

There was one Prof CK Raju who said. . . that Euclid was a manufactured personality. . .<sup>34</sup>

The reporter went on to accuse me of being unconcerned with the evidence: “for people like Raju,” he wrote, “the evidence does not matter”.

The demand for evidence is a sensible one. But, what exactly is the evidence for “Euclid”? People rarely know the evidence for the stories they heard in their childhood. Children believe what they are told—*they ask for evidence only when the story changes*.

The reporter had explained to me his method of checking out the evidence; he already did what many people today would do: he cross-checked about Euclid with Google.

Ask Google about Euclid, and you get over 8 million results. That seems quite reassuring. A story repeated 8 million times on the net is evidence, isn't it? An excellent proof by numbers: “So many people believe this, they can't all be wrong, can they?”<sup>35</sup>

Anyway journalists, these days, are often interested only in a good story which would *sell* with their readers; truth or evidence have become secondary concerns. However, one could be charitable and say this reporter knew not that he knew not, for he probably did not know about the missing evidence for Euclid, which is not mentioned on the Internet: namely that it is Theon, not Euclid, whose name is mentioned in Greek manuscripts of the *Elements*.

## 2.2 He who knows he knows not. . .

Anyway, unlike the reporter, only the evidence matters to me, and not the number of people who believe the story. So, I again raised the same point about Euclid, another couple of years later. This was in a discussion in a mailing list on the history of mathematics.

One of the discussants, an Austrian mathematician called Peter Flor, again found my scepticism objectionable, for he too had been brought up on stories of Euclid. However, being an academic, rather than a reporter, he suddenly realized he did not know exactly what the evidence was for Euclid. One might say that he “knew that he knew not”. But the stories he had heard gave him confidence that the evidence was there, known to knowledgeable historians. So, he asked the authorities to step in:

C.K. Raju states that historical evidence on Euclid is very meagre, and that much has been ascribed to him with insufficient reason. Could one of the historians on this group kindly indicate where one may learn what is known. . . ?<sup>36</sup>

### 2.3 He who knows he knows

The late David Fowler was widely recognized as a leading authority on Greek history. He “knew and knew that he knew”, and he answered as follows.

Dear Peter Flor  
 <<What is known at present I. about the person  
 “Euclid”>>  
 Nothing  
 <<2. and more importantly, on the origin of the texts  
 of which he is (or was) supposed to be the author? >>  
 Almost all of our texts come from Constantinople, the  
 earliest from 888 AD, closer [in] time to us than to the  
 supposed date of Euclid!  
 Best wishes,  
 David Fowler<sup>37</sup>

Strange, isn't it? Here is a name, “Euclid”, familiar to every child who is schooled, and grows up convinced that the name corresponds to a real historical person, and that any thought to the contrary is outrageous. He is happily shown pictures of white-skinned men which purport to be images of “Euclid”. The story has been told for centuries, and is retold 8 million times on the web. Yet, leading scholars say that NOTHING is known about the person “Euclid”!

### 2.4 How myth differs from history

So is this “Euclid” myth or history? The difference is this: a myth is a web of stories—each story, like a strand in a spider web, is supported mostly by another story, which is supported by yet another story, and so on. The stories are sticky—they stick to the human mind, which gets entrapped in myth like a fly gets trapped in a spider web. The young minds of children are especially susceptible to such traps. History, however, requires hard evidence to support each story. “Euclid” as