



STYLE DATING OF ROCK ART - AN OUTDATED METHOD?

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SUMMARY

In this article I have tried to show some of the basic challenges that are addressed in my PhD-thesis. This article's framework only allows a short introduction of my work and the methodical challenges within this topic. The article is intended to question the use of shoreline dating and style dating, and especially considering the combination of those two. The challenge is twofold. On the one hand we see that shoreline dating assumes that all rock art localities were shore bound, and some of the material from Central Norway seems not to be. Shorelines only give maximum dates, but the rock art could have been made any time after the panel had become dryland and were accessible. On the other side the challenge is that the concept of style has never really been defined.

A solution to these challenges is so distinguish between gestalt, type and style, which I think is representing different levels within rock art expression.

RIASSUNTO

L'autrice espone alcuni dei problemi affrontati nel corso del proprio dottorato di ricerca. L'articolo introduce i concetti chiave di un lavoro più ampio incentrandosi sui metodi di ricerca. Affronta una duplice sfida: propone la rimessa in discussione della tecnica che prevede un'analisi dell'andamento del litorale come riscontro per la datazione e riesamina il concetto di stile.

Molti siti sono legati all'andamento costiero anche se una parte del materiale della Norvegia centrale sembra non esserlo. L'uso del litorale consente solo datazioni di massima.

Dall'altro lato, il concetto di stile non è mai stato definito. L'autrice propone di distinguere fra i concetti di gestalt, tipo e stile, che rappresentano diversi livelli all'interno dell'espressione rupestre.

INTRODUCTION

My PhD-project focuses on the concept of style in rock art. Style is often seen in a time perspective. Since the beginning of the 20th century many researchers have tried to systematize the rock art of Norway (BRØGGER 1906; GJESSING 1936; HALLSTRÖM 1938; HANSEN 1904; MALMER 1981; SHETELIG 1921, 1922). As an attempt to make sense of the material, much effort has been put on classifications, typology and chronological sequences based on the rock art's style. Traditionally, the rock art in Norway is divided into two traditions; the Northern and the Southern tradition. The first is often connected to the Stone Age hunting tradition and is dominated by cervids, but you also find marine birds, whales, boats (rectangular and often without crew), some geometric figures (e.g. zigzags or fringe figures) and fishes. The Southern tradition is often seen in relation to the South-Scandinavian Bronze Age cultures and is overrepresented with large ships with lines indicating crew. Spirals, concentric ring figures, cup marks, foot prints, domestic animals as horses, are also represented.

My study area is Central Norway, where both traditions are represented. In this paper I will focus on the Northern material from Central Norway, which

constitutes the basis of my thesis. The aim is to study how style has been used in the rock art research of Central Norway. The material consists only of 552 figures from 67 panels. Of the 552 figures, 260 are cervids. The cervids therefore stand out as the largest group of motifs. The rest consists of 86 whales, 110 birds, 65 boats and 31 fish figures.

STYLE AND DATING

Using style in combination with shoreline dating, researchers developed a stylistic sequence of the Northern material which has been used in greater or lesser extent for almost a century. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a common theory that style developed from naturalistic to schematic. This was founded in an evolutionary idea that style developed in this linear way, and that the style degenerated from a primitive naturalistic and artistic expression to a schematic form; that lacked aesthetics and was reduced to something abstract and symbolic (GJESSING 1936, p. 159). Gutorm Gjessing (1936) developed a chronological sequence of the material from the Northern tradition in Central Norway. The sequence evolved from naturalistic via semi-naturalistic to schematic style;

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- Style I – Large naturalistic animals, often just contoured drawn.
- Style II – Smaller but still contoured drawn animals, less naturalistic and sometimes with internal lines (lifelines).
- Style III – Small schematic animals with internal pattern (GJESSING 1936, p. 168)

The stylistic sequence was supported with shoreline dating. In Scandinavia, since the Holocene, there has existed a land uplift after the disappearance of the ice that covered Scandinavia during the last Ice Age. This land uplift is actually still going on. The logic behind it is; the higher up in the landscape, the older the rock art. Combining these two methods is common in Norway and in other parts of the world. The challenge is that this style sequence developed in the 1930s and is not always supported by the findings in Central Norway. According to the theory, younger styles can be found at higher sea levels, but older styles should not be found at lower sea levels. There are several sites which doesn't follow the pattern, one site in Central Norway really stands out; Evenhus (Frosta municipality).

The challenge is that there is no good relying shoreline curves throughout Central Norwegian, so the datings I use are rough dating meant only to show a tendency. All these boats show great similarity (Fig. 2), but the shoreline dating is quite different. Figure A: is located 22 masl, this sea level correspond to approx. 3300 BP. Figure B which are almost identical to A, is located 30 masl, which makes it a thousand years older, approx. 4400 BP. Figure C is a bit different, but the figure show similarity in the way it is constructed. This figure are much older according to shoreline dating, it is located 22 masl, which in this area dates approx. to 5000 BP. Of course, shoreline dating only gives maximum dates. The rock art could have been made any time after the panels were available after the land uplift. But figure A from Evenhus cannot be older than 3300 BP, and I find it difficult to dismiss the similarity with figure B. This indicates that the panels not always were shore bound. This is just one example of many, and it shows that shorelines not always support the similarities or dissimilarities of the material in Central Norway. Using shorelines to support the rock art's style is therefore problematic in this region.

Kalle Sognnes (1994, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2012) has been a leading rock art researcher in Norway for many decades now, and his work is concentrated on the rock art from Central Norway. Sognnes (1994) have also questioned the style sequence from the 1930s, and finds style II particular challenging. While style I represents the large naturalistic figures and style III represents full schematism, most of the material is what Gjessing (1936, p. 168) defined as style II. These figures are less naturalistic, often smaller and with internal lines. This large group of figures shows different levels of differences. The number of Northern rock art sites has also tripled since Gjessing made the chronological style sequence, and Sognnes points out that no researcher has since questioned the chronology. Sognnes is one

of the researchers that have started doing so. He has used Gjessing's chronology in preliminary studies. Fig. 3 shows figures from the sites that Gjessing meant represented style I-III (phase I-III), Sognnes added a fourth. Sognnes has questioned whether or not these phases might represent chronological periods (SOGNNES 1994, pp. 37-39). Fig. 3 actually illustrates the challenge with the old style sequence. Several of figures representing phase II is from Evenhus, which has the youngest maximum date (shoreline) of the sites belonging to the Northern tradition in this region. Eva Lindgaard (2014) have recently presented this topic, and compared this framework of style chronology with a strait jacket. She also points out the problem with interpreting both old and new material within this old framework. Using shoreline dating, she finds an overlap between all three styles which implies that different styles don't necessarily mean difference in time. Her suggestion is to build a dating framework consisting of radiocarbon dating and shoreline dating, and that archaeological excavations at rock art panels should become a primary documentation method, alongside with documentation of the figures themselves (LINDGAARD 2013, pp. 58-60, 65). In other words she focuses on alternative dating methods, and I agree that radiocarbon dating should be used where the context can be related to the rock art panels. This isn't always straight forward. Kalle Sognnes (2014) compares radiocarbon dates from three excavated rock-shelters with rock art from Central Norway. The result indicates that the rock-shelters were used for a long time period. A challenge by dating cultural deposits/structures is that even though it apparently seems to belong to the same context as the rock art, it doesn't need to be so. The dates from one of the rock-shelter (Sandhalsen) don't support the rock art. This rock art is traditionally interpreted as belonging to the Northern tradition, but the sample taken from the bottom of the trench isn't older than 3315±75 calibrated to 1680-1510BC (TUa-937), which correspond to Scandinavian Early Bronze Age (SOGNNES 2014, pp. 47-50). This either means that the rock art is younger than previously thought, but it can also mean that the production of the rock art was made during a stay which left no datable material or cultural deposits.

STYLE MAKES NO SENSE?

What I miss about Lindgaard's (2014) conclusions, is the concept of style. When she points out the incorrect use of style in connection with the chronology, she rejects the methodical use of style. As a consequence of this, she leaves the concept of style. In my work I wanted not to follow this path because I believe style gives meaning to the material. A great challenge with the rock art research on a general basis is the lack of definition of style. As a consequence, researchers use the concept differently. Many rock art researchers also use the concept of type. Style and type are often used interchangeably and researchers do not necessarily make the same distinctions between them. This doesn't always lead to serious consequences, not if the

research's aim isn't to sort, classify or make chronology based on these concepts. I feel strongly that we need to develop a conscious awareness of these concepts, especially when they are being used as a foundation for classifications and dating.

I also believe it is necessary that we separate type and style, and treat these concepts as foundations for different methodical approaches. I define type as something that is constructed by the researcher. Types are tools used for generalization in order to classify and organize a certain material. This helps the researchers to see potential patterns. Images are sorted into types based on their construction. For example, is the animal contour drawn or made up of different parts? Therefore, types do not need to reflect chronology.

Style, however, is something else. In my definition, style is part of the rock art, and is an aspect of the image which comes from the artist. Elements which can affect style may be: the artist's choice of panel (the geology), choice of technique, composition, size of the figures, perspective, traditions (group, family, generation etc.) and the individual artist's preferences. Since style can be seen as a reflection of the artist, I believe style should be seen on an individual level. This means that different styles do not necessarily have to mean a difference in time or dating. It can reflect different artists coexisting at the same time.

This correlates to what Polly Wiessner (2009) calls emblematic and assertive style. The emblematic style refers to groups and borders between groups. Assertive style, however, refers to individual identity and expression (WIESSNER 2009, pp. 107-108). Researchers such as James R. Sackett (2009), William K. Macdonald (2009) and Stephen Plog (2009) have also worked with the same topic and how style can be an expression of both groups and individuals. In other words, style can refer to different levels. This represents the crux of the matter, how do we separate what is individual style or group style? And how can we be sure that what I see as an individual expression of style representing the artist is the same as another rock art researcher sees it? If we don't define how we interpret style it is very likely that researchers will operate on different levels of style. The consequences can be misinterpretations and chronological sequences that make no sense. As a result the rock art material will appear as meaningless. One of the challenges in my PhD-project was to make a typology of the different motifs (presented in the introduction). At first this seemed like a comprehensible task, and many figures show similarities in the way they are constructed. Studying the figures further, they started to show more dissimilarities than similarities. What separated them wasn't easy to pinpoint. As I started to group the material, I ended up with almost as many groups that there were figures, pushed to the extremes. There was a need for trying to identify what connected the figures, and if there was something similar to figures.

Michael Polanyi (1962) claims that all art forms is impossible to carry forward between different people or different generations with only some sort of a user

manual. The art must be taught. He reckons that art can be taught through a master-apprentice relationship (POLANYI 1962, p. 53). It is difficult to say if this teaching have taken place by a master giving step by step guides to an apprentice, or if the apprentice where watching a master's actions. A closer look at the material from Central Norway shows that there are some similarities in the basic structure of the motifs.

Ernest W. Adams and William Y. Adams (1991) use gestalt-theory to support typology as a method. Briefly summarized, gestalt-theory addresses our perception and how we see a picture. Wolfgang Köhler (1972) refers to that gestalt is often being used as synonym for form or shape. Perception is about creating meaning, to recognize and understand. Gestalt-factors like stimuli that are similar to each other/may be associated to each other, will affect how we organize and interpret the object/image. The overall principle behind gestalt-theory is the quest for the wholeness, how we are able to see patterns and relations (EKELAND 2004, pp. 214-216). Peter S. Wells (2012) explains our process of seeing, and how our eyes move in all directions when looking at a picture, as saccadic movements. This means that our eyes are always fixed at two points and our eyes move in quick simultaneous movements between these two points. In other words our eyes are always comparing. When we study an object, we will first recognize the external form before we see the details and internal structure (WELLS 2012, p. 20). I have transferred this theory to how we recognize rock art pictures, and find it most likely that the people that produced the rock art started with the external lines of the figure.

The typology should only answer one question. That means that you cannot explain several topics like dating, geographical variations and figurative construction at the same time. The goal for my typology is to see if there are any patterns in the way the figures are constructed. Because of this, my typology doesn't tell anything about geographical orientation or chronology. But my typology shows that there are 4-5 basic compositions (for all five motifs) which I have identified as gestalts. These gestalts can be interpreted on the basis of Polanyi's theories, as different schools or traditions of making rock art, used by different people at the same time period or passed down generations. The figures belonging to the same gestalt shows variations in different attributes. These variations I have interpreted as artistic freedom within a certain framework (gestalt). Some of these figures have similarities in attributes, and the figures are divided into different types according to absence or presence of certain attributes. My typology only shows the variation of gestalts and types, but I have identified a third individual level; style. Very few figures are made so similar that they can be interpreted to have been made by the same person. There are however, a few figures that can be seen as having the same style. These figures don't necessarily occur on the same panel as the figure under illustrates.

This illustration (Fig. 4) is an example to show how I have sorted the material. All of these boat figures

belong to gestalt B because they are all rectangular boats with two stems and internal markings. The top three figures belong to type 1; and have two vertical lines, and the three last figures belong to type 2; as they have both vertical and horizontal lines. I believe the two upper boat figures share the same style. The lines are constructed in a way that they almost seem identical. As explained in Fig. 2, these two boats (found at Evenhus V and Hammer VIII) are shoreline dated a thousand years apart. The sites are located 100 kilometers apart, but by sea the distance is reduced to 62 kilometers (Fig. 1). Both sites are located on strategic harbor areas at a passage through the fjord of Trondheim (Trondheimsfjorden). If I am correct in placing style at an individual level, it means that Hammer VIII were no longer shore bound when the figure was made, if it was made at the same time as that at Evenhus V. There are also more two more figures (4 & 5) in this example that share the same gestalt, type and style. These two figures are found at Hammer VIII as well but do not share the same type as previous example from this site. They are located right underneath each other at the same panel. Based on the fact that these two figures show the same style and the positioning on the panel, I interpret that they could have been made by the same person.

THE GENERAL TREND AND CONCLUSION

Asking in the title of this article if style dating is an outdated method, the answer has to be yes. The material from Central Norway supports that. I find both style and shoreline dating to be problematic at best, but they can also be directly misleading. This consequently will affect the interpretations. Operating with only the concept of style, it will not distinguish the different levels of expressions (individual, group or tradition). By separating gestalt, type and style, I believe these three levels can be identified and interpreted in a new context. Almost none of the 67 panels that constitute my material have figures belonging to the same type

and style. An interpretation of this can be that none of the panels were made at the same time by the same person. Almost every panel has different gestalts and types which may indicate different group traditions. Not one panel consists of figures all sharing the same style. If the figures on one panel were made at the same time, an interpretation of different styles can be that several people were involved in the production of the rock art.

The Stone Age society was characterized by mobile people where hunting (both land animals and marine) and fishing constituted a large part of the livelihood. General archaeological findings testify to a strong hunting culture where slate artifacts were attractive in Central Norway (and along Trondheimsfjorden) (ALSAKER 2005, pp. 69, 81). Before domestication the people needed to follow the food resources and maybe the rock art sites served as markers or medium for the same or between different groups of people. A medium for communication for different groups of people, but not necessarily a meeting place. The gestalts, types and style imply several visits to the same panel.

Even if the panels can be seen as one context, in fact it could consist of many different contexts involving different people belonging to different groups of tradition. In this setting, different style may reflect different artists. The few gestalts and types imply a standardization that may have been used for a long time. The teaching of the rock art could have been passed down for generations. By attempting to see style at an individual level it might be possible to get closer to the individual artist. Instead of trying to fit the material in predetermined chronological phases, we need to recognize the complexity of this rock art and the different levels of information each figure may possess.

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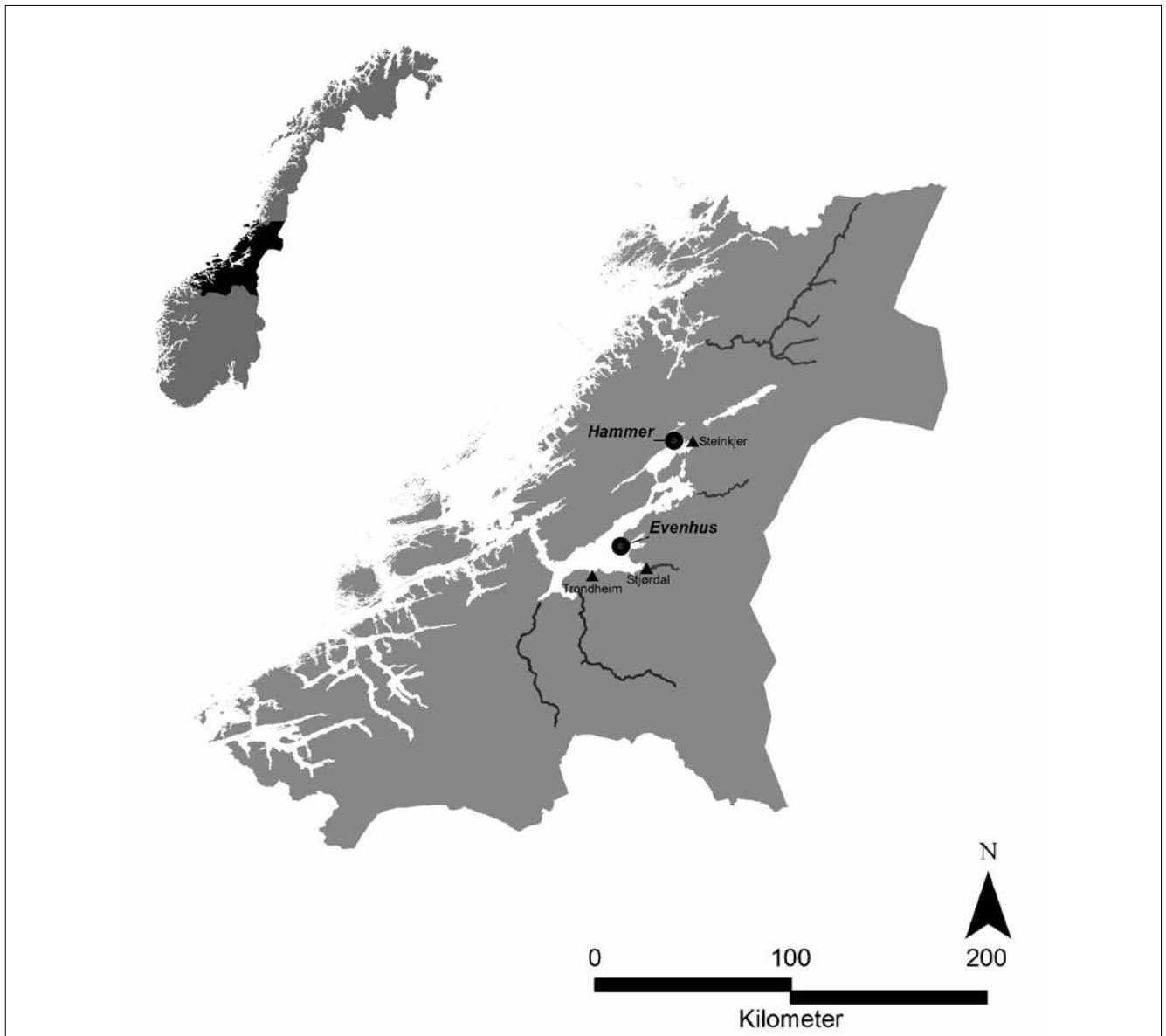


Fig. 1 - Central Norway. Illustration: Raymond Sauvage, NTNU, The Museum of Natural and Cultural History (2015).

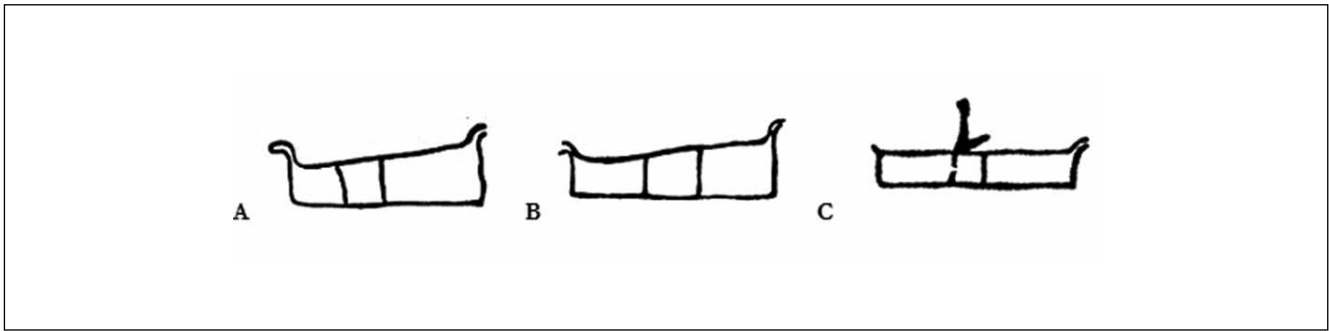


Fig. 2 - Boat figures. A: Evenhus V (Gjessing 1936), B: Hammer VIII (Bakka 1988), C: Rødøy I (Sognnes 1984).

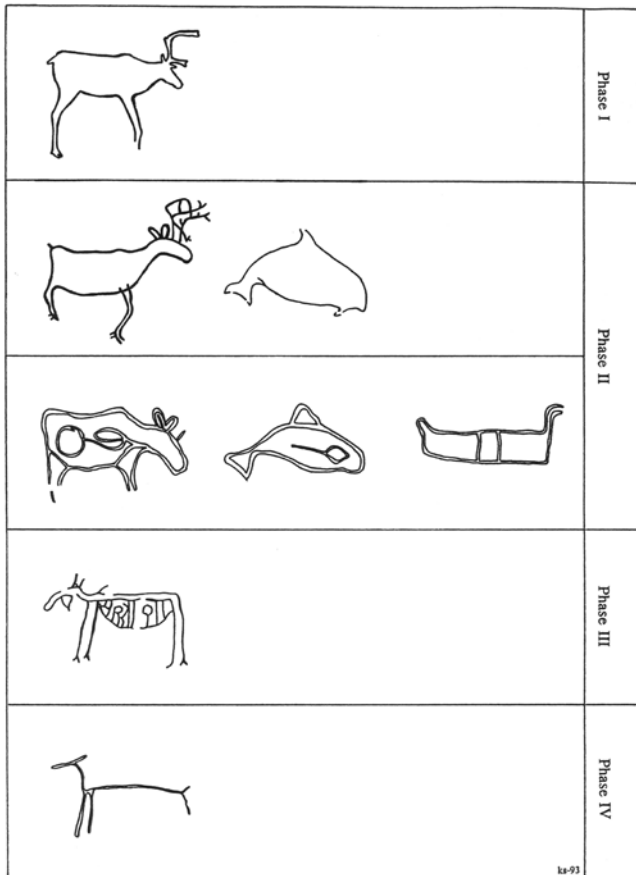


Fig. 3 - Development of style phases, made by Sognnes (1994).

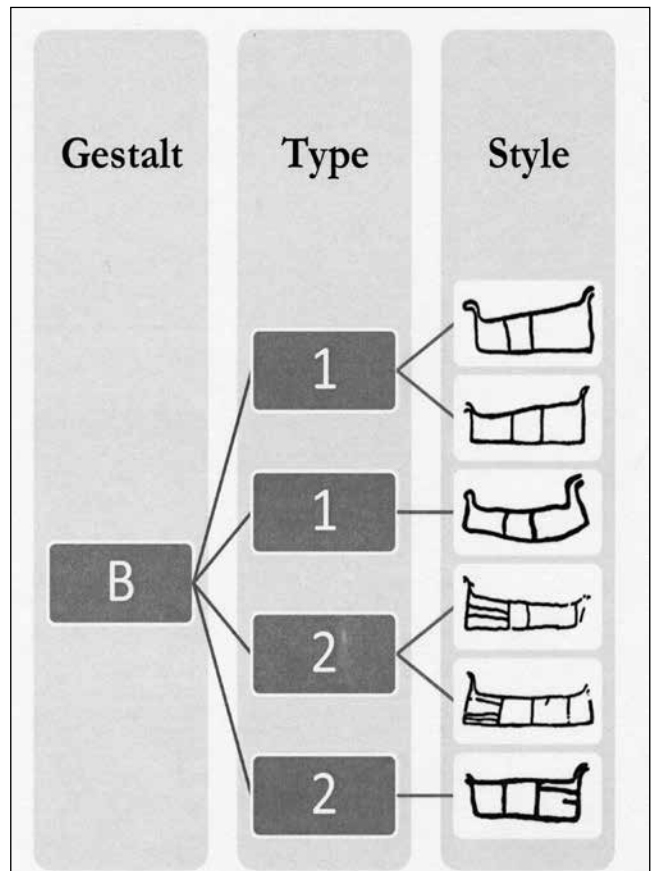


Fig. 4 - Gestalt, type and style. The six boat figures from the top: 1. Evenhus V (Gjessing 1936), 2. Hammer VIII (Bakka 1988), 3. Evenhus V (Gjessing 1936), 4. & 5. Hammer VIII (Gjessing 1936) and 6. Evenhuns V (Gjessing 1936).