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## RETROSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE FOR SCIENTIFIC PROVENANCE STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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# Retrospective and Prospective for Scientific Provenance Studies in Archaeology

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**Abstract:** Provenance has been one of the major scientific applications in archaeology for a hundred years. The ‘golden age’ began in the 1950s, when large programmes were initiated focussing on bronzes, ceramics, and lithics. However, these had varying impact, ranging from wide acceptance to outright rejection. This Element reviews some of these programmes, mainly in Eurasia and North America, focussing on how the complexity of the material, and the effects of human behaviour, can impact on such studies. The conclusion is that provenance studies of lithic materials and obsidian are likely to be reliable, but those on ceramics and metals are increasingly complicated, especially in the light of mixing and recycling. An alternative is suggested, which focusses more on using scientific studies to understand the relationship between human selectivity and processing and the wider resources available, rather than on the simple question of ‘where does this object come from’.

**Keywords:** provenance, archaeological theory, resource-scape, human resource selection, human materials processing

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## Contents

1 The Provenance Hypothesis	2
2 The Origins of Chemical Analysis in Archaeology	5
3 The First Expressions of Provenance	9
4 The Archaeological Framework	11
5 Provenance in Practice	14
6 The 'Golden Age' of Provenance Studies	25
7 Cracks in the Façade	53
8 Towards a New Provenance Hypothesis	57
References	62