

Some Biblical scholars go to great lengths to reconstruct the Bible. If they did the same to a modern event like the America's Cup, the results would look something like this...

The America's Cup Myth

It is of course well known that the Bible contains many errors, and that Biblical research has established that the Jesus of history is very different to the Jesus of the Bible. However it is less well known that the same research techniques can be used to show that many other widely believed events are also mythical.

An excellent example is the story of the America's cup, in which an Australia yacht (Australia II) comes from behind to defeat its American rival, using the secret Australian invention of a winged keel. The parallel is interesting, because the story is an inspiration to all Australians, just as the resurrection of Christ is an inspiration to Christians.

But the first thing to realise is that, like the Bible, the America's Cup documents are historically unreliable. For instance, books on the America's Cup contain at least two distinct styles. The first style is the vivid and picturesque language describing the events. The second style is a careful record of dates, measurements and margins, usually arranged in tabular form. Biblical scholarship has taught us that this indicates sources from two different authors. The books as we have them were created by an editor, who combined these sources into a single document.

We also note that the books refer to the "next challenge" in Fremantle in 1987. Any scholar will tell you that, since it is impossible to predict anything about the future, this indicates that the books were written in 1987 or later. This gives at least 4 years for the America's Cup story to be told and retold, with accumulated embellishments, before it was written down in its current form.

This combination of multiple sources and elapsed time has led to numerous contradictions and errors in the America's Cup documents. One obvious contradiction is the size of the yachts. The yachts are called "12 metre yachts" in the narrative, yet the tables of measurements indicate the yachts were approximately 19 metres long.

Another contradiction is the date of the final race. One book says that the race occurred in Newport on September 26, yet this is later contradicted when it states that Australians watched the race on September 27.

Other events simply do not square with the historical facts of the era. For instance, the legend states that Australia II had a winged keel. This reveals that the author was hopelessly confused, as it is well known that it is planes - not boats - which have wings.

This is supported by the reports that the yacht's owners tried to keep the wings a secret. Just as the gospel stories have Jesus keeping his "true identity" secret (indicating that he probably never believed he was the Son of God), so these incidents indicate that the yacht's owners did not really believe that Australia II had wings.

Much research has been done into whether the heroes of the story ever existed. Australia II was supposedly designed by Ben Lexcen, who never went to high school. In addition to the improbability of this, there is no mention anywhere of a Ben Lexcen until the mid 1970s. The legend that he changed his name from Bob Miller is a little too convenient. More likely he never existed, and the author simply borrowed his name from a type of Toyota car which was popular at the time of composition.

The identity of the supposed owner of the yacht is a mystery. The books give his name variously as "Alan Bond" or "Bondy". In my research, the only person I could find of either name was an inmate of Perth Gaol in 1991. It is not possible that this felon could have once been a yacht-owning multi-millionaire.

Another curious aspect of the myth is the behaviour of the prime minister, Bob Hawke. According to tradition, he appeared on national television, in a coat covered in Australian flags, drenched in champagne, and declared a public holiday. Contemporary records confirm that Mr. Hawke was prime minister at this time (although the myth gets his first name wrong, for his name was actually Robert Hawke); but prime ministers

always wore a suit in the 1980's, and they had no power to declare a public holiday. It is also absurd to suggest that a politician would try to make political capital out of a sporting victory.

And what of the legend that Australia II came from 3-1 down to win the best-of-7 series 4-3? Even in contests where all other factors are equal, such comebacks are extremely rare. For instance, no team has ever come from 3-1 down to win the finals of the NBA Basketball Championship. So for Australia II to do so, in America, in a sport where Americans had been champions for more than a century, would have been a miracle. And we all know that miracles never occur.

It is far more reasonable to believe that Australia II had no winged keel, and did not physically win. But she did her best and so, in an indefinable sense, she had a spiritual victory.

So rather than trusting in a victory that never happened, and attempting to beat Americans by clever inventions that never work, we should simply follow the path of the historical Australia II, and try very hard at whatever we do. In that way we too will experience spiritual victory, without ever being deluded into believing that we can physically *win* anything.

Therefore we see that the America's Cup stories are just as confused, contradictory, and unbelievable as the Bible. As we approach the 21st century, we need to turn our back on primitive legends, and demythologise the America's Cup. While the historical Australia II can be an inspiration to us all, no thinking person can any longer believe that she actually won the America's Cup. To do so would be as naive as to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Postscript (1996)

It has come to my notice that a similar America's Cup myth developed in New Zealand during the mid 1990's. Due to the proximity of the two countries, and the similarities in the myths, it is obvious that the New Zealand culture adopted and embellished the Australian myth.

Not only do both myths entail winning the America's Cup, but in both myths the opposing skipper is called Dennis Conner. Since it is absurd to suggest that the Americans would allow the same skipper to lose the Cup twice, it is clear that the New Zealand legend is simply an adaptation of the Australian myth.

However the two myths have differences, which are consistent with the ways in which myths develop. While Australia II wins the cup narrowly, the New Zealand yacht Black Magic becomes all-conquering, losing only a single race. This is similar to the development of Yahweh in the Old Testament, from the strongest god among many (in the Exodus myths) to the only, all-powerful god by New Testament times.

Black Magic also has divine assistance, with the only yacht to defeat it being struck in half and sinking in three minutes. Of course this incident is not historical (as if a multi-million dollar yacht would break in half and sink without even colliding into anything), but has been inserted to demonstrate Black Magic's superiority to Australia II (as the name of the stricken yacht, One Australia, is clearly an evolved form of Australia II). It has striking similarities to the myth of the Red Sea engulfing the Egyptians.

So we see the same myth being retold in a different setting. There is no need to believe that either yacht ever actually won the America's Cup, let alone the naive suggestion that both stories are historical and describe two separate events.

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