

Letters To Zinjanthropus

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THESE ancient documents were discovered by the great German archaeologist Dr. Felix von Scheistsprechter at his dig in Kenya in 1964. They have baffled scholars of antiquity ever since.

The proper translation of the LETTERS may never be known. No Rosetta stone was found with them, and the language is obscure and heretofore unseen. This version, published for the first time here in SKETCH, culminates ten years of rigorous effort by the world's greatest linguists. It is generally regarded as the best translation to date, yet unexplained anachronisms and idioms appear.

Even the exact age of the LETTERS remains a mystery. Carbon-14 and other scientific dating tests have been either inconclusive or contradictory. One thing is known, the LETTERS are very, very old.

The eight missives—actually, one appears to be some sort of primitive telegram—are arranged here exactly as Dr. Scheistsprechter found them. What was their time span? It is difficult to say with certainty, yet from the context it is possible to guess: The first seven were written in a relatively short time period, possibly only a few months. The eighth came approximately a year later.

Whatever meaning is gleaned from these ancient documents, we hope that they be used toward the enlightenment of all mankind.

—the translators.

Dear Mr. Zinjanthropus,

Hope this letter finds you well. For that matter, I hope it finds you at all, the way the postal service is these days.

Did I spell your name correctly? You have a very difficult name to spell and pronounce. I'm wondering if you'd mind if I called you "Mr. Zin" or just "Zinnie." I know it is very informal but I already consider you to be the best friend I have, even though we have met only once.

I must say, I was really quite surprised when we met in the forest last month. At first, I thought you were just some new type of animal I had not encountered before. But when you started talking, I was quite taken aback. You see, Yahweh had led me to think I was unique in this place. He was always winking and patting me on the back and saying, "Adam, you're one-of-a-kind."

It was really nice having someone to talk to for a while. I get so bored here among all these dumb animals day after day. Of course, Yahweh and I talk sometimes, but he doesn't come around very much and he has always been so enigmatic anyway.

When he dropped by one day last week I asked him if he knew about you. He raised his bushy, white eyebrows and said of course he knew about Zinjanthropus. Then he delivered a long lecture about "divergent evolution" or something like that. The old man can be so boring and long-winded when he gets going on that stuff. It seems he wants me to know all about it for some reason, but I can't for the life of me figure out what.

Anyway, he was trying to explain to me how it is that you and I are both "unique," even though we both speak and both walk upright. Near as I can gather, when Yahweh made me he broke the mold, then he made you with the same mold. Ha, Ha! Just kidding, Zinnie.

Well, keep your chin up, if you have one, and drop me a line sometime, OK?

Sincerely,
Adam H. Sapiens

Dear Zinnie,

Good news! I have discovered a wonderful new method for getting the laundry done. I call it marriage. Basically it consists of getting some other creature to wash your loincloth for you. This eliminates doing it yourself and it is certainly more stylish than going about in the buff. This same creature, so she says, can be used for other chores including cooking, cleaning, carrying out the garbage, and rearing children, whatever they are.

Where does one find such a creature, you may ask. Well, Zinnie that is quite a story. I was taking a snooze one afternoon last week when I awoke with the feeling that something had gone out of me. I looked around and saw her sitting on a rock at the edge of the pool. As I approached, I could see that she was dangling a string into the water with a long stick. A bright colored object was tied to the end of the string. It flashed and danced beneath the water.

"Whatcha doin'?" I asked her.

"Fishin'," she answered, to my surprise. She gave me a little white smile.

"Oh. What's that flashy thing down there?"

"It's a fishing lure." She smiled again.

"A fishing lure. What does a fishing lure do?"

"It attracts the fish."

"It attracts the fish? And what do you do with the fish?"

"I cook them."

"Oh. I'm a hunter myself."

I sat on the rock and watched her fish for a while. A fat, brown trout swam up the flashy thing, looked at it, and then bit. She lifted him blinking and flapping into the air, took him off the line and deposited him in a wicker basket she kept beside her.

"How long have you been doing this?" I asked in amazement.

"Doing what?"

"Doing this, this fishing."

"About fifteen minutes."

"But what did you do before that?"

"That's funny," she said, cocking her head and opening her eyes very wide, "I really can't remember."

Pretty soon Eve—that's her name, Eve—pretty soon she had several nice, fat fish, and she offered to fix them for dinner. I took her up on the idea as I was getting awfully tired of chestnuts and ground squirrel tails.

Ever since then I have kept Eve around.

She is very helpful most of the time, but she always wears that silly little smile like she knows more than I do. Sometimes she gets underfoot when I'm in a hurry, and she is always snuggling up close when I try to sleep at night. I wouldn't mind so much except she makes it difficult to sleep and I am a very busy man, as you know.

If this keeps up and she doesn't stop smiling all the time, I may have to find another place for her. In the meantime, Zinnie, I suggest you find one of these creatures for yourself. They can be very helpful if they aren't too pesky and don't smile all the time.

I hear they're going to raise the postal rates. Isn't that just the way it goes: a fellow finally gets someone to write to and they raise the rates.

Sincerely,

Adam H. Sapiens

Dear Zinnie,

I have made a most astounding discovery. It is amazing. I must tell you about it. You won't believe what happened. I can hardly believe it myself. It concerns Eve. It is amazing.

Last night, after a delicious spaghetti dinner, Eve was in one of her playful moods and she . . . with my. . . Well, Zinnie, I was a bit taken aback at first, but then I . . . and she . . . in return. And then, before I knew what was happening, we started. . . Then she . . . wow . . . tongue in my ear! . . . look on her face as we . . . and then . . . in each other's arms. It was wonderful.

Now I know why she had that smile on her face all the time.

I can hardly wait to tell Yahweh.

Your Friend,
Adam

With time, unfortunately, portions of the fragile manuscript have disintegrated beyond legibility. Translators were not able to interpolate much of the wording in LETTER three. Hence the ellipses.

Dr. Zinjanthropus,

Why didn't you tell me you already knew about women? You and Yahweh must have had a good laugh keeping this from me so long. I feel so naive. When I told Yahweh about Eve, he just got this wicked gleam in his eye and patted me on the shoulder and said, "That's my boy!" I hate it when he treats me condescendingly like that.

As for your new invention which you call the wheel, I can see no value in it. If hominids were meant to roll, they'd have been given casters."

Adam H. Sapiens

Dear Zinnie,

Of course I'll accept your most gracious apology. But first, you must accept mine. I really lost my temper, and I'm sorry. Friends, OK? I suggest we get together for a game of cribbage sometime, if we can devise a deck of cards, whatever they are.

Eve and I are getting along just fine. In the evening, after a hard day's work, I come home, put my arms around her and whisper those three little words that every woman wants to hear: "What's for dinner?" She used to giggle when I did that, but now she doesn't say a word. I can tell she is becoming more efficient in her cooking by the way she bangs the pots and pans around.

Not that it bothers me, but sometimes I think Eve is becoming a little too serious. Whereas she used to smile all the time, she is now constantly muttering to herself about "being taken for granted"—whatever that means. I can't understand it. She's been here only six weeks.

The other night, when I was telling her how important my job is, she became very angry and red-faced and said, "You, Adam H. Sapiens, are a male chauvinist pig." That was three days ago and she hasn't spoken a word since. Do your wives ever act like that?

I can't get over what she called me: "male chauvinist pig." I know what a male is, and I know what a pig is, but I've been looking through **Webster's Incredibly Brief Dictionary** and I can't find the word "chauvinist" anywhere. I can't find "Webster" either.

Sincerely,
Adam

Dear Zinnie,

Thanks for the advice but it doesn't matter now because you see Eve has left me. She left a note saying she didn't like my attitude and she would not come back again. Not that I really care, but if you should happen to see her, tell her that she left her fishing lure here and that I will keep it here for her until she comes back.

Well, how have you been Zinnie? I've been feeling just wonderful lately. I am so wide awake that I hardly even sleep at night, I just lie there and think about things. I don't get hungry anymore, either. I mean I do, but when I try to eat, my stomach tightens up and I lose my appetite. This would be a great food saver, but then the food supply here is unlimited.

Actually, I've been getting along just fine without her. I don't need her delicious meals to soothe my stomach, nor her soft voice to bless my ears, nor her constant smile to warm my heart. And I'm sure I will survive without her soft-breasted and callipygian physique next to mine. I got along without her before, didn't I?

I have been thinking a lot lately and have decided that life is something more than just a bowl of cherries. I asked Yahweh why Eve had left me, and he got this faraway look and said, "Things are as they were meant to be. Now you must discover yourself." You can never get a straight answer from that guy. He disappeared after that, and I haven't seen him since.

If you should happen to see Eve, please tell her about the lure, and that I am getting along just fine without her and not eating or sleeping. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Adam

DEAR ZINNIE TELL EVE TO WAIT THERE I WILL
COME TO HER STOP WILL BRING HARD CIDER AND
ALL OF US WILL HAVE A PARTY STOP ON MY WAY
RIGHT NOW NON-STOP
ADAM

PS SORRY I HAD TO SEND THIS COLLECT

Dear Zinnie & Family,

The Sapiens wish the Zinjanthropi a Happy New Year. We certainly have cause for celebration here. About six weeks ago Eve dropped an eight and one-half pound baby boy and we've been raising Cain ever since.

Both Eve and I like the calendar you devised, Zinnie, especially the pictures. Could you please explain what all the rows of numbers are for? Next time we meet, I must show you my plans for a perpetual motion machine. It is only half finished and already it makes all of your inventions combined look primitive.

Take care and write soon before the rates go up again.

Sincerely,
Adam & Eve Sapiens