

The Guadeloupe Controversy: A Second Reply to Kurt Wise

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Having received a copy of the very lengthy article by Kurt Wise regarding the Guadeloupe skeleton, I am grateful for this opportunity to reply to his answers to the main questions that I have posed previously in this journal.¹ I note that most of his criticisms are directed at Cooper, and I will leave him to defend his claims, and I am sure that he will have little difficulty in so doing.

In reading the article, I found that I had marked almost every page of the typescript with one or more critical comments of the arguments used or the evidence presented. Rather than write a lengthy reply I will simply criticise just a few of the more glaring examples of inadequacy in the case Wise presents.

1. Mantell's 'Evidence'²

All that seems to exist of Mantell's 'evidence' is a set of lecture notes taken by a third party when Mantell lectured at Brighton in 1838. Wise admits that Mantell received his paper 'second hand' (he presumes Moreau de Jonnes) and assumes that his '*vertical scale was exaggerated*'. Mantell also described the skeleton as in a '*consolidated sand*' when in fact it is very hard limestone, suggesting that Mantell either could not tell the difference or his source of information was inaccurate. Wise uses Mantell's evidence as valid and uses one of his diagrams of the strata sections. Yet even when taken to task by Cooper nevertheless suggests that '*it is best that we do not reject his information but that we use it with caution*'. Had Cooper and I used such third hand inaccurate evidence Wise would have rightly rejected it as unacceptable.

2. Clerc's Excavation Site

Clerc describes his excavation site as '*. . . protected from high seas by madreporic reef and is close to a tranquil bay*.' This description is very clear. Yet how does Wise try to avoid the uncomfortable fact that Clerc excavated in soft sand behind the protecting reef whilst the skeleton was found in the tidal area on the beach front? He suggests that the reef Clerc referred to was one that is well out to sea, and that Clerc actually excavated in the intertidal zone on the beach proper.³ Yet he also suggests that the bodies were buried '*between the ancient reef and*

the island cliff'.⁴ Wise seems to change the site of burial to suit the particular objection he is trying to overcome.

Clerc specifically says that it was '*close to a tranquil bay*' and never refers to any tidal inundation during the excavation. Wise here is indulging in wishful thinking in reading into Clerc's paper inferences that it does not contain. Having made this contention he blandly claims that Clerc's description '*does not rule out the possibility that Clerc found artefacts* [comment — we are talking about skeletons!] *in solid limestone*',⁵ and that it is '*not impossible that Clerc's burial ground is, in places, hard sandstone*'.⁶ Even more amazingly he suggests that '*Clerc's description does allow for the possibility that at least some of his excavations were done in the intertidal zone of a beach near Morel*'.

Now either Clerc did or did not excavate on the beach side. If he did not, then Wise's dismissal of my conclusions (that Reynal de Saint-Michel deliberately introduced Clerc's excavations as a 'red herring') fails completely. If on the other hand Clerc **did** excavate on the beach, in solid rock and between tides, then he should have clearly said so, and his failure to even mention this would immediately put a very large question mark over his reliability for much else that he says. In view of this, my criticism of Saint-Michel remains. Incidentally, I note that one of Clerc's reports is dated 1970. If he is still alive the precise location of his excavations can be determined? It is furthermore interesting that he also never gave the precise location of his site. Why was this when he knew that he was working close to a site that had contained a contentious skeleton?

3. The State of the Skeleton

I have consistently sought an explanation of how the skeleton could be both crushed and yet be reasonably articulate in a solid rock. Wise tries to answer this in his scenario that the skeleton was of a woman '*who was wounded or tortured in war, or perhaps killed in a severe storm*' who was buried in sand that later became lithified.⁷

First, he has to speculate that she was tortured by an enemy, but her body was later repossessed by her tribe and then given a decent burial. This is hardly the situation that

occurs in intertribal wars. What would be the purpose of an invading tribe torturing a woman — for information regarding the disposition of the male defenders? In any case, crushing of the ribcage and tearing arms off is hardly torture, for the person would have quickly died from such treatment, and even savages would see little point in torturing a dead body!

Second, even if she was given a decent burial by her tribe, would they really have put her in the grave with the front right rib cage displaced to the left and the sternum buried in the rock above the left humerus? Surely they would have arranged it better than that?

I can only repeat my question which is that three features have to be explained simultaneously. How can a body remain fairly articulate (that is, the ligaments have not had time to decay), yet be severely distorted and then be buried in hardened rock? Wise has given his best suggestions, but I find none of them credible.

With Wise's inadequate explanation for the evidence discovered, I am reminded of the 'explanations' given for the 'ape-men' at Peking where only skulls were found and no other long bones of any significance. It was suggested that they were the hunting trophies of raids made by the resident cannibal 'ape-men' against nearby tribes. Another explanation was that they dried out the skulls of their dead before bringing them into the cave (where they were found mixed with the bones of animals hunted for their meat!) The far simpler explanation that they were the skulls of large macaques caught by humans for the delicacy of their cooked brains was not even considered.⁸

OVERALL CRITICISMS

I will pass over his inadequate excuses for the failure of the experts to precisely locate the skeleton site or to produce a section of the strata, and many other features in his article that could be strongly criticised. I would however like to stand back and take a fuller overview of the article as a whole in two particular aspects.

1. Scientific Standards

In the opening paragraphs he strongly criticises the scientific standards used by some creationists. It is to be admitted that there are occasional lapses, but he has no right to continue by claiming that there are '*many examples*'. On this subject of accuracy and objectivity, of greater interest is the high moral tone that Wise adopts in preaching to creationists to improve their standards of argument and evidence, yet in this and the other aspects his own arguments are far from reaching the high standards he is so keen that others should reach. I have illustrated some of these in the sections above, but others can be given such as the following.

I am accused of basing an accusation '*. . . only on negative evidence, which is shaky evidence indeed.*'⁹ Yet

he himself uses the argument that when a writer does not specifically mention the fact (which Wise would have wished he had) he nevertheless suggests that such omission does not rule out the possibility that it may be as Wise would like to interpret it. This is indeed implying a case from the absence of evidence.

Some examples, in addition to those given above, are:—

- (a) '*To deny that the British Museum skeleton came from Clerc's excavation pits does not deny that it came from another part of the same stratum*'.¹⁰ Agreed, but as the material is completely different, it is unlikely. More important, it is for Wise to provide some evidence at least for his statement rather than make such an unsupported inference to bolster his case.
- (b) '*It is not impossible that Clerc's burial ground is, in places, hard sandstone*'. Again he produces no evidence and furthermore seems to forget that the skeleton is encased in very hard limestone, not consolidated sandstone.

If Wise wishes us to refrain from using negative evidence he should set us all a good example by complying with his own strictures. Indeed, I could write much more on the sophistry that is evident in Wise's paper.

2. Wise's Stance

Having considered his method of presenting his replies I would like to turn to where Wise himself stands. I cannot but help note the following:

- (a) I have read the paper that he presented to the First International Conference on Creationism in 1986 in which he used many of the same arguments as he has in this paper; that is, that creationists should give much more cognisance of standard (evolutionary) methods of dating. Thus he is criticising creationist methods and supporting those various techniques that many creationists strongly reject.
- (b) At the beginning of this paper he gives a clear impression of his full support for the creationist cause; for example —
 - (i) His earnest desire that creationists should improve their '*image*' by not '*distorting the truth*' of which he claims there are '*many examples*'.
 - (ii) He compliments Dr Andrew Snelling for his editorial policy and thanks him '*on behalf of creationism*'.¹¹
 - (iii) At the end of the paper he particularly appeals to creationists to be more '*Christ-like*' — a comment that I found thought-provoking, although not in a way he might approve.
- (c) Having noted his comments at the beginning and end of his paper (and at a few other points), nevertheless, sandwiched between them, the main body of his paper is actually a strong defence of persons and techniques that are fully evolutionist. Examples are —

- (i) He clearly has a high regard for Stephen J. Gould. Although Gould considers '*all creationists are cheats and liars*', Wise nevertheless considers him '*respected*'. Respected by whom might I ask? Were a creationist to voice the same opinion of all evolutionists, I suspect he would lose the respect of many creationists immediately.
- (ii) He says that '*refutation of Darwin's ideas is not necessarily a refutation of evolutionary theory*',¹² which is to erect yet another line of defence that protects evolution. In the same paragraph he claims that '*modern theorists*' are more in favour of '*spasmodic evolutionary change*'. This is only another name for '*punctuated equilibrium*', the new evolutionary theory proposed by Gould and Eldredge to get over the problem of the gaps in the fossil record.
- On this subject, I note that Wise is at the same University as Gould and I cannot but wonder if there has been any influence or other connection between them. Upon inquiry, I discover that Gould was Wise's Ph.D. supervisor! Then as a member of a famous (establishment) university, plus as a student of Gould's, he must have surely come under very heavy fire for his stand as a creationist? Perhaps he could give us some instances of the strong opposition that he has no doubt had to suffer under?
- (iii) He states that '*The theory of evolution cannot be thoroughly negated by any such evidence — evolution can merely be altered . . .*'.¹³ What evidence **would** negate the theory in his opinion?
- (iv) As I have mentioned above, the whole paper is a defence of standard evolutionary dating methods. Indeed, it is a very lengthy paper that will occupy many costly pages of a prestigious creationist journal — space that in my opinion could be put to much better use!

BEING CHRIST-LIKE'

If I may return to his appeal that we should be more '*Christ-like*', I found this disturbing. I have met this approach being adopted by rank evolutionists deliberately to disarm creationists by suggesting that to be critical of any adverse evidence is an unchristian display of a lack of 'love' — an accusation that I totally reject. Christ is **the Truth**, and we will only find our way to this in all spheres of life on this earth by open and frank discussion between Christian brothers who are prepared to 'speak the truth in love'. I am not of course for one moment suggesting that Wise used this phrase with any such intention, but I think that it was unwarranted, to say the least.

I am sure that he would be only too willing to explain his position, by letting us know if perhaps he has contributed many papers in his creationist activities that actually

support the creationist movement, as against castigating us for our lack of appreciation of the worth of modern techniques. Any such information would go a long way to removing any thoughts that may have entered the minds of some creationists who are rather more suspicious than I.

REFERENCES

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3. Wise, Ref. 2, para. 12.
4. Wise, Ref. 2, para. 21.
5. Wise, Ref. 2, para. 19.
6. Wise, Ref. 2, appendix II, para. 32.
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9. Wise, Ref. 2, appendix III, para. 6.
10. Wise, Ref. 2, para. 13.
11. Wise, Ref. 2, appendix IV.
12. Wise, Ref. 2, appendix I, para. 8.
13. Wise, Ref. 2, appendix II, para. 15.