Prehistoric sickles worldwide: techno-typology, hafting, function, cultural aspects, and symbolism

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Sickles and sickle blades have been at the center of agricultural practices for over 10,000 years. They appeared earlier around 15,000 years before our time, at the end of the Epipalolithic period, and remain a useful and important tool almost to this day.

Most sickles were composed of a bone or wooden grooved haft with flint (stone) cutting inserts (sickle blades), fixed inside the haft with adhesives. While flint inserts are found on many sites, the bone or wooden sickles are quite rare. Therefore, for many periods, sickle morphology must be deduced from the characteristics of stone inserts, remains of adhesives, and microwear analyses.

The size, shape, and material of the haft, the shape and design of the inserts, the way inserts were attached to the haft, the type of adhesive used - were all in constant change reflecting adaptations to many different factors. Considering the large number of variables affecting sickle morphology and design (e.g., raw material, type of blanks, hafting mode, adhesives used, growing efficiency in harvesting techniques, type of plants, dry vs. green plants, field density, stalks height and thickness, gender and age of the harvester, cultural and symbolic aspects, and more), several research lines from different disciplinary fields were engaged in an attempt to give a more particular answer to the question of changes in the form of sickle inserts.

We therefore propose to hold a multidisciplinary workshop-session focusing on raw materials, techno-typology, experimental harvests and function, ethnography and botany. A holistic approach via a collaboration of researchers from different disciplines is needed for a better understanding of the sickle, its production, use, and relationship with man and culture.
An effort will be made to organize a display of various sickles from different contexts worldwide.

We intend to publish the lectures and posters presented during the workshop as a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal.