

Foreword

Roll up! Roll up!, I am tempted to shout—to catch your attention. This is an important book, important for at least six good reasons. It is about cryptozoology. It is not about the Loch Ness monster, nor about Bigfoot. It discusses the possible survival until our own times of dinosaurs. It tells of a gallant knight in search of a dreadful dragon. Its action takes place in the heart of darkest Africa. It is an unfinished saga.

This intriguing book shows us that it may require moral and physical courage as well as intellectual acumen to undertake research in cryptozoology (the study of “hidden animals” on scientific principles). It gives a vivid account of the search for a particular creature not yet listed in our zoological catalogues, from the preliminary groping through the maze of literature impinging on cryptozoology (my own card catalogue of that literature far exceeds twenty thousand references and my library contains at least 225 published volumes devoted to it) to the actual hunt in the field—or, rather, the swamp—for that creature. The book also shows that luck, good and bad, plays a large part in searches of this kind.

Furthermore, it does not just deal with still undescribed species of recent mammals or reptiles; it deals with dinosaurs and suggests that, of all fossil creatures, they could have survived until now. Ay, there’s the rub, for it is well known that the last dinosaurs became extinct about 65 million years ago, at the end of the Mesozoic Era. This is held to be such an absolute and indisputable truth that two of the favourite questions of science writers is why have dinosaurs vanished and what wiped them off the face of the earth? A plethora of scientific hypotheses, usually of the most extravagant nature, from constipation to a glut of comets, has been put forth over the years to account for this unquestionable extinction. Not a single hypothesis is in the least satisfactory. No wonder; none of the

scientists responsible for such lucubrations first asked this very simple question: how could any inner cause or catastrophic impact wipe out selectively a whole group of very diverse animals—two entire orders of reptiles no less—and leave unscathed some of their close relatives, such as the crocodiles and tortoises, not to mention many other living beings sharing their various habitats?

Roy Mackal asks a much more pertinent question than the traditional ones: why should all dinosaurs be extinct? Could not at least one genus survive today? After all, we still have the tuatara of the order Rhynchocephalia (which pre-dates the dinosaurs), the coelacanth as a sole survivor of the Devonian order Crossopterygia, and the nautilus group of which several species still thrive in tropical waters as representatives of an order dating from the early Palaeozoic Era. And I am only mentioning here some of the most famous “living fossils”, there being others innumerable. I would even go so far as to say that they are, in a way, common and familiar. Indeed, we live our lives among them; we wash ourselves down with the skeletons of sponges, we eat oysters and mussels, we live in houses teeming with spiders, and we use crushed horse-shoe crabs as fertiliser on our fields. As Mackal’s investigations have led him to conclude that a less familiar living fossil, a kind of sauropod dinosaur, seems to be lurking in equatorial Africa, it just may help to put an end to one of the most persistent and aggravating worries of the zoological community: the explanation of the alleged extinction of dinosaurs. This alone makes the present book outstandingly interesting.

Incidentally, why do science writers never ask what they ask about dinosaurs in connection with much more extensive groups of animals, whole classes indeed, which are similarly supposed to be extinct, such as trilobites or graptolites? Fairly obviously it is not for scientific reasons. Trilobites, for instance, played as significant a part in the oceans as did dinosaurs on the continents. No, the answer is an emotional one, because dinosaurs and some of their relatives—sauropterygians and pterosaurs—are the present embodiment of the old dragon archetype. And to feed myths, to

speak the language of mythopoeic thought, amounts to stirring up directly our most intimate feelings, emotions, fears, or lusts by the use of suggestive symbols. This explains why children are still enthralled by fairy tales or stories about mermaids, satyrs or unicorns, or by their contemporary often transparent versions in disguise. Even adults cannot resist this kind of hidden persuasion. Why do you think *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* have been such tremendous literary successes? First of all it is because Professor J.R.R. Tolkien was a most erudite folklorist who knew how to make all his characters and plots conform to the universal and everlasting patterns of myth. Whether die-hard rationalists like it or not, it is for no other essential reason that dinosaurs, alias dragons, impersonators of evil in our western world, are as popular amongst scientists as they are amongst laymen. In a way to claim a belief in the extinction of dinosaurs is rather like claiming to have killed a dragon—in each case the claimant may be considered a hero.

This brings me again to my fourth reason for recommending this book. Who, indeed, can resist the spell of a story telling of the long and indefatigable search for a most elusive dragon by a valiant knight who is intent, not upon killing it but upon its capture—if only on film? Come, come, the thrill is provided by the adventure and its attendant hazards, by the obstinate fight, the overcoming of implacable enemies and the anticipation of the outcome—not, in this instance, a mindless butchery.

This enchanting tale is flavoured, furthermore, with magic and fascination, for it unfolds in the darkest and least familiar part of Africa. The main events are enacted in places scarcely attainable without wading knee-deep, sometimes waist-deep, through insalubrious swamps or flooded forest for hours on end—the actors were certainly not airlifted to their destination. Needless to emphasise that the stage of this remarkable drama is poorly explored and very thinly populated.

There is even a seventh reason why this book is important, but it has to do with the philosophy of science rather than science itself. Roy Mackal's work may help us to overhaul and thus understand

the intricate mechanisms of any scientific discovery because the long story of the present one is unfolded here before it is finally achieved. It is usually after a discovery is made that one is able to reconstruct the way it was generated and how it developed, which events and actions combined to bring it to fruition. Here, for once, discovery is caught in the act. Now we must examine how Roy Mackal came to hunt his particular dragon.

The hypothesis of dinosaur survival was originally promulgated in 1909 by the celebrated German “King of Zoos”, Carl Hagenbeck, who happened to be exceptionally well informed about the world’s megafauna, assisted by the numerous animal catchers who worked for him. Thanks to some striking accounts of sightings in Africa and to persistent traditions of Africans and despite a few sensational hoaxes, the argument in favour of surviving dinosaurs gained more and more support among certain adventurous or romantic naturalists. A first synthesis of the question, which had become very involved in the meantime, was attempted by the British science writer Frank W. Lane as well as by Captain William Hichens of the Intelligence and Administrative Services of East Africa. During the Second World War it was developed further and brilliantly buttressed by the American science writer of German origin, Willy Ley. It was later summarised and somewhat sensationalised by Ivan T. Sanderson, a science writer of Scottish origin, who contributed an article to the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1948, entitled “There Could be Dinosaurs”.

At this stage one was being led to imagine that huge reptiles, escapees from the Mesozoic Era and often said to be blood-thirsty, were roaming about over most countries of the African continent, from the Gulf of Guinea to Mozambique and from Ethiopia to Namibia, even reaching the interior of temperate South Africa. A few daring but foolhardy explorers were thus to waste much time and money looking for these monstrous relics, since it is certainly more difficult to find a brontosaurus over the whole range of tropical Africa than it is to find the proverbial needle in a haystack. A correct cryptozoological analysis of the vast amount of collected data and a search for further evidence was obviously required; and

this is what I attempted in my book *Les Derniers Dragons d'Afrique* (*Africa's Last Dragons*), published in French in 1978. It had gradually occurred to me that most reported cases of apparently unknown animals of amphibious habits dwelling in the dark continent which could be broadly classified as "dragons" were quite irrelevant to the question of dinosaur survival. They concerned either outsized pythons or crocodiles or undescribed species of sirenians or fishes, such as lungfishes and catfishes, or even of large sabre-toothed cats apparently survivors from Pleistocene times. In fact the only described animals which had at least the outer appearance of sauropod dinosaurs seemed to be confined within three regions very distant from each other: the middle Zambezi River; the west bank affluents of the middle Congo River, spreading mainly over the People's Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, slightly overflowing also the bordering areas of Gabon, Cameroun and Chad; finally, the vast marshes in the interior of Benin.

As the most recent reports from the present Zambia dated from the nineteenth century, however, it may well be that the animals in question had since become extinct in the Zambesi River basin. Because the rumours from Benin (then Dahomey) all originated from a single person they could only be accepted provisionally and with the utmost caution, statistical evidence being the best foundation for cryptozoological claims. Consequently, the only region in Africa where one could entertain a hope of meeting sauropod-like animals was the crescent-shaped area stretching out from the northern Congo to southern Chad.

Significantly, the information collected throughout this region came precisely from the most trustworthy sources. First there was the scientific report of the German Likouala-Congo Expedition of 1913-14, conducted by Hauptmann Freiherr von Stein zu Lausnitz. In this unpublished document the captain had given a very detailed account of the *Mokele-mbembe* as conveyed to him by the riverside villagers of the lower Ubangi and Sanga Rivers. Then I received vital information in communications given to me privately by Lucien Blancou, Chief Game Inspector of the French

Colonies, who while studying the fauna of equatorial West Africa from 1929 to 1945, had picked up from the inhabitants of the Ubangi-Chari region many traditions as well as first-hand eyewitness testimonies about similar amphibious animals of large size, both long-necked and long-tailed. The German account was published in Germany by science writer Wilhelm Bölsche in a booklet entitled *Drachen* (1929) which was devoted to the dragon legend; subsequently this account was disseminated in the English-speaking world by Willy Ley in his book *The Dodo, the Lungfish and the Unicorn* (1948). Lucien Blancou's revelations were disclosed in my own book *On the Track of Unknown Animals* (1958), published in a dozen different languages.

It was the information contained in my later, more thoroughly documented book on the dragons of Africa, however, that I conveyed in 1978 to James H. Powell, Jr., with whom I had been in correspondence for a decade and who was determined to solve the problem of the surviving dinosaurs in the field. Since 1973 he had already made investigations in Gabon and Cameroun, unfortunately on the strength of a report I had discovered was quite unreliable and which led him to places much too far from the most likely ones. So I urged him repeatedly to concentrate his efforts around the Sanga and Likouala Rivers in the People's Republic of the Congo or around the west bank affluents of the Ubangi River in the Central African Republic.

This well-considered advice was later communicated, especially through the medium of my book on the African dragons, to Roy Mackal when he and Powell decided to join forces in the search for living dinosaurs. Consequently they turned their attention towards the Congo early in 1980 and the cornucopia of information they gathered diligently from among the indigenous people there confirmed that they were, indeed, on the right track.

Curiously enough the achievement I am proudest of in this lengthy and painstaking guidance work, performed dry-shod in libraries and laboratories, is not of a cryptozoological character but is rather referable to "cryptophytology" (having coined the word "cryptozoology" in the late 1950s I don't see why I should hesitate

to create another word here and now in the late 1980s to denominate “the science of hidden plants”). Baron von Stein’s report had mentioned that the *Mokele-mbembe*’s favourite food was “a kind of liana with large white blossoms, with a milky sap and apple-like fruits”. Thanks to the expertise of my old friend General-Pharmacist Armand Bouquet, former director of research at the ORSTOM in Brazzaville, I had been able to state in my 1978 book that “it could be recognised as one of the *Landolphias*’s”. Two years later the American team collected specimens of the plant, known locally as *malombo*, which was pointed out to them as being the preferred food of the suspected dinosaur. These samples were identified at the Botany Department of the University of Chicago as *Landolphia mannii*. If I had been able to give such a correct prognosis of the plant in question, owing to the accuracy of the German explorer’s account, may I be justified to think that I could be correct also about the identity of the animal which was said to feed on it? Its identity, of course, can only be settled once and for all by a close or prolonged examination of one of the animals. From the bottom of my heart I hope it will be the privilege of Roy Mackal to conduct that examination, and this is why.

I have known Roy for over a quarter of a century. We had been exchanging cryptozoological information since 1960 but did not meet until 1982 when the International Society of Cryptozoology was founded in Washington D.C. Roy knows his zoology to his fingertips: for me this is the essential prerequisite to solving any zoological—or cryptozoological—problem, even if it does sound like a self-evident truth. He and I do not always agree on particular points—I would start worrying if we did—but as far as Mokele-mbembe is concerned agreement between us is total. He has thoroughly studied the literature of the subject, collected as much circumstantial evidence as possible, and has briefed his case with a master hand. He has the true scientific spirit compounded of inquisitiveness, insight, open-mindedness, scepticism, and rigour to which he brings flair and imagination. Browse among the pages of this book and you will not find the slightest rash statement on any of them. The author never pontificates, denies nothing off-hand, and is never cock-sure about anything. All his opinions,

even his apparently craziest hypotheses, are phrased with the greatest caution. Always he keeps himself as distant from the delirium of the lunatic fringe as from the dogmatism of established science.

To crown it all Roy has made several penetrating incursions in the field—and what a field it is!—to familiarise himself with the environment, to look for concrete evidence, to check minor details, to trace and question more witnesses and to perfect his strategy. Without in the least wishing to minimise James Powell's courageous and repeated investigations and some interesting probes by others Roy Mackal, unquestionably, may justly claim to be the most complete cryptozoologist to have tackled the problem of the possible survival of the dinosaur in Africa. He deserves to be the one who will solve that problem definitively. Unfortunately the solution is just as likely to rest with some adventurous brat who may not be able to tell a horse from a cow but knows exactly where and how to look for a possible dinosaur. But this brat would not be the true discoverer of the *Mokele-mbembe* but merely the last—and weakest—link in a long chain of countless efforts, beginning with Hagenbeck's bold supposition and of which the other main links bear the names Stein zu Lausnitz, Bölsche, Ley, Blancou, Heuvelmans, Powell, and Mackal.

The *Mokele-mbembe* is undoubtedly the zoological craze of the 1980s. Just possibly it could become the greatest zoological discovery of the twentieth century—indeed of any century. As the search for this well concealed creature is still unresolved this book cannot answer the question, “Is *Mokele-mbembe* a living dinosaur?”; but it should help us to appreciate that the question is worth asking, whether or not an answer is forthcoming. This book is at once topical, exceptional, highly educational, suited to thrill us, to hold us spellbound, and to leave us breathless. Can the general reader ask for more?

Bernard Heuvelmans, D.Sc., Sc.F.Z.S.
President — International Society of Cryptozoology
Centre for Cryptozoology, Saint-Chamassy, 24260
Le Bugue, France.