

Science News

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COVER: Craters riddle the surface of Mercury in a computer-enhanced mosaic of pictures taken by Mariner 10 from a distance of 124,000 miles as it approached the planet March 29. Largest of the craters is about 124 miles in diameter. Mariner 10 has produced major new findings about the innermost planet. See p. 220 (Photo: Wide World)

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April 6, 1974

To the Editor

Sagan overkill on Velikovsky?

Cornell University astronomer Carl Sagan indulged in unnecessary overkill when he compiled 56 pages of criticism to deflate the wobbly "Worlds in Collision" theories of Immanuel Velikovsky (SN: 3/2/74, p. 132). The eminent Dr. Sagan could have made much better use of his time.

Sagan seems to delight in ridiculing "wrong thinkers" who dare to dabble with ideas which run counter to what is currently accepted by the scientific establishment. This requires little courage.

In previous issues of SCIENCE NEWS, the omniscient Sagan dismisses the elusive mystery of the unidentified flying objects with a few sarcastic words. He also summarily rejects any notion that at some time during its 4 to 5 billion years of existence, earth may have been visited by beings from other worlds.

True, the idea of "ancient astronauts" has been tainted by its association with nonscientist Erich Von Daniken, who uses it as his main theme in his book, *Chariots of the Gods*. But Sagan would be wise to curb his intellectual snobbery. Even a mediocre mind like Von Daniken's can grasp and savor an intriguing idea which could ultimately prove to be correct.

Sagan's own book, *The Cosmic Connection*, may someday seem quaint for its sweeping assumptions, founded as they are on our still very limited firsthand knowledge of the universe.

William D. Conner
Science columnist
Springfield Daily News
Springfield, Ohio

Velikovsky symposium

I have been a subscriber to SCIENCE NEWS continuously since 1941. In all that time few things have stirred my interest as has "Velikovsky and the AAAS: Worlds in Collision," so ably reported in the March 2 issue. On the other side I resent the gratuitous slur at the end from Isaac Asimov.

My purpose in writing is: Where can I obtain the proceedings of the seminar which the article says will be published?

Lyle Raub
Gary, Ind.

(The co-arranger of the Velikovsky symposium, Harvard astronomer Owen Gingerich, told us that one reason for holding the sessions was to produce a documented debate that could serve as a point of reference for further discussion. He said the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1515 Massachusetts Ave. N. W., Washington, D.C. 20036, intends to publish the proceedings once difficulties over rights to the material can be worked out.—Ed.)

Hurrian disharmony

Your article on the Hurrian music (SN: 3/16/74, p. 172) is, so far, the most comprehensive and accurate report I have seen in the press. Still, as one who from the beginning played an active part in the whole story, I am disappointed to see that I am not given credit for the one contribution which is mine and at the same time decisive.

It was I who noticed that the musical terms occur in the lower part of the Hurrian tablet from Ras Shamra/Ugarit and who immediately drew the conclusion that they must in some way or other be the musical notation belonging to the text in the top part of the tablet. I announced this orally at a scholarly meeting, the Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, in Brussels in the summer of 1969, and published it in the form of an article in the scholarly journal *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archeologie orientale* 64 (1970).

Lastly: Both Wulstan and I had our respective tentative musical interpretations performed: Wulstan by Oxford choir boys, whose tape was played at the Rencontre Internationale of 1971 in Paris, and I here in Chicago (sung "live" in a lecture before the combined Near Eastern and Music Departments of the University of Chicago in the fall of 1971. Admittedly Anne Kilmer's may be closer to the real thing, but it was not the first performance.

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