

Porc-Epic Cave, more than 90 years later – a typical MSA site in the Horn of Africa?

Abstract

Since its discovery in 1929, Porc Epic cave, located near Dire-Dawa in eastern Ethiopia, was identified as a reference site for the Middle Stone Age (MSA) in the Horn of Africa. Materials found at the site are composed of tens of thousands of lithic artefacts, a rich faunal assemblage, a large collection of ochre and ochre-processing tools, and human remains. The MSA lithic assemblage from Porc-Epic is notably famous for including a high diversity of retouched points made from different raw materials. While backed pieces were observed in the MSA lithic assemblages of Porc-Epic, most are coming from the uppermost levels and may reflect mixing with the top of the sequence that included LSA occupations. Backed pieces are therefore no longer regarded as a characteristic of the MSA assemblages from Porc-Epic. In addition, due to the large size of the assemblage, only part of the lithic material was studied. In this presentation, we first review the current state of knowledge on the site, its dating and its material. The MSA at the site, although generally considered to be Upper Pleistocene, remains poorly dated. Here, we present new results from optically stimulated luminescence analyses and discuss their implications for the understanding of the chronology of MSA occupations at Porc-Epic. We then focus on the lithic material by combining the datasets we collected, in order to have a larger sample for the lithic assemblages of the site. This data will be used to summarise the main technological characteristics and discuss potential spatial patterns in lithic technology at the site. We then use the data retrieved from Porc-Epic to discuss its place within the MSA of eastern Africa.

Keywords

Porc-Epic Cave, Middle Stone Age, Horn of Africa, lithic technology

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