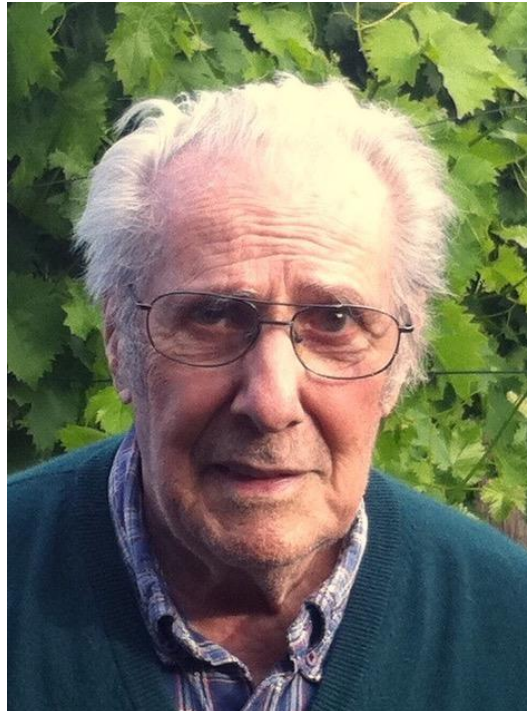

Jacques Tixier (1925-2018)

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Jacque Tixier

Jacques Tixier was an internationally known prehistorian and the founder of the technological “reading” of lithic industries. The first approach to this interpretation is based on experiments and the recognition of the chronological order of technical gestures.

He passionately sought out his study material in the field and conducted excavations in France, North Africa, the Near East and the Middle East. He was driven by the need to transmit his knowledge and was an excellent orator and teacher. His strong character, warmth and contagious enthusiasm captured the attention of novice students, seasoned professionals and reached out to the general public, both old and young.

His extremely rich career, with several ruptures, is not easy to sum up. We will attempt to present the main stages of this career, then develop several of the “themes” that best reflect his personality and his most important scientific contributions to Prehistory.



The Algerian period

Jacques Tixier was born on the first of January 1925 in Bordeaux, and entered the Primary Teachers Training School (Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs) of Algiers-Bouzaréah in 1947. In 1948, he was appointed to a school in El-Hamel, a village on the border of the northern Algerian Sahara. He had excellent memories of his teaching years and loved talking about them. Considering his gift for teaching, we can easily imagine that his young pupils must also cherish good memories of their master. He discovered a prehistoric site near his school (which he simply called "El Hamel"), comprising several Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic levels, and abundant microliths. After school, he collected material from the surface, excavated, sieved, marked and studied lithic material, day in, day out. In this solitary environment, he took to knapping, in order to understand the series he discovered. He subsequently joined the Bardo Museum, directed by Professor Lionel Balout, Dean of the Arts Faculty of Algiers. The latter was struck by Tixier's remarkable qualities of observation and first of all involved him in the preparation of the 2nd Panafrican congress of Prehistory in Algiers (1952) - where his first publication appeared (Tixier 1954) (These references refer to J. Tixier's general bibliography; the other references are listed at the end of the text.) - then transferred him to Algiers (1953). Jacques Tixier returned to his studies (he obtained a Certificate of prehistoric archaeology of North Africa) and was responsible for the reorganization of many of the prehistory collections curated at the Bardo Museum, many of which were incorporated into his PhD thesis., and the installation of the Centre for Anthropological, Prehistoric and Ethnological Research (Centre de Recherches Anthropologiques, Préhistoriques et Ethnologiques - CRAPE). He excavated the Dakhlet es-Saadane rock shelter during this period, which he published in 1955 (Tixier 1955a). That same year, he moved away from school teaching and began working in the CNRS, where he remained throughout his career.

When fieldwork in Algeria was no longer possible (due to the Algerian War 1954-1962), he began working in Morocco in 1957, where he studied the industries of Aïn Fritissa, which were published two years later (Tixier 1959a). He came back to France during the summer holidays and excavated, knapped and conversed with François Bordes. He assimilated the new methods - including statistical methods which were developing at that time. He also began a PhD directed by L. Balout, on the Epipalaeolithic of Maghreb.

Back to France

In 1962 he was obliged to leave Algeria. He was attached to the Chair of Prehistory of the National Museum of Natural History, which had just been created for the Dean L. Balout, at the same time as the associated CNRS laboratory (ERA 50, then LA 184). These structures were hosted at the imposing Human Paleontology Institute building (IPH, Monaco Foundation, associated with the MNHN), rue René Panhard, in the 13th arrondissement of Paris.

He submitted his PhD in Bordeaux in 1963. This "Typology of the Epipaleolithic of Maghreb" (Tixier 1963a) went well beyond the scope of Maghreb and became a widely diffused "classic". Indeed, the description of the types can be applied to different microlithic industries- geometrical or not - and the terminology adopted in the PhD is universal. (His terminological lexicon also inspired the lexicon in "Prehistory of knapped stones", vol. 2 (Tixier 1984a).)

Alongside his teaching and research activities, he became involved in two prehistoric divisions of the Ministry for Culture - Lorraine then Limousin - and was elected to the National CNRS committee twice (section 31).

Throughout his career, J. Tixier made countless interventions for a very diverse public, and was internationally recognized early on as a top level knapper-experimenter. In 1973, his friend Philip Smith (Professor at the University of Montreal) instigated his involvement in a special edition of *Time Life* on “Cro-Magnon” (Tixier 1973a), for which the photographer Pierre Boulat took a magnificent series of photos of J. Tixier knapping and manufacturing bone tools.

His main fieldwork

In 1964, he began excavations at La Faurélie II (Magdalenian and Azilian) in Dordogne (which finished in 1972). Many French and foreign students participated in fieldwork at the site and learned a lot from their time there, as J. Tixier, a born teacher, enjoyed sharing his knowledge and bringing them to visit the many other excavations of the region at the end of the week. 1964 was also the year of the Eyzies Congress, which was unfortunately never published, but where he met the American Don E. Crabtree, another pioneering technologist, who became a very good friend. Crabtree introduced J. Tixier to pressure flaking, which was a complete revelation to him. He discovered Amerindian obsidian pressure flaking with Crabtree’s first experiments with a crutch and copper point, which immediately evoked for him the flint blade debitage he had observed in Capsian and Neolithic assemblages in North Africa. He also discovered the intentional heating of raw materials to optimize their properties. He began a series of heating experiments at the IPH in 1966, which were subsequently revived and published in 1976 (Inizan *et al.* 1976a).

In 1967 and 1969, with Roger de Bayle des Hermens (CNRS), he undertook two fieldwork seasons at Jebel Irhoud in Morocco, where he recorded the stratigraphy, collected the lithic series and found a juvenile human humerus (Hublin *et al.* 1987).

In 1968, the Museum signed a convention to take over research at Ksar Aqil in Lebanon. This vast rock shelter is located in the valley of Antelias and was settled from the Middle Palaeolithic to the Epipalaeolithic. The 22-m-deep stratigraphy reveals continuous occupation from the base to the summit. Professor L. Balout entrusted Jacques Tixier with the direction of this enormous Palaeolithic site and excavations there began in 1969. By that time, he was part of the RCP 50 CNRS team, directed by Jean Perrot. He obtained a Wenner Gren Foundation grant which enabled many young North American and European students to work there. Again, J. Tixier gave lessons on prehistoric technology (often by knapping) and when possible, brought his excavators to discover the other accessible sites of the region.

But in 1975 the excavation season at Ksar Akil was brutally interrupted by the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990). Yet, that same year, J. Tixier was invited to the inauguration of the National Museum of Qatar, at the instigation of the Danish prehistorian Holger Kapel, who needed a specialist to confirm the alleged Early Palaeolithic age of the bifaces that he had discovered at prehistoric sites. Based on knapping techniques, the early age of these bifaces was not confirmed, but a long friendship nonetheless ensued between the two men. And this was the beginning of another adventure for Jacques Tixier. In 1976, a contract was signed between the CNRS and the Emirate of Qatar and six multidisciplinary archaeological fieldwork seasons took place from 1976 to 1982, as part of the RCP 476, which was created by the CNRS for this purpose, and with the support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The creation of the Prehistory and Technology laboratory

In 1978, J. Tixier submitted a State Thesis, spurred on by Professor Eric de Dampierre, the director of the Department of Ethnology and Comparative Sociology at Paris X-Nanterre at that time, who wished to consolidate the teaching of prehistory. This enabled J. Tixier to

supervise his students' PhDs, of which there were many. (Hélène Roche who submitted her PhD in 1979 was the last of his students who was not supervised by him (only on paper of course).) Furthermore, until that time, his team was mainly comprised of young researchers and PhD students - including the authors of this text - and was part of the LA 184. But following disagreements with Professor Balout, who was organizing his own succession at that time, he was brutally evicted from the IPH, with his team. And that is how the CNRS came to propose the creation of his own laboratory in the Centre for Archaeological Research (Centre de Recherche Archéologique - CRA): URA 28 "Prehistory and Technology", a thematic laboratory, with no geographic borders or temporal limits, created in 1979. From 1981 onwards, the team had two bases; one in Sophia Antipolis (at the site of the CRA) and the other at the CNRS in Meudon-Bellevue. As a result, he was offered offices in a building known as "the factory", which had previously been an engine-testing site. The building was still in its original state but with some CNRS funds and a lot of bright colours, the offices were soon rendered suitable. Up until 1988, the laboratory was comprised solely of lithic specialists, but decided to open out to specialists of other materials after that date (bone, pottery, and later metal). Jacques Tixier directed the laboratory - which subsequently became ERA 28 - until 1987. (Since 1997, the laboratory is implanted in the Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie on the Nanterre campus and was reorganized in 1999 into a Mixed Research Unit - Unité Mixte de Recherches (UMR 7055, CNRS/ Paris Nanterre University) and is now called « PréTech ».)

From typology to the technological approach

"...a constant preoccupation guides him: the intelligence of knapping and retouch techniques -the forms and types of lithic industries" wrote L. Balout in the preface of "Typologie de l'Épipaléolithique du Maghreb" (Tixier 1963b: 5). This intelligence of knapping techniques, which leads to forms and types, is clearly discernible in his remarkable cleaver classification as early as 1956 (Tixier 1957), which is still a model of its kind today.

"How" tools were made was J. Tixier's first concern, much more so than "why", which he considered to be a different, and much more elusive problem for understanding prehistoric populations. On the other hand, he soon realised that the "how" question could be tackled through observation and reasoned experimentation, in order to elucidate all the knapping processes, long before formalising technological interpretation. He developed his analysis principles for a lithic complex for the first time during a colloquium organized by the Wenner Gren Foundation in 1965 and subsequently published a reputed article (Tixier 1967).

But all these developments were still a long way off when Jacques Tixier began his career at the beginning of the 1950s. The "typological revolution" had just started, with the application of type-lists - and cumulative diagrams, initiated by François Bordes for the Early and Middle Palaeolithic (Bordes 1950) and Denise de Sonneville-Bordes and Jean Perrot (1953) for the Upper Palaeolithic. These study methods were very beneficial for prehistory as they brought order and rigour to the study of lithic industries, which were sometimes lacking in descriptions. J. Tixier himself contributed to the typological domain in a number of his early publications, although it was already clear that technology was his main preoccupation.

But excesses of all kinds can have adverse effects and at the end of the 60s and early 70s, J. Tixier and a number of his colleagues were struck by the "dehumanisation" of studies and publications on knapped lithic productions, which were often only typologies, percentages and diagrams. Everything was ready for another revolution, a technological one this time, and his whole analytical approach to lithic industries, including the capital notion of the *chaîne opératoire*, theorized by Marcel Mauss and André Leroi Gourhan, was to be part of it. His first summary of this appeared in his thesis "Method for the study of lithic toolkits - Méthode

pour l'étude des outillages lithiques" submitted in 1978. Surprisingly, this volume was not officially published at the time, but was nonetheless widely read. It was only published in 2012, in a magnificent bilingual edition, printed in Luxembourg (Tixier 2012) and apart from some inevitable hints of obsolescence over 30 years later, the work as a whole is still extremely pertinent.

Several meetings and round tables subsequently led to exchanges, debates (sometimes heated) and consolidated and diffused this new approach. The first of these was a round table organized by the newly created URA 28, in 1979, at the CRA in Sophia Antipolis (Préhistoire et technologie lithique, 1979). A second one followed a year later in Tervuren, Belgium, entitled "Tailler ! Pour quoi faire ?" (Cahen 1982). Quite a program. A third colloquium focusing on blade and pressure debitage, was organized by the URA 28 in our premises in Meudon-Bellevue in 1982 and was published by the CREP (Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Préhistoriques - Centre of Research and Prehistoric Studies) as volume 2 of the series "Préhistoire de la pierre taillée" (Title inspired by André Leroi-Gourhan's "Prehistory of Western art - Préhistoire de l'art occidental" (Leroi-Gourhan 1978), who generously authorized us to borrow it.) (1984a). The highly successful volume 1 "Technologie et terminologie", which partly presented his technological approach had been published several years beforehand, in 1980 (Tixier et al. 1980).

The CREP venture, or Jacques Tixier's idea of patronage

In November 1965, the French Petrol Company (Compagnie Française des Pétroles - Algeria) invited him to conduct fieldwork in the region of Ouargla, during the course of which he discovered the site of Bordj Mellala with Dr Trécolle. The site had been protected by a dune up until then and was perfectly intact. The CFP(A) funded work at the site for the next two years, then the site publication in 1978 (Tixier 1978a 1978b). The original format and remarkable iconography of this publication received much attention, in particular from Yvonne Rebeyrol, a scientific journalist at le Monde, who highlighted the quality of this site monograph. It was published by the CREP, a non-profit making association created for this purpose. At that time, Jacques Tixier was the editorial advisor for *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, for which he was paid. He decided to transfer all of these earnings to the CREP. In this way, when volume 1 of the "Préhistoire de la pierre taillée" series was ready (For the anecdote, when the text of the volume was ready for publication and we were at the design and layout stage, we no longer had access to the IPH offices. Yet, in that pre-computer era, we needed a lot of space. Yves Coppens, who was the director of the Musée de l'Homme at that time, kindly hosted us in the Anthropology laboratory.) (Tixier et al. 1980a), we were able to publish it without any problems under the CREP label. Not only did Tixier's initial generosity give us considerable freedom of publication, it also enabled us to set a sale price in keeping with the budgets of those for whom it was chiefly intended, i.e., students. And the venture did not stop there, as profits from the sale of volume 1 were then used to publish volume 2 (proceedings of the round table on blade debitage, (1984a)), then volume 3 (Inizan *et al.* 1992), the English version of volume 1, revised and augmented of a multilingual lexicon (German, English, Arabic, French, Greek, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese) at the end of the volume, and finally volumes 4 (Inizan *et al.* 1995) and 5 (Inizan *et al.* 1999), which are re-editions of volumes 1 and 3, with two additional chapters. We also transferred the rights for the text of vol. 4 -or vol. 5- for translation into Japanese, Portuguese and Farsi, and then published them online with free access in 2009 (see references at the end of the article).

Teaching, transmitting, exchanging

Tixier's lab at the IPH was beneath the glass roof and was the brightest part of that prestigious but rather austere building (we had the impression that we were on our way to "heaven"). There were several small rooms behind his office, one of which was his knapping workshop with his experimental collections. If you needed to know what a microburin was, several gestures later, there you had it and understood perfectly. A burin spall? Easy... and no more mixing up crested bladelets and backed bladelets!

Many French and foreign prehistorians came to meet him, some for a short visit and for the pleasure of conversing with him, others from countries where prehistory teaching was still not very developed, who came to learn from him and stayed a while.

From 1963 onwards, J. Tixier set up informal Prehistory courses, which people heard about by word of mouth. These inspiring courses were held in a large room in the IPH basement, which was a lot darker than his office. Even at that time, they already focused more on "how" tools were made than on the often-fastidious description of "types" of objects (Any students in prehistoric archaeology at the end of the '60s who did not have to "ingurgitate" endless lists of Bronze Age daggers or Villanovian fibulae, for example, can cast the first stone!), and incorporated different materials (stone, metal, bone, *etc.*), unlike in other more conventional prehistoric archaeology courses. In Tixier's courses, we were not shown slides or drawings but real stones, knapped before our eyes. The public was mixed and included confirmed professionals, students, and prehistory-loving amateurs who excavated and were well versed in typology. Questions arose from swirls of tobacco smoke from all quarters, including from Tixier (it was a different epoch).

This teaching was set up informally on an unpaid basis, and was later institutionalised at the IPH as part of the Practical School for Higher Studies - Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, then in Nanterre from 1972 onwards, with a firm technological focus. And it was no mean feat to introduce flint knapping to University lecture halls. We were responsible for the practical courses and it soon became clear to the three of us that the students had trouble with the terminological typological and technological jungle. We therefore felt the need to create a standardized vocabulary to enhance mutual understanding and back up the technological interpretation of knapped lithic objects. This resulted in the publication of the first volume of the series "Préhistoire de la pierre taillée - (Prehistory of knapped stone)", edited by the CREP in (Tixier *et al.* 1980).

The teaching program at the IPH, then Nanterre, was not the only place to learn and exchange: as we said earlier, there were excavations (La Faurélie, Ksar Akil, *etc.*), round tables, but also daily conversations, and when visitors to the lab came to talk about a specific problem, students often listened in and learnt from the exchange too, as they were no hierarchical barriers.

In this way, J. Tixier trained several generations of technologists. And when, over 30 years ago, the CNRS developed permanent teaching courses, it also set up a "knapping course" as part of the professional teaching program. The first session was so successful that this teaching course became a permanent element, and was subsequently taught by the trained generation. It is now part of the Thematic Schools and continues to attract students from across the world, and will no doubt soon be taught by the third generation...

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