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Notes on frictional tendencies among prehistorians

A. Problems of English-language nomenclature of rock art motifs

- An attempt is first here made to suggest clear-cut names and to illustrate certain enigmatic motifs among rock carvings. **Fig. 1.** Cup and Ring. **Fig. 2.** Cup, Rings and Groove (or "Duct"). This latter is a single cup, partly-enclosed by interrupted rings and with a straight groove running from the cup and outwards to a point beyond the rings. Clear identification is vital, since they exist basically from Scotland far down into the southern Sahara. Serious difficulties can exist in positive identification of faded carvings in rock art. A third type, the Spiral (**Fig. 3**) is rarer (Morris, 1977: 13) and can look similar to Rings in blurred photos. Photos of faded carvings can produce errors of identification. Illustrations in two Wikipedia texts (see bibliography) show clear-cut errors in descriptions. One text in German presents no problem, since the photos are clear enough. But one does wonder if the authors of various descriptions were prehistorians.
- However in a work by Barnett et al. (2010) some of the twelve un-numbered photos after page 168 show much inaccurate description. As a prime example of how lack of care causes errors is a so-called kerb stone shown in the fifth photo. While the description fits what is visible to-day, the carved stone was excavated in 1982 while lying face-downwards inside the cairn and erected outside it. Its previous function remains unknown. By October 2013 the unique carving had faded away.
- Part of the title of an earlier publication (Sharpe et al., July 2008) reads "managing and enjoying our carved heritage". If one goes back to the 1970s, a text by Beckensall (1976:187 and 188) shows a photo of part of my **Fig.2** with the incorrect name of "Cup and ring marks".
- Featured in Barnett et al. (2010: xi) is a page of profound remarks by R. Bradley. Rock art, well-known in Scandinavia and Iberia, hardly featured in academic English texts before the 1970s. This is attributed to enigmatic carved motifs which could not be used to illustrate prehistoric life as in N Europe. Material had also previously been handled almost entirely by non-professionals. A suggestion holds that even to-day such work may be viewed as a fringe pursuit, with which I tend to agree. (In 1992, if my information is accurate, a well-known amateur became a fellow of a learned society, but left it in 2004. Did he not encounter the milieu for which he craved?). Bradley also records an extreme reluctance to look beneath the ground surface and that emphasis on

management presupposes a knowledge of what requires to be managed and why. Part of the title of a work by Sharpe et al. (July 2008), even mentions "managing and enjoying our carved heritage". Bradley does not deal with fading or efforts to conserve rock art.

B. Scandinavian attempts to conserve rock carvings and British failures

- Meanwhile Scandinavian efforts have been continuing in to slow down fading of rock carvings. Tourism has an important role, since visitors enjoy the variety of motifs at numerous sites. Conservation is carried out by interdisciplinary teams and a number of differing materials have been tested. The system appears to encourage visits during better weather and to cover up sites during winter. I know not whether non-professional volunteers have been used in the teams, as has happened in Britain, sometimes with unfortunate results.

- It looks as though publicity for rock art, and thus for those working on it, was still all-important around the birth-time of the NADRAP (Northumberland and Durham Rock Art Project) website in 2008. Mention of Conservation and Management was prominent in literature. Prior to that there had been an investigation termed "Fading Rock Art Landscapes". It had been clear to some that fading was inevitable and efforts made into researching the question. However it seems that no real solutions occurred. In several British versions of a "Rock Art Code", the latest of which I saw in 2016, solely panels at risk from impact are mentioned as needing protection. Nothing along the lines of Scandinavian methods was mentioned. Comparison of the work of Barnett et al. (2010) in Britain and Ernfridsson et al. (2010) in Scandinavia demonstrates the unsatisfactory situation in the first-named country.

- A text by M. Motter (2017: 8) states that "our climate is unable to maintain the glaciers" (in Adamello, Trento Province) and "our glaciers should be allowed to die away with the dignity which they deserve". Having often thought of Adamello as a desert of rock and snow and the Sahara as a desert of rock and sand, my feeling on British rock art is the same.

- In the Tiris area of West Sahara carvings seem to have faded at Zoug between the early 1970s and 2006. Nowak et al. (1975: fig.174) call these circular motifs "megalithic". Clarke and Brooks (2018: fig. 16b) show the same carvings, probably photographed in 2006, calling them "engraved concentric circles". Various rather similar-looking faded West Saharan carvings shown by Sáenz de Buruaga et al. (2016) allow no opinion, since earlier photos, if any, are unknown to me.

C. The Bournemouth Paper (2000) and its useful suggestions

- The bibliographical reference of this mammoth and painstaking work produced

in 2000 in Bournemouth has been suggested in a long title. I have inserted "T. Darvill et al." as authors, since many experts participated and the word "Anon" in a bibliography can lead to confusion.

- The work includes much useful and logical information. Many problems and dangers are encountered and some unsuitable and even dangerous practices are mentioned. It is clear that advice given in the paper is not always respected. A useful statement on the dangers for rock art in connection with humans is given, regardless of whether these are incidental to everyday life or directly connected with intentional work on rock art by Mankind.

- Obviously since 2000 a good many unexpected situations have been met and some could hardly have been foreseen by the authors of the Bournemouth document. The problems of protecting interesting sites which have long been well-known are self-evident.

- An unfavourable impression was given by a project started in 2011 by RAMP (Rock Art on Mobile Phones) apparently run from the Centre for Culture and Heritage Studies, Newcastle University. "Cup and ring-marked" stones featured (incorrectly) in a somewhat vulgar notice about three known sites on the NADRAP website. Luckily the mobile phone aspect was short-lived: perhaps local reception was unreliable. The NADRAP website showed two sites as being on Open Access land. This was an error (intentional or not?) and permission to continue was rescinded. In February 2012 a fire attributed to "campers" destroyed four adjacent pines. The apparent intention seemed to aim at publicity, while simply ignoring the warning of M. Simões de Abreu (2001: 12) of dangers for the art in areas without proper controls. On the RAMP website featured some carvings which looked as though some kind of dark liquid had been put on them on 6 June 2006. However the name of the photographer was not available from consultation with the ERA (England's Rock Art) website, a truly scandalous omission by any standards. It is still not clear what substance was used, with whose authority and whether any permanent damage occurred. Following the discovery of footfall on the same site, the County Archaeologist wrote me on 20 July 2012 that "no intervention intended to preserve carvings appears to interest the university".

- Publicity for readers or spectators is all well and good. Encouragement by English Heritage, seemingly the top dog in heritage matters and now re-named Historic England, may have given a praiseworthy sense of purpose and fulfilment to young and older volunteers helping with rock art work. Yet English Heritage may not have been knowledgeable about rock art (R. Bednarik, in litt, 08 June 2015). Perhaps there was an apparent lack of comprehension between

bureaucrats and field-workers, namely English Heritage and University people.

- News reaching youngsters not physically involved in voluntary rock art work, yet conscious of its existence, may have encouraged them to explore. How many fine carvings at unprotected and/or unknown sites may have been uncovered and then simply abandoned to fade away under the onslaught of the elements? Similar tragedies have occurred at least twice in professional circles since 1982. Lifting up the same piece of turf time and again to view carvings below it achieves the same result. One professional complained to me that young explorers had found unrecorded carvings, but had refused to disclose their location! It is clear that there have emerged a number of fresh problems probably right outside any feasible imagination of the Bournemouth authors in 2000. Possibly around 2011 or 2012 I received from English Heritage some guidelines on recording rock art. These were very detailed, but may have been compiled in an office equipped with all available aids to documentary research. They appeared quite unsuitable for use by a field-worker obliged to wade through the weighty prose in a snowstorm or even in good weather. In 2014 a visit from English Heritage showed clearly that the individual concerned had absolutely no idea of the urgency of taking rapid action to slow down fading.
- In early 2013 came news to the effect that climate change might be accelerating the fading of rock carvings. Possibly certain alert people may have already suspected such an event. In 2012 English Heritage had exerted its overall authority to begin "scheduling" certain rock art sites, this appearing to be a purely paper transaction making it an offence to meddle with a scheduled site. The procedure offered no physical protection. In any event I concluded long ago that most, if not all, vandalism probably occurs on the spur of the moment. The culprit may not even realize that an offence has been committed and the chances of being caught look very small. I once carried out an experiment in Frankfurt University library. Early one morning I wrote several words in pencil on a wall. By evening many new texts had been added. In 2013 a few British sites were duly "scheduled" and some evident useless bureaucracy was completed.

D. Failure to co-operate or actual disagreements

- **a.** Early in the millenium there was a dispute over an Algero-French rock paintings project in SE Algeria. Even a later diplomatic meeting at Algiers did not resolve the problem. Six Algerian specialists protested strongly at the behaviour of the former leader of the French group (Hachid et al., 13 April 2013). See also Hachid, 2113b. One might well ask what the CNRS may have thought about the disagreement.

● **b.** I failed to understand why a review by Vernet & Le Quellec (2016-2017) criticised a book mainly containing material on prehistoric stone and other artefacts (Klenkler et al., 2016). Writing in a specialist rock art journal, the authors seemed to be attempting an expert appraisal of a work written for scientists, although it was actually aimed at tourists. How this could happen is a mystery. However it seems that some French specialists nowadays may feel a need, even an obligation, to disagree with any text whatever which does not meet with their own supposedly-expert knowledge.

● **c.** An occurrence which may support my conclusion above concerns a text by Y. Gauthier, who criticised quite mercilessly a work by a young professional geomorphologist and prehistorian (Gauthier, 2011). The victim excavated a quantity of Algerian stone monuments and has clearly been obliged to rely on his own physical strength and mobility during such work. Following this he has also needed to indulge in much thought and research to describe his finds. Can such praise possibly be accorded to Gauthier?

● Over the years it rather looks, so far as one can determine, as though Gauthier may tend towards excitement and aggression when viewing the work of others. Some of his hand-written remarks on a copy of the text published by Vernet et al. (2016-2017) arrived by post from France (with my christian name spelt wrong on the envelope) even before the Cahiers themselves reached me late in May 2018. I was amazed that Gauthier seemed to believe that some of his articles listed therein should have been cited elsewhere. I had not considered them suitable for inclusion in a work written for tourists.

● **d.** F. Soleilhavoup (2009: 217-218) suffered some severe criticism from Le Quellec, seemingly without having merited all of it. His own carefully-worded reply ended with a suggestion that Le Quellec could at least have been more polite.

● Following such violent disagreements and accusations, I did wonder whether relations between Algerian and French experts, especially those dealing in rock art and prehistory, might improve to such an extent that further French work in Algeria may perhaps be allowed in the far distant future.

E. "A flexible presentation of rock art to tourists"

● Following on from the difficulties mentioned in part (D), perhaps we should look again at the nature of information aimed at tourists. Compare M. Maka (2008) and Milburn (2009: 213-214). The latter commented unfavourably on remarks of A. Mazel and S. Beckensall. Various points raised by them appear to show little more than pious hopes, presumably due to lack of professional specialists able to offer interdisciplinary advice on the behaviour of stone, as done in Scandinavia.

- It may be that only a website subject to constant modification can be kept simple enough to be of real use to non-professional visitors. But who is capable of writing this? And will the same website be acceptable to different nationalities?
- Much professional language, or text intended to appear so, may be far too complex for normal tourists seeking a restful holiday. Here one may cite (Vernet et al., 2018: 295-297) who seem not to have understood the vital need for simple text in an English-language book for tourists, rather than long and often bellicose arguments on obscure points of detail. In the late 1970s I had been shown in Tenerife a large collection of prehistoric stone implements from Spanish Sahara. Prof. Luis Diego Cuscoy kindly invited me to study them, which I was regrettably incapable of undertaking.
- All in all it looks as though a website could be the best solution. That means a website constantly subject to revision and edited by mortals well in control of their would-be scientific emotions and able to produce facts rather than fury.



Fig. 1. Cup and Ring.
Such carvings may also have a number of concentric rings around the cup.



Fig. 3.
Spiral



Fig. 2. Cup, Rings and Groove.

After J. C. Bruce 1869. A modern picture by Beckensall (1976: 188) actually portrays part of a later-added curving groove leading away from the same large Cup, Rings and Groove carving towards a second (outside the picture). This curving groove may not have been recognized by contemporary nor modern writers as a later addition. Yet Bruce chose to omit it from his drawing.

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