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A Giant Sauropod Dinosaur from an Upper Cretaceous Mangrove Deposit in Egypt

Joshua B. Smith,^{1*} Matthew C. Lamanna,¹ Kenneth J. Lacovara,² Peter Dodson,^{1,3} Jennifer R. Smith,¹ Jason C. Poole,⁴ Robert Giegengack,¹ Yousry Attia⁵

We describe a giant titanosaurid sauropod dinosaur discovered in coastal deposits in the Upper Cretaceous Bahariya Formation of Egypt, a unit that has produced three *Tyrannosaurus*-sized theropods and numerous other vertebrate taxa. *Paralititan stromeri* is the first tetrapod reported from Bahariya since 1935. Its 1.69-meter-long humerus is longer than that of any known Cretaceous sauropod. The autochthonous scavenged skeleton was preserved in mangrove deposits, raising the possibility that titanosaurids and their predators habitually entered such environments.

In the early 20th century, the Bavarian geologist Ernst Stromer described a diverse biota from the Upper Cretaceous [Cenomanian: 93.5 to 99.0 million years ago (Ma)] Bahariya Formation (1) of the Bahariya Oasis, Egypt (Fig. 1).

The vertebrate discoveries included fish, turtles, plesiosaurs, squamates, crocodyliforms, and four dinosaurs: the theropods *Spinosaurus*, *Carcharodontosaurus*, and *Bahariasaurus*, and the sauropod *Aegyptosaurus* (2). Tragically, Stromer's collections were largely destroyed during an Allied bombing of Munich in 1944 (3). With exceptions from Morocco (4–6) and Algeria (7), evidence of Late Cretaceous African dinosaurs remains limited. An improved understanding of Late Cretaceous African terrestrial vertebrates is important for the paleoecology of this region and is needed to evaluate biogeographic hypotheses pertaining to Gondwanan fragmentation (5, 8–10). Here we describe the partial skeleton of an extremely large sauropod dinosaur, the first tetrapod reported from Bahariya since 1935 (11). The specimen

consists largely of vertebrae, pectoral girdle, and forelimb elements and is preserved in sediments indicative of intertidal deposits. A number of morphological differences distinguish the humerus of the specimen (Fig. 2A) from that of *Aegyptosaurus*, precluding referral to that genus (12). Because of these distinctions and its possession of several autapomorphies, we designate the new specimen as *Paralititan stromeri*, gen. et sp. nov. (13).

Two preserved caudal sacral centra of *Paralititan* lack pleurocoels. The centrum of the first caudal vertebra (Fig. 2B) is wider than high and procoelous, and has a convex distal articular condyle. The centrum is not biconvex, as in the titanosaurids *Alamosaurus* (14), *Neuquensaurus* (14), and *Pellegrinisaurus* (15). Its ventral surface has weakly developed longitudinal ridges laterally bordering a sagittal concavity. A postspinal lamina is present between spinopostzygapophyseal laminae on the distal surface of the neural spine. A second proximal caudal (Fig. 2C) is strongly procoelous and has a well-developed distal condyle.

The scapula is concave medially. A prominent dorsomedial rugosity borders the medial concavity as in the titanosaurids *Aeolosaurus*, *Lirainosaurus*, *Neuquensaurus*, and *Saltasaurus* (14, 16). Distal to the glenoid, a well-developed tabular process projects from the caudoventral margin of the scapula. The development of this structure in *Paralititan* is equaled only in a scapulocoracoid referred to the brachiosaurid *Brachiosaurus altithorax* (17).

The humerus is strongly expanded proximally and distally. Because of the modest de-

¹Department of Earth and Environmental Science, University of Pennsylvania, 240 South 33rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104–6316, USA. ²Engineering Geology, Drexel University, 3141 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA. ³Department of Animal Biology, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, 3800 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104–6045, USA. ⁴Academy of Natural Sciences, 1900 Ben Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19103, USA. ⁵Egyptian Geological Museum, Egyptian Geological Survey and Mining Authority, Athar El Nabi, Maadi, Cairo, Egypt.

*To whom correspondence should be addressed. E-mail: smithjb@sas.upenn.edu

Table 1. Phylogenetic data matrix. The macronarian *Camarasaurus* is postulated as an outgroup of titanosauriformes (45, 46). Character codings are as follows: 0, hypothesized plesiomorphic states; 1 and 2, hypothesized derived states; ?, missing or uncertain data (19).

Taxa	Characters											
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	
<i>Camarasaurus</i>	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	0
<i>Brachiosaurus brancai</i>	11001	01000	00000	00000	00000	001?1	00000	001?0	00001	01010	01000	0
<i>Andesaurus</i>	??111	11000	1100?	?0?00	00?00	001??	?????	?????	?????	??111	?????	?
<i>Epachthosaurus</i>	??111	??010	11011	?0?01	1?011	1110?	1????	?????	??111	111?1	?101?	0
<i>Opisthocoelicaudia</i>	??112	11101	?1111	1?002	01110	10111	11011	01111	11111	11101	11011	0
<i>Alamosaurus</i>	?????	?????	?????	??101	10011	11101	11?11	101?1	1111?	?1??1	1????	?
<i>Malawisaurus</i>	11?12	1????	1100?	?0101	10011	00111	1????	?????	?????	?????	?????	1
<i>Paralititan</i>	?????	?????	?????	?0111	1101?	?????	??1??	?111?	??1?1	?????	?????	?
<i>Saltasaurus</i>	??112	11111	11001	11111	11101	11101	1?111	11111	1??11	11?11	?1111	1

REPORTS

velopment of a proximolateral process, the proximal end is sinusoidal in cranial view, as in *Saltasaurus* and *Opisthocoelicaudia* (18). A well-defined muscular depression occupies the proximal region of the cranial surface. The deltopectoral crest is extremely developed and medially deflected, extending more than 53% of the length of the element. The rectangular radial condyle is well developed distally. A shallow fossa, bounded by medial and lateral ridges, occupies most of the proximocaudal surface of the humerus. The lateral ridge develops into a tuberosity approximately 350 mm from the proximal margin, as in *Lirainosaurus* and *Saltasaurus* (16), whereas the medial ridge, unknown in titanosaurids, is most developed 560 mm from the proximal end. Elongate supracondylar ridges that extend over one-third of the length of the humerus define an extensive olecranon fossa. The distal surface of the preserved metacarpal is rectangular and flattened, suggesting phalangeal reduction or absence on this digit.

Phylogenetic analysis of titanosauriform sauropods (19) places *Paralititan* within Titanosauridae (Fig. 3 and Table 1). Characters supporting its inclusion within the clade include strongly procoelous proximal caudal centra with well-developed postspinal laminae, a proximolateral process on the humerus, and reduced manual phalanges. The position of *Paralititan* within Titanosauridae permits an estimation of its body size (Fig. 2D). The humerus is 1.69 m in length, ~14% longer than the next longest known humerus from a Cretaceous sauropod (20). The South American titanosaurid *Argentinosaurus* is regarded as the most massive terrestrial animal known and may have approached 90 metric tons (21) and 30 m in length (22). The humerus of *Argentinosaurus*

is unknown, but we estimate its length at 1.81 m (7.5% longer than that of *Paralititan*), using more complete titanosauriforms (23). There-

fore, *Paralititan* is probably not as large as *Argentinosaurus* but represents one of the heaviest terrestrial vertebrates yet discovered.

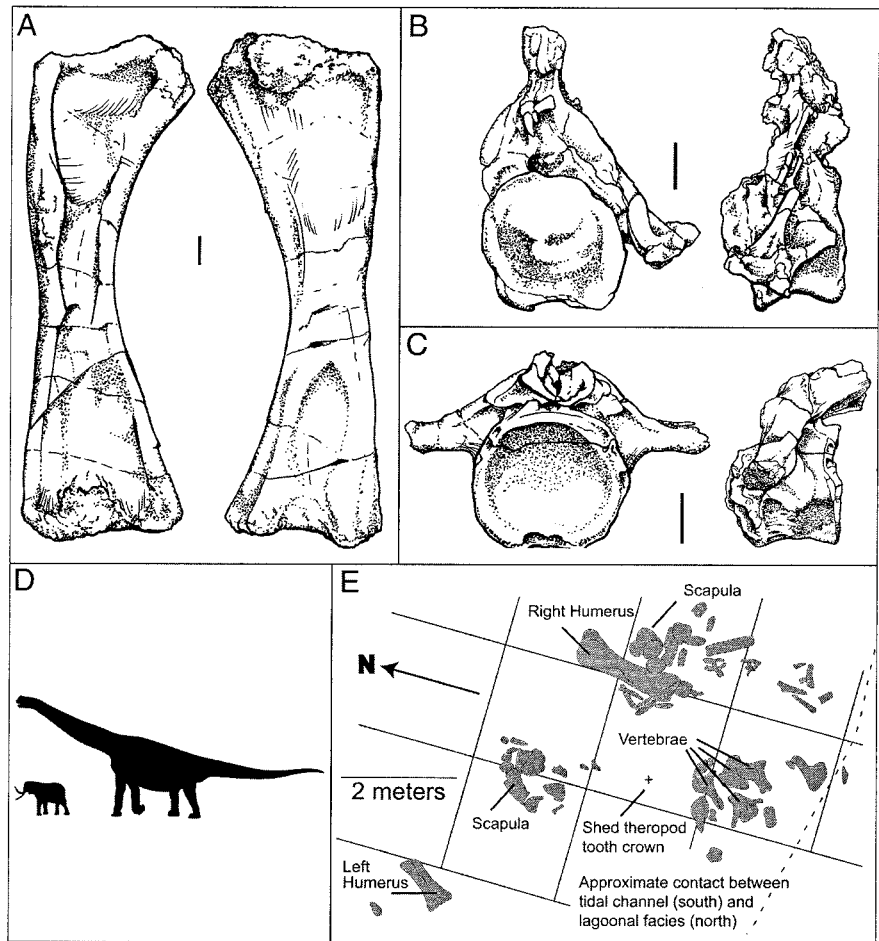


Fig. 2. Anatomy, taphonomy, and estimated size of *Paralititan*. (A) Right humerus in cranial and caudal views. (B) First caudal vertebra in distal and right lateral views. (C) Proximal caudal vertebra in proximal and right lateral view. Scale bars in (A) through (C) equal 10 cm. (D) Size comparisons between *Paralititan* and an African elephant. (E) Quarry map of BDP 2000-18.

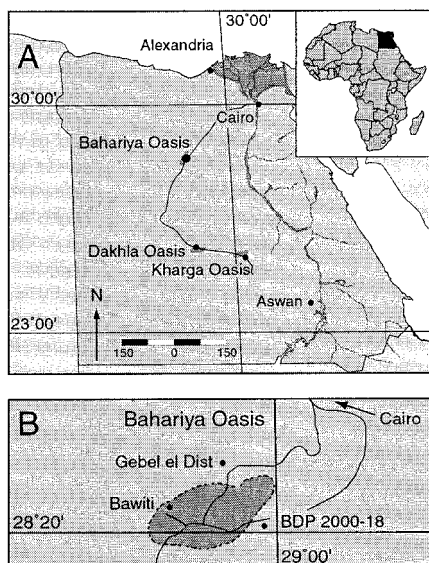


Fig. 1. (A) The Bahariya Oasis, ~300 km southwest of Cairo, Egypt. (B) Location of BDP 2000-18.

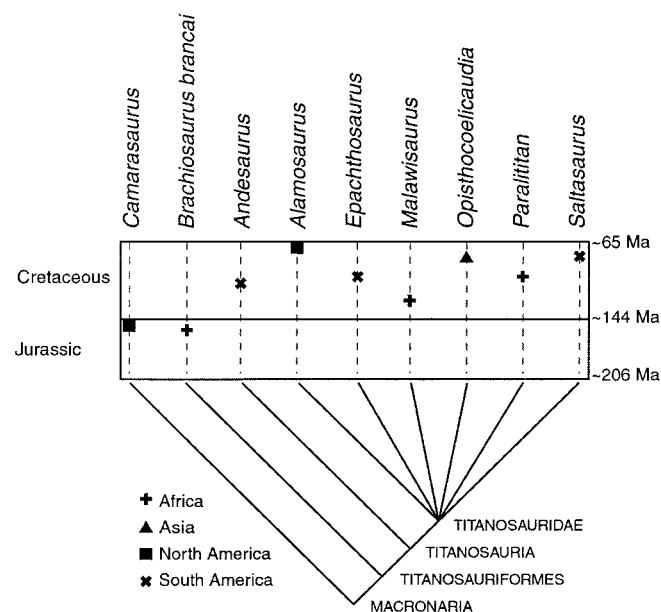


Fig. 3. Summary of phylogenetic, temporal, and geographic relationships among titanosauriform sauropods. The cladogram depicts the strict consensus of 12 most parsimonious trees (length, 72 steps; consistency index, 0.806; retention index, 0.759) resulting from a parsimony analysis of eight titanosauriforms and 56 anatomical characters (19).

REPORTS

Paralititan is preserved in low-energy paralic sediments, representing vegetated tidal flats and tidal channels. These units alternate vertically and are laterally variable. The tidal flat facies is a brown friable shale, rich in rhizoliths and plant remains, often containing leaf compressions and stems of the mangrove (24) tree fern *Weichselia reticulata* (25, 26). In some places the facies is found, conformably, above glauconitic nearshore marine sands, a stratigraphic relationship that supports a mangrove interpretation. The relationship appears to be conformable, as evidenced by a lack of ravine surfaces between occasional rhizoliths that extend from lagoonal muds into marine sands. This succession of environments is known to occur along modern low-energy coasts, where mangroves prograde out onto the active shore face (27, 28). The seaward migration of mangroves into the open marine realm requires both a low-energy littoral zone and wave-resistant salt-tolerant plants, such as *Weichselia*.

The *Paralititan* quarry spans both tidal channel and vegetated tidal flat facies (Fig. 2E). In situ plant roots, throughout the bone layer, indicate limited water depth, and fine-grained sediments suggest low current velocities. The closely associated elements could not have been transported to this location as clasts. In addition, the shallow, vegetated tidal flat would prevent a large sauropod carcass from floating to this location. Evidence therefore indicates that this individual walked to this location, over tidal flats and along tidal channels, before its death. Furthermore, the specimen shows indications of being scavenged by a carnivorous dinosaur (29). Therefore at least two species of Bahariya dinosaur traversed paralic environments.

It is interesting that this extremely productive biota, containing some of the largest known terrestrial vertebrates (30), occurs during a time with extremely low thermal gradients from pole to pole and high global sea levels (31, 32). Mid-Cretaceous ocean-atmosphere systems are of particular interest in paleoclimate research, representing extreme "hothouse" conditions for post-Pangaeian Earth history. The apparently high productivity of this Cenomanian environment may reflect a biotic response to some aspect of this condition.

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11. Other new Bahariya vertebrates include remains of chondrichthyans, osteichthyans, turtles, plesiosaurs, squamates, crocodyliforms, and dinosaurs. Theropod remains represent *Spinosaurus*, cf. *Carcharodontosaurus*, and two indeterminate forms. Sauropod remains include an indeterminate partial skeleton and a possible rebbachisaurid scapula.
12. Although the holotype of *Aegyptosaurus* (1912VIII61) was destroyed, and comparison with *Paralititan* is thus difficult, several characters distinguish them. Specimen 1912VIII61 was substantially smaller (humerus length 59% that of *Paralititan*), may have had pleurocoelous proximal caudals (33), possessed a weakly medially convex scapula with no dorsomedial prominence, had a humerus with a weak proximomedial expansion and more medially positioned deltopectoral crest restricted to the proximal third of the element, and lacked the autapomorphies of *Paralititan*. Stromer (33) tentatively referred several isolated elements to *Aegyptosaurus*, including an indeterminate vertebra (1912VIII66), two possible caudal cervicals (1912VIII67), and an isolated procoelous caudal (1912VIII65). Because two Bahariya Formation titanosaurs are now recognized, this material referred to *Aegyptosaurus* must be considered *Titanosauria incertae sedis*.
13. **Etyymology:** *Paralititan stromeri* (pa·ral'i·ti'tan strom'eri): paralos (Greek), near the sea (paralic refers to tidal environments); Titan (Greek), an offspring of Uranus and Gaia, symbolic of brute strength and large size (effectively, "tidal giant"); *stromeri*, in honor of Ernst Stromer. **Holotype:** CGM 81119 (Egyptian Geological Museum, Cairo). **Locality:** BDP 2000-18, near Gebel Fagga (28°20'10.7''N latitude, 28°59'04.7''E longitude). **Material:** Two fused caudal sacral vertebrae (probably 5 and 6), first caudal vertebra; proximal caudal vertebra; dorsal and sacral ribs; incomplete scapulae; complete right and incomplete left humeri; distal metacarpal; and several additional elements. **Diagnosis:** Very large titanosaurid characterized by proximal caudal centra wider than tall; prominent tabular process on caudoventral margin of scapula distal to the proximal expansion; and humerus with medial ridge on the proximocaudal face and rectangular radial condyle. *Paralititan* shares the following characters with other titanosaurs: lack of pleurocoels on caudal sacrals; proximal caudal vertebrae with strongly concave proximal articular surface, well-developed distal articular condyle, ventral excavation, and postspinal lamina; humerus with proximolateral process and strong supracondylar ridges; and reduction or absence of manual phalanges. **Referred material:** Stromer (33) described a very large cranial dorsal vertebra (1912VIII64). Specimen 1912VIII64 was opisthocelous, pleurocoelous, and caudally wider than tall, as in *Epachthosaurus* and *Pellegrinisaurus* (15), and may pertain to *Paralititan*.
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28. Additional evidence of low-energy environments includes fine-grained sediments, low-velocity bedforms, the absence of ravinement surfaces, in situ bivalves, and horizontal burrows. All nonfossil clasts in the Bahariya system are medium sand size or smaller.
29. A cf. *Carcharodontosaurus* tooth (crown height = 65 mm), recovered from BDP 2000-18, is larger than clasts that could have been transported to this location.
30. *Paralititan* coexisted with three *Tyrannosaurus*-sized carnivores (*Carcharodontosaurus*, *Bahariasaurus*, and *Spinosaurus*) and with other large vertebrates (such as the 3.5-m coelacanth *Mawsonia* and the 10-m crocodyliform *Stomatosuchus*).
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