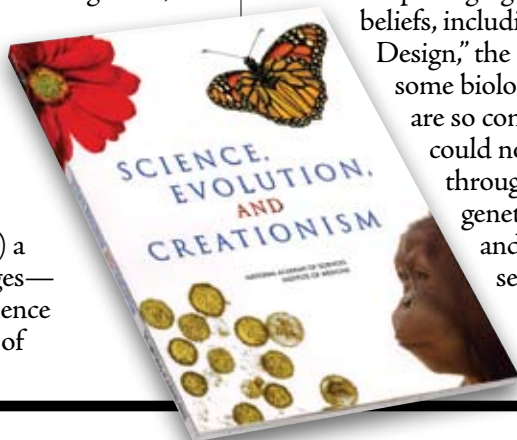


BOOKS

Evolution in Brief

The development of the human species is one of the most fascinating stories that archaeology helps to tell. It is also a story that has become one of the most distorted and controversial. In an effort to untangle the misinformation that various anti-evolution groups have created to advance their political agendas, the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine have published *Science, Evolution, and Creationism* (2008) a brief—only 70 pages—overview of the science behind the theory of



evolution intended for non-scientists. First published in 1984, this new edition takes into account recent fossil discoveries (a 375-million-year-old creature found in Canada that is a transitional form between shallow-water fish and the first land-dwelling animals, and early bird-like fossils from China). It also looks at the latest repackaging of creationist beliefs, including “Intelligent Design,” the idea that some biological structures are so complex they could not have evolved through random genetic mutation and natural selection.

The writing is not scintil-

lating, but it is clear and understandable. In addition to the main text, the book presents information in a variety of ways. Definitions of terms appear in the margins rather than gumming up the main text. Several pages are devoted to testimonials from prominent scientists and religious leaders who see no conflict between evolution and religion. The sections dealing with people include examinations of human and chimp DNA sequences and a brief review of the fossil record.

Science, Evolution, and Creationism succeeds in covering a vast subject, clarifying concepts, detailing evidence, and analyzing the arguments for and against evolution. It's not a breezy book, but it's an important one. —MARK ROSE

MUSEUMS

A Feather in Peru's Cap

The rain forests of the Amazonian basin abound with parrots, macaws, and other brightly colored birds, whose silken feathers were prized by ancient Peruvians for more than 2,000 years. Perched in the otherwise subdued galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the exhibition *Radiance from the Rain Forest: Featherwork in Ancient Peru* features some striking objects, including 70 garments, crowns, personal ornaments, and accessories made between the seventh and sixteenth century A.D. These items were used for both personal adornment and ritual purposes by several cultures, such as the Chimú and the Inca. Also on view are pieces created by the Wari, who were better known for their practice of wearing the skulls of subjugated enemies.

Among the highlights are four Wari wall hangings that were made by stringing together macaw feathers and then sewing them onto a fabric backing. The still-vivid blues and yellows radiate off each other, evoking images of modern art. A total of 96 such pieces were accidentally discovered—rolled up in eight ceramic jars—in 1943 at the site of Corral Redondo by local workers preparing adobe near La Victoria on Peru's southern coast. They

may have decorated walls or been offerings to the gods.

Displayed in close proximity in a tiny gallery space, the works transform the average experience of viewing an exhibition into the sensation of being right in the middle of an ancient religious ceremony or gathering of the Peruvian elite.

The exhibition is on view through September 1.

—ETI BONN-MULLER



The Chimú/Inca ear ornaments, left, are embellished with feathers that were trimmed and pressed flat. The delicate headdress, above, was crafted by the Wari, who were better known as bloodthirsty warriors.