

Creation Science Rebuttals
Fossil Tetrapods
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A common claim by young earth creationists is that a fossil which shows evidence of rapid burial proves Noah's Flood, and thus a young earth.. This is again evident in an article in Technical Journal (TJ) in the April 2001 issue.¹ This article is titled "Fossil Reptiles on the Russian Platform," and it was again featured on the Answers in Genesis website on 12 April 2006.

The Russian author, Lalomov, tells about an exciting find of large fossil [tetrapods](#) in Upper Permian strata, which is thought to be approximately 260 million years old. These tetrapods are from an extinct group of anapsids known as [Pareiasaurs](#). The reptiles were buried in a standing position with their heads erect.

One attempt at explaining how these 300 fossils came to be buried is that they were bogged down in soft sediment after a heavy rainfall. The author goes on to show that another geologist interprets the layers in a uniformitarian framework. However, as with anything in science, you can find a dissenting opinion. Although this one author gives this as slow deposition, do all geologists who have studied this rock unit believe it

was slow deposition? The author fails to explain if this position is the dominant one among scientists who have studied the rock layer in question. Just looking at this Answers in Genesis article, this is not necessarily uniformitarian-type deposition. These five horizontal layers could have easily been formed catastrophically, 260 million years ago.

Not surprisingly, the author says "To me these conclusions are very questionable." I would expect nothing less than this. He makes this statement out of necessity, not out of the scientific evidence. The strata is millions of years old, so they must be contested, no matter what the scientific evidence is.

His first point is that "Pareisasaurs were herbivorous reptiles that lived in similar conditions to the modern giant aquatic turtle." He claims that it is unreasonable to assume that they drowned in a swamp, and they more likely were caught unaware by a catastrophic event. This presents no problems from an old earth perspective. While the author believes it was Noah's Flood several thousand years ago, old earth creationists believe it was another flood event, millions of years ago.

His second point is that the average rate of deposition would mean that it would take at least 10,000 years to bury the animals. There are two possibilities. First, they could have sunk into the mud feet-first, and actually could have been covered by this sediment quickly by this sinking action. However, it is unlikely they would have all remained with heads upright, although this would have to be ruled out by a study of this process. The other possibility is that the deposition rate is wrong.

Perhaps this unit should be interpreted as several rapid flood events. I tend to support this possibility. In either case, a young earth is not indicated, due to the other strata above and below the fossils.

The third point that the author makes is that there are virtually no plant fossils present. He says "It is difficult to imagine how 300 large reptiles, each more than 1 m long, could live without food on a piece of land just 3 km long." This seems to be a valid point, but it relies upon several assumptions that cannot be proven. We don't know if they lived there...we don't know if they died there (they could have been transported by water to this burial place. In either case, this has no implications against an old earth viewpoint.

His fourth and final point is that the strata was deposited during the final marine transgression for the region. Based on erosion rates, this transgression fits better with a Flood only 4,500 years ago, versus one 260 million years ago. This also makes unprovable assumptions. The erosion rate is assumed to be constant based on erosion rates observed today in major rivers of the world. We cannot be certain that it has been constant over millions of years. He claims that not more than 1020 meters of land has been eroded. He gives no source for this number...is it accurate? If it is, using the erosion rate he gives (0.2–1.4 mm per year), this amount of land would be eroded away in 5.1 to 728 thousand years. This is still much too old for Noah's Flood! For 4,500 years, he needs erosion rates of 226 mm per year, or over 200 times the rates that he quotes!

Conclusion

These fossil tetrapods may indicate a rapid burial by a flood, but there is no reason to suspect that it was Noah's Flood. Old earth creationists can view these as local flood events, or even the possibility of the bodies sinking into the mud. Erosion rates given do not come close to supporting the author's conclusion that the transgressions fit better with a global flood only 4,500 years ago.

¹ Lalomov, Alexander V., Fossil Reptiles on the Russian Platform, TJ 15(1): April 2001. Available online at answersingenesis.org/tj/v15/i1/russia.asp