HOBBIT HOMINIDS – DATA PROPERTY RIGHTS

Hobbits locked away as scientists argue – Science – www.theage.com.au

It has been a plague of archaeological research since the beginnings of the discipline in the eighteenth century, and a contemporary scandal, though few speak out about it.

So I hear that the hobbit hominid remains have been locked away by a palaeontologist in Jakarta – Teuku Jacob of Gadjah Mada University. He apparently won't let anyone look at the bones.

Sounds crackpot, but it is actually standard practice in many archaeology communities. Finds are considered the intellectual property of the archaeologist who dug them up (though I don't know what claim Teuku Jacob has on homo floresiensis). Trouble is that many never get round to publishing what they hang on to, and even take the information they have about a site and its finds to the grave with them.

The scandal is this attitude of ownership, but also the amount of archaeological information that is locked away and effectively lost. Museums across the world are full of stuff that has suffered this fate. Maybe even the majority of stuff in museums is like this.

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