

#56

March/April, 2006

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The Astronomers of Nabta Playa

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Mark H. Gaffney
on New Discoveries
of Astonishing
Prehistoric Knowledge



According to most experts the dawn of Western civilization occurred in the fourth millennium B.C. with the sudden flowering of Sumer in southern Iraq and Pharaonic Egypt soon after. This is the mainstream view that was taught when I was a college student. Increasingly, however, it is under assault. Recent discoveries are challenging almost everything we thought we knew about human history. In 1973 a team of archaeologists made such a discovery while traveling through a remote region in southern Egypt. They were navigating by compass through a trackless waste known as the Nabta Playa and had halted for a water break, when they noticed potsherds at their feet. Fragments of old pottery frequently are an indicator of archaeological potential, and the team returned later to investigate. After several seasons of digging they eventually realized that Nabta Playa was not just another neolithic site. The breakthrough came when they discovered that what had looked like rock outcroppings were in fact standing megalithic stones.

They also found a circle of smaller stones, which in photos look like derelict rocks. Nearby, the arrangement of larger megaliths sprawls over a broad area. The wind-swept site is desolate beyond belief. But thousands of years ago this forbidding waste was a well-watered grassland and seasonally, at least, well peopled.

Today we know that the great megaliths of Nabta Playa are anything but random stones. Long ago, someone relocated them from a still unknown quarry—but for what purpose? Subsequent excavations led by Fred Wendorf, one of the discoverers and a much traveled archaeologist, turned up an abundance of cultural artifacts, which were radiocarbon dated. The ages ranged from 10,000 B.C. to 3,000 B.C., with most of the dates clustered around 6,000 B.C., when the climate was much wetter than now. The Nabta Playa is a basin and during this epoch it

The Astronomers of Nabta Playa

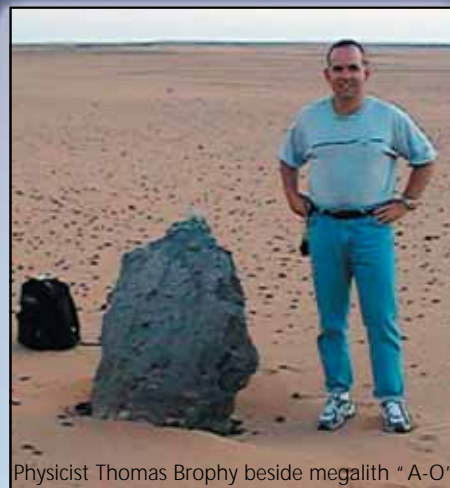
*New Discoveries Reveal Astonishing
Pre-Historic Knowledge*

• BY MARK H. GAFFNEY

filled with seasonal lakes. Excavations through the 8–12 feet of sediments laid down during this period showed that some of the megaliths had been buried intentionally. The team also found strange carvings in the bedrock under the sediments—evidence of great antiquity.

The archaeologists mapped the area and used global positioning technology (GPS) to plot the locations of 25 individual megaliths. Many others remain to be plotted. Fortunately, the site's remoteness protected it from most human disturbance. Though the mapping data hinted at astronomical significance, Wendorf's team searched in vain for the key to unlock the site. In 2001 they presented their research in a book edited by Wendorf, *Holocene Settlement of the Egyptian Sahara*. The two-volume study makes for interesting reading. But its authors had few answers.

However, even as Wendorf's book was in press, a former NASA physicist named Thomas Brophy was quietly pursuing his own astronomical study of Nabta Playa. Brophy had already reviewed the sparse data published in *Nature* in 1998, and after Wendorf's more extensive data became available his nascent theories fell into place. In 2002 Brophy presented his findings in *The Origin Map*. Because the available astronomy software was inadequate Brophy had to custom-engineer his own. Thus armed, he was able to track star movements at Nabta Playa over thousands of years, and succeeded in decoding the stone circle and nearby megaliths. The Cal-



Physicist Thomas Brophy beside megalith "A-O"

endar Circle has a built-in meridian-line and a sight-line—both conspicuous—which indicated to Brophy that the circle was a user-friendly star-viewing platform. Its design was so simple that even a novice could have used it. A night viewer between 6400–4900 B.C. stood at the north end of the meridian axis and allowed himself to be guided by three stones at his feet to the constellation Orion overhead. The correspondence between ground and sky would have been self-evident: The three stones within the outer circle are laid out in the precise pattern of the stars of Orion's famous belt, before summer solstice as indicated by the Calendar Circle itself. Once the pattern becomes familiar it is unmistakable.

In another section of his book Brophy concluded that Robert Bauval and Adrian Gilbert were at least partly correct in their 1992 study, *The Orion Mystery*, in which they claimed that Giza had a similar planned structure. Bauval and Gilbert argued that the pyramids of Giza were constructed to mirror heaven, laid out on the ground to represent these same three stars of Orion's belt.

Here, then, at Nabta Playa, was evidence of a common astronomical tradition of astonishing longevity. Just to give you some idea, modern astronomy is about 500 years old, yet, the astronomy common to both Giza and Nabta Playa survived for at least 6,000–7,000 years, possibly longer. The shared astronomy also suggests a shared cultural tradition. In fact, Wendorf's team amassed considerable evidence of overlap between the neolithic Nabta culture and the much later Old Kingdom of Pharaonic Egypt, when pyramid building reached its zenith. It is interesting that more than a century ago Flinders Petrie, one of the founders of Egyptology, arrived at a similar conclusion. Petrie found evidence that the enigmatic Sphinx was not an Egyptian sculptural form at all, but had originated in Ethiopia.

Brophy's findings also support the work of geologist Robert Schoch, who recently found telltale evidence of water erosion on the

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Cadman went on to explain, "I am situated on some land that has a creek in a remote location. I needed to transfer water from it to a garden area about 300 feet away. There isn't electricity available at the pump site so I needed a water pump that was fully automatic and didn't utilize electricity. That is precisely what Kunkel had suggested for the subterranean pump."

Cadman's pump, once started, requires only one valve at a time and can run indefinitely. He describes it as a "pump and hydraulic pulse generator." By the latter term he means that it is capable of generating seismic shock waves. "When I first started, I thought it was merely a pump," he explained, "After extensive study of the overall layout, it became evident that the water pump aspect was a by-product. The primary function is to send seismic shock waves up towards the King's and Queen's chambers. Although I say that's the primary function, it also pumps water very well."

To make his point, Cadman offered an analogy, "If someone had never been exposed to an automobile engine, an initial observation might be that it was a gas-fired heater. After all, engines put out lots of heat. But the heat is the by-product. The primary function is the creation of directed force. That's also the function of The Great Pyramid's subterranean section. It causes the King's chamber to resonate."

Such a theory, of course, suggests the work of engineer Chris Dunn, who has argued in his book, *The Giza Power Plant*, that the Great Pyramid is a machine created by ancient engineers to produce power. Cadman agrees and adds that "Basically, the subterranean chamber assembly was the motor for the power plant."

Cadman also believes "There's the possibility that the resonance of the pyramid energized the pyramid shape. According to Joe Parr's research, the resonating of the shape causes a 'mass particle' to form where the Queen's chamber is located. Joe Parr has extensive research in this area. His work is similar to Dr. William A. Tiller's work.

We wanted to know, how does the pump operate if it doesn't use an external power source?

"The pump," he offered, "requires a differ-

ence in heights of the water source and the pump assembly. For my pump model, there is a 3-1/2 foot drop from the water supply to the pump assembly. Water is fed from the source down through a pipe into the pump. The basic design utilizes the force of falling water to elevate part of the water. Water flows down the drive pipe into the compression chamber. Water escapes from the waste valve until the water's velocity forces the valve shut. When the valve shuts, the water stops flowing instantaneously and causes the water to compress, resulting in a compression wave, or shock wave, which emanates from the valve area. In the driveline, the water reverses direction until the shock wave reaches air and returns down the pipe. In the output line, a high-pressure surge passes through the check valve. This surge is at least fifty times (3,360 psi at Giza) the static water pressure of the compression chamber.



Cadman's pump working in Washington state.

When the compression wave leaves the compression chamber, a low-pressure situation exists. The low pressure is equal and opposite to the compression wave. This immediately re-opens the waste valve, and the cycle begins again."

If a larger pump were built, would it be capable of lifting the heaviest stones used in the construction of the Great Pyramid?

"Yes," said Cadman. ■

Richard Noone is author of the 1980s best seller 5/5/2000, in which he argued in support of Edward Kunkel's theories regarding the Great Pyramid as a pump. For more information on John Cadman's pump see: http://www.sentinelkennels.com/Research/Article_V41.html. On Chris Dunn see: <http://gizapower.com>.

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Sphinx indicating that the most enigmatic sculpture on the planet dates to this same wetter epoch, or before. Schoch's analysis flew squarely in the face of mainstream Egyptology, which continues to insist on a much later date. A confirmed link between Giza and Nabta Playa would lay to rest any doubts about the relevance of Nabta Playa because of its remoteness. Far from being disconnected from the mainstream of the emerging Egyptian cultural tradition, at one time Nabta Playa may even have been the center of it all.

While all of this is extraordinary, Brophy's conclusions about the other nearby megalithic formation are mind-numbing. Brophy thinks this other construction may be a star map, the creation of which required a knowledge of astronomy that rivaled and may even have surpassed our own. Brophy's conclusions are highly controversial, but his work deserves close attention, because if he is correct we have barely begun to understand where we came from.

So, what do the Nabta megaliths tell us after thousands of years of silence? Their designers placed them in straight lines that radiate out from a central point. The arrangement employed a simple star-coordinate system that assigned two stones per star. One aligned with the star itself and marked its vernal equinox heliacal (i.e., rising together with the sun on the first day of spring) position on the horizon. The other aligned with a reference star, in this case Vega, thus fixing the first star's rising at a specific date in history. In archaeoastronomy single megalithic alignments with stars are considered dubious because at any given time several stars will rise at or within a few degrees of the point on the horizon denoted by a lone marker. Over long periods of time many different stars will rise over this position. The creators of Nabta Playa eliminated uncertainty with the Vega alignment and the specificity of vernal equinox heliacal rising, which occurs only once every 26,000 years for a given star. This fixed the star's rising date. Vega was a logical choice because it is the fifth brightest star in the heavens and dominated the northern sky in this early period. Brophy found that six of the megaliths corresponded with the six important stars in Orion (Alnitak, Alnilam, Mintaka, Betelgeuse, Bellatrix, and Meissa), also confirming his analysis of the nearby circle. Their placement marked the vernal heliacal rising of these stars, which occurred around 6,300 B.C., within about twenty years. The second set of reference stones were keyed to the heliacal rising of Vega, which occurred at the autumnal equinox. In the seventh millennium B.C. the Nabta plain was a busy place.

The heliacal rising of a star occurs when it rises above the horizon with the morning sun. A vernal heliacal rising describes the same event on the day of the spring equinox, which is much rarer. Using a conservative

Gigantic Megalith X-1 is the largest at Nabta Playa. When whole, its longest dimension was over 12 feet. Like many megaliths at Nabta, it was broken or cut apart, possibly intentionally, in ancient times. Directly behind X-1 is a partner megalith more than 7 feet long. These megaliths set atop a knoll which appears to be shaped as a mound inside a spiral pattern. (Thomas Brophy)



Worked and finely shaped megaliths that were on top of Complex Structure A. The footprints at left indicate scale. (Thomas Brophy)



A very finely worked Calendar Circle stone (about 2 feet) toppled out of its place. It appears to be extremely hard like flint and little weathered over the ages. (T. Brophy)



The other end of the same Calendar Circle stone shown above. (T. Brophy)

statistical protocol, Brophy calculated the probability that the megalithic alignments at Nabta were random at less than two chances in a million, which, as he writes "is more than a thousand times as certain as the usual three standard deviations requirement for accepting a scientific hypothesis as valid." The only reasonable conclusion is that the star alignments at Nabta Playa were carefully planned—no accident.

But hold on, because from here Brophy ventures into wild territory. He was puzzled by the fact that the Nabta megaliths were not placed at uniform distances from the central point. Brophy writes: "If the varied distances didn't have a purpose, one would expect the skilled Nabta Playa designers to have used a more pleasing arrangement...[therefore] the distance placements are suggestive of a meaningful pattern." Students of the Giza plateau have often remarked that no detail of

the famous pyramids was left to chance. Every angle, every relationship, every aspect, had a definite purpose. Brophy merely guessed that the same might hold at Nabta Playa. So, what did the variable distances of the megaliths from the central point represent? After considering a number of alternatives, just for fun Brophy theorized: What if the distances on the ground were proportional to the actual distances of the stars from earth? When he looked up the current best measurements as determined by the Hipparcos Space Astronomy Satellite, Brophy was blown away. They matched in each case to within about a standard deviation. The proportional scale turned out to be one meter on the ground at Nabta = .799 light years. The match is "more than astonishing," as Brophy writes, because even with modern technology the science of measuring the distances to stars is a tricky and imper-

fect business. Current best measures of distance must be regarded as approximations. Brophy's conclusion bears repeating: "If these star distances are the intended meaning of the Nabta Playa map, and are not coincidence, then much of what we think we know about prehistoric human civilizations must be revisited."

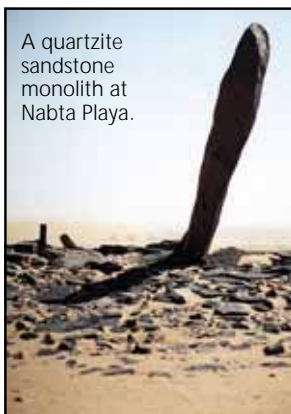
Brophy believes information about the relative velocities of stars, and their masses, may also be encoded in the placements. And he thinks that smaller companion stones lying near the base of some of the large megaliths probably represent companion stars, or even planetary systems. Unfortunately, this cannot be tested at present because astronomy is not yet able to observe earth-sized planets across the reaches of space. Rapid strides are being made, however. A number >

of Jupiter-sized giants have already been detected and resolving power continues to improve. Soon we may know if Brophy's staggering idea is correct.

A Galaxy Map?

Nabta Playa held other surprises. The location of the star map's central point initially drew the attention of Wendorf's team because a complex structure of megaliths had been placed there. One large stone stood squarely at the central point, surrounded by others. Numerous other stone complexes had also been placed in the vicinity. These appeared to be burial mounds and when the archaeologists excavated two of them the team expected to uncover mortuary remains. Instead, they dug through 12 feet of Holocene sediments to bedrock and found bizarre carved sculptures, which they never did explain. Later, Brophy examined these in light of the deciphered star map and was blown away again. He realized that whoever created Nabta Playa might have been in possession of advanced knowledge about our Milky Way galaxy. The bedrock sculpture appears to be a made-to-scale map of the Milky Way as viewed from the outside, i.e., from the perspective of the north galactic pole. The map correctly indicates the position, scale, and orientation of our sun, and the placements of the spiral arms, the galactic center, even the associated Sagittarius dwarf galaxy that was only discovered in 1994. Although Wendorf's excavation had dismantled the stone complex on the surface in the process of exhuming the underlying sculpture, Brophy was able to determine from Wendorf's accurate diagrams/maps that the central point was directly above—and surely represented—the correct position of our sun on the galaxy map. Brophy then made another key discovery: One of the megalithic sight lines stood in relation to the galactic center. Its alignment marked the galactic center's vernal heliacal rising circa 17,700 B.C.. Amazingly, the orientation of the galactic plane in the sculpture also jibed with this date. Brophy concluded that the stone sculpture was a map of the Milky Way as seen from the standpoint of the northern galactic pole. Next, he turned his attention to the second stone complex excavated by Wendorf's team which, likewise, had produced no mortuary remains. Its size and placement suggested that it was a map of Andromeda, our sister galaxy. Calculations showed that its size—about double the Milky Way—and its placement may be consistent with Andromeda's known size/location.

As for Nabta Playa's other stone complexes, they have not yet been investigated...



A quartzite sandstone monolith at Nabta Playa.

Giza: A Precessional Calendar?

Brophy also conducted his own independent investigation of Giza, and there too found evidence the designers knew about the galactic center. Brophy's powerful software enabled him to refine Robert Bauval's estimate of the great pyramid's correlation date.

Brophy agrees that the famous star shafts serve as markers that fix the date of correlation to within a narrow window. When Brophy precessed the sky above Giza he found that the best shaft alignment occurred around 2,360 B.C.—about a half-century later than Bauval's date. Bauval argued that the southern shaft of the King's Chamber aligned with Orion at the time of construction. But Brophy found that the last of the three stars of Orion's belt, Al Nitak (Zeta Orionis) aligned with the southern

shaft more than a century before. The southern star shaft's alignment with the galactic center at the time of pyramid construction also corroborated his findings at Nabta Playa.

Assuming that the layout at Giza is a mirror of Orion's belt, when exactly did this occur? Bauval's preferred date is 10,500 BC, long before the pyramids were actually built, when the three stars of Orion's belt reached their southern culmination of the 26,000 year precessional cycle. When Brophy tested this idea, however, he discovered another layer of complexity. He found that the ground mirrored heaven on two dates: in 11,772 B.C. and again in 9,420 B.C. Brophy concluded that the construction was never intended to designate Orion's southern culmination, as Bauval argued, but rather to bracket the epoch in which this occurred. The two dates also bracket another important event, the northern culmination of the galactic center at around 11,000 B.C. In other words, Giza was constructed as a zodiacal clock, set in stone to the grand precessional cycle. This supports the view that the site's astronomy long predated the actual pyramid construction.

Fully cognizant of the revolutionary nature of his analysis, Brophy wisely makes no final pronouncements in his book. He merely presents his findings as a working hypothesis and invites others to investigate further. Fortunately, many of his ideas are testable. So far, only 25 Nabta stones have been plotted with GPS, and only two of at least thirty stone complexes have been excavated. Time will surely tell... ■

Mark Gaffney is author of Dimona the Third Temple? (1989), a study of Israel's nuclear weapons program. His latest is Gnostic Secrets of the Naassenes (2004), an investigation of a third-century Gnostic source text. E-mail him at: mhgaffney@sbccglobal.net. His web site is www.gnosticsecrets.com.

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a particular integration with earth and plant and water." Buhner noticed that his great-grandfather's feet seemed to interact with the tension of the soil; the soles of his feet seemed to speak to it as they walked in silence to a favorite pond. "Sometimes we would drop a word into the silence like a stone into the water and the word's meaning would send ripples through us until they ebbed, slowed, and stopped," he recalls. "Still, even then I knew those words were unnecessary. For in our time together we were doing something without words that humans have done for millennia. As we lay with the smells, the sounds and the feeling of that place, deep inside something would leave his body and enter mine. I would breathe it into me as slowly as I breathed in his smell; something in my soul found purchase in it. It was a food without which I could not become human." Buhner says this mysterious transfer is always passed in silence between the man and the boy, between the woman and the girl. "It is handed down from one interior world to the next. Its essence penetrates the muscles of the body, the oxygen of the blood, the substance of the spirit. And this was the time in which I first tasted wild water."

It is this experience, the transfer of soul essence, that Buhner feels is the crux of true knowingness. It's something he says can't be captured with words, nor even in the systems of mathematics. While many people see mathematics as a universal, unbiased language that can explain everything around us, Buhner finds it limiting. "Its just a language, another interpretation of experience," he explains. The real deal is that inexplicable transfer of energy/emotion that occurs when we connect with someone we know in a crowd, or encounter a puppy, or a plant. "The Greeks had a word for this *aisthesis*. It means to breathe in, and comes closest to expressing soul essence. It is the heart's ability to perceive meaning from the world." Buhner further explains the phenomenon as eliciting a gasp and a touch, as when we react in awe to a sight like the Grand Canyon, when we recognize our friend and move to greet or embrace them, or when the puppy runs toward us for that rollicking, unbounded frolic. "*Aisthesis* denotes the moment in which a flow of life force, imbued with communications, moves from one living organism to another," he states. "It is a taking in of the world, a taking in of soulful communications. When we experience this sharing of soul essence, we have a direct experience that we are not alone in the world." It's a matter, he says, of using the heart as an organ of perception, a skill we've ceded to the head for far too long.

Throughout the world there is a tradition of direct perception of nature through the intelligence of the heart. Buhner also mentions