

Sammallahdenmäki (Finland)

No 579rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Bronze Age Burial Site of Sammallahdenmäki
<i>Location</i>	Lappi Tl., Province of Satakunta
<i>State Party</i>	Finland
<i>Date</i>	26 June 1998

Justification by State Party

The prehistoric site of Sammallahdenmäki forms the largest, most varied, and most complete monument from the Scandinavian Bronze Age to be found on the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia. Situated in a rugged, rocky landscape, the cairns of Sammallahdenmäki represent the monumental architecture of the period at its best. The ancient coastline is still present on the cliffs of Sammallahdenmäki.

Similar cairns are known from the western coast of the Gulf of Bothnia (Ångermanland, Uppland, and Medelpad in Sweden). However, the stone cairns known from these coastal regions generally occur only in small groups rather than forming extensive cairn areas like Sammallahdenmäki. Together, the 33 cairns of Sammallahdenmäki form a monumental array unique to the area of the Scandinavian Bronze Age culture in terms of the number and variety of its graves and its preserved natural surroundings. The Sammallahdenmäki cairns are also unique examples of Bronze Age religious practices and the monumental architecture related with them. The graves have clearly also functioned as landmarks, being located in highly visible places on the coastal cliffs.

The degree of authenticity of the site area is very high, in relation to both the individual graves and the surrounding natural landscape. Owing to its remote location and the appreciation of the local inhabitants, the site has been preserved almost untouched in its pristine natural surroundings. The ancient site is surrounded by a mainly natural landscape devoid of later structures such as houses, highways, and power lines.

Criteria iii and iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

History and description

History

The Scandinavian Bronze Age culture, from 1500 BC to 500 BC, included the coastal zone of continental Finland and the land archipelago. Bronze is extensively represented in its material culture, although neither copper nor tin is to be found in the area, the metals being largely acquired through trade and exchange. The value of the objects is enhanced by their association with burials and religious sites, such as cairns and other types of grave.

Stone burial cairns constructed of boulders, without earth fill, over cists of stone or wood, were erected on cliffs with a view on the sea all along the coast of Finland; more than 3000 have been identified. They contained both cremation and inhumation burials of members of the community with all the associated funerary objects (grave goods)..

The site of Sammallahdenmäki is associated with sun worship rituals, a cult which spread from Scandinavia over the entire region. It is also a manifestation of land ownership by kinship groups, a practice introduced with agriculture. At the time the hill of Sammallahdenmäki was completely bare of trees and was probably chosen for its unimpeded view of the sea and its openness to the sun in all directions.

Four cairns were excavated in 1891, leading to a better understanding of their contents and of their use. The number of known cairns is greater than the number of known settlements from this period. Thus, the spread of human population can be better observed through the distribution of graves. Many cairns are directly associated with settlements, most probably those of their builders, but the settlement of the people buried at Sammallahdenmäki has not yet been identified

Description

The Sammallahdenmäki cemetery includes 33 burial cairns and is the largest and best cairn site in all Finland; of the cairns, 28 can be securely dated to the Early Bronze Age. They lie along the crest and upper slopes of a 700m long ridge, and are disposed in several distinct clusters.

The structures were built using granite boulders that were quarried from the cliff face below the crest of the ridge or collected from the site itself. Some are also built in drystone masonry. They can be classified into several different groups according to their shapes and sizes: small low round cairns, large mound-like cairns, and round walled cairns. They enclose cists made from stone slabs.

The site also contains two unusual structures. One is oval and elongated (24m by 7.5-8m), and seems to

have been enlarged in three successive stages. It contains only charcoal, no bones of any sort having ever been found. The other is a large quadrangular cairn, known as the "Church Floor" (*Kirkonlaatia*), which is unique in Finland and extremely rare in Scandinavia. Its surface is flat, it has no outer wall, and the layer of stones are thinner towards the centre. Excavations revealed an internal structure in the centre made of stone flags. It is still difficult to determine whether this structure is linked with religious ceremonies or whether it is a tomb.

None of the Sammallahdenmäki cairns have produced any bronze implements. Their layout and location indicates that these cairns most probably belong to the Early Bronze Age.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The cairn area nominated for inscription, which covers 35ha, is protected under the provisions of the Finnish Antiquities Act (295/63), which makes it an offence to dig, cover, change, harm, or remove an ancient monument without prior authorization of the National Board of Antiquities (Museovirasto). The boundaries of the site and of its buffer zone (55ha) were defined in 1993 by the provincial government in agreement with the National Board.

The site and its surroundings are also protected by means of the Finnish regional planning system. Regional plans, which must be approved by the Ministry of the Environment, constitute the most stringent form of legislative protection in Finland. In the successive Regional Plans for Satakunta from 1985 to the present, the buffer zone is listed as a "cultural-historically important environment as defined on the basis of landscape, historical, architectural-historical or architectural-artistic criteria."

Management

The site is in private ownership.

The National Board of Antiquities is responsible for the management of the site. There is no permanent staff specifically charged with the promotion or the maintenance of the site.

Agriculture is the only form of development allowed in the area. No type of construction or clear felling is permitted without prior authorization from the responsible agency. The buffer zone consists mostly of outcrops, fields, and forested areas. It is adjacent to the Saarnijärvi Natural Preserve, a protected natural area.

The management plan for the site drawn up by the National Board of Antiquities aims at keeping it in an untouched state. Maintenance is limited to clearing fallen branches and trees from the site and its paths, and the removal of deciduous saplings from the cairns themselves. No more than a few days are considered to be needed each year for this purpose. Visitor access

is directed by means of marked paths. The natural aspect of the site is considered to be of significant value in understanding and presenting it.

Some 100 people visit the area annually, mainly local schoolchildren. The area is accessible to tourists by marked routes from major highways. An interpretation board displays information on the site and guided tours can be organized through the National Board of Antiquities.

The site is part of the "Footsteps of the Forefathers" touring route developed by a local tourist society. This initiative is included in a larger project of Site Register for Prehistory Touring.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The site was first mentioned in 1878 in an inventory of ancient sites in the region. Some excavation is said to have been carried out on some of the cairns but no account of the results is known to exist. The first scientific excavation took place in 1891, revealing the presence of 17 cairns. A survey in 1961 noted the presence of 26 cairns, and a regional mapping project in 1990 registered a total of 33 cairns.

Little restoration or reconstruction has been thought necessary. The cairns excavated in 1891 and in recent years have been restored to their original state. Some cairns that were plundered in the 19th century have been left in the state that they were in after these illegal interventions since no information is available on their original shape and size.

Authenticity

The degree of authenticity of the site is very high. The cairns are built of granite, which does not erode easily. The surroundings have remained untouched and the cairns themselves have been subject to very little disturbance, apart from the handful that were plundered in the 19th century and those that have been excavated. The remote location of the site has protected it from development, and the local population has taken pride in protecting it.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in May 1999.

Qualities

The site of Sammallahdenmäki offers a valuable perspective on the Bronze Age in the area. The completeness and the integrity of the site make it an invaluable resource for future research on the social behaviour of societies of the time.

Comparative analysis

ICOMOS consulted Professor John Coles (formerly University of Cambridge, UK), who is recognized as

the leading expert on the Bronze Age of northern Europe, on the comparative cultural significance of the Sammallahdenmäki cemetery. In his report he stressed that “the cairns are ... spectacular in the setting, ... they are mostly unexamined, and are remote,” and as a result “they present a quite unrivalled picture of the Bronze Age landscape untrammelled by modern rubbish such as traffic and power lines ... [the site] is well worthy of very serious consideration for listing.”

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The decision to leave the environment of the monuments untouched is welcomed, since it increases the opportunity to study their environmental context.

However, the State Party should be encouraged to make provision for the impact of eventual inscription on the World Heritage List, which would inevitably result in greatly increased visitor numbers. There is a need for promotion at a national and international level so as to raise public awareness of the scientific and symbolic value of this site.

The ICOMOS expert mission was provided with details of the management plan currently being prepared (in conformity with the ICCROM-UNESCO-ICOMOS *Management Guidelines for World Heritage Sites*). These have four levels of priority: Priority A deals with the recording and physical protection of the cairns, Priority B with interpretation (signage, leaflets, etc) and consultation with the local community, Priority C with improvement of the setting of the cairns (including management of the tree cover), disabled access, and contingency plans for a limited increase in visitor numbers, and Priority D with contingency plans for substantially increased numbers.

ICOMOS commends the State Party for the action that it is taking. It feels, however, that higher priority should be given to planning to cope with the anticipated increase in visitor numbers.

Brief description

The more than thirty granite burial cairns of the Bronze Age cemetery at Sammallahdenmäki bear exceptional witness to the social and religious structures of northern Europe more than three millennia ago.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

Criterion iii The Sammallahdenmäki cairn cemetery bears exceptional witness to the society of the Bronze Age of Scandinavia.

Criterion iv The Sammallahdenmäki cemetery is an outstanding example of Bronze Age funerary practices in Scandinavia.