

The Nazca Lines

Image found at www.qtm.net/~geibdan/oldufos/peru.html

The Nazca Desert is a high plateau about sixty miles long and five miles wide on the coast of Peru, some 250 miles south of Lima. At some time before 1000 BCE, the Nazca Valley was inhabited by a people who developed advanced farming methods that allowed them to build an irrigation system, improve their crops, and expand the area of land they could farm. Over the next 1,500 years, they also developed outstanding skills in weaving, pottery, and architecture. The Nazca were wiped out after the Spanish conquest, so that piece of history is quite blank. Perhaps the most fascinating of their cultural achievements was the creation of a remarkable ground art -- the exact purpose of which remains a mystery.

Occasional travelers through Nazca had doubtless noticed the strange and obviously artificial lines in the desert floor, but the lines were unimpressive and meaningless at ground level. As planes began to pass over the Nazca region, air travelers saw that some of the lines formed parts of gigantic figures whose shape could only be appreciated from the air. Aerial photographs of the region proved to be highly dramatic.

Therein lies the mystery. Why would anyone bother to make figures that could only be appreciated from the air in an era when there were no airplanes? It is well established that these drawings are at least fifteen hundred years old.

Archaeologists have developed several explanations for this: one is that the figures, probably of religious significance, were not meant to be seen as a while by human eyes; a second is that the Nazca people built balloons that allowed them to view the figures when they flew over the sites. This suggestion, while not impossible, lacks supporting evidence.

The so-called Nazca lines, of which there are thousands, consist, according to investigator William H. Isbell, of five kinds of markings: long straight lines; large geometric figures; drawings of plants and animals; rock piles; and figures decorating hillsides.

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There are drawings of birds, spiders, fishes, even a monkey, and a few unidentifiable creatures. There are also rectangular shapes and a large number of straight lines that run apparently from nowhere to nowhere.

The lines may be as narrow as six inches or as wide as several hundred yards. Some run for many miles. The Nazca people created some of them by removing dark surface stones and placing them in the desired patterns. For others, according to William E. Shawcross, they removed the desert's "thin brown surface coating" by walking or sweeping across it, "[exposing] the creamy pink soil underneath." Because of the area's dry, stable climate, these light-colored Nazca lines have remained nearly unchanged for many centuries.

One of the first modern researchers to become interested in the Nazca figures was an American scholar, Paul Koosk. He thought that the lines represented "the largest astronomy book in the world." He believed that the lines pointed to certain astronomical

alignments.

Koosk died before he could expand on his theory, but the work was taken up by Dr. Maria Reiche, a German-born astronomer and mathematician who pursued the theory with almost fanatical intensity. She worked out a huge number of astronomical calculations.

Dr. Reiche's conclusions have not been accepted by other scientists. The basic problem is that there are a lot of lines and an almost infinite number of possible astronomical correlations.

The Nazca lines attracted public attention not long after the heyday of UFO sightings began. In the 1950s, as more and more books and magazine articles addressed UFOs, some writers looked back to ancient history and mythology for evidence of early space visitors. In an article in the October 1955 issue of *Fate*, James W. Moseley suggested that since the markings were largely invisible from the ground, the Nazca people must have "constructed their huge markings as signals to interplanetary visitors or to some advanced earth race... that occasionally visited them."

In the early 1960s a French best-seller by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, published in America as *The Morning of the Magicians*, included the Nazca lines in its theory of ancient astronauts. This idea, that advanced space beings visited the earth early in human history and played a part in the development of human intelligence and technology, reached its greatest popularity with Swiss writer Erich von Daniken's book *Chariot of the Gods?*, first published in West Germany in 1968 and reprinted in translated editions around the world. According to von Daniken, the Nazca lines marked out an "airfield" on which spacecraft landed and took off.

Still, nothing in the nature of these lines points to such a purpose. In fact, a critic of von Daniken stated, "It hardly seems reasonable that advanced extraterrestrial spacecraft would require landing strips," adding that Nazca's "soft, sandy soil" was hardly suitable for an airport.

Yet when the first space shuttle flight landed at Edwards AFB in California, many who viewed the landing on television were struck by the similarity of the markings that covered the field on which the shuttle landed and those in the Nazca desert.

Sources: "Strange and Unexplained Phenomena" by Jerome Clark and Nancy Pear and "Encyclopedia of the Strange" by Daniel Cohen.

Further Resources

Archaeological Explorations in Nazca, Peru
by A.L. Kroeber, Donald Collier, Patrick H. Carmichael

Arrival of the Gods: Revealing the
Ancient Landing Sites at Nazca
by Erich von Daniken

Broken Images: The Figured Landscape of Nazca
by David Parker

Encyclopedia of the Strange
by Daniel Cohen

Encyclopedia of Strange and Unexplained Phenomena
by Jerome Clark and Nancy Pear

Lines to the Mountain Gods: Nazca and the Mysteries of Peru
by Evan Hadingham

Mysteries in Peru: The Lines
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