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#252 In search of “cloudstones”? Lithic raw material procurement in mountainous and alpine regions during the Mesolithic and Neolithic

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Access to lithic raw materials was central to hunter-gatherer and early farming societies of the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. In alpine and mountainous regions, knowledge of where and how to access lithic raw materials was key for effective resource exploitation and in extreme instances, for survival. However, the sometimes monumental, physical impact of quarrying and peoples' apparent willingness to travel long distances to procure rock from particular sites, imply that quarrying, procurement sites, and rocks, had social significance too. That is, quarries and procurement sites may have been social arenas or persistent social nodes.

Lithic raw materials exploited in mountainous terrains include types such as chert, quartz, rock crystal, quartzites and radiolarite, all of which are suitable for the production of chipped stone artefacts. Although quarries and other procurement locations securely dated to the Mesolithic/Neolithic are rare, analysis of raw material variation at (settlement) sites can be used to gain insight into the variety and scale of lithic sources exploited. Together, this demonstrate different procurement strategies throughout the Stone Age. Varying intensities and methods of persisting, seasonal, and event-like exploitation, are probably closely related to general landscape use, climatic conditions, mobility patterns, and various social contexts.

What does lithic raw material procurement in the montane and (sub-)alpine zones tell us about Mesolithic and Neolithic economies or social organisation? What was the social significance of these lithic raw materials, these “cloudstones” as commented on by Edmonds and Ferraby (2013)? What can apparent familiarity with perhaps otherwise largely unchanged, natural places reveal about social aspects of these various communities? Did limited access to specific raw materials influence technological developments? There are many gaps in our knowledge, and we invite speakers to explore these with us through case studies or syntheses.

* Edmonds, M. and Ferraby, R. 2013. *Stonework*. Group VI Press

