

Eero Autio

HORNED ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURES IN FINNISH ROCK-PAINTINGS: SHAMANS OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Abstract

It has been generally accepted that the horned anthropomorphic figures in our rock-paintings represent shamans. I doubt the validity of this interpretation and start by emphasizing the methodical advice that the local folk tradition must take priority when drawing conclusions. Furthermore, there is no evidence of such Lapp or Finnish shamans who would have used horns in shamanizing like their Siberian colleagues. Neither do the figures of shamans on the Saami drums give any undisputable proof of it. On the contrary, the emblem and the by-name of the supreme god depicted on the magic drums indicate a god who may have originally been a reindeer. This corresponds also with the statements made by Arvid Genetz, according to which "Mintiš" is a god and the word "mientuš" is of Saami derivation and means a wild reindeer. In the Kola Peninsula there are legends, beliefs and rituals which are distinctly totemistic. All these factors together make me abandon the interpretations based on the Siberian shamanism.

Eero Autio, Vattuvuorenkatu 28, FIN-78200 Varkaus, Finland

In the Finnish rock-paintings there are horned anthropomorphic figures (Fig. 1). As a rule they have been explained to represent shamans. The main reason for the explanation seems to have been the horned head-dresses of Siberian shamans. In principle it is right to use Siberian material as a basis for interpretation but when making conclusions, we must first of all bear in mind the methodological guidelines which should be followed when dealing with local folk tradition.

In practice this means that in Finland the Saami and the Finnish folk tradition must take precedence over others. The starting point for studying the subject in hand is the fact that we have no historical evidence according to which the Lapp or the Finnish shamans would have used horns like their Siberian colleagues. This fact has been forgotten even by those who ought to know it (see e.g. Siikala 1980).

On the Lapp drums there are figures of men that have one, two or more vertical lines on their heads. Some years ago I examined the figures that have three lines on their heads (Fig. 2 A). The motif has been used in varied forms on the Lapp drums and they all depict gods or mythical beings.

The same motif can be seen in the rock-pictures in Hossa (also in Laukaa) in Finland, in Alta-fjord, in the Kola Peninsula and also in Nämforsen. However, the motif has not been found in southern Sweden but instead has been found in the Urals and in Siberia (Fig. 2 B). It has been used in the Permian bronze-works, in the drawings of the Ob-Ugrian plates in Siberia and in a seal found in Mohenjo-Daro (Fig. 2 C-D). My conclusion is that the motif in the rock-pictures in Fennoscandia and in the Urals does not depict a shaman but some mythical being. I have based my conclusion first of all on the Lapp drums and on the Permian and Ob-Ugrian material. In all of these the motif depicts some mythical being (Autio 1990, 12-13).

In order to get a more profound view of the subject I have collected all the shaman-figures from the book "Die Lappische Zaubertrommel" written by Ernst Manker. There are altogether 27 figures which depict or are suspected to depict shamans, but only three of them have such lines on their heads which could be interpreted as representing horns. The tops of the heads of the other figures are bare.

The first figure under suspicion is on the drum

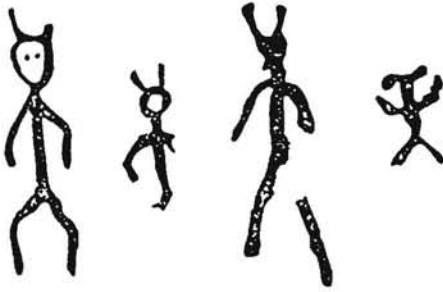


Fig. 1. Horned anthropomorphic figures in the rock-paintings of Finland (Taavitsainen 1977, 152).

22 (figure number 44, see Fig. 3 A). The body of the figure is like the letter Y. It represents a shaman. The figure number 46, which is quite near it, is almost similar. Still, it has been named the god-

dess Madderakka. The shape of the letter Y has been used on many drums for depicting gods.

The second shaman is on the drum 47 (figure number 41, see Fig. 3 B). The definition "Vielleicht der Noid" means that Manker is not sure whether it is a shaman or not. As you can see, the figures 12 and 44, the god Tiermes and the goddess Madderakka, are similar. The figure 43 has only one vertical line and represents Rana-neida, a female mythical being. Another example of this type is the figure 40, the goddess Juksakka. The figures 2 and 51 have three vertical lines, which gives the impression that the lines have been used to indicate the dignity of higher gods. In order to confirm this, I have picked out all the figures that have 1-3 lines on their heads from the 72 drums reported by Manker and I then made a list of them. The result is that the number of lines seems to indicate the degree of dignity of each god (Autio 1993).

The third figure under suspicion is on the drum 51 (figure number 47, see Fig. 3 C). The figure

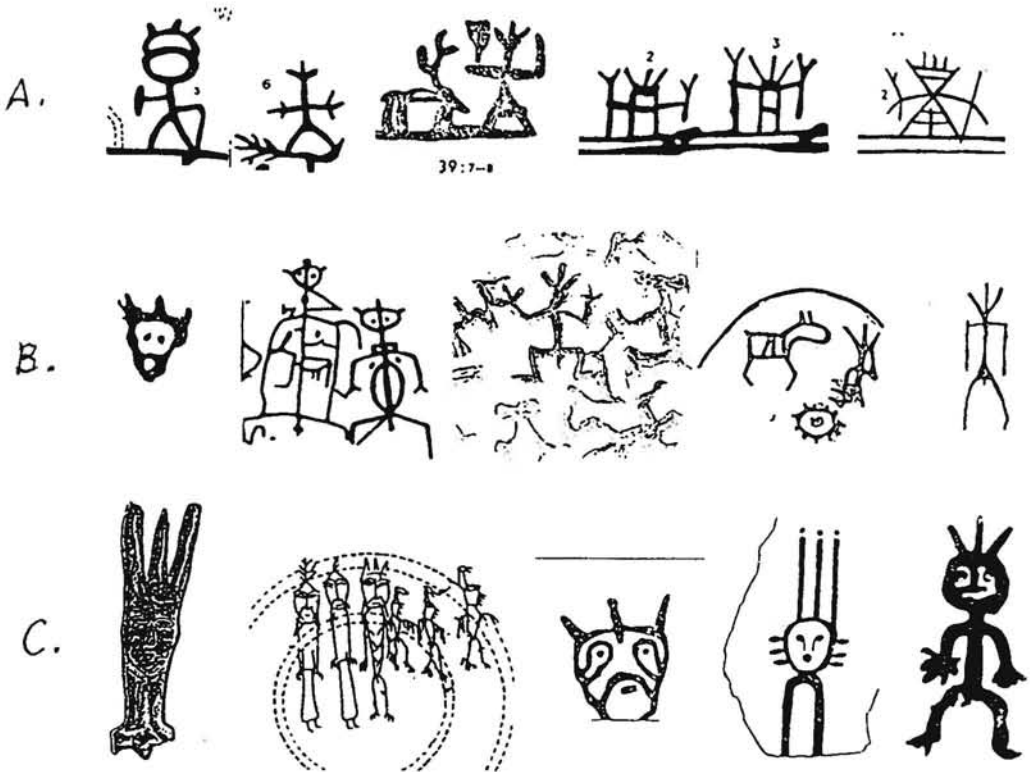


Fig. 2 A-C. Three horned anthropomorphic figures: A - on the Saami drums; B - in rock-pictures; from the left: Hossa (Finland), Alta-fjord, the Kola Peninsula, the Urals, Siberia; C - a Permian bronze work, an Ob-Ugrian plate, a Minusinskian carving, Samus IV ceramic, a Burjatian ongon (Autio 1990, 9-13).



Fig. 2 D. "Proto-Shiva", Mohenjo-Daro (Parpola 1980, 10).

depicts a shaman and has five or six lines going up from its head. The definition made by Manker tells nothing about the meaning of the lines. They may supposedly depict horns or hair. The hair is a more plausible alternative because according to the description made by Elias Lönnrot it is typical

for shamans to have their hair standing on end when they are in ecstasy (Siikala 1992, 208). Therefore this figure is not valid evidence for horned shamans either.

Instead of horned shamans there are figures on the drums that depict horns or antlers which have been used as the emblems of the supreme gods Radien-father, his wife and their son (Fig. 4). The other emblems used in this connection are crosses, trees and reindeer. The antlers are the most popular: they are found on 25 drums. The cross has been used on 21 drums, the tree on 15 drums and the reindeer on 6 drums. The popularity of horns is also reflected in the by-names of the Radien-group, e.g. Sjørve-, Tjørve- or Kiorva-Radien, in English Horn-Radien. These names were also used in cases where the emblem was a cross or tree. It is supposed that the use of horns as an emblem generally symbolizes the power and might of the god, or that the horns may be relics of totemism. The third possibility is the belief according to which the Radien-father would have

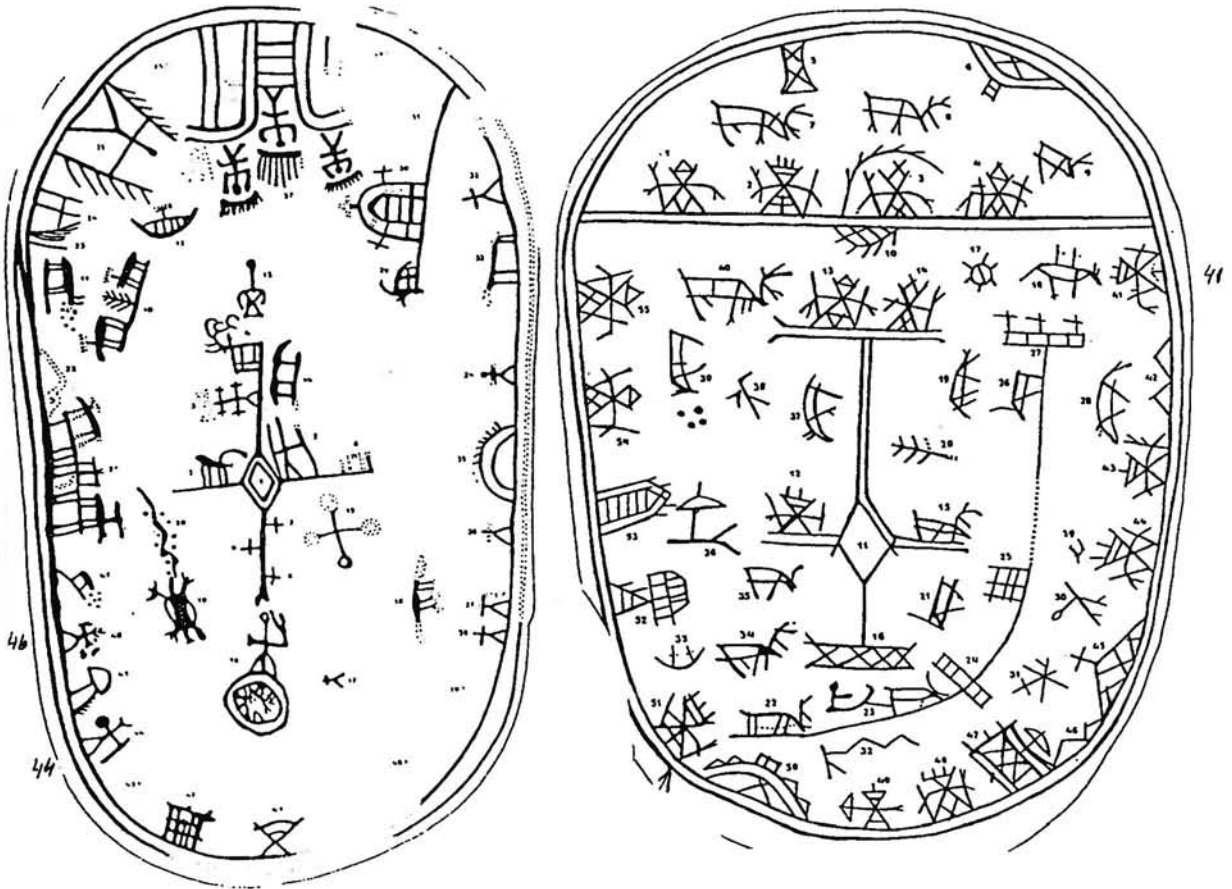


Fig. 3 A-B. Drum number 22 (on the left) and drum number 47 (on the right).

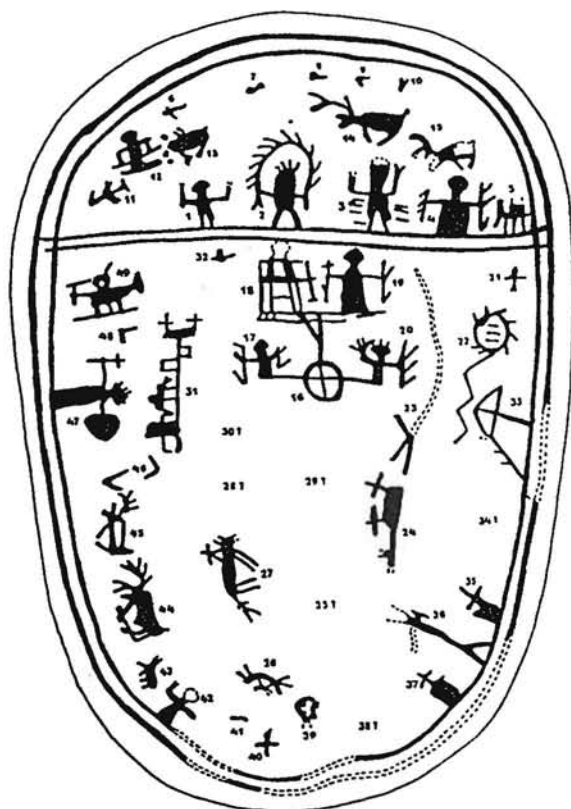


Fig. 3 C. Drum number 51.

created reindeer and other animals.

The examination of the Lapp drums has given me two notable results: firstly, there is no firm evidence of horned shamans; secondly, the emblems of the highest god refer to a reindeer.

The Saamis in the Kola Peninsula have legends of the wild reindeer Mändash who married a Lapp girl. As late as the 1930's there were people who believed themselves to be descendants of that girl (Čarnoluskij 1965, 43, 94). It is amazing that nobody here in Finland has paid any attention to the legends, although the Finnish linguist Arvid Genetz has mentioned them in his dictionary "Wörterbuch der Kola-Lappische Dialecte" (1891). He also gave the information that "Mintiš" is a god and that the word "mientuš" comes from the same derivation or root and means a wild reindeer.

The Russian ethnologist V. V. Čarnoluskij has collected legends of Mändash and published them (Čarnoluskij 1962, 80–103). He also got two pieces of information about the rituals carried out in the Lake Seitajärvi. According to them a group of Saamis were by the lake-side, both men and women naked, and the men were wearing antlers and fighting against each other. As the reports were

not first-hand evidence, Čarnoluskij supports them by the descriptions of the games the young Saamis still played in the previous century. The participants had antlers on their heads. One of the games was fairly long and it had phases which hinted at a fertility cult (Čarnoluskij 1966, 310–313). The Finnish Saami-expert T. I. Itkonen has described the same game and, according to him, the participants behaved almost like mating animals during the game. He adds that the game was a good example of how an old magical ritual has changed into a play of young people (Itkonen 1948, 435–436).

Because the horns of the Siberian shamans have played such a prominent role in many interpretations, it is necessary to point out that nowadays there are archaeologists who do not regard all the horned anthropomorphic figures they meet in prehistoric material as shamans. L. R. Kyzlasov, who has analyzed 126 Minusinskian statues, is of the opinion that the ancient Minusinskians were very early influenced by the ancient civilized cultures where many of the gods were depicted as having horns on their heads. He also uses Hakassian beliefs, e.g. how some tribes believed that they were descended from a bull (Kyzlasov 1986, 240–241).

Another example is E. A. Novgorodova who has identified the birthgiving woman and the foremother in the Mongolian rock-pictures with the help of some of the oldest characters in the Chinese writing system. In some cases the Great Grand-mother has been depicted as having horns on her head. According to Novgorodova (1989, 106–119) this can be explained by totemism. I think that these examples show that we must be cautious when using Siberian material or interpretations. The features that were earlier supposed to belong to the original shamanism may be influences from the ancient civilized cultures or they could be derived from totemism.

Conclusions

There is no undisputed evidence for horned shamans in Finland or in Lapland. On the contrary, the emblem and the by-name of the supreme god depicted on the magic drums may indicate that the god was originally a reindeer. This corresponds also with Genetz's statement of the god Mintiš. In the Kola Peninsula there have been legends, beliefs and rituals which are distinctly totemistic. All these indicators together make me abandon the interpretations based on the Siberian shamanism and explain the horned anthropomorphic

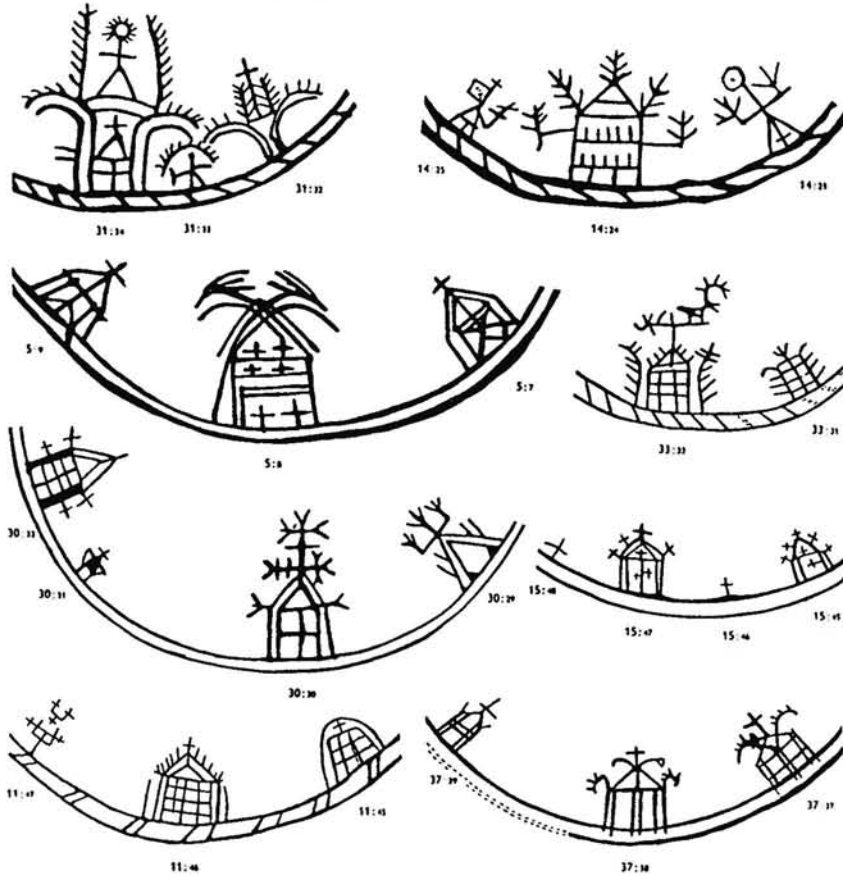


Fig. 4. Figures of Radien-group on the Saami drums by Manker (1950).

rock-pictures in Finland and also in the northern Fennoscandia in the following ways:

- 1) If the figure has two horns, an animal mask or a tail, it may depict a man performing in a totemistic ritual, or a mythical being.
- 2) If the figure has three horns or lines on its head, it probably depicts a mythical being.
- 3) If a group of rock-pictures includes anthropomorphic figures which have from one to three vertical lines on their heads, the lines may have been used to indicate the degree of dignity of the beings, as Gustaf Hallström (1960, 206) has suggested for the rock-carving group of Nämforsen,

or the lines may have been used for some other purpose. It is worth noticing that the same marks have been used also in Alta and on the Saami drums.

The Finnish word "noita" is so old that during the time when the rock-pictures were made there were shamans. However, it is very difficult to recognize a shaman in a rock-picture. For example, in Fig. 5 there is surely a religious procession. The leader of the procession is supposed to be a shaman but he has no particular cult implements. Even an elk-headed staff seems to have been used by ordinary participants.



Fig. 5. Rock-carvings on the river Uikujoki in Eastern Karelia by Savvateev (1970, 87).

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