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EXPLORING HUMAN-MINERAL INTERACTIONS

Techno-functional approaches to extracting and processing mineral resources - International Symposium

Date

17-19 Nov., 2023

Place

Institut für Archäologien
Am Innrain No.52a
Universität Innsbruck
6020 Innsbruck, Austria

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The use of stone tools in mining and mineral processing is a long-standing practice that we can trace back to palaeolithic times. Archaeological evidence from mining sites all over the world suggests that these tools were employed for various tasks such as digging, hammering, chiseling, crushing and grinding different materials. In many cases groundstone tools were fashioned from locally available materials and adapted to the specific mining conditions and requirements of their respective regions. The practice of mineral treatment and exploitation is closely connected to the economic and social aspects of ancient communities. Understanding how prehistoric communities exploited minerals can give us insight into their economic and social structurations, as well as their technological capabilities and forms of access to resources they considered worth extracting.

Researchers face many challenges in understanding the specific tasks and uses of stone tools in mining and processing contexts. In response, use-wear and residue analysis have been developed as methods for macro- and microscopically studying the surfaces of stone tools to identify wear patterns caused by their use and production as well as post-depositional surface transformations. By using traceological analyses, and controlled experiments researchers can infer the types of activities the tools were used for, the types of minerals exploited, and the conditions under which they were used, reused, recycled and finally disposed of.

This symposium aims to provide a platform to discuss the crucial role of stone tools, specifically groundstone tools like hammers, grindstones, and handstones found in mining and processing sites as well as contexts in settlements associated with these sites. These tools were used to extract and process various minerals including salt, ochre, hematite, copper and iron ores, flint, quartz, and other mineral resources. It seeks to bring together doctoral and post-doctoral researchers and established experts, to share their experiences in techno-functional analysis, experimental archaeology, and ethnography. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the role of stone tools in mining and mineral processing across different periods and regions from the Palaeolithic to the more recent periods.

Organisers

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