

THE RISE OF NEO-CATASTROPHISM AND THE CASE FOR A POSSIBLY “ANTEDILUVIAN” PRIMORDIAL CIVILIZATION

by

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Summary

In the post-„Enlightenment“ and post-French-Revolution era Catastrophism had become the undoubted paradigm and “leitmotiv” of geology, which was still upheld in the second half of the 19th century by great geologists like d’Orbigny and Prestwich. Only after 1830 Catastrophism was slowly replaced by Lyell’s “Doctrine of Uniformity” which, however, today has to be classed, from the viewpoint of the “science of science”, as a highly suspect thesis, more ideology than science. For this reason we are observing a slow return to Catastrophism (“Neo-Catastrophism”) by some prominent members of our geological Establishment.

Quite evidently the answer to the problem, if mankind’s past has been non-cataclysmic or riddled with violent upheavals of nature on a regional or even global scale, is of the greatest consequences for considerations pro or con Diffusionism. Part of this problem is the question if we have to reckon with pre-cataclysmic advanced civilizations on our planet, which may have later been annihilated by great upheavals of nature. This is e.g. postulated by the great non-mainstream Establishment geologist Prof. A. Tollmann of Vienna, Austria.

It is shown that from epistemological considerations we have indeed to regard the existence of “antediluvian” advanced and possibly worldwide active civilizations a realistic possibility. The inferences of such a scenario for the Isolationism-Diffusionism controversy would tend to regard Isolationism as a highly unrealistic world view.

IN THE POST-“Enlightenment” and post-French-Revolution Napoleonic era Catastrophism had become the undoubted paradigm and “leitmotiv” of geology. In this world-view it was the overwhelming majority’s opinion that, quite obviously, the

surface of planet Earth had been moulded by repeated cataclysms, i.e. by gigantic, violent natural catastrophes. George Cuvier (1769-1832), one of the great father figures of geology and palaeontology, presented a synopsis of this paradigm in his famous work

“Discours sur les révolutions de la surface du globe”, published in 1812, the year of Napoleon’s disastrous campaign in Russia.

ONLY AFTER 1830 Catastrophism was slowly replaced by the opposite dogma or ideology, to wit the “Doctrine of Uniformity”, mainly propagated by Charles Lyell (1797-1875). In this doctrine, it was suddenly postulated that all geological features, gravel and other debris deposits, mountain ridges etc. had solely been formed by those noncataclysmic forces which we see at work today. Viewed from the standpoint of the philosophy of the sciences, and also in view of the knowledge we have today about the possible causes of cataclysmic events, the “Doctrine of Uniformity” appears to constitute a rather suspect construct, more ideology than science. To understand its success, we have to remember that post-French-Revolution and post-Napoleonic Europe abhorred revolutions (and, obviously, being it only geological “révolutions de la surface du globe”). Lyell was, it seems today, adept in finding the right moment for the presentation of his per se rather dubious doctrine, and in fitting it to the prevailing “Zeitgeist”.

NEVERTHELESS during the remainder of the 19th century, several great scholars continued to uphold the banner of Catastrophism, among them especially Alcide d’Orbigny (1802-1857), and Joseph Prestwich (1847-1888 professor of geology at Oxford). In addition, much to the embarrassment of the now Lyellian Establishment geology, Catastrophism was suddenly enthusiastically received, during the later part of the 19th and the whole 20th century, by a noticable segment of the general public, to wit via books by non-Establishment authors like Donnelly, Hörbiger and Velikovsky (to name only the most charismatic of them), who postulated a cataclysmic past of mankind. In a sense, especially in view of this great work “Earth in Upheaval”(1956), Velikovsky could

rightly be called the father of Neo-Catastrophism.

WITH THE Discovery of the impact cataclysm at the Tertiary/Cretaceous boundary by L. & W. Alvarez (1980), Catastrophism returned to our universities. At least it formed a bridgehead there, among the otherwise still Lyellistic geological and palaeontological Establishment. Traumatic cataclysms during the age of man were still anathema and taboo. But then, in 1993, the Deluge book by A. & E. Tollmann (1) exploded like a bombshell in the midst of the Establishment. Alexander Tollmann was himself a professor of geology, on the prestigious chair of Eduard Suess at Vienna university, corresponding member of the Austrian and Bavarian academies of the sciences, and his wife and coauthor Edith a university lecturer of palaeontology. Professor Tollmann, openly and explicitly, demanded a return to Cuvier’s Catastrophism, and called Neo-Catastrophism the new paradigm of geology. He reminds his colleagues that today we know so much about the very real danger from asteroid and comet impacts that we will have to discard Lyell’s “Doctrine of Uniformity” as highly misleading and unrealistic. Besides in the Tollmann’s scenario the multiple comet impact, which caused (around 7553 B.C., in their reckoning) the biblical Deluge, also annihilated the legendary Atlantis, according to some (others prefer “Mu” in the Pacific) the antediluvian, “primordial” mother and grandmother of later empires and civilizations. With this dictum, traumatic cataclysms during the age of civilized man, up to 1993 anathema and taboo at our universities, had definitely returned to our institutions of higher learning (although the majority opinion there still is not exactly enthusiastic about the idea).

Cataclysms and diffusionism

But what have prehistoric or protohistoric cataclysms, or (Neo-) Catastrophism

generally, to do with Diffusionism? Diffusionism has to do with the interrelatedness of ancient civilizations. Now if we accept, tentatively, in accordance with the Tollmann's scenario, that there existed indeed somewhere after 8000 B.C. an advanced civilization on our planet, and that there occurred terrible cataclysms since then, this will add a whole new dimension to diffusionism.

FIRST, up to now we have been used to regard diffusionism (beside considerations with respect to the facts of "two-dimensional" geography) as, on the time scale, a thing of a few millennia, at least as far as transoceanic maritime interconnections are concerned, from about 2500 B.C. (full-blown ancient civilizations) to about 500 A.D. (Polynesian migrations). Now we would have to add another five millennia, during which time span very many events and developments of a diffusionist nature could have happened. Such an extension of the time scale by about 5000 additional years would, indeed, amount to an almost unsurmountable obstacle for any attempt, to arrive at realistic "evolutionary trees" for the ancient civilizations. Diffusion of cultural traits, or ethno-linguistic "transfusions" could then occur, over 50 centuries and by unknown geographic intermediate stages, by taking many paths, which it would be impossible to pinpoint with accuracy. Such "evolutionary trees" would then, by necessity, remain at least as hypothetical as those of palaeontology.

SECOND, in a scenario in which impact events or sudden pole displacement ("fast precession") events played a major role, we will have to reckon with cataclysms of such a magnitude that possibly whole civilizations may have sunk to the depths of the oceans. Such pole displacement events, caused by almost-occurring near-collisions of planet Earth with other planetary bodies, had been postulated by Velikovsky and the "fast precession" events described in detail by

Warlow (2). Indeed, today the alleged "stability of the solar system" seems a doubtful proposition, on theoretical grounds as well as because Sumerian tablets seem to describe a rather irregular behaviour of planet Venus. If ancient centers of civilization should have sunk to the depths of the oceans, it would become an even more impossible task to construct diffusionist "evolutionary trees". The recent discovery, in Japanese waters near Taiwan, of a sunken advanced civilization, with step pyramids reminiscent of ancient South America(3), can be seen as a reminder in this respect.

THIRD, if mankind's past should indeed have been punctuated by great cataclysms of nature, this would have obvious consequences for any discussion about the possible existence of any "antediluvian" or "primordial" civilization (or civilizations, at different epochs) on this planet, and would thereby add – because of the interrelatedness of this problem with more general diffusionist considerations – to the complexity of our puzzle. We will return to this in a moment.

"Antediluvian" civilizations?

WE HAVE SEEN that, in the Tollmann's scenario, an advanced civilization ("Atlantis") is supposed to have been in full-blown existence as early as somewhere after 8000 B.C., which is more or less the same point in time, to which the so-called "End of the Ice Age" is dated by our Lyellian geology Establishment. This is an astounding coincidence about which, strangely enough, the Tollmanns never comment in their book. It reminds one of that famous statement by professor Charles Hapgood (in his work with the subtitle "Evidence of Advanced Civilization in the Ice Age"), where he is discussing the implications of certain very old world maps for prehistoric considerations, to wit that this evidence "takes the civilization of the original

mapmakers back to a time contemporaneous with the end of the ice age in the northern hemisphere”(4). Among others, he is especially alluding to a world map drawn by Oronteus Finaeus in 1531.

In contradistinction to the Tollmanns, the possible interrelatedness of the cataclysmic destruction of “Atlantis” with the so-called “End of the Ice Age” had already been commented upon by another non-mainstream scholar, professor Emilio Spedicato of the University of Bergamo (Italy), under the title: “Apollo Objects, Atlantis and the Deluge: A Catastrophical Scenario for the End of the Last Glaciation”(5). Here it is not a multiple comet impact, but an impact by a member of the “Apollo” group of asteroids. This asteroid group constitutes a very real, and ever present, danger for mankind on our planet. The effects of such impacts have been studied, at professor Spedicato’s institute, by way of computer simulations, for impacts on continental land as well as into the oceans. And it has been found that impacts on continental land would tend to produce an (at least regional) “Ice Age”, whereas an oceanic impact would bring an existing “Ice Age” to a sudden end, by incessant downpours of warm rains, and mega-tsunamis of warm ocean water. Spedicato’s scenario has led the present author to tentatively explore the possibility that, what our Lyellistic Quaternary geology Establishment sees as an absolutely noncataclysmic “Ice Age”, might conceivably as well have been a period of repeated cataclysmic events(6).

WITHIN the conceptual framework of Neo-Catastrophism we may then end up with the possibility that, viewed backwards from our time, such a scenario of a quasi-coexistence of advanced civilizations with great cataclysms, as described by the Tollmanns and Spedicato, could extend far beyond the “End of the Ice Age”, all through the “Ice Age” (whatever its true nature) itself, and even into the Tertiary epoch. But would not such a scenario have to founder on the “rock”

of the great paradigm of Lyellism-cum-Darwinism, to wit that anatomically modern humans evolved (from “apemen”) only as late as during the alleged “Great Ice Age”? Not necessarily, it seems.

Epistemology and the antiquity of modern man

EPISTEMOLOGY is defined as the theory of knowledge, especially the critical study of the origin, nature, validity, methods, and limits of knowledge. When engaged in the study of so-called “scientific evidence”, one should have a goodly competence in this field, otherwise one will fall into one of the “traps”, which is accepted “common knowledge” of “majority opinion” sometimes amounts to. Today it seems we should keep this especially in mind when we come upon synopses of the evolutionary history of mankind, and upon statements about the alleged, only very late appearance of modern man.

THERE ARE good reasons to suspect that not all and everything, which our Establishment prehistorians and anthropologists tell us in this respect, must be necessarily true. There is e.g. that voluminous, pioneering work by M. Cremona & R. Thompson(7) which has, incidentally, been published in that same year 1993 as the Tollmanns’ Deluge book, and which presents, rather convincingly, quite another scenario for the history of the human race. And there can be no doubt that this work meets the highest possible academic standards. Neo-Scholasticism’s myth that modern man evolved from “apeman”, as late as during the “Great Ice Age”, seems to have been exposed, and definitely disposed of, as a great ideological deception by these two remarkable nonconformist, non-Establishment scholars.

In the Cremona-Thompson scenario modern man existed already in former geological ages, above all during the Tertiary epoch,

and, even worse for current Lyellistic-cum-Darwinistic “majority opinion”, there has been no evolutionary change since then. “We” may have been contemporaries of the dinosaurs. And, most pertinent for any discussion about cultural diffusion, during those geological ages “we” seem to have repeatedly created advanced civilizations: Cremo & Thompson have a special chapter “Evidence for Advanced Culture in Distant Ages”. But, and this is essential to keep in mind, during all those ages “we” always had as contemporaries “apeman” of the most diverse kind(8).

BUT HOW DID Cremo & Thompson find out (the reader may ask) that modern man existed already in distant geological ages? The answer is simple: they invested an unbelievable amount of work in retracing the excavation history of all prehistoric human remains, to wit finds, which were accepted by the Establishment, as well as those that were rejected. Then the truth came out, i.e. massive suppression and manipulation of unwelcome evidence, on quasi-ideological grounds.

So we should perhaps reckon with the possibility that Palaeolithic man, far from having just evolved from “apeman”, was descended from highly cultured people which had, however, been thrown by great cataclysms from their height into the abyss of an extremely primitive, precarious existence.

And if there should indeed have been many cataclysms during the history of mankind, there may have been many Palaeolithic epochs.

The problem of “antediluvian” civilizations

IF WE ACCEPT, again tentatively, that modern man existed already in former geological ages, he would, because of his inherent mental capacities, of course again and again begin, immediately even after heavy cataclysms (if these were not too traumatic), to construct a new civilization. This concept is in accordance with the contents of the chapter “Evidence for Advanced Culture in Distant Ages” in the Cremo-Thompson book. But in a scenario in which the prehistory of mankind is punctuated by many cataclysms, it is problematical to speak of an “antediluvian” civilization. The expression “Diluvium” (literally “Flood”, a relict from Cuvier’s time) is still in use among Quaternary geologists as a synonym for the deposits of the “Great Ice Age” or Pleistocene. In a polycataclysmic past there will have been many “Floods” and many “Diluviums”. Any (for us) “antediluvian” civilization would again, in its turn, have its own “antediluvian” civilizations. Under such circumstances it would probably remain a vain hope to ever be able to find remains of the first,

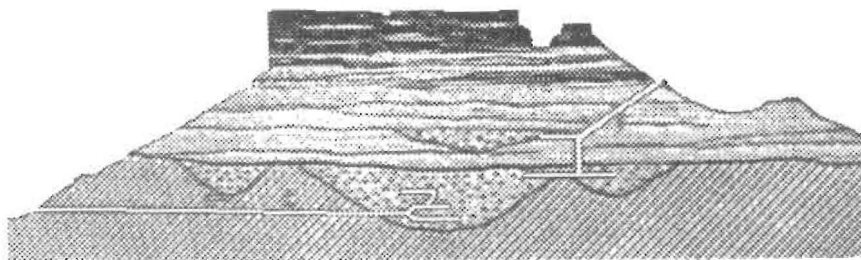


Figure 1: Side view of Table Mountain, Tuolumne County, California, showing mines penetrating into Tertiary gravel deposits beneath the lava cap (Cremo & Thompson 1993).

“primordial” civilization of mankind. Certainly, in such a scenario, neither “Atlantis” nor “Mu” could lay claim to the title of the very first civilization of mankind.

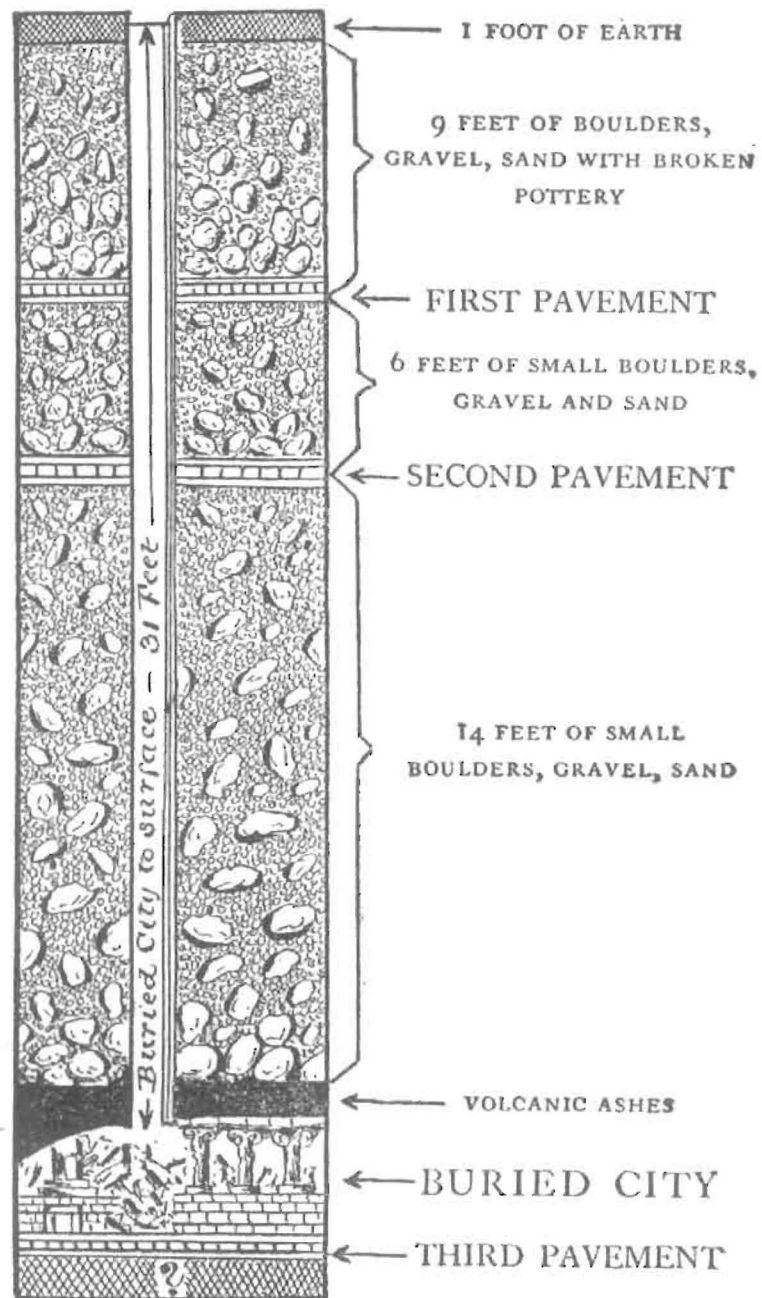
WE CAN BEGIN to understand the cataclysmic (and, for man, traumatic) effect of such gigantic upheavals of nature, when we study e.g. the accompanying illustrations. One shows Tuolumne Table Mountain in California (Figure 1), where artifacts of prehistoric man have been found in Tertiary gravel deposits, beneath a lava cap. This one has been taken, by Cremo & Thompson, from an 1899 work(9), i.e. it comes from a time when Establishment science, although already tending towards dogmatic Neo-Scholasticism, was yet far less selective and dogmatic than today.

The other depicts the 1911 discovery by William Niven (1850-1937), well-known in his day, of some prehistoric city buried under gravel, boulders, sand and volcanic ashes, which had obviously been overwhelmed and destroyed by some gigantic natural cataclysm(10). This discovery seems to have been “forgotten” by our Establishment, because for Lyellism and Darwinism, there cannot exist prehistoric advanced civilizations annihilated by great cataclysms. In a Cremo-Thompson-Velikovskian scenario, however, a prehistoric city destroyed by cataclysms would be quite natural, such finds would have to be expected. We do not yet know during which prehistoric time, or geological period, Niven’s destroyed city, under today’s megalopolis Mexico City, (Figure 2) and the civilization, of which it must have been a part, existed. As yet, to this writer’s knowledge, there has been no serious attempt to locate the whereabouts of Niven’s excavation reports, plus accompanying artifacts, referring to this special excavation.

I only possess a letter, dated June 13th, 1980, written by Gordon Ekholm, curator at the American Museum of Natural History, in which he assured me that many of Niven’s artifacts, photos, and notebooks are still there. But Niven excavated at many places. It would need the efforts of a dedicated and experienced researcher to find out if Niven’s material from that ruined city is among the remains mentioned by Ekholm. For the historian of science Niven’s discovery is of considerable importance, because we seem to have here the very first recorded case of the discovery of some “antediluvian” civilization.

Inferences of this scenario for diffusion

QUITE OBVIOUSLY a scenario of mankind’s prehistory, in which Neo-Catastrophism, a great antiquity of modern man, and successive levels of “antediluvian” civilizations play a major role, will have implications for diffusionist considerations. Though, on the one hand, this new scenario would make diffusionism the only serious alternative (and isolationism a totally unrealistic proposal), on the other it would tend to make it increasingly difficult to clearly discern any details for epochs before the last, i.e. most recent, major cataclysms. A most tantalizing uncertainty for all events before say 2000 B.C. (to a lesser degree even before about 700 B.C.) would rather become the norm. All considerations for the time “behind the curtain” would be necessity have to remain more or less speculative, and there would be no way to avoid it.



Niven's Mexican Buried Cities

Figure 2

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Zusammenfassung

Im wissenschaftlichen Zeitalter nach „Aufklärung“ und Französischer Revolution war der Katastrophismus das unangezweifelte Paradigma und „Leitmotiv“ der Geologie geworden, dem noch in der 2. Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts große Geologen wie d’Orbigny und Prestwich anhängen. Erst nach 1830 wurde der Katastrophismus nach und nach durch Lyells „Doctrine of Uniformity“ („Aktualismus“) verdrängt, die jedoch heute, aus der Sicht der „Wissenschaft von der Wissenschaft“, als eine hochgradig suspekthe These, mehr Ideologie als Wissenschaft, angesehen werden muß. Aus diesem Grunde beobachten wir heute, daß bereits von einigen prominenten Mitgliedern unseres geologischen Establishments eine Rückkehr zum Katastrophismus als geologische Leit-Doktrin gefordert wird.

Offensichtlich hat die Antwort auf die Frage, ob die Menschheitsvorgeschichte im Sinne des Kataklysmen leugnenden Lyellismus oder durch öftere gigantische Naturkatastrophen unterbrochen verlief, allergrößte Konsequenzen für die Isolationismus-Diffusionismus-Kontroverse. Teil dieses Problems ist die Frage, ob wir mit vorkataklysmischen Hochkulturen zu rechnen haben, die später durch Erdkatastrophen vernichtet wurden. Dies wird beispielsweise durch einen großen „Abweichler“ im Geologie-Establishment, Prof. A. Tollmann in Wien, postuliert.

Es wird gezeigt, daß aus wissenschaftsphilosophischer und erkenntnistheoretischer Sicht die Annahme „vorsintflutlicher“ Hochkulturen in der Tat legitim erscheint. Solche Hochkulturen wären mit Sicherheit weltweit aktiv gewesen. In einem solchen Szenario muß die gesamte Isolationismus-Diffusionismus-Kontroverse in neuem Licht erscheinen, und muß der Isolationismus als gänzlich unrealistisch verworfen werden.