

Where Dr Menzel has gone wrong

A reply from Aimé Michel

At the very outset of my reply, I hope that Dr Menzel will allow me to state that there is agreement between us on one point at least. I regard as fully justified the suspicion in which the amateur is held. When a specialist on the Sun ventures to explain the UFO phenomenon in terms of mirages (when mirages are outside the range of his competence), then he exposes himself to the scorn of those who are in fact experts in both these fields of research. Dr Menzel has already suffered this fate when he wrote his first book, *Flying Saucers* (Harvard University Press), in 1953: his interpretation of the phenomena due, if we are to believe him, to temperature inversions ended up by giving us flying houses and flying lakes (see Aimé Michel, *The Truth About Flying Saucers*, Corgi edition, p. 190 and in the American edition, p.186). These rationalisations certainly amused the meteorologists but failed to explain the flying saucers.

There are so many howlers in his attempt to deal with Orthoteny that I propose to deal with them in the order in which Dr Menzel has committed his errors.

The Arguments

He starts by criticising my statistical method and, if his arguments are accepted, he soon demolishes it. It is, he says, essentially the method of an ignoramus and an amateur. He then exposes the method adopted by Lex Mebane. He is willing to admit that it is “correct”, but finds a way of improving and simplifying it. He says: “Connect any two of the points – preferably the ones farthest apart – by a straight line. Then draw, parallel to this line, two other straight lines, two and a half miles on either side of the original line. These two lines define, within the boundary of the map, a roughly rectangular corridor five miles wide, running across the map”, etc.

And now let us refer to the passage in my book at the foot of page 78 in which I set forth my own method: –

“Assuming that real objects were seen, we may allow that their distance from the observer (and hence from the line) was as great, perhaps, as two and a-half miles. This gives us a rectangle 5 miles wide and 287 miles long, having an area of 1,440sq. miles, within which we may assert that all six of the objects seen were located.”

Yes, indeed! Dr Menzel is “improving” Mebane's method by means of his own method, which is in turn none other than the poor and amateurish method of Aimé Michel. He not only uses my figures (rectangle and possible aleatory surface) but he keeps my method of calculation while putting it, it is true, into mathematical formulae and baptizing my rectangle

with the name of “corridor”. (Let us note *en passant* that these formulae of which he seems very proud because they are “professional”, are the elementary formulae of combinative analysis that youngsters in all scientific schools throughout the world learn around the age of 18. We note that Dr Menzel has not forgotten them.)

An Analysis of the facts

Dr Menzel's satisfaction with his work is a joy to see. He says: “This formula agrees with the one in Michel's book, given by Mebane, but my derivation of this is simpler. *Mebane does not properly define the corridor*” ... (My italics. – A.M.). That it should have been Aimé Michel who, in fact, defined the corridor, is of no importance. Aimé Michel is only a poor stupid amateur, and Menzel, who copies Michel's methods, congratulates himself on his achievement. But let us leave the methods and see whether Dr Menzel succeeds even in his analysis of the facts.

On October 7, 1954, he writes: “Michel had 27 sightings. Michel marvels at finding 19 three-point lines! Statistics indicate that he should have found 37, twice as many on a random distribution of sightings”, etc. From his analysis, Dr Menzel draws a number of deductions:

- 1. Michel makes himself look ridiculous by finding less three-point alignments than are foreseen by mere chance. To this my reply is: Dr Menzel had at hand all the factors – map, locations of eye witnesses, etc., – for finding the missing alignments. Why has he not done it? It is true that there are three or four more that can be found. But a dozen and a half is impossible, no matter who tries it. Which is good proof that the network of sighting-points is inexplicable by chance. I await Dr Menzel's explanation on the subject of this curious insufficiency of chance alignments. For the reader who is not a mathematician, we would explain that a result *lower* than chance is just as conclusive as a result higher than chance. It is moreover easy to cast 27 points – or more – on to a surface and produce no alignment of any sort. It is enough if one puts these points on a circle, for example.
- 2. Mebane (so Dr Menzel says) adduces “magical” arguments, which have nothing to do with Science, when he emphasises the regular and “boxed-in” appearance of the line-up of October 7 in comparison with the artificially obtained line-up given on page 261. Dr Menzel asserts that the regularity or irregularity of a line-up is a purely subjective notion. It is at this point that we begin to have our suspicions as to why it is that Dr Menzel is so proud of his formula of combinative analysis. It is because for him they are apparently the summit of Mathematics. I am therefore happy to reveal to him the existence of a mathematical discipline which is called Topology and which shows, precisely, how to obtain in rigorously strict fashion, those results that Dr Menzel is unable to imagine outside the realm of “magic.” And as it seems a bit late in the day for Dr Menzel to start studying Topology, will he please allow me to remind him of a “magical” arrangement of things well known to astronomers, namely the disposition of the white streaks radiating out around the crater Copernicus, on the surface of the Moon. If it is by chance that the network of October 2 converges in a star at Poncey (page 106) and if it is by chance that it converges on October 7 at Montlevic (page 141), and if we are engaging in “magic” when we establish the fact of these convergences in the form of

a star, then is it “magic” that Dr Menzel’s colleagues are practising when they seek the possible causes for the streaks around the crater Copernicus?

– 3. Even more interesting than the deductions made by Dr Menzel are those that he refrains from making. I said in my article in the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW (Vol. 9. No. 3, p.3) that since certain alignments could be explained by chance, I had – since Lex Mebane’s work on the subject – directed my investigations to the other alignments, namely those involving numerous points. What does Dr Menzel do about the network of October 7? He attacks the three-point alignments, but completely ignores the most interesting alignment of that day – the Cherbourg-Cassis alignment which covers *seven* points. His own formula should tell him that the odds against chance are of the nature of 1,000 to 1. Is this the reason why he ignores this particular alignment? Or does he prefer not to see anything he would rather overlook?

It is true that Dr Menzel has made a frontal attack on the most difficult alignment for him to explain, namely Jacques Vallée’s Bayonne-Vichy Line (BAVIC). Here we see the “triumph” of his methods. He says: –

“Let us suppose for example that a four-point line has shown up, crossing some map. He (Michel) would like to get some more sightings to confirm the reality of this line. A number of towns and villages lie along the line. How easy to write to some friend, to the local newspaper, or to the postmaster of several of these towns, requesting information about sightings on a certain date. Sure enough, two replies come in; the four-point line becomes a six-pointer. And the amateur statistician becomes impressed with his predictive powers and with the reality of the line.”

A skilful polemicist

What possible answer can Aimé Michel give to this accusation? That he wrote neither to the local newspaper nor to the postmaster? If he did one can almost see Dr Menzel’s smile of condescension and air of disbelief. And if Michel protests his good faith and honesty he will merely attract a deeper distrust. Dr Menzel is a skilful polemicist. When the facts cannot be interpreted by his method in the way he would like, he falls back on insinuation. I am, he alleges, a faker and a liar. The game is won.

The time has come to do what Dr Menzel has not apparently done and that is to refer to the book which he is attacking. On page 177 the facts which he disputes are reported. It will be seen there that *all* the facts involved in this alignment have been taken direct from the large Paris daily papers. No local newspaper, no writing to the postmaster! Certainly not, that is a trumped-up story. On consulting my files, I find that I need have quoted only three large Paris newspapers – *France Soir*, *Le Parisien Libéré*, *Paris Presse* – in order to obtain all the references to that particular day, September 24, 1954. And that is not all. Dr Menzel’s invention does not end there. In 1958, Jacques Bergier sends me another sighting for this day. It was reported in *Le Parisien Libéré*, but several months later, which explain why I had not seen it earlier. This new sighting was also found to be on the BAVIC line and brought the number up to seven (out of a total of 10) sightings which were strictly on a line. Dr Menzel has this to say: “Why did his correspondent send him this sighting? The probability is high

that the friend had already noted its closeness to the BAVIC line... If the sighting had *not* fallen on the line, we most certainly would never have heard of it.”

Until that point I had supposed that Dr Menzel had not read my book. Perhaps he cannot read. But let us refer to my book on page 206. Bergier, who is there compared with Dr Menzel, is referred to by me in these terms: “In France, my most stubborn and persistent adversary is the physicist Jacques Bergier, of the New York Academy of Sciences, a former student of Madame Curie. Sometimes we both refute each other in the same newspaper issue...”(1)

Yes indeed! Bergier, my “accomplice”, if we are to believe Dr Menzel, turns out to be none other than the Dr Menzel of the French saucer world. I cannot believe that Dr Menzel can have forgotten my description of Bergier. Courtesy alone forbids my suggesting the explanation of why one man, in a scientific argument, should so readily accuse his opponent of bad faith. Need I say more

In conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about Vauriat which a sighting enabled us to locate along the previously established BAVIC line. This line had been calculated with extreme precision by Jacques Vallée who based himself on numerous sightings other than those of September 24, 1954. His calculations have been tested in France by another method, equally strict, and the result is identical. This is the line that was marked out across the map of the Puy de Dome region and with which we found Vauriat. Now, the agreement between the BAVIC line and the Vauriat sighting is such that, on the 1: 200,000 scale, where one millimetre equals 200 metres, *no error at all* can be detected.

For the sake of gratifying Dr Menzel, however, let us agree to allow an error of, say, 200 metres. How many sightings would be needed over the whole of France for chance to allow the possibility of placing *one* sighting in a corridor of 400 metres wide? Dr Menzels suggests 100. Very good. Let us grant him 200. In fact, on the basis of the formula that he proposes, the calculation calls for at least 1,500 sightings. Well, where are these sightings?

To sum up, all that is left of Dr Menzel’s arguments is an interesting, but not intentional, suggestion: it is that the non-aleatory character of the networks be analyzed by Topology. Apart from that, he has merely demonstrated his incompetence and his triviality. His self-admiration is so sincere that this demonstration will not profit him at all. The flying saucer is his hobby horse. It would be kinder to let him continue riding it. What he has to say about the subject of flying saucers is neither of interest nor of importance.

(1)Readers of the May-June, 1963, issue of the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW will recall that Aimé Michel’s article on Global Orthoteny Jacques Bergier produced the Vauriat sighting to Michael as an means of upsetting the BAVIC alignment and not in order to support Orthoteny. – Editor.