

PETER TOMPKINS AND KRYPTOS

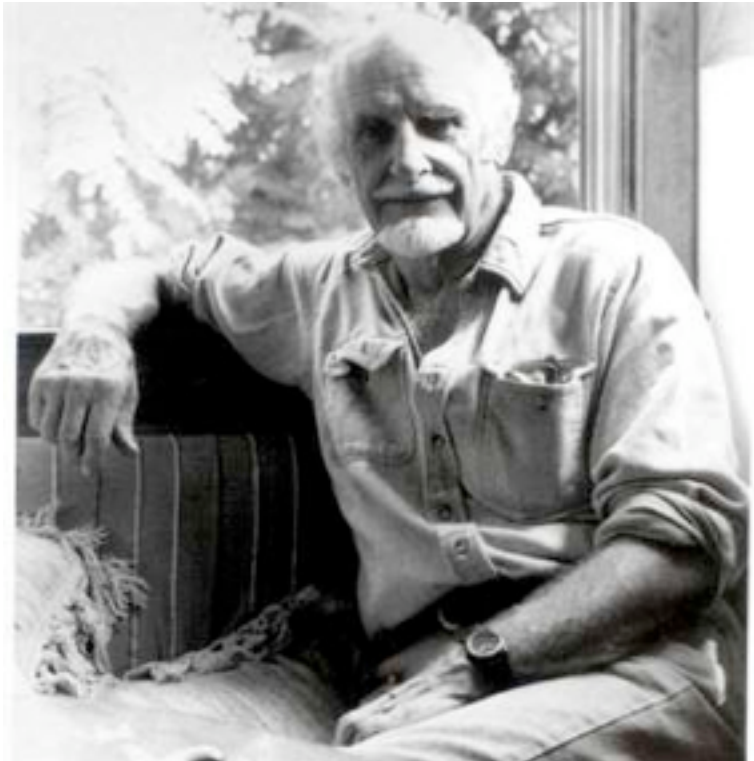


Photo © Loren Coleman, [Cryptomundo](#), Jan 2007

A study of shared secrets

Dr Randy Thompson
March 2010

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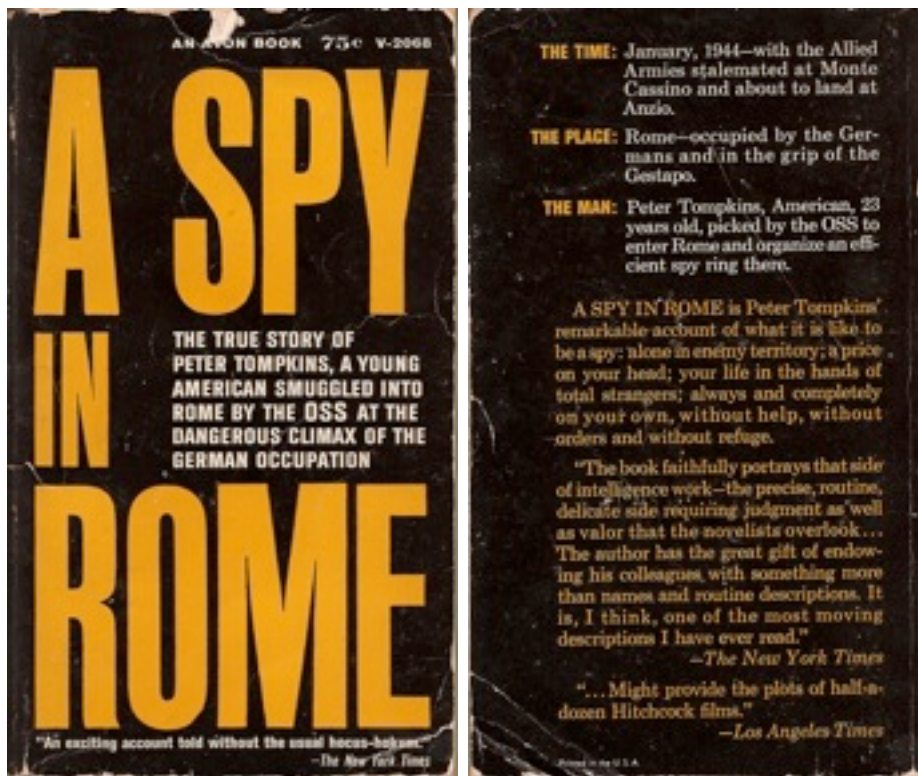
Introduction

Peter Tompkins passed away in January 2007, about a year and a half after I had first learned about Kryptos. That would have been just about the time that I was entertaining the notion that Kryptos was a giant enigma machine, with rotors somehow defined by the plaintext of the previously solved sections. Of course that notion led precisely to nowhere, but I was determined to never give up trying until Kryptos was solved (most likely not be me, I realized). I was captivated by the Kryptos mystery, enthralled by the sense of secrets and challenges, and compelled to “play spy” even if only in the context of a harmless puzzle.

Until the fall of 2009, I was oblivious to Peter Tompkins, and even then I only knew him as the author of *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*,¹ a book that I had identified as having [possible relevance to Kryptos](#).² I purchased the book on Amazon. It was several months later that I decided to look as closely at the author as I did the book, and I was absolutely floored.

What I discovered - when I finally bothered to look - is that **Peter Tompkins was a spy**. And when I say that he was a spy, I’m not talking about some rogue employee in a compartmentalized program who decided to become a traitor, a la “Falcon and the Snowman”. This man was an honest-to-goodness field agent hand-selected by General “Wild Bill” Donovan himself to direct the OSS efforts as an undercover agent behind enemy lines in Rome during World War II. Tompkins thereby contributed to the success and future of the OSS, which later became the CIA. (General Donovan has been referred to by some as the “father of the CIA”, and his men were known as his “shadow forces”.)

Fascinated by this discovery, I obtained a copy of Tompkins’ book, *A Spy in Rome*,³ which is basically the diary of his espionage operations in Rome. Picture a James Bond novel, complete with nerve-racking scenes where Bond is in the company of dangerous enemies who don’t know who he is. Now imagine that the story is written in first person, from Bond’s point of view. Next, imagine that Bond does not present himself as superhuman, unafraid, and without flaw. Rather, you feel his emotions, his fears, his insecurities, his losses, and his triumphs. Finally, imagine that it is a true story. That’s *A Spy in Rome*. It is an absolutely riveting cloak-and-dagger story, and you should run (don’t walk!) to your computer to order this out-of-print book from Amazon, Alibris, or eBay.



This book was published in 1962, around the time that a young Ed Scheidt began working at the CIA primarily in operations and ultimately as head of the CIA Cryptographic Center. I'd say the odds are fairly good that Scheidt has read Tompkins' book, although I can't be certain. Regardless, it is inconceivable to me that Scheidt could possibly have been unaware of Tompkins' exploits as a gatherer, exploiter, and clandestine disseminator of information.

Peter Tompkins was a brave patriot, an accomplished author, a gatherer of information, a keeper of secrets, and a master of clandestine operations and communications. He was the very definition of a "spy", at a time and place when being caught meant a quick death if you were lucky. By contrast, Kryptos is a game that some people are playing; a kind of brain teaser on super steroids. I am humbled by the comparison between Peter's sacrifices for the sake of his country and my sacrifices for the sake of entertainment and (perhaps) notoriety.

I do need to state for the record, however, that around 1972 the works of Peter Tompkins seemed to undergo a significant transformation from the factual (*A Spy in Rome*, 1962) and the speculative but still balanced (*Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, 1971) to the philosophical, bizarre, and occult (*Secret Life of Plants*,⁴ 1973). Perhaps the immense popularity of the pyramid book - combined with other popular 1970's distractions - got the better of him. (I am trying to be diplomatic.) Regardless of how one feels about the life and works of Peter Tompkins after that transformation, I don't think it detracts from the hero he was. Furthermore, it doesn't preclude the possibility that one or more of his books were referenced in the design of Kryptos.

I wish that I had met Peter Tompkins and had a chance to get to know him. I suppose that by reading some of his books, I have at least come into contact with his legacy; I have known a shadow of who he was. I guess that I have Kryptos to thank for that.

“Secrets” of Peter Tompkins

The following biography, including the image, was extracted from a post by Loren Coleman on [Cryptomundo](#), January 24, 2007:⁵



“Peter Tompkins was born April 19, 1919, in Athens, Georgia, but spent much of his childhood in Rome after his parents moved there to study art. His father was a sculptor; his mother, a painter. Schooled in France, Italy and Switzerland, Tompkins returned to the United States to attend Harvard College, but left early to become a war correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune and NBC.

“In 1941, Tompkins was recruited by “Wild Bill” Donovan to join the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA. He served as deputy to the chief of psychological warfare during the British-American invasion of north Africa in November 1942, as part of Operation Torch...

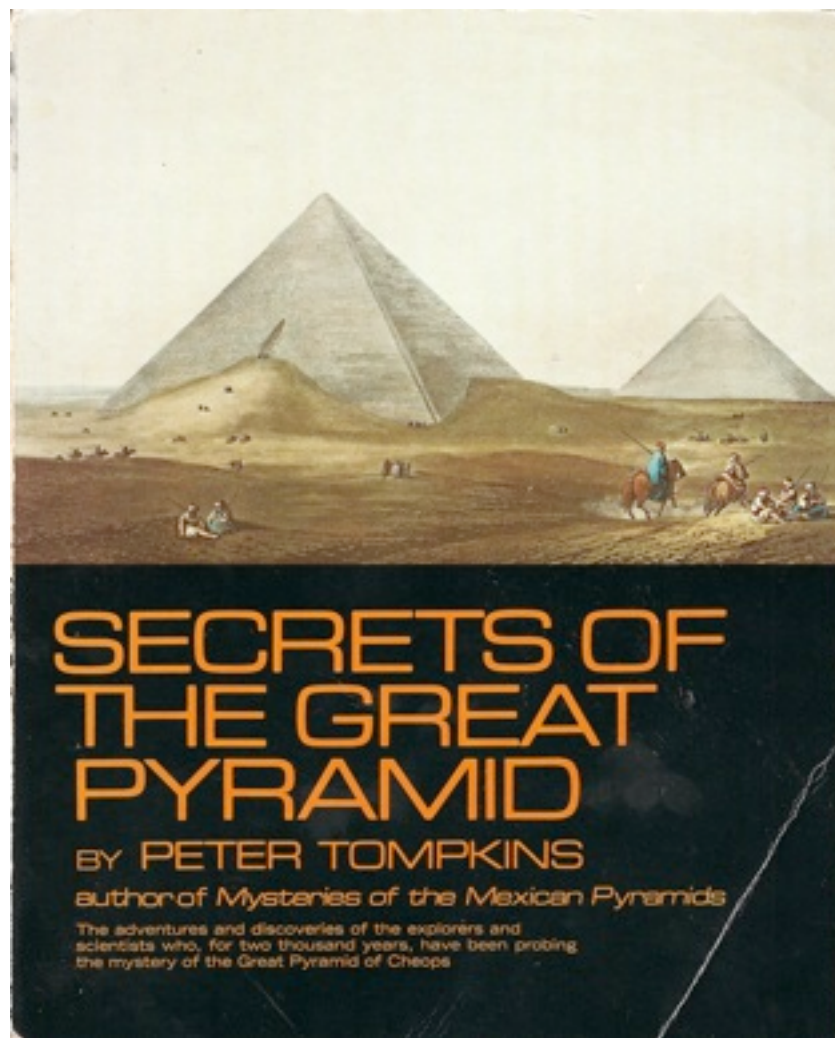
“One of the first missions of Donovan’s spy organization was Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, and Coon worked with Peter Tompkins. Carleton Coon was in charge of Torch and the affair was such a success that it insured the future of the OSS. OSS’s leadership, who were later connected to the Central Intelligence Group, then the Central Intelligence Agency, would never forget Coon for his contributions to the budding American intelligence community. Tompkins too became linked to spy work for several years and was thought of very highly within the OSS...

“With paramilitary, parachute and secret radio training, Tompkins was sent to Salerno in southwestern Italy in 1943 to infiltrate agents into enemy territory. Tompkins spent five months filing intelligence by secret radio and promoting partisan activities before being transferred to Berlin to spearhead OSS activities there. He was OSS Officer in Charge, Rome Area, and after the liberation of Italy moved on to spy in France and Germany...

“Tompkins later wrote mainstream magazine articles and numerous books, including The Secret Life of Plants, (written with another shadowy figure, Christopher Bird, with whom he wrote other works), Secrets of the Great Pyramid, Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids, The Magic of Obelisks, A Spy in Rome and Italy Betrayed.”

Note the list of books at the end of the biography. Peter Tompkins was a man obsessed with secrets, mysteries, and (in later years) hidden forces of nature and other occult and/or new age stuff. (No value judgments here.) Actually, an important book, *Secrets of the Soil*,⁶ is missing from the above list. I'll be mentioning that book again in a later section.

Meanwhile, let's consider the book that opened this door of study to me: *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*. Published in 1971, this book was a huge hit. In it, Tompkins does a fantastic job of providing a comprehensive view of research performed across the centuries regarding the Great Pyramid of Cheops. Detailed facts, measurements, and numerous theories (many of them competing) are presented in a way that even a layman can appreciate. While Tompkins does present some of the more unlikely and arcane beliefs held by others he does not strongly endorse them in this book.



If the content of this book doesn't clearly reveal how much research went into it, a brief perusal of its lengthy bibliography will. Peter Tompkins went to great lengths to gather information for this book. In 1971, the internet was called "the library", and it is no mystery which library Tompkins preferred for the purpose. The first paragraph of the "Acknowledgements" section of *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* reads as follows:

"My first debt is to the courteous and efficient staff of the Library of Congress, whose institution - along with those of other helpful librarians around the world - made the research for this book a delight instead of an ordeal; they are a better and cheaper investment for our future than more weapons of destruction."

The "Acknowledgements" section then proceeds to mention numerous individuals that contributed a great deal to Tompkins' efforts. So apparently, in the years leading up to 1971, Peter Tompkins spent a great deal of time at the Library of Congress. Indeed, it is easy to confirm this by Googling the term "*Peter Tompkins*" "*Library of Congress*" with the quotation marks included. Of note, there are these quotes obtained:

"Unlimited access to the stacks of the Library of Congress allowed me to rewrite, from sources more rational and better informed, all manner of history, both recent and ancient, deliberately distorted by establishment hacks."

-Peter Tompkins' own website at <http://www.odeion.org/petertompkins/>

"Peter Tompkins' search into this secret world was mostly conducted in the bowels of the Library of Congress, where little Ptolemy [Peter's son] often accompanied him. Together they trod the underground corridors of power, dividing their time between Capitol Hill and the suburb of Maclean, near the Langley HQ of the CIA, then fully engaged in its own subterranean activities. Behind those neat lawns and prim letterboxes, secrets seethed."

-Ruth Braden book review of "Secret Life of Parents" by Ptolemy Tompkins

So in the late 1960's to early 1970's, at least, Peter Tompkins enjoyed unlimited access to the stacks of the Library of Congress and spent a great deal of time there (otherwise, he was near Langley). Given that he had been granted such privileges, used them extensively, and made it his first debt to acknowledge the staff, I find it most probable that Peter Tompkins had at some point made the acquaintance of Herbert J Sanborn Sr, Chief of the Exhibits Office at the Library of Congress, and father of Jim Sanborn. Perhaps the two were even friends at one time, but that is pure speculation.

As I described earlier, Tompkins' work took a significant turn towards the fringe with the publication of *The Secret Life of Plants* in 1973 (with Christopher Bird). In 1989, Tompkins and Bird teamed up again to produce *Secrets of the Soil*, a New Age version of organic farming (to put it mildly). Later we'll delve more deeply into this latter book, but for now I'll make a high level observation: if you strip away some of the more esoteric layers of these publications, what remains is an indictment of modern biotech and a philosophical treatment of how we can harness nature's hidden forces to do a better job using our land. (The specific proposals of how to do so are the controversial aspects.) That sounds a bit like Jim Sanborn's modus operandi, minus the fringe science, of course. Here is an interesting quote that suggests that Sanborn shares Tompkins' low opinion of biotech:

"[Adam Lerner, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art] sees a connection between Sanborn and some of today's artistic activists, who incorporate real science into their art to drive home a political point -- about the failings of biotech, maybe, or the way we use our land. Yet there's a difference: Sanborn's work never preaches, it just shows.

"What is the comment? You don't know," Lerner says. "That is what makes it so good."

-Blake Gopnik, *Sparkling Interest Within the Sphere of Art*, **Washington Post**, Aug 25, 2009

And so we have established potential connections between Peter Tompkins, Ed Scheidt, Herbert J Sanborn Sr, and Jim Sanborn himself. If that's all I had turned up at this point, I wouldn't have bothered with this report. But that is not all. Not nearly.

We are now going to dive into Kryptos itself to see whether there are any connections to the works of Peter Tompkins.

“Secrets” of Kryptos

There is an old joke, usually told by aging Physics professors to young Physics students, that goes something like this:

A farmer thinks that his chickens may be ill, and he calls a biologist, a chemist, and a physicist to help him get to the bottom of it. After some observation, the biologist says “I can tell you for sure that there's something wrong with the chickens, but I don't know what it is.” The chemist did some blood work and announced, “I can tell you what infection your chickens have, but I don't know how they contracted it.” Meanwhile, the Physicist had just been sitting there writing furiously in his notebook. Suddenly, he

jumped up and shouted, “I have the answer, but it only works for spherical chickens in a vacuum!”

Well, I do remember that I thought it was funny when I was the young physics student, but I don't really think it's that funny now. The moral of the story is that sometimes, when a problem is very complicated, it can help to ignore some of the finer detail and focus on the big picture. The key is knowing what you can ignore and when. Kryptos is no different. Considering the sheer number of interesting aspects of the artwork, including the plain text deciphered so far, there are so many details that one can easily get overwhelmed if (s)he tries to take it all in at once. For one thing, not everything that seems interesting will ultimately be significant (and/or useful). For another, the things that are significant and useful may have to be interpreted and used in the proper order.

How well I recall the early days of my work on Kryptos: having new, wild ideas sometimes in the middle of the night; thinking “oh my God, that HAS to be it”; lying in bed sleepless, suddenly paranoid that someone else has probably had the same idea as me at almost the same instant; losing sleep until I finally got up and tested my theory in order to beat the other guy to the punch. I knew better than to present something like that prior to testing it myself, and the quick ideas always failed. So I was quiet in the Kryptos community for the better part of three and a half years. Patiently listening, I wish I had a dime for every time someone in the community opined “K₄ is probably really simple, and it will shock us with how it was right there under our noses, but nobody thought of it the right way” or “just keep turning over every rock”.

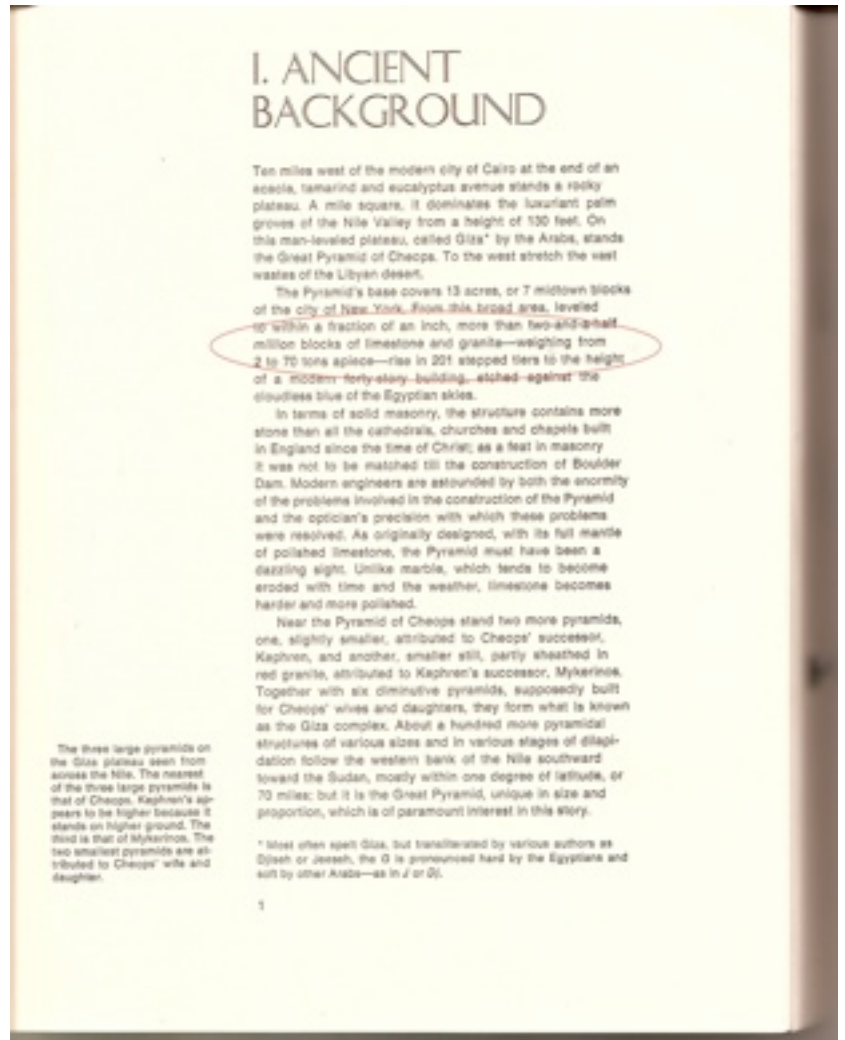
Then slowly, surely, my appraisal of Kryptos changed. I began to accept that Kryptos might require hard work. I'm not talking “hard” as in “trying a bunch of different things until something worked and the answer popped out”. I mean “hard” as in “meticulously going through hypotheses and thought experiments, analyzing clues and noticing signs”. (To mix some metaphors, Kryptos is like one of those carnival games that is extremely hard to win and yet is designed to seem as if you *almost* win on any given attempt, thus luring you on.) I began to iteratively ignore some clues in favor of others, making the chicken as spherical as it could be and seeing where it got me. And slowly I made progress, and [APEX Theory](#) took form.

Note: By the way, even though I came upon the fascinating things presented here while trying to extend APEX Theory, the discoveries are supplementary and independent. That is, they work hand-in-hand with my theory and even advance it, but they also stand on their own merits. So anybody that doesn't especially like APEX Theory still may find these ideas attractive.

Anyway, as I said in the introduction, I was oblivious to Peter Tompkins until the Fall of 2009, and even then I only knew him as the author of *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, a book that I had identified as having possible relevance to Kryptos. Little did I know at the time that what I had in my hands was the very heart of the “spherical chicken”. In other words, I strongly believe that various elements of Kryptos (i.e. not just the sculpture itself) contain numerous parallels to the works of Peter Tompkins, and that these parallels were intentional.

Let’s begin with the parallels related to the Great Pyramid:

- From page 1 of *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, the main component of the Great Pyramid is limestone (see image at right)
- There is a chunk of limestone on the ground next to the Kryptos sculpture (below, right)
- “The final part is obviously the, you know, the apex of the pyramid there.” (Quote by Jim Sanborn)
- The plaintext of K3 originates from Carter’s book about King Tut’s Tomb (in ancient Egypt)
- K3 and K4 are suggestively paired together and apart from the rest, on a subsequent Kryptos-related Sanborn piece known as “Antipodes”
- Two other Kryptos materials, petrified wood and copper were also found in the Great Pyramid



- From page 15 of *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, the interior chambers of the Great Pyramid were fashioned from “polished red granite” (see image at the right)

- “Polished red granite” was also used by Sanborn at the CIA (quoting a description, most likely provided by Sanborn, found at the [CIA website](#))

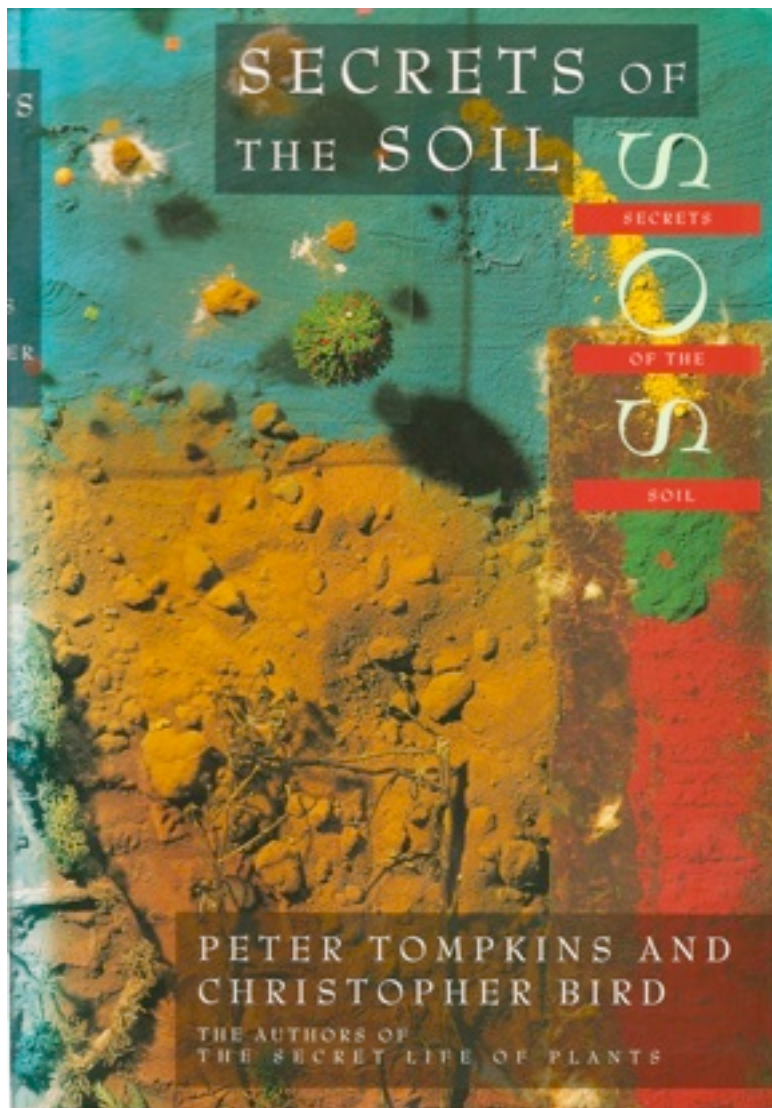


- There is a “Khufu-looking-pyramid” structure in the strata, according to [Monet's Kryptos Observations](#). (Note that “Khufu” is another name for “Cheops”, the creator of the Great Pyramid.)



Photo from “[Monet's Kryptos Observations](#)”

Now let's consider another Tompkins book entitled *Secrets of the Soil*, published in 1989 just before Sanborn and Scheidt were working out encryption methods for Kryptos. I became interested in this book only because of the possible relationship between its abbreviation (SOS) and the similar clue in the Morse Code. So I searched around on the internet to get more information about the various editions of this book. (Yes, I know that in Morse Code "SOS" is a prosign as opposed to an acronym, but in popular culture the distinction has been blurred, and I can't say with certainty that Sanborn wouldn't have "gone there" with his hint.) Nevertheless, I found some things that made the connection far more compelling. First of all, the UK version of the First Edition has a very interesting dust jacket:



Note that the image contains a cross section of ground, with some plant parts and soil, but it also contains a huge "SOS" turned sideways and heading down into the ground. Not only does this seem to be a curious link to the "SOS" in the Morse, but it also resonates well with the plaintext snippet from K2, "The information was gathered and transmitted underground." I always wondered why anyone would "transmit" anything into the ground. Perhaps now I know. Indeed, if one reads the book, there is a chapter that discusses the use of electromagnetic energy transmitted into the ground for the purpose of eliminating certain pests. Intrigued, I purchased a used copy of *Secrets of the Soil* from Alibris, and found many more parallels to Kryptos:

- There is a small whirlpool near the foot of the Kryptos sculpture, positioned even closer to the copper plate than the chunk of limestone



Image captured from video at ["The Kryptos Project"](#), Jew-Lee Lann

- Regarding the whirlpool, Jim Sanborn wrote

*"In a small pool on the plaza, partly surrounded by the copper plate, water will be **turbulent** and provocative, constantly **agitated** into standing waves."*

-Jim Sanborn letter to Agency, From Gary Phillip's **Realm of Twelve** site

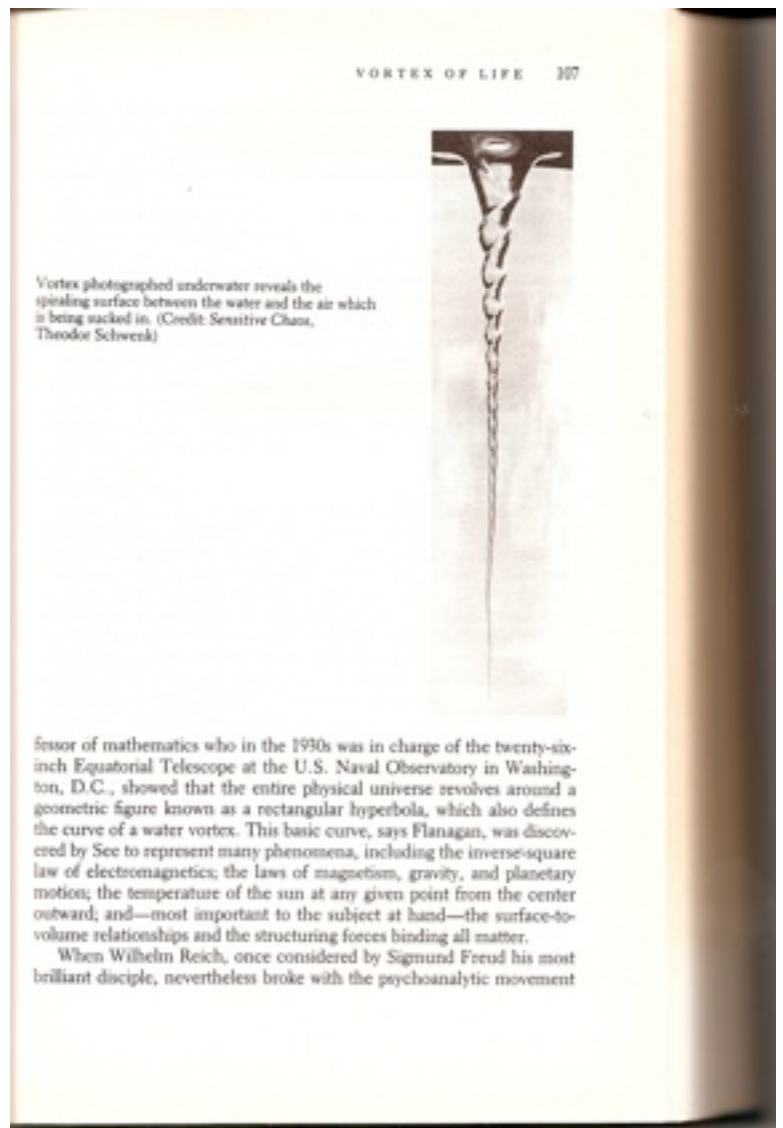
- *Secrets of the Soil* contains a chapter entitled "Vortex of Life" regarding the hidden powers of vortices. There is even a section on the power of whirlpools. (See the image below and to the right.) It is interesting to compare Sanborn's description of the Kryptos whirlpool with the following description of whirlpools from the book:

*"Flanagan realized the same cosmic energies could be captured in water undergoing **turbulent** chaotic movement or vortical flow and - most important - that these energies would remain in the water after the flow has ceased until the water was again **agitated** violently enough to disrupt them."*

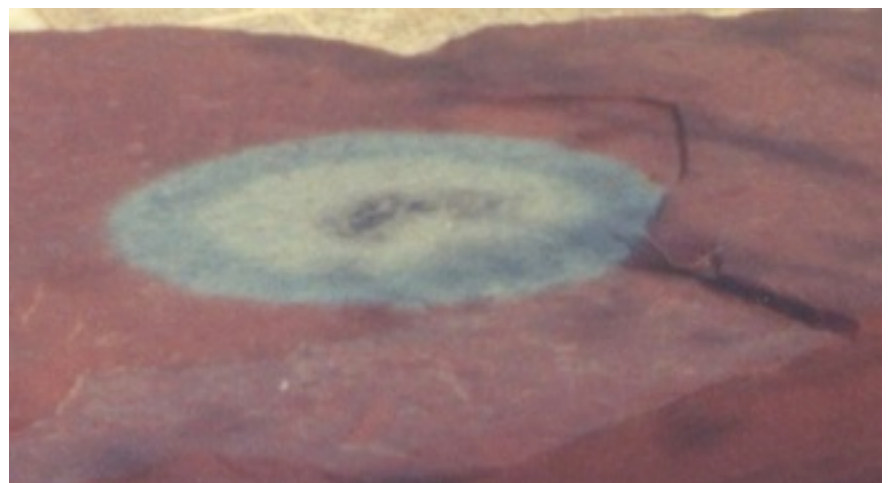
-Peter Tompkins, *Secrets of the Soil*, Page 108

- *Secrets of the Soil* is also replete with theories about hidden natural forces, which are part of Sanborn's typical theme

- The plaintext of K₄ is said (by those who supposedly have been shown it) to be philosophical and abstract. *Secrets of the Soil* would do quite nicely as a source for such material, if a book code were used



- There is a mysterious “Green Blob” surrounded by a copper-colored region “behind” the Kryptos sculpture (image at right)



- The “Green Blob” resembles this black and white image (at right) of a copper chloride “Chromatograph” of a “bio-dynamic” material known as BD500. This image was extracted from the lower right part of a figure on page 300 of *Secrets of the Soil*



Conclusions

This report details numerous potential connections between Peter Tompkins and Kryptos.

Tompkins was an OSS spy that had an impact on the history of the CIA, wrote an espionage book that was most likely known to both Sanborn and Scheidt, and probably had (at least) a professional relationship with Jim Sanborn's father. Tompkins' subsequent books contain material that is rich with parallels to various elements of Kryptos and quotes by Jim Sanborn. No other treatment that I have seen explains so many Kryptos elements in one simple coherent thesis: **Kryptos is based upon the literary works of Peter Tompkins.**

Perhaps not all of these discoveries are meaningful, but I am inclined to believe that the net result is that Kryptos indeed contains references to works by Tompkins. And as long as we are entertaining the notion that such references exist, we might as well wonder why. When asked how many encryption techniques were used in Kryptos, Sanborn responded “maybe five or six”. Is it a stretch to consider that a book code - one of the most mysterious and alluring of the encryption methods - is one of them? Given that APEX Theory strongly suggests that a book code is required, I already have my answer. But for those of you who don't subscribe to APEX Theory, you could at least consider the ramifications of these new findings. Perhaps you can use them as a springboard for your own studies.

In the next section, I merge this work with APEX Theory to form a plan of action that I believe will result in the final solution. Opponents of APEX Theory can tune out now.

Addendum: Connection with APEX Theory

Last summer, I had been working on K₄ for about four years, and I presented a multi-step process (called “APEX Theory”) which I believe will ultimately lead to the solution. Rather than clutter up this report with the details, I’ll refer you to APEX Theory via [this link](#).

By last fall, I had already concluded that K₄ probably employs a book code and that the topic might somehow be related to the Great Pyramid of Cheops. To my initial delight, a Google search yielded a treasure trove of results, and my imagination was sparked by each and every one. But eventually, as I saw that the possibilities were far too many to explore in a lifetime, my delight changed into dismay. I realized soon enough that I was highly unlikely to ever guess exactly which book I needed for a potential attack, but I consoled myself with the fact that it would be fun to learn a little bit more about the topic. So I obtained a copy of *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, and I commenced reading. My selection of that particular book was based on several things, including its immense popularity, its vintage (not so old as to be out of print and rare, like some of the others that emerged from the Google search, but not so new that it is post-Kryptos) and because of the brief description of its subject matter, which seemed to be spot-on. I figured that these qualities made it an excellent candidate for use in a puzzle such as this. But my selection had nothing to do with the author, who I figured was just some scholarly gentleman who writes intriguing historical books. So imagine my surprise when I discovered that that “scholarly gentleman” had been an undercover operative for the OSS in World War II, who sent intelligence via secret radio, and who also played a critical role in the (pre)history of the CIA, all facts that were most likely known to Ed Scheidt. And I had had one of his books in my hands for months, for entirely different reasons! That’s a pretty steep coincidence. And that coincidence led me to investigate further, resulting in the many more coincidences that I have presented here. Sure, I realize that meaningless coincidences are a dime a dozen, but when multiple coincidences emerge from one simple premise, that is something that shouldn’t be ignored.

I’m thinking that this Tompkins connection has done two things: it has confirmed that my line of reasoning in APEX Theory is fairly close to the mark, and if a book code is really the answer then it has also decreased my search space from millions of possible source texts down to a manageable number. I consider confirmation of my reasoning and a significant reduction in search space to be a major breakthrough, and I have posted that opinion on various message boards.

Combining the discoveries presented here with the book code conclusion of APEX Theory, I believe that one of the three Tompkins books discussed above (i.e. *A Spy in Rome*, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, or *Secrets of the Soil*) is possibly the source. My current favorite is *Secrets of the Soil* because of the presence of “SOS” as the last clue in the Morse Code and because

of the proximity of the whirlpool to the sculpture. My second favorite is *A Spy in Rome* because of the three books it is the most relevant to the CIA and yet is not referenced at all. (Perhaps the last challenge is to put all of the pieces together to find Tompkins and then take the final step to relevance.) The other book, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, is left as the least likely candidate due to (1) the location of its reference in the interior of the Morse clues rather than at the end, and (2) the relative distance from the sculpture to the elements that reference these books (i.e. the whirlpool is closer than the limestone piece).

In APEX Theory, K₄ is deconstructed using various clues and signs, and the result is a sequence of 48 characters that I refer to as the “APEX Sequence”. Actually, there are three variants of the APEX Sequence that arise from minor variations of a convention used in step 9. These variants, with differences colored in red, are...

APEX 1:

“EBXAJRAAJPPBEHBLDVEPEXDXOVFXPARFZPEFACAGPEDPRXN”

APEX 2:

“EBLAJRAAJPPBEHBLDVEPEAXDXOVFXPARFZSEFACAGPEDPRXN”

APEX 3:

“EBLAJRAAJPPKEHBMMDVEPEAXDXOVFXPARFZSEFACAGPEDPRXN”

To complete the solution of K₄, I believe we need to group the characters in pairs or triplets, yielding either 24 or 16 words, respectively, extracted from the appropriate book. If done properly, this may result in a message of the expected length (around 100 characters). But a complication arises in that there are numerous ways one could use the APEX sequences to index into a book, and it’s possible that another transposition of characters or words is also required. I can conceive of over a hundred possible combinations of steps that may still be needed (not to mention the ones I have yet to conceive of) and since I don’t have any of these books in digital form, each combination will involve some manual effort.

I now have copies of the potential books, and I am preparing for a focused study in early April. (I usually only have a few hours per month to pursue Kryptos ideas, but upcoming events are providing me an opportunity to spend about 9 days of significant focus.) Between now and the study period, I’ll contemplate the possible existence of more clues in order to constrain the search space. I will document my findings and report them sometime in April 2010. Stay tuned.

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