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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

Bi-Monthly Magazine

**Towards a Sustainable
Future of Farming**

Religion and Philosophy

What's New in the Past ?

**The Sun in Celtic
Mythology**

**PHILOSOPHY
CULTURE
SOCIETY
ESOTERICA
ART
AND MORE**



About Us

NEW ACROPOLIS is an international organization working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society for the next generation.

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 **Philosophy
Culture
Volunteering**

What's Inside

EDITORIAL 04



PHILOSOPHY 05
Religion and
Philosophy



ESOTERICA 09
The Symbolism of the
Chinese Dragon

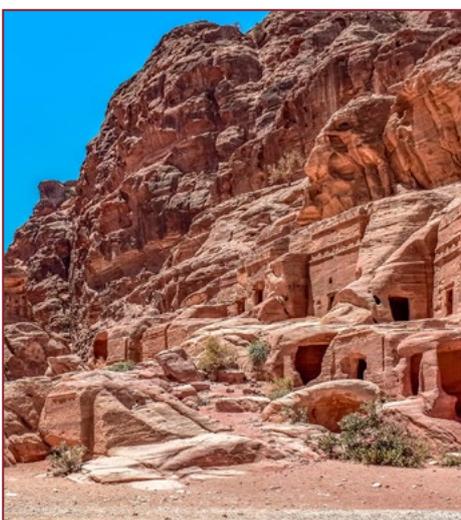


SOCIETY 07
Towards a
Sustainable Future
of Farming



ART 11
The Oldest Art and the
Origins of Humankind

CULTURE 13
The Symbolism of
Sumo



SCIENCE & NATURE 15
What's New in the
Past?

MYTHS OF THE WORLD 17
The Sun in Celtic
Mythology



Editorial

Human connections are more important than digital ones

Which would you prefer: meeting for a quick cup of coffee with a friend or spending the same amount of time texting back and forth about the same topic? Chances are that most of us would prefer the first but usually end up doing the second. But can 10 texts really equal a face to face exchange? Can an emoji replace the smile and the look in the eyes of a friend? Is a network the same as a community?

In recent years, our human interactions have become eroded by modern technology in almost all areas of our lives. Shops have replaced friendly cashiers with self-checkout lanes, airports helpful check-in staff with machines, at work we have virtual meetings and we now communicate primarily through writing. However, without hearing the tone of voice and registering the subtleties of body language, the written words can often quite easily be misinterpreted. Speaking to someone in person will usually give us a much more accurate understanding of a situation and even business has started to understand that the secret to success lies in human connection. When there is belonging there is engagement, and when there is engagement there is productivity.

There is little doubt about the positive effects of modern technology. The possibility of building global networks, maintaining long-distance friendships and communicating quickly with many people at once are just some of its advantages. However, the sad truth is that for all the social media friends we may have, studies have shown that the circle of friends and confidants has shrunk dramatically over the past two decades and that as a result people are finding themselves lonelier than ever. Nearly a quarter of those surveyed say they have no close friends or confidants at all – a 14% increase since we all became so digitally connected.

Modern technology has also changed dating and our intimate relationships. You may have heard of 'situationships' - a rather confusing phenomenon of modern dating. These are noncommittal 'relationships' that are so completely undefined that those who are in one don't know whether they are in a relationship or not. It is more than a friendship but not quite a relationship, which means that there are no clear

boundaries and therefore allows people to get away with some very bad behaviour indeed. What a sure recipe for a lot of heartache, for a roller coaster of hope and disappointment, for uncertainty when we are all craving some form of stability and certainty! The philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman speaks about 'liquid love' – a metaphor for the increasingly brief and superficial encounters that characterise modern love and the frailty of human bonds.

There are many studies that show how important human contact is for our health. Strong social connections lead to a 50% increased chance of longevity, strengthen our immune systems and improve our physical and psychological well-being. Their absence is of greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure, and the emotional impacts of loneliness can actually trigger cellular changes that alter the gene expressions in our bodies.

We are profoundly social beings. Brene Brown, professor and author of many popular books, says: "A deep sense of love and belonging is an irresistible need of all people. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick."

The late poet and philosopher John O'Donohue wrote: "In this post-modern world the hunger to belong has rarely been more intense, more urgent. [...] And although technology pretends to unite us, more often than not all it delivers are simulated images that distance us from our lives. The 'global village' has no roads or neighbours; it is a faceless, impersonal landscape from which all individuality has been erased."

No matter how much technology we will have in the future, some things will remain fundamental, and a deep connection between human beings is one of them. But it seems that digital connection has negatively impacted our ability to connect. So, don't wait for others to take the first step. Open your heart, dare to make yourself vulnerable and treat others how you would like to be treated yourself.

Sabine Leitner

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

Today, there is a deep divide between these two fields and, for most people, they are seen as antagonistic. Religion is about faith, or blind belief (in the popular imagination), while philosophy is about reason. Faith seems to be in contradiction with reason. Can this opposition ever be resolved?

At its root, however, religion is not about faith, but about union with “God”, by which is meant

the ultimate source of everything, whatever that may be, the ultimate mystery. If a philosopher is defined as a lover of wisdom, a seeker of truth, a person in pursuit of knowledge, will he or she not also be interested in the ultimate cause of all things?

The question is not so much whether the philosopher will be interested in that question, but whether philosophy can lead to the discovery of that Causeless Cause. Most of the philosophers of antiquity, notably Plato and his successors, maintained that this is indeed the ultimate goal of philosophy: to lead to the discovery of Reality. Plato presents this view in his “Allegory of the Cave” in the Seventh Book of the *Republic*. In this allegory, the philosopher treads the path from the darkness of ignorance, through the deceptive shadows of opinion, to the final light of Truth, symbolised by the world outside the cave, illuminated by the brilliant light of the Sun.

Like the philosophers of India, Plato describes how, by pacifying the senses and training the mind in discernment and stability, a philosopher can reach a state of inner serenity where he or she will be able to see clearly. In that condition, Truth will dawn on the mind, like the sun rising over the mountains and illuminating the glittering surface of a calm lake. Philosophy is the means to reach this state of vision, which could be likened to a



Three Philosophers by Giorgione (1508)

...One day, I am sure, the unity will be restored: religion will become more philosophical and philosophy will become more mystical. Reason and faith will cease to war with one another and will realise that they are brother and sister...

divine illumination, which is also the goal of religion.

However, one would not think of Plato as a religious person, although he believed in some form of “God” and even “Gods”. At the same time, he was very critical of the religion of his time, its view of the Gods as venal, unpredictable beings with passions and flaws very similar to our own, as if they had been made in our image and not the other way around.

What, then, is religion, and how does it differ from philosophy? Although in essence religion can be said to be a path towards re-union (possibly deriving from the Latin *religare* = to bind together again), that is to say, a path towards becoming reunited with one’s true self, with all beings, and with God as the transcendent cause of all; in practice, religions offer a specific way of life, with rituals, prayers, meditational techniques, designed to lead towards that goal. They will often be divided into two or more levels: a more intense practice, such as monasticism, where the whole life of the individual is dedicated to that end; or a less intense way where the follower of the religion is enjoined to adhere to a code of morality and perform a series of actions or rituals, such as pilgrimage, almsgiving, or attending religious services in church, mosque or temple. For many believers, this is a way of securing happiness in the afterlife, although this is not, I would suggest, the essence of religion, in the same way

that mere discursive reasoning and the discussion of ideas is not the essence of philosophy. Both religion and philosophy are, I would suggest, at their highest levels, mystical activities, in the sense that they both aspire to attain contact with the highest Truth, which dwells in the region of the “Sacred”.

How, then, did the division between religion and philosophy come about? I would suggest that it arose as a reaction to the tyrannical sway that religion held over everything in the Middle Ages, when people could be burned at the stake for holding views considered to be “heretical”, or contrary to the tenets of religious faith. So, when philosophy became free of the shackles imposed on it by a narrow-minded form of religion, it moved further and further away from religion, and in many cases rejected it entirely, as if it had become “allergic” to it.

In the twentieth century, a number of scholars such as Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade began to rebuild bridges between religion and philosophy. One day, I am sure, the unity will be restored: religion will become more philosophical and philosophy will become more mystical. Reason and faith will cease to war with one another and will realise that they are brother and sister, that they can walk together harmoniously on the arduous path towards Truth.

Julian Scott



Pythagoreans Celebrate the Sunrise by Fyodor Bronnikov (1869)

Towards a Sustainable Future of Farming

It's a fact that more than 7.7 billion people are living in this world and, if this trend continues, we will reach 10 billion by around the middle of the century. But every new-born means a hungry and thirsty mouth, who demands food and drink each day. Agriculture, the main producer of what we eat, is trying to keep pace with the growing demand: the latest modern technologies that are being applied are based upon monoculture or single-crop systems, which is a widespread practice in both industrial and organic farming. Although monoculture is not a new technique (it was used already in the later Middle Ages), its extent and intensity has massively increased in the last hundred years, when the population of the world started to boom.

The main advantage of monoculture farming is undoubtedly the large quantities that can be produced in a short period of time. But this mode of farming has downsides as well, such as soil depletion, nitrogen pollution caused by excessive use of fertilizers and the disappearance of traditional farming. While centuries ago the farmer's job represented a secure livelihood, which earned the bread for the whole family, today's farmers are struggling due to automatization of the sector and competition from giant corporations. Just one or two years with extreme weather conditions can destroy a whole family business, force farmers to take loans or give up their farms. The spread of technology-based, remote-controlled



farming helps to control the food chain for the financial markets, but it carries with it huge social risks. The industrialization of agriculture and the practice of monoculture, together with globalization, have led to depleted soil quality and a higher suicide rate among farmers worldwide. They have also led to a revival of slavery. In southern Italy, organized criminals own farms and employ migrants from Africa to do the hard farming jobs for less money than the minimum wage in the country. The produce is then used by the discount chains, which look for the least expensive fruit and vegetable suppliers so that they can undercut their competitors.

Traditional agriculture, which is more balanced in its approach and effects than industrialized farming, worked hand in hand with nature, as fruit and vegetable production was very dependent on the circumstances. Every area has its own specifications, which are ideal for certain fruits and vegetables, and farmers had to take this into account. This does not mean that new technologies should be done away with, but their unnecessary overuse can be eliminated. A movement called agroecology takes this approach. Agroecologists do not necessarily oppose technology in agriculture but instead assess how and when technology can be used in conjunction with natural, social and human assets. At the same time, quantity is not everything. There are years when plants produce less growth so farmers achieve lower harvests. But just as human beings need to rest sometimes, so do plants. In their life-cycles, there are ups and downs as well. Small-scale, polyculture farming, where more than one crop is produced in the same place at the same time, make plants more resistant to diseases and less dependent on pesticides and fertilizers. Smaller quantities can also mean better quality. Think about the tomatoes grown by small producers which you can buy at a farmer's market, compared with the tomatoes you buy in a supermarket. The taste, the texture and the colour are different.

As more and more people wake up to the fact that modern agriculture is not sustainable in the long term and is harmful for nature and for people, they are re-discovering the values of traditional agriculture and small farms. One of these schools of thought is permaculture, which is growing in popularity among young farmers, who are thinking about whole systems and using the observation of nature to create regenerative systems.

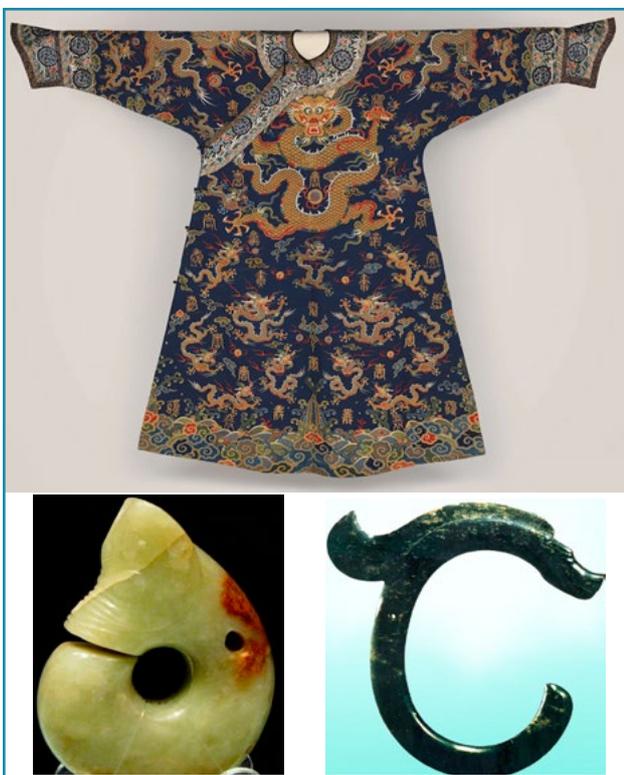


Farming in the future does not necessarily mean you need to own land. You can even make a garden on your balcony or create a communal garden with neighbours and friends. In London, there are many communal gardens maintained and shared by local residents. These gardens provide not only healthy food for their cultivators, but offer a great place to meet, socialize and build friendships and community. So, farming in the future could become more eco-friendly, polyculture-based and communal.

Istvan Orban

The Symbolism of the Chinese DRAGON

The Chinese Dragon is the most ancient and most important mythological and esoteric symbol of China. The origins of this symbol are lost in the mists of time. In China, artefacts depicting dragons have been unearthed which date back to the fifth millennium BC. It is said that the ancient people of China saw themselves as the descendants of the dragon and even today Chinese



Top: Imperial court robe with five-clawed dragons woven on it.
Bottom: Jade pig dragon disc and C-shaped jade dragon, Hongshan culture - 4700 to 2900 BC from the Hongshan culture.

people feel a strong connection with this symbol.

There are representations of dragons practically all over China. The most important of these are found in royal palaces, sculpted or painted in temples or woven on silk robes worn by high priests and royalty. The symbol of the dragon (especially the Yellow Dragon) was the symbol of imperial authority, the emblem of the emperor. Legendary emperors like *Huang-Ti* (Yellow Emperor) and *Yan-Ti* were both closely related to 'Long' (a generic name for the Chinese Dragon). There is also a story which connects the mysterious figure of *Fu-xi* with dragons. According to this tradition, *Fu-xi* had the arrangement of the trigrams of the I Ching revealed to him in the markings on the back of a mythical dragon-horse.

In the various alchemical, religious and philosophical writings of China, there are many references to Chinese sages who, after gaining immortality, became identified with the dragon and ascended to heaven. After his meeting with Lao Tzu, Confucius allegedly remarked "I cannot tell how he mounts on the wind through the clouds, and rises to heaven. Today I have seen Lao Tzu, and can only compare him to the dragon." Besides the popular 'Long', there are more than 100 ancient dragon names attested in Chinese classic texts.



Unlike the “evil” dragon of the Western imagination, the Chinese dragon is a beneficent and gracious creature. In popular mythology it signifies power, excellence, goodness, perseverance, heroism, nobility and greatness. It brings energy, optimism, intelligence, courage, good fortune and ambition. In the philosophy of the Yin and Yang, it is identified with Yang - the “positive” and active pole of life, the realm of spirit, heaven and the divine. In one tradition, we find three classes of dragons: the lowest were the *Li Lung* or earth dragons, whose realm was the waters of the earth, the second class were the *Chen Lung* who were associated with storms and clouds (the astral realm) and finally we find the *Tien lung* or celestial dragons, who belonged to the spiritual realm and guarded the mansions of the gods.

In one form, we find it coiled like the *Ouroborus*, the symbol of the *eternal return* and the *totality of life*. The Chinese dragon is related to the number 9, the most sacred number in China. 9 is the symbol of time and cyclicity. A legend speaks of 9 major types of dragon: the horned dragon, winged dragon, the celestial dragon, the nature spirits dragon, the dragon of hidden treasures, the coiling

dragon, the yellow dragon and the dragon king. These nine are the offspring of the primordial dragon, the unknowable “mystery”. Thus it becomes esoterically identified with the eternal and omnipresent TAO. This is why the dragon acquires an unlimited range of paranormal powers. It is said to be able to disguise itself as a silkworm, or become as large as our entire universe. Folktales speak of the dragon having all the attributes of the other 11 creatures of the zodiac, in other words, it contains within itself all the possible archetypes of existence.

Some scholars have suggested that the form of the Chinese dragon comes from stylized depictions of existing animals, such as snakes, fishes or crocodiles. Interestingly enough, in Chinese Buddhism the dragons are analogous to the Hindu *Nagas*, the wise serpents, who are depicted emerging from the mouth of Makara (the mythical crocodile, vehicle of *Varuna* in the Vedic tradition). These symbols suggest the analogy between the mythical dragons of ancient China and the Initiates, teachers of mankind who, like fishes (see also Hindu, Assyrian and Babylonian Myths), emerge from the ocean (symbol of past evolutionary cycles) and, after having accomplished their “avataric” tasks, return into the sea.

With this short article I hope to have inspired you to dip your feet as well as your hearts and minds into the “rich” waters of Chinese mythological symbolism. And who knows if one day, you will not end up face to face with the Dragon itself.

Agostino Dominici



A close up view of one full dragon from the Nine Dragons handscroll painted in 1244

The Oldest Art and the Origins of Humankind

Art forms are a sign of the emergence of symbolic thinking and, in this way, art represents a fundamental threshold in the evolution of humankind. It is what makes us human.

Scientists have found evidence of cave paintings, sculpted figures, decorated bone tools and jewellery. Paintings in caves like Chauvet, Altamira and Lascaux go back to the Upper Palaeolithic period between 40,000 and 10,000

years ago. Researchers have concluded that these artefacts must have been created by modern humans (*Homo Sapiens*) who were spreading all over Europe after their arrival from Africa.

In 2018 there was a claim of the oldest human-made cave painting discovered in Blombos cave in South Africa. The art work is dated to 73,000 years ago, significantly older than any other previous findings. Meanwhile an international team of researchers from the Max

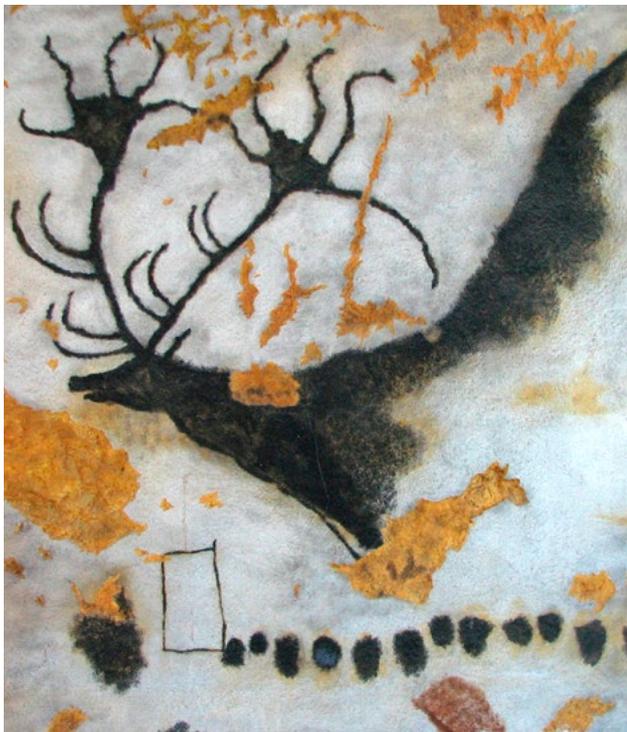


Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany, in cooperation with Southampton University in the UK, has been examining some of the cave art in Spain using uranium-thorium dating. They have confirmed that the art works in the caves they were studying are actually older than we had believed so far.

“Our dating results show that the cave art at these three sites in Spain is much older than previously thought”, says team member Alistair Pike from the University of Southampton.

“With an age in excess of 64,000 years it predates the earliest traces of modern humans in Europe by more than 20,000 years. The cave art must thus have been created by Neanderthals.”

“According to our new data Neanderthals and modern humans shared symbolic thinking and must have been cognitively indistinguishable”, concludes João Zilhão from the Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies in Barcelona. “On our search for the origins of language and advanced human cognition we must therefore look much farther back in



A painting of the *Giant Deer (Megaloceros)* from Lascaux caves

time, more than half a million years ago, to the common ancestor of Neanderthals and modern humans.”

Interestingly, in 2014 the scientific journal *Nature* published a paper reporting on fossil freshwater shell findings from Java, Indonesia. In the collection they found evidence for freshwater shellfish consumption by hominins, one unambiguous shell tool, and a shell with a geometric engraving. Data indicate that the engraving was made by *Homo erectus*, and that it is considerably older than the oldest geometric engravings found so far. Now we are looking back half a million years. They don't know what the purpose of the engraving was, but the evidence of a geometric art representation is there. *Homo erectus* (meaning 'upright man') is a species of archaic human, with the earliest fossil evidence dating to 1.8 million years ago. *Homo erectus* is the immediate predecessor of Neanderthal man.

So now we are looking deep into the past, but we don't see the real depth yet. There is not enough physical evidence. But what we do know is that the emergence of art and religion is fundamental for the development of humankind. Cave art is generally considered to have a symbolic and religious function. Some experts think that cave art may have been used alongside the shamanic practices of entering a trance state and sending the soul of the shaman into the otherworld to make contact with spirits. By understanding that human activities are thousands of years older than we believed until now we could re-examine with new eyes myths and stories of past civilizations and traditions.

Today we are very much obsessed with the idea of progress and evolution. But let's just pause for a minute and consider whether truly developed and civilized human beings would destroy the environment they live in, poison themselves and treat animals so cruelly? Maybe progress has not been as fast as we would like to believe.

Miha Kosir

The Symbolism of Sumo



Sumo is a form of wrestling that expresses the Japanese Shinto religion. It has at its heart principles of dignity and courtesy, and as well as being Japan's national sport it is also a religious ritual. The Sumo wrestlers, called *Rikishi*, may look big and cumbersome but winning fights involves a combination of strength, agility, speed, craft, technical skill and flair. Many Sumo are actually excellent dancers! To train to become a successful Sumo wrestler involves huge personal sacrifice, with young hopefuls joining a stable (*heya*) at age 15/16 and living and sleeping there, training 7 days a week and carrying out all tasks involved in running the stable, including the cooking, cleaning and shopping until they begin to rise up the ranks.

“The colours and directions of the tassels are based on the I Ching and together with the inner ring represent the Five Constants (benevolence, justice, ceremony/behaviour, knowledge, integrity) and Five Virtues (piety, justice, altruism, loyalty, ceremony) of Confucianism.”

The first recorded Sumo fight (bout) was around 23 BC and initially existed mainly in popular Shinto shrines as a way of making contact between man and spirit. It gradually became more competitive in the Middle Ages during the age of the Samurai and became a form of hand-to-hand combat to decide which of the two fighters should have the blessing of the Gods.

There are 6 tournaments (*basho*) a year. The ring in which the bouts take place is called a *Dohyo*. It is an 18ft square slab of clay edged by 32 rice straw bales, raised 30 inches above the stadium floor with a 15ft diameter ring in the centre marked out by 20 more rice bales. Building it takes 3 days, supervised by a Shinto priest and ending in an opening ceremony the day before the tournament. Here three referees dressed in white consecrate 4 wooden sticks representing the 4 seasons with the words ‘Long life to earth and may wind and rain faithfully follow’. An earthenware pot filled with good luck charms such as dried chestnuts, seaweed and cuttlefish is buried in the centre of the ring with offerings of salt and sake. Hanging above the *Dohyo* is the wooden roof of a Shinto shrine from which silk tassels hang from each corner in the colours of the 4 seasons: green to represent Spring hangs in the east; red, representing Summer hangs in the south; Autumn is represented by a white tassel in the west, and Winter is represented in the North by a black tassel. The rice straw circle represents the ritual of harvest and contains the ring itself which is ‘the realm of the absolute’. It is regarded as sacred ground.

The colours and directions of the tassels are based on the *I Ching* and together with the inner ring represent the Five Constants

(benevolence, justice, ceremony/behaviour, knowledge, integrity) and Five Virtues (piety, justice, altruism, loyalty, ceremony) of Confucianism.

Each bout lasts on average just 10 seconds but is preceded by an extensive round of rituals performed by both wrestlers including throwing salt to purify proceedings, stamping to drive out evil spirits, clapping to attract the attention of the gods, turning palms up to show they are unarmed, ritually rinsing their mouths with water and cleansing their bodies with paper, then more salt-throwing and more stamping, and then when satisfied both wrestlers will crouch down on their marks to glare at each other. This part is called *Shikiri Naoshi* and can last for up to 4 minutes - before TV this had no time limit! *Shikiri Naoshi* is a kind of ritualized aggression involving prolonged eye contact and threatening postures designed to undermine an opponent’s self-confidence and boost one’s own. Many Sumo experts can tell from this who is more likely to win. Then comes the moment of truth, the *tachi-ai*. Both wrestlers must touch the clay with both hands before they charge and must stand up together, simultaneously, for a clean, harmonious start. The wrestlers can prolong this point, crouching, standing, resettling, creating tension until the point at which they are both ready. They both touch the clay with both hands and leap out at exactly the same time, meeting at the exact mid-point in between themselves with a huge force, said to be up to 1 tonne of force. This is the first and often most important move – how they meet each other. From here the rest of the bout can be won or lost.

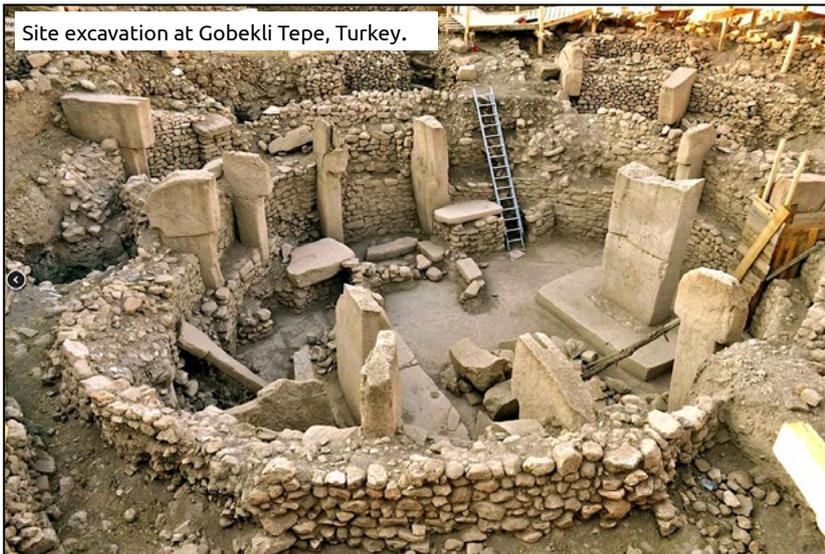
Tom Moran

What's New in the Past?

Archaeology, a relatively modern science, took off during the industrial revolution. Not just because the scientific method allowed for better research tools, but also because the religious dogmas that had imposed their own version of the past were slowly fading. And even though the most enlightened scientific figures of antiquity knew that the earth was round, old religious biases often interfered with a more reasonable vision of our cosmology.

It is important to realise that more than 99% of human history is pre-historic, meaning that there are no written accounts. You don't even have to go that far back to find a non-recorded or lost part of history. England's first written historical records, for example, date from the 7th century AD (St Bede). So how can we learn more about this hazy period? New scientific methods in different fields are helping us creating a timeline.





Making mistakes is part of learning. It is what the scientific method is about. For something as complex as ancient history and pre-history it is very difficult to draw definitive conclusions. Trying to fit a specific timeline established a few decades or centuries ago might be our first mistake. This could be compared to a detective looking for evidence to convict someone he believes to be guilty and ignoring, whether consciously or not, the evidence that points in a completely different direction.

Collecting and compiling new and old data can be tricky, especially when you have conflicting data (e.g. egyptology). With the help of new scientific methods such as optics and nuclear physics, we have been able to see through rocks, earth and jungles to find traces of ancient human civilizations.

Laser scanning technology (LiDAR or Light Detection

And Ranging) has helped us see through very thick tropical jungle in central America. It has allowed us to discover over 60,000 Maya structures. Laser technology can also help to analyse some of our very ancient structures such as Stonehenge in more detail.

Seeing through stone and bedrocks using infrared technologies and muography has allowed us to look at the great pyramid of Khufu in a different way, revealing secret chambers and corridors. These non-intrusive methods are designed to analyse with care one of the world's most ancient and massive structures. Other pyramids have been subjected to the same analysis in an attempt to understand their purpose and use better.

However, you don't always have to use fancy scientific tools to make new discoveries about our past. More often than not, just opening our eyes or digging a little can lead to paradigm-

shifting discoveries. One of these is Gobekli Tepe in Turkey. This site was believed to be too recent to be worth investigating, but thanks to the perseverance of the archaeologist Klaus Schmidt, in 1994 one of the greatest and most ancient megalithic sites in the world was unearthed. As a result, Gobekli Tepe has made us reconsider our current timeline regarding the beginning of civilization.

To find the most ancient sites in human pre-history you might have to go to Indonesia. Some scientists claimed in 2012 that the pyramid of Gunung Padang might be the oldest structure ever discovered. The pyramid-shaped monument, made of many layers of basalt stones and earth, could be as old as 28,000 years.

All this does not mean that we have to reject our current views of the past entirely, but it can help us to broaden our horizons and keep an open mind when it comes to something as complex as human history. Philosophy of history, which forms part of our curriculum at New Acropolis, shows us that, as well as objective facts, there are many subjective elements in history, which we need to be aware of if we are to penetrate the deeper meaning of history in the different cultures around the globe.

Florimond Krins

THE SUN IN CELTIC MYTHOLOGY



Top: Detail from an altar depicting a three-faced god identified as Lugh/Lugus. **Bottom:** Head of 'Apollo Grannus' from the Roman-Celtic shrine of 'Minerva Aquae Sulis' at Bath.

“There is an earthly sun, which is the cause of all heat, and all who are able to see may see the sun, and those who are blind and cannot see him may feel his heat. There is an eternal sun, which is the source of all wisdom, and those whose spiritual senses have awakened to life will see that sun, and be conscious of his existence; but those who have not attained full spiritual consciousness may nevertheless perceive his power by an inner faculty, which is called Intuition.” This quotation from Paracelsus indicates what many cultures had already known about the Sun, that it is not just a centre because of its position, but also because of its vital and spiritual power.

The Celts were one of those cultures that recognised the importance of the Sun. They had many deities with solar attributes and celebrations marking the significant times of the Sun cycle. At the Beltane Festival (Beltane means “bright fire”, referring to the Sun) the return of the summer is still celebrated today. Great bonfires, sometimes with sweet smelling Juniper, are built to achieve purification and rejuvenation. The Beltane festival is said to have been related with Belenus, called the “Fair Shining One” (or “The Shining God”), who was one of the most ancient and most widely worshiped Celtic deities. He is associated with the horse and rides across the sky in a wild, horse-drawn chariot which is one of the characteristics of a solar deity. Incidentally, he was also the patron deity of the Italian city of Aquileia.

Another well-known sun god of the Celts is Lugh, whose name means “shining one” or “flashing light”. His name is the origin of the Pagan festival “Lughnasadh” (which is also the Irish Gaelic name for the month of August). He was the patron god of Lugdunum (currently Lyon, France)

and was associated with multiple skills and industries including arts and crafts, commerce, history, healing, war and blacksmiths. Among his symbols were ravens and specifically a white stag in Wales. He is represented as a king, a leader of the army but also a powerful god who brings light into the world.

The Sun has also had many female representations. In Irish Gaelic, the word for the sun is Grian. Although no myths remain about Grian, she is found in place names like Lough Graney and Tuamgraney. She is the winter sun and her sister or her dual nature, Áine, is the summer sun. Áine is the goddess of wealth, with power over crops and animals and she is sometimes represented by a red horse.

Étaín is another Celtic goddess considered to be associated with the Sun. She was originally a Sun goddess before becoming a moon goddess. She is the heroine of well known story in Celtic mythology, *Tochmarc Étaíne* (*The*

Wooing of Étaín). Through being faithful to love and to her true self, she was reborn and became immortal again. Elements sacred to Étaín are the sun, dawn, the sea, rain, water, butterflies, apple blossoms, and swans. She is the goddess of healing, rebirth and the transmigration of souls.

The “triple goddess” Brigid has dominion over the early spring equinox, light and fire. She is remembered for her solar nature, fitting her role as a goddess of fire and light. Brigid was also known by many other names, but all the different divinities were three-aspected goddesses: “Fire of Inspiration”, “Fire of the Hearth” and “Fire of the Forge”.

The sun is the source of all life on Earth and we can find the various aspects of this source of life represented in all these Celtic deities embodying will, wisdom, life-giving renewal and healing energy still come true.

Pinar Akhan



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