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Author(s): Irwin, A. G.

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Castle Museum

Norwich

12 May 1983

Dear Sir,

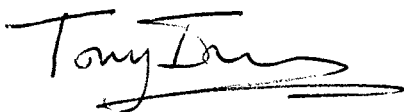
Is She My Type ?

Reading the account of Homo sapiens in Systema Naturae, it is clear to me that Linnaeus made the description from a series of specimens. Rather than seeking a neotype (which is how I interpret Jon Cooter's suggestion), why not designate a lectotype from the specimens available to Linnaeus? Of these, Linnaeus himself is the obvious choice. His remains were interred in Upsalla Cathedral in 1778, but unfortunately Sir James Smith left this important type material in Sweden when he snatched the Linnean collections. Should we seek to exhume the great systematist and reunite him with his collections in Burlington House? I think not.

The question of a female paralectotype cannot be solved by looking to his wife, Sara Lisa (née Moraea). Systema Naturae was published less than one year after he met her and four years before they were married. I am sure that Linnaeus would not have been thinking of her when he wrote "umbilico excavato".

The final solution to this problem may be provided by Linnaeus himself. His description is prefaced by "Nosce te ipsum". I leave you to reach for a Latin dictionary and/or mirror.

Yours faithfully,



A. G. Irwin