

CARL GEORG BRUNIUS AND A POSSIBLE / NON POSSIBLE RELATION BETWEEN SCANDINAVIAN ROCK ART AND HIEROGLYPHS

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SUMMARY

In the beginning of the 19th century very little of rock art was discovered, documented and available in printed form. A pioneer in this research was Carl Georg Brunius, who hoped to find some deciphering inspiration in the hieroglyphs of Egypt. After some decades he gave up a possible connection and used the Scandinavian folklore and ethnographic parallels to reach an understanding of the petroglyphs.

RIASSUNTO

All'inizio del XIX secolo l'arte rupestre era ancora poco nota, poco documentata e solo in minima parte edita. Carl Georg Brunius è stato un pioniere della ricerca tentando di confrontare l'arte rupestre con i geroglifici egiziani. Dopo alcuni decenni di studio, rinunciò al suo intento di trovare un possibile collegamento cercando nel folklore scandinavo e nei paralleli etnografici una nuova chiave di lettura al fenomeno.

BACKGROUND

About two hundred years ago, there seem to have been close contacts and interdependence within the field of archaeology in Sweden, Europe, and North Africa. These include research, technological inventions, publications, and the contemporary political situation between scientific work, technological inventions, the production of publications and the contemporary political situations. However, communication among scholars was limited to academies, personal visits, publication exchange, and the developing publishing houses. At this time, a researcher was constantly looking for more information and more colleagues interested in the same fields of knowledge.

Carl Georg Brunius (1792-1869) was born in a parish in the west of Sweden called Tanum, which later on would be famous in archaeology for its magnificent rock art from the Nordic Bronze Age. In his early years, Brunius started his academic career at the Lund and Uppsala Academies, with a special focus on Greek and Latin. Eventually he was given a position in Lund. He also worked as an architect designing medieval-styled buildings. While spending the summer vacations at his childhood home, he searched for ancient monuments, mainly rock art sites (Fig.1). He showed his account to the chancellor in Lund, Lars von Engeström – an eager collector of old manuscripts and books – who became interested and arranged for the inventory to be translated into French. This report was presumably intended for an international public, but unfortunately the project was cancelled. This happened in the year 1818, a critical time in Sweden and in all of

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Fig. 1 - One of c. a hundred documents of Bohuslanean rock art panels, made by Carl Georg Brunius just before 1818. Note the measurement grid, which was used both on the panel and in a reduced scale on the bedrock. From the site of Lilla Gerum, Kyrkoryk in the parish of Tanum. The Antiquarian-Topographical Archives, The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Stockholm.

Europe. King Karl XIII, who replaced the dethroned and expatriated Gustav IV Adolf on the throne, died in this year and was succeeded by his adopted son, the former Napoleonic marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte. The political situation in Sweden was very unclear at the end of the Napoleon wars, and Chancellor von Engeström, who was also the foreign minister of Sweden and a former ambassador, was too engaged in Sweden's political situation to carry through the introduction of an amount of rock art documentation. What came into play was probably that at that time there was no suitable printing technique available for the large-scale documents. Lithography was introduced a decade later.

As Brunius was one of the executors of von Engeström's estate and looked through his vast manuscript and book collection in Stockholm after his death, I believe that Brunius took back his abandoned manuscript. At the end of his life Brunius rewrote and enlarged the work of his youth and published his view of Swedish rock art in Swedish (BRUNIUS 1868, HILDEBRAND 1937A). After Brunius' death, in 1893, his son organized his father's manuscripts and sold them to the Antiquarian-Topographical Archives at the Royal Academy of Letters in Stockholm. Later research seems to have omitted Brunius' contribution (NORDBLADH 2015).

BRUNIUS AT WORK

When Brunius carried out his field work the available reference works, such as inventories, were extremely limited. It is important to remember that this was before the French Palaeolithic caves were discovered. Neither had reliable chronologies been established.

However, the endeavour to connect early rock art to the Egyptian sphere is not unique for Brunius even if he must have been one of the earliest ones to do so. For example, in South America such a connection was proposed. (Ref. wanted in here)

Brunius' interest in rock art was not limited to the rock pictures. Instead, it was connected to the question of how humans used to communicate, and how writing systems were created and established, and how they may have been related to each other. The new term "hieroglyph" (sacred signs) might be helpful in this mission. Brunius was acquainted with some of the early publications on inscriptions cut into Egyptian obelisks, most of them moved during the Roman Empire to Italian soil. Several classical texts had also survived and been used in Renaissance work trying to explain but not to read Egyptian signs. For example, the Jesuit antiquarian Kircher (1602-1680) saw the hieroglyphs as a secret, mysterious information system, hidden to the masses (KIRCHER 1650).

Kircher's interpretations had no real foundation in the signs but were important in inspiring contemporary freemasons to see these holy figures as a possible link to God.

Many scholars had ideas about the hieroglyphs, some of them fantastic but totally wrong, some more reliable, but no attempts were made to really "read" the signs. However, the oval cartouches were said to contain royal names, something which was successfully experimented on later. The lack of progress in interpretation and reading the signs was probably due to the limited extent of visual records and the weak quality of the documentation.

NAPOLÉON AS A DESERT LION

At the end of the 18th century, there was a historical event, which totally changed the scene. The very young general Napoleon Bonaparte was rather suddenly ordered by the Directory to invade Egypt and Syria, as they provided English access to India. In the long run, this French invasion was a military failure, but at the same time the campaign had a tremendous impact on the political foundation of the Mediterranean and Near East regions but also on science and general research and knowledge (MEYERSON 2004).

In 1798, Napoleon arrived in Egypt with almost 400 ships, 38,000 soldiers, horses, canons and a big group of scientists and other intellectuals in all over 150 individuals. New technologies were also introduced to Egypt such as printing machines for different languages, air balloons, and advanced artillery. The only technology that was missing was – with the cruel war and the resistance operations in mind – a guillotine. Napoleon wanted to appear as a liberator and to create a just regime, with clear rules and laws, in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In order to make the administration of this a new, rather unknown country possible, the main task for the scientists was to supply the campaign with maps and inventories of all natural resources. To these were also added, for example, ancient monuments, the history of the country, language, medicine, music, and theatre. This enterprise remains one of the largest ever investigations of a piece of an unknown continent.

Napoleon considered the completion of the French Revolution outside of France, with its political, cultural and social ideas – for all people, as his special task. This

was forced on the local societies with a combination of administrative changes and awful brutality. It is important to remember that France during this period had been at war for 29 years and had fought an incredible total of 713 battles all over Europe. The memory and effects of the Egyptian mission had a strong impact on trade, industry, politics, and military organization, not to mention territorial geographies. To the general public, Napoleon appeared to be a soldier of fortune. With classical historical figures, such as Alexander the Great, as strategic models, the coming emperor described and explained his mission. While in Egypt, the general even converted to Islam, in order to get support from the local inhabitants. This “religious-political” turn was probably soon forgotten. Napoleon saw himself as a scientist or rather as a savant. At this point, Napoleon had an appreciation of knowledge and scientific work which was fundamentally divergent from the predominant opinions during the French Revolution.

During the Jacobins’ Reign of Terror, the chemist and nobleman de Lavoisier was accompanied on his way to the gallows with the comment that the Republic had no use for scientists.

The future emperor’s initiative to also award medals to scientists and not only to successful military officers, became an everlasting splendid procedure in Academia.

A NEW ERA OF HIEROGLYPH STUDIES: DISCOVERY, DOCUMENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND COMPETITION

However, the French army suddenly lost its fleet, got stuck, and could only move by foot. In the meantime the scientists worked with their inventories, measurements and collections.

Later their experiences were compiled in France and published in twenty-four very large volumes, a masterpiece in the history of printing (*Description de l’Égypte 1809-1828*).

In 1801, Napoleon’s men had to surrender to the English and give up all of their equipment and collected antiquities. The brought balloon machinery was destroyed and never used. In the meantime, Bonaparte secretly left his army and brought back a few savants with him to France. Among the antiquities he had to give up, despite strong protests, was the remarkable find of a basalt stone slab a little higher than one meter, found in Rosetta in the building material of a defence wall, where the smooth slab surface had a text in three different scripts: Greek, Demotic and Hieroglyphic, with approximately the same contents (Fig. 2). The texts were a piece of propaganda, produced by the Greek authorities in 196 BC. This stone became a fixed point in the study of hieroglyphs, and it was soon exhibited at the British Museum.

Not until 1824 could Champollion himself visit the museum to view and trace the partly damaged inscriptions on the stone. After a number of years during which the stone caused a great sensation, the scholars discovered many more materials with more elaborate texts, and the academic interest in the Rosetta stone dwindled (ADKINS 2001).

The study of hieroglyphs grew and engaged many competing scholars and learned amateurs. After a while, this field was a cause for conflict among the scholarly communities in different countries, with above all Thomas Young in England and Jean-François Champollion in France as the main figures.

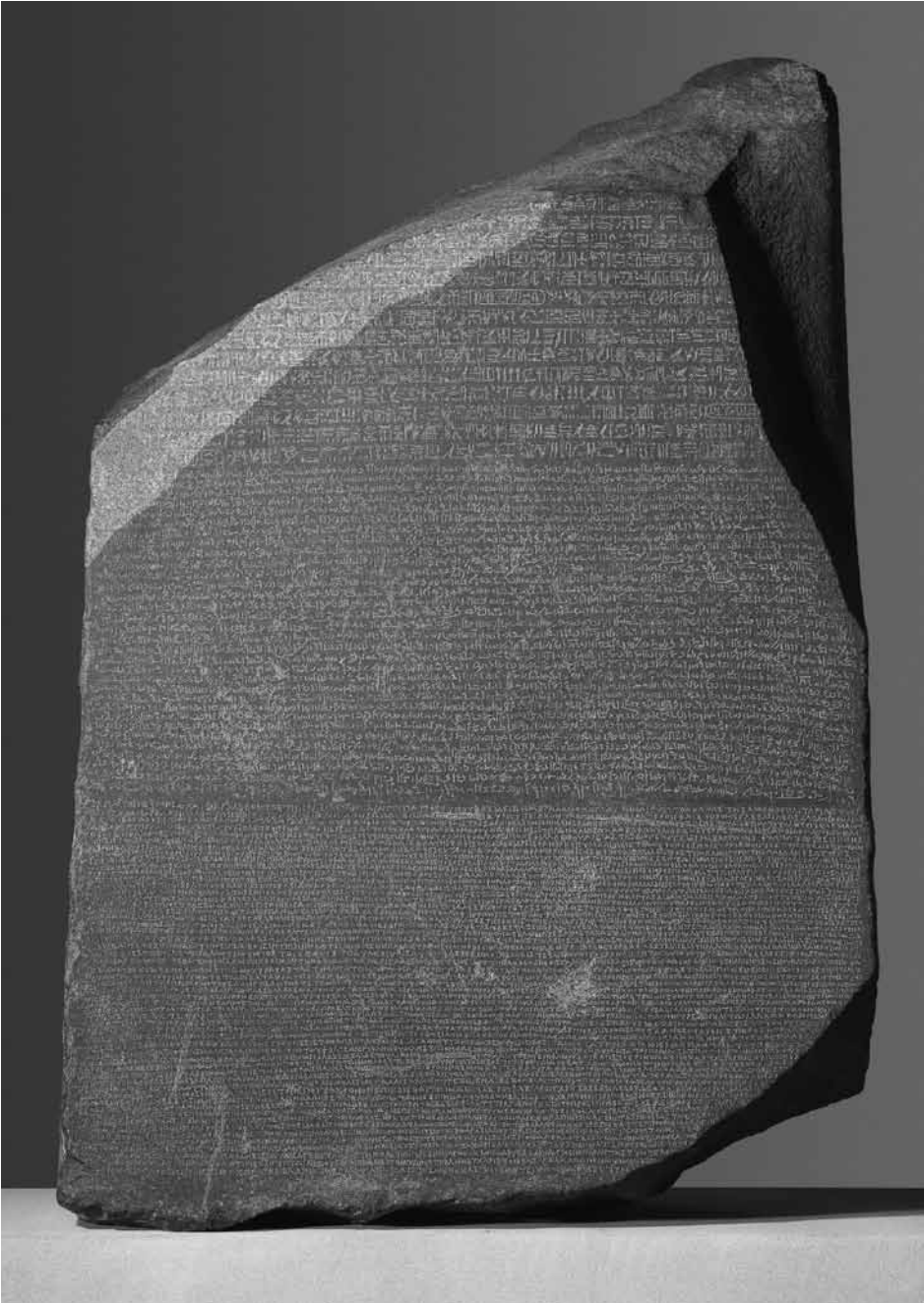


Fig. 2 - The Rosetta stone in British Museum. Photo: British Museum. Part of a bigger, partly damaged stele with three script languages, where -at the top - the hieroglyph rows are the most affected. A century after the donation, the stone slab was cleaned and some original layers of white and black were discovered in the depressions. These were remnants from the earliest copying procedures of the carvings, a method of contrast, reinvented and used in Valcamonica by Professor Emmanuel Anati.

The hieroglyphs were seen as a system of signs with figures of human beings, animals, plants, ships and wagons etcetera, but they also had additional signs to make the interpretation more precise. This script was organized within rows or columns and could be read from different directions. There were thousands of different signs, but only about five hundred were used regularly.

Spoken Egyptian and its scripts did not develop totally in parallel. The so-called Middle- Egyptian script was in use long after the spoken language had changed. Finally, the use and understanding of the hieroglyphs died out, sometime between 300 and 400 BC. Greek and Latin became the languages of the new rulers. The hieroglyphs existed over a period of about 4,000 years and of course changed in terms of their execution and grammar. However, the hieroglyphs were not adopted and accepted – unlike Greek and Latin – outside of the culture of the Nile. For a long time the Egyptian language survived in Coptic writing, which mainly used Greek letters.

What is important is that the demand for correct documentation was solved, and the stone slab of Rosetta became a sort of printing press, where the cut signs were made more visible in a black and white projection.

The inscription of the Rosetta stone was printed to scale 1/1 in many versions (too large for a printed book) and sent out to the learned world. Champollion, at that time a rather young man, was supported in his studies by the scientist Fournier, who had been a member of the Egyptian campaign. Champollion published his findings on a small scale, and his more final results were edited by his older brother (ADKINS 2001, MEYERSON 2004).

Champollion was an admirer of Napoleon, and in fact, they met socially in Grenoble in 1815 in a situation in which linguistic questions could be discussed. Napoleon was a man of extensive reading, especially history, and on board the ships to Alexandria he lectured to the crew on historically important men such as Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great.

Champollion was not present during the French campaign to Egypt but he was later made curator of the Egyptian collection in the Louvre. In this position he planned an expedition to Egypt, to travel and see the antiquities, especially the inscriptions. However, the local antiquarians, who were also diplomats and artefact dealers, did not help him much and he had difficulties in connecting the finds at the Louvre to the sites where they had once been found. His expedition departed in 1828 and was co-directed group of French-Tuscans which included many artists. After obtaining travel permits, the expedition moved in small boats up the river Nile, observing ancient remains on both sides. Many sites had been affected by robbers, whose destructive work could be compared with earlier documentation in *Description de l'Égypte*. After having reached Wadi Halfa at the Second Cataract, the boats turned northwards, staying at sites for more documentation. The more than year-long expedition was a great success, with a lot of observations and documents, and with more items gathered for the collection in Paris. However, there had been many hardships and Champollion was both over-worked and in bad physical condition. In 1831, he was installed as a professor at Collège de France, but died soon after.

Thus, once again the hieroglyphs could be interpreted and even read, about 1,400 years after the last glyph was cut.

An important part included in this writing was the names of rulers, with their secondary names and titles. The custom to add Latin numbers to names was introduced by modern historians to create order in the dynastic lines.

The main reason that it was possible to understand and read hieroglyphs was the Coptic language, which was understood to be the old Egyptian language. Foreign names of historically known royalties were also important for the translations, which had been given new forms within the hieroglyphic system.

EGYPTOLOGY FOR THE PEOPLE

The above describes the academic side of the events. At the same time, partly involving the same people, you can see the use of hieroglyphs and Egyptian artefacts within the Freemason organisation, where the signs and forms were given mystical interpretations. At least in Scandinavia, 90 % of all antiquarians, historians and priests belonged to the Freemasonry Society, and it must have had an effect on archaeology in the 19th century.

In academia Egyptology became a discipline of its own, stimulated by the plundering of Egyptian architecture and more easily movable artefacts for private collections or public museums' displays, often organized by consuls of European nations and adventurers.

Parallel, but in a different social situation, Egyptian architecture style and wrapped and un-wrapped mummies were used as entertainment in Western Europe. Learning and ridiculing walked hand- in- hand.

BRUNIUS AND CHAMPOLLION

Turning back to Brunius, at the beginning of his rock art studies, he was influenced by the Egyptian script, as the philologist that he was. In addition, he was – as were his contemporaries – occupied with the events of the French Revolution and its continuation, and the actions of Napoleon as a general and emperor: a mighty and forceful person who could change the course of history. In the long run, Napoleon was seen as a much dangerous man, the terrible disturbances around the revolution in France were replaced by a new society, which in many ways was a remake of the old order.

Every European nation had scholars engaged in deciphering the hieroglyphs but none could present very much progress. At some point, a Swede, the orientalist Johan David Åkerblad (1763-1819), worked on the texts from the Rosetta stone on two copies, which he had obtained during his collaboration with the linguist Silvestre de Sacy. With his knowledge of Coptic Åkerblad could identify some of the names in Greek and Demotic and the signs and their corresponding sound. Åkerblad soon gave up his Egyptian studies but became famous for his discovery of a runic meandering inscription on the shoulder of the Pireus Lion, a gigantic marble sculpture, which had been moved to Venice.

Two other scholars, both Danes, one in Rome, the archaeologist Georg Zoega (1755-1809) and the bishop and church archaeologist Frederik Münter (1761-1830) were able to read Coptic texts. In Münter's case, he collected among other things, Egyptian artefacts, some of which he had built into his residence in Copenhagen. Brunius was influenced by their publications, but they probably made him sceptic.

tical that it would be easy to understand both hieroglyphs and Scandinavian rock art as related sign systems.

At the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the secretary Johan Gustaf Liljegen (1791-1837), an antiquarian and old friend of Brunius from Lund, was his co-writer on a series of travel books of prehistoric places to visit. In 1827 there was correspondence between the secretary and Jean-François Champollion himself, the latter was a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities from 1826, a time period when his results were ridiculed and rejected by many colleagues (HILDEBRAND 1937a). Having the opposite opinion was the same as being seen as an enemy on the battlefield of science and fame. The famous interpreter of the hieroglyphs was very positive to a possible relational study between the Egyptian script and the Nordic rock carvings of which he knew, as he was interested in the runes and the mythology of the ancient Nordic peoples. He even thought that the runes could be part of the development of the systems of writing. But nothing came out of this contact and both people passed away too early.

Brunius knew of this correspondence and the Academy made a decision to ask their member Professor Brunius to produce faithful documentation of the petroglyphs from his home province. The Academy does not seem to have been aware of Brunius' earlier very large and carefully made documents of the same kind (Nordbladh 2015). However, in 1838, there was a new, smaller field campaign to find more glyph sites (HILDEBRAND 1937a).

There are other possible connections to Brunius' interest, in particular Sven Hylander who was a protégé of Christian J. Thomsen in Copenhagen. He showed the Kivik grave to the famous Danish archaeological pioneer in 1820 and visited Paris and many colleagues there that same year, among them the Danish geographer Malte Brun and the orientalist Silvestre de Sacy, the supporter of the young Champollion. Hylander was also one of Brunius' fellow students, but died very early (HILDEBRAND 1937b, p. 421f).

At old age, Brunius stated that he, after undertaking a great amount of investigative work including into the legacy of Champollion, had found no close connection between Swedish rock art and the hieroglyphs. Instead, Brunius tried to force interpretation of the rock art using old Nordic mythologies, but without giving up his strong demands for correct documentation.

Does that mean that he denied the relationship between rock art and the hieroglyphs and that the claims of Egyptian connections diminished? Not really. During the following centuries, many signs of historical contact between Egypt and Scandinavia were discovered.

Some examples include:

In both areas, boats and ships were used as narrative vehicles of information; the use of wooden coffins in graves in the Scandinavian Bronze Age are faintly similarities to Egyptian burial cases;

some small miniatures in Bronze showing a sort of gymnastic dance or fight have been found in both areas;

Egyptian movable furniture in the form of wooden folding stools are also found in graves in South Scandinavia and North Germany;

the use of very light chariots of war can be seen in Scandinavian rock art panels and some metal details and in full scale from Egyptian graves and picture panels;

recently, a few blue glass beads have been discovered in Scandinavian graves, the analysis of some of them shows them to be Egyptian;

looking closer at rock art in the Nile valley and in the deserts there are panels which are quite different from the pharaonic style: simpler, "looser" compositions that more closely resemble Scandinavian depictions (Fig. 3) (WILSON 2003, p.5);

in addition, there is, for example, the temple in Taffeh, now in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden and The National Museum of Antiquities in Holland which on top of its pharaonic reliefs contains some very crude rock art figures including ships, of quite a different character than the foundation, which are totally ignored by the later carvers (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3 - Egyptian rock art from site 26, Wadi Abu Wasil, Eastern Desert. Suggested dating c. 3.500 BC. (Photo: Francis Lankester, www.eastern-desert.com)



Fig. 4 - Outside of the Temple of Taffeh, Egypt. Now in Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden. Dating of the temple is 27 BC to 14 AD.

On top of the original reliefs on the right shorter wall there is another layer of rock art, more coarse and without considering the bottom decorations. Photo © Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, NL.

The character of these documented, connected and contemporary finds in two very distant areas must be analysed further in order to understand the nature of their relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

Not only are the results of scientific work of interest. It is also vital for our understanding of these finds to find out what kind of reference work were available at what times. These works became manifold through the years and necessary choices had to be made. What did these choices represent? For the understanding of how and where writing began, the earliest civilizations, China and Egypt, were used. All writing systems were believed to have been interconnected, but of different ages.

How was the work done? Was it a combination of autopsy, documenting others and one's own production, and the use of published material? There is a tension between making your own documents and relying on those that already exist.

The questions and answers which are of current interest in the history of archaeology and rock art are far from definitely formulated and will henceforth surprise us and even scare us. At the same time we will learn more. Writing a history of research which only deals with strict archaeological matters is a self-deception both for the discipline and the people and society involved.

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