

ROCK ART ON THE WATER

International Seminar' June 7-9th 2022

A seminar report

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TECHNICIANS AND POLITICAL ADMINISTRATORS FROM FINLAND, PORTUGAL, FRANCE AND SPAIN EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES IN THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT AND TOURIST USE OF EUROPEAN PREHISTORIC ART.

Finnish rock art is one of the best-kept secrets of European cultural heritage. Since the late 1960s, after the different sites began to be discovered, mainly on the shores of lakes in the centre and south of the country, they gradually began to be studied at the turn of the century. In the absence of a research tradition, with mostly local publications and little institutional awareness of the real value of prehistoric art, the social and political appreciation of this heritage has still to be achieved in Finland.

This prehistoric cultural heritage is still largely unknown by the inhabitants of the country, and even more so at an international level. Indeed, visits to the sites are very rare and the infrastructures for the visualisation of the art with acceptable safety standards, as regards both the rock art and visitors, either are very modest and limited or do not exist.

Although an A-Z glossary (catalogue) formulated by Finnish photographer Ismo Luukkonen has been published online: <http://www.ismoluukkonen.net/kalliotaide/suomi/index.html>.

There have also been numerous academic publications and some sites have been studied in certain detail. Professor Pekka Kivikäs's research at Saraakallio and Astuvansalmi, among other sites, should be highlighted: <https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol18/finland.pdf>. Also, the work of Antti Lahelma: <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/19406>. This rock art was included on Finland's tentative list for its designation as World Heritage by UNESCO, and the prehistoric art has still to be addressed by Finnish Cultural Heritage researchers and managers. This is especially the case when it is compared with the interest and degree of integral management devoted to sites in such countries as Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, Italy, France and Azerbaijan, to mention only a few of the countries in the Council of Europe with rock art sites in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

The great art of the Finnish lakes

Among the dozens of places with prehistoric paintings on the shores of the great lakes in Finland, two large sites stand out. The first is Saraakallio, in Laukaa, central Finland, and Astuvansalmi, in Ristiina, Mikkeli which is in the south Savonia region of south-eastern Finland. In both cases, these are large boulder formations and rock terraces at the edge of the water, where communities of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers and the first Neolithic farmers painted large panels in red, and are visible some just above the water-level whilst others are hundreds of metres away from the water.

Using the substances of red ochre painted figures of elks, deer, reindeer, boats (spiritual rituals and traveling), horned figures, possibly spirits, as well as men and women carrying out different tasks and groups of dancers are evident, as well as stains of colour and even handprints help form a large pictorial repertory created with different techniques (series of dots, colour-wash, painted lines, etc.) all in different shades of red ochre. These artistic representations are currently dated between 6500 and 3500 BP, although some authors suggest slightly early chronologies.

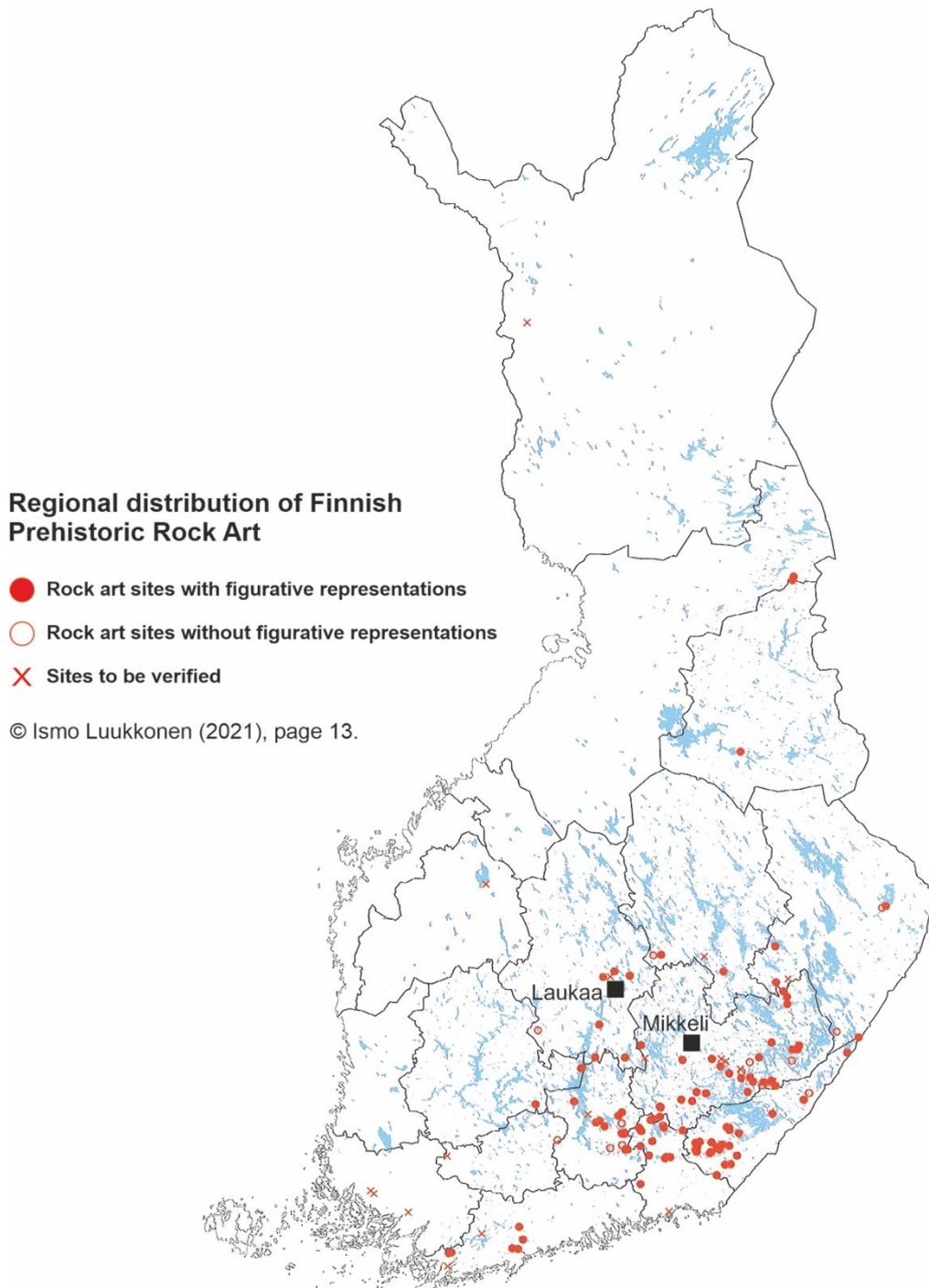


Figure 1. There are approximately 140 prehistoric rock painting sites in Finland and new ones are found annually.

The beauty and excellent conservation of the environment in which these sites are located, the clear water lakes and the endless forests of conifers and birch, are another attraction that should not be ignored because they perfectly represent the setting for the decorated sites during the first phases of the human occupation of Finland, after the Arctic Ice Cap retreated towards the north at the end of the Ice Age. As a curiosity, it is worth adding that Lake Saimaa is the home of the only species of freshwater seal, and the forests all around contain significant populations of forest reindeer, glutton, bear, wolf and, above all, elks.

The management of the sites and their tourist use

Unlike other Council of Europe countries, like Norway, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and even Azerbaijan, no model has been defined for the management of rock art sites in Finland. Most of the sites are in private property, even though, because they are on the lake shores, they can be visited by boat. However, there is rarely any educational or information support, any modern structures allowing the physical access to the decorated panel or specific organised visits with a defined calendar, apart from the tourist boats that approach the panels so that visitors can see the ‘curiosity’ of the prehistoric paintings. It should be noted henceforth, that that all rock painting sites are protected under the Antiquities Act (1963).

The towns of Mikkeli and then Laukaa took the initiative of joining the Council of Europe Cultural Route ‘Chemins de l’Art Rupestre Préhistorique -Prehistoric Rock Art Trails’ PRAT-CARP (www.prehistour.eu) to seek the collaboration concerning these routes in order to learn from the successful experiences in other regions where rock art has been a specialised tourist resource for over a century. For instance, Cantabria (Spain) and Dordogne (France), or in places that have developed these resources more recently, like Vale do Côa (Portugal), Valcamónica (Italy) and the Gobustan Reserve (Azerbaijan).

After the break imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, in late 2021, the organisation Visit Mikkeli Ltd contacted the other members of the PRAT cultural route to propose holding a technical seminar regarding the sites of Saraakallio and Astuvansalmi in collaboration with the tourism development companies of Mikkeli and Laukaa. This would allow the members of PRAT-CARP in other countries to see the sites for themselves and, at the same time, the Finnish companies would learn the options for the work that needed to be done to present the rock art sites to the public in the best possible conditions.

As a response to these proposals, the towns of Laukaa and Mikkeli held an international seminar between June 7th and 9th 2022 to facilitate the exchange of expert information about the technical management and tourist use of the rock art sites associated with the water bodies.

The first two days were devoted to the fieldwork and consisted of technical visits to the sites of Saraakallio and Astuvansalmi so that experts from several countries (Spain, Portugal and France) could see the current status of the Finnish rock art sites, their archaeological character

and the issues for their conservation and public access. They were also able to appreciate the model of tourist visits based on viewing the panels from boats.

In the case of Saraakallio, the paintings are not accessible and visitors can only observe them from a boat at a distance that does not allow a clear view. A link to the paintings, which make up the largest collection of images in Finland can be found via the following link, and are accompanied with text in Finnish: <http://www.ismoluukkonen.net/kalliotaide/suomi/sk/sk.html>

At Astuvansalmi tourists can disembark from a boat and see the paintings from a precarious wooden gangway that at least enables many of the numerous paintings to be viewed. A modest information panel provides some explanations about them.



Figure 2. The revered sacred site where the sleeping god of Astuvansalmi is encountered and whose facial features bearing closed eyes, nose and mouth are visible on the right side of the rock formation which makes up the figures head. The photograph is taken from a boat on the lake. Photograph and copyright Francis Joy (2022). Photographs pertaining to the rock art of Astuvansalmi can be found via the following link, which are accompanied by text, which is in Finnish Language: <http://www.ismoluukkonen.net/kalliotaide/suomi/as/as.html>



Figure 3. Organizers and participants visit the rock paintings at Astuvansalmi on June 8th to study and photograph the illustrations. Photograph and copyright Ramón Montes-Barquín (2022).

In terms of the number of visible and clear figures at Astuvansalmi and Saraakallio compiled by Ismo Luukkonen, he has counted “112 identifiable figures (30 cervids, 52 humans, 22 boats, 12 hand-prints, 8 other animals and 11 geometric figures) at Saraakallio. Where as, at Astuvansalmi, he has counted 78 identifiable figures (23 cervids, 18 humans, 14 boats, 10 hand-prints, 8 other animals and 5 geometric figures)” Luukkonen (2022 personal correspondence).

The seminar presentations and awards

Rock Art on the Water - rock art sites by the seas, lakes and rivers - the presentation materials of the rock art seminar day and participants and program can be found via the following link: <https://visitmikkeli.fi/rockart>

The technical presentations on 9 June took place in the auditorium of the War and Peace Centre in the town of Mikkeli. Different models for the management and tourist use of rock art in Europe were presented, especially the experiences of Vale de Côa (Douro region, Portugal) and the Vézère valley (Dordogne, France), where water plays a major role in the visits to the rock art sites.

The latest models for the exhibition of the phenomenon of prehistoric art in different countries were also presented: from Norway to Azerbaijan, including such regions as Valcamónica (Italy) and Cantabria, Extremadura and the east of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain).



Figure 4. Organizers, presenters and guests on June 9th at the Centre for War and Peace Studies, Mikkeli. From left to right: Service Manager Suvituulia Brohz, Valérie Coustillas – Office Manager, Regional Council of Dordogne-Périgord, France. Tarja Pönniö Kanerva, Project Manager, GeoNaCu Saimaa-project. Ph.D. Heli Peltola, Marketing and Communications Manager in the Municipality of Laukka. Aida Carvalho – President of Cõa Valley Foundation, Portugal. Mayor of Mikkeli Pirjo Siiskonen who is the President of the Municipal Council of Mikkeli, Finland. Pellervo Kokkonen, Senior Advisor, Savonlinna Development Services Ltd, Finland. Leoncio Carrascal Ruiz, who is the President of the Asón-Agüera-Trasmiera Local Action Group which supports the utilization and assimilation of local products and culture into tourism. Ana Manrique, Manager of Valles Pasiegos Rural Development Agency, Cantabria. Vanesa Balaguer, Manager of Campoo Los Valles Rural Development Agency Cantabria. PhD Francis Joy, Scholar of Sámi religion and Prehistoric Rock Art, from the University of Lapland Arctic Centre, Rovaniemi, Finland. (Front) Ph.D. Ramón Montes – Technical Coordinator of the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe Prehistoric Rock Art Trails. Ph.D. José Manuel Rey-Garcia – Director of Pontevedra Museum, Galicia, Spain. Ana María Flores, Technician on Cultural Tourism from the Government of Extremadura, Spain. Photograph and copyright Francis Joy (2022).



Figure 5. Ville Mantere from the University of Turku presenting his research in connection with human-animal relations in rock art in the Nordic countries, especially with regard to the significance of elk and water. Photograph and copyright Tarja Pönniö Kanerva (2022).



Figure 6. Riitta Rainio from the University of Helsinki presents new and innovative research in connection with acoustic and auditory recordings at rock art sites in Finland, which brings a rather remarkable and new series of perspectives and approaches that are being implemented in rock art research. Photograph and copyright Tarja Pönniö Kanerva (2022).

In the second part of the seminar, the rock art of Finland was approached from different points of view. These included not only archaeological and ethnographic aspects but also a presentation about the culture and world of the cosmological landscapes in the Sámi culture in connection with their pre-Christian religion, which was animistic and characterized by shamanism. The Sámi people in Finland, like Norway, Sweden and Kola Peninsula in north-west Russia, where there are multiple rock art sites, have recorded their beliefs and practices through rock art for thousands of years as a way of preserving and transmitting cultural memory, beliefs and practices.

The main result of this international meeting was the agreement to establish an international technical committee to support the authorities of Laukaa and Mikkeli in the development of a large multi-disciplinary project, consisting of three phases:

Phase 1. Archaeological appraisal of the pictorial record at the sites of Saraakallio and Astuvansalmi, applying the new technologies of multispectral analysis of images painted on rock, and other techniques that will enable more precise information about the contents of the rock art sites.

Phase 2. Precise diagnosis of the conservation of the paintings, which are sometimes affected by natural degradation processes caused by water action and microorganisms (mostly colonies of lichen and bacteria). In this phase, some simple restoration actions might be taken to divert the water flow that directly affects the paintings and to reduce the impact of microorganisms on the rock art.

Phase 3. Finally, infrastructures will be designed for the reception of visitors and interpretation of the rock art. This will mainly involve ways in which the tourists can view the decorated panels at closer range without any risks to either the depictions or the visitors.

Raising both awareness and visibility concerning the uniqueness of rock art and its value for local tourism enterprises

During the seminar days, the mayors of Laukaa and Mikkeli received the official sign of the Cultural Routes Programme of Council of Europe <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes> as members of the Cultural Route Prehistoric Rock Art Trails <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/prehistoric-rock-art-trails>

Both cities have been accepted as members of this great European Programme <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/-/municipality-of-laukaa> / <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/-/mikkeli-development-miksei-ltd->) due to the presence in their territories of important rock art sites that have been recognized by the

Scientific Committee of PRAT <https://www.prehистour.eu/scientific-committee/> as exceptional destinations of the European Cultural Heritage.

The certificates must be placed at the sites of Saraakallio and Astuvansalmi when both have been prepared to received visitors in the best conditions possible. Precisely, the seminar of Mikkeli was the first step to work in the projects to convert these wonderful sites, Saraakallio and Astuvansalmi, in two European references of rock art sites open to the public.



Figure 7. Before dinner on June 8th, the group gathered outside Terti Manor House, where Ramón Montes-Barquín and Leoncio Carrascal Ruiz presented Pirjo Siiskonen who is the President of the Municipal Council of Mikkeli, Finland, with a certificate endorsing the Astuvansalmi rock art site as being part of the Cultural Routes Programme of the Council of Europe and as official member of the Cultural Route Prehistoric Rock Art Trails. In addition, Heidi Hänninen who is Communication Manager of Mikkeli city, Timo Paakki who is the CEO of Mikkeli Development Miksei Ltd, and Topiantti Äikäs who is Director of Land Use and Planning, Mikkeli City were also in attendance for the presentation. Photograph and copyright Francis Joy (2022).



Figure 8. On the morning of June 9th at the Centre for War and Peace Studies, Leoncio Carrascal Ruiz presented Susanna Nuijanmaa (center) who is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Hospitality Management, at JAMK University of Applied Sciences and Heli Peltola (right) the Communication manager of Laukaa Municipality with a certificate endorsing the Saraakallio rock art site as being part of the Cultural Routes Programme of the Council of Europe and as official member of the Cultural Route Prehistoric Rock Art Trails.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the persons whose names are mentioned above and who have contributed to this report and wish the management teams in Laukaa and Mikkeli

fruitful discussions and inspiration for future development of rock art trails and further international cooperation.