

THE SATURN THEORY

by Ev Cochrane

The Saturn theory, in addition to presenting a comprehensive model of ancient myth, offers a radically different approach to understanding the recent history of the solar system.¹ Briefly summarized, the theory posits that the neighboring planets only recently settled into their current orbits, the Earth formerly being involved in a unique planetary configuration of sorts together with Saturn, Venus, and Mars. As the terrestrial skywatcher looked upwards, he saw a spectacular and awe-inspiring apparition dominating the celestial landscape. At the heart of heaven the massive gas giant Saturn appeared fixed atop the North polar axis, with Venus and Mars set within its center like two concentric orbs (see figure one, where Venus is the green orb and Mars the innermost red orb). The theory holds that the origin of ancient myth and religion—indeed the origin of the primary institutions of civilization itself—is inextricably linked to the numinous appearance and evolutionary history of this unique congregation of planets.



Figure one

How does one go about documenting this extraordinary claim? Extraordinary claims, it is commonly said, require extraordinary evidential support in order to be believed. While I believe the Saturn theory can and eventually will meet this crucial test, it goes without saying that a discussion of the various lines of evidence pointing to the polar configuration would require several volumes in order to make a compelling case. In this brief overview, alas, I can do no more than offer a small sampling of the relevant evidence.

¹ While I would not presume to speak for David Talbott or Dwardu Cardona, the two senior pioneers and my partners in this field of study, it is nevertheless the case that the three of us share similar viewpoints in many respects.

If the truth be known, the Saturn theory suffers from an embarrassment of riches with respect to evidence which supports the central tenets of the theory. Early descriptions of the “sun” and various planets from Mesopotamia and elsewhere describe them as occupying “impossible” positions and moving in a manner which defies astronomical reality (as currently understood, that is). The ancient sun god, for example, is said to “rise” and “set” upon the same sacred mountain.² The planet Venus is described as standing at the “heart of heaven” or within the crescent of Sin.³ Mars is pointed to as a principle agent behind “eclipses” of the ancient sun god.⁴ While not one of these scenarios is possible given the current order of the solar system, each is perfectly consistent with the history of the respective planets in the polar configuration as reconstructed by the Saturnists.

The testimony from ancient myth and folklore is equally unequivocal that the respective planets once moved on radically different orbits and rained catastrophe from the skies, even if that message has been overlooked and “ostrachized”⁵ by everyone except Velikovsky. Thus, numerous cultures tell of the time when different suns ruled the heavens. This belief was especially common in the New World: “The idea that the sun was not eternal was shared by other American Indian tribes so widely that we consider it must have been part of their belief long before any high culture had arisen in the Americas.”⁶

The *Popol Vuh*, lauded as the “Mayan Bible,” attests to the same idea. There a previous “sun” is described as follows:

“Like a man was the sun when it showed itself...It showed itself when it was born and remained fixed in the sky like a mirror. Certainly it was not the same sun which we see, it is said in their old tales.”⁷

Equally widespread are traditions which report that a great monster once eclipsed the sun and brought the world to the brink of destruction. Countless cultures preserve memory of the terrifying time when Venus assumed a comet-like form,⁸ or when a spectacular conjunction of planets dominated the celestial landscape.⁹ Such traditions can be documented from one culture to another and, upon systematic analysis, reveal numerous analogous structural details, a telltale sign that they were inspired by common experience of spectacular celestial events rather than creative imagination and fantasy.

In addition to the remarkably detailed and consistent testimony from ancient myth and folklore, the artistic record likewise provides compelling evidence that the planets only recently moved on radically different orbits. Consider, for example, the three images

² In the Gilgamesh Epic, for example. See A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago, 1970), p. 65.

³ See E. Cochrane, “Mons Veneris,” *Aeon* 4:5 (1996), pp. 63-82.

⁴ For a thorough discussion of these issues, see E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997).

⁵ This word, coined by Samuel Butler, describes the propensity of some to stick their heads in the sand in order to ignore the obvious.

⁶ C. Burland, *The Gods of Mexico* (New York, 1967), p. 140.

⁷ D. Goetz & S. Morley, *Popol Vuh* (Norman, 1972), p. 188.

⁸ I. Velikovsky, *Worlds in Collision* (New York, 1950), pp. 162-191; D. Talbott, “The Comet Venus,” *Aeon* 3:5 (1994), pp. 5-51; D. Cardona, “Cometary Venus,” in D. Pearlman ed., Stephen J. Gould and Immanuel Velikovsky (Forest Hills, 1996), pp. 442-466; E. Cochrane, “On Comets and Kings,” *Aeon* 2:1 (1989), pp. 53-75.

⁹ See the discussion in D. Pankenier, “The Bamboo Annals Revisited...Chronology of Early Zhou, Part 1,” *BSOAS* 55 (1992), p. 281.

depicted in figure two. As I have documented¹⁰, such images are ubiquitous in the prehistoric rock art of every inhabited continent. Hitherto they have been interpreted as drawings of the Sun by virtually all leading authorities on ancient art and religion, this despite the fact that they do not have any obvious resemblance to the current solar orb.



Figure two

It is noteworthy that the ancient sun-god was depicted in the very same manner by the earliest civilizations in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Figure three, for example, shows an Akkadian seal in which the Shamash disc is represented as an “eye-like” object, as in the first image in figure two. Figure four shows the Shamash disc as an eight-pointed star or wheel. Figure five shows the Shamash disc as an eight-petalled flower. Numerous other variations upon these common themes could be provided, all impossible to reconcile with the appearance of the current solar orb.



Figure three

¹⁰ E. Cochrane, “Suns and Planets in Neolithic Rock Art,” *Aeon* 3:2 (1993), pp. 51-63; see also the discussion in E. Cochrane, “Venus, Mars...and Saturn,” *Chronology and Catastrophism Review* (1998:2), pp. 16-20.



9 (134.a)

Figure four



Figure five

It is at this point that the researcher is presented with a theoretical dilemma, the successful resolution of which promises to unlock the secrets of our planet's extraordinary recent (pre)history. If one elects to dismiss the specific and consistent imagery associated with these ancient solar images as the product of creative imagination—the typical approach of conventional art historians—one is also forced to dismiss the equally widespread testimony that different suns prevailed in ancient times. This approach has little to recommend it, for it involves nothing less than turning a deaf ear to the testimony of our ancestors and, in any case, has thus far produced precious few insights into the origin of ancient symbolism and myth.

Yet the alternative is equally unthinkable, for it involves accepting these endlessly recurring images as accurate drawings of the ancient “sun”, albeit one different in nature and appearance than that currently prevailing. As bizarre as this possibility appears at first glance, it does have much to recommend it. The ancient Babylonians were careful to distinguish Shamash from the current sun, identifying the “sun” god with the distant planet Saturn.¹¹ It was this little-known datum which led Velikovsky to consider the possibility that Saturn formerly appeared more prominent, perhaps even serving as a sun-like body for the satellite Earth.¹² Velikovsky’s seminal insight, in turn, served as the theoretical foundation for the subsequent researches of Talbott, Cardona, Rose, Tresman, Newgrosh, and others who offered further evidence for the basic claim that Saturn once dominated the heavens, a fact reflected in the otherwise puzzling prominence accorded this planet in the earliest pantheons.¹³

The “Saturn theory” receives additional support from the representation of the planet Venus in ancient art. A straightforward interpretation of the various images superimposed upon the “solar” disc in figure two would understand the first as an “eye”; the second as an eight-spoked wheel or “star”; and the third as an eight-petalled flower. Now it is a remarkable fact that the planet Venus is consistently associated with these very forms from one ancient culture to another. The ancient Sumerians, for example, represented Venus (as Inanna) as an eye-goddess, eight-pointed star, and eight-petalled flower or rosette. Consider the figurine represented in figure six, thousands of which were discovered by Max Mallowan during his excavations of the Inanna-precinct at Uruk. Similar “eye-goddesses” have been found throughout the ancient world, from Neolithic Europe to India.¹⁴ Figure seven shows an early cylinder seal from the Jemdet Nasr period (c. 3000 BCE), depicting Inanna as an “eye-goddess” alongside her familiar eight-petalled rosette.



Figure six

¹¹ Already common knowledge by the time of the astronomical reports sent to Assurbanipal and other Assyrian kings (c. 700 BCE), the identification of Saturn and Shamash likely goes back to the first systematic attempts at monitoring the heavens. See here the discussion in U. Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian Astrology* (Copenhagen, 1995), pp. 122-123.

¹² I. Velikovsky, *Mankind in Amnesia* (Garden City, 1982), pp. 99ff.

¹³ For a similar conclusion, see G. de Santillana & H. von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston, 1969).

¹⁴ M. Dhavalikar, “‘Eye Goddesses’ in India and their West Asian Parallels,” *Anthropos* 60 (1965), pp. 533-540.



Figure seven

The sacred iconography surrounding the Akkadian Ishtar reveals the same basic images. Thus, figure eight shows Ishtar/Venus together with an eight-spoked wheel, while figure nine shows Ishtar/Venus together with an eight-pointed star. Figure ten shows Ishtar in conjunction with a rosette-like star.



Figure eight



Figure nine



Figure ten

The fact that the planet Venus was associated with the very same forms in Mesoamerica, where the observation and worship of our Sister planet formed an obsession, strongly supports the conclusion that such images have their origin in the ancient appearance of the planet. The same conclusion is supported by the fact that cultures as distant and disparate as those of the Australian aborigines, Maya, Polynesians, and Chinese described Venus by epithets signifying “Great Eye,” “Great Star,” and “luminous flower.”¹⁵

¹⁵ E. Cochrane, “Suns and Planets in Neolithic Rock Art,” *Aeon* 3:2 (1993), pp. 51-63. See also the author’s forthcoming *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2000).

How are we to explain this curious state of affairs whereby Venus is associated with the very symbols seemingly depicted in prehistoric “sun”-images? Surely not by reference to the current solar system, for Venus does not even vaguely resemble an “eye,” eight-pointed “star,” or “flower.” Yet if Venus only recently appeared superimposed against the backdrop of Saturn/Shamash—as per the reconstruction offered by Talbott and myself, depicted in figure one—its role as an “eye” is explained at once. Upon further evolution of the polar configuration, Venus assumed a radiant appearance, sending forth streamers across the face of the ancient sun-god (see figure eleven). This situation is reflected in the latter two images in figure three and accounts for Venus’ role as a “star” or “luminous flower”.



Figure eleven

Planets in Ancient Lore

At the turn of the century it was widely held that the most sacred traditions, telling of the Creation, Deluge, Golden Age, Dragon combat, etc. were “nature” myths describing the stereotypical behavior of the two primary celestial bodies, typically in allegorical or euhemeristic fashion.¹⁶ The Saturn theory offers a similar conclusion, with the all-important proviso that the planets formerly dominated the celestial and intellectual horizons rather than the current Sun and Moon.

That the earliest gods and mythical figures of the various cultures are celestial in nature is easily shown. The Sumerian goddess Inanna, explicitly identified with the planet Venus already at the dawn of the historical period (c. 3300 BCE), is a case in point and might well serve as an exemplar for comparative analysis. Virtually every ancient culture will feature a goddess with notable structural affinities to Inanna, although the identification with Venus is not always preserved. The Pawnee Indians of the American central plains, for example, celebrate the wondrous deeds of the primeval goddess cupiritta-ka, identified with Venus.¹⁷ It was her union with the warrior-god u-pirikucu, explicitly identified with the planet Mars, which signaled the crowning event of Creation:

“The second god Tirawahat placed in the heavens was Evening Star, known to the white people as Venus...She was a beautiful woman. By speaking and waving her hands

¹⁶ The so-called solar school of mythology championed by F.M. Muller and others.

¹⁷J. Murie, “Ceremonies of the Pawnee,” *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (Cambridge, 1981), p. 39.

she could perform wonders. Through this star and Morning Star [Mars] all things were created. She is the mother of the Skiri.”¹⁸

As the Pawnee traditions attest, the planet Mars played a prominent role in ancient myth and religion. Wherever one looks, one will find the red planet accorded a numinous power wildly out of proportion to its present modest appearance. The Sumerian war-god Nergal, early on identified with the planet Mars, forms a pivotal figure in comparative analysis. Thus, it can be shown that war-gods and warrior-heroes from every corner of the globe share numerous characteristics in common with the Sumerian god, including some of a remarkably specific nature.¹⁹ To take but one mythical theme of hundreds available: The Makirtare Indians of the Amazonian rain forest tell of the time when the hero Ahishama, identified with the red planet, climbed a giant stairway to the sky.²⁰ The fact that a very similar story was related of Nergal in ancient Mesopotamia²¹ suggests that the mythical theme originated in objective historical events involving the red planet.²² Yet one looks in vain for a satisfactory explanation of this particular mythical theme given the current order of the solar system, wherein a celestial stairway is not to be found. Neolithic rock art, however, offers countless examples of “stairway”-like appendages descending from the ancient sun god, thereby complimenting and helping to illuminate the universal myth of a luminous stairway spanning the heavens (See figure twelve). The possibility thus presents itself that the stairway to heaven was a visible apparition associated with the ancient sun god during a particular phase of the polar configuration.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹ See E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses: The Planet Mars in Ancient Myth and Religion* (Ames, 1997).

²⁰M. de. Civrieux, *Watunna: An Orinoco Creation Cycle* (San Francisco, 1980), pp. 113-114.

²¹S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford, 1991), p. 171. See also the discussion in E. von Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal* (Berlin, 1971), p. 52; J. V. Wilson, *The Rebel Lands* (London, 1979) p. 98; and O. Gurney, “The Sultantepe Tablets,” *Anatolian Studies* 10 (1960), pp. 125, 130.

²² E. Cochrane, “The Stairway to Heaven,” *Aeon* 5:1 (1997), pp. 69-78.

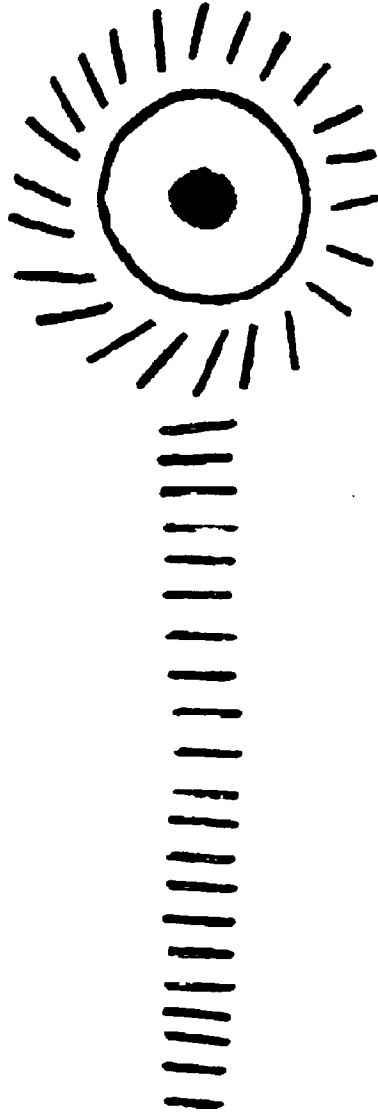


Figure twelve

Towards a Science of Mythology

With the goal of developing a rigorous scientific methodology for the study of ancient myth, the Saturnists would offer a series of basic groundrules deemed to be essential if researchers are to discover the true significance and message of ancient mythical traditions. First and foremost, perhaps, is the general proposition that ancient myth constitutes an invaluable and generally trustworthy source for reconstructing a valid history of our solar system. Far from being a leap of faith, this fundamental finding of the Saturn theory derives from several decades of extensive research into ancient myth and can be demonstrated using the normal methods of logic and evidence.

A second basic tenet would emphasize the comparative method. Simply stated, no ancient myth or primary cultural institution is fully understandable in isolation. Egyptian myth, to take but one example, is incomprehensible apart from detailed analysis of analogous themes and motifs from ancient Mesopotamia and the New World, both of which provide the indispensable link to early astronomical traditions all but lost in Egypt

itself (Horus's identification with the Morning Star *and* Mars offers a notable exception in this regard and forms a close analogue to the Pawnee traditions surrounding the red planet). Hathor's identification with the "Eye of Ra," for example, can only be understood by reference to the widespread idea whereby Venus once formed the central "eye" of the ancient sun god. Note further that Hathor's name, which signifies "House of Horus,"²³ captures perfectly the essence of the relationship of Venus and Mars as illustrated in figure one. The planet-goddess Hathor/Venus, as the "Eye of Ra," literally housed the warrior Horus/Mars. It is little wonder, then, given the reconstruction offered here, that the Egyptian Pyramid and Coffin Texts implore the dead king, as Horus, to ascend the numinous celestial ladder in order to join Re and reign in the "Mansion" of Hathor in the sky: "I am Horus; give me the ladder which you gave to my father, so that I may ascend on it to the sky and escort [Re]..."²⁴

A third basic tenet of the Saturn theory holds that ancient myth and ritual typically commemorate dramatic events witnessed by human beings. If myth constitutes a creative interpretation of the traumatic celestial events in pseudo-historical terms—the flooding of the world, the warrior-hero's consorting with a beautiful goddess—ritual originated as a purposeful and remarkably faithful attempt to reenact the fateful events in question. Mars' climbing of the celestial stairway, for example, was reenacted in countless sacred rites throughout the ancient world.²⁵ The archetypal rite of the sacred marriage, attested already at the dawn of history in Mesopotamia, purports to commemorate the king's union with the planet Venus (Inanna).²⁶ The original inspiration for this bizarre rite, as I have theorized, was the spectacular conjunction of Venus and Mars in prehistoric times.²⁷

A fourth basic tenet of the Saturn theory holds that historical evidence together with consistent (or widespread) human testimony must be given credence, even if a ready explanation of such testimony is not immediately obvious or appears to contradict current scientific opinion. Velikovsky's admonition in the preface to *Worlds in Collision* serves as a rallying cry here: "If, occasionally, historical evidence does not square with formulated laws, it should be remembered that a law is but a deduction from experience and experiment, and therefore laws must conform with historical facts, not facts with laws."

The famous controversy over the likelihood that rocks (meteors) could fall from the sky, a possibility denied by several of the best minds of the 18th and 19th centuries, might well serve as a prototype here. Formerly dismissed as too ridiculous to merit serious discussion, the fact that meteorites occasionally fall to Earth from heaven was well known to the ancient Sumerians. All but lost for several millennia, such knowledge is once again commonplace amongst schoolboys everywhere.

Equally lesson-laden is the on-going controversy over the possibility that rocks from Mars could somehow find their way to the Earth, fervently denied by various leading authorities until quite recently (c. 1987). The eventual triumph of the Martian meteorite hypothesis is yet another classic example of the leading paradigms of the Scientific Age being instantly overturned by a series of anomalous findings.²⁸ Such examples could be

²³ H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1952), p. 277.

²⁴ Spell 769 in the Coffin Texts.

²⁵ See, for example, the numerous rites involving the symbolic ascent of the polar axis or World Tree in M. Eliade, *Shamanism* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 487-494.

²⁶ D. Reisman, "Iddin-Dagan's Sacred Marriage Hymn," *JCS* 25 (1973), pp. 186-191.

²⁷ E. Cochrane, "The Female Star," *Aeon* 5:3 (1998), pp. 49-64.

²⁸ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, "Martian Meteorites in Ancient Myth and Modern Science," *Aeon* 4:2 (1995), pp. 57-73.

multiplied *ad infinitum*. Science, much like religion, proves to be notoriously malleable in this regard: What is considered impossible or fantastic by one generation might well come to be accepted by future generations unencumbered by similar prejudices.

A fifth basic tenet of the Saturn theory holds that recurring anomalies in ancient myth and tradition offer a key to discovery. Certainly it is most unlikely that one culture would invent traditions of fire-breathing dragons (or witches) that once threatened to eclipse the ancient sun god. Yet when one finds the very same improbable motif from one ancient culture to another, logic suggests that something other than fantasy and coincidence is at work here and that a radical reassessment of our basic assumptions of the ancient traditions may be in order.

A sixth central tenet of the Saturn theory holds that the history and evolution of the polar configuration constitutes nothing less than the history of the gods. The “birth” of the warrior-hero, the war-like rampage of the mother goddess, the “death” or “eclipse” of the primeval sun god—and a thousand different themes alike—all have their inspiration in the spectacular events associated with the evolution of the polar configuration.

A seventh basic tenet of the Saturn theory holds that future discoveries vis a vis the geology and geomorphology of the respective planets will act to either confirm or deny the model. For it stands to reason that, if the extraordinary history described here has any basis in reality, such events must have left an indelible mark on the planets that participated in the polar configuration. It is also expected that some of these telltale signs of participation in the polar configuration will prove to be difficult, if not impossible, to explain by any other model.

A Fundamental Objection to the Saturn Theory

The most obvious objection to the Saturn theory is its apparent incompatibility with conventional astrophysics. This is indeed a formidable objection, one deserving of serious attention and, ultimately, a valid answer, ideally in terms of offering a viable physical model for the polar configuration. While promising steps towards achieving a viable physical model have been achieved (the models of Grubaugh and Driscoll, for example), such attempts have thus far proved preliminary and only partly successful. Much work remains to be done in this area, preferably by scientists trained in the requisite fields of astronomy, physics, and mechanics. Personally, I remain confident that an answer will be found if for no other reason than that it is highly improbable that a theory with so much historical evidence in its favor could prove entirely illusory.

If the history of science teaches us anything, it is that there is ample precedent for reserving judgment on a historical thesis well supported by evidence but lacking a viable physical model. Darwin’s theory of evolution, to take a particularly notorious example, languished for decades under the objection that it lacked a viable model of heredity which could explain how the much needed genetic changes could originate and come to be fixed (rather than blended, as per earlier models of heredity). Already by the time of Darwin, there was a wealth of evidence that evolution had occurred—how else are we to explain the fact that modern whales occasionally show traces of vestigial hind limbs and hip girdles?—but a viable model of heredity was not yet at hand, to say nothing of a chemical model for genetic mutation or embryonic differentiation. Even today, well over a hundred years later, many of the most fundamental questions surrounding the biochemical mechanisms of evolution remain unanswerable. We still have little understanding of how the various phyla originated or why some species proved successful while others became extinct. In the meantime, however, while modern biology awaits a solution to these truly perplexing and formidable mysteries, no informed scientist can doubt the historical reality

that biological evolution has occurred. The question is how did life evolve and by what precise means? A similar situation surrounds the Saturn theory, in my opinion. Here, too, the historical evidence is unequivocal that various planets once participated in a polar configuration and wrecked havoc with the inner solar system. The question is how we are to understand these tumultuous historical events from the standpoint of physics?