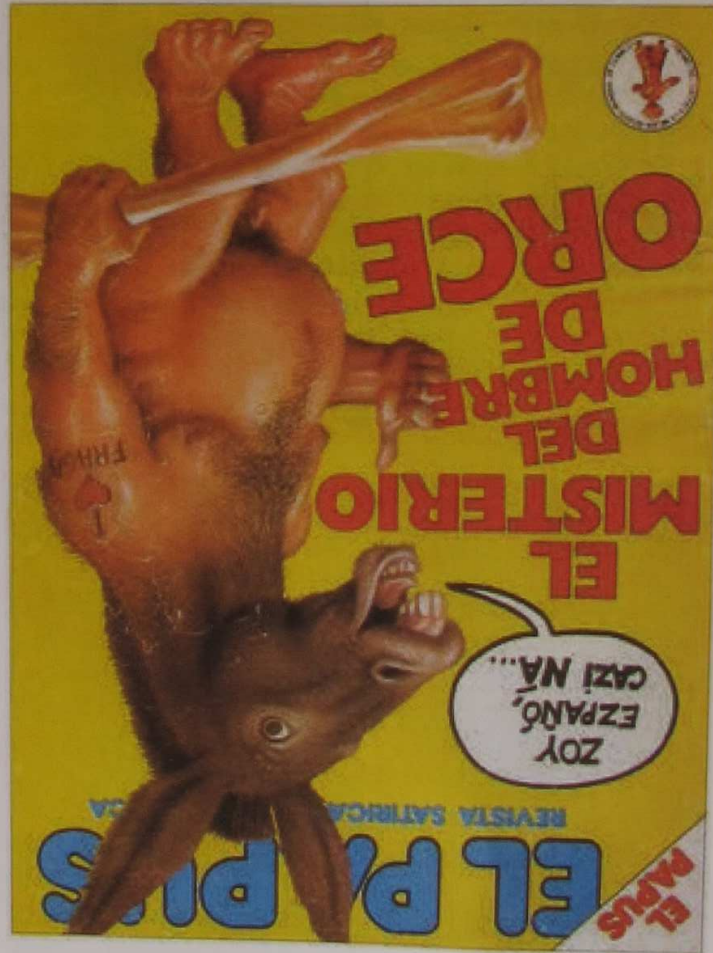


Ass is Taken for a Man

Miquel Carandell Baruzzi went from Barcelona to Cambridge on the trail of a famous donkey



Making an ass of the purported missing link. Magazine *Métode*. *Revista de difusión de la investigación de la Universitat de València*, nº 53: p. 37.

The strange title of this article was the headline of a little news item in the *Daily Telegraph* on 14 May 1984. The Madrid correspondent of the newspaper reported the revelation that a skull discovered last year and believed to be the oldest-ever found of a man in Eurasia is more likely to be that of a prehistoric donkey; This article merely echoed the previous day's front-page story of the Spanish newspaper *El País*, which first made the announcement. The *El País* revelation touched off the so-called "Orce Man controversy", the main case study of my PhD thesis. In 1982, Paleontología de Sabadell, near Barcelona, in northern Spain, found a skull fragment in the little town of Orce, near Granada, in southern Spain. After publishing a note in their institution's house journal, their finding was widely reported on Spanish television, in all the national newspapers and in some international ones like *The Times* and *The Guardian*. As I argue in my thesis, the public announcement and reception of the skull

In Cambridge, I found several British and international primary sources that demonstrated the international reach of the Orce debate. I also presented my work at CRASSH, Cambridge's Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Science and Humanities, in the "Field Notes" seminar devoted to the history of archaeology and anthropology. In sum, my enjoyable time spent in the Cambridge "bubble" helped me to grow as a historian of science and, with the priceless help of my sponsor, to shape my PhD thesis, which I aim to submit in mid 2015.

also very lively, public controversy, which lasted for more than twenty years and is still occasionally rekindled. Newspapers and magazines were the scenario for scientific debate and even satirical magazines dealt with the issue. The interactions between science, media and politics show up clearly in the analysis of the controversy.

When it was first unearthed, the interior part of the skull was embedded in rock. Later, when it was cleaned up, a little crest appeared. For a couple of prestigious French archaeologists, Henry and Marie-Antoinette de Lumley, who were invited to inspect the bone, the crest indicated that the bone was not that of a hominid but instead that of a young donkey, or ass. The de Lumleys urged the team of younger Spanish scientists to hold a press conference and admit their mistake in public. The Spaniards rejected this option, so the French communicated directly with the *El País* newspaper to announce the new interpretation of the skull fragment. This was the start of a sometimes harsh, but

fragment discovery story was crucially shaped by the political context in 1980s Spain, namely, by the ongoing construction of a new democratic state after the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975.

Miquel Carandell Baruzzi