

The Beliefs and Practices of Peter Armstrong, Sámi Drum Maker and Healer and the Expressions of Sámi Religion in a Contemporary Setting

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In the midst of a revival of Sámi shamanism, the work of different practitioners is slowly becoming more visible throughout northern Fennoscandia, which is where engagement with the work of Peter Armstrong is encountered within a ritual landscape setting deep in Sápmi, the Sámi homeland area in northern Sweden. Armstrong's beliefs and practices are what characterize his work as a healer and ritual—ceremonial specialist and drum maker, which are all abilities that have been well-known much earlier among noaidi the religious specialist in Sámi culture from the seventeenth century when Sámi pre-Christian religion underwent harsh and forceful changes due to missionizing and conversion of the Sámi people to Christianity. This new research presents a number of cultural expressions in relation to the making of Sámi religion in a contemporary context which is encountered through the practices of offering, healing, ritual landscapes, drum making and decoration.

In the midst of a Nordic revival of both Norse and Sámi spiritual traditions and practices, in connection with the fragments of Sámi pre-Christian religion in which the practice of *noaidivuohhta* or shamanism has figured predominantly, there are today, both narratives and new paradigms in relation to these ancient practices that are emerging in different areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula, northwest Russia, through the work of individuals. Whereby and in the case of the Sámi, what remains of the fragments of their pre-Christian religion are being recovered, recontextualized and reclaimed after centuries of repression and colonization by what at the time was the ruling powers of the Kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark predominantly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹

¹ There are different ways the term Sámi is spelled. For example, Sámi, Sami and Saami.

During this period, the Sámi shamans were persecuted, given death sentences and in some cases put to death in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland and large numbers of drums which were used by the *Noaiditt* the religious specialist in the culture were hunted down and burned. Those drums that did survive were sent to museums in Europe or hidden away in remote places from the missionaries and priests as the religion and related practices went underground in order to remain secret.²

Within the spheres of Sámi pre-Christian religion which was outlawed, there are two main areas of tradition that are characterized by practices related to reverence, worship and divination. Predominantly, these are connected with making offerings to supernatural powers via stones and wooden objects who were present in the land, air, water and below the earth. Secondly, the use of a drum for divination and trance work. Each of these practices are representative of customs and conventions that form both expression and communication between the human and spiritual worlds. Despite being outlawed and having to go underground to survive, practices as such have been ways of life for the Sámi people both past and present and therefore, can be seen to take up a central position again within the culture today and thus, are connected with the rejuvenation and restoration of identity and reanimation of traditions and practices.

Research into this revival throughout the Nordic countries by different scholars has both described and summarized in what ways:

Nordic shamanisms have become part of the international scene, but are also “home grown”—on local lands and through the use of local traditions including Sami and Norse religions of the ancient past. Both have been central to the shape and inventory of neoshamanism in the Nordic countries, and by 2014 constituted their most active and profiled parts. Together, they offer rich opportunities for watching second and third-generation neoshamanism evolve, and challenge some of the central assumptions of neoshamanism and pagan research—for instance, that these religions cater primarily to urban romantics for whom connections to nature have in practice been lost [. . .]. (Kraft, Fonneland and Lewis 2015, 2)

From within the context of what is stated above, the aims of this case study are to help with understanding through what agencies Sámi drum maker and healer Peter Armstrong’s work provides different examples

of how the spiritual practices of making offerings, conducting healing, drum making and decoration which can be seen as heritage practices takes place at his home in Swedish Sápmi and are visible within the context of this revival and how through these practices sacred narratives are created. Through this solitary interview, it has been possible to capture and assess in what ways Armstrong is revitalizing his spiritual beliefs and practices through helping others and reembracing traditions by using different spiritual methods and approaches and as a consequence different types of narratives are constructed. Through the documentation process and working closely with Armstrong, it has been possible to capture and assess what values and importance these new types of knowledge have today. Each example of his work provides insight into in what manner such practices and narratives are reflected in the values of the earlier Sámi pre-Christian religion and why this is important.

Methods and Approaches Used in the Research

As a way of adhering to the ethical guidelines when working with Indigenous people, I have added Peter Armstrong as the co-author of the paper as a way of respecting his position as a knowledge holder and participant from the Sámi community. Henceforth, in the essential role concerning the coproduction of knowledge and its presentation for the purposes of advancing better research ethics into the study of Sámi culture and traditions and the role and benefit of mutual cooperation in relation to this.

Because of the nature of the approaches used, data collected and compiled in this case study which is based on the transmission of oral narratives to me as a researcher through an interview obtained during ethnographic fieldwork I have used combined narrative methods in the research as they provide a suitable framework for communicating different types of meanings in connection with human and spiritual experiences with regard to assessing the values of the work undertaken by Armstrong. The application of my own narrative research methods to this particular study are important because the oral narratives-stories collected are embedded within the Sámi socio-cultural context and are thus, concerned with beliefs (world-view), practices, rituals and perspectives of both past and present. Furthermore, because the research materials contain data that includes spiritual as well as human experiences (inner and outer narratives) this gives the discourses a particular quality and depth to them and the aforementioned is evident in how Armstrong interacts with the environments in which he lives and works as well as the ways sacred space is constructed and used.

² A recent discovery of a drum that has been found is evident in the work of Trude Fonneland and Dikka Storm (2022).

Equally, through documentation of a combination of his work and beliefs the data provides a number of examples of how he is reembracing what he sees as cultural heritage and related practices.

The ways I have structured the research paper and presented the different contexts with regard to the various fields of enquiry (offering practices, healing practices, drum use, drum making and decoration), or different parts of the interview, this has been done in such a way I have attempted to show how they have a mutual relationship with each other in the manner they are all connected with Armstrong's beliefs, healing work, construction of identity and the important role his input has in relation to these. How I have applied the narrative methods within each chapter reflects this through the ways the data has been described during the interview followed by my documentation, organization, subsequent analysis and presentation of it. Ultimately, the purpose of the research was to collect new types of knowledge that are based on insights and personal experiences relayed through Peter Armstrong's work in all respects of what he describes orally in relation to my research questions. Accordingly, pertaining to the remaking of different elements and expressions of Sámi religion in a contemporary setting and how these questions are answered through the participants lived experiences in relation to offering practices, healing practices, drum use and decoration the insights of which he has shared with me so the data could be recorded.

In this narrative research, I have striven to follow what (Taiaiake 1999, cited by Preston 2005, 57), describes in relation to how

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

Having noted this, what makes research of this particular context challenging with regard to being able to demonstrate the long-term continuity Sámi religion because of the secrecy around the Sámi traditions and practices and their visibility in the past because of going underground. Thus, it is why I have chosen to approach the subject matter in a similar way to Fonneland and Äikäs (2020, 1) who

[Approach the study of] "Sámi religion" from a long-term perspective seeing both the past religious practices and contemporary religious expressions as aspects of the same phenomena. This does not refer, however, to a focus on continuity or to

a static or uniform understanding of Sámi religion. Sámi religion is an ambiguous concept that has to be understood as a pluralistic phenomenon consisting of multiple applications and associations and widely differing interpretations, and that highlights the complexities of processes of religion-making.

One of the ways I have attempted to follow how this has been outlined by both scholars is by making references to earlier sources where in certain cases in relation to offering practices and creation of ritual space descriptions and references are given which thus, help demonstrate links between what is outlined as "[. . .] past religious practices and contemporary religious expressions as aspects of the same phenomena" (Fonneland and Äikäs 2020, 1). Combining the new research material and photographic data helps to furthermore, demonstrate in what ways this has been done.

Earlier Research and Sámi Culture and History

As an association with this earlier analysis noted above by Kraft, Fonneland and Lewis (2015), and from within the context of the research that has taken place within the aforementioned revival in a broader setting with regard to a study of the making of Sámi religion within contemporary society, I have been fortunate to be able to interview Armstrong on different occasions since 2013.³ Building on this earlier communication, the latest meeting was during the weekend of May 20th 2023, when I visited his home in Jänkänalusta which is 20 km outside the town of Kiruna, deep inside the Arctic Circle in Swedish Sápmi.⁴

The Sámi are Europe's Indigenous people. "There are 75,000–100,000 Sámi depending on the method of counting, many of them living outside their homeland." (Fonneland and Äikäs 2020, 2) The Sámi are one people who live across the four nation states of Fennoscandia, meaning Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in northwest Russia. The Sámi people have a long and consistent history of settlement in many areas that are today inhabited by Norwegians, Swedes, Kvens, Finns and Russians.

Sámi culture is not or has not been uniform in this wide area as is demonstrated, for example, by the use of ten Sámi languages. The traditional livelihoods include

³ See for example my earlier publications (Joy 2018; 2020).

⁴ "The term Sápmi exists in every Sami dialect, and has several meanings: the geographical region where the Sámi have traditionally settled, the Sami population, the Sami language and a Sami person" (Sámi Instituhtta 1990, 11).

hunting, fishing, gathering, reindeer herding, and crafts which are also practices today. There have also been differences in the religious practices in this wide area, but also some shared ideas. (Fonneland and Äikäs 2020, 2)

Despite obscurity, research by Sámi scholars suggests that the distant ancestors of the Sámi people being hunters, trappers and fishers lived along the coastal areas of the Arctic Ocean and Baltic Sea as well as lakes and waterways throughout all four countries after the last glacial period. Henceforth, “archaeologists have shown that northern Fennoscandia became predominantly Sámi in the first millennium BC” (Lehtola 2002, 21). Furthermore, and in terms of linguistic research in relation to the ancient history of the Sámi people, Sámi linguist Ante Aikio notes how

While Saami languages can be shown to have come to Lapland from the south, the Saami as an ethnic group did not “come” from anywhere—they were formed in their present territories through a complex social process that involved the adaptation of a new language. The earlier speakers of “Palaeo-Laplandic” languages belong to the cultural and genetic ancestors of the Saami even if they were not their linguistic ancestors (Aiko 2012, 106)

In terms of the preservation of the ancient cultural memory of these earlier peoples, we find that both spiritual and subsistence practices linked with hunting, reindeer herding and fishing throughout Fennoscandia where the Sámi people have previously had or currently have settlement have been preserved through prehistoric rock art.⁵ This art also contains illustrations of drums that belonged to the *noaiditt*, who are often referred to today as shamans. Moreover, and from around the twelfth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sacred Sámi drums appear in literature sources because of their use and representation as identity markers within the culture.⁶ In each case what we are able to comprehend are the different ways regarding how art is one of the central elements that is connected both individually and collectively with Sámi culture in relation to identity. On Sámi drums this is particular evident in relation to the Sámi cosmos in connection with cultural memory.

⁵ Different perspectives on this particular field of study have been presented by Ville Luho (1971), Milton Núñez (1981; 1994), Antti Lahelma (2008) and Francis Joy (2018).

⁶ See for example, the work of Johannes Schefferus (1673; 1971).

Approaching the Research Area

A walk outdoors with Peter Armstrand to assess what was visible in terms of ritual landscapes before putting my questions to the research participant was characterized by observation of the surrounding area where from the southwest point on the compass from the interviewees garden, the snow filled Abddasvárri mountains were still visible at this time of the year thus, demonstrating the much colder temperature in late Spring. The surrounding landscape in the area where he lives is one of pine and forest birch trees growing in what is presently land that is soaked because of the melting snow and ice.

As a way of starting the interview, I asked Peter Armstrand if there were any other healers in his family as a way to try and establish whether or not his work was built on inspiration or inheritance from any individual family members given how shamanism tends to run in families. The following was relayed by the research participant.

I do not know if anyone in my family background has used drums during healing work because in earlier times it was kept a secret. It was illegal to have or use a drum. But there have been family members such as my mother’s mother and her grandmother as well as my father’s grandfather who have all been healers and I saw some of this when I was visiting them during childhood, but we were asked not to discuss it outside of the family home.⁷ (Armstrand 2023 personal correspondence)

It has been a tradition among Sámi shamans to create a ritual healing space in the form of a *lavvu* which is a tent used for living in and for reindeer herding. It was also a place which had has a sacred space where séances and healing work were undertaken. The tent, like the Native American tee-pee, has a fire at the center and reindeer skins which are spread out on the floor or areas where healing takes place.

During the following discussion, I asked Armstrand if he could reveal what kind of healing work is undertaken in and around the tent (Fig. 1) and altar areas. He responded in the following way.

The tent was put up in 2021. The healing work that takes place in the tent can be varied but it may also be undertaken around the sacred area of the altar. Healing

⁷ More about the healers in Armstrand’s family can be found in the chapter about his healing work in my doctoral dissertation (Joy 2018, 228–37).



Fig. 1 Peter Armstrand kneeling outside the tent in his garden used for healing and ceremonial work. Photo: Francis Joy, Kiruna, Swedish Sápmi, 2023

the body can be done in different ways. Plant and fungus medicine are often used as a medium for opening up the sight.

Healing techniques and practices may vary depending on the nature of the issues and thus, work required. A common problem can be entity removal from persons who have been involved in substance abuse in different ways. Also, persons who require soul retrieval work or the need of a power animal because they are feeling lost, empty and depressed.

The most common use of the tent is for ceremonies for different purposes. I have done work with Siberian shamans from Mongolia to help with healing a great conflict. In the winter I have made ceremonies to help with fertility issues among female clients. (Armstrand 2023 personal correspondence)

When I asked Armstrand about the significance of the altar (Figs 2, 3) being close to the tent he responded as follows.

An altar was constructed at the side of the tent which consists of two moose skulls and a reindeer skull. Below the altar are sacred stones and crystals to help add power



Fig. 2 The sacred space created around the altar is evident in this part of Peter Armstrand's garden, consisting of eight wooden posts that have colored ribbons fastened to the top of them. They are marked out approximately 2.5m from the central birch tree altar which is evident in the center of the circle. Photo: Francis Joy, Kiruna, Swedish Sápmi, 2023

and connection. Around the altar are eight poles that represent the eight points on the compass, north, east, south, west, northeast, southeast, southwest and northwest. There are ribbons attached to the poles that are red, blue, green, yellow and white, which are placed there as an offering gift to the spirits of Sámi culture.

The reindeer skull is a tribute to the Sámi and the moose skulls as a recognition of the animal and its strength and power. Both of these animals come in search of food in the long winter months and so, like reindeer meat, moose meat helps sustain us.

I chose a birch tree to build the altar around and upon. The birch acts as an antenna that transmits and receives messages. Therefore, before ceremonies, I make a boat from birch bark and place offerings inside it and then put it on the fire. The symbol of the boat carries the intention to the spirits. For example, if someone has been abusing alcohol, with the assistance of the spirits, we extract the effects of the drug from a client's body and spirit and place it in the boat and then offer it to the spirits. Boat offerings can also be used for offering gifts to the spirits.

In addition, and in order to call upon assistance from the spiritual world, I feed the fire in the tent with different offerings which are gifts to the spirits. The com-



Fig. 3 The central pole of the altar is the birch pole with one reindeer (center) and two moose skulls (above and below) attached to it which are decorated with red, yellow and green ribbons. Photo: Francis Joy, Kiruna, Swedish Sápmi, 2023

monest are tobacco, local herbs, meat, coffee, salt, and when required, alcohol. I work with what I feel is required. The significance of making offerings to the fire is because through the fire is the spirit world entrance. Therefore, we say in the Sámi tradition that the spirits sit on top of the tent with their feet in the smoke and flames and they wait for the offerings to cook so they can absorb the nourishment from the smoke. (Armstrand 2023 personal correspondence)

The construction of the circle using wooden poles as a way to designate the area as a sacred ritual space that are, with the exception of the ribbons, without ornamentation, and birch pole-tree in the center as a representation of the *axis mundi* is quite interesting from both a cosmological and historical perspective. Firstly, because there are likewise, associations with *sieidi* offering places where wooden poles are noted in different locations in the historical Sámi areas as earlier research has established.⁸

Secondly, and in relation to this, from studies into sacred Sámi wooden objects by Bergman et al. (2008) it is noted how in earlier research:

Sacred objects of stone were referred to as *siejdde*, but the same term could also be applied to wooden objects. *Värro muorra*, in contrast, exclusively denoted sacred objects made of wood (Mebius 1968, 61–70). *Värro* means offering, and *muorra* (pl. *muora*) means either wood or tree.⁹ However, sacred trees were not encompassed by this term. In his study of Sami offerings and ritual practices, Mebius (1968) identified different categories of *värro muora*: (1) offering poles, with or without ornaments and made of inverted stumps, with the roots uppermost; (2) offering sticks with or without ornaments, but with rings of twigs (of birch or spruce) bound together at the ends; (3) offering pillars related to the concept of *axis mundi*; and (4) sticks and twigs with attached meat of sacrificial animals. (Bergman et al. 2014, 5)

What holds further interest is that the altar constructed by Armstrong is not a place where offerings from animals that have been sacrificed would be placed as they would have been earlier. Instead, we see a change whereby, meat and other provisions that would have been bought previously are given as offerings instead. This may include moose that have been shot for their meat, skin and antlers, all of which would be eligible as impartings' to the spirits. A further reflection of a much older practice is visible through Armstrong's work is the offering of moose and reindeer skulls to the spirits (Fig. 3). This is a well-known tradition among the Sámi that tends to be tied to offerings to stone *sieidi* boulders.¹⁰ However, reindeer skulls are also visible in relation to offerings made to wooden idols (Fig. 4) of Thor which has been built on sacrificial platforms. Some examples of these are evident in early seventeenth century sources.

⁸ <https://www.nationalparks.fi/akassaivoandseitapahta/seidasasplacesofworship-forthesamipeople>

⁹ The verbal form is *värrodit* (to offer).

¹⁰ See the work of Tiina Äikäs and Marte Spangen (2017 and 2020).

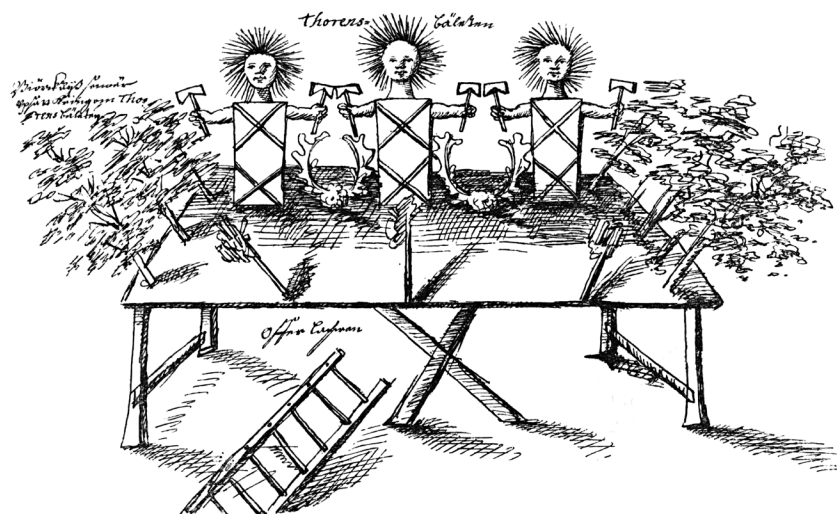


Fig. 4 Wooden anthropomorphic idols (*värromuorra*) on a platform (*luoptte*) used by the Sámi for ritual and sacrificial offerings as depicted by Samuel Rheen (1671) (Mulik and Bayliss-Smith 2006, 28)

What is interesting about this sacrificial platform are the branches around the outside of it; those three at the front appear to look like poles. Also, the reindeer skulls with antlers that have been placed between the wooden idols furthermore demonstrate how antlered skulls have been important within the creation of ritual landscapes and are thus, linked with oral traditions.

A further point to be mentioned also in relation to the presence of the skulls on the altar is Armstrong's animistic thinking whereby in relation to their positioning and presence within the ritual space we see how that even after death they are considered to have value and importance with regard to them still being connected to a spiritual or soul essence which means that a form of communication is possible. In addition, there is also a need to point out that the symbolism of three skulls of dead animals erected on a birch tree quite clearly illustrates the work of the shaman and his ability to communicate beyond the veil and into the spiritual realms when needing to do so for assistance from the animal spirits, which is a typical practice known among the Sámi shamans. Offerings to the spirits of the Sáivo world were typically made in order to summon particular spirits for assistance when needed.

There are also similar behaviors around the hunting and killing of bears in the much earlier Sámi traditions whereby the bears skull is decorated after death in relation to how the animal is reborn in the Sáivo world.¹¹ Decoration of both moose and reindeer skulls using colored ribbons may signify how their status has been elevated in some way.

With further reference to the use of poles concerning within ritual landscapes with regard to Sámi oral traditions, we also find that within the painted cosmological landscapes on old Sámi drums from the seventeenth century there is evidence of Sámi gods and goddesses holding poles made from birch branches on drums from all Sámi areas from this time, thus indicating a connection between these.

One of the rarer ritual offering practices that is linked with Sámi oral history and traditions captured and likewise presented in the research is a birch bark boat offering to the Mahtaráhkká the Mother goddess through the fire by Armstrong. The photographic material and accompanying text presented below are unique being that they appear in a contemporary setting. Typically, there is a long tradition within Sámi culture of constructing boats using birch bark in order to make offerings to supernatural powers but these are from the past. Evidence of these can be found in missionary sources from the seventeenth century in all areas of Sápmi; and the nature of offerings vary of course as does the types of wood used for their construction.¹²

From bottom right to top left we see the different stages of the ritual where the first part is the creation of the boat which is sewn together at both ends and then above the offerings have been placed inside it. From information received from Armstrong he stated how there was "herbs salt, coffee sugar and juniper brush inside the boat" (Armstrong 2023 personal correspondence). Bottom left shows where the boat has been placed on pieces of birch wood that are burning and then top left we can see how the offering has been consumed by the fire (Figs. 5, 6, 7).

When I asked Armstrong if he would be willing to provide some insight concerning the purpose behind the offering he relayed the following information:

¹¹ See Juha Pentikäinen (2007, 50–62).

¹² One example for instance can be found in the work of Mulik and Bayliss-Smith (2006, 84).



Fig. 5 The boat made of birch bark, constructed as a sacred vessel for offerings to the Goddess Mahtaráhkká. Photo: Peter Armstrand, Kiruna, Swedish Sápmi, 2023



Fig. 6 The offerings placed in the boat and covered over with juniper brush. Photo: Peter Armstrand, Kiruna, Swedish Sápmi, 2023



Fig. 7 The boat has been put into the fire and it is consumed by the flames, as the fire is the entrance to the spirit world. Photo: Peter Armstrand, Kiruna, Swedish Sápmi, 2023

I build boats for different purposes in relation to using them to make offerings. In this case the offerings were given to Mother Earth Mahtaráhkká as gratitude for what I have received regarding help with my work. The juniper brush is used to cover up the herbs, salt, sugar and coffee because of its purifying powers; meaning that the offerings are given with clear intention and received precisely. I used reindeer skin thread to sew the ends of the boat together because it burns slower than for example rawhide which is consumed very quickly by fire before the



Fig. 8 The illustration of one of the only two surviving drums from the Kemi Lappmark area in Finland taken from the work of Ernst Manker (1938–1950, 2). There are deities standing on the cross sections of the drum holding poles and branches probably made from birch wood. In addition, in the bottom right section of the drum figures 63–5 exhibit poles. Furthermore, associated with figure 46 there are poles evident behind the human figure. Some of these maybe connected with offering activities.

offerings have been absorbed, therefore, a strong thread is needed for keeping the boat intact. I use the same approach when using a boat made from birch bark for making offerings to the water spirits. Once the boat is on the water and burning the offerings are absorbed before it burns itself out. Then the ritual is complete. (Armstrand 2023 personal correspondence)

Drum Making and Decoration

In addition to Peter Armstrong's healing and ritual work, one more dimension to his talents is that he also makes and decorates drums which is another practice linked with the skills of Sámi shamans of both past and present and thus, Sámi oral traditions in relation to how drum landscapes have been painted (Fig. 8). Having studied his work for ten years in relation to drum making, it has become obvious as to how the art of drum making is not only a method for healing and processing difficult past emotions because of both collective and individual trauma but it is also a creative embodied practice whereby it lays the foundation for communication with supernatural powers, instructs and helps the drum maker move between different states of consciousness given the nature of the approaches and focus applied. Furthermore, and in relation to construction of the cosmological drum landscapes the practice holds the potential for preserving and transmitting cultural memory and reclaiming heritage practices which were earlier forbidden.

One could also go as far as to say that the sacred structures painted within the drum landscapes are a reminder of the importance of creating ritual landscapes because of the ways they emphasize transcendence and other than human relationships, which has been the basis for living within Sámi culture for millennia. Therefore, and similar to the recording of ancient prehistoric rock art landscapes, painted drum landscapes encompass a much wider understanding of what might point towards the very basis of what has been termed Sámi pre-Christian religion passed across many generations.

During the time spent at Armstrong's home, I asked him if he would be willing to share information about his work as a drum maker and also how using a drum links with his healing work. The data from the interview is presented below.

I have worked extensively making drums for approximately twenty years and have probably made around one thousand of these. In 2022 the development of my drum making took a positive turn whereby drums were created in relation to three medical doctors, including a psychiatrist. Two came to build them here at my home and the third ordered one which I made. This is a sign of progress because not so long ago the Sámi shamans were seen as charlatans.

The wood used to make the frames of the drums with varies but pine and birch wood sourced from local areas is the most common. The skins used to cover the

drum frames with are from reindeer. The ink used to decorate the skin with once it is dry is acrylic.

In terms of the development of my work as a drum maker, I have made drums for Sámi shaman Eirik Myrhaug who lives in Norway and also for shamans in Peru, and for one shaman on the island of Åland, which is between Sweden and Finland in the Gulf of Bothnia. I have also made drums for shamans in the Nordic countries who are undertaking healing and ceremonial work, and decorated these with Norse symbols. Furthermore, I have made drums for shamans throughout Europe such as in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

These orders and the interest in my work demonstrate how they are sought after. People look to the Sámi traditions as a basis for the recovery of their own traditions because to some extent we have maintained fragments of our worldview on seventeenth century drums which are in European museums; whereas, people in other European countries in particular have lost or not learned about the worldview of their respective cultures. This does not mean they appropriate our traditions but what we have in Sápmi and in the museums in Europe does inspire people to investigate their own traditions and to ask questions they would never have thought about earlier.

The Sámi drum is like a template as an inter-species communicator and it has been very interesting to note over the years how people are becoming interested in how to do this and more so, much more recently because of Climate Change many people want to know how they can communicate with and become closer to and help nature and the animal kingdoms some of which are under the threat of extinction because of what humans are doing to the planet. (Armstrand 2023 personal communication)

When I asked Armstrong if he could provide a description of the content of the drum he has made with regard to the figures, symbols and the structure-layout of landscape he responded as follows.

The drum was made as a special edition for Sámi shaman Eirik Myrhaug (Figs. 9, 10) and is painted in the exact way he asked for it to be laid out. It is a south Sámi design with the *axis mundi* in the center and a rhomb symbol as the sun: Beaiivi-Ibmel in the center. Eirik lives in southern Norway, in Oslo. On the top ray is a white celestial reindeer which can be seen over the northern sky, in the star constellation of Cassiopeia and Perseus. Above the northern axis on the at the top of the drum to the left is Radienadje the highest god, and then to the center on the top is Radienadje son Radienbardni's who watches over nature. On the lower part of the *axis mundi* are three crosses which represent the holy men or men/gods of the weekend who are a central part of the old Sámi religion. Below the *axis mundi* is the symbol of



Fig. 9 The drum is a South Sámi design that has a sun in the center in the form of a rhomb symbol which is on the *axis mundi*, the world pillar (Armstrand 2023 personal correspondence). Photo: Francis Joy, 2023

Mahtaráhkká, the Mother Goddess. Below her are her daughters. The first is to the left; the bow woman Juksáhkká; to the right is Uksáhkká and after the tree on the right is Sáhráhkká. To the right of Sáhráhkká is an offering place constructed from poles and antlers. To the left of Juksáhkká are the sacred mountains Passe varra.

In terms of animals there are two ravens who are the shaman's messengers and then a bear who is a sacred animal in the Sámi tradition and therefore, a symbol of strength and power. To the left behind the two ravens are two reindeers between crosses. This represents the entrance to the Sáivo world and world of the dead Jabma Aimo. At the top of the drum on the right side holding a hammer is Dierpmis the thunder god. Then the water god Čáhceolmmái portrayed as a fish on the top left side. Above the

fish symbol is the wind god Bieggolmmái holding a shovel in each hand. And in front of the fish is the *lavvu* tent where the shaman undertakes his work. These are the main deities and animals on the drum. (Armstrand 2023 personal correspondence)

With regard to Armstrong's healing work using drums, when I asked him if he could provide some insight into how this is approached he responded in the following way.

I have been using drums for undertaking healing work for approximately twenty years. Using the drum for healing means I can work deeper into a client's body and energy-field, and it is an effective tool to help balance people. The drum can be used to help treat psychological conditions, negative emotional states and pain in the body.

When using the drum for clearing up negative emotions a combination of using the spirit guides helps and calling on the wind god Bieggolmmái to blow the difficult energy away. If someone has something inside or attached to them which should not be there I use my mind to go inside them to locate where the intrusion is in the body and once located I remove it by sucking it out with the assistance of my guardian spirits who then take it away.

When using a drum during healing work I also use *joiking* which is a special way of singing used by the Sámi. I use the voice for calling in the healing powers. The Sámi spirits recognize the *joik* and so it is initially used as an invocation and utilized throughout the healing work as a way of staying connected to the spirits of our culture who help in many different ways.

The spirits invoked for assistance are also painted on the drum. These powers are also called upon to assist with matters pertaining to divination. Thus, there are different forms of dialogue—communication that take place through the use of the drum and offering practices.

Progress with healing is seen in the ways client's moods lift and they become happier and their energy lifts and increases. They may feel restored to wholeness.

I also do distant cleansing and healing work. One example concerns doing a healing on a building in Indonesia where the owner, a man had been trying to sell it for five years but was unable to do so because it was a sick building that has a painful history attached to it. I made an out-of-body journey using the drum to perform a cleansing ritual on the house. And the owner sold it the following day. (Armstrand 2023 personal correspondence)

Discussion

What has been described above from the cooperation work with Peter Armstrong at his home in Kiruna has provided different contexts that have helped demonstrate how sacred narratives are formed and why these are important which is presented in what ways the knowledge has been recorded. Moreover, and with reference to what has been documented in his garden, this is in terms of how different frameworks are created for initially helping to initiate communication with the invisible worlds and also perform healing and ceremonial work for different purposes. From observation of the circular shape of the tent, the ritual space around the altar as well as the oval shaped form of the drum we are able to gain insight into what Armstrong sees as the cyclical concept of renewal of life which is a worldview that takes up a central position in the culture of the Sámi people past and present. In addition, the idea of working within a circle is one of the ways the Sámi shaman has been able to connect with the wider cosmos and thus, affirm his position within this with regard to communicating with supernatural powers for the purposes of undertaking his vocation as a healer, animal communicator and ritual specialist.

The method of creating sacred narratives illustrates how the basis originates within the creation of different types of circles and cyclical behaviors and can be understood in each context in connection with offering practices, healing and ceremonial work, drum making and decoration. Henceforth, these ways of knowing helps us with understanding in what ways activities and observations as such are important and furthermore, brings forth new examples of in what ways Armstrong is reclaiming and reaffirming his Sámi identity both individually as well as within the wider Sámi sociocultural context and also how knowledge production takes place as has been described through what the research participant has characterized with regard to his work.

Another important point to be noted is how Armstrong has purposefully constructed ritual landscapes in his garden area which could be seen as a reminder of how much earlier in Sámi villages in many places offering sites were often close to the dwelling place where tents were located. In addition, how healing, ritual and séance work were conducted within these spaces. Through closer observation we can see how Armstrong has created within the circles he has constructed a series of cosmological landscapes which convey cultural constructs that are connected to the realms of the sacred and therefore, oral narratives.

Perhaps the most obvious construct is the symbolic positioning of the birch tree altar which is a sacred structure that encompasses different elements. The crown on the tree being linked with the upper celestial world. The middle part of the trunk where the animal skulls are located being representative of the middle world or physical reality, and the roots of the tree symbolically traversing down into the lower realms. Therefore, what the construction, content and orientation of the altar does is also reflect how Armstrong has perceived in his mind a plan to depict a structure that would encompass different elements that are intimately tied to the Sámi cultural context and practices in relation to the worldview of the shaman. This can likewise, be seen as a basis for creating sacred narratives with regard to offering practices inter-species communication, ceremonial activities and healing practices. All of these are linked with expressions of the sacred aspects of culture and thus, can be found in association with much earlier Sámi pre-Christian landscapes.

Also, the use of birch bark to create the vessel of a boat for making and offering to Mahtaráhkká reflects yet another cultural expression linked with use of the tree because of its powers and status as a sacred tree that is connected with the earlier offering traditions within Sámi culture and pre-Christian religion.

The creation of the painted drum landscape can be seen in a similar way where the oval shape of the drum has been formed because it reflects how oval shapes are known to be connected with the earlier Sámi culture and pre-Christian religion in which typically, how a tripartite view of the cosmos was portrayed. On the drum featured in the research through Fig. 9, the world pillar or *axis mundi* can be seen to function in a similar way the birch tree does as a cosmological axis that is in the center of the ritual circle consisting of eight poles. Inside the painted drum landscape are offering places and also a tent where the shaman undertakes his work. Thus, all of these structures and manifestations are contemporary religious expressions and are in their essence, subsequently linked with oral narratives.

By being able to establish these connections it is possible to comprehend how the painted drum landscape reflects the microcosm whilst it could be attested how the tent and altar in the garden areas reflect larger representations of the macrocosm. What connects these together is they are in their own ways each being representations of the universe and Armstrong as a human being, being a part of these. Furthermore, each demonstrating a type of cosmic order which is intimately tied to narratives associated with the structures within the Sámi universe. The functions of each of the structures in the garden as well as the use of the drum allows Armstrong



Fig. 10 A photograph of a drum landscape designed by Eirik Myrhaug from paper and sent to Peter Armstrong to create. Reused with kind permission from Eirik Myrhaug. Photo: Eirik Myrhaug, 2023

to move through and engage with these structures in order to carry out his work and therefore, express himself.

In terms of the creation of specific narratives in relation to Armstrong's engagements, use and activities with and within these different components in connection with the cosmological landscapes it is clear that because of the need for sensitivity the full content of how and why for example, entity removal or soul retrieval work has taken place has not been fully disclosed means that we only have a short insight into his work in relation to activities as such. However, the descriptions of how and why the altar was set up, skulls tied to the cosmic birch tree, construction and use of the birch bark boat

as well as drum building and decoration each of these practices do provide a broader insight into specific narratives in connection to engagements with these different components. Perhaps one of the most striking to me is the short story about the house cleansing in Indonesia which contains the essence of what could be described as out-of-body travel with spiritual helpers in order to undertake restorative work for both a person and also his dwelling place. This it could be asserted is consistent with shamanic narratives.¹³ And through this, we are able to learn how the shamans work not only includes healing people but also buildings because of how they can collect debris which can cause problems, thus keeping a person stuck to a building that is sick.

I wanted to add this data here because it provides an important insight into firstly how Sámi shaman Myrhaug has contacted Peter Armstrong and asked him to make him a drum and has provided specific instruction regarding the positioning of the main deities and formation of the cosmological landscape. From this design and the observation of the finished drum pictured in Fig. 9 above, we are able to better comprehend in what ways Armstrong has constructed a series of sacred narratives through his artwork in order to create the Sámi cultural landscape using earlier symbolism from seventeenth century drums to do that. In addition, how through observation of the structure of the landscape and content of both landscapes, we can see how cultural heritage is used as an important resource in order to construct and recreate both the sacred structures associated with an earlier worldview and the narratives attached to these as illustrated initially by Myrhaug and then brought into form by Armstrong.

What is furthermore important to consider is just how crucial the old Sámi drums are as cultural resources despite approximately about seventy of them being in the custody of museums throughout Europe and this example of the interaction between Myrhaug and Armstrong help us understand this. Ultimately, and why for the shamans in Sámi culture as sacred artefacts they have much value and are one of the main resources upon which they draw upon in order to use earlier symbolism from older cultural narratives combined with their ways of knowing to create sacred narratives which assist with connecting past and present together. A further important point to be noted is how despite controversy around what old symbolism on seventeenth century drums mean because much of the data was collected by outsiders, that both Myrhaug and Armstrong have

knowledge of what these older symbols are, what they mean, how they can be reused in order to create the present for sacred purposes. Ultimately, to be able to express this in the contemporary world and provide yet further examples of how religion is made and is intertwined using sacred narratives as a basis for this and expressions of Sámi culture.

Concluding Remarks

A combination of the different elements used within a Sámi ritual landscape in different contexts that are sacred structures has helped with revealing a modern-day example of how Sámi cultural expressions and religious practices have been remade within the home and surrounding area where Peter Armstrong undertakes his work for different purposes, one of the main ones being personhood. Henceforth, using distinctive applications that are rooted within a combination of approaches which have produced diverse narratives in connection with healing, ritual and offering practices and drum making and decoration that help build and reinforce identity and Indigenous lifeways. Through the work of Peter Armstrong as presented above, we see a number of values connected with authentic forms of interspecies communication captured through the research that has helped reveal how connections are established, strengthened and maintained with the supernatural powers that are known to him and likewise, evident within Sámi culture both past and present.

Being that these traditions have been kept secret earlier due to missionary work and persecution of the Sámi the materials presented in this research paper have helped demonstrate how Peter Armstrong has unlocked these past stereotypes in order to reclaim Sámi cultural heritage practices and traditions. Because of the painful past, the elements of Sámi religion and cultural expressions were made passive by outsiders on account of the fear and hysteria surrounding the powers associated with the Sámi shaman. Thus, engaging once again with traditions that are being reclaimed, reembodyed and renegotiated has proven beneficial for research purposes. This is because these different examples of practices that are tied to beliefs illustrate how through joint cooperation and coproduction of knowledge it has been possible to understand the following. In what ways the human–culture–nature relationship continues to be restored as the fear and hysteria of the past are replaced by freedom, new insight and understandings about how the essential spiritual agency takes up a central role and function again and is expressed in different contexts. Henceforth, through various forms of communication which as a consequence, animates identity and helps

¹³ Earlier documentation of these kinds of skills among Sámi shamans can be found in the work of Johannes Schefferus (1971, 54–5).

Peter Armstrand with reembodying an ancient past which is subsequently utilized to create the present as has been demonstrated through what has been presented in this single case study.

One of the most important components that stands out in terms of research design which has helped make this study a valuable contribution in relation to how earlier Sámi oral traditions and practices have been combined with new ones is not only evident with regard to in what ways these have been described but also where it has been possible they have been both consolidated and supported by photographic data which helps enrich how each of the connecting landscapes are portrayed. Therefore, providing the reader with a better comprehension of how these different practices and traditions are interconnected with each other.

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Interview Material

Armstrong, Peter 2023. Interview with a Contemporary Sámi Shaman, pp. 1–6.

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