

Assessing the past cultural diversity of East Africa

Steven Goldstein (University of Pittsburgh) & Tom Güldemann (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

A limited amount of evidence is part and parcel of the scientific enterprise to reconstruct early population history. This problem is often aggravated by misconceptions about the identity and labels of cultural entities, leading to larger umbrella concepts that mask the diversity of the past. In genealogical language classification and archaeology this is known as the "lumping" approach. More nuanced consideration of past diversity - especially between fields - is critical in building better historical models. Our talk attempts to survey the potential cultural diversity of eastern Africa in the past based on a comprehensive assessment of the current archeological and archaeogenetic records and ethnolinguistic inventory, including areas that border on East Africa in a narrow sense. We conclude that the area should be assumed to have displayed a considerably higher cultural diversity than commonly assumed in historical modelling.