
Stone axes in ritualized contexts – the production and deposition of pecked adzes at Strandvägen, Motala, 5500–5000 BC

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Abstract

This poster aims to present the production and utilization of pecked and polished round-sectioned adzes of diabase at Strandvägen in Motala, eastern Sweden (c. 5500–5000 cal BC), and the contexts of their final depositions. Much speaks in favour of a ritualized concept where axes produced on site were deliberately used as ritual props among human bones along the Rivershore of Motala Ström.

Finds and intra-site studies of the settlement at Strandvägen have previously revealed a delimited area of greenstone axe production (Carlsson 2007). Axes from the site are mainly pecked round-sectioned adzes (*Swe*: trindyxa), but there is also fully polished smaller adzes or chisels with accentuated narrow sides, as well as ground stone adzes of Lihult/Nøstvet type. The raw materials used are local greenstone and diabase and the find material includes both axe blanks and flakes. Characteristic hammer stones of red porphyry are also found together with raw material, grinding stones, and fragmented axes.

Motala is one of few places in the region demonstrating a manufacture of greenstone axes, although production appears to have been limited and not intended for further distribution. It, rather, illustrates the specialized craft and the spatial disposition of the settlement also seen in, for example, the production of bone tools, as slotted points or leisters (Gummesson and Molin 2019). Moreover, several of the axes at the site were deliberately deposited in and along the waterside of the River Motala Ström, along with richly decorated bone artefacts and human bones (Molin et al 2014; Gummesson and Molin 2016; Larsson and Molin 2017).

At Strandvägen inhumation burials, as well as disarticulated human bones formed important parts of the local mortuary practice (Molin et al in press). The shoreline of the river was of importance where human bones were immersed in the water and deposited on stone packings built along the riverbed. These depositions have clear parallels to the finds at the nearby site Kanaljorden where several human skulls (calvaria) were recovered in a similar depositional context (Hallgren and Fornander 2016).

Previously, Mesolithic research has tended to view grave goods as possessions of the deceased, however, evidence is now emerging showing that deliberately deposited tools played an active part in hunter-gatherer mortuary rites. The practice of creating material culture, not the least stone axes, specifically for placement within burials or ritual depositions have recently been illustrated by the early stone adze from Hermitage, Ireland (Little et al 2017).

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This implies a pattern of material culture appointed specifically for use in ritual contexts, and the associated levels of care and social interaction within mortuary practices (*cf.* Nilsson Stutz 2006).

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