

THE SOURCE OF VERNE'S DINOSAURS

By William Butcher

The Web is a fantastic resource for finding Verne's sources, especially the many proper names he cites. But in searching for obscure references, human ingenuity will not be replaced in the foreseeable future, as shown by the following example.

In *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* (I 3), Conseil refers to "les archiotherium, les hyracotherium, les oréodons, les chéropotamus et autres carcasses de monsieur" (the Archaeotheria, Hyracotheria, Oreodons, Chaeropotami, and monsieur's other carcasses). As in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, the fossil creatures mentioned are not easy to trace, with archiotherium, in particular, not attested on the Web, although archaeotherium ("killer pig") is. But it is often wrong to blame the author or the publisher for shaky spelling.

In this instance, as in so many others,¹ the vital clue was to be found in Jean-Michel Margot's monumental *Bibliographie documentaire sur Jules Verne* (Amiens, 1989), where E. de Girardin's "Voyage dans les Mauvaises Terres du Nebraska (Etats-Unis)" (*Le Tour du Monde (Nouveau Journal des Voyages)*, Jan.-June 1864, pp. 49-68) is indicated as a source of *Twenty Thousand Leagues*. A first observation is that Emile de Girardin (1806-81) was well-known to the public and to Verne, mentioned twice in the correspondence and characterised in *Paris in the Twentieth Century*.² But in addition the

French National Library, unlike its foreign counterparts, has taken the excellent initiative of placing tens of millions of pages of text online (at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>), including the whole of the periodical *Le Tour du monde*, perhaps Verne's most important single source. Searching for Girardin on Gallica takes you immediately to <http://gallica.bnf.fr/scripts/ConsultationTout.exe?E=0&O=n034384.htm> and a fascinating article on an expedition up the Missouri to the Badlands, complete with beautiful illustrations. On p. 68, we find "archiotherium ... babiroussa ... l'oréodon du docteur Leidy ... *cheropotamus*", together with full descriptions of these creatures, whose fossils were found in Nebraska in the 1840s. On the same page are references to Cuvier, a fossil jaw, a "gangue" (setting), giant tortoises and even the volcanic cone of Mount Etna surrounded by fertile plains – all of which can be found in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864). Elsewhere in the article, we discover steamboats "trembling in their very frames", an explanation of pemmican like the one in the first chapter of *Captain Hatteras*, fossil mastodons and elephants, "an antediluvian architecture", rumours of "petrified men", and, above all, an illustration of the "floating islands of the Missouri" and an "immense graveyard" of bones. "How did the piles of bones belonging to species of mammals which no longer exist come to be found heaped up in such disorder together with millions of sea-shells and turtles in the middle of the desert 400 leagues from the Ocean?" – one of the questions that Verne's 1864 novel brilliantly answers. Without Girardin, then, at least two of Verne's masterpieces would not have been the same.

Equipped with Margot, one can spend many delightful hours in the online French National Library exploring the documentary sources of Verne's fertile imagination.

(FOOTNOTES)

1. For example, a recent piece, Lise Sabourin's "Jules Verne et l'Ecosse" (in *Roman et récit de voyage*, 2001) underlines the influence on *Child of the Cavern* of C. Survilli's "L'Ange de la houillère" (*Musée des familles*, Vol. 22, December 1854, pp. 73-83 and 113-19). These two articles are Margot's items 1 and 2.

2. Girardin, a politician and publicist, created the *Musée des familles*, where Verne published pieces in the early 1850s. In a letter to his mother of 22 February 1849, Verne describes visiting the box of Alexandre Dumas to see the opening of his *La Jeunesse des mousquetaires* the day before, with Girardin and Dumas also *père* present. In *Paris*, the protagonists are discussing the death of philosophy, including "... a journalist, a publisher, an economist, a jack-of-all-trades, an artillery general with more noise than wit, going by the name of Girardin." / "Wasn't he an atheist?" / "Not at all. He believed in himself." On 3 September 1875, Hetzel wrote to Verne that Girardin was the only person encouraging him to sue Offenbach for plagiarism of Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*.

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THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN ANTIFER'S ISLAND?

by Dennis Kytasaari

It was reported by CNN.com, Reuters, and likely elsewhere that an island that has remained submerged for the last 171 years will possibly be making a reappearance in the next few months. When the island last appeared in 1831, a few countries claimed ownership of the territory. Whether they will or not do that again remains to be seen, I just wonder if anyone will be looking for Captain Antifer's treasure.

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YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER?

by Dennis Kytasaari

Is this your last newsletter? Please check below your address on the envelope that this newsletter came in; there you will see what the expiration year is for your membership. If it is anything other than 2002, then you have nothing to worry about. If it is 2002, then this is your last newsletter. If you wish to continue receiving this newsletter, then please refer to my mailing from last September, which contained the current membership list and a renewal form. If no longer have that form, you may contact me via the information contained in the adjacent column.