

ON ELKS AND PLACES THAT GATHER

Emplacing North Swedish Rock Paintings

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This paper argues for the importance of emphasizing emplacedness in studies of Fennoscandian rock art. Drawing on a discriminating analysis of three red ochre paintings from Neolithic northern Sweden, it is shown that stylistically comparable panels were created and used through divergent practices connected to their respective spatial context. This result raises questions about the epistemological legitimacy of conceptualizing rock art sites as instantiations of one coherent phenomenon: a problem that is tackled by applying the Bergsonian approach towards the relation between difference and repetition. By putting forward the idea of particularity as constitutive for, rather than opposed to, generality, it is argued that the semiotic flexibility of the elk motif can be seen as an reflection of the force that simultaneously gathers and distinguishes the separate rock art sites across the region of Norrland.

Keywords: Parietal art, rock paintings, Neolithic, Northern Sweden, place, difference and repetition

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INTRODUCTION: PLACE AS A PICTORIAL PROPERTY

In recent years, research on Fennoscandian parietal imagery has developed into a vibrant field, comprising inspiring suggestions as to how to encounter imagery as more than static depositories of cosmological referents. In fresh seminal works, scholars have drawn attention to other constituent elements of visual culture than those founded by the identifiable designata of the motifs, a stance that has led to stringently articulated emphases on such things as materiality and landscape (Helskog 2010; Gjerde 2010), cosmological transition (Janik 2004; Lahelma 2008; Fuglestedt 2010) or the generative accumulation of figural elements (Sjöstrand 2011; Sapwell 2016; Stebergløkken 2016). Against this dramatic influx of new theoretical approaches, it is nevertheless interesting to note that the field of circumpolar rock art research has not yet transcended its traditional empirical focus on famous and abundant localities. Narrative compositions at Nämforsen, Alta, or Zalavruga are still preferred by the majority of scholars, resulting in a broad neglect for the material that actually constitutes the major part of the stationary imagery from prehistoric Fennoscandia. As the reader will probably suspect, I am referring to the red ochre paintings, which – in the region of northern Sweden – are distributed over approximately 40 distinctive localities, to be compared to eight petroglyph sites. Albeit not rigorously ignored by researchers, there is still a widespread custom of using the paintings as an ‘example bank’ for ascribing geographical extensity to the suggested cosmological trope outlined from studies of monumental petroglyph sites (see however Viklund 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Lindgren 2004; Hansson 2006; Holmblad 2005; Söderlind 2011, 2017; Larsson & Broström 2013; Olofsson 2012; Sjöstrand 2015, 2017 or Ramqvist *et al.* 2016 for studies particularly focused on North Swedish rock paintings). Indirectly, this treatment nourishes an unspoken suggestion of large localities possessing some overall explanatory validity, meaning that circumpolar hunter-gatherer imagery is portrayed as one uniform pictorial programme, oblivious to both local alterations and oscillations in significance tied to temporality. As this pursuit of comprehensiveness makes all rock art localities appear as a token of the same social phenomenon, it also leads to an ignorance of perhaps the most puzzling aspect of this imagery. I mean the dual formats of Norrlandic rock art for aesthetic execution: the well-known but seldom discussed the fact that *painted and carved motifs in principle do not occur at the same localities*. This detail – that this enclave of hunter-gatherer imagery presents material in which stylistically analogous pictures, featuring the very

same motif, have been depicted by means of two, and two separately employed vehicular media – speaks in favour of the semiotic flexibility of the main motifs. Clearly, the lack of ‘fusion palimpsests’ is to be regarded as symptomatic of a deeply rooted and continuously embraced attitude according to which a carved elk was regarded as inappropriate to add to a painted composition. Basically, the separation between paintings and carvings reveals an approach according to which the significance of a composition was held to be conditioned by its medium, and not only by the motifs displayed.

That two elks, of which one is made of the type of void management that constitutes carving, and the other is made by painting on the rock face with a mixture of body fluids and red pigment, must be seen as referring to, and in different senses, making a basic assertion by every means. As Hans Belting reminds us, no image reaches us unmediated (2005:304), and by common knowledge, it is easy to realize that the significance of a pictorial feature is not simply expedited or transmitted, but rather enclosed in its medium. Acknowledging this truism, one is nevertheless obliged to critically review the traditional venture of identifying a unifying pictorial panoramagram in studies of Norrlandic rock art. Because, when recognizing the semiotic impact of medium, one is bound by argument to take seriously the fact that pictorially communicated meaning is always materialized and, inevitably, thus also *emplaced*.

To investigate how spatial context informs pictorial referents, that is, to go from the pursuit of large explanatory models to scaled-down observations of place-bound significance, constitutes the major objective of this paper. By way of three descriptive case studies, I am going to demonstrate that formally comparable palimpsests from the Norrlandic painting tradition have been created and used through divergent practices with a clear connection to their respective spatial context. In more conjectural terms, I set out to illustrate how figure and ground, picture and place form what James Elkins has referred to as a ‘supra-sign’, and this in so far that the meaning of the picture (this monumental word is here used in a Peircean sense, i.e. as shorthand for the interpretant generated from a pictorial sign-vehicle and its determining object (Peirce 1998: EP2 478) is presented by way of its materialized, mediatized and thus also *spatially embedded appearance* (Elkins 1998:90f).

The paintings analysed in the paper were chosen on the basis of their non-monumental character, the fact that they are relatively recently discovered, and, most important, on the basis of their comparable iconic properties regarding motif and stylistics. My final selection consisted of Häglinsten in Liden parish (Raä Liden 494), Medelpad County, the Lillklippen panel in the parish of Stenvikstrand (Raä Ramsele 182),

Ångermanland County, and two closely located panels that I refer to as the Lillälgsjön sites (Raä Junsele 174 and Junsele 176), those too located in Ångermanland. After a descriptive overview of these localities, questions of place and iconic repertoire are further discussed in a deliberate epistemological vein. Here, the problem of whether one really can talk about ‘Norrländic hunter-gatherer imagery’ when keeping the individual rock art sites’ documented differences in mind becomes linked to Henri Bergson’s thoughts regarding the relation between difference and repetition as these are articulated in his most famous work *Creative Evolution* from 1907. According to Bergson’s position, disparateness is in fact the most solid common denominator among individuals within a class, which by extension means that particularity can be grasped as an entity that is not opposed to, but rather constitutive for generality. Drawing on this insight, I will construct an argument that outlines the semiotic flexibility of the elk motifs as key to a thicker understanding of the aesthetic consistency of Fennoscandian rock art imagery. The sheer fact that the elk motif was so multifaceted that it was capable of filling different roles in different contexts is argued to be a lead towards finding out what connects rock art sites across this vast region together.

CASE 1, HÄGLINSTEN (RAÄ LIDEN 494, MEDELPAD)

The first painting to be examined is called Häglinssten (‘Häglin’s stone’), which can be found close to the shore of the Indal River just outside the parish of Långå in Medelpad County. The painting, as at all of the sites that I will be discussing, is located in a rich heritage milieu and is surrounded by several pitfalls and small activity settlements. The painting is nonetheless not oriented towards these material structures, as it faces the river from its place on the south-western side on an impressive boulder (Figure 1). Today, this block is located at the brink of a moderately steep slope, encased in such dense terrain that the river is hardly visible when one stands in its proximity. Yet an oddly looking sandbank some fifty metres to the west bears witness to the block’s spectacular geographic situation in the past, something to which I will return after providing a survey of the panel itself.

A brief look at the panel will probably evoke ideas of the image depicting a ‘shaman’ or ‘masked hunter’ (Figure 2). Such a spontaneously ascribed reference will nevertheless appear dubious when one looks more closely at the elements comprising the main composition. When attentively examined, it is evident that what appears as an anthropomorphic

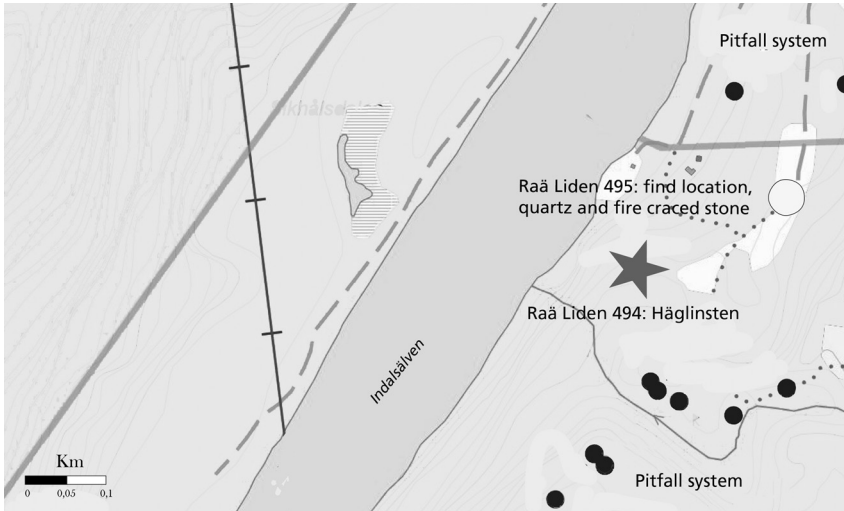


Figure 1. The area of Häglinsten with registered archaeological features marked (map from FMIS).



Figure 2. Häglinsten. Photo: Ylva Sjöstrand.

figure is rather a complex pictorial assemblage, containing a number of separately painted motifs (Figure 3). At the upper part of the boulder, one finds an elk, depicted with hollow body, angled legs and surface-painted head, i.e. the characteristic stylistic features that mark the sec-

ond of the total of four chronological phases in Norrlandic rock art. (These four phases, to which I will refer throughout this text, were first delineated by Lars Forsberg by way of Multi-Diagram Scale statistics, but are also supported by research by the vast majority of Norrlandic rock art scholars. For a detailed overview of the chronology, I recommend Forsberg 1993, Sjöstrand 2011:113f, 2015, as well as Baudou 1993, Lindqvist 1994, or Ramqvist 2002 as works that support this chronological schema.) Juxtaposed with the elk's backbone is a boat, made in phase IV design, which is attached to the elk in a manner that makes the congregation induce associations of a prolonged body. Underneath the boat, another elk figure is placed, that too in phase IV design. Regarding the reddish area in the right, or south-west, section of the painting, it is possible to discern at least one boat of contour-painted type, which can be placed in phase III on the basis of the contour-painted lines and high fronts. Moreover, one can detect at least one elk of phase IV type. Here, I draw only on what is clearly distinguishable, but even from this brief account it is clear that the pictorial stratigraphy at Häglinsten is rich and complex. It started, most probably, with the phase II elk at the top of the stone, which was followed by the contour-lined boats from

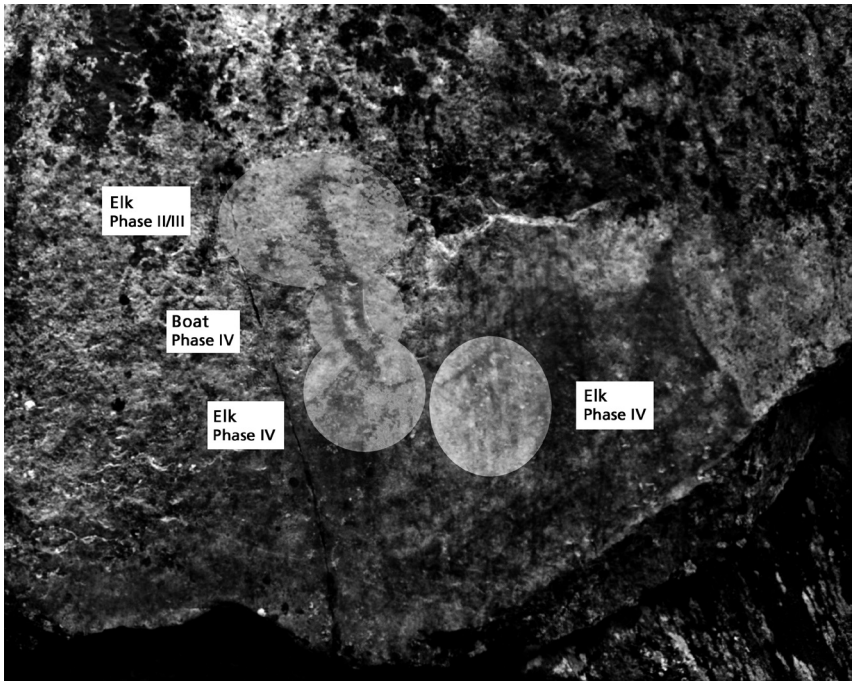


Figure 3. Häglinsten as it appears when documented with Photoscan 3 Pro, and with its pictorial stratigraphy illuminated and explained. Photo: Ylva Sjöstrand.



Figure 4. The dead falls, looking south-east. Photo: Ylva Sjöstrand.

phase III. Thereafter came the elks and boats from phase IV. Regarding the centre boat-elk assemblage, my impression is that this stock boat overlaps both of the elk figures to which it is attached, which indicates that it was put as a ‘bridge’ between them, but this is, of course, hard to fully validate.

On the basis of previous research which suggests that boats and elks constituted totems for different clans, it might seem suitable to interpret Häglinsten as a place for symbolic manifestations of contacts between groups (Tilley 1991; Lindqvist 1994; Bolin 2000; Fuglestvedt 2010, 2017). Such an explanation is more than probable, but that the panel is to be understood as an expression of ideas about formalized contacts, personal encounters and/or interregional connections is a point possible to make without invoking the concept of totemism. For if we look at the situation of Häglinsten in relation to its immediate surroundings, it is clear that the panel is located *on one of the very last landing sites before what formerly comprised one of Sweden’s most distinguished waterfalls*. These whitewater rapids, previously known as Gedungsen or the ‘great rapids’ became what is today the spectacular ‘Dead Fall’ due to a failed canal project in the late 18th century (Figure 4). If one looks at calculations of the local shoreline displacement, one can see that the painted boulder was located just where it became hard to paddle due to the current from the falls (Figure 5). One can also conclude that the boulder stood under water until approximately 5000 BC and that from

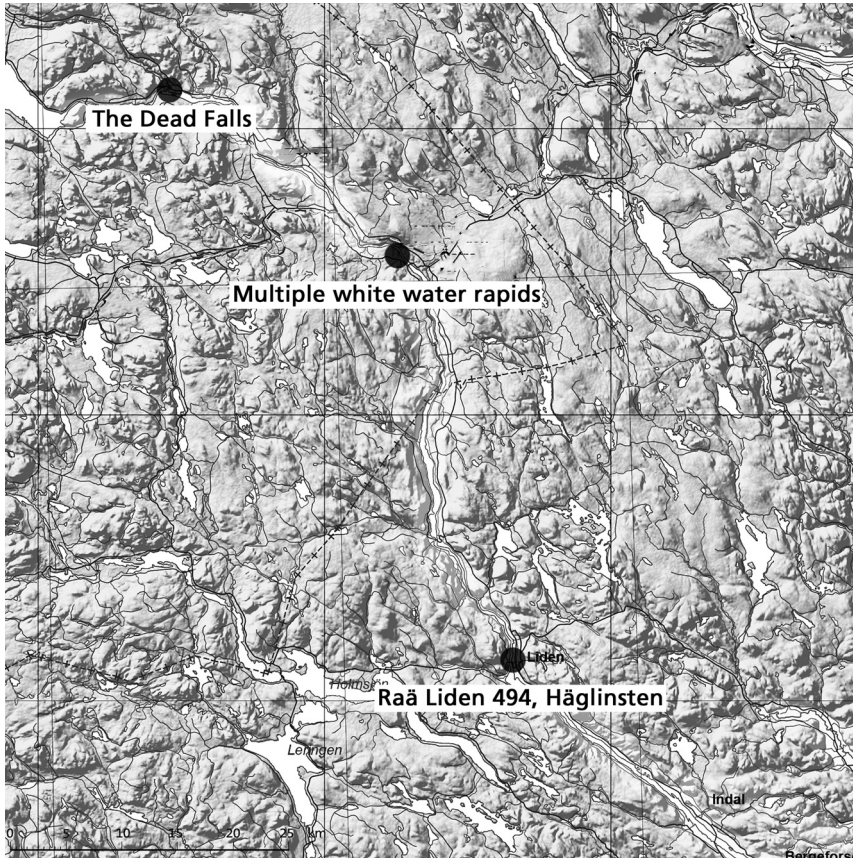


Figure 5. The spatial relation between the dead falls and Häglinsten on basis on the shoreline curves at 5000 BP (map generated from the shoreline investigations undertaken by the Geological Survey of Sweden).

this date it was placed on a small spit, reaching approximately 20 metres from the riverbank (Figure 6a). During the following two millennia, the boulder was located on the shore, marking the beach that the sandbank mentioned above is the remains of (Figure 6b). From approximately 3000 to 2000 BC, i.e. when phase IV is at its peak and when most paintings at the Häglinsten site were made, the painting was located right at the shore, where it very well might have served as a shelter during bad weather (the block is tilted, and there is also a quite inviting boulder cave further up the slope). Also during this period, Häglinsten was highly visible to people approaching it by boat, and the sandy beach made the entire area exceptionally well suited for securing canoes (Figure 6c). Häglinsten appears, on the basis of its location, to have been located in a busy travel hub, and its pictorial appearance reflects crea-

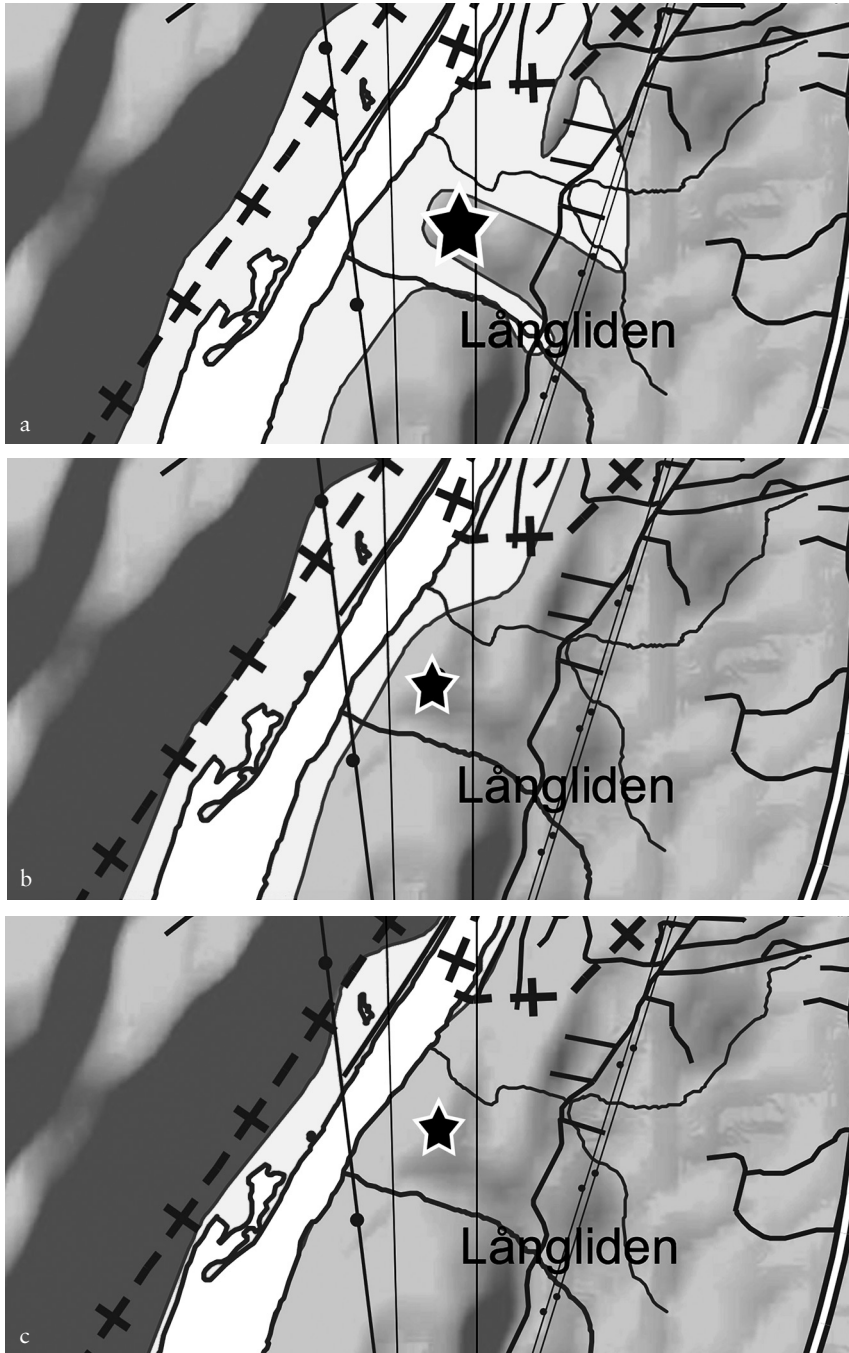


Figure 6a, b, c. The shoreline at Haglinsten at the different dates specified in the text. Geodata from the geological survey of Sweden (map generated from the shoreline investigations undertaken by the Geological Survey of Sweden).

tive encounters and playful elaboration of the pre-existing motifs. The best way of illustrating the particularity of Häglinsten is nevertheless by contrasting it to the other two examples delineated here, which, as we will see, are located in radically different geospatial settings.

CASE 2, LILLKLIPPEN (RAÄ RAMSELE 182, ÅNGERMANLAND)

In comparison with the panel at Häglinsten, the painting at the mountain of Lillklippen, located just where the Vängel River connects to the Fjällsjö River, has radically different visual traits. Because of its visibility from the riverbank, this painting is hidden from curious eyes, located at the direct entrance and inside a boulder cave as it is (Figure 7) In the local community, this boulder structure is called Bakugnen, ‘the baking oven’, and according to oral history, the domestic association elicited by this name corresponds with its use as a shelter for settlers during historic times (Viklund 2004a). This painting’s connection to occupation of habitualized space, to what Husserl called the ‘near sphere’ that condenses duration and historicity (Husserl 1981:249), is also what I want to emphasize as constitutive for its instrumental function for the societies that



Figure 7. The boulder cave of Lillklippen. Photo: Ylva Sjöstrand.



Figure 8. Lillklippen as documented with Photoshop using the ‘select colour range’ tool. Photo: Ylva Sjöstrand.

inhabited this particular region during the Neolithic periods. Whereas the Häglinsten had pitfalls and small activity settlements in its wider spatial context, the Lillklippen panel is visually linked to a very special type of domestic material structure. I will describe this construction in more detail in a minute, but, as with the case of Häglinsten, I nevertheless want to start by inviting attention to the panel itself.

From observations in the field, one can conclude that the Lillklippen panel consists of at least two elks placed within, or rather bilaterally composing, a red ochre patch. As seen in the photo (Figure 8) the elks are fragmentary indeed, and can be discerned in the field only under optimal light conditions. Obviously, the poor state of preservation makes stylistic classification difficult, but judging from the animal’s rectangular body, long bent legs, and traces of ‘lifelines’, it is possible to state that the Lillklippen elks were most probably made during the period of phase III and IV stylistics. This estimation is also in line with the dating of the settlements in the immediate vicinity and also corresponds to the fact that the majority of paintings are stylistically datable to the later horizons of the Neolithic (Seitsonen 2005; Lahelma 2010; Sjöstrand 2015). Important to note, however, is that the cave is full of red stains, sometimes revealing an elk-like feature, such as a leg or body outline, and given that the latest paintings are the best preserved, these fragments imply continuity further back in time. The way this site looked when its figurative extensivity was still intact could very well have been similar to

the appearance of the Boforsklacken panel (Fjällsjö 196), located some 5 kilometres to the north-east. At Boforsklacken (Figure 9), elks from at least three phases (II, III and IV) have been placed in accordance with a ‘layer on layer’ principle, and on the basis of what is possible to observe at Lillklippen, this form of superimposition might very well have been essential for the creation of this panel as well.

The blurred patches and fragmentary fields of ‘elks in a mess’ that obstruct attempts to date the Lillklippen elks stylistically are, in my opinion, a good lead towards achieving a fuller understanding of this painting’s officially renowned significance. That the elks were painted in a manner that was more about revealing continuity than producing recognizable pictorial narratives is something that distinguishing this painting from other localities. Moreover, this observation is highly interesting on the basis of the panel’s contextual situation in relation to other remains from the middle and late Neolithic. The Lillklippen panel is located in a micro-landscape particularly rich in traces from this period (Figure 10). Particularly important to take into account is the site mentioned just a minute ago: the large semi-sedentary dwelling site of Bastuloken (Ramsele 183), located only some two hundred metres north-east of the painting (Viklund 2004c:2; Engelmark & Harju 2005; Larsson 2009, 2010b:12; Gjerde 2010:359–368; Persson 2014:95).



Figure 9. Part of surface 2 at Boforsklacken (after Kivikäs 2003:89).

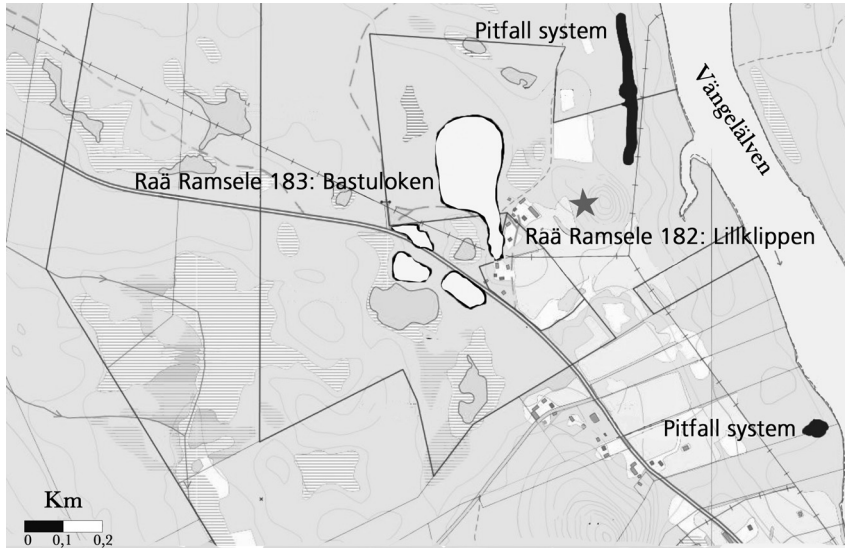


Figure 10. The area of Lillklippen and Bastuloken (map from FMIS).

The Bastuloken site comprises three circular subterranean house grounds of the type that, in the terminology of north Swedish archaeology, can be referred to as ‘mounds of burnt stone’. The main characteristic of these constructions is their long-time continuity, which was not just a matter of permanent residence, but also of successive practices of disposing of stone and elk bones in the circular mounds that were used as foundations for the huts. In the case of Bastuloken, the stratigraphic contexts reveal a use from 2600 to 1800 BC, with a particularly intense phase from 2500 to 2200 BC, which corresponds to phase IV in Norrlandic rock art. After this, the accumulation of osteological material slowed down remarkably (Larsson 2010:22), which can be explained against the background of the reduction of the elk population that took place during this period of time (Larsson *et al.* 2012; see also Ojala *et al.* 2008; Tallivaara & Seppä 2012). Another interesting result from the Bastuloken excavation concerns the evidence in favour of its seasonal usage. The vast majority of elk craniums were found without antlers, which shows that these animals had been hunted during the cooler season (Storå *et al.* 2011:57) This excavation results thus speaks in favour of a proto-sedentary organization of forager groups of northern Sweden, a once controversial research result which today has broad scholarly support (Lundberg 1987; see also Helskog & Schweder 1989:166; Norberg 2008; Sjöstrand 2011; Damm & Forsberg 2012:898).

In understanding the Lillklippen panel, its hidden yet convenient location in relation to a long-continuity site for semi-sedentary winter oc-

cupation, the fact that it marks the entrance and inside of a cave and the strong probability that it indicates a pictorial practice of deliberate overlapping, are parameters that must be taken into account. On the basis of this specific context, Lillklippen can be interpreted as a micro-social place, with an official significance primarily oriented towards returning members of the people that invested time and effort in the stationary constructions found in this enclave of the Vängel river landscape. This setting is different from that of Häglinsten, which is located in a shared and public space, occupied by travellers from multiple groups. In short, I think that Häglinsten and Lillklippen must be understood as place-specific pictorial features and that they thus need to be grasped contextually before being connected to a general cosmological ‘ism’ outlined from studies of monumental petroglyph sites. This point, that images with similar aesthetic appearance have been surrounded with differentiated pictorial practices, will be substantiated with one final example, comprising two rock painting localities located some 200 metres apart on the north-western shore of Lillälgsjön close to the parish of Junsele in Jämtland County. The name of this lake can be directly translated to ‘the small elk lake’, and, as will soon become clear, this emphasis on elks and lakeshores is also broadly in line with my suggested approach for how to understand the social function of the red ochre paintings at these sites.

CASE 3, THE PAINTINGS AT LILLÄLGSJÖN (RAÄ JUNSELE 174 AND RAÄ JUNSELE 176)

To start by describing the paintings, the northernmost of the two, Junsele 174, has at least two elk figures from phase II, which are placed on a 1.5 × 1.5 m slightly tilted surface on the southern side of a nearly cube-shaped boulder (Figure 11). The other panel, Junsele 176, has only indefinable colour patches, and although at least two elks, probably from phase II, can be discerned in extremely good light conditions, photos could not do justice to these stylistic observations. Moving on to the spatial situation of the panels, both of them are associated with clearly used, high-quality quartz ores (Figure 12). At Junsele 174, the ore is right next to the painting, whereas the panel of Junsele 176 has the quartz quarrel at a separate rock outcrop some 20 metres to the south-west. During my field visits I observed plenty of fire-cracked stone and worked quartz right on the surface in front of both panels, which indicates that the area in direct association with the panel were used frequently. In comparison with the other localities discussed here, the amount of ma-



Figure 11. Junsele I (Raä 174) with the elks highlighted. Photo: Ylva Sjöstrand.

terial residue from stone production and temporary dwelling was thus remarkably large. That the panels at Junsele 174 and 176 were regularly visited over the course of generations is completely understandable with respect to their spatial affordances. Unlike the boulder cave that holds the Lillklippen panel, which sure offers shelter from heavy rain or snow, but, at the same time, has the scent, moisture and somewhat soggy ground characteristic of the inside of caves, the surfaces in front of the tilted blocks holding the Junsele 174 painting provide, if not infallible rain shelters, then at least comfortably dry and warm grounds. At these sites, you can support your back against a sun-warm cliff while resting your legs, and although they are not, as at Häglinsten, spectacular sites of kind that you ‘just can’t miss’, they definitely belong to the type of features that one notices, and if you need a break, they can be regarded as particularly good options. This observation was also made by the archaeologist Annika Söderlind, who soon after her discovery of the panel in 2011 reported that the painted panel ‘offers a good place to sit down’ (Söderlind 2011:5, 2017:8). The Junsele panels are thus more signposts than landmarks, and this in so far that they are clearly visible, yet require that one pays attention and actively scans one’s surrounding in the lookout for them.

Also considering the fact that the remains of a mound of burnt stone, albeit not so extensive as that at Bastuloken, can be observed at the spot of the nearby settlement of Junsele 175, a long-term occupation of the

Lillälgsjön area is highly probable. As mentioned above, mounds of burnt stone are not something that one really ‘builds’ since this type of construction rather is created through successive activities undertaken over long periods of time. What is interesting, however, is that the Junsele paintings were interacted with in a somewhat different way from both the localities discussed above. Although these paintings form part of an actively used landscape, and although they are linked both to a busy river (like Häglinsten) and to a domestic node (like Lillklippen), there are indications of that they have filled a somewhat special social function. To outline this, we have look at the panel’s visibility, continuity of usage, and lens that through the attitudes regarding aesthetic modification that we can trace on the basis of an analysis of their visual appearances.

Given that the Lillälgsjön panels were visited regularly for long periods of time, it is peculiar to note that the Junsele 174 palimpsest (also that of Junsele 176, but since I cannot support my field observations with any photos, I leave that panel outside this particular discussion on aesthetic classification) is somewhat stylistically ‘shallow’. What I mean is that Junsele 174 has not been subject to extensive repainting, as have the two other compositions discussed in this paper. At this Lillälgsjö site, the elks are contour painted in phase II or III design, and one cannot see the same non-synchronic artistic dialogue as at, for example, Häglinsten where motifs from different periods of time are found in the same composition. The palimpsest at Junsele 174 is a partly similar to that of Lillklippen, but at the latter site the elks have been layered, transforming them into blotches of colour that communicated continuity. This is not really the case at Junsele 174 in which the two elks from phase II form a much more narrative composition. The elks are there made so that they follow the Lillälgsjön lake towards its outlet in the larger Betnar lake. One can also convincingly argue that we see an elk cow with her calf, a common but rarely discussed motif in Fennoscandian rock art (see discussion in Günther 2009:18).

That the panel of Junsele 174 has a narrative expression that has been actively preserved – and this since no elk from other phases has been applied in a way that alters the composition, and no chronologically similar elks have been made in an overlapping manner – is thought-provoking in view of the site’s long continuity of extensive usage. Its well-kept original features and lack of secondary modification is thus to be understood as highly indicative of its particular significance. One part of the explanation why this painting has been actively kept from changing could be that, as an unintentional implication, it achieved the status of a reliable marker that made the land-

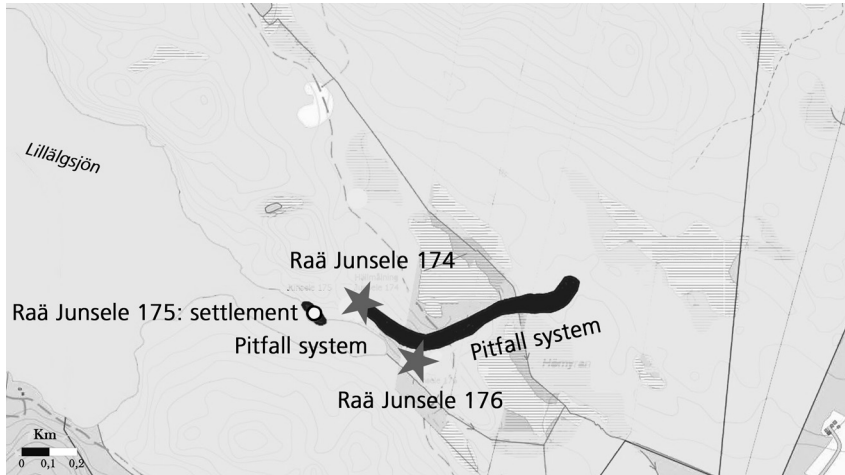


Figure 12. Map of the Lillälgsjön area with registered archaeological features marked (map from FMIS).

scape denotable. By being surrounded by a practice of maintenance, involving regular visits, a dense mist of orally ascribed histories and anecdotes, but no altering pictorial modification, this painting came to provide the micro-landscape with a feature that could be referred to with exactitude and stringency. It became a reliable points for spatial denotation, independent of season, which is an extremely important precondition for collective hunts.

My suggestion – that these paintings were associated with elk hunt, that they were ways of animating the landscape with fixed points from which one could spin a web of instructions regarding where and how to move in relation to the elks – is also something that makes sense if one looks at the contextual localization of the two panels in the landscape. As has been demonstrated by collaborating research carried out by archaeologists and ethologists, the routs employed by the present elk population in this area have long historic continuity. By mapping the contemporary elk population's movement in the landscape, it has been demonstrated that the elks of today move along trails corresponding to the spatial distribution of pitfalls from the deep past (Larsson *et al.* 2012). This thesis is certainly demonstrated in the Lillälgsjön area. From both panels, the visitor is offered splendid views over the animal path that follows the western shore, which leads towards a supremely strategically placed pitfall system (Junsele 61:1). As seen on the map (Figure 12) these hunting traps cut through the passage between the lake and the mountain ridge, where the paintings are placed at two different terraces. The way the painting surfaces are oriented towards the pitfall sys-

tem makes these sites different from Häglinsten and Lillklippen, which also have pitfalls in their immediate surroundings, yet without having this intimate visual connectedness between panel and animal path. Obviously, the main point here is not that the unaltered appearance of the Lillälgsjön paintings over the years was only due to the convenience of referring to them, but rather that these two panels must be understood in relation to this animal path, with its accompanying pitfall system and practices involving preparing, undertaking and harvesting the benefits of collective hunt.

Although I do not want to subscribe to the carnophallogocentric idea of ‘hunting magic’, that views the painted elks as a magical tool for attracting prey, it is obvious that these panels were approached through, and in conversations thus also related to, activities of hunting in the manner that Rane Willerslev described as ‘mimetic animism’ (Willerslev 2007:9). A part of the explanation why the Junsele elks were not changed could thus indeed be that these images were thought of as having something to do with the prospect of successfully hunting elks with the help of the pitfalls in this area. To me, it does not seem farfetched to think that alterations of the pictures, for more or less articulated reasons, were considered to potentially disturb or harm the outcome of hunting activities in this region. Perhaps these paintings marked the point where the hunting company met, and made their arrow points, prior to the pursuit of elks. Perhaps this place was considered animated with special powers, and that alterations of it therefore were avoided on a ‘better safe than sorry’ basis. My main point, however, is that these panels, compared to the elks at Lillklippen and Häglinsten, were surrounded by a different type of social practice, which serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of not conceiving rock paintings as substitutable representations of a coherent, transcendental and non-place-bound cosmological template. At the Junsele panels, we see, as in the other cases, a specific example of how the elk gained an officially recognized significance through the place-specific acts that surrounded its individual pictorial manifestation. We see, as in the other case studies, how the pictures are signs of ways of painting places.

THE CONTEXTUAL DIVERSITY OF ROCK PAINTINGS

In the studies just presented, I have sought to draw attention to the fact that rock art panels with formal resemblance appear in contexts so disparate that it is beyond doubt that they facilitated distinctive forms of

pictorial engagement. When one is receptive to the tempo-spatial affordances of these aesthetically infused places – to what is to be regarded as their ‘genius loci’ – they appear as more than interchangeable tokens for one coherent social phenomena. At Häglinsten the elks are encompassed in a spatial setting marked by the great rapids, the major obstacle for reaching the inland of Norrland when coming from the coast. At Lillklippen, the painted animals are found at a location connected to long-term winter dwelling and all its associated practices for constructing and maintaining such a habitualized domus. This trait also permeates the socio-contextual realm encompassing the Junsele panels, but here the paintings are noticeably associated with hunting, stone-tool production, and observation of animals moving along the trail just below. Also, the pictorial practices that generated these three palimpsests are noticeably different. At Häglinsten, we see a creative playfulness according to which old figures have been radically altered by deliberate iconographic modifications. At Lillklippen, the elks are applied over each other, successively forming a non-figural palimpsest that expressed continuity at the cost of narrativity, and at the Junsele I panel, the elks from the early Neolithic were left untouched, making the panel become a seasonally independent point for spatial reference by which the landscape could be denoted with the exactitude necessary for the organization of hunting parties.

A synopsis is captured in table 1. In relation to it, I must nevertheless hasten to disabuse the reader who sees in these proposals the outline of some cores of meaning regarding the rock paintings discussed. Even

Table 1. Schematic outline of the differences between the rock painting sites analysed in the paper.

	Setting	Visibility	Pictorial practice
Häglinsten	Travel hub	Landmark for canoers looking for landing site	Deliberately modification of iconography
Lillklippen	Domesticated space	Hidden in a boulder cave, requires knowledge of exact position	Continuous application of figures at the cost of their distinguishability
Junsele 174 & 176	Hunting grounds	Aesthetic enchantment of quartz ore. Visible as a seasonally independent reference point for orientation in the landscape	Deliberate preservation of pre-existing figures despite long continuity

though I certainly argue that the structuring components to which I have paid attention support the specific interpretations just presented, I don't want to give the impression that Häglinsten was *only and always* a resting stop for travellers, that Lillklippen is to be understood *as nothing but* a micro-social pictorial facility, or that the Junsele panels were *constantly and collectively* comprehended as connected to the pitfall systems in their surroundings. What I have outlined is simply a range of officially recognized functions of red ochre paintings, which, of course, covers only a fraction of the full range of significances that a picture is able to generate for the intentionally biased and emotionally attuned mind that experiences it. What I have tried to demonstrate is only that *attentiveness to the contextual aspect reveals how three paintings, on the surface quite similar, can be held as symptomatic for different forms of pictorial practices*, a point that, if held as satisfactorily demonstrated, leads back to the general question of difference and repetition.

In the following closing discussion, I thus want to ask, in a sceptical vein – *what generality a rock art site really can be assumed to possess*. Can we, from an awareness of the essential non-repeatability of pictorial places, really justify operations that, from analysis of monumental petroglyph sites, strive to detect the cultural totality assumed to orchestrate rock art panels displaying the same iconographic repertoire? In fact, would such an approach not rather foreclose on our scholarly perceptiveness regarding the spatio-temporal particularity that animates the motifs displayed? As is clear by now, this paper has proffered positive answers to these questions, but the tricky part *is to not make these replies into a rejection in principle of the phenomenon of commonality*. Such a dismissal of unifying strands of coherence between rock paintings would equal a vulgar denial of place as discursively radiant, of place as a conglomerate of past and planned events and, accordingly, of place as emerging from the living beings that move through, with, and between them. To neglect resemblance between pictorial places is to ignore the factuality of lines, trails, bonds, and connections – all that composes open-ended and vivid relations between and beyond idiosyncratic experiences that, in the words of Edward Casey, make place *gather* (1996:14). The question, naturally, is thus not *if*, but *by virtue of what*, hunter-gatherer rock art sites across Fennoscandia are tied together. The problem, as I see it, is to articulate epistemologically sound outlines of the processes by which the locally situated can be rightfully held as an epitome of something more culturally extensive. By what dual process involving both existence and transformation are structural orders affected by being *lived*? How, or rather, from which

axiomatic understanding of the phenomena of difference and repetition can we achieve a way of considering places as entangled, not despite but because of their dissimilarities?

MERGING GENERALITY AND PARTICULARITY

The problem of how one may talk about a Norrlandic hunter-gatherer rock art tradition whilst keeping the particularity of pictorial places firmly in mind is linked to the wide epistemological discussion regarding the relation between singulars and universals. My analytical point of entry to this immense field of thought consists of the position argued for by theorists working in a Bergsonian vein. The stance I am referring to puts forward the claim that *the primal common denominator between distinguishable entities is that of their essential non-generality*. Stated more exactly, this idea holds particularity as constitutive of, and not opposed to, generality. What is shared is that nothing is utterly replicable, thus not strictly equivalent to something, or anything, else (Bergson 1998:331; see also Grosz 2005:6).

That the particular really is the most solid commonality generates an exciting implication when put in relation to the archaeological material discussed here. For if we are in agreement that the only proper commonality that ties the Norrlandic rock art sites together is that of all of the sites being different, then the larger ‘outside’ of rock art will be completely reachable by studies of the emplaced ‘inside’. The proposal demonstrated and defended throughout this paper, that elk figures were placed in such different settings that they can be linked to divergent pictorial practices, will become an observation that does not obscure, but, on the contrary, exposes a strong tie linking these pictorial places with each other. The different rock painting sites in northern Sweden can, in that case, be seen as instantiations of a chronologically and geographically widespread tradition of *making red ochre elks for various reasons*. The generality possessed by these pictorial places, I want to conclude, is that they all are expressions of a way of thinking *with* the elk, i.e. to paint places by putting the elk motif to work.

In the fact that images of elks have been applied in various contexts, chosen due to place-specific intentions, we have the commonality that makes these separate places possible to address as a coherent imagery. The flexibility of the elk motif stands out as precisely that force that brings generality to the different sites. To put it as clearly as possible: the images we have looked at in this paper indicates a sys-

tematically executed practice of putting elks in place, meaning that the emplacement of the elk becomes a unifying mode for visual presentation. What links the sites together is their shared demonstration of the elk's semiotic flexibility, that is, the elk's capacity to operate in context-sensitive ways.

Hence, from this interpretation, the elk motif is not to be seen as a transmitter of some strictly symbolic and place-independent message which is always dislocated and never anything but represented. The position argued for here is that red ochre elks must be understood as *place-bound presentations of ontic instantiations of this species*. What I am asserting is thus that in the rock paintings we see depictions of elks, rather than instantiations of a coherent symbolic practice according to which this animal was used as a token for some mythological entity. This idea, that painted elks are no more and no less than emplaced pictures of elks, might seem reductive and trivial but actually, this emphasis on non-representationality is a move that actually emphasize and embracing the social texture of the elk. As elegantly demonstrated by Benjamin Alberti and Yvonne Marshall, there is a much higher degree of reduction attached to archaeological operations that single out a key motif as a sign referring to some monolithic belief, and this since such a representational approach actually *removes* the elk from the life-world said to be described (Marshall & Alberti 2014:22f) In other words, there is no place left for elks in an archaeological narrative that consistently comprehends depictions of this animal as tokens for something else (see this point further elaborated on by Descola 1992:111, 1996:85f; DeMarrais 2007:255; Holbraad 2007:192f; Coccia 2016:21). It is strange the way in which rock art archaeologists constantly demand more from the studied palimpsests by striving, always with complicated methods, to make them reveal some hidden, obscure symbolic core presumed to lure within or beyond that what is visible. Inspired by Ingold (2011:63, 74f), I want to emphasize the versatility of embracing our own *astonishment* over what these paintings actually put forward, that elks can be made with blood and soil, that it is *perfectly possible* to create works that are equally accurate to characterize as organic and geological. When facing an elk made by red ochre on a cliff wall, one is standing in front of an image that reveals itself as both man-made and natural, that actually comprises a product of both body fluids and geological processes. As materialities, the paintings are physical attestations of the authentic reality of the categorically unstable; the boundaries between life and death, body and stone are beautifully destabilized in front of one's eyes. The insight regarding the possibility of hybridity is not achieved by association with some

transcendent ‘beliefs’ as much as it is executed through the very physical explication and exposure that is being worked out, is being put to work, by and through the pictures themselves.

THE SEMIOTIC FLEXIBILITY OF THE ELK – THE GATHERING FORCE OF PICTORIAL PLACES IN NORRLAND

That every image of an elk has a place-specific official function and that paintings, taken as a category of archaeological material, thus illuminate how the restlessness of the elks as a visual sign was embraced and implemented by the Neolithic hunter-gatherer societies comprises the main proposal outlined here. In this last section, I want to explain why this outline of the elk’s evasive role cannot be seen as a strictly ‘theoretic interpretation’. In other words, I want to delineate why the metapragmatic versatility and semiotic multimodality of the elk motifs cannot really come as a surprise to archaeologists familiar with Norrlandic Stone Age archaeology.

If there is any track along which lives were lived in these hunter-gatherer communities, it was that which came from moving alongside this particular animal. The types of stationary man-made remains discussed in this text – the pitfalls, the mounds of burnt stone and, if so needless to say, the rock art – demonstrate this point with supreme lucidity. These structures, which are basically the main forms of stationary material culture known from this time and region, *are all conditioned by the elk*. To put it in more explicit terms, these material structures look the way they do, are what they are, because the elk informed their appearances. Think about the pitfalls, which were made exclusively for elk hunting and which run across the landscape in long systems, thus requiring the effort of restoration as well as secured channels for effective communication of their exact location. Or ponder the mounds of burnt stone, the sedentary winter dwelling sites on which elk bodies were prepared on a scale that can almost be described as industrial. The sheer fact that entering one of these constructions literally meant stepping into an elk body, made of innumerable elks and by innumerable humans, makes it clear that this animal (with which one builds one’s house) cannot possibly be reduced to a monovocal sign, attached to one particular reference in aesthetically keyed visual communication.

The way the elk informed every man-made part of the stationary landscape in Neolithic Norrland obstructs every attempt to pin down its meaning in terms of a singular significance. The elk was sometimes

the reason for the need to watch one's step when crossing an area with recently prepared pitfalls, and in other situations could be the lived and desired game which one gestures towards during an afternoon spent on a cliff plateau facing an animal path. In this dense mist of social implications resulting from institutionalized actions centred on elks, we have the rock art, and it is my firm opinion that, with the awareness of just how variously the elk came to inform social life, we cannot take these portrayals as emblematic for some interregional idea, abstract cosmological 'ism' of which the elk is solely a representative.

That the elk is tied to such a variety of practices, elicits such a variety of different actions and permeates undertakings aimed at such a diversity of goals is what brought unity to the various rock art sites. This commonality is no more and no less than that all sites featuring this animal express their affiliation with the elk in distinctive and place-specific ways. The semiotic flexibility of the elk motif is the true link that binds these sites together. The tie is the 'imponderabilia' of the elk, which is merited by this animal's fundamental and truly conditional significance in the Neolithic hunter-gatherer society.

To conclude, *it is exactly because pictures of elks are pictures of elks* – the animal that one relies on, the animal within whose bodies one dwells, the animal of which myths are told, but also personally experienced anecdotes, hilarious stories, and socially imperative metaphorical sayings – that the pictures featuring elks could be utilized for such a variety of reasons. By varying the medium, emplacement, and surely also the style and attributes, the semiotic potentiality of the elk was realized, and simultaneously also reinforced. Ultimately, it is thus the merging of place and picture, figure and ground that fertilize the seed of meaning in the mind of the living being: That someone who, in the end, can experience nothing that is not mediated as and by way of emplacedness.

SUMMARY

In this text, I have discussed the importance of emplacedness in studies of Norrlandic rock art. By way of three descriptive case studies of rock paintings, I have demonstrated that compositions with similar iconography were created and used through different practices with relation to their respective spatial context. That stylistically comparable paintings filled different social functions evokes questions about the epistemological legitimacy of conceptualizing rock art sites as instantiations of one coherent phenomenon. In other words, when realizing that similar rock art sites have been used differently, can we then really

talk about them as symptomatic expressions of one coherent tradition? In the paper's discussion section, this problem was tackled by applying the Bergsonian approach towards the tension between difference and repetition. According to this theoretical position, non-generality is in fact the most solid common denominator among individuals within a class. This means that particularity is not opposed to, but rather constitutive of, generality, what is shared is, in fact, that all things are different. From this insight, I argued that the result of the case studies, i.e. that the painted elks operated in place-specific ways, can be seen as an outline of that which unites rock art sites across the region of Norrland. The sheer fact that the depictions of elk 'made sense' in the most varied contexts actually tells us that it was the semiotic flexibility of this animal that bound rock art sites together. In short, what make the rock art sites of Norrland gather significance from each other is the 'imponderabilia' of the elk: this animal's unfathomable significance in the Neolithic hunter-gatherer society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the anonymous reviewers for providing insights and expertise that greatly assisted me in strengthening the argumentation presented in this paper. I also want to thank Irini Tsokatos Åberg for help with the maps, as well as the archaeologist Annika Söderlind for sharing her great knowledge about the Lillälgsjön area. Lastly, I would like to show my gratitude to the Swedish Research Council, which funded this research within the framework of an international postdoc scholarship.

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