From Angels to Aliens: The Watchers in 1 Enoch according to Ancient Aliens Theory

Giuseppe M. Cùscito

Abstract. The pseudepigraphical First book of Enoch (1 Enoch) has always fascinated its readers because of its recounts of what supposedly happened 'behind the scenes' of some biblical events. It expands on the story that is briefly sketched in Genesis 6:1–4, regarding the 'sons of God' that united with the 'daughters of men', when Giants were on Earth, before the Flood. In 1 Enoch, the protagonist is depicted as the receiver of heavenly wisdom, which was acquired during his travels at the edges of the cosmos, accompanied by angels who instructed him. The book also tells how the Watchers (i.e. heavenly creatures) united with women and taught them 'forbidden' knowledge on arts and crafts. Contemporary ancient aliens theory has reinterpreted the book of Enoch as the recount of a close encounter between the protagonist and some aliens. In this view, the Giants have been interpreted as hybrids between humans and aliens (the Watchers), who have taught techniques and science to humans. The paper will point out the quasi-religious aspects of ancient aliens theory, especially regarding how it uses religious (both canonical and noncanonical) texts to validate and promote its ideology.

1. Introduction

Ancient aliens, or ancient astronauts, theory (henceforth AAT) is a set of beliefs based on the dual hypothesis that Earth has been visited in the past by extraterrestrials and that ancient texts and imagery carry testimony of such encouters. In this view, the technologically (in some versions of this modern myth, sometimes also spiritually) advanced visitors were considered as gods by the humans, which described them as deities in sacred texts. In some cases, especially in later authors, AAT also posits that our species was created by ancient astronauts through genetic engineering.

The main methodological flaw of ATT is that the two hypotheses on which it is based, namely that we could have been visited by aliens and that the ancient myths preserve traces of such encounters, seem to back each other up in a circular reasoning that reinforces itself without being

Giuseppe M. Cùscito, 'From Angels to Aliens: The Watchers in 1 Enoch according to Ancient Aliens Theory', *Culture and Cosmos,* Vol. 28 no. 1 and 2, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter 2024, pp. 73-88.
www.CultureAndCosmos.org

supported by sufficient proof. Secondarily, AAT also presents all the traits of other non-scientific theories that can be subsumed within the domain of pseudoarchaeology, of which AAT can be considered a branch.[1]

The idea of beings coming from other worlds, so powerful that humans considered them deities, first appeared in works of fiction, specifically in Howard Phillips Lovecraft's horror stories published between 1916 and 1939. In the same time, Charles Fort published his *Book of the Damned* (New York: Boni and Liverlight, 1919), in which we find two short passages that probably represent the earliest occurrences of AAT in a non-fiction work. According to Fort, ancient stories recounting encounters with demons could be reinterpreted as reports of close encounters: 'Some day I shall look over old stories of demons that have appeared sulphurously upon this earth, with the idea of expressing that we have often had undesirable visitors from other worlds'.[2] Like in Lovecraft's stories, the aliens are considered mainly indifferent towards humans: 'I accept that, though we're usually avoided, probably for moral reasons, sometimes this earth has been visited by explorers'.[3]

AAT became mainstream thanks to Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, who translated Lovecraft's stories into French and considered them as containing a kernel of truth: 'It is thus not impossible that at least part of Lovecraft's myths is demonstrated'.[4] The two authors are mostly famous for their *magnum opus*, namely *The Morning of the Magicians*.[5] In it, they openly show their indebtedness to Fort (pp. 193–197) and promote a new way of looking into reality that they call 'fantastic realism' (pp. 86–87), although they never define it with sufficient clarity: they state that the 'fantastic' is different from the 'imaginary' and that it is 'more real than

[1] For a critique of all the methodological flaws in pseudoarchaeology, see Garrett G. Fagan, 'Diagnosing pseudoarchaeology', in *Archaeological Fantasies*, ed. by Garrett G. Fagan, (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 23–46.
[2] Charles Fort, *The Book of the Damned* (New York: Boni and Liverlight, 1919), p. 67,
[3] Charles Fort, *The Book of the Damned* (New York: Boni and Liverlight, 1919), p. 137.
[4] 'Il n'est donc pas impossible qu'une partie au moins du mythe de Lovecraft soit vérifiée': Jacques Bergier, *Les extra-terrestres dans l'Histoire*, (Éditions J'ai lu: Paris, 1970), p. 97.
[5] Louis Pauwels and Jacques Berger, *The Morning of the Magicians* (New York: Dorset Press 1963), first published as *Le matin des magiciens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960). References in this paper are based on the French edition.

the real', although they never explain how to access it or how to distinguish between the 'fantastic' from the 'imaginary'. *The Morning of the Magicians* popularised fringe theories such as AAT and the alleged esoteric or occult roots of nazism, which they vastly overplayed.[6] In the wake of the success of *The Morning of the Magicians*, in 1961 Pauwels and Bergier founded the magazine *Planète*, in which they continued blurring the lines between fantasy and reality by publishing both fictional stories and non-fictional articles on scientific or non-scientific theories, without clearcut distinctions. Since then, AAT has always kept an ambiguous attitude towards academia, that had been deemed 'dogmatic' by Fort (*Book of the Damned*, p. 7), followed by many subsequent proponents of AAT.

One notable exception in the attitude of AAT authors towards academia is represented by the two astrophysicists Carl Sagan and Iosif Shklovskii. Their book *Intelligent Life in the Universe* is based on Laura Fern's authorised translation from Russian of Shklovskii's *The Universe, Life and Mind*.[7] The English version, edited and expanded by the two astrophysicists, is dedicated to the research of other intelligent life forms in the universe. Chapter 33, entitled 'Possible consequences of direct contact', speculates on what could happen if a civilisation arrived on a planet already inhabited by another civilisation. If the hypothetical visitors happened to be far more technologically advanced than the indigenous people, then the former could be easily taken for gods by the latter, although not every recount of meetings with gods should be taken as a testimony of an alien contact:

> Such an unusual occurrence would certainly be described in the legends and myths of the people who came into contact with space voyagers. The astronauts would probably be portrayed as having godlike characteristics and possessing supernatural powers. Special emphasis would be placed on their arrival from the sky, and their subsequent departure back into the sky. These beings may have

[6] See, for example, Julian Strube, 'Nazism and the Occult', in *The Occult World*, ed. by Christopher Partridge, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 336–347.

[7] Carl Sagan and Iosif Shklovskii, *Intelligent Life in the Universe* (San Francisco: Holden Day, 1966); Iosif Shklovski *The Universe, Life and Mind* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Science, 1962).
See also E. Öpik, 'Life in the Universe (review)', *Irish Astronomical Journal*, no. 8 (1967): pp. 94–99 (94).

> taught the inhabitants of the Earth useful arts and basic sciences, which would also be reflected in their legends and myths.[8]

Since AAT started to become widespread, some of its proponents interpreted the pseudepigraphical books dedicated to the patriarch Enoch as testimonies of a series of close encounters with extraterrestrials. The passages in which the eponymous patriarch is taken to heavens have been interpreted as alien abductions, while the ones mentioning the fallen angels (called the Watchers) having intercourse with women and teaching them arts and crafts have been regarded, respectively, as recounts of genetic engineering (or plain cross-breeding) and the transfer of advanced technological knowledge. The offspring of such union are generally called Nephilim, although improperly, as we shall see.

In order to understand how the Watchers ended up being interpreted as aliens, it is necessary to start from the sources and then examine the different meanings that the word could have, or could have not, conveyed.

2. Enoch from the Bible to non-canonical texts

The patriarch Enoch is mentioned several times in the Bible. In Genesis his name appears in two different genealogies which come from different sources, conventionally called J and P, that present similar names, although in different order. For example: in J the patriarch's name is spelled Hanok, he has a son named Irad, his grand-grandson is Metushael and they all descend from Cain (Genesis 4:17–24); whereas, according to P, Enoch is the son of Yared and the father of Methushela (i.e. Mathusalem), from the offspring of Adam and Eve's third son Seth. Traditionally, later texts mentioning Enoch refer to P's genealogy (Genesis 5:21–24), where we read:

> When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch

[8] Carl Sagan and Iosif Shklovskii, *Intelligent Life in the Universe* (San Francisco: Holden Day, 1966), p. 454.

> walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.[9]

The original Hebrew behind the phrase 'walked faithfully' is a derived form of the root *hlk*, which usually stands for 'to go' and from which, incidentally, the word *halakah* derives.[10] The reciprocal form (*hitpa'el*) of the verb *hlk* can mean 'to go from place to place, to wander' or 'to behave, to establish a relationship' or 'to be in a close friendship or relationship'.[11] This, united with the phrase 'God took him away', has led the author(s) of 1 Enoch to assume that he was taken up to the sky while still alive, although it could be argued that the text itself says that he lived a total of 365 years, without specifying 'on Earth', which means that he could have been 'taken away' after his passing.

Moreover, Enoch is briefly mentioned in some books of the New Testament, such as the Gospel of Luke (3:37), Epistle to the Hebrews (11:5) and the Epistle of Judas (1:14–15), as well as in pseudepigrapha such as the *Book of Jubilees* (4:16–26). More importantly, three books have been attributed to him, conventionally named 1, 2 and 3 Enoch. Those books are generally not included in any Jewish or Christian canon, except for 1 Enoch, which is considered part of the Old Testament by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The only complete versions we have of 1 Enoch (also known as *Ethiopic Enoch* or *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch*) and of the aforementioned *Book of Jubilees* have survived in Ge'ez, an ancient Ethiopian language. They appear to be translations of lost Greek versions of Aramaic (for 1 Enoch) and Hebrew (for *Jubilees*) originals, which were redacted probably in the last centuries BCE and of which fragments have been found at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls.[12]

---

[9] Bible quotes are from the New International Version (NIV), unless differently specified.

[10] I.e. 'the body of Jewish law supplementing the scriptural law and forming especially the legal part of the Talmud', https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/halacha, visited on 22 April 2025.

[11] My translation from *Even-Shoshan Dictionary. Renewed and Updated for the Years Two-Thousand* (Jerusalem: Hamilon Hechadash, 2009), vol. 2, p. 389: הלך לכאן ולכאן, התשוטט ממקום למקום […], התנהג, התיחס […], בלה הרבה בחברותו של-, היה ביחסי קרבה והכרות.

[12] J. Milik, *The Books of Enoch. Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); H. Drawnel, *The Aramaic Astronomical Book (4Q208-4Q211) from Qumran. Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

The text of 1 Enoch as we know it is the result of a redaction of several textual units that can be divided as such, although different subdivisions have also been suggested: an introduction (Chapters 1–5), the *Book of the Watchers* (6–36), the *Book of the Similitudes* or *of the Parables* (37–71) which also contains fragments of an otherwise lost *Book of Noah* (roughly 67–69), the *Book of Astronomy* (72–82), the *Book of Dreams* (83–90), the *Epistle of Enoch* (91–104) and fragments of various sources (105–107), among which the already mentioned *Book of Noah*, and a conclusion, likely added by the editor (108). The oldest textual unit is represented by what is known as the *Book of Astronomy*, composed no earlier than the end of the fourth century BCE, while the *Book of the Watchers*, in turn, appears to be the result of a redaction of at least two different sources, as will be shown later on.

The second book of Enoch (2 Enoch), is also called Slavonic Enoch because it is preserved only in a Slavonic translation of a lost Greek original from the first century CE circa. It recounts the ascent to heaven of the eponymous protagonist and how he saw the seven planetary heavens of Ptolemaic cosmology, with the places of eternal salvation and damnation.

The third book of Enoch (3 Enoch) was written in Hebrew in the fifth or sixth centuries and recounts rabbi Ishmael's ascent to the seven heavens. In the uppermost one, he finds the angel Metatron who reveals that he was known as Enoch before he was taken to the heavens, bestowed of supernatural wisdom and then turned into an angel.

3. The Watchers as angels

Of all the three books of Enoch, this paper will focus on the first one, which tells, in a more detailed way, the story of the fall of the so-called Watchers. The name 'Watcher' is used to refer to an angel or, in the plural form, a whole class of angels, in the biblical book of Daniel (4:13–17), which has served as a model for 1 Enoch in several regards, especially for its apocalyptic visions.

1 Enoch also expands on the following biblical passage (Genesis 6:1–4):

> When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. […] The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also

> afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.
>
> The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

The phrase 'sons of God' from the previous passage is a literal translation, indeed a calque, from the Hebrew phrase *bnei elohim*. The Hebrew term for 'son' (sing. *ben*), though, can cover a vast semantic field that goes well beyond the original meaning related to family, including the status of belonging to a group in a generic sense, not necessarily related with consanguinity. Thus, the phrase could simply mean 'the divine beings'. The name 'Nephilim', on the other hand, stems from a different root, the meaning and etymology of which are still matter of debate. The phrase 'human beings' translates the Hebrew *bnei adam*, literally 'sons of Adam'.

Chapter 6 of 1 Enoch expands on those passages by adding the names of those Watchers, 'the angels, the children of heaven', which swore an oath to one another, by proposition of their leader Semyaz. The reference to the oath (*ḥrm*) could be a way to explain with a pseudoetymology the origin of the name of mount Ḥermon, where the oath is said to have taken place (1 Enoch 6:6). Similar word plays are to be found in the Bible itself, which states, for example, that the name of the first man, Adam, comes from *adamah*, i.e. the Hebrew name for the soil from which he was made (Genesis 2:7; 3:19.23).

The section of 1 Enoch known as The *Book of the Watchers* thus appears to fill out the narrative gaps left out by chapter 6 of Genesis, by adding details and retelling a more coherent story. From a philological point of view, not only would it be risky to assume that the one present in 1 Enoch is the actual backstory that the authors of Genesis had in mind, but there are clues that point to the opposite direction. One notable example of that is that Genesis itself says that the Nephilim (that 1 Enoch later interprets as giants) were already on Earth when the divine beings united with the human women. In other words, in the very first verses of chapter 6 of Genesis we learn that, before the Flood, there were at least four different

species on Earth: the divine beings, the humans, their hybrid offspring and the Nephilim/giants. The *Book of the Watchers*, though, conflates the latter two and identifies the giants as the offspring of the unholy union, which provoked God to send the Flood (1 Enoch 7:1–6):

> And they took wives unto themselves, and everyone (respectively) chose one woman for himself, and they began to go unto them. And they taught them magical medicine, incantations, the cutting of roots, and taught them (about) plants. And the women became pregnant and gave birth to great giants whose heights were three hundred cubits. These (giants) consumed the produce of all the people until the people detested feeding them. So the giants turned against (the people) in order to eat them. And they began to sin against birds, wild beasts, reptiles, and fish. And their flesh was devoured the one by the other, and they drank blood. And then the earth brought an accusation against the oppressors.[13]

The passage hints to another version of the story, better retold in chapter 8, which likely derives from a different source and in which the Watchers' sin was not to have had intercourse with humans, but to have taught them the arts and crafts, whereas the Bible itself attributes those discoveries to the first patriarchs. In this case, the leader of the Watchers is not called Semyaz, but Azaz'el (1 Enoch 8:1–4):

> And Azaz'el taught the people (the art of) making swords and knives, and shields, and breastplates; and he showed to their chosen ones bracelets, decorations, (shadowing of the eye) with antimony, ornamentation, the beautifying of the eyelids, all kinds of precious stones, and all coloring tinctures and alchemy. And there were many wicked ones and they committed adultery and erred, and all their conduct became corrupt. Amasras taught incantations and the cutting of roots; and Armaros the resolving of incantations; and Baraqiyal astrology, and Kokarer'el (the knowledge of) the signs, and Tam'el taught the seeing of the stars, and Asder'el taught the

[13] All quotes from 1 Enoch are from Ephraim Isaac, *1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch. A New Translation and Introduction*, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume One. Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers 2011 – 1st ed. Yale University Press 1983), pp. 5–89.

> course of the moon as well as the deception of man. And (the people) cried and their voice reached to heaven.

In chapter 10 of 1 Enoch we read that the Flood was not sent because of the sins of humankind, as the Bible says, but to wipe out the Nephilim that were devouring everything. We also read that the Watchers are chained, as God commands to the angel Michael (1 Enoch 10:12):

> And when they and all their children have battled with each other, and when they have seen the destruction of their beloved ones, bind them for seventy generations underneath the rocks of the ground until the day of their judgment and of their consummation, until the eternal judgment is concluded.

In short, 1 Enoch rewrites Genesis 6:1–4, mainly by conflating the giants (Nephilim) mentioned in the Bible with the offspring of the unholy union between the humans and the divine beings, which it calls Watchers. This conflation of different species that in the Bible appear distinct characterises the interpretation of the Watchers as aliens in AAT. In fact, as we shall see now, proponents of AAT further conflate the Watchers with what 1 Enoch consider their offspring, the Nephilim.

4. Carl Sagan and Iosif Shklovskii

Although it represents only one of the different versions of the modern myth of alien contact, the trope of extraterrestrials as civilisers recurs often in the literature on this theme. Immediately after the passage from *Intelligent Life in the Universe* quoted earlier, in which they hypothesise that aliens could have taught arts and crafts to the first humans, Sagan and Shklovskii quote one of the earliest authors of AAT, by expressing scepticism towards some of his interpretations:

> In 1959, the Soviet ethnologist M. M. Agrest postulated that representatives from an extraterrestrial civilization have indeed visited our planet. Despite the great dangers of confusion with legends generated in other ways, such hypotheses are entirely reasonable, and worthy of careful analysis. Agrest has boldly conjectured that perhaps a number of events described in the Bible were in reality based on the visit of extraterrestrial astronauts to the Earth. For example, the circumstances surrounding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah remind Agrest of a nuclear explosion as it might have been described by an observer living in ancient times.

> As another example, Agrest considers the incidents related in the apocryphal book The Slavonic Enoch to be in reality an account of the visitation of Earth by extraterrestrial cosmonauts, and the reciprocal visitation of several Galactic communities by a rather befuddled inhabitant of the Earth. However, The Slavonic Enoch fails to satisfy several of the criteria for a general contact myth, mentioned above: It has been molded into several different standardized supernatural frameworks; the astronomy is largely incorrect; and there is no transparent extraterrestrial motivation for the events described. The interested reader may wish to consult standard versions of the tale.[14]

Interestingly enough, Matest Agrest has used (in the meaning of the term which will be clarified later) 2 Enoch instead of 1 Enoch, although the former does not mention physical places, but rather describes the seven heavens, with the Sun, the Moon and the planets together with the places for eternal salvation or torment. Sagan and Shklovskii dismiss the passages of 2 Enoch mentioning ancient cosmology as a later addition of 'standardized supernatural frameworks', although this claim is not supported by any textual evidence. In doing so, they show a biased approach to the text, since they consider spurious the elements that do not fit in their interpretation as the ancient texts being the result of knowledge coming from ancient civilisers. Anything that is not strictly scientific is considered the product of the humans that wrote those texts, although it can be argued that, if one removes anything that could be referred to the body of knowledge that one would expect from an ancient civilisation developed autonomously on Earth, then nothing remains.

The two astrophysicists assign great importance to the origins of the Sumerians, since most of the other ancient civilisations are said, not without exaggeration, to descend from theirs:

> The successors to the Sumerians and Akkadians were the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians. Thus the Sumerian civilization is in many respects the ancestor of our own. I feel that if Sumerian civilization is depicted by the descendants of the Sumerians themselves to be of non-human origin, the relevant

[14] Carl Sagan and Iosif Shklovskii, *Intelligent Life in the Universe* (San Francisco: Holden Day, 1966), p. 454.

> legends should be examined carefully. I do not claim that the following is necessarily an example of extraterrestrial contact, but it is the type of legend that deserves more careful study.[15]

It is not clear how 'more careful study' of this 'type of legend' could help us discover some facts regarding events that are supposed to have taken place in actuality. Any specialist in disciplines related to history, while studying an ancient text or myth, expects to reconstruct a piece of a people's *cultural* history, not its *actual* history. This lack of critical attitude towards the sources is one of the fundamental flaws of AAT. Moreover, the claim that Sumerian civilisation is 'in many respects the ancestor of our own' is too vague and misleads the readers into overestimating the role and scope of Mesopotamian legacy in our cultures.[16] Lastly, that Sumerian civilisation is depicted by its descendants as of non-human origin is an exaggerated claim that is not sufficiently grounded.

One prominent example that the two astrophysicists use as alleged proof of the transfer of knowledge between advanced civilisations and people that lived in ancient Mesopotamia is represented by one seal, held in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin (VA243). In the upper left corner, it features a cluster of dots grouped around a star. Sagan and Shklovskii erroneously interpreted the central star as the Sun and the dots around it as the planets of our solar system, including the Earth's Moon, in spite of the fact that the Sun has never been represented like with the sign featured in VA243 and that in ancient Mesopotamian texts there is no mention of any planet that is not visible to the naked eye.[17]

To summarise, chapter 33 of Sagan and Shklovskii's *Intelligent Life in the Universe* appears to be based on the kind of circular reasoning shown above and on overinterpretation of texts and imagery with which the two authors had no familiarity.

5. Zecharia Sitchin

Together with the interpretation of Enoch as an *abductee*, the interpretation of the Watchers as aliens, in spite of its incongruences, has been widely accepted by proponents and followers of AAT. The first example of the

[15] Carl Sagan and Iosif Shklovskii, *Intelligent Life in the Universe* (San Francisco: Holden Day, 1966), p. 456.
[16] For a more accurate assessment, see Stephanie Dalley, *The Legacy of Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[17] For a more thorough discussion of VA243, see https://sitchiniswrong.com/va_243%20page.htm [accessed 6 May 2025].

interpretation of the Watchers as aliens in recent literature is Zecharia Sitchin's first book of his series on ancient aliens, namely *The 12th Planet*, published in 1976.[18] In it, Sitchin further conflates the Nephilim and the Watchers, which are identified with extraterrestrials: 'The sons of the gods who came to earth from the heavens were the Nefilim. And the Nefilim were the People of the Shem – the People of the Rocket Ships'.[19]

In the quoted passage, Sitchin arbitrarily assigns the meaning of 'rocket ship' to the word *shem* in Genesis 6:2, which derives from a very common Semitic root simply meaning 'name'. This heavy use of pseudo-etymologies and very loose translations that have been shown not to be based on any known dictionary represents Sitchin's typical way of making his arguments.[20] Not only does he conflate the Watchers with the Nephilim, but he also conflates the latter with other supernatural beings mentioned in Mesopotamian texts. At the end of a chapter in which he discusses elements of Babylonian astronomy, he concludes: 'Teaching humanity the true nature of Earth and the heavens, the Nefilim informed the ancient astronomer-priests not only of the planets beyond Saturn but also of the existence of the most important planet, the one from which they came'.[21]

The alleged 'true nature of Earth and the heavens' described in Babylonian sources is far from corresponding to what we would expect from science coming from an advanced civilisation. In fact, in the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish* (tablet 5:11) the heaven and the earth consist of the two halves of the body of the primordial monster Tiamat that was killed by Marduk.[22] Sitchin does quote *Enuma Elish*, but reinterprets it in a way that forces the text so that it conveys a totally different meaning, namely the formation of our solar system, while claiming that such knowledge was transmitted by the Nephilim:

> But why not take the epic at face value, as nothing more nor less than the statement of cosmologic facts as known to the Sumerians,

[18] Zecharia Sitchin, *The 12th Planet* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976).
[19] Zecharia Sitchin, *The 12th Planet* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), p. 172.
[20] See for example the criticisms of Sitchin's theories at Michael S. Heiser's website, 'Sitchin is Wrong': https://sitchiniswrong.com [accessed 6 May 2025].
[21] Zecharia Sitchin, *The 12th Planet* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), p. 203.
[22] Stefan M. Maul, *The Art of Divination in the Ancient Near East* (Waco: Baylor University Press 2018), first published as *Die Wahrsagekunst im Alten Orient. Zeichen des Himmels und der Erde* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck 2013), p. 228.

> as told them by the Nefilim? Using such a bold and novel approach, we find that the "Epic of Creation" perfectly explains the events that probably took place in our solar system.

Moreover, Sitchin's reference to the 'planets beyond Saturn' in the previous quote shows that he used Sagan and Shklovskii's interpretation of the seal VA243 as proof of cosmological knowledge that the Sumerian could have only received from extraterrestrial visitors. Referring to the seal, he writes (cursive in the original): 'It is clearly a depiction of the solar system as it was known to the Sumerians: a system consisting of *twelve* celestial bodies'.[23]

To summarise, Sitchin overestimates the scope and depth of the knowledge of ancient civilisations while, at the same time, underestimating ancient people's intellectual capabilities and reinterpreting and overinterpreting ancient imagery and texts.

6. Erich von Däniken

Another prominent author of AAT is Erich von Däniken, who presents, in at least one of his books, the idea of aliens that 'took one of the creatures and altered it genetically'.[24] According to von Däniken, the Nephilim mentioned in Genesis 6:4 consisted of a group of aliens who mutinied. Moreover, in his view, the passages of 1 Enoch quoted earlier are self-evident proof of the contact of those aliens with humans. After quoting the passages from 1 Enoch in which the Watchers teach humans basic arts and crafts such as jewelry making and withcraft, he adds: 'I won't bother you with a commentary on this text. After all, you can read as well as I!'.[25] This represents a clear example of the kind of circular reasoning on which AAT is based: if one hypothesises that the ancient texts describe encounters with extraterrestrials, then no further explanation or commentary is needed. He also seems to imply that humans are not deemed capable of any advancement and that the first humans needed to be taught everything, including language:

---

[23] Zecharia Sitchin, *The 12th Planet* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), p. 204.
[24] Erich von Däniken, *Enoch and the Return of the Gods* (Newburyport: Red Wheel Wiser, 2023), [originally published as Erich von Däniken, *Return of the Gods*, Rockport: Element Books, 1997)], p. 54.
[25] Erich von Däniken, *Enoch and the Return of the Gods* (Newburyport: Red Wheel Wiser, 2023), pp. 41–3.

> The first intelligent human beings had no speech. How could they have done? Their direct ancestors were apes; they grunted and roared. So the extraterrestrials decided on a training program. The *Homo sapiens* pair were placed in a protected garden—Biosphere 1—and taught speech, as the book of Genesis (11:1) reports[26]

So, von Däniken seems to exclude the possibility that human beings can achieve anything, and hypothesises that the earliest scientific and technological advancements were possible only thanks to aliens.

Many other examples of the identification of the Watchers as aliens are present in other media: in episode 3 of the ninth season of the popular television show called *Ancient Aliens*, the Watchers are explicitly called 'a group of ancient aliens', whereas a Google search of 'Enoch aliens' yields no less than 1,000,000 results, as of May 2025.[27]

7. Conclusions: The use of 1 Enoch in AAT

Umberto Eco has distinguished between the interpretation of a text and its use.[28] To simplify, the former takes place when a text is read through the lens of the author's culture, while the latter happens when the readers uses the filter of their own culture as a way to resignify the text. That could happen either when the author and the reader belong to different cultures or when they belong to the same culture, but are from different epochs, or, more commonly, when the writer and reader belong both to different cultures and different epochs. Using those definitions, in the case of AAT, the ancient texts are not *interpreted*, but *used* in order to push a certain worldview. In spite of the absence of any evidence pointing to any particularly advanced knowledge, and in spite of proof that clearly points to the opposite case, ancient texts are believed to be a reliable testimony of a series of encounters with scientists from other worlds. In the case of 1

[26] Erich von Däniken, *Enoch and the Return of the Gods* (Newburyport: Red Wheel Wiser, 2023), p. 54.
[27] 'Ancient Aliens: The Watchers Who Oversee Mankind' (Season 9), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEIPYmiLuTA [accessed 6 May 2025].
[28] Umberto Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), p. 110 (1st ed. 1984. English translation: *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Umberto Eco, *Aspetti della semiosi ermetica*, in Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2016) p. 76 (partial English translation: *The Limits of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

Enoch, the alleged 'wisdom from the stars' that, according to the ufological use of the text, was supposed to be transmitted from the extraterrestrials, consists of simple metallurgy, cosmetics and any other kind of knowledge that we would expect from a naturally evolved civilisation from two thousand years ago.

The passages of 1 Enoch in which the Watchers are said to have transmitted knowledge to the humans have been carefully selected and reinterpreted, while at the same time all the passages that go against the AAT interpretation, such as those mentioning magic and cosmetics or ancient cosmological views, have been downplayed or outright ignored. The 'wisdom from the stars' transmitted by the Watchers is far from being so advanced for it to be considered necessarily as coming from extraterrestrial civilisations.

Since the sources do not explicitely mention advanced technologies, proponents of AAT usually justify their use of such texts by suggesting that the ancient authors could not interpret correctly what they were seeing, so they described things that were incomprehensible to them with terms with which they had more familiarity. Ironically, the same can be said about the past and contemporary AAT writers themselves: when they face a text or imagery that they can not understand due to their lack of knowledge of the culture that produced it, they filter it through the terms and ideas with which they are more familiar, namely contemporary science and technology and works of science fiction. In a way of reasoning that is typical of esotericism, the ancient texts are read as if they hinted to a deeper meaning that is not apparent on a surface level, and the only ones able to recognise such alleged hidden meaning are the proponents and followers of AAT. The implication of having found the allegedly true meaning of the Scriptures is often accompanied by the claim that they present a literal reading, when the opposite is often the case. For example, in Georgio Cattaneo, Mauro Biglino, *The Naked Bible* (Turin: Tuthi 2021), the Bible, far from being read literally as claimed, is used to promote AAT.[29] Another notable example is represented by Zechariah Sitchin, *The Twelfth Planet*, in which it is stated, for example, that the name TIL.MUN 'literally meant "land of the missiles"' (p. 161).

The use of 1 Enoch made by AAT authors represents only the latest of a series of reinterpretations that have been carried out for centuries on this

[29] For a criticism of Biglino's overinterpretation of the Bible, see Stefano Bigliardi, 'Of *Polenta* and *Elohim*. Mauro Biglino's 'Ancient Aliens' between Anti Religion and New Religiosity', in *Handbook of UFO Religions*, ed. by Benjamin Zeller, (Leiden–Boston: Brill 2011), pp. 270–294.

ancient text and on Genesis 6:1–4.[30] Notably, AAT further perpetuates a trend that already started more than two thousand years ago, when 1 Enoch was written, with the conflation of the different classes of non-human beings mentioned in Genesis 6:1–4. Those Bible verses, besides the human beings, mention the divine beings, their offspring and the Nephilim. Whereas 1 Enoch calls 'Nephilim' the offspring of the divine beings and the humans, Sitchin and von Däniken call 'Nephilim' the beings who came and taught arts and crafts to humans, after having created the first human couple through genetic engineering. One would expect that AAT proponents would identify the ancient astronauts with the divine beings that came down to Earth and that 1 Enoch calls Watchers, and the name 'Nephilim' to be reserved for the hybrids, but instead all the three non-human classes of beings have been more conveniently conflated into one.

In later years, Sagan later strongly downplayed, if not completely retracted, his own stance regarding ancient alien civilisers:

> But as provocative as this and similar legends were, I concluded that it was impossible to demonstrate extraterrestrial contact from such legends: There are plausible alternative explanations. We can understand why priests might make myths about superior beings who inhabit the skies and give directions to human beings on how to order their affairs.[31]

In spite of that, the hypothesis that he contributed to make widespread had been widely accepted in fringe circles and the interpretation of the Watchers as aliens is part of this process, since he popularised the idea of ancient civilisers of humankind.

AAT appears to be a new mythology which resignifies ancient lore, using it to rewrite our past and to try to explain our role in the cosmos, maybe in order to feel somehow connected with higher intelligences that are thought to inhabit it and that are believed to have graced us with their intelligence and with their wisdom coming from the stars.

---

[30] On the reception of 1 Enoch, see Ariel Hessayon, Annette Yoshiko Reed, Gabriele Boccaccini (eds.), *Rediscovering Enoch? The Antediluvian Past from the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2023. On Genesis 6:1–4, see Jaap Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4. Analysis and History of Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill 2019).

[31] Carl Sagan, *The Cosmic Connection: An Extraterrestrial Perspective* (New York: Dell Publishing 1973), p. 159.