

## HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS IN SHAMANISM WITHIN NORDIC CONTEXTS

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**Abstract:** *The subject matter of human-animal relations with regard to inter-species communication is a field of study that is rich and varied within northern and Arctic landscapes and discourses. This focus of attention comes from within the fields of shamanism, animism and cosmologies from various time periods with reference to the creation of sacred narratives, recorded through art and oral traditions. In this research, both animistic and narrative approaches are used to engage with these respective fields of inquiry through data collection and participant observation that links these important subject matters together. Firstly, through data collection from two prehistoric rock art landscapes in Finland, secondly, from data analysed from within cosmological landscapes within two sacred Sámi Noaidi drums from the seventeenth century Sweden, and lastly, through data collected via interviews with two contemporary shamans about their spiritual work, beliefs and practices which also includes knowledge sharing from a contemporary Sámi drum landscape. Collectively, these spheres can be understood as adjoining landscapes where past and present worlds meet. Rock art research as a foundation to the study provides some of the very early depictions of human-animal relations with regard to inter-species communication (telepathy) illustrated through art. From these sources, cosmologies have developed which are characterized by shamanic visionary narratives and coproduction of knowledge determined by engagement with various spiritual beings across millennia. Through an examination of these different types of behaviour, the results of the research demonstrate how it is possible to grasp in what ways they link past and present practices, beliefs and traditions together and why these are important.*

**Keywords:** *rock art, sacred landscapes, human-animal communication, drum figures, narratives, telepathy.*

**Título:** *Relaciones Humano-Animal en contextos nórdicos*

**Resumen:** *El tema de las relaciones humano-animal en cuanto a la comunicación entre especies es un campo de estudio rico y variado dentro de los paisajes y discursos del norte y del Ártico. Este foco de atención proviene de los campos del chamanismo, el animismo y las cosmologías de varios periodos de tiempo con referencia a la creación de narrativas sagradas, registradas a través del arte y las tradiciones*

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orales. En esta investigación, se utilizan enfoques tanto animistas como narrativos para interactuar con estos respectivos campos de indagación mediante la recopilación de datos y la observación participante que vincula estos importantes temas. En primer lugar, a través de la recopilación de datos de dos paisajes de arte rupestre prehistórico en Finlandia; en segundo lugar, a partir de datos analizados dentro de paisajes cosmológicos en dos tambores sagrados Sámi pertenecidos a Noaidi del siglo XVII en Suecia; y finalmente, a través de datos recopilados mediante entrevistas con dos chamanes contemporáneos sobre el trabajo espiritual, creencias y prácticas, que también incluye el intercambio de conocimientos desde un paisaje contemporáneo de tambores Sámi. Colectivamente, estas esferas pueden entenderse como paisajes adyacentes donde se encuentran mundos pasados y presentes. La investigación sobre el arte rupestre como base del estudio proporciona algunas de las primeras representaciones de las relaciones humano-animal en cuanto a la comunicación entre especies (telepatía) ilustradas a través del arte. A partir de estas fuentes, se han desarrollado cosmologías caracterizadas por narrativas visionarias chamánicas y la coproducción de conocimientos determinados por la interacción con varios seres espirituales a lo largo de milenios. A través de un examen de estos diferentes tipos de comportamiento, los resultados de la investigación demuestran cómo es posible comprender de qué manera se vinculan las prácticas, creencias y tradiciones pasadas y presentes, y por qué son importantes.

**Palabras clave:** arte rupestre, paisajes sagrados, comunicación humano-animal, figuras de tambores, narrativas, telepatía.

*What kinds of examples of telepathic communication are perceptible from within ancient prehistoric rock painting sites in Finland, Sámi shaman drums landscapes from the seventeenth century Sweden and the work of contemporary shamans, which provide valuable accounts of different values in connection with human-animal relations?*

## Introduction

The content of this study is varied and important because of the nature of the different themes associated with the subject matter of human-animal relations and shamanism both past and present. Attention throughout the study is placed on in what ways certain forms of inter species communication depicted within artistic landscapes at sacred places play central roles and functions regarding how the transmission

of spiritual agency takes place, and therefore, in what manner these themes have been constructed through art as diverse types of sacred narratives.

Compositions as such from different time periods are presented in the paper and framed within a Nordic context because they are relative with each other from research connected with Finland, Sweden, and Denmark, concerning how diverse types of sacred narratives are depicted. These are encountered in their

earliest, original forms by lakesides in Finland from within a range of prehistoric rock art sites where different painted landscapes featuring human-animal activities have been illustrated. The substances used to create the art with consists of a traditional mixture of iron ore, animal fat and blood, and in some cases, egg white is used as a kind of silicone layer.

To follow, are other examples of human-animal interactions-relations from much later and these are presented from within the traditions of Sámi shamanism (*Noaidivuohta*). As rare illustrations, they are exhibited from within painted cosmological drum landscapes which have their origins in the seventeenth century and from Swedish *Sápmi* (1). These are brought into focus in relation to how they provide several important examples of metamorphosis from human to animal forms in connection with the vocation of the Sámi shaman (*Noaidi*), and his performance as a ritual specialist, artist, shapeshifter, and interspecies communicator (2). To correspond with these much earlier spiritual themes are two present-day contributions relevant to shamanic compositions of human-animal relations from both Danish and Sámi (Swedish) contemporary shamans. Namely, participant A who lives in Copenhagen and who is a practitioner of core shamanism and participant B who is a Sámi shaman from Kiruna, Swedish *Sápmi*, and who is a drum maker and healer (3). This is in relation to their spiritual work where documented examples collected through interviews with each participant regarding their work by Francis Joy, brings forth new kinds of data pertaining to both knowledge and application of communication skills used by both persons to transmit and receive infor-

mation from certain animal powers.

Through consolidation of these three frameworks and time periods by the ways they are introduced in the study means they are presented within a regional context and reflect different social and cultural perspectives on shamanism and human-animal relations with reference to local history, traditions, beliefs, and practices both past and present.

The reason the prehistoric research paradigm is both interesting and important for examining these themes is as follows. When it comes to ancient history there has been a lack of convincing evidence in some areas regarding the long-term continuity of the transmission of ritual art in connection with the practice of shamanism from prehistoric times until the seventeenth century. This is because traditions from within exceptionally prolonged period have been oral traditions.

One of the strongest themes of human-animal relations that has been recorded through art has been amongst the ancient traditions of the Sámi who are an Indigenous people, in which there are links with ancient rock art. The Sámi “[...] living in the northern parts of Scandinavia and Finland and in the Kola Peninsula, are the only Indigenous people in the EU to have their own language, culture, means of livelihood and identity” (Kulonen, Seurujärvi-Kari and Pulkkinen, 2005: 5).

Like other cultures, the Sámi have constructed different knowledge systems using art as a method for communicating social and cultural perspectives regarding their relationship with the natural world, which is observed manifest within traditions, practices, cultural memory, and heritage. Two of the most visible framework-

ks where these are observable extensively are from within diverse types of prehistoric rock art (paintings and carvings) and painted sacred drum landscapes from the seventeenth century. From within contexts as such we find evidence of multiple examples of human-animal relationships. Thus, demonstrating how these practices have been part of both the social and cultural order. Having created diverse experience related to hunting, fishing, dancing, metamorphosis, flying, trance, and other forms of ritual behaviour such as traveling in boats that have moose-head sterns. A variety of these kinds of illustrations have been preserved through art.

We find evidence of these practices within ancient rock art landscapes and on painted drum landscapes from the seventeenth century which are divided into cosmological segments. One of the common features of rock art sites in Finland is how all prehistoric sites are all located by water where depictions of human-animal relations and interactions are evident. These contain and thus, depict sacred structures and ritualistic thinking and behaviours and shamanistic narratives recorded through art from different time periods. Inside of which, different examples have been recorded where Sámi shamans have used telepathy (human sensory abilities such as sacred sight, hearing, and taste for example) to communicate with other worlds and beings. Similar, contemporary practices are evident within the contributions from both participant A and participant B. Henceforth, what has been documented in connection with the interviews helps demonstrate in what ways these different forms of communication with individual beings takes place and thus is a spiritual practice which

continues among shamans today.

Certain scholars who have studied the pre-Christian worldview of the Sámi have noticed correlations between prehistoric rock paintings in Finland and cosmological landscapes on Sámi drums from the seventeenth century. For example, Luho (1971), Nunez (1981), Lahelma (2008) and Joy (2018). These theories do suggest a sort of historic continuity from prehistory to the seventeenth century.

We know that further afield there are more recent links with the Sámi in relation to this in the *Badjelánnda* rock art site which is in the Sarek mountains in Swedish *Sápmi*. And according to scholars Mulk (1994) and Mulk and Bayliss-Smith (2001:134) “our knowledge of the prehistory of the last 2000 years suggests that the rock engravings at *Padjelanta* were produced by local Sami from *Sirkas sjidda*”. In addition, there are rock art sites in many areas where the Sámi have had settlement both past and present. For instance, in Norway such as at the Alta site in Finnmark and in northern Finland for example, close to the Hossa Värrikallio rock painting in Kainu as well as at a more recently discovered site in Kolari. This means there are cosmological associations with different landscapes because of how sites by water were carefully chosen to depict sacred narratives.

### **Research question, aims and approach used**

In relation to the research question, the aims and approach to the research are grounded in the animistic theory of knowledge production and construction of narratives because

of interactions between human beings and non-human persons. And to demonstrate how in this analysis these themes are visible within different contexts, this becomes evident in the ways the subject matters have been approached and how the structure of the paper has been formulated. The animistic theory of knowledge and knowledge production means that the approach is built on accepting there are various kinds of supernatural beings within the cosmos and through certain approaches, rituals, taboos and customs, communication with these powers is possible. What comes from encounters and interactions as such is a type of knowledge production in the forms of sacred narratives. These are evident within rock art landscapes and Sámi drums. Reflections on both sources demonstrate how knowledge systems are established and subsequently embedded and embodied in traditions, beliefs, and practices. Henceforth, whereby relationships between human persons, animals and spiritual beings are created because they are understood to have mutual benefit. And therefore, these interactions which are chiefly depicted through art are instrumental in helping us with understanding certain affiliations and practices that have helped human beings establish communication with the natural world, especially with animals who are in both physical and non-physical forms.

My approach does not mean that I am arguing for an unbroken line of continuity regarding the transmission of traditions from prehistory to the present time. But, attempting analysis of the diverse types of data in connection with what Scholars Trude Fonneland and Tiina Äikäs (2020: 1) refer as approaching “[...] “Sámi religion” from a long-term perspective

seeing both the past religious practices and contemporary religious expressions as aspects of the same phenomena”.

### Method used in the research

The narrative methodology applied to the research is characterized by how animism is a foundational language that is communicated through art regarding these special relationships and how through these we can assess various experiences linked to spiritual beliefs, practices and perspectives that have been communicated in different environments. Henceforth and as stated by Taiaiake (1999), and cited by Preston (2005: 57), who perfectly describes the benefit of using a narrative approach to the research because of in what ways:

*“The communication of culture is extremely important in this regard, and it is a significant reason why a cultural context of both past and present is key to understanding the nature of oral history. A linking of the past with the present is often a goal in establishing the continuity of cultural tradition and imbue these traditions with a certain degree of current relevance.”*

What draws attention to rock art, painted drum landscapes past and present as well as documentation of contemporary oral narratives using a narrative approach combined with the animistic theory of knowledge production means that it helps bring into focus the significance of.



*[...] The role and function of the landscape and certain places and features within the landscape in specific areas. This is because within these places' communication, and what will be referred to as mythic discourse, takes place between humans and non-humans, and this dialogue is known to be of benefit to human beings in their daily lives and activities (Helander-Renvall, 2009: 44).*

This is also the case on Sámi drums from the seventeenth century and thus.

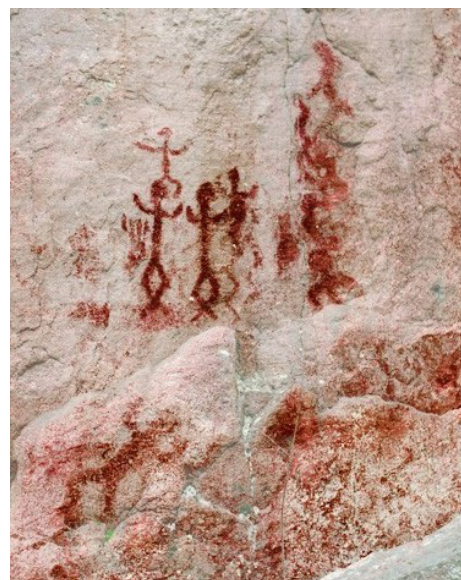
*Animism is central to this discussion [...] [because] animism situates nonhuman animals and other entities including plant, animal, earth, sky, and in some definitions, spirit "person" as volition and communicating subjects (Harvey, 2006; Stuckey, 2010). They are stakeholders in the world and co-participants in inevitable human knowledge making and research processes (Barrett, 2011: 124).*

Therefore, using evidence of telepathy within human-animal relationships depicted within prehistoric rock paintings in Finland and on a Sámi drum from the seventeenth century creates a foundation to examine contemporary shamanic practices as a way of attempting to establish both insights and links between past and present. This helps enrich our understanding of why relationships that have been recorded

in diverse ways through art are important and in what ways this tradition continues through assessment of contemporary examples.

By way of illustration, how the past is drawn upon as a historical resource and in what ways this is communicated through personal narratives regarding interactions between humans and animals as well as through art. Whereby, ancient symbolism is reused to create new types of narratives that have value and meaning. These helps reinforce why shamanism as a field of study within this Nordic context makes a worthwhile contribution to this subject.

### **Examples of human-animal relations and communication within two different environments illustrated at the Juusjärvi and Verla prehistoric rock painting sites in southern Finland**



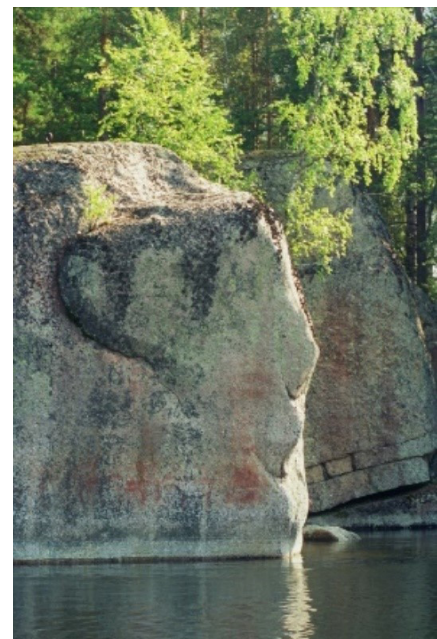
**Figure 1.** The painted area on the shore of lake Juusjärvi Kirkkonummi, southern Finland is an elaborate prehistoric landscape. Photograph and copyright Ismo Luukkonen (1994-2024).

The first example of human-animal relations in terms of mythic discourse, telepathy, language, or mode of communication depicted in rock paintings is presented here within the painted landscape which conveys a range of theories as to what may be taking place. On close observation, human figures who are dancing are changing into both animals (birds) and reptiles on the upper left area of the panel. Underneath one of the figures is a human handprint. On the upper-right side human figures appear to emerge from inside the rock and changing into what look like snakes. In both cases, ecstatic performance and thus, metamorphosis seems evident as does telepathic communication that conveys complex but important relationships that are within the context of animistic thinking and construction of sacred narratives depicting a shared reality within this environment which is above the lake.

Below these are a human figure who looks as if he is falling or flying and with a large pike with its mouth open to the left. Given how the painted area is above the lake the scene is clearly connected with ritual activity linked with water. What these illustrations depict is linked with human-animal and human-reptile collaboration using telepathy. The fact there appears to be people dancing on the upper part of the area and a fish in the lower area suggests the painted rock surface could be indicative as to how the artist has communicated by what method the rock surface could be representative of a cosmological landscape that is divided into segments. Henceforth, which is typical when a sacred landscape has been created and the specific ties to the environment become apparent in relation to this through both human

and animal interactions.

Our interpretation of the landscape is that the art was not created for the sake of it, but for reasons of demonstrating how these sites have their own agency which can benefit human persons and other beings through reciprocal relationships and thus, are used to record worldview and construct identity.



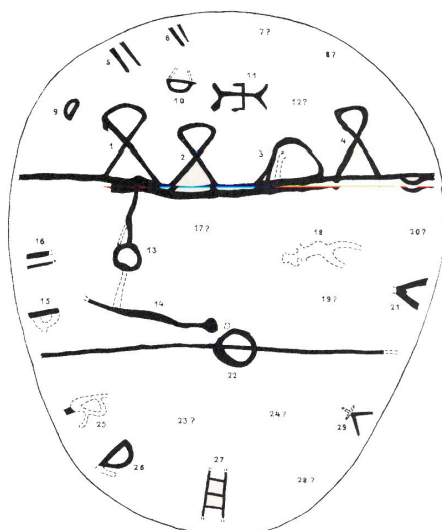
**Figure 2.** A stone figure located at the Verlankoski rapids, Verla, south-eastern Finland. Photograph and copyright Francis Joy (2005).

A second example of human-animal relations and communication is exhibited here on a stone figure which has an ear, nose, and teeth visible and looks like a natural formation in the form of a bear's head. Above the waterline is a prehistoric rock art landscape painted on it which shows a line of moose and a human figure riding one of them. In this sense we find a landscape within a landscape and like the Juusjärvi landscape the Verla site is located

by water indicating mythical connotations with the underworld. But more importantly, it reflects human-animal relations in two diverse ways. The first is recognition of the stone animal-like figure by prehistoric people who chose the location for painting because it was recognized as having a specific kind of agency, and secondly, the line of moose communicates something connected with animal ceremonialism and hunting within which a human person is involved.

This sacred landscape prompts questions as to whether the bear-like stone head is a local god or Master of the animals and whether or if the painted landscape is a way of communicating with this supernatural power something about hunting through the medium of art? However, given the fact there is no evidence that there have also been offerings made to the stone makes it difficult to tell if any notion of a reciprocal relationship is present in connection with this.

### Examples of human-animal relations depicted within illustrations of sacred Sámi drum landscapes from the seventeenth century.



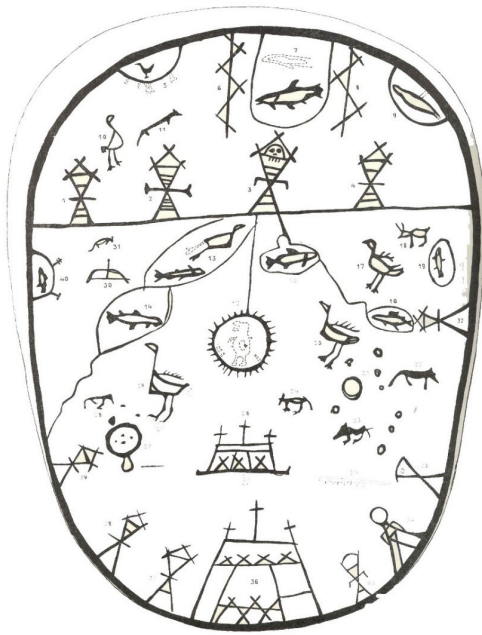
**Figure 3.** An illustration of a seventeenth century Sámi shaman drum from Ernst Manker (1950).

The third illustrative example of an important landscape where human-animal relationships are apparent is within a sacred drum landscape which is divided into three layers or segments. The drum design is typical of a north Sámi design from “Torne Lappmark” (Manker, 1938: 810), which is in Swedish *Sápmi*. The upper field of the drum contains structures that are consistent with offering places to spiritual beings (see Manker, 1950: 428).

Regarding the main activity as interpreted through an animistic perception of reality where within the drum landscape, according to Finnish scholar Juha Pentikäinen (2005: 385), the central narrative on the drum depicts “the journey of the shaman’s soul to the realm of the dead (the ladder-like figure at the bottom). The shaman’s soul travels in the guise of a snake, his assistant spirit.” What is important to comprehend concerning the wider narrative is how the shaman in the form of a snake is reinforcing ties with beings in the spiritual world using telepathic communication and metamorphosis. The three lines across the drum can be seen as being representative of liminal space. The topmost being a specific location possibly “[...] where the dead are commemorated” (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith, 2006: 101), by the water. The importance of the offering places can be seen through how well the structures are defined, even on the original photograph on the drum in the work Manker’s 1938 volume: *Die Lappische Zaubertrommel: Eine Ethnologische Monographie*. 1. Evidence



of a human changing into a snake means the drum landscape has a similar theme to what is depicted at the Juusjärvi site.



**Figure 4.** An illustration of drum number 63 from Manker's (1938: 60) inventory of surviving drums.

From Manker's volume this drum from among the remaining ones that have survived is the most richly decorated one with animals and reptiles as its main content. What makes the landscape unique is that there are no other ancient Sámi drums with content as such. From observation there are several types of birds, fish, reptiles such as a frog and forest animals. Swedish scholar Håkan "Rydving (1995: 62) believes the drum "probably belonged to a hunter of fisherman"" (Joy, 2015: 23). Like both the Juusjärvi and Verla sites the connections with water are evident; meaning we see how important it is as part of a cosmological landscape which helps form "[...] a social space

for humans and non-humans to interrelate to each other" (Helander-Renvall, 2009: 44), and the primary way this is undertaken is through telepathic (sensory) communication as a method for collaboration between human persons and spiritual assistants or helpers.

What holds interest and value from a research point of view is how in the upper section of the drum are offering places to different gods and in the centre of the drum as if in a sun or something similar is an unusually shaped bird (4). However, it also appears to have two arms like a person would have and therefore, it is difficult to know whether or not it could be a supernatural being with human and animal-like characteristics such as a *Sáivo* bird who in the Sámi traditions is one of the *Noaidi*'s main helpers, or else the *Noaidi* in the guise of a bird figure? The triangular-like structures inside the drum also reflect similar ones illustrated in the upper landscape of the drum in figure 3, which in both cases symbolise both social and cultural spaces and perspectives on offering practices within Sámi culture at the time.

Creating rock art in liminal spaces is a well-known practice among Indigenous people and given how rock paintings in Finland are by water we can see the awareness of the artists and why certain locations would have been chosen because they have both social and cultural significance in terms of beliefs and reverence towards ancestors. This is, likewise, reflected within the Sámi drum landscape. Evidence of this has been discussed by Sámi archaeologist Inga-Maria Mulk and Tim Bayliss-Smith as an example of Christopher Tilley's interpretation of sacred space in connection with research at the Nämforsen rock art site in northern Swe-

den whereby, “visual symbols (‘texts’) were produced at a place that was seen as ‘liminal’, and on ritual occasions when liminality was celebrated” (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith, 2006: 100). However, this is not only observed regarding human beings and liminal space but also animals and other spiritual beings as well. For instance, as an expression of where different worlds meet that are both visible and non-visible. Therefore, and in terms of important insights that can be derived from within both rock art sites and drum landscapes in how.

*“A living being co-exists within certain environmental conditions and is dependent on all other beings with which he/she is in relationship. In this sense one can speak about ‘intersubjectivity’ meaning direct subject-to-subject sharing of presence” (Helander-Renvall, 2009: 44).*

### **Participant and human-animal relations in the shamanic arena from a Danish perspective**

To help further elaborate on the nature of additional human-animal relationships within the realms of shamanism, in June 2023, I interviewed Danish shaman participant A who is 77 years old and currently lives in Copenhagen. The reason for the interview was that in addition to the collection of data which would provide insights into the participants work, that moreover, the material would also bring forth new types of narratives in connection with contemporary shamanism and human-animal

relations with regard to participant A’s beliefs with reference to his personal interactions with different spiritual beings within both the inner and outer worlds. These are based on relationships that have been developed through spiritual awareness and sustained working relationships with the powers within both fields. Below is an account of what participant A relayed briefly about his spiritual work, and a more extensive description of his education (training), work and relationships with different spiritual powers and in what ways communication with these has, and currently takes place.



**Figure 5.** Practitioner of shamanism participant A. Photograph and copyright Participant A (2023).

*“I begin my education and training with shamanism in 1989. The first experience with spiritual beings when I was participating on a meditation course and during one of the exercises two shamans came*

*to me in the inner planes and asked me if I wanted to be an apprentice and work with them and I said yes. I then met a friend and told her about it, and she said she was going to be attending a shamanism course, and so I went along. I studied and undertook my education into shamanism with Serge Kahil King and Johnathan Horvitz who both at the time, gave classes in Denmark.*

*Concerning my education with Johnathan Horvitz, I attended different courses and through this study, I began to work with different power animal helpers (spirits). There are different spirit animals that assist with different tasks, such soul retrieval work and counselling and teaching work. The spirit animals do a lot of the work. I delegate the work telepathically to the spirit helpers and so it is a teamwork. In my shamanic practice, it is important to maintain the working relationship with each of these different helpers. We speak (communicate telepathically) regularly. During healing work with clients, if there are the basic issues like energetic intrusions (blockages) in a person's body they will suck it out and sometimes they eat it but clear it away. They also assist with finding lost soul parts during soul retrieval work. Sometimes, if there are harmful entities who have taken hold of soul parts the animals will*

*help with this and sometimes this can be arduous work and so their involvement is especially important because it takes place in the spiritual world where they use trickery and do battle when needed.*

*My two spirit guides suggested telepathically I go to Lapland and buy a lavvu (tent) and start a summer camp and begin teaching courses. So, I followed that direction and went to Swedish Lapland. I did that for 10 years and so within that time, I was working and developing a relationship with these shaman guides in the inner worlds telepathically.*

*My work further developed during the three month periods I spent in the wilderness each summer which meant that be being so isolated I was often in an altered state of consciousness and encountered whilst being on the mountains the souls of deceased people and different animals in this middle world; meaning that the physical world has an invisible side to it and when we peel back the layers of our conditioning we can come into contact with places as such and the spirits who travel through and reside there” participant A (2023 personal correspondence).*

During the interview, I asked the research participant if he could share about his work healing other persons with assistants from the

animal helpers. The following was relayed in relation to this.

*“I also ran a shaman clinic for fifteen years in Denmark. When I was spending time in the wilderness, I had a couple of ravens living next to where I used to put my tent. I learned from the ravens much more about my pathway and how to help people. It is what happened because I was living alone in a remote area. They directed me about how to work with dreams, also. They could see and understand my dreams and so gave me direction with my work. This was a non-verbal, non-intellectual state of mind through which communication took place. I used to take my food with me to the mountains and would bury cheese in the snow to preserve it, but the ravens would uncover it and eat it. So, through these interactions a relationship was built.*

*Concerning the tools, I use that assist me in my work, I use drums during healing work. The drums have their own spirit. I have both a reindeer skin drum and a moose skin drum. I have polar bear and seal claws that I use as amulets which when I wear them, I get their power. They help with divining what kind of help is needed for individual clients”* participant A (2023 personal correspondence).



**Figure 6.** “One of the ravens on the mountain with whom I developed a working relationship with” participant A (2023 personal correspondence). Photograph and copyright participant A (2023).

*“When working in the shaman clinic, if I had a client who needed a soul retrieval because of soul loss due to trauma or other kinds of injuries and they were suffering with depression, dissociation or had lost the will to live as a consequence of being fragmented, I would do 4 sessions with that person. First session. I would do a drumming-journey to retrieve an animal spirit helper (power animal) for the client and blow this energetic power into them. I would sit on a chair and drum while I talked out aloud about everything that was going on during the journey – while the client listened. I would ask the client to treat the spirit animal the*



*same way children who have an invisible friend do until next week. I would explain that the spirit animal is important because it is needed to help with the soul retrieval.*

*Second session. I would teach the client to drum-journey during a shamanic counselling type of session where the client would interact with the spirit animal helper and prepare for the soul retrieval. And more homework. Third session. I would do the soul retrieval healing, either using Sandra Ingerman's method (5) or other methods to help restore the person back to wholeness. I would then observe the client's reaction after blowing the soul part or parts into them. Some clients are noticeably quiet afterwards, and others want to talk a lot. Forth session. I would speak with the client about how to integrate the soul-part and how to avoid losing soul-parts in the future, and how to use shamanism as a means of maintaining a 'healthy' soul. And I, or the client, would do a drumming journey to get advice telepathically about the same issues from the spirits. Session five. I always offered clients a free consultation 3 months later, to follow up, if they wanted that.*

*Because I had the shaman clinic for fifteen years and then after the ten years of spending summers on the mountain from 1996 to 2005 the*

*work was implemented in the clinic, I then began teaching shamanism courses in Denmark and in the summer in Jänkänalusta, Kiruna which is in Swedish Sápmi. During this time, I was teaching the courses on the mountain – nature shamanism.*

*When I am in the forest, I will make offerings to the spirits of the land such as juniper brush by burning it and offer coffee. These offerings are for the animal helpers and the spirits of the mountain. It is a way of giving thanks for their assistance. When I am in Copenhagen in the clinic, I would use incense both as an offering for their assistance and for cleansing. I used to make plant remedies. I would burn some of this like incense. This had two purposes. The first was to burn plants as an offering of their soul to the spirits and whilst at the same time the aromatic scents would fill the room and feed the spirits. I have an altar in Jänkänalusta, Kiruna. I have a fireplace in the forest where I make offerings to the fire and use salt.*

*Every morning, I use a rattle and call in the different spiritual helpers from the world of the unborn, the world of the dead and the eternal world. In this process I call in the raven spirit who sits on my left shoulder, I call the mountain buzzard on the right shoulder and snow owl on the crown of my head and the crow has a nest in my stomach*



*and sits there. My polar bear and wolf are my two principal spirit animals who walk with me in life. Then I have other spirit animals who I see occasionally. I meet some of these when I go for walks in the forest. Much of this communication takes place telepathically as well as me using words.*

*I use the rattle to connect with the animals more than I use the drum. I do four circles with the rattle and then call them in using my voice. My higher power is nature. I talk to this power every morning. I am an animist in terms of my outlook on life. Staying connected to my power animals helps keep me strong in terms of my health and maintain my spiritual condition, so daily contact with the spirits keeps my soul healthy just like eating healthy food keeps the body healthy. There are powers both tangible and non-tangible and so we learn what these are and how to encounter them. People need nutrients from the spiritual powers within nature and this nutrition is for the soul” participant A (2023, personal correspondence).*

### **Participant B and human-animal relations from the perspective of a Sámi shaman and drum maker**

On September 2nd (2023) researcher Francis Joy interviewed Sámi shaman participant B who lives in Kiruna, in Swedish *Sápmi*,

about his work with a particular focus on the human-animal relations in connection with his healing, ceremonial and drum making work. The purpose for the interview was to firstly collect data and secondly, gain a series of insights into what kinds of interactions take place, in what particular contexts, and in what ways relationships with spiritual animal beings are maintained, as well as the roles and functions of human-animal relationships on a painted drum head made by participant B. Furthermore, participant B has been interviewed on different occasions between 2013 and the present time by researcher of Sámi shamanism Francis Joy (6). The first question was directed towards how animals help participant B in his work?



**Figure 7.** Participant B in his winter attire. Photograph and copyright participant B (2022).

*“If I look back on my life, the first connection with the spirit of an animal was young when a raven spirit*

*came to me. For me animal spirits give me energy-power when I call them in before and during healing and ceremony work. They protect but this differs depending on which species they are. For example, I work a lot with my bears which are the primary helpers, and with the eagle which can see things such as difficult or complex situations or circumstances from above and offer indications for workable solutions. Other birds such as ravens who are messengers from the spirit world can, likewise, send messages to the spirit world using their assistance, for example, to communicate with the powers in the upper world, such as the highest gods and goddesses from my Sámi religion, Rádienádjje and Máttaráhkká. Ravens are birds that move between life and death and so are threshold birds associated with sacred space.*

*Another way of understanding animal communication is for instance if you come to understand the significance of a grouse when it is on the road in the approaching time of winter it is almost one hundred percent certain that there will be snowy weather soon because the bird symbolizes this; it is an informant. This is something people here in Sápmi look out for. Another example, is how, in the summer when you look at the swallows one can determine the weather if they are flying low*

*and are looking for insects closer to the ground rather than higher above the ground” participant B (2023, personal correspondence).*

The second question was concerned with in what contexts do animals assist during ceremonial and healing work?

*“Sometimes the spirit animals show themselves to you when you are in ceremony or during healing work. If they come during a ceremony, I know a hundred percent that they have something to tell me. They may also come and watch me through the window, and they make themselves known. During healing work, sometimes they come and tell me what I should do to help a particular person. They may also take part or all the illness from a client who is sick and fly away with it. When I am doing ceremony and begin healing work, I use my drum. It acts as a key to the door to the spirit world and it is the same as inviting or asking for their assistance. When one collaborates with them and get to know them, they are always with you. So, the relationship develops overtime. It is like my relationship with love my dog; it is the same, it must be cared for and taken for exercise. Like feeding a dog so it is nourished, I feed the animal spirits in diverse ways using different foods or offerings. Always*

*when one does a ceremony, you give offerings. Sometimes, when I am in the forest, I can take bird seeds with me, or I can give something into the fire during a ceremony, so they get nourishment that way. Food to feed the helping spirits through the fire are salt, pieces of meat, different herbs, and coffee. This is a reciprocal relationship. As I feed and sustain them, they support me in my work”* participant B (2023, personal correspondence).

The following question was concerned with why are different animals painted on drums?

*“Painting animals of drums is a way to honour them and then when I use my brass ring on the drum for divination purposes the animals may guide the direction of it and thus, it may stop on a certain animal and can be an indicator of which direction I need to observe and follow. Animal spirits are important to help with divination, ceremony, and healing. If I do contact or distant healing, they are always with me to provide energy-power.*

*In the older times, the Sámi shamans had a much closer connection to nature than what we presently have. Today the electro-magnetic frequencies traveling through the air can disturb this communication and so it is why it is important to be*

*outdoors in nature as often as one can do because nature helps clean this electro-magnetic resonance out of the way and helps to redefine our relationship with the animal kingdom and spirit world.*

*The qualities of materials used in drum making such as the skin from the reindeer is important. People today must know where to get a good skin and how the animals have been raised and taken care of and that they have had a good life because a drum will carry that energy. If we slaughter a reindeer for its skin, we must honour the animal for its sacrifice for food and tools and so using a reindeer skin for a drum is a way of doing that. Other animal parts such as bear claws or bird feet, likewise, need to be honoured as well. When I come across animals that have been killed on the road by a vehicle, I can take what I need so the spirit of the animal is honoured in this way. Through animal parts, this provides a link with the spirit of the animal in the other world; the Sáivo world where they are reborn. But this can vary from animal to animal, therefore, some might stay in the middle world to help and be amongst their species. About fifty percent of my work is influenced by contact with animals”* participant B (2023, personal correspondence).



**Figure 8.** An example of a contemporary Sámi drum made by participant B. Photograph and copyright participant B (2022).

As a way of broadening understanding about the relationship between human, animals and animal spirits regarding different forms of communication, I asked participant B if he could describe some of the main elements in the contemporary painted drum landscape that would reflect these connections as a method to help furthermore, provide insights into their importance within his work. The following information was relayed:

*“The frame drum is made from pine wood and reindeer skin and painted with acrylic inks. There are three bears on the right side of the drum, a mother and two cubs. The drum was made for a woman and so the bears are a representation*

*of a mother figure protecting the children and bears do that fiercely. Also, in the Spring when nature begins to awaken bears leave the den and always have newborn cubs at this time and so they stay close to the mother.*

*The reindeers on the central pillar of the drum on the east-west axis are a bank account in the Sámi culture because of their value and representations of the ways of life. Reindeers are walking up and down the world tree or pillar in different directions as they do in the natural landscapes but also in the spiritual landscapes as well.*

*There is a reindeer and a net-like structure, this is an altar, a place of offering on the right side of the drum above the three bears. This is representative of a place to offer reindeer to the spirits for help and assistance so that the bears and moose will leave the reindeer alone and not attack them. It is a sacrifice to the spirits of wild clan animals who are masters of the animal kingdoms.*

*At the top of the drum the Noaidi is traveling in the spiritual world up above the northern skies, in a sledge with a reindeer pulling it. The reindeer is his spirit animal and so his guide in the other world. On the left side of the drum there are two ravens. When you are sending messages to the spirit world*



*when working in different capacities, the ravens take the words to the other realms in the sky. There are also swans on the world pillar as well as a crane. Swans are a symbol for family and family also means ancestors. The crane as a symbol is a bird of the Spring time and if you think about an area of marshland which is a place between the physical world and the Sáivo world, the crane is a gate keeper and guardian of these areas and this is what is being communicated in the areas the birds are located in.*

*The eagle on the left is for me a bird which provides me with an overview of any situation when I need answers to questions and information when I am healing a client. The design reflects an older symbol found on seventeenth century drums and so it is a unique and significant symbol. Because, by bringing these older symbols into the modern world it is important and means they demonstrate how human-animal relations on earlier drums was just as important as it is today and therefore, by reusing these older symbols I am communicating in what ways I as a Sámi person are taking back the traditions and knowledge” participant B (2023 personal correspondence).*

Evidence for the use of sensory communication (telepathy) as method for the transmission of information/knowledge is evident through both prehistoric rock art landscapes and Sámi drum landscapes from the seventeenth century. Within both contexts we can comprehend some of the early discourses that are commonplace within shamanism and animistic landscapes and thinking. However, what is striking to notice within these contexts is how telepathy does not only concern communication from human-to-human mind or human-to-animal mind but in the case of the Verla rock art site, from human to a stone person in the form of an animal head, using art as a medium. Thus, this recognition demonstrates a unique and fresh perspective within this type of research which deserves further investigation at some point soon.

The reasons for this are that similar animal-like features are well known from within Sámi cultic sites and *sieidi* stones further north, not only in Finland but Norway, Sweden and the Kola Peninsula, north-west Russia, which have had offerings made to them (7). What is likewise, distinguishable are similarities in behaviours and practices of spiritual or out-of-body travel which appears as being evident on the Juusjärvi site as well as on figure 3 above where the Sámi shaman changes into a snake to travel. Through each of these landscapes we see different narratives linked with diverse types of human-animal communication and thus, relations.

With reference to the interview materials, there is no doubt that what has been described above from the two participants provides some level of both insight and understanding into how

## Discussion



through telepathy both personal and cultural narratives are formed which are based on a belief in a connection with both animals and the spiritual world. However, there is a distinct difference when it comes to the drum and its structure and painted landscape because of how participant B has used the language of symbolism to communicate diverse types of narratives that relate to both past and present Sámi cultures and cosmologies. Thus, when additional consideration is given to the rock art landscapes and those on earlier Sámi drums we can observe an inter-connectedness between in what ways art is used as a method for communicating narratives where interactions and interplays between human, animals and spiritual landscapes within a northern context which spans three time periods, namely, prehistory, seventeenth century and contemporary culture. What is being likewise transmitted are sacred narratives linked with sacred sites and spiritual powers within different regions, which it can be said in connection with the work of both participants, connect past and present practices. Despite no artwork being within the contribution from participant A, evidence is presented of a working relationship between raven birds upon the mountain as is the case in participant B's response about the raven symbolism illustrated in the painted drum landscape. Therefore, we see in both cases several ways human-animal relations form sacred narratives within both the inner and outer worlds in connection with the involvement of different actors from the animal kingdom, human world, and sacred natural landscapes. Thus, and in what ways they come together to play an integral part in demonstrating how both the shamans and ani-

mal powers appear as being dependent on each other for life, survival, undertaking healing and restorative work and creating art.

In addition, through participant A's contribution we are given insight into in what ways he uses distinct types of offering practices as a method for opening and asking for assistance with his work as well as giving thanks for help received from different powers. We likewise see a similar practice in participant B's work both in the physical reality as well as offering practices being reflected through the painted drum landscape. Equally, all of these behaviours that are described are commonplace within shamanic practice and therefore, help provide in essence an understanding of how some of the structures are created where in turn, telepathy is used for working purposes as well as spiritual development and as a guide throughout life in order to help likewise, with maintaining good health and well-being.

It is also worthwhile to mention how through the contributions by both participants we encounter examples of the continuity of ideas, concepts, beliefs, and practices in relation to shamanic heritage and spiritual traditions as examples in the modern world within a northern context which may also be linked with identity building. Henceforth, which is rooted in relationship with the natural world and animal kingdom where ideas about coexistence and reciprocal relationships are evident.

There is one further point to mention about how within the ancient rock art and seventeenth century drum landscapes a relationship exists between both art and sacred sites. Within these landscapes and consequently, these comprehended as being foundational in the ways they

communicate the earliest language forms to us. Thus, helping provide certain insights into how both traditions and practices have continued. Conversely, which today still fulfil a number of social functions for custodians of culture and practitioners of shamanism as has been demonstrated through what has been presented above.

### Concluding remarks

We have attempted to demonstrate within the research both the possibilities and richness of exploring the ancient origins of ritual landscapes that are closely tied to shamanism, animistic thinking, and importance of creating sacred narratives where human and animal relations are evident within the world of nature. We can also see how shamanism and animistic thinking regardless of evidence of variations concerning cross-cultural concepts and influences, these do in their own ways attribute to the production of both knowledge and art which is conveyed through the language of symbolism at both sacred sites and drum landscapes across millennia.

Our collective authoring of this paper has helped bring into focus the potential for an additional study of human-animal relations regarding the distinct roles and functions of the shaman who still today takes up both the role and function of an animal communicator. This is grounded in the belief of a world of souls which is real and where one can have dialogue within different contexts through direct personal experience using drums, ritual, and ceremony as well as offering practices and divination. These are the skills the shaman has mastered to be of service to both human beings and the spiritual powers

that exist just beyond in various cases, the veil of our conscious understanding as has been outlined by the authors above.

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### Notes

- (1) Please note that all Sámi terms are italicized, and the term *Sápmi* denotes the areas where the Sámi people have settlement today.
- (2) I am using the term *Noaidi* here in the past context. Today, the terms *Noaidi* and *shaman* among the Sámi can be interchangeable.
- (3) In terms of research ethics, I have included participants A and B as co-authors of the research because both have assisted with the study, and I consider this as being respectful and reflects the value of both their contributions.
- (4) For a much broader explanation of theories in relation to the drum landscape see the following link: [https://lacris.ulapland.fi/ws/portalfiles/portal/2304681/ShamanVol23\\_Joy.pdf](https://lacris.ulapland.fi/ws/portalfiles/portal/2304681/ShamanVol23_Joy.pdf)
- (5) This method is illustrated in Sandra Ingerman's book: *Soul Retrieval, Mending the Fragmented Self*. Published by Harper, San Francisco (1991). Soul retrieval work is where the shaman goes into an altered state of con-

sciousness and travels out-of-body into the spiritual realms with the assistance of helping spirits, usually animals to find lost soul parts. Once these have been found the shaman brings them back and blows them back into the client's energy system to make them whole again. This work is sometimes needed several times depending on the circumstances which took place causing the soul part or parts to split off to survive a traumatic or life-threatening experience, for example.

(6) See Francis Joy's doctoral dissertation *Sámi Shamanism and Art as Systems of Embedded Knowledge* (2018), and *The Importance of the Sun Symbol in the Restoration of Sámi Spiritual Traditions and Healing Practice* (2020).

(7) See the work of Ian Whittaker, pp. 301-304 (1957).

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