An Impressive Defence of Archaeopteryx

The 2 May, 1986 issue of Science offered an impressive defence of Archaeopteryx by Alan J. Charig (et. al.), Chief Curator of Fossil Amphibians, Reptiles and Birds of the British Museum of National History. Entitled "Archaeopteryx is not a Forgery", the article (page 622 ff.) examines the charges made against the authenticity of the feathered Archaeopteryx fossils and answers each one in detail. This complete approach was necessary, according to the authors, because Archaeopteryx is one of the best "transitional" fossils known. The authors failed to mention older and contemporary (to Archaeopteryx) fossils of unquestionable birds.

A number of features, according to their report, argue for the authenticity of feathered Archaeopteryx fossils. Many of these are obvious from a comparison of both halves (slab and counterslab) of the limestone rock in which the Archaeopteryx fossil at the British Museum is found. They note that it does indeed often appear as if slab and counterslab do not match in these cases, even before preparation begins. But, there are certain key features which establish the necessary match as authentic.

The so-called "double-strike" feather is actually two feathers. An electron micrograph is provided in the article which clearly shows both shafts of both feathers involved in the "double-strike". British Museum scientists also point out that an additional support for the position that the feathers could not have been faked by the discoverers can be found in the fact that the full feather area of the fossil was not uncovered from the matrix until after the fossil was acquired by the Museum.

The British Museum scientists appear to have offered an impressive defence of the feathered Archaeopteryx fossils, including their own specimen. It should be added that this defence of the fossil itself still does not clear up the debate about exactly what kind of creature Archaeopteryx really was. We hope that our readers will carefully study Gerald Duffett's lecture diagram in this issue. This graphic comparison of Archaeopteryx characteristics clearly shows that even an authentic feathered Archaeopteryx is by no means a clear example of a creature that is half reptile and half bird.

by Paul A. Bartz

Source: 'Bible-Science Newsletter: Contrast', July-August 1986

************************************************************************