

# The Nazca Geoglyphs

## *A Pictographic Creation Story*

BY DARREN IAMMARINO

THE NAZCA GEOGLYPHS—POPULARLY KNOWN AS THE Nazca Lines—of southern Peru were first discovered in the 1920s and made public in the 1930s immediately became the subject of awe and controversy. The more speculative theories as to the origin and purpose of these enigmatic lines and biomorphic glyphs have ranged from ancient alien runways to some form of sacred geometry. This article will not deal with these fringe explanations as no scientist takes them seriously. Instead it: (1) critically examines the more recent and credible theories about the Nazca Geoglyphs, many of which revolve around the importance of water, and (2) proffers a novel argument about the purpose, function, and meaning of the biomorphic figures, as well as the more complex geometric shapes. The thesis is that the geoglyphs—specifically the figural geoglyphs on the San Jose Pampa—represent a permanent pictographic record of the creation myth(s) of the Nazca culture. Further, I propose that the figural geoglyphs were used in a religious and ritualistic fashion in at least two ways. First, they may have been used to re-enact key aspects of the creation myth for the purpose of restoring order to society through the production of rain or predictable floods. Second, the labyrinthine nature of the geoglyphs may have been used to induce trance states and allow access to the powers of various deities or important deceased ancestors. Reconstructing this creation myth I will attempt to bring back to life for the first time in nearly two thousand years an ancient Peruvian origin story.

### **I. Previous Scholarship**

The history of Nazca scholarship is plagued by the same issues that obscure most academically informed fieldwork—a lack of interdisciplinary knowledge and interdepartmental communication. As scholars we can know only so much and often we are told to know more and more about less and less to the point that we know nearly everything about nearly nothing. An engineer might focus on how an ancient site was constructed, while an astronomer will, not surprisingly, believe an ancient site is astronomically aligned, but without the insights of a cul-

tural anthropologist, both the engineer and the astronomer may project Western biases and miss the holistic picture. This is precisely what happened with the Nazca Lines.

The first two people to provide a lengthy and detailed account of the Nazca Lines were Paul Kosok and Maria Reiche. Maria Reiche has become something of a cultural icon as a champion for the living descendants of the original Nazca. For this reason her theory based in archaeoastronomy has exerted a strong impact on later research, even though it is lacking in scientific support. Kosok and Reiche posited that the numerous lineal figures stretching across the San Jose Pampa were used as a sort of star map or calendar.<sup>1</sup> The idea likely came to Kosok on a 1941 trip to Nazca where he witnessed the sun setting directly over one of the lines. After a later trip to Nazca Kosok said, “A number of the lines and roads were found to have a solstitial direction: a few with an equinoctial direction could also be identified. Moreover, various alignments were found to be repeated in several places.”<sup>2</sup>

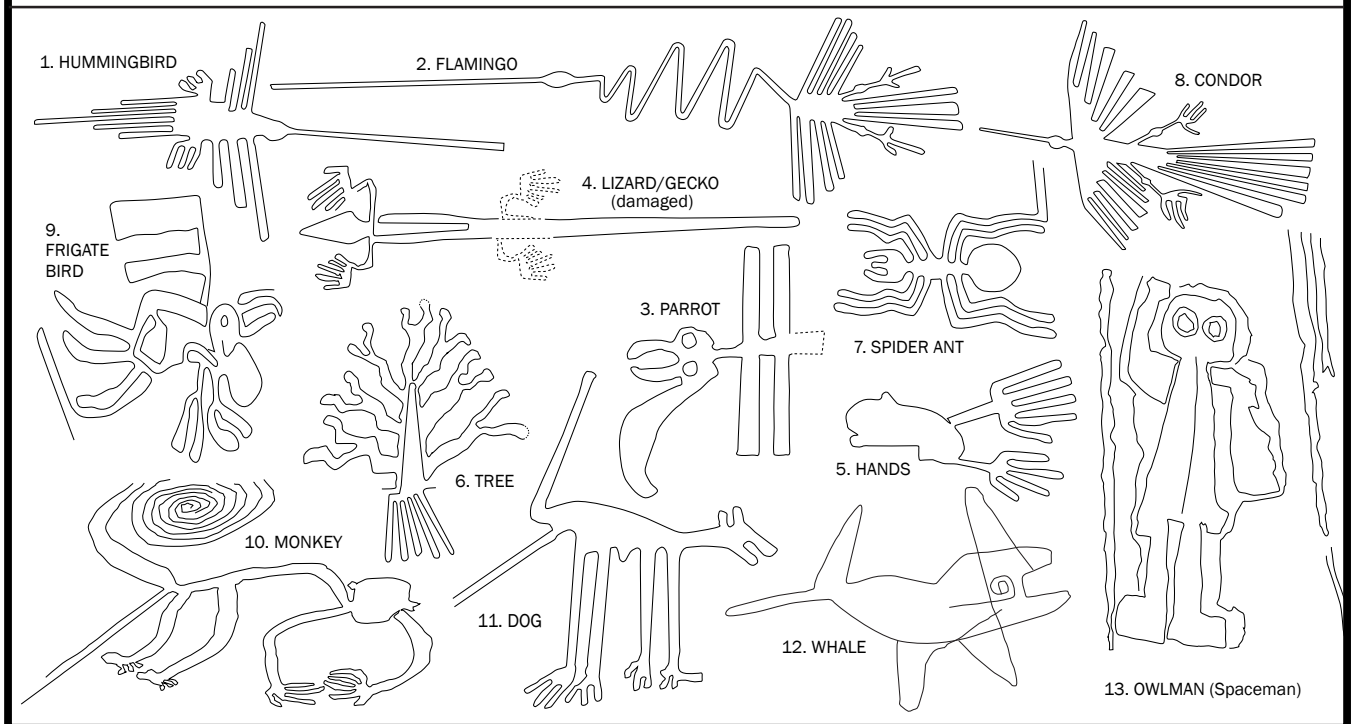
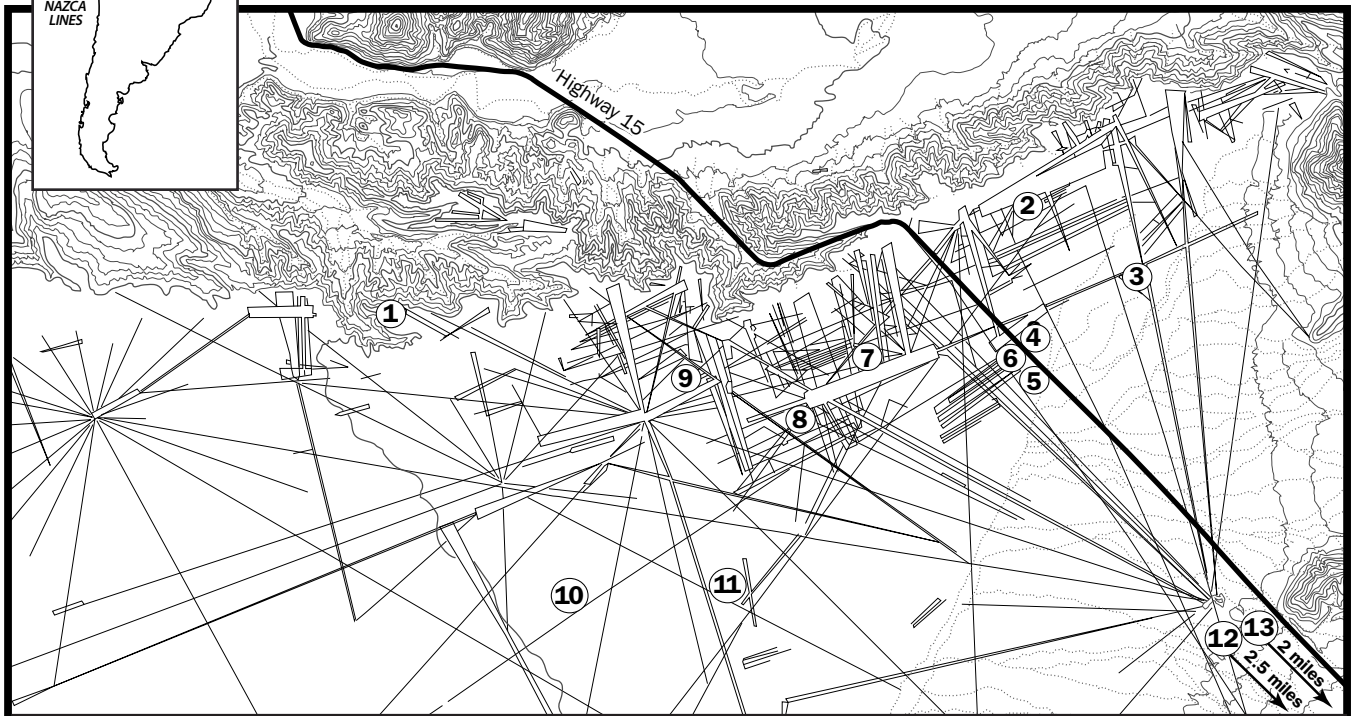
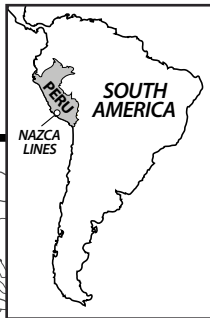
The main thrust of the argument is that the lines were used to predict the coming equinoxes and solstices. This knowledge was important since the Nazca people relied so heavily on farming, water, and their harvest. The biomorphic figures, rather than pointing to anything, represented the various constellations in their appearance and disappearance on the horizon. The major problem is that there are hundreds to thousands of lines going in all directions. It stands to reason that, statistically, “a few with equinoctial direction” would inevitably be found if that is what one is looking for. Why would the Nazca people make so many lines, make them so long and have so many seemingly unnecessary animal figures all over the desert floor? The ambiguities inherent in Kosok’s research did little to faze Reiche. Enlisted by Kosok to help in his research, she spent the next 40 years expounding on the ancient astronomical calendar theory.

The initial critique of Kosok and Reiche came from fieldwork by Gerald Hawkins, and later by Anthony Aveni. Hawkins, an astronomer commissioned by *National Geographic*, pointed out that the lines of

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## The Nazca Lines, Trapezoids and Geoglyphs

(Names for the geoglyphs vary greatly, especially for bird-like figures.)







Two famous Nazca Geoglyphs: (Top) The Monkey located at 14 42'24.93 S 75 8'18.40 W. (Bottom) The Owl-Man, also known as the Astronaut, Space-man, or Priest is located on a hill at 14 44'42.71 S 75 4'47.24 W.

Nazca show no statistically significant results when compared with key astronomical events, specifically, solstices, equinoxes and lunar standstills. In addition, there were found to be no statistically significant alignments to astronomical bodies, such as the 45 brightest stars, including the brightest star of the Pleiades, which is known to be of importance in Andean cosmology. The result of Hawkins' survey was definitive: "The lines as a whole cannot be explained as astronomical nor are they calendric."<sup>3</sup>

Hawkins' research had some additional fortunate implications derived from the numerous finds of classic Nazca pottery only in the archeological protected zone of the pampa, the area containing the vast majority of the biomorphic geoglyphs. Hawkins and Reiche had found early Nazca pottery in the protected zone, which suggests that the animal images, as well as some of the larger rectangular and trapezoidal shapes, may be from an early period of Nazca culture, specifically around 100-200 C.E. The interesting point is that when the finds of Hawkins and others within the protected zone are compared with the rest of the surrounding pampa, a radically different picture emerges.

The impressive fieldwork of Persis Clarkson outside the protected zone has demonstrated that the majority of the "lineal figures" have pottery in and around them that is much later—900-1,000 C.E.—than that found in the protected zone.<sup>4</sup> This finding is further evidence against the astronomical calendar theories of Kosok and Reiche because the lines likely did not exist until centuries after the biomorphic geoglyphs. Aveni offers this intriguing fact: "One surprising result is that the lines and figures may have represented at least two separate and unrelated efforts portrayed on a single canvas."<sup>5</sup> Reiche believed that the fact that many of the lines ran straight through the biomorphs suggested that the lines were connecting that biomorph to a constellation.<sup>6</sup> However, if the lines were not there originally, that is clearly impossible. This insight—that the majority of lines and ray centers date to late Nazca and post-Nazca—will play an important role in my own argument.

I must point out at this juncture that I do believe that the mystery of the Nazca Lines (but not the biomorphic geoglyphs) has been *for the most part* solved by previous scholars, specifically Aveni and later, Johan Reinhard's excellent ethnohistorical work on mountain deities, the importance of water, and agricultural fertility.<sup>7</sup> Reinhard argues that the lines and trapezoidal figures are ceremonial pathways or ritual sites related to the continued regularity of the flow of water. The focus on the importance of water and



tracking underground waterways has also been noted by David Johnson, who observed that the various Nazca Lines marked out subterranean water flows, underground aquifers, and/or simply mythical sites such as hills that were associated with water in some way, shape, or form.<sup>8</sup> However, Johnson's claims about the biomorphic geoglyphs do not seem to be backed up by any evidence.

It may be true that the lines, spirals, rectangles, and trapezoids are associated with above-ground water sites or that they map out underground waterways, but the biomorphic geoglyphs—which are our focus here—do not seem to represent changes in direction of the flow of water underground, as Johnson suggests. Why make so many unique images that are so large and involved just to represent a change in the direction of the water? Further, why use such a plethora of animal images rather than four or eight directional markers/images? Since there is not a repetition of the same few images—which would be expected if marking off directional changes—Johnson's theory on the function of the biomorphs seems unlikely. Additionally, as it is widely agreed that *the vast majority of lineal figures* came hundreds of years after the original zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures. This would mean that, at best, David Johnson's theory is incomplete. The much earlier and far more impressive biomorphic geoglyphs require a completely different explanation from the lineal figures.

## II. Situating the Nazca Geoglyphs within the Wider Pan-Andean Mythic Narrative

The specific beliefs and practices that made up the Nazca religious and mythical paradigm still remain a mystery, mainly due to the paucity of any written evidence. Since the Nazca were a pre-literate people, the best we can do is infer what we can from the archeological record, the geological record, and the historical and literary records, which come much later with the arrival of the Spanish in the 1500s. Our story begins with the only “indigenous” creation account we know of, written by a native and not by a Spanish historian or missionary.

### Pan Andean Mythic Motifs: The *Huarochirí Manuscript* and Inca Mythology

The *Huarochirí Manuscript* was written around 1598 by an anonymous source identified only as “Thomás.” The manuscript is somewhat jumbled and is full of revisions, redactions, and marginal notes from Father Francisco de Avila. In general, the text gives various accounts of different origin myths and attempts to provide a chronology of

which major deity came first. The debate over primacy is between Cuniraya Viracocha, which is basically a later Inca version of the much earlier Kon/Pachacamac duality and Paria Caca, who is the main creator god of the local people who composed the *Huarochirí Manuscript*. The manuscript is relevant to my thesis because the author of the text is forced to give other famous creation stories in order to make sense of all the alternatives; one of these creator gods—Kon—is likely associated with the coastal region in and around the Nazca Geoglyphs. The author repeatedly addresses Cuniraya, which for our purposes can safely be said to be at least similar or analogous to Kon, if not the same deity.

There are too many references to Cuniraya to provide all of the examples; instead, I present the most pertinent aspects as they relate to my overall argument and claims. The first reference runs as follows,

Also, as we know, there was another *huaca* [super-human person, powerful and holy object] named Cuni Raya. Regarding him, we're not sure whether he existed before Paria Caca or maybe after him. However, Cuni Raya's essential nature almost matches Viracocha's. For when people worshiped this *huaca*, they would invoke him, saying, 'Cuni Raya Vira Cocha, you who animate mankind, who charge the world with being, all things are yours! Yours the fields and yours the people.' And so, long ago, when beginning anything difficult, the ancients, even though they couldn't see Vira Cocha, used to throw coca leaves to the ground, talk to him, and worship him before all others.<sup>9</sup>

First, I believe that Cuniraya is akin to the older Nazca anthropomorphic deity represented on the Pampa in the geoglyph of the “Astronaut/Owl-Man” and also on the neighboring plains of Palpa in numerous other anthropomorphic images.<sup>10</sup> This creator deity associated with water and the creation of mankind could go by many names: Kon, Cuniraya, Pachacamac, Viracocha, Anthropomorphic Flying Being (Western scholarly attribution to a Paracas/Nazca cultural deity).<sup>11</sup> The stories told of the creator anthropomorphic gods in all the Andean myths show similarities. The most relevant example for my purposes is that the anthropomorphic creator God either walks around through the entire Andean landscape or flies around performing miraculous feats, as well as providing for the creation of humankind, life-giving water, and fertility.<sup>12</sup>

Later in the *Huarochirí Manuscript* there is an explicit statement that puts to rest the debate about



which god preceded all others. “Cuni Raya Vira Cocha is said to have existed from very ancient times. Before he was, there was nothing at all in this world. It was he who first gave shape and force to the mountains, the forests, the rivers, and all sorts of animals, and to the fields for humankind’s subsistence as well. It’s for this reason that people in fact say of Cuni Raya, ‘he’s called Paria Caca’s father.’”<sup>13</sup> This leaves little doubt that even in other parts of the ancient Andean world, Cuniraya or Viracocha, or more generally the anthropomorphic creator deity, is the originator of all life and life sustaining processes. Therefore, it stands to reason that worshiping him and propitiating him—or the god that defeats him—is a good idea if you want to maintain social order, the flow of water, and all other life giving substances.

The final aspect of the *Huarochiri Manuscript* bearing on the function of the Nazca Lines and geoglyphs comes from chapter 14 of the manuscript.

There Cuni Raya told him, ‘Inca, mobilize your people, so that we may send magicians and all sorts of shamans to Ura Ticsi, the world’s lower foundations (alt. underside of the world).’ As soon as he said this, the Inca promptly gave the order. ‘I am a condor shaman!’ [literally, I am the camasca of the condor] ‘I am a falcon shaman!’ said others. ‘I am one who flies in the form of a swift!’ replied still others. He [Cuni Raya] instructed them, ‘go to the world’s lower foundations.’<sup>14</sup>

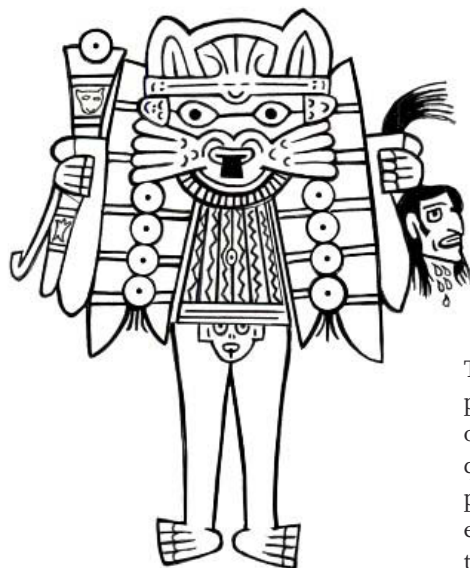
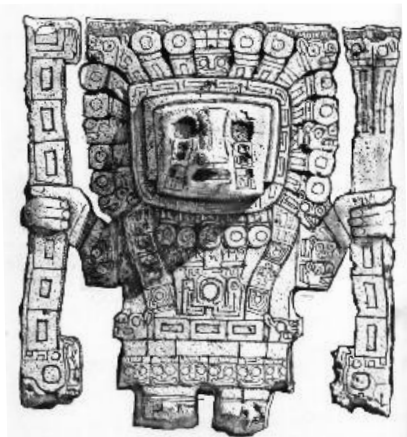
This highlights two key points related to the possible function of the Nazca Lines and geoglyphs. First, the shamans in the region frequently “embody” or take on the species power of numerous local birds. This could explain the prevalence of bird imagery on the San Jose Pampa and their use as invocatory aids. A second hypothesis surrounds the mention of the underside of the world. It is possible that the labyrinthine qualities of the Nazca Lines and geoglyphs were to help aid in trance induction, but also in transporting the shaman into the lower firmament of what was likely a threefold division of the universe into *underworld*, *middle*

*world/earth*, and the *heavens*. This function of the lines is supported by other scholars who have stated that the spirals may be viewed as magical portals to the underside of the world accessed through shamanic journeys as the shaman’s familiar (e.g., a condor, falcon, or swift). While on the underside of the world one could, in theory, still see the geoglyphs and the same can be said for being transported up into the heavens above.

To put this into a larger perspective—in essence my thesis—the *biomorphic images may represent a pictographic creation story laid out on the pampa*. When the shamans danced and “tranced” through the Nazca Geoglyphs, they magically and ceremonially retold and re-energized the story and they took on the powers of their ancestors, all while ensuring that the creator god Kon was pleased. When Kon was appeased, then he would keep bringing water for their agricultural needs. This shamanic, religious, and mythological understanding of the nature and function of the Nazca Lines and geoglyphs is somewhat addressed by one other previous scholar whose work revolves around Peruvian history, Maria Rostworoski, who comes closest in her assessment of the lines and their function, but still misses the more general point. Rostworowski points out that,

The lines and biomorphic figures constituted a means of communication between the ancient Nasca and the divinity, and the drawings would be a manifestation of religious expression... maybe the spirit of the air, wind, sea and earth was present in the images. It is quite possible that the arrival of the god Kon coincided with the cresting of the rivers with water that was indispensable for life on the coast and which coincided with rain in the highlands.<sup>15</sup>

Up to this point I am in agreement with Rostworowski. However, when she states, “the purpose of the biomorphic figures and lines was to attract the attention of the flying divinity who had arrived on earth and whom they were awaiting,”<sup>16</sup> I feel she is somewhat missing the point. It is not so much that they were “waiting and trying to attract the attention” of Kon, but rather, the issue was *to appease and propitiate a capricious*



**Images of the Peruvian Creator God**  
 (Top) A pottery fragment thought by some to be ca. 4,000 years old.  
 (Middle) A sculpture from the lintel of a massive gateway near Lake Titicaca—ca. 1,500 years ago. (Bottom) An image of Kon from a 20th century wall painting. (opposite page) The Creator God painted on pottery.

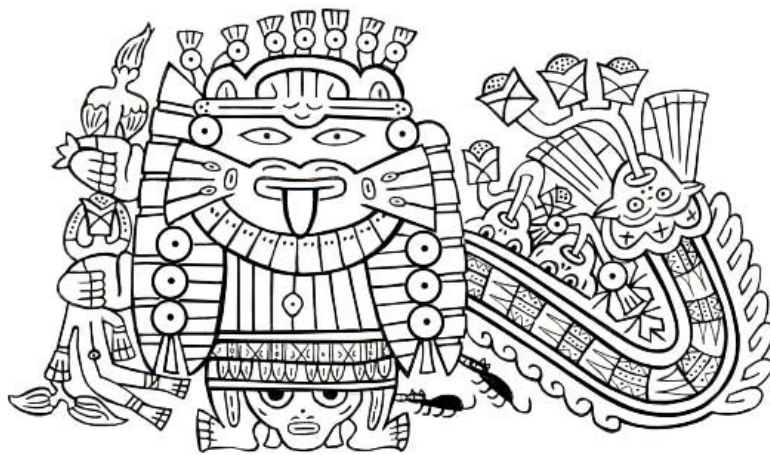
god who could and had destroyed prior generations of humanity at will. Contrary to Rostworowski's hypothesis, the people may have wanted to avoid attracting Kon's attention due to fear, but nevertheless, they wanted to be prepared to show him due reverence when/if he appeared again.

In addition to the mythological creation accounts within the *Huarochirí Manuscript*, there is another source that we can turn to in order to obtain a record of Kon within ancient Andean creation myths. However, when introducing the writings of the Spanish chroniclers one must be especially careful to take into account their heavy bias for Catholicism and their disdain for all things magical and shamanic.

### Las Cronistas on Andean Myth and Religion

What little information we have about ancient religious beliefs and practices in pre-Hispanic Peru comes from the few Spanish chroniclers that arrived with the waves of conquistadors in the 1500s. Not surprisingly, the majority of their information is biased and must be taken with at least a few grains of skeptical salt! Further, the focus of their accounts was on the Inca myths and not on an attempt to uncover the beliefs of other ancient Andean peoples like the Nazca. It may seem that given all of this there is little point in examining what *las cronistas* had to say, but that would be foolish because many practices and beliefs can persist for thousands of years with only minimal change.

The most relevant *cronistas* for understanding the history of the pre-Hispanic Andean region are: Agustín Zárate, Bernabe Cobo, Juan de Betanzos, Antonio de la Calancha, and Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa. I will mainly focus on Zárate because his origin account is the most pertinent because it is uncharacteristically not simply an Inca creation account. Zárate does something truly unique—he presents a blended version of the creation story of the ancient Peruvians. He has created a pastiche of origin myths from all the different versions that he learned about or encountered. This is valuable for the present study because the majority of the *cronistas* merely presented an Incan version of creation, which comes a millennium after the Nazca people and is thus, too far removed in time and also in geographical location. In addition, nearly all of the Spanish historians of the time added a heavily Christianized gloss to the accounts which made it appear that there was a flood narrative or that the Inca believed in a trinity.<sup>17</sup> Though Zárate may be guilty of injecting a flood myth onto the end of his



blended account of Peruvian creation stories.

Zárate's retelling of the creation account is short enough to reproduce the majority of it. What follows is the entire account minus the flood narrative at the end, which in any case has little relevance to any understanding of the Nazca Lines and geoglyphs. He begins by saying, "It is true that some kinds of traditions have been preserved among them, added to, changed or diminished from age to age according to the imaginations of the time. This is more or less what they amount to."<sup>18</sup> This quote supports my claim that Zárate gives a blended account of what he considers a pan-Andean creation story but what may in fact be more of a southern coastal creation story. He continues with his retelling of the origin story. I have italicized the points that seem to be of greatest relevance to an understanding of a possible Nazca origin myth.

They say that there came from the north *a man without bones or joints, who shortened or lengthened the road he walked according to his wishes, and raised or leveled mountains as he pleased; that this man created the Indians of that time, and that since the inhabitants of the plain had displeased him he made their country sandy, as it is to this day. He decreed that rain should never fall there, but sent them the rivers that flow there, so that they should at least have water to drink and to cool them. This man was called Con, and he was the child of the sun and moon. They considered him a god and worshipped him; and they say that to the people he created he gave the grasses and wild fruit for their nourishment.*

Afterwards there came another man from the south, with more power than the first. *He was called Pachacamac, which means creator, and he was also the child of the sun and the moon. On his arrival Con disappeared, leaving the men he had made without a leader or protector. Pachacamac then changed them into monkeys, cats, bears, lions, parrots and other birds of the*



country. Then Pachacamac created the Indians of today, and taught them how to till the earth and grow crops. They considered Pachacamac a god, and all the princes of the land wish to be buried when they die in the place which took its name from him because he dwelt there, and which lies four leagues from Los Reyes. The Indians say that Pachacamac lived there for many centuries, up to the time when the Christians came to Peru; but he has not appeared since...<sup>19</sup>

The italicized lines need to be unpacked one-by-one. First, we hear of a man/god named Con who “has no bones or joints.” It is possible there is a parallel here to the wildly popular Nazca Geoglyph known as “the astronaut” or “the owl-man.” This large anthropomorphic geoglyph is unique in that it appears almost cartoonishly (without bones?) carved into the hillside with one arm raised, similar to the ubiquitous staff god images throughout ancient Peru. This is the only anthropomorphic figure on the San Jose Pampa, and I feel it is likely that it represents the Nazca creator God, who is more or less identical to Con or Kon.

Next, we learn that Con is capable of shortening or lengthening roads and raising or leveling mountains. It is possible that there is a connection here to the Nazca lines, trapezoids, and rectangular figures spread out all over the desert. It could be a sign to the god Con showing that they remember and respect his power to arbitrarily alter the lengths of roads and the heights of mountains. It is worth noting the massive trapezoidal “runway” shapes are often found on top of flattened hills and mountains.

Continuing on we discover that Con is the child of the sun and moon. I believe that there are two possibilities here. First, Con may represent one age of the sun, and then when Pachacamac comes it is a “new age of the sun.” The second possibility is that Con represents the power of the daytime and that Pachacamac represents the night and hence, “on his arrival [Pachacamac’s] Con disappeared.” So, when the night approaches the sun simply vanishes, nowhere to be found. Alternatively, Pachacamac may be the sun in its nighttime voyage on the underside of the earth and due to the cyclical changes of space and time—*pachacuti*—sometimes Pachacamac is the daytime sun and sometimes he is not depending upon the age of man that one is living in. It should be mentioned that both Con and Pachacamac are extremely important ancient deities and Pachacamac’s influence was so powerful that even up to the period of the Inca Empire and

the arrival of the Spanish, neither the Inca nor the Spanish could fully destroy the cultic devotion given to Pachacamac. In fact, he was the second most important deity in the Incan period even though he was not associated with the Inca people.

Lastly, Zárate drops a bombshell when he points out that Pachacamac *transformed* this earlier race of humans into monkeys, cats, bears, and all sorts of local birds. The vast majority of the Nazca Geoglyphs are animals, with the monkey, hummingbird, condor, and parrot being perhaps the most famous images of all. This may be a case where the Nazca people are remembering their origin story and are rightly terrified given the previous acts of both Kon and Pachacamac.

What would you do in this situation? I know what I would do and that would be to appease and propitiate the gods, and what better way to do that than by retelling the story in a permanent everlasting format—carve it into the desert gravel and sand. This ritualistic activity would prove to the gods that the people have not forgotten and they will not make any mistakes in the future. In addition, it allows the people to reconnect with the power of their ancestors who have been transformed into the native wildlife. What a beautiful way to forge an intimate ecological connection by actually believing that many of the animals were, in truth, your ancestors of a prior age. This worldview could explain why a belief in sympathetic magic, shamanism, and ancestor worship was so strong in the region; *we can connect with these animal powers because they are literally our ancestors*. We can connect by walking, dancing, and re-enacting our creation myth. In the process of re-enacting, we ensure that we will not be starved or dehydrated by Con and that we will not be transformed into other creatures by the power of Pachacamac.

### III. The Meaning and Purpose of the Nazca Geoglyphs

This evidence strongly suggests that the Nazca Geoglyphs were designed as a pictographic or “huacographic” creation story, which was meant to provide three critical functions:

1. A way to appease Kon/Pachacamac and thus, ensure order out of chaos and the continual flow of life-sustaining water.
2. A mytho-magical means to convey *camay* or unique, animating powers to individuals through numerous *huacas*/glyphs which taken together, comprised an all-encompassing origin

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story/*huaca*. The entirety of the Nazca Geoglyphs on the San Jose Pampa can be understood as a permanent “carved in rocks/sand” pictographic recording of their creation myth...a myth similar to the one that is written down hundreds of years later by Agustín Zárate.

### 3. An impressive and profound way to practice ancestor worship.

In regard to functions number one and two, the following points stand as supporting evidence for the claims:

- (a.) The glyphs were put on the desert floor and were made on a massive scale that is necessary only if you wanted a god in the sky or underworld sky to see it. Kon is described by another Spanish chronicler—Francisco López de Gómara—as flying across the lands. “[Kon] Andaba, o quizá más bien volaba, ligero y ágil acortando las distancias, bajando las sierras y alzando los valles.”<sup>20</sup> Essentially this translates to: “Kon walked, or perhaps rather flew, light and agile shortening distances, lowering the hills and lifting the valleys.”
- (b.) Many of the biomorphic geoglyphs match up with key events in the creation story as related by the *cronista* Agustín Zárate (e.g., the monkey, various birds).
- (c.) In addition, the inclusion of the one and only anthropomorphic figure known today as the Astronaut, suggests that it is probably a god and Kon is a likely candidate given the region and the figure’s relationship to the other geoglyphs. Furthermore, it is intriguing that the Astronaut figure is both enclosed rather than open like a labyrinth and is on a hillside. This could very well be because that specific image is not meant to be ritually walked. If by walking the lines a shaman or ordinary person can take on the *camay* or magical power of the figure represented, it would clearly be blasphemous to try and take on the power of the creator god himself, especially given that he seems to have many trickster god attributes. Furthermore, hills and mountains are associated with mysteriously storing and providing water for agriculture, an act intimately intertwined with Kon’s primary role.
- (d.) The large “leveled” trapezoid and rectangular glyphs also fit into the creation myth narrative that Kon raised and leveled mountains at will.

Note again for number one that Con or Cuni-raya and Pachacamac may be two sides of one coin and thus represent the sun in two modes—the underside of the world and the upside of the world. It is possible that the underside due to *pachacuti* becomes the upside and vice versa cyclically and hence, the constant confusion in trying to identify and distinguish these two deities.

There is plenty of evidence to support the claims that the geoglyphs conveyed *camay* to shamans. Due to the prominence of shattered and unshattered pottery on and around the geoglyphs (at least decades ago), it is almost certain that the lines were used ritually and were walked. I am strongly inclined to believe that the entire pictographic creation story was walked once a year, but that certain glyphs could be walked whenever a shaman needed to “take on” the attributes of that animal or spirit. Repetitive walking, plus constant turning in a labyrinth, plus chanting, plus drugs is a potent mixture for a profound altered state of consciousness.

I will say that there is little to no way to put forth supporting evidence for my third claim above about the lines being used for ancestor worship other than to rely on my other claim that the animal glyphs represent an earlier race of humans. If that is true or if some of the glyphs represent specific *ayllus* or kinship groups as some have suggested,<sup>21</sup> then it is certainly possible that walking the animal glyphs could also have been an act of ancestor veneration.<sup>22</sup>

### What About the Straight Lines?

The primary focus of this paper has been to uncover the meaning and functions of the biomorphic geoglyphs; however, it is worthwhile to briefly address the actual lineal figures to round out a complete picture of what may have been happening on the San José Pampa throughout the history of the Nazca people. First, it seems likely that the actual lineal figures did not exist until hundreds of years after the original biomorphic geoglyphs were laid down.<sup>23</sup> This does not automatically mean that they are completely unrelated to the meaning and functions of the lines.

There is possibly a relationship between the earlier biomorphs and the later lineal figures. As I have argued above, the importance of water is represented in the pictographic creation story of the protected zone and also, the later lineal figures have been shown by other scholars to relate to water. Perhaps the later lines may have served to funnel the power of the protected zone/creation



myth to other parts of the dry desert through the force of magic and the animating effect of ritual. This possibility seems more probable than an early hypothesis I had that the later lineal figures may have acted almost like a map or guide connecting the dots and thus explaining the proper chronological ordering of the creation story. There are just too many lines—and lines completely separated from the biomorphic images themselves—to support this “connect the dots” hypothesis.

Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to recreate a rough approximation of the Nazca creation myth laid out on the Pampa by employing later pan-Andean mythic motifs. Below is but one attempt at “reading” or “translating” the pictographic creation story into modern English; I present it as more of a creative work than a rigorously supported set of arguments. Finally, I conclude the paper with a “summary and interpretation” via the voice of a fictional ancient Nazca storyteller. In so doing I am not suggesting that this reinterpretation is exactly what the Nazca believed, only that it is in line with both later Andean myths and ubiquitous themes and motifs that can be found within the creation stories the world over. The following myth represents a pastiche of scholarly research on Andean mythology, known pre-Columbian myths, such as the *Huarochiri Manuscript*, accounts of the earliest Spanish chroniclers and most important, Nazca imagery and iconography.

### **The Return of Kon: Resurrecting the Nazca Creation Myth**

In the beginning, before the existence of humans, animals, and the very earth itself, there was a vast darkness. Out of the darkness the great creator God Kon spontaneously and mysteriously appeared. Kon called into being the Earth, the Moon, the sky and the stars, and even time itself. At this point, Kon, or as he is known to some—Coniraya Viracocha—took on a physical yet ethereal form. He developed the appearance of a tall man wearing a long white robe and carrying a large staff. Although he looked like a man, he seemed to flash with the brightness of the sun and he moved about the land gracefully for he was quite agile. Some even say that he had no need for bones or joints.

As the master of time and space, Kon could travel great distances in the blink of an eye, he could raise or level mountains at will. However, during this primordial age, the Earth was still barren and lifeless. Looking out upon the emptiness of the Earth, Kon decided to create plants to grow within Pachamama

or Mother Earth. Kon also created animals to roam on her surface. Yet still, something was amiss, and so Kon took it upon himself to create humans, who at least in some respects would resemble him. For reasons that remain unclear, this first race of humans failed to appreciate the works of Kon—his generosity, his power—and so he made them suffer with a great drought. Kon came down from the north and took away the rain and the abundance of Mother Earth, leaving nothing but sand and sporadic river floods to provide for the sustenance of the people.

Somewhat later, another god arrived on the scene, this time from the south. This god was called Pachacamac, he was an ancient god like Kon, but he was invisible, whereas Kon was visible. Pachacamac was the god of things unseen—the darkness, the enigmatic, and the ocean depths. The people recognize the characteristics of Pachacamac in the Killer Whale because the Killer Whale is both black and white and thus, resembles the boundary between things seen and unseen. The Killer Whale is also terribly powerful and lives in the ocean depths. Out of nowhere, the Killer Whale appears and demands blood; supposedly, he can even carry the sun on its nighttime journey through the underworld.

Regardless of Pachacamac’s true form, when the darkness of Pachacamac came, Kon suddenly disappeared. Without a leader, Kon’s people were defenseless against Pachacamac who turned them into monkeys, spiders, llamas, parrots, bears, cats and other birds of the country. After the transformation of the first race of man, Pachacamac created the Indians of today and taught them how to cultivate crops. Although he is honored as a powerful god, the people know that Pachacamac’s time is limited and that he must share the cosmos with Kon. As one arrives the other always leaves. Soon...Kon will awaken and once again fly over the lands. The sun will rise, ice will melt, and water will flow and the rivers will spill their bounty across the plains.

However, the neatly ordered rhythms of nature come at a price. The people must dance their dances, walk their sacred lines; they must make sacrifices. Most importantly, the people must remember. Remember their origins, their gods...they must never forget the great visible works of Kon and the hidden and invisible ways of Pachacamac.

### **Summary and Interpretation**

This is why we Nazca people have created our lines and images on the desert floor—first and foremost, to honor our beginnings and to show Kon that we remember his deeds. We drew our story into the dry

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ground as a signal to Kon so that he will never forget us and so that he will be pleased with us. We need his life-giving rivers and his far-reaching warmth. With our desert story, we also show reverence to our ancestors who were transformed into animals. This is why we made such large copies of them in the desert. Walking the paths of the monkey, the condor, the spider, we connect with nature, which is all around us. The powers of the birds and animals can

be shared because we are all distant relatives. When we call to the animals and copy their movements, their ways, they let us borrow their gifts, their powers. Finally, we placed an image of Kon as a shimmering man holding a staff and an image of Pachacamac as a powerful Killer Whale so that both of them will be given their proper place. Then, and only then, can there be order out of chaos and peace within the land. **S**

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3. For a full account of Hawkins' survey results see: Hawkins, Gerald and Anthony Morrison. 1978. *Pathways to the Gods: Mystery of the Andes Lines*. Michael Russell Publishing. Also note: Hadingham, Evan. 1987. *Lines to the Mountain Gods: Nazca and the Mysteries of Peru*. New York: Random House.
4. See: Clarkson, Persis. 1990. "The Archaeology of the Nazca Pampa: Environmental and Cultural Parameters." In *The Lines of Nazca*. Anthony F. Aveni (Ed.) Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 117-72; Clarkson, Persis and Ronald Dorn. "Nuevos Datos Relativos a la Antigüedad de los Geoglifos y Pukios de Nazca, Perú." *Boletín de Lima*, 78: 33-45; Clarkson, Persis and Ronald Dorn. "New Chronometric Dates for the Puquios of Nazca, Peru." *Latin American Antiquity*, 6: 56-69.
5. Aveni, Anthony. 2000. *Between the Lines: The Mystery of the Giant Ground Drawings in Ancient Nazca, Peru*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 3.
6. Leading Andean scholar and anthropologist Gary Urton spent years living in Peru and he collected ethnographic data from the various indigenous groups. Urton pointed out that in the Southern Hemisphere, *constellations that we are familiar with in the Northern Hemisphere play little to no role*. Instead, the indigenous people of Peru *look to the space between star clusters, the so-called Dark Magellanic Cloud*. See: Urton, Gary. 1979. *At the Crossroads of the Earth and the Sky*. Austin: University of Texas Press; Urton, Gary. 1978. "Orientation in Quechua and Incaic Astronomy." In *Ethnology*, vol. 17 (2), 157-167. The natives recognize shapes in the spaces *in-between* the star clusters and so if Nazca had anything to do with astronomical alignments, it is more probable that the lines should be pointing to these shapes rather than specific stars. Of course, the sheer size of the space between some of the clusters makes any attempt at claiming astronomical alignment to the Dark Magellanic Cloud pointless because almost any line going any direction would point to one of the dark spaces; this is further damaging evidence to any astronomical calendar theory as an explanation for the meaning of the Nazca Lines.
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8. Johnson, David. 1999. "Die Nasca-Linien als Markierungen für unterirdische Wasservorkommen," *Nasca: Geheimnisvolle Zeichen im Alten Peru*. Judith Rickenbach (Ed.) Zurich: Museum Rietberg, 157-164.
9. Salomon, Frank and George Urioste (Eds.) 1991. *The Huarochiri Manuscript*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 44.
10. For examples of other anthropomorphic geoglyphs in and around the Nazca territory see: Reindel, Markus and Johny Isla. 1999. *Das Palpa-Tal: Ein Archiv der Vorgeschichte Perus*. Nasca: Geheimnisvolle Zeichen im Alten Peru. Judith Rickenbach (Ed.) Zurich: Museum Reitberg.
11. The prevalence of Kon or Concón as a wandering nonlocal deity with great power can be found across a large swathe of Peru. This argument is well presented by: Rostworowski, Maria. 1992. *Pachacamac y el Señor de los Milagros: Una Trayectoria Milenaria*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos.
12. The entirety of chapter 2 in the *Huarochiri Manuscript* is devoted to Cuniraya's wanderings around Peru and his bringing into being all that is.
13. *Ibid.*, 91.
14. *Ibid.*, 88-89.
15. Rostworowski, Maria. "Origen religioso de los dibujos y rayas de Nasca." *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 79: 198-199.
16. *Ibid*, 198-199.
17. See Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa's, *The History of the Incas*, for a prime example of a Christian gloss on the Incan creation stories.
18. Zárate, Agustín. 1968. *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru*, translated by J.M. Cohen, 1555. Harmondsworth: England, Penguin Books, 48.
19. Zárate, *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru*, 48-49.
20. De Gomara, Francisco Lopez. 1941. *Historia General de las Indias*, ed. Espaca-Calpe, 1552, Madrid.
21. Gary Urton and Helaine Silverman have both drawn this connection to the importance of social groups or *ayllus* creating tangible social space for ritual practice.
22. This possibility could be strengthened by the fact that certain geoglyphs, such as "hands," "huarango tree," and "the astronaut" are closed, meaning that they may not have been ritually walked. This matters because why would kin groups associate themselves with the more ambiguous geoglyphs or plant oriented geoglyphs? As for the astronaut, I have already claimed that as a creator deity, it would be blasphemous to ritually walk and take on his power. The point is that the animal glyphs appeared to be walked, whereas more amorphous, plantlike or godlike glyphs were likely not walked, and the animal glyphs may well have been connected to a previous race of humans.
23. The evidence for a later date for the lines as opposed to the biomorphic figures primarily comes from the work of Persis Clarkson who found numerous functionally associated ritual remains in and around the Pampa. The pottery around most of the lines suggests a much later date than the biomorphic geoglyphs. This point is further strengthened by the fact that Maria Reiche, one of the first researchers in the area in modern times, found very early Nasca pottery in and around the biomorphic geoglyphs.