

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
MAGICIANS OF THE GODS

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HANCOCK

AMERICA
BEFORE

THE KEY
TO EARTH'S LOST
CIVILIZATION



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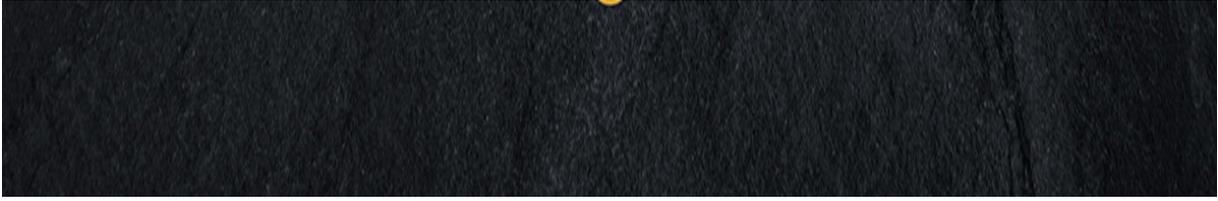
AMERICA

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The Key to Earth's Lost Civilization

GRAHAM HANCOCK

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  NEW YORK

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*For Santha,
through many lives, past, present, and future, my
soul mate always. Looking forward to more
amazing adventures!*

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE IN MY SHELVES A renowned and much respected book titled *History Begins at Sumer*.¹ The reference, of course, is to the famous high civilization of the Sumerians that began to take shape in Mesopotamia—roughly modern Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—around 6,000 years ago. Several centuries later, ancient Egypt, the very epitome of an elegant and sophisticated civilization of antiquity, became a unified state. Before bursting into full bloom, however, both Egypt and Sumer had long and mysterious prehistoric backgrounds in which many of the formative ideas of their historic periods were already present.

After the Sumerians and Egyptians followed an unbroken succession of Akkadians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, and there were, moreover, the incredible achievements of ancient India and ancient China. It therefore became second nature for us to think of civilization as an “Old World” invention and not to associate it with the “New World” at all.

Besides, it was standard teaching in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the Americas—North, Central, and South—were among the last great landmasses on earth to be inhabited by humans, that these humans were nomadic hunter-gatherers, that most of them subsequently remained hunter-gatherers, and that nothing much of great cultural significance began to happen there until relatively recently.

This teaching is deeply in error and as we near the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, scholars are unanimous not only that it must be thrown out but also that an entirely new paradigm of the prehistory of the Americas is called for. Such momentous shifts in science don't occur without good reason and

the reason in this case, very simply, is that a mass of compelling new evidence has come to light that completely contradicts and refutes the previous paradigm.

Everyone has and does their own “thing,” and my own thing, over more than quarter of a century of travels and research, has been a quest for a lost civilization of remote prehistory—an advanced civilization utterly destroyed at the end of the Ice Age and somewhat akin to fabled Atlantis.

Plato, in the oldest-surviving written source of the Atlantis tradition, describes it as an island “larger than Libya and Asia put together”² situated far to the west of Europe across the Atlantic Ocean.³ Hitherto I’d resisted that obvious clue which I knew had already been pursued with unconvincing results by a number of researchers during the past century.⁴ As the solid evidence that archaeologists had gotten America’s Ice Age prehistory badly wrong began to accumulate in folders on my desktop, however, and with new research reports continuing to pour in, I couldn’t help but reflect on the significance of the location favored by Plato. I had considered other possibilities, as readers of my previous books know, but I had to admit that an immense island lying far to the west of Europe across the Atlantic Ocean does sound a lot like America.

I therefore decided to reopen this cold case. I would begin by gathering together the most important strands of the new evidence from the Americas. I would set these strands in order. And then I would investigate them thoroughly to see if there might be a big picture hidden among the details scattered across thousands of scientific papers in fields varying from archaeology to genetics, astronomy to climatology, agronomy to ethnology, and geology to paleontology.

It was already clear that the prehistory of the Americas was going to have to be rewritten; even the mainstream scientists were in general agreement on that. But could there be more?

This book tells the story of what I found.

PART I

MANITOU



The Mystery of Serpent Mound

1

AN ENCHANTED REALM

places on earth to have been inhabited by human beings. Only a handful of remote islands were settled later.

This is the orthodoxy, but it is crumbling under an onslaught of compelling new evidence revealed by new technologies, notably the effective sequencing of ancient DNA. The result is that many of the most fundamental “facts” of American archaeology, many of the “ground truths” upon which the theories and the careers of its great men and women were built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, now stand exposed as fallacies.

Far from being very recent, it is beginning to look as though the human presence in the Americas may be very old—perhaps more than 100,000 years older than has hitherto been believed.

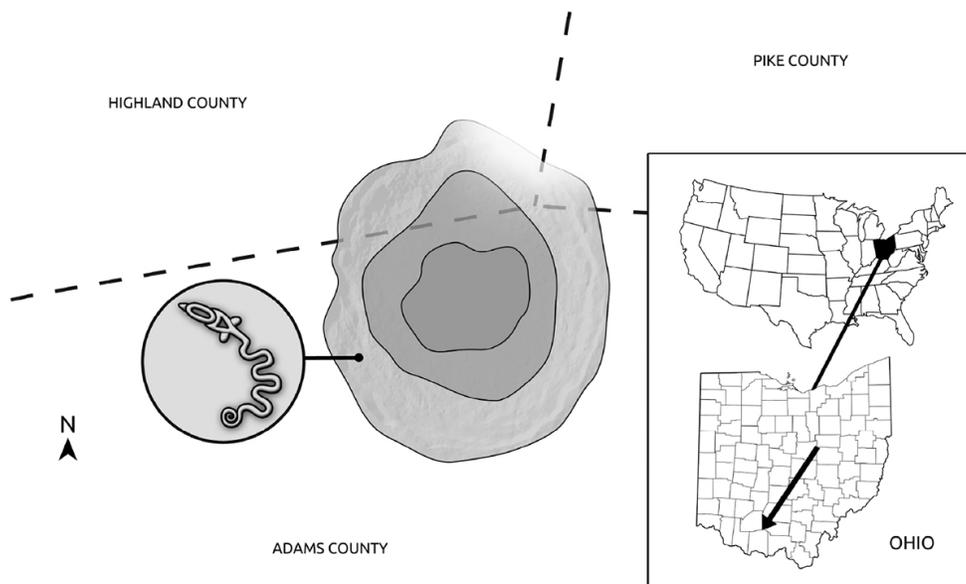
This greatly extended time frame, taking us back deep into the Ice Age, has profound implications for how we view, interpret, and date all the monuments of the Americas built before the time of Columbus. The possibility that they might have an unrecognized prehistoric backstory can no longer be discounted. Moreover, the New World was physically, genetically, and culturally separated from the Old around 12,000 years ago when rising sea levels submerged the land bridge that formerly connected Siberia to Alaska.¹ This separation remained total until just 500 years ago when genetic and cultural exchanges restarted during the European conquest. It follows, therefore, that any deep connections between the Americas and the Old World that are not the result of recent European influence and that cannot be attributed to coincidence must be more than 12,000 years old.

It was with all this in mind, on June 17, 2017, that I made my first visit to Serpent Mound, a national historic landmark in southern Ohio described as “the finest surviving example of a prehistoric animal effigy mound in North America, and perhaps the world.”²

It’s in Adams County, about 75 miles east of Cincinnati and 7 miles north of the town of Peebles by way of SR-41N and OH-73W. With its rolling hills and green meadows, this is a predominantly rural, substantially forested part of the state, running northward

from the Ohio River. On that vibrant summer day every tree was in full, luxuriant leaf, every flower was in bloom, the fields glowed, and the winding lanes seemed part of a bucolic dream.

In some remote epoch, however, this entire idyllic area suffered a devastating cataclysm, the most striking remnant of which has all the features of a classic impact crater 14 kilometers in diameter with a pronounced central uplift, sunken inner ring-graben, transition zone, and outer rim.³ Millions of years of erosion have softened its contours but Google Earth or an overflight reveal its obvious crater-like appearance. Most geologists agree that it is the result of some kind of explosive event but the nature of the explosion for a long while remained unsettled and there were heated arguments between those who favored volcanism and those who favored an impact by an asteroid or comet.⁴ Because Serpent Mound is the best-known feature within it, and because of the uncertainty caused by the dispute, the crater was therefore officially known for many years as the “Serpent Mound Cryptoexplosion Structure.”⁵ Only since the late 1990s has mounting evidence led to today’s widespread consensus that it was, as many had long suspected, formed by a hypervelocity cosmic impact.⁶



Variously referred to as the “Serpent Mound Crypto-Explosive Structure” and as the “Serpent Mound Disturbance,” most scientists now agree that the

bizarre geological feature within which the mound was built is an ancient impact crater with a diameter of around 14 kilometers.

As to timing, the impact was “later than Early Mississippian, because rocks of this age [about 345 million years old] were involved in the disturbance, and earlier than the Illinoian glaciation (125,000 years ago), because these sediments are undisturbed in the northern part of the structure.”⁷

That’s a pretty wide window! Nonetheless, most of the experts seem confident that the crater’s age must be in the hundreds of millions, not just hundreds of thousands, of years.⁸ And while it’s thought unlikely that the Native Americans who built Serpent Mound could have known anything about cosmic impacts, many scholars speculate that as keen observers of nature they would certainly have noticed the curious, jumbled, cataclysmic, ringlike structure of the area and been impressed by it.⁹

“They had to know there was a significance to that spot,” says Ohio geologist Mark Baranoski. “They placed a deep reverence in old Mother Earth. It’s almost mystical that they built a spiritual site.”¹⁰ Similarly, geoscientist Raymond Anderson of the University of Iowa describes Serpent Mound crater as “one of the most mysterious places in North America. The Native Americans found something mystical there. And they were right.”¹¹

Dating back to the time of the impact, an intense magnetic anomaly¹² centered on the site causes compasses to give wildly inaccurate readings. There are also gravity anomalies caused by the impact and there are multiple underground caverns, streams, and sinkholes that, in the view of Ohio archaeologist William Romain, would have been seen by the ancients as entrances to the underworld: “Among many peoples, unusual or transitional areas such as this are often considered sacred. Indeed such places are often considered supernatural gateways, or portals, between the celestial Upperworld and the Underworld.... One can only conclude that the Serpent Mound builders were aware of at least some of the

more unusual characteristics of the area and that they located the effigy in this anomalous area for a very specific reason.”¹³

As we drove the last few miles along OH-73W, I could reflect that we were entering the lair of the Serpent—a sacred domain where the forces of earth and sky had once collided with sufficient energy, according to the calculations of state geologist Michael Hansen, “To disturb more than 7 cubic miles of rock and uplift the central portion of the circular feature at least 1,000 feet above its normal position.”¹⁴

One might expect the great effigy mound to be located on the high point of that central uplift, but instead it uncoils and undulates along a sinuous ridge in the southwestern quadrant of the crater near the edge of the ring-graben. At the northern end of the ridge, where it takes a turn to the northwest, lies the serpent’s head.

I’d seen it all in plan and maps many times before, but now, for the first time, I was about to see the real thing. I was traveling with my wife, photographer Santha Faiia, and with local geometrician and archaeoastronomer Ross Hamilton, who has devoted much of his life to the study of Serpent Mound and whose book on the monument is a thought-provoking reference on the subject.¹⁵

Not only here but elsewhere in the world I have noticed that very special ancient places such as Serpent Mound seem able to invoke mechanisms to protect themselves from human folly. Among these mechanisms, from time to time, a passionate and devoted individual will be prompted by a particular site to go forth as its advocate—Maria Reiche at the Nazca Lines, for example, or Klaus Schmidt at Göbekli Tepe—and ensure not only its preservation but also the dissemination of key knowledge about it.

For the past decades, with absolute commitment, lean and gray-bearded and ascetic as a Buddhist monk, Ross Hamilton has been that individual for Serpent Mound.

GROUND AND SKY

WE TURN OFF 73W JUST before Brush Creek and enter a manicured park, maintained by the Ohio History Connection. Leaving our vehicle, we follow the footpath through scattered stands of trees, pass the visitor center, and come after a few moments to a grass-covered embankment about three feet high.

“The tail of the Serpent,” Ross says.

I frown. It’s a bit of an anticlimax! I don’t immediately see the mystic spiral I’ve been expecting from the plans I’ve studied. But modern steps surmount the outer curve and from this vantage point the inner coils of the earthwork become visible.¹⁶

The effect remains underwhelming, largely because the present management of the site has allowed a thick clump of trees to block the view that would otherwise open up to the north across the full length of the Serpent’s body from its tail to its head.

To see the immense effigy as a whole, therefore, rather than in isolated parts, we need to observe it from the sky. Fortunately, Santha has come prepared for this with a recently acquired MavicPro drone equipped with a high-resolution camera. She fires up the little quadcopter right away and suddenly we’re looking down through the monitor from an altitude of 400 feet with the Serpent beneath us, unfolding outward from that coiled tail.

The site is almost deserted but there are a few people in the shot and they give me a sense of its scale. I know it already from my background research, but to see it with my own eyes is quite another matter. This undulating Serpent, with its gaping jaws, is 1,348 feet long.¹⁷ The earthwork mound that forms its body averages around 4 feet in height and tapers from a width of about 24 feet to about 22 feet through its seven principal meanders before narrowing farther into the spiral of the tail.¹⁸ People beside it appear as midgets or elves in the shadow of a dragon and for the first time, with a shiver down my spine, I become aware—not in my intellect, but in my heart, in my spirit—that a mighty and uncanny power slumbers here.



From an altitude of 400 feet, the full form of the great Manitou of Serpent Mound becomes visible. PHOTO: SANTHA FAIIA.

Ross seems to read my mind. “Some call it a Manitou,” he says. “But I’d go further. I’d say our Serpent is *Gitché Manitou*—the Great Spirit and ancestral guardian of the ancient people.”

For those reared in the materialist-reductionist mind-set of Western science, the Native American notion of Manitou seems slippery and elusive. Though it may be materialized it cannot be reduced to matter. Nor can it be weighed, measured, or counted. It is an unquantifiable, formless but *sentient* force, “supernatural, omnipresent and omniscient,”¹⁹ in one sense a spiritual entity in its own right, in another the mysterious, unseen power that animates all life and that can manifest both in natural phenomena and in man-made objects and structures that have been created with correct intent. “The profoundness of a spiritual presence of Manitou, and through it recognition of the supernatural,” comments one authority, “was and is a tangible entity seen and felt by hundreds of