

XXVI VALCAMONICA SYMPOSIUM 2015

Capo di Ponte (Bs) ITALY
September 9 to 12, 2015

PROSPECTS FOR THE PREHISTORIC ART RESEARCH
50 years since the founding of Centro Camuno

PROSPETTIVE SULLA RICERCA DELL'ARTE PREISTORICA
a 50 anni dalla fondazione del Centro Camuno



*Centro Camuno
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Proceedings

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Proceedings of the XXVI Valcamonica Symposium, September 9 to 12, 2015
Atti del XXVI Valcamonica Symposium, 9 - 12 Settembre 2015

I Edizione multilingua, Edizioni del Centro (Capo di Ponte)
ISBN 9788886621465

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Edited by / A cura di: Federico Troletti (CCSP / University of Trento, Italy)

Editing / Redazione: Federico Troletti, Valeria Damioli

Tranlated / Traduzioni: William J. Costello, Valeria Damioli, Ludwig Jaffe, Federico Troletti

Layout and Graphic Design / Impaginazione e grafica: Valeria Damioli

Printed in September 2015 by Press Up s.r.l.

Finito di stampare in Settembre 2015, presso Press Up s.r.l.



EDIZIONI DEL CENTRO

Via Marconi, 7

25044 Capo di Ponte (BS) - ITALY

tel. +39 0364 42091

email info@ccsp.it - www.ccsp.it



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Under the auspices and the participation of / *Con il patrocinio e la partecipazione di*



With the support of / *Con il sostegno di*

Banca Valle Camonica (Gruppo UBI Banca)
SIAS Segnaletica Stradale s.p.a., Esine



ROCK ART IN SOUTH-EAST SWEDEN THE LOCAL CHRONOLOGY AND A WIDER CONTEXT

Peter Skoglund *

SUMMARY

This paper discusses rock art in south-east Scania, south-east Sweden. Chronological analysis indicates that the material is divided into four phases which start at c.1700 BC and end at c. 200 BC. It is argued that each of these phases had its own characteristics and that there were turning-points when the character of the rock-art tradition changed. The major conclusion is that there were no specific meanings attached to rock-art, but it was a medium used for different purposes over time as society changed.

RIASSUNTO

L'articolo esamina l'arte rupestre della Scania, Svezia sud-orientale. L'analisi cronologica indica che il materiale è diviso in quattro fasi collocabili fra il 1700 a.C. e il 200 a.C. circa. Viene illustrato come ognuna di queste fasi abbia avuto le caratteristiche proprie e con punti di svolta in coincidenza con il cambiamento di carattere nella tradizione dell'arte rupestre. In conclusione l'arte rupestre era un mezzo utilizzato per vari scopi che muta al mutare della società che l'ha prodotta.

This paper discusses the rock art around the town of Simrishamn in the south-eastern part of the province of Scania, Sweden (Fig. 1). This area holds 27 panels with figurative images. In a Scandinavian perspective this is a rather limited number of panels, but it stands out due to the many 1:1 scale images of metal axes. As a result, the region has attracted the interest of various scholars since the late 19th century (BRUZELIUS 1880-82; MONTELIUS 1900; ALTHIN 1945; BURENHULT 1980; COLES 1999; BERTILSSON 2013; SKOGLUND 2013).

Based on a chronological analysis of these panels I will argue for a division of the material into four phases. Thereafter, I will briefly relate each of these phases to a historical context.

PHASE 1, 1700-1400 BC

The revised ship chronology developed by Flemming Kaul (1998) and Johan Ling (2008, 2013) (Fig. 2), complemented by studies of axe motifs and other datable images on the panels are an important starting point for the following discussion.

The beginning of the rock-art tradition in south-east Scania is defined by the occurrence of carvings resembling the flanged axes in use during the Late Neolithic II and the Montelius period I of the Bronze Age, c. 1950-1500 BC (Vandkilde 1996). These kinds of axes occur on four sites, namely Simrishamn 15, 16, 18 and 23 (numbers according to the Ancient Monument Register; www.fmis.se) (Althin 1945, Taf. 1; Almgren 1987). The axes represent various types, but the rather pointed edges of the blade are characteristic for some of them (Fig. 3). There are not many well-dated parallels to these axes in the regional record of metal axes. However, axes with slightly pointed edges occur in the Fjälkinge hoard in north-east Scania, which has been dated by Helle Vandkilde as very late in the sequence

of Late Neolithic II hoards, 1950-1700 BC (VANDKILDE 1996, pp. 148-149).

Outside of Scandinavia there is an interesting parallel to some of the axes with pointed edges in the material from England dating to the Arretton-phase. The Arretton type of axe is crescent shaped with pointed edges and dates to 1750-1500 BC which equates to Montelius period I, 1700-1500 BC (NEEDHAM *et al.* 1997).

Another argument favoring the beginning of the rock-art tradition to around 1700 BC is the occurrence of ships of the Rørby type which appear in close connection to axes with pointed edges in south-east Scania. The Rørby ships are characterized by a horizontal or slightly upturned keel extension and significantly inturned prows (Fig. 2, 1). This kind of ship occurs in one instance on a metal item, namely on the famous sword from Rørby at Sealand in Denmark dated to 1600-1500 BC (KAUL 1998, pp. 73-79).

Thus both the axe images and the ship images have their oldest parallels in metalwork from the period 1700-1500 BC.

In summary, this phase is characterized by axes of the Beddinge type as well as other kinds of flanged axes, ships of the Rørby type, and additionally, human images, axes, footprints and circle images.

PHASE 2, 1400 - 1100 BC

The start of this phase is marked by the introduction of the horse motif in Scandinavian Bronze Age iconography. It should be noted that the horse was already used as a draught animal in the earlier phase, as indicated by rare finds of bridle cheek-pieces and ferrules (VANDKILDE 2014). Around 1400 BC the horse gained a stronger position in rituals and was commonly reproduced in iconography, for example on the handle of

* Swedish Rock Art Research Archives/University of Gothenburg (Sweden)

razors (KAUL 2013a; KAUL 2013b, p. 157). This dating of the horse motif has implications not only for the dating of the horse images and horse drawn chariots, but also for ships ending in horses' heads which postdate 1400 BC (Fig. 2, 6) (LING 2013, pp. 53–59).

Another feature associated with this phase is the palstave with slightly outturned blades differentiating it from the socketed axe which displays a straighter outline. On this basis, and following Nordén in his account of the Norrköping axes (1925, p. 138), the identification of the axes at Järrestad 13 and Gislöv 8 as palstaves rather than socketed axes is justified.

PHASE 3, 1100 – 800 BC

This phase is only represented on two sites where the ships were made in a slightly different style compared to the previous phase. The prows rise almost vertically ending in a stylized horse or bird's head. The keel extension is asymmetrical and rises in the fore (Fig. 2, 11).

PHASE 4, 800 – 200 BC

This phase is characterized by the introduction of swords with winged chapes (metal tip for a scabbard). They exist as a unique feature at Järrestad in south-east Scania (Fig. 4), but are numerous in the provinces of Bohuslän, Sweden, and Østfold, Norway (VOGT 2006). A starting point in this discussion is the outline of the chape. In the Scandinavian rock-art material it is boat- or wing shaped in correspondence to type A1-A3 in Pare 1991. As demonstrated by Christopher Pare, these kinds of chapes are exclusively associated to the Gündlingen type swords (1991). The Gündlingen swords are related to Hallstatt C0; a transitional phase between Hallstatt B and C covering the time-span c. 800-750 BC (FRIEDRICH, HENNIG 1996; JENSEN 1997; HENNIG 2001; FONTIJN, FOKKENS 2007).

The riders, which are found standing on horses at Järrestad, should also be attributed to phase 4 (Fig. 5). They resemble riders found on Pomerian face urns, even though they differ in details (ALTHIN 1945, p. 78; HUTH 2003, Taf. 29, 30, 39). Another association involves the images of people actually sitting on horses which, in Bohuslän, are found in contexts that could be dated to the early Pre-Roman Iron Age, 500-200 BC (KAUL 2003).

The ship is represented by several different types during this period. In the beginning of the period the outturned prow sometimes ending in an elaborated horse's head is a typical feature (Fig. 2, 12). During period VI the asymmetrical ships are replaced by symmetrical ships, some of which closely resemble the Hjortspring ship (BENGTSSON 2013): the oldest Scandinavian wooden ship dating to c. 400 BC (Fig. 2, 16).

In the following, the four phases of rock-art in south-east Scania will be related to a broader north-European perspective.

THE MARITIME CHARACTER OF THE EARLY ROCK-ART, 1700-1400 BC

There is a distinct increase in the consumption of metal in south Scandinavia around 1600 BC (VANDKILDE 1996; VANDKILDE 2014). Oscar Montelius already pointed

out that the raw materials used in Scandinavian metalwork came from abroad, despite the fact that there were copper sources in the Scandinavian Peninsula. This assumption has gained support from recent lead isotope analysis carried out by Johan Ling and his team on a number of Swedish bronze items. The analysis indicates that there was no indigenous copper mining in Scandinavia, but the copper came from overseas, in particular from Central Europe and the western part of the Mediterranean (LING *et al.* 2013, LING *et al.* 2014). In a larger geographical framework it is evident that the Simrishamn-area holds a very strategic position as a nodal point in the southern Baltic. It is located at a crossroad of sea-routes where one route from the mouth of River Oder crossed the Baltic – using the island of Bornholm as a stepping stone – ending up in south-east Scania where it met another sea route, following the Swedish coast line.

Long-distance trade would have required organization with meeting places where people could meet, negotiate, and exchange goods. Given its strategic position in a larger geographical context, the area in question south of Simrishamn is a good candidate for such a meeting place. Thus it seems possible to give the coastal panels, dominated by ships and axe motifs dating to phase 1, a rather straight forward interpretation: they can be seen as the outcome of rituals related to the passage of ships and the loading, unloading and distribution of their cargo including metal and metal axes (compare MALINOWSKI 1922; LING 2008; WEHLIN 2013).

A WIDER USE OF THE SHIP IMAGE, 1400-1100 BC

The period from c. 1400 BC is contemporary to an increase in the quantity of metalwork. The richness of the Nordic Bronze age in Montelius period II and III, 1500-1100 BC, is usually explained by southward amber trade in exchange for metal. These long distance contacts brought with them influences and ideas from far abroad (KRISTIANSEN, LARSSON 2005; KAUL 2013a). The revitalization of the rock art tradition around 1400 BC should probably be seen in this light.

The start of phase 2 is set to 1400 BC and this displays both similarities and differences to phase 1. On an overall level there is continuity with the same types of images in use both in phase 1 and phase 2. However, the contexts of the images are different; an idea that becomes clear when looking at the distribution of axe images. Instead of having coastal locations like the flanged axes in phase 1, the palstaves occurring in phase 2 are located further inland without visual contact to the sea (Fig. 6a-b). A similar change is also noted when looking at the distribution of ship images (Fig. 6c-d). The number of ship images close to the sea decreases and they also appear in new contexts further inland. Noteworthy ships and axe motifs now also occur on panels that are part of grave constructions.

Following Sherry Ortner's work on key-symbols (1973), it seems reasonable to regard the axe and the ship motifs as key-symbols (compare Sjöstrand 2011). Key symbols have many characteristics, one being that they can be used in many various contexts and situations; they are able to summarize many different

aspects into one symbol. For example, a flag may represent a nation, the inhabitants of the country, the history of the nation etc. In a similar way we may think of the use of the ship and axe motifs during this phase as symbols summarizing a variety of different meanings.

DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF IMAGES, 1100-800 BC

Around 1100 BC there was a decrease in the number of panels. The number of sites decreases from 14 to 2. The declining activity is also significant when discussing motifs instead of panels: there are just eight ships on the two panels compared the c. 130 motifs attributed to the subsequent phase 4, and the c. 500 motifs that can be attributed to the earlier phases 1 and 2. The decrease in activity from phase 2 to phase 3 is thus significant, both when it comes to the number of sites and the number of motifs.

Changes in the visual tradition around 1100 BC may be related to influences from the Central European Urnfield cultures, where only a limited number of symbols expressed in metals were seen by the public. The figurative art of the Urnfield culture is restricted to mainly birds, ships and circle motifs; the focus on ships purely in the rock art may be the result of these connections.

A NEW ICONOGRAPHY 800-200 BC

Similarly to the previous phase, the number of panels is very limited in phase 4 and only consists of three panels. However, the number of images increases from c. 8 in the previous period to c. 130.

There is a marked concentration of images at the Järrestad site, situated c. 5 kilometres inland from the sea (SKOGLUND 2013). This site was probably not in use in phase 3, but the activities seem to start with the production of a larger human image around 800 BC. This image bears a sword with a winged scabbard: something that is not found in the local archaeological record but was an influence from emerging Hallstatt C cultures on the Continent or from the British Isles (Fig. 4).

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We should probably view the six riders that occur on the panel in a similar way (Fig. 5). Here we see a rider expressed in Scanian rock-art for the first time. There is a clear emphasis on the riders controlling the horses by holding back their heads with a bridle. This demonstrates knowledge of the art of riding in contrast to earlier rock-art depictions of horse drawn chariots or horses' heads being displayed as part of a ship.

At Järrestad, both the persons and the horses are depicted in full length and there is a clear emphasis on the riders controlling the horses by holding back their heads with a bridle. This may be associated with an increased use of horses in connection with warfare in Hallstatt C.

SUMMARY AND COCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to demonstrate the historical character of rock-art in south-east Scania, Sweden, which underwent several profound changes over its 1,500 year existence. It started out around 1700 BC primarily as an activity in the maritime realm, but motifs like the ship and the axe, hitherto having a clear connection to the sea shore, expanded into areas further away from the sea, gained a wider significance in contemporary society around 1400 BC. There is a break in the tradition around 1100 BC as the number of panels and the number of motifs decreases and focus moved to the ship motif. This may be related to the expansion of the Urnfields where only a rather restricted repertoire of motifs were expressed in public. Around 800 BC there was revitalization of the tradition as new motifs were added such as the warrior and the rider on the Järrestad panel. These new elements were partly the result of contact between south Scandinavia and the emerging Hallstatt cultures.

The major conclusion to be drawn from this study is that there is no specific meaning attached to rock-art, but it was a medium that could be used for different purposes as society changed through time.

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Fig. 1 - The position of the Simrishamn area in south-east Sweden.

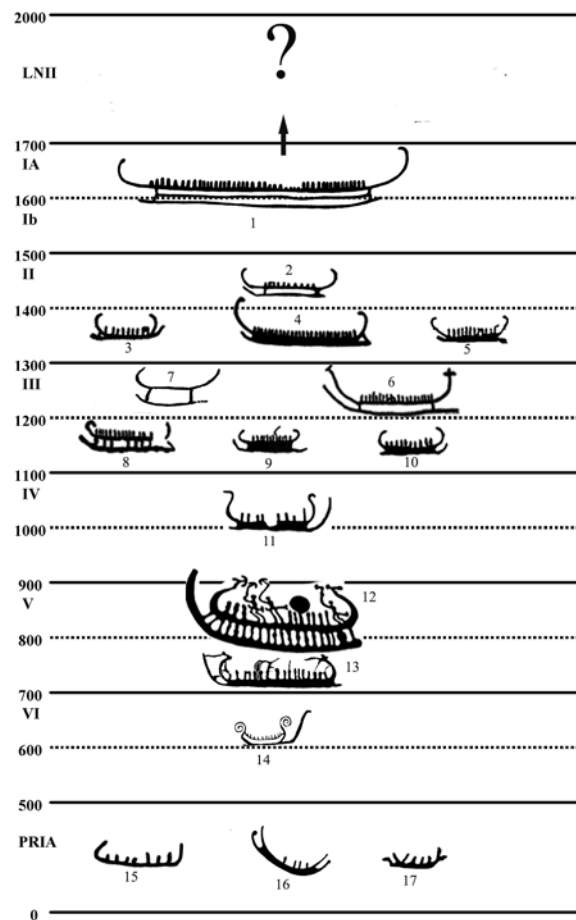


Fig. 2 - Rock-art from Bohuslän chronologically determined in relation to shoreline dating: 1–10, ship depictions from the EBA (1700–1100 BC); 11–14, ship depictions from the LBA (1100–500 BC); 15–17, ship depictions from the early PRIA (500–200 BC). Copyright J. Ling. From Ling 2008: 105.

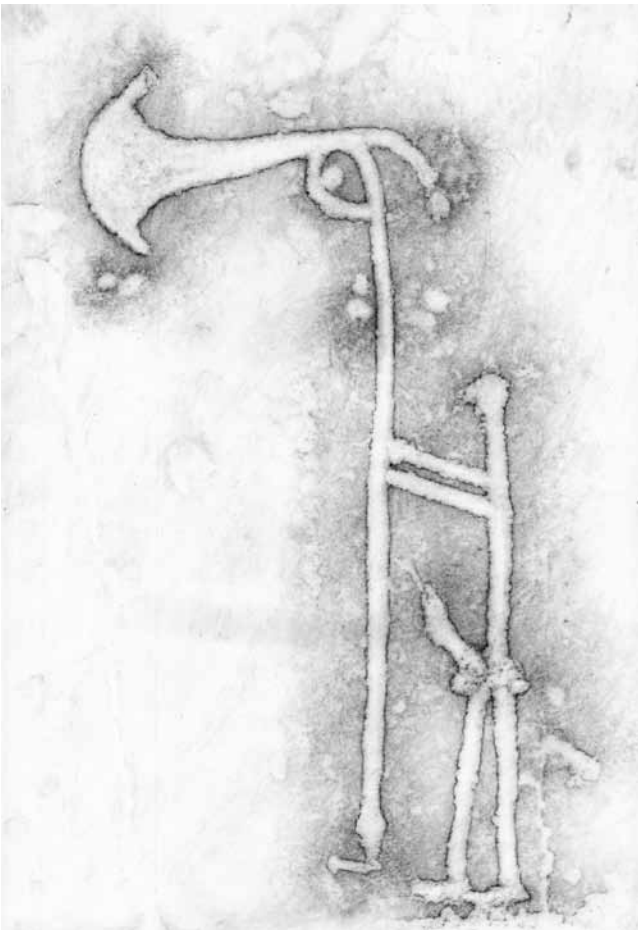


Fig. 3 - Representation of miniature human holding an actual-size axe, Simrishamn 23. Frottage Dietrich Evers 1970. Source: Swedish Rock Art Research Archives. SHFA id: 2356.

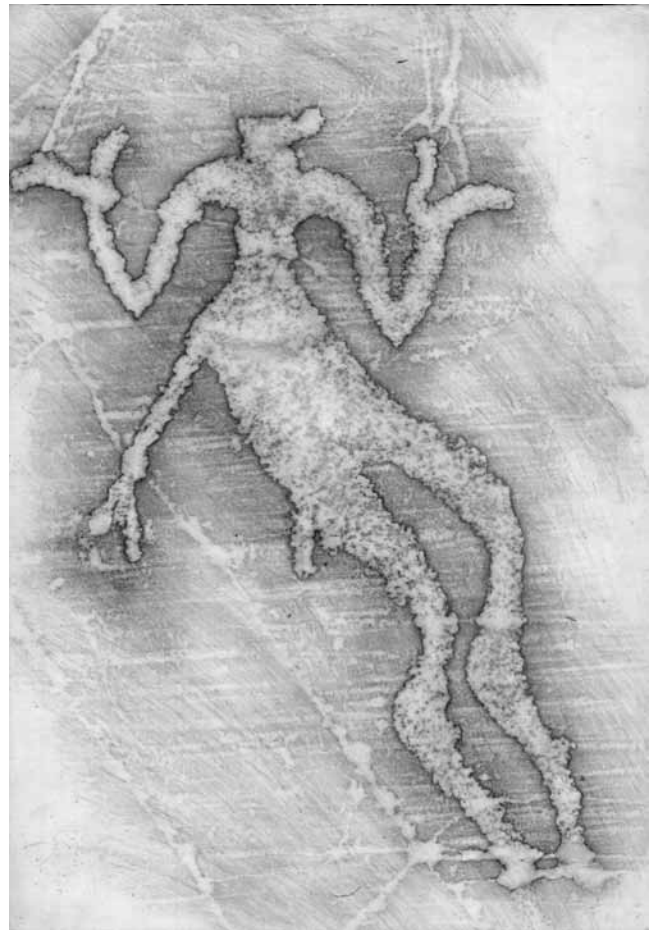


Fig. 4 - The larger human figure at Järrestad. Note the fork-like ending of the sword interpreted as a winged scabbard, Järrestad 13. Frottage: Swedish Rock Art Research Archives/Österlens museum, 2008. Source: Swedish Rock Art Research Archives. SHFA id: 276.



Fig. 5 - Two out of the six riders at Järrestad. Note the very clear depiction of the bridles. Järrestad 13. Photo: C. Bertilsson 2008. Source: Swedish Rock Art Research Archives. SHFA id: 3982.



Fig. 6a - Distribution of axes images dating to phase 1 (1700-1400 BC). Image: Peter Skoglund.

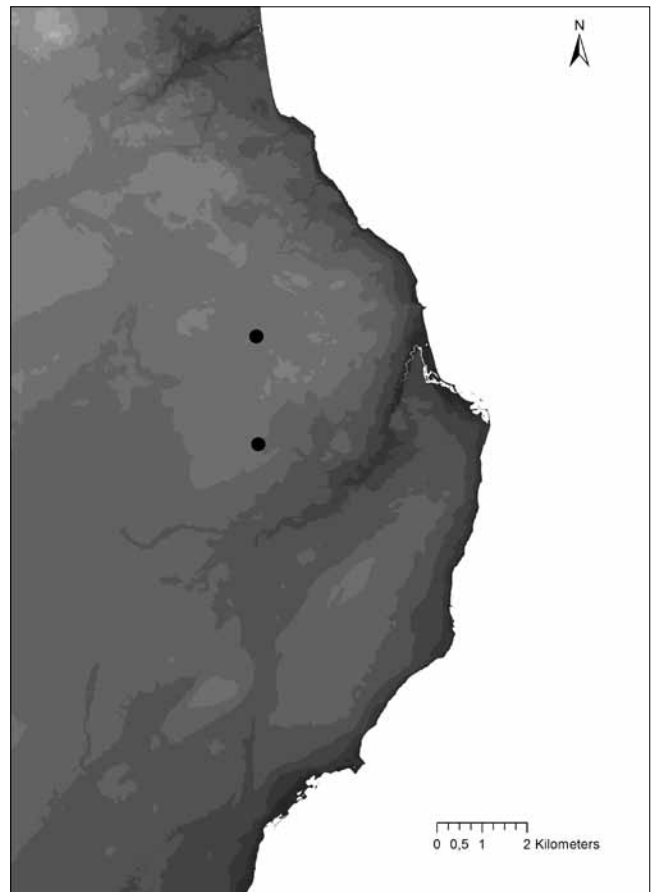


Fig. 6b - Distribution of axe images dating to phase 2 (1400-1100 BC). Image: Peter Skoglund.

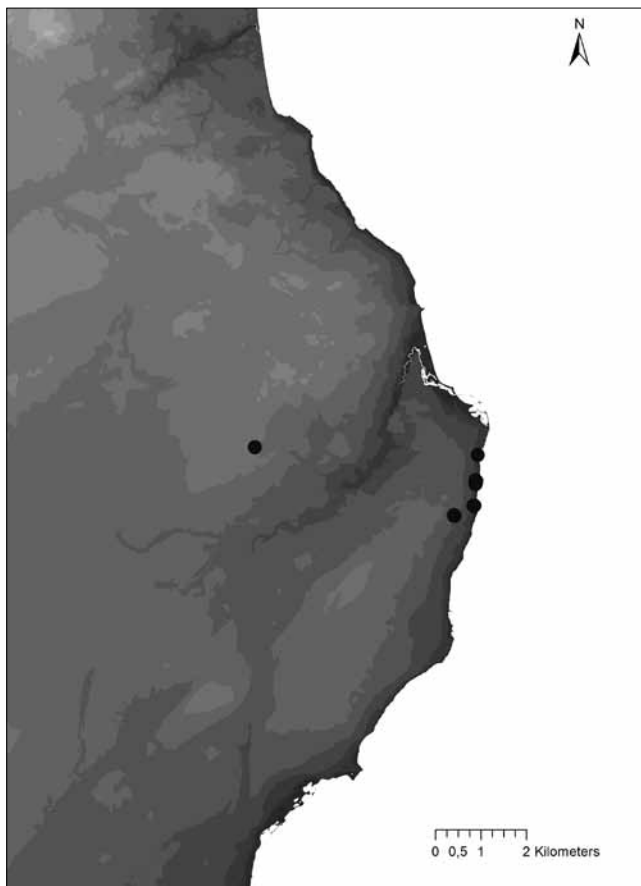


Fig. 6c - Distribution of ship images dating to phase 2 (1400-1100 BC). Image: Peter Skoglund.

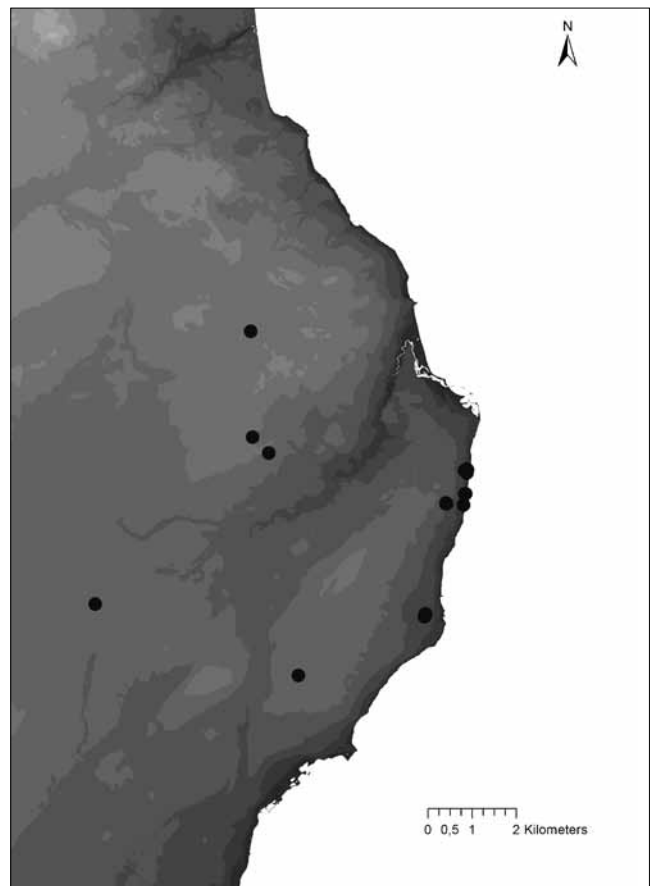


Fig. 6d - Distribution of axe images dating to phase 2 (1400-1100 BC). Image: Peter Skoglund.