

# Opening the Bronze Age world

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In the above paper by Johan Ling and Zofia Stos-Gale, an object seen in a number of Swedish rock paintings and carvings is understood to be a representation of the so-called oxhide shaped ingot of the eastern Mediterranean Minoan-Mycenaean Bronze Age culture.

Of course, interpretations of the often stylised motifs seen in Scandinavian rock art are open to debate. Comprehension of such motifs is subject to a continuous discussion, where the progress of research also depends on the presentation of new and challenging 'readings'. For instance, is it possible to identify depictions of Central European gold hats among the motifs carved on the slabs of the Bredarör burial cist at Kivik, in Sweden (Randsborg 1993; Goldhahn 2013)?

Some 30 years ago, the oxhide-ingot interpretation of the motifs in question may have seemed improbable. Today, however, a larger body of evidence of long-distance connections between the eastern Mediterranean and Central and Northern Europe is at hand. We could mention the Middle Bronze Age fortified site of Monkodonja in Istria, Croatia, in the northernmost part of the Adriatic Sea, which is seen as an imitation of Mycenaean palace architecture. There are even finds from Monkodonja demonstrating contact with Cyprus (Terzan *et al.* 1999; Hänsel 2007). Consequently, it now seems possible to set aside the former scepticism over the significance of long-distance connections between the Aegean and Continental Europe (Harding 2007). The importance of Nordic or Baltic amber should be reconsidered, as we know that it reached even distant places beyond the eastern Mediterranean, such as Qatna in Syria. Nordic amber was also part of the cargo of the ship wrecked at Uluburun off the south-west Turkish coast (Mukherjee *et al.* 2008). The results of the metal analyses shown in Ling and Stos-Gale (above) further corroborate the evidence of connections between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean, including Cyprus.

Southern Scandinavia has yielded other finds that reveal early influences from the eastern Mediterranean. Well-known objects reflecting such influences are the folding stools belonging to period II of the Nordic Bronze Age (1500–1300 BC). An intact example was found in an oak-coffin burial at Guldhøj, in South Jutland, Denmark, and dated using dendrochronology to *c.* 1389 BC (Randsborg & Christensen 2006) (Figure 1). Folding stools are known from 16 graves, including the find from Guldhøj, one hoard in Denmark, and from southern Sweden and northern Germany (Prangsgaard *et al.* 1999). Similar stools are known from the same period in Egypt, and they appear in frescoes from the palaces of Pylos and Knossos, where they are depicted in use. It was not the stools themselves that were imported, but the concept and design that were transmitted from the eastern Mediterranean to Northern Europe. Thirty years ago, a rather sceptical approach as to long-distance connections prevailed:

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Figure 1. The well-preserved folding stool made of ash-wood, Guldhøj, Jutland, Denmark, c.1389 BC. Photograph courtesy of the National Museum of Denmark.



Figure 2. A two-wheeled chariot in use, carved on a stone slab on the great cairn of Bredarör, Kivik, Scania, Sweden. Around 1300 BC. Photograph: Flemming Kaul.

*“The folding stools of the two areas do indeed show close similarities, but it must be remembered that the form is a simple one and was most likely widely distributed. In my view a direct connection between Scandinavia and the East Mediterranean is a very-far-fetched explanation of this phenomenon”* (Harding 1984: 104).

Now seemingly, times have changed (Harding 2007, 2010).

Another phenomenon reflecting influences from the eastern Mediterranean is the two-wheeled chariot depicted in Scandinavian rock art (Winther Johannsen 2010); the most elaborate example can be seen on one of the slabs of the large stone cist of Bredarör at Kivik, in Scania, southern Sweden (Randsborg 1993; Goldhahn 2013) (Figure 2).

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Recently, it has been proposed that the introduction of the single-edged razor into southern Scandinavia around 1400 BC was due to influences ultimately stemming from the eastern Mediterranean (Kaul 2013). No imported Mycenaean or Minoan razor has been found in the North. As with the folding stools, it was the idea that was transmitted over long distances; this time, the idea of the shaven warrior.

If these indications of contact were seen as isolated phenomena—as single observations—they could have been regarded as being coincidental. However, with the increasing amount of evidence, including the new findings presented by Ling and Stos-Gale (above), a larger pattern of long-distance north–south connections is seemingly emerging.

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