

Reply to Bertilsson

John Coles

Fursdon Mill Cottage, Thorverton, Devon EX5 5JS, England (jmcoles@btinternet.com)

The overall impression of Dr Bertilsson's comment on my paper, which was appropriately called "A conflict of opinions", is that it is a rather personal attack on my work and my opinions. Anyone can express his or her conclusions in a logical and constructive way, so long as they are based on an objective appraisal of the situation. Here we seem to have an unleashing of opinions and commentary built up over a period of time, some of which have little or nothing to do with my paper. I restrict my response to a few facts, but a few opinions will creep in.

Dr Bertilsson refers to me as an outsider who revels in the fact, and notes that I have never shown an interest in being officially involved in Swedish projects. To this I might say that I have never been asked to join a committee, and had I been asked I might well have refused. I have sat, and still sit, on innumerable committees in Britain and Ireland and that surely is enough for anyone to have to endure. Maybe Swedish committees are more jolly.

Nonetheless, my work on Swedish rock carvings is not done in isolation and I have had the benefit of collaborative work in the field and in the archives from many Swedish colleagues, including several professors, a class of person of whom Dr Bertilsson seems not to wholly approve, and of course such work is unfunded by the European Union.

I am well aware of the several reports that Dr Bertilsson accuses me of confusing; I think he has actually sent me copies of them, and I have reviewed one of them for ICCROM. We disagree, but not very much, about the cleaning and painting, and the burying and abandoning, of rock carvings, but his comments about the covering of some sites – that I am upset about not being able to visit such sites – are misguided; I do not say anything of the sort in my paper.

What Dr Bertilsson does not comment upon is the demonstrable damage done and being done to sites in the areas for which I have personal knowledge and documentation; these were the primary concern of my paper.

Just look at the pictures, as they say. If such damage exists, what are the regional and national agencies doing about it? That is the fundamental question and I am bound to say that I see rather little action taking place to address it, although there are notable exceptions. And regarding the assertion by Dr Bertilsson that "it is certainly not true that [the sites] were buried for almost 3000 years" – how does he know that? How is it, then, that the current search for previously unknown sites requires the removal of soils to expose the buried rock surfaces?

Dr Bertilsson's remarks and his defence of the records of Mr Kjellén in Uppland are interesting but incomplete. I might remind him that the plans of almost all the sites in this area were in the private collection of Mr Kjellén, whose property they were, and my book on the carvings was dedicated to him in acknowledgement of his great work. Having been invited to study the carvings of the area, I had hoped to be able to inspect the archive and profit from it. A meeting between Mr Kjellén and me was arranged but cancelled at short notice. I went ahead and made my own plans to the best of my ability at the time of operation. The critical comments made about these records by Dr Bertilsson have not been transmitted to me; are they relevant to the paper on "Conflicts"? If they include the chalking of images for the record-making, I agree, but then I must ask why the same process is recommended and condoned in parts of Sweden today. I no longer use the process. Now, in 2004, Mr Kjellén's archive is in the public domain and that is good. I am well aware of the inadequacy of records of rock carvings, made by me and by others, and perhaps indeed by Dr Bertilsson. We can but do our best to eliminate errors and create a reliable documentation.

We surely aim to protect and document the traces of past societies wherever we can, and we have to accept the gradual diminution of the record over time. What we should not accept is the loss of evidence that could have been preserved. I know that Dr Bertilsson and I can agree on this.