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COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS AND THE MEDIEVAL NORDIC WORLD

NORSE COLONIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Edited by Cordelia Heß, Solveig Marie Wang, and Erik Wolf



RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN THE NORTH

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Colonial Entanglements and the Medieval Nordic World

Religious Minorities in the North: History, Politics, and Culture



Edited by
Jonathan Adams
Cordelia Heß
Christhard Hoffmann

Volume 8

Colonial Entanglements and the Medieval Nordic World



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Within the project, we have been trying to meet some of the demands indigenous scholars and indigenous peoples have directed at an academic culture that has tended to exploit, ignore, and diminish their efforts and cultures. Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu (Greenland National Museum & Archives) has been our Greenlandic project partner, and we would like to thank Dr Christian Koch Madsen for his cooperation and for hosting our research stays in Nuuk. We would also like to thank Ditte Melitha Kristensen, Hans Lange, Aká Simonsen, and Ebbe Volquardsen of Nuuk for helping us during these stays and for sharing their experiences with us.

However, due to the specificities of the funding, it has not been possible to remunerate any of the Greenlandic colleagues, employ student assistants in Nuuk, or in any other way “give back” to the local communities. We discuss options for reciprocal relations in academic research about indigenous communities in the postface of this book, and we would welcome continuous discussions in Germany and elsewhere about how these relations can be developed.

The present volume originated from a conference held at the University of Greifswald in February 2023 as part of this project. We would like to thank all the participants, also those who were not able to contribute to this volume, for generously sharing their time, thoughts, and experiences with research on colonialism and the medieval Nordic world with us. We would also like to thank Clemens Räthel, Henriette Hellinger, Marierose von Ledebur, and Paul Kirschstein, for making this conference a well-functioning success.

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Cordelia Heß, Solveig Marie Wang, and Erik Wolf
Greifswald, July 2024

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and Aaron Deter-Wolf. She has also published the article “Examining the Physical Signatures of Pre-Electric Tattooing Tools and Techniques,” co-written with Aaron Deter-Wolf and Danny Riday in *EXARC* (2022), and the article “Chalcolithic Tattooing: Historical and Experimental Evaluation of the Tyrolean Iceman’s Body Markings” in *The European Journal of Archaeology* with Deter-Wolf, Robitaille, Riday, and Aurélien Burlot (2024).

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Cordelia Heß

Colonial Entanglements and the Medieval Nordic World: An Introduction

I am quite unable
To capture seals as they do
I am quite unable.
[. . .]
Dance songs I do not know them
To dance as they do
I am quite unable.¹

1 Medieval Colonialism, Racism, and Religious Minorities

Leaving aside for a moment the borders of modern nation states, which all too often have defined the contours of scholarly projects in their claim to represent continuity between pre-modern and modern identities and entities, the medieval Nordic world was sprawling. People who spoke the northern versions of Germanic languages – Old Norse with its two principal dialects East and West Norse – settled not only in the more inviting parts of the Fennoscandic landmass, but also throughout the entire North Atlantic, the British Isles, elsewhere in Europe, and, briefly, in North America.² In most of these areas, they shared the land with people who spoke different languages: belonging to the Finno-Ugric and Arctic language groups, and some languages which have disappeared since then. All of these peoples were confronted with Christianity and Christians at about the same time, with different reactions and outcomes.

The present book is an attempt to cover one specific aspect of the broad field of “the Global Middle Ages” by focusing on the Northern fringes of Europe as well as their societies’ contemporary colonial entanglements.³ In Greenland and Sápmi,

1 “I am quite unable / Taptuna,” in *Poems of the Inuit*, ed. John Robert Colombo (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1981), 91.

2 Daniel Bruun, *The Icelandic Colonization of Greenland and the Finding of Vineland* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2016 [1918]).

3 For different definitions of “the Global Middle Ages” – conceptual, methodological, and thematic – see Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, “Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages,” *Past & Present* 238, suppl. 13 (2018): 1–44.

the non-Germanic-speaking populations became subject to colonial oppression and domination in post-medieval times. Acknowledging the catastrophic impact this had on their societies and cultures informs our approach to researching these regions. However, the medieval Nordic world also makes it necessary to think whether continuities between the eleventh and sixteenth century and today are warranted, and in which cases a simple equation between contemporary and pre-modern identities, groups and processes makes no sense. With this framework, this book also contributes to the emerging field of medieval postcolonial studies.

Defining power relations between different peoples in the same area before 1500 as colonialism is not yet an established terminology, and while the significance of colonialism for the development of modern racism is firmly established,⁴ the intersections of medieval concepts of race and different forms of asymmetrical power relations in areas of settlement have not yet been explored. One of the reasons for this is the specific relation between Christian and non-Christian populations in the North. The Saga literature, which has served most prominently for the few attempts so far to include the Medieval North into the Global Middle Ages and postcolonial studies,⁵ has been written by Christian clerics who remembered the pre-Christian past of their societies in an ambiguous, partly judgmental, partly also admiring way. In this context, the equation “race as religion,” which has been developed as a description of the increasingly essentialistic and biologicistic Christian view on Jews and Muslims,⁶ makes little sense as a description of these clerics’ relation to their own community and past.

The adoption of the Christian religion, whether forced or voluntarily or anything between these poles, has been a major part of colonialism in the entire modern era, contributing to the erasure of indigenous cultures and rituals. The entanglements between the comprehensive process of Christian expansion in Northern and Eastern Europe from the eleventh century on and colonial relations in these areas have, however, not yet been explored; partly because of the lack of an accepted definition of colonialism *avant la lettre*, and partly because of the generally slow adoption of postcolonial terminology and theory in medieval studies of these areas. Conse-

⁴ See for example Julian Go, “Postcolonial Possibilities for the Sociology of Race,” in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos, 3rd edition, Routledge Student Readers (London, New York: Routledge, 2022), 579–94.

⁵ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Basil Arnould Price, “Queer Indigenous Relationality in *Finnboga Saga Ramma*,” *Speculum* 99, no. 2 (2024): 381–408.

⁶ See for example David Nirenberg, “Race and Religion,” in *A Cultural History of Race*, ed. Thomas Hahn and Marius Turda, The Cultural Histories Series (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 67–80.

quently, we lack a comprehensive framework for the significance of the adoption of Christianity for later colonial relations. It is, however, striking that the common scholarly and popular narratives about this process differ a lot depending on who was Christianized: a conscious political strategy by the Scandinavian kings, a passive and forced adoption by the Saami. These narratives are quite obviously shaped by later colonial relations and need to be investigated in detail. Why should people who spoke Norse languages have been much more positive and susceptible to Christianity than Finno-Ugric speaking people, who were exposed to the new religion at the same time and under similar circumstances?

Throughout the book, we use the term “indigenous peoples” for the non-Norse speaking populations, but this raises issues as well, even if used as a strategic anachronism. Indigeneity in itself is a term defined by United Nations conventions, developed in relation to groups affected by European overseas expansion after the sixteenth century. It relies on a cultural continuity of pre- and postcolonial societies, as well as on a concept of colonialism with a moment zero – aspects very difficult or impossible to live up to by medieval peoples whom we often only know by the ethnonyms given to them in Latin historiography. Both Latin and Old Norse historiography has an abundance of ethnonyms for people in Northern Fennoscandia, but only one, and a very pejorative one, for everyone the Norse met between the Greenlandic West Coast and Newfoundland.⁷

The Saami are the only officially recognized indigenous group in Europe, but an identity between the people identifying as Saami in today’s Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia on the one hand and the groups denoted in medieval sources as *finnr*, *scritefenni*, *bjarmar*, and others, can be largely assumed but is impossible to apply to an entire imagined collective of people. Archaeological studies, but also interdisciplinary historical studies, have helped to deconstruct the inherently modern idea of stable, clearly delimited cultural identities. This also applies to the medieval Fennoscandic area, where people of different languages and cultures have lived side by side for centuries, before the relations between governmentally defined “Saami” and Norse-speaking people turned into colonialism at some point after 1500.⁸

Several Arctic peoples have lived in Greenland since the period of the European Middle Ages, and while today’s Inuit may be closer to the group called the Thule culture in archaeological classifications than to the previous Dorset culture,

7 Kirsten A. Seaver, ““Pygmies” of the Far North,” *Journal of World History* 19, no. 1 (2008): 63–87.

8 See for example Solveig Marie Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia: An Interdisciplinary Study of Norse-Saami Relations in the Medieval Period*. Religious Minorities in the North: History, Politics, and Culture 5 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

it can hardly be assumed that they were the same immutable collective of people since the 1200s. And if we accept that medieval identities and group adherences may have been more complicated than the ones forcibly created in the eighteenth century, then the processes of Othering, racialization, and exclusion must also have been more intricate and less accessible to our understanding of these processes. Medieval Studies need to complicate the idea of a continuous identity of peoples and groups and at the same time be partisan to the postcolonial struggles of colonized peoples in Fennoscandia and elsewhere.

Over the past decade, Medieval Studies have started to engage with the paradigms of Postcolonial and Indigenous Studies; it seems premature to speak of an “Indigenous turn,” but a discussion of accountability in relation to Indigenous communities and research questions has definitely begun.⁹ The Middle Ages are per definition a Eurocentric concept. And due to the political and structural specifics of European history departments, pre-modern research informed by contemporary political questions (“*Gegenwartsinteresse*”) has been, and often still is seen as suspect for political and/or epistemological reasons. The situation in North American universities – and societies – is quite different, and the ongoing social and political struggles in the former European colonies have sparked not only interest, but also debate, conflict, and a little chaos in Medieval Studies globally.¹⁰ However, the paradigms developed here, as well as those of Critical Race Studies, were made without reference to or thought of the medieval Nordic world. Many of the classical authors of Postcolonial Studies drew inspiration from their home countries in Africa or Asia, which had been colonized by the British Empire or France and went through comprehensive and often violent processes of decolonization during the second half of the twentieth century. Greenland and Sápmi, on the other hand, are still colonized in some regards, but in none of the Nordic countries are Saami attempting to form an independent nation state. At the same time, Greenlandic political and economic independence from Denmark is a hotly debated topic. Constructions of race play a major role in both Postcolonial and Indigenous Studies – which in

⁹ See, for example, Tarren Andrews, “Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts,” *English Language Notes* 58, no. 2 (2020): 1–17; Brenna Duperron and Elizabeth Edwards, “Thinking Indigeneity: A Challenge to Medieval Studies,” *Exemplaria* 33, no. 1 (2021): 94–107; Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia*.

¹⁰ A good introduction into the field is an interview with US scholar Geraldine Heng, famous for her contributions to the field of Global medieval history as well as studies of medieval race, by Swiss scholar Isabelle Schürch: “Interview with Geraldine Heng,” *traverse. Zeitschrift für Geschichte – Revue d’Histoire* 29, no. 2 (2022): 167–80. The European specifics are detailed in a comment to this interview: Cordelia Heß, “Zum Status Quo der rassismuskritischen Mediävistik: Ein Kommentar zu Geraldine Heng,” *traverse. Zeitschrift für Geschichte – Revue d’Histoire* 29, no. 3 (2022): 171–85.

turn have become increasingly relevant to Medieval Studies – but their theoretical terminology mainly derives from the situation in North America, where race is primarily defined by a visible colour line, largely constructed around the Black/White binary.¹¹ There are discussions in Indigenous Studies as to whether this Black/White binary has a tendency to make Indigenous identities and politics invisible. It is particularly difficult to apply to an Indigenous group such as the Saami, who are definitely targets of racism, but of a racism without somatic markers.

In sum, there are a number of aspects which make the applicability of terminology from postcolonial and indigenous studies to the medieval Nordic world difficult.

2 The Medieval Nordic World

Settlements that have become part of the collective memory of the Nordic countries include Iceland, Greenland, North America, Finland, and Sápmi. Not all of these settlements led to actual colonies, nor did they all lead to the production of written sources.¹² Some of these settlements turned into stable colonies, a group of people living in an area away from their geographic origin for several generations, but maintaining cultural features and manifold connections to the homeland. Some were established on uninhabited land and thus can be categorized as colonies, but not colonialism. But in some cases, these colonies also turned into or developed colonial relations, in which the originally small and marginalized settlements formed the seed of later asymmetrical relations between the settlers and the autochthonous populations surrounding them. The early Latin historiography about Scandinavia as a missionary area, the Icelandic sagas,¹³ hagiographic texts, and a number of narrative and diplomatic sources all testify to contemporary awareness of these colonies, their inhabitants, and their contact with other peoples. The fragmentary character of these texts, however, makes it necessary to

11 Andrea Smith, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy,” in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Daniel M. HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 66–93.

12 For an overview of the manifold Scandinavian settlements and their afterlives, see the contributions in Anne Pedersen and Søren Sindbæk, eds, *Viking Encounters: Proceedings of the Eighteenth Viking Congress, Denmark, August 6–12, 2017* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2020); also C. L. Symes, ed., *The Global North: Spaces, Connections, and Networks Before 1600* (Arc Humanities Press, 2021).

13 Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, *Beyond the Northlands: Viking Voyages and the Old Norse Sagas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

also consider material sources, archaeological finds, and architecture, in order to understand the relationship of the Norse to their neighbours, the structure of their settlements, and their economy. Leaving aside new evidence from more recent archaeological excavations,¹⁴ Old Norse and Latin texts about these phenomena have been read and used in historical and literary scholarship for centuries now. However, it seems worth the effort to revisit them using new paradigms and, in the course of this revisiting, to also reconsider both colonial and postcolonial paradigms themselves.

Medieval Nordic colonialism is thus defined by sources produced in Scandinavia, in the modern sense of the term. These texts describe many of the areas involved in Scandinavian trade, settlement, and expansion – while others, such as the probable Norse settlements in the Rus', or in the British Isles, remain silent and are only described by non-Norse travellers and historiographers.

The chronological scope of medieval Nordic colonialism conforms to the Eurocentric definition of the Middle Ages; namely, the spread of Christianity and, consequently, the arrival of Latin literacy from the late eleventh century on. Its end is defined by the Reformations, which deeply restructured the Nordic kingdoms, their relation to one another, and their administration, and within short order led to the formation of relatively centralized realms under royal dynasties and with growing administrative bodies – the preconditions for state expansion and colonialism in the modern sense.

It is important to note that this definition of “the Middle Ages” already diverges from the Central European definition, in which the period starts several centuries earlier and in which the Scandinavian Viking Age or Younger Iron Age roughly corresponds to the later part of the Early Middle Ages and the beginning of the High Middle Ages. These periodizations were made without taking Indigenous (and many other) perspectives into account, and they make little sense in most of the Northern European colonies. The Norse settlements in Greenland started around 980, but Church administration was only established in 1126, and Latin literacy seems to have played only a minor role prior to the apparent end of the settlements around 1450.¹⁵ Many aspects that define the High Middle Ages in continental Europe never made their way to Northern Fennoscandia, where nu-

¹⁴ See the contributions in Marte Spangen et al., *Currents of Saami Pasts Recent Advances in Saami Archaeology*, Monographs of the Archaeological Society of Finland 9 (Helsinki: The Archaeological Society, 2020); Andrea Amft and Mikael Svonnö, eds, *Sápmi Y1K – livet i samernas bosättningsområde för ett tusen år sedan*. Sámi dutkan – Samiska studier 3 (Umeå: Samiska studier Umeå univ, 2006).

¹⁵ Lisbeth Imer, *Peasants and Prayers: The Inscriptions of Norse Greenland* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2017).

merous significant shifts in culture and society are visible around 1300 – a date that is insignificant in the common periodization.

The chronological scope of “the Middle Ages” differs even more from Indigenous conceptions of time. The few Indigenous sources that are accessible to a Western form of knowledge production and transmission as written texts do not measure time in the same way; nor do they present contact with the Norse as central events in their narratives. Attempts to bring indigenous sources, storytelling and narratives in dialogue with the written texts in Latin and Norse are relatively new, partly because of a long neglect of indigenous knowledge and partly because they face a number of problems regarding their methods and the circumstances in which oral traditions were collected and written down in colonial contexts.

In this volume, two contributions explore the significance of Indigenous storytelling for an understanding of “medieval” contacts and thereby shift the focus of historiography from the constructions and narratives we meet in Latin and Old Norse texts. Tim Frandy reads a collection of mostly Inari Saami narratives, written down in the late nineteenth century, as evidence of Saami “medievalism,” not in the sense that they speak of the European Middle Ages but in that they denote a time of contact between the Saami and other, mostly hostile, peoples – who may or may not have been Norse. Timothy Bourns asks whether Inuit storytelling, within which only a very limited corpus deals with the Norse, can help us to understand the encounters – and points at the pitfalls that lie in the forms in which we access these stories.

3 Religious Change and Religious Minorities

The oppression of non-Christian religions was a major feature of early modern Nordic colonialism, as were the policies of forced assimilation in Sweden, Finland, and Norway (*fornorskningspolitikk* and its Swedish parallels); as such, the question of religious change and its connection with ethnic and cultural identities constitutes a major aspect of most research about the medieval Nordic world and its Indigenous peoples.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the medieval sources paint a much more com-

¹⁶ Sannhets- og Forsoningskommisjonen, “Sannhet og forsoning – Grunnlag for et oppgjør med fornorskningspolitikk og urett mot samer, kvener/norskfinner og skogfinner: Rapport til Stortinget,” <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/sannhets-og-forsoningskommisjonen/rapport-til-stortinget-fra-sannhets-og-forsoningskommisjonen.pdf>; Daniel Lindmark and Olle Sundström, eds, *De historiska relationerna mellan Svenska kyrkan och samerna: En vetenskaplig antologi* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2016).

plicated picture, in which both Saami and Norse converted according to a timetable and motives we are not able to reconstruct. Both forced and voluntary conversions, or a mix of the two, must be considered in this period, which means that individuals and families with mixed Saami and Norse background may have been able to choose their religion – a narrative that returns agency and the question of individual motivation to Indigenous historical actors, instead of assuming their role to be that of victims and passive recipients of some central religious agenda. If and how the Christian religion and its rituals changed as a result of interreligious contact in this period and these regions must, however, remain unknown, given the lack of sources.

The slow but comprehensive shift from polytheistic religions to Christianity in Fennoscandia and the Arctic was part of a general and fundamental religious change in medieval Europe, which unfolded with very different dynamics and at a very different pace in different regions. Scandinavia was not the last European region to adopt Christianity, but it was late in doing so. Church structures developed during the twelfth century in its more densely settled areas: parts of the Norwegian coastal regions and Viken; Västergötland, Mälardalen, and Skåne in Sweden; and the islands now considered part of Denmark.¹⁷ In other, more rural areas, such as the Scandes mountain region, or large parts of today's Finland, evidence is sparse.¹⁸ The image of Christianization as a conscious, centrally and strategically planned process cannot be maintained for Northern Fennoscandia. It seems that church buildings and organization were not a centralized enterprise in these areas, but the effort of local communities that converted for reasons unknown.¹⁹ In Norse Greenland, there were already Christians amongst the first generations of settlers, and they had already built a surprising number of churches prior to the establishment of the Garðar bishopric in 1126. But how these churches and parishes were organized, who was reading mass and administering the sacraments, is unclear. It seems unlikely that all the parish and private church buildings in the remote areas of Greenland and Sápmi had clerics serving in them. In these communities, far from the closest cathedral and access to a clerical education, Church and parish must

17 Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, "Introducing Christianity to a Challenging Environment: The Example of Norway," in *Making Christian Landscapes in Atlantic Europe: Conversion and Consolidation in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Tomás Ó Carragáin and Sam Turner (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 423–40; Bertil Nilsson, "The Christianization of Sweden," in *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North*, vol. 4: *The Christianization Process* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1695–1728.

18 Tuomas Heikkilä, "The Christianization of Finland," in *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North*, vol. 4: *The Christianization Process* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1729–44.

19 Stefan Brink, "Bygdekyrkor eller egenkyrkor i Norrland?" in *Kyrkan i landskapet*, ed. Ulf Sporrong (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 2015), 77–98.

have meant very different things than in other parts of Europe, where the centres of Christian culture, power, and education were older and more evenly distributed.

It is worth noting that the process of religious change and how quickly or slowly it occurred were not connected with modern ethnic categories. Saami and Norse alike converted or kept to their old polytheistic faiths; religious hybridity and reciprocal knowledge of rituals and symbols were widespread. Contact with the new religion seems to have sometimes led to a more clearly expressed polytheistic religious identity, which could be either Norse or Saami, while in other cases people simply adapted Christianity, or they combined amulets, burial rites, and other religious customs from several different religions.²⁰

This more recent picture of religious change in Northern Europe differs significantly from older conceptions, which, based on the written sources, assumed a relatively swift and comprehensive change of religious customs following the often politically motivated baptisms of kings. Additionally, previous research tended to equate Saami with pagan and Norse with Christian – a notion that is not tenable after a critical re-reading of the sagas and the legal and diplomatic sources.²¹

In the present volume, two articles deal with the specific forms of religious ritual that developed in the communities of the Arctic and Fennoscandia. Christian Koch Madsen analyses the material finds from Norse Greenland in relation to their potential religious significance, Christian or non-Christian, and Solveig Marie Wang reconsiders the legal and diplomatic sources about converting and converted Saami.

4 Colonial(ism)

In 2013, Jonas Nordin and Magdalena Naum published the anthology *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity*, bringing together scholars of the early modern period who were applying postcolonial perspectives to the colonies of early modern Sweden and Denmark.²² Their main objective was to argue against

²⁰ Håkan Rydving, “The Christianization of the Sámi,” in *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North*, vol. 4: *The Christianization Process* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1745–59.

²¹ Else Mundal, “Kong Håkon Magnussons rettarbot for Hålogaland av 1313 og andre kjeller till kristinga av samane i mellomalderen,” in *Sápmi YIK – livet i samernas bosättningsområde för ett tusen år sedan*, ed. Andrea Amft and Mikael Svonni, Sámi dutkan – Samiska studier 3 (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2006), 97–114.

²² Magdalena Naum and Jonas Monié Nordin, eds, *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena* (New York/Heidelberg: Springer, 2013).

the notion, prevalent at the time, of the two Scandinavian countries being “benevolent masters,” and to call attention to the significance of colonial projects, both overseas and in Fennoscandia and the North Atlantic, for their emergence as nation states.

Ten years later, the notion of “benevolent masters” has suffered a great deal.²³ However, the definition of colonialism and, consequently, the geographical and chronological scope the editors chose for their volume continue to define a public and, for the most part, also the scholarly understanding of colonialism.

Colonialism is a multifaceted phenomenon, one which is best understood by the overseas activities of early modern nation states: the establishing of overseas trading companies, the privileges granted to them by the royal houses of Europe, the enforcement of their monopolies by European military forces, and the slave trade between Northern Europe, the West Coast of Africa, and the Americas and Caribbean. The forms of domination that developed through these processes varied in different parts of the world and according to the immediate needs of the European forces: settler colonialism, in which a distinct demographic change in the colonies was achieved by a massive influx of settlers; extractive and mercantile colonialism, in which there is a focus on the extraction of natural resources from the colonies and the control of trade opportunities. While the latter category need not involve a demographic majority of colonizers, a European elite often organized trade and political domination.

These definitions of different forms of colonialism all rely on early modern exemplars. All of which required a centralized royal power, resources for a military force and the maintenance of the colonies, a demographic surplus from which to draw troops and settlers, and close cooperation with church organization to support the colonial enterprises with missionary activities. None of these conditions were present in the medieval Nordic countries. Some scholars define the relation of the Swedish, Norwegian, and Russian nation states to the Saami regions as internal colonialism, consisting of the development of uneven power relations within a state and the exploitation of one region or people in favour of another. Especially in Fennoscandia, the coexistence and cohabitation of people of different languages and cultures throughout large areas was the norm for the entire Middle Ages. Saami-speaking populations did not live in a segregated northern area but also as far south as today’s Oslo and Stockholm.²⁴ The question

23 See Gunlög Fur and John L. Hennessey, “Svensk kolonialism, Sverige och kolonialism eller svenskar och kolonialism?,” *Historisk tidskrift* 140, no. 3 (2020): 375–84.

24 Jonas Monié Nordin, “Spaces of Resilience and Resistance: Sámi Habitation in Southern and Central Sweden during the Late Medieval and the Early Modern Period,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 27, no. 2 (2022): 480–505.

here is where and when this coexistence turned into colonial forms of settlement and exploitation – colonialism and colonial forms of settlement and exploitation were not suddenly invented in the early sixteenth century.

Several contributions in this volume examine different forms of contact, trade, and settlement. Thomas Wallerström returns to his own PhD thesis from the 1990s, reviewing it in the light of contemporary postcolonial theories, and arrives at a very different picture of Norse settlement in the Gulf of Bothnia, in the north of present-day Sweden and Finland. Carina Damm revisits the extensive fur trade of Saami and Bjarmians with Scandinavian merchants. Oula Seitsonen describes changes in land-use patterns stipulated in Saami societies by colonial encounters from the late Viking Age to the modern period.

5 Entanglements

The current volume is a contribution to an understanding of the medieval roots of colonialism, as well as the medieval roots of modern forms of oppression and inequality in formerly or currently colonized areas. This is what we mean by “entanglements”: Inuit and Saami today are still struggling for political and economic inclusion, for land rights, independence, cultural and linguistic identities, and the restitution of cultural heritage. Medieval relations are rarely referred to in these struggles – partly because the early modern and modern forms of oppression overshadow the perception of medieval relations, partly because medieval sources are not well suited to substantiate land rights or stable cultural and linguistic identities.

During the centuries that we know as the Middle Ages, people who spoke Norse languages settled over large areas of the Fennoscandic landmass, as well as on many islands in the North Atlantic. Their settlements and colonies were on land that was partly uninhabited and partly inhabited by other groups of people, many of whom spoke Uralic or Arctic languages. The movements of and interactions between these peoples shaped the landscape, and they shaped the perception of later meetings and encounters. While many of these meetings, settlements, and colonies may not fulfil any of the criteria of modern colonialism, they were nevertheless used in order to legitimize the latter: In the sixteenth century, the Danish crown claimed a need to reform the Nordic settlers in Greenland, with whom contact had been lost around 1450.²⁵ The Swedish and Norwegian adminis-

²⁵ Janus Møller Jensen, *Korstoget til Grønland: Danmark, korstogene og de store opdagelser i renessancen 1400–1523* (Aarhus: Turbine, 2022).

trations incorporated Northern Fennoscandia into their crown lands, whose inhabitants had been paying tribute since the early fourteenth century, if not earlier.²⁶ The incorporation of today's Finland into the Swedish realm included a number of elements associated with modern colonialism: military outposts to secure access to key regions, the establishment of a Swedish-speaking elite, and Christianization under the auspices of the Archbishop of Uppsala. The Saami living on the Finnish landmass were also integrated into this realm, similarly without consultation.

All of these medieval relations play a role in modern relations and entanglements – even though this role is in many cases not well understood. The incongruity of modern Nordic nation states and medieval realms and political and cultural entities in the pre-modern period underlines this – most clearly in the case of Finland.²⁷ Our understanding of the development of Saami and Norse identities in the large areas of cohabitation and simultaneous settlement, for example, changes with every new archaeological excavation. The impossibility of defining the borders of Sápmi in the Middle Ages, the large and seemingly limitless settlement area of Saami in Southern Fennoscandia, which has only recently been addressed in scholarly debate and consequently also in debates about Saami identity, are but one example of this.

Entanglement also refers to our positions as scholars in Medieval Studies. Scholarship is rarely impartial, despite longstanding claims by predominantly white, male, conservative historians regarding their own impartiality. But since Indigenous communities include many different voices and opinions, it is impossible to be partial to all of them or to one specific political direction or movement. It is, however, possible and also necessary to be partial on the side of those people who were traditionally silent in the written texts and whose perspectives played no role in traditional scholarship and perceptions about these regions.

Two chapters in this volume deal with specific forms of modern entanglements. Jay Lalonde analyses the significance of Vinland mythology and the memory or imagined traditions about the Norse travels to North America for nineteenth- and twentieth-century settler colonialism, contrasting these with the medieval texts as well as with Indigenous perspectives from the region. Christina Lentz analyses the depiction of medieval Norway and Scandinavia from the perspective of Indige-

²⁶ Lars Ivar Hansen, “Norwegian, Swedish and Russian ‘Tax Lands’ in the North,” in *Taxes, Tributes and Tributary Lands in the Making of the Scandinavian Kingdoms in the Middle Ages*, ed. Steinar Imsen (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2011), 295–330.

²⁷ Suvi Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences, Colonial/Racial Histories, and National Narratives: Rewriting Finnish History,” *Scandinavian Studies* 91, nos. 1–2 (2019): 163–81.

nous peoples, and their presence, or (more often) their absence, in the construction of colonial narratives in contemporary Norwegian schoolbooks.

Instead of a conclusion, we have included a chapter in which various scholars discuss partiality, their own positionality as scholars, and how these are influenced by contemporary power imbalances. This chapter derives from discussions we had during a conference in Greifswald in the spring of 2023, from which many of the other contributions in this volume also originated. In our field, as in most others, scholars rarely have the time or feel safe enough to voice their own insecurities, thoughts about their own positions within colonized or recently decolonized societies, and the significance of this research both for themselves and for the societies they work on and in. Considerations like these often fit awkwardly into an academic world where bold statements and confrontation are more highly valued than dialogue and taking a step back and listening. As such, this final chapter marks the position of this book in general within a rapidly growing and equally rapidly changing field of historical research – a status quo that will need to be reevaluated soon enough in dialogue with and by listening to the societies impacted by the colonial entanglements of the medieval Nordic world.

6 A Note on Spelling

The editors have decided to capitalize the words “White” and “Black” when pertaining to the social constructs commonly associated with “race.” Doing so is in line with the current recommendations of both the American Psychological Association and the Chicago Manual of Style. There is no real controversy around capitalizing “Black” to denote People of Colour with an identity and positionality forged through survival of (and often resistance to) specific processes of colonialism and racialization. At the same time, we recognize strong arguments against capitalizing “white,” in terms of not wishing to further solidify or imply prestige for a concept with no coherent historical or cultural basis beyond privilege and the infliction of oppression. Beyond simple consistency, however, capitalization serves to draw attention to the use of the word “white” as a social construct, and as such can counter the tendency to naturalize and invisibilize whiteness, one of the significant ways in which this concept – and the harms associated with it – has been normalized. We realize that this decision will probably seem wrong in a few years from now, since these conventions are subject to growing consciousness around issues of race and thus can and must change and adapt quickly. They also look differently in different parts of the world and with different language backgrounds.

Another example of customs that look different in different parts of the world is the addition of national or ethnic affiliations of indigenous scholars within the text. This has become more and more common in Indigenous Studies in North America, and while it indeed adds to indigenous visibility, it feels very wrong to add national, religious, ethnic, or any other affiliations to people's names by default from a German/European perspective.

We have chosen to capitalize the term “Viking” as well, not in order to suggest a common national or ethnic identity of this group, but because we use it as a contemporary cultural concept.

We also have chosen the spelling “Saami” instead of “Sámi” or “Sami” throughout the volume. In the different Saami languages, various self-descriptions are used by Saami people, and “Sámi” is the spelling used within and for North Saami languages. Because the majority of Saami peoples live in the North Saami language areas, these groups, and their history, cultures, and language, are better known than those of other Saami groups. As such, using the spelling “Saami” is more inclusive in English since it contrasts the majority spelling and emphasizes the diversity of Saami societies. We have nevertheless chosen to use the Northern Saami spelling when of “Sápmi” when referring to the traditional Saami homelands, as this spelling seems to be the most standardized in English language texts.

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Part 1: **The Medieval Nordic World**

Tim Frandy

Chapter 1

Medieval Saami Imaginaries: Colonial Encounters as Memorialized in Traditional Legend Cycles

Introduction

For generations, the fascination with – or even fetishization of – so-called precolonial, “pre-contact,” or pre-Christian Indigenous pasts has captured the minds of both Western anthropologists and contemporary Indigenous peoples who seek to reverse the culture loss brought about through colonization. But understanding the distant historical past is a complex and often fraught process for many Indigenous communities. Historical records can be sparse, and they are often written from the perspectives of missionaries, explorers, or travellers. They otherwise may exist as a subtext within government documents, like court records or tax rolls. Archaeological evidence reveals remnants of material culture from the past but might offer little about the vast complexes of intangible cultural heritage of Indigenous people in distinct cultural eras. While oral histories shed light upon historical events of the past few generations, the gradual process of their folklorization sometimes transforms historical events into fantastical (but captivating) reimaginings that endure through oral transmission. Further, colonization and missionization have contributed significantly to cultural disruption and knowledge loss, breaking intergenerational historical memory and challenging epistemological and ontological frameworks that assist in the interpretation of the past.

Understanding what life was like in medieval Sápmi – the traditional homeland territories of the Indigenous Saami people, extending through Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia – poses a great challenge for contemporary researchers, community scholars, and cultural leaders wishing to better understand their own cultural history. Because of the shortage of older sources written from Saami perspectives, all interpretations of medieval or even early modern Saami cultural history require significant amounts of ethnographic reconstruction. Over the past few decades, polarized and sometimes heated debate over Saami history has had numerous contemporary political implications –

whether involving Saami historical occupancy of lands in the Girjas court case,¹ or the question of Forest Saami cultural endurance in Finland and its role in Indigenous recognition today.² Where Saami history is uncertain and sparsely documented, contemporary human interpretation fills the gaps in our knowledge.

Still, to a large extent, all histories must navigate the complexities of assembling knowable facts into comprehensible narrative patterns that help explain the complex social, political, cultural, economic, and ecological dynamics in which all human life occurs. This observation about history is hardly new, but it rose to greater prominence following the turn toward postmodernism in the 1980s. For instance, Alan S. Downer, Jr, Alexandra Robert, Harris Francis, and Klara B. Kelley write,

History is not an objective chronicle of the events of the past as they actually happened. It is a historian's model of the past. This model is a reconstruction based on what survives in the documentary record, what portions of that record historians have discovered, what decisions historians make about which records to include as the basis for their analyses, and which analytical frameworks inform their analyses. History is actually a complex of relationships between the past and the present. This is hardly a revelation, since historiographers have made this point often.³

1 Christina Allard and Malin Brännström, "Girjas Reindeer Herding Community v. Sweden: Analysing the Merits of the Girjas Case," *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 12 (2021): 56–79.

2 Antti Aikio and Mattias Åhrén, "A Reply to Calls for an Extension of the Definition of Sámi in Finland," *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 5, no. 1 (2014): 123–43; Janne Antikainen et al., "Metsälappalainen kulttuuri ja edistäminen," *Valtioneuvoston selvitys – ja tutkimustoiminta* (Helsinki: Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2019); Tanja Joonas, "The Political Recognition and Ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 in Finland, with Some Comparison to Sweden and Norway," *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 23, no. 3 (2012): 306–21; Tanja Joonas and Juha Joonas, "The Historical Basis of Saami Land Rights in Finland and the Application of ILO Convention No. 169," *The Yearbook of Polar Law Online* 3, no. 1 (2011): 351–88; Tanja Joonas, "Statuksettomat saamelaiset paikantumisia saamelaisuuden rajoilla [Non-Status Sámi Locations within Sámi Borderlands]. Review of *Doctoral Thesis by Erika Sarivaara. Sámi Allaskuvla, DIEDUT 2/2012, 300 pp. ISBN 978-82-7367-031-1.*" *The Yearbook of Polar Law Online* 5, no. 1 (2013): 698–702; Ari M. Laakso, "Critical Review: Antti Aikio and Mattias Åhrén (2014). A Reply to Calls for an Extension of the Definition of Sámi in Finland," *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 7, no. 1 (2016): 101–6; Laura Junka-Aikio, "Can the Sámi Speak Now?" *Cultural Studies* 30, no. 2 (2016): 205–33; Erika Katjaana Sarivaara, "Máttuid giela gáhtten: Stáhtusmeahtun sápmelaččaid sámegiela eláskahttin Suoma bealde Sámis [Saving the Language of Our Ancestors: Language Revitalization of 'Non-status' Sami on the Finnish Side of Sápmi]," *Sámi dieđalaš áigečála* 1 (2010): 51–69; Erika Katjaana Sarivaara, "Statuksettomat saamelaiset: Paikantumisia saamelaisuuden rajoilla" (PhD thesis, Sámi Allaskuvla, 2012).

3 Alan S. Downer, Jr et al., "Traditional History and Alternative Conceptions of the Past," in *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, ed. Mary Hufford (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 39–55.

All historiography is therefore a narrativization of the past in relation to the present, and in large part the challenges of writing Saami history remain akin to those other historiographers face, save for the relative shortage of quality sources from which the past can be reconstructed.

In other words, while historical legends and folklore do not necessarily tell us the objective facts of Saami history, they communicate how Saami people understood their own history within specific historical moments and contexts. Such processes are, in fact, not terribly different from other history-making efforts that navigate the complexities of historical cause and effect across complex and ever-changing social, cultural, and economic systems. In the analysis that follows, I present three different legend genres common across Sápmi, anthologized in the many folktale collections published between 1880 and 1930, looking to how they situate the past in relation to the most pressing issue at the turn of the twentieth century: the escalation of brutal settler colonialism and policies of forced assimilation.

1 Reconstructing Early Saami Histories from Saami Perspectives

One crucial reason for the absence of reliable Saami historical source material is the relatively recent development of written Saami languages – the single best tool for long-term documentation of cultural events from emic perspectives. Part of the Uralic language family, the Saami languages are generally considered to include at least nine living – and two or more extinct – distinct languages. By estimated number of speakers, living Saami languages include Davvisámegiella (North Saami; 20,000–26,000 speakers), Áarjelsaemien gielle (South Saami; 500–1,000 speakers), Julevsámegiella (Lule Saami; 650 speakers), Aanaar Saami (Inari Saami; 400 speakers), Nuõrttsää'mk̄iõll (Skolt Saami; 300 speakers), КИЛТ сáмь кӀлл (Kildin Saami; 100–200 speakers), Bidumsámegiella Saami (Pite Saami; 30–50 speakers), Ubmejesámengiälla (Ume Saami; 30–50 speakers), терско-саамский язык (Ter Saami; 0–10 speakers), and Akkala Saami (0–10 speakers).⁴ Some suggest the last speaker of Akkala Saami died in 2003,⁵ but since that time, additional speakers have been located

⁴ Lieuwe Jan Hetteema and Hanna Outakoski, comp., *Sámi: The Sámi Language in Education in Sweden*, 2nd edition revised from the 1st edition compiled by Mikkel Svonni (Leuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 2020). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED612710.pdf>.

⁵ Leif Rantala and Alefina Sergina, *Áhkkila sápmelaččat. Oanehis muitalus sámejoavkku birra, man mañimus sámeielalaš olmmoš jámii 29.12.2003* (Roavvenjárga: Lapin Yliopisto, 2009).

and language revitalization efforts have begun in the small community.⁶ Geama (Kemi Saami) is generally regarded to have become extinct in the mid-1800s, although some evidence suggests it may have endured into the twentieth century along the Finnish–Russian border.⁷ Kainuu Saami is generally believed to have gone extinct in the 1700s.

These languages were only transformed into written languages when missionaries created orthographies for them in attempts to convert Saami people to Christianity. This involved both the writing of religious texts in Saami languages and the creation of lexicons for missionaries to use in the conversion of local peoples. Accordingly, many of the earliest works written in Saami were closely tied with the Church – an institution that was frequently hostile to and at best misunderstanding of Saami culture. In 1619, the Swedish priest Nils Andersson/Nicolaus Andreæ (1557–1628) published Christian songbooks and catechisms in Saami.⁸ By 1633, the Lutheran Catechism was translated into South Saami, with the entire New Testament to follow in 1755. In North Saami, the New Testament was first translated in 1840 by the bishop Nils Stockfleth, and later the complete Bible in 1895. A variety of works by outsiders chronicle Saami life in early modern times with varying degrees of reliability, including works like Johannes Schefferus's *Lapponia* (1673), originally produced with the intent to disprove claims that Sweden had enlisted Saami magic to secure military victories. Further information comes from travelogues, like Jan Huyghen van Linschoten's *Voyagie, ofte Schipvaert, van by Noorden om langes Noorwegen, de Noortcaep, Laplant, Vinlant, Ruslandt, de Wite Zee, de Custen van Candenoës, Swetenoes, Pitzora, &C. Door de Strate ofte Engte van Nassau tot voorby de Revier Oby* [Voyagie, or Sailing by Ship, from the North along Norway, the North Cape, Lapland, Finland, Russia, the White Sea, the Coasts of Kanin Peninsula, Indiga, Pechora, etc. through the Strait of Nassau to the River Ob] (1595),⁹ Joseph Acerbi's *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland, and the North Cape, in the Years 1798 and 1799* (1802),¹⁰ or Carl von Linné's (Linnaeus's) *Carl von Linnés lappländska resa* [Carl Linnaeus's Lap-

6 Elisabeth Scheller, "Kola Sami Language Revitalization – Opportunities and Challenges," in *L'Image du Sápmi II: études comparées*, ed. Kajsa Andersson (Örebro: Örebro University, 2013), 395–96.

7 Antikainen et al., *Metsälappalainen kulttuuri ja edistäminen*, 41–42.

8 Florian Siegl, "Ume Saami – The Forgotten Language," *Études finno-ougriennes* 48 (2017): 1–26.

9 Jan Hughen van Linschoten, *Voyagie, ofte Schipvaert, van by Noorden om langes Noorwegen, de Noortcaep, Laplant, Vinlant, Ruslandt, de Witte Zee, de Custen van Candenoës, Swetenoes, Pitzora, & C. Door de Strate ofte Engte van Nassau tot voorby de Revier Oby* (Franeker: Gerard Ketel, 1914).

10 Joseph Acerbi, *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland, to the North Cape, in the Years 1798 and 1799*, 2 vols (London: J. Mawman, 1802).

land Journey] (1961 [1732]).¹¹ Many of these travelogues portrayed Saami culture with some degree of disdain, offering narrative accounts that provide at best unreliable and at worst overtly racist representations of Saami culture.¹²

As far as secular writings in Saami languages, Johan Turi (1854–1936) is considered the first Saami author to be published in Saami, with his 1910 publication of *Muitalus Sámiid Birra* [*An Account of the Saami*] and his subsequent collaboration with Per Turi, *Sámi Deavsttat* [*Saami Texts*] (1918–1919), although novelist Matti Aikio's *Kong Ahab* was published in Norwegian in 1904, and an account of Saami life was written by Kristoffer Sjulsson around the same time as Turi's work.¹³ The latter remained unpublished until 1979.¹⁴ Mention should also be made of the Saami pastor Anders Fjellner (1795–1876), who collected and compiled a now mostly-lost collection of mythic-epic poetry called “Biejjen baernie” [“The Son of the Sun”],¹⁵ along with the great Saami preacher Lars Levi Læstadius (1800–1861), whose *Fragmenter i lappska mythologien* (1997) [*Fragments of Lappish Mythology* (2002)]¹⁶ presents one of the first systematic attempts to understand traditional Saami religion from Saami perspectives – despite the numerous inaccuracies and complex entanglements with Læstadius's own desire to proselytize the Saami through the use of Saami folklore and rhetoric. Around the same time, ethnographers and linguists began documenting Saami languages and oral culture in works like Just Qvigstad's *Lappiske eventyr og sagn* [*Saami Fairy Tales and Legends*] (4 volumes; 1927–1929),¹⁷ August Koskimies and Toivo Itkonen's *Inarilappalaista kansantietoutta* (1917) [*Inari Sámi Folklore: Stories from Aanaar* (2019)],¹⁸ Itkonen's later *Suomen lappalaisia* [*Finland's Saami People*] (2 volumes; 1948),¹⁹ or Emilie Demant Hatt's *Med lapperne i højjefeldet* (1913) [*With the Lapps in the*

11 Carl von Linné, *Carl von Linnés lappländska resa* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1961 [1732]).

12 Petra Broomans, “The Image of the Sami in Travel Writing,” in *Europe: The Nordic Countries*, ed. A. Swanson and B. Törnqvist (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 211–23.

13 Thomas A. DuBois, Introduction to *An Account of the Sámi by Johan Turi*, trans. Thomas A. DuBois (Chicago: Nordic Studies Press, 2011), 5.

14 Louise Bäckman and Rolf Kjellström, eds., *Kristoffer Sjulssons minnen. Om Vapstenlapparna i början af 1800-talet*, upptecknade af O.P. Petterson (Lund: Nordiska museet, 1979).

15 Anders Fjellner, *Biejjen baernie: Anders Fjellner – Sámi Son of the Sun*, ed. Harald Gaski (Kår-åsjohka: Davvi Girji, 2003).

16 Lars Levi Læstadius, *Fragmenter i lappska mythologien* (Turku: NIF, 1997); Lars Levi Læstadius, *Fragments of Lappish Mythology*, trans. Börje Vähämäki (Beaverton: Aspasia, 2002).

17 Just Knud Qvigstad, *Lappiske eventyr og sagn*, vols 1–4. (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1927–29).

18 August V. Koskimies and Toivo I. Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore: Stories from Aanaar*, trans. Tim Frandy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019).

19 Toivo I. Itkonen, *Suomen lappalaiset*, 2 vols (Porvoo: WSOY, 1948).

High Mountains (2013)].²⁰ Though such ethnographic works still remain outsider accounts, and they are sometimes flawed in their understandings of Saami culture, these sources at least attempt to value cultural understanding, rather than to simply levy hostile judgment against a perceived “lesser” culture.

Still, even without abundant written sources, Saami people have always maintained a sense of their own distant historical past through stories, historical sites, archaeological finds, and evidence within the landscape around them. Such curiosities about the old Saami ways of life are reflected, for instance, in the work of Johan Turi, who speculates about this deep history, including information about how he thought Saami people lived, hunted, trapped, and herded reindeer.²¹ Turi explains,

Mon jurddašan ahte sii leat eallán bivdduin vuohččan, guli- ja lottii- ja gottii- ja guovžžai- guin ja visot meahcielliiguin. Man dihte mon doaivvun dan: go gávdnojit sámegeilat namat várppiin dain jávrriin, gos eai dáláš sámit bivdde šahten. Ja dat lea velá stuorit mearka, ahte sámit leat orron guhká ovttat sajiin. Dat leat dat rokkit mat leat eatnama siste juohke sajis, gos dološ sápmelaččat leat orron. Dat rokkit leat leamaš sin goadit ja dahke sii rokkiid dego iežá nai meahcieallit. Ja eanemus oassi dain rokkiin gávdno mearragáttiin ja jávre- ja jorkhagáttiin, ja dakkár báikkiin gos lea meahcielliid golangeaidnu – dakkár, gos gorsagierragat bohtet oktii, ja jávregaskkat. [...] Eai olbmot gal jáhke daid rokkiid, ahte dat leat leamaš olbmuid dahkan rokkit dahje goadit, muhto dat leat gávdnojuvvon mánga mearkka dasa: dollasajit, suovvamuorra ja okta njiškun.²²

I think that they lived at first off fish, birds, and wild reindeer as well as bear and various wild animals. This is why I believe so: one finds Sámi names for netting places in lakes where Sámi nowadays don't fish. And an even greater indicator that Sámi have lived for a long time in these same parts are the pits that occur in the ground everywhere where the Sámi of old used to live. Those pits were their *goadit*. And they dug burrows like other animals of the wilds. And most of these pits one finds along the coast and on lakesides and riverbanks, and in such places where the trails of wild animals cross, such as spots where ravines come together or areas between lakes. ... People don't think these pits were made by people or were *goadit*; but many indications of this fact have been found: fire rings, a pot beam for hanging pots over the fire, and even a heddle.²³

Saami people, like all people, have been in a continual process of reconstructing their own history for millennia. Such glimpses into the past as evidenced through

²⁰ Emilie Demant Hatt, *By the Fire: Sami Folktales and Legends*, trans. Barbara Sjöholm (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

²¹ Johan Turi, *An Account of the Sámi*, trans. Thomas A. DuBois (Chicago: Nordic Studies Press, 2011), 11–18.

²² Johan Turi and Mikael Svonn, eds, *Muitalus sámiid birra* (Kárášjohka: ČálliidLágádus, 2010), 13–14.

²³ Turi, *An Account of the Sámi*, 11.

artefacts, language, and stories do not simply tell us about the past, but also provide important insight into how people *understand* the past in the context of a historical present.

Saami people had enjoyed some degree of sovereignty until early modern times as a distinct people (characterized by language, livelihoods, and cultural practices) occupying specific territories in the multi-ethnic kingdoms of Sweden-Finland and Denmark-Norway. They were involved in an economy that provided valuable furs that supported the state through taxation.²⁴ Political and social conditions first began worsening for Saami people during the late medieval period and grew exponentially worse beginning in the seventeenth century and lasting until the middle of the twentieth century.²⁵ Politically, a series of wars and border disputes led to a series of border closures in the far north, disrupting the reindeer migration routes that regularly crossed national borders.²⁶ These border disputes also led to multi-state taxation of many Saami people, who were often subject to taxation by two or even three nations.²⁷ Religiously, a wave of sometimes cruel and violent Christian missionaries, such as Gabriel Tuderus, began entering many Saami communities, resorting to violent enforcement of specific interpretations of Christian doctrine to facilitate conversion and submission.²⁸ Tuderus, for example, was widely known as a violent person, stealing and burning sacred *noaidi* drums, ensuring the *noaidi* Aikia Aikianpoika was sentenced to death for witchcraft, and nailing shut the sacred doors, *boasšut*, of traditional *goahti* homes.²⁹ Socially, the Enlightenment led to Indigenous knowledge, cultural logics, and belief systems being branded as irrational and laden with backward superstition, leading to a type of colonial paternalism that ushered in an era of assimilation-driven economic and educational developmental ideologies that sought to destroy

24 Neil Kent, *The Sámi Peoples of the North: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Hurst, 2014), 14.

25 Kent, *The Sámi Peoples of the North*, 23; Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *The Sámi People: Traditions in Transition*, trans. Linna Weber Müller-Wille (Aanaar: Kustannus-Puntsi, 2004), 30–32.

26 Lehtola, *The Sámi People*, 36–37.

27 Jesper Larsson and Eva-Lotta Päiviö Sjaunja, *Self-Governance and Sami Communities: Transitions in Early Modern Natural Resource Management* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 78.

28 Väänänen Kyösti, “Gabriel Johannes Tuderus,” *Studia Biographica* 9 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2011).

29 Læstadius, *Fragments of Lappish Mythology*, 143; Kent, *The Sámi Peoples of the North*, 104; Frances Joy, “Reconstructing Culture through Art – for the Memory of Sámi Noaidi Aikia Aikianpoika,” *Beneath Northern Lights*. Blog. April 2, 2019. <https://www.beneathnorthernlights.com/reconstructing-culture-through-art-for-the-memory-of-sami-noaidi-aikia-aikianpoika/>.

Saami culture in order to benevolently “help” Saami people.³⁰ Economically, advances in agriculture and rising populations in the Nordic south saw settlers encroach farther into Saami lands, particularly in the 1700s and 1800s.³¹ The project of centralizing authority in mono-ethnic nation states led to harsh social, political, and economic conditions for Saami people, whose social status fell markedly from being the rightful owners of Saami lands and a valuable tax base to being lowly migratory squatters on crown lands.³²

On the ground, as court cases suddenly pivoted from favouring Saami rights to consistently siding with encroaching settlers in the mid-1700s,³³ settler populations were seemingly emboldened to instigate conflict and commit violence against Saami people. Saami reindeer herder Elisabet Rensberg, from Härjedalen, shared three stories with Emilie Demant Hatt, later published in her work *Ved ilden* [*By the Fire*], that speak of such conflicts with settlers faced by her own family. Speaking about her own uncles and grandparents around the early nineteenth century, Rensberg tells of Swedes forging orders from the king that commanded the murder of the Saami, and of local farmers plotting to murder Saami people before being explicitly forbidden to do so by a priest. In one particularly compelling story, Rensberg details how settlers would dress as Romani people before attacking Saami people, absolving themselves of blame by targeting another vulnerable ethnic minority in the Nordic countries.

Endnu i mine forældres tid var Lapperne rædde for skøjere og for bønder. Bønderne kunde klæde sig ud som tater og forsøge at røve og stjæle hos Lapperne. Min farbror var engang paa vej til sit stabbur med renost, som var kløvjet paa rener. Stabburet stod et skjult sted i skoven. Allerbedst som han gik, blev han forfulgt af sine egne bonde-naboer, skønt han ikke kendte dem i deres forklædning. Han bandt nu renerne i en birkeskov og skar sig der en forsvarlig birkekæp og vendte sig med den mod sine forfølgere. Han drev dem nogle svære slag over hænderne, saa de tabte knivene og flygtede.

Han genkendte dem ikke ved den lejlighed; men da han siden traf sine naboer, saa han, at det var dem, der havde faaet slagene over hænderne.³⁴

30 Bart Pushaw, “Sámi, Indigeneity, and the Boundaries of Nordic National Romanticism,” in *The Idea of North: Myth-Making and Identities*, ed. Marja Lahelma and Francis Fowle (Helsinki: The Birch and the Star, 2019), 23; Magdalena Naum, “Between Utopia and Dystopia: Colonial Ambivalence and Early Modern Perception of Sápmi,” *Itinerario* 40, no. 3 (2016): 489–521; Lehtola, *The Sámi People*, 44–46; Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 228.

31 Lehtola, *The Sámi People*, 31–32; Kent, *The Sámi Peoples of the North*, 237–40.

32 Kent, *The Sámi Peoples of the North*, 20–21.

33 Lehtola, *The Sámi People*, 30–32.

34 Emilie Demant Hatt, *Ved ilden: Eventyr og historier fra Lapland* (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1922), 84–85.

In my parents' time the Sami were still afraid of wandering folk and of farmers. The farmers could disguise themselves as [Romani] and try to rob and steal from the Sami. My uncle was once on his way to his storage hut with reindeer cheese, which was tied onto the pack reindeer. The storage hut was in a hidden spot in the forest.

As he was walking, he was followed by his own farmer neighbors, although he didn't recognize them in their disguises. He tied up the reindeer in a birch forest and cut himself a birch switch for self-defense and turned to his pursuers. He hit them hard on their hands, so they lost their knives and fled.

He did not recognize them on that occasion, but when he later met his neighbors, he saw that they had bruises on their hands.³⁵

The violence endemic to the nineteenth-century colonization of Sápmi figures into Saami imaginings of earlier historical times – times which most scholars regard as actually having been more favourable to the Saami than the post-Enlightenment colonial era. The sections below further illustrate how specific genres of historical and belief legends set in the historical past accrue meanings associated with the nineteenth-century colonial experience. Anthropologist Sami Lakomäki notes the ways that the historical context of colonialism has shaped Saami oral culture, explaining that “the circulation of violent stories in and around Sápmi from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century needs to be understood in the context of colonialism.”³⁶ These stories create imaginaries of the distant past that project nineteenth-century colonialism backwards in time, positing an even more abjectly violent past.

2 Čuđit Stories and Extractive Colonialism

Čuhti (plural: *Čuđit*) stories are one of the most common kinds of Saami legend. Set in the distant historical past (roughly between 100–500 years prior), they tell the story of bands of merciless marauders who come to Sápmi to slaughter Saami people and steal their possessions. In most of these oral stories, it is unclear exactly who the *Čuđit* are, or if these stories connect directly to identifiable historical events. Variations of the Anglophone term “Chude” – with an etymology likely rooted in the old Slavic term **tjudjo* [strange, foreign] – have been used historically to describe various Baltic Finnic peoples in the areas of Northwest Russia, Karelia, and Estonia. Scholars have linked *Čuđit* with a number of possible outside groups, including Birkarls, Vepsians, Karelians, and Setos peo-

³⁵ Demant Hatt, *By the Fire*, 82.

³⁶ Sami Lakomäki, “Talking about Violence: Bloody Stories and Colonialism in Sápmi, ca. 1600–1900,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 49 (2024): 3.

ples.³⁷ But the Komi – a Finno-Ugric people in Northwest Russia – regard *Čudit* as either the Komi’s pre-Christian ancestors, mythical heroes, or supernatural black creatures similar to gnomes,³⁸ suggesting origins perhaps outside of historical conflicts alone.

Although *Čudit* stories include many kinds of encounters with dangerous raiders, a large subcategory involves the enlistment of a Saami guide. A group of ruthless *Čudit* isolate an individual Saami person (often a moderately vulnerable figure, like a teenager or an older woman), whom they compel to serve as their guide to another Saami *siida* [community] for further raiding. The guide typically uses superior knowledge of the environment to outsmart the *Čudit*,³⁹ usually leading to their gruesome deaths, whether causing them to fall off a cliff, drowning them by sending them off in a leaky boat, or stranding them on an island to perish from hunger.⁴⁰ Sometimes place names commemorate the locations of their deaths.⁴¹ The Aanaar Saami schoolmaster Iisakki Mannermaa tells the following representative story about the *Čudit*, collected in 1886 by August Koskimies:

mot’òmin kaunäditt’i Lauruk’adž ja ruoššilih mētsist. tšudēh hiitt’ejī pāšiš Lauruk’ā, mutt’o sun tšuurvij ruošagielāin: “elleđ mū pijji, mun lem tšude-oiṽālmāi.” ruoššilih pott’i Laurakk’ā saṽvāid ja aṽvudi, ét’ē siṽ naṽdem oapp’ā kaṽñam liiji. Lauruk’adž toalvui tšūdiṽ Anarrinon pāihis albā, kost sust juo stuorā kārveis tađe verrin vālmaštum lei, sātšāliṽ kārṽā tšātsan, te monni kārṽās ja sulādī Anar stuorā jāurri mielṽi Pättšveṽi vuāštā. ruoššilih liiji vāibadam, eā vajjām sūhād innig ige Lauruk’adž luaštām košten eṽamist oadṽid. sun sārnuṽi tšūdiṽguṽim: “koaš juo mist hoap’uslāiān mātki li, ét’ē ep’ ošta eṽamist oadṽid, te oadṽžūvet’ēđ tiṽ puoh oadṽāstallađ kārṽas. kale mun ohtūuṽ sūṽvadam tāssādž ko risēs siṽā albānš-koat’a; kale mun talle ti tsunnam”.

tšudēh kiṽtr’āli tom šieu sāniṽ oṽpāst ja oadṽāstilli. vāṽṽam kuo liiji toh nohādi eṽpu lussis nahārāid. Lauruk’adž sullādij Pättšvuona mielṽi, mast kuoškaṽuṽ, Teṽṽogievṽiṽēs, iṽ lem innig kukk’ēn, kuo kārveis kuoška oaivan albāniṽ, pajjēdiṽ oht ruoššiladž oaivis ja tsēlhij Lauruk’āin: “korrā piegā kullō”. Lauruk’adž ēđāi: “iṽ tot’ piegā leh vai kottšam. mutt’o kullō joaṽvim. kale mun ti tsūṽnam, kuo siṽp’ albā pōdiṽžep’; oadṽid rāuhast”. tšudē aṽn oadṽāi; vāṽṽam kuo sunnuṽ lei, nohhādiṽ hoap’ust riālgis nahhāran. kuo Lauruk’adž oiniṽ, ét’ē puohah ruoššilih lē oadṽimin, sun sūhaliṽ tallan kuoška oaivan, nūškiṽ mott’ōm kēđci olā, luoštiṽ kārṽā mōnnađ vuālus stuorā kuoška, mast tšudēh kale moṽāniṽdi kuo tšātsi

37 Natalia Drannikova and Roald Larsen, “Representations of the Chudes in Norwegian and Russian Folklore,” *Acta Borealia* 25, no. 1 (2008): 62, 66–67.

38 Aado Lintrop, “On the Udmurt Water Spirit and the Formation of the Concept ‘Holy’ Among Permian Peoples,” *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 26 (2004): 20–23.

39 Thomas A. DuBois, “Folklore, Boundaries, and Audience in *The Pathfinder*,” in *Sami Folkloristics*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Turku: Åbo Akademi, 2000), 263; Thomas A. DuBois, “Insider and Outsider: An Inari Sami Case,” *Scandinavian Studies* 67, no. 1 (1995): 68.

40 Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 139–40.

41 Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 131–32, 139–42.

kārḃä siza pōḃij; mutt’o kārḃži lei äģi, kiḃkk’ed kārḃis mōnai kuoškast kommōḃ ja tsuoḃk-
k’anij ōutai pit’ai, ruoḃah hēvanī, ij ohtākin ēnnaman pēssam. Lauruk’adž nūrai ruoḃššilij
tāḃģij kuoška vuolñi, savōnist ja riddōin sehe pihtāsiij ja erēs annēmgauniij.⁴²

Once Laurukāž and Russians met each other in the forest. The invaders tried to shoot Laurukāž, but he yelled in Russian:

– Don’t shoot me! I’m a Čudit leader!

The Russians came to talk with Laurukāž, and they were happy that they had found such a guide. Laurukāž took the Čudit to the shores of Aanaar near his home, where he had a large boat already prepared. He pushed the boat into the water, and they got into the boat and set off rowing along the great waters of Lake Aanaar, toward Páččvei (Paatsjoki). The Russians were very tired and they weren’t able to row any longer, and Laurukāž wouldn’t let them row to any land to sleep. He said to the Čudit:

– Since we are in a bit of a hurry on this trip and we can’t take the time to sleep on dry land, you can all go to sleep right here in the boat. I’ll wake you up.

The Čudit thanked him for the welcome words, and they lay down to sleep. Because they were so tired, they fell into a deep sleep. Laurukāž rowed along Páččvei fjord, where the Tebdokievņis Falls (Teutoköngäs) were nearby. When the boat neared the neck of the falls, one Russian lifted his head and said to Laurukāž:

– I hear a strong wind.

Laurukāž said:

– The wind has not yet picked up. You hear but a whisper. I’ll wake you when we come near the village. Sleep now in peace.

The Čuhti again went to sleep. Tired as he was, he soon was back in a sweet slumber.

When Laurukāž saw all the Russians were deep asleep, he set off quickly to row into the neck of the rapids. He jumped onto a stone and let the boat go into the great falls, where the invaders finally woke up, since water was coming into the boat. But there was no time to react: suddenly the boat capsized in the falls and broke apart. The Russians drowned, with not a one able to reach land. Laurukāž gathered the Russians’ bows from the shores of a still water below the rapids, as well as their clothes and other goods.⁴³

Sometimes known by the name Laurukāž (Laurukainen, in Finnish), the young male hero in many of these stories uses deception and knowledge of the local landscape to lull the Čudit into a sense of comfort, before escaping as he sends them to drown in the rapids.

Čudit stories exist across Sápmi and beyond. Finnish folklorist Matti Sarmela has demonstrated that these stories exist throughout much of Finland,⁴⁴ especially in the northern and eastern regions along the Russian borderlands. Furthermore, as Thomas DuBois notes, “Similar tales – catalogued by Christiansen (1958) as type ML 8000 – are

⁴² August V. Koskimies and Toivo I. Itkonen, *Inarilappalaista kansantietoutta* (Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, 1917), 31–33.

⁴³ Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 138.

⁴⁴ Matti Sarmela, *Finnish Folklore Atlas: Ethnic Culture of Finland 2*, 4th partially revised edition, trans. Annira Silver (Helsinki: Suomen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2009), 486–88.

told about wartime threats throughout the Nordic region.”⁴⁵ Although the term “Čuđit” remains ambiguous, in the central and eastern parts of Sápmi many of these stories specify the direction of their anxieties through the use of the term “Ruošša-Čuđit” [Russian Čuđit]. In the story above, Mannermaa even uses the terms “Čuđit” and “Russians” interchangeably, as he alternates their usage throughout the original Aanaar Saami text. Although the historical and linguistic evidence points to *Čuđit* being a Finno-Ugric people, Mannermaa and others actively attribute these raids to “Russians” and the many connotations such a polyethnic term might entail. Folklorist Matti Sarmela suggests these stories likely emerged from historical events in the border regions:

Constant skirmishes along the eastern border took place between Sweden-Finland and Russia, and at times, such as in the 1490s, they also erupted as border wars. In the shadow of these wars, raid wars took place between the Finns and Karelians also around Käkisalme in Ladoga Karelia and North Karelia, the areas where the legend of Laurukainen has mainly spread. The raids continued the longest in the north, along the river Oulujoki and in Kainuu; ryssät or the enemy were Dvina Karelians.⁴⁶

According to Sarmela, anxiety about raids, destruction, and war leads to the rise of – or at least intensifies the cultural significance and transmission of – *Čuđit* stories, ultimately manifesting in this semi-fictionalized cycle of legends detailing the theft of Saami material wealth under threat of violence, which have often been linked to the 250 years of settler skirmishes following the Nöteborg Peace Treaty (1323) between Sweden and Novgorod.⁴⁷ Although stories such as these have been collected over a wide geographical range, their poignancy endures in Saami communities due in large part to the context of enduring and escalating colonial violence enacted against Saami people during the nineteenth century.

These stories were generally regarded as representative of actual historical events, and they served as dire warnings of the depths of colonial brutality. Although Saami people have long prided themselves on their tradition of being a peaceful people, these stories caution that the only way colonial violence can be managed is through a combination of trickery and violent (and sometimes gruesome) death. These colonial anxieties still resonate today in, for example, Nils Gaup’s modern interpretation of a *Čuđit* story, the Oscar-nominated 1987 film *Ofelas*⁴⁸ [Pathfinder], or in the English translation of Sofia Jannok’s 2016 song “Čuđit” as “Colonizer.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ DuBois, “Folklore, Boundaries, and Audience in *The Pathfinder*,” 63.

⁴⁶ Sarmela, *Finnish Folklore Atlas*, 487.

⁴⁷ Lehtola, *The Sámi People*, 23.

⁴⁸ Nils Gaup, dir., *Ofelas* (Oslo: Norwegian Film Institute, 1987).

⁴⁹ Sofia Jannok, “Čuđit,” on *Ordá: This Is My Land*, Gamlestans Grammofonbolag GGLP04, Vinyl LP, released April 8, 2016.

Transforming from what is likely a pan-Nordic narrativization of war to a metaphor for a more localized Saami experience of colonization, these stories frame nineteenth-century violence and theft of Saami land and property as a direct extension and continuation of *Čuđit* marauding. These stories serve to contextualize nineteenth-century colonialism and as a metaphor for Saami people to think with in order to understand their contemporary challenges and crises driven by outside forces. This brand of nineteenth-century colonialism – enforced not through the instruments of war but through the tools of policy and law – remains colonialism: the *Čuđit* in a new garb bearing little more than the most brutal intentions. The violence of the present ensures the continued memory of historical violence, and the distant past is constructed to highlight the continuity of Saami resistance to colonization. This allows Saami people to historicize contemporary conflicts, and it offers a moral compass to navigate the injustices that the Saami face in protean colonial policies.

3 The Stállu and Settler Colonialism

Whereas *Čuđit* stories rely upon perceived historical veracity to suggest their legitimacy in explaining Saami colonial encounters, stories about the feared *stállu* (plural: *stálut*) reflect colonial themes through the invocation of the supernormal world. The *stállu* is a well-known figure in Saami legends, “from Härjedalen in the south to the Kola Peninsula.”⁵⁰ This troll-like creature is large and powerful and enjoys tormenting, killing, and eating Saami people; places named after *stálut* still dot the landscape of Sápmi today (e.g., Stalloberget, Stálogárggu, Stálojávri, Stálojohka, and Staalolampi). At once, the *stállu* is known to possess powerful magic but also to be somewhat dim-witted and easily tricked. There are a few distinct traditions regarding *stálut* across different Saami cultures. In the most widespread tradition, wicked people can conjure *stálut* by carving a humanoid form out of the earth; by giving them gifts, such as half of their soul and possessions, evil-doers can animate these golem-like entities. These *stálut* are sent to attack others, generally with the intent to kill them. Usually, they must be wrestled with in a fight to the death, and although *stálut* are extremely dangerous, Saami tend to prevail in these struggles. A variety of special protections (e.g., never taking a *stállu*'s knife to kill him, disposing of the *stállu*'s remains in specific ways, killing the *stállu*'s dog) help ensure the *stállu* is properly terminated and cannot resur-

⁵⁰ Eldar Heide, “The Wild Host and the Etymology of Sami Stállu and Norwegian Ståle(sferda): Reflecting Ancient Contact,” *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 75 (2019): 73.

rect itself. In another tradition that co-exists alongside this one, *stálut* live in the remote wilds much like human beings – closer to the later troll traditions of the Scandinavian countries. Though they are dangerous, they can more easily be avoided and are less likely to do harm if left alone. These *stálut*, in particular, like to eat Saami people, and they sometimes carry sucking straws or iron pipes that they use to drink their blood.⁵¹ Hybridized versions of these traditions are also relatively common in traditional stories as well.

In yet another tradition, *stálut* were associated with visits at Christmastime, the darkest time of the year and a time that most of Northwest Europe formerly associated with frightening supernatural encounters, with a common motif of a travelling caravan of supernatural entities known as the “wild hunt” (motif E501 in Stith Thompson’s *Motif Index*).⁵² Precautions were taken in advance of Yule, the Nordic precursor to Christmas, in order to avoid *stállu* attacks. Wood piles were stacked neatly so loose wood would not snag the *stállu*’s sleigh caravan pulled by rodents, which might cause them to linger in the area. Buckets of water were put outside, so if a *stállu* was thirsty it would not seek out human blood. Everyone was expected to be quiet, since the *stálut* were on the prowl. These practices endured into the middle of the twentieth century.⁵³ In some regions, a person would even dress up as a *stállu* and travel from house to house – similar to the Julebuk tradition that formerly existed across the Nordic countries. According to Heide, “From Lyngen/Storfjorden in Troms, a habit is recorded that someone disguised as Stállu would come to the Christmas party trying to poke the girls with a half-burned stick of firewood (to make black marks on their clothes), demanding ‘tax for the king’ – or go from farm to farm doing this. ... Sometimes the stick would be phallus-shaped, and the girls would try to tear the clothes off Stállu.”⁵⁴ More contemporary pan-Scandinavian Christmas traditions took hold shortly after the Second World War, however, as the Julenisse tradition spread throughout Sápmi. Within the past few decades, the name Juovllastállu (the Yule Stállu) has sometimes even been used to refer to Santa Claus in North Saami – a recent reappropriation of the term.⁵⁵

Scholars have long taken interest in the origin of the *stállu*; it was first noted in the 1870s that the consonant cluster “st” at the beginning of the word is uncommon in the Saami languages, suggesting that the word is a loan word from a Scan-

51 Harald Gaski, John T. Solbakk, and Aage Solbakk, *Min njálmmálaš árbevierru: Máidnasat, myhtat ja muitalusat* (Kárášjohka: Davvi Girji, 2004), 167–68.

52 Heide, “The Wild Host,” 76–80.

53 *Ibid.*, 74–75.

54 *Ibid.*, 75.

55 *Ibid.*, 93n2.

dinavian language.⁵⁶ Accordingly, *stálut* have often been linked to Scandinavian settlers – a fact echoed in the Birkarl-like, tax-collecting *stállu* mentioned above. Eldar Heide surveys some of these theories in his work on the origins of the *stállu*. One popular early theory, common even in the nineteenth century within Saami communities, posits that “*stállu*” comes from the word “*stállli*” [steel], and references the chainmail marauders or settlers might wear, which is similar to the *ruovdegákti* [iron shirt] said to sometimes be worn by *stálut*. Heide convincingly argues that such a hypothesis is effectively implausible due to the cultural uses of steel and iron.⁵⁷ Heide himself argues that the word comes from “*ståle*,” meaning a group of living beings, in reference to the group of spirits engaged in the Christmastime wild hunt.⁵⁸ Regardless of the *stállu*’s etymological and narrative origins, at the turn of the twentieth century Saami people explicitly understood *stállu* as a colonial or settler outsider, posing a different kind of threat to Saami communities and social order than the *Čuđit* did.

The example below, told by Saami author Johan Turi in his classic *Muitalus Sámiid Birra*, draws from the *stállu*-as-wilderness-dweller tradition. Turi writes:

Stálut ledje stuorrát, ja go bohte dat olbmot, de sii heahpane, go sii leat nu stuorrát, ja dat iežá olbmot leat nu unnit ja čábbát. Ja stálut ledje heajut sahkkehít, ja stáluin ledje unnán nisoolbmot. Sii elle eanaš gottiiguin ja biertnai- ja visot meahcielliiguin]. –

Okta stállu lei bárdniláš, ja son čuvodii sámiid muhtumin. Ja son álggii orrut ovttá sámi siiddas, mii lei hui rikkis. Ja dan sámis lei nieida, ja stállu álggii irggástallat dan sámi niidii, ja nieida álggii maiddá liikot stálu bárdnái.

Ja nieidda áhčči lei hui vuostá. Son ii ipmirdan, got son galgá nieiddas oažžut eret stálus. De son jurddašii ovttá goansta. De son vurdđii go stállu vulggii gottiid bivdit, dego su vierru lei, de son dagai johttáma. Ja go sii johttáje, de son dajai vivvasis, ahte “mon johtttán, jos guhká ádjánat, muhto mon guođán nieidda ja dudnuide borranbohccuid.”

Ja go son johttái, de son čanadii bohccuid vivvasis, ja nieidda biktasiid cökkai stohkkejalgnái, ja ráhkadii nu siivvut ja ráhkadii muoraid muohttaga vuollái. Go stállu manai ain meaddel, de son duolmmui daid muoraid. Ja de son doaivvui ahte eallime dat lea, go dat muorat lihkaštahte, mat ledge čihkkon muohttaga vuollái. Ja go son málistii, de son čuorvu moarsis borrat, muhto go son ii bohtán, de son dajai:

– Boađe jos sidat, gal mon boran ieš.

Siida go lei johtttán, son lei čuollan olu rutniid ja gokčan daid jođáhaga ala, nu got su dáhpi lea leamaš ovdal nai. Ja go stállu álggii nohkkat, de son fas čuorvvui moarsasis;

– Boađe nohkkat!

Soai leigga juo ovdal nohkan olu ovttas bálddalaga. Ja go moarsi ii bohtán su lusa, go son čuorvvui, de son viehkalii ja dohppii moarsis ja guttii báldasis. Ja son álggii guldalit oza – ja guhte diehtá gokko son guldalii – go son fuomášii ahte dat leage dušše stohkki gárvvuhuvvon.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 75–76, 85–86.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 86–88.

Ja de son suhtai nu, go stálut leat ge leamaš hilibadat; go suhte, de eai diehtán, maid galggai vuohččan dahkat. Ja dát stállu maid ii diehtán, ahte son leai galgat gárvodit vuohččan, ja de easka vuolgit doarridit siida. Muhto son leai seammálágáš go iežá nai stálut, ahte son vulggii viehkat jodáhatráigge álás. Ja go jodáhaga ala ledje rutniid dahkan olu, de son viegai seavdnjadin rudnái. Ja son beasai das bajás, ja son viegai ain, ja gahčai fas nuppi ráigái. Ja son beasai fas bajás das nai, ja vulggii fas viehkat velá garraseappot, ja son gahčai fas. Ja dal leai son galbmon bealleheggii, ja de ii son šat beassan bajás, ja de son galbmui jámas.

Ja de sii vulge geahččat got lea geavvan. Ja nieida vulggii maidá geahččat. Ja de sii gávdne, go leai galbmon, ja bierggasriehpu leai galbmon skihččat. Ja dat su moarsi gal ii liikon go oinnii, ahte lea galbmon su irgi. Ja go son oinnii dan biergasa, got dat lea galbmon, de son dajai;

– Vuoi, vuoi, got lea galbmon bierggasriehpu!

Ja son goase čieru. Son leai álgán liikot stálu bárdnái, ja son leai náitalit, jos leai beasat, muhto áhčči earuhii nieiddas eret stálus dainna lágiin, ahte duššadii nu got lea ovdalis muitaluvvon. –

Stálut leat nohkan dál goase visot, muhto leat goit soames sámít velá stállu sohka. Ja dat lea šaddan dainna lágiin, go stálut leat náitalan sámí nieidda[igui]n, ja de lea šaddan soames olbmot – bealli stállu ja bealli olmmoš. Ja sii leat veaháš iežálágážit go iežá olbmott – hámis ja luonddus.⁵⁹

Stálut were large, and when people came along, they grew ashamed that they were so large and that the people were so small and beautiful. And stálut were bad at reproducing, and they had very few wives. They lived mostly off wild reindeer and bears and other wild animals.

One *stállu* was a bachelor and he began to socialize at times with the Sámi. And he started to live in a Sámi *siida* which was very rich. And the Sámi man there had a daughter, and the *stállu* started to court this girl. And the girl also started to like that *stállu* boy.

And the girl's father was very much against it, but he didn't know how he could get his daughter away from that *stállu*. And then he thought of a method. He waited until the *stállu* had set off to hunt wild reindeer, as was his custom. Then he prepared to travel away, and once they had left, he said to his son-in-law [the *stállu*]: "I'm moving. If you're gone for a long while, I'll leave my daughter and reindeer for the two of you to eat."

And when he was leaving, he tied up some reindeer for his son-in-law, and his daughter's clothes he put on a dry tree stump, and arranged it so carefully and placed branches under the snow. When the *stállu* walked by, he stepped on these branches and thought that the tree stump was alive because it was jostled by the branches hidden in the snow. And when the *stállu* had gotten the meal ready, he called to his bride to come eat. But when she didn't come, he said:

"Come if you want; I'm eating anyway."

And as the *siida* was leaving, the man had cut many holes in the ice along the trail they had taken and covered them over, as was their custom before. And when the *stállu* was ready to sleep, he called to his bride again:

"Come sleep!"

59 Turi, *Muitalus sámii birra*, 151–52.

They had already often slept together side by side. And when his bride did not come when he called, he jumped out and grabbed his bride and pulled her down beside him. And he started to feel around her chest and who knows where else he felt, and then he realized that it was nothing more than a dressed up tree stump.

And he became furious – for the *stálut* tended to be reckless – when they became angry, they didn't know what to do first. And that *stállu* also didn't know that he needed to get dressed first, but just headed off after the *siida*. But he was much the same as other *stálut* in that he set off down the trail stark naked. And since they had made many holes under the trail, he fell into one of the holes in the dark. And he climbed out and started running again and fell into another hole. And he climbed out of that one as well and started running even harder, and he fell in again. And now he was half dead, and he didn't manage to get out of it and so he froze to death.

And then they came to see what had happened. And the girl came to see as well. And when they found him, he was frozen solid, and his poor penis was frozen stiff and erect. And his bride did not like it when she saw that her bridegroom had frozen. And when she saw the penis that had frozen, she said:

“My oh my, his poor penis is frozen!”

And she nearly cried. She had started to like that *stállu* boy, and she would have married him if allowed, but her father separated his daughter from the *stállu* in the manner described above.

The *stálut* are now almost all gone, but some Sámi are still related to them. And that came about when *stálut* married with Sámi girls, and people were born who were half *stállu* and half human. And they are different from other people both in appearance and nature.⁶⁰

Though Turi's telling is not representative of the more common golem-*stállu* tradition, he taps into an additional motif present in many *stállu* tales: the *stállu*'s sexuality. Male *stálut* sometimes court and marry Saami women – often to the great distress of the woman's family. These and other *stállu* tales often end with the physical destruction of the *stállu*'s penis, which is sometimes frozen (as above), shot off with an arrow,⁶¹ or eaten in soup by his own *stállu* family.⁶² One need not conduct an elaborate Freudian reading to glean that these stories tap into anxieties about gendered power structures in outsider communities – in other words, colonial patriarchy. The story presents a cruel outsider, who can scarcely tell the difference between a human woman and a stump, and only comes to recognize the difference after a sexual assault. The daughter's fixation on his frozen and erect penis serves to underscore the hyper-sexual nature of the attraction, and – as in other tales – the destruction of the *stállu*'s penis corresponds with a sudden and humiliating loss of his power. These anxieties are ech-

⁶⁰ Turi, *An Account of the Sámi*, 147–48.

⁶¹ Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 95–97.

⁶² Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 89–93.

oed in the aforementioned Christmas *stállu* tradition, in which a Birkarl-like, tax-collecting *stállu* enters the home while trying to poke girls with a phallic stick. More generally, these stories express fears about intermarriage with cultural outsiders and abusive relationships in which social dynamics are closely linked to male anger and sexuality. Marrying outsiders – and, more generally, colonial patriarchy – is dangerous.

Whereas *Čuđit* stories speak to the overt violence of militaristic and extractive colonialism, Turi's *stállu* story speaks to the Saami's relationship with settler colonialism – in particular, with the increasing numbers of Nordic settlers moving into Saami territories and taking an interest in marrying into Saami families. Turi emphasizes this fact by suggesting that the descendants of Saami–*stállu* relationships are still living in Saami communities today. In this light, it is particularly noteworthy that already in the nineteenth century Saami regarded the *stállu* as a metaphor for settlers, creating the folk etymology of “*stállu*” coming from the word for steel and making historically dubious claims about chainmail-wearing aggressors engaged in violence against Saami people. As a remembrance of the past, this genre of *stállu* stories narrativizes Saami experiences with settler colonialism, projecting its historical realities backward into the imagined past. Unlike the *Čuđit* who invade Saami lands, the *stállut* are never said to have lived elsewhere, nor have arrived from afar; rather, living in close proximity to potentially violent outsiders is understood as a longstanding condition of the Saami experience. As is the case in settler colonialism, the threat of the *stállu* exists more on a personal and familial level, with one of the greatest dangers being to have a daughter who inexplicably succumbs to the *stállu*'s charms, only to find herself caught up in the cycles of violence of colonial patriarchy, control, and manipulation.

4 Peeivih-Vuáláppáž and Lateral Violence

While *Čuđit* and *stállu* stories speak directly to a colonial and ethnic Other, legends of religious shift in Sápmi speaks to more intracultural aspects of the colonial experience. Similarly set in the semi-distant historical past, the legend cycle of Peeivih-Vuáláppáž [Vuáláppáž, son of Peeivih] tells of Vuáláppáž's feats of seemingly superhuman strength and his role in the Christianization of Sápmi. Vuáláppáž's father, Peeivih, is identified in numerous stories as a *noaidi* [a Saami shaman].⁶³ A revered figure, Peeivih-Vuáláppáž was considered a real person, and he was recognized by

63 Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inarilappalaista kansantietoutta*, 38–39; Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 144–145; Lakomäki, “Talking about Violence,” 15–16.

many residents of Gihittel (Kittilä) and Bealdovuopmi (Peltovuoma) as a direct ancestor.⁶⁴ These stories dabble in the genres of both heroic legend and saint's legend, with certain stories simply pointing to Vuáláppáž's strength in the performance of great feats (e.g., placing boulders, or rowing with unthinkable speed) and others explicitly connecting his powers with miracles (e.g., changing the weather through prayer to facilitate the destruction of a sacred *sieidi* [rock or wooden figure]). Peeivih-Vuáláppáž bears similarities to two broader regional narrative traditions. One of the traditions emerges from the well-known regional legends about the *Kalevanpojat*. Common throughout Northern and Eastern Finland, through Karelia and into Estonia, *Kalevanpojat* are physically powerful giants whose feats of strength in bygone times resulted in the creation of distinct landscape features; in particular, peculiarly placed boulders. Furthermore, Peeivih-Vuáláppáž closely resembles another well-known figure, Óláfr Haraldsson (Saint Olaf; 995–1030), known elsewhere in the Nordic oral tradition for his stature and for his role in legends involving the Christianization of Norway.⁶⁵ Vuáláppáž's name is itself the Saami language version of Olaf, and many Peeivih-Vuáláppáž stories involve Christianization through the displacement or destruction of *sieidi*-related religious traditions. These *sieiddit* formerly figured centrally in a broader Saami religious culture, in which distinctive looking stones or wooden figures, which had a certain degree of supernatural power over their own local region, were given offerings of meats, fats, blood, coins, or drink, in exchange for good fortune. *Sieiddit* were (and still are) often given offerings in exchange for good fishing or hunting, for instance.⁶⁶

These Peeivih-Vuáláppáž legends exist as a subset of stories that detail the painful process of religious conversion in Sápmi, a process that spanned (depending on the specific region of Sápmi one resided in) roughly between the 1300s and 1800s, with the most pronounced changes occurring in the 1600s and 1700s. Even in the early twentieth century, most Saami were acutely aware of their pre-Christian past, largely because of the fierce stigmatization of – and strong endurance of – traditional Saami magico-religious practice. Missionaries, soldiers, settlers, and even some Saami engaged in the destruction of sacred items and sites, including *sieiddit*. Such legends speak to various forms of lateral violence – violence by Saami people directed at other Saami people within a colonial context. The following tale, told by Johan Kitti and recorded in 1888, explains one such encounter with a young Saami man trying to destroy a sacred site:

64 Lakomäki, "Talking about Violence," 15–16.

65 DuBois, "Insider and Outsider," 71–72.

66 Læstadius, *Fragments of Lappish Mythology*, 102–8.

De lei ok'ta boares olmai, gutte lei hui likkulaš gulid oaž'žot muttin jawrist. Son valdi alces ovta nuorra olbma guoibmen, gutte didi, atte son ani sieidi. Go soai bodiga jawre lusa, de soai suoppoiga nuotti ja oažžoiga olo gulid. Go ækked šaddai, de soai vuoššaiga gulid, ja go batti dul'degodi, de valdi boares olmai vuoja ja bijai sierra nuvt atte nuorra olmai dam i gal'gam oaidnet. Go soai leiga gær'gam borrhamest, de soai bijaiga nok'kat; muttu nuorra olmai goži javohaga nuvt, atte boares olmai dam i ar'vedam. Go boares olmai lei væl'lam oanehažža, ja son doaivoi, atte su olmai lei nok'kam, de njagai son olgus, valdi vuoddjalitti ja manai fadnasi ja sugai ras'ta joga. Go son bodi dokku, de manai son ovta vil'ges jor'ba gædge lusa, maid son vuoidai vuojain, ja son manai fadnasi, bodi ruok'tot ja nokkai. Das'tu njagai nuorra olmai fadnasi, sugai ras'ta joga, valdi dam vu'dujuvvum gædgi fadnasi ja suwdi guow'do jawre, gosa son dam bal'kesti, ja sugai ruok'tot nok'kam varas. Go son likkai bajas, de manai son olgus oaidnem ditti, movt olgubæl'de lei, ja son aicai, atte gæd'gi lei sæmma sajest.

Dam bæive soai biwdiga, muttu soai æba ož'žum olo gulid, eitu dam madi, atte soai vuoššaiga, ja dak leddjē hui silik, nuvt atte soai oažžoiga hui un'nan vuoja. Muttu boares olmai vur'ki vuoja su lit'tasas. Nuorra olmai ar'vidi dam hui burist; son bijai nok'kat, dainago son didi, maid boares olmai galgai. Go boares olmai lei ruok'tot boattam, de manai nuorra olmai olgus ja sugai gædgi lusa, maid son valdi fadnasi, ja čanai nubbi stuora gædge dasa hui nannuset væddaih guoim gidda, sugai guow'do jawri ja sup'pi dokku, bodi ruok'tot ja nokkai. Go ided lei šad'dam, de manai son olgus, ja son oini, atte gæd'gi lei fastan sæmma sajest. Son šaddai sagga ibmaši; muttu son oroi javohaga.

Dam bæivi biwdiga soai maida; muttu æba soai ož'žum mai'dege gulid, vaiku soai oiniga hui olo gulid alu go soai suoppoiga nuotti. Muttu go nuotti bodi gad'dai, de æba soai oaž'žum mai'dege. De dajai nuorra olmai atte: "Hæitok bai læge du ibmel." Boares olmai ar'vidi, atte su ibmel lei billestuvvum, ja son suttai nu sagga olbmas ala, atte son aigoi su god'dik. Nuorra olmai fer'ti battarek dade buoreb, made fargabut. Boares olmai bazi ok'tu ok'tan nuttin ja fadnasin; muttu son oažžoi nu olo gulid, atte son i sattam raddjak.⁶⁷

There was once an old man who always had great luck when fishing from a particular lake. He took a young person out to this lake as a fishing companion, and this young man knew that he used a *sieidi*. When they came to the lake, they put out their seine and caught a lot of fish.

When evening came, they cooked up some fish. When the stew began to boil, the old man took some fish grease and put it aside, so that the young man wouldn't see it. When they had finished eating, they went to bed, but the young man silently stayed awake, so that the old man didn't know that he was awake.

Once the old man had lain down for a little while and thought that his friend was asleep, he crept out to his boat and rowed up along the river. When he got there, he went to a white, round stone, which he greased with the fish fat. He then went back to his boat, returned to the camp, and slept. The young companion crept out to the boat, rowed along the river, and took the greased stone to the boat. He rowed the stone to the middle of the lake, where he threw it into the water, and rowed back to the camp to sleep. When he woke up, he went outside to see how things were. He noticed that the stone was in the exact same place.

67 Qvigstad, *Lappiske eventyr og sagn*, vol. 2, 506–8.

That day they fished, but they didn't catch many fish, only enough so that they could cook dinner. It was a terribly weak stew, and they got just a little grease. But the old man saved the grease in a little container. The young person noticed this. He set off for bed, because he knew what the old man had to do. Once the old man had come back, the young man went out and rowed to the stone, which he took into the boat. This time, he tied another big stone to it with roots; he rowed to the centre of the lake and threw it out. Then he went back and slept. When morning came, he went out and saw that the stone was once again in the same place. He started to really marvel about how this could be happening, but he stayed silent.

That day they fished again, but they didn't catch any fish at all, even though they always saw a lot of fish when they threw out the seine. But when they pulled the seine to the shore, they didn't get a thing. Then the young man said, "Your god is in fact perhaps weak."

The old man knew that his god had been offended. He got so very mad at his companion that he intended to kill him. The young man had to flee, the faster the better. The old man stayed alone with one seine and the boat. But when he started fishing again, he caught so many fish that he wasn't even able to keep them all. (My translation)

Kitti's story reveals the enduring power of the *sieidi* in the mindscape of the community, able to regulate the fish released to humans and to magically resurrect itself from the depths of the lake. Kitti is sympathetic to the old man and suggests that the one to blame for the violence was the younger Christian who was participating in the destruction of an effective traditional system of religious practice.

As traditional religious practice grew increasingly stigmatized, it tended to be practised in secrecy, and uncertainty abounded in the community over who still engaged in it. Such concerns are echoed in Ole Jonsen's short narrative from 1883 about a *noaidi* who is treated poorly and responds with a display of mystical might:

Muttim aike guolastæd'dje sukka nuorraï gæsaçet males-guole, ja de boatta gad'dai ja gæssam læi mallasan ja çuop'pa battai. Malistæd'dje læ loavon, ja son læ nis-olmus, mut'to noai'de val. De goç'ço guolastæd'dje mannat sun goattai ja dakkat dola ja malistet dan guollebade. Muttu malistæd'dje daddja: "Im mon jowta; mus læ hollo bar'go loavon: halmak cab'mit ja gor'nek sew'njet." De daddja guolastæd'dje: "Don galkak var'ga malistet." Go guolastæd'dje dan dajai, de sut'tagodi malistæd'dje ja daddja: "Buvte var'ga guollebade dëk!" De viežžai guolastæd'dje bade ja guddi lovvui malistæd'dje lusa. De bajedi malistæd'dje dan bade halmait nala; de duol'dagodi guollebatte. De daddja guolastæd'dje: "Don boaltak ollis hal'ma-loavo." Muttu sus i læm mikkegen dolait, muttu batte dan ditti duoltai halmait nal'de ilma dolagæt'te. De imastalla guolastæd'dje, mi dat gal'ga lækktet, go batte duol'da halmait nal'de ilma dolahækkka. De daddja malistæd'dje: "Deinago don sidak nuvt hoappon borrat, de ver'te dun ežat borramhallo duoltahtet guollebade" (lækktet dollan bade vuolen).⁶⁸

68 Qvigstad, *Lappiske eventyr og sagn*, vol. 2, 494–96.

Once a fisherman was rowing to seine some fish to eat during the summer. He came to the shore and had dragged up some food and cut it up into a pot. The cook was in the barn, and she was a woman, but a *noaidi* nonetheless. The fisherman told her to come to his *goahiti* [turf hut], to make a fire and cook the fish stew. But the cook said, “I don’t have time; I have a ton of work in the barn: the straw must be threshed and the grain winnowed.” The fisherman said, “You need to cook food, and you need to cook it now!” When the fisherman said that, the cook got mad and said, “Well, bring your stew pot here now!” The fisherman fetched the pot and carried it to the barn to the cook. The cook set the pot up on top of the straw and boiled the fish stew right in the hay barn. The fisherman said, “What are you doing? You’ll burn down the whole hay barn!” But when he looked again, he saw that she wasn’t using any kind of fire. The stew was boiling over the straw without fire. The fisherman marvelled over this. How could it be, that a stew boils over ordinary straw without fire? The cook said, “Maybe because you’re in such a hurry to eat. Your own burning desire to eat boils your fish stew.” (My translation)

Jonsen’s narrative presents the woman’s *noaidi* skills as a disquieting reminder of the endurance of these traditions and as a reminder of the ways aggressive actions can quickly escalate into violence given the tensions of the colonial context. The cook could have gone further than just boiling the stew using magic; she could have done far worse to the overbearing fisherman. Jonsen’s story ultimately suggests the need for respect and peacefulness between the two belief systems that were co-existing within the community.

In contrast to the above examples, however, many storytellers approach the destruction of the old ways as a welcome cultural development. For many Christian Saami, the idea of early and voluntary adoption of a newer, more powerful, and superior faith has powerful appeal. The Peeivih-Vuoláppáž cycle celebrates the displacement and destruction of these old ways. For instance, the Aanaar Saami catechist and farmer Mikko Aikio tells of Peeivih-Vuoláppáž:

toi äigij kuo (k)rist-oško vuottšin kulluškuođij ja pōđij taid Simieñamaid, lei tãbbin älmäi, keän nommä lei Peivih-Vuoläb. sun lei meidei poatt’am kullađ krist-oskōst ja kulm-oñtsi im-
 èlist, mut ton äigi palvãli ulmũh ain sieidij. mut’ Peivih-Vuoläbavž lei eãp’ãnu-zast, ét ij
 sieidj leh äinaskin rievat’is immël. tonđiet sun pajëluv kējjaškuođij sieidij ja aĩvalškuođij
 taid hevatt’id. mut sieidist lei vuõõimĩ nuutt’ ennũ, ko sun tōvvai Peivih-Vuoläbã puwættsen, ét
 sun ij vajjãm kolbedgin. sun fertt’ij orrod kōđijn, ko eãrrazeh elli kolbemin. kolbembōijij
 orōđijnis ja illã vajebēijnis sun vuordij kolbēid ja kējjai kēlrãigi mielō olgōs jave vuãmãšij
 kuo pietitt’emes pãrnãvž peãvãvãt nuwtt’ũlgai mielō, te sun ärvijij, ét sieidj li sũ kũmmat-
 t’almin. sun tsēlhij nãutt’: “Muđušjãuri äkk’ũ ũlgai mielō peãvãvãt, mut’ ele huola, tuoñã-
 rokk’e, kuo mun tãst puarãniđvžem, kale tun vala puãlãh.” Jēde uštũ, kuo sun puãrrãnij,
 te sun vuolgiij sieidj kuul ja nũrai muoraid sieidj kēđgi olã. kuo sun puãllãtškoođij, te pōđij
 aĩve ja pieggã nuutt’, ét ij tullã puãllãmgin. sun fertt’ij nube kērdi puãllãtt’ij jave lũhalij
 taid sãnijij, maid sun lei kũllam ja mãttam: “ējji, algē ja pasē jiega nõman”. te tũlavž kēm-
 maguođij jēde sieidj puolij. – tãt sieidj-bãikk’i lei Muđušjãuri nuwtt’ibeln Sieidjvãrã

riddōst ja tälliur aijn oaīñojeh kodè tšoarvih ja tãutih ton sieid̄i-bãihist mušton tãste, éf mī oūdãejijih lē tovvēn ep'immēl paļvãlam.⁶⁹

In those times when the Christian faith first arrived here in Sápmi and started to become better known, there was a man by the name Peeivih-Vuálappáž. He too had come to hear of the Christian faith and the triune God, but in those times people still worshiped at *sieiddit*. Peeivih-Vuálappáž, however, suspected that the *sieidi* was no proper god. For that reason he started to despise *sieiddit* and started to destroy them. But the *sieidi* had powers so great that they made Peeivih-Vuálappáž sick, so that he couldn't even go out seining. He had to stay at home while others went out seining. So he waited in sickness for the seiners and looked out from the hole in a spool and then noticed a naked child crawling along the seining rack. He guessed the *sieidi* had been haunting him. Vuálappáž said:

– The old woman of Muddusjãvri (Muddusjärvi) Lake is crawling along the rack, but don't you worry, you damned creature ... I'll get better and once I do, you indeed will burn!

And so after he recovered, he went to the *sieidi* and gathered wood onto the *sieidi* stone. When he started to light the fire, there came rain and wind so that no flames would spark. He had to start trying to light the fire again, when once again there came rain and wind, extinguishing the flames again. Then he lit it yet a third time and recited those words, which he had heard and learned:

– In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!

Then the flames sparked and the *sieidi* burned.

This *sieidi* place was on the shore of Muddusjãvri, on the north side of the Sieidivaarã (Seitavaara) Mountain. And in that *sieidi*-place you can still see wild reindeer antlers and bones as a remnant of our ancestors' ungodly worship there.⁷⁰

Using a spool as a magical tool, Vuálappáž sees that the *sieidi* has unleashed some kind of spirit upon him to make him sick. In retribution, his efforts to burn the *sieidi* are thwarted by this powerful adversary until his appeal to the Christian god finally allows him to overpower it.

In other instances, Vuálappáž is said to have created rock formations that are associated with *sieidi* sites. One of these sites called Pajalaskedgi (Päällyskivi, or the Capstone) is known locally to exist at Konišnjargã (Konesniemi), in which a very large stone is balanced precariously upon three smaller stones, all atop a boulder. Such “capstone” formations have been associated with *sieidi* sites along the Finnish–Russian border, stretching down to the historic Saami villages of the Kitka siida and beyond. Another, more prominent, example is again related by Mikko Aikio:

valã mot'õmin kiũšed̄i sũ tãpžah, ko siñuũ liiji kũllam, ét sun lei nuuřt viehšã, ja liiji tãtt'uõ mielastis oaĩniõ sũ stuořã viehšvuoða. te sun kihtui opp'et tšãitt'iõ vuoimijis ja vãlbij stuořã

69 Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inarilappalaista kansantietoutta*, 39–41.

70 Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sámi Folklore*, 145–46.

kēđgi, pajjēđij tom pajàs ja steřgǵǵǵlij ēnnam sīzǵ; tot' keđđgi valǵ onnǵ pēivi li tǵst orrōmin Tseǵudzui-geđđgi nommǵsī pǵǵihist mēra rido albǵ Vǵrjjuvuona tavǵveln.⁷¹

Another time he was taunted by Norwegians, when they too had heard of him being strong and wanted to see his great strength. He agreed again to show his strength and took a large stone, lifted it into the air, and threw it so it stuck into the ground. That stone is still to this day visible at a place called Ceǵvžuikeđđgi (Ceavccageǵđgi) on the north shore of Vǵrjjuvuona (Varanger) Fjord, near the sea.⁷²

Located in Unjǵrga (Nesseby, Norway), today Ceavccageǵđgi is managed by the Vǵrjjuat Sǵmi Musea (Varanger Sǵmi Museum). Surrounded by circles of concentric rings of small stones, this distinctive angular stone wedged into the earth is widely accepted to have been historically used as a fishing *sieidi* in Varanger Fjord. Although it was used for centuries, if not millennia, dating back to antiquity, these stories represent a figurative displacement of a pre-Christian past and Christianity's re-mythologizing of place. Through this process, as DuBois notes, "the Christian outsider becomes incorporated into the Anar landscape and thereby into the Anar heart, an event unparalleled in accounts of Nuortta [Skolt Sǵmi] or Russian interlopers. The positive social value [Vuǵlǵppǵž] represents – i.e., Christianity – must be incorporated into both the human collective and the physical terrain."⁷³

If *Čuđit* stories are a means to think about extractive colonialism, and *stǵllu* stories engage with settler colonialism, the Peeivih-Vuǵlǵppǵž legend cycle is about lateral violence and colonial erasure. These legends present this lateral violence as an acceptable violence, necessary for the creation of Saami agency within the present. If Vuǵlǵppǵž's actions are indeed violent, he at least represents the violent pangs of internal growth – a coming of age story for the Saami – as Saami willingly adopt a more powerful and effective system of religious practice. In an effort to reconcile the tensions between a not-too-distant historical past and a Christian present, these stories mitigate accusations of Saami paganism and witchcraft, and they erase – wherever possible – the undesirable marks of the pre-Christian past that still dot the landscape today with the palimpsest of Christian conversion. Ironically, this meant whitewashing the real and documented violence of early missionaries (like Gabriel Tuderus and others), supplanting them with stories of voluntary conversion from within the Saami community: Peeivih's *noaidevuohta* becomes Vuǵlǵppǵž's Christianity; and *sieddit* are rendered the relics of heroic saint's legends. Such a trope acknowledges the violence of the past but reframes it in ways that empower the current realities of a Christian Saami present.

71 Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inarilappalaista kansantietoutta*, 44.

72 Koskimies and Itkonen, *Inari Sǵmi Folklore*, 148–49.

73 DuBois, "Insider and Outsider," 72.

In some ways, the Vuáláppáž legends reflect Saami survivance in ways similar to the other genres we have examined. The Saami survive *Čudit* raids, rejecting genocide or displacement as others claim dominion over their lands. They survive *stállu* attacks and intermarriage, and struggle to maintain kinship networks and familial identity. And they survive Christianization by reimagining conversion, removing the brutal missionary figure, and resisting narratives that they have been “saved” by outsiders – an incredibly dangerous concession during a period of forced assimilation.

Conclusion

As Saami people (re)constructed their own history around the turn of the twentieth century, their imaginings of the past by necessity emerged in dialogue with their historical present. In reflecting upon nature of violent stories in Sápmi, Sami Lakomäki notes,

When people tell stories about the past, they invite others into a conversation in a specific social and political setting. Addressing contemporary concerns from contemporary vantage points, the storytellers and their audiences imagine, discuss, and debate what occurred in the past and what bearing it has for the present. Stories, then, tell less about the events they depict than about the meanings which narrators and audiences ascribe to those events.⁷⁴

At the height of forced assimilation and overt colonialism in the nineteenth century, Saami people came to see the undercurrent of these colonial dynamics within their own history, and these themes manifested themselves within several different genres of historical and belief legend cycles. *Čudit* legends resonate with the extractive colonialism of historic raids and exploitative taxation structures within the context of the slow violence of state-sanctioned land theft in the 1800s. The interpersonal dimension of living alongside settlers was reflected in *stállu* tales, as these two cultures struggled to peacefully co-exist. The “undesirable” pre-Christian past was mediated in many ways, including the critique of Saami lateral violence, the erasure of a pre-Christian past via the remythologizing of a Saami landscape through Peeivih-Vuáláppáž tales, and the eventual coming to terms with Christian violence as having been part of a journey toward the perceived greater good of the contemporary world. These historical experiences with extractive colonialism, settler colonialism, and missionization undergo processes of folklorization as they emerge as prominent and predominant themes within

⁷⁴ Lakomäki, “Talking about Violence,” 3.

these widespread legend cycles. Saami history, like all history, consists of imaginaries, as facts and memory are built and re-built into stories – creating elegant but ephemeral sandcastles on the shore that weather in the wind and rain, eroding back into the expanses of beach, only to be re-assembled by others who wander upon those same beaches under the summer sun.

These medieval imaginaries are best understood as a narrative prequel to the present. Set in an unspecified historically distant past, the legends above explain the origins of current social and political realities, narrativize contemporary insider–outsider power dynamics, and ultimately advocate for Saami agency within a painful process of social and cultural change. Such a process is akin to any form of historiography, wherein the production of historical narrative emerges equally from the historiographer as from verifiable historical fact. As such, the supernatural *stállu* may tell us little about actual Saami life in the medieval period, but its re-imagining as a colonial allegory reveals much about how Saami people constructed their own history in relation to the colonial struggles of the nineteenth century. Although in the medieval period Sápmi most likely enjoyed greater prosperity and security than in the era of Enlightenment, Christianization, and settler colonialism that followed, the nineteenth-century Saami construction of the historically distant past tended to blur these periods into a more amorphous time, one defined less by linear chronology and more by a nexus of diverse narrative experiences with colonialisms that explain and frame the Saami–settler relations of the present. Such colonial themes are pervasive across Saami legends, revealing that the most terrifying monsters of all are not – as in other European traditions – the creatures lurking in the dark forest thicket; rather, these monsters are the human colonizers, settlers, and missionaries who come to Saami lands.

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Timothy Bourns

Chapter 2

Can We Access a Counter-Narrative to the Vínland Sagas through Kalaallit Oqaluttualiaat?

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to introduce a relatively new project in which I am questioning whether, and how, we can access a counter-narrative to the Old Norse-Icelandic Vínland sagas by creating a dialogue with Greenlandic Inuit oral tradition, specifically the folklore collection compiled in the nineteenth century by Hinrich Johannes Rink, the famed Danish geologist and glaciologist.¹ While the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus famously preserves textual traces of the first encounters between Norse explorers from Scandinavia and the Indigenous peoples of Greenland and North America, these descriptions are one-sided, Eurocentric, and racialized. However, there also exist five lesser-known Inuit tales about Norse settlers in medieval Greenland which were recorded in the nineteenth century. My hypothesis is that appreciation of these stories may promote recognition of “the other side of the story,” thus reframing and reimagining first contact between European settlers and the Indigenous peoples of Greenland and North America while acknowledging the value of Indigenous oral traditions and validity of non-textual knowledge and culture. At this early and evolving stage, my objective is to plant a seed, foster dialogue, and pose questions, rather than provide definitive answers or a polished final product. To this end, this volume also contains a conversation which includes reflection, feedback, and discussion between myself, Maya Sialuk Jacobsen, and Christian Koch Madsen, moderated by Cordelia Heß (see “A Way Forward? Discussing Colonial Entanglements and Medieval Studies” in this volume).

¹ I use “we” to refer to Old-Norse Icelandic scholars as well the medievalist community at large, but it is also intended in the broadest and most inclusive possible sense of the word.

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1 Positioning and Situating

First, to briefly situate myself in relation to this research: broadly speaking, I study and teach the history of narratives and question what the stories we tell tell us about who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. I am a scholar of medieval literature and Old Norse-Icelandic literature in particular. My instigating motivations for thinking more seriously about Indigeneity in relation to my research included my firm belief in the brilliance and significance of traditional ecological knowledge, as well as reflection on my many years as a canoe-tripping guide, primarily with Camp Wanapitei: moving through Indigenous lands and communities in northern Canada, experiences which also shaped my purpose and identity as a scholar of animal and environmental studies. While I currently live in the UK (at the time of writing) and have spent much of my adult life to date in Europe, I am from Canada and was raised in southern Ontario, born in a town known to settlers as Oakville, on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, part of the Anishinaabe Nation, and I come from a white settler background on both sides of my family.²

Kalaaleq scholar Robert Petersen writes that “If one cannot observe one’s own prejudices, the results will be filled with ethnocentrism,” and as I have heard Tongva medievalist Wallace Cleaves say on multiple occasions, “research yourself or you will be researched.”³ Positionality and subjectivity are unavoidable.

2 On honouring the land and territory, see “Land Acknowledgement,” Town of Oakville, 20.03.2024 <https://www.oakville.ca/town-hall/land-acknowledgement>.

3 Robert Petersen, “A Greenlandic problem of lack of intermediate persons,” in *Papers presented at the Indigenous Anthropology in Non-Western Countries Symposium No. 78* (New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, 1978), 13; Wallace Cleaves, “Indigenous Ways of Knowing + (Pre)Modern Ecocriticisms: A Conversation,” roundtable hosted by the Oecologies Research Cluster, online, February 11, 2022; Wallace Cleaves, “Human-Nature: Stewardship and Kynde Relationality Between the Medieval Wilderness and the Indigenous Environment,” paper presented at the Conference of the Medieval Association of the Pacific, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, April 21–24, 2022. Cleaves further explains that “My focus and the attendant direction of my research is influenced by my own perspective, *as it must always be*” (emphasis added), and thus “all academics who study cultures, periods, and subjectivities different from their own should probably be asking themselves [. . .] how their own subject positions necessarily and profoundly affect their own research and work.” Wallace Cleaves, “From Monmouth to Madoc to Māori: The Myth of Medieval Colonization and an Indigenous Alternative,” *English Language Notes* 58, no. 2 (2020): 24. For medievalist critique of so-called objectivity, also see Nahir Otaño Gracia, who writes that “White [heteronormative] academia needs to stop pretending that calls to objectivity, impartiality, and clarity are about rigor – these calls are about power,” and the words of Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh: “Who I am shapes my canon. It determines what I read, why I read, how I read, and what I experience while reading.” Nahir Otaño Gracia, “A Critical Subjec-

able, though medievalists are not traditionally accustomed to facing them, and academics in general are not very good at confessing to their privileges. I also hope that sharing some of these considerations will prompt reflection and dialogue about responsibility and ethics. Thus, when it comes to this work, not only asking *how* but also *why* – leaning into that discomfort, that learning edge. Given the significance of positionality and privilege in relation to this (and all) research, these are important factors for me to continue to reflect upon – recognizing the limits of what I can and should do as a person who is not Inuit or Indigenous, and in all honesty, I still feel as though I am in the relatively early stages of what must become a lifelong journey of unlearning and relearning. With humility and commitment, I aim to situate myself as an ally working towards Reconciliation (“addressing past wrongs”), Decolonization (“deconstructing colonial ideologies”), and Indigenization (“naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems”).⁴ I also hold the conviction that medievalists of all stripes, and especially Old Norse scholars, have an ethical responsibility to not frame *Vinland*, and more widely the narrative history of the medieval North Atlantic, in a one-sided way. In doing this work, I therefore aim to proceed with solidarity, respect, and accountability.

tive Analysis of Objectivity,” *The H-Net Book Channel*, 01.06.2022, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/1883/discussions/10333626/critical-subjective-analysis-objectivity>; Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” *Literature Compass* 16, nos. 9–10 (2019): 2.

⁴ My understanding of these terms is informed by Antoine Asma-na-hi et al.: “*Reconciliation* is about addressing past wrongs done to Indigenous Peoples, making amends, and improving relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to create a better future for all [. . .] *Decolonization* refers to the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches [. . .] Decolonization necessitates shifting our frames of reference with regard to the knowledge we hold; examining how we have arrived at such knowledge; and considering what we need to do to change misconceptions, prejudice, and assumptions about Indigenous Peoples [. . .] *Indigenization* is a process of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts. In the context of post-secondary education, this involves bringing Indigenous knowledge and approaches together with Western knowledge systems” (emphases added). Antoine Asma-na-hi, Rachel Mason, Roberta Mason, Sophia Palahicky, and Carmen Rodríguez de France, *Pulling Together: A Guide for Indigenization of Post-Secondary Institutions*, Professional Learning Series (Victoria: BCcampus, 2018), 6–7. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers>.

2 Sources and Context

The Old Norse corpus preserves textual traces of the first encounters between Norse explorers from Scandinavia and the Indigenous peoples of *Kalaallit Nunaat* and Turtle Island, Greenland and North America. Most famously, the two *Vínland* sagas – *Eiríks saga rauða* [The Saga of Erik the Red] and *Grænlendinga saga* [The Saga of the Greenlanders] – contain the most elaborate narrative detail about Norse-Indigenous interaction in Newfoundland and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence (possibly ancestors of the now-extinct Beothuk people).⁵ Indigenous peoples in Greenland are also briefly mentioned in several other Old Norse-Icelandic texts, usually in the context of conflict.⁶ These encounters are only described from a one-sided, Eurocentric perspective, and much scholarship has evaluated their racialized depiction of Indigenous peoples that the Norse colonists encounter, the

5 *Eiríks saga rauða*, in *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 4, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), 193–237; *Grænlendinga saga*, in *ibid.*, 244–69. These so-called *Vínland* sagas were composed in the thirteenth century but are only preserved in later manuscripts: *Eiríks saga rauða* is preserved in *Hauksbók* and *Skálholtsbók*, and *Grænlendinga saga* is preserved in *Flateyjarbók*. The earliest textual mention of *Vínland* is in Latin, by Adam of Bremen in the 1070s – see Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*, in *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*, ed. Werner Trillmich and Rudolf Buchner, 7th edition (Darmstadt: WBG, 2000), 488–90. As Annette Kolodny suggests, the Beothuk are “prime candidates for the first indigenous peoples of North America to have met the Norse. But we will probably never know.” See Annette Kolodny, *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vinland, the Peoples of the Dawnland, and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2012), 99, and further references therein. Birgitta Linderóth Wallace has suggested that they were ancestors of Alonquin-speaking Innu, who were related to the Beothuk, though archaeological evidence indicates that several other groups would travel east to the Atlantic coast during the summer season. Birgitta Linderóth Wallace, “*Vínland* and the Death of Þorvaldr,” in *Vinland Revisited: the Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson (St. John’s: Historic Sites Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2000), 389.

6 Old Norse-Icelandic texts which mention the presence of *skrælingjar* (Indigenous peoples, whether Late Dorset or Thule Inuit) in Greenland include *Íslendingabók* (ch. 6), *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 48), and the Icelandic Annals for 1379 and 1385), as well as the Latin *Historia Norwegiæ*. See references and discussion in e.g. Robert McGhee, “Contact Between Native North Americans and the Medieval Norse: A Review of the Evidence,” *American Antiquity* 49, no. 1 (1984): 4–26; Jette Arneborg, “Contact Between Eskimos and Norsemen in Greenland – A Review of the Evidence,” in *Beretning af tolvte tværfaglige Vikingsymposium*, ed. Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Højbjerg: Hikuin og Afdeling for Middelalderarkæologi, 1993), 23–35; Jette Arneborg, “Cultural Borders: Reflections on Norse-Eskimo Interaction,” in *Fifty Years of Arctic Research: Anthropological Studies From Greenland to Siberia*, ed. Rolf Gilberg, Jørgen Meldgaard, and Hans Christian Gulløv (Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark, 1997), 41–46.

so-called *skrælingjar* [a term which translates as “barbarians” in modern Icelandic and – like the colonial exonym “Eskimo” – is best avoided in common parlance].⁷ The legacy of Vínland is also a problem, as it has historically been used as justification for settler-colonialism and its symbolism continues to be appropriated by white supremacist groups.⁸

The Vínland sagas receive more than enough airtime and I will not discuss them at length in this essay, though I hasten to add that there is surely plenty of exciting and important creative and critical work that remains to be done with these texts, not least from postcolonial and decolonial perspectives. These two pseudo-historical, semi-fictional texts were written independently of one another in Iceland in the thirteenth century and describe events occurring from 970 to 1030. They are similar in some ways, such as recurring characters, but differ in the details; they both tell of the Norse voyages to Vínland, the first expedition led by Leifr inn heppni [the Lucky], son of Eiríkr rauði [the Red], who himself founded the first Norse settlement in Greenland after being outlawed from Iceland. They feature first contact, trade and conflict, and importantly, in *Eiríks saga rauða*, the settlers realize that there will always be danger and conflict with the

7 In the Hauksbók version of *Eiríks saga rauða*, for example, the Indigenous population is described as “svartir menn ok illiligr ok höfðu illt hár á höfði; þeir váru mjök eygðir ok breiðir í kinnum” (“dark people and wicked-looking and they had nasty hair on their heads; they were very large in the eyes and broad in the cheeks”) [in the Skálholtsbók version, they are described as *smair* rather than *svartir*, i.e. “small”], *Eiríks saga rauða*, 227. On this racialization, see e.g. Sverrir Jakobsson, “Black Men and Malignant-Looking’: The Place of the Indigenous Peoples of North America in the Icelandic World View,” in *Approaches to Vínland: A Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North Atlantic Region and Exploration of America*, ed. Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: The Nordic House, 2001), 88–104. Both sagas feature episodes of trade exploitation: with red cloth in *Eiríks saga* and dairy products in *Grœnlendinga saga* – on this bilking, see e.g. Jerold C. Frakes, “Vikings, Vínland and the Discourse of Eurocentrism,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 100 (2001): 157–99, and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 257–86.

8 On Vínland and Indigenous erasure, see e.g. Christopher Crocker, “The First White Mother in America’: Guðríör Þorbjarnardóttir, Popular History, Firsting, and White Feminism,” *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 30 (2023), 1–28; and Christopher Crocker, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Vínland: History, Whiteness, Indigenous Erasure, and the Early Norse Presence in Newfoundland,” *Canadian Journal of History / Annales canadiennes d’histoire* 55, nos. 1–2 (2020): 91–122. On the legacy of Vínland, see further Kolodny, *In Search of First Contact*; Tim William Machan and Jón Karl Helgason, eds, *From Iceland to the Americas: Vínland and Historical Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Carlyne Larrington, *The Norse Myths that Shape the Way We Think* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2023), 25–52.

land's first inhabitants, so they returned home.⁹ Significantly, this is about five centuries prior to the voyages of Columbus.

Most scholars of Old Norse studies, let alone medieval literature and history more widely, are seemingly unaware that there also exists a series of *Kalaallit* [Greenlandic Inuit] legends about *Qallunaat* [Norse settlers] in Greenland which, as claimed by their collector, Hinrich Rink (anglicized as Henry Rink), date to the medieval period.¹⁰ According to Old Norse textual sources, Greenland was settled by Norse-speaking settlers from Norway and Iceland in the year 985 or 986 CE, which generally accords with archaeological evidence.¹¹ There were two primary Norse colonies established on the island throughout the medieval period, generally known as the Western and Eastern Settlements, which were eventually abandoned in the fifteenth century, perhaps partially due to a cooling climate during the Little Ice Age (whereas the Thule Inuit communities in Greenland continued to survive).¹² There was cross-cultural contact and exchange during this period, the degree to which is unknown but the existence of is certain, as evidenced by the archaeological record, Old Norse textual references, and the potential existence of Old Norse loanwords in modern Greenlandic Inuit languages.¹³ The mem-

9 *Eiríks saga rauða*, 230.

10 There are virtually no publications on the subject in medieval and Old Norse studies, and to my knowledge, the stories are rarely taught or discussed. One notable exception is Gwyn Jones' *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland, and America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Jones reproduces the story of "Ungortok the Chief of Kakortok" from Rink's English translation, which he identifies as a "splendidly bloodthirsty tale" (214–19).

11 See Jakob Benediktsson, ed. *Íslendingabók – Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1968), 13.

12 For a recent and accessible overview of the medieval Norse colonies in Greenland, see Robert W. Rix, *The Vanished Settlers of Greenland: In Search of a Legend and Its Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). Also see Jette Arneborg, "The Norse Settlement of Greenland," in *The Cambridge History of the Polar Regions*, ed. Adrian Howkins and Peder Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 129–52. On depictions of Greenland and its Norse settlements in Icelandic saga literature, see e.g. Gísli Sigurðsson, "Greenland in the Sagas of Icelanders: What Did the Writers Know – And How Did They Know It?" in *Stanzas of Friendship: Studies in Honour of Tatjana N. Jackson*, ed. Natalya Gvozdetkaya, Irina G. Konovalova, Elena A. Melnikova, and Alexandr V. Podossinov (Moscow: Dmitriy Pozharskiy University, 2011), 83–100; Jonathan Grove, "The Place of Greenland in Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative," *Journal of the North Atlantic* 2 (2009): 30–51.

13 On possible Old Norse loanwords, see van der Voort, Hein, "Eskimo Pidgin in West Greenland," in *Language Contact in the Arctic: Northern Pidgins and Contact Languages*, ed. Ernst Håkon Jahr and Ingvild Broch (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1996), 157–260. On the archaeology of Inuit-Norse contact in Greenland and northern Canada, see e.g. McGhee, "Contact Between Native North Americans and the Medieval Norse," 4–26; Arneborg, "Contact Between Eskimos and

ory of these encounters was also preserved in Indigenous oral narration, but this tradition has never been recognized as valid historical source material and brought into the field of medieval studies. Of course, Vinland and Greenland are not the same place, these are not the same peoples, despite being lumped together under the term *skrælingjar* in saga literature. But as historians of the premodern, we are working with the few narrative source materials available. Archaeology has much to offer as well, though sadly, organic artefacts preserved in permafrost are decaying rapidly as rising temperatures thaw the soil.¹⁴

3 The Recording of Inuit Greenlandic Oral Tradition

Greenland was colonized by Denmark in the eighteenth century, beginning with Hans Egede's first mission in 1721, and in the nineteenth century, Hinrich Rink lived in Greenland for sixteen winters and twenty-two summers.¹⁵ In 1858, Rink issued an invitation to all Greenlanders for examples of legends and poetic works, and the response was considerable.¹⁶ While also drawing upon previously recorded stories, Rink coordinated the publication of this material between 1859 and 1863 in both Kalaallisut [West Greenlandic] and Danish within a four-volume

Norsemen in Greenland," 23–35; Arneborg, "Cultural Borders," 41–46; Hans Christian Gulløv, "The Nature of Contact Between Native Greenlanders and Norse," *Journal of the North Atlantic* 1 (2008): 16–24; Hans-Christian Gulløv, "Inuit-European Interactions in Greenland," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prehistoric Arctic*, ed. Max Friesen and Owen Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 897–914.

14 See e.g. Jørgen Hollesen et al., "Climate Change and the Preservation of Archaeological Sites in Greenland," in *Public Archaeology and Climate Change*, eds. Tom Dawson et al. (Oxford/Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2017), 90–99; Rasmus Fenger-Nielsen et al., "Arctic Archaeological Sites Threatened by Climate Change: A Regional Multi-Threat Assessment of Sites in South-West Greenland," *Archaeometry* 62, no. 6 (2020): 1280–97.

15 Hans Egede, *Det gamle Grønlands nye perustration* (Copenhagen: Johan Christoph Groth, 1741); Robert Brown, "Obituary: Dr Hendrik Rink," *The Geographical Journal* 2, no. 1 (1894): 65.

16 The letter was dated April 22, 1958, and printed in both Kalaallisut and Danish. It is preserved at The Royal Library in Copenhagen, and a photographic reproduction can be seen in e.g. Kirsten Thisted and Arnaq Grove, eds, *Jens Kreutzmann: Fortællinger og akvareller* (Nuuk: Atuakkiorfik, 1997), 9. Kirsten Thisted, ed. 'Således skriver jeg, Aron': *Samlede fortællinger og illustrationer af Aron fra Kangeq [1822–1869]*, vol. 1 (Nuuk: Atuakkiorfik, 1999), 12; and Kirsten Thisted, Gåba Thorning, and Arnaq Grove, eds, *Taama allattunga Aron: Aalup Kangermiup oqaluttuai assiliaaliu tamakkiisut [1822–1869]*, vol. 1 (Nuuk: Atuakkiorfik, 1999), 12.

set titled *Kaladlit Okalluktualliait: Grønlandske Folkesagn* [Greenlandic Folktales – Greenlandic Oral Traditions]. Much of this wide-ranging oral tradition was recorded from multiple narrators and published alongside striking hand-coloured woodcut illustrations by the Inuk artist Âlut Kangermio (also known as Aron of Kangeq), a seal hunter who had been bedridden from tuberculosis, as well as Jens Kreutzmann of Kangaamiut.¹⁷ In addition, two other Greenlanders were especially involved in the publication process: the catechist Rasmus Berthelsen, who assisted with the translations, and Lars Møller, who managed the printing press. This is where three of the stories of Inuit-Norse contact appear in published form for the first time.¹⁸

All five stories of Inuit-Norse contact were then sectioned together and published in Danish in 1866 in the first volume of *Eskimoiske eventyr og sagn*, where they are sometimes abridged.¹⁹ The tales were later translated into English and published in 1875 in *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, and here the Inuit-Norse narratives were reordered and collected in a single chapter, number 54: “Stories about the Ancient Kavdlunait.”²⁰ Rink includes a note at the beginning of this chapter: “The four following tales are given in one section on account of their more local character, being known only to the west Greenlanders, especially the southernmost of them, and representing the only trace of intelligence left con-

17 On the artwork in the volumes, see Michael Hatt, “Picturing and Counter-Picturing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Colonial Greenland,” *Art History* 43, no. 2 (2020): 308–35, who argues that “[t]he complications of Danish colonial rule structure these visual images at every level: from the subject matter and iconography, through style and making, to the very notion of picturing itself” (311).

18 Hinrich Rink and Rasmus Berthelsen, eds, and trans. *Kaladlit okalluktualliait: Grønlandske Folkesagn*, 4 vols (Godthaab/Nuuk: Nounqme, 1859–1863), especially vol. 1: 1–29, vol. 2: 1–23, and vol. 4: 65–69. On the collection and publication of these stories and related folkloric material, see e.g. Kirsten Thisted, “On Narrative Expectations: Greenlandic Oral Traditions about the Cultural Encounter Between Inuit and Norsemen,” *Scandinavian Studies* 73, no. 3 (2010), 253–96; Kirsten Thisted, “The Impact of Writing on Stories Collected from Nineteenth-Century Inuit Traditions,” in *Incline Aures: Oral Perspectives on Early European Verbal Culture*, ed. Jan Helledén et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 2001), 167–210; Thisted, ed. *Således skriver jeg*; Thisted, Thorning, and Grove, *Taama allattungua Aron*; Kirsten Thisted, “Republication of Greenlandic Tales Collected in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Cultural and Social Research in Greenland 95/96 (Grønlandsk kultur- og samfundsforskning): Essays in Honour of Robert Petersen*, ed. Birgitte Jacobsen, in collaboration with Claus Andreasen and Jette Rygaard (Nuuk: Ilisimatusarfik, 1996), 253–64.

19 Hinrich Rink, ed. *Eskimoiske eventyr og sagn: oversatte efter de indfødte fortælleres opskrifter og meddelelser*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1866), 198–209.

20 Henry Rink, trans., *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo: With a Sketch of Their Habits, Religion, Language and Other Peculiarities*, ed. Robert Brown (Edinburgh/London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1875), 308–24.

cerning the ancient Scandinavian settlers which the author has been able to discover by inquiries made in the country.”²¹ The fifth tale – “Pisagsak and the Kivigtok” in the 1875 English ordering – was apparently only received from one narrator, so Rink questions its validity on source critical grounds.²²

Following the 1866 Danish ordering, the first story which features Norse settlers was originally titled “Oungortok, kavdlunâtsiât angnertât” in Kalaallisut and “Oungortok, de gamle Nordboers Høvding” in Danish (later “Ungortok, de gamle Kavdlunakkers Høvding” in *Eskimoiske eventyr og sagn* and “Ungortok, the Chief of Kakortok” in the English). The second story is titled “Kalâtdlit kavdlunaitsiânîk takorkârnerinîk” and “Om Grønlændernes første Sammentræf med de gamle Nordboer” (later “Kaladlits (Skrælingen) første Sammentræf med de gamle Kavdlunakker” and “The first meeting of the Kaladlit with the ancient Kavdlunait in Greenland”). The third is “Kavdlunaitsanîk” and “Om de gamle Kavdlunakker” (later “Striden paa den glatte Iis mellem Kaladlit og de gamle Kavdlunakker” and “Encounter of Kaladlit with the ancient Kavdlunait on the ice”). The fourth and fifth stories were not published in *Kaladlit okalluktualliait* but appear later as “Pisagsak” in *Eskimoiske eventyr og sagn* and “Pisagsak and the Kivigtok” in English, and “De gamle Kavdlunakkers Undergang ved Arsut” – “The ancient Kavdlunait’s ruin near Arsut.” In *Kaladlit okalluktualliait*, the second story is attributed to Aron of Kangeq (dated 20 February 1859) and the third is written by the catechist Abraham Eliassen of Niakornak (Umanak), i.e. Niaqornat (Uummaq), dated 1861, which he identifies as a story that he heard in his childhood.²³

These rich and detailed narratives describe first encounters, competition, conflict, friendship and linguistic exchange. They are fascinating and there is much that could be done with them, but I do not know the full story. For example, I do not yet know enough about the complex and problematic nineteenth-century context in which the oral stories were recorded, collected, and compiled, and my preliminary understanding is mixed. Rink seemingly proceeded with respect for Greenlandic traditions and peoples, defending Inuit land rights against the Dan-

21 Rink, trans., *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, 308.

22 Before the fifth tale, “Pisagsak and the Kivigtok,” there is a note that “[t]his tale, having only been received from one narrator, appears too doubtful to be included among those that treat on the ancient Kavdlunait.” It is also noted that the fourth tale was “received from North Greenland.” Rink, trans., *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, 321 and 320. There is an extensive note following the second tale, discussed below.

23 Further research into the recording and collection of the different versions of these tales – their oral history, authorial attribution, and the various extant documents which preserve them – is still required. See the references to Kirsten Thisted above and the extensive database “Greenlandic Myths and Stories,” compiled by Birgitte Sonne, Danish Arctic Institute, <https://ark.tiskinstitutt.dk/en/knowledge-database/greenlandic-myths-and-stories>.

ish government and advocating for Indigenous sovereignty. He learned Kalaallisut and published in it alongside his own colonial language, founding the first Inuit language newspaper, *Atuagagdliutit* [Readings], which he published with a small printing press and lithographic press that he brought from Denmark. But he was also a colonial administrator, serving as Royal Inspector of South Greenland, and some of the language used in his Introduction, however much a product of the time, and however much he identified the prejudices of the Christian missionaries, which he labelled the “source of national evils,” remains undeniably problematic and offensive by today’s standards.²⁴ As Rink claims, “Scarcely any other country will be found where the Europeans have shown so much consideration for, and been so careful of, the uncivilised native as in this case.”²⁵ We have good reason to question the supposed exceptionalism of Danish colonialism.²⁶ And under what conditions were these stories collected and published? How to navigate “the complex ambiguities between preservation and exploitation”?²⁷

24 Rink, trans., *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, 76.

25 Rink, trans., *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, 77–78.

26 Kalaaleq scholar Aviâja Egede Lyngé writes that “We have always been taught that we were one of the best colonies in the world. No slavery, no killings. We learned it through Danish history books and from Danish teachers.” Aviâja Egede Lyngé, “The Best Colony in the World,” in *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism. A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in 5 Acts. Act 2: Greenland 2006*, <https://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org/files/pdf/ACT2/ESSAYS/Lyngé.pdf>; also see Aviâja Egede Lyngé, “Mental Decolonisation in Greenland,” *Inter-Nord* 21 (2011): 273–76.

27 Sae Matsuno, “Kaladlit Okalluktualliait (Greenlandic Folktales): Contentious Histories of Preserving Indigenous Oral Traditions,” Blog Post, *UCL Special Collections*, 17.05.2021, <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/special-collections/2021/05/17/kaladlit-okalluktualliait-greenlandic-folktales-contentious-histories-of-preserving-indigenous-oral-traditions>. Silke Reeploeg argues that “the materials at the heart of these publications were also subsequently removed and dispersed (delegated) to colonial archives, and rearranged and censored according to European premises, including the values, tastes and ideas of individual collectors, institutions and audiences. To teach history with these materials today not only means acknowledging this process of delegation and predetermination, but also identifying ways to interrupt the colonality of knowledge production.” Moreover, this process “produced an ignorance of Indigenous ways of knowing and valuing by assimilating and delegating entire world views, relationships and cultural competencies into western epistemic structures and habits.” Silke Reeploeg, “Unthinking Historical Thinking: Lessons from the Arctic,” *History Education Research Journal* 20, no. 1 (2023): 4, and further references therein.

4 Questioning my Questions, Education, and Pedagogy

Most optimistically, these stories may help bring together the fields of medieval studies and Indigenous studies. Bitterroot Salish scholar Tarren Andrews writes in the Introduction to ‘Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts’ that these are “two disciplines that have not yet developed a shared story.”²⁸ I hope this project will inspire new and diverse approaches to medieval studies and research into the history of Inuit-Norse relations, helping to build a bridge between two traditions which Inuvialuit sculptor Abraham Anghik Ruben identifies as being “similar in spirit” (one of his sculptures, *Thor 900 AD*, is shown in Figure 2.1).

However, this all needs to be done one step at a time. I need to think about slowing down, listening, learning, and really doing my homework.²⁹ As Andrews writes,

This special issue is intended to slow down medievalist engagement with Indigenous studies, to ask us all to be more deliberate, to be thoughtful, and to consider first the ethics of kinship and reciprocity that we owe Indigenous peoples, places, and communities who have labored to craft Indigenous studies as an academic field. In other words, this issue asks medieval scholars to take the first steps in laying the foundation for what it might look like to “extend an invitation,” rather than “engage with,” Indigenous studies scholars. This begins with the difficult work of reflection and self-examination that aims to consider the limitations of Euro-American epistemologies and how to overcome them, think deeply about the exclusionary traditions of our methodologies and how to reassess them, learn from medieval studies’ recent failings to respond generously to other politically oriented methodologies, and find ways to hold ourselves accountable to the futures we want to imagine.³⁰

²⁸ Tarren Andrews, “Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts: An Introduction,” *English Language Notes* 58, no. 2 (2020): 3. On the so-called “Indigenous turn” in medieval studies, also see Brenna Duperron and Elizabeth Edwards, who detail several potential methodologies to connect Indigeneity and medieval studies in “Thinking Indigeneity: A Challenge to Medieval Studies,” *Exemplaria* 33, no. 1 (2021): 94–107, and in the Saami context of medieval Scandinavia, see Solveig Marie Wang, “The Intersection of Medieval Studies and Indigenous Studies: A Norse-Saami Case Study,” *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 15 (2024): 119–50. On the multifaceted portrayal of Saami peoples in medieval texts, see further Solveig Marie Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia: An Interdisciplinary Study of Norse-Saami Relations in the Medieval Period*, Religious Minorities in the North: History, Politics, and Culture 5 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

²⁹ On the need to “do your homework,” see e.g. Lissa Paul, “Speaking the Unspeakable; or Providing the Evidence Without Being Censored,” *Book 2.0* 12, no. 2 (2022): 224, who follows Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 1990), 62.

³⁰ Andrews, “Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts,” 2.



Figure 2.1: Abraham Anghik Ruben, “Thor 900 AD.” Image courtesy of Abraham Anghik Ruben.

In terms of my own process, some of the first questions I was asking about this material now strike me as inappropriate, or at least not my place to ask, especially at this stage, and certainly not on my own, even if they are obvious starting places for a historian of medieval literature. I wondered, in a kind of traditional ‘research’ sort of way, to what extent these tales might reflect, to some unknown degree, historical events of the so-called Middle Ages, or if instead they represent fictionalized narratives composed at a later date. On linguistic and narratological grounds, Kirsten Thisted, amongst others, has argued that these stories can tell us more about encounters with Danes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than with Norse settlers in the medieval period.³¹ In any case, I do not think this is the right approach for me at this time, the right question for me to start with,

³¹ Thisted, “On Narrative Expectations,” 253–96; also see for example Inge Kleivan, “Grønlandske sagn om nordboerne,” *Tidsskriftet Grønland* 8–9 (1982): 314–30. If this is the case, then the stories can still operate as counter-narratives in pedagogical, popular, and scholarly discourse.

and it could be “privileging western ontologies and epistemologies.”³² I also wondered if there are significant variations between the original Kalaallisut and the translations into Danish and English, and what elements were lost in the shift from oral tradition to written text.³³ There are valid questions to ask, but I do not think I can provide the answers on my own – this would require collaboration, and I need to be aware of my limitations.

Bearing in mind my positionality, relative expertise and inexpertise, I think there are other questions which are more appropriate and respectful for me to be asking.³⁴ Shifting the research gaze onto myself and my field: how is the study of these narratives problematized by the colonial context in which they were recorded, yes, but also how can they disrupt the settler-colonial premise of the Vínland saga tradition? How can a person who is not Inuit or Greenlandic, such as myself, appropriately engage with these stories? Who benefits, and how? It certainly should not just be me. What is the purpose?

Education is emerging as a central focus for me, and I am now questioning the pedagogical potential of these tales: whether, and how, they could, or should, be read, taught, and studied alongside the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, unsettling the curriculum while also maintaining an acute awareness of ‘who is speaking for whom’. Thinking about teaching with an appropriate anti-colonial pedagogy, and not research in the traditional sense of the word, which is too often extractive; this is about trying to “decolonize” our curricula, a process which should prove “unsettling.”³⁵ Much of my shift in thinking about this project is inspired by a series of courses that I took with the University of British Columbia, where I

32 Lana Ray, “Decentering Whiteness in Indigenous Research,” lecture, *Centre for Indigenous and Settler Colonial Studies, University of Kent*, 13 December 2022.

33 Further questions arise, and the answers will be anything but straightforward: what is lost and what goes missing when Indigenous narratives are translated and understood through the lens of a different language and cultural context? Can locally embedded knowledge be translated to a global scale? How?

34 For a similarly self-reflective approach to many of the same kinds of questions that I pose here, see Stephen Yeager, “The Global Far North: Planning Indigenization Efforts in Medieval Studies,” *English Language Notes* 58, no. 2 (2020): 151–66. For a Saami studies perspective, see Torjer Olsen, “Privilege, Decentring, and the Challenge of Being (Non-) Indigenous in the Study of Indigenous Issues,” *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 47, no. 2 (2017): 206–15; and on Indigenous “research,” see Linda Tuhivai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

35 On these terms, curricular decolonization and “settler moves to innocence,” see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

was previously a postdoctoral researcher, and I am particularly grateful to the Indigenous Initiatives team for helping facilitate this shift in mindset.³⁶

In the Canadian context, and thinking about my teaching and about reconciliation, I recall the words of Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada (a multi-year investigation of the residential school system): “It was the educational system that has contributed to this problem in this country. And it is the educational system, we believe, that is going to help us to get away from this. We need to look at the way that we educate children, we need to look at the way that we educate ourselves.”³⁷ I view teaching as an important element of this work’s purpose: sharing stories and having discussions, with the learners, which includes both myself and students, as co-creators of knowledge and ideas. I am also reflecting on our syllabi within (historically) colonial institutions: which stories do we share, and why? Which reflections do we encourage, innovations do we inspire, changes do we support? Crucially, Sinclair adds: “We need to look at what it is that Aboriginal people themselves are allowed to say within the educational system about their own histories.”³⁸ Applying this important requisite to the Greenlandic context, it speaks to me of the importance of dialogue and collaboration. I hasten to add that I do not share this message lightly, and it is one that has implications beyond the Canadian context and applies, in different ways, here in the UK and Europe (from where I currently write) – the responsibility remains.

5 Counter-Narratives in the (Global) Contact Zone

With an eye on pedagogy, I now turn to some of the post- and anti-colonial theory and thought which is guiding my thinking and the idea of ‘reframing first contact’. Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s seminal book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Vínland and Greenland can perhaps be described as contact

³⁶ More specifically, I attended sessions with the UBC Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology on “Connecting Power, Privilege, and Positionality to Teaching and Learning Contexts,” “Fostering Meaningful Connection with Indigenous Focused Topics,” and a more extensive course on “Indigenous Initiatives Design Series,” which focused on positionality and place, motivation and context, and I am immensely grateful for the guidance and wisdom of the facilitation teams, as well as mentors, colleagues, and friends.

³⁷ Murray Sinclair, “TRC Mini Documentary – Senator Murray Sinclair on Reconciliation,” National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 20.03.2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjx2zDvyzsU>.

³⁸ Sinclair, “TRC Mini Documentary.”

zones: spaces “of imperial encounters . . . in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”³⁹ There is a recentring to the term: It is often used synonymously with “colonial frontier,” but “while the latter term is grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is the frontier only with respect to Europe), ‘contact zone’ shifts the center of gravity and the point of view. It invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect.”⁴⁰ Though Norse Greenlanders were not a colonial power in the medieval period, these episodes of contact can be viewed as “proto-colonial,” laying the foundations for what was to come (Hans Egede, for example, first travelled to Greenland in search of lost Norse settlers).⁴¹ Premodern Greenland and Vínland are not colonial frontiers. They are contact zones, and we are now looking at history from both sides.

Thinking about this recentering of the contact zone, I therefore question whether the stories from Kalaallit oral tradition can operate as counter-narratives: “stories impacting on social settings that stand opposed to (perceived) dominant and powerful master-narratives . . . [they] unfold power to shape and change various fields.”⁴² In this case, the Old Norse texts which I study are perceived as the dominant and powerful master-narrative – the story of Vínland which receives so much attention and celebration. In literary studies, counter-narratives can operate as “a vital tool for contesting canonicity, and ideological dominance.”⁴³ Of course, the interpretation of which narrative is ‘master’ and which is ‘counter’ also “hinges upon the interpreter’s social position and belonging,” but I think it is clear which

³⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edition (New York/Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The medieval “proto-colonial” can be defined as “incipient formulations of race, subjection, conquest, and subordination that must be in place for the colonial age to burst forth,” and “the construction and installation of mentalities and ideologies that set the stage for a colonialism-to-come.” Duperron and Edwards, “Thinking Indigeneity,” 96, 100.

⁴² Klarissa Lueg and Marianne Wolff Lundholt, eds, *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2021), front matter.

⁴³ “Most affirmatively, counter-narratives can be interpreted as creative, innovative forces fostering beneficial societal change; forces holding productive potential for progress, development, as well as for ethical issues such as justice and accessible resources.” Klarissa Lueg et al., “Introduction: What Counter Narratives Are: Dimensions and Levels of a Theory of Middle Range,” in *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives*, ed. Klarissa Lueg and Marianne Wolff Lundholt (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2021), 11 and 4.

story is dominant in medievalist circles.⁴⁴ This leads me to “narrative multiperspectivity,” which, in critical pedagogy studies, has been shown to encourage empathy.⁴⁵ As Bjorn Wansink et al. suggest, “In the context of history education, the notion of multiperspectivity refers to the epistemological idea that history is interpretational and subjective, with multiple coexisting narrative about particular historical events, rather than history being objectively represented by one ‘closed’ narrative.”⁴⁶ This is about presenting more than one narrative perspective to evaluate historical events, acknowledging that many groups have been ignored, or worse, in traditional historical narration. It is about highlighting previously marginalized perspectives; not only looking at the past from the dominant narrative standpoint and offering multiple points of view, encouraging critique as well as empathy, recognition, and acknowledgement. This stance is not only political: it is ethical and a matter of good scholarship and pedagogy – taking all points of view into consideration when narrating the past. For this to happen, however, the stories would also need to be carefully placed in their cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts – in the so-called Middle Ages (the period in which they are set), the nineteenth century (the period in which they were recorded), and the present (the period in which they might now be read and studied). This decolonial framework also points towards the transformative potential of a richer and more diverse medieval studies in the twenty-first century. These tales speak to a more global Middle Ages, as we challenge, expand, diversify, and critically reshape disciplinary borders – temporal, geographical, and methodological.⁴⁷ How can this quite tradi-

44 Lueg, Bager, and Lundholt, “Introduction: What Counter-Narratives Are,” 4.

45 Jason L. Endacott and John Sturtz, “Historical Empathy and Pedagogical Reasoning,” *Journal of Social Studies Research* 39 (2014): 1–16; Jukka Rantala, Marika Manninen, and Marko van den Berg, “Stepping into Other People’s Shoes Proves to be a Difficult Task for High School Students: Assessing Historical Empathy Through Simulation Exercise,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48 (2016): 323–45.

46 Bjorn Wansink et al., “Where Does Teaching Multiperspectivity in History Education Begin and End? An Analysis of the Uses of Temporality,” *Theory & Research in Social Education* 46 (2018): 496.

47 For an overview of the so-called “Global Middle Ages,” including issues with the term and its transformative, transdisciplinary potential to counter Eurocentrism and essentialism, see e.g. Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) and further references therein; on the application of this conceptualization to the Old Norse literary context, see Carl Phelpstead, “*Kringla Heimsins*: Old Norse Sagas, World Literature and the Global Turn in Medieval Studies,” *Saga-Book* 46 (2022): 155–78; Sif Ríkharrðsdóttir, “The Margins of Literary History: Sagas, Eddic Poetry and World Literature,” in *A Companion to World Literature*, vol. 2: 601 CE to 1450 CE, ed. Christine Chism (London/New York: Blackwell-Wiley, 2020), 979–92.



Figure 2.2: Robert Delaunay, “Relief-disques” (Wikimedia Commons: public domain).

tional, oft-conservative academic field move beyond the overrepresentation of white European men?⁴⁸

I find Robert Delaunay’s 1936 *Relief-disques* helpful for envisioning such an approach to medieval literature (Figure 2.2). In this abstract painting, the centre can be seen as the traditional canon, which remains present, but is also seemingly cut through – both the smaller circles and the larger circumference grow bigger, bolder, on the outskirts – the eye is not quite certain where to settle but sees connections and therefore develops a more holistic perspective. Thinking with canonical narratives alongside those forgotten, developing greater narrative and historical insight in the process. Working on the edges because that is where work becomes edge-breaking; looking to the margins because that is where we see the marginalized; centring the supposed periphery because that is how we can make space – for new, different, diverse perspectives, identities, transformations. This could be part of a deeper widening and broadening out of the discipline: multilingual and multicultural, global and inclusive. But this idea may also entail telling stories which are not necessarily mine to tell, ours to tell.

⁴⁸ See Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument,” *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

6 The Tales Themselves

The first time I presented this project was in Greifswald, Germany, at the conference “Colonial Entanglements and the Medieval Nordic World,” from which this volume originated. At the time, I did not feel comfortable sharing the stories, even though they are freely available and accessible online. I felt, and still feel, as though the tales which Rink collected and published should be identified as Greenlandic Inuit cultural property, thus following standard ethical protocols for engaging with Indigenous intellectual property, including respect, recognition, attribution, consultation, consent (the asking of permission), protection if and when appropriate, the sharing of benefits, and reciprocity – what do we receive, what do we give. In many ways I am not yet sure what this might look like, but that it surely involves developing connections and building relationships, especially in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), and some of these ethical questions are further explored in this volume’s aforementioned dialogue.

With all this context and these reflections and disclaimers in mind, I now consider it appropriate to turn to the tales themselves. As detailed above, there are five stories in Rink’s collection which detail Inuit–Norse contact. I here include the second tale, originally penned by Álut Kangermio, in Kalaallisut from *Kaladlit okalluktualliait* as well as the later abridged English translation. I have chosen this narrative in particular because it is relatively short, and like the *Vínland* sagas, it describes first contact. It is the beginning of the story “Kalátdlit kavdlunaitsiânik takorkârnerinik” (“Om Grønlændernes første Sammentræf med de gamle Nordboer”), which constituted its own narrative in the English translation as “The first meeting of the Kaladlit with the ancient Kavdlunait in Greenland”).

Nûp kujatânit umiat atautsit avangnamut autdlârput. itsarôk kalátdlit nunât inokardluángikatdlarmat, nûngmut pigamik inugsíngitdlat (mássákut nôrdlit nunânut), tuvapait igpigssûput igpigssûp kâne paormat amerdlakaut.

Tássanisíardlutik kangersinermut autdlârput. (nûp iluanut) sule ingerdlavdlutik kôrnup kangiane, kangiussap kínguane igdlorssuarssuak takulerpât, sule inugsinatik; orníkgamíko inué naluai kaláliúngingmata; sunauvfa tássa kavdlunaitsiat. umiat tikingmatik kavdlunât nuánârput, aitsât kalátdlinik takuleramik.

Kisiáne kalátdlit kavdlunânut ersigput, mássa kavdlunât asagâtik; umiat tássanímersutsiáinariardlutik ernínak autdlârput, mássa kavdlunât erdigigâtik; kangersinermut pigamik, takulerpait kavdlunârpagssuit ilulialingmíitut; ujaragssuarnilo, ivisártûnilo, nunatarssuarmilo itut, takuínardlugit ernínak kimagpait.

Umiat táuko tápavánga anigdlákamik, kalálekaticit ornigtardlugit okarfígissarpait, mássa ilia ungasigsumíitut, itsarôk tamána nuna inokardluángikatdlarmat, táukunánga umianit atautsinit kalátdlit tusaramik, nûp iluane kavdlunârpagssuarnik, táuko umiat tusarfisik ilagalugit ornigpait, umiat kavsiuvdlutik tagpavunga kangersinermut pigamik, kavdlunaitsiat ilagilerpait, malugigamikik ingmingnut asánigtûmata. matuma kingorna umiat tikiugtardlutik

inuit (kaládtlit) kisa amerdlasôrssuágorput. inuit okausê kavdlunaitaiit ilivkaleramik ingmingnut asakatiglerput, ingmingnidlo ikíngutiglerdlutik.

Ama tauva kaládtlit takuait, kapisigdlitdlo ameraligdlo tamarmik kavdlunádtlit. kapisilingne kavdlunárdlo inugdlo ingmingnut ikíngutinárígdutik, ingmínutdlo asakáungók, ingmínut kimangnek ajorput, ingmínutdlo unangmissardlutik (itsarók kisiáne pisigsimik sákokaratdlarmata), pisigsimik ingmínut unangmivdlutik karssutik autdlarssuakátautilerángatigik kavdlunádtlo kaládtlitdlo issingnátldlarângók kuiaginermit, karssutik ungasigssorsuarmut autdlardtarmatigik; tamarmik pisigsimik ajúngitsorsúsugamik, karssuê sanilerígdutik tugsimassaraut, tássa taimagínartarput ingmínut naligígínartarput.

Iláiniásit taimailiordlutik ingmínut unangmivdlutik, kavdlunádtlo kaládtlitdlo sule issingnárátik, kavdlunák inungmut ikíngutimínut okarpok: kanunga kákarssuarmut majuardlunuk, atánut kekertánguamut tugtup angissorssúp amia paugtordlugo, tássánga kákarssuarmut ámut pisigsimik erkoriakísigo, uniortok kákarssúp ivnarssuatigut ajagaujumárpok, erkuissordle ajagaujumárpok kavlnáp taima okarfigingmane inuk okarpok: hê, uvanga taima piumāngilanga ikíngutigígvavnuuk, ardlarput tokutásángilak; kavlnák taima okaluínarmat, mássa inúp inerterniánguarualuárane sukagkalugtuínarpok; kisa kavdlunákataisa inuk okalugfigílerpát: súsassok táuna taima piumāínarpok ivnarssuagkut ajagaugune.

Kavdlunákatertik taima pivát uterítsokingmat. inuk piumāngíkaluatdlardlune kisa tássánga autdlalerput; autdlalermata kaládtlitdlo kavdlunádtlo amerdlasôrssúvdlutik ilagílerpait issingnáriardlugit; tássánga kákarssuarmut pigamik, atánut kekertánguamut, angissorssúp amia paugtugak, tássánga kákarssúp kánit kavdlunáp sujugdliuvdlune piseriaraluarpá uniordlugo; kingornagut inúp piseriatdlará, paugtugarssuak kiterpiánguatigut pisigpá erkordlugo. kavlnák taima piumagame, ivnarssúp siná ornigpá; okautsine ilumórtut maligdlugit, kavlnádtlo akimarnit tusaussut pivdlugit; taima ajagauvok sórdlo okartok; kavdlunádtlo tamarmik súsassórát, taima piumāmat; kingorna ingmingnut asakatigígínarput.

Kingornalo táuna kákarssuak atserpát pisigssárfingmik: (tássane kavdlunárdlo inugdlo pisigsáriaká taungmata). [. . .]⁴⁹

The later, condensed English translation (with the names of people and places, I have included the modern Kalaallisut in square brackets):

In former times, when the coast was less peopled than now, a boat's crew landed at Nook (Godthaab) [Nuuk]. They found no people, and traversed the fiord to Kangersunek [Kanger-

49 Rink and Berthelsen, *Kaladlit okalluktualliait: Grönlandske Folkesagn*, vol. 2, 2–8. For a transcription of the text with modern Kalaallisut orthography, see Thisted, Thorning, and Grove, *Taama allattungu Aron: Aalup Kangermiup oqaluttuait assilialiaalu tamakkíisut [1822–1869]*, vol. 1, 100–105. For the facing-page Danish translation (omitted due to the word limit), see Rink and Berthelsen, *Kaladlit okalluktualliait: Grönlandske Folkesagn*, vol. 2, 3–9 (available via Google Books); also see Rink, *Eskimoiske eventyr og sagn*, vol. 1, 205–6. The tale continues in both the Kalaallisut and Danish versions (but not the English), opening with the story of Navaranaaq: an Inuit girl who lives with the Norse as a servant and creates conflict between the two peoples. They include many narrative moments which resemble other stories about encounters with different peoples (a process of standardized formulaic descriptions which Thisted terms “narrative expectations”). For a summary of the remainder of the story, see Thisted, “On Narrative Expectations,” 262–67.

suneq]. Half-way up to the east of Kornok [Qoornoq], near Kangiusak [Kangiusaq], they came upon a large house; but on getting closer to it, they did not know what to make of the people, seeing that they were not Kaladlit [Kalaallit]. In this manner they had quite unexpectedly come across the first Kavdlunak [Qallunaaq] settlers. These likewise for the first time saw the natives of the country, and treated them kindly and civilly; but the Greenlanders nevertheless feared them, and made for their boats. On getting farther up the fiord, they found many Kavdlunait [Qallunaaq] stationed. However, they did not put in anywhere, but hastened away as fast as possible. When the boat and its crew returned from their summer trip in the fiord, they told their countrymen all around of their encounter with the foreigners, and many of them now travelled up to see them. Many boats having thus reached Kangersunek [Kangersuneq], they now began to have intercourse with the Kavdlunait [Qallunaaq], seeing that they were well disposed towards them. Later on in the summer, many more Kaladlit [Kalaallit] arrived, and the foreigners began to learn their language. At Kapisilik [Kapisillit] a Kavdlunak [Qallunaaq] and a Kalalek [Kalaaleq], it is said, became such fast friends that they would not be separated, but were constantly together. They tried to excel each other at different games and feats of dexterity; and their countrymen on both sides were greatly diverted as lookers-on; but being both first-rate archers, their arrows always fell side by side. One day the Kavdlunak [Qallunaaq] said, "Come, let us climb yon lofty hill; but first we will stretch a skin for a target to aim at on that little islet yonder; then we will try which of us can hit the mark. He who fails shall be thrown down the precipice, and the other remain the conqueror." The Kalalek [Kalaaleq] answered, "No, I will not agree to that, because we are friends, and none of us shall perish." But the Kavdlunak [Qallunaaq] persisted so long that his own countrymen at last said, "Well, let him be thrown down as it is at his own will;" and the Kalalek [Kalaaleq] at last gave in, and they climbed the mountain together, accompanied by a crowd of spectators. The Kavdlunak [Qallunaaq] was the first to shoot, but altogether failed; then the Kalalek [Kalaaleq] came in for his turn, and pierced the skin in the centre. According to his own desire, the Kavdlunak [Qallunaaq] was hurled down the precipice, and his countrymen only thought it served him right for having thus recklessly pledged his life. From that day until the present this mountain has been called Pisigsarfik (the shooting-place) [Pisissarfik].⁵⁰

50 Rink, trans., *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, 317–18. There is also an extensive note following the second tale: "The two preceding stories are compiled from six different manuscripts, in which the contents of both are partly mixed up, and the same events have been localized for each of the two tracts of coastland in which ruins of the old settlements are still to be seen – viz., the district of Julianehaab, now most generally supposed to have been the old Easterbygd, and the district of Godthaab, identified with the ancient Westerbygd. The second story, however, is only told by the Godthaab narrators, who appear to have linked the first one to it, having previously altered and adapted it for their homestead fiords of Kapisilik, Pisigsarfik, and Ameralik, and inserted the tale of Navaranak (see No. 18) to explain the beginning of the warfare. The name Kakortok signifies Julianehaab itself, as also some very remarkable Scandinavian ruins about eight miles distant from it. Arpatsivik is an island between these places, upon which some very ancient sod-covered Eskimo ruins are still to be seen, and are pointed out as Kaisape's home." Rink, trans., *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, 318–19. Kaisape is the protagonist of the first tale, "Ungortok, the Chief of Kakortok," which is the longest by far in the series (see 308–17).

We thus have the first killing between the Norse and the Inuit, and it is not the last – a result of (perhaps specifically masculine) hubris and competitive drive. The Norseman shot first; this was his idea; and even his countrymen recognized the error of his ways. There is also the insinuation that the Kalaallit are better at shooting arrows, and indeed, given the skin target, at hunting seals. In my subjective interpretation, I wonder if this competition can be considered as a metaphor for actual lived violence between the two groups – a story entailing a fight to the death – in this case, an event which was instigated by the Norse, and the tale would thus serve as a guiding lesson. Reading the two traditions and narrative perspectives alongside one another, I am developing a new writing idea about ‘Lessons from First Contact’ – when two previously disconnected cultural groups encounter one another for the first time, what goes wrong, and why? In the Greenlandic tradition and *Eiríks saga rauða* (as well as the second series of encounters in *Grœnlendinga saga*), contact is initially peaceful, so what leads to conflict? In the Old Norse-Icelandic, it is a consequence of cultural misunderstanding – an unfortunate incident with a bellowing bull brought by the settlers which induces fear – as well as linguistic barriers and miscommunication, the leaping to assumptions and turning to violence, and there is also unequal bartering in trade and thus exploitation. In my current reading of the Greenlandic Inuit tales, it is a matter of overweening pride, masculine ego, and competitive drive. What would the opposite of these look like? How can we take a different path?

Slow Conclusions for the Future

In the spirit of slowing down, practising academic patience, and considering the benefits of stillness and reflection, I am not going to enter detailed narrative analysis of these stories in this publication – my first for this nascent project.⁵¹ I view this essay as a beginning – an invitation and an opening – rather than an ending, and I am not offering any definitive conclusions or solutions. That said, I do find the tales to be incredible to think with. As an ecocritic, and considering traditional ecological knowledge, I am particularly interested in the ways in which the Inuit

There is a clear association between Norse settlements in the stories and the locations of contemporary ruins, which merits further investigation and future research.

51 On slowing down, slow scholarship, and “slowciology,” see e.g. Lowell Duckert, “Speaking Stones, John Muir, and a Slower (Non)Humanities,” in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington, DC: Oliphant Books, 2012), 273–79; and Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21–25.

can use their advanced awareness of the local environment and its natural hazards to their advantage over the Norse settlers, who struggle to successfully recognize and navigate more icy terrains (for a similar story about ice and colonial misnavigation in Saami tradition, see Frandy in this volume). There is immense potential for ecocritical analysis and cross-cultural comparison and consideration of environmental themes and motifs, values and beliefs, and connections can also be drawn to the eventual abandonment of the Norse colonies in Greenland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thinking with the stories alongside the *Vínland sagas*, I also consider narrative perspectivity, land and desire, competition and ego, gender and power – exciting topics for future work. There is so much potential for comparative textual, narrative, historical, and cultural analysis, in time, when I get there, when we get there. As per the title, it is not can *I* access a counter-narrative, it is can *we*. And if the final answer to the question posed in my title turns out to be “no,” then I think this too would be something worth learning, and a great many other things would have been learned in the process.

These are some of my ongoing thoughts and reflections as I consider and continue to reconsider my questions, my limits, how I am situated and best positioned to contribute, and what appropriate, and not appropriate, outputs for this project might become, and how to make them collaborative. With a big heart and an open mind, I hope to expand this work to be as relational and connective as possible, rooted in ethics and grounded in communities.

Thank you. Takk fyrir. Qujanaq.

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Part 2: **Religious Change and Religious Minorities**

Christian Koch Madsen

Chapter 3

Far from Rome? Exploring Religion and Syncretism in Medieval Norse Greenland

Introduction

The decades before 1000 CE saw one of the final migrations of the Viking Age: In a last westward push across the North Atlantic, Icelandic settlers populated South-west Greenland.¹ They founded two settlements: the Eystribyggð (“Eastern Settlement”) in South Greenland and the Vestribyggð (“Western Settlement”) in the Nuuk and Ameralik Fjords (Figure 3.1). For the next 400–450 years, these served as bases for sedentary, pastoral farming and long-distance harvesting of Arctic marine resources, most importantly walrus and narwhal tooth and polar bear pelts.² Exploitation of high-value Arctic exports may indeed have been a main impetus for founding the Greenland settlements and – when trade in these commodities declined – contributed to their eventual abandonment.³ By 1400 CE, the Vestribyggð was completely depopulated, and fifty years later the Eystribyggð was as well.⁴

The peak population of Norse Greenlanders – Grænlinga – likely never exceeded 3,000 people.⁵ This small society living on modest farms dispersed over

1 Steven Hartman et al., “Medieval Iceland, Greenland, and the New Human Condition: A Case Study in Integrated Environmental Humanities,” *Global and Planetary Change* 156 (2017): 123–39; Rowan Jackson et al., “Disequilibrium, Adaptation, and the Norse Settlement of Greenland,” *Human Ecology: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 46 (2018): 665–84.

2 Andrew J. Dugmore et al., “Cultural Adaptation, Compounding Vulnerabilities, and Conjunctions in Norse Greenland,” *PNAS* 109 (2012): 3658–63; Jackson et al., “Disequilibrium, Adaptation, and the Norse Settlement of Greenland,” 665–84.

3 Bastiaan Star et al., “Ancient DNA Reveals the Chronology of Walrus Ivory Trade from Norse Greenland,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 285 (2018); Karin M. Frei et al., “Was it for Walrus? Viking Age Settlement and Medieval Walrus Ivory Trade in Iceland and Greenland,” *World Archaeology* 47 (2015): 439–66.

4 Jette Arneborg, “The Norse Settlement of Greenland,” in *The Cambridge History of the Polar Regions*, ed. Adrian Howkins and Peder Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 129–52.

5 Niels Lynnerup, “The Greenland Norse. A Biological-Anthropological Study,” *Meddelelser om Grønland, Man & Society* 24 (1998): 3–149; Christian Koch Madsen, *Pastoral Settlement, Farming, and Hierarchy in Norse Vatnahverfi, South Greenland* (PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2014).

vast and often dangerous Arctic landscapes, on the margins of economic viability, and geographically and culturally isolated from the Scandinavian homelands, constituted an extreme frontier of medieval Europe and the Roman Catholic Church,⁶ a frontier that continued to intrigue the Church, kings, and scholars of Europe.⁷ However, with increased isolation European knowledge of the settlements faded into rumour and folkloric echoes.

But how did isolation affect this Catholic outpost at the “end of the world” and its religious minority, fabled to live in a land locked in ice,⁸ inhabited by magical unicorns,⁹ behind a sea of monsters,¹⁰ and under threat – real or imagined – from “heathen savages” encroaching on and attacking the Norse settlements?¹¹ Did distance and isolation from Church centres shape particular religious beliefs? Perhaps even leading the Grænlendinga to abandon their Christian faith in favour of the Old Norse gods? Or did the Norse call upon other, even more alien, powers? Is it even possible to address such questions?

This article succinctly explores the religious beliefs and practices of the medieval Norse Greenlanders, particularly any evidence of syncretism that may have arisen from their societal and life conditions in the Arctic. After considering the available sources on Norse religious beliefs, their potentials and biases, and the evidence of Christianity, literary and archaeological sources are queried for evidence of other religious beliefs and what these beliefs may have been. By the very nature of the available evidence, many contentions must remain in the realm of the speculative. Far from a complete study, this article thus means only

6 Jette Arneborg, “The Roman Church in Norse Greenland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 61 (1991): 142–50; Laurence M. Larson, “The Church in North America (Greenland) in the Middle Ages,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 5 (1919): 175–94.

7 Vivian Etting, “The Rediscovery of Greenland during the Reign of Christian IV,” in *Norse Greenland: Selected Papers from the Hvalsey Conference 2008*, special issue, *Journal of the North Atlantic* 2 (2010): 151–60.

8 Laurence Marcellus Larson, ed. and trans., *The King’s Mirror (Speculum Regale – Konungs Skuggsjá)*, translated from the Old Norwegian (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), 143; Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds, *Historia Norwegie* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2006), 57.

9 Else Roesdahl, *Hvalrostand, elfenben og nordboerne i Grønland* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2019); Aleksander Pluskowski, “Narwhals or Unicorns? Exotic Animals as Material Culture in Medieval Europe,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 7 (2017): 291–313.

10 Larson, *The King’s Mirror*, 135; Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegie*, 57.

11 Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *The Flatey Book and Recently Discovered Vatican Manuscripts Concerning America as Early as the Tenth Century* (London: Norræna Society, 1906), 169; Finnur Magnússon and Carl Christian Rafn, eds, *Grønlands historiske Mindesmærker*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-selskab, 1845), 33.

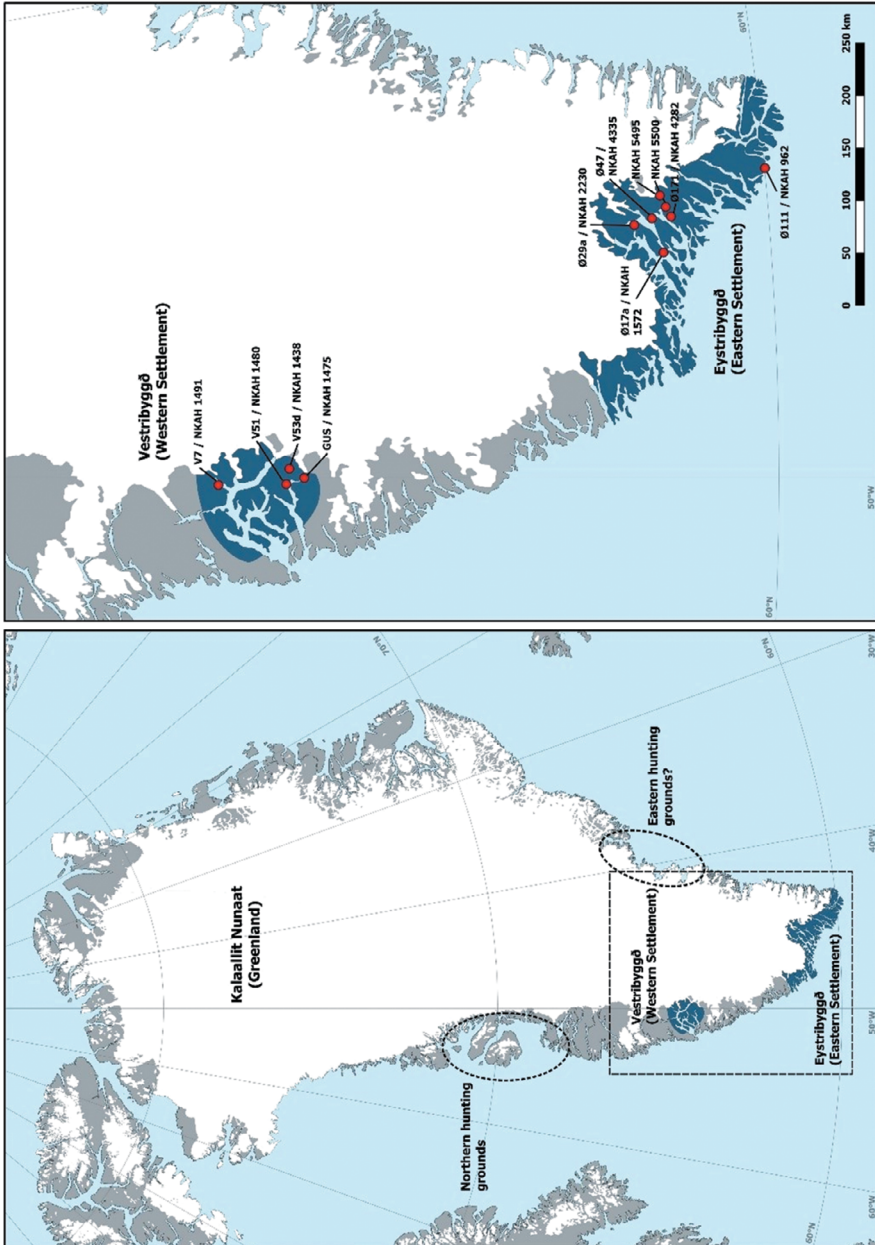


Figure 3.1: Maps showing (left) the two medieval Norse settlement areas in Southwest Greenland and the hunting grounds where walrus and narwhal was hunted, and (right) a close-up map of the two settlement areas with indications of sites (red dots) mentioned in the text (map by C. K. Madsen, 2023).

to query a topic that has been little investigated¹² and to search out avenues for further exploration.

1 Sources on Norse Religious Beliefs?

There are two main lines of evidence that inform us about Norse religious beliefs and practices: literary and archaeological evidence. In turn, the literary sources may be subdivided between those composed by (more or less) contemporary observers outside of Greenland, i.e., the corpus of Nordic and European medieval literature, and inscriptions written by the Grænlinga themselves. The archaeological evidence may also be subdivided between architectural remains, i.e., ruins and features relating to religious practices, and the artefactual evidence, i.e., portable material culture, such as symbols, figurines, amulets, and other religious remains.

1.1 Nordic and European Medieval Literature on Norse Greenland

Nordic and European medieval literature on Norse Greenland consists mainly of sagas, annals, diplomas, didactic texts, papal letters, as well as a few later sources of questionable origin and content.¹³ This corpus is extremely modest when compared to Scandinavia; so modest, in fact, that almost all records were assembled in the seminal, three-volume *Grønlands historiske Mindesmærker* (GHM I–III, 1838–1845). Hardly any new literary evidence has been added since, and historical research has mainly consisted of re-evaluating these sources.¹⁴

¹² See, for example, Lesley Abrams, “Early Religious Practice in the Greenland Settlement,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* 2 (2009): 52–65; Kirsten A. Seaver, *The Frozen Echo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 96–97.

¹³ Magnússon and Rafn, eds, *Grønlands historiske Mindesmærker*; Ólafur Halldórsson, *Grænland í miðaldaritum* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1978).

¹⁴ See, for example, Seaver, *The Frozen Echo*; Halldórsson, *Grænland í miðaldaritum*; Jette Arneborg, “Norse Greenland Archaeology: The Dialogue Between the Written and the Archaeological Records,” in *Vinland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium – Selected Papers from the Viking Millennium International Symposium, 15–24 September 2000*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson (St John’s: Historic Sites Association of Newfoundland & Labrador, 2003), 15–24; Arnved Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland: Viking Peasants in the Arctic* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2019).

These records are problematic for several reasons: First, the sources were almost all written or compiled by outside observers who had never visited Greenland, and the general pattern seems to be: the farther away from Greenland the observer, the more uncertain (or fanciful) the descriptions. Second, the sources were often written down decades or centuries after the events described, copied or recopied from original, now lost, manuscripts, each step introducing uncertainties. Third, literacy in this part of the Nordic Middle Ages was generally limited to royal, state, and ecclesiastic administrative elites and dealt mainly with taxation, trade, laws, holdings, tithes, appointments, and the activities of bishops and clergy, royal officials, and the like.¹⁵

Consequently, the Nordic medieval literature is rich on and biased towards themes and topics of Christianity but tells us very little about how Catholicism was actually organized and practised in Norse Greenland. In terms of other religious beliefs and syncretism, the literature is all but silent. The Icelandic sagas provide somewhat richer sources on aspects of religious life in Greenland. However, biases of geographical and temporal distance still apply, and, as has been noted,¹⁶ the Icelandic sagas on Greenland largely reveal the preoccupations of contemporary Icelandic writers and audiences mixed with folklore of old.

1.2 Norse Inscriptions from Greenland

A comprehensive synthesis of all known inscriptions, both runic and in the Roman alphabet, from Norse Greenland was recently published by Lisbeth Imer (Figures 3.2, 3.9).¹⁷ She identified some 160 (more or less) readable inscriptions carved into steatite, wood, bone, and antler artefacts from archaeological excavations. Not a single example of Norse writing on parchment or paper has ever been found. Only a few additional inscriptions have been identified since.¹⁸

The inscriptions from Greenland exhibit similar grammatical development and thematic content as in the other rune-writing Nordic societies, which can be categorized as “futhork inscriptions, names, owners’ inscriptions, manufacturer’s inscriptions, self-referential inscriptions, inscriptions that demonstrate the carver’s ability

¹⁵ Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 107–10.

¹⁶ Jonathan Grove, “The Place of Greenland in Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative,” in *Norse Greenland: Selected Papers from the Hvalsey Conference 2008*, special issue, *Journal of the North Atlantic* 2 (2009): 30–51.

¹⁷ Lisbeth M. Imer, *Peasants and Prayers: The Inscriptions of Norse Greenland* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2017), 9, fig. 2.

¹⁸ Unpublished artefacts stored at the Greenland National Museum & Archives.

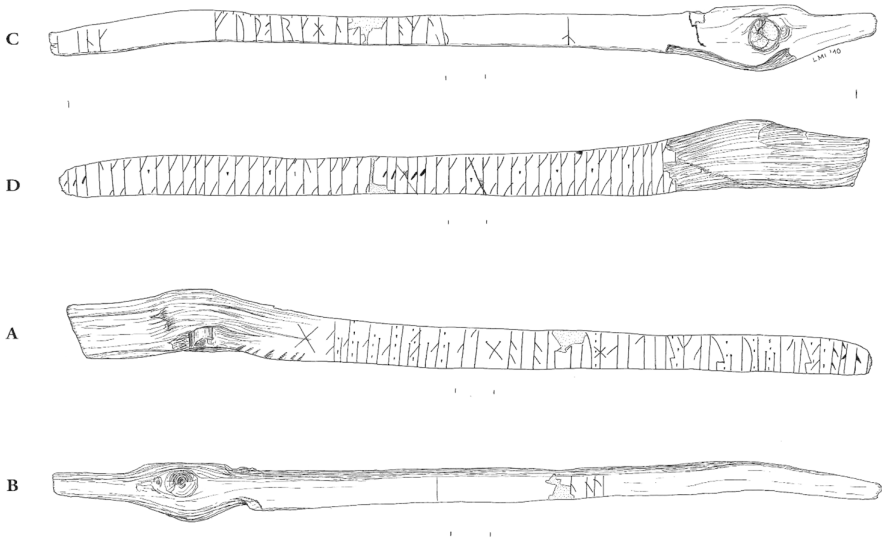


Figure 3.2: The so-called “Narsaq rune stick” (length = 42,6 cm), one of the longest, poetic runic inscriptions from Greenland, from the early period farm Ø17a / NKAH 1572 in Eystribyggð. Note that the rune stick is roughly shaped like a serpent (or dragon) with natural cam forming the eye (reproduced from Imer 2017, 252; with permission).

to write, cryptic runes, religious inscriptions, messages, poetry, and – dominating the picture – illegible inscriptions, single runes and rune like signs.”¹⁹ Many inscriptions are difficult to interpret, and Imer offers both her own and earlier translations. Although some extent of literacy appears to have been fairly widespread among the Grænlendinga, the inscriptions are relatively silent on religious beliefs, except for the clearly Christian texts (see below), and even though more inscriptions are very likely to be unearthed in future archaeological excavations, the themes of the inscriptions are not likely to change significantly.

1.3 Greenland Norse Religious Architecture and Features

In Norse Greenland, the most unequivocal – and only – religious architecture and features so far identified are churches and the associated Christian burials in churchyards (Figure 3.3, see below). Thus, there is no evidence from Greenland of non-Christian (pagan) buildings and features, like the Viking-Age temples, ritual

¹⁹ Imer, *Peasants and Prayers*, 132.

“temple halls/farms,” sacrificial pits, pagan graves, etc. found in the rest of the Nordic world.²⁰

Admittedly, archaeological investigations of Norse sites in Greenland have only “scratched the surface,” both in the metaphorical sense that few of the existing sites and features have been excavated, and in the literal sense that few of these have been excavated to anywhere near a full extent. Most sites were excavated at a time when the main objective was to identify basic outlines of buildings while only noting and not investigating earlier phases.²¹ The few ruins that have recently been “completely” excavated are all small and, with the exception of the presumed *Þjóðhildarkirkja*,²² vernacular buildings or features²³ are unlikely to yield evidence of religious practices and beliefs.

20 Kevin P. Smith, Guðmundur Ólafsson, and Albína Hulda Pálsdóttir, “Ritual Responses to Catastrophic Volcanism in Viking Age Iceland: Reconsidering Surtshellir Cave through Bayesian Analyses of AMS Dates, Tephrochronology, and Texts,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 126 (2021): 105316; Gavin Lucas, ed., *Hofstaðir: Excavation of a Viking Age Feasting Hall in North-Eastern Iceland* (Reykjavík: Institute of Archaeology, Reykjavík, 2009); Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen et al., “A Ritual Site with Sacrificial Wells from the Viking Age at Trelleborg, Denmark,” *Danish Journal of Archaeology* 3 (2014): 145–63; Davide Marco Zori, “The Norse in Iceland,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Topics in Archaeology*, ed. Chris Gosden, Barry Cunliffe, and Rosemary A. Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–36; Maeve Sikora, “Diversity in Viking Age Horse Burial: A Comparative Study of Norway, Iceland, Scotland and Ireland,” *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* 12/13 (2003): 87–109; Þóra Pétursdóttir, “Icelandic Viking Age Graves: Lack in Material – Lack of Interpretation?” *Archaeologia islandica* 7 (2009): 22–40; Davide Zori et al., “Feasting in Viking Age Iceland: Sustaining a Chiefly Political Economy in a Marginal Environment,” *Antiquity* 87 (2013): 150–65; Anders Andrén, “Behind ‘Heathendom’: Archaeological Studies of Old Norse Religion,” *Scottish Archaeological Journal* 27 (2005): 105–38.

21 See, for example, Poul Nørlund, “Buried Norsemen at Herjolfsnes,” *Meddelelser om Grønland* 67 (1924): 1–270; Poul Nørlund and Mårten Stenberger, “Brattahlid,” *Meddelelser om Grønland* 88 (1934): 1–161; Poul Nørlund and Aage Roussell, “Norse Ruins at Gardar: The Episcopal Seat of Medieval Greenland,” *Meddelelser om Grønland* 76 (1930): 1–170; Aage Roussell, “Sandnes and the Neighboring Farms,” *Meddelelser om Grønland* 88 (1936): 5–232.

22 On Tjodhildes Church, see Knud J. Krogh, “Tjodhildes kirke på Brattahlid,” *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark* 1963–65 (1965): 5–18; Knud J. Krogh, *Erik den Rødes Grønland* (Herning: Nationalmuseet, 1982).

23 Joel Berglund, “The Excavations at the Farm beneath the Sand Introduction,” in *Man, Culture and Environment in Ancient Greenland: Report on a Research Programme*, ed. Jette Arneborg and Hans Christian Gulløv (Copenhagen: Danish Polar Center and the National Museum of Denmark, 1998), 7–13; Christian Koch Madsen, Michael Nielsen, and Frederik Fuuja Larsen, *Interim Report on Archaeological Investigations in the Vatnahverfi 2015*, unpublished field report (Nuuk: Greenland National Museum & Archives, 2016); Maria Hinnerson Berglund, “Red Sandstone and Greenlandic Wool. Two Diagnostic Artefacts in the Interpretation of a Newly Discovered Saeter in Southern Greenland,” *Acta Borealia* 15 (1998): 153–74.

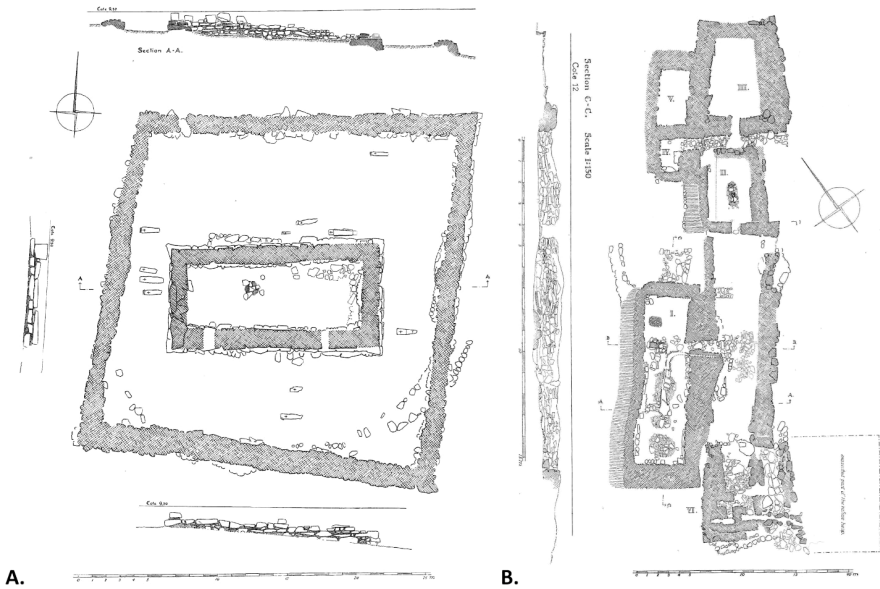


Figure 3.3: Excavated ruins at NKAH 2239/Ø29a (Brattahlíð): a) one-cell type Church (ruin no.1) built after c. AD 1250/1300; b) the farmhouse (ruin no. 2). A key aim in early excavations of Norse buildings in Greenland was to reveal a clear floorplan and the presence of earlier phases were merely observed, not investigated – note for instance the older walls under the church and farmhouse. Consequently, most architecture and artefacts are from the medieval period (modified after Nørlund and Stenberger 1934, Figures 12 and 26).

Thus, most excavated buildings and features are medieval (see, e.g., Figure 3.3) and, unsurprisingly, almost solely display evidence of Christianity. No identified pits have been investigated for ritual purposes, nor has the surrounding landscape been investigated for potential pagan grave sites. As a result, there is very little archaeological evidence of the Viking Age or transition period in Norse Greenland in general – and even less of any pre-Christian religious beliefs, practices, or rituals. If pre-Christian religious life and ritual practices were centred on the chieftains’ (“temple”) farms, as in Iceland,²⁴ perhaps future comprehensive and targeted excavations at the largest Norse farms in Greenland might reveal similar evidence.

²⁴ See, for example, Jesse Byock and Davide Zori, “Viking Archaeology, Sagas, and Interdisciplinary Research in Iceland’s Mosfell Valley,” *Backdirt: Annual Review of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA* (2013): 124–41; Zori et al., “Feasting in Viking Age Iceland,” 150–65.

1.4 Greenland Norse Religious Artefacts

Like the architecture and features, most archaeological artefacts from Norse Greenland are from the Middle Ages. In addition, since many of the artefacts potentially related to religious beliefs are small (see below), they may easily have been overlooked and are likely underrepresented in collections from older excavations not using systematic screening of soils. However, over the last decades several modern midden excavations with systematic screening of soils have investigated temporal changes in the Norse subsistence economy and have therefore been carried out from “top to bottom.”²⁵ As the preservation of organic artefacts has generally been good, artefact collections from such new excavations would seem to offer a possible source for identifying religious objects from the whole Norse settlement period.

However, this potential remains largely unexplored for several reasons: First, most of the recent midden excavations are only published as reports, if at all.²⁶ Second, since these investigations focus on zooarchaeological analysis, artefacts have received little attention and are only presented summarily, not analyzed. Third, some Viking-Age symbolism – for instance, serpents/dragons and birds – carried over seamlessly into medieval religious imagery, making it difficult to interpret what beliefs figurative artefacts reflect. A comprehensive artefact analysis is beyond the scope of this article, which will instead highlight examples of how Greenland Norse religious artefacts may be identified in future studies.

2 Evidence of Christianity in Norse Greenland

As stated above, much of the Nordic and European medieval literature concerns ecclesiastical affairs and administration that need little further elaboration in this context. It is sufficient to observe that this corpus of literature clearly shows the

²⁵ See, for example, T. H. McGovern et al., “Vertebrate Zooarchaeology of Sandnes V51: Economic Change at a Chieftain’s Farm in West Greenland,” *Arctic Anthropology* 33 (1996): 94–121; Konrad Smiarowski, “Climate-Related Farm-to-Shieling Transition at E74 Qorlortorsuaq in Norse Greenland,” in *Human Ecodynamics in the North Atlantic: A Collaborative Model of Humans and Nature through Space and Time*, ed. Ramona Harrison and Ruth Maher (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), 171–94; Georg Nyegaard, “Dairy Farmers and Seal Hunters: Subsistence on a Norse Farm in the Eastern Settlement, Greenland,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* 37 (2018): 1–80.

²⁶ Unpublished field reports on file at the Greenland National Museum & Archives.

interest and investment of Nordic and European ecclesiastical authority in Greenland; indirectly, that the Roman Catholic Church had, or intended to gain, a strong foothold in Greenland, probably more so over time.²⁷ The impression of well-established Christian beliefs is reaffirmed by the local Greenlandic inscriptions with runes or the Roman alphabet, of which 40–50 per cent are religious prayers invoking God, Jesus, Mary, and/or saints; i.e., a proportion higher than in contemporary Scandinavia.²⁸

Christian religious architecture is demonstrated by sixteen churches in the Eystribyggð, including a tentatively identified monastery and nunnery,²⁹ and two or three in the Vestribyggð – some in several phases, spanning the entire settlement period (Figure 3.3).³⁰ Hundreds of Christian graves from the entire settlement period have also been excavated in the churchyards, whereas not a single pagan grave has been found. This suggests that Christianity was already well established during the founding of the settlements, which is unsurprising since it coincided with the conversion of the Icelanders in 1000 CE. This also serves as a warning that later historical stories, such as *Eiríks saga rauða's* (chapter 5) account of Leifr Eiríksson (“Leif the Lucky”) introducing Christianity and his mother Þjóðhildr (“Tjodhild”) subsequently founding the first church in Greenland – *Þjóðhildarkirkja* – should be read with caution, perhaps more as an anecdotal, narrative echo of the Icelandic conversion story.³¹

Symbols of Christianity are also overwhelmingly predominant among the religious artefacts: the ensigns of a buried bishop,³² carved crucifixes³³ (Figure 3.4) and crosses,³⁴ and crosses incised on everyday items and tools, such as loom weights, spindle whorls, and other items. The latter in particular appear with high frequency, and although no formal investigation has been conducted, exam-

27 Arneborg, “The Norse Settlement of Greenland,” 134.

28 Imer, *Peasants and Prayers*, 105f.

29 Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, “Medieval Monasticism in Iceland and Norse Greenland,” *Religions* 12 (2021): 374.

30 Fig. 3.3; Arneborg, “The Norse Settlement of Greenland”; Jette Arneborg et al., “Norse Greenland Dietary Economy ca. AD 980–ca. AD 1450: Introduction,” in *Greenland Isotope Project: Diet in Norse Greenland AD 1000–AD 1450*, special issue, *Journal of the North Atlantic* 3 (2012): 1–39.

31 Grove, “The Place of Greenland in Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative,” 39.

32 Nørlund and Roussel, “Norse Ruins at Gardar,” 1–170.

33 Fig. 3.4; Aage Roussel, “Farms and Churches in the Medieval Norse Settlements of Greenland,” *Meddelelser om Grønland* 89 (1941): 1–354; Roussel, “Sandnes and the Neighboring Farms,” 5–232; Christian L. Vebæk, “Vatnahverfi – An Inland District of the Eastern Settlement in Greenland,” *Meddelelser om Grønland, Man & Society* 17 (1992): 1–132.

34 Jette Arneborg and Ebbe Nyborg, “Christian Medieval Art in Norse Greenland. Crosses and Crucifixes and Their European Antecedents,” *Scripta Islandica* 71 (2020): 155–76.

ples of crosses incised on artefacts are estimated to number more than one hundred.³⁵ The abundance of such crosses surely reflects, in part, the temporal bias of the artefact assemblages, as discussed above, as well as the simplicity of the cross as a symbol – in its simplest form it requires hardly any skill to make and is easily identifiable. However, the apparent predominance of Christian symbols and beliefs also includes artefacts with (and without) Christian inscriptions interpreted as prayer sticks, rosaries, and religious textual amulets.³⁶



Figure 3.4: Wooden crucifix found on Vestribyggð farm no. V53d, one of the most elaborate examples of Christian art and symbolism found in Norse Greenland (photo: N. Elswing 2004, National Museum of Denmark, with permission).

Another, small group of artefacts should perhaps also be included along with the Christian religious amulets: miniature human head carvings (Figure 3.5). Made from wood or walrus ivory/tooth, such head carvings of (presumed) Norse origin have turned up in excavations of farms as well as in Inuit archaeological contexts

³⁵ Many artefacts with incised crosses have not been published but are kept in storage at the Greenland National Museum & Archives.

³⁶ Imer, *Peasants and Prayers*, 63.

far from the settlements.³⁷ As head carvings have not previously been considered Christian religious amulets, they are treated in some detail here.

Perhaps the most important evidence of the amuletic purpose of (at least some) miniature head carvings is a walrus ivory head measuring approx. 4.5 cm in height, which was found in the erosion front by Vestribygð church farm V51/NKAH³⁸ 1480 (Figure 3.5a).³⁹ The head displays distinctive male facial features: a rather austere square face with a wide mouth and a nose bridged by a distinct philtrum, large eyes under a pronounced brow, and deep nasolabial folds – perhaps accentuated to indicate the man’s advanced age? The man wears a rather high hat crowned by a wide-angled ridge.

Although the hat’s ridge is somewhat wide angled and lacks a concave “dip” in the middle, its shape and proportions suggest that it was meant to portray a bishop’s mitre, similar to – but carved with greater skill and attention to detail than – those of the twelfth-century Lewis Chessmen bishops;⁴⁰ the mitres of Lewis bishops 25–26, for instance, also have rather low ridges (Figures 4.18 and 4.19). That the shape of bishops’ mitres was known to the Grænlendinga is indicated by a chess piece found in the bishop’s farm of Garðar, Ø47/NKAH 4335.⁴¹ Was V51’s head carving a modest depiction of one of the sanctified bishops popular in medieval Scandinavia, e.g., St Clemens or St Nicholas? Ívarr Bárðarson’s fourteenth-century *Description of Greenland*, for instance, lists a church in Eystribygð dedicated to St Nicholas.⁴²

Another potential saintly head carving from Norse Greenland is a 10.4 cm–long wooden figure of a dragon’s head biting into the top of a human head (Figure 3.5b). It was found in the sleeping room of Vestribygð farm V53d.⁴³ In this carving, the

37 Roussell, “Sandnes and the Neighboring Farms,” 5–232; Roussell, “Farms and Churches in the Medieval Norse Settlements of Greenland,” 1–354; Hans Christian Gulløv, “Eskimoens syn på europæeren – de såkaldte nordbодукker og andre tvivlsomme udskæringer,” *Tidsskriftet Grønland* 1982 (1982): 226–34; Jørgen Meldgaard, “Eskimoer og Nordboer i det Yderste Nord,” *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark* (1995): 199–214; Peter Schledermann, “Ellesmere. Vikings in the Far North,” in *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, ed. William W. Fitzhugh and Elizabeth E. Ward (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 248–56.

38 NKAH – “Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu Heritage” – is the new official heritage site numbering system used by Greenland National Museum & Archives, which is provided here alongside the old Ø-/V- site numbers for reference.

39 Fig. 3.5a; Roussell, “Sandnes and the Neighboring Farms,” 124, 184, fig. 108.

40 David H. Caldwell, Mark A. Hall, and Caroline M. Wilkinson, *The Lewis Chessmen Unmasked* (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland, 2010), 32.

41 Nørlund and Roussell, “Norse Ruins at Gardar,” 163, fig. 102.

42 Derek Mathers, “A Fourteenth-Century Description of Greenland,” *Saga-Book* 33 (2009): 80.

43 NKAH 1438; Roussell, “Farms and Churches in the Medieval Norse Settlements of Greenland,” 287, fig. 177.



Figure 3.5: Miniature head carvings from Norse Greenland: a) from V51/NKAH 1480, height 4.5 cm (photo: L. Larsen 2023, National Museum of Denmark, with permission); b) V53d/NKAH 1438, height 10.4 cm (photo: J. Lee 2023, National Museum of Denmark, with permission); and c) from the Sermermiut settlement in the Disko Bay, height 6.1 cm (photo: M. Nielsen 2023, Greenland National Museum & Archives).

face is more crudely made and genderless, with large, almond-shaped eyes and wide nose and lips; here too, the nasolabial folds are distinctly depicted. The dragon's (or serpent's) head is somewhat damaged but still easily recognizable. The shape of the figure seems determined by the original medium (a wooden stick). Was this a Norse version of St George and the Dragon?

A third noteworthy possible Norse miniature head carving was found by the Inuit site of Sermermiut in Disko Bay.⁴⁴ It is a 6.1 cm–long carving in birch (*Betula pubescens*),⁴⁵ of which the head forms the upper approx. 2 cm, the neck and “body” a 4.1 cm–long slender barrel shape below. Thus, the figurine could be fixed in a soft surface (turf/soil) or carved depression in wood or steatite. The person's sex is indeterminate, but they appear to wear a hat with a low, rounded but flat-topped crown and narrow brim from under which flows shoulder-length hair with a pageboy-style cut. The hat and hair frame a triangular face, carved rather rudimentarily, with narrow eyes, nose, and mouth made as mere shallow cuts. A protrusion – slightly damaged – below the chin seems to depict a cowl or hooded

⁴⁴ Fig. 3.5c. Meldgaard, “Eskimoer og nordboer i det yderste Nord,” fig. 8.

⁴⁵ Meldgaard, “Eskimoer og nordboer i det yderste Nord,” 209.

cape, and another protrusion just under the widest part of the body resembles apron-like clothing.

If this head carving, too, was meant to portray a saintly bishop, then the rounded crown of the “mitre” would typologically suggest an earlier type than the figurine from V51 (Figure 3.5a). Alternatively, but less likely, the head ornament may not be a hat at all, but a simplified crown of thorns portrayed very similarly to the Jesus carving in a crucifix from V53d (Figure 3.4),⁴⁶ including the rope-spiral rendering of the hair. Could the head carving from Sermermiut be a Norse amulet invoking Lord Jesus? Without a reliable archaeological context or date – as with several of the head carvings – we cannot, in fact, be certain that it is Norse. Indeed, the shape and size of the figurine’s body could suggest that it was an artistic bottle stopper with a (self-)portrait – wearing a woollen cap (“mut”) – of one of the European whalers who frequented Disko Bay in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries.⁴⁷

If the miniature head carvings are Norse, they could – carried in a pouch or placed in the home – have served as Christian amuletic wards against evil, to ensure health and prosperity, and would be an, albeit modest and somewhat unusual, echo of the cult of saints practised in medieval Scandinavia.⁴⁸

However, an amuletic function of the head carvings could help explain why they also turn up in Inuit archaeological contexts. Amulets were vital to precolonial Inuit religious and daily life, and there were strict rules as to how the amuletic powers could be transferred, disturbed, or lost.⁴⁹ For instance, an amulet and its inherent powers could be passed from one person to another, but only through some reciprocal exchange. The skills or prowess of a successful hunter could be passed to another through an object’s mere association with the former. Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen, for instance, was allowed to trade his hair and clothes for Inuit amulets, as they believed him to be an especially vigorous man and hoped that this quality would be transferred to the new owner of his hair.⁵⁰ Perhaps the magic and protective amuletic powers of carved Christian saints – in which the Norse would themselves have believed – were coveted and treasured

46 Fig. 3.4; Roussel, “Farms and Churches in the Medieval Norse Settlements of Greenland,” 247f., fig. 158.

47 See Gulløv, “Eskimoens syn på europæeren,” 231.

48 See, for example, Thomas A. DuBois, ed., *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Dario Bullitta and Kirsten Wolf, eds, *Saints and their Legacies in Medieval Iceland* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2021).

49 Knud Rasmussen, *Fra Grønland til Stillehavet – Rejser og Mennesker fra 5. Thule Ekspedition 1921–24*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1925), 353–54.

50 Knud Rasmussen, *Fra Grønland til Stillehavet – Rejser og Mennesker fra 5. Thule Ekspedition 1921–24*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1926), 60.

amulets among the Inuit, whether gifted, traded, or discovered in the abandoned settlements?

In summary, all lines of available evidence point to predominantly Christian beliefs in medieval Norse Greenland and to the presence of the Roman Catholic Church. New, large churches were built even after 1300,⁵¹ religious symbology is regularly represented, and, as noted above, the relative frequency of religious inscriptions was higher than in contemporary Scandinavia.⁵² Was the religious minority of Norse Grænlinga possibly even more devout than their North Atlantic counterparts? Perhaps as a spiritual and psychological response to their relative geographic (and religious) isolation and the harsh Arctic environment? Did nothing of their old pagan beliefs persist?

3 Evidence of the Old Norse Religion

Greenland was settled around the time that belief in the Old Norse religion and pantheon – the Aesir (*ON Æsir*) – were being replaced by Christianity in Scandinavia. Thus, Iceland formally converted to Christianity in 1000,⁵³ just a few decades after Eiríkr rauði and the first settlers landed in Greenland. However, official, historical conversion was only a culmination of a complex, dynamic process which took place over several centuries.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, some people were Christian prior to conversion⁵⁵ – and, just as expectedly, some would have remained true to the old religion after conversion. In Greenland, relatively isolated from Scandinavian Church centres and influence, this might have been even more the case.

Several medieval written records do state – directly or indirectly – that the Grænlinga were pagan at the start of the settlement, although they do not agree entirely on the specifics as to how, when, or by whom Christianity was introduced.⁵⁶ Expounding the details and discrepancies of this conversion narrative is beyond the scope of this article; suffice to observe that medieval written evidence clearly shows that at least some in the first generations of Grænlinga

51 See, for example, Figure 3.3a; Arneborg, “The Norse Settlement of Greenland,” 134.

52 Imer, *Peasants and Prayers*, 105.

53 Kristjánsdóttir, “Medieval Monasticism in Iceland and Norse Greenland,” 374.

54 See, for example, Anders Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants, and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

55 Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland*, 50–58.

56 Arneborg, “Norse Greenland Archaeology,” 15–24.

would have practised the Old Norse religion. Others, even a majority, were likely already Christian, as also implied by the archaeological evidence.⁵⁷

There is one late source that refers indirectly to paganism in Norse Greenland: it is a letter from Pope Alexander VI written just before the turn of the fifteenth century to aid a bishop-elect, Brother Matthias of the Order of St Benedict, who was heading for Greenland.⁵⁸ In this letter, conditions in Greenland are portrayed in a very dire light, stating that no ship had landed in Greenland for eighty years at that time and that since the Grænlinga had no ordained priests or bishops, many had turned away from Christianity. There is no mention of what other religion they should have turned to, but Brother Matthias was meant to restore order to this situation and lead the lost souls back to the true faith.

There are some intriguing accuracies in Pope Alexander VI's letter: that the Greenland settlements were very remote and surrounded by ice-filled waters that could only be penetrated in the month of August (when the summer drift ice on Greenland's southwest coast has melted) and that people there lived on milk and dried fish (which in this context could also refer to sea mammals) because they had no bread, wine, or oil. The information that no ship, priest, or bishop had been to Greenland for eighty years also corresponds well with the last written record of direct contact with the Norse Grænlinga, i.e., the Hvalsey Church letters.⁵⁹ However, most of this information could have been obtained from available medieval records,⁶⁰ and with nearly a century of no contact, the claim of the Grænlinga's turn from Christianity must remain highly uncertain – in fact, at the time the papal letter was written the settlements had been abandoned for some fifty years.

Medieval Norse literary accounts of *völur* (sing. *völva*, derived from the ON *vǫlva*) in Norse Greenland also point back to the Old Norse religion: In the Viking Age, the *völva* was a female practitioner of the old religion and its associated magic, especially *seiðr*, the art of foretelling and influencing the future – she was a sorceress and seeress.⁶¹ One of the most striking accounts of a *völva* is found in *Eiríks saga rauða*.⁶²

57 See above and Arneborg, "The Norse Settlement of Greenland," 129–52.

58 Seaver, *The Frozen Echo*, 237–38; Anderson, *The Flatey Book*, 176.

59 Magnússon and Rafn, eds, *Grønlands historiske Mindesmærker*, 41.

60 Seaver, *The Frozen Echo*, 237.

61 Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie – Første Bind* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1920), 31–32; Leszek Gardela, "Into Viking Minds: Reinterpreting the Staffs of Sorcery and Unravelling 'Seiðr,'" *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008): 45–84.

62 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds, *Eyrbyggja saga* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935).

En er hún kom um kveldið og sá maður er í móti henni var sendur þá var hún svo búin að hún hafði yfir sér tuglamöttul blán og var settur steinum allt í skaut ofan. Hún hafði á hálsi sér glertölur. Hún hafði á höfði lambskinnskofra svartan og við innan kattarskin hvítt. Staf hafði hún í hendi og var á hnappur. Hann var búinn messingu og settur steinum ofan um hnappinn. Hún hafði um sig hnjóskulinda og var þar á skjóðupungur mikill. Varðveitti hún þar í töfur þau er hún þurfti til fróðleiks að hafa. Hún hafði kálfskinnskó loðna á fótum og í þvengi langa og sterklega, látúnshnappar miklir á endunum. Hún hafði á höndum sér katt-skinnsglófa og voru hvítir innan og loðnir [. .]

Borð voru upp tekin um kveldið og er frá því að segja að spákonunni var matbúið. Henni var ger grautur af kiðjamjólken en til matar henni voru búin hjörta úr alls konar kví-kindum þeim sem þar voru til. Hún hafði messingarspón og hníf tannskeftan, tvíhólkaðan af eiri, og var af brotinn oddurinn.⁶³

When she came in the evening, with the man who had been sent to meet her, she was clad in a dark-blue cloak, fastened with a strap, and set with stones quite down to the hem. She wore glass beads around her neck, and upon her head a black lamb-skin hood, lined with white cat-skin. In her hands she carried a staff, upon which there was a knob, which was ornamented with brass, and set with stones up about the knob. Circling her waist she wore a girdle of touch-wood, and attached to it a great skin pouch, in which she kept the charms which she used when she was practising her sorcery. She wore upon her feet shaggy calf-skin shoes, with long, tough latches, upon the ends of which there were large brass buttons. She had cat-skin gloves upon her hands, which were white inside and lined with fur [. .].

The tables were brought forth in the evening, and it remains to be told what manner of food was prepared for the prophetess. A porridge of goat's beestings was made for her, and for meat there were dressed the hearts of every kind of beast, which could be obtained there. She had a brass spoon, and a knife with a handle of walrus tusk, with a double hasp of brass around the haft, and from this the point was broken.⁶⁴

This description of a *völva* was written down in distant Iceland centuries after the events described and, of course, must be treated with due caution. However, the notion that some people possessed special, magical, and often dangerous powers is indisputable, as this was a common belief that persisted for a long time all over Europe – in the Middle Ages, in the form of witches. The description of the burning of a male witch in Greenland in 1406 shows that dangerous magic was at play in the Christian Norse settlements.⁶⁵ Also noteworthy in the saga account is the special vestment and equipment of the *völva*. Although the exact details are perhaps not to be trusted, the description of her equipment is likely more important: the staff and the combination of rare and common materials of

⁶³ “Eiríks saga rauða”, trans., Icelandic Saga Database, Sveinbjorn Thordarson (ed.), URL = http://www.sagadb.org/eiriks_saga_rauda.is.

⁶⁴ Arthur Middleton Reeves, trans., *The Saga of Erik the Red* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2003), 21–22.

⁶⁵ Magnússon and Rafn, eds, *Grønlands historiske Mindesmærker*, 41.

differing value, colour, and origin. It seems that it was this unusual combination, perhaps not the individual objects or elements of clothing in themselves, that set the *völva* apart – her symbols and symbols of supernatural power and authority.

In 2015, the author led the excavation of a small, remote Norse one-room hut (NKAH 5495, Figure 3.1) situated close to the Greenland Ice Cap in Eystrbyggð.⁶⁶ Hidden in a chest or other container under a turf bench in the hut was a cache of artefacts (Figure 3.6): ten fragments of walrus tooth (worked and unworked, one belt buckle, and mandible gaming pieces, one complete, one unfinished); a double-sided comb of caribou antler; the horn core of a sheep and a cow; the tooth of a caprine; a phalanx of a seal, one small unidentified bone of a marine mammal, and one of a terrestrial mammal; a fragment of an iron knife; a copper alloy vessel fragment; a worked, unidentified steatite object; two jaspis fire starters, one red, one milky white; and some ferrous metal fragments.



Figure 3.6: Lower part of hidden artefact cache at Norse site NKAH 5495 in Eystrbyggð during excavation. The objects lay closely together, some overlapping, surrounded by a dark, organic residue, suggesting they were deposited together in a wooden box or other container under a turf bench (photo: C. K. Madsen 2015).

⁶⁶ Madsen, Nielsen, and Larsen, *Interim Report on Archaeological Investigations in the Vatnahverfi 2015*.

Except for the valuable walrus tusks, none of these objects are uncommon in themselves, having been found in several excavations. However, the combination of objects of different value, colour, and origin – e.g., marine v. terrestrial – is unusual and reminiscent of the description of the *völva* in *Eiríks saga rauða*. While it could be argued that this was a material kit for the kind of craftsmanship that occurred on seasonal sites,⁶⁷ some elements of the cache – like the horn cores and the (worthless) small bones – have little or no real explanation or parallels in this context. Could it have been a hidden stash belonging to a *völva* or witch, a hermit travelling between farms? A tempting thought, perhaps, but the true explanation must of course remain elusive and uncertain.

Despite the relatively high number of local Norse inscriptions, there are only two potential mentions of Aesir. One is an inscription on a wooden stick from the Farm Beneath the Sand⁶⁸ in the Vestribyggð with the name Þórr (“Thor”), one of the main deities of the Old Norse pantheon. However, as noted by Imer,⁶⁹ the name is unlikely to refer to the god, but is rather a short form of the common compound man’s name Þór-. The other inscription is a short runic poem on a stick coarsely shaped like a dragon/serpent (Figure 3.2) from the early farm Ø17a/NKAH 1572 in the Eystribyggð.⁷⁰ Interpretation of the poem is, however, problematic and varies significantly, one translation of the poem’s first line reading “On the sea, the sea, the sea, is the ambush of the Æsir/where Ása sat,” another translation of the same line reading “On a tub/vessel saw he, who sat on a tub/vessel.”⁷¹ Thus, both local inscriptions referring to Aesir are ambiguous.

As mentioned above, no religious architecture or features in Norse Greenland can be associated with the Old Norse religion, and there is a complete lack of any pagan graves.⁷² Apart from a fragmented skull of a male dating to c. 1280–1305,⁷³ inexplicably deposited in a farm building, no Norse human remains have ever been discovered outside of churchyards. However, recent excavations in the churchyard of Eystribyggð farm Ø64/NKAH 4319 revealed a small grave with a

67 See, for example, Gavin Lucas, “Pálstóftir: A Viking Age Shieling in Iceland,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 41 (2008): 87–100.

68 GUS/NKAH 1475; Berglund, “The Excavations at the Farm beneath the Sand. Introduction,” 7–13.

69 Imer, *Peasants and Prayers*, 69.

70 Christian L. Vebæk, “Narsaq – A Norse *landnáma* Farm,” *Meddelelser om Grønland, Man & Society* 18 (1993): 1–47.

71 For a full discussion of the Narsaq rune stick, see Imer, *Peasants and Prayers*, 80–81, 251–52.

72 Arneborg, “The Norse Settlement of Greenland,” 129–52.

73 Arneborg et al., “Norse Greenland Dietary Economy,” table 8.

pile of human bones lying in an unanatomical order, i.e., a reburial in a small pit.⁷⁴ Among the bones were fragments of a horse jaw, as well as a pair of seal and sheep vertebrae. As a human rib was pushed through a hole in the sheep vertebra, it was certainly part of the grave.

Furnishing the dead with weapons, tools, equipment, and animals – in whole or in part – for the afterlife was a central aspect of Viking-Age burial customs not generally practised in Christianity. It is therefore most likely that the feature found at Ø64 was a reburied pre-Christian grave, where part of the animal burial gifts made their way into the new, Christian grave along with (skeletized) human bones, either through inattention or indifference. As outlined above, there seems to have been little time between the last believers in the Old Norse religion and the first believers in Christianity in Greenland, so it is quite conceivable that some of the newly converted Grænlendinga would have sought to posthumously rebury their next of kin and thereby ensure their eternal salvation. If so, emptied pre-Christian graves should be found in the settlement landscapes, possibly with some grave goods remaining.

In terms of religious artefacts, the Mjöltnir (Thor's Hammer) is one of the few unequivocal symbols of the Old Norse religion known from all over Viking-Age and transition-period Scandinavia.⁷⁵ So far, two examples of the Mjöltnir (Figures 3.7a–b) – both carved in outline on flat steatite objects of unknown function – have been found in Greenland at the large Norse church farms Ø29a/NKAH 2230⁷⁶ (Figure 3.7a) and Ø111/NKAH 962 (Figure 3.7b),⁷⁷ thought to be the historically mentioned Brattahlíð and Herjolfsnes farms, respectively.

The Mjöltnir example from Ø29a (Figure 3.7a) is carved into one end of an oval, now partially broken, steatite object; it had at least two bored holes and measures approx. 3.5 × 3.4 cm. The position of the holes suggests that it was not worn suspended from a necklace but is more likely attributed to secondary use of the object, perhaps as a loom weight. It was reported to have been found on the floor of the farm's byre/barn (ruin no. 20). While the ruin is not dated, the prevailing excavation methodology of uncovering mainly the most recent building phase

74 Niels Algreen Møller et al., *Vatnahverfi 2007 – Udgravninger i norrøne kirkegårde og møddinger. Rapport om opmålinger og udgravning i Vatnahverfi, sommeren 2007. Feltrapport 26* (Copenhagen: SILA – Nationalmuseets Center for Grønlandsforskning & Danmarks Middelalder og Renæssance, 2007), 22; Jette Arneborg et al., *Ressources, Mobility, and Cultural Identity in Norse Greenland, Vatnahverfi-Project – Report from the Field Work 2008 (unpubl. field report)*, ed. Caroline Polke Paulsen (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 2009), 13.

75 Jörn Staecker, "Thor's Hammer – Symbol of Christianization and Political Delusion," *Lund Archaeological Review* 5 (1999): 89–104; André, "Behind 'Heathendom'," 105–38.

76 Fig. 3.1b; Nørlund and Stenberger, "Brattahlíð," 130, fig. 96.

77 Fig. 31b; Nørlund, "Buried Norsemen at Herjolfsnes," 224, fig. 157.

(s), as mentioned above, suggests that the byre/barn is later medieval and, consequently, the Ø29a Mjölfnir could be interpreted as evidence of a surviving belief in the Aesir, and hence of syncretism.

However, because of the rather coarse excavation methods and description, there is no way of knowing if the object was really deposited in a medieval context. It could just as well have been embedded in the turf walls or roof, cut from older deposits somewhere around the farm, and found its way to the floor when the building collapsed; or the original object could have been uncovered during farm work or building repairs and then re-sourced as a loom weight with no religious significance, only to be finally discarded on the barn's floor.

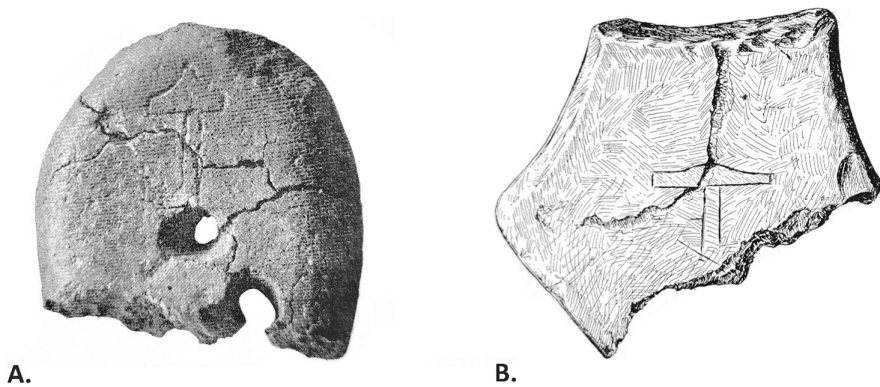


Figure 3.7: The two known examples of Thor's hammers from Greenland, both edged in steatite: a) from church farms Brattahlíð Ø29a/NKAH 2230, height 3.5 cm; b) Herjolfsnes Ø111/NKAH 962, height 18.0 cm (reproduced after Nørlund 1924, figure 157; and Nørlund and Stenberger 1934, figure 96).

Even more uncertainty applies to the second Mjölfnir example from Ø111 (Figure 3.7b), a pentagon-shaped steatite object that originally measured approx. 18.0 × 18.5 cm. The side of the object opposite the carving is described as showing some kind of wear. There is no information on the find spot. While there may have been a hole in the object's broken end from which it could have been suspended from a necklace or the like, it seems rather too large and heavy for this purpose. Compared to the Mjölfnir-decorated object from Ø29a, the example from Ø111 seems more purposefully designed and shaped. Perhaps the broken-off, likely tapered, end served to fix the object in a soft (turf?) surface or hole or depression in a movable base piece.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Like several of the later wooden crosses and crucifixes; see Arneborg and Nyborg, "Christian Medieval Art," 155–76.

A less certain, but nonetheless intriguing, indication of Aesir could perhaps be the depiction of cats. Depictions of cat heads have been found on several Greenland Norse artefacts, including a wooden arm rest (Figure 3.8) from church farm V51/NKAH 1480, and on the handles of steatite bowls from Ø29a/NKAH 2239⁷⁹ and Ø171/NKAH 4282.⁸⁰ Apart from wooden play-horse figurines, cats are in fact the most frequently portrayed domestic animal in Norse Greenland. This is somewhat surprising because cats are virtually non-existent in the zooarchaeological record;⁸¹ i.e., even if they were not likely to be consumed, they do not appear to have been very common. So why the multiple cat depictions?

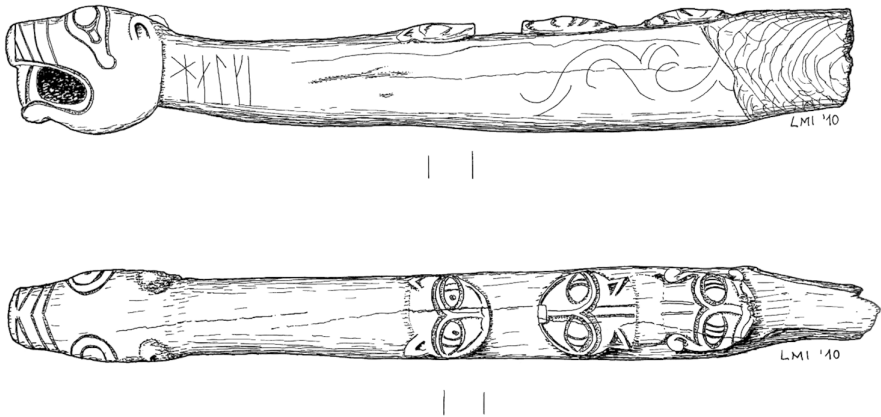


Figure 3.8: Carved wooden armrest (?) from the Western Settlement Norse farm V51/NKAH 1480, depicting a polar bear (?) and three cat heads. The name “Helgi” is inscribed with runes on one side (reproduced from Imer 2017, 288; with permission).

Cats were familiars and drew the chariot of Freya, one of the principal deities in the Norse pantheon, goddess of fertility, love, sex, battle, death, wealth, and *seiðr*. The ritual importance of cats in the Viking Age has therefore also been accentuated⁸² – and this may explain the meaning of the *völva*’s cat-skin vestment in *Eiríks saga rauða* (see above). However, a recent study has pointed out that the ritual significance of cats has perhaps been overstated, both in terms of its gendered sphere and role within religious practice, as well as the fact that cats were just as much an

⁷⁹ Nørlund and Stenberger, “Brattahlid,” 123, fig. 84.

⁸⁰ Unpublished excavation material in storage at the Greenland National Museum & Archives.

⁸¹ See, however, Nyegaard, “Dairy Farmers and Seal Hunters,” 1–80.

⁸² For an overview, see Matthias Toplak, “The Warrior and the Cat: A Re-Evaluation of the Roles of Domestic Cats in Viking Age Scandinavia,” *Current Swedish Archaeology* 27 (2019): 213–43.

ordinary fur animal used for clothing, trade, and pest control.⁸³ Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the cat depictions from Greenland are all found on objects of the home and household, perhaps an indication that it carried some magical significance, possibly attached to the female religious sphere.

4 Other Religious Beliefs?

The question remains as to whether the Grænlendinga had beliefs in parallel to Christianity or the Old Norse religion. This is, however, very difficult to answer with the available evidence, or lack thereof. Indeed, since we have no direct sources or comparative baseline for the physical expression or symbols of any non-established religious beliefs, we do not even know what form such evidence might take. The following will therefore simply present a few ideas on future avenues to address this question.

Besides head carvings, the artefactual evidence from Norse Greenland includes several figurative representations of animals and other creatures. Relatively frequent among these are carvings of miniature polar bears⁸⁴ and walrus⁸⁵ made from walrus tooth/ivory and worn from necklaces or the like. The well-preserved examples show that the figurines were made with considerable skill, attention to detail, and knowledge of the animals' physiology. In addition, these miniatures are tiny (2.6–3.8 cm in length), easy to overlook during excavation, and therefore most likely underrepresented in the archaeological record, especially from older excavations where excavated soils were not screened. Examples of polar bear canines crafted to be worn from necklaces have also been found.⁸⁶

Made from valuable materials and directly associated with the noted vital importance of Norse long-distance hunting for polar bear skins and walrus and nar-

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Two polar bear miniature pendants from excavations of Norse site V54/NKAH 1486 in storage at the Greenland National Museum & Archives; n=4, figs 8, 9A-B: Nyegaard, "Dairy Farmers and Seal Hunters," 37, fig. 32; Roussell, "Sandnes and the Neighboring Farms," 123–24, fig. 106.

⁸⁵ Two walrus miniatures from recent excavations of middens at Norse sites V54/NKAH 1486 and Brattahlid (Ø29a/NKAH 2230) are unpublished but in storage at the Greenland National Museum & Archives; n=3, fig. 9C: Roussell, "Sandnes and the Neighboring Farms," 124, fig. 107.

⁸⁶ Inge Bødker Enghoff, "Hunting, Fishing, and Animal Husbandry at the Farm beneath the Sand, Western Greenland," *Meddelelser om Grønland, Man & Society* 28 (2003): 46; Vebæk, "Narsaq – A Norse *landnáma* farm," 32f, fig. 39.



Figure 3.9: Polar bear and walrus miniatures cut in walrus ivory/tooth: a) from Eystribyggð Norse farm Ø34/NKAH 2282, length 3.4 cm (photo: M. Nielsen 2015, Greenland National Museum & Archives); b) from Vestribyggð farms V51/NKAH 1480, length 2.4 cm; and c) V52a/NKAH 1432, length 3.8 cm (photos: C. Hansen 2002, National Museum of Denmark with permission).

whal ivory, such pendants were likely not (primarily) ornamental but rather imbued with amuletic power and purpose. The hunt for Arctic marine-species bear was relatively dangerous, as was the journey to the distant hunting grounds beyond the settlements (Figure 3.1). Thus, such amulets should probably be seen as part of both the psychological kit and personal identity of the Norse hunter, i.e., a means of magically favouring a safe and successful hunt, while at the same time serving as a mark of the prowess and skill of the accomplished hunter – perhaps earned through one’s first participation or kill in the hunt?

The significance of polar bear and walrus in the minds, and possibly beliefs, of the Norse is echoed in other material culture, where they are represented through both stylized⁸⁷ and naturalistic representations,⁸⁸ walrus-tooth buckles and buttons,⁸⁹ and gaming pieces made of walrus bone and tooth.⁹⁰ In a recent excavation,⁹¹ a walrus mandible seemed deliberately placed in the turf wall of a Norse farmhouse (Figure 3.10), a practice reminiscent of a walrus vertebral column built into the base of an early-period house in Iceland.⁹² The ritual significance of such deposits – serving to protect and/or bring favour to a household – was recognized up until very recently in Scandinavia.

⁸⁷ Nyegaard, “Dairy Farmers and Seal Hunters,” 36, fig. 31.

⁸⁸ Madsen, *Pastoral Settlement, Farming, and Hierarchy in Norse Vatnahverfi, South Greenland*, fig. 2.3.

⁸⁹ Else Roesdahl, “Fine Belt-Buckles of Walrus Ivory – Also Made in Greenland,” *UBAS – University of Bergen Archaeological Series* 8 (2015): 267–73.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Nyegaard, “Dairy Farmers and Seal Hunters,” 37–38.

⁹¹ Unpublished excavation of the Arctic Vikings Fieldschool carried out by the Greenland National Museum & Archives at the Eastern Settlement farm NKAH 5500 in 2019.

⁹² Frei et al., “Was it for Walrus?,” 6.

Another probable example of such a ritual deposit is from the Cathedral of Garðar (Ø47/NKAH 4335), where a concentration of walrus bones was observed in the graveyard and church, especially by the gable wall of the chancel.⁹³ Although the excavators admitted some uncertainty as to the archaeological context, their description of so many walrus skull fragments, not commonly found in middens, and several in rows and at uniform depth, seems to preclude random occurrence through redeposition of, for instance, midden soil. In addition, four to five narwhal skulls – not native to Southwest Greenland – were also found in the east end of the cathedral’s chancel during an earlier excavation, leading the excavators themselves to allude to “religious or demoniacal ideas”⁹⁴ behind the deposits.



Figure 3.10: During the excavation of farm NKAH 5500 in Eystribyggð, a large skull fragment of a walrus upper mandible with the tusk removed was found firmly lodged in a turf wall with no other bones. This suggests that the skull fragment was deliberately built into the wall, probably for ritual purposes (photo: C. K. Madsen 2018).

⁹³ Nørlund and Roussel, “Norse Ruins at Gardar,” 138.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

The ritual practice of the arranged, intentional deposition of animal skulls of economic and social importance is, for instance, also noted in the large Viking-Age hall at Hofstaðir, Northern Iceland, where a minimum of twenty-three cattle skulls displayed deliberate, likely ritual, patterns of butchery and deposition.⁹⁵ The arrangement of these cattle skulls likely signalled both the ritual and economic importance and hegemony of the hall, and the walrus and narwhal skulls found at Garðar might have served a similar purpose in a Greenland context. Importantly, the skulls at Garðar suggest that such deposition was not at odds with, but rather was embedded within, Christian religious beliefs, practice, and symbolism – a form of Catholic “walrus/polar bear cult.” This might also be said of the walrus and polar bear amulets and depictions that were apparently used alongside the aforementioned Christian textual amulets and saintly miniature head carvings.

A similar ritual practice is perhaps reflected in a grave at the churchyard of Norse Herjolfsnes Ø111/NKAH 962, where one individual was interred with the head resting on a small whalebone box, which contained a meat residue and was hence interpreted as a food container, possibly of Inuit origin.⁹⁶ Whether or not this is so, supplying the dead with gifts (for the afterlife?) was not a normal part of Norse burial customs. It is intriguing to consider what beliefs were at play in such deposits and arrangements. Perhaps meticulously going through excavation and artefactual records, systematically looking for and scrutinizing the “unusual” or “out of place,” could, in the future, reveal more about the beliefs, and syncretism, of the Greenland Norse.

Conclusion and Perspectives

Through a succinct review of the literary and archaeological evidence of medieval Greenland Norse religious practices and syncretism, this article argues for the clear dominance of Christianity – in the form of the Roman Catholic Church – as demonstrated by literary descriptions, churches, burials, crosses, crucifixes, textual amulets, and, possibly, amuletic saint portraits, although modest in expression when compared to medieval Scandinavia. The evidence of Christianity is, in fact, so overwhelming that one could speculate that the Norse Greenlanders may have been even more devout than their North Atlantic counterparts, perhaps due

95 Gavin Lucas and Thomas H. McGovern, “Bloody Slaughter: Ritual Decapitation and Display at the Viking Settlement of Hofstaðir, Iceland,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 10 (2008): 7–30.

96 Nørlund, “Buried Norsemen at Herjolfsnes,” 225.

to their extreme living conditions on the “edge of existence,” isolated from the cultural and religious world they were part of and identified with.

In contrast, evidence of belief in the Old Norse gods is very slight and uncertain; apart from anecdotal literary allusions, it is only represented by two Mjölñir (Thor’s hammer) depictions and three examples of cat head carvings, perhaps related to the religious sphere and to the vocations of the Old Norse goddess Freya. Even considering that the available evidence is heavily biased towards the medieval period, the lack of evidence of the Old Norse religion supports the notion that most settlers were already Christian when the Greenland colony was founded.⁹⁷ Evidence of religious syncretism is just as fleeting, but walrus and polar bear amulets, as well as skulls of walruses (and narwhals) purposefully deposited in or near building walls, including the Norse Cathedral of Garðar, might point to a form of “walrus/polar bear cult.” However, rather than being an expression of syncretism, the latter appears to have been an accepted religious practice and was likely even integrated into local Christianity due to the importance of the Arctic wildlife for trade and contact.

As noted above, the medieval written record on Norse Greenland has often been mined for descriptions of both Christianity and paganism and is therefore unlikely to yield any truly novel revelations. However, as has been illustrated in this article, there are other avenues for continuing to explore Norse religious practices: first, by meticulously scrutinizing archaeological objects or features that seem “out of place,” in odd combinations or deposition, such as the aforementioned strange cache from NKAH 5495, a burial box from Ø111/NKAH 962, or walrus skull fragments from NKAH 5500 and Ø47/NKAH 4335. Second, by comparing any observed patterns with evidence from the neighbouring North Atlantic areas. Third, figurative representations of humans, animals, and other creatures also seem to present a particularly interesting research potential, affording a view into the minds and symbology of the medieval Grænlendinga. Fourth, archaeological investigations could target missing (and emptied) heathen graves or pits associated with ritual behaviour, especially at the farms that later became religious centres, i.e., the largest church farms.

⁹⁷ Arneborg, “The Norse Settlement of Greenland,” 129–52.

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Chapter 4

Saami Conversion and Identity Negotiation in the Medieval Period

Introduction

While several researchers have established that the conversion of Saami peoples to Christianity was more complex and protracted than previously supposed,¹ the general assumption tends to perpetuate a sharp contrast between the Saami and Christianity.² The rarely questioned connection of Saami characters with “magic” and its performance in medieval, particularly Norse, texts has contributed to this association. Additionally, the strong emphasis on the Protestant mission and its particularly grave consequences for Saami societies in the early modern period, and the associated Saami pietistic revival from the eighteenth century onwards, are often treated as the cataclysms behind the move from the traditional Saami belief systems to Christianity.³ However, several texts from the medieval period indicate that Saami individuals or groups converted to Christianity, in some form, and graves with Saami identity markers found in medieval Christian cemeteries and Christian elements found in otherwise Saami contexts indicate a level of familiarity with Christianity.⁴ In the Norse oath *Trygdámál*, however, fragmentarily preserved in the

1 Bo Lundmark, “Medeltida vittnesbörd om samerna och den katolska kyrkan,” in *De historiska relationerna mellan Svenska kyrkan och samerna*, vol. 1, ed. Daniel Lindmark and Olle Sundström (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2016), 221–40; Inga-Maria Mulk and Tim Bayliss-Smith, “Colonization, Sámi Sacred Sites and Religious Syncretism, ca. AD 500–800,” in *The Sound of Silence: Indigenous Perspectives on the Historical Archaeology of Colonialism*, ed. Tiina Äikäs and Anna-Kaisa Salmi (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 39–70 (39); Else Mundal, “Kong Håkon Magnussons rettarbot for Hålogaland av 1313 og andre kjelder til kristninga av samane i mellomalderen,” in *Fjolð veit hon frøða. Utvalde arbeid av Else Mundal*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen et al. (Oslo: Novus, 2012), 339–58; Siv Rasmussen, “Samisk integrering i norsk og svensk kirke i tidlig nytid. En komparasjon mellom Finnmark og Torne lappmark” (PhD thesis, Arctic University of Norway, 2016); Asgeir Svestad, “Buried in Between: Re-interpreting the Skjoldhamn Medieval Bog Burial of Arctic Norway,” *Medieval Archaeology* 65, no. 2 (2021): 286–321.

2 Sirpa Aalto and Veli-Pekka Lehtola, “The Sami Representations Reflecting the Multi-Ethnic North of the Saga Literature,” *Journal of Northern Studies* 11, no. 2 (2017): 7–30.

3 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 355. Siv Rasmussen, “The Protracted Sámi Reformation – Or the Protracted Christianizing Process,” in *The Protracted Reformation in Northern Norway: Introductory Studies*, vol. 1, ed. Lars Ivar Hansen, Rognald Heisedal Bergesen, and Ingebjørg Hage (Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk, 2014), 165–83 (78).

4 Svestad, “Buried in Between,” 288–302.

Gulapingslög but surviving in Icelandic texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,⁵ the Saami are distinguished from *both* Christians and heathens: “cristnir menn kirkior søkia. heiðnir menn hof blóta [. . .] fiðr scríðr,” [Christians “come to church, heathens hallow temples (. . .) [the Saami] ski].⁶ In this article, I further investigate some of the medieval sources that recount Saami conversion to or familiarity with Christianity. By examining the integration of Christianity into Saami societies as described in these sources, the article considers questions of identity, culture, and geopolitics, and aims to highlight the diversity within, and the dynamic nature of, medieval Saami societies. Here, I draw on existing research that recounts Saami conversion to Christianity in the medieval period, offering an alternative reading of religious transition as demonstrating the fluidity of premodern Saami identities.

1 Ambiguous Christians and Inner Others?

While examples from the medieval textual corpus relate reluctance to convert (especially among groups associated with power centres in Hlaðir and throughout Hálogaland),⁷ it is often assumed that Saami identity was not compatible with a Christian identity in this period.⁸ Rather, the focus tends to be on traditional Saami knowledge, which is seen as contrasting with more “established” belief systems.⁹

5 The oath is included in both the Íslendingasögur *Grettis saga Ásmundarssonar* (ch. 72) and *Heiðarviga saga* (ch. 33), which are both assumed to have been written down in the fourteenth century; it can also be found in the pre-1264 Icelandic legal text *Grágás*.

6 Vilhjálmur Finsen, ed., *Grágás 1852: Konungsbók* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1974), 206–7. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, trans., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás 1*, vol. 1 (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 184–85. Throughout this article I employ the self-designating term “Saami” for the Saami peoples. I have therefore substituted other terms designating the Saami in both the primary material as well as in the secondary sources as such: [Saami].

7 Alexandra Sanmark, *Power and Conversion: A Comparative Study of Christianization in Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2004), 113–16. Svestad, “Buried in Between,” 136–39.

8 Anna Lydia Svalastog, “The Sámi Are Just Like Everyone Else? A Scientist of Religion Looks at the Encounter between the Christian Missionary Religion and the Sámi Ethnic Religion,” in *Uppsala mitt i Sápmi. Rapport från ett symposium arrangerat av Föreningen för samisk-relaterad forskning i Uppsala*, Upplandsmuseet 4–5 maj 2011, ed. Håkan Tunón et al. (Uppsala: Naptek/CBM, 2012), 22–27 (24, 26).

9 Marte Spangen, *Circling Concepts: A Critical Archaeological Analysis of the Notion of Stone Circles as Sami Offering Sites* (Malmö: Holmbergs, 2016), 31.

According to Marte Spangen, it is therefore essential to emphasize that “Sami [sic] beliefs and rituals have been neither coherent nor static” and that these beliefs and ways of organizing life were and are diverse and regionally varied.¹⁰ Spangen further cautions that the tendency to employ early modern sources for medieval or older Saami religious expressions risks maintaining an image of the Saami as “particularly static and traditional instead of acknowledging variation.”¹¹ Nevertheless, certain features such as animism, an understanding of one’s surroundings and its components (such as animals, buildings, nature, and the deceased) as personified and sacred, and that certain individuals can communicate with this “cultural landscape,”¹² can be seen as universal within Saami belief systems from at least the medieval period onwards. Multiple scholars have noted that Saami and Norse belief systems shared certain central religious features, such as spirit journeys, shapeshifting, weather magic, animal spirits, personifications of nature, magical clothing and weapons, and aspects connected with ecstatic ritual performance, which allowed for common understanding, mutual respect, and shared rituals.¹³ Scholars often argue for diminishing commonalities between Norse and Saami belief systems following the former’s large-scale conversion to Christianity.¹⁴ Magic is without question the theme most frequently associated with the Saami in medieval texts and is, as a result, also the theme most often discussed in research on medieval portrayals of the Saami.¹⁵ Because the Saami are often interpreted by scholars as inherently pagan, this reading results in the misleading impression that the Saami are the exclusive “heathen Other” in the source material.¹⁶

However, Else Mundal asserts that the information about Christian Saami peoples found in medieval texts has generally been neglected even though it has been

10 Spangen, *Circling Concepts*, 70.

11 Spangen, *Circling Concepts*, 70.

12 Mulk and Bayliss-Smith, “Colonization, Sámi Sacred Sites,” 43.

13 Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen, *Hunters in Transition: An Outline of Early Sámi History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 50–51. Else Mundal, “Sami Sieidis in a Nordic Context?” *Journal of Northern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2018): 11–20 (11–13). These features are also what I incorporate into the term “magic” here, although it should be noted that “magic” is an inherently difficult term to define and I therefore do not pursue this definition any further.

14 Mundal, “Sami Siedis,” 18.

15 Aalto and Lehtola, “Sami Representations,” 13. Else Mundal, “The Perception of the Saamis and Their Religion in Old Norse Sources,” in *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1996), 97–116 (114).

16 Solveig Marie Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia: An Interdisciplinary Study of Norse-Saami Relations in the Medieval Period*, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

known by scholars “for a long time.”¹⁷ She further argues that the presentation of the Saami as heathen is by the end of the Middle Ages an “over-exaggeration.”¹⁸ From the mid-eleventh century on, the papacy preoccupied itself with establishing basic ecclesiastical structures, including in the Nordic countries. In 1053, Pope Leo X confirmed the authority of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen over the Nordic countries, including the land of the “Scrideuinnum” [the Saami].¹⁹ In Adam of Bremen’s history of the archdiocese dating from the 1070s, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, certain Saami groups (here denoted by the exonym *scritefenni*) are portrayed as having converted alongside the other populations of Fennoscandia:

Inter Nordmanniam et Sueoniam Wermilani et Finnédi degunt, et alii; qui nunc omnes sunt christiani [. . .]. In confinio Sueonum vel Nortmannorum contra boream habitant Scritefini, quos aiunt cursu feras praeterire. Civitas eorum maxima Halsingland, ad quam primus ab archiepiscopo designates est Stenphi episcopus [. . .]. Qui etiam multos carundem gentium sua praedicatione lucratus est. Praeterea sunt alii numero carentes copimus solos Gothos, Wermilanos et partem Scritefinorum, vel qui illis vicini sunt.²⁰

Between Norway and Sweden dwell the Wärmilani and [Finnedi] and others; who are now all Christian [. . .]. On the confines of the Swedes and Norwegians toward the north live the Skritefengi, who, they say, outstrip wild beasts at running. Their largest city is Hälsingland, to which the archbishop designated Stenphi as the first bishop [. . .]. By his preaching he won many of those heathen [. . .]. There are besides countless other Swedish peoples, of whom we have learned that only the Goths, the Wärmilani, and a part of the Skritefengi, and those in their vicinity, have been converted to Christianity.²¹

In addition to relating that they live on the “confines” of the Swedes and Norwegians and that some of them had been converted to Christianity, Adam relates that the Archbishop Stenphi had been appointed to the Saami city of Hälsingland. It is crucial to note, however, that Adam’s text has to be read in light of his politi-

17 Else Mundal, “Samekvinner i norrøne kjelder,” in *Åarjel-saemieh. Samer i sør*, vol. 9 (Snåsa: Saemien Sijte, 2007), 110–25.

18 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 355. It should be noted, however, that diverse strategies and goals will have been considered when these religious relationships were being negotiated. One key difficulty when analysing these negotiations is of course that the conversion to Christianity in Fennoscandia is predominantly treated within a national framework; see Rasmussen, “Protracted Sámi Reformation,” 80. Furthermore, it should be noted that these medieval Saami conversions therefore occurred in a variety of dynamic spaces, times, and contexts.

19 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 17, no. 849, https://www.dokpro.uio.no/cgi-bin/middelalder/diplom_vise_tekst.cgi?b=14931&s=n&str=

20 Adam Bremensis, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. Martin Lappenberg (Hannover: Impensio Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1876), 172–73.

21 Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 205–6.

cal agenda to incorporate the Scandinavian dioceses into the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen and that his account is likely not indicative of actual large-scale conversions. The conversion from the Old Norse belief system to Christianity in the south of Fennoscandia was rooted in older missionary attempts, but was largely initiated as a socio-political enterprise in the period between the tenth and twelfth centuries.²² It is reasonable to assume that a significant portion of the Saami peoples living closest to the Norse in these southern regions converted during this phase.

Based on Adam's *Gesta*, scholars assume that certain Saami groups in the south and along the coasts may have converted to Christianity as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²³ This assumption is likewise supported by *Historia Norwegie*, a mid-twelfth-century Latin history of Norway, in its description of Norway and the surrounding realms and peoples:

Es[terra] nimis sinuosa, innumera protendens promuntoria, III [habita]bilibus zonis per longum cincta: prima, que maxima [et] maritima est, secunda mediterranea, que et montana [dicitur], tertia siluestris, que Finnis inhabitatur, sed non aratur. Circumsepta quidem ex occasu et aquiline refluente Oceani, a meridie uero Daciam et Balticum Mare habet, sed de sole Swethiam, Gautoniam, Angariam, Iamtoniam. Quas nunc partes – Deo gratias – gentes colunt christianie. Versus uero septemtrionem gentes per plures paganes – proh dolor – inseruientes trans Norwegiam ab oriente extenduntur, scilicet Kyriali et Kweni, Cornuti Finni aq utrique Biarmones.

Full of fjords and creeks, it is a country that pushes out countless headlands, and along its length encompasses three habitable zones: the first and largest is the seaboard; the second is the inland area; also known as the mountain region; the third is wooded and populated by the [Saami], but there is no agriculture there. To the west and north, Norway is enclosed by the Ocean tides, to the south lie Denmark and the Baltic Sea, while to the east are Sweden, Götaland, Ångermanland and Jämtland. The people who live in these regions, thanks be to God, are now Christian. However, towards the north there are, alas, a great many tribes who have spread across Norway from the east and who are in thrall to paganism, that is, the Kirjalers and Kvens, the Horned Finns and the two kinds of Bjarms.²⁴

Here, the Saami are described as inhabiting one of the three habitable zones of Norway and are specifically grouped among those peoples who are, according to the author, now Christian. According to Mundal, the Saami peoples described as living in this third zone should be understood as representing what we today

²² Sanmark, *Power and Conversion*, 75–116.

²³ Rasmussen, "Protracted Sámi Reformation," 80.

²⁴ Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds, *Historia Norwegie*, trans. Peter Fisher (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 52–55.

know as the South Saami community.²⁵ In the following chapter, the anonymous author lists the four provincial jurisdictions of Norway and claims that Saami peoples also lived in the northernmost province Hålogaland: “Quarta Halogia, cuius incole multum Finnis cohabitans, et inter se commercia frequentant” [The fourth is Hålogaland, whose inhabitants dwell a good deal with the (Saami), so that there are frequent transactions between them].²⁶ It does indeed seem likely that the author is differentiating between several Saami groups, and in the subsequent description of the Saami in chapter four, the author further relates that:

Est igitur uastissima solitudo affinis Norwegie diuidens eam per longum a paganis gentibus. Que solummodo Finnis et bestiis incolitur, quarum carnibus semicrudis uescuntur et pelibus induuntur.

On the borders of Norway is an immense wilderness, which divides the country along all its length and separates the Norwegians from the heathens. Only [the Saami] dwell here and wild animals whose flesh they eat half-raw and whose skins they clothe themselves with.²⁷

Consequently, *Historia Norwegie* presents a picture of the Saami as living within Norway, both in southern and northern contexts, as well as in the “immense wilderness” along its borders.

More important, however, is that in these descriptions the Saami are contrasted with other, explicitly heathen, groups. First, the Saami are described as inhabitants of a Christian region within Norway, juxtaposed with several northern groups coming into Norway from the east that are specifically termed pagan. Secondly, in the fourth chapter, the Saami are described as living in the borderlands that *separate* Norway from the heathens. Here, then, the Saami are not described as heathens themselves but as the inhabitants of the land between Norway and the heathens.²⁸ Nevertheless, these descriptions do not hinder the author of *Historia Norwegie* from later describing a Saami ritual performance or from making a generalization describing the Saami as a “prophane secte” [unholy band].²⁹ In this description, the Saami are also differentiated from the visiting Christians: “Item dum Finni unacum christianis” [When the (Saami), together with the Christians], indicat-

25 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 343.

26 Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegie*, 56–57. One would also assume that the close connections between Norse and Saami peoples throughout the medieval period meant that some Saami would have been intimately aware of Christianity and probably converted alongside their neighbours during the first phase of Christianization in the North.

27 Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegie*, 58–59.

28 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 344.

29 Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegie*, 64–65.

ing that this Saami group was not seen as Christian by the author.³⁰ As Mundal has noted, though, the distinction is not between “christiani” and “pagani” here, but between the Christians and the “Finni” [Saami], which she reads as denoting that the Saami group described may have been converts to Christianity but seen as acting based on superstitions (“superstitio”).³¹ I would argue that it should nevertheless be emphasized that despite the perceived paganism of the Saami’s behaviour, the visiting Christians are portrayed as also participating in the ritual (or superstition) described.

Overall, I consider these differing and slightly contradictory descriptions in *Historia Norwegie* to be indicative of an understanding at the time of writing that certain Saami groups had converted to Christianity while others had not. Furthermore, these accounts seem representative of the ambiguous portrayals of Saami characters or peoples in later medieval texts, as being both included within and excluded from the majority society (as portrayed in Norse texts).³² Or, as the above-mentioned *Trygðamál* puts it, neither one nor the other, but something in between.

In the only medieval law codes that “undisputedly” mention the Saami,³³ a similar ambiguity as is expressed in *Historia Norwegie* is noticeable. These instances can be found in the surviving Christian sections of the Eastern Norwegian provincial law codes for the *Borgarþing* and the *Eiðsiváþing*, which are believed to have been in use from at least the end of the twelfth century until the promulgation of the National Code under Norwegian King Magnús lagabætir (1238–1280) in 1274.³⁴ In the *Borgarþingslög*, covering the Viken region in the areas around the Oslo Fjord from [Sarps]Borg to Bohuslän, it is related that: “þet er ok vbota værk. er maðr fær a finnmarkr at spyria spadom” [It is unlawful for persons to travel to the Saami to ask for divination].³⁵ Similarly, in the *Eiðsiváþingslög*, enforceable in the Oppland area, it is stated that:

30 Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegie*, 62–63. Likewise, in the late twelfth-century *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, the luck of Christian fishermen is juxtaposed with the non-Christian Saami fishers’ lack thereof; see Carl Phepstead, ed., *A History of Norway & The Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, trans. Devra Kunin (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001), xxv–xxx, 70–71. Here, the author seems inclined to emphasize the benefits of conversion to Christianity rather than attempting to alienate the Saami.

31 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 344–45.

32 See Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia*.

33 Miriam Tveit, “‘Otherness’ Within? The Sámi in Medieval Scandinavian Law,” in *Otherness in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz and Ian N. Wood (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 437–56 (445–46).

34 Tveit, “‘Otherness’ Within,” 443.

35 Rudolf Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch, eds, *Norges Gamle Love: Norges Love ældre end Kong Magnus Haakonssöns Regjerings-Tiltrædelse i 1263*, vol. 1 (Christiania: Chr. Gröndahl, 1836), 372.

Engi maðr a at trua. a finna. eða fordæðor. eða vit. eða blot. eða rot. eða þat. er til hæiðins siðar hœyrir. eða leita ser þar bota. En ef maðr fær til finna. oc uærðr hann sannr at þui. þa er hann utlægr. oc ubota maðr.³⁶

No person should believe in [the power of] the Saami, or sorcery, or [their] drum, or sacrifice, or root, or in that which belongs to heathendom, or seek help there. And if a person seeks out the Saami, he is an outlaw and an unlawful person.³⁷

Such prohibitions indicate that the lawmakers did indeed perceive a danger that Christians would seek out the Saami hoping to participate in their rituals. Now, it is significant to emphasize that the problem expressed in the law codes is not the Saami's performance of this activity itself, but rather the fact that Christians sought it out. Complicating matters further still, Mundal has emphasized how it is often taken for granted in scholarship that the Saami performers mentioned in these laws were heathen, or rather, not Christian.³⁸ She goes on to demonstrate that other prohibitions against performing and practising magic exist in all medieval Norwegian law codes, and in those cases the law codes do not characterize the performers as heathens, but rather as "bad" Christians.³⁹ Indeed, according to *Historia Norwegie*, the Saami living in precisely those regions had in fact converted to Christianity. Clearly, according to the law texts, the Saami living in those regions were still nevertheless performing rituals associated with non-Christian behaviour. Following Mundal, then, the behaviour of the Saami portrayed in these two law codes may just be another characterization of so-called "bad" Christian behaviour, as representations of peoples who had converted to Christianity but did not follow its commandments strictly.

Nevertheless, it is curious that the laws do not prohibit the Saami from pursuing these activities in these contexts.⁴⁰ Again, the portrayal of the Saami as "neither, nor," but rather something in between, is apparent in the written material. While the ambiguity could reflect the notion of the Saami as the so-called "inner other" of Norse society,⁴¹ it also, I would argue, reflects the dynamic strategies of medieval Saami societies in their meeting with large-scale changes such as conversion.

36 Keyser and Munch, *Norges gamle love*, vol. 1: 389–90.

37 Mundal, "Sami Siedis," 12.

38 Mundal, "Sami Siedis," 14.

39 Mundal, "Sami Siedis," 18.

40 See Tveit, "'Otherness' Within?" for a discussion of the legal position of the Saami within (and beyond) these law texts.

41 Tveit, "'Otherness' Within?"

2 Mission, Expansion, and Interactions

As Inga-Maria Mulk and Tim Bayliss-Smith have noted, colonial contact established through, for example, geographical expansion leads to an intensification of social interactions, with religion being a key part of the “new identities people form through this process.”⁴² *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, written in the 1260s, relates that the Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson (1204–1263) appropriated significant northern areas by establishing Christianity in the North: “Hann lét gera kirkju norðr í Troms ok kristnaði alla þá kirkjusókn” [he let a church be built north in Troms and Christianized all these parishes].⁴³ This church is likely what was being referred to in a letter from Pope Clement V in 1308 noting the different churches within the realm of Norway, including the “Ecclesia Sanctae Mariae de Trinis iuxta paganos” [Church of Saint Mary in (Troms) close to the pagans].⁴⁴ “Paganos” here possibly refers to several different groups of peoples, including both Saami and Norse peoples, and most likely the other groups mentioned in *Historia Norwegie* as discussed above. Furthermore, it has been argued that the inclusion of the term “paganos” in this description and the observation that King Hákon Christianized the parishes in Troms signify the role of the church as a missionary church.⁴⁵ It could also be read as a strategy for establishing royal rule in the region, since the subjects of a Christian king had to be Christian. In the cases involving King Hákon, the emphasis on his building of churches or converting peoples (as described below) is part of a conscious strategy of the writer to portray Hákon as a crusading king.⁴⁶ Indeed, Stefan Figenschow has demonstrated that Hákon would have been able to strengthen his position both within the realm and in Rome by claiming crusading efforts against the eastern “pagans,” while simultaneously being able to avoid crusading efforts in the Holy Land.⁴⁷

The emphasis on a mission in the North during King Hákon’s reign is further highlighted later in his saga, where it is stated that “til hans komu ok margir Bjarmar, er flýit höfðu austan fyrri ófriði Tattara, ok kristnaði hann þá, ok gaf þeim einn fjörð, er Malángr heitir. Ok lét hann kirkiu gera i Ofotafirdi ok virki vid Ag-

42 Mulk and Bayliss-Smith, “Colonization, Sámi Sacred Sites,” 44.

43 Þorleifur Hauksson, ed., *Hákonar saga II* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2013), 155.

44 Gustav Storm, ed. *Norges Gamle Love indtil 1387*, vol. 4 (Christiania: Grøndahl & Søn, 1885), 364–65.

45 Adolf Steen, *Samenes kristning og finnemisjonen til 1888* (Oslo: Land og Kirke, 1954), 62.

46 Stefan Figenschow, “Approaches to Mythologized ‘Others’ in Norwegian Expansion to the North,” in *Myths and Magic in the Medieval Far North: Realities and Representations of a Region on the Edge of Europe*, ed. Stefan Figenschow, Richard Holt, and Miriam Tveit (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 237–58 (246–47).

47 Figenschow, “Approaches to Mythologized ‘Others,’” 247.

denes” [to him came many Bjarmir who had fled from the east and the strife of the Tatars; and he christened them and gave them the fjord called Malangr. He let a church be built in Ofoten and a stronghold at Agdenes].⁴⁸ Coincidentally, Malangen Fjord, mentioned in the Icelandic treatise *Rímbegla* as discussed above, is presented here as having been Christianized. While the latter example accentuates cultural affiliation (“Bjarmir”), the focus of the saga remains on their conversion, which aligns with the portrayal of King Hákon as a missionizing king.⁴⁹ The inclusion of the stronghold in Agdenes corresponds with an episode from the earlier late twelfth-century saga of the Norwegian King Óláfr Tryggvason, by the Icelandic monk Oddr Snorrason, where the king is described as agreeing to ask a Saami man dwelling in the mountains of Þjálfahellir (somewhere in Agdenes) for help. The king is reluctant to meet “þesskyns men” [men of that kind], and the Saami man also addresses this characterization: “í þínu foruneyti eru björt guð, en þeira samvistu má ek eigi bra, því at ek hefi annarskonar natúru” [accompanying you are bright spirits, and I cannot endure their presence because I am of a different nature].⁵⁰ While I have previously been inclined to read this incident as a negative depiction of non-Christian characters,⁵¹ I now argue that the incident should not be understood as a contrasting characterization between the Christian and the non-Christian, but rather as a way of emphasizing the king’s holiness. This characterization is evident in the fact that the king is portrayed as seeking out the prophesying help of the Saami man (the same act being prohibited in the Eastern Norwegian law codes) and that the Saami man subsequently emphasizes the piety of the king (“í þínu foruneyti eru björt guð”). The whole act ends in a positive outcome, as “fór þetta allt eptir því sem Fiðrinn hafði sagt” [afterwards, everything turned out as the Saami man had said].⁵² Significantly, the Saami man is never explicitly described as non-Christian, the king is portrayed as seeking him out, and the whole act has a positive outcome. The Saami character is indeed described as being of a “different nature,” though, and while non-Christians recognizing holiness is a common hagiographic trope, we should not neglect the possibility that the episode might indicate that the Saami man was understood to be Christian but still practising non-Christian rituals.

A church was built in Vardø at the easternmost point of the Varanger Peninsula in 1307, as was the Vardøhus fortification around the same time, during King

48 Þorleifur Hauksson, *Hákonar saga*, 266.

49 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 342.

50 Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Færeyinga saga – Óláfs saga Odds* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2006), 187–88.

51 Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia*, 77.

52 Ólafur Halldórsson, *Odds*, 190.

Hákon Magnússon's (1270–1319) reign. Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen have noted the long-standing status of these newly built churches as chapels, lacking permanent parish organization and the independent right to tithe, which they argue demonstrates that this northern area was still considered mission territory (“terra missionis”).⁵³ The lack of permanent parish organization could also mean that neither Crown nor Church was interested in these churches, which changes the narrative. According to Siv Rasmussen's calculations, there were seventeen churches and chapels in Finnmark by 1589, all situated by fishing villages and eleven of which were from the medieval period.⁵⁴ Similarly, the first churches to be built in Northern Sweden and Finland were erected along the Gulf of Bothnia in the fourteenth century, with chapels established in Piteå, Luleå, Tornio, Kemi, Saloinen, and Ii.⁵⁵ By the early fifteenth century, chapels had been erected in Liminka, Oulunsalo, and Hailuoto, although it is uncertain whether these were founded by Church or state officials or by wealthy local farmers with interests in the perceived economic, spiritual, and/or political advantages offered by their presence.⁵⁶ In today's Northern Sweden, the church site of Rounala, near the present-day border with Norway (and Finland), seems to also date from the 1300s and has been linked with trading routes between the Arctic coast, the Bothnian Bay, and the Baltic Sea, and has been associated with meetings with missionaries connected with the Troms region.⁵⁷ While the cultural identities of those buried is uncertain, the church is located in a Saami-dominated region and the individuals buried, whether they were personally Christian or not, are buried in sanctified ground.

It has often been emphasized that the building of churches, fishing villages, and fortifications in this northern expansion represented the geopolitical strategies of the emerging nation-states of Norway, Sweden, and Novgorod to establish their authority in order to monopolize taxes and gain access to the Saami resource areas and thereby also fur-trading privileges.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, such expansion may also have been motivated by benefits such as the papal recognition of sovereignty offered by the conversion of the Saami and other peoples living in these regions. Rasmussen therefore cautions that although candid, some accounts

53 Hansen and Olsen, *Hunters in Transition*, 158.

54 Rasmussen, “Protracted Sámi Reformation,” 81.

55 Timo Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces: Creating Third Spaces and Fractured Landscapes in Medieval Northern Finland,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 14, no. 2 (2014): 244–67 (252).

56 Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 252–53.

57 Kerstin Lidén, Markus Fjellström, and Thomas Wallerström, “Nya resultat från Eskil Olssons Rounala-utgrävning 1915,” in *Kunglig makt och samiska bosättningsmönster: Studier kring Väinö Tanners vinterbyteori*, ed. Thomas Wallerström (Oslo: Novus, 2018), 282–308 (289–91, 300).

58 Hansen and Olsen, *Hunters in Transition*, 158; Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 256.

that relate the Christianization of the Saami may reflect individual ambition to gain increased authority or power within the Church or for converters to appear as saviours and gain access to salvation, rather than actual conversion.⁵⁹

3 Religious Expression and Spirituality

In 1313, King Hákon Magnússon issued a law amendment (*réttarbót*) for Hálogaland, specifically addressing Saami conversion:

En vm naud finnana. er ver hafom understadit oc mykin fattigdom bæde at vinnum. sua oc odrum þeim lutom sem þeir þurfa til viderlifts at hafua. hafuom ver giort þa vegd oc þa miskund agiort. at .xx. vettra fra þui at þeir verda christnir goruer. skulo þeir eigi meiri luka. huart sem þeir verda sakadir vidr konongdomenom edr christenrættin oc herra erchibiscops. en þridiung af sekt þeira sem boken vattar. i huerio grein sem huer verdir saka-dir. En a þessom .xx. vettrom allom lidnum skulu þeir suara fulri sekt sem adrir bumenn oc þo met vegd oc miskund þar sem þat hœfuir.⁶⁰

And with concerns for the distress of the Finns (Sámi [*sic*]), of which we have heard have great poverty both in work and in other things they need for a subsistence, we have given the relief and mercy that 20 winters from when they are Christianised, they shall not pay more – whether they are charged by the kingdom or the Christian laws and the master archbishop – than one third of that fine stated by the book, no matter what section they are charged with. And when these 20 winters are over, they will pay full fine as other settled men and likewise with gentleness and mercy where it is suitable.⁶¹

This amendment is specifically related to the Saami population in Hálogaland, which might indicate that the Saami population further south was already understood by the majority society to be Christian. On the other hand, the amendment demonstrates that a significant number of Saami peoples in the north of the country had not yet converted to Christianity and demonstrates the royal or governmental aspiration for Saami peoples to convert. It also demonstrates the benefits offered Saami peoples when converting, here granted a twenty-year period of exemption from fines. This exemption clearly demonstrates the wishes of the state to incorporate Saami peoples as official royal subjects. By establishing this exemption, Saami converts in Hálogaland would be regarded as taxpayers under King Hákon, thereby pre-empting any competition from the other states. Since the

⁵⁹ Rasmussen, “Protracted Sámi Reformation,” 85. See also Lundmark, “Medeltida vittnesbörd,” 224.

⁶⁰ Rudolf Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch, eds, *Norges Gamle Love: Lovgivningen efter Kong Magnus Hákonssons Död 1280 indtil 1387*, vol. 3 (Christiania: Chr. Gröndahl, 1849), 107–8.

⁶¹ Translation based on Tveit, “‘Otherness’ Within,” 445; and Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 340.

amendment related to the payment of fines, it likely forms part of a geopolitical agenda, but I would argue that it could also form part of a Christian strategy to convert a heathen population in order to gain access to spiritual benefits such as salvation, as discussed above. The amendment also includes a section warning state agents not to scare the Saami when collecting taxes from them.⁶² The amendment is therefore usually understood to be related to two episodes recorded in the annals preserved in the late fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók* manuscript (GkS 1005 fol.). An entry from 1310 stresses that taxes had stood uncollected from Finnmark for several years, and a royal agent is therefore sent north, returning to the royal court in 1311.⁶³ Later, in the year 1313, it is related that “þetta sumar kom Marteinn (finna kongr) til Hakonar kongs” [this summer Marteinn, King of the Saami, visited King Hákon].⁶⁴ There are few to no details about this high-status visit, but it has been emphasized that Marteinn is the name of a popular medieval saint. The fact that the annal entry recognizes the status of Marteinn as “finna kongr” – i.e., king – is peculiar and clearly demonstrates that King Hákon, or those writing the entry, acknowledged the status of Marteinn as a leader. The visit has been directly connected with the 1313 law amendment, especially as it includes the remark that “er ver hafom understadit” [which we have heard of/understood], which implies that the court had been informed of the distress expressed by the Saami and as a result amended the law.⁶⁵

The *réttarbót* certainly will have made life easier for newly converted Saami peoples in Hálogaland and reminds us of the individual and social agency that conversion to Christianity could facilitate. The last section of the amendment, stating that the Saami should be treated “met vegd oc miskund þar sem þat hœfuir” [with gentleness and mercy where it is suitable] after the twenty-year exemption period has passed, seems to hint at a state-encouraged “mild conversion” to Christianity.⁶⁶ Such a soft transition will have been beneficial to the interests of the state and should be seen as a tool to avoid larger conflicts with the Saami population, who were important to the realm both geopolitically and economically due to their fur trade monopoly.

62 Not included here; see Keyser and Munch, *Norges gamle love*, vol. 3, 108.

63 Gustav Storm, ed., *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania: Grøndahl & Søn, 1888), 392.

64 Storm, *Islandske Annaler*, 393.

65 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 341.

66 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 351.

Comparably, a decree was put forward by the administration of the Swedish-Norwegian King Magnus Eriksson (1316–1374) in 1340, referring to the population of the recently annexed “Laepmarch”⁶⁷ and establishing the privileges of those referred to as Birkarls. Confirmed by the king’s son Eiríkr Magnússon in 1358,⁶⁸ this decree granted the privilege to those of Christian faith or who wanted to convert to Christianity (“som åå Christo tro, eller til Christna tro sig omwenda wele”) to appropriate land in the region, pay taxes to the king, and be subject to the laws of Hälsingland. These privileges are directed at the whole population and not just the Saami, unlike the 1313 amendment. This decree will therefore have also targeted the non-Christian population living in the “Laepmarch”; this legal expansion can be understood as a tactic whereby the non-Christian peoples who lived in this region and who converted became legal subjects under Swedish law.⁶⁹ As such, taxation would have been owed to the Swedish Crown, and not to Norway or Novgorod; in this way, the decree stipulates Swedish rights to taxation and simultaneously makes the Saami living in this region subject to the Swedish Crown.⁷⁰ Again, both the state benefits (geopolitical expansion) and the individual and societal benefits (land privileges) for the Saami (or other non-Christian) converts are clear.

Conversion was also a Church matter, of course. In 1346, a bishop from central Sweden is said to have baptized approximately twenty Saami and Karelian individuals in the church at Tornio in a “dramatic ceremony.”⁷¹ Timo Ylimaunu and others read this ceremony as forming part of a plan to transform the “complex landscape of cultural mixing into Catholic and Swedish territory.”⁷² The text deals with the border between the dioceses of Uppsala and Turku, and so the presence of a bishop from Sweden baptizing people in this area should be seen as emphasizing the Swedish bishop’s authority over this particular region.

In other matters, however, spirituality played a more central role; this seems to have been the case for the late fourteenth-century (potentially) Saami missionary Margareta. Appearing in five letters by different authors from the late 1380s to 1414, this female visionary was, like the “finna kongr” Marteinn, given a Christian name at some point in her life, and no difficulties with communication are mentioned. Notably, though, Margareta is only described as Saami in one source, in the last of the letters mentioning her, written by the abbot of the Munkaliv monastery

67 Riksarkivet, *Svenskt Diplomatariums huvudkartotek över medeltidsbrev* (SHDK), nr 4571.

68 SHDK, nr 7420.

69 Tveit, “‘Otherness’ Within,” 446–47.

70 Similar to the 1313 amendment.

71 Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 245.

72 Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 245.

in Bergen.⁷³ Here, the abbot describes Margareta's wish to continue her mission work among the Saami people ("gente Lapponica"), "ex quibus predicta M[margareta] se natam asserit" [from whom the aforesaid Margareta asserts that she was born].⁷⁴ The fact that the other letters do not emphasize Margareta's Saami affiliation speaks volumes about late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century ideas about ethnicity, which is not deemed important in this context. As Cordelia Heß notes, this paucity of primary sources is largely ignored in historiography, which tends to focus on Margareta's status as a "lappkvinna" [Saami woman], Saami saint, or even as a victim of colonialism and racism.⁷⁵ On the contrary, the letters themselves seem to describe her as a visionary and missionary. In the mission letter granted to Margareta by the eponymous Queen Margrete Valdemarsdatter (1353–1412) of the Kalmar Union after a meeting at the court in Malmö, dated 6 August 1389, it is stated that the queen and the Archbishop of Lund "vniverso populo Lappenorum et specialiter corone regni Swecie subiecto salute et relictis erroribus viam agnoscere veritatis" [greet all the Saami people and especially those who are subject to the Swedish crown and wish to leave their errors and recognize the way of truth].⁷⁶ The letter contains a summary of the core Christian beliefs and grants Margareta "power of attorney" (*fullmakt*)⁷⁷ to resume her missionary work in the Saami areas north of the Archdiocese of Uppsala.⁷⁸ While Margareta was never canonized, she is described as continuing to preach and conduct mission work. On the whole, the story about Margareta showcases clear Saami (if we accept the Abbot of Munkaliv's characterization of her), and of course also female, agency, regarding both Church and state. Furthermore, it demonstrates the fluid intersection of religion and ethnicity in medieval Fennoscandia, and again highlights the normalized presence of Saami Christians in the medieval period.

73 Cordelia Heß, "Margaretas periphære Visionen. Mission, Kolonisierung und 'race' im Spätmittelalter am Beispiel der Saami," *Historische Zeitschrift* 316, no. 1 (2023): 1–26.

74 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 4, no. 794, https://www.dokpro.uio.no/cgi-bin/middelalder/diplom_vise_tekst.cgi?b=4265&s=n&str=.

75 Heß, "Periphære Visionen," 7.

76 Edward Grönblad, ed., *Nya källor till Finlands medeltidshistoria*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Bianco Lunos Boktryckeri, 1857), 19.

77 Lundmark, "Medeltida vittnesbörd," 232.

78 Grönblad, *Finland medeltidshistoria*, 19–21.

4 Identity Negotiations, Concepts of Fluidity, and “Thirling”

With the abundance of material that refers to Saami converts to Christianity from the early to the later medieval period having been clearly established, the question still remains as to how and why the association between the pre-modern Saami and non-Christian behaviour (or paganism) has endured. Several remarks across the saga material denote a similarly somewhat delayed or “soft” transition to Christianity among the non-Saami.⁷⁹ The Earls of Hlaðir and the Hálogaland elite are famously portrayed as being reluctant to convert to Christianity as a strategy to retain autonomy in the northern areas.⁸⁰ Similarly, several episodes relate that while people did convert, they often reverted to their old faiths.⁸¹

Likewise, extracts from the medieval *kristinn rétttr* (Christian laws) indicate that while the general population had converted, there was jurisprudence in place to sanction those who did not conform to the moral commandments (or were “bad Christians”) as well as for non-Christians, as mentioned above. In the *Borgarþingslög*, there are regulations for those who “æigi kristin uera” [who were not Christian],⁸² which could indicate a reluctance to acknowledge Church authority or someone who continued to practise activities that were seen as superstitious or idolatrous.⁸³ In the *Eiðsivabingslög*, these activities or practices, called “hæiðins siðar” [heathen ways], are described and sanctioned with fines or outlawry.⁸⁴ Despite these sanctions, an earlier clause in the same law code conveys that some areas remained less converted⁸⁵ than others:

Ef maðr kómr af lannde þui. er lit er kristit. oc sægiz uera cristin. [En ef hann kann næfna prest. þan er skirði han. oc guðfaður oc guðmoður. þat hæildar honum.⁸⁶

79 Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Heimskringla*, 3 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2014), vol. 1: 195, 211; vol. 2: 334, 365, 408, 514.

80 Hansen and Olsen, *Hunters in Transition*, 143–44.

81 Finlay and Faulkes, *Heimskringla 2*, 292.

82 Keyser and Munch, *Norges gamle love*, vol. 1: 341.

83 Lisa Collinson, Torgeir Landro, and Bertil Nilsson, eds and trans. *The Borgarthing Law and the Eiðsivathing Law: The Laws of Eastern Norway* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2021), 68.

84 Keyser and Munch, *Norges gamle love*, vol. 1: 382.

85 As opposed to the unspecified “land hæiðit” (heathen land) mentioned in both the *Borgarþingslög* and the *Eiðsivabingslög*, Keyser and Munch, *Norges gamle love*, vol. 1: 340, 392.

86 Keyser and Munch, *Norges gamle love*, vol. 1: 380.

If a man comes from a little-converted area and calls himself a Christian, and if he can name the priest who baptized him, and his godfather and godmother, that supports his position.⁸⁷

These clauses indicate that there was an understanding and an attempt to navigate the fact that several religious identities were being negotiated at the same time. Apparently, some areas (“lit er kristit”) and some individuals (“æigi kristin uera”) were seen as less Christian than others. Epitomizing the “protracted” nature of the Christianization process,⁸⁸ the clauses demonstrate that following conversion several peoples continued to negotiate their non-Christian identities simultaneous with being perceived as Christians.

Returning to the idea of a soft transition and the legal amendments incorporating the Saami as state subjects through their acceptance of the Christian faith, it is likely that for some converts, much as for the rest of the population, Christianization was a way to initiate social integration into the ecclesiastical system, rather than being purely motivated by spirituality and personal belief.⁸⁹ Several scholars therefore emphasize the meaning or definition of being recognized (as opposed to identifying) as Christian in the medieval period, which will have been subject to regional variation, and argue that many people were Christian in theory but not necessarily in practice.⁹⁰ Established by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the “minimum requirement” to be recognized as Christian was twofold: that an individual had been christened and that they participated in confession and the Eucharist at least once a year.⁹¹ These requirements provided space for converts to continue to practise their former beliefs and still be formally recognized as Christian; they might have provided the Saami with opportunities to negotiate their religious identities, depending on the context, while also upholding their “Indigenous religion.”⁹² On the basis of these requirements, Mundal suggests that, as Saami religious practice was intimately connected with holy places in nature and spirits as much as personified deities, the continuation of these “Saami” practices may have been ignored by the Norwegian state and/or Church and could have been regarded as superstitions or folklore rather than heathenism.⁹³ This view will have enabled Saami people, and other converts, to act as Christians among Christians but to continue the practice of non-Christian beliefs within their own cultural context.

87 Collinson, Landro, and Nilsson, *Laws of Eastern Norway*, 93.

88 Rasmussen, “Protracted Sámi Reformation.”

89 Rasmussen, “Protracted Sámi Reformation,” 79.

90 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 354; Svalastog, “The Sámi Are Just Like Everyone Else?,” 25.

91 Rasmussen, *Samisk integreering*, 30.

92 Rasmussen, “Protracted Sámi Reformation,” 79.

93 Mundal, “Magnussons rettarbot,” 345, 353–56.

This interpretation allows us to read the above material as forming part of a Saami “double consciousness” which reflects the opportunities for Saami peoples to interact within different spheres of religion depending on context. In the context of Norse-Saami interaction, the concept of double-consciousness can be seen as analogous to a process whereby intersecting cultural identities and perceptions create a complex sense of self and community both within and outside the majority (and colonial) society. Originally articulated by W.E.B Du Bois in 1903, Du Bois outlined how African Americans had a “double consciousness” due to viewing themselves through both their own perspectives and that of a racist society.⁹⁴ Likewise, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon describes how colonized peoples develop a divided self-perception grounded in seeing themselves both from the derogatory lens of the colonizer as well as through their own non-colonial and “Black skins.”⁹⁵ The medieval material presented above demonstrate the possibilities for reading the Saami characters as living between Saami and Norse cultures, in a state of ongoing identity negotiation. This ongoing negotiation might reflect a kind of “double-consciousness,” as discussed by Du Bois and Fanon, in the material, are we to accept that the material portrays actual societal relations.

Perhaps this double consciousness, reflected in the mixing of religious spheres, is what Queen Margrete and the Archbishop of Lund refer to in their letter, when they emphasize the significance of believing in God and “illum solum Deum colere” [to worship that God alone].⁹⁶ The fact that the Saami are described as powerful sorcerers in pre-modern texts, at the same time as the texts above refer to the conversion of large numbers of Saami peoples in the medieval period, showcases the fluidity of religious identity and the opportunities that existed for negotiating this identity. Overall, I believe, this mix reflects the complexities of identity and demonstrates that medieval Saami identity was diverse and dynamic and does not appear to have been rigidly defined.

Timo Ylimaunu and others have proposed “thirding” as a concept for understanding such processes of identity negotiation in dynamic and culturally ambiguous spaces, defining this concept as the “creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new

94 W. E. D. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. Mclurg & Co, 1903).

95 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008). Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 205–6.

96 Grönblad, *Finlands medeltidshistoria*, 21.

alternatives.”⁹⁷ First introduced in Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*,⁹⁸ the concept of thirthing involves the blending of different cultural elements that result in the creation (or re-creation) of hybrid identities that create new forms of cultural expressions (as neither one nor the other, but something in-between). This in-betweenness captures the essence of the ambiguous presentation of the Saami in the aforementioned *Trygðamál*, which states that “cristnir men kirkior sokia. heiðnir menn hof blóta [. . .] fiðr scríðr,”⁹⁹ [Christians come to church, heathens hallow temples, (. . .) (the Saami) ski].¹⁰⁰ Echoing *Trygðamál*, Ylimaunu and others further argue that the people living in these culturally ambiguous spaces “discern a complex world which cannot be described with dichotomous categories.”¹⁰¹

The ambiguous accounts about the Saami will also have been based on regional variation and the strong likelihood that while some Saami groups or individuals converted to Christianity,¹⁰² others did not. However, it has been noted that following the Protestant Reformation in the first half of the sixteenth century, the loss of religious freedom removed the opportunities for this negotiating of religious identity and took away the possibility of interacting with multiple religious spheres. With the reform to Lutheranism, it was no longer sufficient to “just” be baptized and observe Christian rituals annually or to act Christian in Christian contexts, as stipulated in 1215.¹⁰³ Saami peoples who had previously been accepted as Christian were now regarded as heathen (like Catholic or Orthodox Christians were) unless they converted to Lutheranism and participated spiritually, socially, governmentally, and politically in Christian life.

Conclusion

Portrayed in various medieval texts as existing equally within and beyond the borders of the majority Christian society, the Saami appear separate from other groups that are described as unquestionably pagan; nevertheless, they are also in certain contexts described in terms distinguishing them from Christians. This am-

97 Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 249.

98 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

99 Vilhjálmur Finsen, *Grágás*, 206–7.

100 Dennis, Foote, and Perkins, *Grágás*, 184–85.

101 Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 249.

102 The Saami peoples living among Orthodox Christians or converting to Orthodox Christianity will have had different experiences than the Saami peoples in contact with Western Christianity, for example.

103 Svalastog, “The Sámi Are Just Like Everyone Else?,” 25.

bivalence, I would argue, stems from the reality of medieval society where Saami peoples were, in fact, regarded as both inside and outside of the majority society, based on regional variation within Saami societies, different ways of life, and, also, the normalized presence of and interactions with Saami peoples throughout the medieval period. Acknowledging these stories of conversion highlights, in the words of Mulk and Bayliss-Smith, the fact that religious change in Sápmi is “by no means a simple story of colonialism.”¹⁰⁴

Different texts demonstrate that conversion to Christianity could facilitate both social and individual agency, as well as spiritual benefits. Regardless of the motives, which of course may at times have been forceful (such as was the case with the conversion of the Norse population), different Saami groups seem to have generally been targeted (according to the source material) with a so-called “soft transition” to Christianity. This soft transition can be observed in the material that seems to demonstrate that some Saami peoples could act within different spheres of religion in different contexts and thereby negotiate their religious identities in these set contexts. The material demonstrating that several Saami peoples converted to Christianity, for different reasons and with different outcomes, maps a more complex history involving conversion beyond strict colonialism. However, the sources regarding these conversions are largely geopolitical in nature and should therefore not necessarily be seen as representing actual conversion to Christianity, but rather that there was a royal or state wish to incorporate the Saami into the “Christian realm.” Returning to *Trygðamál*, these sources “discern a complex world which cannot be described with dichotomous categories,”¹⁰⁵ and such an acknowledgement provides new baselines for understanding and interpreting the diverse Saami pasts in future research.

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104 Mulk and Bayliss-Smith, “Colonization, Sámi Sacred Sites,” 40.

105 Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 249.

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Part 3: **Colonialism**

Thomas Wallerström

Chapter 5

The Gulf of Bothnia, c. 1300–1600, as a “Third Space”: A Postcolonial Interpretation of the Written Sources

Introduction

Until recent decades, medieval Sweden was regarded as exceptionally conservative compared to the rest of Europe. Today, however, it is viewed as just like any other Western European realm in the Middle Ages, more or less dominated by the papacy (Figure 5.1).¹

The time in question was very much in the wake of a revolution – “The First European Revolution,” as British historian Robert Ian Moore puts it, describing the period c. 970–1215.² This period saw major economic, social, political, ideological, and scientific transformations in Western Europe. Different political theories as to how “best” to organize society were at work (and still are).

Such political shifts are sooner or later marked by the coinage of new terms. This occurs when the traditional vocabulary appears increasingly inadequate to express the new insights. In the later sixteenth century, for example, a new buzz phrase, “the reason of state” (*raison d'état*), was introduced,³ which still remains

1 Sweden was described as a kingdom on the European periphery, whose development during the Middle Ages was determined by specifically national characteristics. More recent international scholarship emphasizes the commonalities in the history of European states. Through the dominance of the papacy, an entire system of cultural practices was copied and permeated throughout kingdoms and principalities. Gunilla Tegengren, *Sverige och Nordlanden. Förvaltning och nordlig expansion 1250–1550* (Umeå: Kungl. Skytteanska Samfundet, 2015), 17–39; Philip Line, *Kingship and State Formation in Sweden 1130–1290* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 151–409, 468–80; Neil Kent, *A Concise History of Sweden* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2008), 16–60.

2 Robert Ian Moore, *The First European Revolution: c. 970–1215* (The Making of Europe) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

3 Peter Burke, “Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 479.

Note: I am very grateful to the readers of previous versions of this article, who suggested improvements. Thank you!

relevant in political theory today.⁴ This and other political theories have characterized the written sources.

More recently, much has been written about “third spaces,” using “hybridity” and other concepts from the tradition of postcolonial theory, which is critical towards colonial perspectives on the past.⁵ New analytical concepts and frames of reference were deemed necessary in the analysis of colonialism and its aftermath in the era of “decolonization.” Postcolonialist “thinking,” as such, was grounded in the testing of new frames of reference in order to “provincialize,” “de-naturalize,” or “de-transcendentalize” Western forms of knowledge and the universalist pretensions that came from them.⁶

1 Background

This article is not about “a medieval colonialism” that is identical to that type of colonialism which we tend to associate with the early modern period. Instead, a process of “replication” took place; the diffusion of cultural and social forms found in the Latin Christian core, as I discuss below.⁷ In this article, I take a new look, a postcolonial one, as I revisit my old PhD thesis from 1995, a historical-archaeological investigation. What can be learned from such an intellectual experiment? Will I find that I was previously misled by colonial perspectives, without being aware of this influence? This “experiment” is inspired by an interview with notable postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, conducted by Jonathan Rutherford and published in 1990.⁸

In English, the PhD is titled *Norrbotten, Sweden and the Middle Ages: Problems Concerning Power and Settlement on a European Periphery*. It deals with the

4 Scott Burchill, *The National Interest in International Relations Theory* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

5 As a theoretical concept, postcolonial studies form part of several traditions, including studies of postcolonial politics, predominantly those after Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, postcolonial theory, and postcolonial ethics; cf. Robert Nichols, “Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault: Survey of a Field of Problematization,” *Foucault Studies* 9 (2010): 112–13.

6 Nichols, “Postcolonial Studies,” 111. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Introduction. Midcolonial,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), 1–17.

7 Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 306–7.

8 Homi Bhabha and Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 207–21.

western and northern coasts of the Gulf of Bothnia,⁹ which at the time were underdiscussed areas. Not much was known about the previous settlements, in particular those by the lower part of the Torne River Valley to the north of the Gulf, by the Swedish–Finnish border; they were “not really Swedish” because of the predominant Finnish language, as well as being “not really Finnish” due to their location on the Swedish side of the border. I ascertained that the Swedish expansion to the North had much in common with what happened in other parts of Europe through systematic colonization and the implementation of a clerical and secular text-based administration, based in its turn on a common legal infrastructure.¹⁰

In this article, I take a new postcolonial look at the medieval and early modern written sources – the cornerstones of several previous studies on the political and cultural history of the region. I ask: What places/spaces can be considered “thirded” and how is this “thirdness” reflected in the medieval sources? In answering these questions, I try to show that the province of Norrbotten should be understood as being such a “third space” in the late Middle Ages and early modern period; being an arena for such processes of “replication,” namely, an arena for the implantation of European ideas about how society should “best” be organized, and the practices of power involved in this organization. The documents reflect this power organization through their reflection of Western ideology, rationalism, and the idea of the *raison d'état* [reason of the state], just as the doctrine of *iura regni* [the rights of the realm] were. This power organization was also visible in the cultural landscape through the associated practices of church building, marketplace establishment, and agriculture within the market system. As the written sources are situated within these ideologies, they must be understood accordingly.

This “postcolonial experiment” complements a previous study of the Finnish side of the Gulf.¹¹

9 The settlement history of the Finnish part of the coastal landscape (Österbotten) is different and partly disputed. Markus Hiekkänen, *Finlands medeltida stenkyrkor*, trans. Camilla Ahlström-Taavitsainen (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitetsakademien, 2020), 613–15; Andreas Granberg, *Bosättningsfrågan som en del av Österbottens äldre historia. Kunskaps-cirkulation och fria forskare i kontrovers 1978–2005* (Turku: Åbo Akademi, 2022).

10 Thomas Wallerström, *Norrbotten, Sverige och medeltiden. Problem kring makt och bosättning i en europeisk periferi* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), 149–73.

11 Timo Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces: Creating Third Spaces and Fractured Landscapes in Medieval Northern Finland,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 14, no. 2 (2014): 244–67.



Figure 5.1: The Baltic Sea, Gulf of Bothnia, and the province of Norrbotten in the north. (Nordic Archaeological Abstracts 2004, 375).

2 Terminology

Homi K. Bhabha, himself having grown up in Mumbai (Bombay), had to introduce a new terminology to describe “what was going on” in the European metropolises among those marginalized groups that trace their ancestry back to the former colonies overseas. In his interview with Jonathan Rutherford, he has much to say about “cultural diversity” in the European metropolises, defining it as a third space. This “third space” displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political activities, which can only be inadequately understood using older frameworks. In this interview, Bhabha was critical of the concept of “cultural diversity.” To him a distinction must be made between the notions “cultural diversity” and “cultural difference.”

Why these neologisms? Are cultural *diversity* and cultural *difference* not the same? “Cultural diversity,” he argues, is not well suited to the study of cultural change because it overlooks the difference between groups, very often established among and between themselves: an “*incommensurability*”.¹² It is reductive. Instead, Bhabha prefers to talk about “cultural difference,” as this term allows for a better understanding of the outcome of encounters of people of different ancestry.

Moreover, the concept of cultural *diversity*, as opposed to cultural *difference*, originates in “the liberal tradition, particularly in philosophical relativism and in forms of anthropology; the idea that cultures are diverse and that in some sense the diversity is a good and positive thing [. . .]. It is a commonplace of plural, democratic societies to say that they can encourage and accommodate cultural diversity.”¹³ Unlike cultural difference, cultural diversity is an *epistemological* object – perceived accordingly as a tangible object of empirical knowledge. Such a perception is misleading, according to Bhabha, because it fails to recognize the universalist and normative position from which it constructs its own political judgements. With the notion of cultural difference, on the other hand, Bhabha explained that he was trying to identify positions of liminality.

In the interview between Bhabha and Rutherford, Bhabha has much to say about “cultural diversity” in the European metropolises, defining it as a third space. This “third space” displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political activities, and sociocultural interactions, which can only be inadequately understood using older frameworks.

The notion of “cultural translation” is central in the interview, as he argued that no culture is complete unto itself. There are always other cultures that con-

¹² Bhabha, “The Third Space,” 209.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 207–8.

tradict its authority, and it is always subject to intrinsic forms of cultural translation. There is no “in itself” or “for itself” within cultures.¹⁴ “Translation” is also a way of imitating, in a displacing sense: to copy, to transfer, to transform. Cultures are decentred structures. Their liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even incommensurable, practices, and priorities.¹⁵ “Negotiation,” another term, is not just some kind of compromise or selling out. It is what politics is about. In politics, in any political struggle, new “sites” are always opened up. If you keep referring to those new sites using old principles then you are not really able to take part in them fully, productively, and creatively.¹⁶

How about “hybridity”? This notion comes from the genealogy of “difference” and the idea of “translation.” The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new. It denies the essentialism of a prior given or original culture: all forms of culture are in a continuous process of hybridity, a new area for the negotiation of meaning and representation. Hybridity combines the traces of other meanings or discourses, as Bhabha states: “it does not invest them with the authority of being original: they are only prior in the sense of being anterior.”¹⁷ The importance of hybridity is *not* that it allows you to trace two original moments from which the third appears. Hybridity is precisely about a *new* situation, a *new* alliance formulating itself – perhaps demanding that you *translate* your principles, *rethink* them, *extend* them. Hybridity allows *other* positions to appear.

In Rutherford’s interview with Bhabha, I found two clues for a revised understanding of the late medieval and early modern period in the province of Norrbotten. Firstly, Bhabha’s statement that no culture is complete unto itself; that there are always other cultures which contradict its authority, and culture is always subject to intrinsic forms of translation. There is no “in itself” or “for itself” within cultures. Secondly, in a parenthesis, Bhabha remarks that “rationalism is an ideology, not just a way of being sensible.”¹⁸ I had never thought of this before.

14 Ibid., 210.

15 Ibid., 210–11.

16 Ibid., 216.

17 Ibid., 211.

18 Ibid., 209–10.

3 The West of the Gulf of Bothnia in the 1500s

The regime of Swedish King Gustav Vasa (1523–1560) is often considered the foundation of Sweden as a nation in older historical research. This is only true to a certain extent. In retrospect, while the year 1523 was very much a take-off – i.e., the introduction of an administration not seen before – much of the structure had been established much earlier. The legislation, a constitution, a royal council, systems for taxation, parliamentary sessions – all these factors have a genealogy going back to the thirteenth century or even earlier.¹⁹ It was, however, during the reign of Gustav Vasa, that the coastal landscape of the Gulf of Bothnia and its hinterland, was firmly included in the realm, the emerging territorial state, as well as its text-based administration.

The prehistory of the province of Norrbotten, in the European far north, differs from that of most other parts of Fennoscandia: Late Iron Age cemeteries are “missing,” as are many of the categories of ancient remains and artefacts familiar from most other parts of prehistoric Sweden, Norway, and Finland, despite it having been populated by the end of the Ice Age almost 11,000 years ago (Figure 5.2).²⁰

This province was a sparsely populated landscape, only partially known by the medieval Uppsala- and Stockholm-based administrators more than 1,000 km away. It offered endless opportunities to escape the uncomfortable demands of bailiffs or the Church. Territorial states were not yet defined, and between 1323 and 1595 a double border existed in the North. One in an East–West direction separated exclusively Swedish territory from the Swedish- and Novgorodian common area, while another, in a South–North direction, separated exclusively Novgorodian territory from the same common area (Figure 5.3).²¹

This “double border” was established in the Nöteborg (*Orekhovets, Pähkinäsaari*) Treaty of 1323 with Novgorod, later (1487) conquered by Ivan III of the precursors of today’s Russia and Moscow. That political situation explains the “Eastern” character of the archaeological finds from that time and why elements of the first fiscal terminology in Northern Scandinavia are translations from Russian.²² The situation was similar in Northern Norway at the time: two sets of borders with Nov-

19 For a recent discussion of this, see Anders Fröjmark, “Brott eller kontinuitet? Året 1523 i Sveriges historia,” in *Sverige 1523*, ed. Claes Gejrot (Stockholm: Riksarkivets årsbok, 2023), 15–37.

20 Olof Östlund, “Aareavara and the Pioneer Period in Northern Sweden,” in *The Early Economy and Settlement in Northern Europe: Pioneering, Resource Use, Coping with Change* ed. Hans-Peter Blankholm (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd), 13–58.

21 Jarl Gallén and John Lind, *Nöteborgsfreden och Finlands medeltida östgräns 2* (Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland 1991), 493.

22 Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 31–36, 261, 309.

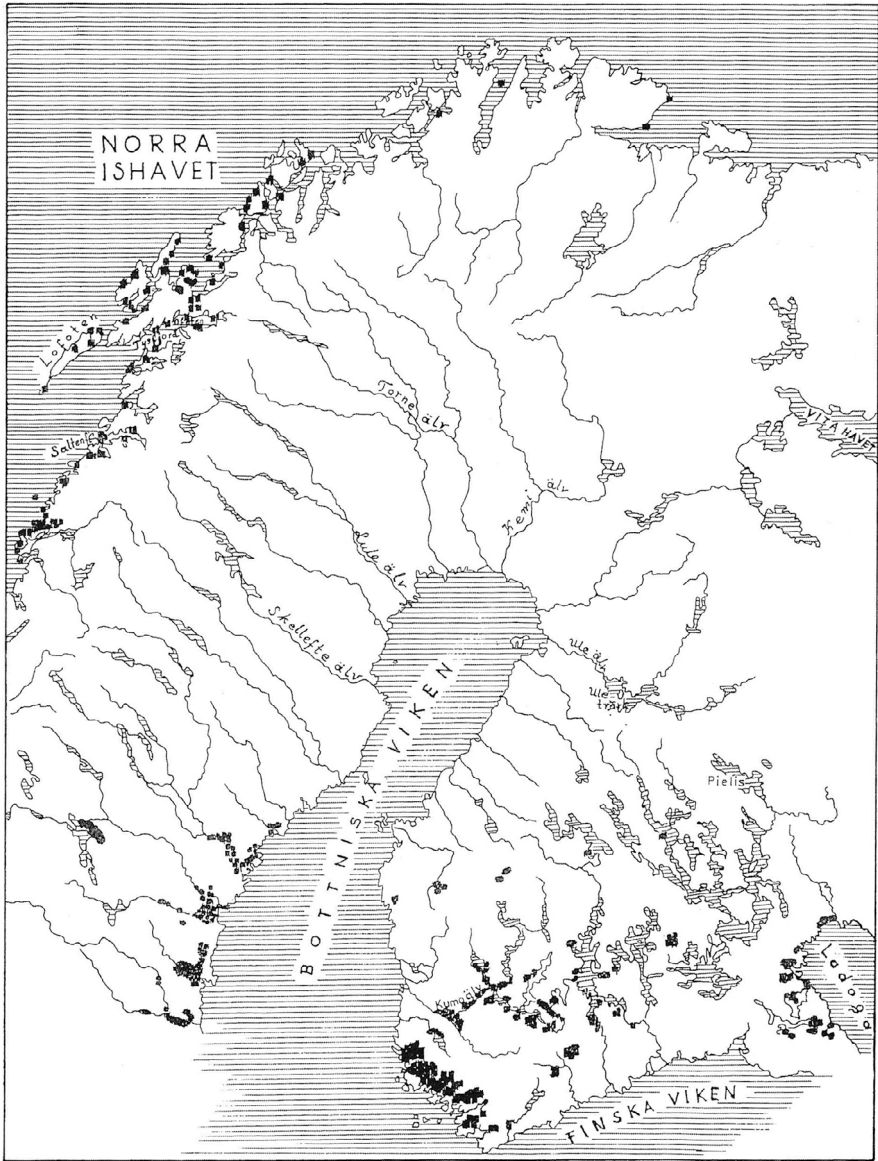


Figure 5.2: The continuous settled areas in the “neighbourhood,” as a rule connected with agriculture, c. 1100 (Zachrisson 1984, 13).

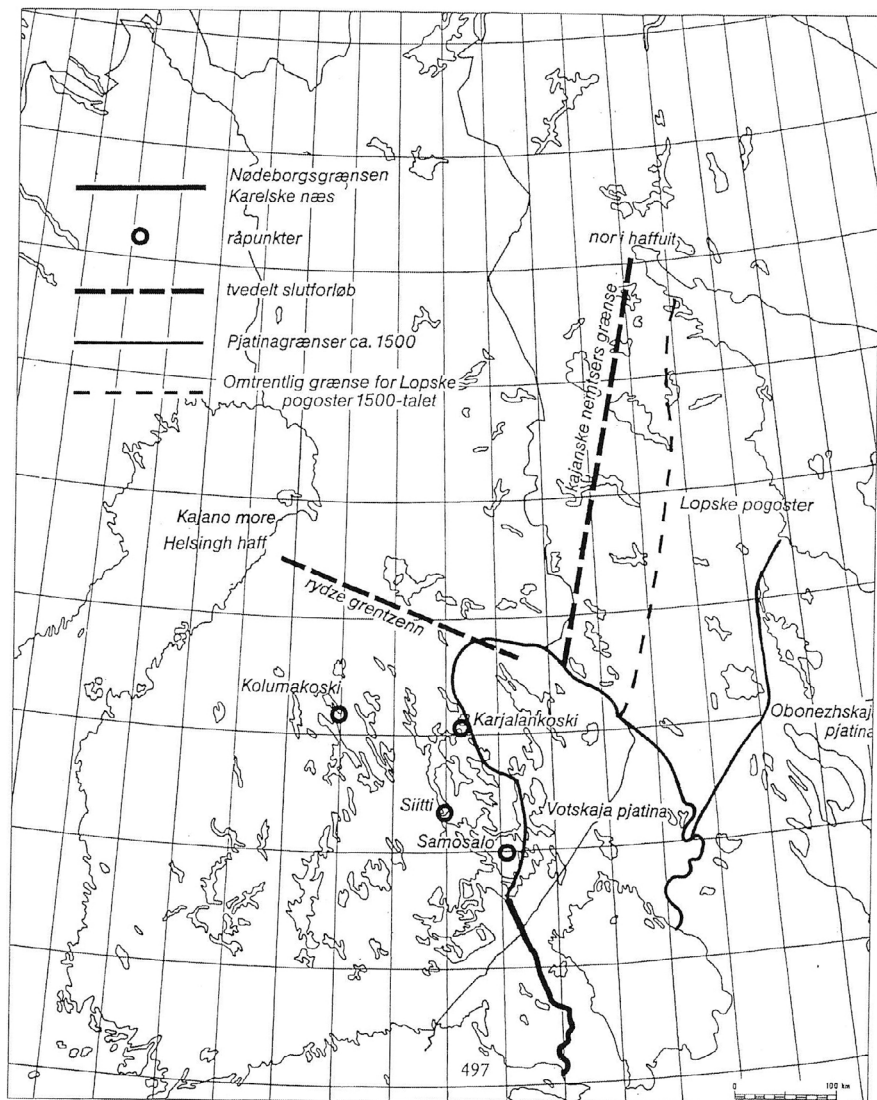


Figure 5.3: The two sets of borders according to the Nöteborg treaty of 1323 (Gallén and Lind 1991, 497).

gorod (Russia), according to Lars Ivar Hansen’s convincing interpretation of the Norwegian–Novgorodian Treaty of 1326.²³ It was only later, in early modern times, that attempts were made to integrate Northern Fennoscandia into the system of territorial states.

The territorial significance of the Nöteborg treaty has been debated for centuries: was the Gulf and its hinterland considered Novgorodian or Swedish territory in 1323? It was neither as we now know; not Swedish, Norwegian, or Novgorodian (Russian), nor was it considered exclusively Saami, but rather, as I suggest here, something “in between,” a “third space.” The research on this debate has at times been biased by a nationalistic mindset, first by the diplomats who produced written sources, and later by the historians while interpreting the treaty within the framework of the same mindset.²⁴

4 The Dissertation

To summarize, I tried to ascertain how the province of Norrbotten became a part of Sweden and why a latecomer to the arena (“Sweden”) “won” the struggle for dominance. A fourteenth-century political observer might have predicted another outcome. What were the factors that led to the Swedish success? To answer this question, the dissertation dealt with four primary, partly interconnected, problem areas:

- (1) The origin of permanent agricultural settlement in coastal Norrbotten, well defined by a royal cadastre in 1543, the first reasonable comprehensive source for settlement history (Figure 5.4);
- (2) Contacts between Norrbotten and the outside world in the Middle Ages;
- (3) Changes in these contacts; especially the influence of the Swedish Crown and the papal Church;
- (4) The changing character of medieval royal power, from lordship to a territorial definition.

In addition, I looked at the identity of some groups mentioned in the written sources, some of which are unique and have no clear counterpart in the politically

²³ Lars Ivar Hansen, “The Russian-Norwegian Border in Medieval and Early Modern Times,” in *Hybrid Spaces: Medieval Finnmark and the Archaeology of Multi-Room Houses*, ed. Bjørnar Olsen, Przemysław Urbańczyk, and Colin Amundsen (Oslo: Novus Press, 2011), 367.

²⁴ See Jarl Gallén, *Nöteborgsfreden och Finlands medeltida östgräns* (Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1968), 1–38.

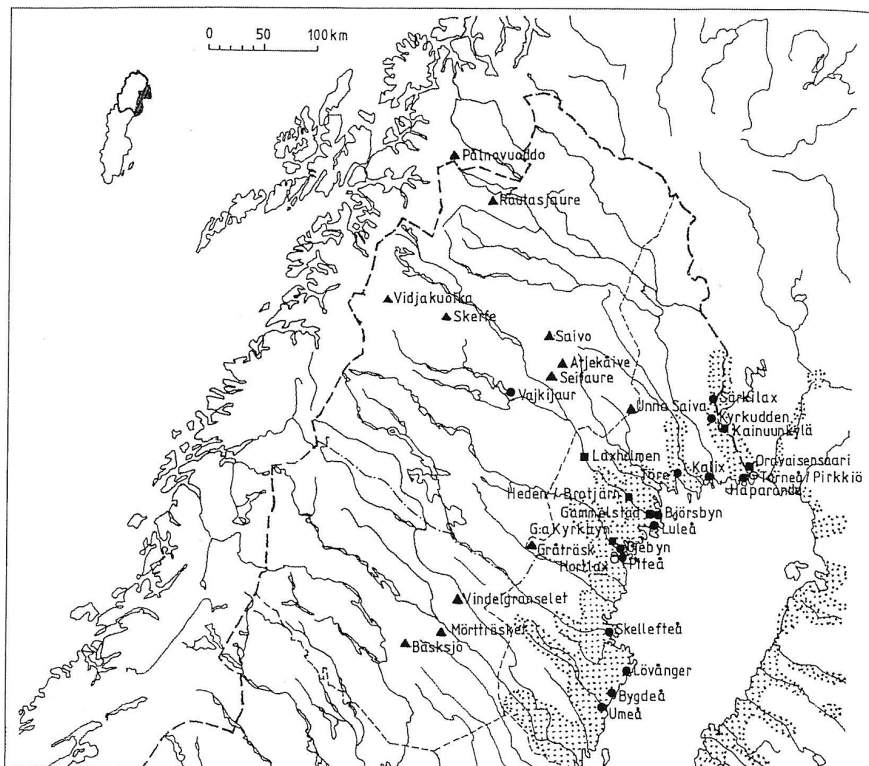


Figure 5.4: The agricultural settlements of provinces Västerbotten and Norrbotten (shaded), and places discussed in the original dissertation (Wallerström 1995, 14).

central parts of Sweden, Norway, or Finland. Saami lifeways, settlements, and economies appeared as a largely anonymous and unproblematic backdrop, as they did in most other research at the time.²⁵ Perspectives have since changed, however.²⁶

Written records were critically reinterpreted, taking into consideration the archaeological investigation of key sites (central places) and vegetational-historical studies of the coastal agricultural landscape.²⁷ I tried to interpret data by placing it

²⁵ Solveig Marie Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia: An Interdisciplinary Study of Norse-Saami Relations in the Medieval Period* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 18–27.

²⁶ Lars Ivar Hansen, *The Sámi, State Subjugation, and Strategic Interaction* (Oslo: Novus Press, 2018).

²⁷ Ulf Segerström “Vegetationshistoriska perspektiv på den fasta bosättningens uppkomst i Norrbottens kustland (inkl. Torneå),” Appendix 1 in Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 5–24; Ulf Seger-

in the correct cultural context of its time. Attempts were made to identify cultural influences through comparison. Source criticism was mandatory. The work required the identification of groups, seemingly ethnic categories, mentioned in the sources.²⁸

I also paid considerable attention to connections with the medieval power centres. I was influenced by a vague structuralism (“external structures”) and Michel Foucault’s groundbreaking understanding of “power.”²⁹ Power also comes from below, from unconscious or voluntary dependencies.³⁰ Based on recent research, today I would add – from economic and religious (ideological) alliances.³¹

I wanted to find out how this part of the world (Figure 5.4) changed and why the change took place. Because of that, I was interested in the significance of colonization project(s) mentioned in fourteenth-century sources and the Swedish reception of a political doctrine establishing “regal prerogatives,” *iura regni*, in the northern periphery. This was a revival of the Roman law from late antiquity, introduced in Scandinavia, Germany, Northern Italy, England, France, Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland from the twelfth century on.³² I will come back to *iura regni*; i.e., defining the power of *regnum* of the Realm (the State), in contrast to that of the Church, the ruler’s assets, and the aristocracy.³³

Parish formation and church-building in Norrbotten around 1350 brought judicial order to the area, along with monopoly trade, marketplaces, and the use of money. Unlike the Novgorodian, later Russian, competitors’ coercive taxation and

ström, “Naturmiljön, agrikulturen och människans påverkan på vegetationen i norra Norrland,” in *Att leva vid älven. Åtta forskare om människor och resurser i Lule älvdal*, ed. Evert Baudou (Bjåsta: CEWE-förlaget 1996), 57–77.

28 Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 213–50.

29 Foucault understands power as a relation that is not only repressive, but productive. It is present in all levels of society, cf. Clair O’Farrel’s guide to his terminology in *Michel Foucault* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2005), 149.

30 Michel Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge*, vol. 1: *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurleu (London: Penguin, 2019), 81–98.

31 Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 318–20; Olov Lund, *Nätverksstaten. Statsbildningsprocesser och rumsliga praktiker i senmedeltidens Sverige 1440–1520* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Augusti, 2022), 25–45, 436–41.

32 Dieter Hägermann, et al., “Regalien, -politik, -recht,” in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 7 (Munich: dtv, 2003), 557–62; Lars Hamre, Gunnar Prawitz, and Jens Ulf Jørgensen, “Regale,” in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* 13 (Malmö: Allhems förlag, 1968), 698–706; Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 27–30, 295–306.

33 See also Thomas Wallerström, “Om riksbildning, ‘maktmanifestationer’ och den politiska verksamhetens utveckling i Sverige under medeltiden,” in *Från stad till land. En medeltidsarkeologisk resa tillägnad Hans Andersson*, ed. Anders Andrén, Lars Ersgård, and Jes Wienberg (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 389–98.

unstable lordship over local groups, the Swedish settlement was associated with the Church and agricultural colonization following general European patterns of expansion. The subjects were, in the long run, made dependant on a social order guaranteed by the Crown. The Church levelled out cultural differences between centre and periphery, high and low, paving the way for government based on consensus.³⁴

The protracted expansion of the fourteenth-century kingdom can be traced in administrative written sources³⁵ and physically in the churches, marketplaces, settlement patterns, systems of cultivation,³⁶ and structures for communication, like harbours in the maritime cultural landscape.³⁷ From the fourteenth century on, there were at least attempts at establishing a Stockholm- and Uppsala-based administrative network, controlled by the secular and ecclesiastical elites.³⁸ The early modern social economic structure had medieval roots, a cultural diversity forming “gateway communities,” as Jari-Matti Kuusela and colleagues have shown.³⁹

This is, or was, a general picture of Norrbotten. Was I too reductionist? Did I overlook cultural complexity? Do I have to change my understanding of the history of settlement and Swedish dominance when viewed through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha’s version of postcolonial theory? His understanding of the social interplay in a third space? His study of the colonizer/colonized dividing line?

5 A Postcolonial Perspective

Now I will “revisit” my old book, published in 1995. I am curious about postcolonial theory. Will a postcolonial theoretical framework change the findings? Will it expand them?

³⁴ Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 309–20.

³⁵ Later also by Tegengren, *Sverige och Nordlanden*.

³⁶ Later by Birgitta Roeck Hansen, *Gårdsgårdor och tegskiftesåker. Resursutnyttjande och kulturellt inflytande i det gamla landskapet Västerbotten* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2002).

³⁷ Christer Westerdahl, *Norrlandsleden III. Norrlandskusten under medeltiden. Det maritima kulturlandskapet* (Skärhamn: Båtdokgruppen, 2014), 50–73.

³⁸ Tegengren, *Sverige och Nordlanden*, 151–232.

³⁹ Jari-Matti Kuusela, Risto Nurmi, and Ville Hakamäki, “Co-existence and Colonisation: Re-assessing the Settlement History of the Pre-Christian Bothnian Bay Coast,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 49, no. 2 (2016): 177–203; Jari-Matti Kuusela, “Signs of Cultural Diversity in the 13th to 15th Centuries AD Coastal Region of the Bothnian Bay in Northwestern Fennoscandia,” *Arctic Anthropology* 57, no. 1 (2020): 53–71.

I am particularly interested in Bhabha's criticism of how groups in the European postcolonial metropolises have been described in terms of "cultural diversities," and how this relates to an ideological perspective, Western rationalism. To Bhabha, "rationalism" is an *ideology*, i.e., a set of culturally determined values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms for action, not just a way to be sensible.⁴⁰

The Gulf of Bothnia in the Middle Ages is of course unlike today's European metropolises with their postcolonial diasporas. However, the provinces of Norrbotten and Lapland do bear witness to a "diversity," often simply described as "Swedish," "Finnish," and "Saami." Though potentially anachronistic, I think his perspective is worth considering given how much attention has been paid to the identity of groups in earlier North Scandinavian research. Some identities are also represented by place names throughout Northern Fennoscandia, oral tradition, and/or are mentioned in written sources. An "index" might look like this: *Kvæns, Kväner, Kajans, Kainuulaiset, Gáinolatj, Birkarls/Bircarlians, Karelians, Karjalaiset, Lapps, Finns, Terfinns, Lappalaiset, Hämälaiset, Chuds, Russians, Bjarmar, Hälsingar, Bottnakarlar, Kylfings, "Ryssar,"* and *Venäläiset* (the Finnish word for Russians), in addition to the mythical *Stállu*, and – of course – the Saami.⁴¹ Some of these are mentioned frequently.

Despite the risk of anachronism, I will test Bhabha's perspectives:

- 1) What results can be expected when people of different ancestries come together?
- 2) Can such "results" be observed in my research area? Where? Before 1634? Later?
- 3) What else can be seen with these "postcolonial" glasses?
- 4) Again, how about my own perspective? Did I somehow overlook things?

My experiment "ends" in 1634. That year, silver was discovered in Sápmi, close to the Norwegian border. More mining projects followed in the wake of this discovery. That was the take-off for the mining industry: silver, copper, iron – and later the forestry industry and hydroelectric power.⁴²

40 Bhabha, "The Third Space," 209.

41 Thomas Wallerström, "On Ethnicity as a Problem in Historical Archaeology. A Northern Fennoscandian Perspective," in *Visions of the Past: Trends and Traditions in Swedish Medieval Archaeology*, ed. Hans Andersson, Peter Carelli, and Lars Ersgård (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997), 317–29. These problems are also discussed in Wallerström, "De historiska källornas 'folknamn' som analysenheter," in *Stat, religion, etnisitet*, ed. Bjørn-Petter Finstad et al. (Tromsø: Universitetet i Tromsø), 383–424. On the *Stállu*, see Tim Frandy's discussion in this volume.

42 See, for example, Jonas Monié Nordin, *The Scandinavian Early Modern World: A Global Historical Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2020), 115–31; Åsa Össbo, *Nya vatten, dunkla speglingar*.

As previously mentioned, we cannot really talk about “colonialism” in this part of Northern Sweden before 1634. This is because colonization is not the same as colonialism. The net result of the *medieval* expansion was the diffusion of cultural and social forms found in the Latin Christian core. That earlier expansion would serve as a foothold, however, for the economic exploitation that was to come – the early modern rationalism ideologically situated in a political theory (“the reason of state,” often referred to as *raison d’état* in English texts).

Can something new still be learnt from an interview with Homi K. Bhabha, an Indian-English professor of literature, from 1990, and from his reading of the critical colonial and postcolonial writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? The better the frames of reference, the better the answers.

6 A Third Space

The rest of the article is dedicated to such a new “postcolonial” approach to my old book and some later articles of mine.⁴³ It is based on Homi K. Bhabha’s terminology, in particular his views on “third spaces” and “third places,” and, specifically, his statement that what we call “rationalism” is an ideology. Old issues, “evergreens” in Northern Fennoscandian historical research, are also revisited. Finally, I reconsider my old excavation at Kyrkudden, by the Torne River.

As explained in geographical dictionaries, first and second spaces refer to two different, only potentially conflicting, spatial groupings where people interact physically and socially. “Third spaces” are the in-between or hybrid spaces. The first and second spaces work together to generate a new third space: indeterminate, fluid, mutable, liminal, dominated by neither one group nor another.

It is an adaptation of Homi K. Bhabha’s conceptualization of the creative space positioned in between the colonizer and the colonized, characterized by hybridity in which translation and negotiation can occur: productive of new possibilities, creating new cultural meanings and inclusionary politics.⁴⁴

Industriell kolonialism genom svensk vattenkraftsutbyggnad i renkötselområdet 1910–1968 (Umeå: Institutionen för idé och samhällsstudier, 2014).

⁴³ Cf. Thomas Wallerström, “Emerging Ethnonyms, Ethnicity, and Archaeology. The Case of ‘Finns’ in Northern Europe,” in *The European Frontier: Clashes and Compromises in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jörn Staecker (Lund: Lund University, 2004), 73–88.

⁴⁴ Susan Mayhew, “Third Space Theory,” in *A Dictionary of Geography*, 6th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Alisdair Rogers, Noel Castree, and Rob Kitchin, “Third Space,” in *A Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Such a third space is evident in the distribution of Swedish, Finnish, and Saami place names. The Saami toponyms predominated in Swedish Lapland, of course, normally in Swedish forms.⁴⁵ Likewise, Swedish forms of the original Finnish are found in the eastern part of Norrbotten, some “translated.”⁴⁶ The distribution of Saami and Finnish place names has been widespread, as seen by some place names found between the coast and the province of Lapland⁴⁷ and around the lakes recorded for taxation purposes from 1553–1567 in the (former) parishes of Piteå and Luleå (Figure 5.5).⁴⁸ In the present-day parish of Överkalix, which remains a borderland, some settlements had Finnish and sometimes original Saami names, the latter often adapted to the dominant Swedish via Finnish.⁴⁹ The local dialect (some say language), basically Nordic, shows Finnish and Saami interference features.⁵⁰

When the early Saami- and Finnish speaking groups are looked for in today’s Swedish language area, they are found.⁵¹ Saami near the coast are more or less hidden in the historical written sources – seemingly unimportant to the administrators of the time, and therefore not recorded. Several placenames with the prefix *Lapp-* nevertheless refer to this presence.⁵²

The Saami- and Finnish-speakers appear to have predated the Swedish presence in the coastal landscape. Original Saami place names have in some cases

45 See, for example, Ann-Charlott Sjaggo, *Ortnamnen i Arjeplog/Arjeppluovve – en berättelse om landskapet och folket* (Tromsø: Universitetet i Tromsø, 2021).

46 See, for example, Gunnar Pellijeff, *Ortnamnen i Norrbottens län Del 14: Övertorneå kommun Bebyggelsenamn* (Umeå: Övre Norrlands ortnamn utgivna av Dialekt, ortnamns- och folkminnesarkivet i Umeå, 1982).

47 Olavi Korhonen, “Samiska ortnamn nedanför lappmarksgränsen,” in *Norrbotten 2009*, ed. Per Moritz (Luleå: Norrbottens museum, 2009), 203–34; and my articles from 1997.

48 Identified in Birger Steckzén, *Birkarlar och lappar. En studie i birkarlaväsändets, lappbefolkningens och skinnhandelns historia* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964), 471–74; map (Figure 5.5) from Kustaa Vilkkuna, *Kainuu-Kvänland: ett finskt-norskt-svenskt problem* (Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien, 1969), 91.

49 Gunnar Pellijeff, *Ortnamnen i Norrbottens län Del 13: Överkalix kommun A Bebyggelsenamn* (Umeå: Övre Norrlands ortnamn utgivna av Dialekt, ortnamns- och folkminnesarkivet i Umeå, 1982), 17.

50 Margareta Källskog, “Interferenser i det flerspråkiga Överkalix” in *Nordkalotten i en skiftande värld – kulturer utan gränser och stater över gränser*, ed. Kyösti Julku (Rovaniemi: Pohjois-Suomen Historiallinen Yhdistys, 1988), 181–96.

51 Anna Elmén Berg and Håkan Myrlund, *Nya perspektiv på den samiska befolkningen i Pitebygds jordbruksbygder* (Piteå: Piteå museums förlag, 2022); Lars Elenius, *Möten mellan olika folk. Den mångkulturella kyrkstaden i Gammelstad* (Luleå: Gammelstad kyrkstad världsarv, 2019).

52 Noel D. Broadbent, *Lapps and Labyrinths: Saami Prehistory, Colonization, and Cultural Resilience* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2010), 193–99.



Figure 5.5: The fishing waters of the (former) Pite- and Lule parishes, recorded in the 1553–1567 cadastres. Those with numbers have original Finnish names (Vilkuna 1969, 91).

been adapted to Finnish and later adapted once again, but this time to Swedish. Swedish dialects and place names in Norrbotten have more in common with politically central parts of Sweden to the south than they do with the provinces in between, thereby “bypassing” a couple of coastal provinces.

There must have been a “mix” of these languages spoken, possibly in addition to an even older Nordic substrate hinted at by some place names.⁵³ These scenarios are at least partly supported by more recent archaeological data.⁵⁴

⁵³ Lars-Erik Edlund, “De norrbottniska dialekterna – några nordiska perspektiv,” in *Norrbotten 2009*, ed. Per Moritz (Luleå: Norrbottens museum, 2009), 187–201; Lars-Erik Edlund, “Ortnamn och kulturgränser inom det botteniska området,” in *Norrbotten 1997* (Luleå: Norrbottens museum, 1997), 54–69.

⁵⁴ Ingela Bergman, “Finnar, lappar, renar och bönder. Om medeltida befolkningsgrupper och näringar avspeglade i ortnamn i Bottenvikens kusttrakter,” *Arkeologi i Norr* 12 (2010): 167–91; Ingela Bergman, “History, Hearths and Contested Landscape: Sámi Land Use East of the Lapland Border of Sweden,” *Meta. Historiskarkeologisk tidskrift* (2021): 109–20.

A first wave of agriculturalists came from different parts of present-day Finland, beginning prior to the fourteenth century. This was most evident in the Torne River Valley, which remains Finnish (Meänkieli) speaking.⁵⁵ The economy was agricultural combined with hunting, fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture, and the predominant cattle breeding. It can be traced back to the beginning of the eleventh or twelfth century according to historical agricultural data, which is supported by archaeological and place name studies. This is in the lower reaches of the valley.⁵⁶

These Saami- and Finnish-speakers both experienced a wave of immigration: a result of the expansionism of the European medieval world. The Swedish expansion into the Gulf had much in common with the German *Drang nach Osten*, its expansion to the East. Colonization by Swedish-speaking settlers was considered justified at the time, according to a royal doctrine declaring that it was legitimate to “grant” territory with no recognized (or accepted) “owner” – an element of *iura regni*. This model is also paralleled elsewhere in Europe, although here in Norrbotten it occurred without the more typical military conquest, towns, and settled elites dwelling in castles. Demands for a royal share in *bona vacantia* [empty land] has a long history in Sweden, going back to the twelfth century or earlier.⁵⁷

Later on, in the early 1600s, combined church/marketplaces had also been established in Swedish and Finnish Lapland, controlled by the state. The three towns on the coast (Tornio/Torneå, Luleå, Piteå) were founded in 1621 – commercial and political outposts in the expanding system of governance. The principle of the early modern territorial state had been established by that time, though its implementation could be tricky.⁵⁸ This was during Sweden’s time as a European great power, partly facilitated by the extraction of food from the Saami via a system of heavy taxation (Figure 5.6).⁵⁹

In summary: the presence of Saami-, Finnish-, and Swedish-speakers constitutes a third space. People of different ancestries and modes of living “came together” at the same time as they were dominated by the Swedish state. This

55 Meänkieli (literally “our language”) is today the official name of the version of Finnish traditionally spoken in the eastern part of Norrbotten. UNESCO, “Tornedalen Finnish (Meänkieli) in Sweden,” <https://en.wal.unesco.org/countries/sweden/languages/tornedalen-finnish-meankieli>.

56 Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 145–47, 310–12.

57 Jerker Rosén, *Kronoavsöndringar under äldre medeltid* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1949), 35–36.

58 Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 295–320; Thomas Wallerström, *Kunglig makt och samiska bosättningsmönster: Studier kring Väinö Tanners vinterbyteori* (Oslo: Novus Press, 2017), 184–208.

59 Lennart Lundmark, *Uppbörd, utarmning, utveckling. Det samiska fångstsamhällets övergång till rennomadism i Lule lappmark* (Lund: Arkiv för studier i arbetarrörelsens historia, 1982).

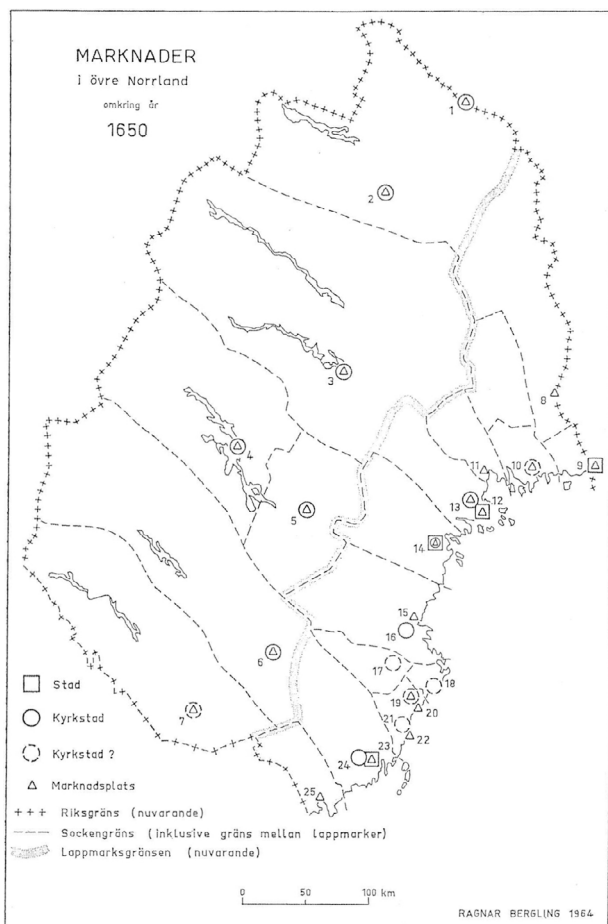


Figure 5.6: Market places in the provinces of Norrbotten, Västerbotten, and Lapland c. 1650. (Bergling 1964, 171).

meant, at least potentially, the merging of transport and hunting technologies with a market economy framework that included money, official marketplaces, parish structures, church-building, and the application of a foreign judicial order to a new arena by the Gulf around 1350. This correlates with what historian Nils Blomkvist has labelled a “Catholic World-System.”⁶⁰ Its long-term imprint on the agricultural landscape has been mapped (1543) and reconstructed from the tax re-

⁶⁰ Nils Blomkvist, *The Discovery of the Baltic: The Reception of a Catholic World-System in the European North (AD 1075–1225)* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

cords of that year, the first of their kind (Figure 5.4). Hunting and fishing were also important to the agriculturalists.⁶¹

7 *Iura regni*

A fourteenth-century political observer might have predicted another outcome. The Principality of Novgorod could have “won” but did not. Unlike the Novgorodian competitors’ coercive taxation and unstable lordship over local groups, the Swedish subjects were made dependant on a market system and a social order controlled by a royal administration and backed by law.⁶²

There was a model for this: the doctrine (or doctrines) of royal prerogatives – *iura regni* – a collection of laws established by Frederick I Barbarossa at the Diet of Roncaglia in 1158. These pertained to the rights enjoyed by the king or emperor in his capacity as lord of the kingdom, the “content” of which would vary over time depending on the balance of power.

The major regal rights, *regalia maiora*, included the core rights of sovereignty: to rule and govern the country, to maintain law and justice, peace and order in the kingdom, and to command in war and peace. These rights and functions could not be removed without diminishing the position of the king. The *regalia minora* were of an economic nature, situational, and intended to secure the finances of the kingdom. In Sweden, this could mean income from coinage, fines, mining, fisheries, taxes, customs receipts, or a share in the commons.⁶³

As Swedish historian Sven Lundkvist has pointed out, this regalistic way of thinking must have been the basis for King Magnus Eriksson being able to grant the Pite River and adjoining fjords, islands, and shores to the knight Nils Abjörns-son (Sparre) in 1335. It is clear from the charter that during the king’s minority, Nils had built houses at considerable cost and had moved families up to the area to advance Christianity. It is also stated that this property was granted to Nils not just for use during his lifetime but that it was also to be inherited by his descendants.⁶⁴ This hypothesis is supported by the local vegetational history, archaeolog-

⁶¹ Roeck Hansen, *Gårdsgårdor*, 8.

⁶² Wallerström, *Norrbottnen*, 318–20.

⁶³ Wallerström *Norrbottnen*, 27–30, 295–306; Gunnar Prawitz, “Regale,” in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* 13 (Malmö: Allhems förlag, 1968), 701–5.

⁶⁴ Wallerström, *Norrbottnen*, 49, 295–306; Sven Lundkvist, “Iura regni – Rikets rättigheter. Statsledningen och Övre Norrland under sex århundraden,” in *Bothnia. En nordsvensk region*, ed. Lars-Erik Edlund and Lars Beckmann (Höganäs: Bra böcker, 1994).

ical excavations on the central site serving this project for colonization, and the ownership history of the site in question.⁶⁵

Over time, different spheres of power came to be defined by regal rights. There appears to be a certain momentum to the emergence of the post-medieval territorial state: sooner or later the territory of one king’s regal rights must be separated from that of his rivals. Sooner or later there had to be borders on the ground marking where the king’s laws were valid, where his coins were accepted, where his military organization belonged, and therefore areas where he had the right to found towns or marketplaces where trading could be carried out under his protection (and as one source of income for him). In addition – and this must have happened in the northern periphery – the rights of the king’s subjects to the commons must have needed to be demarcated from those of other kings’ subjects (Figure 5.3).⁶⁶

This was tricky, and it remained so until more “modern” state territorial borders were established in the North (to Russia in 1595, to Denmark-Norway in 1751). And, in turn, this was a source of long-standing international conflicts. Saami groups were pieces on this chessboard.⁶⁷ Old documents were therefore searched for in the archives; with questions asked such as which Saami group paid their taxes to which royal bailiff, and for how long?⁶⁸

Over the long term, the Church levelled out cultural differences: between groups, between centre and periphery, between high and low, gradually paving the way for government based on (enforced) consensus. The fourteenth-century (and later) farmers who moved up from the South, with their market-integrated economy, had a lot to lose by not supporting the Crown. The rival Novgorodian contenders for that hegemony did not have the same incentives to offer those who would submit to their power.⁶⁹

Through these slow processes of state territorialization borders were gradually drawn. The doctrine was further developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially by kings like Gustav Vasa: a claim for Crown rights over *res nullus*

65 Wallerström, *Norrbottnen*, 79–84, 89–90, 326nn6–8. The place, which was deserted by the early fifteenth century, is called Gamla Kyrkbyn.

66 Wallerström, *Norrbottnen*, 28–29, 295–306.

67 Sven-Ingemar Olofsson, “Övre Norrlands historia under Carl IX och Gustav II Adolf,” in *Övre Norrlands historia*, vol. 2, ed. Gunnar Westin (Umeå: Norrbottens och Västerbottens läns landsting, 1965), 45–89.

68 Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen, *Samenes historie fram til 1750* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2022), 247–250; Sven Ulric Palme, *Sverige och Danmark 1596–1611* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1942), 211, 220–221, 232–233, 425, 537, 543.

69 Wallerström, *Norrbottnen*, 277–94.

and *bona vacantia* – lands, forests, and fisheries “without owners.” Precious metals were of crucial importance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and onwards) in the Swedish North.⁷⁰ This is much like the colonialism to come.

In sum, this process of European expansion generated a third space: not Saami, not Finnish, not Swedish, not (Danish-)Norwegian, not Russian (Novgorodian). Swedish kings expanded the medieval realm elsewhere in a similar way, in present-day Finland and Estonia; this predated its early modern expansionism, which included colonies in North America and Africa.⁷¹

8 Hybrid Places, Hybrid Spaces

The distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference is a potential eye-opener. It allows us to “see” the activities in hybrid spaces, or third spaces. They are more likely than not to result in hybridity. At least, if Bhabha’s analysis is valid.

Many places in Northern Scandinavia can be labelled medieval and early modern hybrid spaces or places. In fact, such hybrid places/spaces are a prerequisite for “cultural contacts” often described in terms of “cultural borrowings.” These have to have “taken place” somewhere. Where?

Their size and form varied: from towns by the Gulf to the combined church/marketplaces in the interior of Swedish Lapland (Figure 5.6). They were all institutionalized, in the sense of having had (built) structures designed specifically for these encounters. By the time of seventeenth-century colonialism in Sápmi, hybrid places also appeared in association with the early modern mining industry, populated by “locals” (Saami and others) side-by-side with “foreign experts,” which in turn connected Northern Scandinavia to the global colonial world.⁷²

The long-enigmatic “multi-room houses” in the coastal region of Arctic Norway and Northwestern Russia provide another example. They emerged around 1200, probably with their main period of use extending until the mid-fourteenth century, in some cases being occupied as late as the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century. Their very design was the result of a mix of distant traditions,

⁷⁰ Rosén, *Kronoavsöndringarna*, 40–41; Lennart Stenman, *Rätten till land och vatten i lappmarkerna i historisk belysning* (Karlstad: Karlstads universitet, 2001), 3; Gunnar Prawitz, *Ett bidrag til fiskeregalets historia i Sverige* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1952); Gösta Åqvist, “Till den svenska regalrättens historia,” in *Rättshistoriska studier*, vol. 11, ed. Stig Jägerskiöld (Stockholm: Nordiska bokhandeln, 1985).

⁷¹ Wallerström, *Norrbotten* 154–61; Nordin, *The Scandinavian*, 143–80, 227–38.

⁷² Nordin, *The Scandinavian*, 100–142.

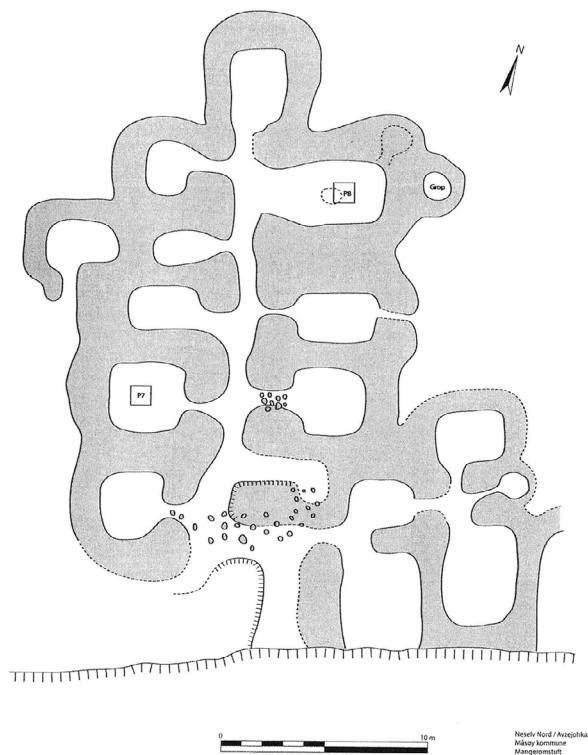


Figure 5.7a: Multiroom-house with a corridor at Neselv Nord/Avzejohka (Olsen 2011, 25f).

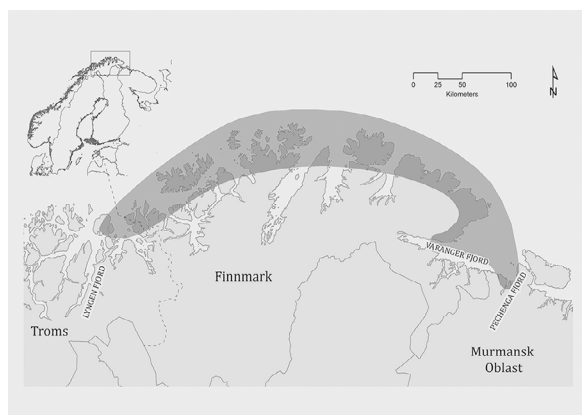


Figure 5.7b: Distribution of multi-room houses (Olsen 2011, 25f).

borrowings, and local adaptations, thus making the multi-room houses truly hybrid spaces (Figures 5.7a–b).

While they attracted the curiosity of scholars and laymen for centuries, monocultural interpretations predominated. Now reinterpreted as part of a context of complex cultural encounters involving the Saami and western and eastern newcomers, these sites may have provided secure and institutionalized nodes where trade and taxation could take place – hybrid spaces. This was also in a territory that had been defined as “common” (in 1326, to Norway and Novgorod).⁷³

Moreover, many natural formations have place names referring to specific identities in the north of Fennoscandia; place names beginning with *Lapp-* and *Finns-*, or to Russians, Karelians, and people associated with the Finnish province of Tavastia (Finnish: Häme). The category of *Kainuu-* and its Saami “synonym” *Gáinolatj* are much discussed (Figures 5.8a–c).⁷⁴

These place names have one thing in common: they refer to the presence of groups that appeared as anomalies (strangers) in the landscape. This indicates encounters: otherwise the designation would have been meaningless. I think this is about hybrid spaces rather than monocultural spaces, simply because these designations would have involved two parties: those who coined the place name and those to whom the place name referred. This suggests that hybrid spaces are also to be found in the “wilderness,” far from areas under “external control” (towns, marketplaces). Unsurprisingly, such hybrid places and spaces are a prerequisite for “cultural contacts,” “cultural borrowings,” or “influences.”

The inability to consider the wider implications of “cultural diversity” as highlighted by Bhabha – Eurocentrism, nationalism, and here, a penchant for dichotomies – has constituted an obstacle in historical and archaeological research.⁷⁵

73 Bjørnar Olsen, Jørn Henriksen, and Przemysław Urbańczyk, “Interpreting Multi-Room Houses: Origin, Function and Cultural Networks,” in *Hybrid Spaces: Medieval Finnmark and the Archaeology of Multi-Room Houses*, ed. Bjørnar Olsen, Przemysław Urbańczyk, and Colin Amundsen (Oslo: Novus Press, 2011), 371, 386–87.

74 For placenames referring to Russians in Finland, *Venäjä-*, see Vahtola, *Tornionjoki- ja Kemijokilaakson*, 320, to complement figure 5.8b. Likewise, for placenames referring to *Gáino-* and *Kainuu-* identities in Sweden, see Korhonen, *Natur och näringar*, 87, to complement figure 5.8c.

75 It has also been known for a long time that Nordic words were adopted into Saami languages. Tellingly, much less attention has been paid to Saami influence on the Scandinavian languages, which was more extensive than generally expected. Jurij Kusmenko, *Der samische Einfluss auf die skandinavischen Sprachen. Ein Beitrag zur skandinavischen Sprachgeschichte* (Berlin: Nord-europa-Institut der Humboldt-Universität, 2008).

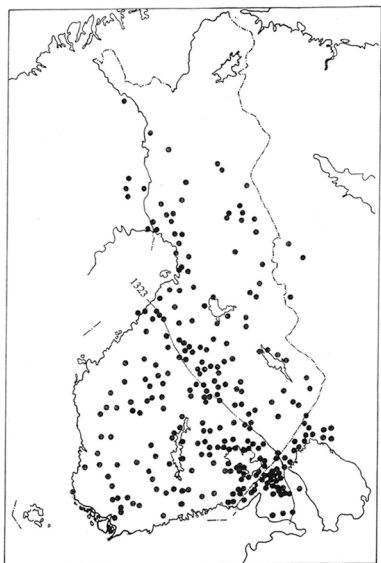


Figure 5.8a: Placenames referring to identities: Hämeen (Tavastians) (Vahtola 1980, 98).

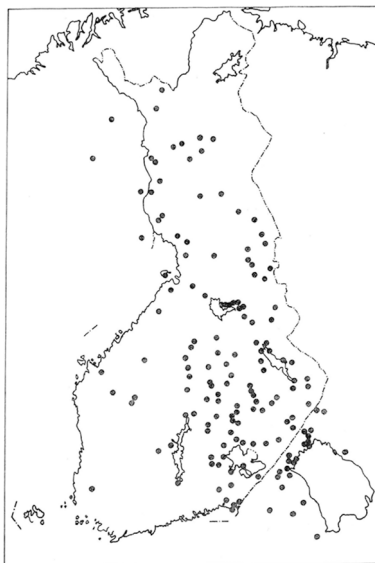


Figure 5.8b: *Karjala* (Karelians) (Vahtola 1980, 317).

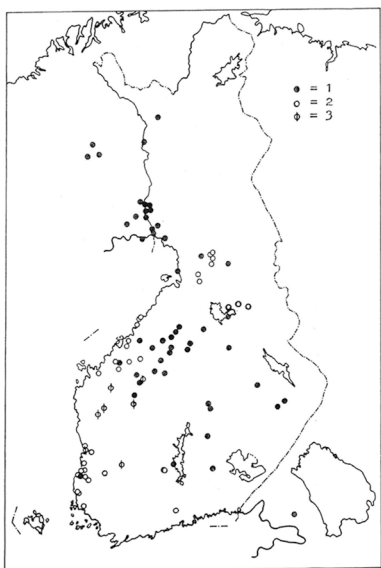


Figure 5.8c: Placenames referring to identities: *Kainu(u)n-*, *Kaino-*, *Kainua-*, *Kainanen-* and *Kainisto-* (Kvens) (Vahtola 1980, 474).

9 Discussion

As mentioned above, Bhabha describes rationalism as an ideology, not just a matter of being sensible.

Clearly, he is not only referring to general qualities like being wise or intelligent (aspects of being human), or a methodology for attaining knowledge, but to “rationalise at a higher level.” Without saying it, Bhabha must be referring to rationalism as the outcome of the philosophical and political reflections of the sixteenth century and later – an ideology, a cornerstone, a guide to obtaining knowledge for governmental control – the *raison d'état*.

When I read that, I must confess that I was a bit surprised. Have I been oblivious, somehow, about the fact that practices of dominance and government are situated within that time-bound political theory?

This is about a *practice* (or practices) culturally situated in European political thought: a powerful mix of rational thinking and government, which expanded worldwide via colonialism and imperialism.

I think the wider implications of that political theory are overlooked in Northern Scandinavia. It is likely to have had an effect on the structure and content of written sources. Since most historical information is based on that category, we have a major source of error to keep in mind when considering our third space. Perhaps the written state sources have more to do with the views of the rationalistic political agents, each with their own administrative agenda, than with “reality itself”? For instance, when conceptualizing the societies they encountered?

Since when has this *raison d'état* been imposed? This “rationality” as a guiding principle in government? Which has resulted, inter alia, in the categorization of people from “above”?

When confronted by large-scale cultural changes such as these, it is worth the effort to identify the historical impact of, or the achievements of, exceptional individuals.⁷⁶

Political theorists like Niccolò Machiavelli have no doubt made an impact on arguments, attitudes, and mentalities – a literature that has served as a guide for generations of rulers embracing so-called Machiavellism,⁷⁷ from its precursors⁷⁸ up to nationalism. This is about the sovereign state’s goals and ambitions (economic, military, cultural, or otherwise). This is also the case in regions regarded as “peripheral.” I will come back to the legacy of this controversial secular political theorist.

⁷⁶ Burke, *Tacitism*, 479.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'État and its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (Boulder: Westview Press Inc., 1984).

⁷⁸ Burke, *Tacitism*, 483–84.

There have been many such political theories about how society should “best” be ordered. In fact, a range of “governmentalities” have appeared over the centuries, to borrow a term from the Collège de France professor of “the history of systems of thought,” Michel Foucault.

10 On Rationalism as an Ideology in Western European Political Thought

In a series of lectures, Foucault presented an analysis of the genealogy of political structures, from antiquity up to his own lifetime (1926–1984).⁷⁹ He coined the term “governmentality.”

This is the government by a set of *practices* and *mindset(s)*, in many ways associated with the state. Accordingly, “the state” is understood as one episode in a long history of “governmentalities.”⁸⁰ It is about a style of governing situated within four stages of governmental reason; or more precisely, three stages and one pre-stage. The pre-stage is that of the Christian pastorate-model, followed by the rise of government proper, liberal governmentality by the mid-eighteenth century,⁸¹ and, most recently, neoliberalism.⁸²

In every detail, he examined a transition from an art of governing based on principles derived from the traditional “pastoral” virtues (wisdom, justice, liberality, respect for divine laws and human customs) or from recognized skills (prudence, considered decisions, care to surround oneself with the best advisors),⁸³ to an art of governing based on the principles of *rationality*, and the specific domain of its application to the state, a belief in *reason* as a source of knowledge in contrast to the authority of the Bible – the idea of *raison d'état*.⁸⁴ This is associated with the rationalism that emerged at the end of the sixteenth and in the course of the seventeenth century, and with the names Descartes, Galileo, and Kepler.⁸⁵

79 An excellent summary of Foucault’s lectures on “Governmentality” (1977–79) is provided by Todd May, “Governmentality” in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 175–81.

80 Foucault, *Security*, 247–48.

81 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, ed. Michel Snellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 27–50.

82 Foucault, *The Birth*, 317–24.

83 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Snellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 163–90.

84 *Ibid.*, 227–53.

85 *Ibid.*, 285–310.

With the Renaissance, and later the Reformation, political authority had to find its own rationale in the form of justification and finding its methods of operation. Unsurprisingly, Machiavelli's controversial *The Prince*, published in 1532, was at the centre of this development and subsequent debates. The late sixteenth century saw a flood of political treatises, *contra* and *pro* his writings. By this point, the survival of the state appeared as the paramount political consideration for rulers – an end in itself. This *raison d'état* was to be the new matrix of rationality, according to which rulers must exercise sovereignty in governing people.⁸⁶

The modern state was born when governmentality became a calculated and intentional practice. The pre-stage, however, was the model of the shepherd and his flock: his tending to the flock, seeking the salvation of each of its members. This tending was, in contrast to the forms of governmentality that arose later, for the sake of the shepherded – a model for medieval kingship, according to Foucault.⁸⁷ That spirit is found in the medieval provincial law codes, like the *Hälsinge* law code (for the north of Sweden) and the one issued by King Magnus Eriksson for the realm.⁸⁸

The development of *raison d'état*, however, gave rise to a new historical perspective, one that is no longer focused on “the end times” and the unification of all particular sovereignties in the empire of the last days. Instead, it opens onto an indefinite time in which states must struggle against one another in order to ensure their own survival.⁸⁹

The population was no longer conceived of as a “mere collection of subjects of right,” or as a “set of hands making up the workforce,” in the spirit of pastoral power, but was now analysed as a collection of elements that form part of the general system of living beings, providing a hold for concerted interventions (through laws, but also through changes in attitudes, ways of doing things, and ways of living, which may be brought about by “stately campaigns”).⁹⁰

Apart from the theories that formed and justified it, *raison d'état* took shape in two great assemblages of political knowledge and technology: a “military-diplomatic technology” and that of the “police,” a word that at the time referred to the collection of means of bringing about the internal growth of state power.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 87–114.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁸⁸ Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén, eds and trans., *Magnus Erikssons landslag i nusvensk tolkning* (Stockholm: AB Nordiska Bokhandeln, 1962), xii; Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén, eds and trans., *Svenska Landskapslagar tolkade och förklarade: Södermannalagen. Hälsingelagen* (Stockholm: AWE/Gebbers, 1979), xliii.

⁸⁹ Foucault, *Security*, 365.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 366.

The “military-diplomatic technology” consists in securing and developing the state’s power through a system of alliances and the organization of an armed apparatus.⁹¹ Now the political problem of population also began to emerge, splitting off from the technology of “police” and in correlation with the birth of *economic* thought. What is known as mercantilism emerged.⁹²

More than the problems relating to the legitimacy of a sovereign’s right over a territory, it now appeared important to attain *knowledge* about and stimulate the development of the state’s power, in both a European and a global space, all in competition with other states. This all is very different from the medieval confrontations between (potentially) royal dynasties; the major problem was now that of a power dynamic and the rational techniques that might allow one to affect it.⁹³

This is exactly what happened in Northern Fennoscandia: a contest about where *the* state borders were “meant” to be.

The Saami were asked about “old taxation rights”: to which king had their particular group paid their taxes? This turned out to be difficult because the Saami provided the answers “wished for,” whether because they felt threatened or because they misunderstood the issue – they didn’t grasp the distinction between what were legal and what were simply mutually accepted taxation rights. In a large common area with no state borders, some paid their taxes to two or even three parties (Sweden, Denmark-Norway, Novgorod, later Russia).

This was reported by an anonymous writer, a critic, identified as a Swedish bailiff of the provinces of Västerbotten and Ångermanland, who was involved in researching the question and who sat on a committee trying to establish borders with Russia at the end of the sixteenth century. He had questioned the Saami on the matter and was sceptical of this method of collecting depositions; no durable peace could be expected that way, he claimed.⁹⁴

Michel Foucault’s Collège de France lectures about past governmentalities provide good working hypotheses for understanding the practices and intellectual foundations of European expansion up to the recent past. He always remained interested in the problem of how human beings seek to impose order on the world via their social structures and knowledge, the points where this order breaks down, and how they change with the passage of time.⁹⁵

91 *Ibid.*, 365.

92 *Ibid.*, 337, 366.

93 *Ibid.*, 364–65.

94 Steckzén, *Birkarlar*, 76–82. As to combined church/marketplaces in Sweden: one was established in each *lappmark* at that time; i.e., at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Wallerström, *Kunglig makt*, 192–94.

95 O’Farrell, *Foucault*, 11.

11 Why Is All This Important? In the Scandinavian North?

Again, I think this governmentality of the *raison d'état*, fills a gap in our repertoire of explanatory historical frameworks in Northern Scandinavia. This is in addition to the medieval doctrine of *iura regni*, the rights of the kingdom mentioned above. It is also important as a commentary on the written sources. It is tempting to suppose that the written records of Gustav Vasa's administration reflect "old structures," and they did sometimes – but not always. (This is old news.)

From this point on, however, practices of *economic* interest were recorded by administrators. It must be remembered that *by necessity* the knowledge of the bailiff and the vicar was obtained from churches and marketplaces, or other places where people of different backgrounds and identities gathered – third places or spaces. The alternative is absurd: political agents strolling around the wilderness trying to find their potential subjects for taxation?

That economic thought made an imprint on the written sources: the meticulous cadastres of the Saami in Swedish Lapland and of the agrarian populations by the Gulf of Bothnia, which were established by the mid-sixteenth century, the final years of Gustav Vasa's reign. These have constituted an important source for detailed studies.⁹⁶

Gustav Vasa's political agents established land registers and an associated legal system, which subsequently came to apply in the *lapmark* – a Swedish system based on Saami land use.⁹⁷ Legal historian Nils Johan Päiviö has traced the genealogy of that legal system to a twelfth-century doctrine of *dominium*, a Europe-wide approach to ownership. It was most likely the old Saami system of land use that laid the foundation for establishing land taxes.

According to the doctrine of *dominium*, ownership was *shared* with the state; the end result of this was the Saami loss of land and water, as Päiviö has shown. This was introduced to Gustav Vasa's administration by the German-born Conrad von Pyhy, a jurist who had served in Emperor Karl V's secretariat.⁹⁸ This had an impact, not only on the control of the agrarian landscape throughout Sweden, but

⁹⁶ See, for example, Mats Berglund, *Gårdar och folk i norr. Bebyggelse, befolkning och jordbruk i Norrbotten under 1500-talet* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2006).

⁹⁷ Kaisa Korpipää-Labba, *Om samernas rättsliga ställning i Sverige-Finland* (Helsingfors: Juristförbundets förlag, 1994), 52–57.

⁹⁸ Nils Johan Päiviö, *Från skattemannarätt till nyttjanderätt* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2011), 80–81.

in Swedish Lapland, too.⁹⁹ And, of course, this was brought together with the doctrines of *iura regni*, mentioned above.

12 Old Issues, New Perspectives

Source-critically speaking, categories predating the “Era of *Raison d’État*” have different qualities from those coined by political agents dedicated to rationalistic thinking in a programmatic way.

In such a context, it is no wonder that categories of people – some much discussed in research – disappear from official sources. “The” identity of the *Kvæns*, *Kajans*, *Kväner*, *Kainuulaiset*, and *Gáinolatj* is often assumed to be one specific ethnic group, referred to in different languages. This is one prominent example, discussed by the learned since the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁰

As Finnish historian Kyösti Julku argues, this was not a singular group, either *Finnish* or *Swedish*, as some of the paradigms were formulated, but instead it referred to groups of various ancestries living on the coastal strip at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, from the forest of Tavastia and Kyrö in Finland to the Skellefte River on the Swedish part of the coast.¹⁰¹ His colleague, the Swedish professor of Saami languages and culture Olavi Korhonen observes that the *Kainuu*-place names and their Saami equivalents in Sweden are typically found by places that were good for fishing and/or by the borders between administrative areas where coastal and inland populations met, when they did not lie along important highways. He visited most of these places and questioned local inhabitants.¹⁰² Places good for fishing might have been appealing to many people of different ancestries.

In any case, it is no wonder that this identity has been a long-standing problem. It more or less disappeared from the written sources, in tandem with integration

⁹⁹ Wallerström, *Kunglig makt*, 184–208.

¹⁰⁰ Hansen and Olsen, *Samenes historie*, 149–51. For recent contributions, Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia*, passim; Staffan Fridell, “Kväner och Kvänland: Ett tolkningsförslag,” in *Ortnamnssällskapet i Uppsala Årsskrift*, ed. Mats Walhberg and Staffan Nyström (Uppsala: Ortnamnssällskapet i Uppsala, 2023): 35–41.

¹⁰¹ Kyösti Julku, *Kvenland-Kainuunma* (Oulu: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Pohjoinen, 1986). A historiography on the matter is provided in this book (also in English).

¹⁰² Olavi Korhonen, “Natur och näringar på platser med Gáino- och Kainu-namn i Sverige,” in *Nordkalotten i en skiftande värld – kulturer utan gränser och stater över gränser*, ed. Kyösti Julku (Rovaniemi: Pohjois-Suomen Historiallinen Yhdistys, 1987), 62–82. Placenames referring to *Gáino*- and *Kainuu*-identities in Sweden can be found on page 87 in this work.

into the Swedish kingdom¹⁰³ – apparently being too dull for rational administrative purposes and therefore sinking in oblivion (for almost anybody but historians).

This is the heart of the problem of the identifications, I think, in addition to researchers' penchant for dichotomies and national categories.

These priorities have also been part of the old problem in interpreting the Nöteborg Treaty, its territoriality,¹⁰⁴ and the old question of “who” the *birkarlar* or Birkarls (Bircarlians) were: a group granted royal privileges in the fourteenth century within a system for taxation replaced at the beginning of the seventeenth.¹⁰⁵ There have been tremendous controversies regarding the identity of this group going back as far as the late seventeenth century. Where did they come from? Or more to the point: Were they Finnish- or Swedish-speakers?¹⁰⁶

Finnish historian Jouko Vahtola argues convincingly that the Swedish-speaking administrators needed a particular word for the local elite who had regular contact with Saami groups – a practice (previously established) placed under royal control by a royal privilege. This, I would add, was to be renewed (or not) when new kings came to power. No wonder the term is absent from contemporary sources outside the west and north of the Gulf.¹⁰⁷

This group, living by the mouths of the Torne, Lule, and Pite Rivers, were from that moment (1328 at the latest) brokers for royal dealings with the Saami. They brought commodities like furs to the coast and brought necessities back to the Saami in return. Nobody was allowed to interfere with this exchange, according to the royal decree of 1328. It was upheld by mutual interest, involving those of the Saami and the settled inhabitants recruited from the Swedish- and Finnish-

103 Lars Elenius, “The Dissolution of Ancient Kvenland and the Transformation of the Kvens as an Ethnic Group of People: On Changing Ethnic Categorizations in Communicative and Collective Memories,” *Acta Borealia* 36, no. 2 (2019): 117–48.

104 The Nöteborg discussion “started” for historians in the early nineteenth century; Gallén, *Nöteborgsfreden*, 1–2.

105 The *birkarlar* are much discussed; one recent example being Risto Nurmi, Jari Matti Kuusela, and Ville Hakamäki, “Swedenization of the North – the Early Medieval Northern Expansion and the Emergence of the Birkarls,” *Acta Borealia* 37, nos. 1–2 (2020): 1–26; Hansen and Olsen, *Samenes historie*, 151–52, 161, 226, 230–36.

106 Birger Steckzén, *Birkarlar och lappar*, 15–61.

107 Jouko Vahtola, “Birkarlaproblemet,” in *Nordkalotten i en skiftande värld – kulturer utan gränser och stater över gränser*, ed. Kyösti Julku (Rovaniemi: Pohjois-Suomen Historiallinen Yhdistys, 1988), 324–33; Wallerström, *Norrbotten*, 239–50.

speaking parts of the Bothnian coast. A neologism was needed for this group. (It is a myth that they employed force against the Saami.)¹⁰⁸

From this it is obvious that the early tax records were based on the way people practised their livelihood at least as often as on ethnicity. That was rational to the early modern administrators.

From this it follows that one and same person, in some cases, could be identified as a *Kvæn*, *Kajans*, *Kväner*, *Kainuulaiset*, or *Gáinolatj* – in addition to *Birkarl* if they were such a person. In fact, it has also been shown that one and same person could be categorized as a “lapp-man” *and* a settler, meaning a peasant, during the course of their life. Degree of residency and way of life were more rational criteria than ethnicity as a standard for classification, at least at times.¹⁰⁹ Is this not about hybridity? From this it also follows that we have a blind spot: We cannot expect the vicars and bailiffs of the past to have been sensitive social anthropologists accurately depicting the social landscape.

From the mid-sixteenth century on, they might have classified people in the North according to the needs of the state – the *raison d'état*. This was the case in Northern Norway for two hundred years. The classification of the Saami and the Kvens was not only ethnic: Ideological and political considerations were heavily at play in defining, categorizing, and re-categorizing the non-Norwegian population.¹¹⁰

This is what happened during the eighteenth century, when the main concern was establishing and consolidating the borders of the state – a kind of geographical enclosure and delimitation. Later, during the nineteenth century and through to the Second World War, however, the overriding goal was to depict all the inhabitants within these established borders as being as culturally homogeneous as possible. Today, it has become desirable once again to acknowledge the presence of both the Saami and the Kvens. (The Kvens are a minority group in the Norwegian part of Northern Scandinavia with roots in Finland, who have resided in Norway since at least the seventeenth century.)

This is not unique. Words change meaning over time, at pace with changes in their context.¹¹¹ The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein introduced a term for this

108 Hansen and Olsen, *Samenes historie*, 151–52; Ingela Bergman and Lars-Erik Edlund, “Birkarlar and Sámi – Intercultural Contacts beyond State Control: Reconsidering the Standing of External Tradesmen (Birkarlar) in Medieval Sámi Societies,” *Acta Borealia* 33, no. 1 (2016): 52–80.

109 Nils Arell, *Rennomadismen i Torne lappmark – markanvändning under kolonisationsepoken i fr. a. Enontekis socken* (Umeå: Kungl. Skytteanska Samfundet, 1977), 37–40.

110 Bjørg Evjen and Lars Ivar Hansen, “One People – Many Names; On Different Designations for the Sami Population in the Norwegian County of Nordland through the Centuries,” *Continuity and Change* 24, no. 2 (2009): 211–43.

111 This is the case with the terms for many human groups. The term *finne* is a prominent example, cf Wallerström, “Emerging Ethnonyms, Ethnicity and Archaeology”.

process: *Sprachspiel* [language game]. It is an analogy. He argued that a word, or even a sentence, has a different meaning depending on context – as if according to the rules of a game.¹¹²

The language game continues: today we can see a process of symbolic, transnational nation-building by national minorities – *Sápmi* and *Kvänland* – as new forms of ethnopolitics among Saami- and Finnish-speaking minorities in the North.¹¹³ People are rational, too, as they confront the *raison d'état* of contemporary nation states with interpretations of historical sources – their own. They try to regain lost land and water. Archaeology is involved in court proceedings,¹¹⁴ and are asked “who came first?”, facing a difficult historical and archaeological dilemma.¹¹⁵

These observations relate to the aforementioned question of “cultural diversity” as an object of epistemology. It cannot be taken for granted that the categories found in the written sources accurately depict a complex social reality in the past (like a “third space”) or the nationalist’s need for national identities for the purpose of historical legitimation.

Instead, the written sources *a priori* reflect practices: practices like taxation, economic transactions, struggles for political dominance, missionary work, the production of written records on the one hand, and practices like Saami hunting, fishing, and reindeer breeding on the other. Again:

all forms of culture are in a continuous process of hybridity, a new area for the negotiation of meaning and representation. Hybridity combines the traces of other meanings or discourses. “It does not invest them with the authority of being original: they are only prior in the sense of being anterior.”¹¹⁶

112 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

113 Lars Elenius, “Nationella minoritetens symboliska nationsbyggande,” *Historisk tidskrift* 138, no. 3 (2018).

114 Malin Brännström, “The Enhanced Role of Archaeological and Historical Research in Court Proceedings about Saami Land Use,” in *Currents of Saami Pasts. Recent Advances in Saami Archaeology*, ed. Marte Spangen, Anna-Kaisa Salmi, Tiina Äikäs, and Markus Fjellström (Helsinki: The Archaeological Society of Finland, 2020), 177–88.

115 Thomas Wallerström, *Vilka var först? En nordskandinavisk konflikt som historisk-arkeologiskt dilemma* (Stockholm: Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2006).

116 Bhabha, op. cit., 211.

13 Conclusions

A postcolonial approach was an eye-opener for me, as to how the rationalism of early modern administrators made an imprint on the written sources, which were in turn used by generations of researchers who all too often had a penchant for dichotomies and unwarranted monocultural and (certain) national categories (i.e., political agendas).

Describing such a social landscape as an arena of “cultural contact” populated by “cultural diversity” is inadequate. “Third places” and “third spaces” are *a priori* a better conceptual tool for such an analysis. Nor does “cultural diversity” properly describe the outcome or its eventual result over generations. “Cultural interaction” is an umbrella term rather than an analytical one. “Hybridity” is a better analytical concept, although not so much in archaeology, doubtlessly due to intrinsic theoretical, empirical, and methodological difficulties.¹¹⁷ It is not only a matter of tracing two original moments from which the “third” appears; again, hybridity allows *other* positions to appear.

There have been many such third places and third spaces – potential arenas for what was going on around 1600¹¹⁸ by the system of combined church/marketplaces in Lapland, towns and marketplaces by the coast (Figure 5.6), and probably in “the wild,” as I suggested above (Figures 5.8a–c). It also seems plausible to regard coastal Norrbotten as a third space and as having third places in the Middle Ages and later.

Applying a borderland perspective to the Finnish part of the Gulf, historical archaeologist Timo Ylimaunu and colleagues convincingly reconstructed a social landscape compatible with mine on the Swedish side of the border. People created “very specific materialities and subjectivities.” This was because political, social, and ideological dynamics between state societies produced two kinds of cultural spaces: hybrid third spaces and “fractured landscapes.” Although seemingly contradictory, these often emerged side by side in the same physical space, as has been archaeologically demonstrated.¹¹⁹

117 “Cultural hybridity” has also been critiqued due to its polarizing connotations and political undercurrents: Stephen W. Silliman, “A Requiem for Hybridity? The Problem with Frankensteins, Purées, and Mules,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 15, no. 3 (2015); Ville Hakamäki, “Late Iron Age Transculturalism in the Northern ‘Periphery’: Understanding the Long-Term Prehistoric Occupational Area of Vinivaara E, Finland,” *Acta Borealia* 33, no. 1 (2016): 31–32. Marcus Brittain and Timothy Clack, “Archaeologies of Cultural Contact. An Introduction.” In *Archaeologies of Cultural Contact. At the Interface*, edited by Marcus Brittain and Timothy Clack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 7–9.

118 Ragnar Bergling, *Kyrkstaden i övre Norrland* (Umeå: Skytteanska samfundet, 1964), 168–72.

119 Ylimaunu et al., “Borderlands as Spaces,” 245, with quotations.

Archaeologist Ville Hakamäki suggests the concept of “platforms for transculturalism” when discussing the culturally vague character of such places in the Finnish interior. Such third places or spaces (or platforms of transculturalism) are not really known from written sources because commercial activities outside the official marketplaces were forbidden by kings like Gustav Vasa¹²⁰ – an apparently empty gesture in a landscape such as this.

They are, however, within the reach of archaeology, as Hakamäki has demonstrated: sites with archaeological remains suggesting both local and foreign influence, but also a “mixing” of cultural traits and broader temporal and spatial horizons. These are typically well sheltered from the weather, situated beside bottlenecks in the systems of winter and summer communication.¹²¹ Places rich in natural resources like fish can be assumed to be another such category, appealing to anybody in need of food.

After all, humans are social creatures. And it must have been almost impossible to avoid crossing cultural borders (if they existed) in such a sparsely populated landscape. At least some visitors to hybrid places (or platforms of transculturalism) were curious, creative, clever, competitive, or enjoyed learning languages and socializing with strangers. Sometimes they fell in love with partners of a different culture. If so, this might have resulted in babies with relatives in different “camps.” I imagine that these (cute) little babies must have been the focus of attention from close relatives of different ancestries. These babies might have grown up in different cultural regimes. Translators, traders, and other “cultural brokers” (like the Birkarls) may have had such a background.

Prior to the eventual creation of states, nodes in the European peripheries like the north of Fennoscandia were zones that constituted meeting places. Plenty of clashes occurred in such zones but so did many trading arrangements and much intermingling.¹²² Today we also know that zones of convergence and hybridity, so-called frontiers, often developed distinctive social and cultural customs and civic/administrative structures, which differed markedly from those in core areas.¹²³

While historical scholarship focuses largely on frontier militarization, some medievalists have shown that “devices of arbitration, negotiation, trade and other

¹²⁰ Hugo Yrwing, “Landsköp,” in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid*, vol. 10 (Malmö: Allhems förlag, 1965), 282–91.

¹²¹ Hakamäki, “Late Iron Age Transculturalism,” 1–22.

¹²² Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 4.

¹²³ Ian P. Grohse, *Frontiers for Peace in the Medieval North: The Norwegian-Scottish Frontier c. 1260–1470* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 36, with quotations.

peaceful dealing equally characterize frontier life.”¹²⁴ “Ambiguity” is a central concept in recent frontier studies: ambiguous identities, ambiguous jurisdictions, and ambiguous political loyalties¹²⁵ – just like the territoriality of the Nöteborg treaty, the identities of Birkarls, and the vague identity of the *Kvæns*, *Kajans*, *Kväner*, *Kainuulaiset*, and *Gáinolatj* referred to above – all “evergreens” in Northern Fennoscandian research.

It is more likely than not that the researcher working in “European peripheries” will occasionally come across *vague* identities. All culture is more or less vague – at least according to Bhabha. Through his neologisms (like hybridity, interstice, liminality) he argues that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent, that’s “the” location of culture according to him. This was referred to in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994/2004), which had not yet been published at the time of his interview.

Guiding principles like *raison d'état*, regalism (*iura regni*), and the *dominium* doctrine of shared ownership as highlighted by Nils Johan Pääviö, must have been highly relevant everywhere in Gustav Vasa’s Sweden. These strategies for dominance no doubt left an imprint on the character of the written sources and the cultural landscape, too; through establishing places for trade, the administration of justice, and Christianity – all meant to regulate human behaviour in favour of political elites trying to impose *their* visions of social order.

Political doctrines and practices like warfare, diplomacy, and social strategies were successful in making subjects economically and ideologically dependant. In the long run they resulted in the present state borders and their sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century precursors.

The implementation of this Eurocentric ideology was firmly situated within a Western European political structure that was simultaneously involved in global colonialism and its aftermath in the postcolonial diasporas in Europe. There have been many political doctrines of different genealogies, available for future investigation.¹²⁶ What did they mean to “ordinary” people?

A postcolonial perspective makes it easier to find words for the “this and that” that made the European “core areas” into political centres and that made other areas “peripheral.” And, as I have tried to show, made places and spaces “third.”

¹²⁴ Ibid., 35–36.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 5–6, with quotations.

¹²⁶ My article in *Arctic Anthropology* (2009) is another such example that discusses the significance of a twelfth-century doctrine in forging North Atlantic centre–periphery relations in the Middle Ages.

This is very much about explaining why the character and composition of archaeological and written sources was like it was at different points in time and exploring why that composition changed. It is about a contextual archaeological and historical analysis of developments in “remote areas.”

14 Final Thoughts

Writing my PhD, I was interested in “solving” old problems, as the subtitle indicated (“Problems Concerning Power and Settlement on a European Periphery”). These were issues defined by previous generations of researchers. I now realize that my perspectives were a bit narrow.

I now know more about what can be expected when people of different ancestries come together. Bhabha introduced a terminology to be considered when interpreting Northern Scandinavian archaeological and written sources: *hybridization, imitation, cultural uncertainty, cultural translations, negotiations, etc.*

This is about what really happened beneath the surface of “cultural encounters” and what was hidden behind the label of “cultural diversity.” This was largely a closed world to me at the time of writing. Moreover, I did not realize the impact of rationalism as a mode of thinking when applied to the art of government and (indirectly) to research based on written sources.

My main methodology was to work comparatively while trying to locate the “origins” of the settlement structure known from 1543. I tried to find “parallels” and connections with “external structures.” In so doing, I was doomed to overlook hybridity when interpreting my excavation in the late 1970s, a grave site “of Iron Age character” at a place officially called Kyrkudden, by the Torne River, on the Swedish side of the border, some 50 km from the river mouth.

Besides the eleven more or less partial graves, an old marketplace was identified. It had been in use from the fourteenth to the early seventeenth century.¹²⁷ The burials “began” earlier (in the eleventh or twelfth century) and the most recent ones appeared to be later than the marketplace – which was a surprise because a chapel had been built close to the graves in 1618. Christianity as (parish) organization, however, was already established there in the fourteenth century. It had not had the desired effect.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Wallerström, *Norrbottnen*, 109–47. The archaeological report is published as an appendix in vol. 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 114–28.

Although limited in number, I had expected to identify close parallels to “my” excavated graves in certain parts of Finland and/or present-day Russia, if not elsewhere in Scandinavia (Figure 5.2). The closest parallels were a couple of (Karelian?) “houses of the dead.” Luckily, the reconstruction of the local economy was illuminating – it was much easier to identify similarities in parts of Finland than it was in Sweden or Norway. The place names, as interpreted by Jouko Vahtola in his PhD thesis from 1980, were also helpful.¹²⁹

Lately, Finnish colleagues have provided an explanation for the “lack of uniformity” in the graves. Such variation is simply what is to be expected: a fluidity of adaptations of cultural features in the North as well as distinct similarities between communities. Such a variation was “the norm” in the decentralized network that existed in Northern Sweden, Finland, and on the White Sea coast in Russia between the ninth and sixteenth centuries.¹³⁰

This indicates that burials like those at Kyrkudden, in the parish of Hieta-niemi, contain people of different traditions and – probably – hybridity. On the opposite side of the river is a village (or hamlet) with parallel names in Finnish (Kainuunkylä) and Swedish (Hälsingebyn). With its nearby marketplace, I now understand this to be a third space.¹³¹ This accords with Olavi Korhonen’s observations on how the *Kainuu* place names were distributed in liminal zones, when they were not simply good places for fishing – attractive to strangers as well as to the locals. In this case the toponym refers to a village/hamlet of such a category.

I think some of the findings as to how the settled population came to being, can be described well by terms like “ambiguity,” “hybridization,” “imitation,” “cultural uncertainty,” etc. on this “platform of transculturalism.” In my own defence for my previous mistake, if necessary, all I can do is refer to a truism: research is always based on the perspectives of previous researchers, whether for good or for bad. That is the situation we are all in.

129 Jouko Vahtola, *Tornionjoki- ja Kemijokilaakson asutuksen synty. Nimistötieteellinen ja historiallinen tutkimus* (Rovaniemi: Pohjois-Suomen Historiallinen Yhdistys, 1980). Cf. however Birger Winsa, *Östligt eller västligt? Det äldsta ordförrådet i gällivarefinskan och tornedalsfinskan* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991).

130 Hanna-Leena Poulakka and Jari-Matti Kuusela, “Burial Practices in Northern Sweden, Northern Finland and the White Sea Coast between the 9th and 16th Centuries AD: Adaptation of Practices in a Decentralised Network,” *Fennoscandia archaeologica* 39 (2022): 28–54.

131 Wallerström, *Norrbotnen*, 115.

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Carina Damm

Chapter 6

Honey, Bones, and Furs: The Saami and the Bjarmians as Brokers in the Early Medieval Trade between Scandinavia and the Islamic World

Introduction

Within Old Norse literature, Fennoscandian peoples such as the Saami and the mysterious Bjarmians are widely depicted as hostile “strangers” and “heathen” others who stand in opposition to the magnates and heroes of the Scandinavian North. The sagas present “Finnar” as skilled magicians, often Saami,¹ who bring trouble and misfortune.² This article challenges that stereotype, by highlighting the positive side of the transfer processes between the Scandinavians and their closest, yet different and marginalized, neighbours. Specifically, I will argue in favour of the vital role of the Saami and another Nordic population, the Bjarmians, as mediators, or “brokers,” in the long-distance trading networks of the early Middle Ages. This will be done by examining the trade in furs and skins, which connected Indigenous actors with the “Austrvegr,” or Eastern Route, that led from the Baltic Sea³ to Rus’ and stretched as far as the Abbasid Caliphate in the South.⁴

1 However, the modern Icelandic word *finni* designates a person from Finland, whereas the term bore different connotations in the Middle Ages. See Sirpa Aalto, *Categorizing Otherness in the Kings’ Sagas* (Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland Publications, 2010), 115–16.

2 Aalto, *Categorizing*, 210.

3 On Scandinavian-Slavic interrelations in the Baltic Sea region, see Jakub Morawiec, *Vikings among the Slavs: Jomsborg and the Jomsvikings in Old Norse Tradition*, *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia* 17 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2009), and now Carina Damm, *Händler, Piraten, S(k)laven: Die südliche Ostsee in der altnordischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Fassbaender, forthcoming).

4 The term “broker” will be applied following the definition of Antje Dietze, to mean a mediator who is “necessary to arrange contact, provide access and information, translate, conduct negotiations, and facilitate transactions in various transregional or transnational constellations.” See Antje Dietze, “Cultural Brokers and Mediators,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*, ed. Matthias Middell (London/New York: Routledge, 2018), 494.

1 Fennoscandia: A Fur-Trading Hub from Prehistoric to Late Medieval Times

Long before the late medieval colonization of Sápmi,⁵ furs from the cold taiga region formed the main pillar of trade in the lands east of Fennoscandia, particularly Rus' and the Islamic world. This trade involved the Saami and Bjarmians as indispensable suppliers of furs and pelts.⁶ Starting in the late eighth century, Scandinavian chieftains, Khazars, Volga Bulgars, Rus', and – in the eleventh century – the organized cities of Novgorod and Rostov-Suzdal', all built their prosperous economies around the trade in squirrel, marten, beaver, and fox furs. The Indigenous populations of the Scandinavian Peninsula, the Saami, provided these in abundance. Through these exchange processes, new human and non-human actors at one of the northernmost ends of the Viking world were brought into a Nordic focus. Among these elements, we might, for instance, ascribe agency to unexplored territories, objects, and materials, as well as distant cultures. Thus, during the mid-eighth century, Finnish people and the Ves' settling south of Lake Onega and east of Lake Ladoga instigated the development of one of the most important gateways to the riches of the East: Staraya Ladoga. There, on the shores of the Volkhov River, furs were exchanged for the other two elements of the commercial triad of the Middle Ages: silver dirhams and slaves.⁷ These were highly coveted commodities in a long-distance trading network – one that had been operating all the more intensely ever since actors from the Islamic world, the Black Sea regions, and Byzantium had signalled their interest in the splendours of the

5 See most recently on the topic Solveig Marie Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia: An Interdisciplinary Study of Norse-Saami Relations in the Medieval Period* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

6 Inga-Marie Mulk, "The Role of the Sámi in Fur-Trading During the Late Iron Age and Nordic-Medieval Period in the Light of the Sámi Sacrificial Sites in Lapland," *Acta Borealia* 13, no. 1 (1996): 48.

7 On the massive influx of Islamic silver dirhams into the Baltic Sea region, see Marek Jankowiak, "Two Systems of Trade in the Western Slavic Lands in the 10th Century," in *Economies, Monetisation and Society in the West Slavic Lands*, ed. Mateusz Bogucki and Marian Rębkowski (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo IAE PAN; Wydawnictwo WH US, 2013), 137–148, and most recently Marek Jankowiak, "The Flows of Dirhams to North-eastern Europe and the Rhythms of the Slave Trade with the Islamic World," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Jonathan Shepard, and Marek Jankowiak (London/New York: Routledge, 2021), 105–131. For a recent overview on the importance of slavery for the northern European economies in the Middle Ages, see Felix Biermann and Marek Jankowiak, eds, *The Archaeology of Slavery in Early Medieval Northern Europe: The Invisible Commodity* (Cham: Springer, 2021).

Fennoscandian resources.⁸ The central role of the Saami as suppliers of skins and furs is attested by numerous textual sources that span over one and a half millennium in time, which will be supplemented below with evidence obtained from archaeological research.

2 Earliest Textual Traces from Classical Antiquity

The earliest textual insights come from the Roman historian and senator Tacitus (c. 58–120), who reports in ch. 46 of his *Germania* on the “Fenni” (presumably the Saami), described as living “mira feritas, foeda paupertas” [in astonishing barbarism and disgusting misery].⁹ Further, he notes the following:

non arma, non equi, non penates; victui herba, vestitui pelles, cubile humus: solae in sagittis spes, quas inopia ferri ossibus asperant. idemque venatus viros pariter ac feminas alit; passim enim comitantur partemque praedae petunt. nec aliud infantibus ferarum imbriumque suffugium, quam ut in aliquo ramorum nexu contegantur: huc redeunt iuvenes, hoc senum receptaculum. sed beatius arbitrantur quam ingemere agris, inlaborare domibus, suas alienasque fortunas spe metuque versare; securi adversus homines, securi adversus deos rem difficillimam adsecuti sunt, ut illis ne voto quidem opus esset.

[They have] no arms, no horses, no household; wild plants for their food, skins for their clothing, the ground for their beds; arrows are all their hopes; for want of iron they tip them with sharp bone. This same hunting is the support of the women as well as of the men, for they accompany the men freely and claim a share of the spoil; nor have their infants any shelter against wild beasts and rain, except the covering afforded by a few intertwined branches. To these the young men return: these are the asylum of age; and yet they think it happier so than to groan over field labour, be cumbered with building houses, and be for ever involving their own and their neighbours' fortunes in alternate hopes and fears. Unconcerned towards men, unconcerned towards Heaven, they have achieved a consummation very difficult: they have nothing even to ask for.¹⁰

This earliest mention of the Saami from around 98 CE portrays them as primitive, poor, and godless creatures. They are closely connected with their natural envi-

⁸ Mats Roslund, “Bringing ‘the Periphery’ into Focus: Social Interaction between Baltic Finns and the Svear in the Viking Age and Crusade Period (c. 800 to 1200),” in *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund (Turnhout: Brill, 2017), 180.

⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on Oratory*, trans. M. Hutton, W. Peterson, revised by R. M. Ogilvie, E. H. Warmington, and Michael Winterbottom (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 212–13.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on Oratory*, 212–15.

ronment, which supplies them with nourishment in the form of plants and with the skins in which they are clothed.

Their sole distinguishing feature is their craftsmanship in producing arrows that, as Tacitus underlines, are tipped with bones instead of iron. Tacitus's impression of Saami crafts is corroborated by the archaeological, and more precisely osteological, data from the animals listed below that have been unearthed in Finno-Ugric settlements in today's Northern Russia. The data reveal special techniques for the hunting of fur-bearing animals, such as squirrels or beavers, using blunt-tip arrowheads made of deer or moose antler bone.¹¹ The scarcity of iron mentioned by Tacitus is likewise reflected in the archaeological record from the taiga zone that stretches like a belt over almost the entire Northern Hemisphere. Extensively worn iron knives have been discovered at the Ortinsk hillfort (*Ортинское городище*), which was established in the sixth century and is situated about twenty kilometres from the Barents Sea. The finds indicate that metal was indeed a rare and intensively used commodity in that northernmost part of Russia.¹² Further finds from the same site, including imported glass and ceramic beads dated from between the ninth and eleventh centuries, a broken blunt-tip arrowhead, as well as the bones of beavers, polar foxes, and hares, prove that the local Finno-Ugric population of the Pechora River region was directly engaged in early medieval long-distance trade.¹³

Parallel to the establishment of the Ortinsk settlement, the Mediterranean saw the first mention of Fennoscandia as the source of highly sought-after, rare, luxury furs. Thus, around the year 551, Jordanes reports, presumably from Constantinople, on a flourishing trade between the Svear and the Romans. The latter were, according to the Gothic historian, particularly eager to obtain the extraordinarily dark and beautiful furs from the circumpolar region (*Getica* III.21):

11 With these blunt tips, the arrowheads would merely stun the struck animal until the hunter could approach it, and would – most importantly – leave the skin and fur of the animal intact. See Roman K. Kovalev, “The Infrastructure of the Northern Part of the Fur Road between the Middle Volga and the East during the Middle Ages,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 11 (2001): 36. On the possible early origins of the Saami, see also the recent article by Asgeir Svestad and Bjørnar Olsen, “Archaeology, Language, and the Question of Sámi Ethnogenesis,” *Acta Archaeologica* 93, no. 2 (2023): 1–29.

12 O. V. Ovsiannikov, “Plemennoi tsentr letopisnoi ‘Pechery’ na beregu Ledovitogo Okeana (Ortinskoe gorodishche VI–X vv.),” in *Novye istochniki po arkheologii severo-zapada*, ed. Vadim Masson and E. N. Nosov (St Petersburg: Institut istorii material’noi kul’tury, 1994), 149.

13 Ovsiannikov, “Plemennoi tsentr letopisnoi,” 150, 152.

Alia vero gens ibi moratur Suehans, quae velud Thyringi equis utuntur eximiis. Hi quoque sunt, qui in usibus Romanorum sappherinas pelles commercio interveniente per alias innumeras gentes transmittunt, famosi pellium decora nigridine. Hi cum inopes vivunt, ditissime vestiuntur.¹⁴

Another tribe that lives there are the Suehans who like the Thuringians use outstanding horses. The Suehans are those who, through commercial activities with innumerable other nations, export sapphire-coloured skins for use of the Romans: they are famed for the fine blackness of these skins. And although they live in poverty, they are dressed richly.¹⁵

Olof Sundqvist and Torun Zachrisson have pointed out that the *Getica* is probably referring to the trade in Arctic fox pelts, which the “Suehans” [Svear] acquired from the neighbouring “Screrefennae” [Saami], about whom Jordanes reports in a preceding passage.¹⁶ If fur-wearing Saami people had been commonly associated with barbarian habits that were confined to uncivilized northerners,¹⁷ Jordanes’s note evokes the idea of a shift in the mindset of classical antiquity in the mid-sixth century.

3 Latin and Old English Medieval Sources

The Byzantine picture is complemented by additional notes from the Central European *latinitas* in the form of Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, which was put into writing around the year 1075. One of the scholia¹⁸ (no. 137) to his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* alludes to the “Skritefingi” as par-

¹⁴ Theodor Mommsen, ed., *Iordanis Romana et Getica* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1882), 59.

¹⁵ Jordanes, *Romana and Getica*, trans. Peter van Nuffelen and Lieve van Hoof (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 230.

¹⁶ See Olof Sundqvist, *An Arena for Higher Powers: Ceremonial Buildings and Religious Strategies for Rulership in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), 36; Torun Zachrisson, “Exotiska föremål och nya seder under mellersta järnåldern,” in *Förmodern globalitet: Essäer om rörelse, möten och fjärran ting under 10000 år*, ed. Anders Andrén (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011), 123–24.

¹⁷ James Howard-Johnston, “The Fur Trade in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak, and Jonathan Shepard (London/New York: Routledge, 2021), 59.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the scholia (i.e., marginal or interlinear explanatory notes) to Adam’s *Gesta*, see Carina Damm, “*Ad insulas Baltici*. Role and Reception of Scholia in Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*,” in *Adam of Bremen’s Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. Grzegorz Bartusik, Radosław Biskup, and Jakub Morawiec (London/New York: Routledge, 2023), 96–107.

tially Christianized inhabitants of Hälsingland, where snow perpetually covers the “Hyperborean mountains.” The men were hardened by the cold, did not care for the shelter of their houses, and made use of the flesh of wild animals for food and of their pelts for clothing. A little later, in his fourth book, *Description of the Northern Lands* (chapter 31), *magister* Adam again highlights the substantial importance of big game in the snowy mountains, whereas black foxes, hares, and white martens were only to be found in Norway. This might allude to the agency of Saami fur hunters and traders on today’s Norwegian territory, even though the *Gesta* do not explicitly specify as much.

Drawing upon Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta*, the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus reports in his *Gesta Danorum* around the year 1200 on the “Skrit(h)finni” or “Scricfinni,” whom he describes as passionate hunters living in the eastern part of Fennoscandia.¹⁹ According to Saxo, they stood out as extraordinarily skilled skiers who ventured beyond even the most remote parts of the mountains to reach their desired hunting grounds. The first element of the ethnonym might thus derive from the Old Norse lexeme *skriða* (“to glide” or “to travel on skis or snowshoes”), which is already mirrored in Jordanes’s semantics on the hunting “Screrefennae.” From Saxo’s *Gesta* we also learn that the Saami would often use animal skins instead of money as a medium of exchange when trading with their neighbours.

The significance of furs as a form of tribute is, in turn, already described several centuries earlier by the Norwegian traveller Ohthere, who around the year 890 relates how Northern Norwegian chieftains and Scandinavian traders primarily accumulated wealth by demanding tribute from the Saami (“Finnas”), which was paid, for instance, in deer skins and ship rope made of whale and seal hide. All payments would have been made according to the rank of birth, with the highest status persons delivering the skins of fifteen marten, five reindeer, and one bear, as well as ten measures of bearskin coats or otter skin.²⁰

¹⁹ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. Peter Fisher, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16.

²⁰ Niels Lund, ed., *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred: The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan Together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius* (York: W. Sessions, 1984).

4 Trade with the Islamic World in Arab and Rus' Sources

It was not only Gothic, German, and Scandinavian authors who considered it worthwhile to preserve a common knowledge about these close entanglements between Scandinavian, Indigenous Finnic, and Rus' actors in the medieval fur trade. Moreover, a new appetite for furs arose in the young, desert-born Islamic world by c. 750, when the Abbasid dynasty took over the caliphate. In the new political centre Baghdad, furs soon became a luxury item demonstrating status among the elite. Thus, it is said that the fifth Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809), the initiator of the Islamic Golden Age, possessed 4,000 sable robes in his treasury.²¹ As is well attested by Arab historiographers, such as al-Mas'ūdī (c. 896–956), fashionable furs of the finest quality had by the ninth century already become luxury items, extraordinarily coveted by the wealthy elite of the urbanized Islamic Orient.²² This new demand was satisfied by the fur-producing areas of the cold taiga region, where the thickest and softest pelts originated in their purest colouring.²³ Once more from an Arab source, an account by the tenth-century geographer Ibn Ḥawqal, we learn that beaver pelts were exported throughout the world, but were only found on the northern rivers of the territory of the Rus', the Bulgars, and Kūbāya, which was how he denoted Kyiv. Ibn Ḥawqal also related that the imports of honey and wax came from the territories of the Rus' and the middle Volga region of the Bulghār.²⁴

One of the most revealing sources on the fur trade between the Islamic caliphate and Finno-Ugric populations are two travelogues by Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī (1080–1169), known under the titles *al-Mu'rib 'an ba'd 'aja'ib al-Maghrib* [Praise of

²¹ Moshe Gil, "The Radhanite Merchants and the Land of Radhan," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17, no. 3 (1974): 56.

²² See Søren M. Sindbæk, "A Site of Intersection: Staraya Ladoga, Eastern Silver, and Long-Distance Communication Networks in Early Medieval Europe," in *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 83; Roman K. Kovalev, "The Infrastructure of the Northern Part of the 'Fur Road' between the Middle Volga and the East during the Middle Ages," *Archivum Eurasiae medii aevii* 11 (2001): 25–64.

²³ Johan Callmer, "The Rise of the Dominion of the ar-Rus in the Northern Parts of Eastern Europe, Seventh to Ninth Centuries A.D: A Case of Culture Construction," in *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 155; Janet Martin, *Treasure of the Land of Darkness: The Fur Trade and its Significance for Medieval Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1.

²⁴ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ibn Ḥawqal's Kitāb Šūrat Al-Arḍ: Opus geographicum*, ed. Johannes Hendrik Kramers (Leiden: Brill, 1873; reprint 2014), 393.

Some of the Wonders of North Africa] and *Tuhfat al-albab wa nukhbat al-‘aja’ib* [The Gift of the Hearts and Bouquet of Wonders]. Little is known about the adventurous life of that traveller from Zirid Granada, whose exploratory spirit took him from al-Andalus via Sicily, where he witnessed Mount Etna in full eruption, to the centre of the Islamic world, namely Baghdad and Mosul, where his two accounts originated.²⁵ Replete with wondrous episodes and a clear interest in law, climate, and trade, al-Gharnāṭī’s account provides abundant details about his long stay in Volga Bulgaria between 1136 and 1150 at a place called Saqṣīn, presumably the successor of the Khazar capital of Itil, and Bulghār.²⁶ In one of the chapters, the learned Andalusī traveller reveals how the Bulgars demand taxes from a people called Wisū who live one month’s march away. The Wisū are presumably to be identified with a Finno-Ugric tribe known from the Old Slavonic *Povest’ vremennykh let* (*Primary Chronicle*; henceforth: *PVL*)²⁷ as the Ves’; i.e., today’s Veps, who settled between the Lakes Ladoga, Onega, and Beloye. Another people, according to al-Gharnāṭī, are the Arū: “They live where very good beaver, ermine and grey squirrel are hunted. There, in summer, the day is twenty-two hours long. The best and highest-quality beaver pelts come from those parts.”²⁸

Although the Wisū are rather easily identifiable as Veps, the fur-providing Arū have puzzled scholarship since the early nineteenth century, and a clear ethnographic ascription remains to be accomplished. Judging from al-Gharnāṭī’s description, the Arū would have settled in the upper reaches of the Kazanka River in today’s Tatarstan, a region that during the Middle Ages was known under the name *Арская земля* [Arskaya land].

Besides the Arū and Wisū, Al-Gharnāṭī knows of a third Indigenous population engaged in the early medieval trade in honey, sable skins, swords, and bones between Fennoscandia, Volga Bulghāria, and Islam:

25 Évariste Lévi-Provençal, “Abū Ḥamid al-Gharnāṭī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, ed. Thierry Bianquis et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

26 Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, trans. Caroline Stone and Paul Lunde (London: Penguin Books, 2011), xxvii.

27 The *Povest’ vremennykh let* (“Tale of Bygone Years”) is the most important source for the history of the early Rus’. Compiled in Kyiv in about 1116, it is based on older West and South Slavonic texts, as well as Byzantine chronicles and oral sources. Though controversial due to its late date (the oldest extant manuscript is dated to 1377), it is the only source for many events in eleventh-century Rus’. For an English-language translation of the *PVL*, see Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans., *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1953).

28 Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan*, 69.

Beyond Wisū, there is a region known as Yūrā, on the Sea of Darkness. They have nothing but huge trees and forests, in which honey is gathered. They also have great numbers of sable, the flesh of which they eat. The merchants take to them [. . .] swords [. . .] and the bones of cows and sheep in exchange for sable skins, and so make great profits.²⁹

In the following, the Andalusī traveller gives a detailed itinerary of the trade flows in the opposite direction, from the Islamic countries to the North:

Now, these swords are exported from the lands of Islam to Bulghār with great profit for the merchants. Then the people of Bulghār take them to Wisū, the place of the beavers, and the people of Wisū take them to Yūrā, where they sell them for sable pelts, slave girls and young boys.³⁰

The Yūra mentioned here are presumably the Iugra known from the *PVL*, where they are described as “людьє єсть язъкъ нѣмъ, и сосѣдять с Самоядью на полунощныхъ сторонахъ”³¹ [an alien people dwelling in the north with the Samoyeds].³² In a curious passage, the chronicle tells how the Iugra apparently only recently settled in the North. Corroborating the role of the Yūrā as providers of pelts in return for swords, the *PVL* goes on to state how these creatures, presumably Samodeic people, would point at “желъзо, и помавають рукою, просяще желъза; и аще кто дасть имъ ножъ ли, ли секиру, и онц дають скорою противу”³³ [iron objects, and make gestures as if to ask for them. If given a knife or an axe, they supply furs in return].³⁴

Another Old Slavonic source, the fourteenth-century Novgorod First Chronicle (*letopis*), records for the year 1193 that a Novgorodian army mounted a major campaign against the Iugra, capturing one “gorod” [fortified settlement] after another. Luring them into a trap, the Iugra offered the Novgorodian voivode silver and sable and pleaded with them to spare their slaves and the source of their tribute. After having invited all the Novgorodian commanders to negotiations, the Iugra killed most of the attackers inside a fortification, while those who survived

29 Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan*, 70.

30 Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan*, 72.

31 Mikhail B. Sverdlov and Varvara P. Adrianova-Peretts, eds, *Povest' vremennykh let*, trans. Dmitrii Sergeevič Lichačëv, revised 2nd edition (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1996), 107. The ethnonym “Samoyed” entered the Russian lexicon as a folk etymological modification of the endonym *Saamod*, thus erroneously designating them as self-eaters (“samoedy”). This idea might already be reflected in the account of the *PVL* and may explain why Samoyedic people continued to be described as inhumane cannibals; for example, as in a travelogue from the year 1670. However, the endonym *Saamod* can eventually be traced to the same root as *suomi* (“Finns”) and *sami*.

32 Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 184.

33 Sverdlov and Adrianova-Peretts, *Povest' vremennykh let*, 107.

34 Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 184.

were held captive for a year.³⁵ Given the lack of naturally occurring silver deposits in that part of today's Northern Russia, Elena A. Rybina suggests that the silver offered by the Iugra had reached the Finno-Ugric populations east of the Urals as early as the sixth century, more precisely in the form of Byzantine and Sasanian vessels that were exchanged for precious furs.³⁶ These rhythms of silver flows to the subpolar regions might likewise be reflected in Arab accounts as well as in prose and legal sources from the medieval North, as will be shown.

5 Between East and West: Bjarmian Furs in Old Norse and Rus' Sources

In high medieval Iceland, vibrant prose narratives and skaldic poetry attest to centuries-long relations of trade and exchange in the eastern margins of the Viking world. We can deduce from the following Norse sources that Scandinavians who visited the territories inhabited by Finno-Ugric tribes were attracted by the silver objects they encountered, which would have been used for religious purposes, as utility objects, or as symbols of power. In turn, these attributes made them highly coveted goods that could be acquired either by looting or via tax and tribute collection.

One of the best-known prose narratives from medieval Iceland, *Heimskringla*, tells how Þórir hundr, a mighty chieftain from Northern Norway and an adversary of the Norwegian King Óláfr Haraldsson, undertook a trading expedition to the neighbouring Bjarmians. This is a hitherto not clearly identified Finno-Ugric population that settled around the White Sea, perhaps ancestors of the Komi-Permyaki who today live mostly on the upper Kama River.³⁷ The story starts with a journey to the White Sea, described as extraordinarily dangerous even though it took place during the summer on well frequented routes. Upon their arrival in Bjarmaland, Þórir hundr and his companions find their way to an emporium and

35 Arsenii Nikolaevich Nasonov, ed., *Novgorodskaiia pervaiia letopis' starshego i mladshego izvoda* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1950; reprint, The Hague and Paris: Europe Printing, 1969), 40–41.

36 Elena Aleksandrovna Rybina, *Torgovlia srednevekovogo Novgoroda: Istoriko-arkheologicheskie ocherki* (Velikii Novgorod: Novgorodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2001), 228–29; Roman K. Kovalev, *The Infrastructure of the Novgorodian Fur Trade in the Pre-Mongol Era (ca. 900–ca. 1240)* (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2002), 189.

37 The ancestors of the Komi-Zyrians may have migrated from the area of the Vyatka River, provoked by pressure from the Volga Bulgars pushing them to migrate to the basin of the Vychegda River, a tributary to the Northern Dvina.

start trading. As the saga recounts, Þórir acquires a huge number of grey furs, as well as beaver and sable skins – as does his wealthy Norwegian companion Karli, who with “allmikit fé [. . .] keypti skinnavörum margum”³⁸ [a very great deal of money (buys) many fur goods].³⁹ After the closure of the market, the trading companions make their way along the Dvina River; i.e., in the settlement area of today’s Komi. According to the saga, once they come ashore, they reach a Bjarmian sanctuary devoted to the god Jómali, whose giant statue holds in its lap a bowl filled with silver coins, which Þórir readily pours into his tunic.⁴⁰

A little later, the text reveals further details about the geography of the trade in the precious goods that Þórir acquired in Bjarmaland. Thus, chapter 139 of *Óláfs saga helga* states that the Northern Norwegian chieftain made his way to England, where he was welcomed by King Knútr inn ríki, having with him all the money they had looted and carrying a great barrel with a false bottom filled with grey furs as well as beaver and sable.⁴¹ The appeal and profitability of the English market is further confirmed by late medieval English customs registers that mention furs of different kinds, such as red and grey squirrel, beaver, otter, bear, elk, and lynx that were imported from Norway to the British Isles.⁴²

Apart from trade with the West (i.e., Norway and England), Rus’ sources also attest to the vital role of the Komi-Bjarmians as primary suppliers in the medieval fur trade in the opposite, easterly direction. Thus, the *PVL* mentions the “пермь” [Perm’] (presumably the Old Norse *Bjarmar* and today’s Komi) as paying taxes to the Rus’.⁴³ By the end of the eleventh century, the Komi territory became subject to the Novgorodians, who collected taxes among them, especially in the form of the unit of forty furs known in Russian as “сорочок” [sorochook].⁴⁴ Mervi Koskela

38 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla II* (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1945), 229.

39 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla II, Óláfr Haraldsson (The Saint)*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research), 152.

40 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla II, Óláfr Haraldsson (The Saint)*, 153. The motif of a silver vessel, in turn, recurs in other saga episodes; for example, in *Yngvar’s saga víðförla*, where an Icelandic Viking raider with the telling name Ketill (Old Norse for “kettle, cauldron”) steals a silver cauldron from a giant in Garðaríki. *Órvar-Odds saga* also mentions a cauldron filled with silver in the land of the giants, and as such introduces a further common literary pattern, namely the association of giants with Fennoscandia. See Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, eds, *Vikings in Russia: Yngvar’s Saga and Eymund’s Saga* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 51.

41 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla II, Óláfr Haraldsson (The Saint)*, 169.

42 See Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Medieval Arctic Norway* (Warszawa: Institute of the History of Material Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences, 1992), 231.

43 Sverdlov and Adrianova-Peretts, *Povest’ vremennykh let*, 10.

44 Furs were commonly packed into bundles of forty items (*sorochni*), and this prevailed as the standard unit for packaging furs from early medieval times until modernity. On the *sorochook*

Vasaru has argued that relations between Scandinavians and Bjarmians seem to have been sporadic yet intense, both in terms of trade and raiding expeditions.⁴⁵ That picture is corroborated by *Óláfs saga helga*, discussed above, which relates how Norwegian travellers return from Bjarmaland to their homelands with abundant booty. Also, Saxo's *Gesta* reports on how the Swedish champion Arngrimus returns from Bjarmaland "spoliis tropheisque auctus" [laden with spoils and trophies].⁴⁶

When following Norwegian movements to Bjarmaland, we might raise the question of whether mobility processes also occurred in the opposite direction, from Finno-Ugric into Scandinavian territories. In that respect, little is known. What we can, however, deduce from Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (1264–65) is that only a decade before the saga was put into writing, many Bjarmians were settled around Malangen in Northern Norway. As a reason for their forced migration, Sturla mentions a conflict with the Tatars, who eventually pushed them westwards, where they were given permission to settle.⁴⁷ But who were these Tatars? Once more drawing upon the Novgorod *letopis*, we learn of recurring Mongol activity in Novgorod and Lithuania around 1260. A later mention in *Hákonar saga* corroborates this view when stating: "gengu Tattarar á ríki Hólmgarða-konungs" [the Tatars went into the realm of the King of Hólmgarðr (Novgorod)].⁴⁸

Continuing from Bjarmaland along the "Austrvegr," we enter the similarly puzzling kingdom of Bjálkaland. This toponym is mentioned in the Old Norse literature only once, in *Qrvar-Odds saga*. It designates a pagan territory ruled by the sorcerer Álfr bjálki. He pays tribute to the Norwegians and is visited by the saga hero Qrvar-Oddr to collect taxes. Another incentive to travel eastwards is King Herrauðr of Húnanland's offer to betroth his daughter Silkisif to the man who succeeds in collecting the tribute, which provides additional motivation to Oddr.⁴⁹ Already in the late nineteenth century, Richard Constant Boer plausibly identified the toponym Bjálkaland as cognate to the Russian word "белка" (*belka*), meaning squirrel.⁵⁰ Moreover,

unit, see R. K. Kovalev, "Birki-sorochki: upakovka mekhovoykh shkurok v Srednevekovom Novgorode," *Novgorodskii istoricheskii sbornik*, vol. 9 (St Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2013).

45 Mervi Koskela Vasaru, *Bjarmaland* (Oulu: University of Oulu, 2016), 163.

46 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 342–43.

47 Koskela Vasaru, *Bjarmaland*, 427.

48 Marina Mundt, ed., *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar etter Sth. 8 fol, AM 325 VIII,4° og AM 304,4°* (Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institutt, 1977), 209.

49 Margaret Clunies Ross, ed., *Qrvar-Odds saga* 59 (Gyðja, Lausavísur 1), in *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 874.

50 Richard Constant Boer, "Über die Qrvar-Odds saga," *ANF* 8 (1892): 87.

the king's name Álfr may be reminiscent of the Latin "albus" [white], which evokes further associations with the extraordinary quality of the thick and shiny pelts of the fur-bearing animals traded from the cold taiga region. Notwithstanding the inaccuracy of the toponym, is it possible to locate that "land of furs" more precisely on the Old Norse mental map? Matthias Egeler has argued convincingly for the identification of Bjálkaland as Bjarmaland, based on several parallels in the construction of the narratives. Thus, as hinted at in the beginning of this discussion on Bjarmaland, one of the standard motifs in the Old Norse literature is raiding expeditions to that Finno-Ugric territory, in the course of which pagan burial mounds or sanctuaries are desecrated and looted.⁵¹ Two episodes in *Qrvar-Odds saga* fit that picture well: the first describes the plundering of a mound in Bjarmia that consisted of a mix of earth and ritually deposited coins, whereas the second tells how Oddr slays the high priestess of Bjálkaland in her temple and burns down the sanctuaries.

A summary of the surveyed sources may best be expressed in the words of Else Mundal who has stressed the dichotomy of the Scandinavians' behaviour towards the Bjarmians and Saami, which could not be more different. Thus, compared to the treatment of the Saami in the literature, which tends to be at least partly benevolent, the sagas sketch a picture of Bjarmaland as a space where Scandinavians had the right to loot and kill as they pleased.⁵² The remote location of the Bjarmian lands and enigmatic names like that of the god Jómali or King Álfr undoubtedly contributed to the mystical allure of these distant regions around the White Sea. The potential riches, mostly in the form of furs and silver coins, and the fame that could be easily retrieved by any means necessary only added to that allure.

It is evident that Fennoscandia played a significant economic role in the medieval North. Legal codes from this period provide clear evidence of the scope of tributary dependencies within the described taxation and trading relations.

51 Matthias Egeler, *Avalon, 66° Nord. Zu Frühgeschichte und Rezeption eines Mythos* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 88.

52 Else Mundal, "The Perception of the Saamis and Their Religion in Old Norse Sources," in *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1996), 107.

6 Furs as a Means of Payment and Taxation in Nordic Sources

The northernmost Old Swedish laws prove that the hunt for furs was one of the most important economic activities in late medieval Fennoscandia, with the law being in use in the northern part of the Swedish kingdom and parts of Western Finland.

Thus, *Hälsingelagen* from c. 1330 mentions an annual tax that was to be paid in “twælyt skin” [two-coloured pelt] and in “blaskorin skin” [blue-cut pelt].⁵³ Such descriptions match the account of the aforementioned Arab historiographer al-Mas’ūdī, who as early as in the tenth century was praising the extraordinary quality of black fox obtained from the Volga region.

The broad geographical scope of the Northern Swedish laws reflects, in turn, the need for the legal regulation of fur as a precious resource, both in terms of obtaining as well as processing it. We can be confident that the mechanisms described had been in place for many centuries, despite the fact that previously practised customs were only codified in the Northern Swedish law in the fourteenth century. Within this timeframe we can confidently identify the peak of the fur trade between Scandinavia and Rus’ merchants in the eleventh century; these, in turn, supplied the Bulghārs with the shiny, highly coveted pelts of sable and black fox. Those exchanges were facilitated by the established trading routes that culminated in exchange with the urban centres of the Abbasid Caliphate.

Further insight into trade and taxation with the Saami can be gained from the concept of “finnkaup.” This “trade with the Saami” is amply described in the Old Icelandic saga literature, perhaps most prominently in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, where it appears as an inherited right that is passed on amongst kin and is dependent on spatial belonging, until it becomes a royal prerogative.⁵⁴ Norwegian magnates of the northern region of Hálogaland, such as *Óláfs saga helga’s* anti-hero Þórir hundr, used their right to exert “finnkaup” to strengthen their political and social power in addition to securing the source of wealth represented by the natural resources the Saami had to offer. Besides exquisite skins and furs, these also included fish and whale products, like oil and blubber. These were exchanged for butter, tin, and other scarce goods in medieval Sápmi. One term closely related to “finnkaup” is “finnskatt,” which designates the taxation and

⁵³ See Carl J. Schlyter, ed., *Codex iuris Helsingici: Helsingelagen* (Lund: Berlingska boktryckeriet, 1844), 23.

⁵⁴ Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia*, 155.

payment of tribute by the Saami in acknowledgement of their submission to the Norwegian crown, as is stated in the Latin *Historia Norwegie*, written c. 1220:

Ibi infinita numerositas bestiarum, scilicet ursorum, luporum, lyncozum, uulpium, sabelorum, lutrearum, taxonum, castorum. [. . .] Sunt etiam apud Finnos scuriones quam plures ac mustele. De quarum omnium bestiarum pellibus regibus Norwegie, quibus et subiecti sunt, maxima tributa omni anno persolunt.

In that region there live vast numbers of animals, including bears, wolves, lynxes, foxes, sables, otters, badgers and beavers. [. . .] In Finnmarken there are also very large numbers of squirrels and ermines. From all these animals' pelts the people pay a large tribute every year to the Norwegian kings, who are their overlords.⁵⁵

Eventually, by the High Middle Ages, the organized taxation of the Saami had become a royal privilege and served, as has been shown by examining the Nordic legal sources, as a key source of income for the young Norwegian state.

7 The Fennoscandian Fur Trade and the Language of Colonialism

How then might we assess the role of the Bjarmians and the Saami in the trade relations of the medieval North? And based on how they are described, is it possible to identify the place of the Finno-Ugric Indigenous populations in processes of exploitation, cooperation, and cultural decline? As Anna-Kaisa Salmi and Veli-Pekka Lehtola have emphasized, the Saami past has often been framed as a history of colonialism (if not imperialism) and subjugation, with Indigenous populations victimized by oppressive states. Conversely, Knut Odner argued as early as 1982 in favour of the Saami's specialized role within the economic system of pre-historic Scandinavia, on which Nordic communities relied as far back as the Iron Age (c. 500 BCE–400 CE). Furthermore, those interdependencies might have allowed the Saami hunters to maintain both economic and social stability – and thus may have been to a certain degree mutually beneficial.⁵⁶ I agree with Solveig Wang who states that the assumption that the Saami were oppressed by Norwe-

⁵⁵ Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds, *Historia Norwegie*, trans. Peter Fisher (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 58–61.

⁵⁶ Knut Odner, *Finner og Terfinner. Etniske prosesser i det nordlige Fenno-Scandinavia* (Oslo: Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo, 1983), 24, 40, 81.

gian chieftains in the High Middle Ages “reinforces a colonial viewpoint and the dualism associated with it.”⁵⁷

However, the dual role of the Saami in the medieval trading networks of the North are more ambivalent as the opinions presented above suggest. Their agency thus asks for a more complex study of postcolonial criticism that – in the words of Homi K. Bhabha – “bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority [. . .].”⁵⁸ The concept of colonialism is, eventually, not simply a matter of a clear-cut binary between colonizer and colonized. Rather, it is a complex phenomenon shaped by an intricate web of negotiations,⁵⁹ ambivalence and hybridity. The power structures that connected the Saami with the Norwegian state had remained fluid from prehistoric times throughout the Middle Ages due to changing *commodity frontiers* – to use a term that has recently become popular among social historians.⁶⁰ Thus, at the end of the High Middle Ages, Norwegian magnates were less engaged in the fur trade, which entailed the end of trading and taxation expeditions to the Saami and Bjarmians. In the winter of 1310, the Norwegian King Hákon Magnússon (1270–1319) sent the Icelander and royal representative Gizzur galli Bjarnason on a final “finnferð” to demand tribute from the Saami.⁶¹ The expedition was an unsuccessful attempt to re-establish an already disrupted trading and taxation dynamic related to the exploitation of subaltern Indigenous populations in the circumpolar region. Another material indicator for these fluid economies is the varying quantity of Norwegian coins found at the most important Saami sacrificial sites in today’s Northern Sweden, which decreases after 1150 and ceases entirely around 1200.⁶² Christian Keller has noted that as late as 1611, four-and-a-half centuries later, the Dano-Norwegian King Christian IV provoked the Kalmar War with Sweden. In response, the latter attempted to re-establish medieval taxation rights over the Saami by making territorial claims on contemporary Finnmark.⁶³

57 Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia*, 165–66.

58 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 171.

59 On the negotiations that accompanied colonial politics, see: John Gerring et al., “An Institutional Theory of Direct and Indirect Rule,” *World Politics* 63, no. 3 (2011): 377–433.

60 See Sven Beckert et al., “Commodity Frontiers and the Transformation of the Global Countryside: A Research Agenda,” *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 3 (2021): 435–50.

61 Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen, *Hunters in Transition: An Outline of Early Sámi History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 154.

62 Hansen and Olsen, *Hunters*, 145.

63 Christian Keller, “Furs, Fish, and Ivory: Medieval Norsemen at the Arctic Fringe,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* 3 (2010): 5.

Conclusion

Even before the massive influx of Arab silver in the first half of the tenth century, furs were a luxury commodity highly esteemed by Islamic and Scandinavian elites. The analysed sources ranging from classical to medieval texts, show that Indigenous populations like the Saami and Bjarmians were their indispensable suppliers and operated as brokers in long-distance trading networks that connected Fennoscandia with Rus', Volga Bulgaria, and the Islamic Abbasid Caliphate. Within these reciprocal exchange processes, I have identified a dual role of Finno-Ugric actors in early medieval Fennoscandia. Thus, on the one hand, Sápmi represented a target for looting, as described in the Old Norse sources, as well as for colonialist expansionism exerted by Scandinavian elites. On the other hand, Fennoscandia served as the starting point for the movement of Finnic people along the "Austrvegr," as is attested by the foundation of the eastern emporium Staraya Ladoga, which became the pivotal hub in the trading networks of the early Rus'. Changing political and economic landscapes eventually resulted in dynamic commodity frontiers, with a decrease in the importance of royally privileged trading relations with the Saami, as has been shown by the example of "finnkaup." This is undoubtedly the case with the Norwegian kingdom, whereas Sweden took a different path. This is evidenced by the royal privileges granted to those tradesmen who interacted with the coastal Saami societies in Northern Sweden, the so-called "birkarlar".

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Oula Seitsonen

Chapter 7

Close Encounters of the Northern Kind: External Impacts and Indigenous Saami Reindeer-Herding Responses in Northernmost Europe, c. 700–1600 CE

Introduction

The Saami people are the only Indigenous people in Europe; their transnational homeland Sápmi covers the northwestern shore of Europe from Central Norway to the Kola Peninsula, Russia (Figure 7.1). Saami have maintained many of their traditions and ways of being into the twenty-first century, adapting to fit the demands of the modern world, nation states, and capitalism. The best-known of these traditional lifeways is reindeer husbandry, which has evolved over time since the Late Iron Age, although all Saami groups never adopted it in larger scale.¹ Changes in livelihood practices are reflected in the archaeological record of Saami habitation and belief systems.

In this chapter I review major changes in the settlement and land-use patterns and religious practices of reindeer-herding Saami, c. 700–1600, in the Gilbbsjávri microregion centred on Lake Gilbbsjávri (Figure 7.1a; N69°, E22°; all place names in North Saami language [SaN]). This regional case study contributes to our understanding the developments of the pastoralist lifeways in northern Sápmi through time and how these are intertwined with colonialism. Sápmi has been subject to various colonial disruptions from different directions, at least

¹ Anna-Kaisa Salmi, “The Archaeology of Reindeer Domestication and Herding Practices in Northern Fennoscandia,” *Journal of Archaeological Research* 31 (2023): 617–60.

Note: Thanks for the ongoing cooperation of the Sámi Parliament, Sámi Museum Siida, Metsähallitus, reindeer master Juha Tornensis of the *Giehtaruohtta bálggus*, and to Olli and Lempi Kunnas and Sanna, Sohvi, Elsa, and Elvi Seitsonen for taking part in the fieldwork. This research is part of the projects “An Archaeological Perspective on Inequality in Welfare Society” (Kone Foundation 2022), “Archaeological Survey of Snow Patches in the Hálđi-Ritničohkka Region, Sápmi” (Arctic Avenue/Swedish-Finnish Cultural Foundation 2022), and “Long-Term Changes in Biodiversity in the Arctic” (Finnish Cultural Foundation 2023).

since the early modern period.² However, Nordic countries have been slow to acknowledge their colonial legacies; for example, Finland still has not ratified ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Thus, as archaeologist Bryan Hood³ has aptly noted, archaeological research in Sápmi is an integral part of the process of decolonization, one that can give a “voice” to the material traces of the subaltern Saami pasts.

The University of Oulu has carried out Saami archaeological studies in what is known as the “upper end” of Finland since 2019. This area had seen little archaeological activity before the twenty-first century, and our fieldwork was initiated following a call from the head of the local reindeer herders. Research has been carried out in co-operation with him and other locals, and we have aimed at co-producing data with the locals about their land-use practices and conflicts using combined archaeological-anthropological surveys.⁴

The Gilbbesjávri microregion is the coldest mountainous corner of Finland; to this day it is still inhabited by the reindeer pastoralist Mountain Saami whose ancestors herded their animals in the area. The study area is transnational, like Sápmi itself, and includes, from the dominant Southern perspective, the remotest corners of Finland, Sweden, and Norway (Figures 7.1–7.2). Lake Gilbbesjávri sits on a watershed that links the inland to the Arctic Ocean coast in the north, and along the rivers running south to the Baltic Basin, which has facilitated intergroup interactions over time. In this paper, I place research in the Gilbbesjávri area in the context of broader Saami, European, and global developments. This contributes to ongoing transnational discussions on questions such as reindeer domestication, land-use histories, and colonial legacies from an archaeological perspective.⁵ First, I provide an overview of the archaeological material and general development of

2 Anna Källén, “Postcolonial Theory and Sámi Archaeology – A Commentary,” *Arctic Anthropology* 52, no. 2 (2015): 81–86; Bjørnar Olsen, “Sámi Archaeology, Postcolonial Theory and Criticism,” *Fennoscandia Archaeologica* 33 (2016): 215–29; Marte Spangen, Anna-Kaisa Salmi, and Tiina Äikäs, “Sami Archaeology and Postcolonial Theory – An Introduction,” *Arctic Anthropology* 52, no. 2 (2015): 1–5; Carl-Gösta Ojala and Jonas M. Nordin, “Mining Sapmi: Colonial Histories, Sami Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden,” *Arctic Anthropology* 52, no. 2 (2015): 6–21.

3 Bryan C. Hood, “Framing Sami Entanglement in Early Modern Colonial Processes: Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Perspectives from Interior North Norway,” *Arctic Anthropology* 52, no. 2 (2015): 37–56.

4 Vesa-Pekka Herva et al., “Walking Together and Speaking through Contested Landscapes in Gilbbesjávri, Sápmi,” *Arctic Anthropology*, submitted.

5 Knut H. Røed, Ivar Bjørklund, and Bjørnar Olsen, “From Wild to Domestic Reindeer – Genetic Evidence of a Non-Native Origin of Reindeer Pastoralism in Northern Fennoscandia,” *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 19 (2018): 279–86; Salmi, “The Archaeology of Reindeer Domestication.”

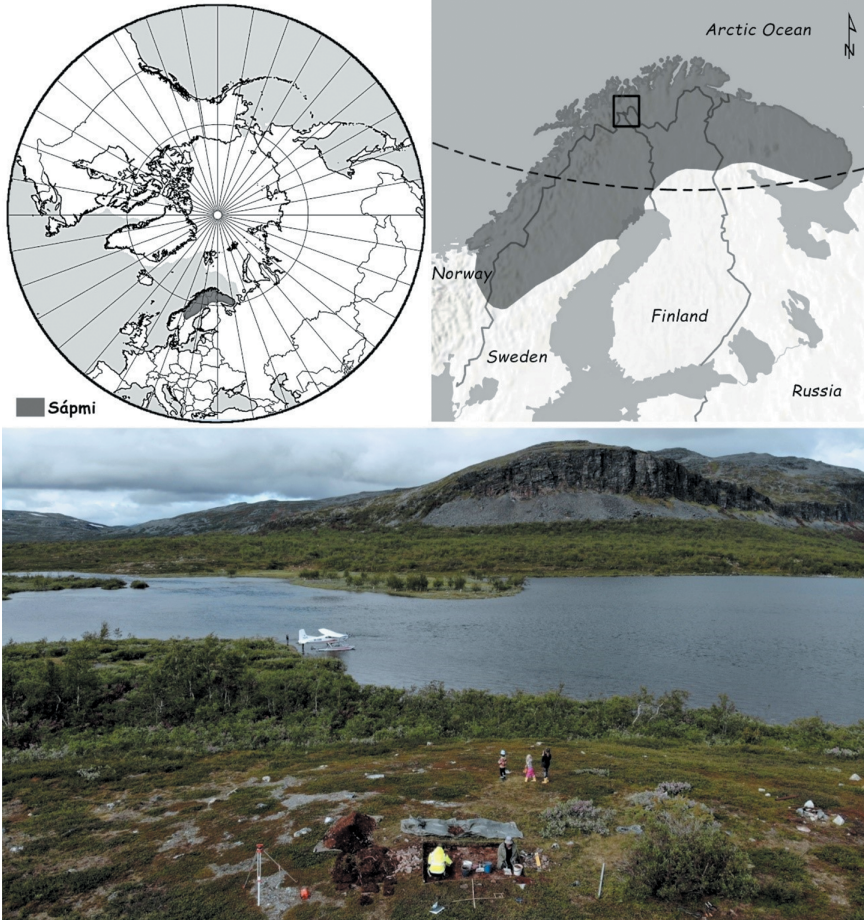


Figure 7.1: Top left: location of Sápmi and the Lake Gilbbesjávri microregion in the Arctic. Top right: location of the Lake Gilbbesjávri microregion (background maps Esri). Bottom: excavations in the roadless Giehtaruohtasa meahccegiovllu wilderness area, Olli Kunnas and Sanna Seitsonen in the trench digging, in the background Lempi Kunnas, Elvi, and Elsa Seitsonen (illustration and photo: O. Seitsonen).

reindeer herding and pastoralism (“herding” refers to small-scale husbandry in a hunter-herder society, “pastoralism” to a predominantly pastoral system). I then discuss how the archaeological materialities reflect Saami responses and adaptations to the various external impacts and influences over time.

Through time, people in the different parts of Sápmi have adapted their lifestyles to the local conditions, with diverse subsistence practices, mobility patterns, and so on. However, there are some overarching cultural elements that remain

consistent over vast geographic distances in Sápmi, appearing as concurrent changes in the archaeological record. Also noteworthy are the sweeping continuities in Saami habitation, land use, and cosmologies over time, from the Iron Age up to the present day.⁶

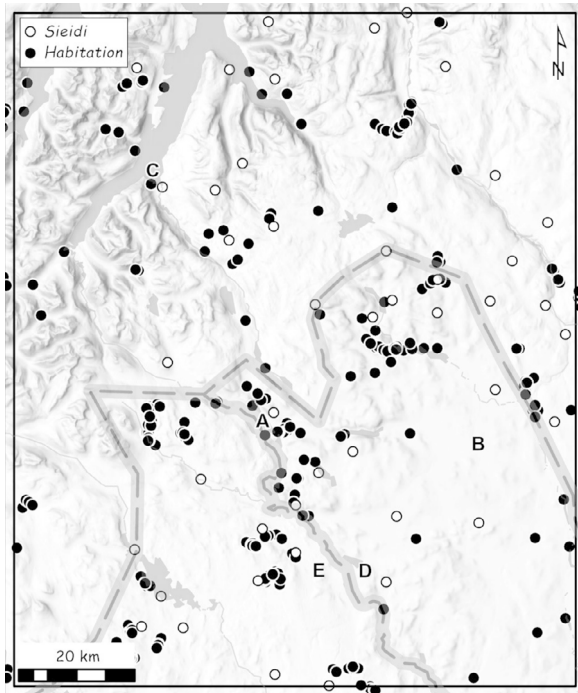


Figure 7.2: Distribution of all known Saami habitation and sieidi sites in the Gilbbesjávri microregion, and some mentioned localities: a) Lake Gilbbesjávri and Gilbbesjávri Village, b) Raittijärvi Village, c) Ivgobahta, d) Dálvas Mountain, e) Ruovdnál Church (illustration: O. Seitsonen).

⁶ Anna-Kaisa Salmi and Oula Seitsonen, “Effects of Reindeer Domestication on Society and Religion,” in *Domestication in Action: Past and Present Human-Reindeer Interaction in Northern Fennoscandia*, ed. Anna-Kaisa Salmi (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 215–47.

1 Saami Archaeology in the “Upper End”

In all three countries that the Gilbbsjávri area spans, the region has remained archaeologically largely unexamined prior to the twenty-first century, owing to its remoteness from the southern centres and lack of infrastructure, including drivable roads. Due to this, most of the known sites in this “upper end” have only been identified over the last two decades.⁷ The focus of our work has been on settlement and mobility patterns and their temporalities. The Saami archaeological material from this transnational microregion includes 99 habitation sites from Finland, 84 from Norway, and 209 from Sweden (Figure 7.2). Anyone who has worked with transnational data knows that harmonizing archaeological datasets from neighbouring countries can be time consuming, challenging, and sometimes downright infuriating.

We have recently obtained from Gilbbsjávri the largest regional sample so far of radiocarbon dates relating to Saami contexts from any area of Finland: fifty dates from Saami habitation sites and fifteen more from cryosphere archaeological contexts; the latter are the first from any archaeological cryosphere site in Finland.⁸ In addition, we have begun using artificial intelligence-driven remote sensing approaches in the search for new sites in the far-flung region.⁹ Despite the recent rise in research activity, large parts of the microregion remain unvisited by archaeologists (Figure 7.2). Furthermore, only two Saami sites have been excavated on the Finnish side, with a few others in Norway.¹⁰ Despite these limitations, our results provide a baseline for future work.

Stone-built hearths are the most visible archaeological “type features” at Saami sites (Figure 7.3). According to archaeological and ethnographic findings, these were originally central hearths inside the tipi-like Saami tents, known as *lávvu* or *bealjegoahti* (SaN) depending on their wooden superstructure. The chro-

7 Oula Seitsonen and Sami Viljanmaa, “Transnational Landscapes of Sámi Reindeer: Domestication and Herding in Northernmost Europe 700–1800 A.D.,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 46, no. 3 (2021): 172–91.

8 Oula Seitsonen, “Ruttoa Yläunturissa? Saamelaisten Poronhoitokohteiden Ajoittuminen Enontekiön Yliiperällä,” *SKAS* 4 (2020): 2–20; Oula Seitsonen et al., “Archaeology of Finland’s Only ‘Permanent Glacier’: The Past, Present, and Future of the Ritničohkka Snowfield, Sápmi,” *Journal of Glacial Archaeology*, in press.

9 Oula Seitsonen and Janne Ikäheimo, “Detecting Archaeological Features with Airborne Laser Scanning in the Alpine Tundra of Sápmi, Northern Finland,” *Remote Sensing* 13, no. 8 (2021): 1599.

10 Johan E. Arntzen, *Arkeologiske undersøkelser i tilknytning til Mauken/Blåtind Skytefelt*, (Tromsø: Tromsø Museum, 2010); Ingrid Sommersest, “Villreinfangst og tamreindrift i Indre Troms: Belyst ved samiske boplasser mellom 650 og 1923” (PhD thesis, Tromsø Universitet, 2009).

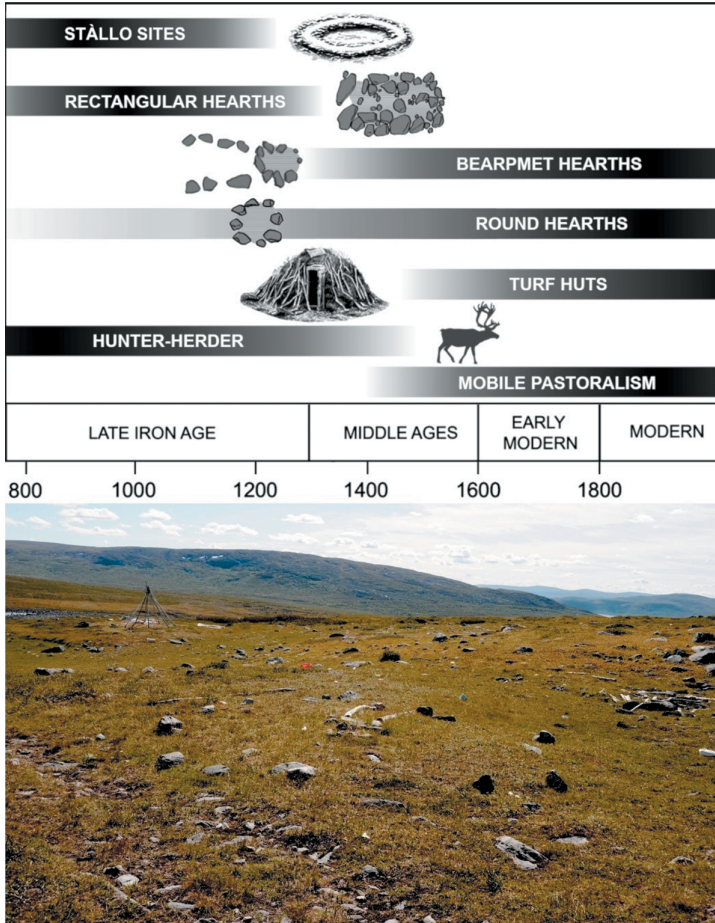


Figure 7.3: Top: chronology of the different kinds of archaeological features related to reindeer herding and pastoralism in Sápmi, periodization follows the northern Finnish temporal framework (based on Seitsonen and Fjellström 2022, 156). Bottom: modern Saami seasonal herding site in Gilbbesjávrí. In the foreground a recurrently used lávvu tent floor with a *bearpmet* (SaN) hearth in the middle, with wooden logs marking the tent entrance (SaN: *uksa*) and a tent ring around it, and in the background the standing wooden superstructure of another lávvu tent (photo: O. Seitsonen).

nologies and typologies of Saami hearths are relatively well established today, and one can find detailed descriptions of the various features in the referenced articles.¹¹ Different hearth types appear nearly simultaneously in distant areas.¹² This highlights the active long-distance contact networks, mobilities, and socio-economical connections and diverse ties that linked the Saami communities with each other and their surrounding communities through time.

1.1 Hunter-Herder Heritage, Seventh to Fifteenth Century CE

The earliest archaeological hearth type linked with small-scale reindeer herding in Sápmi consists of what are known as rectangular hearths (Figure 7.3). These are rectilinear (sometimes oval) hearths lined with larger rocks and typically filled with a stone packing.¹³ They often appear in what are known as hearth-rows, arranged in a line as anywhere from three to over ten hearths about ten metres apart. Their radiocarbon dates are from the mid-sixth century on, their heyday being in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, only to dwindle away in the fourteenth century.¹⁴ The hearth-rows in particular date to the peak period, as do three out of four hearth-rows in the Gilbbesjávri microregion, dated to 1030–1270 CE (all dates calibrated using Oxcal v4.4.4,¹⁵ atmospheric data from Reimer et al.,¹⁶ presented with 95.4% probability).¹⁷ The fourth hearth-row in the area, at Devddesvuopmi (Norway; Figure 7.2f), is dated to 640–1040 CE and has some of the earliest

11 Petri Halinen, “Viewpoints on the Disintegration of the Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Sámi Societies and the Emergence of Reindeer Herding in Northern Fennoscandia,” in *Oodeja Mikalle. Juhlakirja Professori Mika Lavennolla Hänen Täyttäässään 60 Vuotta* (Helsinki: Suomen arkeologinen seura, 2022), 147–55; Bjørnar Olsen, “Two Hearth-Row Sites in Pasvik, Arctic Norway,” in *In Search of Hearths: A Book in Memory of Sven-Donald Hedman*, ed. Petri Halinen & Bjørnar Olsen (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2019), 9–30; Oula Seitsonen and Markus Fjellström, “Habitation Sites and Herding Landscapes,” in *Domestication in Action: Past and Present Human-Reindeer Interaction in Northern Fennoscandia*, ed. Anna-Kaisa Salmi (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 153–86.

12 Petri Halinen, “The Inland Sámi Societies of Northern Fennoscandia during the Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Period: An Archaeological Approach,” *ISKOS* 21 (2016), 160–74.

13 Pirjo Hamari, “Vanhemmat markkinapaikat ja pohjois-suomen rautakautinen asutus,” *Muinaistutkija* 4 (1998): 67–76.

14 Olsen, “Two Hearth-Row Sites”; Ingrid Sommerseth, “Archaeology and the Debate on the Transition from Reindeer Hunting to Pastoralism,” *Rangifer* 31, no. 1 (2011): 111–27.

15 Christopher Bronk Ramsey, “OxCal v4.4.4,” (2021), <https://c14.arch.ox.ac.uk/oxcal.html>.

16 Paula J Reimer et al., “The IntCal20 Northern Hemisphere Radiocarbon Age Calibration Curve (0–55 Cal kBP),” *Radiocarbon* 62, no. 4 (2020): 725–57.

17 Seitsonen, “Ruttoa Ylätunturissa?”

radiocarbon dates of any hearth-row in Sápmi.¹⁸ One of the earliest radiocarbon-dated single Saami hearths is also from the microregion, from Mauken (Norway), dated to about 550–650 CE.¹⁹ On the Finnish side of the area, the earliest hearths studied so far date to the late tenth century (Figure 7.4). Hearth-row sites have often been interpreted as aggregate camps where several family groups came together seasonally, likely in the wintertime, whereas sites with one to three hearths have been interpreted as the seasonal settlements of individual Saami families, probably used in the summers.²⁰

Rectangular hearths are found over a vast geographical region, from outside modern-day Sápmi in Norway and Sweden to Kola Peninsula in Russia. They seem to be connected to the introduction of small-scale herding of (semi-)domesticated reindeer, based on their topographic setting, which differs clearly from the previous periods and their associated finds.²¹ For example, the age profiles of reindeer faunal remains suggest herding,²² there are possible signs of corralling reindeer at hearth-row sites,²³ and the habitation sites are situated higher up than in earlier times and are adjacent to potential reindeer pastureland.²⁴ The archaeological evidence indicates that at this time the Saami relied on a mixed hunter-fisher-gatherer-herder subsistence, with small herds of domesticated reindeer used for transportation and luring purposes. Based on the faunal remains from rectangular hearths and *sieidi* (SaN) sacrificial sites, we can conclude that sheep too were kept in parts of Sápmi, at least in the later part of this period, probably for both meat and

18 Sommerseth, “Villreinfangst og tamreindrift i Indre Troms.”

19 Arntzen, “Arkeologiske undersøkelser.”

20 Halinen, “The Inland Sámi Societies of Northern Fennoscandia”; Sven-Donald Hedman, *Boplatser och offerplatser. Ekonomisk strategi och boplatsemönster bland skogssamer 700–1600 AD* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2003); Olsen, “Two Hearth-Row Sites.”

21 Sven-Donald Hedman, Bjørnar Olsen, and Maria Vretemark, “Hunters, Herders, and Hearths: Interpreting New Results from Hearth Row Sites in Pasvik, Arctic Norway,” *Rangifer* 35, no. 1 (2015): 1–24; Inga-Maria Mulk, *Sirkas: Ett samiskt fångstsamhälle i förändring Kr.f. – 1600 e.Kr* (Umeå: Umeå Universitet, 1995).

22 Maria Vretemark, “The Faunal Remains from Two Hearth Row Sites in Pasvik, Arctic Norway,” in *In Search of Hearths: A Book in Memory of Sven-Donald Hedman*, ed. Petri Halinen and Bjørnar Olsen (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2019), 67–74.

23 Philip Jerand and Johan Linderholm, “Possible Traces of Reindeer Corralling at a Hearth-Row Site from 1000–1300 CE in Northern Norway,” in *In Search of Hearths: A Book in Memory of Sven-Donald Hedman*, ed. Petri Halinen and Bjørnar Olsen (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2019), 31–39.

24 Hedman, *Boplatser och offerplatser*.

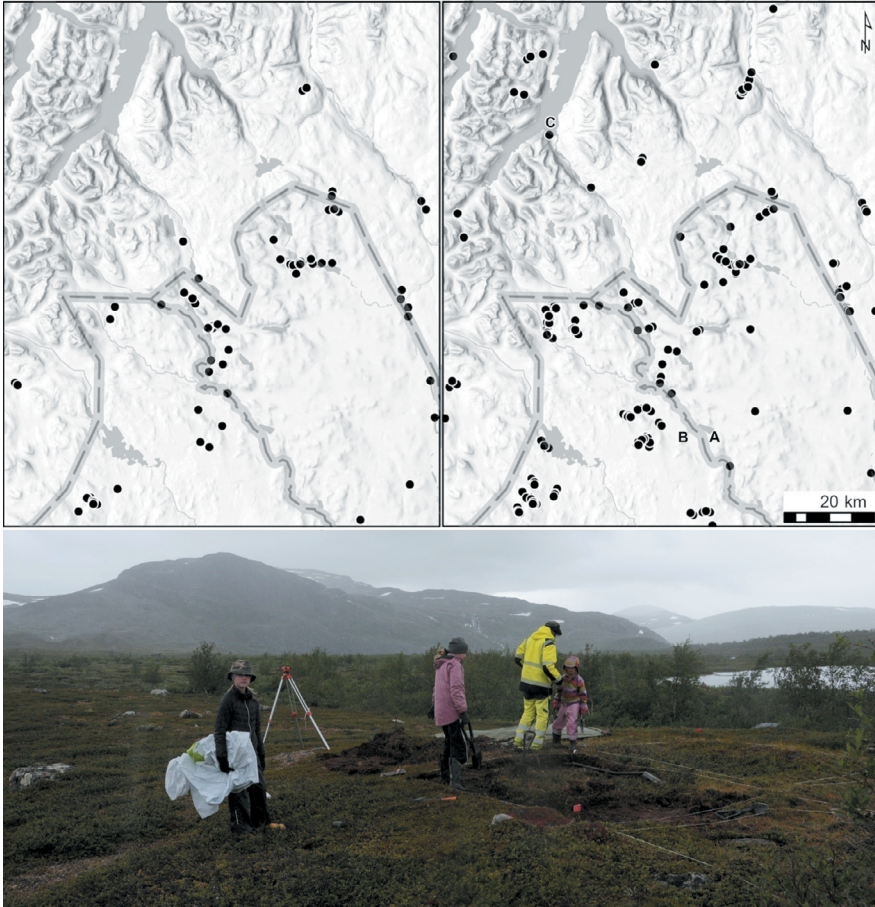


Figure 7.4: Top left: distribution of the seventh–fourteenth century Saami hunter-herder habitation sites: rectangular hearths and *stáallo* housepits. Top right: distribution of the post-fourteenth century Saami nomadic pastoralist habitation sites: *bearpmet* and circular hearths, turf huts, and *gieddi*, and the approximate borders of the historical Ruovdnál siida. Other important locations related to the post-fourteenth century Saami habitation: a) Dálvas Mountain, b) Ruovdnál Church, c) Ivgobahta marketplace (background maps Esri). Bottom: excavations of a historical Saami *darfegoahti* (SaN; turf hut) in the study area. Háldi Mountain in the far distance, from the left Elsa and Sohvi Seitsonen, Olli and Lempi Kunnas (maps and photo: O. Seitsonen).

wool.²⁵ Morphological changes in the reindeer bones also indicate their use as draught animals. So far, the oldest signs of this in Finland are from the turn of the thirteenth–fourteenth century; however, owing to the acidic soils, the preservation of unburnt bones older than this is almost non-existent.²⁶

Contemporaneous with the rectangular hearths are what are known as *stállo* foundations: shallow housepits with low earthen walls (Figure 7.3).²⁷ These are found in different geographical settings than rectangular hearths, mostly in the high mountain zone of Norway and Sweden, and appear to be the remains of more permanent structures or reinforced tents.²⁸ *Stállo* foundations are typically arranged linearly, similar to the rectangular hearths, with two to five housepits in a row.²⁹ Radiocarbon dates from *stállo* sites range from the mid-sixth to the thirteenth–fourteenth century, with their heyday being in the ninth–eleventh centuries, preceding that of the rectangular hearths. The most northerly known *stállo* foundations are situated in the Gilbbesjávri microregion, at Devddevuopmi, and these are also some of the earliest, dating to 650–1210 CE.³⁰ There is a clear inland distribution of both rectangular hearths and *stállo* sites in this region (Figure 7.5).

Besides practical reasoning, Saami habitation and land-use patterns also mirror belief systems. Traditional Saami spirituality is deeply embedded in their relational worldview and holistic landscape perception.³¹ This is archaeologically most evident at the sacrificial *sieidi* sites (SaN), which appear contemporaneously with the rectangular hearth and *stállo* sites. *Sieidi* are typically anomalous places in nature, such as conspicuous rocks, cliffs or other landscape features (Figure 7.6), and offerings made at them through time have included animals and their parts, coins,

25 Ingela Bergman, Olle Zackrisson, and Lars Liedgren, “From Hunting to Herding: Land Use, Ecosystem Processes, and Social Transformation among Sami AD 800–1500,” *Arctic Anthropology* 50, no. 2 (2013): 25–39; Olsen, “Two Hearth-Row Sites”; Vretemark, “The Faunal Remains.”

26 Anna-Kaisa Salmi et al., “Earliest Archaeological Evidence for Domesticated Reindeer Economy among the Sámi of Northeastern Fennoscandia AD 1300 Onwards,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 62 (2021): 101303.

27 Mulk, *Sirkas*; Sommerseth, “Villreinfangst og tamreindrift i Indre Troms”; Inger Storli, “*Stallo*–boplassene. Spor etter de første fjellsamer? (Oslo: Novus, 1994).

28 Lars Liedgren and Ingela Bergman, “Aspects of the Construction of Prehistoric *Stállo*-Foundations and *Stállo*-Buildings,” *Acta Borealia* 26, no. 1 (2009): 3–26.

29 Sven-Donald Hedman, “Stállotomter från kusten och upp till högfjällen, vad berättar de?” in *Från kust til Kyst – Áhpegáttest Áhpegáddaj*, ed. Bjørg Evjen and Marit Myrvoll (Svolvær: Orkana Akademisk, 2015), 29–50; Inger Storli, “On the Historiography of Sami Reindeer Pastoralism,” *Acta Borealia* 13, no. 1 (1996): 81–115.

30 Sommerseth, “Villreinfangst og tamreindrift i Indre Troms.”

31 Elina Helander-Renvall, “Animism, Personhood and the Nature of Reality: Sami Perspectives,” *Polar Record* 46, no. 1 (2010): 44–56.

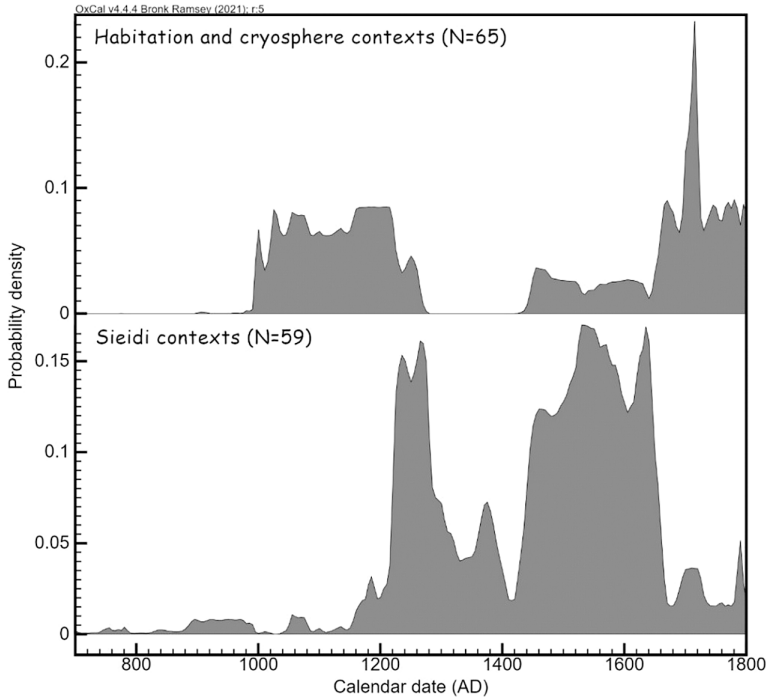


Figure 7.5: Top (a): summed probability density of the new radiocarbon dates from the Finnish part of the Gilbesjávri microregion, from Saami habitation and cryosphere archaeological contexts (N=65); notice the fourteenth century gap in the dates (based on Seitsonen 2020, 9, 12; Nuñez et al. 2020, 72–3). Bottom (b): summed probability density of the radiocarbon dates from Sieidi contexts in whole Sápmi (N=59; based on Nuñez et al. 2020, and Salmi et al. 2018) (calibrated with Oxcal v4.4.4, with atmospheric data from Reimer et al.) (illustration: O. Seitsonen).

ornaments, and alcohol.³² Interaction with *seidis* was a way to maintain good relationships with animate and inanimate beings and guaranteed luck in various activities, e.g., reindeer luck (SaN: *boazolihku*) in herding and hunting, or dog luck (SaN: *beanalihku*), as good reindeer dogs were and still are crucial to everyday interspecies interactions within Saami communities. Reindeer antlers have always been especially important and powerful sacrificial items, reflecting the central place of reindeer in Saami society through time.³³

³² Tiina Äikäs, *From Boulders to Fells: Sacred Places in the Sámi Ritual Landscape* (Helsinki: Suomen Arkeologinen Seura, 2015).

³³ Gunvor Guttorm, *Čoarvi muitala. Čoarvvi hápmi ja ivnnit nübeduddjomis* (Guovdageaidnu: Sámi allaskuvla, 1993); Nils Oskal, “On Nature and Reindeer Luck,” *Rangifer* 20, nos. 2–3 (2000): 175.

The earliest radiocarbon dates from a *sieidi* come from Unna Saiva (Sweden) – a bear bone dating to 550–780 – and parallel the early dates from the habitation sites.³⁴ Some clear temporal trends are observable in the sacrificial materials. Offered metal objects mainly date to about 800–1300, the heyday of both the rectangular hearths and the *stállo* sites. The diversity of faunal remains radiocarbon-dated pre-1400 CE (based on median age) reflects the mixed hunter-herder subsistence way of life: 35 per cent of the sacrificed bones are of species other than reindeer, including bear, birds, fish, and even sheep/goat (the latter dating to 1270–1400).³⁵

1.2 Pastoralist Heritage Post-1400

The fourteenth century stands out as a clear turning point in the Saami archaeological record. Most notably, both the hearth-row and *stállo* sites fall out of use and are replaced by new kinds of domestic combustion features. The post-fourteenth-century habitation sites are characterized by what are known as *bearpmet* hearths (SaN): stone-lined hearths (without a stone packing) with two to four radially extending stone lines (Figure 7.3). These lines mark the entrance area (SaN: *Uksa*) inside the dwelling; if there are also lines in the backside they marked the traditional sacred space leading to the back door (SaN: *boassjo*). This spatial organization is deeply rooted in Saami cosmology; for instance, the gendered spatialities and attributes and deities related to various parts of the domestic sphere and presiding the use of space.³⁶ Based on the find distributions, geochemical analyses, and observed features, this general pattern displays a long continuity from the Iron Age to the modern day (Figure 7.3); of course, the exact meanings attached to this intra-dwelling spatial patterning might have evolved over time.

Bearpmet hearths are radiocarbon dated to the fifteenth–twentieth centuries; the earliest one from Gilbbesjávri area dates to 1430–1660 CE.³⁷ Contemporary with the *bearpmet* hearths are circular hearths (the larger of which might be older and contemporaneous with the rectangular hearths, but this needs addi-

34 Milton Nuñez et al., “Animal Remains from Saami Offering Places: Glimpses of Human-Animal Relations from Finnish Lapland AD 1000–1900,” in *Currents of Saami Pasts: Recent Advances in Saami Archaeology*, ed. Marte Spangen et al. (Helsinki: Archaeological Society of Finland, 2020), 61–78.

35 Anna-Kaisa Salmi et al., “Tradition and Transformation in Sámi Animal-Offering Practices,” *Antiquity* 92, no. 362 (2018): 472–89.

36 See Oula Seitsonen and Natalia Égüez, “Here Be Reindeer: Geoarchaeological Approaches to the Transspecies Lifeworlds of the Sámi Reindeer Herder Camps on the Tundra,” *Iskos* 4 (2022): 124–45; Toivo I. Itkonen, *Suomen Lappalaiset Vuoteen 1945* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1948).

37 Sommerseth, “Villreinfangst og tamreindrift i Indre Troms.”



Figure 7.6: Sacrificial Saami sieidi at Kirkkopahta, with a fish head and other offerings wedged into the cracks in the rock (photo: O. Seitsonen).



Figure 7.7: View over the area where the Gova siida campsite and sieidi stone were at the foot of the Sáná Mountain before the new housing was built on top of them (photo: O. Seitsonen).

tional research),³⁸ foundations of the turf-covered *darfegoahti* huts, and what are known as *gieddīs* (SaN) herding sites, which are visible as areas of lush vegetation, enriched by their repeated use.³⁹ In the Gilbjesjávri microregion all of these date to the (late) fourteenth–twenty-first century, and reveal long continuities in land use and habitation, as is also the case throughout Sápmi. Simultaneously, the intrasite organization at the habitation sites changes; the post-fourteenth-century hearths are placed nonlinearly and are more dispersed, comparable to the modern-day seasonal sites where each family camps about fifty metres from one another.

These changes likely signify the spread of long-range nomadic pastoralism. Spatially, the post-fourteenth-century sites move both higher to the mountains and to the seashore, where the reindeer summer pastures were located, and cluster along the potential reindeer migration routes (Figure 7.5). Nomadic pastoralism seems to have commenced in the Norwegian-Swedish mountain zone and to have spread in different directions from the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries on.⁴⁰ The mobility shift was also accompanied by the introduction of new reindeer haplotypes in the fifteenth century, likely connected to the spread of new economic practices with new types of animals and herd structures.⁴¹ However, this process was probably more one of increased emphasis on the importance of domesticated reindeer rather than any wholesale change in the lifeways, as evidence of supplementary feeding and draught reindeer appears already from the late thirteenth century.⁴² From the sixteenth century on, written records also document Saami pastoralism, reindeer milking, and the use of draught reindeer and sleds.⁴³ Still, not all Saami communities adopted nomadic pastoralism, some instead relying on their ancestral hunter-herder lifeways into the twentieth century.⁴⁴

38 Seitsonen, “Ruttoa ylätunturissa?”

39 Nina Karlsson, *Bosättning och resursutnyttjande: miljöarkeologiska studier av boplatser med härdar från perioden 600–1900 e. Kr. inom skogssamiskt område* (Umeå: Inst. för Arkeologi och Samiska Studier, Umeå Universitet, 2006).

40 Matti T. Heino and Maxime Pelletier, “Impact of Human Selection on the Genetics and Morphology of the Reindeer,” in *Domestication in Action: Past and Present Human-Reindeer Interaction in Northern Fennoscandia*, ed. Anna-Kaisa Salmi (Cham: Springer International, 2022), 35–61; Røed, Bjørklund, and Olsen, “From Wild to Domestic Reindeer.”

41 Gro Bjørnstad et al., “Ancient DNA Reveals a Major Genetic Change during the Transition from Hunting Economy to Reindeer Husbandry in Northern Scandinavia,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39, no. 1 (2012): 102–8; Røed, Bjørklund, and Olsen, “From Wild to Domestic Reindeer.”

42 Salmi, “The Archaeology of Reindeer Domestication.”

43 Olaus Magnus, *A Description of the Northern Peoples, 1555* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2010); Johannes Schefferus, *Laponia* (Hämeenlinna: Karisto, 1963).

44 Itkonen, *Suomen lappalaiset vuoteen 1945*.

Reindeer constitute 95 per cent of faunal remains from *sieidis* dated after 1400 CE, with only one bone each of sheep/goat and western capercaillie. This is likely related to the increased importance of reindeer. After the mid-seventeenth century, the number of radiocarbon dates from *sieidis* drops notably (Figure 7.4),⁴⁵ which might be connected to the process of (forced) Christianization, which was related in turn to the increasing Northern colonial ambitions of the emergent states of Sweden, Denmark-Norway, and Russia.

The use of *sieidi* sites has continued in many places up to the present, although nowadays the offerings are often made by neopagans and tourists.⁴⁶ Furthermore, some *sieidis* have been rather carelessly destroyed by recent infrastructural developments; e.g., in the centre of Gilbbesjávri Village new housing destroyed the *sieidi* stone and ancestral campsite of the local Gova *siida* in the 1990s (Figure 7.7).⁴⁷ The lack of acknowledging the traditional and sacred geographies of Saami has allowed this kind of careless devastation, which mirrors the general neglect of Saami perceptions by the authorities and the enduring colonial interests, be it tourism, mining or other activities. However, some more secretive family *sieidis* are used and honoured by locals even today.

2 Trade, Pandemics, and Climate: Stimuli, Change, and Saami Responses

Lastly, I attempt to summarize major developments in Saami reindeer husbandry and its archaeological traces through time as discussed above, and connect these to concurrent socio-economic and climatic events. Many developments observed in the archaeological material appear to reflect conscious Saami responses to broader external influences, like fluctuating socio-economic networks and climatic events.

⁴⁵ Anna-Kaisa Salmi et al., “Zooarchaeological and Stable Isotope Evidence of Sámi Reindeer Offerings,” *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 29 (2020): 102129.

⁴⁶ Áikäs, *From Boulders to Fells*.

⁴⁷ A *siida* is a traditional herding community.

2.1 Early Reindeer Hunter-Herders in the Seventh–Fourteenth Centuries CE

The earliest written record of reindeer herding in Sápmi is the account given to King Alfred (the Great) by the Norwegian chieftain Óttarr (English: Ohthere) in the late ninth century. Óttarr stated that he owned 600 reindeer, and six valuable reindeer used by Saami in catching wild reindeer, likely draught or lure animals.⁴⁸ Thus, by the ninth century at the latest the Saami were making a distinction between semi-domesticated (SaN: *boazu*) and wild (SaN: *goddi*) reindeer, and were in close contact and co-operation with other ethnic groups.⁴⁹ Most likely small-scale reindeer herding existed prior to this account, as suggested by the earliest radiocarbon dates associated with the rectangular hearths and *stállo* sites from the seventh–eighth centuries on (Figure 7.8). Based on the GIS analyses of site distributions, it seems likely that Late Iron Age–early medieval hunter-herder mobility in the Gilbbesjávri microregion was considerably more tethered than the later nomadic migrations of the post-fourteenth-century pastoralists. The catchment territories of hunter-herders appear to have been smaller and to have included various ecotones, allowing for an array of hunting, fishing, gathering, and herding opportunities.

During the warmer conditions of the Medieval Climate Anomaly (MCA, c. 950–1250 CE), the forested zone extended further north and higher up in the Gilbbesjávri region than in either the subsequent Little Ice Age (c. 1300–1850 CE) or present-day conditions. It remains to be seen how the current climate change affects the forest cover, but there are already signs of the tree line creeping up the mountain sides. The four hearth-row sites in the study area might represent aggregate winter camps, and during the MCA they were all near the boundary of the modelled mixed forest zone that would have provided shelter, firewood, and pastures, although in the vicinity of alpine tundra (Figure 7.4). Then again, the potential summertime sites with one to three hearths are found in both open tundra and forest zones. Based on pollen studies, *stállo* sites that today are on the open tundra were also originally in a more sheltered mountain birch environment.⁵⁰ It appears that until the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries the local hunter-herders practised tethered residential mobilities, with intensive herding of their small reindeer herds in the vicinity of the habitation sites, and longer

48 Ivar Bjørklund, “Domestication, Reindeer Husbandry and the Development of Sámi Pastoralism,” *Acta Borealia* 30, no. 2 (2013): 174–89; Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen, *Hunters in Transition: An Outline of Early Sámi History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

49 See Carina Damm, this volume.

50 Bergman, Zackrisson, and Liedgren, “From Hunting to Herding.”

logistical mobilities, e.g., to meet the wild reindeer herds seasonally wandering across their territory.⁵¹

There must have been an array of motivations shaping the development of small-scale reindeer herding in Sápmi from the seventh–eighth century on. Carpelan, Linkola, and Heikkinen⁵² have underlined the importance of close interaction between Saami and Norse people practising sheep/goat husbandry. There might have been close reciprocal client or cooperative bonds between these groups, as suggested by Óttarr’s late ninth-century account.⁵³ Some Saami vocabulary related to dairy economy also indicates that it might have been adopted from the Nordic peasants, as it largely comprises words borrowed from Proto-Scandinavian and tentatively dated to the first–sixth centuries CE.⁵⁴ As vocabulary connected with reindeer husbandry is of local origin, this suggests that the dairy practices might have developed as a result of external stimuli. Milk was indeed a product that could not be acquired through hunting, unlike hides, furs, and meat.⁵⁵ It might be significant in this context that sheep/goat bones have also been found during the excavation of rectangular hearth and *stállo* sites.⁵⁶ However, so far there is no direct archaeological evidence as to the origins of the reindeer dairy economy.

Besides connections with neighbouring groups, the simultaneous climatic changes might have encouraged major changes in people’s lifeways. The Late Antique Little Ice Age, the result of numerous volcanic episodes, began at about 536 CE; this involved a sudden drop in temperature, possibly by as much as 2 degrees in summertime in the Gilbbesjávri area, and a subsequent cooler period that lasted until the mid-seventh century.⁵⁷ Agricultural societies were particularly affected by this century-long cooling and the subsequent Justinian plague, but subsistence prac-

51 Markus Fjellström, Oula Seitsonen, and Henri Wallén, “Mobility in Early Reindeer Herding,” in *Domestication in Action: Past and Present Human-Reindeer Interaction in Northern Fennoscandia*, ed. Anna-Kaisa Salmi (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 187–212.

52 Christian Carpelan, Martti Linkola, and Hannu Heikkinen, “Reindeer Husbandry,” in *The Saami: A Cultural Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ulla-Maija Kulonen, Irja Seurujärvi-Kari, and Risto Pulkkinen (Vammala: SKS, 2005), 313–22.

53 See Damm, this volume.

54 Carpelan, Linkola, and Heikkinen, “Reindeer Husbandry”; Minerva Piha, “Combining Proto-Scandinavian Loanword Strata in South Saami with the Early Iron Age Archaeological Material of Jämtland and Dalarna, Sweden,” *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen* 2018, no. 64 (2018).

55 Carpelan, Linkola, and Heikkinen, “Reindeer Husbandry.”

56 Mulk, *Sirkas*; Inga-Maria Mulk, “The Role of the Sámi in Fur Trading during the Late Iron Age and Nordic Medieval Period in the Light of the Sámi Sacrificial Sites in Lapland, Northern Sweden,” *Acta Borealia* 13, no. 1 (1996): 47–80; Olsen, “Two Hearth-Row Sites.”

57 Ulf Büntgen et al., “Cooling and Societal Change during the Late Antique Little Ice Age from 536 to around 660 AD,” *Nature Geoscience* 9, no. 3 (2016): 231–36.

tices of hunter-gatherer groups in the North were probably also altered (Figure 7.8). A sudden cooling of the summertime temperatures would have caused major changes in animal behaviour and plant life, affecting hunting, gathering, and fishing opportunities. This might also have been a factor behind the development of new religious practices and ways of life, as a response to these catastrophic changes and the recovery from them, as the radiocarbon dates suggest that both *sieidi* use and reindeer herding developed from the late-sixth/early-seventh century on (Figure 7.8). Wild reindeer hunting had been the main sustenance activity in most of Sápmi ever since the Stone Age, and thus the Saami already had intimate transgenerational knowledge of reindeer behaviour, which might have facilitated their (semi-)domestication.

Hunting for skins and furs in the mountains might have become a profitable form of trade and livelihood with the expansion of fur trade networks in Europe during what has been called the “long eighth century” and the subsequent Viking Age.⁵⁸ Reindeer transportation might have allowed Saami to meet the increased demand for inland goods, for in the winters reindeer sleds extended their mobilities and multiplied their transport capacity, as compared to during the profitable mass hunts during the spring migration of wild reindeer.⁵⁹ In the summers, the reindeer might have been used for carrying supplies, as in later times.

During this period, the small coastal chiefdoms were developing into embryonic states, and there was a growing demand for inland products.⁶⁰ Saami occupied an important position as gatekeepers between the valued inland resources and the outside traders who came seeking them. In fact, the first researcher who recognized the hearth-row sites in the early 1900s, the Finn Toivo Itkonen, called them “older marketplaces.”⁶¹ This might be a rather fitting name, as the rich archaeological assemblages suggest that at least some might have served not only as seasonal meeting sites for the different Saami households but also as loci for recurrent interaction with outsiders. Recently, Kjell-Åke Aronsson⁶² has suggested an analogous role for the *stállo* sites as seasonal socio-economically important

58 Aleksander Pluskowski, “The Castle and the Warren: Medieval East Anglian Fur Culture in Context,” in *East Anglia and Its North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Bates and Robert E. Liddiard (Boydell: Woodbridge, 2013), 152–74.

59 Itkonen, *Suomen lappalaiset vuoteen 1945*.

60 Hedman, Olsen, and Vretemark, “Hunters, Herders, and Hearths.”

61 Hamari, “Vanhemmat markkinapaikat.”

62 Kjell-Åke Aronsson, “The Function of the Stállo Foundations in the Scandinavian Mountain Ridge Reconsidered,” in *Currents of Saami Pasts: Recent Advances in Saami Archaeology*, ed. Marte Spangen et al. (Helsinki: Archaeological Society of Finland, 2020), 94–103.

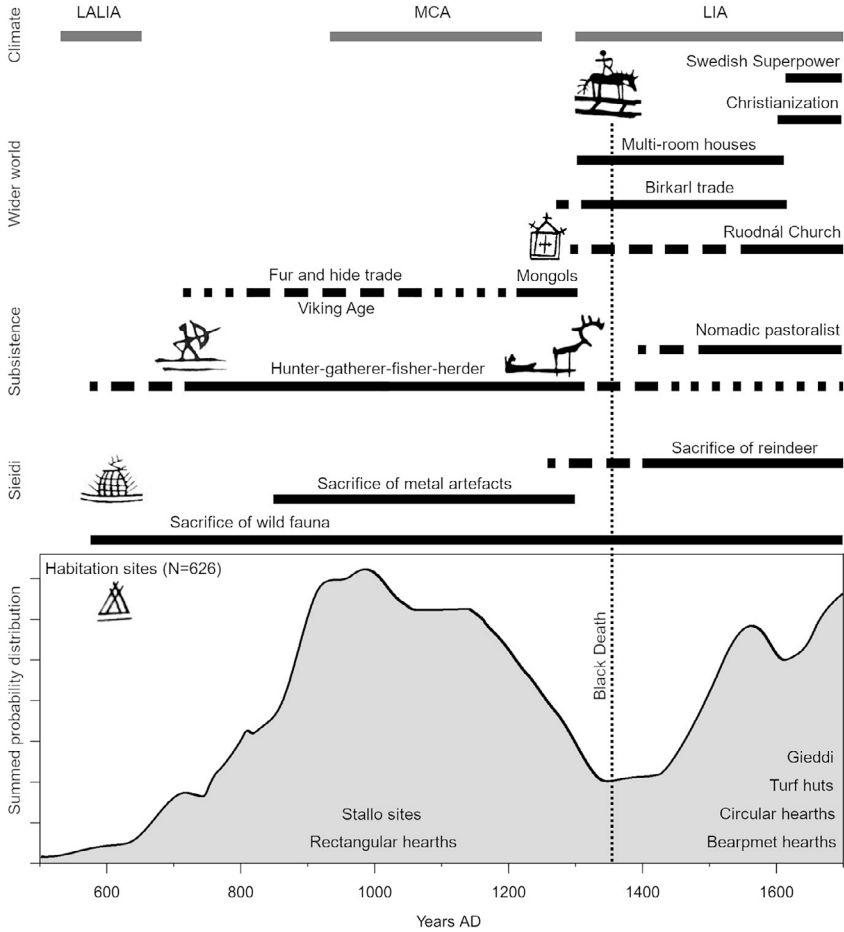


Figure 7.8: The summed probability distribution of radiocarbon dates from Saami reindeer herder contexts from the whole of Sápmi (N=626), showing the clear decline in dates in the fourteenth century (after Salmi and Seitsonen 2022, 226), changes in the Saami subsistence in the Gilbbesjávri microregion, concurrent climatic changes (LALIA = Late Antique Little Ice Age; MCA = Medieval Climatic Anomaly; LIA = Little Ice Age), and major socio-economic events in the wider region. Small figures are adapted from the imagery painted on the Saami shaman drums; the Black Death is marked with the horse and rider image of Ruto, the Saami demon of pestilence (illustration: O. Seitsonen).

meeting and trading places between different Saami groups and outsiders from various directions.

The regular linear intrasite organization visible at the hearth-row and *stállo* sites might have acted as an expression of Saami group cohesion vis à vis the outsiders bartering with them.⁶³ The coming together of Saami societies in response to intensifying contact with outsiders might also have sparked the development of the traditional Saami *siida* communities. However, at the same time, subtle intrasite differences in the richness of finds and structural details of the hearths might hint at internal social stratification connected to unequal accumulation of wealth through trading and/or specialization.⁶⁴ The practice of sacrificing valuable imported metal artefacts at the *sieidis* in the ninth–fourteenth centuries may have been one way of counterbalancing the growing inequality and of accruing prestige in Saami societies.⁶⁵

2.2 Disruptions and Development of Nomadic Pastoralism after 1400 CE

In the fourteenth century the archaeological record of Sápmi goes through some major changes. The decline of rectangular hearths, hearth-rows, and *stállo* sites takes place in parallel with the waning of the sacrifice of metal objects and wild animals at *sieidis* (Figure 7.8).⁶⁶ The warmer MCA climatic conditions started to cool in the thirteenth century. Simultaneously, the Mongol expansion from the East reached the domains of Novgorod (Russia), which disrupted the established long-distance networks, and in Southern Scandinavia early state formation had accelerated in both Norway and Sweden in the thirteenth century.⁶⁷ These changes might be reflected by the first peak in the radiocarbon dates and reindeer offerings at the

63 Hedman, Olsen, and Vretemark, “Hunters, Herders, and Hearths.”

64 Olsen, “Two Hearth-Row Sites.”

65 Inger Zachrisson, “De samiska metalldepåerna år 1000–1350: i ljuset av fyndet från Mörträs-ket, Lappland,” *Archeology and Environment* 3 (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 1984).

66 Inga-Maria Mulk, “From Metal to Meat: Continuity and Change in Ritual Practices at a Saami Sacrificial Site, Viddjavárri, Lapland, Northern Sweden,” in *Måttut-Måddagat: The Roots of Saami Ethnicities, Societies and Spaces/Places*, ed. Tiina Äikäs (Oulu: Giellagas Institute, 2009); Inger Zachrisson, “The Sámi and Their Interaction with the Nordic Peoples,” in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2008), 32–39.

67 Hansen and Olsen, *Hunters in Transition*; Risto Nurmi, Jari-Matti Kuusela, and Ville Hakamäki, “Swedenization of the North – the Early Medieval Swedish Northern Expansion and the Emergence of the Birkarls,” *Acta Borealia* 37, nos. 1–2 (2020): 1–26.

sieidi sites in the late thirteenth century (Figures 7.5, 7.8), perhaps as a spiritual response to a period of crisis.

Then, in the mid-fourteenth century, the Black Death (bubonic plague) spread to the Scandinavian Peninsula. Coastal Norway was especially hard hit and suffered badly: there are estimates that in some places 40–50 per cent of the population died, and the country took centuries to recover from this blow.⁶⁸ There is no information as to how far north or inland the plague spread or if it the inland Saami themselves became infected. However, there is no doubt that the destruction that the Black Death wrought among the Norse population affected the inland Saami populations indirectly at least, as the established socio-economic networks were disrupted.⁶⁹ Interestingly, the Saami demon of pestilence Ruto (or Ruotta) is depicted in shaman drum imagery as a horse (sometimes with a rider), an animal alien to Saami culture (Figure 7.8). The Ruto imagery might signify a collective trauma caused by some past plague epidemic that spread rapidly to the Saami area through outsiders, hence its depiction in the form of an alien animal. This might be linked to painful memories of the Black Death or some later plague, such as that of the seventeenth century.⁷⁰ The spread of past, present, and future epidemics to indigenous areas from the outside is closely linked with colonial encounters, interactions, and biopolitics.⁷¹

So far, no sites in the Gilbjesjávri microregion have been radiocarbon dated to the fourteenth century (Figure 7.8); furthermore, elsewhere in Sápmi there is a clear decline in the radiocarbon dated sites at that time (Figure 7.8). From the turn of the fourteenth–fifteenth century on, the new archaeological features – *bearpmet* hearths, *gieddi*, and *darfegoahti* turf huts – replace the earlier archaeological types. Simultaneously, there is increasing evidence of supplementary feeding and sacrificing of domesticated reindeer, and the first morphological signs of the use of draught reindeer appear in the archaeological assemblages.⁷²

Amongst the multiple external disruptions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were the growing demands and taxation by the embryonic states of Sweden, (Denmark-)Norway, and Novgorod (Russia), the related spread of Christianity,

68 Ole Jørgen Benedictow, *The Black Death and Later Plague Epidemics in the Scandinavian Countries: Perspectives and Controversies* (Warsaw: De Gruyter Open Poland, 2016).

69 Sommerseth, “Villreinfangst og tamreindrift i Indre Troms.”

70 Risto Pulkkinen, “Ruto,” in *The Saami. A Cultural Encyclopedia*, ed. Ulla-Maija Kulonen, Irja Seurujärvi-Kari, and Risto Pulkkinen (Vammala: SKS, 2005), 339–40.

71 See Tim Frandy, this volume.

72 Anna-Kaisa Salmi et al., “Working Reindeer in Past and Present Reindeer Herding,” in *Domestication in Action: Past and Present Human-Reindeer Interaction in Northern Fennoscandia*, ed. Anna-Kaisa Salmi (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 95–121.

the cooling environment, the Mongol expansion in the East, the Black Death, and possibly also the depletion of wild reindeer.⁷³ It seems likely that the multi-room house sites, to give one example, that appear in the fourteenth–seventeenth centuries on the Norwegian Arctic Ocean coast northeast of Gilbbesjávri, as well as the activity of Birkarl traders originating from the Baltic Sea coast from the late thirteenth to seventeenth centuries, were each related to the reappearance of multiethnic and multilateral socio-economic networks in the wake of the thirteenth–fourteenth-century crises.⁷⁴ Kuusela et al. have suggested that the Birkarl trading system might have had its roots in the established Iron Age contact networks, which is supported by Bergman and Edlund’s proposition that trade between Birkarls and Saami developed from mutually beneficial Indigenous starting points and that their relationships were based on interdependence and reciprocity.⁷⁵ However, in the sixteenth century the Birkarl families’ role changed as they became tax collectors for the Swedish Crown. In addition to the Swedish Crown and Birkarls from the South, Saami in the Gilbbesjávri microregion were likely involved in socio-economic networks with other outsiders, such as the Norse and other traders sailing along the Arctic Ocean coast and Karelian and Russian merchants from the East.⁷⁶

Pastoral nomadic lifeways likely developed as a Saami response to changing socio-political, economic, and ecological stimuli. These fuelled the change from viewing reindeer as prey animals and a means of mobility and increased transportation, to identifying reindeer as owned means of production.⁷⁷ However, the shift towards a nomadic pastoralist economy might have been rather fluid, as (small-scale) reindeer herding had provided a resilient and adaptable basis for

73 Hansen and Olsen, *Hunters in Transition*; Bjørklund, “Domestication, Reindeer Husbandry and the Development of Sámi Pastoralism”; Storli, “On the Historiography of Sami Reindeer Pastoralism.”

74 Ingela Bergman and Lars-Erik Edlund, “Birkarlar and Sámi – Inter-Cultural Contacts beyond State Control: Reconsidering the Standing of External Tradesmen (Birkarlar) in Medieval Sámi Societies,” *Acta Borealia* 33, no. 1 (2016): 52–80; Jørn E. Henriksen, “The Chronology of Multi-Room Houses,” in *Hybrid Spaces: Medieval Finnmark and the Archaeology of Multi-Room Houses*, ed. Bjørnar Olsen, Przemysław Urbańczyk, and Colin Amundsen (Oslo: Novus, 2011), 229–36.

75 Jari-Matti Kuusela, Risto Nurmi, and Ville Hakamäki, “Co-Existence and Colonisation: Re-Assessing the Settlement History of the Pre-Christian Bothnian Bay Coast,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 49, no. 2 (2016): 177–203; Bergman and Edlund, “Birkarlar and Sámi.”

76 Lars Ivar Hansen, “Networks, Diversity, and Mobility among the Northern Sámi in the 16th Century,” in *Networks, Interaction and Emerging Identities in Fennoscandia and Beyond: Papers from the Conference Held in Tromsø, Norway, October 13–16 2009*, ed. Charlotte Damm and Janne Saarikivi (Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, 2012), 217–39.

77 Hood, “Framing Sami Entanglement in Early Modern Colonial Processes.”

Mountain Saami existence since the Iron Age.⁷⁸ Long-term continuity from the Iron Age onwards is evident in the importance of hunting, fishing, and gathering that persists even in the pastoralist Saami societies up to the present day, although nowadays these appear more as transgenerational forms of cultural self-expression than subsistence practices.

The Saami herders' reindeer groups grew perhaps partly as a response to the increasing demand by the Swedish crown for animal goods and bull reindeer as tax products, and for transportation services in their colonial undertakings. The enlarged herds required larger pastures and longer pasture cycles, which might have led to the establishment of the long-distance pendular transhumance patterns characteristic of the Mountain Saami since medieval times, and in places to the present day.⁷⁹ Also, the increased mobility would have permitted a form of passive pastoralist resistance against the rising demands and taxation of the outside colonial powers; a kind of independent anarchist response that allowed them to move beyond the outsiders' reach if needed.⁸⁰

It is known from historical documents that by 1595 the Saami pastoralists in the Gilbbesjávri microregion practised long-distance transhumance between their winter pastures in the Finnish inland forest zone to the south and the summer pastures on the North Norwegian coast.⁸¹ On the coast the Ivgobahta marketplace (Figure 7.2c; Norway: Skibotn) acted as a summertime point of contact between outsiders and Saami nomads, at least from that time on. At the other end of the yearly cycle, the first church in this part of Sápmi, Ruovdnál Church (Figures 7.2e, 7.5b), acted as a wintertime marketplace from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, if not earlier. It was founded by the mid-sixteenth century, although the earliest dated burials from the churchyard are from the thirteenth century (Figure 7.8). According to transgenerational memories, Ruovdnál Church was established by three Saami brothers, who cut the logs to build it on the Norwegian coast and then transported them inland, though it might also be connected to a missionary sent by Swedish King Gustav I Vasa in 1559 to preach to the Saami.⁸² In any case, Christian influences had already been reaching Saami from different directions centuries

⁷⁸ Hood, "Framing Sami Entanglement in Early Modern Colonial Processes."

⁷⁹ Carpelan, Linkola, and Heikkinen, "Reindeer Husbandry."

⁸⁰ Hood, "Framing Sami Entanglement in Early Modern Colonial Processes."

⁸¹ Itkonen, *Suomen lappalaiset vuoteen 1945*; Kaisa Korpijaakko, *Saamelaisten oikeusasemasta Ruotsi-Suomessa: Oikeushistoriallinen tutkimus länsi-pohjan lapin maankäyttöoloista ja -oikeuksista ennen 1700-luvun puoliväliä* (Helsinki: Lakimiesliiton kustannus, 1989).

⁸² Jack P. R. Dury et al., "Consideration of Freshwater and Multiple Marine Reservoir Effects: Dating of Individuals with Mixed Diets from Northern Sweden," *Radiocarbon* 60, no. 5 (2018): 1561–85.

earlier. Besides being ecclesiastic centres, churches across Sápmi acted as seasonal multicultural loci for trading, colonial administration, and social contacts until the nineteenth century.⁸³ It is perhaps significant that, according to the Saami oral histories, the winter camp of the local Ruovdnál *siida* was in the immediate vicinity of Ruovdnál Church, somewhere near Dálvas Mountain (literally “Winterfell”) (Figures 7.2d, 7.5a).

It appears that the long-distance nomadic pattern of “travel[ling] like the reindeer”⁸⁴ between winter pastures in the forest zone (in Finland) and summer pastures on the coast (in Norway) was practised in the Gilbbesjávri region from at least the late sixteenth century. Even though these pastoral movements had become restricted since the mid-nineteenth century by national borders and their closures, the mobilities display a long continuity. Since there were no roads in the area before the Second World War, the pastoralist mobilities remained traditional, and even in the mid-twentieth century the famous Saami elder Gáijohaš, Ántt’ Ásllat, of the Raittijärvi *siida* (Figure 7.2b) described their mobile lifeway as “always coming and going, like migratory birds.”⁸⁵ In fact, the last seasonal migration using a reindeer caravan (SaN: *raidu*) in Finland was accomplished by Gáijohaš’s *siida* as recently as the mid-1960s.

Oral histories underline the continuity of pastoralists’ transnational mobilities and also make a distinction between the mobilities of the long-range nomadic pastoralists and the last wild reindeer hunters, who according to them remained more sedentary until the nineteenth century. According to local transgenerational memories, the number of wild reindeer had diminished over the centuries in the Gilbbesjávri region, and the last wild reindeer were shot in 1916 in the sacred Hálđi Mountain area, known locally as the “Mother of Reindeer” owing to its importance as a springtime reindeer birthing ground.

The fourteenth-century disruptions likely instigated a process of change from more egalitarian hunter-herder societies towards pastoralist communities where reindeer came to be seen as privatized *siida* and family property. In the former the accumulation of wealth might have been counterbalanced, at least as a public

83 Tiina Äikäs, Oula Seitsonen, and Anna-Kaisa Salmi, “Kolari Marketplace in a Multicultural Landscape between Sámi, Swedes, and Finns,” *Meta H 2021* (2021): 125–42; Itkonen, *Suomen lappalaiset vuoteen 1945*.

84 Johan Turi, *An Account of the Sámi*, trans. Thomas A. DuBois (Chicago: Nordic Studies Press, 2011).

85 Oula Seitsonen, “We Are Always Coming and Going, like Migratory Birds’: Diachronic Changes in the Seasonal Settlement of Sámi Reindeer Herders in Lake Gilbbesjávri Region, North-western Sápmi, 700–1950 AD,” in *Seasonal Settlement in the Medieval and Early Modern Countryside*, ed. Piers Dixon and Claudia Theune (Leiden: Sidestone, 2021), 295–308.

display, by the sacrifice of valuable metal objects at *sieidis*.⁸⁶ At the same time, the linear intrasite organization of dwellings underlined, at least symbolically, Saami unity vis à vis outsiders, and Saami authority and agency in the seasonal interactions. Such expressions of unity can no longer be observed in the archaeological record after the fourteenth century; the dynamics of the multiethnic exchange were transformed as a result of increasing colonial involvement.⁸⁷ The new emphasis on privatizing the reindeer appears analogous to the effects that the Black Death had in Central Europe, which led to the rise of what has been termed “agrarian capitalism.”⁸⁸

Conclusion

Reindeer husbandry in Sápmi appears to have developed since the sixth–eighth centuries CE as the result of interplay, conflict, and conscious Saami responses to various environmental and socio-economic influences, underlining the agency and importance of local Indigenous actors. The role that Saami played in their interactions with outsiders seems to have fluctuated over time. In pre-1400 CE times, the Saami hunter-herders appear to have maintained a more mutually reciprocal and cooperative relationship with outsiders in their seasonal interactions.⁸⁹ Saami apparently formed a well-integrated part of Norse society, at least in parts of Sápmi, and ethnic boundaries were probably fluid and evolving.⁹⁰ The more equal Saami position in the intergroup negotiations might have been visually and symbolically transmitted by the linear intrasite organization. However, the very need for such expressions of group cohesion might hint at an asymmetry of group relations at this time.⁹¹

Conversely, in post-1400 times the intergroup relations appear more as exploitative colonial interference driven by outside agents. These included the demands of embryonic states in different directions, all struggling to gain a foothold

86 Seitsonen and Viljanmaa, “Transnational Landscapes of Sámi Reindeer”; Zachrisson, “The Sámi and Their Interaction.”

87 Hood, “Framing Sami Entanglement in Early Modern Colonial Processes.”

88 Tom Scott, “Agrarian West,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History 1350–1750*, ed. Hamish Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 398–427.

89 Bergman and Edlund, “Birkarlar and Sámi.”

90 Hege Skalleberg Gjerde, “Common Ground. Saami-Norse Interactions in South Norway during the Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Period,” in *Currents of Saami Pasts: Recent Advances in Saami Archaeology* (Helsinki: Archaeological Society of Finland, 2020), 149–59.

91 Hood, “Framing Sami Entanglement in Early Modern Colonial Processes.”

on the northernmost shore of Europe. This is mirrored in the archaeological record by the major changes in the land-use and movement patterns that suggest increased mobility, perhaps as an answer by mobile people to the increasing demands and restrictions. The long-range nomadism allowed the Saami a form of pastoralist anarchist resistance against the colonial attempts to assert control. For most of the year, they roamed in the “wilderness,” beyond the reach of the authorities, whom they met only seasonally and at set locations, such as churches and marketplaces. Obviously, the Saami have never experienced their lands as any kind of “wilderness,” but instead as an integral part of their way of life; as one interviewee put it, “Home is all our fells.”⁹² They could choose to remain out of reach or even migrate to completely new areas. This illustrates in one way how colonized people in different contexts will find inventive ways of resistance and self-expression.⁹³

Gilbesjávri region has been in the past and hopefully remains also in the future the homeland for pastoral nomadic Saami groups. The local *siidas* have chosen to maintain their traditional ways as much as possible, though adapted to the demands of outside world and capitalism. The Raittijärvi *siida* in particular has deliberately decided to stay out of reach, and there is still no road to their remote village. According to a local story, while on a ski trip the former Finnish president, Urho Kaleva Kekkonen (1900–1986), offered them a road, but they chose instead to take a telephone line, which has now been replaced by wireless communication through satellite links. Members of Raittijärvi *siida* have been determined to follow the traditional herding practices as much as possible, yet modernized with snowmobiles, drones, and GPS devices. Their pendular transhumance today takes place within the borders of the state-regulated *bálggus* (SaN) reindeer herding cooperative. However, on a local level, within the *bálggus*, the fluid pasture boundaries are continually being negotiated communally by the different *siidas* that inhabit the territory, in accordance with common law.⁹⁴ Besides Raittijärvi, the

92 Herva et al., “Walking Together and Speaking through Contested Landscapes.”

93 David A. Chappell, “Active Agents versus Passive Victims: Decolonized Historiography or Problematic Paradigm?” *The Contemporary Pacific* 7, no. 2 (1995): 303–26; Melissa Nursey-Bray et al., “Indigenous Adaptation – Not Passive Victims,” in *Old Ways for New Days*, ed. Melissa Nursey-Bray et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 25–56; See Carina Damm, this volume, and Solveig Marie Wang, this volume.

94 Hannu I. Heikkinen, “Holding Ground and Loitering Around: Long-Term Research Partnerships and Understanding Culture Change Dilemmas of Indigenous Saami,” *Time and Mind* 14, no. 3 (2021): 459–74; Pirjo Oinas, “Yhteisöllisyys poronhoidon muutoksen voimavarana,” *Maaseututkimus* 31 (2023): 55–79; Helena Ruotsala, *Muuttuvat palkiset: elo, työ ja ympäristö Kittilän Kyrön paliskunnassa ja Kuolan Luujärven poronhoitokollektiiveissa vuosina 1930–1995* (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2002).

neighbouring Gova-Labba *siida* also continues to migrate between their summer and winter pastures in the early twenty-first century. They say that they might revive those migration patterns again in the future, depending on multiple factors such as the constantly renegotiated pasture-use rights and changing climate.⁹⁵

Throughout time, active Saami agency has been an integral part of multiethnic, multilateral negotiations.⁹⁶ The changes reflected in the archaeological remains appear not just as Saami reactions to outside colonial influences, but rather as conscious Saami responses and adaptations to the fluctuating climatic and socio-economic environment. Viewed from the state-centred perspectives of the South, Gilbbesjávri area has always appeared peripheral and difficult to reach, which has afforded the local Saami some freedom. Colonized people tend to be portrayed as passive and powerless, but even under colonial rule people will find means of (passive) resistance and self-expression.⁹⁷ The Saami have had to adapt over time to the ever-increasing presence of Nordic (settler) colonial, mercantilist, and capitalist systems, but at the same time they have maintained, and revived, resilient reindeer-based lifeways and cosmologies that transmit their heritage into the twenty-first century. This is manifested in the twenty-first century in their modernized version of ancestral practices, though necessarily adapted to the demands of the global capitalist framework.

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95 Hannu I. Heikkinen et al., “Poronhoidon historia käsivarren lapissa ja mallalla,” in *Poronhoidon ja suojelelun vaikutukset mallan luonnonpuistossa*, ed. Mikko Jokinen (Helsinki: Metsäntutkimuslaitos, 2005), 14–24.

96 Hood, “Framing Sami Entanglement in Early Modern Colonial Processes.”

97 Chappell, “Active Agents versus Passive Victims”; Nursey-Bray et al., “Indigenous Adaptation.” See Damm, this volume, and Wang, this volume.

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Part 4: **Entanglements**

Jay L. Lalonde

Chapter 8

“There Is a Strong Leaven of the Old Norse Blood in Nearly All of Us”: Settler Colonialism and the Vínland Mythology on the East Coast of North America

Introduction

The Norse settlement site at L’Anse aux Meadows in today’s Newfoundland, the ancestral home of the Beothuk, has been the subject of popular consciousness ever since its 1960 so-called discovery by Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad. Stories of Norse presence in North America have fuelled settler colonialism and impacted immigration policy and discourse since at least the second half of the nineteenth century. A significant body of contemporary research now exists on the use of Norse and “Viking” imagery (including the Vínland Sagas) among White supremacists¹ and the far right in North America and Europe.² But there often seems to be somewhat of a disconnect between the popularity of Norse imagery among the far right and the

1 The capitalization of “White” is an editorial decision made by the editors of this volume.

2 See, for example, Verena Höfig, “Vinland and White Nationalism,” in *From Iceland to the Americas: Vinland and Historical Imagination*, ed. Tim William Machan and Jón Helgason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020) and “Re-Wild Yourself: Old Norse Myth and Radical White Nationalist Groups in Trump’s America,” in *Old Norse Myths as Political Ideologies*, ed. Nicolas Meylan and Lukas Röslü (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 209–31; and, especially, Zachary J. Melton, “An Excuse for Violence: The Viking Image, Race, and Masculinity in U.S. Popular Culture” (PhD thesis, University of Iceland, 2023).

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much longer intertwined histories of settler colonialism, White supremacy,³ and increasingly restrictive immigration policy in the Americas. While it is important to examine why twenty-first-century racists and White supremacists seem so drawn to symbols associated with the Norse, this imagined link between a North American White settler identity and the Norse has a much longer history than these contemporary iterations. Furthermore, the focus on the marginal Norse presence in today's Atlantic Canada and possibly New England has created a specifically East Coast manifestation of colonial entitlement, one that facilitated an easy path to immigration and naturalization for Scandinavian settlers, who were seen as direct descendants of the Norse and thus as having a perceived *right* to settlement. Furthermore, it also created a symbolic link between the Anglo settlers themselves and the Norse – even if the settlers did not have any actual Scandinavian heritage – reinforcing the ideology of White supremacy and settler claims to land.

The larger framework in which images of the Norse as early “discoverers,” “migrants,” or “settlers” (even though there does not seem to be much archaeological, historical, or textual evidence for any of these contemporary classifications) appear has to do with how settler colonialism has been dependent on immigration and how immigration has, in turn, continuously reinforced, solidified, and normalized settler colonial governance and jurisdiction. In this chapter, I will examine a small fragment of this mutually reinforcing structure. I will trace the ways in which the repeated invocation of Vinland mythology – i.e., the *popular narrative* of Vinland, present in commemorative practices and performances, rather than the historical or textual phenomenon – became part of settler colonial logic. First, it was used in promoting Scandinavian immigration to Canada and the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Second, mirroring settler colonial doctrines, this narrative has also functioned as an argument for the alleged right of American and Canadian settlers to the land and re-

3 By *White supremacy*, I mean the way settler societies rely on a racialized hierarchy in which Whiteness and those perceived as White occupy the top, creating a racialized binary between them and those perceived as “other” and not (entirely) White. This hegemony of Whiteness is both taken for granted and continues to afford privileges to those benefitting from Whiteness, while enabling and enforcing the exploitation and dehumanization of those cast as non-White and “other.” In this way, White supremacy is a fundamental feature of settler societies, and the settler colonial “logic of elimination” (Wolfe 2006) is inherently racialized. For a discussion of Whiteness as an enduring structuring element of settler societies, see, for example, Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwood, “Beyond White Privilege: Geographies of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism,” *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 6 (2016): 715–33; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Daniel HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido, eds, *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

sources of what we now generally think of as the East Coast of North America – the homelands of many Indigenous nations, such as the Mi’kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot. While some of these settlers have certainly used their supposed Scandinavian heritage to support their claims to land and belonging, such heritage has curiously not been a requirement – unlike their ability to benefit from proximity to Whiteness and Anglo-Saxonism.

1 The Brief Encounters in the Vínland Sagas

The narrative of Vínland and the Norse settlement and travels there are based on the relatively sparse descriptions in what are known as the Vínland Sagas, i.e., *Grænlandinga saga* [The Saga of the Greenlanders] and *Eiríks saga rauða* [Erik the Red’s Saga], as well as – at least since the L’Anse aux Meadows excavations – archaeological evidence. The Norse arrived on the eastern coast of North America from Greenland around the year 1000 CE. Their voyages, as recorded in the two sagas, point to the Norse sailing to Baffin Island (“Helluland”) and along Labrador (“Markland”), to and around Newfoundland, and potentially all the way around Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island, to the Gulf of St Lawrence, around the south shore of Nova Scotia to the Bay of Fundy, and – though much less likely – perhaps even to Maine and New York State, before establishing a small settlement called Leifsbúðir on the northernmost tip of today’s Newfoundland, at what is now known as L’Anse aux Meadows. The settlement – whether intended to be permanent or not – was clearly both short-lived and extremely marginal in its influence, and the descriptions of the camp, landscape, and events that took place there are relatively sparse.⁴

The sagas do, however, describe interactions with Indigenous people:⁵ the inhabitants referred to as *skrælingjar* in “hide-covered boats” whom Þorvaldr’s

⁴ Though the Norse settlement in North America itself seems to have been marginal both in its size and duration, recent archaeological research points to North America being a source of timber for shipbuilding and other larger projects for Norse settlers in Greenland. While the imports of timber from the East Coast of North America seem to be infrequent – compared to those from Iceland or Norway – they point to the Norse continuing to sail from Greenland to North America until the fourteenth century. See Lisabet Guðmundsdóttir, “Timber Imports to Norse Greenland: Lifeline or Luxury?” *Antiquity* 97, no. 392 (2023): 454–71.

⁵ By *Indigenous*, I mean original peoples of a particular area; in this context, simply those peoples present in the area before the Norse arrival.

men kill without any provocation.⁶ There is also a description, during Þorfinnr karlsefni and Guðríðr's voyage to Leifsbúðir, of the Indigenous people wanting to trade furs for iron weapons (which Þorfinnr forbids).⁷ Eventually, one of them picks up an axe and kills another man with it; he then famously throws the axe into the ocean, perhaps concluding that the Norse weapons were of no real value to people not wishing to wage war.⁸ The Indigenous people are described paradoxically: as both very frightening and easily frightened; threatening in battle but readily killed by the Norse without pretext. In *Eiríks saga rauða*, it is clearly implied that the Norse left because they felt threatened by the Indigenous people.⁹ There has been much debate about who these people were, but the descriptions of their kayaks and homes point to the ancestors of today's Inuit.¹⁰ The Gulf of St Lawrence has always been a busy place, however, and while Newfoundland is the ancestral home of the Beothuk, the area visited by the Norse was also occupied and used by the Mi'kmaq, Innu, and potentially other Algonquian-speaking peoples of today's Labrador.¹¹ The Norse presence is a marginal episode in the history of diverse and long-standing contacts and relationships in the Gulf.¹²

6 "The Saga of the Greenlanders," in *The Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. Jane Smiley (London: Penguin, 2001), 642.

7 This description is reminiscent of papal bans on selling weapons to non-Christians, especially that of Pope Alexander III at the Third Lateran Council in 1179, explicitly targeting Saracens (Muslims). See, for example, Sophia Menache, "Papal Attempts at a Commercial Boycott of the Muslims in the Crusader Period," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63, no. 2 (2012): 236–59.

8 "The Saga of the Greenlanders," 648.

9 "Eirik the Red's Saga," in Smiley, *The Sagas of Icelanders*, 671.

10 Referred to as proto-Inuit or by the archaeological term Thule.

11 See in particular the literature review in Charles A. Martijn, "Early Mi'kmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, c. 1500–1763," *Newfoundland & Labrador Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 44–102. See also Susan M. Manning, "Contrasting Colonisations: (Re)Storying Newfoundland/Ktaqmkuk as Place," *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 314–31.

12 See Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tingley's young adult novel *Skraelings* (Iqaluit: Inhabit Media, 2014). In it, they imagine the Norse through the eyes of a young hunter, Kannujaq, as strange newcomers to the world populated by the Inuit and Tuniiit, who are themselves engaged in complex relationships, including conflicts. In this way, the Qitsualik-Tingleys reposition and recontextualize the Norse episode in Newfoundland, situating it in its rightful place: as just one of many stories of contact between diverse peoples and nations. While the Vinland story has been weaponized to further and justify Indigenous erasure and displacement, the Qitsualik-Tingleys show that this point of view – while it may have been historically privileged – is far from being the only one possible. See also the sculptures *Odin*, *Thor 900 AD*, *Odin Shape Shifter*, and *The Beginning* by the acclaimed Inuk artist Abraham Anghik Ruben (see fig. 2.1 in this volume). Perhaps most clearly thematizing Norse–Inuit contact, *The Beginning* is a sculpture of a Norse man holding a toggle harpoon, which has been used for whaling by Inuit and other Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

2 Colonial Doctrines and Echoes of Early Modern Land-Taking

The many scholarly and popular portrayals of Norse settlement in North America cannot be isolated from the founding doctrines of settler colonialism, which references to the Norse have often been used to reinforce and justify. European sovereignty claims in the Americas are rooted in a series of fifteenth-century papal bulls that enabled the so-called Doctrine of Discovery. The most important of these bulls for colonial expansion were *Romanus Pontifex* and *Inter Caetera*.¹³ *Romanus Pontifex* is a bull re-issued in 1455 to Alfonso V of Portugal by Pope Nicholas V, granting Portugal sovereignty over all lands south of Cape Bojador in West Africa. This Portuguese monopoly in Africa was further affirmed in the Spanish–Portuguese Treaty of Alcáçovas in 1479, which first divided the colonial world into Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence. After Columbus’s first voyage, this division was modified in the papal bull *Inter Caetera* in 1493, issued by Pope Alexander VI to Ferdinand and Isabella of Aragon, and in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, which drew a precise line in the Atlantic to demarcate supposed Spanish and Portuguese colonial claims. These papal declarations meant that by the late fifteenth century, the Doctrine of Discovery effectively allowed Europeans to claim sovereignty over *any* lands – even if they were clearly already inhabited – as long as they were not already held by a Christian prince. The presence of non-Christian occupants – “pagans” or “heathens” – was not necessarily considered an obstacle to asserting sovereignty, even though some, such as the famous sixteenth-century philosopher and jurist Francisco de Vitoria, clearly saw Indigenous peoples as the owners of their lands and the conquest of their lands as therefore unjust.¹⁴ The legal concepts originating in these papal bulls have been essential for justifying ongoing European colonization.

These doctrines were originally often less about the colonization of the New World *per se* than about managing real and potential conflicts between sovereign states. At the same time, they were a reaction to a novel problem;¹⁵ i.e., how

¹³ For the texts of these bulls in Latin and English, see pages 9–26 (*Romanus Pontifex*) and 27–32 (*Inter Caetera*) in *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917).

¹⁴ Andrew Fitzmaurice, “The Genealogy of Terra Nullius,” *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 129 (2017): 6–7.

¹⁵ As legal scholar Antony Anghie argues, “Sovereignty doctrine acquired its character through the colonial encounter” (29). Debates among early modern European jurists about sovereignty and jurisdiction were directly defined by ongoing colonial dispossession. See Antony Anghie, “Francisco de Vitoria and the Colonial Origins of International Law,” in *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13–31.

should European colonizers include Indigenous peoples in their understandings of sovereignty and ownership. This can be seen in the writings of the sixteenth-century philosopher and jurist Hugo Grotius, as well as in those of Vitoria and the School of Salamanca associated with him.¹⁶ Studying the legal and philosophical justifications for colonialism soon reveals that these doctrines were often fractured, contradictory, and could be made highly flexible. While the element of “discovery” has been important for asserting a claim to a territory, sighting land or formally landing and claiming it for a sovereign has not typically been enough to ensure that other powers would respect this claim. Occupation of the territory, rather than its “discovery,” became crucial. The medieval idea of *occupatio* has generally been seen by scholars as the source of Western understandings of property and rights.¹⁷ The earliest European discourse on rights revolved around property rights. The idea of occupation is key to understanding how empires have argued for their ownership of overseas territories, and its use increased in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Adam Smith and John Locke argued not only that the European occupation of territory justified its ownership, but that real occupation was only achieved through the land’s use or so-called “improvement by labour.” This Lockean provision has been used to disregard any Indigenous presence, occupation, or use of land (which itself could not be ignored by the numerous Europeans who came into contact with Indigenous people) that did not conform to European expectations of improvement – which is to say, all of them. In this way, European colonizers and colonists adapted *occupatio* to render the New World void of ownership and thus to justify colonial dispossession.

These ideas about European occupation as grounds for property rights to land are rooted in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century legal debates, but they have shaped and moulded colonialism throughout its ongoing history, including the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that I focus on in the remainder of this paper. While the formal doctrine of *terra nullius* (“no one’s land”) originated only in the late nineteenth century and has been mainly employed in twentieth-century international negotiations about sovereignty over Svalbard and the Poles,

¹⁶ The doctrines developed by the Spanish and the Portuguese and their focus on “discovery” (as well as on “conquest”) heavily influenced British colonial policy: In 1496, Henry VIII granted a patent to John Cabot and his sons, authorizing them to claim, in his name, all and any lands “which before this time were unknown to all Christians.” Though the presence of non-Christians was not considered a problem when claiming “discovery,” even scholars of the time asserted that discovery did not automatically mean *ownership*.

¹⁷ As Andrew Fitzmaurice has put it, already in medieval Europe, “*occupatio* was used to explain how people came to have rights in things,” (2) and this idea has laid the ground for legal justifications of colonial dispossession. See Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

it is clearly based on underlying ideas of discovery and occupation. In the notorious 1823 case *Johnson v. McIntosh*, US Chief Justice John Marshall asserted that discovery did indeed grant title over the land “discovered” and that this title superseded any “occupation rights” the Indigenous inhabitants might have had. This opinion was also used in Canadian cases. Even though the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 2014, in *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia*, that “the doctrine of *terra nullius* never applied in Canada, as confirmed by the *Royal Proclamation*,” the case still asserted that the Crown has an underlying title in land and a right to encroach on Aboriginal title¹⁸ in the “public interest.”¹⁹

As Andrew Fitzmaurice emphasizes, well into the nineteenth century, “explorers and politicians persisted with claims of discovery, jurists insisted that original title came from occupation and that derivative title came from conquest and cession.”²⁰ While these doctrines of colonial dispossession have early modern and even medieval origins, they are still visible in contemporary settler colonial anxieties about sovereignty, such as when, in 1953 and 1955 – during the Cold War – the Canadian state coerced about a hundred Inuit to relocate from Inukjuak in Nunavik and Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) in Nunavut to High Arctic islands that had never been permanently inhabited before, in order to assert its sovereignty in the Arctic by occupation – however marginal in numbers – of the territory.²¹ Such a broad look at legal justifications of colonial expansion helps us to see that while discovery has indeed often been invoked, it is *occupation* that provides the key argument for colonial sovereignty claims. Similarly, the construct of discovery, supported by imagined occupation, remains the basis for the Norse fantasies of settler Canadians and Americans.

¹⁸ “Aboriginal title” is a concept in Canadian law that recognizes a *sui generis* right of Indigenous peoples to the use of and jurisdiction over their ancestral lands. This title has generally been interpreted by courts as usufructuary – granting the use of and access to land – rather than ownership right, thus entirely different from private property ownership such as fee simple. A long history of Canadian court decisions shows the problematic nature of such a relationship to land being decided by settler colonial courts, which are mainly concerned with questions such as the relationship of the Aboriginal title to the Crown’s underlying title and whether the Aboriginal title (established as at very least *having existed* in the past in *Calder v. British Columbia* [1974]) could be extinguished, such as through treaty signing.

¹⁹ *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia* [2014] 2 S.C.R. 257, at para. 69 and 71.

²⁰ *Sovereignty, Property and Empire*, 9.

²¹ For studies of the High Arctic relocations, see especially Keith Lowther, “An Exercise in Sovereignty: The Government of Canada and the Inuit Relocation of 1953” (Master’s dissertation, University of Calgary, 1989); Larry Audlaluk, *What I Remember, What I Know* (Iqaluit: Inhabit Media, 2020); and Daniel Dumas, “Place Them on a Stamp: Inuit, Banal Colonialism, and the ‘Pioneer Experiment’ of the High Arctic Relocations,” *Political Geography* 105 (2023): 1–10.

3 Viking Romantic Nationalism and Claiming the Land in New England

So where does this all leave Vínland – and, more importantly, the *myth* of Vínland, as constructed over the last two hundred years by North American settlers? As described above, the Norse presence on the eastern coast of North America and their settlement at what is today L’Anse aux Meadows were clearly marginal: spatially, temporally, and in their influence on on-the-ground relations. As Simon Halink points out, “the Norse settlement of Vínland was, in fact, a *failure*.”²² This is not, however, the context in which the Norse visitors appear in North American history and popular culture. Even though in the Vínland Sagas themselves, the settlement is described unambiguously as a failure and the land as very clearly inhabited by Indigenous people, the story has gained a nationalistic character, centring the Norse as adventurers, explorers, and discoverers.

The Vínland story became especially popular in the early nineteenth century, with the emergence of Romanticism and the need for national origin myths. In the United States, this involved the proliferation of Anglo-Saxonism, a movement looking to define American identity, usually as superior, by its perceived Anglo-Saxon origins – and this era also coincided with the beginnings of mass migration to America from Western and Northern Europe, including Scandinavia. Ideas specifically linking North American settlers to the Norse begin to appear in earnest around the mid-nineteenth century. In the early 1850s, Henry Schoolcraft attributed part of the petroglyphs on the Dighton Rock in Massachusetts to the “adventurous Northmen from Greenland” who visited America, sailing from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia south to Massachusetts and Rhode Island.²³ Schoolcraft argues that the Vínland mentioned in the sagas corresponds to New England.²⁴ In 1874 – which was also, coincidentally, the year of the first major emigration from Iceland to America – Rasmus B. Anderson published his book, *America Not Discovered by Co-*

22 Simon Halink, “The Good Sense to Lose America: Vinland as Remembered by Icelanders,” in *From Iceland to the Americas: Vinland and Historical Imagination*, ed. Tim William Machan and Jón Karl Helgason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 160.

23 Henry R. Schoolcraft, “Archæological Evidences that the Continent Had Been Visited by People Having Letters, Prior to the Era of Columbus,” in *Historical and Statistical Information, Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co, 1851), 106. Unlike Carl Christian Rafn and others a few decades earlier, Schoolcraft does not see the Dighton Rock as a fully Norse artefact, but proposes that there are two distinct sets of petroglyphs on the rock: one Algonquian and the other Norse (111).

24 Schoolcraft, 107.

lumbus, in which he famously insists that Columbus knew about and was inspired by the Norse “discovery.”²⁵ In 1887, Marie A. Shipley published her book, *The Icelandic Discoverers of America: Or, Honour to Whom Honour is Due*, citing the “immediate necessity of establishing the truth.” Shipley argues that Columbus “robbed the Northmen of their discovery” – an act that she sees as equally despicable to his having enslaved people.²⁶ These and many other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts highlight the role of the Norse as pre-Columbian explorers and link them with contemporary Scandinavian immigrants to America and their descendants. These accounts emphasize that Scandinavia and North America share a unique bond and that Scandinavians have a unique *claim* to America – one preceding Columbus’s claim. Being able to replace Columbus with Leifr Eiríksson, a Norse explorer known from the *Vínland Sagas*, as the true “discoverer of America” meant being able to privilege White, Protestant,²⁷ and Nordic identities among settlers.

The nineteenth century saw the first mass migrations of Scandinavians to North America and increasingly restrictive immigration policies in both the United States and Canada. For the first time, state bureaucrats and policymakers aimed to design explicitly racialized policies,²⁸ and the narrative about the “desirability of immigrants” became embedded in mainstream public debate. This desirability relied heavily on imagined racialized and gendered categories. While British settler colonies certainly prioritized British settlers, they also relied on others who could successfully conform to what I call a “proximity to White Anglo-Saxon Britishness.” These settlers were, in historian James Belich’s words, “by no means exclusively Anglo, but Anglo-prone,” and they “experienced varying de-

25 Rasmus B. Anderson, *America Not Discovered by Columbus* (Chicago: S.C. Griggs, 1891), 13.

26 Marie A. Shipley, *The Icelandic Discoverers of America: Or, Honour to Whom Honour is Due* (London: Trübner & Co, 1887), 4.

27 Since the real Norse visitors of America could not, of course, have been literally Protestant, this linkage appears to be an essentially racialized transfer of the religious – but largely linked to perceived Whiteness – virtue associated with contemporary Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons onto the pre-Reformation Norse. This may have been motivated especially by the unease in Anglo settler colonies that the Catholic Columbus “discovering” America for Spain should be their founding father.

28 In my view, these systems of immigration restriction started with the US 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act* and 1885 Canadian *Chinese Immigration Act* and continued with various legislation attempting to restrict the entry of immigrants not perceived as sufficiently White (usually coded as “unsuitable for integration”) through head taxes, requirement of direct sailings, and explicit national quotas in both the US and Canada well into the 1960s. People perceived as mentally or physically ill, sex workers, and the poor have, however, been singled out as undesirable since the earliest immigration legislation, but restrictions on racialized grounds came much later.

grees of integration but ended up reinforcing an English-speaking society.”²⁹ These “Anglo-prone” settlers were contrasted and compared to those potentially arriving from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, and often also to Jewish and Southern and Eastern European migrant-settlers. Perceived nationality and religion played an important role in this concept of desirability, as did conformity to normative property, family, and sexual regimes.³⁰

The desirability of Scandinavians as ideal colonial settlers was frequently defended by numerous government officials, especially regarding their ethnic bloc settlements in Manitoba, North Dakota, and later Saskatchewan. The discourse regarding their desirability was also reflected in ethnic newspapers: Vinland imagery had been prominent in Icelandic-American and Icelandic-Canadian papers in the late nineteenth but even more so in the early twentieth century. In 1883, an Icelandic newspaper in Winnipeg called *Leifur* commenced publication. Its first issue included an affected poem of the same name, celebrating the memory of Leifr Eiríksson, who “first found Vinland, the land on which we live,” and directly linking his voyage to his compatriots’ arrival “nine centuries later.”³¹ Icelandic nationalism and support for emigration to America often went hand in hand. A well-known proponent of both, Jón Ólafsson – a grandiose writer, politician, and advocate of establishing an Icelandic colony in Alaska – in 1893 praised the United States in a poem, describing it as “Franklin’s nation in the land of Leif the Lucky,”³² and many Icelandic settlers and their descendants adopted the view that their perceived relationship to the Vinland Norse gave *them* the right to settle in America. Icelandic-Canadian (and later Icelandic-American) Arctic explorer and ethnologist Vilhjálmur Stefánsson described Icelanders as predestined for the American republic because of their own tradition of representative democracy.³³ Prominent community leader and immigration agent Sigtryggur Jónsson mentions the Norse going to America as the “first emigration” in his summary of early

29 James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 128.

30 Mormons, Doukhobors, Hutterites, and Mennonites were especially questioned as allegedly undesirable settlers because of their unconforming religious practices, particularly collective living and holding property, as well as polygamy practised by some Mormon settlers.

31 S. J. J., “Leifr heppni,” *Leifur*, May 5, 1883, A2.

32 Jón Ólafsson, “Bandaríkin,” in *Ljóðmæli* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1896), 203. “Franklín þjóð í Leifs ins hepna landi.” This poem was composed for the Icelandic Day (*Íslendingadagurinn*), itself in part a performance of Icelandic settler-worthiness in America. For an account (in Icelandic with an English summary) of Jón’s voyage to Alaska and attempts to establish an Icelandic ethnic settlement there, see Hjörtur Pálsson, *Alaskaför Jóns Ólafssonar 1874* [Alaskan Tour of Jón Ólafsson 1874] (Reykjavík: Bókautgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1975).

33 Halink, “The Good Sense to Lose America,” 166.

Icelandic settlements,³⁴ and some Icelandic settlers and their descendants have clearly identified with this sense of entitlement.³⁵ One of these self-described Icelandic pioneers, Kristbjorg Kristjanson, born in 1886, asks: “Did not Columbus himself before he sailed west consult the log books and charts of the Norsemen in Iceland? [. . .] Who then would be more deserving of settling in this land than the descendants of the Vikings of old whose historical deeds gave Columbus the courage to go ‘on and on’?”³⁶ Settler reflections like these reveal a sense of a direct relationship to the Vikings and of Icelanders as deserving of the land they settled on, implicitly contrasting themselves to those who are not. This Icelandic nationalistic adoption of *Vínland* and Leifr Eiríksson as the symbols of an Icelandic birthright to America do not, however, exist in a vacuum. They have been reinforced by commemoration and public history practices, including placing statues and alleged Norse sites in the public space.

4 Commemoration and the Performative Historiography of Viking America

Around the same time as the first issues of *Leifur* were being read in Icelandic settlements in Manitoba and North Dakota, the eccentric chemist Ebon Norton Horsford of Cambridge, Massachusetts (perhaps best known for his development of baking powder), was entirely convinced that *Vínland* was in fact New England³⁷

34 Sigtryggur Jónasson, *The Early Icelandic Settlements in Canada* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Free Press Company, 1901), 3–4.

35 Many examples of this settler entitlement can be found in Icelandic letters and newspaper articles. For example, Björn Pjetursson in *Ísafold* refuses the charge that Icelanders who emigrate do not care about their country and likens them to the Norse in *Vínland*, which he calls “erfðaland vort Íslendinga frá Leifi heppna Eiríkssyni” [the country we Icelanders inherited from Leifr the Lucky Eiríksson]. Similarly, an anonymous Icelandic settler writes in *Leifur* in 1885 that Icelandic-Canadians are now rediscovering *Vínland*, and another Icelandic settler who provides information for others about to settle in America writes in *Heimskringla* that “*Vínland er endurfundið; synir Norðmanna bygja Ameríku*” [*Vínland is found again, sons of the Norse are building America*].

36 Kristbjorg Kristjanson, “A Tribute to the Pioneer Icelandic Settlers of Pembina County,” in *Echoes from the Icelandic Immigrants* (Cavalier: Northeastern North Dakota Heritage Association, 1999), 11.

37 A book-length study could be dedicated to the particular regional varieties of the works purporting to locate Norse settlements across North America, such as around the Great Lakes. For this theory, see James W. Curran, *Here Was Vinland* (Sault Ste. Marie: Sault Daily Star, 1939). For a historical account of the fabricated “Viking grave” allegedly found near Thunder Bay, see Doug-

and had two memorial markers placed to this effect.³⁸ In 1887, a statue of Leifr Eiríksson (also funded by Horsford) was installed in Boston; another was erected in Chicago in 1901 and a third in St Paul, Minnesota, in 1949. Þorfinnr karslefni – another Norse explorer depicted in the *Vínland Sagas* – was honoured with his own statue by renowned Icelandic sculptor Einar Jónsson, which was unveiled in Philadelphia in 1920. These commemorative practices echo the earlier, mid-nineteenth-century tendency to identify New England with the *Vínland* of the sagas and to “[include] the Vikings in an Anglo-Saxon New England tradition.”³⁹ As scholar of Icelandic literature Christopher Crocker points out, “[b]y positioning the early Norse settlers as White ancestors of present-day Anglo-Americans, their brief occupation was seen as a precursor to the eventual so-called Manifest Destiny of European colonial expansion.”⁴⁰ In this way, the presence of the Norse has been used to mark the beginning of the “real” (i.e., White) history of North America⁴¹ – entirely ignoring the at least tens of thousands of years of Indigenous presence as well as the marginality of the Norse settlement – and to provide a justification for European colonization. Recalling the colonial doctrines of occupation, these statues *literally* claim space through marking settler presence on it.⁴²

The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago hosted the exhibition “The Norse Discovery of America,” where Norwegian painter Christian Krogh, for example, unveiled his dramatic painting “Leif Eirikson Discovers America.”⁴³ Further ex-

las Hunter, *Beardmore: The Viking Hoax That Rewrote History* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018).

38 One commemorating the site where Leifr allegedly built his house, and another at the site of an entire supposed Norse town, Norumbega. The mythical land of Norumbega was famously marked, for example, just south of the Gulf of St Lawrence on the 1570 Ortelius map of the world.

39 Dag Blanck, “The Transnational Viking: The Role of the Viking in Sweden, the United States, and Swedish America,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016): 7.

40 Christopher Crocker, “What We Talk About When We Talk About *Vínland*: History, Whiteness, Indigenous Erasure, and the Early Norse Presence in Newfoundland,” *Canadian Journal of History* 55, nos. 1–2 (2020): 99.

41 Often personified in the birth of Snorri, “the first White child.”

42 For a deeper analysis of the ethics of commemoration and settler colonial monuments, particularly focusing on commemorations of the New Sweden colony, see Adam Hjorthén, “Transatlantic Monuments: On Memories and Ethics of Settler Histories,” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 53, no. 1 (2021): 95–120. Hjorthén makes an important point about New Sweden often being presented as an instance of immigration rather than colonialism: as the “beginning of Swedish immigration to America.” (116). This classic move to innocence is reversed in commemorations of *Vínland*: Here, European presence in America is given outsized importance and is construed as a beginning of European settlement – a move entirely in line with the tradition of colonial doctrines of occupation.

43 Christian Krogh, *Leiv Eirikson oppdager Amerika*, oil on canvas (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet, 1893).

emphasizing this period’s interest in all things Norse and of the conceptual links being made and performed between the Norse and Columbus, *Viking* – a replica of the Gokstad “Viking ship” – was sailed from Norway to the Exposition. In their analysis of the ship as engaging in “performative historiography” of Viking America (alongside replicas of Columbus’s own three vessels), Axel Andersson and Scott Magelssen argue that “for the traditional elites of the East Coast, a successful Viking voyage could prove the historical existence of a Viking colony in New England, and thus constitute a whiter and more northern origin of the United States.” At the same time, Andersson and Magelssen note that “for Midwestern Scandinavian immigrants struggling to perform their own place in the American story, *Viking* stood to legitimize and reify their *birthing* as Americans [emphasis mine].”⁴⁴ The term Andersson and Magelssen use – performative historiography – helpfully describes the way Norse and “Viking” imagery has been used to reinvent the history of the East Coast – both in the US and Canada – to indeed present it as more White and more northern,⁴⁵ as well as to justify Anglo settlement through this constructed and reinforced link with the Norse, based on a perceived connection between the Norse history of occupation in *Vinland* and its Anglo-Saxon corollaries. The idea of Whiteness and a binary opposition to “the Other” – non-White, non-settler – potentially inhabiting the same space are fundamental to this construction. This performance is a way to support the nationalist project, as Andersson and Magelssen argue, and is also a deeply settler colonial one, quite literally aiming to justify a Scandinavian right to settlement based on perceived descent. Columbus and Leifr Eiríksson here occupy a similar conceptual space, allowing for a multiplicity of ways of relating to settler identity, while solidifying its unquestionable entitlement to both physical space and to space in the public discourse and historical narrative. Less than forty years after *Viking*’s transatlantic voyage, in 1929, Wisconsin was the first US state to officially adopt Leif Erikson Day as a state holiday, and numerous other statues, memorials, plaques, and commemorative events could be men-

44 Axel Andersson and Scott Magelssen, “Performing a Viking History of America: The 1893 Voyage and Display of a Viking Longship at the Columbus Quadricentennial,” *Theatre Journal* 69, no. 2 (2017): 177. See also Amy C. Mulligan, “Migration of a North Atlantic Seascape: Leif Eiríksson, the 1893 World’s Fair, and the Great Lakes *landnám*,” in *From Iceland to the Americas: Vinland and Historical Imagination*, ed. Tim William Machan and Jón Helgason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

45 The stereotype portraying Canada as well as some areas of northeastern US as “northern” seems to echo nineteenth-century climate determinism and has provided a useful way to erase Catholic, Mexican, and Black presence from the White national myth. For an analysis of the concept of Whiteness – and its articulations as northernness and geographical racism – as central to Canadian identity, see Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, and Audrey Kobayashi, eds, *Rethinking the Great White North* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

tioned – emerging especially between the 1880s and 1920s but still being produced in the current century, including as various “millennial projects.” For example, in 2000, Iceland gifted Canada a replica of a statue of Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir, who has been immortalized as “the mother of the first White child born in America,” Snorri.⁴⁶ These commemorative items and practices are an ongoing form of reinforcement of this settler historiography of America, beginning with Leifr Eiríksson, and of the imagined connection between White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans and Canadians – especially on the East Coast – and the ancient Norse.

Archaeologist and Heritage Studies scholar Torgrim Guttormsen argues that “[d]uring the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a continental and transnational commemoration practice united Scandinavians in America and Europe with a common historical narrative: the story of Leif Erikson as the first European to discover America.”⁴⁷ In addition to this motivation, and while many of these commemoration efforts were indeed led by Scandinavian-Americans, I see them more broadly as symptomatic of a nineteenth-century need to create a new identity⁴⁸ – especially for White Protestant settlers on the East Coast, including (but not limited to) the “Boston Brahmins.”⁴⁹ The East Coast element of this mythology is significant: for the Boston Brahmins – as for, I suggest, East Coast Anglo settlers in Canada – “[c]hampioning the Viking past in New England, then, was a way to fight both the Turner thesis and the Columbus narrative.”⁵⁰ Defining an

46 Since 2002, the statue has been installed on the ground floor of the main building of Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, a location that seems to provide official credence while not being particularly public facing. For unknown reasons, the name of the sculptor (Ásmundur Sveinsson) is omitted from the statue’s label, but the language, while somewhat sanitized (“the first child of European ancestry to be born in America” – the statue’s official name, by Ásmundur Sveinsson, is “Fyrsta hvíta móðirin í Ameríku” [The First White Mother in America]), still clearly implies the value of Snorri and the entire Norse presence as symbolic settler ancestors justifying the future settler presence through their so-called discovery. In Iceland, identical copies of the statue are located at Laugarbrekka, where Guðríður was born, and at Glaumbær where she lived in later life. See also Christopher Crocker, “‘The First White Mother in America’: Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir, Popular History, Firsting, and White Feminism,” *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 30 (2023).

47 Torgrim Sneve Guttormsen, “Valuing Immigrant Memories as Common Heritage: The Leif Erikson Monument in Boston,” *History and Memory* 30, no. 2 (2018): 82.

48 Including in Iceland itself and in Norway, both of which only became fully independent nation states in the twentieth century.

49 Guttormsen, “Valuing Immigrant Memories,” 96; Andersson and Magelssen, “Performing a Viking History,” 183. The term “Boston Brahmins,” coined by Oliver Wendell Holmes in his 1861 novel *Elsie Venner*, refers to Boston’s nineteenth-century Anglo Protestant elites, usually associated with Puritan descent and Harvard education. These elite Bostonians stood in sharp contrast with the increasing numbers of immigrants arriving in Boston by mid-nineteenth century.

50 Andersson and Magelssen, “Performing a Viking History,” 183.

American or Canadian identity on the basis of an affinity with Leifr Eiríksson and the Norse provides a convenient way to avoid uncomfortable reminders of Indigenous genocide (the Turner thesis and the Anglo-prone westward expansion) or the Catholicism of Spain and Italy as represented by Columbus.⁵¹ These attempts to mark a supposed cultural affinity with the Norse – often by literally (re)claiming land by erecting statues and memorials – are evidence of the ongoing impact of early modern colonial doctrines and their afterlives in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century iterations of settler colonialism.

5 Pulp, Paper, and Norse Nova Scotians

This settler historiography and myth-making is curiously malleable, and it can be found all over the East Coast. Local histories of Newfoundland have included mentions of *Vínland* since the early nineteenth century⁵² – even before the “discovery” by the Ingstads – but this phenomenon has been in no way limited to Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders. Local histories of New England (as the example of Ebon Horsford above shows) and of Nova Scotia also proudly link themselves to a supposed Norse presence. Take, for example, the booklet *The Markland Sagas*, commissioned by the pulp-and-paper baron C. H. L. Jones and published in 1934. Written by the notoriously racist historian and beloved resident of Liverpool, Nova Scotia, Thomas H. Raddall, the text’s introduction argues that the province of Nova Scotia is, indeed, the “Markland of the Norsemen” described in the *Vínland Sagas*, and it links Nova Scotia’s sailing and shipbuilding industries to this supposed Norse heritage.⁵³ Jones and Raddall present many places in Nova Scotia as the locales described in the *Vínland Sagas* (from the Mira River in Cape Breton through Canso to Cape Sable, Yarmouth, and more). Most importantly, the authors focus on persuading their readers that, in fact, *all* Nova Scotians can link their identities to the

51 For the political and ethnic tensions between the two colonial heroes, especially as representing anti-Italian sentiment, see Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, “Leif Eiríksson versus Christopher Columbus: The Use of Leif Eiríksson in American Political and Cultural Discourse,” in *Approaches to Vínland: A Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North-Atlantic Region and Exploration of America*, ed. Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Sigurður Norðal Institute, 2001), 220–26.

52 According to Crocker, the Swiss clergyman and schoolmaster Lewis Anspach’s *A History of the Island of Newfoundland* (1819) was the first such history to introduce and discuss what he termed “the discovery of the Island of Newfoundland by the Northmen” (99).

53 C. H. L. Jones was so proud of this imagery that he also named his Mersey Paper Company’s steamship the *SS Markland*.

Norse – but “all” seems to be limited to White, Anglo-Saxon-adjacent groups of settlers, as the authors say that “there is a strong leaven of the old Norse in nearly all of us, whether we be English, Irish, Scots or Norman French.”⁵⁴ Even though the booklet is deeply embedded in the local settler pride of the southwestern shore of Nova Scotia, it also operates comfortably within Canadian national identity.

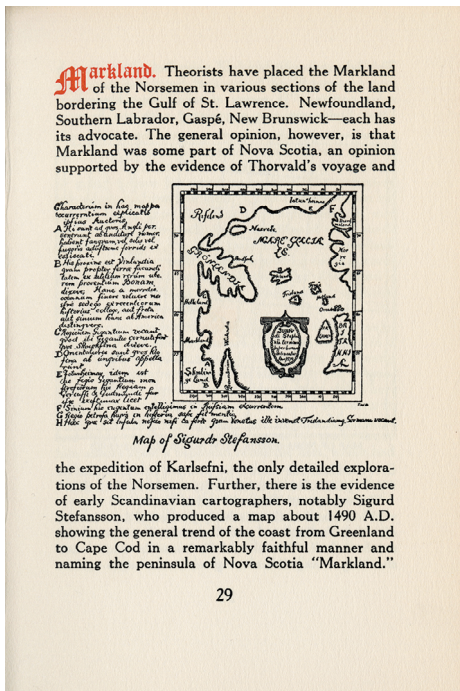


Figure 8.1: *The Markland Sagas* by C. H. L. Jones and Thomas H. Raddall. Image courtesy of the Thomas Head Raddall Fonds, Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The authors argue that “[a]s Canadians, we have a double interest in the Norse discovery of America. We live in what we believe to be the very land visited by our *blood kinsmen* of long ago [emphasis mine].”⁵⁵ In the context of Anglo-prone settler colonialism, it is hard to overstate this link: there is no disconnect – quite the opposite, in fact – between decidedly identifying as “Canadian” but also as related to the Vínland Norse. This imagined connection offers a convenient way to displace settler responsibility⁵⁶ and, instead, to justify a claim to occupation of

54 C. H. L. Jones and Thomas H. Raddall, *The Markland Sagas* (Montreal: Gazette Print. Co., 1934), 8.

55 Jones and Raddall, *The Markland Sagas*, 8.

56 Settler responsibility would mean facing one's complicity in colonial harm exploiting Indigenous lands, resources, and labour, and working collectively to repair and rebuild respectful rela-

the lands – and, just as importantly, the waters – of so-called Nova Scotia. Like historians Ian McKay and Robin Bates, I see this imagined connection as a convenient “way for white people to think of themselves as first peoples.”⁵⁷ Jones and Raddall even argue that the Mi’kmaq probably arrived *after* the Vikings.⁵⁸ In fact, the authors’ desires are not limited to Viking fantasies – rather, they are imperial in nature. Their book concludes with the following paragraph:

We may imagine the astonishment of early European explorers at this discovery of a *Nordic empire* athwart the western road to India. Indeed, we may fancy this *Nordic race*, with its tradition of the sea, venturing far into the Atlantic and eventually “discovering” Europe while Columbus was still daydreaming at Genoa. But Eric [the Red] fell from his horse. The men who went to Markland lacked the vision of empire. The people who might have laid, on the shores of Nova Scotia, the foundations of a *Nordic Empire of the West*, remained in the Greenland ice and perished [emphases mine].⁵⁹

The pathos and graphic racism of *The Markland Sagas* might seem unrelatable today, but the booklet offers a telling view into early twentieth-century settler sensibilities circulating on the East Coast. While the Nordic Empire imagined by Raddall has never materialized, the underlying sentiments are arguably still very current. Raddall dreamed of an alternative Nova Scotia where the Norse would have stayed and set up a settler colony, one that might even have had imperial ambitions of its own. Raddall’s dream was an anti-Indigenous fantasy rooted in Anglo-Saxonism and White supremacy. “The seekers after white origins”⁶⁰ still strive to find definitive proof that Nova Scotia had been visited by the Norse, including periodic waves of interest in the so-called Yarmouth or Fletcher Stone. This stone, with markings interpreted by some as a runic inscription, was allegedly discovered in 1812 by Dr Richard Fletcher and was perhaps Yarmouth’s most sought-after tourist attraction between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, offering a convenient stop for American tourists.⁶¹ While skepticism about the stone’s provenance appeared almost immediately after its alleged discovery, and while it seems to have lost most of its appeal in recent decades, the stone, along with the Leif Erikson Park and Trail at Cape Forchu (see figure 3), still plays

tionships. As Onyx Sloan Morgan writes, however, “[r]ights often replace responsibility when allocated through citizenship by the settler colonial state; settler responsibility is absolved, relegating obligations to the state alone” (333).

⁵⁷ Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 319.

⁵⁸ Jones and Raddall, *The Markland Sagas*, 111.

⁵⁹ Jones and Raddall, *The Markland Sagas*, 116.

⁶⁰ McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*, 320.

⁶¹ There was also a popular resort called the Markland Hotel at Cape Forchu until the 1920s.



Figure 8.2: The so-called Fletcher Stone. Image courtesy of Yarmouth County Museum and Archives.



Figure 8.3: Leif Erikson Trail sign, inviting the “modern-day explorer” to discover Yarmouth County. Cape Forchu, Nova Scotia (photo: J. Lalonde).

an important role in marketing local tourism and provides an ongoing link to Norse imagery. Despite being seemingly innocuous, the local tourism industry choosing to link the southwestern shore of Nova Scotia to the Norse is complicit in the fantasy of settler colonial claim to land and belonging.

Conclusion

The Vinland narrative has been used in both historical and popular discourse not only to reinforce and perform a historiography of White supremacy and Indigenous erasure, but also to justify an Anglo settler “birthright” to the East Coast in particular and to North America in general. This settler entitlement and validation of White supremacy has been assumed both by settlers of Scandinavian descent and by Anglo-Americans and Anglo-Canadians. The insistence on relating oneself to a mythological historiography beginning with the Norse and on defining one’s identity by these constructed origins constitutes a settler move to innocence and a particular manifestation of settler colonial tautology.⁶² North American settlers, especially those on the East Coast, have long sought to establish their identities as linked to the Norse and to construct the history of North America as beginning with the Norse, rather than with Indigenous occupation since time immemorial. Icelanders and other Scandinavian migrant-settlers have been viewed (and have viewed themselves) as having an established right to settle in North America, but a much broader group of settlers have claimed to be descendants of the Norse, thus revealing deep links to the ideas of White supremacy and Anglo-Saxonism. Local histories, statues, tourism, and other forms of commemoration all use references to Vinland to perform the myth of White origins and to reinforce the idea of settler entitlement. Together, they form a specifically East Coast manifestation of settler colonialism and relation to Whiteness. The discourses of discovery, exploration, a “blood connection” to the Norse, and Indigenous marginalization cannot be viewed in isolation. They must be recognized as

62 See Travis Wysote and Erin Morton, “‘The Depth of the Plough’: White Settler Tautologies and Pioneer Lies,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 9, no. 4 (2019): 479–504. See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40, for their seminal concept of settler moves to innocence. Here, settlers relating to Leifr Eiríksson do not attempt to identify as Indigenous (as in “settler nativism”), but they externalize any colonial violence as not related to them (but to Columbus), or with their imagined ancestors as predating it in any case. By ordering settler time to begin with Norse explorers, both Indigenous history since time immemorial and the colonial dispossession starting in 1492 that made way for an empire of Anglo settler colonies can be easily and conveniently ignored.

elements reinforcing the doctrines of colonialism, especially those of discovery and of occupation, the combination of which has formed the basis of British colonial sovereignty claims and traces of which are still clearly visible in contemporary Canadian court decisions and popular historical understandings.

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Christina Lentz

Chapter 9

Colonialism 2.0? Medieval Saami–Norse History in Norwegian Upper Secondary School Textbooks

Introduction: Colonialism in Textbooks

Textbooks hold significant power in shaping the worldviews of entire generations.¹ History textbooks in particular are by no means “neutral” media and have been exploited for contrary purposes, such as furthering nation-building and national identity in the nineteenth century, and cosmopolitanism and international understanding in the twentieth.² The field of textbook research is correspondingly broad. In the context of increasing efforts at decolonization, one important branch of study is dedicated to investigating how textbooks deal with colonial pasts and include marginalized groups.³

This chapter will examine four Norwegian history textbooks published in 2021 and based on the new national curriculum, in order to ascertain how this latest generation of textbooks deals with the country’s colonial past. Norway is not commonly associated with colonialism, even though it has acted, from the nineteenth century on,⁴ as a colonial power towards its Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, Nor-

1 Michael H. Romanowski, “Reading Beyond the Lines: What Students Learn from Their History Textbooks,” in *Textbook Violence*, ed. James R. Lewis, Bengt-Ove Andreassen, and Suzanne Anett Thobro (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2017), 7–8.

2 Torun Granstrøm Ekeland, “Enactment of Sámi Past in School Textbooks: Towards Multiple Pasts for Future Making,” *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 61, no. 3 (2017): 319–32; Susanne Grindel, “Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts of History Textbooks,” in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 259; Falk Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision* (Paris: UNESCO, 2010), 8; Robert Maier, “Tools in Teaching Recent Past Conflicts: Constructing Textbooks Beyond National Borders,” in Carretero et al., eds, *Palgrave Handbook*, 674.

3 Andrew Mycock, “After Empire: The Politics of History Education in a Post-Colonial World,” in Carretero et al., eds, *Palgrave Handbook*, 391–92.

4 The recent report of the Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission applies the term to processes that occurred as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Sannhets- og Forsningskommisjonen, “Sannhet og forsoning – Grunnlag for et oppgjør med forsoningspolitikk og urett mot samer, kvener/norskfinner og skogfinner: Rapport til Stortinget,” <https://www.stor>

way previously participated in Danish colonial enterprises overseas.⁵ At the same time, Norway has itself also been a victim of colonialism, having been subjected to Danish and Swedish colonial rule over the centuries, resulting in a late independence (1905) and nation-building process.⁶ One might expect these contradictory historical experiences to be reflected, not just explicitly but also implicitly, in textbooks, especially in history books.

To detect such influences, this article combines critical discourse analysis, which focuses on the connections between language and social structures of power, with postcolonial critique, which historically locates and evaluates the discourse. The deliberate focus is on the presentation of the precolonial period, specifically the chapters on medieval history and the depiction of Indigenous/Saami–Norse relations.

The working theory is that textbooks are not only designed based on genre restrictions and concessions to school realities but can also bear witness to hidden colonial mindsets, as colonialism is not only expressed in actions but also in a specific way of “staging” or narrating history.⁷

The questions this chapter seeks to answer are whether it is possible to trace such a “colonialism 2.0,” meaning colonial influences in the way history is presented; to what degree do research, the national curriculum, and schoolbook discourse align or differ; and what conclusions can be drawn from this for the design of future textbooks, specifically with regard to whether the Saami should be described as a “nation of their own” or as an integral part of Norwegian history.

This chapter approaches these questions by first providing an overview of the existing research and outlining the theoretical framework. Next, the structural conditions of schoolbook production in Norway will be described. The primary focus of the chapter will be dedicated to an analysis of the four history textbooks in question. The chapter concludes with a discussion of possible alternative ways of “translating” medieval history into textbooks.

tinget.no/globalassets/pdf/sannhets-og-forsoningskommisjonen/rapport-til-stortinget-fra-sannhets-og-forsoningskommisjonen.pdf, 161.

⁵ For a critical overview over Scandinavian colonialism, see, for example, Kristin Gregers Eriksen et al., “Education and Coloniality in the Nordics.” *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Pedagogikk og Kritikk* 10, no. 3 (2024): 2–4.

⁶ Sahra Ali Abdullahi Torjussen, “Fremstillingen av kolonialisme i norske lærebøker” (Master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2018), 11–12.

⁷ Stuart Hall, “When Was the Post-Colonial? Thinking at the Limit,” in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), 153.

1 The “What” and the “How” of Textbook Presentation

1.1 Medieval Norwegian History

When it comes to Norwegian medieval history and its “translation” into textbooks, the presentation of (religious) contacts with the Indigenous⁸ Saami population is particularly relevant to this study. Historical research informed by an Indigenous methodology – for instance, Saami archaeology and Postcolonial Studies – has increasingly challenged prevalent narratives of victimization and has argued for a more nuanced view of Saami–Norse relations in pre-modern times, underscoring Indigenous agency. Based on archaeological findings,⁹ *inter alia*, it can be assumed that Saami and Norse had been living “side by side” and had most likely been “good neighbours” at least until power relations became more asymmetrical with the expansion of centralized royal power in the twelfth century.¹⁰ While distinct ethnicities can be identified, there was also constant contact and exchange that resulted in fluid identities. A dualistic understanding of Norse and Saami ethnicities is therefore of little value.¹¹ The expansion of the central state in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, accompanied and supported by the Christian mission to the Indigenous population, gradually created more asymmetrical power relations. But it is only in the nineteenth century that contemporary research comes to unanimously apply the term “colonialism” to Saami–Norwegian relations.¹²

⁸ The word “Indigenous” is used here with reference to the International Labour Organization’s 1989 Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, which defined Indigenous Peoples as those populations “which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.” International Labour Organization, *Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* (No. 169) (1989), art. 1.

⁹ Granstrøm Ekeland, “Enactment,” 328.

¹⁰ Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen, “Sannhet og forsoning,” 161.

¹¹ Solveig Marie Wang, *Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia: An Interdisciplinary Study of Norse-Saami Relations in the Medieval Period*, Religious Minorities in the North: History, Politics, and Culture 5 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 2.

¹² Eckhardt Fuchs and Marcus Otto, “Introduction. Educational Media, Textbooks, and Postcolonial Relocations of Memory Politics in Europe,” in *Postcolonial Memory Politics in Educational Media*, special issue, *Journal of Educational Media, Memory & Society* 5, no. 1 (2013): 8; Torjer

The historical nuances and complexities of Norwegian medieval history are difficult to transfer into textbooks, which, by their very nature, must select, omit, shorten, organize, simplify, and interpret history. In other words, historiographical texts result from the decisions of “what” to tell, but also of “how” to tell it, in order to create coherent meaningful narratives. This process is reminiscent of storytelling and has accordingly been prominently referred to as “emplotment” by historian Hayden White.¹³

While students are given the impression of cohesive, neutral, and objective texts, the books’ narrative structures frequently aim at creating (national) memory cultures, often at the expense of already marginalized and underrepresented groups.¹⁴ This “tinted and patternised” character of historiography is not usually made visible by the textbook authors who presently produce textbooks.¹⁵

1.2 What is Told

While textbooks cannot possibly include all existing knowledge, often what is told are narratives that “embody, promote, and legitimize particular values, ideologies, interests, assumptions, and beliefs.”¹⁶ And what – or who – is not included in the story is all the more telling: Torjer Olsen notes the power that textbook authors have to narrate people or groups into or out of society. He distinguishes between the “absence” and “inclusion” of Indigenous peoples and issues related to them in textbooks and uses the term “Indigenization” to designate an alternative approach, one that would give Indigenous peoples their own voice.¹⁷ While Indig-

Olsen, “Colonial Conflicts: Absence, Inclusion, and Indigenization in Textbook Presentations of Indigenous Peoples,” in *Textbook Violence*, ed. Lewis et al., 76.

13 Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 27–42.

14 Timothy Lintner and Deborah Macphee, “Selecting History. What Elementary Educators Say about Their Social Studies Textbook,” in *The New Politics of the Textbook: Critical Analysis in the Core Content Areas*, ed. Heather Hickman and Brad J. Portfilio (Boston: SensePublishers, 2012), 260; Romanowski, “Reading Beyond the Lines,” 9; Fuchs and Otto, “Introduction,” 3; Mycock, “After Empire,” 394–95. Ruth Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 23.

15 Dagrún Skjelbred, *Skolens tekster: et utgangspunkt for læring* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2019), 65.

16 Romanowski, “Reading Beyond the Lines,” 8.

17 Olsen, “Colonial Conflicts,” 71–72.

enization is the ideal, Norwegian textbooks have been shown to be “deficient”¹⁸ even when only considering the inclusion and representation of Indigenous content. If the history of Indigenous peoples is told at all, it is as an appendage to the history of the dominant group,¹⁹ discussed in separate chapters or attached to the end of chapters, a practice that Granstrøm Ekeland describes as a special form of othering.²⁰ What is true for medieval Norse–Saami relations is even more true for those peoples affected by Viking raids and settlements; i.e., the Indigenous peoples of Greenland and North America, but also the populations of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Normandy. What little research there is indicates that these (Indigenous) populations and their fate are rarely even mentioned in textbooks, something which of course is also the result of a lack of historical sources.²¹

This way of presenting history very often leads to a selective, fragmentary picture of (Norwegian) Indigenous history. If it is addressed at all, this is done briefly when dealing with “origins” and the Middle Ages and is then ignored for the next few centuries, only to be prominently mentioned once again in the context of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics of Norwegianization (*for-norskningspolitikk*), without establishing any connection to present-day politics.²² Adequately including the perspectives of minorities and underrepresented groups in textbooks is a larger challenge, and not one limited to Norway. In the Norwegian case it has been reduced, inter alia, to the dilemma of respecting students’ (and teachers’) desire for immediate “relevance” and fulfilling the compulsory, curriculum-prescribed educational task of teaching Indigenous history.²³

18 Torjer Olsen and Kristin Evju, “Urfolk og nasjonale minoriteter som tema i samfunnsfag,” in *Nye spadestikk i samfunnsfagdidaktikken*, ed. Kjetil Børhaug, Od Ragnar Hunnes, and Åshild Samnøy (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2022).

19 Olsen, “Colonial Conflicts,” 82–83.

20 Granstrøm Ekeland, “Enactment,” 324.

21 Bente Aamotsbakken, “Pictures of Greenlanders and Samis in Norwegian and Danish Textbooks,” in *Opening the Mind or Drawing Boundaries? History Texts in Nordic Schools*, ed. Porsteinn Helgason, Simone Lässig, and Roderich Henry (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2010); Cordelia Heß, “Margaretas periphere Visionen. Mission, Kolonisierung und ‘race’ im Spätmittelalter am Beispiel der Saami,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 316, no. 1 (2023): 2.

22 Arnfinn H Midtbøen, Julia Orupabo, and Åse Røthing, “Gamle minoriteter i det nye Norge?” in *Nasjonale minoriteter og urfolk i norsk politikk fra 1900 til 2016*, ed. Nik Brandal, Cora Alexa Døving, and Ingvill Thorson Plesner (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2017), 257–59.

23 Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook*, 39–40; Midtbøen et al., “Gamle Minoriteter,” 267. The fact that there are no regional editions of textbooks in Norway makes this problem even more pronounced.

1.3 How History is Told

Hidden colonial mindsets are also expressed in how the main text and the meta-text – titles, subtitles, sources, annotations, questions, pictures, and maps – are designed.²⁴ When it comes to the “how,” the choice of vocabulary and the framing of the discourse are of particular importance.

As mentioned, textbooks struggle to reflect the subtleties of Saami–Norwegian relations. This often results in simplistic, static, dualistic representations of the Indigenous population. Several studies have shown that Norwegian textbooks have a tendency to stereotypically contrast Indigenous “nature-based” and “exotic” ways of life as nomadic reindeer herders to “technology-driven” Norwegian colonizers which are associated with tools, ships and farms.²⁵ In so doing, they subscribe to a relatively typical neocolonial modernization paradigm.²⁶ Also worth noting are textbooks that problematize the Indigenous population as “trouble makers” while at the same time downplaying the abuse that was inflicted upon them or the fact that this was approved by the state itself.²⁷ These ways of portraying minorities are not limited to history textbooks,²⁸ nor is this a uniquely Norwegian historiographical phenomenon.²⁹ And stereotypical representations of Sápmi can even be found in history textbooks specifically developed for Saami schools.³⁰

24 Granstrøm Ekeland, “Enactment,” 326; Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook*, 48–49.

25 Nik Brandal and Eirik Brazier, “De fremmede og staten,” in *Nasjonale minoriteter og urfolk i norsk politikk fra 1900 til 2016*, ed. Nik Brandal et al., 27; Granstrøm Ekeland, “Enactment,” 324; Torjer Olsen, “Indigenizing Education in Sápmi/Norway. Rights, Interface, and the Pedagogies of Discomfort and Hope,” in *Routledge Handbook of Indigenous People in the Arctic*, ed. Timo Koivurova et al. (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2020), 29.

26 Grindel, “Colonial and Postcolonial,” 261.

27 Aamotsbakken, “Pictures,” 71–72; Olsen, “Colonial Conflicts,” 82–83.

28 Bente Aamotsbakken, “En marginalisert litteratur? Representasjon av samiske tekster i norsk-faglige læremidler for ungdomstrinnet,” *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift* 99, nos. 3–4 (2015): 282–93; Anne-Beathe Mortensen-Buan, “Dette er en Same.’ Visuelle framstillinger av samer i et utvalg lærebøker i samfunnsfag,” in *Folk uten land? Å gi stemme og status til urfolk og nasjonale minoriteter*, ed. Norunn Askeland and Bente Aamotsbakken (Kristiansand: Portal, 2016), 93.

29 Tülay Altun, *Das osmanische Reich in Schülervorstellungen und im Geschichtsunterricht der Sekundarstufe I und II. Eine rekonstruktiv-hermeneutische Analyse von Passungen und Divergenzen unter Berücksichtigung der Bedingungen der Migrationsgesellschaft, Mehrsprachigkeit*, Band 51 (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 2021), 149; Christina Lentz, “Präsenz und Repräsentation der Sorben in deutschen Geschichtsschulbüchern, oder: Wie kann man über nationale Minderheiten unterrichten?” in *Deutsche und norwegische Schulmedien im Vergleich*, ed. Christina Lentz and Heike Wolter (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023); Lintner and Macphee, “Selecting,” 259.

30 Kajsja Kemi Gjerpe, “Gruppebaserte fordommer i lærebøker,” in *Fordommer i skolen. Gruppekonstruksjoner, utenforskap og inkludering*, ed. Marie von der Lippe (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2021), 316.

The combined result of “what” and “how” decisions, and not only in Norwegian textbooks, is often to promote hierarchical master narratives from the point of view of the colonizer. These anachronistically project the concept of the nation state onto the past, suggesting traditions that objectively never existed, in order to generate a collective identity and national pride at the expense of underprivileged groups.³¹

1.4 The What and the How: Examining the Discourse

Just as the “what” and the “how” together constitute the specific form taken by (textbook) discourse, critical discourse analysis (CDA) – which has been successfully applied in Textbook Studies previously – will provide the theoretical framework for this study.³² As the goal is to detect potentially colonial patterns, CDA will be informed by postcolonial theory: Both approaches share the interest in analysing hidden power structures and ideologies and making marginalized voices – or their absence – visible. While CDA offers a profound linguistic analysis specifically developed to detect hidden power relations in a variety of texts and media revealing the interconnectedness between language, ideology, power, and social structures,³³ postcolonial studies contribute by locating this phenomenon within the broader context of the cultural, political, and historical impacts of colonialism and its ongoing effects on colonized societies or groups.³⁴ Both theories can thus be fruitfully combined into a postcolonial critical discourse analysis (PCDA).³⁵

In this study, the focus will not only be on the linguistic choices but also on the interplay of texts, metatext, and pictures that is typical of textbooks. A selection of four Norwegian upper secondary school history textbooks, all from 2021, will be analysed in regard to (1) *if* and *where* they address Saami history, or Indigenous–Norse relationships (intra-Norwegian as well as extra-Norwegian ones), and (2) *how* they discursively present these relationships, with (3) a special focus on *historiographical reflections* found within the books. In order to place

31 Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook*, 38; Mycock, “After Empire,” 292–93.

32 Theresa Catalano and Linda R. Waugh, “Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), and Beyond,” in *Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Studies, and Beyond*, ed. Theresa Catalano and Linda R. Waugh, *Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy & Psychology* 26 (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 6.

33 Wodak et al., “Discursive Construction,” 8–9; Catalano and Waugh, “Introduction,” 1.

34 E.g. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978); Homi Bhabha, “Sign Taken for Wonders,” in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2001), 38–43.

35 Ruth Sanz Sabido, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the British Press* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 26.

the medieval historical discourse in the larger framework of the textbook in question, and to therefore better understand and evaluate processes of exclusion and inclusion of Indigenous voices, (4) I will conduct a selective *comparative examination* of how Indigenous history, specifically European colonialism in early modern times, is described elsewhere in the books.

2 Context

In order to understand the discourse in the textbooks, Norwegian educational policies and the curriculum must also be taken into account.

The Norwegian curriculum consists of an interdisciplinary general part and a subject-specific part; it applies to all Norwegian schools except those that adhere to the Saami curriculum. Following a reform in 2006 (*Kunnskapsløftet*), the Norwegian curriculum no longer mandates specific content, but rather defines the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students are supposed to acquire. This means that authors of history textbooks are free to choose what to include, a freedom that is reinforced by the fact that Norway abolished government approval processes in 2000.³⁶ That being said, researchers have pointed out how textbooks rely heavily on inherited “canonical” content, which can be seen as a form of intertextuality that is resistant to change, or, in other words “quotations without quotations marks.”³⁷ Furthermore, change in educational material as well as in teaching practices takes time, due to an “institutional tardiness.”³⁸ Notwithstanding these limitations, a sound evaluation of the textbooks is only possible by taking the curriculum guidelines into account.

In 2020, Norway passed a revision to the aforementioned 2006 *Kunnskapsløftet* curriculum, known as the *Fagfornyelse*, which is not only based on national school policies but also has to take into account international agreements, like the 1989 ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169), signed by Norway in 1990. In Article 31, the Convention explicitly mentions textbooks and demands that “efforts shall be made to ensure that history textbooks and other educational materials provide a fair, accurate and informative portrayal of the societies and cultures of these peoples.”³⁹

³⁶ A good overview of Norwegian schoolbooks and schoolbook policies can be found in Skjelbred, *Skolens tekster*, esp. 41–57.

³⁷ Aamotsbakken, “Pictures,” 64; see also Mortensen-Buan, “Dette er en Same,” 93; Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook*, 38.

³⁸ Gjerpe, “Gruppebaserte,” 317; Olsen, “Indigenizing,” 28.

³⁹ ILO, *Convention*, art. 31.

More than its predecessors, the new curriculum has clearly been designed with underrepresented and formerly colonized groups in mind.⁴⁰ It addresses Saami cultural heritage⁴¹ as part of the cultural heritage in Norway and expresses the conviction that not only Norwegian but also the Saami languages are important in the pursuit of cultural participation and knowledge.⁴² It emphasizes that all students are supposed to “få innsikt i det samiske urfolkets historie, kultur, samfunnsliv og rettigheter” [gain insight into the history, culture, social life, and rights of the Indigenous Saami people]⁴³ and should learn about “mangfold og variasjon innenfor samisk kultur og samfunnsliv” [diversity and variation within Saami culture and community life].⁴⁴ The paragraph on democracy and participation stresses the school’s role in furthering democratic values and attitudes with respect to Indigenous and minority groups.⁴⁵ This perspective has been newly incorporated into the Norwegian curriculum.⁴⁶

The subject-specific history curriculum, for its part, states that “historie skal bidra til at elevene utvikler innsikt i norsk og samisk historie og kulturarv, og forståelse for mangfold” [history should help pupils develop insight into Norwegian and Saami history and cultural heritage, and an understanding of diversity],⁴⁷ a formulation that lends equal value to Norwegian and Saami history. The respective competency goals mention Indigenous history with respect to students having a competent understanding of “empowerment and liberation” in Norwegian and Saami history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁸

Looking at the curriculum as a whole, it does not promote aspects indicative of colonial thinking and the desire for a nation-building narrative along the lines of “great men” and events. Instead, it underscores the importance of reflecting on historiography and of including different perspectives in what is being taught. With regard to Indigenous issues, it mentions knowledge about Indigenous culture, history, and society, as well as the importance of considering things from the perspective of others in order to understand the specific situation of Indigenous peoples.⁴⁹

40 Olsen, “Colonial Conflicts,” 75; Olsen and Evju, “Urfolk,” 4; Granstrøm Ekeland, “Enactment,” 321.

41 Kunnskapsdepartementet, *Kunnskapsløftet 2020: Overordnet del – Verdier og prinsipper for grunnsopplæringen* (2017), 5.

42 Kunnskapsdepartementet, *Kunnskapsløftet*, 5.

43 Kunnskapsdepartementet, *Kunnskapsløftet*, 6.

44 Kunnskapsdepartementet, *Kunnskapsløftet*, 6.

45 Kunnskapsdepartementet, *Kunnskapsløftet*, 9.

46 Olsen and Evju, “Urfolk,” 4.

47 Utdanningsdirektoratet (UDIR), *Læreplan i historie (HIS01-03)* (2019), 2.

48 UDIR, *Læreplan i historie*, 7.

49 Olsen, “Indigenizing,” 33.

It is worth noting that curricula and textbooks are normative documents, and their analysis permits only very limited conclusions as to how history is actually taught in the classroom. Nevertheless, research shows that teachers – including Norwegian ones⁵⁰ – continue to rely heavily on textbooks to support students’ learning at home and to structure their teaching, even basing entire lessons upon them. This lends them a “power of definition”⁵¹ and thus the status of a hidden curriculum.⁵² Even though modern teaching grants textbooks less authority than their allegedly impersonal and neutral predecessors held, students still place considerable trust in their content.⁵³

The following section will analyse if and how four widely used Norwegian secondary school history textbooks “translate” medieval history in the context of the normative directives.

3 Schoolbook Analysis

The corpus analysed consists of four upper secondary school history textbooks, all of which are based on the new 2020 curriculum (*fagfornyelse*) and all of which were published in 2021 (Table 9.1).⁵⁴

Table 9.1: Overview of the textbooks analysed.

Title	Author(s)	Authors’ background ⁵⁵	Publisher	Year
Historie på Tvers. Historieverk for VG 2.	Anne Grønlie	Teacher	Argus	2021
	Nils Håkon Nordberg	Teacher		

⁵⁰ Mortensen-Buan, “Dette er en Same,” 95.

⁵¹ Mortensen-Buan, “Dette er en Same,” 93.

⁵² Granstrøm Ekeland, “Enactment,” 321; Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook*, 47.

⁵³ Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook*, 50; Romanowski, “Reading Beyond the Lines,” 7.

⁵⁴ The following quoted material from the textbooks has been translated by the author.

⁵⁵ Professional backgrounds have been retrieved from online sources. In the sample analysed, the authors are mainly teachers, some have a background in journalism, and only two actively work in research. None of them are experts in medieval history. History teachers at Norwegian secondary schools usually hold a university degree in history. See Utdanningsdirektoratet (UDIR), “Tilsetning og kompetansekrav,” last modified 2024, <https://www.udir.no/regelverk-og-tilsyn/skole-og-opplaring/ny-opplaringslov/hva-er-nytt-i-ny-opplaringslov/kompetansekrav-for-ansettelse-i-larerstilling/>.

Table 9.1 (continued)

Title	Author(s)	Authors' background	Publisher	Year
Grunnbok i Historie VG2/VG3., 1. Utgave/ 1.opplag.	Hege Faust	Teacher	Aschehoug Undervisning	2021
	Siv Falang Gravem	Teacher		
	Håkon Korsvold	Teacher		
	Steingrímur Njálsson	Teacher		
	Siri Ødegård	Teacher		
Perspektiver Historie VG2 VG3, 2. utgave, 1. opplag.	Per Anders Madsen	Author, journalist	Gyldendal	2021
	Hege Roaldset	Teacher		
	Ane Bjølgerud Hansen	Teacher		
	Eivind Sæther	Journalist		
Alle Tiders Historie. Verden og Norge før 1800. VG 2.	Trond Heum	Teacher	Cappelen Damm AS	2021
	Kåre Dahl Martinsen	Professor (contemporary history)		
	Tommy Moum	Teacher		
	Ola Teige	Associate professor (early modern history)		

These books have been published by the most important publishing houses for Norwegian educational media, and so one can reasonably assume that most Norwegian secondary school students will be exposed to at least one of them. Secondary school textbooks (for students age 15 and older) have been chosen because by that age Norwegian students are supposed to already have a general historical overview of Indigenous issues from earlier grades,⁵⁶ which (in theory) allows for more in-depth study and also makes them better prepared to discuss controversial topics like colonialism.

⁵⁶ Olsen and Evju, "Urfolk," 7.

3.1 Historie på Tvers

*Historie på Tvers*⁵⁷ [History Across] was written by a team of two history teachers. As the title indicates, the book does not follow a chronological path but tells history – more or less as a tale of progress – following different themes *across* periods. The chapter covering medieval history mentions the Saami only in passing, in the context of the famous Ohthere report from 890 CE. This is generally viewed as the first source to name Norway; it describes the geography, economy, and the local population, with valuable information about the Indigenous population. *Historie på Tvers* features the Ohthere source in order to provide the first mention of “Norway”; meanwhile, the Indigenous population is only referenced in a subordinate clause in the context of Norse trade: “Likevel regnes han [Ohthere] som en god kilde til å forstå næringslivet oppover langs de nordlige delene av norskekysten og handelssamkvemet også med Samer og Kvener” [Nevertheless he (Ohthere) is considered a good source for understanding the economy up along the northern parts of the Norwegian coast and trade *with the Saami and Kven as well*].⁵⁸ The failure to explicitly mention Indigenous history is also “visible” on the map at the beginning of the chapter, which shows important Viking sites and does not indicate the Saami territory, Sápmi.⁵⁹ Apart from the subordinate clause on Saami–Norse trade, their specific relations are not explored in any detail.

This failure to include the Saami is representative of how the book recounts medieval history through an almost exclusive focus on nation- and identity-building, describing how Norway became a nation and had its largest geographical boundaries in the so-called *Norgesveldet* in the thirteenth century.⁶⁰ This focus is illustrated by reflections such as the following:

Men en ting som er mindre kontroversielt, er historiens evne til å skape følelse av at vi er del av lange tradisjoner og at vi er medlemmer av en nasjon som har røtter tusenvis av år tilbake. Nordmenn er ett folk, vi har samhörighet med hverandre og vi er stolte av langt mer enn å ha vunnet vår selvstendighet i moderne tid.⁶¹

But what is less controversial is history’s ability to create the feeling that we are a part of long traditions and that we are members of one nation that has roots that go back thousands of years. Norwegians are one people, we have togetherness, and we are proud of much more than of having won independence in modern times.

57 Anne Grønlie and Nils Håkon Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers. Historieverk for VG 2* (Argus, 2021).

58 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 209. Emphasis mine.

59 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 193. However, it should be noted that the “location” of Sápmi in the Middle Ages remains an open research question.

60 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 178.

61 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 193.

By using the words “we,” “one people,” and “togetherness,” this short passage exemplifies how the book is clearly talking about and to the majority ethnic Norwegian population, excluding not only those with Indigenous heritage but also immigrant groups that cannot identify to the same degree with Norwegian national history. At the same time, the authors chose a vocabulary full of pathos, urging students to be “proud” of Norway’s “long traditions” and “roots that go back thousands of years.” The degree to which this book is written by the majority for the majority is also demonstrated in repeated questions like “Hva skjedde med det norske samfunnet da vi ble kristnet?” [What happened to Norwegian society when we were Christianized?]⁶² Here again, the collective “we” is used, assuming a uniformity that disregards the fact that the Saami did not convert at the same time as the Northern Norwegian Vikings and that anachronistically treats the Norwegian state as a static, ancient entity.

The way Viking outward expansion is referred to in *Historie på Tvers* confirms this narrative approach. The Vikings⁶³ are described as “oppdagere, plyndere, handelsmenn og bosettere” [explorers, plunderers, merchants, and settlers]⁶⁴ who travelled “vidt og bredt” [far and wide],⁶⁵ and who, despite their wildness, “impressed” the “Europeans” with their revolutionary knowledge of ships and the sea.⁶⁶ The language employs extremes to underscore the admirable qualities of the Vikings: they came from the “ytterste nord” [outermost North],⁶⁷ they presided over “revolusjonerende skip og kunnskaper om havet” [revolutionary ships and knowledge of the sea],⁶⁸ they went where “ingen Kristen mann turte å forflytte seg” [no Christian man dared travel],⁶⁹ and, again, the Viking ship was “høyt teknologi for sin tidsalder” [high technology for this age].⁷⁰ The focus on Viking accomplishments likewise persists with regard to their territorial expansionism. The Viking settlements in Iceland, where they established “Europas første demokratiske republikk i år 930” [Europe’s first democratic republic in 930],⁷¹ and Normandy, where they established “et hertugdømme med en statsadministrasjon som trolig var den mest effek-

62 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 190.

63 The book uses the term “Vikings,” as well as “skandinavere” (205) and synonyms like “sjødyktig folk” (206) and “plyndere” (207).

64 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 205.

65 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 205.

66 “[. . .] europeerne lot seg også imponere av sjømannskapet til vikingene,” Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 206.

67 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 207.

68 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 207.

69 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 207.

70 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 206–7.

71 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 208.

tive og sentraliserte i Europa på den tiden” [a duchy with an administration that was truly the most effective and centralized in Europe at the time]⁷² are explicitly listed, whereas the settlements in Greenland and Vinland, where the Vikings also encountered Indigenous populations, are only referred to in two visual components. One is the well-known painting by Christian Krohg from 1893, which heroically depicts Leifr Eiríksson’s “discovery” of America. This very painting just recently provoked a heated debate in Norway when its removal from the Oslo National Museum’s permanent exhibition was associated with one of the curators referring to it as colonialist.⁷³ The other visual component is a picture showcasing the ruin of a house in Greenland. The accompanying explanation discusses how the Vikings “oppdaget” [discovered] Greenland and Vinland, as if those regions had not already been inhabited by other groups, and how the settlements eventually “forsvant” [disappeared].⁷⁴ There is no reference to the pictures in the running text or the study questions.

Interestingly, the chapter “European Colonialism Overseas” features comparisons with Norwegian medieval history by listing Norse “accomplishments”; for example, when Viking and Portuguese maritime technology, which “åpnet nye muligheter” [opened up new possibilities],⁷⁵ is praised, and when national pride in their respective traditions of sea travel is compared.⁷⁶ Tellingly, the conquerors are referred to as “sjøhelter” [heroes of the ocean]⁷⁷ and are presented as risk-takers.⁷⁸

This way of telling history culminates in the observation that small countries, too, can become world powers.⁷⁹ The consequences of colonialism for the Indigenous peoples are referred to in just one sentence, and even though the powerful descriptive term “folkemord”⁸⁰ [genocide] is employed, it comes across as a side note in an overall nationalistic framing of history.

Historie på Tvers is interested in telling the (success) story of how Norway became a nation. That the authors are well aware of their historiographical approach becomes obvious in an entire page dedicated to historiographical reflection, attached to the chapter on medieval history. Under the title “Historieskriving medfører valg”

72 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 208.

73 See, for example, Jens Christian Sundby et al. “Kunsthistoriker om fjerning av Krohg-maleri: Dette er klassisk sensur,” NRK, 19.02.2023. https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/nasjonalmuseet-har-fjernet-christian-krohgs-maleri-leiv-eiriksson-oppdager-amerika_1.16303805.

74 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 212.

75 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 275.

76 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 276.

77 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 275, 277.

78 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 276.

79 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 277.

80 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 279.

[History-Writing Entails Choice],⁸¹ alternative ways of presenting history are put forth. Amongst these, a focus on Indigenous peoples' lives is listed, only to conclude that in the chapter in question the decision was made to present medieval history "gamlemåten, den måten som skolebarn helt fram til 1970-tallet fikk fremstilt Norges tidlige historie på: gjennom konger og hendelser" [the old-fashioned way, the way schoolchildren learned about history up until the 1970s: through kings and events].⁸² This is true not only for the chapter in question: The entire book is characterized by a focus on nation-building and national pride and an almost naïve faith in technology, featuring only the perspective of the majority population.

3.2 *Grunnbok i Historie*

*Grunnbok*⁸³ was collectively written by five authors, each of whom has a background in teaching. Unlike *Historie på Tvers*, *Grunnbok* opted for the more traditional approach of telling history chronologically. There is no mention at all of the Saami in the chapter on Norwegian medieval history, neither directly nor indirectly as in *Historie på Tvers*. The book focuses instead on the Vikings⁸⁴ historical⁸⁵ and memorial-cultural importance,⁸⁶ with a particular emphasis on their navigational skills and gift economy. While the (political) effects of the introduction of Christianity to the heathen Norse are discussed, the Saami are mentioned neither in the running text nor in the metatext.⁸⁷ Consequently, the map that shows medieval Norway does not refer to Sápmi.⁸⁸ That does not mean that *Grunnbok* does not include Norway's Indigenous population at all. The history of the Saami is narrated in a separate chapter titled "Én nasjon?" [One Nation?], which dedicates a total of six pages to Norwegian Indigenous history, *one* of them covering Saami history before 1814. With regard to the medieval period, the book points out how peaceful relationships supposedly were between Saami and Norse before the latter converted to Christianity in the eleventh century. *Grunnbok* mentions the first laws in the twelfth century, "som gjorde det forbudt for nord-

81 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 201.

82 Grønlie and Nordberg, *Historie på Tvers*, 201.

83 Hege Faust et al., *Grunnbok i Historie VG2/VG3* (Aschehoug Undervisning, 2021).

84 *Grunnbok* almost exclusively uses the term "Vikings." One exception, however, is the word "nordboerne." Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 87.

85 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 86–87.

86 See, for example, Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 85, 92–97.

87 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 87–88.

88 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 89.

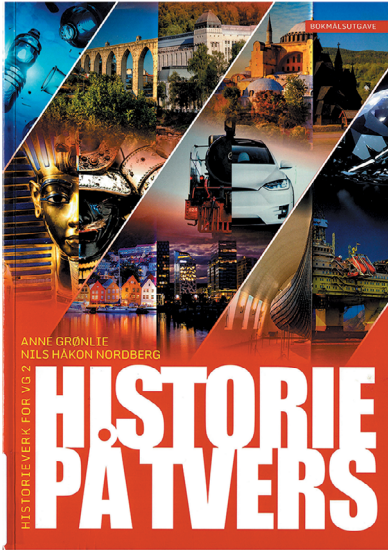


Figure 9.1: Book cover of the schoolbook *Historie på Tvers* (Drammen: Argus, 2021).



Figure 9.2: Book cover of the schoolbook *Grunnbok i Historie* (Oslo: Aschehoug Undervisning, 2021).

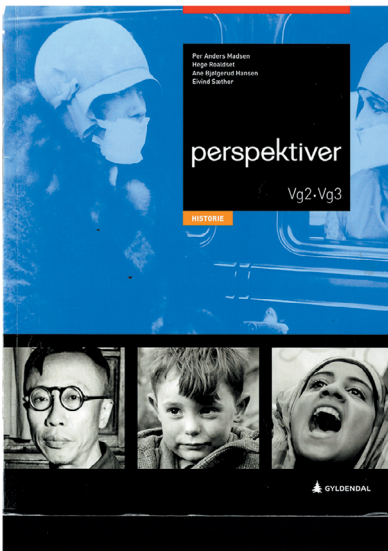


Figure 9.3: Book cover of the schoolbook *Perspektiver* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2021).

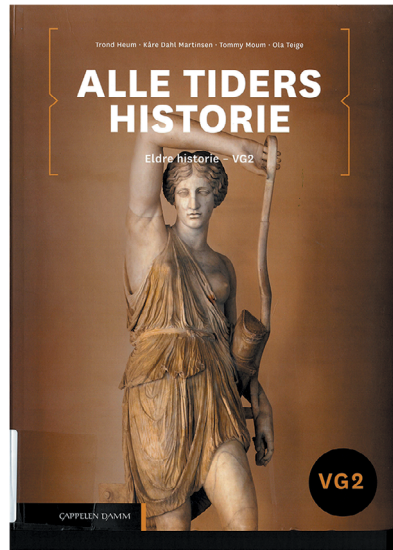


Figure 9.4: Book cover of the schoolbook *Alle Tiders Historie* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2021).

menn å bli spådd eller helbredet av samer” [which made it illegal to receive prophesies from or be healed by Saami].⁸⁹ This development is associated with the beginning of a process of othering that finds its tragic climax in “grusomme trolldomsprosesser” [cruel witchcraft trials]⁹⁰ (which are not associated with a specific century). The rest of the chapter mainly focuses on the policy of Norwegianization, which is described as part of a larger and longer lasting colonial framework, and the development of research with regard to the Saami.⁹¹ Even though the book dedicates an entire chapter to Saami history, it is given very little space compared to “Norwegian” history, not to mention the fact that Indigenous history is marginalized in a separate chapter instead of being integrated into the different historical periods. As a consequence, students will not conceive of the Saami as an integral part of Norwegian (medieval) history, and they will see Indigenous history primarily as a history of victimization, without being aware of the precolonial ethnic fluidity and liminality. It should also be mentioned here that the book uses temporal forms like “de levde” [they lived], which suggests that the Saami only exist in the Norwegian past, not in the present.⁹²

When it comes to medieval encounters with Indigenous peoples outside of Norway, *Grunnbok* opts for a relatively neutral description of the Vikings’ “outward expansion,” by recounting how they “oppsøkte og påvirket” [sought out and influenced]⁹³ a large geographical area and how they were themselves culturally influenced in turn, bringing these influences back home.⁹⁴ Their shipbuilding skills are also portrayed rather neutrally: “De gjorde også noen forbedringer i skipsteknologien som skulle vise seg å gjøre båtene deres overlegne alle andre fartøyer på den nordlige halvkule” [They also made some improvements to ship technology that made their boats superior to all other vessels in the northern hemisphere].⁹⁵ This aspect is visually portrayed by a photo of the famous Gokstad ship in the Oslo Vikingskipmuseum.⁹⁶ The Viking raids are mainly described in terms of their economic importance, and Viking settlements are portrayed as the consequence of conquest and trade. While the history of the Icelandic settlement is told in a fair amount of detail, neither Greenland nor the settlement in North America are mentioned here, and as a result, encounters with Indigenous peoples

89 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 89.

90 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 89.

91 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 288.

92 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 286.

93 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 88.

94 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 91.

95 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 87.

96 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 87.

are similarly absent. The focus on cultural exchange also comes through in the chapter “European Colonization Overseas.” The first encounters between the native populations, such as the Taíno and Carib, and Europeans are characterized as “kommunikasjonsproblemer, uklare roller og situasjoner hvor maktforholdene ble snudd opp ned” [communication problems, unclear roles, and situations in which power relations were turned upside down],⁹⁷ as well as general cultural differences that had to be overcome, glossing over the actual violence underlying these encounters.⁹⁸

Grunnbok contains a series of *historiographical reflections*; specifically, on the availability and partiality of sources and the focus on events and important people, while “andre sider ved samfunnsutviklingen kommer fram mer indirekte eller er vanskelig å kartlegge” [other aspects of societal development come across more indirectly or are difficult to grasp].⁹⁹ Similar reflections are also integrated into the questions in the metatext that encourage a critical examination of what the book does not contain, such as “savner du noe, er det spørsmål du ikke har fått svar på, eller har nye spørsmål kommet til i arbeidet med disse kapitlene?” [do you miss anything, are there questions you have not received answers to, or have new questions arisen while working on these chapters?] and “hvis du synes noe mangler, hvilke grunner kan det være til at det ikke er med?” [if you think something is missing, what reasons could there be for its omission?].¹⁰⁰ Overall, *Grunnbok* tries to bypass delicate topics by choosing a neutral and seemingly objective language and by relegating Saami history to its own chapter. The result is a narrative – as has been demonstrated with regard to the Viking expansion and European colonization overseas – that presents history as the result of cultural encounters, not as a consequence of often asymmetrical power relations.

3.3 Perspektiver

*Perspektiver*¹⁰¹ was written by a team of four authors with backgrounds in teaching and journalism. Interestingly, *Perspektiver*, like *Historie på Tvers*, prominently features Ohthere’s report, but with a very different objective; namely, to

97 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 169.

98 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 174.

99 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 103.

100 Faust et al., *Grunnbok*, 142, questions 3 and 4.

101 Per Anders Madsen et al., *Perspektiver – Historie VG2 VG3* (Gyldendal, 2021).

provide a roughly one-page introduction to Saami ethnicity and history, titled “Saamene trer fram” [The Saami Emerge].¹⁰² The book mentions archaeological findings that suggest an independent Saami identity, discusses the origins of the Saami languages, and describes the relationship between Saami and Norse as “more mutual and equal than the Norse sources suggest.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, *Perspektiver* underscores the problematic nature of sources more generally, how they only allow an “outside” perspective onto the Saami, resulting in the othering and exclusion of Indigenous peoples from a historiography oriented around nation-building.¹⁰⁴ A map of medieval Norway identifies the areas of Saami settlement.¹⁰⁵ The Indigenous population of Norway is therefore thoroughly included in the chapter on medieval history, with its own short section that is well informed by research. The way in which the Ohthere report is used reveals the very different narrative approaches textbook authors can develop from one and the same source.

Nevertheless, despite this well-thought-out paragraph about the Saami, *Perspektiver* is also structured around the question of how “Norway” became a “united country,” a focus that is reflected in the thematic structure of the sub-chapters¹⁰⁶ and the actual presentation of history as a process leading to the creation of the Norwegian national state:

I den perioden vi nå skal ta for oss, trer konturene av «Norge» fram for første gang. Det var dramatiske århundrer. Vikingene¹⁰⁷ herjet langt utenfor landets grenser. Kristendommen fortrengete den norrøne gudelæren. En begynnende samlingsprosess pekte fram mot en norsk statsdannelse. Dette er en periode vi fortsatt merker sporene etter.¹⁰⁸

In the period we are looking at now, the contours of “Norway” are visible for the first time. Those were dramatic centuries. The Vikings ruled far beyond the country’s borders. Christianity displaced the Old Norse religion. The beginnings of a unification process pointed towards the formation of a Norwegian state. This is a period we still feel the traces of.

The (dramatic) nation-building perspective also predominates in other chapters, such as the one titled “Great Empires and Nomadic People,” where students are encouraged to think about how to advise a ruler “med store ambisjoner” [with

102 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 82–83.

103 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 83.

104 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 83.

105 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 83.

106 For example, “A kingdom is rising,” 83; “The meaning of the Viking journeys for the coming together of Norway,” 84; “A Norwegian state is formed,” 90.

107 As in this quote, the book uses the term *vikinger* throughout the chapter.

108 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 76.

big ambitions]¹⁰⁹ who wants to “overta andre områder og skape seg et nytt rik” [take over other regions and establish a new empire].¹¹⁰ Another assignment asks students to take on the role of a court historian and to find “eksempler fra tidligere historie som kan brukes til å inspirere og gjøre mennesker i dag stolte” [examples from earlier history that inspire pride in people today]¹¹¹ and “minst to eksempler som du mener kan brukes til å støtte opp om et modern lands nasjonsbygging” [write down a minimum of two examples that can contribute to a modern country’s nation-building].¹¹² These tasks are not designed to encourage critical reflection about hierarchical power relations but instead actively contribute to solidifying “mainstream,” if not to say imperialist, perspectives. The paragraph about the Saami therefore seems almost like a curricular requirement pasted into an older narrative framework. Saami perspectives are by no means an integral part of the storyline but are recounted separate from “mainstream” history.

The nation-building narrative becomes even more obvious in the way Viking outward expansion is described as a political and economic necessity and, consequently, how the Vikings are portrayed as merchants, explorers, and pioneers with regard to maritime technology, who “oppdaget” [discovered], “reiste” [travelled], and “spredte seg over et enormt område” [spread over an enormous area].¹¹³ Greenland and North America were, according to the book, populated as a consequence of “dristigere ferder” [daring voyages].¹¹⁴ Here, too, the choice of words is characterized by admiration and superlatives. There is a reference to the Indigenous population of “Vinland,” in the context of the local population, unlike the Norse, not being familiar with iron.¹¹⁵ Mentioning them therefore serves to “prove” the Norwegian presence at that time but does not provide them with their own agency. The entire subchapter is striking not only in its choice of words but also in its pretence of objectivity. Similar to *Historie på Tvers*, Viking history is recounted in such a way as to instil awe and national pride in students who are working with the book. But this narrative is not implemented consistently: interestingly, the book uses its metatext to critically reflect on its own choice of words, by asking students why the word “oppdaget” [discovered] in the running text is

109 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 126.

110 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 126.

111 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 126.

112 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 126.

113 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 80.

114 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 81.

115 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 81.

in quotes,¹¹⁶ a question that might provoke a critical discussion about the existence of Indigenous peoples in the areas populated by the Vikings.

This back and forth between including Indigenous history and critically addressing conventional narratives, while at the same time pursuing these same conventional narratives by adopting a nation-building perspective, continues in the chapter on European colonialism overseas. But here, the consequences of European colonization for the Indigenous peoples are clearly stated and readers are encouraged to critically confront the colonial actions of the Spaniards and even to imagine things from the perspective of the Indigenous people. The word “explored” is again in quotation marks, and *Perspektiver* explicitly mentions that these same areas had been inhabited for centuries.¹¹⁷ An information box is dedicated to representing the Indigenous perspective.¹¹⁸ At the same time, the book also euphemistically presents the colonial rulers as adventurers and gamblers who were seeking power, gold, and honour,¹¹⁹ and repeatedly uses the term “indianere” [Indians],¹²⁰ which the Norwegian encyclopaedia *Store Norske Leksikon* refers to as a “loaded term” that should be replaced by more neutral or positive terms like *urfolk* [Indigenous peoples].¹²¹

The nation-building perspective predominates in *Perspektiver*, even though the book clearly tries to occasionally include Indigenous history. It reflects upon historiography in several places, as mentioned, for example, with regard to Indigenous perspectives. Furthermore, there are even reflections on the effects of colonialism on historiography and the perception of history, in the context of decolonization efforts on the African continent.¹²² The book gives the overall impression of being torn between including minority perspectives and following a more “classical” nation-building approach.

116 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 81.

117 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 133–34.

118 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, “Hva tenkte urbefolkningen,” 136.

119 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 136.

120 See, for example, Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 132, 134.

121 Stener Ekern, “Amerikanske urfolk,” *Store Norske Leksikon*, 06.11.2022, https://snl.no/amerikanske_urfolk.

122 Madsen et al., *Perspektiver*, 122.

3.4 *Alle Tiders Historie*

Alle Tiders Historie,¹²³ the last of the textbooks analysed, was written by a team of two teachers and two (associate) history professors. It also features Ohthere's report, even including an extract from the original source, in order to describe Saami–Norse relations. It mentions that the Saami were subjected to “hardthendt skatteinnkreving” [tough tax collections] but also talks of “fredelig kontakt” [peaceful contact] and trade,¹²⁴ therefore referring to a range of possible interactions between the Saami and Norse. *Alle Tiders Historie* further discusses Saami and Norse identities as a result of cultural contact with each other and other peoples.¹²⁵ Surprisingly, it is the only book in the corpus to mention Saami boat-building skills and to take the opportunity to note Saami technological abilities as well as the effects of exchange and collaboration.¹²⁶ *Alle Tiders Historie* is also the only textbook analysed that includes a paragraph devoted to Saami culture, including the organization of Saami community (*siida*) and religion (*noaide*, *sjaman*), emphasizing that “religiøst sto ikke nordmenn og samer så langt fra hverandre før kristendommen ble innført” [religiously, Norwegians and Saami were not very far apart from one another prior to the introduction of Christianity].¹²⁷ In this context, it should be noted that *Alle Tiders Historie* is the only book to employ Saami terminology.

Alle Tiders Historie is therefore remarkable in many ways when it comes to the inclusion of Saami history. It focuses on Saami–Norse encounters and exchange and therefore best reflects the current state of medieval research. By looking at Saami culture and using Saami terminology, it gets beyond the usual victimization narrative. Unlike *Historie på Tvers* and *Perspektiver*, the Ohthere source is taken as a point of departure to not only introduce Indigenous history, but also to critically reflect upon the notions of “nation” and “nationality”: “Når vi bruker betegnelser som nordmenn, dansker og svensker, må vi huske på at dagens nordiske nasjonalstater ikke eksisterte i tidlig middelalder” [When we use designations like Norwegian, Dane, or Swede, we must keep in mind that today's Nordic nation states did not exist in the early Middle Ages].¹²⁸ This critical focus is reinforced by its own information box that explains that the idea of nations and nation states only originated in the late eighteenth century, even though some historians believe that the

123 Trond Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie. Verden og Norge før 1800. VG 2* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm AS, 2021).

124 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 122.

125 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 122.

126 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 121.

127 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 125–26.

128 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 121.

medieval Norwegian sense of identity is comparable with the modern national one.¹²⁹ This focus does not mean that nation-building does not play any role at all in *Alle Tiders Historie*. The process of political unification and Christianization further structures the chapter, and it is only the Vikings¹³⁰ who are named as the victims of these historical developments.¹³¹ But this nation-building process is told from a European perspective rather than just a Norwegian one: “det pågikk også lignende samlingsprosesser i mange andre land på samme tid, noe som kan ha påvirket norske høvdingar” [there were similar processes of unification in many other countries at that time, and this may have influenced Norwegian chieftains].¹³² Viewing history from a simply European angle is typical of the entire book. Even though the integration of Indigenous history within the narrative texture of *Alle Tiders Historie* is certainly inconsistent, it is included in each historical period and as such is taken up again in the context of early modern history, where two entire pages are dedicated to ethnic minorities.¹³³

The aforementioned European perspective is also maintained when it comes to Viking outward expansion, which, in an interesting twist, the book introduces as “colonization”: “Denne koloniseringen av områder utenfor Norge kalles ytre ekspansjon” [This colonization of regions outside of Norway is called outward expansion].¹³⁴ The use of this term draws a clear connection to later forms of Norwegian colonialism towards the Saami, and thus to a period when the term “colonialism” is generally accepted. Quite apart from the question of whether this use is appropriate or anachronistic in a medieval context, the book undoubtedly establishes a very different framework for the Viking expansionism compared to the distorting glorification of the other books. That being said, Indigenous encounters abroad are only mentioned in passing. Viking settlements in Greenland and Vinland are referred to in a factual manner without touching upon the Indigenous populations in the running text. It is only in an information box about Greenland, seven pages later in the book, that the Inuit are mentioned as one of several reasons why the Norse settlements in Greenland “forsvant” [disappeared].¹³⁵ It should be noted that *Alle Tiders Historie* also mentions Viking ships, but in a neutral way, by using the passive voice and opting not to praise Viking technological superiority: “Vikingskipene var konstruert slik at de både kunne krysse åpne havstrekninger og var lette å ta seg

129 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 128.

130 The book alternates between using the terms *viking* and *høvdingar*.

131 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 127–30.

132 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 127.

133 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 230.

134 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 119.

135 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 143.

fram med oppover elver, siden de ikke stakk dypt i sjøen” [The Viking ships were constructed so that they could cross the open ocean and were light enough to be taken along rivers, as they did not sink so deep into the water].¹³⁶

The overall impression of *Alle Tiders Historie* as a book is that it opts for critical approaches and privileges European perspectives over Norwegian national ones; this is confirmed in the chapter on “Oppdagelser, kultur møter og den første globaliseringen, 1500–1800” [Discoveries, Cultural Encounters, and the First Globalization, 1500–1800].¹³⁷ Despite the use of the term “discoveries” in the chapter title, it is made clear that the American continent was populated prior to the Europeans’ arrival. There is a slight tendency to present colonial politics in terms of competition between the European powers, with a fairy-tale-like notion of adventure and risk-taking, expressed in sentences like these: “Men livet på haciendaene tilfredsstilte ikke de mest eventyrlystne. Rykter om enorme gull- og sølvforekomster motiverte ambisiøse unge menn fra Spania til dristige reiser inn i ukjente områder” [But life on the haciendas did not satisfy the most adventurous. Rumours of enormous quantities of gold and silver motivated ambitious young men from Spain to undertake daring voyages into unknown areas].¹³⁸ But compared to the other books, *Alle Tiders Historie* dedicates significantly more space to the fate of the Indigenous population and mentions racial politics and hierarchies. Questions are included to encourage critical reflection with reference to the Indigenous populations, and the sources selected take care to show that Indigenous people were not “viljeløst og resignert” [without will and resigned], as the Spaniards claimed.¹³⁹

Alle Tiders Historie also includes historiographical reflections, especially with regard to the anachronistic use of the concept of the nation state, explicitly arguing for a European approach to history. It also underscores the limitations of historiography due to the lack of source-based knowledge about the perspectives of those who did not have power. Addressing the Norwegian *storhetstid* [age of greatness], for example, the book states that modern historians are “varsomme med å bruke en slik betegnelse. Blant annet kan vi stille spørsmålet: Storhet for hvem? De styrende eller dem som ble styrt?”¹⁴⁰ [wary about using such a designation. Among other things we can ask: great for whom? For those who were in power or for those who were ruled?] Such reflections occur throughout the book and are not relegated to their own paragraph.

136 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 118.

137 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 159.

138 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 168.

139 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 168.

140 Heum et al., *Alle Tiders Historie*, 138.

4 Colonialism in Textbooks – Textbook Colonialism?

Torjer Olsen writes that “a colonial past needs to be put into a narrative. There are many options as to how this can be done.”¹⁴¹ What has become clear from this analysis is that each textbook opts for a very different narrative approach. Although they all seem to follow an unofficial thematic canon with regard to what is included, they differ greatly when it comes to how they present history and what aspects they prioritize.

A good example is the use of the Ohthere source, which is presented in three of the four books. While *Historie på Tvers* uses it as a point of departure to introduce Norwegian nation-building and only mentions the Saami in a subclause, *Perspektiver* and *Alle Tiders Historie* use it to discuss Indigenous history. Both those books include entire paragraphs on Indigenous history and culture in their respective chapters on medieval history. *Alle Tiders Historie* even attempts to integrate Indigenous history into the different historical periods throughout the textbook. *Historie på Tvers* entirely glosses over Indigenous history, whereas *Grunnbok* others it into its own chapter.

While the analysis makes it clear that none of the textbooks has found a “perfect” approach to telling Saami history, it is much more difficult to take a position on the question of how the Saami should be described – as a “nation of their own” or as an “integral part of Norwegian history”? – for this is not just a question of historiography but also of politics, related to the self-conception of today’s Saami community. This is why it is so important that Saami scholars be included in the composition of future history textbooks. One could even go further and suggest using Indigenous or minority sensitivity readers in the textbook editing process. This suggestion has nothing to do with censorship or distorting history, but could be a way to avoid the unintended reproduction of bias and harmful power relations.

While there is some attention paid to the Saami, none of the books discuss the existence of Indigenous peoples with regard to Viking expansion or the expansion of the Norwegian central state at any length, even though they all mention Norway’s enormous territorial influence in the thirteenth century. That none of the books emphasizes the fact that Greenland and Vinland were populated before the Vikings’ arrival¹⁴² is obviously due to a lack of sources, but how Viking expansionism is referred to is nonetheless telling: the focus clearly lies on the Viking colonists

141 Olsen, “Colonial Conflicts,” 82.

142 On this issue, see Timothy Bourns, this volume, and Jay Lalonde, also in this volume.

and their “achievements,” not on those – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – peoples affected by their expansionism. Even a more thoughtful book like *Perspektiver* portrays Viking history using a vocabulary of admiration. Cordelia Heß recently described how medieval historiography is anachronistically influenced by the knowledge of later colonization;¹⁴³ Susanne Grindel has observed postcolonial framings in textbooks as well.¹⁴⁴ Anachronistic postcolonial approaches to history could not be detected in the textbooks analysed, however, except perhaps for *Alle Tiders Historie*’s use of the term “colonization.” Instead, all the textbooks, with the exception of *Alle Tiders Historie*, are heavily influenced by no less anachronistic nation-building narratives. These ultimately result in a specific form of textbook colonialism, or “colonialism 2.0.”

As hoped, comparison to other chapters was helpful in detecting and confirming the general narrative approach of each book. Such confirmation is all the more important as the books were written collectively, which could potentially have led to narrative inconsistencies. However, no inconsistency was apparent, which allows to draw general conclusions on the books, not just on the chapters on medieval history. The books’ narrative choices are marked by and reflect colonialist mindsets; this is not only apparent in what is being recounted, but also in the use of a collective “us” and “we,” in the omission of “unpleasant” content, as well as in questions that make students almost exclusively take on the majority population’s perspective. These factors can be termed a “silent othering” and the structural continuation of the nineteenth-century mindset of perceiving the Saami as a people without history.¹⁴⁵ Historiographical reflection comes across almost as a form of self-justification, as those books that devote the most space to such reflections also have the most problematic approach to history. When it comes to implementing the new curriculum as presented under point 2 (“context”), *Historie på Tvers* clearly fails to represent its stated values, and there is room for improvement in *Grunnbok* when it comes to including Indigenous history within Norwegian history and presenting Indigenous people as actors and not just victims. *Perspektiver* seems to still be influenced by its older versions and should be less timid about integrating Indigenous perspectives. *Alle Tiders Historie*, while not perfect, is the book that best represents the new curriculum. What must be observed overall is that each of these books falls short in their use of pictures and maps beyond illustrating and as such misses an opportunity to enhance learning, improve visual literacy, and deepen historical understanding. Most concerning though is the almost

143 Heß, “Margareta,” 3.

144 Grindel, “Colonial and Postcolonial,” 268.

145 Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen, *Samenes historie fram til 1750* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2004), 11.

complete absence of original sources. Their inclusion would offer students not just a more immediate approach to history, but would also show them how narratives are constructed based on fragments of the past and would help them to develop historical thinking.¹⁴⁶

It must be mentioned, however, that the stereotypical, dichotomous portrayal of the Saami that was identified by previous studies could not be detected in any of the books in question. While this is a positive development, it is no reason to rest on one's laurels.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

The textbooks convey colonial mindsets to different degrees; looking for a colonialism 2.0, a colonialism that is expressed in schoolbook pages rather than in the historical events themselves, can reveal the perpetuation of power structures that the curriculum is actually trying to leave behind. Textbooks are here to stay, and new educational technologies are unlikely to diminish their importance.¹⁴⁷ But since they only change after some delay, teachers must take responsibility to encourage students to critically engage with this text genre.¹⁴⁸ Given that information from the Internet is easily available and accessible, greater value should be placed on one's ability to evaluate a textbook's "factuality" and to recognize potential bias than to make sure that students learn historical "facts." This could be done by treating history textbooks not as sources of information but as examples of how history can be framed. The books analysed provide a good basis for such an approach; for example, teachers could ask their students to compare the different framings of the Ohthere source.

Additionally, the concept of history textbooks should be reconsidered. New work on this traditional medium presents alternatives, such as bi- or multinational textbooks that denationalize historiography.¹⁴⁹ Another approach is to tell history in hypertexts: without a set beginning or a moral at the end, hypertextual narration styles allow for a more flexible, situational, associative mode of history-

146 Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto: Nelson College Indigenous, 2012), esp. chap. 2, "Evidence: How Do We Know What We Know About the Past?" 35–66.

147 Romanowski, "Reading Beyond the Lines," 18; Altun, *Das osmanische Reich*, 136.

148 Romanowski, "Reading Beyond the Lines," 20–23; Lintner and McPhee, "Selecting."

149 Maier, "Tools"; Altun, *Das osmanische Reich*, 75–79; Olsen, "Colonial Conflicts," 84.

telling as a work in progress, which better reflects the fluidity of modern identities.¹⁵⁰ This could result in a form of “mapping,”¹⁵¹ contribute to implementing more recent cultural approaches, like *histoire croisée* or *entangled history*, and do better justice to the complex realities of precolonial, colonial, and “post”-colonial relationships. These innovative formats are one way to “recover loss of memory” and break the so-called postcolonial “conspiracy of silence.”¹⁵²

The analysis of four Norwegian history books has shown that the (Norwegian) history textbook genre still has a long way to go in developing innovative approaches to textbook historiography. To end on a positive note, however: A book like *Alle Tiders Historie*, with its critical approach to the national narrative and its European rather than national perspective, represents a good start to overcoming textbook colonialism.

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¹⁵⁰ Jakob Krameritsch, “Die fünf Typen des historischen Erzählens – im Zeitalter digitaler Medien,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 6 (2009): 420–23.

¹⁵¹ Krameritsch, “Die fünf Typen,” 428.

¹⁵² Mycock, “After Empire,” 398.

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A Way Forward?

Discussing Colonial Entanglements and Medieval Studies:
Postphase

Introduction

Academic work is most often about Indigenous peoples, not by them or with them. This fact has been heavily criticized by Indigenous communities worldwide – as the saying goes, “nothing about us without us.” This means not only a necessary dialogue between academics of various backgrounds, but also between academic and non-academic groups and fora. Most researchers working in postcolonial fields now attempt to pre-empt this criticism in various ways: by somehow including Indigenous communities in their research, by integrating Indigenous perspectives (or what they believe to be such perspectives), or by pointing out the usefulness of their research to the communities concerned.

The pitfalls and dangers of these approaches are manifold; they include tokenism, white saviour syndrome, and the attempt to find a representative and have them speak for an entire community or even society. The latter is particularly complicated when it comes to Medieval Studies. Many scholars have been working hard to establish greater recognition of alterity in the medieval period or have been arguing against a continuity between medieval political entities and modern nation states. But the question of integration and representation of Indigenous communities potentially re-instates an imagined continuity – between the Dorset of the eleventh century and today’s Inuit, for example, or between medieval Finnu-Ugric-speaking people in Fennoscandia and modern-day Saami.

Navigating one’s own position in research about colonial and postcolonial societies is also complicated and can often be painful, shameful, or embarrassing. As political frameworks and contemporary relations change, so do the conditions and requirements for Medieval Studies as a discipline. Students and scholars of Medieval and Nordic Studies who are interested in the colonial legacy of the Nordic countries need to face these issues and complexities. How do we disrupt the colonial legacy in our scholarship? How do we bridge the gap that exists between Indigenous peoples and academia?

Another complicating factor is the wide range of disparate perspectives and frameworks in different areas and countries. For example, because of the predominance of Holocaust memory and history in Germany, German memory cul-

ture pertaining to colonialism is only just surfacing. There are public debates and conflicts around statues and street names connected to colonialism and colonial racism (like the Bismarck statue in Hamburg or the “M*straße” in Berlin), issues about the restitution and repatriation of museum items and collections (most famously, the Benin bronzes), and a recent, yet criticized, agreement between Germany and Namibia regarding an acknowledgement of the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples between 1904 and 1908. Nordic and Scandinavian colonialism is largely absent from public discourse in the rest of Europe, just as it is within Scandinavia, and colonial issues are rarely discussed, with the possible exception of Indigenous land rights. And while some things are slowly changing, these changes are predominantly limited to the academic sphere and to smaller activist networks, while Scandinavian and Nordic majority societies do not perceive the colonial past or present as a particularly pressing issue – potentially with the exception of Norway, where a Truth and Reconciliation Commission has delivered a report on the historical relations between the Norwegian state and Saami and Kvens/Norwegian Finns to the Parliament in 2023. In Canada, the situation is yet different because of the country’s colonial legacy and ongoing colonial structures, and, most importantly, their impact on the lived reality of Indigenous peoples. On a wider societal scale, recent decades have seen increased reflection, awareness, and dialogue concerning questions of colonialism and Indigeneity. This is reflected in the 2008–2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (*Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada*) and its ninety-four calls to action in response to the atrocities of the Canadian Indian residential school system, as well as the more recent Land Back movement and related social and environmental justice efforts. That said, much work remains to be done.

The following discussion is an attempt to tackle some of the complex issues surrounding the study of medieval Nordic colonialism while foregrounding productive paths forward for working on the subject. It is an attempt to make transparent some of the concerns with which we struggle in our work. This discussion originated at a conference in Greifswald in February 2023. Some of these thoughts and ideas were raised in response to individual papers; some emerged over dinner and a glass or two of wine. Some of these questions and concerns have also found their way into various contributions in this volume (and other scholarly work). We decided to conduct an experiment and reconstruct some of the discussions in a Zoom meeting in September 2023, because we felt that these aspects are all too often only discussed around conference coffee tables and do not find their way into traditional academic writing. They are, however, a vital part of the scholarly discussion, as we attempt to find a way forward in a contested and highly topical field – between the two extremes of not being able to say anything at all, and being completely oblivious to the realities of the societies we live in

and our position within them. The transcript of the Zoom meeting has been edited somewhat for clarity and readability.

We talk about various issues, such as positionality and the academic ego, engagement with Indigenous sources, the usefulness of the term and concept “medieval,” and relations between scholars and Indigenous communities, with a general focus on Greenland. All participants and the moderator work in different fields and with different methods and terminologies, so specialists in each discipline will probably miss specific key words or references to debates which have been going on for years in their respective fields. The methodological issues we address need to be considered by all scholars whose work addresses postcolonial and/or Indigenous areas and topics, but they are also highly personal matters, depending on our backgrounds, nationalities, experiences, and attitudes. Including this transcript within an academic volume seems both radical and obvious – radical, because we rarely allow ourselves to be this personal in academia, and because we may regret some or many of our current positions in a few years; obvious, because they are such a big part of every academic’s life, work, and worldview.

We hope that this text can be part of a way forward, of marking a status quo and a position which is by no means permanent, but which is an expression of how we situate ourselves in a quickly evolving and changing field. To be continued.

Discussion

13.09.2023, 13.00 CET

Cordelia: My first question to the three of you revolves around positioning oneself and one’s research in a context and field. I think that especially in the fields of colonial and postcolonial history and studies, this is radically different from the methods I learned when I studied history in the 1990s and 2000s, when the academic ego was something entirely different than what it is today. We were never encouraged to discuss our own incentives or motives, or why we do what we do, and I have a feeling that this is about to change radically and that people are much more open and attentive to discussing how what we do is related to who we are. So – who are you and where do you situate yourselves and your research?

Tim: I can start. My name is Tim and I am from the country known as Canada. At the moment, I live in London in the UK, though I have moved around a lot in my adult life. I situate myself very much as a scholar of Old Norse and Old Icelandic literature, this is primarily what I work on, and I am also part of a new generation of scholars questioning how we can and should do things differently in our

research. This means no disrespect to the generations of incredible scholars who have come before us, as we stand on the shoulders of giants, but as scholars we should always be seeking improvement. I am trying to improve and do better by recognizing the history of colonial violence around the world and specifically the ways in which Medieval Studies is implicated in this history. Similarly, I am questioning how we can envision, think about, and frame history differently by incorporating multiple and different and more diverse perspectives, narratives, and experiences.

I would certainly like to become more aware and more informed, but I do not think you can change your position, your positionality, and your situatedness in relation to your work, as this is predetermined. There is the possibility of doing your homework to learn and strive to do better and educate yourself. Historically, in a lot of scholarship there is this ingrained sense that you can be objective and that who you are does not impact the work or research that you do. However, I think it impacts upon it at every level and in every way, related to your life experiences and identities, your histories, your family, your workplace, your privileges, the languages you speak, and your motivations. All these aspects impact what you say and write and even the words you choose and the view that you have of the world. It is so peculiar to me that this obvious fact has been somewhat rejected in academia for so long and that there is still a tendency to write as if our work is based on “truth,” when this truth actually differs from one person to the next.

Maya Sialuk: My name is Maya Sialuk and I am actually from Greenland where I am sitting right now. I am not a trained scholar and I come from outside of the academic world, but I work in the academic world. I do research on the intangible culture of Inuit in Canada, Alaska, and Greenland, and in Russia.

I am like very many other Greenlandic people with mixed backgrounds. My father is Danish and my mother is Greenlandic, and so my childhood home was like a tiny version of the society outside. We had the White man at the end of the table deciding which cultural aspects were acceptable in the home, what Greenlandic foods we could eat, and where and when we could speak Kalaallisut, which was confined to the kitchen. Certain Greenlandic foods were not allowed in the house, while others were, and cultural aspects like these magic songs for children that follow us our entire lives were not allowed. Cultural aspects were divided into acceptable and unacceptable spheres, much like it was organized outside the home, too. I never questioned this, as this is how life and the world were like when I was a child.

When I became older and had children of my own and pursued my research, I asked myself why we were not questioning our postcolonial existence and the

whole concept of knowing or not knowing whether you are living in this postcolonial existence. I was preoccupied with these questions for quite a while, because the awareness is growing stronger in Greenland, to the point of being obnoxious and aggressive and perhaps not very constructive. With the non-awareness of the past, that is how the world looked: like a harboured resentment or kind of anger, but not in the sort of ways that it is expressed today.

How does this affect my research? Hugely, obviously. It was my world and the world of those I do research on – and with, too. There are two aspects to my work: I research, and I also use it in the practical sense, as I tattoo people with the tattoos that I am researching. I am sitting down with all these individuals who have these scars and these questions, and the identity issues are huge. As such, the conversations around my research very much revolve around the questions of who am I? Where am I? How am I? Somehow these questions have also been beneficial to my own person in that – I hate the word *healing*, but I guess we are. I also dislike the word *journey*; I am not going anywhere and I am sitting here. Obviously, there is nevertheless some kind of healing aspect embedded in the process of becoming what and where we are supposed to be. There is also a whole side to this process where it goes too quickly and people do not become whole but create a persona from the culture that is [being] rediscovered and re-implemented in society.

I sit in-between these spaces and feel very calm about my own person now. I am almost fifty-four and I do not question so much whether I am Danish or Greenlandic or who I am: I am me, and I know who I am. Everybody I work with is still questioning these aspects and I am watching the directions that my research is taking on. “My child” (my research) is taken out into the world by other people and in ways that sometimes seem unhealthy and create situations where there can be a lot of resentment; for instance, when Timothy feels that he has to ask for permission during his talk in Greifswald. And I ask myself, who of these people will be the right ones to ask? We are still learning how to reimplement culture, and we are confused, and we grab it at every chance we get, but it has no form yet. There is just a lot of resentment – and so, who to ask? Indeed, I am highly involved in my own work as a person.

Christian: My name is Christian Koch Madsen and I am the deputy director of the Greenland National Museum and Archives [NKA]. I am also an archaeologist and researcher at this institution. I have been working here permanently since 2015; I first began here in 2006 as a student helper. I mention this because I was basically trained by many of the people who I am now working with here. During this time I have also been learning about what NKA sees as its objectives and important points of research.

Cordelia: My name is Cordelia Heß, Professor of Nordic History at the University of Greifswald. I am German, and before I came to Greifswald in late 2017 I lived in many different countries and places for longer or shorter periods. I am actually quite new to the topic of colonialism and medieval colonialism, as previously I mainly worked on medieval and contemporary antisemitism. These experiences linger in the background of my work: being German and the grandchild of Nazi perpetrators, as many people in Germany are, and working on antisemitism as a non-Jewish person and coming from the side of the “perpetrator” – these are all things I think about a lot when thinking about colonial contacts and relationships. I recently returned from six months in Canada, which was mind blowing in terms of the differences in how people from Europe and North America talk about colonialism, both inside and outside of academia.

One of the issues we discussed was who “owns” Indigenous sources and who has the right to use them – do White scholars have to ask permission? What if this permission is not granted – and by whom? White academia has for centuries been defining what historical sources are and has often deemed Indigenous knowledge to be irrelevant. How do you deal with this heritage today?

Maya Sialuk: When it comes to asking for permission, what we would call “White Academia” and “Indigenous groups” are often grouped as all the same. There is no “I” in Indians and it is like we become one big lump of groups that are all the same, that all think the same, that are all in the same state. That is obviously not true. I know people are saying that they understand that Inuit and Amazonian people are not the same, and of course, this is obvious. But also within our groups we are different people. Depending on who you talk to you are going to get different replies. I get yelled at a lot for being so involved in academia, as if I have gone over to the enemy’s camp. And I think that academics were the ones to write things down, and so I have to go into this camp. We are all different people, all of us, also within the groups [i.e., White academics and Indigenous people].

Tim: I think it is crucial to not only question how to not be perceived as the enemy camp, but also to actually actualize not being the enemy camp. I think a lot of us sincerely have that hope, but it is not a straightforward path. And as you say so importantly, what it means for one person is not what it means for another. The question of permission or consent I posed at the conference came from a place of wondering, “Who am I to be doing this specific research?” I am further along now and have thought more aspects through and also talked to more people. The general idea of permission or consent has become clearer to me as a mobile thing: it is not like simply signing a document, yes or no, or saying that you have the green or red light to pursue certain research, because one person could be fine with the research and another person might not be. I therefore view this

concept of consent and permission as a living thing: It is communal and constantly evolving, rather than something which is static. If it is not just a “yes or no” type of conversation, then I would imagine it should be open to feedback, constantly. Always listening and evolving, being honest and transparent and clear about who you are, what you are doing, and why. It also does not feel like it is my place to say all of this, as I am not a part of the Greenlandic community and I am a cultural outsider, which relates back to the question of asking for permission and consent. I understand that it is not as straightforward as a yes or no, and so now I am asking myself the questions: What can I do from where I stand? What should I do and what should I not do?

Maya Sialuk: The question is also “What can I do? What is culturally appropriate for me to share with you?” For example, when people ask to be tattooed by me, often White folk travelling around in the Arctic somewhere and they want to have a souvenir from their trip but then they are terrified to ask me. Very nervously, they ask if they are crossing any boundaries by being tattooed. And I say that I can tattoo anyone that I want, but that there are certain things I cannot tattoo on certain people and so I will not. But it is the thing of just having that conversation. If we are talking about religion, for example, there are certain things that are not mentioned and not talked about, that are protected within us and that we do not share with outsiders, even though we can talk about everything else around it. It does not have to be as black or white as “we can” or “we cannot.” Instead, we have to adapt the conversation – in this case, to what Timothy needs and what Maya can tell. It is ad hoc, depending on the situation and as a living thing, right?

Christian: I have a lot to say to all of this. I think it is important to not draw battle lines where they do not need to be. Also, because Greenland is and has its own vibrant research community and research institutions, with a lot of investment from many different people. The whole idea of asking for permission is not wrong, but I think a better question to ask for this proposed mindset is, “Is this useful to anybody?” The whole idea of getting permission could simply be to reach out to different stakeholders and ask whether this is interesting to them, and if some responses are positive then you have actually validated that your work has meaning and that you can go ahead with it. The lived reality here is that people actually want to know more about these things and they are happy to have our side come in and invest and research certain things – but maybe not everything. As long as there is a dialogue between you and them, as long as you give something back, which is actually a recommended research strategy pertaining to Greenland, now elaborated in the National Research Strategy. The strategy reflects the wish of the Greenlandic population to ensure that researchers are

doing research which interests people and that they leave something behind. That is the main idea, and so you can work, talk, or think about this concept of permission in a more structural way and then say that this is actually something that people are talking about and are thinking about implementing as well. And so there is an ongoing dialogue; you can start to open gaps in the battle lines and start chatting instead.

My own way into this research and position has been a constant learning experience. Like Cordelia, I was taught nothing about postcolonial thought and [I felt] there was just an open field for research. I made all the mistakes of all the White male researchers before me. Working with people, especially working with Greenlandic archaeologists whom I still work with, I realized that there are different ways to go about conducting research. That was a long learning process, because I do have a Danish background and I did grow up in a little village on Fyn. I took the mindset from that environment into a completely different environment, and so there has been a complete and ongoing transformative process. That impacts your work tremendously. Time is so important; the time you spend here, and the engagement with the people also takes time. A lot of people come in [to Greenland] to do research and they finish their research and then leave, because that is how it works if you live in a different country – you only have a certain amount of time and a certain amount of money. Where I actually see the transformation is in the “coming back” or sticking around and picking up on the same and continuing to develop the more personal relationships, that in turn open up for more dialogue. The main thing I learned early on is to “shut up and listen,” and only once you have done this can you start talking. We are taught to research differently in the rest of Scandinavia because if we are not the first ones to talk then we will not be heard, and so we always just jump in with nonsense or “blah blah blah.” It is often better to do it the other way around, and once you pursue the more dialogical approach, I have actually found that people directly ask us “Why don’t you research this because I would like to know that about my ancestors.” And so even though I am the symbol of colonialism in Greenland, being a White Danish male, I will still get the result of someone saying that it “would be nice to know something more about this” or “can you investigate this” particular aspect. We can and we do have these openings, because there are only a few people here and they are doing whatever it is they are doing. They are doing their jobs, and so they are not going to do the research, but they want to know more. We have to be constantly aware of the imbalances that exist in our relations with one another, but then we have these openings to do really meaningful and valuable research, too – even if you are a White Danish male.

Maya Sialuk: I do understand why Tim asked the question of consent, because consent is very commonly used in Canada where he is from. For example, there was a White Canadian student who wanted to do research on Sassuma Arnaa, the mother of the sea, and there had been a whole discussion online on social media regarding whether he actually had the right to do that. That seemed to be a Canadian thing. I do not think that this discussion has reached Greenland in the practical sense yet. There is nevertheless a little bit of it present at the very surface of the conversation. How to chase people away is by being very typically White Male and using a million words. Speak with less words.

Tim: I agree and appreciate everything that is being said from both of you. It is really valuable, insightful, and important. The responses that I sometimes get to me doing this research are very interesting, and often people in academic settings seem to be very dismissive of the ethical and political concerns that I have, some of which we have discussed now. I try to explain that there is more to it; for example, the colonial contexts of how the stories were recorded and collected by Hinrich Rink *Kaladlit okalluktualliait: Grönlandske Folkesagn*, Nuuk 1859–63, the ongoing legacy, and also everything that has happened in the past three centuries. There seems to be a dismissal of my concerns about these colonial factors. Or often I get a response that is more about how I cannot be doing this research at all: I should not even be trying or even asking this. I feel like neither of these responses is the right way forward, as they are both too extreme, but they are very common responses that I have received. I would argue that the more appropriate path is a bit more nuanced. I get what Christian was saying about questions of reciprocity, community interest, who benefits, and whether I am giving back as a part of this process. There is also another way to move forward that I think we are speaking to here. What Maya said about why not just be fierce and just do it; I appreciated that and maybe I was going too far in being overly cautious and worried about stepping on people's toes, or being too delicate or something. There is this fear of reproducing the colonial encounter in some way, which is a very scary thought. There is a way to be fierce and also cautious at the same time. I remember you said that I was being respectful, which is good, but to be fierce as well. Maybe there is a way to not lose that respectfulness and to keep listening before over-speaking too much.

Maya Sialuk: Exactly. The respect and will to conduct this research is very strong fuel for getting work done. Like with Christian, this includes making all these mistakes and learning from them, but to keep coming back and to actually be immersed within the society and within the cultural work in this country. There is something else about all of that, which is what we keep seeing in these communities with people coming and going – having immense respect for those that return

or stay. They do not have to live here but they keep coming back to the world of our culture. For instance, as researchers you can have archaeologists that do not live here but they come here all the time, and the locals in the areas where they work know them and are happy to see them. There is something about staying on and not just visiting, taking, and leaving. One can be fiercely hanging on.

Tim: An ongoing commitment that is not just a brief passing moment or an academic trend, but something more meaningful.

Cordelia: You have covered a lot of aspects of where to go, the potential ways to work on the topic, and ways we can work together. You have also mentioned a few things to be wary of, both regarding what we can do wrong and also regarding potential reactions from different groups. At this point I can share some impressions I got at UBC in Vancouver, where they dedicate a lot of focus to the decolonization of the curriculum and academia in general. Several indigenous communities have lived in the Vancouver area since time immemorial, but the Musqueam Nation ($x^w m \theta k^w \acute{a} y \acute{a} m$) is today located closest to UBC. This means that the Musqueam community gets a lot of requests by UBC researchers having them sign off on research plans, asking them whether certain aspects of their teachings “are ok,” or they would like elders to attend their classes to help. There are several First Nations in the area, but the Musqueam seem to receive most requests of this kind because they are the closest, and thus are made representatives of all the Indigenous peoples in the region. There are discussions regarding on the one hand the wish to integrate Indigenous perspectives and on the other, the question why they would have an interest in helping with research, probably without being paid for it? I can fully understand the researchers’ awkwardness, because how do you build these meaningful relations? For many of us, with the exception of Christian and Maya who have been immersed in the community for a long time, this is but one research topic among many others. Not everyone has the opportunity to move to Greenland for a couple of years, or to Sápmi or to another colonized area, and put more long-lasting effort into the stay. What could this “building meaningful relations” look like? It certainly cannot be a matter of inviting Indigenous people to all of our conferences as tokens and claiming it is therefore not a White dialogue. So what does “building meaningful relations with Indigenous communities” mean, and how can we do it?

Christian: I think you are making a very important point, because we are currently seeing this research fatigue coming out of this, because today everybody is thinking about these topics and about co-production of knowledge, and you already have this research fatigue in the communities. I think you have exactly the right starting point: Whenever you have a research project, sit down with your-

self and ask yourself, like Tim did, “Why am I doing this? For whom and how? How do I want this to unfold?” And if it is unfolding somewhere else, impacting on someone else, you should consider how the communities could be involved or not. I mean, it is just a reflective process of thinking, and I think that alone is something new in academia, because we have just been acting like “I have this project idea, I will get funding then I will begin the project.” That is how we are used to working. And at times, we still have to work like that because, as you say, the local communities might say they are not even interested in participating because they find them completely irrelevant or they don’t have time to participate. They, of course, have every right also to say “no.” It could be some climate or geophysical research in the lakes of their backyard. Perhaps they do not want to be involved in that. And nor do they want to sign off on papers or collaborations just to see the research having minimal impact on their daily lives. In that situation you have to turn around and admit that “Okay, my project is mainly academic and maybe I should not turn to the community, as in the small communities, but I should turn to the local research community.” There is also Greenlandic research. With that you can say, “Okay, my project is maybe more relevant for collaboration with the university [Ilisimatusarfik], the nature institute [Pinngortitaleriffik], or something similar,” and call it an academic project, because there is a lot of that around as well and there should be room for it, too. But I think the whole starting point is so important, like Tim’s thoughts of reflection for his starting point, and yours as well, Cordelia, after being in Canada. You question “Is this really the right way to do it?”

Cordelia: Is it possible that a lot of this “building relationships” actually amounts to shovelling the work over onto the Indigenous communities instead of doing it yourself?

Maya: That is sad.

Christian: As I said, a meaningful relationship could also be economic. If you are conducting research in a small community and you are leaving some kind of economic positive footprint, it is a meaningful relationship to the people living there. Just be honest about it, you do not have to wrap it up in all kinds of fancy words. If you get the sense that your project is maybe not something that people are going to want to invest their time in, you can still contribute. By using and paying for local services, paying other people like students, and asking them to participate in the research, that way they gain something by [you] being there. There are multiple different ways to angle it, and it does not always have to be that we have to sit in the sharing circle with everybody every time we do something, because people will get fed up with that, too.

Maya Sialuk: Yes. Enough with the sharing circles, enough with the panel talks! Jesus Christ! Include us – in outfitting systems, renting boats, and I don't know – there are a lot of ways to involve people in projects. But of course, you might not have to rent a boat to go through Greenlandic myth. I understand that. Maybe that should be an academic institution collaboration, rather than population [or community] based.

Tim: I think it absolutely is, although it could be interesting to have that shared and discussed at different community levels and to be open to that. On the surface and just thinking about my project: I am an academic, and if I were to collaborate, it would probably be an academic collaboration, and hopefully there might be other impacts that come out of that. The ones I have thought about are mostly in terms of pedagogy and teaching and how we frame history. If there could be positive outcomes for anyone in Greenland that would be something to prioritize – whether that is possible and to find that out.

Maya Sialuk: Also, in your particular project, which we also touched on in Germany, there was the way you read the myth. There is an actual learning process involved in reading them, understanding what it is that they are saying, and how to do that. The majority of the population here do not know how to do it. Maybe a result of all of this could also be a hint or guide as to “how do you understand your myth.” How do you? If it should have any impact on the population and not just the academic world, it could be that we try to ask what the myths are good for, or whether they are stories, guidelines; asking how we understand their whole setup and what is that all about? Why are they similar in language, even when they come from different territories far from each other? What am I supposed to get out of that? These kinds of questions, because how to understand the myths has been forgotten in the population. They are difficult to read and they are difficult to understand, because they come from a mindset that is not there and that has been replaced. So how to get that back and how are you going to do that?

Tim: I cannot.

Maya Sialuk: Exactly, and that is where your need for a partner who knows how to do that comes in. I am not saying that this partner has to be Inuk. The foremost scholar on these myths is a Danish woman. I hope she is still alive, because I am trying to muster the courage to approach her. She is very old and she is amazing. Her brain is amazing. She understands the myths, their purpose.

Cordelia: I think this is a good way to start talking about the sources we work with. We have been talking a lot about the academic field and academic versus

non-academic relations, mainly in Greenland and a little bit in Canada. Regarding the sources, I think that it is quite obvious to all of us that the colonial view of Greenland and other colonized areas was informed, on the one hand, by the colonial mindset of the researchers, but also by a kind of methodological purism. Looking at one kind of sources, reading them in a way they have always been read, and understanding them in the same way. I was wondering, and this is very much what Tim was working with: What is the way forward? For example, I personally think that in Viking-Age Studies there has been a lot of progress because people stopped reading only the sagas, or only looking at material sources; there was more dialogue and more inclusion of modern theories and terminology. People came to more modern and holistic understandings of, for example, processes of religious change. Similar processes are taking much longer in other areas of medieval studies, particularly in German-speaking academia. What do you think about what we can do, or what needs to be done, and also where we are, regarding these fields in Greenlandic history, Nordic history, postcolonial history? The core of these questions is what do we do with Indigenous storytelling within the framework of the sources that Western academia is used to working with?

Maya Sialuk: What I have experienced a lot when I deal with academia, which was my recent experience writing for Oxford [*The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology and Anthropology of Body Modification*], was that when I use my culture and the oral tradition as knowledge, as valid knowledge, it is automatically called storytelling. I find that a little . . . hold on, I am not storytelling here. I am using it as a knowledge bank and as a source that is as if not more valid than Franz Boas, or whoever. But the moment I use my own culture as a source, it is branded as storytelling. There is an attitude that storytelling is not something true, is not something real – it is like fairy tales. Of course, that is an attitude towards Indigenous knowledge that has to change.

Cordelia: If you cannot put a footnote on it as a reference, then it does not count.

Tim: This circles back so productively to that big question of removing the gap between Indigenous peoples and academia, and of what sources are valid . . .

Maya Sialuk: It is just the fact that there is a thing called Indigenous research methodology; shut up, we are people and we are doing the same thing you guys are. I find it confining that the two things cannot go hand in hand. Make your choice: are you doing Indigenous research methodology or are you using anthropology references? Well, I am doing both, because they are both valid.

The way that you described Medieval Studies, Tim; it was actually not until I sat in the same room as you in February that I realized that is how time is counted in academia. In my work, I have never thought about how the Inuit

myths that I work with are perhaps partly from medieval times. I do not count time the same way as you and that in itself I find interesting, and as an interesting point in this conversation about how we perceive history and how we present it as comprehensible in timelines and such. I got involved with these topics because I cannot shut up.

Christian: I work with archaeology and mainly material culture. I have learned a lot from, for instance, Maya – as you know, what we bring from my schooling and academic schooling is a very functionalist view of things – since we do not have any written sources. We do not. From the periods that we are looking at, they are very few, and they do not address what we want to know today. When we then start to learn how everything is connected through intangible cultural heritage and see how it links to the material culture – that is when you say, “Oh my god!” I think about that when I am interpreting material culture. It is a dialogue, what you are talking about Cordelia, that I think is still super important, and where we can do a lot – for instance, with Inuit archaeology, in the way we think about it. And then, of course, also on Maya’s side, I will sometimes chat about something that changed from where, or lived memory, because some of it goes a long way back. And we can always chat about “What does that mean, then?” So I think there is a way forward there.

Maya Sialuk: Maybe the gap really is between tangible and intangible culture, where a lot of Indigenous knowledge is considered intangible culture, but we are like, “It is reality!” Intangible culture is still a touchy subject somehow, it is not as acceptable as the idea of “This is a pen, 2023, it is made of, by, for the purpose of, etc.” Maybe we [Maya and Christian] use each other a lot, using our perspectives on the same thing. For instance, a settlement: Christian will ask, “Why are the doors turned this way and not that way?” And I will think, from the intangible mindset, “Well, what was the time? Where in the religion are we? How does that relate to where the doors are?” The museum exhibition downstairs from this office [in the NKA in Nuuk] is built with intangible stories that are not told. I have had the archaeologists one by one downstairs going through it, and they were surprised: they never saw it, never thought about it, they are so used to only looking at the material stuff. But one cannot exist without the other . . . is that helpful, Tim?

Tim: I mean for me or for . . . ?

Maya Sialuk: Well, I was joking. For you.

Tim: I think this dialogue is very helpful for me and I hope that what comes of it will be helpful for readers as well.

Cordelia: I think we are talking about two different things here. One is the general tendency in Western academia not to see the value in Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of transmitting knowledge and, as Maya says, immaterial knowledge and sources. I think we can all agree on that. That is a cultural problem and that is something that we need to work on to understand this better. But I think there is also this much more concrete problem that you have with the Norse settlements in medieval Greenland, where there is material evidence, and there is the saga literature, and a little bit of other written evidence. And then, if we try to put Indigenous knowledge into it, we are left with the stories that are being recorded in a very problematic colonial setting and are being transmitted in a very problematic way – we only have old translations of them, heavily edited, and so on. I think my final question to all of you is to ask: Where are we at? Are we at a point where we can actually bring these widely differing sources into a research methodology? Or do we need a completely new way of recording this Indigenous knowledge and making it available before we can work with it? What is your take on this – where are we now?

Maya Sialuk: I think there has to be some recording first. My experience is that I did the same research for thirteen years. I am very immersed in this subject. I am not like you guys, having all kinds of projects – I only have this. When I talk to people who are in the beginning of trying to understand the intangible culture, religion, or, in my case, the tattooing practices of Inuit, there is still a lack of automatic understanding of certain things, which I have because of my age. I am from North Greenland, from a rural area, a hunting area. My upbringing helps me understand the material that I work with. If you are younger and you are brought up somewhere else, for instance in Nuuk, you do not have that baggage with you. And so that baggage would have to be recorded. Also, for instance, if Tim comes to Greenland and starts discussing myths with people, it will not be very constructive because it needs to be recorded how we understand them and what their purpose was. They are regarded as stories because that is what we have learned from the outsiders; they are just crazy stories and they have a difficult build up. I am trying to remember what I was told about them; they do not have the normative build up. The normative obviously being a Western, Eurocentric way of telling a story. The Inuit myths do not seem to have a purpose. When I started rereading them later, with the knowledge that I have from my own childhood and upbringing and contact with the original religion, I was like, “Holy smoke!” This is actually a guideline on how to be Inuk – how to *Inuking* – and what goes wrong if we do not do it right and what to do to repair it if so. It is like a scripture, but not regarded as such, not presented as such. Which is also why I am doubting you will find anything, Tim, as in regards to a different narrative on the sagas.

There is some material that would be interesting to look at in that regard, but that is a different discussion. I feel that a lot has to be recorded, because we do not know how to use our own knowledge yet. I am super generalizing for all Indigenous people all over the world; I mean Greenlanders.

Tim: There is a series of stories in Rink's collection that are said to deal with Norse settlers in the medieval period and describe interaction and first contact between Inuit Greenlanders and Norse visitors. I first encountered this collection coming from a Saga Studies or Old Norse Studies perspective. In a lot of ways in the field now, we are putting different traditions and conversations together with one another, looking at Old Norse sources alongside Arabic sources, for example, and as part of a larger movement of a more Global Middle Ages, where we are not just looking at cultures in isolation but seeing the world in a more global and multicultural way. Christian spoke earlier about making mistakes and certainly that is a part of every learning process. The kind of questions I first asked when I encountered these stories are the way I would naturally approach them, informed by my background, and it is certainly not the way they would be experienced or thought about in Greenland. How do we then work and develop a framework, if we should even develop a framework, as outsiders reading these sources? I do not think it is the way anthropologists used to record stories and then publish them and share them with the world . . .

Maya Sialuk: We were talking about, at some point, that I should try and read those [stories]. I have possibly read them; I have read so much of the myths and the legends, but without specific interest in that particular subject. I think that perhaps the purpose of the stories of this meeting would be related to how to deal with meeting outsiders and figuring out where the spirituality of these strangers lies; how do we deal with it when we kill them? That is a big part of whether they will take revenge, etc. I have a feeling that it will still be a story of how to deal with the situation rather than it being a recording of a historical event, this meeting. Do you know what I mean?

Tim: Yeah I do. One of the first questions I was asking was whether these stories were historically accurate. I quickly realized this is not the right question for me to be asking. This is ridiculous. I dismissed it, but it was an initial question coming from my training, background, and fields. The question about time, which you brought up at the beginning of the conversation, is so interesting here as well: how the timelines do not operate in the same way. As a kind of "medievalist" – I mean, Medieval Studies is the story of the Middle Ages – to ask, then: the middle of what? The Classical period, Greek and Rome, and the Renaissance – this is not an Inuit timeline.

Maya Sialuk: No. When I go to the White side of my brain, I find “medieval” old sounding, but when I go to the other, non-White side of my brain, I know that the time of Rink’s recordings is quite recent. And the Norsemen feel recent, compared to how we regard our history, and stay on in this place, not just Greenland but with regards to the whole. So it was interesting to me, too. It never actually occurred to me, until I was listening to all of you at the conference: this is new stuff, but it sounds so old. I had a little battle in my head about it. What is the concept? Which concept are we talking about? What is old? What is new?

Christian: I think we end up talking quickly about Tim’s project. I think it actually is an amazing idea to work with this. That is why I have been giving it a lot of thought, and put in comments [into the guiding document] as well. The thing is that Tim is actually one step ahead, and so there should be a step before that, like I wrote. Something that maybe could represent the way to move this field a little bit is by going back. So, doing some sort of basic source-critical work, because we have all been working with the published versions of Rink. That is what people have been working with for 180 years now. But we must remember that there are a lot of sources there, he transcribed them and merged them together when they were too similar, but all of the original sources are still there; some of them in Greenlandic and with information about who sent them and from where in Greenland. Unravelling all of that would be the start to answering Tim’s questions. I think it is really good and for a long time I have wished that someone would come to look at the sources again with different eyes and postcolonial perspectives, because it was set in stone for a long time that these stories were just reflecting contemporary colonial–Inuit tensions. I think that may be true in some way, but we also have to go back and look at the sources, but this time doing source-critical work before something can really change the way we read them.

Maya Sialuk: So you do have to come here for a couple of years, Tim.

Tim: That sounds like a conclusion . . .

Maya Sialuk: One of us, one of us!

Christian: I had another point about these Indigenous research methodologies. Because we talked about that earlier today and at the moment we are still fighting this tension. And there are battle lines being drawn and we should just see how that is happening. What we should be working with when we think of both research and Indigenous peoples is first to create a demilitarized zone, where we on each side put down “our guns” and start listening and talking. That is the first step, and with time the demilitarized zone can then become a playground, right? That is really how we want research to be and that is when I think cross-cultural

research will explode, once we have turned the demilitarized zone into a playground. I think the way to do that is to start with some of the things we have done here, and actually how Tim has been going about starting his project. We just have to find the way there; maybe we do not have all the answers, but I think we are starting to ask the right questions.

Tim: We definitely do not have all the answers, but I think we are starting to ask the right questions. We are asking, and we are also changing our questions, and I think that is an important step in what is a long process which cannot be rushed. It needs to be slowed down and taken one step at a time. The steps forward are not just scholarly and academic in nature, but they are also based on being friendly, and kindness, joy, and love, and there are other things that we need to prioritize besides knowledge acquisition, things that are more important and so that matter more – they matter the most. I think that would also be a part of that way forward.

Cordelia: I think that sounds like something we all can agree on.

Maya Sialuk: Everybody loves love.

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