Ecological perspectives on technological diversity at Kanjera South

*Manuscript Submitted to the Journal of Human Evolution*

**Abstract**

The aspects of hominin behavior responsible for Oldowan stone tool variation have been the focus of much debate. There is some consensus that Oldowan artifact variation arises from a combination of ecological and cultural factors. These factors are often examined independently of one another. The diversity of raw material types and technological strategies present at the site of Kanjera South provide an opportunity to examine the interaction effect of ecology and culture on Oldowan stone tool variation. Here we combine previous analyses of raw material properties, provenance, and technology with quantitative measures of core reduction intensity and tool utilization to examine the influence of both ecological and techno-cultural factors on stone tool variation at Kanjera South. The results of this analysis show that technological variation at Kanjera South reflects a dynamic relationship between raw material properties, provenance, and hominin mobility. Cores produced on raw materials from distant sources are more reduced than locally sourced raw materials. Distant raw materials are generally more resistant to edge attrition compared to those available locally which may have incentivized their transport over long distances. Moreover, the variation in stone tool reduction is not constistent with neutral models of stone tool transport and discard. This suggests that the lithic assemblage at Kanjera South may reflect a structured land-use strategy that may relate to the resource rich nature of the Homa Penninsula. This pattern of stone tool utilization also has an impact on the technological strategies employed by Oldowan tool makers at Kanjera South. Cores produced on raw materials from distant sources also exhibit more complex core reduction strategies than locally acquired materials. While this pattern is partially due to the differences in the quality of knappable stone, bifacial centripetal and multifacial core-reduction strategies also arise due to the continuous transport and use of exotic raw materials. These results demonstrate that ecological factors such as raw material provenance and physical properties have strong impacts on reduction intensity and the technological strategies utilized by hominins. Yet, not all stone tool variation at Kanjera South can be explained by this relationship. These results suggest that Oldowan stone tool variation should not be examined from a strictly ecological or technological perspective, but rather within the context of its broader cultural-ecological system.

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# 1. Introduction

The Oldowan is relatively simplistic as it consists primarily of core and flake tools (Leakey 1971). In contrast to earlier typological approaches, experimental models by (Toth 1985) suggest that the Oldowan is a simple core and flake industry whose primary goal is the removal of flakes with sharp cutting edges. In spite of its superficial simplicity, Oldowan stone tool variation is a vast resource of information regarding Early Pleistocene hominin behavior. Technological analyses show that Oldowan hominins had at least a basic understanding of the general principles of flaking and selection of suitable tool stones for artifact manufacture (Braun et al. 2019; D. R. Braun, Plummer, Ferraro, et al. 2009; Delagnes and Roche 2005; de la Torre 2004; Roche et al. 1999; Semaw 2000; Stout et al. 2005). In addition, Oldowan hominins also transported stone tools various distance to the places where they are used and discarded (Blumenschine and Peters 1998; D. R. Braun, Ditchfield, et al. 2008; Harmand 2009; Hay 1976; Isaac 1984; Potts 1991; Toth 1985). Despite early suggestions that the Oldowan was a largely expedient tool kit (Chavaillon 1970), it may reflect a more nuanced technical system, where raw material is acquired, transported, utilized, maintained and eventually discarded (Isaac 1984).

The spatial dynamics of the Oldowan has been a central focus of Early Stone Age research since the 1970s. Extensive and continuous landscape scale research at classic Oldowan localities such as Olduvai Gorge and Koobi Fora have yielded a multitude of information regarding the techno-economic behaviors of Oldowan hominins within the broader landscape context. On this front has been to elucidate interesting relationship because stone tool production strategies, raw material availability and paleoenvironments. In addition, this work also seems to suggest a strong link between tool-using behavior and wooded environments.

The 2.0 ma site of Kanjera South provides an opportunity to add our understanding of the relationship between stone tool production and the broader landscape as it is the only site from this time frame that is situated in an open-grass land. The lithic assemblage at Kanjera South shows a substantial representation of exotic raw materials and a diversity of different core reduction strategies and therefore provides an opportunity to investigate how hominin move, utilize, and manage stone in a more open environment. In addition, while Early Oldowan assemblages dating to 2.0 million years ago and older seem to illustrate a similar level of technological competence to those from latter timeframes, substantially less is known about the broader foraging behaviors and land-use strategies of ESA hominins during this time. While a few studies from Gona demonstrate some potentially interesting interactions between raw material abundance and technological strategies, early Oldowan sites have yet to be placed into their broader ecological and environmental context. Therefore, an investigation of hominin stone tool transport and utilization patterns at Kanjera would not only add to our understanding of how the landscape structures stone tool using behavior, but also our understanding of hominin land-use patterns during the earlier Oldowan.

Here we present an integrated approach that examines Oldowan lithic technology a Kanjera South within its broader ecological context. In doing so, we combine previous analyses of raw material properties, provenance, and technology with quantitative measures of core reduction intensity and tool utilization to elucidate the broader land use pattern that produced the lithic assemblage at Kanjera South. Not only are we able to characterize the broader pattern of land-use of Oldowan hominins at Kanjera South, but we also show that this land-use pattern may also condition the technical decision making surrounding how stone is economized across space. In doing so, while Oldowan technology is often argued to reflect socially mitigated processes, we show that the lithic variation at Kanjera South reflects interaction of raw material properties, foraging ecology, and landscape scale constraints on raw material availability influence technological variability in the Oldowan.

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# 1.2. Background to Kanjera South

***Insert* Figure 2**

The 2.0 Ma site of Kanjera South is situated on the northern side of the Homa Peninsula on the edges of the Nyanza Rift near the shores of Lake Victoria (Plummer et al., 1999; Ditchfield et al., 2019, figure 2). The extensive excavation of a 3 meter deep sequence of silts and clays recovered over 3000 fossils and similar numbers of stone artifacts (Plummer et al., 2009a). The stratigraphy at Kanjera South is made up of approximately 30 m of fluvial, colluvial and lacustrine sediments (Ditchfield et al. 2018). Extensive research on the geochronology and sedimentary context has demonstrated that the lithics and fossils accumulated predominantly due to hominin activity (Behrensmeyer et al., 1995; Plummer et al., 2009a, 2009b; Ferraro et al., 2013; Ditchfield et al., 2019). as well as enamel isotope studies landscape surrounding

Extensive geological surveys of the Homa Peninsula and the surrounding area reveal a high diversity of igneous and metamorphic rocks that provided a wide range of suitable materials that hominins could utilize for flake production. As such, this diversity is reflected in the lithic assemblage. More than 16 different rock types are represented in the assemblage but the bulk of the material is produced on 8 of them. Geochemical finger printing of the lithic material makes it possible to further subdivide the lithic assemblage to two broad categories of raw material provenance: local and exotic (table 1). Local materials suggest are derived from the Homa Mountain Carbonatite center (Figure 2). Drainages running off the flanks of this mountain would have carried materials such as phonolite, limestone, and fenetized rocks within the immediate vicinity of Kanjera South. Sources of the exotic materials, such as quartzite, rhyolite, andesite, and granite are located more inland from Lake Victoria in places such as the Kisi Highlands and Oyugis (Figure 2). While these materials were likely acquired from river channels traveling west-ward toward Kanjera South, they are not present in Pleistocene river conglomerates west of the Samanga fault. This has been used to imply that exotic materials were transported at least 10 kilometers to Kanjera South.

Kanjera South is not only unique the number of raw material represented but also the diversity of technological production strategies present within the assemblage. Unlike other Oldowan sites from timeframe, the flake production strategies range from simple unifacial techniques to bifacial and multi-facial techniques. Previous work has suggested that some this diversity reflects the differences in the quality of the raw materials at the site or the need to maximize the amount of flakes removed from a high quality materials (Braun et al., 2009). The wide ranging in the diversity of materials from local and exotic sources and technological reduction strategies provides an opportunity to investigate the dynamics between hominin land-use patterns, stone tool production and Oldowan assemblage variability.

**Insert Figure 3**

# 2. Materials and methods

*2.1 Materials*

To explore the relationship between land-use and Oldowan assemblage variability w (Table 2) To examine the effect of stone tool transport on assemblage variability the relationship between raw material provenance and stone tool utilization was examined. Therefore, the preexisting knowledge (see above) regarding raw material provenance, raw material properties, and core exploitation strategies was combined with an in depth analysis of the lithic material that was designed to quantify the intensity of stone tool utilization prior to their discard at Kanjera South.

To this end a total 1500 stone artifacts (171 cores and 1329 flakes) were characterized using a series of continuous and ordinal variables. Table XX provides a detailed summary of the number of lithics per raw material included. In addition, to the previously published technological analysis, the cores were also categorized using the commonly used diachritic types defined by de la Torra and Mora (de la Torre and Mora, 2005). These data were then used to predict the reduction intensity of the cores and the flake sequence number of the flakes.

*2.2 Estimating Core Reduction Intensity*

Reduction intensity is a commonly inferred attribute within lithic analysis. Within Oldowan and

Acheulean research, core reduction intensity has been understood through a variety of ranging from those as simple as mass, the number of flake scars to more sophisticated methods that use linear models to estimate the degree to which a core has been reduced. Simple measures such as mass and the number of flake scars are not always appropriate as nodules selected for exploitation as cores are sometimes not similar in size. This particularly the case at Kanjera South where toolstones originate from a variety of sources and can vary substantially in size. The number of flake scars also do not reflect a 1 to 1 relationship with reduction intensity the continuous removal of flakes will erase evidence of previous removals (Moore and Perston, 2016). The reduction intensity of cores influences a variety of attributes that interact throughout the reduction sequence (Douglass et al., 2018). As a result, multi-variate estimates of core reduction intensity provide a way to consider a suite of variables in tandem.



Here we follow methods outlined by Douglass et al. (2018) to estimate the reduction intensity of individual cores in terms of the proportion of mass lost prior to its discard using a predictive generalized linear model. This model was developed based on the experimental reduction of cobbles from collected from the Homa Penninsula, specifically to estimate the reduction intensity of cores recovered from Kanjera South. Estimates of core reduction intensity are accurate within an error range of 10% and application to a subset of the cores from the Kanjera South assemblage suggests that the model is generally applicable to the broader Kanjera South assemblage. In its estimation of core reduction intensity the model considers, the number of flake scars, exploitation surfaces, the number of exploitation surface convergences, the proportion of cortex, and average platform angle to estimate core reduction intensity. Although the definition of the aforementioned attributes are outlined in Douglass et al. (2018), they are worth summarizing here. The number of flake scars intuitively refers to the number of previous flake removals present on the core. The number of exploitation surfaces refers to the number of areas of the core where flakes were removed along a similar axis. This variable is related to core rotation which is argued to increase as core reduction increases (e.g. Delagnes and Roche 2005). The number of exploitation surface convergences documents the number of times different exploitation surfaces intersect with each other. Throughout reduction exploitation surfaces with different flaking axes tend to converge (Braun 2005, Douglass et al 2017). The proportion of cortex has an intuitive relationship with core reduction intensity. That is, the total proportion of the core that possesses cortical surface area will diminish during reduction. Average platform angle, measured in degrees, refers to the mean angle between striking surfaces. Various experimental replication studies show that, as this angle approaches 90°, it becomes increasingly difficult to detach a flake (Cotterell, Kamminga, and Dickson 1985). Therefore, as a core approaches exhaustion, the platform angles on the core are likely to approach 90°. More specific details regarding the specification of the model and lithic attributes it considers can be found in Douglass et al. (2018).

## 2.2. Flake Sequence Estimates

Flake sequence can be general defined as the order number that a given flake was removed from the core. It is a complimentary measure to core reduction intensity as it examines the influence of core reduction on the flake assemblage. The distribution of flake sequence values within an assemblage can provide insight into the relationship between stone tool transport and assemblage formation. For example, if sequence values from the beginning of the reduction sequence (i.e. the 1st, 2nd, 3rd flakes removed) are absent from the flake assemblage then it can be assemblage that they were discarded prior to the core’s arrival at the site or were removed off site. In the Early Stone Age, flake sequences are most commonly characterized using a six-category classification system (more colloquially known as Toth types), based on the on the presence of cortex on a flake’s platform and dorsal surface (Toth 1985).

Here we follow Braun et al. (2008), which uses a multi-linear model to estimate flake sequence values. This methodology is specifically focused on understanding the approximate location of a flake within a reduction sequence. Unlike Toth’s flake types, which is focused on relative sequence information, the multi-linear model allows for an absolute placement of a flake within a reduction set (within a prescribed error). The multiple linear regression uses flake length, width, number of platform facets, number of flake scars, and the number of flake scar directions; specific details for each measurement are clearly outlined in Braun et al. (2008: 2156, Fig 3). Before the sequence number can be estimated, the number of flake scars and amount of dorsal cortex must be divided by the log of the surface area of the flake (Braun et al., 2008). These variables are then used by the predictive model to estimate the flake sequence number. Flake sequence estimates have a maximum error between +/- 8 sequences. However, an application of the method to refitting sequences from the Koobi Fora formation showed it always places flakes in their relative order (Braun et al., 2008). Therefore, while information derived from individual flake sequence estimates may be coarse-grained, it remains useful for assemblage scale comparisons.

## 2.3. Edge to mass ratio

Assuming that most stone tools are produced to create sharp edges, one possible measure is estimating the amount of sharp edge produced per given unit of mass. Technologies that produced a higher amount of edge per volume of material can be considered more efficient (Braun and Harris 2003). Here we use a measure of edge that is based on tracing the edge of whole flakes (Braun and Harris 2003; Isaac and Isaac 1997). To calculate efficiency this edge estimate is divided by the logarithmic transformation of mass. The reason for this transformation is that mass increases in three dimensions (i.e. volumetrically) and the edge of a flake increases in two dimensions. The logarithmic transformation of mass prevents distortions of this ratio that are the result of general size parameters. For example, very small flakes have relatively high edge for a given amount of mass, but this is not always the most efficient way to produce the greatest amount of edge relative to volume (e.g. see discussions on this topic in Kuhn 1991). Flakes that have high amounts of edged relative to their mass tend to be relatively thin flakes, and there is the possibility that the efficiency of these tools is limited by their capabilities to complete certain tasks (e.g. tacks that require intensive use of edges such as hide scraping may not be feasible with relatively thin flakes). Here we calculate the edge to mass ratio of flakes within raw material categories. We then aggregate this measure across raw materials types to assess the overall efficiency of a given raw material. These aggregate measures are likely more reflective of the generalized pattern of efficiency in tool production over time at the Kanjera South locality.

2.3 Statisical comparisons

The following comparisons were made to elucidate the broader land-use strategy of the Kanjera

South hominins. To examine the influence of raw material provenance and transport on core utilization,

core reduction intensity values and flake sequence values were compared according to raw material type.

This significance of these differences was then tested using a Kruskal-Wallis, significant differences were

determined using a *p-value* threshold of .05 (Gotelli and Ellison, 2013). This provides means by which to

place the documented assemblage variability within the context of broader foraging and land-use system

that stone tool use is a part of. To examine whether this land-use strategy had an effect on the core

reduction strategies employed at Kanjera South. The representation of diacritic reduction types was

compared by raw material type and a chi-squared test was used to test the significance of these

differences. In addition, core reduction intensity values were also analyzed according to raw material

type. A Kruskal-wallis was used to assess the significance of these differences.

# 3. Results

## 3.1. Core Utilization

Core reduction intensity estimates reveal that there is a wide range of variation in the amount of mass that was removed from the cores at Kanjera South. Some cores were minimally utilized whereas others were reduced as much as 95% of their original mass. There is also a significant relationship between core reduction intensity and raw material type (Kruskal-Wallis, *p* < 0.0001). This pattern appears to be driven by raw material provenance. Cores produced on raw material types that originate from more distant sources (BBa, BFe, BQu, NyR, and OGr) are on average more substantially reduced than those that occur locally (FNy, HPh, HLi) (Kruskal-Wallis, *p* < 0.001; Fig. 4).

Insert Figure 4

Flake sequence values range from the first flakes off the core to the 30th flake in the sequence. As with core reduction intensity, raw material type has a significant influence on flake sequence values (Kruskal-Wallis, *p* < 0.001). The largest differences are, again, those between rock types derived from more distant sources and those found locally. Flakes produced on rock types from more distant raw material sources are from later in the reduction sequence (Fig. 5), while flakes from the locally found materials are from earlier stages of reduction. Interestingly, there is a striking amount of homogeneity in the distribution of flake sequence values associated with exotic or distant raw materials. Aside from Bukoban Felsite (BFe) the inter-quartile range of flake sequence values are very similar from distant sources. Even though Bukoban Felsite has a wider range than the other exotic mateirals, its median is quite similar. The sequence values associated with flakes from the local materials are also similar to each other but show slightly more variation. Homa Phonolite exhibits the widest range of flake sequence values.

Insert Figure 5

As previously reported (D. R. Braun, Plummer, Ditchfield, et al. 2009), the Kanjera core assemblage is comprised of a wide variety of technological types or core reduction strategies. The frequency of core reduction strategies present shows a significant relationship with the raw material type (Fishers exact test, *p* < 0.001). Though unifacial and unidirectional reduction strategies are present in small frequencies, there is a greater representation of centripetal, bifacial and multi-facial exploitation strategies in materials from more distant origins (Fig. 6). On the other hand, local materials such as the Fenetized Nyanzian (FNy) and Homa Phonolite (HPh) are represented by greater number of unifacial or uni-directional core reduction strategies (Fig. ). Contrary to this general pattern, cores produced with the local material Homa Limestone (HLi) are often multi-facially reduced. However, as is addressed in the discussion this is likely related to the properties of the raw material itself .

When the core reduction intensity values for each reduction strategy are considered, unifacial and unipolar, core reduction strategies result in less reduction than strategies that require bifacial, multifacial or polyhedral strategies (Kruskal Wallis, *p* < .001) (Figure 6). In other words, core reduction strategies that require fewer core rotations, such as unifacial and unidirectional strategies, are less reduced than those that that involved more comples patterns of rotation.

Insert Figure 6

## 3.2. Flake efficiency

Analysis of the relative proportion of edge to mass in flakes indicates significantly different technological strategies applied to the different raw materials from the Kanjera South assemblage. Although the mean values of the different raw materials are relatively similar, the overall distribution of values indicates that rock types from sources that are further away from Kanjera South (e.g. rhyolite, felsite, quartzite) are produced in a way that allows for much higher efficiency values than those seen in the rock types found close to Kanjera South (e.g. Homa Limestone and Fenetized Nyanzian, *p* < 0.01 for all pairwise comparisons between Homa Limestone and all Bukoban rock types; *p* <0.001 for all comparisons between Fenetized Nyanzian and all other rock types Kruskal-Wallis Rank Sum test, Chi2 = 312.70, df = 5, pairwise comparisons between raw materials use Dunnn’s Test with Benjamin-Hochberg correction for multiple comparisons). It should be noted that even though there are significant differences between the edge to mass ratios, the distributions show significant overlap (Fig. 7). This indicates that while it is physically possible to produce flakes with similar edge to mass ratios in each raw material type, hominins at Kanjera South did not implement this strategy as frequently on raw materials that were locally abundant. Hominins at Kanjera South consistently produced flakes with greater edge and less mass from rock types that came from more distant sources. We only include rock types that have greater than 50 flakes because the wide variance in values seen in this measure results in wildly divergent values in small samples.

Insert Figure 7

# 4. Discussion

*Inferring Land Use at Kanjera South*

The results of this study show an interaction between stone tool utilization, raw material type and core reduction strategies. The most striking distinction is the difference in the degree of utilization of materials from local and distant sources. This is also reflected in the flake sequence data. To some extent, this can be explained by the poor quality of some of the local materials. As discussed in Braun et al. (2009), removal sequences in local fenetized rocks (FNy) tend to be short because of the presence of preexisting internal fracture planes within the material. The chalky nature and block-like geometry of Homa limestone (HLi) also limits the number of flakes that can be removed.

However, differences in material properties do not explain all of the differences in reduction intensity between local and exotic materials. Not all of the cores from local sources have internal flaws. In particular, Homa phonolite does not have the defects common in the other local raw materials but it is still less reduced than the nonlocal raw materials. In addition, the coarse grained nature of Oyugis granite, makes it difficult to maintain angles of less than 90 degrees, thus limiting the degree that the material could be reduced (D. R. Braun, Plummer, Ditchfield, et al. 2009). Despite these limitations, however, Oyugis granite is still more reduced than any of the local raw materials (Fig. 4). The totality of these data suggest that raw material properties does not explain all of the variation in the Kanjera South assemblage.

Therefore, the differences in stone reduction intensity may be the result of continuous use of exotic materials as they are moved across the landscape. This is supported by the absence of flake sequence values from early stages of reduction in the non-local assemblage. In terms of land-use, these differences in utilization intensity of materials from local and distant sources is consistent with the distance-decay pattern of tool-use (Newman, 1994; Close, 1999). Modeling work has demonstrated that differences in the reduction intensity of materials from local and distant sources can arise in the absence of a structured land-use pattern (Brantingham, 2003; Pop, 2016). However, the Kanjera South assemblage deviates from these neutral models in one critical aspect. These models not only will reduction intensity increase but also as the distance from the increases (Brantingham, 2003, p. 501)In contrast with model expectations, while exotic materials are reduced more substantially than local materials, the interquartile ranges of flake sequence and core reduction measures of assemblages from distant sources are as wide (or wider) than those associated with local sources. It has been hypothesized that deviations from the neutral model of this nature may arise due to increasingly linear movements toward specific locations (Brantingham 2003; D. R. Braun, Rogers, et al. 2008). Moreover, subsequent work modeling the influence of directed movement towards attractors has shown that while a distance-decay pattern remains visible, tools from earlier stages of reduction will be over-represented (i.e. greater variance in reduction) (Reeves, 2019). Thus, the greater than expected range in variance in the reduction intensity of distantly sourced cores may suggest that hominins directed their movement to Kanjera South. This is not to say that hominins carried rocks directly to Kanjera South. However, the site may have acted as an attractor on the landscape where hominins frequently visited to carry out stone tool using behaviors.

This concept is supported by other archaeological and paleoecological evidence. Numerous taphonomic studies of the faunal assemblage from Kanjera South have verified that hominins efficiently exploited small bovids and may have processed larger carcasses that were scavenged from carnivores. (Ferraro et al., 2013; Oliver et al., 2019). Use-wear studies that demonstrate that hominins carried out a variety of resource processing activities with the stone artifacts that were produced at Kanjera South, including butchery and the processing of a variety of plants, including underground storage organs (USOs; Lemorini et al., 2014, 2019). These studies attest to the notion that hominins spent a great deal of time producing stone tools for a variety of tasks. The fact that the lithic assemblage included in this study was excavated from a 3 meter stack of sediment suggests that Kanjera South revisited repeatedly for likely centuries. Thus, the patterns evinced by this study are the result of the repeated visitation by hominins over generations. This result further attests to the influence of landscape structure on the foraging ecology hominin tool makers and the formation Oldowan lithic assemblages over the long term. In future, it would be interesting to determine if there was something unique about the location of Kanjera South specifically or whether patterns reflect a more general attraction to the Homa Pennisula. However, substantial faulting in the region makes it difficult to place Kanjera South within a broader landscape context.

While the notion that hominins directed their movement toward specific localities or ecotones has been suggested at other localities, Kanjera South represents the earliest documented evidence of this pattern.

The land-use pattern elucidated at Kanjera South also differs from other Oldowan sites in its scale. The pattern described a Koobi fora, suggest that hominins directed their movements across paleogeographic settings, at scale of 100s of meters. Whereas at Olduvai Gorge the directed movement toward riparian woodlands is suggested to occur over a scale of 5 kilometers. Given that the minimum transport distance needed to discard non-local materials at Kanjera South, the data presented here implies that a pattern of directed movement occurs at a scale of at least 10-13 kilometers. This is an interesting distinction as Kanjera South is also the only site from this time frame that is situated in an open grassland (Plummer, Ditchfield, et al. 2009). Humans tend to travel farther and more frequently in open arid environments than those that live in more productive environments (Burnside et al., 2012). Moreover savanna-adapted chimpanzees from Fongoli also possess a larger home range and practice fission-fusion less frequently (Pruetz and Bertolani, 2009). In this respect, the increased scale of this land use pattern at Kanjera South may provide evidence further evidence of the adaptive flexibility of Oldowan hominins to thrive in different environments.

*The influence of land use on Oldowan production strategies*

The results of this study also suggest that this pattern of land-use influences the technical decisions of Oldowan tool makers. The fact that exotic raw materials show a strong bias toward more reduced, complete bifacial and multifacial reduction strategies as opposed to the more even representation of core reduction strategies among local materials suggest that the broader pattern of stone tool transport influenced ways in which Oldowan hominin economized stone. The relatively long transport distance in combination with the lower quality of material available near Kanjera South may have incentivized the retention of exotic raw materials in areas where materials of such quality were less abundant. In this light, the high frequency of the bifacial and multifacial reduction strategies may have arisen from a need to maximize the amount utility that could be extracted from these cores. Similar phenomenon have been documented inframes whereis

In this sense, the exploitation of multiple flake removal surfaces on a core allows a core to remain active in a toolkit for a longer period of time.T provides additional support for this Therefore, this corpus of information may suggest that Oldowan hominins where able to adopt different technical strategies in order to mitigate the changing qualities in available raw materials over large transport distances. This pattern of exploitation in the context of the broader land-use strategy at Kanjera South, provides additional evidence for high level of planning and foresight in Oldowan hominins.

While core reduction strategies are often considered to be intentionally applied cores, it may be that the various core exploitation strategies present within the Kanjera assemblage reflect varying levels of reduction intensity. Potts (1992) suggested that this may be the case at based on differences in the mass of specific core types at Olduvai Gorge. This has been shown to be possible based on controlled experiments by least effort experiments by Toth (1982) and later by Moore and Perston (2016). This work has explicitly tested for this by directly estimating the amount of mass lost from each core in the assemblage The fact that the various core exploitation strategies present at Kanjera South are correlated with reduction intensity – I.e. unifacial cores being the least reduced and multifacial cores being the most reduced – provides further evidence that various diachritic models of exploitation may not be intentionally applied but rather points on a continuum of one single least-effort exploitation strategy.

Therefore, these results also have broader implications for how techno-economic variation arises in the Oldowan record. Variability in the Oldowan record is often interpreted through a socio-cognitive, in which technological differences between assemblages are argued to reflect social learned information, that particularize various groups or individuals (Delagnes and Roche, 2005; Roche et al., 2009, 2018; Stout, 2011). More recently, these criteria have been used to argue for the presence of copying social learning mechanisms in the earliest Oldowan (Stout et al., 2019). However, the results of this work strongly link the application of various technical strategies with the broader land-use system in which tool-use is incorporated. Moreover, the fact that core reduction intensity seems to increase as cores become more rotated further suggests, that uni-facial, bifacial and multi-facial cores may not reflect discrete strategies but rather points on continuum of reduction that arises out of a need to maximize the utility of high-quality materials.

Finally while the preceding analysis emphasizes the role of the broader environment and land-use on technological variability, ecology is not the sole driver of Oldowan technical variation. The inter-quartile ranges in figure 6 show a substantial amount of overlap between the reduction intensity and core reduction strategies. This suggests that not all variation can be explained by environmental parameters such as raw material avalaibility and material properties. Moreover, inter-site differences between West Turkana sites are not easily explained factors such as raw material availability alone (Roche et al., 2018). This unexplained variation may be the result of socio-cultural dynamics that may have maintained information regarding the stone tool production process between groups. However, the fidelity and the mechanisms that underlie the maintenance of this information remain an open debate (Hovers, 2012; Morgan et al., 2015; Stout et al., 2019; Tennie et al., 2016, 2017). However, the results of this analysis show that it may be counterproductive for research on Oldowan technology to focus on specific aspects of stone tool technology (Fig. 1). Rather studies should examine the Oldowan within the broader socio-ecological system. It may be the interaction between function, ecology and sociality that provide information on the cultural capacity of Oldowan tool makers.

# 4.4. Implications for the Oldowan as a whole

The site of Kanjera South is unique in relation to Oldowan sites of a similar age or older. Many of the sites 2 million years old or older are situated in close proximity to raw materials sources and are comprised of a singular reduction strategy (Roche, Blumenschine, and Shea 2009; Plummer and Finestone, 2018). In contrast, the assemblage at Kanjera South shows a substantial representation of exotic raw materials and a diversity of different core reduction strategies. This provides us with the unique opportunity to more thoroughly examine how early Oldowan hominins circulated stone across space. The results from Kanjera South elucidate how the interaction of raw material properties, foraging ecology, and landscape scale constraints on raw material availability influence technological variability in the Oldowan. While many sites show strong selection for specific materials, the frequent use of unifacial reduction strategies at sites such as Lokalelei 2C, East Gona, Hadar, Omo, Ledi Geraru may relate to the overall abundance of knappable material that is immediately available at these site (Braun et al., 2019; Kimbel et al., 1996; Roche et al., 1999; Stout et al., 2005). In other words, there may be little incentive to exhaustively reduce a core when material is so abundant (Clark and Barton, 2017). In this sense the broad scale the technological diversity represented at Kanjera South may reflect adaptations to the specific contextual conditions at this locale.

# 5. Conclusion

Despite the superficial simplicity of the Oldowan, its variability reflects a complex interconnection of ecological, behavioral and social factors. The site of Kanjera South is unique in relation to Oldowan sites of a similar age or older. Many of the sites 2 million years old or older are situated in close proximity to raw materials sources and are comprised of a singular reduction strategy (Roche, Blumenschine, and Shea 2009; Plummer and Finestone, 2018). In contrast, the assemblage at Kanjera South shows a substantial representation of exotic raw materials and a diversity of different core reduction strategies. This provides us with the unique opportunity to more thoroughly examine how early Oldowan hominins circulated stone across space. The results from Kanjera South elucidate how the interaction of raw material properties, foraging ecology, and landscape scale constraints on raw material availability influence technological variability in the Oldowan. The combination of quantitative measures of stone tool reduction with qualitative characterizations of lithic technology (e.g D. R. Braun, Plummer, Ditchfield, et al., 2009; Plummer and Bishop, 2016) provides new insights into the ecological factors that influence oldowan technology, and hominin behavior.

The fact that exotic materials are much more substantially reduced that from local sources reflects the differences in the quality of the raw materials available. The higher quality of the exotic materials would have incentivized the transport of these materials over longer distances. In this light, these differences in reduction also highlight that Oldowan tools were part of a mobile tool kit that reflects a broader land-use strategy. The marked differences in reduction intensity in combination with the paucity of early sequence flakes also suggests that exotic materials were often utilized prior to their arrival at Kanjera south. Although exotic materials are more reduced than local marerials the variance in the amount of stone tool reduction exhibited in the Kanjera South assemblage does not adhere to neutral expectations. This result suggests that the lithic assemblage at Kanjera South reflects a structured land-use pattern, that may indicate that hominins directed their movement, at least on occasion, to Kanjera South.

This pattern also appears to have an influence on the technological strategies employed by Oldowan tool makers at Kanjera South. The relationship between core reduction strategies and reduction intensity indicates that raw material quality and provenance have a strong influence on the technological variation observed within a lithic assemblage. While these results show that ecological parameters have a strong effect on stone tool variation, a substantial amount of variation remains unexplained by ecology alone. Overall, these results suggest that future studies must utilize a more integrated approach to understand the behavioral significance of the Oldowan.

# References