

There Were Giants

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There *Were* Giants

LOREN C. EISELEY

IN 1941, one of the last boats to leave Java carried in the mail bags below decks, a small package addressed to a well-known scientist in the United States. In that parcel was the evidence for one of the most spectacular scientific discoveries of this century—a discovery that in normal times would immediately have reached the presses of the entire world. But bombs fell at Pearl Harbor. The long night at Bataan commenced. The Japs stormed ashore in Java, and the sender of that obscure little package vanished into the Oriental darkness.

Did he wonder briefly whether his precious specimen had reached sanctuary in the West? Is he alive and restless with the weight of his great secret? We do not know. We know only that he is the discoverer of one of the darkest and strangest secrets in the whole history of man's mysterious past. For in that little package was the jaw bone of a human giant—a giant from the primordial time-depths of the Ice Age. A giant, moreover, whose blood may bear a strange relationship to our own.

Since the days of Greek mythology, the world of fable has been busy with tales of giants. Men everywhere have been fascinated by legendary accounts of stalking monsters in human form. Pliny, the Roman naturalist, even speculated in what may, after all, prove to be a flash of uncanny foresight, that in the beginning all men were giants. The Biblical statement that "there were giants in those days" has long received puzzled acceptance by the devout. Yet until the little package came from Java, science had searched in vain for any evidence that would justify the tales persisting in folklore. Giants of a sort, it knew, of course. But those eight-foot unfortunates, occasionally seen in circuses, were the giants of pathology. Diseased pituitary glands were responsible for great size and, at the same time, a feeble and uncertain hold upon life.

Science had, then, found no evidence that any race of people ever, at any time, ranged beyond the size accorded to men of today. Now and then it had encountered and investigated excited rumors concerning giant men, only to find that the bones on which the rumors were based were not those of human beings, but of prehistoric beasts of monstrous size. As a matter of fact, evidence had seemed to point to a slight increase in man's stature within the past century or so. Then came the strange bone from the East.

II

Numerous active volcanos still boil and grumble in the interior of Java. They have been rumbling in a disgruntled sleep ever since Java rose

from the seabeds a million years ago, forming a long wide alley of land stretching eastward toward Australia and joining, at the same time, the continent of Asia.

That early men, heavy-browed, and apelike of feature, took quick advantage of that long protrusion of land to wander eastward into what are now the spice islands of Indonesia, we know from the bones that lie in the tumbled volcanic muds and the driftage in the river beds.

It was from a bank of the Solo River that the skull cap of the famed Java Man—*Pithecanthropus*—first came to light in 1895. The whole world has heard the story of how Dubois, a Dutch physician, discovered this low-browed forerunner of modern humanity, and how scientific and unscientific voices were pitched in bitter argument until subsequent discoveries of additional specimens gave *Pithecanthropus* an unchallenged place in college textbooks.

But apelike of feature though he was, this early human ancestor was completely unexceptional in terms of size. Like Peking man or the Neanderthal cave man of Europe, he seems to have been massive-browed, rugged, but of short stature—no taller, in fact, than many existing Eskimo or Japanese.

The story of human evolution was read by science as being merely the slow transformation of an erect-walking, ground-dwelling ape into a creature with a greatly enlarged brain and a less simian and protrusive face. There was plenty of evidence to show that throughout a long-time period our grosser facial features had grown steadily more sensitive and refined. There was no thought that any peculiarly large or strange human forms might have existed. Little more was expected than the filling in of certain gaps in the series of transitional types leading to modern man.

It was for just this reason that Dr. G. H. R. von Koenigswald of the Dutch Geological Survey had been prowling the back hills of Java for some years. Java had become the happy hunting ground of the paleontologists—the bone hunters. Its constantly growing series of fossil human remains proclaimed it a rich source of material upon the human past, and Dr. von Koenigswald had made more than one previous contribution to our knowledge of Ice Age man.

As time passed he pressed his work more assiduously. Funds from American research organizations began to aid his efforts. In Europe the war clouds darkened. World War II began. Still von Koenigswald pursued his labors with the steady purpose of those who delve in the depths beyond our petty concepts of time.

Von Koenigswald's search was rewarded. He found a bone—a fragment. In the Japanese war office the little yellow men were making their last plans. They were not concerned with bones nor the strange selfless

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science of the West. Let the foreign devils hunt bones if they would. Their own maps read Rice, Rubber, Oil, and the rising bloody sun of conquest over all.

Von Koenigswald wrote a little note to a brother scientist in New York. He sent a cast of the bone he had found. He did not write in detail about his find. There seemed plenty of time. The invasion fleets were creeping southward as he pondered his strange discovery. They came; and von Koenigswald passes from our story. But the cast, in due time, reached Dr. Franz Weidenreich, one of the two greatest living authorities on fossil man, himself the describer of the world-famed Peking man fossils.

III

It did not take this skilled anatomist long to determine that the unusual jaw and its accompanying teeth were human. Nor were they those of a pathological giant. Instead, they represented a healthy, normal man from the Javan jungles of a million years ago. But what a man!

Let the amazed Dr. Weidenreich himself describe the find. He writes: "*The jaw fragment is undoubtedly human but it exceeds by far in the size of the teeth and especially in the thickness of the bone all that is known hitherto not only of fossil or recent man but, so far as the bone is concerned, even the biggest gorilla of any collection in the world.*"

So impressed was Weidenreich by the character of this new human specimen that he suggested for its scientific title the appropriate name of *Goliath javanicus* (termed by von Koenigswald *Meganthropus paleojavanicus*).

The giant mandible is of a nature which makes its confusion with early anthropoid types impossible. The chin region reveals unmistakably human characteristics, and the teeth, though enormously large, are human in pattern. This mighty being who could have picked a modern Dempsey or Joe Louis apart like matchwood, was cast on primitive but human lines.

Curiously enough, there are hints that more than one race of these great creatures may have roamed the hills of southeastern Asia. A few years before the discovery of "Goliath," a huge lower molar tooth had been discovered in South China. Though the tooth had some human-like characters, no such enormous men were known at that time. In consequence, paleontologists, inspired by scientific caution, had tentatively named their discovery "Gigantopithecus," implying that it belonged to some form of giant anthropoid ape.

The new discovery, however, has caused Dr. Weidenreich to express the positive opinion that this huge molar belonged to a human being of even more heroic proportions than "Goliath." In the dim world of the early Ice Age, southern Asia had heard the tread of human feet whose like was never to be heard again.

Who were these strange beings? What relationship do they bear to ourselves? A thousand questions leap into the mind. Most of them cannot be answered until additional work is done—work that must await the return of peace to regions now in the hands of the enemy. Science is, nevertheless, already beginning to grope tentatively along the fringes of this weird problem.

The exact antiquity of the remains needs extended study, but there are suggestions that the fossils may be older than the “normal”-sized primitives such as Java man, though the latter may have overlapped “Goliath” on the earlier time scale. In fact there may have been both giant and ordinary-sized human types simultaneously in existence. If so, we can guess something of the shivering dread with which poor *Pithecanthropus* cowered away from the approach of his mighty relatives. For beings of such proportions, granted even a reasonably active brain such as they must have possessed, would have been undisputed masters of the jungle. From such evidence as we have, it is apparent that they must have carried the mighty weight and muscle of a gorilla, with a massive boned and muscled cranium to correspond to the powerful jaw.

Yet something in their giant makeup must have doomed them to eventual extinction. Were they too grandiose in conception—a wasteful experiment of nature? It is possible. Giantism comes often in the old age of a given type and forewarns its disappearance. It was so with the dinosaurs and the mammoths. Bulk quickly reaches the point of diminishing returns. Too much energy must be given to food gathering. The smaller and quicker-footed are often more adaptable to such vast environmental changes as were witnessed by the Ice Age World.

Does this mean that these human giants passed without leaving traces of their blood among us, without relationship, in fact, to the rest of mankind? Here again an answer is difficult. There have been suggestions, even before the discovery of “Goliath,” that certain of the features which characterize modern humanity are the result of what is called *pedomorphism*; that is, the retention of infantile characters into the adult stage. It has been pointed out, for example, that the young of the great anthropoid apes and of man are much more similar than are the adults. The thesis has been ventured that man owes certain of his distinctive characters to the retention of features which, in the anthropoid, are fetal or infantile and are rapidly lost. Weidenreich has dwelt on the fact that dwarf types among existing animal races, such as dogs, show the greatest reduction in the bony crests of the skull and a proportionately larger brain adjusted to a smaller and less massive brain box.

Since human evolution seems to reveal trends of this nature, are we to suspect that these great gorilloid beings may actually be related to ourselves, and that we represent some kind of “dwarf” sport which, reduced

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in size, and retaining a lengthier childhood, eventually lost the formidable characters of our huge forerunners? Again we do not know.

But of this we *can* be sure. The discovery of "Goliath" will immensely complicate the study of human evolution and introduce a myriad problems just as it seemed that a reasonable outline of our remote history was becoming possible. For now, at least, we know that somewhere in the jungles of a million years ago there roamed a mighty brother of the men from whom we seem to be descended. And of all the wild, incredible human faces which, age by age have stared at their own reflections in the ancient drinking holes of the Solo River, none, surely, were more formidable than his.

DUSK I LOVE

ELIZABETH R. WINTERS

dusk I love who know the morning's light,
the night's darkness, the black and white
of yes and no and all false and true.

I have lived with definite so long,
with wrong and right, with weak and strong,
with how much undefined, dusk, by you.

for I have seen the between hours,
when towers grew soft as flowers
and cold stones were stemmed in warmest hue.

and I have watched a kind gentle grace
take place behind the coarser face,
unloose the many masks old and new.

I, too, felt the purple air's dissent
from meant purpose and clear intent,
nothing certain but a changing view.

then let me have time's dusk perspective
to give the life men think they live
an outer shape and an inner clue.