

DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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In memoriam Jacques Tixier (1925–2018)

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On 3rd April 2018, the world-famous scholar Jacques Tixier died at the age of 93. He was the last one of the three great French prehistorians who made fundamental imprints on prehistoric archaeology after World War 2. François Bordes (1919–1981) has renewed the typology of knapped stone tools by establishing a classification system and a statistical evaluation of lithic assemblages.¹ André Leroi-Gourhan (1911–1986) has elaborated the theoretical basis and the methodology of a palaeoethnological approach for excavating and analysing Palaeolithic sites with the aim of reconstructing the everyday life of prehistoric societies.² Jacques Tixier has developed the method of technological reading (*lecture technologique*) of knapped stone artefacts with the aim of understanding the technical behaviour of prehistoric people.³

This method was born from the long “conversation” he made with lithic artefacts during analyses of archaeological materials, as well as during knapping experiments. These conversations were fuelled by his innate intellectual curiosity and his vital desire for understanding. As he evoked the story in a video interview in 2015,⁴ even the very first prehistoric artefacts, found in the spoil heaps of the Pair-non-Pair Cave during a school excursion in 1940, started to interrogate him. It was reinforced by a contact with an archaeological material from his field surveys in Algeria in 1949, where he worked as a teacher in a primary school. The always returning fundamental question “How were these stone tools made?” led him trying to reproduce them using only the materials that were available to prehistoric man.⁵ The acquired knowledge was further enriched by the discussions with colleagues and friends involved in lithic experimentations, including Don E. Crabtree, François Bordes, and Gene Titmus.

He was also determined to share his knowledge through teaching, lectures or knapping demonstrations. He carried them out with an excellent pedagogical sense attracting people of all ages. I met him for the first time in a similar context during a lithic technology course at Université Paris X in Nanterre in 1986. He opened an unknown door for me toward a new aspect of Prehistory, which had a great impact on my scientific activity. Fourteen years later, thanks to him, I could participate in the thematic school of the CNRS, entitled “Technology

1 BORDES 1950; BORDES 1961; BORDES 1984.

2 LEROI-GOURHAN – BRÉZILLON 1972.

3 INIZAN et al. 1999; TIXIER 2012.

4 Jacques Tixier interviewed by Jean-Philippe Rigaud, Alain Turq and Pierre-Jean Texier at the Musée national de Préhistoire, Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, in 2015 – <https://www.pole-prehistoire.com/index.php/fr/decouvrir/les-ressources-en-ligne/expositions-virtuelles/90-portail-les-temoins-de-la-prehistoire/les-temoins-de-la-prehistoire/309-jacques-tixier> (accessed 13. 03. 2019).

5 TIXIER 2012, 31.

of prehistoric knapped stone and experimentation”, organized by his former students and colleagues, Pierre-Jean Texier, Jacques Pelegrin, Pierre Bodu, and Alain Turq. This excellent educational training was very didactic, combining theoretical, archaeological and practical aspects, following Jacques Tixier’s mind.

He was an outstanding researcher too. He conducted excavations in Algeria, Lebanon, Qatar and France. His main interest in excavating was also a palaeoethnological approach: how to record past human activity and behaviour, and how to reconstruct it in space and time. The most attractive example was unearthed at Bordj Mellala in the sandy Sahara.⁶ A prehistoric camp from 7000 BC was preserved by the sand, where domestic area with ceramic fragments, combustion traces and bottles from ostrich egg were found. Several workshops of lithic tool production were also identified, yielding the proofs of task sharing strategy, which was demonstrated by refits.



I had the chance to see Jacques Tixier working very closely, when we analysed the unique blade depot of Boldogkőváralja dating from the Neolithic Bükk Culture.⁷ I was impressed seeing him tirelessly passing over the almost 600 silex blades one by one, for a thorough examination under the magnifying glass. It was an open-minded discussion with the artefacts. He explained to me: each lithic assemblage has its own characteristics. It is always the assemblage that will tell you what to study, what the important features are, what kind of information it could yield. You only need to pay your attention and let them tell their stories.⁸

He had a unique skill: to be a colleague, a mentor, a teacher, an uncle and a friend all at once, and give you basics for your life in any moment.

6 TIXIER 1976.

7 MESTER – TIXIER 2013.

8 TIXIER 2012, 70.

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