

Stone Tool Recycling Throughout History

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This paper provides an overview of the most common secondary uses of chipped and polished stone tools throughout history. Although the earliest product of man's activity, as a part of everyday life, they were preserved up to the present time. Throughout history, the meaning and role of stone tools was changing, but they remained a humans' constant accompaniment.

Stone tools are the oldest preserved remnants of humans and humans' ancestors, hominins.

Because of their attractiveness and durability, stone tools often outlived their makers and found their place in different historical periods and circumstances with the same, similar, or with completely changed function. The recycling of small pieces of stone, which are often difficult to recognize as artefacts, is not easy to perceive, and therefore, in many publications of the historical period such specimens are interpreted as a result of stratigraphic disturbances.

Even though it is difficult to determine the changed function on a piece of stone, it allows us to inspect some of the processes that are not noticeable on other objects due to their susceptibility to modification or decay. The durability of the stone allowed for multiple transformations and conversions, and for the return of once wasted specimen after several hundred or thousands of years back to the sphere of human everyday life, as a means of performing everyday tasks, or as a patron and/or a good luck charm.

Reasons for recycling are various and depend on different factors, and perhaps the most important one in this case is the time, or the historical period in which a particular item started being re-used. At a time when the stone is still the basic raw material, the reasons for recycling are (at least as it seems to us) clear, simple, and they could even be said to be self-explanatory, and the basic function of the object remains the same, although the activity may have changed (cutting, harvesting, tanning, logging, etc.). With the changes in technology and the production of tools and raw materials used to make them, the role of stone tools also changed: as unusual objects in the landscape, glossy unusual objects on the surface or in the ground, as belonging to liminal sphere, not belonging neither to the living nor to the dead, neither natural nor artificial. Because of this, their role passes from a simple basic tool into the sphere of the different, mystical and subliminal.

The first possible recorded case of recycling originated from the Fuente Nueva site in Spain, from layers dating back to around 1,300,000 years ago. But here it is not a case of recycling system, but simple processing and adaptation of a simple tool (Barsky et al., 2015).

During the Bronze Age, the bronze becomes the dominant raw material for tool making and by the end of the Bronze Age, stone tools are gradually and finally replaced by metal. However, stone tools remain part of the inventory of later prehistoric populations. There are no known roots of the apotropaic meaning of stone tools that would be the primary context for stone tools throughout historical periods, but it seems that this change in the semantic roles of stone tools can be traced back to the later periods of prehistory. Kitchenware and forestry tools slowly become magical items, and will remain as such almost to the present day.

Already in the ancient Greece, stone axes and artefacts have found their place as rare and valuable objects. In Greece, they were called *astropelekia*, axes that fell from the sky (Stevens 1870). Plinius in *De rerum natura* conveys Sokrat's description of the *ceraunia* (prehistoric stone axes) that says there are two cavernous black and red caves, reminding of helebards or ax heads, and that with their (magical) help they can conquer entire cities (Steven 1870).

On some axes, there are engraved inscriptions in Greek, which were found in the Roman context (Faraone 2014). There are no indications that they recognized them as the tools of their ancestors, but as natural shapes that had special properties, like opal or coral. Neolithic axes of the eastern Mediterranean, later decorated or in their original form, have found their home as amulets in France, Britain and elsewhere (Pharaoh 2014). For some of the Greek inscriptions it is believed that they may have been created later, as counterfeits, but in this case, it is a recycling of prehistoric artefacts. A proven example of counterfeiting, a very recent one, is a stone axe with a carved depiction of deer that the finder has ornamented to sell it better.

From the Middle Ages almost to the present day, stone axes or arrowheads were kept as protection from thunder. Patron saints and gods in various European mythologies and religions are connected to stone axes (e.g. Thor in Norsk and Perun in Slavic mythology). It was believed that axes were formed during a storm when lightning hit the ground (Belaj 1998).

In Israel and Egypt, stone tools were used in the rituals of circumcision, following the mention in the Bible of the flint knives used in circumcision ritual (Walton et al. 2014).

Pre-historic stone artefacts were sometimes used for threshing sledges in modern times (Malta, Turkey). Till mid-20th century, in rural areas, threshing sledges were made, and they are being kept in many households to this day as a symbol of tradition and a manifestation of personal identity (Gurova 2013: 181).

We are not able to determine all the purposes of reuse of prehistoric stone tools, but the fact is that a prolonged lifetime of stone tools was caused by the attractiveness of shiny objects, human curiosity, and the need to explain the world around and define strange objects in the environment. It took several thousand years to produce knowledge about these unusual items and finally place them in the correct historical and functional context.

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