

# The late Early Pleistocene site of Mulhuli-Amo (Danakil Eritrea): new paleoanthropological findings

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Field work carried out in the northern part of the Eritrean Danakil depression led to the discovery of two 4.7 km apart, but stratigraphically correlated and penecontemporaneous (c. 1 Ma old) paleoanthropological sites of the late Early Pleistocene Aalat sedimentary succession at Uadi Aalad (UA) and Mulhuli-Amo (MA), near the village of Buia. Together with postcranial and dental remains, the fluvio-deltaic deposit unit of the UA *Homo* site has produced a virtually complete adult cranium (UA 31) displaying a blend of *erectus/ergaster*-like and derived morpho-architectural features. Since 2010, systematic research extended to the fossiliferous area of Mulhuli-Amo.

The MA fluvio-lacustrine sedimentary succession consists of deltaic sand grading overlain by pedogenized muddy deposits with sandy fluvial channels capped by fluvial channelized gravelly sand with subordinate mud. Bones and stone tools occur at the base of the channelized gravelly sand. In 2015, the excavation of an area of 72 m<sup>2</sup> and of a test trench (1\*1.5 m) in partially eroded sand layers, in combination with selective surface collection, allowed the identification of 57 Acheulean lithic artifacts (including flakes, cores and bifaces on quartz, rhyolite and sedimentary rocks) associated with faunal remains (245 specimens were collected representing mammals, reptiles, birds and fish). Overall, the site has consequently brought to the identification of 29 human remains, including an isolated molar and 28 cranial fragments sampling at least three individuals: an immature, a sub-adult and an adult. Among the cranial remains, fragments of a mandible, frontal, sphenoid, parietal, temporal and occipital bones are represented. Seven fragments articulate into a nearly complete left parietal (MA 88A-G) and two additional joining remains form a large portion of a right parietal (MA 64A-B), likely from the same individual. A comparative morphological analysis of the new remains from Mulhuli-Amo with the Early-Middle Pleistocene African record, notably the UA 31 cranium, is currently ongoing.