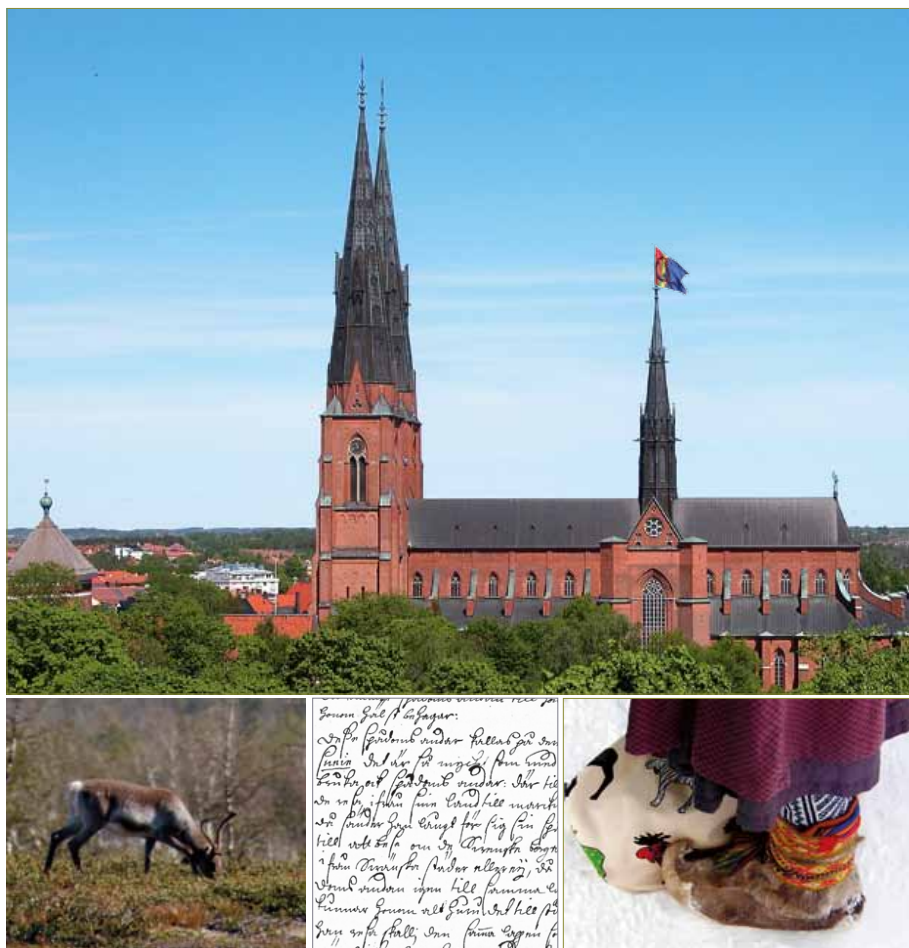


# Uppsala mitt i Sápmi

Rapport från ett symposium arrangerat av Föreningen för samiskrelaterad forskning i Uppsala, Upplandsmuseet 4–5 maj 2011

Red. Håkan Tunón, Märit Frändén, Carl-Gösta Ojala & May-Britt Öhman



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Omslagsbilder: Överst: Uppsala domkyrka (foto/montage: Håkan Tunón). Nedan t.v.: Ren på sommarbete (foto: Anna Olofsson); nedan mitten: utdrag ur en avskrift av *Descriptio Lapponiæ*, skriven av samer och Uppsalastudenten Nicolaus Lundius; nedan t.h.: Samisk tradition i förändring: Kautokeinoskor med mansskoband från Jukkasjärvi, burna till kjol (foto: Håkan Tunón)

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# 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\*

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(1)  
When academics present Sámi religion, this usually means pre-Christian Sámi religion, which is then depicted as non-literate and polytheistic, a tradition that has many rites, including both private and public sacrificial rites, and is based on oral narratives. These characteristics coincide with pre-Christian Norse religion. At the same time, pre-Christian Sámi religion differs from pre-Christian Norse religion in that it is shamanistic. The Sámi shaman is called noaidi (Northern Sámi). Pre-Christian Norse religion is not shamanistic, although several stories, especially those linked to Odin, have shamanistic traits. In the Sámi tradition, the noaidi both maintains and renews the tradition. Shamanistic traditions operate with rituals in which the shaman enters a trance or ecstasy and undertakes journeys in time and space in order to gather necessary information and to have dealings with the dead, in order to restore health, or to cut bonds that are pulling an individual towards the realm of the dead.<sup>1</sup>

Presentations of pre-Christian Sámi religious history are superficially tidy and clear, and are characterized by a scholarly consensus. Debates among church historians contribute one further sphere, namely, a discussion of the extent to which Læstadianism is a Sámi

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Christian tradition or a Christian tradition with Sámi participants.<sup>2</sup>

(2)  
In studies of pre-Christian Sámi religion, the state of the sources and the interpretation and combination of these sources pose a considerable academic challenge. This is why source criticism, that is to say, the critical investigation of the background and value of the sources, plays a central role. Since the sources are fragmented, the work of interpretation is linked to critical comparisons with other traditions such as pre-Christian Norse religion, popular Finnish traditions, and the myths and rites of circumpolar cultures.

The principal academic tools in the study of pre-Christian Sámi religion have been the historical-philological method and phenomenological analyses. The history of religion has been helped, and is still helped, by the disciplines of secular history, folklore, ethnography, anthropology, and archaeology. Particular theories about history, culture, and religion have functioned as parameters for the content and the manner of the historical-philological investigations. All these theories have assumed that Sámi religion consisted of greater and lesser variations of a non-Christian tradition that was uniform from a phenomenological perspective and that disappeared in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup>

\*This present text is part of an ongoing project on research history and ethics concerning Sámi life and culture, *Sápmi, past and present theories and histories*. The project has resulted in three articles: Svalastog & Eriksson, "You can use my name: You don't have to steal my story – A critique of anonymity in indigenopus studies", in *Developing World Bioethics* 2010;10(2):104–110; Pye & Svalastog, "Colonial and missionary perceptions of Sami and Ainu in Sweden and Japan", in *The CSSR [The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion] bulletin* 2007, september; Svalastog, "Tiden som förs vann", in Amft & Svonni (eds) *SápmiY1K – Livet i samernas bosättningsområde för 1000 år sedan*, Umeå University: Sami Studies Nr 3, 2006;3:115–134. A book chapter on maps and theories on Sámi history and religion will be published 2012 in a book written by the ad hoc group Riekkis, published at Arthub Publisher. ([www.riekkis.se](http://www.riekkis.se)).

Today, a question-mark has been placed from many different angles with regard to theories that present religion as something uniform, stable, and culturally pure. The critics have pointed both to diachronic variation and to variation from one locality to another at one and the same time. They have also shown that different participants in a society can have differing narratives and rites that regulate their everyday life, for example, because of gender, age, and social position. Besides this, they have emphasized that popular praxis and official doctrine in a people can not only be distinct from one another, but can also encompass different narratives and practices, and that encounters between traditions are dynamic: some elements are taken over and renewed, while others are eliminated and rejected.<sup>4</sup>

Parts of this critique have been integrated into the study of pre-Christian Sámi religion, but there is one striking exception, namely the treatment of Christian elements in the history of Sámi religion and the lack of understanding that the Christian tradition too must be included in the study of Sámi religious history.

### (3)

Research during the last three decades has brought to light South Sámi history in central Scandinavia and cultural encounters in the whole of Finno-Scandinavia. Scholars from a variety of disciplines relate a concurrent story when they tell about Sámi and Norse lives: that relationships to the Sámi people are regulated and attested in central mediaeval texts, in legal codes (the Eidsivating Law and the Borgating Law), in new practices such as the Rettarbot of King Hákon Magnus for Hålogaland in the fourteenth century, in the nationally important historical accounts by Ágrip (about Harald Hairfair), in the many stories about Sámi and the Sámi people in Snorre Sturlason, and in the Norse saga literature. In the last thirty years, archaeologists have confirmed the Sámi presence in central Scandinavia and along the coastal regions that earlier scholars believed did not belong to the Sámi areas. The archaeologists have shown that Sámi and non-Sámi Scandinavian groups lived side by side both before and during the Middle Ages. Linguistic researchers have studied the terms used by Sámi to express the relationships with non-Sámi persons who married into their group and loan-words from Sámi to Norse. Both the terms for relationships and the loan-words point to interaction and a well-established trade between the peoples. Historians of religion and folklorists have begun a fresh comparison with pre-Christian Norse traditions, but this time free from the evolutionistic theories of earlier periods.<sup>5</sup>

The polemics of polycultural Scandinavia of the Viking age and the early Middle Ages had a well-known continuation in J. Schefferus' book *Lapponia* (1673) about the life and culture of the Sámi, which was written to counter accusations, especially from Germany, that were linked to the Thirty Years War. (The accusations were spread by means of pamphlets that claimed that the Swedes won battles on the European battlefields because they made use of Sámi who practiced magic.) Several very celebrated senior civil servants in Sweden had a Sámi background, including the pastor Olaus Sirma, the pastor Anders Fjellner who transmitted the cycle of poems called *The son of the sun*, the pastor Petrus Læstadius, the pastor and botanist Lars Levi Læstadius, and the provincial governor Johan Gran. When the Swedish crown established its rule in the north, it made use of Sámi as jurors in court cases. Both the early settling of Iceland and the much later emigration to the United States included Sámi persons. Sámi were among the Norwegian national heroes who accompanied Fridtjof Nansen across Greenland, and among those who took part in the work of resistance during the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

The historical depth in the Sámi presence and participation in Scandinavia has consequences for how we understand Sámi religious history – probably larger consequences than we have as yet grasped.

### (4)

Questions are raised by the fact that Sámi people have lived over a long period together with, not separated from, other peoples in Scandinavia, while at the same time they have, correctly, been perceived as a distinct people going back to the pre-Christian age. I am particularly interested in the question of unity and purity in religious history from the Viking age up to the present day.

Trade between Sámi and non-Sámi persons has been marked by the will of the Norse kings, and their will to exercise power has changed over the course of time. After the land gets Christian kings, they regulate their own people's trade with Sámi persons by law, and they begin to tax the Sámi revenues. At a later period, boundaries begin to be set for the presence of Sámi and their use of natural areas. Three historical trajectories are especially important:

- a) The construction of the *nation* that begins with the consolidation of Norway as one country in the ninth century. This later takes the form of the takeover of land and the development of mining in central Scandinavia and northern Sweden.

- b) The development of *national borders* from the sixteenth century onwards. The Swedish crown had ambitions in the northern regions. War was fought between Denmark-Norway, Sweden-Finland, and Russia to get hold of the resources in the northern regions. The Peace of Calmar led to the establishing of the border between Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland in 1751. At the same time, reindeer husbandry was forbidden south of Femundsmarka. In 1905, Norway was liberated from Sweden and the national border between Norway and Sweden was closed to Swedish Sámi engaged in reindeer husbandry, although the national border of 1751 was defined in such a way that it permitted free passage for the Sámi across the border.
- c) The development of *ideas and concepts* in this period that had their origin in European colonial politics and ideology (Axel Oxenstierna called the areas of Sámi dwellers in the north the “India” of contemporary Sweden), and in the Christian mission. Colonial and missionary activities produced ethnographic accounts of the Sámi people and their life. These accounts are descriptive, evaluative, and controlling. The Sámi are made into something exotic, while at the same time Sámi life and economic activity are marginalized both socially and geographically. This has consequences for public discourse.<sup>7</sup>

(5)

In Norway and Sweden, it was taken for granted that pre-Christian Norse tradition did not cease to exist on the day that a Christian king came to power. Snorre Sturlason’s saga about Hákon the Good is perhaps the best known account of this. When the Christian king Hákon comes to Lade, north-east of today’s Trondheim, he is invited to take part in the sacrifice. He takes part symbolically in order to show respect, but he is criticized for lacking respect when he does not take part fully. The established tradition continues after the arrival of the new religion. One must assume that this also applies to Sámi contexts.

An important question here is: When did the Sámi people make their acquaintance with Christian tradition? The mediaeval researcher Else Mundal claims that the Sámi people were Christianized in three phases. The first Christianization occurred at the same period as the encounter with Christianity and the Christianization of other peoples in Scandinavia, when the Christian missionaries came from the Continent, Catholics from the south and Orthodox from the east. The second Christianization was carried out by Norwegian and Swedish

kings in the period before the Reformation. The third Christianization was Protestant, and it is at this period that the principal literary material about pre-Christian Sámi tradition was written down. The best known scholars include the Swedish-Finnish missionary and pastor Pehr Högström in the seventeenth century and the zealous von Westen, who initiated and carried out the Danish-Norwegian mission in the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

Von Westen seems harsher than earlier missionaries. The new element is that it no longer suffices to observe ecclesiastical rituals and behave correctly in order to be regarded as a Christian: one must also believe aright and think aright. Pure doctrinal orthodoxy becomes the key to the kingdom of heaven and a requirement for participation in the Protestant lands. We find this idea later on in various renewal movements. This understanding of Christianity was combined with particular notions of people and culture.

Other currents in the history of ideas in the eighteenth century include the idea of *Völkgeist* (H. G. Herder), the “soul of a people”, and theories that languages are members of linguistic families, which in turn represent cultural families. The Sámi people have a language from a different linguistic family than other peoples in Scandinavia; but it was unthinkable that one nation could consist of several peoples with different languages and cultures.

One can perhaps say that the ambition of the Protestant mission with regard to orthodoxy, together with contemporary ideas about people and nation, have prevented us from seeing the older shared Scandinavian history during the middle ages and the Viking period.

(6)

It is universally known today that in Christian regions in Asia, Africa, and South America, there are local religious traditions that are maintained alongside Christian traditions. This situation, where different traditions are combined, is found more or less universally, wherever missionary traditions (of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism) have spread. It is the rule, rather than the exception, that local traditions and elements survive alongside the missionary tradition. The various missionary traditions have however taken different views of local traditions, and the level of conflict between the existing and the new traditions has varied. In its doctrine, Islam has operated with the concept of “the people of the book”, where certain traditions are recognized. Buddhist tradition has incorporated local gods as protectors of Buddhism. The Christian tradition has had both strict and punitive sets of attitudes and more liberal and inclusive sets of attitudes.

In Norway and Sweden, traditions that deviate from the official church are called popular religiosity. This includes traditions that can be traced back to the earlier Catholic period and traditions that are linked to health, to places, and to local economic activities – for example, accounts and strategies for action in relation to ghosts (unbaptized children, murdered persons, those who have committed grave wrongs) and to various kinds of beings, such as subterranean beings.<sup>9</sup>

The missionary traditions are super-contextual. They are doctrines that claim to formulate universal truths, and they are not dependent for their implementation on the time and space in which they are elaborated. Since these religions are super-contextual, they cannot give explanations and directives for the life, the economic activities, and the geography to which they come – this is done by the tradition or traditions that already exist in that place. In the course of time, when a missionary tradition becomes established, it will function as a basis for new narratives and practices in the great and small events of everyday life. The missionary tradition will in its own way be localized and linked to time and space. In the course of time, there will also be a variety of practices with regard to the relationship between the old and the new. Some places, some groups, and some families will see particular elements as central; others will define the center differently. And the claim of the missionary traditions to general validity and universality will entail that there will also be a place for “the pure doctrine and praxis” (orthodoxy).

It is not particularly difficult to explain either the conflicts or the continuing use of existing traditions. The challenge lies in remembering how natural such a coexistence and overlapping are, so that one can develop a critical eye for the way in which scholarly research and historiography have taken their starting point in an idea of a “people” and in official doctrines and officially accepted praxis.

If one takes seriously the fact that the Sámi people were in contact with Christian tradition at an early date, it is unreasonable to see the process of Christianization as entailing a change of religion. And it is natural to suppose that the Sámi people, like other peoples, integrated elements, narratives, a set of personages, and concepts that the Christian tradition brought with it.

In this perspective, the Sámi woman who strove in the fourteenth century to get Queen Margaret, the queen of the Scandinavian union, to take an interest in bringing Christianity to the Sámi, is interesting. It is also interesting to note that the Catholic Mary-monogram is also a traditional Sámi silver ornament, and that

the Persons of the Trinity (one God in three Persons) are central in formulae for staunching blood.

The eighteenth century was the great missionary century in Christian history. In northern Europe, the mission was Protestant, unlike the earlier Christian mission in this region. It no longer suffices to be baptized and to observe the Christian rituals. Now, one must also believe, think, and feel in the correct manner. It is against this background that von Westen can behave as if the Sámi people had not been Christianized, at the same time as the bishop in Trondheim held that the Sámi people were Christian. Von Westen had to go to Copenhagen to get backing for his missionary project.

#### (7)

If the Sámi people encountered Christian tradition at the same time as other peoples in Scandinavia, we must assume that Christian elements have their place in the history of Sámi religion, just as old and new elements are combined and form new dynamic universes in other places and periods.

The Christian missionary tradition makes claims that are universal and generally valid. We must assume variation in the way in which older and new traditions are combined, and that the universal and generally valid claims entail tensions and conflict. The desire to distill out a pure Christian tradition in Scandinavia or a pure pre-Christian Sámi tradition will not be particularly fruitful, if one is interested in living religion rather than in abstract doctrines and principles. The idea of the “pure tradition” excludes continuity and imposes fetters on Sámi religious history (as it does on other religious histories too). The idea of the “pure religion” eliminates the breadth and depth in the many different contexts, human experiences, encounters, and challenges of which the Sámi people are bearers and administrators.

Instead of searching for a pure tradition, we ought to investigate the processes that lead to the continuation, renewal and change. Some old and new elements are adopted, while others are rejected; others again are integrated afresh, or combined in new ways. A good example of this is the Læstadian revival in the nineteenth century. Læstadianism does not cover all the Sámi regions, and where it becomes strong in an area, there are variations from one place and family group to another. And when shamanistic practices become more of an individual encounter, practiced by the noaidi in solitude, this indicates change, not that it has disappeared. The idea that being Sámi amounts to not integrating Christian narratives, or that one ceases to be a bearer of Sámi

religious history if one belongs to the state church or to the Læstadian revival movement, if one tends more towards alternative religiosity, or is linked to neo-shamanistic traditions, indicates that a scholar is operating with obsolete categories from the phenomenology of religion. It also indicates an unwillingness to investigate the Sámi people in the same way as one investigates other peoples.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Endnotes

- 1 See for example Mebius 2003; Steinsland 1998; Näsström 2001; Hultkrantz 1978; Hultkrantz 2000; Eliade 1964.
- 2 See for example Aadnanes 1986; Nergård 2006; Kristiansen 2005.
- 3 See, for example Bertell 2003; Rydving 1993; Rydving 2000; Holmberg 1996; Kildal 1945; Hallencreutz 1990.
- 4 See for example Bertell 2003; Sundqvist 2000; DuBois 1999.
- 5 See for example Ojala 2009; Bergstøl 2008; Svonni 2010; Kusmenko 2004; Mundal 1996; Mundal 2004; Mundal 2006; Berthell 2003; DuBois 1999; Zachrisson (ed.) 1997; Hætta 2002; Kvenangen 1996; Fjellheim 1995; Ruong 1969; Hødnebo & Magerøy (ed.) 1979.
- 6 See for example Pentikäinen 2002; Fur 1992; Hallencreutz 1990; Lundmark 1979; Järventaus 1980; Norlander 1938.
- 7 See for example Pye & Svalastog 2007; Svalastog 2006; Ehrensverd 2006.
- 8 See Mundal 1996; Mundal 2004; Mundal 2006; Hallencreutz 1990; Kildal 1945.
- 9 See for example Eriksen 1986; Alver & Selberg 1992; Bø 1972; Solheim 1952.