
Mid-Holocene adaptation to the highlands of Ethiopia: the case of Beefa Cave, Melka Kunture, Upper Awash, Ethiopia

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Résumé

During the African Humid Period (15-5 ka BP) the Ethiopian highland was integral part of a wider settlement system, whilst, during the driest phases it could have been a *refugium* area (Hensel et al., 2021). In this framework, vegetable resources played a key-role in the diet, and especially tubers, which are rich of starches and fibers.

Beefa Cave is part of Melka Kunture archaeological site, with a well-known Lower and Middle Pleistocene record. It opens on the right bank of the upper Awash river, at 2000 m a.s.l. on the Ethiopian highland. The first fieldwork, carried on in November 2019, exposed levels of overlapping fireplaces, containing a very standardized lithic complex, composed by obsidian bladelets and geometric artefacts and a significant amount of charred seeds.

Dates obtained from charcoals placed the excavated levels in the Middle Holocene, i.e. a prehistoric phase poorly documented in the Awash basin, at the limit between the Later Stone Age and the Pastoral Neolithic. The residues analysis on a selection of lithic artefacts led to the discovery of several starch granules generally ascribable to wild tubers species and may have played a specific role in the subsistence strategy of the human groups who inhabited the area. Through the analysis of use-wear and residues from the lithic complex, macrobotanical and faunal remains, we reconstruct the specific highland adaptation of the Holocene hunter-gatherers of the Middle Awash.

Mots-Clés: Mid, Holocene, Beefa Cave, Melka Kunture, Upper Awash, Ethiopia

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