

Article

How Rocks Die: Changing Patterns of Discard and Re-Use of Ground Stone Tools in Middle Bronze Age Cyprus

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Abstract: Cultural objects are thought to have a lifespan. From selection, through construction, use, destruction, and discard, materials do not normally last forever, transforming through stages of life, eventually leading to their death. The materiality of stone objects, however, can defy the inevitable demise of an object, especially durable ground stone tools that can outlive generations of human lifespans. How groups of people deal with the relative permanence of stone tools depends on their own relationship with the past, and whether they venerate it or reject its influence on the present. A case study from the long-lived site of Prasteio-Mesorotsos in Cyprus demonstrates a shifting attitude toward ground stone objects, from the socially conservative habit of ritually killing of objects and burying them, to one of more casual re-use and reinterpretation of ground stone. This shift in attitude coincides with a socio-political change that eventually led to the ultimate rejection of the past: complete abandonment of the settlement.

Keywords: Cyprus; prehistory; ground stone; materiality; social conservatism

1. Introduction

We have learned from Leroi-Gourhan [1], Lemmonier [2], and others [3] that objects have lifespans, but what about objects whose material qualities make them immortal? While stone tools certainly undergo transformations in the stages of *chaîne opératoire*, they are extremely durable. In fact, the primary stage of a ground stone tool's lifespan, selection of the raw material, would have been contingent upon an understanding of durability by ancient craftspersons. Hardness, coarseness, and density of stone would have been well understood by those in the ancient world, not to mention far more nuanced qualities like crystalline structure, impact resistance, and heat retention. Ancient toolmakers knew their stones. Many ancient cultures relied upon knowledge of stone properties for survival (hunting tools, woodworking, kitchen implements, processing pigments, building materials, manufacturing cloth, etc.), so it can therefore be assumed that they also understood their relative permanence, especially of stones selected for long periods of use.

If people in the past understood that stones do not deteriorate in the same way as organic materials or more friable materials such as ceramics or plaster, perhaps they also conceived that stone tools may not meet the end of their cultural life in the same way as these less permanent objects. There is occasional evidence for heirlooms in antiquity [4], but when we see broken or worn out ground stone tools in the archaeological record, their utilitarian nature often leads us to surmise that discard patterns are haphazard and the result of dumping old broken tools. But the persistence of hard stones like basalt, diabase, and even some forms of limestone suggests that their immortality would have been understood too. The utilitarian use of ground stone did not necessarily make them special objects of reverence, but how a culture viewed the lingering existence of the tools of one's ancestors is something

that must be considered. Did a group see discarded stone tools, broken or unbroken, as objects of respect, mnemonic links to ancestors, or simply trash that can be reused as a resource, unbound by sentimentality? Was their attitude somewhere in between? This paper challenges the purely utilitarian explanation of ground stone tool discard by explicitly acknowledging what the ancient users of these tools would have understood: the materiality of stone is permanence, but the attitude of people toward the concept of permanence is something that is culturally fluid.

A community's relationship with permanence is intrinsically tied to the idea of social conservatism. In a socially conservative community, a cultural group is held together by bonds of tradition, values, and institutions, including a sense of place and space. Ultimately a conservative group is fragile, however, because these norms are not permanent, they are continuously being renegotiated and are not necessarily universally accepted or understood. These bonds must be constantly reinforced in order for them to retain legitimacy. A powerfully conservative group, therefore, places emphasis on emblems of their social bonds, creating a social inertia that leads to the reinforcement of the social structure [5]. Conservative culture draws links to the past that makes the case for the timelessness and immutability of the group. By contrast, in a less socially conservative group, one would expect to see less of this assertion of permanence, and a socially radical group would reject this permanence outright. While it might seem a lot for the humble ground stone tools to bear, the attitude of a community toward stone objects, especially after their "death" as used objects, can act as a proxy guide to how socially conservative or politically revolutionary a society is.

In the case of ancient Cyprus, we have long understood that the pace of social change was different to that on the mainland, despite Cypriot knowledge of the growth of state level society in the 3rd millennium BC [6]. In the 3rd millennium BC, communities in Cyprus continued to hold onto simpler social structures, and the accompanying settlement patterns, subsistence strategies, and object assemblages that were increasingly rare in the mainland Near East. What was once considered a cultural "backwater," Cyprus has in more recent decades been acknowledged to have been on a different social trajectory than the mainland, deliberately rejecting complex state level society and urbanization for a time in favour of retaining small scale egalitarianism. This began to change at some point in the Late Chalcolithic/Bronze Age, and by the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, Cyprus was on its way to becoming a major player in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean system, perhaps due to its access to abundant metal resources [7–9].

What changed? Understanding the shift from simple to complex society in Cyprus is something that has been pursued by many scholars, but the nature of the archaeological remains in Cyprus does not lend itself to easy answers. Unlike on mainland Near East, Cyprus has no *tells* and it is typical for sites to exist in a limited time frame, sometimes only being occupied for one cultural period before the inhabitants moved on to another location. One exception to this general rule is the site of Prasteio-Mesorotsos in the Dhiarizos Valley in the west/southwest of the island (Figure 1). Located approximately 15 km upriver from the location of the major Late Bronze Age site of Palaipaphos, Prasteio-Mesorotsos was continuously occupied for much of prehistory and was abandoned at roughly the same time as the establishment of the "urban" area of Palaipaphos, probably in the Middle Cypriot II-III period [10]. The evidence from Prasteio-Mesorotsos therefore provides a valuable chronological tool to see shifting attitudes toward social structure, social conservatism, and the eventual radical rejection of conservatism exemplified by the site's abandonment and the establishment of a new urban community on the coast. Furthermore, because stone tools are used in every period and they are so-long lived, the use, discard and re-use patterns in their contexts can tell us something about the relationship between the materiality of stone and the attitudes toward maintaining the status quo.

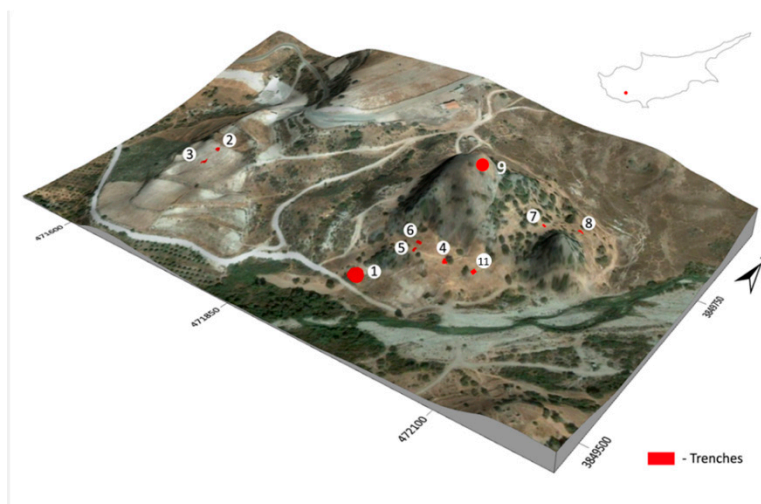


Figure 1. Overview of the site of Prasteio-Mesorotsos, showing locations of trenches mentioned in the text.

2. Materiality of Stone

Fundamental to the construction of social groups is the communication of ideas, creating a collective consciousness that we call culture [11]. For a culture to exist between people, it therefore must find expression in some kind of physical form, be that speech, art, built environments, or even natural landscapes [12–14]. For ideas to form into a culture, there must be some way that the participants can view the same subject allowing them to coalesce into a coherent viewpoint. As with all creatures, human groups are subject to ecological principles and certain behaviours are rewarded or rejected according to their success or failure in a given environment. Wasting water in arid climates is not a behaviour that will lead to long term success for a group, for instance. There is a continuous feedback loop between the physical world and the virtual collective consciousness that we call culture, with materials providing constraints and parameters on human agency [15].

Humans as terrestrial creatures live in a stone world, and as a consequence all human cultures are bound to some extent by the materiality of stone. Understanding the properties of stone has always been essential to our survival, even in cultures where stones are marginal in the environment. Some stones are soft and easy to manipulate, some can be pulverized into special materials like paint or medicines, some fracture into sharp tools that can provide meat or reap harvests, some are so hard and resilient that they can be used to grind grain, scrape skins, or be used as weapons. Stone is the literal foundation for all life, but the way human groups regard stone is variable, contingent upon how they view themselves and their place in the world. For instance, in today's world, knowledge of the properties of stone is a specialized subject, related to division of labour that has removed most people from having to grind their own grains or hunt their own meat. We have also developed ways to extract distilled properties from stones, removing metals from ores and isolating only the hardest of stones for cutting tools. In other words, while stones are ubiquitous and essential, even today, the way groups of people engage with stones is contingent upon how they are socially organized and constructed.

Stones have various properties, not all of which are necessarily important to every culture. Having an abundance of stone types (among other resources) to hand is therefore conducive to meeting the needs of changing cultures and long-lived communities [16]. If settlements were only situated in the optimum locations for natural resources, however, there would be very few places to live. Other factors are involved in site selection, including group traditions, memory, adaptation, and competition that can override deficiencies in local resources to some extent. In short, while environmental factors create a structural constraint for human agency, ultimately people choose where to live and how to live there. The materiality of stone influences the way culture forms, but the perception of this quality can change according to the structure of the cultural group and individual agents within.

This explanation of the relationship between cultures and their environment is important to understanding the reasons why the site of Prasteio-Mesorotsos was occupied for so long. The first inhabitants appeared in the Neolithic period, and a continuous unbroken sequence of occupation can be seen throughout the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Bronze Age. This represents at least four thousand years, with no apparent hiatus or change of the local population until the site's abandonment in the Middle Cypriot Bronze Age (MC). This is not to say that the culture stayed static throughout this time, however. On the contrary, although the inhabitants of this site seem to have chosen an ideal spot for a number of subsistence strategies, which accounts for the remarkable longevity of occupation, the connection to this place required constant reinforcement and eventually these connections were broken. Ultimately, the decision to stay in a spot is only partly determined by natural resources; the type of society and the desire to stay or move can be equally or more important [16].

3. Neolithic Establishment

Prasteio-Mesorotsos seems to have been first settled in the Late Cypro-Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (LCPPNB), although in these early periods there appears to have been seasonal occupation [16]. Certainly by the Aceramic Neolithic period (second half of the 7th millennium BC), the settlement was permanent and fairly substantial, judging from the excavated remains and the spread of surveyed Neolithic artefacts that span approximately half of the c. 10 ha site [17,18]. The Neolithic inhabitants chose to settle around the large rocky outcrop from which the modern name “Mesorotsos” derives. This outcrop is the dominant landscape feature in the valley, and one of the few places with intervisibility between the top of the highest peak in Cyprus and the sea. It is strategic, but in the Neolithic period it just as likely represented the ecotone between the forested uplands and the pastoral and agrarian lowlands, a crossroads between the west of Cyprus and the rest of the island and a ritual place of congregation that featured intercommunity feasts [19].

In addition to the large-scale pit oven for communal feasting, a more modest scale domed oven has been found in an area of domestic occupation that began in the LCPPNB and continued unbroken through the Aceramic and Late Neolithic periods (Figure 2). Throughout the Neolithic period, it seems as though this domed oven was used, demonstrating remarkable continuity, even at times when occupation was intermittent, but becoming more substantial as time went on. It is likely that the earliest inhabitants were actively trying to establish their connection to this special place by means of crafting and maintaining objects and facilities such as large transportable ground stone tools and caches of stone blanks and preforms in storage pits [20]. The pit house in the earliest periods seem to be fairly ephemeral, but by the Aceramic Neolithic substantial, stone wall footings were being made for permanent structures and a series of repeated houses forms one upon another were created with floors upon floors.

An early attempt to establish a sense of connection, memory, and ownership of this location by the inhabitants was to create a special ritual “pit complex,” a series of intercutting shallow pits, most of which were found with traces of special broken objects placed into them [21]. The first of these pits contained a well-made spouted stone bowl made of blue-green picrolite material, most likely obtained from seams in the central Troodos region of Cyprus. The stone bowl is similar in form to those found in Kalavassos-Tenta period 2, suggesting a date in the LCPPNB period [22]. A likely complete human head (a complete mandible and partial maxilla were found along with fragments of cranium, but was partially cut by a later pit) was found in another pit dating to the Aceramic Neolithic period, and in the Late (Ceramic) Neolithic period a special conical bowl, broken in half and containing a single stone pestle, was laid into another pit. One of the latest of the pits found in the complex contained a fragment of a human female figurine made of unbaked clay [21]. Together the length of time that the pit complex was used, alongside the deposition of broken special objects, suggests that the earliest Neolithic inhabitants were attempting to leave something behind that tied themselves to this place, perhaps while they were pursuing a semi-sedentary lifestyle. As their attachment to the place grew,

they also came to stay in the settlement year-round, continuing the same ritual behaviour in the pit complex, but also creating a built environment of permanent houses that also created a sense of home.



Figure 2. Area V Neolithic domestic and ritual spaces, showing the earliest seasonal occupation likely in the Late Cypro-Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (LCPPNB), at which time a domed oven was constructed. Continuous Neolithic ritual activity took place in the pit complex, and later Neolithic stone wall foundations are shown in foreground.

Further details of this pit complex are detailed in another publication [21] and analysis is still ongoing, but it is important to mention here that this pit complex represents “knowledge of where the pit complex was maintained as well as perpetuation of the ritual behaviour,” which demonstrates “that those using the pit complex created an intergenerational social memory” [21]. The co-occurrence of broken objects, fragments of human remains, and a clay human effigy perforated to be broken for this interment, represents a continuous habit of ritually “killing” of objects. Some of these are useful items such as ground stone tools, some are containers, some are made of special material such as picrolite, and some were once living things. This pit complex therefore established very early on in the site’s occupation a tradition for ritually preserving the immortal remains of the dead and their objects and respecting their resting place. Although the pit complex apparently does not continue past the Late Neolithic, a similar practice continues in the domestic sequence of burying objects and human remains below floor and house layers.

4. Chalcolithic Conservatism

The Chalcolithic period at Prastio-Mesorotsos continued on directly from the Late Neolithic period, in some instances building identical floors and structures immediately above the earlier. Thus, the Early and Middle Chalcolithic periods can be seen as eliding with the earlier Neolithic periods, continuing to build elliptical structures with slightly sunken floors, substantial plaster hearths, and occasionally caches of ground stone tools left in place at the end of the life cycle of a building or floor level. The behaviour of leaving useful stone tools in caches or on benches or shelves in buildings before building an identical floor with the same tools directly above is typical of Chalcolithic Cyprus [23]. At the nearby Middle Chalcolithic sites of Kissonerga-Mosfilia and Souskiou-Laona, the latter of which is in the same valley as Prasteio-Mesorotsos, one often finds three or four identical floor layers each packed with tools left presumably in situ. Although the evidence from Prasteio-Mesorotsos is far more fragmentary than these other two sites, there is evidence of persistent architecture and repetition of tool use between layers.

In the levels above the Neolithic deposits in Area V-VI, an elision between the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic can be seen in a series of domestic deposits superimposed upon one another. In an elliptical building (building 550) bounded by thin stone wall foundations made of angular limestone cobbles and igneous river pebbles, there was found a series of floor layers using the same interior space. The earliest of these levels appears to date to the Late Neolithic, and the latest of the three or four strata is more likely Early Chalcolithic in date judging from the ceramics. In a central place in the house was a built low (c. 5 cm tall) circular platform made of plaster and used as a kitchen area, with a hearth, stone anvil, or grinding stone, a substantial limestone mortar with a hemispherical bowl, and most of a whole ceramic jar crushed in place. This earliest use of the kitchen area was then covered over by a second floor, upon which the kitchen area was rebuilt with a similar hearth, anvil, mortar, and ceramics. A third floor had another identical installation with the same paraphernalia again (Figure 3). This represents three distinct phases within a single house, where rather than reusing the objects between phases, they were deliberately left buried, the property of the previous users, possibly the ancestors or intergenerational elders. It is not possible to say precisely why still useful objects were left in place only to be covered with a new floor layer with identical objects. The habit seems to have “retired” or “killed” the earlier objects by burying them and the floor they are associated with, only to replaced them with “living” objects in the next phase. This habit continued with a series of stone-filled pits cutting the surfaces of building 550, containing an abundance of stone tools, some of which were still usable but retired through burial. Included in one of these pits was a mortar and pestle combination found together (Figure 4) and intact.

In another portion of the site in Area VII, a massive limestone basin and an anvil were found adjacent to a very well-preserved and maintained plaster hearth, upon which a substantial quern was placed (Figure 5). Although not fully excavated yet, the hearth has at least three distinct phases, some of which are rebuilds, and appears to overlie remains of either an earlier occupation within the same building or possibly in an earlier building in the same place. It appears likely that the huge basin was used for quite some time; one of the rims was broken away but it was left in place perhaps to be used as a tray or grinding platform. This suggests a continuity of use of this ground stone tool in the latest phase of the use of the domestic structure, with its eventual retirement coming when the entire house was buried under the collapsed superstructure. Throughout the Chalcolithic period, the typical behaviour shows that stone tools were associated with phases of architecture and the life that was lived in them, but earlier phases and the lives of the ancestors and their tools were buried in a sequence and left undisturbed.

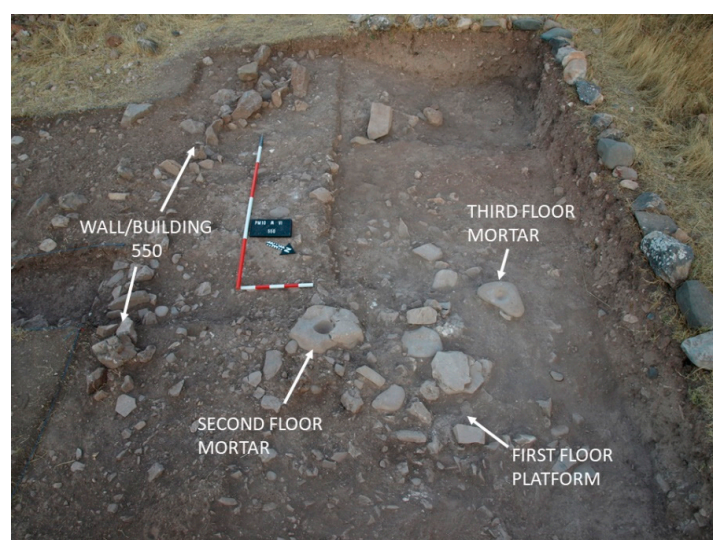


Figure 3. Late Neolithic/Early Chalcolithic building 550 in Area VI, with kitchen areas and sequence of stone mortars left intact.



Figure 4. Mortar and pestle set (PM186): limestone mortar and diabase pestle, found together in discard pit in Area VI.

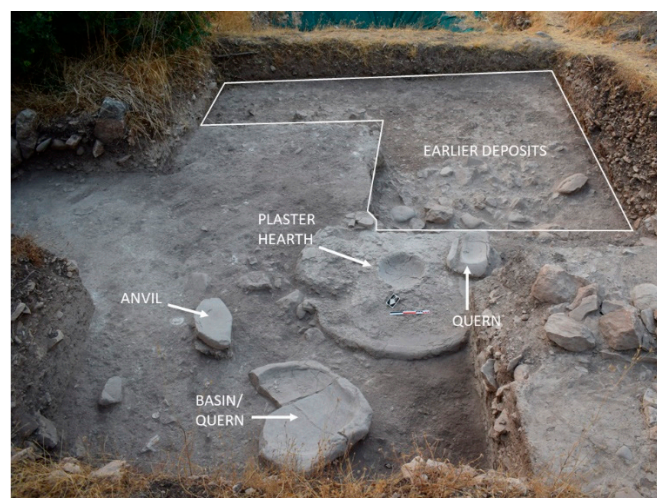


Figure 5. Early or Middle Chalcolithic domestic structure in Area VII with circular plaster hearth, limestone basin, anvil, or grinding platform and a quern, with earlier deposits (unexcavated) below.

5. Middle Bronze Age Revolution

A surprising feature of the archaeological sequence at Prasteio-Mesorotsos is the fact that not very much occurs in the transitional Philia phase between the Late Chalcolithic and the Early Cypriot Bronze Age (EC). At other sites, the Philia phase seems to mark the shift from the organic layout of circular houses in the Chalcolithic to the more structured rectilinear houses of the Bronze Age [24]. This shift is accompanied by new styles of pottery, some showing knowledge of Anatolian forms, an increase in metallurgy, new subsistence strategies and division of labour, and in general a more complex social structure. At Prasteio-Mesorotsos the Late Chalcolithic, the Philia, and EC all seem to elide into one another. Apart from new forms of pottery (although some forms do continue from the Late Chalcolithic into the MC periods, especially the black-topped bowls), for the most part, life carries on in the EC as it

did in the Late Chalcolithic, continuing to use curvilinear architecture, building organically, depositing infant remains with funerary objects on the terminal floors of buildings, and other behaviours typical of the Chalcolithic periods [25]. Likewise, ground stone tool production carries on in much the same way as before, with caches of ground stone objects being left in situ on sequential floor levels, with the layout of each stratum reflecting that which came before. In other words, although chronologically speaking these inhabitants of Prasteio-Mesorotsos were living in the Early Cypriot Bronze Age, they were culturally continuing some Chalcolithic traditions and behaviours. These were a socially conservative people who maintained the lifestyle that was first formed by their (probable) ancestors in the Neolithic, maintained by their forebears in the Chalcolithic period, and held onto in the EC in spite of the wave of cultural change spreading to communities across the island.

When the change from simple egalitarian society to complex hierarchical society took place is difficult to pinpoint in Cyprus, especially when long sequences are rare at sites. Because single or limited period settlements are often founded in periods of change, the sequence showing this cultural revolution is lacking. Archaeology picks up the evidence either before or after the change had occurred [25]. At Prasteio-Mesorotsos, however, it appears that the major cultural change that put the inhabitants on a trajectory of increasing social complexity was not between the Chalcolithic and the Bronze Age, rather between the EC and the MC, judging from stratigraphy and the ceramics.

Remains from the Bronze Age have been discovered in at least three trenches at Prasteio-Mesorotsos (Areas II, IV, and XI), but by far the longest and clearest sequence can be found in Area IV where the EC/MC stratigraphy is unbroken and without hiatus. From the remains in Area IV, we have been able to identify several architectural phases in the Bronze Age which have been broken down into the earlier A phase and a later B phase, distinguished by a major architectural reconfiguration. From the artefacts found in the sequence, we have identified that the earliest layers so far exposed date to the terminal Late Chalcolithic or transitional Philia phase and shortly thereafter we see evidence for EC I–II ceramics, confirming a continuous occupation from the Chalcolithic into the Bronze Age. The architectural sequence reveals a series of domestic structures with no apparent gaps or hiatuses continuing through the EC and extending into the Middle Cypriot period, probably the MCII–III period. Abruptly at the end of this sequence we see an abandonment, and this seems to have occurred across the entire site, confirmed by evidence from survey and from Areas II and XI which also have Bronze Age remains. No Late Bronze Age material at all has been recovered from anywhere on the site, and the occupation saw a hiatus in the second half of the 2nd millennium only to be reoccupied in the Cypro-Geometric period several hundreds of years later.

There are four subphases in Area IV's phase A, each representing a stratum with at least one building. Curiously and unexpectedly, the architecture does not look like the typical Bronze Age rectilinear buildings and layout with streets and adjoining walls. On the contrary, the architecture continues to look very similar to the Chalcolithic structures seen in earlier deposits and at other comparable sites. Although full plans of buildings are rare due to erosion from the hillslope, the typical EC house structure at Prasteio-Mesorotsos appears to be a small roundhouse (c. 4–8 m diameter) with thin (c. 30–60 cm thick) stone wall foundations (using angular cobbles or river pebbles), earthen floors and occupational deposits, central hearths, south-facing entrances, and they do not seem to have adjoined other buildings on the same surface. They often have multiple floor layers within them, and stone tools and tool blanks are found in the fills and on the surfaces, sometimes left intact, (Figure 6). In one case from phase A4, a large quern was found with the rubbing stone in situ within the quern (Figure 7). In at least two buildings, the remains of infants were found on the terminal surface before the building was filled and covered over for the creation of the next phase [25]. None of this evidence is typical of the Bronze Age, but fits well with the behaviours seen in the earlier Chalcolithic periods.



Figure 6. Early Cypriot curvilinear structures from phases A2 and A3 from Area IV.

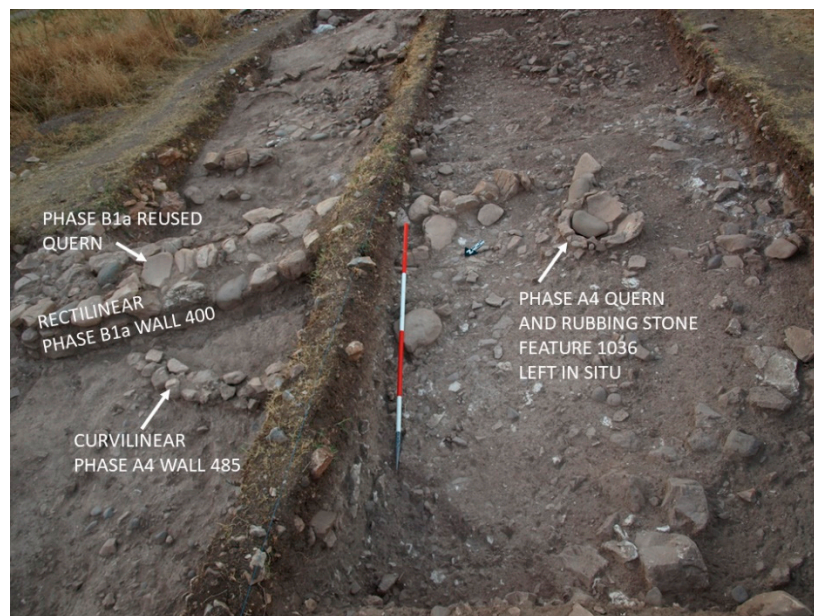


Figure 7. Transition from Phase A4 with thin curvilinear structure with wall 485, to Phase B1a with thick rectilinear wall 400, which reused broken querns in its construction.

Phase B in Area IV began using the surfaces that represent the termination of phase A4, indicating that there was no break in the sequence. But the architectural style and the behaviours of the inhabitants changed dramatically. This is best exemplified by the latest curvilinear wall from phase A4 (wall 485) being cut by the foundation trench for rectilinear wall 400 (Figure 7). The building bounded by wall 400 and its return 420 are built using entirely new construction techniques. Unlike the EC curvilinear buildings, all phase B walls are rectilinear and well-built, with wider wall foundations using much larger tabular limestone slabs and often using recycled querns, rubbing stones and even reused mortars for things like door sockets (Figure 8). Phase B walls also sometimes have a foundation trench, unknown in earlier strata, and there are also different arrangements of the interior spaces, including benches or bins, pot stands made of pebblecrete or in some cases, reused mortars, probably robbed from earlier strata and recycled for a new purpose. A trend of increasing sophistication in architecture

began in phase B1 a with wall 400 and continues through the rest of the MC period into phase B3, culminating in an impressive series of terraces and massive wall constructions (some up to 1.5 m wide), with a series of associated living and working spaces [25].



Figure 8. Typical architecture of Phase B in Area IV, showing walls 475 and 1464, with many reused and repurposed ground stone tools.

Importantly, terracing becomes a major activity on the site, using large quantities of soil to create a stepped appearance to the built environment, which necessitated a more ordered and organized layout of the entire village. In order to make these terraces, however, it seems as though they were using resources right to hand, and a large number of cast-up artefacts from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods can be found in phase B construction material. The reordering of the built environment in phase B destroyed the stratified remains from earlier periods. But rather than universally reburying the artefacts, they sometimes put them to good use instead, in wall foundations, as door sockets, as post pads, and other reimagined uses. Unlike phase A structures, which never had reused artefacts used in wall foundations, nearly every phase B building has reused earlier materials in their construction and use. In addition to the drastic changes in the organization and look of the village, it appears as though the inhabitants also had a new attitude of how to view the past and the objects buried by their ancestors.

Ultimately, however, this increasing social complexity and architectural sophistication resulted in the eventual abandonment of the settlement. While it may seem strange that the inhabitants of this village left it just as they were beginning to invest so heavily in its reimagining, we must remember that while it is in an ideal spot for some natural resources, it is also 15 km from the coast. It is not a particularly good location for engaging with extra-island communication. A coastal site at the mouth of the same river valley would be better suited for the establishment of a larger community organized around more of a hierarchical social structure. The terminal prehistoric materials from Prasteio-Mesorotsos fit into the MCII-III category, which are nearly identical to the earliest materials found in Bronze Age Palaipaphos [10]. Thus, it appears that the major changes that we see occurring from phase A into phase B at Prasteio-Mesorotsos culminated in the abandonment of the site and likely ushered in the establishment of an urban community on the coast.

6. Death of Stones

Stone tools were used from the earliest periods of inhabitation at Prastio-Mesorotsos and continued to be produced and used throughout every subsequent period (including historic periods from the Iron Age onward). Building foundations were made of stone from the Aceramic Neolithic onwards as well, and every phase thereafter used stones in their architecture, with some stone walls in the MC reaching more than 3 m in height. Prasteio-Mesorotsos is a stone village, and the inhabitants used (and still use) the abundant and variable stones available in the Dhiarizos river valley to fulfil their needs. Tabular limestone for stacking wall foundations is available on site, basalt and diabase stones for grinding and pounding tools can be found in the river, chert is available at a nearby source, rarer stones like picrolite can be found in small seams less than a kilometre away [16]. With such abundance, it would seem as though there would be no need to reuse or rework stones. Indeed, in the Medieval and post-Medieval periods, a threshing floor (*aloni*) was built at the base of the Mesorotsos outcrop, and of the hundreds of stones used in its construction only one confirmed tool was found amongst them in spite of the site being littered with them.

In the earliest Neolithic periods, the inhabitants of the site would have been new to the location and the first to be there. There were no pre-existing artefacts that they would have encountered on the ground, and there would have been an absence of stones like diabase or basalt on site, which are common to spot on the hillslopes of the site today. All of these pebbles and cobbles, while abundant in the riverbed, can be considered manuports, dating no earlier than the Neolithic. After the Neolithic, however, the site began to transform into a literal heap of tool blanks, tools, and broken discards. This probably stemmed from the fact that the Neolithic inhabitants likely did not gather large quantities of stones all at once, but continuously practiced stone collection on a daily basis, transporting a selection when out away from camp [19].

Once the site began to fill up with stones, the culture then had to make a decision about what to do with these stones. At first it appears that stones were venerated through ritual deposition in the Neolithic period. As the site was being established, the community respected the permanence of the stones (perhaps the “Mesorotsos” outcrop itself was venerated), which helped to reinforce their link to the location, especially while they were seasonal occupants. As the site became a year-round settlement, the buildings themselves came to be made of stone. Rather than dismantling, robbing, or reusing the stones, however, it appears as though the walls were kept in place as long as they could support a building, often through several floor phases. Many of these phases had stone tools left in place and new floors lain directly over, only to have similar tools created and placed just above their earlier counterparts. This refurbishment appears to have taken place periodically within specific households rather than as a simultaneous community-wide rebirth. Thus, each household maintained the sense of tradition organically, perhaps at the birth or death of a family member, seasonally or with celestial cycles, or for other possible reasons. Stones, for all their permanence, were made to die, buried and left in the ground, providing a chain between the living inhabitants and deceased ancestors.

The Chalcolithic practice of crafting new curated stone tools (expedient tools can be somewhat different, with more reuse), and using them until they were formally deposited in buried strata seems to carry on at Prasteio-Mesorotsos into the EC period. While the ceramic styles changed with the times, the local culture held onto traditional practices in architecture, burial, subsistence, and social organization. Unusually for the Bronze Age, stone bowls seems to continue in use and production with some frequency, including the typical Chalcolithic habit of placing stone bowls and cupped stones alongside the interior wall opposite the doorway in the area thought to be a kitchen. This shows persistent use of stone tools in domestic contexts from the Chalcolithic into the EC. There are no instances of reused tools being found in wall foundations in either the Neolithic or Chalcolithic periods on site, indicating that it was probably thought inappropriate to use the tools of one’s ancestors as building material. Likewise, none of the EC round buildings have any reused tools in the wall foundations, suggesting that respect for the ancestors’ tools continued into the EC as well.

This all changed in phase B on the site, during the shift from EC to MC periods. Almost every aspect of life changed, including the relationship with stones specifically and the ancestors' remains (stone, bone, ceramics, even human burials), generally. The MC inhabitants seem to have had no problem digging up previous inhabitants remains, using them for building materials and reusing them and reimagining their purposes. For instance, pottery with round bases become common in the Bronze Age, and in the MC period they started to reuse Neolithic and Chalcolithic mortars set into the ground and used as pot stands. They likely encountered these up cast mortars because they were digging earlier deposits and using the soil for terracing. Intact stone tools found in the process of extracting terracing material apparently was fine to reuse for building walls, mounting doors, and posts and crafting a Bronze Age interior space. Prior to the MC, there is little evidence for digging up or reusing earlier materials, representing a respect for the permanence of the ancestral presence. The permanence of stone was known in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, but in the MC period, there was a rejection of the importance of this permanence. Change and looking to the future was more valued, seeking out opportunities for a more complex society. The ultimate rejection of this permanence came with the rejection of the site itself, marked by its complete abandonment and the establishment of a new settlement at Palaipaphos [10].

7. Conclusions

Stone tools as an artefactual category tell us something about the economic life of past peoples. Analysis of the stone tools at Prasteio-Mesorotsos is still ongoing and studies such as residue analysis and use-wear patterns are being conducted to determine the types of activities for which the tools were used. This may enhance our understanding of the changing nuances of *chaîne opératoire* at the site. Additionally, the materiality of the stones from which these tools are made gives us an important piece of information that can help us to understand social attitudes from the past. In particular, this paper highlights changing attitudes towards maintaining social inertia and reinforcing conservative traditions in a group. The immortality of stones, even when they are transformed into cultural objects, would not have been lost on past people, and as a metaphor for the permanence of a social order, stone tools could have been used as powerful symbols holding together fragile communities. This seems especially true for socially conservative groups that seek to maintain the status quo in spite of a rapidly changing world around them.

The newcomers that arrived at Prasteio-Mesorotsos in the pre-pottery Neolithic were innovators and adventurers, claiming a new territory for themselves. They were the revolutionaries, but once they began to settle down at this location, they required symbols of permanence and ownership, some of which were ritualized and formalized, such as the pit-complex. This suggestion is reinforced by what we see at other Pre Pottery Neolithic sites in Cyprus and elsewhere in the Near East, where the selection of objects, animals, and human remains to be buried established traditions of magic, symbolism, spirituality (perhaps specifically animistic), and community [26]. The ritual killing of contemporary utilitarian objects transformed them into an association with the world of the ancestors. This concept finds support in ethnographic literature and reflections on community mythmaking [27]. Other symbols of ownership and permanence were probably more informal, like the habitual non-use of older stone tools and the effective prohibition of excavating previous layers of occupation. Taken together, these data provide clues to how the people who lived at Prasteio-Mesorotsos saw themselves in an ordered cosmos and the nature of their world that they were actively creating [28,29]. This behaviour worked well to maintain the sense of memory and legitimacy of ownership between the inhabitants and the place due to their ancestry, and these traditions continued to be practiced throughout the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and surprisingly, the EC period. The EC period at Prasteio-Mesorotsos is atypical for what we know about the island thus far, but it is possible that other sites not yet excavated also represent socially conservative groups, clinging on to the old ways for many years after the trends elsewhere are for revolution and change.

The pace of change is something that comparative stratigraphy and culture history do not have a good lens to understand. When a category of artefacts like ceramics appear, we place that stratum into the appropriate chronological period. Comparisons to other sites with similar pottery act as a guide for the interpretations of another. In other words, when we see Bronze Age pottery, we expect to also see the usual accompanying changes in social structure, economy, architecture, and behaviour. How would archaeologists of the future deal with excavating a 21st century Amish village, however? Socially and materially conservative groups that have made a decision to keep their lifestyle relatively unchanged from the 18th century could easily be mistaken as belonging to an earlier period, if it were not for the occasional intrusive 21st century item, such as rollerblades (which are not proscribed technology in Amish culture). It is an intriguing thought experiment, and it leads us to ask how we might identify social conservatism and varying paces of change through archaeological remains. In any case, it appears as though ceramic objects at prehistoric Prasteio-Mesorotsos do not seem to have been used as a touchstone for a relationship with the past that defined conservative principles. Ceramics were allowed to change with technologies, trends and caprices. Perhaps it is the physical malleability of ceramics that draws a contrast with stones in their social use.

At least one element of how we might observe social conservatism is to see how past cultures dealt with objects of permanence, such as stone tools. The treatment of stone tools, when understood in context, can establish a proxy index for the degree to which a group is socially conservative or socially revolutionary. If there is a taboo against disturbing items of permanence, this indicates a reverence for them. Extreme behaviours of reverence, such as burying complete or ritually killed objects such as those found in the pit complex, or later on in Chalcolithic pits, show that the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and EC community at Prasteio-Mesorotsos was purposefully socially conservative [30]. They latched on to any symbol of immutability, in spite of the fact that things were constantly changing, with deaths, births, droughts, pests, and even things like changing styles of pottery. Some change was accepted as long as there were literal touchstones that created a frame of reference for the permanence of the social order [31].

On the contrary, what we see in the MC period is the complete rejection of these objects of permanence, not only the stone tools, but the entire site itself. The MC inhabitants violated the ancestral layers and cast them up to be trodden underfoot in their newly terraced village. Ancestral and immortal tools were recast as door sockets, or hidden under walls in the foundations. There was little respect for the permanence of these objects and within a relatively short time, this led to the ultimate revolution: relocation. The abandonment of the site and the shift to the coast severed all ties to the land that their revolutionary forebears in the Neolithic established, and new traditions, new objects of permanence (monumental stone architecture, heirloom imported stone seals, etc.) were established in a new urban context in Palaipaphos [32,33].

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