

de 69 años. El epílogo intenta dar respuesta a la pregunta ¿por qué regresó Moles a España a finales de 1941? Las reflexiones realizadas son el colofón de una brillante biografía. ■

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Miquel Carandell Baruzzi. *The Orce Man: Controversy, Media and Politics in Human Origins Research.* Leiden: Brill (Cultural Dynamics of Science, 3); 2021. 252 p. ISBN 978-90-04-43149-2. 129,00 €

The history of human origins is a history of chasing superlatives. Over the last one hundred and fifty years, the field of paleoanthropology —and especially the media frenzies that surround the science— has taken individual hominin discoveries and worked them into many narratives of humankind’s evolution, one fossil at a time. Consequently, we’ve come to think about the fossils in grandiose terms. The oldest. The biggest. The fastest. The smartest. The most like us.

This approach —playing up the search for “the most missing link of missing links”— means that the stories of fossil discoveries are often locked into an easily digestible template for public consumption. (Something akin to: “Scientists say that this fossil is the oldest human ancestors; other scientists disagree. Scientists debate this point for decades.”) It becomes easy, then, for stories of fossils to become stories of such controversies, played and replayed, over the course of a fossil’s life. Famous fossils —like the Taung Child, Lucy, and the entire Neanderthal species— are no strangers to such debates, but other, less-iconic, less-well-known fossils often find themselves in the same historical holding patterns of tension and discourse between members of scientific research communities, museums and institutions, and, of course, the public. Such is the case of the fossil “Orce Man.”

In *The Orce Man: Controversy, Media and Politics in Human Origins Research*, historian Miquel Carandell Baruzzi explores the history of the “Orce Man” fossil, discovered in Spain in Orce in 1982. Rather than simple re-chronicle the life history events of the fossil —originally thought to be a cranial fragment from a fossil hominin and later determined to belong to an ancient equine— Carandell

Baruzzi shows that the story of the fossil is one of politics, media, and scientific research agendas, institutions, and egos. Neatly moving beyond the “it’s a hominin, no it’s not, yes it is, no its not” part of the fossil’s history, *The Orce Man* shows how expectations for stories of scientific discoveries play out and how the public presentation of the fossil —its public life— shapes both its own narrative and its own discourse, particularly in the context of nationalism and state-building.

“Due to the public character of palaeoanthropology, as the Orce Man case shows, what starts out as restricted scientific skirmish can turn into a very public controversy,” Carandell Baruzzi notes in his introduction. Because there are so very, very few hominin remains in the historical record (especially compared to other fossils or paleo artifacts like chipped stone), each and every hominin fossil carries cultural cache and influence that sometimes outstrips its scientific significance. Any new fossil hominin discovery will, inevitably, be compared with its predecessors —not just the fossil’s anatomy, but the structure of the story of its discovery and reception. It’s easy to think that fossils discovered over a century ago will have little bearing on those discovered more recently— Carandell Baruzzi shows that this is not necessarily the case and certainly wasn’t with Orce Man.

The real strength of *The Orce Man* comes in Carandell Baruzzi’s analysis of Orce Man within the context of Spain’s political history in the 1980s-1990s, highlighting the role that science and newly forming scientific institutions, specifically, had in the post-Franco twentieth century. Drawing on extensive archival research as well as a series of oral history interviews, Carandell Baruzzi emphasizes how willing the Spanish press was to report on a discovery like the Orce Man fossil, particularly in the context of Spain’s radical political and social changes. Moreover, this reporting and the surrounding scientific discourse, invested Spain in the broader science of paleoanthropology and research agendas of the 1990s – specifically, in fossils that would fit the bill for the “first Europeans.” (Although Spain’s history of famous Paleolithic discoveries dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, the discovery of a fossil like “Orce Man” reinvigorated scientific interest in Spain’s paleoanthropological record.) Thus with its own fossil superlative —its own “first European”— Spain entered the paleoanthropological discourse of the 1980s-1990s in a way that it couldn’t or wouldn’t have decades prior.

“From its public presentation, the bone [e.g. Orce Man] become much more than a hominid or equine cranial fragment,” Carandell Baruzzi argues, “it was the flagship for certain claims, a way to control excavation sites, a gain for the next election, a way to get credibility restored, the solution to economic problems and even a chance for public recognition.” *The Orce Man: Controversy, Media and*

Politics in Human Origins Research is an important, carefully researched and argued piece of scholarship showing how paleoanthropology and its history does a lot of social, political, scientific, and cultural work with ancient bones. ■

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■ Klara Ana Kapova, Erik Persson, Tony Milligan and David Dunér (eds.) *Astrobiology and Society in Europe Today*. New York: Springer; 2018. 72 p. ISBN 978-3-319-96264-1. 46,00 USD.

La astrobiología es un vasto campo científico cuya constitución en los cercanos años 90 está asentada en la exobiología, una interesante disciplina científica nacida en pleno contexto de la Guerra Fría con la unión, de la mano de la NASA, de los estudios sobre el origen de la vida y la era espacial. Ampliando su campo de estudio hacia los exoplanetas, nuevos sistemas planetarios y enfoques cada vez más interdisciplinarios, la astrobiología, que se presenta como el estudio del origen y la distribución de la vida en el Universo, tiene implicaciones que desbordan el campo puramente científico. Dada la profundidad de sus planteamientos, sus investigaciones se hallan necesariamente entrelazadas con cuestiones de índole política, económica, cultural y social que en modo alguno pueden ser tomadas como aspectos secundarios o espurios. Estos aspectos, antes bien, abren nuevas cuestiones que deben ser abordadas.

El libro que reseñamos, desarrollado por la red multidisciplinar *COST Action Origins and evolution of life on Earth and in the Universe (ORIGINS)*, se hace cargo de estos aspectos en el contexto de la vida social y científica europea. Puede afirmarse que sus objetivos centrales son, por un lado, el reconocimiento de las implicaciones sociales de la astrobiología y, por tanto, del papel positivo de las ciencias sociales y las humanidades a la hora de optimizar la contribución que la astrobiología puede aportar a los ciudadanos europeos y, por otro lado, la recomendación de la creación de un gran consorcio de instituciones que dé lugar a un Instituto Europeo de Astrobiología (EAI por sus siglas en inglés), cuyos objetivos serían la coordinación y el liderazgo en las relaciones internacionales, los programas astrobiológicos, educativos, divulgativos, etc.