



## SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

November 30, 2022

Ms. Bela Bajaria  
Head of Global Television  
Netflix, Inc.  
100 Winchester Circle  
Los Gatos CA 95032

Ms. Rachel Corp  
Chief Executive Officer  
ITN  
200 Grays Inn Rd,  
London, WC1X 8XZ

Dear Ms. Bajaria and Ms. Corp,

I write this open letter to express the Society for American Archaeology's concern over the series *Ancient Apocalypse* hosted by Graham Hancock, produced by ITN Productions, and aired on Netflix beginning on November 11. This series publicly disparages archaeologists and devalues the archaeological profession on the basis of false claims and disinformation. I write to encourage you to correctly classify the genre of the show, to provide disclaimers about the unfounded suppositions in the show, and ideally to balance the deleterious content in the show with scientifically accurate information about our human past.

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 5,500 members, the SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. The SAA has members throughout the United States, as well as in many nations around the world.

The SAA supports its members' work to understand humanity's past through ethically based scientific and humanistic investigation, to promote preservation of archaeological resources and cultural heritage through support of legislation and education, to create collaboration between the profession and descendant communities, and to assist professional growth. The members of the SAA champion archaeologists in their efforts to advance knowledge of and protect the past for society and to build a more just and equitable future of the profession. The effects of this show run directly counter to the purpose, mission, goals, and vision of the SAA.

We have three principal concerns with regard to *Ancient Apocalypse*:

- (1) the host of the series repeatedly and vigorously dismisses archaeologists and the practice of archaeology with aggressive rhetoric, willfully seeking to cause harm to our membership and our profession in the public eye;
- (2) Netflix identifies and advertises the series as a “docuseries,” a genre that implies its content is grounded in fact when the content of the show is based on false claims about archaeologists and archaeology; and
- (3) the theory it presents has a long-standing association with racist, white supremacist ideologies; does injustice to Indigenous peoples; and emboldens extremists.

Our efforts to [combat pseudoarchaeology are not new](#). Archaeologists have published extensively on the flaws of unscientific theories and the dangers they pose, including several recent [media interviews](#), [opinion pieces](#), and [social media posts](#) addressing specific content from this show. Popular television series such as *Ancient Aliens* on the History Channel have promoted false claims about the ancient past for many years. These claims frequently [rob Indigenous peoples of credit for their cultural heritage](#). However, *Ancient Apocalypse* is more harmful than *Ancient Aliens*. It not only disparages the cultures of Indigenous peoples but also carries the harm a step further by disparaging archaeologists. The combative tone of Graham Hancock damages the public’s perception of archaeology.

After more than a century of professional archaeological investigations, we find no archaeological evidence to support the existence of an “advanced, global Ice Age civilization” of the kind Hancock suggests. Archaeologists have investigated hundreds of Ice Age sites and published the results in rigorously reviewed journals. The assertion that *Ancient Apocalypse* is a factual “docuseries” or “documentary” rather than entertainment with ideological goals is preposterous. If there were any credible evidence for a “global Ice Age civilization” of the kind Hancock suggests, archaeologists would investigate it and report their findings with rigor according to the scientific methods, practices, and theories of our discipline. If the evidence warranted scientific peer-review, we would acquire funding to test it, publish our results, and promote it in our own outreach materials. Contrary to Hancock’s claims, archaeology does not willfully ignore credible evidence nor does it seek to suppress it in a conspiratorial fashion.


Archaeologists devote their careers and lives to researching and sharing knowledge about the past with the public. When Hancock refers to professionals as “so-called experts” and accuses them of being “patronizing” or “arrogant,” this disparages our public reputation. Our archaeological community is not monolithic but extremely diverse. Our membership represents a wide range of nationalities, ethnicities, genders, and beliefs. We do not always agree with each other. However, Netflix and ITN Productions are actively assaulting our expert knowledge, fostering distrust of our scientific community, diminishing the credibility of our members in the public eye, and undermining our extensive and ongoing efforts at outreach and public education.

The assertions Hancock makes have a history of promoting dangerous racist thinking. His claim for an advanced, global civilization that existed during the Ice Age and was destroyed by comets is not new. This theory has been presented, debated, and refuted for at least 140 years. It dates to

the publication of *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882) and *Ragnarok: The Age of Ice and Gravel* (1883) by Minnesota congressman Ignatius Donnelly. This theory steals credit for Indigenous accomplishments from Indigenous peoples and reinforces white supremacy. From Donnelly to Hancock, proponents of this theory have suggested that white survivors of this advanced civilization were responsible for the cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and around the world. However, the narratives on which claims of “white saviors” are based have been demonstrated to be ones modified by Spanish conquistadors and colonial authorities for their own benefit. These were subsequently used to promote violent white supremacy. Hancock’s narrative emboldens extreme voices that misrepresent archaeological knowledge in order to spread false historical narratives that are overtly misogynistic, chauvinistic, racist, and anti-Semitic.

For these reasons, we call upon both Netflix and ITN Productions to remove any labels that state or imply that this series is a factual documentary or docuseries and reclassify this series as “science fiction.” We urge both Netflix and ITN Productions to add disclaimers to the series that its content is unfounded. We also request that Netflix develop a policy that balances such false narratives with the presentation of scientific documentaries and accurate reporting on the knowledge that archaeologists have generated and continue to generate every day.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Sandweiss', with a horizontal line underneath.

Daniel H. Sandweiss, Ph.D., RPA  
President