

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BIRDS IN SÁMI TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

During the 17th century small animals were connected with the Sámi *noaidi* – religious specialist and artist – with regard to the practice of *noaidivuolta* (shamanism) and other tasks he performed. Some of these animals were peculiar species of birds that varied in setting making them significant as assistants. Birds as such are illustrated on historical Sámi drums, particularly those from Swedish *Sápmi*. The value of birds within Sámi tradition means that some contemporary Sámi artists reuse early illustrations as sources of inspiration for new types of drum, meaning that *noaidi* power is manifest through their work. Moreover, one can suggest that these drums play a role in the on-going spiritual significance of birds within different settings, thus helping to perpetuate their merit today.

KEYWORDS: birds • *noaidi* • narratives • art • cultural heritage • Sámi drums

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INTRODUCTION

From within the spiritual traditions of the Sámi of northern Europe, interest in the art of the *noaidi*¹ which was portrayed on sacred drums from the 17th century has been extensive. *Noaidi* were in a past context known as sacrificial specialists, drum diviners and more recently in contemporary society as artists and healers. In the 17th century Sámi sacrificial practices were forbidden because they were linked with the pre-Christian religion and worldview, which was deeply animistic and thus outlawed by the church and by state of Sweden. As a consequence, large numbers of sacred drums containing *noaidi* powers manifest through decorative landscapes were collected and destroyed by missionaries and priests during drives to convert the Sámi from their Indigenous religion to Christianity. Those drums that survived which are approximately 70 in number and can be found both exhibited and in the archives of museums in Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark and the United Kingdom, where they have been for centuries.

This paper investigates subject matters pertaining to the traditions of sacred Sámi drums, their uses, and the painted symbols representing the worldview of the *noaidi*, especially concerning the appearance and significance of certain animals as assistants, protectors or guardians of *noaidi*. One of the key aims is an attempt to bring past and present knowledge together to make comparative studies by searching for possible evidence of continuity of tradition and practice. This has helped in compiling different types of analysis of shamanistic narratives such as stories portraying sacred, animated landscapes through art. The bird in the Sámi tradition past and present is the central research context investigated within the scope of this paper in relation to new types of painted drum landscape that contain birds, as created by Sámi artist and drum maker Elli-Maaret Helander from Finnish *Sápmi* and drum maker and artist Peter Armstrand from Swedish *Sápmi*.² There have been various opportunities to meet and interview contemporary Sámi *noaidi* and artists since 2006, which has led to successful cooperation in the coproduction of knowledge published as academic research. Information from Helander is quite limited as she does not speak English and tends only to share certain kinds of knowledge.

Previous studies on birds as assistants to the *noaidi* include two earlier publications (Joy 2015; 2016). These publications were concerned with efforts to understand the human–animal bond better, and predominantly covered the human relationship with the souls of animals within Sámi culture. Bird motifs from earlier sources were analysed, to support a new investigation into a role of birds as helpers on old sacred Sámi drums from Sweden. Francis Joy endeavoured to interpret additional contexts where bird motifs appear and therefore their prominence in relation to how Sámi associations with birds have influenced artists in their work.

Different animal helpers have assisted the *noaidi* on his or her journey to perform certain tasks with one particular prominent destination being a mythical paradise called *sáivo*.³ There have chiefly been four species of assistant to the *noaidi*: reindeer, birds, snakes and fish. These allies are clearly noted within the historical materials.

From a study of photographs of Sámi drums from the 17th century from the nomadic hunting culture, as well as Sámi drums exhibited in museum collections, which are oval-shaped drums with decorative landscapes that had been painted using red alder bark dye, it has been interesting to note how very few of these contained different types

of bird. Initially, sacred Sámi drums were used for divination, trance and healing practices within the former nomadic hunting culture and were typically characterised with the work of the *noaidi* and his or her spiritual assistants, which were primitive sources of power. The old drum landscapes were divided into two to five different levels or cosmological zones representative of the Sámi cosmos.

In contrast, the birds painted on contemporary drumheads are presented as artistic productions in exhibitions. However, the former nomadic hunting culture no longer exists and so contemporary drums are made for a variety of purposes (for instance, divination and healing practices within contemporary settings as well as light trance achieved through rhythmic drumming and chanting, i.e. *yoiking*⁴). *Yoiking* as a Sámi form of singing, is, likewise, also connected with earlier drums, deep trance states and summoning spiritual assistants from the *sáivo* world. Activities painted on contemporary drumheads are all ways in which *noaidi* powers are seen as both transmitted and manifest within Sámi culture.

As sacred contemporary artefacts, they add increased interest and bring new significance to a local study of the developments of both drum-making and tradition from individual Sámi perspectives. The study of contemporary drum landscapes demonstrates in what ways ancient symbolism from the Sámi drums of the 17th century appears to have been influential especially because of the powers associated with these landscapes. This brings into focus how cultural heritage from different areas has been adapted for the construction and development of sacred narratives and to re-engage with and take back ownership of both power and tradition. The paper gives examples of what the drum makers see in the new era and how birds are depicted today as messengers, assistants' guardians and helpers to the *noaidi*. This reflects spiritual powers associated with both past and present cultures.

The surviving older painted drums depict landscapes that contain knowledge systems of an animistic worldview, which the *noaidi* used as a cosmological map in order to travel to other worlds in a trance state. Many Sámi artists and *noaidi* draw on this rich artistic cultural heritage, using it as a resource in different fields of production (see, for example, Helander-Renvall 2005; Sunna 2006). Approaches to creating art suggest a tradition of following the ways of the ancestors when re-embracing and remaking heritage sacralities that relate to the maintenance of beliefs and practices that are characterised by inter-species communication through drum building and decoration. Ultimately, these practices are linked with identity building and the *noaidi* working as a mediator between the human world and the invisible spiritual realms within nature (see for instance Ahlbäck and Bergman 1991).

Examples that match current knowledge of the very early formation of the Sámi religion are found throughout Fennoscandia within ancient rock art depictions of hunting myths and beliefs. These colourful landscapes are indicative of an animistic worldview that was characterised by hunting, fishing and trapping practices. Within these landscapes are found illustrations of human figures holding drums, flying, dancing, falling and changing their forms into animals, indicating trance scenes and ecstasy in connection with what would be termed today *noaidivuohhta* (in the north Sámi language) or shamanism. Many landscapes and figures have similar parallels to 17th century drum landscapes (see, for example, Joy 2018).

Birds depicted on drums symbolise important aspects of Sámi beliefs, values, and practices. These images reflect continuity within Sámi cultural and spiritual traditions, linking 17th-century drum-making with contemporary practices. Our study highlights this continuity, particularly through the adaptation and reuse of ancient symbols. However, understanding these practices in historical depth is challenging as Sámi spirituality was often practiced in secret and passed down orally or through art. Today, fragments of this legacy are visible in the revival of Sámi shamanism, with contemporary art reanimating and recontextualising spiritual traditions.

Conversely, interactions with drum makers have raised important questions. For example, how and why are the ancient sources of art that are linked with Sámi cultural heritage reused today and what values do they have for both individual artists and Sámi society. Why are birds considered to be of particular importance within shamanistic narratives to the extent that they appear depicted within different cosmological landscapes on Sámi drums? In what ways are birds in particular, as well as other animals, illustrated through sacred *noaidi* drums, grave artifacts, holy places? How can newly illustrated drums, which are associated with divination, healing and communication, be better understood as manifestations of certain spiritual powers within different areas of Sweden and Finland?

We are able to gain a critical insight into how different spiritual beings bring different powers and qualities to the Sámi cosmos. This was undertaken using two approaches in data collection. The first was a study of art on both 17th century drums. The second was to look at the landscapes portrayed on contemporary drums made by Armstrand in Kiruna and Helander in Inari. This took place through visits to their homes where photographs were taken of drums, and through correspondence via Facebook and Skype between 2015 and 2021. During interviews Joy was sent photographs they had taken of their artistic work. This way of building cooperation helped us better comprehend how spiritual powers portrayed as artistic symbolism help shape, enrich and sustain traditions, beliefs and practices. Ultimately, these practices have their origin in sustainable thinking and subsistence practices that are reflected in the human–nature–animal relationship.

Equally, the core of this is characterised holistically by relations with invisible worlds and non-human entities who dwell there and who manifest as animal spirits or souls and other supernatural beings that figure prominently and are, thus, entwined within both past and present Sámi.

The complexity of Sámi shamanistic traditions within different areas is characterised by multi-faceted relationships consisting of various frameworks and knowledge systems depicted through art and landscapes. Visual representations of these landscapes on drums express practices associated with the *noaidi* that relate to inter-species communication with a multitude of invisible powers. They assist with forming the basis for more-than-human relations and can be divided chiefly into three categories: animal communication, communication with supernatural powers (gods, goddesses and the spirits of a particular culture and/or area), and communication with deceased ancestors.⁵ Animal communication has a central role as one of the *noaidi*'s main tasks, because the *noaidi* has the ability to transform him- or herself into an animal. Furthermore, in terms of certain animal species being used as sacrificial quarry for different offering practices, there is a long-written history of how differences between reindeer, horses

and birds have been significant because of the ways they have been offered to ruling and tutelary spirits. This can be understood as a method for developing and fostering reciprocal relationships and for establishing and maintaining the wellbeing of the *noaidi* and wider society. Needless to say, practice has taken up a central role and function within culture.

RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODS

The aim of the paper is to examine why birds are spiritually significant for the mythical *sáivo* world in Sámi tradition. In order to do this, Joy analysed four contemporary drums made by Armstrong and three drums made by Helander. In addition, Joy analysed birds depicted on five Swedish *noaidi* drums from the 17th century, as well as a metal bird found in a 17th century *noaidi* grave in Kuusamo, a former Forest Sámi settlement area in northern Finland.

The context of the study across the two time periods, the 17th century and the present day, has been arranged to suit the themes presented, with a focus on broadening our understanding of the roles and functions of the Sámi *noaidi* and his or her relationship with birds within various settings. Use of the photographic data helps emphasise how different forms of communication are significant. For example, metamorphosis and shapeshifting are activities that are characterised by out-of-body journeys (flying) to other invisible realms, or they embody various spiritual powers that are revered and commonplace practices within Arctic shamanism. With regard to analysis of the new drums made by Armstrong and Helander, the aim is also to examine their importance and functions because the work of both artists carries with it examples of the ways their own beliefs link with Sámi cultural beliefs, and through art in what ways these beliefs are revived and transmitted. Revealing what these beliefs are helps provide insight into and some level of understanding of the construction of narratives through art. Knowing these beliefs also gives evidence of different types of spiritual practice and an understanding of how art as a medium is used in identity building. The research presents examples of how reuse of cultural heritage can take place through the use of various kinds of symbolism. Understanding these factors is critical because they provide innovative instances of ways of communicating the sacred aspects of culture that can be seen as representative of indigeneity. These ways of communicating bring together diverse perspectives on human–animal relations through the work of individual artists.

Through their artwork Armstrong and Helander demonstrate how certain techniques associated with altered states of consciousness are used and how this relates to the ways the *noaidi* carries out his or her culturally specific duties. The evidence we have points towards different practices that show the importance of the transmission of spiritual knowledge through inter-species communication and human–animal relations as they relate to identity building.

Today, there are some Sámi drum makers and artists who want to talk about their work and its importance in Sámi culture. They are aware of the relationship to the *noaidi*'s task as an mediator between the human world and the invisible worlds where the spirits reside. By including pictures of decorated drums and explanations of the symbols painted on them, the aim is to better understand the functions of different species of bird and their associations with *noaidi* and the mythical paradise *sáivo*.

From a study of the data collected from Armstrong and Helander, it has been possible to make certain comparisons with older drum landscapes from the 17th century. Notably because of how the symbolism from the older drums has been copied and either modified and reused or reused without modification. This helps us see how currently, ancient cultural heritage is a valuable resource that shows how older narratives connected with certain kinds of symbolism have been utilised to create new enactments and storylines as well as build new types of sacred structure.

We have adapted Vilma Hänninen's (2004: 1) "Model of Narrative Circulation". This method has been applied in the ways Joy has formulated the structure of the data and combined the symbolism of older narratives illustrated on older 17th century drums portrayed in the work of Ernst Manker (1950), with the personal narratives of Armstrong and Helander. The knowledge collected through interviews with Armstrong and Helander is given priority and treated with respect through their inclusion as co-authors in the paper. In addition, the narrative method can be seen as being given a worthwhile and legitimate position within the study as a way of demonstrating through the structure of the study how the older texts and illustrations have been influential to both drum makers, and therefore can be linked with the new narratives. Thus, when these are combined with meaning and purpose in the study, we find results that are important and significant with regard to us being able to understand why Sámi history is a valuable resource that artists can draw upon in order to create new types of narrative related to cosmological and shamanistic landscapes on drums. However, one of the main problems with using older data in a study is the uncertainty generated by the ways that drum landscapes have been interpreted by people outside Sámi culture. For example, Manker (1938; 1950) and the priests and missionaries of the northern districts where drums were collected from the Sámi throughout the course of the 17th century.

Here is an explanation of how the method has been used. Firstly, in terms of the collection, formulation and use of the data, use of this method helps us reflect on the literature sources included in the chapter to follow, which helps inform the reader about narratives from different parts of *Sápmi* in connection with the *sáivo* realms, *noaidi* and birds. The reason for doing this is because these stories help create a foundation for what follows. It also helps the reader gain a broader understanding of the Sámi cosmology.

Examples of contemporary Sámi drums bring into focus the painted landscapes that adorn the drums, which are characterised by their own inner narratives. They show how Indigenous knowledge has been shared, not only through spoken narratives but also through the way in which artists have used symbolism, both past and present, to transmit personal thoughts, beliefs and experiences. This intimates how the work of the artists can be understood as reinforcing both their own personal worldviews as well as the collective Sámi worldview.

Being able to both get access to and assess the work of the artists helps to present new evidence of the ways in which inner narratives can be combined with existing narratives to make a story rich and interesting, thus linking them through this relationship. Armstrong's and Helander's work shows this in the way they have drawn on the position of *noaidi* and the artistry of *noaidi* drums from the 17th century to help enhance their work. We see this in the ways the materials have been formulated and presented, illustrating how both artists have constructed narratives that are reflected through their art and the textual data that accompanies it.

A study of the data in this particular context shows how use of the narrative method helps to communicate some of the different ways art plays a key role in the transmission of traditions, practices and cultural memory. The rest of the article deals with the spiritual significance of birds in Sámi culture as helpers of *noaidi* in different contexts, although primarily in connection with their inclusion in the mythical world of *sáivo* as reflected through both the art and various textual sources used in the research.

In addition, the narrative methodology serves two further functions. Firstly, it aims to draw attention to how

the potential of the inner narrative to shape the lived narrative is based on its prospective quality: the inner narrative not only organizes memories of the past but anticipates the future and forms the narrative projects one sets to enact (Hänninen 2004: 80).

And secondly, “fascination with the concept of narrative seems to stem from its ability to bring together various disciplines, as well as to bridge the gap between science and art” (ibid.: 69). This is in order to produce narratives that are coherent and well defined in this case within Sámi culture. This, we will argue, is evident in the ways the data has been chosen, collected, formulated and presented, which, again, demonstrates how the method has been used and how it works in this particular research.

As a method of demonstrating the ways both Armstrand and Helander have constructed contemporary narratives through their artwork, and how some of these artworks have been characterised through birds portrayed on 17th century drums from Sweden (published in Manker 1950), we have also drawn on some of the major sources from within Sámi scholarship to add to the discussion because of the richness and value of what individual scholars have had to say about both the cosmology and beliefs of Sámi from different areas, as well as about the position of the *noaidi* in Sámi society. One of the major themes in this paper is the *sáivo* world and birds, an important enough location cosmologically that Sámi scholars such as Louise Bäckman (1975; 1978) have written about it. Bäckman sees particular mountains as portals to the *sáivo* world. More recently, Sámi scholars Aage Solbakk (2007; 2018), and Anna Westman with John Utsi (1999) have drawn attention to the *sáivo* world.

We also find such narratives from outsiders of Indigenous cultures, especially missionaries and clergymen, who have been involved in compiling data that have contributed to our understanding of Sámi narratives. For example, within “the measures implemented by missionaries in the 17th and 18th century also resulted in an accumulation of what the symbols on the drums represented and how the drums were used” (Storm and Isaksen 2014: 96). One of the major historical sources discussing the *sáivo* world, birds and other animals as assistants of the *noaidi* is encountered in discussions by Juha Pentikäinen (see Laestadius 2002 [1838–1845]) in connection with Sámi beliefs, deities and cosmology. Another important early source about birds is Johannes Schefferus’s *History of Lapland* (1673; 1971 [1674]). His work was based on missionary texts and illustrations of the pre-Christian Sámi religion and on offering practices. Swedish scholars Håkan Rydving (2011), Rolf Kjellström (1991) and Bo Sommarström (1987) have also made important contributions to research in the field of Sámi *noaidi*, birds and animals.

Combining these materials helps provide a rich discussion about the *sáivo* world, the Sámi *noaidi* as an inter-species communicator, and birds as their allies and assistants.

BIRDS AND ANIMALS WITHIN THE SÁMI TRADITIONS AND
THE MYTHICAL PARADISE OF SÁIVO

Much of the commentary about old *noaidi* drums comes from Swedish *Sápmi* because the majority of drums that have survived are from the south Sámi areas, as are the older drums included in this research.

A notable contribution to the discussions is Kjellström's (1991) article "Traditional Saami Hunting in Relation to Drum Motifs of Animals and Hunting", which is concerned with an inventory of birds painted on different drumheads from the 17th century solely as food sources, and is therefore linked with hunting. However, the fact they are painted on different drums means they also have spiritual significance because the Sámi *noaidi* also deployed magical techniques prior to hunting that were often linked to the *sáivo* world in order to find food sources by trapping certain animals. Sommarström (1987) describes how in the Luleå river region in the south Sámi area, the Sámi revered a sacred stone shaped like a bird. The location is by a cave, which could be understood as being an entrance to the mythical *sáivo* world. Sommarström (ibid.: 214) relates the short narrative as follows.

In the 17th century Saamis described the principal deity here as being a stone in the shape of a large bird; it is not known whether it was placed in this cavity, or below in a small cave where also other *sieidi* stones⁶ were offered to in latter times, with fat, bones, and reindeer antlers. A certain *Bieve* ("sun") *Niila* ... used to go to the left side of the opening and there whirl a bull-roarer around his head; the sound was 'similar to bird's wings' and returned as an echo after two hours from the unknown depths of the interior (Lars Pirak, personal communication 1986).

What we find in this short but engaging narrative are different forms of inter-species communication, which seem somewhat mysterious but nevertheless often make up some of the most interesting stories from an individual within the culture of the indigenous Sámi area in Sweden, as is the case in this example.

Another early source about birds in Sámi tradition is encountered in the work of Swedish Sámi preacher Lars Levi Laestadius (1838–1845), edited by Pentikäinen (2002). Laestadius had drawn a considerable amount of material from 17th century missionary sources in addition to his own work among the Sámi. He presented comprehensive descriptions of birds that covered their status as spirit animals from the *sáivo* world, and thus as assistants to the *noaidi*. According to Laestadius (2002 [1838–1845]: 111), "thanks to his close relationship with *sáivo* the *noaide* had received the right to use the underground animals as his private and uncontested property".

These animals, it can be said, were consulted and also offered advice and counsel in matters pertaining to hunting and religious practice. However, according to Rydving (2011: 126–127) it is important to be aware that:

the special knowledge of the *noaidi* and his powers attributed to him could be used both constructively, to help his family and community, and destructively, to hurt his enemies. The birds who were believed to assist the *noaidi* reflect this dual aspect of his character, which the authors of the [missionary] sources interpreted ethically in terms of a good/evil dichotomy.

Rydving also goes into much broader detail about the terms relating to birds used by the *noaidi* and their functions indicating their occurrence in all Sámi areas. As a further demonstration of the diversity within Sámi languages and concepts spoken and described among the south Sámi in different areas, Bäckman (1978: 43) notes:

The holy mountain was called *Sájva-ájmuo* or *Sájva* by the southern Saamit. The anthropomorphically imagined spiritual beings, *passe-vare* or *sájva-olmai* residing in the sacred mountains functioned as the *noaidi*'s teachers, advisors, and tutelary spirits in general. In addition, they played an important role in the selections of shamans [*noaidi*].

Of these, birds are of particular interest because of their ability to predict the future, communicate with human beings using a particular language and because *noaidi* also have the abilities to fly during their travels to invisible worlds, and can thus communicate with different spiritual beings. Bäckman (1975: 140) in her summary of *Sájva* conceptions of guardian spirits among the Lapps, describes the mythical realm:

The word *sájva* is instanced all over the Lapp area, though with both phonetic and semantic variants. ... In Kola Lapp, the word signifies direction: south-west, and is written *savj*, *sajv* or *sovj*. In Lapp areas in the west, it is only certain lakes that are designated *sájva* – deep mountain or valley lakes with clear water that may be without inflow or outflow. In certain places, moreover, it is believed that *sájva* lakes are double-bottomed, and that the two bottoms are connected by a hole resembling the smoke-hole of a Laplander's tent. They may thus also be designated *rieppien-jávrieh* (smoke-hole lakes). Mythic traditions are associated with *sájva* lakes; some of these lakes are regarded as sacred, and sacrifices are offered up there, either to the lake itself or to a being that is believed to hold sway there.

Bäckman (ibid.: 46) also makes a distinction “between unpleasant *Jabme-ájmu*, the kingdom of the dead, and the paradisiac *Sájva-ájmuo*, home of the *noaidi*'s spirit helpers and tutelary spirits”. Some common factors found in northern and southern Sámi beliefs and cosmologies are how in the *Sájva* world “the helping-spirits were animals with whose assistance the *noaidi* could make his soul journeys, [and in relation to the *Jabme-ájmu* world, this was the abode of] the protective-spirits [who] were dead relatives who could aid him with advice” (Westman and Utsi 1999: 13). In addition, according to Solbakk (2018: 47), Bäckman “interprets *Sáivu/Sáiju* as the place for dead *noaidi* to reside after death, whereas the ordinary dead stay in *Jábmiidáibmu* [the world of the dead]”.

In terms of the different species of bird linked to both *noaidi* and the *sáivo* world within different areas, in missionary texts predominantly from Swedish *Sápmi*, Laestadius (2002 [1838–1845]: 111) describes:

The birds (i.e., *sáivo loddeh*) were of variable sizes, some like swallows, sparrows, grouses, eagles, swans, wood grouses, serpents, and hawks. Some were speckled white and black, some had black backs, white wings, and a grey abdomen; some were pink, others black, grey, and white.

Laestadius (ibid.: 111–112) provides additional information about the roles and functions of different birds as helpers of the *noaidi*:

They served their master's by accompanying them when they *yoik* (sang magic songs), showed them the way when they travelled and gave them hunting gear when they were going hunting. They brought them information from far away regions and helped them look after the reindeer and other possessions. When they were of this kind, they were called *sáivo-loddeh*, of which some Lapps had many, others only a few. When, however, the *noaide* used *sáivo-loddeh* for the purposes of inflicting harm on other people, which was not uncommon, the birds were called *vuornes-lodde*. The *noaide* could also travel long distances on the back of a bird.

In a more recent and general description pertaining to the use and sacredness of the Sámi drum we likewise find a connection with birds. According to Solbakk (2018: 23),

The *noaidi's* most important tool was the drum, in Northern Sámi called *goavddis*, in Southern Sámi *gievrie* – “the curved” and in Kola Sámi *kyömdes*. The *goavddis* was the Sámi sacred Scripture or Bible. Skanke writes that to the Sámi, the drum (Sámi magic drum) is what the catechism is to Christians. With this, the *noaidi* would have contact with the other worlds, with the gods and with the dead. The *goavddis* was protected as a sacred object, and people sacrificed to it. The wood material had to come from a “special kind of tree” that stood alone and, in a place, where the sun did not shine. It is said that it was handed down from father to son, and that its power increased with the years. It was meticulously taken care of and was packed in a leather bag, while the accessories, the *bállin* and *vuorib* ... were stored in a special bag made from the skin of a diver bird.

The diver bird can be seen as a symbol that links the three worlds because of its ability to dive down from the lake surface into deep waters and also fly above the earth. Solbakk did not explain why the skin of this particular water bird was chosen, but it may be because it is a spiritual bird that functions on behalf of the *noaidi* as a messenger or communicator between worlds. Ultimately, the drum accessories being kept in a bag can also be an identity marker.

It is of fundamental importance to give a brief description of the role and function of ecstasy in Sámi pre-Christian religion and the structure of the Sámi universe in order to better understand the role of art, and also in what ways narratives have been constructed as a response. Accordingly, and with regard to the use of ecstasy in communicating with the spirits of the *sáivo* world, Pentikäinen (2005: 386) notes how with regard to the practice of shamanism,

Another central aspect of the view of the universe as existing on three planes, with the shaman as an intermediary between the celestial world, our human world and the underworld. ... In this he has assistant animal spirits; these are manifested in the Saami culture by the supernatural wild reindeer, fish, and bird, which are essential for the journey of the shaman's soul, and into which he was believed to be able to metamorphosize.

BIRDS PAINTED ON SÁMI DRUMS FROM THE 17TH CENTURY

Another rich and complex layer pertaining to the culture of the Sámi and their history is drums from the 17th century. This is a period when missionaries and clergymen

forced the Sámi people to give up their drums and to turn away from their pre-Christian religion and related practice in which *noaidivuohhta* had a central position. These drums have been catalogued in the work of Swedish ethnographer Manker. His first volume, *The Drum as a Monument of Material Culture* (1938), provides an inventory of all the surviving drums including shells that have no skins attached, making 77 in total. Photographs of all the drums and the tools used to play them as well as those used for divination purposes are included. In addition, he also provides photographic data on how diverse types of drum have been constructed and in which areas these have their origins. The second volume, *The Drum as a Record of Spiritual Life* (1950), illustrates how documentation of Sámi Indigenous knowledge painted on the heads of drums, has provided a descriptive record of both spiritual and mundane realities that are like oral and cognitive maps, which tell the story of the land, people, their beliefs and practices.

Photo 1 illustrates different types of bird on the cosmological landscapes of the surviving Sámi drums. However, it must be noted that not all of these are linked with the *sáivo* world and inter-species communication. Manker (1938; 1950) presents various data, and thus narratives, that speak about the *sáivo* world. This is supported by different artistic expressions of the *noaidi*'s journeys to this otherworldly place because *noaidi* are painted flying to this realm within different drum landscapes. Birds are likewise painted on different drumheads that are described as being linked with the *sáivo* realm.

The illustrations on the *noaidi* drums in Manker 1950 provide insights into the relationships between *noaidi*, spirit animals and birds. These images reveal how birds act as assistants, facilitating communication across species and playing important roles in the *noaidi*'s tasks.

There is a certain amount of doubt about the reliability of some of the figures and landscapes illustrated on the old drums and the exact nature of the narratives associated with them because some of the landscapes are very faded.

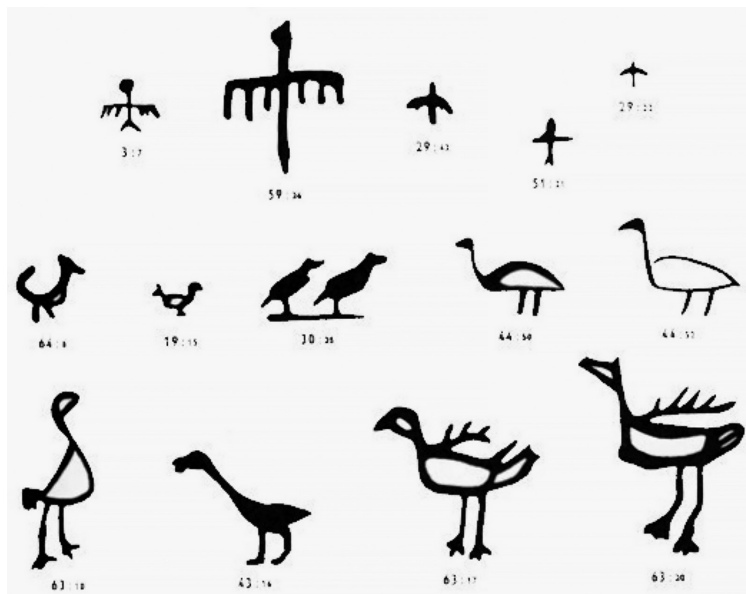


Photo 1. Different types of bird (Manker 1950: 27).

Having made this point, and as Laestadius has noted above from the birds that are identifiable, some of these are spirit birds whilst others are waterbirds, mainly taken from drums from the southern Sámi areas in Swedish *Sápmi*. It is also helpful to note that it is sometimes unclear which bird is an assistant to the *noaidi*, and which is a *noaidi* who has metamorphosed into a bird.

Photos 2 and 3 are illustrations of southern Sámi painted drums with *sáivo* birds or *noaidi* in the form of birds. These cosmological landscapes with birds have religious connotations indicating the birds have religious or spiritual significance and value as spiritual assistants of the *noaidi*.

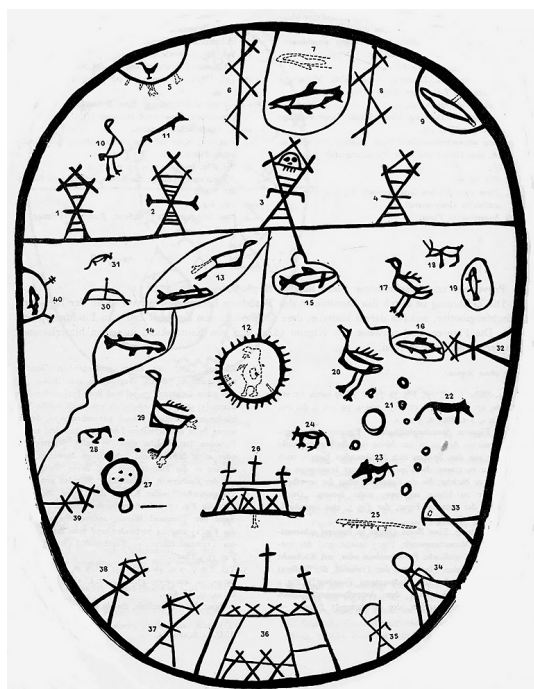


Photo 2. "Luleå type" drum (Manker 1938: 781).

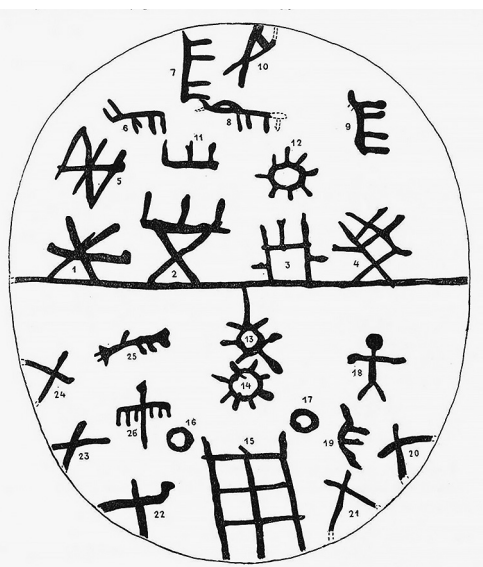


Photo 3. Drum from "Luleå Lappmark" (Manker 1938: 776).

In the centre of the drum in Photo 2 is a circular symbol (figure 12) with a figure inside that looks like a bird (see Joy 2015 for more on this figure and its possible significance in the *sáivo* realm).

In the lower section of drum in Photo 3, to the left, is figure 26, which is described as "*Saivolodde* or *noadelodde*" (Manker 1950: 404). Unlike the bird, figure 12 in Photo 2, the bird in Photo 3 is closer to the entrance to the *sáivo* world, as identified by Manker (1938: 776).

What the bird in Photo 2 might be indicating, because of its location in the upper field of the drum, is how it could be involved in some way with the use of fishing magic to seek out food sources. Typically, the *noaidi* painted the drums with red alder bark dye that had been chewed or boiled beforehand in order to extract the colour from the wood. The main reason for this is briefly explained as follows:

For their daily life, the Samis had these gods: *Leaibealmmái* – the ... alder tree man was the god of hunting. The ... alder tree was regarded as a sacred tree. With dyes made from the bark, the people painted the figures on the *goavddis* – drum. *Leaibealmmái* had control over the wild animals of the woods. (Solbakk 2007: 34–35)

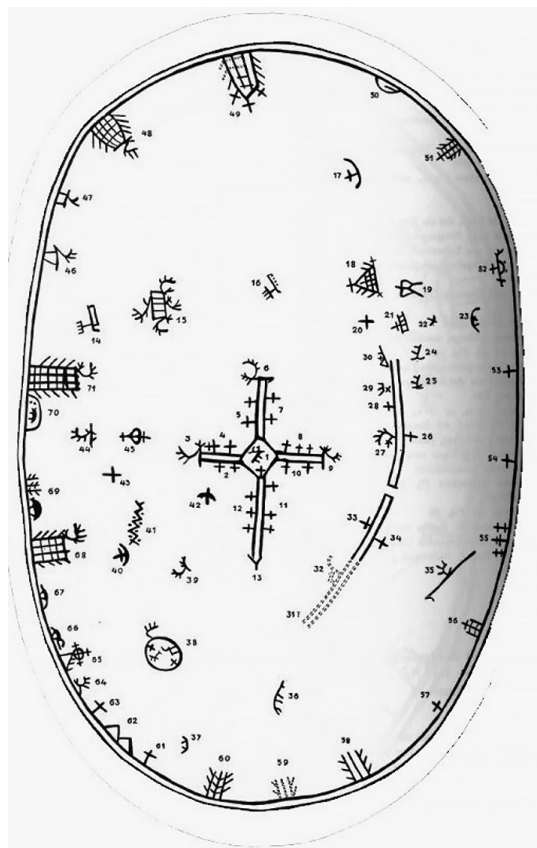


Photo 4. Drum recorded as being from "Åsele Lappmark" (Manker 1938: 590).

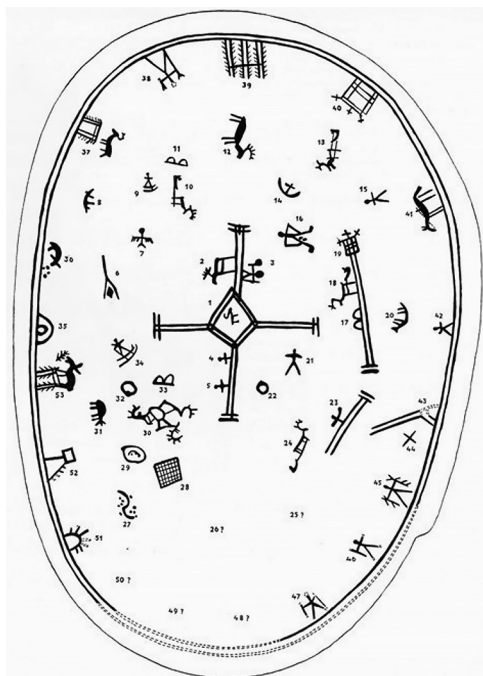


Photo 5. Drum originating from "Åsele Lappmark" (Manker 1938: 457).

On this drum (Photo 4) there are two bird figures. Number 22 is close to the *sáivo* world entrance on the upper right side of the drum, and number 42 is by the central axis in the middle of the drum. These are described as *noide* or *saivolodde* (Manker 1950: 304). The bird figure numbered 42 looks similar to the ones painted on the drums made by Armstrong and Helander. On close observation, figure 20 also looks like a bird.

In Photo 5, in the upper left field, to the left of figure 2 (a moose figure with a large horn), on the northern axis, a bird is evident as figure 7 and described as *noidvogel*, *noadelodde* or *saivolodde* (Manker 1950: 229). The shape of the bird's wings and its design are likewise evident in the works of Armstrong and Helander.

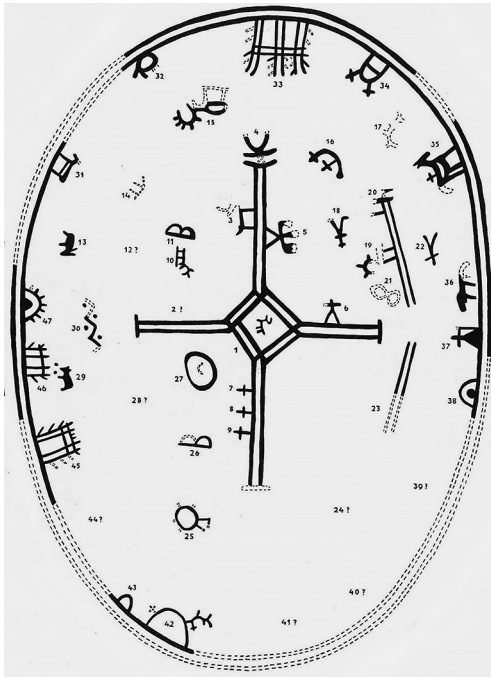


Photo 6. The mental landscape of the *noaidi* is captured on painted drum number 4 from "Åsele Lappmark, Sweden" (Manker 1950: 232).

four drums made by Armstrand. In order to understand the roles and functions of the birds on contemporary drums and to understand how the drum makers formulate magical landscapes by reusing ancient symbolism, Joy conducted an interview with Armstrand. According to him:

With every drum I make and every drum other Sámi drum makers make, they are bringing back Sámi religion. When I go out into nature and play the drum, I believe the old spirits of nature wake up and want to collaborate with us again. They are painted on the drumhead, being revived and invoked again. It is slow but the seeds are being sewn that will grow again if they are cared for. (FM 2021: Armstrand)

When Joy asked Armstrand if he could

Photo 7. A drum landscape painted by Armstrand containing different species of bird. Photograph Peter Armstrand, 2019.

Two *noaidi* figures, numbers 18 and 22 (Photo 6), are upside down as if flying or falling towards the mythical *sáivo* world or the world of the dead, which is portrayed as two lines (figure 20) on the upper right-hand side of the drum.

When giving further consideration to how the *noaidi* figures flying on the old Sámi drums above, and on one of the new drums presented in the next chapter made by Helander (Photo 11), a question arises as to whether the two lines representing the entrance to the *sáivo* world in some way reflect a two-tier or double-bottomed lake that is upside down?

CONTEMPORARY SÁMI DRUMS WITH BIRDS

Having described the significance of birds in a historical context, it is now time to focus on different bird figures and demonstrate how they have value for contemporary Sámi drum makers. We start with



provide a description of the birds painted on the drumhead in Photo 7, he responded as follows:

The bird with the long legs is a crane. In terms of its roles and functions, the bird is the bringer of the wind; they arrive in the Spring and have enormous power as a bird. All the distinct species of bird are helpers of the *noaidi*. The two birds on the right are geese. Geese and swans are symbolic of relationships with the family. (FM 2021: Armstrong)



Photo 8. This drum has a large bird-like figure at the centre. Photograph Peter Armstrong, 2019.

At the top of the drum (Photo 8) is, according to artist, “the symbol of an eagle, a spirit bird. It is in the centre of the drum because it has a much wider view of everything. It is an old symbol and so has a lot of value.” (FM 2021: Armstrong)

Armstrong points out that in the upper right field of the drum (Photo 9) “there are two ravens who are messengers, and they take information from the *noaidi* to the spirit world or wherever the information is directed. On the bottom of the

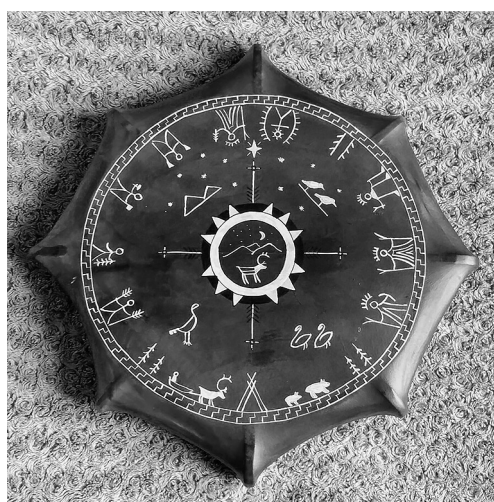


Photo 9. A sun-shaped drum with eight spokes similar to a Siberian drum. Photograph Peter Armstrong, 2019.



Photo 10. Above the large sun symbol in the centre of the drum is a bird in flight. Photograph Peter Armstrong, 2019.

drum are swans and a crane.” (FM 2021: Armstrong)

Also visible in the painted drum landscape around the edge (Photo 9) are divine beings characterised by auras; other spiritual powers of the weather and the earthly realm are also evident. One of the most intimate features is the *noaidi* in a sledge behind a *lavvu* and two bears at the base of the drum. The bears are cultural symbols that represent how bears were hunted ritualistically because of their supernatural powers during the spring.

When Joy asked Armstrong for a description of the significance of the large bird in flight in Photo 10, he responded in the following way:

The symbolism is of a pigeon because it carries messages and therefore acts as a go-between for heaven and earth. The pigeon, like sparrows, lives among humans all the year around. People in shamanism tend to choose birds that are predators and therefore enormously powerful, but the smaller and less significant birds can be more powerful in a spiritual sense. (FM 2021: Armstrong)

When seen from different perspectives birds are all relevant as spiritual assistants. When one is connected with an eagle, one has an expanded view, for example because the bird can fly at great heights. (FM 2021: Armstrong)

What is also noticeable in the drum landscape (Photo 10) is how the symbol of a very old sun, one of the most widely used symbols by Sámi artists, is at the centre of the instrument. Furthermore, at the end of the sun’s four rays are animals. Armstrong provided commentary on the significance of these particular features:

The eagle is symbolically located in the north, a wolf in the east, moose in the south and fish, who is a representation of the water God *Tjasolmai*, is in the west. These animal powers also correspond with the four elements of earth (north), air (east), fire (south) and water (west). The drum depicts a ritual landscape where understanding is gained as to how through my artwork they help comprise and provide structure within the Sámi cosmos. The reason why the sun ray in the east is divided into two rays at the end is because this kind of design is found on some of the much older drums. (FM 2021: Armstrong)

The work of Sámi artist Helander is brought into focus through three elaborately decorated drums. What makes this particular presentation of both interest and significance is how Helander has also adapted the same bird symbol (Photo 11), as Armstrong (Photo 8).

The drum in Photo 11 is divided into three liminal zones or border areas that can be understood as identity markers within the Sámi cosmos. Helander describes the central human figure in the following way:

A flying witch. In the past there were many witches. Flying witches were the most famous. A flying witch travelled with the winds and clouds, and at times transformed into a wolf or a fish, and sometimes he flew through the air in the form of a bird. He was also a skilled warrior and marksman who fought with ancient Sámi against Russian robbers. The witch also has wings portrayed. The bird figure can be seen to the right of the 'flying witch'. (FM 2015: Helander)

The bird illustration above the *noaidi* to the right is somewhat identical in design to the bird on both Manker's drum (Photo 3), and Armstrand's drum (Photo 8), where it is described as an eagle.



Photo 11. An elaborately painted drum landscape containing different elements. Photograph Francis Joy, 2015.



Photo 12. This drum, made by Helander, depicts four different species of bird. Photograph Elli-Maaret Helander, 2021.

Photo 13. The painted figure in the central position is a *noaidi* with wings suggesting a connection with birds and flight. Photograph Elli-Maaret Helander, 2021.

Helander describes birds and their spiritual attributes in the following way:

These birds travel with Sámi people annually on the reindeer migration routes and were yard birds. These are as follows from top to bottom. Great tit, jaybird, willow grouse and raven. The great tit is an angel of God, jaybird is a bird of good fortune, the willow grouse is like a wizard or wise man and the raven is a messenger of death. (FM 2021: Helander)

According to Helander, “the flying witch is the strongest of all of the witches. The flying witch has a connection to another reality, and with this connection he helped people and animals on the earth.” (FM 2021: Helander)

It is also necessary to acknowledge other animals and sacred structures painted within the drum landscapes that suggest inter-species communication between the human world and the souls of particular animals in the invisible realms, the assemblage of which are made visible within the contributions of both artists. It is furthermore helpful to recognise how use the sun symbol figures prominently in the centre of three of the four drums made by Armstrand (Photos 7, 9 and 10), whereas on two of the three drums exhibiting Helander’s work (Photos 11 and 13) we find the *noaidi* or flying witch at the centre of the cosmological landscape. However, because of the interchangeability of symbolism, the drum itself may likewise be a representative of a sun symbol considering the ways it encompasses many different elements within the Sámi cosmos. One could liken this to how the light of the sun touches everything with its warmth and brings unity. A further point concerning Helander’s two drums (Photos 11 and 13) is how the *noaidi* figures are holding drums, which when given additional consideration might be seen as being representative of a sun symbol. Close observation of the drum the *noaidi* figure is holding in Photo 13 shows a rhomb symbol at the centre of the drum, which is linked with southern Sámi drum designs as representative of the sun. A further point worth mentioning is that when taking into consideration what Rydving (2011: 126–127) noted above about the *noaidi*’s abilities to harm enemies, sometimes also using birds for this, it is possible that we might see defensive tones in Helander’s work, especially through the *noaidi* illustrated in Photos 11 and 13, who are holding what look like oversized drum beaters that could have a protective and defensive function.

The majority of the old Swedish Sámi drums that have survived from the 17th century are sun-centred drums. Whereas, and because, there are only two surviving drums from the Finnish *Sápmi* area, they are of the segmental type; one is illustrated with a *noaidi* holding a drum and a hammer to play it with. This figure is not at the centre of the drum.

It is interesting to note how in both cases where Helander has depicted the *noaidi*, he has wings, a drum and beater/hammer to play the drum, and appears to be wearing a ritual costume and mask. This might mean there is an association with the old Sámi drum from Finnish *Sápmi* both in terms of representation and conservation of cultural heritage. When understanding this it is easier to comprehend what Sámi scholar Elina Helander-Renvall (FM 2015: Helander-Renvall) has said:

The drum art is pictorial in the sense that the old drums contain pictures that translate the perceived world of the old times into conscious forms of pictorial image. It is an art form that follows certain styles, motifs, and ideology [worldview]. Earlier, this type of art was defined as primitive because it reinforced and supported

the religious ideas of the Sami of that time and because Sami, as also other tribal people, were regarded as primitive. At that time, one function of the drum was to reinforce the feeling of participation in the cosmic form of existence, in the celestial community. The use of drums was also part of everyday life, based on ideas from animism. The old art transcended or overshadowed the individual. Instead, it was important that the group lived in good health and survived. Thus, the main drum events were collective.

Additional analysis of the other drums made by Armstrong and Helander show an unusual but interesting context, especially in relation to Photo 8, where Armstrong has placed the spirit or *noaidi* bird at the centre of the drum. This is also portrayed through Helander's drums, which have *noaidi* depicted on them as flying witches and may possibly indicate that these figures can be interchangeable. This would mean that they can be represented as *noaidi* or birds because of the witch's ability to change form from human to animal and visa-versa through the use of spells, songs or magical practices. In this way, we can see how the artist has been creative in the ways the figures have been designed around the narratives associated with both *noaidi* and bird figures and how there are similar patterns reflected from older drums, and thus, how the story has emerged. This helps bring into focus the traditional and ancient practice of shamans in different cultures keeping in close contact with the world of the spirits by changing into animals. Equally, the animals the shaman had dominion over could change into human beings. These activities can, likewise, be understood as kinship systems whereby distinct types of bird are representatives of both spiritual helpers and guardians that protect the shaman and could be related to a particular tribe, such as eagle, raven or owl clan.

A brief study of Photo 12, which has four different species of bird, could be seen to add yet another dimension to the spiritual significance of birds. Within Sámi culture birds as messengers, as observed by reindeer herders in particular, could be seen as emitting audible noises and making physical movements that could be warnings of changes in weather, etc.

Another valuable point to note is how Helander has depicted some architectural structures within the cosmological landscape of the drum in Photo 13 that appear to be consistent with the *sáivo* world. For example, cross-like symbols and horned figures indicating a holy place and spiritual beings below the position in which the *noaidi* stands. In Photo 13, we see the *noaidi* standing between different levels of reality with what look like antennae rising from the top of his head through the mythical reindeer that is above his head, possibly representing his free soul as that of an animal.

The layout of this drum landscape might be an indication the *noaidi* who has a bear to his right and horned spirit beings to his left – possibly forming the *Áhkká* group who consist of four female deities with different functions in Sámi cosmology – is positioned between the worlds metaphorically.⁷ Thus, this drum demonstrates ways in which the *noaidi* embodies culture, tradition and cosmological used power for a variety of purposes.

When the figures and landscapes on the contemporary drums are reflected upon and linked with other examples of communication and spiritual travelling depicted within ancient Sámi drums we may conclude as follows. What these contexts reveal with regard to providing links between past and present are shared patterns of experi-

ence of the production of new types of knowledge. We can propose that this leads to a better comprehension of the importance of costume, mask, dance, metamorphosis, and out-of-body travel, which are all equipment and activities or spiritual practices that are comprehensively linked with shamanism, inter-species communication and narratives across millennia. Therefore, when we look at the ways in which these narrative have been depicted, we see how each case has a story attached to it that is possibly linked in some way with the artist's own inner-personal experiences, which could provide additional insight into one of the reasons why birds are so significant as holy beings within shamanism and related heritage practices, especially within Sámi tradition. It must also be noted that the way in which the two artists have reused and recontextualised the *noaidi* and bird figures can help us see their value in a contemporary setting as well as some intimation of the personal beliefs of both artists.

Further important point to be considered regarding Photo 11 is the symbol of a fish directly below the *noaidi* below the membrane or lower zone. This symbol is typically representative of *Tjasolmai*, the waterman, on old Sámi drums, and is indicative of the powers associated with *sáivo* lakes and fishing. *Tjasolmai* could therefore also be linked with *sieidi* stones and offerings; perhaps the cross-like structures in the *sáivo* realm are representative of places as such? On Armstrand's drum (Photo 10), at the left, the symbol of the fish is evident as *Tjasolmai*, also indicating links with the *sáivo* realm. Conversely, links with the *sáivo* realms are apparent on all of Armstrand's drums, demonstrating how important and indeed central this is within Sámi cosmology.

Neither Armstrand nor Helander say much about their own narratives of out-of-body travelling and shamanism, and whether or not what they encountered within the context of their own private practices has been translated into art. However, on analysis of their materials, their knowledge of the positions of *noaidi* and birds might be indicative of where, among their personal experiences, the inspiration came from to formulate their artistic works and accompanying narratives. It might be possible to grasp some understanding of how older symbolism has been utilised as a foundation from which to generate new narratives that are communicated through art.

Perhaps one of the most substantial outcomes of this study is that it is possible to understand of how reliant the Sámi are and have been upon receiving help from birds, and thus how they can be seen as dependent on their support for a number of essentials.

In order to introduce two further features to the study of the significance of birds among Sámi *noaidi*, i.e. his or her associations with birds, and flying, in 2016 Joy published a paper emphasising how a metal bird was found in a shallow grave belonging to a *noaidi* on Palosaari Island, Lehtoniemi, Kuusamo, Finland in 1970. In addition to the discovery of the bird, close by were an axe head, belt buckle, silver coin and knife blade. Furthermore, the remains of a reindeer bone hammer used to play a drum was also found in the grave. The dating of the find is the 17th century.



Photo 14. The metal bird among other grave items. Photograph by Oliver Belcher, 2016.

What comes to mind with the design of the bird is not only how well it has been preserved, but how it has what looks like a cross on its back and therefore, might have been placed in the grave as a symbolic gesture and helper to the *noaidi* in the afterlife. Within Helander's drums there are crosses (see Photos 11 and 13), one in the *sáivo* realm and others in the upper world zones that are associated with spiritual beings. There is a similar depiction within the landscape on one of Armstrand's drum (Photo 7): in the upper left field there is a deity holding two sticks that are cross-shaped, thus demonstrating possible correspondences or attributes.

The metal bird found in the grave has five holes around its edges, which may signify that it was fastened to something such as a garment or ritual item after death. It is something unique as far as other similar grave artefacts go. The birds depicted on drum landscapes past and present and this metal bird, clearly communicate themes related to the afterlife and other worldly activities, in connection with the vocation of the *noaidi* and his or her functions within this magical paradise in different Sámi areas. Birds might also be indicative of how they accompany or guide the soul of a deceased *noaidi*. Whatever way one chooses to interpret the significance of the metal bird discovered in the grave, one may choose to see it as a possible representation of its association with the tasks of the *noaidi* and his or her vocation as an inter-species communicator and traveller between different worlds.



Photo 15. On the upper right side, a Sámi man is praying in front of a bird-shaped sieidi stone.

have been taken to be birds – eagle, owl, goose, ptarmigan, etc” (ibid.: 304). Finally additional reference to stones that look like birds, from the categorisation of different types of magical stone within missionary sources, show how, “The Lapps gods were like those of other tribes: shaped of stone like a bird” (ibid.: 302). This provides another example of the different ways in which birds interact with humans and therefore have been known to communicate the sacred aspects of Sámi culture, and of the ways kinship and partnership ties are evident within earlier depictions of the Sámi pre-Christian cosmology.

The possible links with *sáivo* shown by the metal bird and the large stone bird figure depicted in Picart 1673–1773 (Photo 15), show something of a cosmology that is remarkable and integrated enough to warrant further investigation at some point in the future.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What we have endeavoured to accomplish by analysing two individual fields of drum making and decoration from within contemporary Sámi culture, combined with research from the 17th century, has been the following. We have demonstrated through the data collected the ways in which the spiritual significance of birds within the Sámi traditions from different areas within *Sápmi* have been depicted through art and oral narratives.

To add a further dimension to the bird find within the context of Sámi religion, the reason for including the illustration here is because it comes from around the same time the Sámi were being portrayed through art by different 17th century researchers and missionaries. From observation, it seems that some bird-shaped stones might have been considered physical manifestations of the *sáivo* birds who lived in the *sáivo* realm but had also materialised on earth. The illustrations depicted in Picart (1673–1773) would be indicative of such a materialisation, bringing into focus another form of inter-species communication between humans and stone beings. From what can be derived from literature on this subject, “in his collection of sources (1673), Schefferus ... noted Lundius: there is a stone called *sedde* which looks like a bird” (Whittaker 1957: 303).

Missionary sources on references to different types of holy stone note how “the other *seites* accepted as animals are purely natural formations. Most of them

From a study of the new materials consisting of cosmological structures and *noaidi* figures designed and illustrated by Armstrong and Helander it seems obvious the images on the drums represent how each individual portrayed what they observe and understood as living landscapes as expressed through sacred narratives, central aspects of culture they see as being vibrant and alive. Therefore, in each case this could be viewed as one of the motivating factors behind drum making and the formulation, redesign, recontextualisation, reuse and revivification of the symbolism and narratives that accompany the artists' reapplication and re-embracing of traditions that has been inspired by the animistic landscapes of older drums.

These more recent examples of applications of birds from different Sámi areas to contemporary drum landscapes are something new in terms of their representations of spiritual aspects of the culture and the contexts they appear in today. We have also attempted to demonstrate through the historical materials how in either context, birds of various species are connected and used as assistants by the *noaidi* in the tasks he or she might perform.

These connections are important in the maintenance of various key structures, practices and beliefs, knowledge that might help us better understand some of the interlocking and connecting features and relationships between the Sámi *noaidi* and the spiritual beings and animals in the mythical *sáivo* realms across millennia. Moreover, it is important to understand how use of the narrative research method and its application has been instrumental in helping to demonstrate this structure through the ways in which the data has been formulated, structured and presented.

A further important point to make with regard to birds and *noaidi* figures presented through Armstrong's and Helander's drum landscapes. They illustrate the ways each artist has drawn upon cultural symbols from different Sámi areas in what they see as heritage that is rightful to use in making links between their own narratives and beliefs and Sámi cultural narratives.

It is possible to see what has been presented above reflected in what Sámi scholar Elina Helander-Renvall has said:

Among the Sámi, shaman drums are still treated with respect as they give expression to existence of spirit beings and the sacredness of life. In addition, every historical drum and its symbols are still important for the identity, inscape, and cohesion of the Sámi people as they mark out the inner energising aspects of culture. (FM 2015: Helander-Renvall)

With the aforementioned in mind, we can better understand how drum making within Sámi culture is as important today as it has been throughout history. This is because drums are a central supporting component for the *noaidi* in the tasks he or she performs, with the assistance of his or her helpers. A study of the painted landscapes of these drums also provides insights into continuity of belief, practice and oral narrative, as rooted in Sámi culture. As a consequence, we are able to understand better how these legacies are fundamental to the survival of tradition and culture. However, it is important to understand that when it comes to ethical practices and reuse of cultural heritage in Sámi society certain customs and taboos mean that generally the Sámi have tended not to mix or reuse cultural symbols and patterns from different areas. But we must admit that Armstrong and Helander seem to be exceptions to the rule.

Despite the apparent ambiguity, the illustrations of birds as being associated with *noaidi* on 17th century drum landscapes, and the textual data included in the research in connection with this and the *noaidi*'s activities around the *sáivo* realm, give the impression that these landscapes hold much value for the drum makers. Therefore, by including the landscapes in the study it has been possible to some degree to see the ways in which cultural heritage, belief, worldview and practice have come from different areas to continue the tradition into the modern age. This is especially true in terms of supporting wellbeing and expression of personal belief and practice, where drum makers can be free from persecution by reclaiming their cultural symbols.

Through these individual encounters and descriptions of heritage practices, the aim has been to understand better how Sámi oral traditions have been portrayed through the work of each artist from their own point of view. This is evident through the ways the artists' inner narratives of being drum makers have combined with older narratives as a way to reintegrate cultural symbolism and landscapes into different areas of Sámi society.

What we are also able to gain some understanding of is how both drum makers are re-embracing traditions by illustrating the ways *noaidi*, and birds as assistants, are represented in the ways both individual's work use new types of symbolism that have been redesigned, recontextualised and applied within contemporary settings. Equally, and especially through Helander's contributions on figures 11 and 13, there are intricate structures surrounding the *noaidi*, for example the flying witch figures that are associated with cosmological landscapes, architectures and structures from the drums of the 17th century. Both artists have sought to use this as a technique for communicating the development of tradition, oral narratives and cultural conservation. They have sought to retain cultural memory and the roles and functions of both *noaidi* and the birds associated with his or her work.

It has also been necessary to make a change from red alder bark, which was used to paint drums in the 17th century when the Sámi were nomadic, to the use of acrylic paint for the contemporary painted drum landscapes described above. This shows a partial change in the tradition and could also be understood as representing a symbolic shift from the 17th century hunting era to the era of domestication. It must also be viewed as a social change in the way knowledge is produced, although there are still Sámi drum makers who use red dye from alder bark and apply it to drum landscapes for ritual purposes.

NOTES

1 Note that the terms '*noaidi*' which is a north Sámi term for the religious specialist in Sámi culture is interchangeable with 'shaman'.

2 The north Sámi term *Sápmi* is used to define the current homeland areas of the Sámi people.

3 The *sáivo* world or realm is a mythical underworld accessible through a double-bottom lake or beneath a sacred mountain. It is often depicted on 17th century Sámi drums. Spirits who educated and protected the Sámi *noaidi* and assisted him or her live in the *sáivo* world.

4 *Yoiking* was considered a sin by the missionaries and priests and subsequently outlawed until around the year 2000. In some parts of Finland Christians still consider it a sin.

5 An early source outlining this is *The History of Lapland* by Johannes Schefferus (1971 [1674]).

6 The term *sieidi* is found in the north Sámi language to refer to a holy or sacred stone to which offerings are made. In addition, *sieidi* stones can be shaped like animals or reptiles and are considered to be connected to the *sáivo* world. They have supernatural powers, as many were located on islands, shorelines and mountains.

7 For a contemporary description of the roles and functions of the *Áhkká* goddesses, see Joy 2020. Also note too that the term *Áhkká* can be spelt *Áhkku*, and therefore, see Sami Gods 2019.

SOURCES

Names included with consent of participants.

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FM 2015: Helander-Renvall. Francis Joy's interview with Elina Helander-Renvall on Sámi spirits and their roles.

FM 2021: Armstrong. Francis Joy's interview with Peter Armstrong on four Sámi drums and the significance of birds within their cosmological landscapes.

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