

# Moving ships

## A case study from Southwest Norway

### Introduction

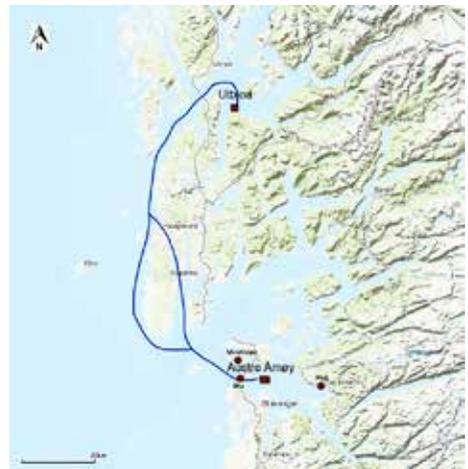
The majority of rock art in SW- Norway is concentrated to the Middle and Northern part on Jæren Stavanger peninsula, as well as the islands and mainland areas in the southern part of Boknafjord. Rock art sites in Rogaland seem to have been selected based on the proximity of water communication points from and around the Boknafjord basin, and further north to Karmsundet and Sunnhordland islands and fjord systems. The rock art is situated in sheltered places like inner skerries close to the shore inlets, bays, natural harbors or headlands (Myhre 2004). Assuming that ships were a part of the everyday life of a coastal Bronze Age population, it is plausible that ships were also part of a beliefs-systems based in a maritime ontology, where ritual actions was part of daily life (Wrigglesworth 2010). Apart from their symbolic and cosmological role, ships have improved human mobility, making it possible to trade over longer distances, increased access to marine based sources of nutrition, facilitated warfare etc., and therefore have agency in forming Bronze Age society. The ship motif comprises approx. 72 % of the rock art in Rogaland, since the initial registration 150 years ago, the number of open rock art locations has increased to 111 sites (Nicolaysen 1867, Høgestøl *et al* 1999, Høgestøl *et al* 2018).

Almost every open- air rock art sites in Rogaland have a maritime location (Kjeldsen 2017). Open-air sites can appear near Bronze Age coastal cairns, or in their immediate vicinity, at the sites at Utbjoa (Vindafjord), Nag (Strand), Bru and Hodnefjell (Mosterøy) these are located in sim-

ilar maritime environment. The cairns occupy prominent positions in the landscape and would be easily visible to seafarers. However, the rock art is only visible at a relatively short distance, and a craft would have to be near the shore for occupants to view it. (Fig. 1)

With focus on open- air site, and two rare ship motifs found at Austre Åmøy and at Utbjoa north in the region the hypothesis is, the island Austre Åmøy have been used as a large scale meeting grounds for performing rituals to create certain traditions, where ideas and knowledge were exchanged and spread further in the region. The carving activity at Austre Åmøy has its beginning in early Bronze Age based on the imagery similar to the "Rørby-sword"

Fig 1: Map with outer and inner sea-routes and rock art in context with coastal cairns.



ship, (1800 -1500 BC) and continues Late Bronze Age, there is approx. 1200 motifs at Austre Åmøy (Malmer 1981, Kaul 1998, 2017, Kjeldsen 1993, 2005, 2017). The majority of the rock art panels are at ground level, close to the shoreline, open and monumental in scale, and easy to access from the seaside (Høgestøl et al 1999 Kjeldsen 1993, 2005).

Flemming Kaul (2017) points out that ideas can be transmitted by travelers over varying distances. They were imbedded in a complex network of exchange rituals, which he describes as “xenia”, a concept of hospitality and friendship of individuals from non-related groups, a set of moral and religious obligations to secure food and accommodations for travelers. Kaul uses the similarity of ship imagery in northern Norway, and northern Bohuslän, Sweden to suggest that the ship imagery discussed in this article is spread by occasional long-distance travelling (Kaul 2017:173 ff).

Goldhahn (2007:208-209) describes the major occurrence of rock art in Sweden and Norway as areas with a mediating position between societies with different but closely related regional ceremonial and ritual centers. I assume the rock art at Austre Åmøy may have been part of ritualization strategies used as a power relationship between individuals and society as a complex strategy of organizing social norms, and not necessarily with any involvement of religious activities. This could explain the absence of Bronze Age burial mounds/cairns on Austre Åmøy (Bell 1992).

### The grave chamber

In 2013, the Museum of Archaeology (AM-UiS) documented three open-air rock art sites near Bronze Age burial cairns along the Utbjøa heritage trail in Vindafjord municipality. Vindafjord is located on the Haugaland peninsula in northern Rogaland. The studied area on Utbjøa is “hilly” with wet areas, rock outcrops, clefts, sparse forests and rocks with areas of



Fig 2: After excavation of stone cist in Early Bronze Age cairn. Photo: Arkeologisk Museum - UiS

heather and scrub vegetation. The coastal zone in Vindafjord is long and varied with steep rocks towards the sea (Mandt 1972, Indreliid 1991). The rock art and cairns in Vindafjord are situated at Bjoa, a spit between Ølen-Sea and Skjold, which extends northwards towards the fjord-systems in Sunnhordland (Fig. 2).

During fieldwork, we were aware of a collapsed stone cist on top of a Early Bronze Age cairn. The Directorate for Cultural Heritage appropriated funds for a survey, of this feature, both to secure any items “overlooked” during the looting of the grave as well as allow for, a possible dating of the burial mound/stone cist, and thus an age correlation between the grave monument and rock art (Kjeldsen 2014). The cist was open with the two upper stone-slabs lying besides the collapsed stone cist. It is about 3 m from the western edge, oriented northeast- southwest. The east wall-slab is approx. 83 cm wide, 40



Fig 3: Early Bronze Age cairns in context with rock art at Utbjoa, Vindafjord municipality.

cm high, the west wall-slab 83 cm wide, 40-45 cm high, with the flat sides turned inwards towards the burial chamber. The north and south walls of the cist consisted of two slabs each, such that the walls had double-sided slabs. The bottom of the cist consisted of six flat stones. The stone cist construction was very solid with a total average length of 2.10 m. The grave-slabs had no traces of carvings (Kjeldsen 2014). Approx. 25 - 30 m west and below the cairn is the rock art site with two carved ship motifs (Mandt 1972, Indrelid 1991). Charcoal samples were collected from a 30 cm deep layer in the eastern end of the cist, 2 sigma calibration suggest a date to the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age: 480-390 BC (Cal BP 2430-2340), which indicate the charcoal in the grave is at least 600 years later than the estimated burial (Kjeldsen 2014 (Fig. 3)).

### The ships at Utbjoa I

The rock face with the two ship carvings is vertical (1.5 m x 2 m) the top ship was documented and described by Gro Mandt (1972:30 pl. 26a and b) as a two-line contour pecked ship with a "decorative designed railing extension that may seem to be finished with an animal head, possible a horsehead", as well as a circle/sun images with four radial lines in front of

the ship. This ship (after Mandt 1972:102, Wrigglesworth 2011:117) is placed in Late Bronze Age per.V - VI based on the razor knives and bronzes, more specifically to per. V, 900-700 BC (Mandt 1972, Kaul 1998, Wrigglesworth 2011). A variation of the *Utbjoa I* ship is carved in dot-pecking technique at Austre Åmøy, the imagery has possible hybrid animal elements

attached to the railing (Fett 1941: pl. 17, Kaul 2017).

Wrigglesworth (2011:118) dates the contoured symmetrical ship (without decorations) at Utbjoa I to Early Pre-Roman Iron Age, while Mandt dates the type to per. V. Variations of the same symmetrical type is depicted at Austre Åmøy site I, V, VI as well as at Bru (Fett 1941, Høgestøl *et al* 1999, 2006). Mandt (1972: 112) interprets *Utbjoa I* as a unit, where the motifs are carved within a short period of time, and classifies both ships as the same type, dated to period V (900-700 BC).

However, the contoured depicted ships belong to the same tradition despite some decorative variations found at the ship designs at *Utbjoa I* and Austre Åmøy. The iconography (in the region) seems constant and immutable, I assume the majority of the rock art conformed to strict conventions in the choice of both motifs and symbolism in the artistic tradition (Kjeldsen 2017) (Fig. 4 and 5).

*Utbjoa III* is located approx. 5-10 m east of two cairns and the location is at ground level. The site has ten ship images, one-foot/sole with cross-section, and one circle (with four radial lines). The lines are shallow and fragmented due to weathering. Based on the ship types Mandt (1972:111-112) dates the rock art to Late Bronze Age (per. IV or V). It is suggested that the ship



Fig 4: Contour pecked ship, one with decoration, possible animal head at Utbjoa I, Vindafjord municipality. Photo: Bergen Museum

Fig 5: Contour pecked ship with possible animal decoration at Austre Åmøy, Stavanger municipality. Photo: Arkeologisk Museum - UIS





Fig 6: Rock art site at Utbjoa III, Vindafjord municipality. Photo: Bergen Museum - UiB

motifs that are carved in a small “cluster” are contemporaneous (Mandt 1972).

The carvings at *Utbjoa I* are not visible from the sea, unless a vessel was travelling close to the shore from the south. While *Utbjoa III* is located at ground level and not visible from the sea, the cairns themselves are clearly visible from the sea. (Fig. 6).

### They came back

It should be noted that long-distance sea-voyage (in southwest Norway), undertaken in flat-bottomed boats, possibly without the technology of sails, in one of the world’s most dangerous and unpredictable bodies of waters did require time, knowledge and planning. What is common to the various regions of the southwest Norway is sea routes where boats had to travel through natural insights in the coastal landscape to avoid the dangerous sea stretches along

the outer sailing-lane. However, a plausible calculation reveals that travelling by a “Hjortespring”- like vessel, it would take a crew approx. 21.5 hours. Assuming a speed of three knots (66 nautical miles and 5.5 km/h), with optimal sea and weather conditions (without breaks) to travel along the less weather exposed inner sea-route (as an example) from Austre Åmøy to Utbjoa (Fig 1). Cairns and rock art were media for ritual behavior throughout time as mentioned, Utbjoa, Nag, and Bru are sites which may have been revisited several times.

Goldhahn (2006) suggests how different groups and identities manifest themselves in a monument, and uses as examples four monumental burial mounds, each with its own unique character. Sagaholm in Småland, Bredarör in Kivik, Mjeltehaugen in Sunnmøre, and Skelhøj in Jutland date to Early Bronze Age period II - III. Despite their varying topographical locations and different building materials, the construc-

tion of these burial mounds required a structured division of labor in the collection of building materials (peat, stones, slabs etc.). Due to the time consuming process, the different groups/ individuals may have manifested themselves and their identities into the finished monument, thus the monument became a manifestation for not only the dead but for the living as well.

Bradley argues that the representation of movement is a key theme in Scandinavian rock art, related inextricably to an environmental cosmology in which the roles of fire, sunlight/sun, snow, running water, people, the shoreline and even time are constantly in flux (Bradley 2009). The influence of the ship agency contributed to a dynamic and economic foundation in the Bronze Age society. The ship was given the status of a powerful symbol carved in rocks, that influenced human daily life, their surrounding landscape, wild and domesticated animals and, not least, the commemoration of the dead. The carved ships at *Utbjoa 1* appear to be guided by the sun image from the grave monuments

to the water's edge. Due to the rare design, it is possible that these images had a different symbolic signature only known to esoteric groups.

The use of open-air rock art sites over extensive periods of time may result in the incorporation into different processes, including burials and collective memory. Rock art may also serve as a medium for symbolic features within maritime groups, it may have acted as a focal point for regular visits, keeping traditions alive within the group, and to communicate the social position and social needs of maritime groups or actions in the maritime landscape (Ling & Cornell 2010, Enlander 2016, Kjeldsen 2017). Syvertsen (2003) points out that grave slabs with carvings (inside the grave) seems to decline towards the younger Bronze Age. Syvertsen proposes a ritual change from the individual to the collective. The change may have been triggered by a crisis unrelated to an individual and thus the rituals require a more general, collective and public content so the legitimation of power strategies could be maintained.

Fig 7: Rock art site *Utbjoa 1* and cairn from air, Vindafjord municipality. Photo: Arkeologisk Museum - UIS



However, in Rogaland it seems like the construction of burial mounds ends approx. 1300 - 1100 BC, while rock art activity is increasing in the area after 1100 BC. I presume there is a shift where the symbolic functions of the monumental burial mounds are moved from the grave mounds to the open rock art sites, from the individual's mark to the mark of a group (e.g. genus). The change is throughout the region, I suggest a superior common ontology where the symbols/motifs and landscape are subject to universal rules and create an identity for the performer and the users. One must assume that the symbols could be both material and non-material. The motifs could be interpreted as symbolic reference points that emphasize the cohesion between the groups and the landscape. It is assumed that there is a long-term continuity as well as a change in the relationship between man and landscape (Kjeldsen 2002) (Fig. 7).

## Concluding remarks

The archaeological material shows that the Utbjoa area was used from the Early Bronze Age and possibly to the Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age. The rock art sites may have had different purposes where I suggest that Austre Åmøy had a central role as a ritual and ceremonial center, whose main purpose was the maintenance of power strategies in relations to exchange of ideas, while Utbjoa appears as a place where rituals related to burials were the main purpose. Coal sample taken from the stone cist supports Wriggelworths (2011) dating of the symmetrical contour carved ship at *Utbjoa I* (without animal decoration) to Early Pre – Roman Iron Age. The two late Bronze Age “animal” decorated ships indicate communication and possible exchange of ideas between Utbjoa and Austre Åmøy undertaken by long-distance sea-voyage as Kaul (2017) suggest.

In the Late Bronze Age/Early Pre-Roman Iron Age the cairn at *Utbjoa I* was re-vis-

ited and ritual activities took place. Due to the coal sample from the stone cist in the Early Bronze Age burial cairn, we know a fire was lit on top of the cairn, and it may have happened in connection with the production of the last Early Pre – Roman Iron Age ship images to be carved at *Utbjoa I*.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank photographer Annette Øvrelid for the pictures, Grethe Morell and Wenche Brun for graphic help, and Dr. Sean Denham for improvement of my English.

*Gitte Kjeldsen*  
Museum of Archaeology. Department of  
Collection. University of Stavanger Nor-  
way.  
gitte.kjeldsen@uis.no

## Bibliography

- Bell, C., 1992, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Bradley, R., 2009, *Image and Audience. Rethinking Prehistoric Art*. Oxford University Press.
- Enlander, R., 2016, The rock ‘artist’: exploring processes of interaction in the rock art landscapes of the north of Ireland. In *Archaeology with Art*, edited by H. Chittock & J. Valdez-Tullett. Archaeopress Archaeology, p.33 – 52.
- Fett, E. & P., 1941, *Sydvestnorske helleristninger. Rogaland og Lista*. Stavanger Museum.
- Goldhahn, J., 2006, Om döda och efterlevande med exempel från Bredarör, Skelhøj, Sagaholm och Mjeltehaugen. In *Samfunn, symboler og identitet – Festskrift til Gro Mandt på 70-årsdagen*, edited by R. Barndon, S.M. Innselset, K.K. Kristoffersen and T.K. Lødøen. UBAS Nordisk no. 3, p. 283-303. Bergen.
- Goldhahn, J. & Østigård, T., 2007, *Dödens hand – en essä om brons – och hållsmed*. Arkeologiske Skrifter 65. Göteborgs Universitet.

- Høgestøl, M., Bakke, B., Bakkevig, S., Bjel-  
lend, T., Borgarp, C., Kjeldsen, G. & Wal-  
derhaug, O.**, 1999, Helleristningsfeltene  
på Austre Åmøy, Stavanger kommune,  
Rogaland. Dokumentasjon, sikring og til-  
rettelegging feltene I-VI-5. *AmS-Rapport*  
9, p. 99.
- Høgestøl, M., Prøch-Danielsen, L. Bakke,  
B., Bakkevig, Borgarp, C., Kjeldsen, G.,  
Meeks, A., Nitter, M., & Walderhaug, O.**,  
2006, Helleristningslokaliteter i stavan-  
gerområdet, Rogaland. Dokumentasjon,  
sikring og tilrettelegging. *AmS-Rapport*  
19, p. 100.
- Høgestøl, M, Prøsch-Danielsen L. & Wal-  
derhaug, O.**, 2018, Bergkunst på Midt- og  
Sør- Jæren samt i Dalanregionen. Ristn-  
inger i skiftende natur. Motiver, historikk,  
naturmiljø og tilstand. *AmS-Varia* 59, p.  
82.
- Indrelid, S.**, 1991, *Fornminne og fornminn-  
evern i Ølen kommune*. Historisk museum,  
Universitetet i Bergen.
- Kaul, F.**, 1998, *Ships on Bronzes. A study  
in Bronze Age Religion and Iconography*.  
Copenhagen: PNM Studies in Archaeology  
& History Vol 3: ½.
- Kaul, F.**, 2017, The Xenia Concept of Guest-  
friendship- Providing an Elucidatory Model  
for Bronze Age Communication. In *North  
meets South. Theoretical aspects on the  
northern and southern rock art traditions  
in Scandinavia*, edited by P. Skoglund, J.  
Ling & U. Bertilsson. Oxbow p. 173-198.
- Kjeldsen, G.**, 1993, *Norske helleristninger.  
Et studium af figursammensetningen på  
helleristningslokaliteten Austre Åmøy i  
Vest-Norge*. Unpublished cand. phil. The-  
sis., Århus Univ, p. 77.
- Kjeldsen, G.**, 2002, Å forstå helleristninger.  
*Frå Haug ok Heiðni* nr. 1, 2002.
- Kjeldsen, G.**, 2005, Bronsealderens berg-  
kunst på Austre Åmøy i Rogaland. *K.A.N.*  
nr. 25, 2005.
- Kjeldsen, G.**, 2014, *Sikringsundersøkelse  
av hellekiste Utbjoa Gnr. 254/2 Vindafjord  
k. Rogaland*. Unpublished Report B, 2014  
no. 7 to Topographic archive. Universitetet  
i Stavanger, Arkeologisk museum.
- Kjeldsen, G.**, 2017, Deep Time Rock Art in  
SW-Norway. *Adoranten* 2017.
- Ling, J. & Cornell, P.**, 2010, Rock Art as  
secondary agent? Society and agent in  
Bronze Age Bohuslän. *Norwegian Archae-  
ological Review*, 43 (1) p. 26-43.
- Malmer, M.P.**, 1981, A chorological study  
of North European rock art. Stockholm:  
Kung. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitats  
Akademiens Handlingar, Antikvariska  
serien 32.
- Mandt Larsen, G.**, 1972, *Bergbilder i  
Hordaland. En undersøkelse av bildenes  
sammensetning deres naturmiljø og kul-  
turmiljø*. Årbok for universitetet i Bergen.  
Humanistisk serie 1970 No. 2.
- Myhre, L.N.**, 2004, *Trialectic Archaeology:  
Monuments and space in Southwest Nor-  
way 1700-500 BC*. AmS-Skrifter, 18. Stavan-  
ger: Arkeologisk museum i Stavanger.
- Nicolaysen, N.**, 1867, Tillegg til «Norske  
Fornlevninger» m. m. *Aarsberetning fra  
Foreningen til norske fortidsminners be-  
varing* 1866, p. 54-78
- Syvertsen, K.**, 2003, *Ristninger i graver-  
graver med ristninger. Om ristningers  
mening i gravminner og gravritualer. En  
analyse av materiale fra Rogaland*. Unpub-  
lished cand. philos. Thesis., UiB, p.169.
- Wrigglesworth, M.**, 2010, Bronze Age  
Rock Art and Religion in a Maritime Per-  
spective. In *Changing Pictures. Rock Art  
Tradition and Visions in Northern Europe*,  
edited by J. Goldhahn, I. Fuglestad & A.  
Jones. Oxbow, p. 186-196.
- Wrigglesworth, M.**, 2011, *Finding your  
place. Rock art and local identity in west  
Norway. A study of Bronze Age rock art  
in Hardanger and Sunnhordaland*. Un-  
published doctoral thesis. University of  
Bergen.