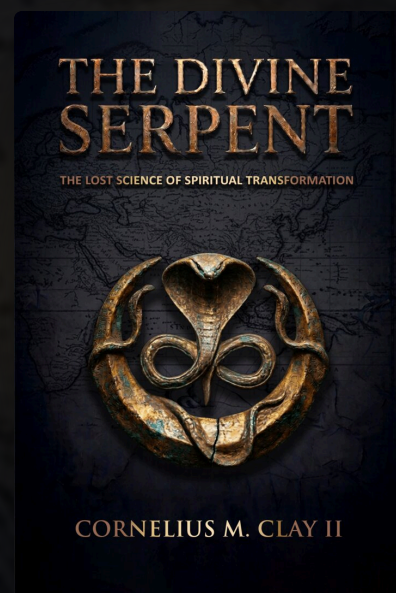


Press Release · Black Sage Press

NEW BOOK ARGUES THE WORLD'S OLDEST SYMBOL ENCODES THE ACTUAL MECHANICS OF HUMAN TRANSFORMATION

After more than twenty years tracing the serpent across nine civilizations and traditions, independent scholar Cornelius M. Clay II argues that humanity's most persistent symbol preserves something more precise than myth: a recurring pattern of how transformation actually unfolds.



TWENTY YEARS · SIX CONTINENTS · ONE SYMBOL

475 pages · 6×9 · Black Sage Press · Published August 29, 2026

LOS ANGELES, CA — August 29, 2026 — For more than two decades, writer and independent scholar Cornelius M. Clay II has followed one image through the archaeological record, ancient texts, and living traditions of six continents: the serpent. His new book, *The Divine Serpent: The Lost Science of Spiritual Transformation*, argues that this most persistent of images has been systematically misread, and that recovering its meaning reveals something precise about how transformation works.

The book traces the serpent across nine civilizations and cultural traditions that never met: Southern Africa, Sumer, India, Egypt, Mesoamerica, Aboriginal Australia, East Asia, Greece, and Mali. In each, the serpent appears at the same kind of threshold, where what has been must give way to what comes next. Clay argues that this consistency is not coincidence. It may be evidence of accuracy.

TRANSFORMATION UNFOLDS UNDER CONSTRAINT.
REGENERATION PRECEDES RELEASE. VULNERABILITY
PRECEDES RENEWED STRENGTH.

CORNELIUS M. CLAY II

Why it matters now: the structures that once carried people through profound change, such as initiation, ritual, and shared sacred story, have largely dissolved, leaving individuals to carry the full weight of transformation alone. *The Divine Serpent* asks what ancient cultures understood about that process, and what we can still use.

MEDIA CONTACT

Cornelius M. Clay II

cornelius@corneliusclay.com
corneliusclay.com

AT A GLANCE

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"These are not spiritual metaphors," Clay writes. "They are structural realities, observed independently across the full span of human history." The book argues they were carried by a creature whose most visible act of transformation occurs without ceasing to be itself.

The book opens at Tsodilo Hills in Botswana's Kalahari, where in 2006 archaeologist Sheila Coulson and colleagues reported a python-like rock marked with hundreds of human-made indentations, alongside evidence they interpreted as ritual activity more than 70,000 years old, a reading that remains debated. From there it moves through Inanna's descent in Sumerian myth, the coiled Kundalini of Indian yogic tradition, the feathered serpent of Teotihuacan, and the Rainbow Serpent of Aboriginal Australia: traditions separated by vast distances and deep time that nevertheless repeatedly encode a strikingly similar sequence of destabilization, threshold, and reintegration under constraint.

Alongside the nine, the book confronts what Clay calls the Abrahamic Paradox, the question that started the inquiry. In Genesis the serpent is the agent of humanity's fall; in Numbers it is raised on a staff, and those who look upon it are healed.

Clay is careful about what the comparison shows. The book does not argue that ancient civilizations shared one religion or a single historical source. It argues that independent cultures repeatedly represented strikingly similar patterns of change through the same creature. In the language of the subtitle, the "lost science" is not a forgotten technology but an ancient way of observing and recording how transformation works.

He holds no formal academic appointment. "What this work holds instead," he writes, "is a question taken seriously enough to follow across twenty years, through disciplines that do not usually speak to one another, toward a conclusion that none of them reaches alone."

Written for readers of Karen Armstrong, Mircea Eliade, and Iain McGilchrist, *The Divine Serpent* is available in paperback (\$29.99) and hardcover (\$54.95) through major online retailers, and through Ingram Content Group for independent bookstores and libraries worldwide.

For thousands of years, people have looked at the serpent and seen a god, a demon, a healer, a tempter. *The Divine Serpent* asks what they were actually looking at.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more than twenty years, **Cornelius M. Clay II** has pursued one question through comparative religion, anthropology, neuroscience, and the phenomenology of transformation: why does the serpent appear wherever people try to describe profound change? His research draws on primary texts, archaeological records, and living traditions across six continents. *The Divine Serpent* is his first book. He lives between California and Australia.

PRESS KIT

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FOR EDITORS, PRODUCERS & HOSTS

INTERVIEW & STORY GUIDE

Why does the serpent appear wherever people try to describe transformation?

Cornelius M. Clay II spent twenty years following that question across nine civilizations and traditions.

STORY ANGLES

- I THE ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION**
What ancient cultures understood about change before modern psychology gave it a vocabulary.
- II WHY DID SO MANY CIVILIZATIONS CHOOSE THE SERPENT?**
How one animal came to stand for wisdom, death, healing, and renewal in cultures that never met.
- III THE SERPENT WE MISREAD**
What if humanity's oldest recurring symbol began as an observation, not a metaphor?
- IV BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL**
In Genesis the serpent brings the fall; in Numbers it heals. Why it cannot be reduced to tempter or savior.
- V TRANSFORMATION WITHOUT INITIATION**
What happens to people when a society loses its frameworks for profound change.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK CORNELIUS M. CLAY II

- 1 After twenty years with this question, what surprised you most?
- 2 Why did so many unrelated civilizations choose the serpent to represent transformation?
- 3 Are these parallels evidence of contact between cultures, or of independent recognition?
- 4 What do "destabilization, threshold, reintegration" look like in a modern life?
- 5 What did ancient cultures understand about change that we have lost?

FAST FACTS

- SUBJECT** Comparative religion and anthropology
- SCOPE** Nine traditions, six continents, twenty years
- QUESTION** Why does the serpent appear wherever people describe transformation?
- ARGUMENT** Serpent imagery may preserve an observed pattern of change: destabilization, threshold, reintegration
- READERS** Religion, mythology, philosophy, psychology, consciousness

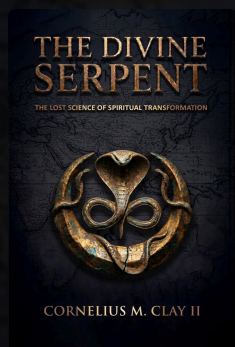
WHAT THE BOOK DOES NOT CLAIM

- That ancient civilizations secretly shared one religion.
- That cultural parallels prove historical contact.
- That the serpent carries one universal meaning.
- That readers must choose between mythology and science.
- That its "lost science" is a forgotten technology. It is an ancient way of observing change.

It asks what becomes visible when archaeology, anthropology, comparative religion, and the living animal are considered together.

BOOK AN INTERVIEW

MEDIA cornelius@corneliusclay.com · **PRESS KIT** corneliusclay.com/press



BOOK FACT SHEET

THE DIVINE SERPENT

The Lost Science of Spiritual Transformation

CORNELIUS M. CLAY II

THE SERPENT MAY HAVE LOOKED LIKE A SYMBOL. WHAT IF IT WAS ACTUALLY AN OBSERVATION?

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

FROM THE BOOK

THE OPENING

Seventy thousand years ago, people traveled for days through predator-filled terrain to stand before a python carved into living rock in the Kalahari Desert. They brought offerings. They returned across generations. They left no explanation. The serpent was already saying what they came to hear.

Source: "Ritual: Organised Activity Identified as World's Oldest," *Current World Archaeology*, issue 22 (2007), on Sheila Coulson's research at Tsodilo Hills, Botswana. The interpretation remains debated; the book sets out the evidence in detail.

Across nine civilizations and cultural traditions that never met (Southern Africa, Sumer, India, Egypt, Mesoamerica, Aboriginal Australia, East Asia, Greece, and Mali) the serpent appears wherever transformation is described. *The Divine Serpent* argues that this is not symbolic coincidence but may be evidence of accuracy.

COMPARABLE TITLES

Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (Ballantine Books)

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (Harcourt)

Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary* (Yale University Press)

BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS

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