

# **The Valcamonica symposium 2002**

**Recent perspectives on the documentation and  
presentation of rock art**

# The cave paintings of Porto Badisco

## *A prehistoric sanctuary cave from Southern Italy*

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### Abstract

Porto Badisco, on the coast of Apulia, has a deep cave with rock paintings that reveal the beliefs and ritual practices of their Neolithic makers. A research project conducted by the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici is analysing these paintings reaching some preliminary reading of their meaning.

### Context

The "Grotta dei Cervi", a cave at the shore village of Porto Badisco, near Otranto (Apulia, Italy), was discovered in 1970 and published in a book by Paolo Graziosi in 1980 (English edition 1996). Graziosi carried out a fundamental exploratory and descriptive work. However, interpretations about where, how and what was painted, remain problematic. On request of the province of Lecce and with the concession of the Superintendence of Antiquities of Apulia, a research project on this cave began in 2000.

In a peninsula on the northern side of Porto Badisco, near a docking bay of the Adriatic Sea, over 1 km of underground corridors form a deep cave with stalactites and stalagmites, natural shapes and colours of a rare beauty. The rock surfaces have been covered by Neolithic and Eneolithic paintings, belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> millennia BC. There are numerous paintings and a few engravings. According to the depictions of axes and other tools and to the findings of patterns and stone objects the site appears to have a sanctuary for about 1500 years.

From the typology of the paintings we can deduce that the cave was used by three different groups during this time. A large part of the paintings are made with guano and mud. An assemblage of figures, which form a separate typological group, is concentrated at the beginning of the central corridor. They are painted in Siena-red ochre. This group appears to include the earliest paintings. Another

group of paintings is constituted by large compositions which cover vast surfaces in corridor 3. Its typological and syntactic features distinguish it from the others and it likely includes the latest pictures of the sanctuary. Most of the other paintings seem to show a rather homogeneous conceptual pattern. They were made by different hands and presumably over a rather long period of time.

The archaeological levels near the opening of the cave contained remains of material culture, discovered during several years of excavations by the Archaeological Superintendence of Apulia and the Italian Institute of Prehistory and Protohistory in Florence (Cipriani & Magaldi 1979; Lo Porto 1976; Orofino 1970). Sporadic remains of fireplaces, small walls and other structures, fragments of ceramics, flint and bone, have been found inside the deep cave.

The environment completely isolates the visitor from the rest of the world: this factor is usually present in deep caves and it has influenced man's behaviour both in the decorated caves of the Palaeolithic and in the ritual caves still used by contemporary tribal groups in several continents. Porto Badisco cave, similarly to the almost coeval Magoura cave in Bulgaria, seems to follow the same rule.

### Connection between paintings and natural shapes

The presence of pre-existent natural shapes has often favoured the execution of graphic signs. The choice of place to execute paintings seems to be determined by the natural shapes of rock surfaces. The sinuosity of walls attracted man's hand. Walls have a history, told us by the paintings themselves. There are different markings and also some rare superimpositions which allow us to reconstruct the process of accumulation of the paintings.

Approximately in the middle of the central corridor, one of the most impressive shapes of the

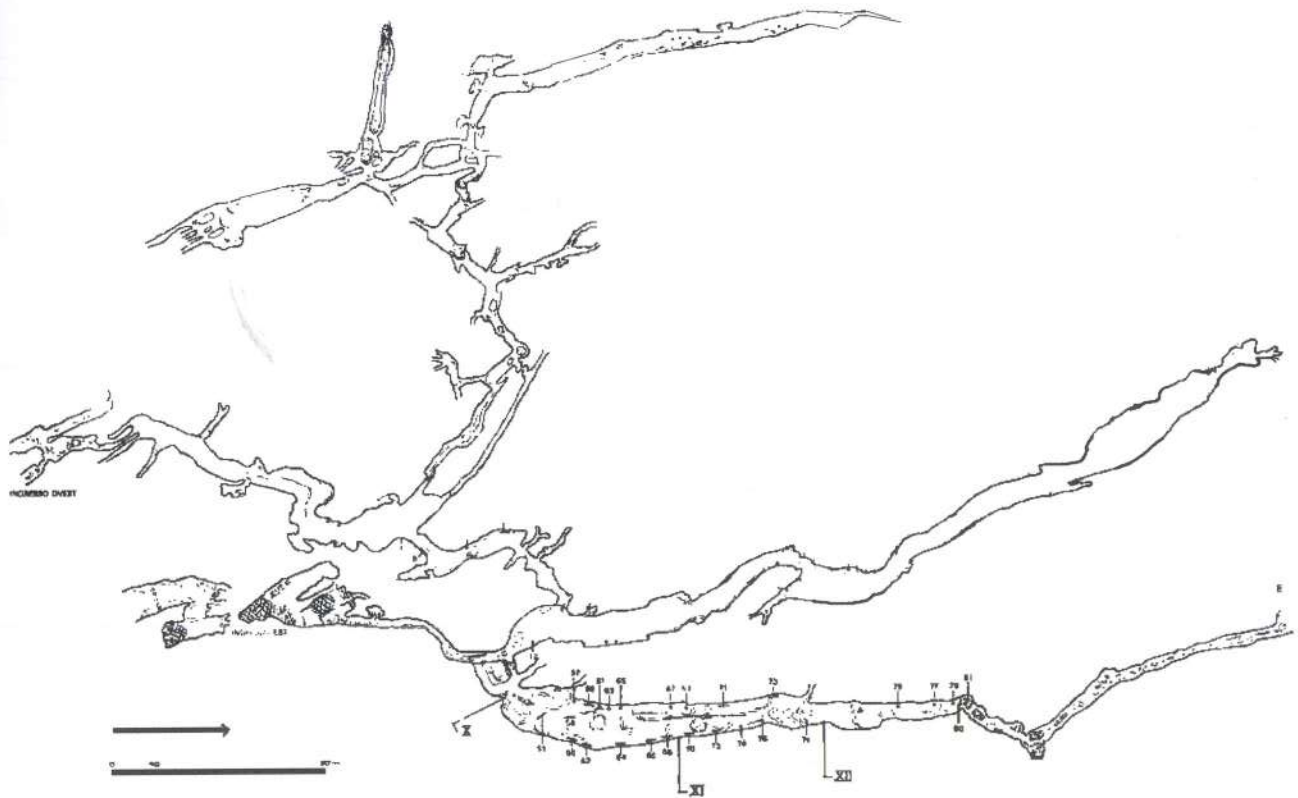
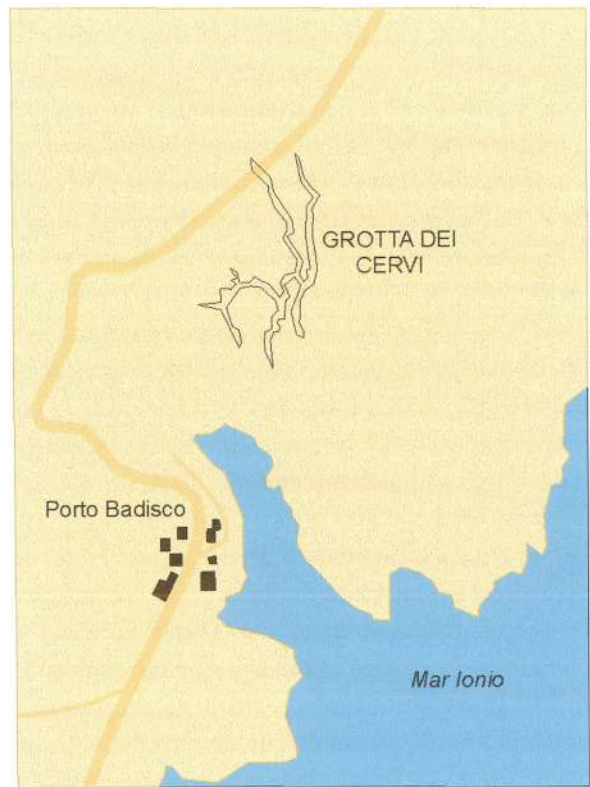


Fig. 1-2. Geographic location of the site and plan of the cave. (After Graziosi, WARA Documents Archives.)

cave is a large anthropomorphic natural form, over two metres high, surrounded by painted signs. Man's action was added to the natural shape. It has a phallic shape at the pubic area determined by a stalagmite which was intentionally broken in ancient times and is growing again. Water dripping from the ceiling keeps this phallic stalagmite wet and we can see in this instance that nature has been the source of ideas, which were then elaborated by man. It looks like a guardian-deity of a passage which goes further on, towards the main sanctuary of the cave.

From the side of the entrance, visitors must first cross a hall with ochre paintings. Then he must cross a narrow passage full of stalactites and stalagmites, before reaching this spot. The intentional removal of the calcareous encrustation of the rock surface, made by people who used the cave in ancient times, completes the outline of the large anthropomorphic figure, giving the image a realistic aspect. A sort of white "head" protuberance appears above, and below there is a light body shape with dark-coloured paintings. They are made in three different phases and display three different levels of conservation. The paintings were created in different phases but probably during the course of the same period. There are recurring ideograms, mainly rectangles with dots in the centre. Probably the most recent painting is the one considered by Graziosi to represent sexual intercourse. There are two shapes with a vague anthropomorphic aspect, with their legs apart, joined one another by a sort of 'T' shape.

In front of this anthropomorph, on the other side of the passage, there are some niches with appealing natural shapes: they are full of paintings. It was probably an important place for the prehistoric people who used this cave. The anthropomorphic image dominates a steep passage, wet because of water dripping from the ceiling, with stalagmites and stalactites. Mud makes the slope slippery and dangerous. The paintings, mainly those on the sides of the anthropomorph, were smoothed and therefore damaged by the hands leant against the wall. It seems that leaning the hands on the wall, at the foot of the anthropomorph, was a habit and perhaps a rite. No doubt, many hands have touched this spot in ancient times.

Along the corridors of the cave there are areas with concentrations of paintings and areas without any. The choice of zones to be painted seems to be largely dictated by the natural shapes of the rock surfaces which attracted man's attention. For many of

the paintings, the choice of position also involved the presence of an open location where people could stay. This lead us to consider the activities linked to the paintings and carried out by small groups of people.

The iconography is composed of signs made by different hands. We can see for example an "idol-shape" and a circle with elements which seem to be made by the same hand. Then there are other figures, among which is an anthropomorph without arms. Some other signs were added later by different hands. It seems that adult fingers alternated with thinner, younger ones. Some fingers belong to people under 15. So, we can see that small human groups visited the cave in ancient times, and they may have been composed of both adults and adolescents. So far, the tentative distinction between male and female hands has not lead to reliable data, but most of the adult handprints display bold shapes, probably belonging to males.

Each wall has a story that could reveal to us the beliefs and motivations of the people who used this cave for centuries and committed to it their messages. At first sight, some signs could seem to be easily interpreted. There are male characters with bow and arrows which are usually defined as hunters, the anthropomorphic figures suggesting a direction with their arm are defined as indicators of the direction to be followed. Sun disks or star shapes are considered to be astral symbols. The so-called "idol-shapes" are believed to represent worshipped images. Goats and deer are images considered to be the prey of the hunt. These figures are associated with others that are less clearly definable and whose meaning is not obvious. The accompanying ideograms look like words, parts of a speech which has to be deciphered and understood as a whole. The single words reach their full meaning if they are part of a sentence. Paintings show two different types of syntax: one of associations and metaphorical sequences, the other of anecdotal or descriptive scenes.

The circular shapes called "anthropomorphic collectives" by Graziosi still raise questions. They were interpreted as symbols of a clan or a tribe, where each entity corresponds to a sign, all being connected by a line which forms a circle and creates the unit. Solidarity, which emerges from the ideograms, was probably very important for the authors of these drawings. They might indicate some rules and symbolize union and brotherhood. The figures with the shape of a chessboard or a "small carpet", found also in Magoura cave in Bulgaria, on the

Chalcolithic menhir statues in the Alpine area and in other zones, probably have the same meaning. According to a comparative analysis and ethnographic parallels, it has been supposed that these figures might represent liturgical mantles belonging to the chief or to the shaman. The mantle is the symbol of authority and power and may represent the spirits and other supernatural entities.

Some elements might represent ceremonial vestments. Some others seem to depict weapons and tools such as axes, lances and shields. As among modern ethnographically recorded peoples, the spear may indicate power, the shield protection, a specific pectoral or belt may indicate the high social status and so forth. The association between them could reveal their metaphorical meaning. Other signs could be magical formulae, coded messages of occult sciences, spells, blessings and other elements of wishful thinking. Walking along these passages one feels to be faced by a secret language expressed in a mysterious pictographic writing which is ready to be deciphered.

Among the symbols and ideograms which seem to have an active function, with the apparent intention of triggering an event, waking natural forces, causing rain or making the sun shine, there are ideograms which, if we look to ethnographic analogies, seem to ascribe identity. They are probably symbols of a tribe or a clan, some sort of coat of arms or tribal marks.

Recording this rock art should provide the elements for reading the messages written in this graphic language, where the grammar and the syntax involve not only graphic signs, but also the natural shapes near them. If, as it seems, the artist wanted to convey specific messages, this was done according to the way of thinking of 5,000 years ago. The sequences of pictograms, ideograms and psychograms reveal cognitive and associative systems which are interesting not only for their historical and archaeological meaning, but also for psychological and semiotic implications. A similar associative system recurs in other monuments of the same period, such as the engravings of the Kurgan culture in the Pontic area and in Azerbaijan (Anati 2001b), or the chalcolithic menhir statues and the monumental compositions in the Alpine area (Anati 1999). Other figures, mainly spiral-shapes and maze-shapes, have Mediterranean associations, showing a recurrence of patterns from sites such as the Neolithic temples to the Maltese islands (Anati 1988; Anati & Fradkin 1988; Evans 1971).

## Cultural associations and chronological elements

The artists and the customers who used the cave of Porto Badisco did not live in the cave, which seems to have had just a cult purpose. The archaeological layers at the entrance of the cave are probably the camping remains of small groups of people who came only on particular occasions. Ethnographic parallels would suggest temporary stations for initiation groups. The village where the artists lived must have been related to the creek, a few hundred metres away, where there are fresh water pools and easy access to the sea bay. However, such a village, if it indeed existed, has not yet been identified. The entire zone was suitable for hunting, fishing and pasture. The choice of the place indicates that the sea and navigation must have played a fundamental role.

Who were the people who painted the cave? Did they originate from inland or from the coast? They obviously had their own cultural identity and their location indicates the importance of the sea for them. Thanks to typological comparisons, the paintings are included in a chronological context. Regarding the paintings made with guano, it is possible to make an analysis of the C14. But the resulting date refers to the deposit of guano, which does not necessarily correspond to the date in which it was used to make the paintings. However, it can constitute a *terminus postquem*. The C14 analysis of a fireplace gave the date of about 4,000 BC, which is likely to correspond to a late or final phase in the history of this sanctuary.

In order to define who the ancient users of the cave were, the artists who made the paintings on the walls, the material culture found in the cave may be of help; it allows us to find a temporal and cultural location for these people (Whitehouse 1969; Lo Porto 1976). But even in this case it is not always possible to demonstrate the relationship between the rock iconography and the ceramics or the flints found on the surface or in the layers. The pottery, belonging mostly to the Neolithic culture of Serra D'Alto, would indicate a chronological location in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. Among the paintings of the cave, 'S'-shaped patterns, spirals and double spirals, have analogies with vase decorations and they confer a similar temporal indication. Comparisons with patterns of the already mentioned Maltese Neolithic show that they fit, more or less, in the same horizon (Anati 1988). Beyond the remains which can be



Fig. 3. Panoramic view of the entrance to the «Grotta dei Cervi» at Porto Badisco. (WARA Archives 5800.)



Fig. 4–5. The cave is a prehistoric sanctuary, an appealing environment where natural shapes inspired man. (WARA Archives W05617; W05792.)



referred to the Serra D'Alto culture, pottery fragments from the Diana culture of the Late Neolithic have been found in the cave. There are also sporadic Eneolithic elements which may be attributed to a period just after Serra D'Alto. The material culture therefore confirms that the cave was used for a long time during the Neolithic, but also just afterwards, in the Eneolithic.

A puzzling finding concerns patterned engravings on a few surfaces inside the cave which show assemblages of lines and patterns quite different from those of the paintings. They might well be the work of hunter-gatherers earlier than the Neolithic. How was the first painting in the cave created? How did the first visit of man happen? How did this prehistoric sanctuary come into existence? At the moment, these questions are still open.

## The search for meaning

As mentioned already, natural shapes and colours on rock surfaces played a fundamental role in the choice of surface to paint. In fact, the first paintings look like completions and interpretations of the natural contours of the rock surfaces. Starting from these primary units, the images have multiplied, spreading to the various corridors and halls of the cave.

In the main, central corridor there is a curious recurrence of paintings being re-done. Additions of lines or signs, which were drawn by different hands, to the "circles of social aggregation", occur often. If we carefully observe these paintings, we realize that they are not random signs: nothing is occasional. Each mark was made on purpose and in a deliberate way, and must have a precise meaning. Even the occurrence of 'spots' is not random: they were made using the thumb along an intentionally irregular ovoid form, one being large and the other seven being small. The aim is likely to have been that of communicating information, using ideograms. We could call it an ideographic "writing" and, like any other writing, it ought to be deciphered.

This cave constitutes an emblematic case. Here the archaeologist must face coded messages. What are we to do with them? The great challenges of archaeology are not only discovery and description but, above all, comprehension. Numerous rock pictures, pottery shards and flint implements have been discovered, drawn, photographed and described for two generations and everything is registered and stored. What is

the aim of all that? It is time to step further, from description to interpretation, reading and comprehension of the messages. This is also the challenge for the cultures of tomorrow.

On the walls of the cave there are figures that are defined as "idol-shapes", an ambiguous term referring to images with a vague anthropomorphic aspect. They also occur in other contexts of rock art including the Neolithic and Eneolithic megalithic art in various parts of Europe. Among the rock engravings of Valcamonica there are similar figures whose meaning we do not know exactly, but which are called "idol-shapes" by common consent (Anati 1990). They can be found in the Atlantic megalithic art of the Iberian Peninsula, Britain and Ireland, and in other areas, as far as the opposite corner of the Continent, in Azerbaijan. How far do the graphic similarities mirror conceptual analogies? These "idol-shapes" have a vague anthropomorphic look, but they are not anthropomorphs. What was their function?

In Porto Badisco Cave, as in Magoura Cave in Bulgaria, there are groups of figures that have been defined as "hunting scenes" (Anati 1971). Wild goats are faced by anthropomorphic figures holding bows and arrows. In an assemblage where the most common syntactic forms are associations of graphic signs and sequences, these rare scenes, which seem to have a descriptive and anecdotal nature, appear at first as expressions of a rationalistic pragmatism different from most of the images. But there are "hunting scenes" with four-horned goats, whether they are metaphoric or real animals. Is it a real hunting or a hunt for something that corresponds to the idea of a four-horned goat? Such pictures might reflect concepts similar to those used today by some tribal populations. For example, the Bedouins of Sinai say "I hunted a gazelle", meaning that they have seduced a girl. In Apulia "He had a good hunt" means he was lucky.

The artist took some natural spots into consideration. Apparently, such spots were important for him. They are ferruginous spots, darker than the surrounding rock surface and the prehistoric artist painted around them, as if the natural shapes were part of the context or the paintings were connected to these shapes. Graphic signs must be deciphered in their context.

The descent into the cave is a voyage into a world that is different from common human habitat. The cave is a world with no natural light, with peculiar

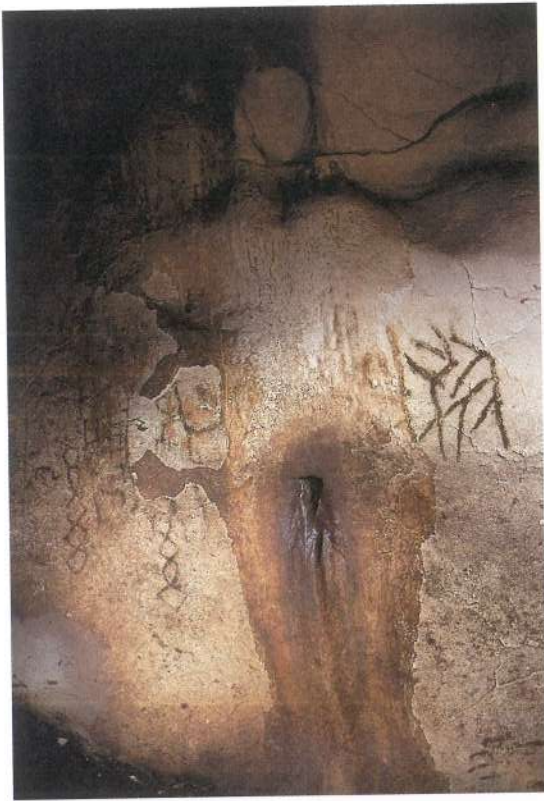


Fig. 6. The so-called «spirit» is a natural shape of the rock which looks like a human body, over 2 m high. The intentional removal of the calcareous encrustation completes the outline of the figure, forming the lower limbs. A stalagmite, which was broken during Prehistory, can be seen as the male sexual organ. Water dropping down from the ceiling makes it wet all the time. Around this evocative shape, man has left the traces of his artistic creation. (WARA Archives W05112, W05114.)



Fig. 7. The painted panel to the right of the passage is 5,5 m wide. Among the figures, we can notice cross-shaped symbols, often recurring in Porto Badisco, schematic archers, quadrupeds and abstract, complex, «arabesque-shaped» figures. (WARA Archives W05119.)

Fig. 8. Detail from the previous picture. In the middle, there is a large «arabesque-shaped» figure, surrounded by anthropomorphs and cross-shapes. (WARA Archives W05106.)







Fig. 9 a-b. Cross-shapes, spiral-shapes, «arabesques» and schematized vulva symbols seem to be associated in the composition of complex messages. (WARA Archives W05619; W05620.)



Fig. 10 a-b. A composition with a sort of lizard in the middle, with two radiate disks and other signs on the sides. The panel looks like the explanatory sketches of a school blackboard. (WARA Archives W05621, W05622.)



Fig. 11. Black painting of a figure with a crest composed of seven signs. (WARA Archives W5470.)

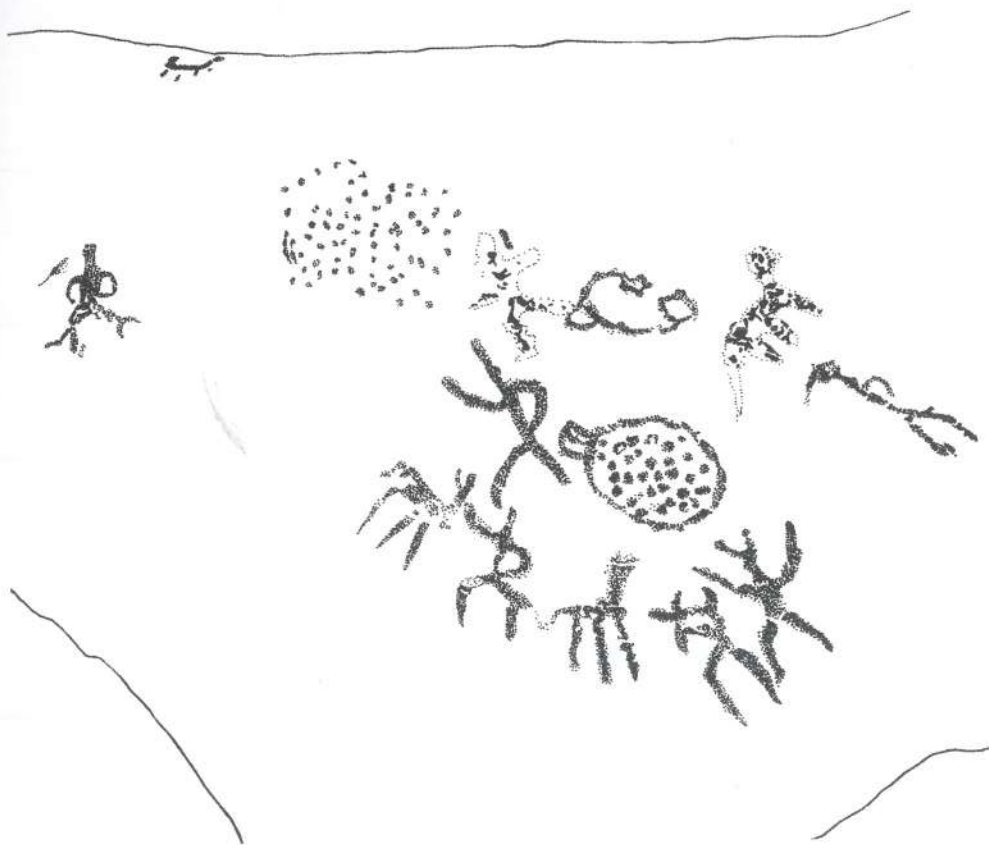


Fig. 12. Men and animals constitute the main subject in the figurative pictures of Porto Badisco. These two subjects can be found isolated but they generally compose hunting scenes. This is the most complex group among the pictures in red and it is the best preserved one. We can notice a larger concentration of figures on the right side: there are six anthropomorphs and three figures of animals. A man is represented while he holds the bow and he is going to shoot an arrow against a wild goat. A group of points appears above on the left.

that one of the cave's purposes concerned initiation. Handprints, in many cases of initiation sites, indicate that the young people who were being initiated accepted life roles, laws and rules, and embraced being an active component of society. Handprints are their signature. In Africa, America and Australia there are still tribes who practise this rite as a conclusion to the initiation process. From the paintings of Palaeolithic caves, to the secret places for the initiation of young people of the Iranga tribe in Tanzania, to the initiation shelters in the Arnhem Land in Australia, this custom seems to be widely spread. Ethnographic parallels show caves where the candidates went, together with their instructor, frequently a shaman, for meditation and for receiving the education they needed to become adults. In some cases they remained isolated from the rest of the world for weeks of initiation rites.

This intense concentration of handprints is a particularly impressive aspect of the cave. How revealing would it be if the voices, fears and thoughts, along with the handprints of these young people, had survived? The problem is that we still cannot fully understand the messages they left to us. Looking at these paintings, we wonder what else they made which left no traces. And what other traces are there, besides the rock art, which have not yet been found?

This preliminary analysis demonstrates that the initiation practices were among the main activities carried out in the cave. However, not all the images regard initiation, only some of them appear to have been intended for teaching and education. The main keepers of the cave were probably the shamans, who used it not only for initiation rites, but also for other practices, trying to communicate with the supernatural world, reading the messages, sometimes complicated, which were suggested by the natural shapes of the rock surfaces.

## Conclusion

After a long stay in the cave, one returns to the light of day and finds oneself in front of the sea. Porto Badisco's little natural harbour has some fishing boats. From a distance, their shape should not be too different from that of the Neolithic pirogues that may have been there when the cave was in use. When coming out of the occult world of "Grotta dei Cervi" we realize how much light there is in the darkness

when man visits it. After spending many hours for several days in the cave and going through its passages many times, one feels that there are places that were particularly meaningful for their ancient users, where they produced the main concentrations of paintings.

To our mind, the most appealing point of the cave is the "spirit", which is not a picture made by man, but a group of natural shapes completed and enriched by man's marks. The other dramatic place is that with over one hundred adolescents' handprints, likely to be early evidence of "matriculation exams".

The ancient users of Porto Badisco probably looked for the meaning of natural shapes, like other tribes on Earth. The shapes, endowed with specific meanings, often mirrored the spirits will to show themselves with metaphors and allegories that had to be read and understood.

One can only imagine the kind of rites that may have been practised in front of the "spirit" of fertility and eroticism, which comes out of the rock and whose penis-stalagmite is always wet. The removal of the phallic stalagmite does not seem to be recent. The stalagmite is growing again thanks to the water dropping down from the ceiling, so the breakage could be dated to Prehistory, when the cave was used for ritual purposes. This penis-stalagmite was circumcised or simply cut? This might have been a ritual practice, a castration of the spirit, or just the contrary: a way to enhance its virility. Whatever the case may be, one cannot avoid asking oneself: what happened in this space?

This monumental passage of the cave also shows the vulnerability of rock art. Some paintings are covered with calcareous encrustation. Some of them, the most ancient ones, are faded. Recent splashes of mud, caused by walking in puddles and mud, reach the paintings. There is also a hand print, probably not intentional, that is not prehistoric and not for ritual purposes, but merely because a hand, dirty with mud, looked for a support in the slippery passage!

Before arriving at the large hall in the final part of the main gallery going deep into the earth, the visitor meets the "ghost", which looks shocking even today. After the muddy descent, one has to crawl along a narrow, tight, snaky and difficult passage before joining the main concentrations of prehistoric paintings. The twisted but harmonious shapes of walls, corridors and stalagmites are the body which men covered with tattoos, looking for the most suitable corners and shapes for delivering their

messages. After crawling, slipping into the mud in front of the erotic spirit-guardian, after visiting the corridors and the halls covered with puzzling signs, the visitor gets to the point where some young people, over 5,000 years ago, left their handprints, as an eternal memory of the experiences they lived in this cave, the culture, the rites and ceremonies. The fears and the questions marked on the walls are still waiting to be understood. The itinerary in the cave appears as a test leading to initiation, even for people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paintings of this immense, dark, natural underground museum raise many questions for which we cannot as yet provide answers.

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# British rock art

STAN BECKENSALL

Every year, the study of British rock art intensifies as more researchers enter the field and as official bodies organise themselves to deal with its recording, preservation and display. Most of the country has been covered in some detail and published, a good basis for further work, with investigation pursuing rock art in the landscape, in monuments and as portables. This paper gives a summary of some of that work. The next step is further research through excavation and a universal system of recording.

I was asked at a university seminar at the end of a talk that I gave on Prehistoric Rock Art in Britain why, although I obviously loved the motifs and places where they were found, and was fascinated by them, I was very reluctant to let myself speculate more about the people who made them and what the symbols might have meant. My reply was that as an archaeologist I had to keep an intellectual detachment and only make statements that I could prove. If I wished to speculate, I did so in poetry and drama. My answer is still the same, for although a great deal of speculation is floating around about drug-induced states of trance, entoptic imagery, shamanic practices, alternative archaeology, paganism and more, no matter what standpoint you take, you really have to be confident that you can prove your point. I am unmoved by reviews that imply that I should be dealing with these matters. Quite simply, I prefer to spend my valuable time on what I do best: recording accurately and making sense of the distribution of rock motifs in Britain. This has involved me in producing more work in this than any other person in Britain. If theorists (some of whom seldom go into the field to look at and for rock art) want to use my discoveries, that is fine by me. But the hard-graft work of recording, time-consuming and involving great distances, has made it possible for others to speculate. It is not possible to appreciate rock art without doing work of this kind, as it has to be experienced in the field. Try making a highly accurate drawing without the use of a laser scanner, for example!

British rock art is almost entirely abstract. Interpreting symbols and motifs from the deep past is a dangerous business, as people tend to project *themselves* into it. What often arises is their problems, beliefs and aspirations. That is not necessarily what they meant to the people who made them. Ronald Morris, a solicitor and rock art specialist, teased out 104 explanations of the markings from various sources and gave them marks out of ten! Do read them.

My interest in rock art began about 30 years ago in an encounter with the great panel of rock art on Old Bewick Hill in Northumberland after I had spent two years teaching in Malta and incidentally considering rock art there. It was not exactly the road to Damascus, but it did begin a kind of missionary zeal to find out more and to share such places with other people. So why the reticence? It is the discrepancy between what we know and what we do not know, and an awareness that some things we shall never know that should protect us from making rash statements. I hope that I have learnt this lesson, for all our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance.



Fig. 1. A pristine motif that shows all the pick marks in its making. The motif was hammered onto the rock after a decorated panel had been removed above it in prehistoric times. North Plantation, Fowberry, Northumberland.

About 5,000 years ago, perhaps for a period of over 1,000 years, people hammered symbols onto rock surfaces with a hard stone pick that was harder than the receiving rock. It was only about 200 years ago that people became aware of the markings, and the term that they used has stuck: *cups and rings*. It is a good description in many ways, although it excludes linear grooves. And *cups*, the most common element in all rock art, small shallow circular depressions in the rock, sounds much better than *cupules*, which sounds like some ugly swelling on the body. We call the arrangement of symbols and motifs into panels *Rock Art*, although much of what we see may not be aesthetically evocative. However, the term suffices.

From such simple beginnings as a cup and groove, people who chipped their patterns were familiar with many common motifs, but others expressed some individuality. If you like, they shared the same language, but some were more articulate than others. Rosettes, radiates, multiple concentric rings, crowded motifs and well-spaced motifs are just a few variations on the theme. Spirals are much rarer. What is really stunning in all British rock art is there are no pictures of animals, people or human activity. It occurs in the open air, in the landscape, facing the sky, it appears on some standing stones, in some rock shelters in Northumberland, and in burials. These are the contexts that I use to classify the places of their discovery.

## Open air rock art

Some motifs cannot be seen until you are almost on top of them, as many are on near-horizontal surfaces flush with the ground, and prehistoric people must have known where to look for them in the landscape. We can sometimes predict where we might look for 'new' ones. Their locations may coincide with strikingly visible natural features, such as cliffs, but they don't give themselves away easily. And who knows what message they conveyed to which group of prehistoric people? Some of the rock surfaces are large, like those at Achnabreck in Argyll (RCAHMS 1988), and some are small pieces of earthfast rock carried by ice, such as those on Barningham Moor, Co. Durham (Beckensall & Laurie 1998). Open-air motifs blend sympathetically with the landscape, and use surface irregularities on the rock in their design. The spacing of motifs on the surface is important, for

they may be widely separated, linked very closely, run into each other, cover the surface or leave unmarked patches and borders. It is rare to find evidence of superimposition, which would help to hint at some sort of chronology.

There is a way of looking at the designs, for no matter what features of the landscape the sites may overlook, the people who made the designs used the slope of the rock, cracks, and natural indentations to create a design which is meant to be viewed from the bottom of the slope.

There is now a considerable amount of information about all these open-air rocks, and the positioning of the motifs on those chosen for this special treatment. From regional surveys in England and Scotland we can imagine a landscape 4,000–5,000 years ago in areas that had rock art in an almost pristine wilderness. Some changes had been made: a clearing, a well-defined path, signs of a camp, or a burnt area where vegetation could regenerate. In marginal areas like these there is evidence that the earlier Mesolithic hunters and gatherers chose the same areas for their camps and blade making as the motif-makers. This stands out particularly clearly in County Durham (Beckensall & Laurie). Agriculture brought with it a more static society based on farms and land enclosures, but hunting and herding continued to play a big part in their economy.

We tend to separate secular and ritual activity in modern society, but the distinction may not have applied to earlier societies. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that motifs may mark special places in the landscape that are relevant to hunting areas, and that the same motifs are put into graves and on standing stones. Their use reflects a different way of thinking about them.

In some ways decorated panels enhance the landscape. Unlike what was around them, they were organised, compact, spread over rocks specially chosen for the purpose, and an encounter with some of them would have been very impressive. However, leaves and other things would have covered some of them in a short time, and for their use to be anything more than temporary, one has to assume that the surfaces were kept clean. Were there prehistoric caretakers? Perhaps the paths to them were so well used that this became an automatic process. We don't know. Assuming that they could have been put there in a period that might amount to over a thousand years it makes the process even more difficult to understand!



Interest in motifs has not sufficiently taken into account the details of their setting. That many panels of rock art are at prominent viewpoints has been recognised, but it is only recently through the work of Richard Bradley and his Reading University students that an attempt has been made to place this within a coherent statistical framework. What distances can be seen from marked rocks, in what directions, and how far away do you have to be before you can see the marked rocks? Is there a reason why some rocks were chosen for marking and not others? This involves taking a sample of all outcrop rocks in the area and comparing them. Are the sites of marked rocks inter-visible? All these data are there for the taking. Is there any rule that determines where different designs are sited? For example, are complex designs (with many concentric circles) in different places in the

landscape from simple patterns (such as cups or single rings)? If so, as motifs are a means of communication, are they designed for different audiences?

Such work has involved dividing a landscape into grids that include marked and unmarked rocks, measuring distances from rocks and the angle of sight, and making sense of the results. It was done on many sites in different regions in Britain, and took into account information already available. One interesting part of the research programme was to set down the students in a limited area of known rock art to see if they could predict where the markings might be. They were able to do so quite accurately.

Although all regions where there is rock art must be seen as different, Richard Bradley has put forward a number of common factors. He suggests that where

there are monuments, the rock art leads to them in a carefully constructed way, with the complex motifs at the highest parts. Simple motifs tend to be lower down on the margins, where local people went about their daily business, and he thinks that the complex motifs are therefore addressed to people coming from some distance to the monument sites. His landscape surveys show that the complex motifs are often at “entrances” in the natural terrain, and are reached by a sequence of others. He sees “thresholds”, which may have conspicuous rocks or rock outcrops overlooking the river valleys, at places where valleys run into an area of ritual.

This ‘logic’ of distribution seems to work in an area like Tayside, where the most elaborate panels are higher up than those with just cupmarks. A panel newly discovered by the Scottish Royal Commission (Fig. 2); it is clearly a work of art and at a dominant



Fig. 2. A complex design built up over time, discovered by the RCAHMS on a panel at over 400 m above Loch Tay.



Fig. 3. Achnabreck, Argyll.

viewpoint over the loch and its valley below. But we must not regard only those panels with multiple concentric circles as 'complex', for cup marks and grooves can produce complex patterns without them. Another point is that there are panels with simple cups in the same area as the complex images. In the Kilmartin area of Argyll, Paul and Barbara Brown have found five panels of 'simple' art in a valley above the main valley with its rich monuments, and leading to them, as high as those at Achnabreck (Fig. 3).

As Britain has thousands of marked rocks, I have chosen just a few examples to show how the markings relate to the landscape. This selection is necessary to represent the kind of study that has already included most known concentrations of rock art such as Argyll, Galloway, Strath Tay, Cumbria, Northumberland, West and North Yorkshire, County Durham, the Peak District, East Yorkshire and Cleveland. The latest publication has again been produced by non-professional archaeologists (i.e. those who do it out of interest, in their own free time and at their own expense). Dr Keith Boughey and Edward Vickerman have just

published *Prehistoric Rock Art of the West Riding*, the result of many people's work over many years, bringing the number of recorded rocks in that area to over 640. Add that to the 870 or so in Northumberland, and you will see what thorough work has been going on in Britain, and how its recording has been published to a high standard.

Cumbria has provided us with some of our most recent and spectacular discoveries of rock art in the landscape. All these are published except one



Fig. 4. A very important recent discovery in the Langdale valley. Chapel Stile, Cumbria.

(Beckensall 2002). In the Langdale valley a massive block of Andesite tuff that had broken away in geological times from the mountain was covered on its flat eastern face with motifs that would fit happily into an Irish passage grave (Fig. 4). The motifs are crowded, some are unusual, some may have been put on the rock at different times (even recently), but what is so fascinating is that this valley links the famous Langdale Neolithic axe quarries with Lake Windermere. Here we have an important valley route marked with a large art panel. At Ullswater in the heart of the Lakes another group of panels came to light recently, covered with cups and linear grooves – again an important route for anyone wanting to access the rich valley food supplies of lake and marsh. Cumbria also has some significant rock art incorporated in its stone circles and cairns, notably at Long Meg and her Daughters. A new site has now been found in another valley, at Crummock Water (forthcoming).

## North Northumberland

Open-air rock art in Northumberland has a wide distribution and follows an interesting pattern. In the Wooler area, where the River Till flows towards the

Tweed along a flat plain consisting of sediments laid down by a large glacial lake, the plain is reached through gaps in the sandstone scarps to the south and east. The River Glen flows in from the west past the Cheviots, which are composed of igneous rocks. The Till begins its life as the River Breamish, rising in the Cheviots, down the Ingram valley, flowing north past sandstone ridges on either side, which include major rock art sites. The river makes a right-angled bend to break through the sandstone to enter the Milfield Plain. Recently the plain has been shown not only to contain Saxon buildings, but henges, cemeteries, linear ditches and pit alignments of the prehistoric period.

One area will illustrate how the siting of rock art works. One of the “entrances” to the Milfield Plain is along the valley of the Broomridgedean Burn. It has cut into the sandstone, and is flanked by a steep sandstone scarp known as Broomridge, which has panels of rock art, four figures of deer, early Bronze Age/Late Neolithic burials under a rock overhang on Goatscrag Hill, evidence of destroyed burial cairns at the other end, and the largest outcrop of marked rock in England, at Roughting Linn.

The ridge has its own distinctive natural focal point in outcrops of sandstone that are eroded into dramatic shapes visible for many kilometres, and

they lie below that part of the ridge from which burials were cleared away for recent agriculture. The survival rate of rock has been affected by the use of some outcrops for the quarrying of millstones, some of which, in various states of removal, are still visible. Surface traces in the thin soils have been disturbed by rig and furrow ploughing. The ridge has marked outcrops that overlook the Broomridgedean Burn valley, with its access to the Milfield plain via a sunken lane, and the other side has views of the North Sea and Ford Moss.

The map (Fig. 5) gives the locations of the rock art panels and other related features on the edge of the Milfield Plain. From west to east, at Broomridge, there are three panels of rock art on outcrop. To the east of

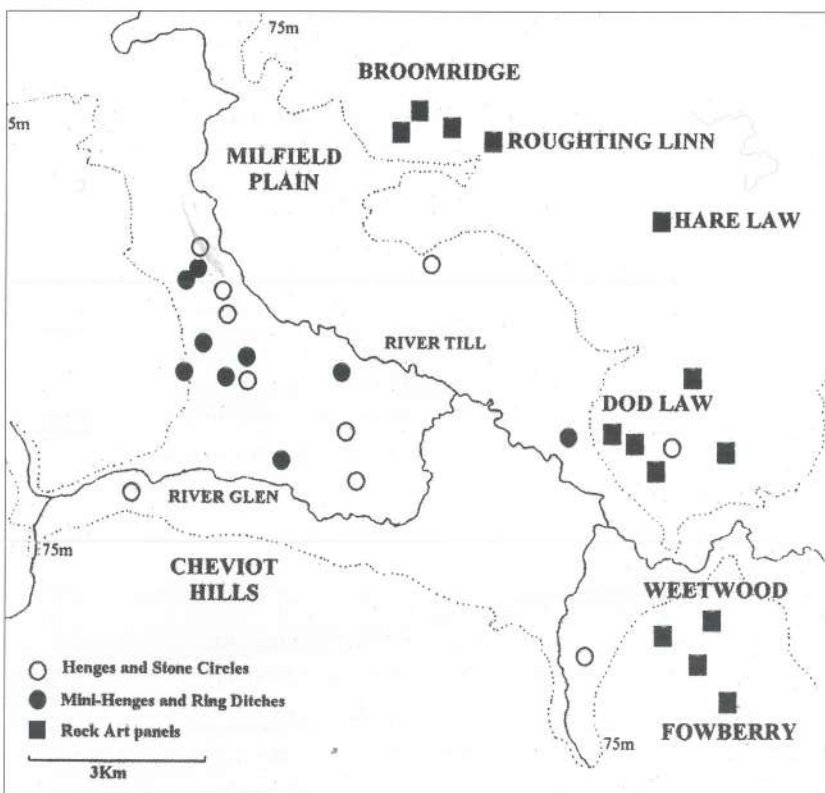


Fig. 5. Map showing the distribution of rock art panels on the ridges around the monuments on the Milfield Plain, Northumberland.

these, Goatscrag Hill rises above the rest of the ridge, and on one edge (NT 976 371) are sets of two cups joined together by a curved groove, like horseshoes. Underneath the rock overhang were cremation burials in pots buried below the present floor level. Four figures of deer pecked into the vertical iron-stained wall of the rock overhang. Three are static, and one has its legs bent in movement. They appear to be prehistoric, but not definitely so.

The crag drops away to the stream, which meets a second stream. Together, they have cut through the sandstone to form a promontory. The Broomridge-dean Burn tumbles over the edge of this as a waterfall called Roughting Linn, which means that the water bellows like a bull into the pond. This promontory has massive, multiple earth and stone walls separated by ditches, enclosing the promontory in an arc. It has never been excavated, so we cannot assume anything more than that it is prehistoric.

Beyond this only a few metres away is a large whaleback of sandstone (NT 983 367), uncovered by William Greenwell in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Half of it on the west has been quarried away, and a large slice has been cut out of it crosswise, but the rest has such a variety of motifs that it is justifiably one of the finest rock art panels in the world. Richard Bradley drew attention to its similarity in appearance to a long barrow or chambered tomb, and pointed out that the deep, ringed motifs run around the edge like the decoration on Irish passage grave kerbs. The more delicate, plant-like motifs are arranged further in to the rock, above the others.

This natural outcrop occupies an important place in the landscape at the threshold between the route to the Milfield Plain and access to the coastal plain of the North Sea. Despite its importance in world heritage, it is totally unmanaged and neglected – in fact, a national disgrace, despite its brooding charm. In contrast to its dismal story is the discovery of a fantastic panel under a rock overhang at Ketley Crag on Chatton Park Hill (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. An exceptional design within an area of outstanding rock art. Ketley Crag rockshelter.

The area in which it lies has other superb art, and the farmer has now applied for, and received, money from DEFRA to keep animals off these panels, and to open it up to the public. Here is a great opportunity for authorities to step in with help and planning, but nothing has happened yet. Further south the Roman Wall has attracted millions of pounds. Britain is not very good at looking after its entire prehistoric heritage.

There is one very important and positive development, however. Newcastle University was given funding to put my archive on the Internet. Dr. Aron Mazel, well known for his work in South Africa, for his excavation and recording of cave paintings and for his work as a museum curator, was appointed for two years or so to work on the recording of the whole archive, with a very experienced and skilled team. He and I are revisiting all the sites in Northumberland, re-recording them – and inevitably finding more. This often happens, for when he is filling in his record cards and taking innumerable photographs, I am free to explore further. That's how we find new rocks for me to rub and draw. We have also found plenty to say about the condition of the sites (good and bad), to assess threats to the art and to talk to the farmers and landowners.



Fig. 7. A well-balanced and well-executed design on an earthfast boulder. Millstone Burn, Northumberland.

Millstone Burn/Snook Bank (Fig. 7) was an area revisited in this way. It marks the gap and communication route between low-lying, level ground to the south and the hills to the north. The burn is so named because millstones have been quarried in the area, and *Snook Bank* is the ridge where the beasts were shackled. The Roman road, the Devils Causeway, follows the same valley on its route from Hadrians Wall north. Other cup and ring marks in the area follow a NE-SW course towards Alnwick and Rothbury on high ground that includes a cup and ring marked outcrop at Lemmington Wood (NU 1294 1080) side by side with runes. There is a rock shelter at Corby Crags (NU 1279 0962) with a Food Vessel urn under the overhang and a cup, channel and basin above it. Southwest, via cairnfields and other features, the sandstone scarp reaches the Coquet at Rothbury, where there are major rock art sites on either side of the river. Thus we have an area with many other uses of this landscape.

It is only recently that the well-visited area of Lordenshaw (NZ 0512 9912-0060 0045), has revealed that some of its stone piles are tri-radial cairns. One of these has two exposed cupped stones at the junction of two of the radial walls (NZ 0525 9905). An outstanding ridge of sandstone is dominated by a large enclosure, usually referred to as a hillfort that continued to be used as a settlement in Romano-British times. Within the fort are faint cup marks, but on the slopes leading away from the ridge are varied motifs that include very large cups, one of which is at the head of a long, wide serpentine channel. Also on the whitened outcrops on the eastern side are long grooves linked in some cases to cups, and cups and rings, basins, clusters of midget cups. The ridge leads

down to the junction of the Whitton Burn to the River Coquet, including cairns and more marked rocks, ending at the valley bottom with large cups on outcrop. To the west, the art nearest the hillfort begins with a large outcrop, much of which has been quarried away, but with some fine motifs, overlooking the Coquet valley to the Cheviots, and looking up to the Simonside Hills.

## Cairns

Rock art exists in late Neolithic/early Bronze Age burials, and it is this difference of use and its associations that enable us to move towards some kind of chronology. Below, further west on a parallel outcrop, is another set of motifs including the famous 'Horseshoe Rock' (NZ 0502 9918) on the edge of a cairn. The relationship between cairns and motifs is well defined here. In Northumberland some cairns are built on decorated outcrops and incorporate marked stones in their structure, as we have seen, and here the same area uses rock art in the landscape and in monuments. It is appropriate that English Heritage chose this place to launch its Pilot Survey in 1999.

In Galloway, which has extensive art in the landscape, including more spirals than anywhere else, there is only one monument that includes markings, at Cairnholy cairn (NX 516 548). The same applies to west and north Yorkshire, where only a few cup-marked rocks come from cairn material, out of about 640 rocks. County Durham, Swaledale and Wensleydale have over 10 cairns with marked rocks, including How Tallon (NZ 057074) and Addleborough Cairn. Many of the sites in the Peak District and North and East Yorkshire and Cleveland have decorated stones in cairns. Examples in Scotland have been known for much longer; here metal axes are pictured superimposed on cup marks on the inside of cist slabs. There are also two slabs in destroyed cairns that have line patterns instead of cup and rings, but using them in the same kind of cists, characterised in the Kilmartin area by slabs notched like housing joints to fit the cists together.

Motifs on stones in a few early Bronze Age cairns have always attracted people's attention. On close examination, however, it has been found that many of the decorated cist slabs were eroded before being inserted, and some were broken off larger surfaces. An example is an early Bronze Age cist at Balbirnie, (NO 285030) in Fife, Scotland. In the Neolithic

dateable tombs of Ireland's Boyne valley some decorated slabs were purpose-made, and others had been re-used. Some decorate the outside of the mound, and others were placed inside, presumably to be viewed by a different audience. What we now make of the re-use of decorated surfaces taken from open-air art is that its purpose had changed: it was buried, often face down, no longer to be seen, but still a meaningful symbol.

Whatever the meaning of these abstract designs, they eventually went out of use. It may be that their Neolithic symbolism was irrelevant to, and perhaps hopelessly incompatible with, the basic cosmology of the Bronze Age, which gave rise to the interment of important individuals in single graves, or to the burial of several such individuals in the same mound. The fact that some early Bronze Age cists contain re-used panels of formerly open-air rock art, however, may represent the last vestiges of a belief system, at a time of change and probably of crisis in many ways, which still recognised the power of the old symbolism.

It is beginning to be recognised that some decorated slabs were produced specially for the monuments in which they were discovered. In these cases, however, the decoration had been used in a way that suggests its meaning had changed – or was in the process of change. It was buried, often face down, and no longer to be seen. An example is the recently excavated cist at Fulforth Farm, Witton Gilbert, near Durham city, where the cover was purpose-built and decorated on two sides, the more elaborate cups and rings on the underside of the cover, the other with plain cups (Fig. 8). Not only that, but also two freshly decorated stones were placed inside the cist. One is decorated with single cups and rings and zigzags. The other is a boulder with deeply picked linked cups on one side and the beginnings of a cup on the other. The site is late Neolithic/early Bronze Age.

Similarly, in the material used to build stone cairns, some stones are now being found with freshly decorated cups and rings mostly face-downwards, like wreaths brought to a funeral. One such double-kerbed mound at Fowberry (NU 019278), Northumberland, was built on profusely decorated outcrop rock. There are other round cairns on decorated surfaces that reinforce the significance of these places. Thus the motifs can continue to be used, perhaps for as long as hundreds of years, but in a different way and with a different meaning.

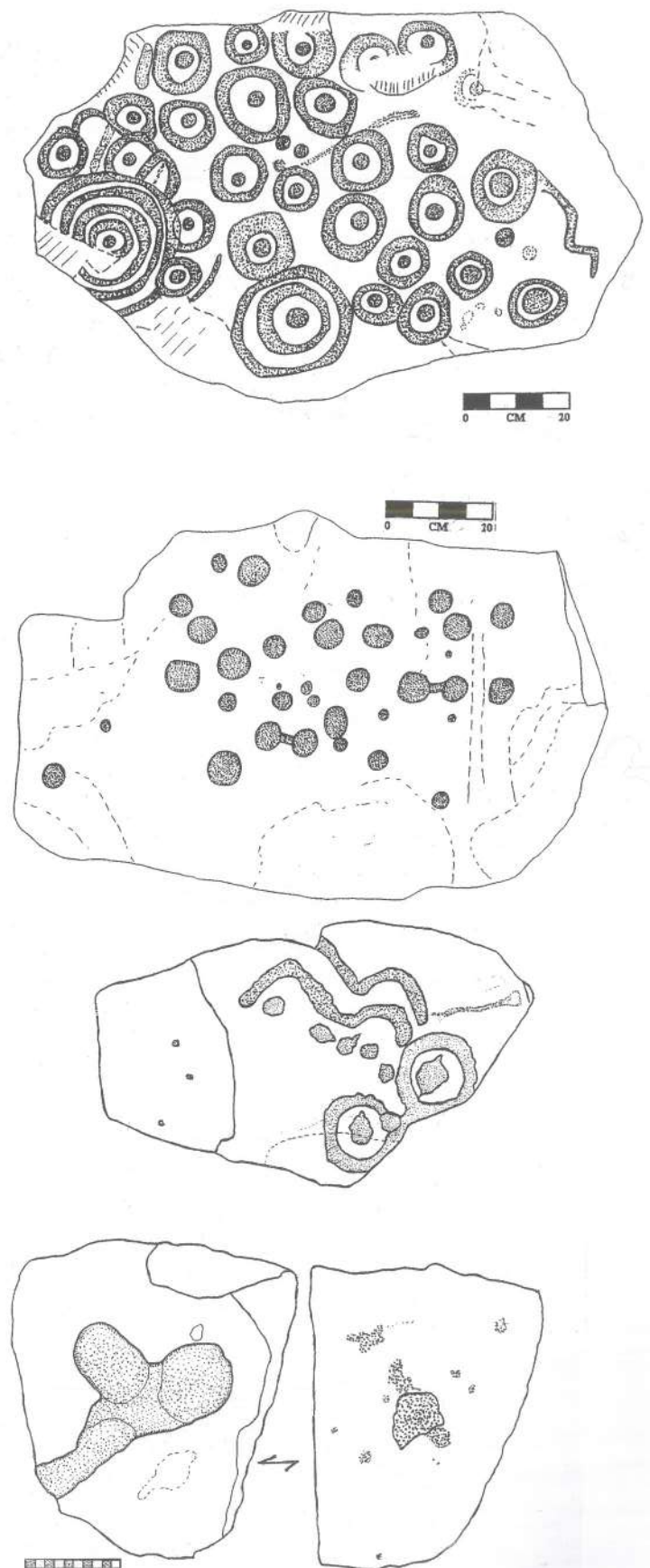


Fig. 8. A decorated cist cover with the elaborate motifs facing into the grave. Fulforth Farm, Witton Gilbert, Durham.



Fig. 9a-c. Long Meg, Cumbria.

Northumberland has rock-shelters with motifs, but Food Vessel and Beaker burials in two of them could be later than the making of the motifs. Establishing a chronology for the motifs is very difficult. I doubt whether we will ever know precisely what the symbols mean, whether some of the people who made the motifs were clear about their origins, and why the markings have so much in common with those, for example, in Galicia or California. We may speculate that the motifs may also have been tattooed on the skin, painted on wood, or woven into material, but these do not endure like stone. They appear on outcrop and earthfasts in the landscape, but some are on 'portable' rocks (i.e. they can be moved).

## Standing stones

Motifs appear on a small number of monuments, but even then they can not be dated absolutely. Long Meg (NY 571372), for example, a tall pillar of red sandstone outside the portal entrance to a massive circle of volcanic standing stones in Cumbria, is covered in motifs (Fig. 9). Whether or not this legendary witch, turned to stone for dancing with her daughters on the Sabbath, lay flat, or was part of a cliff, is unknown, but the raising of this huge stone creates a totally different impression from horizontal outcrop. The motifs are linear, spiral, concentric, half ovoid, some finished and others roughed-out, and include recent initials. The early motifs may have been added when the monument was erected, or much later; or Long Meg may have been brought to the site covered in decoration centuries ago. The discovery of a huge ditched enclosure circling the present farm, another smaller enclosure and Stukely's stone circle in the same area emphasises what a very extensive site this is, and the rock art is literally outstanding. Seen from the centre of the circle, Long Meg is aligned on the axis of the midwinter sunset over the two western portal stones. It is taller and more colourful than the stones of the circle.

A spiral and lozenge-shapes have recently been recorded at Castlerigg stone circle (NY 292236). Rather plainer designs occur on standing stones in the Kilmartin valley, Argyll. These examples are interesting, but at what stage they became part of the monuments is not known. That they are *there* means that they were clearly regarded as important to whatever rituals were enacted there.

This brief review gives some idea of the extent of rock art in England and Scotland, and the data are the result of the work largely of independent archaeologists. The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland with its publication of *Argyll, Volume 6* has shown what an excellent survey can be produced that sets rock art in a wider setting within a region. Reading University has demonstrated the value of field surveys based upon existing data. English Heritage set up a Pilot Project that should help to gather together existing information and relate it to the threats posed to a valuable resource and produce a strategy for conservation and intelligent display of rock art, provided that the initial report is followed up, which it has not been until the revival of the committee in 2003. Rock art study is at last taking its rightful place as an important part of archaeology, but it needs a considerable amount of care to preserve it.

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# Recent trends in rock art management and research of the Nordic countries – a personal overview

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## Abstract

During the last ten years there has been an explosion of research as well as significant changes in the management of rock art in the Nordic countries. This paper intends to provide an overview of these developments, tracing their roots within the context of the establishment of rock art as a discipline in its own right and focussing on the specifics of developments at the management level. It is the author's belief that these developments will have far reaching consequences, leading the way in technological developments in documentation and database management and providing important lessons for the management of rock art throughout the world.

## Background

Management and research of rock art has a long tradition in Scandinavia. Some of the sites in Bohuslän, Jämtland and Uppland were recorded as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Jarl Nordbladh (1995) at the second Alta Conference on rock art presented this early history. In fact, Nordbladh's work also covers the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the early 1990s. Most of his conclusions (1995:30) are still valid although a massive development has also taken place in the last decade. This means that more sites have been found, documented, managed and visited by more tourists. And simultaneously, more reports, papers, thesis and books on rock art have been written and published then ever before.

To a great extent, this development reflects an extraordinarily rise in funding and other resources within these fields. One obvious consequence is that rock art management and research have enlarged their arena and attracted a public interest of a hitherto unknown size. To a certain extent, this mirrors the general development of a trend in society

for a much greater interest in archaeology and history. But the main reason seems to be the fact that the rock images, painted or engraved, themselves attract an interest far bigger than that trend. In recent years, bus-, boat- and carloads of hundreds of thousands of tourists come to experience the images in places like Alta, Begby and Vingen in Norway, Tanum, Simris and Nämforsen in Sweden, Bornholm in Denmark and Astuvansalmi and Värrikallio in Finland.

## Intensified rock art teaching

It is hard to tell exactly which factor triggered the present situation. One obvious factor is that there were more university teachers actively interested in rock art than ever before in the Nordic countries in the 1980s and 90s. To mention only a few, Jarl Nordbladh in Göteborg, Kalle Sognnes in Trondheim, Knut Helskog in Tromsø, Gro Mandt in Bergen and Göran Burenhult in Lund and Stockholm. This meant that more students were taught this subject and developed a personal interest in it which led to papers and theses. In that way rock art more or less developed into a discipline in its own right at some of the main archaeology institutions in Scandinavia. Although, the persons mentioned above had and still have rather different approaches to rock art, they have one thing in common; they have all been heavily engaged in field projects on rock art documentation (Burenhult 1973 & 1980; Helskog 1988 & 1993; Mandt 1972 & 1991; Nordbladh 1973, 1975, 1980 & 1981; Sognnes 1982, 1983, 1987 & 1990). It was natural for them as part of their teaching to bring students out into the field to study rock art directly on location. This was a great experience for many students and it provoked an extra strong interest in dedicating their upcoming academic

studies to rock art. Furthermore, although documentary aspects of those field studies included some additional contexts, like the surrounding environment and landscape, their main focus was on the images as such. Where were they placed, how were they manufactured and how could they be explained and interpreted? This laid further emphasis on the imagery as the most important inherent quality of the rock art: a quality that makes it much easier to connect to a wider interest in images and art that reaches far outside the usual realms of archaeology. Rock art in this way became a bridge to other scientific subjects and disciplines, such as semiotics and psychology, although much of the main archaeological interest focused on archaeological context and landscape environment.

These developments also lead to some unexpected consequences. Some archaeologists started to read more into the rock images than the traditional history of religion researchers would ever have dreamt about. Or rather, read more information out of the images: much more. The first entry of this kind on Scandinavian rock art was Christopher Tilley's (1993) attempt to re-interpret the Nämforsen engravings by writing something like a novel about it. Tilley's book almost had the effect of an armour-breaking missile judging from the reactions it gave rise to. They were mostly confusion and strong defensive reactions since it was heavily and criticised by nearly everyone. Nowadays it seems to have been almost forgotten although it has a few followers like Joakim Goldhahn's book on Sagaholm (2001). It is hard to tell whether this phenomenon has been fully established or should be considered more like a "one hit wonder". It is obviously part of postmodernist archaeology where many scholars work intensely to find new interpretations and explanations for old and/or new finds and complexes. These efforts have been revitalising and resulted in many new and intriguing research studies. A good and rather varied overview can be gained from the report from the seminar held at Vitlycke Museum some years ago (Goldhahn 2002). But a major drawback is that much of this recent work in Sweden and Norway is written and presented only in Swedish and Norwegian, which means that most of the new and provoking ideas and theories of these works never reach a wider academic circle. This is a big pity.

The actual research picture seems there to have been rather dispersed and not at all uniform. At the

same time it is obvious that the relativism that is one of the characteristics of the postmodernist school may lead to a situation where profound academic studies and results may be questioned and challenged by less professional individuals and institutions. It could turn out to be a thin line between a public approach and a populist such resulting in a situation where «Any guess is a good guess».

This is specifically true for rock art research that for a long time has suffered from «infiltration» by confused theories and distorted ideas that does not fulfil even the lowest scientific demands. An illuminating example is the case of the research project based on explaining much of the Swedish rock art by relating the images to a solar eclipse. The two most upsetting fact about this case was that it was financed by public means and that it was designed by a natural scientist without the slightest knowledge about rock art (Populär Arkeologi 1995). However, as long as academia rests on a strong relation between theories and practices it runs only a little risk to be overrun by those phenomena. In conclusion this means that the positive qualities of rock art may also attract much negative interest. However, much more so has the intensified academic teaching of rock art in the last 20 years resulted in a very large rise in attraction in university circles.

That has also resulted in a relatively big number of new students' papers and thesis in recent years. A much analytical and readable overview of especially late 1990s research trends is provided in *The Lonesome Sailing Ship* by Katherine Hauptman Wahlgren (2000). Hauptman Wahlgrens' dissertation based on the rock engravings at Norrköping in Östergötland (2002) is also a good example of a postmodernist related research work still founded on traditional fieldwork but giving raise to much new ideas and theories of interpretation. Hauptmans' work is based on structural analysis of the rock art images that as a second step are interpreted in a hermeneutic way. One advantage of her work is that she focuses on the images as such relating this basic intrinsic quality of rock art to modern art theories.

Excavations in this very area of a major Bronze Age settlement site lead to another recent doctoral thesis of great importance for understanding the archaeological context of the rock art written by Hélène Borna-Ahlkvist (2002). Partly founded on field documentation work in the same area of the panels at Fiskeby Berghage and Ekenberg is the recently issued

thesis by Åsa Fredell with the informative title: *Bridging Images- Pictorial Communication of Ideology and Cosmology in the Southern Scandinavian Bronze Age and Pre-Roman Iron Age* (2003). Fredells' work that was partly compiled within the RockCare project is a broadly designed attempt to demonstrate a contextual connection between rock art images, bronze artefacts and mythology. Although, being a rather demanding task Fredell certainly manages to clear new land in these traditionally separate fields of archaeological research by putting them into a common context.

This renewal of focussing on the rock art images as such stands in an seemingly very healthy contrast to much of the research of the last decade where rock art sites and other prehistoric monuments sometimes seems to have become less interesting. The focus of interest has instead shifted to the landscape as such as an arena for prehistoric man (or should it rather be the modern researcher?) acting as a director shaping and constructing completely conscious topographic forms were the prehistoric monuments including rock art sites have been degraded to supernumeraries playing a modest, subordinate role. In that situation a turn back to the rock art images themselves could be the right prescription to find new ways of research leading forward to a deeper and more thorough understanding of rock art – the world's most widespread prehistoric phenomenon. That the interest in the rock art images have started a new trend is further witnessed by a seminar arranged by Tanum's Rock Art Museum at Underslös bearing the informative title of «Prehistoric Pictures as Archaeological Source» in 2002 (Milstreu & Pröhl 2004). The aim of this symposium was to promote a change of research focuses towards a situation where the rock art pictures are equally important as artefacts in archaeological research.

## **Big projects on research and management**

All the teachers mentioned above had in common that they conducted rock art field projects. Normally they were based on individual incentives and based only on one specific university. However, one such project originally run by Gro Mandt at the University of Bergen also became a project on the national level namely the Norwegian «Bergkunstprojektet» that

started more than 20 years ago (Mandt 2000 for a complete history of the project). This means that the concepts and methods of the project were applied on a national level although the focus for a long time was on the rock art of the Bergen region and the sites of Ausevik and Vingen. Alongside of other results the most important achievement of this project was that it provided a tool for bridging an otherwise expanding gap between university and heritage administration – research and management. The occurrence of this alliance is one of the factors that have led to the situation of today in the Nordic countries where much of the funding falls on rock art projects of a similar kind.

Another illustrating example is the «Air Pollution project» of Riksantikvarieämbetet in Sweden that was carried out in the years of 1988–1995 (Bertilsson & Löfvendahl 1992, Löfvendahl & Bertilsson 1996). This project originally focused on research on environmental damages on monumental stone buildings but also came to encompass the prehistoric rock art. The Ministry of Environment basically provided the funding of the project. As the projects name indicates the focus of the studies performed was put on the impact of the environmental pollution on the rock art panels. But as a consequence much time was designated to study the rock art images and their state of conservation. One important outcome was the creation of registration forms for basic classification and field documentation that could be digitised and used for comparative analyses then and in the future. This form resulted in the creation of a data base named «Hällrist» which basic structure has been further refined in the Rock Art Base and its follower RockCare Base, a highly condensed form still in use (C. Bertilsson 2000). This means that collection of information on rock art has been performed in a similarly structured and organised way in more than 15 years. Much of the data might then be used for future comparisons. The manifold activities of this project lead to an important rise of knowledge about the state of conservation of the rock art panels and an insight that much of the erosion and other damages seems to have appeared and/or accelerated since the 1930s. Although, no specific environmental pollution factor causing this damages could be sorted out it became obvious that the accumulated effects of changing use of land and the pollution on the environment also had affected the rock art in a much negative way. This was especially valid

for the granite area of Northern Bohuslän with the Tanum World Heritage area as its centre. But also in other areas such as Enköping in Uppland it became evident that an accelerating deterioration was taking place on many bedrock surfaces (see also Coles 1992).

The major results and achievements have since been the foundation of much rock art research and management in Sweden and to a growing extent also in Norway. This goes for aim, organisation and participants. A crucial factor for the relatively success of this project was the cross science perspective expressed in the close co-operation between the many geologists and archaeologists involved in the work. In order to meet with the goals and to produce results an open-minded atmosphere without too much subject orientated prejudice and prestige is essential. This was further enhanced by the simultaneous participation of specialists from universities and experts from heritage management. Other important ingredients were the excerption of and research for all possible information on rock art in the national archive ATA of Riksantikvarieämbetet. These documents provided an important interface with the past even though it could originally have been accomplished for a specific and restricted purpose. A good example is the detailed photos taken at the Aspeberget engraving in Tanum 1938 that provided an excellent basis for comparison with modern photos taken under similar conditions (Bertilsson & Löfvendahl 1992:29, Fig 8 a and b). In that way new information on the degradation of this specific panel could be reached. The accumulated budget for the rock art part of the project during seven years was approx. 300 000 euros.

Another synergetic effect of this project was that it triggered organised co-operation between the national heritage boards of the Nordic countries starting in 1995. First between Sweden and Norway but soon also Finland and Denmark joined. This work was initially focused on the field documentation of rock art and came very close to producing a joint form for field recording based on Hällrist and Bergkunsdatabasen. However, before this task was finalised a new and bigger project was set up funded by the Interreg II program of the European Union. The project was named «Rock Carvings in the Borderland» and was based on a close co-operation by the counties of the

border region of Sweden and Norway, Bohuslän and Östfold. This region seems to have formed a close unity in the Bronze Age and is one of the richest rock art areas of all Europe. More than 6000 panels with more than 90.000 images have been registered there (Hygen and Bengtsson 1999). Therefore, the project had a solid foundation for an activity plan that encompassed a wide range of activities from rock art recording over site excavations to education activities and book productions (Kallhovd and Magnusson 2000). The project owner was the County Administration of Göteborg but Riksantikvarieämbetet in Sverige together with Riksantikvaren in Norway provided the main funding. In total the project budget exceeded 6 million euros. The main focus of this programme was to try to make research and management activities that are normally directed towards the rock art only also work to enhance regional awareness and cultural tourism. Much of the projects programme and activities was originating from earlier such performed in the Air Pollution and Bergkunst projects and also resting on their results and conclusions. Very many efforts were put in to further test and develop those earlier achievements in the fields of degradation and geochemical analyses of the granite bedrock of the region (Löfvendahl and Magnusson 2000). Another aim was to compare and refine existing techniques and systems for field documentation and database registration of rock art and to try to include the task to develop common standards within those fields (Bertilsson and Magnusson 2000, Magnusson, Bertilsson, C. and Olsrud 2000).

This focus on field documentation and database recording was further emphasised in the subsequent RockCare project within the framework of the Raphael and Culture 2000 programmes of the European Commission (Bertilsson & Fredell 2003). This project was set up and funded on a fifty-fifty basis with the EU by the National Heritage Board in Sweden in 1998 and run until 2001. It is now in its final and reporting stage but two reports, one presenting the target issues of the project (Bertilsson 2000) and another focussing on the rock art documentation seminars arranged in Tanum, Sweden and Valcamonica, Italy (Bertilsson & Fredell 2003) have already been published. The four main aims of this project were the following:

1. To arrange seminars and meetings so that the RockCare project could use the help of a network of international experts.
2. To develop new methods for the presentation of rock carvings and to improve access to sites of archaeological interest, especially the rock carvings in Tanum.
3. To elaborate further methods for protection against environmental destruction and deterioration.
4. To develop new methods for documentation and to make efforts to make results comparable between different countries.

The co-partners of the project were Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici in Capo di Ponte, Valcamonica, Italy, National Board of Antiquities in Helsinki, Finland and National Centre of Rock Art in Vila Nova de Foz Côa, Portugal. The Laboratoire Départemental de Préhistoire du Lazaret in Nice, France also participated in the initial phase of the project.

## Development of documentation methods

The seminar activities of the project was rather successful bringing together experts from the major European research and management institutions at several different occasions and locations like Tanum, Valcamonica, Astuvansalmi, Mont Bego and Foz Côa. This resulted in theoretical discussions in combination with practical applications and test of different documentation methods like rubbing, tracing, laser scanning and digital photogrammetry.

One of the major achievements of those events was that of evaluation of existing documentation methods. This has resulted in recommendations of an ideal standard recording procedure including several steps and methods starting with rubbing, followed by tracing and digital photographing. The application of the paper rubbing method should follow the standards developed by Tanums Hällristningsmuseum at Underslös in cooperation with the National Heritage Board and RockCare. This requires for the use of a standard format high quality graphic printing paper that can easily be scanned and digitised as a subsequent step. The following step is normally the tracing on plastic that can be performed in two different ways; where the rock images are well preserved and the peck marks still are visible it should be done according to the standards of the so called «Dot technique» on high quality transparent

plastic developed by the CCSP in Valcamonica (Fig. 1); on panels where the images are more eroded and less visible it is better to apply the contour tracing technique developed by Vitlycke Museum in cooperation with BOTARK. At any circumstance, it is of vital importance to use both methods since they are not oppositional but complementary. The rubbings give as far as possible «objective» depiction of the rock art images and also capturing the essence of their original artistic qualities and details while as the different tracing methods give its executor a fair chance to interpret the peck marks and lines on the rocks. In recent years the original Italian «dot technique» has been adapted and adjusted to the specific conditions of the granite rock panels in Bohuslän by Lasse Bengtsson and his team at Vitlycke as demonstrated by the depiction of the magnificent engraving at Åby in Tossene (Fig. 2).

Both methods have proved to be useful for recording of damages of the panels surfaces. On rubbings cracks, exfoliations and the state of erosion of the rock surface gets «automatically» recorded. This data can then be further treated and analysed on the digital records resulting from the scanning of the rubbings. This information could in turn be used for general analyses and classification of the panels according to their degree of damage. The plastic tracings have another advantage in that they are transparent and allow the recorder to interpret and add information also about the state of conservation of a panel during the process of documentation.

Much effort has been put into the task to develop new methods and innovative concepts for recording of damages (Ernfridsson 2001). This has included also tests and recommendations of different conservation methods (Strömer 1997).

Within the RockCare project were also made tests of using different digital recording techniques such ranging from the production of 3D photo maps based on traditional analogue cameras, over the use of a high resolution laser scanner to the use of high tech digital photogrammetry (Johansson & Magnusson 2004). All these high tech methods have proved to be very useful for recording of the very highest level of accuracy. Their only drawback, but a major one, is the high cost which is still between 10 and 20 times higher than the use of traditional methods of rubbing and tracing. This clearly indicates that the use of traditional methods will dominate still for a long time. In fact, they have another advantage that may never be possible to out role whatever technical



Fig. 1. Tracing of rock engraving at Simrislund in Scania, Sweden by Italian team from Dipartimento CCSP, Valcamonica with leader Umberto Sansoni. Photo: Catarina Bertilsson, RockCare.



Fig. 2. Central part of Bronze Age rock engraving at Åby in Tossene, Bohuslän. Cf. tracing figure 2. Photo: Bengt A. Lundberg, RAÄ.

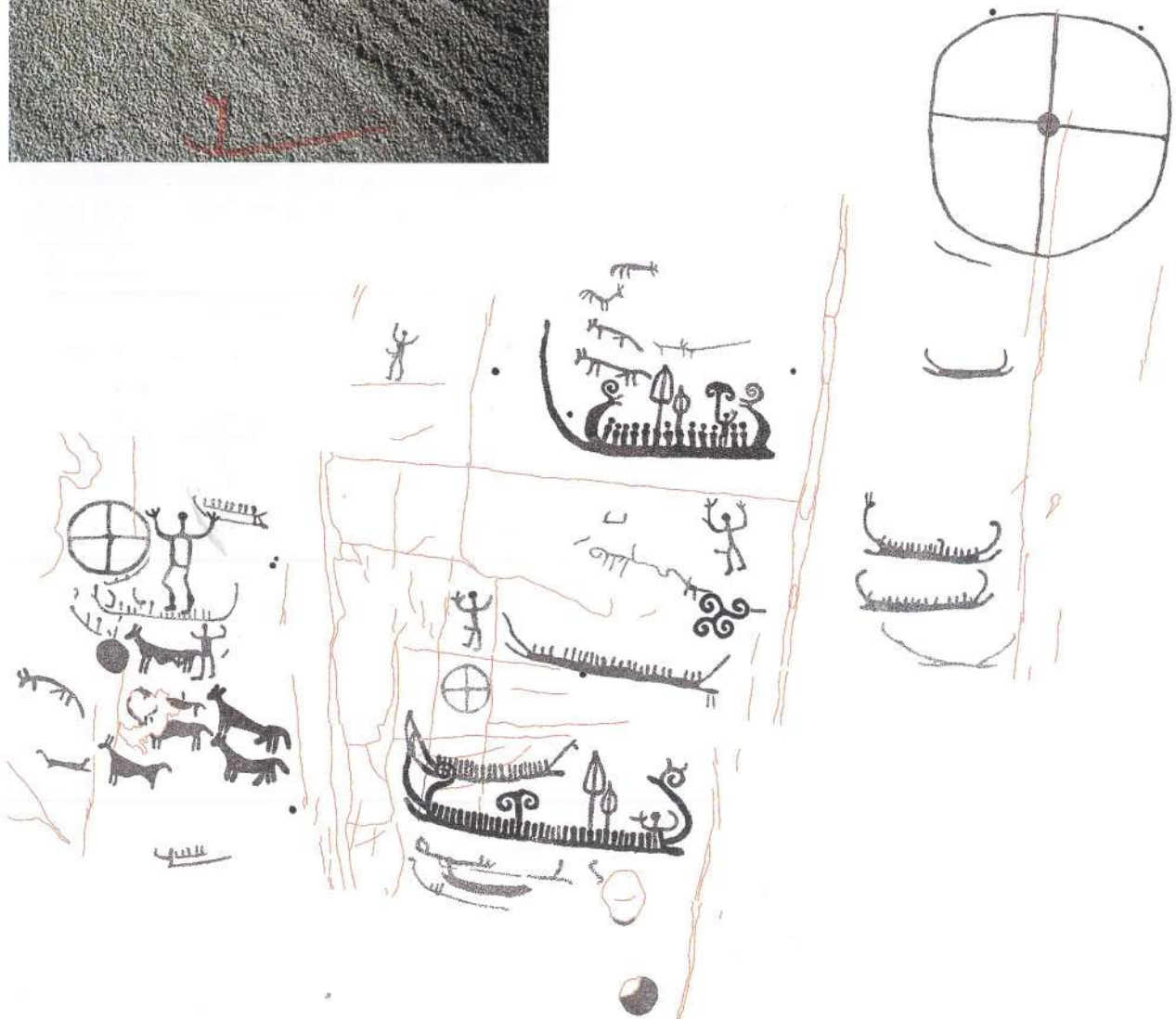


Fig. 3. Section of Bronze Age rock engraving at Åby in Tossene, Bohuslän. Tracing technique. Indicates various depth of images; black-deep, grey-shallow, and cracks-red on the panels surface. Tracing: Lasse Bengtsson, Vitlycke museum.

development, they require for a natural and close examination of the rock and its images by the recorder. This normally leads to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the study object that is almost impossible to reach when using only high tech methods. It could be expressed in the following way; the symbiosis between man and nature will (hopefully?) always stay stronger than that between man and the machine. All the same, the digital photogrammetry has proved to be a very useful method recording heavily damaged panels like at Kåfjord in Alta where recently a huge area of a steep and heavily damaged site of several hundred square metres have been recorded by using the ATOS technique developed by Metimur in Göteborg. Due to the extremely bad conditions of this site this was judged to be the only chance avoiding to damage the fragile panels as much as possible. However, in normal conditions rubbings and tracings would have presented a just as satisfactory result and including more of the original qualities of imagery and artistry of the original rock art artist. And in adapting the old rubbing technique to the most modern digital standards is also reached another important and twofold aim the scanned documents become an interface with both the past and the future and between the prehistoric rock art images and the modern high tech and IT world.

## Documentation of images

The focus of the images is one of the most obvious traits of the last decade. This includes everything from concentration on a «pure» basic recording as that performed and published continuously by the two museums in Tanum (e.g. Bengtsson & Olsson 2000 and Milstreu 1999) to more research orientated and analytical recording enterprises performed by John Coles in several sites and areas in Sweden in recent years and by David Vogt in Östfold, Norway (Coles 2000 and Vogt 1998 and 2000). Coles interest in Scandinavian rock art has been obvious for many years resulting in debate articles, several public guide books, research papers and a major study of the rock carvings of the Enköping area in South-West Uppland. In his extensive study of the Uppland engravings based on field documentation work performed by him Coles focuses much on the site and social hierarchy being expressed in and interpreted from the rock art sites and images. Doing this, Coles

puts the material of that region into a much used explanatory model that, someone might argue, have passed its «best before date» already in the 1980s but regardless of that still of course can be used as a basis for valid conclusions. Coles has a vast knowledge of most phenomena and aspects of the European Bronze Age and thus can provide a most useful model for putting the Enköping rock art in its «right place». There is however one aspect of Coles work that could be a matter of discussion namely his recording methods; while as his photos is of highest quality and the maps and plans of the rock panels are plain and easy to understand it is fairly obvious that his field documentation using contour chalking does not meet with modern research standards. Since this method is not very accurate, this may also lead to a result where many images and details on the panels has not been seen and recorded. An obvious example is the horses above the ship in the centre at the Grillby panel in Villberga (Fig. 3), (Coles 2000: Fig. 93). They were included already in Einar Kjéllens original recording from the 1930s and are much evident on the digitised rubbing made by Catarina Bertilsson in 2003 (back cover Fig. 3). It seems that the presence or absence of the horses is not only a matter of the accuracy of the depiction method it also most certainly adds elements of importance for interpreting this big panel.

In his subsequent recording of the Häljesta engraving in Västmanland it seems that Coles has become more observant on the problem with the recording technique and now using also the rubbing method. This resulted in a more thorough documentation including the discovery of a number of «new» images (Coles 2001: 245p). Regardless of this methodological improvement it is still obvious that the much schematised way in which Coles present the images on the plans of the panel loses much of their original artistic manners and important details (Cf. Fig. 4 and Coles 2001: Fig. 19). Manners and details which are at hand also in his very rubbings.

## North of the Border – Norway

In Östfold in Norway rock art is equally abundant as in Bohuslän south of the border many new sites have been discovered and recorded in recent years. This extensive body of data has led to a need for renewal of existing concepts of management and research. Especially the later aspect has been the basis for the works of David Vogt who has not only





Fig. 4. Plan of rock engraving at Grillby in Villberga, Uppland from Coles 2000. Documentation made by John Coles.

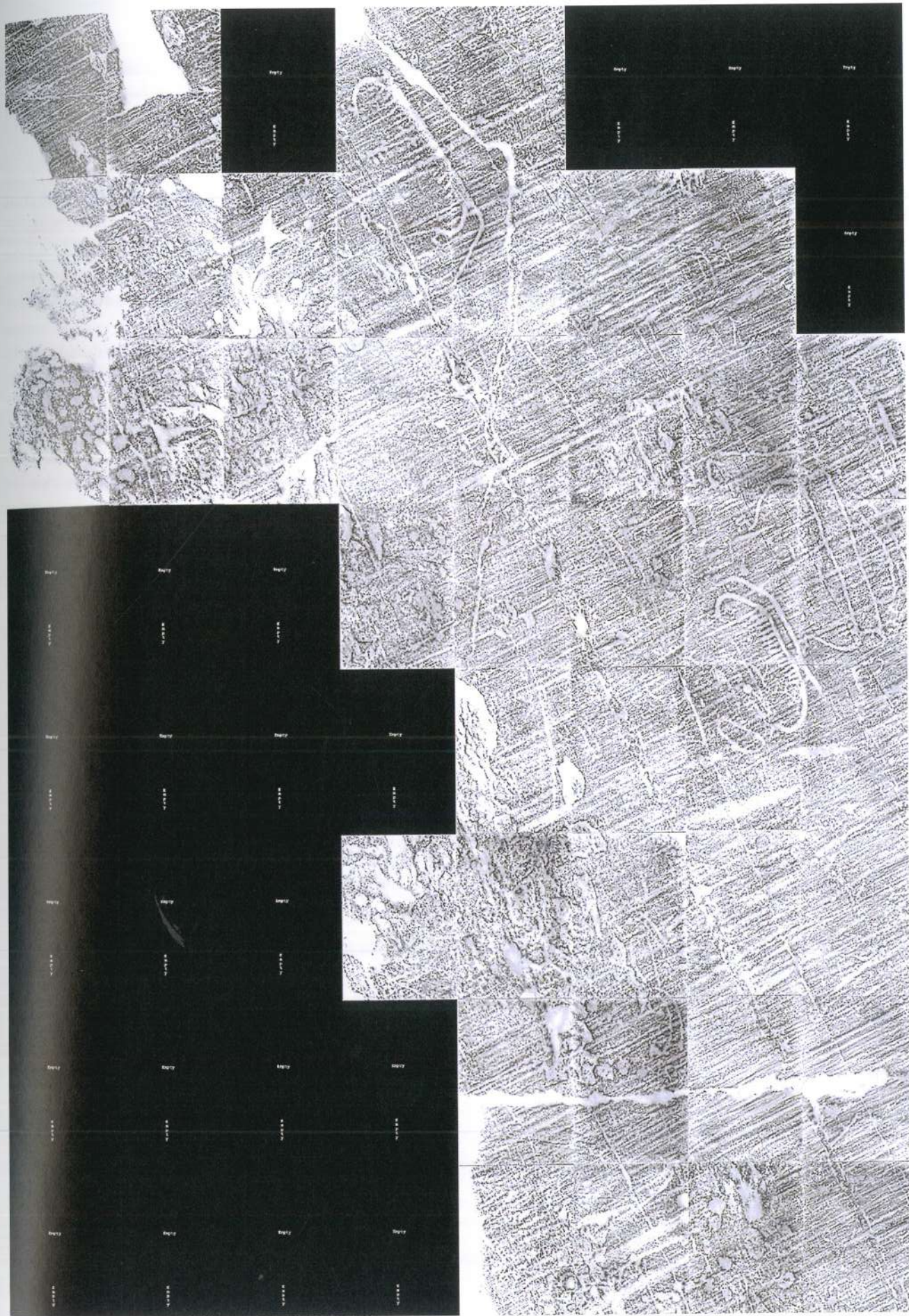


Fig. 5. Rubbing of the Grillby engraving. Note especially the very small horses above the central ship to the right of the contoured footprint. (See also back cover Fig. 3). They were recorded already by Einar Kjellén in the 1930s. Those and other images and details are missing in Coles plan. Rubbing: Catarina Bertilsson, RockCare. Scanning by Karl-Magnus Drake, Solparken och Riksarkivet.

recorded and published the new findings but also made serious efforts to put the rock art into a de- and reconstructed environmental setting and social context (Vogt 1998 and 2000). This might regardless of other implication serve to further develop the process of integration of research and management on rock art between Östfold and Bohuslän that started in the last decade. This seems to be urgently needed if rock art research in the Nordic countries will not stay most of the time running around in restricted circles of analyses and interpretation that was drawn up already many years ago. In order to avoid that it is of vital importance that the process of both geographical and intellectual widening and integration of different research perspectives that have started in the last decade will become an even more obvious trend of the first decade of the third millennium. Although, it is not the intention here to present or evaluate all present research in Norway it should be stressed that many new and interesting rock art studies has been performed also there. Of specific interest are the new studies at Vingen including excavation of areas in front of panels by Trond Lödöen that has revealed much new information including Late Mesolithic dates. Anne-Sophie Hygen has also introduced a new field of Scandinavian rock art research, namely that of management and conservation of the sites (Hygen 1996).

The same tendency of widening circles and of integration is also typical of the research focussing on the paintings and engravings of Northern Scandinavia and Finland. In recent years research has prospered much from intensified contacts within this area including the Western parts of former Soviet-union, the White Sea region and Russian Karelia. Several common projects have been performed especially in the Russian regions were several sites are located including the major ones at Zalavruga and Besov Nos. Contacts between researchers has lead to widening of the general research concept and its' context including also ancient myths and beliefs from the region (Kare 2000). An important contribution that may serve to further promote this development is publication on Nämforsen – its rock art and archaeological context in 2001 where the site and the vast archaeological data and record around it is presented and put into a modern framework. Except for the essays on the rock images and archaeological objects a most valuable report is given on the reason behind all this concentrated archaeological efforts that was put into the site – the

exploitation of the grand rapid – Nämforsen – with the magnificent rock art panels for the purpose of building an electric water power plant (Biörnstad 2001). This matter illustrates in a striking way an eternal dilemma of 20<sup>th</sup> century archaeology; the mutual dependence of rescue archaeology and research were those two elements seem to feed each other in an endless process. However, it is also a good illustration to the fact that research and management are the two sides of one and the same coin.

Another fact that becomes evident from studying this dynamic development on research on the art of the Northern hunters is that it looks like it will stay being just that forever. Although modern and excellently written overviews are presented in the referred works and the sites is said to belong to the same traditions, very few comparisons are ever made between sites and images in Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. It seems that the national borders have been cemented and having their prime function to stop cross border ideas and research. In that way there is a really big need for a new dialogue. This dialogue should in my world of conception not only concern internal affairs of the Northern hunters but should also be encouraged to include the art of the Southern farmers trying to find common concepts and elements.

## The Danish picture

So far not much has been said about Denmark. This could have been explained by the fact that Denmark has very few rock art sites compared to some of the neighbouring countries. But it will not! Although Denmark has considerably less rock art sites than Norway and Sweden it has many more sites than Finland. However, since this essay is not focussing on site numbers we will not further pursue along this line of analyses. Instead we will try to point to some obvious elements of present rock art research and management in Denmark. Denmark has in fact a long tradition within these fields going back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when the first officially recorded rock art site in Scandinavia situated at Backa in Brastad in Bohuslän, now in Sweden but then in Norway was reported to the Danish king by a Norwegian priest. This matter implies among other things that giving rock art sites specific national identity is rather meaningless and does not promote

modern research. It seems that Danish rock art, although restricted to the Island of Bornholm except for engravings on free lying stones and boulders and roof slabs of megalithic tombs, has been very much focus of research and management in the last decade. In fact, one of the first to actually analyse the often referred to connection between rock art and archaeological objects was Flemming Kaul in his study based on ships engraved on various bronze artefacts from the Bronze Age (1998). This study seems to have triggered off or at least inspired some of the subsequent research work presented above (Fredell 2003). His attempts to use the engravings also as a mean for dating has brought a new or rather forgotten aspect of archaeology back on the target; the possibility to use a combination of different sources to reach new knowledge. This is also evident from his rather refreshing application of myths and concepts from the Nordic mythology in the interpretation of the Bronze Age rock images. In that way it may be argued that Kaul has turned the focus back to the days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where Nordic archaeology was still in its formative process of building up sequences of cultural history based on the study of artefacts as its main source of information. On that background, it is an interesting fact that

although the research performed by Danish archaeologists (Jörgen Jensen, Klavs Randsborg and Kristian Kristiansen) have resulted in considerable contributions to the creation of a new Bronze Age prehistory very little or nothing of that has concerned rock art. This after all, probably reflects that rock art has been a minor subject in Denmark. However, important contributions have been made especially within the field of documentation by Tanums Hällristningsmuseum in Sweden built up and still run by Danes (Gerhard Milstreu). The systematic documentation concept developed and performed there has also been applied in Denmark in recent years and especially on the Island of Bornholm where some rock art sites like Madsebakken and others nearby are equal to many sites in Sweden and Norway (Fig. 5). The activities on Bornholm now include also excavation of areas adjacent to rock carvings with promising results. Another positive factor is the newly started cooperation with the neighbouring areas in Simrishamn, Scania with the impressive rock art sites of Järrestad and Simrislund situated in one of the richest Bronze Age areas of all Scandinavia. This may lead to the development of wider objects of study and broader basis of ideas and concepts for interpretation.



Fig. 6. Rock engraving at Lille Strandbygård in Bornholm, Denmark. Painted with water and chalk powder solution for documentation. Photo: Gerhard Milstreu, Tanums Hällristningsmuseum.

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# Education and rock art – the British experience

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight the small role of teaching of prehistoric rock art in formal education and its contrasting higher presence in informal education in Britain. We will try to explain this contrast and suggest the potential role of prehistoric art in formal education as a marker of past diversity.

With little or no archaeology taught in British schools archaeology is still perceived by many as an exotic adjunct – a peripheral curiosity – the domain of quirky eccentrics in colourful sweaters or khaki-clad adventurers searching for priceless artefacts. Worse still, archaeologists are considered by some to be disrespectful – disturbing sacred ground and analysing artefacts and remains with no regard for those to whom they belonged. Yet, if the number of television programmes about archaeology is a reliable measurement of public interest, the popularity of archaeology becomes apparent. The place of prehistoric rock art in this public medium is, however, almost non-existent. It will be the aim of this article to explain the reasons behind this indifference towards prehistoric rock art in relation to the current state of information and education related to rock art in Britain. In our explanations several issues will be mentioned, including the selection of particular pasts for British, English and Scottish nationalisms. We will conclude by suggesting improvements necessary for the future of research and the preservation and enjoyment of this important aspect of British culture.

## Formal education

Formal education on rock art exists, to a very limited extent, in the United Kingdom in schools and universities. Regarding school teaching of prehistoric archaeology in general and of prehistoric rock art in particular, its almost total absence is one of the main reasons behind the general lack of knowledge by the public. There is an almost complete absence of archaeology in the timetables of most British schools

(Fleming 2000; Henson 2000b). Although British history is taught, the content varies by country: in Scotland topics begin with ‘*The ancient world before the 5<sup>th</sup> century*’, in Wales children learn about ‘*The earliest peoples*’ and in Northern Ireland teaching begins with ‘*The Middle and New Stone Ages*’. Sadly in English schools for the average 7–14 year old child history begins in a puff of smoke from which emerge Julius Caesar, Roman villas, roads and soldiers. Since it is not mandatory, knowledge of prehistory is not usually part of the training for history teachers. Some students may be lucky enough to be offered G.C.S.E. Archaeology at age 14–16, and new AS and A2 courses bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary education. This situation explains why most students entering British Universities to study archaeology have no previous experience of the subject (Collis 2000).

As regards university education, although prehistoric archaeology is taught in most of the old universities (Henson 2000a), as far as we know, only at Durham University is there an undergraduate module that focusses on prehistoric art and several students have written their undergraduate dissertations on rock art (Fig. 1). At a higher level,



Fig. 1. Durham student practising rubbing techniques for her dissertation in 2002.

prehistoric art is taught as part of the MA in Archaeology (Prehistoric Art) in Durham, the MA in Comparative Art and Archaeology at UCL in London, the MA in Archaeology (Prehistoric and Ancient Arts) in Manchester and the MA Archaeology of Art and Representation in Southampton. In fact, the teaching of rock art is very new in British universities. This is due, in part, to the emphasis on science since the 1950s (Fagan 2001), which caused most teaching related to the ideological world to be left aside. In Britain, perhaps with the exception of Haddingham (1974) no academic publication was made on open-air rock art from the 1950s until the early 1990s.

In fact many archaeologists enter the subject after a career elsewhere, perhaps pursuing a hobby or interest developed through evening classes run through an expanding programme of Continuing Education. The contribution of amateurs, such as Ronald Morris, Stan Beckensall, Maarten Van Hoek and local groups in Ilkley and Northumberland is testament to the interest of non-professionals.

One could ask why education on prehistory and prehistoric rock art is needed at all. In the modern world the role of history – and therefore of archaeology – is to underpin identity. This is why history was introduced in school curricula throughout the nineteenth century, during the emergence and consolidation of modern ethnic and national identities (Dodd 1999; Phillips 1998). The selection of the past undertaken by the regulating authorities is clearly connected with the golden ages and with the version of history a country wishes to promote. It is our view that a programme including societies with different social structures and a contrasting sense of aesthetics, as prehistoric societies in Britain did, would help to promote diversity. It is heterogeneity and not a single, uniform past, which better fits the history of the United Kingdom and of Europe. Moreover, it is this diversity which, in the face of the current social make-up of Britain and Europe, will help many to feel a sense of identity. We are not only referring to immigrants arriving onto our shores, but also to those involved in the internal migration throughout the country so common in Britain nowadays.

### ***Between formal and informal education: museums, exhibitions and the public***

One of the main functions of museums in the nineteenth century was education. As Elizabeth Crooke has discussed for the Irish case (Crooke 2000),

the aim of museums with historical and archaeological objects was the dissemination of knowledge of the past of the nation (or of the region within the nation). It cannot be but significant that it was in those nations in the British Isles that in the nineteenth century included prehistoric archaeology – understood as Celtic archaeology – in their own national history where pieces of prehistoric rock art first entered museums: Ireland and Scotland. At the time – and to a great extent still today – English nationalism was mainly based in the idea of the empire and this is the reason why the British Museum had objects from almost everywhere except the United Kingdom (Caygill 1992; MacGregor 1998). Still today the British Museum only exhibits one single piece of rock art – in fact megalithic art – that of the Badbury barrow, Dorset (South England) (Stuart Needham, pers. comm.). English nationalism – somehow overlapping with British nationalism from an English perspective – is centred in London and the south of England. Rock art is found in the north, and therefore considered, as the region itself, marginal (for a discussion of marginality and Scottish archaeology see Barclay (2001)).

In the United Kingdom, as in other parts of the world, museums were the focus of presentation and protection of archaeological objects until the 1960s when interest shifted toward the larger cultural environment and monuments (Walderhaug Saetersdal 2000: 167–8). This obviously affected monuments such as Stonehenge, still the focus of a lively debate (Skeates 2000: 80–4; Wainwright 2000), and Hadrian's Wall. Until recently, prehistoric rock art had also been completely ignored in landscape management. Despite some good information at a few sites, such as Castlerigg (Fig. 2), most completely lack any type of management. It is surely not just an open mind that accounts for the preservation of a roadsign indicating “Long Meg Druids Circle” (Fig. 3) but, rather, a simple lack of interest. This same apathy may also explain why nobody prevents rockclimbers from practising on rock art panels (Fig. 4), and why the first rock art site to be found in Northumberland, the very special place of Roughing Linn, is being consumed by vegetation (Fig. 5) whilst its information panel is falling apart (Fig. 6).

All the examples so far referenced are located in the north of England, whereas, we would argue, centralisation inevitably tends to focus interest on the south of England and the capital of the state, London. In our opinion, given the growing popularity of rock





Fig. 2. Information panel at Castlerigg, Cumbria.



Fig. 3. Roadsign to "Long Meg Druid Circle".

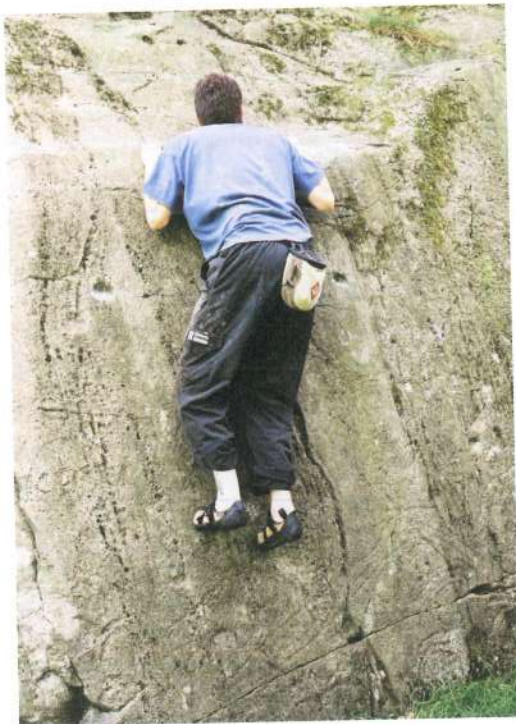


Fig. 4. Rockclimber practising on Chapel Stile rock art panel.



Fig. 5. Roughting Linn. General view.

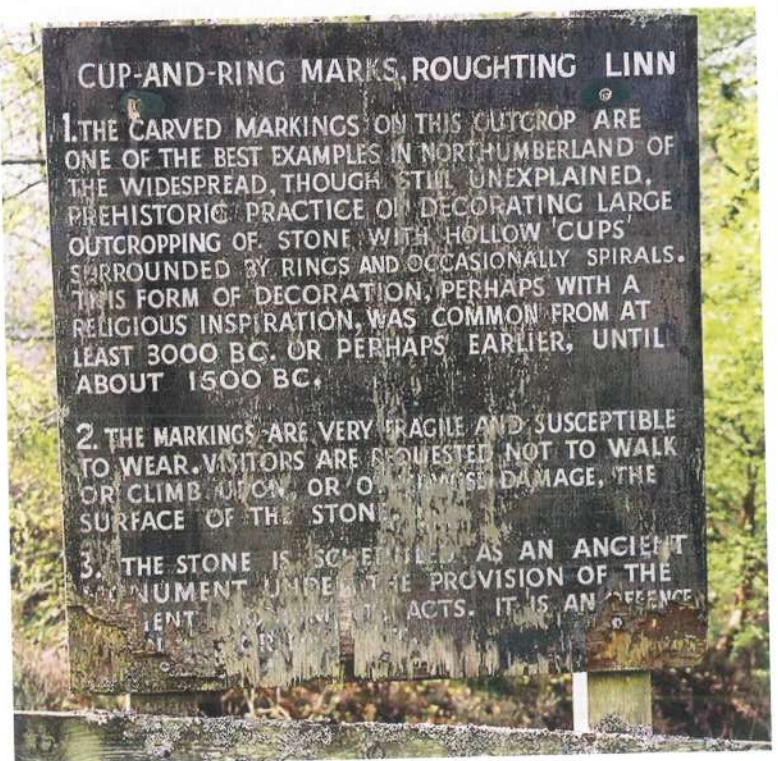


Fig. 6. Information panel at Roughting Linn.

art among both local populations and visiting tourists, it is increasingly urgent to develop measures to ensure both the protection of the sites and their sustainable use. Education, including the creation of good information panels, guide brochures and the training of tourist guides should be one of the primary goals of the heritage authorities.

In contrast to the situation in England, in Scotland the rock art area of Kilmartin excels in the good presentation of rock art sites to the public. Excellent information panels are coupled with good conservation practices (Figs. 7 & 8). For the last five years tourist visits to the rock art at Kilmartin have been complemented by an excellent exhibition at

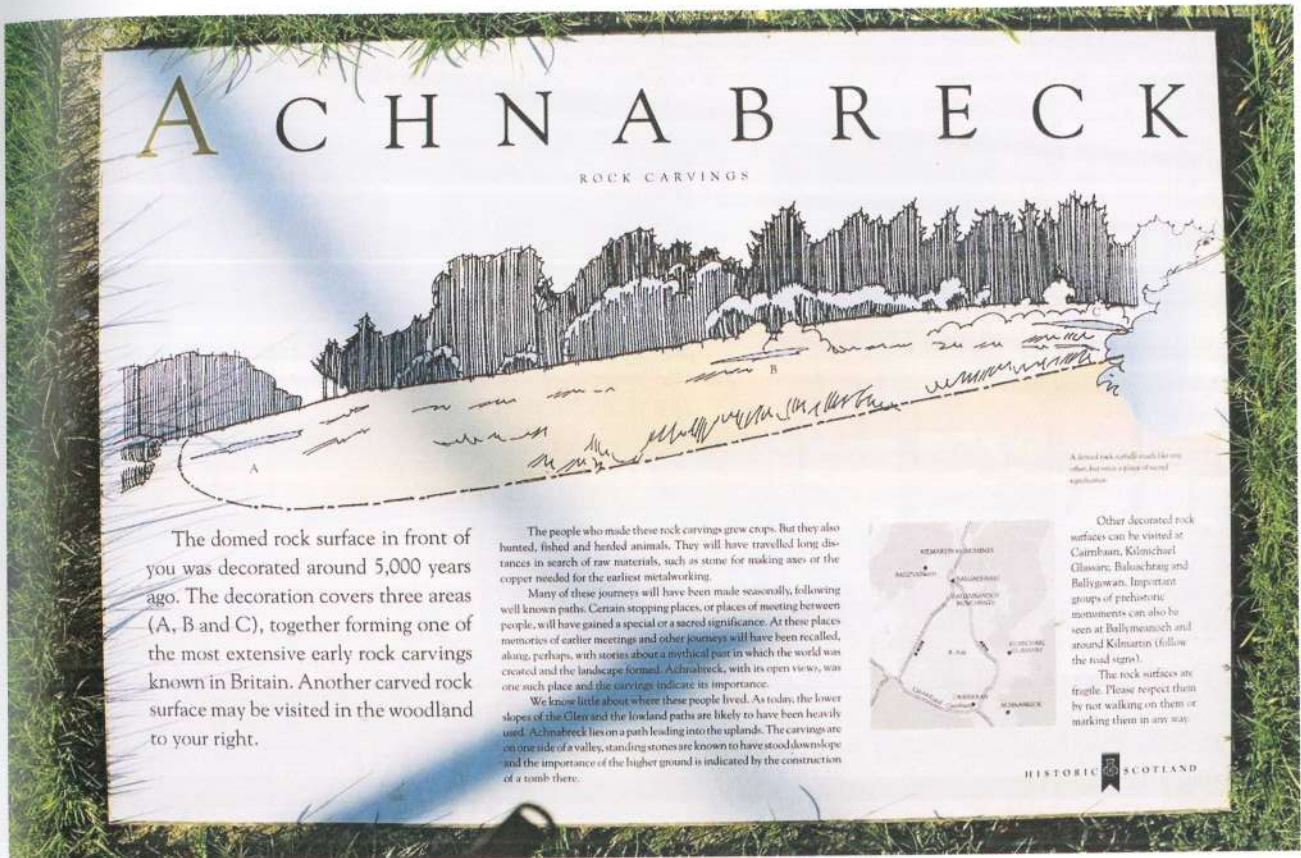


Fig. 7. Information panel at Kilmartin.



Fig. 8. Platform view at Achnabreck, Kilmartin.

Kilmartin House, a local private museum (Fig. 9). In 2002 one of us (MDA) visited Kilmartin museum and was struck by an exhibition of children's work at the entrance of the museum (Fig. 10). Although not directly inspired by the carvings, this attempt to involve children coincided with activities undertaken

in two other museum environments in the north of England that were specifically related to rock art. Both exhibitions (independently organised) in the spring and summer of 2002, included activities for children. An exhibition on "Stone Circles and Standing Stones of Eden", in Penrith, was linked with



Fig. 9. Detail of permanent exhibition at Kilmartin House.



Fig. 10. Final product of children's activity organised by Kilmartin House.



Fig. 11. Exhibition of pupils' work connected with the "Stone Circles and Standing Stones of Eden" exhibition, Penrith 2002.



Fig. 12. Activities for children at the "Art on the Rocks" exhibition, Durham 2002.



Fig. 13. Activities for children at the "Art on the Rocks" exhibition, Durham 2002.

school workshops, the products of which were included in the exhibition (Fig. 11). The workshops explored aspects of the prehistoric landscape through artefacts, photography, paintings, sculpture and words. Youngsters from local primary schools were invited to take part in a 'Museum Challenge' competition and the professional artist, Karen McDougall, went into the schools to work with the children on artwork, which then became part of the exhibition display. This was supplemented with visits to local sites. The project was welcomed by teachers who used ideas from the exhibition in literacy, geography and art classes. A second exhibition, organised in Durham, included an interactive display, a competition where children had to paint something inspired by rock art (Fig. 12) and a panel where visitors – both children and adults – could write their own ideas about the exhibition. Finally, children were encouraged to produce their own work of art (Fig. 13). Both exhibitions included talks not only by academics – one of the writers of this paper (MDA) included – but also of amateur popularisers such as Stan Beckensall.

## Conclusion

As stated above, in the modern world the role of history – and therefore of archaeology – is to underpin identity. This is why archaeology is still important and this is why we have argued that learning about prehistoric rock art is important. It is an understanding of diversity and not homogeneity which is key to current social processes in our own society. Education begins in schools, but it is not restricted to academic institutions. Formal education, as important as it is, is not the whole story: museums have traditionally been the main complementary institutions to formal education. The emphasis on landscape has led to an increasing relevance of heritage management. In this paper we have analysed the impact of prehistoric rock art in the three fields so far mentioned – formal education in schools and universities, museums, and sites themselves. We have argued that there are clear differences between the ways in which, within the United Kingdom, England and Scotland make use of prehistoric rock art. We have related such differences to the nationalist ideology in each of them but highlighted how alternative voices are being raised. Hopefully these will grow and continue to be heard in the future because their message is important for us all.

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*All photographs in this article by Margarita Díaz-Andreu.*

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# New suggestions on symbolism in the medieval rock art of Valcamonica

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The analysis of non-figurative rock art (cupmarks, grooves, crosses, etc.), that is widespread in the Alps and clearly connected to local oral traditions and folklore, can bring new light onto ancient societies. Beyond the rock art typology, Valcamonica is one of the richest areas in Europe regarding medieval figurative engravings. Besides crosses, keys, Salomon's Knots, which are subjects of obvious Christian inspiration, we can find images of castles, warriors, horsemen, etc. Particular attention has been paid to the Solomon's Knot, a polysemantic symbol that represents the equilibrium between two opposite concepts. Historic rock art should be coupled with the study of imagery of the same period in order to clarify meanings and purposes: a result that is almost impossible if we look only at the few known contexts of the thousand of prehistoric engravings.

The Alps is an area rich not only in figurative but also in schematic rock art representations which preserve folkloristic heritage and oral narratives, the roots of which are buried in pre-Christian beliefs and behaviour. The new religious messages were late to take hold and did not eliminate the deep-rooted ancient practices, which would have resulted in the loss of the cult itself. During 2000–2001, Sansoni, Lentini and Marretta (2001) investigated an area rich in schematic rock art, at the beginning of Valcamonica and the edge of Lake Iseo, between Pisogne and Piancamuno. This work explored the references buried in legends and traditions, which might have related to the iconographic traces on the rocks. The language of the stones and the oral narratives were compared using the instruments of archaeology and cultural anthropology. The analysis of oral sources revealed their producers' world-views, designating a particular conception of space, the domestic and the wild, thus delineating a particular geography of the territory. The object of analysis was a micro-culture that can be taken as representative of the wider Alpine context, characterised by a fundamental homogeneity. This newly gathered evidence, used in conjunction with official History,

can help us to reach a better understanding of the series of human events that represents our cultural substrate.

In this area, characterised by schematic art, the only example of figurative art is a single human image (Fig. 1). The weapons handled would have been used for fighting at a distance and identify him as a cross-bowman or a magical guardian watching over the territory. The figure has a large open hand, a sign of power or magical or spiritual virtues, and is surrounded by other signs that are difficult to



Fig. 1. Pisogne, Valcamonica.



Fig. 2. Pisogne, Valcamonica.

understand. It can be considered to date between 1100 and 1300 AD, according to the weapons' typology.

Other signs are crosses, or boundary-markers, which may also express a spontaneous popular ritual as is the case for the various crosses on a rock that is situated on a path leading to some mines in the area Pè de l'Aden. The cross, an apotropaic symbol *par excellence*, can be used as protection against negative entities or as a sign of exorcism (Fig. 2). So, the boundary-marking crosses do not only have a practical purpose. The meaning of boundaries overcomes physical reality, as the peace and equilibrium of the community presupposes the sanctification of boundaries, entrusted, not by chance, to stone: a powerful and eternal substance. The Romans offered sacrifices and gifts to the stones during the festival called Terminalia, in honour of the tutelary divinity, and whosoever violated the boundary could be killed. In Scandinavia the boundary stones were under the protection of the god Thor, and according to German and Scandinavian legends the transgressors, after death, wandered without rest trying to replace the stone in the right

position. The choice of the cross as boundary-marker could be motivated by its protective value and by the will to consecrate the boundary itself.

The horseshoe also has a protective value: it protects the hoof of the animal and, by extension, the human being. It is made of iron, a metal with magical properties, connected with strength and power. The horse itself presides over the passage between life and death; it connects reality with the other side, it is the vehicle of death represented in Roman triumphs. Horseshoes present on the rocks, according to numerous folkloric narratives, are the sign of the passage of a Saint or a demon, who have left the imprint of the horse. Frequently it marks boundaries between the world of the living and that of the dead. These signs and the relative legends occur in particular places, near deep ravines. It is probable that there is a relationship between engraved signs, the choice of places and popular beliefs, regarding manifestations of divine or diabolic entities or the world of the dead.

The souls of the dead had much importance in pre-modern societies. Wellbeing and prosperity was asked of them and was vital for the community. The divinities of Hades (Demetra) or the ancestors would guarantee rebirth in the cycle of life. But potentially dangerous contact with the world of the dead was regulated by well-established rituals (e.g. for the Romans through the "mundus", for the Celts in the days of Samain). European folklore clearly shows that beside good spirits there are damned souls, responsible for meteorological disasters, epidemics, famines, or who simply want victims. The defence of the collective against those souls is varied: exorcisms or processions defining the space of the village and fields to protect from wandering souls that were thus confined beyond the territory of the community. For instance, even today during the "Notte Encrusera" in the Saviore Valley, the young build barricades at cross-roads and in front of the church on New Years Eve to stop restless souls from penetrating the village. The same protective aim is found in the rogations directed to the four cardinal points in the period prior to sowing. For these we only have the memories of oral history, but maybe deeper research including toponymy or cartography showing the ancient use of territory – domestic spaces, wild spaces – could add some clarification.

Particular attention should be directed to shrines along old paths. Often they are built on rocks engraved during the pre-Christian era with the

function of disabling the strength of the pagan traditions by superposition. Christianity absorbed pagan sacred areas and practices in a complex equilibrium between its own affirmation and continuity with the pagan practices. The comprehensive reading of the signs from the Middle Ages can only be achieved within the religious framework in which the penetration of the new faith reworks an archaic religiosity not without resistance and syncretic effects. In the area of Campanine one finds the major concentration of medieval figures in Valcamonica and the Alpine Arc, extraordinary for the variety of Christian subjects: keys (Fig. 3), crosses, symbols of the Passion of Christ, script, Solomon's Knots. There are also images belonging to the lay tradition: a castle (Fig. 4), knights, warriors, scaffolds, hangmen, heraldic emblems, and magic signs. The boundary between sacred and profane is very weak. Certainly, the desire to narrate found expression in the incision of rocks. On rock 50 of Campanine, in the middle Valcamonica, there is a representation of a fence inside which there are figures holding a cross, a pole, a stick that terminates in a spiral, an anthropomorph characterised by a long tunic and others with clothes split in the middle. This could represent a procession near a walled village with a gate or a castle. Other depictions of castles in the area are similar to real constructions in the territory.

On rock 14 a figure with big hands is juxtaposed next to a phalliform with the base of an inclined cross. Is this a propitiatory scene in which one can see an archaic ritual, not domesticated by Christian orthodoxy? Another sign of great interest is the Solomon's Knot. It represents the equilibrium between the horizontal and vertical dimensions, the harmonic and vital link of the unbreakable intertwined. Solomon's Knot is represented, on various media, by civilisations distant in space and time. This symbol has an extraordinary diffusion in the Roman world, from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD onward. In Valcamonica the first examples come from this period, both on walls and rocks. Solomon's Knot is a powerful symbol that established itself perfectly in the Christian epoch when the new religion gave the symbol new meaning, without annulling the previous values that had determined its great success. In the Germanic and Longobard area there are many examples on belt-buckles and jewels. The Nordic taste for plaits created fancy forms among which one can individuate both simple and complex knots. In Ireland



Fig. 3. Campanine, Valcamonica.



Fig. 4. Campanine, Valcamonica.

monks decorated pages dominated with this theme and in Sweden we find the best examples of these knots on a silver pendent in the form of a cross from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. This shows the strong link between the matrix of the knot and the cross. In Valcamonica we find the knot, in the Middle Ages, on the rocks of





Campanine and also on frescoes from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Figs. 5 and 6).

The incised rocks of the Middle Ages present a reflection of that which was depicted on the walls of churches, with a common language that only a rigorous iconographic confrontation could clarify. It is necessary to continue research in all directions, in such a way that historic rock art research complements the study of the imagery as well as anthropological research. Only thus can we gain clarification of the meanings of the incisions on the rocks.

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Fig. 5. (Left) Campanine, Valcamonica.

Fig. 6. (Below) The church of Malegno, Valcamonica.

