

**Session title: PREHISTORY REVISED: RESEARCH OR DESTROYED MEGALITHIC TOMBS**

**Organizer:** Lars Larsson, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University, Sweden

**Time:** Friday afternoon

**Room:**

**Session abstract:**

Over the millennia, but especially during the last few centuries, a large number of megalithic tombs have been destroyed. For several decades the knowledge about megalithic tombs was based on excavations of well-preserved tombs. A common opinion was that, with the destruction of structures visible above the surface, information about the megalithic tomb had disappeared forever. It was of no use to excavate any remaining parts, especially as there were many well-preserved tombs to which research efforts could be directed. Today not many tombs remain unexcavated, and those that exist deserve to be protected. Therefore research has aimed at megalithic tombs in greater or lesser states of destruction. Intensified rescue excavations have resulted in the identification of previously unknown megalithic tombs. In addition, old surveys and maps provide a different view of megalithic tombs than the present situation.

The session will demonstrate that the so-called destroyed megalithic tombs generate broad information and are of major importance for new knowledge about Neolithic societies.

**Paper abstracts:**

**TOWARDS A BORDER - TRACES OF MEGALITHIC RITUAL IN THE FIORD COUNTRY**

Einar Østmo, University of Oslo, Norway

Archaeological finds from the Funnel Beaker Culture in the Oslo Fiord region of SE Norway comprise stray finds from vaguely known contexts, but also twenty-five reasonably certain sacrificial deposits, none of which is indicative of repeated deposition events. Twenty-three reasonably likely flat graves have also been identified. Both the sacrificial deposits and the earthen graves represent a simplified practice compared to that found in South Scandinavia. In addition, five megalithic graves are known or believed to have existed in SE Norway. One was discovered at Skjeltorp, Skjeberg, Østfold in 1872. The remaining four have been identified in recent years at Holtenes, Hurum, Buskerud. Finds from some of these include potsherds of familiar TRB types datable to the Middle TRB, but also tanged points of flint as well as slate points, which may be considered as local influences. Amber ornaments were found in the Holtenes III grave. Radiocarbon ages from Skjeltorp are  $4560 \pm 100$  BP, from Holtenes III  $4660 \pm 80$  BP. At Holtenes, the megalithic cult

tradition existed for some time, uniquely on this northern latitude. Generally, the TRB in this region leaves a more restricted or marginal impression than in South Scandinavia.

## **KNOWTH PASSAGE TOMB COMPLEX: A FOCUS ON THE HIDDEN ARCHAEOLOGY**

Kerri Cleary, Knowth Publication Project, Dublin, Ireland

When excavations began at the passage tomb complex of Knowth, Co. Meath (Ireland) the site was only visible as one large grass-covered mound. As work, under the direction of Prof. Eogan, progressed, a further twenty tombs emerged. These small tombs survived in various states of destruction but the results from their excavation changed all perceptions of Knowth and the way in which the site was utilised by Neolithic people. Excavation of the large mound also resulted in the unexpected discovery of two passages and two phases of construction, as well as the possibility of settlement activity contemporary with the use of some of the tombs. Further 'hidden archaeology' of the site emerged with the discovery of a large corpus of megalithic art that brought new knowledge about the Neolithic society that built and maintained the passage tomb cemetery. Therefore, although the site at Knowth was chosen for exploration because it was a 'well-preserved tomb' the excavations resulted in a much more complex story than was expected when work began in 1962.

## **DESTROYED MEGALITHIC TOMBS: A SOURCE OF FURTHER KNOWLEDGE ON MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS**

Niels H. Andersen, Moesgaard Museum, Denmark

It is thought that about 30000 megalithic tombs were originally constructed in Denmark between 3400 and 3200 BC. As we in Denmark only have large stones available in the form of glacial erratic blocks from moraine deposits, many of the megaliths from the tombs have, during the last millennium, been reused in the construction of churches, manor-houses, roads etc. Only about 2400 graves remain in the landscape today and these are protected by law. Most of these tombs were partly excavated in the 19th century, often by non-archaeologist such as landowners, priests and school teachers. Information from these interventions is, for the most part, non-existent and the tombs are now empty.

Intensive field surveys over the last 20 years in several areas of Denmark have provided much new knowledge about megalithic tombs. In the south-western part of Funen, in the Sarup-area, where causewayed enclosures dating from exactly the same time period as the megalithic tombs have been excavated, survey of a 12 km<sup>2</sup> area has revealed the locations of about 120 megalithic tombs. Within this area only two tombs are protected by the law. The location of these many new tombs gives us, therefore, quite another picture of the ritual landscape! Fifteen excavations have revealed the remains of 31 tombs. Some of these provided much new information, for example: long barrows overlying long houses, barrows overlying settlements and fields with ardmarks, special construction of barrows to include

offering of fine ceramics in the earthen fill, diverse ways of constructing the same type of tombs within the small area, frequently abundant finds in the chamber areas which had, after all, not received the attention of the landowners prior to destruction, new information concerning the practice of offering ceramics in front of the tombs and indications of the activities in the area around them.

The excavations of the megalithic tombs in the Sarup area have, together with excavations of settlements, analyses of pollen, cereal grains and of other materials, given us a much more diverse view of the active Neolithic period between 3400 and 3200 BC which saw the construction and use of enclosures and of large megalithic monuments.

## **A VANISHING LANDSCAPE OF MEGALITHIC TOMBS**

Lars Larsson, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University, Sweden

Scania, the southernmost part of Sweden, includes about 125 dolmens and passage graves still existing in a more or less preserved state. Due to marked changes in the regulation of farmland during the late 18th and early 19th century we have an excellent source of very detailed maps combined with written descriptions of almost every field. These and other kind of maps provide an excellent basis in order to detect megalithic graves that today are totally lost or at a stage that they are hardly identifiable. From this information one might get a better understanding of the distribution of megalithic tombs and also reach an understanding of the processes that caused the destruction of these monuments.

## **ANCESTRAL CARVINGS AND MONUMENTAL FEASTING: INTERPRETATIONS OF A UNIQUE ASSEMBLY PLACE FROM THE EARLY FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE IN SCANIA, SWEDEN**

Elisabeth Rudebeck, Malmö Heritage, Malmö, Sweden

Rescue excavations are often considered problematic for archaeology because they defy common research ideals that require the posing of informed questions before choosing the object of excavation. However, investigating places that we could never have chosen, let alone predicted, based on previous knowledge, may lead to fundamental reappraisals of our views of the past. In this contribution, I will present results from the 2001–2002 investigation of a site included in a rescue archaeology project in Scania, in the south of Sweden. The site was named Almhov and, to my knowledge, this type of site is one of a kind (so far) in northern Europe. Within a circular area, about 200 meters across, on a slightly elevated hillock to the west of a wetland area were the remains of an Early Neolithic (4000–3500 BC) assembly place. The site included traces of long-barrows and dolmens, with and without remaining burials, more than 150 pits with deposits of pottery, animal bones, plant remains, flint tools, flint debris etc. The building and tending of ancestral monuments and communal feasting seem to have been the main activities at the site. The Almhov site reveals that long-barrows and megaliths may have been parts of complex sites, on

which the monuments were only one of several elements in the communal celebrations.

### **LESSONS FROM A DESTROYED TOMB**

Karl-Göran Sjögren, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Göteborg University, Sweden

In this contribution I will outline the state of preservation and destruction of Swedish dolmens and passage graves, with a focus on the west Swedish region, particularly Falbygden. While the general rate of destruction is quite high in most regions, Falbygden benefits from a comparatively low destruction rate. In conjunction with good conditions for preservation of bone, this situation allows us to study details of for instance burial practices or landscape patterning. At the same time, new investigations have shown that even heavily destroyed tombs may contain a wealth of information. I will illustrate this with the example of the passage grave at Frälsegården, excavated in 2001. The tomb was leveled c. 1900 and has been plowed over since. In spite of this, the excavation uncovered a partly undisturbed bone layer, giving us several new insights into Neolithic burial practices in Sweden.

### **BONES IN STONES: DISENTANGLING THE MORTUARY RITUALS IN NEOLITHIC MEGALITHIC TOMBS FROM WESTERN SWEDEN**

Torbjörn Ahlström, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University, Sweden

The excavation of the passage tomb Frälsegården, province of Västergötland, in 2001 provided us with very detailed osteological and archaeological data from a chamber of a passage tomb. For the first time in centuries, we had the opportunity to test models advanced in order to explain the function of these monuments in Neolithic society. Are megalithic tombs to be construed as ossuaries? A place where bones were deposited after the individuals were skeletonized outside the tomb? Or do they represent graves where both burial and decomposition occurred? Here, I present the methodology employed to disentangle the masses of bones, involving osteology, GIS and statistical methods. Some examples of necrodynamics will also be presented, as we were able to identify more or less complete individuals.

### **NECROPOLISES AND TOMB LINES: MARKING ROUTES IN THE RIO DE GOR MEGALITHIC DISTRIBUTION**

José Andrés Afonso Marrero and Juan Antonio Cámara Serrano, Department of Prehistory and Archaeology, University of Granada, Spain

Rio de Gor Megalithic tombs assemblages are one of the most important funerary clusters in the Southern Iberian Peninsula. From the first scientific data in 1868 many graves have been destroyed, especially by farming and almost all the remaining tombs had been excavated between 1868 and 1959. However some new data can be

obtained by tombs adequate localization using GPS system and older ones can be carefully used in order to get conclusions about territorial control. A research about the inner differences in some Rio de Gor necropolises is made in this paper through the relation among tombs situation, typology and graves goods. Differences among necropolises can be seen because some of them are marking the ways on the plateau following the river valley (Los Olivares), other ones are emphasizing the control over the valley with an important number of tombs in high places (Hoyas del Conquín) and finally other necropolis are defining the ways from the bottom of the valley to the plateau (La Sabina o Las Majadillas). A new study about examples from the last two types is made here taking into account the relations among the tombs in every necropolis. Although an evaluation of previous unsystematic surveys and looters destructions of monuments must be taken into account, such as we have referred in general analysis, all the 1959 published graves have been newly found in the chosen sample and other nineteenth century excavated tombs have been added to the general catalogue. The sample has been also chosen because in these bigger groups (Hoyas del Conquín and Majadillas) the most regular and richest tombs were localized. Results have shown that main tombs help to mark the river line while necropolis, as we have previously refer, tend to define movement lines from the bottom to the top of the valley, even as they are looking for controlling the valley (Hoyas del Conquín).

## **BEYOND THE GRAVE: POTTERY TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL LANDSCAPES IN NEOLITHIC PORTUGAL**

Ana Jorge, Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield, UK

Western Iberia is renowned for its megalithic tombs, the high number and diversity of which led Georg and Vera Leisner to refer to the Neolithic of this area as the 'Portuguese Megalithic Culture'. As in many other parts of Western Europe, these places have seldom survived undisturbed after millennia of re-use (as forges, sheep shelters, outbuildings, even chapels) and centuries of curiosity (carried out by antiquarians, gold diggers and local communities). The lack of archaeological context of the resulting museum collections has limited the ability of archaeologists to understand more fully the roles of these monuments in Neolithic societies.

In Central-Northern Portugal, attention has traditionally been focused on creating architecture and artefact typologies for dating purposes, and on identifying lithic raw materials and 'special' objects indicative of larger scale exchange. Despite the ubiquity of pottery, its relatively unvaried morphologies and almost total absence of decoration has made ceramics apparently unhelpful to develop more complex interpretations. However, technological studies of pottery offer new approaches to this material beyond appearance.

This paper will focus on the comparative study of pottery assemblages from the dolmen of Fiais da Telha and two small settlements located in the Mondego Plateau in order to illustrate how ceramic petrographic analysis can provide new insights into the ways that megalithic tombs participated in broader social landscapes.

**Poster abstract:**

## **DÖSERYGG - A MEGALITHIC CENTRE**

Magnus Andersson and Björn Nilsson, National Heritage Board, Lund, Sweden

In the agricultural plain of south-western Scania, Sweden, lies the archaeological site Döserygg. Investigations at the site have resulted in the discovery of a megalithic complex dating to the Early and Middle Neolithic. The site comprises the remains of at least ten megalithic monuments (long dolmens), closely related to a processional route, cult houses and other complex structures. The site has yielded a rich find material consisting of grave goods, ritual deposits and votive offerings. The Döserygg site displays a quite unique combination of finds and monuments, reflecting different aspects of ritual life and behaviour. The Döserygg site was discovered by the National Heritage Board in connection with the construction of a new motorway, in the autumn of 2007. It is an on-going project and the excavation will be continued in the autumn of 2008. Project leaders are Magnus Andersson and Björn Nilsson. They can be reached at the National Heritage Board, Lund, Sweden.