



Issue #7
Ancient Civilizations
September 15, 2003



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Dear Reader,

We are running out of space to give proper credit to our contributors, so from now on, for extensive information about the artists, please visit:

<http://www.octopusarmy.org/credits.php>

Also, make sure to read about the Lewis and Clark Expedition because there will be a quiz in the next issue and explorers are way cool.

Your Non-Writer Editor And It Shows,
Maggie Krzywicka

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Now accepting submissions for issue #8 deadline is October 31st, 2003. The theme is **Grammar**.

We accept short original unpublished or previously published pieces for which you retain the copyright. No politics or pop culture references are allowed. We do not distinguish between fiction and non-fiction articles.

If you are reading this after July 31st 2003, please visit our website for the current theme and guidelines.

Compensation is in the form of free issues and glory.

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Octopus Army #7: Ancient Civilizations

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Psyche auf Antigua

by *Robert Scott Martin*

I have forgotten most of this trash; the bits that survive are like puzzle pieces that got mixed in with the puzzle I'm doing (today) and don't fit anywhere. A leaf someone tracked onto the subway, a paperback Freud sinking to the bottom of the lake, a corroded spark plug in the Baghdad museum. Interruptions intruding on the otherwise smooth surface of the world we now.

Every antique is a monster, ripped screaming from its mother ('era) and cast out to devil the mind. What makes something "older" than another is what we call its archaic or anachronistic character, its extraordinary (intrusive) power to resist (ana) the erosive flow of time (chronizein), to alone survive to tell thee, to resist Hamlet's Mill that grinds so terribly fine. Bill Burroughs in a teenybopper bar, three decades after all the other beats had vanished into the grave. A hundred-year-old penny in a handful of change. And the question is always, "can such an alien thing be real, or is it a forgery?"

And the terrible answer is often, "this belongs in a museum," where it can be painted like Lenin's or King Tut's corpse to await the final judgment, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection (or revolution) to come. The angel of history walks backward.

The Greek Dark Ages

by *Erin Finnegan*

Before 1000 B.C. the Greeks had a fairly advanced civilization. There was heavy trading on a practically international level. Greek technology was as advanced as it could be (for the Bronze Age or whatever), and people lived in major urban areas.

Then a series of calamities befell the Greeks. There were earthquakes, famines, and a few invasions by tribes from the North. 75% of the population died. The remaining Greeks abandoned the cities and moved into rural settlements in the hills, which were more easily defensible. The written language was lost. Trading with other places stopped, and technology regressed to an earlier level. The Greeks became simple farmers.

Eventually the Dorians moved in, and the Macedonians had something to do with all of this, but I'm not sure how these types of people tie in together, or what it has to do with Crete.

By 800 B.C., civilization began to return, and a new written language was made up, adapting characters from the Phonetian alphabet. By now the Dorians were integrated into Greek society. Trading started again, the technology level went back up, and the cities were rebuilt.

The most significant thing about the Greek Dark Ages I've read so far is

that it was the time of Homer. Homeric poetry remembered the earlier Greek history and passed it on through oral tradition until such a time that written language had returned, and the poems could be written down. Greek has, throughout history, returned to Homer's poems again and again as a source of national pride and identity.

I just think the Greek Dark Ages are kind of neat. In the European Dark Ages the written language was kept alive by the clergy, but for the Greeks, nothing, nada. That's got to suck. Can you imagine what it would be like to remember, in your old age, that things that were written down during your childhood? "I remember when we had a written language! Those were the days!" "You'll have to excuse Grandpa, he's a little out of it."

For me, the story behind the Greek Dark Ages is a hopeful one. Western mythology is obsessed with the "End of the World." In Christianity, history is linear, with a definite beginning and a definite end. Typically, older civilizations, particularly Eastern ones, recognize that history is often cyclical; civilizations rise and fall, because that's just what civilizations do. Greek civilization didn't die out completely - it wasn't the end of the world, although it probably seemed like at the time. They took a major catastrophic blow, and it took them 200 years to recover, but they did eventually recover.

Of Three Queer Doctrines

by Johnson Hal

[I came across this text on a random page folded once and stuck in a nineteenth century geography primer. I haven't been able to identify the source of the loose leaf, but I thought it was interesting enough to transcribe. For clarity's sake, I started the transcription partway down the page, at the beginning of a section. The text ends abruptly at the bottom of the reverse. Hal.]

Christianity in its nonage, spread to the East with a greater alacrity than to any other cardinal point of the compass. The third century was marked by an especial spread, so rapid that order and sound thought could scarcely keep pace with the missionaries. This dissemination climaxed in the establishment of a Christian kingdom at Armenia in 301, which we have become accustomed to call that dominion first to embrace Christianity; but there were, in fact, several other Christian kingdoms in Central Asia that slightly predated it. These may have died out due to their faulty doctrine, even as the Nestorian Prestor John was at last overwhelmed in his pride and false preaching, and, indeed, the references to such lands which survived the dark ages, are scarce. How many far-flung bishoprics founded by Didymus as he marched to-wards the sun, have been forgotten by the cruel amnesia of history? Of three, at least, travelers' tales have brought us details, which it may not be entirely beyond the scope of the present volume to outline in conspectus.

The holy writings of Scripture only very imperfectly traveled to the East, and so these countries oft had to seek salvation in mere scraps and slight verses. The first such kingdom to be examined, located near Oderia on the banks of the Keilet, had the singular misfortune of possessing only the verses Matthew 6:25ff ["Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on..." Hal.] Short lived was this kingdom, and soon, we read, it perished to the man.

More fortunate, yet no less queer, were those who lived in Illacia, who possessed only the famous passage of Ecclesiastes which states "there is no new thing under the sun." As this was the whole of their law, the Illacians embraced it as a stern injunction. If Solomon demandeth no new thing under the sun, Solomon shall be proven right! Therefore, they did perform nothing new under the sun; novelty was permitted only at night.

It may be assumed from their behavior that the Illacians benefited from a corrupted form of neoplatonic thought that permitted them to interpret rather broadly, what should be seen as new. A potter could in the daytime throw new pots that were patterned after a particular type, for example; but only at night could he contrive a new design entirely. This was their basic reasoning, and it permitted them in the main, to exist under far fewer restrictions than the Hindoo Jainists, or even than the Papists, who persist in their Medieval tabus. Only two true inconveniences were to be endured: One pertains to elimination, and can hardly be discussed here. The other pertains to the miracle of childbirth.

To the best of their primitive ability, the Illacians attempted to prolong a woman's labor until dusk. But betimes their craft failed them, and then a child were born in daylight. And abomination this should have been, had not the wily Illacians taken precautionary steps, for ever, when a woman waxed enceinte, she or her husband would fashion in the night a pair of crude wooden dolls, one of each sex, and each of which were proclaimed to be the new child. These dolls were nursed, tended, and put to sleep as would be any infant, at least until their fleshy child be born. Now, a child born at nighttime, as was heretically believed to be the law of God, could ensure that parents might discard, or pass on to needy neighbors, these dolls, who in such a case lost all power. But should a child be born to the unlucky mother under the eye of the sun, that child was proclaimed to be nothing new, but a copy of the doll.

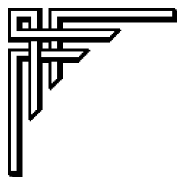
Such a child of daylight would unhappily find that the doll which corresponded to his sex was treated throughout his life as a kind of elder brother. It was fed first, and administered to in sundry ways, first. The poor child lived in its shadow. Nor could he outgrow it. Throughout his life he would carry the doll; his neighbors would address it by his name, and he would attempt to answer for it as best he, a mere iteration of mute would, could; when he married it would share his wife's bed first. He followed its instruction faithfully, for he knew well that it was real and he was not.

Only one heresy, in the nearby realm of Tocasen, was filled with a greater array of dolls, and that is the third one under discussion, which possessed as a holy text naught but Matthew 18:3, and...



Top Ten Names for Sausage-Serving Restaurants
by *Phil Guie*

10. For Better or for Wurst
9. Chip Off the Ol' Brockwurst
8. Kielbasa Nova
7. Always a Wiener!
6. The Missing Link
5. Da Bratwurst
4. Three Weisser Men
3. More Banger for yer Buck
2. Kiss! Kiss! Banger! Banger!
1. The Best of Times, the Wurst of Times



Homemaker's Corner

Fun with the Dark Arts:

Liver, Mirror of the Soul

The Babylonians believed that the liver was the mirror of the heavens and the seat of life, and hence the future could be read from it. The Etruscans and after them the Romans also practiced hepatoscopy. It's an exciting form of divination that's fun for everyone. Next time you're having a party, how about trying out a bit of hepatoscopy instead of the tired Ouija board and magic eight ball. Here's how:

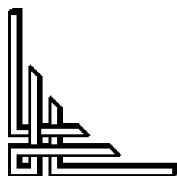
1. Slaughter a sheep, goat, or cow.
2. Remove the liver.
3. Follow the diagram on the right to read the signs:

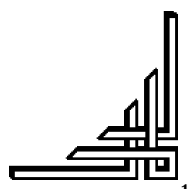
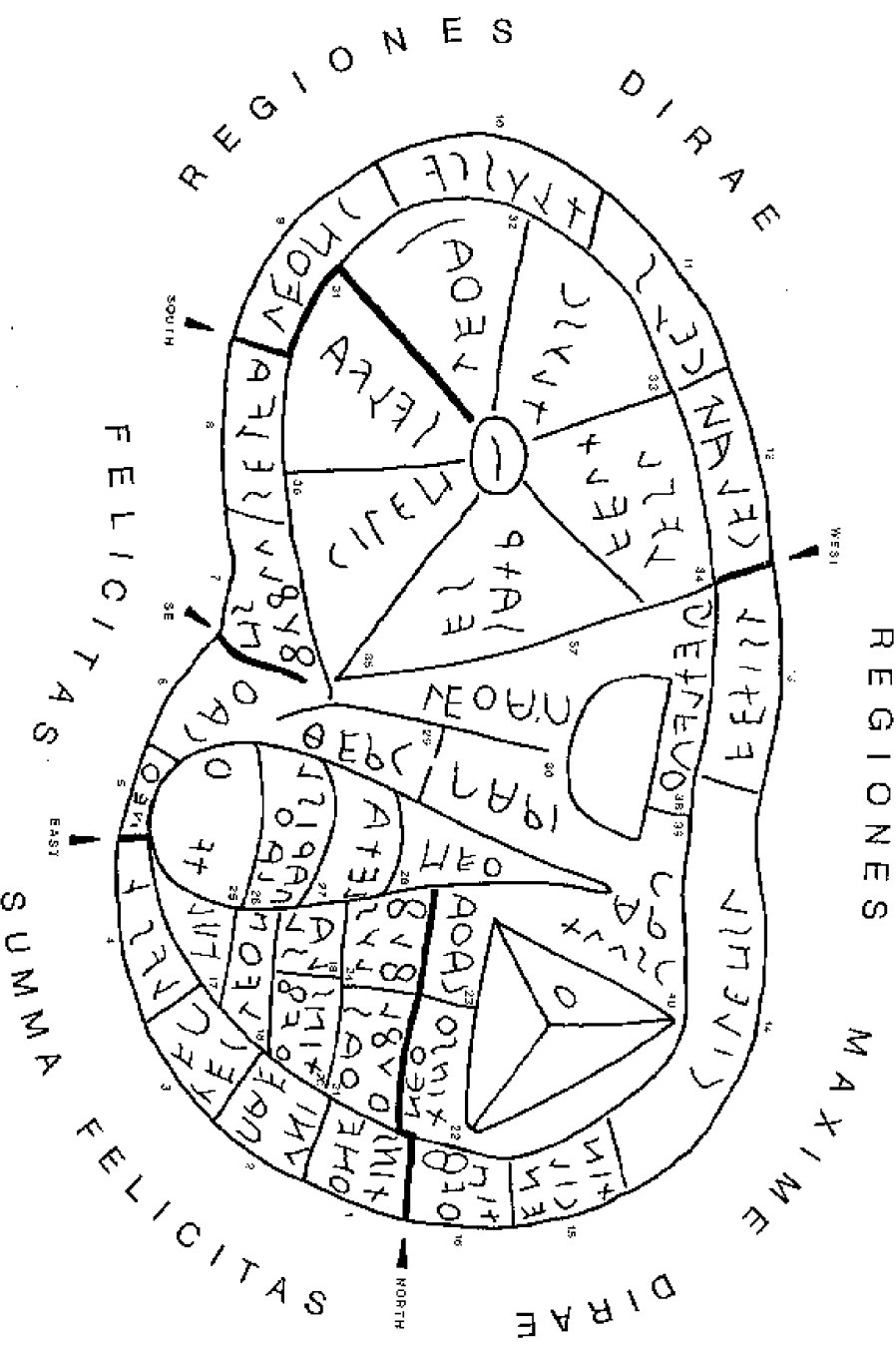
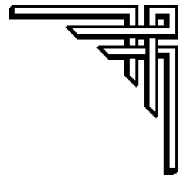
Recipes for the Adventurous:

Things to Consider When Cooking the Traditional Foods of Ancient Rome

Among the myriad of theories about why Rome fell to the barbarians is that the Romans were all suffering from lead poisoning. Various facts are brought forth as evidence: that the Romans had lead pipes, that they used lead based paints, that they used lead to attain a fairer complexion. While every good homemaker is concerned about the safety of the pets and miniature humans under his care and so is naturally always worried about lead poisoning, the issue of Roman lead poisoning should interest the homemaker even further for it affects how we prepare food when following Roman recipes.

One of the proofs that the Romans suffered from lead poisoning is that their recipes are extremely salty. When a person has lead poisoning, his ability to taste salt is diminished. Hence, when attempting to reproduce a Roman delicacy for the enjoyment of guests in your family Vomitorium, go easy on the salt.





The Indian Epics

by *Josh Geller*

How old is Indian civilization?

Western scholars will tell you that the Aryans invaded India sometime around three or four thousand years ago. This is completely bogus for a number of reasons, and I don't take it too seriously. To be fair, an increasing number of western scholars also don't accept, or don't completely accept, this idea any more.

Traditional Indian scholarship maintains that the Aryans left their original Arctic homeland a very long time ago; they argue about how long ago, exactly; some say 17,000 years, some say 24,000, some give even large numbers.

Recent discoveries along the now dry course of the Sarasvati river tend to show that the Indus valley civilization is much older than was originally thought, and that these people were in fact Aryans as opposed to Dravidians, or that some of them were; in other words, these discoveries tend largely to vindicate the traditional Indian view. These discoveries are controversial, and it doesn't help matters that the current Indian government is using them for propaganda purposes.

How old are the Indian epics?

The two big Indian epics are "The Mahabharata" and "The Ramayana"; the Vedas are said to be older, but the Vedas are, at least traditionally, not available to large chunks of the population.

The epics are dated internally by describing unique astronomical occurrences that took place at the time of the events that they describe and by other means. The traditional date of the war which is the central event of the Mahabharata is mid 32nd century BC.

The historical setting of the Ramayana much older than that of the Mahabharata, I have seen a traditional date of 76th century BC (if anything I have trouble believing it is that young) for the events described in the Ramayana; the story of Rama presented as part of collection of ancient lore in the Mahabharata in such a way as to make a lot of people think that the Ramayana was actually composed later than the Mahabharata, which may well be.

For a number of reasons, I tend to accept these traditional dates.

The Ramayana

The Ramayana tells the story of Rama, rightful King of Ayodhya in northern India and the seventh Incarnation of Vishnu, whose wife Sita is abducted by Ten-Headed Ravana, the Demon King of Sri Lanka and taken by him to Lanka in his aircraft Pushpaka.

Rama wants to get Sita back and kill Ravana. Unfortunately, he doesn't know where Ravana lives. So he and his brother Lakshmana strike a deal with Sugriva, who declares that he is the rightful King of the Vanaras, a term that modern Indians translate as 'monkey'. The deal is that Rama will help Sugriva overcome his rival to the throne and that in exchange, once Sugriva is established as King of the Vanaras, he will order his subjects to search for Sita and Ravana.

The Vanaras

Who were the monkeys in the Ramayana?

In Hindu iconography, the vanaras are represented as humanoids with monkeyish faces and with tails, but these monkeys have some notably unmonkeylike characteristics:

They can talk, although some can apparently talk much better than others can.

They wear clothes and jewelry.

They start fires with firesticks.

They do big engineering: the vanaras subject to Sugriva live inside of Kishkhinda, a hollow mountain that seems to be in the Himalayan foothills. It doesn't say anywhere that they hollowed out the mountain and they may not have, another hollow mountain being said to have been built by the Gods, but at one point in the story they build a causeway across the ocean from India to Lanka. It is interesting to note that this causeway is still there, and is still called 'Nila's Bridge' after the vanara engineer who headed up the project.

They, or some of them - at least Hanuman the Monkey God and a few others - seem to be able to fly or maybe teleport.

Hanuman, at least, can change his size and shape; at one point he carries both Rama and his brother Lakshmana around on his back.

They don't seem to be able to use missile weapons, except for thrown stones and trees. They claw and bite, jump around and do a lot of damage to the surrounding area, tearing up trees and throwing them. Interestingly, in Greek myth, the Centaurs also fight like this.

They are easily distracted and have a short attention span.

They seem to have matriarchal institutions: the King is whoever is married to Tara, the Queen (Tara, of course, is a famous Himalayan goddess, and it's probably not a coincidence that this all seems to be happening in the Himalayan foothills).

I think that the vanaras are archaic human people, what modern anthropologists usually refer to as "homo erectus". There are certainly other possibilities; that they are capuchins or baboons that have been genetically or surgically modified, or other human people that are different enough from the Aryans (say pygmies or something) that they call them monkeys in the normal racist way.

I suppose that it is even possible that they are all or partially imaginary.



The Google

by *Lothar D. Schenk*

In a time and place too distant to describe here, A'tol once summoned his google. Seemingly out of nowhere, the glittering sphere took shape and came to rest in his outstretched palm.

"Tell me about ancient civilizations!", he commanded.

The google flashed once and soft pale light pervaded the space where A'tol stood. Looking up, he noted a large silver disk floating on the horizon. A rabbit in a leaping posture seemed to be frozen on its surface.

A winged dragon with five toes on each claw emerged winding sinuously from behind the silver disk, while the sky above the horizon slowly took on a rose-colored tint. Its 117 blue scales like mother-of-pearl clinking softly, the dragon drew ever nearer, spewing water out of its mouth in large gushes, which fell upon the ground below and assembled there, growing from a mere puddle to a pond to a lake.

Green reeds soon sprang up to cover the banks of the lake, while water lilies broke its surface everywhere, creating a criss-cross of ripples, unfolding big bright-yellow petals. A slender man with the head of an ibis, followed by a baboon, strolled through the rustling reeds. While his long sharp beak turned this way and that way, following his gaze around, he made little scratching noises with a sharp stylus on a tablet he held in one hand.

Trumpeting sounds from the left heralded the advent of a massive body, plowing its way through splashing water. A big gray shape with large flapping ears and a long coiling trunk emerged. On its broad back was fastened something like a wide-open hut with a large linen canopy above. Two brown-skinned figures with bare chests and turbaned heads sat in it, a small richly ornamented table between them. The surface of the table held an inset pattern of squares, alternately coloured white and black. Strange looking pieces of wood were scattered over it.

"Aaaaaaaah", breathed A'tol. "How boring!"

The google flashed again and turned coal-black. In the blink of an eye, the scene had vanished.

With a flick of his wrist, A'tol dismissed the google, which dissolved into the silent shadows from where it had come.

