

Reponse

PROUS, André. O povoamento da América visto do Brasil: uma perspectiva crítica. **Dossiê Surgimento do Homem na América. Revista USP**, São Paulo, mai-out, 1997, p.8-21.

PROUS, André. The Peopling of America as seen from Brazil: a Critical Perspective. **The Appearance of Man in America Dossier. Revista USP**, São Paulo, May-Oct. 1997. p. 8-21.

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André Prous' article, recently published in the "Revista da USP" (São Paulo University Magazine) is both inept and amateur as well as lacking scientific rigour and including falsehoods.

A large part of the author's criticisms of our discoveries made in his article only highlight the deficiencies in his academic training. This might be an excuse worth considering were it not for the fact that a response requires one to refer to points made in the article.

1) Errors in the description of work done by Ameghino when referring to primate fossils.

2) It is not solely **"the Brazilian monkeys of Goiás"** that use stones to break seeds and **"coquinhos"** (nuts). In the Serra da Capivara National Park, Piauí, we found stones under certain trees, used by **"guaribas"** to crack open the hard seed shells allowing them to eat the nuts. This fact does not occur in shelters, much less, near hearth remains. It is therefore superfluous and childish to state that stone can flake when falling down a chute or when thrown by monkeys from on high. Who would excavate under a chute? Who would collect scattered stones at the foot of hills?

3) The sentence **"the virtually indestructible charcoal"** (*sic*) reveals the author's high degree of ignorance as they certainly are destructible, just as all organic matter is. In the Serra da Capivara National Park, we have been monitoring flora and fauna for around 10 years. Poachers have started fires

and we have observed how the remains left by those fires and those left by charcoal have evolved. However ignorant an archaeologist is s/he ought to be capable of identifying when remains come from a branch or trunk which burned naturally or from forest fires because their arrangement is totally different to the remains of intentional fires.

4) The first paragraph of **"Psychological Reasons"** shows the author's level of "scientific" training. To say that **"almost none would dare to look for their (man's) remains in geological sediments dated 10,000 or 11,000 years old"** shows the mistake of those who adopt a simple theory as law, without any factual basis. The author says that **"this psychological barrier is partially broken today"**, and we don't believe that it deals with psychological barriers. This is lack of scientific training. I have to remind you that all prehistorians, including the Americans, accept the African flaked pebbles as being the work of human beings, even when they are found isolated on the surface, without other contextual elements. Even knowing that in Africa there also exist monkeys that use stones as instruments, none ever proposed that a Pebble Culture wasn't the work of humans. I wonder if Prous thinks that, in Africa, the men are intelligent and the monkeys stupid and that in Brazil the opposite is true? One of the Pedra Furada flaked pebbles, within an African collection, would be perfectly classified.

5) When the author of the article says that **"In Brazil, particularly where each archaeologist is used to being "owner" of a research territory and where there isn't a tradition of open debate ..."** there is an undeserved criticism of our Academy that has welcomed so many foreigners, including Mr. Andre Prous. Brazilian law demands that we apply for authorization to carry out archaeological research, marking out the territory, which is their right. Would Mr. Prous by any chance allow me to excavate a site tomorrow that he was working on? By any chance can all archaeologists in France work wherever they like?

The correct procedure for someone intending to write a report criticizing a particular subject within the peopling of America, is to visit the sites which s/he is going to write about beforehand in order to study the lithic material, the excavation plans and colleagues' data. Despite his limited standing even Mr. Prous would have been given an invitation if he had shown the slightest interest.

He cannot allege that he isn't interested in the Serra da Capivara Park archaeological sites because over the years he has criticized the work done by professionals carrying out research at the Fundacao do Museu do Homem Americano with an unhealthy obsession.

6) When he states that **“the Yankee researchers”** have **“often scorned”** the **“Latin-Americans”**, he forgot that this scorn also extends to the French researchers. Recent publications on the origins of man, discuss the *Australopithecus* discovered by the Americans, but make no mention of the *Australopithecus* found by French colleagues in Chad. Many other examples could be cited. One need to understand that the majority of our American colleagues do not read any language other than English, just as many of the French only read in French.

I wonder if foreign researchers are interested in what we, Latin-Americans, think of them?

In both situations, discussing work of which you have no direct knowledge, sites that you have never visited, industries that you have never seen, is a sick pleasure, revenge for the mediocre.

7) The subtitle **“An immigrant of more than 20,000 years old?”**, hides direct criticisms of our work, amongst confused, biased reflections. Firstly, it refers to a *‘marquise’* (a projection running alongside a facade used as shelter), to describe the rock shelter ceiling. In consequence he has to admit that everything thrown falls on, and not underneath, it despite the law of gravity existing.

My team is made up of capable professionals and we take all the assumptions about natural origin into consideration, eliminating the doubtful cases. We never fail to present those remains of whose anthropic origin we are certain just because a colleague from afar, who doesn't know the region, thinks that we aren't as prudent as he is. In the shelter there aren't any **“water-filled potholes”**. The potholes were well marked out and outside the area used by man. The team's paleontologist simply confirmed what the archaeologists and geomorphologist had already verified: during the Pleistocene, it rained a lot more than it does today. In the Pleistocene, the region was covered in an Atlantic Forest type vegetation and not by *“caatinga”*. However, if heavy rainfall brought more material and even if that material fell with greater force, it couldn't possibly fall inside the area covered by the shelter because Newton didn't say

that the law of gravity is only true for dry periods. And as far as stones ricocheting so many metres distance is concerned, it seems to us that Andre Prous really does lack knowledge of natural phenomena. Alongside the National Park rock walls, we found countless chutes and countless gravel deposits. Inexplicably, falling pebbles flaked naturally next to the pebble and block arrangements, next to hearths and charcoal only at Pedra Furada... My academic training stops me from accepting the absurd suppositions of certain colleagues. Everything that I have seen and analyzed, leads me to declare calmly and securely (and with certainty that future discoveries will confirm our results) that it really was man who between 60,000 and 50,000 years ago started to frequent Pedra Furada, leaving traces of his tools and hearths there.

8) Mr. Prous ought to write less in order to make fewer mistakes. To say that **“the final Pleistocene climate was much more humid than today’s: it could therefore have sustained a scrubland - besides forest galleries”** (*sic*) is beyond certified ignorance. The climate was more humid but the vegetation wasn’t the only product of this humidity, it also depended on the geological substrata and the insolation. The region was covered by humid tropical forest, not by scrubland. What succeeded it wasn’t *cerrado-caatinga* as our illustrious colleague thought. Islands of forest persisted in the humid valleys and the hillsides at Pedra Furada were covered in even more humid vegetation until the moment that it was cleared, around 100 years ago. Even today, within the site area, there is the embauba (*Cecropia peltata*), a plant typical of humid forests.

The statements the author of the article made about the hearths, stating that they aren’t anthropical, are totally invalid. My team tested every possibility. If we were dealing with natural forest fires, we would have found the same type of structures outside the sheltered area, on the hillside and in the valley. In the excavations and surveys carried out at these places, we have never found anything similar to the structures in the shelter, in a place where the rain doesn’t reach.

9) When he writes, **“hasty statements, never verified, made by some members of the team, or contradictory information”**, besides being totally unethical this statement demonstrates an ignorance of scientific procedure on the part of the article’s author. We have been working in the region for 27

years, we have formed hypotheses, some were confirmed and others disproved by ourselves. For example, we believed that there weren't any classical projectile tips so typical of American archaeology in the region. In July 1997, after many years of work, we found two magnificent, typical tips in a grave. We are now going to publish them and Prous will be able to accuse me, once again, of being contradictory. If research doesn't serve to test the hypotheses, if the first assertions were the correct ones, the research can be suspended. We publish our hypotheses so that colleagues know along which lines we are working so that they can also test them.

The two red, straight-lined segments found on a fallen block and dated 17,000 years ago are not products of natural deposits. We really are dealing with pigment applied to the rock on purpose. We cannot confirm if these marks were really a rock practice or simply a gesture made by someone cleaning two fingers on the wall. But should we not mention them for that reason? It would be more ethical for Prous to cite the publications that certify the date of 10,000 years old for the small painted plaque and the contradictory publication with the layer date.

With regard to the book by Gabriela Martin, *The Prehistory of Northeastern Brazil*, prefaced by myself, Andre Prous distorts the truth of the text, in an attempt to obtain arguments for his statements in relation to the antiquity of rock paintings at the Perna site (Sítio do Perna).

10) Andre Prous is lying when he writes, **"The systematic attempts to present Pedra Furada as a place where every type of remain is more ancient than those of other places also shows itself in relation to human skeletons. In a meeting in Brasília photographs of a "child's skull" were presented found in a very ancient context. It was self evident that we were dealing with a monkey's skull"**. Firstly, we have never found any skulls at Pedra Furada. Secondly, we have never found any monkey's skulls. Thirdly, the child's skull that we found didn't belong to ancient contexts but to more recent cultures of agricultural potters. Fourthly, I have never been to a meeting in Brasília about burials. The author deserves to be taken to court for defamation and slander for this statement.

11) It is lamentable that the author of the article doesn't supply data related to the publication in which he cites the existence of polished rock in Minas Gerais, dated 9,000 years old.

We would like to make it clear that the Fundacao do Museu do Homem Americano not only aims at research but also at forming human resources. This being so, our students and trainees take on responsibilities, leading excavations, analyzing material and publishing results. For these reasons, certain sites delay being fully published because they make up part of material used for theses or dissertations. Others, even when ready, are difficult to publish due to high costs, as is the case of the monograph about Pedra Furada. Others need to be translated because they were retyped in French, a language ignored by North Americans as much as Portuguese is.

Finally, it remains to be asked where this insistence of Mr. Prous' comes from in repeatedly trampling on the results of archaeological research done at the Serra da Capivara National Park, by increasingly unethical means. For example, he publicly congratulated Dr. Fabio Parenti on his brilliant doctorate thesis about Pedra Furada, defended in Paris, but criticizes Parenti's work, relative to this archaeological site, whenever he manages to be heard. This review is necessary for the sake of truth. It is not our intention to ridicule the author of this unfortunate article. He has managed to achieve that by his own doing.

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