



Why microwear matters: case studies from the Dutch Neolithic

CENTRE FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE (CAS) SEMINAR SERIES

DATE: FRIDAY 23 MARCH 2018

TIME: 3:30-4:30PM

VENUE: 41.G03A, UOW

SPEAKER: ANNELOU VAN GIJN

Annelou van Gijn is professor of Archaeological Material Culture and Artefact Studies at Leiden University. She studied anthropology and archaeology at Washington State University Pullman (US) and the University of Groningen and obtained her PhD at Leiden University in 1990. Her teaching and research focus on prehistoric technology, ancient crafts, experimentation and the reconstruction of the cultural biography of objects. She is a specialist in microwear analysis and is leading an extensive experimental house building project using only Stone Age tools. Annelou has established and is directing the Leiden Laboratory for Artefacts Studies.

SEMINAR OVERVIEW:

Throughout their life path objects circulate through time and space and can be inscribed with different meanings, ranging from a mundane to a highly ceremonial or even sacred significance. These roles can change during the life path of the objects. Studying prehistoric objects from a biographical perspective has proven to be extremely useful in gaining insight into the highly variable functions and meanings objects must have had in the past. Especially microwear analysis – using low and high power microscopy to study traces of wear and tear – has provided unique insights in the life paths of things. It is one of the methods to detect the hidden evidence for the manufacture, use, transformations and treatments of objects. Although many different materials can be imbued with special meaning, stone is special in that it is a lasting material that connects generations. As such it is often considered a perfect repository for symbolic knowledge. The study of stone objects from a biographical perspective has shown that not only impressive flint daggers and oversized axes display evidence for special (ritual) treatment, but also seemingly domestic items like unretouched flakes and querns. This presentation will elucidate the importance of close, microscopic, inspection of objects for a better understanding of past ritual behaviour by drawing on some examples from the Dutch Neolithic.



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