

9. SUMMARY

*Sillä monta ajatusta on vielä kesken, ja toisia ei ole vielä kunnolla aloitettukaan...*⁸⁰⁶

*Veikko Huovinen 1959:
Havukka-ahon ajattelija, p. 211*

At the beginning of this book, I posed questions with the common idea of sacred places in the context of a landscape, as a part of which these places were associated with changing meanings and different activities during their long life cycles. Here I summarize the main directions of my research by answering these questions:

What kinds of landscape elements are typical of sacred places and can variation be observed between different types of sacred places?

As written sources have also stated, water and high places stand out in the topographical features of sacred places. However, the location of a sacred place is affected by the landscape elements typical of each region. In addition, the relationship between a sacred place and a topographical feature is not homogenous, but there are differences in the sizes of waterways and elevated places, as well as in the location of the sacred place in relation to the topographic element. Those landscape features that are most representative in general also dominate in places used by both communities and individuals. They also stand out in the examination of sacred places associated with masculinity and femininity. Places used by communities are represented by fells and lakes, or large landscape elements. Places used by individuals are distributed more evenly between different groups. Only islands and lakes are represented in the material by more than one place. Hills seem to be more significant for feminine places and islands and hills for masculine places than for all sacred places in general.

What are sieidis like as elements of the landscape?

Sieidi stones as landscape elements are characterized by their atypical shape and size. Atypical shape is sometimes connected with anthropomorphism or zoomorphism. These features occur in sieidis so often that they are most likely not incidental, but also not the single definitive factor for the selection of a sieidi stone. The majority of the inspected sieidis were 1.5 to 2.5 metres high. Thus, the size of the sieidis was not necessarily impressive in itself, but enough to make them stand out from the surrounding stones. This is one reason why most of the inspected sites are reasonably or very visible. The direction of visibility, on the other hand, did not seem to be important. Sieidi stones are thus often atypical for their environment, but the atypical features are so varied that they alone cannot be used to define a sieidi that is not associated with oral tradition or archaeological finds. Some sieidis stand out only because of their location in fairly stoneless terrain; in another environment, they might be quite unobtrusive.

⁸⁰⁶ "Because many thoughts are still unfinished, and others have not yet been properly started..."

Can sacred places be described as liminal places?

Features considered as liminal, namely a connection to water or a high place, are associated with the locations of many sacred places. In addition, liminality may be seen as being closely connected with Sámi beliefs, which incorporated the idea of a tripartite world, travel between the worlds, and sieidis as places from which one could contact another world. On the other hand, water and high places could also acquire meanings unconnected to liminality, such as meanings connected to their use as migration routes or passageways or parts of a soundscape or a subsistence-related landscape. Sacredness and contacts with the hereafter were also not tied to certain people or places. Sacredness is not static in nature, but instead the boundary between sacred and profane can change. Liminality as a boundary in the world of experience and landscape is mobile and situational. Sieidis are examples of liminal places that are at the same time *between worlds but not divorced from this world*. Sacredness and contacts with the hereafter manifested themselves in the landscape in many forms related to both everyday and ritual activities and were not restricted to liminal places in the landscape.

What makes places sacred?

In the foregoing, I have suggested that sacredness could manifest itself in the landscape in many forms. There was a wide variety of sacred places, from individual lakeshore boulders to great fells. Places could be associated with meanings of sacredness due to oral tradition and stories, anthropomorphism, liminal features, the soundscape created by the water, or some reason inconceivable to a modern researcher. Few places were associated with all of the above-mentioned sacred features, and some sacred places may seem very mundane to modern eyes. Often encountered characteristics of sacred places are a shape or size that stands out from the environment and a connection with a high elevation or a waterway, which could be associated with different meanings from liminality to a subsistence-related landscape. However, these characteristics cannot be used to construct a watertight model of what a sacred place should look like or where it should be located.

Can sacred places related to different means of subsistence be differentiated in the landscape?

Of all sacred sites, in particular sieidis for which the offerings are known are related to subsistence. This information is available for 44 sites either from written sources or the archaeological material. The material shows that fish sieidis are concentrated near water and that sieidis dedicated to wild or domesticated reindeer are found in fell and hill terrain more often than fish sieidis. However, the locations of sieidis also overlap, because some wild reindeer sieidis are known near waterways and fish has also been offered farther away from fishing sites. Domesticated reindeer sieidis are more closely connected to a certain type of landscape, namely fells, than fish or wild reindeer sieidis. Sieidis for which no mention is made of other offered species than domesticated reindeer are located especially in fells. This indicates that a specific tradition was related to the locations of domesticated reindeer sieidis.

What is the connection between means of subsistence and ritual activities? And what other activities are associated with sacred places?

Hunting pits are the most common archaeological site type found in the vicinity of sacred places. This does not necessarily mean that they were contemporary, because datings from hunting pits near sacred sites indicate much older use. However, the taskscape related to hunting may have been passed down from the use of hunting pits to sieidi offerings. In addition to hunting, other activities taking place near sacred places include settlement, reindeer pasturing, and fishing. In the areas of Inari and Utsjoki, the distance between a sacred site and the nearest homestead is in most cases less than five kilometres. Camping near sieidis in particular has been related to migration journeys. Sometimes sacred places also form clusters. Usually a sacred place is located 1 to 10 kilometres away from the next sacred place. Concentrations of sacred places are often located in places associated with other human activities. Sacred places formed a part of the taskscape, even though no other archaeological sites have often been observed within a radius of about three kilometres from sacred places. Sacred places were a part of the landscape in which the mundane and the ritual were bound together. In addition to activities related to subsistence and settlement, there were burial islands near sacred sites, and oral tradition also tells of burials near sieidis. In the north, it can also be observed that churches were often built in the sacred places of the ethnic religion or in landscapes dominated by these places. There was no similar tradition in the southern parts of the research area. In later times, sacred places have acquired new meanings through tourism. The reasons for visiting sacred places may vary from neo-paganism to tourism or respecting the traditions of one's ancestors.

What kinds of actors and bodily experiences are related to sacred places?

In discussions of actors related to sieidis, gender-specific restrictions are often mentioned, but only a few individual sacred places are associated with restrictions that would limit their user groups based on gender. The number of people visiting sacred places may have varied from individuals to entire villages. Also animals, especially at sieidis, may have been both actors who consume offered bones and enjoy the sieidi's protection and objects of action in the form of offerings. Heads and antlers were especially significant parts of the offered animal, and they are frequently found in the archaeological material. As for the deliberate placing of animal bones, there are only a few examples. In addition, the archaeological material indicates that bones were broken and burned, perhaps in connection with offering activities. The field of activity related to ritual remained close to the sieidi, as indicated by both archaeological finds and phosphate analyses. The field of activity may have been restricted to a certain side of the sieidi due to the visibility of the sieidi, the direction of approach, the approachability by water, or the open or restricted space around the sieidi formed by microtopography. Beliefs related to offering were not static, but the meaning of offerings could change. This is indicated by the moving of offered bones observed at Sieiddakeädggi, for example. At sieidis where no archaeological material has been found, offerings may have been moved or ritual activities that leave no material traces may have taken place.

To what extent are sacred places a part of a profane landscape?

Many activities classified as profane from a modern viewpoint have taken place in the vicinity of sacred places, from hunting and fishing to settlement. On the other hand, even everyday activities may have incorporated elements of the sacred, for example, in the form of beliefs associated with hunting. There has thus been no clear division between sacred and profane. Everyday activities have been carried out near sacred places, but at the same time, sacredness has formed a part of everyday life. In the landscape, the sacred and the profane are intermingled.

What is the life cycle of sacred places?

Sacred places have acquired a multitude of meanings since their introduction up to their abandonment or reuse. In the selection of sacred places, the clearest chronological difference seems to be related to the location of domesticated reindeer sieidis in fell terrain. Otherwise there do not seem to be chronological differences between different types of sacred places. The beginning of the use of sacred places is associated with a period characterized by changes in ritual activity. This could be seen, for example, in the increasing number of slate graves and the use of bear graves, although there are no examples of either grave type within the area of Finland. Based on the inspected sites, the species distribution of offerings was greater in the early phases of the offering tradition, whereas typical offerings in the 16th through 18th centuries consisted only of wild or domesticated reindeer. Capercaillies have also been found from one site during that period. In the more southern area, there are no bone finds at all. This may indicate a different offering tradition or an earlier end to offerings. Until the late 19th century, artefact finds are very rare in the area of Finland as compared to Sweden. Artefact finds classified as modern consist mainly of coins and small personal items. Some of the modern finds, such as alcohol and tobacco, continue old traditions, whereas others, such as a bunch of sprigs and tealight candles, create new traditions. The modern finds indicate that the use of sieidi has been transmitted from the sphere of subsistence to the sphere of tourism and neo-paganism.

Sieidi sites at which no archaeological bone finds were made provoke a need for additional research. In the future, it would be interesting to develop methods for also studying those sites at which no bones have been preserved or at which they were never even offered. In addition, it would also be interesting to include within the field of study those sacred places that do not necessarily fulfil the rule of two identifying criteria set in my work. Sacredness could be approached, for example, through toponyms in cooperation with linguists. This would allow us to also study places that are not associated with a strong oral tradition. In this case, attention should be paid to research-ethical questions of information dissemination. New sites could provide additional information on the question of the life cycle of sacred places and the nature of ritual activity.