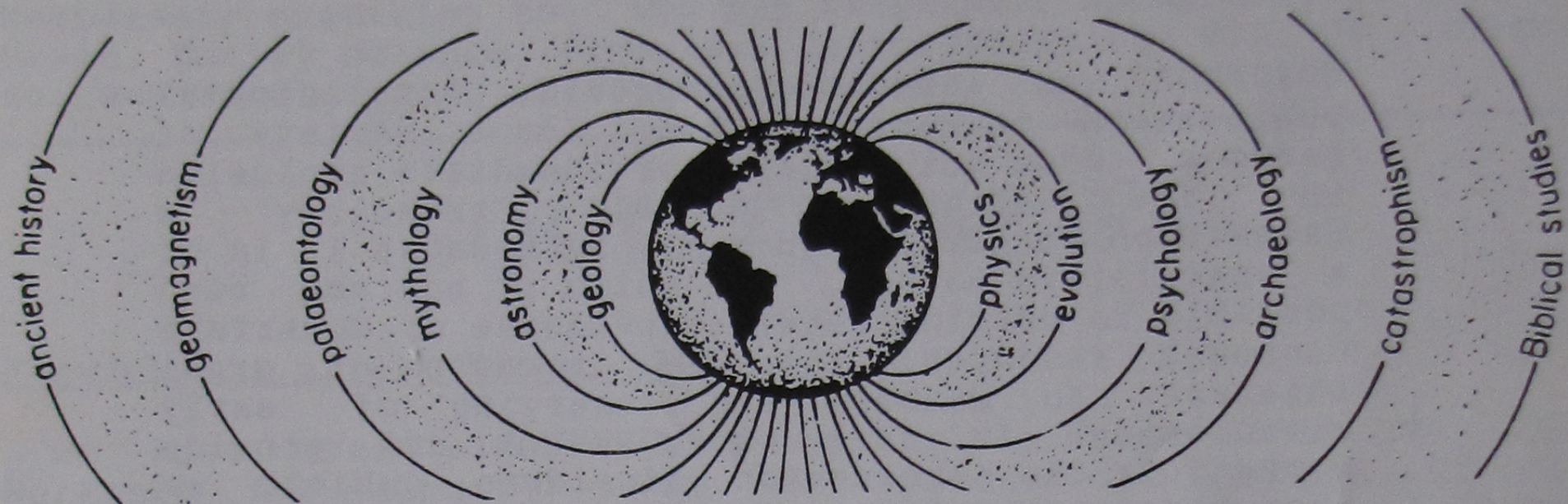




Society for Interdisciplinary Studies
CHRONOLOGY & CATASTROPHISM
WORKSHOP



2003, Number 1

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Gods and Planets

www.mythopedia.info/gods-and-planets.htm

The fallacy of Velikovskyan catastrophism. ©2003 Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs. Summary: A common assumption of Velikovskyan theories is that there is an archetypal, one-to-one relationship between specific gods and specific planets: if you read a myth about a planetary god, that myth must have its origin in the history or the behaviour of the associated planet. The birth myth of Aphrodite, for instance, must be explained by reference to former behaviour of the planet Venus. The inference sounds logical, yet in this treatise I argue that it is erroneous. There is evidence that the specific identifications of planets with gods is marginal or non-existent in many parts of the world, and of late origin in other parts. The myths generally existed prior to the establishment of links with planets.

Although this conclusion removes the planetary component from Velikovskyan theories of myth, the possibility that the myths reflected the appearance and development of certain solid bodies at close quarters with the earth is by no means discarded. The various aspects of the Saturnists' polar configuration in particular retain their validity as reliable reconstructions of the mythical archetypes, that must have once displayed themselves in visible form in the night sky. I contend and concur with the Saturn theory (1) that all mythical archetypes were spawned by catastrophic encounters with solid bodies in the sky, (2) that these encounters provoked plasma configurations - somewhat like auroras on a massive scale - similar in character with the postulated 'polar configuration', and (3) that the earth was for some time in polar alignment with these cosmic bodies.

During the catastrophic disruption of the configuration the ancient stargazers lost track of the solid bodies in case and noted that the gods had disappeared. Across the globe the remembered agents of the disaster were subsequently and independently re-identified with the planets, with comets, with the sun, the moon, the most conspicuous stars, and a host of other natural phenomena, in the belief that these bodies represented the true gods of the lost configuration. Hence the same gods came to be identified with many different planets and other celestial phenomena through an indirect process of symbolical representation. This is a subtle digression from the Saturnist view that the planets Mars, Venus, and Saturn were directly linked with the gods through an unbroken line of tradition - a digression which is of profound significance for a correct understanding of the nature of myth.

1 A Constructive Approach Towards the Saturn Theory:

Catastrophism and planetary catastrophism are not the same thing and should not be recklessly identified with each other. Catastrophism as the general theory of earth-threatening and life-altering impacts on earth is now very much in vogue and boasts a respectable corpus of supportive data.

Planetary catastrophism is a highly speculative and much more radical interpretation of the history of the solar system, according to which some of the planets themselves were on erratic courses in the recent past. This brand of catastrophism was first launched by Immanuel Velikovsky in the 1950s.

Many people today still uphold the value of Velikovsky's work and it is possible to define a general *Neo-Velikovskyan* movement, consisting of thinkers who are historically connected with Immanuel Velikovsky or have elaborated his ideas further. Among these are the exponents of the Saturn theory, who have greatly inspired my own reasoning and helped me to explore previously uncharted vistas in the world of mythology. As the Saturn theory still appears to be in its formative stages, it is of great importance that methodological flaws in the theory are clearly identified and corrected before it is to be embraced by wider groups of people. False assumptions may also hinder the progress of proper model-making.

The Saturn theory has further pursued Velikovsky's enquiry of the mythical associations of the planets. In 1980 David Talbott published *The Saturn Myth*, in which he showed that many cultures from around the world associate similar yet curious traditions with the planet Saturn. 'Saturn gods' are widely remembered as creators of the universe, kings of the Golden Age, and, most curiously, as identical with the gods of the sun and the north pole. Following these patterns to their logical consequences, Talbott reasoned that the planet Saturn must therefore have stood at the celestial north pole in a former past, looming large enough to be remembered as the true sun for centuries after the planet had lost its eminent position in the sky.

In close cooperation with Ev Cochrane and Dwardu Cardona the model was further expanded by deciphering the parts of the planets Venus and Mars in the hypothetical events of the past. It was found that the planet Venus is almost universally remembered as a goddess and Velikovsky's conclusion that many ancient traditions described the planet Venus in cometary forms was confirmed. Other traditions showed that Venus, too, was associated with the mythical centre of the world, identified as the celestial north pole. Ev Cochrane in many articles pertaining to ancient Mars lore found that the planet Mars was universally remembered as a warrior, who had come from the north pole of heaven and had been in conjunction with the planet Venus during a period of stability. All of this taken together led to the development of a physical model of a 'polar configuration' more revolutionary than any other model of myth offered before. It assumed that the earth had once, within the reach of human memory, been aligned and phase-locked with the planets Mars, Venus, Saturn and perhaps Jupiter in that order. All appeared to be located in the stable polar centre of the cosmos, held together by a common axis running through their poles like a 'shish-kebab'. From an earth-bound perspective

Venus appeared in front of Saturn, and Mars in the centre of Venus. The subsequent displacements of Mars and Venus from their positions would have led to the disintegration of the polar configuration and the inauguration of the current system of planets orbiting around the sun. The highly dynamic phases through which the whole configuration passed would have provided the visual origin for the myths, rituals and icons of the world.

Strange as this scenario may seem, it gives a much fairer hearing to mythology itself than any other theory proposed before. As a celestial catastrophe - with or without implications for the atmosphere of the earth - it answers all demands that an explanation for the origin of mythology should meet. The specific forms reconstructed to have existed in the polar configuration make sense of uncountable traditions in mythology. Much of this material has been discussed in Ev Cochrane's *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997) and *the Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), as well as the many articles by Talbott, Cochrane, Cardona, and Moss that have appeared in the magazines *Kronos* and *Aeon*. And as if all that is not enough, the model has received quite a credible physical basis of support - at least for a layman like myself - by the involvement of Bob Grubaugh, Fred Jueneman, Wallace Thornhill, Don Scott, Anthony Peratt, and others in the movement, all of whom have contributed to the understanding that there is a physical possibility and even likelihood for the former existence of the configuration. In its most recent formulation, which will be presented in the forthcoming *Thunderbolts of the Gods*, co-authored by David Talbott and Wallace Thornhill, the model works with the idea that electromagnetical forces play a far greater part in the physics of the cosmos than was previously assumed, and that plasma phenomena were prominent in the polar configuration as well, accounting for many of the puzzling 'symbols of an alien sky' gathered by Saturnists before.

Methodologically, the Saturnists - if I am allowed to use that generalisation - have achieved far more than Immanuel Velikovsky. Especially David Talbott has often placed stress on the specific lines of reasoning that lead to his spectacular ideas, arguing that the model perfectly lends itself for testing by the numerous acid-tests it generates. All of this greatly enhances the credibility of the model. To be sure, my own view on the history of the polar configuration shares a good deal of the methodological underpinnings of the Saturn theory and was based on its central ideas to a large extent.

It is true that Talbott, Cochrane and Cardona have all written bits and pieces about matters of method and reasoning, which are generally very insightful and often incorporated in my own views as well. Yet in spite of that, a more or less complete picture of how exactly the new model of myth relates to previous schools of thinking - in which respects it differs and how it arrives at its conclusions epistemologically - has never really been advanced, and the train of reasoning in my view lacks

consideration of some alternative possibilities worthwhile to be contemplated. To put it bluntly, I cannot help but think that the Saturnist *method* appears to be more something of an afterthought, originating from previously hidden assumptions implicit in Velikovsky's work, rather than an actual guideline through the maze of possibilities that the myths offer us.

It is not with any feelings of hostility that I dismiss some of the Saturnists' tenets in the following text. In fact, I would have loved to support their entire work, had I not felt that a dead end had been reached methodologically, so that real progress could only be made once a number of obstacles were removed first. In my opinion, respect does not necessarily imply complete acceptance, although it is with some regret that I now take up arms against a number of pioneering scholars who have shown to be great friends and sincere investigators above all, worthy of an honest and thought-out response. I hope that my criticism will be understood as constructive thinking, intended to pursue the great discoveries made by Talbott, Cochrane, and Cardona further, and not as scathing to anyone's reputation or work, so that the good harmony in which we cooperate may not be damaged by what follows. Let us encourage each other to investigate in honesty and without any concern for competition or personal honours what really transpired in the elusive past about which we apparently know so little. Whether the Saturnists would prove my criticism wrong or would accept it and correct the model accordingly, it would be to the benefit of all if the considerations presented in this paper were at least heard. A challenge is therefore offered to those who subscribe to the Saturn model.

In my opinion one of the core assumptions in all brands of Velikovskyan thinking - the Saturn theory included - is undermined by a methodological weakness that has hitherto barely been exposed. This is the issue of the exact nature of the concept of *planetary gods*. Just as some gods have close associations with the sun and others with the moon, so there is a class of planet gods, which was especially prominent in the cultures of antiquity. Such planetary gods as Marduk, Nergal, Ishtar, Kronos, Zeus, Hermes, Ares and Aphrodite belong to the most conspicuous figures in Babylonian and Greek mythology. Velikovskyan make extensive use of the mythologies attached to the gods of the planets, but have not so far produced a more detailed study of the relationship between a god's myth and a god's planetary connotation. Instead, they have always taken it for granted that the identification of the god with the planet was original and that the myths surrounding the planetary gods had risen in reflection of the planet's behaviour and history. The implicit rationale in the Saturn theory is that gods and goddesses who exhibit similar features as these definitely planetary deities must for that reason have represented those same planets as well, especially if the features in case are not immediately obvious with regard to the contemporaneous behaviour of the respective

planets. Thus, one of Cochrane's strongholds is that the god Apollo must originally have represented the planet Mars, because his oldest characteristics are remarkably similar to those of Nergal, Ares, Resheph, Heracles, and other gods positively known to have represented the planet Mars. In this derivative way, numerous deities are shown to have had planetary origins. The typically mythical characteristics of those gods are then traced back to the early history of the planets themselves.

At first sight the argument seems logical and straightforward enough, but the more you think about it, the more unjustified it becomes. Is it not possible that some or all planetary gods *acquired* their planetary characteristics *in later times*, simultaneously with the increase of astronomical interest, for instance? Is it not thinkable that the myths are older than the specific planetary identifications of some gods, so that the origin of those myths must *not* be sought in the planetary connotation? Could it not be that the similarities between Apollo, Heracles, and Nergal predate the connection of the latter two with Mars, tracing to an older substratum of archetypal narrative traits? Enough is at stake to pay some attention to the matter.

In my opinion there is a more economic way to maintain the notion of celestial catastrophe as the basis for myth, yet simultaneously reject direct connections between specific gods and specific planets. In this respect – but not in all respects! – I can see where Roger Ashton was coming from when he wrote:

Velikovskians reconstruct myth with planets in place of gods. With the planets are then associated the attributes and deeds of the gods, both of which in turn are interpreted in a planetary fashion. In all of this, there is a long string of superimposed hypotheses, usually punctuated in any given essay with mutually separated components of circular arguments. The governing assumptions of this process are generally unstated.[1]

In what follows I will work this out and show why there is a historical discontinuity between the divine celestial agents in the mythical prototype and the actual planets observed in the sky in post-catastrophic times.

Further article contents: 2 an eclectic attitude? 3 Saturn not universally remembered as the sun 4 no universal gender distinction of the planets 5 no archetypal rôle distinction between the mythical characters, but an exchange of rôles 6 the planetary identification of the gods a secondary development 7 discontinuity in observation of the planets 8 the planetary identifications as mere symbols 9 casting the planets in archetypal rôles: the mechanism of symbol transfer 10 myth and the interdisciplinary approach: Talbot's reply 11 myth and true science: Cardona's reply 12 myth and chronology: Cochrane's reply 13 were the gods planets?

Reference 1: 'The Unworkable Polar Saturn', *Aeon*, I. 3, 1988: ad loc

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