Delat land: en historisk-arkeologisk studie av samisk medeltid och tidigmodern tid i Central- och Mellansverige

Jonas Monié Nordin

In the early 900s King Harald Hårfager of Norway married the maiden Snöfrid. She is one of many Sámi agents in the Norse sagas representing the lively contacts between the different cultural spheres of early medieval Scandinavia (cf. Aalto 2010; Steinsland 2012). In other Norse sagas (e.g. King Sverre’s saga), the Sámi of medieval central Sweden are addressed. What these sagas indicate, is the possibly large and influential Sámi community of central Scandinavia during the early middle ages (cf. Zachrisson 1997): An indication that is underlined by the findings of Sámi objects in early medieval towns, legislative records, and linguistic evidence.

The list of traces of Sámi agency from the Medieval period can be made long. Yet, these traces are seldom acknowledged in scholarly discussions of the Middle Ages, and they are rarely analysed with scientific methods and in academic contexts. Although exceptions exist (Steinsland 2012), the Sámi past has not been of general interest in medieval studies. Moreover, the situation during the high and late Medieval period is specifically unchartered, and academic studies are wanting.

In addition to this want, a vast majority of archaeological and historical studies concern what is perceived as the majority society of the past (and present), i.e. Germanic, Nordic or Norse societies. Seen from this perspective, traces of other traditions and identities are seldom recognized as part of, or relating to majority groups, instead they are viewed as separated “containers” and antagonistic entities (Giddens 1990; Hansen & Olsen 2014). Thus, historically the land may have been shared by various groups, but in the writings of history become separated. Consequently, the Sámi past has seldom been studied as part of a greater national or regional history and are recurrently perceived as peoples without history (cf. Wolf 1982; Olsen 1986; Nordin & Ojala 2017a). In particular, the history of the Sámi in southern Scandinavia and intersections with national history – from the Medieval period and onwards – is an understudied and separated field of investigation (cf. however Zachrisson 1997).

Still, in all parts of what now is contemporary Sweden and in wider Scandinavia, a manifold of archaeological, historical, and linguistic evidence, suggests a long history of close relations, interactions, collaborations and co-habitations between Sámi and Norse communities from the late Iron Age until the Early Modern period. Literally as it was suggested in the Sagas. This history and these interactions are however not continuous and linear, nor are they accessible through traditional historical studies. Sources are often ephemeral in character, and oftentimes only accessible through archaeological perspectives. Therefore, in order to obtain a deeper understanding of Sámi Middle Ages south of present-day Sápmi, we need to use a broad set of methodologies and perspectives and expand our datasets.
Drawing on a combine of archaeological and historical methods, this project suggests analysing the Sámi population in Central and Middle Sweden during the Medieval and early Modern Periods, in relation to the majority society of that time.

**Purpose and aims**

From a multitude of evidence, we know about lively contacts between the Nordic societies and the Sámi during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages (Zachrisson 1984, 1997). There is also a body of literature concerning Sámi populations from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that has provided with an understanding of the role and position of the Sámi people in Central and Middle Sweden as more or less marginalized and proletarized (Svanberg 1999; Westerdahl 2008; Larsson 2018; Nordin 2018). What the situation for the Sámi in southern Scandinavia during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period was like is nevertheless, surrounded by silence and lack of research. In particular, the interlacing and interactions of Sámi, Norse, Finnish (in Sweden and in Finland), and other traditions, as suggested by the Sagas, have not yet been acknowledged at length. Sámi habitation south and east of the mountain regions, has generally been considered anomalies (cf. discussion in Zachrisson 1997).

Yet, the finding of for instance a Sámi anthropomorphic idol in Falun dated to the turn of the century 1500, Sámi settlements from the middle ages, and the written record mentioning Sámi farm owners, together with Sámi offering sites, place-names, and loose finds, dated to the Middle Ages, the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, rather suggest Sámi presence. Thus, data so far identified does not support absence, nor disappearance of the Sámi in the Middle Ages as has been suggested in older research (see discussion Zachrisson 1997:9–20). As more in-depth scholarly analyses of the empirical evidence do not exist, the material begs the question of what the Medieval and Early Modern period was like for the Sámi in Central Middle Sweden?

The aim of the project is to address the Sámi medieval history and further an understanding of Sámi communities in Central and Middle Sweden, in relation to the Christian, Swedish-speaking majority society of that time. The period of study is the aftermath of Christianisation and state formation, but before the ethnic separation known from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Svanberg 1999; Nordin 2017, 2018). The project is guided by three research questions:

1. What material and immaterial traces can be associated with Sámi settlements in Middle and Central Sweden from the Medieval to the Early Modern periods and how are these traces related to those of the majority society of the time?
2. What position did traditional Sámi religion hold in the region? From the Norse Kings’ sagas, and Snorri’s *Heimsksringla*, we know of the Sámi ritual specialists; can they be linked to the finding of ritual depositions from the high and late Medieval period related to Sámi religion and cultural praxis in Central and Middle Sweden?
3. What form of continuity, if any, can be seen between the Medieval and the Early Modern situation, where the latter is, signified by an ethnically defined indenture-system (the so called sockenlappssystemet)?
References
Aalto, S. 2010, Categorizing Otherness in the Kings’ Sagas. University of Jouensuu
Montelius 1875–7, Sveriges hednatid samt medeltid. Sveriges historia från äldsta tid till våra dagar, 1, Stockholm.


