

INGA-MARIA MULK & TIM BAYLISS-SMITH

Liminality, Rock Art and the Sami Sacred Landscape

ABSTRACT The paper suggests that cultural landscapes were permeated by religious meanings in all pre-modern societies, including Sami societies before c. AD 1600. We suggest that knowledge of this sacred landscape was not restricted to an elite or to shamans, but was widely shared. For the Sami, religious rituals and associated images (e.g. rock art) involved all levels within a social hierarchy that linked the individual adult or child, the family, the band or *sijdda*, and the association of family groups or *vuobme*. We can decode the sacred landscapes of such societies if we can reconstruct sites of perceived anomaly and liminality in the landscape. This is discussed in the article with reference to Proto-Uralic cosmology in general and the Sami world-view in particular. The concepts of anomaly and liminality enable us to interpret the Badjelánnda rock art site in Lapponia, northern Sweden, as not only a place of resource procurement (asbestos, soapstone) but also a sacred site. We suggest that the Badjelánnda site should be seen as a gateway to the Underworld, and therefore visits for quarrying, human burials at the site, or wild reindeer hunting in the vicinity were marked by ritual acts, directed perhaps towards the Sami female deity *Máttaráhkká*. The rock art should therefore be interpreted as an aspect of religious ritual, and in a context where anomalous topography signified that the Badjelánnda site was necessarily a liminal place.

KEYWORDS liminality, rock art, cultural landscape, sacred sites, Proto-Uralic cosmology, Sami religion, soapstone, *Máttaráhkká*, Badjelánnda, Lapponia

Introduction

How can the 'sacred' aspects of landscape be defined? To broaden the question, how can the division between 'sacred' and 'profane' be understood, and can these concepts help us to reconstruct the cultural landscapes of past societies? In this paper we approach these questions through the related concepts of 'anomaly' and 'liminality'. We shall argue that more rigorous definitions are needed if we are to adopt the more holistic view that archaeologists like Bradley (2000) and Insoll

(2004) have advocated. Our case-study is the Badjelánnda site in the Laponia World Heritage area in northern Sweden, where scratched images of anthropomorphs, boats and reindeer have been found. We have documented these images in a full-length research monograph, where we also propose a chronology and offer interpretations of both their iconic and symbolic meanings (Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2006). In this article we expand on our interpretation of the Badjelánnda site as a sacred place as signalled by its topographic anomaly and perceived liminality.

The Badjelánnda site consists of a small hill bounded by cliffs, and is located in the zone of alpine vegetation in the Scandes mountains about 700 metres above sea level. Today, Laponia is an area of summer grazing for reindeer as well as a popular tourist destination and a region of nature conservation. Formerly it was a place for hunting wild reindeer, for fishing, and, at the Badjelánnda site itself, for the quarrying of asbestos and soapstone (Fig. 1). The site exemplifies the problems of archaeological interpretation that occur in cases where, self-evidently, the use of a site seems to make sense purely in terms of an 'economic' rationale. We believe, however, that the Badjelánnda site was seen as a sacred place, and that during visits to the

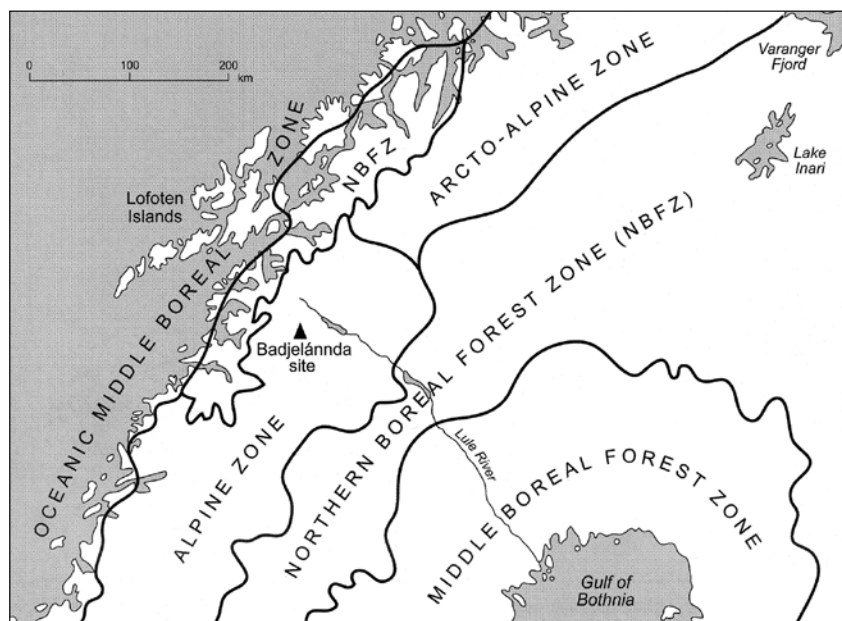


Fig. 1. Map showing location of the Badjelánnda site, and also boundaries of the major physiographic-vegetation zones (after Pålsson (ed.) 1984).

site the Sami carried out rituals in which the scratched images ('rock art') played some part.

For an understanding of 'the sacred', cultural landscapes have proved to be a useful integrating concept (e.g. Schanche 1995, Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 1998). Ethnographic studies have shown that a strong emphasis on the sacred as an aspect of landscape is justified, except perhaps in western/urban/industrial societies. Arguing from ethnographic evidence, Richard Bradley suggested

that many features of the landscape might have special powers. They could play their part in a mythical narrative and their significance might well be interpreted and reinterpreted from one generation to the next. Places that were left entirely unmodified might be among the most significant to those who visited them: rivers could assume special properties; the paths crossing the landscape recreated the movements of the ancestors; and entire areas of the country might take on a sacred character. [...] Such information could be lost to field archaeology, even though it plays a crucial role in defining land rights in the present. The everyday landscape that offers food and shelter for those who live there might also provide a means of interpreting the world. (Bradley 2000: 28-29.)

Yet most archaeologists come from western/urban/industrial cultures in which such ideas are foreign, and their religious beliefs, if any, do not match the 'sacred landscape' world-view. Particularly when wedded to a positivist or evolutionist methodology, such scholars may have difficulty in empathising with the religiosity of the world majority, past and present. In his book *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion* Timothy Insoll (2004: 22) estimates that today perhaps 80 per cent of the world's population live lives in which "religion provides the overarching framework for other aspects of life, at least as outwardly manifest." If, for most people today, technology, diet, refuse patterning, housing, gender relations and landscape perception are all influenced by religion, why should this not also be true of the past?

Insoll concludes that the expected norm for prehistory is for religion to permeate all aspects of life, providing for people the basic structure into which their secular concerns are fitted. Yet 'the sacred' and 'the secular' can often be hard to separate in a landscape. Using as an example the Bambara in West Africa, Insoll suggests that the interweaving of natural places with features created by human action and invested with spiritual meanings makes a rigid division between sacred and secular difficult to achieve. Making such a distinction is also complicated by variations in perception, with some groups having more access to knowledge of the sacred landscape than others, and some individuals having more interest in such things (Insoll 2004: 91).

By focusing on the concepts of anomaly and liminality, we aim to show how cultural landscapes like the Badjelánnda site can be decoded. We first need to understand these landscapes using the broader perspective, both social and religious, that is provided by research on other northern hunter-gatherer-fisher societies. To reconstruct this context we need to expand our view from Sami archaeology, in order to incorporate insights from the ethnography and cosmology of other Finno-Ugrian societies. There is evidence to suggest that Sami religion shared some features with Nordic religions in the Iron Age and Medieval periods. However, there seems little doubt that Sami cosmology originated in interactions with other Eurasian hunting societies in the post-glacial period. The present-day relict distribution of Finno-Ugrian languages and peoples extends from northern Scandinavia eastwards as far as Siberia, and this wider cultural context can provide some useful insights into the beliefs that structured Sami cultural landscapes.

The social organisation of sacred acts

In hunter-gatherer societies knowledge of the landscape and what it signifies is rather widely shared, at least among adults, because social difference and gender divisions are much less marked than in most agrarian societies. Much of the ritual that connected people to the spirit world was not restricted to a special elite, for example shamans, but was instead part of everyone's everyday activities. Peter Jordan (2001) has argued that in most discussions about north-Eurasian hunter-gatherer cultures, too much emphasis has been put on the role of the shaman:

Drawing on a case-study from the Siberian Khanty, I will argue that the actions of the shaman form but one, albeit celebrated, dimension to a much wider dialogue between human and spiritual domains. In this broader field of communicative contact the actions of creation, use and deposition of material culture form the essential media of communication. (Jordan 2001: 88.)

The Khanty are hunter-fishers who live in the Ob river region of western Siberia. They speak a Finno-Ugrian language that, like the Sami language, can be traced back to common Proto-Uralic roots. Jordan's model for the social organisation of sacred acts among the Khanty is shown in Fig. 2. Rather than acts of communication being restricted to an elite, everyone, even children, acknowledge the existence of the spirit world on a daily basis, for example by following routine taboos concerning the sacred groves and the deposition of bones and discarded clothes. Minor but rather frequent acts of sacrifice (Khanty *pory*) involve almost all the adult population. It is only the

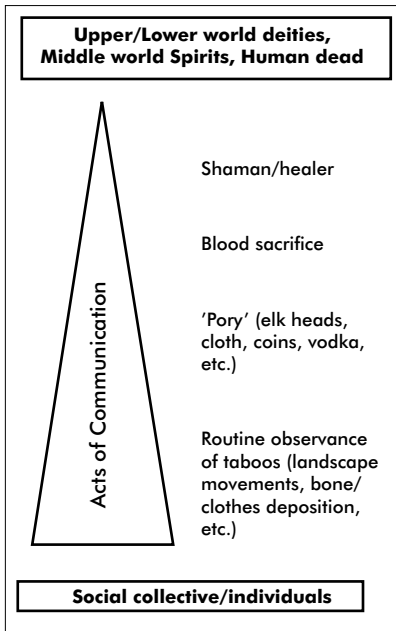


Fig. 2. Jordan's (2001) model showing the various acts of communication that link the Khanty human and spirit domains, and suggesting a restricted role for shamans by comparison with the more frequent and more widely distributed ritual acts of other groups in society.

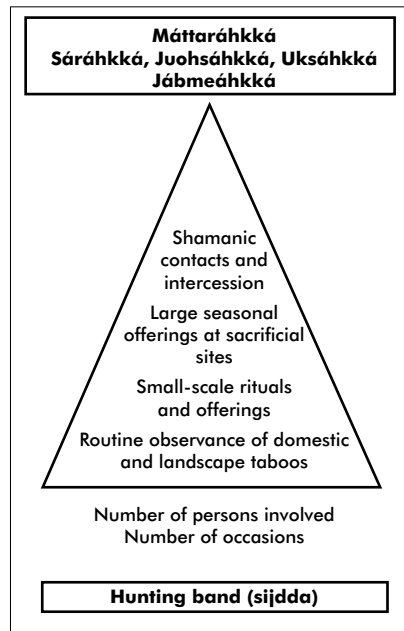


Fig. 3. A model for Sami hunting society (Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2006: 91) indicating the wide range of religious practices that linked members of the sijdda with Máttaráhkká and other primary deities, and suggesting that sacrifices, offerings and ritual observance were widely shared as well as widely dispersed in the sacred landscape.

larger-scale blood sacrifices occurring seasonally that might be restricted, for example to expert hunters. The occasional intercession of the shaman or healer, although spectacular, only involves a few people, and shamanising is confined to the dwelling place rather than leaving some material trace in the wider cultural landscape (Jordan 2001, 2003).

This model can readily be transposed to the Sami past, and it provides a useful structure for understanding the relations between the Sami and their prime female deity *Máttaráhkká*, for example (Fig. 3). At the family level *Máttaráhkká* and her three daughters were acknowledged by everyone in the routine observance of taboos, such as the division of space within the tent (Swedish *káta*) between male–north–blood and female–south–milk, and by making everyday token sacrifices of food and drink (Ränk 1955, Mancker 1957, Mulk 1994, 1996).

In this society the most individualistic acts of communication were those of the Sami shamans (Lule Sami *noajdde*) who were engaged in divination and acts of intercession with the deities by transporting their souls

to the Underworld while in a state of trance (Hultkrantz 1978, 1992, Bäckman 1975). There is no evidence from historical sources that the *noajdde* performed any wider social role (Laestadius 2002), and Hultkrantz (1978: 53) doubted that the person officiating at sacrifices was necessarily a *noajdde*, although sometimes he might have had this position.

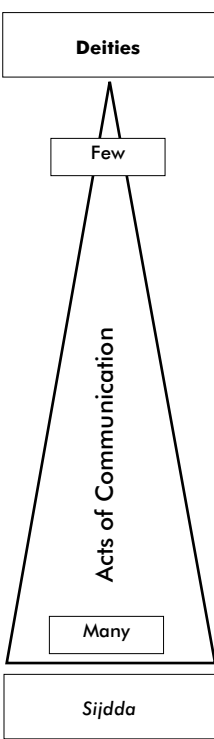
Instead, sacrifice in Sami society was an act carried out by adult men and women at the family level. Everyday offerings to *Máttaráhkkhá* and other female deities often took place inside the dwelling. Other deities were the focus for small-scale ritual offerings at shrines sometimes placed on small wooden platforms (Lule Sami *luovve*) and often situated on the north side of the settlement (Rheen [1671] 1897, Mulk 1994). Laestadius, writing in 1840, reviews the eighteenth century sources and concludes that “brushing the idol’s image with blood and fat was the practice in all sacrificial situations” (Laestadius 2002: 152). Funerals were also occasions for ritual at family level, the main participants being the close kin of the dead person (Pettersson 1957).

The organisation of space in and around the family dwelling reflected the concepts of sacred and profane that everyday rituals both reflected and reinforced. There was a gendered division of space within the dwelling (Sw. *kåta*) itself. Daily small-scale offerings to *Sáráhkká* (*Máttaráhkká*’s daughter) were made in the central hearth. The main south-facing doorway was for general use, but the northern door was restricted to men and was used only for bringing meat and fish into the dwelling. Outside on the northern fringes of the settlement were the places for animal slaughter, processing and meat storage. Located further away to the north were the holy places and shrines visited for more occasional offerings. Men, women and children moving through this landscape would at all times have been aware of sacred (‘liminal’) boundaries, gendered taboos, and the various signs of ritual observance (Mulk 1994: 203–217, Kleppe & Mulk 2006).

At a more aggregated level of activity than the family, task groups consisting of closely related families, or several men (for hunting), or several women (for fishing) would have worked together on a more occasional basis, or seasonally. The Sami equivalent of the Khanty blood sacrifices were the large-scale rituals involving adults from several families, such as women at the start of the salmon fishing season in summer (Terebikhin 1993), and groups cooperating for the wild reindeer hunting (Vorren 1978: 265f., 1980: 247f., Sammallahhti 1982). It would have been a task group that quarried stone at the Badjelánnda site, and as in these other cases, religious ritual would have been part of the activity.

Sami Hunting Society

In fact, for Sami hunting society in the interior of northern Sweden before c.1600 the situation was more complicated than the Khanty model suggests, because individuals related not just to their families and task groups within the local band (Lule Sami *sijdda*) but also to social institutions at a higher level in the overall structure (Fig. 4). In Mulk's (1994: 186-195) reconstruction of social organisation in the Lule river valley, there were four *sijdda* that made up an integrated regional network (*vuobme*) of about 1,000 people. Each *sijdda* consisted of a set of related families totalling 200-350 people and occupying a large territory of about 20,000 sq. km of boreal forests, foothills and mountains. Within this *sijdda* territory people moved seasonally, following the wild reindeer migrations and taking advantage of local and seasonal opportunities for fishing, hunting fur-bearing animals, and communicating with outsiders.



The diagram on the left illustrates a hierarchy of communication. At the top is a box labeled 'Deities'. Below it is a box labeled 'Few'. A large triangle connects 'Few' to a box labeled 'Many' at the bottom. The triangle is labeled 'Acts of Communication'. Below the 'Many' box is a box labeled 'Sijdda'.

	Means of Communication	Principal actors	Main occasions	Material remains
	Shamanic drum divination, sorcery and trance experience	Shamans (<i>noajdde</i>)	Times of crisis (infrequent, unpredictable)	Shamanic regalia, costumes, drums, etc.
	Blood sacrifices and offerings at special shrines	Hunters of large game (wild reindeer, elk)	Animal slaughter during seasonal migrations (especially autumn)	Offerings at sacrificial sites (meat, antlers, jewellery, coins) + ROCK ART
	Regular small-scale sacrificial offerings	Hunters of small game, fishers, collectors of natural resources All adults	Other occasions for hunting, fishing, quarrying, etc. Births, deaths and marriages	Token and ephemeral offerings, <i>siejdde</i> stones + ROCK ART
	Routine observance of restrictions and taboos	Everyone – men, women and children	Day-to-day actions and movements in the home and in the landscape	Almost no material trace

Fig. 4. The totality of act of communication with deities and spirits in Sami hunting society, showing frequency of ritual acts, size of the social unit involved, and number of places in the cultural landscape that were affected. This model proposes a role for rock art at the intermediate level of family or task group, within the overall social and ritual hierarchy.

At family, *sijdda* and *vuobme* levels these different activities would have required co-operation at different social and spatial scales, both for ritual acts and for economic activities. For example, membership of the *sijdda* brought with it the obligation to participate in collective hunting but also the right to share in the meat and skins gained by this activity. While prestige as a successful hunter might accrue to the individual, many of the rituals that accompanied the killing of animals were organised collectively, and were carried out at sites close to where the co-operative hunting or fishing activities were taking place.

In the above reconstruction of Sami hunting society co-operation and sharing are recurrent themes, but the giving and receiving of gifts was a principle not confined to the material world. Reciprocity was also a feature of the relations between people and the divine powers. To understand the social and ideological meaning of sacred sites, it is important to consider sacrificial offerings as a form of gift. It may be significant that the Sami word for 'sacrifice' and 'gift to the gods' is *vaerro*, a word that also means 'tax' (Fellman 1906, Solem 1933: 246f., Mebius 1968).

For the Sami the giving of gifts to the gods would have corresponded exactly to the giving which was part of their everyday life, as well as signalling exceptional happenings. Sacrifices to the deities must have occurred at various levels in society, taking place during the periodic gatherings of elders, being enacted by large or small groups during hunting and fishing trips, or occurring to mark special occasions in the life of a household. Such rituals must have happened at each level in society: (a) the regional network, *vuobme*; (b) the association of family groups, *sijdda*; (c) the family; and (d) the individual (Mulk 1994: 187f.).

Religious rituals were one of many collective activities that helped to maintain social networks and an egalitarian social structure (Mulk 1996). Interactions within the *sijdda* most probably integrated several functions at the same time. The council from the different *sijdda* communities met to resolve problems affecting the *vuobme* as a whole, while the people in general met in order to exchange goods, make marriage alliances, perform religious ceremonies, etc. The religious ceremonies were most probably carried out at special places whose location and significance was a form of knowledge shared by the entire society. Easy access was important, so the most important sites needed to be in close proximity to winter settlements, other base camps, transit camps, or hunting and fishing sites. The winter settlements were particularly important for ritual fellowship, and in addition they were the major centres for trade in goods from faraway places (Mulk 1994: 30f., 247f.).

At the largest normal scale of aggregation, the band of related families

sharing a *sijdda* territory would have organised a collective blood sacrifice on those few occasions when the whole *sijdda* was living or working together, probably at times of autumn reindeer hunting and midwinter residence at the base camp. The most celebrated sacrificial sites, for example Sájvva near Gällivare, were probably visited by people from different *sijdda*, or may have been used on the rare occasions when elders from *sijdda* within a regional network, *vuobme*, came together (Mulk 1994: 186f., 199).

Rock art and the Sami *sijdda*

We interpret the material evidence for anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery in the Sami cultural landscape as more likely to reflect intermediate levels in this hierarchy of sacred acts performed at different levels of social aggregation. Images at the Badjelánnda site, for example, should not be seen as reflecting the esoteric knowledge of *noajdde*. Instead, we believe the images were produced by persons who shared 'shamanistic' beliefs about the world but who were not themselves necessarily shamans. After reindeer hunting in the vicinity of the Badjelánnda site, or after visits there to quarry soapstone, or because of the wish to revisit a place where ancestors were buried, rituals and offerings were made for which the images on the rock played an important role. It could well be that *noajdde* as such played no part in this activity, except in his everyday role as hunter, quarryman or participant in sacrifices to the ancestors.

How did the use of this site relate to the social organisation of Sami hunting society? Archaeological reconstructions of prehistoric northern Fenno-Scandia have been based on models that predict a hierarchical structure of individuals, families, task groups, bands, and regional networks or aggregations, each level mobilising for different economic purposes (Forsberg 1985, 1993, Mulk 1988, 1991, 1994, Bergman 1995). The task group occupied a small 'extraction camp' located close to the resources that were being targeted. The camp would be occupied for one or two days before the group moved on. We believe this 'task group' is the type of group that would have visited a site like Badjelánnda. Although ritual is likely to have accompanied resource extraction, in Neolithic and Bronze Age extraction camps we do not usually find evidence for rock art or sacred offerings, although of course such evidence may not have survived (Fig. 5).

We find instead that in the Neolithic and Bronze Age rock art was likely to be associated with more important ritual practices, those that were restricted to either 'base camps' or 'aggregation camps'. Forsberg (1985, 1993) and Baudou (1993) have shown that the spectacular rock carvings at Nämforsen in central Norrland were made at an aggregation site, where mem-

Archaeological site categories	(A) Associated rock art in Neolithic and Bronze Age	(B) Social equivalents in the Sami Iron Age	(B) Sacred sites in Sami hunting society
BASE CAMP: centre of a resource utilization area used by the whole tribe	ROCK PAINTINGS (e.g. Jansjö, Boforslacken, Brattfors, Högberget, Fångsjön)	The SIJDDA'S WINTER SETTLEMENT	Siejdde stones and idols and local sacrificial sites, located in the boreal forest zone
FIELD CAMP: occupied by part of the tribe for shorter periods of time	[No evidence for rock art. Instead ritual may have focused on sacred natural places, stones and idols, and routine observances]	Smaller settlements for FAMILY GROUPS in spring, summer and autumn	Sacred stones (siejdde) and wooden idols (värromuorra) and local sacrificial sites located in foothills and mountains zones
EXTRACTION CAMP: occupied by a task group for a few days to extract a particular resource	[No evidence for rock art, sacred stones or idols. Instead perhaps ritual was focused on token sacrifices and routine observances]	TASK GROUPS from within the sijdda, engaged in hunting, fishing, etc.	Sacred sites associated with specialised hunting, fishing, collecting or quarrying places [e.g. Badjelánnda site]
AGGREGATION CAMP: large site where groups from different tribes met for short periods; located in areas rich in food resources and preferably near tribal borders	ROCK CARVINGS (e.g. Nämforsen)	Occasional (annual?) meetings of sijdda elders and other from within the vuobme	Regional sacrificial sites (Sájjva-, basse-) e.g. Skierffe, Bas-seuksa
Sources, notes: Forsberg (1985), Mulk (1988, 1991, 1994: 248), Bergman (1995) English terminology follows Ramqvist (2002: 155)	Source for link between sites and rock art/paintings: Ramqvist (2002). Other suggestions [in square brackets] are by Mulk & Bayliss-Smith (2006)	Source: Mulk (1994, 1996)	Sources: Rydving (1993), Mulk (1994, 1996). Source for the Badjelánnda suggestions [square brackets] Mulk & Bayliss-Smith (2006)

Fig. 5. The organisation of space in Norrland, showing the sacred sites and types of rock art associated with different levels of social organisation and settlement: (A) in the Neolithic/Bronze Age; and (B) in Sami hunting society of the Iron Age–Medieval period.

bers of different groups met in summer during the salmon run. Ramqvist (2002) has suggested that inland from Nämforsen we can find the winter base camps of smaller tribal units, and here there is evidence for sacred sites where rock paintings were produced on vertical cliffs and other outcrops, usually close to water. At the 'field camps' that were only occupied for shorter periods during seasonal migrations, rock art is absent and instead ritual must have been done in other ways, leaving no archaeological trace.

When we move forward from the Bronze Age period of rock engravings and rock paintings into the Sami Iron Age, we can identify the same hierarchy of social groups and settlement sites, but with different mobility patterns (Mulk 1988, 1994:188f, 1996, 2005). However, at the main sacred sites the evidence now consists not only of rock art, but also sacrificial sites with *siejdde*-stones and *värromuorra* (see Fig. 5). Lack of evidence or loss of evidence may underlie this apparent change between Bronze Age and Sami Iron Age in the way that the landscape was used for religious acts. However, we believe we can see clearly a continuity in the nested hierarchy of social groups that had a ritualised engagement with the landscape and its resources, even if the forms of ritual have changed.

Phase 1 of the images scratched at the Badjelánnda site pre-date the Viking Age and may relate to the period of asbestos quarrying at the site during the Asbestos Ceramic period in the Bronze Age, or even before. It was the availability of smooth soapstone surfaces that made it possible for groups visiting the site to leave behind evidence of its status as a sacred place and threshold to the Underworld. Use of the site could be commemorated not only through ritual and perhaps sacrifices but also through rock art. In this way groups visiting the site were able to reinforce their collective memory and so create a form of 'monument' (Rowlands 1993), a process that perhaps could be accomplished at other extraction camps in other ways.

What kind of commemoration did the various images achieve? As we have argued elsewhere (Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2001, 2006: 53-63), it is not possible to specify with certainty the identity of the Phase 1 anthropomorphs, although Máttaráhkká is a possibility. We find it hard to 'read' these symbols today because as icons we find them ambiguous, but as 'cosmic symbols' their contemporary identity was no doubt absolutely clear.

The Phase 2 images are more varied, and we can speak with some certainty about the boats. The images have been drawn with much iconic detail (masts, sails, side-rudders, anchor) that suggests they depict the maritime technology of the period c. AD 800-1350. They may have had, in part, a narrative function, reflecting the new 'historical' rather than 'cosmic' world-view that began to prevail as a response to growing contacts between the Sami and the outside world in the Viking Age. Nevertheless we believe that the

choice of boat motif reflects the symbolic meaning that underlies these iconic images. In the Early Medieval period right up until Early Modern times boats were used by the Sami as potent metaphors for suggesting the transport of souls to and from the Underworld (Bayliss-Smith & Mulk 1998, 1999, Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2006: 65–88). The symbols displayed at the site might have changed in Phase 2, but there is an underlying continuity of deeper meanings.

Badjelánnda's place in Sami sacred geography

Despite this weight of circumstantial evidence, we still must face the fact that the 'hard' evidence for Badjelánnda being a sacred site is slight and rather intangible. It is only when we consider its place in the overall cosmology or world-view of Sami hunting society before c. 1600 that its status as a place of special significance, probably a holy mountain and sacrificial site (*bassevárre*) and sacrificial site, becomes more secure. To substantiate this claim, we must reconstruct the main features of the 'sacred geography' of the Sami. An equivalent 'map' of Proto-Uralic cosmology has been constructed by the Russian scholar Vladimir Napol'skikh (1992) using a wide range of ethnographic and historical sources (Fig. 6).

Proto-Uralic is the term given to the original language and culture of the people speaking the Finno-Permian group of languages, which includes Sami, Finnish, Karelian and Estonian, and also the Ugric language group,

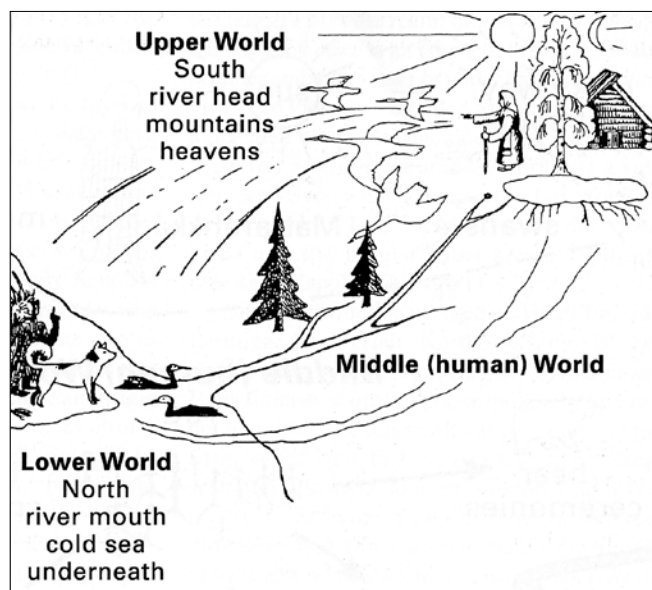


Fig. 6. The Proto-Uralic world-view according to Napol'skikh (1992).

which includes Hungarian and Khanty. Together the two groups form the Finno-Ugrian language family. Scholars have long recognised that the various peoples who speak these languages share various cultural traits, and it was generally assumed that these common traits reflected a common origin in a reconstructed language known as Proto-Uralic that existed around the fifth millennium B.C. (Uibopuu 1988: 39). In fact Proto-Uralic is more likely to have been a group of mutually intelligible languages whose integrity was maintained by interaction based on similar traditions, trade and kinship connections, leading to borrowing (Wiik 2000).

A key feature of the Proto-Uralic world-view is the division of the world into three realms:

- The Upper World = South = river headwaters = mountains = heavens;
- The Middle (Human) World, in which the World River runs, connecting upper and lower worlds, and in which fir trees connect the earth with the heavens;
- The Lower World = North = river mouth = cold sea = underneath.

The deity who rules the Upper World is described as the Old Woman of the South, mistress of life, protector of birth and motherhood, sender of souls, mother of gods, and mistress of migratory water-birds. The sun, the moon and the Milky Way are other key features of the upper world. Migratory water-fowl such as swans, ducks and geese serve as messengers to the celestial realm; they also symbolize human and animal souls, and they bring the new year in spring. The Lower World begins where the World River flows into the icy seas of the north, and is the realm of evil and the land of the dead. It contains an Island of the Dead, which is either under the water or under the earth. Diving birds like loons are regarded as bad spirits or are associated with shamans. Souls can return from the lower world to the middle world via a subterranean river, which emerges in a Lake (or Sea) of the Water of Life, which is where the water-birds and the human souls are revived and renewed (Napolskikh 1992: 11-12).

This reconstruction is based on Volga-Finnish, Permian, Ob-Ugrian, Northern Samoyed and Selkup data, with some input from Sami and Balti-Finnish sources. Not surprisingly, we cannot identify all of this mythical geography in the Sami world-view that we can reconstruct from scattered historical sources, folklore and a few myths. In Fennoscandia rivers flow in directions that often do not match the simple north/south = cold/warm = Lower/Upper World dichotomies that we find in the Finno-Ugrian cultures in Russia. The Lule river, for example, originates in the (cold, northern)

mountains in the Badjelánnda region and flows southeast to the (warm, southern) Gulf of Bothnia. Instead, according to the *Mjandasj* myth, it is the River of Blood that separates the Middle World from the supernatural world, and indeed the Upper and Lower Worlds often seem to be conflated.

Nonetheless there are many similarities. The Old Woman of the South of the Proto-Uralic cosmology has a direct parallel in *Máttaráhkká* of the Sami but *Jábmeáhkká* who guards the Underworld is not a separate deity but rather a different aspect of *Máttaráhkká* herself.

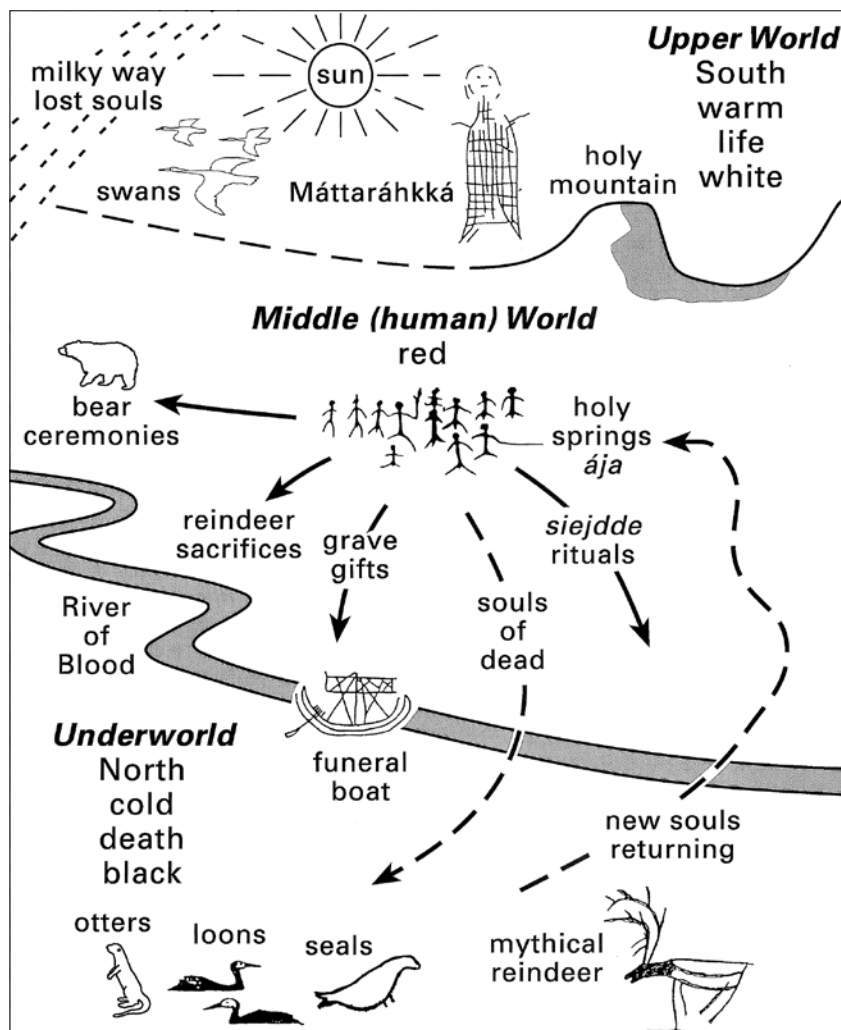


Fig. 7. Our reconstruction of the ancient Sami world-view, based on various sources (Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2006: 96). In this diagram the images representing *Máttaráhkká* and the funeral boat are copied from two figures depicted at the Badjelánnda site (D18 and D13 respectively).

We attempt to depict the main features of this Sami cosmology in Fig. 7. Like the Napolskikh model, this 'map' of Sami sacred geography should be regarded as a generalized and abstract picture rather than something that existed in complete and concrete form in the minds of every individual. Myths show that in Sami cosmology it was the River of Blood that separated the Middle World from the Underworld. The free-souls of the dead needed to cross this river, while new souls returning emerged in the Middle World from holy springs (*ája*). Boats symbolized the transport of souls to the Underworld, which was also the domain of mythical reindeer like *Mjandasj*. The mother Earth figure *Máttaráhkka* and her daughters belonged to the Upper World but pervaded all worlds. Their domain was accessible via holy mountains, and their presence was acknowledged by the Sami in everyday rituals and taboos. This world view, or some version of it, must have structured people's everyday behaviour in a range of contexts, by defining what aspects of life and landscape were regarded as normal and what aspects were regarded as special or 'sacred'.

Defining the boundaries of the sacred

What do we mean when we claim that the Badjelánnda site was a 'sacred' place for the Sami who visited it in the past? The English word 'sacred' is derived from the Latin verb *sancire*, 'to separate', 'to set bounds to' or 'to sanctify', but we can find an equivalent word in almost all languages: "its root universally denotes 'to cut', 'to set apart', 'to mark off'" (Anttonen 2000: 1). What times or places, what artefacts or what people are regarded as 'sacred', and which ones are thought to be impure, dangerous or polluted? These are actually questions about the agreed boundaries between categories. All such boundaries are cultural constructs that are maintained by norms, taboos and rules of avoidance, which serve to protect a social consensus by making behaviour toward the sacred morally binding (Douglas 1966).

For the Sami, the cultural categories that underlay their notions of what was 'sacred' were often subject to challenge from the alternative world-views of several of the groups with which they interacted. Louise Bäckman (2005) focuses on challenges to the authority and world-view of the *noajdde*, and she divides the history of contact into four different periods:

- *The pre-Viking period, before the 9th century AD.* Despite the transfer to the Sami language of some loan-words of Germanic origin, it is difficult to see Sami religion at this time as being significantly affected by Germanic society, and the *noajdde* retained his authority as sole arbiter of the sacred.
- *The Viking period, approximately 800–1000 AD,* saw intensified contact between Norse and Sami. While the Scandinavians showed great

respect for Sami 'sorcery', at the same time the Sami adopted some designations of Nordic origin for their gods.

- *The Roman Catholic mission* to the north began about 1200, when churches were first established in north Norway, serving as new sacred places to rival the old sites, and Catholic priests and monks set out to contact the Sami people. (This process began somewhat later along the coastline of the Gulf of Bothnia.) New concepts were incorporated into Sami belief, and "the *noaidi* was no longer the only one who was able to give answers to the fundamental questions of life and death" (Bäckman 2005: 37).
- *The Lutheran Mission* began in the first half of the 16th century under state sponsorship; in northern Sweden new churches were built inland at traditional Sami meeting places. By about 1700 "the *noaidi* was outmanoeuvred as the one responsible for the well-being of Saami society" (Bäckman 2005: 37).

We have proposed that the Phase 1 images at Badjelánnda are standardised symbols of the supernatural, with anthropomorphs representing deities, and we associate them with the pre-Viking period of Bäckman's scheme. These symbols reflect the unmodified 'cosmic' world-view of the Iron Age Sami. The more varied images of Phase 2, while still permeated by the symbolic meanings of Sami cosmology, nevertheless begin to reflect Sami–Nordic interaction in the Viking or early Roman Catholic period. We see at this time a more 'historical' style of depiction, as shown particularly in the detailed pictures of sailing boats and reindeer.

By Phase 3 the site's sacred character was in dispute, following the intense confrontations with the Lutheran mission and the Swedish state that challenged the validity of Sami beliefs. The shamanic cosmos no longer defined the boundaries of the sacred. After 1700 many of the Sami sacrificial sites were desecrated by priests, and they gradually fell out of use. Increasingly the Badjelánnda site was becoming merely a place of resource procurement, with a few graffiti to commemorate visits to the site.

Liminal times, places and persons

The two related concepts of *anomaly* and *liminality* are useful ways of defining what is 'sacred' in any culture. If we can establish what was regarded in the Sami world-view as *anomalous* and *liminal*, then we can specify why certain times and certain places needed to be marked by religious ritual, and why such events were sometimes memorialised by images. We argue that it was in the context of ritual that the making of images took place, and we

suggest that the Badjelánnda site provides us with a rare opportunity to gain insights into this process.

Ideas about *liminality* were first developed in social anthropology by Arnold van Gennep (1909), in his analysis of the meaning of rites of passage such as birth, coming-of-age, marriage and death. Van Gennep argued that before a person could be regarded as having made the transition from one state to another, three steps had to be taken. First was 'separation' of the person, second was his or her 'transition', and third was his or her 'incorporation' into a new state of being. The second stage Van Gennep termed the 'liminal phase', after the Latin word *limen* meaning 'threshold', 'gateway'.

Victor Turner (1967, 1969) greatly extended the notion of liminality through his work on the rituals that accompanied rites of passage in African tribal societies. His focus on liminal persons, those who have entered into the state of liminality, generated many insights:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualise social and cultural transitions. (Turner 1969: 95.)

He shows that the symbols employed to represent liminality often relate to death, dissolution, decomposition, and foetal loss, or to their opposite states – gestation, birth, suckling, etc. (Turner 1967: 96). In tribal societies the liminal state and its associated ritual is something that everyone experiences at points of transition in their lives, but on a temporary basis.

Liminality is also attributed to ritual specialists such as shamans, and to persons who are expert in negotiating boundaries. Smelting iron or making jewellery involved controlling a material and symbolic transformation, and included the production of objects that mediated between mankind and the supernatural world (Hedeager 1999, 2001: 484). Terje Gansum (2004: 52) has noted how, in Iron Age Europe, the smith acquired "an odd and liminal role compared to other craftsmen". In more hierarchical societies liminality becomes institutionalised in the roles played by monks, priests, healers, tricksters and others (Turner 1969: 107).

Turner discusses liminal people, and he identifies certain occasions as being necessarily liminal (rites of passage, for example), but he pays less attention to liminal spaces. He does, however, note that "liminality is regarded as a time *and place* of withdrawal from normal modes of social action" (Turner 1969: 167, emphasis added). As an example he cites the initiation rites of North American Indians, which involved going alone into the wilderness to fast and to pray: "this solitude is liminal between boyhood and manhood"

(Turner 1967: 100). Seclusion of the liminal group of boys (*neophytes*) in an isolated place such as the forest is also common at some stage in their initiation. As Jane Harrison first pointed out for Ancient Greece, it is in the liminal state that sacred mysteries (*sacra*) are communicated to neophytes, as (1) exhibitions, 'what is shown', (2) actions, 'what is done', and (3) instructions, 'what is said' (Harrison 1903: 144–160).

Turner suggests that the messages conveyed to novices are predominantly through non-verbal, symbolic forms of communication, for example pictures representing the journeys of the dead or the adventures of supernatural beings (Turner 1967: 102). Other symbolic means include:

masks, arrays of sacred objects, body painting, rock painting, and so on, often accompanied by the telling of recondite origin-myths or other type of gnomic utterances, secret languages, and songs [presenting] the basic assumptions of their culture. [...] This liminal phase in tribal societies [...] constitutes, quite typically, a cultural domain that is extremely rich in cosmological meaning, though often misleadingly simple in outward form. The symbol vehicles may be unimpressive, but the messages they convey are highly complex. (Turner 1974: 196.)

In this way, perhaps, simple images of Sami deities or sailing boats could have been the starting point for long stories about the creation of new life or about the transport of souls across the river that separates this world from the Underworld.

In more recent writings the term 'liminal place' has become more prominent (Trubshaw 1995). Victor Turner himself examined pilgrimage, an institution that developed from the localised liminality of tribal initiation rites to become mass journeys to distant sacred places, involving for participants long periods of absence. Pilgrimage is seen by Turner as a kind of 'anti-structure' that "breeds new types of secular liminality," such as the fairs and fiestas that surrounded sacred shrines in medieval Europe (Turner 1974: 182). In various ways the pilgrimage constitutes a liminal experience for participants, and the destination is invariably perceived as a liminal place. In the case of Mecca, Jerusalem or Rome it is seen as the sacred centre. In the case of Compostela it is a peripheral place at the western limits of the known world but also the burial place of the apostle James, providing for pilgrims a direct connection (*limen* 'threshold') to Jesus Christ. Several Indian pilgrimage shrines are liminal in the sense of being located in the borderland between different language groups. The two holiest destinations for Hindu pilgrimage are at the extreme margin, being located on the far side of the Himalayas in western Tibet (Turner 1974, Turner & Turner 1978).

Liminality and rock art

One of the first archaeologists to apply Turner's ideas of liminality to rock art in a systematic way was Christopher Tilley (1991: 140f.), in his book on the Nämforsen rock art site in central Norrland. Tilley suggests that the elks, boats and other images at Nämforsen are a kind of 'text', organised according to a male-female oppositional logic. Different motifs were associated with different clans and moieties, and they were combined to form visual narratives. These images were produced at a place that was seen as liminal, and on ritual occasions when liminality was celebrated. In an argument that parallels Turner's 'anti-structure' through pilgrimage, Tilley regards the happenings at Nämforsen as a hunter-gatherer version of Foucault's 'heterotopia'. It was a magical place associated with life-crisis rituals and religious ceremonies, far removed from everyday existence (Tilley 1991: 137).

In Tilley's view, Nämforsen's liminality is demonstrated by the position of the rock carving sites next to the Ångerman river. Most of the images are found on small islands where the river ran through rapids and plunged down to the sea. This location matches well the ideas contained in shamanic myths of the Evenki people of Siberia, who see the entrance to the Underworld as connected to islands and whirlpools (Tilley 1991: 134). Sites like those on the Ångerman river would therefore have been perceived as essentially liminal, and highly appropriate places for rites-of-passage ceremonies:

It seems very likely that the carved islands in the rivers and the carvings on the northern river banks at Nämforsen would have been used in initiation ceremonies for novices – places of liminal seclusion where vital ritual information was conveyed through instruction and inspection of the cosmologies and mythic stories inscribed on the carved rock surfaces, no doubt involving the ancestors (mythic double-headed elks, elk-humans?, etc.). (Tilley 1991:169–170.)

This interpretation is not entirely imaginary. The archaeological evidence shows that Nämforsen was indeed an 'aggregation camp' where different groups came together in summer to fish for salmon and for social interaction (Forsberg 1985, 2000, Baudou 1993, Ramqvist 2002). In other respects Tilley's account contains too many assumptions and assertions that cannot be substantiated. For example, he assumes that the images were almost contemporary, whereas Forsberg (1993) has shown that different motifs belong to different periods. Tilley's use of ethnographic analogy seems tenuous, and it is particularly mysterious that he uses the Evenki from Siberia rather than the cosmology of the Sami whose ancestors occupied the Nämforsen area. Nevertheless his application to rock art of Turner's (1969) ideas, espe-

cially the idea that myths, rituals and liminality are inter-connected, signals the route towards a more holistic understanding.

Tilley's approach to liminality has stimulated some productive research in both northern and southern Scandinavia. In south-west Sweden Richard Bradley (1997) has examined rock art from Bohuslän, interpreting it in the context of the Bronze Age landscape of islands on which were placed burial cairns, and further inland some former islands turned into low hills by a rapid fall in sea level. On many of the hills there is rock art, with numerous images of boats in the zone surrounding these former islands. Nordbladh (1980) had already suggested that the carved rocks define the outer edges of the domestic landscape and separate it from the places of the dead on higher ground. Bradley suggests that the boats are intended to convey the idea of water itself, so "the effect of these drawings was to convert the higher ground into another set of islands, where the dead might be commemorated" (Bradley 1997: 322). Life-size footprints traverse this boat-dominated zone of symbolic water. These footprints, Bradley suggests, mark the pathways of the dead and connect the land of the living to the domain of the ancestors. The rock art was created or used in the context of funerary ritual, and the liminal zone between the living and the dead was the appropriate place for these rituals to be undertaken (Bradley 1997: 322).

In Finnmark, north Norway, Knut Helskog (1999) identifies the actual shoreline as the liminal zone in his interpretation of the rock art of Alta fjord. From a comparison of Alta, Nämforsen and Besoki Sledki in Karelia, he suggests that "the carvings represent liminal places where spirits and people met to maintain and reinforce relationships" (Helskog 2004: 282). Ethnographic analogies from a range of north Eurasian cultures including the Sami support the notion that water, lakes and rivers are elements that facilitate communication with other dimensions. The place where air, land and water meet is therefore an appropriate place for rituals that connect people with the spirit world:

Turner (1969) discusses spatial oppositions, mostly in natural landscapes, when discussing connections between rituals and symbols. [...] Liminality might [...] be associated with places of unique spatial attributes, such as the shore, where the metaphysical and cosmological worlds have a possible counterpart in nature [...]. (Helskog 1999: 79–80.)

Oppositions expressed in the rituals might, he suggests, have a symbolic counterpart in the rock-art motifs. Perhaps in the images sky–land–water is represented in oppositions between land and sea animals, birds and fish, or dancers and hunters, etc. Helskog admits that the problem with Alta is that there are so many images, and sometimes it is uncertain what they show (iconic meanings) or represent (symbolic meanings). The vast range of

possible interpretations means that there could be an almost infinite number of symbolic oppositions (Helskog 1999: 80).

Sacred boundaries in the Finnish landscape

Independently from Tilley, Helskog and Bradley, the concept of liminal space has also been explored by Veikko Anttonen (1992), using ancient Finnish cultural landscapes as material for a case study. Building on the concepts of Mary Douglas and Victor Turner, Anttonen examines the boundaries of the sacred (Finnish *pyhä*) and the changing meaning of cult sites (Finnish *hiisi*). He argues that all societies make the invisible boundaries of everyday life visible by acts of separation and prohibition. The selection of markers of the sacred is based on the perception of *anomaly* and *liminality*. Elements that signal *anomaly* (plants, animals, persons, objects, events) are those that are regarded as exceptional within a cultural system. The detailed and somewhat bizarre list of 'anomalies' specified for the Israelites in the Book of Leviticus, especially the numerous food taboos, is a well-known example (Douglas 1966: 42-58). Anttonen's concept of *liminality* derives from Turner, and emphasises points of transition or transformation. When applied to boundary markers in the cultural categories of pre-Christian Finns, the two concepts, anomaly and liminality, have a considerable overlap

In Finland the connotations of *hiisi* (sacred place) were transformed by Christianity. Christian burials were confined to churchyards and social life became focused on the farm or village. The sacred places known as *hiisi* were changed, from 'place for the dead who are favourable to the living', to 'a symbol of a world [outside the village] that is hostile to humans' and the home of evil giants, devils or hell. Yet the word *hiisi* was originally attached to place-names for sites that were topographically exceptional:

Topographical anomaly and liminality cover such exceptional points of terrain as stone and boulder fields, rocks, and trees with special forms. They have symbolic value as indicators of meaningful border lines [...]. In addition, topographical anomaly explains why springs and other openings, holes and cracks in the ground, have belonged to the prehistorical conceptual sphere of the sacred [...]. A mountain, a hillock or a flat treeless hilltop is attached a special meaning as swollen, grown land; its power and substance is stronger than that of a territory which does not contain any fixing points for a boundary that separates. (Anttonen 1992: 37.)

Even today more than one hundred *hiisi* place-names can be found in Finland, and there are also many in Estonia. It was these anomalous places that were chosen for burial of the dead.

According to this view sacred space is the category of 'that which is beyond the borderline' or *limen*, and that borderline is defined by things in the landscape that are perceived as being anomalous. Liminal spaces are impossible to possess or fully control because they are sources of supernatural energy. They are places "in which humans and other entities in perceived reality are regarded as having originated (grown) and where they return in various processes of life (birth, dying, decomposing, decaying, burning, etc.)" (Anttonen 1992: 36).

Therefore, to discover why particular places (*hiisi*) were selected for burials in pre-Christian Finland we need to understand the indigenous concepts of 'sacred' (*pyhä*). To make something sacred and mark it off as a separate place (or time, or person) from a profane one "requires a perception of boundary and difference", so that we can divide off the exceptional from those phenomena that belong in the sphere of everyday life (Anttonen 1992: 37).

Archaeological evidence for liminality

Independently the same logic has been applied by Antti Lahelma (2005) in his analysis of Finnish rock paintings. Lahelma points out that no ethnography or oral tradition from Fenno-Scandinavia can definitely connect rock art to sacred sites, but the nature of rock art sites provides us with strong clues about their original meaning. In Finland the rock paintings are generally located in places that are obvious topographic landmarks along rivers or lakes, very often "impressive light-coloured rocky cliffs rising on lakeshores," or large boulders by the water side, sometimes close to rapids. These places, like Sami *siejdde*-stones, waterfalls and holy mountains, are "breaks in the homogeneity of space" – in other words, they are topographically anomalous in the terms used by Anttonen (1992). These places also suggest liminality. Cliffs rising from lakeshores could readily be constructed as transitional points between the lower world (water) and the upper world (sky), as represented in the three-tiered cosmos of the Sami *noajdde*'s drum (Lahelma 2005: 38–40). Therefore we can understand better the meanings that underlie Finnish rock art by recognising the anomalous and liminal status of the actual rocks upon which they are painted.

Another example from Finland is provided by *lapinraunio* or 'Lapp cairns', large circular stone cairns that sometimes contain graves and/or offerings. Many are located along the boundary between the coastal zone and interior of central Finland, and they are usually built on bedrock foundations on dry slopes close to water, or on hill tops, or on small islands in lakes. Those that have been dated were built in the late Bronze Age or the pre-Roman Iron Age (Taavitsainen 2003).

Taavitsainen suggests that the concept of *pyhä* can help in the interpretation of this cultural landscape. This word was used as an adjective to describe boundaries of social significance. Very often the sites of *lapinraunio* have place-names that include the words *pyhä* (sacred), *hiisi* (sacred place) or *lappi*. The word *lappi* is a reference to hunter-gatherers, probably Sami, who occupied the interior, while the coastal zone was the domain of a Proto-Germanic speaking population in the period 1500-900 BC. It was probably the Sami who constructed these cairns, which were positioned along the boundary between the agricultural zone along the coast and the forests of the inland (Taavitsainen 2003: 34). Whether the *lapinraunio* are territorial markers or sacred sites, their place-names remind us of their original role in demarcating liminal space.

Badjelánnda as a liminal place

These various examples demonstrate that identifying difference (anomaly) and boundary (liminality) is the main challenge when researching cultural landscapes of the past, especially where religion is centred on natural features rather than monuments. Anomaly and liminality can suggest, for example, that a burial mound or rock art site belonged to the sacred rather than the profane sphere of life.

For the Badjelánnda site there are numerous signs (*indices*) that would have been interpreted by the Sami as indicating its anomalous and liminal position in relation to the Sami cosmology or world-view (Mulk 1997, 2004, Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2006). Today these signs can provide for us a range of field evidence, as summarised in Fig. 8. Anomaly would have been signalled by the shape of the landform itself, and by the valuable soapstone and asbestos that was found there. As a special landmark it could be constructed as a holy mountain and an appropriate place for sacrificial ritual. The need for reciprocal gifts to the deities would also have been signalled by the useful resources that could be quarried there.

If graves were still visible at the site, or if their presence was signalled by stones or wooden idols, this would have indicated the site's liminal status as the home of ancestor spirits. Liminality was also signalled by the vertical south-facing rock faces that provided a direct gateway to the Underworld, always perceived as being in the north. The black colour of the rock and its almost transparent smoothness also suggested that this was a threshold to the Underworld, while the water that seeped out of cracks in the rock signalled that this was a holy spring, the source of new souls returning to the Middle World in which people live.

All these signs would have affected people's behaviour at times when

Type of evidence	Perception of the evidence	Interpretation of the evidence
Evidence of LIMINALITY in the landscape	South-facing cliff	A threshold to the Under-world
	Smooth rock surface, black in colour	Boundary between this world and the Underworld
	Water seeping from the rock	A holy spring, the source of new souls
	The graves of certain ancestors	An underground home of the spirits, in need of sacrifices
Evidence of ANOMALY in the landscape	Unusual topography, vertical cliffs, etc.	A sacred mountain
	Rocks containing valuable resources (soapstone, asbestos)	A gift of nature, requiring reciprocal offerings
Images (ICONS) suggesting both ANOMALY and LIMINALITY	Anthropomorphs	Máttaráhká, Earth Mother
	Sailing boats, reindeer	Transport of the soul
LIMINAL life cycle events	A death within the sijdda, task group or family	A soul in transition
LIMINALITY in people's relations to animals	Hunting and killing wild reindeer in the autumn	A gift of nature, requiring reciprocal offerings

Fig. 8. Signs of the anomalous and the liminal at the Badjelánnda site. The table summarises the types of evidence that might have signalled to the Sami that Badjelánnda was a sacred site.

they were visiting or passing by the Badjelánnda site. Important liminal events occurring in this Middle World, such as illness, the death of people, or the slaughter of reindeer during their autumn migration, would have found an apt focus in rituals carried out there. The rock art that is still visible today would simply have reinforced symbolic meanings that were already apparent to most observers in the past.

We have therefore argued that our understanding of cultural landscapes like the Badjelánnda site will be enhanced if we consider how people in pre-modern societies perceived topographic anomaly. We have seen how, for members of Sami hunting society, certain anomalous breaks in the homogeneity of space, for example cliffs, caves, springs or waterfalls, signified boundaries or gateways between this world and other worlds. Resource procurement in this landscape was never merely an economic activity. Decoding the ways that past landscapes were used requires an appreciation of

how sacred boundaries were defined, how rituals were necessary to mark liminal times and liminal places, and how, sometimes, the production of images would be implicated in the reinforcement of these meanings. In modern times and in a World Heritage Area like Lapponia, the concept of 'sacred' is likely to be restricted today to the boundaries of national parks and to lists of protected species, either 'keystone' or 'charismatic' in their status. However, in their interpretation of the cultural landscapes of the past archaeologists require a much broader definition of the boundaries of the sacred, as this paper has tried to demonstrate.

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