



Book Reviews

PICTURING THE BRONZE AGE EDITED BY J LING, P SKOGLUND AND U BERTILSSON

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This hardbound volume presents research derived from an international symposium on Bronze Age rock art held in Tanum, Sweden during 2012. The ‘pictures’ referred to in the title derive mainly from petroglyphs found in different regions of Scandinavia and Europe. There are also some discussions involving metal objects, such as bronze axes, which have been depicted in stone carvings.

To begin with, the papers by Jarl Nordbladh and Ulf Bertilsson examine different aspects of the historical development of rock art research in Sweden and highlight how the discipline had addressed theoretical and analytical approaches in earlier times. Nordbladh focuses upon Carl Brunius’s pioneering work carried out in the early 19th century whereas Bertilsson reviews the history of research related to the petroglyphs of Tanum, Sweden. In particular, the status of the Tanum motifs had shifted from mere curiosities in the 18th to early 19th centuries to important objects of archaeological inquiry by the end of the 19th century. Perhaps, the most illustrious Tanum researcher was Oscar Montelius who approached the dating of Bronze Age rock art by comparison with objects derived from the archaeological record and not by the traditional scholarly method of finding associations with literary allusions derived from Nordic sagas.

Several papers pick up on the themes of warriors and conflict. The site report by Andreas Toreld, for example, presents recently discovered rock carvings found at Brastad, western Sweden that he dubs the “valley of violence”, as there are many scenes of warriors carrying swords, spears, bows and arrows. The paper by Johan Ling and Michael Rowlands moves beyond description and attempts to contextualise similar figures with swords found in the rock art panels of Bohuslän, western Sweden. They argue the images reflect an underlining pan-European code of ideology belonging to a warrior class that, in turn, can be linked to the images of ships which, perhaps, signify maritime institutions and international alliances involving the trade of metals and amber.

Other perspectives on how to interpret the depiction of human figures in scenes of rock art are offered by Peter Skoglund and Lynne Bevan. Skoglund compares carvings from the Early Bronze Age in southern Sweden to ones from the Late Bronze Age along the west coast of Sweden. He suggests the early representations of humans were connected to symbols of social unity while later images were used for social competition and the reinforcement of sub-group identities in society. Bevan, however, takes a different approach in her comparison of figures derived from Italian and Swedish rock art sites and focuses upon issues of gender and sexuality. Though it provides a well-versed overview of scholarly ideas about masculinity in European rock art studies, the article does not consider other archaeological contexts beyond the rock surface that would have contributed additional clues towards understanding the complexity of gender negotiations in Bronze Age society.

Many of the rock art images that Bevan draws upon are located in Valcamonica, northern Italy, which are also the subject of analysis in two other articles by Alberto Marretta and Umberto Sansoni. Marretta highlights objects of material culture found in the Valcamonica region that correlate to particular rock art motifs, including a stone bas-relief and a bronze pendant. Meanwhile, Sansoni compares Valcamonican images with ones found at sites in southern Sweden and contends they provide proof for long-distant contacts between these societies which, arguably, imply a distinct tier of Indo-European homogeneity in the Bronze Age.

Moving west from Italy, the study of the rock art in Galicia, north-west Iberia (Spain) is the focus of two papers. R. Fábregas Valcarce and C. Rodríguez-Rellán provide a comprehensive overview of research themes explored in Galician rock art over the past two decades ranging from plotting locations in the landscape, making connections to the archaeological record and dating to various proposals put forward in interpreting the depictions of weaponry and geometric designs. In contrast, the paper by Manuel Santos-Estévez and Alejandro Gümil-Fariña focuses more narrowly on the Atlantic coast as an important factor in the placement of Galician rock carvings. They argue the visibility and accessibility of these rock art sites may have been related to navigational concerns and asserting political control over natural harbours.

Heading back to northwest Europe, a concise overview of the Bronze Age rock art of Denmark is provided by Louise Felding. This is then followed by a discussion of the results of a spatial analysis project involving the viewsheds of rock art panels generated in GIS software and mapping out early landscapes across parts of Denmark. Meanwhile, Andrew Meirion Jones discusses the production of metal axes and their rock art depictions in Early Bronze Age Scotland with particular reference to Kilmartin Glen. This paper offers a good overview of bronze axe technology in Scotland and argues for the act of carving axe-shapes into stone as being connected to the alchemical nature of metalworking. The axe carvings, however, are too often referred to as simply 'performances' and there is no deeper exploration of the dynamic engagements of a human body in motion producing rock art.

A similar situation occurs with the over reliance of using the label 'ritual' in the description of rock art images among several papers throughout the volume. Once again there is a lack of discussion in what actually these so-called ritualistic activities entail or how they take part in living religious experiences. The paper by Richard Bradley, however, does stand out in its attempt to explore an alternative avenue in the theorisation of rock art and religion as he examines the continuities and discontinuities between Scandinavian rock art imagery and decorated metal razors found in Bronze Age graves. In order to look at the images in a different way, Bradley switches from reading the meanings behind the art to a consideration of how values were learned in Bronze Age society through modes of religious expression.

Overall, *Picturing the Bronze Age* presents a small but diverse collection of fascinating articles that provide a wealth of historical perspectives and a variety of approaches to the study of prehistoric rock carvings. Though this book offers an array of interesting case studies from Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, Spain and Italy, its limited geographical range only leaves the reader wanting to learn more about the Bronze Age rock art of not only other European localities but also from other parts of the world.

Kenneth Lymer
Wessex Archaeology

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