

Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (rSOUV)

Rock Carvings in Tanum (Sweden)

(557 rev, 1994)

Brief Synthesis

The Rock Carvings in Tanum, located in the northern part of Bohuslän province in western Sweden (Västra Götaland County), are a unique artistic achievement for their rich and varied motifs (depictions of humans and animals, weapons, boats, and other symbols) and for the cultural and chronological unity they express. They reveal the life and beliefs of people living in the Nordic region of Bronze Age Europe, and are remarkable for their large numbers and outstanding quality. A cultural landscape with a continuity in settlement and consistency in land use that spans more than eight millennia, the area is rendered outstanding by its assemblage of Bronze Age rock art.

Northern Bohuslän is a land of granite bedrock, parts of which were scraped clean about 14,000 years ago as the Scandinavian Ice Sheet slowly moved northward, leaving gently curved rock faces exposed. These were the “canvases” selected by Bronze Age artists. There are at least 1,500 known rock carving sites in northern Bohuslän concentrated in certain areas, including the parish of Tanum. The carvings were executed by pecking and grinding the rock using stone hammers and points. The panels of rock art, skilfully created with simple tools, show a rich diversity of compositions of the highest quality, even when regarded simply as works of art or design. Compared to other similar contexts, these motifs and scenes are even more outstanding in their ability to convey reflections of life and cosmology during the Nordic Bronze Age (c. 1700 BC - 500 BC). It is obvious that the intention of these panels, which are often situated in commanding positions in the landscape, is to convey messages, thereby confirming their role as primary contemporary centres for worship and cult.

The Rock Carvings in Tanum represent a unique artistic achievement through their skilful and detailed depictions of animals, humans, ships, weapons, and symbols of the Bronze Age. These sometimes include lively scenes and complex compositions of elaborate motifs from travel, status, power, warfare, and cult. Some panels, or rather parts of them, were obviously planned in advance. Probably the most evident example of this is the panel at Fossum. In many cases, these motifs, techniques, and compositions create an exceptional testimony to the culture of the European Bronze Age.

Criterion (i): The rock carvings of the Tanum region constitute an outstanding example of Bronze Age art of the highest quality.

Criterion (iii): The range of motifs on the Tanum rock carvings provides exceptional evidence of many aspects of life in the European Bronze Age.

Criterion (iv): The continuity of settlement and the ongoing practice of agriculture, as illustrated by the Tanum region’s rock carvings, archaeological vestiges, and modern landscape features, combine to demonstrate a remarkable permanence during eight thousand years of human history.

Integrity

Within the boundaries of the 4,137.609 ha property are located all the elements necessary to express the Outstanding Universal Value of Rock Carvings in Tanum, including over 600 known rock carving sites, which is the highest density of such panels in northern Europe. The integrity and completeness of this area is illustrated in the centrally situated Tanum plain, where rock carving sites occur in zones in the plain’s western and north-eastern peripheries. The great majority of known settlements and prehistoric cemeteries are located at the northern and eastern edges of this

plain. The boundaries thus adequately ensure the complete representation of the features and processes that convey the property's significance. No buffer zone has been defined.

The property in general does not suffer from adverse effects of development and/or neglect. A significant proportion of the carvings are well preserved, although a few vulnerable sites are in the process of ongoing degradation. An upgrading of the E6 highway, which crosses parts of this property, was planned at the time of its inscription. Swedish authorities worked jointly with the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS and reached a satisfactory solution in 2009 to protect the attributes that sustain the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Eleven wind turbines located about 5 km northeast of the World Heritage property were approved according to Swedish legislation and completed in 2014. Studies indicate that the impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property is negligible. One wind farm approximately 10 km north of the World Heritage property is planned.

Authenticity

Rock Carvings in Tanum is entirely authentic in location and setting, forms and designs, materials and substances, and spirit and feeling, as substantiated by scientific studies of the carvings themselves and by comparative typological studies of dated Bronze Age art on other archaeological artefacts. The authenticity is expressed not only in the panels themselves, but also in the adjacent terrain, which may contain evidence of rituals and other practices connected to them. This authenticity has been maintained. The consistency in land use with its ongoing practice of agriculture makes it possible to understand the location of the panels close to the Bronze Age sea level. This also reinforces the authenticity of the property. In Tanum, as in the rest of Scandinavia, figures at selected rock carving sites have been repeatedly painted over the past five or six decades, since their granitic environment can make them difficult to distinguish. Today, only a few carefully selected exposed panels are painted with a non-destructive paint by trained specialists. Future structural changes in farming and agriculture may threaten the qualities of the open cultivated landscape.

Protection and management requirements

Rock Carvings in Tanum is designated as an Area of National Interest, and as such is protected under the Environmental Code (2010) and the Planning and Building Act (1987). A major part of this property includes about 1,000 individual monuments or groups of monuments that are protected under the Cultural Heritage Act (1998). All the rock carvings in the property are located on privately owned land except for part of those on Vitlycke Farm, which are owned by the Museum of Rock Carvings at Vitlycke. In 2012 the Management Council adopted a management plan that includes a vision and objectives for protecting and managing the property. The plan has a yearly revised plan of action focusing on organization, increased engagement of the local population, monitoring, sustainable tourism, and a full documentation of all panels (due to be finished in 2020). Three international research and development projects as well as comprehensive programs for recording damage have created vital basic knowledge for the implementation of future protection programs.

Sustaining the Outstanding Universal Value of the property over time will require ensuring the municipal master plan continues to address wind energy issues, including impeding wind turbines within the World Heritage property; continues to identify areas outside the property with respect to the cultural and natural values of the landscape as a whole; and continues to examine the question of how increased sustainable tourism may contribute to the economic development of the region. Important steps in the latter include the creation of a rest stop in conjunction with the new E6 highway, as a gateway to the World Heritage property and with information about the area, and an increase in the visitor capacity of Vitlycke Museum. The museum, including the re-creation of a Bronze Age farm, plays an important role in helping visitors to decipher the rock carvings and the landscape. Its capacity as a visitor and management centre will be strengthened in coming years.

The vulnerable sites in the process of ongoing degradation should continue to be closely monitored, and any degradation counteracted according to accepted international practices.