

# The Villfara Monument

– Rock Carvings, Death, Cosmology and Rituals in Early Bronze Age Scania

BY JENS WINTHER JOHANNSSEN

## Abstract

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The remains of at least two different graves were found by Sven Nilsson's excavation of the Villfara mound in eastern Scania in 1863: A grave from the Late Neolithic or the Bronze Age Period I and a male grave from the Bronze Age Period II. A stone with rock carvings belongs to the latter grave. This includes a depiction which may contain several symbolic meanings: it expresses the buried male's elaborate social status and depicts his way through the afterlife and incorporation in the Sun's eternal journey. It also depicts the Early Bronze Age's cosmological beliefs of the Sun's journey during the evening and night. The rock carvings indicate that rituals took place by the mound on several occasions before, during and after the burial.

*Jens Winther Johannsen, Roskilde Museum, Munkebro 2, 4000 Roskilde, Denmark. jwjohannsen@gmail.com.*

## Introduction

The Villfara mound is located in Österlen in eastern Scania, approximately 20 kilometres to the south of the famous Kivik cairn (Fig. 1). The mound is best known for its content of a stone with rock carvings, which has often been mentioned in the archaeological literature, since it was first described in the early 19th century. In the famous work *Studien zu den Bronzezeitlichen Felszeichnungen von Skåne* Carl-Axel Althin interpreted the rock carvings as partly of recent date (1945, pp. 96 ff.). Although Althin's postulate was soon after refuted (Rydbeck 1945; Nordén 1946), his interpretation has become established, and the stone, not to mention the mound, has thus only been briefly mentioned ever since. The heated debate in the 1940s was mainly focused on the rock carvings being of recent date or not, and consequently the monument

has not been discussed in its full context since Sven Nilsson's brief presentation of the excavation in 1863. Furthermore, the full content of the Villfara stone has never been published.

With its rock carvings, the Villfara mound is an interesting example of the Early Bronze Age's burial tradition and plays an important role in the discussion of the period's rituals, cosmology and beliefs regarding the afterlife. The present paper is thus an attempt to revive the monument in the archaeological discussion.

The Villfara mound is today almost completely destroyed. Only a gentle, stony rise of approximately 17 metres in diameter remains (Fig. 2). Despite the destruction, it is still possible to get an impression of the mound's vanished monumentality: with its position at a peak in the landscape, it has a remarkable view over fertile, Scanian farmland as far as the eye can see.

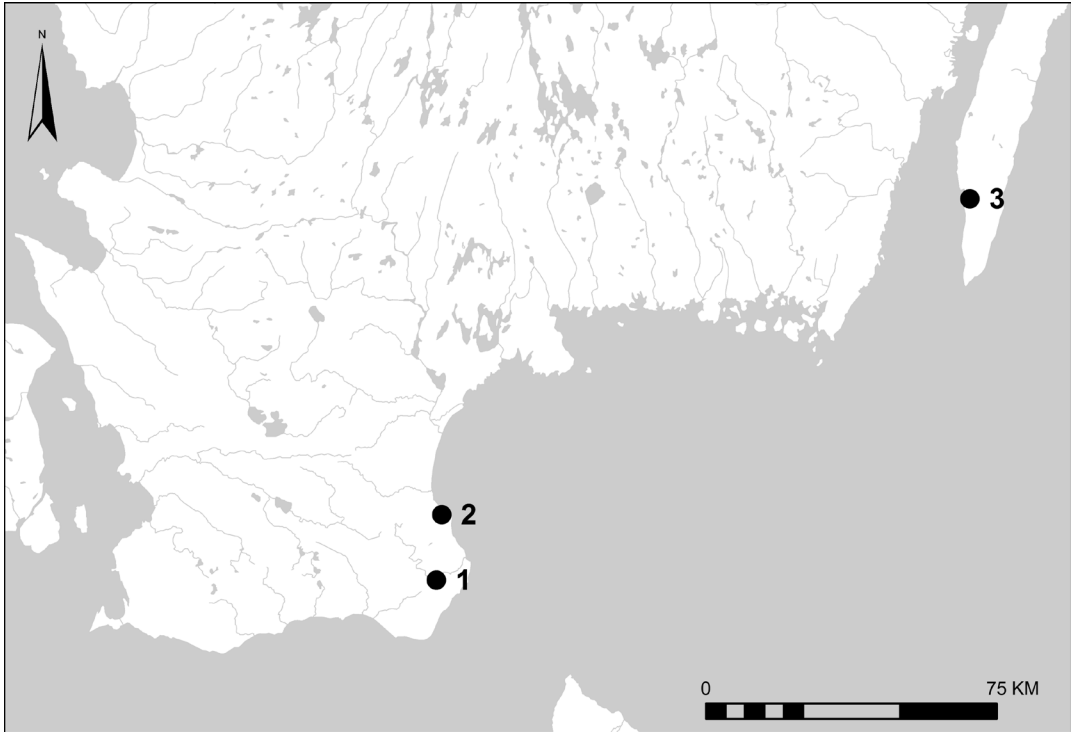


Fig. 1. Map showing the most important sites mentioned in the text. 1: The Villfara mound, 2: The Kivik cairn, 3: The Klinta mound. Map by A. Pihl.



Fig. 2. The Villfara mound in Östra Tommarp parish, eastern Scania, as it looks today. Photo by J.W. Johansen.

The place name Villfara, which is connected to several mounds in the area, literally means “to get lost”. According to local tradition, trolls live inside the mound and by passing it at night, the wanderer risks getting lost and is bound to wander around the mound until the dawn of light (Nilsson 1862–64, p. 130).

## The excavation of the Villfara mound

The stone with the rock carvings was found on the top of the Villfara mound, partly under a drystone wall marking the boundary between the parishes of Östra Tommarp and Vallby, when it was described for the first time by Niels Henrik Sjöborg (Sjöborg 1822–30, p. 146; Nordén 1946, pp. 133 ff.). Sjöborg mentions a wagon motif in his description of the rock carvings (Sjöborg 1822–30, p. 146), and this was what led the Swedish polymath Sven Nilsson to visit the Villfara mound in 1862. The year after Nilsson presented the stone in the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities and was then requested by the academy to excavate the Villfara mound. Nilsson planned the excavation during the spring and summer of 1863. He hoped to reveal additional rock carvings inside the mound, but his main goal was to find out whether the monument belonged to the Bronze Age. Thereby, he expected that the excavation of the Villfara mound indirectly could date the Kivik cairn, because of the resemblance of the Villfara stone’s rock carvings to those of the Kivik cist’s slabs (Nilsson’s 1862–65, pp. 151 & 173).

The excavation took place in the autumn of 1863. The records of the excavation are unfortunately limited. Sven Nilsson’s diaries do not contain any more information about what happened in the two days the excavation took place than his description – by modern standards unfortunately rather insufficient –

in *Skandinaviska Nordens Urinvånare*. Here Sven Nilsson describes the mound as considerably flattened by ploughing and estimates its height at approximately five Swedish feet (about one metre) prior to the excavation. With help from local farmhands (Nilsson 1862–65, p. 151) Nilsson excavated an eight feet (about 2.40 metres) wide trench from the edge to the centre of the mound. This revealed a mix of soil and stones of various sizes up to approximately 60 centimetres in diameter, which according to Nilsson likely belonged to a collapsed vault (Nilsson 1862–64, p. 131). Finds began to appear close to the bottom of the mound. Nilsson does not state whether the finds were stratigraphically separated, but only refers to the order in which they turned up: a horse tooth, some potsherds (which Nilsson describes as fragments of urns), charcoal, a spearhead made of flint, an arrowhead made of flint, a flint dagger, and finally, in the evening of the second day of the excavation, a fragment of a bronze belt hook turned up close to the bottom at the centre of the mound (Nilsson 1862–64 pp. 131 f.). It was clear to Nilsson that the bronze fragment belonged to the early part of the Bronze Age, and now that his main goal was reached, the excavation was ended. After the excavation Nilsson had the Villfara stone moved to the church of the nearby village of Vallby (Nordén 1946, p. 135). In 1905 the stone was moved again, this time to Lund University Historical Museum, where it is now exhibited in the hallway leading to the museum’s first floor.

## The finds

Unfortunately, the majority of the artefacts are lost, and were already missing when Nordén was re-examining the find in 1933 (Nordén 1946, p. 136). Only the flint dagger and the belt hook remain. The flint dagger is a 23-centimetre long, beautiful specimen of

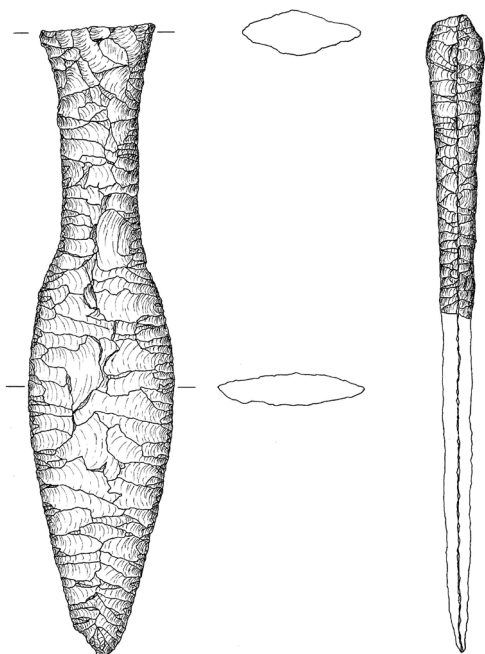


Fig. 3. The flint dagger found in the Villfara mound during the excavation in 1863. Length: 22.9 centimetres. Drawing by L.G.C. Andersen.

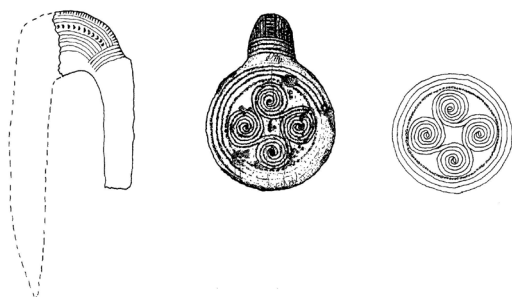


Fig. 4. The belt hook found in the Villfara mound during the excavation in 1863. Length: 2.8 centimetres. Drawing by L.G.C. Andersen.

Lomborg's type V (Fig. 3). It has been suggested that the dagger and the belt hook derive from the same grave from the Bronze Age Period II (Nordén 1946, p. 137; Burenhult 1980, p. 103). This is unlikely, however, as no daggers of Lomborg's type V have been found in a closed Period II context, to which the belt hook belongs, and the type V dagger more likely belongs to the end of the Late Neolithic or the Bronze Age Period I (Lomborg 1973, p. 80). Flint daggers are found in both graves and hoards, and the imprecise description of how the Villfara dagger was found makes the interpretation of it difficult. However, daggers are most often found in male graves (Lomborg 1973, pp. 189 ff.). There are several examples of Late Neolithic graves incorporated in Bronze Age mounds (e.g. Strömberg 1975, p. 57) and that the dagger was found inside the mound thus makes it reasonable to assume that it originally belonged to the grave of a male, who was buried at the end of the Late Neolithic or the Bronze Age Period I.

Only the plate and a small part of the hook remain of the belt hook. The plate is decorated with four linked spiral ornaments, typical of the Bronze Age Period II (Fig. 4). Belt hooks only very rarely occur in hoards, but are common gifts in male graves from the Early Bronze Age (Willroth 1985, p. 119), which makes it likely that the belt hook belonged to a male who was buried in Period II.

Nilsson's description of the now lost arrowhead, spearhead and sherds only gives a vague impression of which period they belonged to, and it is thus too uncertain to take them into consideration. Both arrowheads and spearheads do occur in Late Neolithic graves, and the lithic finds could thus derive from the same grave as the dagger, but could however also have belonged to the Bronze Age Period II grave. The sherds which are described as urn fragments may have derived from an urn grave, possibly from the Late Bronze Age. This is highly uncertain, however.

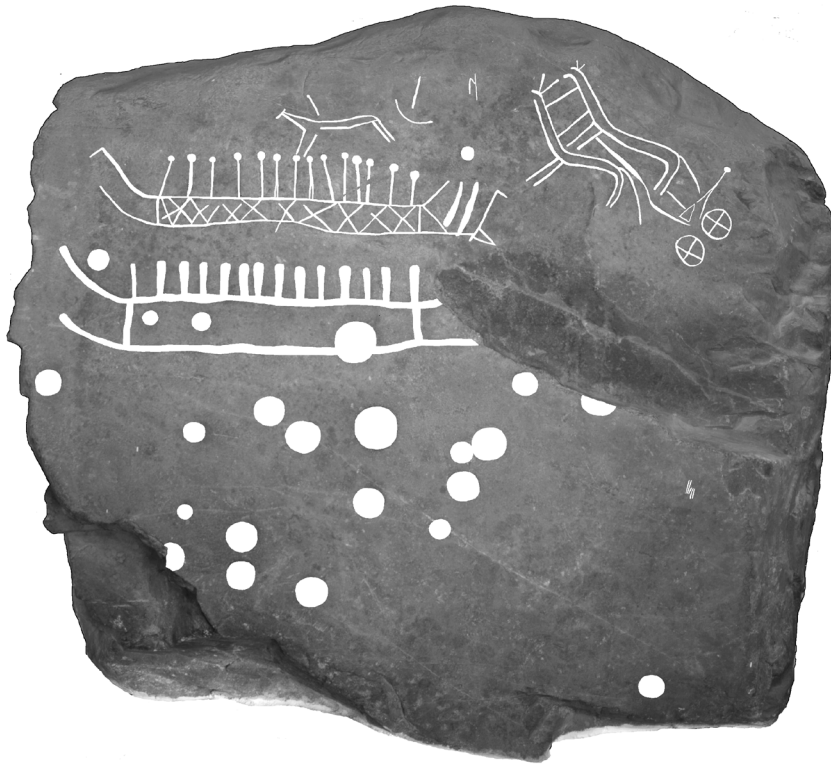


Fig. 5. The Villfara stone with its various motifs highlighted. The stone is approximately 100 centimetres tall, 110 centimetres wide and 50 centimetres thick. Photo by A.N. Jensen; drawing by J.W. Johannsen.

## The Villfara stone

The Villfara stone is approximately 100 centimetres tall, 110 centimetres wide and 50 centimetres thick and consists of the hard and dark rock type diorite (Nordén 1946, pp. 140 ff.). Its rock carvings have been published several times, first by Sven Nilsson in 1864. His depiction is highly idealized; several details have been left out, while other non-existent details are added (Nilsson 1862–64, p. 130). A number of more or less accurate photos of the stone, in which the various motifs are highlighted with chalk, have since been published (Nordén 1917, p. 20; Bolin 1930, p. 33; Bing 1937, p. 125, Rydbeck 1945, p. 23). Marstrander has published an often used but

rather idealized representation of the stone's wheeled vehicle, which is likely based on one of the published photos (Marstrander 1963, p. 169). The latest drawing of the stone is published in Burenhult's *The Rock Carvings of Götaland* (1973, p. 64), which however has been criticized for its inaccuracy (Selling 1985; Randsborg 1993, p. 90; Goldhahn 1999, pp. 41 ff.).

Despite the shallowness of some of the rock carvings, they likely stood out clearly when they were made, and for some time after, as the new carvings must have been white on the dark stone (see Goldhahn & Østigård 2007, p. 259). But today it is impossible to see every detail with the naked eye. The shallowness of the rock carvings makes them dif-



difficult to document. After an initial attempt with the widely used rubbing technique (see Milstreu 1996, pp. 10 ff.), the photographic technique of RTI scanning was adopted in the preparation of the present depiction (for further description of the technique see Earl *et al.* 2011; Jensen *et al.* 2012, pp. 4 ff.). This has revealed two ships, a horse-drawn wheeled vehicle, a horse, 23 cup marks and three unidentifiable motifs (Fig. 5.).

The rock carvings were claimed to be partly of recent date by Carl-Axel Althin (1945, pp. 96 ff.). Althin's main argument was that the thin-lined rock carvings of the stone had been made with what he thought was a steel chisel, which excluded the Bronze Age date. Both Rydbeck and Nordén, however, soon after pointed out that there are no punch marks on the stone to support the assumption that the motifs were made with a steel chisel. More likely, the thin lines were carved into the stone, or perhaps pecked and subsequently carved, which may have been the most effective technique on the hard diorite (Rydbeck 1945, p. 24; Nordén 1946, pp. 140 ff.). In the review of Althin's interpretation Nordén refers to his own work from 1925 where rock carvings from the sites of Himmelstalund, Ekenberg and Leonardberg in Östergötland were published. Some of these had been found under rubble layers dated to the Bronze Age, i.e. in closed Bronze Age contexts, and were made with a thin-lined technique similar to that of the Villfara stone (Nordén 1925, pp. 145 f.; Nordén 1946, pp. 138 f.). That an even broader range of techniques was used for the rock carvings in the closed context of the Sagaholm mound (Goldhahn 1999, pp. 76 ff.) clearly demonstrates that different techniques do not necessarily indicate different dates of rock carvings.

Althin also claimed that the right part of the upper ship and a part of the wheeled vehicle were made on a part of the stone which eroded after the lowest ship was made, as the

erosion has destroyed the right part of this, again indicating a recent date. A look at the stone, however, shows that this is incomprehensible, as the rock carvings are only found in the areas which are *not* eroded (Fig. 5), which was also pointed out by Nordén (1946, p. 141).

Althin further referred to the cross ornamentation of the uppermost ship and to the same ship's dot-headed crew lines, as an argument for a recent date for the rock carvings, as both traits according to him are unknown on other Scanian rock carving sites (Althin 1945, p. 99). Dot-headed crew lines are however known from several other Scanian rock carvings (Nordén 1946, p. 141). The cross ornamentation on the hull is unique in Scania, but is common in both Östergötland and Bohuslän, and the cross ornamentation thus rather indicates a connection from Scania to the north in the Bronze Age than that the motif was made in modern times.

The ship *does* have two unusual traits, however: the right keel extension is decorated with an animal head and what could be interpreted as two thick crew lines are standing directly on the keel line. These details differ from the scheme followed by other ship motifs from the Bronze Age, as crew lines are generally positioned on the upper horizontal line of the ships and normally only prows are adorned with animal heads. The explanation of these unusual traits may be that the details were added at some point after the ship was made. The vertical line in the right side of the ship's hull may represent its original hull-end, while the diagonal line between the hull and the horizontal keel line probably depicts its original rudder (Fig. 6). The horse head-adorned upturned keel extension and the smaller rudder were likely added to the ship to make space for the two thick, sloping lines. At first glance these look like crew lines, but neither their size, their slightly curving outline nor their sloping angle correspond to the other

crew lines on the stone. The two sloping lines are more similar to the legs of the horses, and may thus represent a pair of legs.

At the end of Althin's discussion of the Villfara stone he concluded that parts of the carvings were probably copied from an 18th-century drawing of the Kivik cist's slabs; an interpretation which he emphasized by the location of the chariot-like vehicle on the upper right side of the Villfara stone, which corresponds to the Kivik chariot's location on its respective slab (Althin 1945, pp. 99 ff.). Nordén, however, questioned whether the isolated rural area of Östra Tommarp, where the Villfara stone was found, could have had a person who was capable of making such a sophisticated fraud between 1780, when the earliest depiction of the Kivik slabs was published, and 1830 where the Villfara stone was described for the first time (Nordén 1946, p. 141 f.). Furthermore, the similarities between the vehicles, which Althin sees as an indication of the Villfara rock carvings being of recent date, is a poor argument as several similar wheeled vehicles are known on rock carving sites throughout the southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula (Johannsen 2010, pp. 166 ff.), and even though the wheeled vehicles of the Villfara stone and the Kivik cist depict the same type of vehicle, they are far from identical. The style of the elegant Villfara draught horses differs from the carved out

horses of the Kivik chariot, as they are made with thin, curving lines, which more resemble the group of horses on the Hästholmen panel in Östergötland (Broström 2007), again pointing to a northern rock carving tradition.

To conclude, none of Althin's arguments are convincing, and all the motifs of the Villfara stone were most likely made during the Bronze Age.

The flat side of the Villfara stone is covered with rock carvings. The figural carvings are concentrated in the top part of the stone, while the cup marks are mainly concentrated in the lowest part. At least two different techniques were used when the rock carvings were made. The lowest ship motif consists of broad lines, which were probably pecked into the rock surface with a hammerstone, a technique which may also have been used when the cup marks and the two sloping lines to the far right in the uppermost ship were made. The remaining motifs, that is, the uppermost ship, the wheeled vehicle, the horse and the three unidentifiable motifs, are thin-lined, and were likely carved into the stone, as suggested by Rydbeck and Nordén.

The stone's uppermost motif is the wheeled vehicle, which is made with the thin-lined technique described above. The driver's body is depicted as a curved stick, likewise the arm. The head of the driver is a small carved-out dot, thereby closely resembling the crew

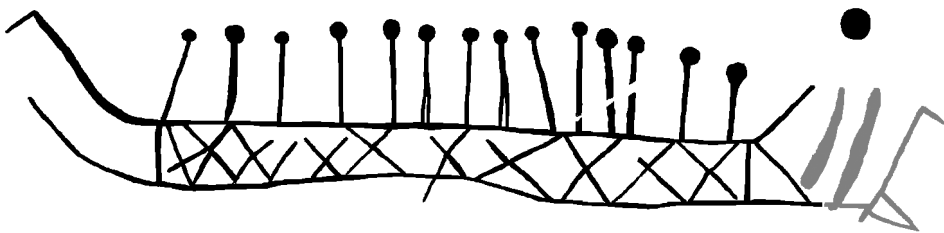


Fig. 6. The uppermost ship motif of the Villfara stone. The original ship is highlighted in black while the details added later are shown in grey. Drawing by J.W. Johannsen.

lines of the uppermost ship. The two long-tailed draught horses have forward-stretched necks and their four legs are pointing slightly forwards. The vehicle itself has an elegant, minimalistic outline consisting of two four-spoked wheels, a small, triangular box and a draught pole, which curves upwards towards the straight yoke.

To the left of the wheeled vehicle are two motifs which do not follow a formal rock carving scheme: closest to the draught horses is a figure consisting of three short lines and further left is seen what might be an unfinished wheel cross. These two unidentifiable motifs possibly belong together with a highly stylized horse motif which is carved to the left of and a bit lower than the wheeled vehicle and just above the uppermost ship. Similar to the draught team of the wheeled vehicle, the horse has a long forward-stretched neck. Its front legs are pointing forwards while the back legs are pointing backwards, as if the horse is running. Right above the horse's back is a diagonal line with a thickening in the top end, which possibly represents a rider.

Below the horse are two ships, one above the other. The two ships follow the same basic outline consisting of prows, hull, gunwale, keel, keel extension, stabiliser and crew lines and are of almost the same size. The uppermost ship, however, is the most detailed: The crosses on the ship's hull possibly depict details of the hull's construction. Similar to the crew lines of the ship on one of the famous Rørby swords (Rønne in press), the heads of the fourteen crew lines are depicted with carved-out dots, which makes them unusually anthropomorphic. Two crew members are even depicted with legs (nos. 6 and 8 from the left). As mentioned above, what could be two large legs are pecked to the far right in the ship and are possibly a later addition to the motif. Just above the two legs is a small cup mark, which probably also belongs to the motif. On the left prow is what may be a horse

head, which, like the legs and the right keel extension, is possibly a later addition. The ship is facing left, shown by the upturned left keel extension and the rudder's location on the right side of the motif.

The lowest ship's far right side is destroyed due to the damage to the stone's surface. It is less detailed than the ship above, but the thickenings at the head end of the fourteen crew lines make it stand out from the average ship depictions of the time. The keel extension at the left end is turned upright, while it is possible to see, despite the erosion, that the right keel extension protrudes horizontally, which together show that this ship too is facing left. Just above the fore of the ship is a small cup mark, which probably belongs to the motif.

The stone includes 21 cup marks besides the two which have already been mentioned. These are concentrated in the lower part of the stone. A few of the cup marks are very large and deep, while others are barely visible. One of the largest and deepest cuts the keel line of the lowest ship.

Finally, five narrow and shallow short lines are carved right below the eroded area. It cannot be excluded, however, that these lines are natural.

The stylistic similarities between the wheeled vehicle, the horse and the ships suggest that all the figural carvings are likely to be contemporary and part of the same composition. This is further emphasized by the fact that none of the figural motifs overlap. Also, the close resemblance between the curves of the prows and keels of the two ships indicates contemporaneity (see Kaul 1998, p. 88). The additional details of the upper ship motif, however, show that it consists of at least two different phases, while it is not possible to say how much time passed before these additional details were made. Some of the cup marks were possibly also added to the stone at some point after the figural motifs were made. This



is indicated by the large cup mark which cuts the keel line of the lowest ship. Even though it cannot be excluded that the cup marks were made immediately after the other motifs, their lack of order does not correspond to the strict organization of the figural motifs, and there is thus some reason to believe that at least some of the cup marks were added on different occasions.

Considering the thin-lined technique, the outline of the draught horses and the ornamentation on the upper ship's hull, the rock carvings of the Villfara stone follow a style which is most common in the south-eastern part of Sweden, and it is thus reasonable to date them according to the new established rock carving chronology from Uppland (Ling 2013, pp. 85 ff.). Following this, the style of both ships clearly belongs to the Early Bronze Age, most likely Period II. The style of the horses, with their long forward-stretched necks and legs, also points to a date in the Early Bronze Age (see Nordén 1917, p. 11). The date of the rock carvings thus corresponds to the date of the belt hook, indicating that the stone and the belt hook were part of the same grave from the Bronze Age Period II. The stone's original position is uncertain, however, as when Sjöborg saw it in 1830 it apparently was part of the previously mentioned drystone wall (Sjöborg 1822–30, p. 146). The stone was however found lowest in the wall just where it crosses the Villfara mound (Nilsson 1862–64, p. 130) and the stone and the mound were most likely part of the same grave monument (see Nordén 1946, pp. 130 ff. for detailed discussion). Considering Nilsson's description of the scattered artefacts found inside the mound (Nilsson 1862–64, p. 131), the graves may either have been robbed before the excavation, or were disturbed by ploughing and the stone may thereby have been moved from its original position. The composition of the motifs, however, gives a clue as to which way the stone was originally incorporated in the

monument. That the rock carvings were possibly made over a longer period of time shows that the stone was accessible, which indicates that it was set outside the mound; possibly as part of a kerbstone circle, or that the top of the mound in fact was its original position, as suggested by Nordén (1946, p. 130). The cup marks on the lowest part of the stone indicate that the entire side with rock carvings was above ground, and the stone may thus have been lying horizontally with the rock carving surface facing up.

## Travelling with the Sun: Status, death and afterlife of the Villfara man

Summing up, the Villfara mound probably included the remains of at least two different graves. The earliest is represented by the type V flint dagger and most likely contained a male, who was buried in the Late Neolithic or in the Bronze Age Period I. The earliest grave was somehow incorporated in a mound, possibly a soil-covered cairn, in the Bronze Age Period II, which included a male grave with a belt hook. The latter monument included the stone with rock carvings, which possibly was set on the outside of the mound, either positioned horizontally on the top or as a kerbstone.

While it is difficult to comment further on the earliest grave, the Bronze Age Period II finds leave more room for interpretation and have several relevant parallels. The most famous is the Kivik cairn, and whenever the Villfara mound is mentioned, the main topic is most often this remarkable monument (Nilsson 1862–64; Nordén 1926; Grinsell 1942; Randsborg 1993; Goldhahn 2013). The resemblance to the slabs of the Kivik grave is obvious, first and foremost because of the Kivik grave's well-known chariot motif on

slab no. 7 and its aforementioned resemblance to the Villfara chariot. Another well-known parallel is the Sagaholm mound close to Jönköping in the northern part of Småland, with its internal stone circle containing depictions mainly of horses and ships (Goldhahn 1999). While the rock carvings of the Kivik and the Sagaholm graves are both part of very elaborate grave monuments, rock carvings have also been found in connection with several more humble graves in Denmark, Sweden and Norway (see Randsborg 1993, pp. 71 ff.; Syvertsen 2002; Kaul 2004, pp. 150 ff.). An example derives from a disturbed barrow in Järrestad, eastern Scania. This is likely contemporary with the Villfara mound and included a stone cist in which a rectangular slab contained several cup marks and two ship depictions, one above the other and both facing left (Althin 1945; pp. 71 f.). A stone deriving from a kerbstone circle of a mound found in Birkerøgel, close to Gilleleje in northern Zealand contains a similar depiction of two left-turned ships, one above the other (Glob 1969, Fig. 17 & pp. 205 f.).

The closest parallel to the Villfara monument as a whole is a mound from Klinta on the Swedish island of Öland (Fig. 1). Like the Villfara mound this monument is best known for containing a stone with rock carvings. The stone was found close to a drystone wall, on top of a partly destroyed mound. Excavation of the mound revealed what might be the remains of a small cairn or a cist built of limestone slabs. Bones from a child were found in the north-western part of the mound, while the disturbed remains of a larger human individual were found in the mound's southern part. The cone-shaped Klinta stone is just above one metre tall. Uppermost on its widest side are four deep cup marks to the left of three concentric circles surrounding another cup mark. Below the circle motifs are two left-turned horses; one above the other.<sup>1</sup> Below these is a depiction of a left-turned ship with

seven crew lines. Under the ship are two right-turned horses beside each other. The horses are facing an unidentifiable figure, possibly a supine person, while a curving line, which may correspond to the lineal borders of the Kivik slabs, is pecked at the bottom of the stone. A narrow side of the stone and parts of its base are covered with about 150 cup marks (Arne 1917). The ship's slightly inturned prows and the outline of the horses point to a date in the Bronze Age Period II, and the motifs and their relative position to a certain degree also corresponds to the motifs on the Villfara stone: The two left-turned horses most likely depict a draught team and may thus possibly hold the same symbolic meaning as the chariot on the Villfara stone. The draught team is depicted above the left-turned ship, which thus together to some extent corresponds to the chariot's position compared to the uppermost ship of the Villfara stone. Furthermore, the number of cup marks indicates that these may have been added on several occasions. As will be suggested below, the figural motifs of the Villfara stone may be parts of the same narrative, which is depicted as four different but closely related scenes. The rock carvings of the Klinta stone may be a similar type of depiction, containing almost the same motifs in almost the same order.

Close parallels as regards the motifs of the Villfara stone are also found on large open-site panels. An example is a panel at Hemsta, Boglösa parish (RAÄ 131) in Uppland, which contains a contemporary depiction of a highly stylized cart above a ship. Both cart and ship are facing left (Fig. 7).

The Villfara stone has been known for more than 180 years and has often been mentioned in archaeological literature. The stone is however mainly discussed as a part of the interpretation of the Kivik grave, and the various interpretations tend to focus on just one or a few of its motifs: According to Sjöborg, the depiction of the wheeled vehicle indicates

that the person who was buried in the Villfara mound died on a journey or in a race (Sjöborg 1822-1830, p. 146), while Nilsson suggested that the Villfara stone was a sacrificial stone and the flint dagger found in the mound a sacrificial knife. Nilsson related this interpretation to his theory of the Phoenicians' presence in Scandinavia and their worship of Baal (Christensson 2005; Nilsson 1862-64, pp. 133 ff.).<sup>2</sup> Nordén interpreted the motifs as various vehicles transporting the deceased to the afterlife, an interpretation related to his perception of rock carvings as representing the Bronze Age's grave magic (Nordén 1917, pp. 30 ff.). Finally, Bing mentioned the Villfara chariot in a discussion of other Scandinavian depictions of horse-drawn wheeled vehicles, which he believed represented a horse god (Bing 1937, pp. 124 ff.).

Some of the motifs of the Villfara stone obviously correspond to that of the Kivik cist and may hold some of the same symbolic content. The composition of motifs is not

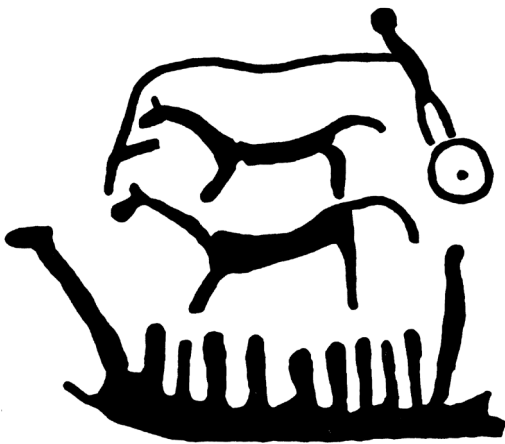


Fig. 7. The ship and the cart on the Hemsta panel in Boglösa (RAÄ 131), Uppland. Both the motifs' position relative to one another and their orientation are similar to the corresponding motifs on the Villfara stone. The rock carvings are contemporary with the Villfara stone and may possibly depict a part of the same mythological sequence. Drawing after a photo by J.W. Johannsen.

the same, however. The different motifs of the Villfara stone are probably closely related to each other, and the fact that their composition does not correspond to that of the Kivik cist's slabs shows that the motifs together depict a different narrative. The content of the Villfara stone thus has to be studied on its own premises.

The motifs may together hold several symbolic meanings. Obviously, the various motifs are closely related to the elite: the ship was the most important means of transport in the Bronze Age, while the newly introduced horse was a strong expression of both power and wealth. Not least, the wheeled vehicle of the Villfara stone resembles in every detail the light and fast chariots which in the Bronze Age profited the absolute elite in large parts of the Old World. Well-known examples of this type of vehicle are the six exclusive chariots found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (Littauer & Crowel 1985; Johannsen 2010, pp. 153 ff.). The figural motifs of the Villfara stone may thereby express the deceased's elaborate social status, and may even depict his possessions. But the depiction undoubtedly also contains deeper iconographic codes. The stylistic similarities of the figural carvings of the Villfara stone, the closed composition and the strict organization of the motifs indicate that they are parts of the same narrative. The narrative perspective has in recent years been adopted in studies of the rich Scandinavian Bronze Age iconography. Most influential is Flemming Kaul's study of depictions on bronze razors (1998). In the study, Kaul puts a jigsaw puzzle consisting of isolated motifs from the razors together into a Late Bronze Age narrative, where the Sun is carried by different agents on its daily and eternal journey. Most prominent in the Sun's journey is the ship. In short, ships which are facing right are interpreted as day ships carrying the Sun across the sky during the daytime, while left-turned ships below the earth carry the Sun back to its

starting point during the night (Kaul 1998, pp. 258 ff.). Even though this interpretation relies on Late Bronze Age material, the same cosmological understanding of left and right seems to have existed in the Early Bronze Age. This is indicated by the sun chariot from Trundholm. When the golden disc is facing the viewer the horse is pointing towards the right, symbolizing the sun travelling from left to right across the sky in the daytime. When the dark side is facing the viewer the horse points left, representing the extinguished sun travelling from right to left below the earth during the night (Kaul 1998, p. 259). Inspired by Kaul, Skoglund has adopted the narrative perspective in a discussion of various rock carvings. Skoglund sees the rock carvings of e.g. the Sagaholm grave as a cartoon-like depiction of different but related scenes which together depict a progressing narrative (Skoglund 2009). In the same way, the four figural rock carvings of the Villfara stone may together describe a movement which is depicted as four different but related scenes. Accepting this interpretation, and bearing Kaul's left-right/right-left logic in mind, the chariot, the horse and the two ships of the Villfara stone, which are all facing left, likely express an Early Bronze Age night/death symbolism. The left orientations of the motifs indicate that they are to be read from right to left.

The first scene is the uppermost motif of the stone: the driving chariot with its two wheel cross wheels. Except for cup marks, the wheel cross is the most common rock carving motif in Denmark and is also common in Scania (Glob 1969, p. 56; Malmer 1981, pp. 66 ff.). The motif is obviously a sun symbol, and probably holds several related symbolic meanings (Kaul 2004, pp. 150 ff.). The Villfara chariot with its two wheel cross wheels should therefore probably be seen as a vehicle of the Sun or perhaps more likely, a metaphor for the Sun itself (Johannsen 2012, pp. 105 f.). Considering the motif's position in the up-

permost right corner of the stone, and bearing the right-left logic in mind, the chariot may represent the Sun driving in the dusk, just below the horizon.

To the left of the first scene and a bit lower are the horse and the two unidentifiable figures, which may together depict the next phase of the Sun's nightly travel. The wheel-cross-like figure is so indistinct, however, that it seems too tenuous to interpret this as a sun symbol. However, the horse on its own might very well be a metaphor for the Sun (Kaul 2004, p. 171). Thus, this motif could be seen as the Sun, now represented as a single horse, which is about to land on the ship underneath it.

The third scene is found directly below the horse and depicts the situation after the Sun's arrival with the sun horse to the night ship. It consists of the uppermost ship and the cup mark above its aft. The cup mark likely represents the Sun itself, while again the whole motif could be seen as a metaphor of the Sun. The two legs in the aft were possibly added to the motif further embody the Sun and thereby to make its presence in the scene clearer. That the Sun is positioned where the rudder is suggests that it is actively steering the ship, and the motif is thus a depiction of the Sun, which has embarked on its nocturnal journey, from right to left, below the horizon.

The fourth and last scene consists of the lowest ship motif and the cup mark above its front prow. The lowest ship is depicted slightly further left than the uppermost ship, again indicating movement. The Sun here too is represented by a cup mark, but it has now moved from the aft to the fore. As a whole, this might be a representation of the last phase of the Sun's nocturnal journey, as the position of the Sun in the fore may depict when the Sun is about to leave the night ship; possibly just before the dawn of light, right below the horizon.

Kaul has suggested the existence of a Bronze Age belief that some humans after their death became part of the Sun's eternal journey as passengers on the divine sun ship (Kaul 2004, p. 189). This may explain why a depiction of exactly this part of the Sun's journey with its night/death symbolism was included in the Villfara man's grave monument. The night scene on the Villfara stone may be seen as a depiction of the deceased Villfara man's travel through the afterlife and his incorporation in the Sun's eternal journey – first as passenger on the divine sun chariot, then riding on the sun horse and finally as passenger on the night ship sailing through the night to the sunrise. The death of the Villfara man may thus have been his entrance to a divine life close to the Sun.

The next question is when and why the carvings were made. That the stone was by all accounts positioned outside the mound relates it to other rock carvings, which even though they may have been part of a burial, were visible after the grave was closed (Widholm 1998, p. 92). In recent years it has been questioned whether it is possible to maintain a dichotomy between rock carvings connected to graves and rock carvings which are found in open air, when it comes to the interpretation of the symbolic content (Bradley 1997; 1999; Goldhahn 2012, p. 223). On the rock carving panel Törnfall 107 near Västervik in the North-Eastern part of Småland, feet depictions found under a cairn seem to be part of the same composition as feet depictions found outside the cairn. The feet inside the cairn are shallow compared to the feet depictions outside, as if they were only pecked once. This difference has been interpreted as reflecting different stages of rituals which were going on before, during and after the burial. Unlike the motifs inside the cairn, which must have been made before the burial, the rock carvings outside the cairn, which were likely also made before the burial, were renewed by continu-

ous pecking by ongoing rituals, after the grave was closed and the cairn was built (Goldhahn *et al.* 2011; Goldhahn 2012, pp. 227 f.). New rock carvings stand white on the darker rock surface but vanish over time, but by renewing selected motifs they could be “switched on” again. Through the selection of which motifs to switch on and which not to, the motifs and thereby their symbolic content were revived and controlled (Wahlgren 2004, pp. 154 ff.). As stated above, the closed composition of the wheeled vehicle, the horse and the two ship motifs of the Villfara stone and their strict organization in relation to each other, indicate that these four figural motifs were the earliest rock carvings on the Villfara stone and that they were probably made on the same occasion. The continuous pecking and carving on the Villfara stone, however, indicate that selected motifs were switched on at rituals by the mound, as on the Törnfall site. This may also explain why new details were added to the uppermost ship motifs: the motif was modernized to follow changes in the religious beliefs or to add new elements to the stone's narrative.

The rock carvings of the Villfara stone, depicting the Sun's nightly travel and the deceased's incorporation in the Sun's eternal journey, may thus have been made to visualize and manifest the myths for the participants in the burial rituals and were probably made just before or during the actual burial. After the grave was closed the myths were possibly retold during continual celebrations of the glorious ancestor inside the mound. The figural motifs which are clearest today (the chariot and the two ships) were switched on at such occasions, possibly as substantiation of the depicted myths and the kinship with the buried Villfara man. The cup marks may also have been part of such post-burial rituals and added to the stone to manifest and commemorate the celebrations.



## Conclusion

In the foregoing, the Villfara mound and its content of the remains of a Late Neolithic-Bronze Age Period I grave and a grave from the Bronze Age Period II have been discussed. Emphasis has been placed on the stone with rock carvings which was part of the Period II grave. The stone includes several motifs which probably express the elaborate social position of the deceased man. The motifs may also be seen as a representation of a myth of the Sun's nightly travel, and possibly depict the deceased man's incorporation in the Sun's eternal, cyclic journey.

Narratives similar to the one depicted on the Villfara stone, including wheeled vehicles and ships, are, as mentioned, found on other Scandinavian rock carving sites dated to the Early Bronze Age. The present interpretation of the rock carvings suggests that a wheeled vehicle along with ships and horses was part of an Early Bronze Age sun myth, as one of several means of transport in the Sun's cyclical journey. Wheeled vehicles may also have played an important role in the period's beliefs about the afterlife. As wheeled vehicles do not occur as a motif on the bronze razors, their role in the Sun myth may have been taken over by the horse and the ship in the latter half of the Bronze Age. The fact that wheeled vehicles were depicted on Scandinavian rock carving sites throughout the Bronze Age and into the Pre-Roman Iron Age somewhat contradicts this, however (Johannsen 2010).

The myths of night and death proposed here were possibly the focal point of continuous rituals at the Villfara mound, in which the rock carvings played an active role. In contrast to how we most often understand rock carvings found in relation to graves, the Villfara stone was thus not a static object and thereby its function was similar to that of the larger open-site panels. The several other stones with rock carvings, which are found close to graves

throughout Southern Scandinavia, may thus also have been parts of rituals which took place before, during and after the burials.

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## Notes

- 1 Arne sees two left-turned horses (1917, p. 199), while Burenhult (1973, p. 66) and Skoglund (2009, p. 132) only see one. Unfortunately, the motifs have never been sufficiently documented, but in my opinion there is a second left-turned horse although it is difficult to see.
- 2 The stone with rock carvings which is related to the Villfara mound has been known jokingly among Swedish scholars as "Villfarelsestenen" (the delusion stone), mainly because of Sven Nilsson's interpretation of the stone as proof of the Phoenicians' presence in Scania (Goldhahn, pers. comm.).

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