

Re: A China–Sumer connection?

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Peter T. Daniels wrote:

> *phippmartin@hotmail.com* wrote:

>

> *This seems to have been before you—all started crossposting to sci.lang.*

> *First assumption: that China and Sumer "developed in parallel."*

It isn't really an assumption. The Chinese and Sumerian civilizations developed over the same period of time. Sumerian writing dates back, presumably, to 5500 years ago and we can, supposedly, trace back Sumerian writing to its very beginning. The Chinese believe that their system of writing and their calendars were both invented some 4700 years ago, but in order to invent calendars they must have developed a writing system first, what with them not having had a separate mathematical notation (one→1, two→2, plus→+). It's true they had the abacus to do calculations but they must have been able to writing things down. So the earliest Chinese writing must date back a few more hundred years and, therefore, about the same time that writing developed in Sumer.

> *Why name*

> *those two in particular? Is there anything about them that makes them a*

> *natural class, such that the same development isn't seen anywhere else?*

I think it is fairly clear that the Egyptians borrowed a lot from the Sumerians, with Egyptian hieroglyphics being similar to Sumerian writing and the story of Isis and Osiris being similar to that of Inanna and Dumuzi. The Sumerians also, presumably, had contact with the Indians by sea and with other neighbouring cultures by land. It is doubtful that the Sumerians had direct contact with China and yet Sumer and China both developed phonetic ideographs, a twelve hour day, a twelve month solar calendar and similar beliefs in astrology with astrological symbols typically represented by animals and associated with the months of the year and the constellations in the sky. It is reasonable to ask why that would be. No assumption is being made at that point.

sci.anthropology: Re: A China–Sumer connection?

> *simultaneous? what's your evidence for simultaneous?*

I'm talking about development over a long period of time. While the Sumerians were developing writing, etc. so were the Chinese. It was simultaneous in the sense that it was happening at the same time.

> *Neither of them ever quoted a single Sumerian text (myth or otherwise).*

They have now.

> *"Claims of links" are not persuasive.*

Except that I am here sitting in front of a computer in Taiwan. I'm not going to go to a library or a museum and wade through Chinese texts. The evidence that one might need might be locked in a room in the Smithsonian for all we know. For 99.9% of the world, it might as well not exist. This is the 21st century. If information isn't available online then for most people in the world it simply isn't accessible.

> *The fact that some Indus seals*

> *have been excavated in Mesopotamia shows that there was some sort of*

> *contact between the Indus Valley and the Euphrates Valley in Sumerian*

> *times, but it does not show that there was direct contact; the tiny,*

> *valuable objects could have passed from hand to hand to hand just as*

> *easily, and more plausibly, than been carried by single merchants making*

> *the entire trip across the Iranian Plateau.*

Just as physical objects can be passed from person to person, so can ideas. If people can communicate with neighbouring cultures then ideas can diffuse outward (or in this case around), the only limitation being the extent to which these ideas continue to be understood by the people who would be passing them on.

> *Once again, what is the _evidence_ for contact?*

The evidence would be the Chinese and Sumerian stories that their Emperors or "fishmen", respectively, handed down their knowledge, that their knowledge was not developed over time as you would expect to have been the case. It does seem as though both people aren't giving themselves enough credit for developing writing, agriculture and calendars by themselves. If you want to dismiss any lunacy about aliens or Gods or demons or time travellers then any myth about knowledge coming from somewhere else must be referring to contact with other cultures.

I should point out that the Incans had similar myths about agriculture and irrigation having been provided them by a God-like ruler. This could also refer to contact with another culture that would have had to

sci.anthropology: Re: A China–Sumer connection?

have travelled by sea, although this might have been a one time event that would be very difficult to find any actual evidence for.

- > *What peoples are you*
- > *talking about? You cannot put modern names to them; the best you can do*
- > *is identify archeological horizons that might be associated with the*
- > *ancestors of this or that group.*

PKM actually referred to "Australians" from "Indonesia". I didn't want to be pretentious and start using the same terminology, although I suppose I could have said "ancestors of modern Malays (and Turks)".

Hypothetically, we could argue for the following contacts.

Chinese – Australian – Sumerian/Indian – Turk/Azeri – Chinese

Rice was cultivated in East Asia as far back as 10 000 years ago (based on cooked rice being found in pots dated to that time). Some Chinese ideas could have been passed on to the Sumerians as a result of seafaring traders, as their own stories about themselves seem to suggest. If we assume now that the Sumerians developed a twelve month solar calendar and the idea of astrology all by themselves then these ideas could have been passed back to the Chinese by the Australians or, more likely, through mutual contact with Turkish/Azeri traders. I say the latter is more likely because the Yellow Emperor's kingdom was located in Western China along the banks of the Yellow River so to assume that knowledge was passed on to them by Turkish/Azeri traders is in-keeping, again, with what the Chinese had to say about themselves.

- > *Why do you automatically assume that all those Asians weren't smart*
- > *enough to come up with things themselves, but had to be "sharing"*
- among*
- > *each other?*

Where is the assumption here? How is this any different from the idea that Indo–European language and culture diffused outward from the Caucasus mountains? It doesn't seem to be giving a lot of credit to other people in the region for developing their own ideas. A more complete theory of development in Europe would acknowledge the possibility of the influences of Turkish and Semitic peoples. While the concept of Indo–European language and culture doesn't automatically lead to white supremacy, I can see why some people would argue that there's a connection.

- > *How is that different, basically, from postulating aliens or*
- > *Atlanteans or gods or demons?*

Because the Asian people are developing these ideas themselves, although not necessarily independently. If you assume that everything was provided to them by aliens or

sci.anthropology: Re: A China–Sumer connection?

Atlanteans or gods or demons then you are presuming everybody to have been too stupid to have developed these ideas themselves. I consider that to be not only implausible but borderline racist. Note that the idea that knowledge was passed between civilizations requires that the traders, be they Austronesians or Turks, need to be intelligent enough to understand the ideas they would have to be passing on. There might very well have been some basic knowledge of agriculture, using symbolic writing, keeping time and setting dates that was common to most people in Asia 5000–6000 years ago.

The issue here is plausibility. It isn't just a question of relying on evidence that you can see, hear or touch but of putting together a theory that one can believe. Do you believe that the sun is a massive fusion reactor? And yet if you look at it with your eyes all you see is a big ball of fire. Developing a plausible theory requires more than simply relying on what you can see, hear and touch. Otherwise you would just go on believing that the sun is a big ball of fire and be done with it.

Martin