

Solveig Marie Wang

**Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia**

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

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Edited by  
Jonathan Adams  
Cordelia Heß  
Christhard Hoffmann

## **Volume 5**

Solveig Marie Wang

# **Decolonising Medieval Fennoscandia**

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An Interdisciplinary Study of Norse-Saami Relations  
in the Medieval Period

**DE GRUYTER**

We acknowledge support for the open access publication from the University of Greifswald.

ISBN 978-3-11-078416-9

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-078430-5

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-078435-0

ISSN 2627-440X

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110784305>



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**Library of Congress Control Number: 2022950628**

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2023 with the author(s), published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston.

This book is published with open access at [www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com).

Cover image: © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway: C26831 Runebommehammer av horn, Photo: Johnsen, Erik Irgens. Creative Commons License CC BY-SA 4.0.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

## Preface

This book investigates the relationship between Norse and Saami peoples in the medieval period and focuses on the multifaceted portrayal of Saami peoples in medieval texts. It is a result of my three years of research on Norse-Saami relations at the brilliant Centre for Scandinavian Studies at the University of Aberdeen, from 2018 to 2021. Through a systematic analysis of the source material, influenced by postcolonial methodologies rooted in interpretations of archaeological material, it demonstrates the many possibilities for reading and including Saami peoples in our narration of medieval Fennoscandian history. I first became interested in the representation of Saami history during my undergraduate studies, when I conducted an analysis of the film *Sameblod* (2016) by Amanda Kernell. While writing my undergraduate thesis on the role of women in the feud narratives of medieval Norse texts, I came across the abundant source material describing Saami characters or culture(s) and was confronted with what I felt was a misrepresentation, or lack of representation altogether, of this material. This confrontation of the material in turn led to bigger confrontations, both personally and professionally, of representation, historiography, identity, and presence.

The book consists of seven chapters, all related to the themes above. Presenting the historiographic and political background of research into Norse-Saami relations in the medieval period, chapter 1 emphasises the need for employing postcolonial methodologies in such research and its current significance. Chapter 2 considers the various sources referring to the Saami from the classical period to the late fifteenth century and provides an overview of the development of the textual motifs associated with the Saami in this textual tradition. In chapter 3, I undertake a structural analysis of how these motifs specifically allude, directly or indirectly, to the Saami. Here, I also problematise the scholarly assumptions often inherent in the discussion of these particular motifs. Chapter 4 discusses spatial relations and geopolitics, primarily focusing on northern Fennoscandia and the portrayal of different northeastern groups. In chapter 5, I cover Norse-Saami trading affairs and employ decolonising tools to provide alternative readings of the source material and again emphasise the many possibilities for interpreting this material. The opportunities for reading Saami characters are further elaborated in chapter 6, which explores personal relationships between Norse and Saami peoples as expressed in the source material. Chapter 7 combines the decolonising tools employed throughout and here I challenge the often-assumed exclusive connection between the Saami and the far north by analysing the multitude of sources pointing to medieval Saami presence in the south.

Primarily, the study demonstrates the normalised, longstanding, spatially wide-ranging, varied, and significant presence of Saami people in medieval Fennoscandia. Overall, the book is both a personal and professional confrontation of the misrepresentation of Saami history in majority history writing and the historiography of the nation state. By writing the thesis and publishing this book, I hope to be able to contribute to a growing field of scholars who are readjusting the colonial episteme and reasserting Indigenous narratives in historiography.

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# List of Abbreviations

Ágr	<p><i>Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum</i></p> <p>Edition: Matthew James Driscoll, ed. and trans., <i>Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum</i> (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2008)</p>
Án	<p><i>Áns saga bogsveigis</i></p> <p>Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. <i>Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum</i>, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1829)</p>
Bárð	<p><i>Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss</i></p> <p>Edition: Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmursson, eds., <i>Harðar saga</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1991)</p>
DN	<i>Diplomatarium Norvegicum</i>
Eb	<p><i>Eyrbyggja saga</i></p> <p>Edition: Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthías Þorðarson, and Ólafur Halldórsson, eds., <i>Eyrbyggja saga</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985)</p>
Eddukvæði	<p><i>Eddukvæði 1</i></p> <p>Edition: Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds., <i>Eddukvæði 1</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 36 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014)</p>
Eg	<p><i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i></p> <p>Edition: Sigurður Nordal, ed. <i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933)</p>
Finnb	<p><i>Finnboga saga ramma</i></p> <p>Edition: Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed. <i>Kjalnesinga saga</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1959)</p>
Fsk	<p><i>Fagrskinna</i></p> <p>Edition: Bjarni Einarsson, ed. <i>Fagrskinna</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985)</p>
Fær	<p><i>Færeyinga saga</i></p> <p>Edition: Ólafur Halldórsson, ed. <i>Færeyinga saga – Óláfs saga Odds</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 25 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2006)</p>
Gautr	<p><i>Gautreks saga</i></p> <p>Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. <i>Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum</i>, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1830)</p>
GHR	<p><i>Göngu-Hrólfs saga</i></p> <p>Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. <i>Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum</i>, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1830)</p>
Gr	<p><i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i></p> <p>Edition: Guðni Jónsson, ed. <i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>, Íslenzk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936)</p>
GrL	<p><i>Gríms saga loðinkinna</i></p> <p>Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. <i>Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum</i>, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1829)</p>
HálfðEyst	<p><i>Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar</i></p> <p>Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. <i>Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum</i>, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1830)</p>

- HálfdSv* *Hálfdanar þáttur svarta*  
Edition: Peter Andreas Munch, ed. *Fornmannasögur eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 10 (Copenhagen: Kongelige Nordiske oldskriftselskab, 1835)
- Hamburg-Bremen* *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*  
Edition: Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans., Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) [English translation]
- Hammaburgensis* *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*  
Edition: Adam Bremensis, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. Martin Lappenbergh (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1876)
- Hkr 1–3* *Heimskringla*  
Edition: Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla 1–3*, Íslensk fornrit 26–28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941–50)
- Helgisaga* *Helgisaga Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar*  
Edition: Rudolf Keyser and Carl Richard Unger, eds., *Olafs saga hins helga: En kort saga om Kong Olav den Hellige fra anden halvdeel af det tolfte aarhundrede* (Christiania: Feilberg and Landmarks Forlag, 1849)
- HHábr* *Hauks þáttur hábrókar*  
Edition: Peter Andreas Munch, ed. *Fornmannasögur eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 10 (Copenhagen: Kongelige Nordiske oldskriftselskab, 1835)
- HN* *Historia Norwegie*  
Edition: Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds., Peter Fisher, trans., *Historia Norwegie* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006)
- Hrólfr* *Hrólfs saga kraka*  
Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1829)
- Hák 1–2* *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*  
Edition: Þorleifur Hauksson, ed. *Hákonar saga 1–2*, Íslensk fornrit 31–32 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2013)
- IA* *Íslandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Icelandic Annals)  
Edition: Gustav Storm, ed. *Íslandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Kristiania: Grøndahl & Søn Bogtrykkeri, 1888)
- IllGr* *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*  
Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1830)
- Ket* *Ketils saga hængs*  
Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1829)
- Kjaln* *Kjalnesinga saga*  
Edition: Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed. *Kjalnesinga saga*, Íslensk fornrit 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1959)
- Landnáma* *The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók* (English translation)  
Edition: Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, eds., *The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók* (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2006)
- Ldn* *Landnámabók* (Old Norse version)  
Edition: Jakob Benediktsson, ed. *Íslendingabók – Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1968)

- Ljós* *Ljósvetninga saga*  
Edition: Björn Sigfússon, ed. *Ljósvetninga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 10 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1940)
- Mesta 1–2* *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*  
Edition: Peter Andreas Munch, ed. *Fornmannasögur eptir gömlum handritum*, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Kongelige Nordiske oldskriftselskab, 1825–26)
- Mork 1–2* *Morkinskinna*  
Edition: Þorður Ingi Guðjónsson, ed. *Morkinskinna 1–2*, Íslenzk fornrit 23–24 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2011)
- NGL 1–3* *Norges Gamle Love*  
Edition: Rudolf Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch, eds., *Norges Gamle Love*, 3 vols (Christiania: Chr. Grøndahl, 1836–49)
- Odds* *Óláfs saga Odds*  
Edition: Ólafur Halldórsson, ed. *Færeyinga saga – Óláfs saga Odds*, Íslenzk fornrit 25 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2006)
- OEH* *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius* (Ohtthere)  
Edition: Malcolm R. Godden, ed. *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 44 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2016)
- Orkn* *Orkneyinga saga*  
Edition: Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, eds., *Orkneyinga saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney* (London: Penguin Classics, 1981)
- Qrv* *Qrvar-Odds saga*  
Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1829)
- Passio* *A History of Norway & The Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr (Passio et miracula beati Olavi)*  
Edition: Carl Phepstead, ed. and Devra Kunin, trans., *A History of Norway & The Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001)
- Reyk* *Reykdaela saga ok Víga-Skútu*  
Edition: Björn Sigfússon, ed. *Ljósvetninga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 10 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1940)
- RN* *Regesta Norvegica*
- Saxo* *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes* (Saxo Grammaticus)  
Edition: Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans., Peter Fisher, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Skáldskaparmál* *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*  
Edition: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, vol. 1. London (Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998)
- Sv* *Sverris saga*  
Edition: Þorleifur Hauksson, ed. *Sverris saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 30 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2007)
- StSt* *Sturlaugs saga Starfsama*  
Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1830)

- SprlaSt* *Sprla saga Sterka*  
Edition: Carl Christian Rafn, ed. *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1830)
- Vatn* *Vatnsdæla saga*  
Edition: Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed. *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939)



# Acknowledgements

I wrote this thesis during the final years of my PhD program at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies at the University of Aberdeen and submitted and defended it in the summer of 2021. The years at the Centre were an absolute privilege and I am forever grateful. First and foremost, I extend my gratitude towards my two wonderful supervisors. I am beyond grateful for your valuable feedback and support. Hannah, thank you for supporting me from the very start (struggling with Old Norse cases and whatnot...) and for encouraging me to do the jump from being an undergraduate to a PhD candidate. Your patience, enthusiasm, expertise, and advice have been priceless, and I am incredibly thankful (hand heart!). Charlotta, thank you for the incredibly useful archaeological and postcolonial resources you have introduced me to along the way. A big thank you for all the pep talks and encouragement, and of course, the countless Kilau coffees. Tack så mycket! I truly appreciate all the effort you have both put into my project and all the kindness you have shown me, and I look forward to the next time we get to catch up. I also extend my sincere thanks to my viva examiners, Prof. Ralph O'Connor and Dr Carl-Gösta Ojala, whose input and insightful discussion during and after the viva has been incredibly valuable for the thesis itself and for myself as a researcher.

The research trips I have undertaken during my thesis would not have been possible without financial support. I extend my thanks towards the University of Aberdeen Development Trust, DHP postgraduate funding and the Centre for Scandinavian Studies. Additional thanks go to the Creating the New North research group at the University of Tromsø, who not only hosted me twice but also contributed with very productive feedback and vital input during our many discussions. I am grateful to Svenska Institutet for financing my planned research stay in Sweden, which was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19. To CG, thank you for offering to supervise my research in Uppsala and the enthusiasm you showed (and continue to show) for my project and research.

Furthermore, I am incredibly grateful to the Open Access pilot program for monographs at the University of Greifswald (where I find myself incredibly grateful to be employed) for receiving funding for this publication. I extend my gratitude towards my department, the Chair of Nordic History, from which parts of the funding for this publication comes from. I am very thankful, especially for all the encouragement from good colleagues. A major thanks go out to Prof. Dr Cordelia Heß for all her help with getting this process of publication going and for always encouraging me in my research (and for teaching me about feierabend and likewise, for joining in on the utepils). And cheers to my office mates! I also extend

my gratitude to Henriette Hellinger, the brilliant student assistant at the Chair, who has helped out with several versions of this manuscript.

A very humble thank you goes out to the editorial team at De Gruyter, particularly Robert Forke and Dominika Herbst. I greatly appreciate your time and patience (!) and I am very much looking forward to being able to thank you in person. It has been a real pleasure working with you! Likewise, I am thankful to the editors of the series. It is a great privilege and incredibly humbling to have my work published among such wonderful company.

I extend my sincerest thanks to my supportive family, friends, and co-workers around the world, without whom this journey would have been so much harder (not to mention uneventful!). To my friends and co-workers, past and present, at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies: thank you for your academic support, but even more so, for the pints, potlucks, and the pandemic calls. To my close and wonderfully brilliant and absolutely outrageous friends Heidi, Ingrid, and Jennifer; thank you for being there for me, for everything (literally!), throughout. Y'all run the world! A special thank you goes out to my extended family up north, who very kindly accommodated “søringen” during my research trips to Troms, and to my uncle for his genuine interest in my project. To my family in Oslo: you rock (*kgid!*). Lastly, I am beyond grateful for my amazing mum (*the Marianne*). For supporting me in everything, for being a voice of reason, for always being there, and for, quite frankly, being my person. Being compared to you is the best compliment.

You all deserve a big drink, and so do I. Skål!

## Conventions

This thesis does not anglicise Old Norse names, places, beings, or concepts, unless quoting from scholarly translations that employ other conventions. On first occurrence, individual Old Norse words are marked by double quotation marks, followed by an English translation in square brackets: “*ǫndurdís*” [skiing (female) deity]. Following its first instance, the word will be italicised and not translated (*ǫndurdís*). Placenames from the source material are maintained in their original form when specific texts or past landscape concepts are referred to (Bróndalǫg), but when referring to more general landscapes or contemporary places and regions, the modernised and most contemporary placename is listed (Trøndelag).

The English translations employed in the study correspond to standard scholarly editions. When no edition is referred to, translations are my own. In some modern translations of the source material, the translators have employed the term “Lapp” when translating medieval terms describing Saami peoples. As the term is considered derogatory to Saami peoples today, I have actively avoided using the term myself and the translations have therefore been altered like so: “[Saami].” The term has also been altered in direct quotations, and I have to the best of my ability employed the term “Saami” for Saami peoples throughout (see footnote 1, section 1.1). The term “Finnar” (or similar) has been altered to [Saami] in translations and when employed in direct quotations, the term appears in its first instance but is followed by [Saami]. This is partly because employing the self-designating term Saami is more in line with the suggested episteme, but also because “Finn” is used as a deliberately pejorative term for Saami peoples today. When this change from “*Finnar*” to [Saami] in direct quotations of secondary sources is made, the scholars cited have unquestionably referred to the Saami in their original quotation. The medieval term “Finnar” is not uncomplicated and may sometimes refer to other Fennoscandian groups than the Saami, such as Finnish people (see section 4.3.2), potentially also the Kvenir (see section 4.3.1) and possibly other groups, as I discuss in more detail in sections 1.1.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 4.3.2. In this thesis, as I detail further in the aforementioned sections, the term “Finnar” is primarily treated as denoting Saami peoples (with some exceptions; see section 4.3.2).

In order to avoid confusion, the present study has not adopted the new division of Norwegian counties (11 counties from 1 January 2020), and instead refers to the previous division (consisting of 19 counties). However, Trøndelag is here treated as one region for ease, rather than locating instances into the previous two counties of Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag. When I use the term “Finnmark” in this thesis, I refer to the Norwegian county (pre-2020), and not the medieval landscape which is referred to as Finnmark, finmarkr or Finnmarkar. Some

translations, however, translate Finnmark or similar to “Finnmark,” and these translations have not been amended.

The thesis that this book is based on was presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Aberdeen, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy in June 2021, and successfully defended in August 2021.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 An Introduction to Saami-Norse Relations in the Medieval Period

Saami<sup>1</sup> people and groups were significant social and political players in medieval Fennoscandian societies.<sup>2</sup> Written sources from as early as the classical period and throughout the medieval period describe the Saami as expert hunters, skilled skiers, and able fishermen, distinct from, but nevertheless part of, Norse society. Sources like *Ágrip af Noregs konungasögum* refer to Saami settlements in the medieval period reaching far south into Norway, even incorporating Hadeland and the adjacent Swedish areas.<sup>3</sup> Saami presence in Iceland and in England is alluded to in a handful of sources, which alongside the Saami fur trade monopoly in eastern trading networks demonstrates the far-reaching influence of Saami societies in the medieval period. Archaeological material also supports a wide-spanning Saami settlement area,<sup>4</sup> beyond the current cultural and political borders of Sápmi (see section 1.1.2). Close contact between Saami and Norse groups is therefore not surprising, and trade, personal relationships like marriage and childrearing, alliances, shared ritual performance, and magic, are common themes connected to the Saami across medieval texts, particularly in the Norse sagas. Recent archaeological research focusing on liminal identities and cultural fluidity as significant factors in Norse-Saami interactions has contributed to an understanding of medieval Fennoscandia as less monocultural than previously assumed.<sup>5</sup> While scholarship is gradually moving away from colonial strategies treating Indigenous people as irrelevant to the study of medieval Fennoscandia in general, the rise of Far Right views and ethnocentrism has contributed to the re-emergence of formerly debunked myths like racial superiority, and strengthened monocultural inter-

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1 For the usage of *Saami* in English, rather than the more commonly used *Sámi*, see Marte Spangen et al., eds., *Currents of Saami Pasts: Recent Advances in Saami Archaeology*, Monographs of the Archaeological Society of Finland 9 (Helsinki: Archaeological Society of Finland, 2020), 3.

2 Fennoscandia refers to the Scandinavian and Kola Peninsulas, mainland Finland, and Karelia.

3 *Ágr*; 4–6.

4 Jostein Bergstøl and Gaute Reitan, “Samer på Dovrefjell i vikingtiden: et bidrag til debatten omkring samenes sørgrense i forhistorisk tid,” *Historisk tidsskrift* 87 (2008): 9–27.

5 Marte Spangen, “Silver Hoards in Sámi Areas,” in *Recent Perspectives on Sámi Archaeology in Fennoscandia and North-West Russia*, ed. Petri Halinen et al. (Helsinki: Finnish Antiquarian Society, 2009), 94–106 (103).

pretations of past societies.<sup>6</sup> The return of these harmful concepts represents alarming developments, and is crucial to the motivations behind this thesis. Focusing on an interdisciplinary approach through the comparative analysis of Norse texts, and relevant archaeological material from the medieval period, I demonstrate the multifaceted and cross-cultural reality of medieval Fennoscandia, and highlight the momentous role that Saami people played within this reality. By employing an archaeological framework based on postcolonial methodologies in my analysis of the textual presence and appearance of Saami characters across medieval texts, I emphasise concepts like cultural fluidity and liminality to challenge lingering colonial structures or assumptions about the role of the Saami within Norse society. In emphasising the portrayal of what can be read as Saami people, or people with Saami ties, in the source material, I explore cross-cultural relations, power relations, sociocultural and geopolitical developments, regional variation, borderlands, diversity and less defined cultural identities.

### 1.1.1 Terminology and Chronology

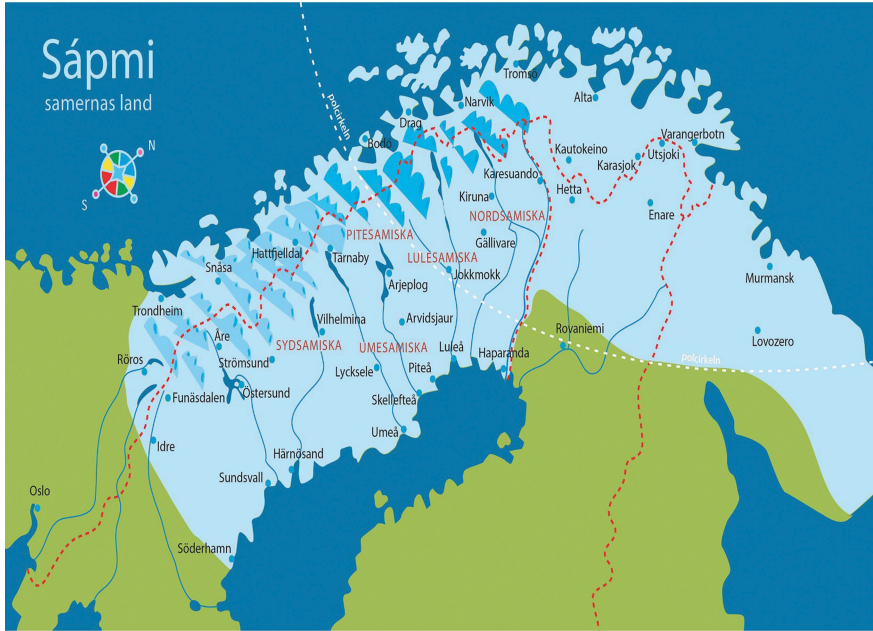
Throughout this thesis I refer to several contested terms. Ethnicity, for example, is a controversial concept and a notoriously difficult term to define.<sup>7</sup> I have approached ethnic identity with Siân Jones's definition in mind: "that aspect of a person's self-conceptualisation which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent."<sup>8</sup> Several different people inhabited Fennoscandia in the medieval period, including the Saami and the Norse. The Saami and the Norse are described in different terms, have distinctive languages and different cultural expressions, and can therefore be defined as two different ethnicities. Cultural fluidity is nevertheless apparent in several sources, and at times, defining a character or assigning archaeological material using either Norse or Saami ethnicity proves unhelpful. I have actively employed the term "cultural affiliation" rather than ethnicity in my analysis to emphasise this fluidity. By cultural affiliation, I mean the extent to which a character, or the archaeological material, is described with or

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6 Christoffer Kølvrå, "Embodying 'the Nordic Race': Imaginaries of Viking Heritage in the Online Communications of the Nordic Resistance Movement," *Patterns of Prejudice* 53, no. 3 (2019): 270–84.

7 Carl-Gösta Ojala, *Sámi Prehistories: The Politics of Archaeology and Identity in Northernmost Europe*, Occasional Papers in Archaeology 47 (Västerås: Edita Västra Aros, 2009), 25.

8 Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), xiii.



**Figure 1:** Sápmi today, by Anders Suneson, “Sápmi,” Samiskt Informationscentrum, <http://www.samer.se/1002>.

assigned cultural markers associated with one or both groups. For the purposes of the thesis, cultural affiliation is therefore to be understood as comparable to the concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity, but without the polarising connotations associated with ethnicity (see section 6.3). Indeed, employing the term cultural affiliation reinforces the idea that commonality is often more apparent than contrasts in the source material, perhaps demonstrating why strictly talking about ethnicity as one or the other, in certain cases, can be unproductive. It should be noted that ethnic identity does play a significant role in both past and present lives, and will have been a crucial factor also in Norse-Saami relations.<sup>9</sup> It does not, however, always have to have been the defining factor for these relations and this fluidity is what I aim to highlight when using the term cultural affiliation. Significantly, it should be emphasised that neither of these concepts should be understood as static, and that these concepts were and are dynamic.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Cole, “Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature,” *Saga-Book* 39 (2015): 21–40 (38). See also Basil Arnould Price, “Búi and the *blámaðr*: Comprehending Racial Others in *Kjalnesinga saga*,” *Víator* 11, no. 4 (2020): 442–50.

In this thesis I employ postcolonial concepts like “liminality,” “fluidity,” and “decolonisation.” Liminality indicates so-called “in-between” spaces and refers to a kind of intermediate space or transition.<sup>10</sup> When it is employed here, it is used with the meaning of identity formation in the intermediary stages between Norse and Saami cultures. Through the portrayal of characters with both Saami and Norse descent that are not assigned any specific ethnic or cultural affiliation in the texts, liminal identities appear as a kind of in-between space between Norse and Saami identities and cultures. Fluidity is a concept I have employed to contextualise the societies and identities forming as a consequence of Norse-Saami meetings, through the “mixing” of Saami and Norse cultural features and traditions, and creating a new “third room.” Hybridity and creolisation are commonly used postcolonial terms referring to similar processes of ethnic or cultural “mixing.” Both terms have been debated previously due to their problematic connotations with race and notions of “cross-breeding” (hybridity is originally a botanical term).<sup>11</sup> Generally, the terms refer to the coming together of two distinct entities and the subsequent creation of a third, distinct entity through the mixing of both. By employing the term fluidity, I refer to similar concepts, but avoid problematic connotations with race. The concept of decolonisation is further explained in section 1.3, but in short, it indicates acknowledging a majority culture’s presentation of history and actively employing tools to deconstruct colonial notions embedded in this presentation of history.<sup>12</sup> As such, decolonising methodologies acknowledge that “research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions.”<sup>13</sup> The background of these conditions regarding research on Saami history is discussed in detail in section 1.1.2, but it should be emphasised here that decolonisation is an ongoing process and that the current research contributes to this ongoing process.

When employed here, the term “Indigenous” should be understood in a political context as defined in UN’s ILO Convention 169 (ILO 169):

peoples in independent countries who are regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present

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<sup>10</sup> Pramod K. Nayar, *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 98–99.

<sup>11</sup> Nayar, *Postcolonial Studies*, 91, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edition (London: Zed Books, 2012), 8.



state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, cultural and political institutions.<sup>14</sup>

One misunderstanding occasionally arriving in the debate about Indigeneity concerns the commonly accepted view that by being defined as “Indigenous” implies that the group in question must have been the first inhabitants of a given area. This view is incorrect, and in accordance with ILO 169, Indigeneity is not determined by being the first inhabitants of an area, but specifically the affiliation and belonging to a place at the time when present state boundaries were established by others than themselves (i. e., the “coloniser”), and that have retained some or all of their own sociocultural and political institutions. Therefore, the terms native and Indigenous are not synonymous in this thesis, as both Saami and Norwegian people, for example, are native to Norway, but only Saami people are defined as Indigenous according to ILO 169. Nevertheless, these matters are far from simple, and the connections between historical belonging or even “authenticity” prior to the “establishment of present state boundaries” and legal rights are further discussed in sections 1.3. and 7.2. These terms are not uncomplicated, and it should be mentioned that, with the above example in mind, Saami people can identify as Norwegian and Saami, and vice versa. Furthermore, it should also be noted that Indigeneity is difficult to define, and that the above definition is not meant to exclude those Indigenous groups or individuals that do not define themselves according to ILO 169.

Throughout this thesis I refer to what I call the Saami Motif-Cluster. I contextualise the term fully in chapter 3, but it should be defined in brief here. Throughout the textual tradition, Saami characters are portrayed in patterns associated with Othering,<sup>15</sup> primarily connotations with magic and supernatural beings,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> International Labour Organization, “ILO 169: Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (NO. 169),” ILO.org, [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:ILO\\_169](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:ILO_169).

<sup>15</sup> See section 1.2.

<sup>16</sup> The term “supernatural” and its place in Norse studies has been debated on several occasions, but it is nevertheless a useful term when used in the broad sense. See Daniel Sälvborg and Karen Bek-Pedersen, eds., *Supernatural Encounters in Old Norse Literature and Tradition* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 6–8. In this book, “supernatural” incorporates portrayals involving the paranormal and magical phenomena considered to belong to the real world as well as “fantastic” phenomena belonging to stories “where the question of truth is not relevant,” 8. For the term “magic” itself and understandings of the typology of magic in medieval Scandinavia, see Stephen A. Mitchell, “Scandinavia,” in *The Routledge History of Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), 136–50. I employ Mitchell’s working definition of magic as “that part of religious and social life believed to allow those with special knowledge to communicate with

hunting and archery, forest animals, and references to winter weather and skiing. These associations become stereotypes about the Saami in the textual tradition and form part of the Saami Motif-Cluster.<sup>17</sup> Saami characters are often, but not exclusively associated with the north, and to describe this association I employ the designation “far north.” Here, the designation refers to the Fennoscandian areas above the polar circle. As I elaborate in chapter 2, the Norse terms *finn* (singular) and *finnar* (plural) are today generally understood as exonyms denoting the Saami people. While there has been some debate regarding the exonym, descriptions of livelihoods, spatial belonging, language and culture, as well as the longstanding usage of the term, particularly in Norway, strengthen the postulation that the term “finn” refers to Saami people.<sup>18</sup> With minor exceptions, accounted for in chapter 4, the term is here treated as denoting Saami people. The designation Fennoscandia includes Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Kola peninsula of Russia, and Russian Karelia.

Regarding chronology, I have chosen to interpret the material analysed in the thesis as belonging to either early in the medieval period, which I count from around the 800s to the 1100s (including the Viking-Age), and later in the medieval period, which I count from the 1200s to the end of the fifteenth century. This chronology is comparable to the approach taken by Judith Jesch in *The Viking Diaspora*, where she argues for the usefulness of considering the “long Viking Age” as a concept stretching from the 750s to c. 1500 based on overall continuities especially visible in the archaeological material as well as in textual sources.<sup>19</sup> Keith Ruiter emphasises the benefits of considering this broad timeframe of continuity in the conceptual analysis of interdisciplinary evidence-sets,<sup>20</sup> such as in the present thesis. While I do not treat the whole timeframe employed in the thesis as the “Viking Age,” but rather refer to it as medieval (early or late), I do agree that the evidence for continuity and overall processes of continuity evident in the material, especially the texts, occurring throughout this long period should be emphasised. Most of the archaeological material employed here originates from early in the medieval

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and acquire the supernatural assistance of otherworldly powers.” I have avoided using the terms “sorcerer”/“sorcery,” although I have not changed its appearance in translations.

17 As noted in section 3.1, the usage of the term “textual” is not intended to exclude the likelihood that many of the same motifs were also present in oral tradition.

18 Carl-Gösta Ojala, *Prehistories*, 32. Else Mundal, “The Perception of the Saamis and Their Religion in Old Norse Sources,” in *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 97–116 (98). See section 2.2.

19 Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 10, 55.

20 Keith Ruiter, *Mannjafnaðr: A Study of Normativity, Transgression, and Social Pragmatism in Medieval Scandinavia* (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2018), 19–20.

period, with the majority of the textual sources originating later in the medieval period. This twofold periodisation has enabled the analysis of overall tendencies in the source material, but when appropriate and when the sources allow, I specify the century/centuries. The chronology of the archaeological material is specified when discussed, as best possible, and the chronology of the textual material is contextualised in chapter 2 as well as throughout.

The starting point of research was a methodological approach where I conducted close readings of a set list of medieval texts focusing on Fennoscandian relations, investigating whether and how Saami characters were described. Each instance was then inserted into a database (Excel), where aspects like context, characters, Saami descent, trade, magic, personal relationships, or alliances, characteristics, and attributes, features of Othering, and locations were noted. This systematic approach enabled the overall analysis of the different appearances and allowed identification of the general tendencies associated with Saami characters in these texts, as well as more detailed analysis of individual characters and specific occurrences. In turn, this approach allowed for the inclusive reading of characters or people that were otherwise not described as Saami, as possible Saami representations in the texts. This approach takes its inspiration from Lars Ivar Hansen's report from 1984 ("Skal en bare bruke kilder som omtaler samer i rekonstruksjonen av samisk fortid?"), which advocates employing historical source material that initially does not mention the Saami specifically, but can highlight Saami presence when reading between the lines.<sup>21</sup> The methodology of actively searching for Saami characters across these texts is admittedly subjective since I rely on my own expectations of how Saami characters are described and use similar descriptions to identify non-specified characters as affiliated with the Saami. As Sirpa Aalto and Veli-Pekka Lehtola say, "our own subjectivity and possible bias may affect the ways we think that the Saami should be represented."<sup>22</sup> It should therefore be stressed that while the Saami Motif-Cluster does consist of repeated textual motifs connected to Saami characters, these are never exclusive, and as will become clear, there are many different ways of reading Saami characters in the source material and Saami portrayals are both multifaceted and diverse.

The textual sources span from early in the medieval period, with Ohthere's account from the 890s being the earliest, and the *fornaldarsögur* from the later medieval period being the most recent, the youngest of which derives from the late

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<sup>21</sup> Lars Ivar Hansen, "Skal en bare bruke kilder som omtaler samer i rekonstruksjonen av samisk fortid?," in *Viester-Alas: Rapport fra et seminar på Vesterålens bygdemuseum og kultursentrum*, ed. Lars Slettejord and Helge Guttormsen (Melbu [n. p.], 1984), 140–74.

<sup>22</sup> 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 (10).

fifteenth century.<sup>23</sup> The texts I have employed in my main analysis include saga material, Ohthere's account, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, *Passio Olavi*, *Historia Norwegie*,<sup>24</sup> *Gesta Danorum*, the *Borgarþingslög*, *Eiðsivapingslög*, and *Gulapingslög*, *Landnámabók*, both the Poetic and Prose Edda, and official state documents as listed in section 2.7.4 and 7.4.1. This thesis leans most heavily on saga material, as this is the most abundant in portrayals of Saami characters. The saga material covered in this thesis is divided into three commonly accepted genres, being the *Íslendingasögur*, the *konungasögur*, and the *fornaldarsögur*.<sup>25</sup> The relevant texts belonging to each respective genre are further contextualised in section 2.6. A starting point in recent interpretations of archaeological material from the medieval period emphasising the widespread distribution of Saami material culture and the prevalence of Norse-Saami fluid identity markers in this material has been crucial in my reading of the textual material. This starting point is further elaborated in section 1.3 and is grounded in a postcolonial framework, but in short, indicates that I employ these interpretations of the archaeological material to legitimise my own reading of the textual sources.

### 1.1.2 Saami Pasts and Presents

The Saami are the Indigenous people of Fennoscandia. The traditional Saami settlement area is called Sápmi, and is located within the nation states of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and in the Kola peninsula of Russia, but many Saami people live outside of this region. The borders of Sápmi have been contested throughout history, particularly in the southern areas of Norway and Sweden, and along the Bothnian coast.<sup>26</sup> As I emphasise throughout and discuss more closely in chapter 7, there is considerable evidence indicating that the Saami area was significantly larger in the medieval period. The fight for Saami cultural and social “revival,”

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<sup>23</sup> As discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Historia Norwegie* is a short Latin history of Norway, presumed to have been written in Norway sometime in the mid-to-late twelfth century (see section 3.2.1). The chronicle itself is not a saga, but it is listed among the *konungasögur* in chapter 2, for ease. See *HN*, 8–46, for an overview and discussion of the contents and structure, suggested dating and place of writing, educational background and transmission history.

<sup>25</sup> Massimiliano Bampi, “Genre,” in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London: Routledge, 2017), 4–14 (4–5).

<sup>26</sup> Ojala, *Prehistories*, 72.

self-determination, and legal rights has been a long process, and is still relevant.<sup>27</sup> In this section, I will briefly summarise this process and explain why it is relevant for historical research today.

The Saami languages belong to the Finno-Ugric language family and are structurally and etymologically different from the Nordic languages.<sup>28</sup> Traditionally, there are ten “living” Saami languages (figure 2), with North Saami being the most common and spoken by about 90% of the people that speak Saami on a daily basis. The languages are traditionally divided into Western Saami and Eastern Saami, and include North Saami, South Saami, Ume Saami, Pite Saami, Lule Saami, Inari Saami, Skolt Saami, Akkala Saami (the language is considered moribund), Kildin Saami, and Ter Saami.<sup>29</sup> The variation in Saami languages is “an important reminder that ‘the Saami’ is not a homogenous entity, neither in the present nor in the past.”<sup>30</sup> This recognition is significant for our understanding of Saami societies in the medieval period as regionally varied and linguistically diverse. It should also be emphasised that past and present Saami livelihoods and subsistence strategies have been diverse and regionally varied, and include but are not limited to whaling, fishing, forestry, reindeer herding, farming, and hunting.

While the Saami are, for the most part, officially recognised as Indigenous people today, with variable legal and cultural rights across Sápmi, this has not always been the case. With increasing expansion into Saami settlement areas throughout the medieval period, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the emerging states of Norway and Sweden and the Novgorod Republic gradually colonised Saami areas by implementing official institutions in order to gain access to natural resources and the Saami trade, in a political power play manifested in geopolitical expansion. These developments meant that Saami people were increasingly incorporated, to some extent, into the nation states as royal subjects. Although severe colonial practices were administered as a result of these developments in the following early modern period, such as mission work and destruction of Saami religious items, the nineteenth century witnessed a marked shift in colonial strategies. With the slogan “lapp ska vara lapp” [the Saami shall remain Saami], the Swedish state initiated segregationist policies directed at the reindeer herding Saami in the nineteenth century “for them to survive as nomads in the modern world” and be protected against “civilisation.”<sup>31</sup> These reindeer herders were not permitted to build permanent settlements and so-called “nomad schools” were established

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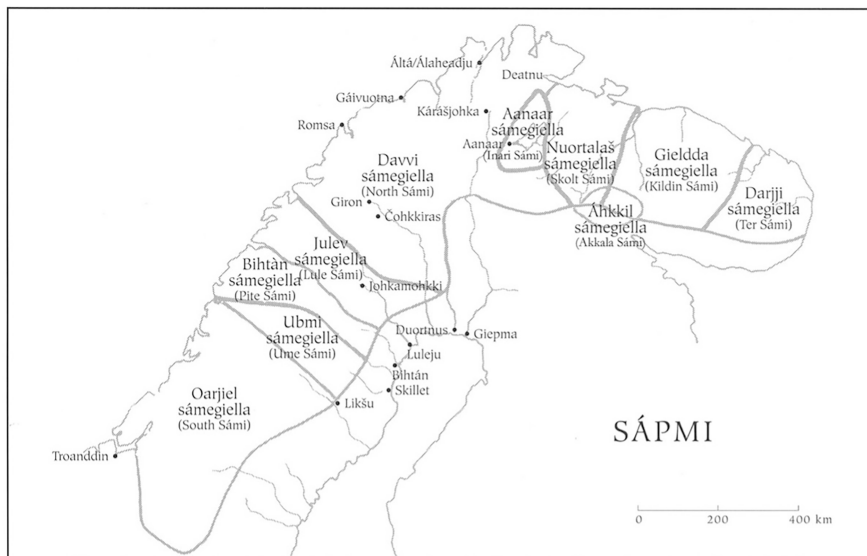
<sup>27</sup> Ojala, *Prehistories*, 98.

<sup>28</sup> Store norske leksikon, “Samisk,” snl.no, 12.12.20 <https://snl.no/samisk>.

<sup>29</sup> “Samisk.”

<sup>30</sup> Ojala, *Prehistories*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> Ojala, *Prehistories*, 94.



**Figure 2:** Core Saami Language Location, by Veli-Pekka Lehtola. Printed in Ojala, *Prehistories*, 73, after Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *The Sámi People: Traditions in Transition* (Inari: Kustannus-Puntsi, 2004), 11.

for their children.<sup>32</sup> Another policy employed by the Swedish state was assimilative and directed at non-reindeer-herding Saami. According to the Swedish government, these people were not “authentic Saami people” and were forcibly assimilated into Swedish society through active interventions like forced schooling and relocation.<sup>33</sup> These policies have very clearly affected the Saami population in Sweden today, who prior to 1992 had to be reindeer herders and live in so-called Saami villages in order to gain legal rights as Indigenous people in Sweden. In Norway, the main political strategy from the 1850s onwards was the “fornorskningspolitikk” [Norwegianisation policy], which was built on the assumption that “a Norwegian Norway is a better Norway” and was directed towards the Saami, Kven, and Forest Finn populations.<sup>34</sup> The policy was manifested through forced Christianisation of the Saami population which involved the destruction of ritual objects, forced relocation and assimilation into Norwegian society and obligatory school-

<sup>32</sup> The South Saami-Swedish film *Sameblod* revolves around the emotional turmoil of these nomad-schools. *Sameblod*, directed by Amanda Kernell (Nordisk Film, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Ojala, *Prehistories*, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Ketil Zachariassen, “Fornorskningspolitikken overfor samar og kvenar,” *Norgeshistorie*, 02.02. 2020 <https://www.norgeshistorie.no/industrialisering-og-demokrati/1554-fornorskningspolitikken-overfor-samar-og-kvenar.html>.