

*Vitality and dissolution in
the grand cycles of existence*



Abstract and train of thoughts

The taxonomy of heavens is both cosmic embryology and cosmic palaeontology.

It is mere vanity that prevents modern science from accepting the enormous periods of time insisted upon by the ancients, as elapsed since the first civilizations. 3

Shesha is the great serpent-cycle, represented as swallowing its own tail. He has a thousand heads, embellished with the pure mystical sign. 4

He is the spirit of vitality and dissolution in the grand cycles of existence. 5

Christian theologians claim unblushingly that their Patriarchs lived some four thousand years ago. 5

The secret meaning of the Biblical Patriarchs revealed.

They are all identical to the "Mind-born Sons" of Brahmā, who become mortal heroes only to be vilified by lower minds as much as ancient mythology is perverted. 6



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[These brief notes from Madame Blavatsky's pen on a number of unrelated subjects appear from their context to have been written much earlier than the actual date of their publication. Some passages in them are almost identical with certain sentences in *Isis Unveiled*. Material concerning Bunsen can be found *verbatim* in the First Draft of *The Secret Doctrine*. It is most likely that these notes belong to the period of 1885-86, and are for this reason published at this particular point of the chronological series. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

The Hermetic axiom has been made good by astronomy and geology. Science has become convinced now that the milliards of heavenly hosts — suns, stars, planets, the systems in and beyond the Milky Way — have all had a common origin, our earth included. Nevertheless that a regular evolution, incessant and daily, is still going on.

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. . . Cosmic life-times have begun at different epochs, and proceed at different rates of change. Some began so far back in eternity or have proceeded at so rapid a rate, that their careers are brought to a conclusion in the passing age. Some are even now awaking into existence; and it is probable that worlds are beginning and ending continually. Hence cosmic existence, like the kingdoms of organic life, presents a simultaneous panorama of a completed cycle of being. A taxonomic arrangement of the various grades of animal existence presents a succession of forms which we find repeated in the embryonic history of a single individual, and again in the succession of geological types; so the taxonomy of the heavens is both a cosmic embryology and a cosmic palæontology.¹

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So much for cycles again in modern orthodox science. It was the knowledge of all these truths — scientifically demonstrated and made public now, but in those days of antiquity occult and known to Initiates alone — that led to the formation of various cycles into a regular system. The grand Manvantaric system was divided into other great cycles; and these in their turn into smaller cycles, regular wheels of time, in Eternity. Yet no one outside of the sacred precincts ever had the key to the correct reading and interpretation of cyclic notation, and therefore even the ancient classics disagreed on many points. Thus, Orpheus is said to have ascribed to the “Great” Cycle 120,000 years' duration, and Cassandrus 136,000, according to Censorinus.²

¹ Alexander Winchell, *World Life: or, Comparative Geology*. [Chicago: S.C. Griggs & Co., 1883]; pp. 538-39.

² *De Die Natali, Life of the Emperor Hadrian by Ælianus Spartianus*. Chron. and Astron. Fragments.

[Reference is here made to Chapter XVIII of Censorinus' work, the passage in question being as follows:

. . . Est præterea annus, quem Aristoteles maximum potius, quam magnum, adpellat: quem Solis. Lunæ, vagarumque quinque stellarum orbes conficiunt, cum ad idem signum, ubi quondam simul fuerunt, una referuntur, cujus anni hiems summa est *κατακλισμος*, quam nostri diluvionem vocant; æstas autem *εκπυρωσις*, quod est mundi incendium. Nam his alternis temporibus mundus tum exignescere, tum exaquescere videtur. Hunc Aristarchus putavit esse annorum vertentium duum millium CCCCLXXXIV; Aretes Dyrrachinus, quinque millium DLII; Heraclitus et Linus, decem millium CC∞; Dion, XMCC∞ XXCIV; Orpheus, CMXX; Cassandrus, tricies sexies centum millium. Alii vero infinitum est, nec unquam in se revertilium. . . .

— Boris de Zirkoff.]

Analogy is the law, and is the [278] surest guide in occult sciences, as it ought to be in the natural philosophy made public. It is perhaps mere vanity that prevents modern science from accepting the enormous periods of time insisted upon by the ancients, as elapsed since the first civilizations. The miserable little fragment torn out from the Book of the universal History of Mankind, now called so proudly “*Our History*,” forces historians to dwarf every period in order to wedge it in within the narrow limits primarily constructed by theology. Hence the most liberal among them hesitate to accept the figures given by ancient historians. Bunsen, the eminent Egyptologist, rejects the period of 48,863 years before Alexander, to which Diogenes Laërtius carries back the records of the priests, but he is evidently more embarrassed with the ten thousand of astronomical observations, and remarks that “if they were actual observations they *must have* extended over 10,000 years.” “We learn,” he adds, “from one of their own old chronological works . . . that the genuine Egyptian traditions concerning the mythological period, treated of *myriads* of years.”¹

We must notice and try to explain some of these great and smaller cycles and their symbols. Let us begin with the cycle of Mahāyuga, personified by Śesha — the great serpent called “the couch of Vishnu,” because that God is Time and Duration personified in the most philosophical and often poetical way.

Shesha is the great serpent-cycle, represented as swallowing its own tail. He has a thousand heads, embellished with the pure mystical sign.

It is said that Vishnu appears on it at the beginning of every Manvantara as “the Lord of Creation.” Śesha is the great Serpent-Cycle, represented as swallowing its own tail — thence the emblem of Time within Eternity. Time, says Locke² — Time is “duration set forth by measures,” and Śesha [279] sets forth evolution by symbolizing its periodical stages. On him Vishnu sleeps during the intervals of rest (*pralayas*) between “creations”; the blue God — blue because he is space and the depth of infinity — awakens only when Śesha bends his thousand heads, preparing to again bear up the universe which is supported on them. The *Vishnu-Purāna* describes him thus:

Below the seven Pātālas is the form of Vishnu, proceeding from the quality of darkness, which is called Śesha, the excellencies of which neither Daityas nor Dānavas can (fully) enumerate. This being is called Ananta [the infinite] by the spirits of heaven (Siddha) [Yoga Wisdom, sons of Dharma, or true religion], and is worshipped by sages and by gods. He has a thousand heads, which are embellished with the pure and visible mystic sign [Swastika]; and the thousand jewels in his crests (*phana*) give light to all the regions . . . In one hand he holds a plough,³ and, in the other, a pestle . . . From his mouths, at the end of the Kalpa, proceeds the venomed fire that, impersonated as Rudra [Śiva, the “destroyer”] . . . devours the three worlds.⁴

¹ *Egypt's Place in Universal History*, Vol. I, pp. 14 and 15 resp. [The italics are Madame Blavatsky's.]

² *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1869

³ An emblem referring to the “ploughing” and sowing the renewed earth (in its new Round) with fresh seeds of life.

⁴ H.H. Wilson, *Vishnu-Purāna*. Ed. by Fitzedward Hall; Book II, ch. v, p. 211

He is the spirit of vitality and dissolution in the grand cycles of existence.

Thence Śesha is the cycle of the great Manvantara, and also the spirit of vitality as of destruction, since Vishnu, as the preserving or conservative force, and Śiva as the destroying potency, are both aspects of Brahmā. Śesha is said to have taught the sage Garga — one of the oldest astronomers in India, whom, nevertheless, Bentley¹ places only 548 B.C. — the secret sciences, the mysteries of the heavenly bodies, of astrology, astronomy, and various omens. Śesha is so great and mighty, that it is more than likely he will someday, in far off future ages, render the same service to our modern astronomers. Nothing like “Time” and cyclic changes to cure sceptics of their blindness.

Christian theologians claim unblushingly that their Patriarchs lived some four thousand years ago.

But Occult truths have to contend with a far more blind foe than science can ever be to them, namely, the [280] Christian theologians and bigots. These claim unblushingly the number of years lived by their Patriarchs some four thousand years ago, and pretend to prove that they have interpreted “the symbolic predictions of scripture” and have “traced the historic fulfilment of two of the most important of them” — handling Biblical chronology as reverently as though it had never been a rehash of Chaldæan records and cyclic figures, to hide the true meaning under exoteric fables! They speak of “that history that unrolls before our eyes a record extending over six thousand years” from the moment of creation; and maintain that there are “very few of the prophetic periods whose fulfilment cannot be traced in some parts of the scrolls.”²

Moreover they have two methods and two chronologies to show those events verified — the Roman Catholic and the Protestant. The first relies on the calculations of Kepler³ and Dr. Sepp;⁴ the latter on Clinton,⁵ who gives the year of the Nativity as A.M. 4138; the former holds to the old calculation of 4320 by lunar, and 4004 by solar years.



¹ [Richard Bentley, 1662–1742, English classical scholar, critic, and theologian, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. Bentley was the first Englishman to be ranked with the great heroes of classical learning and was known for his literary and textual criticism. Called the “founder of historical philology,” he is credited with the creation of the English school of Hellenism, and introduced the first competitive written examinations in a Western university.]

² [Henry Grattan Guinness, 1835–1910. *The Approaching End of the Age, viewed in the Light of History, Prophecy, and Science*. 5th ed. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880]

³ [Johannes Kepler, 1571–1630, German astronomer, mathematician, and astrologer. He is a key figure in the 17th century scientific revolution, best known for his laws of planetary motion, and his books *Astronomia nova*, *Harmonices Mundi*, and *Epitome Astronomiæ Copernicanæ*. These works also provided one of the foundations for Newton’s theory of universal gravitation.]

⁴ [Johann Nepomuk Sepp, 1816–1909, German historian and politician, and a native of Bavaria.]

⁵ [Henry Fynes Clinton, 1781–1852, English classical scholar, chronologist and Member of Parliament.]

The secret meaning of the Biblical Patriarchs revealed.

They are all identical to the “Mind-born Sons” of Brahmā, who become mortal heroes only to be vilified by lower minds as much as ancient mythology is perverted.

The word “patriarch” is composed of the Greek word “Patria” (“family,” “tribe,” or “nation”) and “Archos” (a “chief”), the paternal principle. The Jewish Patriarchs who were pastors, passed their name to the Christian Patriarchs, yet they were no priests, but were simply the heads of their tribes, like the Indian Rishis.¹

First, seven are mentioned, then ten, then twenty-one, and so on. They are “Gods” and creators of men — many of them the “Lords of Beings”; they are the “Mind-born Sons” of Brahmā, and then they become mortal heroes, and are often shown as of a very sinful character. The Occult meaning of the Biblical Patriarchs, their genealogy, and their descendants dividing among themselves the earth, is the same. Again, Jacob’s dream has the same significance.²



¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE ORIGIN OF THE MYSTERIES) XIV p. 252 *fn.*

² *ibid.*, (THE DOCTRINE OF AVATARAS) XIV p. 380 *fn.*