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Just a minute ...: Victoria mathematician ponders the possibility that we're actually living in the 10th or 11th century AD

Diane Dakers
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PHOTO CREDIT: Debra Brash, Times Colonist

University of Victoria mathematician Florin Diacu is studying the possibility that our chronology is all wrong, and the gap between the fall of the Roman Empire and today isn't the 16 centuries we've been led to believe. But even this specialist in celestial mechanics hasn't been able to come to any definite conclusion.

THE LOST MILLENNIUM

BY FLORIN DIACU; KNOPF CANADA;

312 PAGES; \$35

According to our calendar, this year is 2006. But what if it's not? What if historians and scholars have miscalculated chronology and we're actually living in the 10th century AD, rather than the 21st? That's what Russian mathematician Anatoli Fomenko believes, and he's made enough of a case for his history-rocking theory that UVic math professor Florin Diacu has made a study of his own on the subject.

When Diacu first heard about Fomenko's theory in 1994, the concept piqued his curiosity enough that he conducted some rudimentary research into the matter. But because he couldn't find an English translation of Fomenko's work, Diacu let the project slide. Six years later, though, a detailed magazine article about the Russian's theories caught the mathematician's attention and rekindled his curiosity about the chronology question, prompting him to resume his research in earnest.

After three years of investigation, Diacu documented his findings in a manuscript that would become the recently released book, *The Lost Millennium: History's Timetables Under Siege*.

"I did the research for fun because I wanted to know," says Diacu, a specialist in celestial

mechanics, something that figured significantly in his study of chronology. "It was just pure curiosity. I like to understand things. That's what mathematicians do."

In his search for the truth about chronology, Diacu considered everything from the Bible to astronomical calculations and observations, to the absence of human progress during the Middle Ages, to carbon dating of artifacts.

He also discovered Fomenko wasn't the first scientist to advance the theory that our calendar is out of whack. Among those who believed traditional history had it wrong was Isaac Newton, who spent the last few years of his life studying chronology, concluding that some significant historical events -- the legendary Argonautic Expedition, the fall of Troy and the founding of Rome -- were mis-dated by centuries.

In the end, after all his research, what Diacu concluded was that some of Fomenko's conclusions made sense and others were "blunders." What he didn't find, though, was a firm answer to his question about the accuracy of the chronology on which our calendar is based.

"My goal was to see whether Fomenko was right in his chronology, and not to blame him if he was not," says the Saanich resident. "The main question I had -- and still have -- was, 'Is chronology correct?' After looking at the existing arguments, I have reservations."

But he says he now knows there is a way to find the answer -- radiocarbon dating of historical artifacts, something the keepers of those artifacts aren't keen on. "That's something I can't implement by myself," says Diacu. "I need money and I need historians."

So far, though, Diacu hasn't heard a word from historians about The Lost Millennium. "I would like to hear from them. I'm curious to see how historians see these things," he says, noting that he expects the book will shake them up because, in it, he's questioning "something we've all learned in school that we thought was iron-clad -- and now all of a sudden, it changes."

He adds: "I have respect for what historians do and it's not their fault that chronology might be wrong because it was not historians who created chronology. It was scientists. ... But they just trust the existing chronology as they would trust in God. It's like a religion."

But Diacu has seen first-hand how history can be misrepresented -- or revised to suit the climate of the day. "Growing up in Romania, I had witnessed how Nicolae Ceausescu's regime rewrote history," writes Diacu, who fled his homeland in 1988, living as a political refugee in Germany before coming to Canada as a post-doctoral student. "Convenient aspects were emphasized, inconvenient details omitted and the past kept on changing. This had made me reflect on the fragility of history."

Knowing how easily history can be distorted and subjected to the interpretations of individual scholars through the ages, and having now seen the discrepancies in the research over the centuries, Diacu hopes The Lost Millennium will prompt readers to ask questions of their own and encourage historians and other scientists to help him find the answers.

"This is an attempt to raise awareness about how things are," he says. "I'm not saying historians are wrong. I'm saying, 'help me see if they're right,' and if they're right, fine. But as things are, there is no proof."

Victoria writer Diane Dakers has a BSc in physical sciences with a minor in mathematics.
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