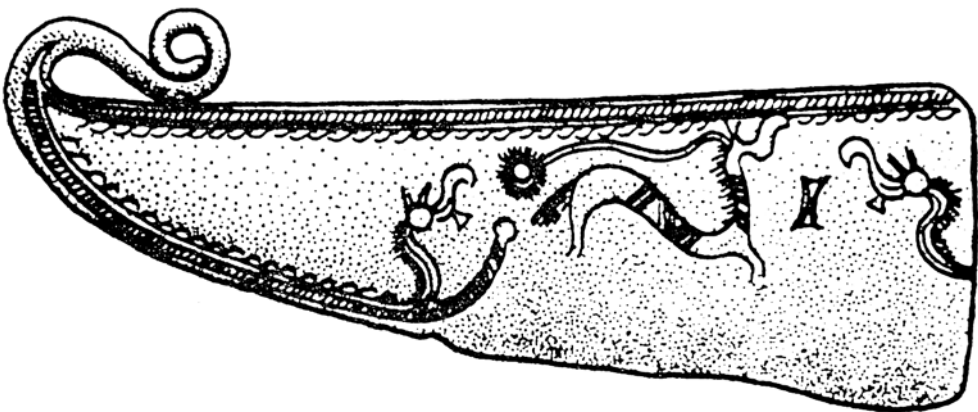


Ships with horse head stems and humans with horned "helmets", can be dated to late Bronzeage. Photo: Kaul/Milstreu.



Razor with the sunhorse. Denmark. After Aner & Kersten.

ROCK ART IN SCANDINAVIA - IMAGES AND FINDS – DATING AND INTERPRETATION – WITH COMPARISONS TO ALPINE ROCK ART

Gerhard Milstreu

SUMMARY

L'arte rupestre scandinava ha conosciuto negli ultimi 10-15 anni un'intensa attività di documentazione e ricerca.

Le ricerche portate avanti da diversi progetti in UE hanno contribuito al riconoscimento del valore delle informazioni e delle immagini, portando ad un crescente interesse riguardo l'utilizzo delle immagini come materiale di partenza alla pari di manufatti e testi, nel tentativo di acquisire una più profonda conoscenza della preistoria, in particolare dell'età del bronzo.

Le immagini sono sempre più utilizzate per capire sia gli aspetti religiosi che mondani delle società preistoriche. Un cambiamento a partire dalla ricerca tradizionale, che tende a porre su uno stesso piano di importanza immagini e oggetti nella ricerca archeologica.

Images and signs

Ships

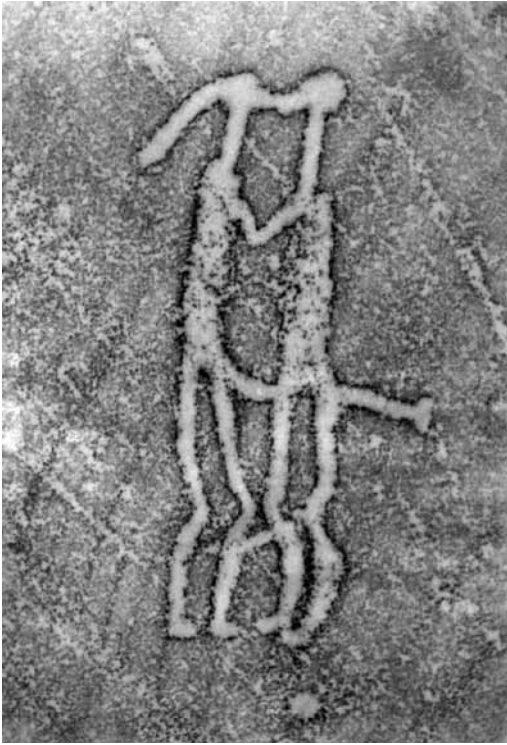
The favoured pictorial motif in Scandinavian rock carvings is the ship. Cup marks excluded, depictions of ships comprise over 25% of the Danish carvings, while the corresponding figures for Sweden and Norway are about 50% and 60% respectively. It shows the paramount interest of the engravers in the ship, something that separates them from contemporaneous carvings in the rest of Europe.

The Scandinavian ships belongs to the whole Bronze Age, 1800-500 BC and the first period of the early Iron Age and is comprised of tens of thousands of ships carved into solid rock or onto loose stones and hundreds of ships portrayed on bronze artefacts, such as razor blades. In 1996-97 a complete survey of ships depicted on bronze artefacts from the Danish Bronze Age was made, Ships on Bronzes (Flemming Kaul 1998).

Humans and animals

Animals and men comprise about 40% of the Scandinavian rock carving's repertoire. Especially the size of the humans are remarkable normally about 70-130 cm, and the tallest strongly phallic men are over 2 metres high. Humans very often are part of a composition. Unique depictions of the "sacred wedding", a scene found all over on Scandinavian rock carvings and in Valcamonica, ceremonial fights with axes, processions, ploughing scenes, hunting scenes, deers with antlers chariots: two wheeled drawn by horses and four wheeled drawn mostly by oxen, men with bow and arrow and Sodomi scenes. Women are relatively seldom seen on the rock art. They comprise about 2 % of all human representations in Scandinavia.

Other common signs in Scandinavian rock carvings are footprints, the hand with open fingers and parts of the arm, pointing to four short parallel strokes, the circle in a variety of forms, usually interpreted as sun symbols.



The "sacred wedding".Tanum. Rubbing: Gerhard Milstreu.

Excavations - Rock Art in Context

Systematic performance of excavations at rock carving sites was a high priority in the EU-project Rock Art in Northern Europe, 2002-2005 and was carried out at several panels in Scandinavia. The results are promising, and almost at any place where an excavation has been carried out interesting traces of human activity have been revealed.

For instance, the Madsebakke rock on Bornholm/Denmark, is delimited by a wooden fence, and cooking pits or fire scorched stones have been found at some of the rock carving sites.

Probably the most interesting excavation, which still is going on, are from Valcamonica. At Cemmo, Capo di Ponte, a semicircular stone wall enclosing rock carvings was excavated. The carvings are seen on the vertical faces of two large boulders. The stone wall delimiting the sacred area in front of the rock carvings, like the wooden fence at



The excavation at Madsebakke on Bornholm Plan: Palle Ø. Sørensen.

Madsebakke, Bornholm. Almost all the sites have been in use from Neolithic times, perhaps earlier, to roman iron age.

The focus: Excavations – Rock Art in Context is a contribution to the beginning change in research traditions, which tends towards seeing pictures and finds, objects, constructions etc. as equally important in archaeological research.

A fundamental problem in rock art research is that of chronological uncertainties. Rock art is extremely difficult to date, and no direct dating methods have yet proved to be satisfactory.

The pictures were made in a historical context, and have thus been coded at the moment of creation as a part of a cultural and social reality. Decoding and understanding this picture-language is not a simple process



The Fossum panel, Tanum. Photo: Gerhard Milstreu