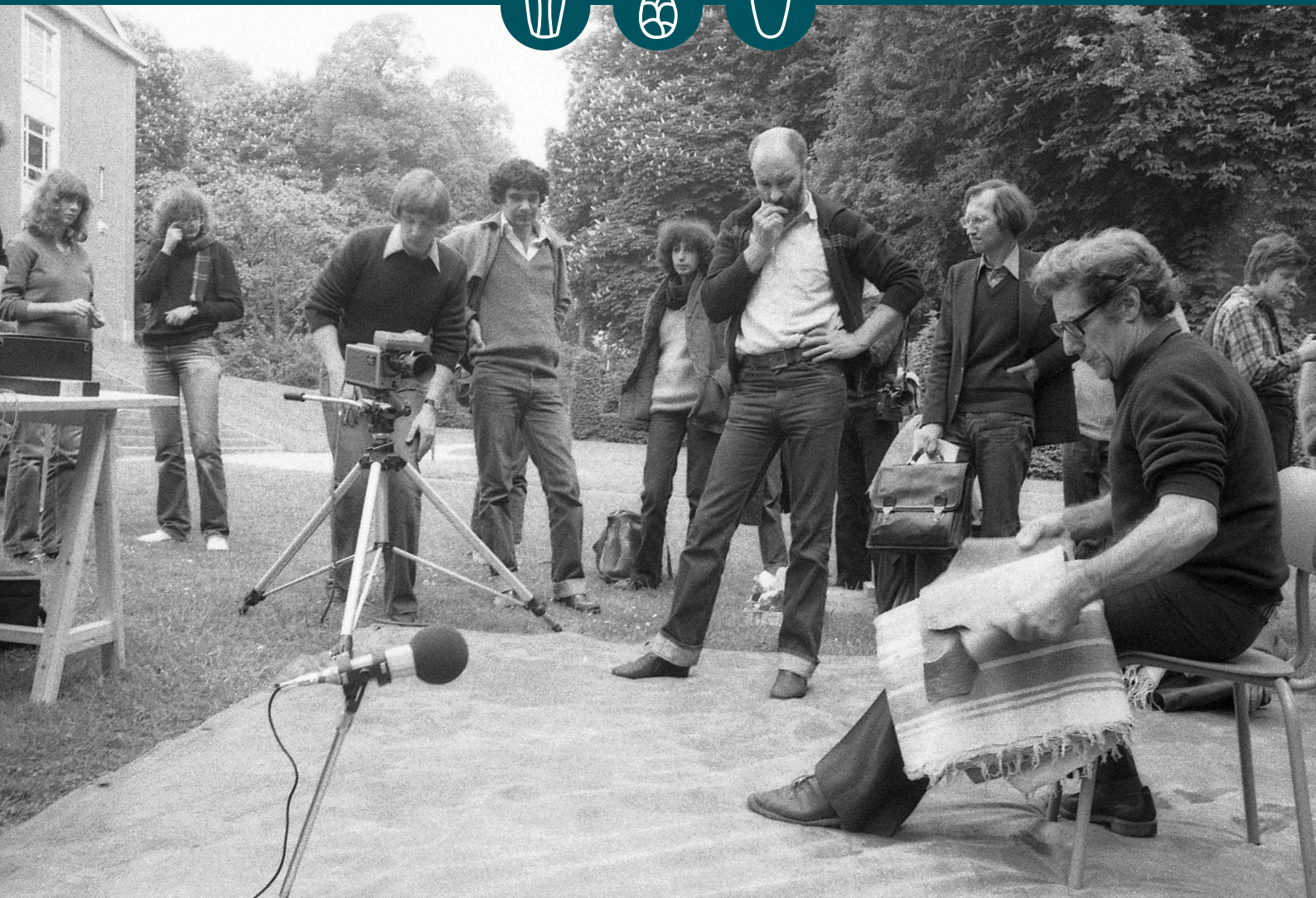


# LITIKUM

A Kőkor Kerekasztal folyóirata  
Journal of the Lithic Research Roundtable  
7. évfolyam • Volume 7 • 2019





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Zsolt Mester, György Lengyel, Attila Király



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SHORT COMMUNICATION

## Jacques Tixier in pictures

Pierre-Jean Texier<sup>1</sup>, Marcel Otte<sup>2</sup>, Zsolt Mester<sup>3</sup>, Attila Király<sup>4</sup>

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**Abstract • Kivonat**

Jacques Tixier, the scholar of lithic technology passed away on April 3rd 2018. We dedicate the next volume of 2020 to his memory. As another form to pay homage to Jacques Tixier, we recall his personality by photographs, sent by his former students and colleagues.

**Keywords • Kulcsszavak**

Jacques Tixier, lithic technology, history of research, in memoriam


**Cite as • hivatkozás**

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### Les Eyzies de Tayac, France, 1964 (Fig. 1–3)

Attila Király (text), Pierre-Jean Texier (photos)

Photos from the dawn of experimental knapping – Les Eyzies de Tayac, France, 1964. This conference was organized by François Bordes, an avowed lithic expert at this time. The participants of the meeting not only discussed ancient artefacts, but they tried to reproduce them. Of course, most people did not use knapped lithic artefacts in the sixties, so the technology was practically unknown at that time.

Bordes, Crabtree, Jelinek and not least, the young prehistorian, Jacques Tixier provided a fresh and long-term orientation of research: the role of stone tools in the past will be recognized only if we would understand the technology of making and using them. What else could be a more direct method to excel in this than practice?

The entire career of Jacques Tixier was determined by this technological approach. Sadly, the proceedings of the Les-Eyzies conference were never published in print (or in video). However, the participants were

satisfied that the experimental method works, and the method became a pillar of technological studies.

References for the Les-Eyzies-de-Tayac conference:

Delpech, F., Jaubert, J. (eds) 2009. *François Bordes et la préhistoire*. 134e Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques, Bordeaux.

Jelinek, A. 1965. Lithic Technology Conference, Les Eyzies, France. *American Antiquity* 31(2):277.

### Man and stone, Miskolc (Fig. 4–6)

Zsolt Mester (text and photos)

The experimental knapping accompanied Jacques Tixier throughout his life. In 2015, at the age of 90, he showed me his "workshop" in the basement of his house in Pradines. It was touching to see his tools and products. He confessed with a little sadness that he is knapping less and less. He practised and taught it so enthusiastically that everyone looked at him with admiration, while thinking that knapping is the best









**Figure 1** (previous page, top). Les Eyzies conference, 1964. Jacques Tixier detaches flakes with his right hand from a raw material block. The knapping surface of the raw material block and the hard hammer will collide in a way that results in the detachment of a sharp flake from the lower surface of the raw material block. Photo: courtesy of Pierre-Jean Texier.

**Figure 2** (previous page, bottom). Les Eyzies conference, 1964. Don Crabtree explains a lithic artefact he created, under the watchful eyes of his crowded audience. François Bordes sits on his right with his trademark pipe, and Jacques Tixier is on the upper left of the photo. Photo: courtesy of Pierre-Jean Texier.

**Figure 3** (top). Les Eyzies conference, 1964. Bordes and Tixier are conducting indirect percussion. With this technique, an intermediary object called a punch, is placed between the raw material and the hammer to control the direction of the blow. Judging from the look of Tixier, there were unsuccessful attempts before the photo was taken. Photo: courtesy of Pierre-Jean Texier.

thing in the world. Fortunately, many of us witnessed his enthusiasm.

In 1999, Jacques Tixier with his wife Catie was invited to a symposium at the University of Miskolc. Since it was his first visit to Hungary, he was curious about everything, including local raw materials. So we showed him a block of limnosilicite, a siliceous rock of post-volcanic origin that had been widely used by the prehistoric people of the region because it was abundant. Jacques never had the opportunity to work with this material very different from flints of sedimentary origin. He had a lot of problems, but he continued to work with it tirelessly. In the end, his perseverance was rewarded by a fairly good tool. When he finished working, he gave me his diagnosis of the behavior of that raw material. And I immediately realized that experimental knapping is for him a tool for understanding human-material interaction. Since

then, I consider this conclusion as one of the most important lessons by Jacques Tixier.

### **Ksar Akil, 1972 (Fig. 7)**

*Marcel Otte (text and photos), Attila Király (English translation)*

It was then Paradise, moreover in the Levant, in the Holy Land filled with past, light, spirit. At twenty, I barely touched it, as in a dream of wonder: the French-speaking Middle East was Jacques Tixier, as if the French culture had spread like a veil of thought and good taste around all of the Mediterranean shores. The story was there: Byblos and its openings to the deserts of the East until to the western sea, from which all civilization seemed to arise in order to fertilize the then barbaric lands of Europe. This feeling was so powerful that we participated in the excavations as if our youth had been coming to light, as well as our future. Jacques climbed the scaffolding beams like a monkey among trees, everything was happy, serious,





**Figure 4–5.** The crime scene – all You need are lithic raw material, tools and a lot of plastic foil. Tixier works a low-quality block of Avas limnic silicite at the former Department of Prehistory and Ancient History, Miskolc University, 1999. Photos: Zsolt Mester.



**Figure 6 (left).** Visiting the Miskolc Avas-Túzköves site in 2005. This huge palaeolithic quarry was used to extract limnic silicite tens of thousands years ago. In clear weather the Tokaj hills can be seen from here – source area of the famous Carpathian obsidian raw materials. Next to Tixier, Avram Ronen inspects the lithics; at the right margin, William Davies can be seen. The person with the rucksack is Pierre Vermeersch. Photo: Zsolt Mester.

**Figure 7 (right).** Ksar Akil, Lebanon, 1972. The cave entrance at the times of the excavation. Photo: Marcel Otte.

festive: a delicious atmosphere that made us know each other from all over the world. Jacques was attentive to everyone, in their differences, took care of our little personal problems, our thirst, our hunger, our distant ties. Paradise was there; just before the Yom Kippur War that made us flee to Northern Syria – another daydream. In your twenties, you do not fear anything.

The oriental atmospheres intoxicated us, we met old Western archaeologists, who absorbed all the Levant: Father Fleisch in his white cassock, under his colonial helmet, always on foot with his eighty-or-more years, Francis Hours, Paul Sanlaville, the Cauvin. Huge caves to visit with our perfect French-speaking Lebanese friends, the venerable French Institute of Beirut, the





**Figure 8.** Knapping demonstration of Jacques Tixier to the participants of the "Préhistoire et technologie lithique" conference, Tervuren, Musée Royal de l'Afrique centrale. Organizer: D. Cahen; spectators: D. Binder, S. Beyries, F. Van Noten, H. de Saint Blanquat, A. Tuffreau. Photo: courtesy of P.-J. Texier.

smell of the dried mud that the walls were made of, the story palpated with both hands and still running in this corner burned by the waves of perpetual violence. The mountains where I went to visit the Arab nomads, often Syrian refugees.

Jacques welcomed us to a hotel on the coast where we thought we were dying of ephemeral pleasure. The Ras Shamra cave ('that of the dog'), intersected by the road on one side, by the railroad on the other. Paleolithic objects appeared there like white treasures full of mystery. We were told about Dorothy Garrod, Kathleen Kenyon as they would popping up from fabulous novels, as if they had been there the day before. Everything was mixed in these circumstances, made of a warm past, of kindness, of humor and of this deep desire for a bright, meaningful future. As long as Protohistory seemed to have formed our own civilization, so much had we thought to discover there what modern men in Europe will be: everything was at its origin in these delightful excavations, in a miracle operated by Jacques. In the evenings, we wanted to think more about the meanings of our companionship, to discover the gestures recorded in the tools unearthed during the day. Jacques saw every style, every step in those tools, touching them with his fingertips like a caress. His eyes sparkled at each discovery, and his smiles made

us love these rocks full of past. This door opened on the Levant then introduced me to Syria and the magic of the deserts of El Kown where the Cauvin reigned. I was told that the shelter itself from Ksar Aqil had been bombed, that nothing was left of it. How could so much living poetry exist, how could it disappear so quickly?

### Tixier's knapping demonstrations (Fig. 8)

*Marcel Otte (text), Pierre-Jean Texier (photos), Attila Király (English translation)*

With Jacques, the magic came first! Warmth, immediate sympathy, southern accent, strong black eyes, complicit smiles, carnivorous appetite, interest in shapes, textures, materials, stretching rocks to living beings, especially those furnishing the other half of humanity: everything was in complementarity, in harmony, in gourmet flavor at Jacques, this living enjoyer. The spectacle, the sound, the carefully orchestrated emotions captivated the admirers, immediately conquered, as he loved them so much.

Large spaces cleared around the performance, religiously contemplative atmosphere, all eyes and ears stretched towards the magic gestures. By his predictions, Jacques knew how to solicit the imagination, before especially to make the gesture towards the rock and to

make it speak according to his predictions, his wishes, his desires. The game contained in these dialogues made the master of ceremonies laugh and captivated the faithful, by a communicative enthusiasm, a cascade of events where the objects arose at every moment like the appearances of a conjurer, except that of his hats sprang out of stone rabbits, in all the forms solicited by a delighted, fascinated public. The tension eased with each blade extraction, Jacques was happy, and we were enriched! As if his power and his charm had fertilized a little of all that, hitherto hidden in the depths of ourselves.

Like a crystal fashioned in the forest of dreams, these sessions are perpetuated indefinitely in later times, they inhabit us and encourage us. Everything seems now as pleasant in the rocks as these recollections offered by Jaques, by his skill and by his generosity. The technique was then draped with a delicious poetry, which has become so rare in the meantime and elsewhere. The imagination had seized the rock, transformed it into dreams, embellished it, ennobled it. This is where Jacques and his magic are hidden: to give a soul to the gestures, and to make love the humblest pebbles, to fascinate the eyes that now question everything else.

At the time of his defense of the thesis, the ceremony was at its height: the mystery of Jacques had gathered François Bordes and André Leroi-Gourhan, as one would assemble the sky and the earth, the water and the fire, in a pagan and grandiose liturgy, in a historical treat. There was a bit of witchcraft in such accomplished ambitions. These events have opened a fruitful and enthusiastic way: it continues every day with each contact with the knapped stones loaded with thought and sensitivity infused by the magic of Jacques.