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Conference Review: EAC14, Curitiba, Brazil, May 2025

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The fourteenth edition of the experimental archaeology conference (EAC14) was held from May 12-16th 2025 in the city of Curitiba, Brazil, co-hosted by the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). This was EXARC's first EAC event to be held outside of Europe, and one of the first dedicated conferences on experimental archaeology to be held in Brazil. Consequently, the lead-up to the event was filled with as much trepidation as excitement, but thanks to the organisers at EXARC and the UFPR, and an excellent team of volunteers both online and on the ground, the final event ran without a hitch.

> The opportunity to experience the beauty and deep history of Brazil was a fantastic one, and the hybrid format of the event ensured an accessible and positive experience for both in-person and online participants.

Conference Sessions

Session content

The academic sessions ran in the afternoons on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the conference week, hosted in a wood-panelled lecture hall in the main building at the centre of the Campus Juvevê. In addition to the afternoon sessions, which were hybrid in format (more on that below), two online-only sessions were held on Tuesday and Wednesday morning. There were also three keynote talks which looked at the History of experimental archaeology in South America (presented in-person by Prof. Dr. Hugo Nami from Argentina), the importance of experimental archaeology and ethnoarchaeology in technical studies of material culture (presented online by Prof. Dr. Udayakumar Sankarlingam from India), and the use of digital technologies for archaeological experiments (presented in-person by Prof. Dr. Alex Martire from Brazil).

The sessions were divided into themes that focused on different materials. On day one, the papers centered on research into lithic technology, featuring projects from around the world, including Norwegian coffee-bean sinkers, recycled axes from the Netherlands, and Brazilian bow-and-arrow technology. On day two, the online-only session looked at metalworking technology, while the afternoon sessions considered organic technologies, featuring studies looking at bone, wood, and textiles. Again, there was a great variety in the papers presented, including research on tattooing tools, use-wear on teeth, musical bone tubes, and roman leather shoes. The final day's morning session presented projects involved with public outreach and traditional craft, while the afternoon sessions looked at ceramic technologies, and included speakers from all over the world, including China, Ukraine, Brazil, Argentina, and Croatia. The diversity of projects presented was an excellent example of the increasing depth and connectivity of the international experimental archaeology community.

Hybrid format

As with all EAC events since the start of the pandemic, EAC14 was hybrid in format. It might be expected that, considering the wide geographical divide between the organisers from EXARC and those on location in Curitiba, there would be some technological issues on the day. However, it is a testament to the volunteer teams from both sides that, for both the online and in-person participants, everything ran extremely smoothly.

All of the presentations were pre-recorded by the speakers, and uploaded during the conference days to the EXARC YouTube channel by EXARC volunteers, meaning that anyone could watch the sessions online. Live watch-along sessions were hosted on the EXARC Discord

server, moderated by another team of volunteers who did an excellent job of keeping the online aspect as engaging as possible. Additionally, volunteers from the UFPR established a livestream of the conference sessions, which were broadcast directly to the EXARC channel so that online participants could also watch the live Q&A sessions and keynote speakers. The volunteer teams were all thanked extensively by the organisers at the end of the conference, and it is important to highlight again how essential their work is, and that the success of the EAC14 conference is due in a big part to their dedication.

The number of in-person participants was lower than in previous years, but it was considered to be extremely well attended for a Brazilian archaeological conference, which (according to the Brazilian organising team) generally have lower participation numbers than their European equivalents. The relatively small size of the conference delegation also meant that closer connections could be made, and friendships and collaborations were definitely formed that will hopefully consolidate the international experimental archaeology community even further in years to come - something that might not have been possible in a larger group of participants. The majority of the in-person participants were from within Brazil, but several speakers had travelled from abroad to attend, coming from Poland, Croatia, Germany, and elsewhere in South America.

Language accessibility

One of the highlights of the conference sessions was the availability of live translations. When entering the lecture theatre, participants could collect a set of headphones, which were linked to a box at the back of the room. Inside were two interpreters who provided a live translation feed, in either English or Portuguese, of all aspects of the in-person conference sessions. This allowed speakers to present their papers in the language they were most comfortable in, and also enabled audience members to ask questions and participate in discussions, regardless of their English language ability. The audio-visual team at UFPR also ensured that the English translation audio was looped into the YouTube broadcast, so that online participants would also be able to understand everything that was being said in the live feed. This resource was an extremely valuable part of the conference, and made an enormous difference in terms of accessibility to local students who wished to join, and to a decrease in anxiety and nerves from many participants!

Workshops

The reason for the academic sessions being held in the afternoons was because the morning program was dedicated to practical in-person workshops held in various rooms and gardens on the Campus Juvevê. There were four workshops on offer to participants: A lithics workshop run by Prof. Dr. Hugo Nami (Monday to Wednesday), a ceramics workshop run by Prof. Ana Elisa de Castro Freitas (Monday to Wednesday), a bone and antler workshop run by

Dr Matilda Siebrecht (Monday to Tuesday), and an indigenous painting workshop run by Eldissandra Toscano de Souza (Wednesday).

The multi-day format of the majority of the workshops allowed participants to focus on practising their skills and implementing the techniques learnt over several days. However, many participants were disappointed that they were unable to attend all of the workshops on offer. In spite of this, the general feedback from participants on the workshop content was extremely positive. Several of the live presenters during the conference sessions referred to information learnt during the preceding workshops, and the diversity of research backgrounds of the participants led to enlightening discussions and inspiration for all.

Excursions

For in-person participants, one of the highlights of the conference was definitely the two days of excursions that took place on Thursday 15th and Friday 16th May. Especially for those who had travelled from outside Brazil, it was a wonderful opportunity to see the variety of landscapes and environments outside of the city, and to learn more about the history of Brazilian archaeology.

On the first day, the bus drove participants eastward through the mountains and rainforests to the coastline at Antonina. From there, they took a boat out to visit various historical sites along the coast, including the renowned Sambaqui (shell mound) at Ilha do Corisco. Unfortunately, the low water levels meant that, even with an additional loop on the journey added to the preceding tour, the boat was unable to dock at the island with the shell mound, and so participants had to admire it from the water instead. However, the views throughout the tour were beautiful, and everyone enjoyed the trip out on the water.

After lunch, the bus drove on to Paranaguá, where participants visited the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. There was time to look around the exhibits, and several of the local organisers gave a brief introduction to the history of Brazilian archaeology and the importance of the Sambaquis (shell mounds) in the development of the field.

On the second day the bus drove west, into rolling hills and grasslands. First, participants were shown around the Museum of Natural Sciences at Ponta Grossa, which houses an impressive collection of rocks and minerals and focuses on a geological perspective of Brazil. After lunch, participants hiked out into the countryside to visit the Usina São Jorge Rock Shelter, which is a heritage site known for its beautiful rock paintings. The tour was guided by a local expert on the rock shelters, who was able to share insights into the protection and conservation of the sites.

Conclusion

EXARC declares itself to be an international organisation, and EAC14 helped to consolidate this claim by establishing the experimental archaeology network outside of Europe. The opportunity to experience the beauty and deep history of Brazil was a fantastic one, and the hybrid format of the event ensured an accessible and positive experience for both in-person and online participants. Thanks to the incredible dedication of the organisers, the volunteer teams and, of course, the speakers themselves, this event was a definite success, and is hopefully the first of many future conferences to be hosted by the diverse members of an increasingly international network.

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FIG 1. THE CONFERENCE VENUE AT THE UFPR. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 2. VOLUNTEERS FROM THE UFPR WHO ENSURED THAT THE YOUTUBE FEED AND LIVE TRANSLATION WORKED SMOOTHLY. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

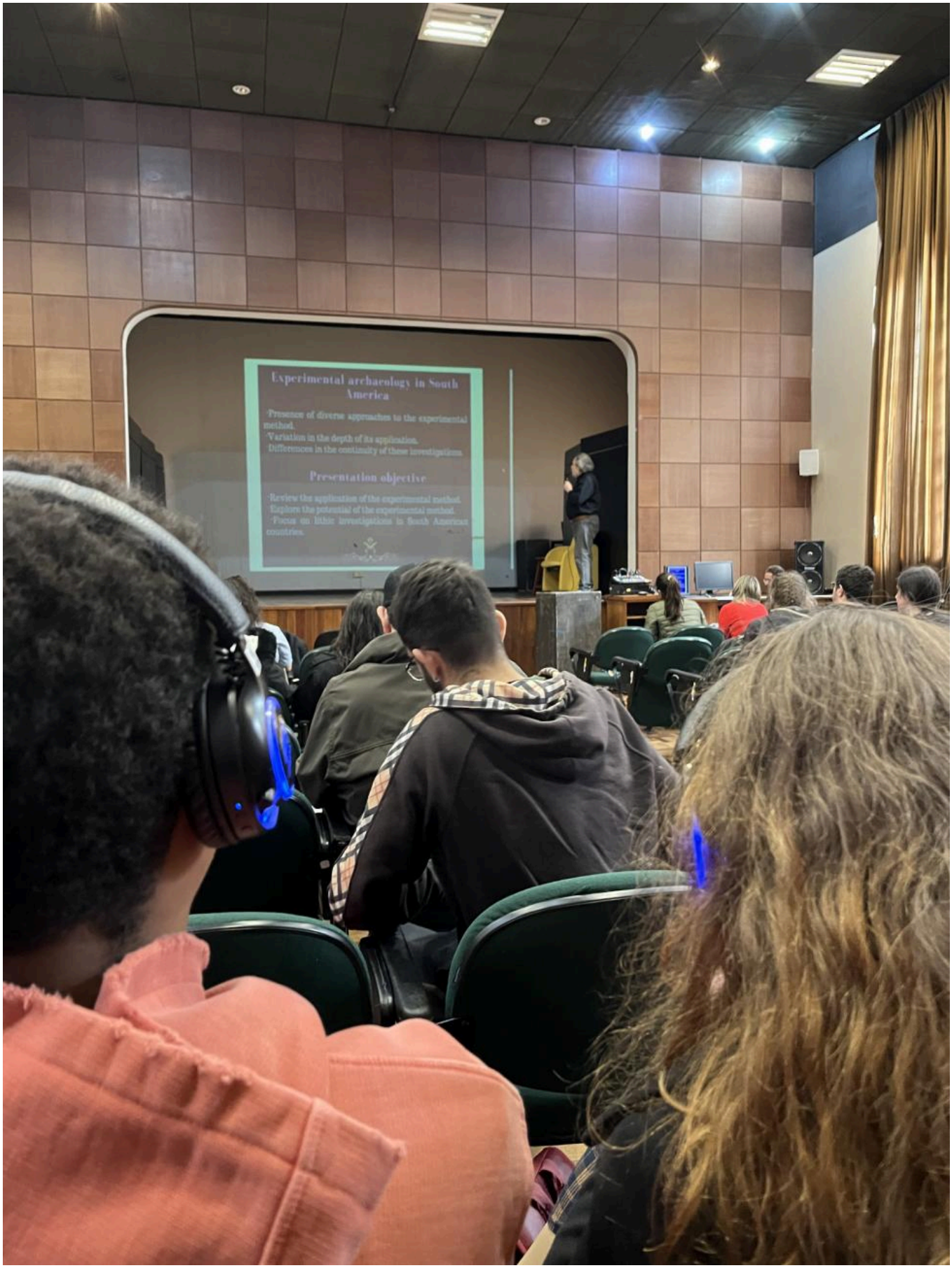

FIG 3. LIVE TRANSLATORS AT THE EVENT ENSURED THAT EVERYONE IN THE AUDIENCE COULD UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS BEING SAID JUST BY PUTTING ON A PAIR OF HEADPHONES. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 4. PARTICIPANTS AT THE BONE AND ANTLER WORKSHOP. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 5. PARTICIPANTS AT THE LITHICS WORKSHOP. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 6. PARTICIPANTS AT THE CERAMICS WORKSHOP. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 7. PARTICIPANTS AT THE INDIGENOUS PAINTING WORKSHOP. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 8. THE VIEW FROM THE BUS ON THE FIRST DAY OF EXCURSIONS. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 9. PARTICIPANTS OF THE FIRST EXCURSION DAY ON A BOAT OUT FROM ANTONINA TO SEE THE SHELL MOUNDS. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 10. PARTICIPANTS ON THE FIRST EXCURSION DAY LEARNING ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGY IN BRAZIL AT THE PARANAGUA MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 11. A MOMENT OF CALM WITH EAC14 SWAG. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 12. PARTICIPANTS ON THE SECOND EXCURSION DAY LEARNING ABOUT LOCAL ROCK FORMATION AT THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCES IN PONTA GROSSA. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 13. HIKING OUT TO SEE THE USINA SÃO JORGE ROCK SHELTER ON THE SECOND EXCURSION DAY. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.

FIG 14. ROCK PAINTINGS AT THE USINA SÃO JORGE ROCK SHELTER ON THE SECOND EXCURSION DAY. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT.