

Glösa – Transfiguring Rock Art

Introduction

In the summer of 2003 I and my colleagues from the Archaeology Department at Jämtlands läns museum spent a few pleasant weeks doing recording work at Glösa, Alsen.

The items being recorded were the famous rock carvings at Glösabäcken, and the work was a small part of the large inter-Nordic RANE-project (Rock Art in Northern Europe). As we lay there and worked on the rocks there was one question that kept on coming back to us: What do the figures really depict? The majority of those who have come into contact with these carvings in recent years have, in one way or another, had previous knowledge of the elks at Glösa. What was a little strange was that the more time we spent at the rock carvings, the more difficult it was to see them as elks. All of us working with the recording had visited Glösa before, but with activities of this type one works close to the figures for a long period of time; the figures were literally right under our noses.

In the autumn of 2000 anyone who was interested could read in the local newspaper about a newly discovered rock painting at Tännadalssjön. What was written made me a little reflective. It had been my colleague, Lars-Inge Lööv, and I who had shown the journalist the site and it was us that she had interviewed. On the way to the painting we had joked with the journalist when she had asked about what sorts of animals could be seen in the painting. "Maybe a little pig," we said. When we got to the painting a bit



later we explained the animal figures in a more conventional manner: possibly elks, perhaps reindeer and maybe a little bear. You can imagine our surprise when, a few days later, we read in the newspaper: "It looks sort of like a little pig, and a larger animal with horns next to it." (LT 2/10 2000). This, almost embarrassing, incident taught us that rock paintings are not a matter for jokes. Today no-one believes that a pig is depicted in the cave painting at Tännadalssjön, or...?

Prehistory and archaeology are usually associated with material culture – objects and remains. From one perspective this is correct. From another perspective archaeology and

prehistory are about texts. Practically all archaeology results in text. Reports, articles, theses and popular reference works about prehistory are some examples of archaeological texts. Archaeology and prehistory are also usually associated with the distant past. In one way this is true, but from another point of view archaeology and prehistory are extremely contemporary phenomena. During the time that archaeology has been carried out using scientific methods a number of texts have been produced on the subject of prehistoric conditions. These texts have been produced in a social and historical context where the archaeology has not existed in prehistory, but rather in the currently existing contemporary society.

A fair amount has been theorised and written about rock carvings. This study examines the suppositions and writings about the rock carvings at Glösa. I have chosen Glösa for primarily two factors: the first known written record of them is from 1685, which makes it possible to follow interpretations of them over a long period of time, and the carved figures are difficult to interpret.

One question is: How can it be that the same figures can be described in different ways at different times and by different people? Is it research about rock carvings that results in this change, or could it possibly depend on other factors? With regards to Glösa the differences revolve around what the animals carved into the rock actually are. The most common interpretation of the animal figures at Glösa is currently that they depict elk, but that hasn't always been the case. Another question is almost the opposite of the first: Why is it that the figures have been interpreted and described in such a similar manner, especially in the descriptions from the past 40 years? Is it scientific proof of what the figures depict that could be the basis for this, or could it be due to something else? My study is also, to a certain extent, an epistemological study, in which the Glösa Carvings are an example of how presumed knowledge and truth are constructed and created. Has new knowledge been accumulated or has old knowledge been reproduced; can it be claimed that 319 years of studying the Glösa Carvings has resulted in us knowing more

about them today than we did in 1685? Or do we know something else today?

In this study not only the various interpretations are important, but it is also of importance who made those interpretations and when. I have therefore chosen to use a strictly chronological presentation. If the interpretations of the figures are products of their times, what factors are relevant to the assertions about what is depicted? Who believes they have the authority to decide what the figures represent? The word authority is problematic. Knowledge and authority are intimately associated with each other; it is through knowledge that authority is exercised. Knowledge gives the authority to define, categorise and decide what "reality" should look like. Knowledge of phenomena is most often mediated through texts; texts can therefore be seen as a form of exercising authority. A text's authoritative importance is often longer than its author's active life. Accordingly old, but also new, texts that are read as if they are unproblematic sources of knowledge to be used for understanding 'reality' exercise their authority over the reader.

Further, the various descriptions of Glösa that follow are to be seen as a process where a set of ancient remains or, more accurately, a cultural environment, is loaded with values and meanings over a long period of time. However, Glösa is also to be seen as a place that has generated all these descriptions and stories. In other words, there is a two-way interaction between place and description. Some changes that occur in a cultural environment consist of physical changes to the environment, while other changes can be found in people's thoughts about the place.

For archaeological material to be able to reveal something it has to be interpreted; this is absolutely the case with rock art. However this can be problematic when interpretations appear to be facts. The basis of the empirical scientific ideal is that objective facts exist; facts come from observing and describing reality as it is. Interpretation is something that may occur at a later stage of scientific thought and has nothing to do with facts. It is often said that facts are interpreted. In my



Fig. 2. Some of the figures at Glösa. The Glösa carvings are highlighted, signed and easily accessible to visitors. (Photo: Karl-Johan Olofsson/JLM)

opinion this is completely wrong. Facts do not exist in their own right, facts are produced by people. People are shaped by a cultural and social environment that changes with time. Therefore a fact, and the knowledge that is built upon facts, is highly relative and dependent on factors that are a long way from the object being studied. Thus, fact and interpretation are different words for the same thing. All knowledge is tied to the perspective that was used when the so-called reality was studied. Which perspectives are used and how they are created are described by the discourse analyst Jonathan Potter: "The world is not ready categorized by God or nature in ways that we are all forced to accept. It is *constituted* in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it." (Potter 1997:98). In other words, the perspective taken on a phenomenon is combined with changeable cultural and social processes, which in turn leads to something that can temporarily be called fact/interpretation.

The animal figures that can be seen at Glösa are usually regarded as fact. They are of a certain type and of a certain size, and the carved lines have a depth and a width. That which is said about them after this is most often called interpretation; this usually consists of ideas about the carvings' meaning, what they represent and their context. My thesis is that all of these are interpretations, but at several different levels. In this study I am going to examine the most basic level of interpretation, the interpretation of the figures' design. Consequently it is not the question of what the figures represent or communicate that is most important in this study, but rather what various people have said about what the figures literally depict, which of course are also interpretations. In other words this is a study of what people have written about the figures at Glösa when the figures have been treated as icons, in other words as directly illustrative pictures (for a more thorough reasoning about how

rock art can be seen from a semiotic perspective, see Lindqvist 1994:125-126). Rock art is, or can be, among the most democratic of ancient remains. Each and every person can have their own ideas about what it is they can see on the rock. The pictures do not usually need to be excavated for them to be visible. Rock art is, at least with regard to motifs, an archaeological material that can and should be interpreted by everyone. However, the archaeological interpretive advantage and archaeological knowledge present barriers to amateur archaeologists. In other words, we usually tell people what they are supposed to see. Using so called objective methods to be able to determine what animal species is represented at Glösa is pretty much impossible. The archaeologist cannot say what the figures represent with any greater or lesser certainty than anyone else. Foresters, hunters or biologists may be able to put forward their opinion on more certain grounds. However, the archaeologist may have knowledge of conditions at the time when the carvings were made. Furthermore, the archaeologist may have knowledge of, and have researched into, how others have interpreted rock art, here and in other places. Analogies can be drawn with other places and other times. Ethnographic material can be referred to. Sensible and appropriate interpretations can be made, but when it comes to finding the so called truth – and by truth I mean the significance and meaning that the carvings had for those who made them – this knowledge is not enough. It is also uncertain whether those who made the carvings, and those who were alive at the time the carvings were made, knew the meaning of the carvings in an unequivocal manner. This is even more the case at Glösa because the actual figure motifs have been, and will continue to be, difficult to interpret and much debated. Do the figures represent elks or reindeer or do they represent animals that are not found in the forests? Are they mythological fantasy animals or animals that only exist in a dream world?

The work which follows here is a study of written descriptions of the figures at Glösa.

The descriptions that I have selected are not the only ones in existence. My selection is based upon what can be found in the museum's library as well as, in some cases, material which has been easy to order. Some texts are even available on the Internet. I have chosen to examine some descriptions carefully, others less carefully and some not at all.

Travellers: 17th – 18th Centuries

The rock carvings at Glösa are mentioned in writing for the first time in 1685. This occurred in connection with the first attempt to systematically collect information about ancient remains in Sweden, *Rannsakingar efter antikviteter*². It was Anders Plantin, a circuit judge, who recorded the conditions at Glösa: "Between Wijken and Blöta in Alsen parish there are in a brook on the mountain below the water drawings of many animals like deer and reindeer the size of sheep, and the old tradition is that St. Olaf made them with his bare fingers. Can be seen when the water is low in the brook."³ (*Rannsakingar efter antikviteter* 1960:257). It is difficult to know whether the description builds upon Plantin's own interpretations of the figures or whether he retells what the local population say that they see on the rocks. Regardless of this, it is this description of Glösa that becomes the official one. In this, the first written description, the figures therefore depict deer and reindeer.

In the same year, 1685, but some months later, Glösa was visited by the doctor, scientist and author, Urban Hiärne. In his travel journals the following can be read about Glösa: "On the 19th we journeyed to Alsen Church, where Lieutenant Colonel Ribbing also lived, and then we came to a place along the brook where we saw engraved in stone quite a number of Lapp reindeer, larger and smaller, not knowing what it should signify" (Festin 1917:122). Urban Hiärne, who is proven to have visited Glösa, goes one step further than Plantin in his interpretation of the animal figures. He sees reindeer, and not just any old reindeer, but Lapp reindeer.

In *Geographie öfwer Sweriges rike*⁴, published in 1773, the carvings are described in the following manner: "[...] and a rock by



Fig. 3. Animal figure at Glösa. Does it depict a reindeer or some other animal? (Photo: Karl-Johan Olofsson/JLM)

Glösa Gård in Alsan, where Animals, that liken Reindeer, are cut; it is believed that in Heathen times here was a place of Sacrifice" (Tuneld 2004 [1773]).

Some years later, in 1775, the topographer and author A. A. Hülphers described the rock carvings in this way: "Not far from the village of Glösa on a rock near the highroad are some figures of animals such as reindeer, etc., deeply carved or cut in the loose limestone, and it is said that here was a place of sacrifice in heathen times."⁵ (Hülphers 1912 [1775]:179-180).

The following can be read in Fale Burman's diary entries from 1791: "On the same road, not far from the village of *Glösa*, are *Glösa* rocks, in which clumsy pictures of reindeer from ancient times are cut and seem to be made with flint or other hard stone. If I do not deceive myself, this is a relic from the time when the *Lapps* alone had the land and maybe not yet knew of or possessed iron. In general it is believed, that here was a *place of sacrifice*" (Burman 1902:14-15). As can be seen, the diary entries were first published in 1902. They had lain forgotten in the University of Uppsala's collections for around 100 years before they were published and became easily available. The same year that Burman wrote his notes he was a history fellow and became lecturer at the Kungliga Vetenskaps societeten⁶.

Priests and antiquaries: 19th century

N. J. Ekdahl visited Glösa in 1828. Ekdahl, who was ordained, had a great interest in

antiquities. He was a member of the Götiska Förbundet⁷ and had close contacts with the Vitterhetsakademien⁸. From 1827 to 1830 he devoted himself to researching Norrland's antiquities, a project that was financed with a government grant (Hallström 1928-9:73-74). According to Hallström, Ekdahl's journeys in Norrland are to be regarded as a new chapter in the academy's research work. Ekdahl took a systematic approach and the guiding principle for the antiquary's fieldwork was to make a complete inventory (Hallström 1928-9:77). Ekdahl visited the rock carvings in Glösa on 18 July. "I went back to Alsen where there is a rock with figures of animals drawn upon it (see Pl. G.). The piece of rock where the figures are is 30 ells long and 15 wide. The rock is said to have been a place of sacrifice for the aborigines. A Cataract runs over it which has worn away quite a number and perhaps most of these grotesque figures. Traces of grills may also be visible." (Hallström 1928-9:128). Ekdahl mentions nothing about what species of animal can be seen on the rocks, but he takes a clear distance from the figures. It is possible that the ordained Ekdahl saw the figures as an expression of heathendom and idolatry. This was also the first time that measurements are taken. Furthermore, Ekdahl was the first to draw the figures, or, more correctly, to state in writing that he had done so.

In the *Dansk Antiquarisk Tidskrift*⁹, from 1845, C. A. Wetterbergh, also known as Onkel Adam, published an account of the journey that he made to Glösa in the summer of 1842. Wetterbergh was a qualified physician but became famous for his writing. He was the first person to try to offer a more complex interpretation of the figures at Glösa. He rejects Hülphers' idea that Glösa was a sacrificial site: "According to general belief, which Hülphers also cites in his description of Jemtland, this rock carving shall have been made by Lapps and the place was for them one of their places of sacrifice" (Festin 1932:212). Because Hülphers doesn't mention Lapps in his description of Glösa, only reindeer and sacrificial site, Wetterbergh himself makes that connection, which he then questions and rejects. But it is also possible to see Wetterbergh's rejection of the

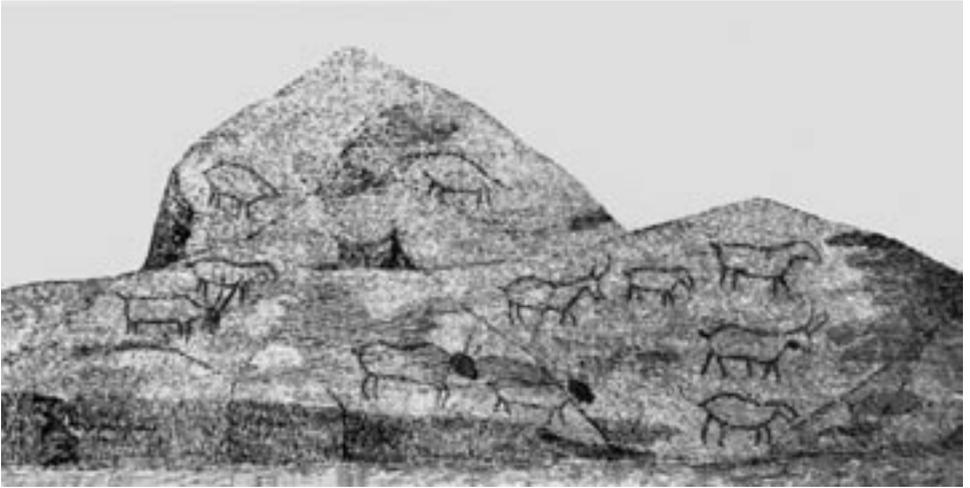


Fig. 4. Wetterbergh's detailed drawing of the carvings at Glösa (from Festin 1932).

sacrificial site idea as a reaction against what is, according to him, the general conception of ancient remains as cult sites: "One has in general chosen to interpret all remains from ancient times, as meaning religious use or deeds of battle" (Festin 1932:212). Further, he cites research results that support his interpretation: "That such [sacrificial sites] exist, which have a whole other origin, the more thorough researches that have begun in recent times and the sterner criticism directed to our classification of antiquities, have properly proven. One has, in one word, come some steps closer to knowledge of the old Northmen's life and habits" (Festin 1932:212). Thereafter follows reasoning based upon the theory that if rock carving sites were Sámi (Lapp) sacrificial sites there should be more locations with rock carvings. It is in this context that the idea that the rock carvings at Glösa depict elks occurs for the first time: "The carved animal figures admittedly liken Reindeer or Elk, and one has therefore ascribed them to the Lapps; but if the Lapps usually cut figures in rock, they would probably have done so at more places and always Reindeer [...]" (Festin 1932:212). What Wetterbergh is saying is that the rock carvings at Glösa were probably not a Sámi sacrificial site; instead he puts forward the idea that Glösa is a hunting place that was

used by the ancient Northmen. The hunt would have been organised so that the animals were driven over the drop in the river and for each successful hunt another animal figure was cut into the rock.

It is apparent that Wetterbergh believed that the Sámi could only carve reindeer while Northmen could carve both elks and reindeer. By interpreting the carved figures as both elks and reindeer the conclusion is that it was Northerners who carved them. Furthermore, one has to take Wetterbergh as meaning that Sámi and reindeer make the place a sacrificial site, which, according to Wetterbergh, it is not, while Northmen, elk and reindeer make it a hunting place. The Sámi then appear to be something magical and religious while things that are Nordic appear to be concrete reality. Furthermore, Wetterbergh's logic with regard to his ideas about a sacrificial site/hunting place can be seen to be slightly unconsidered, but these ideas have consequences for what the figures can be thought to represent. His reasoning is built up through suppositions: that if it was a Sámi sacrificial site there should be more sites with presumed Sámi carvings. Because there aren't, which there should be because the Sámi are "a wandering nomadic people" according to Wetterbergh, Glösa

cannot be regarded as a sacrificial site and the figures can, therefore, not only depict reindeer. If one takes Wetterbergh's logic and applies it to his own interpretation, the result is as follows: The settled Northmen's hunting method, hunting animals over cliffs, cannot be relevant to Glösa, because such an effective hunting method should have been practised in other places and resulted in figures carved in rock in those places. Because there are no animal figures at places equivalent to Glösa, it cannot be Northmen who made the figures. Therefore, none of the figures can depict elk.

The example shows that Wetterbergh's logic, or rather lack of logic, forms the basis for a supposition about what the figures depict. Furthermore, an anachronistic idea can be discerned: those who made the carvings are either Sámi or Northmen. He accordingly transfers his two contemporary categories to prehistoric conditions. There is also an intimation of, expressed using a modern term, ethnocentric ideas behind the suppositions about different groups' abilities to depict animal figures on rocks.

Wetterbergh's ideas about Sámis and Northmen were very much in line with the contemporary public debate about these issues. Ideas of cultural hierarchy were well established in Sweden at the beginning of the 19th century. These ideas were based upon cultural inequality, where hunter-gatherer and nomadic cultures were at a lower level than agricultural cultures (Lundmark 2002:12). At this time the idea of the Sámi as being an indigenous people still generally prevailed. It wasn't, in the meantime, based on favourable sentiments about Sámis (Lundmark 2002:20).

In Eric Festin's commentary on Wetterbergh's text, approximately 90 years later, it says that: "It is therefore so very so very heartening, that it was our very own Onkel Adam who, with regard to this collection of ancient remains, is in on a line of interpretation, which was later come upon by professional men and accepted as it was" (Festin 1932:211).

It didn't take 90 years before professional men approved Wetterbergh's ideas about Glösa, it only took three years. A. E. Holmberg, priest and antiquary, published his

thesis, *Skandinaviens hällristningar, arkeologisk afhandling*¹⁰, in 1848. He mentions Wetterbergh's article and he agrees with Wetterbergh on all the points about Glösa. Holmberg probably didn't visit Glösa, rather he refers to a drawing made by Wetterbergh that "shows [...] 11 animals, probably elks or reindeer" (Holmberg 1848:138).

In 1845 a survey of Alsen parish was performed by the surveyor L. A. Burman. The description was written fourteen years later, in 1859. In point five, ancient remains, the following can be read about Glösa: "At the farm, Glösa, where the so-called Glösabäcken forms a steep drop, there are some clumsy representations of animals, almost like he-goats, cut in the rock. It is also supposed, that during heathen times here was a source of sacrifice and a suicide precipice, where they launched themselves down the rock wall on a journey to Valhalla, and it is undoubtedly so that the travellers, on arrival at the valley bottom, got to see 'Jumala'" (Alsen's parish 1859). Burman even provides the sources that formed the basis of this description: information from the local tax and enforcement office and priesthood, as well as his own personal observations at the site. The influence of popular 19th century writers is also hinted at in the description. Wetterbergh's interpretation has not apparently influenced this description, which is perhaps not so strange. Wetterbergh's text was published in the *Dansk Antiquarisk Tidsskrift*, which was probably not read to any great extent by surveyors or by priests.

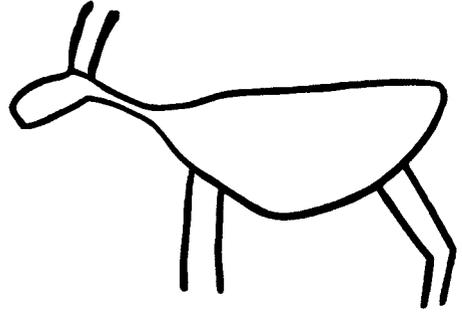
Artur Hazelius journeyed through Jämtland and Ångermanland in 1852. He was 18 at the time and kept a diary during the journey. In a short note from the visit to Glösa he wrote: "We also found a stone, on which around 10 reindeer were cut, – but it is said that some years back even more could be seen." (Leijonhufvud 1934:98).

In 1868 the artist and cultural researcher N. M. Mandelgren came to Glösa. "Glös Bäckens rock carvings sketched 21/7 1868. These rock carvings are cut with a large chisel, approximately one inch wide and pointed lance, they are at the deepest place one inch deep, but mostly shallower, in some places it appears as if a pickaxe was used, as in fig, which also



Fig. 5. Mandelgren's drawing of Glösa (from the Mandelgrenska samlingen 1:12-61-156).

Fig. 6. A drawing by Peter Olsson depicting one of the figures at Glösa (from Olsson 1895b).



could be done with a chisel? It is said to have been done by those who caught reindeer? By mischievous millers who lived there? My opinion is that here, in olden times, was both capture and transport, one sees here both traps and snares, as well as reindeer and elk, among these are ones loaded with carrying frames of the same kind used even today in the village" (Mandelgrenska samlingen¹¹, 1:12-61:156 ab). On another occasion Mandelgren described Glösa in this way "[...] but those found at Glösa falls in Jemtland only hunt for reindeer and elk" (Mandelgrenska samlingen, 3:12-25 22:25).

There is no doubt that Mandelgren knew what had been published about the rock carvings some decades before he visited Glösa. In Mandelgren's archive both Wetterbergh's sketch and Holmberg's thesis are mentioned. What is original about Mandelgren's description is that he gives measurements for the carved lines' depth and width, as well as that he interpreted some figures, probably those with inner lines, as pack-reindeer.

The next person to write about Glösa was the antiquary and natural science researcher Peter Olsson, who visited the rock carvings in 1877. Peter Olsson was a Zoology Fellow at the University of Lund and taught

natural science at the elementary school in Östersund. He was also administrator of the newly started antiquarian association in Jämtland. There is a short notice about Glösa in *Jämtlands Läns fornminnesförenings Tidskrift*¹², printed in 1895: "In a stream at Glösa there are rock carvings with pictures of deer etc., partly shown in *Antiqvarisk Tidskr.* 1844, Kjöbenh. P. 175, Tab. IV, V and in A. E. Holmberg's *Skandinaviens hållristningar*, Sthlm 1848. I visited them in 1877, but have not had occasion to compare them with the drawings" (Olsson 1895a:21).

After further visits to Glösa, Olsson wrote a longer article about rock paintings and rock carvings in Jämtland. "In the group shown by the present sawmill there are at least two more animals, thus thirteen altogether. Besides, further down the flat cliff some rock carvings were discovered, depicting five mammals, as well as traces of hacked lines. One of the animals, 26 cm. long, is sketched in natural size and shown reduced *Tab. 1 fig. 2*. The other carvings depict animals of the same species, probably reindeer, but are rather worn from flowing water. The animals' legs and antlers are shown through $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cm. wide channel-shaped grooves. The antlers are standing and almost straight (none of the animals lack antlers, one animal in the upper

group may have branched antlers), bodies rectangular, egg-shaped or triangle-shaped. Also the head is always shown in contour, not completely hollowed out. Some of the animals most resemble he-goats" (Olsson 1895b:56).

There is a suggestion of uncertainty in Olsson's description of which animals are depicted in the carvings, but those animals that he names are reindeer and he-goats. Elks are not even mentioned, despite him having access to both Wetterbergh's and Holmberg's descriptions of the site. He doesn't speculate about the site's function, though he does give a fairly good description of what he observes.

Archaeologists: 20th and 21st centuries

Now we have come to the time for qualified archaeologists to give their opinions about Glösa. In 1904 Oscar Almgren mentioned the Glösa Carvings in the book, *Sveriges fasta fornlämningar från hednatiden*¹³ (Almgren 1904:42-43), but provided no detailed description of the carvings.

The first to present and document Glösa more thoroughly was the archaeologist Gustaf Hallström. At the time of his first expedition to Jämtland, in 1907, he had a Bachelor's Degree with Comparative Archaeology as its main subject (Baudou:1997:75). In a longer article (Hallström 1907:160-189) in the antiquarian periodical *Fornvännen* about rock carvings in the north of Scandinavia the Glösa Carvings got just over six pages. In the article the topography is described in the following manner: "The carvings are located approx. 150 m. 5° E. of Halvar Månsson's manor house [...] :Height above the lake (295.4 metres above sea level) is 40-50 m." The location of the rock carvings is described as follows: "It is really one large single rock carving, 11.3 m. long and 4.15 m. wide with SSW direction, height difference between the highest and lowest situated animals is 2.67 m." Hallström then continues by describing the angles of the rocks with gradients and directions. He gives measurements for the figures' relationship to one another, the depth and width of the carved lines, the number of figures as well as their sizes. It is

obvious that Hallström has been thorough, he has measured and documented the site in a way that none of his predecessors did. He also gives references and comments upon the older descriptions that exist. Hallström says the following about Wetterbergh's sketch of the site: "Tab IV shows a new view of the area with a wild mountain landscape in the background, perhaps drawn to impress the Danish plains dwellers, for in reality it does not at all exist" (Hallström 1907:182). The others are criticised for a lack of thoroughness and for not contributing any new knowledge about the carvings.

According to Hallström there are details on the figures that provide guidance as to what they depict: "On some animals there is a trace of a chin tuft and a short tail, two distinguishing features which indicate reindeer or elk." (Hallström: 1907:183). However, he believes that it is very difficult to decide which species are represented.

It is also apparent that Hallström saw the carvings as works of art: "They are no better than children's drawings with regard to their artistic merit." He also provided an explanation as to why the figures at Glösa are so ugly: "From an artistic viewpoint it can be seen as odd that such naive drawings, like those at Glösa, often have four legs, which is a notable understanding of reality, but it is not found on the following carvings, which have a great artistic value, of the northern Scandinavian group, and not either on the Nämfors carvings' best products, the elks. But this is a psychological characteristic, that is often found in artless drawing and is almost always found in the southern Scandinavian rock carving area." (Hallström 1907:183-184).

It is slightly difficult to understand Hallström's ideas in the above reasoning. His own documentation of Glösa is built on a thorough description of the carvings' site, but when those people who carved the figures have carved four legs on the animals, Hallström finds this naive. Most people would probably describe both reindeer and elks as four-legged creatures. This paradox can be explained by Hallström seeing what he did at Glösa as the practice of an empirically based science, while those who made the figures were seen



Fig. 7. Detailed picture of the carvings at Glösa. In total there are approximately 65 carved figures, of which about 45 represent animals. (Photo: Karl-Johan Olofsson/JLM)

by Hallström as being practitioners of artistic activities. Or, in other words, in a scientific description built upon empiricism and facts elks and reindeer should have four legs, but in an artistic description four-legged animals should preferably not have four legs; then it is bad art, then it is naive.

What Hallström does is to establish that the carvings are art and that there is good rock carving art and bad rock carving art. This establishment of what the carving site represents is not something that can be measured, but is instead built on the unexpressed ideas that Hallström had about what rock art, good art and bad art are. By turning around Hallström's argument about psychological characteristics of the artist who creates bad art, to only encompassing the observer's, in this case Hallström's, psychological characteristics, or more accurately, his ideas, prejudices, values and evolutionary view of art, it is possible to understand the picture of the Glösa Carvings provided by Hallström.

Oscar Almgren was Professor of Nordic and Comparative Archaeology – he was the first Professor of Archaeology in Sweden – when the revised second edition of Almgren's survey *Sveriges fasta fornlämningar från hednatiden* was published in 1923. In the preface it says that this edition is: "[...] considerably extended due to the progress in research during the past 19 years" (Almgren 1923). With regards to rock art the terms naturalistic and stylistic now entered the discussion. "So

far, in Sweden very few of these naturalistic rock pictures are known of, and all in central Norrland. Most majestic is the large elk carving on a cliff on the shore of Ånnsjön, in west Jämtland, on Landverk's property in Åre parish (fig. 38). More stylised and probably younger are the animal carvings at Glösa-bäcken..." (Almgren 1923:60).

What Almgren primarily expresses is an aesthetic attitude; large animal figures are more impressive than small animal figures which are difficult to define. Next is that figures are ordered chronologically. Larger animal figures, that more closely resemble real animals, are older than smaller and more ambiguous animal figures. This reasoning can appear somewhat strange when it becomes apparent that Almgren was the foremost pupil of Oscar Montelius (Baudou 1997:53). It was Oscar Montelius who developed, together with Hans Hildebrand, typology within archaeology. Typology can be described, in a simplified manner, as theories about an object's development, from lower and less developed forms to higher and more developed forms. The inspiration behind typological theories comes from the conceptual worlds of common sense, natural science and progressive thinking (Welinder 1994:208). Or, in Montelius' own words: "[...] partly how we [antiquaries] generally use the same method as he [natural scientist], in that we collect as much material as possible and order it so that the result is immediately visible, – partly with reference to evolutionary theory, how we are at a purely Darwinian standpoint" (Montelius 1900:267-268). Then another question is whether typology is really built upon Darwin's theory or whether it was a general evolutionary theory that Montelius expressed (Gräslund 1974:207-216). If typological theory is transferred to rock art it seems as if Almgren, and also Hallström, thought in the opposite direction, that the oldest is most impressive, more complete and at a higher level of artistic development. If rock art is to be only seen as art it is of course a free choice, from an aesthetic perspective, to claim that one is more beautiful than the other. Adding typology and chronology to the argument is more problematic. One parallel with theories about rock art is Iron Age

animal ornamentation. Montelius' reasoning around this is as follows: "Those animal pictures that are found in this ornamentation, were in the beginning drawn comparatively faithfully to life, but eventually became so changed and 'stylised', that without knowledge of the entire serial development— here it a question of a type of 'retrograde' development – one cannot say, which animal is intended, hardly that it should be an animal." (Montelius 1900:256). Thus, it is here a question of reversed development of animal figures. To be able to understand how reversed development can still be seen as development the people behind the creation of the animal figures must be highlighted. What is apparently problematic becomes understandable if ancient peoples are seen as being undeveloped. The theory must be that ancient people made art that was true-to-life because they didn't understand that they could express the same thing with schematic art. People developed through time, from a lower standing to a higher standing, and realised that reality could be expressed in a more abstract manner. People developed but the art became stylistic and ugly. Or, as one art history book expresses it: "The elks in picture 2 [the naturalistic elk carvings at Ännsjön] are a product of the primitive hunter's senses, sharpened by life's essentials and not yet blunted by an augmented cultural environment's irrelevancies" (Lindblom 1944:3). The two presumed opposite notions, or possibly more accurately expressed, two vague trains of thought, are here united. They revolve around two theories: Rousseau's noble savage and Darwin's theory of evolution. However, the two points of view are not necessarily incompatible (Liedman 1997:144), which is hinted at in the above reasoning about development and aesthetics.

Hanna Rydh presented her opinion of Glösa in three articles during the 1930s and 40s. She had successfully defended her doctoral thesis in archaeology and was married to the county governor of Jämtland. To her it was obvious that hunting magic is the reason behind the carvings. By carving his quarry into the rock the carver envisaged that the animal would be easy to hunt. Hanna Rydh uses analogies to lend weight to her theories.

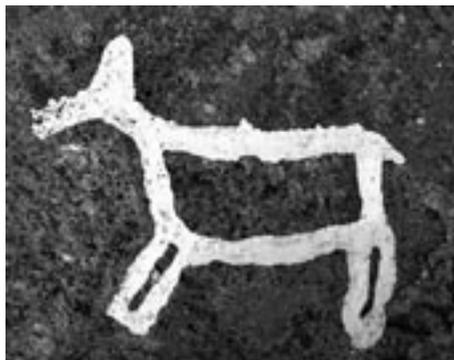


Fig. 8. Figure at Glösa. The animal figures at Glösa are about 20 to 66 cm long. (Photo: Karl-Johan Olofsson/ JLM)

First she refers to the German archaeologist, Leo Frobenius', time among pygmies in the Sahara, where hunters drew their quarry on the ground before the hunt. Secondly, Rydh finds support in the ethnologist, Herman Hofberg's, depictions of hunting in Närke; they were written in the 19th century and describe the man called Bottorpa Lasse, who drew the animals he wanted to shoot before the hunt. Furthermore, she claimed that in Western Europe these customs have roots 30,000-40,000 years back in time (Rydh 1937:15-17). Then she walks right into the analogies' trap. She takes the above theories and applies them, without problem, to the rock art sites in Jämtland. Difficulties of time, space and cultural context are not important, instead it is "[...] the same train of thought in the people that around 4000 years' ago found their livelihoods in the great forests" (Rydh 1934:40, 1937:17). That it is problematic to draw straight lines between those animals which are depicted on rocks and those animals that are actually eaten is illustrated by finds of bones at remains of settlements in the south of France. In the Lascaux caves 60 % of the animal figures represent horses and 0.2 % are reindeer, whilst those bones found at contemporary settlements close to and in the mouth of the caves are 89 % reindeer, and barely 1 % are horse bones (Larsson 1994:13). To transfer the conditions at Lascaux to Glösa is to walk into the same trap as Hanna Rydh. On the other hand, knowledge of the situation in

Lascaux can be an aid to realising that there may be many reasons as to why figures were depicted on rocks. The connection between animal bones and rock art is complicated, as Lascaux demonstrates. The bone material that dominates at probable contemporary settlements in northern Sweden is elk. A total of 75 % of mammalian meat comes from elk (Ekman & Iregren 1984: 38). But to draw the conclusion that the figures at Glösa represent elks because of this is, in my opinion, to go too far. It could be just the opposite that applies to Glösa. The figures can depict animals that were not hunted.

It can be argued that at the time Hanna Rydh wrote her articles about Glösa, information about the conditions at Lascaux might not have been accessible to her. In this context this is of lesser importance because the information that Rydh's articles convey, even today, represents some kind of information about Glösa. In other words, it is not Hanna Rydh's competence as an archaeologist that is being discussed, the point is rather the information that her writings convey through time.

Rydh's statements about what the figures depict are somewhat strange. In the first article she wrote: "[...] that contain whole areas with antlered elks and reindeer." (Rydh 1934:42). On the other hand, some years later she wrote: "It is clear that the animal pictures represent elks." (Rydh 1937:18). Admittedly, she does say one may sometimes be able to guess that the figures depict reindeer, but there is no ambiguity in the above quote.

The book *Jämtland och Härjedalen* was published in 1948. It was part of a series called "Hembyggsböckerna: läseböcker för skola och hem"¹⁴. In the article about Jämtland's prehistory Glösa is described in exactly the same way as in the article from 1937: the carvings depict elks. What is more, the reader learns that the carvings at Glösa are reminiscent of children's drawings (Rydh 1948: 52-53). Whether she had become more certain of what the figures depict or whether it was because of where the articles were published – the first in the national *Svenska turistföreningens årskrift*¹⁵, the latter in the journal for local history, *Jämten* and in the regional

history book *Jämtland och Härjedalen* – can only be speculated.

At the end of the 1930's Glösa was visited by the English archaeologist Grahame (J.G.D.) Clark. In 1935 Grahame Clark was appointed a lecturer at Cambridge and some years later became one of the outstanding names in the world of archaeology (Trigger 1993:314-322). Clark divided Scandinavian rock carvings into a southern Bronze Age group and a northern Arctic group. In its turn, the Arctic group consists of two main groups, styles A and B, which are generally equivalent to naturalistic and stylistic carvings. Clark places the rock carvings at Glösa in Arctic, style B. Clark also believed that style A was older than style B, but he based his reasoning on geological observations. He warned against drawing conclusions about carvings' ages based only on stylistic studies: "This development from naturalistic to schematic representation accords with the impression one had gained from observing the engravings themselves, but without some such confirmation it is highly dangerous to determine the direction of the development of an art-style or a material culture-type" (Clark 1938:67). Clark was cautious about saying what the figures at Glösa depict. One picture caption states: "A schematic cervid at Glösa, showing degenerate representation of internal organs" (Clark 1938:64). That which Mandelgren interpreted as pack-harnesses Clark interpreted as internal organs. Other inner lines are seen as a mystery: "A feature of several of the engravings of elks, which it is difficult to explain, is the presence of a band around the middle, suggesting some kind of harness; at Landverk (FIG. 2, C) and at Åskollen the band is indicated by a pair of parallel lines, while at Glösa and Gärde it is shown by a single line. If found on engravings of reindeer the band could be explained as indicating some such harness as the Lapps employ; on elks it remains something of a mystery" (Clark 1938:60). It can be understood from this short paragraph that Clark saw the figures at Glösa as elks. He also concludes that those who made the carvings were people who lived in tribes and that they supported themselves on hunting and fishing. Their remains are the settlement

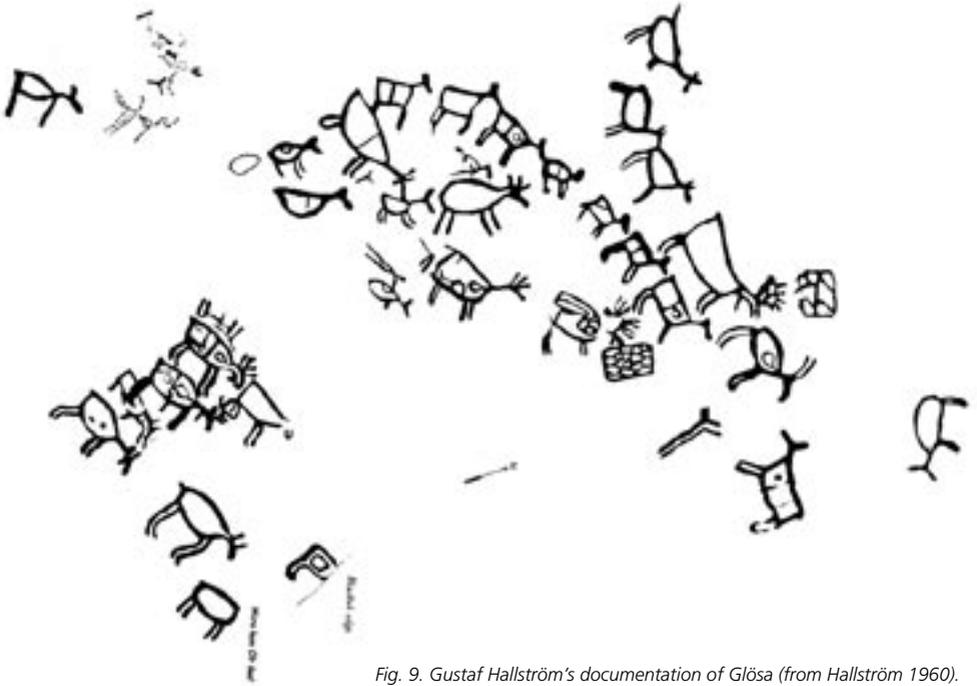


Fig. 9. Gustaf Hallström's documentation of Glösa (from Hallström 1960).

materials that are found at what are today known as Stone Age settlements.

The popular book *Hällristningar i Sverige*¹⁶ was published in 1965. The chapter about rock carvings in Norrland was written by the archaeologist Sverker Janson. Included in the information about Glösa is the following: "The animals are fairly badly characterised. It is quite notable that all four legs are drawn on the animals, in contrast to the better Norrland carvings. It is probably elks, or possibly reindeer, that are depicted" (Janson 1956:70). That there are better and worse carvings is apparent from Janson's text; Glösa belongs to the worse carvings. One can wonder what it is that qualifies the Glösa Carvings for the worse carvings category. Maybe it's because the figures have four legs, or perhaps it's the difficulty of defining what the carved animals are that motivates this evaluation.

After almost an entire lifetime of studying rock art Gustaf Hallström published his great book *Monumental art of Northern Sweden from the Stone Age. Nämforsen and other*

localities (Hallström 1960) in 1960. Hallström had visited Glösa three times, in 1907, 1924 and 1939, and the book contains an excellent description of the carvings, with both text and illustrations. As in the article from 1907 there are many measurements, gradients and details that are described. Hallström's documentation of Glösa has stood the test of time and is a valuable document for use in studying and comparing physical changes in the carvings over the years.

It is interesting to note that Hallström was no longer sure which stage of development the carvings belong to: "Glösa shows a considerably more advanced stage of the petroglyphic art – or, if one prefers, a considerably more degenerated one" (Hallström 1960:76). It is possible, according to Hallström, to choose which stage of development the carvings belong to depending on what the observer prefers. Those carvings that he saw as artless children's sketches in 1907, can now be seen as sophisticated and advanced carvings. How can this be? The carvings in the rock haven't

changed over the years that Hallström has studied them, except for the natural wear on them. But in another way the carvings have actually changed. The change consists of Hallström thinking and writing in another way than in 1907. Hallström, in the autumn of his years, was one of the most highly regarded rock art researchers in the Nordic countries, possibly in the world, and now had the authority to change the view of the carvings at Glösa.

The above reasoning shows how difficult it is to use the concept of development when different rock art sites are compared and evaluated. So-called development usually goes from worse to better, sometimes in the other direction. Whether it is to be seen as better, higher or more advanced is a relative opinion that can change. Instead of talking about development in one direction or the other, change is a better concept with which to illustrate differences over time.

However, what hasn't changed is the view of the carvings' site's function and use: "Already a hundred years ago this carving locality was rightly pointed out as excellent goal for a prehistoric battue. Wetterbergh writes about this [...]" (Hallström 1960:77). It can be seen that Wetterbergh's theories from the 19th century are still alive.

After approximately 50 years of studying rock art and three visits to Glösa Hallström is of the opinion that it is still very difficult to say which animal species the carvings depict. This is what he concludes: "I for my part regard all the animal figures as belonging to species Cervidae and of these probably comprising only elk and reindeer, chiefly elk." (Hallström 1960:75). In other words, Hallström tends toward them being elk, but he's not entirely sure.

A book that is likely to have been significant for archaeologists' opinions about Glösa is Märten Stenberger's *Det forntida Sverige*¹⁷. The book was published in three editions, the first in 1964 and the last in 1979. For many years it was used as a course book on the archaeological core curriculum. Those students who read the book could, amongst other things, learn that: "[...] there are many pictures at Glösa, 40 or so animals, mainly

elks here as well." Stenberger continues with: "Here, above the waterfall, hunters have perhaps driven out their quarry and forced it into the cleft" (Stenberger 1964:156). The same words can also be read in the last edition. In other words, not so much has happened to theories about Glösa since Wetterbergh's article from 1845.

In the popular travel guide *Med arkeologen Sverige runt*¹⁸, first edition from 1965, it says the following about Glösa: "The figures are mainly composed of four-legged animals, elks or reindeer. The animals are poorly characterised [...]" (Biörnstad 1965:311). Biörnstad probably means the stylisation and the difficulty in discerning the figures' species when she writes "poorly characterised". However, the word "poorly" has negative associations. Those making the carvings were probably of another opinion about the figures' characterisation; they carved the figures in just the way they wanted to have them. In the revised third edition from 1987 nothing is mentioned about characterisation and the animal figures are simply four-legged animals (Selling 1987:389).

The archaeologist Ronnie Jensen began his article from 1977 with some thought provoking sentences: "Rock art is not composed of any uniform group, either culturally or in terms of time. There were probably ethnic differences between the hunter-gatherers, which produced this great amount of rock art" (Jensen 1977:270). However, a little further on in the article he agrees with the chronology where the largest and more realistic figures are oldest and the smaller figures, the more stylised and schematically depicted, are the youngest (Jensen 1977:281-282). The ethnic and cultural aspects of rock art's differences and variations have had to make way for the long established theory about stylistic development over time. Without stylistic chronology involved in the reasoning Jensen's thoughts can be seen in another light. Then it is suddenly possible to conceive of a number of ethnic groups that are present in an area at the same time and where the stylistic differences can be seen as indications of difference between the groups. One must naturally assume that the appearance of rock art has varied over



Fig. 10. Detailed picture of the carvings at Glösa. The entire carving area is 20x10 metres. (Photo: Karl-Johan Olofsson/JLM)

time, but those changes do not necessarily correspond to a linear artistic change. On the other hand, it is possible to surmise that ethnicity processes, over time, result in changes in rock art's appearance. However, it shouldn't be said that this only has to do with one ethnicity process; it could have to do with several groups' different ethnicity processes. To connect all northern Scandinavian rock art and search for a presumed unbroken linear development built upon stylistic change appears doubtful. An alternative way of thinking is to look at rock art sites as isolated episodes. What the sites have in common is that they contain figures placed on rock, but where the meaning and use of the rock art is to be seen as something that has changed over time (Simonsen 2000:20). In other words, in that which seems to be the same there is room for much which is different. This point of view appears appropriate when both time and geography are taken into account. The production of rock art is about thousands of years, large geographic areas and continuously changing people. In Jensen's article it is taken for granted that the figures at Glösa are elk. The title of a picture depicting the carvings at Glösa is:

"The elk is the most frequent motif among the figures. It was the most desired quarry" (Jensen 1977:278). Jensen joins those who believe that the carvings represent game animals. "It is simply the case that the motif figures of rock art largely reflect the ecological situation in which their creators lived and worked and the basis on which hunting was done" (Jensen 1977:279). It is not so strange that ecology has a role to play in what figures are carved, but to draw the conclusion from there that the animals that were carved must be those that were hunted is to go too far. It could be exactly the opposite, that those animals that were carved were those that were not to be hunted. Alternatively, they were hunted, but the meaning in their depiction is not food but something else.

In 1989 Jensen publishes another article about rock art. In this the animal figures now "probably" represent elk (Jensen 1989:208). He questions evolutionary style development and provides a clear alternative to a strictly chronological perspective. Rock art's varying appearance can be explained with geographical, environmental, cultural and social variations. And: "[...] pictures with similar characteristics in differing areas can have different meanings and be from different times" (Jensen 1989:199). But nevertheless the old reasoning remains: "The large elk carvings at Landverk certainly belong to the oldest carving phase" (Jensen 1989:203): "The smaller schematic figures are probably younger than the larger naturalistic carvings" (Jensen 1989:210). At the sites referred to there are no empirical grounds to support these ideas, it is rather that evolutionary style development is steering his thoughts to some extent, despite the alternative points of view given in the article.

One alternative to the purely stylistic chronology is to make comparisons with Norwegian conditions. Through studies of land elevation, beach displacement and variations in rock carving styles on the Norwegian coast, it has been possible to establish a system of style and chronology. Extremely simplified, it is possible to say that the largest and most naturalistic carvings are further above the present water line than the smaller sche-

matic figures, so the largest figures must be the oldest carvings. However, there are objections to this way of dating carvings. The theory is based upon the carvings being made at the then existing shoreline. According to Sognnes this can only be relied upon if traces of the old shoreline exist at the site of the carvings, which they do at occasional sites; for example, Hammer in Steinkjer. Sognnes further believes that land elevation can often only provide maximum datings; in other words, the carvings cannot have been done before the land rose out of the sea. To assume that all rock carving sites were always located at beaches is to simplify matters. That all suitable rock could be used for making carvings has to be taken into consideration, regardless of whether they were near the beach or not. Sognnes believes that detailed studies of the local topography around each individual carving site must be done before drawing conclusions about land elevation and style (Sognnes 2000:152-153). Sognnes' reasoning shows that, in principle, the carvings could have been made at any time after the rock rose from the sea (Sognnes 1999:15). Further, this reasoning illustrates the difficulties that exist on the Norwegian coast regarding the use of land elevation as an aid to dating. The question that then arises is: is it appropriate to transfer problematic information regarding rock carving sites on the Norwegian coast to carving sites that are situated inland, and to carving sites that are situated in topographically completely different surroundings?

In a picture heading in the reference work, *Norrlands forntid*¹⁹, which is sometimes used as a course book on core courses in archaeology, the figures are described as follows: "Approx.60 carvings, many elks [...]" (Baudou 1992:24).

One year later, in 1993, Britta Wennstedt Edvinger's licentiate dissertation *Genus och djursymbolik*²⁰ was published. Many new and interesting ideas were introduced in her examination of Norrland's rock art. She has a constructivist relationship to the pictures and is the first, in my study, to expressly problematise her own role in the process of interpretation. Rock art is problematised from the standpoint of sex/gender and the

previous emphasis on its connection with hunting and economy is strongly challenged. She borrows an expression from Claude Lévi-Strauss that illustrates ways of thinking about the animal figures: "It is not because the animals are good to eat that we find them here, rather it is because they are 'good to think'" (Wennstedt Edvinger 1993:69). Wennstedt Edvinger's dissertation, which can be characterised as post-procedural, provides an excellent example of how empirical material should be treated. In contrast to her more or less positivistic predecessors within rock art research in Norrland she discusses the relationship between documentation and interpretation. She advocates greater thoroughness in the recording of rock art and shows how small, but important, details have been neglected (Wennstedt Edvinger 1993:23). It is through being thorough with the details in the documentation that conditions can be provided in which the pictures can be interpreted using new, alternative, varied and possibly better, ways of framing the questions. Seen in this light archaeology that has positivist and empirical ideals and demands a strict objective position with regard to the material being studied appears rather confused. Often, the reverse criticism the case. It is even possible to invert the reasoning and claim that newer and different ways of asking questions need other methods of documentation.

When it comes to the issue of the animal figures' species she believes, entirely correctly, that there has generally been a lack of discussion and problematisation around the species' definition. "Species definitions give the impression of having occurred as a matter of routine and often on a totally impressionistic basis" (Wennstedt Edvinger 1993:50). Her own criterion for species' definition is that an animal figure is to have at least one species specific characteristic. She claims that the elk is an easy animal to identify in rock art; the chin tuft, hump and characteristic head shape with the muzzle and ears are the species specific characteristics (Wennstedt Edvinger 1993:51). So far everything is fine, but when she arrives at Glösa it becomes problematic: "Very few of the 45 identifiable animal figures have any great likeness



Fig. 11. Animal figure at Glösa. What type of animal is this? (Photo: Karl-Johan Olofsson/JLM)

to elks, but six of them can have their species defined on the basis of the occurrence of a chin tuft. A further nine figures have the head shape that is characteristic of elks, but no other species specific characteristics. I have been unable to identify any reindeer" (Wennstedt Edvinger 1993:32). Thus, there are 15 elks that she has succeeded in defining according to the above criteria, four of them are also clearly identified as bull elks. Now something strange happens; the animal figures that are indefinable, 30 in all, and those that didn't have much resemblance to elks, become probable elks. The same thing happens with those figures that, according to the species specific criteria, were elks; even the four that were clearly bull elks also become probable elks:

<i>species</i>	
large cervid, probably elk	45
other, indefinable	-

(Wennstedt Edvinger 1993:32)

In other words, all the animal figures that originally were not like elks, of which some then became clearly elks, are collected in the same category "large cervid, probably elk". It is possible to wonder whether previous research has affected thinking in this case. In the early 1990s anyone who was interested could look up the word Glösa in *Norrländsk*

*uppslagsbok*²¹ and read: "The most frequent motifs at the Glösa Carvings are elk figures" (Norrländsk uppslagsbok 1993:365).

In the archaeologist Lars Forsberg's review of rock art sites in Norrland the carvings are described in the following manner: "Here the images are mainly of elks; approx 65 of the designs are outline elks [...]" (Forsberg 2000:68). Britta Lindgren refers to Forsberg in her article "Hällbilder – Kosmonogi & verklighet": "The carvings total 60-70 figures (all contour), mainly elk motifs [...]" (Lindgren 2001:74). One year later she writes: "The elk pictures from Glösa, with clearly antlered bulls placed behind elk cows (fig 4), indicate regenerative thinking rather than hunting magic" (Lindgren 2002:61). In a newly published article Per H. Ramqvist describes Glösa thus: "At this site, like the sites nos 3-15, all elks are outlined [...]" (Ramqvist 2003:80). Finally, those with inquiring minds can read on the Internet: "At Glösa there is a rock carving with 65 elk figures" (Nationalencyklopedin online²², <http://www.ne.se, 19/2/04>).

Conclusion

In this study of what has been written about Glösa there are three ideas about the animal figures' species. From the end of the 17th century until the middle of the 19th century reindeer but not elk appear in the descriptions. In 1845 elk appear for the first time and accompany reindeer in the majority of the descriptions until the middle of the 1960s. After the 1960s reindeer vanish from the descriptions and become "probably elks", "likely elks", "a number of elks" or simply "elks" (table 1).

During a period of about 300 years the figures have therefore undergone a change of species. This is probably due to a number of interwoven causes. The descriptions from the 17th and 18th centuries probably reflected a local idea about Glösa. Plantin's note about the legend of Saint Olof, Hjärnes' visit to the site with Lieutenant Colonel Ribbing who was resident in Alsen and Hülpher's note about an alleged sacrificial site in heathen times all indicate this. The ways of describing Glösa changed over time.

Year	Source	Species
1685	Plantin	Deer and reindeer
1685	Hiärne	Lapp reindeer
1773	Geographie öfwer Sweriges rike	Like Reindeer
1775	Hülphers	Reindeer etc
1791	Burman	Reindeer
1828	Ekdahl	Grotesque figures
1845	Wetterbergh	Reindeer or elks
1848	Holmberg	Probably elks or reindeer
1852	Hazelius	Reindeer
1859	Burman	Like he-goats
1868	Mandelgren	Reindeer and elks
1895a	Olsson	Deer etc
1895b	Olsson	Mammals, probably reindeer, resemble he-goats
1907	Hallström	Reindeer or elks indicated
1923	Almgren	Carved animals
1934	Rydh	Elks and reindeer
1937	Rydh	Elks
1938	Clark	Elks
1948	Rydh	Elks
1956	Janson	Elks or possibly reindeer
1960	Hallström	Elks and reindeer, chiefly elks
1964	Stenberger	Mainly elks
1965	Biörnstad	Elks or reindeer
1977	Jensen	Elks
1987	Selinge	Four-legged animals
1989	Jensen	Probably elks
1992	Baudou	Many elks
1993	Wennstedt Edvinger	Probably elks
1993	Norrländsk uppslagsbok	Elk figures
2000	Forsberg	Mainly elks
2001	Lindgren	Mainly elk motifs
2002	Lindgren	Elk pictures
2003	Ramqvist	Elks
2004	Nationalencyklopedin	Elk figures

Table 1. Summary of interpretations.

One person who has had a great influence on Glösa is Wetterbergh. He turned his back on the idea of reindeer, Sámi and a sacrificial site. It is possible to detect Wetterberg's unwillingness that such a noteworthy place as Glösa could have had anything to do with heathen hocus-pocus. He circumvented that worry by reinterpreting the figures as elks. The ordained Ekdahl had talked of "grotesque figures" some years before. This way the figures came to be seen as somewhat less grotesque. Holmberg was also a priest and could easily accept Wetterberg's arguments

and publish them. Wetterberg's description of Glösa lived on far into the 20th century. Hallström quotes him as late as 1960. Glösa was documented back in the 19th century, but Hallström was the first to do it within the realm of archaeological science. With that the rock carvings at Glösa became scientific and Hallström's words came to carry great weight.

Another reason that it is easier to see elks at Glösa nowadays is that at most of the other rock art sites in Norrland there are figures that are much easier to see as elks.

Elks are the most frequent animal motif so it is convenient to generalise and also see the figures at Glösa as elks. There is a danger in generalising too much and taking it too far. The boundaries of the specific cannot be stretched ad infinitum. Instead of connecting Glösa with other sites with distinct elks, Glösa should be seen as an exception to these sites. There is often a tendency to find similarities between phenomena, but by studying differences and variation it should be possible to ask other questions.

A third reason is literature. Others are often referred to without question; if something is repeated often enough, and by enough people, things that were uncertain tend to become certain. Much of the pre-understanding that there is about Glösa comes from literature. The visitor already knows what they are going to see when they visit the carvings. That which can be read in reference works and course books is seen as expert opinion and so helps to create an image of the site. Consequently, there is no pure empiricism, rather all empiricism is permeated by theory, and there is no other way for it to be. However, it is possible to be more or less aware of this situation.

In the introduction I reflected on which factors resulted in the changing views of Glösa. A primary prerequisite for something to be written about Glösa is that a group of people agree that it is important to do so. The first descriptions of the carvings were made at a time when Sweden was a great power. *Ranssakningarna efter antikviteter* was one way to show the rest of the world that Sweden also had a long history; that countries should have had a long history in order to be a country to reckon with was important at that time. In this way, the carvings at Glösa came to be a part, albeit a very small part, in the political manoeuvring around the great power of Sweden. At the end of this era there is a gap until the 19th century when ancient remains began to be interesting once more. The history of the Fatherland again became important and the Götiska Förbundet was formed. It was at this time, when passion for things Nordic was at its height, that antiquary Ekdahl, member of the Götiska Förbundet, and Wetterbergh visit Glösa. It is possible to

see two strategies as to how one could relate to the carvings at that time; Ekdahl distanced himself from the figures and called them "grotesque", while Wetterbergh performed a strange analysis and made Glösa conform to a Nordic context.

To continue with the possible effect of a flow of ideas that are constrained by their time on the view of Glösa I shall jump forward to the 1930s. As I've shown above, Hanna Rydh reinterpreted the figures at Glösa. First she wrote about both reindeer and elks, to later write that it is obvious that they are elks. Rydh moved at the centre of power, partly as wife of the county governor, partly as a director of Heimbygda, the county's organisation for regional history societies. During the 1930s the regional history movement developed in national and conservative directions (Rolén 1990:543). It can only be speculated whether this is of any importance for interpretations, conscious or subconscious, of the figures at Glösa. But if the figures were seen as identity-forming symbols for advocates of Jämtland's local districts in the 1930s, in that context elks work much better than reindeer figures.

It is apparent that whether they are reindeer or elk figures have consequences for the theories about which people have carved them. To put contemporary ideas about folk group categories and culture in a prehistoric context leads in the wrong direction. Groups of people through time must be seen as processes. The meaning of symbols also changes with time. The supposition that reindeer mean Sámi and elks mean Northmen, which some of the older interpretations suggest, is not viable. Naturally, neither is the reverse.

Do we know more about Glösa today than in the 17th century? It is obvious that in one way we do. No-one now thinks that Saint Olof was involved with the carvings; we now know much more about the context in which the carvings were made. Furthermore, we have more detailed knowledge about the figures' size, their number and the carved lines' depth and width. On the other hand, it is very doubtful whether we know any more about what the figures depict and it is very likely that we don't have any idea what they represent. This study demonstrates

Fig. 12. Digitalised rubbing from the documentation of Glösa, RANE project 2003. The rubbing is from the central section of the site.



that despite much having been written and thought about Glösa, and over a long period of time, we don't know so much more. To, if possible, know more, it is not enough to look with our present understanding. To start with, the old knowledge, and the previous authorities' ideas, must be questioned. Next, it is not enough just to study the carvings as they are. More thorough documentation of the carvings will provide opportunities for new, alternative and varied ideas. Furthermore, it is a priority that not only the figures themselves are focused on, as demonstrated by research around the rock paintings at Flatruet in 2003. Three arrow heads were found, immediately making the paintings much more interesting. Paths to new interpretations were opened. That which can be found near to rock art is, in other words, of great importance for how the pictures can be interpreted.

The majority of those who have written about Glösa have, in some way, chosen to define the species of the figures. It could be beneficial to shift the focus from what the figures depict, elk, reindeer or other living animals, to animals that only exist in myths, dreams and in the imagination, animals that can change species depending on the mood of the observer, and possibly to figures that cease to be animals, so becoming something entirely different.

Will we have full understanding of the carvings if this is done? No, probably not, but the discussion around them should become more interesting. In this reasoning the questions and answers vary and the discussion itself becomes important in the context in which it occurs. This context is the present – now, but context has existed in all previous nows and will exist in all future nows, and this is part of the continuously ongoing talking, writing and arguing about the terms and existence of the human race.

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Translated by Clare Barnes, Åre Translation

Footnotes

- ¹ All translations from Swedish sources are by the translator of the article, unless otherwise stated.
- ² *Researches into Antiquities*, trans. Hallström 1960:62.
- ³ Trans. Hallström 1960:62
- ⁴ *A Geography of the Kingdom of Sweden*
- ⁵ Trans. Hallström 1960:63
- ⁶ The Royal [Swedish] Society of Sciences
- ⁷ An order devoted to the protection of Swedish culture.
- ⁸ The Royal [Swedish] Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities
- ⁹ *The Danish Antiquarian Journal*
- ¹⁰ *Rock Carvings of Scandinavia, an Archaeological Thesis*
- ¹¹ The Mandelgren Collection
- ¹² *The Journal of the County of Jämtland's Antiquarian Society*
- ¹³ *Sweden's Ancient Remains from Heathen Times*
- ¹⁴ "Local History Books : reading books for school and home"
- ¹⁵ *The Swedish Touring Club's Yearbook*
- ¹⁶ *Rock Carvings in Sweden*
- ¹⁷ *Ancient Sweden*
- ¹⁸ *Round Sweden with the Archaeologist*
- ¹⁹ *Norrland's Prehistory*
- ²⁰ *Gender and animal symbolism*
- ²¹ *Reference Book of Norrland*
- ²² On-line National Encyclopaedia

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