Evolutionary troubles with the origin and demise of dinosaurs

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With so much emphasis on dinosaurs among scientists and laymen alike, one would think that they would have a good story about their origin and demise by now. However, if some of the latest literature is any indication, evolutionists remain unable to formulate consistent theories about either topic.

The origin of dinosaurs unknown

Recent articles in *Science* indicate that the origin of dinosaurs is unknown, and that there are many questions about 'early' dinosaurs from the late Triassic.[1,2] Michael Balter admits:

> "But paleontologists are equally concerned with puzzling out how these mighty beasts got their start. Who were their ancestors? … Tracing the origins of the earliest dinosaurs has been a major challenge for paleontologists because there are no uncontested fossils from their earliest days on Earth."[1]

A new discovery in northwest Argentina, where other late Triassic dinosaurs have been found, suggests weaknesses in existing theories.[2] The new discovery is of a 1-m-long *T. rex*-like dinosaur named *Eodromaeus murphy*, which has added more confusion to the origin of dinosaurs. Another dinosaur previously found in the area, *Eoraptor*, was considered one of the earliest theropods, but has now been named as the ancestor of the sauropods! This conclusion is not sitting well with a lot of evolutionists.

This field area is significant. It contains the supposed representatives of all three major lines of dinosaurs: theropods, sauropods and ornithischians. This new round of reclassification pushes the origin of dinosaurs back as far as the mid Triassic. Though no fossils of the ancestral dinosaur have been found, paleontologists believe it to have been bipedal. This would require the evolutionary sequence to move from quadruped reptiles to a biped dinosaur ancestor, and then back to the later quadruped dinosaurs. There is no explanation for such changes.

Paleontologists have also found other vertebrates, mainly reptiles, in the rocks of northwest Argentina. Dinosaurs represent only about 10% of the vertebrate fossils. Furthermore, the dinosaur fossils appear, disappear, and then reappear in successive stratigraphic layers. Paleontologists explain this by claiming that the dinosaurs did not outcompete the reptiles but only filled empty niches. This follows the recent idea of cooperative adaptation rather than the old 'survival of the fittest' imagery of evolution.

Fossils in the late Triassic rocks of northwest Argentina are the 'oldest' remains yet found on Pangea. The dinosaurs became dominant at the Triassic/Jurassic boundary, and reptiles largely disappeared. This suggests that early dinosaur evolution was geographically restricted for about 15 million years, another problem for paleontologists. Why did they not migrate sooner to other parts of Pangea? What environmental factor allowed the sudden spread and radiation of the dinosaurs from *Eodromaeus* to its more common cousins? If nothing else, this demonstrates that parts of the fossil record remain undiscovered. Future discoveries could and probably will change the story once again. For these reasons, our confidence in the evolutionary origin of dinosaurs should be restrained. Paleontologists simply do not know the origin and early evolution of dinosaurs.

Controversy over dinosaur demise

Evolutionary scientists have basically set the extinction of dinosaurs at the Cretaceous/Tertiary (K/T) boundary. If dinosaur remains, including tracks or eggs, are ever found in early Tertiary sedimentary rocks, geologists typically redate the rocks to Cretaceous.[3–5] This is circular reasoning.[6–8] Jepsen admitted:

> "Geologists themselves must take much of the responsibility for the dissemination of this concept [that the dinosaurs went extinct quickly] because they have often defined the end of the Age of Reptiles or Mesozoic Era [about 65 million years ago] as the exact time that dinosaurs became extinct. Ergo, reasoning in a tight circle, dinosaurs became extinct at the end of Mesozoic time."[9]

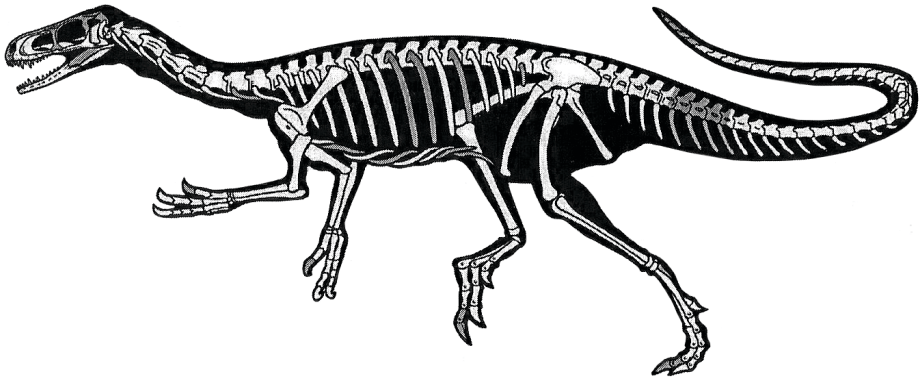

Photo courtesy of Walter Vieth

Figure 1. Skeletal silhouette of the new one-meter long theropod *Eodromaeus murphi* found in northwest Argentina (from Martinez *et al.,* ref. 21).

In recent decades, this boundary has become more important. Neocatastrophist views of extinction have typically required catastrophic events, particularly impacts. The best known is that at Chicxulub in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico. However, there are a number of major problems with this theory, one of which is that the buried impact crater indicates that the supposed asteroid was not large enough to ensure a worldwide extinction of the dinosaurs.

Regardless, a group of 41 scientists, many of them planetary scientists, insisted once more in a review article that the Yucatán impact killed off the dinosaurs.[10] This rather dogmatic pronouncement generated three letters to the editor. One by 29 scientists, mostly paleontologists, claimed that there is no consensus, that the impact played only a small role in the demise of the dinosaurs, that the proposed extinction scenario was simplistic, and that there have been many other large impacts on Earth with no associated extinctions.[11]

Another letter stated that the review article neglected the volcanic extinction hypothesis and that the Yucatán impact was too small to kill off all the dinosaurs.[12]

The third letter stated that the review article used selective evidence, there is no evidence the impact and iridium anomalies are the same age, and that the Yucatán impact happened before the end of the Cretaceous.[13] That assertion was supported by an article in the *Journal of the Geological Society, London* and in an article in a recent special paper of the Geological Society of America, which added that there never will be a consensus on these matters, the impact did not cause any species extinctions, and tying the impact to the K/T boundary is an ideological argument resulting in circular reasoning.[14,15]

The other side has problems too. The authors of the review noted that the volcanic hypothesis cannot explain the extinctions because the Deccan lava flows were also too early and extinction events could not be specifically correlated with other continental flood basalts.[16] They also asserted that new data offered substantial evidence that the Chicxulub impact was at the K/T boundary, implying that it also caused the dinosaurs to go extinct.

Creationist implications

This heated exchange reveals the lack of consensus for an extinction theory. It also questioned the significance of the end-Cretaceous dinosaur extinction based on the questionable dating of the Chicxulub impact. The Flood demise of those dinosaurs not on the Ark is looking better all the time.

This dispute also illustrates how biases drive conclusions within historical geology and paleontology, and the role of circular reasoning in analysis. It is certainly evident in the agreement of dates of rocks and fossils within their paradigm.[17] Although this makes evolutionary paleontology appear strong on the surface, digging deeper reveals problems like the impasse about the dating and speed of the rise of dinosaurs, dinosaur extinction, the K/T boundary, and the Chicxulub impact. I think this is only the tip of the iceberg. We need to be aware of the way in which circular reasoning is used in geology and paleontology.

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