

Stone Tools in Transition:
From Hunter-Gatherers to Farming Societies in the Near East

F. Borrell, J.J. Ibáñez, M. Molist (eds.)

Stone Tools in Transition: From Hunter-Gatherers to Farming Societies in the Near East

Papers presented to the 7th Conference on PPN Chipped
and Ground Stone Industries of the Fertile Crescent

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Summary

Presentations	11
Tribute to Marie Claire Cauvin	17
Brief introduction to the 7 th Conference on PPN chipped and ground stone industries of the Fertile Crescent	21
<i>Ferran Borrell, Juan José Ibáñez and Miquel Molist</i>	
Assessing typo-technological variability in Epipalaeolithic assemblages: Preliminary results from two case studies from the Southern Levant	29
<i>Lisa A. Maher and Danielle A. Macdonald</i>	
Wadi al-Hajana 1: A Khiamian outpost in the northwestern piedmont of Mt. Bishri, central Syria	45
<i>Sumio Fujii and Takuro Adachi</i>	
The bidirectional blade industries of the southern Levant	59
<i>Omry Barzilai</i>	
Nahal Hava: a PPNB campsite and Epipalaeolithic occupation in the central Negev highlands, Israel	73
<i>Michal Birkenfeld and A. Nigel Goring-Morris</i>	
Large-scale larnite quarries and production sites for bifacial tools in the southern Judean desert	87
<i>Jacob Vardi</i>	
Qumran Cave 24, a Neolithic-Chalcolithic site by the Dead Sea: a short report and some information on lithics	101
<i>Avi Gopher, Cristina Lemorini, Elisabetta Boaretto, Israel Carmi, Ran Barkai and Heeli. C. Schechter</i>	
Observations on the <i>chaîne opératoire</i> of bidirectional blade production at Nahal Lavan 1021 based on refitting studies	115
<i>Netta Mitki, Omry Barzilai and A. Nigel Goring-Morris</i>	

Household-level flaked-stone tool production at the Neolithic site of 'Ain Ghazal, Jordan	133
<i>Theresa M. Barket</i>	
Early Neolithic flint raw material selection at LPPNB Ba'ja / southern Levant. Preliminary results from two room fills of area B-North	147
<i>Christoph Purschwitz</i>	
A functional investigation of perforators from the Late Natufian/Pre-Pottery Neolithic A site of Huzuk Musa – a preliminary report	165
<i>Iris Groman-Yaroslavski, Danny Rosenberg and Dani Nadel</i>	
Microdrill use at Khiamian sites in central and northern Levant (Syria and Lebanon) . . .	177
<i>Jesús González-Urquijo, Frederic Abbès, Hala Alarashi, Juan José Ibáñez and Talía Lazuén</i>	
The Neolithic commodification of stone	191
<i>Hans Georg K. Gebel</i>	
The Neolithic of Lebanon: a statement of current knowledge	207
<i>Maya Haïdar-Boustani</i>	
Caching and depositing in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B of Yiftahel, Israel	219
<i>Hamoudi Khalaily, Ianir Milevski and Omry Barzilai</i>	
The significance of long blade caches and deposits at Late Neolithic Shir, Syria	231
<i>Dörte Rokitta-Krumnow</i>	
Opening Pandora's Box: Some reflections on the spatial and temporal distribution of the off-set bi-directional blade production strategy and the Neolithisation of the Northern Levant	247
<i>Ferran Borrell</i>	
Exchange of points in the PPNB: points with the Palmyran retouch from Tell Ain el-Kerkh, northwest Syria	265
<i>Makoto Arimura</i>	
Naviform technology at Göllüdağ, Central Anatolia: some remarks	277
<i>Semra Balci</i>	
The lithic assemblages of Gusir Höyük (Turkey): the preliminary results	289
<i>Çiler Altınbilek-Algül</i>	
The early cypriot Pre-Pottery Neolithic: new evidence from the Amathus area	299
<i>François Briois, Jean-Denis Vigne and Jean Guilaine</i>	
Chipped stone artifacts from the aceramic Neolithic site of Chogha Golan, Ilam Province, western Iran	315
<i>Mohsen Zeidi and Nicholas J. Conard</i>	

Chipped stone industry from the excavation at the PPN settlement of Tell-e Atashi, SE Iran	327
<i>Mozhgan Jayez and Omran Garazhian</i>	
Study of the chipped stone assemblage from systematic surface sampling at the PPN settlement of Tell-e Atashi.	341
<i>Maryam Shakooie and Omran Garazhian</i>	
A reappraisal of the Pottery Neolithic flaked stone assemblages at Tall-i Jari B, Fars, Southwest Iran	349
<i>Yoshihiro Nishiaki</i>	
The ground stone tools from the aceramic Neolithic site of Chogha Golan, Ilam province, western Iran	365
<i>Nicholas J. Conard and Mohsen Zeidi</i>	
Keeping the razor sharp: hafting and maintenance of sickles in the southern Levant during the 6 th and 5 th millennia bc	377
<i>Jacob Vardi and Isaac Gilead</i>	
The PPNA quarry of Kaizer Hill, Modi'in, Israel – The waste piles	395
<i>Gadi Herzlinger, Leore Grosman and Naama Goren-Inbar</i>	
Incised slabs from Hayonim cave: a methodological case study for reading Natufian art	407
<i>Dana Shaham and Anna Belfer-Cohen</i>	
Grooved stones and other macrolithic objects with incised decoration from the PPNB at Tell Halula (Syria, Middle Euphrates Valley)	421
<i>Miquel Molist, Maria Bofill, Anabel Ortiz and Bushra Taha</i>	
Grooved stones in the Southern Levant: typology, function and chronology	435
<i>Ariel Vered</i>	
Natufian bedrock mortars at Qarassa 3: Preliminary results from an interdisciplinary methodology	449
<i>Xavier Terradas, Juan José Ibáñez, Frank Braemer, Karen Hardy, Eneko Iriarte, Marco Madella, David Ortega, Anita Radini and Luis C. Teira</i>	
Göllü Dağ Obsidian Project	465
<i>Nur Balkan-Atli, Nurcan Kayacan, Semra Balci, Laurence Astruc and Korhan Erturaç</i>	
Results of geochemical analyses of obsidian artefacts from the Neolithic site of Tell Labwe South, Lebanon	475
<i>Lamya Khalidi, Bernard Gratuze, Maya Haidar-Boustani, Juan José Ibáñez and Luís Teira</i>	
The consumption of obsidian at Neolithic Çatalhöyük: a long-term perspective	495
<i>Tristan Carter and Marina Milic</i>	

The obsidian assemblage from Neolithic Hagoshrim, Israel: pressure technology and cultural influence	509
<i>Heeli C. Schechter, Ofer Marder, Ran Barkai, Nimrod Getzov and Avi Gopher</i>	
The obsidian at Arpachiyah, Iraq; an integrated study	529
<i>Stuart Campbell and Elizabeth Healey</i>	

The *7th Conference on PPN Chipped and Ground Stone Industries of the Fertile Crescent* was held in Barcelona and Bellaterra from the 14 to 17 February 2012, with the conference proceedings now being published here under the title *Stone Tools in Transition: From Hunter-Gatherers to Farming Societies in the Near East*.

The Culture Department in the Government of Catalonia and, more precisely, the Directorate-General of Cultural Heritage opted to collaborate in the organisation of the event for several reasons. First, because of its marked international character and the long tradition of these scientific meetings, going back over 19 years. The second important point was that on this occasion, a Catalan university, the Autonomous University of Barcelona and in particular its Prehistory Department was the co-organiser. Additionally, we thought that the subject, Neolithic studies in the geographical area of the Near East, the cradle of our civilisation, and the important interdisciplinary and crosscutting nature of the topic ensured the achievement of excellent results.

In fact, this event totally fulfilled the objectives we would like Catalan archaeological research to achieve: the accreditation of the research at an international level; presence in international forums and publications; and attainment of a high degree of excellence.

There is no doubt that Catalan archaeological research is in this line. The number of Catalan teams working abroad is clear evidence of this. The existence of pluri-disciplinary and crosscutting research projects on a high level of quality are the main proof that our research standards in archaeology are comparable with those of the most advanced countries, despite this being a small country.

In the same line, the Culture Department would also like to acknowledge our main groups of consolidated research on this period, who are conducting archaeological projects in the Near East. Furthermore, we would like to extend this acknowledgement to all the Catalan archaeological excavations overseas. All these elements would have sufficed by themselves alone, but the Conference added an especially significant ingredient: our Mediterranean vocation and the fact that it would lead to such an interesting publication as the one presented here, which bears witness to all the aspects being described.

In short, we believe the Conference is clear proof that our archaeological research is competitive and of high quality.

Finally, we wish the greatest success to the next conference, currently being organised, which will take place in Cyprus and which will ensure the continuity of these major scientific meetings, once again within a European and Mediterranean cultural framework.

Josep Manuel Rueda Torres

Subdirector-general of Architectonic, Archaeological and Palaeontological Heritage
Directorate-General of Archives, Libraries, Museums and Cultural Heritage
Culture Department of the Government of Catalonia

One of the trends that have most influenced society, and also universities, in recent years is the increase in international relationships, communication and collaboration. This takes place on institutional levels, but also, and above all, on a more basic level of research teams, laboratories and even more often between the researchers themselves. The use of new technologies has greatly helped in this as they have improved its speed and immediacy. However this has not reduced the need for meetings and conferences where, generally in person, researchers gather about an object of study or a speciality. The advantages range from the ease of discussion about new ideas and hypotheses, and direct dialogue with colleagues, to learning about new topics and/or teams. Therefore, the holding of conferences is still very much of interest.

Of the meetings which the UAB as a scientific institution helped organise in 2012, we can highlight in this brief presentation the one that was the origin of the present publication: the *7th International Conference on the Chipped and Ground Stone Industries in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Fertile Crescent*. The meeting congregated about a hundred researchers who presented a considerable number of oral communications and posters. The international nature of the conference should be stressed, as archaeologists from a dozen countries took part.

The material and immaterial cultural heritage of societies possesses undoubted intrinsic value as an identifying element of people and nations, and acts as an axis of cohesion and social and cultural activity. There is doubtlessly also a perfectly legitimate economic dimension. Both aspects are quite compatible and complementary. It is therefore important for heritage to be considered an asset, and not only a source of expenses, a burden, in its preservation.

The geographical area of the Near East enjoys very special meaning and importance for the world of history and archaeology, on a specific level and for a more general understanding of the Eurasian area. As is well known, the origins of the phenomena of social and economic transformation were located there; aspects of the magnitude of the first farming societies and cities, and the appearance of states (before in any other part of the world). Archaeologists, historians and philologists trace the evidence and study these phenomena so that with their knowledge they might contribute towards improving modern societies. The studies in the present proceedings of the scientific meeting, organised by the SAPPO research team in the University Prehistory Department together with the IMF of the CSIC, approach the Neolithisation process in the Near East through the study of the stone tools found at archaeological sites in the region. This research leaves no doubts about the vitality of Near Eastern archaeology and the significant presence of researchers from our institutions in this field of science.

Pilar Dellunde

Research Vice-rector, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The 7th *Conference on PPN Chipped and Ground Stone Industries of the Fertile Crescent* was held in Barcelona in winter 2012 at a time of socio-economic difficulties in southern Europe and a complex situation in the Middle East. The conference therefore signified a major stimulus as well as the recognition of the work carried out until that time by several research groups in the Mediterranean area and the Near East; in particular, in the case of the CSIC, by the team headed by Dr. Juan José Ibáñez at the Institución Milà i Fontanals. In such a context, the PPN7 succeeded in showing that scientific collaboration is an important instrument for progress, as the researchers were able to share and exchange experiences and knowledge. It was also a magnificent platform for discussions between scholars of different nationalities, with different views on scientific matters and, possibly, also on socio-political realities and their impact on heritage and research in the region. In this respect, while awareness of the social and cultural value of archaeological heritage is growing, major sites that could contribute significantly to a better understanding of the birth and development of Near East cultures continue to be destroyed and plundered. For this reason, the meeting was an excellent example of how scientific collaboration can be, and indeed is, a model of transversal and institutional cooperation.

Luis Calvo

Delegate in Catalonia of the Spanish National Research Council – CSIC