

**Society, Symbol and the Warrior: A study of the social,  
ideological and religious impact of Urnfield and early  
Hallstat on the South Scandinavian Bronze Age Society.**

**A research proposal and individual research plan.**

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<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>3</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><u>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</u></b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SOCIETY, IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY, SYMBOLS AND THE BODY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><u>SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY</u></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><u>EXPECTED RESULTS</u></b>	<b>9</b>
<b><u>DISPOSITION</u></b>	<b>9</b>
<b><u>INDIVIDUAL STUDY PLAN FOR THE PHD DEGREE IN ARCHAEOLOGY</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b>COURSE WORK</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>THESIS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>OTHER ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>PUBLICATIONS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>FIELDWORK</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>PLANNING</b>	<b>12</b>
2003	12
2004	12
2005	13
2006	13
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	<b>14</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Around 1300 BC was the beginning of perhaps one of the most dynamic periods of the temperate European prehistory. This phase was characterized by sweeping changes of societies in a very rapid manner.

**A far reaching transformation of European society and economy was initiated towards the end of the second millennium. New forms of burial rite, new technologies, new weapons, a new level of intensification of agriculture and industrial production, and proliferation of defended sites mark this new phase. These changes indicate new basis for social organisation and a new level of differentiation within society. Relationships between the elite's were carried on through competition for status, achieved by prowess of arms, or generosity in giving. This competition produced a wide spread uniformity of culture at the elite level (Champion 1984: 269).**

The reasons for these changes are not completely clear, but a number of factors have been suggested. At the beginning of the Urnfield period temperate Europe was at a climactic optimum, which enabled an unusual high level of agriculture and population density (Bouzek 1993:386 – 395). Also the access to raw materials such as bronze or instance, was readily available everywhere (Bouzek 1999:57). This alone cannot explain the phenomenon in itself; one has to broaden the interpretative frames in order to explain these processes.

Material culture seem to reflect the different elite's uniformity in character by being very homogenous, there are a general similarity between material categories such as: Weapons, ornaments, pins, armour, buckets and cups (Sprockhoff 1930, Bouzek 1985, 1997, 1999). The possibility of a shared symbolic and religious belief system working in a symbiotic relationship with the material culture is not an altogether improbable idea. These symbols, such as sun symbols and birds heads among others must have had a potent ideological and religious nature, understood and used over an extended area and period of time (see Kossack

1954, 1999). Bouzek proposes that it should be seen as the later stylistic koine's of Hallstatt and La Tène, normally carried out by a specific ethnical group, such as the Celts, and then adopted by its neighbours (Bouzek 1999:58). This was not only a question of art, decoration or style, it was rather a complete package containing both of mental ideas and strategies together with the physical implements needed to use them within the specific society.

It appears that much of this material and symbols was concentrated to the elite level of society. In most cases this would imply that the religious change either never reached the common people or it trickled down, in a similar way to the initial introduction of Christianity to North-western Europe during the early medieval period (Viking Age in Scandinavia). The elite in much of Europe was constituted of warrior societies, this is apparent from both archaeological excavations of burials, hoards and rock art. More distant but still relevant are also the written sources of the early Mediterranean rim.

So, what does it all mean? A shared belief system and a materialistic symbolic system were adopted, in part or as a whole, by the regional and local elite groups in temperate Europe. This change was connected to the already open lines of communication, which served as the sources of precious raw material and prestige objects for large parts of Europe, and in some cases Asia Minor and North Africa. More importantly was the effects of these lines of communication in relationship to the diffusion of different symbol packages. Along with the material people and ideas travelled, and this is where we, the researchers, can begin to understand the societal construction and different relationships between groups in Europe. This network created a situation in which temperate European societies were developed in a very special trajectory which probably did not end until the medieval period. In relation to the Mediterranean world the difference in society is obvious, they choose a pattern of formation which centred around the city first and then larger blocks of organised statehood. The old patterns with chiefs and tribal structures could be seen in archaic classes and institutions, but quickly lost power to a more formal power structure (Champion et al 1984).

## **OBJECTIVES**

What this thesis will address is the symbolic structure embedded into a material reality and the people living within its confines. A comparative study both within the Nordic area and between the Nordic area and Central Europe will allow a deeper understanding of how the symbols are adopted, in which situations they appear what areas of activity they apply to and for how long they remain viable in a specific cultural situation. The time period which the thesis will cover spans from the 1300 BC to about 750 BC, from the Urnfield to the end of the Hallstat B. The questions that this work is trying to answer are:

1. Which symbols and why?
2. How does the symbolic/material world relate to the physical world?
3. How are the symbols displayed and in what circumstances?
4. By whom are this system adopted and are there variations?
5. Can one see a resistance within the specific society against the adoption of a new set of symbols and belief system?
6. In what cultural system(s) are the symbols a part of?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Society, Ideology, Identity, Symbols and the Body***

A lot of the work with this thesis will in one or the other way address the idea of the society and its interplay with the material culture and other societies. To work with symbols especially the kinds which might be of the migrating kinds forces the researcher to look at society not as an isolated entity, but rather as a number of more or less competing patterns of behaviour. This means that society can not be understood without the addition of space and time, to frames of reference which separates all archaeology from collectors of curiosa and

artefacts. The Urnfield and Hallstat phases of prehistory is most common described as warrior societies, in which competition centres around personal prowess in battle, gift giving, feasting and domination of rituals (to mention a few: Treherne 1995; Kristiansen 1998). These types of societies seem also to have been very sensitive to outside impulses; in many cases adopted them outright. A possible explanation is that these types of societies needs surplus of prestige goods in order to keep valuable social contacts open. This forces members of the society, either travel and exchange products, or to raid, in order to obtain a surplus which can be invested into ritual and social life. The society of the warriors will serve as the back drop of the thesis and the structuring element in which people act, this structure will at the same time both enable and limit agents (operators, people) within the society (Shanks and Tilley 1987:128; Giddens 1982, 1984; Bourdieu 1977).

**[T]he position that we wish to adopt here is that the social totality as a network of internal relations embraces the concepts of system and structure. By the former is meant the networking relation between individual and groups in a field of existence embracing the categories of the economic, the political, the ideological and the symbolic which together constitutes conditions of existence for the social strategies of individuals and groups situated in time – space. The social totality as a system networking of internal strategies and relations between different individual groups is also a structured totality. Action and meaning becomes oriented or fixed at specific spatio-temporal conjunctures in that economic, social, political, and ideological/symbolic are ordered by structures which constitute and are constituted in and through social practise and social strategies deriving from that pattern (Shanks and Tilley 1987:127).**

The symbolic field is a single part that humans interact within a greater social system. It limits, but at the same time let people act within a given society. A change of fields would imply a radical change of the structure of behaviour of the individual and the group. Individuals acting within these sets of structures are not completely controlled, but aware, often in a practical, intuitive manner. If the social totality is comprised of a number of fields

which structures and is in turn structured by human agents. These negotiations are not equal within this system "... [S]tructures enable and are produced in practises which are organized around political relations of dominance and subordination, power, and control" (Shanks and Tilley 1987:129). Ideology then is not the political belief of a group of people; it is rather a practise which misrepresents inequalities in a way that is in the dominant group's best interest (Ibid). In this light, one can re-examine the symbolic, as a field of structure within society masked as a "good" structure with ideological precepts which serve to keep people within accepted structures of acting.

The materiality has a special relationship to the society. It is a part of the structuring principle, not as a reflection of society, but as an active resource, a symbolic physical system within structuring practises used in political situations and manipulated in ideology (Shanks and Tilley 1987:134).

Identity and corporality becomes the posters and television for these humans, a way of showing the dominating structures in public places and in a mobile way, the body can be seen as the ultimate ideological and symbolic tool of the time, it encapsulates the precepts of society into a whole. It is also the instant when the social principles are united with the material world, both the social and the object is present and obvious on and within the human body.

## **SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

Most of the source material is already present in the literature produced in the last century. There has been an enormous growth of knowledge of Bronze Age Europe. Presently the greatest need is not to acquire more source material, but to begin with research on the already existing material into a more coherent form, one could say that the greatest discoveries are now lying dormant in the cellars of museums, departments, institutions and libraries of Europe and the world.

In a more practical manner the idea is to trace symbolic, ideological and religious structures in the material by analyzing the patterns of behaviour of different material categories and then compare the patterns. For instance by examining rock art by looking at what types of figure

are created, when and by whom one can construct a life cycle of rock art use in Scandinavia. Then by comparing this structure to others obtained from metal work and burials one can perhaps see a larger pattern which will enable the thesis to answer the questions put forward in the beginning of this paper. This analyze of structure or spatial relationships will be carried out both cross materially (between different material categories) and cross – culturally. It is in the comparison of different or similar behaviour we can see the pattern and begin our interpretation of the phenomenon. The hermeneutic interpretation cycle always takes its start in the part and compares that to the whole, but in order for it to be a fruitful comparison one has to lay the foundation of interpretation. For archaeologist this is time and space. Time – will give you a chronological limit which enables the archaeologist to establish the historicity of a specific object. Space is simply where the specific object was found and its relation to other objects. These two concepts will always be the centre point of interpretation to be able to make sense of an otherwise chaotic prehistory.

The thesis will address three large material classes: Rock art, metal work and burials. The reason for just these and not other material categories depend on the special character of these categories. Rock art is unique, in the sense, that it gives us an insight into the thought processes of its creators. Their views on the world they lived and worked in. Burials were chosen because it touches upon the treatment of dead, funerary practises, construction of the funerary monument and the concept of death. There is not a single culture or society on the face of the world that has not a more esoteric idea about death and thus it is always surrounded by a lot of symbolic and ritual practises. The last category, metal work, does not occur as an isolated phenomenon, but is instead obtained into the archaeological record from a number of sources. This is a good thing, because the material within will tell multiple stories depending on the object's individual life – cycle. Although most of the known Bronze metal work has its origin in either graves or hoards.

The material will be thoroughly examined, their life cycle in history determined, and then compared to each other and the same categories from outside the Scandinavian Region. The data will be collected into a data base to make the work of analyzing easier.

Some field work will be carried out in relation to rock art which is the “problem child” of the thesis. Simply put, the lack of published documentation and the chronological vacuum around rock art will probably force some field research to take place.

Although it does not exist any written sources from the area of study, there are written sources which either is distant in time or space (or sometimes both). Some of the work will be directed towards the goal of gaining a passing knowledge of these sources in order to gain some insights into the mind of the time. There could also be references to practises which could serve as a source of explanation to some of the patterns in the other source material.

## **EXPECTED RESULTS**

The expected results will be a better knowledge of how material and symbolic, ideological and religious system behaves within a specific cultural setting over time. I have mentioned a term I call life – cycle, with this I mean that objects and symbols change patterns and disappear over time. This pattern is connected to the structuring principles within societies, which means that the pattern is based on the change of society's focus. The comparative study between two societies, or more, could give an idea into how they relate to each other and when societies are open to influence and when they are closed.

## **DISPOSITION**

1. Introduction
  - 1.1 Objectives
  - 1.2 Methodology
2. Theoretical framework
3. The European Bronze Age
  - 3.1 What came before
  - 3.2 Urnfield
  - 3.3 Hallstat
  - 3.4 South Scandinavia
4. The pattern of rock art
5. The pattern of burials
6. The pattern of metal work
7. Patterns of South Scandinavia



## **THESIS**

**Working title:** Society, Symbol and the Warrior: A study of the social, ideological and religious impact of Urnfield and early Hallstat on the South Scandinavian Bronze Age Society.

**State of research:** The main activity related to the production of the thesis has been centred on literature studies in order to develop a corpus for the research. This has been a success, a lot of different material in connection with the three primary material categories has been found. I will also look into the possibility of using the Danish database over bronzes that has been created by the Danish National Museum. This data base would probably allow me to save a lot of time by making it possible to access the material in both text and pictorial material without having to travel between different museums and institutions. I have also located a database over burials from the whole of Europe from the Bronze and early Iron Age. This data base was created between a number of universities in Europe in collaboration to create a unified instrument of displaying burials and grave archaeology from the whole of Europe.

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### **PUBLICATIONS**

Ling, J. & Gutebrand, J. 2003. Hav och hällristnings skepp – tid och förändring. *Fynd 1-2/01*. Göteborgs Stadsmuseum. Gothenburg.

### **FIELDWORK**

A lot of times this spring and summer have been spent in the field in order to build a general idea of how rock art interacts with the landscape, its internal morphology and chronological aspects in relation to the level of the sea both present and in prehistory. This has been absolutely necessary because of the abysmal state of rock art recording and documentation in

most of the Scandinavian countries. The availability of good source material, readily usable to researchers, is with few exceptions simply not in existence. This summer's field work has made it possible to shape a general idea about the age and transformation of rock art through the periods that are the focus of the thesis and will hopefully incorporate rock art into a much larger context than it is commonly used for.

## ***PLANNING***

### **2003**

The remainder of the year will primarily be focused on work with the thesis itself. A general introduction, theoretical approaches and the chapter on rock art will be in focus for the rest of the year. My hope is to be able to present a general approach to rock art as a symbolic system when we have the Cambridge meeting this December. I will also try to write an article after the Cambridge meeting which will cover the part of work presented at the meeting. Also there is slight chance that some field studies and study trips to museums in Scandinavia and Germany will take place in connection to winter holiday. This will be determined by weather and my own travels to and from Spain. If I drive home to Sweden from Spain the possibility exists to stop at a number of museums on the way home.

### **2004**

The first part of the year will be dedicated to course work required to be carried out within the PHD program in Spain. This will generally take about 3 – 4 months, probably the first term. The summer period, from June to August will be dedicated to field work and field trips and museum visits. The rock art will probably need a lot of field time. Also the work with burials and hoards would benefit of field visits, although there are no excavations planned for in any form. The thesis work will continue in earnest in the autumn again, with new data from the field. I hope that I will be able to begin working with burials and maybe bronzes in the last part of the year. As this year, the new results will be presented at the Cambridge meeting next December for an evaluation and input from colleagues and senior researchers. An article

covering this years work, will be produced, after this years Cambridge meeting. One conference will be visited at least each year as a rule, although at the moment I have not any plans on exactly which it will be. This will be put into the plan as soon as I have the time to address this with my supervisors.

## **2005**

This year will continue in the same way as the last year. Spring and autumn will be used to write the thesis. The main area of study will be bronzes and other prestige goods which might be necessary to study but do not fit into the other material categories. The summer will be used to visits in the field and some field work. The intention is that this summer should be the last summer for field work, so the last year can be completely dedicated to the writing of thesis. As last year the plan is to present the new results both at the Cambridge meeting and as an article at end of the year.

## **2006**

The last year of the thesis work will be the year to write and in other ways finalise the book for publishing. The main research work will be dedicated to a synthesis, a melding of the different areas of research into a whole. The result will be presented at an appropriate forum before the thesis is put in front of the committee.

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