



Seminar

TOMASZ GRALAK

Johan Peter Falck Fellow, SCAS.
Assistant Professor of Archaeology, University of Wrocław

*Prehistoric Art:
Selected Questions*

Tuesday, 13 November, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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ABOUT TOMASZ GRALAK

After graduating in 1997, Tomasz Gralak received his doctorate from the University of Wrocław in 2003 as well as his habilitation in 2017. Since 1997 he has been working closely with the Rescue Excavations Team, part of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Wrocław section). He has participated in rescue research and conducted fieldwork at many archaeological sites in south-western Poland. As a result of this research, he has published a series of reports and articles. Since 2008 Tomasz Gralak has been Assistant Professor at the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Wrocław. He is interested in the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age and questions about prehistoric metrology, architecture and art. These issues are also the main topics of his lectures. Another subject of his works is the relationship between material culture and ideology. During his research he has completed internships and scholarships in Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia.

He has published the monographs *Influence from the Danubian Zone of the Barbaricum on the Territory of Poland in Late Antiquity, Archaeological Studies* (2012), and *Architecture, Style and Structure in the Early Iron Age in Central Europe* (2017), as well as over sixty scientific articles, such as 'Structure and Style: A Cultural Border in Central Poland in Period II of the Bronze Age' (2015, BAR International Series 2772) and 'The Reception of Late Antiquity Ideology by Barbarian Communities in Central Europe' (2014, Niš and Byzantium XII). At SCAS, Tomasz Gralak plans to work on his forthcoming book about artistic expression in Bronze Age Europe.

ABSTRACT

It is difficult to imagine a deliberate execution of anything without a prior plan (intention). That is why when describing archaeological artefacts one can ask not only how something looks, but also why it looks in a certain way. It seems that such an approach corresponds to pre-modern concepts of art; for Thomas Aquinas: „art is a proper knowledge of making things”. Thus, the manner of producing archaeological artefacts reflected the way their creators thought and perceived the world. The consequence of such an assumption is the opinion that material objects embody an idea – a myth.

For preliterate societies the ability to memorise is essential for the survival and preservation of culture. That is the reason why traditional oral texts were constructed and presented in a very specific way. Several characteristic features were identified: additivity - adding new elements without their ordering (time sequence, hierarchy of importance, etc.), redundancy - this technique consists of multiple repetitions and enables the more complete provision of the information in question. Redundancy is connected with another phenomenon described as ‚variations on a theme’. The repeated information is presented slightly differently each time. The question is if the structure of material objects made by illiterate societies is somehow similar. These issue will be analysed by studying the composition of metal artefacts and pottery from Bronze age in Central Europe. It seems that everyday items and ornaments were also constructed of repeating elements. Moreover it is possible to observe various variations. Thus in case of bronze artefacts, pottery and traditional oral texts general rules were the same. Another question is what kind of stories (myths) tells these objects.