The Department of Anthropology

Presents:

Grant McCall

Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Tulane University

Friday, October 9
4:00 p.m.
27 Macbride Hall

Rethinking the Acheulean: What studying technological organization can tell us about Middle Pleistocene hominin evolution

Acheulean handaxes were first recognized as artifacts by incipient natural scientists more than three centuries ago. Since then, they have never failed to capture the imaginations of Paleolithic archaeologists. The striking formal characteristics and archaeological patterning of Acheulean handaxes have commonly been taken as indications of early hominin cognitive sophistication, cultural modernity, and even certain forms of reproductive behavior. Likewise, handaxes have been taken as markers of many distinct patterns of subsistence behavior, the most important of which has been the hunting and butchery of big game. Unfortunately, virtually all of these sorts of propositions have turned out to be ambiguous at best, suffering from a broad range of referential shortcomings. This presentation will propose an alternative way of approaching the Acheulean handaxe problem based on a reconsideration of technological organization. I will argue that the archaeological record of the Middle Pleistocene implies patterns of early hominin economic behavior that were radically different than those known among modern hunter-gatherers. This fact, in turn, frames the great significance of the transition from the Acheulean period to the Middle Stone Age.

Grant S. McCall is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Tulane University. He received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Iowa in 2006. McCall's interests include hunter-gatherer behavioral ecology, technological organization, rock art research, and lithic analysis. McCall has done field research at Stone Age sites in Namibia for more than fifteen years. He is also currently the editor of the journal Lithic Technology.

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