

This text may be freely used, provided that the source is cited.

Obituary for Erich von Däniken

It is with great sadness and dismay that we learned of Erich von Däniken's death on 10 January 2026. Our thoughts are with his family. Friends around the world, millions of readers, and fellow travelers who had the privilege of working with him for decades mourn his passing. His 'Research Society for Archaeology, Astronautics and SETI' (A.A.S.) and all those interested in Paleo-SETI research have received the news with deep consternation.

Childhood and youth

Erich von Däniken was born on April 14, 1935, in Zofingen, Switzerland, and grew up in Schaffhausen. The humanistic Collège St. Michel in Fribourg had a formative influence on EvD, as many called him. Even during his high school years, he demonstrated a keen interest in archaeology, futurology, space travel, and philosophy, with a particular focus on the philosophy of religion. He began questioning conventional interpretations of legends, myths, and biblical texts. Biblical texts, in particular, described a God who was not the Almighty but rather appeared in a space vehicle with wheels and other technical details. He questioned who or what was behind such descriptions. For EvD, these inconsistencies in the Old Testament were not to be accepted on religious grounds alone. He once said: If there is a creator god to whom one will be accountable for one's actions after death, that god will certainly ask whether one has used one's mind righteously to seek and find Truths in life.

He analysed evidence of human history in mythology, archaeology, and ethnology with imagination and realism. The advent of space travel in the 1950s and 60s reinforced this hypothesis, prompting the question of whether extraterrestrial life forms may have influenced the development of humanity thousands of years ago, leaving traces on Earth.

In his exhaustive search for evidence, Erich von Däniken displayed remarkable perseverance and consistency. He undertook expeditions to all parts of the world, meticulously documenting findings that fell outside the established frameworks of archaeology and mythology.

The world-renowned author

The 1960s and 70s were an early, turbulent phase in Erich von Däniken's life. As a young restaurateur, he wrote articles on various topics and, in 1968, published his first book, 'Chariots of the Gods', which quickly became one of the most influential non-fiction books of the 20th century. Still working as a hotelier, the writer, who quickly rose to fame, was supported during this phase by his wife, Elisabeth, and his family after personal misfortunes, professional setbacks, and public hostility.

But many critics and skeptics had underestimated the enormous popularity of his works among broad sections of the public. Erich von Däniken sparked an avalanche. His debut work, "Erinnerungen an die Zukunft" (Memories of the Future, filmed in 1969 and nominated for an Oscar), became his first international bestseller under the English title "Chariots of the Gods" and triggered "Dänikenitis" worldwide, as the New York Times dubbed the phenomenon.

Erich von Däniken marked a turning point in the thinking and feelings of many of his readers. In his early works, he built on C. W. Ceram's archaeological study of the past, "Gods, Graves and Scholars," published in the 1950s.

His formula, "The gods were astronauts," proposed that earlier civilizations viewed extraterrestrial visitors as gods because their advanced technology appeared magical. Support for this idea

includes archaeological relics, mythological accounts, and traditional rituals, all documented by ethnologists. Erich von Däniken presented facts open to different interpretations, but these facts are real and can be verified by anyone.

Erich von Däniken's estimated worldwide book circulation is 80 million copies; the Swiss author is among the most internationally successful of our time. His books have been translated into nearly 40 languages. In addition to 49 non-fiction books, his publications include books for young people, novels, CDs, and DVDs. His analyses, thoughts, and interpretations have served as the basis for documentary films, Hollywood blockbusters, and digital publications. On September 26, 1996, RTL TV Station broadcast the film "*Außerirdische – kehren Sie zurück?*», by and starring Erich von Däniken ("Extraterrestrials – will they return?). With 4.9 million viewers, it achieved the highest ratings after 10 p.m. at that time. Together with RTL, Erich von Däniken made two sequels in 1997, which were broadcast in the fall of that year and in the spring of 1998. His biography was documented in books, films, and television media during his lifetime. In the following decades, Erich von Däniken gave countless lectures and participated in public discussions and at universities.

Among the many awards Erich von Däniken received during his lifetime, the honorary doctorate from the Universidad Boliviana (1975) and the title of Honorary Citizen of the Peruvian city of Nazca are particularly noteworthy. Other outstanding awards include:

- Honorary doctorate from the Universidad Boliviana, Bolivia (1975).
- Honorary citizenship of the city of Nazca, Peru
- Honorary citizenship of the city of Ica, Peru (1981)
- Honorary membership of the Order of the 'Cordon Bleu du Saint Esprit, Germany (1987).
- 'Prêmio Lourenço Filho' in gold and platinum, Brazil
- 'Golden Idea Award' from the Swiss Society for Idea and Innovation Management. Switzerland (2003)
- 'World Explorer Award' from the World Explorers Club, TU Lodz, Poland (2004).
- Award from the City of Curitiba, Brazil (2013).

Erich von Däniken remained modest despite his successes. Or, in his own words: "... a good glass of red wine, a cozy flat, a nice evening with family and friends - that's better than a mansion with a swimming pool, luxury and first class amenities." Erich von Däniken preferred to invest in research, expeditions, and projects that would provide even more evidence for his "god-astronaut theory." This hypothesis is known as Paleo-SETI or pre-astronautics.

The hypothesis

Erich von Däniken was a friend of open communication and spoke his mind. Also, and especially, when it came to dealing with the media and his fight against the simplifications and untruths that are spread time and again. He emphasized that, for example, he had NEVER said that astronauts from space had built the pyramids or other prehistoric monuments such as Stonehenge themselves. Or that the Peruvian plain of Nazca was an airport of the gods and that the ground drawings there were landing strips. However, these and other absurdities were repeated in the media, just as the misleading term 'UFO researcher' was. Erich von Däniken was much more interested in provoking thought. In his opinion, the ancient people documented their observations and encounters with the supposed 'gods' in works, myths, and traditions. EvD himself said that he had found no recognized proof for his theory, but a great deal of circumstantial evidence. THESE need to be discussed, weighed up, and researched. The motto was: provide inspiration and create a new climate of thought, but NOT ONLY for the sciences.

Erich von Däniken had an important message: his theory, paleo-SETI or pre-astronautics, should be addressed in the scientific debate. Under no circumstances did he want it to become a cult or a quasi-religious movement simply because the central question concerned extraterrestrial intelligences. He concluded that the topic of ETI (Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) must be part of objective discussions and research. Erich von Däniken repeatedly emphasized that faith had no place in this and therefore stressed that he did not want to be a guru or a sect leader. Rather, he wanted to break through the zeitgeist, to tear down the wall in the minds of those trapped in overly narrow thought structures. He saw himself as an intellectual troublemaker and was perceived positively by many in this way.

In 1998, the promoter of the Paleo-SETI hypothesis founded the 'Research Society for Archaeology, Astronautics and SETI' (A.A.S.), which continues the work of the former 'Ancient Astronaut Society', publishes the magazine 'Sagenhafte Zeiten' and organizes specialist conferences. The A.A.S. is open to anyone interested in following in Erich von Däniken's footsteps to find answers to the world's great mysteries. His life's work is also continued by the Erich von Däniken Foundation and its research projects. It was on his initiative that the 'Erich von Däniken Mysteries of the World' Foundation was established, which, among other things, realized the goal of building an adventure park in the Interlaken area, the 'Mystery Park'. The aim of the project was to raise questions, bring all visitors closer to the great mysteries of this world in an entertaining way, and motivate them to actively research them themselves. Although the theme park he initiated closed at the end of 2006 for economic reasons, more than a million people have visited the 3D displays, film presentations, and documentaries since it opened in 2003. The park in Interlaken continues to operate today under the name 'Future Campus Etherlaken'.

The human, E. von Däniken

Erich von Däniken was not only an author and researcher; he was also married to his wife, Elisabeth, for 65 years, the father of a daughter and grandfather of two, and he even met his great-granddaughter. Since 1995, Erich and Elisabeth von Däniken have lived in Beatenberg, in the Bernese Oberland, the 'most beautiful place in the world', as he emphasized, with a view of the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau mountains. In recent years, however, peace and contemplation were repeatedly interrupted by extensive lecture tours through Central European countries and the USA, new book and film projects, and intensive work in his office in Interlaken. His 49th and last book, 'Notes from my life', was published in 2024. Until 2024, he accompanied study tour groups to the sites of ancient civilizations and explained his interpretations of unusual finds or traditions on-site.

Until a few months before his death, Erich von Däniken appeared at international events and was featured in many media outlets, including the US TV series "Ancient Aliens," which was based on his ideas and was known to a global audience.

What attributes can be used to describe Erich von Däniken? Fellow travelers describe him as strong-willed, full of ideas, imaginative, optimistic, creative, uncomplicated, persistent, pragmatic, daring, impulsive, generous, goal-oriented, spirited, strong, and ingenious. Sometimes energetic, sometimes sensitive.

Erich von Däniken had a strong will, a sometimes edgy distinctiveness, and a purposeful pursuit of evidence that supported his theory. Tough in debate and never one to shy away from a dispute, he was a brilliant communicator who was equally sociable and amiable in his personal dealings with everyone who knew him. Albert Schweitzer once said: *'The only important things in life are the traces of love that we leave behind when we leave.'* This statement fits Erich von Däniken's long life very well.

Erich von Däniken leaves behind a vast mosaic of unforgettable memories, a legacy from the most successful non-fiction author of our time, marked by his consistent commitment to seeking answers to the question he popularized: Did our planet Earth receive visits from extraterrestrial intelligences in the distant past? Behind his research and public image, however, were also philosophical questions that few people were aware of.

Among the great mysteries and questions of this world that von Däniken grappled with in long discussions with friends and acquaintances were life, evolution, time, space, and death. *'For us believing physicists, Albert Einstein once wrote shortly before his death, 'the distinction between past, present and future has only the meaning of an - albeit persistent - illusion'.* Erich von Däniken believed that a bridge was possible between the reality of our world and that which cannot be grasped by our intellect.

For von Däniken, who believed in the 'great spirit of creation', there was no 'end', only a new beginning. With this in mind, we honor Erich von Däniken's memory, bow to his life's work, and remember his energy, determination, and straightforwardness with gratitude, esteem, and respect.

Future generations will remember Erich von Däniken for his bestsellers and documentaries, his countless lectures and media appearances, his Erich-von-Däniken Foundation, and through the A.A.S. Research Society, which continues his work.

Written by the contributors of A.A.S. GmbH and the editors of the magazine 'Sagenhafte Zeiten.'

Quotes by Erich von Däniken

"Truth never triumphs, but its opponents gradually die out."

"Our current space travel resembles the rafts of the Stone Age."

"Invented 'gods,' i.e., purely imaginary figures, would not have remained in mankind's consciousness for long ... The gods we are talking about must have been real apparitions, so clever and powerful that they left a lasting impression on our ancestors and shaped the world of human thought and belief for many centuries."

The Nazca Lines: "I have often been accused by smarty-pants of categorizing people who lived thousands of years ago as not particularly intelligent. On the contrary, I think they were very clever. They weren't so stupid as to scratch large markings into the ground over generations without realising that they were actually recorded by some gods. By which gods?"

"For me, myths are not interesting 'fairy tales'; they are invariably reports of facts, in which eyewitnesses who participated passed on their observations in oral reports, using the vocabulary available to them at the time. The core of the myths contains facts."

"Myths only seem inexplicable to me when viewed through the foggy lenses of a non-technical era."

"Professional archaeologists find the speculation about the pyramids frustrating. It's understandable that they're annoyed by outsiders and "pyram-idiots" because their questions are either trivial or unanswerable."

"The story 'from ape to intelligent man' is a monkey theater with thousands of unanswered questions and thousands of half-finished answers."

"Exact sciences are excellent, as long as they are not subordinated to any ideology."

"It is the fantasists who keep the world in suspense, not the bean counters."

"To me, there is no question that aliens exist. The only question is why they make it so difficult for us to prove their existence."

About Erich von Däniken

"There is a commonality between Erich von Däniken's literary visions and the Nazca lines: the 'straightforward construction principle'."

Prof. Dr. Gunter Reppchen, former dean of the Department of Surveying/Cartography, Dresden University of Applied Sciences.

“There are only a few who become more likable, as the number of their enemies increases. Erich von Däniken is one of those people on whom hatred fortunately rolls off like water off a lotus leaf. ... The persistence with which he advances new working hypotheses without appealing to faith makes him a true scientist.”

Prof. Dr. em. Beda Stadler, professor emeritus and former director of the Institute of Immunology at the University of Bern

“Erich von Däniken's interesting projects deal with extraterrestrial visits to Earth, to give ETs an opportunity to intervene in Earth's development.”

Prof. Dr. Harry O Ruppe. Until 1994, Chair of Space Technology at the Technical University of Munich

“In my view, Erich von Däniken has achieved something extraordinary: With the power of constructive doubt, he has torn down ossified edifices of knowledge and doctrine, opening our eyes to alternative, no less plausible explanations.”

Dr. Shamsey Oloko, philosophical practitioner & mindfulness teacher, Berlin

“In the 1960s, Erich von Däniken and his thesis – ‘they were here, and they will come back’ – caused a sensation. He inspired me to make my feature film ‘Die Delegation’ (The Delegation), which won the Golden Camera Award after being broadcast on ZDF to 20 million viewers.”

Rainer Erler, writer, director, and film producer

“Erich von Däniken, a man full of curiosity and tireless energy, tries to awaken in many people the desire to explore the mysteries of the universe. A man of remarkable intelligence and rare generosity. His efforts to delve into the mystery of the ancient astronauts testify to his great dedication to researching the history of our planet.”

Prof. Dr. Luis E. Navia, Associate Professor at the New York Institute of Technology

“In science, you often have to imagine things before you discover them. Data is not enough. The importance of these books [Erich von Däniken's] lies in their ability to expand our imagination. That's why we can find things we couldn't imagine without these works.”

Prof. Dr. Avi Loeb, Harvard University

Notes

Condolences can be posted on this website: www.evd.ch

Other websites with information about **EvD** and his work:

- www.daniken.com Erich von Däniken website in German/English (with biography, bibliography, and more)
- www.evdstiftung.ch Erich von Däniken Foundation
- www.sagenhaftezeiten.com “Research Society for Archaeology, Astronautics and SETI,” A.A.S. GmbH, and the magazine “Sagenhafte Zeiten”
- www.legendarytimes.com and “Legendary Times,” the English-language counterpart of the research society
- www.jungfraupark.ch the ‘Mystery Park’ theme park in Interlaken (now “Zukunftscampus Etherlaken”)