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The Nämforsen rock carvings situated by the Ångerman River in Norrland, Northern Sweden, constitute one of the largest rock art concentrations in Northern Europe. The carvings have been known since the 1700’s and studied by archaeologists for well over a century. Of all the researchers that have studied the Nämforsen rock art, the site is first and foremost personified in Gustaf Hallström (1880–1962), who spent a great deal of his life studying and documenting the carvings. Hallström’s work eventually resulted in his well-known monograph Monumental Art of Northern Sweden (1960). This book, which included the first all-encompassing documentation of the Nämforsen rock carvings, came to act as the main reference work for a whole generation of archaeologists working with the Nämforsen rock art.

Between 2001 and 2003, a new documentation survey of the Nämforsen rock art was undertaken by Thomas B. Larsson and Sven-Gunnar Broström, both recognized archaeologists from Umeå University. Their documentation was published in 2011 (The Rock Art of Nämforsen. The Survey 2001–2003. Umark 62) and it is freely available also on the internet (http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:497241/FULLTEXT01.pdf). To be brief, the results of this documentation project were astonishing. Several panels that in Hallström’s view had contained only a few images turned out to comprise myriads of hitherto unidentified figures, and there emerged also a number of new panels that had gone entirely unnoticed by Hallström. In total, the new documentations resulted in the discovery of 726 new figures and in an increase in the overall number of figures at Nämforsen by 39 %. The most conspicuous growth was on the island of Laxön, where the number of carvings increased with as much as 69 %. It thus goes without saying that the new documentations are of essential value for all scholars working with the Nämforsen rock art.

In essence, Nämforsens Hällristningar is a presentation of the results of the 2001–2003 documentations. It contains basically the same information as the aforementioned publication from 2011, with the main difference being that the new book has been directed towards a broader public. The book begins with two short basic introductory texts written by Siv Bylund, an archaeologist at the Nämforsen museum. The first is about rock carvings in general and the second about the Nämforsen rock art in particular. These concise overviews give the unacquainted reader an idea of what rock carvings are, what motifs are depicted, where carvings exist and how they are dated. Next follows two brief sections written by Thomas B. Larsson, the first being a summary of the research carried out at Nämforsen and the second a text centered on northern rock art and its interpretations. Given that all of the introductory parts are only a few pages in length and partly overlapping, it would have been more articulate if the texts regarding rock art in general and the texts concerning Nämforsen would have been combined into two more clear-cut chapters. What is even more bewildering, however, is that the introductory parts are only in Swedish, although the main part of the book – the presentation of the carvings – is written both in Swedish and in English. One can thus only wonder why the rest of the book has not been translated into English, which would have made the book more approachable for international readers.

Before the actual presentation of the carvings, there is yet a brief description of how the documentation was made and how the carvings are presented in the book. In their work, Larsson and Broström chose to utilize Hallström’s tripartite division of the Nämforsen rock art into three main groups, according to the islands on which the carvings are situated (Laxön, Notön, Brådön), as well as his classificatory system as regards carving groups. The rock art figures are thus pre-
presented in the book within different-sized panels. This decision undoubtedly can be praised, for it makes it easy for the reader to compare the new tracings with Hallström’s tracings, and it also enables the evaluation of earlier descriptions and interpretations in the light of the new discoveries.

Another commendable feature as to the way of presenting the new figures is the use of a two-color system. The figures that were found during the new documentations are presented as red, whereas those that were identified also by Hallström are marked as black. This manner of separating the new and the old carvings works amazingly well and illustrates the great dissimilarities between different panels as to the amount of new figures. There are many panels, even large ones, which are entirely black, indicating that the new tracings are identical with those made by Hallström. Correspondingly, there are purely red panels, indicative of figure assemblages that Hallström did not at all discern. The majority of the traced panels, however, contain both black and red images in different proportions. It is incredible to see how the overall character of some panels is completely changed in consequence of the new figures marked with red. For instance, on the panel D:14–15 on Laxön, as much as 141 new figures were discovered during the new documentations, and the panel is now known to contain more than double the amount of carvings than what was previously thought.

All of the rock art panels are portrayed in scale and with an arrow signifying the orientation of the panel. Moreover, precise coordinates have been given for each panel. This can be considered as especially helpful in the present-day world, because visitors today have the possibility to track down the panels by means of their mobile phones. The coordinates are particularly valuable when locating figures and panels that have not been painted with red color, because the unpainted images at Nämforsen are often nearly impossible to discern during the daylight. In addition to the technical details, brief descriptions have been written about the individual panels. These explanations merely define in a few words what the new figures represent and on what points the new tracings differ from those made by Hallström. The total amount of figures on the three islands and at Nämforsen overall is briefly summarized after the presentation of each main group.

There is little discussion about the Nämforsen rock art on a deeper level, because as the authors state in the very end of the book, they “leave interpretations and analyses to other rock art researchers” (p. 123). While this decision of focusing solely on the descriptive aspect of the art is understandable, it would nevertheless have been interesting to read at least something about how the prominent scholars themselves think about the meaning and function of the carvings. To be sure, Larsson and Broström have worked with the Nämforsen carvings lengthier and more painstakingly than most present-day researchers, and most probably the authors would have had new outlooks to share also regarding the interpretation of the art. Unfortunately, however, deliberations are lacking and this fact further strengthens the aforementioned feeling of Nämforsens hällristningar being somewhat clumsy and incomplete. This transpires in other ways as well. For example, the same paragraph about the use of red and black color occurs verbatim in four (!) different places in the book (p. 29, 34, 66, 105). Likewise, the introductory texts and the actual representation of the carvings also give a sense of being rather detached from each other. This is a pity, because it would not have required any great effort in order to have made the book into a more eloquent entirety.

One of the evident strengths of Nämforsens hällristningar is its small-scale format. Contrary to most rock art reference works, which typically are of considerable size, this book is only a centimeter thick and weighs a mere 600g, which makes it ideal for carrying along when moving across the Nämforsen panels. Although the small size of the book is naturally to the detriment of the dimensions of the tracings, the decision of making a portable version can still be considered advantageous. Indeed, the book comes best to its rights when it is at hands in situ and it certainly is of assistance for everyone visiting Nämforsen.

To sum up, Nämforsens hällristningar is above all a comprehensive pictorial presentation of the Nämforsen rock art. It can easily be recommended for everyone interested in the site and the book.
is certainly a must-have for researchers studying the rock carvings. The introductory texts make the book easily approachable also for the general (Swedish-speaking) audience, and in the end of the book there is also a small glossary explaining the central terms used in the text. However, for readers who are more interested about the context and interpretation of the Nåmforsen rock art than of its new figures, Hallström’s work is still the recommended source to get acquainted with.

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The main objective of Caroline Ahlström Arcini’s new book is to shed new light on the everyday life of Viking Age people through an analysis of osteological material from a range of Scandinavian cemeteries excavated in the twentieth century. The study consists of seven chapters and is supplemented by numerous high-quality illustrations as well as an appendix with strontium values from animals used for baseline.

The opening chapter *The bare bones* outlines the main objectives of the study and introduces the reader to the Viking Age. Ahlström Arcini’s makes it clear that her focus is not only on those individuals who took part in “plundering expeditions” (p. 1), but also on people who led more peaceful and sedentary lifestyles. Although in recent years much has been said about aspects of health and migration in different parts of the Viking world, her book aspires to be the “first synthesis of its kind examining Viking Age populations from several different regions in present-day southern Sweden”.

Chapter 2 entitled *Eight Viking Age burial grounds in south-east Sweden* provides contextual information (i.e. geographical location, research history) on the sites chosen for analyses of health and mobility of Viking Age populations. These include Trinitatis in Lund, Vannhög, Fjälinkinge, Kopparsvik, Slite Square, Fröjel, Birka and Skämtsma. The varying details of external and internal funerary architecture, as well as the treatment of the bodies and specific deployment of grave goods, all attest to the heterogeneous nature of the buried people and their beliefs.

The third chapter entitled *Immigrants or locals?* emphasises the multi-ethnic nature of Viking Age societies, which resulted not only from Norse expansion and raiding, but also from trade and other economic, political and social factors. First, we are introduced to the main principles of isotope analyses, and how to determine an individual’s mobility by measuring the ratio of strontium. Ahlström Arcini then outlines the results of studies carried out on the material from the cemeteries under her scrutiny, and the different patterns that emerge from this research. We learn that the proportions of foreigners in the eight cemeteries vary, with Birka, Fjälinke and Trinitatis in Lund showing large numbers of non-locals. Together with textual and numismatic evidence, isotopic analyses indicate that some of the individuals buried at Lund probably came from England in their different roles as “above all coiners, goldsmiths and priests” (p. 46). We also see evidence for close interactions with the West Slavic world on the southern coast of the Baltic, something that is additionally supported by material culture, especially in the form of characteristic types of pottery.

Referring to a wide array of interesting examples, the fourth chapter entitled *Health and care for the frail* investigates people’s diet, dental health as well as the various joint problems they suffered from. The section devoted to everyday accidents and battle traumas that affect bones ends with an intriguing conclusion that “traces of weapon injuries were fairly rare in a time that is known for its violence” (p. 63). A skeletal disorder known as dwarfism, which has been noted in several individuals from Viking Age cemeteries at Skämtsma and Kopparsvik, is also examined here. This is followed by a discussion on selected instances of leprosy in Viking Age Sweden and their wider historical and cross-cultural context. Ahlström
Arcini concludes by observing that “there is much to suggest that the sick and the disabled were looked after” (p. 70) and that the Viking society turns out not to be as brutal as it previously seemed.

The next chapter *Markers of identity?* is concerned with bodily modifications, and in particular with the phenomenon of tooth modification (involving filing grooves on the upper front teeth, but also on canines and premolars) which has been noted in several Viking Age burial sites in Scandinavia. The reasons for this puzzling practice may have been manifold – it could have been done for purely aesthetic reasons, but perhaps also to manifest a particular identity or profession. The relatively high number of individuals with tooth modification found on Gotland suggests that this custom may have marked out people who in some ways were associated with that island.

The sixth chapter *Burial grounds designated for particular purposes?* deals with the demography of burial grounds that show an unusual age and sex composition. The cemetery under scrutiny in the first section is Fjälkinge, where a remarkably high number of infants and elderly women has been noted, suggesting that the people who used the site were a society with an expanding population and high infant mortality. Alternatively, it is argued, Fjälkinge might represent a special type of cemetery designated for people representing very specific age groups. This chapter also examines cemeteries adjacent to market places and harbours (esp. Slite, Kopparsvik and Fröjel on Gotland and Birka in Lake Mälaren), which often show an uneven gender distribution. Again, the explanations are manifold – the contents of the graves could represent the martial character of the society using the site and/or its involvement in trade or some other notions. What clearly shines through from these investigations is that “there is a distinct tendency for certain cemeteries in the Viking Age to have a division of individuals according to age and sex” (p. 89).

In the final chapter *A time of many faces*, Ahlström Arcini concludes that the Viking Age is a period characterised by extensive mobility, traces of which can be seen not only in the dispersal of exotic material culture, customs and grave goods but which can also be inferred from specialist osteological analyses. She emphasises that it is not always easy to determine the reasons for people’s migrations, and points out that many factors and motivations came into play. An attempt is also made here to find an explanation for the diversity of burial customs, especially in the late Viking Age. An argument is put forward that the conversion from paganism to Christianity was pivotal, but this is probably only part of a much more complex process. One thing that needs to be acknowledged is the fact that the tenth century not only witnessed a radical religious change but also, partly concurrently with this ideological shift, it saw the founding of early states. Both in Scandinavia and elsewhere in the medieval world, prospective elites devised various ways to expand and express their power, which surely must have affected the burial practice.

A few final remarks must be made on the overall impression of the volume. Originally written in Swedish, Caroline Ahlström Arcini’s book has been translated into English by Alan Crozier. The style is fluent and elegant, with an occasional literary feel, which will certainly make this volume attractive for non-professional audiences. Although the text has been carefully proofread, some minor grammatical, terminological and other errors do occur throughout the volume. A more serious problem is the author’s assertion that: “The dwarfs were small beings who were believed to live underground, afraid of daylight” (p. 64). This view finds no support in Old Norse literature and is probably a projection of modern ideas of dwarfs derived from children’s books, movies and folklore. In fact, descriptions of dwarfs in Old Norse texts are remarkably vague, and we can very rarely learn anything concrete about the physical appearance of these beings. Another problematic statement can be found in the opening chapter of the book where we read that even though there was never a homogenous Viking Age culture, “the Old Norse mythology and language were the same” (p. 2) – as recent years have shown, and especially the work of scholars like Stefan Brink, Neil Price, Jens Peter Schjødt and others, there was much variety in both Old Norse mythology and language during the period between the eighth and eleventh centuries. The author’s inter-
pretations of prone burials, to which she returns on a number of occasions throughout her book, could have been even more nuanced if she had referred to the work of other medieval archaeologists dealing with atypical mortuary practices (e.g. Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon deviant burial customs*, Oxford 2009; Leszek Gardela, *Bad death in the Early Middle Ages: Atypical burials from Poland in a comparative perspective*, Rzeszów 2017).

Regardless of some minor shortcomings, Caroline Ahlström Arcini has produced an engaging and timely publication which emphasises the great potential bioarchaeological studies can have for a better understanding of the past. The captivating style of writing, together with well-chosen case studies and high-quality illustrations, ensure that the book will appeal to a wide audience, and not only a handful of Viking and Old Norse specialists. Hopefully this can help in developing new collaborative research projects that will span across academic disciplines and cultural areas, leading to an ever more nuanced and exciting picture of the past.

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Avhandlingen har två tydligt definierade syften, dels att »utifrån de tidigkristna gravmonumenten analysera framväxten av kristna begravningsplatser och ett nytt religiöst och maktpolitiskt landskap i brytpunkten mellan vikingatid och tidig medeltid«, dels att »upprätta en heltäckande sammanställning över de tidigmedeltida gravmonumenten« (s. 12). Det sistnämnda syftet uppfylls med råge. Avhandlingen är uppdelad i två volymer där del 2 utgör en detaljerad katalog över de 602 hällar och fragment av tidigkristna gravmonument som är kända till dags dato, vilka härrör från 84 olika fyndplatser i Närke, Småland, Södermanland, Västergötland, Öland och Östergötland. Varje sten beskrivs ensartat under 24 rubriker och avbildas genom foto och teckningar, totalt 350 trycksidor med bortemot 700 illustrationer. Denna gediget utförda empiriska sammanställning är otroligt imponerande och utgör en enorm forskningsresurs inför framtiden.

I avhandlingens del 1 presenteras och tolkas gravmonumenten samlat utifrån flera olika aspekter. I kapitel 5 redovisas kronologiska och regionala mönster (s. 59–180). Utgångspunkten är en presentation av gravmonumenten i vilken runstensresande och gravskifteförändringar disku-
teras landskapsvis. Ljung visar, med stor tydlig-
het, för att visa på utvecklingen har hon inde-
latt gravmonumenten i tre kronologiska grupper: I) 1000-
talets första hälft då monumenten upp-
visar en begränsad geografisk spridning, en hete-
rogen utformning samt en påfallande parallelli-
etet mellan runstenar och gravmonument; II) 1000-
talets mitt och decennierna efter 1050 då grav-
monumenten får en större geografisk spridning
och en mer enhetlig utformning, ökad intensitet
samt uppvisar en parallellitet med runstensre-
sandets upphörande; III) 1000-talets slut då gra-
monumenten når en avsevärt större spridning.
Den kronologiska bilden visar på uppenbara re-
gionala variationer inom den sena runstenstradi-
tionen. Denne uttrycker, enligt Ljung, den reli-
giösa förändringsprocessens kronologiska utveck-
lung.

I kapitel 6 (s. 181–222) kontextualiserar Ljung
de tidigkristna gravmonumenten och monument-
miljöerna i sina samtida sammanhang. En slut-
sats är att monumenten alltid återfinns på tidig-
kristna gravplatser, och att det därmed finns ett
klart samband mellan dem och tidiga träkyrkor.

I kapitel 7 (s. 223–228) undersöker Ljung
sambandet mellan tidigkristna gravmonument
och de klostergrundläggningar och stenkyrk-
byggen som inleddes under 1100-talet. Hon vi-
sar övertygande på flera exempel där kontinui-
teten löper rakt in i tidig medeltid, exempelvis
klostren i Vreta och Alvastra. I kapitel 8 diskute-
rar Ljung relationen mellan runstenstraditionen
och kristnanet (s. 229–248). Hon menar att den
sena vikingatidens gravskicksförändringar, run-
stensresandet och förekomsten av tidigkristna
gravmonument var intimt sammanlänkade, vil-
ket gör att de måste förstås samlat. Gravmonu-
menten ser hon som bevis för att runstenstradi-
tionen fortsatte genom hela 1000-talet, men i
delvis annan form och i en ny kontext, den krist-
na kyrkogården. Områden med kistor och ligg-
ande hållar respektive områden med resta ste-
nar som gravmonument markerar, enligt Ljung,
två skilda regioner där kristnandeprocessen och
den kyrkliga etableringen tog sig olika uttryck.

Avhandlingens svagaste del är det kronolo-
giska fundamentet (s. 31–44), som inte känns helt
övertygande. Ljung baserar sina dateringar på
stildata och analyserade ornamentet
på framför allt uppländska runstenar. De tidig-
kristna gravmonumenten indelas, som nämnt
ovan, i tre kronologiska grupper vilka motsvarar
de absoluta årtalsperioderna ca 1000–1050, 1050–
1080 och 1080–1100, alltså perioder omfattande
ca 50, 30 respektive 20 år. Det relevanta kronologi-
är troligen korrekt då den ornamentala utmyck-
nningen mycket riktigt förändras över tid. Men
frågan är hur trovärdiga de mer finmaskiga date-
ingarna är. Stilutveckling är förvisso en succes-
siv process, men att gruppera stil i tidsmässigt
avgränsade stilgrupper, som dessutom avlöser
varandra utan nämvärd överlappning, känns kon-
struerat och anakronistiskt. Här saknas en dju-
pare problematisering av stilbegreppet och den
materiella kulturens mening. Stil är nämligen ett
i dateringssammanhang komplext redskap då det
måste förstås i anslutning till tingets betydelse
och budskap. Stil är också ett dynamiskt feno-


Bortsett från dateringarnas riktighet, som framöver borde prövas ytterligare, är Cecilia Ljungs avhandling ett arbete som med noggrannhet och sakliga resonemang tolkar de tidigkristna grav- monumentens budskap. De är helt klart uttryck- for elitära nätverkskretsar, en kristen ideologi och ett kristet landskap. Bilden av den uteavstående och åtsakliga kristnandeprocessen, och det sociala anammandet av en kristen praktik, har blivit bra mycket klarare med avhandlingens resultat. Det är därför en viktig och värdefull avhandling som kommer att prägla forskningen lång tid framöver, i alla fall under de närmaste 100 åren.

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