

## **Paper EAA 2011**

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**Session: A new sense of place: Landscape and monuments in the northern European Neolithic**

**Session organizers: Gordon Noble & Deborah Olausson**

### **Abstract**

#### **“Fragments of life and death - interpretations of grinding and polishing stones from the Almhov burial site”**

The burial- and ceremonial site Almhov was discovered as a result of large scale archaeological excavations in Southern Sweden, revealing the remains of five long barrows, two dolmens and about 200 pits, rich in finds. Given the multitude of activities performed at the site – including for example monument building, pit-digging, burying, feasting and axe manufacturing – the site can serve as an example of the complexity of large Early Neolithic gathering places. The activities as well as the physical monuments and pits can be interpreted as an expression of how Early Neolithic man made sense of the changing world brought about by the Neolithization. Different perspectives as well as archaeological remains of various kinds offer different narratives of this on-going process.

This paper focuses on the numerous grinding and polishing stones found at Almhov, and discusses the role these had in this process. Grinding stones are often interpreted in a strictly functional way; i.e. as tools used to shape, sharpen and polish axes and other objects. And at a first glance the grinding stones from Almhov may appear simply as fragmentary pieces of sandstone. A detailed study, however, has resulted in a more nuanced picture. The fragmentary grinding stones, which were either worn out, destroyed by fire or deliberately fragmented by force, were found in the long barrows as well as in the dolmens and the pits. But the grinding stones from the long barrows stand out both in appearance, in the way they were deposited and how the fragmentation was caused. In this paper I will discuss possible reasons for why grinding stones were attributed a special significance in the initial phase of the establishment of Almhov. The fragmentation of the tools as well as their position within the monuments raises a number of questions about, for instance, the transformative aspects of grinding and polishing, and the role of grinding as a social activity. Why for example were pieces of burnt grinding stones placed in connection with the façade of one of the long barrows? Why are grinding stones, broken into halves, put into the graves? This paper suggests that the tools represented the novelty of making monuments and to put them together with the dead could have been a way of mediating new practices with reference to the past.