

ABSTRACT

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Title: An Analysis Of Middle Stone Age Blades From The Yas-1
Archaeological Site, Gona, Afar, Ethiopia
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Year: 2021

The Ya'alu South 1 (YAS-1) Middle Stone Age site at Gona, Ethiopia, is a rare open-air archaeological site with artifacts and well-preserved associated fauna dating to ~86,000-71,000 years ago (86-71 ka). The site is located relatively close to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, a possible exit point for modern humans leaving Africa, and dates to a time just preceding the most significant dispersal of *Homo sapiens* out of the African continent, according to recent genetic studies. The YAS-1 site is also associated with an anatomically modern *H. sapiens* cranium and has been environmentally reconstructed, exhibiting traits of a wetland river valley.

Given the site's importance in potentially helping to explain this major dispersal event, each aspect of the archaeology needs to be examined closely so as to help in understanding possible cultural and/or technological breakthroughs. The most abundant artifacts at the site are the stone tools, consisting of prepared cores, points, blades, and byproducts of their manufacture. The blades are especially interesting, since they have traditionally been seen as markers of modern human behavior. This thesis provides the first analysis of the YAS-1 blade assemblage, which has important implications for tracing behavioral and cognitive modernity, cultural traditions and human migrations.