

Reproducing archaeological objects: historical, material and empirical approaches

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Abstract:

Reproductions of prehistoric objects or monuments, such as casts, rubbings, copies, drawings and photographs, are commonly found alongside archaeological material and archives in museums and universities. However, until recently, these reproductions have attracted little interest from researchers. This session aims to highlight these objects and emphasize their usefulness in contributing to the history of prehistoric archaeology. The presentations will examine the process of creating these reproductions and provide an opportunity to share methodologies that link materiality, archives, and epistemology.

The session will focus on the people involved in producing these reproductions: what political, scientific or artistic choices motivate their selection and manufacture? Does tracing their history reveal networks of actors and circulations that are similar to or different from those of archaeological objects? Studying their production enables to consider the choice of medium, its materiality and the technical expertise involved, which is not necessarily equivalent to archaeological expertise. This enables us to identify and trace the individuals on the margins of the history of archaeology, often referred to as “little hands”. How have these reproductions been used over time? Are they preferred educational tools or promotional items?

The session will also consider the value of these objects at the time of their production and how this has evolved. This includes scientific, heritage, memorial, educational, artistic and sentimental value. Presentations may shed light on the epistemology of the discipline through these objects. Does the experience of reproducing an archaeological object brings us closer to the experience of those who crafted it in earlier periods? In other words, is reproduction a privileged means of accessing the past? To what extent does reproduction retain its primary function over time while also becoming an archive of the history of the discipline? What conservation and jurisdictional issues do these objects raise today?