

## 22 Epilogue: Is There a Future for the Aquatic Ape Theory?

This volume presents the first thorough published analysis of Sir Alister Hardy's Aquatic Ape Theory. The organisers of the AAT meeting in Valkenburg in 1987 feel that they assembled a representative sample of the broad array of existing opinions: both the advocates and the adversaries, as well as a number of uncommitted contributors in the middle. Readers are now invited to make up their own minds.

As editors, however, we feel obliged to give our own judgement on the theory, on the basis of the various contributions to this book. These are drawn from the standpoints of geology, palaeontology, palaeo-anthropology, comparative zoology, primatology, evolutionary biology, morphology, physiology and methodology. We have attempted to remain as neutral and objective as possible, as none of us has previously dealt in any depth with the AAT, coming to it from our different disciplines but each with an interest in human evolution.

First, it is clearly impossible to provide a conclusive answer to the question of whether there was an aquatic ape. Second, the arguments for and against the theory are difficult to weigh against each other. We will not rehearse them all; they are summarised at the start of each chapter. Our general conclusion is that, while there are a number of arguments favouring the AAT, they are not sufficiently convincing to counteract the arguments against it.

Let us add three final points. First, all the participants appreciated the open attitude and the fair and friendly atmosphere that characterised the Valkenburg conference. All lent a willing ear to their adversaries. Second, it may well be rewarding to reconsider the issue once further evidence – for instance, from palaeontology – becomes available. Third, we are convinced that the whole undertaking – both the conference itself and the preparation of this book – has been well worthwhile. And it has certainly not been merely a rebuttal of the theory. We feel that its advocates, reproaching the anthropological establishment either for having refused to listen or for laughing it away, had the right to be heard and in turn to hear the counter-arguments. An important epistemological function of the introduction and defence of a somewhat far-fetched idea is the moral obligation imposed upon the scientific establishment to listen and not to shy away from reformulating its own position, and so to

improve its own quality. This at least has been one positive outcome of the Aquatic Ape Theory debate.

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