

1 **Level U3.1, a new archaeological level discovered at BK (Upper Bed II, Olduvai Gorge) with**  
2 **evidence of megafaunal exploitation**

3  
4 José Yravedra<sup>a, b\*</sup>, David M. Martín-Perea<sup>b, c, d</sup>, David Uribebarrea<sup>b, d</sup>, Fernando Díez-Martín<sup>e</sup>, M.  
5 Soledad Domingo<sup>d, f</sup>, Mari Carmen Arriaza<sup>b, g, h</sup>, Elia Organista<sup>b</sup>, Julia Aramendi<sup>a, b</sup>, Rebeca Barba<sup>b</sup>  
6 Enrique Baquedano<sup>b, i</sup>, Manuel Domínguez-Rodrigo<sup>a, b, j</sup>

7  
8 a. Prehistory Department, Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain

9 b. Institute of Evolution in Africa (IDEA), Covarrubias 36, 28010 Madrid, Spain

10 c. Paleobiology Department, National Natural Sciences Museum – CSIC, Madrid, Spain

11 d. Geodynamics, Stratigraphy and Paleontology Department, Complutense University of Madrid,  
12 Madrid, Spain

13 e. Prehistory Department, Valladolid University, Valladolid, Spain

14 f. Department of Evolutionary Ecology, Doñana Biological Station – CSIC, Seville, Spain

15 g. School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies, University of the Witwatersrand,  
16 Private Bag 3, 2050 South Africa.

17 h. Centre of Excellence in Palaeosciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South 10  
18 Africa.

19 i. Regional Archaeological Museum, Alcalá de Henares, Spain

20 j. Real Colegio Complutense at Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

21

22

23

24

25

26 \*corresponding author: joyravedra@hotmail.com

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36 **Abstract:**

37

38 Excavations at Bell Korongo (BK) have yielded important evidence to infer different behaviours of  
39 early hominins in several archaeological levels since 1935. The present study shows the results for a  
40 new geological and archaeological level discovered at BK (Level U3.1). The main goal is to describe  
41 geologically this newly discovered level, alongside a preliminary taphonomical analysis of the  
42 archaeological remains embedded in it in order to better understand assemblage formation processes.  
43 This new level was deposited at the base of LA Unit 3, in decantation facies over a point-bar. Although  
44 these facies, found throughout the site furnish ideal conditions for preservation, this is the first time  
45 that any archaeological or paleontological remains have been found embedded in them. The  
46 preliminary taphonomic study suggests the assemblage is the result of a short time span involving  
47 processes accumulating remains from different thanatocoenoses created over a time span of less than  
48 one year, also leading to believe the sedimentation process was triggered by flooding of the channel  
49 during the annual heavy rains in the wet season. Furthermore, a considerable percentage of bones,  
50 including megafaunal remains, appear cutmarked and with percussion marks. Level U3.1 is the  
51 youngest level at BK, and adds to the evidence of the megafaunal exploitation behaviour of early  
52 Pleistocene hominins, which has already been extensively reported in BK Levels 4 and 5 and other  
53 African Lower Pleistocene sites.

54

55

56 **Key words:** Taphonomy, Lower Pleistocene, Homo erectus, Cut marks, Percussion marks, Olduvai  
57 Gorge

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

## 71 **1. Introduction**

72 The Bell Korongo (BK) site was discovered by L. Leakey in 1935, and was intensely  
73 excavated from 1952 to 1958, uncovering remains of a minimum of 24 individuals of *Pelorovis*  
74 *olduwayensis* (Leakey, 1954). Initially, L. Leakey interpreted the site as a megafaunal mass killing  
75 site, whereas later in the sixties M. Leakey classified the site as a swamp to which most of these  
76 animals were driven, dispatched and consumed by hominins (Leakey, 1971). However, modern  
77 taphonomical analyses carried out by Monahan (1996), Egeland and Domínguez-Rodrigo (2008) and  
78 Domínguez-Rodrigo et al (2009a) have shown that the assemblages have a diachronic history in  
79 which hominin and non-hominin agencies intervened (frequently independently) and affected the  
80 archaeofaunal concentration.

81 Excavations carried out by TOPPP (The Olduvai Palaeoanthropology and Paleoecology  
82 Project) between 2006 and 2012, following the archaeological levels and stratigraphic sequence  
83 described by M. Leakey revealed that Levels 1, 2 and 3 were characterized by anthropic activity on  
84 medium and small sized animals (size 1-3 according to Bunn, 1982) and on large sized animals (sizes  
85 4-5 according to Bunn, 1982) in the lower Levels 4 and 5 (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2009a, 2014a;  
86 Organista et al., 2015). Taphonomic analyses revealed primary early human access to small, and  
87 medium carcasses and very likely, an early access to large carcasses also (Monahan, 1996; Egeland  
88 and Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2008; Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2009a, 2014a; Organista et al., 2015).

89 Very large mammal such as hippopotamids, giraffids and large bovid exploitation as seen at  
90 BK is common in the Lower Pleistocene at Olduvai Gorge. Several sites throughout the gorge show  
91 this kind of behaviour: hippopotamus bones at Sam Howard Korongo (SHK; Domínguez-Rodrigo et  
92 al., 2014b) and, large bovid bones in the lower Bed II site of Frida Leakey Korongo West (FLKW;  
93 Díez-Martín et al., 2015). Furthermore, several sites from other African archaeological localities also  
94 present anthropogenic traces on large mammal bones. For instance, El Kherda in Algeria (Sanhouni  
95 et al., 2013), Koobi Fora in Kenya (Bunn, 1994) and Buia in Eritrea (Fiore et al., 2004) revealed  
96 hippopotamus carcass remains bearing cut marks, and at Peninj (Tanzania), cutmarks are found also  
97 on giraffid remains (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2002). Alongside these sites, there are others with  
98 association of megafaunal remains and lithic industry, although cutmarks are not visible on the bones.  
99 Such is the case of Frida Leakey Korongo North 6 (FLKN6) in uppermost Bed I, Olduvai Gorge,  
100 where elephant bone remains show no evidence of anthropic activity (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al.,  
101 2007) or Thiongo Korongo (TK) in Bed II-III, Olduvai Gorge (Yravedra et al., 2015).

102 During the 2016 field season, excavations at BK were resumed. Although the original aim of  
103 these excavations was to proceed with the study of the lower levels described by Organista et al.  
104 (2015), a new level was discovered before reaching them. This fortuitous find motivated the present  
105 study, which has as its main aim to describe geologically and archaeologically this newly discovered

106 level. Furthermore, a preliminary taphonomical analysis of the remains embedded in this level has  
107 been conducted in order to better understand the formation of this archaeological assemblage.  
108 Although results presented in this work are undoubtedly preliminary, an extensive excavation of the  
109 encountered level is logistically unviable at the moment. Since further excavations of this level will  
110 not be carried out in the near future, a report of this new geological and archaeological level with  
111 evidence of megafaunal exploitation was deemed necessary.

112

## 113 **2. Geologic setting**

114 Olduvai Gorge is located on the western margin of the southern bifurcation of the Gregory  
115 Rift, the eastern branch of the East African Rift in northern Tanzania (Hay, 1976; Figure 1). The site  
116 is situated on the South wall of the Side Gorge, 3 km upstream from its junction with the Main Gorge  
117 (Figure 1). The Side Gorge is only 20 m deep in the BK area and therefore only the uppermost part  
118 of Bed II, small sections of Bed III and Ndutu are naturally exposed (Hay, 1976). The present study  
119 focuses on the westernmost section of the site, in Trench 14.

120

121

### 121 **Figure 1.**

122

123 Stratigraphically, BK is situated directly above Tuff IID (Hay, 1976), which was recently dated  
124 at 1.338 +/- 0.024 Ma (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2013). The site is placed in a large meandering  
125 river, where most of the archaeological levels are found in the point-bar and the thalweg (Uribelarrea  
126 and Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2017). The channel deposit consists of three sedimentary Lateral Accretion  
127 (LA) units of low-energy fluvial deposits (LAU1-3) overlain by a channel macroform (CHU4) filling  
128 the channel with very fine overbank sediments (Figure 2, Uribelarrea and Domínguez-Rodrigo,  
129 2017). The two lowermost LA units (LA Units 1 and 2) contained the only archaeological levels  
130 known before this study: Levels 3a, 3b, 4a and 4b (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2014a) along with  
131 Levels 4c and 5 (Organista et al., 2015; Organista et al., 2017) are found in LA Unit 1, whereas Levels  
132 1 and 2 (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2009a) in LA Unit 2. These five archaeological levels are found  
133 in fluvial deposits mainly composed of clay, silt and sand (ranging from very fine to very coarse  
134 sand). The archaeological levels vary in thickness, from 15 cm to 1 m with different concentration  
135 patterns (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2009a; Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2014a; Organista et al., 2015;  
136 Organista et al., 2017).

137

138

### 138 **Figure 2.**

## 139 **3. Materials and methods:**

140

141 *3.1 Geology*

142 Stratigraphical levels and LA unit limits in Trench 14 were measured and georeferenced with  
143 sub-centimetre precision using a laser total station (TOPCON) and correlated to previous levels and  
144 their uncovered boundaries as measured and described by Uribe Larrea and Domínguez-Rodrigo  
145 (2017) throughout the rest of the site. Macro and microscale stratigraphical and sedimentological  
146 features of the profile were logged in detail and photographed.

147

148 *3.2 Zooarchaeology and taphonomy*

149 Additionally, a preliminary taphonomical and zooarchaeological analysis has been carried out  
150 over the 103 fossil remains found in the new level described. Taxonomic identifications were based  
151 mainly on teeth and compared with reference faunal material. In cases where such determination was  
152 not possible, specimens were classified considering animal weight/size classes following Bunn  
153 (1982), where sizes 1-2 are considered “small-sized” (size 1 animals weighing <50 kg, such as  
154 Thompson's gazelles and size 2 animals weighing 50-125 kg, like impalas), size 3a and 3b as  
155 “medium sized” (size 3a animals weighing 125-250 kg, like topis and size 3b animals weighing 250-  
156 500 kg, like zebras), and “large” species include size 4 (>500-1000 kg, like elands or buffaloes), size  
157 5 (1000-4000 kg, like rhinoceros) and size 6 (>4000 kg, like elephants).

158 Faunal remains were quantified by Number of Identified Specimens (NISP), Minimum  
159 Number of Individuals (MNI) and Minimum Number of Elements (MNE). NISP determination  
160 follows the protocol described in Yravedra and Domínguez-Rodrigo (2009). MNI estimates  
161 considered element side and ontogenetic age (Brain, 1969). For skeletal profiles, elements were  
162 organized into four anatomical regions: cranial (i.e., horn, cranium, mandible, and teeth), axial  
163 (vertebrae, ribs, pelvis, and scapula, *sensu* Yravedra and Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2009); upper  
164 appendicular limbs (humerus, radius, ulna, femur, patella, and tibia), and lower appendicular limbs  
165 (metapodial, carpals, tarsals, phalanges and sesamoids). Long limb bones were further divided into  
166 upper (humerus and femur), intermediate (radius and tibia), and lower (metapodial) bones  
167 (Domínguez-Rodrigo, 1997). We are aware that pelvis and scapulae have traditionally been classified  
168 separately from axials but, given their overall similarity in bone texture and taphonomic properties to  
169 traditional axial bones, we decided to classify them together with vertebrae and ribs, since all respond  
170 exactly the same to post-depositional weathering and carnivore ravaging processes (see Yravedra and  
171 Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2009 for explanation).

172 It is now well-known that MNE estimates of long limb bone MNE at Olduvai and elsewhere  
173 often differ substantially depending on whether epiphyses or shafts were used for element  
174 identification (Pickering et al., 2003; Cleghorn and Marean, 2004; Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2007).  
175 For this reason, for MNE estimates we have applied the bone section divisions proposed by Patou-

176 Mathis (1984, 1985), Münzel (1988), and Delpech and Villa (1993) as described in detail by Yravedra  
177 and Domínguez-Rodrigo (2009). In this system, shafts are divided into equal-sized sectors, regardless  
178 of the area of muscular insertion. These sectors (upper shaft, mid-shaft, lower shaft) can be easily  
179 differentiated and oriented (cranial, caudal, lateral, medial). Yravedra and Domínguez-Rodrigo  
180 (2009) describe the criteria used in the division of each shaft sector, taking into account the orientation  
181 of each specimen. Long limb element identification considers Barba and Domínguez-Rodrigo's  
182 (2005) division by shaft thickness, section shape, and medullary surface properties. Following  
183 element and shaft sector identification, MNE is quantified by comparing all the specimens of the  
184 same element and size group by element size, side, ontogenetic age, and biometrics (Lyman, 1994).

185 Bone surface modifications such as cut, percussion, and tooth marks were systematically  
186 examined with a 10X-20X hand lens following Blumenschine (1988, 1995). The diagnostic criteria  
187 defined by Bunn (1982), Potts and Shipman (1981), and Domínguez-Rodrigo et al. (2009b) guided  
188 the identification of cut marks. Trampling and cut marks were distinguished according to Olsen and  
189 Shipman (1988) and Domínguez-Rodrigo *et al.* (2009b). Tooth marks were recorded following  
190 Binford (1981) and Blumenschine (1988, 1995). Finally, the identification of percussion marks was  
191 based on Blumenschine and Selvaggio (1988) and Blumenschine (1995).

192 For comparative purposes, surface modification frequencies (based on NISP) were calculated  
193 separately for epiphyses and shafts (Blumenschine, 1988, 1995) and quantified by element type and  
194 bone section (Domínguez-Rodrigo, 1997) as well. The presence of tooth, percussion, and cut marks  
195 was considered for the whole assemblage, whereas estimated percentages included only well-  
196 preserved bone surfaces.

197 Weathering was estimated according to Behrensmeyer (1978), measured on a scale from Stage  
198 0 (not weathered, exposed for less than one year before burial) to Stage 5 (extremely weathered,  
199 exposed for 6 -15 years before burial). The impact of water activity was estimated with the presence  
200 of abrasion, polishing, and carbonates coatings. Abrasion is indicative of the erosion caused to the  
201 remains by means of friction with sedimentary particles. Stages proposed by Alcalá (1994) were used  
202 to analyse abrasion: intact bone (Stage 1), rounded bone (Stage 2) and polished and smoothed bone  
203 (Stage 3).

204 For breakage analysis, fractures on long bones are considered according to Villa and Mahieu  
205 (1991) and Lyman (1994) criteria. Perpendicular and smooth (dry) fractures often occur in  
206 recrystallized or permineralized bones and are produced by diagenetic processes, whereas spiral,  
207 irregular and saw-toothed (green) fractures occur in fresh, collagen-rich bones, usually produced by  
208 carnivoran or anthropic activity and trampling (Lyman, 1994).

209 The analysis of bone fragmentation was carried out according to three variables: 1) the size of  
210 bones samples, 2) the preserved shaft circumference of long bones and 3) the green or dry fracture

211 pattern.

212 Bone specimens were divided into several categories according to their length: <30 mm, 31-  
213 40 mm, 41-50 mm, 51-60 mm, 61-70 mm, 71-80 mm, 81-90 mm, 91-100 mm and >101 mm.  
214 According to Bunn (1982) we use the three categories for shaft circumference where (1) stands for  
215 shaft circumference <50%, (2) covers the >50% range and (3) the shaft circumference is 100>75%.

216

## 217 **4. Results:**

218

### 219 *4.1. Geology*

220 Level U3.1 is a 40-60 cm tuffaceous silt level found overlying a 3-4 cm white and heavily  
221 cemented carbonate hard pan (Figure 3). This is carbonate level adapts to a chute channel erosive  
222 surface scarred into a 10-40 cm clayey silt layer, part of the LA Unit 2 as described by Uribelarrea  
223 and Domínguez-Rodrigo (2017).

224 The uppermost surface of the LA Unit 2 is undulated, especially towards the thalweg  
225 (westwards), where swales and irregular depressions are found, corresponding to small chute  
226 channels. The same hard pan can be found throughout the site and is used as a marker unit separating  
227 LA Units 2 and 3 (Uribelarrea and Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2017). Archaeological and palaeontological  
228 remains are found embedded at the base of the tuffaceous silt, resting on top of the carbonate layer  
229 and therefore at the base of LA Unit 3.

230

231

### **Figure 3.**

232

### 233 *4.2. Taxonomical and skeletal profiles*

234 BK level U3.1 shows 5 MNI of *Hippopotamus* sp., *Equus oldowayensis*, *Alcelaphini* size 3a and Size  
235 3b and *Antilophini* size 2 (Table 1). Furthermore, skeletal remains of a size 4 taxon have been found,  
236 but have not been taxonomically classified. All individuals found are adults. Unidentified size 3b taxa  
237 dominate de assemblage (19.4%), followed by *Equus oldowayensis* (12.6%, Table 1). These species  
238 have been previously identified in other archaeological levels at BK (Monahan, 1996; Domínguez-  
239 Rodrigo et al 2007, 2009a, 2014a; Egeland & Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2008; Organista et al, 2015,  
240 2017).

241

242

### **Table 1**

243

244 Table 2 shows the skeletal element proportions represented in Level U3.1. A total of 40.78% of the  
245 remains were anatomically unidentifiable. Ribs (13.59%) and teeth (9.71%) constitute the most

246 abundant skeletal elements of the assemblage. All skeletal remains were disarticulated and isolated,  
247 with no evidence of association. All anatomical regions are represented in the assemblage, with axial  
248 bones being the most abundant and shafts are more abundant than epiphyses (table 3).

249

250

### Table 2.

251

252

#### 253 4.3 Bone modification data

254 Over two thirds (67%) of *Equus oldowayensis* bones were cutmarked (Table 1): a mandible  
255 (Figure 4A), rib, pelvis and tibiae. A *Hippopotamus* sp. rib was also cutmarked (Figure 4B), along  
256 with a size 2 tibiae (Figure 4C), size 3b tibiae, pelvis and two ribs and size 4 humerus and femur.  
257 These marks are straight, long and deep with a V-section and are normally found in groups of two or  
258 more parallel marks. Furthermore, percussion marks were found on a *Hippopotamus* sp. rib, a size 3b  
259 radius (Figures 4D and E) and pelvis and a size 4 radius. No carnivore marks were observed  
260 throughout the assemblage. Trampling marks were identified in 14.6% of the remains (Table 1),  
261 diagnostically superficial, discontinuous and with a U-section.

262

263

### Figure 4.

264

265 Bones showing no weathering (Stage 0) are the most abundant in Level U3.1. No bones  
266 displayed weathering Stages 2 or higher. The vast majority of the remains (92.23%) remained intact  
267 with no abrasion (Stage 1); only 7.77% of the remains had some abraded surfaces attributable to  
268 abrasion Stage 2. No bones displayed abrasion Stage 3.

269 Fragmentation of the fossil remains is not very intense (Figure 5A). Fossil remains longer than  
270 3 cm dominate the assemblage, with a high representation of bones with sizes over 10 cm. Type 3  
271 long bone circumferences are most abundant, whereas Type 2 is very underrepresented (Figure 5B).  
272 Spiral, irregular and saw-toothed (green) fractures (Figures 4D, E, F and G) were most abundant in  
273 long bones (NISP = 18, 90% of all fractured long bones) and only 2 specimens of long bones presented  
274 perpendicular and smooth (dry) fractures.

275

276

### Figure 5.

277

#### 278 4.3. Lithics

279 A total of 17 lithic specimens have been retrieved, out of which 15 are elaborated in quartz  
280 (88.2%) and 2 in basalt (17.8%). The collection is distributed by technological categories as follows:



281 a) 1 vesicular basalt oval nodule (79x53x39 mm, 219 g); b) 2 modified battered blocks, showing  
282 multifacial-multipolar arrangement of negative scars. One of them has no evidence of percussion  
283 stigma units surfaces and can be typologically defined as a sub-spheroid. The other is a heavy hemi-  
284 nodule (619 g) with signs of intense crushing in ridges; c) 2 multifacial-multipolar exhausted cores  
285 and 1 core fragment; d) 11 detached pieces, including 2 whole flakes (mean 26x36x12 mm) with plain  
286 butts, no bulb of percussion, linear dorsal patterns and Toth types 5 and 6; 1 non-cortical,  
287 longitudinally broken flake; 4 flake fragments (including 1 basalt specimen); 3 debris (maximum  
288 length <15 mm), and 1 non-cortical retouched flake, in which two opposed notches (one distal and  
289 one proximal) have been identified.

290 The lithic sample is small and no important conclusions can be drawn. However, the sample  
291 shares common elements found in other archaeological levels at BK: 1) raw materials present are the  
292 same (quartz and basalt), with quartz being clearly predominant in the sample and 2) sub-spheroid  
293 elements have been found (Díez et al., 2009; Sánchez-Yustos et al., 2016).

294

## 295 **5. Discussion:**

296 Level U3.1 was deposited in decantation facies, such as those explained by Uribelarrea and  
297 Domínguez-Rodrigo (2017) for archaeological sites in meandering rivers. These quick and low  
298 energy sedimentation processes furnished ideal conditions for preservation. The low percentage of  
299 abraded (Stage 2, according to Alcalá, 1994) remains reinforces this interpretation. Level U3.1 is the  
300 first documented archaeological level to be found in this type of facies at BK, which although are  
301 theoretically more favourable for fossil preservation, had up to date contained no remains whatsoever  
302 (Uribelarrea and Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2017). Furthermore, this new level is also the youngest  
303 archaeological assemblage found at the site, since it is found in LA Unit 3 (Figure 6).

304

305

### 305 **Figure 6.**

306

307 The occurrence of *Equus oldowayensis*, antilophini size 2, alcelaphini size 3a and alcelaphini  
308 size 3b remains alongside *Hippopotamus* sp. bones is related to an open environment near water.  
309 These results are shared with the rest of the archaeological levels at BK, inferring an open habitat in  
310 a fluvial basin with periodic wetlands (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2009a, 2014a; Organista et al.,  
311 2015).

312 The evidence at hand, particularly the predominance of unweathered remains (weathering  
313 Stage 0, according to Behrensmeier, 1978) and the homogeneous distribution of the remains on top  
314 of the same isochronal layer suggest that the assemblage is most probably the result of multiple  
315 depositional events burying thanatocoenoses created over a time span of less than one year. This can

316 also suggest the sedimentation process, triggered by an overflow of water over the riverbank and  
317 subsequent flooding of the floodplain (UribeArrea and Domínguez-Rodrigo, 2017), probably took  
318 place during heavy rains in the wet season, when water regimes would reach such high flow discharge  
319 levels.

320 The low occurrence of perpendicular and smooth fractures is indicative of a low impact of  
321 diagenetic processes. Spiral, irregular and saw-toothed fractures, often related to carnivoran or  
322 anthropic activity and trampling were found in 90% of long bones. However, no carnivore marks  
323 have been found and trampled bones only account for 14.6% of the sample. Fragmentation of the  
324 fossil remains is not very intense, with large specimens (> 10 cm) due to the occurrence of size 3b, 4  
325 and 5 taxa. The fact that bones from all anatomical regions are represented in the assemblage also  
326 reinforces the idea that carnivores played little to no role in the accumulation of the remains.

327 Level U3.1 constitutes yet another example of a lower Pleistocene level showing evidence of  
328 large mammal (>1000 kg) exploitation. This new level embeds percussion and cut marked  
329 hippopotamus bones, adding to the list of the aforementioned sites of SHK in Olduvai Gorge  
330 (Domínguez-Rodrigo et al., 2014b), El Kherda in Argelia (Sanhouni et al., 2013), Koobi Fora in Kenia  
331 (Bunn, 1994) and Buia in Eritrea (Fiore et al., 2004).

332 The repeated occurrence of archaeological levels preserving evidence of megafaunal  
333 exploitation spanning a large amount of time throughout LA Units 1, 2 and 3 implies that this  
334 particular area of the landscape was for some reason preferred by hominins for this type of activity.  
335 UribeArrea and Domínguez-Rodrigo (2017) hypothesize whether or not this was due to the  
336 concentration of water resources and vegetation along the channel banks, offering greater protection  
337 against predators than an open plain.

338 Further investigations should enquire about the circumstances which motivated these  
339 megafaunal anthropized assemblages at BK throughout several different time frames, and try to test  
340 the different hypotheses proposed, such as that by UribeArrea and Domínguez-Rodrigo (2017).

341

## 342 **6. Conclusions**

343 Level U3.1 was deposited in quick and low energy sedimentation processes in decantation  
344 facies inside a meandering river channel. This level is the first documented archaeological level to be  
345 found in this type of facies at BK and is the youngest archaeological assemblage found at the site,  
346 since it is found in LA Unit 3.

347 Taphonomically, the predominance of unweathered remains and the homogeneous distribution  
348 of the remains on top of the same isochronal layer suggest that the assemblage is most probably  
349 comprised of thanatocoenoses created over a time span of less than one year, buried by multiple  
350 depositional events during heavy rains in the wet season, when water regimes would reach such high

351 flow discharge levels.

352 The occurrence of large mammal exploitation in Level U3.1 adds to the rest of archaeological  
353 levels preserving such evidences, spanning a large amount of time through LA Units 1, 2 and 3,  
354 implying a preferred use of this area by hominins for these activities throughout time. The reasons  
355 behind this recurring behaviour remain unknown, and should be further studied.

356

### 357 **Acknowledgements:**

358 We thank COSTECH and the Antiquities Unit (Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism) of  
359 Tanzania for the permission to conduct research at Olduvai. DMMP acknowledges an FPI  
360 postgraduate fellowship associated to Project CGL2015-68333-P. MSD acknowledges a postdoctoral  
361 fellowship under the program “Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowships” (European  
362 Commission). We would like to thank the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, the  
363 general direction of Fine Arts and Cultural Heritage and the Spanish Institute of Cultural Heritage,  
364 with fellowships to archaeological projects overseas to project PR47/17-20999: “La explotación de  
365 megafaunas en el Paleolítico inferior africano. Nuevas perspectivas desde BK (Bell Korongo, Olduvai  
366 Gorge, Tanzania)”. The support of the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Palaeosciences (CoE-Pal)  
367 towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are  
368 those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the CoE. We are grateful to the editor of  
369 this journal and for the constructive comments of Mauro Papini and an anonymous reviewer that  
370 helped to improve this manuscript.

371

### 372 **References:**

- 373 Alcalá, L. 1994. Macromamíferos Neógenos de la Fosa de Alfambra-Teruel. Instituto de Estudios  
374 Turolenses. 1554, 1994.
- 375 Ashley, G.M., Hay, R.L. 2002. Sedimentation patterns in a Plio-Pleistocene volcanoclastic rift-margin  
376 basin, Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania. *Sedimentation in Continental Rifts*, 73. SEPM Special  
377 Publication, 107-122.
- 378 Barba, R., Domínguez-Rodrigo, M., 2005. The taphonomic relevance of the analysis of bovid long  
379 limb bone shaft features and their application to element identification: study of bone  
380 thickness and morphology of the medullary cavity. *Journal of Taphonomy* 3, 17-42.
- 381 Behrensmeyer, A.K. 1978. Taphonomic and ecological information from bone weathering.  
382 *Paleobiology* 4 (2). 150-162.
- 383 Binford, L.R., 1981. *Bones: Ancient Men and Modern Myths*. Academic Press, New York.
- 384 Blumenschine RJ. 1988. An experimental model of the timing of hominid and carnivore influence on  
385 archaeological bone assemblages. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 15: 483–502.

- 386 Blumenschine RJ. 1995. Percussion marks, tooth marks and the experimental determinations of the  
387 timing of hominid and carnivore access to long bones at FLK Zinjanthropus, Olduvai Gorge,  
388 Tanzania. *Journal of Human Evolution* 29: 21–51
- 389 Blumenschine, R.J., Selvaggio, M.M., 1988. Percussion marks on bone surfaces as a new diagnostic  
390 of hominid behaviour. *Nature* 333, 763-765.
- 391 Brain C. K. (1969). The contribution of Namib desert Hottentot to understanding of Australopithecus  
392 bone accumulations. *Scientific Papers in Namibian desert Research Station* 32. 1-11.
- 393 Bunn HT. 1982. Meat-eating and human evolution: studies on the diet and subsistence patterns of  
394 Plio-Pleistocene hominids in East Africa. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of California:  
395 Berkeley.
- 396 Bunn, H. T. (1994). Early Pleistocene hominid foraging strategies along the ancestral Omo River at  
397 Koobi Fora, Kenya. *Journal of Human Evolution* 27. 247-266.
- 398 Cleghorn, N., Marean, C.W., 2004. Distinguishing selective transport and in situ attrition: a critical  
399 review of analytical approaches. *Journal of Taphonomy* 2, 43-67.
- 400 Delpech, F., Villa, P., 1993. Activités de chasse et boucherie dans la grotte des Eglises. In: Desse, J.,  
401 Audoin-Rouzeau, F. (Eds.), *Exploitation des animaux sauvages a travers le Temps. IV,*  
402 *Colloque International de l'Homme et l'Animal.* Editions APDCA, pp. 79-102.
- 403 Díez-Martín, F., Sánchez Yustos, P., Domínguez-Rodrigo, M., Mabulla, A., Barba, R., 2009. Were  
404 Olduvai hominins making butchering tools or battering tools? Analysis of a recently excavated  
405 lithic assemblage from BK (Bed II, Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania). *J. Anthropol. Archaeol.* 28,  
406 274–289.
- 407 Díez Martin, F. Sánchez Yustos, P.; D. Uribe Larrea<sup>2</sup>, E. Baquedano, D. F. Mark, A. Mabulla, C.  
408 Fraile<sup>1</sup>, J. Duque<sup>1</sup>, I. Díaz<sup>1</sup>, A. Pérez-González<sup>7</sup>, J. Yravedra, C. P. Egeland, E. Organista &  
409 M. Domínguez-Rodrigo. 2015. The Origin of The Acheulean: The 1.7 Million-Year-Old Site  
410 of FLK West, Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania). *Scientific Reports of Nature Scientific Reports* |  
411 5:17839 | DOI: 10.1038/srep17839
- 412 Domínguez-Rodrigo M. 1997. Meat-Eating by Early Hominids at the FLK 22 Zinjanthropus Site,  
413 Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania: an Experimental Approach Using Cut Mark Data, *Journal of*  
414 *Human Evolution.* 33(6), 669-690.
- 415 Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Dela Torre, I., Luque, L., Alcalá, L., Mora, R., Serallonga, J., Medina, V.  
416 2002. The ST site complex at Peninj, West Lake Natron, Tanzania: implications for early  
417 hominid behavioural models. *Journal of Archaeological Science.* 29, 6. 639-665.
- 418 Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Barba R., Egeland C.P. 2007. *Deconstructing Olduvai.* The Netherlands:  
419 Springer.

- 420 Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Mabulla A., Bunn H.T., Barba R., Diez-Martín F., Egeland C.P., Espílez E.,  
421 Egeland A., Yravedra J., Sánchez J. 2009a. Unraveling Hominin Behavior at Another  
422 Anthropogenic Site from Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania): New Archaeological and Taphonomic  
423 Research at BK, Upper Bed II, *Journal of Human Evolution*. 57(3), 260-283.
- 424 Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Juana S., Galán A.B., Rodríguez M. 2009b. A New Protocol to Differentiate  
425 Trampling Marks from Butchery Cut Marks, *Journal of Archaeological Science*. 36 (12),  
426 2643-2654
- 427 Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Pickering T.R., Baquedano E., Mabulla A., Mark D.F., Musiba C., Bunn  
428 H.T., Uribelarrea D., Smith V., Diez-Martin F., Pérez-González A., Sánchez P., Santonja M.,  
429 Barboni D., Gidna A., Ashley G., Yravedra J., Heaton J.L., Arriaza M.C. 2013. First Partial  
430 Skeleton of a 1.34-Million-Year-Old *Paranthropus boisei* from Bed II, Olduvai Gorge,  
431 Tanzania, *PloS ONE*. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0080347
- 432 Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Bunn H.T., Mabulla A.Z.P., Baquedano E., Uribelarrea D., Pérez-González  
433 A., Gidna A., Yravedra J., Diez-Martin F., Egeland C.P., Barba R., Arriaza M.C., Organista  
434 E., Ansón M. 2014a. On Meat Eating and Human Evolution: a Taphonomic Analysis of BK4b  
435 (Upper Bed II, Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania), and its Bearing on Hominin Megafaunal  
436 Consumption, *Quaternary International*. 322-323:129-152.
- 437 Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Diez-Martin F., Yravedra J., Barba R., Bunn H., Mabulla A., Baquedano E.,  
438 Uribelarrea D., Sánchez P., Eren M. 2014b. Study of the SHK Main Site Faunal Assemblage,  
439 Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania: Implications for Bed II Taphonomy, Paleoecology and Hominin  
440 Utilization of Megafauna, *Quaternary International*. 322-323, 153-166.
- 441 Egeland C.P., Domínguez-Rodrigo M. (2008) Taphonomic Perspectives on Hominid Site Use and  
442 Foraging Strategies during Bed II Times at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, *Journal of Human  
443 Evolution*. 55(6), 1031-1052.
- 444 Fiore, I., Bondioli, L., Coppa, A., Macchiarrelli, R., Russom, R., Kashay, H., Solomon, T., Rook, L.,  
445 Libeskal, Y. 2004. Taphonomic analysis of the Late Early Pleistocene Bone Remains from  
446 Buia (Dandiero Basin, Danakil Depression, Eritrea): Evidence for large mammal and reptile  
447 butchering. *Rivista Italiana di Paleontologia e Stratigrafia* 110, 89-97.
- 448 Leakey, L.S.B., 1954. The giant animals of prehistoric Tanaganyika and the hunting grounds of  
449 Chellean man. New discoveries in Olduvai Gorge. *The Illustrated London News* 224, 1047-  
450 1051, illustration by Neave Parker
- 451 Leakey M. 1971. *Olduvai Gorge, Volume 3: Excavations in Beds I and II, 1960-1963*. Cambridge,  
452 England: Cambridge University Press.
- 453 Lyman, R.L. 1994. *Vertebrate taphonomy*. Cambridge University Press.

- 454 McHenry, L.J. 2012. A revised stratigraphic framework for Olduvai Gorge Bed I based on tuff  
455 geochemistry. *Journal of Human Evolution* 63, 284-299.
- 456 Monahan, C.M. 1996. New zooarchaeological data from Bed II, Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania:  
457 implications for hominid behavior in the Early Pleistocene. *Journal of Human Evolution* 31,  
458 93-128.
- 459 Münzel, S.C., 1988. Quantitative analysis and archaeological site interpretation. *Archaeozoologia* 2,  
460 93-110.
- 461 Olsen S, Shipman P. 1988. Surface modification on bone: Trampling vs butchery. *Journal of*  
462 *Archaeological Science* **15**: 535–553
- 463 Organista E., Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Egeland C.P., Uribelarrea D., Mabulla A., Baquedano E. 2015.  
464 Did Homo erectus Kill a Pelorovis Herd at BK (Olduvai Gorge)? A Taphonomic Study  
465 of BK5, *Journal of Archaeological and Anthropological Science*.  
466 DOI:10.1007/s12520-015-0241-8
- 467 Organista E., Domínguez-Rodrigo M., Yravedra J., Uribelarrea D., Carmen Arriaza M<sup>a</sup>., Cruz Ortega  
468 M<sup>a</sup>., Mabulla A., Gidna A., Baquedano E. 2017. Biotic and Abiotic Processes Affecting the  
469 Formation of BK Level 4c (Bed II, Olduvai Gorge) and their Bearing on Hominin Behaviour  
470 at the Site, *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*.
- 471 Patou-Mathis, M.E., 1984. Contribution a l'étude des mammifères des couches supérieures de la  
472 Grotte du Lazaret. M. A. Dissertation. Université de la Sorbonne, Paris (unpublished).
- 473 Patou-Mathis, M.E., 1985. La fracturation des os longs de grands mammifères: élaboration d'un  
474 lexique et d'une fiche type. Outillage peu élaboré en os et en bois de cervidés. *Artefacts* 1,  
475 11-22.
- 476 Pickering, T.R., Marean, C., Domínguez-Rodrigo, M., 2003. Importance of limb bone shaft fragments  
477 in zooarchaeology: a response to "On in situ attrition and vertebrate body part profiles"  
478 (2003), by M.C. Stiner. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 30, 1469-1482.
- 479 Potts, R., Shipman, P., 1981. Cutmarks made by stone tools on bones from Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania.  
480 *Nature* 291, 577-580.
- 481 Sanhouni, M.; Rosell, J.; Van der Made, J.; Vergés, J.; Ollé, A.; Kandi, N.; Harichane, Z.; Derradji,  
482 A. y Medig, M., 2013. The First Evidence of Cut Marks and Usewear Traces from the Plio-  
483 Pleistocene Locality of El-Kherba (Ain Hanech), Algeria: Implications for Early Hominin  
484 Subsistence Activities Circa 1.8 Ma., *Journal of Human Evolution*, 64, pp. 137-150.
- 485 Sánchez-Yustos, P., Díez-Martín, F., Domínguez-Rodrigo, M., Fraile, C., Duque, J., Uribelarrea, D.,  
486 Baquedano, E. 2016. Techno-economic human behavior in a context of recurrent  
487 megafaunal exploitation at 1.3 Ma. Evidence from BK4b (Upper Bed II, Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania).  
488 *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 9 (2016) 386–404

- 489 Uribelarrea, D., Domínguez-Rodrigo, M. 2017. Geoarchaeology in a meandering river: A study of  
490 the BK site (1.35 Ma), Upper Bed II, Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania). *Palaeogeography,*  
491 *Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, 488. 76-83
- 492 Villa, P., Mahieu, E., 1991. Breakage patterns of human long bones. *Journal of Human Evolution* 21,  
493 27-48.
- 494 Yravedra, J., Domínguez Rodrigo, M. 2009, The shaft-based methodological approach to the  
495 quantification of long limb bones and its relevance to understanding hominid subsistence in  
496 the Pleistocene: application to four Paleolithic sites. *Journal of Quaternary Science* 24 (1)  
497 85-96.
- 498 Yravedra J.; Domínguez-Rodrigo, M.; Santonja, M.; Rubio-Jara, S.; Panera, J.; Pérez-González, A.;  
499 Uribelarrea, D., Egeland, C.; Mabulla, A.; Baquedano, E. 2016. The large mammal  
500 palimpsest from TK (Thiongo korongo), bed II Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania. *Quaternary*  
501 *International* 417. 3-15.

502  
503  
504  
505  
506  
507  
508  
509  
510  
511  
512  
513  
514  
515  
516  
517

#### 518 Captions of Figures and Tables

519  
520  
521  
522  
523

Figure 1. A. Map of East Africa, showing the location of Olduvai Gorge. Modified from Ashley and Hay (2002). B. Map showing the Ngorongoro Volcanic Highlands and Olduvai Gorge. Modified from Hay (1976) and McHenry (2012). C. Location of the mentioned sites along the Main and Secondary Gorges at Olduvai Gorge. Modified from Hay (1976).

524

525 Figure 2. A. Bell's Korongo (BK) profile and Trench 14 location. B. Transversal stratigraphic section  
526 of the four Lateral Accretion Units and location of archaeological levels and detailed stratigraphic  
527 sections. C. Detailed stratigraphic sections. Modified from Organista et al. (2015).

528

529 Figure 3. A. Trench 14 eastern wall. B. Geological interpretation of eastern wall. C. Detailed  
530 photograph of *Hippopotamus* sp. rib in Level U3.1.

531

532 Figure 4. A. Cutmarked *Equus* mandible. B. Cutmarked *Hippopotamus* sp. rib. C. Detailed photograph  
533 of cutmarks on *Hippopotamus* sp. rib. D. Cutmarked size 2 tibiae. E. Size 3b radius with percussion  
534 marks. F. Detailed photograph of percussion marks on size 3b radius. G. *Hippopotamus* sp. rib with  
535 green fracture and peeling. H. *Hippopotamus* sp. rib with green fracture.

536

537 Figure 5. Level U3.1 bone remains fragmentation. A. Length of Level U3.1 fossil remains B.  
538 Circumference completeness according to Bunn (1982).

539

540 Figure 6. Level U3.1 geological interpretation and location inside the meandering channel and its  
541 relationship with the different depositional and geological processes.

542

543

544

545

546

547

548

549

550

551

552

	NISP	MNE	MNI	NISP CM	CM %	NISP PM	PM %
<i>Equus</i>							
<i>oldowayensis</i>	13	12	1	4	67	-	-
<i>Hippopotamus</i> sp.	5	5	1	1	20	1	20
Antilophini size 2	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Alcelaphini size 3a	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Alcelaphini size 3b	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Undet. Size 2	5	4	-	1	20	-	-
Undet. Size 3	5	4	-	-	-	-	-



Undet. Size 3a	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Undet. Size 3b	20	13	-	5	26	2	10
Undet. Size 4	8	7	-	2	25	1	13
Undet.	43	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>						

553

554 Table 1. Faunal representation of Level U3.1. NISP CM: Number of cutmarked specimens; NISP

555 PM: Number of percussion marked specimens. Teeth have been excluded for the calculation of cut

556 mark (CM %) and percussion mark (PM %) percentages.

557

558

	Size 2		Size 3		Size 3a		Size 3b		Size 4		Size 5		Undet.	Total	
	NISP	MNE	NISP	MNE	NISP	MNE	NISP	MNE	NISP	MNE	NISP	MNE	NISP	NISP	%
Horn	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.97
Skull	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.97
Mandible	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.97
Tooth	-	-	-	-	1	1	9	9	-	-	-	-	-	10	9.71
Vertebrae	-	-	1	1	-	-	3	2	1	1	-	-	1	6	5.83
Rib	-	-	1	1	-	-	9	3	1	1	3	3	-	14	13.59
Scapula	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.94
Humerus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	2	1.94
Radius	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	4.85
Pelvis	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	1	-	-	-	3	2.91
Femur	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	3	2.91
Tibia	2	1	1	1	-	-	5	4	1	1	-	-	-	9	8.74
Metapodial	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	3	2.91
Metatarsal	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.97
Undet.	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41	42	40.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>
Cranial %	16.7	20	0	0	50	50	32.4	42.3	0	0	0	0	-		
Axial %	0	0	40	40	50	50	44.1	30.8	37.5	42.9	60	60	-		
Upp. Apend. %	66.7	60	20	20	0	0	20.6	23.1	62.5	57.1	20	20	-		
Low. Apend %	16.7	20	20	20	0	0	2.94	3.85	0	0	20	20	-		

559

560 Table 2. BK Level U3.1 skeletal profiles.

561

562

		Size 2	Size 3	Size 3a	Size 3b	Size 4	Size 5
<b>Humerus</b>	P. Epif.	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Shaft	-	-	-	-	2	-
	D. Epif.	-	-	-	-	1	-
	MNE	-	-	-	-	1	-
<b>Femur</b>	P. Epif.	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Shaft	1	-	-	1	1	-
	D. Epif.	-	-	-	-	-	-

	MNE	1	-	-	1	1	-
<b>Radius</b>	P. Epif.	-	-	-	-	-	1
	Shaft	1	-	1	1	1	1
	D. Epif.	-	-	-	-	-	-
	MNE	1	-	1	1	1	1
<b>Tibia</b>	P. Epif.	1	-	-	1	-	-
	Shaft	2	1	-	5	1	-
	D. Epif.	1	-	-	1	-	-
	MNE	1	1	-	4	1	-
<b>Metapodial</b>	P. Epif.	1	-	-	-	-	1
	Shaft	1	1	-	-	-	1
	D. Epif.	1	-	-	-	-	1
	MNE	1	1	-	-	-	1

563

564

565 Table 3. NISP and MNE for long bone epiphyses and diaphyses.