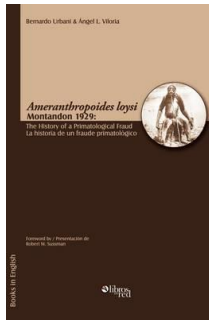




Book Review

***Ameranthropoides loysi* Montandon 1929: The History of a Primatological Fraud.** Bernardo Urbani and Ángel L. Viloría, Buenos Aires: Libros en Red, 2008. 296 pp. ISBN 9781597544450. \$34.50 (paperback).



In 2008 two Venezuelan scholars with a shared interest in the history of the natural history of their native country, collaborated to document how a fraudulent claim of human ancestry impacted science and sociopolitics on three continents for more than a generation. The result is a wonderful read, in both English and Spanish, richly referenced in the literature and carefully argued. Outside of the compelling historical narrative, the most interesting aspect of this book is its dedication to full bilingual presentation, in the tradition of one half of the book being in English and the other half in Spanish, unabridged. This should be a model for all of scientific literature.

The introduction to the book is provided by noted anthropologist and primatologist Robert Sussman. He astutely observes that the story of de Loys' ape is larger than the provocative photo and its manipulation; it is a story of the global historical context of the eugenics movement, the dangerous currents of how science can be overrun by more accessible messaging (i.e., propaganda). From the introduction onward the tone of this book is that of a cautionary tale, and well-done.

Urbani and Viloría thoroughly document the flurry of reactions to the initial publication of the “monkey on a box”. A century later it is remarkable to see how much was said about the specimen, in very disparate settings, and by a wide variety of prominent scholars. Even

the Russian literature is sourced! At times it can become confusing to follow the chronology, because scientific publishing in the early part of the 20th century was print-based, of course. When the authors follow the dates of publications they sometimes need to “leap-frog” over publications in other countries because of the lag in information flow in that era. In other sections they stay on a theme of argument but, by the same necessity, jump back and forth in chronological time to stay on point. But the reader is compelled to keep up because the message that emerges is how a relatively obscure datum point (the photo of the monkey) seeds larger and more elaborate motivations to control how and where the story of human evolution is told. For fans of the history of physical anthropology this book is a treasure.

The literature reviews of chapters 2 and 3 occupy the majority of the analysis. They are followed by a brief assessment of the historical turns at which simultaneously there were definitive critiques of the claim for *Ameranthropoides* as well as perpetuations of the misinformation. This is the essential lesson of time-transgressive academic literature and unequal wisdom. As the authors note, had the community heeded the wise words of Angel Cabrera as long ago as 1930, the arc of *Ameranthropoides* in the collective anthropological consciousness might have been quite different.

Cryptozoologists will find much to explore here as well. The authors dutifully account for

all literature that contends the picture to be that of a large and ape-like creature. They then use the rest of the literature and their own forensic research to dismantle this proposition completely. The idea that *Ameranthropoides* is anything other than a modern spider monkey is, as they say, “laid to rest”.

This book accomplishes three important and useful markers for the scientific community. One, it adds solid research and chronicle to the history of physical anthropology and

evolutionary biology. Two, it demonstrates the insidious nature of hoaxes to destabilize the careful path of science. And, three, as a completely bilingual book-length document it leads by example toward the future of scientific publishing.

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