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Fraud and Forgery in Paleoanthropology

by Jerry Bergman, Northwest State College - December 23, 2009 - Part 2

The endless, vicious, and sometimes physical confrontations between the Leakeys and other leading anthropologists, such as Donald Johanson and Timothy White, are very illuminating as to how critically important preconceptions are in interpreting and understanding the extant fossil evidence. Because fossil evidence usually accounts for less than ten percent of the animal by volume (rarely are organs, muscles, skin, hair, or other parts preserved), this evidence can be interpreted in several ways, even in the rare situation in which a skeleton is fairly complete. Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*) is the most complete putative human ancestor skeleton discovered so far (Dalton 2006, p. 268). Only less than 40% of the skeletal remains were eventually recovered at Hadar, and debate still exists whether the bones recovered all belong to the same individual. Most other fossil finds consist of, at best, a few bone fragments and sometimes only teeth. As Lewontin noted, when we study the remote past, before the origin of the actual species *Homo sapiens*, we are faced with a fragmentary and disconnected fossil record. Despite the excited and optimistic claims that have been made by some paleontologists, no fossil hominid species can be established as our direct ancestor (Lewontin 1995, p. 163). A problem noted above is that cliques develop, and the leader of one of these cliques justified excluding others from examining the fossils by implying “that he had assembled the best possible team to study one set of fossils concerned (and thus by implication that it was unnecessary for others to see them).” Furthermore, the author of a *Science* report on the fossils asked “if it ‘really mattered’ whether only the describers and their cronies saw the type specimens of new species at first-hand” (Tattersall and Schwartz 2002, p. 240). They conclude that it is “absurd to act as if the finders of particular fossils are alone qualified to study them.” And that it is “one thing for high priests in temples to reserve access to religious relics; science is an entirely different case. Science is not a matter of faith (or of power); it is a matter of the free flow of information” (Tattersall and Schwartz 2002, p. 241).

Debates Part of Science

Debates are required to make progress in science—but the viciousness that Morell eloquently documents is hardly what

we would expect of paleoanthropologists who are interested in truth and desire to rationally evaluate their ideas. Nor is this behavior rare. Gardner notes that mainline anthropologists reacted to one fellow anthropologist, Dr. William Arens, who disagreed with the orthodox view “with the same fury they displayed toward Derek Freeman’s *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, a book exposing Mead’s gullibility in taking at face value the myths told to her by Samoan pranksters.” Gardner adds that Anthropologists have yelled insults at Arens in meetings. They have pounded him relentlessly in their writings. Reviewers called his book “dangerous” and “malicious” (Gardner 2000, pp. 139–140). The extent of the outrageous behavior shown by these individuals was so extreme that it could not be discussed in a family publication. In addition, the morals of some leading paleoanthropologists leave much to be desired. Some people, especially females, have concluded that Louis Leakey and his cohort took advantage of women by using their position to exploit them for sexual favors (Morell 1995). Some also condemn Louis’ son, Richard, as not only wrong but also ignorant. Holden wrote that some authorities actually view him “as a nonscientist who parades his lack of credentials in the many speeches he delivers.” His critics add that the “deficiencies in his education” show up in “sheer ignorance of basic evolutionary principles, and the non-African aspects of this field,” wrote C. Loring Brace of the University of Michigan in a scathing review of two books, *Origins and People of the Lake* (Holden 1981, p. 739). Professor Brace also contends that Leakey held very antiquated views on evolution. The major 1980s and 1990s war, though, was between the Leakey and Johanson camps involving, not only differing interpretations, but also claims that the other was ignorant. Professor Reiner Potsch von Zieten’s Key Discoveries Falsified Inquiry has now confirmed what the British *Guardian* called “one of archaeology’s most sensational finds”—a 36,000 year-old skull fragment discovered in a peat bog near Hamburg has now been falsified. Until falsified this fragment was believed to be a “vital missing link between modern humans and Neanderthals” (Harding 2005). The thirty-year academic career of the distinguished German anthropologist Professor

Reiner Potsch von Zieten “has now ended in disgrace after the revelation that he systematically falsified the dates on this and numerous other ‘stone-age’ relics” (Harding 2005, p. 1). The crucial skull fragment once believed to have come from the world’s oldest Neanderthal has, according to Oxford University’s radiocarbon dating unit, now been determined to be closer to a mere 7,500 years old. Other skulls were incorrectly dated by Potsch as well. After redating the evidence it was concluded that Potsch had methodically falsified the dates on numerous artifacts: he had simply made up the dates to fit his theories. Testing revealed all of the skulls dated by Potsch were, in fact, far younger than he had claimed. Thomas Terberger, who discovered the hoax, stated that as a result of the hoax “anthropology is going to have to completely revise its picture of modern man” (quoted in Harding 2005, p. 1). The committee also found that Von Zieten committed numerous other “falsehoods and manipulations.” His deceptions were so serious that it “may mean an entire tranche of the history of man’s development will have to be rewritten” (Harding 2005, p. 1). Yet another of Professor Von Zieten’s finds, the Binshof-Speyer woman, was determined to have lived in 1300 BC, not 21,000 years ago as Von Zieten argued, and the Paderborn-Sande man, which was dated by the professor at 27400 BC, died only “a couple of hundred years ago, in 1750” (Harding 2005, p. 1). Further research found that Potsch had passed off fake fossils as real and had also plagiarized other scientists’ work. The scandal was finally exposed when Professor Potsch was caught trying to sell his department’s entire chimpanzee collection to a museum in the United States. The committee that investigated him required ten different meetings with twelve witnesses to produce findings that the committee documented “were increasingly bizarre. After a while it was hard to take it seriously It was just unbelievable. . . . what he did was incredible” (quoted in Harding 2005, p. 2). It was also determined that the professor, who had a fondness for Porsches and Cuban cigars, could not even operate the carbon dating equipment that he had claimed to have used to produce his now discredited dates! This claim should have aroused suspicion because carbon-14 dating is most always done by highly trained specialists in well-equipped labs, rarely by the paleontologists. Professor Von Zieten was forced to end his career after the confirmation of his many “falsehoods and manipulations” came to light. This scandal is critically important in physical anthropology because his 30-year academic career yielded many sensational finds that were important evidence for modern evolution theory. He evidently found that he could get away with the frauds, and continued to make outrageous claims until they became so ludicrous that somebody began to investigate. The university administrators admitted that they should have discovered the professor’s bizarre fabrications much earlier, but the “high profile anthropologist . . . proved difficult to pin down” (Harding 2005, p. 2).

The Hobbit Bone War

One of the latest paleoanthropology conflicts was over the so-called Hobbit fossil man bones believed to be those of eight individuals discovered in 2003 in the Liang Bua cave on the Indonesian island of Flores. The bones are from a creature now given the scientific name *Homo floresiensis*. The bones’ discoverer believed they represent a new branch of human evolution. A major problem in this interpretation is the bones were dated at only 18,000 years old. Although discovered by a team led by Mike Morwood, a rival team soon had taken possession of the skeleton. The conflict was exasperated when Indonesian paleoanthropologist Teuku Jacob, noting that pygmies still live nearby, concluded that the bones are not from a missing link, but rather are a “modern human pygmy with microcephaly” (Culotta 2005a). Morwood judged this conclusion mindboggling (Culotta 2005a). Tensions built when Jacob made public his conclusion that *H. floresiensis* is *not* a new human species, but a *Homo sapiens*. The bones were later returned to the scientists that discovered them “after months of dispute with a competing scientist who had taken them away” (Dalton 2005a).

Tim White and Chris Stringer agree with Morwood’s team and rejected Dr. Jacob’s conclusions (Dalton 2005a). Dr. Jacob sent rib bone pieces to be DNA analyzed to help settle the dispute, but those who advocated the new species theory have demanded that they be returned immediately (Dalton 2005a). Soon after the bones were returned, Morwood reported that they were “seriously damaged,” but Jacob insisted that the bones were intact when they left his lab (Culotta 2005b). Morwood also claimed that the bones were not only damaged, but a “still-unpublished jawbone ‘broke in half . . . and was badly glued back together, misaligned’” and “the left side of the pelvis—which he calls one of the hominids most distinct features—was ‘smashed’” making it much more difficult to determine the fossil’s missing link status (Culotta 2005b). Another problem is, in the process of making a mold to make copies of the bones, Jacob’s critics claimed that “breakage and loss of anatomic detail,” occurred and the “cranial base of the skull and jawbone” were allegedly seriously damaged (Culotta 2005b). The jaw was broken in half between the front teeth, obliterating structures critical to its identification and the pelvis was shattered into “100 crumbs” (Dalton 2005b, p. 934). Dr. Jacob denies doing any damage, noting that his lab is the only one in Indonesia set up for paleoanthropological study and has highly trained staff and up-to-date equipment. In fact, Jacob noted “his team reconstructed some of the remains, putting pieces together in order to study them” (Culotta 2005b). A number of paleoanthropologists have sided with Jacob, one noting that he saw the bones, including the left side of the pelvis, which was undamaged. Another researcher doubted if just making molds could damage the bones (Culotta 2005b). In October 2005 more evidence, including two jawbones that are virtually identical, was uncovered that,

Morwood claimed, supported the new species interpretation. Examples he cited in support of his interpretation include the jaws lacked a chin structure. The researchers argued that this was important because chins are a distinguishing feature of *H. sapiens*. They also found spectacularly long arm bones identified from two individuals (Culotta 2005). These finds raised more question than they answer. Dalton wrote that the Liang Bua Cave controversy is not rare, but in this case was unprecedented. Morwood added that the conflict between the paleoanthropologists resulted in his team not being allowed to work at the hobbit work site, the Liang Bua Cave: Disputes over paleoanthropology dig sites are not uncommon—there has been considerable squabbling over the control of hominid sites in Africa. But it is unprecedented to close down such a spectacular site. “Liang Bua is the crown jewel of the caves,” says Brown, adding that only a small percentage of it has been excavated so far. “This is where the team should be focusing” (Dalton 2005b, p. 935). Research has continued at other sites on the island of Flores and nearby islands, the researchers so far finding promising hints about the origin of *H. floresiensis*, but no new hominid bones. Work in the Soa Basin, for example, suggests that hominids were present on Flores significantly earlier than 840,000 years ago, the earliest date previously reported. . . . But without access to Liang Bua, the mysteries of the ancient “hobbit” people will probably remain secret for the foreseeable future (Dalton 2005b, p. 935). Nonetheless, the quarrel over whether the find really represents a new species continues to the extent that paleoanthropologist Peter Brown concluded



Pliocene Man

“It is a complete circus” (Dalton 2005a). The latest finds include fragments of six or more persons, producing the conclusion that Overall, *H. floresiensis* presents a fascinating conundrum and prompts some tantalizing predictions that will continue to strain credulity without more fossil evidence (Lieberman 2009, p. 42). One reason for this conundrum is that a “minuscule brain in a species so recent that also made stone tools has strained credulity” of researchers (Lieberman 2009, p. 41). The new view is problematic because “if proponents of the new view of hobbits are right, the first intercontinental migrations were undertaken hundreds of thousands of years earlier than” previously believed and by a fundamentally different kind of human, one that arguably had more in common with primitive little Lucy than the colonizer paleoanthropologists had envisioned. This scenario implies that scientists could conceivably locate a long-lost chapter of human prehistory in the form of a two-million-year record of this primitive pioneer stretching between Africa and Southeast Asia if they look in the right places (Wong 2009, p. 72). Needless to say, this conclusion “does not sit well with some researchers” for many reasons, including the concern that the “further back

we try to push the divergence of the Flores [hominin], the more difficult it becomes to explain why a [hominin] lineage that must have originated in Africa has left only one trace on the tiny island of Flores” (Wong 2009, p. 72). The new view has been challenged by a number of other scientists, including Field Museum of Chicago evolution primate expert Dr. Robert Martin who “remains unconvinced that *H. floresiensis* is a legitimate new species” (Wong 2009, p. 72). He has concluded that the first find, called LB1—the only example whose brain size was known—was a modern human with some yet unidentified medical disorder. As of this date, the conflict continues, but meanwhile many scientists are welcoming the shake-up. LB1 is “a hominid that no one would be saying anything about if we found it in Africa two million years ago,” asserts Matthew W. Tocheri of the Smithsonian Institution, who has analyzed the wrist bones of the hobbits. “The problem is that we’re finding it in Indonesia in essentially modern times” (Wong 2009, p. 73).

After five years and over a dozen scholarly papers on Hobbit, one researcher added that if we don’t find something in the next 15 years or so in that part of the world, I might start wondering whether we got this wrong. . . . The predictions are that we should find a whole bunch more [fossils] (Wong 2009, p. 73).

Aimé Rutot and the Eolith Controversy.

Belgian Museum conservator Aimé Rutot (1847–1933) was a leading European paleoanthropologist widely respected by many in the scientific community for decades. As a prominent scientist with an international

recognition, he published in the leading scientific journals not only in geology, but also in paleoanthropology (Bont 2003, p. 606). Rutot specialized in early human artifacts, especially stone flints (Bont 2003, p. 604). Rutot is most well known for his work on eoliths, artifacts believed to be the “crude evolutionary precursors of Paleolithic” tools that document human brain evolution. Eolith is Greek for eos meaning dawn and lithos meaning stone. Eoliths were first named and collected by Benjamin Harrison in about 1885 (O’Connor 2003, p. 255). The “dawn stone” finds were a major scholarly topic for decades. By evaluating the eoliths, Rutot and his many disciples concluded they were the products of the evolving human brain. They reasoned the eoliths were evidence that primitive brains produced primitive tools and more advanced evolved brains produced more advanced tools. Rutot and his supporters concluded that the eoliths were physical evidence that proved a very primitive human brain once existed, thus proving evolution. These pre-Paleolithic tools were earlier and simpler than those fashioned by more evolved humans—so simple that it was difficult to determine if they were even stones reworked

by humans. One of his many highly respected converts included Professor Hermann Klaatsch (1863–1916) who discussed in some detail Rutot’s work and its importance as evidence for human evolution (Klaatsch 1923, pp. 19, 117, 237, 246, 265). Another supporter of the eolith theory was Charles Dawson of the Piltdown forgery fame, who presented papers at conferences, such as the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1915, on the importance of eoliths in human evolution (Weiner 2003, p. 135). Around 1900 more discoveries strengthened Rutot’s belief in the human origins of eoliths (Bont 2003, p. 608). As many of the marks on the stones did not appear intentional, such as is obvious in Indian arrowheads, Rutot concluded the marks documented “a primitive idea of utilization” of stones (Bont 2003, p. 608). His ideas were then spread throughout the world by the sale of artifacts, statues, and pictures, all which served to sell human evolution to the public. They even were involved in the famous Piltdown forgery (Weiner 2003, pp. 55–56, 116). Rutot’s most ambitious museum project was the “three-dimensional reconstruction of human evolution” based on his eolith ideas that humans evolved from a “bestial precursor” to modern mankind. In this and other displays the Negro was often represented as the evolutionary predecessor of the white race (Bont, 2003, p. 627). The statues all depicted some combination of simian and human (often Negro) traits assembled according to his eolith theory, not fact. His view, in true Darwinian philosophy, was the “white Europeans were the vanguard of progress,” and that war was actually necessary for progress; both ideas were woven into his eolith theory (Bont 2003, p. 628). He also relied heavily on racism, concluding that the “three human races had only a very distant common ancestor.” As a result Rutot did not speak of “the origin” of humanity but of plural “origins.” In his view, the superficial similarities between the different races were based on resemblances in lifestyle, not on a common origin. Rutot would even go on to connect every human race with a type of anthropoid ape, stating that the former were the evolved and the latter the degenerate forms of a common stock (Bont 2003, p. 628). His success in spreading his Eolithic theory and his views of prehistoric races was due in part to the fact that they met accepted scientific standards. Furthermore, they were the bearers of ideas that were shared by at least some European scientists. . . . His ideas spread because he was able to involve lots of people in his expanding networks, at the center of which was his own museum. These networks helped him to be omnipresent. He published his articles in leading periodicals; he received archaeological finds from all over the world; his categories were used in important museums; his theories were taught by respected scholars; and his reconstructions of the past were widely known and accepted as authoritative. He skillfully used . . . different channels to spread his ideas—in popular



I read Wilson's Almanac

magazines as well as in universities (Bont 2003, p. 629). Rutot concluded that the evolution from Eolithic to Paleolithic man was not Darwinian, slow and gradual, but rather, based on the archaeological record and De Vries’ mutation theory, it occurred rapidly by leaps (Bont 2003, p. 616). From this evidence Rutot concluded “that evolution occurred by leaps and that small individual variations were of no importance in a long-term perspective” (Bont 2003, p. 616). Based on the archaeological record, Rutot determined that a “clear dividing line” existed between “eoliths and paleoliths,” which we know today was actually a division between naturally made and human made artifacts (Bont 2003, p. 616). Rutot cooperated with other scientists and other researchers by sending them reports, photographs, and even sample eoliths from his extensive collection for their evaluation. This enabled him to gain international support for his ideas. At the peak of this debate, in 1906, Rutot’s work was widely accepted and he received numerous scientific rewards, recognition, and honors. As more research was done, the doubts about both his theory and his evidence mounted. The main problem he and everyone else had was to distinguish “real eoliths” from “pseudo-eoliths” (Bont 2003, p. 610). The struggle between the supporters of his eolith theory and the detractors became fierce, with each side accusing the other of forgery, of retouching their photographs, and even some claiming that their critics were mentally ill (Bont 2003, p. 614). Most of Rutot’s examples of the putative oldest known human tools that he labeled eoliths have now been shown to be misidentified—careful examination has concluded that they showed no clear evidence of human workmanship, debunking Rutot’s whole eolith theory and, concurrently, his attempt to construct a prehistoric race of humans (Bont 2003, p. 604). Rutot’s “extensive collection of stone implements” has now been “discredited as an assemblage of forgeries and misinterpretations” (Bont 2003, p. 604). Rutot once remarked that, although “everything has been discredited,” by his peers, he still clung to his conclusions (Bont 2003, p. 605). Rutot tried to extrapolate from his eoliths the habits and mental capacities of the makers—now recognized as a foolish exercise, considering the fact that the eoliths were all natural, and not man-made. In his writings Rutot went into enormous detail about the character, motivations, goals, mentality, intelligence, attitudes, and logic of his race of people all based on his eolith stones! He concluded the eolith makers were passive, peaceful, and imitative creatures (Bont 2003, p. 616). The eoliths also had a “certain degree of perfection,” but no evidence of progressive or active creators, nor of their mental state. **WATCH THE WORD AND THE SWORD EVERY 1st and 3rd TUESDAY OF THE MONTH ON WHKY 14 Out of Hickory NC USA - This Years Theme For The Broadcasts Is CREATION versus EVOLUTION.**