

# Solid As a Rock?

## An Ethnographical Study of the Management of Rock-carvings

Anders Gustafsson & Håkan Karlsson

This paper takes its point of departure in a critical and ethnographically directed discussion of how Swedish heritage management – in practice – constructs, organises and presents the past (i.e., the cultural heritage) to the public at the rock-carvings in Tanum. This ethnographical approach is helpful when trying to move beyond the structures – and specific ways of viewing the world – that are a consequence of our own archaeological socialisation. Suddenly activities that, with an archaeological eye, seem to be completely normal, present themselves instead as peculiar examples of the culture of contemporary archaeology/heritage management. In this paper we present examples – derived from both the past and present – of how this specific culture approach handles and stages the rock-carvings in Tanum. It is stressed that, for various reasons and not least ethical and democratic ones, this culture and its rituals need to be examined even further from an ethnographical point of view.

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### INTRODUCTION: FROM TANUM 1938 TO TANUM 2004

It was a dark and cold evening in December 1938, and the place was Tanum in Bohuslän, western Sweden. There was a thin layer of snow on the ground, as well as on the rocks with carved pictures from the past. Six men – all well clothed against the cold – were assembled in a circle on one of the central rocks that had the most magnificent carvings. From the distance, the local population could follow the activities of the men through the pattern of light and shadow that their lanterns created on the rock. Then suddenly the scene changed: high flames shot up from the rock. The local inhabitants that had assembled a short distance from the rock could see the faces of the men who were turned in their direction, at the same time as they wondered what was happening. Who were these men, what were they doing here, and above all, what kind of magical activities were they carrying out? When the flames slowly died out in a blue gleam, they could hear some of the men on the rock demanding more. More of what? Since the men spoke in a dialect different from their own, the locals understood that the men did

not come from this part of the country; instead it sounded as if they were from Stockholm. But what were these strangers doing at the rocks in Tanum in the middle of December? Once again there were huge flames springing from the rock, and in the sudden light the spectators could see the small containers that some of the men carried and larger containers standing behind them at the rock. The air started to smell of burned petrol. Were they using burning petrol on the rock-carvings, and if so, why? Some minutes passed and there were no more flames on the rock; instead, the locals could see how the men standing there began to bring forth the larger containers that had been placed behind them. Now that it was dark again – except for the flickering lights of the men’s lanterns – the inhabitants dared to move closer. They could clearly see how the contents of the containers – something white in colour – was poured onto the rock, exactly at the place where the rock-carvings were located. The six men spoke in whispers as some of them spread the white material in an even layer over the rock-carvings. Questions and wonderings were exchanged between the locals. Obviously, their voices must have reached the ears of one of the men because he suddenly shouted out, “Who’s there!” At the same time, he pointed in the direction of the people standing beneath the rock. The five other men turned around in the direction he pointed, and now the locals and the six men were standing face to face with each other. “What are you doing here?” asked one of the men, standing with white hands on the rock; he spoke in a rather sticky voice. The inhabitants did not know what to answer, and instead there was an awkward silence. Finally, one of the locals broke the silence: “We were just about to ask you the same. What are you up to with the rock-carvings?” One of the men on the rock stepped forward with a presumptuous smile as he answered the question. “We are here to do some castings of the rock-carvings”. “That’s illegal,” shouted a local. The man on the rock smiled even wider and said: “Don’t worry, we are officials from Stockholm. We have permission.” “But what about the flames, the smell of petrol, and the white stuff you are pouring on the carving?” “We had to clean the rock before we could start with the casting. Petrol is splendid when it comes to burning away things, and the white stuff you are referring to is a rubber-mixture used for casting.” There was a sudden silence as the locals let this information sink in. It seemed as if there were no more questions to be asked. Perhaps it was best to let these well-educated gentlemen carry on their work and go home. The smiling, self-confident man had just turned around and started to walk back to the other men on the rock when a girl, perhaps eight years old, spelled out the question that was in the minds of most of the inhabitants: “But are burning petrol and rubber really good for the carvings? Won’t that harm them?” The man turned around again. “We know what’s best for these carvings, don’t worry.” The girl and some of the locals seemed as if they were not so sure of that. However, the men at the rock continued with their work and gave no further notice of the local inhabitants. Slowly the locals began to depart and walk home with the rest of their questions in this dark and cold evening of December 1938.

What does this narrative introduction have to do with archaeology and with the use of ethnographical approaches and methods in archaeology? The answer is: everything. The happenings described in the story are not purely fictional (see *Göteborgstidningen* 11 December 1938), and in a simplified manner the story tells us a lot about archaeology, not least about archaeology as a good field in which to apply ethnographical methods. The dubious activities that some heritage managers carried out in Tanum in December 1938 are remindful in more than one way of “peculiar” (“peculiar” at least from a Western perspective) activities and rituals that could have been carried out, observed, studied and analysed in other cultural contexts in different parts of the world in the 1930s. Archaeology (not least in the form of practical management of the cultural heritage) contains a tremendous amount of unusual and strange socially and culturally embedded rituals and activities – rituals and activities that produce not only material culture (artefacts) in various forms, but also specific social relationships between different actors. During the last 15 years various aspects of these socially and culturally embedded archaeological activities and their material remains have been studied within the framework of different reflexive approaches – approaches that have a common ground in ethnographical ideas and ethnographical methods, even if this is not explicitly evident in all cases (cf. Edgeworth 2003; Olsen 1993; Gero 1994, 1996; Goodwin 1994; Shankland 1997; Holtorf 2002).

It can be concluded that if one approaches the rock-carvings in Tanum today, 65 years after the happenings in our story, it is clear that the practical and everyday activities carried out by contemporary heritage management are still very – and in some cases extremely – strange if one views them with the eyes of an ethnographer (Gustafsson & Karlsson 2002, forthcoming). If we only look at these activities as archaeologists we undoubtedly run the risk of becoming culturally and contextually blinded, as well as questioned by our colleagues. Some activities have been carried out in the same way for decades, and via the archaeological culture one is socialised to view them as completely “natural”. If we start to question them from an ethnographical point of view arguments such as, “It has always been done in this ‘scientific’ way,” or, “Do you really mean that the material culture we use when ‘doing archaeology’ shall be viewed as artefacts, or that the whole discipline shall be viewed in analogy with a cultural artefact?” the response will be, “Nonsense!” However, when we try to leave the well-trodden and traditional paths of archaeology, we can become personally convinced that an ethnographical approach, and ethnographical methods, if applied to archaeology, can teach us something about ourselves and about archaeology as a social, cultural and existential activity carried out in the present (*ibid.*). It can provoke and shock our thoughts and let them run in different and new directions – directions where archaeology, its familiar activities or our fixed social role, cannot be taken as something self-evident. Such an approach is embedded in (self-) criticism and reflexivity, and it enables us to consider archaeology exactly as what it is said to be; namely, as a specific social and cultural activity carried out within the

framework of a specific historical, ideological and socio-political context, that is, a specific cultural activity approaching and acting both towards the past and the present, as well as towards the future. Even if an ethnographical perspective primarily focuses on the culture of contemporary archaeology, its activities and its material culture, this does not mean that the past and its peoples are ignored; rather, it is the other way around. Such an approach lets us view archaeology and its material culture as a cultural phenomenon and enables us to study it in the same way as we as archaeologists study past – and in some cases present – cultures and their material culture. This can lead to new ways of looking at – and understanding – the past and its peoples through the recognition that archaeological interpretations of the past are always embedded in the contextually and socially dependent archaeological processes of the present.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussions concerning the benefits of using an ethnographical approach, and ethnographical methods, in archaeology. This is done through: 1) a brief presentation of the project “Cultural Heritage as Societal Dialogue”, which we are carrying out during the period 2002–2004. This project takes its point of departure partly in ethnographical observations of how contemporary Swedish heritage management – in practice – constructs, organises and presents the past (i.e., the cultural heritage) to the public at some central sites in the province of Bohuslän, western Sweden. 2) The presentation of an ethnographically oriented case-study derived from the project. The case-study focuses on the practical and material activities of heritage management, as well as on how these activities influence the relationship among the heritage management, the public, the past and the present at the world-heritage-listed rock-carving site of Tanum, Bohuslän.

#### THE PROJECT: ITS BACKGROUND AND APPROACHES

The general background of the project “Cultural Heritage as Societal Dialogue” can be found in the fact that today there is a deep and increasing public interest in the past in the Swedish society. This interest shows itself in a variety of ways, for instance in the building of “Viking ships”, the increase in the number of reconstructed “prehistoric buildings and villages”, etc.

Anyhow, without penetrating any deeper into the background of the present interest in the past, it can be stressed that contemporary Swedish archaeology/heritage management in most cases has not done much to encourage this interest arising from “below”. Thus, it is not a well-designed pedagogical strategy for the presentation of archaeological interpretations and results that underlies the current interest; rather, the interest is – as mentioned above – the symptom of specific and contemporary trends in Swedish society. It can be concluded that Swedish archaeology – as currently practiced at universities, museums and within the cultural-heritage sector – on a general level has not yet succeeded at handling, canalising, or giving any priority to this interest. Undoubtedly, this is a serious situation that touches upon topics concerning politics, ethics and democracy,

since most archaeologists – despite which archaeological field of activity they are involved in (i.e., universities, museums, heritage management) – work within a framework where an open and creative relationship to, and a continuous discussion with, the public formally is presented as an important one (Burström, Winberg & Zachrisson 1996; Karlsson 2000; Karlsson & Nilsson 2001; Gustafsson & Karlsson 2002; forthcoming).

Against this general background, there is also a more specific background to the project: Above we have seen that, in the present situation, the public interest in the past is partly neglected since there is a profound gap between archaeology and the public. This gap also exists between the policy documents that guide the archaeological relationship to the public, and the appearance of this relationship in practice. Thus, it is no exaggeration to state that much more could be achieved concerning the communication and dialogue between archaeology/heritage management and the public. During the last few years the cultural-ministry and the National Heritage Board have realised that there is a serious problem – a problem consisting of a situation in which there is no agreement between the policy documents and their practice, and in which the democratic aspect of everyone's right to create a relationship to the past and its remains is neglected. As a consequence of this, resources have been invested in various projects that discuss this problem (cf. [www.raa.se/agendak](http://www.raa.se/agendak); [www.raa.se/forskning/index.asp](http://www.raa.se/forskning/index.asp); Carlie & Kretz 1998; Flodin 1999; RAÄ 1999, 2000, 2001; Elfström 2002; Myrberg 2002; Strassburg ms). This is excellent, but it seems as if most of these projects have a rather general direction since they approach the problem solely with a quite high-flown rhetoric, and since they seldom reach down to the practical activities of archaeology/heritage management (Gustafsson & Karlsson forthcoming).

Thus, it is in the light of both the general and the more specific background presented above that the project “Cultural Heritage as Societal Dialogue” should be viewed. In short, the aims and objectives of the project are to analyse and discuss (in a historical and in a current perspective) how antiquarian/archaeological knowledge has been/is constructed, and how it has been/is communicated to the public, in a study-area – and at some central sites – in the province of Bohuslän. Thus, the project contributes to the discussion of the relationship between archaeology/heritage management and the public, but it moves beyond any high-flown rhetoric concerning this relationship, since it instead, via its empirical point of departure and its ethnographical methods, reaches down to the practice of the actual relationship. Accordingly, the project approaches the practical activities of heritage management (e.g., conservation activities), as well as the material culture (artefacts) that these activities produce (e.g., information-boards, plaques/sign-posts, different materials used for the setting of sites, guide- and travel-books, etc.). Already from the beginning, we were convinced that the discussion of the relationship between archaeology/heritage management and the public did not need any more general descriptions; instead, it was concrete empirically-based

examples of this relationship in practice that were needed. To accomplish this, we also knew that we needed to approach the activities of heritage management – and the material culture produced by these activities – not with the eyes of archaeologists, but with those of ethnographers.

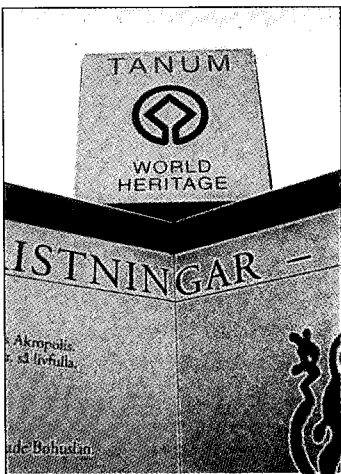
Below we will present a brief case-study derived from the project. This case-study departs from the current view held by the heritage managers of the rock-carvings of Tanum (and all other rock-carving sites as well), namely that the carvings are authentic in themselves. This culturally fixated view of authenticity leads to strange practices and rituals, for instance, when it comes to the care of the carvings. It also leads to a situation in which the public's experience and understanding of rock-carvings and the past is manipulated in certain ways, and in which the relationship between managers and the public is merely monologic in character.

## THE CASE-STUDY

### *Background*

There is an epistemological problem if one interprets the concept of authenticity in the sense of being original – a problem directly related to the actual rock-carvings' status as part of the world heritage. According to UNESCO, which has handled and managed the world heritage convention since 1972, there are a number of criteria that must be fulfilled if a phenomenon is to be classified as world heritage. The criterion of authenticity (in the sense of being original) is among the central ones. If a phenomenon is classified, the host country has an obligation and a responsibility to preserve, protect and take care of the phenomenon in such a way that it remains unchanged (original) for coming generations ([www.unesco-sweden.org/varldsarvskonventionen.htm](http://www.unesco-sweden.org/varldsarvskonventionen.htm)).

Voilà! In UNESCO's convention the epistemological problem – or rather the epistemological impossibility – is obvious. How does one protect, manipulate, tend and take care of something that receives its value from being unprotected, unmanipulated, untended and uncared for? For the heritage managers of Tanum – with their orthodox view of the meaning of the concept of authenticity – this dichotomy is not problematic at all, since the rock-carvings are regarded as authentic in themselves. This at the same time as they neglect notions that this authenticity is a consequence of present meanings and manipulations of various kinds. However, from a different perspective it can be argued that the authenticity of the rock-carvings in Tanum (as elsewhere) is not a phenomenon



*Fig. 1. Information-board at Vitylcke, Tanum. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.*

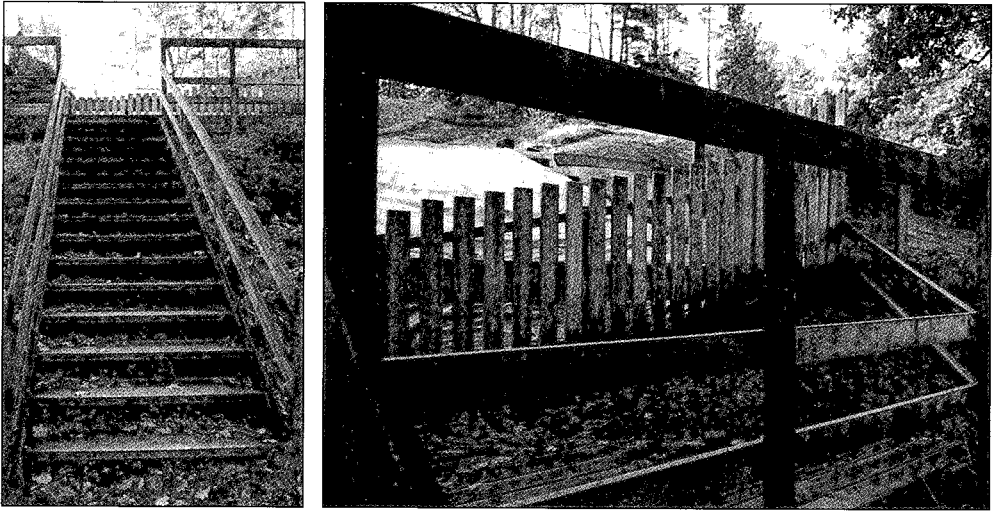


Fig. 2. Stairs and ramps at Aspeberget, Tanum. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.

imbedded in them; instead their authenticity is negotiated and constructed by specific cultural processes and activities in the present. These processes and activities create a narration of the rock-carvings that tells the public that these rock-carvings are authentic (original) remains from the past. From this it follows that archaeologists and heritage managers constantly construct the past and its authenticity within the framework of a contemporary narration (cf. Lowenthal 1985, 1997; Shanks 1998; Holtorf & Schadla-Hall 1999).

### *Staging and authenticity*

For some colleagues these arguments can be provocative, of course, but an observation of the conditions in Tanum does create some thoughts and questions about the authenticity of these rock-carvings. On the most basic level it can be stressed that nobody knows whether rock-carvings were painted in the past or not, and definitely not whether they were coloured red, as they are today (cf. Hallström 1931: 281f.). This painting of carvings – which seems to be a specific Scandinavian tradition despised in other parts of the world, and which is taking place on a grand scale, for instance at Tanum – is a kind of contemporary manipulation, but it is far from the only one. On a general level it can be said that the rock-carving sites in Tanum (Aspeberget, Fossum, Litsleby and Vitlycke) are places that are staged and constructed in such a way that they have more to do with the present than with the past. Ramps, stairs, fences and locked gates, which lead the public around the rock-carvings in a well-designed odyssey, are some further examples of staging and construction. These phenomena certainly did not exist in the past, nor did the cement barriers that conduct the draining water from the carvings, as is the case at Aspeberget (cf. Magnusson 1996).

Draining water is often argued to be an important factor of localisation for the



Fig. 3. Cement barrier that conducts away the water from rock-carvings at Aspeberget, Tanum. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.

rock-carvings, but here it is conducted away from them. Is this authentic?

It is not just the rock-carvings and the rock adjacent to them that are staged and manipulated with paint and cement barriers in the

present. At some places, for instance Vitlycke, the entire landscape surrounding the carvings is heavily manipulated. Besides the stairs and ramps, this place has also acquired small gravel roads and paths that direct the public. In parallel, the woods have been pruned and formed after a specific (national romantic) template – a template in which birch, oak and some spruce constitute the scene. This forming of the vegetation is perfectly in line with the views and intentions of contemporary heritage management, whereby some types of trees are favoured above others (cf. Gustawsson 1965). In front of the central rock-carvings at Vitlycke there is a completely open area covered with short-cut grass. If we take a brief look at the two illustrations below (Figs. 4 and 5), which show the area in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century respectively, one can wonder which illustration gives the most authentic view of the area.

The landscape surrounding the carvings at Vitlycke is also heavily drained, and at some places one stumbles over ditches, drain-pipes, tubes and hoses. The staging of Vitlycke is in many ways remindful of a well-designed park. The primary point in this context, however, is that this park and the constructions and phenomena in it – in the form of ramps, stairs, roads and paths, cement barriers, ditches, drain-pipes, pruned trees and shaped woods, open areas with short-cut grass, and red paint in the rock-carvings – have little to do with the past or with any authenticity of the past; rather, it is all about present manipulations staged by

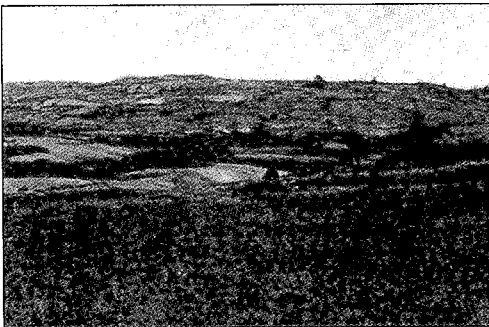


Fig. 4. Vitlycke c. 1900. Unknown photographer. BMA.

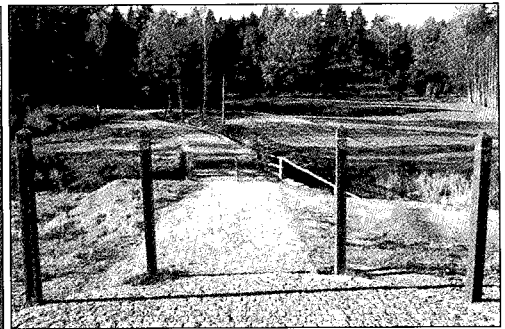


Fig 5. Vitlycke 2000. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.





Fig. 6. Two examples of drainage at Vitylcke, Tanum. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.

contemporary heritage management. These phenomena do, however, contribute to a narrative construction in which the rock-carvings are presented and regarded as authentic, that is, as originals from the past. Thus, it is contemporary heritage management which, via a specific staging of the place, constructs the past and its authenticity within the framework of a present narration

– a narration that invites the public to believe that the rock-carvings are unmanipulated and authentic in themselves.

However, because the activities of heritage management at this place are taken for granted – and viewed as completely “natural” – most managers are quite unaware of this situation. This situation is further strengthened by the fact that most of them are caught up in an epistemological perspective where there are clear gaps between the past and present, and where the rock-carvings – their authenticity and meaning – are viewed as isolated in the past. This view also leads to a sacral worship of the carvings as holy relics from the past, and it is therefore a catastrophe when the rock-carvings tend to weather away (Bertilsson 1994; Strömer 1997). Obviously there is a contradiction here! If the rock-carvings are viewed as authentic in themselves (i.e., the usual view amongst the people who worry about the weathering) their weathering, decay and disappearance must also be part of this authenticity. From this perspective, trying to prevent their weathering ought to be totally wrong, since such contemporary activities affect the authenticity of the rock-carvings. Anyhow, this line of thought does not seem to influence the people who worry most about the decay of the carvings; instead it seems as if such arguments are viewed as plain heresy. The question is, however, for how long is it possible to regard more and more manipulated phenomena as authentic objects from the past; is it really possible to neglect the fact that rock-carvings, like all created things, live their lives and that they – just as us – slowly decay (cf. Shanks 1992, 1998; Karlsson 1998; Wienberg 1999; Holtorf 2002)?

### *The blindness of preservation*

Today, the prevention of any form of decay to the rock-carvings (in Tanum) is listed as the primary point of the agenda, and the heritage managers responsible for this prevention seem willing to go very far to succeed in their mission. Above we have seen that the landscape adjacent to the rock-carvings has been drained,

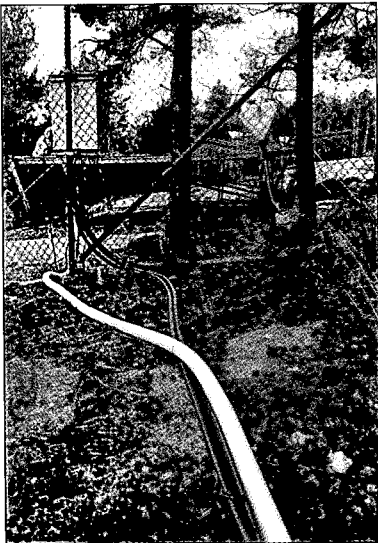


*Fig 7. Two examples of coverage of rock-carvings (incubators) at Aspeberget, Tanum. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.*

and that the drained water is streaming in trenches, drain-pipes, tubes and hoses. At Aspeberget and Vitlycke there are also other examples of preservation where some rock-carvings have been covered by sand and plastic installations – installations that remind one of incubators (Fig. 7). In short this means that at these places the heritage management has constructed a huge – and totally artificial – heart-lung machine that keeps the rock-carvings alive.

There are huge sums invested in these life-giving activities and in the research aimed at solving the question of how the decay of the rock-carvings shall be prevented, that is, how they can be vaccinated against their alleged worst enemy: acid rain. For some heritage managers it seems as if archaeological research on rock-carvings has become synonymous with chemical-technical investigations and experiments (cf. Bertilsson 1994; Strömer 1997; Löfvendahl 2001).

Even if acid rain is regarded as the primary threat to the rock-carvings, there is also another serious threat, namely human beings, or more specifically the trampling feet of the public. Thus, the official policy is that the public must be prevented from any type of (injurious) direct physical contact with the rock-carvings. The irony of this policy is that the rock-carvings shall obviously be protected for future generations against the interest shown by generations living in the present! One of the things forgotten (by the heritage management) when acting in this manner is, of course, that these rock-carvings are not only the property of contemporary heritage management; they are also the public's cultural heritage. There is an enormous risk that the management's



*Fig. 8. "Research activities" or a scene from "The X-Files"? Litsleby, Tanum. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.*



Fig. 9. Don't walk... A small reminder at Vitlycke, Tanum. Photo: Håkan Karlsson.

preservation-mania, and its sacral worship of the rock-carvings, is pursued so far that the end justifies the means, and that all the democratic aspects concerning the accessibility of the rock-carvings for the public are neglected (Gustafsson & Karlsson forthcoming). The advocates of the “intensive care” are, for instance, well aware of the fact that there is a clash of interests between preservation (=care) and public accessibility, but at the same time it is the accessibility for the public that is downplayed in the name of ethical arguments (cf. Bertilsson 1994; Löfvendahl 2001).

Through the years, the well-meaning ambition to preserve and document the rock-carvings has shown itself in a variety of ways, and it can be interesting to highlight the risks of the kind of blindness that seems to affect some heritage managers. In a PM to the county antiquary of Bohuslän written by a heritage manager in 1965, one can read that:

During the period 16/5-4/6 I was stationed in Tanum with the purpose of cleaning and painting rock-carvings, amongst others, at Aspeberget and Vitlycke. All rock-carving surfaces had been exposed to damage through casting with latex, and through paintings and reconstructions of partly weathered carvings... At Aspeberget a casting with latex had been accomplished, and as a consequence the coating [of the rock surface] had disappeared on an area c. 0.5 x 1 m. Attempts were made to remove the sharp borders between this area and the coated, natural surface, with the help of a strong lye consisting of caustic soda. This attempt was only partly successful... At the Vitlycke-surface a number of castings had been carried out, and this had resulted in 0.5 – 1m<sup>2</sup> huge, bright spots, where the rock surface's coating had disappeared. Latex from the castings had also been spilled on the rock surface. The attempts to remove the borders between the coated surface and the areas where castings had been made, with the help of caustic soda in different concentrations and with nitric acid, were only partly successful. During the work on the Vitlycke-surface, 5-10 school classes per day visited the site. All the children wanted to run on the rock and some of the youngest boys tried to slide down it. After the cleaning and the painting, on several occasions I observed school groups that ate their lunch on the rock, and the children dropped sandwiches and ice-cream, threw sausages and slices of cheese, and spilled milk on the rock – all of which left ugly grease spots. (ATA, our transl.)

The above reasoning concerning the dangers of ice-cream, milk, sausages and slices of cheese may seem strange in the light of the chemical experiments with

caustic soda and nitric acid that were carried out in the holy name of preservation. The writer of this PM seems to be so blinded by his worship of the rock-carvings that he no longer can place them in a normal social and human context.

#### THE CARE OF ROCK-CARVINGS AS A SWORD OF DAMOCLES

In this context – and perhaps not surprising in view of the example presented above – it must be stressed that, in the striving for authenticity and preservation, it seems as if heritage management in connection with the care of rock-carvings has manipulated the carvings through the years in such a way that they have become seriously damaged. In the text quoted above, caustic soda and nitric acid are mentioned as suitable means for the reparation of the carvings after “illegal” castings. Unfortunately, if one searches in the central archive of the National Heritage Board of Antiquities (ATA), one can collapse under the weight of similar examples. Here are just a few of them:

When removing this paint [from the rock-carvings] a solution of acetone, alcohol or benzyl was used. The experiments have not yet shown whether this paint damaged the rock surface or not... (Hallström 1931:278, our transl.)

The cleaning [of the rock-carvings] with burning petrol took place before the castings were carried out. These were performed with a latex mass that was sprayed over the rock-carvings. (*Göteborgstidningen* 11 December 1938, our transl.)

The analysis of the colour-tests showed that the colour can be removed with a solution of caustic soda. (1946. ATA Dnr 3924/46, our transl.)

There are no difficulties removing the paint [from the rock-carvings] if brushing with a solution of caustic soda and water. (1946. ATA Dnr 3733, our transl.)

...despite the fact that I used thinner and scouring powder I am not convinced of a successful result... Primarily I am afraid that... my cleaning attempts lead to a situation where the lichen-cover on the rock-surface dies, which will mean that next year the rock will have a huge, bright spot. The result will be a need for a total cleaning. (1955. ATA Dnr 004277, our transl.)

When I arrived the carving was covered with ice. After the ice had been removed and the rock dried with the help of compressed air and a blowtorch... (1958. ATA, our transl.)

Suitable procedure when removing oil paint from a rock-carving... 1) Careful mechanical cleansing (e.g., scraping with a knife). 2) Thereafter, apply a paint-remover, for instance, Beckers “Tarväck”. ...Scrape away loose layers of paint with knife or chisel. Dry with a rag. Possibly, repeat the treatment. 3) Thereafter, wash first with thinner and then with soapy water. (1959. ATA, our transl.)

The question is, of course, also how authentic the actual rock-carvings are after they have been “treated”, and “cared for”, with various chemicals for at least



*Fig 10. Cleaning with caustic soda in the 1950s. (Note the white “cleaned” areas on the rock.) Photo: Claes Claesson, BMA.*

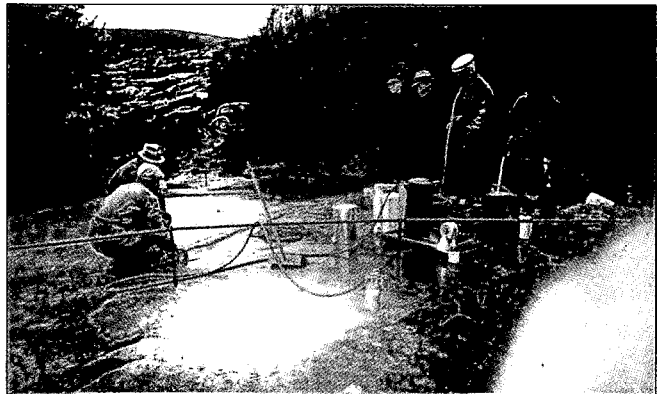
seven decades. Can heritage management still present these rock-carvings as authentic originals from the past?

Contemporary managers do not deny that earlier cleaning methods used by heritage management in Tanum have damaged the rock-carvings, but at the same time the injurious effects of these methods are viewed as mild in comparison with the contemporary weathering caused

by the injurious acid rain (Löfvedahl, Åberg & Bertilsson 1992:7ff). It can, however, be noted that there are some researchers who take another standpoint:

Conservation of rock-art sites through physical intervention of any form should only be undertaken after serious consideration of the ethical and scientific implications; the so-called conservation measures applied at some sites may represent a greater threat to rock-art than the effects of natural weathering. (Walderhaug & Walderhaug 1998:136)

Against the background of the methods described above, one is ready to support this interpretation. The so-called care has probably damaged the rock-carvings more than the acid rain. This self-critical discussion – which exists, for instance, in Norway – has been absent in the Swedish context. The idea of the acid rain as the “bad guy” in the drama has reached axiomatic proportions, and to stress that it is (the earlier) heritage management and its “caring” methods that represent the most serious damage to the rock-carvings is close to heresy – actors involved in rock-art research tend to risk excommunication if they state it loudly and clearly.



*Fig. 11. Two examples of a unit for spraying of latex in work in the 1950s. Photo: Claes Claesson, BMA.*

Surprisingly it is not just these earlier methods that may have damaged the rock-carvings. It has been stated that the paint used – and which is still in use – when painting the carvings has a direct injurious effect on them. In 1988 and 1995 the company StenKonserverings Konsult AB, which was contracted by the National Heritage Board as consultants, stressed that:

The painting is accomplished in a free manner, often after assumption. The paint is too strong in relationship to the stone, and the consequence is that when the paint flakes off it takes with it 1-3 mm of the bedding. At the places where carvings have been painted according to the painters' own interpretation, a new, previously non-existing, carving is created. This is the case at many places... (Klingspor 1988: 2, our transl.)

The stone surface is cracking and splitting. The paint used in the carvings has contributed to the destruction of the carvings. (Klingspor & Kwiatkowski 1995: 4, our transl.)

Here heritage management is contributing – within the framework of its “caring” activities – to the creation of new carvings. Another example of recent “caring” activities at Tanum is the tests carried out to measure the degree of weathering with the help of a so-called *Schmidt Test Hammer* at the end of the 1980s (Sjöberg 1988a, 1990, Fig. 12 below) This instrument is usually applied at building constructions when controlling the hardness/strength of concrete. It tests the hardness/strength of the concrete by measuring the rebound from a controlled stroke against the tested surface (Sjöberg 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1990).

Thus, the instrument is based on the work of a piston, which, with controlled pressure, is “shot” against the surface of the rock; the instrument measures how hard the piston rebounds, and in this way the instrument can give a value to the strength of the rock surface. In the tests conducted in Tanum, the instrument was allowed to deliver a number of “controlled strokes” against rocks with carvings, but also – quite sensationally – directly against the rock-carvings (Sjögren 1988a, 1990). The report from the tests describes how 28 rock surfaces with carvings, 145 areas on these surfaces, and 85 carvings were tested (i.e., “shelled”) in this way (ibid.).

In this examination 10 strokes were delivered to each of the surface-areas, and 5-6 strokes to each carving. The later lower number was used to prevent the 25mm<sup>2</sup> large stroke-points from injuring the carving. (Sjöberg 1988a:4, our transl.)

In general 5-10 tests [i.e., strokes] per carving were executed. These were, however, performed in such a way that there should be a minimum of viability of where the test had been carried out. (Sjöberg 1988a:12, our transl.)

This means that c. 1,500 “controlled strokes” were delivered to the rock surfaces and that c. 600 of these were aimed directly at rock-carvings. Many of these

carvings were situated in what later became the world-heritage area, for instance carvings at Aspeberget, Vitlycke, Fossum and Litsleby (ibid.). From the quotations above it is obvious that the strokes were so powerful that it was possible to see where the tests had been carried out. The serious thing, however, is not what one can possibly see with the eye after a series of test, but rather the things that are impossible to see; that is, what is the consequence of this treatment to the rock-carvings and their rock surface? In its ambition to preserve, the heritage management obviously considered this experiment as completely in order, since it could result in some clues concerning the degree of weathering of rock-carvings and rock surfaces. The thought that these “hammer-blows” could injure the carvings does not seem to have occurred to the responsible managers, and if it did, it seems as if the consideration was that the end must justify the means.

### CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

It is obvious that the physical staging of the rock-carvings in Tanum, as well as the activities carried out at this place by heritage management, are products of an epistemological view whereby the carvings are considered as authentic (originals) in themselves. This leads to a situation where the carvings are treated as holy relics from the past – relics that must be protected and cared for in every possible way. Not least since heritage management envisions a situation in which the rock-carvings are threatened from all directions, both from the ground in the form of the public and from the air in the form of acid rain. From this follows: costly research on how the carvings shall be protected against acid rain; activities and installations that shall protect them until the miraculous cure is invented, for instance constructions where some carvings are covered by installations and where the surrounding landscape is drained; a staging where the public are kept from all forms of

direct physical contact with the carvings with the help of ramps, stairs, etc. This setting forces the public to move in certain ways at the site and gives the public no possibilities to approach, experience and understand the carvings in other ways than the one presented by heritage management; a completely monological situation where there are no forms of, or incitements for, a dialogue between heritage management and the public – the former are the active shamans and the latter the passive spectators – or between the public and the past.

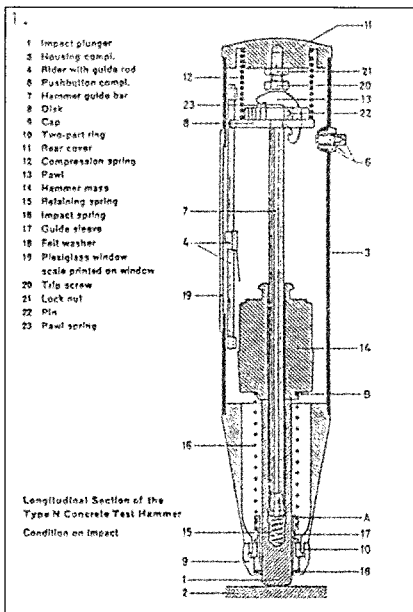


Fig. 12. Longitudinal section of the Type N Concrete Test Hammer (condition on impact). From Sjöberg 1987:5.

As mentioned, the main factor underlying the heritage management's view – and thus also the practice that follows from it – is the conviction that the rock-carvings and their meaning are firmly isolated in the past. Besides the practical effects of this view, a powerful narration is constructed and presented to the public at places such as Tanum – a narration in which the carvings are presented as authentic originals from the past and in which there are clear dividing lines between the past and present, as well as a clear division of power between the heritage managers as “experts” and the public as “amateurs”. This narration is also strengthened and supported by the practical activities and the material staging and physical structures that govern the public's ability to approach the carvings physically as well as in their minds.

However, as shown above, this narration and the activities that follow from it can be critically discussed and deconstructed within the framework of an ethnographical approach where one reaches down to an observation and analysis of the empirical dimensions and practical activities of the culture of heritage management. With such a point of departure it is obvious that the narration presented by the Swedish heritage management at Tanum, as well as the activities and material staging carried out as a consequence of it, have little to do with the past; rather, most of it is a contemporary construction of the past put together within the framework of the specific culture of archaeology/heritage management. Once again, this does not imply that the rock-carvings are not from the past; however, and this is important, their authenticity (as original) and the narration about their authenticity (as original) is primarily contemporary to its nature. Here one stumbles over an epistemological dichotomy that is also part of the UNESCO-convention – a dichotomy that ought to lead to a critical questioning of the activities and narrations produced by contemporary heritage management, as well as its relationship to the public. Can the rock-carvings at Tanum, for instance, still be viewed as authentic (originals in themselves) even though, during the last decades, they have been cared for with petrol, caustic soda, lye, thinner, scouring powder, nitric acid, acetone, alcohol, benzyl, paint, soapy water; even though they have been “cared for” with compressed air, scraping with a knife, blowtorch, brushing and *Smith Test-hammer*; and even though their surroundings have been staged with stairs, ramps, drainage, paths, pruned woods, etc.? Probably not. It is quite ironical that the preservation-mania and the “caring” activities have resulted in methods that damage the carvings. The question of why the rock-carvings are still presented as authentic (in themselves) in the official narration, despite this treatment, is of course an interesting one.

Perhaps it is all about power and authority, both on the disciplinary and the personal level; that is, if archaeologists/heritage managers do not show the society that they are indispensable “experts”, they risk losing both economical support as well as their employment. On the other hand, perhaps it is all about the traditional disciplinary socialisation into a – long-lived – specific epistemological view of the relationship between past and present, and a traditional modernist view of our





Fig 13. *Contemplation in the 1920s. Unknown photographer. BMA.*

own role as shamans who know all about, and control, the past.

Without answering these questions, one wonders whether the rock-carvings at Tanum would be of lesser value – and to a lesser degree authentic – if they were viewed as part of the present. Would they no longer be interesting if their authenticity were recognised as a product of present narrations, and in that case, why not? From our point of view there is a value in the fact that the rock-carvings are imbedded in specific cultural processes in their present existence, and in the ways that this has shown itself during the years. Furthermore, if the rock-carvings were viewed as part of historical – and contemporary – cultural processes, the striving for the original authenticity could perhaps be abandoned, at the same time as the sacral view of them could be left behind as an expression of a specific relationship in a specific horizon of time. One consequence of such an awareness – if put into practice – might be that public accessibility to the rock-carvings could be prioritised above preservation, at the same time as archaeology/heritage management might be willing to open up a dialogue with the public. Awareness, and a discussion, of the cultural processes that influence heritage management and its relationship towards the past, its remains, and the public seem to be necessary in the future. Perhaps the authoritarian role of heritage management (concerning the past and also the contemporary public) should be abandoned in favour of various practices that encourage the public to reflect critically, and where the management is ready to meet the public in an open and democratic

dialogue. Probably this would also be the fairest and most ethical way to handle the past, that is, to recognise that there are no final answers.

Without answering these questions, it can be concluded that, as archaeologists, we are in most cases not used to approaching our own subject from an ethnographical point of view. Yet the interesting thing is that if we take this step – and approach our own discipline as a specific culture fixed in a specific historical, ideological and socio-political context – we will find that an ethnographical approach has much to teach us about our subject, about ourselves, and perhaps also about the past. The approach has undoubtedly helped us to move beyond the structures – and specific ways of viewing the world – that are a consequence of our own archaeological socialisation. Suddenly activities that, with an archaeological eye, seem to be completely normal, present themselves instead as strange examples of the culture of contemporary archaeology/heritage management. For various reasons – not least ethical and democratic ones – this culture and its rituals need to be examined even further from an ethnographical point of view.

It is a light and warm morning in June 2004...

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ATA – Antikvarisk Topografiska Arkivet, Stockholm

BMA – Bohusläns museums arkiv.