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New Middle Pleistocene Elephant Butchering Site from Greece

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'Marathousa 1' is a Lower Paleolithic open-air site in the lignite mines of Megalopolis, Greece. It was discovered in 2013 and subsequently excavated in 2014 and 2015 by a joint team from the Ephoreia of Paleoanthropology and Speleology, Ministry of Culture, and the Paleoanthropology section, University of Tübingen (Panagopoulou et al. 2015). Lithic artifacts were found in stratigraphic association with elephant and other faunal remains (carnivores, bovids, cervids, micromammals, turtles, birds). The find-bearing layers occur between two lignite seams and are composed of silty sands. The site's context likely represents a low-energy depositional environment, such as a shallow-water swamp close to the shore of a lake. Fast burial in a very fine-grained matrix ensured extraordinary preservation conditions for the faunal and lithic material, but also for paleobotanical micro- and macro-remains. An elephant cranium and several postcranial elements were found in close anatomical association and are attributed to a single individual of the species *Elephas (Palaeoloxodon) antiquus*. Cut-marks and percussion marks on bones indicate hominin exploitation of the elephant carcass and other animals. The lithic assemblage is composed of small-sized flakes and flake fragments, cores, and retouched tools. Technological characteristics point to a simple operational sequence aiming at the production of flake blanks and the preliminary analysis suggests an *in situ* knapping episode. 'Marathousa 1' is the first Middle Pleistocene archaeological site ever to be excavated in mainland Greece and the first Greek open-air Lower Paleolithic site with both lithic and faunal remains to be examined by systematic excavation. A first dating analysis by ESR places it in middle Middle Pleistocene, making it the oldest currently known dated archaeological site in Greece.

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References Cited

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