

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Readers are invited to submit reviews of current literature relating to origins. Mailing address: ORIGINS, Geoscience Research Institute, 11060 Campus St., Loma Linda, California 92350 USA. The Institute does not distribute the publications reviewed; please contact the publisher directly.

THE EMERGENCE OF MAN SERIES. Vol. II: THE MISSING LINK. Maitland A. Edey. 1972. NY: Time-Life Books. 160 p.

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The Missing Link is volume two of Time-Life's new series, *The Emergence of Man*. The title is the kind that has long been associated with flights of science fiction; yet this is a book that purports to be reporting sober science fact. Implicit in the title is the claim that the Missing Link has in fact been found; that the Australopithecines (used in the widest possible sense of the term) are intermediate forms linking man and ape. This may seem an audacious claim. But it can't be dismissed as simply another example of sensationalism in scientific popularizations. Actually, the cool confidence of the title simply reflects the consensus opinion of today's paleoanthropologists.

In a way, what is disturbing about this book for creationists is its very excellence. Because the book is so attractive, it is all the more effective as an ambassador of the evolutionary view of human origins. Even the creationist critic must grant grudging kudos to Time-Life for producing a book with many laudable qualities:

1. The book is attractive. The visual impact of the book is probably more important than what is said in it, since more people will look at the pictures and illustrations than will read the text. Particularly impressive are the reconstructions of Australopithecines superimposed on actual photographs of African landscapes. The result is striking realism. It is interesting to note how the pendulum has shifted in reconstructions of fossil hominids. The Australopithecines of this volume look far more man-like than the Neanderthals of a generation ago!
2. It is reasonably accurate and current. Fossils found as recently as 1971 are included and one does not find gross errors or misrepresentations. Certainly the scientific credentials of the consulting editors, Sherwood Washburn of the University of

California at Berkeley and Bernard Campbell of the University of California at Los Angeles, are impeccable.

3. It is balanced. Devoting an entire volume to the Australopithecines gives Time-Life the chance to introduce more of the various lines of evidence that are used by paleoanthropologists. Thus the book deals with the artifactual evidence and inferences derived from the study of living primates as well as the fossil evidence. It devotes considerable space to behavioral as well as physical evolution. (There is an entire chapter on the social life of the Australopithecines.) And a chapter is also devoted to recent efforts to develop “objective” standardized means of calculating how closely related various species are and at the same time calibrate how rapidly evolutionary changes have occurred by measuring differences in the DNA or the differences in the blood protein molecules of species.
4. It is relatively honest in acknowledging the limited nature of the direct evidence paleoanthropology works with and the welter of conflicting interpretations present in the discipline. One of the most valuable features of this book is an inventory complete through 1971 of all Australopithecine finds. Although over 1400 specimens have been found, most are only scraps of bone or isolated teeth. No complete skeleton of one individual exists. The final picture essay of the book is also an inspired exercise in honesty. It features photographs of 15 paleoanthropologists together with brief statements by each expert. It is hard to find any two statements that agree!

For the creationist the most important sections of this volume are those dealing with the “hard evidence” — the fossil bones, the artifacts, the geological strata. Those portions describing the behavior of the Australopithecines and how they evolved from ape to hominid are of lesser value because they are almost purely speculative reconstructions based on current anthropological theory and inferences drawn from the behavior of living primates or other animals with supposedly similar ecological relationships. Even if one accepts the validity of what Washburn calls the “evolution game,” it is clear that these tales are still primarily science fiction. The problem is that they are based mainly on inferences drawn from indirect sources of information whose relevance is suspect

or are based on a body of evolutionary theory the creationist may not accept. One can be reasonably confident that 10 years from now new and quite different stories will be told.

The creationist who does not feel constrained to play the evolution game in the same manner must still come to terms with the direct, historical evidence: the fossils, the thousands of artifacts, other types of archeological evidence, and the geological context. This evidence raises certain questions:

- 1) Are current interpretations of the Australopithecines as erect bipeds with closer affinities morphologically to man than apes correct?
- 2) What is the meaning of the variability present in the Australopithecine fossils? Some experts identify as many as 4 distinct forms in Africa, and a few put the differences at the generic level.
- 3) Is the association of Australopithecine fossils and artifacts valid? This question is particularly critical if one assumes that the presence of artifact traditions, as opposed to simple opportunistic tool-use, is indicative of the presence of distinctly human cultural capabilities.
- 4) Also vital is the geological question concerning the relative age of these fossils.

Creationists could wish that Time-Life would give “equal time” to creationistic interpretations of origins in books of this sort that reach such a large public and are widely used as supplementary sources in schools. Such a wish could conceivably come true someday, particularly if current efforts in the textbook realm are successful. Time-Life is a commercial enterprise, of course. If there is a sufficient demand the day could come when one of the consulting editors in a series of this sort would be a creationist. It could come, that is, if creationists produce a demand; if there is a supply of creationistic paleoanthropologists with creditable scientific credentials; and if persuasive alternative interpretations are at hand.