Beyond Stones and Bones: Sir Alfred Russell Wallace and the Spirit World

By Michael A. Cremo

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Earlier this year [2003], on an April afternoon, I walked into the Darwin Museum in Moscow to give a lecture against the Darwinian theory of human evolution. The lecture was attended by museum staff, scientists from Moscow universities, and members of the general public. As I spoke, I could see on the wall opposite me two large vertical portrait paintings, one of Charles Darwin and the other of Sir Alfred Russell Wallace, who was, with Darwin, the co-founder of the theory of evolution by natural selection.

Darwin had been working for twenty years on his book *Origin of Species,* but could never seem to finish it. One day he received a letter from Alfred Russell Wallace. In an enclosed paper, soon to be submitted to one of Londons’ scientific societies, Wallace outlined the theory of evolution by natural selection. Darwin was troubled. By the rules of scientific etiquette, the theory of evolution by natural selection should be credited to Wallace - because Wallace would be the first to publicly present it. Darwin consulted his elite scientific friends, who said he should ask Wallace to allow him to submit an evolution paper of his own at the same time. Wallace agreed, and for a long time the theory of evolution was known as the Wallace-Darwin theory.

Later, Wallace and Darwin had a falling out over Wallace’s research into the paranormal. After reading one of Wallace’s papers, in which he attributed the development of the human brain to a guiding spiritual intelligence, Darwin wrote him a letter (March 27, 1869), saying, “I differ grievously from you … I hope you have not murdered too completely your own and my child [the theory of evolution by natural selection].”

Wallace did not kill the young theory of evolution, but he did lay the foundations for alternative explanations for human origins. My own alternative explanation, which can be found in my latest book, *Human Devolution: A Vedic Alternative to Darwin’s Theory,* owes quite a bit to Wallace’s research.

When I spoke at the Darwin Museum in April, I simply presented the archeological evidence for extreme human antiquity documented in my earlier book *Forbidden Archeology.* For example, I outlined the evidence from the California gold mines. These discoveries of human bones and artifacts, from deposits now regarded as Eocene (over 33 million years old), were published by geologist J. D. Whitney of Harvard University in 1880. Wallace accepted Whitney’s evidence. In an article in *Nineteenth Century* (1887, vol. 22, p. 667), Wallace noted that such evidence tended to be "attacked with all the weapons of doubt, accusation, and ridicule." Wallace suggested that "the proper way to treat evidence as to man's antiquity is to place it on record, and admit it provisionally wherever it would be held adequate in the case of other animals; not, as is too often now the case, to ignore it as unworthy of acceptance or subject its discoverers to indiscriminate accusations of being impostors or the victims of impostors."

The archeological evidence for extreme human antiquity accepted by me and Wallace shows that we need a new explanation for human origins. But this evidence does not itself provide that new explanation. For that, we have to go beyond stones and bones.

In my book *Human Devolution,* I propose that before we ask the question “from where did human beings come?” we should first of all ask the question, “what is a human being?” Today, most scientists believe that a human being is simply a combination of the ordinary material elements. But if we dare to look at all the evidence accumulated by scientists, we find that the human organism also includes more subtle vital and conscious elements. Some of the best evidence for this was provided by Wallace.

Wallace, along with other British scientists, such as Sir William Crookes, a Nobel laureate in physics, conducted extensive experiments into the paranormal. From these experiments, Wallace concluded that the universe is populated with spirit beings. Some of the minor spirit beings, he proposed, are in contact with the human population on earth. According to Wallace, the minor spirit beings, acting through human mediums, were responsible for a variety of paranormal phenomena, including clairvoyance, miraculous healings, communications from the dead, apparitions, materializations of physical objects, levitations, etc. More powerful spirit beings may have played a role in the origin of species.

In this regard, examples of paranormal production of biological forms are important. A particularly striking case was reported by Wallace, who, accompanied by others, saw a clergyman medium named Monk produce a complete human form. In his autobiography (1905 v. 2, p. 330), Wallace described the event, which took place in an apartment in the Bloomsbury district of London: “Everything happened in the full light of day. After a little conversation, Monk . . . appeared to go into a trance; then stood up a few feet in front of us, and after a little while pointed to his side, saying, ‘Look.’ We saw there a faint white patch on his coat on the left side. This grew brighter, then seemed to flicker, and extend both upwards and downwards, till very gradually it formed a cloudy pillar extending from his shoulder to his feet and close to his body. . . .but appearing joined to him by a cloudy band at the height at which it had first begun to form. Then, after a few minutes more, Monk again said ‘Look,’ and passed his hand through the connecting band, severing it. He and the figure then moved away from each other till they were about five or six feet apart. The figure had now assumed the appearance of a thickly draped female form, with arms and hands just visible. Monk looked towards it and again said to us ‘Look,’ and then clapped his hands, on which the figure put out her hands, clapped them as he had done, and we all distinctly heard her clap following his, but fainter. The figure then moved slowly back to him, grew fainter and shorter, and was apparently absorbed into his body.”

Wallace wrote in his autobiography (1905 v. 2, pp. 349–350): “The majority of people today have been brought up in the belief that miracles, ghosts, and the whole series of strange phenomena here described cannot exist; that they are contrary to the laws of nature; that they are the superstitions of a bygone age; and that therefore they are necessarily either impostures or delusions. There is no place in the fabric of their thought into which such facts can be fitted. When I first began this inquiry, it was the same with myself. The facts did not fit into my then existing fabric of thought. All my preconceptions, all my knowledge, all my belief in the supremacy of science and of natural law were against the possibility of such phenomena. And even when, one by one, the facts were forced upon me without possibility of escape from them, still, as Sir David Brewster declared after being at first astonished by the phenomena he saw with [the medium] Mr. Home, ‘spirit was the last thing I could give in to.’ Every other possible solution was tried and rejected. . . .We ask our readers not for belief, but for doubt of their own infallibility on this question; we ask for inquiry and patient experiment before hastily concluding that we are, all of us, mere dupes and idiots as regards a subject to which we have devoted our best mental faculties and powers of observation for many years.” For Wallace, all this had implications for human origins. In his book *Contributions to a Theory of Natural Selection* (1870, p. 359), Wallace concluded that, “a superior intelligence has guided the development of man in a definite direction, and for a special purpose, just as man guides the development of many animal and vegetable forms.”

My own views, inspired by the ancient Sanskrit writings of India, differ somewhat from those of Wallace, but share a family resemblance. For example, I share with him the ideas that there is more to a human being than atoms, and that the cosmos is inhabited by a hierarchy of spirit beings, who play a role in the origin, history, and future of the human species. In Moscow, during my talk at the Darwin Museum, looking at the paintings of Wallace and Darwin, I certainly felt a closer bond with Wallace.