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WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY SEMINARS

THE ROLE OF FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS IN UNDERSTANDING LATE PLEISTOCENE LITHIC STATE OF THE ART, ADVANCES, AND CHALLENGES

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When a stone tool is used, residues and mechanical wear traces form on it that preserve a memory of its use. This means that the wealth of stone tools that have been unearthed at archaeological sites over the last centuries amount to an immense archive of past human behaviour. In this presentation, we offer our perspective on the current state of the art in lithic use-wear and residue analysis. We discuss recent developments that have improved the reliability of archaeological interpretations and opened up new research questions and agendas. We highlight the crucial role of combining different microscopic techniques in detecting and assessing functional wear and residues on stone tools. Additionally, we emphasize the importance of integrating various aspects of the methodology — such as chemical residue analysis, experimental archaeology, and microscopic methods — into a comprehensive functional analysis protocol, while stressing the importance of contextual information in the interpretation of functional evidence. This integrated approach enhances both the reliability and precision of archaeological interpretations. We also address ongoing challenges and identify subfields that require further development. These issues are examined through our recent methodological innovations and archaeological case studies, with a focus on the Palaeolithic in Europe and the Stone Age in Africa.

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