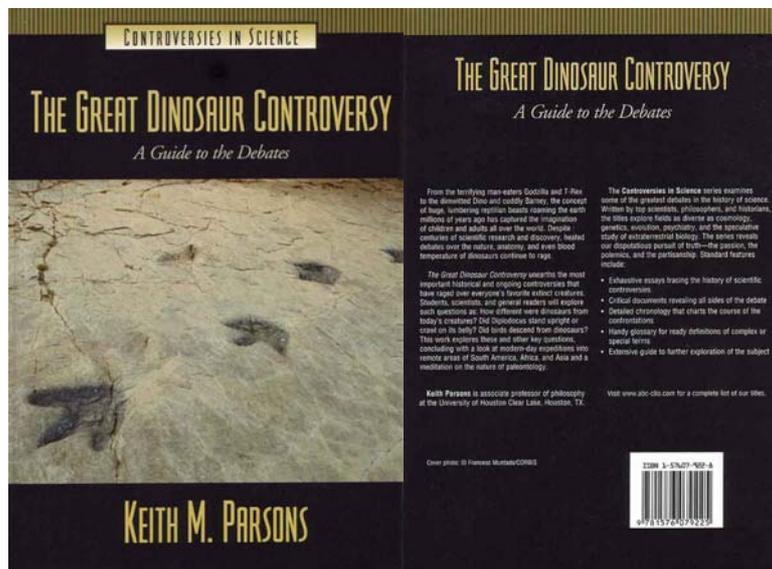


**Parsons, K.M. 2003. The great dinosaur controversy. A guide to the debates. - Santa Barbara CA, ABC-CLIO**

Book review by A.S. Schulp



Controversies attract attention. Consensus is, after all, very boring. Hot debates and fierce competition are a healthy environment to push scientific knowledge forward. So, it is not surprising that a palaeontologist enthusiastically defending a not-so-mainstream idea about exciting fossils, such as dinosaurs, will attract considerable media attention. Controversy sells.

A new book by Keith Parsons on such controversies, “The great dinosaur controversy” promises to provide “a guide to th[ose] debates”. In chapters often not exceeding twenty pages each, the major controversies in dinosaur palaeontology are discussed at top speed. Were dinosaurs warm- or cold-blooded? Are birds flying dinosaurs rather than flying crocodiles? And what killed the dinosaurs? Were they killed by volcanoes, or did something fall out of the sky? Not surprisingly, Cope, Marsh, Darwin and Owen make their appearances, too.

A lot of space, about the other *half* of the book is occupied by appendices. The book appears to be aimed at a wider audience than just palaeontologists, as one of the appendices provides a short introduction in the field of dinosaur palaeontology itself. The remainder of the appendices provide excerpts from the primary sources on the topics discussed.

So what does this book offer? It does provide a very readable introduction in the ‘Big controversies’ about dinosaurs. It could serve as a departure for further reading. It does provide a balanced summary of the debates, as the title claims. But what does it add, if most books and papers mentioned in the book are already on your bookshelf? Most topics discussed in this book are also found, for example, in ‘The complete dinosaur’ by Farlow & Brett-Surman - which for less money provides a much wider overview of this science.

What does it add if most of the topics have been previously discussed at length in more specialized books? Not much, apart from summarizing some of the hottest debates in one place. At a price point above 80 US\$, the book offers little value for money, unless perhaps if you are particularly interested in these debates from a philosophical or history-of-science point of view without having much background in palaeontology.

Parsons, K.M. 2003. The great dinosaur controversy. A guide to the debates. - Santa Barbara CA, ABC-CLIO. 294 pp. ISBN 1 57607 922 8. Price US\$ 85 (paperback).

#### Cited literature

**Farlow, J.O. & M.K. Brett-Surman. Eds. 1997.** The complete dinosaur. – Bloomington, Indiana University Press.