Hominid fever: yet another alleged early human ancestor unearthed

Peter Line

It seems these days that there are precious few ordinary human or ape fossils unearthed; rather they all have to be a missing link between the two. One of the latest contenders for 'apeman' fame, this time as the 'world's oldest early human skeleton' or 'oldest walking hominid',[1,2] consists of bones 'dated' at between 3.8 to 4 million years ago from a site in the northeastern Afar region of Ethiopia. The remains include a complete tibia and shoulder blade, as well as parts of a femur, ribs, vertebrae, collarbone and pelvis, as well as an ankle bone. The fossil remains of up to 11 other individuals are also reported to have been found. As the finds have not been published in a journal, nor been reviewed by outside scientists, it is difficult to make an assessment of the find at this stage, except what can be interpreted from a few quotes released to the media from 'hominid' fossil experts.

It is stated that

> 'Scientists are yet to classify the new find, which they believe falls between *A. ramidu*s and *A. afarensis*. The fossils would help "join the dots" between the two hominids, said Yohannes Haile-Selassie, an Ethiopian scientist and curator at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History as well as a co-leader of the discovery team.'[2]

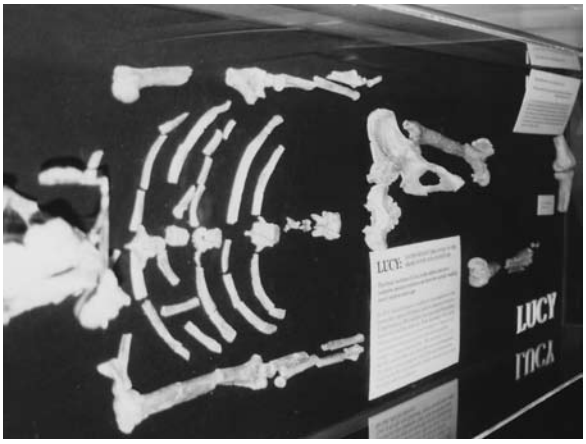
Falling between *Australopithecus ramidus* and *Australopithecus afarensis* (e.g. 'Lucy') hardly boosts its status as a missing-link hominid. According to Peter Andrews, of London's Natural History Museum, the thin enamel on the teeth of *ramidus* 'is more of what you'd expect from a fossil chimp', and the features of an upper arm bone suggest 'knuckle-walking, chimp-style'.[3] Even the team that discovered *ramidus* admits that the specimen 'shows a host of characters usually associated with modern apes'.[4]

As for the younger and, hence, supposedly more evolutionarily advanced *afarensis*, it had the brain the size of an ape; a skull that was ape-like; a body similar in shape and stature to apes; and other parts of its skeletal morphology indicates that it was specialized for climbing in trees, as well as knuckle walking, as are apes.[5] Much has been made of skeletal features indicating *afarensis* may also have had limited ability for (non-human-style) bipedal locomotion. However, similar limited bipedal ability also existed in other apes, such as *Oreopithecus bambolii*, presumably not considered a human precursor because it was 'evolutionary dated' to earlier than the supposed human and chimpanzee split, and because it was found in a location (Italy) unsuitable as the cradle for 'early apemen'.

According to the authors who studied the specimen, parts of the pelvis of *bambolii* resembled that of *afarensis*, and its femur showed 'a pronounced diaphyseal angle combined with condyles of subequal size, similar to *Australopithecus* and *Homo* and functionally correlated with bipedal activities'.[6] According to Henry Gee, 'this creature is thought to have become bipedal independently and was only distantly related to hominids'.[7] Apes evolving a form of bipedal locomotion once is difficult enough to believe or imagine; that it must have independently happened multiple times, in order to 'rescue' evolutionary theory, reveals evolution to be a collection of just-so stories that can be accommodated to almost any scenario, no matter how unlikely.

This brings us to the big claim concerning this new fossil find. That is, the '"ankle bone which, with the tibia, proves the creature walked upright", said Latimer, co-leader of the team that discovered the fossils'.[2] Whether this is the case or not cannot be assessed on the information available. The morphology of the rest of the skeleton is not known either, but since the specimen is placed between *ramidus* and *afarensis*, then one must assume that it was essentially ape-like. In response to the claim the creature walked upright … so what! Even if this creature had some form of limited bipedal ability, as may have been the case with *afarensis*, it proves very little, as this trait, as indicated by the non-ancestral ape *bambolii*, was not unique to these supposed hominids. However, one should also be wary of claims that this or that skeletal feature 'proves the creature walked upright', as usually some other evolutionist fossil 'expert' will debunk or dispute the claim. As examples of this, *Ardipithecus kadabba* and *Orrorin tugenensis* come to mind.[8]

One cannot help but be cynical about the real reason there appears to be so many claims of 'early apemen', particularly as many of the alleged apemen are based on meager fossil fragments. That is, the only 'real' evidence for apemen is the assumption



To those not constrained by having to interpret every fossil scrap in an evolutionary framework, the specimens categorized as Australopithecus ramidus *and* Australopithecus afarensis *(e.g. 'Lucy'—as shown above) were merely types of apes. Hence, if this new 'oldest early human skeleton' falls between the above two species then this hardly boosts its status as a missing-link hominid.*

that evolution is true, and so, based on the false notion that humans must have evolved from apes, the fossil record is interpreted to support this erroneous framework. Hence, by definition, if fossil scraps with even the minutest indication of bipedal capability are found in the right locality and time zone, then it is an apeman; if not, it is an ape. It becomes akin to self-fulfilling prophecy, and hence it is no surprise that 'apemen' contenders from Africa will soon probably outnumber living apes there. In another tactic evolutionists construct a 'straw-man' of how, to them, God must have designed animals if He indeed was the Creator. This conveniently allows them to debunk their own 'created god', and then use this as 'further' proof of evolution. However, there is no logical reason why God could not have created different *kinds* of apes; and that these originally created ape *kinds* and their offspring possessed variation in anatomical and physiological features, including locomotion methods and abilities.

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World record enzymes

Jonathan Sarfati

One vital class of proteins is enzymes, which are *catalysts*, i.e. they speed up chemical reactions without being consumed in the process. Without them, many reactions essential for life would be far too slow for life to exist. Catalysts do not affect the equilibrium of reactions, only the rate at which equilibrium is reached. They work by lowering the activation energy, which means decreasing the energy of a transitional state or reaction intermediate.

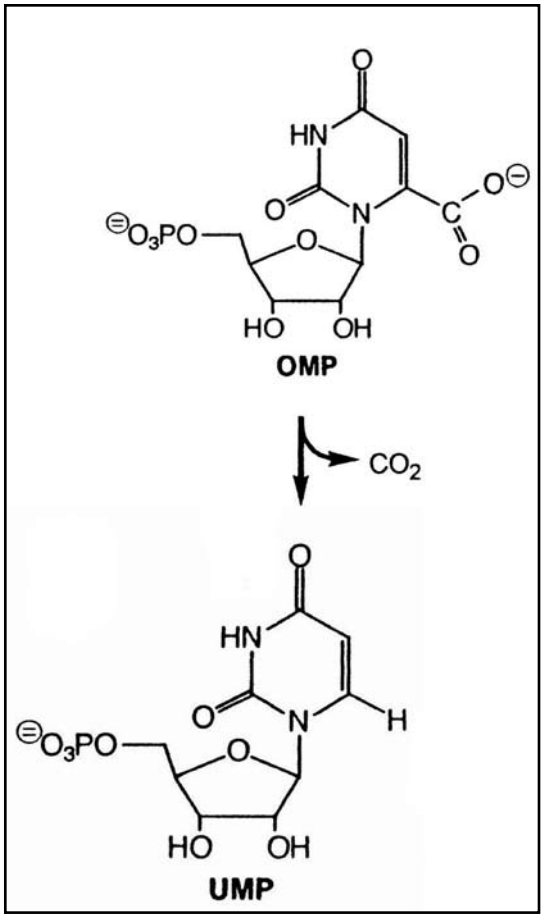
Rate enhancement by 10^{18}

Enzyme expert Dr Richard Wolfenden, of the University of North Carolina, showed in 1998 that a reaction '"absolutely essential" in creating the building blocks of DNA and RNA would take 78 million years in water', but was speeded up 10^{18} times by an enzyme.[1] This was orotidine 5′-monophosphate decarboxylase, responsible for *de novo* synthesis of uridine 5′-phosphate, an essential precursor of RNA and DNA, by decarboxylating orotidine 5′-monophosphate (OMP).[2]

The enzyme has a special shape, a *TIM-barrel*. This binds the substrate at the open end of the barrel, while protein loop movements almost totally surround the substrate. The enzyme has amino acid residues in just the right places to interact with the functional groups on the substrate. One lysine provides a positive charge to interact with the increasing negative charge as the substrate reacts, and provides a proton which replaces the carboxylate group at C-6 of the product. And the enzyme is structured so that some hydrogen bonds form and delocalize negative charge in the transition state, lowering the energy. Interactions between the enzyme and the phosphoribosyl group anchor the pyrimidine within the active site, helping to explain the phosphoribosyl group's remarkably large contribution to catalysis, despite its distance from the site of decarboxylation. Still other interactions hold the pyrimidine within the active site, which also contributes greatly to the catalysis, although it is far from the site of decarboxylation.

Rate enhancement by 10^{21}

In 2003, Wolfenden found another enzyme that exceeded even this vast



Decarboxylation of orotidine 5′-monophosphate (OMP) to uridine 5′-phosphate (UMP), an essential precursor of RNA and DNA, by the enzyme 5′-monophosphate decarboxylase.