

The Dropa tribe and their stone discs revisited

More than a decade ago, Hartwig Hausdorf reignited the debate as to whether aliens had crashlanded in the remote Chinese mountain range of Baian-Kara-Ula. Over the past decade, several elements of the story have been confirmed.

Philip Coppens

In the mid-1990s, German author and tour guide Hartwig Hausdorf reignited the debate as to whether aliens had crash-landed in their craft in the remote mountainous region of Baian-Kara-Ula, in China's Qinhai Province. Over the past decade or so, several elements of the story have been confirmed. The alleged crash-landing at Baian-Kara-Ula has become known as "the Chinese Roswell"—though the crash, if there was one, occurred not in 1947 or thereabouts but several thousand years ago. At the core of the story is that in 1937–38, an expedition led by Chi Pu Tei, an archaeologist with the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Peking (Beijing), was trying to find shelter in the Kunlun-Kette mountain chain. The team members entered a cave and found inscriptions on the walls. At the back of the cave they found several tombs, aligned in a row, containing



strange-looking skeletons, each measuring 1.0 metre 20 centimetres in length and having an abnormally large skull. Buried with the skeletons were unusual stone discs, 716 in all, about 30 cm wide and 1.0 cm deep with a hole in the centre, each bearing strange hieroglyphs. Were these Stone Age long-playing records?

The story goes that the Chinese Academy of Sciences tried to ban the publication of these findings, but eventually the story of the Dropa (or Dzopa) tribe and their stone discs was released—though never confirmed.

There are several aspects to this story: the strange skeletons; the discovery of a little-known tribe of dwarf-like beings; the nature and whereabouts of the discs; and the decipherment of the inscriptions.

The script was apparently only deciphered and the passages translated in the early 1960s by a team led by Professor Tsum Um Nui of the Peking Academy of Prehistory. He claimed that they describe the crash of an extraterrestrial spacecraft 12,000 years ago. Here are a few lines from the translation: "The Dropa came out of the clouds in their aeroplanes. Before sunrise, our men, women and children hid in the caves ten times. When they finally understood the sign language of the Dropa, they realised the newcomers had peaceful intentions..."

As for the discs, it has been pointed out that stone discs are a known ingredient of Chinese culture and are called "Bi" discs. Although their origin is unknown, these Bi discs have been dated to as far back as 10,000 BCE—thus largely coinciding with the time-frame of the alleged crash.

Bi discs were normally made from jade or other precious materials and were regarded as status symbols. In the aftermath of war, the losers were required to hand over their discs as a sign of submission. Furthermore, it is known that the discs were used in burials. In aristocratic burials, the discs were normally placed above the head, below the feet and on the chest of the deceased. Interestingly, Bi discs were often considered to be "the Ear of Heaven", and sometimes the hole in the disc was placed in front of the mouth so that the dead could speak to their ancestors. The story that stone discs with hieroglyphs were found in a tomb is therefore not only plausible but likely—considering, too, that Bi discs often carried inscriptions.

In 1974, a tourist, Austrian engineer Ernst Wegerer, saw and photographed several discs in the Banpo Museum in Xian, in Shensi Province. But this begs the question of whether these discs, which are similar in description to those reportedly discovered in Baian-Kara-Ula, were "just" Bi discs or actual examples of the ones found in the mountain cave during the 1937–38 expedition.

Descendants of the Dropa



Many people incorrectly believe that the story of the Dropa tribe was first aired in a 1978 book titled *Sungods in Exile*, edited by David Agamon. This book details the 1947 expedition of the English scientist Dr Karyl Robin-Evans, who supposedly reached the Baian-Kara-Ula mountains and made contact with the Dropa. According to the book, the tribe comprised several hundred members, all dwarfish in appearance and four feet (1.22 metres) tall on average. Dr Robin-Evans stayed there for half a year, learned the Dropa's language and was introduced to the history and traditions of the dwarfish beings, who told him that their ancestors had come from Sirius, of all places.

It is now known that the book was largely science fiction dressed up as non-fiction, but many people had already decided that the Dropa story was bogus—especially those who erroneously) argue that the book was the first to mention the “ridiculous” story.

It would seem that *Sungods in Exile* either was meant to cash in on stories about the Dropa that were in circulation for a few years before it was published, or—if you like a conspiratorial explanation—was meant to discredit the story. Why? Perhaps it was merely because China was a communist nation and any interest in things Chinese was officially

discouraged at the time by western governments.

But it was definitely not a hoax—at least not one executed in 1978. The Berlin-based historian Dr Jörg Dendl has been able to trace the first mention of the Dropa story to 1962, when a monthly magazine for vegetarians, *Das vegetarische Universum* (“The Vegetarian Universe”), published an article titled “UFOs in Prehistory?” in its July edition. Dr Dendl has so far not been able to find the original Chinese or Japanese source, but it is clear that the story is much older than 1978.

Furthermore, the story reported in *Sungods in Exile* of an expedition coming across dwarfish people in the Baian-Kara-Ula region has nonfictional counterparts. Dr Dendl found a 1933 clipping about a Chinese confrontation with dwarflike beings. Though some might argue that the location was in “Tibet”, at that time Baian-Kara-Ula was mistakenly labelled as being part of Tibet. The article relates how a woman, only 1 m 20 cm tall, was seen being escorted by Chinese soldiers and that she and her group were being held as slaves. There was also a statement that they were cannibals, but this might merely have been an excuse to cover for their inhumane treatment. Most importantly, the existence of the Dropa—or a tribe like them—has been confirmed. In November 1995, the Associated Press (AP) stated that some 120 “dwarfish beings” had been discovered in Sichuan Province, in a so-called “Village of the Dwarfs”. (Some sceptics cast doubt on the AP account, though it is easily verifiable. In fact, on 9 November 1995, the German publication *Bild* ran a report titled “Das Dorf der Zwerge – Umweltgifte schuld?” [“The Village of the Dwarfs – environmental pollution to blame?”] about the discovery.) The tallest adult in this village was three foot 10 inches (1.0 m 15 cm) tall; the smallest was two foot one inch (63.5 cm).

The location of the village is only a few hundred kilometres from the Baian-Kara-Ula mountain range. However, despite China's becoming more open, this entire area including the village remains off limits to foreigners.

Hartwig Hausdorf, who has been on the track of the Dropa since at least the early 1990s, ponders whether in recent years the Dropa's descendants might have abandoned the mountains and settled in the nearby lowlands—where they were “discovered” in 1995.

According to a report in *Bild* on 27 January 1997, a Chinese ethnologist claimed that the tribe's dwarfism was due to a high concentration of mercury in the soil, which had poisoned their drinking water for several generations. The claim did not go unchallenged, however. Dr Norbert Felgenhauer of the Munich Institute for Toxicology argued that this theory is nonsense. He stated that such poisoning would result in immediate death, not stunted growth, and introduced as evidence the case of the Japanese town of Minamata, where in the 1960s many inhabitants died from mercury poisoning. He also noted that mercury was unable to change human DNA and hence could not be held responsible for causing an hereditary trait—one that was clearly apparent in this tribe.

Deciphering the Discs

So, we know that the existence of stone discs is possible, if not likely, and that, if the 1933 report is correct, there were dwarfish people living in that region. The question, then, is this: is the decipherment of the script correct? If it is, then it does not necessarily prove that alien beings crash-landed in China, but at the very least it shows that these “genetically bizarre” beings believed they were descendants of aliens.

According to the story, in 1962 a team of five scientists from the Peking

Bi Disc



Academy of Prehistory, led by Professor Tsum Um Nui, managed to decipher the inscriptions. Despite the claims made in the translation, the scientists eventually published their findings. Professor Um Nui then apparently was forced (or he decided) to abandon his position, after which he returned to his native Japan where he died shortly afterwards. Though little is known about what happened next, Hausdorf underlines that, in 1966, the Cultural Revolution began—and, as with all such revolutions, much was lost forever. There is no verification of the 1962 translation as such, though it should be pointed out that there is no evidence in the camp that argues it's all a hoax to suggest that the 1962 story and the translation are invented. So far, the best the detractors have been able to argue is that the story is improbable (of course!) and that no one has ever been able to decipher a stand-alone language, let alone an extraterrestrial language. That is true. But nowhere does the account say, and no one has ever argued, that this was a “unique language”.

The only claim in this connection is that in 1937–38, when the discs were discovered, their inscriptions could not be read immediately. Only in 1962 did a team of specialists succeed in this task. For all we know, the language in which the script was written had not yet been deciphered in 1937, or no one had paid sufficient attention to the inscriptions, or only in 1962 was someone able to identify the language in which the inscriptions were written. But note the year: 1962. This is the year that the earliest known reference to the story appeared—found by Dr Dendl in a German magazine—and it would suggest that something happened in 1962 that made a Chinese or Japanese source report on it.

The translation of the discs might be precisely such an event: Professor Um Nui publishes his translation, the media pick it up and create a controversy; he decides to retire and return to Japan, while the media outside of China also report on it, ending up in the German magazine “The Vegetarian Universe”. If the story was invented, it means that it was invented (or misreported) in 1962.

The 1978 Sungods in Exile hoax is now clearly nothing more than a footnote in the story, largely responsible for popularising the entire saga but definitely not for creating or inventing it out of thin air.

The 1962 article also discusses some technical details of the discs, underlining the potential factual nature of the story. It notes that the discs were composed of cobalt, iron and nickel—the only metals to produce a magnetic field. Nickel is found largely in Canada and Central Africa, but in recent years it has been found in China, in the general area where the discs were located.

For Hausdorf, this is a further indication that the story is factual, for this find post-dates the discovery of the discs—and the 1962 article. In short, what in 1962 was unlikely and improbable has now been confirmed.

A New Expedition

Baian-Kara-Ula remains one of China's most remote regions. Its mountains reach as high as 5,000 metres and descend to 2,000 metres. Despite the altitude, summers can be pleasantly warm in this region.

It is now said that a new expedition is being prepared and will soon be under way. It is apparently largely an initiative of Chinese media empires, its main sponsor being the China Daily newspaper. If the participants are able to get their act together, it might not be another decade before this story takes yet another twist.

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