were once inhabited by prehistoric people who left evidence of their presence there in an abundance of rock art on ledges and

in caves and in the many *wadis* (valleys) skirting the massifs. Perhaps the greatest mystery of these strange places was that, in spite of the plentiful rock art and stone artifacts that attest to human presence, no actual human remains or even empty tombs have so far been found there. This was also the case at Nabta Playa.

The question surely begs asking: Were Gilf Kebir, Jebel Uwainat, and Nabta Playa not places of permanent habitation but outposts for people who moved from place to place and who had their home base elsewhere? For example, could the people of Nabta Playa, with their mysterious megalithic legacy, be the same people of Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat, with their puzzling rock art legacy? If so, then how could such people traveling on foot—or, at best, on donkey—across such vast distances (there are 580 kilometers—about 360 miles—between Nabta Playa and the Gilf Kebir–Jebel Uwainat regions) in this totally waterless desert?

Before we attempt to answer such questions, we must look at an interesting and possibly very relevant geographical fact: Nabta Playa and the Gilf Kebir–Jebel Uwainat area are almost on the same east–west line that runs just north of latitude 22.5 degrees north, forming a sort of natural highway between the Nile Valley, Nabta Playa, and, at its western end, Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat. From a directional viewpoint, then, ancient travelers would easily have known how to journey to such distant locations simply by moving due east or due west—a direction that can be determined by the sun's shadow. Knowing, however, in which direction to move is one thing; making the long journey to a distant end point is quite another. Such a long stretch of desert crossing is impossible on foot or on a donkey unless there are watering holes or wells along the way. Yet there are no wells or surface water in this stretch of desert between Nabta Playa and Gilf Kebir, only bone-dry sand, dust, and rocks. Nothing could survive in this wasteland without adequate sources of water. Indeed, that Jebel Uwainat and Gilf Kebir were discovered so late shows how problematic it is to reach these regions without motorized four-wheel-drive vehicles that are fully equipped for rough terrain.

Because of this, as well as the hazards involved in such deep desert trekking, only a handful of people have ventured into this wilderness. The region is still a no-man's-land for tourists, and very few, if any, Bedouins who roam the Egyptian Sahara go there. In fact, so uninterested were Egyptologists in these remote areas that the places were—and still are—hardly mentioned in any but the rarest of Egyptological textbooks. Oddly enough, in 1996 it was left to Hollywood to generate some interest in Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat through the academy-award-winning film *The English Patient* in which the hero supposedly crashes his single-engine plane on the western side of Gilf Kebir. Yet even then the scenes in the movie were shot not on location but in the more accessible desert of Morocco.^{*1} At any rate, whatever the reason, Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat were not included in the Combined Prehistoric Expedition mandate. The CPE must have assumed, as most Egyptologists did in those days, that no one could have traveled such vast distances in the arid desert in ancient times, and therefore, there could not be a direct connection between the prehistoric people of Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat and the people who built and occupied Nabta Playa. We will return to this important misjudgment in the next chapter.

In the later twentieth century another misjudgment occurred: although from 1973 to 1994 the site of Nabta Playa was the intense focus of anthropological and archaeological investigations by the CPE, it nonetheless failed to take notice of the very obvious megalithic alignments there, and it certainly did not have them checked by an astronomer. This was a rather curious oversight that even Fred Wendorf himself had trouble explaining: “The megaliths of Nabta were not recognized or identified for a long time. We began to realize their significance only in 1992. . . .”² and “it is not clear why v

failed to recognize them previously, or rather why we failed to understand their significance during the first three field seasons 1974, 1975, and 1977 at Nabta. It was not that we did not see them because we did, but they were either regarded as bedrock or, in some instances where it was clear they were not bedrock, regarded as insignificant.”³

As the author John Anthony West once remarked, archaeologists can have blindered views and miss the obvious: “[I]f you are bent on looking only for potatoes in a field of diamonds, you will miss seeing the diamonds!”⁴ To be fair to the CPE, though, the anthropological and archaeological evidence so far was in itself exciting stuff. Carbon-14 dating resulted in dates as far back as 7000 BCE and as recent as 3400 BCE, showing an on-and-off presence at Nabta Playa over an incredible span of years: more than three and a half millennia. The evidence at Nabta Playa also showed that at first people came seasonally, when the lake was filled by the monsoon summer rains, arriving probably in July and staying until January, when the lake dried up again. Eventually, sometime around 6500 BCE they figured out how to stay at Nabta Playa permanently by digging deep wells. Around 3300 BCE, however, the changes in climate made the region extremely arid, and Nabta Playa had to be abandoned. The mysterious people simply vanished, leaving behind their ceremonial complex that the CPE had discovered more than five millennia later. Its members were now at odds to understand the function and meaning of the complex.

First the CPE was baffled by the dozen or so oval-shaped tumuli at the north side of Nabta Playa. These looked like flattened igloos made of rock debris and covered with flat slabs of stones. More baffling still was when one of these tumuli was excavated by the CPE. It was found to contain the complete skeletal remains of a young cow, and other tumuli also contained scattered bones of cattle. Wendorf christened the area “the wadi of sacrifices” and concluded that these cattle burials and offerings appear to indicate the presence of a cattle cult. Radiocarbon dating placed these cow burials at around 5500 BCE, thus at least two thousand years before the emergence of the well-known cattle cults of ancient Egypt, such as those of the cow-faced goddess Hathor, the universally known goddess Isis, and the sky goddess Nut.⁵

There were also strange clusters of large stones at the western part of Nabta Playa—about thirty of them, which the CPE called complex structures. When some of these were excavated the CPE found to its great astonishment, that these structures had been deliberately placed over natural rock outcrops that were 3 to 5 meters (about 10 to 16 feet) below the surface of the earth. Furthermore, it seemed that these strange rock outcrops had actually been smoothed to “mushroom-like” shapes by human hands! The largest of these so-called complex structures was named Complex Structure A (CSA). When excavated it was found to contain, at a depth of 3 meters, a large, rough stone sculpture carved to look something like a cow and placed above the sculpted rock outcrop. Moreover, emanating from Complex Structure A were a series of stone alignments that shot out like spokes from a bicycle wheel for several hundred meters, with some projecting toward the north and others toward the east.



Figure 1.1. Prehistoric palette found at Gerzeh, ca. 4000–3000 BCE, thought to represent the goddess Hathor.

There was more, however. The now-famous part of Nabta Playa, its *pièce de résistance*, was a small stone circle at the northwest part of the site, which looked a bit like a mini Stonehenge. The standing stones—twenty-nine of them—that formed the circle contained four gates, which created lines of sight that ran east–west and north–south. Placed in the center of the circle were two rows of three upright stones each (six stones in total), which gave the whole arrangement the appearance of the dial of a giant clock. Some of the stones had clearly been displaced, perhaps by vandals, and so the CPE invited a young and gifted anthropologist from the University of Arizona, Dr. Nieves Zedeño, to help them reconstruct the circle to its original form of millennia ago. Clearly this was no ordinary prehistoric structure. At this stage the CPE anthropologists were completely baffled as to what purpose it might have served. Wendorf and Schild were now beginning to suspect that the whole of Nabta Playa might have less to do with anthropology and more to do with astronomy. So, in 1997, they finally sought the help of an astronomer from the University of Colorado in Boulder, Dr. Kim Malville, who was known for his specialized studies on the astronomy of prehistoric sites. They were in for a big surprise.



Figure 1.2. Schild with Calendar Circle, Nabta Playa, winter 1999

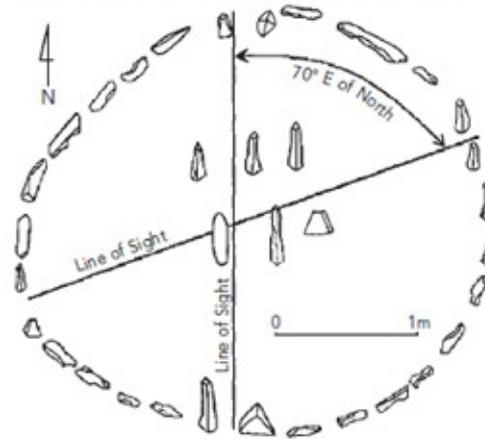
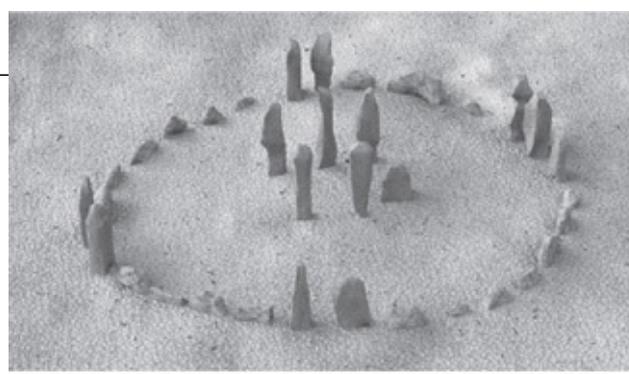


Figure 1.3. Artist's graphic depiction of the Calendar Circle, based on the archaeological reconstruction map of Applegate and Zedeño. Graphics by Doug Thompson for Carmen Boulter.

Reconstructing the Calendar Circle

There has been a certain amount of controversy as to what exactly happened during and after the reconstruction of the circle (called the Calendar Circle) at Nabta Playa. In June 2008 the authors contacted Dr. Zedeño and asked her if, because she appeared to have been much tampering with the Calendar Circle (especially in 2007–2008), she might help work out what happened from the time the circle was discovered (in 1974) to the publication of Malville's article in *Nature* in 1998. It was noted to Dr. Zedeño that in February 2008 the Calendar Circle was removed from its original place at Nabta Playa and transported to the Nubian Museum in Aswan.

Dr. Zedeño replied in a personal correspondence to Robert Bauval: "I mapped the calendar in the winter of 1991–1992. I never saw it again, or before that date for that matter, so I don't know what happened to it. No idea what the cow stone is or where it was before it was removed. Some photos do not seem to be of the same site, in fact there seems to be a fake calendar photo here and there. . . . The only authoritative publication about the calendar I know of is a chapter in Wendorf, Schild, and associates. . . ." As Dr. Zedeño indicates, she mapped the circle in 1991 and 1992, whereas Schild said he made the first map in 1992. Also, Zedeño suggests that the only authoritative paper she knows is a chapter in the publication of Wendorf et al., which in fact is an article by Zedeño herself and a colleague, Alex Applegate, published in 2001. She ignores the 1998 publication in *Nature* by Wendorf and Malville. We are not sure what "fake calendar" she refers to. Furthermore, Zedeño says she never saw the Calendar Circle before 1991 or after 1992 and therefore does not know what happened to it. yet in her 2001 article coauthored with Applegate, she writes: "However, one should note that since the time of the site's original discovery [1973], only eight of the presumed fourteen upright slabs remain in place, while the other six center slabs have fallen. In addition, the presumed outer ring suffered an even greater displacement with one of the stones deposited over 7 meters [about 23 feet] from its postulated position." To confuse things even further, in an e-mail message we received from Romuald Schild on June 12, 2008, "The first field map of the calendar was made by dr. Zedeño and Schild in February 1992, while the first hypothetical reconstruction of the device, including directions and angles of the sights (gates), was drawn by myself, also in February 1992."

IN COMES ARCHAEOASTRONOMY

In the past forty years or so there has been a growing interest in the new scientific field

archaeoastronomy, which, according to one school of thought, is defined as the study of the astronomies, astrologies, and cosmologies, as well as the alignments of monuments and buildings of ancient cultures. This scientific discipline has emerged as a new tool for archaeology, because it has become more apparent in recent years that the cyclical motions of the stars, sun, moon, and planets were very much an integral part of the religious ideologies of ancient cultures and that ancient people applied such ideas to the design and alignment of their monuments. It is thus imperative to bring the science of naked-eye observational astronomy as a necessary instrument in order to understand fully the meaning of the design, alignments, and sometimes the choice of location of ancient temples, pyramids, and even whole cities. For example, according to E. C. Krupp:

The cosmos itself is what mattered to our ancestors. Their lives, their beliefs, their destinies—all were part of this bigger pageant. Just as the environment of their temples was made sacred by metaphors of cosmic order, entire cities and great ritual centres were also astronomically aligned and organised. Each sacred capital restated the theme of cosmic order in terms of its builders' own perception of the universe. Principles, which the society considered its own—which ordered its life and gave it its character—were borrowed from the sky and built into the plans of the cities.⁷

A sort of stillborn precursor of modern archaeoastronomy can be found in the turbulent intellectual milieu that swirled through the French intelligentsia at the turn of the nineteenth century. After Napoleon, in 1799, took a cadre of top scientists and scholars along with his army on the adventurous military campaigns through Egypt. Napoleon also took along artists to record the journeys in sketches. One such artist, Vivant Denon, was fascinated by a zodiac sculpted onto the ceiling of a temple at Dendera. In Paris, Denon published as a book his sketch of the Dendera zodiac, along with an account of his travels, and it became a huge bestseller in both France and England. In the important scientific and scholarly societies of Paris there arose a protracted and very active debate focusing on attempts to date the Dendera zodiac. One camp was composed of scientific luminaries of the time, many of whose names are familiar to any student of science today. These scientists often gathered at the home of the Marquis de Laplace. Particularly active in the Dendera zodiac debate were physicists Jean-Baptiste Biot and Joseph Fourier, astronomer Johan Karl Burckhardt, and his engineering partner Jean-Baptiste Coraboeuf. The approach that all in this camp followed in order to attempt to date the zodiac was to match calculations of the astronomical precession of the equinoxes with the images of constellations on the Dendera zodiac. They followed the reasoning of pre-French Revolutionary scholar Charles Dupuis, who had based his study of the origins of religion on interpreting religious mythologies in astronomical terms. As California Institute of Technology historian of science Jed Z. Buchald puts it,

Dupuis had located the birthplace of the zodiac in an Egypt older by far than any chronology based on textual arguments—and especially on the Books of Moses—could possibly allow. (Standard biblical chronology placed the origin of all things at about 4000 BC. . . .) According to Dupuis, the zodiac, and astronomy itself, was born near the Nile over 14,000 years ago. The Greeks, he insisted, were scientific children compared to the Egyptians, whose knowledge and wisdom underlay all of Western science and mathematics.⁸

The scientists competed fiercely, often disagreeing with each other. For example, Biot seems to

have enjoyed pointing out that Fourier, famous for his mathematics, had miscalculated the heliac rising of Sirius. Yet they all used precession calculations to date the Dendera zodiac. One thing that hampered them and that is still uncertain today was that it is not clear how much of the Dendera zodiac is representative of actual events in the sky and how much of it is merely symbolic horoscopy. This gets at the heart of the other camp in the zodiac-dating debates of the time: the philologists and linguists who argued that astrophysical calculations should not be applied, because all ancient symbology is best understood as an expression of the cultural lives of the ancients, not as a representation of the physical world.

Stirring even more the turbulence of the debate was that many French intellectuals, such as Dupuis, had little use for biblical fundamentalism, while others believed all scholarship should be firmly based on interpreting biblical Mosaic (emphasizing the Books of Moses) chronology. One of these was the young Jean-Francois Champollion.

Meanwhile, a French antiquities collector named Saulnier had dispatched a master stonemason named Lelorrain on an expedition to Dendera to steal the zodiac. After using stone saws and chisels and finally dynamite, Lelorrain managed to cart the remains of the temple ceiling back to Paris. The remains, however, did not include the parts of the ceiling that ended up winning the Dendera zodiac debates. In September 1822, Champollion, after years of poverty-stricken excruciating efforts,⁹ finally cracked the code for how to decipher hieroglyphs. Champollion first deciphered the cartouches that contain royal names. (A cartouche is an oval enclosure in which the name of a pharaoh is inscribed. Only a king's name can be written within a cartouche.) Among the first cartouches he deciphered were those next to the Dendera zodiac. There he read the ancient Greek word for "ruler," thus dating the construction of the zodiac ceiling to the Ptolemaic period and winning the debate for the side of the philologists, who could happily boot the physicists and astronomers out of the circle of those considered able to offer legitimate authority about antiquity.

Yet in what must be one of the great ironies of history, in 1828, when Champollion had the resources finally to mount his own expedition and he arrived at Dendera to see his famous cartouches, he was horrified to find them empty. They never had contained any hieroglyphs, no royal names at all. It seems the artists with Napoleon's army, who were often quite accurate in their depictions, in this case had been puzzled by the strange, empty cartouches and had sketched something in them simply for artistic reasons. By the time of Champollion's trip, however, the philologists had consolidated their authoritative hold on antiquities studies enough to keep the physical scientists at bay for some time. Further, as it turned out, Champollion's date was not far off anyway.*²

Eventually, we would have a new mode of historical understanding stemming from neither the extreme philologist-linguist camp nor the extreme physicist-astronomer camp, but a synthetic approach including many forms of evidence—archaeological, artistic, linguistic, and astronomical—that would come into play.

Because he began to employ such a synthetic approach, the father of archaeoastronomy may legitimately be the British astronomer Sir Norman Lockyer. Lockyer was born in 1836 in Rugby, England. As a young man, he had worked for the War Office in London, and it was there that he first developed a keen interest in astronomy. In 1862 Lockyer was made a fellow at the Royal Astronomical Society, and, in 1868, while working at the College of Chemistry in London, he made his first major contribution to science by showing that the bright emissions from the sun during a total eclipse were caused by an unknown element he named "helium"—twenty-seven years before Sir William Ramsay would isolate this gas in the laboratory! In 1869 Lockyer made another important

contribution to science: he founded the journal *Nature*, which was to become the most influential scientific periodical in the world. Further, in 1885 Lockyer became the world's first professor of astronomical physics. For his many discoveries and achievements, Lockyer was knighted in 1897.

At the age of fifty-three, toward the end of his academic career, Lockyer indulged in his greatest passion: the study of the astronomies of ancient cultures and the alignments of their temples. He realized that archaeologists had not “paid any heed to the possible astronomical ideas of the temple builders”¹⁰ and, furthermore, that “there was little doubt that astronomical consideration had a great deal to do with the direction towards which these temples faced.”¹¹ He had read of the magnificent pyramids and temples of ancient Egypt, and so, in November 1890, Lockyer went there to see them for himself. In Cairo he was assisted by the German Egyptologist Heinrich Brugsch, an authority on astronomical inscriptions and drawings found in temples and tombs of pharaohs and noblemen. During a meeting with Lockyer, Brugsch explained that the rituals and ceremonies of ancient Egyptians clearly contained astronomical connotations. Encouraged by this, Lockyer sailed to Luxor. There he studied the alignment and symbolism of several temples, including the great temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak. Back in England, Lockyer published his findings in *The Dawn of Astronomy*. This was the first book of its kind, and, taking into account the incomplete and rudimentary knowledge of Egyptologists at that time, Lockyer's work is a remarkable achievement that brought to attention the importance of applying astronomy to the studies of ancient cultures. Yet even though Lockyer's approach was highly scientific and his arguments sound, nearly all Egyptologists either ignored or rudely derided his thesis. Like Galileo before him, who calmly told his inquisitors “but it [Earth] does move . . .” (*e pur si muove*), poor Lockyer told the Egyptologists “of all the large temples I examined there was an astronomical basis . . .”¹² His words fell on deaf ears. In the years that followed, the Egyptologists took refuge in their belief that by having silenced Lockyer and having thrown him off their turf, they had shaken off all those pseudoscientists, dilettantes, and hangers-on who dared to oppose their views. For a while it did seem that they had succeeded.

In 1963, however, another archaeoastronomer came to haunt them again with a vengeance: the American professor Gerald Hawkins of the Harvard-Smithsonian Observatories in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hawkins infuriated archaeologists by publishing in Lockyer's now highly influential academic journal *Nature* a series of articles on the vexed topic of the alleged astronomy of Stonehenge, and he followed the articles with the publication of his now-renowned book *Stonehenge Decoded*. Hawkins went much further than Lockyer: he claimed that the alignments at Stonehenge were definitely astronomical and had been deliberately aimed at the sun and moon *azimuths* (positions at rising and setting). He also asserted that the fifty-six holes of the so-called Aubrey Circle were representative of the fifty-six years of the moon's full eclipse cycle of three nodal revolutions of 18.6 years each. The implications were huge. This interpretation meant that the ancient builders of Stonehenge, far from being primitives and illiterate barbarians, were sophisticated astronomers who also knew that Earth was a sphere or globe. This, of course, was pure anathema to the archaeologists, and soon they were again up in arms. As our colleague and friend John Anthony West once remarked

There are few things in this world more predictable than the reaction of conventional minds to unconventional ideas. That reaction is always and invariably some combination of contempt, outrage, abuse and derision. . . . However, this standard reaction may be seriously muted or further enhanced by a potent new wild card, added to the deck only in the latter half of the twentieth century: the PR factor. If the unconventional idea attracts wide public interest, that

is to say if it is easily understood and is “sexy” enough; especially if it results in bestselling books, extensive TV coverage or movie blockbusters, the attack gets ratcheted up. . . . As long as the public interest is there, Hollywood and television can be relied upon to keep stirring the pot no matter what the “experts” say. And sooner or later the cynics, skeptics and debunkers at the *New York Times*, *Scientific American* and *Skeptical Inquirer* will be forced to confront the offending idea.¹³

This time, however, they faced a less accommodating opponent than the passive Sir Lockyer. Hawkins’s book became a bestseller, and, with his solid academic reputation, the archaeologists had much trouble quenching the huge interest and support Hawkins received from the public and media. Hawkins had singlehandedly forced the scholars out of their ivory towers and made them face up to the challenge. What made matters even worse for the skeptics was the support that he received from academic heavyweights such as Sir Fred Hoyle, who not only confirmed Hawkins’s calculations but also agreed that “a veritable Newton or Einstein must have been at work”¹⁴ at Stonehenge three millennia ago.

Hawkins was soon followed by a Scotsman, Alexander Thom, an engineer with a keen interest in the ancient megaliths and prehistoric monuments of the British Isles. After years of meticulous investigation of the astronomical alignments of these ancient sites, Thom was convinced that all were the collective work of a pan-generation construction program that reached its pinnacle in 1850 BC. He was able to show that many of the megalithic sites incorporated a common canon of geometry and mathematics that resembled what was supposedly invented by the Pythagoreans of ancient Greece—yet they appeared in the British Isles more than a millennium earlier! According to Thom, the dimensions of the prehistoric sites were determined by a common unit of measurement, about 2.7 feet in length, which he termed the *megalithic yard*. Thom proposed that these sites were meant to express magical ideas and symbolize important belief systems by making use of astronomical observations of the sun, moon, and stars.

This time, some archaeologists took notice with uneasy embarrassment, for it was becoming obvious that their elderly peers, in their zeal to defend their coveted turf, might have been too hasty in rejecting the research of Lockyer, Hawkins, and Hoyle. Alexander Thom’s impeccable data and the razor-sharp mathematical logic in his book *Megalithic Sites in Britain* could not be ignored by unbiased archaeologists. Thom also managed to have articles published in the reputable and peer-reviewed *Journal of the History of Astronomy*, which gave much credence to his ideas. It seemed that finally, the new science of archaeoastronomy had made a crack in the wall of archaeology.

Since Alexander Thom’s days, the science of archaeoastronomy has gained much ground and popularity among the public and even with some Egyptologists and archaeologists of the new generation. Starting in the late 1960s, serious investigators began to feel more comfortable coming forward with their ideas on the astronomical alignments of ancient Egyptian temples and pyramids. The first major breakthrough came with the astronomer Virginia Trimble, who codiscovered the stellar alignments of the shafts in the King’s Chamber of the Great Pyramid in 1963. This discovery opened the way for more research on the Egyptian pyramids and also encouraged others to come forward and brave the firewall of academic Egyptology.¹⁵ Today many new players have entered this fascinating field of research, mostly because computer and satellite technology such as Google Earth, GPS, and user-friendly astronomy software have allowed amateurs to investigate ancient sites on screen in the comfort of their office or home. Further, with the arrival of the Internet coupled with the

exponential growth of computer and digital technology and electronic communication with easy access to downloading scientific publications, research on ancient cultures is no longer the monopoly of closed-door archaeological institutions or university and museum departments. Even so, Egyptologists and archaeologists still pull rank when new ideas threaten to topple their coveted applecart. We speak from our own experience when we published *The Orion Mystery* in 1994 and later, in 2002, *The Origin Map*. We too endured from Egyptologists and archaeologists the all-too-familiar war of words and the debunking that is passed off as criticism.

There are, nonetheless, signs of a growing acceptance that connections do exist between astronomy and the orientation, alignments, and location of ancient sites. In 1981 the First International Conference on Archaeoastronomy was held at Oxford, in England, where astronomical alignments of temples were discussed openly and seriously. Then, in 1983, there took place the First International Conference on Ethnoastronomy at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. In 1993 the world's attention was galvanized by the German engineer Rudolf Gantenbrink and his daring exploration with a miniature robot of the star shafts in the Queen's Chamber of the Great Pyramid of Giza and his stunning discovery of doors at their ends. Finally, in 2002, *National Geographic* staged a live television event in an attempt to open the Gantenbrink doors in the Great Pyramid. An estimated six hundred million viewers around the world saw the program. Thanks to the persistence of a new breed of archaeoastronomers such as Archie Roy of Glasgow University, Giulio Magli of Milan Politecnico, Edwin Krupp of the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles, Anthony Aveni of Colgate University, Alex Gurstein of the International Astronomical Union, and Juan Belmonte of the Tenerife Observatory to name but a few, archaeoastronomy has now become an important aspect in the understanding of ancient cultures. Today a few major universities around the world have added new chairs for archaeoastronomy, and more scholarly papers, articles, and books are being published by professional archaeoastronomers and serious amateurs alike. All this has caused a large crack in the wall of Egyptology—and archaeoastronomy has slipped in to stand beside conventional archaeology as a major tool to study the pyramids, temples, texts, and tomb drawings of the pharaohs.

So when Kim Malville, a professor emeritus of astrophysics and planetary sciences at the University of Colorado, arrived at Nabta Playa in late 1997, he was greeted not by the usual tongue-in-cheek reception, which might previously have been expected from Egyptologists and archaeologists, but with a genuinely collegial reception and a great hope that he could help solve the mystery of the stone alignments there. At this point everyone working at Nabta Playa must have felt that under their feet was a potential intellectual and political time bomb, not only because of its great antiquity but also because of what Malville was there to confirm. Before we go into this, however, we must understand better why the CPE made the mistake of leaving out of their research and investigation the regions of Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uwainat, for even with the problem of their great distance from Nabta Playa, it should have been obvious that they were in some way related to the ancient people who developed Nabta Playa. Let us review, then, where and when this intriguing story of the Egyptian Sahara really began. Surprisingly, it was not in Egypt but in the dimly lit corridors of Balliol College, Oxford, England.

WANDERLUST

The journey of Hassanein Bey, graduate of Oxford University and now Secretary of the Egyptian Legation in Washington . . . a distance of 2200 miles, has been characterized by the Director of Desert Survey, Egypt, as “an almost unique achievement in the annals of geographic exploration.”

EDITOR, “CROSSING THE UNTRAVERSED LIBYAN DESERT,” *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE*, SEPTEMBER 1924

To him who has the wanderlust, no other actuating motive for exploration is needed than the knowledge that a region is unknown to civilized man.

AHMED HASSANEIN BEY, “CROSSING THE UNTRAVERSED LIBYAN DESERT,” *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE*, SEPTEMBER 1924

OXFORD GENTLEMAN, QUEEN’S LOVER, AND DEEP DESERT EXPLORER

When we think of the Arabian deserts and their rolling landscape of golden dunes, for most of us who comes to mind are romantic figures such as Lawrence of Arabia, Omar Sharif, or even Rudolph Valentino. Few will think of Ahmed Hassanein Bey^{*3} or even know who he was. It may come as surprise to many, then, that according to the Royal Geographical Society of London, Hassanein Bey ranked as the greatest desert explorer of all times, so much so that the director of the desert survey in Egypt at that time referred to Hassanein’s desert exploration as “an almost unique achievement in the annals of geographic exploration.”

So who really was Ahmed Hassanein Bey, and why is he important to our investigation into the origins of the pharaohs?

Ahmed Hassanein was born in Cairo in 1889. He was educated at an English private school, as was then customary for well-to-do families in Egypt. As a young man, he was sent to England to complete his gentleman’s education at Balliol College, one of the most prestigious institutions of Oxford University. The very stiff-upper-lip education that he received there would serve Hassanein well for the diplomatic career he was destined to pursue in Egypt. Described by his peers and biographers as an exotic blend of court official, diplomat, Olympic champion (he represented Egypt in Brussels in the 1920 Olympics and in Paris in 1924), photographer, writer, politician, royal tutor (to the future King Farouk) and an incurable romantic (among his amorous conquests was the lovely Queen Nazli). Hassanein was the last of the great desert explorers. He also had an excellent family pedigree: he was

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