



IMAGES ON THE ROCKS AND IN THE ARCHIVES – FOUR CENTURIES OF DOCUMENTATIONS OF PREHISTORIC ROCK ART IN SWEDEN

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ABSTRACT

Within the framework of the new strategic plan for “Kulturarvsakademien” that has just been formulated at Gothenburg University a research program with the title “From Ancient remains for the Educated to Heritage for the Public and the World” will be performed. The project proposes to trace the historical changes from the first discovery of rock art until their present day status as World Heritage Site. By analyzing the manner how social, cultural and academic forces have interacted and changed over time, important aspects of the formation of cultural heritage will be illuminated and its interaction with the academic discourse could be studied. Traces from earlier societies and their notional worlds are all around us.

RIASSUNTO

All'interno della cornice del nuovo piano strategico per “Kulturarvsakademien” che è stato appena formulato all'Università di Göteborg, sarà realizzato un programma di ricerca col titolo “Da resti antichi per persone colte a Patrimonio per il Pubblico ed il Mondo”. Il progetto si propone di tracciare i cambiamenti storici dalla prima scoperta dell'arte rupestre fino al suo stato attuale come sito de Patrimonio Mondiale. Analizzando come le forze sociali, culturali ed accademiche hanno interagito e sono cambiate negli anni, alcuni aspetti importanti della formazione del patrimonio culturale saranno posti in luce e la sua interazione con il discorso accademico potrà essere studiato. Le tracce di antiche società e dei loro mondi nozionali sono ancora intorno a noi.

RESUME

Dans le cadre du nouveau plan stratégique pour « Kulturarvsakademien » qui a été juste formulé à l'Université de Göteborg, sera réalisé un programme de recherche intitulé « Des restes anciens pour les gens cultivés à Patrimoine pour le Public et le Monde ». Le projet se propose comme but de tracer les changements historiques à partir de la première découverte de l'art rupestre jusqu'à son état actuel comme site du Patrimoine Mondial. En analysant comment les forces sociales, culturelles et académiques ont interagi et sont changées tout au long des années, certains aspects importants du Patrimoine culturel seront mis en lumière et son interaction avec le discours académique pourra être étudiée. Les traces de sociétés anciennes et de leurs mondes de notions sont encore parmi nous.

INTRODUCTION

The rock art in Sweden constitutes one of the world's most interesting and best preserved prehistoric imageries. Regional variations exist within a wide complex of repertoires, where themes appear repeatedly, without ever being identically presented. Those circumstances are of great international scientific interest and can offer new possibilities to investigate into similar phenomena without being contemporary or identical. “The rock carvings of Northern Bohuslän are one of the treasures of the ancient world of the north. No other area in all of Europe can surpass Bohuslän in the number and variety of images carved in the living rock.” (Coles, J. 1994. ICOMOS Evaluation report. Paris)

Bronze Age rock art represents a unique Nordic contribution to world culture, and more than 17.000 localities are known in Sweden alone, 5000 from western Sweden, Bohuslän where tenth of thousands of images have been carved into the rocks. These traces have been defined as cultural heritage and the Tanum area that is specifically rich on images, has been declared a World Heritage property for the benefit of all humankind following the UNESCO decision 1994. The rock carvings have attracted interest since the early 17th century when depictions were made and attempts of

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interpretation formulated. Several big documentation projects were conducted in the 19th century in Bohuslän. In the course of the 20th century the knowledge and information of the rock carvings spread outside academic circles to tourists, schools and public. In the 20th century rock art became an important part of the official cultural heritage and became an important tourist attraction. This inspired autodidactic researcher to engage in exploring rock art. Following extended education, nationwide inventories and increased political engagement in heritage matters, the study of rock art has grown considerably. Paradoxically a national archive or database on Swedish rock art has not existed. However, some progress has been made in terms of primary documentation, which represents a necessary first step towards making the rock art available for research, nationally and internationally.

This is the background for the need for a modern infrastructure for rock art research focusing on documentation, management and conservation that has resulted in the project Svenskt Hällristnings Forsknings Arkiv - SHFA. The initiative is financially supported by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond and Riksantikvarieämbetet. Västarvet, Tanum municipality and Länsstyrelsen support the project too. In 2007 a nationwide inventory of all primary field documentation of rock carvings begun. Records on rock art are kept in more than 80 public and private archives.

The unique overview resulting from the inventory also reveals new information and significant details of the reasons behind and the aims of these documentation initiatives performed through almost four centuries. It testifies that rock art has since long fascinated viewers and invited them to record and to interpret the images carved in the bedrock. This work was done by local clergymen being the only educated persons around. Gradually, it became a prioritized matter of the state and its most renowned antiquaries were sent out to record the rock art as part of a national and royal heritage. Those missions developed into the organized inventories from the end of the 19th century.

In the 20th century rock art became an important part of the official cultural heritage that was presented to the general public as an important tourist attraction. This inspired autodidactic researcher to engage in exploring of rock art. Discoveries of new sites then became an end in itself/ focus. Following extended education, nationwide inventories and increased political engagement in heritage matters the study of rock art has grown considerably. This peaked in applying for the rock carvings in Tanum to be inscribed onto UNESCO's World Heritage List which took place in 1994. This century's long process can now be researched by the use of the information being assembled in SHFA. A working title of this project is:

From Ancient remains for the Educated to Heritage for the Public and the World.

The rock carvings have attracted interest ever since the early 17th century when depictions were made and attempts of interpretation formulated. The oldest know is Peder Alfssön's aquarelle from 1627 now kept in the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen, depicting the panel at Backa in Brastad. The rock carvings in Northern Bohuslän have ever since been focus of documentations and research. From other regions some of the most significant rock carvings like at Glösa in Alsen in Jämtland and at Rickeby in Boglösa in Uppland were recorded by the first national inventory named "Ransakningarna..." conducted in the mid 17th century (Nordbladh, J. 2004).

At the time of the Napoleon wars, in the beginning of the 19th century C.G. Brunius accomplished a complete documentation of rock carvings in Tanum. He recorded the engraved images using a co-ordinate system. He got many predecessors in Bohuslän but also in other parts of Sweden. In the course of the 20th century the knowledge and information of the rock carvings spread outside academic circles to tourists, schools and general public. Today, the number of researchers, academic and private occupied with discovery and documentation of rock art has increased to an extent that no one could ever have foreseen.

By making these historic depictions accessible in the database of SHFA together with the modern and recent ones, new and unique opportunities will be created to research also the documentation and interpretation of rock art in a time depth perspective. This will certainly help to shed new light on this exciting prehistoric source category. It will create new possibilities for researching rock carvings from a historical perspective in shifting social context.

ROCK ART CONSERVATION – ON ROCKS AND IN RECORDS

The increasing accumulation of documentation has led to an increased demand to put it into archives and to make it accessible to researchers and others interested.

The goal of the inventory is to for the first time to produce an overview of the widely spread

documentation made in various materials using shifting standards and now kept under uncertain conditions. It is also the basis for the digitalization of the documentation in process which highlights the need to secure the documents and their information. For many of the early publications on rock art the field notes have been lost. In the few cases where they still remain they are in urgent need of conservation and of transfer to other media. This problem of the deterioration of the documentation itself has to be addressed and solutions for its preservation for the future be presented.

The documentation as such, whether imagery or textual, encompasses information that has to be researched and interpreted. It was produced as descriptions of original objects intentionally keeping as much of its inherent qualities as possible. In that respect it is loaded with a remaining source value. As time goes by it becomes historical documents whose value may become more obscure and less obvious. To be understood it has to be put into its historical and/or archaeological context and its original qualities updated and transformed to make possible interpretation and reuse in modern research.

Step by step SHFA produces a detailed picture of the quantity and quality of existing documentation of prehistoric rock carvings. The inventory of archives has yet encompassed more than 50 institutions. The work is performed according to the time plan and a report on the results will be published in spring 2009.

DOCUMENTATION, TRANSFORMATION AND PRESENTATION OF PREHISTORIC ROCK ART IN EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE.

In 2007 a research team was formed and provisional archive and digitization centre was set up at Tanums Hällristningsmuseum in Underslös, a private museum that was founded in 1952 and throughout the years has made important contributions to education on and documentation of rock art. The first task for the team was to start a nationwide inventory of all primary field documentation of rock carvings kept in more than 80 public and private archives begun, with the goal to produce an overview of the widely spread documentations made in various materials using shifting standards and now kept under uncertain conditions. The inventory was also the basis for the digitalization of the documentation which highlights the need to secure the documents and their information. The unique overview resulting from the inventory also reveals new information and significant details of the reasons behind and the aims of these documentation initiatives performed through almost four centuries. By making these historic depictions from the inventory accessible in the database of SHFA and continuously complemented with recent documentations, unique opportunities for research of rock art documentations will be established. The inventory of archives has yet encompassed more than 50 institutions.

The documentation as such contains specific information that can be researched and interpreted through. The material was produced as thorough descriptions of original objects with the intention to keep as much as possible of the inherent qualities of the original. In that respect these documentation results can be seen loaded with remaining source values. As time goes by they become historical documents whose value may become more obscure and less obvious. To be understood this research theme intends to put the material into its historical context and the original qualities of the documents will be thoroughly analyzed as a basis for a modern interpretation.

Approximately 2000 panels have been properly documented during the last 10 years in 3 EU projects under the leadership of the Swedish National Heritage Board. This material is the core of the new national database, which will consist of

- The scanned images from primary documentation, which will be made available in digital format for research
- A systematic national survey of archive material in museums, including older documentation of rock art and photographs, which will be recorded in the database, and selectively scanned as well.

The material is organized in a new database created for this purpose since 2007 at Gothenburg University named Swedish Archive for Rock Art Research - (Swe. SHFA) in collaboration with the Swedish National Heritage Board.

CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW DATABASE FOR DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH ON ROCK CARVINGS.

The new database concerned consists of three separate modules; a first module called SHFA Bild (SHFA= Svensk HällristningsForskningsArkiv), built up from digital information from scanned



image documentation of rock carvings, a second module called SHFA Arkiv, built up from the information collected by the archives inventory from different institutional archives and private collections systematically registered in the forms constructed according to the standards set up by Antikvariskt Topografiskt Arkiv (ATA) and ABM entered into the database, and a third module SHFA Hällbild with basic information on the single objects available in the information systems on ancient monuments – FMIS of the National Heritage Board and in parts of a web based database – SHFA Hällbild with detailed descriptions of single rock carving localities that was developed by the project RockCare – Tanum Cultural Heritage Laboratory within the framework of the Raphael and Culture 2000-programs of the European Union.(for detailed description of metadata etc. see Robertsson, R Rock Art and the Internet. In: The Valcamonica symposiums 2001 and 2002. Bertilsson, U & McDermott, L. eds. 2004).

The objectives of the new database can be summarized in the following way:

To collect all available information about rock carvings that are now being stored in its original analogue format in a large number of institutional archives and private collections. To put the information together in a single database to eliminate time consuming collecting and recording of basic research data.

To simplify the access to information on rock carvings regardless of physical location and allowing the handling of all information and images through user friendly interfaces and web services by the use of Internet.

The infrastructure of the SHFA database is visualized in the figure following below developed for the pre-study of IT-system financed by a research grant from the National Heritage Board.

MAINTENANCE OF THE DATABASE.

The database project is part of University of Gothenburg's priorities in its strategic research plan, that is just being accomplished and the regional museums/heritage institutions have also agreed to collaborate on the creation of a permanent institution to run and maintain the database. In addition the Swedish National Heritage Board has a wish to be able to present the database in their 'Kulturmiljösök' (Culture Port). SHFA are also collaborating with SND (Swedish National Database center) in Gothenburg on the future running of the database. During 2009 negotiations and applications for permanent funding are expected to be finalized, in collaboration between University of Gothenburg, the regional heritage institutions and the National Swedish Heritage Board.

AVAILABILITY AND FUTURE USE OF THE DATABASE

The database is based upon publicly owned information that presents no ethical problems of access and use for research. There will be developed guidelines for the future use of some privately recorded information. Only information that is given full free access for future use will be accepted. When names are recorded they refer to the person who did the registration/recording of the rock carvings, normally publicly employed archaeologists. As already described the database will be made fully and freely available in an internet version through user friendly webservices now being developed. The project is organized as a joint venture between Gothenburg University and The Swedish National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet), and it is supported by the regional museums (Västarvet), and Länsstyrelsen (regional cultural heritage authority), plus Tanum municipality. All parties have signed a contract of commitment. When the project is finished the database will be linked to and integrated into the so-called 'Kulturmiljöportal' (cultural port) in the National Swedish Heritage Board. This is a database for public access to heritage information and documentation, and the rock art database will be among the first to be made accessible. The system-demands, including user- friendly interfaces and web services are developed during the project period, financed by the Swedish National Heritage Board (see previous section). It will also include updating entries and quality control of data, which also define which institutions are allowed to update the database. In this way the future use and updating of the database will be secured. During the project period information is made available on the project web-page: www.shfa.se

RESEARCH POTENTIAL

The last 10 years has seen an international scientific breakthrough in our understanding of Bronze Age rock art. From being concerned primarily with typological classification and formal analyses rock art research is now integrated into more holistic interpretations of Bronze Age society and

religion. This development is exemplified in an explosive increase of articles dealing with rock art during the last 5 years, now numbering several hundred (Goldhahn 2006). Also more doctoral dissertations and monographs on Bronze Age religion and rock art have been published in recent years (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, Kaul 2004, Bengtsson, Fredell 2003, Hauptman Wahlgren 2003).

Much of this research is based upon secondary sources of a much lower quality than the original documentation. The very detailed documentation in the data-base will be presented in a form that allows researchers to distinguish between the several events of carving, that is the historical sequence of the carving, and also their depths, indicating repeated carvings.

Such information allows new interpretations of the meaning and use of rock art in ritual and religion. They include:

- The role of rock art in rituals of initiation and preparation of maritime expeditions. Many panels are situated on the Bronze Age shoreline and dominated by ships.
- The role of rock art in Bronze Age religion. Which sequences corresponds to known Indo-European myths, and what was their role in the rituals
- The long-term use of rock art, as evidenced by the new documentation and dating of the sequences on the panels suggests a similar persistence of Bronze Age myths and rituals.

The plan is that the database will be accessible in 2010. In a subsequent phase the intention is to widen the work to include further Nordic countries, a joint project with the Danish Nationalmuseum in Copenhagen is just being formulated. A suggestion for future co-operation will be presented to the research institute CCSP – Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici in Valcamonica in Italy that keeps one of the largest library and research archive on rock art in the world. This will open new avenues of research areas and topics.

ROCK ART RESEARCH AND WORLD HERITAGE IN DIALOGUE

UNESCO:s World Heritage Centre held a conference on World Heritage Rock Art in Drakenberg, South Africa in April this year were the SHFA-project and the planned concentration on research and education on cultural heritage at the University of Gothenburg were presented. Special focus was put on the research topic Rock Art and World Heritage in Dialogue.

In summary, it is an urgent task to research the information that is now being assembled in the modern, easily accessible research data base on rock carvings loaded with the extraordinarily rich documentations on Sweden's rock art that has been assembled by ambitious researchers for almost four centuries.

The infrastructure and research program now being developed in Sweden by Göteborg University is well suited to be adapted in other countries in Europe and other parts of the world. A basic infrastructure already exists in the form of the Rock Art sites inscribed onto the World Heritage List of WHC - UNESCO and synergetic effects could be accomplished by enhanced co-operation within this framework.

SUMMING UP

The University of Gothenburg has a leading position within rock art research and documentation due to the new infrastructure that has been built by SHFA at the Institute of Archaeology supported by grants from Riksbankens Jubilumsfond and the Research and Development funds from the National Heritage Board. SHFA thus constitutes a cornerstone in the present concentration on/commitment on the Cultural Heritage.

The rock art cuts across all times and subjects and forms a growing heritage in shifting context that creates new opportunities for cross faculty research and education.

The world Heritage Rock Carvings in Tanum thus offers unique opportunities for research on rock art and cultural heritage in all its aspects.

The rock carvings unites/amalgamates research, preservation and public communication and interaction i.e. all aspects of the cultural heritage processes, its role in our own time/the contemporary period included.

A unique expert knowledge has been built up by SHFA during the last years with the support of Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, the National Heritage Board and the Western Swedish Region.

SHFA is rooted locally in Tanum municipality, regionally in Västra Götaland and carries on research of national extent that can get approval internationally by co-operation with WHC/UNESCO.



The archives survey of rock art documentation that is digitized by SHFA creates hitherto unknown opportunities for interpretation, dating and history of documentation of research.

The increased precision and accessibility of the documentation have promoted the dynamic development of Bronze Age research in the last decades. The rock carvings have become an important part of an extended archaeological research context and a source of new knowledge about prehistoric art, religion and cognitive processes in a global perspective.

New non-tactile and ethically more acceptable methods for preventive care and conservation of rock carvings have attracted interest internationally. They may be further developed and refined by the Conservation Institute on site in Tanum's World Heritage. Authenticity may serve as a comprehensive theme for innovative research.

The landscape of the rock carvings has changed appearance several times since they were made. Their meaning and the tales about them have changed across time. Thus, landscape and rock carvings in interaction will help to open new roads of research.

SHFA is an asset to education and research across subjects and faculties lines that could be manifested and developed by seminars with international researchers and changing themes that meet with and bridges over the different alignment of the faculties: Rock Art and Archaeology, Rock Art and Conservation, Rock Art and Art, Rock Art and Cultural Heritage, Rock Art and Museums, Rock Art and Religion.

The new infrastructure created by SHFA is an important contribution to the process of strengthening research and education through participation in graduate education, Master courses and School of Research with doctoral student and Post doctoral researchers that will promote the development of a complete research milieu in Tanum's World Heritage.

SHFA is located on site in Tanum among the rock carvings in the World Heritage property and participates in a local conservation and public communication project named World Heritage Walks.

SHFA constitutes a research- and education political democracy project making documentation of rock art that has for a long time been locked up in archives publically accessible.

THE PROJECT TEAM.

Project management:

Kristian Kristiansen did a major new interpretation of the Bronze Age as historical epoch together with Thomas Larsson. It was published in a 400 page book on Cambridge University Press in 2005: *The Rise of Bronze Age Society*, which received the Society of American Archaeology's book award 2007. Here rock art is used in a re-interpretation of Bronze Age religion that also utilizes Indo-European mythology, which can be exemplified in rock art panels in Sweden.

Ulf Bertilsson. Has ever since the mid 1980s been engaged in research activities related to rock art, either performing direct personal research, making documentation as a basis for future research or creating opportunities for research by realizing projects and arranging special events like symposia, seminars or conferences. He has also devoted much time, during his employments as heads of units/departments at the National Heritage Board and in various EU-projects, to build infrastructure for research by creating databases designed especially for rock art research. This is also valid for his international engagement manifested by being the President of ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for Rock Art - CAR

ACHIVES INVENTORY AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Åsa Fredell did her PhD on Swedish rock art, and continued her studies of rock art in Galicia.

She has by now worked 10 years on rock art documentation and research. She is also responsible for the inventory of archives which result will constitute the basis for her planned forthcoming research.

DIGITAL PROCESSING AND WEB EDITOR

Catarina Bertilsson has been involved in rock art documentation during the last 20 years in three EU supported projects in which she has been responsible for database development. She is also a specialist on scanning procedures and a web editor responsible for the project website www.shfa.se recently educated in Adobe Master Design - digital image, visualization and web. During her career at the Register of Ancient Monuments at the National Heritage Board she gained long experience of

the “FMIS-system” and archive matters including digital processing and long term storage of images according to the standards developed by “ABM-centrum”.

LOGISTICS AND SCANNING

Gerhard Milstreu devoted the last 35 years to developing more advanced methods for rock art documentation, and created a rock art museum and documentation centre in Tanum, where the project is located. For these extraordinary achievements he received the honoree doctoral title of University of Gothenburg in 2000.

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