

Chapter 2

Violence, Warriors, and Rock Art in Bronze Age Scandinavia

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Introduction

Scandinavian figurative rock art from the Bronze Age 1700–500 BC, is highly evocative, and it is therefore not surprising that this prehistoric manifestation has inspired a variability of interpretations over the years (Almgren 1927; Coles 2005; Goldhan and Ling 2013) (Fig. 2.1). Broadly speaking, the rock art may be seen as a selection of images that represent social and ritual actions, and/or positions, but also cosmological features and beings (Fig. 2.2 cf. Kaul 1998; Goldhan and Ling 2013). Some compositions may be regarded as episodic, others rhapsodic, performed in a varied and ambiguous way. Mobility and conflict seem to go hand in hand, with highly ritualized scenes or compositions. Moreover, Scandinavian Bronze Age (1700–500 BC) rock art includes many depictions of violence, fighting, and warriors. There are staged fights in boats, combat scenes on the ground, but also some scenes depict the act of killing (Fig. 2.3). The war-related figurative rock art seems to correspond to theatre/performance and showing-off, but is also, thus, related to actual violence and war. Advertising is an important strategy in warfare

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Fig. 2.1 The regions with rock art discussed in this chapter. 1—Bohuslän and Östfold, 2—Scania, 3—Norrköping, 4—Uppland

(Ling and Cornell 2010) and it is tempting to see the depicted warriors on the rock art as a manifestation of this strategy. A noteworthy fact is that there is no other Bronze Age region in Europe where the image of violence is so pronounced. Most of the scenes could be related to two separate chronological phases in the Bronze Age, namely period II (1500–1300 BC) and V (900–700 BC) (see Ling and Cornell 2015) and it is notable that this correlation to peaks with the amount of bronze



Fig. 2.2 Rock art site at Tanum showing warriors and ships along with a variability of social and ritual representations. Tanums. Hällristningsmuseum Underslös. *Source* SHFA

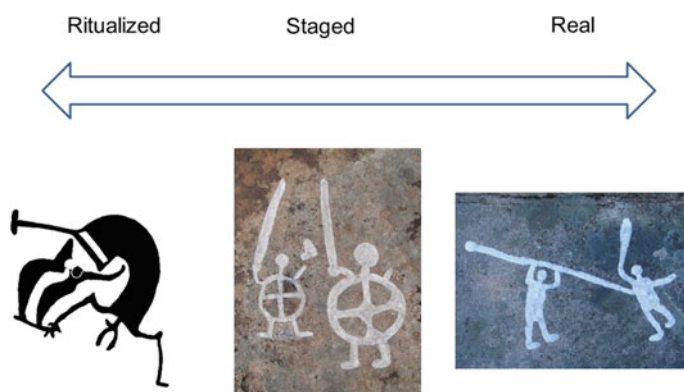


Fig. 2.3 The social spectra of depicted warriors on the rocks, from ritualized to realistic. Photos by A. Toreld. Documentation by Stiftelsen för dokumentation av Bohusläns hällristningar. *Source* SHFA

metals in Southern Scandinavia.¹ The figurative rock art seems to represent a wide social spectrum of idealized items themes and actions. Some of the figurative depictions seem to articulate more social features while others more ritualistic and staged features of society (for a more thorough commentary on this, see Cornell and Ling 2010; Ling 2008: 178). Thus, we include the whole spectra, from ritual, staged to realistic, when discussing the act and significance of depicting war-related social phenomena on the rocks. Moreover, one important strand we wish to highlight is the active and intentional dimension of depicting antagonistic elements in rock art.

Rock Art, Economy, and Society in the Bronze Age (BA)

It is important to stress that the war-related figurative rock art appear and vanish with the Bronze Age (BA). There are, interestingly, no war related figurative rock from the Neolithic era (4300–1700 BC) in Scandinavia. The presence of violence is, probably related to the Bronze Age society's investments in long distance trade that in turn, bolstered a pronounced general social inequality (Vandkilde 2006; Ling 2008; Earle and Kristiansen 2010). Thus, the major difference between the economy and social organization during the Neolithic versus the Bronze Age in Scandinavia was that elite Bronze Age households started to invest in the Maritime forces of production,—relations of production and long distance trade (Earle 2002). This investment led to an expansion of certain households and thereby to a more pronounced social inequality. The investment in maritime trade could be seen as a general feature for the coastal regions in Bronze Age Europe. Thus, the investment in Maritime ventures—long distance exchange and—praxis, constituted the general trends that differentiated the Bronze Age (BA) societies from the Neolithic social formations, and these developments also fomented social complexity.

The shift from the Neolithic to the BA was a profound structural transformation based on a changing political economy (Kristiansen and Earle 2014). Large-scale trade in metals and other forms of wealth across Europe developed in the Bronze Age. In simple terms, the BA witnessed an emergence of social stratification based on elite control over long distance trade (Earle 2002). This new situation lead to the rise of so-called individualizing stratified societies and organized polities (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005; cf. Renfrew 1984).

Fundamental to this transformation was the investment in long distance trade and advantages of maritime interaction and exchange created in turn, the comparative advantage for maritime chiefdoms based on specialized boat building and knowledge, strategic locations with respect to trade, and warriors to protect

¹The Nordic Bronze Age is divided in 6 phases; Period 1: 1700–1500 BC, Period 2: 1500–1300 BC, Period 3: 1300–1100 BC, Period 4: 1100–900 BC, Period 5: 900–700 BC, and Period 6: 700–500 BC (see Ling 2008).

shipping (Rowlands and Ling 2013). This would have favoured “trading chiefdoms” of Scandinavia and the Atlantic. Similar developments of maritime long-distance trade were contributing factors to the emergence of Aegean city-states (Earle 2002). However, it is important to stress that the social forms differed between these societies, but the material evidence also shows that these maritime polities formed networks that extended across distances, intertwined by competition and cooperation.

The palpable maritime sphere corresponds to a kind of ideology which became one of the major cornerstones for the Nordic Bronze Age, grounded in a maritime reality (Rowlands and Ling 2013) with an emphasis on building and crewing ships for maritime activities, including trading, raiding, and warfare (Fig. 2.4). A special fraction of Bronze Age Scandinavian society was involved in maritime long distance trade, travel, and warfare. The Scandinavian Rock art shows many features that could be related to this praxis. For instance, the “warriors” depicted on the rocks are often accompanied by large ships, specific ritual gear, and other exotica indicating that this practice took place at a macro regional level, and it is in this light we can picture Scandinavian Bronze Age “warriorhood”.

Scandinavia’s dependence on metals during the Bronze Age triggered the need to participate in wider metal securing networks. Thus, the development of boat technology and maritime skills were of major importance for the rise of

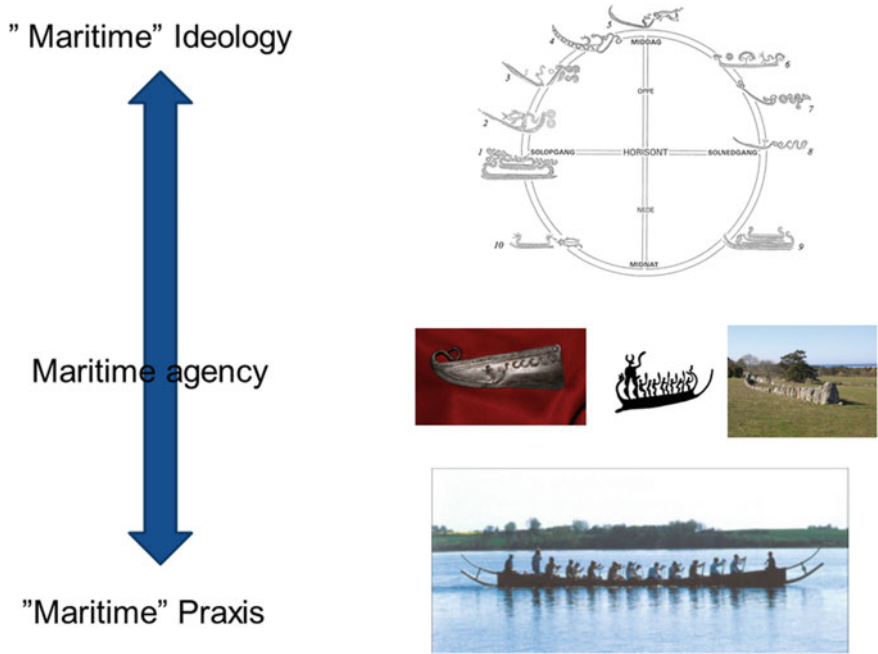


Fig. 2.4 Model of the Nordic maritime ideology, grounded in social action, so expressed in graves and bronze items

Scandinavian regional polities during the Bronze Age, not least with regard to the new role of exchange and trade (Earle and Kristiansen 2010: 226–230).

On basis of the control of the metal trade, a mutual dependence was established between two spheres of production, the agro-pastoral (already established during the Neolithic) and the “new” maritime sphere of production, but perhaps also including or articulating with other spheres. We thus suggest the possibility of the existence of different socio-economic spheres, in particular, an agricultural/pastoral sphere and a maritime sphere. Thus, it is not farfetched to envision the gradual emergence of at least two distinct modes of production, which articulated with each other; one agricultural/pastoral and a maritime mode. The spatial distribution of large and independent households in the southern Scandinavian landscape was characteristic of the decentralized political economy during the Bronze Age (Kristiansen 1998; Earle 2002; cf. Holst et al. 2013). Kristiansen describes this as follows:

Chiefdoms, or rather clusters of chiefdoms, are reflected in localised style variations and in metalwork... These stylistic regions are approximately 500–1000 km², 20–40 km across, normally with one or a few central places... Within this region, local settlement units (individual chiefdoms) are defined by clusters of barrows typically only a few kilometres across (Kristiansen 1998: 27).

The interaction between highly varied regions in terms of environment, production, skills, and socio-economic and political settings was key since it slowly created a rationale for specializing in production. For instance, many of the coastal areas with rock art had access to timber, a feature that was scarce and lacking in the deforested agro-pastoral regions. The coastal areas also benefitted from the knowledge of the sea and transportation on water (Fig. 2.1). Areas with agricultural surpluses are associated with barrows and large bronze hoards (Holst et al. 2013), and these regions are also known for the large amounts of deposited metal in funerary contexts (thus ending the exchange cycle of metals). The coastal regions of Sweden and Norway were deeply involved in building, crewing ships and creating and maintaining maritime institutions, manifested by rock art, cairns, and ship-shaped graves (Ling 2008). This maritime sphere was more fragile, but probably also more dynamic, due to the instability of the sources of exchange, i.e. amber, metals, and other products (Ling 2008).

Rock art, burials, and metal hoards indicate that Scandinavian Bronze Age societies were socially stratified and were based on a decentralized socio-political organization (Kristiansen and Earle 2014). Population estimates and dating of non-excavated burials is tricky, but it has been suggested that only a limited number, about 15–20% of the population, was buried with several exquisitely produced bronze artefacts and in monumental settings (Holst et al. 2013). Indications of social inequality are also very pronounced in Scandinavian Bronze Age Rock art. The clearest examples depict enlarged warriors together with numerous smaller anonymous “collective” oarsmen. This representation strongly indicates that certain individuals in society controlled the ships and thereby the maritime trade (Ling 2008: 202 ff., Fig. 2.5). The location of the Scandinavian rock

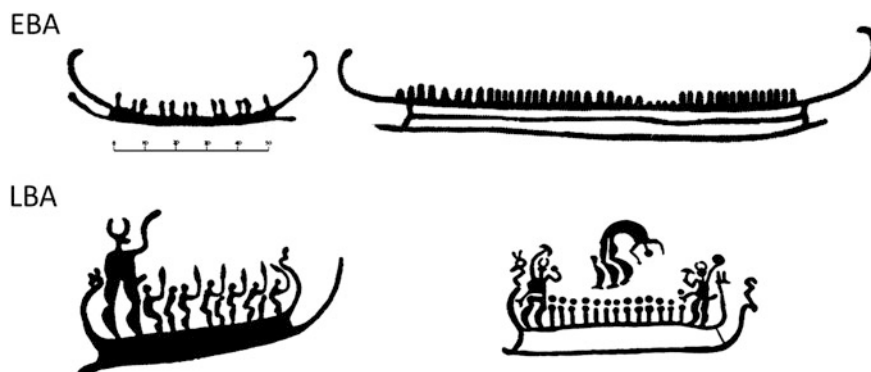


Fig. 2.5 The ship as a social context for the display of social positions and social inequality on the rocks (after Ling 2008)

art and burial cairns reflect the decentralized societal organization of Scandinavian coastal societies during the Bronze Age. In other regions, barrows and metal hoards seem to have had a similar key function (Kristiansen 1998). The actual workings of this socio-economic process are still largely unknown, along with the differences between groups and regions that are of key importance. Just to mention some elements, the maritime factor is stronger in certain areas, while the agro-pastoral factor has a stronger presence in others. Still, both of these elements were necessary to create the Scandinavian metal-oriented economy.

The engagement with the metal trade throughout southern Scandinavia involved ownership of land for the production of cattle, possession of seagoing ships and amber for export production. In short, during the Scandinavian BA, individual households possessing substantial agro-pastoral resources invested in the maritime forces of production. These investments allowed said households to accumulate wealth and eventually, political power.

Regions and Chronology

In modern day southern Scandinavia, localities with high incidences of rock art depicting warriors and weapons were generally located in coastal areas. Areas of particular interest are the west coast of Sweden and east coast of Norway, Norrköping and Uppland areas in eastern Sweden and Scania in the south east (see Fig. 2.1).² These areas share certain traits in terms of the setting of the rock art in

²The Scandinavian landscape has been transformed by shore displacement. This displacement is why many rock art sites (which are found inland today) were located along the coast during the Bronze Age.

the landscape (Fredell 2003; Ling 2013). They were all, in the Bronze Age, in different ways, linked to water, the coast, and waterways. The Bohuslän region faced the North Sea, while Scania, Uppland faced the Baltic and even Norrköping was linked directly to the Baltic Sea. Regarding the dating of rock art, various techniques have been used over the years (Kaul 1998; Ling 2008, 2013). The most recent contribution of typological dating of rock art is Flemming Kaul's comparative study of ships on bronzes and on rocks. His comprehensive approach has been endorsed and cited by a number of scholars (Kaul 1998). The other major method focused on shore line dating and the context of the rock art panels in the landscape (Ling 2008) (Fig. 2.6). The basis of this chronology was premised on the elevation of the ship types in relation to shore displacement. However, it should be stressed that these two methods complement each other and that Scandinavian scholars are in general agreement with regards to BA chronology.

Turning to the topic of depicted warriors on the rocks, the first known representations of warriors are from about 1500–1400 BC (Ling 2008). These military depictions become more accentuated in the following periods and reach a peak during period V (900–700 BC). Warriors are also represented during the Pre-Roman Iron Age (PRIA), until 300 BC (Ling 2008).

In terms of chronology, specific regions show a higher frequency of depicted warriors and weapons from certain periods than others. For instance, in the Norrköping area there is a very clear dominance of panels with representations of weapons, warriors, and ships that could be related to period II (1500–1300 BC) (Nordén 1925; Fredell 2003). This is also the case in Uppland, even if the depictions of weapons and warriors are less frequent than in Norrköping (Ling 2013). Along the west coast of Sweden, depictions of warriors from period II are present at many places but not as frequent as the scenes from period V (Ling 2008). Interestingly, however, are the recent discoveries of sword wielders represented in rock art along the west coast of Sweden dating to period II (Toreld 2012). Regardless of region, it is, however, notable that a high percentage of the figurative scenes of warriors and/or weapons can be dated either to the Nordic Bronze Age period II (1500–1300 BC) or to period V (900–700 BC) (Ling 2008, 2013). These are also the phases when the greatest amounts of metals were in circulation in Scandinavia. Moreover, during these phases, Scandinavian societies were involved in long distance trade.

The strategically accessible locations of the rock art, from a maritime perspective, may suggest that warriors from larger areas and from different polities could have interacted at these sites. Several of the coastal rock art locations could have worked as arenas for metal distribution in southern Scandinavia. These locations could have functioned as “aggregation” sites for groups with mobile occupations such as travellers/warriors/traders, and also for sedentary inland populations (Fig. 2.1). In light of the strategic maritime positioning of rock art, it is intriguing to see that new metal analyses indicate that Scandinavian societies were connected to sources of metal from various regions of Europe (Ling et al. 2014). Thus, the fighters and warriors depicted on the rocks in these regions may then represent agents engaged in this particular praxis in this part of Scandinavia during the Bronze Age. It is notable

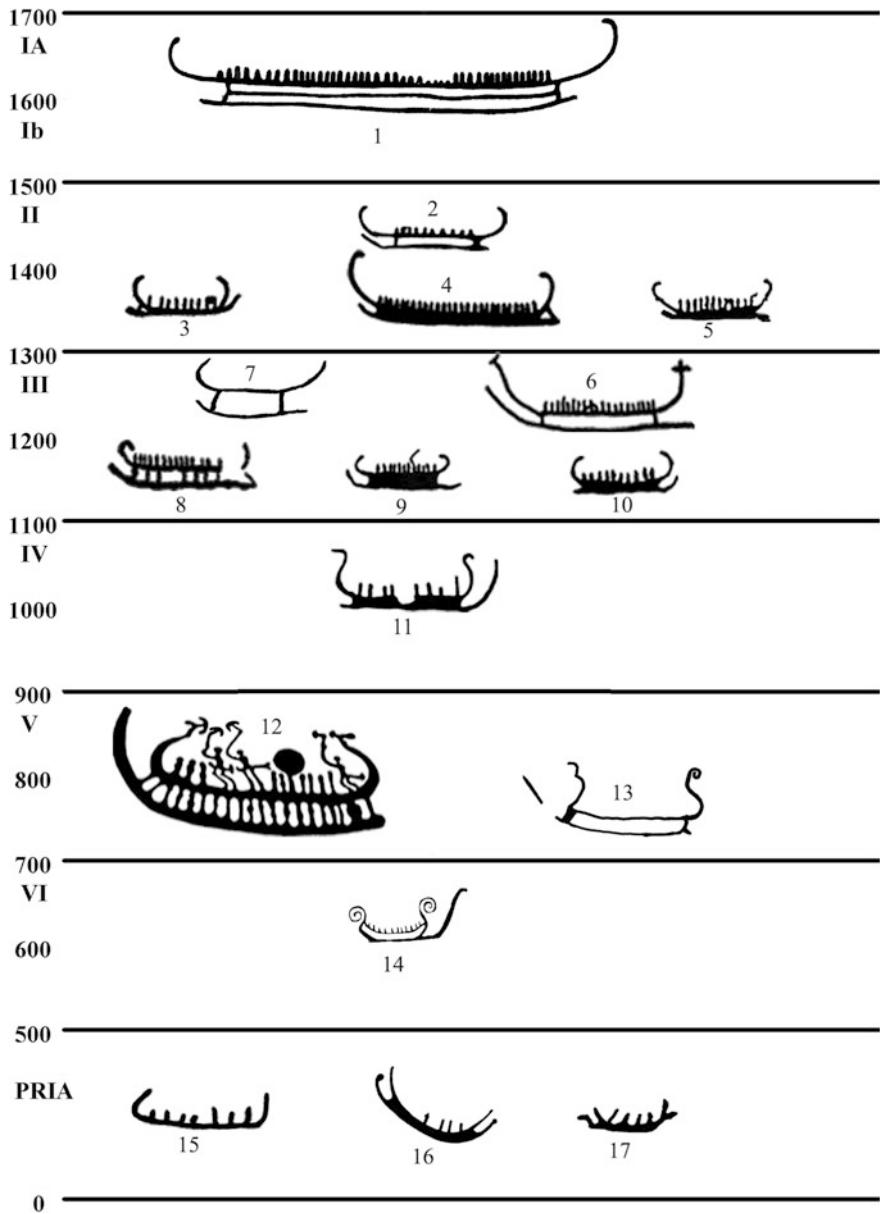


Fig. 2.6 Ship chronology based on shore displacement. Ship images with inward turning prows dominated during the Early Bronze Age, 1700–1100 BC, while outward turning prows terminating in animal heads characterized the Late Bronze Age, 1100–500 BC, also symmetrical ship images of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, 500–200 BC (after Ling 2008)

that a high percentage of these figurative scenes can be dated to the Nordic Bronze Age period II and V respectively. It is also notable that this correlation is associated with peaks in the amount of metals in southern Scandinavia that correspond to these periods (Kristiansen 1998; Ling and Cornell 2015).

Images of Violence, Warfare, and Weapons

In combat scenes the most frequent weapons depicted are axes, clubs, spears, and bows, but swords, slings, and other weapons also appear on some rock panels (Nordbladh 1989; Harding 2007). The outcome of a fight is seldom depicted, rather a staged encounter with two opponents aiming spears, axes, bows, and in some cases raising swords against each other is more common. However, there are relatively few scenes in which the outcome of the fight is evident.

The depicted weapons on the rocks indicate that the raw material for the making of weapons varied (Harding 2007). Metal weapons are frequently depicted but weapons made from stone and/or wood are also represented on rock panels. In terms of armour, shields are frequently depicted in rock art (Fig. 2.7). Traditionally, these shield bearers have been associated with Late Bronze Age contexts (Coles 2005). However, recent chronological research on shield bearers adjacent to rock art depicting ships indicates a dating to period II (Ling 2013). Additionally, recent discoveries of panels with shield bearing sword wielders dated to period II–III (Ling and Cornell 2015). This indicates that shields could have been used during a major part of the Bronze Age, as was the case in Ireland (Harrison 2004).

Throughout Scandinavia, swords are very rarely depicted in an active fashion. Generally, these weapons hang passively on the warrior's hip. However, panels showing sword wielders were recently discovered in western Sweden (Toreld 2012;

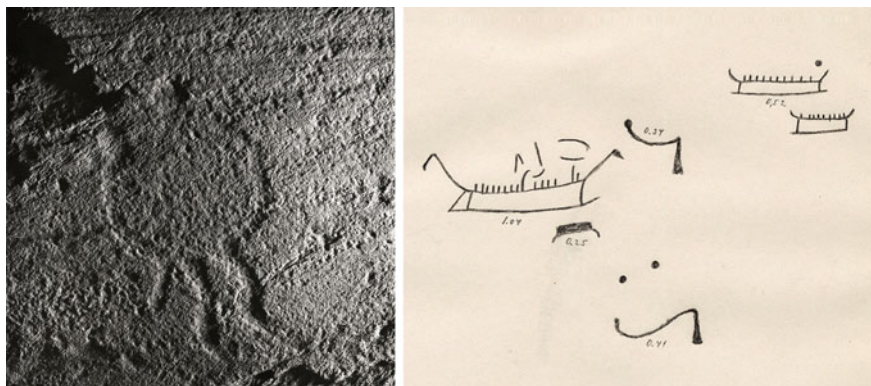


Fig. 2.7 Weapons and armour made out of metal, stone, or wood depicted on the rocks. Documentation by Stiftelsen för dokumentation av Bohusläns hällristningar. *Source* SHFA

Ling and Cornell 2015). Full-scale depictions of bronze weapons such as swords, palstaves and flanges, and or ceremonial axes are quite common in Norrköping, Uppland (Fig. 2.8), and Scania. In general, this rock art dates to period II (Ling 2013). Examples of depictions of spears and swords from later phases in the Bronze Age are a common feature on the panels along the west coast of Sweden (Ling 2008).

It is important to keep in mind that the war-related theme is only one theme present in Scandinavian rock art. It is also relevant to think of the rock art as a biased depiction of society, not as an actual representation of it. The war-related figurative rock art seems to correspond to theatre/performance and showing-off, but is also related to actual violence and war (Ling and Cornell 2010) (Fig. 2.3). Among the warriors, within this category, there was social inequality and we would argue that the social position of the warrior was not fixed or set but had to be achieved in praxis through active performance. Advertising or showing-off were important strategies in this context and it is tempting to see the rock art as an instrument of this action (Ling and Cornell 2010). To use contemporary analogies, we can think of large military parades, and public demonstrations arranged by various branches of the armed forces. But there is also a potential of actual violence, an implicit threat in these depictions.

Pecking in the very particular medium of the durable rock was, in particular cases, used for strategic purposes as warfare. Prehistoric warfare has, although, been downplayed in rock-art research in favour of ritual aspects (Almgren 1927; Kaul 1998). It is, however, important to stress that the rock art displays certain generic features of Bronze Age warfare (Nordbladh 1989). These actions depicted were not far removed from daily life. They transmit evocative questions about life and death. Rock art imagery was not idyllic and pacific, but rather, it was the opposite. There seems to be a general consensus with regards to certain elements connoting the Bronze Age warrior (Kristiansen 1998; Osgood 1998; Harrison 2004; Vandkilde 2006; Molloy 2007). Looking at the Scandinavian rock art and its context, we identify the following traits: martial arts, the showman/sportsman,—traveller and—trader. These traits and occupations are very pronounced in Scandinavian Bronze



Fig. 2.8 Metal axes, spears, and ships from Early Bronze Age depicted in Uppland rock art. Photo and documentation by E. M. Kjellén. *Source* Ling 2013

Age rock art and also in Iberian rock art from this time period thus, indicating the presence of a strong warrior ethos within these societies (Fig. 2.9).

In this context, it is also important to stress that the Nordic Bronze Age is associated with an increased number of actual weapons along with a large number of rock art panels depicting conflict (Thrane 2006). Moreover, some of these Bronze Age weapons show clear traces of wear (Kristiansen 1984; Horn 2013). Small-scale raiding and armed clashes involving bloodshed and death were probably rather common during this time period (Thrane 2006). Recently, skeletal material indicating that large-scale violence and warfare took place in Bronze Age northern Europe was recovered in the Tollenze Valley of northern Germany (Jantzen et al. 2011). This evidence constitutes the most salient archaeological example of Bronze Age violence and killing on a massive scale in Northern Europe and the battle in the Tollenze Valley is likely to have included approximately 2000–5000 combatants (Jantzen et al. 2011).

It seems that a conflict between a Nordic faction and a Central European faction occurred at about 1300 BC at this location. It is important to stress that Scandinavian/Nordic Bronze Age was expanding southwards in Northern Germany during this particular phase and this may have fuelled this particular battle. Thus, in light of this archaeological evidence of warfare in the Bronze Age, it is not surprising to find innovative configurations on the rocks illustrating different scenes of conflict and fighting ranging from ritualistic to more realistic renderings.



Fig. 2.9 Typical features and actions that can be connected to Bronze Age warriorhood. Tanums. Hällristningsmuseum Underslöss and SHFA. *Source* SHFA

The Maritime Factor

Most of the warrior and combat scenes represented on Scandinavian rock panels have been simultaneously pecked close or adjacent to depictions of ships indicating an association between warriors and watercraft. Moreover, a large percentage of these rock panels were also made close to the BA shoreline. This repetitive maritime pattern is very evident and should not be ignored, though many scholars have overlooked the depiction of warriors against the background of this maritime context (Nordbladh 1989; Ling and Cornell 2015). At present, archaeologists have not recovered any Bronze Age Scandinavian boats. However, most scholars recognize the great similarities between the Hjortspring boat, dated to 340 cal BC, and the Bronze Age boats depicted in rock art, indicating a long boat-building tradition in Scandinavia (Crumlin-Pedersen 2003; Kaul 1998).

The average Bronze Age ship, as inferred from rock art depictions, carried a crew of 7–20 which may support the theory of a local mode or tradition of building boats of a certain size during the Early Bronze Age–Late Bronze Age (EBA–LBA) (Ling 2008). Some images depict large ships with crews of up to 40–60 individuals. These types of watercraft were likely war canoes and/or ceremonial vessels used for specific maritime events (Fig. 2.10). Comparisons between archaeological and ethnographic data indicate that the large Bronze Age ship images depicting many crew members could have been based on actual ships (Ling 2008).

It appears that depictions of social inequality are very pronounced in rock art associated with ships. For example, some rock art shows enlarged warriors next to numerous smaller anonymous “collective” oarsmen. These oversized individuals are placed fore and aft in what seem to be commanding positions, often with weapons or other items aimed, directed at anonymous groups of oarsmen in the mid-section of the ship (Ling 2008: 202 ff.). This latter form of representation seems to indicate that certain individuals in society controlled the ships along with the maritime trade (Ling 2008: 202 ff.; cf. Hayden 1995).

In terms of maritime position, the southern part of Scandinavia, had a very strategic location and could have controlled the traffic along with the flow of metals from both the North Sea and the Baltic. The Danish isles held a favourable position in terms of metal supply coming through the riverine routes of the Oder and Vistula and overland routes from Central Europe. Moreover, all metal imported from the west had to pass Jutland. Therefore, the rise of power in northern Jutland during this period is understandable. According to recent analyses, a large percentage of EBA metal recovered in Sweden originated from sources in Central and Western Europe, such as the Alpine region, the British Isles, and Iberia (Ling et al. 2014). After the large expansion of metallurgy in the Nordic zone beginning in c. 1500 BC, most of the copper found in the artefacts analysed seems to have been channelled through a western “maritime route” that followed old Bell Beaker networks along the Atlantic

EBA



LBA

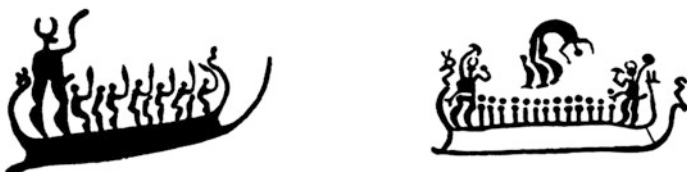


Fig. 2.10 Crewed ships from the EBA (*top*) and LBA (*bottom*). Documentation by T. Högberg and Milstreu, G. Tanums. Hällristningsmuseum Underslös. *Source* SHFA

seaboard (Ling et al. 2014).³ Scandinavia’s success in the “global” metal networks in the Bronze Age could broadly be explained by its strategic location, its unique socio-economic and political forms, and notably by the capacity of local elites to organize long distance maritime sea ventures. The products “exported” included, as mentioned above amber, furs, and hides.

Rock Art Social Positions and Maritime Agency

We will now introduce some theoretical aspects about the intentional dimension of depicting antagonistic elements. This is of importance, especially when discussing the act and significance of depicting war-related social phenomena in rock art.

We turn to the Anthropologist Alfred Gell, who argued against the conventional art history perspective which focused on symbolic meaning and aesthetic perceptions. In its place, Gell stressed and emphasized *agency, causation, result, and transformation*. For Gell, art was an active praxis intended to change the world. He further argued that humans use artefacts and images as forms of extended agency, in his terms as “secondary agents,” and through these agents, humans accomplish their intentions/aspirations (Gell 1998). According to Gell, this secondary agency must

³Bell Beaker Culture dates from 2600–2200 BC. It was an expansive and technologically sophisticated society that engaged in long distance trade and introduced new knowledge and practices regarding warfare, metallurgy, and mining throughout the north Atlantic (Harrisson 2004).

always be understood in relation to human praxis. Thus, the material, the image, has no life of its own, and no ontology nor independent agency (Gell 1998; Osborne and Tanner 2007). Gell referred to the term “magic” when it comes to the intentions behind the artistic representation, as an active praxis for manipulating social positions and social actions in the landscape. Thus, magic, in contrast to religious ritual, is *intended* to alter and transform the social world and bring about some desired practical result without the interference of supernatural beings (Gell 1998). Or as Petrovic (2003: 16) puts it: “Magic denotes the belief in the individual’s own powers, while religion shows a belief in beings with super-natural powers”. In keeping with Gell and his emphasis on agency and transformation, Scandinavian rock art could have served to emphasize and proclaim the agency of the Bronze Age warriors of the region.

There are some other important social traits that should be highlighted in terms of the persona of a successful warrior/trader/traveller. First of all, the person in question is characterized by a high degree of social exposure due to his ambivalent social position (i.e. liminal state) in society. Thus, this means that the warrior must strive to attain a high social position. Advertising can serve as an important strategy in this context and it is tempting to see rock art as a manifestation of this strategy (cf. Harding 2007).

Furthermore, being a warrior in a maritime environment most likely would have involved various initiation rituals and preparations in connection to sea voyages. Seasonal occupations at sea must have contrasted starkly with land-based life and work. Seagoing men would have encountered a completely foreign world, filled with dangerous natural forces such as harsh weather, hazardous waves, rocks, and shoals (cf. Malinowski 1922; Ling 2008). However, this foreign world was also a world which offered great possibilities and hopes for success along with access to exotic items. In this context, to be successful, individuals needed to possess extraordinary discipline and navigational skills. Additionally, while at sea, individuals likely adhered to various norms and taboos so as to supernaturally protect themselves from hazardous waters (Ling 2008). Numerous anthropologists, ethnologists, and archaeologists have used concepts such as “rite de passage” and “taboo” to describe these types of behaviours at sea. Some general sociological phenomena may also be worth noting, such as special initiation rites, particular social and cognitive forms and norms of perceiving, acting, and communicating via various form of speech and/or body language (Westerdahl 2005; Ling 2008).

Thus, rituals conducted in preparation for sea voyaging may have been engaged in by the shore at three stages: (1) Before a journey (pre-liminal rites and rites of separation); (2) During a journey (liminal rites and rites of transition); (3) After a journey (post-liminal rites and rites of incorporation) (cf. Malinowski 1922; Gell 1998).

Among Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski distinguished two main driving forces behind the symbolic and magical behaviour connected with different stages and forms of maritime action (Malinowski 1922: 105). They are both of a rather rationalistic cognitive nature, namely the economic risk and the personal risk. These rites are conducted with the purpose of preventing negative events from taking

place while at sea. At the same time, these rituals serve to promote individual success along with collective action during the various stages of maritime activities. In fact, similar social preparations and initiations are often discussed in situations involving war (Vandkilde 2006; Harding 2007). In this context, apparently, social and ritual preparations are necessary in order to effectively confront the enemy.

Thus, being a maritime warrior in the BA required an understanding of a kind of double “magic” to be able to alter and transform the social world and bring about some desired practical results. The following points highlight some of the knowledge and skills that an initiated Bronze Age maritime warrior would have likely possessed.

- Navigation and ship propulsion
- Fighting skills
- Trade etiquette
- Knowledge about precious materials and craftsmanship
- Knowledge of customs, expressions and praxis of foreign societies

Bronze Age warriors possessing the aforementioned skills and knowledge, proceeded to create rock art. Most rock art is found in an open, accessible, coastal location which indicates that it is associated with a more open public social praxis and rituals than a “personal” praxis. In this respect, the rock art panels do not seem to provide the spatial, expressive or social conduct, or criteria of control and restricted access that chiefly agency demands. The placement of rock art seems to reflect a public rather than private intent. Bearing this in mind, it is tempting to associate rock art with more communal activities such as competitive feasting and marital initiation rites.

There are, however, other patterns indicating a more restricted agency regarding the production and viewing of rock art, such as the general maritime location and content along with the pervasive masculine representations with warrior attributes related or connected to ship images. About 90–95% of the human images depict masculine traits (Ling 2008). Therefore, some scholars suggest that the rock art could have been connected to male puberty rites (Goldhahn and Ling 2013). The stylistic representation of the male body and typical male warrior equipment suggest that the production of the rock art was closely connected with agencies and interactions involving masculine matters.

In terms of the rock art’s location, structure, and content, the following characteristics are most prominent: There is a predominance of:

- panels found at coastal or maritime locations.
- ships.
- ritual performances on or in connection with ships.
- figures with equipment associated with males.

As previously mentioned, a tempting assumption in this context is that rock art may have been produced in accordance with maritime puberty or other initiation rites necessary for admittance into the esoteric maritime warrior/trader society

which granted access to knowledge and skills (see Hayden 1995). Rock art produced as part of a rite for ensuring the success of maritime activities (such as long sea voyages) would have included images of warriors kneeling, sitting, or performing actions onboard ships such as raising paddles or weapons or blowing horns.

Thus, the creation and display of rock art served as a mechanism by which BA individuals operating in maritime groups could record their actions, communicate their ideals, and proclaim their positions in society. Given the location of panels, Scandinavian elites/chiefs most likely could not have monopolized access to rock art sites. Thus, this maritime medium is a visual representation of individual agency which strove for success on long distance trading expeditions and in social climbing in general.

Conclusion: Rock Art, Warfare, and Long Distance Trade

Rock art and burials both indicate that Scandinavian Bronze Age societies were socially stratified and were based on a decentralized socio-political organization (Earle 2002).

The engagement with the metal trade throughout southern Scandinavia involved ownership of land for the production of cattle, possession of seagoing ships and amber for export production. In short, during the Scandinavian BA, certain households drew upon resources made available by the local strong on agro-pastoral economy, and invested in the maritime forces of production. Such households were able to accumulate wealth and political power in Bronze Age Scandinavia.

The strategic communicative location of rock art regions, in maritime settings, may suggest that warriors from outlying areas and from different polities could have interacted at these sites. In light of the strategic maritime positioning of rock art areas, it is intriguing to consider that recent metal analyses show that the Scandinavian societies in were connected to sources of metal from various regions of Europe (Ling et al. 2014).

Several of the coastal rock art regions could have served as arenas for metal distribution in southern Scandinavia. These locations could have functioned as aggregation sites for groups with mobile occupations such as travellers/warriors/traders along with the more sedentary village populations of inland areas. Thus, the combatants and warriors depicted on the rocks in these regions is probably related to agents engaged in this particular praxis during the Scandinavian Bronze Age. It is notable that a high percentage of these figurative scenes date to the Nordic Bronze Age period II and V respectively and it is interesting that this is associated with spikes in the amount of metal arriving in southern Scandinavia (Kristiansen 1998). Thus, this indicates that most of the rock art depicting weapons and warriors could be connected to a time period when Scandinavian societies became involved with long distance exchange and trade.

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