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AAPA Members Forum

Editors note: Opinions expressed in this column are those of their authors alone. They do not represent official positions of the AAPA, nor do they necessarily reflect opinions of its officers, executive committee or the editorial board of this newsletter.

Bone Clones' "re-creation" of *Kenyanthropus*

We want to inform the AAPA membership that the company Kronen Osteo has had no access to the *Kenyanthropus* hominin skull (KNM-WT 40000) of which they sell a Bone Clones "re-creation". Casts of this fossil are not yet available and only a limited number of photographs have been published. Consequently, substantial aspects of the company's "re-creation" of KNM-WT 40000 qualify as pure "creation".

In 2001 we announced new Plio-Pleistocene hominin fossils from Lomekwi, Kenya (Leakey et al, *Nature* 410, 433-440, 2001). The finds include a cranium, KNM-WT 40000, which we designated as the type of a new hominin genus and species *Kenyanthropus platyops*. We are currently preparing a full description of the cranium, and the National Museums of Kenya does not yet sell casts of the specimen. It is thus with some surprise that we learned from US colleagues that, what appears to be a cast of the cranium takes pride of place on the cover of the Kronen Osteo 2002 catalogue (www.boneclones.com).

Under the name "Bone Clones" Kronen Osteo offers for sale what they describe as "re-created" hominin fossil crania. Their catalogue explains that the specimens are sculpted, based on casts and photographs of the originals. By not physically re-casting authorised casts the company avoids infringing on copyright. We do not intend to discuss here the quality of those "re-creations" that are based on actual casts and detailed photographs of well-published specimens. Neither do we on this occasion intend to consider the morality of using such "re-created" casts. What we do wish to bring to the attention of the membership of the AAPA, however, is that the "re-creation" of KNM-WT 40000 is a special case. Based on just a few photographs, it differs significantly from the "real thing".

Published photographs of the *Kenyanthropus* cranium show its front, top, left side, and palate. Leaving aside the question how well these views are "re-created" by Kronen Osteo, it is clear that the cranial base, right side and rear must have been "created". This has been done in part by incorporating the isolated temporal bone KNM-WT 40001, a specimen we explicitly did not assign to *Kenyanthropus*. It is also worth noting that the photograph shown in the catalogue as the example from which the sculptor is working is a three-quarter view published in *National Geographic Magazine* (October 2001). This was not a scientific photograph to document the cranium's morphology. One of us (MGL) was simply asked by the photogra-

pher to pose holding up the separate facial and neurocranial parts of the cranium, without any intent of aligning them correctly. This may be fine for a popular science photo, but it is troubling when it is taken as the source for a "re-created" cast to be used in academic and scientific settings. We were not approached by Kronen Osteo for advice or comments.

Does any of this really matter? The current situation is that an important, but yet only partially described piece of evidence for human evolution is accompanied by a scientifically inaccurate facsimile, that has the potential of reaching a large audience of students and nonspecialists. We know that some of our colleagues have assumed that it was sculpted using an authorised cast. Indeed, one of us (FS) has received comments suggesting that information in the *Nature* article is at odds with the morphology of the Bone Clones cast, and by inference questioning our descriptions. All we can do at this stage is to maximize awareness among colleagues of the discrepancy between the fossil evidence, and the creative output of Kronen Osteo.

One may be deeply concerned how the creationist lobby would repond when human evolution classes are being taught, and the general public informed through museum exhibits, using a "re-created" and partially invented fossil. More parochially, the members of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists should consider whether the prominent presence of Kronen Osteo exhibiting at their annual meetings amounts to an endorsement, even if by implication only.....

Thanks to the numerous colleagues who have discussed this matter with us, and have commented on drafts of this contribution.

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