

Our Masters – research on the Late Paleolithic in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century

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Abstract:

This session will investigate the development of the Late Paleolithic research from the mid-20th century to the early 21st century, highlighting the scholars, methodological changes, and interpretive frameworks that have influenced current understanding of this period's dynamics. The term “our masters” refers both to pioneering researchers whose foundational work established the discipline and to the theoretical paradigms that have had a lasting impact. Beginning with the post-war decades, the overview describes how traditional culture-historical approaches gradually gave way to more advanced analytical methods, including refined lithic typologies, settlement pattern analyses, and the widespread adoption of radiocarbon dating as well as palaeoecological changes during the Late Glacial period. These innovations transformed chronologies, enabling more precise reconstructions of changes in human behavior during the final stages of the Pleistocene.

We aim to honour influential figures whose work laid the foundations for modern Paleolithic archaeology, examine the methodological breakthroughs that transformed the field, and consider how new analytical tools and interdisciplinary approaches continue to reshape long-standing interpretations. By reflecting on “our masters,” we aim to encourage a conversation about the discipline's intellectual history and the paths future research might follow.