

The *South African Journal of Science* follows a double-anonymous peer review model but encourages Reviewers and Authors to publish their anonymised review reports and response letters, respectively, as supplementary files after manuscript review and acceptance. For more information, see [Publishing peer review reports](#).

Peer review history for:

Kuljian C. Contesting a legendary legacy: A century of reflection on Raymond Dart and the Taung skull. *S Afr J Sci.* 2025;121(1/2), Art. #18323. <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2025/18323>

HOW TO CITE:

Contesting a legendary legacy: A century of reflection on Raymond Dart and the Taung skull [peer review history]. *S Afr J Sci.* 2025;121(1/2), Art. #18323. <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2025/18323/peerreview>

Reviewer 1: Round 1

Date completed: 18 June 2024

Recommendation: Accept / **Revisions required** / Resubmit for review / Resubmit elsewhere / Decline / See comments

Conflicts of interest: None

Does the manuscript fall within the scope of SAJS?

Yes/No

Is the manuscript written in a style suitable for a non-specialist and is it of wider interest than to specialists alone?

Yes/No

Does the manuscript contain sufficient novel and significant information to justify publication?

Yes/No

Do the Title and Abstract clearly and accurately reflect the content of the manuscript?

Yes/No

Is the research problem significant and concisely stated?

Yes/No

Are the methods described comprehensively?

Yes/No

Is the statistical treatment appropriate?

Yes/No/**Not applicable**/Not qualified to judge

Are the interpretations and conclusions justified by the research results?

Yes/**Partly**/No

Please rate the manuscript on overall contribution to the field

Excellent/**Good**/Average/Below average/Poor

Please rate the manuscript on language, grammar and tone

Excellent/Good/Average/Below average/Poor

Is the manuscript succinct and free of repetition and redundancies?

Yes/No

Are the results and discussion confined to relevance to the objective(s)?

Yes/No

The number of tables in the manuscript is

Too few/Adequate/Too many/**Not applicable**

The number of figures in the manuscript is

Too few/Adequate/Too many/**Not applicable**

Is the supplementary material relevant and separated appropriately from the main document?

Yes/No/**Not applicable**

Please rate the manuscript on overall quality

Excellent/**Good**/Average/Below average/Poor

Is appropriate and adequate reference made to other work in the field?

Yes/No

Is it stated that ethical approval was granted by an institutional ethics committee for studies involving human subjects and non-human vertebrates?

Yes/No/Not applicable

If accepted, would you recommend that the article receives priority publication?

Yes/No

Are you willing to review a revision of this manuscript?

Yes/No

Select a recommendation:

Accept / **Revisions required** / Resubmit for review / Decline

With regard to our policy on '[Publishing peer review reports](#)', do you give us permission to publish your anonymised peer review report alongside the authors' response, as a supplementary file to the published article? Publication is voluntary and only with permission from both yourself and the author.

Yes/No

Comments to the Author:

General comments:

This is a comprehensive review of the legacy of Raymond Dart and will undoubtedly contribute toward a more critical assessment of his legacy. The authors have succinctly outlined the various aspects of his career and research interests in great detail. The paper emphasises that there have been critiques of Dart and his work which have gone largely unnoticed and disregarded by the scientific community, trickling into the general public and the collective memory of the scientific community. This is an important publication that is easily understandable and devoid of overly technical jargon, making the important information it is attempting to convey easily accessible to a broader audience.

Major comments:

There are bold (and important) statements made throughout the article that would benefit from the inclusion of more references, especially as it relates to the work on race typology and cultural diffusion.

Minor comments:

Abstract

Line 6- italicise *Australopithecus africanus*

Line 20- correct spelling of Taung child

There is a focus on the Taung child discovery which is important but the other interests Dart had (notably race typology) are only briefly mentioned in lines 10 and 11. I would recommend elaborating further on that point. Same point as above for the critical reflection of Dart's work (i.e., lines 13 and 14).

The myth of one man, one fossil

Line 25- please provide a reference for the sentence ending "in late 1924"

Line 26- add reference for Dart memoir

Lines 23-33- These set a good scene and contextualise the events

Line 36-37- Are there references to the mentioned blog posts that can be cited?

Lines 55-60- please add reference

Lines 111-120- are there references available that can be cited for texts/publications that demonstrate how Robert Young was excluded from the discovery narrative?

Line 115-116- the way this line is phrased seems rather speculative, was hiding discoveries common at the time? Are there other examples within the field that support this idea of single scientists hiding pivotal information about discoveries in order to not share the glory?

Lines 145-158- Is it possible to elaborate further on the paths that the mentioned co-workers of these prominent scientists took? Did they continue working at fossil sites and contributing toward discoveries? Some excavation teams are often generational. Has this changed in the science and are there examples of this change? Where are these people now? Did these prolific discoveries impact their lives in any way? This paragraph can be expanded to include some of these details and truly emphasise the importance of their

role in palaeontology and the discoveries that have shaped the way we think about human evolution. It is also important to note that these workers, labourers and assistants were mostly Black African people and their erasure speaks to a broader systemic problem that still lingers within the science.

Decades of Glowing Dart Biographies

Line 174-175- References for the acceptance of the Taung child by the scientific community.

Line 175- are there other examples of support Dart received locally that can be mentioned or cited?

Line 194- Can some examples be cited of the articles/websites/blog posts that refer to Dart solely in the light of the Taung discovery to support the statement.

Other areas of Dart's work- long unexamined

Line 209-214- References and examples of other scientists who have supported (and refuted) the concepts of racial types would further support the statement.

Beginning to critique scientific racism in the 1990's

Lines 286-291- References and examples of Tobias research/interest in race typology would strengthen the statements made in this paragraph.

Another critique in the 2000's

Lines 348-356 Direct references and examples of Dart's support of cultural diffusion would strengthen the statements made in this paragraph and set the scene for Dubow and Derricourt.

Line 457- Contextualise the use of the term "coloured" in the light of Apartheid racial classification hierarchies. At that time it was a term used to describe and segregate people of mixed ancestry but since then, it has also come to represent a self-identified heterogeneous community with a distinct and diverse heritage. Capitalizing the C in Coloured (e.g., Lines 456, 464 as it pertains to identity) also emphasises that this is a community of people and not objects or pigments. The use of inverted commas also alludes to this not being a recognised identity or group.

Author response to Reviewer 1: Round 1

In abstract, include more on race typology.

AUTHOR: Instead of mentioning "race typology" in passing, I added "This paper also explores Dart's belief in race typology, and his disturbing anthropological practices, which were not questioned in the era of racial segregation and apartheid, which carry painful legacies in the fields of anatomy, anthropology and palaeoanthropology."

In abstract, elaborate on need for critical reflection on Dart's work.

AUTHOR: I have modified two sentences: "However, critical reflection on Dart's legacy of scientific racism began in the 1990s and 2000s and continues today." And "This paper will review scholarly writing on Dart's overall career, confirm this legacy of scientific racism, and argue that it stands alongside his legendary legacy of having described the Taung skull."

Line 25, provide reference for sentence ending "in late 1924."

AUTHOR: References 2, 5, 6, 8 were added here.

Line 26, add reference for Dart memoir.

AUTHOR: Reference 1 was added here.

Lines 36-37, are there references to the mentioned blog posts?

AUTHOR: I decided to delete the sentence referring to these posts.

Lines 55-60, please add reference.

AUTHOR: I added references 5 and 6 here.

Lines 111-120, are there references that demonstrate Young being excluded from discovery narrative?

AUTHOR: I modified the text and references as follows: "Young was largely written out of history. (1,5, 6, 9,10) Young passed away in 1949, and by the time Dart wrote his memoir a decade later, Young played no role in delivering the skull to Dart. (1)"

Lines 115-116, this line seems speculative.

AUTHOR: I agree and deleted that sentence.

Lines 145-158, it is possible to elaborate further on the paths of these co-workers of prominent scientists?

AUTHOR: After much deliberation, I decided to keep the names of some of these co-workers in the text despite the inability to expand and elaborate on their stories in this paper. I also added: "This story of the Taung skull can serve as a reminder to look for and document the team of people involved with fossil finds, rather than attributing them to one person."

Lines 174-175, References for the acceptance of the Taung child by scientific community.

AUTHOR: I added the following sentence: "European scientists were skeptical of Dart's claims about Taung at first, even calling Dart's claims "preposterous," (1p45, 44) and it did take more than twenty-five years for the international scientific community to accept the significance of the Taung skull. (43, 44, 45)"

Line 175, are there other examples of support Dart received locally that can be mentioned or cited?

AUTHOR: In addition to the supportive reaction from Wits University and Jan Smuts, I added the following sentence: "Many South Africans saw Dart as a scientific hero (13, 17p2, 47p231) an image that continued for the rest of his life."

Line 194, Can some examples be cited of the articles/websites/blog posts that refer to Dart solely in the light of the Taung discovery to support the statement? I

AUTHOR: I deleted the word "only" so that the sentence now reads: "There are countless documents, articles, websites, and blogs that refer to Dart and the Taung skull. (5, 10, 46)"

Line 209-214, References and examples of other scientists who have supported (and refuted) the concept of racial types would further support the statement.

AUTHOR: I modified the following sentence to show examples of other scientists: "Dart believed that race typology, which classified humans by their physical characteristics, was an important aspect of physical anthropology, as did Robert Broom and Michael Drennan in South Africa, Robert Terry and Alec Hrdlicka in the United States, Lido Cipriani in Italy and many others across Europe and the U.K"

Lines 286-291, References and examples of Tobias' research/interest in race typology would strengthen the statements made in this paragraph.

AUTHOR: I added this sentence: "As a student of Dart's in the 1940s and 50s, Tobias fully embraced race typology. (50, 51p226)"

Lines 348-356, Direct references and examples of Dart's support of cultural diffusion would strengthen the statement and set the scene for Dubow and Derricourt.

AUTHOR: I added Dart references 31 and 57.

Line 457, Contextualize the use of the term "coloured" in light of Apartheid racial classification hierarchies. Issue of capitalizing.

AUTHOR: I significantly cut back on this section, but also added this sentence: "At the time, the term "coloured" was used to describe people of mixed ancestry, and was later used as an apartheid racial classification."

Reviewer 2: Round 1

Date completed: 18 June 2024

Recommendation: Accept / **Revisions required** / Resubmit for review / Resubmit elsewhere / Decline / See comments

Conflicts of interest: None

Does the manuscript fall within the scope of SAJS?
Yes/No

Is the manuscript written in a style suitable for a non-specialist and is it of wider interest than to specialists alone?
Yes/No

Does the manuscript contain sufficient novel and significant information to justify publication?
Yes/No

Do the Title and Abstract clearly and accurately reflect the content of the manuscript?
Yes/No

Is the research problem significant and concisely stated?
Yes/No

Are the methods described comprehensively?
Yes/No

Is the statistical treatment appropriate?
 Yes/No/**Not applicable**/Not qualified to judge

Are the interpretations and conclusions justified by the research results?
Yes/Partly/No

Please rate the manuscript on overall contribution to the field
Excellent/Good/Average/Below average/Poor

Please rate the manuscript on language, grammar and tone
Excellent/Good/Average/Below average/Poor

Is the manuscript succinct and free of repetition and redundancies?
Yes/No

Are the results and discussion confined to relevance to the objective(s)?
Yes/No

The number of tables in the manuscript is
 Too few/Adequate/Too many/**Not applicable**

The number of figures in the manuscript is
 Too few/Adequate/Too many/**Not applicable**

Is the supplementary material relevant and separated appropriately from the main document?
Yes/No/Not applicable

Please rate the manuscript on overall quality
 Excellent/**Good**/Average/Below average/Poor

Is appropriate and adequate reference made to other work in the field?
Yes/No

Is it stated that ethical approval was granted by an institutional ethics committee for studies involving human subjects and non-human vertebrates?
Yes/No/Not applicable

If accepted, would you recommend that the article receives priority publication?
Yes/No

Are you willing to review a revision of this manuscript?
Yes/No

Select a recommendation:
 Accept / **Revisions required** / Resubmit for review / Decline

With regard to our policy on 'Publishing peer review reports', do you give us permission to publish your anonymised peer review report alongside the authors' response, as a supplementary file to the published article? Publication is voluntary and only with permission from both yourself and the author.
Yes/No

Comments to the Author:
The scope
 The title of the manuscript is "Contesting a Legendary Legacy: A Century of Reflection on Raymond Dart and the Taung Skull". The scope and language of the article is appropriate for the South African Journal of Science and the upcoming monograph of the centenary of the discovery of the Taung child skull.

The content

The introductory paragraphs (rows 23-77) provide a good context of the many characters (including the labourers of the mine) involved in the unearthing of the skull to demonstrate the myth of a 'one man' discovery narrative. However, these paragraphs require additional referencing to support these daring statements. In rows 149 to 155 the authors discuss the role of other workers in scientific discoveries; however, they do not nuance the role of the black labourers against the likes of Robert Young and Josephine Salmons. These two groups had completely different backgrounds and roles in relation to scientific research in 1924. Therefore, it is important to provide a full distinction of the roles that these two groups (or even 3, considering that Josephine is a woman and a student) which will tie in with their later discussion on segregation. Another missing context is the history of how Dart, as a scholar of anatomy, was influenced by his training to centralise himself as an individual in research. His training is not discussed in the paper. Beside the historical context of South Africa at the time, this is a critical aspect of his scientific behaviour.

[Rows 470-475] Kuljian's book is a critical paperback however, chronicles of its publishing background and audience are not relevant to this manuscript. The authors did not award other authors with the same indications. It is great that the authors cited her work (which is important to this discussion) however its centralisation is futile in this argument.

While this is the concluding paragraph, its subheading "Continued Hesitance Within Palaeoanthropology and Biological Anthropology to Embrace Dart's Painful Legacy" [Rows 477-490] require speaks to a continued hesitance which they do not even establish. The preceding paragraphs presented a historical overview and the continuation of Dart's legacy and there is no forecasting of the hesitance as implied in the subheading/ This paragraph requires more indication of this aversion to strengthen the conclusion.

Presentation

This is a well-presented manuscript with good focus on the topic. The writers have developed a good flow of their critical reflection of Dart's legacy and have provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate Dart's role in his ascendance to eminence in the discovery of the Taung child skull.

Author response to Reviewer 2: Round 1

Rows 23-77 require additional referencing to support these daring statements.

AUTHOR: On row 25, for the sentence ending "in late 1924," I added references 2, 5, 6, 8. On line 26, I added reference 1 for Dart's memoir. On lines 36-37, I decided to delete the sentence referring to blog posts. Therefore, there is no longer a need for references there. In relation to rows 55-60, I added references 5 and 6.

Rows 149-155, need to nuance the role of other workers, especially Black labourers.

AUTHOR: I decided that elaborating on the stories of these workers would require a separate paper. I deleted the paragraph and replaced it with: "This story of the Taung skull can serve as a reminder to look for and document the team of people involved with fossil finds, rather than attributing them to one person."

Missing context on how Dart, as a scholar of anatomy, was trained to centralise himself as an individual.

AUTHOR: Thank you for making this point, which I think is relevant for scholars in many fields across the sciences and the humanities, not only those in anatomy. Also, not only in the early 20th century Australia and England, but also today. Derricourt touches on this point indirectly in his paper: Derricourt, Robin, "Raymond Dart and the danger of mentors". *Antiquity*. Volume 84, Issue 323, March 2010 (Reference 47). However, Derricourt focuses more directly on how Dart was unduly influenced by his mentor in terms of his belief in cultural diffusion. I have not found references that point directly to Dart's training to centralize himself. It would be interesting to pursue why Dart consistently acknowledged Salmons but not Young.

Given the available references and the space available, I have decided not to explore these themes in any depth in this paper.

Rows 477-490, Closing subheading "Continued Hesitance" not well established.

AUTHOR: Thank you for pointing out that this closing section does not make sense. As a result, I have deleted the heading and rewritten the closing. I added the heading "Conclusion" and added this text as well: "In the 1990s, Dubow suggested that historians of science were beginning to explore the area of science studies and the sociology of science, and that they were departing from the "great man" tradition of scholarship. (17p26) What Dubow suggested thirty years ago is important to historians of science today; it is important to understand Dart's career as a whole, not only by looking at its most prominent part. It is important to view Dart, not only as a hero, but also as a human scientist shaped by the colonial thinking of his time. In the last thirty years, many scholars have explored multiple aspects of his scholarship, and have described Dart's more complex legacy."
