

Mammoth taxonomy problems

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Evolutionary scientists have worked out a scheme for the origin and evolution of mammoths from elephants.¹ Mammoths supposedly arrived in Eurasia from Africa about 3 Ma ago and evolved from *Mammuthus meridionalis* to *M. trogontherii* to *M. primigenius* (the woolly mammoth). *M. trogontherii* then migrated across the Bering Land Bridge into North America about 1.5 Ma ago and became the Columbian mammoth, *M. columbi*. The woolly mammoth is assumed to have evolved in Siberia during the late Pleistocene around 250,000 years ago and spread to the rest of Eurasia and North America. We disagree with the dates, but the general idea of mammoths spreading into North America during the Ice Age is accepted by creation scientists. This taxonomy is based mainly on teeth. However, the classification or taxonomy of mammoths is still not worked out.²

Mammoth splitting

The taxonomy of North American mammoths is especially a problem for evolutionists, who view ‘species’ as distinct, interbreeding units. The taxonomic splitters have dominated the conversation. The earliest mammoths are of course said to be ‘primitive’, similar to *M. meridionalis* in Europe. Lister and Sher reject the idea that *M. meridionalis* (figure 1) was ever in North America, as some evolutionists have suggested based on flawed data: “Past identifications were often based on worn molars and failed to take into account the mode of eruption and wear among elephants.”³

The tooth wear had caused the number of lamellae, or parallel ridges, to have been miscounted, and so the mammoth was assumed to be the primitive form. I wonder how often this kind of mistake happens because of their assumptions. ‘Advanced’ mammoths are sometimes dated older than ‘primitive’ mammoths, adding to their consternation. So, it appears the evolutionary terminology ‘primitive and advanced’ is subjective and dependent on reasoning from the ‘dates’. This also shows that both evolutionists and creationists need to be cautious with our models and not jump to conclusions too quickly.

It appears that the European *M. trogontherii* and American *M. columbi* are the same type of mammoth and should not be different species:

“On this evidence, the source of *M. columbi* lies in *M. trogontherii* of Eurasia, its appearance in North America representing a dispersal and the distinction between the two species largely a matter of usage.”⁴

Lister and Sher conclude that despite all the names given to North American mammoths, there are only

two firmly established ‘species’: *M. columbi* and *M. primigenius*. However, scientists that espouse evolution admit it is very likely *M. columbi* and *M. primigenius* are the same species,^{5,6} especially since there are a number of intermediates or hybrids between these two supposed species that are given several names, such as *M. hayi*, *M. haroldcooki*, *M. jeffersonii*, or *M. imperator*. It appears the taxonomic splitters have been responsible for mammoth taxonomy.

Creationist suggestions

Evolutionists think that species are like our created kinds: interbreeding organisms that cannot breed with other species. However, we can accept all these mammoths as one created kind, since they can interbreed and look much alike. The kind is obviously at a higher classification than species with the *average* kind at the genus or family level.

The evolutionist taxonomic confusion with mammoths also shows us that we should be cautious about accepting the details of mammoth

taxonomy, dividing an organism into multiple species, since many assumptions and misinterpretations seem to go into it. The fossils point to one kind that has much variability built in. This especially shows up in the teeth. The special features of the woolly mammoth could be simply adaptations to the cold, since they lived in the colder regions compared to the Columbian mammoth.

Whether mammoths are one kind, and separated from extinct Ice Age mastodons or living and extinct types of elephants cannot be known for certain. What we do know supports what I have suggested before⁷ that the elephants of order Proboscidea, with their many similarities, are all one kind. This is also the opinion of Sarfati.⁸ This is not evolution, but simply the variation due to different environments triggering various expressions of the pre-existing gene pool created within the elephant kind.

References

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Figure 1. Complete skeleton of *Mammuthus meridionalis* (Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, L'Aquila)