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The Sun is God

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Abstract. The belief that precession of the equinoxes – the slow shift of the stars against the sun's position at the vernal equinox – was well known in ancient times is a staple of modern 'alternative' archaeology. It underpins Norman Lockyer's early archaeoastronomy in the 1890s and 1910s, C. G. Jung's theories on early Christianity in the 1950s, Giorgio di Santillana and Hertha von Deschend's *Hamlet's Mill* in the 1960s, and best sellers by Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval in the 1990s. However, the idea can be traced back to radical anti-Christian Enlightenment thinkers at the end of the eighteenth century, such as Jean Sylvain Bailly (1736–1793), who expounded his arguments on the astronomical origin of religious forms in two major works, *Histoire de l'astronomie ancienne* (1775) and *Traite de l'astronomie indienne el orientals* (1787). Charles François Dupuis (1742–1809) extended the debate in 1781 in his *Mémoire sur l'origine des constellations, et sur l'explication de la fable*, by attempting to establish the astronomical origins of mythology, while setting out a detailed argument that the twelve signs of the zodiac originated as an allegory of the seasonal cycle. The radicals' purpose was to undermine Christianity's claim to unique truth by demonstrating that it shared a common origin with all other religions, that the first religion was sun worship, that all gods, including Christ, were essentially solar, and that the changing forms of deities and religious ritual could be observed in the shift of constellations in relation to the vernal equinox. However, what was to anti-clericalist free thinkers a means of demonstrating religion's essential meaninglessness became, in the hands of the Romantics, a way of demonstrating that all religions were meaningful. Moved by such feelings, together with the belief that all religions shared a solar origin, the English painter Turner is reputed to have uttered the words 'the Sun is God' on his deathbed. Two hundred years later the belief in the ancient knowledge of precession is still capable of exciting great passion.

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Introduction

This paper forms a part of a larger investigation of the nature of millenarian and apocalyptic thought and its relationship to astronomy and astrology, a theme explored in depth in *The Great Year*.¹ My immediate interest is in the background to a contemporary strain of millenarianism, the New Age movement, along with its astronomical measuring grid, the Age of Aquarius. A subset of this inquiry deals with the problems raised by the modern hypothesis that precession of the equinoxes was well known before the time of its second-century BCE Greek discoverer, Hipparchus. This hypothesis is most strongly associated with one book, Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend's *Hamlet's Mill*.² This is a book which inspires strong emotions and the belief that there was a universal ancient civilisation of great intellectual sophistication carries a force which can best be described as religious: it is an article of faith for many of those westerners who refuse to accept the proposition that the modern west itself represents the highest point of human culture. Santillana and von Dechend's fundamental point is that

One should pay attention to the cosmological formation contained in ancient myth, information of chaos, struggle and violence. They are not mere projections of a troubled consciousness: they are attempts to portray the forces which seemed to have taken part in the shaping of the cosmos.³

With this in mind, Santillana and von Dechend set out to search ancient texts for any clue of possible pre-Hipparchian knowledge of precession. So convincing were they that their work has become a foundation text of what has now become known as 'alternative archaeology', a publishing genre that began with Bauval and Gilbert's *The Orion Mystery* in 1994 and continued with such works as Graham Hancock's *Fingerprints of the Gods* (1995), Mark Vidler's *The Star Mirror* (1998) and Adrian Gilbert's *Signs in the sky: prophecies of a New Age* (2000).⁴ The book, though,

¹ Nicholas Campion, *The Great Year: Astrology, Millenarianism and History in the Western Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1994).

² Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and its Transmission through Myth* (1969; Boston MA: David R. Godine, 1977).

³ Santillana and von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (1969), pp. 150–1.

⁴ Robert Bauval and Adrian Gilbert, *The Orion Mystery: unlocking the secrets of the pyramids* (London: William Heinemann, 1994); Graham Hancock,

does not meet with universal agreement and was savagely reviewed when it appeared.⁵ My judgement, which is entirely separate to the question of whether pre-Hipparchian knowledge of precession existed, is that *Hamlet's Mill* represents profoundly poor scholarship. As an example, Santillana and von Dechend repeatedly take literary texts out of context, as they do with Virgil's 'messianic' eclogue.⁶ The book is also derivative and unoriginal. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the origin of the ideas that underpin not only belief in the Age of Aquarius, but also existence of a universal primeval civilisation.

The Sun is God

I have taken my title from a phrase attributed to the English painter J. M. W. Turner. According to Turner's biographer, John Ruskin, just a few weeks before he died, the painter had remarked 'the Sun is God'.⁷ Turner was well versed in classical mythology, had studied Hinduism and was therefore well aware that the Christianised imagery of the west was just one way of representing the sky as an allegory. The sun was not only God's messenger, as in Milton; it could represent the power of Apollo, it might be a lingam or phallus, or might be related to the Indian god Brahma, who had created the world by means of a 'spirit of the colour of flame'. These were ideas which Turner may have picked up from Alexander Dow's 1768 *History of Hindostan* or Payne Knight's essay in comparative religion, the sensational *Account of the remains of the Worship of Priapus lately existing in Isernia*, published in 1786. Knight, for whom Turner worked in 1808, was deeply anti-religious but the orientalist William Jones, who greatly influenced Turner, was at once a devout Christian and very respectful of Hinduism. Jones' work on oriental languages spanned the years 1770-94 and he believed that there must be a

Fingerprints of the Gods: a quest for the beginning and the end (London: BCA, 1995); Mark Vidler, *The Star Mirror: The Extraordinary Discovery of the True Reflection Between Heaven and Earth* (London: Thorson, 1998); Adrian Gilbert, *Signs in the Sky: Prophecies for the Birth of a New Age* (London: Transworld, 2000).

⁵ Edmund Leach, 'Bedtime Story: Hamlet's Mill by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend', *New York Review of Books* (12 February 1970): p. 36.

⁶ Santillana and von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (1969), p. 244.

⁷ John Gage, 'J. M. W. Turner and Solar Myth', in J. B. Bullen, ed., *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 39–48.

relationship between the Hindu and classical Greek Pantheons, and that both were fundamentally expressions of the sun. He concluded that:

It seems a well-founded opinion that the whole crowd of gods and goddesses in ancient Rome and modern Varanes [Varanasi], mean only the powers of nature, and principally those of the SUN, expressed in a variety of ways, and by a multitude of fanciful names.⁸

The Origin of the Idea of the Age of Aquarius

The origin of the belief that the Age of Aquarius is imminent can be traced to two strands in eighteenth-century European thought. The first was the attempt, central to Enlightenment ideology, to establish a common origin to religion. The means by which this was to be accomplished was the study of comparative religion, the deliberate aim being to diminish Christianity's claim to unique status.⁹ The second was the use of the apparent shift of the stars caused by the precession of the equinoxes as a means of dating the history of the Indian sacred texts, the Vedas. This project was underway as early as the 1760s, and expanded into an examination of the history of astronomy as a whole.¹⁰ An essential component of this investigation was the examination of Indian chronology, particularly the use of long period known as yugas.

These two separate strands of inquiry were combined into the attempt to locate religion's common origins in astronomy, particularly in worship of the sun as god, or reverence for it as a symbol of the divine, by the French Enlightenment radical Jean Sylvain Bailly (1736–1793). Bailly expounded his arguments on the astronomical origin of religious forms in two major works, *Histoire de l'astronomie ancienne* (1775) and *Traite de l'astronomie indienne et orientales* (1787). Bailly was a significant figure in late eighteenth-century astronomy and his study of Jupiter's moons, the *Essai sur la théorie des satellites de Jupiter*, was rewarded with membership of the French Academy, the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Inscriptions. He was elected to the States-General in 1789,

⁸ A. M. Jones, ed., *The Works of Sir William Jones with the life of the author by Lord Teignmouth* (London, 1807), Vol. 3, pp. 385–6, cited in Gage, 'J. M. W. Turner and Solar Myth', p. 42.

⁹ Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 1–6.

¹⁰ George Costard, *The Use of Astronomy and Chronology Exemplified* (London: L. Davis & C. Reymers, 1764).

and subsequently became President of the National Assembly and Mayor of Paris, but was guillotined during the Terror in 1793. Bailly believed that a highly scientific civilisation had existed before the Deluge, an idea he discussed in correspondence with Voltaire who himself thought it quite likely that 'long before the empires of China and India, there had been nations cultured, learned, and powerful', an opinion which was later to be cited approvingly by H. P. Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society.¹¹ However, in the context of late-eighteenth century scholarship this was hardly a controversial idea, finding its rationale in Plato's own account of the destruction of Atlantis.¹² Bailly discussed the supposed beginning of the Kali Yuga, the current era of Hindu chronology, in 3102 BC, by which time, he calculated, the vernal point had precessed to the 'Eye of Taurus' (the star Aldebaran); in other words, the sun rose in Taurus at the spring equinox.¹³

By the time that the *Traite de l'astronomie indienne el orientals* had been published, Bailly's fellow radical, Charles François Dupuis (1742–1809) had entered the debate. His *Mémoire sur l'origine des constellations, et sur l'explication de la fable*, extended the argument in 1781 by attempting to establish the astronomical origins of mythology, while setting out a detailed argument that the twelve signs of the zodiac originated as an allegory of the seasonal cycle (not in itself a controversial idea).

Dupuis, though, made two original contributions to the emerging theory of the origins of religion. Firstly, he argued that astronomy originated in Egypt, a claim which had a significant impact on Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798-9, encouraging the expedition's cultural activities and directly stimulating the development of the discipline of Egyptology. Secondly, he approached the possible links between the signs of the zodiac and the farming year with fresh eyes. He argued, for example, that the sun should be in Aquarius in July, rather than in January-February, for, as the sign of the water pourer, it should coincide with the annual Nile flood. According to Dupuis, the only plausible

¹¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vols. 1 and 2, facsimile of the original edition of 1888 (Los Angeles, CA: The Theosophy Company, 1982), II.742; citing a book by Jean Sylvain Bailly, *Lettres sur l'atlantide de platon et sur l'ancienne histoire de l'Asie (etc.)* Vol. 2. (London and Paris: M. Elmesly, 1779).

¹² Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1931), 24E–25D.

¹³ Jean Sylvain Bailly, *Traite de l'astronomie* (Paris, 1787), pp. xlvii, xxix.

explanation for Aquarius' displacement from July to January-February was that the zodiac had been invented in 13,000 BCE and that it then took fifteen-thousand years for precession to shift it to its present location, in which the Sun falls in Aquarius in January and February. This chronology's radical significance lay in its unambiguous breach of the Christian convention that the world was around six thousand years old. As his book was published some eight years before the French revolution overthrew the Catholic supremacy, political expediency obliged Dupuis to pull back from its anti-Biblical implications. Accordingly he took refuge behind the claim that the great upheavals which accompanied the Deluge may have disrupted the positions of the stars, and that 15,000 years of apparent precessional shift took place in just 6,000 years.¹⁴ He also proposed an evolutionary theory of religion in which the original revelation of the one true god gave way to worship of the creation, that is worship the stars, rather than of the creator.¹⁵ Dupuis' work was an international sensation and in 1786 he was invited to Berlin by Frederick the Great, the greatest political patron of Enlightenment thought, although the Prussian monarch died before Dupuis could accept the offer. Dupuis' work was sufficiently well known in England by 1797 to attract a violent rebuttal, although it did not actually appear in English until abridged versions were published in 1857 and 1873.¹⁶

The theory that religion and astronomy shared common origins was developed in the revolutionary atmosphere of 1790s France by François Henri Stanislas Delaunay in his 1791 work, *L'Histoire générale et particulière des religions et du Culte*, an attempt to establish the foundation of religion in astral worship. Delaunay followed Bailly and Dupuis in linking the evolution of religious forms to the precession of zodiac signs over the vernal point and, as a direct consequence, the sun's position against the background of the stars at the spring equinox. Delaunay set out for the first time a complete theory of history in which astronomical, and hence religious, iconography, evolved with the precession of the equinoxes. His scheme commenced in 15,194 BCE,

¹⁴ Charles Dupuis, *Mémoire sur l'origine des constellations, et sur l'explication de la fable* (Paris: Veuve Desaint, 1781), p. 72.

¹⁵ Dupuis, *Mémoire sur l'origine des constellations*, pp. 78, 89.

¹⁶ Extracts from Dupuis' work appeared in English translation much later as *Was Christ a person or the sun? An argument from Dupuis* (London, 1857); *Christianity a form of the great solar myth* (London, 1873); and *On the connection of Christianity with solar worship*, trans. T. E. Partridge (London, 1877).

with the sun in twenty-nine degrees of Libra at the spring equinox. This date, he argued, was the origin of the Egyptian zodiac. After around 2000 years, in 13,079 BCE, the sun rose in Virgo at the spring equinox and it then proceeded in reverse order through the signs until it rose in Aquarius at the spring equinox of 1726. This was too close to Delaunay's own time for him to specify its cultural correlations. Instead he wrote simply 'Plus de changements'.¹⁷

Delaunay's book was followed in 1795 by Dupuis' second major work, the three volume *L'Origine de tous les Cultes, ou Religion universelle*, together with a further one volume abridgement of the same work in 1798.¹⁸ Dupuis considered humanity's fundamental religious error was to mistake astronomical allegory for religious truth. He had written how ancient fables were 'a veil thrown over the operations of nature', in which anthropomorphic deities obscured the original truths which they represented, and that this concealment was embodied in the inscription on the temple of Isis at Saïs, which read 'I am that which was, is, and will be. No mortal has yet lifted my veil'.¹⁹ This metaphor passed to H. B. Blavatsky's 1877 *Isis Unveiled* via W. Winwoode Reade's 1861 *The Veil of Isis*, J.C. Colquhoun's 1836 *Isis Revelata* and Godfrey Higgins' 1833-6 *Anacalypsis* (from the Greek 'unveiling').

After 1789, liberated from the need to explain his date for the invention of the zodiac in a Catholic context, Dupuis was free to mix his classical erudition with overt anti-clerical polemic, and he set out his belief that God is the Platonic world-soul, the animating force in nature and the universe. Robespierre's Festival of the Supreme Being, the peak of the revolutionary attempt to create a religion based on nature, had been celebrated on 8 June 1794 and, even though the revolutionary era came to an end with Napoleon's coup in October 1795, Dupuis' theories persisted. Particularly influential was his statement that Jesus' life was an allegory of the sun's course through the zodiac, with crucifixion a symbolic representation of the cross of the year, divided by the solstices and equinoxes. This claim became the corner-stone of early nineteenth-

¹⁷ Patrick Curry, Nicholas Campion, and Jacques Halbronn, *La Vie Astrologique Il Y A Cent Ans* (Paris: Edition Guy Trédaniel, 1992), p. 89.

¹⁸ Charles Dupuis, *L'Origine de tous les Cultes, ou Religion universelle* (Paris: Agasse, 1795).

¹⁹ Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 32.

century anti-clericalism in Britain and an approach to the origins of religion which may be known as the 'sun-as-god' school.

Dupuis' ideas were propagated by the shorter and more polemical *Les ruines des empires*, published by his friend Constantin François de Volney in 1791, an English translation of which appeared in 1795, four years later. Volney, like Bailly and Dupuis, was a radical, having been elected to the National Assembly in 1789, and had also travelled widely in Egypt and Syria. *Les ruines* was chiefly an account of the problems inherent in the European political system together with their suggested solutions, some of which he set out in his proposals for a new egalitarian world in a chapter entitled 'The New Age'.²⁰ Volney included one chapter summarising the argument that Christianity was just one of many religions derived from astronomical allegory; no more, in fact, than 'the Allegorical Worship of the Sun', and its mythology could therefore be reduced to the dramatisation of the ancient stories of the constellations. He followed Bailly and Dupuis in arguing that religion originated in nature, that agriculture required knowledge of the heavens, that the earliest form of worship was therefore stellar and the evolution of religious forms followed the thousand year Persian epochs.²¹ Much of his argument was concerned with linguistic analysis. For example, in one abstruse passage, he argues that, if Jesus was Yesus then y+e+s equals the solar period, for reasons which are not explained, and Jesus is equivalent to Bacchus.²² He followed Dupuis in his argument that Christianity was nothing more than an allegorical worship of the sun and that the location of the vernal equinox in Aries was indicated by that religion's ram and lamb symbolism.²³

The sun-as-god theory was well known in England by the mid 1790s. It entered radical circles with the publication of Volney's *Les ruines* in 1795 and was felt worthy of a serious rebuttal by the radical dissenter Joseph Priestly (1797) and a scathing parody by John Prior Estlin (1797). Estlin ridiculed Dupuis' case, attacking Volney in the process, presenting an eloquent demonstration that any text can be read as an allegory of the solar year. Yet, over the coming decades, Dupuis' theory gained a series of influential supporters and even the theory's criticism spread the word. For example, Estlin's criticism of the theory that the shift of the vernal

²⁰ Constantin François Volney, *The Ruins, or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires* (London, 1795), pp. 127–33.

²¹ Volney, *The Ruins*, pp. 228–34, 289.

²² Volney, *The Ruins*, pp. 228–34, 295.

²³ Volney, *The Ruins*, pp. 228–34, 285–98.

point from Taurus into Aries was revealed by a corresponding shift from bull to ram imagery, can only have alerted his readers to this very possibility.²⁴

The first major evangelist for the sun-as-god theory in England was the anticlerical deist (and former Tory MP and diplomat) Sir William Drummond (1770?–1828), whose best-known work, *The Oedipus Judaicus*, was printed in 1811. Influenced as much by the Christian cabalism of Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), and hence the entire tradition of Renaissance Hermeticism, as by Bailly and Dupuis, Drummond set out to interpret six Old Testament passages, turning Joshua's invasion of Canaan from an exercise in brutality to an allegory for the sun's movement through the zodiac signs, linked in turn to the twelve tribes' identification with the twelve signs, and serving a vital purpose by explaining the true working of God's heaven.

Whereas Drummond had deliberately avoided causing offence to established religion, the Reverend Robert Taylor (1784–1844), took a radical and confrontational line. Taylor was an anti-Christian deist who discovered Dupuis' work in 1829 on his release from prison after serving a sentence for blasphemy. Twenty-eight years later, in 1857, Taylor gathered many of his sermons into a collection under the title *The Devil's Pulpit: or Astro-theological Sermons*. In this he reproduced his sermon on Easter Sunday 1831, in which he claimed that the blood of Christ represented the sun's loss of power at the Autumn equinox, and in which he enacted a parody of the Eucharist. For this he was returned to gaol on further blasphemy charges.

Taylor did not mince his words: in his sermon on the Star of Bethlehem, preached on 7 November 1830 in the Rotunda on London's Blackfriars Road, he denounced the Bible as an astronomical/zodiacal allegory, while *Revelation* itself was just a 'scientific astronomical mythos' and Christianity, which failed to recognise its own origins, was 'stupid' and 'ignorant'.²⁵ Like Dupuis, he believed that the key to understanding religion was linguistic, that God and the sun shared the same etymology, as did Aries, the lamb and Jesus.²⁶ In his opinion,

²⁴ John Prior Estlin, *The Nature and Causes of Atheism* (Bristol: N. Biggs, 1797), p. 37.

²⁵ Robert Taylor, *The Devil's Pulpit: or Astro-theological Sermons* (London: Richard Carlile, 1831), pp. 28–29.

²⁶ Taylor, *The Devil's Pulpit*, p. 30.

Sun and Day were found in the first primitives, not of a particular language, but of the most ancient and universal ever uttered by men. San, pronounced Zan, Zon, Son, and Zun, that is, with every vowel, and every mode of uttering the initial, that the tongue could encompass, like Gad, Gid, Ged, God and Gud, was, like the word, the common Ammonian name, for the Sun and Jupiter.²⁷

Once it was recognised that all deities were solar, Taylor argued, it was clear that Christ was identical with Heracles, Bacchus, Mithra (Mithras), Apollo, Christen (Krishna), Vichenu (Vishnu) and 'all other allegorical types of the Sun'.²⁸ Meanwhile, the Hebrew word for God, Tsour, Zor or Zir, he argued, was related to the Greek aster, star, and the designation 'sir', applied to people of rank, as well as Easter and astronomy.²⁹ Moreover, he argued, that John the Baptist's feast day, 24th June, was the summer solstice in the Julian calendar, and that this confirmed the solar character of Christ's life.³⁰

The idea of the solar origin of all the world's major religions then went through a number of interesting twists. The first was that the nature of the argument was inverted. Rather than showing that Christianity shared common origins with all other religions and was therefore, like them, equally false, it was argued that all religions, including Christianity, were equally true. Both arguments were anti-Christian, at least anti-mainstream Christianity, but one was radical and secular, the other radical and religious. The second point of view was already evident in Turner's solar religion.

It was a radical deist, Godfrey Higgins (1772–1833), who, though a keen supporter of Bailly, Dupuis and Drummond, prepared the literary foundation for the religious appropriation of the sun-as-good theory. In his major work, the huge two-volume *Anacalypsis*, published in 1836, Higgins adapted the Platonic theory of occasional cataclysms. He took from Pythagoras and Plato a doctrine of creation by emanation from the One and added a theory of racial evolution commencing with Africans as the original race. From Hesiod he borrowed the concept of a primeval Golden Age of peace and harmony. For the most part, though, his work is a rehash of Bailly, Dupuis and Drummond: the sun was the 'first god of

²⁷ Taylor, *The Devil's Pulpit*, p. 3.

²⁸ Taylor, *The Devil's Pulpit*, p. 30.

²⁹ Taylor, *The Devil's Pulpit*, p. 41.

³⁰ Robert Taylor, *The Diegesis; being a Discovery of the origin, Evidences, and Early History of Christianity* (London: Richard Carlile, 1829), pp. 208-9.

mankind', the most visible symbol of the One, represented by 'Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Oromasde, Mithra, Osiris and Typhon'.³¹ Paraphrasing Taylor, he wrote, 'the history of the sun is the history of Jesus Christ'.³² All religions, including Christianity, he concluded, are therefore forms of solar worship. When the sun was in Taurus at the spring equinox, from 4700 BC onwards, he wrote, gods were worshipped as Bulls and the great teacher was Buddha and, after the vernal point entered Aries, ram-headed gods were in vogue and the great teacher was Krishna.³³ Whereas his predecessors had linked Christianity to the ram, Higgins broke with tradition and linked Christianity to the Fish, and hence with Pisces, establishing what was subsequently to become the convention of Aquarian Age historiography. Higgins himself did have eschatological concerns, worrying that 'perhaps man is near his end'.³⁴

The sun-as-god school lost its political radicalism but gained mainstream respectability with the work of Max Müller (1823–1900), the nineteenth-century's most distinguished orientalist and 'one of the founding fathers of the "science of religion"'.³⁵ The founder of the academic discipline of comparative religion, almost a century after the radicals laid its foundations, Müller was convinced that all religion began with the awe of natural forces emanating from the sky, that these then became focused on the sun, the sun was then deified and the resulting deities then assumed a life of their own.

While Müller's ideas are generally ignored by modern academia, his main ideological rival's opinions remain enormously influential. This was Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891). Blavatsky's two massive books, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, together with her organisational vehicle, the Theosophical Society, which she founded in 1875, pulled together all existing strands in western esoteric thought and provided the

³¹ Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis, an Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis; or an Inquiry into the Origins of Languages, Nations and Religions*, 2 Vols. (London: Longman, Res, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman, 1836), I.34–5, 43.

³² Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, II.144.

³³ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I. 24–6, 152, 264.

³⁴ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I.634, 637; II.445.

³⁵ Hans J. Klimkeit, 'Müller, F. Max', in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, 16 Vols (London and New York: MacMillan, 1987), Vol. 10, pp. 153–4. See also Max Müller, *On Ancient Hindu Astronomy and Chronology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1862) and Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and co., 1873).

theoretical underpinning for much of twentieth century esoteric ideology, including the New Age movement and contemporary 'alternative' archaeology. She had little to say about precession, although her immediate successors did. But she did argue strenuously for the solar basis of all religion and the existence of an ancient universal civilisation.

Santillana and von Dechend are heir to Blavatsky's legacy rather than academic traditions in the history of science, as is the substantial body of literature on the New Age and the Age of Aquarius. The fact that their ideas are unoriginal says nothing about their veracity; but to put any set of ideas into a historical context at least helps us assess whether they constitute a genuine account of the past or another species of myth. *Hamlet's Mill* should be read essentially not as a historical text, but as a work of modern myth.