

Ethnoarchaeology and the Organization of Lithic Technology

Grant S. McCall

Published online: 7 January 2012
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012

Abstract Although the modern production and use of stone tools is rare, ethnoarchaeological research on this subject has provided important perspectives on methodological approaches to archaeological lithic analysis. Recent ethnoarchaeological research on lithics frequently takes the form of “cautionary tales,” warning against the primacy of functional variables most commonly invoked by lithic analysts. I argue that lithic ethnoarchaeology would benefit from a comparative organizational framework for explaining variation in patterns of stone tool use that takes into account the predictability and redundancy of the location and timing of technological activities. Understanding the underlying causes of modern patterns of stone tool use, in turn, offers a framework for exploring sources of lithic technological variation in the archaeological record. I also argue that technological analytical perspectives, such as the *chaîne opératoire* and sequence of reduction approaches, can benefit from the insights gained through lithic ethnoarchaeological research, helping us define important analytical concepts and identify appropriate units of analysis.

Keywords Stone tools · Ethnoarchaeology · Organization of technology · *Chaîne opératoire* · Sequence of reduction

Introduction

Since the 1960s, experimental knapping has formed the basis for the analysis of archaeological lithic assemblages, and archaeologists interested in stone tools now routinely learn to knap as an aspect of their training. Ethnoarchaeological studies of modern forager technology also have contributed a great deal to modern lithic

G. S. McCall (✉)
Department of Anthropology, Tulane University, 101 Dinwiddie Hall, New Orleans,
LA 70118, USA
e-mail: gmccall@tulane.edu