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THE  
PHILOSOPHICAL MAGAZINE.

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AUGUST 1798.

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- I. *Description of the large Orang Outang of Borneo.* By  
F. B. VON WURMB. *From the Transactions of the Ba-*  
*tavian Society in the Island of Java.*

MANKIND have bestowed every possible pains to trace out the progress of nature, and to discover those threads by which her works are connected; and their exertions, indeed, have not always been fruitless. Thus, for example, the discovery of animal plants pointed out the transition from the vegetable to the animal kingdom. The bat and the flying squirrel displayed the connection between quadrupeds and birds; and the seal and the sea-cow that of quadrupeds with fishes.

The greatest vacuity which appears to us in the plan of nature is, certainly, that observed between man, a being endowed with reason, and the irrational animals. Naturalists hitherto have endeavoured, but in vain, by the most accurate researches, to acquire some satisfaction on this point; and we may almost consider it as certain that the links of the great chain, here wanting, are not to be found in the world which we at present inhabit. Were nothing more required but similarity of bodily conformation, this transi-

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tion, without doubt, would be found in the four-handed race of apes. But as the qualities of the mind are here as much considered as the form of the body, it is evident that the ape, which does not deserve the second rank among the irrational animals, cannot form the link that connects quadrupeds with man. The external figure, however, of this animal has since the earliest periods engaged the attention of naturalists; and by the similitude of its body we are led to suspect a similitude of mental powers in beings to which the all-wise Creator has given so much likeness. But as the discoveries made by the searchers into nature are frequently not so much the truth as something suited to the systems which they have adopted, this circumstance has given rise to a great deal of error. The celebrated Linnæus himself was induced by a figure which Bontius \* delineated of an orang outang, or wild man, seen in the island of Java, and the accounts of some travellers, to class his *homo nocturnus* or night-man between man and the ape, and thereby to establish the existence of a being, the truth of which is as yet very doubtful.

Buffon proceeded in a much more cautious manner. That celebrated naturalist suspected, and not without reason, that the accounts given with so little accuracy of the night-men alluded only to the white negroes or kakerlaks, considered in a false light or under the veil of prejudice; and, indeed, the description given by Bontius of the orang outang differs only in some very inconsiderable circumstances from the figure of the white negro or kakerlak Saudami described by M. van Iperen †. If we take from this description of Bontius the ruff under the chin, and the few hairs which cover the head, a more beautiful human form

\* Bontius resided as a physician at Batavia in the last century, and wrote *Hist. Nat. et Med. Ind. Orient.* EDIT.

† See the first part of the *Transactions of the Batavian Society in the Island of Java.*

would

would appear than that of Saudami\*; and had the latter grown up, not at the court of the prince of Tabana, but in the solitary woods of the island of Bali, his mental powers would have been so little expanded, that an inattentive observer might have classed him among the pongos, varis, orang outangs, &c. of Battel, Pyrard, Reguat, and others. But the figure which Bontius has given us of the orang outang may have been delineated with too great a resemblance to that of man, and contrary to truth; for, if we adhere only to the description, we can discover nothing more than a common large orang outang or pongo. Briffon, who classes the orang outang of Bontius along with the vari, appears to have been of the same opinion. An instance of such a false and too human-like representation of this animal occurs also in the figure of an orang outang of the island of Borneo, given in Beckman's voyage; where the author speaks, without all doubt, of the same species as that transmitted to our society from that island. But be this as it may, it is certain that since the time Bontius resided in Java, or the middle of the last century, no orang outang, such as that delineated by him, has been found either in this island or in any of those in the neighbourhood; and as he asserts that he saw several such animals of both sexes, it is certainly incomprehensible why the least traces of them are not now to be discovered. The oldest and most experienced Javanese are acquainted with no other orang outangs than such as are real apes; and they distinguish under this Malayan name

\* "The description of the white negro," says the author in his *Letters from India*, "will afford a new and incontestable proof to our naturalists, that every thing hitherto said of whole races of *kokerlaks* or white negro night-men, and the like, is mere fables, and that such men are sometimes produced here and there only by accident. The parents of this white negro, who is called Saudami, were, like the other inhabitants of their native country, the island of Bali, of a dark brown colour, and their son was not sickly, but large and strong. I found him to be five feet two inches and a half in height Rhinelandish measure." EDIT.

two kinds without tails, which Buffon places among the bongos or jockos. Both are natives of Borneo, the only place almost where they are found; and whatever travellers may say, they are as little to be seen in the forests and wilds of Java as the lions and elephants represented on some charts of that island. The small species which Buffon, by abbreviating the Congo name, calls jockos, are often brought to Java by ships coming from Bangareï; and of this kind was that sent alive to Europe in 1776, and of which an accurate description has been given by Wosmaer. The orang outang of the large kind, or the pongo of Buffon, is not common even in its native country Borneo; and much pains and labour had been in vain employed, for upwards of twenty years, in endeavouring to catch one of these strong and mischievous animals. M. Palm, the resident at Rembang, was at length so fortunate, on occasion of his being sent on an important mission to Sukkadana, to procure after a great deal of trouble one of these animals, which he sent to the Batavian Society preserved in arrack. The following accurate description of it will, in my opinion, show how fruitless it will be to search for the wild men of Bontius in this species of orang outang.

The head in a certain degree is somewhat sharpened from behind towards the top. The mouth projects a little forwards, and on each cheek is a fleshy excrescence (*vleeschachtige kwabbe*) which extends sidewise more than the thickness of the head. The ears are small, and lie flat to the head. The eyes are small and prominent. The nose, without any perceptible elevation, consists merely of two long nostrils, placed in an oblique direction towards each other. The mouth is surrounded by thick lips, and in the inside has no pouches (*zakken*). The tongue is thick and broad. On that of the animal in question there were found some remains of green herbs which it had eaten. Each jaw is furnished before with four broad incisors, standing between two thick canine teeth, which rise above them. The face is of a dark brown colour,

colour, and has no hair, except a very thin beard. The neck is exceedingly short. The breast is much broader than the hips. At the rump there is no appearance of a tail, nor of any tough projecting hide. The penis seems to be drawn back into the body. The hands are long, and the palms as well as the fingers are of a dark brown colour, and have no hair. The legs are short and thin, but the muscles are strong. The feet have a great resemblance to the hands. The toes and fingers are furnished with black nails, almost like those of a man, except the large toes, which are smaller and shorter; a difference that arises perhaps from the frequent use made of them. The breast and the belly are mostly bare. The other parts of the body, the face, the ears, the palms of the hands, the feet and the fingers excepted, are covered with brown hair, which in many places is fully as long as the finger.

Under the skin of the throat and breast of the animal transmitted to the society, there were found two bags, one of which occupied the greater part of the breast, and, as well as the smaller which was enclosed in it, had a communication with the wind-pipe. As this rare animal was destined for the cabinet of the Prince of Orange, it was subjected to no further anatomical researches, for fear of destroying its configuration. The bowels, to guard against corruption, were taken out before it had been transmitted to Batavia. We, however, flatter ourselves with the well-grounded hope of being able to give, at some future period, a particular and accurate account of the properties, habits and manner of living of this large orang outang, as the jurisdiction of the East India Company, under the present government, has been so considerably extended in Borneo, that access is now opened for us to the interior parts of that great island\*. With regard to the manner in which this

\* In the second part of the Transactions of the Batavian Society there is a pretty circumstantial description of this island, together with a short extract from the journal of the above-mentioned M. Paim.

animal was caught, we were informed by M. Palm, that it defended itself so furiously with sharp-pointed ticks, which it broke off from the trees, that it was impossible to take it alive. This property it seems to possess in common with the African pongos, which, as Beutel says, attack elephants with these weapons, and drive them from their places of resort\*.

The following is an accurate measurement of the different parts of this animal, according to the Rhinlandic foot † divided into twelve inches :

Whole length of the animal from the soles of the feet to the crown of the head 3 feet  $10\frac{3}{8}$  inches. This, however, does not agree with the measurement made in the island of Borneo, where the whole length was found to be 49 inches ; but perhaps a different standard was employed, or the body of the animal might have become contracted by lying in arrack. Circumference of the body at the shoulders 3 feet  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch. Circumference of the body below the breast 3 feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Circumference at the hips 2 feet  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Aperture of the mouth  $4\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Length or projection of the muzzle  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Distance from the middle of the upper lip to the eyebrows  $4\frac{7}{8}$  inches. Distance between the corners of the eyes  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch. Breadth of the eye the same. Distance from the eyebrows to the hinder part of the head  $6\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Diameter of the head from top to bottom  $10\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Diameter of the head across, measured at the distance of  $3\frac{3}{8}$  inches from the top of the above line,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Diameter of the head measured as before, at the distance of  $6\frac{5}{8}$  inches from the crown,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches. External circumference of the ear  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Circumference of the ear below where it adheres to the head 3 inches. Height of the ear  $1\frac{5}{8}$  inch. Breadth  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch. Distance from

\* Ought not this property to procure to the orang outang the first rank among animals next to man? For, whatever Buffon may say to the contrary, we know of no other animal which willingly employs for its defence any weapons but those bestowed on it by nature.

† The Rhinlandish is to the English foot as 1083 to 1000. It is therefore equal to 12.896 English inches. EDIT.



the share bone to the collar bone 2 feet  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch. Distance of the breast bone from the share bone 1 foot  $\frac{2}{3}$  of an inch. Distance between the nipples of the breast  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Length of the arms to the tips of the fingers 3 feet  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an inch. Circumference of the arm at the shoulder  $11\frac{1}{8}$  inches; in the middle 1 foot  $\frac{2}{3}$  of an inch; at the elbow 11 inches. Circumference of the fore part of the arm in the middle  $10\frac{7}{8}$  inches; at the hand  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Length of the upper part of the arm 1 foot  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch. Length of the lower part of the arm 1 foot  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Length of the hand from the joint to the tip of the middle finger  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Length of the thumb 3 inches; of the second finger  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches; of the middle finger  $5\frac{3}{8}$  inches; of the fourth finger  $5\frac{3}{8}$  inches; of the little finger  $4\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Circumference of the hand measured at the root of the thumb  $9\frac{3}{8}$  inches; of the thumb and the three following fingers  $3\frac{3}{8}$  inches; of the fifth finger  $3\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Length of the palm of the hand  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Breadth of the palm of the hand  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Thickness of the hand  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch. Length from the heel to the upper end of the thigh bone 1 foot  $8\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Length of the thigh bone 1 foot  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Circumference of the thigh 1 foot  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Length of the leg from the knee to the sole of the foot  $11\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Circumference of the leg close under the knee 11 inches; at the middle of the leg  $10\frac{5}{8}$  inches; at the ankle 10 inches. Circumference of the foot where the large toe begins  $10\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Length of the great toe  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches; of the second toe  $4\frac{3}{8}$  inches; of the third toe 5 inches; of the fourth toe  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches; of the fifth toe  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Breadth of the sole of the foot where the great toe begins 4 inches. Breadth of the sole of the foot at the heel 3 inches. Length of the sole from the heel to the beginning of the toes  $6\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Circumference of the great toe 4 inches; of the three following toes  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches; of the fifth toe  $3\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Width between the root of the great toe and the root of the second toe 4 inches.