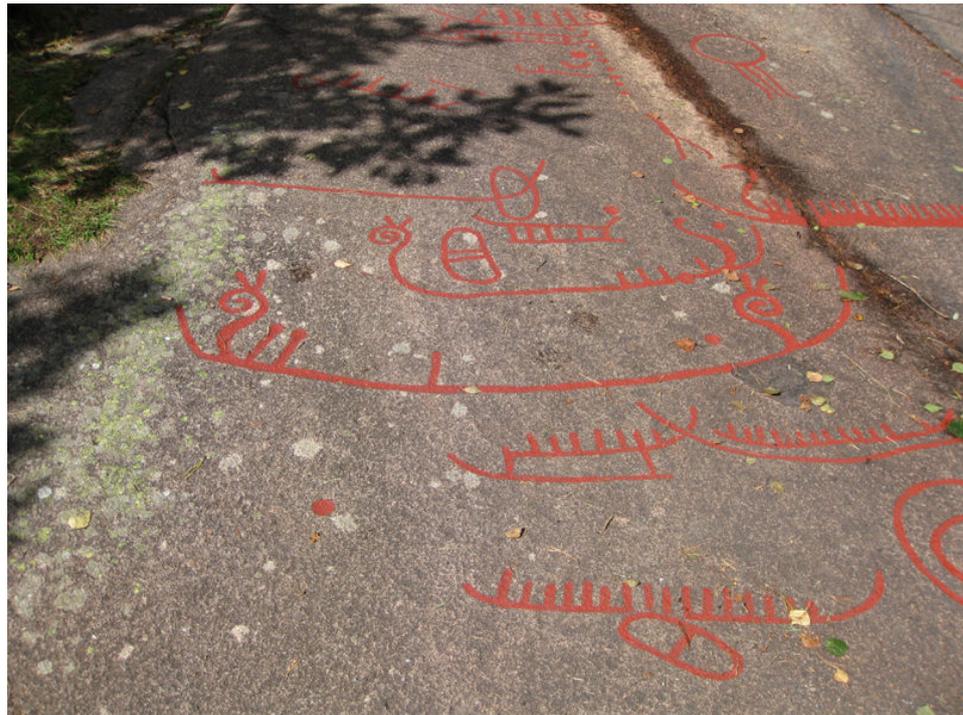


# Arkæologisk Forum

Nr.34  
2016



Lisbeth Imer og Henriette Lyngstrøm Protest mod nedlæggelsen af den marinarkæologiske masteruddannelse under Syddansk Universitet	3
Jannie Amsgaard Ebsen Arkæologiske profilafræk	4
Mette Svart, Annemette Kjærgaard og Anders Hartvig* Objekttilpasningsparathed, tak! Forundersøgelser af landbebyggelse fra middelalder og nyere tid	11

### Tema: Statsbegreber

Redaktionen Temaintro: Statsbegreber	17
Rubina Raja* Den romerske stat i den historiske klassiske arkæologi – eksemplet Gerasa i Jordan	18
Nils Hybel* Begrebet stat i historisk belysning	22
Ole Thyssen* Statens diagram – en filosofisk analyse	25
Morten Ravn Sammenfatning og refleksion over temaet om statsbegreber	29
Mette Løvschal* Vidensopdagelse i store datasæt Udfordringer og perspektiver for dansk arkæologi	34
Courtney Nimura* Ships at the shore – A Scandinavian-wide review of prehistoric rock art	40
Thomas Grane Limeskongressen 2015 Øl, pølser og romertidsarkæologi	46

\*Fagfællebedømt artikel

# Ships at the shore

## – A Scandinavian-wide review of prehistoric rock art

Scandinavia is home to an immense corpus of rock art images among which the ship motif is prominent. Because of this, the rock art of Scandinavia has often been interpreted in terms of social ritual, cosmology, and religion associated with the maritime sphere. This paper summarizes recent work by the author revolving around a Scandinavia-wide GIS database for prehistoric rock art, and related analyses of the ship motif and its relationship to a maritime landscape.

Scandinavian archaeologists are fortunate to have at their disposal one of the world's largest concentrations of pictorial information. Over 22,000 rock art sites containing over 200,000 individual motifs have been reported in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, which span the Late Mesolithic to the Early Iron Age. Of the many motifs that comprise the lexicon of rock art imagery, the 'ship' has been the most extensively studied. Ship motifs are the second most frequent rock art motif, dominating a wide geographical region from southern Denmark to northern Norway. Because of this, it has often been interpreted as evidence of prehistoric worldviews or cosmologies.

The rock art of Scandinavia presents a unique opportunity to investigate more intangible aspects of ancient life in northern Europe. In the past many scholars have argued that the relationship between land and sea was of particular importance in an ancient cosmology; echoes of these beliefs are still found in Arctic ethnography (e.g. Zvelebil & Jordan 1999). Hellskog (1999) has written extensively on the rock art of northern Norway, arguing that a tripartite cosmology could have existed in prehistory. It explains how the land, sea, and sky comprise different but related worlds. They intersect where land meets water, and for that reason the shoreline is very important. Similar ideas have been suggested in other regions like Finland (e.g. Lahelma 2005). Ships and the sea figure prominently in current interpretations of the images found in Bronze Age rock art and also on portable bronzes from Denmark (where rock art is rarer) and southern Sweden. Kaul (1998) has argued that they must have played a pivotal role in the propagation of cosmological beliefs.

Scholars have shown that images of ships were carved on rocks near the coast in some regions (e.g. Ling 2014[2008]), yet this has never been shown at a pan-Scandinavian level. Even at a local scale drawings of ships are found in inland areas today. This is due to a post-glacial phenomenon called isostasy, which caused the land to rise and the shoreline to retreat. During the Bronze Age this occurred along much of the Scandinavian coast. Recent studies have used new palaeoenvironmental data to situate these rock art sites in their original landscapes (Ling 2012; 2014[2008]). The results suggest a strong relationship between ship imagery and watery locations.

What effects would changes to the coastline have on the purpose, meaning, or efficacy of rock art? In order to respond to such a question there must be a method for looking at both the distribution of rock art and individual motifs across a large geographical area. It is equally important to utilize local evidence of shoreline displacement data.

### A Scandinavian database of rock art

Most rock art studies in Scandinavia have focused on relatively small areas. In a recent study conducted by the author a database of Scandinavian rock art was created, which included all the prehistoric rock art from the Late Mesolithic to the Early Iron Age in Denmark, Norway and Sweden contained in each country's national heritage database. This database is currently held by the author, though attempts are being made to make it publicly available. The results of the data analyses conducted are presented in a recent monograph, *Prehistoric Rock Art in Scandinavia* (Nimura 2015). Using a Scandinavian-wide database,

one can ask where ship motifs appear in relation to the shoreline, and also study the distributions of other

images (Fig. 1).

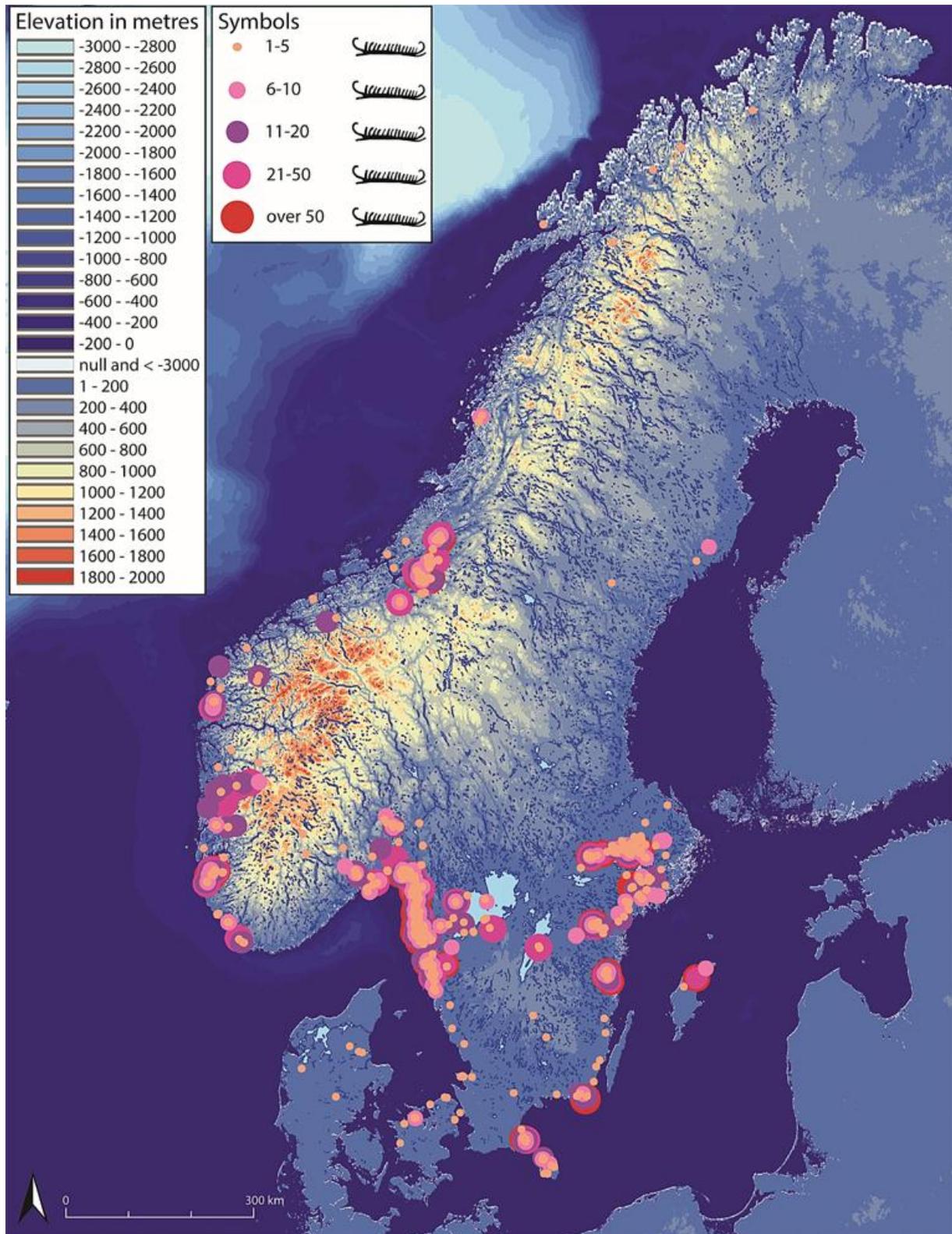


Figure 1. The distribution of ship images in rock art with different size circles representing the different quantities of ship motifs at each site (Nimura 2015, 51, fig. 4.2).

Key results show that nearly 30% of ship motifs appear within 2 km of the present-day coastline (e.g. Figs 2-3) – a figure which increases to nearly 40% when inland water is considered. Their frequency declines the further they are from water (whether inland or coastal). Other pan-Scandinavian patterns were observed including the distribution of other figurative motifs which are common in ‘watery’ environments. Feet /

foot sole and circular motifs follow similar patterns to ships in that they appear in large concentrations near watery locations such as the coast, but they also diverge from this pattern by appearing further inland. Further analysis shows that circular motifs and ships often appear together on rock art sites, an observation which has been made in regional studies, for instance in Östergötland (see Hauptman-Wahlgren 2002, 93).

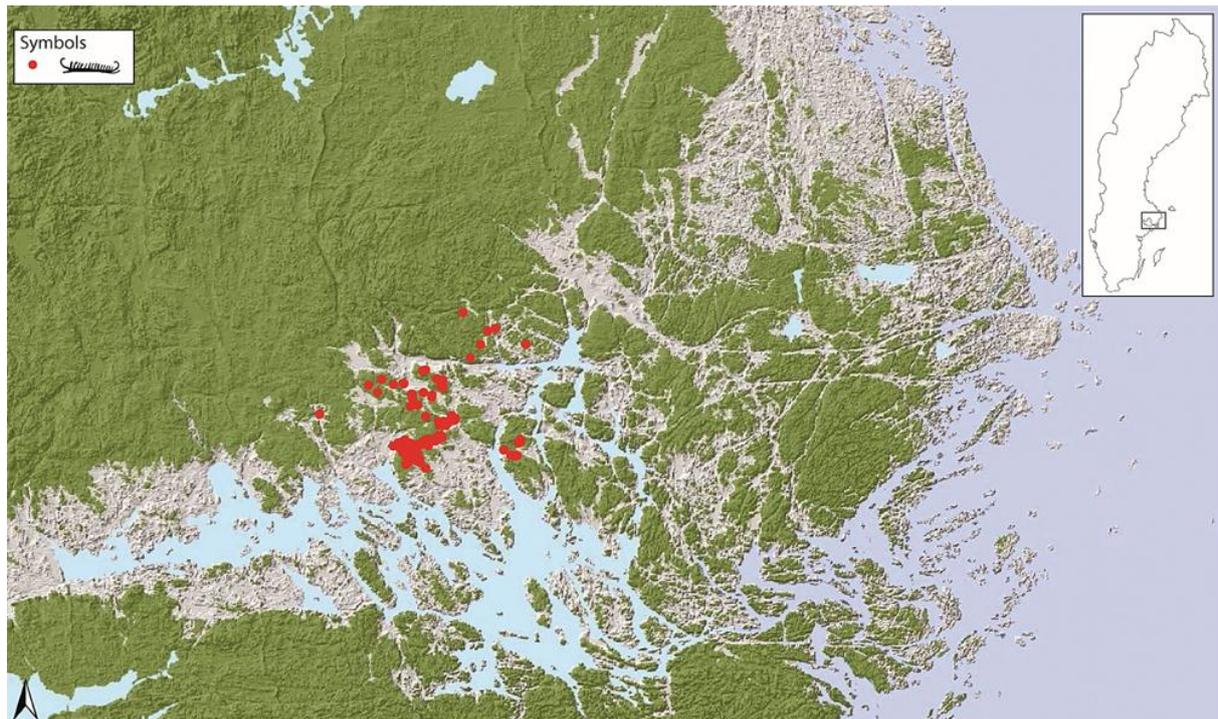


Figure 2. The distribution of ship motifs on rock art sites in Uppland on a palaeolandscape reconstruction map from the Early Bronze Age showing ship motifs clustered on the edges of water. The map represents the Uppland landscape at c. 3500 cal yr BP (c. 1550 BC). The green represents land in c. 1550 BC and the grey represents land in present day (palaeolandscape map from Sund 2010).

### Agency, environmental change and rock art

With this new database it has been possible to better understand the general distribution of motifs and their relationship to watery locations. In many areas these sites would have been affected by isostatic rebound and experienced a ‘disappearing’ shoreline. How would this have affected the purpose and meaning of rock art?

One proposition is that rock art possessed agency, and that agency involved a complex relationship between humans and objects. The term agency describes people’s ability to bring about a desired outcome, but

archaeologists and anthropologists have applied the same principle to non-human entities such as artefacts and landscapes (e.g. Gell 1998; Gosden 2005). A material agent can be an object, a natural entity or any non-living thing – in this way rock art could have played a part in shaping actions and behaviour. In the Scandinavian Bronze Age, these complex relations would have involved the environment. People created things and things in turn shaped people. Humans acted on the environment but the environment also ‘acted’ on humans.

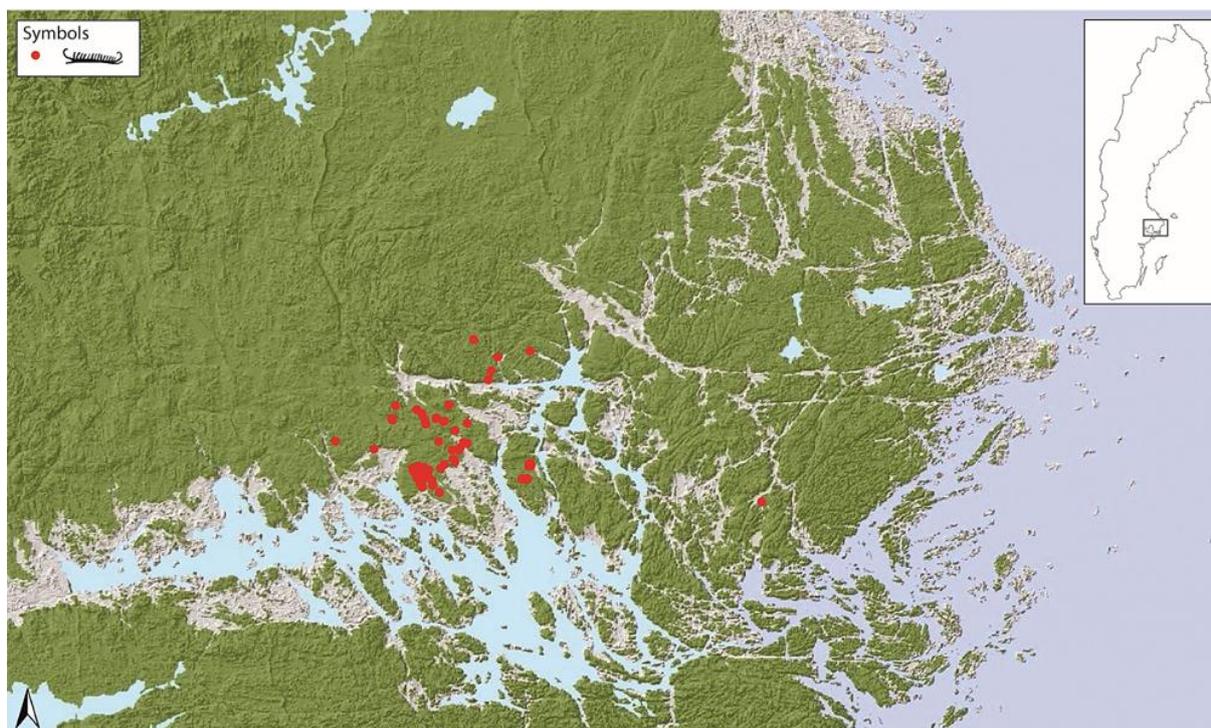


Figure 3. The distribution of ship motifs on rock art sites in Uppland on a palaeolandscape reconstruction map from the Late Bronze Age showing fewer ship motifs clustered on the edges of water. The map represents the Uppland landscape at 2500 cal yr BP (c. 550 BC). The green represents land in c. 550 BC and the grey represents land in present day (palaeolandscape map from Sund 2010).

In a recent paper Christina Fredengren (2011) investigated deposits of artefacts and other items in the Mälaren valley, Sweden. She proposed that water could be a material agent, making it an active part of the human–environment relationship (Fredengren 2011, 126). She observed changes in depositional patterns when the landscape was affected by shoreline displacement in the Late Bronze Age, and suggested that these depositional practices were altered as a result of the water withdrawing (Fredengren 2011, 126).

In the Bronze Age, the fact that so much rock art was created near the sea suggests a system of belief that involved its maritime setting. With a Scandinavian-wide database we can begin to look at where motifs are located and how they relate to coastlines that either shifted or remained relatively static in the face of isostatic rebound. In Bohuslän, Sweden, sites with ships were continually carved close to the shoreline, even when it was disappearing (Ling 2014[2008]). In other regions such as in Uppland, Norway, the tradition of carving ships close to the coastline began to wane after the shoreline had retreated (Ling 2012).

There are many areas where shoreline displacement was minimal, or is difficult to determine, yet in those regions where we know that environmental change occurred it is likely that communities had to re-evaluate the purpose and meaning of these sites.

There is another possibility – rock art sites continued to be created near water but with a novel purpose: to prevent the sea from ‘disappearing’. It is possible that the erection of monuments and the deposition of artefacts and human remains were attempts to forestall natural phenomena such as rising waters and dangerous seas (e.g. Larsson 2003/4; Vieira 2010). The same applies to the making of rock art. The images themselves possessed agency and might have been intended to alter the settings in which they were situated. At the very least, we cannot deny that the shifting shorelines would have required some renegotiation of the original meanings of rock art on the coast. As John Coles (2005, 101) convincingly argued:

*‘Sea-water had an important role but one that changed over time; a landscape studded with rock*

carvings linked to the existing sea-level would be altered and probably lose much of its contemporary purpose as the waters withdrew ... '

These environmental changes would also have influenced the intentions of those who made and used

rock art. Hopefully the combination of broad geographical patterns and local palaeoenvironmental data can help us to better understand this enigmatic material.

## References

- Coles, J. 2005  
*Shadows of a Northern Past: Rock carvings of Bohuslän and Østfold*. Oxford: Oxbow
- Fredengren, C. 2011  
Where wandering water gushes: The depositional landscape of the Mälaren Valley in the Late Bronze Age and Earliest Iron Age of Scandinavia.  
*Journal of Wetland Archaeology* 10, 109–35
- Gell, A. 1998  
*Art and Agency: An anthropological theory*.  
Oxford: Clarendon
- Gosden, C. 2005  
What do objects want?  
*Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12(3), 193–211
- Helskog, K. 1999  
The shore connection: Cognitive landscape and communication with rock carvings in northernmost Europe.  
*Norwegian Archaeological Review* 32(2), 73–94
- Hauptmann Wahlgren, K. 2002  
*Bilder av betydelse: Hällristningar och bronsålderslanskap i nordöstra Östergötland*.  
Lindome: Bricoleur Press
- Kaul, F. 1998  
*Ships on Bronzes: A study in Bronze Age religion and iconography*.  
Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark
- Lahelma, A. 2005  
Between the worlds: rock art, landscape and shamanism in Subneolithic Finland.  
*Norwegian Archaeological Review* 38(1), 29–47
- Larsson, L. 2003/4  
Land, water and symbolic aspects of the Mesolithic in southern Scandinavia.  
*Before Farming* 03/04(3), 215–26
- Ling, J. 2014[2008]  
*Elevated Rock Art: Towards a maritime understanding of Bronze Age rock art in northern Bohuslän, Sweden*.  
Swedish Rock Art Research Series. Oxford: Oxbow
- Ling, J. 2012  
*Rock Art and Seascapes in Uppland*.  
Swedish Rock Art Research Series. Oxford: Oxbow
- Nimura, C. 2015  
*Prehistoric Rock Art in Scandinavia: Agency and environmental change*.  
Swedish Rock Art Research Series. Oxford: Oxbow
- Sund, C. 2010  
*Paleogeografiska förändringar i östra Svealand de senaste 7000 åren*. Master thesis.  
NKA 16. Department of Physical Geography and Quaternary Geology, Stockholm university, 1-72
- Vieira, V. 2010  
A context analysis of Neolithic Cygnus petroglyphs at Lake Onega.  
*Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 20(2), 255–61
- Zvelebil, M. & Jordan, P. 1999  
Hunter fisher gatherer ritual landscapes – Questions of time, space and representation.  
In: Goldhahn, J. (ed.) *Rock Art as Social Representation: Papers from a session held at the European Association Annual Meeting in Göteborg 1998*, 101–27.  
Oxford: Archaeopress

\*Fagfællebedømt artikel

## About the author

Courtney received her PhD in Archaeology from the University of Reading, and her MA Distinction in Maritime Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. She is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford and a Junior Research Fellow at Wolfson College, University of Oxford. Courtney is also the Assistant Editor of Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society, a Council member of the Prehistoric Society and an Executive Committee member of the Nautical Archaeology Society.

Academia.edu page:

<https://oxford.academia.edu/CourtneyNimura>

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to Professor Richard Bradley, University of Reading who commented on an earlier draft of this paper and Professor Chris Gosden, University of Oxford. This paper summarizes the key points of the book recently published with the help of the Swedish Rock Art Research Archive and the University of Gothenburg. The author wishes to thank members of that department especially Dr Peter Skoglund and Dr Johan Ling.

Arkæologisk Forum er et fagligt tidsskrift der søger at sætte det arkæologiske fag ind i en større sammenhæng – både videnskabeligt og samfundsmæssigt. Her kan både arkæologisk faglige og fagpolitiske emner behandles og debatteres.

Skriv til Arkæologisk Forum:

Arkæologisk Forum modtager gerne bidrag. Kontakt redaktionen, og få råd og vink om indhold, læsere, formaliteter, deadlines m.v.

Fagfællebedømmelse:

Generelt bliver tekster i Arkæologisk Forum fagfællebedømt. Fagfællebedømte artikler er markeret med en stjerne (\*) ved forfatternavnet.

Kontakt:

redaktion@archaeology.dk  
www.archaeology.dk

© Forfatterne og Arkæologisk Forum.

Artikler, indlæg og billeder må ikke mangfoldiggøres i nogen form uden skriftlig tilladelse fra redaktionen.

Redaktion:

Mette Palm (ansv. redaktør)  
Jette Rostock  
Bo Jensen  
Anna Beck  
Ole Thirup Kastholm  
Signe Lützau Pedersen  
Sara Gjerlevsen  
Morten Ravn

Udgiver:

Foreningen af Fagarkæologer – FaF

Forsidebillede:

Helleristningsfelt i Tanum, Sverige.  
Foto: Mette Palm ©

Tryk og oplag:

Museum Vestsjælland trykker 250 stk.

Arkæologisk Forum udkommer:

maj og november

Abonnement og løssalg private:

165,- kr. årligt (2 numre)  
82,50 kr. pr. nummer

ISSN 1399-5545



Foreningen af  
Fagarkæologer  
faf@archaeology.dk  
www.archaeology.dk

Nr.34  
2016  
Arkæologisk Forum