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978-0-521-84796-4 - The First Africans: African Archaeology from the Earliest Tool

Makers to Most Recent Foragers

Lawrence Barham and Peter Mitchell

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## THE FIRST AFRICANS

Africa has the longest record – some 2.5 million years – of human occupation of any continent on earth. For nearly all of this time, its inhabitants have made tools from stone and have acquired their food from its rich, wild plant and animal resources. Archaeological research in Africa is crucial for understanding the origins of humans and the diversity of hunter-gatherer ways of life. This book provides an up-to-date, comprehensive synthesis of the record left by Africa's earliest hominin inhabitants and hunter-gatherers. It combines the insights of archaeology with those of other disciplines, such as genetics and palaeoenvironmental science. African evidence is critical to important debates, such as the origins of stone tool-making, the emergence of recognisably modern forms of cognition and behaviour, and the expansion of successive hominins from Africa to other parts of the world. Africa's enormous ecological diversity and exceptionally long history also provide an unparalleled opportunity to examine the impact of environment change on human populations. More recently, African foragers have been viewed as archetypes of the hunter-gatherer way of life, a view that is debated in this volume. Also examined is the relevance of African hunter-gatherers for understanding the development and spread of food production and the social and ideological significance of rock art.

Lawrence Barham is professor in the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology at the University of Liverpool. A scholar of the evolution of symbolic behaviours, he is the author of *The Middle Stone Age of Zambia* and coeditor of *Human Roots: Africa and Asia in the Middle Pleistocene*. Prof. Barham serves on the Council of the British Institute in Eastern Africa and is editor of the journal *Before Farming: The Archaeology and Anthropology of Hunter-Gatherers*.

Peter Mitchell is professor of African archaeology in the School of Archaeology at the University of Oxford, and Tutor and Fellow in Archaeology at St Hugh's College, Oxford. With a specialisation in the archaeology of southern African hunter-gatherers, but also much broader interests in African archaeology, he is the author of *The Archaeology of Southern Africa* and *African Connections: Archaeological Perspectives on Africa and the Wider World*. Prof. Mitchell is Hon. Secretary of the British Institute in Eastern Africa, serves on the editorial boards of seven leading journals, and is the immediate past president of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists.

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LAWRENCE BARHAM

*University of Liverpool*

PETER MITCHELL

*University of Oxford*



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