

Pseudo-Archaeology and the Media: A Case Study of Ancient Egypt

by

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Thesis:

This paper will analyze various pseudo-archaeological theories and myths regarding ancient Egypt which the media frequently puts forward. One by one, I will present the true archaeological stories to debunk these theories in order to lay each pseudo-archaeological claim to rest. Furthermore, my goal for this paper is to establish how influential and manipulative the media has the power to be, and how this gives the public a significant misconception about ancient Egypt. This is due to the media's growing popularity, its refusal to provide proper evidence for the theories it sets forth, and its ability to manipulate evidence and context(s) in order to fit its narrative(s). Using ancient Egypt as an example allows me to show just how negative the media can be regarding history that is thousands of years old, and how little is known to the public at large.

Within each chapter, readers will find extensive evidence to counter pseudo-archaeological claims about ancient Egypt. First, Chapter 1 will discuss the false claims made by author Erich von Däniken and his attempt to credit extraterrestrials for building the Great Pyramid of Giza. What is significant of this chapter is not just countering his claims, but to acknowledge that he, an individual with no archaeological training or historical background, could write a book (*Chariots of the Gods?*) based on his outlandish theories.

Next, Chapter 2 will analyze the History Channel's "Ancient Aliens" and its weak attempts to manipulate audiences into believing that Pharaoh Akhenaten was an extraterrestrial. This chapter is significant in that this show's global popularity exposes uneducated minds to such theories without proper archaeological or scientific evidence.

Then, Chapter 3 breaks down the curse of King Tutankhamun, and further recounts where Egyptian curses originated. Newspaper outlets of the Victorian Era greatly influenced the perception of ancient Egypt, which ultimately led the public to perceive Egyptologists' findings to be fantastical and mysterious. The importance of this chapter is to establish how the frenzy of all things Egypt originated.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the mainstream media's tendency to negatively portray ancient Egypt. The consequences of the media's perception also negatively affects the validity of archaeologists as academics, and archaeology as a discipline. Its importance is to give readers an in depth examination of the persuasive mechanisms it uses to exaggerate a culture's 'outlandish' features. My hope is to inform readers of the harm which pseudo-archaeology has the potential to cause. Some harm is miniscule, however, the concept of going against mainstream archaeology is what must be exemplified.

Before we begin, there must be a clear understanding of what pseudo-archaeology means. It is the false interpretations of the human past which deliberately ignore and go against mainstream archaeology. With the help of the media, it harms society's perception of our ancient past. Those who engage in it seek beneficial outcomes for their beliefs; fame, views, and profit are the most notable. For the sake of this paper, I must also outline the frequently debated use of the term 'alternative archaeology' rather than 'pseudo'. To explain the difference, I look to professors Garrett Fagan and Kenneth Feder, "People who cheat at poker are not playing 'alternative' poker. They are manipulating play to ensure a beneficial outcome, all the while presenting themselves to the table as regular poker players. The same can be said of pseudoarchaeology" (2006, 721).

Chapter 1: Erich von Däniken and The Great Pyramid of Giza

This chapter will discuss The Great Pyramid of Giza and the ever revolving pseudo-archaeological claims it attracts. A brief, but necessary, outline of ancient Egypt will educate readers in regard to the outlandish claims made by an uneducated history enthusiast, Swiss author Erich von Däniken. I will illustrate his false claims while providing factual evidence completed by true archaeologists, historians, and scholars. Further, I will discuss von Däniken's inability to credit the ancient Egyptian people for their wondrous accomplishments as he genuinely undermines their tools, mentality, and ingenuity in hopes of promoting the Ancient Astronaut Theory: the theory that aliens came to earth and gave our ancient ancestors the knowledge to build the thriving civilizations they later became.

The Great Pyramid of Giza is known as the last of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and its construction by ancient Egyptians has sparked great interest at the Giza Plateau and Egypt itself over the last few centuries. The Great Pyramid was built by King Khufu of the 4th dynasty (2589-2566 B.C.) during Egypt's Old Kingdom (c. 2686-2160 B.C.) (Shaw 2000, 482). Its remarkable size has left thousands stumped regarding the ancient Egyptian's abilities to take on such a monumental design. Egyptologists and archaeologists alike have spent over 200 years excavating and researching the Giza Plateau to uncover the ins and outs of the pyramid, and the Egyptians who built it (see Lehner 2002). Academics, scholars, and historians have made immense progress over the years resulting in the fulfillment of archaeological artifacts stretching across the world for all to enjoy. The discoveries of the pyramid itself have been remarkable for the archaeological community: from its constructor to its workers, to the tools used, and more, the Great Pyramid of Giza has been intriguing in all its forms.

However, in recent decades, enthusiasts and independent thinkers have argued that the Great Pyramid has an ‘otherworldly’ purpose. These non-professionals, including von Däniken, have countered archaeological evidence in order to spread false ideas surrounding the structure. Von Däniken is not an archaeologist, an Egyptologist, an academic, or a historian. However, he believes his claims set him apart from the conventional. In 1968, he wrote *Chariots of the Gods?*, a book which is described to have “caused a sensation”, and was “game-changing” (“Ancient Aliens” 2019) in the time it was written. To summarize the book, von Däniken ‘provides evidence’ which he believes could confirm the visitation of extraterrestrials who gave prehistoric humans the intelligence necessary to construct their civilizations. He theorizes this evidence is found in ancient religious texts, art, literature, and artifacts (von Däniken 1968). However, it is clear that he did not and does not conduct thorough research. But in the case of the Great Pyramid, like many of his claims, aliens gave ancient Egyptians the knowledge of pyramid building, and the Egyptians themselves only did the “dirty work” (*Nova* 1978).

This chapter will focus on 3 claims which Erich von Däniken has made over the years which are included in his book, *Chariots of the Gods?*, and on television shows he has partaken in: the History Channel's “Ancient Aliens”, a *Nova* documentary, and his show “Erich von Däniken: Beyond the Legend” (*Gaia* 2017). The claims which I will be debunking are: 1) Egyptians have no prehistory, 2) pyramids mysteriously appeared, and 3) the Egyptians could not have built the Great Pyramid of Giza based on the tools at hand.

Section 1: Egyptian Prehistory

The first claim which von Däniken makes clear in *Chariots of the Gods?* is this; “...ancient Egypt appears suddenly and without transition with a fantastic ready-made civilization....luxurious tombs carved out of the rock, pyramids of overwhelming size - these and many other things shot out of the ground, so to speak. Genuine miracles in a country that is suddenly capable of such achievements without recognizable history!” (von Däniken, 91). In sum, Egypt has no prehistory. Von Däniken made, and continues to make assumptions on a civilization which he clearly knows little to nothing about (*Gaia* 2017). This entire quote is an act of persuasion which stimulates his readers’ belief(s) that ancient Egyptians were students to a higher power. And while he makes no mention of alien visitation (yet), we, the audience, assume he believes it was aliens who supplied these resources, afterall, that is what his book speculates. While this claim seems vague to a learnt student or academic, it was and could be startling to a reader, which furthers the spread of such false narratives. Those uninitiated in ancient Egyptian history might not and may not have conducted personal research and had taken the word of von Däniken without hesitation.

Archaeologists and Egyptologists know for a fact that the ancient Egyptian civilization did not rise out of the sands of the Sahara Desert, or that it was “ready made” as von Däniken suggests. In fact, early Egyptian civilization has been traced as far back as 12,000 years ago (Butzer 1976). Around this time, nomadic tribes began settling around the most significant characteristic of any civilization - water. An early site called Wadi Kubbania situated right off the Nile River in Upper Egypt has been significant thanks to recent excavations in the 20th and 21st centuries (Banks, Cummings, Snortland, Gatto 2017). Research has provided that this site was lived on by early Egyptians who cultivated crops - wheat, barely, and chickpeas (Feder

1990, 144). Further research has uncovered additional remains of human activity such as compound tools during the late-paleolithic period (12-20,000 years ago) (Maisels 1999, 30). Excavations have moreover uncovered small villages in which these early people thrived (Feder, 144). Using Wadi Kubbaniya as a reference site which corresponds with the Nile River, more evidence based on radiocarbon dating - the process which allows organic material to be dated after it has died - provides researchers with the conclusion that these early people were thriving off of wild game, fish, and crops around 12,000 years ago (Feder, 144), and their villages allowed for a more stationary way of life as the years went on. Around 8,000-10,000 years ago, researchers have summarized (also based on radiocarbon dating) that early Egyptians moved away from relying on wild animals for food (a step back from the nomadic life-style) and began to domesticate them; skeletal remains of goats, sheep, pigs, cows, and horses each display changes over thousands of years which further provides assurance to the researchers of the site (Solheim 1972). From domestication comes a more fixed way of life for the once nomadic people, and with an agricultural revolution, domesticated animals, and growing villages, the early Egyptians were beginning to shape their future empire.

Ancient Egypt has a history as far back as 12,000 to 20,000 years ago, depending upon the evidence at hand. Carbon dating (carbon-14 detection) has given archaeologists the opportunity to date artifacts, settlements, etc. as far back as 50,000 years thanks to the technological advances (American Chemical Society 2019). Yet according to von Däniken, this is incorrect, and need I mention that radiocarbon dating began in the 1940s, long before his 'legendary' book. But there is another source which provides evidence as to why von Däniken could be more wrong in his claim. In 1965, former professor emeritus of classics at New York

University, Lionel Casson, wrote *Ancient Egypt* which includes popular Egyptian histories. In chapter 1, “The Enduring Land”, Casson writes, “Antiquity, vast and richly textured, cloaks the land of Egypt. In the dimness of prehistory, more than 10,000 years ago, man began to settle in the long valley ribboned by the Nile. Sustained by the life-giving river, the land prospered and, in the fourth millennium before Christ, burst into splendour under the first of the pharaohs. And in splendour outstanding in the ancient world, it flourished for 27 centuries” (pg. 11). Why is it that a man, who years prior to *Chariots of the Gods?*, decided to write the book with the knowledge of early Egyptian civilization as far back as 10,000 year ago? How is it that Casson knew the Egyptian civilization thrived for thousands of years? Simple, Casson explored their history. The purpose of noting Casson’s book was to establish a resource available for von Däniken to read, so why did he not look? Or did he, but found that his alternative views were infinitely more suitable for his agenda? Another source von Däniken could have sought out is William Matthew Flinders Petrie, most notable for his work in Egypt throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Section 2: The History of Egyptian Pyramids

Next, we will move to his claim of pyramids appearing out of nowhere. Ancient Egyptians had about 80 years of pyramid building successes and failures from which they learned. Today, we know of four famous pyramids built before the Great Pyramid of Giza: the Step Pyramid, the Bent Pyramid, the Meidum Pyramid, and the Red Pyramid. Before they could be built, the Egyptians had to devise a cultural practice which they learned over many years, so

we must understand where pyramid building stemmed from. This will take us back around 8,000 to 6,000 years ago in predynastic Egypt, and the time of the first 'pyramid', the mastaba.

Erich von Däniken's claim of "luxurious tombs" and "pyramids of overwhelming size" is not what archaeologists would claim existed in predynastic Egypt. The earliest pyramids, known as mastabas, can be traced thanks to excavations at the site of Hierakonpolis (Egyptian name: Nekhen), one of the earliest Egyptian settlements to be uncovered (Maisels 1999). Around 8,000 to 6,000 years ago, we find the remains of tombs which led to a deeper understanding of the question, where did pyramid building stem from? These early burials were constructed based on status; they were carved into bedrock, filled with goods, and covered with mounds of dirt, and it is these dirt mounds which prompted the early version of the mastaba (Feder, 145). As time progressed, King Narmer of Dynasty '0' (c. 3200-3000 B.C.) (Shaw, 481) came to the throne, and through him the cultural practice of burials shifted. Narmer and his successors were buried lavishly, and dirt mounds soon became large, square sundried blocks - the modern mastaba. And through the development of these mastabas, we see later kings attempt to make their tombs grander than before (Feder, 145).

The four pyramids built before Khufu's were genuine marvels of the time period, although not as grand as that of Khufu, they demonstrated a growing sophistication in Egyptian culture. These pyramids came to be by way of creating larger, more refined mastabas. The first large mastaba we see is at the site of Saqqara where King Djoser (c. 2667-2648 B.C.) (Shaw, 482) built his funerary mastaba, the Step Pyramid, also during Egypt's Old Kingdom. It was built by creating one square mastaba smaller than the other, and stacked atop another until the shape

of a pyramid was formed. Today it stands as a testament as the first large scale 'pyramid' in ancient Egypt.

Next, there are the Bent, Meidum and Red pyramids built by King Sneferu (c. 2613-2589 B.C.), Khufu's father. The Bent pyramid was an attempt to follow in the footsteps of the designer of King Djoser's pyramid, Imhotep (Malek 2000, 86-87). However, King Sneferu failed as he accidentally lingered from its design; miscalculations between the base and summit of the pyramid caused the center of the structure to bulge at its midsection (Malek, 87). On a side note, King Sneferu did not wish to fully copy Imhotep's design; the facade of his pyramid is smooth, not stepped. He then embarked to build the Meidum pyramid from the inside out; a cast-like core was built with mud brick to hold the weight of the future pyramid from collapsing onto itself, however, as seen from ruins, bricks cover the desert sand beneath the core as it had eventually collapsed (Davey 1976). What is left is the center of the pyramid. As seen at their sites, Sneferu did not carry the tradition of the step mastaba, and in turn created a new generation of pyramids after his death. His final attempt at a perfect monument was the Red pyramid - the first true pyramid of ancient Egypt (Malek, 88).

As established, pyramids of ancient Egypt did not appear out of thin air. Cultural and political transformation were significant points in which the structures had to evolve. Erich von Däniken to this day does not understand the complexity Egyptians introduced to the ancient civilization. His lack of energy to study this civilization prevails, sadly, as his presence and words are desired among millions across the globe. The importance of mentioning these past pyramids is to help readers understand that Khufu had many examples to review before building

his incredible monument. With the many attempts by his father, Khufu applied those techniques to showcase his relic to stand the test of time, and display everlasting power.

Section 3: Egyptian Tools

And finally, Erich von Däniken has theorized that the ancient Egyptians could not have built the Great Pyramid of Giza as “there are many problems connected with the technology of the pyramid builders and no genuine solutions” (von Däniken, 92). In this final testimony, I will evaluate the ways in which von Däniken underestimates the intellectual abilities of the ancient Egyptians. I will use his term ‘technology’ by means of explaining the tools and resources he claims are non-existent or too primitive for pyramid building. Those tools are the copper chisel and rope.

First, von Däniken states that the copper chisel was an inappropriate tool for carving limestone blocks needed in the foundation of the pyramid. However, a National Geographic documentary called “Who Built the Pyramids” filmed possible work methods of ancient workers. As recorded, the audience will notice that the film crew used a valid quarry site in which archaeologists believe much of the limestone originated (Lehner 2002). Today's workers are seen hammering nails into the soft limestone bedrock. Limestone is inaccurately described as a difficult stone to work with, but in reality, it holds the perfect properties of being soft enough to cut, and durable enough to withstand the elements and the test of time. Workers continue to carve channels between the bedrock in the measurements desired. Once ready to be cut into blocks, workers used long wooden poles to separate each piece with back and forth motions with their bodies. Easily, these workers in groups of 3 or 4 were able to carve the bedrock using

copper chisels and nails, as well as strength. The stones, depending on the size, were hauled by groups, or carried by a single worker to an end point. Von Däniken, however, believes these tools to be too primitive for the job without realizing the vast amount of copper chisels found at the pyramid site, and displayed at the Cairo Museum. He continues to believe that extraterrestrials came to earth and gave the ancient Egyptians the knowledge of pyramid building, and used alien machinery, such as levitation machines, to aid its building process (*Nova* 1978).

And finally, von Däniken does not believe the use of rope existed at this time in Egypt due to the fact that no rope had ever been found at Giza (von Däniken, 96). Rope was a necessary resource throughout dynastic Egypt, and its reliefs within many tombs are crucial to the archaeological community as these images depict the real-life scenarios in which rope was made (Teeter 1987). These reliefs are on display at the Cairo Museum as well. The materials used for rope have been found to be papyrus, leather, and camel, and others (Teeter 1987). The practice in which rope was likely used as a hauling mechanism is thoroughly discussed and put to the test (Edwards 2003) as its presence was alive and well at the time of the Great Pyramid. With the durability of Egyptian rope, it may have been likely that a single strand could haul a stone weighing 4 tons (Edwards, 349). Stating in the interview by *Nova*, von Däniken does not believe rope was around at this time, but who is surprised?

Conclusion:

As shown throughout the chapter, the vague claims which Erich von Däniken proposes are unethical to the archaeological community, and more importantly, the legacy of the ancient

Egyptians. Those who wish for von Däniken's 'knowledge' are sadly exposed to misinformation based upon personal desires and lack of study. His books have gained millions of followers across the world, and have attributed to many television series in which he participates and introduces new 'researchers' into his distorted claims. Today, the archaeological community hastily responds to his claims as they are seen as the orthodox striking a sword in the creative minds of those who seek different outlooks of the human past. Countless books and articles written on this issue refer to von Däniken's claims as he has been a major proponent of this pseudo-archaeological dilemma. As for his claims against the ancient Egyptians, it is clear he has not given them credit for their accomplishments, and it is even clearer that his stance on the civilization has not changed; this evidence is found in the many references I cited, as well as countless others. Nevertheless, the ancient Egyptian civilization evolved into the grand kingdom we know today. Although there are skeptics, there are archaeologists, historians, scholars, etc., who wish to teach ancient Egypt's true past. With countless resources at our disposal, no one in the world should believe there is another source on earth, or the universe, that can dismantle the past and future accomplishments made possible by humankind. Sadly, our alien adventure does not stop here! We have another pharaoh to discuss, one who is said to have been an alien himself: Pharaoh Akhenaten.

Chapter 2: Ancient Aliens and Pharaoh Akhenaten

This chapter will debate episodes from the popular television series from the History Channel, “Ancient Aliens”. I chose this series to display its manipulative tactics used to draw attention to their arguments. Discussed in these episodes are the presumptions that the ancient Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten was an extraterrestrial due to ‘overwhelming evidence’ found throughout his reign. The ‘evidence’ the speakers of the show argue are the radical changes in the pharaoh’s personal art depictions, and the shift in the traditional religion from polytheism to henotheism. While these modifications were shocking for the time period, as well as now, there is enough evidence in which archaeologists and Egyptologists alike have examined in hopes of uncovering his true intentions. These professionals accomplish this by examining historical writings and the remains of his ancient capital, Akhetaten, ‘The Horizon of Aten’ (Gardiner 1961, 220); better known today as Amarna (Freed 1999, 23). However, the interviewees and narrator of “Ancient Aliens” suggest that the drastic shifts may tell us more than what conventional scholars indicate; that Akhenaten may have been a hybrid alien whose ancestors came from the stars. The series directs attention to 2 specific presumptions to prove their theory as to why he may have gone against tradition (“Ancient Aliens” 2010, 2014, 2017): 1) his shift in religion to worship his alien ancestors, and 2) his abnormal art depictions. This chapter will be set up accordingly, and debunked with facts to assure readers that Pharaoh Akhenaten was not an extraterrestrial, and to dismantle the ill-thought theories against his legacy.

Before the sections begin, a brief introduction of the show is necessary as it is a major proponent of the pseudo-archaeological agenda of claiming Akhenaten was an extraterrestrial. “Ancient Aliens” aired on the History Channel in 2009, and its creator, Kevin Burns, is also its executive producer whose work can be seen on many familiar networks such as the Travel Channel, A&E, and National Geographic. With his ‘notable’ reputation, he founded Prometheus Entertainment in 1999, and produced many television series with similar bases like that of “Ancient Aliens”. The series aims to uncover humankind’s extraterrestrial origins, better known as the Ancient Astronaut Theory. Though let it be known that the speakers involved are not all professionals; some have Ph. Ds, however, many of them are self-named enthusiasts of history such as, previously mentioned, Erich von Däniken. An additional enthusiast named Giorgio Tsoukalos is a prominent figure of von Däniken’s work, is a frequent speaker of the show, and has even become an additional consulting producer. He will be regarded by means of his doubtfulness of ancient peoples’ abilities later in the chapter. The guest speakers evaluate ancient civilizations through art, architecture, and literature. In doing so, the episodes are taken rather literally by its audience members. I used to be one of the millions who loved watching as it undoubtedly surprised me each time I was exposed to a theory or information unknown to me prior. However, I later came to realize that the information was either taken out of context, misinterpreted, or downright false. The show particularly enjoys playing off of what they deem to be abnormal aspects of a culture’s artifact(s), religion, literature, monuments, and so on.

The storyline of the series impulsively sabotages the work of mainstream archaeologists. Its basis consists of the examination of ancient artifacts while ultimately delegitimizing the history behind the intellectual ingenuity of a culture. The biggest example of this is the show’s

inability to refer to context, whether it be cultural, social or intellectual (Moshenska 2017, 123), the series does not care to take these into consideration all the while its audience members are mesmerized by its far-fetched theories. And because it ignores such key aspects, its viewers are ultimately left in the dark. Without presenting true scientific research, many audience members take away the wrong idea(s), and therefore, the wrong history (Fagan & Feder 2006, 727). The purpose of scientific and historical research is to understand the reasons for objects to be created, or carvings to be carved, or inscriptions to be written. The show and its speakers willfully and deliberately ignore analyses and twist information in order to fulfill their fantastical agenda(s). Furthermore, “Ancient Aliens” impulsively questions conventional scientific research leading audiences to mistrust the archaeological community.

To conclude this introduction to the series, it is all the more important to incorporate its most damaging trait: racism. The show uses artifacts, literature, etc. to suggest that an alien race may have had a role in the giving of knowledge to our ancient ancestors, denouncing their abilities. While the show may not have a racist or discriminative agenda, its consequences have proven, and continue to be destructive to the archaeological community, and ancient cultures around the world.

Introduction: Pharaoh Akhenaten

Most notable for his break from tradition is Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, better known today as Akhenaten. He ruled from 1352-1336 B.C. in the 18th Dynasty of Egypt’s New Kingdom (c. 1550-1069 B.C.) (Shaw, 484). He is widely known for his radical reconstructions of art and religion in a profoundly traditional civilization during a time of prosperity and wealth attributed

to the reign of his father (and additional predecessors), Amenhotep III (Aldred 1968, II).

Akhenaten abandoned the worship of customary deities and instead implemented a sole god, the Aten. In the early years of his reign, Akhenaten moved the traditional capitals from Thebes and Memphis to a plain halfway between Cairo and Luxor known as Amarna (Gardiner, 220).

Amarna had never belonged to another god which made it more appealing for the manifestation of the Aten (van Dijk 2000, 269). Furthermore, Akhenaten depicted himself drastically different than his predecessors and successors for as long as the Egyptian kingdom lasted (Freed, 17).

These drifts from tradition have been studied for decades, and it is the commitment to the study which has allowed Egyptologists to uncover the possibilities as to why.

Unlike Egyptologists, there are those who believe the pharaoh wandered from tradition due to his extraterrestrial origins. “Ancient Aliens” seems to believe that their vague presumptions are concrete evidence regarding Akhenaten’s actions, and believe that by referencing the abnormalities of his reign will persuade audience members to believe their false narrative. As manipulative as it seems to historians and scholars, “Ancient Aliens” claims may come across as revolutionary to those who wish to believe in such profound theories.

The introductions to the sections will consist of the ‘evidence’ or ‘reasons’ regarding why “Ancient Aliens” believes Akhenaten was an alien, followed by historical sources debunking their outlandish claims.

Section 1: The Aten is (Not) a UFO

To begin, “Ancient Aliens” believes Akhenaten shifted Egypt’s traditional polytheistic religion to worship his alien ancestors immortalized as the sun-disk, the Aten. In the episode

“The Pharaoh’s Curse”, the series proposes that due to the irregular imagery of the Aten, its purpose was otherworldly (“Ancient Aliens” 2017). The show focuses on the depictions of the Aten reaching down from the heavens with its “curious arms and rays” (“Ancient Aliens” 2017), along with human-like hands at its ends to represent the Aten solely anointing the king and the royal family. The show’s guests also believe the Aten to be a UFO based upon its shape...you believe it? Of course you do! A sly and manipulative tactic the show uses in the clip, “Ancient Aliens: Top 3 Conspiracies of Season 8” (2014), has frequent speaker David Wilcock examining the abnormalities of Akhenaten. While speaking, the show decisively transforms an image of the Aten into a UFO disappearing into the universe. As for more evidence, I am afraid this is all the show supplies. For further examination, we must distinguish what the Aten is, and why Akhenaten chose it as his supreme god.

According to Egyptologists (Wilkinson 2003), the Aten was introduced during the New Kingdom of Egypt (c. 1550-1069 B.C.) (Shaw, 484). However, there is a reference of it from *The Story of Sinuhe*, a chronicle set in the time of the death of Pharaoh Amenemhat I (c. 1985-1956 B.C.) of Egypt’s Middle Kingdom (c. 2055-1650 B.C.) (Shaw, 483) more than 600 years before Akhenaten came to the throne. But there is a difference between the deity which Akhenaten worshipped, and the noun meaning ‘disk’. Let me explain. To distinguish the noun, *aten* will be replaced.

In Egypt’s Old Kingdom, there is evidence that *aten* was used to distinguish circular objects, such as mirrors and regalia of cult objects (Redford 1984, 170). Additionally, *aten* was “...spoken of as an entity distinct from the sun god, through which he manifests himself” (Redford, 170). Furthermore, the word already signified the “visible celestial body of the sun”

(van Dijk, 268) which then became part of the sun god Ra - the creator god. Moving into the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055-1650 B.C.) (Shaw, 483), the expansion of the empire led Egypt's pharaoh's to use *aten* as a royal and universal symbol: a pharaoh's military campaign could be said to include "all that the sun-disc encircles" and universally as "the sun-disc of all lands" (see Redford, 170).

Back in the New Kingdom, we see pharaohs Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III who, prior to Akhenaten, had shown interest in sun gods (Bryan 2000, 249/ 254, Redford, 171 & Wilkinson, 58). Thutmose IV acknowledgements to the sun gods are documented in his monuments and inscriptions. At a building campaign at Giza, he created his Sphinx Stele which left out Giza's cult god Amun-Ra, and instead devoted himself to Horemakhet, the sun god which is identified with the Great Sphinx (Bryan, 243). This stele famously sits between the giant paws of the Great Sphinx to this day. Amenhotep III, Akhenaten's father, even created the phrase "Amenhotep-Is-The-Dazzling-Sun-Disc" to be placed at the royal palace at Thebes (Redford, 171). Additional examples are available, and therefore available to Akhenaten. However, the question regarding the Aten's symbolism to the pharaoh is still in the air.

Much of the evidence which associates Akhenaten's belief in the Aten could be said to lie within the (possible) deification of his father, although there is skepticism (Bryan, 254-255 & Redford 2013). Pharaoh Amenhotep III extended the kingdom's power into the Near East, was a superb architect, created treaties among diplomatic empires, and founded holdings of goldmines in the territory of Nubia (van Dijk, 265). Through these accomplishments, the Egyptian kingdom found wealth in trade, while he increased his devotion to the sun god Ra (Freed, 20-21). It has been suggested that Amenhotep III deified himself during his lifetime given his frequent

association with the god (see Bryan, 254-255). Given the speculation, it is thought that this insistent identification gave way for Akhenaten to affiliate the Aten with his father.

Sadly, I cannot answer why Akhenaten shifted the religion to praise the Aten, but I can provide theories based on historical evidence, unlike “Ancient Aliens”. In prominent historical sources, such as *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* and *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, evidence of what Akhenaten did to worship the Aten is readily available. By using reliable sources, I give my readers possibilities, while “Ancient Aliens” provides their audiences with b.s. accusations, and false ‘historical’ information.

Section 2: Abnormal Physical Characteristics

In addition to falsely accusing Akhenaten of worshipping his alien ancestors, “Ancient Aliens” attempts to uncover his ‘truth’ through his drastic artistic depictions from the episodes “The Visitors” and “Ancient Aliens: Top 3 Conspiracies of Season 8”. These episodes address Akhenaten’s skull, eye-shape, facial structure, and torso. The arguments regarding these characteristics are biased being that the show’s storyline is to question the ‘abnormal’, and reward alien visitation for all things as such. Unlike this ignorant conclusion, scholars have suggested that Akhenaten may have suffered from an array of disabilities which are studied by examining his mummy. This will be discussed later in the section.

In “The Visitors”, the show opens with the remains of a mass burial of a South American civilization. The skulls are of particular interest to the show, of course, as they have severely elongated craniums. This caused speculation as to whether the skulls were human or not (“Ancient Aliens” 2010). The reason for the show to bring up elongated craniums is due to the

many busts and reliefs which portray Akhenaten, and his family, to have a severely elongated skull. To be sly, the show purposely implemented images from some cultures around the world to examine the common ritual of head binding, specifically from an African culture. And even included images of foot binding from ancient the Japanese culture to further their argument (“Ancient Aliens” 2010). I believe these images are meant to act as persuasion mechanisms to give their audience the free-thinking spirit to believe head binding was more than just another cultural practice.

Moreover, the series’ guests proceed to interpret the ancient cultural practice of skull binding as a form of mimicking (“Ancient Aliens” 2010), and just who do the speakers believe these ancient cultures were mimicking? Aliens, of course! To make matters worse, frequent speaker Giorgio Tsoukalos says, “...those gods were physical beings, because if they were just a figment of our ancestors' imagination, I don’t think that’s a compelling enough reason to expose your children to such a ritual to achieve that type of look. And in my opinion, these people were misinterpreted space travelers” (“Ancient Aliens” 2010). Analyzing this quote seems to be a modern-day remark to the welfare of a child, than to the ancient importance of a culture’s practice. When he speaks of children, the show refers to an image of an African mother and her infant whose cranium is bounded. Tsoukalos claims the ritual is along the lines of abuse, without realizing how “artificial cranial deformation” (Fehir 2014) is accomplished. The symbolism of this ritual was to establish class, was a form of fashion, an ode to ancestry, or a differentiation mechanism (along with many more explanations as the practice differs from place to place) (Fehir, 32). This relates to the case of Akhenaten as we examine his artistic depictions with an elongated skull, and many other physical abnormalities.

Within both episodes mentioned earlier, the speakers believe these depictions to be more than just cultural or individualistic. Between the many sculptures and images of the pharaoh, as well as his family, with dramatically elongated craniums, the series further suggests that the reason for an artisan to depict his king in such a form was to capture his true features (“Ancient Aliens” 2010, 2014). By this, the show believes an artisan would have been fired for imagining his king in such a way (“Ancient Aliens” 2014), therefore, the only reason for the elongated skull was to mean that Akhenaten was of alien ancestry. However, scholarship suggests that the king wished to be depicted in such ways being that he may have actually looked this way.

Next, the show accuses the pharaoh of extraterrestrial origins by means of his eye-shape, narrow torso, and large hips (“Ancient Aliens” 2010, 2014, 2017). The show assumes that the depicted eye-shape resembles that of the ‘modern-day gray alien’, therefore he must be an alien. His statues portray the king with wide, feminine ‘birthing’ hips and thighs, therefore his features are too odd to be human. Images also perceive the king with a slender torso, again, much like a ‘modern-day gray alien’. His statues and images also portray a flacid and overall weak embodiment - nothing like the manly images of previous kings. Therefore, Akhenaten must have been attempting to depict himself as an individual of a separate species.

While the show holds the right to perceive these images as strange, their accusations are none for the history books. The purpose for these physical characteristics are debated among the archaeological community, but rest assured that the intent of body modification or realistic depictions are not due to the mimicking behaviors of aliens! It is, however, heavily debated that the king may have suffered from a genetic deficiency(ies) - Marfan’s Syndrome (Burrige 1996), Aromatase Excess Syndrome and Sagittal Craniosynostosis Syndrome (Fitzsousa 2015) (to name

a few) - which may have caused an extent of issues affecting his livelihood. And might he have had a range of disorders, one cannot assume that Akhenaten's origins lie among the stars.

Conclusion:

Still the answer to why Akhenaten generated such religious and artistic change to his kingdom is widely unanswered, and the only true remains we have of him and his creations are those at Amarna. The sources I have cited hold large amounts of evidence pertaining to what Akhenaten did throughout his reign, but not why - everything is speculative. Though, we can possibly conclude that the art which Akhenaten introduced characterized him and his family, as well as the world around them. Not only were images of the king realistic, artistically speaking, but as were those of the natural world: images of swimming fish and flying birds are among this style (Gardiner, 220). The pharaoh introduced an art the Egyptian kingdom had never, and would never experience again. Whether or not Akhenaten had a genetic deformity is another debate, and it could have quite possibly played out in his artwork all along.

In sum, Pharaoh Akhenaten, was first and foremost not an alien nor a hybrid. He seemed to have been his own individual. Through his art we see an appreciation of the physical world and naturalistic imagery, and through his accomplishments, it is important to remember just how drastic his endeavors were. He has been deemed a "heretic" for a reason, however the reason may be traced back to mistruths, misinterpretations, or misinformation. As for "Ancient Aliens", the show uses pseudo-archaeological mechanisms which exaggerate their inaccurate agenda to their audience with no regards to context. It is crucial to properly expose the show's darkside, and it is just to the integrity of the archaeological community, and more importantly, the legacy of Akhenaten. Although, Akhenaten is not the only pharaoh to be deemed otherworldly; the

curse of King Tutankhamun, his son, is one that has lived on almost 100 years after his discovery in 1922.

Chapter 3: The Curse of King Tutankhamun

This chapter will examine the curse known around the world of the famous Egyptian pharaoh, King Tutankhamun, and how the world of reporting and the belief in superstition led to a pseudo-archaeological cult which follows the name of the king to this day. The curse of Tutankhamun has continued to flourish almost 100 years after his discovery. This has resulted in false narratives and claims created by poor reporting of newspaper outlets unable to receive the exclusive stories hoped for, and in turn created a superstitious frenzy about the king. The curse began with the discovery of the pharaoh's tomb in 1922 by Howard Carter and his private financier George Herbert the 5th Lord of Carnarvon (Lord Carnarvon) (Casson, 166). Carter had been excavating in the Valley of the Kings from 1919-1921 (Newberry 1939, 69), and on November 26th, he and his team stumbled upon a sealed door beneath the debris from a previous excavation of the tomb of Ramases VI (Gardiner, 238). There, the team came across 4 chambers; the outer 2 were sadly plundered, although the 2 innermost chambers had been completely sealed (Gardiner, 238). At the time the tomb had been discovered, word of a new pharaoh swept through newspaper outlets all over the world creating a thirst for a story. However, only one newspaper was given permission to do so. The *Times* newspaper of London and Lord Carnarvon had arranged an exclusive deal solely allowing their reporters to sell the story of the tomb: Lord Carnarvon would receive £5,000 and 75% syndication rights, while the *Times* was permitted to enter the chambers for the ultimate story (Luckhurst 2010, 6). Reporters of additional newspaper outlets such as those from the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* became frustrated, and were keen on sabotaging the deal by getting their hands on any story at the site (Luckhurst, 6). The approach of sensationalizing stories was a must for people to read their material. Nevertheless, the theme of

manifestation of ancient Egypt had begun a few decades prior to King Tut's discovery during the Victorian Era of England, and it had much to do with the liveliness of the curse we know today (Montserrat 2000, 10).

Before the craze in England began, it is understood that a renaissance of Egyptian fascination came to be by the campaign set out by French General, Napoleon Bonaparte (Brier 1999, 46). He traveled to Egypt from 1798-1801 and inhibited a wave of Egyptian interest throughout Europe thanks to the many scientists who accompanied him: biologists, linguists, mathematicians, chemists, and many more (Brier, 46). What was so significant about this group were their capabilities which then fundamentally created Egyptology (Brier, 46). Thanks to Napoleon, it is possible to trace the origins of Tut's curse by uncovering the first mentions of an 'Egyptian curse' in old records of the Victorian Era. To accomplish this, I looked to Roger Luckhurst, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at the Birkbeck University of London. I will examine his article, "The Mummy's Curse: A Study in Rumour" which articulates how the curse came to be due to the previous precursors of urban English folklore which are fundamental to the curse story (Luckhurst, 9). Before his work, however, the basics of King Tut's curse will be identified and refuted by Joyce Tyldesley, senior lecturer in Egyptology at the University of Manchester, and her recent publication, *Tutankhamen's Curse: The Developing History of an Egyptian King*.

Introduction: King Tutankhamun

The history of ancient Egypt has had a tendency to intrigue the minds of millions through its wondrous pyramids, millenia old mummies, and, of course, 'curses'. The incorporation of

Egyptian culture into modern society could be a chapter, and a book on its own. Places around the world have assimilated Egyptian fashion, art, architecture, etc. into everyday life due to the empire's 'exotic' customs, particularly Europe and the West (Roth 1998, 218). But in the case of King Tut, the incorporation of ancient Egyptian history has come about through urban folklore, and a desire for more than just contemporary research. The longing for a superficial anomaly as a result for a phenomena has only increased throughout the years, and highly due to insufficient media outlets (Roth, 220-221), including previously mentioned, The History Channel. The specialty of these outlets is their ability to manipulate data, context, and translations by perceiving them in a way only acceptable for their agenda(s). And later, that source spews inaccurate, and false narratives to the minds of audience members causing a highway for invalid ideas to travel. Phrases like, "pyramid-idiots" (Roth 1998), "Egyptomania" (Holt 1986), and "Tutmania" (Stevenson 2019, 175) are used to describe the ignorance of those who believe, and speak of such inadequacies. King Tutankhamun, sadly, has not been left out of such ignorance, and his 'curse' has only added fuel to the fire.

King Tutankhamun is one of, if not, the most famous pharaoh in all Egyptian history. Known by millions across the world as "the boy-king", Tutankhamun was about 9 years old when he ascended to the throne around 1332 B.C. (Wendrich 2004, 226). He is known for re-establishing tradition after the Amarna Period created by his (likely) (see Gardiner, 237) father, Akhenaten, by returning the kingdom's deities to their rightful centers of worship (van Dijk, 281). Additionally, he attempted to expel and reverse all references of the Amarna Period in order to restore the Egyptian kingdom under the good graces of the gods once again (Gardiner, 237).

Further, Tutankhamun repealed the original ending of his throne name, Tutankh-aten, to what we see today, along with his wife, the third daughter of Akhenaten and Tutankhamun's half-sister, Ankhesenamun (previously Ankhesetp-aten) (Gardiner, 236). To proceed in his offerings, he honored the traditional deity Amun by depicting an array of offering scenes inscribed on the Third Pylon at the Temple of Karnak, once again, to reinstitute the kingdom's favorability among the gods (Gardiner, 236). Throughout his reign, Tutankhamun was assisted by Horemheb, a senior military official (van Dijk, 282) who reigned as regent in Tut's early years, and his vizier, Ay, a senior court advisor (van Dijk, 283). These men counseled King Tut to restore Egypt's once prosperous military campaigns, religious temples, and political ties with the Mitanni and Hittites, whom Akhenaten ignored (van Dijk, 282-283).

Suddenly, King Tutankhamun died about 10 years into his reign, and the theories surrounding his death are continuously speculated as there are those who believe the king suffered from an ailment, or died due to a hunting accident ("The 115th Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America." 2014, 363). Due to his sudden death, his tomb was forced to be expedited: the chambers were small, and did not resemble the tomb of a king for that matter. Although, each of the 4 chambers were tightly packed with about 5,000 artifacts for the king's journey to the afterlife (Gardiner, 239): alabaster vases, royal daggers, chariots, and a throne to name a few (Gardiner 238-239). Since its discovery, the tomb has been shrouded in theories of a curse. And although many false outlets feed upon false narratives, the curse can actually be traced to valid sources of those who have dedicated the time to uncovering how the curse came to be, by whom it was spread, and how it has affected the king's history.

Section 1: The Curse

The 3 main aspects of the curse I will be discussing are, 1) the canary and the cobra, 2) Lord Carnarvon's death, and 3) the number of curse victims. The curse begins with the story of a cobra that snuck into Howard Carter's home and killed his beloved canary. This happened to occur the day King Tut's tomb was opened (Tyldesley 2012, 213-215). Due to the fact that the cobra was a symbol of pharaonic power in ancient times, local Egyptian workers who were part of the excavation became weary as it may have well been the king himself who killed the songbird in retaliation for his woken slumber. Secondly, the death of Lord Carnarvon was due to an infected mosquito bite which suddenly killed him only weeks after the burial chamber was opened (Tyldesley, 84). And thirdly, there have been multiple deaths surrounding the opening of the burial chamber and the sarcophagus of the king; these deaths could have only been caused by disturbing the king (Tyldesley, 233-234). The underlying theme of each scenario consists of the king seeking revenge for being disturbed, and the media's role in creating false narratives which in turn manipulated the world's thoughts. Thankfully, the truth of each scenario can be refuted.

Beginning with the cobra and the canary, Tyldesley provides an article written by Carter for *Person's Magazine* recalling the moment a worker told him the news of his beloved canary, he writes, "...the messenger brought about news of tragedy...[he] told me that a cobra had entered the house, passed down the passage...and killed my pet!" (Tyldesley, 214). While it seems coincidental that a cobra, a pharaonic symbol, would be found eating the bird of the excavator himself, it is hardly uncommon. Being that Carter housed many types of animals at his home in Egypt, he experienced and recorded the death of some animals on a few occasions, one which included a cobra in a different light (Tyldesley, 215-216). However, it is understandable

how and why a story of a curse could surround this particular scenario. The curse also mentions the fear which local Egyptian workers may have felt after this incident, though it seems only necessary to say that these workers wished to be paid for their service(s), not to be scared off by simple superstition (“Curse of Pharaoh Denied by Winlock” (Winlock 1934) 1934).

Next, the curse states that Lord Carnarvon was bit by a mosquito which then became severely infected, and caused his death only weeks after it occurred. Each aspect here is valid. But there is more to the story which the media did not mention. Lord Carnarvon was an ill man long before he had ever set foot in Egypt, and before he knew Howard Carter. He was in a near-fatal car crash in 1901 which resulted in a weakened body and immune system (Tyldesley, 83). On the road to recovery, it was suggested that he healed in a dry, warm climate, and Egypt was Lord Carnarvon’s place to heal, thus establishing his love for Egyptian antiquity. Though it seems miniscule, an infected mosquito bite potentially had devastating effects on an ill-bodied individual. What led to his declining health was the accidental slicing of the scab while shaving (Tyldesley, 84). It quickly became infected, and sadly led to blood poisoning followed by pneumonia which caused his death on April 5th, 1923 (Tyldesley, 84). What the curse also mentions is that he died ‘weeks’ after the burial chamber of the tomb was opened. The entrance to the burial chamber was opened on February 17th, 1923, Lord Carnarvon died one month and less than 3 weeks after its opening. Stating the term ‘weeks’ allowed the curse to carry speculation being that the term was never given an actual timeline. It was and is ambiguous, yet the public was not led to see it as such. A part of this story which must also be mentioned is the tale of Lord Carnarvon’s death brought about by the once famous British gothic novelist Marie Corelli. Either thought to be “tosh” or “exciting” (Tyldesley, 223), her popularity gave her the

power of influence. She was quoted, with the knowledge of the state of Lord Carnarvon, “I cannot but think some risks are run by breaking into the last rest of a king of Egypt...According to a rare book I possess...the most dire punishment follows any rash intruder into a sealed tomb...Was it a mosquito bite that has so seriously infected Lord Carnarvon?” (Tyldsley, 224 & Luckhurst, 6). Why this quote is so significant to the curse story is that Lord Carnarvon actually died 5 days after she said this (Tyldsley, 224), thus strengthening the story’s ‘validity’.

Finally, there are a number of deaths ‘associated’ with the opening of King Tut’s burial chamber. For this section, I will mention the work done by Herbert Winlock, former director at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in charge at Carter’s excavation (Winlock 1934). Quickly mentioned by Tyldsley (p. 236), Winlock was present for the tomb’s opening, therefore was an intimate member of the excavation and had close ties with both Carter and Lord Carnarvon (Winlock 1934). He had even suggested that the spread of superstitions was attributed to members of newspaper outlets once frustrated with the contract Lord Carnarvon signed at the very beginning of the tomb’s discovery (Winlock 1934). Unable to allow the public deem “...superstition as fact” (Tyldsley, 236) Winlock decided to examine the data of which individuals were around during the various stages of the excavation, and which ones died soon after the burial chamber was opened (see Nelson 2002 for further analysis). His work is summarized as so: 1) using Carter’s notes, of the 30-40 men, plus Carter, who discovered the steps leading to King Tut’s tomb (Nov. 22nd, 1922), all men, as far as he could tell, were alive and well. 2) The day the tomb was breached (Nov. 24th-26th) all 5 witnesses were still alive, besides Lord Carnarvon (d. 1923). 3) The opening of the inner chamber (Feb. 17th, 1923), 22 individuals were present, of which 6 had passed away. 4) 22 individuals were present at the time

King Tut's sarcophagus was opened (Feb. 12th, 1924), only 2 had died. 5) Of the 10 individuals present the day King Tut's mummy was unraveled (Nov. 11th, 1925), all were still alive in 1934. He continued his analysis and found more individuals which newspaper outlets associated with the curse, and realized that each person had either never entered the tomb during the time period (of 1922-1925), or had entered by way of tourism (Winlock 1934). Thankfully, the work conducted by Winlock provides common-sense at a time of desired superstitious realities.

Section 2: Egypt and 19th Century Victorian Folklore

Finally, I will examine a story which worked as the backbone of the curse of King Tutankhamun. Luckhurst begins with the narrative of an English aristocrat Thomas Douglass Murray. His story begins in 1864 as a recent college graduate, eager to travel to Egypt with the hopes of purchasing an ancient Egyptian commodity (Luckhurst, 10). While abroad, Murray came across what is famously displayed in the British Museum, "The Unlucky Mummy"; painted on the outer sarcophagus is the image of a priestess of Amun-Ra (Luckhurst, 10). Eager about his purchase, he had the mummy shipped back to England, though the priestess would bring ill-fate for doing so. Upon parting for London, Luckhurst states the consequences supposedly fabricated by the mummy herself: 2 men carrying the sarcophagus suddenly died, 2 more who were part of Murray's party became ill and too perished, and Murray himself lost an arm in a shooting accident while firing at a quail. But the most intriguing part of this curse is the supposed negative silhouette which was captured while attempting to photograph the sarcophagus, and it is said that the photographer died soon after.

The sarcophagus was a frequent topic, especially among “late-Victorian occult circles” and I will acknowledge 3 narratives which aided this mummy story (Luckhurst, 11). Madame Blavatsky was the founder of the Theosophical Society that taught and teaches “to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity” (The Theosophical Society in America). She once claimed to have seen this silhouette, and being that she was an influencer, she became a credible source to Murray’s story. Another narrative we know is from Louis Harmon, a “society palmist” - someone who read hands and told one’s fortune/ misfortune. He claimed to have read the hand of Murray before his trip to Egypt, and expressed that he (Harmon) had “an unaccountable feeling of dread and horror seemed to creep from it” (Luckhurst, 11). In addition to his superstition, Harmon knew an ill-fated trip awaited Murray being that when he returned, the hand which Harmon read was the one which Murray lost in the hunting accident (Luckhurst, 11). Because Madame Blavatsky and Louis Harmon wrote of their superstition with Murray’s story, their followers relied on their information as credible, furthering the spread of misinformation.

The final narrative I will point out brings us to 1904 when a journalist from the *Daily Express* named Bertram Fletcher Robinson was investigating Murray’s curse story. It is said he wished to disprove the rumors, however, Robinson soon became part of them. While investigating, he died of enteric fever in 1907 and became another victim of the priestess of Amun-Ra (Luckhurst, 9). Stories began to circulate that Murray’s curse was still very much alive, furthering the spread of the tale.

Conclusion:

It has been made clear that poor reporting, and the belief in non-credible sources may be to blame in regards to King Tut's curse. This gave way for King Tut's reputation to be distorted even almost 100 years after his exceptional discovery. What is interesting is that once the curse of Thomas Douglas Murray was debunked, Roger Luckhurst has speculated that it was fueled due to Murray's colonial interests in Egypt (Luckhurst, 18), as well as the growing tensions between England and Africa during the 1880s due to colonial expansion (Luckhurst 2012). Murray was an acquaintance of Sir William Mackinnon, the owner of the British India shipping line, and who formed the British East Africa Association "in an attempt to colonise the interior of East Africa" (Luckhurst, 19). Another figure which Murray knew was Sir Samuel Baker who ruled a kingdom, "Equatoria", in modern day Sudan (Luckhurst, 19). I point out Baker to show his "sympathy" for the African Slave Trade, however, his rule in Sudan still proves some sort of intervention. Luckhurst suggests the curse of Thomas Douglas Murray "was a fantasy that was the product of colonial occupation" (Luckhurst 2012). There are historical contexts which must continue to be explored in order to truly uncover how and when Egyptian curse stories originated. And thanks to Roger Luckhurst, these contexts prove to be of this world and not another. But what are curse stories without having millions of people engulfed in their superstition? In the modern era of the 20th and 21st centuries, film and television propelled such mythical interpretations of ancient Egypt, which is what chapter 4 will explore.

Chapter 4: The Mainstream Media: Fallacies of Egypt and Archaeology

The basis of this chapter will be to express the problems which mass media has created regarding the ways ancient Egypt is portrayed on screen, as well as the portrayal of archaeology. The term 'media' will be used to describe both film and television, with each term being used within its personal section of the chapter. I will open a discussion of just how mass media greatly affects the validity of archaeology as a discipline, and the representation of ancient Egypt's culture. The importance of this chapter is to exercise how persuasive false information can be to a global audience and I will achieve this by incorporating a variety of films and television series about ancient Egypt to further my argument.

A key takeaway of this chapter will be the discussion of stereotypes of archaeology in popular culture. This section will include an assessment of how archaeologists can combat false information by creating a better learning environment for an audience, while providing true scientific research and evidence to assist their arguments. Archaeologists may potentially promote an informative way to capture a global audience to the wonders true archaeology has to offer. To achieve this, the archaeological community must have a greater understanding of the mechanisms used by media outlets in order to achieve similar outcomes; a global following. Though this seems contradictory, the mainstream media has the potential to benefit the field by, much like the infamous *Indiana Jones* franchise, portraying archaeologists and the discipline as adventurous and romantic. While the archaeological field is not quite like its famous portrayals, the silver lining is the attention and interest these portrayals bring. This section will mention various media sources as well as professional archaeologists and scholars whose work and attention to the field address these discussions.

Section 1: Inaccuracies and Egypt

I will begin with notable moments within the plots of 2 movies to exemplify these stereotypes. Please note; ‘alien’ does not always refer to the modern-day image of a gray alien, but more so the image of robots, strange creatures, and humans from other planets.

To touch on the theme of aliens and the ancient Egyptians, I will briefly describe the sequel to the *Transformers* franchise, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. The storyline of aliens coming to earth or fictional planets to invade and destroy is a theme we have seen countless times - *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Predator*, *Men in Black* and *Avengers* to name a few. *Transformers* ultimately corresponds to this. The plot consists of alien robots from the planet Cybertron descending to earth to either protect it and all its people - the Autobots, or destroy it for its abundant resources - the Decepticons. In this sequel, the leader of the Decepticons, “The Fallen”, wishes to destroy earth by using an ancient machine hidden somewhere on the planet that destroys suns. As it turns out, the machine was hidden in Khufu’s Great Pyramid all along. Now, the storyline does disclose that the machine was built by the ancestors of the robots, but being that the machine is inside one of ancient Egypt’s greatest achievements, the subtle mixture promotes the false ideology of ancient Egyptians interacting with an alien race. Though a point which the movie does not at all touch upon are ancient Egyptians, they are not embedded in the storyline. We, the audience, cannot assume that the movie wished to project the idea that ancient Egyptians were contacted by ancient robots in order to hide their machine. However, the image is there. The movie even includes a line stated by one of its main characters in regard to the pyramid, “Awesome. I think aliens built that.” This line promotes another subtle way of ancient Egyptian relationships with aliens, without having a storyline regarding it.

The 1999 film *The Mummy* has many stereotypical representations of ancient Egyptian's as barbaric soldiers, and even mummy-soldiers. We see this constant role like clockwork. One author named Jack Shaheen has actually evaluated over 900 films which portray these characterizations (see Shaheen 2003). Only his book reaches further than the boundary of ancient Egyptian representations. His more modern film evaluations see terrorist-like characterizations of Middle Eastern peoples. *The Mummy*, though a rather fun and action-packed film, has its mischaracterizations. The story begins in Thebes, Egypt in 1290 B.C. when a high priest named Imhotep is having an affair with the mistress of the pharaoh Seti I, Anuk-su-namun. Once they are caught, Imhotep kills Seti, but not before Seti calls for his murder. Imhotep escapes, and Anuk-su-namun commits suicide believing Imhotep would resurrect her. Before this could happen, Imhotep is caught by the loyal guards of the pharaoh who cut out his tongue and conceal him in a sarcophagus with flesh eating beetles at the feet of Anubis. Millennia later, Rick O'Connor and brother and sister duo Jonathan and Evelyn Carnahan join forces to find the City of the Dead, Hamunaptra, and its lost treasures. There, they stumble upon the mummy of Imhotep, and accidentally awaken him with the Book of the Dead. Desperate to send him back into the underworld, and stop him from wreaking havoc on the world, the team must fight off Imhotep's mummy soldiers, the Medjai, and re-kill Anuk-su-namun for the sake of the world.

As for Egyptian inaccuracies we have multiple to go off of. In the beginning of the film, we see that the famous sphinx is not yet completed, and is made to resemble Seti I. However, the sphinx was built by the pharaoh Khafre, son of Khufu, in the 4th dynasty (Shaw, 90). The real Seti I ruled Egypt in the 19th dynasty (Shaw, 485). The villain Imhotep is said to be a high priest of Seti I, meanwhile Imhotep was the architect for King Djoser's pyramid in the 3rd dynasty

(Shaw, 482). The name Anuk-su-namun is offley familiar, and that is because it resembles Ankhesenamun, the wife and half-sister of Tutankhamun. She is meant to be Anekhsenamun, only she never would have met, nor had an affair with Seti I being that she was queen in the 18th dynasty while Seti I ruled a few decades after in the 19th dynasty. While I only mentioned a few inaccuracies, there are truly an abundance of them within the franchise. However, it is recognized that these movies were meant to entertain and make money. The directors and producers never had to accurately depict or describe ancient Egypt, only to have it loved by a global audience, much like our next example.

Likely the most famous archaeologists in all cinematic history is Indiana Jones. Prized for his cowboy manifestation, fighting skills, and charming looks, this character has brought the most canny features of archaeology to life (McGeough 2006, 176-177). While the fantasy of dangerous adventures and unearthing hidden treasure can be somewhat relevant in regard to modern contexts, I would like to examine some of the reasons that such manifestations and themes in media may be harmful to archaeology, and ultimately undermining to archaeologists. I will later discuss the promotion of true archaeology in the media, and how it has the potential to aid archaeology. Let us begin to discuss how the media affects archaeologists and the discipline.

First, we must take a look at how fictional archaeologists are displayed in popular culture. As professor Gabriel Moshenska writes (2017), we have: the detective, the tomb raider, the explorer, and the bookworm. The detectives often conduct the work real archaeologists are supposed to; they use their archaeological and anthropological abilities to examine, record, and conclude their findings. They are enticed to follow guidelines, and do not seem to project bad mojo around mainstream archaeology, like Dr. Ruth Galloway of the t.v. series *Bones*. Tomb

raiders on the other hand are the “transgressors” in “ the darkest corner of popular culture”.

These characters diminish the values of archaeology and stop at nothing, and spare no expense to pursue their goal(s) like Elsa Schneider in *Indiana Jones: the Last Crusade*. This characterization misguides audiences into believing there are those like them in the real field even though, of course, there are bad apples in any profession. The archaeologist as an explorer is mixed with some of the best and worst qualities of archaeologists in popular culture. These characters, like the other categories, are often Europeans on an exotic adventure. They tend to hold more “colonialist attitudes” being in an exotic land uncovering a treasure somehow never found by the locals of the area. But this character is not completely negative as, like Indiana Jones, they tend to save the world from evil...all the time. Bookworms or the “bumbling eccentric” either are too stubborn for their own good, or are stuck with their head in the clouds like that of *Indiana Jones*’, Marcus Brody. The bookworm is often an incredible scholar, but oftentimes uncompromising like Evelyn Carnahan of *The Mummy* (Moshenska, 158-159). Each of these characterizations do make for fun, action-packed adventures for audiences, including myself. Though it is significant for them to be taken with a grain of salt; these difficulties persist considering limited audience members are initiated with archaeology. The importance of healthy representations, as we will come to see, can aid the discipline, the scholars, and most importantly, the viewers.

Section 2: How Archaeologists Address Pseudo-Archaeologies

Rather than attempt to discredit pseudo-archaeologists, the ongoing scrutiny that archaeologists should instead get on the same level as these individuals seems to be the solution

(see Feder 2016, Hiscock 2012, Moshenska 2017). As it is commonly argued that true archaeologists ‘...serve as a special state police force dedicated to eradicating interpretations that are considered false or inappropriate by a self-selected jury’ and to realize that “...the only true remedy for professional archaeologists is to try harder at practising a socially and culturally meaningful archaeology themselves “ (Holtorf 2005, 548-549). While archaeologists are no “police force”, they are, however, the members of a practice which allows them to trace the livelihoods of those who came before us. Therefore, they take into consideration the fact of those who deem the field as somewhat malleable to their personal creativity, and take false views with no real evidence as caution to their cause (see Fagan & Feder 2006). To approach pseudo-archaeology in the media, archaeologists must stoop to their level. To do this, we must examine how some archaeologists differ when it comes to responding to pseudo-archaeological claims, and go from there.

Thanks to Professor Peter Hiscock of the University of Sydney and his article, “Cinema, Supernatural Archaeology, and the Hidden Human Past” (2012) I will discuss some positions archaeologists have regarding the discipline’s portrayal in media, these include: 1) some believe it is ok to be enthusiastic about such media portrayals and the ways archaeology is represented, 2) some do not mind the plots and storylines within film, t.v., etc., but for some to claim truth in a pure pseudo-archaeological manner is what is most worrisome, and 3) there are those archaeologists who despise the work media outlets create due to the fact that false claims may be misleading, and inaccurate. There are archaeologists who believe that directors/ producers in the media should hire them to promote accuracy (Hiscock, 163). A downside to this, however, is the realization that, when talking about film in particular, these films are meant to entertain, not

solely convey accurate history. The persuasive nature of media combined with visually pleasing content within the underlying theme of pseudo-archaeology is to spur imagination, not to provide archaeological evidence to their audience (Hiscock, 174).

A silver lining to mass publicity in the field of archaeology is not one to be misconstrued. Many archaeologists (see Fagan & Feder 2006) believe the mainstream media poorly represents the field. To combat these voids, one common approach archaeologists take is to directly debunk pseudo-archaeological claims by providing research and evidence (see Cline 2008, Feder 2016, Moshenska 2017 & Roth 1998). But in the age of the internet, this is almost impossible. How can archaeology be viewed for what it is when the line between education and entertaining is obscured (Parker 2016, 150)? Particular television series are ‘meant’ to be educational, yet the framework of the series may suggest otherwise. For example, Egyptologist Zahi Hawass, former Egyptian Minister of Antiquities, is almost a traitor to his own field. His televised events, “Chasing Mummies” and “Digging for Truth” seek to uncover questions about ancient Egyptian culture, yet his motive is almost manipulative. He purposely speaks of other ‘theories’ regarding his findings meanwhile he, an Egyptologist, understands many aspects of the ancient world. Yet, he questions these aspects and insinuates a greater theory (Parker, 150 & Roth, 222).

Archaeology has become so culturally accepted that the irony for what it has become popular for is not real archaeology (Feder 2016, 199).

In stating that, archaeologists, like Kenneth Feder, suggest that it is “irresponsible” not to respond to pseudo-archaeological claims. As a professor, he has noted (see Feder 1990 and past citations) that the best way to respond and manage such claims is to do so on a “case-by-case basis” (Feder 2016, 202). Using group discussions with his students has provided him with

particular insight. Debunking claims, however, can almost lead to a game of whack-a-mole; where one claim is bopped on the head while another pops up seconds later making it almost impossible for archaeologists to keep up. Another reason why responding is so difficult is that archaeologists are seen as those behind their ivory tower, and that any form of response from academics or professionals leads audiences to distrust them. This is due to the fact that pseudo-archaeologists constantly play the ‘underdog’ card, leading the public to see academics as a “police force” (Feder 2016, 201). But likely the best way to approach pseudo-archaeology is for archaeologists to “reassess their opinion on archaeology” (Anderson, Card, Feder 2013, 27) and treat this ‘subsection’ as a “phenomenon worth studying” (Moshenska, 136). A quote by NYU Professor Ann Macy Roth lays this out strategically, “...we must stop avoiding the alternative versions of the Egyptian past that are being propagated, and begin to engage them. We must learn to explain not only where the errors lie but also how we arrive at our conclusions, making the process of historical scholarship clearer...” (full quote in Roth, 228).

Conclusion:

Before I conclude, I would like to take a moment and bring attention to the place where mainstream archaeologists come from when they discredit pseudo-archaeology (see Fagan & Feder 2006); it is due to the underwhelming evidence which individuals such as Erich von Däniken, Graham Hancock, and countless others bring attention to. And it is their, and I stress, fantastical agenda which they purposefully project onto ancient peoples and civilizations regarding their possible connection(s) to extraterrestrials. The thought of individuals believing aliens descended to earth to teach our species our greatest achievements should be appalling to

those who believe in the power and ingenuity of our species. It is thoughtless, and more importantly, discriminatory. Now, I do not believe these individuals are racist themselves, however, there is a fine line that many individuals cross, and force their agenda through television, books, and film with the help of dramatic interest (see McGeough, 175, & Roth 1998, 222). It is known that movies are not completely true, and that is ok! I personally love going to the movies to watch, most recently, *Avengers: Endgame* to find out how the egomaniac Thanos is killed...you know...the giant purple alien trying to take over the universe? Even I am guilty in this argument. Media has every right to be entertaining, but we cannot explain the past as “a resort to the irrational” (Fagan 1987, 3). Movies allow us to escape from reality. I do not, however, condone the use of media to spew one’s egotistical and fantastical views on ancient civilizations when there is evidence to counter their claims. Of course there are some answers which archaeologists are still trying to figure out, but to undermine one’s ancestors and fundamentally deem them unintelligent and incapable is morally wrong.

Thus, what accounts for our obsession with all things Egypt? Perhaps it is the accessibility (Brier 2004, 16); because the media continuously exaggerates Egyptian art, culture, jewelry, fashion, and so much more, (see Roth 1998), there is a constant battle between fact and fantasy. Herodotus, the father of history himself recalled in his *Histories*, “...nowhere are there so many marvels in the world” (Brier, 16). Between Europe and America, “Egyptomania” can be found at famous monuments: the Louvre in Paris, and the obelisks and columns of government buildings in Washington D.C. are all reminiscent of this once thriving civilization. Likewise, the past great Greek and Roman civilizations admired and promoted Egyptian architecture within their own. It is unparalleled that the world is fascinated with all things Egypt, though it is

significant to promote a healthy image of this civilization, rather than constantly sensationalize it. There is an understanding by archaeologists that the media creates fantastical films, documentaries, blogs, magazines, etc, but they believe there is a difference between “fanciful” and “fraudulent” (Anderson, Card, & Feder, 24). To archaeologists, it is wrong for authors and non-experts to continue to ‘develop, recycle, and promote’ (Anderson, Card, & Feder, 24) such false narratives and ideological visions of the ancient world. And finally, it is irresponsible to go against mainstream archaeology with the intent to harm any range of history.

Conclusions:

In conclusion, this paper has analyzed pseudo-archaeological theories and myths regarding ancient Egypt which the media constantly promotes. In this paper, I have presented the real archaeological facts behind each myth and pseudo-archaeological theory, which have debunked the myths and theories. I have, in turn, shown Egypt's true history and its sophisticated culture over the millenia. Furthermore, I have outlined how manipulative the media may be, and how it affects the validity of ancient Egypt. In each chapter, readers were provided extensive evidence to counter pseudo-archaeological claims about ancient Egypt. First, Chapter 1 discussed the false accusations made by author Erich von Däniken and his attempt to credit extraterrestrials in the construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza. von Däniken has stated that Egypt had no prehistory, that pyramids were "ready-made", and that the ancient tools used in the building process were simply too primitive. One by one, I refuted von Däniken's claims which were mere speculations not backed by evidence. von Däniken is the one most responsible for promoting the Ancient Astronaut Theory time and time again, and who has gone against mainstream archaeologists knowing his claims are false.

Next, Chapter 2 analyzed the History Channel's "Ancient Aliens" and its speculations about Pharaoh Akhenaten's extraterrestrial origins. The show portrayed Akhenaten as an alien because he shifted the traditional religion to worship his ancestors manifested as the Aten, and because the king was artistically depicted as an 'abnormal' human. The show played off these characteristics knowing their viewers would find them unexplainable. However, with thorough research, I have assured readers that this king was no alien.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 explored the curse of King Tutankhamun, and recalled how Egyptian curses originated. The Egyptian campaign by Napoleon Bonaparte and newspaper outlets of the Victorian Era greatly influenced the perception of ancient Egypt in Europe. The fame caused by King Tut's discovery led outlets to conduct poor journalism, and therefore led the public to perceive Egyptian findings as mystical or haunted. By noting a specific story about one of the first Egyptian curse stories, I gave readers background information of how King Tut's curse formed.

Finally, Chapter 4 examined how today's media negatively portrays ancient Egypt, particularly in film. Additionally, I wrote of the consequences of how the media negatively affects the validity of archaeologists, and archaeology as a discipline. It was necessary to give readers an in depth examination of the persuasive mechanisms the media uses to exaggerate and sensationalize a civilizations 'fantastical' features.

All in all, I wrote this paper because I believe it is necessary to expose the media's disservice to the archaeological community. Pseudo-archaeology has undermined the tremendous revelations which archaeologists and scientists alike have uncovered about our ancient past. To present the theory - the Ancient Astronaut Theory - that extraterrestrials had a hand in mankind's achievements is unacceptable. This counterfeit version of archaeology attempts to manifest itself outside the realm of mainstream archaeology to prove its independence from the conventional. Having achieved this by leading its followers to distrust archaeologists and the discipline, pseudo-archaeology has demeaned countless ancient histories, and the trust which archaeologists have sought to uphold in their field and to the public.

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