

G. H. R. von Koenigswald and Asia—An Obituary

Received 30 November 1984

JENS FRANZEN

ONLY A FEW scientists in the world have ever had the luck to witness the development of a discipline of research from its early beginnings. Professor Gustav Heinrich Ralph von Koenigswald was one of them. Professor von Koenigswald died July 10, 1982, at his home at Bad Homburg near Frankfurt am Main, West Germany; he was 79.

His interest both as a scientist and as a private individual was mainly dedicated to Asia: its people, its culture, and its significance for the evolution of man.

After completing his studies in geology and paleontology at the universities of Berlin, Tübingen, Köln, and Munich with a doctor's degree in 1928, Ralph became assistant at the Bayerische Staatssammlung in Munich. Two years later he became a stratigrapher on Java with the Geological Survey of Netherlands India. He now began to realize the dreams of his youth, to follow the track of Eugen Dubois, the discoverer of *Pithecanthropus* of Java. In 1931, under the supervision of Ter Haar, he took part in an excavation of early fossils of man. Eleven skullcaps of *Homo soloensis* were unearthed from an upper Pleistocene gravel deposit on the bank of the Solo River near Ngandong.

Soon Ralph discovered another source of fossil hominoids. In Chinese pharmacies he observed so-called "dragon teeth" and bones which were sold as medicine. Among these, he discovered an isolated tooth. In 1935 he published an article describing this tooth as belonging to a giant hominoid he called *Gigantopithecus blacki* in honor of Davidson Black, the discoverer of Peking man. Much later he described other "dragon teeth" as *Sinanthropus officinalis* (1952) and *Hemantropus peii* (1957). A fourth group of hominoid teeth from Chinese pharmacies belonged to a big fossil Orang, the first known from the Asiatic continent.

The highlight of his life came when he became a research associate of the Carnegie Foundation in 1937 on the recommendation of Teilhard de Chardin, who had visited him on Java the year before. Now Ralph was able to concentrate exclusively on his search for fossil man. His choice of fieldwork was the anticline of Sangiran in the middle of Java,



Professor von Koenigswald in his office at the Senckenberg Museum at Frankfurt am Main (Germany) in 1972 surrounded by a Wajang figure and the reconstruction of *Pithecanthropus modjokertensis*, one of his most important discoveries.

Photo: Senckenberg-Museum, E. Haupt.

where large quantities of lower and middle Pleistocene mammals appeared after heavy tropical rainfalls. He was on the right track as, in 1937, native collectors he had hired brought an evidently human mandible which later became *Pithecanthropus B* or Sangiran 1b respectively. A few weeks later he discovered about 40 fragments of a skull, which was restored at Bandung, and turned out to be the second one of *Pithecanthropus erectus*. With this information in hand it was possible to settle the old question of whether *Pithecanthropus* was a fossil man or ape, as the volume of the brain was determined at about 775 cc. Although only half the volume of the brain of modern man, it was distinctively more than that of any living ape.

During the following years, a series of extraordinary discoveries were made by systematic fieldwork. In 1938, another skull of *Pithecanthropus* came to light consisting of most of the occiput and the complete palate with the dentition. This skull, which was numbered *Pithecanthropus IV* (Sangiran 4), came from the lower part of the section, the black clay. It was evidently older than *Pithecanthropus II* (Sangiran 2), which came from the upper part of the section, the Kabuh Formation. With its large canines, the ape-like diastema in the upper jaw, and the exceptional thickness of the occipital bones, it appeared to be far more primitive than any other hominoid known at that time. Still more primitive was the fragment of a very massive mandible (in comparison to *Pithecanthropus B*) which came from the lower part of the black clay in 1939. Ralph made this specimen (Sangiran 5) the type of a new species which he called *Pithecanthropus dubius*. In 1941 he made his last important discovery on Java, another massive mandible (Sangiran 6), resem-

bling to some extent the African Australopithecines, which was published as *Meganthropus palaeojavanicus* in 1950.

With the expansion of World War II, the search for fossil man came to an end on Java for a long time. Koenigswald was captured by the Japanese invaders. Mrs. Luitgarde von Koenigswald rescued the originals found by her husband with the help of Swiss and Swedish friends.

After the war, Koenigswald was invited by the Rockefeller Foundation to come to New York to work at the American Museum of Natural History with his friend and colleague Franz Weidenreich. In 1947 he moved back to Europe to become the first professor of paleontology at the Rijksuniversiteit at Utrecht, The Netherlands.

But his thoughts and feelings about Asia never left him. He had spent 15 years of his life there; years that had been decisive in his scientific career as well as in the development of his personality. Of his publications 169 out of 263 were concerned with Asiatic topics. His themes ranged from anthropology, paleoanthropology, and ethnology through paleontology, geology, and prehistory, to special kinds of problems such as the origin of the tectites—glass meteorites occurring over almost all of Southeast Asia. In the center of his scientific life stood *Pithecanthropus*, early man from Southeast Asia. Koenigswald's personality cannot be described by looking at only his curriculum vitae and his scientific work. He had a special sense of humanity, tolerance, and humor. He was prone to outbursts of laughter and eye blinking whenever he talked about his experiences. He was a brilliant storyteller and knew the myths, tales, and way of thinking of the Asiatic people.

Koenigswald received many honors: Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (since 1950); Honorary Member, New York Academy of Sciences (since 1959); Associate, National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A. (since 1972); Honorary Member, Anthropological Society of Austria (since 1976); and Correspondent Member, Austrian Academy of Sciences (since 1975). In 1976, he was made *Doctoris honoris causa* of the University of Jogjakarta in Indonesia. He was awarded the Golden Annandale Medal of the Society of Bengal (Calcutta, 1954); the Darwin Medal of the German Academy Leopoldina (Halle, 1959); the Thomas Huxley Medal of the Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1964); the Werner Reimers Foundation Prize (Frankfurt, 1966); the Golden Medal of Nice (1976), and the Cretzschmar Medal of the Senckenbergische Naturforschende Gesellschaft (Frankfurt, 1977).

Gustav Heinrich Ralph von Koenigswald is survived by his wife Luitgarde, his daughter Felicitas, his granddaughter Annette, and his grandson Ralph.

PUBLICATIONS OF G. H. R. VON KOENIGSWALD ON ASIAN TOPICS*

Additional Abbreviations

- INI *Ingenieur in Nederlandsch-Indië*
 Mj *Mijningenieur*
 N *Nature*. London
 NM *Natur und Museum*. Frankfurt am Main
 PKNaw *Proceedings Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen*, Amsterdam

*Bibliography compiled by Jens Franzen.

- Q Quaternaria. Rome
 Sc Science (N. S.). Lancaster
 SJA Southwestern Journal of Anthropology. Albuquerque
 YCI Yearbook Carnegie Institution. Washington, D.C.

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