



The Bronze Age landscape

Open fields, forests and watercourses – a landscape worked for millennia – sometimes inviting and imbuing a feeling of prehistory. There is such a landscape in Björksta and it breathes the Bronze Age. However, the landscape has changed since the Bronze Age, 1,800 – 500 BC. Where there was once sea, there are today fields and meadows. The untilled moraine heights are now covered by dense forest. In the Bronze Age, the forest was sparser because people took firewood, worked the fields, cut leafy twigs from the coppices and let the livestock graze there. It is there we can today see traces of Bronze Age people – on the sea shores of the past.

Mankind and water belong together. In prehistoric times, water meant transport routes – possibly long routes. The sea was unbounded. Therefore, mankind and boats also belong together. The boat was part of everyday life, and part of the spiritual world. Ships are common motifs in rock carvings, but the voyages depicted are not real. Ships are symbols of rebirth and of the journey to the other side.

A common religion

All over southern Scandinavia, similar pictures occur in rock carvings. Ships, footprints, circles, cup marks, carts and human-like figures. There was thus a clear idea of what should be depicted and what it symbolised. Everyone did things the same way. But “everyone” was not people in general – the pictures were carved and controlled by those in power, perhaps primarily those with religious power. Welfare and fertility lay in their hands. The gods and goddesses could not be depicted, however – instead they had to appear as symbols.

Religion also decided how the dead were to be buried. Therefore, graves and their contents look practically identical over an enormous area. The similarities carry a clear message – the people who lived in the Bronze Age had a common religion. The society was stratified, and a ruling class steered everyday life and its ceremonies. The foundations had been laid for chieftaincies.

Preserved and unpreserved

When you hear the term Bronze Age, you perhaps think of items made of bronze. It is after all bronze items that have given the era its name. Bronze items belonged to those with power, and were not part of everyday life. However, everyday objects have also been preserved for posterity, at least in part. Around the landscape, you can see remains from Bronze Age homes in the form of mounds of fire-cracked stones – waste heaps. They consist of chipped stones from hearths and cooking pits. No remains of houses can be seen on the ground – they are discovered during excavations. On the other hand, small Bronze Age fields can sometimes be discerned. They lie in moraine soil and the most prominent traces of them are small clearance cairns. The other stone cairns are graves – seen on heights with a view over the landscape.

In Björksta, there are the remains of several homestead and burial sites – located near the rock carvings. Here it is possible to make out a Bronze Age settlement with remains of human life here on earth – and their religious beliefs.



Lasting images

Rock carvings and rock paintings are the oldest surviving traces that mankind has left. Pictures are older than the written word. Through rock carvings, mankind expressed wishes and beliefs – about life as an eternal cycle and about the fertility that was crucial to all life on earth. One can wonder whether the pictures were carved forever in the rock, or whether there were other pictures that have now disappeared. Rock carvings give us insight into the philosophy of life and the religion that mankind lived by for more than 1,000 years. The pictures speak to us, but in the silent imagery of the Bronze Age.

Visit Björksta Bronze Age settlement!

The Lillån Valley in Björksta features an abundance of rock carvings. These pictures were produced in the Bronze Age and reflect the religion that prevailed in the community at the time. There are information boards at about ten places in Björksta, telling of the rock carvings. Two of the sites are accessible to wheelchair users. Start your journey at Björksta Church. There you will find an information centre dealing with the Bronze Age and a map for you to take with you. Have an enjoyable journey in the footsteps of the Bronze Age!

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