

# Archaeological Sites as Space for Modern Spiritual Practice



# Archaeological Sites as Space for Modern Spiritual Practice

Edited by

Jutta Leskovar and Raimund Karl

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Archaeological Sites as Space for Modern Spiritual Practice

Edited by Jutta Leskovar and Raimund Karl

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Jutta Leskovar, Raimund Karl and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1610-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1610-6

# CONTENTS

“Traces of our Ancient Religion”: Meaning-Making and Shamanism at Sami Offering Places and at the Isogaisa Festival, Northern Norway..... 1 <i>Tiina Äikäs, Trude Fonneland, Suzie Thomas, Wesa Pertola and Siv Ellen Kraft</i>	
Flowers on Merlin’s Tomb: Heritage Management and Neopagan Practices on Archaeological Sites in Brittany (France) ..... 21 <i>Gadea Cabanillas de la Torre</i>	
Tir Sanctaidd: Neo-Pagan Engagement with Prehistoric Sites on the Preseli Hills..... 38 <i>Delun Gibby</i>	
Interpreting the Atlantic Hillforts in NW Spain outside Academia: Local Rural Folklore <i>versus</i> New Age Pan-European Discourses ..... 54 <i>David González Álvarez</i>	
The Social Context of Archaeology in Romania: Teaching Field Methodology on an Orthodox Holy Site..... 72 <i>Emily R. Hanscam</i>	
Mix and Match, Old and New – Material Remains of Religious Practices by Estonian Pagans ..... 90 <i>Tõnno Jonuks, Ester Oras and Martti Veldi</i>	
Human and Civil Rights, Archaeology, and Spiritual Practice..... 110 <i>Raimund Karl</i>	
Neo-Paganism and Sacred Places – A Survey in Austria and Beyond.... 124 <i>Jutta Leskovar</i>	
Archaeological Sites as Space for Contemporary Religious Practices in the Southern Urals ..... 143 <i>Aynur Tuzbekov and Bakshiev Ilshat</i>	

Archaeological Sites as Space for the Ritual Practice of Contemporary Czech Pagans.....	170
<i>Matouš Vencálek</i>	
Around the Witches' Circle: Exploring Wicca's Usage of Archaeological Sites.....	182
<i>Ethan Doyle White</i>	

“TRACES OF OUR ANCIENT RELIGION”:  
MEANING-MAKING AND SHAMANISM  
AT SAMI OFFERING PLACES  
AND AT THE ISOGAISA FESTIVAL,  
NORTHERN NORWAY

TIINA ÄIKÄS, TRUDE FONNELAND,  
SUZIE THOMAS, WESA PERTTOLA  
AND SIV ELLEN KRAFT

### **Introduction**

In 2010, the first shaman festival to be held in the Nordic countries opened its doors to the public in the county of Lavangen, Northern Norway (Fig. 1). The festival is named *Isogaisa* and presented as an indigenous festival highlighting the spiritual traditions of indigenous people. At this annual festival, shamans from all over the world gather to perform ceremonies and exchange knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Over the past two years, we have seen that around 500 people visit the festival annually.



Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the *Isogaisa* festival.

Festivals are often held up as being an expression of a changing cultural scene. These events blur the boundaries between the hall and the stage; between the performers and the audience; between the organisers and the voluntary workers. They create new arenas, reach a wide audience and represent opportunities to be seen and heard (Pedersen and Viken 2009, 185). This is precisely an arena where participants have opportunities to express their values, memories, traditions and aspirations. As a festival, *Isogaisa* thus acts as a contact zone, where people negotiate and reflect on their identities. In this perspective festivals do not merely



entertain, they accomplish social work. They generate and display meaning. At *Isogaisa*, different cultures and religious traditions join and confront each other, forcing celebrants to embrace diversity. Such festive situations can be fraught with tension, since people come together, not merely as spectators, but also as agents (see Phipps 2009). For this reason, festivals are windows into the ways communities cope with social flux and cultivate creativity.

*Isogaisa* is just one of many examples of how shamanism is expressed in contemporary society, yet still the festival can be described as a major venue for shamanic as well as indigenous religion-making in the present. Concerned with sense-making on emic grounds, this chapter focuses on ways in which people manifest their spirituality through material culture and embodied actions at the *Isogaisa* festival. Our approach to gathering our data has been largely ethnographic, based on documentation, observation and interviews. The *Isogaisa* festival constitutes an intertwined stage where notions of being and belonging are recast. Our focus on the festival *Isogaisa* shed light on how and by whom motives from Sámi ethnic religion are articulated and activated in the process of religious meaning-making.

## Methods

In 2014, a group of five researchers from the disciplines of archaeology, religious studies, and museology conducted fieldwork at the *Isogaisa* festival. Research methods included short, semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of material culture related to the rituals. The documentation of material culture was achieved by taking notes and photographs as well as creating a photogrammetric 3D model of the festival's main offertory structure, the fire. During the festival, members of the research team attended different gatherings and festivities that were offered as part of the programme of activities in order to observe the following things: How did participants express their spirituality? Does ethnic religion play a role in the gatherings? What kind of material culture is used in the rituals? In addition, we conducted 16 semi-structured interviews. Both festival organisers and festival participants were interviewed and the interviewees were selected so that they represented different (ethnic/cultural) backgrounds, sex and age groups.

People were selected for the interviews in three ways 1) based on previous contacts, 2) selecting people who were somehow active during the festival, and 3) randomly. Fonneland and Kraft had attended *Isogaisa*

in previous years, and they had contacts to persons who had similarly been there before. We also approached people who we had seen taking a somewhat active role in the festival, e.g. attending the *sieidi* trip (a walking excursion and ceremonial experience offered ahead of the formal opening of the festival), or organising ceremonies. The third group were people who either spontaneously joined in group interviews that we were already holding or who had otherwise approached us with their stories or to strike up conversation. Due to the sensitivity of the topic – personal spiritual practices of people – it was important to gain the trust of the persons interviewed. Hence, previous acquaintance was often important. On the other hand, there is an atmosphere of communality and sharing knowledge at *Isogaisa*, which makes it easy to approach people. Many wanted to tell their life stories and worldviews. We used semi-structured interviews that enabled people to share their stories. In all discussions, topics related to the meaning of ancient offering places and Sámi ethnic religion as well as the use of material culture in rituals were included. The interviews were anonymous, but some of the interviewed expressed their wish that they would be cited with name. In every instance, interviewees were asked to sign a consent form which recognized that they were aware of the purpose of our research, and of their rights as interviewees (for example to anonymity and the right to withdraw their data at a later date without having to give an explanation). In all cases, interviewees gave consent for their interviews to be digitally recorded. The majority of the interviews were carried out in English, with one interview carried out in Russian and English with the assistance of an interpreter.

Studying religious practices and expressions involves taking belief seriously, both existentially and emotionally. In shamanic performances there is no room for detached observers (see also Rountree 2010, Trulsson 2010, Magliocco 2004, Lindquist 1997). During the festival’s rituals and performances, we participated on equal terms with fellow practitioners and tried to experience the world of the other, without imagining that we could ever see or feel the way the individual practitioner does. The field of modern shamanism is a venue where people meet and exchange knowledge and experience, knowing that the experience can never be completely identical, but varies from individual to individual. Even though our view is not that of an insider, we study shamanism without prejudice and hope to have been able to attain a sympathetic, but critical approach.

## **Sámi Ethnic Religion**

The Sámi are the indigenous people of northern Fennoscandia. Their livelihood has traditionally been based on reindeer husbandry, hunting, fishing and gathering, with considerable variation between different Sámi groups. Religious ideas and practices have varied within the area populated by the Sámi (Rydving 1993). There have also been temporal changes in religious practices (Rydving 1993; Äikäs and Salmi 2013), though there are shared ideas, such as the central role of sacred landscapes, natural elements and places (Rydving 1993; Äikäs 2015), and the reciprocal relationship people had with the spirits and gods that affected their lives (Schanche 2004, 5).

The spirits and gods were approached by giving offerings. Offerings were made at certain sacred places, for instance sacred stones called *sieidi* (in this article the North Sámi orthography is used). *Sieidis* are usually rocks or rock formations unshaped by humans and hence their recognition demands cultural knowledge, written sources, place name evidence, or archaeological finds (cf. Äikäs 2011). The offering practices have varied temporally and spatially. Offerings have included, for instance, animals and animal body parts, metal objects, alcohol, and tobacco (Manker 1957, 40–52; Äikäs 2015). The oldest dating from offering material including bones and metal objects indicate that the tradition began in ca. 500–1300 AD (Hedman 2003, 24; Salmi et al. 2015). The offerings were connected to subsistence and livelihood; they were often made in the hope of future success in hunting, fishing, and reindeer herding, or following such success, as well as to prevent harm and danger to people and the herd. The species diversities of the animal offerings at Sámi offering sites reflect the connection between subsistence strategies and religious rituals (Äikäs et al. 2009).

Christianisation of the Sámi affected the offering tradition, as animal offerings seem to cease after the 17th century, a period when Christianisation began in northern Fennoscandia (Kylli 2012; Äikäs and Salmi 2013). After that, the offering tradition continued as offerings of coins, small personal items, and as today's touristic performances (Äikäs and Salmi 2013; Äikäs and Salmi 2015). Some of the offerings, including quartzite, tea lights, and cones, have their closest resemblances in contemporary neo-pagan rituals (Wallis 2003; Blain and Wallis 2007; Äikäs 2012; Äikäs and Spangen 2016) (Fig. 2). In Norway, the Sámi ethnic religion that was paganised some 300 years ago as a result of Sámi Christianisation has become increasingly important as a source of symbols of national identity, and for tourism, as well as for the indigenisation of

Christianity and of New Age and shamanic milieus (see Johnsen and Kraft 2017). Focusing primarily on Sami shamanism, *Isogaisa* constitutes precisely an arena where ancient religious traditions are brought to life in new settings. At the festival these traditions are practiced by Sámi and non-Sámi alike, and incorporated in a neo-pagan context. Old and local traditions are merged with global discourses on pagan rituals, spirituality, and indigeneity, and in this melting pot new forms of religion are taking shape.



Fig. 2. Tea lights from the *sieidi* of Taatsi in Kittilä, Finland (photo: Tiina Äikäs).

## Shamanism and Religious Creativity

Prior to the late 1990s, contemporary shamanism in Norway differed little from modern shamanic practices found elsewhere on the globe and in the areas of their origin. Since then, a Sámi version of shamanism has been established, along with a new focus on the uniqueness of the Arctic north, expressed through New Age discourses and events, as well as through various secular or semi-secular currents. Shamanism in Norway is not a unified, organised movement, but a patchwork of shifting and elastic networks, stretching across both regional and national borders (Fonneland 2010). There are still some events that can be said to act as focal points where shamans from all over the country meet to socialise and share their

knowledge. This primarily applies to the annually arranged alternative fairs organised in cities all over the country and not least to the *Isogaisa* festival.

Shaman Ronald Kvernmo is the founder and leader of *Isogaisa*. According to him, the motivation behind the festival is to unite a pre-Christian Sámi worldview with modern ways of thinking, and thus create “a spiritual meeting place where different cultures are fused together.” This blending of cultures and knowledge is especially underlined in the presentation of *Isogaisa* at the festival’s homepage. Here we can read:

“What is *Isogaisa*? *Isogaisa* is a mountain, a goal in the distance. A wish to experience something beautiful, something indescribable. The *Isogaisa* festival is a social meeting place, where different cultures blend. The old Sámi spiritual way of seeing the world is combined with modern ways of thinking. Indigenous people present their own culture and then take part in the performances of other groups. In this way shamanism is brought to a higher level and achieves broader professional content.”

The religious creativity and blending of cultures and traditions are particularly visible in the various ceremonies that are held during the festival week. Here shamans from all over the world share their knowledge and act together. The pipe ceremony, hunting ceremony, ceremony against mining, tea ceremony, and the many drumming journeys offer ritual passages in which the sensing of the landscape, the sound of the drum, tastes, and scents represent a liminality, transformation, and inner self-development. *Isogaisa* is thus not a festival in which the audience is supposed to just come and be entertained; the objective is to come, experience, and *be changed*.

The performance places weightage on how inspiration from indigenous peoples’ religious tradition is a resource in the present day. This, according to the organisers, is something we in the Western world have lost, and which we should rediscover. *Isogaisa* presents itself as being precisely this type of learning arena, where those with inquiring minds may acquire the values they feel we lack in Western culture. The festival offers a perceptible access to the Sámi past, and thus forms a bond between the past and the present.

## **Connection Between Past and Present in Rituals and Material Culture**

The connection and differences between past and present is also highlighted when one compares the material culture and rituals at *sieidi* sites and at *Isogaisa*. In the interviews, we asked people what they give as offerings. The answers revealed that most common offerings were similar

to the things given to the *sieidis* in the rituals of Sámi ethnic religion. In ethnic religion, offerings were often connected to livelihood; they were similar to the food people would eat themselves. Meat, fish, blood, and in later times alcohol were given to the *sieidi* and it was believed that the *sieidi* could consume them and be satisfied (Äimä 1903, 115; Itkonen 1948, 311–312; Manker 1957, 40–52; Sköld 1999, 66). All of these offerings were also evident in the interviews. In addition, coffee offerings were often mentioned (e.g. I7 2014). Coins are also evident in the ancient material as well as in the contemporary findings from *sieidis* and in our interviews (Äikäs 2015; e.g. I7 2014).

Another group of offerings found from *sieidis* are personal objects. In Finland, excavations at *sieidi* sites revealed a bone button and an antler ring – both undated but belonging to the ancient offering tradition (Äikäs 2015). Contemporary finds from *sieidis* also included personal items such as a ring, a yoyo, and spectacles. Interviewees mentioned personal offerings that would not be evident in archaeological material. One cut a part of her hair and laid it in the fire (I4 2014). Another told us that she offers her own tears (I12 2014). A deep personal connection was also in the offerings that reminded of a deceased loved-one: for example, flowers for a botanist wife, or gasoline for a friend, as the following citation shows: “So you don’t give, need to give so much just a little bit some piece of bread, piece of meat, piece of fish. [...] her brother died and I wanted to heal him but before I could do it he just died. And then we, aah, it wa– everybody was surprised so I had – the only thing you could do like was to make a ceremony for him. [...] I sacrificed some reindeer meat and some benzine, gasoline, because he always liked to drive snowmobiles.” (I7 2014; cf. I2 2014).

A common feature in contemporary offerings is the use of things from nature. There were stones and rose petals laid around the central fire (Fig. 3, Fig. 4). The interviewees said that they give herbs, flowers, amber, and stones, especially quartzite (I1 2014; I3 2014; I4 2014; I9 2014; I14 2014). Often also with these natural objects, it was important that they were somehow meaningful for the person offering them. In some cases, the interviewed emphasised that the offering chose you: “So same as the stone that I offered yesterday, it chose me. It’s like – aah – out of the blue you just, just the stone, it’s, it’s like it’s shouting to you without making any noise or anything but you notice it. And you, it just feels, just feels exactly right” (I1 2014; also I3 2014). Quartzite has also been found among the contemporary offerings at *sieidis* as well as sprig bouquets and animal (horse) hair (Äikäs 2015; Äikäs and Spangen 2016). The idea is to leave something that will take its place in the circle of life. The offerings could

also be more abstract such as drumming, singing, or lighting a candle (I12 2014). Interviewee 8<sup>2</sup> stated that for him helping people is a way to give offerings.



Fig. 3. Stones and rose petals laid around the central fire in *Isogaisa* (photo: Tiina Äikäs).

---

<sup>2</sup> Mikkel Gaup who works as an actor and as a shaman and who has visited *Isogaisa* regularly. Unlike many of the other interviewees he expressed clearly his wish to be named.

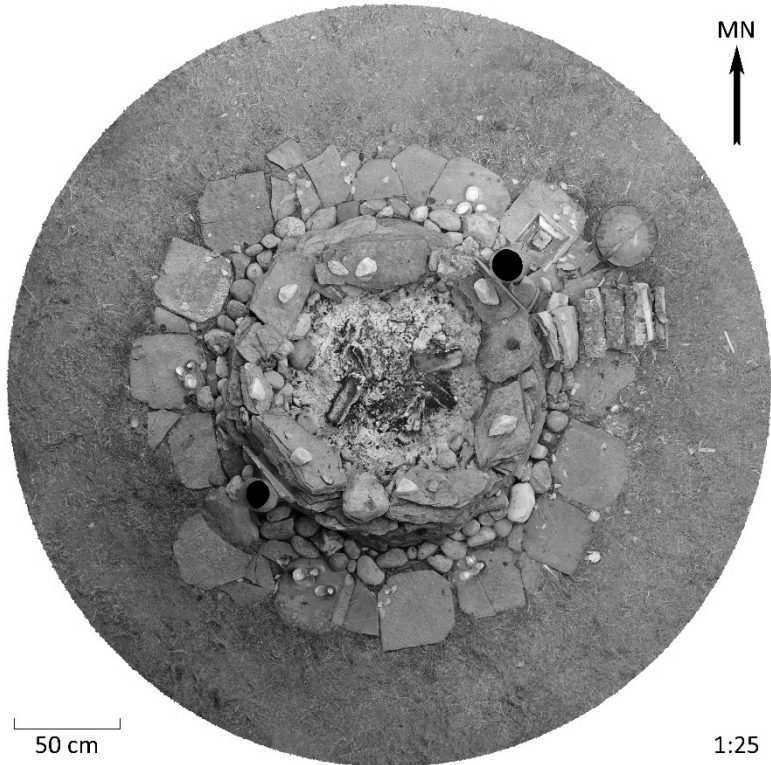


Fig. 4. Orthographic figure of the central fire (figure: Wesa Pertola).

We were also interested in how people related to the old sacred places of the ethnic religion including *sieidis*. The interviewees said that they feel respect for the old sacred sites and they are held important as a link to past generations. Some mentioned a special energy at these sites (I3 2014; I8 2014; I12 2014). Overall, the emphasis was in making one's own sacred place; a place that was meaningful – or in some cases letting the stone choose you (I1 2014; I3 2014; I12 2014). One interviewee also told us that she has an altar that has been passed on from her mother (I4 2014). In a way, this idea continues the traditions of the ethnic religion, where there were communal *sieidis* used by a family or a village for a longer time, but also personal *sieidis* that communicated with only one person (Paulaharju 1932; Rydving 1993). As an interviewee puts it: “In my belief, you make your own sacred places. Because when my ancestors were shamans and they had a sacred place, they build their self. And I have my sacred place,



on my place. So, it's, I don't think it's necessary to go to the old ones when you can make your own." (16 2014) These self-made *sieidis* were also evident during archaeological fieldwork in Finnish Lapland (Äikäs 2015, 164) (Fig. 5).

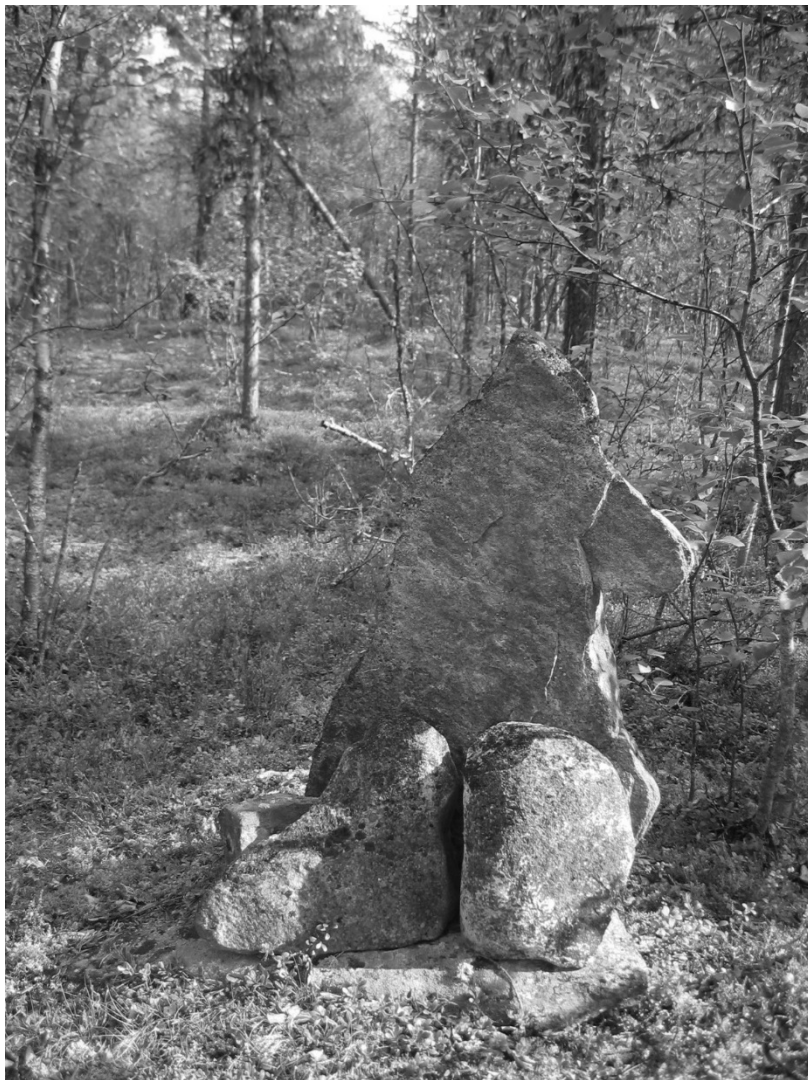


Fig. 5. A self-made *sieidi* in Muonio region in Finland (photo: Tiina Äikäs).

During the festival, before the official opening ceremony, a half-day hike was made to a *sieidi* in the vicinity. Only a small part of the festival visitors took part in this trip. According to Roy Wallis (Wallis 2003, 141), shamanistic practitioners highlight archaeological sites as places where ritual practices “work best”. This perspective is also reflected in the festival, and every year a hike to a Sámi sacrificial site is organised. Our group of researchers were invited to take part in the wandering to the Sámi *sieidi* Rikkagallo (Fig. 6). This part of the festival programme was led by Sámi shaman Eirik Myrhaug, whose family used this area as a pasture for their reindeer a long time ago. The wandering lasted for several hours and participants were encouraged to use the walk as a meditation focusing on what to leave behind in their lives and what to offer at the *sieidi*. The journey in itself was important, as Eirik emphasised to Äikäs, who was forced to turn back in the midway because of her pregnancy. Arriving at the *sieidi*, a ritual was organised. Eirik tells us that Rikkagallo is a *sieidi* that has been used as a sacrificial site throughout history. By continuing the use of this place, Eirik writes himself into a past where the Sámi ancestral spirits play a central part. Although the use of Rikkagallo has continued into the modern era, Eirik still finds it to be an ancestral place. As in the past, Eirik indicates, the ancestors grant power to the individual practitioner. At the same time, they have the ability to influence the future through granting wishes, laid down by the stone in the shape of coins, bones or other objects chosen by the participants. The sacred sites are thus something the practitioners themselves must “make happen.” They require action in order to yield power. These actions also serve to consolidate the practitioner's sense of identity and belonging to the shamanic community.



Fig. 6. A trip to the *sieidi* Rikkagallo was organised as a part of the festival (photo: Trude Fonneland).

When shamans such as Eirik visit and conduct rituals at ancient sacred sites, it can also be seen in the light of one of the key categories of religious studies: the pilgrimage or religious journey (Gilhus and Kraft 2007, 13). One characteristic of contemporary pilgrimages is that the road

is made as you walk. At the core are individual experiences, religious cultivation, freedom, and a break from day-to-day tedium, but also more commonplace objectives such as enjoying nature and meeting people (Gilhus and Kraft 2007, 15–17; Kraft 2007a, 47). When shamans and other participants visit ancient sacred sites, they are travellers on a religious journey through history and across the landscape. They cross the boundary between past and present and between city and countryside. The pilgrimage to the sacred site is also a journey that encompasses both the inner and outer world, and is meant to contribute to religious insight.

Rituals of Sámi ethnic religion did not only include giving offerings to a *sieidi*. They were multisensory embodied practices where sounds, sense of touch, memories, and social relations played an important role (Salmi et al. 2011). Offerings included smearing fat or blood to the surface of the stone and hence caressing the stone’s surface (Paulaharju 1932). Some of the *sieidis* were selected because of the peculiar features in their surface such as depressions or bulges (Paulaharju 1932). These could offer sensory experiences. Historical sources describe different sounds such as yoiking (traditional Sámi singing) performed as a way to communicate with *sieidis*. Other possible sounds connected to Sámi offering places were echoes, sounds of water, and drumming, which was part of the *noaidis* (Sámi shaman) performance (Paulaharju 1932; 1922; Ravila 1934; Itkonen 1948; Äikäs 2015, 112–120; Rainio et al. in press). In addition, embodied ritual practices included memories of ancestors who had visited the *sieidi*; sometimes old offerings and smell of rotting meat acted as sensory reminders of the past rituals (Salmi et al. 2011). The *sieidis* were also places of social gatherings as some of them were visited by whole communities (Rydving 1993).

The embodied practices also played an important role at the *Isogaisa* festival. Drums and yoiking were central to many of the gatherings, and workshops for learning how to make one’s own drum and to yoik were held. In addition, dancing was central to many festivities, and in the year 2011, even a festival dance was created in which such entities as Earth, Sun and ancestors were greeted ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXxqa\\_BJCOs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXxqa_BJCOs)). The importance of sensory experiences is again evident in the “sense lavvu” (a Sámi tent), where people can lie on reindeer skins, listen to drumming, and concentrate on the moment. For many, *Isogaisa* is an arena for social gathering where memories of previous years’ festivals and the people met there are appreciated. The social role of *Isogaisa* is intensified by the name-giving ceremonies held there in the years 2014 and 2015. Here, babies are lifted up to the skies

and in the cardinal directions to introduce them to the gods. In the ceremony, the baby also gets his or her own yoik.

This type of a return to the old paths does not involve simply picking up types of rituals that have been practiced in the past. As Catherine Bell (Bell 1997, 256) emphasises, “What is seized upon as tradition is usually a rather new synthesis of custom and tradition [...] This type of ‘return’ to tradition, therefore, is clearly a force that opens the tradition to many changes”. In the shamanic milieu, creativity takes precedence over tradition. Shamans taking part in the *Isogaisa* festival do not abide by any fixed tradition, but bring into being their own. Here the self is highlighted as a genuine source for approaching the core of past traditions.

A new phenomenon is the role given to hugging. Hugging is described as the power of the festival. One interviewee stated that for her, giving hugs to the trees is a way of giving offerings (I11 2014). Hugs are deemed so important that a festival hugger is selected every year. One of the interviewees related to the role of hugging in the following manner:

“And when you have the love to give to, to everything and everyone, so, I love to give a hug and a yeah, there’s healing in my hugs. [...] Just standing and hugging and she was crying and things were happening inside so these location were somewhere went away. So the flow was better” (I14 2014).

Central for the festival was a fire that was burning in the main *lavvu* for the whole festival. It was around this fire where most of the ceremonies took place, but the fire was also a place for personal offerings made in solitude. There is evidence of sacrificial use of fire from the ancient Sámi offering places. Burnt bones have been found for example from sites in Inari, Finland, and written sources explain how food was prepared by the *sieidi* and then eaten so that the *sieidi* would be fed (Hætta 1923 [1860s], 79; Äimä 1903; Itkonen 1948, 313; Paulaharju 1932; Äikäs 2015). The interviewees at *Isogaisa* also mentioned how they are often eating by the fire and giving food as offerings and sharing it with spirits or ancestors sitting around the fire. It was also important not to put any trash or plastic into the fire; only clean things. Part of honouring the fire was also to decorate the fireplace with flowers, and a small statuette. Also, a small statuette of a Chinese lion had been placed in between the stones of the fireplace. The interviewees emphasised the social importance of fire as a place where people gather and share their food and stories (I1 2014; I3 2014; I11 2014; I12 2014; I14 2014). It seems like the importance of fire has even increased in contemporary practices. People talked about the spirit in the fire; how they honour the fire; and about the healing power of

the fire. One of the interviewees described the meaning of the fire in the following words:

“Aah, for me, when they light the sacred fire, it’s like the lightning, like the spirit, like the heart of the festival of the *Isogaisa*. And then this fire keeps burning the whole time and aah, people come and they, they talk or they make an offering and they share around the fire. And also [there are] these different ceremonies, so for me it’s that beating heart of the *Isogaisa*” (I9 2014).

On the other hand, the festival fire had also a mere practical function:

“First of all to keep the *lávvu* hot. (laughing) And ah, when you have a fire in the room, then, then, then everything is changing. And ah, you know, if you’re sitting, if you sitting in the room and nothing happen then you turn on TV and watch TV. [...] Or if you, if you have a fire then you watching, sitting, staring at the fire, all the time. And aah, and you al-always need to have a kind of fire in *lávvu*. [...] and the next is, this is a shamanistic festival. You need a sacred place, you need to respect something” (I7 2014).

The heat of the fire was also used to tighten and tune the skins of the shaman drums. In this action, the practical and spiritual aspects of the fireplace are combined.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Sámi ethnic religion is usually considered to be something rather static and belonging to the past. Here we have studied it as a part of a living cultural tradition. In the offering rituals practiced at *Isogaisa*, there is a clear connection to the Sámi ethnic religion. This is evident for example in the food offerings, in the use of fire, and in the respect for the old sacred places. One of the interviewees described the connection to the old traditions in the following words:

“In, in the north we have forgotten almost everything because when Christianity came, everything was burnt. Yeah. And, and we, we have nothing left. What’s left is what is written down several hundred years after we were Christian. *So but we find traces of our ancient religion.*” (I12 2014, our italicisation.)

The citation also demonstrates the awareness of the fact that something of the old traditions is lost; the current worldview is a combination of old and new elements. People also emphasised how important it is to share the knowledge from different traditions. They had respect for the old ways,

but they also added some new traditions. One of the interviewees described this as a shaman culture with a difference to Sámi culture: “this is the shaman, shaman culture, like it’s not, it’s not just like the Sámi culture, for me the Sámi culture is something different. Ah, and this is of course like it’s, it’s a part of it, but it’s not many Sámi who practice the old faith. So for me, here, this gathering is more like a, a shaman, yeah, a shaman culture like and I, yes, I feel very much at home, because you, I meet other healers and we connect to each other and it’s a very beautiful space for sharing.” (I9 2014.)

The study of newly emerging festivals, like *Isogaisa*, provides a window onto processes of ritual creativity. *Isogaisa* in our view is a clear example of how religious labels are formed in ever-changing contexts - as a by-product of broader historical processes. *Isogaisa* can be described as a hub for religious innovation and renewal. Here, cultural performers from all over the world meet annually to share their traditions and to be open to inspiration from other sources. The connection to a particular landscape, to northern Norway, nevertheless gives Sámi religious traditions a main priority. At *Isogaisa*, Sámi shamanism is brought to life through a focus that these are traditions that correspond to local nature, ancestors, roots, climate, and mindset. These are traditions retained in the landscape, in old burial places and archaeological sites and that are thus available to people taking part in the festival. The festival landscape is interpreted as having the imprints and traces of ancestors, and this crossover between time and space gives places a touch of mystery. As Anne Eriksen points out: “The past ceases to be a bygone age; it can be perceived as a now because it is related to a here – a here that is also part of contemporary people's own direct experiences” (Eriksen 1999, 92 our translation).

Understanding the significance of festivals like *Isogaisa* in a globalising sphere of indigenous cultural production has implications at the level of cultural policy; for shifts between the local, national and the global as sites of political action. *Isogaisa*, with its seminars, alternative fair, ceremonies and entertainment, is like other festivals in that it is a place for socialising, enjoyment and leisure. Nevertheless, it is also a place where the local and global are merged; where power relationships come into play; where political interests are materialised; where cultural identities are tested; and where new visions take shape.

## Interviews

- Interview 1, 15.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 2, 15.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 3, 15.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 4, 15.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 6, 15.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 7, 16.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 8, 16.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 9, 16.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 11, 16.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 12, 16.8.2014, Isogaisa.  
 Interview 14, 17.8.2014, Isogaisa.

## Bibliography

- Äikäs, T. 2011. *What makes a stone a sieidi or how to recognize a holy place?* Culture Kultūras krustpunkti vol. V, 14–24.
- . 2012. *Quartzite at a sieidi: a new life of an offering site?* In: Berge, R., Jasinski, M. E., Sognnes, K. [eds.] *N-TAG TEN*. Proceedings of the 10th Nordic TAG conference at Stiklestad, Norway 2009, BAR International Series 2399. Oxford: 1–8.
- . 2015. *From Boulders to Fells – Sacred Places in the Sámi Ritual Landscape*. Monographs of the Archaeological Society of Finland 5. Available from [http://www.sarks.fi/masf/masf\\_5/masf\\_5.html](http://www.sarks.fi/masf/masf_5/masf_5.html)
- Äikäs, T. and Salmi, A.-K. 2013. “*The sieidi is a better altar / the noaidi drum’s a purer church bell*”– *Long term changes and syncretism at Sámi offering sites*. *World Archaeology* vol. 45.1 (Archaeology of Religious Change), 20–38.
- . 2015. *North/south encounters at Sámi sacred sites in Northern Finland*. *Historical Archaeology* 49(3), 90–109.
- Äikäs, T. and Spangen, M. 2016. *New users and changing traditions – (re)defining Sami offering sites*. *European Journal of Archaeology* 19(1), 95–121.
- Äikäs, T., Puputti, A.-K., Núñez, M., Aspi, J. and Okkonen, J. 2009. *Sacred and profane livelihood. Animal bones from sieidi sites in Northern Finland*. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 42(2), 109–22.
- Äimä, F. 1903. *Muutamia muistotietoja Inarin lappalaisten vanhoista uhrimenoista*. *Virittäjä* 8, 113–6.



- Bell, C. 1997. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York and Oxford.
- Blain, J. and Wallis, R. 2007. *Sacred Sites Contested Rites/Rights. Pagan Engagements with Archaeological Monuments*. Brighton and Portland.
- Eriksen, A. 1999. *Historie, Minne og Myte*. Oslo.
- Fonneland, T. 2013. "Isogaisa: Sámiisk sjamanisme i festivaldrakt". *Aura Tidsskrift för akademiska studier av nyreligiösitet* Vol 5, 102-131.
- . 2010. *Samisk nysjamanisme: i dialog med (for)tid og stad*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen.
- Gilhus, I. S. and Kraft, S. E. 2007. «Innledning». In: Gilhus, I. S., Kraft S. E. [eds.], *Religiøse reiser. Mellom gamle spor og nye mål*. Oslo, 11-21.
- Hedman, S. D. 2003. *Boplatser och offerplatser. Ekonomisk strategi och boplatsmönster bland skogssamer 700–1600 AD*. *Studia archaeologica Universitatis Umenensis* 17, Umeå.
- Hætta, L. J. 1923 [1860s]. *Bidrag til Finmarkens kirkehistorie. II. En beretning om de religiøse og moralske forhold i Kautokeino før den læstadianske vækkelse*. *Norvegia Sacra. Aarbok til kunnskap om den norske kirke i forntid og samtid*, 3.
- Itkonen, T. I. 1948. *Suomen lappalaiset vuoteen 1945*, II. Porvoo.
- Johnson, G. and Kraft, S. E. 2017. *Introduction*. In: Johnson, G. & Kraft, S.E. [eds.], *Handbook of Indigenous Religion(s)*, Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion vol. 15, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 1-24.
- Kylli, R. 2012. *Saamelaisten kaksi käänntymystä: Uskonnon muuttuminen Utsjoen ja Enontekiön lapinmailla 1602–1905*. Helsinki.
- Lindquist, G. 1997. *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene: Neo-Shamanism in Contemporary Sweden*. Doctoral Dissertation. *Studies in Social Anthropology*, 39, Stockholm.
- Magliocco, S. 2004. *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Manker, E. 1957. *Lapparnas heliga ställen. Kultplatser och offerkult i belysning av nordiska museets och landsantikvariernas fältundersökningar*. *Acta Lapponica* XIII, Uppsala.
- Paulaharju, S. 1962 [1922]. *Lapin muisteluksia*. Second edition. Porvoo.
- . 1932. *Seitoja ja seidan palvontaa*. Helsinki.
- Pedersen, P. and Viken, A. 2009. *Globalised Reinvention of Indigenuity. The Riddu Riddu Festival as a Tool for Ethnic Negotiation of Place*. In: Nyseth, T., Viken, A. [eds.] *Place Reinvention; Northern Perspectives*. Farnham.
- Phipps, P. 2009. *Globalization, indigeneity and performing culture*. In: *Local-Global*, 6, 28–48.

- Rainio, R., Äikäs, T., Lahelma, A. and Lassfolk, K. in press. *Pyhien paikkojen akustiikka: akustiset mittaukset Pohjois-Suomen muinaisilla kalliomaalaus- ja seitakohteilla*. In: Uimonen, H., Kytö, M., Ruohonen, K. [eds.], *Muuttuvat suomalaiset äänimaisemat*. Tampere.
- Rountree, K. 2010. *Crafting Contemporary Pagan Identities in a Catholic Society*. London.
- Ravila, P. 1934. *Reste lappischen Volksglaubens*. Suomalais-ugrilaisen seuran toimituksia LXVIII, Helsinki.
- Rydving, H. 1993. *The End of Drum-Time. Religious Change among the Lule Saami, 1670s–1740s*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Historia Religionum 12, Uppsala.
- Salmi, A.-K., Äikäs, T., Fjellström, M. and Spangen, M. 2015. *Animal offerings at Sámi offering site Unna Saiva – Changing religious practices and human-animal relationships*. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 40, 10–22.
- Salmi, A.-K., Äikäs, T. and Lipkin, S. 2011. *Animating ritual at Sámi sacred sites in Northern Finland*. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 11(2), 212–35.
- Schanche, A. 2004. *Horizontal and vertical perceptions of Saami landscapes*. In: Jones, M., Scanche, A. [eds.], *Landscape, Law and Customary Rights*. Report from a symposium in Guovdageaidnu-Kautokeino 26–28 March 2003. *Diedut* 3, 1–10.
- Sköld, P. 1999. *Seime staembe. Brännivinet i den samiska religionen*. *Oknytt* 20(1–4), 63–84.
- Trulsson, Å. 2010. *Cultivating the Sacred. Ritual Creativity and Practice among Women in Contemporary Europe*, doctoral dissertation, Department of History and Anthropology of Religions, Lund University.
- Wallis, R.J. 2003. *Shamans/Neo-Shamans. Ecstasy, Alternative Archaeologies and Contemporary Pagans*. London.

# FLOWERS ON MERLIN'S TOMB: HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND NEOPAGAN PRACTICES ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN BRITTANY (FRANCE)

GADEA CABANILLAS DE LA TORRE

Brittany is at the same time a rich area in terms of archaeological heritage and a core region in contemporary Western European Neopagan – mainly Neodruidic – movements, a role supported by its strong Celtic identity. This paper deals with the main issues raised by the use of archaeological sites in Brittany as spiritual spaces, focussing on prehistoric examples, as well as the underlying perception of archaeological heritage and information that such practices convey. The aim is to raise awareness of these issues, taking into account the perception and the impact of these activities among believers, whether organised or not, public authorities, the general public and of course archaeologists.

First, a review of the basis for the use of archaeological sites for spiritual practices in this area is presented, according to arguments provided by Neopagan believers in both written and oral sources. Then, an overview of the various ritual and non-ritual activities carried out by different participants on archaeological sites leads to the presentation of specific regional examples, raising key issues for heritage management, the attitude of public authorities and their policies towards this type of use. Finally, the interactions between Neopagan activities and narratives and the production and circulation of archaeological information are discussed in order to analyse the possible roles played by archaeologists concerning this issue. The symbolic appropriation of archaeological heritage for spiritual purposes is thus placed in the wider debate regarding our own responsibilities in the public dimension of archaeology, especially in respect to religious and emotional responses to our objects of study.

The main problem in the study of modern spiritual practices in Brittany is the impossibility to assess exactly how many people are involved in it and to what extent. Neopaganism in Brittany is a synonym for Neodruidic

movements, usually organised as non-profit associations according to the 1901 French law. The oldest such organisation is the Gorsedd of Brittany, established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. (Le Stum 1998, 41–55). From the 1970s on, however, with the revival of Neopagan beliefs and of Breton folklore and identity, a myriad of new independent groups has been created. This diversity has led to a feeling of competition particularly between Gorsedd and more recent organisations (Louboutin 2011).

The historic dimension of Neodruidism as well as the existence of previous local traditions involving the use of archaeological sites as spiritual places (see below) explain why some Neopagan practices such as offerings have become commonplace in Brittany. They engage not only strictly practising believers belonging to organisations, but also an interested public who takes part in those practices in a more or less regular fashion. All visitors involved in spiritual practices on archaeological sites are thus not necessarily Neopagans in a strict sense, or even consider themselves as such, although they do share some Neodruidic beliefs. In this paper, I will be mainly dealing with written sources concerning formal groups, because the general public of such practices is extremely diverse, vague, loose, and particularly difficult to grasp. Partly due to this difficulty, I have chosen to adopt a global approach, as suggested by Robert J. Wallis and Jenny Blain, embracing all alternative - spiritual - site uses (Wallis and Blain 2001, 10).

## **Reasons for the use of Archaeological Sites as Spiritual Spaces**

### **Landscape-Related Reasons**

Many prehistoric sites in modern-day Brittany are located in remarkable natural environments in areas such as forests, seaside cliffs, etc. Those locations have become key tourist attractions, appreciated for the scenery as well as their historical dimension. Those two elements – landscape and heritage – form the core of the region's narrative to attract visitors (Tourisme Bretagne 2016). Both contribute widely to the romantic image of the typically Breton scenery of ruins set in an imagined wild landscape developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. (Pouchard 2015). The preference for megaliths in Brittany, like in Britain, seems indeed to correspond to a romantic, simplified, and stereotyped perception of the past both by the general public and by many ritual performers (Wallis 2003, 80, 143).

Many of those prehistoric sites located in nowadays protected natural areas (Armorique and Golfe du Morbihan regional parks) are easily

accessible and well-known to the local population. A small group, consisting of both locals and visitors, considers such places as inherently powerful, and views them as spiritual spaces even when no archaeological evidence is visible or known (Le Scouëzec 1996, 10). A popular belief is held that the locations of archaeological sites, and particularly ritual and funerary ones, were determined by focal points of the telluric powers identified by ancient populations. The presence of an archaeological site is thus seen as a useful indicator of those special areas, but not an essential precondition to their use as spiritual places.

Megalithic sites are often connected to coastal locations that attract both tourists and a spiritually-oriented public. The best example is undoubtedly the passage grave on the island of Gavrinis (Larmor Baden, Morbihan). The large Neolithic monument includes a set of richly decorated granite slabs in one of the most popular sightseeing places of the Morbihan Gulf. It has recently become a regular meeting place for a druidic group celebrating the summer solstice (Le Télégramme 25/06/2012, Ouest-France 30/09/2013), but had already been identified by Gwenc'hlan Le Scouëzec – Great Druid of the Breton Gorsedd between 1980 and 2008 – as a sacred monument (Le Scouëzec 1987, 231–249). Late prehistoric sites are often still very visible in the landscape, an advantage that has been recognised and used very early in the history of Neopaganism. The first druidic assemblies in the region, dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> c., took place around megaliths: the Breton branch of the druidic Gorsedd established in Wales since the late 18<sup>th</sup> c. celebrated its first meetings in 1906 and 1907 around megalithic monuments in the department of Côtes-d'Armor (Le Stum 1998, 76–82; Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Gorsedd 1907 meeting on the dolmen of Kenac'h Laëron (Gouarec, Côtes-d'Armor). Postcard, c. 1907. Edited by Hamon, Guingamp.

### Historical and Political Reasons

Popular folkloric use of archaeological sites has a long tradition in Brittany: until the early 20<sup>th</sup> c., locals considered megaliths as having magical powers. Those beliefs were obviously not linked to Neopaganism, but archaeological sites did play a major role in some Christian religious practices, connected to processions and the worship of saints. Many menhirs and gaulish stelae were believed to increase female fertility, and married women were encouraged to dance around them, sit on them, touch them or even rub themselves against them. The pardon of Locronan (Finistère) is one of the best-known religious celebrations in Brittany, involving a 12-kilometer-long processional tour of the area around the village. The path is marked by stone crosses, huts sheltering statues of saints installed by local families, and a lying stone. Women would turn around the fallen menhir, known as “the stone mare” or “Saint Ronan’s chair”, and sit on it in order to ask Saint Ronan for children in a deeply syncretic rite (Le Roux and Rochard 2009a; Fig. 2). Similar rites around ancient stones were carried out in Tréguennec (Finistère), where a gaulish stela was traditionally interpreted as Saint Vio’s boat and believed to bring fertility to both women and fields (Le Roux and Rochard 2009b).