

ALIEN VISITATIONS

Useful books:

Brookesmith, Peter. *UFO: The Complete Sightings* (1995)—this is the best collection of materials I have seen, covering different historical periods and international in scope, with apparently not much bias.

Bryan, C.D.B. *Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind: Alien Abductions, UFOs, and the Conference at MIT* (1995)

Some topics to discuss: (would discuss at length in class if time, since they are all curious in their own way)

UFO sightings--historical; 40s and 50s; large-scale investigations, polls, psychological profiles; statistics of unexplained fraction; multiple witness events (e.g. Rendlesham Forest); photographic evidence? (e.g. Trinidad Island photos).

Unexplained phenomena--pictograms (e.g. Nazca geoglyphs [see *The Lines of Nazca*, ed. A. Aveni, 1990]); crop circles; Tunguska explosion; animal mutilations,...

Reports of strange creatures (e.g. “Thetis Monster,” Thetis Lake, B.C., Canada)

Textual interpretations--e.g. Ezekiel in Old Testament (discussed in class)

Cultural interpretations--e.g. the Dogon and the Nommos from Sirius (discussed in class)

Government coverups (the “Federal Hypothesis”)--e.g. NASA missions; Roswell,N.M.; Bob Lazar; alien autopsies,...

Abduction phenomena--history; characteristics; sleep paralysis; multiple abductions; implants; missing fetus syndrome,...

Interpretations of all of human history in terms of alien intervention (e.g. W. Bramley, *The Gods of Eden*, 1989)

We will only cover UFO sightings here—your textbook covers some other material. Basic problem in the most detailed cases is verification of claims—usually when you dig deep enough a hoax or delusion or projection of prior beliefs or simply amplification of mistakes in reports (e.g. the original 1947 Arnold sighting) is implicated. The only fairly objective, and telling,

UFO SIGHTINGS

Historical parallels--how far back can this type of phenomenon be traced?

--Two 30,000 year old Paleolithic cave paintings (at Niaux, France) s. depict elongated (disk-shaped?) objects topped with a dome. One s. has a trail of dots (representing movement?)

--15,000 year old cave paintings (Altamira, Spain)--s. show disks, ovals, and "spacemen". But archaeologists have made more mundane interpretations.

--Indian Sanskrit texts (e.g. Mahabharata) describe flying machines called "vimanas", controlled by gods. Often described as military machines. Hahabharata describes kidnapping of a king by a demonic female entity.

(Myths of most human societies s. included stories of magical flight, extraordinary powers, and abductions. Can interpret this in several ways, though.)

--Earliest recorded sighting? Egypt, around 1500BC. Numerous "fire circles".

--Old Testament--Book of Exodus (~1400BC), ch.13, v.21-22, "pillar of fire;" 2nd Book of Kings (~900BC), ch.2; Elijah (prophet) crosses river Jordon, sees "chariots of fire", "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." (Many would say purely symbolic.) Book of Ezekiel (~600BC)--4 visions (chaps.1,8,10,43) [e.g. NASA engineer Blumrich, discussed in class]

--Alexander the Great (b.356BC)--large "flying shields", silver, shot beams of light that shattered the defenses of the citadels of the enemy (in Lebanon).

--Many Roman writes ~216-66BC: "ships in the sky," "globe of fire," "night suns" (Pliny),...

--Medieval times--dragons, people being "stolen by goblins; succubi, incubi, insemination of sleeping human females; people being taken to "castles in the sky" by "faeries"; ...

--Modern times--Could trace century by century, and since the mass of writing increased so dramatically, could probably find similar descriptions in any decade.

Lots of strange reports into the 20th century.

Example: Fatima, Portugal, Oct.13, 1917--glowing buzzing globe, or disk that was spinning and emitting rays of colored light. White-robed lady inside (Catholic church refers to this as the miracle of "Our Lady of Fatima"). [But what is the source of this description?]

The “modern era” of UFOs began in 1947. There were s. dozens of sightings, mostly in US and France, often formations of “daylight disks” (really?). Culminates with Kenneth Arnold’s sighting from an aircraft of 9 disks above Washington State (June 24?). He was an experienced pilot. He said “formation of very bright objects” (*not* disks--see below). Arnold estimated speed at 1700mph (they were moving directly across his flight path; so he couldn’t get speed without distance! Commonmistake). In definite formation, but erratic, “like a saucer would if you skipped it across water”: term **flying saucer** was born. Emitted bright blue-white flashes from surfaces. Arnold thought they were guided missiles. He later believed they were an unknown species of stratospheric animals.

Other interpretations: Electromagnetic display created by faults and pressures in earth’s crust. (But this occurred at 9200 feet!)

Or flight of secret Republic XP-84 Thunderjets, but no evidence for this.

1950s--Carl Jung got interested, initiated the “psychological interpretation” of UFOs (archetypal images, etc.)

After Arnold’s experience hit the headlines, 850 reports of ufos by July 16. Then dropped to a trickle by August. These sightings defined the outline of the ufo experience as we know it today. After that, only variation and developments on these themes.

--1952--worldwide wave in Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe. Hundreds of sightings reported every month. Many undoubtedly misidentified aircraft and natural phenomena, induced by contagious fascination with ufos. USAF had actually encouraged interest in ufos to increase recruitment into newly formed Ground Observer Corps!

-- Wave of 1954 in France--many sightings, aliens seen, landings. Many of these are hard to explain (partly from lack of information or 3rd party accounts), some s. have multiple witnesses.

(Note similar occurrence after movie ET, and after book “Communion”.)

Some things that most people now agree on:

1. A significant fraction of people think they have observed a ufo, and a large fraction of people (50-70%) who haven't seen one think that ufos "probably exist"

A deceptive poll:

3 Roper polls in 1991 (commissioned by alien visitation enthusiasts) questioned 6000 adults. Questions seeded among the regular in-home servie Roper Reports questionnaire (mixture on lifestyle, activities during past week, political stuff...).

7% answered yes to having seen a UFO (corresponds to 13 million people).
(Note: 11% reported they had seen ghosts)

18% said they had experienced waking paralysis with "sense of strange person or presence or something else."

10 % said they had experienced the feeling that they were flying through the air.

8 % reported finding puzzling scars on their bodies for which they could remember no cause.

2% reported yes to 4 out of the 5 questions. This allowed the people who carried out the poll to claim that 4 million Americans have been abducted.

Psychological profiles (Spanos et al. Nov.1993, J. Abnormal Psychology)-- Study of 49 people (mostly with white-collar jobs) who described ufo sighting or close encounter, plus 127 people citing no ufo incident. The 2 groups showed about the same levels of intelligence, "psychological health", hypnotizability, and tendency to fantasize.

So UFOers are neither psychologically disturbed or fond of elaborating fantasies (~5% of population is claimed by psychiatrists/psychologists to be fantasy-prone).

However there *was* a strong tendency for those who sighted ufos (lights or shapes in the sky) to interpret sightings based on preexisting beliefs and interests (extraterrestrials, reincarnation,...)

Many of the "close encounters" had symptoms suggesting "sleep paralysis" (commonly occurs just before falling asleep or upon awakening). It is well-known that sleep paralysis often triggers unusual sensations and hallucinations.

2. In large-scale investigations (e.g. Hynek's, Blue Book,...), about 90% (95%?) of ufo sightings can be explained by natural phenomena. These are "IFOs" -- stars, Venus, weather balloons, advertising planes, noctilucent clouds, ball lightning,...), while ~10% (5%?) remain unexplained.

a. Only a small percentage of the ufo sightings are hoaxes or by "cranks" or "delusionals".

b. No significant statistical difference between the misidentified objects (IFOs) and the "UFOs", in terms of duration of occurrence, time of day, characteristics of the witnesses,..., (although both groups did have prior UFO interest).

c. Out of ~200 that can unambiguously be identified as nocturnal advertising aircraft, 90% of witnesses described not what was perceptually available to them but instead said they saw a rotating, disk-shaped form. 10% saw a dome on top! [See recent China story, below.]

d. UFO/IFO ratio is about constant. Percentage of unknowns does *not* vary with overall level of sightings. e.g. if total number of sightings (mostly IFOs) rises by factor of 3, so does the number of UFOs. This is consistent with idea that all the UFOs would be IFOs if we had more information on those sightings. Otherwise, to interpret in terms of ETI, this result would mean that aliens deliberately increase their activities to keep the IFO/UFO ratio constant!

Multiple witness events

What about sightings by many people at one time? Most of these get explained, but we don't often hear about it. e.g. Early 1970s, 45,000 people in a football stadium in Louisiana jumped up, many yelling "UFO". "Solved" a few days later: balloon.

China, July 1991. A "wise man" predicted a UFO would appear in spiral form, rotating clockwise. Hundreds of people saw the event. A university professor even sketched a classic flying saucer with portholes. But the "prophet" was a Chinese astronomer who only predicted a meteor shower; his statements were badly distorted in the newspaper. Shows how witnesses can project their own expectations onto natural, if unusual, events.

Why no good photographic evidence? Ed Walters and Gulf Breeze, Florida.

Alert people with cameras often photograph extremely unlikely events (e.g. airplanes falling out of the sky). Why not one clear photo, if so many people have seen them clearly? (Consider that many *fewer* people have seen aircraft falling from the sky.)

British Columbia (Canada) object caught by a family on a trip. See p. 122 of UFOs: The Complete Sightings.

Trindade Island photographs (1958; see photo on pp.9, 22 of UFOs: The Complete Sightings).

Some consider these to be among the best. On Jan.16, 1958, a Brazilian ship, surveying waters as part of IGY. 2 civilians spotted bright lights, shouted to photographer Barauna. In 20 sec. he snapped 6 photos. 4 caught the UFO; many of the 48 crew members witnessed. Captain says pictures were developed immediately, to prevent tampering. Brazilian newspaper reported that the Brazilian Navy had analyzed photos and confirmed validity. But the Navy denies this, and says no officer or sailor witnessed the event.

Later: It was discovered that Barauna had previously published admittedly fake UFO photos. Also, examination indicates image on photos larger than and different from the bright light reported by the witnesses. Ground Saucer Watch, however, declared them real after "digital enhancement tests". No two accounts agree, even on the name of the ship's captain.

Best photos I've seen (if they were only real): Ed Walters' photos of the Gulf Breeze, Florida sightings. Walters' books (with his wife Frances): The Gulf Breeze Sightings, UFO Abductions in Gulf Breeze (1994), and UFOs are Real: Here's the Proof (1997).

Gulf Breeze, Florida is a small resort town near Pensacola. Has become a center for UFO encounters and sightings since 1987. Ed Walters took close-up photos and videotape (4 types of cameras). "Experts and optical physicists" concluded the photos were not faked. (In his book, the "optical physicist" is Dr. Bruce Maccabee; see below). Also, if models, would require elaborate movie set or full-scale model in his neighbors' yards.

In 1988 he was thrown ~20 feet during his sighting. In both encounters he had a "strange hum" in his head before event (implant due to early abductions). Mind filled with images of dogs when he tried to resist.

Walters also passed one (two?) polygraph tests, a voice lie detection test, and a series of psychological evaluations. [But remember Travis Walton--he claimed passed tests, but not true.]

Claims the "red UFO" was filmed by America's Best Kept Secrets (ABC 1991) and a Houston CBS affiliate (1992), and A Current Affair (1992).

Many other people in Gulf Breeze have seen UFOs, some before it hit the press. Several people took photos or reported sightings that often coincided with dates and times of Walters' experience.

But Gulf Breeze is in a very busy air traffic area with hundreds of jets, helicopters, and small aircraft every day and night. Still, most of these people are experienced at identifying aircraft. And some people said the UFOs hovered near their houses, ~30 feet overhead, and had slowly spinning blinking lights, and portholes.

In 1988, rumor that fisherman had netted a large metal object. Military had already announced special radar equipment brought in "to search for drug dealers." Later in year, entire Joint Chiefs of Staff gathered for a conference (first time at that base) in Pensacola. Rumor that they visited a hangar...

Walters later underwent 8 hours of hypnotic regression (supervised by Florida's past president of Board of Examiners). Sessions revealed alien contacts (abductions spanning many years of his life--ages 17,25,33,41 (1987)--8 year period? On p. 238 he claims close encounter in Nov. 1995; took photo.)

1. Dr. Maccabee is a researcher for MUFON, and had a financial interest in Walters' book.

2. Can fake special effects with a polaroid.

3. Model UFO like those in Walters' photos found in the loft of his house.

4. Man revealed he helped Walters fake the photos, and produced film to prove it.

5. Pranksters began sending up brightly lit hot air balloons. Many of the later photos were of these balloons.

The best “residue” cases (according to Jenny Randles, MIT Conference, p.69)

1. Trinidad Island photographs (discussed above)

2. Landing at Trans-en-Provence, France--Man working in his garden saw ovoid land, rose a minute later; circular marks and crown-shaped imprint on ground. Tests by GEPAN (French UFO study group) found soil had been heated to 570-1110 F., plants prematurely aged and had lost up to 50% of their chlorophyll. No evidence of radioactivity. [But Randles calls this a “massive scientific investigation by the French government! And she says there was “radiation induced changes.”]

3. Rendlesham Forest, near RAF Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK. Dec. 27, 1980. Radar at RAF registered “unknown” flying toward coast over the North Sea. Disappeared near Rendlesham Forest. Security police at USAF base saw lights coming down from sky into trees. They left base in jeep, then continued on foot. S. found conical or triangular object, 6-10 ft. base, 6 ft. high. Deputy base commander described it in official report as “metallic”. “Illuminated the entire forest with a white light.” “Had a pulsing red light on top and a bank of blue lights underneath. The object was hovering or on legs.” When patrolman approached, UFO took off. Nearby farm animals “went into a frenzy.” When daylight came, indentations were found on the ground. According to some accounts, the UFO was seen again.

Although many of the witnesses’ accounts contradict each other, this incident remains unexplained. Not sure whether the person giving the above account really saw the “official report,” either.