



Book Reviews

ROCK ART THROUGH TIME: SCANIAN ROCK CARVINGS IN THE BRONZE AGE AND EARLIEST IRON AGE BY PETER SKOGLUND

Swedish Rock Art Series Volume 5. Oxbow Books, Oxford. 2016. 160 pages. 70 figures (col and b/w) and 1 table. ISBN 9781785701641, hb, £20.00

This is the fifth volume in the Swedish Rock Art Series published by Oxbow Books and examines the petroglyphs of south-east Scania, Sweden in the vicinity around the city of Simrishamn. It presents a detailed reassessment of documented rock art scenes that range in date from the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age approximately 1700–200 BC. The book also seeks to contextualise the cultural landscape of these panels in relation to archaeological sites and presents data on recent excavations carried out in the region.

Chapter 1 is the Introduction and in addition to being a historical overview it also outlines the aims and objectives of analysis as well as the interpretative strategies. The earliest known researcher was Nils Gustaf Bruzelius who started studying the rock art of the region in the 1850s. He carried out archaeological excavations on burial mounds to establish the dating of rock imagery at Järrestad and his results were published in the early 1880s. Meanwhile, Oscar Montelius's seminal research on the serialisation of Scandinavian metalwork into chronological periods became the basis of dating rock art carvings which feature identifiable artefacts, such as axe-head motifs. Montelius's six period scheme is inescapable as it provides a chronological framework to Scandinavian rock art studies but it is argued by the author that it should not be an end in itself as other forms of data need to be considered. The documentation and periodisation of rock carvings, however, has been the primary focus of Scanian research, while the concept of the art being part of a cultural landscape has only come to the fore in more recent times. Thus, while setting out the petroglyph chronology in the first part, this volume also attempts in a later chapter to draw upon the results of more recent archaeological excavations in order to build up a picture how the rock art of south-east Scania connected to Bronze Age and Early Iron Age landscapes.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion about developing a comprehensive chronological framework for the rock art based primarily on relative dating techniques. Four stages are proposed with the Bronze Age represented by Phase 1 (1700–1400 BC), Phase 2 (1400–1100 BC) and Phase 3 (1100–800 BC), while the Early Iron Age equates to Phase 4 (800–200 BC). The sequence is heavily reliant on typological matching of images through comparisons to known objects of material culture, such as metal axes and palstaves. Here Montelius's typologies permeate chronological discussions and carry on dating many other rock art scenes throughout the rest of the book. Towards the end of the chapter, the four phases are also defined by their locations relative to the sea. This fascinating line of evidence, however, was only covered in a brief manner. In addition to plotting spatial distribution of sites on contemporary coastlines it would have been useful to see as well a series of reconstructions plotting out the shifting prehistoric sea levels and changing coastlines.

The next four chapters (3–6) examine in detail rock art scenes attributed to the four chronological periods. Here the symbolism of image types such as axes, palstaves, ships, horses, human figures and footprints are scrutinised as well as their relationships to each other in the composition of rock art panels. The first phase (1700–1400 BC) mainly features the depictions of axes and ships which could relate to ideas of seasonal journeys and long distance trade networks. The stone carvings of axes may even have connections to ones found across the sea in the UK, including examples from the Kilmartin Valley and Stonehenge. Phase 2 (1400–1100 BC) is argued to shift from static icons in the first phase to narrative scenes involving a variety of images including ships, axes, dots, circles and human figures. Following an interesting discussion on visual narration in early Buddhist art, it is proposed that the south-east Scanian panels may have focused upon a single occasion, operated in a linear progression, involved multiple episodes from a story depicted in a nonlinear temporal sequence or could have illustrated a succession of episodes contained within a single scene. The third phase (1100–800 BC) has only one rock art site attributed to it involving ships with stylised prows, while the fourth and final phase (800–200 BC) is represented by three sites where the depictions of bridled horses with riders make their first appearance in the region.

Traditional ideas about solarism, however, are frequently drawn upon throughout the aforementioned chapters. The scholarly construct of solarism, which arose to prominence in the late 19th century, has a problematic tendency to consider any representation of a circle in prehistoric art as the fossilised residue of heliolatry. The possibilities for other meanings to cup marks and circular motifs need to be explored as people's engagements with the world around them involved many things and not just a singular preoccupation with the sun.

Chapter 7 attempts to recreate cultural landscapes by examining the results of large-scale excavations of prehistoric settlements which have been carried out over the past 20 years in the region. The synthesis of archaeological data

provides evidence of the complex transformation of human occupations, settlements and burial practices over the centuries. Longhouses and burials mounds found in Phase 1 shift to farmsteads and grave-fields in Phase 2. Meanwhile, around 800 BC (Phase 4) older settlements were abandoned and new ones established in different locations. These discussions in Chapter 7 are then correlated to the rock art panels in Chapter 8, which is also the final section of the book. Here the petroglyph scenes are treated as generalised themes relating to broader European trends from fluctuating maritime trade connections to major social changes.

All in all, *Rock Art through Time* provides a timely synthesis of rock art research and archaeological excavations in south-east Scania, Sweden during the second to first millennia BC. It also offers much information relating to the long, complex history of the rock art imagery in relation to an archaeological landscape that had undergone a variety of transformations through the Bronze Age up to the Early Iron Age.

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