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Book reviews

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Gary Gorman

School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

Anthropology

Yves Coppens

Lucy's Knee: The Story of Man and the Story of His Story.
Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2002.
176 pp. R120 pap. ISBN 1919825894

Lucy's Knee is a short, idiosyncratic book that is equally about the *Australopithecus afarensis* fossil called Lucy and about Yves Coppens, one of her co-discoverers. Coppens is an important paleo-anthropologist who has been central to a number of significant hominid fossil discoveries relating to human evolution over the past five decades, yet for readers and speakers of English he is much less well-known than his colleague in the discovery of Lucy, Donald Johansen. A key strength of this book is that it helps to correct that oversight by bringing the ideas and observations of Coppens regarding human evolution to an anglophone audience in an accessible way.

The six chapters of the book are arranged first to provide an introduction to the setting in which human evolution occurred through a very brief history of the planet and the appearance of primates, concluding with the earliest members of the human lineage (Chapter 1). The second chapter presents the evolution of later hominids, from *Australopithecus* to modern *Homo sapiens*, along with some of Coppens' musings on the significant behavioural and cultural developments of this period. The third chapter presents a brief history of the major findings of paleo-anthropology since its origins in the early 19th century, thus setting the stage for Coppens' entry into the field, which is the subject of the fourth chapter. This autobiographical chapter provides an interesting counterpoint, in that it describes the intellectual setting of French paleo-anthropology which is relatively unknown to anglophone readers. Chapter 5 presents the story of the discovery of the fossil in 1974 and describes the attributes that have led to substantial rethinking of the specifics of human evolution.

The final chapter addresses the way that Lucy has become a symbol of humanity incorporated in French film, theatre, poetry, novels, music, artworks, and even medicine and psychology. This final chapter is perhaps the most unexpected and clearly outlines the distinctions between the French incorporation of science and philosophy into all manner of intellectual pursuits – it is quite foreign to imagine music or theatre in the Anglo-Saxon tradition incorporating introspective philosophical questions derived from paleo-anthropology!

In sum, this is an interesting book, although perhaps not for everyone. The translation from the French original is awkward at points and the interrelationship of a wide range of material will be challenging for some. Nonetheless, *Lucy's Knee* provides a range of insights into the meaning of Lucy to her discoverer, as well as to an unexpectedly diverse public. This book should be acquired by those interested in the philosophical issues raised by paleo-anthropology, as well as by those who are open to diverse perspectives on the meaning of the past.

Kenneth G. Kelly

University of South Carolina

P. Nyathi

Lawo Magugu: Material Culture of the AmaNdebele of Zimbabwe.

Pietermaritzburg: Reach Out Publishers, 2000.
89 pp. R89.83 pap. ISBN 1868511944

The early 19th century saw the formation of several new political and cultural groupings among the indigenous populations of Southern Africa in a process still too often linked in the popular imagination to the expansion and consolidation of the Zulu state under Shaka. Recent historical and archaeological research shows how, in reality, a multiplicity of factors – population growth, in part fuelled by the introduction of maize; recurrent food shortages precipitated by drought, crop diseases and cattle epidemics; competition for trade with Europeans; conflicts over access to agricultural land and cattle; and European settler expansion – combined to destabilize existing institutions, create new ones and provoke the relocation of several communities over distances of hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres. The AmaNdebele were one such group. Led by Mzilikazi, their origins can be traced back to the periphery of the emerging Zulu state. Moving north of the Drakensberg in 1822, they established themselves in the former Transvaal until forced out by Boer attacks 16 years later. Moving north and east, they finally settled in what is now western Zimbabwe, dominating this region and its surroundings until conquered by Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company in 1893-96. Today they form the largest non-Shona speaking component of Zimbabwe's population.

Lawo Magugu provides an important and helpful overview

About the article

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