The Structured Deposition of Querns: The Contexts of Use and Deposition of Querns in the South-West of England from the Neolithic to the Iron Age

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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Abstract

It is now widely assumed that many artefacts found in the prehistoric archaeological record were not casually discarded as unwanted material but were deposited in features and contexts with structure and meaning. This appears to include saddle and rotary querns for they are often found whole and apparently still usable or, conversely, deliberately broken. Analysis of the structured deposition of querns in the south-west of England shows that they were deposited in features on both domestic and non-domestic sites. Furthermore, the location and state of the querns, together with the artefacts found in association with them, indicates that they were deposited with different levels and layers of meaning, even within the same type of feature. The deposition of querns appears to have pervaded all aspects of prehistoric life and death suggesting that they played a role above, but nevertheless related to, their prime task of milling. An exploration of the object biography of querns demonstrates the importance of what are often considered to be mundane tools to subsistence communities. Each quern has its own unique life history, its meaning and value determined by the reasons that gave cause for its manufacture, the material from which it was made, the use(s) to which it was put and who used it. However, all querns share points of commonality, related to their function as milling tools, their role as transformers of raw material(s) into usable products (s), their association with women and the production of food, and the movement of the upper stone. Through these, symbolical links can be made between querns and agricultural, human and building life cycles, gender relations and the turning of the heavens. The reason for a quern’s deposition in the archaeological record may have drawn upon one or more unique or common values.
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