

Representations of maritime archaeology in two national newspapers of Finland

A comparative perspective between
Helsingin Sanomat and *Hufvudstadsbladet*

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Abstract

The article analyses representations of maritime archaeology in 136 newspaper articles published in *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Hufvudstadsbladet* between 2017 and 2020. In both newspapers, maritime archaeology is dominantly represented through underwater (nautical) source material. This corresponds with the focus in Finnish maritime archaeological research where sites and materials situated on land receive less attention. Following on from these observations, it is argued that the maritime cultural heritage on land remains an untapped research potential. As increasingly attractive tokens of maritime heritage on land, special attention is paid to the phenomenology of lighthouses.

Keywords: cultural heritage, lighthouses, maritime archaeology, newspapers, representation.

Maritime archaeology is a small discipline, but of remarkable breadth. Increasingly, the field is breaking the stereotypes of its consisting of underwater adventures and glorious shipwrecks, perceptions that were globally evoked in the pioneering phases of the discipline in the 1950s and 1960s. Although underwater and nautical source material often remains central, the understanding of maritime archaeology and its study is consistently moving beyond this specific and narrow focus. Multidisciplinarity has always been characteristic of maritime archaeology at the University of Helsinki too, where Mika Lavento's role has been of key importance both in teaching and research (Ala-Pöllänen & Lavento 2002; Lavento & Ala-Pöllänen 2007; see also Marila & Ilves 2021).

In line with a growing number of those practitioners of maritime archaeology who argue for the 'archaeology' rather than the 'maritime' aspect of the discipline (Gately & Benjamin 2018: 20), we define maritime archaeology in the widest sense as archaeology that aims to understand humankind and its history with the help of material and non-material remains connected with water. However, the public perception of maritime archaeology is still saturated with the methodological side of the discipline, emphasizing the discovery and recovery of shipwrecks in particular, as has also been empirically demonstrated, for instance, in analyses of the representation of maritime archaeology in

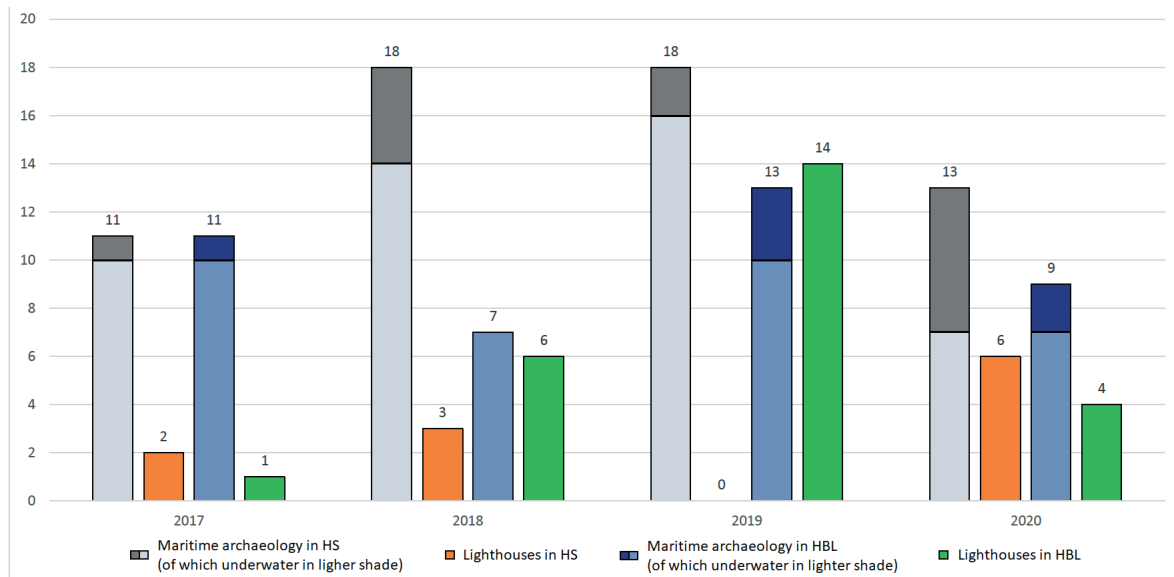


Figure 28.1. The yearly distribution of analysed articles. The dominance of underwater focus in the articles published in both newspapers is prominent. Note also the gradual rise in the number of publications related to lighthouses, 11 of which are published in *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS) and 26 in *Hufvudstadsbladet* (HBL). Graph K. Ilves.

(western) television documentaries (Gately & Benjamin 2018; Sperry 2008). In this study, we focus on another type of media outlet, two national newspapers of Finland, one in Finnish and the other in Swedish, *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS) and *Hufvudstadsbladet* (HBL) respectively, in order to determine whether this generalization is valid for Finnish news-consuming audiences as well. Building on data from the past four years, 2017–2020, we investigate what the selected newspaper media, journalists, and editors believe the public to be interested in regarding the maritime archaeological sphere. Based on the results and to pay homage to the contributions made by Mika Lavento (e.g. 1995; 1998; 2001) in the field of archaeological hermeneutics, we conclude with a phenomenological reflection on lighthouses as tokens of maritime heritage on land.

For this study, both HS and HBL were digitally browsed page by page, focusing on headlines and visual cues followed by a thematic classification of the article based on its contents. Inclusion of the articles in the final body of data was governed by two main factors. First, the presence of archaeology in the article and its maritime connection, and second, a distinct focus on the maritime archaeological material. This entails that references selected include and range from articles dealing with underwater archaeological contexts and/or artefacts to news focusing on museums linked to exhibiting and handling maritime archaeological material, from coverage of people active in the field to articles discussing management and research of maritime archaeological material. Due to their pronounced presence in newspaper media, and regardless of whether they should be considered maritime archaeological in the strict and conventional sense, special attention was devoted to articles dealing with one of the most prominent material traces of maritime cultural landscapes: lighthouses. We also included articles that presented an ‘image’ of maritime archaeology, for instance, through art exhibitions, movies, and books featuring maritime archaeological elements. At the same time, articles with a focus on maritime trade in history did not make the cut if not explicitly emanating from maritime archaeological source material. If the news story was published twice in the same newspaper – a practice employed by HS to draw renewed attention to the highlights of the news week – such texts were counted as a single reference, although the double emphasis itself can be considered to illustrate the expected allure of that particular topic for the general public.

In total, 136 articles represent maritime archaeology in the selected newspapers during the analysed publication period (data available on request). Of these, 36 deal with lighthouses in Finland, and are treated separately in this study. Of the compiled material, 71 texts were published in HS, including 11 articles about lighthouses, and 65 in HBL, including 25 focusing on lighthouses (Fig. 28.1).

The references were thematically classified based on the focus of the text as related to discovery, hobby diving, research, management, and miscellaneous. Of the 100 articles dealing with maritime archaeological topics other than lighthouses, 60 were published in HS and 40 in HBL; one third (32) have a clear emphasis on discovery (Fig. 28.2). There is, however, a distinct difference in the venue of these articles, as the majority of texts (24) with a focus on discovery were published in HS and only eight in HBL. In percentages, this means that in terms of the maritime archaeological sphere, compared to HBL, HS has published twice as many texts centring on discovery; 40% of all maritime archaeological articles in HS have this particular focus. The second largest thematic category, with 27 texts in total, falls within the framework of management, 16 published in HS and 11 in HBL. There are 19 articles allowing categorization as research-focused texts, 11 in HS and 8 in HBL. Articles with a thematic focus on hobby diving number eight, with five texts published in HS and three in HBL. The miscellaneous category has 14 articles, four in HS and 10 in HBL. Thereby, in percentages, there is a much more equal distribution of different focus points in maritime archaeological news in HBL than in HS.

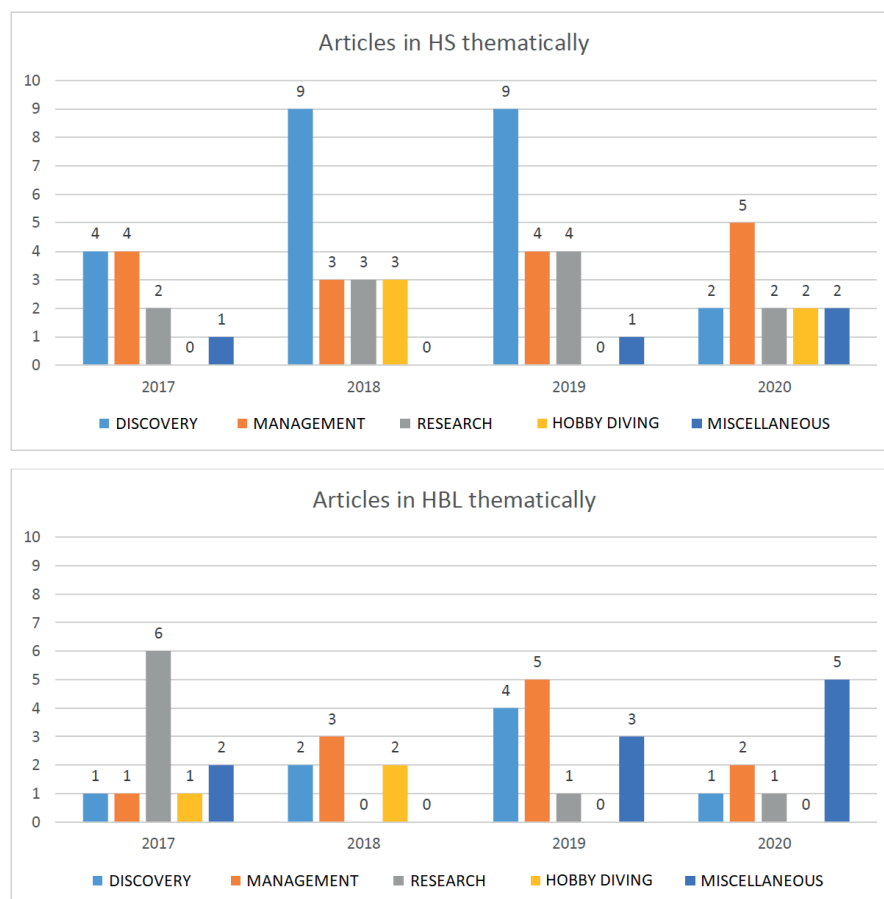


Figure 28.2. The thematic distribution of analysed articles by year and newspaper: 71 texts are published in *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS) and 65 in *Hufvudstadsbladet* (HBL). Articles published in HBL show a more even thematic distribution, while those published in HS often focus on discovery. Graph K. Ilves.

Most of the 36 news stories on lighthouses (24) fall into the category of miscellaneous, as the articles are generic historical overviews of and/or present television documentaries about Finnish lighthouses. There are also lighthouse-related texts with a clear focus on their management (10) – such as informing the public about their renovation or management – and academic research (2). It is notable that of all the references drawn from HBL, articles focusing on lighthouses comprise 38%, while in HS these constitute 15% of the total number of articles within the maritime archaeological sphere.

As to one of the main aims of this study, we clarified whether the article deals with underwater source material or not, as well as if the text (also) concerns shipwrecks or not. Of the 100 articles dealing with maritime archaeological topics other than lighthouses (the latter belonging to the terrestrial sphere alone), 81 focus on the underwater environment, of which 47 are published in HS and 34 in HBL. Thus, in both newspapers, maritime archaeology is dominantly represented through underwater source material (see also Fig. 28.1). Furthermore, 78 articles, 43 in HS and 35 in HBL, deal with shipwrecks, most of these (70) underwater. Interestingly, the archaeologically most significant ship finding in Finland, the 18th-century Dutch merchantman *Vrouw Maria*, is mentioned in only two newspaper articles during the analysed period (see also Hentunen 2014: 16). This is hardly surprising given that more than 20 years have passed since its discovery and newspapers thrive on fast reporting of the latest discoveries. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the *Vrouw Maria* enjoys continued interest in maritime archaeological research (see Ilves & Marila 2021) and seems to have a tendency to resurface from time to time in the media as well (see below). As pertains to the international focus of the articles, we recorded an almost equal distribution of articles dealing with Finnish (45) and foreign material (49); only six articles discuss both Finnish and foreign material in conjunction.

In an analysis comparable to ours, Maddie Hentunen (2014) has explored how maritime archaeological topics were treated in HS between 2010 and 2014. Hentunen's results show HS news being heavily oriented towards discovery. This is perhaps unsurprising given her definition of maritime archaeology as underwater archaeology, but when coupled with our deliberate search for articles that represent a broader definition of maritime archaeology, the conclusion that wrecks found under water are overrepresented in articles published in HS is well justified. Hentunen also notes that the speculated monetary value of wrecks is often forefronted in the media, and that this is in sharp contrast to the information distributed by the Finnish Heritage Agency, which is focused on the research and conservation aspects of maritime heritage. Discussions around the monetary value of the *Vrouw Maria* have recently been revived in HS, and the expressed opinions by the Finnish Heritage Agency officials against her raising showcase the divergence of the two discourses (HS 11 Sep 2021 and 14 Sep 2021). It is therefore evident that HS creates a certain image of maritime archaeology through framing articles from the monetary and novelty aspect to the reader by expecting them to find these angles appealing, while archaeological aspects are downplayed (Hentunen 2014).

Worth reflecting on in this context is the fact that the discovery of wrecks is more frequently the focus in HS (40% of articles) than it is in HBL (20% of articles). What we then witness is a much more balanced distribution of thematic attention in articles published in Swedish (HBL: discovery 20%, management 27.5%, research 20%, hobbydiving 7.5% and miscellaneous 25%; HS: discovery 40%, management 27%, research 18%, hobbydiving 8%, miscellaneous 7%). A similar discrepancy between topics in Finnish and Swedish has also been demonstrated in academic literature published in Finland, where publications in Swedish suggest a much broader conception of the subject matter of maritime archaeology (Ilves & Marila 2021). Setting the matter of language aside, the orientation towards stories related to the underwater element of maritime archaeology, the discovery of wrecks in particular, is witnessed in academic literature in general. It has been demonstrated elsewhere that due to the close ties between hobby divers and heritage management, as well as the large number of well-preserved shipwrecks belonging to the historical period, these topics are frequent in Finnish

maritime archaeological research, while sites and materials situated on land receive less attention (Ilves & Marila 2021; Marila & Ilves 2021).

Against this backdrop where underwater maritime archaeological remains are emphasized in the media, academic research, and heritage management, it is interesting to note that there is increasing attention being paid in newspapers to lighthouses as monumental tokens of maritime heritage on land. Within the analysed period of publications between 2017 and 2020, there is a clear rising trend in the number of articles connected to lighthouses. Three articles were published in 2017, nine in 2018, and 14 in 2019, most of them in HBL. The year 2020 saw 10 articles, but the drop is perhaps partly explained by the dramatic decrease in tourism in the summer of 2020. With that said, while the majority of lighthouse-related articles highlight their historical and ethnographic importance, they simultaneously showcase them as travel destinations. In general, then, the importance of lighthouses as heritage tourism destinations has increased in recent years, partly as a result of the rise in homeland tourism during the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition to media coverage, the increasing interest in lighthouses is also reflected in the number of Finnish Lighthouse Society (FLS) members, with a steady increase from 988 members in 2014 to 1846 members in 2020 (gathered from the FLS yearly reports).

Regardless of their non-archaeological nature, we see the heightened appreciation of lighthouses as an opportunity to also raise awareness of those maritime archaeological sites and materials that have enjoyed less attention in the media, research, and heritage management. On these grounds, we offer a brief reflection on the heritagization of lighthouses, that is, the process through which lighthouses have become a valued and actively used part of maritime heritage in our society.

The heritagization of lighthouses happened in the course of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As a result of the automation of lighthouses, the responsibilities for their upkeep shifted from the lightkeepers to national heritage officials, private owners, and heritage associations (Nyman 2009). Today, the preservation of lighthouses is largely funded with income from tourism. Lighthouses are often located in remote locations where the operators and their families led extremely isolated lives (Nyman 2011). This forms part of the romantic appeal of lighthouses as destinations for sustainable escape tourism, where the objective is to experience solitude and isolation in an authentic but controlled setting (Azevedo 2018; Chylińska 2021; Gómez y Patiño 2010; Opacic et al. 2010).

As secluded heritage sites, lighthouses also have a special role as locations for feelings of nostalgia. Part of the nostalgic capacity of lighthouses is owed to their role as constructions situated cosmologically in the liminal space between the earth and the heavens (Steil 2010a; 2010b) or the land and the sea (Magnani & Pistocchi 2017; Westerdahl 2005; 2010), while some of this quality is attributable to the phenomenological role that light has in modern societies, both as material and metaphor (Bille & Sørensen 2007; Komesaroff 1980; Orange 2018). As beacons of light, lighthouses are mediators situated conveniently halfway between marginality and centrality, natural and cultural, or darkness and illumination. Perhaps partly due to these metaphorical qualities, lighthouses have become tokens of modern maritime cultural heritage, and are therefore central to promoting awareness of the chronological and thematic layeredness of the maritime landscape, both above and under water. In addition to the related fields of maritime ethnography and maritime history, lighthouses connect the ships that sank in their vicinity – or due to their absence – to a wider maritime archaeological landscape, thereby shaping attitudes towards their research.

In other words, what we want to draw attention to with our phenomenological framing of lighthouses is their potential for maritime archaeological research beyond shipwrecks. Underwater heritage management and hobby diving enjoy healthy relations in Finland, mainly due to the protection and management responsibilities related to wrecks since the early 1960s. However, we believe that hobby divers' additional involvement in academic maritime archaeological research on underwater sites other

than shipwrecks, but perhaps more, an introduction to maritime sites on land, would be one way to expand on that relationship and thereby change the image of maritime archaeology in the eye of the public to cover much more than the narrow framework of water vessels. In this context, however, it is important to note that phenomenological research on the experiences of hobby divers has been conducted in Finland (Seesmeri 2020; Tolvanen & Laakkonen 2018) and these studies highlight the underwater landscape as a weird environment where the diver's experience of their own body is altered and the boundaries between different species are transgressed. Importantly, the feelings of unfamiliarity are highlighted in the phenomenological research as key points for revisiting the underwater environment. It is therefore unsurprising that the best selling point of maritime archaeology has been research done under water.

Compared to the underwater landscape, the maritime landscape above water is a more familiar environment containing elements that are easy to overlook. We therefore propose that among the challenges in maritime archaeology – and a way forward – is to also engage in phenomenological research on the maritime landscape above water. The purpose of this phenomenological enterprise would be to make the familiar unfamiliar, a practice that lies at the heart of hermeneutics and phenomenology, and which has been well established, for example, in the archaeology of the contemporary past where archaeology consists of the archaeologist interpreting themselves (Buchli & Lucas 2001; Graves-Brown 2000).

Ironically, Finland's maritime heritage on land remains poorly understood, and in order to render it weird and enticing it first needs to be made familiar. Lake and wetland areas of inland Finland remain particularly poorly understood (Marila & Ilves 2021: 346), and research in those areas would be a good investment for the promotion of maritime archaeology as much more than the study of underwater wrecks. Surveys on the remains of maritime signalling, including lighthouses, have been done in Finland, but more so for the specific needs of heritage management rather than academic research (Nyman 2000; Nyman 2009). Maritime archaeological research on lighthouses is practically non-existent in Finland and, given the increasing popular interest in lighthouses as heritage tourism destinations, research questions on activities connected with them – temporally distant as well as contemporary – should be encouraged in the future.

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