

**Extraordinary Examples of Deception in Peer Reviewing:  
Concoction of the Dorenberg Skull Hoax and Related Misconduct**

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**ABSTRACT**

Good indirect evidence indicates that the so called Dorenberg skull hoax is a contrivance (circa January, 2003) which serves to counteract the rapidly growing dating evidence from fission-track, U-series, diatoms extinct by the end of the Last Interglacial Stage (Sangamonian), etc. for (pre-Wisconsinan) humans in America (>80,000 yr BP), which has been ignored or denied by members of the American archaeological establishment. Much evidence denotes that when an anonymous peer reviewer for the proceedings of an international diatom symposium received a submitted manuscript (in November 2002), the Dorenberg skull hoax was fabricated as a desperate attempt to discredit that manuscript which corroborated recent publications (and earlier works of H. Reichelt, H. Heiden, and F. Hustedt) on age-diagnostic fossil diatoms (scraped from within sutures of the Dorenberg skull discovered in Puebla, Mexico) and which confirmed the great antiquity of humanity in the New World. Prior to 2003, there is no recorded evidence that the Dorenberg skull is a hoax. Evidently, the editor for the proceedings believed all of the misrepresentations by the reviewers about this manuscript and also believed that the author had been duped by the concocted Dorenberg skull hoax which was the main reason for the rejection of the manuscript. Peer reviews of this manuscript offer superb examples of misinformation, misconduct, and deception in the blatant abuse of the peer reviewing process, such as: ignoring published ethics and guidelines for reviewers of scientific manuscripts, making personal attacks under the protection of anonymity, not properly documenting criticisms, discussing a manuscript with others while it was under review, and fabricating a hoax to discredit said manuscript.

**Keywords:** Abuse, Anonymity, Archaeology, Ethics, Guidelines, and Hoax Fabrication.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Diatoms, widely distributed in oceans, lakes, rivers, caves, soil, and air, are tiny one celled algae with short life spans: they are ecological indicators and successfully have been employed in determining the scenes of crimes which resulted in murder convictions [19]. Often diatoms have rapid extinctions, and they commonly have been used to correlate strata in oil exploration [15] and to determine the environment of deposition and age of artifacts [28, 29, 30].

The author's interest in the Dorenberg skull (an ancient human) was aroused upon examining California Academy of Sciences diatom collection slide 191090 which was prepared by F. Hustedt in 1949 from original diatomaceous material in which the skull was embedded. That examination indicated that the skull was Sangamonian in age, (>80,000 yr BP). It had two extant diatoms which had earliest known first occurrences in the Sangamonian, several diatoms which became extinct at the end of the Sangamonian, and two which were restricted to the Sangamonian. These observations correlated with diatoms from many samples collected in the Valsequillo region (Puebla, Mexico) and were submitted in a manuscript at an International

Diatom Symposium (IDS) in 2002. It was known in Europe over a century ago that the "Puebla Man" artifacts were probably older than the Last Ice Age [21]. Despite impressive evidence, most American archaeologists ignore or refuse to believe the great antiquity of these artifacts [23].

Casting doubt on the great antiquity of the Valsequillo artifacts by means of hoax allegations is nothing new; rather it is well documented, e.g., Lorenzo [16] and Irwin-Williams.[14]. Evidently, the reviewer who fabricated the Dorenberg skull hoax never bothered to examine the report by Irwin-Williams [14] (cited in the IDS manuscript), who rebutted the earlier hoax of J. Lorenzo which was intended to destroy the credibility of Irwin-Williams. Apparently Lorenzo was never able to counteract in a peer reviewed publication the rebuttal of Irwin-Williams. Although Lorenzo had nothing to do with the Dorenberg skull hoax, ostensibly he was a hoaxer and his underhanded chicanery is well documented regarding the Valsequillo artifacts.[9].

Archaeology has had a long history of such hoax deceptions as the fabrication of the phony Piltdown Man skull to make it appear to be legitimate; but the reviewer's deception instead was the fabrication of a hoax for the legitimate Dorenberg skull to make it appear to be phony. Before January 2003, the Dorenberg skull hoax was unknown (sans confirming documentation) and was contrived around January 2003 to counter the evidence presented by the author of the IDS manuscript: no mention of such a hoax could be found in the publications, Internet, or web sites before that date. That manuscript was condemned by the reviewer, because it presented dates for the Dorenberg skull and Valsequillo artifacts which were determined to be of Sangamonian age on the basis of diatoms which were associated with bifacial tools and a butchered camel pelvis dated by U-series at 250,000 yr BP. This rejected manuscript was submitted elsewhere and eventually was published [29].

The large body of evidence for the great antiquity of the artifacts at Valsequillo based on the work of the author of the IDS manuscript has been defended by those such as Covey [3] who asked, "When we must discard outmoded preconceptions or science itself, which will go?" Apparently the reviewer would rather have the science go away rather than discard conventional bias. Dogmatic opposition and suppression by mainstream American archaeology concerning the great age (before the Last Ice Age) of the Valsequillo artifacts has been duly noted, e.g., [4].

**2. ERRORS OF THE FIRST REVIEWER**

**Contrived Dorenberg skull hoax**

The Dorenberg skull (an ancient human) evidently was a legitimate discovery made in the early 1890's in the southern part of Puebla, Mexico (Valsequillo region). After seeing the IDS manuscript, the first reviewer quickly contacted one of the author's close associates who was highly experienced with the long history of Valsequillo artifact issues. Apparently in rushing to judgement and attempting to suppress this manuscript, the reviewer misunderstood and distorted some of the information

received. If this reviewer were so well informed on the Valsequillo artifacts and already had discounted the authenticity of the Dorenberg skull by means of a genuine "turn of the century" hoax, then why so much interest in obtaining information from others on the original description and the exact location of the skull? Was this an attempt to gather data to cover for the fabricating of a hoax (with little or no verifiable specifics of the original skull discovery), because more details for supporting the credibility of these fabrications were needed? Concerning this IDS manuscript, this reviewer stated (in an email of 12 February 2003 to the author's close associate): "He, [VanLandingham], included samples from everywhere in his paper including the Dorenberg skull. Is there any real solid provenance on that thing?" This was *after* the libelous review (with fabrications, misrepresentations, and the concocted Dorenberg skull hoax) was sent to the IDS editor (whose letter of rejection to the author was dated 11 February 2003). Ostensibly this reviewer: (1) had little definite information on the factual details of the Dorenberg skull occurrence; (2) was relying heavily on the hoax angle to make the case against this manuscript; and (3) was ignorant of (or failed to read) the original description provided by Reichelt [20, 21].

In relation to the Dorenberg skull, the reviewer claimed that, "... (there is evidence that this was a hoax generated by Europeans to obtain funding for work in Mexico at the turn of the century) in opposition to the totality of mainstream archaeology." This statement by the reviewer probably was invented circa January 2003 specifically to discredit the author's work and that of others who advocate the great antiquity of the Valsequillo artifacts. In making this doubtful claim, the reviewer was unaware that in the times "at the turn of the century" (ca. 1900), there was no "funding" as used in the modern sense. In order to "fund" significant archaeological research in those days, a person had to be: (1) independently wealthy, (2) in royal favor or patronage, or (3) under the direct aegis of a research institution or museum (e.g., Museum für Völkerkunde/Leipzig with which Reichelt was affiliated). Not only was Joseph Dorenberg (the skull's namesake) a diplomat and a merchant of highest integrity, he met all three of the above criteria and supported archaeological and geological research in the Puebla region. In the late 19th century, Joseph Dorenberg was Royal Belgian Consul in Puebla [6]. Such a hoax would have required his complicity. All of the important scientists (i.e., Reichelt, Felix, Lenk, Heiden, and Hustedt) involved in the early days of the Dorenberg skull saga met one or more of the three criteria above. Dorenberg and others associated with the skull would *not* have needed a "hoax generated by Europeans to obtain funding for work in Mexico at the turn of the century," contrary to the claims of this reviewer. Where is the evidence that the Dorenberg skull was a hoax? If it were a hoax, it fooled some of the greatest diatomists of all time, including Reichelt [20, 21], Heiden [10], and Hustedt.[13]. According to Reichelt [21], the Dorenberg skull was on display at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig, Germany. Recently a communication with that museum indicated that the Dorenberg skull was displayed for many years until it was destroyed in a fire (World War II bombing raid), and no reference was made to any hoax involved with it. Moreover, in 2003-2004 many queries to American and European libraries, institutions, and museums revealed nothing about such a hoax.

This reviewer claimed, "Reichelt only knew what he was told about the artifacts, as did Hustedt, there was no scientific description published that gave an age for the skull." It is clear that the reviewer had not bothered to read Reichelt [21], who indicated that the diatomaceous material scraped from within the Dorenberg skull was associated with an age term, "diluviales Alter": Diluvium or Glazialzeit = "Old Glacial-Time" or start of

the Last Ice Age = Würm, i.e., ca. 80,000 yr BP (vide [7]). If the Dorenberg skull were a hoax, how did the alleged hoaxers know that bona fide artifacts, excavated by the highly respected Irwin-Williams [14] over 70 years later, would be found in diatomaceous Sangamonian (ca. 80,000 to 220,000 yr BP) deposits at Valsequillo [28, 29] which matched those diatoms extracted by Reichelt from this skull? In 31 years of researching the Dorenberg skull and its Sangamonian diatoms, the author never found any mention in print of it being involved in a hoax, until the recent (circa January 2003) alleged hoax.

#### **Anonymous Reviewer Sharing Contents of Manuscript**

According to modern consensus, e.g. H. Malde [18], it is unethical for an anonymous reviewer to copy or discuss an unpublished manuscript. This reviewer violated many conventional guidelines in compromising the anonymity of the review process (by discussing the IDS manuscript with one of the close colleagues of its author). Several specific examples of the unethical use of the manuscript by the reviewer exist, e.g.: (1) telephoning a close colleague of the author to discuss the details of this manuscript and further compromising the its details by referring to that phone conversation (in which this manuscript was discussed) with that close colleague in an email of 29 November 2002 to that same colleague; (2) "I read bits of the manuscript to others for their reaction..." (from the reviewer's email of 11 January 2003 to that same colleague); and, (3) "I have only 3 weeks to get this review done... I am desperate for any advice," (from the reviewer's email of 8 December 2002, to that same colleague). How often do we encounter detailed documentation of a reviewer who eventually condemns (on specious grounds) some colleague's manuscript to a known friend of that colleague? Apparently this was not an isolated event, because documented (on university letterhead stationery) evidence indicated that this same reviewer conspired with a Texas archaeology professor to present libelous, unfounded statements about this same IDS manuscript in an attempt to squelch a similar manuscript by that same author which was submitted to another publication. If so much advice and help in evaluating this IDS manuscript were needed, why did the reviewer agree to review it in the first place? If the reviewer were not sufficiently knowledgeable about the contents of this manuscript, when requested by the IDS editor to review it, this reviewer should have declined to do so. In spite of the fact that feedback from the author's close colleague failed to support the attack on the IDS manuscript, the reviewer (a clear apologist for the status quo of the late arrival of humanity in the New World) evidently did not want to miss this opportunity to try to silence this new evidence and unethically made a special effort to try to suppress this work by such means as contrivance (i.e., Dorenberg skull hoax). In referring to the controversy with the Valsequillo artifacts, incredibly this reviewer in an email (of 11 January 2003) to the close colleague of the author of the IDS manuscript confesses, "Perhaps I am now part of the 'arrogant and bigoted academic elite interested more in the preservation of its own prerogatives and authority than the truth!'" Is the reviewer actually admitting to feeling guilty about having lost objectivity or is it a case of feeling intimidated by the American archaeological establishment?

#### **False Comments by Reviewer**

This reviewer condemned as unprofessional the reference in the manuscript to the book *Forbidden Archeology* by Cremo and Thompson [5], a book, based on eight years of library research that brings together once-famous but now forgotten ancient archaeological sites; over 800 pages of previously published data. The reviewer states that the book "has nothing to do with science." The Library of Congress cataloging system officially recognizes *Forbidden Archeology* as a science book, within the

sequence designation "GN700-GN890 (Man, Prehistoric)." In libraries over the United States which use the Library of Congress system, this book is catalogued as a science book (e.g., Texas Tech University Libraries listing under "GN741.C74" - a science book!). In fact, it is unlikely that any librarian or scientist in the world would judge that it would not be a book about science and that it has "nothing to do with science", as the reviewer so incorrectly proclaimed.

### **Failure to Do Library Research**

Contrary to this reviewer's claim that all of the evidence from fossil vertebrates described from the site "cannot provide support for a Sangamonian age", at Valsequillo ample evidence was found for ages older than the 20,000 - 10,000 yr BP range presented by the reviewer, e.g., Maldonado-Koerdell in Aveleyra [1] was tentatively inclined to accept an age for the Valsequillo fauna as old as the Sangamonian Interglacial.

In the unethical discussion of the IDS manuscript with the close colleague of the author, the reviewer admitted to being unfamiliar with the diatom Centric-Paucity (C-P) Zone. In spite of this admitted ignorance of the C-P zone, the reviewer never checked on its validity as a rough dating method and condemned it out of hand. The C-P Zone is valid and already had been demonstrated by VanLandingham [25, 26, 28] as an effective biostratigraphic tool. But, the reviewer would have known this, if examination of these references cited in the manuscript had been done.

### **3. ERRORS OF THE SECOND REVIEWER**

The IDS Dorenberg skull manuscript also was rejected on the opinion of a second reviewer who did not believe that pennate *freshwater* fossil diatoms could be used to make age determinations. This reviewer apparently was unaware that considerable dating and correlation of deposits with centric *and* pennate *freshwater* diatoms had been done conclusively more than once in recent years, e.g., in the Valsequillo region [28]. The potential of pennate diatoms in dating freshwater sedimentary deposits is greater than that of centric diatoms, because in freshwater deposition there are more than 7 times as many extinct pennate as centric diatoms in the fossil record. Pennate diatoms were shown to be more useful than centric diatoms in dating freshwater deposits [24]. Apparently this reviewer was unaware of the work of VanLandingham [27], and others on the "inherent precision limitations" of radiometric and high tech dating in which dating by fossil diatoms can be superior to high tech methods. The VanLandingham [27] investigation of diatom fossils in freshwater sedimentary beds encased by the middle Yakima (Wanapum) Basalt (Miocene) supported the proposition that, under certain conditions like those at Valsequillo, traditional micropaleontology techniques (e.g., extinct species with restricted ranges in the fossil record, earliest known first occurrences, dominant species within assemblages, etc.) could be used as successfully or even more successfully to determine the age of a given fossiliferous zone than a series of samples older and younger than the same zone from the general region which have been "precision" dated by K-Ar or other radiometric methods. It has been many years since this work was published, and ostensibly there is still no criticism of it.

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Lack of use of Guidelines.**

Good ethical guidelines for scientific editors, reviewers, and authors already exist, but reviewers in particular often seem to pay little, if any, attention to them. Some reviewers clearly ignore them and do abuse the peer review system through unethical actions. Not all journals clearly define what is expected from the reviewers; instead, it is assumed that such ethical practices will be followed, an unwritten code if you will. An example of such a code can be found in the guidelines for reviewers by H. E. Malde [18]. Such guidelines are considered broad enough to be effective in reviewing a manuscript for any scientific discipline.

#### **Anonymity and Abuse**

The protection of anonymity of the reviewer invites such opportunities for abuse or lack of objectivity by the reviewer as the sidetracking of work which may render obsolete the reviewer's own work. Today the anonymity of a reviewer can be taken as a license to make unfounded accusations that do not even address the evidence at hand: often statements with distorted logic or no supporting evidence given by the reviewer can pass the editor unchallenged. In recent years, it appears that anonymous peer reviewers can get away with almost any outrageous statements: such reviewers are beyond reproach according to many scientific publications today. Editors and granting agencies often just go along with any specious speculations, wishful thinking, and sometimes pure fabrications of sources and data by the reviewers. Authors must adhere to many requirements when submitting a manuscript yet "reviews are not held to the same standards of objectivity as the papers they address" [17]. For those that abuse the system, being asked to review a manuscript anonymously is "the dream of anybody seeking power, power without responsibility" [11]. Acting under such conditions, a referee can be tempted to reject publication of manuscripts they oppose under the ploy that their claims with respect to the quality of work being reviewed are unlikely to be questioned. In many journals, authors are not allowed to directly challenge a reviewer's comments: why is there not a system of review for the reviewers? In recent years, the ethical foundations of peer review have been questioned. Abundant complaints have led to such outspoken criticism by Horrobin [12] that the current peer review system "is a non-validated charade whose processes generate results little better than does chance." The admonitions of those like Goodstein [8] should be remembered, in spite of some progress in peer review reform in the last few years: "Referees are never held accountable for what they write, and editors are never held accountable for the referees they choose." For the anonymous peer review system to work, referees would have to have exceptionally high ethical standards, but nearly all have had their own ethical standards degraded by themselves being victims of peer review abuse in relation to their own submitted manuscripts. Unfortunately the peer review process is based on the mistaken idea that the anonymous reviewer will be more honest and objective than a reviewer who is known. In such endeavors as arts and politics, criticism is open and aids in improvements, but oddly, science is plagued by the cowardly behavior of anonymity which can squelch the originality and creativity of new ideas usually leading to the discomfort of the establishment with its tendency to shun paradigm shifting [2].

#### **Lack of Rebuttal and Resubmission**

An author should be allowed to submit a rebuttal, if the reviewer's comments are obviously incorrect (and can be refuted by means of documentation) or contain such misrepresentations as the Dorenberg skull hoax. As with our legal system, if

provable errors occur in a trial, the aggrieved person is allowed to appeal the decision in the face of new evidence: the same should hold true with the peer review system (since the editor is a judge), and resubmitting should be allowed, if conclusive proof is presented that blatant misrepresentations were made by reviewers which caused the original manuscript rejection. The editor of the IDS manuscript would not permit a resubmission or admit that the author's 23 page rebuttal pointed out documentable errors by both referees and the fabrication of a hoax. Because the editor acted in behalf of a professional society, the author made a formal protest to that society about the editor, reviewers, and lack of adherence to ethical guidelines, all to no avail. Today most judgements of editors for scientific publications are based entirely and finally on the referee's comments, no matter how outrageous, and most editors will not even entertain the possibility of a resubmittal. In a purely philosophical sense, the anonymous review violates one of our most basic democratic principles. A basic rule of our justice system holds that one who is being judged has the right to confront the accuser. This right is denied when a verdict is rendered in secret on the basis of testimony from unidentified individuals selected by a process in which one cannot participate. In any court, one has the right to know and challenge the qualifications or objectivity of witnesses. Why shouldn't it be so in science also? [17] Throughout history, most scientists published their views without formal review, and peers published their criticisms openly. Given the historical hostility of scientific peers to new ideas and paradigm destroying innovations, how many years would the advancement of science been delayed, if those like Galileo, Mendel, Copernicus, Newton, etc. had been subjected to the flawed peer review system as we know it today?

#### Final Considerations

Peer review abuse has become a major problem in science! If the reader does not believe this, do a Google search, enter "peer review misconduct," and observe the links to 210,000 [sic] items dealing with this subject. Peer review does not prevent fraud and does not greatly improve the quality of science [22]. Hennebert [11] concluded that peer review as undertaken by most scientific publications stifles scientific communication, slows the advancement of knowledge, and encourages dishonest behavior among referees.

The Dorenberg skull hoax epitomizes much of what is wrong with the current peer review process and demonstrates a pressing need for reform. The reviewer who contrived the Dorenberg skull hoax narrowly missed being sued for libel by the author of the IDS manuscript.

The reviewer who concocted the Dorenberg skull hoax tried to argue that redeposition was present at Valsequillo. If redeposition were prominent, why was there a marked paucity of running water diatoms which are so necessary for redeposition? Could it be that the fabrication of the Dorenberg skull hoax arose because the last good ploy (i.e., the redeposition excuse which archaeologists are so fond of invoking whenever the evidence at hand does not fit their favored ideas) against the great antiquity of the Valsequillo artifacts and the associated Dorenberg skull was in danger of being lost, in light of the extensive diatom evidence in the IDS manuscript against redeposition of the artifacts and the skull? [30] Archaeologists and historians were invited to present any evidence of a hoax involving the Dorenberg skull on the following web sites:

[www.alternativearchaeology.org](http://www.alternativearchaeology.org)  
[www.valsequilloclassic.net/nuke/](http://www.valsequilloclassic.net/nuke/)  
[www.robertschoch.net](http://www.robertschoch.net)

In over 4 years, this requested evidence has not been forthcoming. It can be concluded that the Dorenberg skull hoax is a contrivance and not a deterrent to the evident great antiquity of the skull and the associated Valsequillo artifacts.

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