Abstracts

Caught in the act – a geo-ethnoarchaeological study of activity areas at Wadi Faynan, Jordan

Daniella Vos (Bournemouth University)

In recent years, the use of microscopic techniques in order to explore various archaeological research questions has increased, enabling us to study past lifestyles in greater detail. This paper will discuss the efficacy of geochemistry and phytolith analysis for identifying activity areas in ephemeral sites by presenting a geo-ethnoarchaeological study of Bedouin campsites at Wadi Faynan, Jordan. The sites had been abandoned for various durations of time when sampled, enabling the consideration of the effects of taphonomic processes on the presence and preservation of the geochemical and phytolith soil signatures. While discussing this case study, several issues affecting the use of geoarchaeological techniques for the identification of archaeological features will be addressed: how well do soil signatures found in ethnographic sites represent the spatial distribution of activities? What effect do taphonomic processes have on geochemical and phytolith traces within anthropogenic deposits after abandonment? Is the combination of multiple proxies valuable?

Scoops of history: Tracking deposit movement through insect assemblages

Sander Aerts (Museum of London Archaeology, Northampton)

In order to understand the mixture of deposits in an archaeological feature, insect assemblages can play a valuable role. Their ecological niches can tell us how where deposits originate from and how they have travelled to the archaeological context, thus making invisible stratigraphies visible.

Micromorphology of terp mounds

Hans Huisman (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands)

Among the most iconic archaeological features in the Netherlands are the hundreds of artificial hills called *terp* or *wierde*. These hills are the result of c. 1500 year (iron age to middle age) of human settlement in the northern tidal region, which flooded regularly. An overview will be given of the microscopic characteristics of typical terp deposits - based on c. 8 years of micromorphological research - and what they can tell about human activities and interaction with the ever changing landscape.

Hidden stories of tool use: why microwear matters

Annelou van Gijn (Leiden University)

Microwear analysis is increasingly becoming part of the archaeological toolkit. It allows the analysis of traces of wear which reflect the activities an object was involved in or the treatment it was subjected to throughout its life history. Two case studies will be presented to illustrate the added value of microwear studies for a better understanding of "big archaeological questions". The first concerns the changing role of import flint in Neolithic wetland communities during the period of their gradual "neolithisation". The second study discusses the role of amber beads in burial practices from the Middle to the Late Neolithic, as inferred from their life history and treatment, adding crucial information about the changes in social practices surrounding past burial rituals.

Geoarchaeological Studies on a Bioarchaeological Context

Panagiotis Karkanas (Malcolm H. Wiener Laboratory for Archaeological Science, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

A microstratigraphic and sedimentological approach is proposed here for the study of tombs and related bioarcheological contexts. Following this approach processes and activities such as backfilling and reopening processes, floor constructions and maintenance, tombs configuration and their taphonomy are better understood and interpreted. This analysis enables the reconstruction of complex histories of mortuary practices and their social meaning.
