

# correspondence

## UNESCO

SIR,—As visiting scientists at the Weizmann Institute, we find the recent UNESCO anti-Israel resolution doubly abhorrent.

First, as scientists and educators, we are appalled at the biased, politicised and cowardly vote, which has made a travesty of an organisation established to help wipe out just such ignorance and prejudice.

Second, being in Israel we have had the opportunity to explore Jerusalem—the old, the new, the restored, the excavated—and thus to recognise the absurdity of the claim that the excavations carried out in the Holy City have changed its character.

We call on our fellow scientists to join us in protesting UNESCO's moral bankruptcy and in demanding that the organisation abandon politics and return to dealing with science, education and culture.

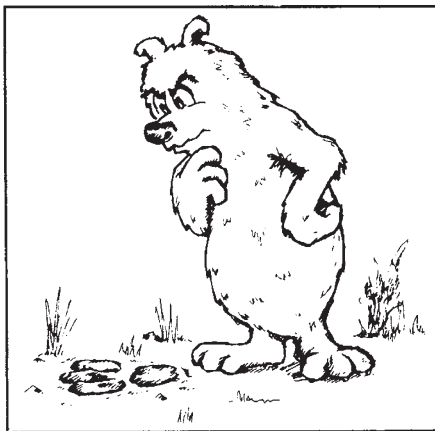
Yours faithfully,

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## Another African Chalicothere

SIR,—Among a large collection of vertebrate fossils from the Lukeino Formation which I made recently I found the proximal phalanx of a large Chalicothere. Its size suggests that it belongs to *Ancylotherium hennigi* Dietrich, although if so that species will prove to be the oldest known specimen (~6.5 Myr).

Chalicotheres are now known from several deposits in Africa—the Lower Miocene of Rusinga and Songhor, Kenya; the Pliocene of Kaiso, Uganda, from which the first African Chalicothere was recognised (C. W. Andrews, *Nature*, **112**, 696; 1923); and Lower Pleistocene deposits such as Olduvai, Tanzania (P. M. Butler, *Bull. Br. Mus. Nat. Hist. Geol.*, **10**, 165–237; 1965). In the Baringo area Kenya, they have been recognised from the Chemeron Formation (~4 Myr.) and now from the Lekeino Formation.



On discovery of the Lukeino fossil, I described a Chalicothere to my field assistant, Mr Kiptalam Chepboi, who assured me that I had accurately described a *Chemosit*. I repeated the description to several other local people, all of whom gave the same opinion. The *Chemosit* is an animal of Kalenjin myth, on which the 'Nandi Bear' is supposed to have been based (*Nature*, **112**, 696; 1923 and B. Heuvelmans, *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, Rupert Hart-Davis, London; 1958) and it was the first discovery of a Chalicothere in Africa that prompted Andrews to enquire whether the Chalicothere was still extant and whether it formed the basis of the myth. It is therefore of great interest to obtain further information from an independent source, separated by more than two generations and hundreds of miles, that indeed the *Chemosit* and the Chalicothere closely resemble one another.

It is unlikely that the Chalicothere is still extant, even in the depths of the Zaire forests, but it is not inconceivable that it survived until the recent past, entering local mythology before finally dying out.

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## Asbestosis

SIR,—W. P. Howard's comment (December 13) on Peter J. Smith's article (October 18), "For those in peril on the factory floor" which dealt with the industrial hazards of asbestos, itself deserves comment. It is true that conditions in the industry are incomparably better than they were in some factories 40 years ago but the occurrence of an average of 139 new cases of asbestosis a year in Britain still emphasises a formidable hazard. Mr Howard, writing from a London office where he only inhales the few asbestos fibres normally present in an urban atmosphere, may have every confidence that in coming years the number of cases will be reduced to a very low level indeed, but this confidence suggests a complacency that is not, I am sure, characteristic of the industry as a whole. We do not know to what level the concentration of asbestos in the atmosphere must be reduced before the hazard will disappear. The Maximum Admissible Concentration level is a guess.

That asbestos is a dangerous commodity cannot be too strongly emphasised and, although it is indispensable for certain purposes, it should be used with discretion. Because of television programmes describing the occurrence of asbestosis and cancer in workers in Hebden Bridge, the public has become aware of dangers that can arise when the material is handled indiscriminately. A general review (*The Biological Effects of Asbestos*, distributed by the World Health Organisation) that summarises the report of a working conference on the biological effects of asbestos, sponsored by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, indicates that all the major commercial types of asbestos can cause cancer and that there is strong evidence to relate past exposure to asbestos with mesotheliomas, a distressing cancer of the pleura that covers the lung.

The danger may not relate only to employees. One paper in the same report represents a study of the incidence of mesotheliomas in the city of Hamburg-Bergedorf in the years 1958–68. In the city as a whole the incidence was 0.056%; in the residential area around one factory it was 0.96%. Cases considered to be occupational were excluded.

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