



GOD IS MY ROCK



**Were meteorites the earliest gods
of humanity?**

by *Greg Taylor*

In 1938, while the world's focus on Hitler's Nazi regime was firmly on the abhorrent activities they were undertaking in Europe, a division of his infamous SS was involved in an expedition to a far-off land. Led by the eminent zoologist Ernst Schäfer, under the auspices of the *Ahnenerbe* (Bureau for the Study of Ancestral Heritage), the research group traveled to Tibet, at the time regarded by some as the original source of the Aryan race. It is claimed that Schäfer's group returned to Germany with a number of sacred artifacts from the mysterious land, including a robe believed to have been worn by the Dalai Lama himself.¹ But none were more intriguing than a religious statue depicting what appeared to be the Tibetan god of the North, Vaisravana. The reason? Carved across Vaisravana's chest was a swastika symbol – and though the original meaning of this particular symbol was as

the Tibetan Bön culture's designation of the sun, it would no doubt have been of great interest to the Nazi expedition.

As World War II broke out, the statue is said to have disappeared into the archives of a private collector for the rest of the century, until only recently re-emerging into public view in 2007. Then, in 2012, it made headlines around the world when an investigation by scientists found that it was likely carved out of an ancient iron meteorite that fell to Earth in Mongolia 15,000 years ago (how could a headline like "Buddhist 'Iron Man' found by Nazis is from Space"² not go viral?).

According to the researchers, the fact that hard, iron meteorites are an "inappropriate material for producing sculptures" suggested it was likely that whomever created it was "aware of the outstanding (extraterrestrial) nature of the object".³ Iron from meteorites has been recognized in ancient cultures around the world as a sacred material, and so it seems only apt that it would be used to create a religious sculpture.

But while there have been some concerns in recent years as to whether the 'Nazi Iron Man from Space' might actually be a modern forgery,⁴ it is a known fact that in ancient cultures, meteorites were not just sculpted into gods – but sometimes were believed to be the gods themselves, fallen from the sky.

ROCK GODS

Put yourself in the mind of an ancient person, without a modern understanding of what the objects in the sky are. You are minding your own business around your campfire at night, when suddenly one of those mysterious star things – suspected by some to be the gods themselves, watching over humanity from on high – falls from the sky, making thundering sounds and catching fire. It lands nearby, burying itself in the sand – and upon uncovering it, you find a massive chunk of iron. Would you think it might be a god fallen to Earth?



'Nazi Space Buddha'

The evidence from historians throughout the ages suggests that the answer to this question might be 'yes'. Indeed, the 2nd century Christian theologian and historian Clement of Alexandria is said to have concluded, based on numerous historical accounts, that "the worship of such stones [is] the first, and earliest idolatry, in the world".⁵

The following examples of historical references to the worship of stones fallen from the sky are offered by Edward King in his 1796 book *Remarks concerning stones said to have fallen from the clouds, both in these days and in antient times*:

[T]he learned Greaves leads us to conclude that [the famous image of Diana at Ephesus was] nothing but a conical, or pyramidal stone, that fell from the clouds. For he tells us, on unquestionable authorities, that many others of the images of heathen deities were merely such.

Herodian expressly declares that the Phoenicians had...a certain great stone, circular below, and ending with a sharpness above, in the figure of a cone, of black colour. And they report it to have fallen from heaven, and to be the image of the sun.

So Tacitus says, that at Cyprus, the image of Venus was not of human shape; but a figure rising continually round, from a larger bottom to a small top, in conical fashion. And it is to be remarked, that Maximus Tyrius (who perhaps was a more accurate mathematician,) says, the stone was pyramidal.

And in Corinth, we are told by Pausanias, that the images both of Jupiter Melichius, and of Diana, were made (if made at all by hand) with little or no art. The former being represented by a pyramid, the latter by a column.⁶

A key point in identifying these sacred stones as originally being meteorites is that they are often not simply referred to just as “fallen from heaven”, but are also commonly described as being conical or pyramidal in shape. A 1936 paper, “The Image which Fell Down from Jupiter”, by C.C. Wylie and J.R. Naiden, discusses the image of Venus at Cyprus noted above (“the image of Aphrodite/Venus in the sanctuary at Paphos was simply a white cone or pyramid”) along with a number of other cases of conical/pyramidal stones fallen from heaven and worshipped:

[T]he emblem of Astarte at Byblus was a cone; and the image of Artemis (Diana) at Perga in Pamphylia was also a cone. We are told that the images of the sun god, Heliogabalus, at Emesa in Syria was a cone of black stone with small knobs on it, and that it appears on coins of Emesa. We are told that the sacred stone of Cybele brought from Pessinus to Rome during the second Punic war was a small black rugged stone, but we do not know whether

it was of conical shape. We are also told that conical stones, which were apparently considered sacred, have been found at Golgi in Cyprus, in the Phoenician temples at Malta, and in the shrine of the Mistress of Torquoise in Sinai.

Similarly, black, conical stones were said to be venerated in the temple of Heliopolis-Baalbek, while the Nabataean god Dushara was worshipped in the form of an obelisk or “an unhewn four-cornered blackstone”.⁷

And while we no longer have physical evidence of these sacred stones – known as *baetyl* stones, and sometimes also as (or related to) the sacred *omphalos* of ancient times – to inspect them first hand, as they have since been lost and destroyed, we don’t need to put our trust only in the descriptions of ancient historians to know their shape, as the images of many of them are preserved for us on coins of the time that depicted them sitting within temples.

This recurring pyramidal or conical quality seemed to baffle the renowned anthropologist James Frazer, who stated that “the precise significance of such an emblem remains as obscure as it was in the time of Tacitus”. However, it doesn’t seem as strange once we consider that this conical/pyramidal shape is common in actual stones fallen from heaven – meteorites – caused by passing through



the atmosphere in a stable orientation, which results in the leading surface being flattened or rounded.

As Wylie and Naiden suggest:

These images show that the stones were the shape of typical meteorites... It is a well-known fact that the blunt cone is the most common and typical shape for meteorites. In primitive times, as now, an occasional meteorite was seen to actually fall. The fall from the sky was naturally regarded as miraculous, and the stone was often placed in a shrine. The priests told the worshippers that this image was not made with human hands, but that it fell from heaven.⁸



Conical black meteorite

FURTHER CONFIRMATION?

The “certain great stone” fallen from heaven mentioned above that Herodian references was the ‘Black Stone of Elagabalus’ (or Heliogabalus). Elagabalus was the Phoenician local name for the Sun God at Emesa, where there was an impressive temple dedicated to the god, which contained a statue of the deity that wasn’t made by human hands, but instead...

...was an enormous stone, rounded at the base and coming to a point on the top, conical in shape and black. This stone is worshipped as though it were sent from heaven; on it there are some small projecting pieces and markings that are pointed out, which the people would like to believe are a rough picture of the sun, because this is how they see them.⁹

The Black Stone would later be moved to Rome, after the temple priest Antoninus – at the age of just fifteen – became emperor of the Roman Empire “through the money and intrigues of his grandmother, and the murder of the Emperor Macrinus”. However, the reign of Antoninus and his ‘rock god’ was rather short:

To the great disgust of the Roman Senate and people, [Antoninus] brought with him from Syria the image of his god, the sacred stone, and himself continued before it his priestly service with all its fantastic forms and gesticulations... He built another temple in the suburbs of Rome, to which the Emesa stone was carried in procession every year, while the populace were entertained with games, and shows, and feastings and carousings.

Herodian thus describes this performance: “The god was brought from the city to this place in a chariot glittering with gold and precious stones, and drawn by six large white horses without the least spot,

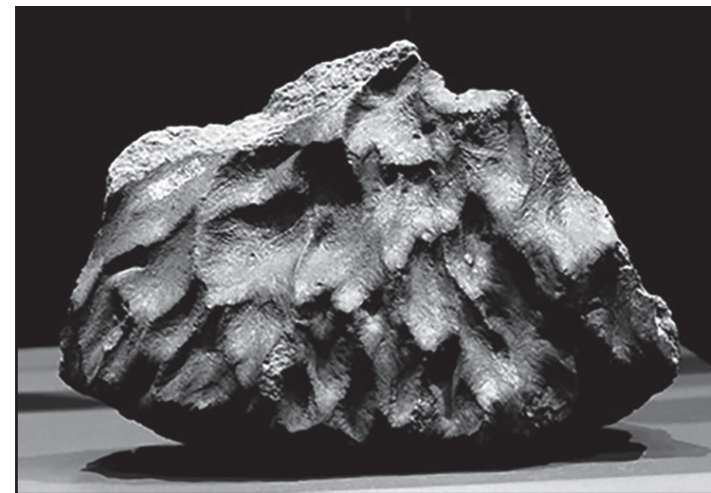
superbly harnessed with gold, and other curious trappings, reflecting a variety of colours. Antoninus himself held the reins – nor was any mortal permitted to be in the chariot; but all kept attendant around him as charioteer to the deity, while he ran backward, leading the horses, with his face to the chariot, that he might have a constant view of his god... The people attended the solemnity, running on each side of the way with tapers and flambeaux, and throwing down garlands and flowers as they passed."

The reign of a foolish boy at this period of Rome's history was necessarily a short one, and at the age of eighteen the soldiers killed him and let the Roman populace have the body to drag through the city streets. The worship of the Sun-god at once ceased, and no doubt, the stone also was thrown away.¹⁰

What is interesting about the accounts of the Black Stone – beyond it being conical – is its colour (black surfaces are a common feature of meteorites, caused by the scorching heat generated as they travel through the Earth's atmosphere), and the fact that its surface was said to be covered in "knobs", and "small projecting pieces and markings". Some researchers have suggested that this is another confirmation of the meteoritic nature of the 'Black Stone', as this description matches well with another feature of meteorites known as regmaglypts.¹¹

Regmaglypts are concave impressions on the surface of larger meteorites that are likely formed by vortices of hot gas as the meteor passes through the Earth's atmosphere, giving them a knobby, eroded surface by the time they reach ground.

This suggestion might help explain another example of ancient iconography that has often baffled (or confused) anthropologists like James Frazer. For example, the original statue of Diana at the Temple at Ephesus (one of the ancient wonders of the world; it was known even to Greek historians of the 2nd century BCE¹² that the sanctuary of the Temple of Ephesus was extremely ancient, with



Meteorite with regmaglypts

claims that the Amazons themselves originally set up the worship of the goddess there) was also described by some as a stone fallen from heaven that was conical or pyramidal in shape, suggesting it was a meteorite. It is also mentioned in the Christian New Testament briefly (Acts of the Apostles 19:35), when the 'town clerk' of Ephesus notes that "the city of the Ephesians is the guardian of the temple of great Diana and of her statue that fell from heaven".

However, while modern excavations of the temple area have failed to recover the original statue, later copies of it (from the 1st and 2nd centuries CE) made of stone, metal and clay, and depictions on coins (dated to around 85 BCE), have been found elsewhere at Ephesus. These depictions show "a female, humanoid figure, standing erect with her arms bent and held forward, as if to hold loosely something staff-like vertically in each hand". But the distinguishing imagery of this depiction of Diana is that "her upper torso was draped with a series of ovoid objects, often in two or three horizontal rows. These have been interpreted as multiple breasts, eggs, fruits, bags of votive offerings, bull or human testicles."

These statuettes and images on coins vary in the different periods, but agree on the essentials. According to Frazer, they represent the goddess with a multitude of protruding breasts. The heads of animals of many kinds, both wild and tame, spring from the front of her body in a series of bands that extend from the breasts to the feet.¹³

Researchers have suggested that if this statue was in fact a meteorite, that – like the “small projecting pieces and markings” on the Black Stone discussed above – this “multitude of projecting breasts” might in fact have originally been regmaglypts¹⁴ (compare the statue of Diana of Ephesus below to the image on the previous page).



Artemis of Ephesus with "multitude of projecting breasts" (Wouter Engler, CC by SA 4.0)

THE IRON BONES OF THE GODS OF EGYPT

The conical or pyramidal shape ascribed to these ancient objects ‘fallen from the sky’ also brings to mind another sacred stone revered by the ancient Egyptians: the black, cone-shaped ‘Ben-Ben’ stone kept in the temple of Ra at Heliopolis. The influential Egyptologist E. A. Wallis-Budge made the connection in the 1920s, and others have made the comparison in subsequent decades (additionally, G.A. Wainwright has argued that the sacred object of Amun venerated at Thebes “gave many signs of a meteorite”). Given that the shape of the Ben-Ben stone is thought to have acted as the model for the capstones found on many of Egypt’s famous pyramids and obelisks, could it be that the pyramids themselves were originally built to mimic meteorites, the ‘gods fallen from the sky’?

The ancient Egyptians certainly knew about meteorites, and held them to be sacred. In 1922, when Howard Carter stunned the world with his discovery of the still-intact ‘lost tomb’ of the Egyptian King Tutankhamun (18th dynasty; 14th century BCE), two daggers were found within the wrapping of Tut’s mummy: one with a blade of gold, the other with a blade made of iron from a meteorite.¹⁵ And this wasn’t just a case of the Egyptians coming across an iron meteorite ‘rock’ and using the exotic material without knowing the extraterrestrial source of the object, as their language specifically records that they were aware: the phrase *bja n pt* (“iron of the sky”) was used to describe this material (given the dagger’s age, it’s sobering to remember that it was just 300 years ago that ‘modern’ scientists were debunking the idea that meteorites fell from the sky).

And around 2000 years before Tutankhamun was buried with his ‘extraterrestrial dagger’, at the very beginnings of ancient Egyptian civilization (ca. 3300 BCE) iron beads made from a meteorite were used in a burial.¹⁶ According to Joyce Tyldesley, an Egyptologist at the University of Manchester who studied the trinkets, this is yet more evidence that “the sky was very important to the ancient



Daggers found buried with Pharaoh Tutankhamun

Egyptians”, and as such “something that falls from the sky is going to be considered as a gift from the gods”.¹⁷ And the fact that these objects made of meteoritic iron have so far largely been found only in high-status graves suggests that this material was very strongly associated with royalty and power.

Furthermore, Campbell Price, a curator of Egypt and Sudan at the Manchester Museum has pointed out that during the time of the pharaohs, the gods were believed to have bones made of iron – and speculated that meteorites may have inspired this belief, with “the celestial rocks being interpreted as the physical remains of gods falling to Earth”.¹⁸

Robert Bauval and Adrian Gilbert wrote about the veneration and use of iron meteorites by the ancient Egyptians in their 1994 book *The Orion Mystery* (Bauval had, in earlier papers, already made the argument that the conical/pyramid shape of the Ben-Ben stone may have been based on the similar shape of oriented meteorites), and note the many descriptions in the ancient Pyramid Texts of the bones of the king as *bja* (iron) and their connection to the stars. For instance, in PT1454 we find the passage “My bones are iron (*bja*) and my limbs are the imperishable stars.”

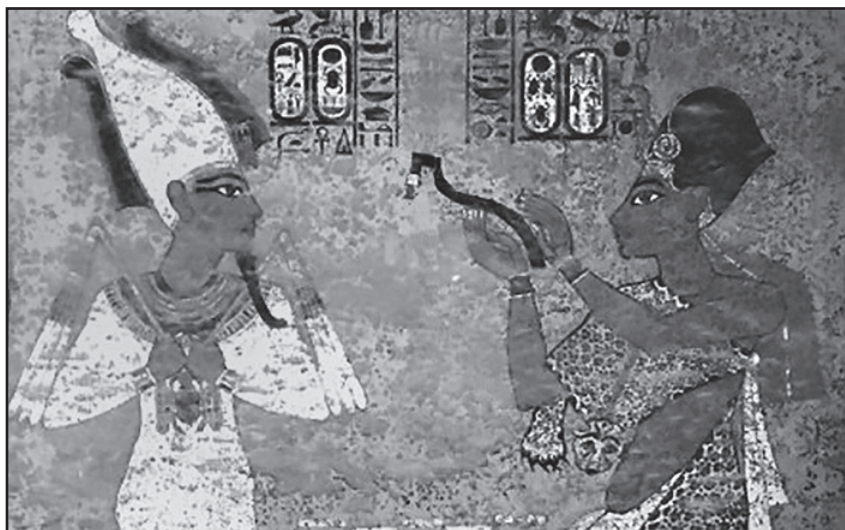
As these passages show, there was a belief that when the departed kings became stars, their bones became iron, the heavenly material (meteorites) of which the star gods were made. Such cosmic iron objects were the only material evidence of a tangible land in the sky populated by star souls, and it was easy to see why the stars were thought to be made from *bja*. Since the souls of departed kings were the stars, they too had bones made of iron.¹⁹

Interestingly, a little known fact about the ancient Egyptians is that they collected fossils of prehistoric animals – multiple tons of remains, consisting of thousands of black, sand-polished bones, have been excavated from shrines dedicated to the god Set. Some researchers have noted that these dark, heavy, fossilised bones share a

strong visual similarity with desert-weathered iron meteorites, and as such have speculated that “they could be the source of inspiration for the Pyramid texts reference to the ‘iron bones of gods’”.²⁰

Furthermore, given that many of the remains were bones of the hippopotamus, and were found at cult centres of the god Set – who was himself often depicted in artwork as a hippopotamus – perhaps we can see a possible connection here with the ceremonial adze used during the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ ritual during the funerals of pharaohs. According to Dr Bernd Scheel, an expert in ancient Egyptian metal-working and tools...

Iron was [a] metal of mythical character.... According to legend, the skeleton (ie. the bones) of Seth . . . was of Iron, [and] was used in particular for the production of protective amulets and magic model tools which were needed for the ritual called the 'opening of the mouth', a ceremony which was necessary to prepare the mummy of the deceased for life after death.²¹



The 'Opening of the Mouth' of the pharaoh using the ceremonial adze

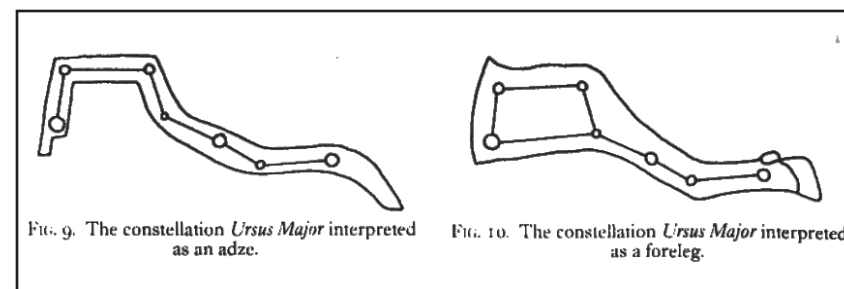


FIG. 9. The constellation *Ursa Major* interpreted as an adze.

FIG. 10. The constellation *Ursa Major* interpreted as a foreleg.

The constellation of Ursa Major representing both the adze and a foreleg
(Image from Roth, Ann Macy, Fingers, Stars, and the “Opening of the Mouth”: The Nature and Function of the Ntrwj-Blades.", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78)

So it is worth pointing out that Egyptologists G.A. Wainwright and Samuel Mercer both noticed that the adze used for opening the mouth was shaped in the form of the northern circumpolar constellation of Ursa Major – which the Egyptians called *mshtyw* (‘the thigh’), and which in Egyptian sky imagery was actually held by Set-as-hippopotamus. Could this curious combination of tools made out of fallen stars, in the shape of animal legs visible as constellations in the heavens, be an indication that the ancient Egyptians (mistakenly) thought the blackened, polished animal fossils they collected were also fallen from the sky like the blackened iron meteorites they had found, and thus were the sacred ‘iron bones’ of the sky gods themselves?

Similarly, Robert Bauval has argued that the ancient Egyptians may also have confused – or at least, equated symbolically – black hard stones such as diorite, basalt and dark-grey granite with the “lusted, black appearance” of chunks of iron-meteorite, as “the resemblance can be uncanny”. This could explain, he says, the use of these materials in the capstones of some pyramids:

Not surprisingly, black basalt was called ‘*Bja-Kam*’ meaning ‘black iron’, suggesting that basalt, and possibly similar black hard

stones viz. diorite and dark granite, were associated to meteoritic ironstone, and consequently to the ‘bones’ of star-gods. Most capstones of monumental pyramids were probably made of granite. The almost-black granite capstone of the pyramid of Amenemhet III in the Cairo museum is a fine example of this. It was discovered in 1902 by Maspero, who remarked that its surface had been ‘mirror’ polished (“poli a miroir”). Such a description is typical for the appearance of a freshly fallen iron-meteorite. Amenemhet III’s capstone could well be the stylised man-made version of an oriented iron-meteorite symbolising his materialized star-soul.²²

ROCKIN’ ALL OVER THE WORLD

While many of the examples given so far are from ancient locations around the Mediterranean, meteorite worship and use



Pyramidion capstones in the Cairo Museum (Ovedc, CC by SA 4.0)

of meteoritic iron for making tools and weapons appears to have been a worldwide phenomenon.

In the New World there have been multiple examples of apparent veneration of rocks fallen from the sky. For instance, a large (1500kg) meteorite was found in a ruined temple at Casas Grandes in Mexico, as well as a smaller iron meteorite that was wrapped and buried like a human mummy bundle, and said to be “similar to depictions and descriptions of the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli”.²³ Other similar finds in the Americas suggest this might have been some sort of tradition: in 1915, a dig at a pueblo-style dwelling at Camp Verde, Arizona, found a meteorite wrapped in a blanket of feathers in what looked like a child’s burial cist under the floor; further to the north, at Winona in Arizona, another meteorite was found in a similar stone cist beneath the floor of a dwelling.

According to one researcher, the Pawnee (who it must be noted were originally from Nebraska, quite a way from the Arizona finds) named meteorites “the children of Tirawhat” (their leading deity), and that one legend foretold that a marvellous being called Pahokatawa would one day come from the sky in the form of a turtle-shaped stone. Meteorite historian Alastair McBeath has noted that “the regmaglyptic markings often seen on larger meteorites...could certainly give a patterning reminiscent of that seen on a turtle’s shell, while...a conical or lenticular form, something like a turtle, would not be unusual”.²⁴ A similarly-shaped, 175kg meteorite was revered by the local tribes of Iron Creek in Alberta, Canada as a “medicine-stone”, and was known by them to have fallen from the heavens.

The Cape York meteorite in Greenland, one of the largest iron meteorites in the world, was a site of pilgrimage for the Inuit of the region. The remains of a massive meteor that collided with the Earth nearly 10,000 years ago are split into multiple chunks, with Ahnighito (the Tent), weighing 31 metric tons; the Man, weighing about 20 metric tons; the Woman, weighing 3 tons; and the Dog,

weighing 400 kilograms being among the largest found.²⁵ The Inuit would walk for 3 days to reach the meteorites, and used them as a source of iron for tools and harpoons for centuries – so much so that a ‘rock wall’ consisting of thousands of small stone boulders surrounded the meteorite named “Woman”, having been left there after working the extraterrestrial iron.

(In the early 19th century stories about these massive meteorites sparked a number of expeditions by Westerners, and in 1894 Robert E. Peary eventually found and removed a number of them – selling the pieces for \$40,000 to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City where they are still on display.)

There is some evidence that indigenous Australians also recorded meteor falls in their oral traditions, and regarded them as supernatural events. For example, the traditional name for the location of the Henbury crater field (created by an impact event <4,700 years BP) in the Northern Territory is *chindu china waru chingi yabu* (roughly translated, “sun walk fire devil rock”).



Ahnhito meteorite

Indigenous astronomy researcher Duane Humacher notes that when a man named James M. Mitchell visited the site in 1921, his Aboriginal guide...

...refused to go near them, saying that it was a place where a fire “debil-debil” [devil] came out of the sky and killed everything in the vicinity. He visited the craters again in 1934 and took another Aboriginal guide with him. The guide said Aboriginal people would not camp within two miles of the craters or even venture within half a mile of them, describing them as a place where the fire-devil lived. He claimed they did not collect water that filled some of the craters, fearing the fire devil would fill them with a piece of iron.

In March 1932, an unnamed resident of the area undertook independent research and spoke to local Aboriginal elders. According to the elders, all young Aboriginal people were forbidden from going near the craters. The elders described them as the place where “a fiery devil ran down from the sun and made his home in the Earth”.

...The current evidence indicates that Aboriginal people witnessed the event, recorded the incident in oral traditions, and those traditions remained intact through the 1930s (and possibly later).²⁶

In Japan, a meteorite was said to have been seen falling into the garden of a Shinto shrine on May 19, 861 in Nogata. This black-crusted meteorite has been kept at the shrine ever since in a small wooden box with the date of its fall engraved on it. And in Krasnojarsk, Siberia, a meteoritic mass of around 700kg was reported by a traveller in 1771 to have been long-regarded by the Tartars of the region as “a holy thing fallen from heaven”.²⁷

One of the world's major religions may even have a strand of meteorite veneration within it: many have claimed that the Islamic relic known as *al-Hajaru al-Aswad* (the 'Black Stone') – said to have been given to Abraham by an angel, and set into the eastern corner of the Kaaba at Mecca by him – is a fragment of a meteorite. Described as being a fragmented, metallic black stone with “a silver-grey, fine-grained interior in which tiny cubes of a bottle-green material were embedded”, the Black Stone – according to other stories – was also said to have been originally worshipped by the Nabateans who visited the Kaaba as a site of pilgrimage in the pre-Islamic period.

However, given the sacred nature of the Black Stone, it has not been scientifically studied and so has never been confirmed to be meteoritic in origin. Additionally, as a part of the *tawaf* ritual during the *hajj* pilgrimage, as Muslims circle the Kaaba many try to touch and kiss the Black Stone – and so its blackened, shiny surface may be a consequence of human interaction (over centuries, involving millions of people) rather than scorching via atmospheric friction as it fell to earth.

Regardless of the still unknown origin of the Kaaba's Black Stone however, even in the last five centuries there are numerous accounts from around the world of meteorites being venerated or kept as sacred objects. In Ensisheim, Germany, a stone weighing nearly 150kg fell from the sky on November 16, 1492. The Emperor Maximilian is said to have had the stone brought to a nearby castle, “and a council of state was held to consider what message from heaven the stone fall had brought them”. It eventually found its way to the local church, where it was hung with a strict command that it should remain there intact.²⁸

In Durala, India, when a 10kg meteorite fell on February 18, 1815, the local people were said to have begun construction of a special temple over it due to its heavenly origin, until the East India Company took possession of it and sent it to the British Museum.



Woodcut illustrating the Ensisheim meteorite fall

And in Ogi, Hizen, Japan, two stones which fell in 1744 were used for more than 150 years in the temple to Shokujo on the festival of that goddess, as locals believed the stones had “fallen from the shores of the Heavenly River, or Milky Way, after they had been used by the goddess as weights to steady her loom” (one of these stones was also sent to the British Museum).²⁹

And if you think that in the 21st century we're well past the 'primitive' idea that we would worship rocks fallen from the sky, it's worth pointing out that a 'Church of the Chelyabinsk Meteorite' was formed when the famous 2013 bolide made news across the world after exploding over Russia, injuring 1600 people.³⁰ The founder of the church, Andrey Breyvichko, has said that he believes the meteorite contains 'information' that “will help people live at a new stage of spiritual knowledge development”. He (and his 50-or-so fellow believers) beseeched authorities to hand over any pieces of the recovered meteorite to them, as they wanted to house them in a (still-to-be-built) temple in Chelyabinsk. Breyvichko stated of the plan, "I think it won't hurt Chelyabinsk to become a truly holy city, home

to a great temple that will be the object of pilgrimage for millions of people from across the world.”

Given the similar accounts across the ancient world of temples housing sacred rocks fallen from heaven, it seems not that much has really changed.

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