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## **Sacred Natural Sites in the Arctic North**

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The subject matters of better preservation and thus, protection of sacred sites, is a topic that is brought into focus herein because of different factors that are increasing the risks to places as such. This is due to how mining, land development and expansion of the travel industry in northern Fennoscandia have multiplied the threats to areas where sites are located. As a consequence, there is an increase in the volume of fires, camping, rock-climbing and leisure activities, which are all contributing factors in their demise. The aims and purpose of the planned research is to firstly, expand on the nature of the threats encountered by the author as demonstrated through photographic evidence at locations in the municipalities of Muonio in western Lapland, Finland. The second aim, bring into focus the different recorded narratives that help with understanding the value and indeed uniqueness these sacred sites in both the Muonio and Inari areas.

Sacred sites connected with the Sámi have been used for long periods of time in northern Finland but we currently lack a comprehensive study concerning the long-term use by different actors. However, and more recently, offerings of various kinds have been found on stones connected with sacred sites. Some of these are by visitors to the areas, whilst others suggest use by local reindeer herders (Äikäs and Ahola 2020). Within the context of this research, the aims are to examine the roles and functions of sacred places in contemporary culture and why mounting threats because of inadequate protection, need to be taken seriously as do the problems associated with them. Moreover, because of how there have been moves to assimilate sacred sites into tourism and now the proposed opening of an iron ore mine in the area of Hannukainen, which will destroy large swaths of the national park and contaminate the Äikäs river.

A further dimension to sacred sites often not taken into consideration when planning for the development of land and expansion of the tourism industry is the value of different narratives associated with locations as such because rather than being comprehended as active locations still in use today, instead they are viewed as heritage sites, which suggests something of the past. For instance, at the Kirkkopahta sieidi in Muonio, as well as both the Pakkasáivo and Äkässäivo lakes, which are also located in the Muonio areas, there are documented oral narratives that originate from within the Sámi culture. These are approximately one hundred years old. In terms of the Porviniemi sieidi likewise, in the Muonio municipality, coins found on the stone suggest personal narratives associated with more recent usage (Äikäs 2015).

The term 'sáivo' is Sámi and is commonly found within Sámi cosmology, in connection with an underground realm where sáivo beings are said to have lived. It is they, according to Sámi mythology, who taught the Sámi noaidi-shamans the art of magic (Pulkinen 2005). Sáivo lakes are also commonly found in areas where the Sámi live in Norway and Sweden

and there are different sources written on this subject matter by eminent Sámi scholars (e.g., Louise Bäckman 1975 and Aage Solbakk 2018) concerning this magical realm in connection to both bodies of water and other locations where the *sáivo* world could be accessed, e.g., through caves beneath certain mountains. These beliefs also establish links between the different Sámi groups throughout the Nordic countries, as well as the smaller Sámi group living on the Kola Peninsula in north-west Russia.

Furthermore, and in connection to what is stated above, there are certain *sáivo* animals that are believed to have taught and empowered the Sámi shaman. A reindeer bull, fish, snake and bird can also be his assistants and protectors. These animals are, likewise, widely documented in Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish literature with regard to Sámi cosmology. The souls of bears and other animals that were hunted and sacrificed are said to be reborn in the *sáivo* world.

Equally, the old Sámi noaidi drums that have survived from the seventeenth century (approximately, seventy in total), are decorated with cosmological landscapes. These consist of between three- to five realms or zones and are representative of the worldview or cosmos depicted by the Sámi shamans. Within these different areas there are many features connected with the *sáivo* world. These vary from offering places, where the shaman who had a reciprocal relationship with the spirit beings in the *sáivo* world and would sacrifice certain species of animals for help and power, to particular animals and deceased shamans residing in the *sáivo* world. In addition, there are painted illustrations of shamans flying to the *sáivo* realm depicted on different drums. Therefore, we find on these drums a visible connection between the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Sámi people, which is very old. This is linked with beliefs and practices as well as taboos and customs that are still adhered to today because contemporary drum-makers also use this older symbolism as a way of preserving and forwarding cultural memory, identity-building and maintenance, as well as making offerings at sacred sites connected with the *sáivo* world.

Another area of scholarship that needs to be mentioned, insofar as it also connected sacred sites with the cosmological landscapes illustrated on Sámi drums, is prehistoric hunter-gatherer rock art, which is approximately seven thousand years old. A great deal of the sites that can be found throughout Fennoscandia are located by sources of water and consist of both rock carvings and paintings.

It has only been within the past fifty years that a few studies into possible links between Sámi shaman drum landscapes from the seventeenth century and prehistoric rock art have been brought into focus, because there are numerous parallels that have been recognized between these sources (Nunez 1995, Lahelma 2008 and 2012, and Joy 2018). Notably, in

Finland, human figures among prehistoric rock paintings, where they are depicted falling and flying close to the edge of lakes, are likewise portrayed on Sámi drums from Swedish Sápmi. In addition, animals such as birds and snakes are also evident among the rock paintings in Finland, as are reindeer and human figures who are shown dancing, indicating ritualistic scenes associated with shamanism and trance.

Because of research being only fairly recent, it is not presently known if the reasons why there are only a few illustrations among the rock paintings in Finland of human figures who are depicted as being engaged in flying-falling and dancing, as well as presence of animals such as snakes and birds that are in close proximity to them, could be because they are depicted above lakes, which may have been in the past, connected with the *sáivo* world and therefore, were known as *sáivo* lakes? It might be this is why as animals as such are quite rare by comparison to other larger animals such as moose and deer.

More studies are needed in relation to this, because the painted landscapes are linked with oral narratives connected with ritual behaviour pertaining to hunting. Furthermore, some of the rock paintings' locations in south-eastern Finland, such as Astuvansalmi and Valkeisaari, are locations where different types of offerings to the spiritual powers who dwell there have been found. Interestingly, Astuvansalmi offerings have been found under water.

A further intriguing dimension to this subject matter is that at the Äkässaivo sacred site in Muonio the location is characterized by a large anthropomorphic stone head, which has facial features, as are the Astuvansalmi and Valkeisaari rock painting sites. In the Sámi cosmology, it was believed that manifestations of a stone figure in the shape of a particular kind of animal or human-like form could be representative of one of the gods of the *sáivo* world and, thus, why offerings were made at these locations (Whitaker 1957). The fact sites that have similar correspondences in south-eastern Finland have rock paintings where they are located is also significant. This is because in some areas the Sámi and their genetic ancestors have had settlements during the Medieval period and, as hunter-gatherers in prehistoric times, they would have traveled extensively on seasonal hunting routes. Evidence of reindeer hunting pits is apparent in northern Karelia, close to the Hossa-Värikallio rock painting site, which is the third largest site in Finland.

Therefore, when it is taken into consideration how there are a series of interconnecting features between these different forms, it is possible to comprehend in what ways inter-species communication has taken place with regard to interactions between animals, humans and the spiritual powers within nature. Moreover, to destroy waterways connected to sacred sites because of mining, or damaging and causing harm to sacred boulders because of tourism, is to rob a country and its cultures of their rights to cultural heritage,

history and spiritual values.

Among some of the major challenges today is that rivers and lakes that are connected with sacred sites are not taken into consideration in terms of such values and inter-connectivity, especially in relation to decisions about mining by planners and developers, as is the case in the Hannukainen threat to the Äkäs river, which is, significantly, linked by name to Äkässaivo. Therefore, a much broader study is needed in relation to this.

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