Letters to the editor

Behind the scenes

I refer to Tas Walker's review of the book *The Map that Changed the World* by Simon Winchester that appeared in Volume **16**(2) of *TJ*.[1] Your readers may be interested in some of the behind-the-scenes activities related to this book.

Simon Winchester was an undergraduate in the department of geology at Oxford University in the mid-sixties. At that time Dr Ronald Oxburgh was the Department head and has since become Lord Oxburgh and president of the Geological Society of London.

After graduation from Oxford, Winchester took to writing rather than grubbing about among fossils and rocks and has since become a very successful 'inky-fingered Fleet Street journalist'. This is his description of himself in his correspondence with me. He has written articles for the *Smithsonian* and the *National Geographic* and in 1998 produced the national bestseller *The Professor and the Madman*. The unlikely subject for this work was the history of the *Oxford English Dictionary* yet this is soon to become a major movie starring Mel Gibson. Such is the power of the well-written word.

I had asked Simon Winchester if his popular account of William Smith had been a commissioned work from Lord Oxburgh and the Geological Society of London? It is no secret that the geological fraternity has been badly rattled by the awkward questions raised by creationists. It seemed to me that Winchester's rise to literary fame and his geological background presented an ideal opportunity to establish the authenticity of the geologic column more securely in the public mind. I was quite up-front with this inquiry and he replied very graciously, explaining that Lord Oxburgh 'had been helpful in more ways than the simply technical' and had given his enthusiastic support. However, neither Oxburgh nor the Society had commissioned the work but rather it was his publishers, HarperCollins.

He stressed, as he did in the acknowledgement to his latest book, that he owed his greatest debt to Professor Hugh Torrens who had for years been, and is still, labouring on a definitive biography of William Smith. Torrens had kindly made all his research material available to Winchester that he might produce a popular account. That account, *The Map that Changed the World,* appeared at the prime door-front space of the principal booksellers in North America about August 2001. This was barely a year after *The Professor and the Madman*! Clearly, there were financial motives on the part of the publishers but readers here may recognize that the Divine hand has been replaced by the greased palm!

However, I want to stress that Simon Winchester was a gracious and generous correspondent and I can thoroughly recommend his books as good reading.

Ian Taylor
Kingston, Ontario
CANADA

References

1. Walker, T., Don't Blame the map, *TJ* **16**(2): 25–27, 2002.

Chronology for everybody

I refer to the article 'Chronology for Everyone'.[1] If you try to match up the AM (anno mundi) dates with secular history, you find that the author has deleted over 60 years of history from the time from the fall of Jerusalem to the birth of Christ. This period of history is very well documented by many historians and such an argument is most implausable. The problem is, the author followed Anstey's chronology. She assumed the Bible gave a continuous history from Creation to Christ, and that the degree to rebuild the city was issued by Cyrus not Artaxerxes. (The book of Ezra has no mention of any degree to rebuild Jerusalem.) This problem was pointed out by at least one reviewer of the article but never corrected in the final edition. I challenge the author to give us BC dates from 1 BC to 562 BC for all the major events. For wherever she tries to delete history, I can easily add in more events in that period to make such a reconstruction impossible. In so doing she will easily see the fallacy of Anstey's work.

There are other errors in the article too, but they are not nearly so serious as this one.

Larry Pierce
Toronto, Ontario
CANADA

References

1. Beechick, R., Chronology for everybody, *TJ* **15**(3):67–73, 2001.

Ruth Beechick replies:

I have high esteem for Larry Pierce's work and scholarship. And I am grateful for his *Online Bible* and his work and commentary on Ussher's chronology, both of which I use.

Larry says that I assumed the Bible gave a continuous history from Creation to Christ, and that is exactly the point of the article. It is an exercise in trying to find such a continuous history. While working this way from Bible to history rather than history to Bible, I could not match AM dates with BC dates. We need the chronology uncertainties and problems resolved in order to do that.

The majority view among chronologers seems to be that we must use secular history to fill a gap in Bible history. Larry raises legitimate questions from that gap-theory view. And I raise some questions from the Bible-only view. One is: Where in Scripture do we find a hint of a gap? Another: Is it reasonable to expect that the Bible would give a detailed chronology for 3,000 years of OT history and then omit 60 years or so from the last 1,000 years? And another: Does this Bible-only view deserve a place at the discussion table in our time? Other questions concern which decree to use for the return from captivity. Discussing the decrees needs a whole article of space.

I am not qualified to take up Larry's challenge to debate secular history. But I can point out that many people also said of Egypt's history that it was 'very well documented by many historians', yet now a good many scholars are saying that there is error of up to several centuries in that history. Of archaeology, Larry himself wrote that it has caused much grief as people have tried to harmonize it with the infallible Word of God.

I believe that we still have chronology problems to solve and I hope that *TJ* will continue to follow up on this topic.

Ruth Beechick
Golden, Colorado
UNITED STATES of AMERICA

Distant starlight and Genesis: is 'observed time' a physical reality?

In Newton's definitions of time conventions,[1] light from the most distant stars reaches the Earth instantly in 'observed' time, but at a time equal to the distance ÷ the speed of light (c) in 'calculated' time. Newton explains that physical observers can only measure the two-way or average speed of light, and it is physically impossible to make a one-way speed of light measurement without making certain assumptions. Thus, he argues that 'observed' time may also be a valid convention to measure physical or absolute time, not just a phenomenological convention. I agree with his discussion on the phenomenological interpretation but I disagree with his physical interpretation.

According to my understanding of Newton's paper:

a. 'calculated' time is the generally understood time-measuring convention. It provides the basis by which we make calculations within the laws of the physical universe. As I understand it, Newton also agrees with this but we all need to be careful not to lose sight of the wealth of discovery that has gone on before, based on this convention.
b. 'observed' time is a time-measuring convention that can be broken into two sub-groups,
   i. a phenomenological convention on time stamping events as they occur,
   ii. a physical or absolute fundamentally true time measurement convention that relates to the concept of the one-way speed of light.

Looking at 'observed' time in a phenomenological sense, I see no contradiction with observation because it simply moves the origin of the time axis that we are normally used to, to the beginning of Creation (Day 1) approximately 6,000 years ago. It does, however, require a progressive creation of stars and galaxies, possibly in shells radially inward centred on the Earth, so that the light of all stars first arrives at the Earth on Day 4. The light travels at the normally understood value of the speed of light c, and it takes millions of years to get to Earth. This all takes place on the negative side of the time axis before the creation of the Earth and the solar system on Days 1–4.

The concepts of one-way and two-way speed of light are presented in Newton's paper.[1] There are two possible interpretations of Newton's concept in regard to the one-way speed of light. In his reference 3, he cites an equation involving the angle θ, which is not clearly defined. This ambiguity is crucial to the arguments used by Newton and it would be of great benefit if Newton could clarify this.

I can see two possible interpretations of this angle. My first impression, based on my understanding of Special Relativity and papers like Ref. 2, is that the angle is the angle in a particular reference frame wherein only light coming inward and parallel to the observer's absolute motion against a universal reference frame would have infinite speed. The speed of light in the direction of this motion is infinite. In the opposite direction it is half c and at right angles to the motion it is c. This is the usual interpretation of the equation in Newton's reference 3. If this is the case, an observer would mostly see stars in one particular direction of the night sky and very few in any other direction. Obviously this is not the case.

The second possibility is that this angle is the viewing direction against some arbitrary axis. To see the stars in all directions in the sky the angle θ must always be zero for the light to travel instantaneously from source to receiver. This concept is consistent with the observed time concept in a phenomenological sense but not in a physical sense. For this to be true, no physical interpretation can be placed on the interpretation. Newton says *'observed time is a fundamentally true—not just phenomenological—language of appearance'* (p. 81, bottom of column 1 of Newton's paper). However, later in the paper he says *'this paper does not strictly require that observed time be an absolute (non-phenomenological) quantity'* (p. 83, middle of column 2). I argue that, regardless of the synchronization convention adopted, the physical interpretation (b (ii) above) is not valid.

Let us consider two co-ordinate systems in relative motion and write