Preface

The 7th Conference of the UISPP Commission on Flint Mining in Pre- and Protohistoric Times took place in Belgium, near Mons, Hainaut, over four days from the 28th of September to the 1st of October 2016, on the invitation of the Public Service of Wallonia and the Mons town museums. The decision to hold the meeting at Mons was largely guided by the presence of the Spiennes mine, well known internationally both through its UNESCO World Heritage status and through the excellence of research undertaken there. Paradoxically, the commission had never been to Spiennes since its creation in 2006, despite the fact that the sites of Spiennes 'Camp-à-Cayaux' and 'Petit-Spiennes' offer numerous opportunities for visiting extraction features, as well as providing high quality data that has constantly been renewed to keep up with developments in Neolithic mining research. Thus this significant local potential facilitated the organisation of the meeting in two phases, the first with presentations of papers and discussions between participants (two days), the second with excursions (two days). Altogether, the conference brought together eighty researchers, from fourteen European countries as well as the United States.

The scientific committee chose three themes for the conference: mining and quarrying, geological characterisation, knapping processes and distribution networks during pre- and protohistoric times. Altogether, nineteen papers were given, together with ten shorter presentations in the form of posters, unequally spread across the three themes. The first theme brought together seven papers and three posters. In addition to the results of recent research on various prehistoric mining sites in France, in the Vaucluse (DE LABRIFFE & REGGIO, this volume) or in Champagne (MARTINEAU *et al.*, this volume), in Catalonia, in Cantabria and in Hungary (BIRÓ *et al.*, this volume), methodological presentations were given dealing with aspects such as defining the extent of sites with non destructive methods like Airborne Laser Scanning (BUDZISZEWSKI *et al.*, this volume) or geophysical survey (BACZKOWSKI, this volume). The mapping of raw material outcrops (VALDE-NOWAK & KERDENER-GUBAŁA, this volume) or of production waste, as around the mine at Rijckholt-St. Geertruid (Netherlands), is another approach to the extent of sites. The creation of databases on a type of raw material, in this case Krzemionki Banded Flint, provided the opportunity to comprehend problems involved in managing large quantities of data of diverse origin and nature.

The second theme was addressed by three papers and one poster. The impact of geological constraints was examined for outcrops of Cambrian and Ordovician levels in the State of New York (LAPORTA *et al.*, this volume), while the consideration of processes of change in siliceous materials now enables a reassessment of procurement territories for the various materials used on archaeological sites. Two French research projects were presented, one on the Massif Central (DELVIGNE *et al.*, this volume), the other on the Bergerac area (FERNANDES *et al.*, this volume). The contributions and limits of the PIXE analysis method on Pyrenean materials were presented in the form of a poster.

The third theme, on knapping methods and product diffusion networks, was addressed by nine papers and one poster. The presence of knapping workshops dating to the Bronze Age on the Wierzbica 'Zele' mine was documented by recent excavation (LECH & WERRA, this volume), while the question of the transmission of know-how was raised through study of blade production on the Casa Montero mine, Spain (CASTAÑEDA *et al.*, this volume). The complexity of distribution networks of good quality raw materials was illustrated by various examples for Ghlin flint from Belgium (DENIS, this volume), Cinglais flint from Normandy (CHARRAUD, this volume), Balkan flint, materials from the Gargano region across the Adriatic sea, flints from Salinelles (Gard, France), as well as materials from the Mons region across Belgium and northern France.

However, the sitting of this conference at Mons was also the chance to present other aspects of local research, such as the human remains from extraction features at Spiennes (TOUSSAINT *et al.*, this volume), or the extraction of local flint in the historic period for gunflint (HAUZEUR *et al.*, this volume). Also, an inventory of collections housed in the Brussels Royal Museum of Art and History revealed just how much material comes from the site of Spiennes itself (CLAES & GHESQUIÈRE, this volume), while other aspects of the collections of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences were discussed, such as a collection of gunflints from Brandon, England or a polished jadeitite axe (ERRERA *et al.*, this volume).

Participants were also able to attend two lectures, one given at the conference by P. Topping on the social context of prehistoric flint and stone extraction in the United Kingdom (TOPPING, this volume); the other, for the general public, by J. Pelegrin at Mons University on the question of the production and diffusion of large flint blades in Europe.

The second part of the conference was taken up by the excursions, lasting just under two days. First of all, a joint visit to the Harmignies quarry was organised, enabling participants to observe the geological sections and the different layers of flint contained within the Spiennes Campanian chalk and exploited in the various mine shafts. Participants were then split into three groups for the three visits planned. As the mine shafts could only be visited by small groups of twelve people at the most, and in order to allow enough time for the sites to be fully appreciated by all, a rotating system of visits was organised, with each group staying half a day at each site. Thus all the conference participants were able to visit successively the deepest shafts (16 m) on the Spiennes 'Camp à Cayaux' site, exceptionally opened for the occasion, the excavation underway on shaft ST6 at 'Petit-Spiennes' and the visitor centre at 'Petit-Spiennes' with its permanent exhibition, as well as a shaft previously excavated by the Society for Prehistoric Research in Hainaut (SRPH).

This 7th Conference of the Commission was thus very rich and well-appreciated by the participants. The publication of the proceedings, thanks to the efforts of the contributors as well as the organisers, all of whom must be warmly thanked here, is a further token of the success of the event and of the dynamic strength of the UISPP Commission on Flint Mining in Pre- and Protohistoric Times.

(translation M. Ilett)

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