

Mumba Cave

The site of Mumba cave can be considered an essential site in understanding the behavior of Middle Stone Age peoples due to the remains of five individual archaic Homo sapiens that were found there. Data and remains that were discovered at the Eyasi basin seem to provide links in understanding the emergence of archaic Homo sapiens. The remains found at the Eyasi may also provide information on the emergence of the anatomically modern Homo sapiens with evidence of modern behaviors such as numerous burials and the presence of elaborate rock art (Mehlman, 83 & 178).

Excavations at the Mumba cave shelter began in 1934 by Ludwig and Margit Kohl-Larsen, they mainly excavated the middle two sites and a Japanese anthropologist excavated other sites and layers including Mumba. The Mumba shelter was heavily researched by the Kohl-Larsens for two years, from 1934 to 1936, during their excavations many fossil hominid remains were found at the Eyasi lakeshore (Mehlman 80). The techniques utilized by Margit Kohl-Larsen during her excavations at the Mumba shelter were performed with an adamant attempt to be accurate and precise in her findings, even though she was not a qualified archaeologist. This technique and concern for detail was rarely found in excavations in Africa during the 1930's (Mehlman 80).

The site of Mumba cave is located on the present day border of Tanzania and Zambia. Mumba is a cave or rock shelter that is located on the shore of Lake Eyasi, near grasslands and highlands. Lake Eyasi partially fills a graben, an elongated depression in the earth. A downward faulting in part of the earth's crust causes the formation of a graben. To the West and Northwest of Mumba lies the Serengeti Plains and to the North Mumba is bordered by the Crater Highlands. To the East of Lake Eyasi tower the Mbulu highlands. The Northeastern side of the lake is known as the Mang'ola Chini and is a very low swampy area, which the Mbari River runs through (Mehlman 81) This location made this a popular site for exploiting nearby game animals. When the site was occupied, the environment was similar to the current ecological zone of this area.

Several relative and chronometric techniques have been utilized to determine the age of the beds at Mumba. Snail shells that have been collected in Bed 4, as well as Bed 5 showed inconsistent dates. The

samples from Bed 4 were dated at 2.7 to 2.8 million and the samples taken from Bed 5 were estimated at 31, 070 + 500 B.P. It has been argued that the dates given for the shells found in Bed 4 and 5 of the Lake Eyasi shore can not be used to approximate the date of the beach itself. It has been suggested that the remains may have come from an earlier environment not contemporary with the beach itself, in turn giving the lake shore a date slightly younger than that of the shell samples (Mehlman 89). Thus far the most accurate date is 31,070 + 500 B.P. this age range is also consistent with the stone assemblages found at the site ranging from Middle Stone Age to Late Stone Age kits. Testing on other samples such as bone, charcoal and ostrich eggshell have also been conducted but the results are forthcoming. The dates given to these deposits will either be consistent or opposing to the dates previously given to the samples that have been tested. Stratigraphic positions of the deposits at Mumba have also been used to suggest dating. Using these sequences it has been suggested that snails may have been a food that was utilized before 12,000 years ago.

The artifacts found at the Mumba Cave site include various lithic and faunal assemblages. Beds I-III are classified as LSA layers, so our focus will mainly center on Beds V-VI which are generally recognized as early through late MSA layers due to the lithic industries represented in them. (Mehlman, 1979) Among the tools found in Bed V are crescents/backed knives, Levallois flakes and cores, and thumbnail scrapers which, in South Africa are well represented and termed Howiesons poort industry. Indeed it is a rarity to find this industry so far up in East Africa. (Mehlman, 1991) Also in Bed V assemblages from Magosian, Stillbay, and Proto-Stillbay industries are represented. In Bed VI, there are Upper Levalloisian and Proto-Stillbay artifacts.

The only human remains occurring in Bed VI are three human molars. These teeth are small in size and are considered morphologically modern. While it seems certain that these molars appear in a MSA context, Gnter Bruer believes them to represent the presence of anatomically modern Homo sapiens. (Mehlman, 1991)

The faunal assemblage in Bed V is vast. Species represented by at least six bones include "zebra, warthog, greater kudu, buffalo, tortoise, and *Damiliscus njarasensis*. Other species, identified from five or fewer remains, include chimpanzee, rabbit, porcupine, leopard, serval, aardvark,

Grevy's zebra, black rhino, white rhino, bush pig, hippo, giraffe, bushbuck, eland, bush duiker, reedbuck, waterbuck, roan antelope, oryx, addax, steinbuck, dik-dik, impala, Thompson's and Grant's gazelles, also guinea fowl and catfish." (Mehlman, 1979) Comparatively, the assemblage in Bed VI is small. The creatures found here are only represented by five or less bones: "zebra, hippo, buffalo, waterbuck, oryx, *Damiliscus njarasensis* and crocodile." (Mehlman, 1979) Shell middens also fill the cave above and below Bed IV. This is because Bed IV represents a rise in Lake Eyasi that filled the shelter with water.

Mehlman suggests that Mumba Cave is situated in an excellent position for exploitation of the animals of the open grassland and old lake terraces as well as animals that prefer the moister environment of the stream courses and swamp edges. (Mehlman, 1979).

Though there is overwhelming evidence for burials and ochre paintings in the LSA beds of Mumba Cave, there is little cultural evidence in the MSA areas. In Bed V there are no fireplaces found and a lone broken palette with red color stained on it. There is also a grinder with traces of color. In Bed VI color is scarce and, again, no fireplaces.

This site was occupied repeatedly by different peoples. This is shown throughout the stratigraphic sequence. Artifacts are found in Beds VI-I and increase in amount and variation as the dates become younger. As mentioned previously, there is evidence that Mumba Cave was inhabited by MSA people, then later by LSA peoples who left many shards of culture behind them. Evidence from Bed IV shows that the cave may have been under water at some point, but after that it was inhabited again. This fact shows that the location of this cave next to the lake and nearby grasslands was prime one for the exploitation of animals and shelter from dangerous predators.