



Hammering Flakes or Flaking Hammers?

Palaeoanthropology meets Primatology 2: The Origins of Percussive Technology

A one-day symposium and workshop at the Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies,
University of Cambridge, October 18, 2008

Recent studies bridging the natural and social sciences have brought innovative insights to the field of human evolution, addressing the factors that explain the genesis of tool-use by human and non-human primates and the evolutionary origins of percussive technologies. In the last 20 years, non-human primate percussive technologies have increasingly interested archaeologists, particularly those investigating early Palaeolithic industries. As the earliest hominin technology remains poorly understood, in seeking to reconstruct the percussive technologies of Plio-Pleistocene hominins the challenge is to find relevant primate behaviours to model aspects of these technologies that are invisible in the archaeological record.

Proposed similarities between *Pan* nut-cracking site-assemblages and Plio-Pleistocene hominin pounding tool assemblages have intensified the debate between archaeologists and primatologists, and recent reports of wild *Cebus* nut-cracking raise further important issues. Re-examination of percussion tools from Oldowan assemblages suggests that pounding tools had a more important role in the development of the first hominin lithic industries than was previously thought. Moreover, claims that stone assemblages produced by non-human primates are not only an indicator of possible functions of hominin pounding tools, but are also similar to these pounding tools in their typology and technology emphasises the need for extensive comparisons between these percussion technologies and urges a focus on the *intentionality* of behaviours of tool production. Despite the significant potential benefits of comparing primate and early hominin percussion technologies, cross-communication between palaeoanthropologists and primatologists has been limited to date. This conference aims to be a step forward regarding the understanding of the origins of technology by discussing similarities and differences between non-human primate and hominin percussion technologies.

We propose to hold a one-day symposium at LCHES on October 18, 2008, that will bring together international researchers at the forefront of percussive technology research, with the aim of opening up new perspectives and research avenues in this developing field. It is anticipated that the format of the day will provide for a series of 30 minute presentations in the morning and afternoon, with a workshop from 4pm onwards. Important outcomes of the day will be the inclusion of ongoing student research alongside established research projects, the forging of international collaborative links between primate and early hominin investigators, and the generation of novel perspectives on the place of percussion in the origins of human behaviour.

The focus of research in LCHES is the integration of biological, anthropological and archaeological approaches to the study of human evolution and human diversity. Its central theme is that human evolution must be studied within an integrated multidisciplinary framework.

Contact details

Please contact Michael Haslam mah66@cam.ac.uk; Victoria Ling vl237@cam.ac.uk
or Adriana Hernandez rah80@cam.ac.uk; Susana Carvalho scr50@cam.ac.uk

Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies

The Henry Wellcome Building

University of Cambridge

Fitzwilliam Street

Cambridge CB2 1QH

United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0) 1223 764 700; Fax: +44 (0) 1223 764 710

