

Tarragona, Spain
4th-7th October, 2021

Multi-scalar Characterization of Raw Materials

Session 15: Practical, Social, and Symbolic Aspects of Stone Raw Materials

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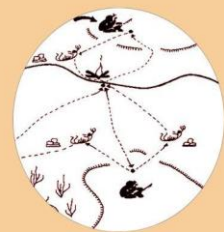
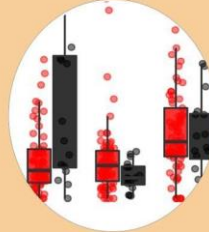
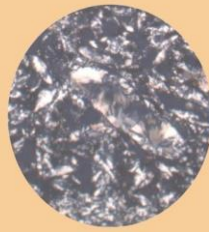
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For over 3.3 million years' humans used rocks for tool production. Rocks were an essential component in early humans' lifeways, and were used for hunting, the processing of meat and vegetal materials, wood processing, shelter construction, and more. In addition, they almost certainly had roles which extended beyond functional considerations, and which were deeply rooted within the social, cultural and symbolic worldviews of these ancient tool makers. Therefore, it is not surprising that early humans invested significant efforts to procure and to move rocks. Indeed, archaeologists have demonstrated that the earliest tool making hominins show clear selectivity in raw material procurement and exploitation. While cost-benefit considerations, such as distance, availability and source accessibility, undoubtedly played a role in hominins' deciding which stones to procure and use, other considerations, such as a rock's mechanical and physical properties, technological requirements, as well as aesthetic and sensorial considerations, probably influenced these choices. Furthermore, ethnographic data show that rocks have unique social and cultural roles in the lives of extant human societies. These roles are expressed by the rituals and folklore surrounding specific rock sources, the forming of special expeditions for rock procurement, long distance acquisition, and the preference of specific rocks for the making of specific tools. Moreover, studies of recent human groups show that stones are conceived at times as active agents, with which a bi-directional interaction is to be maintained. Such insights have added relevance for understanding prehistoric rock selection and use.

This session aims at discussing the many facets of lithic procurement and exploitation among past and recent hunter-gatherer societies, and the complex sets of considerations and motivations that influence and shape these choices. The session welcomes papers presenting archaeological case

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studies, from all prehistoric periods, exemplifying the motivations influencing lithic choices and preferences (e.g., availability, accessibility, mechanical traits, technological needs, aesthetic aspects, social worldviews, symbology, and more), as well as ethnographic documentations of the lithic choices of indigenous groups, and the considerations which lie behind these choices.

We believe that this upcoming symposium provides an ideal opportunity for archaeologists and anthropologists to get together, and explore this intriguing issue in hope of creating a significant contribution to the debate regarding lithic procurement and exploitation strategies during the past and present, and the worldviews and motivations that shape these decisions.