Collecting Sápmi

Early modern collecting of Sámi material culture

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Abstract: This paper presents the research project Collecting Sápmi. Early modern globalization of Sámi material culture and Sámi cultural heritage today, financed by the Swedish Research Council 2014–18. The aim of the project is to examine early modern collecting of Sámi material culture and early descriptions of Sámi culture, primarily in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We aim to study early modern networks of scholars and collectors interested in Sámi material culture, to investigate how and why the collecting was conducted, and to follow the movement of Sámi objects between collections and collectors around Europe. Furthermore, the project aims to discuss the importance of early modern collecting and the collected objects in today’s society. Here, critical issues are raised concerning colonial histories and relations in Sápmi, motivations and ideologies of collecting over time, as well as the rights to Sámi cultural heritage and its management today and in the future.

Keywords: Sámi, Sápmi, colonialism, collecting, globalization, identity, cultural heritage, early modern period, cultural rights, repatriation.
to address. We also point to some important issues relating to present-day museum collections of early modern Sámi objects and the management of Sámi cultural heritage which need to be discussed more in-depth in the future.

**Aim of the Project**

The aim of the project is to examine how, when and why the collecting of Sámi objects took place during the early modern period, and to follow how these objects have moved between collections and collectors in the Nordic countries and elsewhere. Furthermore, the aim is to study the consequences and importance of the early modern collecting of Sámi material culture in today’s society. The project is based on three main, fundamental questions:

1. Why did Europeans collect Sámi objects during the early modern period?
2. What role did the Sámi material culture have in relation to collections from other parts of the world?
3. What is the impact and importance of the early modern collecting on notions of Sámi identity and cultural heritage today?

In order to further investigate these issues and to examine the early modern colonial gaze on the Sámi, one important starting point is to recognize that the early modern world in many ways was globalized and that the collecting of Sámi material culture should be studied in relation to the incorporation of other indigenous material cultures into a Eurocentric worldview. The Sámi material culture spread globally through early modern collecting and early modern Sámi objects are today found in collections around the world. Furthermore, the project relates to current discussions in archaeology and other fields of study on material culture, the agency of things and their relationships, movements and transformations. In this context, things are viewed as active parts in various networks stretching over time and space. Another important starting point for the project is the recognition that the Scandinavian early modern colonial policies and projects in Sápmi, including the early modern collecting of Sámi material culture and construction of images of the Sámi, have had serious consequences for Sámi individuals and communities. The systematic destruction and looting of Sámi objects, especially religious objects, during the early modern period constituted a grave assault on the Sámi people. Confiscation and destruction of Sámi ceremonial drums by state and church officials, sorcery trials and destruction of sacred places are just a few examples, which occurred in connection with forced Christianization and general colonial campaigns. In our view, this part of Scandinavian history needs to be investigated more in-depth. It should also be relevant to discussions on contemporary Sámi self-determination in cultural heritage issues, including claims for repatriation of Sámi cultural heritage.

**Early Modern Collecting and the Colonial Gaze**

Danish and Swedish colonial expansion in the seventeenth century can be viewed as local versions of the larger contemporary European colonial expansion, with obvious similarities and connections as well as dissimilarities and local features (cf. Fur 2006, Nordin 2012). Several traits were shared between European colonialism in Africa, America, Asia and the North, such as the exploration and exploitation of precious metals and exotic commodities. During the seventeenth century, European
courts and wealthy families collected Japanese lacquer objects, African bronzes, salt water pearls, wampum beads, Inuit kayaks, as well as Sámi ceremonial drums (South Sámi Gievrie, North Sámi Goavddis).

Precious stones and metals along with weapons played a particular role in this collecting, but also personal dress and clothes were extensively sought after. So were people. Indigenous peoples, such as American Indians, Inuit, West Africans and Sámi, were “collected”, translocated and displayed at European courts, enslaved or caught in indenture or servitude. Depictions and models of “exotic” people were made and displayed. There was a connection between the Eurocentric collecting of “exotic” commodities and the collecting of people, which has not been thoroughly acknowledged in earlier research and which needs to be studied more.

Early modern European collectors’ significance in the translocation of Sámi material culture was extensive. In several museums in the Nordic countries, as well as in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and other European countries, there are collections of Sámi ceremonial drums and sacred objects such as sieidi-stones along with other Sámi objects, frequently as parts of the oldest collections (see Edbom 2005).

Already in the late medieval period Sámi people, and reindeer, were part of chains of commodity exchange between the Scandinavian kingdoms and the European continent. From the second half of the sixteenth century there is evidence of domestic Scandinavian displays of Sámi people, for instance during the coronation of Erik XIV in 1561, where reindeer as well as Sámi girls were displayed (for more examples, see Berg 1954). During the Renaissance, Sámi people were surrounded by great curiosity, expressed for example by Olaus Magnus (1490–1557) in his description of Sápmi in the Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus (History of the Northern Peoples) in 1555, or by Christopher Marlowe (d. 1593) in Doctor Faustus first published in 1604 (Andersson Burnett 2010, Balzamo 2015). The escalating globalization, especially through the growing contacts between America and Europe and the drastically increased inflow of overseas goods, also affected the interest in the Sámi and Sápmi. The Sámi and Sápmi were increasingly being equated with America and its indigenous peoples (Löw 1956:13). On a material level this was also expressed through the collecting and displaying of things.

These frequently cited parallels between the Sámi and various non-European indigenous peoples, as well as European minorities such as the Scots or Picts, led to a growing interest of the kings and queens of Sweden to examine the issue of Sámi origins (Fur 2006, Andersson Burnett 2010). Early modern Sápmi was turned into an imaginative geography in Edward Said’s sense: an exoticized constructed space used as mirror of the conceited centre (Said 1985:101f.). This imaginative space was not entirely fixed but flexible, movable and changeable. The question of Sámi origins had since the Renaissance been of importance to the Swedish and Danish crowns, their officials and scientists, and theories of Sámi roots and ethnogenesis were constructed during the seventeenth century (and continued to be constructed later through history, see further Ojala 2009:115ff.). The common European interest in defining, and controlling, the origins of “the Other” was also expressed in the production of numerous books on the origins of American indigenous peoples (Kupperman 1995).

Håkan Rydving has pointed out the importance of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) for the Swedish imperial view of the Sámi.
From the entry of the Swedes in the war in 1630 the Catholic League accused the Swedish army of being ungodly in using Lappish sorcerers conducting witchcraft (Rydving 2006). The catholic propaganda portrayed the Swedish troops as a blend of Sámi sorcerers, Scottish barbarians and Livonian mercenaries. The Thirty Years’ War is often regarded as the first modern war. It had global repercussions, hitherto unseen demographic consequences; it entailed the birth of modern diplomacy and the birth of modern propaganda. The Swedish crown was evidently opposed to the anti-Swedish propaganda during and after the war. Several official commissions were ordered to study the Sámi and their land and to intensify their religious conversion. The polymath and portal figure of Sweden’s academic life during the seventeenth century, Olaus Rudbeck (1630–1702), also paid much interest to Sápmi as well as the North in more general terms, nourishing the idea of the Swedes as the hyperboreans, the descendants of Atlantis, living in the far North (Eriksson 2002, Herva & Nordin 2015).

**JOHANNES SCHEFFERUS’ LAPPONIA AND ITS MATERIALITY**

The first researcher to conduct more thorough research on the Sámi and Sápmi was the professor in political science at Uppsala University, Johannes Schefferus (1621–79). Schefferus was one of several well-educated foreign scholars to be recruited to the expanding state of Sweden during the mid-seventeenth century. He worked in several fields of research, such as law, rhetoric, history, archaeology and ethnography. Partly as a result of the anti-Swedish propaganda in connection with the Thirty Years’ War, Schefferus was commissioned to conduct a thorough examination of the history and current situation of Sápmi and its inhabitants by the Swedish Chancellor Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie (Löw 1956, Rydving 2006).

The results were published under the title *Lapponia* in Latin in 1673. The book quickly became widely spread and was translated into English 1674, German 1675, French 1678, Dutch 1682, but into Swedish only as late as 1956 (Schefferus 1673/1956). *Lapponia* contributed to an increase in the already considerable international interest in the Sámi and their material culture. In contrast to the Swedes or Danes, Schefferus expected that the Sámi, which he in many respects described as deviating against a normative Europeanness, had come from somewhere else (Schefferus 1673/1956:41, cf. also Ojala 2009:115ff.). The Sámi were believed to be newcomers to this part of Europe, a notion providing the Swedish crown with the possibility to claim all land and all natural resources of Swedish and Finnish Lapland. It also enforced the Swedish claim of sovereignty over all inhabitants of Sápmi.

Schefferus himself never ventured to northern Sweden or to Sápmi. Many of the Sámi he met were students at Uppsala University (Rydving 2010). Also, he would probably have met Sámi at markets in the towns, such as the annual market of *Distingen* in Uppsala (Löw 1956:16). Furthermore, the Sámi population was much more widely spread in central Sweden during the early modern period than generally acknowledged (cf. Berg 1954, Svanberg 1999). Schefferus used Sámi students of theology at Uppsala University as informants for his work, along with commissioned accounts from missionaries and clergymen in the parishes in Sápmi (Löw 1956, Rydving 2010). The informants provided him with information on topography, climate, economy, traditions, religion, material culture, and much more.

Johannes Schefferus built a museum adjacent
to his house in central Uppsala. Here he displayed archaeological finds, coins, minerals, and Sámi artefacts and he recurrently refers to his collection and museum in his work. The small quadrangular building, which is still standing by St. Erik’s Square close to the Cathedral in Uppsala, can be considered as one of the oldest museums in Sweden. The museum became a central node in the academic networks of Schefferus and his work with *Lapponia*. Schefferus was also an able artist and made several drawings for *Lapponia*, with woodcutters in Frankfurt finalizing the illustrations. The depictions of material objects were made from his own collection of Sámi material culture, including drums, an *ackja* (a wooden sleigh) and other objects. His own inventory is not complete and includes only finds of minerals from Sápmi, which were kept in his museum (Löw 1956, Snickare 2014). These illustrations became of paramount importance for the general notions of Sáminess. For instance, the emblematic motif of the Sámi equipage, the Sámi with reindeer and *ackja*, was already widely spread through the works of Olaus Magnus, but with *Lapponia* it was turned into a symbol, such as the naked Indian on the Armadillo (Mignolo 1995, Mathisen 2014, see fig. 1).

Other examples of early modern collectors of Sámi objects in Sweden include Olaus Rudbeck, the Swedish King Carl XI and aristocrats such as the Wrangel and Brahe families at Skokloster castle by Lake Mälaren. Mårten Snickare has also noted a less well-known collector of Sámi objects, Mårten Törnihelm, who supposedly had a museum building erected at his estate on Ekerö in central Sweden. Mårten Törnihelm held the position as bailiff at Drottningholm castle under the dowager queen Hedwig Eleonora, a well-known collector of the time (Snickare 2014, cf. also Skogh 2013).

In 1679, Johannes Schefferus died and part of his Sámi collection was transferred to Stockholm and the newly founded College of Antiquities (Antikvitetskollegium). But as late as in 1960 a *sieidi*-stone was still displayed in the garden of Schefferus’ museum in Uppsala. It was later brought into the museum and is now stored there as a remnant of his vast but now dispersed collection (cf. Manker 1960, Snickare 2014). In the oldest inventory of the College of Antiquities from 1693, Sámi objects had a prominent position along with war booty from the Thirty Years’ War and prehistoric artefacts. At least seven ceremonial drums, two *sieidis* and one *ackja* were part of the earliest collection (Arne 1931). Other parts of Schefferus’ collection were spread further afield, for instance to the collection of Hans Sloane in England, which came to lay the foundation of the British Museum.

The illustrations from *Lapponia* spread through copying into paintings, tapestry and furniture. In the Skokloster castle, there is a cabinet made in Germany in the late seventeenth century which is decorated with ivory laminae with motifs from *Lapponia*. In a very tactile mode, Sápmi mingled with West Africa and central Europe through the
combination of ebony, ivory and the motif of the reindeer equipage. A vast majority of the ivory brought to Europe in the seventeenth century came from the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin. An almost identical cabinet comes from the Maunu settlement near Karesuando in northernmost Sweden, and has since 1878 been part of the collections of the Norrbotten County Museum. In the workshops of Germany and the Netherlands, the designers indefatigably sought for motifs suitable for the production of arts and furniture for the markets of the global world: American Indians, Chinese, Africans, and from mid-seventeenth century – Sámi – enforcing the notions of an early modern imaginative geography of the world and its peoples.

COLLECTING SÁPMI: AN OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

The project Collecting Sápmi is built around five interrelated empirical work packages, which will be briefly described below.

1. The first work package aims to survey Sámi material culture from the early modern period (i.e. until the end of the eighteenth century) in museum and private collections in Scandinavia and Europe. This work package is based on previously conducted surveys, such as Ernst Manker’s pivotal work on the Sámi ceremonial drums (1938, 1950, cf. also Kroik 2007, Christoffersson 2010), and more recent surveys initiated by Sámi museums, such as Samiskt kulturarv i samlingar (Edbom 2005) and Recalling Ancestral Voices (Harlin 2008), expanding and complementing the results from these earlier surveys. Here, one important goal is to make new information on collections of early modern Sámi cultural heritage available to Sámi museums and Sámi communities.

2. The second work package seeks to analyze and understand the scientific networks of Johannes Schefferus and his informants at Uppsala University in the second half of the seventeenth century. Schefferus’ above mentioned museum is at the core of the work package. Lapponia and its connections with the museum in Uppsala are central, but other works by Schefferus will also be analyzed. The Sámi informants of Schefferus in Uppsala are also of central importance in this study. As part of the work package, we will publish a translated and commented edition of one of Schefferus’ dissertations (Dissertatio philosophica ... deductions colonarium, from 1667), dealing with the reasons for and causes of colonialism. The translation from Latin will be conducted by Ph.D. Anna Fredriksson, Uppsala University Library, with financial support by the Royal Academy of Letters and Antiquities (Kungl. Vitterhetsakademien).

3. In the third work package, we will attempt to follow the movement of early modern Sámi objects, from their areas of origin, and between collections and collectors around Europe. Who did the collecting, where, when and how? What objects were collected? What happened with the objects? Why were collectors interested in Sámi material culture? What did people do with the objects, and what did the objects do with people? Furthermore, the role of the objects in the construction of early modern notions of Sáminess will be discussed. This work package will be based on the survey of existing (or documented) early modern Sámi objects in Nordic and other European collections (the first work package), but will focus on a number of case studies where it is possible to trace the movement of the objects.

4. The fourth work package investigates notions of the Sámi and Sámi culture in the British Isles
during the early modern period, and will focus on the concurrent construction of Sáminess to that of Scottishness and other groups of people of the Atlantic world. What was the role of the Sámi in early modern literature of the British Isles and how was it related to the ongoing colonial expansion of the British and other European powers?

5. The aim of the fifth and final work package is to study the importance of the early modern collecting and the early modern Sámi objects today. In this part of the project, we aim to follow these objects, as well as early modern depictions and descriptions of Sámi material culture, in debates on cultural heritage and history today. One central issue deals with the debates on Sámi self-determination concerning cultural heritage issues, including demands for repatriation of Sámi cultural heritage (in this case, more specifically concerning the early modern objects, such as the Sámi drums; see further Vem äger kulturarvet... 2002, Harlin 2008, Mulk 2009). We will also discuss the globalization of Sámi cultural heritage today, and the importance of the international indigenous peoples’ movement in these debates.

CONCLUSION

The Sámi objects were, and are, part of various networks connecting different times and places. The early modern colonial networks consisted of many different actors or actants – people as individuals and social groups, but also objects, buildings and institutions. Some examples in focus in this project include Schefferus’ museum in Uppsala, the social environment of Sámi students in Uppsala in the seventeenth century, the clergymen destroying Sámi sacred places and drums, the Sámi accused of sorcery for using their drums, Törnhielm’s collection, Carl XI’s model of a Sámi with reindeer and ackja (which is kept at the Royal Armoury in Stockholm, see fig. 2), the Tradescant Collection in Oxford, and Linnaeus’ Sámi drum. The Sámi travelling to different European countries, such as the boy Petrus who was brought to Prague by Johan
Ferdinand Körningh (see Körningh 1956), or the Sámi families taking care of the Swedish King’s reindeer, were also important actors in the colonial networks of collecting, describing and defining the Sámi and Sámi material culture in the early modern period.

The early modern Scandinavian colonialism and the collecting and constructing of Sámi cultural heritage have often been de-coupled from the Western discourse on “the Other”, for instance the American or African (cf. Naum & Nordin 2013). In this project we aim to point out how western intellectuals’ perceptions of the Sámi, from Olaus Magnus and Marlowe to Schefferus and Linnaeus, could be compared with contemporary perceptions of Africans and American Indians and how these Eurocentric views show obvious ideological kinship, with common material consequences.

In this paper, we have presented a brief outline of the recently initiated research project Collecting Sápmi. We have also discussed some aspects of the historical background to the project, focusing on some early modern scholars and collectors, especially Johannes Schefferus. This short paper of course only gives a fragmented and simplified overview of the research project, which includes several researchers from different disciplines and with different approaches to the general theme of the project. The project group and the advisory group, which is connected to the project, include scholars from universities as well as museums, including Sámi museums, in Sweden, Norway and Finland. For us, the collaboration between museums and universities is a very important aspect of the project, which we believe can enrich the study of the histories of early modern colonial collecting of Sámi material culture and its importance and consequences today.

**Literature**


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