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A Powerful Electronic Journal in the New Millennium

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Electronic publication means easily prepared, widely distributed, as well as freely and rapidly published materials. Unfortunately, in many countries electronic publications are not given credit by universities and research institutes. When I presented my scientific production to the Egyptian Permanent Geological Committee of Professors Promotion, the committee discarded my paper published in *Palaeontologia Electronica* from the reviewing process! The refusal to acknowledge electronic publications is due to our old and classic routines and rules, which need to be changed in accordance with the rapid evolution in publishing. Fortunately, these changes will come about in Egypt in the very near future.

The situation reminded me of two significant stages in Egyptian history. The first and most important was when our ancestors in ancient Egypt painted their history on walls and papyrus. The second stage was when the art of printing started in Modern Egypt in 1815. The aims were significantly different between these two stages. The ancient Egyptian painting was aimed to export our great civilization to the world, whereas during the second stage the object was to discover and import the Western civilization to Egypt. Great is the difference between these two stages!

Some declare that the earliest dated printed book known is the *Diamond Sutra*, which was printed in China in 868 CE. Book printing may have occurred long before this date, however. There is even doubt about who was the inventor of book printing in the modern world; some claim it was Laurens Coster, and others that it was Johannes Gutenberg. It seems that Coster was the first to print a book using separated letters, and Gutenberg was the first to print a high-quality book. In fact, Gutenberg was the first to print the Sacred Book (in 1282 pages with 42 lines per page). Before Gutenberg, printing started in Europe by painting or cutting pictures on wood and transferring them to paper.

Since the glory days of printing this art has undergone several evolutionary stages until now, when we can publish our materials online using small personal computers in our homes. No doubt, electronic publishing has entailed a great change.

Regarding PE, the editors are working hard to enhance and improve this powerful electronic journal; their great efforts are to be deeply appreciated. In fact, PE has become an outstanding electronic paleontological journal in the international scientific community. Nevertheless, I will focus on the snags and disadvantages rather than on the improvements and advantages. The advantages to publishing in PE are many and need not to be repeated here (see “Call for Articles” in PE for details). My intention is to see where we are at present to predict where we will be in the future.

In my analysis of the articles published in *PE* since its start in 1998 to 2006, I drew the following conclusions:

1. About 50% of the authors who have published in PE are from North America, and most of those are from USA. European authors come second, with a percentage of 37% (Fig. 1).
2. Authors from Africa, Asia and South America represent one-fourth of the number of the North American authors, and one-third of the number of European authors. There are no authors from Australia. Greater efforts are needed to attract more authors from these continents to publish their works in PE.

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http://palaeo-electronica.org/paleo/2007_1/editoria/focus.htm

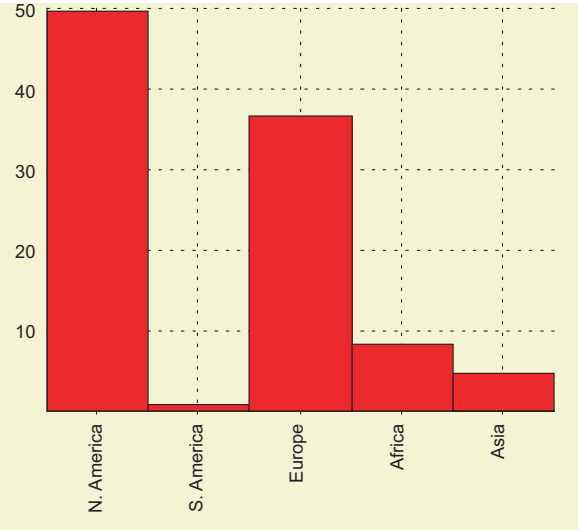

Figure 1. Geographical provenance of authors in PE 1998–2006, expressed in percent of total.

3. The lowest percentage is recorded for South American authors.
4. Most authors from North America are vertebrate paleontologists (note the similar trend of the green and blue lines in Figure 2 since 2001 to the present).
5. Forty-five percent of the published articles in PE were on vertebrate paleontology. Invertebrates represent 36% (of those, 25% of the total were on microfossils and 11% were on macrofossils). The remaining percentage (19%) are technical articles presenting new methods and techniques. The low number of articles on macro-invertebrates may reflect a relatively low awareness of PE in a large section of the paleontological community.

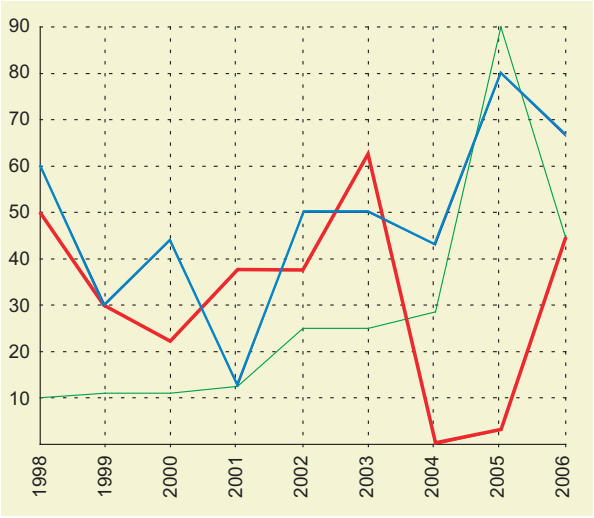

Figure 2. The proportion of PE articles dealing with microfossils (thick red line) and vertebrates (thin green line), and of articles emanating from North America (medium blue line), each reported as a percentage of the total number of articles. Note that these categories are not exhaustive and that some categories overlap so that the three lines do not total to 100%.

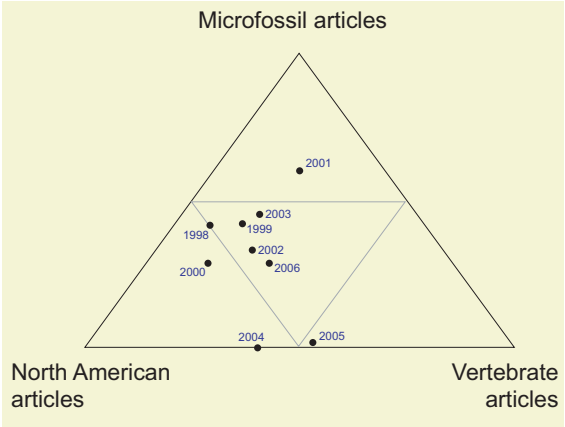

Figure 3. Triangle diagram showing the proportion (in percent) of three categories of articles during the years of PE.

6. Figure 2 shows a drop in micropaleontological articles (the thick red line) in the years 2004 and 2005. (In 2005 there was a special issue devoted for vertebrate paleontological works, however, which may partly explain the low value for that year. There is no such explanation for 2004.)
7. Figure 3 indicates that the years 2000 and 2004 were dominated by North American contributions. Microfossil articles were dominant in 2001, while 2005 was mostly devoted to vertebrate paleontological work, the latter driven in part by a special issue in memory of a vertebrate paleontologist.

One hundred articles in nine years is good but not excellent. *Palaeontologia Electronica* needs to make even greater efforts to fill the gaps evident in the coverage in order to cater to the total international paleontological community.

In summary, making an effort does not mean success unless you search for defects, weaknesses, and disadvantages just as you would search for perfections, strengths and advantages. I hope all the best for PE and its editors, and I am honored and glad to be one of the associate editors of this powerful journal.