Seeing Lithics: A Middle-Range Theory for Testing for Cultural Transmission in the Pleistocene

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Abstract
There is substantial debate over the extent to which the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition and the dispersal of anatomically modern humans from Africa into Eurasia at the end of the Pleistocene were the result of the same process, related processes, or unrelated but coincident processes. The current debate shows a gap in archaeological method and theory for understanding how different cultural transmission processes create patterning in the material culture of foragers at the resolution of Paleolithic palimpsests. This research project attempts to bridge this gap with a middle-range theory connecting cultural transmission and dual inheritance theory with the archaeological study of flintknappers’ flake-by-flake choices in the production of lithic assemblages. The project thus combines a new middle-range theory as well as a new approach to characterizing Paleolithic assemblages for systematic comparison of units of analysis appropriate to distinguishing forces of change in cultural evolution.
Cultural transmission models are coming to the fore in explaining increases in the Paleolithic toolkit richness and diversity. During the later Paleolithic, technologies increase not only in terms of... Tostevin GB (2012) Seeing lithics: a middle-range theory for testing for cultural transmission in the Pleistocene. Oxbow Books, OxfordGoogle Scholar. Villa P, Roebroeks W (2014) Neandertal demise: an archaeological analysis of the modern human superiority complex. In short, a middle-range theory is an analytical theory. Its scope is limited, not in the sense of dealing only with a class of concrete entities as classified culturally, but in the sense of treating only a certain system of variables. A value-commitment to the construction of limited scope but abstract theories coupled with a value commitment to a recursive process of unification of such theories may well be a plausible path for the advance of sociological theory. (For examples of group process research programs in relation to theory growth, see Berger and Zelditch 1993.)

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