

A Functional Study of MSA Points: Evidence from Mumba Rock-shelter, Tanzania

Pastory Magayane Bushozi¹

Abstract

For many decades the function of stone points, abundant in the Middle Stone Age (MSA) assemblages across sub-Saharan Africa, has been a topic of debate. Recent functional studies and interpretations show that MSA points may have been used for hunting purposes. However, it is not known exactly whether these points were used as inserts for spears or arrows. In this study, about 104 points from MSA context have been studied using metric measurements, Tip Cross Section Area (TCSA) value, and use wear traces. The sample came from Level VI-B, VI-A and V of Mumba rock-shelter, northern Tanzania. Initial use-wear and TCSA results indicate that the majority of these could have been used as tip for hunting weapons, but they were not single function implements. Sometimes they performed non-weaponry functions such as they were deployed in butchering, slicing or wood processing. A Kolmogorov-Smirnon (KS) test shows continuity in point production and use over time regardless of variation in age.

Introduction

The Middle Stone Age (MSA) of sub-Saharan Africa is regarded by many Africanist archaeologists as the period in which complex lithic technology, more efficient methods of food acquisition, and symbolic cultural patterns evolved for the first time (McBreath and Brooks, 2000; Shea and Sisk, 2010). One of the most important sites in East Africa that contains archaeological records of the MSA, Late Stone Age (LSA) and Pastoral Neolithic (PN) cultures is Mumba rock-shelter (Mehlman, 1989). At Mumba, uranium series dates the MSA deposits in levels VI-B to $131,710 \pm 6475$ BP, and in Level VI-A to about $109,486 \pm 3915$ BP (Galganic et al., 2012; Mehlman, 1989). The lithic assemblage of Level V belongs to an MSA-LSA transition known as the Mumba Industry (Mehlman 1989). This level has been dated by uranium series and OSL dating techniques to between 58,000 and 35,000 BP (Gliganic et al. 2012; Prendergast et al. 2007).

¹ University of Dar es Salaam,
College of Arts and Social Sciences
Department of History and Archaeology
Email: pbushozi@gmail.com; pbushozi@udsm.ac.tz.