



Book Reviews

NORTH MEETS SOUTH: THEORETICAL ASPECTS ON THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN ROCK ART TRADITIONS IN SCANDINAVIA EDITED BY PETER SKOGLUND, JOHAN LING AND ULF BERTILSSON

Oxbow Books, Oxford, 2017. 213pp, 72 colour and B&W illustrations, hb, ISBN 9781785708206, £20.00

The well-executed figurative carvings associated with Scandinavian rock art, are widely known and admired. *North Meets South* explores aspects of the two rock art traditions in Scandinavia. The work analyses various perspectives and interpretations of the origin and developments of both Northern and Southern traditions. Until relatively recently it was widely accepted that the Northern tradition was developed by indigenous hunter-gatherer communities, reflected by the depiction of animal motifs. The southern tradition was believed to reflect the ideology of farming communities and introduced from elsewhere. The theories expressed in this volume challenge these ideals and explore the connections between these traditions. The book consists of a series of papers from an international symposium coordinated by the Swedish Rock Art Research Archives and examines various theoretical approaches regarding the interpretation and classification of Scandinavian rock art.

Chapter 1 outlines the widely accepted origins/definition of both aspects of Scandinavian rock art. Klungseth Lødøen questions the use of the term tradition and what it refers to, whether it reflects the connection between the individual figures, or the compilation of carvings forming a narrative. What were once considered individual figures assessed independently are now widely interpreted as narratives, the author suggests a reconsideration of the current understanding of the traditions as the varying forms and characteristics of the art creates difficulty in defining either tradition (p.4).

Chapter 2 is concerned with the stylistic and typological classification of the art. The difficulty in dating rock art has resulted in the reliance on stylistic features and characteristics to reflect a tradition. The concept of style being used to chronologically assess the art was introduced in the early 20th century. This led to the establishment of three stylistic groups under which the rock art would be categorised. However, since then the discovery of many new sites has questioned the bounds of these three categories and many sites no longer fit comfortably within the original stylistic definitions. In this chapter Stebergløkken re-defines the existing terminology; type and

style in order to incorporate aspects relevant to modern discovery; research, and concepts. Analyses of the art within the bounds of these new definitions could improve understanding of Scandinavian rock art traditions and the relationship between them.

Chapter 3 is primarily concerned with the depiction of ship imagery in Scandinavian rock art. The approach taken in this chapter by Melheim and Ling, suggest compelling new theories for the origin or the southern rock art tradition. Suggesting that the southern tradition dating to the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age period was not a result of external influence but reflected the underlying ideology of the earlier northern tradition, coupled with the development of a maritime society. The demand for metal in Scandinavia during this period reflected the domination of new maritime institutions and the importance of trade networks to these coastal communities. The relevance and importance of the ship imagery at this time was re-enforced by its presence on grave goods and other artefacts dating to the Nordic Bronze Age. The transformation and incorporation of bulls and later horses into boat motifs is discussed and the authors suggest this connection represents a close ontological relationship between bulls and boats (p.65). The extent of the trade and the development of the plank-built ship encouraged the establishment of extensive trade networks, thus resulting in the formation of maritime communities, it is valid to suggest that the economy and trade of the period was reflected in the carvings from that time in Sweden.

A similar hypothesis was proposed by Bertilsson in Chapter 4 to account for the carvings at Nämforsen, drawing on the theory of maritime orientated societies. The author suggests that the site may have formed part of the larger metal trade network at the time. Also discussed was use of photogrammetric techniques, prompted by the discovery of over 700 previously unidentified figures at the site. New technologies such as photogrammetry and Structure from Motion imagery now dominate global rock art research, creating further insight and challenging our perceptions of both open air and megalithic carvings.

The ship figure is primarily associated with the Nordic Bronze Age, however, examples distributed along the Norwegian coast date to the Mesolithic period. Mange Gjerde's PhD research re-dated the carvings at Alta, Norway to the late Mesolithic approximately 1000 years earlier than originally thought, by adjusting the shoreline chronology in line with excavations and elevations (p.123). The author suggests that the current understanding and typological dating for the boat imagery should be reconsidered and figures and motif associated with boat imagery that does not relate to the Bronze Age should be reinterpreted in an earlier context. Mange Gjerde calls for further research into the connection between what is referred to as hunter rock art of the northern tradition and the southern tradition reflecting the agrarian influence.

Chapter 6 examines the connection between boats and solar imagery drawing parallels with Canada and Russia. In an attempt to view images from the Northern tradition in a wider context, the author assesses southern Scandinavian rock art in a way that both emphasise the northern connection as well as international influence and parallels. The author suggests that the development of the southern rock art tradition was influenced by older traditions and motifs expressed in the northern tradition and new aspects and ideals of modern culture, similar to that expressed in previous chapters.

Chapter 7 discusses the background of the metal trade in Scandinavia in an attempt to link Mediterranean ideology and mythology. The author explores the practicality of these trade routes and networks of exchange and proposes a new theory for the establishment of trading partnerships and exchange alliances. In relation to the Mediterranean concept of *Xenia*, a system of mutual friendship and gift exchange. The author suggests that this concept may be responsible for the 'seemingly -odd' distribution of art motifs in Scandinavia.

The influence of trade and exchange is also discussed in Chapter 8, along with the depiction of axe imagery in northern Europe which is seen to support the theory that Southern rock art was inspired by the Northern tradition. Although influence from the north, south and east have been argued, Skogland maintains that a western influence must also be considered (p.201). Influence from the British Isles and France is likely, supported by recent isotope analyses by Johan Ling on metal artefacts from the Tanum region. Skogland suggests that all metal in the region was imported from outside of Scandinavia from regions such as central Europe and the Mediterranean. This reinforces the possibility of outside influence and Mediterranean connections, discussed in Chapter 7. The chapter explores aspect of trade, suggesting that the axe imagery present on Scandinavian rock art reflected the importance of metal and trading networks to Early Bronze Age societies.

In conclusion, the recent research into both rock art traditions in Scandinavia present valuable theories on the origins of and connections between both rock art traditions. The classification of the art in the early 19th century and the interpretation of stylistic features defined in the early 20th century have been re-established to include recent finds and modern interpretation. The book presents compelling theories that question the interpretation of Scandinavian rock art research, calling for the reinterpretation of sites previously associated with both Northern and Southern traditions. These refreshing views of Scandinavian rock art suggest the division between the two forms of the art should not be as sharply defined, considering the two traditions overlap geographically and often on the same panel, with evidence of superimposition. Overall, the theories seem to suggest a north south influence but does not exclude the possibility of external influence during the later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age period. This highlights the importance of

maritime dominated societies and established trade routes and the art reflects the importance of metal as an import in Scandinavia at this time.

Clare Busher O'Sullivan BA, MPhil

University College Cork

Review submitted: July 2018

The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews

Editor