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Multi-scalar Characterization of Raw Materials

Session 16: Cultural Selection of Knappable Bodies

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Among Indigenous societies, tools embody values and beliefs, including gender norms, personal and family identity passed over many generations. Yet the construction of narratives for deep time tend to preclude non-technological aspects, therefore, lithic studies are mostly conceived in techno-typological terms, and often focus on the tools themselves rather than the people who made them – women, men, children, and the elderly.

In this session we propose to use techno-typological and spatial analyses as means of identifying the 'human component' within knappable bodies and the tools shaped from them.

Anthropological observations show that stone tools technology is a gendered, age-based activity, often influenced by family lineage conventions. Our hypothesis, supported by archaeological and anthropological evidence, is that the choice of the type of material to be worked, its colour and mechanical properties, techno-morphological choices and life-history aspects, as well as spatial aspects likely express a diversity of social perspectives (including learning and gender aspects, as well as family lineage traditions). According to this line of thinking, knappable materials found in ancient archaeological sites could attest to social conventions of past human societies. Can we trace them in the archaeological record?

In this session, we will explore the possibility to identify various social segments that selected and shaped knappable materials in past societies from various perspectives – anthropological/ cognitive theories; ethnography and ethno- history as well as 'traditional' lithic techno-typological, spatial analyses, while combining case studies, reviews, and synthesis. Through these multidisciplinary avenues, we hope to develop a wider perspective on prehistoric and historic stone tools as socio-cultural agents, while putting the spotlight on the children, women and families who made them, and their role in shaping the archaeological record.