

**RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY**

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cates," according to one translation) as evidence that the Semitic God was originally just one member of a divine tribunal who eventually rose to its presidency as the other gods shrank into insignificance.

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**SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

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*Terrible Lizards*

"Dinosaur Renaissance" by George Olshevsky, in *Science Digest* (Aug. 1981), 224 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Remembered today for slumping world economies and higher oil prices, the 1970s were nonetheless boom years for dinosaur hunters, reports Olshevsky, a freelance science writer. During the decade, some 20 percent of the 300-odd known dinosaur genera were discovered. As a result, paleontologists are revising their views of the "terrible lizards" who ruled the Earth before suddenly vanishing 64 million years ago.

The title of "largest known land animal" has passed to *Ultrasaurus*, an 80-foot-long, 80-ton herbivore. *Ultrasaurus* was found in 1979 in the Morrison Formation that underlies much of the Western United States; its 40-foot neck would have allowed it to peek into a fifth-story window. And, in 1976, two Princeton paleontologists working in Montana came across what may have been a "dinosaur nursery." Inside a seven-foot-wide elliptic nest, they found cracked egg shells and the three-foot-long skeletons of 11 baby dinosaurs. An adult's skull was uncovered 120 yards away. The young were too large to be hatchlings, and wear marks on their teeth indicate that they had been feeding on plants somehow procured beyond the nest. Later finds of similarly "supervised" adolescent populations have prompted scientists to dub this new species *Maiasaura* ("good mother lizard").

Meanwhile, in the Gobi Desert, scientists have dug up ancestors of North American dinosaurs. "No one knows exactly when or where the first dinosaurs appeared," notes Olshevsky, who puts the "rise of the reptiles" at the early Mesozoic era (ca. 225 to 180 million years ago). The Earth's land area was then one supercontinent—Pangaea—which began to break up between 160 and 100 million years ago, isolating dinosaur herds and causing them to differentiate. Yet few early North American dinosaurs left descendants. Paleontologists now think that sometime during the Cretaceous period (135 to 75 million years ago), a "Mongol horde" of Asian dinosaurs invaded North America via the Bering Land Bridge and wiped out the natives.

Why did dinosaurs vanish? Paleontologists now think that dinosaur diversity gradually declined during the Cretaceous period. They question most catastrophe scenarios—e.g., that a meteor collision raised sun-blocking dust clouds, killing off the herbivores' food. Yet, at some point, the pace of extinction dramatically quickened, for reasons dinosaur hunters cannot yet explain.