Summer research program seminar series

May 30 , 2024 at 4pm

Venue: Lecture Hall 3 (LH3)

Butchered bones, extinct animals and volcanic ash: Current topics in human evolutionary studies in the Indian Subcontinent

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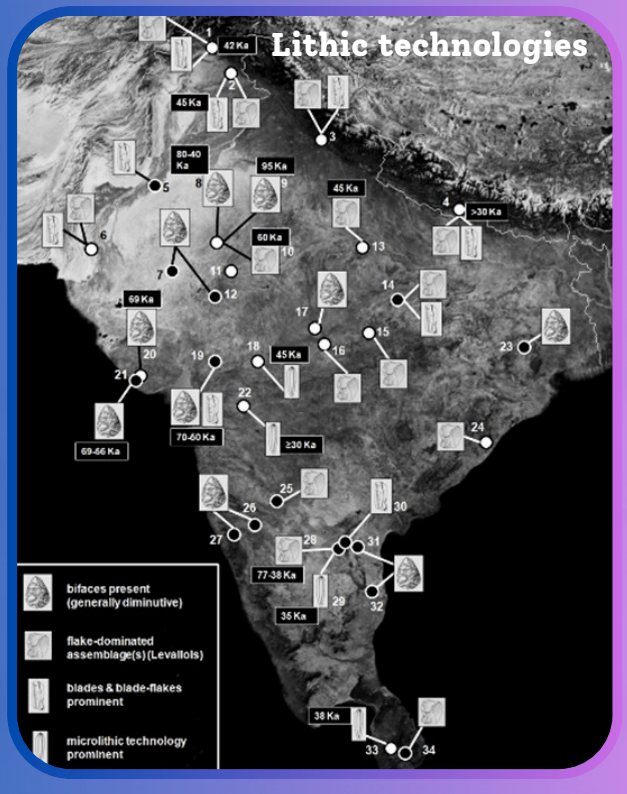

Handaxe

Elephant fossils

The Indian Subcontinent (or South Asia) is large and ecologically diverse landmass situated in the center of the Old World. As a result, it has often hypothesized to be a major biogeographic corridor for various fauna and different hominin species for the last two million years. Recent research across Eurasia has increasingly highlighted the relevance of the Subcontinent in human evolutionary studies, particularly for Asian prehistory. Current paleoanthropological evidence suggests arrival by early humans by at least 1.5 million years ago with Acheulean stone tool technology. While the majority of the prehistoric evidence is dominated stone tools, animal fossils and some rock art, the region has not yielded adequate human fossils to know which species were present over time. It is also not clear when the earliest Homo sapiens arrive and how they replaced the preceding archaic populations (as compared to the better known neanderthalensis to sapiens transition in Europe). This paper demonstrates the scientific significance of the Indian Subcontinent in world prehistory and Asian paleoanthropology by highlighting diverse and exciting research issues and debates. These include alleged butchered bones that possibly suggest the presence of early humans by 2.6 million years ago, possible role of prehistoric humans in the extinction of various faunal species between 60 to 10 thousand years ago (including hippos, ostriches, elephants, cattle and horses), the debated impact on ecology and humans by the Toba volcanic super eruption at ~74,000 years ago and the nature of various technological and behavioral transitions for the past ~2 million years. For instance, due to the typo technological complexity of the stone tool record for the last four hundred thousand years, it is difficult to link specific technologies with specific hominin species. There is also no clear evidence for Palaeolithic technologies to have dispersed eastwards into eastern and southeastern Asia.

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