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The Guadeloupe Skeleton — Some Comments

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I have become interested in the dispute on the age of this skeleton simply to determine where the truth really lies. If it is recent then we should admit our error; if it was deposited at a "Miocene" age then it will be one more of the many cracks that exist in the well known geological "column" of evolution.

DR STRINGER'S CASE

First a few comments on Dr Stringer's paper in Ex Nihilo, vol. 6 (2), 1983, pp. 31–32. **(1)** He mentions that although elsewhere there are coral terraces containing Miocene-Pliocene fossils, "there are no deposits of this type identified as Miocene or Pliocene in the area". Perhaps not "of this type", but immediately behind them the strata is classed as "Miocene limestone"![1]

There are two aspects about the reports of the strata in this area that are very disturbing. The first is that descriptions of the material around the skeleton seem to vary from one person to another. Even more serious is the seeming failure of every single investigator to produce a plan and cross section of the beach area. Had they done so, then many of the problems would have been greatly clarified.

Bill Cooper kindly sent me a copy of a manuscript in which he relates how the island was investigated by one geologist. In 1897, Professor Spencer visited the island and described the whole of its geology in considerable detail, with the noticeable exception of one area; that around Moule where the skeleton was found. In dealing with this he merely states, "It was in this district that the human remains were found. . .Neither these nor the thin layers of unfossiliiferous clays beneath. . .were studied by me in Grande-Terre"!

Cooper's comment on this surprising statement is

"Now here indeed is a curious thing. Professor Joseph Spencer, M.A., Ph.D., F.G.S., a highly qualified geologist who was always so painstakingly thorough in his work, travelled all the way from England to Guadeloupe (no easy journey in those days), examined in minute detail the entire island. . .but who would yet have us believe that he, after travelling to Moule, neglected to examine what must have been the most interesting part of the island! What was his intention in visiting the site if it was not to subject it to such investigation? I suggest most strongly that Spencer did, in fact, examine the beds, but because the evidence was at such variance with his evolutionary philosophy, he decided to forget the matter".

Spencer's omission is highly suspicious and I would add that his failure to examine this beach and date it has enabled present day evolutionists to continue to claim that "there are no Miocene deposits in this area". Surely, if Spencer could have given the area a recent date then he would certainly have done so.

(2) Dr Stringer also states that "examination by Museum staff confirms that it (the encasing matrix) contains (material) such as would be found in a modern beach in the area today."

First, Konig was quite emphatic that "The sand from thence (the Caribbean islands) which I had an opportunity of seeing, was unlike that of which the stone is enclosed."[2] From this, we can conclude that the matrix was NOT formed from any local sands.

Secondly, a member of Dr Stringer's own Palaeontological Department has written a letter which states

"The fossil of Guadeloupe is one of our original specimens and it presents rather a puzzle. The process of consolidating coral sand into rock only takes place in restricted areas and the stated find spot is not one of them. This came out when our Mineralogy Department studied the matrix."

It must be emphasised that this is not an opinion of the Palaeontology Department but of the Mineralogy Department of the Museum, and should surely carry some weight in the argument.

(3) Dr Stringer suggests that the skeleton should be dated by carbon-14. He knows full well that this will almost certainly give a recent date. If this is carried out, then the age of suitable surrounding strata should be also dated using radiometric methods which will almost certainly give a very LONG age, thus proving that neither method is reliable. C-14 dating is very useful to the evolutionists for getting rid of awkward specimens as it almost invariably gives a young age.[3:85-6] Before C-14 appeared they used fluorine content for the same purpose.[3:81]

Whilst on the subject of sources of evidence, it is important to scrutinise carefully all that is claimed by evolutionists. It must never be forgotten by any creationist who bases his findings upon their site investigations that they are working from a completely different conceptual framework to that of the creationist and this may not be apparent in their presentation of facts. They may well have overlooked a vital point that would support the creationist view.

DAVID TYLER'S CONTRIBUTION

Regarding David Tyler's paper (this volume), he does make a number of good points which suggest that the rock is of recent formation. The main part of his case, however, is inferred from microscopic examination of the matrix structure which he contends shows that it is certainly beach rock. I would, however, make the following comments on the two main interpretations.

1. A Recent Deposition?

There are a number of considerations that those who maintain that the skeleton was buried recently must answer. It is not sufficient to select the evidence from some authorities and ignore that from others, or fail to give a reasonable explanation for the circumstances. All the relevant facts should be stated, taken into account and a reasonably complete sequence of events proposed. It is this latter point in which these papers are noticeably lacking. The following are some factors which must be satisfactorily explained if recent burial, intrusive or otherwise, is proposed:

(a) To my mind, the main weakness of those arguments for a recent burial is to explain how the bodies got to their present position in the first place. The drawings of the British and French skeletons are quite different, the first being stretched out and the second being in a foetal position. Tyler says that they are in "various positions of burial". Are we to accept that there was more than one tribe that buried their dead, each laid out in the tribal custom?

(b) It is, furthermore, inconceivable that local tribes had a custom of burying their dead in material that was not only as hard as marble but also below high water level, instead of normal soft ground that was presumably only a few yards away. If they are intrusive burials, then one would have expected to see a line of demarcation between the natural rock and the matrix around the skeleton. Yet the matrix is as hard as the rest of the strata, there being no visible difference reported by anyone. Furthermore, how did the matrix become rock-like so quickly after the burial?

(c) If these skeletons were intrusive then an explanation must be found for the severe dislocation of the bones. Any force that was strong enough to break them would have been more than sufficient to have separated the bones over a large area. They must therefore have been smashed whilst still held together by the skin and sinews. Had they been buried I doubt if they would have been so badly broken and dislocated yet still remain in the burial hole. Had they been "trampled upon", the rib cage would have totally collapsed, yet this appears to be comparatively sound.

One alternative explanation is that they were flung onto the beach from a shipwreck following which they were covered and cemented into the sand. But then, would not the body have decayed fairly rapidly, allowing the bones to be dispersed quite easily? Furthermore, how is it that bones of a dog, vine branches and pestles and mortars have also been found, for these are not usually found on board a ship. Also, small nodules of charcoal were found in the matrix! The possibility that a whole local settlement was engulfed and sealed in at the same time fits the evidence far better.

Tyler in another article admits that even Cuvier "confessed to making a thousand guesses and even inventing incidents to explain their presence".

(d) It seems that the skeletons were discovered because the beach is eroding. If this is the case, how could it have changed from a recent deposition to present day erosion?

(e) Other skeletons and artefacts are reported to have been found in the same strata. This however does not prove a recent deposition. There are sites in America where artefacts (also pestles and mortars!) have been found at great depth and could not possibly have been due to intrusive burial.[3:76-7] They were probably engulfed at the time of Noah's Flood, for similar reports of such deep discoveries have been reported by reliable witnesses in various parts of the world. It is therefore possible for the Guadeloupe skeletons to have been similarly engulfed.

2. Engulfed During Noah's Flood?

To claim that it is a recently formed beach rock simply from an examination through a microscope is not compelling. That the same material could have been laid down quite quickly should not be dismissed.

Tyler says "Calcium carbonate was carried by **RAIN** water to the beach where it was precipitated, sticking the grains together." Later he says that the cement is "aragonite (calcium carbonate) from **SEA** water". Yet the end product is still classed as beach rock! When the same rock can be produced in two quite different ways, is it not possible that there may be yet another way that could give the same result? I would like to suggest one important mechanism that might explain the disposition of the skeletons.

In his monograph on the decrease in the speed of light[5], Barry Setterfield has proposed a quite different mechanism to that presented in standard geological works, for he contends that the great depths of clay and magmatic rocks were formed by large CHEMICAL reactions deep in the interior of the earth. These had been driven to the surface as a solution in supercritical (hydrothermal) water (i.e. at high pressure and temperature). They would be deposited very rapidly and this mechanism would explain why they are sometimes very pure in their consistency for very great depths. If they had been deposited slowly over vast periods of time, as one would expect slow settling clays would take, then one would expect to see several layers of other material due to storms, floods, earthquakes, etc.

Setterfield refers to Stanton's paper[6] which describes precisely this chemical mechanism and says that it can explain the deposition of vast depths of clays and rock strata, and that furthermore there could be pulsatory movement of the outpouring from the depths.

Indeed, I would suggest that the reinterpretation of the geological strata working from this quite different and new mechanism is extremely important to the creationist movement and one that will well repay the efforts of Christian geologists. The important part that the "fountains of the deep" have played in forming the present day geology will hopefully be recognised in the near future.

If this mechanism is considered as a possibility, then the bodies could have been smashed by the force of water or rolled along by the outpouring that subsequently cemented it in. When the mass cooled and evaporated, dissolved material would have precipitated and this might account for the aragonite needles around the sand particles that Tyler reports in the matrix. When I saw the skeleton, I was surprised by the number of small bubbles apparent in the matrix, which suggested to me that there may have been some subsequent collection of entrapped gases in a fluid mass that gradually hardened around the body it had engulfed.

KURT WISE'S ARGUMENTS

The article by Kurt Wise adds some further information but no evidence that finally decides between the opposing viewpoints. He has obviously done a great deal of research, but I would reiterate that he is working from a different frame of conception to that taken by most creationist "young earthers". I have made this point above and cannot emphasise it too much. This difference came out in a careful study of his evidence as follows. I will consider some points in the order that they appear in his article.

(1) "Besides loose gravel or sand nothing has ever been reported overlying the formation". Where is this gravel and sand and how thick? Again, the absence of a true section of the beach leaves the situation far too clouded.

(2) "Duchassaing. . .did not claim" that the Galibis (skeleton-bearing strata) and a raised coral reef dated as Quaternary "were ever in direct contact." This argument is sophistic. Duchassaing classed BOTH strata as "Anthropolite" which infers that they WERE connected. If Mr Wise wishes to contend that they were not connected, then it is for him to show that the obvious inference of Duchassaing's statement is wrong.

(3) "It is my IMPRESSION that the various authors are not describing a rock unit sitting upon a rock, but rather a rock unit lying atop loose beach sand."

Let us consider this question of the failure of all those who examined the strata to provide a section of the beach. We have noted above that Spencer did not even report on the area, whilst Saint-Michel gives only a small scale plan. Here are two highly qualified geologists who failed to provide a vital piece of information that would have clarified the whole picture. Their failure to do so suggests that there is something about the strata that clearly contradicts the evolutionary time scale.

In view of the total failure of these professional geologists to provide a drawing that is one of the basic "tools of the trade", I have reproduced a sketch (Fig. 1) that Bill Cooper sent to me as his understanding of the beach section, to which I have added some further information regarding the "flagstones" I deal with later. It would appear that Cooper suggests that the Galibis formation is continuous with the Miocene Limestone immediately behind it; indeed he contends that they are the same type of rock.

This would be consistent with the skeletons being buried in a great limestone deposit and only in recent

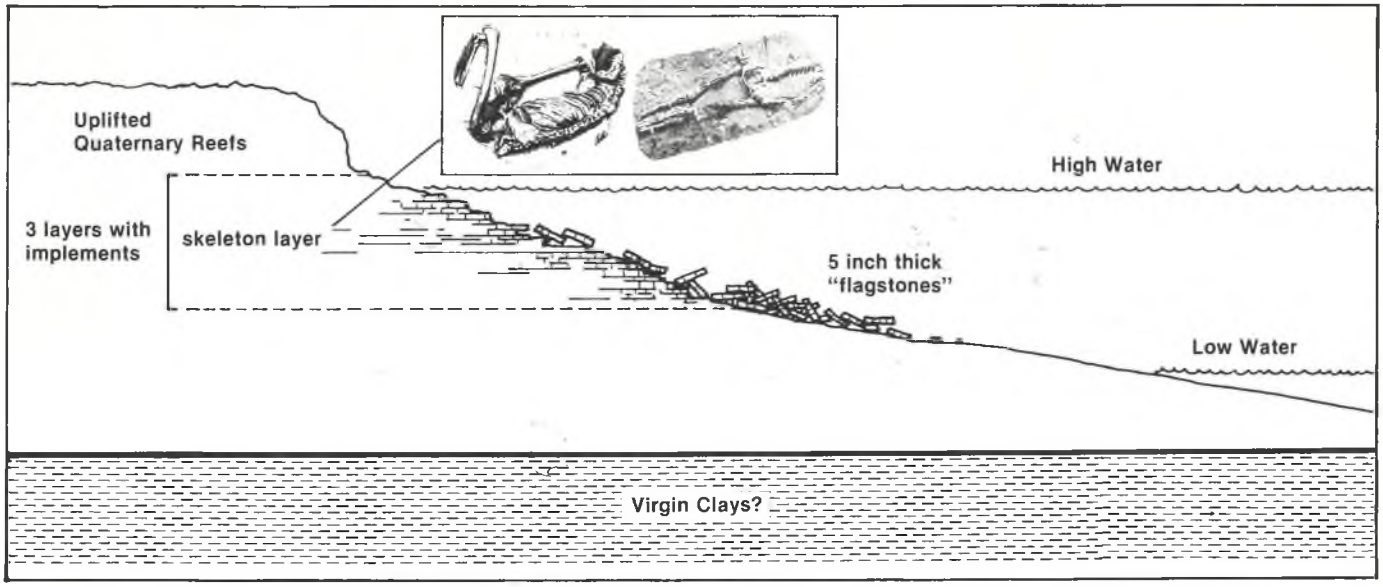

Fig. 1. Possible section of beach

times being exposed by the erosion of the sea. It must be emphasised that this is only a surmise, but until our highly paid specialists are prepared to give an accurate section, then it is the best that can be obtained from the many conflicting reports. If this section is anything like correct, it would give a revealing answer to the question of why there is so much reluctance to give a complete section of the area!

(4) Three experts "felt" that the sand was continually being cemented together. Of these, only the first has visited the site and even he seems to be uncertain. The views of the others are hardly valid. Southall was clearly intent on proving the recent origin of man and neither he nor Prof. Oakley present any evidence to support their contention.

I would here highlight the circular form of evidence that is often used to bolster up the case in support of the arguments for evolution of which the first table presented by Wise is a good example. One (or two) evolutionists visit a site, and pronounce that a formation has certain fossils and they contend that this proves that it should be given a particular early date. This is then quoted by all the experts in their papers and textbooks until there is a whole library accepting the dating as a fact. If one dares to question the original findings, one is dismissively referred to the numerous works by gentlemen with resounding qualifications who have written extensively on the subject, but who have all copied from each other's works in saying the same thing. Yet, on very many occasions, when a creationist visits the area, he finds certain features that completely overthrow the earlier view presented. When he presents his case, he is either ignored, spurned by his colleagues if he is a professional geologist, or presented with the numerous references on the subject; precisely as Mr Wise has done for our benefit. Despite their impressive number, if one examines many of these references, most of them affirm their belief, which is based upon the views of others, and present no new evidence in support.

(5) Mr Wise's description of how fossils date the stratum shows the underlying evolutionary time scale that he is basing all his arguments on. The time scale and framework of the "young earth" creationist is so different that "ne'er the twain shall meet".

(6) Mr Wise claims that a carbon-14 dating "of the Galibis" gave a date of 500 AD for this was the date obtained on "the base of the formation (the oldest part)". I have read Saint-Michel's brief reference to this dating which flatly contradicts this statement for he says that the measurement was made on "the similar layers of THE NEIGHBOURING ANTILLES". If Saint-Michel cannot be bothered to let us know even which one of the hundreds of the islands that make up the Carribean chain he is referring to and which stratum was tested using carbon-14 (which can only be used on ORGANIC material incidentally!) surely Mr Wise does not expect us to accept this evidence as convincing.

(7) The disposition of the skeletons is said to suggest a graveyard. The first question I would ask is whether any other civilisation at any period of time has ever been known to bury their dead at high water level on an open coastline? If it can be shown that any have, then it would reinforce that argument. Otherwise it is only a guess to explain their presence there. I would suggest that it is highly unlikely that they were buried in this location. It would only take one reasonable storm to deposit the remains of their dear departed back on the shoreline for all to see! I

hardly think this would be acceptable to many cultures.

Regarding the damage to the bodies, if they were ritual burials, even though they may have been badly broken, one would have expected the bodies to be laid out in a normal position, not with the arms and legs in the contorted and displaced positions in which they were found.

(8) Although the formation of beach rocks has been known since the turn of the century, yet it seems that the precise mechanism involved is still unknown for Wise says "It is currently thought. . ." This gives one little confidence in the bold statements about the position and formation of these strata.

(9) Following on from (8) above, Cooper may be wrong in suggesting that TIDES would erode newly precipitated calcite, as they may have little effect if the shore is very gently sloping and the beach was sheltered. However, the situation at Moule is quite different for it would surely be subjected to great storms. One of the main factors affecting the storms on a coast is the "fetch", which is the distance across the water to the nearest large land mass that could give shelter. I note that Moule is exposed to the whole of the Atlantic width, is subject to the North-East Trade winds, and furthermore is in a hurricane area. I would suggest that beach rock would have little chance of forming under these conditions. Perhaps those who think otherwise could give a list of locations where it is forming today to see if they are at all like those pertaining to this location.

(10) I confess I was a little amused by the reference to the opinions of Charles Lyell on the subject. I have elsewhere examined the devious arguments Lyell used in his geological evidence and his ulterior motive in persuading Darwin to write about evolution AFTER he returned from the Beagle voyage.[7] I have also given one example of how Lyell invented a theory simply to avoid the obvious inference that the Natchez pelvis provided evidence that human remains had been found in very deep strata.[3:87] As I have said above, his opinions are based upon those who preceded him and not on any new information.

Wise refers to Lyell's note that sands can be cemented as deep as twenty feet, but this is irrelevant. If these skeletons had been found cemented in at twenty feet deep to avoid tidal scouring, then he could not at the same time claim that they were recent intrusive burials.

A LETTER FROM THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

By coincidence, I received from David Tyler a copy of a letter from Dr Stringer. This was in reply to a letter from David about the earlier letter (referred to above) written by Rosemary Powers of the Palaeontological staff in which she stated that the Mineralogy Department considered that the area was not a place where beach rock is forming. The main points of Dr Stringer's letter are as follows:

". . .Miss Powers'. . .reply was based on her recollections going back over 20 years. I have asked her about her letter, and there appears to be no documentary evidence for her comments. I certainly searched in relevant files myself when conducting my own review for the Guadeloupe skeleton. . .

The two essential questions that must be answered here are as follows: —

(a) is the skeleton embedded in "beach rock"?

(b) is beach rock to be found in the vicinity of Moule, from where we know the skeletons originated?

You, I and the Museum's mineralogists are agreed that the answer to (a) is "Yes". . .Regarding (b) the 1961 geological map of Guadeloupe . . .clearly shows that "sable calcaire parfois consolide" occurs in the vicinity of Moule and is described in the accompanying commentary (pages 16–17) as containing human burials. I don't see how there can be ANY disagreement on this point, whatever Miss Powers may have written. I hope this clarifies the situation".

Despite Dr Stringer's emphatic assertion, I would suggest that he has not adequately answered the two questions that he has posed himself.

(a) In order to be absolutely certain that the skeletons were embedded in a recently formed beach rock, it must be shown that the matrix —

(i) is different from all limestones that have been deposited normally, in particular the limestone behind the beach,

(ii) is virtually identical to the material in the strata he is referring to,

(iii) is very similar to other beach rocks known to be forming in the present day and,

(iv) that the mechanism of forming beach rocks is known such that the vital evidence for identifying a beach rock as distinct from a normal limestone can be listed.

This I feel has not been proven. I note that Dr Stringer says that the Mineralogy Department considers the matrix to be a beach rock, but I would have preferred to have had their comments direct on this subject. If they are able to give the evidence required in the four points above, then this would go a long way to proving their case.

(b) Dr Stringer's evidence for claiming that beach rock is found near Moule is to quote the statement of Saint-Michel that there is "sable calcaire parfois consolide". My translation of this is "calcareous

sand sometimes consolidated". This is NOT a statement that it is a beach rock that had formed in comparatively recent times and indeed, had Saint-Michel considered that it was beach rock then he would surely have said so more clearly.

As the paper by Saint-Michel had been quoted and was also the most recent survey, I asked for, and was kindly sent, a copy of the relevant pages and maps by Dr Stringer's Department. When I read the description of the skeleton-bearing strata, I found it contained two surprising paragraphs, and one interesting point on the map. (The following translations are my own.)

The first paragraph described the rocks and says — "*The sand is subject to a phenomenon of very active consolidation and the layered beds, in the form of an amphitheatre following the curve of the beach, are detached and returned by the sea. It has sometimes resulted in a chaotic mass of flagstones that are about 10 or 12 centimetres thick*"

There are three distinct layers of these stones, all containing implements, the **central** one also containing the skeletons. He describes this layer as follows —

"*. . .In this layer, a number of sepulchres have been opened up. The skeletons are frequently in a foetal position, either lying down or sitting up, sometimes surmounted by a conical dish, giving the appearance of being a Chinese head-dress. All the reconstructed skulls show a right frontal-occipital deformation, one of the classical deformations of the American civilisations.*"

Both paragraphs give important information that has never been mentioned by either side.

In the first paragraph, the layers are protruding towards the sea and are obviously being broken up today by wave action and made into a chaotic mass of flat slabs only 12 cm (5 inches) thick. (This is the thickness of the slab in the Natural History Museum which suggests it came from this site.) This description does NOT give a picture of a sand that has solidified in the last thousand years or so. It is far more realistic to contend that the sea has been steadily eroding this area and only now is it opening up these layered strata that contain skeletons. This would strongly support the statement in Miss Powers' letter that "beach rock is not forming in this area."

Furthermore, with all the activity involved in the breaking up of the flagstones, I am baffled by Saint-Michel's description of the area as "subject to active consolidation". Does he really expect us to accept that this rock is forming today to a marble hardness and at the same time being broken up by the force of the waves? I can only think that he makes this statement because of the presence of artefacts and human skeletons. With his evolutionary framework he MUST class them as "recent" but no other reason is put forward, whilst the rest of the paragraph completely contradicts his statement. If this is the only reason for his statement that it is "recent", then it can be ignored as the "age" of the skeletons is the very point of this debate. Even in his location of these important strata he seems to be deliberately vague for he merely says they are "east of Moule".

Saint-Michel's description of the sea-weathered flagstones incidentally clears up one point that puzzled me. In describing the stone containing the skeleton, Konig's report mentioned that there was no mark of a stonemason's tools on the slab received. I would have expected there to have been much chiselling required to cut the rock away underneath the skeleton. It is now obvious that the piece was broken away like many others by the force of the sea prior to its discovery.

His second paragraph is even more surprising for he seems to infer that more skeletons have been found comparatively recently, and he describes them in some detail. He says that some are lying down and others are "sitting up". This latter position presents a problem, for the beds are only 12cm thick, and therefore the skeleton would pass through several layers which would later be separated by the sea. Did they then have to find the connected pieces and reconstruct the sitting posture? We are not told.

The reference to the "Chinese hats" is intriguing. Do we infer that they were buried in this strange attire? What were they made of, and why were no other items found with them? With regard to the comment that there is a deformity of the right (only!) side of the skull that is a characteristic of American civilisation, I find this strange and unconvincing. However, if they ARE American Indians, then we have a simple means of dating the skeletons. We have only to ask the Socio-anthropologists at what period in their culture the wearing of Chinese hats was all the rage in fashions!

THE MAP

The map of the area was interesting. As I have discussed above, Saint-Michel's description of certain layers is not precisely one of "beach rock", for he merely says they are "sometimes consolidated" and then lists them under the heading "Recent Quaternary and present day".

It was whilst I was examining the map that I noticed that he described another older rock (listed under the heading of "Ancient and Middle Quaternary") in a very similar way, for he labels it "calcareous sand consolidated AND STRATIFIED"

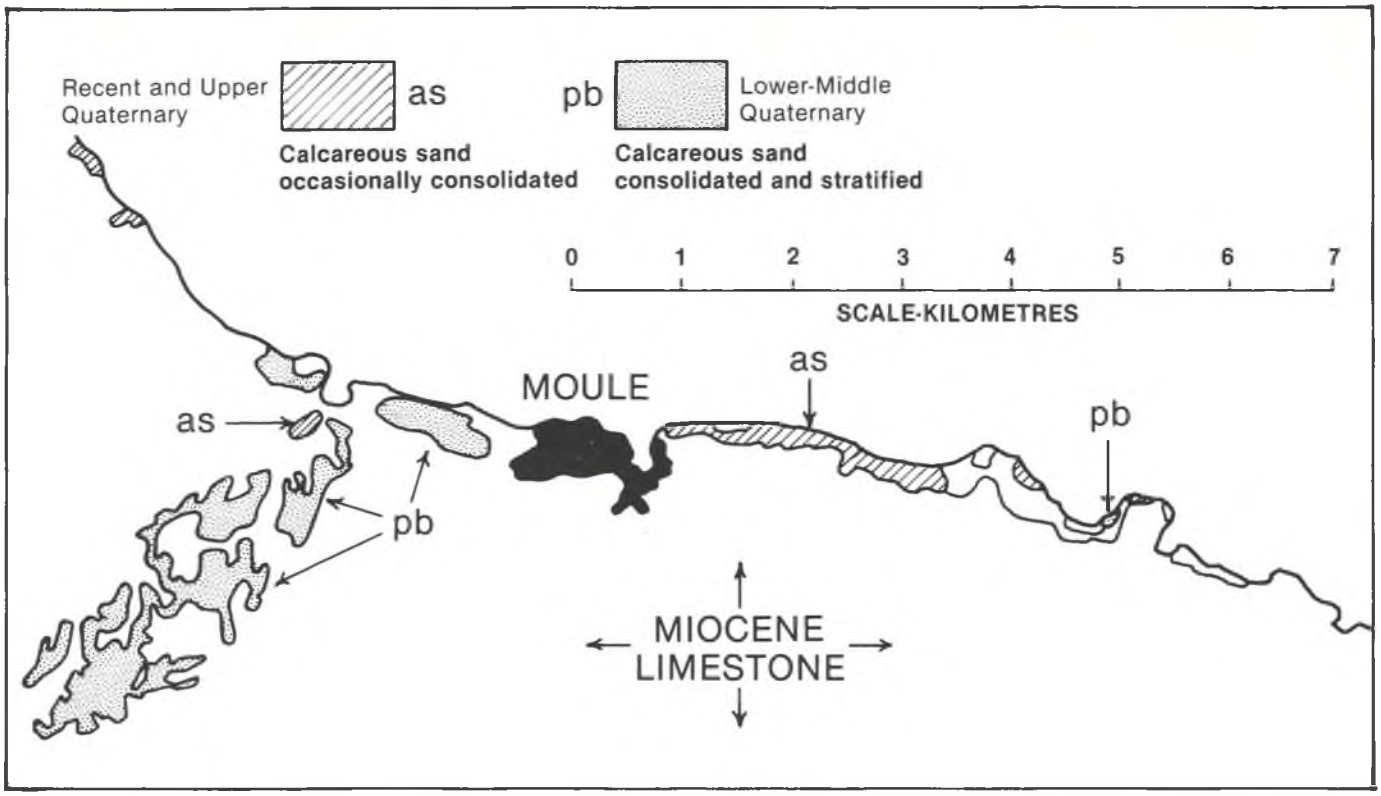

Fig. 2. Map of Consolidated sand strata around Moule

(Fig. 2). Turning to the text describing this rock it said —

"Stratified sands — On the reefs raised up at Meandrina is a formation of stratified limestone sands about 20m (66 ft) thick. These sands are for the most part strongly consolidated. They show varied and incoherent lines which do not visibly correspond to the tectonic stresses. In fact the consolidation is contemporary with the deposit and the slabs thus formed are torn away and "see-sawed" in all directions. This phenomenon is very frequent in our day on the beaches of Grande-Terre."

"It is to the west of Moule that this formation, surmounting the raised-up reefs, shows its stratigraphic position best. . .it covers over, often directly the white Miocene limestone. . .The age of the formation. . .is difficult to guage precisely."

This certainly fits the description of the skeleton-bearing flagstone strata very closely for the following similarities should be noted.

(1) It is a calcareous sand.
(2) It is strongly consolidated. (Could it be as hard as marble?)
(3) Slabs are broken away and formed into a chaotic jumble.
(4) These slabs can be seen frequently on the beaches of Grande-Terre today.

I would suggest that it is more likely THIS is the strata in which the skeletons have been discovered. The "occasionally consolidated sand" strata in which Saint-Michel has put them suggests only a weak cementation if it is sometimes UNconsolidated, and would not be of marble-like hardness.

To the west of Moule, this hard limestone appears not only near the beach but over a wide area inland, reaching as far as 5 km south west from Moule where it is 4 km from the sea. There is however one small area on the beach 5 kilometres to the east of Moule. I would suggest that either this is the site of the skeletons or alternatively, Saint-Michel has incorrectly described the larger area of "occasionally cemented sand" that is also to the east of Moule. I am not of course suggesting that such an error was deliberate. It is unfortunate that he does not locate the precise position of the skeletons.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Usually, as more information becomes available, so a problem becomes gradually clearer. In this debate however, what information does appear in official sources raises even more questions. If one considers Spencer's deliberate avoidance of describing this area and Saint-Michel's quite inadequate treatment of this very important and controversial strata,

which he deals with in only one page, I have the same feeling that I had when researching for my "Ape-men" book, i.e. that there is much that is being deliberately left vague and unsaid, from which many will draw their own conclusions.

It would seem to me that the evidence is still too vague and conflicting to be certain which view is correct. More evidence from the actual site is really needed, preferably from an inspection by someone who will be prepared to look for evidence of the skeletons being buried by a sudden catastrophe. All reports in modern days have been made by evolutionists and it is not unknown for them to overlook evidence that would support the "young earth" creationist cause.

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