

Documenting rock art in dialogue with the rock surface

This aspect of our cultural heritage, is an important archaeological source material that is threatened by natural weathering, that is being accelerated by environmental pollution.

Therefore, it is important that we make efforts in the present to document the images, so that at least a reproduction of the iconography is available for future research.

Documentation

A fundamental research resource

Tanums Hällristningsmuseum *Underslös*, Sweden, (Museum and Rock Art Research Centre of Tanum) has over 40 years of experience with documentation work and is continually developing and evaluating new and existing methods for the various phases of the documentation process.

- ⊕ The rubbing technique remains the primary method, Paper rubbing or frottage can be regarded as an objective method of documentation, as the technique reproduces both the carved figures and the surrounding rock surface, complete with all its features, very accurately and in full-size.
- ⊕ Regarding the integration of third dimension within the documentation of rock art. Five years ago, a collaboration was established between University of Gothenburg, Swedish Rock Art Research Archives and Tanums Hällristningsmuseum *Underslös*, Sweden. The three dimensional methods, SfM and laser triangulation scanning, and the rubbing technique, complement one another



Artificial light

Rubbing

3 D

Research

Our biggest source for the understanding of the social conditions and the spiritual beliefs at the time the images were created, is this imagery, that occurs primarily on stone, but also often on metal, bronze, gold and perishable material, for example wood, or as tattoos.

Acknowledgement of the importance of the images within a scientific context is clear within current research, and the use of the images as a scientific argument, as of themselves, is no longer questioned.

From the perspective of research, the rock carvings have contributed toward a recognition of the value of the images and images and resulted in an increased interest in involving the images as a source material as part of efforts to supplement out knowledge and understanding of prehistoric periods, primarily the Bronze Age.

However, the process of recording is partly dependent upon interpretation of both the motifs and compositions – which are even more difficult to decipher. These images were created within a prehistoric context and they were coded at the moment of their creation as part of their cultural and social development. It is not at all a simple task to decode these images, since they do not agree with our experiences in the present.

Thus, modern documentation, is not only a technical process, but also draws on all the experiences and skills, that *all* the sciences have added to archaeology. This is particularly evident within the natural sciences, where trace element isotope analysis of metal and organic materials, give us concrete knowledge in areas that have been previously dominated by theory.

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