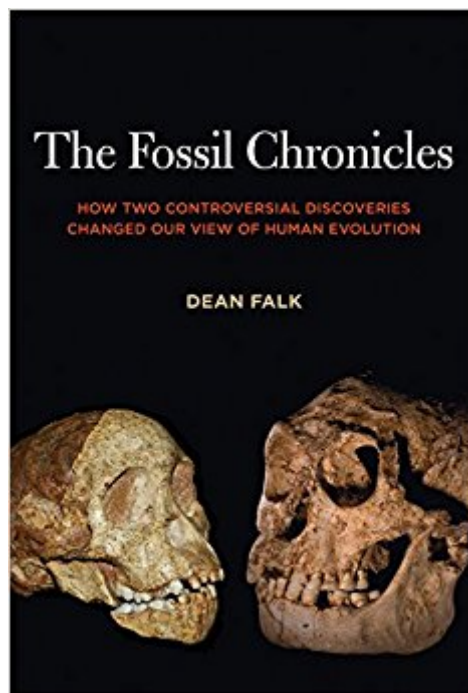




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The Fossil Chronicles: How Two Controversial Discoveries Changed Our View Of Human Evolution



Synopsis

Two discoveries of early human relatives, one in 1924 and one in 2003, radically changed scientific thinking about our origins. Dean Falk, a pioneer in the field of human brain evolution, offers this fast-paced insider's account of these discoveries, the behind-the-scenes politics embroiling the scientists who found and analyzed them, and the academic and religious controversies they generated. The first is the Taung child, a two-million-year-old skull from South Africa that led anatomist Raymond Dart to argue that this creature had walked upright and that Africa held the key to the fossil ancestry of our species. The second find consisted of the partial skeleton of a three-and-a-half-foot-tall woman, nicknamed Hobbit, from Flores Island, Indonesia. She is thought by scientists to belong to a new, recently extinct species of human, but her story is still unfolding. Falk, who has studied the brain casts of both Taung and Hobbit, reveals new evidence crucial to interpreting both discoveries and proposes surprising connections between this pair of extraordinary specimens.

Book Information

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• (Nature 2011-10-06) • "Brilliant. . . . Sparkles with scholarship and wit." • "The book is part historical drama, part neurological crash course and part autobiography The combination is refreshing." • (Wall Street Journal 2011-10-08) • "Infectious. . . . This book provides a powerful reminder that fossils should hold value to those beyond sometimes argumentative paleoanthropologists." • (Kristian J. Carlson, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Qtlly Review Of Biology 2013-03-22)

"With wit and authority, Falk tells the parallel stories of two fossil discoveries that surprised the world, revealing the larger significance of these finds. Her lively recounting combines new historical research with her first-hand involvement in controversial interpretations."—Pat Shipman, author of *The Animal Connection* and *The Man Who Found the Missing Link*; "An absorbing and engagingly personal account, by a leading participant, of two of the major 'brain wars' that have raged along the path to our current understanding of human evolution."—Ian Tattersall, author of *The Fossil Trail* and *Human Origins*; "In *The Fossil Chronicles*, Falk engages us with a 'tale of two brains'. While navigating the surfaces of these ancient brains, she reveals the convolutions of scientific controversies and how personalities and paleopolitics shape the ways we think about human evolution."—Nina G. Jablonski, author of *Skin: A Natural History*

The book is "The Fossil Chronicles" and the author is Dean Falk. For those readers interested in the fast-moving field of paleo-anthropology, this book is a must read. Professor Falk is a well-established expert in human brain evolution and is not afraid of controversy. She has been in skirmishes with high ego scientists before and use facts and logic to win her points. This book was a page turner for me. It was very interesting, had well argued positions, and taught me things that I didn't know before. In fact, I detect the overturning of some traditional thinking in the field of early man. It used to be accepted that the brain power needed to be a hunter-gatherer originated with *Homo erectus* and its larger brain some 1.6 million years ago. However, a lot of new evidence is challenging this wisdom. The book talks about two of those instances. First, Falk's reexamination of A. Africanus and Dart's writings reveals evolutionary brain development not usually attributed to Australopiths. Second, Falk's analysis of the Hobbits of Flores Island was a game-changer. She disproved the microcephalic argument with solid science and added her own thoughts about this mysterious hominin, which survived to be concurrent with our human ancestors. These miniature hominins having an ape-sized brain were capable of making stone tools, controlling fire, and hunting/butchering game animals. She helped convince me that Hobbit is a unique new species and one that overturns the conventional wisdom. Ralph D. Hermansen June 1, 2017

Interesting book, has insight on fossil discoveries. Seems subjective and too wordy over the story of discovery rather than the objective significance of the artifacts

First rate science, and the politics associated with professional/career ideas

THANKS

I learned more about Dean Falk than I wanted to know and less about hobbits and the Taung child. Talking about themselves rather than the purported topic seems to be the norm for anthropologists.

I'm normally not much of a reader, but I couldn't put this one down! Dean Falk's writing style is captivating and entertaining, and her explanations of cranial features, human ancestry and the brain are simple enough for anyone to understand.

A good read, maybe a bit too technical sometimes. And I would have like some sort of general discussion of what was happening with references to other areas.

In this book, Falk tells the compelling stories of two different discoveries and how their implications produced controversy. Through the book, you learn a lot about the specifics of the discoveries and gain deep insight, from the perspective of one of the reserarchers, in the processes concerned with the public reception and research.

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