

# FORTEAN TRAVELLER



opportunity to survey from above these mysterious markings and fire away with my camera.

The Nazca lines enjoy a widespread popularity and are still a long way from any satisfactory explanation.

These geoglyphs, found in southwestern Peru in close proximity to the Pacific coastline, are a UNESCO World Heritage Site and thought to have been produced between 200 BC and AD 700 by people archaeologists refer to as the "Nazca culture". Although the most consistent features of the region are the lines – as well as the elongated trapezoids that the maverick Swiss writer Erich von Däniken famously presented as landing strips for alien visitors – the Nazca plain also showcases a few dozen iconic images, epitomised by such famous figures as the Spider, the Hummingbird, the Flamingo, and the Monkey, each of which measures some 50–200m (165–660ft) on the ground. These delicate features were traced out simply by removing rocks from the surface of the desert. Their prolonged survival was facilitated by the practical absence of wind and rain in this exceedingly dry corner of the planet.

Less well known is that there is a second set of figures immediately adjacent to this area, known as the 'Palpa lines'. While the Nazca lines have been thoroughly mapped by the German mathematician and archaeologist Maria Reiche (1903–1998 – see FT120:45), whose humble residence can still be visited, the Palpa lines have not yet been completely charted and possibly antedate the Nazca lines by some centuries. As the Peruvian government strictly proscribes any pedestrian activity in either one of these archaeological zones, researchers associated with the municipality of Palpa appear to have a monopoly on new discoveries in the area. The state of the art can be checked out at the interesting museum housed inside Palpa's town hall.

Tourists flying over the Nazca lines with one of a few companies based in Nazca are not usually taken outside the familiar circuit that takes in the highlights seen on postcards and in books. During my visit to the region in May 2008, however, I arranged for the pilot to follow an extended itinerary taking in the Palpa lines region as well. Despite the protestations of my vestibular organs and a rush of adrenaline, this has resulted in what I believe is the discovery of a number of figures that have so far escaped attention.

The day after the flight, I was confined to my hotel room in Nazca, where intense convulsions kept turning my physical frame inside-out at regular intervals. Yet as soon as I had regained enough energy to pore over the digital photographs I had taken, using optical zoom factors of up to 12, several man-made features leaped out

## 70. The Palpa Lines, Peru

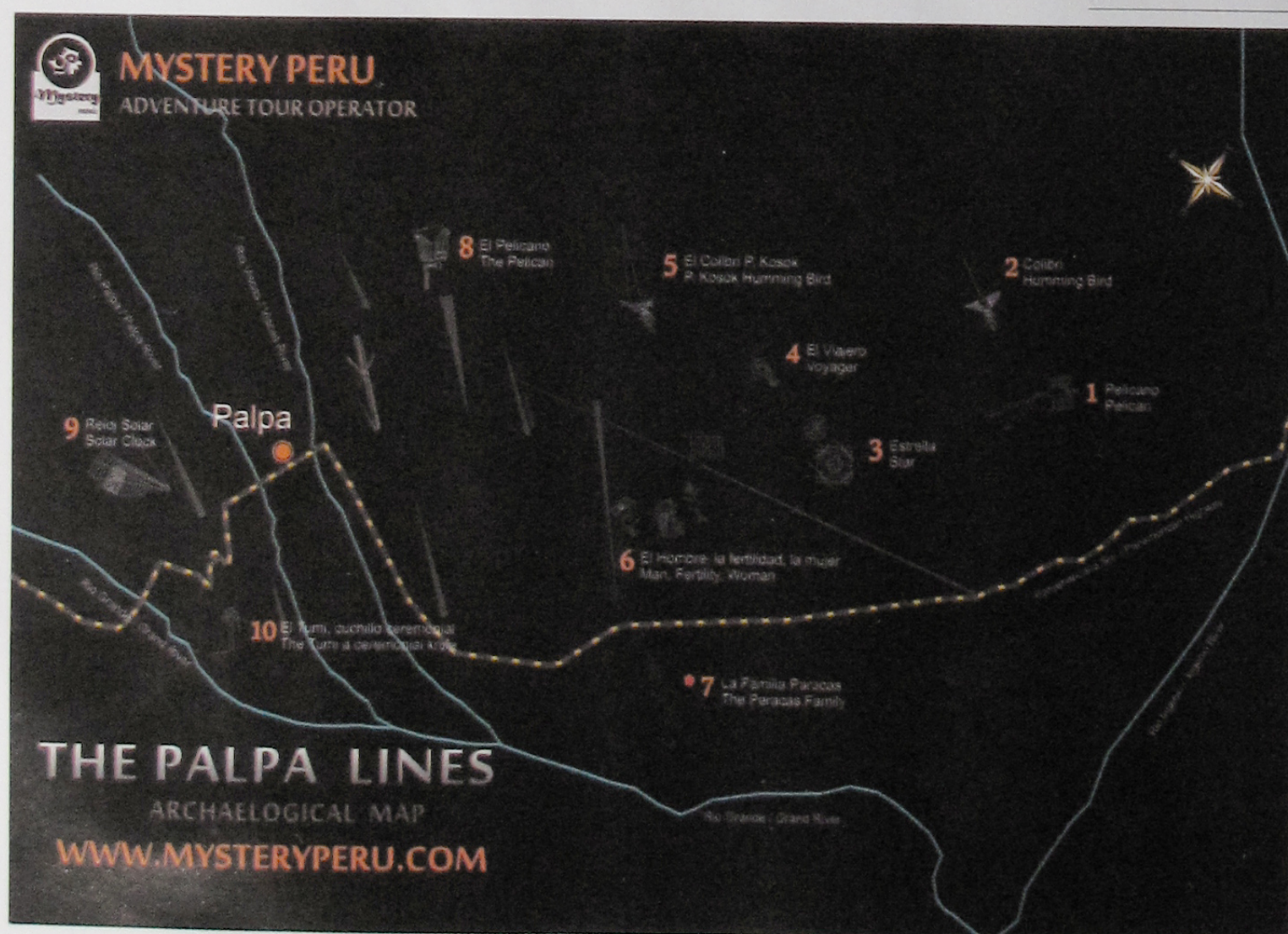
**MARINUS ANTHONY VAN DER SLUIJS** holds on to his churning stomach while overflying some the lesser-known neighbours of the famed Nazca Lines.

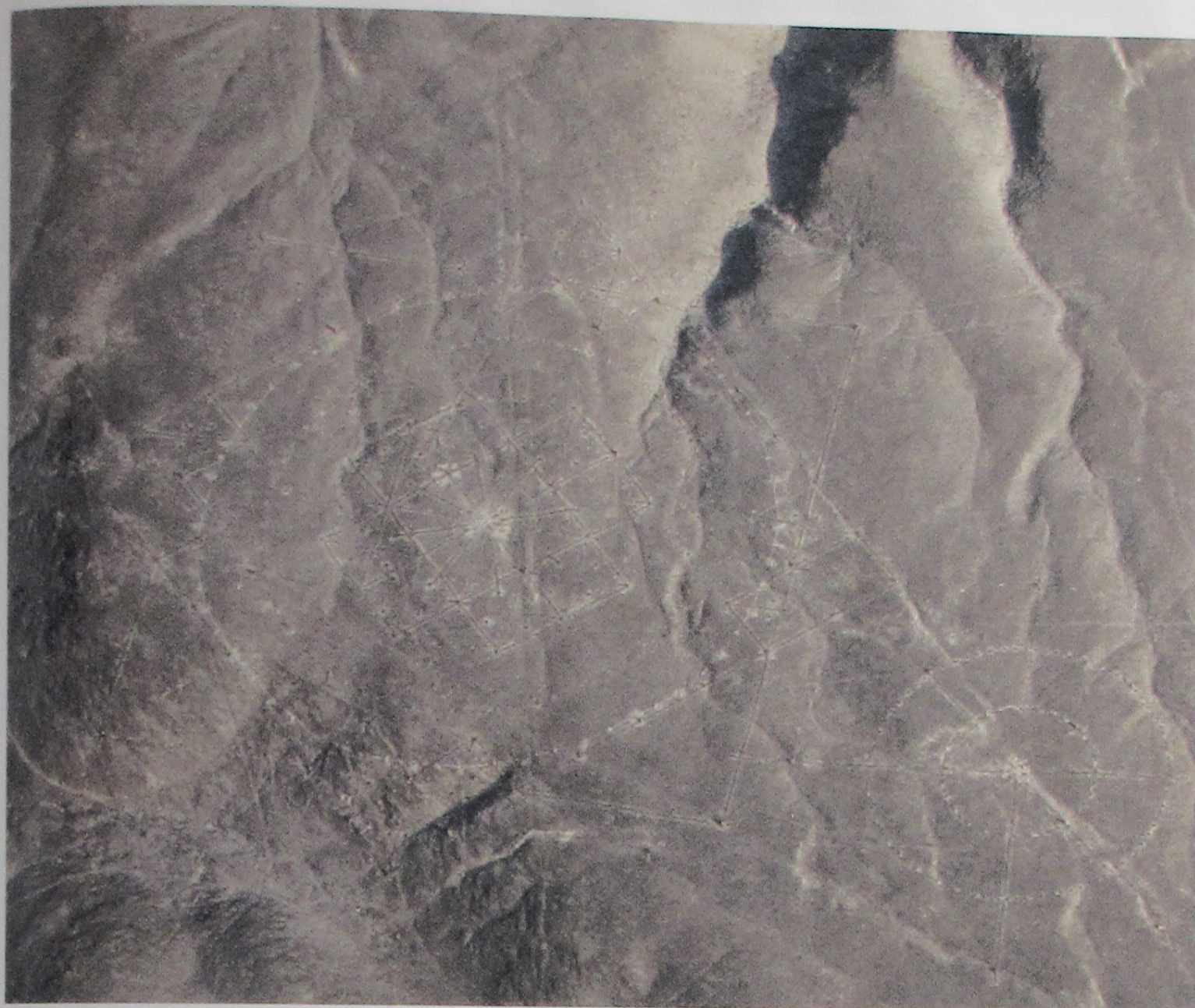
**A**wave of nausea surges through my system as the pilot abruptly banks our light aircraft to the left. Suspended over the Nazca lines at an angle of 60°, my stomach turns and I force myself to keep breathing calmly. As we circle around the crisp figure of the Spider, 45m (150ft) long, the guide draws attention to the elongated right leg of the creature and explains that this identifies the animal as a species of the arachnid order of *Ricinulei*, which reproduce by transforming a leg into a protrusible tube that can only be seen with the help of a microscope. As the plane soars up again – seemingly almost vertically – it is not the vertiginous heights that make me feel giddy, but the motion sickness I'm prone to whenever I am manœuvred at fast-changing angles and speeds on board a smallish airborne vehicle. Yet

I'm determined to bite the bullet, as I have come to this remote part of the world with a mission: to gather information about a little-known structure of stone circles that was erected centuries before the rise of the Incas by the elusive people who occupied the Nazca desert. Setting my faith in the magic properties of fresh ginger, which I place on my tongue at close intervals to stave off the worst bouts of wooziness, I make the most of this unique

### The Palpa lines may be older than those found at Nazca

BELOW: The Palpa Lines are part of the available itinerary for adventure tours.





that I had not been able to discern with the unaided eye during the flight. My intention of taking GPS measurements of these recordings was frustrated by the inability of my GPS device to receive signals through the thick glass windows of the aircraft. Nevertheless, I am confident that the images described below are all situated in the southwestern quadrant of the Palpa region, to the far side of the familiar 'Hummingbird' and the Nazca lines proper.

The complex geometric figure known as *La Estrella* or 'the Star', rarely mentioned in the literature, formed my original motivation to explore the Palpa lines. On the chart supplied by *Mystery Perú*,<sup>1</sup> one of the companies that offer flights over this area, the configuration identified as the Star comprises two juxtaposed forms: a small set of three concentric circles, divided into eight sections, and a larger composition of two squares, one turned 45° with respect to the other, with a set of two concentric circles and a smaller cross-shaped structure at its centre. The first thing I noticed upon perusal of my pictures is that the group includes a third, much fainter figure: a second set of concentric circles is situated opposite, resulting in a 'Mickey Mouse' type of arrangement. The absence of any vegetation in the area makes it hard to estimate the scale of the structure, but a few hundred metres for the entire group seems a safe assumption. My photographs suggest that the perimeters of the circles are dotted with holes or rocks

at equal distances. If rocks, these circles are comparable to stone circles and medicine wheels found in North America and Europe. Uncharacteristic of such stone circles, however, is the presence of symmetric quadrangular structures seen here at Palpa. The combination of squares inscribed in circles that are, in turn, surrounded by squares might suggest to the viewer a more recent origin than is warranted from an archaeological point of view. Certainly, the geometric rigour displayed in 'the Star', as well as the subtlety with which its lines have been traced out, sets it apart from the more rounded

**ABOVE:** *La Estrella* or the Star.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** The Fortress and its odd inscription which looks like "INA" in Roman letters.

**BELOW:** Rays, lozenges and dots feature among the markings.



forms of the animal figures. While the original significance of this remarkable artefact remains anyone's guess, an interest in mathematics must certainly have driven the architects. Arguably, this "Stonehenge of the southern hemisphere" presents an even greater challenge to the imagination of modern archaeoastronomers than Wiltshire's famed monument.

Passing over the familiar figures dubbed the 'Voyager' and the 'Maze', which have been noted by many others, some more subtle structures I spotted in my photographs include a circle formed of eight equidistant lozenges, situated within a series of near-parallel rays, and, in its immediate vicinity, a dense grid of polka dots.

Not far from the river and close to the figure known as *El Tumi* or the 'Ceremonial Knife', I spotted a structure comparable to a 'Fortress' or a 'Sprocket Wheel', not found on any maps I have seen, as well as what appear to be the letters 'INA' in the Roman alphabet, in two different sizes.

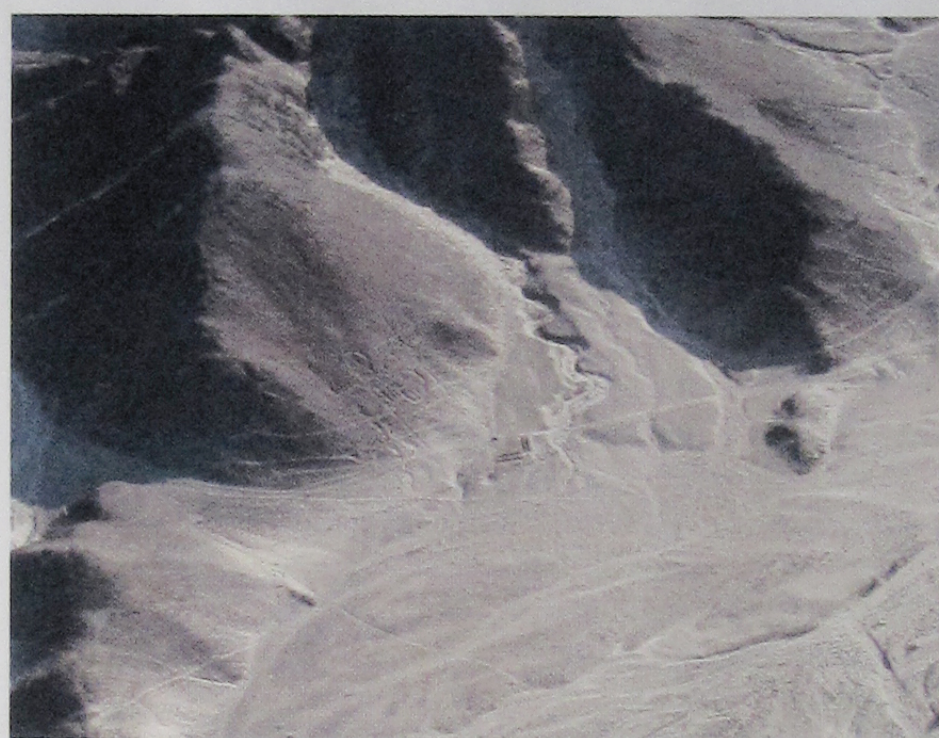




Judging by the presence of a road, I would suspect at least the inscription to be of modern origin. In the same area, not far from the Pan-American highway, I made out an anthropomorphic figure, the hair of which extends to the left, the top and the right at right angles.

Most surprising of all was a figure I discovered on a shot taken on the way back to Nazca; it is inscribed on the foot of a hill just a minute's flight from the green valley that straddles the Rio Grande. This image, never reproduced on any maps I have seen or in the Palpa museum, resembles a juvenile bird like a duck – were it not for some strikingly reptilian features, such as its thick and short extended tail and the structure of its head and bill. Had they seen it, the enigmatic creature would undoubtedly have been grist to the mill of the company I was with that day – a select group of creationists from the American West in search of evidence that dinosaurs and human beings occupied the same slot in geological time.

The group was headed by Dr Dennis Swift, a theologian and pastor who has published on the riddle of the Ica Stones (see FT151:28–32), and included a soft-spoken artist sporting an impressive white beard whose unshakable conviction that the Earth is flat would have seemed eerily out of place even in ancient Greece. Dragons painted on the pottery of the Moche people, to the north of Lima, as well as the scenes depicted on the Ica Stones had already convinced this party that the pre-Inca civilisations of Peru had been treated to an unusually generous share of encounters with beasts that geologists assign to the Mesozoic age. The sight of the puzzling creature I unwittingly photographed while in the throes of biliousness would have delighted these enthusiastic dissenters had they been on the same aeroplane following the same itinerary; this was not to be, and I seem to have been the bird's only



observer that day.

Dennis produced one or two images of 'dinosaurs' he claims to have discovered among the geoglyphs of Nazca and Palpa on other occasions, including a 'Triceratops' that fails to convince me.<sup>2</sup> I likewise reserve judgment with respect to the curious 'bird' I detected at Palpa. Deferring to experts any pronouncements on its zoological or cryptozoological status as well as the construction date of this formation, I merely wish to submit these images to readers in the interest of uninhibited scholarly research. While I cannot help noting a touch of apparent modernity in the almost dinosaurian aspect of the 'bird' and the geometric rigidity of the grid-like structures and the Star, the antiquity of the latter might be vouched for by a possible parallel with the lay-out of Stonehenge and other ancient artefacts with annular structures that involve a periodicity of 112, 56 or 28.<sup>3</sup> Adding to the mystery is the fact that the complete absence of vegetation or any significant amount of rain would make it very hard for hoaxers to produce these figures without leaving traces.

The way forward must surely be to check when 'lay people' were last allowed to tread this land and to continue with *in situ* observations of

**TOP LEFT:** An anthropomorphic figure labelled The Woman.

**TOP RIGHT:** A bird with possible reptilian traits suggesting the figure of a dinosaur.

**ABOVE:** A wider view of the area surrounding the "dinosaur".

the markings insofar as the Peruvian government allows. With naturalistic interpretations of the figures, one can easily go astray; a far more promising line of investigation is that the creatures depicted in the Peruvian sand represent mythical entities. Were these conceived during hallucinatory experiences, in line with a popular theory in the study of ancient rock art? Were they meant to constitute a map of the spirit world that would guide the shaman in his or her psychonautic journeys? Did they correspond to aurora-like manifestations, including linear configurations known as 'Birkeland currents', as the American plasma physicist, Anthony Peratt, proposes? And is there a connection with the fossil of a prehistoric whale found at Nazca, bearing in mind that traditional peoples throughout the world were wont to associate fossils with primordial mythical beings?

Hypotheses will probably continue to outnumber answers for the foreseeable future, but one thing is clear: treading in the footsteps of the ancient Nazcans, modern scholars should leave no stone unturned. **FT**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/y65yw7b> (mysteryperu.com).

<sup>2</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/y5n952z> (dinosaursandman.com).

<sup>3</sup> This suggestion was made to me by Dr Anthony L Peratt and relates to his analysis of Stonehenge as well as other stone circles as Synchrotron Light Recordings or SLRs from Antiquity. See AL Peratt: "Characteristics for the Occurrence of a High-current, Z-pinch Aurora as Recorded in Antiquity", *IEEE Transactions on Plasma Science*, 31, 6, 1192-1214: 1209-1212 (Dec 2003); AL Peratt: "Evidence for an Intense Aurora Recorded in Antiquity" (conf. record, 30th IEEE International Conference on Plasma Science; Jeju, South Korea, 2003), p143; AH Qöyawayma & AL Peratt, "The Influence of 56 Synchrotron Radiating Birkeland Filaments Formed in an Archaic Auroral Sheath on Man-Made Structures and Artifacts Found Worldwide" (conf. record, *Proceedings of the IEEE International Conference on Pulsed Power and Plasma Science*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2007, p623.



**MARINUS ANTHONY VAN DER SLUIJS** is a consulting scholar with the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.