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The 'Lucy child'

Carl Wieland

A young individual of the same species as the famous 'Lucy' has just been unveiled.[1] Found in Dikika, Ethiopia, this specimen is remarkably well preserved. It is of a young female, probably about three years old. The 'age' is supposed to be 3.3 Ma. It has taken five years so far to carefully remove much of the skeleton from the sandstone. The job is not complete; there may be years more work to confirm exactly what the foot bones looked like, for instance.

Why it's important

There was much fuss when 'Lucy' (later named *Australopithecus afarensis*) was originally discovered. At last, evolutionists seemed to have a wonderful 'ancestor candidate'—one which supposedly walked upright, and had a near-perfect mix of ape and human characteristics.

However, as inevitably happens with 'apemen' finds, things started to look different as time went on and as anatomists carefully studied the fossil bones of Lucy and other specimens of her genus, *Australopithecus*. Several researchers using objective computer techniques (like evolutionist Charles Oxnard) pointed out that the features as a whole were not intermediate at all between apes and humans. They also pointed out that their method of locomotion was not upright in the human manner, either. Furthermore, the fingers and toes of other specimens of Lucy's kind seemed to be long and curved, like apes that swing in the trees. Their arms were long, like those of tree-climbers.[2]

Keen to hang onto their vision of an 'apeman', it was argued that these were just evolutionary 'leftovers'. It became harder to defend, however, when the Lucy skeleton itself was shown to have the same wrist mechanism (that 'locks' the wrist for knucklewalking) as do chimps and gorillas.[3] Was this also a leftover? If so, why hadn't natural selection eliminated this if it was no longer used?

Photo by Kevin Zim

Skull of Lucy, *Australopithecus afarensis*.

To make things worse for the belief that these were 'man's ancestors', other australopithecine skulls, when the organ of balance was scanned, also gave evidence that they could not have walked habitually upright like humans at all.[4]

Some might have tried to maintain the excitement, based on the evidence that some australopithecines must have had the capacity for at least rudimentary speech. This evidence was that the inside of their skulls had impressions of the pattern on the brain surface, which showed that they had the same sorts of patterns as we do in the areas of our brain used for language. But that evidence, too, faltered when it was shown that the same patterns are there in some living apes too, but are used only for non-linguistic purposes.[5]

Of course, while this evidence was accumulating, countless evolutionary pictures and displays showing 'Lucy' with what were drawn to be 'human-ape' features (e.g. human-looking hands and feet) were piling up, too. Though contradicted by the evidence, it was too hard, it seemed, to modify all those displays.

Better preservation = more information

This latest discovery of an even better preserved[6] specimen of Lucy's kin (it is so similar, that it is not just put in the same genus, but the same species)

has allowed an even more thorough study of *afarensis*. However, this has only helped to further discredit the validity of this 'ancestor candidate':

- Adjusted for body size, the brain was not significantly larger than an ape's.
- A complete hyoid bone (associated with the larynx) was found which was utterly chimplike. No evidence there of any speech capacity, as some had hoped.
- The one complete fingerbone is curved, like that of a chimp. Curved fingers are designed for grasping in the trees.
- The shoulderblade is gorilla-like—designed for tree-climbing and knucklewalking, not upright gait.
- The organ of balance characteristics in the skull confirm that its locomotion was, like a chimp's, *not* habitually upright.

An associated *Nature* commentary on the article states, diplomatically, of the last three of these that 'all three lines of evidence suggest that the locomotion of *A. afarensis* was unlikely to have been restricted to walking on two feet.'[7] The author, a renowned paleoanthropologist, concedes that this creature's features are 'much more ape-like than those of later taxa that are rightly included in our own genus, *Homo*.'[8,9]

To the author of the *Nature* commentary, looking at the 'Lucy child' through an evolutionary 'lens', this is because it is 'primitive', i.e. it hasn't evolved far enough yet.

It makes far more sense to go with the straightforward understanding of the evidence:

- The reason why this specimen looks so apelike is because it is a member of a (now-extinct) apelike group of creatures, separately created to people and other groups of apes. Indeed, Oxnard long ago argued from multivariate analysis that australopithecines are more distinct from both humans and chimpanzees than these are from each other.[10]
- The reason why it has all those anatomical features associated with non-human locomotion is, quite simply, that it was apelike; apes have non-human locomotion, and no apes are habitual upright walkers.

Conclusion

The 'Lucy child', then, brings into focus all in one beautiful specimen issues which have individually been apparent and have produced an accumulating weight of evidence against the idea of human ancestry. Commentaries on this specimen seem to have little throwaway lines here and there whose purpose seems to be to reassure us that there was some reason for previous researchers to have thought that *afarensis* walked upright. And/or that it may have done (something like) this *some* of the time—as does the living pygmy chimp. But that is not true bipedalism.[11]

Hopefully, as the remaining anatomical features of the 'post-cranial skeleton' are teased painstakingly out of the rock, we will get even more detailed evidence of what *afarensis*, and australopithecines in general, looked like. It is highly likely that it will further strengthen the already overwhelming case that the australopithecines were not man's ancestor. Even some evolutionists agree, incidentally. The problem for the others, one that is probably making it hard for them to let go, is that there is no other candidate in the wings.

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6. Incidentally, in spite of the fact that evolutionists affirm that the high preservation is evidence of rapid burial, most likely in a flood, we would think that this was almost certainly a post-Flood event. I.e. a local flood, not the worldwide Flood of Noah.
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8. Of course; this is because all of those in that genus (e.g. *erectus, neanderthalensis*) are, quite simply, people—descendants of Adam. And even some evolutionists have argued that they should be reassigned to the same species name as ourselves.
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11. In all of this, it should not be assumed that if these creatures had turned out to be bipedal, that would have proved that they were humanity's ancestors. God might have created bipedal creatures that are now extinct. But the point is to show how incredibly weak even this 'showcase' example, of which bipedalism was the highlight, is for evolutionists.