

Pekka Kivikäs

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*Editors Mare Kõiva & Andres Kuperjanov &
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ROCK PAINTINGS IN FINLAND

Pekka Kivikäs

In 1911 the Finnish National Museum received a telephone call informing of the discovery of grid-like marks high on the stepped cliff of Vitträsk in Kirkkonummi, 23 km west of Helsinki. The caller was the famous Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, who had discovered the very first petroglyph site in Finland. About 50 years later another rock painting was found at Lake Juusjärvi, only 5.2 km west of Vitträsk. This discovery initiated the search for rock paintings in Finland.

Since the height of terraces under both painting compositions is suitable for painting, the age of representations could have not been determined by the coastal ground level. The paintings could have



Figure 1. Thousands of years ago the red figures painted on the coastal rock of Vitträsk formed a separate area on the coastal precipice. Even today these rock paintings are impressive, giving the rocks a deeper meaning for us.



Figure 2. The main painting composition on Juusjärvi precipice (left). The upper human head resembles that of a waterfowl. The lower elongated figures of the painting group (52 and 53 cm) overlap with earlier figures. The best preserved painting (height 87 cm) of Ristniemi (centre). Both pictures depict humans with arms spread out in prayer. Symmetrical legs are obliquely crossed at anklebones. A grid-like composition of different motifs in Mäntyharju (right).

been made at any time after the rocks had risen above the water level – probably at the time when today’s lakes still had access to the open sea. It is highly likely that both compositions were created around the same time, as their height from the sea level is almost the same. The paintings of Kirkkonummi have generally been estimated to date to the early pit-comb ceramic period (Luho 1962: 63, 69).

Grid-like representations analogous to the paintings of Vitträsk have also been found in different Swedish and Norwegian locations (Europaeus 1917: 46; Hallström 1952: 401–405), but not elsewhere in Finland or in the Eastern Karelia region. The grid-like painting found in Mäntyharju, Finland, is actually rather a composition of different motifs. As to the origin of the ornament-like motif, it may be interesting to know that analogous pattern was discovered on an engraved cudgel found in North-West Finland.

Paintings that resemble those of Juusjärvi in form have also been found in Kymenlaakso (Kivikäs 1995) and two painting compositions were discovered in 1999 from the southern Salpausselkä re-

gion. The anklebones and feet of the figure depicted on the rock in Miehikkälä Ristniemi appear to mimic the rightmost human figure on the Juusjärvi painting. New finds from the prehistoric coastal area will hopefully provide new information on the petroglyphic tradition of Finland.

Finnish rock paintings are part of to the Northern hunting and fishing culture. Their geographical location, motifs, forms and level of artistic creation are connected with the Stone Age. Among other rock paintings of the North, stretching from Norway to over the Bering Strait, we could regard these paintings as a separate “dialect”. While rock paintings and petroglyphs (prehistoric drawings or carvings on rock) have been found in Norway, Sweden and the Kola Peninsula, only petroglyphs have been discovered in Eastern Karelia. Apart from single representations engraved into surfaces of artefacts, only rock paintings have been found in Finland. The locations of paintings situated in different regions of Fennoscandia are closely connected to the local environment. In Finland the choice of locations appears to have been influenced by jagged coastal landscape and winding passages between islands. Here the scenery is nothing like that in river valleys of Sweden, Norwegian fjord coasts or the open water of Lake Onega.

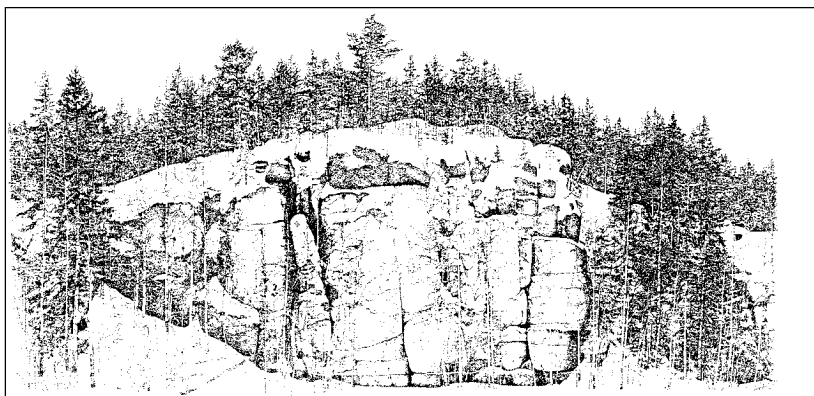


Figure 3. The rock paintings of Ristnieminvuori are located on the right side of an imposing Finnish red granite pillar near the water level. In this area paintings are located either under the highest peak of the rock or around irregular rock formations.

Hunters and fishers who once created these paintings moved along waterways and ridges. Travelling along Finnish water routes required orientation skills. Next to beliefs connected to rocks and paintings this fact appears to have influenced the choice of rocks. Crossings of roads, an arm of a lake, edges of short isthmi or upper areas of waterfalls are most common sites. The location of the rock often appears to have been of greater importance than the visibility of the rock wall: preferable were vertical fault-planned cliffs facing the sun, walls polished by glaciers, or large erratic boulders that may have served as landmarks. As for some rocks near Lappeenranta and elsewhere in Finland, the unique shape of the rock has apparently influenced the choice of painting location.

ROCK ART SITES ANDS THE DATING OF PAINTINGS

More than 75 rock paintings and over 20 sc. “ochre spots” or painted surfaces with no distinguishable figures have been discovered in Finland. The majority of rock paintings have been found in eastern Finland, in the central and southern areas of the Saimaa region, most densely distributed along the first descending streambeds of Saimaa and Päijänne. The locations of paintings suggest the travel routes and the age of paintings. New locations are constantly discovered— for instance, three new sites were discovered only in 1999.

Estimating the age of rock carvings or petroglyphs and rock paintings is always a difficult task. In Finland the estimation is mostly based on comparative analysis of prehistoric coastline, settlements and the height of paintings. Such analysis enables to determine the time when water or ice level reached the suitable height below the painting. This dating technique has proved most effective for paintings that are now located very high on rock surfaces. These paintings could have been created without the use of artificial supporting frameworks only when the water level was considerably higher than it is now.

The number of finds from the prehistoric Suurjärvi region (around lakes Päijänne and Saimaa), the exact heights of painting compositions and results of watershed exploration enable to achieve remarkable success in dating the material under consideration (Kivikäs

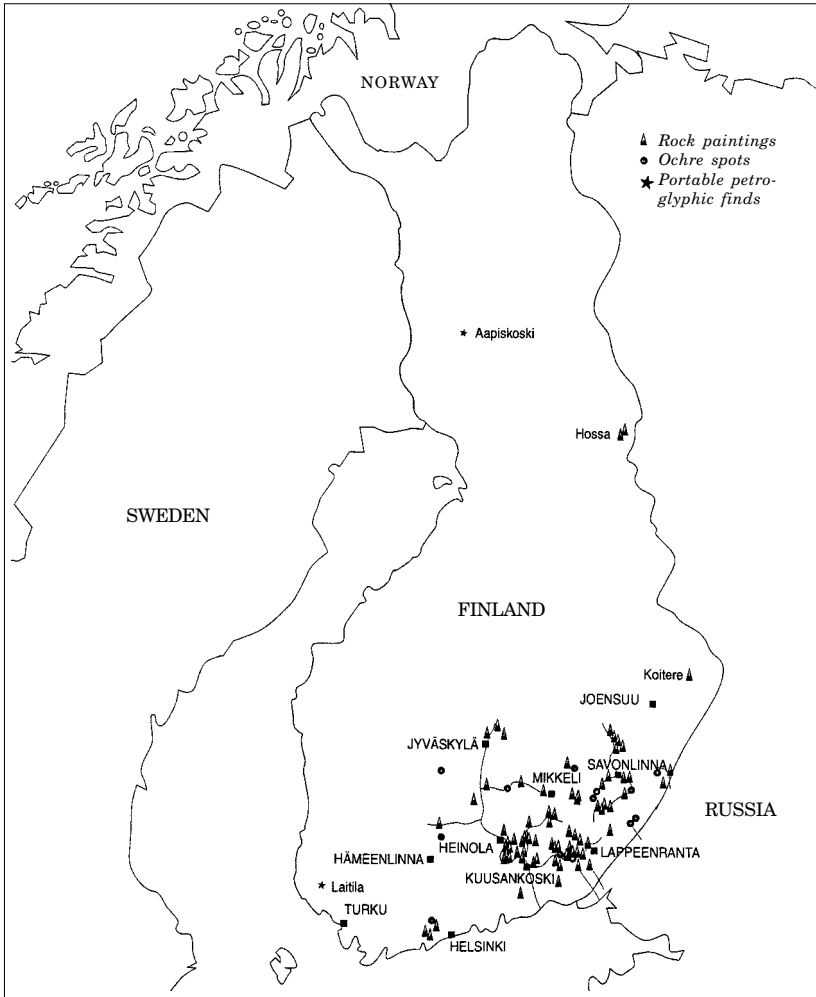


Figure 4. Finnish rock paintings and ochre spots on April 4, 2000. Rock paintings are marked by triangles, ochre spots by circles and portable petroglyphic finds by asterisks.

1999; Kupiainen 1999; Jussila 1999). Thus, in order to understand the rock paintings of Finland, to know the locations, discover new paintings and determine the age of those already found one needs to learn about changes in soil and watershed.

After the glacial period the ground began to rise. The change was most rapid around Merenkurkku (the narrowest part of the Gulf of Bothnia); this caused the indination of the ground level and changes in the course of water outflow from lakes. Formerly, Lakes Päijänne and Saimaa formed Lake Suurjärvi that flew into Perämeri (the northern part of the Gulf of Bothnia). Since the ground rose most rapidly in the north-western outlet area, water pressure exerted its influence on the southern area of the watershed. About 6900 calendrical years ago (6100 BP)¹ the Salpausselkä ridge on Päijänne broke around Heinola and the lake obtained an outlet through the Kymijoki River.

With this rupture the water level of the lower Konnivesi rose, thus making possible the painting of two reindeer figures in visual contact: the reindeer of Rautakannanvuori (on the vertical wall) and the reindeer of Haukkavuori (above a terrace-like formation). Observations of analogous lakeside painting sites at Saimaa and Päijänne (vertical wall / terrace) confirm that the highest paintings of Konnivesi were created at the same time. The water level in the lake remained this high only for a short period (from oral conversation with M. Saarnisto in 1998; also Miettinen 1986: 111). Thus it follows that in the Kymijoki region rock paintings were made already 6900 years ago and according to Timo Miettinen (1986: 111) the reindeer figure on the vertical rock wall of Rautakannanvuori is the earliest rock painting in Finland.

Changes in the streambed of Saimaa underwent three successive stages. The first, southward outflow opened in Ristiina (south of Mikkeli) about 6800 calendrical years ago (Mäntyharju – Vuohijärvi – Verla), the second, the Kärenlampi, Lappeenranta, 6400 calendrical years ago (Väliväylä) and the third, the Vuoksi opened 6000 calendrical years ago (5000 BP). The water level in Lake Saimaa lowered considerably only after the formation of the Vuoksi river.

Measuring conducted at Saimaa and Päijänne indicate that the upper representations of all painting compositions belong to the period of pit-comb ceramic. The highest paintings of Saraakallio were created some centuries after the rupture of Heinolanharju in the early pit-comb ceramic period. The paintings of Saraakallio must therefore be older than those discovered in Astuvansalmi. At Lake Saimaa the water level rose during a longer period of time. There

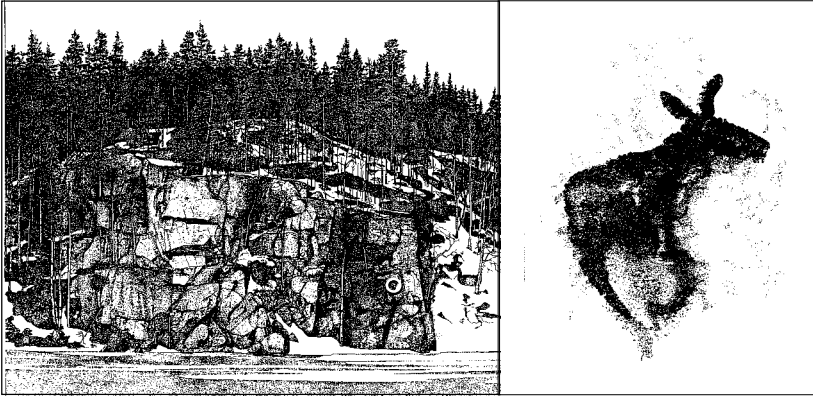


Figure 5. Haukkavuori of Konnivesi (left). The magnificent elk figure (right). The painting is located on a small white side surface of the rock terrace in the upper part of a large bank. Rautakannanvuori is less than a kilometre away.

is nothing to suggest that paintings were created also during the rise of the water level, although it was certainly possible. Some paintings at Saimaa, however, have been created at the time when the water level of Suur-Saimaa was at its highest. Still, it is speculated that most paintings of Suurjärvi have been created after the formation of the Kymijoki and Vuoksi rivers and the lowering of the water level.

Relatively few object finds, probably from the end of Stone Age or the Early Bronze Age, have been discovered near the rock paintings. Four parts of amber pendant have been found in the bottom of Astuvansalmi (Grönhagen 1994). Amber, which was imported to Finland from the south-western part of the Baltic Sea, has also been discovered in burials from the pit-comb ceramic period. Also, objects of certain form have been found in the Baltic area that allow us to associate them with some rock paintings. Motifs of rock paintings have probably been used on engraved bone objects, clay impressions, dyed or tattooed skin, etc. The transision of motifs between different materials may in some cases explain the shape of traces of rock paintings. At the same time it is relatively difficult to find experimentation on painted surfaces.



Figure 6. Location of the paintings of Astuvansalmi, drawn after photographs. The drawing has been altered due to the position of figures and the shadowing trees. The uppermost painting, 12.5 m above the water level in Lake Saimaa, depicts a slanted cross. The discovery of this location (Sarvas 1969) initiated an enthusiastic search for rock paintings in Finland.

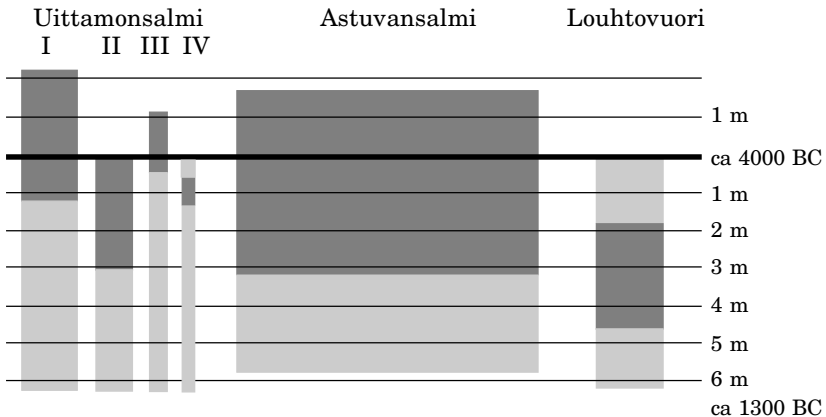


Figure 7. The width of rock surfaces and the age of paintings on them; estimated by the water level of Suur-Saimaa in 4000 BC in the close vicinity of Ristiina. The distance between vertical lines equals 1 metre and the corresponding horizontal measure is equal to 2 metres. The light grey lower part of the column indicates the water level in Lake Saimaa below each painting in the year 1300 BC. The paintings of Astuvansalmi cover more than a 15 m long area.

Finnish rock paintings have been made in ochre of various hues (ferric oxide) (Taavitsainen & Kinnunen 1979). The ochre's colour belongs to the composition of the rock.

The paintings have been preserved under the vitreous silica dioxide layer of varying transparency for thousands of years. Rock surfaces covered with paintings are generally quite small (about 1.5 x 2 m) with rather modest images, although in sites of longer tradition some painting compositions cover larger surfaces. Saraakallio, Väräkallio and Astuvansalmi, for example, were used as sanctuaries during a longer period of time. Belts of paintings originating from different periods, resembling the layers of a cake can be distinguished in both Saraakallio and Astuvansalmi.

The paintings of Saimaa are estimated to originate from 6000–3300 calendrical years ago (Jussila 1999: 113–133), whereas the paintings of the Kymijoki region and Saraakallio were created even earlier. At present it is speculated that the rock paintings of Finland originate in the Neolithic period, but researches in the field have not been completed yet.

MAIN MOTIFS OF ROCK PAINTINGS

The motifs of Finnish rock painting consist of more than 600 images or identifiable fragments. The most important depict humans, elks, antlers, boats and handprints. Also, grid-like marks and patterns, zigzag lines resembling snakes, some birds, fish, unidentifiable animals and zoomorphic motifs, various lines and line-like patterns.

The classification of paintings by details and into categories is relatively complicated. The sc. elk figures display features characteristic to reindeer and elks; also, boat motifs may often resemble horn figures.

Generally, paintings stand at a distance from each other. Homogeneous compositions of two or three different representations are quite rare, although there are instances of the same motif occurring in couples.

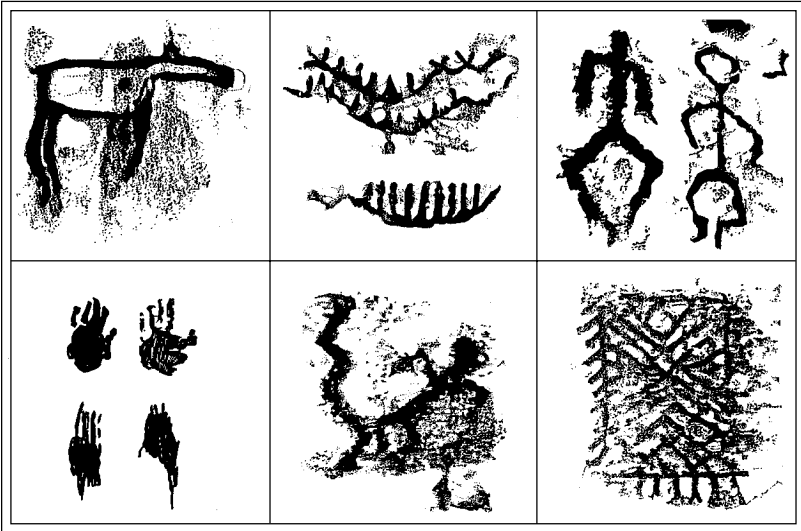


Figure 8. The most common painting motifs are elk, antler or boat motifs, human figures, various depression prints, but also zigzag lines, grid patterns, birds, fish, unidentifiable figures, various lines and spots.

The painter has hardly ever aimed at realistic likeness. The paintings are mostly representations of signs well known to the group, or in other words, the creator has painted pictures of pictorial signs. Familiar signs of a characteristic style are repeated in numerous paintings. This leads us to believe that these figures may not have been meaningful for a certain group of people only, but that instead they were powerful signs connected with legends and beliefs. It is also worth noting that the pictures are painted in colours characteristic of funeral traditions.

These paintings, the memory of a certain group and their link to the past cast in stone, marked off and surrounded the circle of life. All evidence suggests that a rock covered with paintings was considered sacred. The representations depict man's inner world as well as the world surrounding him. A rock covered with paintings as if symbolises the line or the border area between two worlds. Facing the rock, a man could focus on his innermost thoughts, find strength and answers.

There were many reasons for creating rock paintings, some of which we may only guess. Survival depended on the gains from hunting and fishing. At the same time, depicting the surrounding world, the marking of fishing and hunting areas, the success of the tribe in battling diseases and dangers and in overcoming major changes in life, and perception of one's identity seems to have been of equal importance.

Some paintings have been repainted or modified in the course of time. Different generations may also have interpreted the paintings differently. While rock paintings reflect the deeper layers of human soul, they have also been closely connected to the everyday life of contemporary people. The line between those two is truly thin.

Although the sign language of Finnish rock art was also known in the neighbouring countries, it is still unique compared to the

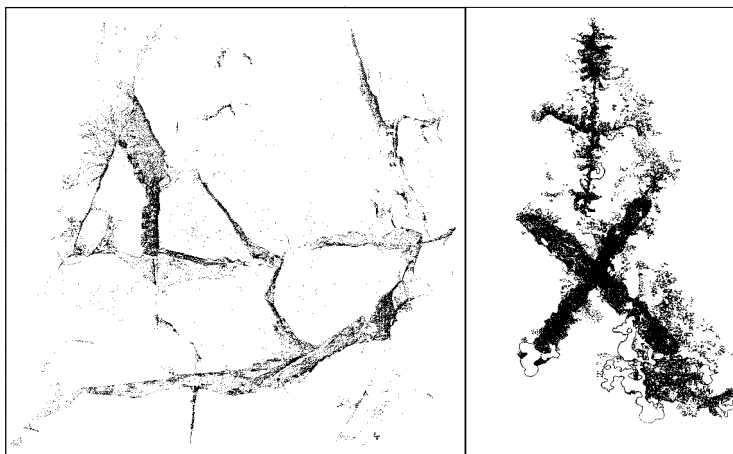


Figure 9 A & B. The projecting precipice of Saraakallio rock displays a variety of different representations. A painting group of ribbon-like and profile human figures stands out in the centre of the rock surface. An “athletic” human figure depicted from the front is partly overlapping these figures. Deep below, to the right of the main group there are traces of a human figure, on the left, one may distinguish traces of zoomorphic figures. The central group of figures appears somewhat oriental and is therefore quite exceptional among other rock paintings discovered in Finland. On the right there is the second slanted cross of Saraakallio. In a sense this motif refers to a very ancient painting tradition.

petroglyphs of Karelia, the Kola Peninsula or Scandinavia. It is surprising, though, that the most frequently occurring motifs in Finnish rock art are anthropomorphic figures (about 240), while the representations of the Swedish hunters culture mostly depict elk. The most frequently occurring motif of Lake Onega petroglyphs, however, is waterfowl (42%) (Poikalainen 1996).

Finnish rock art also includes handprints, which are very rare on other Stone Age paintings of Fennoscandia. The most diverse selection of different painting motifs can be seen in Laukaa Saraakallio. It has to be noted that a dim silicon layer complicates the visibility of paintings to the degree that some paintings can be observed only on rainy days in late autumn and winter.

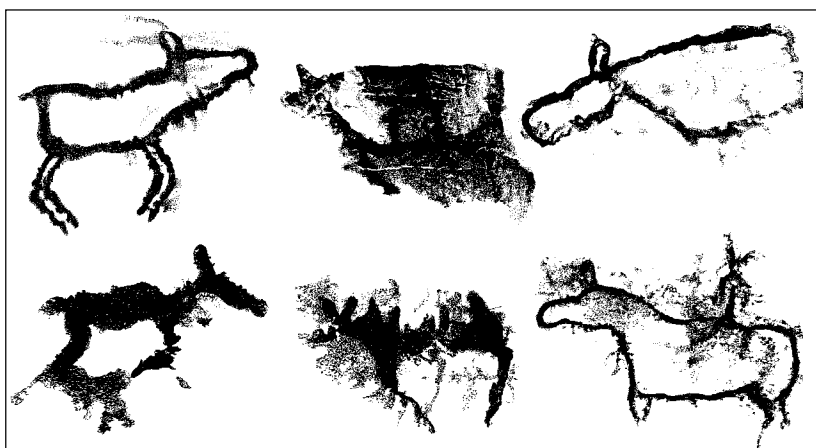


Figure 10. Elk-like figures in Finnish rock art from the top left: Uttosalmi II, Avosaari, Lakiasuonvuori, Väräkallio, Saraakallio, Verla.

In the Northern hunter-fisher culture elks and wild reindeer have constituted an important source of living and been a central subject of rock paintings. The large number of elks cannot only be explained by the fact that elks were a source of subsistence, because no other important game has been depicted on the rocks.

More than 140 elk representations have been found in Finland. All these are located solely by the main prehistoric trade routes. Mighty elks and boats resembling antler motifs can be seen in the upper part of rock paintings of Saraakallio and Ristiina. The elk motifs

depict mostly antlerless females. An animal figure with a small head and a boat-like abdomen was discovered in Päijänne as well as some other representations.

It appears that elks played a central role in beliefs and rituals tying the tribe together. It is possible that some explained their ancestral origin and perhaps also various customs through stories of elks or of wild reindeer. In stories both animals appear as animals of sun (Autio 1993) and the main hunting game; both were also used as names of central star constellations for determining points of compass.

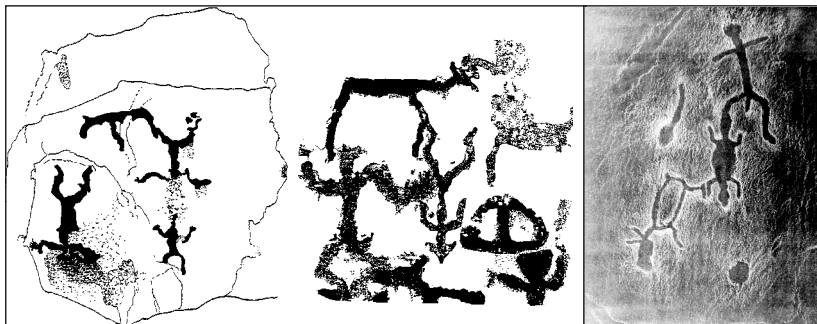


Figure 11. The painting compositions of Verijärvi and Puula Hahlavuori are located in the area of the same watershed. Both compositions depict a human figure upside down, with his foot touching the elk's leg (left). A petroglyph from Cape Peri Nos, Lake Onega (right). Copy by Eve Selisaar.

Not all elks are depicted with legs, or if so, the legs are unusual in their length and position. Other motifs may be linked to the elk legs – on two painting groups a human figure, head downwards, and on a painting in Astuvansalmi a representation of a boat is joined with an elk leg. The same motif appears on Karelian petroglyphs. In Swan Cape the motif of a swan replaces the human figure. In Cape Peri Nos III, however, elk and human figures are connected by a beaver.

About 15 elk figures have a spot or some other mark at the heart region. Evidence suggests that this custom was short-termed and practised on a few rock walls only. Astuvansalmi is particularly rich in similar figures.



Figure 12. Reindeer figure with the heart marked, from Vierunvuori (left). A female figure holding a bow, from Astuvansalmi (right).

Astuvansalmi is also a site where a human figure is depicted in front of an animal figure. The most remarkable of such representations is perhaps a scene where a female figure is aiming her bow towards a reindeer. This group of figures cannot be explained by hunting only and should, most likely, be viewed in the context of Kola-Sami legends about the mythical reindeer Meandash (Charnoluskii 1965; Autio 1993; Sergeeva 1994). In this light the scene depicts the first victim. Ornamentation on the Sami drums also suggests that this scene refers to the daughters of Madderaka, who wished that their son would be a hunter.

Other details referring to the coexistence of elk and men can be found in Astuvansalmi. Horns have been painted on two human figures. Several human figures from Ristiina painting compositions have been depicted standing, one foot on tiptoe. I have tried to explain this unusual standing position with a dance imitating elk, and elk hunting during the rutting season. I found confirmation to the connection with elk from St. Petersburg, Russia, as it turned out that the feet of a small human figure discovered on the Oleni Island resemble the hooves of an elk, and the same was observed on a carved figurine found in Kubenino. In March 2000, a book on Permian bronze castings was issued, containing, among other things, illustrations of hoofed human figures (Autio 2000).

The more recent paintings of Astuvansalmi are usually made in the same manner as the earlier ones, sometimes modifying the earlier paintings. In some cases, for example, the legs of a horned human

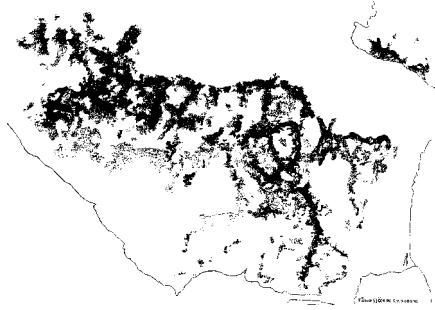
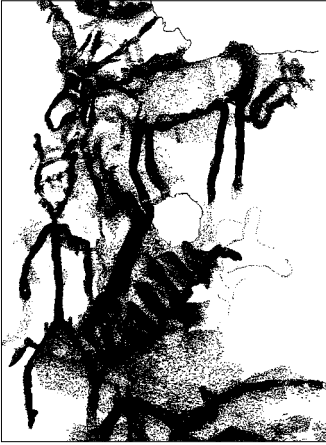


Figure 13. A B This particular group of paintings from Astuvansalmi has been repeatedly repainted. This becomes evident if the contours of the elk are followed moving right from the fore legs. The currently seen representation does not coincide with the figure of the animal beneath that has a gradually ascending back contour. The original head of the figure is covered by more recent paintings. An interesting detail is also the short cross-line drawn to the animal's rear leg, joining it to the muzzle of a smaller elk. A similar detail can be seen on a rock painting in Fångsjö, Sweden (right).

figure have been longer. Or there is a fragment painted in deeper red behind the elk that could be considered as the head of a smaller elk. It is certain that both representations have been painted in different colour, though they are connected by a short cross-line. Have these paintings been created at different times or is it the case of drawing intentional distinction between a female individual and a new-born calf by using separate colours and form?

Two relatively closely situated paintings depicting a smaller animal figure behind a larger one were discovered at the same watershed in Sweden (Nässjö and Fångsjö). The posterior animal figure on the Fångsjö painting is hardly distinguishable due to its small size and colour. But even though the assumption about the differentiation of an elk cow and its calf has no factual foundation, it is still certain that the cross-line joining the animal figures on the Astuvansalmi painting was not made accidentally.

The most common combination of two motifs in Finnish rock art is that of an elk and a human figure behind it in numerous variations.



Figure 14. The tripartite painting of Saraakallio – two vertical lines, elk and human figure (left). A highly unique painting of two figures discovered from Salmenvuori, the Lappeenranta region (right).

Also, there is no uniform explanation as to the co-depiction of humans and elk.

Finnish rock paintings and the petroglyphs of Lake Onega share both similar and dissimilar characteristics. In this light it seems surprising that not a single petroglyph depicting a human figure behind an elk figure has been found in the Lake Onega region.

Anthropomorphic symbols

The most characteristic representation on the rocks of Finland depicts a sketchy human figure from the front with bent asymmetrical knees. The same representation type can be seen on some rock depictions in Norway, on the Kola Peninsula, at Lake Onega, in the Urals and Siberia. Only 1–3 analogous figures have been discovered in the extensive petroglyphic area of Zalavruga in White Sea Karelia. Most surprisingly though, almost no such anthropomorphic symbols have been found on the Stone Age rock art of Sweden.

The main focus of human figures with bent knees is on arms and legs. Knee joints are usually distinguishable, even though legs have been changed from mostly rhombic to almost bandy.

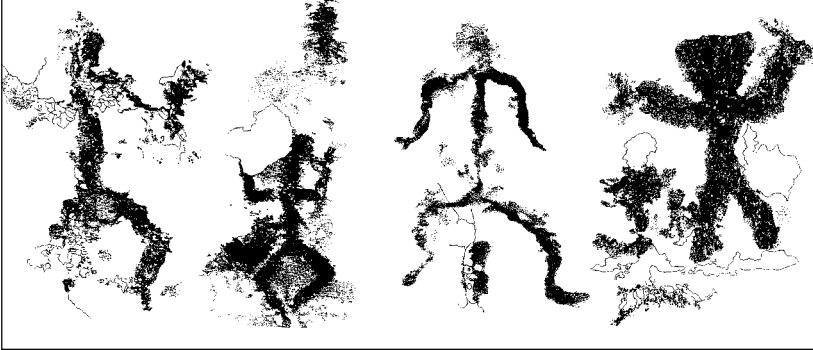


Figure 15. A selection of frontal human figures: an indistinct human figure on a crumbling rock surface, Levasvuori (left); a praying person with something attached to its abdomen, Saraakallio; a possible - giving birth, Värrikallio; a human figure with triangular head holding something, Hahlavuori.

The bent knees of figures may refer to tribal ancestors, a dance connecting the group or a specific manner of depicting a group of people.

Heads usually resemble a smaller spot, a ring or a triangle. Arms are often raised high up in prayer (the adoration position) or rest aside. Sometimes humans are also depicted with straight legs.

A frontal human figure may with slight alterations, by changing the position of limbs or adding a symbol on its hands or head, for example, express different situations. A figure may also be depicted upside down, in a slanted position or joined with another figure. This construction is not very effective for depicting groups of people or motion. Such figures stand apart – alone or in couples (a small and a large human figure) – from other depictions and resemble an icon. But the question remains – does the couple symbolise ancestors, fairies or assisting spirits, an adult and a child or a man and a woman? And even then – which one is depicted larger?

The gender of human figures is hard to determine. Often there is a spot of colour inbetween the figure's legs, but its meaning remains questionable. The paintings of the northern region contain clearer references to the figure's gender. Observing the painting fragments of Värrikallio one cannot but think on a woman giving birth.



Figure 16. Two human figures on the Astuvansalmi painting are depicted with short horns, the left figure is one of them. The human figure from a painting in Väräkallio is dressed in animal skin. Ear-like projections can be seen on human figures in Keltavuori and Uittovuori.

Profile human figures form a separate group. There are no profile figures in the upper parts of earlier paintings. Profile view is most effective for depicting groups, events and motion; many such figures have been simplified to lines or marks referring simultaneously to a human and animal. The largest number of profile figures has been found in Saraakallio.



Figure 17. Profile human figures: a remarkable figure from the upper part of Rautakannanvuori (left); the rest are from Saraakallio.

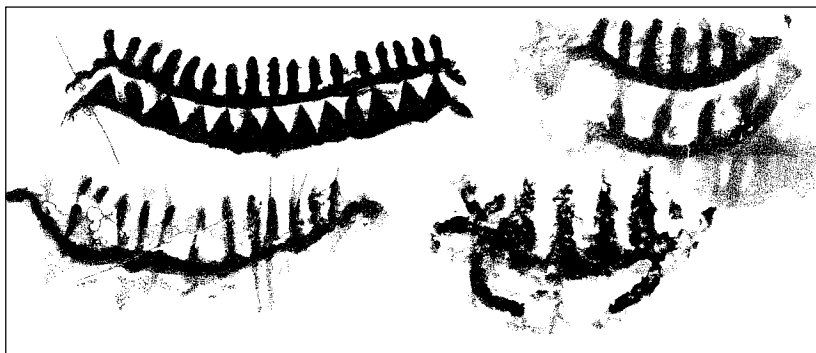


Figure 18. Representations of boats and antler motifs: from the left – Saraakallio, Kannonalus, Kintahuonvuori, Saraakallio.

Boat or antler motifs

The sc. boats are one of the main motifs of rock paintings. The name *boat*, however, is not quite sufficient for the motif group, as the composition definitely encompasses more. The highest comb-like representations on rock walls are generally called horn motifs or marks resembling horn and boat motifs. The joints on such paintings often display traces of triangular forms. Boat and horn motifs are often depicted in pairs, whereas the symbols are either above each other or adjacent: this arrangement refers to the symbolic nature of the motif rather than is just a depiction of a boat. Vessels



Figure 19. On at least three painting compositions the boat motif has been joined to the elk head, resembling thus horns: a 53 cm tall reindeer figure and a pair of horns of Pyhänpää, Päijänne (digitally elaborated picture by Timo Sepänmaa), and the elk and the boat of Astuvansalmi.

with elk head fore can be associated with fishing or hunting, but also with ritual traditions: a shaman may travel by a boat, the sun and the moon cross the sky in a boat, and a boat transports the deceased. Boats were used in initiation and healing rituals as well as at funerals. Horns were associated, among other things, with growth and fertility, and were often used as symbols of elk-like animals.

Handprints and other impressions

Handprints have been found in different parts of the world and they have often been called the oldest painting technique of humankind. On Palaeolithic paintings the result has been achieved by dispersing colour around a hand pressed against the rock surface. Very rarely the print has been made by pressing a colour-soaked hand against the surface.



Figure 20. Prints discovered from the Saimaa region: (left) Havukkavuori I, two pairs of representations from Astuvansalmi (the figure of the lower pair is indistinguishable) and handprints of Astuvansalmi, above each other. The lower handprint has been made on an angular elk head. There's another paw-like print to its right.

Depressed handprints are very characteristic of Finnish rock art, often two prints were made simultaneously. The footprints depicted on Scandinavian rock carvings, especially bear paw prints, sometimes seem to have a similar meaning.

Handprints are the only true-size representations on rock paintings. The motif recurs on different sites, but is most characteristic of Saraakallio, Astuvansalmi and Juusjärvi sites. Some less distinct marks resembling foot and paw prints and vertical rows of impressions have also been found in Finland.



Figure 21. The pair of handprints in the upper part of the Saraakallio site resemble elk's shovel-like horns. The surface has been repainted repeatedly. The slackness of the foreleg of the lower elk could be associated with sacrifice and the figure's swollen abdomen to its gestation.

The impressions of Astuvansalmi (except for one) are located on a 1.5 m wide belt; the corresponding height of the Saraakallio belt is only 1 m. The position of prints at a certain height is the most convincing evidence of the arrival of a new group of population, rather than the adoption of a new style.

Handprints are regarded as the painter's signature, a protective or warding picture. The motif has often been associated with initiation tradition.

On a painting composition in Saraakallio two adjacent handprints bear striking resemblance to elk horns. The hands have been raised as if in prayer. Although there is no sun figure on the rock, the paintings are positioned in such manner that at some time of the day the sun shone on them. The creator of the painting group has also taken into consideration the shaded side of the rock, as no painting has been made on this side.

Reptiles and zigzag lines

In pictorial symbolism the snake is the embodiment of both good and evil forces. Snakes are often associated with sexuality and creative force. Snake-shaped objects and drawings have been discovered in prehistoric locations.

Snake's head and skin have been traditional magic tools, drums are often decorated with snake ornamentation. Snakes were believed



Figure 22. Snake motifs and zigzag lines: Mertavuori (left), Saraakallio (top), Verla (below), Saraakallio and Salmenkallio (right).

to be the assisting animals of witches or representatives of the underworld. A popular belief is also that some shamans had the ability to transform into snakes. Regardless of the aura of mystery surrounding the animal, snake patterns and zigzag lines generally associated with them are not very common in Finnish rock art. Also, not all broken lines can be interpreted as snake figures.

Birds, fish, other animals and unidentifiable marks

Karelians believed swans to be sacred. Impressions of ornithomorphic motifs decorate pottery from the pit-comb ceramic period and 42% of representations carved into the rocks of Lake Onega depict waterfowl, most of them swans. Only one rock painting that without any doubt depicts a waterfowl has been found in Finland, namely in the Savonlinna region. In addition to this, traces of unquestionable figures have been discovered. The sc. Rapakko swans represent a couple and are of different size. The painting resembles the depiction of a human couple. The small number of fish representations is also surprising – fish figures appear only on three painting compositions. The fact that fish were used for food could not, therefore, have been the main stimulus for painting.

Some zoomorphic representations are unidentifiable due to the degree of weathering and blurriness. Some paintings, for example, seem to depict a bear figure, though it cannot be determined for certain.



Figure 23. The swans of Rapakko (left), a human and fish figure painted on a rock precipice of Juusjärvi, and a figure in Hahlavuori (right).

CONCLUSION

Rock paintings are tourism object of many values, with the rock and images on it living in concordance with the weather, seasons, the Sun and water. Expecting to find grandiose paintings and depiction of high aesthetic value in rock art will inevitably cause disappointment. The paintings convey us the thoughts, beliefs and traffic routes of the “ordinary” people who lived by these water bodies. It is not the product of high arts, as it is, but an unadorned “folk song”. The rock paintings of the North offer the best kind of environmental art to those who travel and perceive things with an open mind. Finding one’s way to the images requires overcoming many perceivable and imperceivable boundaries. To view the paintings one must free his mind of established cultural stereotypes, welcome nature and stand still to listen – rock paintings are silent pictures, their voice reaching us over thousands of years.

Comment

¹ BP – the date in radiocarbon years before AD 1950. The number is smaller than that of calendrical years.

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