

‘Giants’ in the land: an assessment of *Gigantopithecus* and *Meganthropus*

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Information on the internet and elsewhere talks about giant humans or giant apemen existing in the past, or even in the present (e.g. Bigfoot). Is there any fossil evidence supporting these claims? Often the names *Meganthropus* and *Gigantopithecus* are mentioned as supporting evidence that giants lived in the past. Fossils have been attributed to these supposed ‘species’, which have been described in publications. Let’s try to sort out fact from fiction about the ‘giant’ claims in regards to the *Meganthropus* and *Gigantopithecus* fossils, as well as assess their place in human origins.

Gigantopithecus

Gigantopithecus, supposedly the largest ape that ever existed, is known from about a thousand fossil teeth and four lower jawbones.¹ The smallest of the jawbones was found in northern India in 1968 and assigned the name *Gigantopithecus bilaspurensis*, as opposed to *Gigantopithecus blacki*, the name assigned to the species represented by the three other fossil mandibles, all found in China between 1956 and 1958.² The Indian specimen, later renamed to *Gigantopithecus giganteus*,³ is believed by evolutionists to have flourished from about 5–9 Ma, whereas the jaws from China, belonging to *G. blacki*, are believed by them to be between 0.5 and 1 Ma.⁴ According to Simons and Ettl:

‘Reconstruction of an adult male *Gigantopithecus* is conjectural because no remains have been found except partial lower jaws and single teeth. It is based on the assumption that the giant ape’s body was in proportion to its massive jaw and that, except for its size and much higher face, *Gigantopithecus* was otherwise like a gorilla. If this is true, it would have stood about nine feet tall [2.75 m] when upright and may have weighed as much as 600 pounds [273 kg].’⁵

In a later reconstruction, by makeup artist Bill Munns, *Gigantopithecus* was estimated to have been more than 3.05 m tall, and weighed as much as 545 kg, which is comparable to a large polar bear.⁶ By comparison, an average male silverback gorilla is about 1.8 m tall when standing erect, and weighs about 180 kg.⁶ Given that no postcranial fossil remains of this big ape have been found to date, these estimates for the stature of *Gigantipithecus* are at best a ballpark figure.

The dental arcade (tooth row) of the *Gigantopithecus* jaws⁷ certainly appears to exhibit the U-shape which is characteristic of the great apes, and not the rounded or parabolic shape of humans.⁸ In comparison with a human mandible, or even that of a gorilla, the lower jaw of *Gigantopithecus* is enormous (figure 1).⁹ Hence, there is no reason to doubt that this ape was huge in stature, and although not the size of King Kong, it may well have stood

2.75–3.05 m tall when adopting an upright stance. However, only the finding of appropriate postcranial fossils from this species will resolve the issue of its stature.

About 60 years ago a respected evolutionist scholar, Franz Weidenreich, proposed that *Gigantopithecus* was a hominid in the ancestral line leading to man. According to Wolpoff:

‘It began with *Gigantopithecus* (theorized at a time when this primate was only known from three molars), and progressively became dwarfed through “*Meganthropus*,” and finally “*Sinanthropus*” which was directly ancestral to the modern condition. *Gigantopithecus*, according to this proposal, was the Asian australopithecine.’¹⁰

According to Boaz and Ciochon:

‘Weidenreich’s gigantism theory of human evolution is today largely forgotten, having been disproved by a rising tide of discovery of earlier fossil forebears from Africa and Asia. We now know that the human species descended not from giants but from pygmy-sized early hominids in Africa millions of years before any of them ever ventured into Asia.’¹¹

Hence, most present-day evolutionists consider *Gigantopithecus* to be ‘a specialized anthropoid ape not related to *Homo erectus*’,¹² and not a hominid or ‘ape-man’.¹¹ As such, *Gigantopithecus* is only of peripheral interest in the human origins debate. Being an ape, *Gigantopithecus* also cannot be used as evidence that there existed giant humans in the past, or that it refers to the Nephilim mentioned in the Bible.¹³ The reason some people think the Nephilim were giants is that a translation of Genesis 6:4 in some English versions, such as the King James Version, calls them giants instead of leaving the word Nephilim untranslated.¹⁴ Hence, the giant ape fossils are seized upon as proof of the giants.

Also, the theory by Weidenreich, that *Gigantopithecus* gave rise to early humans, has at the very least not discouraged, but probably helped spur on, the belief in the abominable snowman (also called yeti), Bigfoot (also called Sasquatch), and other purported hairy, humanlike

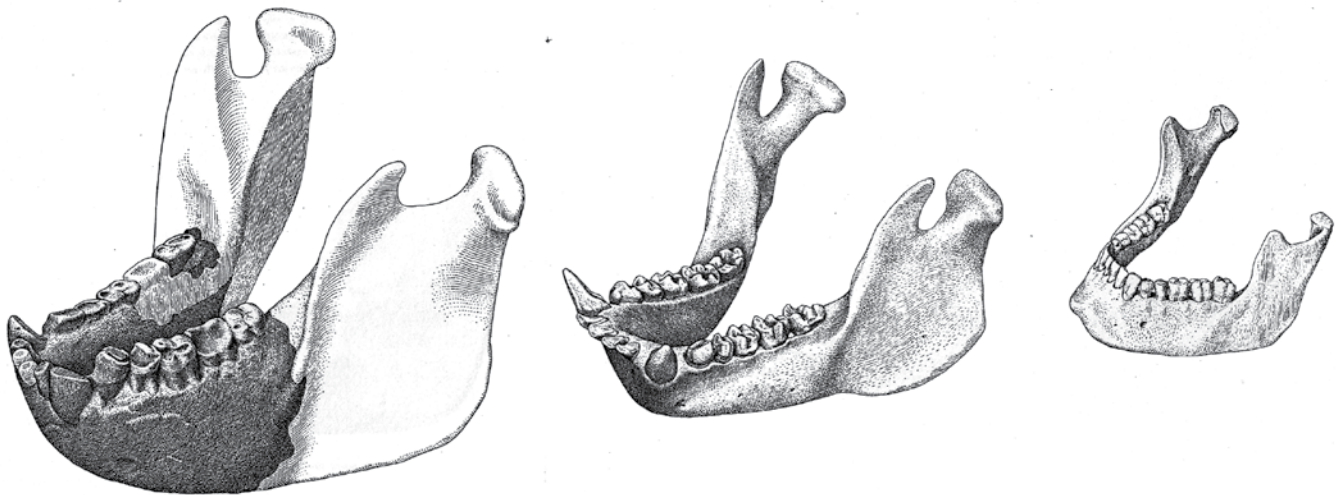


Figure 1. In comparison with a human mandible (right), or even that of a gorilla (centre), the dimensions of the biggest of the lower jaws of the giant ape *Gigantopithecus* (left) is enormous. Note that, although restored in the illustration, the ascending portion of the ape's jaw was not present in any of the four fossil jaws of *Gigantopithecus* (after Simons and Ettl).⁹

creatures. The same can be said for *Meganthropus*, which is considered next.

Meganthropus

The taxonomic naming of *Meganthropus* is confusing at best. Names associated with *Meganthropus* have been (or are) *Homo erectus palaeojavanicus*, *Homo palaeojavanicus*, *Australopithecus palaeojavanicus*, *Meganthropus palaeojavanicus*, and even *Meganthropus africanus*.¹⁵

The main *Meganthropus* fossils consist of Sangiran 6 (the original *Meganthropus* A), Sangiran 8 (*Meganthropus* B) and Sangiran 31, and until relatively recently, along with Sangiran 5 and Sangiran 9, were suggested as possible Asian australopithecines.¹⁶ All are mandibular specimens, except for the distorted partial cranium designated Sangiran 31,¹⁷ and in a study by Kramer the fossils (all from Java, Indonesia) were found to be morphologically linked to *Homo erectus/Homo sapiens*, but not to the australopithecines.¹⁸ In recent years additional mandibles have been attributed to *Meganthropus*.¹⁹

The Sangiran 8 mandible, first described in 1953 by Marks, was recently re-examined by Kaifu *et al.*²⁰ The authors reported that the original assessment of *Meganthropus* B as having a mandible of equal corpus (body) size to that of *Meganthropus* A, the type specimen, was flawed because numerous cracks in the specimen's right corpus inflated its height.²¹ Kramer describes Sangiran 6 as a 'massive, fragmentary mandibular specimen' and cites its discoverer in 1941, von Koenigswald, as stating in a letter to Weidenreich that 'It is so large that *Pithecanthropus*, *Paranthropus*, Peking Man and Heidelberg Man are elegant and dwarfish in comparison with it.'²² In his book, *Apes, Giants and Man*, Weidenreich described that 'the jaw far exceeds in height, as well as in thickness, any known fossil

and modern human jaw, and likewise any jaw of fossil or recent anthropoids'.²³ When viewed in comparison to the jaw of a 'modern man' the Sangiran 6 jaw definitely looks enormous (figure 2).²³ According to Weidenreich, 'Even the jaw of the big male gorilla, though equal in height, has only about half the thickness of the new jaw.'²⁴

Although the incompleteness of the Sangiran 31 cranium prevents any measure of its cranial capacity directly, it has been observed 'that this specimen's cranial volume greatly exceeds that of Sangiran 12, implying a cranial capacity well over 1,000 cm³'.²⁵ Sangiran 12 was measured by Holloway as having a cranial capacity of 1,059 cm³, and was the largest of the Sangiran series crania measured.²⁶ It seems a fair presumption that any brain which 'greatly exceeds' 1,059 cm³ in size must, at the very least, be approaching the mean cranial capacity in living humans of about 1,350 cm³.²⁷

In terms of cranium commonality, particularly of 'extraordinary thickness and well-marked robustness', the Sangiran 31 partial cranium has been compared to Sangiran 4, a specimen assigned to *Homo erectus*.²⁸ Sangiran 4 was measured by Holloway as having a cranial capacity of 908 cm³.²⁶ Wolpoff has stated that

'In Sangiran 31 the torusing and cresting suggest that the missing face must have been very large, especially broad with massive cheeks in the early *H. sapiens* pattern. It is a good match for the most robust of the Sangiran mandibles, such as Sangiran 6.'²⁹

According to some extreme claims *Meganthropus* has been estimated to have stood about 2.75 m and weighed 340–450 kg, but there is little evidence to back up these types of claims.¹⁵ The Bible mentions that there were large-size humans that lived in the past, such as the 2.75 m tall Goliath.³⁰ Hence, in principle, if one believes that the Bible is the Word of God, then giant humans did exist. However,

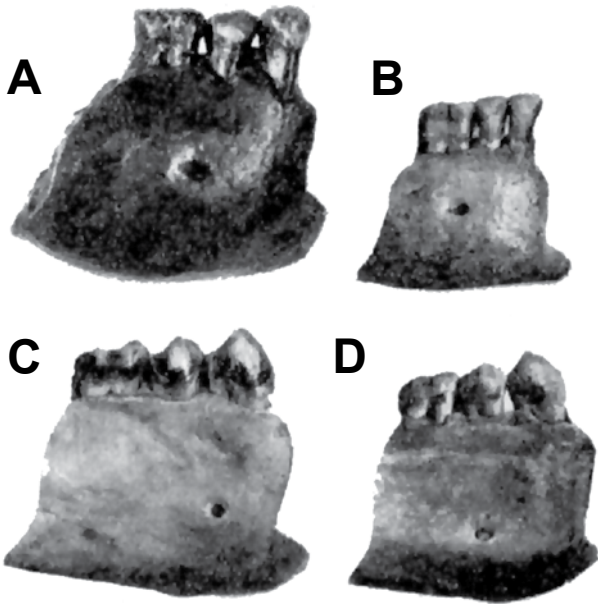


Figure 2. Fragments of the Sangiran 6 (the original *Meganthropus* A) lower jaw (A) is enormous when viewed in comparison with the corresponding cut of the lower jaw of a 'modern man' (B). The jaw of a male gorilla (C), though equal in height, is only about half the thickness of the *Meganthropus* jaw. Jaw (D) is of a male orangutan. Lateral view (after Weidenreich).²⁴

whether Goliath was a uniquely large individual, or there were more people of his immense stature, is not known. As mentioned earlier, the case for the Nephilim being giants is ambiguous.³¹ In speculating about the stature of the 'Java giant' (the individual with the Sangiran 6 (*Meganthropus* A) lower jaw) Weidenreich suggested that

'it may not be too far from the truth if we suggest the Java giant was much bigger than any living gorilla and that the Chinese giant was correspondingly bigger than the Java giant—that is, one and a half times as large as the Java giant, and twice as large as a male gorilla.'³²

The Chinese giant that Weidenreich referred to was *Gigantopithecus*. At the time no fossil jaws, but only teeth, were available of *Gigantopithecus*. Weidenreich estimated that the 'molars of *Gigantopithecus* are more than one-third larger than those of *Meganthropus*, the Java giant'.³³ There are no known postcranial fossils attributed to *Meganthropus*, at least not to my knowledge, so the stature of *Meganthropus* can at present not be known. Hence, even though the massive lower jaw of Sangiran 6 may have belonged to a very large individual, and Weidenreich considered this jaw fragment 'to be the remains of an early giant stock',³⁴ I believe it is premature to use this *Meganthropus* fossil specimen as solid evidence that giant humans existed in the past. However, given that evolutionists invent giant hominids from 'teeth only', which are later shown to be wrong, as Weidenreich did with *Gigantopithecus*, then perhaps creationists, who do entertain the idea that some

of the *Meganthropus* fossils represent giant humans, can be forgiven.

Whilst *Meganthropus* was once considered by many evolutionists to be a robust australopithecine, as already mentioned, comparative analysis has linked them to *Homo erectus* instead.³⁵ It is my opinion that nearly all of the fossils that evolutionists attribute to *Homo erectus* are human, and this would include the fossils assigned to *Meganthropus*. With the redating in the last decade or so of the strata associated with the Sangiran specimens the fossils have become much older,³⁶ and potentially more difficult for evolutionists to explain. From being provisionally dated to approximately 1 Ma up until 1994,³⁷ *Meganthropus* fossils such as Sangiran 31 subsequently became about 1.6 Ma.³⁸

Whilst not accepting these age dates, from an evolutionary point of view what this means is that about 300,000 years after the time that most evolutionists believe that our supposed hominid ancestor *Homo erectus* emerged as a species in Africa (around 1.9 Ma³⁹), and with brains still about two thirds the size of the average modern human,⁴⁰ *Homo erectus* (i.e. *Meganthropus*) was walking around in Java, Indonesia with a cranial capacity around the size of a modern human. This runs counter to the evolutionary notion that there was 'sapientization' of the supposedly earliest representatives of the genus *Homo* to the emergence of the species *Homo sapiens*. According to Parenti there were two evolutionary trends in this 'sapientization' transformation period that cooperated towards a single objective: 'the expansion of the cranial capacity (quantitative sapientization) and the attainment of the recent shape (qualitative sapientization)'.⁴¹ If the Sangiran 31 cranial capacity is as large as implied then the 'sapientization' doctrine is demonstrably wrong. That is, there was no expansion in the brain size of humans (i.e. *Homo erectus*) during the purportedly Pleistocene period. This would not be surprising if the alleged 2 million year Pleistocene geologic time was a fictional period.

Conclusion

From the fossil evidence, the claims that *Gigantopithecus* was a giant are quite reasonable, despite the lack of postcranial fossil evidence, but the creature was a giant ape. Hence, *Gigantopithecus* does not support ideas of giant humans, giant hominids, yeti, or Bigfoot. Concerning *Meganthropus* the jury is still out on whether, in particular, the mandible of specimen Sangiran 6 belonged to a large or 'giant' human. However, caution is urged in making any 'giant humans' claims about *Meganthropus*, particularly as there are no postcranial fossil material. Collectively, the *Meganthropus* fossil specimens are linked in morphology to *Homo erectus*. Also, there is evidence suggesting the incomplete *Meganthropus* cranium Sangiran 31 is close to modern in terms of cranial capacity volume, despite being dated to 1.6 Ma. This suggests that there never was an expansion in brain size during the alleged Pleistocene geologic time period.

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