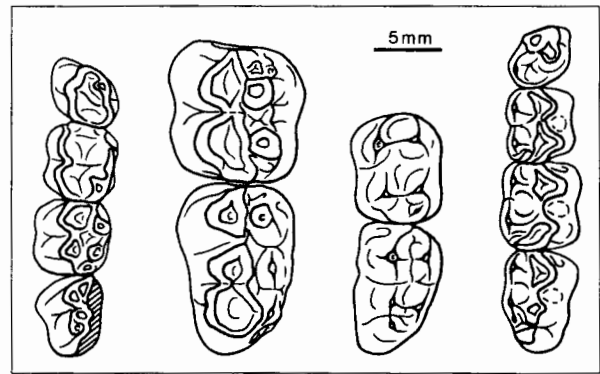


REPRINTED FROM:

Encyclopedia of Human Evolution and Prehistory, 2nd ed; E. Delson, I. Tattersall, J. A. Van Couvering and A. S. Brooks, eds. Garland: New York, 2000

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF:

Eric Delson
Department of Vertebrate Paleontology
American Museum of Natural History
New York, NY 10024



Lower dentitions of victoriapithecine cercopithecids, all dating ca. 17–15 Ma. From left to right: *Prohylobates tandyi*, Wadi Moghara (Egypt); *P. simonsi*, Gebel Zelten area (Libya); two jaws of *Victoriapithecus macinnesi*, Maboko Island (Kenya).

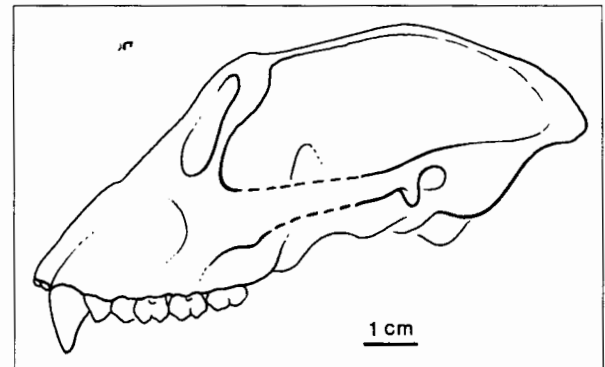
Victoriapithecinae

Subfamily of Cercopithecidae that includes the two earliest genera of Old World monkey, *Victoriapithecus* and *Prohylobates*. The oldest-known cercopithecoid fossils are probably an upper molar and incompletely published canine and elbow fragments from Napak (Uganda), dated to ca. 19 Ma. About 15 jaws and isolated teeth have been described from the Kenyan locality of Buluk, dated to 17 Ma, and two teeth were recovered from deposits at Loperot of probably similar age. In North Africa, Wadi Moghara (Egypt) yielded three partial lower jaws named *Prohylobates tandyi*, and a single mandible fragment was described from near Gebel Zelten (Libya) and named *P. simonsi*; both of these localities probably date to ca. 16 Ma. However, it is from the early Middle Miocene (ca. 15 Ma) sites on Maboko Island and nearby Nyakach on Lake Victoria (Kenya) that these early monkeys are best known, from more than 800 specimens, including a cranium, a face, teeth, and fragmentary postcrania. Undescribed late victoriapithecines have been noted from the Tugen Hills (Kenya) ca. 12 Ma.

Victoriapithecines share an apparently derived mandibular symphysis structure, as well as several features that are probably conservative among cercopithecids or eucatarrhines, such as P_4 long axis slightly oblique to the molar row, small hypoconulid typically present on $M_{1,2}$, and incompletely bilophodont upper molars with persistent crista obliqua (unknown in *Prohylobates*). Molar crown relief is low, the trigonids short, flare moderately developed, and lower-molar bilophodonty (nearly) complete.

The face presents a narrow interorbital distance, a moderately long snout, strong supraorbital tori, and frontal costae (ridges) forming a trigone. These features are usually seen in the Cercopithecinae and considered derived among catarrhines by comparison to opposing states seen in pliopithecidae, Colobinae, Hylobatidae, and mosaically in other taxa. B.R. Benefit has argued that, instead, these character states should be viewed as ancestral, in part because they are present in ancient fossils, but that view is not accepted here. In fact, it may be that a special relationship to Cercopithecinae is indicated for at least some victoriapithecines.

Several authors (especially E. Delson) previously suggested a morphological dichotomy in teeth and postcranial elements (possibly indicating two species that documented the divergence between cercopithecines and colobines), but that has not been supported by the more extensive newer finds. Instead, it appears that Victoriapithecinae represents the sister taxon of all later cercopithecids, which share several derived characters that their common ancestor must have evolved after separating from the victoriapithecines. It has been suggested that this group should be ranked as a full family of Cercopithecoidea, but, pending a better understanding of the polarity of several character-state morphoclines, that suggestion is not followed here.



Left lateral view of male cranium of *Victoriapithecus macinnesi*, from the Middle Miocene (16–14.7 Ma) of Maboko Island, Kenya. Note the relatively straight facial profile and small sagittal crest. By L. Meeker from photo provided courtesy of B.R. Benefit and M.L. McCrossin.

See also Africa; Africa, East; Baringo Basin/Tugen Hills; Buluk; Catarrhini; Cercopithecidae; Cercopithecinae; Cercopithecoidea; Colobinae; Maboko; Napak; Skull; Teeth. [E.D.]

Further Readings

- Benefit, B.R. (1993) The permanent dentition and phylogenetic position of *Victoriapithecus* from Maboko Island, Kenya. *J. Hum. Evol.* 25:83–172.
- Benefit, B.R. (1999) *Victoriapithecus*: The key to Old World monkey and catarrhine origins. *Evol. Anthropol.* 7:155–174.
- Benefit, B.R., and McCrossin, M.L. (1993) Facial anatomy of *Victoriapithecus* and its relevance to the ancestral cranial morphology of Old World monkeys and apes. *Am. J. Phys. Anthropol.* 92:329–370.
- Delson, E. (1979) *Prohylobates* (Primates) from the Early Miocene of Libya: A new species and its implications for cercopithecoid origins. *Geobios* 12:725–733.
- Leakey, M.G. (1985) Early Miocene cercopithecids from Buluk, northern Kenya. *Folia Primatol.* 44:1–14.
- Miller, E.R. (1999) Faunal correlation of Wadi Moghara, Egypt: Implications for the age of *Prohylobates tandyi*. *J. Hum. Evol.* 36:519–533.
- Strasser, E., and Delson, E. (1987) Cladistic analysis of cercopithecoid relationships. *J. Hum. Evol.* 16:81–99.
- Szalay, F.S., and Delson, E. (1979) *Evolutionary History of the Primates*. New York: Academic.