





Studies on the Early Paleolithic site of Melka Kunture, Ethiopia

Edited by Jean Chavaillon and Marcello Piperno

*Cover:* The Awash at Melka Kunture. Modified from an Ethiopian stamp drawn in 1977 by J. Dubois.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs

University of Rome “La Sapienza”

Department of Historical, Archaeological and Anthropological Science of Antiquity

Italian Institute of Prehistory and Protohistory

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ISTITUTO ITALIANO DI PREISTORIA E PROTOSTORIA

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## Foreward

I am indeed privileged to give some remarks about the prehistoric site of Melka Kunture in the Oromia State.

This magnificent geological, paleontological and prehistoric site is indeed the result of a worldwide important archaeological project carried out by the relentless academic and research work of eminent French and Italian scientists over the last thirty-five years.

This site for sure has a special significance in the cultural and economic development of Oromia. Its location by the river bank of the great Awash at its upper reach and in the hearth of Oromia State, only at about 50 km from the city of Addis Ababa, makes it extremely attractive for tourist destinations.

The regional government of Oromia will play active role in developing, protecting and promoting this site as one of the World's treasures.

Finally I would like to congratulate Professors Jean Chavaillon and Marcello Piperno and their associated fellow researchers for their hard work in exploring the site and writing this magnificent book.

Juneydi Saddo  
*President Oromia Regional State*  
*of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*

## Preface

It is a source of special satisfaction for us to acknowledge that, six years from the beginning of the work of the Italian Archaeological Mission at Melka Kunture directed by one of us, its first important objective has been achieved, that is the publication of a monograph including contributions by many Italian, French, English and Israeli scholars involved in ancient and new researches and projects at Melka Kunture and Balchit derived from the activities of the French Archaeological Mission directed by Jean Chavaillon from 1965 to 1982 and then from 1994 to 1995.

As indicated by the title, this volume is a collection of essays on various subjects, including: a history of researches at Melka Kunture; a synthetic introduction to the Oldowan and Acheulian sites either excavated or partially explored through limited soundings; a re-examination of its stratigraphic sequence; a study of the provenance of the obsidian utilized at this Paleolithic site; a detailed description of the lithic assemblages of the main Oldowan sites of Karre I, Gombore I and Garba IV; a re-examination of the faunal remains from Gombore I and Garba IV; the results of a detailed spatial analysis study of the Oldowan sites of Gombore I and Garba IV conducted over several years by means of an intrasite GIS; an archaeozoological study of the faunal remains of Garba IV D; and two studies of a so far unpublished jaw of a *Homo erectus* child found in 1982 at Garba IV E, preceded by an introduction on the remains of other hominids published in previous years.

We are aware that many things have changed since the beginning of our study of the lithic assemblages from Melka Kunture, especially in technical and typological approaches to the lithic industries of the Plio-Pleistocene. What we could call the “classical” approach to these assemblages was supplemented, quite a long time ago, by a study of operative sequences, on the one hand, and the examination of traces of wear and usage on the tools themselves, on the other. These two approaches have opened unexpected perspectives on the behavioral patterns of early hominids, and will also be applied to the materials of Melka Kunture in a near future.

Our second objective, which we set ourselves almost spontaneously as early as the first year of the Italian Archaeological Mission – but was inspired by an idea already put forward by Jean Chavaillon ever since the 1970s – was to turn Melka Kunture into an Open Air Museum where part of the archaeological areas and natural attractions could be opened to visitors.

Over the last few years, our projects have benefited from the increasing support of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, the Authority for Research and Conservation of the Cultural Heritage, and the Oromia Culture and Tourism Commission. The results have been extraordinary. Significant contributions have included the replanting of woods in the protected area of Melka Kunture, the extension of the same area, decreed in 2003, and the Oromia Culture and Tourism Commission’s decision to allocate substantial funds for the building of a new museum at Melka Kunture with the necessary infrastructures (an asphalted road, running water, and electricity).

The English monograph on the earliest sites of Melka Kunture has filled a gap which, in spite of the many articles published by the members of the French Archaeological Mission over the years, had been limiting the scientific community’s understanding of the significance of Melka Kunture. Although it is usually cited as a representative site of the Acheulian, there are actually no other archaeological areas in Eastern Africa, with the exception of Olduvai Gorge, covering such a long time span and offering such a diversity and wealth of sites. Today, Melka Kunture, along with the extraordinary evidence from the nearby site of Balchit, is the most important testimony in the Rift of archaeological events between 1.7 Ma and the present day.

October, 2004

Jean Chavaillon and Marcello Piperno

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