

Book Review

Wonders In The Sky: Unexplained Aerial Objects from Antiquity to Modern Times And Their Impact on Human Culture, History, and Beliefs

by Jacques Vallee and Chris Aubeck

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In 1969 Jacques Vallee wrote a book titled Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers. In that book he argued for the objective reality of anomalous aerial phenomena. He pointed out that the UFO related phenomena had certain common characteristics although the reports were also shaped by the beliefs and culture of those reporting the observations. In making his points about the cultural aspects of reports, Vallee had limited access to historical records. Chris Aubeck is a researcher who has worked with many other researchers around the world since 2003 on something which they called the Magonia Project, a collection of all the historical data on anomalous aerial phenomenon. Vallee and Aubeck combine efforts in this book to review the now larger body of historical evidence and see what conclusions they can draw from the cases that appear to be well documented.

Part I of the book, A Chronology of Wonders, contains 500 selected events from 1460 BC through 1879 AD. There are chapters within Part I covering the following time periods: 1460 BC to 1000 AD, 1000 to 1500 AD, the Sixteenth Century, the Seventeenth Century, the Eighteenth Century, and the Nineteenth Century. The start of each chapter notes the scientific and cultural events from that time period that may affect how anomalous aerial phenomena are reported and interpreted. Since all 500 selected events ended before human flight took place, they clearly show the fallacy in the often repeated claim by some media and debunkers that the UFO phenomena started when pilot Kenneth Arnold reported seeing flying saucers while flying near Mt. Rainier in 1947.

Part II of the book, Myths, Legends, and Chariots of the Gods, covers many reports that did not meet the screening criteria for validity required of events reported in Part I. Some reports in Part II are known hoaxes or misidentified natural phenomena. Others lacked sufficient information to judge whether they were valid or not. Many of the reports in Part II contain insightful comments about cultural, religious, or social attitudes of the time. The report in Part II that I found most noteworthy was the extensive research presented to show that the various stories about the “Dropa stones” have all been based on a hoax. Many modern writers have repeated or embellished on the original tale without realizing that it was a hoax.

Part III, Sources and Methods, discusses the criteria used for selecting reports regarded as having high validity. It also gets into issues of scholarship, such as which version of an event should be retained over other competing versions which may be less accurate or tainted. Part III also discusses how this research effort has been aided by the emergence of the Internet as a source for shared knowledge. Areas suggested for further research are also discussed.

-Mark Commerford