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The Mystery of the Mammals, Monotremes and Marsupials: A Menace to Evolutionism

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ABSTRACT

The alleged evolution of the mammals from reptiles is one of the evolutionists' favourites, yet the record is so unclear and the hurdles so great that educated creationists can easily demonstrate the transformist case to be highly doubtful. Under informed scrutiny, mammal evolution is seen to be an illusion.

INTRODUCTION

Before taking a look at two of the world's most incredible animal groups, the monotremes and the marsupials, a brief critique of the alleged origin of mammals is in order. For a number of very sound reasons, informed creationists do not accept the concept or validity of the geologic time divisions mentioned hereafter.[1–6] However, for the sake of argument I will refer to the various alleged geologic epochs and eras as if they were valid, and show that even then the fossil record still does not support the idea that mammals evolved from reptiles.

THE STEM REPTILES

According to the greatest US 20th century palaeontologists, Romer[7] and Colbert[8], the line of mammal-like reptiles **arose at the same time** as the stem reptiles, which in turn supposedly led to later true reptiles. This was in the so-called Pennsylvanian Period, c.300 million years bp (Before the Present). This of course is rather puzzling, as normally evolutionists would look to more advanced forms as being the most likely to evolve into more complex organisms.

As usual with the major groups, nobody knows the real ancestors of the reptiles or of the first mammal-like reptiles, Class Synapsid, sub-Class Pelycosaur, which appeared in the Pennsylvanian. The pelycosaurs were differentiated from other early reptiles right **from their first appearance,** by having a single lateral opening in the temporal region of the skull, and two coracoid elements in the shoulder girdle. Both carnivorous and herbivorous types flourished into the Permian, c.280 million years ago. It is thought that some members of this group gave rise to the supposedly more advanced mammal-like reptiles, the sub-Class Therapsid, which flourished in Permian to Early Triassic times, around 240 million years bp.

From these Therapsids, it is alleged that the 'early, primitive' mammals arose, sometime in the Late Triassic to Early Jurassic, around 180 million years bp.

FROM THERAPSID TO MAMMAL

However, because of difficulties such as too much specialisation or the presence of too many 'primitive' features, the details of the alleged line of descent from therapsid reptile to mammal are uncertain. Dawson writes:

> *'The fossil record presents a picture of several lines of therapsids approaching the mammalian level of development in the Triassic. It appears likely that at least three or perhaps six or more phylogenetic lines passed from the therapsid to the mammalian grade.'*[9] (emphasis mine) (I will show the reasons for making such extraordinary claims later.)

The groups we are mainly interested in are the Triassic cynodonts and the tritylodonts which persisted into the Late Triassic and Early Jurassic, and according to the fossil record at that time became extinct. The last lingering genera of mammal-like reptiles included the *Ictidosaurian diarthrognathus, Eozostrodon* (also known as *Morganucodon), Kuehneotherium* and one or two others.

Of the two major groups, the cynodonts and the tritylodonts, Romer had this to say:

> *'. . . it seems certain that various mammalian features had been independently acquired in several therapsid groups . . . the cynodonts are sometimes thought to be mammalian ancestors but certain (technical) features debar them . . . some tritylodonts had a mammal-type dentition but this is merely a case of parallel evolution in dental features and (the group)*

is still considered as being therapsid' (reptiles).[10] (emphasis mine)

Even the reptiles 'closest' to mammals *(Ictidosaurian diarthrognathus* and the cynodont *Thrinaxadon*) and other highly regarded candidates such as *Eozostrodon* and *Kuehneotherium,* all possessed a **full complement** of reptilian jaw bones, although some are reduced and the dentary is quite large; a **full reptilian** quadrate-articular jaw joint; and a **typical reptilian** hearing apparatus. **No half-way transitional fossil is known.**

THE FIRST MAMMALS

No undoubted mammal fossil exists from earlier than the Middle Jurassic, and of the earliest alleged mammals of Late Triassic/Early Jurassic times, Romer writes:

'. . we know extremely little of their Mesozoic history,'[11]

In plain English this means that nobody claims to know exactly how, when or where reptiles evolved into mammals. A detailed study of the literature reveals the same picture again and again. During about 40 million years between the Middle Triassic and the Late Jurassic, scientists admit that they know virtually nothing of the mammalian evolution that was supposedly going on! Romer described this enormous time gap as a no-man's land, and Olson wrote:

'After the Early Jurassic, a very curious thing happened. During the next 80 million years, very little seems to have gone on. It was a period of marking time.'[12]

Valentine also found this a great mystery and wrote:

'. . . it is puzzling that (the mammals) did not radiate sooner (than the Early Cenozoic).'[13]

I often wonder if evolutionists really consider how long a million years is, let alone 40 or 80 million! The reality of it all is very questionable — 40 million years with virtually no fossil evidence! No wonder there is so much speculation and wishful thinking involved in the alleged reptile to mammal transition. Again and again Romer[14] has to resort to the subjunctive when commenting on the few pitiful fossil scraps of the Early Jurassic. Each of these scraps of this period attracts the words 'uncertain', 'possible', 'may be', 'suggested', etc., and the old evolutionist favourite of parallel evolution is repeated over and over because of contradictions and/or ignorance caused by fossil transitionals which simply do not exist.

Colbert[15] has the same troubles as Romer and all the others; when the actual evidence so necessary is lacking, and when lateral variations within the type are mistaken for vertical evolution. When features appear which are not expected, then contradictions and puzzles occur which lead inevitably to secondary assumptions such as the ubiquitous claims of parallel/convergent evolution, and these can often be nothing but a sheer 'let-out', as leading British evolutionists Gribbin and Cherfas have admitted.[16]

Now while secondary assumptions may be allowable (and we all make them), it is a great pity that such seeming 'escape mechanisms' are allowed to be invoked when scientists are caught short of the evidence so needed to prove their claims. With all the numerous synapsid/therapsid fossil specimens available, one would think it would be fairly easy to trace the line from reptile to mammal, but it can't be done because it never happened. Not one evolutionist can point to the actual fossil evidence showing that any reptile was transformed into any mammal, and the only way out for them is to call on parallel/convergent evolution, with different mammals supposedly originating from different reptiles. This is known as polyphyletic (many) origins, and is even more difficult to believe than is one single line of transformation.

A further enormous problem is the lack of fossilisation of the soft parts — reproductive system, mammary glands, and other features. Denton[17] also points out the great dangers involved in evaluating fossil skeletal parts alone without the knowledge of important mammalian non-skeletal features. Denton uses the case of the lungfish to emphasize that point. Evaluation of hard parts alone has led evolutionists 'up the garden path' on previous occasions.

JURASSIC MAMMALS

By the Late Jurassic, four distinct mammalian orders were believed to be in existence — the multituberculates, the triconodonts, the panthotheria and the symmetrodonta. All were apparently small insectivore types, or carnivorous with gnawing teeth. Opinions as to their descendants vary widely, and so does the terminology of classification. It is impossible to study the literature and come up with anything like a clear picture of subsequent development of these groups. As Dawson admits,[18] the Mesozoic mammal fossil record is woefully inadequate; this is very strange as it is just at the very time when the alleged transformation was taking place!

Even by the Late Cretaceous, very little is known of mammalian evolution as Dawson points out that

'. . . the postulated relationships (of early mammals) among themselves and with other (later) mammals are highly speculative.'[19] (emphasis mine)

The sub-Class Metatheria, containing the single order Marsupalia, dates from the Late Cretaceous of North America. This marsupial is none other than the Virginia marsupial opossum, family *Didelphidae,* and is almost identical with the extant family! Denton writes:

'. . . the earliest mammal for which there is reasonable evidence . . . was apparently already at the level of living, primitive mammals such as the insectivore s or the Virginia opossum.'[20] (emphasis mine)

To Laserson[21] this early marsupial is a puzzle. As he explains, the marsupials, like the monotreme egg-layers,

are extraordinary because they are both so 'primitive' and yet are at the same time successful, well-adapted modern animals. It is pure evolutionary bias to describe any extant organism as 'primitive' simply because it does not fit the evolutionary scenario. The marsupials are not primitive, as most can hold their own in competition with the so-called higher placental mammals.

For instance, most of the 30 odd species of Australian marsupial mice (some are as large as rats) are carnivorous and absolutely fearless, and will attack and kill placental mice and even larger animals with lightning speed.[22] Neither are most other Australian marsupials, such as the native cats, the bandicoots, the Tasmanian devils, the kangaroos, wallabies and so on, inferior in any way when in competition with placentals.

The extinct Tasmanian wolf, the thylacine, lost its place mainly because of human activities, and **not** because it was primitive in comparison with placentals. In fact, the thylacines were killers of sheep, young cattle and poultry until farmers shot them out. The Tasmanian devil and the native cats are extremely ferocious and prey successfully on various placental animals and birds. Of course, I am fully aware that fighting ability alone is not always the deciding factor in the struggle for survival, but all marsupials are well-adapted to their environment whether arid or wet, hot or cold, and placental Australian mammals exhibit little, if any superiority, whether it be mode of reproduction, attack or defence capability, or any other physical feature.

T. J. Dawson, Professor of Zoology, University of New South Wales, Australia, points out with considerable force that the currently held theory that monotremes represent the earliest stage of mammal evolution, and that the marsupials, having pouches and embryo-like young, were seen as the next step to the placentals, is simplistic and is now **known to be misleading**.[23] He also admits that good transitional stages from reptile to mammal are not known.

ORIGIN OF MARSUPIALS AND MONOTREMES

Evolutionists generally agree that the marsupials arose in Northern America, since the first marsupial opossum fossils are found in that continent from the Late Cretaceous about 80 million years BP. The pattern of fossil marsupials in South America suggests to evolutionists that this opossum family, the *Didelphidae,* migrated into South America via the central American land-bridge in the Early Cenozoic, about 65 million years ago. Then, by means only guessed at, they arrived in Australia and by the Middle Tertiary times not only were the opossums well established but also the thylacines (the marsupial wolf), bandicoots, gliders, moles and many others. Most mammalologists believe that the immigrating opossums were the ancestors of all later Australian marsupials.[24] When one considers the diversity of creatures in the eight main marsupial families, this indeed would have been a miraculous achievement, for there is little or no fossil evidence to support the claim.

Of the claim that the *Didelphidae* are primitive and ideal ancestors for the later 'higher' marsupials, Denton has this to say:

> *'The opossum are not ideal ancestors for the whole marsupial group in terms of their biochemistry. At the molecular level they are as far away from any reptile as any other marsupial species.'*[25] (emphasis his)

Denton also points out that the opossum, a living fossil, almost unchanged morphologically for nearly 80 million years, is in no way primitive in respect to other mammalian groups.[26]

The fossil record of the monotremes, the platypus and the echidna, is very poor and nothing is known of their origins. Of the two groups of monotremes, Lyne had this to say:

> *'No intermediate forms between these highly specialised animals are known and they so little resemble one another that their relatively close relationship would hardly be suspected.'*[27]

Lyne goes on to write, without a shred of fossil evidence to support him, that the monotremes are intermediate between reptiles and higher mammals! However, Lyne admits that fossil monotremes do not differ from the extant species and says:

> *'. . . because of this lack of evidence, the evolutionary history of the monotremes is unknown.'*[28]

No clearer evidence of evolutionary bias could be cited!

T. J. Dawson maintains that monotremes and marsupials have been separate for 180 million years and says it is paradoxical that the relationship of the supposed ancestors of monotremes to their descendants is still largely a mystery.[29] He again forcefully denies that monotremes are necessarily primitive and that the non-availability of soft parts of past species obscures the position.[30] He also comments on 'the grudging conclusion' by modern evolutionists that the brain and intelligence of the monotremes are more developed than would be expected.[31] Furthermore he writes:

> *'We must modify the quaint view that echidnas (spiny ant-eaters) are little more than animated pincushions or glorified reptiles.'*[32]

and he concedes that marsupials are not inferior to the placentals.

Denton has more to add on the subject:

> *'The monotremes afford little evidence for believing that any of the basic character traits were achieved gradually in the way evolution envisages.'*[34]

MAMMALIAN FEATURES

The main diagnostics which distinguish mammals from other forms are:

(1) The young are produced alive (except monotremes)
(2) Possession of hair or fur
(3) Self-regulating body temperature
(4) Mammary glands for suckling the young
(5) The mammalian diaphragm
(6) Squamosal-dentary jaw articulation
(7) The three-bone middle ear construction and the Organ of Corti
(8) Highly differentiated teeth

Evolutionists would argue that there is evidence for a reptile to mammal transition with Nos. (6) and (8) above. I will not go into detailed discussion at this point as this alleged transition is the subject of a further paper. Those who are interested in the detailed argument on the subject should refer to an excellent paper by Gish.[35] Gish shows that most of the evolutionists' claims are little more than wishful thinking.

However, there is no ambiguity about the other six major changes as shown above, which would be required to transform a reptile into a mammal. There is not a shred of fossil evidence which would indicate that the enormous modifications required did actually take place — and all performed by random mutations!

Evolutionists consider that the egg-layers are primitive and a carry-over from the egg-laying reptilian condition, but once again there is no justification for such a belief, except evolutionary bias. The monotremes get along very nicely and they exhibit little empirical sign of reptile ancestry.

The transformists are therefore in a serious dilemma: since the pouched marsupials and the egg-layers are definitely mammals, how do we account for their origin? No fossil lines connect any particular mammal-like reptile with any particular marsupial, monotreme or placental mammal. There is no fossil sign indicating **unambiguous** ancestry for the main mammalian diagnostic features.

How did the embryonic kangaroo learn to find its way through the mother' s fur and attach itself to the teat hidden in the pouch? How did the mammary glands develop in parallel in all three mammalian groups? Where did the platypus get its amazing sensitive duck-like bill? How did the female red kangaroo learn to hold an embryo in suspension until the first-born was weaned? Did all these things happen by random mutation and selection? Surely even the most hardened evolutionist must find this difficult to accept and explain!

Lyne tells us that many marsupials show a remarkable resemblance to certain 'higher' placental mammals without being closely related to them.[36] One staggering case is the Tasmanian marsupial wolf, the thylacine, which bears many striking similarities to the placental wolf, and yet the two are only distantly 'related'.

There is only one way out — the transformist is compelled to resort to the previously mentioned 'escape mechanism', namely parallel/convergent evolution. British scientist, Francis Hitching, is frankly skeptical:

'The marsupials of Australia have evolved in a remarkably similar way to the placentals in the rest of the world. Wolves, cats, squirrels, ground hogs, anteaters, moles and mice all have their look-alike counterparts in spite of all the millions of years they have been raised apart . . . the current explanation explains nothing . . . it seems highly unlikely that natural selection of chance mutations could have arrived at the same near-identical solution of adaptation.'[37]

Of the monotremes, Laserson had this to say:

'If they had been found as fossils in Triassic or Jurassic times, they would have created less astonishment than they do as living creatures.'[38]

On the same page Laserson says the monotremes are one of the great unsolved problems of nature.

It is indeed fortuitous for creationists that the marsupials and the monotremes **are extant** animals, because if they were only found as fossils we would not have the clear picture we have. When we examine the soft parts of these odd creatures, we can see immediately that they are neither primitive nor in any way ancestral or intermediate to the placentals, but are unique animals fully deserving their own distinct classification in taxonomy. I believe that if we were ever able to examine the soft parts of the mammal-like reptile groups, we would see that they too were unique groups having positions in taxonomy not unlike those of the marsupials and monotremes of today, and having nothing to do with so-called evolutionary progression.

Michael Denton, Australian molecular biologist, exhibits extreme skepticism about current evolutionary theory and asks, why is it that out of all the millions of species known to biology, only a handful can be considered to be in any sense intermediate between other well-defined types?[39] And even this handful is not convincing. On the same page Denton points out that although monotremes exhibit a 'reptilian' feature in their reproductive system (egg-laying), their other features are basically mammalian. His point is that if the **individual characteristics** of so-called intermediates were **themselves** in a state of transition, the case for evolution could be more believable.

To conclude, I quote Denton again:

'How much easier it would be to argue the case for evolution if all of nature's divisions were blurred and indistinct; if the systema naturae (natural classifications) were largely made up of overlapping classes indicative of sequence and continuity.'[40]

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