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Afriques

Débats, méthodes et terrains d'histoire

16 | 2025

Affaires classées ? Les archives de l'archéologie
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*L'expérience personnelle et scientifique de Gudrun Corvinus au sein de
l'International Afar Research Expedition, Éthiopie, 1973-1975*

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L'expérience personnelle et scientifique de Gudrun Corvinus au sein de l'International Afar Research Expedition, Éthiopie, 1973-1975

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Introduction

- 1 Following the death of the geologist-prehistorian Gudrun Corvinus (1931-2006), Ulla Mussnug became her sole heir. Corvinus' estate consisted of an extensive collection of personal and scientific documentation originating from a global professional and personal life. In the process of sorting this personal overarching collection, documentation relating to Corvinus' eastern African experiences was separated and donated to the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* (MNHN) in 2025. As a centre for pre-history research, the library of the MNHN now holds this material, where it is readily available upon request to specialists and others interested in the field.
- 2 The MNHN collection (of over 1,000 individual items) consists of different document types related to Corvinus' experiences in East Africa: photographs, field journals, reports, newspaper clippings, personal correspondences, analytical notes, stratigraphic profiles, and maps. It spans the years 1966 (her first trip to East Africa) to 1977 (her participation in the 8th Pan-African Congress in Nairobi, Kenya). The publication of several photographs from the collection in this paper is intended not only as an illustration of past fieldwork, but also as a means to better identify the various actors surrounding and contributing—directly or indirectly—to research activities.

- 3 The core of these archives is related to her participation in two field seasons of the International Afar Research Expedition (IARE) in Ethiopia, in 1973 and 1974. It was during the 1974 season that the famous “Lucy”¹ was discovered, on 24 November 1974.² This find marked a milestone in hominin evolution research in the East African Rift Valley of northeastern Africa. Corvinus’ archival collection comments on this well-known find and the scenarios surrounding the expeditions.
- 4 For the purposes of this article, some methodological points should be noted. Corvinus wrote profusely, attaching great value to the art of letter-writing. Many letters were written in the form of extensive journal entries, which she referred to as narrative letters (“*Erzählbriefe*”).³ These have become a main source of data about daily happenings and expressions of sentiments during scientific excursions, travels, and normal days, in addition to containing scientific documentation. She would often keep blueprint copies of her own lengthy narrating letters, as well as the responses to these. This is, of course, a rare and fortunate situation, making it possible to follow the dialogue. For the sake of simplicity, we reference these here as “letters.”
- 5 Corvinus wrote in German, English, or French, depending on location and addressee. Her handwriting is small and compact, characteristics which at times were intensified. She also had very individual handwriting, referred to by herself as “Gothic.” This style was predominantly used in her mother tongue, German, often for particularly sensitive or personal topics. Although deciphering texts becomes challenging at times, their content and flow remains surprisingly clean, with next to no corrections by herself. This is unlike what one would normally expect from notes made in the field.
- 6 While all types of material have been examined by the authors, documents written in German script remain largely unprocessed. Transcriptions were produced only for the specific needs of this paper. These translations from German to English were made by Ulla Mussnug, as she was familiar with both Corvinus’ handwriting over the course of their long friendship. Every effort was made to preserve Corvinus’ voice and the spirit of her descriptions.
- 7 Some direct quotations that do not form part of the MNHN archives are included in this paper. These are referenced in the article as PAUM (“Personal Archive Ulla Mussnug”), and these remain in private possession. Others are from the MNHN collection but have been kept anonymous, as the contents of the letter are private in nature. We used the following referencing convention in order to keep the recipient anonymous: *Letter to P;14 July 1974* for a letter dated 14 July 1974 to a person with the first-name initial P. While the archive has as yet not been fully digitized, all components are available on request. In this paper, archival documents stored at the MNHN are cited bibliographically by author and date, with their specific reference listed in the “Sources” section at the end of the paper.
- 8 Finally, we recognize that at the time of discovery, the famous fossil *Australopithecus afarensis* was given two names: “Lucy” in English, and “Dinknesh” in order to honor Ethiopia.⁴ However, due to the propensity for the English name “Lucy” in the literature, we are following this convention.
- 9 Relying on the archives of Corvinus as a member of IARE between 1973 and 1975, we seek to present this newly available archival collection, which balances the popular books published by several IARE members⁵ and abundant scientific publications on eastern African Plio-Pleistocene deposits. It is through Corvinus’ lens that the hominin

evolution and hominization narratives⁶ can be viewed as going beyond the recurring milestone of the mid-20th century and the Second World War.⁷ Indeed, it could offer a necessary historiographical counterbalance to the popular books and mass media releases that obscure the mechanisms that elevated “Lucy” to the status of a “super-star fossil,” both in the national heritage of Ethiopia as well as in the world perception of human origins.⁸

The Gudrun Corvinus archive: Personal and scientific reflections from around the world

- 10 Corvinus was born on 14 December 1931, in Stettin (now Szczecin, Poland) on the Oder River just inland from the Szczecin Lagoon. She (Figure 1) never felt a strong connection to Germany, her country of birth (Corvinus 1999), a sentiment she believed to be related to the circumstances related to World War II. Frightening displacement and upheaval plagued her early childhood, probably leaving her traumatized for the rest of her life.⁹

Figure 1: Gudrun Corvinus at Hadar, Ethiopia,



Unknown photographer © G. Corvinus. Stored at the MNHN, Paris

- 11 After having had to move several times, she and her family eventually found their first stable home in Bonn as late as 1946. At her tenth school she was finally able to complete her high school diploma in 1952, after which her academic interests in earth sciences began to show. She registered in geology at the University of Bonn a year later as the only woman in an otherwise all-male class. The head of the department held the belief that, “*Geology is not a profession for women....*” Corvinus was told: “*Choose a different subject or leave my department.*”¹⁰ Undeterred, she enrolled with Otto Schindewolf in 1955 at Tübingen University, to which she remained loosely connected for most of her life.

In 1960 she received her PhD in geology with a specialization in paleontology, training for which she was later formally recognized.¹¹

- 12 Newly married, she and her husband left Germany together for India. Paradoxically, it is her work in Maharashtra that led her to eastern Africa. As a geologist at the Deccan College in Pune, she was employed to geologically survey the Pravara River, a tributary to the Godvara River in 1963. With no funds for logistical support, she walked 250 km of the total length of the Pravara River on her own, often enduring extreme weather conditions and accepting rides from locals on ox-drawn wagons.¹² However, travelling on foot led to her discovery of the Acheulean site of Chirki.¹³ She was given a training opportunity with Mary (1913-1996) and Louis Leakey (1903-1972) in Tanzania with the help of a Wenner Gren Foundation grant. There, Mary Leakey personally mentored her in the current techniques of archaeological excavation of the day.¹⁴ Now having taken a step into archaeology, Corvinus excavated Chirki-on-Pravara¹⁵ as her first independent excavation between 1966 and 1969. The entirety of the archival material related to her life in India was donated to the Sharma Center for Heritage Education, Chennai, including nearly 20,000 photographs.¹⁶
- 13 After having lived in India for more than a decade and completed seven years of geological and archaeological work in Maharashtra, she returned to Europe, followed by two seasons with the IARE (1973, 1974). Having unsuccessfully applied for funding for the 1975 field-season, she spent that year in Paris, where she was hired by the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS) (Laboratoire de géologie du quaternaire) at Meudon-Bellevue from 1 January to 31 June 1975, and devoted herself to analyzing the material she had collected from Hadar.¹⁷
- 14 During her time in Paris, she accepted an invitation to work in the Consolidated Diamond Mines at Oranjemund in Namibia, where she stayed from 1976 to 1980.¹⁸ Her research and experience in the diamond mines of the Lower Orange River in Namibia was partly documented.¹⁹ During these years, she was in charge of Stone Age Pleistocene deposits and Miocene paleontological prospection, contributing to the identification of potential diamond-bearing deposits in the Lower Orange Valley. These archives have been donated to the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Basel, Switzerland. Stone Age artefacts are stored at the Archaeology Department of the National Museum of Namibia.²⁰
- 15 Corvinus spent her final twenty years living in Kathmandu while conducting stratigraphic and palaeontological investigations in the Siwalik Hills at the foot of the Himalayas.²¹ In the posthumous publication of her Nepali excavations,²² Corvinus wrote that all “*the material of the entire prehistoric findings, from the Early Palaeolithic to the Neolithic, is now housed at the National Museum at Chauni (Kathmandu).*” She intended to have two rooms built to function as a small museum, but this was not realized during her lifetime.²³ Remaining archives have been taken into custody by the University of Erlangen, Germany.
- 16 In light of the above, by focusing on her participation in IARE, our contribution thus presents only a small portion of this geographically widely spread, mobile life, meticulously and almost obsessively recorded on paper, photographed, and imparted to those close to her.

The formation of the International Afar Research Expedition (1972-1977)

- 17 Many meters of exposed deposits make the Rift Valley in southern Ethiopia a long-proven location for the discovery of prehistoric artifacts and fossils. The naturalist Emile Brumpt (1877-1951) was a member of Robert du Bourq de Bozas's (1871-1902) expedition to survey the region in 1902.²⁴ Building on these initial finds, Camille Arambourg (1885-1969) also explored the Lower Omo Valley in the early 1930s.²⁵ Several expeditions were conducted after World War II, and then from the 1960s onwards by Franck Brown (1943-2017). However, the International Omo Research Expedition (IORE, initiated in 1967) by Francis Clark Howell (1925-2007), Louis Leakey, Camille Arambourg, and Yves Coppens (1934-2022) marked a threshold in the development of multidisciplinary international research teams in Africa during the second half of the 20th century (Howell 1968).
- 18 At the request of Haïlé Sélassié I (1892-1975), a partnership between France and the Ethiopian Empire was formed in 1952 to develop and promote Ethiopian Heritage and Antiquity studies, including the national development of international research capacity in archaeology, palaeontology, and heritage studies.²⁶ This resulted in the launching of the *Annales d'Éthiopie* journal in 1955 and the Archaeology Section of the Ethiopian Institute of Studies and Research, based in Addis Ababa and led by French researchers. The institute offered important support to many French and international fieldwork expeditions.²⁷ Concurrently, the CNRS laboratory "Laboratoire de géologie du quaternaire" at Meudon-Bellevue in Paris, France (founded by Henriette Alimen, 1900-1996) was dedicated to the geology and prehistory of the Quaternary period. Alimen had been working in Africa since the 1950s and supervised Jean Chavaillon (1925-2013), Maurice Taieb (1935-2021), and Raymonde Bonnefille as doctoral students at Meudon. Thanks to the notable excavations at the incredibly fossiliferous Early Stone Age site of Melka Kunturé, it became a true cradle for French research in Ethiopia.
- 19 From 1965 onwards, Taieb dedicated himself to the geological history of the Afar Triangle further north of the Rift. He was intrigued by the triple junction where the eastern Africa, Red Sea, and Gulf of Aden tectonic rifts came together and the Great Rift Valley flattened out. He decided to make the lower Awash Valley the subject of his PhD thesis²⁸ under Alimen's supervision. He explored this region together with Robert Citron (1932-2012) from the Smithsonian Institute in 1967, leading to the discovery of *Elephas recki* molars. In 1968, he took his co-student Bonnefille, who was conducting palynology studies in the Omo Valley in the south of the Rift on her first trip to the Hadar, a sub-region of the Afar triangle.²⁹ The fossiliferous site seemed to stretch for "thousands of square miles" being "laden with fossils, many of them well-preserved."³⁰ In his book, Taieb refers to it as "both exceptional and fantastic."³¹ Unbeknownst to him then, Hadar was going to play a central role in the formation of the IARE.
- 20 In 1971, the American geologist Jon Kalb (1941-2017) had received funding for mapping the middle Awash Valley. He was *en route* to Ethiopia but stopped over in Paris to meet other researchers working in Ethiopia. Kalb, Taieb, and Coppens (a member and co-director of the IORE) met there in February. They discussed and agreed to join fieldwork seasons in November and December of 1971. The potential for high fossil yields in the Afar prompted Taieb to request a fieldwork research permit from the

Ethiopian authorities for an area covering 33,000 km². This campaign led to the first common publication³² and is described in detail in Kalb's (2000) and Taieb's publications (1985).

- 21 At the same time, the 7th Pan African Archaeological Congress of Prehistory and Quaternary Studies was held in Addis Ababa from 6 to 11 December 1971 and was well attended by big names in the field—for example, the Leakeys, John Desmond Clark (1916-2002), Coppens, and Jacques Tixier (1925-2018). This gave Taieb and Kalb an opportunity to broaden the disciplines present in an international paleoanthropological research team: The International Afar Research Expedition (IARE). In addition to Coppens for palaeontology and Bonnefille for palynology, they invited Karl Butzer, a geographer from the University of Chicago. Bonnefille also recommended Donald Johanson, a paleoanthropologist finishing his PhD at the University of Chicago (Illinois) and who had also participated in IORE. Finally, Corvinus was invited to join this group to study both lithic artefacts and their Pleistocene geomorphological context.
- 22 The archives detail the day she landed in Addis Ababa (1 December 1971), the excursions to Lake Turkana (3 December 1971); then the Congress itself (6 December 1971), as well as the trip to the Awash Valley following the Congress (13 December to 20 December, 1971) (Äthiopien Reise: Teil VII, PAUM).
- 23 A memorandum of understanding was signed on 11 May 1972 by Taieb, Coppens, Johanson, and Kalb detailing the organization of future international geological and palaeontological expeditions to central and southern Afar.³³ In this document it was stated: “*Any prehistoric studies are not, at this stage of research, assigned. When they are assigned, contact should be made with J. Chavaillon. However, Mrs Mary Leakey, Mrs C. Roubet, and Miss G. Corvinus are likely to be approached for work on the Oldowan, Acheulean, and Middle and Upper Palaeolithic industries.*”³⁴ With the work agreement and the permit granted, the first season of the IARE was planned for the end of 1973.
- 24 Corvinus arrived in Addis Ababa on 28 October 1973 to begin the first IARE field season together with Bonnefille and departed on 5 December 1973, four days before the IARE camp was officially dismantled at the end of the 1973 season. While Corvinus had kept a personal notebook in 1973, this was unfortunately stolen in the field, leaving only her personal letters to fill in the gaps.³⁵ Her second season in 1974 was longer. She arrived on 4 October together with H el ene Roche, at that time a PhD student, and stayed until 17 December 1974.
- 25 The IARE is known for having had some internal conflicts. The varying accounts surrounding the discovery of Lucy, the controversy involving Jon Kalb (1941-2017), his subsequent extradition, and the suspension of Ethiopian research permits for foreign paleontologists in 1982 were the culmination of this,³⁶ leading to slowed progress in the field of palaeoanthropology in Ethiopia. Documentation of these personal disagreements and the political consequences for research can be found in the Corvinus archive. For example, several letters were exchanged between her and other team members addressing both professional and personal matters within the IARE. These correspondences mainly include some exchanges with Kalb, Taieb, Roche, and Johanson and could interplay with other archives or published popular books.

Afar Hominin Fossil Discoveries

- 26 Excavations carried out in the Hadar region during the IARE series between 1973 and 1977 led to the discovery of almost 400 hominin remains attributed to *Australopithecus afarensis*, including the famous Lucy, which was brought back to Addis Ababa in 1979 after studies.
- 27 These discoveries rapidly placed Hadar at the forefront of hominin evolution research in Africa and made it a major field site with significant further potential. It led to a first publication in *Nature* in 1976, as part of a series of papers published in *Nature* including the site geology, paleontology, chronology, and prehistory. The opening paper described the hominin fossil discoveries of 1973 and 1974 and their first suggested attribution to the genus *Australopithecus*.³⁷ IARE's further multidisciplinary work, including archaeological results, was presented at the 8th Pan-African Congress that took place from 5 to 10 September 1977 in Nairobi. In 1978, Johanson and co-authors described the new species.³⁸ Later on, in 1982, the results of these discoveries became the subject of a special issue of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*,³⁹ which, in particular, included an article devoted to the A.L. 288-1 ("Lucy") fossil.⁴⁰ Concerning the hominin fossil discoveries, Corvinus's archives more extensively document the atmosphere surrounding the discoveries and the momentum generated by these hominin finds within the field mission. Several remarks reveal a deep interest in the stratigraphic position of the fossils and an interesting series of photographs of the deposits and hominin fossils.
- 28 In 1973, the first hominin discovery consisted of a cranial fragment and the lower part of a femur and upper part of a tibia. It demonstrated a bipedal locomotor mode, with the first biochronology placing the site as older than 3 million years ago (Ma).⁴¹ It was of considerable importance for hominin evolution, as it provided first evidence of ancient bipedalism in individuals not belonging to the genus *Homo*. Until the development of tephrochronology⁴² in Afar in the latter part of the 1970s,⁴³ the estimated age of deposits bearing hominin fossils relied on regional Pliocene and Pleistocene biochronology, which was previously established further south in the Lower Omo Valley.
- 29 To understand these important geological contexts for fossil collection and documentation, Corvinus' training as a geologist was vital. She advocated for a rigorous exploration of the geology and identification of fossil-rich strata, following the same principles that she was taught by the Leakeys and had previously utilized on the Pravara River in India. As a result, Corvinus' archives include numerous maps showing some of the topographical work carried out, particularly in order to locate the sites that yielded lithic industries. In her frequent personal letters to H., a German geologist already familiar with the African Rift, she appears both amazed and, at the same time, seems to question the method used to collect and associate fossils with the Pliocene deposits. For example, on 19 October 1974, in a letter to H. (PAUM), she wrote:
- What we need is a geologist doing petrological and sedimentological work. Primarily, we need some geologists who would precisely map [the area]. Before the palaeontologists start working here – and they are not at all bad – some aerial photography should be done, as well as a topographic and geological map compiled. The stratigraphy and a detailed profile of the sequence of layers alone does not suffice.

30 Taieb, as co-director of the IARE, was also concerned about this. The topographic and stratigraphic work that would have to be carried out was considerable. At the beginning of the first mission, while he was focused on these activities, he worried about paleontologists collecting fossils without noting the location or stratigraphic position.⁴⁴

31 During the 1974 field season, a few weeks before the discovery of Lucy, many hominin fossils had already been collected. For example, the first discoveries were those of a half-mandible and a maxillary bone (upper jaw). They were made by Alemayehu Asfaw (antiquity officer commissioned by the Ethiopian authorities) on 17 October, followed on 28 October by the discovery of a femur by Corvinus. On 18 October 1974, she wrote to H. in her notebook of letters:⁴⁵

Yesterday was a special day for us. Alemayu, the Ethiopian from the Department of Antiquity who had already been with us last year, found a part of a mandible of *Australopithecus* with two molars and a broken premolar. Huge delight! In the evening a celebratory feast was held in Alemayu's honor and later we had whisky and cognac (actually everyone only got one sip). This is very encouraging, to have found *Australopithecus* during the first days.

32 In the same book of letters, when writing on 19 October, she also updated on the status of processing the fossiliferous deposits and fossil identification in a letter to H.:

Don [Johanson] slept with the hominid pieces under his bed and is still totally excited. Last night I remained behind after the others had left for the camp with the finds. I looked at the specific spot of the find calmly and with time. It is located only 5m above the white tuff-like stratum, of which I had sent you a small sample together with the film. (Is it really a tuff?), probably eroded from a layer between the brown clays and the fine sands. I want to look at it more closely today. Subsequently, it is the oldest find in this area from the very lowest Hadar layers. The piece of mandible of the day before yesterday is from the top quarter, immediately under the interposed basalt river, dated 3 Mill. years. The last find yesterday, however, is about 60m lower. It is a completely intact maxilla broken into two pieces with preserved palate and a complete set of teeth (probably female) and another piece of maxilla with two back teeth and premolars of a male hominid. Their preservation is hard to compare with anything else found at Omo and East Lake Rudolf⁴⁶ so far (and these two sites compare in age with Hadar more or less; Hadar, possibly being a little older, can be compared to the lowest layers ABC to Omo) and Hadar goes deeper. Consequently, our finds here are the best and oldest finds so far. The surprising and startling aspect is that they are not *Australopithecine* but *Homo* with a gracile jaw and perfectly parallel rows of teeth not gaping at an angle as with *Australopithecus*. A *Homo* of over 3 Mill. years???? Unbelievable! I can hardly believe it! It is like an enormous swindle. But the pieces were – even though loose – embedded in the gravel of the small 3m high hill.

33 Strangely, Corvinus did not write much about the discovery of Lucy in her daily notes/ letter to H. For someone so excited about all and everything, she makes no extended mention of Lucy in her notebook or the usual festivities that followed big discoveries. She wrote of the excavation of A.L. 288-1, Sunday, 24 November 1974, just over half a page on the usual excitement in the camp, but then goes on to process the morphological details of Lucy and the scientific implications:

Now we finally have a complete *Australopithecus* in front of us, not composed of different pieces.... the dream of any anthropologist... It is unbelievable standing in front of prehistoric remnants of an actual individual who has lived here more than 3 Mill. years ago and who now once again sees daylight.⁴⁷

Figure 2: D. Johanson on the A.L.288 Locality, November 1974



© G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

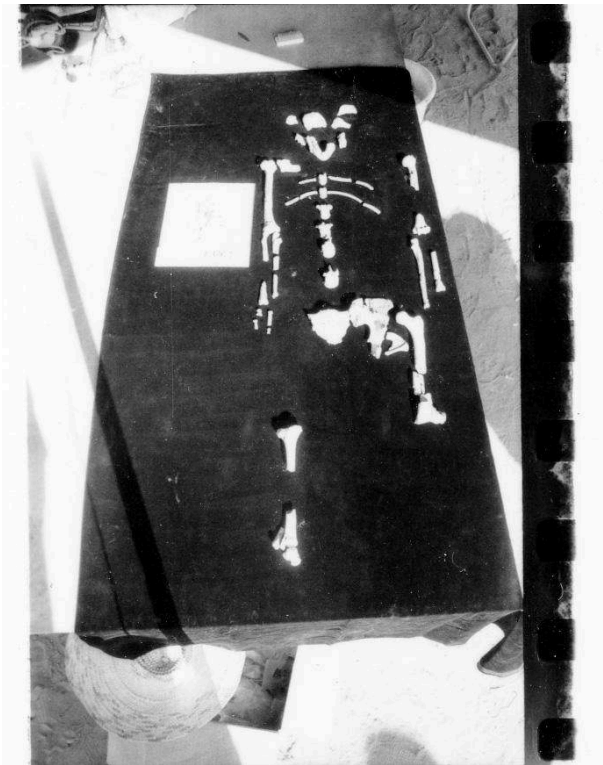
Figure 3: A.L.288-1 fossils being prepared to be photographed on the camp site, November 1974



Plate VII – 1974 n°15.

© G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

Figure 4: Photo from the contact plate of "Lucy"



Being photo shot by the IARE Team, November 1974.
© G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

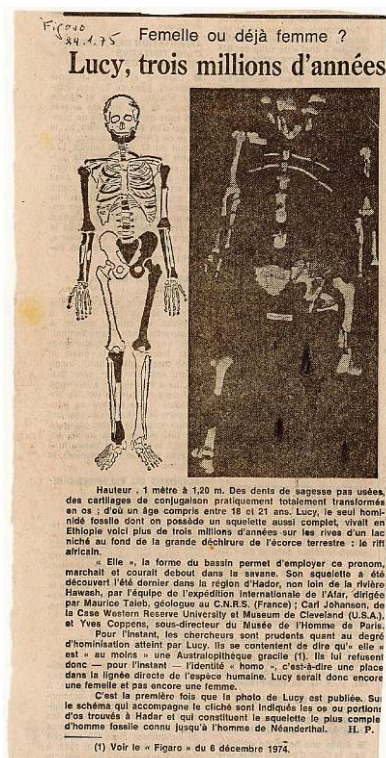
Figure 5: Photo from the contact plate of Gudrun Corvinus photo shooting "Lucy," November 1974



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- 34 A further notable locality is A.L.333, comprised of 217 hominin individuals, and is referred to as “*the First Family*” in a note from Corvinus in Addis Ababa in December 1975. She calls it “*exceptional*” because it includes infants and what she calls a “*baby skull*” and may allow new research avenues into “*man’s ancestor*.”⁴⁸ She associates the death of this multi-age social group to a natural disaster, even though it is not a consensual interpretation of the site formation. Indeed, these notes from the field reveal how conclusions were already being made between the origins of our species and new fossils—at that stage still undescribed and new to science. It is particularly evident at Hadar, where catchy namesakes were captured by the print and visual media.⁴⁹ Names such as “*Lucy*,” implying a “*womanized*” individual, or the A.L.333 social group “*First Family*,” highlight how scientific interpretation can be distorted by the use of modern cultural concepts (Figure 6).⁵⁰
- 35 Indeed, this vulgarization appears as the logical result of the association of the discoverers specific methodological approach and interpretations with one “*sensational*” and mediatized paleontological discovery: the latter favorably helping to publicize the former among large audiences and populations.⁵¹ The specific case of Lucy places bipedalism—and the analogy of Lucy’s bipedalism to *Homo sapiens*’ bipedalism—back at the front of the old debate concerning the criteria of hominization. While the bipedalism diversity among primates has been highly debated and revised since Lucy’s discovery,⁵² bipedalism as a human criterion is still a particularly strong idea for a large audience anchored in mythical narratives built during Antiquity.⁵³

Figure 6: Extract collected by G. Corvinus of *Le Monde* newspaper from 24 January 1975, “*Female or already Woman? Lucy, 3 million years old*”

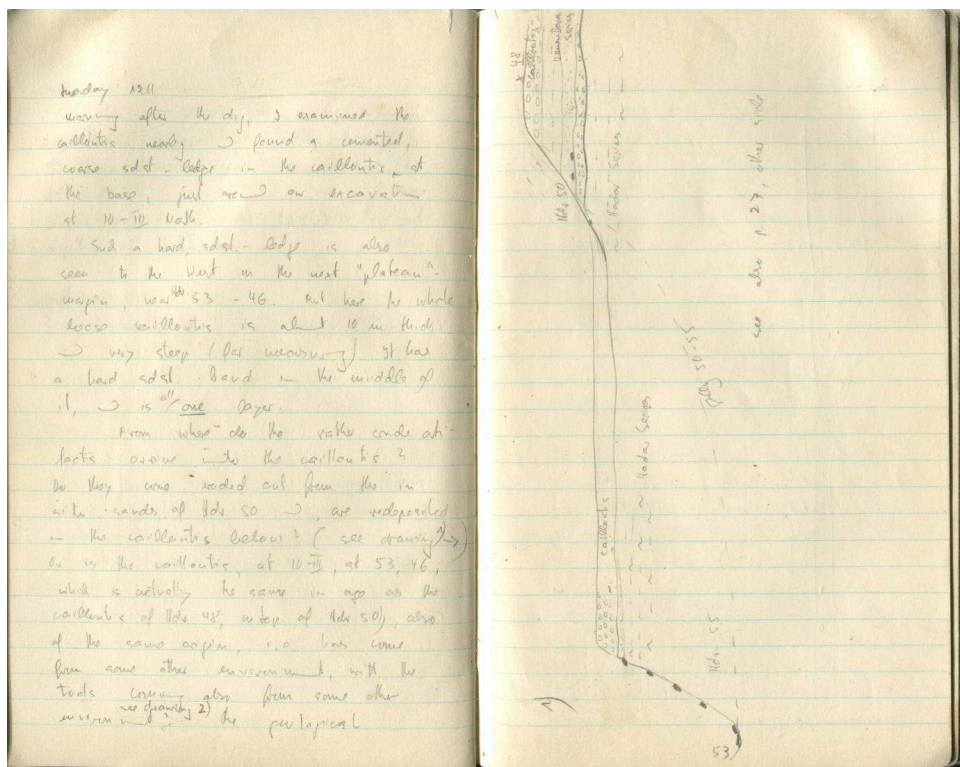


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Research for Early Stone Age at Hadar

- 36 The archive also includes daily field notes that allow us to trace the evolution of field research and a detailed progression of geomorphological understanding of the Kada Hadar Member, which contains Pleistocene deposits at the top of the Hadar Formation (Figure 7). In contrast to the rest of the Hadar Formation, these sediments most often indicate high-energy alluvial contexts. This sediment type usually limits fossil preservation—making study of the Pleistocene deposits a different interest for the IARE team.
- 37 Indeed, Corvinus began, as she did elsewhere, with mapping and documenting the geomorphology and stratigraphy. She recorded each locality, positioned it on the maps (which are present in the archives), and usually provided a description of the lithic artefacts, geomorphological context, and sediments.⁵⁴ At the very beginning of her work, in 1973, localities were recorded as Hdr.+n°, whereas fossiliferous Pliocene sites were registered as A.L. Most of these stratigraphic profiles are drawn in her field notebook (see Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7: Example of field notes taken by G. Corvinus in December 1973 from the "Exploration 1973-1974 notebook"



The notes and the sketches show how Gudrun Corvinus worked in Pleistocene deposits and stratigraphically correlated sites to propose relative dating. As an example, on these pages she replaces the Hadar (Hdr.) localities Hdr.48, Hdr.50 and Hdr.55 on a larger stratigraphy. In the same notebook, each locality is described.

© G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

- 38 At the beginning of the 1973 field season, she wrote:
- I work on the stratigraphy, palaeontology and prehistory along the Hadar, a tributary of the Awash in the northern Rift Valley of the Danakil Alps. I mostly

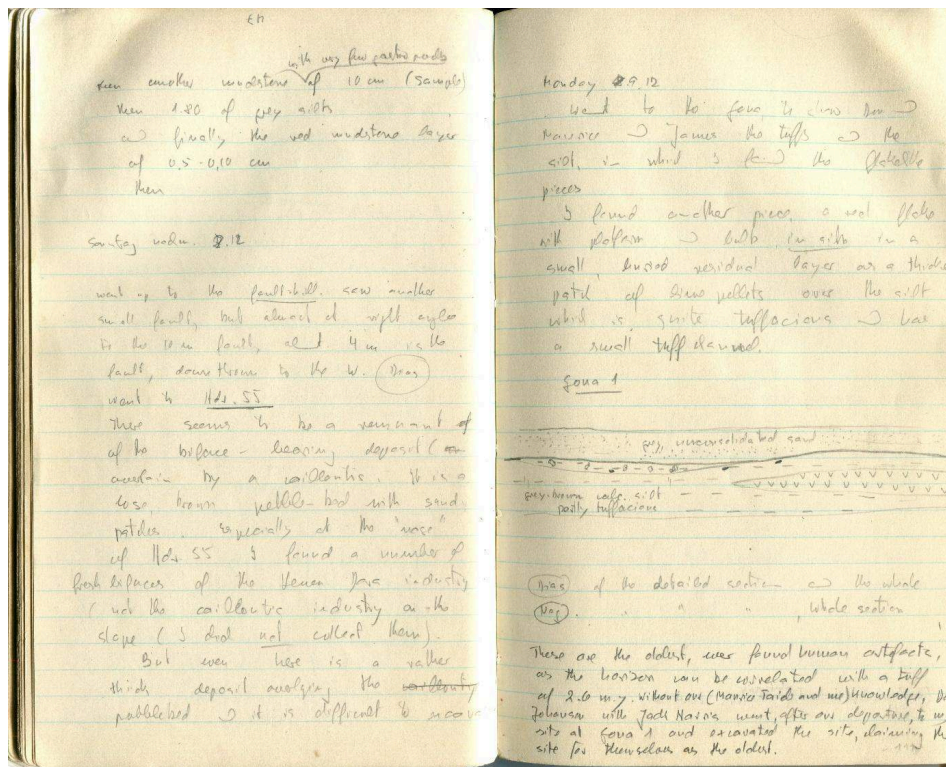
drive out with Jon Kalb, [...] and an Ethiopian and the student Dennis Peal [...], and then I go off on my own. Artefacts are few and far between. Acheul people must have just passed through here, having left behind a few beautifully worked hand axes. I do the geomorphology and the terraces, everything younger than the actual sedimentation, which is early Pleistocene. The area is incredibly rich in fossils particularly in the sandstone layer masses of Elephas, Rhinoceros, Hippo and Bovidae, also Carnivores [...] but no primates. It is very interesting for the palaeontologists.⁵⁵

- 39 The first discoveries of pre-Acheulean artifacts were found a few days before the end of the 1973 field season. Finding artifacts will be one of the main goals during the 1974 season (Figure 10) and form a core of the proposed 1975 activities (Figure 11). Corvinus writes with excitement on 5 December 1973:

I found two sites with Early Stone Age and Middle Stone Age hand axes and one with a very primitive pebble tool and flake tool industry...⁵⁶

- 40 The site published as Afaredo 1—but initially called Gona 1 and later renamed Kada Gona 1 (Figure 8)—is the first pre-Acheulean site discovered in northern Ethiopia and the starting point of the establishment of the Hadar Formation as the earliest known archaeological complex of the world. Alongside other localities successively described and dated by Roche and Tiercelin, Harris, and Semaw,⁵⁷ it marked the discovery of the world's oldest known stone tools until the discovery of the sites older than 2.6 Ma.⁵⁸ The identification of the earliest stone tools, on the one hand, and of the earliest evidence of bipedalism, on the other hand, made the Afar the place that delivered at the time the two most significant criteria of “*humanity*,” establishing, since the 1970s, Ethiopia as one of the cradles of humankind and reinforcing the pioneering work of the Leakeys in human antiquity in eastern Africa.⁵⁹

Figure 8: Example of field notes taken by G. Corvinus in December 1973 from the "Exploration 1973-1974 notebook."



The left page shows some of the first existing notes describing Gona 1 (Afaredo 1) and a posteriori annotated as follows: "These are the oldest, ever found human artefacts, as the horizon can be correlated with a tuff of 2.6 m.y. without our (Maurice Taieb and me) knowledge, Don Johanson with Jack Harris went after our departure, to my site at Gona 1 and excavated the site, claiming the site for themselves as the oldest."

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- 41 A large majority of the lithic series collected by Corvinus are contextualized through field surveys where the piece number is even recorded within levels of pebbles, gravel, sand, and silts.⁶⁰ However, the samples rarely exceed forty pieces rather than being full lithic assemblages. The precision of her records, even in her notebooks where small sketches are particularly detailed,⁶¹ reflect a strong command of geomorphology and clear consciousness of the antiquity of her lithic findings (Figure 10).
- 42 While the geomorphology of the Kada Hadar deposits is central in Corvinus' research questions (origin and deposition of sediments and relative chronology), the lithic material is analyzed through the typological classification method of Mary Leakey, as established in the reference Olduvai Gorge monograph Volume 3.⁶² This used terms such as "crude," "proto-handaxe," or "primitive" to indicate age and complexity of tools. Corvinus was also interested in taphonomy of lithic artifacts (e.g. patina, rolled, fractures) as shown in the captions of her photographs catalogued in dedicated notebooks.⁶³ As a result, while the fossiliferous Pliocene level in which Lucy and other hominins were discovered was already dated through biochronology, the absence of fossils and dated tuffs from the Kada Hadar Member led Corvinus to apply a methodology similar to her work in India—namely, stratigraphic correlations based on a detailed reading of the stratigraphy combined with lithic surface analysis

(taphonomy) and with Leakey's typology. By 1976, five different sedimentary levels containing Earlier Stone Age industries had already been described at Hadar.

- 43 In 1973-1974, her approach was justified, because her research predates the dating of the BTK-3 tephra to approximately 2.7 Ma⁶⁴ and the development of lithic technology. At that time in Ethiopia, early lithic discoveries were found at Melka Kunturé, where excavations were initially led by Gérard Bailloud (1919-2010)⁶⁵ and then by Chavaillon from 1965 (also with Taieb and Bonnefille).⁶⁶ At the same time, lithic technology research was being developed mainly in France by Tixier and transferred to eastern African early hominins stone tools by Roche, who joined the IARE in 1974 while she was Tixier's PhD student (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Gudrun Corvinus and H el ene Roche excavating at Hadar 10 Locality, 1974



Unknown photographer   G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

- 44 Publications,⁶⁷ as well as the sections and records presented by Kalb at the National Geographic Society in 1974, clearly illustrate the limited extent of Lower Pleistocene deposits compared with the Pliocene at Hadar.⁶⁸ Research of prehistoric artifacts played a more peripheral role compared with fossils, which was also reflected in the logistical aspects of the expedition and which Corvinus mentions in her notes. Indeed, it is worth noting that these ancient tools did not attract much attention from the general public, nor from Corvinus' colleagues as evidenced by her notes and personal correspondence.

⁶⁹

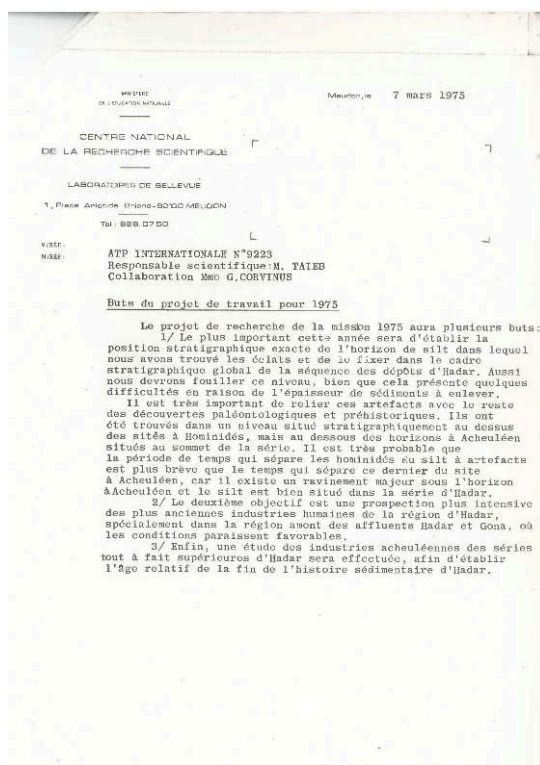
- 45 The discovery of ancient hominins led to the search for lithic industries in Pliocene levels dating to approximately 3 Ma from the outset. This did not stem solely from the 1973 finds but also from preceding finds in the Rift Valley—for example, the discoveries made in 1969 in the Lower Omo Valley by Chavaillon under the direction of Coppens during the IORE, consisting of small lithic series on the surface and *in situ*, the oldest dating back to ca. 3 Ma.⁷⁰ Although the search was ultimately unsuccessful in the Afar, some archives demonstrate that the IARE team already conceived the theory that the emergence of stone tool technology was much older than 2 Ma, dating back to the

Pliocene. As an example of this type of concern, Corvinus wrote to H. on 18 October 1974:

What excitement! Good grief! I have never before seen people so beside themselves as Don and Maurice and Ross and Herbert, when Alemayu found a complete maxilla of yet another Homo, 5m away from the find yesterday... Truly a splendid piece and completely intact, except for one broken canine. [...] It is said that we now have to find artefacts.

- 46 This quotation also echoes initial doubts raised by *Homo* and *Australopithecus*⁷¹ hominin fossils discovered in the Pliocene deposits. It highlights a mindset that is remarkably open to pushing the emergence of lithic technologies back in time, yet remains open to reconsidering chronologies.

Figure 10: Note written by G. Corvinus on 7 April 1975, while she is contracted by CNRS, to summarize the goals of the Prehistory section of the IARE



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Asymmetries in field-work based sciences

- 47 Economic asymmetries and disparities in institutional resources inevitably create challenges for scientific cooperation. This is especially true of relations between wealthy and poorer nations,⁷² but even more so in locations where scientific fieldwork continues to be entangled with ethical concerns inherited from colonization and imperialism.⁷³ This is acknowledged as a direct influence on scientific narratives, even in earth and life sciences.⁷⁴ In addition, the immersive experience of fieldwork abroad by (usually) Western scientists is an important factor that should be considered when analyzing international scientific cooperation and scientific narratives. The topic has been discussed in anthropological sciences,⁷⁵ but it remains underestimated in other

field sciences where the final output does not directly concern anthropological and ethnological narratives.⁷⁶ As an example, evolutionary human sciences have utilized encounters with African wildlife to facilitate the dispersion of scientific narratives more easily to Western audiences via mass media (e.g. *National Geographic* magazine, popular books)⁷⁷ while also drawing from the wealth of exploration literature.⁷⁸

- 48 Shaped by its ancient ties with Christianity, mythologized monarchy, and perceived cultural hybridity, Ethiopia has long occupied a unique place in Western orientalist imaginaries.⁷⁹ European travel literature and missionary accounts have only further exoticized the region as a liminal space between Africa and the East. As a result, achieving a more rigorous historiographical perspective remains a necessary prerequisite for field sciences to disentangle the scientific discourse from political stakes and socio-cultural experiences in Ethiopia. In this section, we suggest that the multi-faceted archive of Corvinus documents the impact of exoticism and socio-economic asymmetries in the IARE context.
- 49 As mentioned earlier, French diplomacy played a decisive role in the development of archaeological research in the Ethiopian Empire. Leaders of the paleontological and geological field programs IORE and IARE benefited directly from this diplomatic and scientific network by being able to conduct their paleontological fieldwork in the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly through the Archaeology Section of the Ethiopian Institute of Studies and Research.
- 50 Two movements were developing concurrently with the establishment of this collaboration: the establishment of heritage laws during the continental African early post-colonial period, and growing competition between individual researchers and institutions in hominin evolution research. In Ethiopia, this occurred against the backdrop of a food crisis, including a major famine in the north of the country in 1973-1974,⁸⁰ which contributed to the subsequent overthrow of the emperor by the Derg in 1974. A few years later, in 1982, the Ethiopian Authority imposed a research moratorium in order to draw up new rules to govern the work of visiting research teams and to harmonize foreign research efforts within Ethiopia. The Authority felt that some teams had not ensured an adequate contribution.⁸¹ Specifically, the ethical concerns regarding the contribution of symbols of national pride was important to the new political establishment.⁸² Lucy, an Ethiopian female figure, had by then become—rightly or wrongly—the most famous of its kind worldwide and was thus a figurehead of the effort. However, even during the moratorium, laboratory research on previously discovered material remained very intensive, advancing our knowledge of the varied ecosystems and lifestyles of *A. afarensis* individuals.
- 51 When the moratorium ended in the 1990s, competition between international researchers continued. Research projects were still designed outside of Ethiopia and funded largely by international foundations or foreign governments.⁸³ The diplomatic collaborations behind paleontological research in Ethiopia encouraged national and international visibility and mediatization of finds. Museums in Addis Ababa played a pivotal role in sharing discoveries and conveying these advances to the Ethiopian population. For the Ethiopian government, the generated promotion of the country was of greater interest than the consistency of the propagated scientific narrative.⁸⁴ The process through which Lucy was mediatized and presented to the Ethiopian and international audience is therefore particularly crucial to the narrative of paleoanthropology in Ethiopia.

- 52 The archives of Corvinus include items related to the organization of research expeditions, as well as the financial aspects and redistribution channels, as evidenced in documents such as the mission orders (Figure 11), correspondence, and submitted research proposals. For example, Kalb's proposal to the National Geographic Society on 5 May 1974 illustrates how the IARE was both a titanic effort and an ant-like endeavor. It clearly outlines the motivations, team composition, and individual responsibilities, along with a budget that allows for a precise evaluation of costs. The details provided include salaries, analyses, equipment, per diems, and additional funding sources, amounting to a total of \$57,030 asked of the Society.

Figure 11: Example of the mission order from the CNRS for Gudrun Corvinus' participation in the second fieldwork campaign of the IARE in 1974, from 1 October to 15 December 1974

ML/L 85/9/1974
 MINISTÈRE
 DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE
 CENTRE NATIONAL
 DE LA
 RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE
 15, quai Anatole France 75 PARIS 7^e
 Bureau 6E
 Missions
 A 6559283 3

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

ORDRE DE MISSION N° 2153

M. Madame CORVINUS Gudrun
 Grade : Chargé de Recherche
 Emploi :
 Indice de traitement de début : 435 GROUPE : II
 Résidence administrative : Laboratoire de Géologie du Quaternaire, CNRS
 92190 NEUILLY BELLEVEUE
 se rendra à : ADDIS-ABEBA (ETHIOPIE)
 Motif de déplacement : Participation à la 7ème Campagne IARE 74 : Etude de gisements
 oïdavaïens
 Durée prévue : DU 1er OCTOBRE AU 15 DÉCEMBRE 1974
 Moyen de transport utilisé : Avion (Classe touriste) PARIS/ADDIS-ABEBA AAR
 Frais de Séjour dans la limite de 60 jours. 2 OCT. 1974
 Fait à Paris, le

Vu, Le Directeur Instructeur,
 Signé: BOUSSET

Par le Directeur Administratif et Financier
 et par Adhésion
 Le Directeur de Département
 des Programmes et Moyens
 Signé: GABRIEL

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- 53 Success and public visibility of the IARE was also driven by a well-established strategy of promotion and media engagement. An example was when the famous and influential Leakeys were invited to visit the sites a day before the discovery of Lucy. Gudrun described these visits to her friend S. in India on 15 November 1974⁸⁵ as follows:
- We have always visitors. One week-end people from the American Embassy came. Another weekend people from the British Council, and Johanson's boss from Cleveland & some people came to make a film. Then 4 reporters came by special plane (we have been cleaning a landing place for a plane) and they interviewed us 3 for a newspaper and one for a radio, but we did not know because we have no radio. I would have liked to hear myself on the radio. Last week, 4 geologists came [...]. Leakey comes with his plane from Nairobi and a man doing Argon from America.
- 54 Other examples from the archive record of Corvinus are events in the field that inform socio-historical issues in cooperation and land access in field sciences.⁸⁶ Insights into the tensions that can arise from the collision of an international expedition into a

region where pastoralist land-use and frequent inter-group conflicts take place⁸⁷ are described. In this case, it appears that the relationship between the Afar and the researchers was initially strained; Corvinus wrote on 8 November 1973:⁸⁸

The friendship with the Afar had to be earned. When the camp was pitched in this unexplored area of the Hadar (I was not there yet), the Afar were very angry about our intrusion into their pastures and sent a delegation to us to inform us to immediately vacate the area. But Maurice Taieb knows Afar of other areas and suggested diplomatically to discuss the issue over a cup of tea. It took a long time, ... but finally they agreed [...] but finally they let us stay and work in their area. Two Afar are now constantly with us, as well as the young headman.

- 55 Shortly after their arrival at the camp a year later, she again wrote about the issue of land usage on 9 and 10 October:

The area seems devoid of people. Last year there must have been a small settlement here. Only this morning the first Afar showed up, [...] with guns and knives. There was a discussion with our two Amhara Ethiopians from Addis, who then translated. Following that, Maurice and Don drove to Bati to talk to the headman there, asking for a written permission for our usage of the pasture for the local Afar.⁸⁹

- 56 From her letters it is not clear whether the permission was for the researchers to utilize the pasture for their encampment or for the employed Afar to graze their own animals. The Afar, who had an established camp at the location during the previous year, returned in 1974. Unfortunately, the conditions negotiated between the Bati headman and the family headman of the group were not acceptable to the latter. Consequently, for several days the family headman was seen reclining under a tree on what he considered to be their space, with ever more Afar coming to settle there, “*while the women were continuing with their chores as normal.*”⁹⁰
- 57 Therein lies a sensitive question in many cases in African archaeology: a contrast between an outdoor scientific laboratory, where personal planes of official visitors can land, and the land used by the remaining rural population. Inevitably, two worlds—or even more—meet, collide, and coexist, creating social and cultural experiences that are entirely unique to field sciences.⁹¹ The open question remains how roles revert once the field season is completed and the camp broken down.

Figure 12: Discussion between IARE team members and Afar people, 1973 Plate IV – 73 n°38



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- 58 Corvinus' perception of Ethiopian people is also documented through numerous series of photos (Figures 12-15). These and the accompanying descriptive notes on the Afar populations introduce greater complexity into the panoply of individuals involved in the IARE: local populations and visiting scientific professionals. Some of Corvinus' images suggest a nascent community evolving around the IARE work and camp. However, this documentation also responds to current ethical debates surrounding image production of local people in asymmetrical contexts.

Figure 13: Ethiopian populations on the way to Hadar, October 1974



Plate 74-I n°31.

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Figure 14: A moment of rest along the Awash River in Hadar, 1974



Plate 74-V n°05.

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Figure 15: Gudrun Corvinus being photographed by a young man along the Awash River in Hadar, 1974

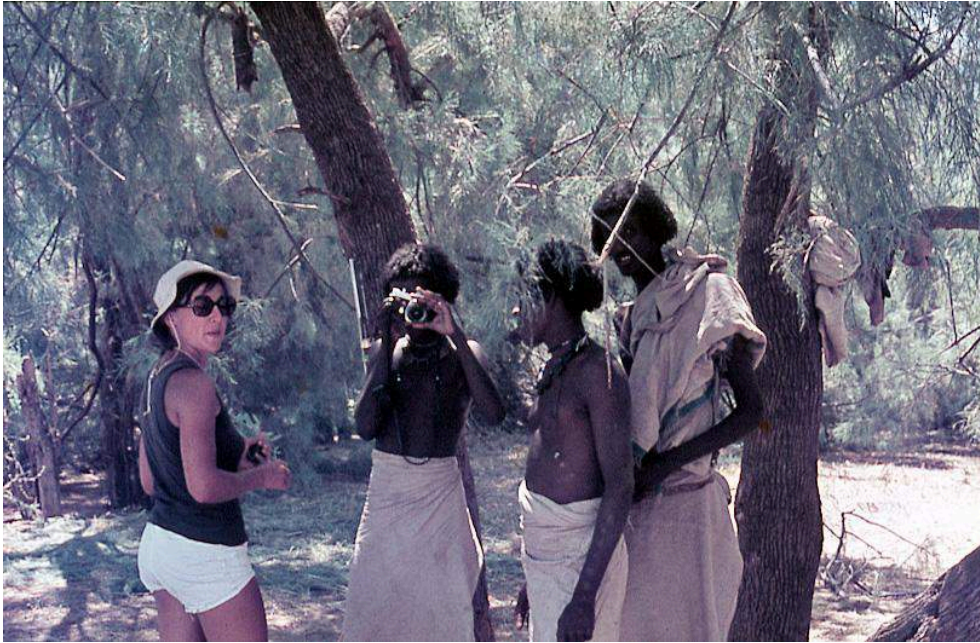


Plate 74-V n°06.

© G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

- 59 Across her texts and selected photographs, we observe a particular curiosity for “otherness.” For example, when Corvinus arrived in Addis Ababa on 4 October 1974, together with Roche, their journey started with the standard trip from Addis Ababa to Millé and then into the middle reaches of the Awash River. They often stopped along the way, taking a series of photographs that add illustration and can be compared with the narratives developed in the correspondence, thus creating a genuine effect of storytelling (e.g. the plate of diapositives 74-I; see Figures 16 to 19).

Figure 16: Market visit in Addis Ababa, October 1974



Plate I – 1974 n°05.

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Figure 17: Market visit in Addis Ababa, October 1974



Plate I – 1974 n°06.

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Figure 18: The IARE team stopping at Mille (?), October 1974

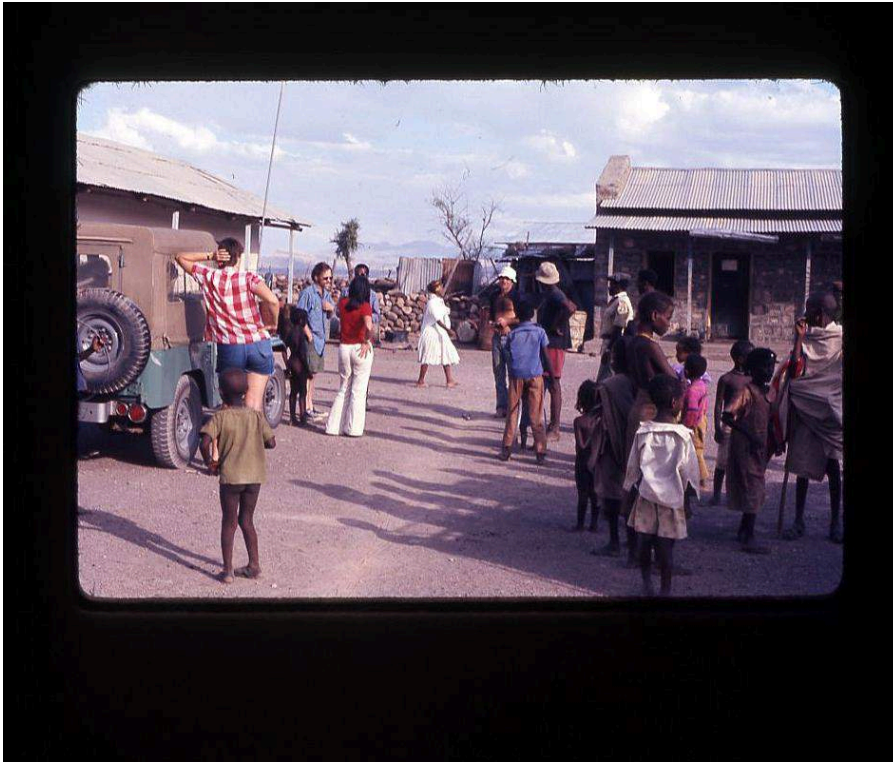


Plate I – 1974 n°26.

© G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

Figure 19: View of Mount Ayalu, October 1974



Plate I – 1974 n°27.

© G. Corvinus – Stored at the MNHN, Paris.

60 In her correspondence to H., Corvinus provides a daily account of her arrival in Addis Ababa and the new curfew imposed on Ethiopian bars, and she then details the entire itinerary—the landscapes, vegetation, sounds, and viewpoints in Mille, Fentale volcano, and Gewane. Interwoven with her descriptions are her moods, the atmosphere of the journey, its logistics, encounters with local populations, the misadventures of the Land Rover, and the comments of the various expedition members. Already she cannot resist describing the beauty of the area:

On the plateau it was beautifully green, the Flamboyant was blooming and the Bougainvillea and other dense yellow flowers. Vast numbers of herds of cows....⁹²

61 The wider Afar region, particularly along its longitudinal oasis, has an exceptional rugged beauty about it and she writes:

Like a thick dark belt the riverine forest runs through this otherwise totally dry, gray rugged land. It was beautiful to see in the sunset.⁹³

62 She describes the dense riverine vegetation, hardly penetrable except along the animal tracks. Even at the river, the heat at the rift floor is often unbearable, at times climbing to above 45°C. Then there is a climb to the top of the plateau:

We had a wonderful view of our colourful camp, which lies like a gypsy camp in the desert at the edge of the riverine forest.⁹⁴

63 Another, yet different, aspect of this romanticization is the presentation of the research area settings in the proposal submitted to the National Geography Society by Kalb in 1974. The proposal purposefully accentuates the remoteness of the research area and the mythological preconception about Afar populations, as exemplified in the “Introduction to the Afar” section:⁹⁵

Infamous for its inhospitable terrain and its people, the Afar has been described variously by explorers as a “landscape of terror,” a “wasteland,” “moonish,” the “void of East Africa.”

64 The intended effect on the potential donor is to propose transforming this “*landscape of terror*” into a landscape of treasures—a narrative already reported in other cases to enhance scientists’ projects.⁹⁶ Indeed, the landscape of treasures is described in the archives, and the narration of the discoveries portrays an emotionally charged atmosphere within the IARE. She wrote to J. on 3 November 1974:

You may have heard about our beautiful hominid discoveries in the press. It is really incredible, how much we have found in the first 2 weeks of our exploration. All the fossil finds were made by Alemayhu, our Ethiopian colleague from the Antiquity department in Addis. He found a right mandible of probably Homo (or Astr) africanus. Then, the same day, while we were all going there to see the site, he suddenly came running, shouting that he had found another one, we saw that it was a complete maxilla in 2 parts, 1st complete and beautifully preserved specimen of a Homo, of a gracile form, teeth one way well preserved and very Homo-like and the 2 rows [sic] of teeth are surprisingly parallel to each other, and next day, while we were photographing the site[,] Melissa, one of our Afar workers found another right maxilla of a Homo. They are not really in situ, but on the slope of small hills, exposing silty deposits of the lower series of the Hadar deposits. Then 3 days later I found a femur in a sediment, above the other sites. And 2 weeks later Alemayhu found another complete mandible, with missing incisors but with a very large canine. And again 3 days later he found a left mandible of a less gracile form. You see, it is very rich.

Concluding remarks

- 65 While it is challenging to critique the scholars who preceded us, it remains necessary to incorporate the epistemology and history of scientific practices. This shapes the perception of our own species in that it influences the discourse on human evolution. In this context, Corvinus's archives offer a remarkable opportunity to engage in this reflective exercise—particularly within African research contexts, where international cooperation remains the dominant framework in the African fields of archaeology, palaeontology, and heritage sciences.
- 66 In the archival legacy of Corvinus, the personal and scientific domains intertwine, offering a micro-historical example of the impact of the Western academic system, individual immersive experience, and emotion in shaping and disseminating scientific knowledge, even within the field of earth sciences. In the specific case of her participation in the IARE in 1973, 1974, and following research in 1975, this newly available archive documents behind-the-scenes insights into the discovery of Dinknesh, Lucy, or A.L.288-1, whose global and national influence is beyond question.
- 67 This period, at the tail-end of the era of European colonial imperialism in the world and of the “*Big Disciplinary Man*,”⁹⁷ was gradually giving way to multidisciplinary teams such as IARE, which would come to take the lead in the field of hominin evolution within the extraordinary open-air laboratory that is the eastern African Rift.
- 68 A topic only briefly addressed in this contribution is the question of gender. Indeed, Corvinus, just as Bonnefille or Roche, represents a fragment of the long struggle of women to enter the sciences.⁹⁸ Perhaps because she was a woman, relatively older than other members of the IARE team, and mostly due to her non-permanent position in an academic institution, without strict scientific affiliation, she sought out projects and adopted a trajectory resembling that of a vagabond archaeologist. This may explain why she accepted a three-year position as a geologist-prehistorian at the Consolidated Diamond Mines in 1975 in southernmost Namibia, which at the time was still under the South African Apartheid regime. Notably, she never fully integrated into any project team, whether at the diamond mines in Namibia or later as a prominent archaeologist of eastern Africa. Her work and legacy are dispersed globally, reflecting a cosmopolitan dimension that facilitated an extensive international network, yet she remained, in many ways, a solitary archaeologist.

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NOTES

1. A partial skeleton of *Australopithecus afarensis* inventoried as A.L.288-1 fossil.
2. M. TAIEB *et al.*, 1974.
3. Written as a journal entry, they were usually addressed to somebody she was close to either professionally or privately.
4. The use of "Lucy" emerged at the discovery site, named by scientists in celebration, and became popular worldwide as the story spread through media and scientific literature. "Lucy" is easily recognized and has become the default in most international contexts, scientific publications, and museum exhibits outside Ethiopia. The local name "Dinknesh" is the name preferred in Ethiopia and among Amharic speakers; it embodies the pride and marvel of the discovery, literally meaning "you are marvelous." However, outside Ethiopia, "Lucy" remains more commonly used due to its origin story and global familiarity. The Ethiopian name helps highlight the fossil's roots and honors its place in African heritage.
5. M. TAIEB, 1985; J. KALB, 2000; Y. COPPENS, 1999; R. BONNEFILLE, 2018; D.C. JOHANSON, M. EDEY, 1981.
6. L.V. PYNE, 2016; A. STANFORTH, 2004; T. GUNDLING, 2020; M. LEQUIN, 2015.
7. E.g. N. COYE, 1998; E. GRAN-AYMERICH, 1998; A. HUREL, 2007.
8. N. FINNERAN, 2013; L.V. PYNE, 2016.
9. G. CORVINUS, 1999.
10. G. CORVINUS, 1999.
11. G. KARVE-CORVINUS, 1966.
12. G. CORVINUS, 1981.
13. G. KARVE-CORVINUS, 1968.
14. True to her nature, she described in great detail the circumstances surrounding this event, starting from the moment she received the letter from Wenner Gren Foundation on 1 April 1966. This diary-like report is part of a manuscript on her life and work until 1972. Comprising more

than 650 pages, it was extracted from letters written to her mother, typed out by her, and even slightly edited. It starts with her initial trip to India in 1961 and ends with a trip to Nepal in 1972, a year before her mother's death. Fortunately, it includes her report of her 1966 visit to the Leakeys at Olduvai, as well as to the 1971 Congress in Addis Ababa. While one of her 1973 notebooks was stolen in the camp, her 1974 journaling in the form of regular letters to a close friend and fellow geologist are replete with information (Vollständige Kopie der Indienberichte, PAUM (Gröt.)).

15. G. CORVINUS, 1970.

16. <https://www.sharmaheritage.in/portal>

17. G. CORVINUS, 1975, 1976; G. CORVINUS, H. ROCHE, 1976.

18. G. CORVINUS, 1985.

19. I. MESFIN *et al.*, 2022; U. MUSSGNUG, 2023.

20. I. MESFIN *et al.*, 2022; U. MUSSGNUG, 2023.

21. G. CORVINUS, 1996; 2007a, 2007b.

22. G. CORVINUS, 2007a, 2007b.

23. G. CORVINUS, 2007a.

24. H. BREUIL, H. KELLEY, 1936; R. DU BOURG DE BOZAS, 1906.

25. P. LESTER, 1933.

26. E.g. A. CAQUOT, J. LECLANT, 1956; MIKAËL KEBBÉDÉ, J. LECLANT, 1955.

27. This legacy endures today, as the French Centre for Ethiopian Studies (IFRE from the French Foreign Affairs Ministry and the CNRS) continues to play a pivotal role in supporting French archaeological missions in Ethiopia.

28. M. TAIEB, 1974.

29. R. BONNEFILLE, 2018.

30. V. MORELL, 2011.

31. M. TAIEB, 1985.

32. M. TAIEB *et al.*, 1972.

33. M. TAIEB, 1985, p. 72.

34. M. TAIEB, 1985, p. 73.

35. G. CORVINUS, 1973c; J. KALB, 2000.

36. E. MARSHALL, 1987; J. KAPPELMAN, 2020; R. LEWIN, 1983; P.C. KJÆRGAARD, 2012.

37. D.C. JOHANSON, M. TAIEB, 1976.

38. *A. afarensis*, D.C. JOHANSON, 1978.

39. D.C. JOHANSON *et al.*, 1982.

40. D.C. JOHANSON *et al.*, 1982b.

41. M. TAIEB *et al.*, 1974, 1975.

42. Combination of potassium-argon dating and correlations of geochemical signature and stratigraphic positions of tuffs.

43. M. TAIEB, *et al.*, 1976; J.L. ARONSON, M. TAIEB, 1981; J.L. ARONSON *et al.*, 1977.

44. M. TAIEB, 1985, p. 76-77.

45. G. CORVINUS, 1974d.

46. Renamed Turkana Lake in 1975.

47. G. CORVINUS, 1974c.

48. G. CORVINUS, 1974a.

49. e.g. D.C. JOHANSON, D. BRILL, 1976.

50. A. STANFORTH, 2004; T. GUNDLING, 2020.

51. In the specific case of *Australopithecus afarensis* locomotion, Mathilde Lequin explains how scientific debates are rooted in metaphysical conceptions of the "upright posture" inherited from

Antiquity, as well as in the impact of the discoverers' philosophical positions and methodological choices on the earliest interpretations of Lucy's skeleton. She argues that these interpretations relied on an "unreasoned equivalence between bipedal traits and human traits" (M. LEQUIN, 2015, p. 176), grounded in a specific methodological framework invoking the concept of directional selection (M. LEQUIN 2015, p. 172).

Indeed, Lequin notes that, according to Lucy's discoverers, "only traits associated with bipedalism are subject to an active selective process. Arboreal traits, no longer under effective selective pressures, are progressively excluded from the selective process" (M. LEQUIN, 2015, p. 179). By contrast, the opposing school of thought favors a holistic approach that assigns comparable importance to all anatomical characters, regardless of their position along the gradient from ape-like to human-like forms.

52. M. LEQUIN, 2015.

53. W. STOCZKOWSKI, 1994.

54. G. CORVINUS, 1974a, 1974b.

55. G. CORVINUS, 1973a.

56. G. CORVINUS, 1973b.

57. H. ROCHE, J.-J. TIERCELIN, 1977a, 1977b; J.W.K. HARRIS, 1983; SEMAW SILESHI, 2000; M.J. ROGERS, SEMAW SILESHI, 2009.

58. S. HARMAND *et al.*, 2015; T.W. PLUMMER *et al.*, 2023.

59. A. STANIFORTH, 2004.

60. G. CORVINUS, 1974a.

61. G. CORVINUS, 1973d.

62. M.D. LEAKEY, 1971.

63. G. CORVINUS, 1974b.

64. J.L. ARONSON *et al.*, 1980.

65. F. ANFRAY *et al.*, 1965.

66. J. CHAVAILLON, 1967.

67. M. TAIEB *et al.*, 1976; J.L. ARONSON *et al.*, 1980.

68. J. KALB, 1974.

69. G. CORVINUS, 1974f; 1974g; 1973d.

70. Y. COPPENS, 1975.

71. Hominin remains will finally be classified as *Australopithecus* and will help to define in much detail the species *Australopithecus afarensis*.

72. A. KÄLLÉN *et al.*, 2024.

73. In the case of Ethiopia, direct colonization occurred under Italian East Africa (1936-1941), while many historians emphasize a longer imperial legacy shaped by both internal dynamics and Western influence, which formed part of the context leading to the 1974 Derg coup and the Eritrean War of Independence (B.K. HOLCOMB, S. IBSA, 1990; ANDARGACHEW TIRUNEH, 1993).

74. N.B. RAJA *et al.*, 2021; W.A. BARR, B. WOOD, 2024.

75. E.g. J. CLIFFORD, G.E. MARCUS, 1986; R. LANSDOWN, 2017; M. JANIS, 2006.

76. J. VETTER, 2011.

77. T. GUNDLING, 2020.

78. M.-N. BOURGUET, 1997; T. FULFORD *et al.*, 2004.

79. W.L. BELCHER, 2012.

80. ALEMAYEHU TELEGN, 2023.

81. R. LEWIN, 1983.

82. R. LEWIN, 1983; N. FINNERAN, 2013; L.V. PYNE, 2016.

83. T. GUINDEUIL, J.-R. BOISSERIE, 2016.

84. T. GUINDEUIL, J-R. BOISSERIE, 2016.
 85. G. CORVINUS, 1974g.
 86. J. VETTER, 2011, 2008.
 87. KELEMEWORK TAFERE REDA, 2014.
 88. Letter to Jö; 8 November 1973, PAUM.
 89. Letter to H., 9 and 10 October 1974, PAUM.
 90. G. CORVINUS, 1974h.
 91. R.E. KOHLER, 2013; 2019.
 92. Letter to H., 6 October 1974, PAUM.
 93. Letter to H., 6 October 1974, PAUM.
 94. Letter to H., October 1974, PAUM.
 95. J. KALB, 1974.
 96. M. BLOEMBERGEN, M. EICKHOFF, 2015.
 97. J. FIGUEIREDO, 2020.
 98. <https://trowelblazers.com/2014/05/08/gudrun-corvinus-trowelblazing-across-200-million-years/>
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ABSTRACTS

In the years 2024 and 2025, the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris received a collection of more than 1,000 written documents and photographs collected by Gudrun Corvinus between 1973 and 1975, when she was a member of the International Afar Research Expedition (1972-1977). During these expeditions, major fossils were discovered, including the iconic “Lucy” (*Australopithecus afarensis*) and what until recently were the oldest stone tools. While Corvinus focused on Pleistocene deposits of the Afar region, she additionally illustrated and described her experiences in letters and journal entries, and with photographs. This paper presents these archives and demonstrates how they can be used to encompass various research themes that contribute to an historiography of palaeoanthropology in eastern Africa. It includes fieldwork practices, the context of fossil discovery and collection, and the Western appropriation of scientific narratives about Africa’s past, as well as the history of scientific cooperation between the West and eastern Africa within the broader postcolonial continental context.

En 2024-2025, le Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle à Paris a archivé une collection de plus de 1000 documents méticuleusement rédigés, photographiés, collectés et assemblés par Gudrun Corvinus entre 1973 et 1975, alors qu’elle était membre de l’« International Afar Research Expedition » (1972-1977). Durant cette période, d’importants fossiles furent découverts, dont la célèbre Lucy, une femelle *Australopithecus afarensis*. Gudrun Corvinus a posé les premières bases de la géomorphologie des dépôts pléistocènes de la région de l’Afar, qui ont ensuite livré ce qui fut, jusqu’à très récemment, les plus anciens outils lithiques connus au monde. Cette contribution présente ce nouveau fond d’archives ainsi que leur potentiel à nourrir divers axes de recherche participant à une historiographie de la paléoanthropologie en Afrique de l’est, incluant l’expérience du terrain, le contexte de découverte et de collecte des fossiles, l’appropriation occidentale des discours scientifiques sur le passé de l’Afrique, ainsi que l’histoire de la

coopération scientifique entre l'Occident et l'Afrique de l'Est dans le contexte continental post-colonial.

INDEX

Geographical index: Afar, Éthiopie

Keywords: Afar, historiography, archives, palaeoanthropology, Lucy, Early Stone Age, field science

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