

David Vogt: *Rock Carvings in Østfold and Bohuslän, South Scandinavia: An Interpretation of Political and Economic Landscapes*. The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture & Novus Press, Oslo 2011.

This book is based on David Vogt's PhD thesis presented at the University of Oslo in 2006. Since the rich rock art heritage across Fennoscandia deserves more visibility outside the Nordic countries, the decision to translate and edit this book into an English version has to be lauded. This is especially important considering that the research presented builds heavily upon the combined efforts of several generations of researchers in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Even if many important volumes and articles have been published in English, such as J. Coles's 2005 *Shadows of a Northern Past: Rock Carvings in Bohuslän and Østfold*, not many Scandinavian authors have published books in English and only rarely cover both Bohuslän and Østfold. For example, J. Goldhahn, a meticulous article writer, has mainly written his monographs in Scandinavian languages. The material and different research questions are probably very familiar to the tight worldwide community of the rock art researchers, but it is of highest importance to have volumes that summarise the existing research to the general archaeological audience and wider public as well. This is not to say that Vogt does not add his own contribution to the academic discussion – quite the contrary – but it is crucial to emphasise the fact that this research, without underrating its merits, would not have been possible without the many predecessors.

The task Vogt has given to himself is huge. There are 2700 fields of rock carvings across southern Norway and Sweden, all of which are included in this study. The aim was to analyse the context of these carvings in the widest possible sense. Vogt discusses not only the content of the carvings with their typology and classification but also their dating, location in the landscape both at the macro and micro level, and their social and political context. Due to the enormous size of the archive material originating from two different countries that have separate governmental heritage management systems, Vogt was unable to check every single entry with original archive sources himself. He had to trust on other people's listings and classifications. He had to present the material in most cases to the extent it has been compiled

by the other scholars studying this and the related subjects, such as the Bronze Age metal objects, before him.

The structure of the book is logical and follows the academic tradition of thesis writing. First Vogt presents the background of the rock carvings, both the two research areas, Østfold in eastern Norway and Bohuslän in western Sweden, and the main period of the rock carvings, the Bronze Age in Scandinavia and Europe. Next he discusses thoroughly the comparative typological dating of the rock carvings before looking at the landscape, climate and vegetation in the study areas in southern Scandinavia from the Neolithic to the Early Iron Age. Then he proceeds into discussing the political organisation and ideology both in Scandinavia and central Europe. At the end he presents rock carvings as an ideological and political system of symbols related to the emerging chiefdoms in the core areas of the southern Scandinavian Bronze Age.

The variable depth of discussion in different subchapters makes this book an uneven read. There are undeniable highpoints, but also passages that would have needed more substance. The study shows strong merits every time Vogt had prepared any original analysis of the rock carving material. He is able to draw conclusions both on the chronology and the location of the carvings and he uses these competently in his final discussion as evidence in the defence of his arguments. However, most of the background and theoretical discussion that does not relate directly to the southern Scandinavian rock art or archaeology is very superficial indeed and in many places resembles a long summary or essay of a book or a major article. A considerable number of pages is dedicated to the presentation of Earle's theoretical statements and his comparative material (p. 191–6, see also 196–203). The thinness of referred material is especially clear in the sections dealing with the European Bronze Age and classical cultures in the Mediterranean. This scarcity of sources is a common characteristic of theses, but these passages could have been tightened and strengthened in the editing phase. Language check and proof reading could have been tighter in places as well, since some abbreviations are still in Norwegian and some awkward expressions only made proper sense, if one knows a Scandinavian language. The apparent Norwegian convention of passing a long list of references with a nod 'and

others' should have been avoided by referring to a bibliography in one of the earlier substantial treatises on different subject matters.

The most satisfying section of the book is the section on the dating evidence. Vogt starts his discussion with the cases where Bronze Age tombs incorporate carvings; sadly the most important ones, such as Kivik, cannot be dated with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, these rock carvings seem to cover a long time span from the Late Neolithic to at least Late Bronze Age, if not into the Iron Age; the Late Neolithic dating is certain, so the rock carvings precede with the introduction of metals. The geographical differences in the distribution of different types of tomb carvings are interesting. In Norway cup carvings dominate, in Sweden boats and in Denmark circular carvings, although there seems to be no chronological difference.

The comparative study of decorations on bronze objects, such as boat motifs, gives a Late Bronze Age date to the motives in question. However, this is partly due to the relative increase in the number of bronze objects in Period IV and later. The different real life objects presented in the rock carvings include possible chapes, shields, helmets, greaves, chariots, lures, animals presented in animal figurines, triskalia and axes. Vogt argues that the object carvings can be used to create a relative chronology. He then shows his convincing results. 263 fields can be dated with these features that have real life comparisons and 42.8% of them are from Periods V and VI. These results show that the phenomenon started in the Late Neolithic or during the transitional period and the subject matter of the carvings changed in the Late Bronze Age before the tradition ceased abruptly. This dating section is the core of this thesis and the basis of any discussion on the political meaningfulness of the carvings. It is clear that this treatise was practically impossible to write before the early 21st century (see the chronological studies, Jensen 1997; 2002).

The ever tightening time limits placed upon PhD students and the need to be shown to be using the latest methods have resulted with some not wholly convincing or rewarding decisions. The landscape context is analysed using GIS with a partial sample. This is not the author's fault. It is quite understandable that, if the material covers areas in two different countries, as a Norwegian citizen Vogt has been able to compile environmental GIS coverage only in Østfold in Norway.

Vogt was able to collaborate with The Norwegian Forest and Landscape Institute (NIJOS) and be able to prove what Erling Johansen, a Norwegian archaeologist who spent his life studying rock art, had assumed intuitively after wandering around Østfold throughout his career. Vogt is clearly not a GIS practitioner himself, since his references lack the basic literature on the study of the rock art and its landscape context, namely Gaffney's, Stančič's and Watson's (1995) Scottish case study. Similarly, the lack of the use of standard statistic methods, such as correlation and chi-squared test, together with presenting the results as a comparison of averages of different distances, suggests that he was not carrying out the analyses himself with standard software. The use of cluster analysis is mentioned (p. 135), but it remains unclear, if this refers to a proper statistical cluster analysis or the results of the different qualitative and quantitative comparisons between rock carving sites with different kinds of carvings. Nevertheless, this section demonstrates that the rock carvings in this area relate to bad drainage and clay soils. There are also demonstrated differences between the types of carvings and their location: the cup marks dominate the carving fields in the north farther inland whereas the ships are visibly present nearer the sea. The pollen data and other evidence shows that the carvings do relate to a grazing landscape outside the main agricultural areas. Sadly, this level of analysis could not be replicated in Bohuslän.

The summary of the settlement history of the case study areas can show that in Østfold tombs, single finds, flints and heaps of fire-cracked stones indicate land use, but the signs of permanent settlement are very limited. Same is true in Bohuslän, although there are clearer exceptions, such as the site of Stora Sund with a reoccurring settlement from the Early Neolithic period onwards with a Late Bronze Age house. There were also Bronze Age cairn and tomb sites. Vogt also points out how few bronze objects have been found from both Bohuslän and Østfold. A total of 233 bronze objects have been found from the first area in Sweden and 48 in Norway; in comparison, over 1500 bronzes have been discovered from Skåne, the undisputable heartland of the Bronze Age north of Denmark. The areas that were rich with rock carvings were in periphery of the Bronze Age interregional networks.

Looking at this volume and comparing it to some other books on cave and rock art, it is surprising how many serious studies on rock art have relatively unimpressive illustrations. Their subject matter is more elaborate than the visual representation of the object of study and this book is no exception in this matter. This scarcity of drawings and distribution maps is probably partly due to the cost of printing, but also due to different copyright issues. It is true that many of the rock carvings discussed in this book – especially those from Tanum near Gothenburg – have been published in more luscious coffee table type volumes, but many, especially those in Østfold have not. Therefore, the lack of a map presenting the distribution of securely dated figures, the lack of the illustrations of many of the key carvings discussed in the dating section and the lack of distribution maps of the settlements discussed in the context section are unfortunate omissions. These illustrations are indispensable for the readers from outside the Nordic countries who are not familiar with the geography of the area. Different distribution maps would also have strengthened the arguments on rock carvings relating to the peripheral grazing areas.

In Part IV of the book Vogt builds a relatively strong case for the rock carving phenomenon flourishing in the peripheral fringe of the Scandinavian Bronze Age and the carvings acting as ideological expression and communication more than anything else. He points out that the case study areas in Bohuslän and Østfold presented good grass on clay lands, possible commons and the rock massifs and plains created natural fences in the landscape. He suggests that the herd owners were in the east in the Skåne core area of the southern Scandinavian Bronze Age who legitimised their ownership – or usage – of the clay lands in the west with the carvings. Some of the motifs had strong central European influences, especially the scabbard and the chariots, whereas ships, foot soles and circular ‘sun’ carvings belong to an earlier, Nordic stratum. He also suggests a continental origin for cup marks. A composite repertoire through different communication networks suggests that different symbolic repertoires were catered for and that continental influences were increasing in importance. Even if some carvings undeniably represent ritual scenes, most of the content can be interpreted in ideological terms as a discourse on power relations. Particular

regal messages were delivered using a ship as a regal symbol. The rise of the rock carving during Periods V and VI underlines the importance of agriculture, interregional contacts and political innovation. Old carving tradition played an active role in society and it was a visual strategy to communicate the rights to the areas of production and strengthen the power structures when the elites and power hierarchies were emerging.

The interpretations follow the general lines of postprocessual social explanation and they are not too original or unique any more. It is clear that this discussion had to see the light of day, but it was cutting edge around the beginning of the new millennium. However, the actual act of pulling all this information together, building a strong core section resulting with a relative chronological outline for different motifs and showing the relationship between the grazing pastures and carvings will outlive interpretations. Vogt clearly knew the drawbacks of this work when he presented it for publication; he had only been able to do the GIS and landscape analysis properly with the Østfold material whereas the reliable datings concentrated in Bohuslän. However, his overall arguments seem to hold and the importance of human figures, ships and metal objects in carvings suggests that these interpretations are not only a plausible, but also a likely explanation. It only raises the questions: who were the actual knappers who physically created the carvings and who was the audience? Bored shepherds or different ritual appropriation teams from the core areas?

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