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Session: Jody Joy, British Museum, Kristin Oma, Norway: The biographical approach where do we go from here? Session 2.

Abstract:

### BRINGING GROUND STONE ARTEFACTS BACK TO LIFE

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This paper examines how a biographical approach can be utilized as a method of categorizing and interpreting ground stone artefacts. In Scandinavian Neolithic archaeology ground stone artefacts, such as handstones and netherstones, are generally considered a “low status” field of research. As a consequence, such artefacts are either neglected as a source of knowledge or routinely categorized according to a preconceived idea of their function. Moreover, since they are seldom formed prior to use ground stone artefacts are ill-suited for research based on typology or chronology. Studies made in southern Sweden suggest that a biographical approach offers a more fruitful way of analyzing such artefacts. By categorizing ground stone artefacts in terms of their “life history”, we shift the attention from their supposed function to e.g. how the raw material was selected, used, reused and deposited – in effect adding a social theory of human agency to the *chaîne opératoire*. Such an approach would contribute considerably to our understanding of e.g. raw material procurement, exchange and the ritual breakage of artefacts, aspects that are highly relevant to our knowledge of Neolithic culture in general. Simultaneously, by applying an alternative categorization based on a biographical perspective we make the conflict between our own views and values and the past’s visible. Such a move renders “the well-known unfamiliar” and make us more susceptible to the fact that every interpretation is dependent on the interpreter and the questions we pose. Ultimately, it forces us to consider why ground stone artefacts are not given as prominent a role in Neolithic archaeology as they were in Neolithic society.