

## Connecting imaginary human evolution dots: the case of *Australopithecus anamensis*

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In the seemingly endless bombardment of ‘human evolution’ propaganda, the latest headlines to grab attention boast: ‘Fossil connects human evolution dots’,<sup>1</sup> and ‘Fossils fill gap in human lineage’.<sup>2</sup> The above headlines are in response to a paper recently published in *Nature*<sup>3</sup> about allegedly 4.1 to 4.2 Ma-old *Australopithecus anamensis* fossils. These were discovered in the Middle Awash region of Ethiopia, with the first author being well-known paleoanthropologist Tim D. White, who is associated with a series of grand claims based on scant evidence.<sup>4,5</sup> Readers anticipating a ‘jaw-dropping’ find with the new claims will also find that the latest fossil scraps on offer will disappoint.

### Assumption of evolution

The fossil bones included some craniodental remains, a femur, a metatarsal shaft without ends, an eroded distal foot phalanx, and an intermediate hand phalanx, belonging to at least eight individuals, with the finds coming from two locations about 10 km apart (see figure 1).<sup>6</sup> White and colleagues claim that

‘the 4.1-million-year-old fossils were anatomically intermediate between the earlier species *Ardipithecus ramidus* and the later species *Australopithecus afarensis*, the Lucy family.’<sup>7</sup>

However, it is not so much the anatomy, but more the timing—that is, they have found something *dated* between *Ardipithecus ramidus* and *Australopithecus afarensis* finds, and so to them this makes the fossils by

definition ‘intermediates’ between the two species. It is all based on the assumption of evolution and the alleged age-date of the fossil. It is in fact difficult to see how anyone can argue on the basis of the morphology of the fossil scraps themselves that they are a link between *afarensis* and *ramidus*.

It is important to note that some evolutionists have attributed earlier finds of *anamensis* to the existing species *afarensis*,<sup>8</sup> and the simplest explanation may be that the latest finds labelled *anamensis* simply represent within-species variation of *afarensis*.

Probably the most significant find by the researchers is the Asa Issie right femoral shaft (ASI-VP-5/154), which they characterize as being morphologically similar to the left proximal femur of AL 288-1 (Lucy).<sup>9</sup> They later refer to a character of the Asa Issie femur (the ‘minimal linea aspera’—related to the distance between ridges of the adductor attachments at the shaft’s midpoint) as being ‘on the presumably primitive end of the considerable range of variation in *Au. afarensis*’.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the applicability of the word ‘primitive’ is assumed, not proved. But notice that in this statement is an admission that this bone indeed falls within the *afarensis* range.

Another fossil piece, a maxilla with dentition (ARA-VP-14/1) is said to be ‘slightly smaller but anatomically similar in preserved parts to the KNM-KP (Kenya National Museums, Kanapoi site) 29283 *Au. anamensis* paratype’.<sup>9</sup>

The authors also discuss enamel thickness and state that the molar enamel thicknesses of the new specimens were comparable to previous *anamensis* specimens, and also that the enamel thickness of *anamensis* was close to that of *afarensis* in some regions.<sup>10</sup> However, in terms of comparison to other alleged species, such as *afarensis* and *ramidus*, one cannot read too much into differences in enamel thickness given that, as the authors indicate, ‘considerable within-species variation is currently being documented in modern human and ape control samples’.<sup>10</sup>

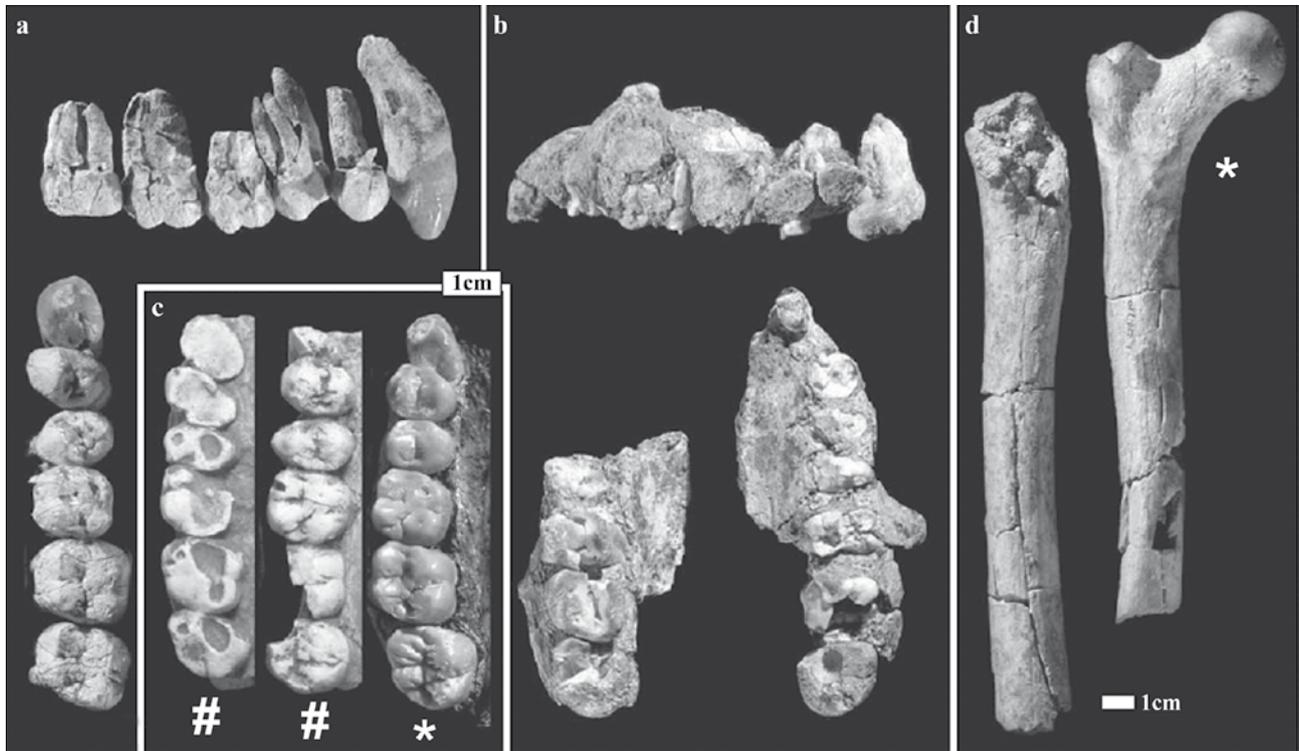
### Earlier *anamensis* finds

It was in 1995 that dental, cranial and postcranial specimens from two separate localities in Kenya, dated from about 3.8 to 4.2 Ma ago, were announced as belonging to a new hominid species *Au. anamensis*.<sup>11</sup> Most of the fossil scraps undoubtedly came from an ape, such as the chimp-like jaws, but controversy has surrounded the allegedly more human-like nature of the tibia and humerus.<sup>12</sup> The *anamensis* humerus lacks a deep, oval hollow, used as a locking mechanism between the humerus and ulna, which is present in chimpanzees, but not in humans. And the *anamensis* tibia is wide, as in humans, because of extra spongy tissue, which acts as a shock absorber during bipedal locomotion.<sup>13</sup>

At the time of publication, paleontologist Peter Andrews suggested that the tibia and humerus, coming from different sections (upper level) of the Kanapoi locality strata than the ‘primitive’ jaws and teeth (lower level), might possibly ‘be related to humans and the other to apes’.<sup>14</sup> There were some mandible fragments (KNM-KP 29287) found in upper level strata, but these were from a different (higher) level than the tibia (KNM-KP 29285) and humerus (KNM-KP 271).<sup>15</sup> At the time there was also the problem of several hundred thousand years in evolutionary time between the upper and lower levels, but in a later paper further ‘dates’ were obtained that narrowed the time gap.<sup>16</sup>

In this later article additional finds of fossil scraps from *anamensis* were reported, but no additional evidence was provided to associate them with the tibia and humerus. Also, the 2000 analysis of a fossil radius (KNM-ER 20419) from the other *anamensis* location, Allia Bay, indicated ‘specialized wrist morphology associated with knuckle-walking’.<sup>17</sup>

In a paper co-authored by Meave Leakey, *anamensis* is said to be very like *afarensis* postcranially, with the humerus, tibia and radius ‘almost exactly matched in size and morphology to the *A. afarensis* collections from Hadar’.<sup>18</sup> Now that you have a femur which is also morphologically similar to *afarensis*, the argument is strong



**Figure 1.** This is the main body of evidence that caused all the ‘evolutionary excitement’. The fossils in the picture comprise six teeth (a), a fragmented maxilla with dentition (b) and part of a right femur (d). Those marked with \* are of *A. afarensis*, and those marked # are of *A. anamensis* for comparison. The maxilla (b) was found 10 km from the other fossils. (After White *et al.*<sup>3</sup>)

that *afarensis* and *anamensis* are the same species. In any case, at most you have an ape-like creature with a similar locomotion pattern to the ape-like *afarensis*. Some of these apes may indeed have had limited ability for non-human bipedal locomotion, but the morphology of creatures such as *afarensis* also indicates they were specialized for climbing in trees, as well as knuckle-walking, as must have been *anamensis*.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

Nothing has emerged from this recent discovery that is inconsistent with the notion that this is just one more member of the group of extinct ape-like primates known as australopithecines, and that it is possibly even the same species as the famous ‘Lucy’. As has been demonstrated by top-level evolutionist anatomist Dr Charles Oxnard,<sup>20</sup> the evidence has always strongly supported the idea that the australopithecines were not on any line leading to humans, even for those who accept this possibility.

### References

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