Proconsul africanus: an examination of its anatomy and evidence for its extinction in a post-Flood catastrophe

Matthew Murdock

In 1948, Dr Mary Leakey found a distorted skull at Site R106 on Rusinga Island, Western Kenya. The find was a nearly complete cranium, mandible and full dentition. Because the skull did not resemble any previously found, a new genus was named for this individual. Arthur Hopwood of the Natural History Museum (London) coined the name 'Proconsul' in honour of the circus chimp 'Consul the Great', which had become famous for riding a bicycle, and smoking cigarettes.[1,2] The genus *Proconsul* currently includes five species which range in size from a macaque (10 kg) to a bonobo (38 kg).[3]

Names and numbers

Proconsul africanus is sometimes known by the names *Dryopithecus africanus*[4] and *Proconsul heseloni*. Mary Leakey's find was labelled KNM-RU 7290 (Kenya National Museum, Rusinga) by the National Museums of Kenya. The British Museum of Natural History renumbered the skull as M32363 while the skull was in their possession.[5]

KNM-RU 7290 was loaned to the British museum in 1949 where it remained until Richard Leakey requested its return in 1982. The British Museum claimed that the *Proconsul* skull was given to them as a gift and refused to return it. A year later Mary Leakey's secretary found the original letter outlining the loan agreement, and the skull was returned to Kenya (35 years later) in 1983.[6]

KNM-RU 7290 was discovered in early Miocene sediments.[5] Evolutionists claim *P. africanus* lived from 19–17 Ma (though some sources extend the range to 23–14 Ma) with the KNM-RU 7290 specimen falling in the middle at 18 million years old.

With the scarcity of hominid fossils from sites alleged to be 3 million years old, it is unlikely that so many of the delicate *Proconsul* bones, such as vertebrae, wrist and ankle bones, and 'thousands of finger bones' of baby proconsuls, found during later excavations would survive six times longer. These bones are most likely post-Flood, and only a few thousand years old.

Figure 1. *Left side of* P. africanus *cranium KNM-RU 7290 showing crushed and distorted parietal.*

The skull

The distorted cranium possesses a complete maxilla, frontal bone, with both left and right parietals. The left parietal was pressed into the braincase during fossilization (Figure 1). Alan Walker corrected much of this distortion using plaster casts. The new reconstruction gave *Proconsul* a less prognathic face[7] and it appears to have had a smaller snout than *Aegyptopithecus*.[3]

Part of the nuchal crest[8] of KNM-RU 7290 was actually found a year earlier than the skull. The fossils were not recognized as hominoid, and had been labelled as turtle bones.[7] Three decades later Martin Pickford realized the fossils had come from site R106, and combined them with the rest of the skull.[5]

Falk had originally estimated the cranial capacity of KNM-RU 7290 at 150 cm^3.[9] Now that the occipital has been added, a new estimate of 167.3 cm^3 has been obtained by Walker.[10] If accurate, the brain size of *P. africanus* is larger than living (extant) monkeys of similar body size, but smaller than extant apes (such as the chimpanzee which averages 400 cm^3 or gorillas at 500 cm^3).[9]

KNM-RU 7290 is remarkable in that it preserves all 32 teeth. The dental formula[11] is 2:1:2:3 in both the upper and lower jaw. *Proconsul* has the typical 5-Y pattern of cusps which is seen in the lower molars of other hominoids (Figure 2).

P. africanus is a sexually dimorphic[12] species with males being larger than females. The small size of the canine teeth indicates that KNM-RU 7290 is a female individual.[5] The mandible is complete and lacks a simian shelf (Figure 2). Distortion in the body of the mandible does not permit contact of the front teeth (Figure 3). Proconsul also had thin molar enamel consistent with a diet of fruit.[3]

Figure 2. *The mandible reveals complete dentition, cusp pattern, and lack of simian shelf. Distortion during fossilization has twisted the body of the mandible.*

Figure 3. *The right side of the KNM-RU 7290 cranium is more complete, and less distorted than the left. The twisted mandible does not permit contact between upper and lower incisors causing a post-mortem open bite.*

Postcranial remains

In 1979 Alan Walker and Martin Pickford found more *Proconsul* fossils in a drawer at the museum. These fossils had been misclassified as pig bones in the 1950s. When they put these fossils together they were able to reconstruct nearly 75% of the *Proconsul* skeleton. Walker looked in other trays and found more fossils that were still embedded in stone. These fossils resembled the green rocks from the Rusinga site. Walker realized that part of the leg and foot had also been found years before but had gone unrecognized. This prompted him to return to Rusinga in 1984 (more than 30 years after the skull had been found) in hopes of finding more remains. It was there that Walker found thirteen more partial *Proconsul* skeletons.[13] A complete death assemblage with what appeared to be a family of *P. africanus* had been found. One of the remains appeared to be that of a pregnant female.[14]

Le Gros Clark scaled down the forelimb of a chimpanzee and *P. africanus* so that they were the same length. He observed that *Proconsul* had a shorter forearm relative to the upper arm than a chimpanzee.[15] The limb proportions in *Proconsul* appear to have been similar to those of modern quadruped monkeys.[3] Yet *Proconsul* had a greater ability to rotate its forelimbs than extant monkeys do.

A large sample of phalanges was recovered from the Kaswanga Primate site (Rusinga Island) in 1984–1985. The 245 phalanges and phalangeal fragments reveal that *Proconsul* had powerful grasping hands and feet.[16]

What makes *Proconsul* unique is that it possesses traits of both apes and monkeys.

- The shoulder and elbow regions of Proconsul are like those of an ape. But the wrist anatomy is monkey-like[17] and suggest it was a tree dweller.
- There is also no evidence in the hand or wrist anatomy of knuckle-walking ability.[18]
- The lumbar vertebrae of *P. africanus* are gibbon-like,[17] while the spine and illium of *Proconsul nyanzae* (specimen KNM-MW 13142) resemble a monkey more so than they do an ape's.[19]

A nearly complete hip bone of *P. nyanzae* and several pelvic fragments of *P. africanus* have been found recently. The new finds come from Rusinga and Mfangano Island. Most of these also had associated femurs.[20] An examination of these bones reveals that *Proconsul* had a long femoral neck and high neck shaft angles. The pelvic and femur bones tell us that there were a variety of hip postures (including abduction[21]) in the locomotion of Proconsul.[20]

Anatomists have determined that *Proconsul* was unable to hang below or swing from branches. Their anatomy would only allow them to walk quadrapedally on the tops of branches like arboreal (mainly tree dwelling) monkeys.[3]

Lack of tail

Whether *Proconsul* had a tail, as in monkeys, or lacked this appendage as in apes, had been the subject of great debate. When more *Proconsul* remains were found in 1984 the question seemed to be settled. One of the new skeletons preserved the last sacral vertebrae. If *Proconsul* had a tail, then there would need to be a large distal sacral vertebral body to articulate with a large caudal[22] vertebrae.[23] To the contrary, the distal sacral vertebra had a 'small, distinctly tapering body', resembling that of the chimpanzee.

Evolutionists do not know when the tail of our supposed ancestors was lost. They merely insist that it must have occurred early in the course of evolution. However there is no evidence of any ape 'losing its tail' in the fossil record.

This quote from Ward *et al*. demonstrates that many evolutionists are guided by their theories, not fossils: Proconsuls 'lack of a tail indicates that tails were lost early in hominoid evolution'.[24]

The only thing this indicates is that *Proconsul* did not have a tail. Concluding that *Proconsul* (and subsequently humans) must have come from an ancestor with a tail is not science as much as science fiction. This is a case of someone allowing their theory (rather than the fossils) to dictate their conclusions.

Ancestral status

Proconsul has been placed in the family Proconsulidae and is said to be the first hominoid. Hominoids are members of the superfamily Hominoidea, which include humans, all living apes, and extinct apes from the Miocene, Pliocene and Pleistocene epochs.[3] Evolutionists have hailed Proconsul as the direct common ancestor of both humans and apes[4] and directly ancestral to *Ramapithecus*, *Sivapithecus*, and *Gigantopithecus*.[25]

From a creationist view, *Proconsul's* ancestors lived with Adam and Eve, and were not ancestral to them. The fossils tell us that Proconsul's ancestors survived both the effects of the Curse (Genesis 3) and the Flood (Genesis 6). Those that survived the Flood gave rise to a variety of species (within the biblical 'kind') some of which migrated to east Africa. They appear to have flourished there for many years.

Post-Flood death assemblage

Like many animals, *Proconsul* went extinct in the years following the Flood (many 'kinds' are near extinction

today). It is unclear whether their numbers dwindled gradually, or if the entire population was wiped out in a single post-Flood catastrophe. Rocks on the shores of Lake Victoria, Kenya have abundant fossils in soils that are 'sandwiched together' with ash-filled lava flows. This area would have been covered in deciduous trees in between these flows[26] and would have sustained great amounts of wildlife.

According to research published in the *Journal of the Geological Society* an entire population of *P. africanus* may have been killed instantly in a single volcanic explosion.[26] Much volcanic activity can be linked directly to the Flood itself (when the fountains of the great deep burst open, Genesis 7:11) and other such activity to post-Flood after shocks (Job 9:6).

The ability of volcanic rocks to give radiometric dates much older than their true age is well documented.[27] Thus a volcano may be both the cause of death for *Proconsul*, and also the source of the associated erroneous radiometric dates.

References:

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2. Tattersall, I., *The Human Odyssey*, Prentice Hall, p. 55, 1993.
3. Boyd, R. and Silk, J.B., *How Humans Evolved*, 3rd Edition, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, p. 272, 2003.
4. Leakey and Lewin, Ref. 1, p. 55.
5. Walker, A., Falk, D., Smith, R. and Pickford, M., The skull of *Proconsul africanus:* reconstruction and cranial capacity, *Nature* **305**: 525–527, 1983.
6. Willis, D., *The Hominid Gang*, Penguin books USA, p. 119, 1989.
7. Willis, Ref. 6, p. 121.
8. Nuchal crest: a flange of bone in the occipital (posterior) region of the skull that serves as the attachment of the posterior neck (nuchal) muscles.
9. Walker *et al*., Ref. 5, p. 525.
10. Walker *et al*., Ref. 5, p. 526.
11. Dental formula: shorthand notation denoting the number of teeth in each quadrant of the upper and lower jaws; for example, 2:1:3:3/1:0:2:3 denotes two incisors, one canine, three premolars, and three molars on each side of the upper jaw and one incisor, no canines, two premolars, and three molars on each side of the lower jaw.
12. Sexual dimorphism: phenomenon in which homologous nonreproductive structures are of greatly different size and/or shape in males and females of the same species.
13. Willis, Ref. 6, pp. 123–124.
14. Lewin, R., *In the Age of Mankind*, Smithsonian Books, Washington, p. 43, 1988.
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17. Lewin, Ref. 14, p. 42.
18. Tattersall, Ref. 2, p. 58.
19. Ward, C.V. The lumbar region of the Miocene hominoid *Proconsul nyanzae*, *American J. Physical Anthropology* **81**(2):314, 1990.
20. Ward, C.V., Hip joints of *Proconsul nyanzae* and *P. africanus*, *American J. Physical Anthropology Suppl.* **14**:171, 1992.
21. Abduction: movement of a limb or part of a limb away from the midline of the body.
22. Caudal: of or near the tail or hind part.
23. Ward, C.V., Walker, A. and Teaford, M. F., *Proconsul* did not have a tail, *J. Human Evolution* **21**:217, 1991.
24. Ward *et al*., Ref. 23, p. 219.
25. Lewin, Ref. 14, p. 44.
26. Volcano may have wiped out our African ancestors, *Geographical* (London, England: 1997) **71**(7):12, July 1999. The volcano of Kisingiri was active during the time Proconsul inhabited the area of East Africa.
27. Snelling, A.A. Radioactive 'dating' failure: recent New Zealand lava flows yield 'ages' of millions of years, *Creation* **22**(1):18–21, 1999. Note: A recent example comes from lava flows at Mt Ngauruhoe, New Zealand. These flows gave erroneous dates (from K-Ar analyses) ranging from <0.27 to 3.5 (± 0.2) million years old. These rocks were "observed to have cooled from lavas 25–50 years ago.

Pseudogene function: more evidence

John Woodmorappe

According to standard evolutionary thinking, pseudogenes are simply disabled copies of genes. Arguments for shared evolutionary ancestry have been advanced based on the similarities in perceived disablements found in orthologous pseudogenes (counterpart pseudogenes in other primates).[1] However, a close examination shows that this presumed evidence is equivocal. Dissimilarities between the pseudogenes of presumably related organisms are at least as prominent as the similarities, and similarities in orthologous pseudogenes can arise independently of shared evolutionary ancestry.[2]

In addition, arguments for shared evolutionary ancestry assume that pseudogenes lack function, and so would not have been specially created with a series of shared similarities from organism to organism. This too is increasingly open to question. Pseudogenes of protein-coding genes are usually compared with their certainly-functional gene paralogs (gene copies within the same organism), and inferences are made about lack of function based on deviations in sequence that are perceived to prevent the eventual synthesis of a functional peptide. However, as elaborated elsewhere[3], the distinction between functional and nonfunctional gene copies is becoming harder and harder to draw. Pseudogenes can, at minimum, be expressed despite having such apparent lesions. Moreover, thanks to genomic recoding processes, at least some seeming disablements can be circumvented, leading to the eventual synthesis of a fully-functional peptide. In fact, more recent evidence shows that genomic recoding (in this case, the translational readthrough of premature stop codons) can, at least in yeast genes, no longer be reckoned a rare phenomenon:

'Our results demonstrate that the