

Resurfaced 1964 VRT video interview of Georges Lemaître

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An invaluable piece of science history has recently resurfaced: a 20-minute video interview featuring Georges Lemaître, the renowned Belgian Catholic priest and physicist credited as one of the originators of the theory of the Big Bang. This footage, once thought to have been lost forever, is one of a kind.

On December 31, 2022, the Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT), the national public-service broadcaster for the Flemish Community of Belgium, recovered a video recording of a 1964 interview of Georges Lemaître. In the video Lemaître delves into the origins of the Universe and expounds on his "hypothesis of the primeval atom," which posits that it expanded from a single point. This concept was initially put forth by Lemaître in 1931. A few months after the interview was conducted, Penzias and Wilson announced their discovery of the cosmic microwave background radiation - a discovery that would eventually lead to the science community widely embracing the theory of the Big Bang.

The scarcity of recordings capturing the discussions and perspectives of cosmologists from the beginning of the twentieth century has made this find particularly valuable. It provides a unique window into the past.

The interview, originally conducted in French, was aired with Flemish subtitles. Vatican astronomer Jean-Baptiste Kikwaya Eluo first took on the task to provide a French transcript of the interview. Shortly after, he enlisted Berkeley cosmologist Satya Gontcho A Gontcho to lead the English translation. Kikwaya Eluo and Gontcho A Gontcho, both French speakers, had in mind to enhance the accessibility of the Lemaître interview for the broader science community. They teamed up with Dominique Lambert, a Belgian theoretical physicist and philosopher at the University of Namur, Belgium, and the author of a book on Lemaître's life and work, to provide some context for the English translation and French transcription. Their work has been made available in a scientific paper on the arXiv, an open-access repository of scientific articles, and will soon be published in the Journal for the History of Astronomy.



Satya Gontcho A Gontcho - She is a French Cosmologist working at the forefront of the efforts to build the largest three-dimensional map of the observable universe ever made by mankind in order to uncover the nature of Dark Energy. She is currently working as a Project Scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.