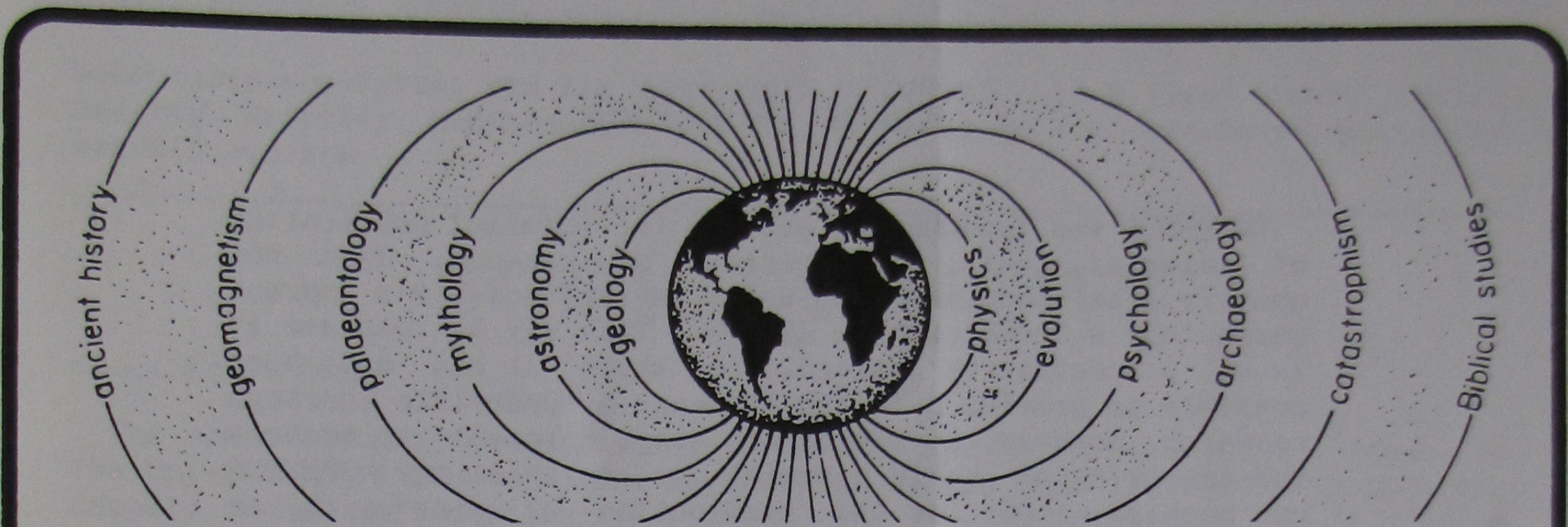




Society for Interdisciplinary Studies
CHRONOLOGY & CATASTROPHISM
WORKSHOP



2003, Number 2

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Gods and Planets (Part 2)

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Continued from Marinus van der Sluijs' article in the last C&C Workshop 2003:1.

Chapter 2: An eclectic attitude?

Roger Ashton in his critique of the Saturn theory accused Velikovskians, apparently including the Saturnists, of tampering with their sources, with the following sarcastic statement:

Velikovskians tend very strongly to take facts and ideas in isolation and out of context, and then glue them together. They then anarchistically try to distort the remaining 99% or 99.99% of facts in each sector in order to try to make it all conform to the ideas and the glueing.[2]

Based on my personal impression of the way Talbott, Cochrane and Cardona perform their research I would never suggest that they manipulate or otherwise deliberately distort the sources they work with. Instead, they typically show care in the use of references and sources not to rip these out of context or twist their meaning. I could not, therefore, agree literally with Ashton's assessment. However, conducting my own research in the field of planetary myth, I have come across a handful of instances where the matter is more complicated than suggested in Saturnist literature, so that the Saturnists' approach in these specific instances might easily be mistaken for an eclectic attitude. Once again, I have no doubt that Talbott, Cochrane and Cardona have always been honest and careful in their approaches, but I would like to bring up a number of issues that make me think the matter regarding planetary gods is somewhat different than presented in the Saturnist theory or that more data need to be taken on board in order to arrive at sound conclusions. I do not accuse anyone of deliberate misrepresentation of the data, but merely wish to show that other solutions are possible than the ones chosen by the Saturnists.

A first example is the following. Talbott reiterates Velikovsky's quotation of a Māori tradition of the planet Saturn as *Parearau*, whose name appears to mean 'her band quite surrounds her'. [3] He does not comment on the fact that *Parearau* was unequivocally regarded as a *female* instead of a male deity in Māori astronomy, leaving his readers with the idea that *Parearau* is a good match for the masculine Saturnian deities of the ancient Greeks and Babylonians. Unfortunately, Talbott also omits to mention the dispute over the identity of *Parearau*. [4] Three native Māori sages have identified *Parearau* as the planet Jupiter, but because they described it as having a ring scholars have *inferred* that they must have erred and must have had Saturn in mind, [5] at the time being unaware of Jupiter's ring system. I would never suggest that Talbott has deliberately left out this information so as to improve his case for Saturn, but suspect that he was simply not aware of the controversy.

A second example is the planetary identification of the Pawnee folk hero U-Pirikucu, literally 'big star', who was better known as Morning Star. Linton suggested that Morning Star may have been the planet Mars:

The actual time of the performance of the sacrifice is not fully known, but it seems to have been made in the late spring or summer of years when Mars was morning star.[6]

Based on the date on which the Pawnee performed a sacrifice to Morning Star, Von del Chamberlain found by retrocalculation of the planets in the sky that Morning Star must have been the planet Mars. Now, Cochrane subsequently utilised the *assumption* of Morning Star being Mars, coupled with the observation that the anthropologist Murie was himself of Skidi blood, as a pivot for the American leg of his theory that mythical figures associated with the planet Mars are typically male and figures associated with Venus female. [7] In reality Von del Chamberlain's idea is no more than an intelligent guess. There is no *direct* testimony from the side of the Pawnee to confirm the identification. We read:

Although this identification is far from certain, astronomer Von Del Chamberlain has shown that it fits well with the celestial circumstances surrounding the only Pawnee Morning Star sacrifice for which we know the date with sufficient accuracy to link the event with the sky.[8]

Note the words 'far from certain'. Morning Star may well be Mars, but we cannot be sure of it. The tentative identification of Morning Star and Mars is obviously too weak to serve as supportive evidence for subsequent theorising. In fact, the mythical character of Morning Star bears a very close resemblance to numerous other 'Morning Star' figures in native American mythology, who are - sometimes directly - identified with Venus and not with Mars. That Morning Star may have been the planet *Venus* as morning star seems to be supported by the fact that the Pawnee Morning Star formed a pair with a girl representing Venus as evening star:

The Morning Star seems to have been a personification of the Male, as the Evening Star was of the female principle. He was conceived of as a warrior who drove the other stars before him from the sky. It was to him that the Skidi band offered a human sacrifice.[9]

Note also that the Pawnee distinguished between the 'true' Morning Star and a 'second' Morning Star:

There were a number of minor heavenly gods, - the second Morning Star, who assisted the Morning Star ...[10]

The coexistence of a true Morning Star and a 'mistaken' Morning Star, as among the Crow Indians, could easily have caused confusion about the correct planetary identity of each of them. In the past, scholars have repeatedly proposed to identify the real Morning Star with Venus, Jupiter, or even a star. [11] It is of the greatest significance to note that the name *U Pirikucu* designated the planets Mars and Jupiter *both*. [12] Considering all this, Cochrane certainly does not strengthen his case by arguing that *all* American Morning Star

figures were incorrectly identified with Venus, offering the Pawnee 'identification' as the sole proof.[13] Why not just accept that the Pawnee Morning Star could have been another celestial body than Mars or that it was probably Venus or Jupiter on the basis of comparative evidence?

Another example concerns classical astronomy. We have a passage in which the Roman philosopher Seneca says that the planet Mars was also called Hercules and the planet Mercury also Apollo.[14] The latter tradition harked back to Hellenistic times. Aristotle already connected the planet *Stilbōn*, 'Mercury', with Hermes and Apollo both, [15] and *Stilbōn Apollōnos*, 'Mercury of Apollo', was also mentioned in the horoscope of Antioch of Commagene, cast on the 17th July 98 BCE. [16] Cochrane utilises Heracles' association with the planet Mars many times in his articles and makes it a foundation point for his theory, yet at the same time claims that Apollo was a clear 'Mars' god as well, because Apollo's mythical entourage is similar to that of Nergal, Erra, Resheph, Heracles, and other 'Mars gods'. Knowing that Cochrane is well aware of Apollo's identification with Mercury in Hellenistic times, I wonder on what grounds he can adhere to the Hellenistic identification of Heracles and Mars and simultaneously abandon the identification of Apollo and Mercury that stemmed from the same tradition? Perhaps Cochrane would resort to a supposed universal association of the same warrior-like characteristics with the planet Mars. But this would not help the Greek case, I imagine, as even in a comparative approach all evidence must first be assessed in its own right. More importantly, however, warrior characteristics were also associated with the planets Saturn, Venus, and Mercury in various parts of the world, as I will go on to show. I thus cannot follow Cochrane's reasoning here. Instead, I suppose an unprejudiced look at the evidence would show that Apollo and Heracles apparently share a nucleus of common mythical characteristics, but that they were assigned to different planets in Hellenistic times, without the slightest indication that they had been planetary gods prior to the Hellenistic era.

Chapter 3: Saturn not universally remembered as the sun

In *The Saturn myth* David Talbott made the claim that the planet Saturn was *universally* remembered as the sun and must, therefore, have shone as a sun in former times:

1. Saturn, not the solar orb, was the authentic 'sun'-god of ancient ritual. 2. Throughout Saturn's reign this sun-planet remained fixed at the north celestial pole. These two themes ... compose a global memory ...[17]

Note the phrase *a global memory*. [18] In lectures the same claim of a universal connection between the sun and Saturn is repeated. The uncritical faction in the audience now believe that there is worldwide testimony for solar Saturn traditions. But the careful reader soon finds that the explicit evidence to substantiate these claims is limited to the Old World only and not to the whole world.

There is no gain saying that the fact that the planet Saturn was identified with the sun in a nucleus of cultures in the Middle East. Franz Boll says with regard to the Babylonian sun that its ...

... Hauptvertreter ist der Saturn, der in vielen Inschriften geradezu wie dann von den Griechen ... als 'Sonne' bezeichnet wird, und die Vertauschung beider Gestirne geht soweit, daß sogar die Opposition von Mond und Sonne in zahlreichen Fällen auf die Stellung des ersteren zum Saturn übertragen wurde.[19]

And Greßmann:

Der höchste Gott wohnt entweder am Pol im höchsten Himmel oder in der Sonne, dem größten Gestirn, oder im Kronos (Saturn), dem fernsten Planeten. Daher stammt die Gleichsetzung Kronos = Helios, die, wie wir jetzt immer deutlicher erkennen, nicht nur in Babylonien, sondern überall in der Astralreligion eine hochbedeutsame Rolle spielte.[20]

And Blass notes with respect to the work of Eudoxus:

In hoc ipso quem modo tractabamus loco Saturni stella non Κρόνου •στήρ vocatur, sed Ἡλίου.[21]

The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus avers that the Babylonians associated Saturn with the sun:

The star which the Greeks name Kronos they call the 'star of the Sun', because it is the most prominent, and gives the most numerous and most important predictions.[22]

Much later, Servius confirms that the god called 'Bel' by the Assyrians represented the planet Saturn and the sun at once:

Apud Assyrios Bel dicitur quadam sacrorum ratione et Saturnus et Sol.[23]

And this tradition was evidently handed down to the Greeks as well, as is shown by a wealth of data. [24] Philippus of Opus, the supposed author of an astronomical treatise called the *Epinomis*, says that the slowest planet bears the name of Helios: ... *pre-eminent among the planets for its slowness was the one whom some call (Kronos) ...* [25] Kronos' name is substituted here for Helios' in some manuscripts. [26] Saturn is also recorded as *stella solis*, the 'star of Sol'. [27] Eratosthenes wrote that the planet Saturn was called *hēliou astēr*, 'star of Helios':

The first star is a large one, Phaenon ['shining'], associated with Zeus. The second star is not large. It is called Phaethon ['radiant'] and is named for Helios.[28]

In a certain papyrus Saturn is identified as *o tou ēliou astēr*. [29] And the planet Saturn is also shortly called *ēlion*, 'sun', in the accusative case. [30] Ptolemy also says that the inhabitants of Mesopotamia revere the star of Venus under the name of Isis, and that of Saturn as Mithras Helios. [31] Hyginus called Saturn the planet of Sol, others say of Saturn. [32] Others simply wrote that Saturn was the most important celestial object, [33] which frankly amounts to the same. The tradition seems to have been retained among alchemists, who called the planet Saturn *the best sun*. [34]

Similar traditions can be found in India, where

the planet Saturn was styled *Sūryaputra*, *Ravisuta*, *Saurai*, all names associated with the sun. [36] As far as the first of these epithets is concerned, meaning 'son of the sun', this does not seem to go back any earlier than the time the Mahābhārata was written. This, at least, is what Scherer says:

Saturn als 'Sohn der Sonne' heißt sūrya-putra- seit Mbh. 6, 81 ... [36]

This body of material is the only *direct* evidence for an early identification of the planet Saturn and the sun. All other sorts of evidence for solar Saturns are indirect: a god identified with the planet Saturn is further identified with another god, who also shows vestiges of solar worship, and so on. But these are deductions that cannot count as direct evidence.

The evidence thus massively speaks for a strong tradition associating Saturn and the sun, but if we take a critical look at it we see that there is no ground to say that the planet Saturn is *universally* recognised as the first sun - a phrase that I have heard being used in speeches held at Kronia conferences. The quoted examples, representing all direct evidence offered by the Saturnists - and more - to prove this point, conclusively show that the association between Saturn and the sun was made in India, Babylonia, and the classical world. This sounds impressive enough, but it is an established fact that the high cultures of the Old World were all interlinked with each other. China has been greatly influenced by India from the earliest times, especially by the means of Buddhism, and India was, in turn, heavily influenced by the Greeks who settled in parts of India in the aftermath of Alexander the Great's victories in the east. Remember the late attestation of the sun - Saturn connection in India. Earlier even the people of India are believed to have been in touch with the Babylonians and Sumerians, especially in regard of astronomy and agriculture. It is also widely held that Egypt in its earliest days was strongly receptive towards Mesopotamian astronomy. In all these cultures the spread of astronomy appears to have gone hand in hand with the spread of agriculture, progressing outwards from Babylonia. Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China must, therefore, be treated as one cultural continuum, at least in their shared residue, and it is not to be excluded that the Polynesians learned from the Hindus and the Maya from the Chinese as well. The spread of astronomy from a Babylonian origin is widely acknowledged and backed up with proper documentation. It shows that all evidence quoted above in favour of a connection between Saturn and the sun counts for only one 'mythogenetic' origin and certainly not for a 'universal' tradition. There is no evidence for the same connection between the sun and the planet Saturn in other parts of the world, unconnected with the Babylonian sphere of influence. Did cultures in America, Africa and Oceania once believe that the planet Saturn was the first sun, their traditions subsequently having been obliterated and lost in the course of centuries? [37] It may be, but it is better to acknowledge that at this point there simply is no evidence available to substantiate such a claim. And although such evidence may be forthcoming - who knows what treasures lie

waiting in the unread reports of anthropologists? - this in fact suffices to disprove the claim of Saturn's universal solar aspect for the moment being. As Peter James remarked:

... the Saturnists have yet to find any evidence that Saturn held any special importance in the myths and legends of the ancient peoples of America. Clearly, the curious beliefs about Saturn were simply due to the spread of astronomical/astrological knowledge among neighbouring cultures. [38]

Of course it remains to be explained why the Babylonians would have compared the sun and the planet Saturn. Their culture is the oldest writing culture in the world. Various explanations have been proffered. Peter James speculated that a flare-up of Saturn might have been the explanation for the planet's association with the sun. Franz Cumont says that Saturn was the 'planet of the sun' or the sun of the night ...

... that is to say, according to a system of substitutions, of which there are many examples, Saturn could take in astrological combinations the place of the star of day when the latter had disappeared. [39]

In a like manner Jupiter seems to have been associated with the moon: *Jupiter could signify the moon in what seems a contrived parallel to Saturn signifying the sun. [40]* David Brown discusses a few more suggestions as to how to account for the equation of sun and Saturn. [41] Cumont, Boll, Koch-Westenholz and other scholars are true paragons of ancient astronomical theory, steeped in knowledge and experience, whose opinions should not be dismissed lightly.

The substitution could also have been made for the reason Boll mentioned above: the planet Saturn as the outermost sphere occupying the outermost orbit then known represented for that reason the all-encompassing deity, within whose interior the entire cosmos was enclosed. This notion coincided with an archetypal feature of the creator-god, who is everywhere the all-inclusive dragon, the serpent coiling round the world, the all-encircling ocean, and so on. The planet Saturn as the outermost orbit was an apt symbolic substitute for the archetypal idea of the all-enclosing deity - a *symbolic substitute*, that is, not necessarily the origin of the archetype. Roger Ashton rightly made the point:

Shamash the god was originally no more the Sun than Saturn the planet. Both the Sun and Saturn are displacement metaphors. During the process of corruption of the earliest content of myth, interchangeable metaphors for godly attributes led in time to spurious narratives and misleading divergences of idiom, whi[ch] I shall in due course illustrate. [42]

The sun for different reasons represented the same archetypal creator-god, and so it may be that both the planet Saturn and the sun inherited a common archetypal myth by means of symbolism. For a more detailed discussion of this methodology I refer to my forthcoming *Comparative mythology*.

[References can be found on the Web site]