

Remembering the Great Comet

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How did it happen that the tranquil and predictable planet Venus inspired memories of terror throughout the ancient world? Within all of the well documented cultures, astronomical traditions describe Venus in the language of a *comet*. Given the specialized focus of historians, few indeed have noted this remarkable and universal pattern. But the collective, seemingly preposterous memory is now established beyond any reasonable doubt, and the theoretical sciences cannot afford to ignore the implications.

1. Introduction

How did it happen that the tranquil and predictable planet Venus inspired memories of terror throughout the ancient world? Within all of the well documented cultures, astronomical traditions describe Venus in the language of a comet. Given the specialized focus of historians, few indeed have noted this remarkable and universal pattern. But the collective, seemingly preposterous memory is now established beyond any reasonable doubt, and the theoretical sciences cannot afford to ignore the implications.

To raise the mystery of the comet Venus is to return once more to the oft-publicized “Velikovsky Affair.” [1] More than sixty years after publication of Immanuel Velikovsky’s **Worlds in Collision**, what can independent research tell us about his most controversial claim, that Venus once took the form of a frightful specter in the heavens, a *comet* linked directly to heaven-altering catastrophe?

Velikovsky’s best critics today are those who, originally inspired by his claims, have devoted decades to examining historical evidence on issues first raised by the controversial scholar. They will tell you that numerous aspects of his reconstruction are logically weak or factually unsupported. Some claims are undeniably incorrect. But these same researchers have also come to recognize that, on certain, most fundamental questions, Velikovsky is fully redeemed. And no consideration makes this more clear than the global language of the great comet Venus in ancient times [2].

On this question it matters not where we start, since all pathways lead to the same conclusion. But whatever pathway we follow, the rules of cross-cultural investigation are essential. Separate fragments of evidence are virtually useless apart from their connections to larger, fully verifiable patterns. And as patterns are brought to light it is also essential that they be traced to their earliest occurrences, where the records themselves are closest to the original human experience.

The ground rules for drawing reliable conclusions preclude the selective use of evidence. Velikovsky, for example, recounts the report by the Roman historian Varro (taken from St. Augustine) concerning a remarkable portent in the heavens, occurring in the time of the mythic king Ogygus. At this time, the report states, the planet Venus “changed its color, its size, its shape, and its course.” [3] But why should we give any credence to such a story, considering its contradiction of direct observation today?

Ancient sources are filled with magical, bizarre and contradictory stories.

Whole lifetimes have been wasted by researchers chasing down Atlantis, King Arthur, or El Dorado’s gold, adding one speculation to another in a chain of reasoning broken from the start. Dependable conclusions can not rest on any local myth. The only basis for serious investigation is when a local theme converges so precisely with independent, global testimony that it is irrational to ignore it.

The comparative approach is not optional, but mandatory. When diverse cultures use different words, different symbols, different sacred practices, and different mythical interpretations to say exactly the same thing, a point of highest confidence—even factual certainty—is potentially available. In this sense, the ancient comet Venus illustrates well how dependable reasoning can work if we will simply follow the necessary ground rules.

In **Worlds in Collision**, Velikovsky placed the anomalous “cometary” traits of Venus along side each other in a logical argument. The strength of the argument derived from the breadth and consistency of converging “witnesses,” something that could not have occurred globally without an identifiable cause. He noted, for example, that in Mexican records, Venus was “the smoking star” the very phrase natives employed for a “comet.” Within numerous cultures he observed a recurring association of Venus with long-flowing celestial “hair” as well as a celestial “beard,” two of the most common symbols of the comet in the ancient world. The same planet, amongst the Babylonians and other races, was called a great flame or “torch of heaven,” ancient words for a comet. But another worldwide name for the comet was the fiery or fire-breathing serpent or dragon, a mythic form taken by the planet Venus in virtually every land.

Velikovsky concluded that the comet Venus inspired some of the most powerful themes of ancient times, a collective memory of global upheaval, earthshaking battles in the sky, decimation of nations on earth, and an extended period of darkness—all suggesting the end of one world age and the birth of another. The symbolism of Venus and the symbolism of the remembered comet stand in a spectacular accord.

In recent decades, the volume of material bearing on this question has accumulated into a massive library reaching far beyond the citations in **Worlds in Collision**. My purpose here will be to provide a sense of the directions that subsequent research has taken and must continue to take.

2. Mother Goddess and Great Comet

I've made the point often, but it deserves repetition. Of the five visible planets, ancient cultures around the world consistently identified only Venus as the mother goddess. This most improbable pattern carries far more implications than could be covered in this article. What we *can* note here is that the goddess archetype and the great comet archetype globally converge on the same planet. One huge improbability, in juxtaposition with another *equal* improbability, invites us to look beneath the surface. The truth can then reveal itself as a core principle, even if more specialized scholarship has missed it.

Only rigorous cross cultural comparison, for example, will resolve the enigma of the ancient goddess' famous "terrible aspect." A goddess of awe inspiring celestial beauty, the source of light and life, attacked the world violently, producing a great storm in the heavens, perhaps even bringing an ancestral generation to the edge of extinction. We see this most vividly in the earliest forms of the goddess, where the images in their raw detail have yet to pass through the filters of inter-regional assimilation and re-interpretation across the millennia. The Sumerian Inanna, the Akkadian Ishtar, the Egyptian Sekhmet (a form of the popular goddesses, Isis and Hathor) all exhibit the same archetypal core. Each represents the ideal of celestial radiance and power. Each is identified as the "life" animating the theater of the gods, and each is the Great Protectress. And with the rise of formal astronomy, each appears as a celebrated form of the planet Venus. How did it happen, then, that the prototypical goddess figure so universally manifests as a raging serpent, dragon, or other monstrous form—a pattern that, in later times, can be found in hundreds of fragments and variations on every habitable continent?

The great star of the Sumerian Inanna, a goddess astronomically identified as Venus, fills the heavens with a "blazing glory," but the image merges seamlessly with that of a fire-spitting dragon. "Like a dragon you have deposited venom on the foreign lands...Raining blazing fire down upon the Land..." [4] The same paradoxical aspect attached to the Semitic (Akkadian) Ishtar, the "great serpent dragon," the "great serpent mother," moving in the sky as a fear-inspiring "torch of heaven." "Thou Ishtar, art the fearful dragon of the gods," the texts say [5]. The goddess herself declares: "I rain battle down like flames in the fighting, I make heaven and earth shake with my cries." [6]

Amongst all of the tribes of ancient Egypt, we find an archaic image of the great goddess, the giver of life and protectress of kings, taking the form of the flaming Uraeus-serpent. Every popular Egyptian goddesses exhibited aspects of the Uraeus, and perhaps none more fully than the Venus goddess Sekhmet, whose story *is* the story of the great female serpent.

For the Egyptians, the Uraeus was the prototype of power and splendor in the sky. The Uraeus hieroglyph *means* "goddess," and it captures the full story of the goddess in her terrible aspect. The Uraeus-goddess appears with a trail of fire: "Behold me, men and gods! I have come into being as the Lady of Glorious Appearings. I have reappeared in glory, I have made my being enduring, my flame is behind me [7].

"It is a flame which drives away on its account...The tip of its flame crosses the land from the sky...No one at all can approach her, the streams behind her are flames of fire." [8]

Is it significant that nothing in the story fits with things seen in our sky today? A star goddess, identified as Venus in the astronomical traditions, becomes a fiery, world-threatening serpent or dragon. Should we simply dismiss the idea as an ancient absurdity, and be done with it? Or perhaps, we might follow the instincts of a detective, one who finds in things out of place the most important clues, and understands that the more unusual the detail the more compelling is the convergence of testimony?

If Velikovsky had traced the mythic archetypes back to their earliest sources, he would have avoided a crucial mistake in his chronology of events. But his research had led him to link the story of "the comet Venus" to the Hebrew Exodus, an event he placed close to 1500 B.C. As a result, he concentrated on later sources. This fateful turn prevented him from seeing elements of the "great comet" theme in much older and more original texts. The best sources of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia preceded Velikovsky's "Exodus date" by more than a thousand years, and it is these earliest accounts that will best illuminate the later fragments.

3. Divine Glory: The Radiant Heart and Soul of Heaven

Before there was a comet named in the heavens, before the listing of any planets, and before any sky-worshippers spoke of a fiery serpent or dragon roaming amongst the stars, there was simply the "Glory." Its presence preceded the flowering of world mythology, but in its first activity it began to establish the celestial identity of the mother goddess.

The "Glory" of the star goddess first appeared as the central, visible *life* of heaven. It was an object in the sky. But short of a new perspective on the subject, the meaning is remarkably elusive. It erupted into awe-inspiring activity. And its identity as the vibrant, fiery Light of Heaven gave rise to the universal language of the "life-giving" goddess. The goddess cleaved to the center of heaven as its luminous heart and soul. But what is this quality of the goddess telling us?

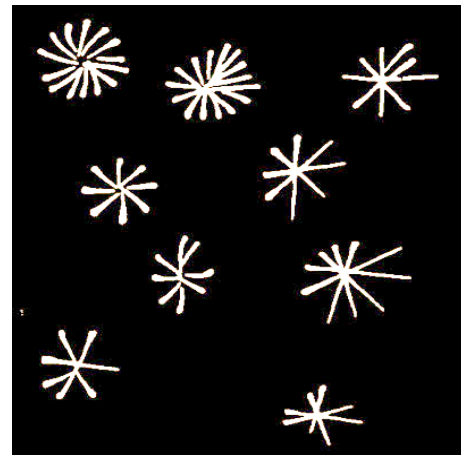


Fig. 1. Cuneiform signs of the fear-inspiring Glory were the pictographic symbols of the goddess Inanna. The images suggest a bright discharge with varying numbers of streamers.

Everything points first to a focal point of radiance, but the object described is missing in our sky. The Akkadian *melammu*, “terrifying glory,” is complemented by an array of synonyms: *namirru*, “radiance”; *salummatu*, “brilliance”; *saruru*, “brightness”; *bastulbaltu*, “dignity” (and more), [9] typically spoken in combination with expressions of overwhelming terror. All converge as the essence of the great goddess, whose frightful Glory the king himself received symbolically as a divine certification of his power and authority. That was the meaning of the sacred marriage of kings, securing for the king the powerful Glory of the goddess. How strange that scholars cannot identify an inspiration for the earth-shaking, heaven-altering, fear-inspiring aspects of the symbolism.

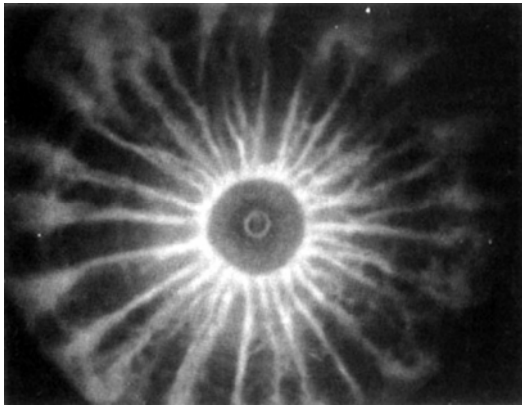


Fig. 2. Radial electric discharge in the laboratory.

Or does the subsequent astronomical identification as the planet Venus, standing out in cross-cultural analysis, tell us more than scholars on this subject have realized?

The impact of the cultural memory is clear in the symbolism of royal crowns and related garments of kings. The crown was anything but a random artifact of kingship rites. Esarhaddon’s crown was “clothed with terrifying radiance (*melammu*), surrounded with dignity (*baltu*), surrounded with brilliance (*salummatu*), wrapped in radiance (*namirru*).” [10] Every nuance of the crown is a pointer to the blazing “Glory” – the mother goddess to whom the king was symbolically connected as spouse or consort.

Centrality, in combination with the outflow of fire and light, defined the goddess in her original form [11]. The Sumerians knew this dazzling object in the sky as the “terrifying splendor in the center of An (‘heaven’).” For the Egyptians it was the central, radiant Eye of heaven, a primordial blast of light celebrated throughout all of Egypt as the life or soul of the gods themselves. No goddess figure in Egypt tells this story more vividly than Sekhmet, whose fiery countenance *was* the Eye, and whose identity and metamorphosis into the serpentine “Great Flame” has found no explanation in 150 years of Egyptological research.

The object celebrated does not exist in our sky, and that incongruity is why, as we compare the earliest stories to their global counterparts, the universal accord is a collective shout from antiquity. It tells us that the astronomical identification as Venus is not just worth following, but the window to the entire story.

The spectacular, conquering Glory changed human history, and when clarified in our own time, its story will permanently alter our perspectives on mythic symbolism around the world.

Decades of research have now shown that *what happens to this first form of the goddess* gives us the full ancient language of the Great Comet, long prior to any naming of the little wisps of gas that now wander into view. First came the archetype; only later did comets enter the lexicon of an emerging observational astronomy, when the sky worshippers came to name these unusual objects as echoes of the first form or prototype.

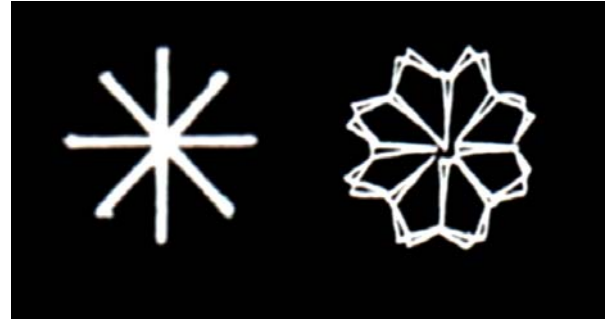


Fig. 3. The Sumerian 8-rayed star (left) was the most common form of Inanna’s Glory. The same form found mythical expression as the *plant of life* or rosette. The Glory *was* the life of heaven, the essential quality of the Venus goddess.

4. Great Protectress

There is a reason why the great goddesses of antiquity were, with surprising unanimity, called the “Great Protectress. When the heavens fell into disorder, the sky itself became a mythic battlefield. Clouds of darkness, seen as rebelling hordes of chaos, appeared to overtake the world. It was in this context that the most spectacular form of the goddess appeared, affecting every ancient culture’s ideas about the meaning of war, conquest, and defense. Was the goddess a divine weapon launched against rebelling powers? Or was she herself the provocation, the feared destroyer of cosmic order?



Fig. 4. The “Celestial Crown” of later Heraldry points back to the Glory of heaven worn by ancient warrior kings. Symbolically, they acquired the crown through conjunction with the goddess.

Human interpretations would stand in competition for millennia. But more fundamental than the interpretation was the underlying event, and our purpose here is to see the event more clearly, through the eyes of global witnesses, for whom an entirely new language was essential. In the comparative approach, the competing interpretations will often provide the strongest confirmation of an event. Confirmation comes wherever, in the absence of the implied event, the broader field of evidence could not exist: by its very *existence*, the evidence *requires* the event.

In the presence of the goddess' devastating radiance, enemies fell. Dark clouds of chaos were scattered by a blast of fire and light. The rebelling hordes fled from its onslaught.

Here is the key to our understanding of this human memory: the fear-inspiring power of the goddess could be magically manifest on earth wherever a warrior-king accessed its protection and offensive potential, repeating on the battlefield the great wonders of a former time.

The fiery radiance of the goddess created an invulnerable and inapproachable space. And that is why, in the sacred marriage of kings, the goddess herself provided the king's resplendent aura, expressed symbolically by the radiance of his "crown of Glory." All of the regalia and symbolic structure in which the cultures immersed their kings, certified his power as the living *consort* of the Great Protectress. To be crowned as king *was* the sacred marriage at the heart of all kingship ritual.

From this starting point the vast symbols fall into place. We allow the cosmic referents to stand for things witnessed in ancient times. Before giving way to the uneventful sky of our own time, the more ancient sky became the theater of cosmic disorder and of warring gods.

In their sacred hymns, the Sumerian priests celebrated Inanna as the "Great fierce storm,...Inanna, emitting fearsomeness and radiance in battle!" It was thus the function of the warrior-king on earth to draw upon the invincible power of the goddess, to vanquish neighboring "rebels" and "barbarians" just as the divine Glory in heaven had conquered the fiends of chaos in the remembered cosmic night.



Fig. 5. Ancient Mesopotamia: the king stands within the protective radiance of the Glory. Image from Beatrice Teissier, **Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals**.

"Kings like the gods strode into battle surrounded by the *melammu*, a radiant, terrifying nimbus devastating to foes..." [12] In the Akkadian language this was indeed the frightful Glory, *pulhu melammu*, the Sumerian *ni.me.lam*. Two nouns—"fear" and "radiance"—combined in the grammatical form of a *hendiadys*. [13] Such was the essential identity of the Sumerian goddess Inanna, the Akkadian Ishtar, and innumerable Mesopotamian and Near Eastern counterparts [14].

The most respected cuneiform authority on the subject, Elena Cassin, describes this as an overwhelming fiery blast revealed in pulsating "splendor." [15] Always, the inescapable quality of the goddess is her discharge of fire and light, reflected symbolically

as the warrior king's nimbus or halo. Of the Akkadian king's enemies, the chroniclers proclaimed. "The effulgence of his surpassing Glory consumed them." [16]

In his seminal article on the subject A. Leo Oppenheim reports that the *melammu* denotes a dazzling aureole or nimbus surrounding a divinity [17], a supernatural garment of fire and flame. As headgear it could be represented by everything from a crown to a turban or frightful mask. It was "The Golden Garment of the Gods" (the title of a subsequent article by Oppenheim)." [18]

"The awe-inspiring splendor" of King Shalmaneser III overwhelmed neighboring tribes [19]. Surrounded by this discharging fire and light the king became invulnerable. Hymns to Inanna thus declared that even the gods "dare not proceed before your terrible countenance." That is the heart of the matter—the *inapproachable* goddess—a key too easily missed in the absence of any celestial referent in today's tranquil sky.



Fig. 6. Japan: the wheel of fire was amongst the most common ancient images of the Glory.



Fig. 7. Ancient Mexico: warrior god in his avian form occupied the protected space, shielded by the streamers of the Glory (*tonalli*).

Akkadian warriors carried images of Ishtar into battle, to be displayed at the head of armies [20]. Her fierce “anger” and “radiance” meant the same thing, repelling all foes. “Who can approach me because of the anger of your heart”? [21] In her original character, the goddess *was* the feminine heart and soul of heaven, and her anger *was* the king’s defense.

Notice, for example, how the independent traditions of ancient Egyptian captured precisely the same content in the terrible aspect of the goddess Sekhmet, known as the great radiant Eye of heaven. The name of the goddess derived from the root *khem*, signifying a fiery blast of “power and glory” in the sky. “It is a flame which drives away on its account...The tip of its flame crosses the land from the sky...No one at all can approach her, the streams behind her are flames of fire.” [22]



Fig. 8. As represented on the U.S. dollar bill, the Egyptian Eye was a manifestation of the celestial Glory.

“I am mistress of the flame,” the goddess announces. “The fear of me is in [their] hearts, and the awe of me is in their hearts.” [23]

“The flame makes his enemies fall...” [24] It is a “flame (moving) before the wind of the sky to the end of the earth” [25].



Fig. 9. Crowning of King Louis XIII. Symbolically, it was the goddess who crowned the king because in the earliest traditions, she was the crown, the protective Glory. Painting by Philippe de Champaigne, 1835.

Surely it is no coincidence that the great flame in heaven, taking the form of a fiery serpent, found its symbolic place on *the crown of kings* in Egypt. Though the words and symbols varied, the parallels between the cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia are remarkably consistent.

5. The Flight of the Goddess

It was said that the Egyptian Atum, or Atum-Ra possessed a central Eye. This was the fear-inspiring Glory of heaven, a striking counterpart to the Sumerian “terrifying splendor” in the center of An. And despite the differences in cultural interpretation, both identify the departure of the goddess with the onset of cosmic upheaval.

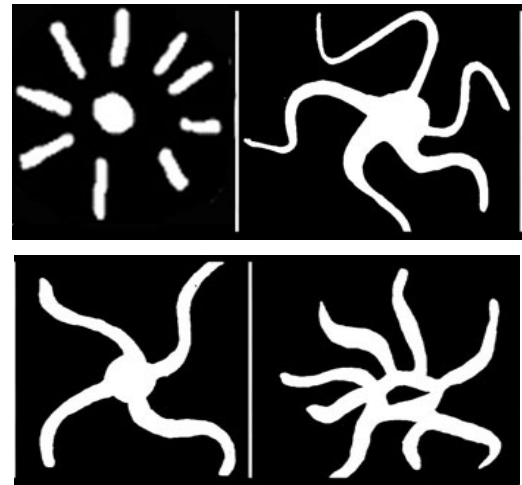


Fig. 10. Left: California rock art captures the starburst form of the Glory. Three other images show the same streamers in their subsequent chaotic phases.

A great rebellion occurred. This was the critical juncture at which, according to all Egyptian traditions, the Eye departed, or was dislodged or fell from its station at the center and summit of the sky, or was flung as a weapon against the rebelling powers. In one of the best-preserved traditions, the Eye went forth as Sekhmet, the flaming “Majesty,” to scatter the dark clouds and devour the “fiends of chaos.” The account is a striking parallel to Sumerian descriptions of a world in fear and trembling at the “tempestuous radiance” of Inanna [26]. Sekhmet, the Eye-goddess, appeared as “a flame of fire in her tempest,” instilling terror and threatening to destroy the world.

Egyptian texts describe the Majesty as “a circling star which scatters its flame in fire” — a weapon against the powers of disorder. The Great Flame rose as “a storm against the doers of (evil) deeds” [27] “...The fiery blast is against you,” the texts say. [28] The match to the warring Sumerian and Akkadian star of “glory” is definitive:

“O ye multitudinous enemies of Ra who have rebelled, ye malicious fiends ... Ye are overthrown, your heads are crushed in, ye are destroyed, annihilated Sekhmet, the blasting fire ... maketh an end to you.” [29]

In later times, when Egyptian armies confronted foreign nations (“barbarians” outside the gate, the terrestrial symbols of the primeval chaos fiends), the king invariably called upon the shining Majesty of Ra, remembering how it had raged against rebel-

ling powers in former times. "My Majesty is upon me, the Chaos-gods are controlled for me, so that they of the celestial expanses quake for me [30].

"I am he who will restore the sky to order, I am he who will have power over darkness." [31]

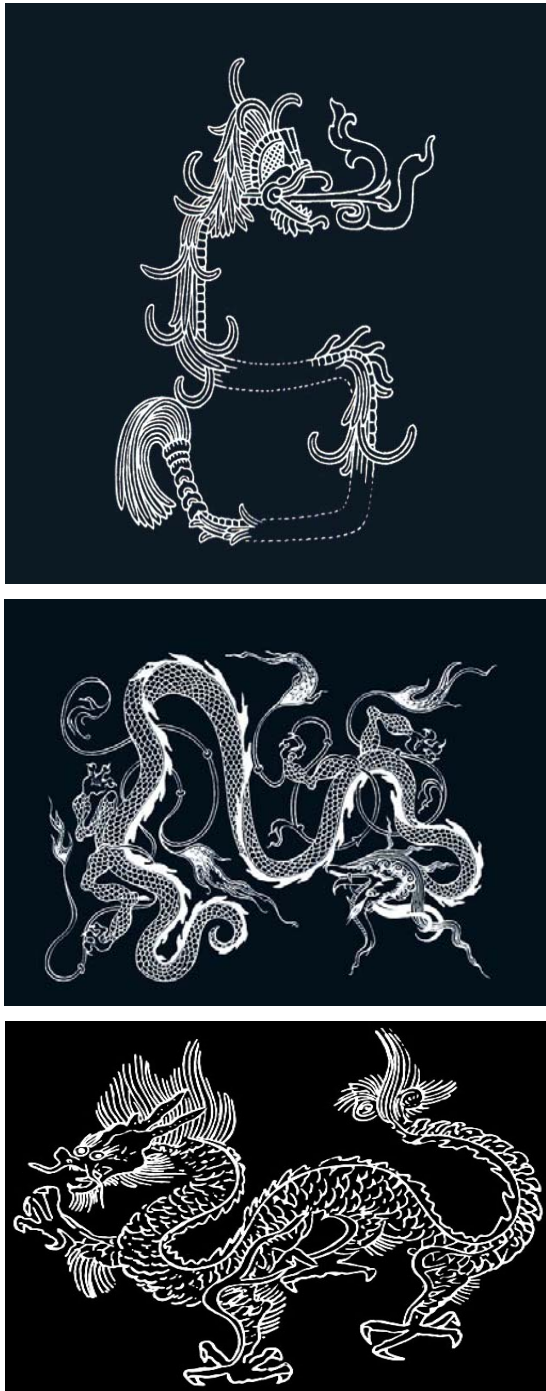


Fig. 11. Mexican, Persian, and Chinese dragons exhibit remarkably similar attributes, highlighting the active serpentine aspects of the celestial Glory in its departure from the center of the sky. The filamentary, hairy, feathery emanations always mean fire, light, and life, the essential qualities of the Glory.

As in Mesopotamia, it was the headgear of the king that reflected most dramatically the protective role of the celestial Majesty. Wrapped around the king's forehead as the Uraeus crown

of every ruler, the goddess "poured out from herself the blazing fire which scorched and consumed his enemies who came near." [32] Such is the concrete meaning of the goddess as Great Protectress, exactly as in ancient Mesopotamia.

Always, the prototype occurs in the theater of the gods. The goddess declares, "I set the fierce heat of the fire between Osiris and his enemy, and I keep away from him the evil ones, and remove his foes from his habitation." [33] Every region of Egypt remembered the role of the Eye goddess under different names. The texts say, "The goddess Tefnut (as the Eye) is seated on thy head, she hurleth her flames of fire against thy enemies, and maketh them to be destroyed utterly." [34] So too, the goddess Isis (also appearing as the Eye), in a hymn to Osiris: "His sister worked protection for him, she drove away the enemies. She turned aside evil happenings..." [35] The goddesses Hathor, Bast, Neith, Iusasset, Nekhebet and innumerable counterparts all filled the same role, manifesting as the *protective Eye of heaven*, symbolically worn as the king's crown of Glory.

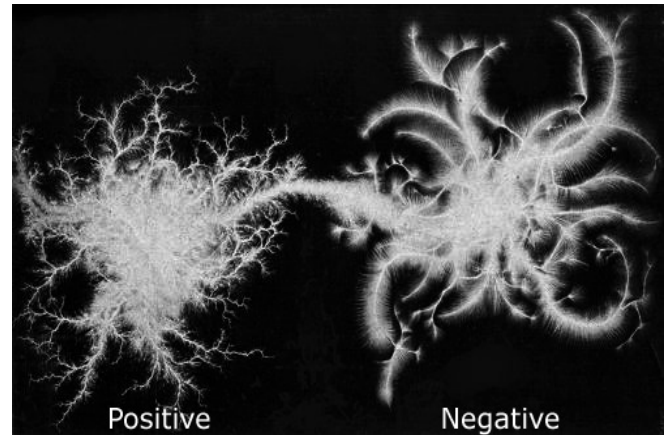


Fig. 12. Electric discharge in the laboratory provides the best explanation for the effusive filamentary aspects of the cosmic dragon.

The texts say that the god, or his regent the king, is "furnished with the brilliance of the Eye in Heliopolis, to overthrow the Sebau fiends." [36] The subject is the crown of kingship. Through his conjunction with the Eye-goddess, he received his radiant crown, acceding to the throne as the consort of the goddess.

That was the meaning of the sacred marriage. To wear the crown was to become the "pupil" of the Eye, enjoying its supreme protection. The fiery Eye and the Great Protectress stood in an absolute identification. "... He is Horus encircled with the protection of his Eye ..." [37] "My refuge is my Eye, my protection is my Eye ..." [38] "I am the dweller in the Eye; no evil or calamitous things befall me." [39]

6. The Glory: Evolution of its Symbolism

Was the goddess in her terrible aspect the leader of the chaos hordes, or their vanquisher? Comparative analysis will show that different cultures found different ways, either to resolve seemingly irreconcilable traits of the goddess or to highlight the most attractive or most frightful aspects. By the *outcome* of the cosmic drama, she often became the destroyer of enemies, the protectress of order, though in truth the early sources do not permit us to separate the one interpretation from the other.

Amongst the Hebrews, the Glory of heaven appears as the *kabod*, taking the form of a consuming fire filling heaven and earth [40]. Its power was manifest in the charismatic life-energy of gods and heroic men [41]. In Ezekiel *kabod* is a blazing fire surrounded by radiance and a great cloud. The divine flames strike the enemy so that “fire goes before [the Lord] and burns up his adversaries round about,” and all behold his *kabod* [42].

It was said that a “rebellion” of the Israelites occurred, followed by a descent of the flaming *kabod* against them. Seeing this the people fell on their faces in fear [43]. According to the encyclopedic *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, the *kabod* and related expressions typified the “polarity of fear and reverence” (in a hendiadys), as seen also in such expressions as “majesty and fear” and “terrible majesty.” [44]

The *kabod* is the acknowledged prototype for the radiant Shekinah, or indwelling, soul-like “Glory” of later Hebrew literature, recognized as the female aspect of divinity, the virgin bride of God. And though the references to the departure of the Shekinah are almost always enigmatic, the exile of the Shekinah became a common theme [45]. In the end times, “the Shekinah will become visible to all.” [46]

The Persian *Zend Avesta* speaks of the “awful Kingly Glory” (*Kavaem Hvareno.*) which is said to have “clave unto the bright Yima.” But later “the Glory was seen to flee away from him.” [47] On its departure, the Glory took the form of a female chaos monster, remembered as “that most powerful, fiendish Drug, that demon baleful.” [48] Yet the same Glory became a *weapon* wielded by the hero Vistaspa, “when he victoriously maintained Holiness against the host of the fiends.” [49]

We encounter this paradoxical duality again and again in the myths and symbols of other lands. The departed glory takes the form of a chaos monster. In the alternative interpretation, it was the fear-inspiring Glory that vanquished and scattered the enemies of cosmic order. But most commonly the goddess-aspects as Destroyer and Protectress stand in uneasy alignment within the diverse biographies of the goddess.

The Hindus remembered the “Face of Glory,” called *Kirttimukha*, said to have been born from the *eye* of Shiva. It was lion-headed and its “mane, disheveled, spread far and wide into space.” [50] The imagery reminds us of the Egyptian Eye-goddess Tefnut. When she took flight, she was seen in the sky as the head of a lion, with fiery, smoking mane. Pacified, the goddess became the consort and *crown* of Horus, the prototype of kings [51]. The monstrous lion-head or leonine goddess with long-flowing mane, or goddess with wildly disheveled hair darkening the sky at the time of a cosmic crisis has almost endless counterparts in myth and folklore (a theme I’ll be illustrating in my NPA slide presentation.)

Authorities have recognized the Face of Glory as a form of the Supreme Goddess, Devi, in her terrible aspect [52]. Like the Medusa head, the *Kirtimukha* could ward off evil [53]. Its symbol was a gruesome mask placed in Medusa fashion as protection over the threshold [54]. The frightful countenance of this angry goddess means both *destruction* and *protection*. The same concept will be seen in the fear-inspiring mask or head of the *T’ao T’ieh* of the Chinese, which Ananda Coomaraswamy identifies as a variant of both the *Kirtimukha* and the Gorgonian [55].



Fig. 13. In Aztec and Maya texts, the “smoking star,” the words for a comet, also meant the planet Venus. Painting from the Codex Cospi.

Buddhist accounts say that streaming fire and light from the head of the Buddha crystalized into a “fierce, terrifying goddess, garlanded by flames, a pulverizer of enemies and demons.” No separation of the goddess and the crown of Glory is possible. Known as the “Victorious Queen of Crowning Light (*Usnisavijaya*) she was the source of life, embodying the “purifying luminosity” of the Shakyamuni Buddha’s flaming crown (*usnisa*), from whose brilliant rays of light she received her name [56].

Over time it is only to be expected that inter-regional assimilation and filtering would tend to separate the goddess into distinct emphases or aspects, all ultimately tracing to the same unified archetype. The “Medusa theme” emerging in Greek literature illustrates well this evolutionary trend. Reflecting the horrific side of the Glory-goddess, the theme is dominated by terror and destruction. The later folklore of the hag or witch will trace to these same threads of evolving mythology.

Fittingly, the Greek Athene, the Great Protectress, will trace back to the same archetype as the Destroyer Medusa. In most instances the later myths will tend to temper the original identification with the crown in order to accommodate the anthropomorphic interpretation of the Glory. But the goddess (or her literary echo, the beautiful princess) delivering a crown of Glory to great warriors or warrior kings can be seen in hundreds of localized stories, even if the original, absolute identity of the goddess and the crown has been lost. This forgetfulness could hardly be avoided as cultures came to separate out an imagined *human* form of the goddess. Thus it was said that Athena crowned the head of Achilles with a cloud of Glory, filling the Trojans with terror. That’s the typical way storytelling evolved as the cosmic powers were, in effect, brought down to earth. And of course the symbolism of the protective Glory extended to other warrior vestiture as well. There is good reason why the famous shield of Athene, symbolically delivered to Greek warriors, bore the head of the Medusa as Athene’s own alter ego. In its various localized

forms, the Glory of heaven was the symbolic protection of every legendary warrior.



Fig. 14. Greece: Medusa head juxtaposed with the venerated scallop shell of Aphrodite, confirming the archetypal identity of the two.

The progressive separation of the terrible aspect of the mother goddess into a more distinctly “malevolent” personality was a worldwide pattern in the transformation of myth over time. The tendency is exemplified in the Hebrew mythology of the “demonic” Lilith, tracing back to the ancient language of the most venerated Mesopotamian goddesses, Inanna and Ishtar, whose darker aspects found vivid expression in the personality of the great female demon Lamashtu, recognized as a mythic prototype of Lilith.

Nor should we ignore the tendency of our forebears to isolate the more “lovely” side of the goddess by a progressive disregard for the darker aspect. Over time, the radiance of the archetypal goddess stood out amongst the Greeks and Romans as the “comely” Aphrodite or Venus. But even here, though the role of fear was greatly diminished, the violent substratum did not disappear completely, as we see in the juxtaposition of the Medusa head with the venerated scallop shell of the goddess in Fig. 14.

With this said, none of the deeper levels of cross-cultural accord will make any sense until one approaches the subject with full attention to concrete detail. It is the details in all of their integrity that *require* an explicit form in the sky. Of this truth, the complete identification of the planet Venus and the Great Comet provides a compelling example.

7. Rise of Astronomy

It needs to be understood that the original language of the Glory-goddess preceded any and all formal astronomy that could be recognized in our own time. A meaningful declaration that “Venus was a comet” would not have been possible. Comets, in the terms we know the phenomena, had not yet been identified or observationally categorized. And planets did not exist as such, and no accurate planet lists can be found until the first millennium BC.

The evidence we are following is that of a collective cultural memory prior to the rise of astronomy. The earliest civilizations were *monumental*, and a monument is, by definition *commemorative*. The first question to be asked, the question that will never be answered by asking our sky to explain the cosmic images of the past, is this: *what cosmic events provoked the pervasive fears and yearnings of our early forebears?* Remembering and magically accessing the wonders of a prior age of the gods was the overriding motive of the early cultures, one might say, the *exclusive* motive of all collective activity.

Such is the great mystery. Converging archaic descriptions of the terrifying Glory are far too vivid, detailed, and explicit to allow for scholarly trivialization, and the depth and breadth of the imagery reached far beyond the influence of any *local* interpretation. But in the absence of a celestial referent, trivialization has been the “default” position of standard scholarly treatments. The alternate possibility, that our early ancestors lived beneath a vastly different sky, has yet to enter scholarly or scientific discussion—despite the fact that the ancient theater of the gods and the celestial theater we know today have virtually nothing in common. Indeed, when we consider the ancient symbols in their full cultural contexts, it becomes clear that our sky cannot explain *any* of the more archaic language.

We have focused this small segment of a vastly larger story on the ancient Near East, because the best sources take us back to the earliest human memories. Nevertheless, the critical steps in this investigation will require comparative analysis of an incontrovertible historical pattern, emerging with the rise of observational astronomy:

Every well-documented symbol, myth, or superstition about comets was attached simultaneously to the planet Venus, from the birth of astronomy onward.

As my slide presentation at NPA 19 will show, the archetypal comet and the archetypal goddess Venus refer to one and the same celestial form. The only cause that can account for such a full convergence is the absolute historic identity of the two. Translated into the language of our own time, the ancient Glory of the goddess was the *Great Comet Venus*.

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