

Graffiti or rock carvings?

Abstract

À Lysekil (Bohuslän, Suède), des gravures rupestres datant du début du XX^{ème} siècle ont récemment été décrites par une association locale : «Lysekils Vänner». Ces gravures liées au rêve américain d'adolescents bien identifiés qui les ont réalisées reprennent les thèmes des bateaux, des cowboys et des premiers occupants. Elles témoignent d'une période économique difficile ainsi que de la tradition de la gravure rupestre.

Några hållristningar från början av 1900-talet beskrevs av ett lokalt sällskap "Lysekils Vänner". Dessa hållristningar ristades av två tonåringar som drömde om Amerika. Deras hållristningar beskriver båtar, cowboys och "indianer". De är ett viktigt dokument om en ekonomisk kristid som är länkad till en sorts traditionella hållristningar.

The Bohuslän region, located on the west coast of Sweden, is famous for its rock carvings, which date back to the Bronze Age. Bohuslän's rock carvings have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1994 for their large numbers and outstanding quality.

New rock carvings or graffiti have been identified and documented by the "Lysekils Vänner" association in Lysekil. Signs indicating their location have been posted on Långeviksdalen, a small road in Lysekil, leading to the seashore. These rock carvings were produced in 1914 by two young boys aged 15, inspired by the American dream. Sven Hård (*1899 Lysekil, +1979 Lysekil), who lived a few hundred meters away and Just Malmström (*1899 Lysekil, +1995 USA) expressed their thirst for adventure by carving various representations of objects, animals and human beings, namely boats, horses, Native Americans and cowboys. At this time, unemployment in Sweden was giving rise to massive expatriation to the US.



On the right vertical wall, a sailboat and, on the left hand side, the road to the small harbour.

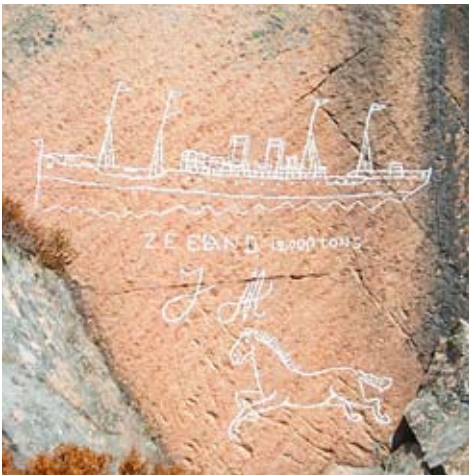
Patterns carved by Sven Hård (initialled SH) include primarily boats and Native Americans, while carvings by Just Malmström (initialled JM) represent boats, horses and cowboys. These rock carvings, easily accessible from the road, are at eye-level and range in dimension from 80 cm to 2 meters.



Sailing vessel, 3 masts, 2-meter-wide. Sven Hård.



Steamboat, 1-meter wide, signature on the upper left. Sven Hård.



Boat and horse. Just Malmström.



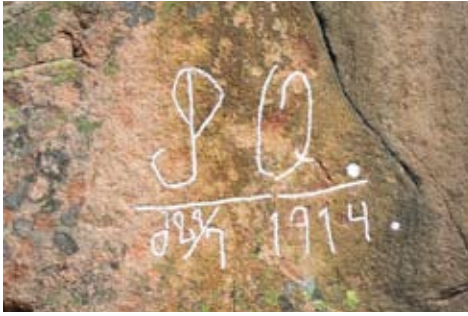
Ab (undated), KA 1914, KH (undated) and YHK 1911.

Native American. Sven Hård.



Horse, cowboy and soldier (?). Just Malmström.





PQ 29/7/ 1914



HH 1914



Woman with hat

Urination or ejaculation



These carvings and their artists have been clearly identified by one of Sven Hård's sons, Ernest Hård, Assistant Professor (Docent) at Göteborg University, who described them to me in the early eighties. On a regular basis, Ernest Hård visited his parents' residence and used the harbour, both located a few hundred meters away from the site. It is likely, however, that other non-identified "artists" also produced other carvings, around the same time or possibly before and after.

These recent carvings by Sven Hård and Just Malmström share certain features with those of the Bronze Age, namely the boat theme, but also differ in many ways. The recent carvings are indeed produced on very steep (almost vertical) walls, whereas Bronze Age carvings are typically found on flat and slightly slanted boulders.

Moreover, the incision of these recent carvings is narrower and shallower. The tools used in the recent carvings included a hard steel chisel, while Age Bronze carvings resulted from hammering boulders with larger stone tools.

Are these recent artifacts actual rock carvings or rather graffiti? This remains an open question, as there is no clear distinction between the two except for their age. Let us recall that older graffiti e.g. from Templars imprisoned at Chinon castle or prisoners at the London Tower are now protected and belong to our cultural heritage. Similarly, these recent artifacts could very well be studied by historians, if not archaeologists, in the future.

The sign posted by the "Lysekils Vänner" provides valuable information about the artists and can be considered as testimony to a critical economic period in the history of Lysekil.

In addition, these artifacts were painted in white by the Vitlycke's museum staff during the summer 2006. Although a small number of carvings remain to be painted, this initiative should be acknowledged.

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