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MESO2025 - 11th International Conference on the
Mesolithic in Europe

Session 3

Regional Identities

Coordinated by Dmytro Kiosak and Thomas Perrin

Archaeologists have long sought to grasp regional identities of the past through the concept of archaeological culture and a related typo-chronological approach. In that sense, an archaeological culture cannot of course reflect a prehistoric ethnic reality, but serves as a flexible categorization, suggesting both persistence over time and the geographical consistency of comparable artifacts within the archaeological sites. To truly grasp prehistoric realities, however, one must look beyond these classifications and grasp the true duration and spatial dimension of these societies. By adopting this approach, these categorical units can acquire tangible historical significance: examining both advances and regressions allows a deeper understanding of human influence and action.

Classical archaeological culture is only one type of spatial and temporal distribution of material culture variability. Only by comparing the spatial and temporal distribution of different categories of artefacts can we propose the identification of prehistoric cultures. At different scales and using different approaches, regional facies or larger techno-complexes can also be identified. Do pattern of variability of lithics, ceramics, bone items, decorations coincide in time and space? Often they do not. Accordingly, we are interested in new approaches to understanding the nature of multicriteria variability: networks, spatial regression models, fuzzy sets approaches and agent-based modelling. These cases of inconsistency between the distributions of different categories of material culture have the greatest heuristic potential for understanding the nature of past identities.

Moreover, radiocarbon dating has given us a powerful new tool for testing typochronologies - and quite often, typochronologies fail this test. So, the question is why? Why did certain types of things that should have existed for a limited period of time actually exist for longer? Why did types that should have outlived each other actually coexist? What are the social mechanisms of innovation behind these cases?

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ORAL PRESENTATION

Monday 15th September, h.15:45-16:00

Polymorphism and singularity of the Second Mesolithic of Southern France

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Between the middle of the 7th and 6th millennia BCE, with the spread of the « Blade and Trapezes Complex « (BTC), southern France can be divided into two main groups, based on lithic production. In the East, in from the Mediterranean to the northern Alps, the Castelnovian complex, first defined by Max Escalon de Fonton, is characterised by the production of regular blades produced by pressure or indirect percussion, from which various types of trapezoidal, often asymmetrical, arrowheads were later derived. To the West, from the plains of Roussillon to the Atlantic coast, the so-called absence of laminar production and the existence of an original type of armature, such as « Gazel points » or « Bastard points », testify to the presence of another cultural sphere. During the 80's, some referred to as the 'Cuzoul Gazel group', a notion now abandoned for lack of internal coherence and chronlogical inconstancy. This Second Mesolithic of Occitania and Aquitaine is actuly under revision due to a major documentary renewal, with the excavation of several sites and the revision of other lithic and chronostratigraphic assemblages, especially in the area between the Rhône Valley and the Aude. Our talk will therefore provide an opportunity to take stock of the available data and to determine whether or not these industries are original in terms of the spread of the blade and trapeze complex.

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ORAL PRESENTATION

Monday 15th September, h.16:00-16:15

S3

The Undifferentiated Epipaleolithic facies in South-Western Italy: the lithic industries from Grotta Santa Maria, Grotta della Serratura and Grotta della Madonna (Campania, Calabria) in the peninsular and insular context

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The Undifferentiated Epipaleolithic is a Mesolithic technocomplex which roots in the late Epigravettian tradition. It was first noticed and described at the beginning of the 1990s by F. Martini after his researches at Grotta della Serratura in Cilento; it was later defined in more detail, also thanks to several evidence coming from southern Italy, Sardinia, Corsica and Sicily. The authors present an update on the knowledge on this technocomplex and its origin, also derived from the revision of three lithic assemblages from the lower Tyrrhenian side: the Mesolithic industries of Grotta della Serratura and Grotta della Madonna, and that from Grotta di S. Maria, which could be an Epigravettian genetic antecedent of the Undifferentiated Epipaleolithic. These stone assemblages share common techno-typological traits as: a low-investment flaking strategy based on local resources and aimed at the production of irregular and non-standardised flakes, the low degree in blanks transformation, the abundance of flake-tools (denticulates, flake scrapers) and the lack or rarity of geometrics and backed tools. These features are comparable with those of other coeval undifferentiated complexes in the Mediterranean. A peculiar aspect of this Mesolithic facies is that it is the only one associated with the maritime mobility of the last hunter-gatherers and their pioneering attempts to move away from the continental coasts towards the Mediterranean. Whether or not there was a conscious strategy to establish a network of landing places linked either to the exploitation of marine resources or colonising movements towards new territories cannot yet be assessed.

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Monday 15th September, h.16:45-17:00

Extending the Mesolithic research to the Western Carpathians

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The vast mountainous territory of the watershed of the middle Danube and Upper Vistula rivers is physiographically diverse in a far-reaching way. In the Early Holocene, the areas of the Western Carpathians, in terms of botany, were more dense forest complexes than can be found in areas located further north and south. So far, Mesolithic research does not concern the Western Carpathians enough, which are usually described as arbitrary boundaries between hunter-gatherer cultures of Central Europe. The Mesolithic settlement from the north reaches almost the border of this mountain range, creating clusters well saturated with findings in the Upper Vistula valley. The materials are diagnostic and classified to the northern technocomplex, represented in the Early Holocene by the Komornica culture. In the Middle Holocene this area was occupied by the Late Komornica culture (with Maglemosian influences) and the Janisławice culture of Eastern origin. At the southern border of the Western Carpathians the situation is less distinct and elements of the western technocomplex are visible. Here, data on the Mesolithic is growing. Three clusters of the settlement have been identified. One, related to the gorges of mountain tributaries of the Vistula River, and two others located in Tatra Piedmont. These findings generally indicate a predominance of northern elements. The specificity is evidenced by the local raw materials used (Mikuszowice Hornstone and Pieniny radiolarite) and a tendency to choose places at the edge of precipitous and high riverbanks in their breakthroughs.

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Monday 15th September, h.17:00-17:15

S3

Kukrek burins or Kukrek cores?

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Among the characteristic products of the Kukrek culture or techno-complex are the so-called Kukrek burins. However, their interpretation varies significantly. These artifacts may be identified as burins on blades, burins on Kukrek inserts (featuring a flat trimming on the ventral side), or burins on flakes with a flat burin facet. The latter definition, however, is particularly problematic. Morphologically unstable, these products demonstrate an angle of inclination of the burin facet relative to the product's axis that is difficult to control, as experimental studies suggest. A more consistent understanding of Kukrek burins defines them as multiple burins on flakes, where the previous burin detachment serves as a platform for subsequent ones. Such burins are systematically found in classical Kukrek collections and are notably rarer in other Mesolithic assemblages from the region. However, detailed analysis of these artifacts, including partial refitting studies, suggests that they were likely not tools but situational nuclei on thick flakes. The knapping principles observed align more closely with those used for edge knapping of secondary cores. This raises an essential question: cores or tools? If these objects are indeed situational nuclei, another key category of Kukrek products gains a technological explanation. However, this redefinition risks blurring the boundaries of the Kukrek culture or techno-complex, potentially diminishing its heuristic value. The informed deconstruction of traditional typological concepts through technological analysis offers a pathway to modernize the typological map of the Mesolithic in southern Eastern Europe.

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Monday 15th September, h.17:15-17:30

LATE MESOLITHIC BLADE CORE CONCEPTS IN SOUTHEAST NORWAY: CHARACTERIZING THEIR VARIABILITY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

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The Mesolithic archaeological record of south-eastern Norway is characterized by abundant and varied lithic assemblages enabling both diachronic and synchronic studies of technological traditions and social connections. South-eastern Norway is bordered by contrasting geographical regions, which makes the area particularly interesting in terms of cultural interactions. During the Middle Mesolithic, the conical blade core concept was the central method for producing blades and microblades in south-eastern Norway. However, towards the latter part of the Middle Mesolithic, and throughout the Late Mesolithic, several new core types for producing microblades appear in the region. These core types have been labelled "narrow faced core", "keeled/wedge shaped core", "handle core", "atypical handle core" and simply "microblade core". While there is a clear morpho-typological variability in these core concepts, the knapped products seem to respond to the same qualitative and morphological attributes. Our knowledge of these Late Mesolithic core types and their temporal and spatial distributions is not well developed, nor are our insights into sociocultural relations. Through a technological analysis of classified blade/microblade cores from coastal and interior Late Mesolithic sites in south-eastern Norway, we aim to shed light on these matters. We discuss our results in connection to raw material conditions, population trends and cultural networks in the Late Mesolithic.

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Monday 15th September, h.17:30-17:45

S3

CORE ISSUES: NEW INSIGHTS INTO BLADE MANUFACTURING IN SOUTHERN NORWAY DURING THE LATE MESOLITHIC

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Diachronic trends in blade manufacturing technology have been a prominent focus of Stone Age research in Norway during recent years. The temporal and geographic locus of such studies has however been somewhat uneven, and the resulting differential resolution of knowledge concerning developments in lithic technology can have implications for the significance attributed to apparent regional variations during certain periods. In southern Norway, one of the most prominent technological divergences occurs ca. 5,600 BC when the handle core concept replaces the conical core concept as the primary method used for blade manufacture in the southeastern part of the country. Handle core technology is known from across Scandinavia as well as other parts of northern Europe and its apparently limited distribution within Norway has been important in defining a regionally specific Late Mesolithic techno-complex known as the 'Nøstvet'. This interpretation is however tentatively problematized by the occurrence of hundreds of handle cores in the collections of archaeological institutions in the western part of the country. This body of material has received little attention and until recently has not been integrated into research of Late Mesolithic technology in Norway. In this paper we present the results of an audit of a selection of reported handle cores from museum collections in western Norway. Our work adds important nuance to established knowledge of intra- and inter-regional developments in blade manufacturing and, consequently, models of socio-techno regionality in southern Norway during the late Mesolithic.

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S3

CRAFTING SOAPSTONE 'COFFEE-BEAN' SINKERS: REGIONAL TRADITIONS AND LOCAL VARIATIONS

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A trend of increasing regionality is apparent throughout the Norwegian Mesolithic. One example of this are small, engraved, soapstone artefacts attributed to the Late Mesolithic and interpreted as line sinkers—also referred to as coffee-bean sinkers for their typical shape. These are unique to the West-Norwegian coast, despite line fishing being attested in other regions of Mesolithic Norway as well. In my ongoing PhD project, I use a combination of methods to study how these sinkers were made. Experiments and photogrammetry inform on the tools and techniques used, while pXRF offers insights into the chemical composition—and hopefully origin—of the source material. By taking on a little-studied artefact type and using novel methods, this project provides new perspectives on Late Mesolithic crafting and regionality in West Norway. I will present specifically on my current study aimed at identifying cross-regional traditions as well as local trends and variations in sinker crafting, and thereby expanding on theories regarding sub-divisions within the West-Norwegian Late Mesolithic social territory.

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POSTER

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S3

Technological and traceological approach to lithic industries of the Second Mesolithic in Southern France

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Between 6500 and 5000 BCE, the groups of the Second Mesolithic in southern France are distinguished from each other by various technological characteristics. The southeast is marked by pressure flaking and trapezoidal microliths (Castelnovian), while the southwest is characterized by the production of specific arrowheads, delineating several areas – such as the "pointe de Gazel" in Languedoc or the "pointe du Martinet" in the northern Aquitaine Basin. However, certain areas, such as the center of the Aquitaine Basin and the northern fringe of the Pyrenees, where the absence of sites is notable, complicate the identification of these spaces. Furthermore, the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic in the Southwest is difficult to discern due to the absence of clear Neolithic markers (ceramics, domestic fauna, cereals). The lack of these markers highlights the necessity of a deeper understanding of lithic industries, particularly arrowheads. However, these tools are often ambiguous, indicating a probable technological permeability between these two spheres. Although arrowheads have been the subject of numerous studies, they are subject to interpretative biases due toclassification methods (typology, technology), researchers' assumptions, or the scale of study chosen. Therefore, we propose to standardize the data on a broader scale by integrating a traceological approach, in order to enrich and verify existing interpretations.

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POSTER

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S3

MESOLITHIC IN THE CANTABRIAN REGIÓN (SPAIN): STATE OF RESEARCH AND DEBATES RAISED

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This poster presents the state of research on Mesolithic in Cantabrian region (Spain), focusing on four aspects: i. It analyses the settlement pattern, determined by the geomorphology of the area, the chronology of the settlements, in some cases, derived from climatic conditions and the deglaciation of mountainous areas, and the availability of economic resources. We present 131 new Holocene shell midden sites that have been located in recent survey projects in Asturias, in the western Cantabrian region. ii. The broad-spectrum economy is analyzed, with the exploitation of the resources offered by the different biotopes. iii. With regard to lithic technology, a latent issue is addressed, regarding cultural unity or diversity in the region, related to the availability of raw materials and the frequency of certain typologies, which mark cultural characteristics and sequences, due to the presence of macro industries such as the 'Asturian peak' in the western part, or geometric microliths, more frequent in the eastern part, with a scarce presence in the central and western part of the region. iiii. Possible inter-territorial and/or allochthonous socio-cultural exchanges.