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1 Editorial

2 One journal to bring them all, and in the fossils bind them

3

4 **1. Introduction**

5 When I was just an undergrad determined to study fossil primates back in the
6 1990s, I could only dream of publishing in the Journal of Human Evolution (JHE)
7 someday. Surprisingly, my wish materialized soon thereafter in 2000, but it took me
8 another decade to suspect I would eventually join the journal's Editorial Board as
9 Associate Editor (AE). When I was invited in 2012, I felt deeply honored, but the
10 possibility to become co-Editor-in-Chief did not cross my mind for a second. Yet this
11 happened in 2017–2020. Serving as JHE editor was an exciting privilege that I do not
12 regret, but I must confess that these four years were the most intense and exhausting
13 of my entire life. Now, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of JHE, after several
14 hundred manuscripts edited and happily retired from my former role, with the
15 reassurance to have left the journal in very good hands, I am utterly pleased to share
16 my perspectives about the past, present, and future of JHE.

17 In a time like ours, when the scientific publication system is permanently on the
18 verge of a major upheaval, a journal that survives for half a century without the
19 support of a scientific society is a bit of an oddity that deserves some reflection.
20 Admittedly, the journal is owned by a major publisher, but this is a sine qua non that
21 does not guarantee long-term survival. Only if we identify the factors that led to the
22 journal's flourish and its subsequent consolidation—arguably, as the leading venue for
23 original paleoanthropological research—may we hope to take the right decisions to
24 secure its persistence in decades to come. I discuss below the three main ingredients

25 that, in my opinion, constitute the journal's recipe for success, together with current
26 challenges, prospects for the future, and a final reflection about the ultimate purpose
27 of JHE.

28

29 **2. The keys of success**

30 *2.1. Scope*

31 As a vertebrate paleontologist specializing in fossil primates, I am thankful that the
32 journal's scope adheres to a broad definition of 'human evolution'. This agrees with
33 the definition of 'paleoanthropology' as "the study of human evolution and that of our
34 closest living relatives, the other primates" (Begun, 2013: 1), largely thanks to Elwyn
35 Simons' influence since the 1960s (Kay, 2018). In my mind, paleoanthropology and
36 paleoprimateology are subdisciplines of vertebrate paleontology rather than
37 anthropology (contra Schroeder, 2020) and hence do not include Paleolithic
38 archeology (contra Begun, 2013), which is a distinct discipline in its own right, even if
39 lithic artifacts are technically human inchnofossils (trace fossils). Semantics aside,
40 paleoanthropology and archeology are intimately intertwined in human evolution—
41 the main focus of JHE—and hence adequately covered by the journal. JHE further
42 publishes on other topics of broad interest in paleoanthropology, leading to the
43 apparent paradox that a very specialized journal is nonetheless multidisciplinary. This
44 is not exempt from challenges, leaving the journal's scope somewhat open to
45 interpretation and requiring a diverse Editorial Board in terms of expertise. However,
46 merging a panoply of different topics under a single unifying theme is one of the
47 outstanding merits of JHE and provides its audience with a more holistic view of
48 human evolution than other journals that partially overlap in scope.

49

50 *2.2. Editorial Board composition*

51 The composition and structure of the JHE Editorial Board is another important
52 factor underpinning the journal's success. In the 1980s, Peter Andrews and Eric Delson
53 reorganized the journal's board by adding new AEs "to coordinate manuscript review,
54 combining three external reviews with their own comments for final decision by an
55 Editor" (Delson and Andrews, 2022: 1). The presence of an intermediate layer of
56 committed AEs covering all the JHE research areas is quintessential to the journal,
57 ensuring that the most suitable reviewers are invited and that their comments are
58 judged fairly by someone with the necessary expertise. Publishers, editors, and
59 associate editors are contingent upon the circumstances and may vary through time,
60 but the board structure dictated by the journal's broad scope constitutes a unique
61 asset that should be safeguarded if we wish the journal to persist as we know it.

62

63 *2.3. Philosophy of the journal*

64 As a specialized journal, JHE does not aspire to publish highest impact research, but
65 nevertheless aims to excel in quality. This implies a tough peer-review process that
66 frequently involves three reviewers and multiple rounds of revision. Many other
67 indexed journals fall short of the stringent criteria of quality and rigorousness of JHE.
68 Thus, getting published in JHE is not intrinsically difficult but may be tedious and time-
69 consuming (for authors and editors alike). Authors submitting to JHE are probably
70 attracted by the journal's prestige, but not to discourage them from submitting again
71 we need to ensure that the review process, tough as it may be, is ultimately rewarding.
72 Fortunately, "JHE has a tradition of working with authors to assist revision so that

73 many 'rejected' articles are actually published after reworking" (Delson and Begun,
74 2014: 4227). It is of utmost importance that future editors adhere to this philosophy of
75 helping authors improve their manuscripts until they are publishable, instead of
76 rejecting outright those that are promising but do not yet fulfill the JHE quality
77 standards. This is surely a plus for young researchers, and the journal should strive to
78 keep it that way.

79

80 **3. Current challenges and future prospects**

81 *3.1. Scope*

82 Journal of Human Evolution has become the benchmark journal for the detailed
83 description of new hominin and other primate fossils. Papers dealing with other topics
84 are required to be more hypothesis-driven and have explicit implications for human
85 evolution. This double standard is essential to preserve the journal's position as the
86 leading forum in paleoanthropology. However, it is difficult to maintain a fair
87 equilibrium. Preserving this status quo will be one of the main challenges of future
88 editors. In parallel, greater efforts should be devoted to increase the number of
89 publications on paleogenomics, which are underrepresented in JHE because molecular
90 biologists can choose among a wider array of high-quality journals. Hopefully, this
91 topic will progressively become more frequent in JHE as molecular techniques become
92 routinely applied to fossils in conjunction with morphological approaches.

93

94 *3.2. Diversity*

95 Research cannot escape the shortfalls and biases of contemporary societies, from
96 patriarchy to racism, and paleoanthropology still suffers from serious problems of

97 colonialism and discrimination. Although awareness has importantly improved lately,
98 there is still a long way to go (Schroeder, 2020). Hence, as the leading journal in human
99 evolution, JHE has the moral obligation to champion social equality and actively
100 combat all kinds of discrimination in board composition and publication opportunities
101 with an intersectional perspective in mind (i.e., by taking into account various factors
102 of disadvantage simultaneously; Cooper, 2016).

103 The journal's board composition has always demonstrated an unambiguous
104 international vocation—even if biased in favor of Europe and North America. The use
105 of American spelling has been sometimes criticized as an expression of colonialism, but
106 it was adopted entirely for practical reasons. Questioning the spelling selection instead
107 of the use of English as the only acceptable language in international journals is a
108 misguided criticism in the eyes of a non-native English speaker like myself, who has a
109 threatened minority language as mother tongue. However, advocating for multiple
110 languages is unrealistic because English is well established as the lingua franca of
111 science, even if this is discriminatory for many researchers (Clavero, 2010; Cheng et al.,
112 2019). Therefore, we should rather ensure that language, and more generally
113 geographic origin and ethnicity, do not constitute a barrier for publishing, reviewing,
114 and editing in JHE. During the last decade, the journal's board has improved in terms of
115 diversity, so hopefully more scholars from other continents will progressively join the
116 board and eventually become Editors-in-Chief. But native English-speaking editors and
117 reviewers should also become more aware of their privileged position and proactively
118 compensate for it by improving authors' writing whenever possible to prevent
119 linguistic discrimination.

120 In terms of gender equality, several women have been co-Editors-in-Chief of JHE
121 since 1994 and the pool of active AEs currently shows gender parity for men and
122 women (Taylor and Zanolli, 2022). However, equal representation of women in
123 publications is more difficult to attain (Bendels et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Álvarez and
124 Lozano, 2018; Warnock et al., 2020) owing to deeper biases that permeate science
125 generally (Handley et al., 2015)—although the situation in biological anthropology and
126 paleoanthropology has improved during the last two decades, progress has been slow
127 and gender inequality persists (Turner et al., 2018). A quick survey of the 489
128 submissions I handled between 2017 and 2020 indicates that, out of the 429
129 corresponding authors to whom I could tentatively assign gender based strictly on
130 name, only 35% submissions were led by women. In contrast, the acceptance rate was
131 virtually the same for women (47%, 70/150) and men (46%, 129/279). Nevertheless, a
132 double-anonymized peer-review system (where authors' identities are concealed to
133 reviewers), which promotes the representation of female authors (Budden et al.,
134 2008), was implemented by JHE to ensure that manuscripts are judged exclusively
135 based on their merits (Plavcan et al., 2018). This is preferable to open review (where
136 authors' and reviewers' identities are revealed), which tends to perpetuate (rather
137 than prevent) biases in favor of well-established authors (Okike et al., 2016). At the
138 very least, the implementation of double-anonymized review sends the message that
139 everyone is welcome to submit to JHE and that the journal aims to proactively
140 minimize discrimination.

141

142 *3.3. Open science and the future of subscription journals*

143 The traditional publication system is in crisis and funding agencies increasingly
144 request that authors publish in open access. However, it is uncertain when (if ever) a
145 complete transition will occur. Journal of Human Evolution will eventually have to
146 adapt or perish, but what to do in the meantime? Despite the merits of open science,
147 open access and data sharing also carry some unintended dangers—e.g., preprints
148 might save lives in biomedicine but will represent a back door for poor-quality
149 manuscripts entering the publication record until we stop considering them fully
150 citable. Even worse, enforcing strict data sharing policies for 3D models of fossils might
151 preclude authors from publishing due to restrictions imposed by the copyright
152 holder—when, indeed, it would suffice that that the models are stewarded (and made
153 available upon reasonable request) by the same institution that curates the physical
154 fossils.

155 Researchers have the moral obligation to contribute to knowledge dissemination
156 throughout society and ideally the journal should more actively liaise with authors to
157 promote their papers through the media and social networks. However, science
158 dissemination is more effectively done through popularizing writings than by making
159 undigested research outputs available to laypeople. Mechanisms—other than Sci-Hub
160 (Bohannon, 2016; Himmelstein et al., 2018)—should be enforced to ensure that
161 paywalls do not preclude anyone from accessing publications but not at the expense of
162 forcing authors to spend their scarce research funds to pay for getting published!
163 Green open-access, as offered by hybrid journals such as JHE (which allows postprint
164 posting on institutional repositories after an embargo), fulfills the requirements of
165 funding agencies but will not deter many people from unlawfully downloading the
166 typeset version. On the other hand, high publication fees de facto preclude many

167 authors from publishing in gold open-access journals. Even if such fees are sometimes
168 waived for unfunded researchers or covered by institutional agreements, these
169 journals more seriously discriminate against researchers from small groups or
170 countries where research is underfunded. Hence, hybrid journals such as JHE are still
171 required and should wait and see how the publishing industry evolves before
172 transitioning into gold open access only.

173

174 **4. Epilogue**

175 During my years of service, amid all the miseries and joys of an editor's life, I
176 reflected more than ever about JHE and an editor's role. I am certain that the journal
177 still holds a valid purpose in paleoanthropology. Even though the journal is not a
178 burden and there is no Mount Doom on the horizon, it is likely to die out sooner or
179 later. Regardless, we should not worry about this, for the papers will remain. No
180 matter how attached we may be to JHE, it is just an instrument at the service of the
181 community and we should be ready to drop it if/when no longer useful. In the
182 meantime, let's toast to more and better fossils for the journal and keep the highest
183 possible standards of quality and ethics. As the oft-quoted Peter Parker's Principle
184 goes, "with great power there must also come—great responsibility!" (Lee and Ditko,
185 1962: 11). So, let's use our editor superpowers wisely—to empower rather than
186 discourage authors—because "good leadership means leading the way, not hectoring
187 other people to do things your way. [...] It is about laying the groundwork for others'
188 success, and then standing back and letting them shine" (Hadfield, 2013).

189 Long live JHE!

190

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199 helpful suggestions based on previous drafts of this editorial.

200

201 **Competing interests**

202 The author received an honorarium from Elsevier while serving as co-Editor-in-Chief
203 but currently has no contractual obligations with the publisher despite being an
204 emeritus member of the journal's Editorial Board.

205

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