

**UFOs in Theological History**

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## **UFOs in Theological History**

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UFOs, as everyone supposedly knows, where they are not merely the misunderstood sightings of anthropogenic artificial aircraft, or celestial or atmospheric phenomena (such as parahelia, lenticular clouds, etc.), or tricks of light, or winged creatures, are the product of the fanciful, the frightened, the hallucinatory, the deluded mind.

And certainly encounters with alien entities are counted at least as dubious, if not more so.

For example, everyone has heard of so-called ‘alien abductions’, and some even take such claimed encounters seriously. But no one seems to consider the irony of hyper-advanced beings, possessed of the technology necessary to leap stunning distances in a single bound, still having the antiquated need to ‘probe’ their human subjects, rather than simply scanning them.

Given our own use of X-ray, MRI, and CAT scans, one would think such advanced beings would have gotten with the times.

We should also consider what significance, if any, the presence of life outside our solar system represents for any or all of the major and minor religions of the world. While some religions are threatened (even existentially) by the possibility, others are friendly to the idea. Some emphatically embrace it. Some even require it.

As such, the question is more than an idle curiosity. If UFOs are real, then things change on the ground for many religions. If UFOs are actually present in religious texts, then things become very interesting indeed.

So what role, if any, do UFOs play in religious history? More specifically, what role, if any, do UFOs play in the sacred texts of any of the major world religions? Only in this way may we talk about UFOs in theological history. So where to begin?

Popular wisdom suggests the UFO genre in the modern consciousness is largely a product of the advent of modern rocketry, the atomic and space ages, and the (literally) godlike power and self-perspective they afforded, together with an ignition of the human imagination with respect to life on other planets. This new perspective, fueled by eyewitness accounts in

1947 of flying UFOs near Mount Rainier (Kenneth Arnold) and a possible UFO crash site near Roswell, NM (W.W. Brazel), led to a sensation in the public consciousness.

This was not a merely public curiosity. Several formal inquiries were made by the governments of many leading nations and several, including the famed ghost rocket investigation by the Swedish military, as well as projects Sign, Grudge, Twinkle, and Blue Book of the US military.

Since that time there has been a booming industry in popular science fiction, popular science, and the cultural imagination regarding the nature, origins, and significance of these entities for human existence in the cosmos. Moreover, there have been a host of claimed sightings, encounters, and abductions, some intriguing, some dubious, and some clearly faked. These claims have been brought into the public eye by the sincere, by the confused, by the nefarious, and by the usual cadre of rascals, rogues, and rascallions, bent only on perpetuating mischief and excitement.

It should therefore come as no surprise that so many cults, sects, and new religious movements associated with UFOs and extraterrestrial life have spring up since the 1930s and 1950s. Whether they are well-known, as the Nation of Islam, the Church of Scientology, and Raelism, or lesser known, as the Urantia Movement, Unarius, or the Aetherius Society, or entirely obscure, such as the Brotherhood of the Seven Rays or the Cosmic People of Light Powers, their beliefs regarding UFOs and ETs are eerily similar, typically predictable, and curiously coincidental with what is (or was) currently known or believed about UFOs and ETs.

This should hardly be surprising. Any new phenomenon in the human psyche inevitably develops its own system of terminology, iconography, and its own hermeneutical spiral, interpreting new data, as well as old data, in light of the new way of seeing things, which in turn heightens the sensitivity of this new form of sight.

So clearly this is all just a new fad in the world, right?

Well, not exactly. UFOs have been documented for centuries at the least. For example, on April 14, 1561, many residents of Nuremberg witnessed an early morning aerial phenomenon that many described as a heavenly battle around and in the sun, and which included a great black triangular object in the sky, as well as objects of many other shapes, sizes and colors. Only a few years later on August 7, 1566, the city of Basel experienced an eerily similar occurrence, also around sunrise.

There are many that have been reported since, and even some reports in ancient literature. One, the dubious Tulli papyrus, supposedly depicts a curious aerial battle in ancient Egypt during the reign of Thutmose III, C. ~1840 B.C. Another, included in Julius Obsequens' *Book of Prodigies*, depicts strange events in the heavens in the two centuries leading up to the time of Christ.

So clearly there are at least some instances of observed UFO phenomenon prior to the modern craze.

The question for our purposes is whether such UFO activity has appeared in religious and specifically theological history. For this the criteria must be fairly stringent.

For starters, UFO religions are not fair game because they are relatively new, are in whole or part based on the modern notion of UFOs or ETs in the first place, and do not have any mainstream acceptance.

Religious art, so full of supposed examples, also cannot be used, simply because it is too frequently ambiguous and open to modern misinterpretation and confirmation bias.

Moreover, popular depictions in the ancient world also cannot be used because, while they may be contextualized within a religious framework, and by moderns be fancifully linked to some specific religion or society, they are not actually associated with any ancient religion. Moreover, many of these, such as the supposed UFO hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt, are either misunderstandings or else optical illusions created by overwriting of one set of hieroglyphs on another.

What we need are explicit mentions of UFOS in ancient sacred texts. And for this we have two good candidates in the sacred texts of both Judaism and Hinduism.

In both cases we see detailed descriptions not of dreams or apocalyptic visions, but of physical observations.

And I will submit that such observations, descriptions and accounts should not be chalked up to mere fantasy, but should rather be taken at face value, leaving aside even the interpretations of their observers.

The reason for this is manifold. First, because the observers use common language as a descriptor for the uncommon, rather than having developed (i.e., contrived) language already fitted for the occasion. Secondly, because the observers implicitly seem to recognize that what

they are seeing does not ‘make sense.’ Finally, because the power of the observers’ respective deities does not require such entities for its expression.

Whatever else may be said, the observers seem really to have seen these things, and to have interpreted them as properly belonging to the religious sphere, and having divine origin and purpose.

Let us examine these in turn.

### **Judaism - Ezekiel and the Wheel**

The setting of the first chapter of Ezekiel is a little unclear in terms of its date, depicting events perhaps between 593-571 B.C. However, Ezekiel indicates that he is not asleep but outdoors, by the river Chedar, and is not alone but with other people. The things depicted in this chapter are referenced as ‘living beings’, and again in chapter 10 as cherubim. What makes his vision of particular interest is not necessarily the presence of the cherubim, which are depicted elsewhere in scripture, typically with multiple wings, with multiple visages, and with eyes all about.

Rather, the interesting thing is the presence of what appear to be glorious machines connected to, and controlled by, these beings.

The vision begins with the appearance of a cloud of flashing fire, glowing brightly like heated metal. In the midst of this cloud four humanoid figures are seen, each with four faces, and four wings, with straight legs, calf-like feet and human hands. And amidst all the flashings of fire and lightning are the curious wheels, termed in chapter 10 the ‘whirling wheels’.

These wheels are linked directly to the cherubim, and are indicated as operating by the power of the spirit (*ruach*) of the cherubim, yet are distinguished from them. The wheels are immense, have a crystalline appearance, and are rimmed about with eyes. They move with the cherubim, and the wheels seem to be interlinked in some way, just as the cherubim themselves seems to be attached to one another at the wings.

Above this glorious machinery, covering the cherubim completely, is a crystal-like covering (1:22-26; 10:1). The text does not make clear whether it is flat or domed or some other shape, and above this a kind of throne upon which is seated a being radiating the glory of the Lord (1:26-28; 10:1).

It is entirely possible to speculate that there is at work some apocalyptic imagery, and that the apparatus is merely intended to represent a kind of heavenly throne or conveyance of YHWH. However, the physical descriptions not only of the machinery, but especially of the circumstances of their appearance, suggest at least the possibility of an encounter of an otherworldly sort.

Consider the entrance of the cherubim. They burst into the atmosphere like a storm wind in a blazing, flashing cloud of fire, with glowing heated metal visible. Could anything more accurately depict the (re)entry of a spacecraft into earth's atmosphere? Their craft appears as interlinked jewel-like wheels, rimmed with what appear to be eyes. The beings within have humanoid forms, but are not human. The craft they pilot is controlled by them, and is capable of moving at lightning-like speed. It roars like the ocean, or the tumult of an army, when it moves. It is capped with a crystalline covering. It is not difficult to imagine the canopy over a cockpit, or command deck.

When faced with radically new experience, human beings fall back to the familiar in their gropings for adequate description. It is hardly a wonder that ancient and even medieval scholars interpreted this vision as an inexplicable encounter of a purely religious sense. But descriptions are meant to form links and recognition and understanding in the mind. Modern scholars are warned to consider the ancient mind in reading old texts. The problem in this case is that Ezekiel clearly had no idea what he was looking at.

More importantly, a revelation of God regarding divine plans for Israel required no such theatrics. Indeed, it would have been far less complicated for God to have simply appeared to Ezekiel as to Abraham, or to so many others in the ancient world, devoid of theatrics, and reveal the divine message.

Ezekiel clearly saw something. And he expended energy straining at his description. And knowing what we know now, it requires something like work, and agile mental gymnastics, not to think of spacecraft, and advanced technology, when listening to this account.

Indeed, such speculations have been made not merely by crackpots, or by questionable authors like Erich Von Daniken in his work *Chariot of the Gods*, but by more serious minds. Joseph Blumrich, NASA engineer and chief of the Systems Layout Branch at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, was a skeptical reader of Von Daniken. But the more he worked to discredit the ancient astronaut theory behind Ezekiel's vision, the more convinced he became of

its truth. His work led him not only to the publication of a paper entitled “The Spaceships of the Prophet Ezekiel”<sup>1</sup>, but to an entire book on the subject,<sup>2</sup> as well as to a patent on an omnidirectional wheel based on his interpretation of Ezekiel’s description.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hinduism – The Epics and the Vimanas**

While the Vedas speak variously of chariots that transport the gods across the skies (similar perhaps to the fiery chariot accounts of the Hebrew scriptures), it is in the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that we see something akin to more recognizable UFOs.

These are termed Vimanas, and are translated literally as ‘traversing’ or ‘measuring out’. In an architectural sense, vimanas serve as the structures covering the inner sanctum of Hindu temples. They are typically domed or pyramidal in shape, and are often capped with round or lenticular features bearing a striking similarity not only to many descriptions of the vehicular counterparts, but even to modern conceptions of the shape of UFOs.

In their vessel form, vimanas are depicted variously as wondrous machines or flying buildings controlled by the wills of their users, and are described not as existing merely in the abstract, or in the heavens, which could be in the realm beyond what humans could see, but in the firmament, which was the visible sky. There were many different kinds of vimanas, and it would fall well beyond the scope of this work to list, let alone do justice to their many references, but it may do to consider some of their descriptions that resonate with eerily similarity to the vision of Ezekiel.

Consider, for example, this passage from chapter 42 of the *Vana Parva*, the third book of the epic *Mahabharata*:

And as Gudakesa gifted with great intelligence was thinking of it, the car  
endued with great effulgence and guided by Matali, came dividing the clouds and  
illuminating the firmament and filling the entire firmament with its rattle deep as  
the roar of mighty masses of clouds. Swords, and missiles of terrible forms and  
maces of frightful description, and winged darts of celestial splendor and

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<sup>1</sup> In *Impact of Science on Society*, UNESCO Volume XXIV, No. 4, October-December 1974, pp. 329-335.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spaceships of Ezekiel*. Bantam,

<sup>3</sup> US patent 3789947

lightnings of the brightest effulgence, and thunderbolts, and propellers furnished with wheels and worked with atmospheric expansion and producing sounds loud as the roar of great masses of clouds, were on that car. (...) the car was drawn with such speed that the eye could hardly mark its progress.<sup>4</sup>

Consider also the following descriptions, also from the *Mahabharata*:

The vimana had all necessary equipment. It could not be conquered by the gods or demons. And it radiated light and reverberated with a deep rumbling sound. Its beauty captivated the minds of all who beheld it. Visvakarma, the lord of its design and construction, had created it by the power of his austerities, and its outline, like that of the sun, could not be easily delineated.

And he also gave [unto Arjuna] a car furnished with celestial weapons . . . And its splendor, like that of the Sun, was so great that no one could gaze at it. It was the very car riding upon which the lord Soma had vanquished the Danavas. Resplendent with beauty, it looked like an evening cloud reflecting the effulgence of the setting Sun.

Bhima flew along in his car, resplendent as the sun and loud as thunder . . . The flying chariot shone like a flame in the night sky of summer . . . it swept by like a comet . . . It was (AS?) if two suns were shining. Then the chariot rose up and all the heavens brightened.

We beheld in the sky what appeared to us to be a mass of scarlet cloud resembling the fierce flames of a blazing fire. From that mass many blazing missiles flashed, and tremendous roars, like the noise of a thousand drums beaten at once. And from it fell many weapons winged with gold and thousands of thunderbolts, with loud explosions, and many hundreds of fiery wheels. Loud became the uproar of falling horses, slain by these missiles, and of mighty elephants struck by the explosions . . . Those terrible Rakshasas had the shape of large mounds stationed in the sky.

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<sup>4</sup> *Vana Parva*, Chapter 42, pp. 94-95.

Vimanas, decked and equipped according to rule, looked like heavenly structures in the sky . . . borne away they looked like highly beautiful flights of birds.

And finally, this example from the second canto of the *Ramayana*:

The splendid chariot, made of silver . . . and bright like the fire itself, making a noise like the roaring of the clouds; defying all obstacles, adorned with jewels and gold, dazzling to the eyesight and bright . . . went speedily on, making space resound like unto the muttering cloud in the sky. He issued out of his abode like the beautiful moon passing through a huge cloud.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult not to hear in these descriptions the manifestation of wondrous and extremely advanced technologies, particularly where the dazzling weaponry, performance, and the noise and fiery expression of their propulsion systems is concerned. And it is certainly the case that no such technologies of human origin existed in the ancient world, so that they could be exaggerated or fictively contrived into these descriptions.

With so many references to these flying machines of the gods, and with such similarities between them on so many points (not to mention their similarities to Ezekiel's observation), it is indeed difficult not to consider that, even from ancient times, ancient observers in the Hindu world, as in other parts of the world, may well have seen technological phenomenon of extraterrestrial origin.

### **A curious coincidence**

It is always fascinating to discover similarities between religious expressions or observations. And in the two religious traditions examined here we have a curious case in point.

At the top of the Vimana on the famed Lord Jaganath Temple in Puri is a giant wheel called the Neela Chakra (Blue Wheel), which is a representation of the sudarshana chakra, the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ayodhya Kandam*, Chapter 16, Verses 28-31.

gloriously powerful weapon of Lord Vishnu, created for the purpose of fighting demons and other evil spirits. Like so many of the vehicular vimanas it is wreathed in flame, powered by the mind, and moves according to the will of Vishnu.

The Neela Chakra is constructed using eight metals: lead, zinc, copper, mercury, iron, brass, silver, and gold. It is a wheel within a wheel, and constructed with eight spokes joining the inner and outer wheels. On its rim, corresponding to the eight spokes are eight decorative wing-like tongues of fire of exotic design. The flames curve back on themselves and form the stylized outline of eyes, all around the rim of the outer wheel.

It is hard not to see the similarities between the Neela Chakra and the entity observed by Ezekiel. A flaming wheel within a wheel, powered by the will of the user, the wheels being joined by eight spokes, corresponding to the eight joined wings of the Cherubim, with eyes all about the rim.

These similarities are so manifold, and so specific, and so striking, that one wonders how they could possibly be coincidental. How could two of the world's most ancient religions, separated by distance and culture and insuperable theological assumptions, have arrived at explicitly otherworldly phenomena that bear such a shocking commonality between them?

Reader, this is a most interesting thing. What do you make of it?