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Heritage of past and present: Cultural processes of heritage-making at the ritual sites of Taatsi and Jönsas

Tiina Äikäs & Marja Ahola

Abstract

This chapter approaches two ritual sites located in the territory of modern Finland from the perspective of heritage-making. Taatsi is an offering site used by indigenous Saami starting from the 10th century AD, whereas Jönsas is a cemetery site connected with the Stone Age populations but used also in the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. What is common to these sites is that they have been used and reused for long periods and gained new meanings also in the contemporary world. By using a site-biographical approach, we suggest that past and present ritual activities, along with other meaning-making processes, such as town planning and youth gatherings, have all been an important part of the heritage-making processes of the Taatsi and Jönsas sites. Accordingly, we propose that archaeological sites should be seen as active places that have obtained changing meanings during and after their original use. Based on the life histories of these two sites, we further suggest that the core idea of heritage existed already deep in prehistory.

Keywords: ritual site, heritage-making, site biography, offering site, cemetery

7.1. Introduction

Within the field of archaeology, cultural heritage is often defined as a known and controllable thing – a site or an object that is discovered, defined, recorded, mapped, put on a site register, managed, and conserved (Smith and Waterton 2009: 42). However, in reality, the process of heritage-making might not be as straightforward as this. For example, as Barbara Bender (1998: 9) remarks in her influential work *Stonehenge: Making Space*, in archaeological literature, the story of Stonehenge seems to end with the last stone put in place – even though the site and its landscape have clearly continued to attract the human imagination during historical and contemporary times. Are these later encounters part of Stonehenge's heritage or should they be understood as less significant moments of history that have not shaped the life of the site? Recently, such a static definition of cultural heritage has been problematized within contemporary heritage discourse (Harrison 2013; Holtorf 2013; Ikäheimo & Äikäs 2017; see also Finn 1997). According to this discourse, archaeological sites should not be observed only as

relics of the past but also as places that are actively used and given meanings in the contemporary world. Indeed, as Cornelius Holtorf (2008: 419) has noted: “the monument’s life history includes *all* its transformations over time and *all* the landscapes it transformed, whether or not that involved any notion that the megalith was “old” and from another time period or not.”

In this chapter, we study the life history of two ritual sites from the perspective of the heritage-making process – the prehistoric burial site of Jönsas in Southern Finland and the historical Saami offering place of Taatsi in Northern Finland (Fig. 7.1). Although geographically located at different ends of the country and dating several millennia apart, these sites nevertheless show points of connection in the way the natural landscape has contributed to ritual activities (e.g. Bradley 2000). Indeed, at Jönsas, a Stone Age cemetery was intentionally established next to a smooth area of bedrock that contributed to the remembrance and recognition of the site also during later times (Ahola 2017). Similarly, the Taatsi site is a topographically impressive location that stands out from the surrounding landscape (Äikäs 2015). By investigating the life history of these ritual sites initially connected with the natural landscape, we aim to gain information on how past and present ritual activities, as well as archaeological research carried out at these sites, have influenced the heritage-making process both in the past and in the present. Making examples of these sites that come from different contexts, one from the forests of Lapland and the other from urban Southern Finland, allows us to show the breadth of the applicability of the concept. Accordingly, we do not concentrate solely on contemporary times, but instead aim also to see whether these sites could also be understood as ‘sites of heritage’ in the past.



Figure 7.1. Map of the sites mentioned in the text.

In order to study the heritage-making process, we analyse the Jönsas and Taatsi sites from the perspective of *site biography*. In a nutshell, the site-biographical approach is a description of the life history of an archaeological site; it includes all the activities, changes, and phases of use and reuse of a site along with all meanings that are attached to it (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Gosden & Marshall 1999: 160–170; Meskell 2004). We suggest that a site-biographical approach is fruitful in the analysis of cultural processes, such as heritage-making, since it gives equal value to all meanings given to a site (Olsen 1990: 200; see also Lucas 2005: 57). As Laurent Olivier has stated (2011: 54–55): “The

recent past, and the present as well, are just parts of a sequence that have naturally been added on to those that preceded them, either by augmenting sites or artifacts with new matter, or by transforming them through physical change. Fundamentally, these transformations are part of the long history of places whose origins usually date back to prehistorical times.” Accordingly, from the perspective of the site-biographical approach, heritage-making is a dynamic process where not only does the past influence contemporary meanings, but also current values and ideas have an effect on how we see and experience the past.

7.2. Remembering, forgetting, and recreating: Making sense of the cultural heritage of past and present

Based on the UNESCO definition, cultural heritage consists of monuments, groups of buildings, and sites that are of exceptional importance to both present and future generations of all humanity and thus warrant permanent protection (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2019). However, according to Laurajane Smith, heritage consists not only of the material culture or places of the past but also of a cultural process or meaning-making. Indeed, as Smith (2006: 44) explains: “There is no one defining action or moment of heritage, but rather a range of activities that include remembering, commemorating and passing on knowledge and memories, asserting and expressing identity and social and cultural values and meanings. As an experience, and as a social and cultural performance, it is something with which people actively, often self-consciously, and critically engage in.”

From this re-theorization of heritage, the story of Stonehenge would not have ended with the last stone put in place. Rather, all engagement with Stonehenge – from the creation of the monument to the present – are part of the cultural meaning-making of what is now considered the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge. However, even if contemporary winter solstice celebrations at Stonehenge are part of the cultural heritage of Stonehenge, archaeological research nevertheless plays a big role in the definition of the site. This is because, in the case of prehistoric sites, we are dealing with a past that we have not witnessed ourselves. It is therefore much easier to accept the authority of written text and knowledge gained via archaeological research than to try to grasp hold of the site without recollections of the activities that have taken place at the site (Smith and Waterton 2009: 46–47). In this sense, the intellectual authority of archaeology has a strong position in the cultural process of heritage-making.

Although cultural heritage is a modern concept, when we look at the attributes linked to cultural heritage – remembering, commemorating, and passing on knowledge, memories, and objects inherited from past generations – these attributes can easily be applied to prehistoric and historic times as well. In fact, if we look at societies lacking written records, it was through oral tradition and the material remains of previous generations that these people formulated their sense of the past (Bradley 2002). In archaeology, this act of commemoration can be seen in the continuous use or reuse of the same sites even for the duration of millennia (e.g. Williams 1997, 2013; Bradley 2002; Wessman, 2010; Ahola 2017). Such traditions are known worldwide and are commonly accepted as intentional behaviour suggesting how people interpreted the remains of past activities in their surroundings in the past and present (Bradley 2002; van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Borić 2010; Bourgeois 2013; Williams 2013). In other words, how people engaged in the cultural process of heritage-making.

In archaeological contexts, the act of reuse is documented, in particular, at burial sites, and is often explained by a need to connect or reconnect with past generations (e.g. Williams 1997; Wickholm 2006; Wessman 2010: 95; Turek 2014). According to the historian Pierre Nora (1989), these sites are usually referred to as ‘sites of memory’, that is, places in which the social memory¹ of the community is

1. Social memory can be understood as the construction of a collective notion about how things were in the past (Halbwachs 1975 [1925]; Conner-ton 1989; Zerubavel 2003)

recalled and passed on (Zerubavel 2003: 6). According to archaeologist Anna Wessman (2010: 94–95; see also Gosden & Lock 1998), the repeatedly used sites can be viewed as communal places where links to certain individuals, ancestors, were considered strong, whereas the sites reused after a hiatus of several hundred years should not be considered as examples of direct social memory but rather as places that were important on a mythical level. In other words, through commemoration, these sites would have been reinvented as places of the mythical past.

In fact, in the act of remembering, past and present as well as body and memory are intertwined; remembrance is a bodily activity as much as a cognitive one (Jones 2007: 12). Hence, not all remembering is an acknowledged action. Henri Bergson's (1988) concept of *habit-memory* refers to something that is learned by means of repetition in connection with bodily perceptions and remembered without an effort. This can include our way of moving in the landscape and acting in a particular place. Remembering can be a repetitive incorporation of bodily movements that forms habitual body memory, and these movements are culturally prescribed (Connerton 1989; Jones 2007: 12). As Andrew Jones (2007: 26) states: "Remembrance is not a process internal to the human mind; rather, it is a process that occurs in the bodily encounter between people and things." According to Dušan Borić (2010: 50), there is also a difference between an acknowledged and bodily remembering: "Discursive transmission of meaning over time depends on the conscious effort of making explicit and *meaningful* links to the past, non-discursive practices refer to repetitive everyday rhythms, which continuously re-produced ingrained ways of doing and acting in a particular way... Such links to the past derive from everyday memory but do not utilize the past through a conscious act of remembering."

To conclude, by interacting with traces of the past in the landscape we constantly give them new meanings and hence recreate the place – we create heritage. A burial mound might be used as a picnic site and an old fortress as an arena for live-action role-playing. In some cases, the old meanings and uses of the place are vital for the creation of atmosphere, in other cases they might be totally forgotten. And then again, forgetting does not mean an end to engagement and meaning. Our bodily interaction with a place can continue even if the past meaning of the place is lost from our memory. Indeed, according to Laurent Olivier (2011: 70), it is not possible to remember unless we also forget. By this Olivier means that memory is not something that once existed and is recalled, but something that is reinvented. In this sense, "perpetuating the past is not preserving it, but transforming it."

7.3. Site biography of Jönsas, Vantaa

We begin our site biographies with the Jönsas cemetery, one of the largest Stone Age cemeteries in Finland. The cemetery consisted of five Neolithic Corded Ware graves (ca. 2800/2700–2300 BC) and more than 20 ochre graves that are connected with Stone Age hunter-gatherer populations (Fig. 7.2; Purhonen and Ruonavaara 1994; Ahola 2017). The site itself has an even longer duration; the cemetery was discovered within a multi-period settlement site that contains find material – lithic flakes and artefacts consisting primarily of quartz, ceramics, and burnt bone – from the Late Mesolithic, the Middle Neolithic (Corded Ware culture), and the Bronze and Early Iron Ages² (Purhonen and Ruonavaara 1994: 89).

2. Based on the chronology provided by Nordqvist and Hervä 2013, the Late Mesolithic in Southern Finland is dated c. from 6800 to 5200 BC, Early Neolithic from 5200 to 4000 BC, Middle Neolithic from 4000 to 2300 BC, Late Neolithic from 2300 to 1800 BC, Bronze Age from 1800 to 500 BC, and Early Iron Age from 500 BC to AD 400.

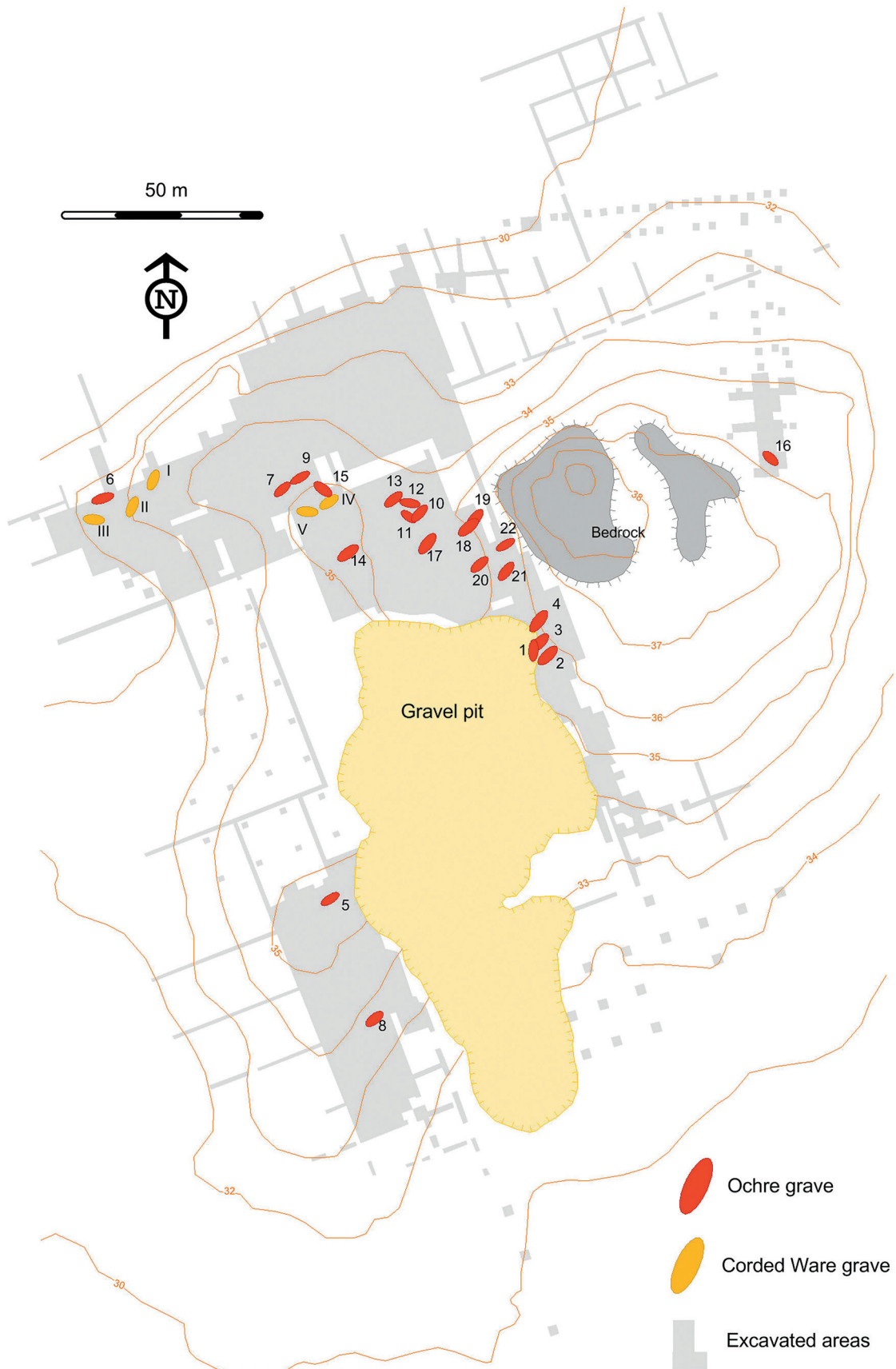


Figure 7.2. A site plan of the Jönsas cemetery after Ahola 2017, Fig 3.

Although it was clearly an important ritual location, the Jönsas cemetery has been a challenge for archaeological research. This is due to the fact that organic materials are usually poorly preserved in the acidic soil of the Finnish territory. Thus, all of the Jönsas graves lack human bone material and, accordingly, radiocarbon dates (Ahola 2017). In fact, although the Jönsas Corded Ware graves were easily recognized as burials due to the documented grave structures and find material typical of Corded Ware grave goods (e.g. Purhonen 1986), the dating of the Jönsas ochre graves – furnished only with water-smoothed stones (Fig. 7.3) – is still problematic (Ahola 2016).



Figure 7.3. A Stone Age hunter-gatherer ochre grave from the Jönsas cemetery. (Photograph: L. Ruonavaara 1987, Finnish Heritage Agency.)

7.3.1. From the Mesolithic to the Neolithic

Due to isostatic land uplift, the landscape of the Jönsas site changed tremendously during the Stone Age. The Jönsas site was first occupied during the Late Mesolithic, and judging from the number of counted objects and the vast distribution of finds, the site was most probably a central site for the Stone Age population of the area (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: 85–88). At this time, the shoreline was ca. 33–32 metres above the present-day sea level, and the site was an island situated roughly one kilometre from the adjacent mainland (Purhonen and Ruonavaara 1994: 91; Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: appendix 3). By the Early Neolithic period, however, land uplift connected the Jönsas site to the mainland, with the shoreline being ca. 25 metres above the present-day sea level (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: appendix 3). At this point, the occupation moved c. 50 metres south-east of the Mesolithic settlement (Purhonen 1980a: 8). Since only small-scale trial excavations have been conducted in this area (Väkeväinen 1973; Purhonen 1980b), we do not know much about this phase of use. It seems, however, that after the Early Neolithic, the Jönsas site was not actively visited until the Corded Ware period.

Although it is not certain when the Jönsas ochre cemetery was established, the mortuary practice of inhumation graves with ochre suggest a hunter-gatherer tradition (e.g. Zagorska 2008; Grünberg 2013) that was in use in the Finnish territory from the Mesolithic to the end of the Neolithic (Edgren 2007; Ahola et al. 2016). Accordingly, it is plausible that the graves are connected to the Mesolithic phase of use or that an old, abandoned settlement site was later reused as a cemetery (Ahola 2017). It is nevertheless clear that with more than twenty ochre graves, the site has been an important ritual location for hunter-gatherer populations.

In a recent study conducted by Ahola (2017), it was noted that the cemetery was set up on purpose next to smooth bedrock located at the highest point in the area. At the same time, an intentional connection to past generations was created by placing new burials among older ones. Because most of the ochre graves were oriented towards the bedrock or were located in close vicinity to the bedrock, it appears that the bedrock might have held a special symbolic meaning for the population burying their dead at the site. In fact, it seems plausible that the bedrock, a topographical anomaly, could have functioned as a reference point for boundaries that separated the sacred from the profane and was thus selected as a burial place (cf. Anttonen 1992, 1996, 2003; Bradley 2000). Perhaps this location on a topographical anomaly made the cemetery “monumental” and thus contributed to the recognition and remembrance of the site.

Another apparent landscape feature at the Jönsas site has been the changing coastline that most likely affected the ways people perceived the site. Indeed, as has been suggested by Vesa-Pekka Herva and Timo Ylimaunu (2014), the rapid emergence of new land from the sea could have been packed with symbolic and metaphorical meanings related to the cosmological role of water and the sea. At the same time, the memory of the changing coastline – a changing liminal boundary with respect to otherness – could have made the site significant. It might even be possible that the water-smoothed stones were collected from the emerged ancient sea bottom and placed in the ochre graves as mnemonic references to the ancient coastline (Ahola 2017).

7.3.2. The Corded Ware phase of use

During the later part of the Middle Neolithic, the Jönsas site was already located far from the open sea and was most likely a natural meadow near a small lake or river (Purhonen and Ruonavaara 1994: 91–92; Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: appendix 3). The Corded Ware occupation of the Jönsas site was located mainly in the northern area of the site, although sherds of Corded Ware pottery were also discovered in areas previously inhabited by the Mesolithic people (Purhonen and Ruonavaara 1994: 93).

The presence of a Corded Ware settlement at an older hunter-gatherer dwelling site is relatively common in the Finnish territory (Edgren 1984: 75). Because the landscape and vegetation of these sites would have differed from the surrounding wilderness due to past activities, the phenomenon has generally been seen as indicating the presence of people who relied on pastoral farming (Äyräpää 1939: 118; Edgren 1984: 75). However, since Corded Ware people also buried their dead in these locations, the phenomenon is not related solely to subsistence (Ahola 2019: 39, 64–66). Indeed, also at Jönsas, five Corded Ware graves are located within the ochre cemetery (Ahola 2017). These graves do not cut any of the older graves, but instead, sherds of a Corded Ware pottery vessel have been discovered from a stone setting of an ochre grave (Purhonen 1980a: 11), suggesting that the cemetery could have been intentionally reused by the Corded Ware people (Ahola 2016, 2017).

7.3.3. From the Late Neolithic to the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age

According to sporadic radiocarbon datings, the Jönsas site might have been occupied during the Late Neolithic Kiukainen culture (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: Appendix 4). However, most of the radiocarbon datings succeeding the Corded Ware phase are either from the Bronze Age or the Early Iron Age, suggesting a more intensive period of use of the site. At this time, however, it seems that

the occupants no longer buried their dead at the site. These people nevertheless built a dozen large pit hearths at the site (Purhonen and Ruonavaara 1994: 89; Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: 232). Similar pit hearths are often connected with seal oil production (e.g. Ylimaunu 1999; Äikäs 2009), but no further analyses have been conducted on the Jönsas hearths. During this period Jönsas was already located roughly five kilometres from the shore (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: Appendix 2008), so the site would have been a poor choice for activities connected with marine resources. Indeed, a more plausible explanation for the large pit hearths is their use as cooking pits (e.g. Lavento 2015: 144–145) that could be related to commemoration and feasting (cf. Kuusela 2013: 120–122). Thus, even if Jönsas was no longer an active cemetery, the ritual nature of the site could nevertheless have continued but with different practices.

7.3.4. From the 1960s to the 2010s

After the Early Iron Age, it seems that the Jönsas site was slowly forgotten until it was discovered during archaeological fieldwork in the 1960s (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: 43). During the first excavations, the Jönsas site was located in a rural area. However, the situation was about to change with the extensive building plans of the Myyrmäki suburb (Hako 2009). These plans went into action during the 1970s and resulted in intensive excavations that continued for a decade (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: 43). During this period, local people eagerly visited the site and an exhibition of the finds was set up at the local school (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: 38). The excavations also gained attention in the newspapers.

The 1970s were clearly the time of the most intensive excavations with several site directors, hundreds of square metres of excavated areas, and tons of finds (Leskinen and Pesonen 2008: 43). After the 1970s, excavations at the site continued during 1985–1987 and 1991. The intensive excavations and the rise of the Myyrmäki suburb resulted in the destruction of the Jönsas site, and after the 1990s, only the fringes of the site were left intact along with the remains of the central bedrock. The presence of the ancient site was nevertheless commemorated in the street names of the newly built area. Accordingly, in Myyrmäki you can still walk on an ‘ochre path’ (Fi *punamultapolku*), ‘flint alley’ (Fi *piikujä*), ‘flake path’ (Fi *iskospolku*), ‘hearth path’ (Fi *liesipolku*), or ‘potter’s street’ (Fi *ruukuntekijänkuja*) (Koivisto 2009: 19). After the last excavations, the reconstruction of an ochre grave was also made in the lobby of the Myyrmäki House (Koivisto 2009: 19), a local cultural and multipurpose centre situated right next to the central bedrock.

With the course of time, however, the excavations and the presence of the site were slowly forgotten. Although no large-scale interviews on the subject have been conducted, two informants who had spent their childhood and youth in the Myyrmäki suburb (approximately from the 1980s to the early 2000s) had not heard of the site. Similarly, when the University of Helsinki conducted small-scale earth resistance measurements at the site in early 2015, locals were surprised that such a site had ever existed. Only one elderly man passing by still remembered the excavations of the 1970s. By the end of 2016, the local art museum, working on the premises of the Myyrmäki House, had also covered the reconstruction of the ochre grave with a mat and some furniture (Fig. 7.4). Since the site itself has never had a visible informative sign, the covering of the reconstruction also covered the last powerful reminiscence of the Jönsas site. Indeed, even though the Jönsas site still existed in the street names of the Myyrmäki suburb, these names were possibly too general to keep up the connection with the distant past.



Figure 7.4. The covered ochre grave reconstruction in the lobby of the Myyrmäki House. (Photographs: M. Ahola 2016.)

7.3.5. The present and the future

In 2013, Ahola became interested in the Jönsas site and especially in the apparent connection between the ochre graves and the Corded Ware graves. In order to understand the connection, she reanalysed the archived find material and reconsidered the remains of the site, resulting in several articles (Ahola 2015, 2016, 2017). Visits to the location of the Jönsas site clearly showed that even if the site itself was no longer remembered, the smooth bedrock located in a small park at the centre of the suburb was still constantly in use. Indeed, in many cases when Ahola visited the site, people were spending time on the bedrock. Traces of modern-day use were present also in the form of a large number of cigarette butts and other trash, along with drug needles. Some graffiti has also been painted on the bedrock (Fig. 7.5).



Figure 7.5. Modern graffiti on the Jönsas bedrock. (Photo: K. Lassila 2015.)

In 2016, the city of Vantaa started to draw up new city plans for the Myyrmäki area (Myyrmäen keskustan julkisen ulkotilan yleissuunnitelma 13.3.2017). According to these plans, the Myyrmäki area needed not only new residential buildings but also more business space. At the same time, the public space at the centre of Myyrmäki was going to be refreshed and unified. Since the plans to improve the public space also included the small park in which the remnants of the Jönsas site were still located, Ahola was contacted by Andreas Koivisto, an archaeologist at the Vantaa City Museum (A. Koivisto, personal email 24 March 2016). This contact led to the exchange of several emails in which Ahola told about her new research and interpretation of the Jönsas site. Koivisto seemed to be very interested in the topic, and since he was part of the committee working on the city plans, he promised to share these ideas with the rest of the committee.

In 2017, the new city plans concerning the public space of the Myyrmäki area were published (Myyrmäen keskustan julkisen ulkotilan yleissuunnitelma 13.3.2017). Remarkably, prehistory – and especially the material discovered at the Jönsas site – was the central theme of the plans. The city architects had not only decided to preserve the central bedrock as ‘an ancient sacrificial site’, but this area was also to be refreshed with a platform and a set of steps (Fig. 7.6) in which the ochre graves were to be marked as human-shaped features made from red bricks (Myyrmäen keskustan julkisen ulkotilan yleissuunnitelma 13.3.2017, p. 23) In addition, an information stand presenting the history of the site was going to be built.

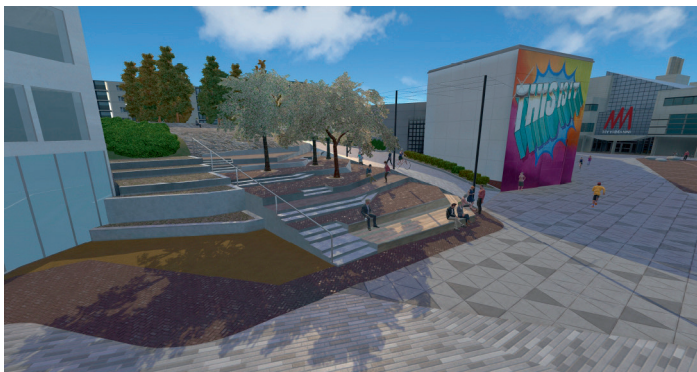


Figure 7.6. The Jönsas bedrock in the new city plans. (Drawing: Myyrmäen keskustan julkisen ulkotilan yleissuunnitelma 13.3.2017, p. 18.)

In addition to the ancient cemetery, the plans had also taken into account the ancient coastline that was going to be represented by large smooth stones placed along the central avenue of the area (Fig. 7.7; Myyrmäen keskustan julkisen ulkotilan yleissuunnitelma 13.3.2017, p. 23). When Ahola interviewed Koivisto (personal comment 12 Oct 2017) on the topic, Koivisto explained that the idea was for the stones to function as reminders of both the changing coastline and the ancient graves. Intriguingly, the idea strongly echoes the interpretation of the meaning that the smoothed stones might have had also during the Stone Age.



Figure 7.7. The water-smoothed stones from Jönsas as an inspiration for urban art. (Drawing: Myyrmäen keskustan julkisen ulkotilan yleissuunnitelma 13.3.2017, p. 22.)

7.4. Site biography of the Taatsi offering place, Kittilä

After investigating the site biography of the prehistoric Jönsas site, we now turn our gaze to another ritual site, the Taatsi *sieidi*. *Sieiddit* (singular *sieidi*, North Saami) are offering places that have traditionally been used in the Saami ethnic religion³. The Saami are the indigenous people of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula whose livelihood has traditionally included hunting, fishing, gathering, and reindeer herding. In connection to livelihood, offerings of most commonly animals, meat, antlers, and metal were made to *sieiddit*. *Sieiddit* were considered to be living subjects that could communicate with humans, eat, and take revenge if betrayed, but they could also be destroyed. The connection between humans and *sieiddit* was reciprocal; a *sieidi* helped humans and in return it received its share of the catch – and either party could cause harm if the other did not keep the promises that were given (Paulaharju 1932; Itkonen 1946; Schanche 2004: 5; Äikäs 2015).

The *sieidi* of Taatsi and the sacred cliff of Taatsinkirkko (“the church of Taatsi”) in Kittilä are among the most well-known Saami sacred places in Finland (Fig. 7.8), mentioned in several written sources (Fellman 1906; Andersson 1914; Paulaharju 1962 [1922], 1932; Äyräpää 1931). Samuli Paulaharju (1932: 50), a schoolteacher and collector of ethnographic knowledge, relates how reindeer antlers, head bones, and fish bones used to be found on top of the *sieidi* of Taatsi. Today the site is curated by Metsähallitus (Finnish Forestry Agency), described in various blogs and books (e.g. Kesäläinen and Kejonen 2017), and visited by tourists.



Figure 7.8. Taatsi and Taatsinkirkko in Kittilä. (Photograph: A. Malinen 2011.)

3. We use the term ethnic religion to describe a world view that partly predated the arrival of Christianity but also lived simultaneously with it (Äikäs and Salmi 2013). We are, nevertheless, aware that even the term ‘religion’ is an etic concept that does not fully cover the notions of a world view that included all aspects of living and livelihood (Äikäs et al. 2009).

7.4.1. From the 10th century onwards

According to datings from archaeological finds, Taatsi received its first offerings around the 10th century AD. These included a pike whose bones were dated to 900 ± 25 BP (Hela-1878), corrected to cal AD 1040–1180 (Reimer et al. 2004). This was the oldest bone material found at *sieidi* sites in Finland so far and reflects the long use period of the *sieidi* of Taatsi. Similarly to other studied *sieidi* sites, the first offerings consisted of wild species. The bones of wood grouse (*Tetrao urogallus*) unfortunately remain undated, but based on evidence from other sites, they were likely to appear in the offerings at Taatsi starting from the 13th century AD. (Salmi et al. 2011; Äikäs 2015.)

It seems that fishers who were fishing at the nearby lakes of Rotkojärvi and Taatsinjärvi made the first offerings. These magnificent rock formations might have caught the attention of earlier hunters too; on top of the shore cliff, 150 metres east of the *sieidi*, there are two hunting pits that are traditionally dated to the Stone Age (Halinen 2005).

7.4.2. From the 17th century onwards

A reindeer bone found on the western side of the *sieidi* gave considerably newer results, dating to 80 ± 25 BP (Hela-1880), corrected to cal AD 1690–1920 (Reimer et al. 2004). (Salmi et al. 2011; Äikäs 2015.) This is somewhat late compared to datings from other sites with a peak in reindeer bones in AD 1400–1650. Wild and domesticated reindeer cannot be separated in osteological analyses of this material. However, it is highly probable that the emergence of reindeer offerings was related to the spread of pastoralism and indicates that the religious importance of reindeer increased at the same time as its changed economic role (Salmi et al. 2018).

In addition to animal bones, also an undecorated bone ring was offered to the *sieidi*. No accurate dating could be obtained, but the way the ring has been made indicates the historical period. The ring can be seen as belonging to the tradition of giving personal items, such as jewellery, to *sieiddit* (Äikäs 2015).

All the ancient offerings were deposited on the eastern side of the *sieidi* and on a small terrace on top of the cliff on which the *sieidi* was located. This was the side from which there was a visual connection to the cliff of Taatsinkirkko. Hence, the connection between these two places seems to have been relevant to the people making offerings. Äikäs has suggested elsewhere that in a world view in which *sieiddit* were considered as living and acting subjects, the eastern side of the *sieidi* of Taatsi could be seen as an area where the *sieidi* interacted with the sacred cliff of Taatsinkirkko (Äikäs 2012). This gave a special ritual meaning for this side of the *sieidi*. Paulaharju (1932: 50) mentions that offerings were also brought to Taatsinkirkko and that offering songs were sung there because it ‘boomed’. This might refer to the echoes that are evident at Taatsinkirkko and create a particular soundscape in the area in front of the cliff (Rainio et al. 2018). Oral tradition claims that Taatsinkirkko, with its pew-like stones, has later been used for church gatherings. This story might nevertheless originate from the name of the place, which refers to a church.

In his book from 1922, Samuli Paulaharju relates how he was told that the *sieidi* was respected by many. The fishermen brought the biggest head from their fish catch to the *sieidi*. A birch pole was used to lift the head on top of the rock. Similarly, deer hunters brought the finest antlers to the *sieidi*. And reindeer herders came all the way from Koutokeino to live near the lake with their herds in late winter and brought offerings to the *sieidi* so that their herd might prosper. But Paulaharju mentions that already before his time the *sieidi* had lost the respect of some people; the top part of the rock formation, “the hat of the *sieidi*”, had been pushed down, the offerings were thrown in the lake by unbelievers, and the last wooden pole was broken into pieces decades ago. (Paulaharju 1962 [1922]: 138–139; Paulaharju 1932: 50–51.) There might have been many reasons for this. Also among the Saami, *sieiddit* that were believed to have lost their powers could be destroyed, but destroying *sieiddit* was also a part of the Lutheran Christian missionary work (Äikäs 2011).

7.4.3. The 1960s

Ancient offerings ceased at Saami offering sites in the 17th century possibly due to the rising influence of Lutheran Christianity (Rydving 1993; Kylli 2012; Äikäs and Salmi 2013). However, this does not mean that these places were forgotten or fell out of use. Coins were among the early metal offerings found at Saami offering sites in Sweden (Serning 1956: passim; Hedman 2003: 161–189; Fossum 2006: 108). Written sources tell that coins were still given as offerings in the beginning of the 20th century (Paulaharju 1932; Kjellström 1987: 24–33). The oldest coins from Taatsi are a Finnish mark from 1963 and a Norwegian crown from 1960. Coins might be left as offerings following the old traditions, but they could also be part of a touristic performance where coins are left at meaningful places. Coins from Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland show that by the 20th century, Taatsi had become a place visited by tourists. Some of the coins might have dropped from the pockets of the visitors but the careful placement of some coins in the crevices of the rock indicates an intentional deposit.

A silver ring with the engraving '1953' – which indicates when the ring was acquired and provides a *terminus post quem* for when it was left to the *sieidi* – could have been left in connection with the above-mentioned tradition of leaving personal objects to the *sieidi*. Apart from the Saami tradition, the motive for this offering might also have stemmed from the more widespread habit of leaving personal objects in sacred places. At a sacred spring in Sigulda, Latvia, this tradition has even been commercialized so that people can buy rings and other 'personal' items from a stall and then throw them into the spring (Äikäs 2015: 165).

Local informants related that the *sieidi* was emptied of coins in the 1960s. This explains the lack of older coins at the site. Some bones may also have been removed during this cleaning.

7.4.4. The year 2008

In 2008, Äikäs carried out archaeological excavations at the *sieidi* of Taatsi. During these excavations, in addition to ancient offerings, we also documented contemporary finds. They were placed in cracks and on flat areas of the stone formation, and in some easily visible places there were accumulations of finds. Recent visits manifested themselves as coins and personal objects that were left at the site. Some more peculiar finds were pieces of quartzite and altogether 29 partly burned tea lights that were placed on rock shelves and on the ground (Fig. 7.9). These kinds of offerings most closely resemble the contemporary Pagan activities documented at archaeological sites in Britain (Wallis 2003; Blain and Wallis 2007).



Figure 7.9. Tea lights on a rock shelf of the *sieidi*. (Photograph: T. Äikäs 2008.)

Here the interpretation of the activities as contemporary Pagan is made somewhat more uncertain by the fact that a shaman entrepreneur called the Shaman of Nulituinen has organized shamanistic sessions, so-called 'Lapp baptisms', at Taatsi. His activities could be interpreted in the framework of touristic practices rather than contemporary Pagan rituals – but of course these can in some cases be intertwined. Some of the above-mentioned objects might have been left there during these sessions. In an interview, the shaman nevertheless denied leaving anything behind (Äikäs 2015). The case of the Shaman of Nulituinen is one example of performances where touristic behaviour and the experience of spirituality might be intertwined. In contrast to personal contemporary Pagan experiences, people attending these organized 'shamanistic sessions' might just want to have a nice experience on their holiday or feel 'the magic of Lapland' without any religious connotations. On the other hand, also a touristic performance can provide spiritual experiences.

Ethnologist Helena Ruotsala (2008: 52) has stated that the Lapp baptism performed at Taatsi transforms a sacred place into a product:

Lapp baptism at the *sieidi* of Taatsi is an example of how local people's sacred place, their magic or historical landscape, has been transformed to a product, a play for tourists without any ethnographic origin – or rather, to a stage of a play. In that sense it enters the area of trans-cultural and trans-local politics of ownership, monetary value and representation. The *sieidi* of Taatsi presents an ideal stage for Lapp baptism in the tourist industry, because the place is 'authentic'. In a sense Lapp baptism is also authentic: it is an authentic part of the history of tourism in Lapland, but it does not belong to the culture or history of Lapland or Sápmi in any other form.

In 2008, most of the documented contemporary finds were located on the eastern side of the *sieidi* and thus continued the old tradition. This was most likely due to the infrastructure erected by Metsähallitus. The *sieidi* of Taatsi is situated by a canyon lake where the cliff from the shore terrace to the waterline is steep and rocky. Hence, the best way to approach the *sieidi* was by using the wooden steps and platform built on the eastern side of the *sieidi*.

7.4.5. The 2010s

In the beginning of the 2010s, Metsähallitus dismantled the stairs and the platform that had fallen into disrepair. After this, the easiest way to approach the *sieidi* was a narrow path on the western side of the *sieidi*. This led to a shift in the use of the *sieidi* – the number of finds deposited on the western side grew significantly. At the same time, the variation in the find material grew: there were no more tea lights, but instead there were decorations made of organic materials and jewellery. The first category included a doll made of twigs, a piece of birch bark sewn together, and a wooden plate with a rune symbol and hairs attached to it (Fig. 7.10).



Figure 7.10. In the 2010s, the contemporary offerings at Taatsi included coins, a twig doll, birch bark, and a rune symbol. (Photographs: A. Rainio 2015 and T. Äikäs 2016.)

The increased number and greater variety of contemporary finds at Taatsi in the 2010s in comparison to 2006 is evident from the visits made to the *sieidi* in 2011, 2015, and 2016. Interestingly, this coincides with the growing number of contemporary finds at the Saami offering site of Áhkku in Alta, Norway. Kjell Olsen (2017: 122) has documented an increase in the contemporary finds starting in about 2013.

One especially striking thing in the finds from the 2010s was the appearance of rune symbols, which are traditionally connected to Scandinavian – not Saami – mythology. A similar example of the use of runes at a supposed Saami offering site⁴ is known at Offerholmen, Porsanger, Norway where runes were carved into a stick that was raised at the highest point of an islet – not in the actual stone structure (Äikäs and Spangen 2016; Spangen 2016: 217–219). Even though there are examples of the use of Germanic runes in Saami areas and by Saami people, they are not known to be connected to the Saami ethnic religion (Rasmussen 2016: 204; Spangen 2016: 218).

In many contemporary Pagan movements, it is acceptable to mix rituals and symbols from different cultural contexts (Blain and Wallis 2007), and this has also been evident in the material culture from sacred sites (Jonuks and Äikäs 2019). This is also the case in folk metal music that seeks inspiration from different elements of folk religion and ethnic religions. Some folk metal fans who are inspired by Finnish bands are known to visit Lapland (personal communication Järvelä 2017) but whether they visit *sieiddit* or leave anything at the sites requires further investigations.

So far, the contemporary offerings at Taatsi have not raised a wide discussion on the appropriate use of sacred places. There has been an international debate on whether this kind of use should be seen as ‘ritual litter’ and contamination or as a continuation of the old offering tradition. Also contemporary Pagan groups have sometimes viewed it as important to clean sites of offerings that do not decompose. (Wallis and Blain 2003: 310; Houlbrook 2015, 2016; Jonuks and Äikäs 2019.)

7.5. Discussion

The site biographies of these two ritual sites suggest that these places were visited and remembered for considerable periods of time. Indeed, in the case of the Jönsas site, the sequences of use and reuse cover a period from the Stone Age to the emergence of the Metal Ages, while the Taatsi offering place can be connected with ethnic religion from the 10th century to as far as the early 20th century. Accordingly, these sites were clearly part of the social memory of the prehistoric and historic populations of the area. Although these populations would not have used the term ‘cultural heritage’, the material remains of commemoration and meaning-making suggest that the core idea of heritage existed even deep in prehistory (cf. Bradley 2000).

Although – as far as we know – Jönsas and Taatsi were not in use simultaneously and are geographically located in different parts of modern-day Finland, they nevertheless show several points of connection. Indeed, in both places, magnificent or somehow anomalous landscape elements seem to have produced significance as well as contributed to the recognition and remembrance of the sites. This seems to imply that ritual activities were clearly attached to landscape. Indeed, the Jönsas and Taatsi sites are not the only ancient sacred sites in Finnish territory connected with outstanding landscape features. On the contrary, many but not all *sieidi* sites are connected with somehow anomalous topographical features (e.g. Äikäs 2015), a phenomenon that applies also to Finnish prehistoric rock art (Lahelma 2008). It thus seems that the topography of landscape played a significant role within the cosmology of prehistoric and historical northern populations. Indeed, Bender (1998: 93) has already suggested that particular places and pathways used by hunter-gatherers seem to have gradually accumulated meanings and ritual significance and thus become marked in some way. This seems to be

4. The current interpretation of this site points to a wolf trap instead of an offering site, but the previous academic interpretation still affects the popular use of this site (Spangen 2016).

true in the case of our examples, in which natural landscape features were treated with ritualized practices – burials, offerings, or feasts. Even though at first glimpse these practices might seem completely different, their ultimate purpose was the same – to somehow mark and engage with a significant place. These anomalous topographical features invoke bodily activity and interaction with the place and thus affect people's remembrance of the place.

While there are similarities between the ritual use of the Jönsas and Taatsi sites, there are also differences. For example, it seems that during the course of time, the Taatsi site was always furnished with offerings. Although the materials used might have varied from food to ornaments and coins, the ritual practice of leaving offerings nevertheless remained, although it carried different meanings in different times. However, the ritual practices conducted at the Jönsas site seem to show more variation, although the significance of the site remained. This might be due to the considerable length of time the Jönsas site was used. Indeed, oral tradition might easily have prevailed at the Taatsi site, while the Jönsas site – used for millennia – was sometimes forgotten and then rediscovered and recreated. In other words, the significance of the site was somehow passed on with new generations – and even new populations – bringing forth their own ways of engaging and making sense of the site. In this sense, the cultural heritage of the past was clearly born as a cultural process.

Interestingly, the idea of heritage-making as a cultural process also seems to be present when we examine how modern people have engaged with the sites. Indeed, during the last decade the Taatsi site has gained several new meanings from local ethnic religion to a touristic site and a ritual place for contemporary Pagan movements. This is not entirely surprising since one of the major objectives in visiting religious heritage sites is the development of identity through spiritual enlightenment (Singh 2016: 135). In the case of the Taatsi site, the doctoral dissertation by Äikäs (2011) might also have contributed to the phenomenon. The dissertation was published in 2011 and it included a list of known *sieidi* sites in Finland, as well as information on the excavations at Taatsi. The dissertation was written in Finnish and it was also read by non-professionals (it was referred to at least on one hiking-related discussion forum). By offering research results and knowledge on *sieiddit*, this dissertation might also have encouraged further visits to *sieiddit*.

What is remarkable is that modern people visiting the Taatsi site clearly wanted to leave something behind. These items could be understood as offerings, but at the same time, it seems as if they wanted to somehow mark the site. Regardless of their original meaning, these items nevertheless contributed to the further recognition of the site. Curiously, a completely different thing happened at Jönsas, where the local art museum covered the old ochre grave reconstruction and thus actively contributed to the further forgetting of the site. If the site itself had been marked somehow, it might have remained in the social memory of the local people. Consequently, the visitors of the Myyrmäki House or the art museum would have understood the meaning of the ochre grave reconstruction. However, because the site was gradually forgotten, it is no wonder the art museum – focusing on modern art – was not interested in the old museum installation with very little connection to modern-day Myyrmäki.

Probably due to the oblivion of the Jönsas site, the site shows no evidence of contemporary Pagan movements. Echoes to the past can nevertheless be seen on the Jönsas bedrock, which seems to be a common place to socialize even today (Fig. 7.5). However, what used to be a significant place and perhaps accessible only to a few is now the dwelling area of the outcasts of society. Although not very appealing for heritage management, this activity is nevertheless a part of the Jönsas biography and consequently part of its cultural heritage.

Even though the Jönsas site is almost completely forgotten today, it was clearly not so during the intensive excavation period of the 1970s. Indeed, during this time, the results of the excavations were used in city planning and especially in naming the newly made streets. What is interesting, however, is that most of the street names are profane. Indeed, instead of emphasizing the newly discovered cemetery, for example, the street names are mainly related to subsistence strategies. In this sense, the

recreation of the site is also entwined with archaeological tradition and represents an era during which religion and ritual were largely neglected (e.g. Insoll 2004). A similar tradition can actually be seen also in a brochure produced for one of the 1970s school exhibitions (Vantaan Martinlaakson radan esihistorialliset asuinpaikat 14.2. –14.3.1974), in which the Jönsas cemetery was explained with one paragraph while the main emphasis of the brochure was on the discovered artefacts and the interpretation of the ancient subsistence strategies.

During the past decade, however, a shift has occurred, making religion and ritual a routine part of archaeological research (Insoll 2011). Indeed, this shift can also be seen in Ahola's work that highlights the ritual practices conducted at the Jönsas cemetery and consequently also interprets the site itself as a ritual place (e.g. Ahola 2015, 2016, 2017). Similarly, the work of Äikäs (2012, 2015) also focuses on religion and ritual practices rather than issues of livelihood connected with the *sieiddit*. As both the modern city plans of the Myyrmäki area and the contemporary use of the Taatsi site emphasize ritual activities, it seems that current archaeological research has again played a key role in the definition of the sites. What is interesting, however, is that the heritage-making process also portrays the research paradigms of the era.

7.6. Conclusions

The case studies of Jönsas and Taatsi demonstrate how a site-biographical approach allows us to study the cultural process of heritage-making both in the past as well as in the present. This again challenges the preservation ethos that is still often typical for heritage management. As we have shown, archaeological sites do not freeze after their prehistoric or historical use; instead, the past and the present are intertwined at these places. Previous use as well as our archaeological interpretation of it affects contemporary use, and our contemporary knowledge influences how we see the past. This is especially evident in the case of Jönsas, where ritual interpretations have been highlighted according to the research paradigm of the time. We see heritage-making as a comprehensive process covering different actions and uses of places where the past is an integral part of creating the meaning of the place. Hence contemporary ritual use as well as urban town planning can be a part of heritage-making.

When we investigated the use and reuse of the Jönsas and Taatsi sites in prehistory and historical times, it also became apparent that the core idea of heritage existed even deep in prehistory. According to this study, especially sites connected with ritual practices were remembered and used or reused for considerable lengths of time. Curiously, when the ritual nature of the ancient sites was known, they were also reused or recreated with practices resonating with the prior religious activities also within contemporary society. It thus seems that sites connected with ritual practices fascinate not only the minds of past populations but also of contemporary Finns. Considering the increasing amount of Pagan activities at the Taatsi site during recent years and the way the ritual nature of the Jönsas site has been taken into account in new city plans, it seems that non-Christian religion and ritual are more highly esteemed than fifty years or so ago.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that archaeological sites should be seen as active places. Jönsas and Taatsi did not function as static religious sites of a certain time period but gained changing meanings after their original use. In their life cycle they might have been used for centuries or forgotten once in a while and later rediscovered and recreated. Even when almost destroyed by modern-day land use, they nevertheless continue their cycle of life. Accordingly, the future challenge of heritage management is to keep track of the continuous site biography and meaning-making process of each site.

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