ZOOARCHAEOLOGICAL AND TAPHONOMIC PERSPECTIVES ON HOMINID AND CARNIVORE INTERACTIONS AT OLDUVAI GORGE, TANZANIA

Charles Peter Egeland

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Doctoral Committee

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Travis R. Pickering, Ph.D.

_____
Nicholas Toth, Ph.D.

_____
Kathy Schick, Ph.D.

_____
Kevin Hunt, Ph.D.

_____
Claudia Johnson, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Charles Peter Egeland

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This dissertation examines variability in the foraging strategies of hominids and large carnivores during Bed I and II times (1.9−1.2 million years ago) at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania. Nine levels from six sites are analyzed and three major issues addressed: (1) the relative roles of hominids and large carnivores in the formation of each faunal assemblage; (2) the identity of the carnivore(s) responsible for carcass accumulation and modification; and (3) the intensity of on-site competition for carcass resources. Competition is utilized as a unifying concept because of its ecological importance and taphonomic visibility. Other than BK in Bed II, little or no evidence for hominid carcass processing is present in the Olduvai faunas examined here. In Bed I, DK likely represents a predation/death arena that was sporadically utilized by hominids for carcass parts while FLKNN 2 and FLKN 5 reflect repeated carcass transport by felids to eating areas. Poor preservation at the Bed II sites of FC West and TK hinders a definitive link to either hominid or large carnivore behavior. A significant portion of the BK assemblage is the result of carcass part transport and processing by hominids. A strong felid taphonomic signature exists in the Bed I faunas, while in the Bed II assemblages hyena involvement with carcasses is much more pronounced. All of the Bed I sites examined here formed in relatively low competition settings. Concomitant with a general shift in site location during Bed II times, FC West, TK and BK all occur in higher competition environments. The co-occurrence of stone tools with fauna that lack butchery damage, especially at the Bed I sites, has important implications for hominid site use. A combination of the faunal and lithic data suggests that hominids were using these sites for activities unrelated to carcass processing. These finding highlight variability in hominid site use at Olduvai Gorge and beyond.