



LINKING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT: THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN ROCK ART INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

Scandinavian prehistory and rock art images provide an extreme diachronic account of a now silent signifier still signifying a cultural communication more than four thousand years later. A focus is cast on the rock art of two distinct cultures in Scandinavia: Alta, Norway and Tanum, Sweden. Gadamer's thesis that all understanding is historically conditioned is brought in: 1) understanding can never be free of prejudice, and 2) understanding involves the union of the observer and the observed, leading to the "fusing of horizons." Rock art images provide a graphic understanding of how a cultural image can take on various interpretations depending on the mindset of the viewer. An interpreter of rock art or intercultural communication can easily misinterpret a message due to preconceptions. Historical consciousness allows understanding the past on its own terms and within its own horizon—not in the terms of contemporary society.

RESUME

Les images de l'art rupestre et de la préhistoire de Scandinavie fournissent un large compte-rendu diachronique d'un signifiant actuellement silencieux mais qui signifie encore une communication culturelle plus de quatre mille ans plus tard. Un focus est placé sur l'art rupestre de deux différentes cultures de la Scandinavie : Alta, Norway et Tanum, en Suède. La thèse de Gadamer qui affirme que toute compréhension est conditionnée historiquement est introduite par le fait que: 1) la compréhension ne peut jamais être libre de préjugés et 2) la compréhension implique l'union de l'observateur et de l'observé, amenant à la « fusion des horizons ». Les images de l'art rupestre offrent une compréhension graphique de comment une image culturelle peut revêtir différentes interprétations selon la mentalité de l'observateur. Un interprète de l'art rupestre ou de la communication interculturelle peut facilement mal interpréter un message à cause d'idées préconçues. La conscience historique permet de comprendre le passé avec ses propres mots et de son propre point de vue, non selon celui de la société contemporaine.

ABSTRACT

Scandinavian prehistory and rock art images provide an extreme diachronic account of a now silent signifier still representing a cultural communication more than six thousand years later. A focus is cast on rock art of two distinct cultures in Scandinavia: Alta, Norway and Tanum, Sweden. Rock art images provide a graphic understanding of how a cultural image can take on various interpretations depending on the mindset of the viewer. An interpreter of rock art or intercultural communication can easily misinterpret a message due to preconceptions. Historical consciousness allows understanding the past on its own terms and within its own horizon—not in the terms of contemporary society.

Historical consciousness, as understood by Hans Georg Gadamer's theory, allows: 1) understanding can never be free of prejudice, and 2) understanding involves the union of the observer and the observed, leading to a "fusing of horizons". Chronological time moves us forward (history), but it is historical consciousness that brings together these horizons of the past and present.

INTRODUCTION

It is believed that human history began in roughly 50,000 BC, but that history, as a culmination of recorded events and written accounts of knowledge, is in comparison, recent. It was after the last great ice age in 20,000 BC that temperatures began to rise, followed by rain, then by sudden bursts of cold weather and then drought: It is during this period of global warming that the course of history changed. Our belief is that at this time people were only moving when they needed to, and that otherwise they were content to stay within their own communities. At the same time, some cave walls in France and Portugal were being elaborately painted, and hunting weapons were being developed.

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It wasn't until around 15,000 BC that the Scandinavian landscape, as we know it today, began to evolve (Helle, 2003). According to Stephen Mithen, this became a time when man developed a mind that was imaginative, inventive, and curious about the world surrounding him (Mithen, 2003). By 5000 BC communities around the world were making a living from farming the land and fishing the seas. A similar process of gradual change of the subsistence economy took place in Scandinavia, especially in the southern areas where the climate at the beginning of the Bronze Age (3800 BC) was much like the Mediterranean today.

The Bronze Age represents an historical epoch during prehistory that was quite different culturally and socially from the times both preceding and following it. The period saw the rise of the state in the Near East and the Mediterranean around 3000 BC and ending in central and northern Europe between 1000 BC and 500 AD (Kristiansen & Larsson, 2005). It was a period of travel and trade, cultural interactions, and social formations / settlements throughout the entire region. The northward procession began around 13,000 BC with reindeer hunters following the receding ice north; the whole of Scandinavia settled at least 4000 years before the Bronze Age began (Bertilsson, 2007).

Scandinavia provides a significant area for rock art studies with its range of images from 8000 BC to the late Iron Age. Alta, Norway which lies 800 km above the Arctic Circle and Tanum in the province of Bohuslän, along the central-west coast of Sweden is both protected under the preservation guidelines set forth by UNESCO World Heritage sites. UNESCO defines a World Heritage site as "a work of man or the combined works of nature and man and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view." An important aspect of any UNESCO World Heritage site is that it belongs to all people, not just those living in the immediate area or country where the property lies. Tanum and Alta are only two rock art sites in Northern Europe to have this distinction. The carvings are preserved in situ and information is provided for visitors on the cultural background of the area along with generalized interpretations of the carvings. The World Heritage sites of Tanum, Sweden and Alta, Norway are used as examples of how historical consciousness can enhance our understanding of the images we seek to understand, document, and protect.

Rock art images that were carved as a means of communication some 6000 plus years ago are still able to provide some sort of communication to those who view it today. Depending on our interest of the image, our understanding of it is important. Historical consciousness, as laid out in Gadamer's important thesis *Truth & Method* (1975), provides us with a method for understanding the image irregardless if we come from a background in the field of archaeology, anthropology, cultural studies, documentation, or historical preservation concerns. It allows us to not just better interpret possible meanings but to intertwine the past history and culture of the carver to our own culture today. It is of importance that one understands how our understandings of the images, which we strive to interpret and protect, have changed and will continue to change, through time.

HISTORY: INTERPRETATION: UNDERSTANDING

Our own personal history guides our interpretation. The interplay of our history between past and present plays a large role in how we perceive images and make prejudgements: how we understand. The historical consciousness theory of Gadamer stating that all understanding is historically conditioned is used here to provide a window on how rock art might be able to be interpreted more objectively

The interpreter of an image (text or any similar signifying artefact) from a past culture belongs to a culture different than the image he or she is viewing; thereby as interpreter's they are conditioned by their own cultural background and hence from their own preconceptions. These preconceptions can hold prejudice. Prejudice from Gadamer's viewpoint can hold either a negative or a positive value; therefore, he feels that understanding can never be free from prejudice (ibid). Understanding always functions against a background of the past: it involves history. Historical consciousness allows the researcher to view rock art as both something that is cultural and intercultural. It also provides a method of viewing the images as extreme examples of diachronic intercultural communication: an image on a rock that was carved thousands of years ago is still able to communicate to a multinational / cultural audience today.

Understanding, is an effect of history, and hermeneutic¹ consciousness is a mode of "being" that is conscious of its own historical being: "historically effected consciousness" (Gadamer, 1975). This

1 Hermeneutics is a technical term used to describe our understanding of the nature of texts and how we interpret them.



understanding provides awareness that as an interpreter reviewing the past you have a particular “horizon”, or viewpoint, that involves a specific “preunderstanding”. Therein, our interpretations may or may not be correct since any conclusion is “historically conditioned” and is apt to change at a later time. Societies and cultures, and the passage of historical time challenge us to understand and accept the importance of past ideas while still maintaining our own cultural identity. This is no easy task. In rethinking history, Michal Pickering states that the real force of Gadamer’s conception of history as horizon is focused on the “task of learning to hear voices of historical otherness and to ‘other’ our own historicity” (Pickering, 1999).

At best, our interpretation can be authentic making it an introspective use of prejudice as a starting point. In other words, our interpretation is verifiable at least in the moment it is made, that is not to say that as we make new interpretations our previous one is lost. It becomes a layer underneath the new interpretation. The idea of prejudice being centred on the present has its basis on our interpretation of the past. Therefore, it is vital that we explore our own understanding and its relation to both the world and to the history that it involves.

Although prejudice is considered undesirable by most, Gadamer believes otherwise. His concern is if all prejudice is removed that that in itself is prejudice (Gadamer, 1975). He suggests that prejudice or prejudgements open us up to what needs to be understood, rather than closing us off from it. Due to the prejudice involved in our own understanding, whenever we try to interpret, we are involved in a dialogue that entails our own understanding of our self entwined with our understanding (prejudice) of what it is we are interpreting. Our prejudice is brought into question in the process of understanding: an encounter with another person or object changes makes our own “horizon” of understanding susceptible to change.

Historical consciousness is present when we allow ourselves to be placed within a historical horizon so that we can understand in the truest sense. The term horizon is used by Gadamer to signify awareness of the historically effected conscious. Chris Lawn explains it as “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (2006). An example is when someone speaks of the “opening up of new horizons”. From Gadamer’s point of view all understanding and interpretation occur from within a particular horizon that is determined by where we are situated and historically determined.

A fusing of horizons develops from the desire for an authentic understanding. According to Gadamer, both the text being investigated / interpreted and the interpreter have separate horizons of understanding that are historically conditioned. Fusing of the two does not take place by merely having the interpreter entering the horizon of the text: it happens when both horizons are merged together. In the following excerpt from *Truth and Method*, Gadamer describes the fusing process.

In the process of understanding there takes place a real fusing of horizons, which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously removed. We described the conscious act of this fusion as the task of the effective-historical consciousness.

Another important aspect is that the horizon of the present is not formed without the past (Linge, 1973). Horizons evolve and change: there is no such thing as a fixed horizon. Horizons change for a person who is moving, it moves with us. It makes sense then that time and temporal distances are also conditions of understanding. Gadamer states it as:

Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged, because it separates, but it is actually the supportive ground of the process in which the present is rooted. . . . In fact the important thing is to recognize the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. It is not a yawning abyss, but filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents to itself to us.

Gadamer’s philosophy on “fusing horizons” is invaluable for a researcher in rock art: a field that envelopes so much interpretation and cultural understanding. Rock art provides an example of how the researcher must place him or herself into the horizon of the past and attempt to understand and interpret the carvings from the point of view of the carver’s culture, but not as the carver himself would have seen them, for that is impossible. It provides an opportunity for researchers to be aware of their own preconceptions about the culture related to the rock art (horizon of the present), the images relative timeframe in history, their perception of the meaning of “art”, and the capabilities of the mind of the carver.

SCANDINAVIAN ROCK ART

Scandinavia provides several advantages to study rock art. First, the two sites provide an opportunity to examine images over an extended period of time. Second, both locations lie on the coast or what once was coastline. Most of the rock art in Alta lies directly on the coast, and in Tanum it has recently been shown that the water height at the time of the carvings would be much higher than the current sea level (Ling, 2008). The land use in both locations is virtually unchanged from the Bronze Age. Tanum began as a hunting-fishing area that developed into an agricultural area and still retains its agricultural past, hunting and fishing now becoming complementary subsistence activities. Alta began as a hunter-fisher area and remains a vibrant area that is connected culturally and economically to hunting and fishing, although reindeer herding has been important all since prehistoric times. And third, the sites provide the largest concentrations of rock carvings in northern Europe.

The rock art of Scandinavia goes back to 8000 BC (Milstreu, 2009). In addition to the two areas of focus, carvings are also found in other coastal areas of Norway and Sweden. In Denmark carvings can be found on the islands of Zealand and Bornholm. The rock used for the carvings in Tanum is Bohuslän granite and in Alta it is slightly re-crystallized sandstone with high quartz content. The sturdiness of the rock surface allows for many of the images to remain remarkably clear as when they were carved.

The first descriptions of Scandinavian rock art occurred in Sweden in 1627 and in Norway in 1823 (Walderhaug, 1994). In the 1900s research was focused on carvings from southern Scandinavia. Little or no research was concerned at the time with the northern carvings; in fact, despite being among the oldest known carvings in Scandinavia, the Alta carvings weren't discovered until 1972. The southern carvings provided images of human figures carrying swords, long boats with crew men, wheels, and ploughing and hunting scenes all of which created some excitement at the turn of the 19th century. Questions at that time were concerned with whether or not the art was local. In 1874, Montelius connected the boat and figures with axes to artefacts found in the British Isles (Walderhaug, 1994). Other connections were later made with the Mediterranean and the Near East. Currently, more focus is concentrated on interpretation and understanding cultural contacts (Bradley et al, 2001).

Early researchers transferred their interpretations on what they knew about modern day culture onto the rock art images. Early interpretations saw southern Scandinavian carvings being records of historical events and periods of war that came long after the carvings were made. It was thought that "the Vikings had been there" (Mandt, 1991) and that one researcher considered the boat carvings in Bohuslän to be "Germanic" (Glob, 1961). It is important to understand that it is this type of thinking that goes into prejudgments / misrepresentations. It is also important to realize that at this time few realized or would acknowledge that an early civilization was capable of such developed work; therefore, it made it more acceptable to relate the images to something that was easily understood in their own timeframe.

At the beginning of the 20th century the carvings were recognized as being associated with the cultures from the Late Mesolithic (6000-3800 BC), the Neolithic (3800-1800 BC) and Bronze Age (1800-500 BC). At the same time a distinction was found between northern and southern carvings. In the northern areas of hunter-fishers images of reindeer, elk, bears, whales, ducks, halibut, boats, human figures, hunting and fishing scenes, and some geometric patterns were found. Bertilsson emphasizes these arguments stating that the southern areas focus more on an agricultural lifestyle, characterized by depictions of boats, human figures, weapons, hands, foot-soles, feet, discs, circles, domesticated animals, agricultural equipment and net-like images are found (Bertilsson, 1987). There seems to be a distinct separation between the uses of images between the two areas, but there are other cases in Scandinavia where the images overlap north/south cultures like at Nämforsen in Ångermanland in north-central Sweden and at Bardal in Trøndelag in central Norway.

ALTA, NORWAY: LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

Alta is located far above the Arctic Circle in the Finnmark region of Norway. It lies at 69°56'49"N, 23°11'16"E. Despite its northern position above the Arctic Circle it has somewhat "temperate" weather conditions much of the year due to the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic. It is an area where the indigenous Sami mix with the native "Norwegians". Alta was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in December of 1985. The main site at Hjemmeluft is located 4 km west of the town's center.

The first carvings were found in Alta in the autumn of 1972. Many of the carvings are situated at the base of the Alta fjord, which was free of ice about 10-11,000 years ago (Anker, 1997). It has been estimated that roughly 5000 images covering 60 panels in four different areas have been identified. The



earliest carvings date back to 6200 BC with the most recent carvings dated to around 500 BC. Dating in the Alta area is based on geological dating of the rock in relation to where the height of the shoreline was during the various periods. The oldest carvings are found at a height of twenty to twenty-five meters above the current sea level, and the youngest carvings a mere eight to nine meters higher.

At the time the carvings were created northern Norway was inhabited by hunter-gathers that were thought to be descendants of the Komsa culture that expanded along the northern Norwegian coast during the Stone Age, which expanded after the glaciers receded around 8000 BC. These hunter-gathers are thought to have moved west starting from the east in Central Asia moving towards the ice free Arctic Ocean coastline, towards the White Sea, and then around the North Cape along the northern coast of Norway. The first settlement was thought to have been in the area known today as Komsa Mt. in Alta between 7000 and 4000 BC (Evers, 1993). They were later known as the Komsa culture and are thought to be the ancestors' of the current Sami.

It is believed that there was a 5000 year period where carving took place. It was a period that saw many cultural changes, including tool production, and technical advances in boat building, metal trades, and fishing techniques. In Alta there are four phases for the carvings with the last split into an A and B timeframe for the carvings (Helskog, 2005)

The Alta area had two separate cultures: coastal and inland. It is believed that both cultures came together to trade goods at the fjord: a meeting of the hunter gatherers with the hunter-fishers. It is thought that geographic location of the fjord may have been seen as a strategic point that created dominance for the coastal culture (Hood, 1998). From ethnographic information, Ingold suggests that the people in the area were "part of an environment with spirits and non-human beings with which they interacted" (Helskog, 2001). Rappaport suggests that every human society establishes a "unique culture" that consists of not only a certain understanding of the nature surrounding them, but also of "other things, many unseen" and that they are as real as the trees, water, and wildlife that surrounds them (Helskog 2001). This relationship and spirituality with the earth agrees with Helskogs' perception that the location of the Alta carvings has a special relationship with cosmology. Therefore, the populations in Alta between 4200-1800 BC are thought to have lived in an environment where everything was interwoven. Bertilsson put forth an interpretation of the early Scandinavian rock art sites as being literally located to "The End of the World" in topographically dramatic landscapes where three microcosmic elements; the earth, the sky, and the sea are distinctly present (Bertilsson, 2000).

Many of the images in Alta are animals that may signify totems. A classification for mythological ordering of human/animal relations that signify these totems has been established. An overwhelming number of the images depict reindeer in various shapes and sizes. Many contain geometrical designs within their bodies. Scenes of bear hunting appear in some of the oldest carvings with the some bears paw prints going into crevices in the rocks: possibly to hibernate. On other panels the bears can be seen traversing in between reindeer and hunters. The bear was considered to be a holy animal by the Sami, and often there would be special sacrifices made during bear hunting season to make sure the hunters would remain safe (Gaski, 2007). Many panels also include images of halibut, salmon, and whales. Halibut seemed to be the preferred fish as many of the images depict large fish at the end of a line off a very small boat. The elk is heavily depicted and is thought to have been a transitional animal or being that moved between the three parts of the world: the underworld, middle world and the upper world. This was because they could move as easily in the mountains as they could in the water (Solberg, 2007).

A second classification concerns images that show relationships between males and females, and humans and animals. Other images show social organization with collaborative bear and reindeer hunts, and crews in boats; the latter may represent trading with other Bronze Age societies (Fig. 3). Various processions on land and in boats with shaman drums and long moose headed poles may provide another classification for rituals. Panels depicting both inland and coastal images may refer to the social communication between the two different cultural settlements (Hood, 2001). Alta has two unique images: one of a man on skies and one man with what appears to be snowshoes. Both images have also been viewed in rock art in northern Russia.

There are only a few images from the late Bronze Age that show similar images to ones found in Tanum. These images are of boats with a large number of crew onboard, sole prints, and human figures with weapons very similar to those found in Tanum. Overall, the general understanding is that the images of weapons in Alta were used more for hunting and less for showing power or battle as seen in Tanum.

THE NATIVES OF ALTA: THE SÁMI

In order to understand the images of Alta it is important to understand the Sámi's cultural background and history in Norway. The Sámi are a group of people living in northern Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Finland) and Northwest Russia that number between 50- 100, 000, with the largest percentage of the population living in northern Norway. The Sámi are split into four groups according to their lifestyle and dwelling: sea Sámi, forest Sámi, mountain Sámi, and river and lake Sámi (Gaski, 2007).

There is much disagreement as to the exact time that the Sámi ethnicity originated; however, it is possible that this might have occurred as late as the last 1000 years BC (Sveen, 2001). Ancient Sámi myth talks of long migrations and that they believe in a shamanistic form of religion that was later denounced by the Christian missionaries. The migration myths speak of two-parts with one group coming from the south and one group coming from the north (Gaski, 2007). They were hunter-gatherers which have been confirmed by archaeological digs. The oldest cultural group goes back to around the birth of Christ (Hætta, 1995).

Colonization began along the coast and then moved inland along the rivers. Due to colonization the Sámi lost much of their autonomy. Groups became spread out, natural resources were exploited, and taxation increased. These things led to many having to give up their hunting societies for a more subsistence based-economy. The Sámi looked to stock farming, fishing along the rivers and in the sea, and reindeer hunting to survive. The nomadic life was becoming a thing of the past in Norway.

In his writings on Sami culture, Hætta a specialist in Sami culture, comments on the fact that Sami history has been researched and interpreted by non-Sami for non-Sami and that Norwegian history has been written down by Norwegians for Norwegians. There is no pre-history recorded for the Sámi's in any of the official historical accounts of the Nordic countries (Hætta, 1995). He also states that the information concerning the carvings in Alta is still too vague to draw accurate conclusions concerning a connection to the Sámi despite the fact that that some similar carving images appear with Sámi shaman drums and similar rock carving images are found on the drums (fig.4).

TANUM, SWEDEN

The parish of Tanum is located in the northern part of the province of Bohuslän Sweden. It lies at 58°43'0"N. and 11°19'60"E, only 30km south of Strömstad on the border with Norway and 150 km north of Göteborg. The summer nights are long and the area enjoys four defined seasons. The area today is made up of small fishing villages along the Skagerrak coast with agricultural areas inland: much as it has been for centuries.

The rock carvings in Tanum became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1994. The site encompasses 60 sq.km. of the central part of Tanum. Although there are thousands of images in the area, focus is placed on five key areas open to the public: Aspeberget, Litleby, Tegneby, Fossum, and Vitlycke, which has one panel containing 200 images across the street from the visitor centre. The rock carvings in these areas are painted a deep red allowing visitors to easily see the images. There are many other sites in the confines of the world heritage area – in total more than 400 panels that show the carvings in their natural state (unpainted), which depending on the weather and light, are often difficult to view. The oldest carvings in this area date from around 1800 BC, with the most recent believed to be from 300 BC.

The majority of figures in Tanum are of boats. Flemming Kaul, of the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen, has spent much of his life researching the boats images found in Scandinavia and developed six chronological periods: all six are represented in Tanum (c.f. Kaul, 1998). In Sweden alone there are 20,000 boats known with half of them found within the World Heritage site in Tanum (Milstreau, 2009). Johan Ling discusses the boats extensively in his recent PhD thesis that uses sea levels in the Tanum area during the bronze age to devise a dateline that compares with the one already established by Kaul (Ling, 2008, Kaul, 1998). Although, there might some obvious risks with Kaul's rather schematic typological dating of ship he has checked it himself against engravings on bronze artefacts found in graves (Bertilsson 2005). In addition, Ling's precise GPS-measures of the ships present possibilities of cross-checking. Used in combination these two very different methods have presented a new and promising avenue for more accurate dating of Scandinavian Bronze Age rock art.

Other images depict agricultural pursuits. Some of these show ploughs and are believed to date back to 1800-500 BC. Recent research states that agriculture was known in the area for a couple of thousands of years (Hygen & Bengtsson, 2000). Many cupmarks / cupules are also found. Cupmarks are considered älvkvarnar or the mill of elves in folklore tales from historical times. It is uncertain,



however if this tradition goes back to prehistoric times, although the cup-mark's tradition made its debut already in connection with the megalithic tombs raised in the Neolithic (Evers, 1994). It is also believed that the stone flour that came from the creating of cupmarks was used during the middle ages as a healing remedy, showing a possible change in how the meaning of an image changed with time. The struggles of man against man are seen in many images of men carrying or wielding weapons. It is believed that the weapons signify mans' strength versus man as a warrior. The show of weapons differs from the images in Alta that used weapons primarily for hunting

In recent years Tanum farming community has embraced the rock art panels found on their properties. Through the help of Markägarrådet (the Landowners Association) – a non-profit organization supporting the development of the World Heritage property that along with local officials developed a walking trail linking the panels through the various farm properties in the area. Nicely illustrated signs provide maps of the trail and specific information is found by every site. None of these images found on this walk are painted in order to enable the experience of one of the original qualities of the rock art that has been distorted on some of the major panels that has been opened to tourists in modern times. This is an early example of "local empowerment" initiated by the Tanum World Heritage's Council in good accordance with the modern strategies of UNESCO.

Additionally, Vitlycke museum – the official visitor's centre offers educational visits to the World Heritage site for local school children. It is felt that bringing the past to the young children will encourage them and their parents to better know the past history of the area and also to be more supportive of the sites to their local cultural and economy.

A win-win situation was also achieved with the relocation and widening of the E6 highway. The highway was originally supposed to cut through the heart of the World Heritage site; however, with much help from international organizations – ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Rock Art and UNESCO's World Heritage Centre interested parties and protective agencies in Sweden a compromise was reached and the highway is now going around most of the sites.

It is also hoped that the already existing rock art research center at Tanums Hellristningmuseum at Underslös can be expanded. Under the direction of Gerhard Milstreu and Henning Prøhl documentation seminars / field work weeks have been taking place for the last 33 years. The completed documentation from the fieldwork adds to the already existing archive of images in Scandinavia. Much of the documentation is done in conjunction with the Swedish Archive for Rock Art Research (SHFA) and Göteborg University, Sweden lead by Ulf Bertilsson. The goals of SHFA is to develop a new infrastructure for rock art research by building a new database of all documentation and other recordings – texts, maps etc. of rock art produced since 1627. An inventory of more than 50 institutional and private archives of which those in Vitlycke and Underslös museums in Tanum constitute the major ones with information on rock art has already been accomplished and constitutes one of the bases for the scanning of documentation performed simultaneously. The goal is to make the database publicly accessible by the web and the progress of the project is continuously communicated on www.shfa.se.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGES

The ultimate goal of rock art research is to come to a comprehensive understanding of what the images meant to the people who made them originally viewed them (Lewis-Williams, 1998). But how does one do that?

In the 1860's C.A. Holmboe, a Norwegian archaeologist and historian stated that he thought the rock carvings of southern Scandinavia showed religious manifestations to honor the dead. Although his contemporaries did not think much of his ideas at the time, a short time later in the 1870s a Danish archaeologist Worrssae put forward the same theory also failing to gain much support. Meanwhile, his contemporaries such as Montelius stood by his own theory that the carvings were recordings of historical events.

Once again in 1901 a Norwegian schoolteacher, A.L. Coll theorized that the carvings were religious and this time the theory gained ground among researchers. This theory is still the dominate one that is connected to carvings in southern areas of Scandinavia. Some researchers question how the carvings could be considered religious in 1900 when the idea was rebuked only 60 years earlier (D. Vogt, 1998). If one considers cosmology to be religious, then there could be a spiritual connection. But to ascertain the original carver was religious goes along the same lines as them being considered "artists" – we are placing values of modern man on early man with terminology or ideas that they more than likely could not discern.

One researcher who has sought alternatives to the theory is Jarl Nordbladh whose approach in the late 1970s and early 80s assessed that the rock carvings could be viewed as communication between people and not between people and the gods (Nordbladh, 1995). Considering the landscape and the images in Tanum and Alta, Nordbladh's semantic approach seems to make sense. By nature of discourse the carvings cannot be studied without independently considering the agents who produced the structure. In other words, how image X relates to image Y if in fact it relates at all, and if it does can image X also represent X1, X2, or X3? Additionally, can we understand X's relation to Y without looking at its context (landscape, surrounding images)?

David Lewis-Williams, a renowned researcher of the rock art found in South Africa, also believes that semantics is one of the issues that need to be considered. We have no guarantee that the carver of the image has successfully conveyed the message to the viewer. As with language itself, much is left to the encoding of the person that receives the information. So if the receiver is of a different cultural background and doesn't hold the same perspectives that the carver would have had, the message could be easily misunderstood (Lewis-Williams, 2004). Consideration should be taken to make sure that western ideology does not dominate interpretation regarding the images or their location. In cultural terminology the concern of an emic and etic point of view comes to the fore. C.M. Bloomer made the following comment on the affect that cultural influence has in forming perceptions (Bloomer, 1976):

Culture is the most prominent non-genetic influence on human perception. Other people teach you what is real: how to respond to your perceptions, and how to think about, talk about, and understand their value and significance. You learn the culturally acceptable ways to attribute meaning to your personal experience. Human infants always acquire the language in which they are reared, regardless of who or where their biological parents may be. Culture, then, constitutes a set of collectively accepted parameters for gauging the nature of things, a perceptually shared reality a world view.

It is this perception that provides a link between intercultural communication and rock art. Both are perceived from the viewpoint of the person as either the signifier or the signified. Person A may see person B and without knowing them make assumptions concerning his or her personality, Person A typically uses this in any further interpretation or communication with person B. Likewise, person B is doing the same with person A. Both act as a signifier as well as the signified.

Rock art does the same, although the rock itself is non-verbal, the image on it acts as the communicator. Therefore, the rock's image sends out a signal to person who takes in all they know about the first glimpse of the image to make an interpretation. At first glance there may be little conscious thought about its meaning, upon learning more about the period that the image was believed to have been made, the interpretation of the image may change, yet the image hasn't changed – it is only the interpretation of it that changes. Moving back to person's A and B, as they communicate the initial interpretations of each other may change. It is only from understanding the background – the history/past – the taking in the collective whole of the person or the situation that the interpretation changes. It is only through approaching rock art an authentic perspective that researchers will be able to provide the most objectivity to their desired field and leads them to incorporate historical consciousness into their research.

Another issue to consider is that interpretations change over time. As communities change and grow images acquire new meanings. Images that were important in the past may have lost significance, and vice versa, yet in a later timeframe the same image may come back and have great meaning again. It is important to point out that it is not time that changes the meanings of the images but it is people who do so.

Difficulty in interpretation also stems from the inconsistencies of the Neolithic period as the Bronze Age spanned different years around the world: what was considered the early Bronze Age in Scandinavia was the late Bronze Age in southern Europe. Additionally, past researchers have used published accounts as the gospel truth, passively pushing those interpretations on to yet another generation of researchers.

In his article 'Towards a History of Rock Art Research: the Blank Version' Nordbladh states the following:

Recently there has been an emphasis on the importance of theories. These are often opposed and the search for a winning standpoint has begun. However, no theory is good for everything as each has its properties, scope, aims and competence . . . Most theories are, after a while, used just as methods because the original thinking has been lost. Explanatory theories are introduced and old ones



abandoned in order to be in line with the 2research frontier". One consequence of this is that old theories have been re-invented due to the lack of historical consciousness. One important historical task is to trace and understand shifts of theories, to identify the core elements of the arguments, how these theoretical standpoints affect the selections made by the researchers when forming arguments and what scientific determinants are involved in the creation of databases" (Nordbladh, 2004).

Without identifying the successive traditions associated with the rock art and analyzing them individually it stands that the field will continue to create some false concepts of the origins of the carvings or paintings (Bendnarik, 2007). Many carvings are viewed only as a collection of images from one location. While this individualistic approach may be necessary locally it is also important to view the carvings from a broader collective perspective across borders. It is equally important to look at cultural artefacts that have been located close to the sites. Bednarik is not alone in his quest to find a better framework for rock art studies. Lewis-Williams also discusses the need for a method that makes sense of data all ready acquired and that methods should not be confused with materials used for dating or documentation. His concern is that there is not enough communication between researchers which creates more misinterpretations and understandings (Lewis-Williams, 2004).

Christopher Chippindale picks up on Lewis-Williams context of multifunctionality of rock art with the following comprehensive considerations (Chippindale, 1998):

Geometry of images: we recognize the image because we are familiar with its shape; we know a horse is of a relative height in relation to its four legs, and that it has a tail and a head. But how does the perspective of that image change when viewed from different angles and when placed as geometric figures?

Composition: relationship of image placement to one another (singular vs. group); similarities/dis-similarities in sizes of images

Spatial considerations: groupings of images; position of the rock surface – high, middle, or low.

Space and Time: superimposed images; positioning on rock: at what height?

Structuralism: binary pairings: Leroi-Gourhan's schema of considering binary opposition between classes of animal images as male: female.

Totems: animals representing different groups or people.

Ambiguity of images: Will image X always mean X; or can X also mean Y; or can Y also mean Y1 or Y2, or Y3 (c.f. Tilley 1998).

'Cultural-descriptive' to 'cultural historical' possible approach to a framework for rock art studies.

Current emphasis is being placed on the development of the carvings and the historical development of the cultures directly involved with them (Bendnarik, 2007). It is thought by some that archaeologists could benefit from collaboration with colleagues in art history, anthropology, semiotics, conservation sciences, geochemistry, geography, and ethnography. Bendnarik believes that rock art studies can serve to help us "understand the cognitive and intellectual world of past and present societies and ultimately . . . in determining how our species acquired its very concepts of reality" (Bendnarik, 2007).

The carvings were understood by those who carved them and for those who they were intended. It is now possible to look at the images as symbols chosen to provide specific meaning intended to illustrate or pass on a message which may have been for spiritual reasons (Hygen & Bengtsson, 2000). Other researchers agree with Ananti when he states that through rock art "we are able to collect information on the events and preoccupations of "artists", revealing which changes, which development of social, economic, cultural and political character development reflect the progression of historical passages" (Ananti, 1994).

A PLACE IN TIME: PROTECTING THE IMAGES

Considering its age, rock art has survived extremely well through the years, but with climate change effects, and its increasing popularity it is becoming more vulnerable. It is important that organizations such as UNESCO see the cultural value and continue to help protect both carvings and paintings for future generations.

Rock art is suffering more today due to natural climatic changes and other environmental changes made by man. Technological advances of modern man also pose a threat to it. As time goes on documenting the carvings becomes difficult from rocks being taken over by lichen or deterioration from age and weathering. The granite surfaces in Tanum are extremely susceptible to the latter, as small pieces of rock can be removed if documentation is not done with the utmost of care, or lichen makes images completely indiscernible. In contrast in Norway the government has mandated that

nature be allowed to follow its course, allowing many carvings to be covered by soil.

Interpretation of the images is part of the documentation process. When images are painted or traced for documentation it is difficult not to interpret the lines of the carvings/paintings somewhat different than they are. The concept that understanding involves the union of the observer and the observed, and how our own prejudices/ prejudgments can taint our understanding should be considered as part of the documentation process. Documentation has created a large resource of images while at the same time correcting and supplementing earlier documentation, and this material comprises an important source of knowledge about a time when history was told in pictures (Milstreu & Prøhl 2004).

It is important that documentation is continued and improved so sites can be preserved for future generations. Documentation today can provide a meaningful dialogue between the past and a means for researchers now and in the future to use the images to further research on the journey of man from out of Africa.

OVERVIEW

Research of rock art demands an understanding of “otherness”, a task that is not always as objective as it should be. Researchers are socialized within a society and have a horizon of understanding that derives from his or her cultural environmental background (Hætta, 1995) and this makes them susceptible to misinterpretation in understanding the communication of another culture. As a researcher or an interested viewer it is difficult to be objective; informative signs suggest meanings to us that are easy to accept as truth, even if we have little understanding of the agents involved. We have to conceptualize the society at the believed time of the carving, the landscape surrounding it, any spirituality (cultural images, i.e., totems), and the images relation to one another and to us as onlookers (discourse and findings). What evolves from this is that rock art provides a diachronic communication between the past cultures of the Stone and Metal Ages with cultures of today. Even though rock art was carved as far back as 8000 years ago, it still communicates to modern man in a way that the original carver could never have imagined.

Prehistory is also history. Both have importance for us today. As time progresses the past will become more defined. Everyday research techniques and their associated technologies (e.g. absolute age dating) are being improved. More and more links to our prehistory as humans are being uncovered. By examining and understanding more about the societies of the ancient world we learn much more about who we are today. In the present study rock art provided a method of understanding how cultural artefacts still communicate long after their maker, and they provide a means of understanding contemporary traditions from a long ago past.

History itself should not be confused with historical consciousness. History takes place through time and affects all people: it is an event in time. Historical consciousness is a person’s historical ideology. It is reflected in the mindset of an individual taking into account the persons cultural background and their own ideology in relationship to the world around them. It is only by placing ourselves within the “others” situation that we can understand it better- we need to place ourselves within the realm of the other person’s cultural traditions and heritage.

Gadamer’s concept of fusion of horizons provides a way to accept misunderstanding as part of the process of understanding through fusing horizons of the past in the present; this approach can be used in research pertaining to intercultural communication and in rock art: both individually and collectively. Knowing that one has preconceptions, and acknowledging that some are positive and some are negative, an opportunity opens up for a clearer, more open understanding of an object or of a person different from oneself. In doing so one is able to incorporate the past into the present in a moving horizon that incorporates our personal heritage and traditions in a historical horizon. It is a horizon that then enables a higher level of vision for the one who is trying to understand. This is a conscious process for the researcher and it is a process that is needed to help shed the etic persona with the following:

Researchers consider ethics: historical consciousness provides this via the concept that prejudgements (prejudice) can be both positive and negative.

Researchers consider axiology: they must understand their preconceptions: historical consciousness provides a useful means through the understanding of which preconceptions are positive and which are negative giving the researcher the means to live with them, or discard them.

Researchers need to consider the past as a subjective interpretation - just as ones own cultural interpretations.

Researchers need a historical horizon that includes personal, cultural, and historical aspects of the self and which allows for those horizons to change as the person changes: merging the past and the present.



Therefore, incorporating historical consciousness allows one to discover another's horizon making the other's ideas become intelligible without necessarily having to agree with him or her. Thinking historically provides one to come to an understanding of what has been handed down through our own histories (personal, cultural, historical) without having to agree with it or see oneself in it. This is meant to provide for a more authentic research with significantly more understanding of the self and of "others".

Research concerning intercultural communication in combination with rock art might look at how World Heritage sites integrate preservation of cultural heritage between the actual site and the local community. Additionally, from a more archaeological view, it would be interesting to survey the documentation rock art world-wide and compile a source of images for cross-referencing. Something this grand would need to start regionally and build on the surrounding areas. This would provide a change from the localized research that currently takes place, and open up more dialogue in the sharing of already documented images.

The World Heritage sites in Tanum and Alta provide a window looking at how such sites can provide a give-take relationship with the community. In Alta more research is focused on early Sami cultural influence of or from the carvings. The museum also works with educating the young children in the area with cultural days where they actively take part in learning about the first civilisations in Alta. The museum also sponsors a series of lecture/ concerts in the summer for tourists and locals. Tanum also works with educating the local school children and through the establishment of the UNESCO walk the local landowners both show their support for preserving and educating people about the carvings. Additionally, the documentation/ fieldwork seminar provided by Tanums Hellristningmuseum Underslös has been providing a means of preserving the past for future generations for 33 years.

Chronological time moves us forward (history), but it is historical consciousness that brings together the horizons of the past and the present. It is important for rock art research that we pause long enough to fuse together the horizons of the past and the present.

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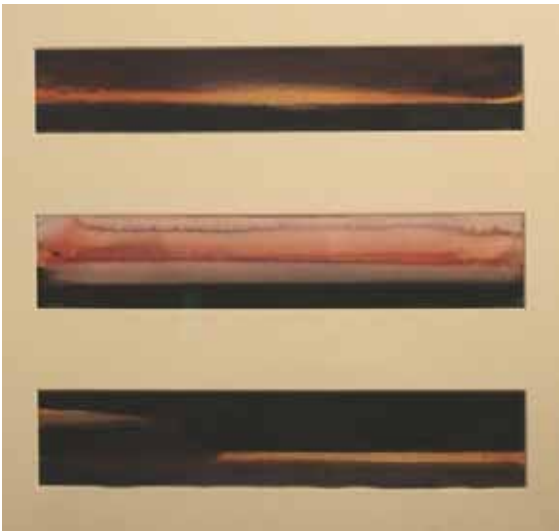


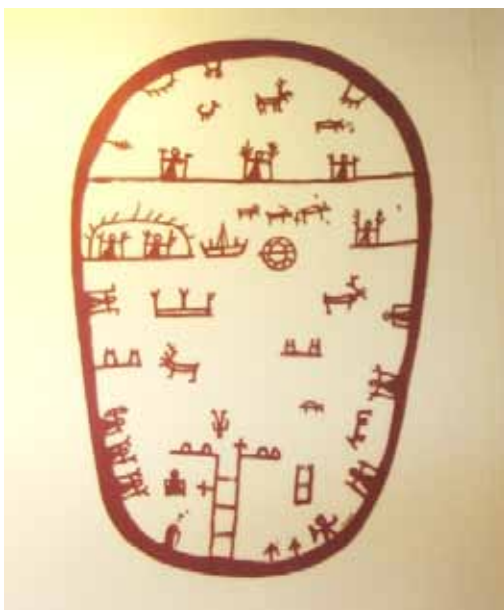
Fig 1. An artists' interpretation of the changes of the horizon from one viewpoint: "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (photo by author 2009).



Fig 2. Location of Alta, Norway above the Arctic Circle and Tanum Sweden to the south.



Fig. 3. Alta, Post 11: 4200-4200-3600 A scene of hunters both from the land and sea with images of reindeer, elk, and bears. The images may have meanings that are both individual and in connection with each other (photo by author 2007).



Figs. 4a and 4b. Alta Post 11: 4200-3600 BC. The rock art image on the left shows two people possibly holding a bird, while the person in the foreground might have a drum. If so, drums might have been used in the area up to 8000 years ago. The photo of a Sami drum from the University of Tromsø, Norway Museum on the right shows similar images as those found in the carvings including a bird like figure in the upper left. More research has to be done to truly state that the carvings were done by the ancestors of the Sami (photos by author, 2007).



Fig. 5a and 5b: Tanum, Sötetorp T-356:1 Ship images in natural light (approx. 15:00) and a frottage of the same images. The ships are ca. 900-700 BC, the lowest one currently lies just a few centimeters above the ground level(photos by author 2009; both are property of Scandinavian Society for Prehistoric Art).



Fig. 6a and 6b: An example of signage that the Landowners Association in Tanum along with local official in Tanum developed for the walking trails. At each sign post a red circle marks where you are in relation to the other points on the rock art trail . The right photo shows Ulf Bertilsson guiding vistors from Alta and Gerhard Milstreu, along with landowner Ulla Kärstrom who is cleaning a panel in Gerum with the help of her dog. (6a:photo by author 2009 property of Scandinavian Society for Prehistoric Art; 6b photo Catarina Bertilsson, 2008, SHFA).