ORIGIN

 The Great Library at Alexandria, Egypt was the largest collection of its kind in the ancient Mediterranean world.

 Founded around 260 B.C., it contained an estimated 400,000 papyrus scrolls (equivalent to 100,000 books today), encompassing every category of knowledge. Important texts were gathered from Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Assyria, India, and elsewhere. Even information on diverse faiths such as Buddhism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism was included. It was a magnificent repository of scholarship, and helped elevate learning to a remarkable degree.

 But the Library ceased to exist eight centuries later, as a result of three major catastrophes:

 The first was a huge fire which raged uncontrollably across the city in 48 A.D. This was set by a besieged Julius Caesar, who attempted to destroy a blockading enemy fleet in the harbor.

 Next came the destruction of Alexandria by Emperor Diocletian in 297 A.D.

 Lastly, the Muslim capture of the city in 642 A.D. under Caliph Omar sealed the doom what was left of the Great Library. Legend says that the Caliph proclaimed, "If those books ( i.e., scrolls remaining in the Library) are in agreement with the Quran, we have no need of them. But if they are in conflict with the Quran, destroy them."

 Though impossible to verify, some fragments of the priceless and unique scrolls from the Library are believed to have survived, and are safely housed today in prestigious university libraries and museums around the globe. But many works were assumed lost forever. We know that they once existed because they were referenced in other ancient histories and writings. Here is a general listing of some of the well-known authors whose works were partially or wholly lost:

 Aristotle / Augustus Caesar / Gaius Julius Caesar / Cato the Elder / Claudius / Livy / Ovid / Pliny the Elder / Strabo / Tiberius / Thales / and some Greek plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

 Where could these lost treasures be found, if they had indeed survived the destructive forces of centuries?

 That was the goal of Dr. Tariq Zahir, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Cairo. His theory was that the missing scrolls still existed, and were secreted away somewhere, waiting to be found.

 His initial thoughts centered around the ruins of the ancient world's second largest library, the Library of Pergamum, in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey). Zahir knew that (according to the Greek philosopher and historian, Plutarch) Marc Antony presented to his new wife -- Cleopatra -- 200,000 parchment scrolls from Pergamum in 43 B.C., to replace the papyrus ones which were accidentally burned in Julius Caesar's fire in Alexandria five years earlier. But Augustus Caesar was said to have later returned most of these rare and important parchments back to the Library of Pergamum, shortly after Antony died. Thus, Zahir would focus on trying to find exactly which scrolls were listed in that return (if true), and where they might have gone afterward. He went to Damascus University in Syria, and Koc University in Istanbul, Turkey, to look for possible answers.

 Tariq was forty-five years old, with a wife, Rehab, and four children. The family had a pleasant home in the green and leafy Maadi Sarayat neighborhood in Cairo. The professor was fluent in Arabic, Turkish, Greek, English, French, and Hebrew. He was admired by his department colleagues for being rugged and daring -- his black hair and finely-trimmed beard just beginning to be flecked with grey. Apart from his impressive teaching and scholarship, Zahir also was well-regarded as a physical fitness devotee -- in fact, he could still proudly perform twenty-five perfect 'push-ups' and a dozen clean 'chin-ups' on demand. He also enjoyed playing soccer on the weekends, either with his children or on a local men's team.

 The professor's research at both university archives was time-consuming and arduous, stretching into two full weeks. Dead end after dead end, frustrating disappointments, a slew of false leads, and crucial missing information was the paltry result. But then, at last, a breakthrough!

 Tariq discovered an obscure reference which noted that some -- but not all -- of the missing Alexandrian library scrolls sent to Pergamum were first transferred to Antioch, then sent by ship to the coast of Libya around 200 A.D. Its exact destination was the Roman oasis settlement of Gaerisa, which lay about 120 miles inland across the Sahara desert from the Mediterranean Sea. The scrolls were to become part of a modest, newly constructed library there.

 Using dams and cisterns for irrigation, the Romans in Gaerisa grew cereals, figs, almonds, olives, dates, and melons, which were then exported to feed nearby Roman Legions. There were ruins of over forty buildings left today, Zahir learned, the Libyan town having since been renamed Ghirza. It had been abandoned by the Middle Ages, and was covered by sand and reclaimed by the desert by the early 10th Century. Archaeologists currently found little of interest among the ruins of Gaerisa, so Tariq would find the area largely devoid of any diggings there, should he decide to venture to that spot.

 So, after informing his superiors and receiving some funding from the University of Cairo -- as well as kissing his lovely wife, Rehab, and their children good-bye for another two weeks -- Dr. Zahir flew to Tripoli. He obtained the vital necessary permits and permissions (after paying the expected bureaucratic custom of 'baksheesh,' or small bribe cash) upon arrival, then rented a dun-colored, late model, four-wheel drive Toyota Land Cruiser. Soon, he was off. His destination: Ghirza.

 Because it was late February, the heat on his drive was bearable. He drove with the windows down to save fuel, which would have been guzzled if he had turned on the vehicle's air-conditioning. Four hours later, over terrible roads and some necessary off-roading, Tariq arrived.

 The remote town of Ghirza was typically poor and sparsely populated, with about two-hundred inhabitants. But fortunately, the nearby ruins of Gaerisa he noticed while driving by were partly excavated, with even some impressive stone mausoleums restored, much to Professor Zahir's relief.

 There was one 'guest house' in Ghirza for lodging (with no electricity or heat) and two 'eating establishments,' both looking rather uninviting and likely unappetizing. But Tariq was used to such deprivations -- he had enough warm clothes for the cold desert nights in his room, and an adequate supply of tinned and dried foods, as well as water-purification tablets for emergencies. Archaeological digs were never glamorous or comfortable, like they were portrayed in the movies; instead, harsh, dirty, and difficult conditions were the norm, he well knew.

 The following morning -- after a bland breakfast of hard-boiled eggs and rice with hot tea -- the gates to the ruins site were unlocked by its sole guard, Abdul. The famed scholar showed his permits and credentials, and was kindly saluted. Tariq carried water and some food, a small spade, a lightweight tarp, a measuring tape, a notebook, a whisk brush, and a digital camera in his canvas duffel bag.

 For two days, going back and forth to the ruins a couple of kilometers away from the town, Dr. Zahir probed the extensive Roman site, looking for any signs in the stone foundations of what could be a modest library. He took careful notes and photos and precise measurements, as per his extensive training.

 Finally, towards evening on the third day, he stumbled upon it. The possible library ruins area seemed somewhat excavated, but there appeared to be an obscure area buried in sand in one corner of the building's former outline. Before the sun set, in already chilly temperatures, Tariq started to excitedly yet carefully dig. He was overjoyed at what he soon discovered!

 He had unearthed five large ancient clay jars, with sealed lids, each measuring 45 cm. x 25 cm.

 The day's light was going fast now, however, so Tariq had cover his digging with his lightweight tarp and head for the gate before the guard, Abdul, locked him in. Back at his lodging, the professor ate a quick dinner , then went to bed after taking a cold shower (no hot water) and updating his notebook with a description of the newly unearthed jars. But because there was no cell phone coverage or internet access in this primitive location, Zahir was unable to check-in with his wife and family just yet.

 His sleep was fitful, due to his excitement. He needed to wait until first light before eagerly returning to the ruins to examine his find in exact detail, after taking the necessary 'in situ' photographs.

 After a hurried breakfast of Berber flat bread topped with oily sardines from a rather rusting tin, and gulping down a cracked mug of tepid black tea, Tariq was off again in his rented Land Cruiser, back to the Gaerisa ruins.

 Nothing he had covered with the tarp had been disturbed. Luck was with him, praise Allah! After performing the routine procedures that all professional archaeologists adhered to, Dr. Zahir gently unsealed the first of the five aged earthen jars. In the light of day, he could clearly notice that several papyrus scrolls had been carefully rolled up and hidden inside. Wearing thin, white cotton gloves, Tariq gently took the scrolls out and assembled them on his still clean covering tarp, careful to keep them out of the direct Libyan sun. He was surprised that these were not the parchment scrolls he was anticipating, particularly because parchment was much more durable.

 The ancient papyrus scrolls were in typical, rough condition -- ink mostly faded, everything written in Greek, with some sadly damaged sections and some random holes causing missing words or letters.

 The professor began feverishly reading. He was amazed to first discover that here were some of the famous missing Greek plays, believed lost for almost two-thousand years! Tariq trembled in realization at what he was seeing.

 He opened the next three jars, and read for the next five hours. They included other works from the Library of Alexandria that were considered lost forever -- works by the geographer Strabo, poetry by Ovid, histories written by or about the Caesars, commentaries by Pliny and Cato...it was a gold mine of rare archaeological treasures! The quantity indicated that not everything once considered lost was here, but some absolutely was -- perhaps 25%, by Zahir's best estimate.

 He took a badly needed meal break -- quickly eating some dates and shelled pistachio nuts, and opening a large tin of tuna fish with his Swiss Army knife, while reminding himself to drink plenty of bottled water. His excited mind was obviously not on his food! Once he finished, Tariq decided to open the fifth and final jar.

 It revealed something totally unexpected.

 Three scrolls, written in Greek, telling a dramatic and unknown story. Some sentences were either incomplete or suffered missing words due to papyrus damage. Tariq began reading , and was soon astonished...

 *I am called Eterna. I and my species came to your planet from a far-away star* (missing)*. By the method of measuring time which you will one day adopt, it is near the year 4000 B.C. However, you must realize that* (missing) *time is only an illusion.*

 *I have come to share* (missing) *wisdom with your inhabitants, to help you evolve* (missing)*. There are many intelligent* (missing) *in the universe. We must work together without fear or competition if we* (missing) *desire to flourish and survive.*

 Dr. Zahir stopped. This was momentous! But could it be a fabrication or a forgery? He needed to verify such a find with his two most trusted colleagues back at the University of Cairo. He photographed the three scrolls, then returned them to their protective clay jar. Next, he loaded that and the other four jars into his Toyota (after explaining to the site's lone guard, Abdul, what he was doing) and drove all the way back to Tripoli after checking out of his Ghirza lodging.

 With cell phone signal restored once back in the Libyan capital, Tariq contacted Dr. Jamal Faris and Dr. Mohamad Misrati in Cairo and urged them to drop everything and come to Tripoli as soon as possible. He briefed them in concise terms on what he had discovered, except for the mysterious contents of Jar #5. That shocking surprise they needed to ascertain for themselves. Proof of alien contact from over six-thousand years ago? A clever fraud? Or a faulty translation passed down across the centuries, based on murky repeated oral traditions? The professor also contacted his wife while in Tripoli, to update her on what he had found, and what he needed to do next.

 "Meet me at the University here," Tariq explained to Drs. Faris and Misrati. "Although they have no Departments of Archaeology or History in Tripoli, they do have a Department of Fundamentals of Religion. Its director is Dr. Mustafa Alatar. He can act as the local authority to permit us to formally examine the contents of all five scroll jars. Let's avoid contacting the media at this early stage. We need to be absolutely sure of our findings, so as not to make us or our University look like fools."

 When his two colleagues arrived about thirty-six hours later, the four professors used a secured room on campus to closely examine the contents of the first four jars. They were deemed to be authentic, to the thrill of the amazed academics. "Some of the actual lost treasures missing from the Library of Alexandria! Well done, Dr. Zahir!" gushed his Cairo colleagues, Jamal and Mohamad.

 Dr. Alatar nodded respectfully in agreement, realizing the importance of what they were examining. "But because these rarities were found here in Libya, I doubt my Government will allow them to be exported. A new museum will undoubtedly be raised here in Tripoli to house such unique and historic marvels," Alatar judged. "Today is indeed a proud day for Libya! Praise Allah!"

 The group next turned to the enigmatic Jar #5. Because all four academics could read ancient Greek text, they poured over the spread-out three papyrus scrolls at their own speed. Here is more of what was written:

 *There is only one Creator in the universe. Human and animal sacrifices to Him are abhorrent and never* (missing)*. All war and killing is an abomination to the Creator* (missing)*.*

 *The enlightened* (missing) *to cultivate are kindness and compassion. The Truth of existence is within. Know your true self. The spark of the living Creator resides* (missing) *us all. Seek and you will find.*

 *Doubt leads to questioning; questioning leads to deeper* (missing)*; deeper thought leads to the realization of truth. Reason and intellect* (missing) *superior to emotions.*

 *Study the logical purity found in mathematics, astronomy, and music. They can help* (missing) *some of the mysteries of* (missing)*.*

 *Nature holds the answers to all of life's riddles. Everything you need for* (missing) *life already exists within nature, for the Creator made each world perfect. Cherish it.*

 *Be independent in your thinking. Strive for excellence in all endeavors. Beware of leaders who may be false and corrupt* (missing)*.*

 *Many spiritual masters will appear in your history as your species evolves. Heed their words. Together, they will lead you to the same Truth.*

 *Death is not the end, it is the beginning. For what you assume is reality is, in fact, just a very long and marvelous dream.*

 *I am called Eterna,* (missing) *to your world to share this wisdom. Realize these words of peace and joy, and be* (missing)*.*

 Professor Zahir spoke first. "Do you realize what we have here, gentlemen? Evidence of a possible first contact with a highly intelligent life form from beyond our planet, with added philosophical musings and religious sayings that wouldn't appear in the Bible for thousands of years. And similar sayings that vastly pre-date our Holy Quran! My friends, this is truly incredible..."

 Professor Faris replied, "We certainly need to have the papyrus carbon-dated, Tariq. Obviously, this was an oral re-telling of either a real or mythical event, that went down through the ages until it was written down -- or re-copied, perhaps many times -- by someone in Greek script. But where? When? And how did Alexandria get it -- if indeed they did -- rather than Pergamum?"

 Professor Misrati added, "We need to re-visit your original Gaerisa ruins site, Tariq, and try to gather more clues. We also need to determine if your find is authentic, or simply a fanciful, tricking ruse."

 The three Egyptian archaeologists worked diligently over the next few weeks. They revisited the ruins, but found nothing new or suspicious. Crucial carbon-dating, meanwhile, came back from Cairo. The tests verified that the fiber and ink analysis taken from the three papyrus scrolls samples proved that they had each been made sometime circa 2560-2550 B.C. The plant fibers also indicated that the papyrus was most likely of Egyptian origin. The trio of academics were also surprised that this identified time frame coincided with the era when the Great Pyramid of Cheops at Giza was nearing completion. Could there be any connection? they wondered.

 Before making any of their conclusions available to the general public, however, the Cairo team wrote up Professor Zahir's discovery for the most-respected academic journal in their field: The Journal of Archaeological Science. Within days, esteemed professors in that specialization from around the globe contacted Tariq and his colleagues via phone, text-message, and email to gather still more information. Several well-known international colleagues also flew into Tripoli to examine the amazing scroll documents for themselves.

 That was when strange events started to occur.

 Archaeologists from around the world now claimed that the mysterious phrase: *I am called Eterna...*had been found to re-occur in many long-forgotten ancient texts, after being more carefully researched again. Reports came flooding in from excited archaeologists in Tibet, Ethiopia, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, the Mexican Yucatan, Peru, and Morocco -- each verifying that they were vaguely familiar with the specific phrase from previous routine translations, but that they disregarded the odd phrase because they could not interpret precisely what those strange words referred to -- that is, until now!

 Dr. Zahir's team requested that photographs of the translations which included that special phrase be faxed immediately to them, c/o the University of Tripoli and the office of Dr. Mustafa Alatar. Perhaps these other translations included the same cryptic messages that Tariq had discovered on the three scrolls from Gaerisa Jar #5, hopefully even with some of the missing data intact? Or did they offer still more new sayings from the enigmatic, possibly extraterrestrial, Eterna? Compiling these additional evidences could take some time. Perhaps a published "Codex Eterna" volume would eventually result?

 And what would be the reaction from the world's religious leaders -- not to mention from their faithful followers -- when they might be forced to realize that we are not alone in the universe, and that some of their 'original teachings' were actually 'borrowed' from an extraterrestrial source some six thousand years ago? The possibilities could be both liberating and deeply disturbing, the team surmised. The primary source sayings of Eterna could -- in fact, if true -- be the actual origin of many of our planet's most basic religious concepts...

 "Such strong evidence as this reminds me of the story of Noah's Ark and the Great Flood. Its watery destruction is mentioned in ancients texts, in various languages, from many completely unrelated cultures around the world. The cataclysm wasn't just a curious Bible legend -- other than the totally unscientific collecting of animal pairs by a surviving family on a large wooden boat. The Great Flood itself really had to have happened," Dr. Zahir announced. "Likewise, such evidence would seem to indicate that our recent find was not merely a singular hoax or sole retelling of a fable, but instead an event that may have actually happened -- long, long ago. "

 Word of Tariq's discovery inevitably leaked out to the global press, probably by some minor bureaucrat, as its dramatic revelations could hardly be kept a strict secret anymore. The professor, when besieged by television camera crews and related journalists, tried to keep the focus on Jars #1-4, and their importance to being some of the once-lost scrolls from the famed Library of Alexandria. A new museum housing these remarkable acquisitions was already being planned in Tripoli, Dr. Zahir announced. The professor publically thanked the Libyan government for their assistance and cooperation -- especially noting the warm, professional welcome afforded his team by the University and Dr. Mustafa Alatar. But soon, Tariq had to submit to relentless requests to further expound on Eterna's dramatic sayings found in Jar #5. He gave in and finally held a larger, global press conference.

 "We may never know if Eterna was actually real, or if he/she/it came to Earth from a far-away planet about six thousand years ago, with the purpose of helping the human race evolve to a higher level. As a curious man, I naturally want to believe it. And our weary world needs to believe it too, I think. We need fresh sources of awe and wonder, and new challenges, to forever keep us moving ahead.

 But as a scientist, I must maintain a skeptical attitude until irrefutable proof is found, if ever.

 Now, if the story of Eterna is merely a myth, I am convinced that it must have been birthed by a very enlightened being -- a supremely gifted spiritual master who predated the wisdom found in both the Bible and the Quran by many, many centuries. Such a unique and remarkable individual gave us some incomparable insights into the baffling riddle of our existence.

 It is for those truths alone that we should be most thankful, and acknowledge them by bringing them into practice in our daily lives..." Tariq concluded, as cameras rolled and clicked amid a crush of reporters.

 Professor Zahir returned at last with his colleagues to Cairo, where he gladly rejoined his family after his exhausting brush with world-wide publicity and the ever-voracious media. He was happy to unwind again for a short while, simply playing soccer with his children. Analyzing and compiling the numerous international texts also referring to *I am called Eterna...*would next be undertaken with his two colleagues, with hopes of a definitive volume of "Codex Eterna" eventually being published.

 But ten days later, he received a phone call from a renowned fellow archaeologist, Dr. Rolf Moore, from the Australian National University in Canberra.

 "Hello, Dr. Zahir? My excavation team near the Olgas rock formation in our Outback area recently discovered something in a new, sacred aboriginal cave we unearthed here that might interest you. It is a very old, detailed carving of some kind of unusual being, with the word "ETERNA" inscribed above it. We frankly don't know what to make of it. Would you like me to fax you a photo? I read with keen interest about your amazing work in Libya, and thought that this might somehow be connected with your scroll translations from your Jar #5."

 When Tariq examined Dr. Moore's faxed photo moments later, however, he was stunned and speechless. His wife, Rehab, entered their home office just then. Her husband was slumped in his favorite leather chair next to his large desk, staring out the window at the tall swaying palm trees in their neatly-groomed backyard.

 "Is anything the matter, my dear?" she gently asked, caressing his shoulder.

 He turned and looked at his wife with amazed but clear brown eyes.

 "It's true...it must really be true!" he declared at last, reaching for her hands.

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

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