

# The History and Culture of the Sami People



# *Sápmi* (Lapland)



The Sami are the only recognized group of indigenous people in Europe.

The live in Sápmi, the northern-most region of Fennoscandia, covering parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninnsula of Russia

- Sápmi is approx. 400,000 km<sup>2</sup>

Despite the close proximity, The Sami have a distinct culture and language that differs from their Scandinavian and Russian Neighbors

Apporoximate Sami Population by country:

Norway - 45,000

Sweden – 25,000

Finland - 9,000

Russia – 2,000

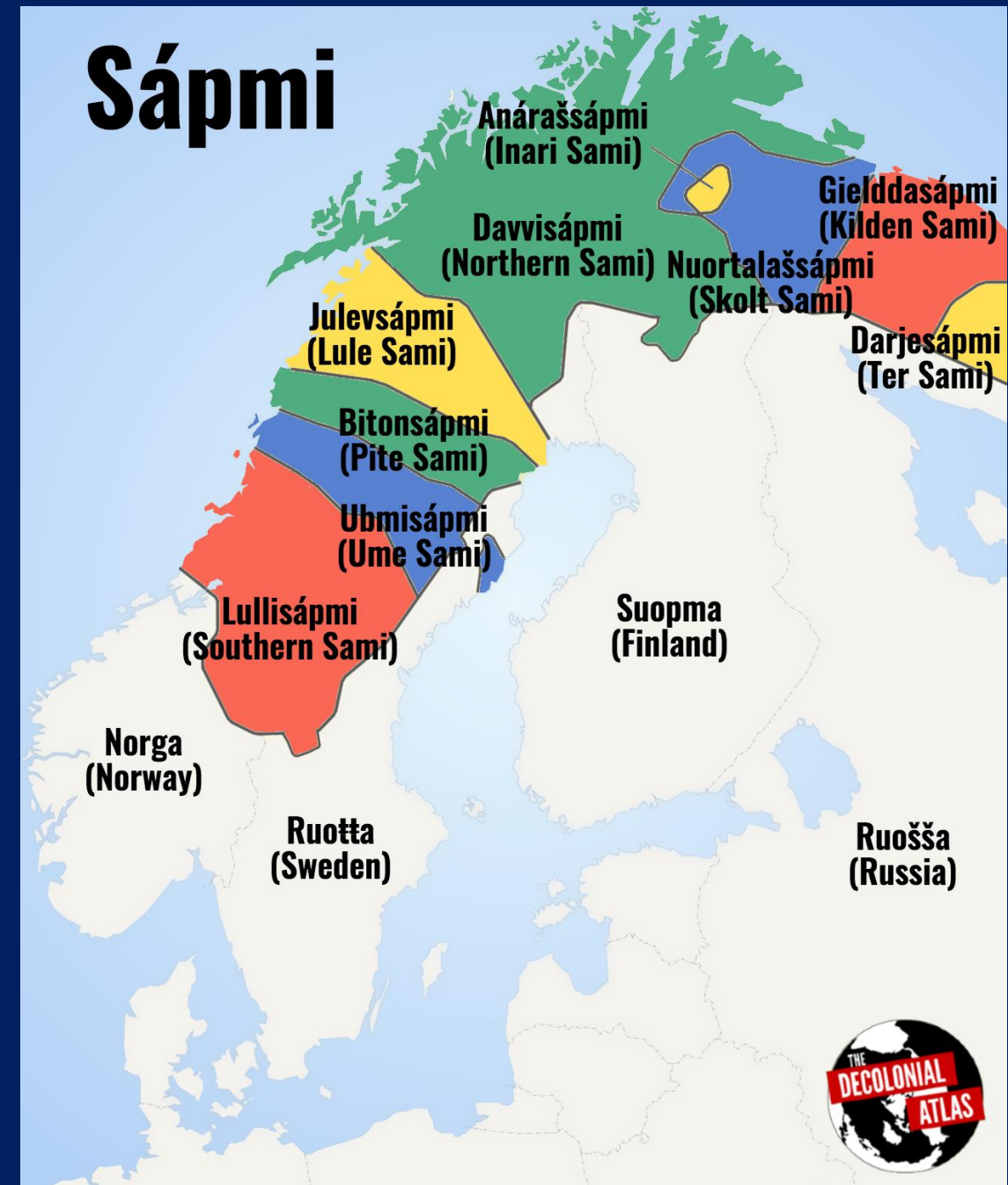
There are 9 Sami groups and languages, and five official orthographies (Official rules for writing)

- Southern Sami (1978)
- Ume Sami (2016)
- Pite Sami (2019)
- Lule Sami (1983)
- Northern Sami (1979)
- Inari Sami
- Skolt Sami
- Kilden Sami
- Ter Sami

The Sami Language(s) belong to the Finno-Uralic Language Family.

This means it originated in the Ural Mountains with Proto-Uralic approx. 7 to 10,000 years ago.

For context, Swedish and English are Germanic Languages, both originating from Old Norse.





- In Sápmi it snows well into June.
- The growing season is only 120 days long, with only 4 months without snow.
- Lakes are frozen of at least half the year.



Over 10,000 years ago, the last Ice Age ended, melting the snow Fennoscandia, and allowed for the early settlers (Fosna-Hensbacka) to settle.

At this point in time, the climate was considerably milder. This meant that resources such as alder, birch, and pine trees were able to grow well.

Similarly game such as Reindeer and Elk roamed this region, and newly formed lakes from glaciers were teeming with fish.

These factors made the area very attractive to early settlers.

By contrast, central Europe had growing competition for such resources.

These first settlers primarily came from the regions of modern-day Denmark, and northwestern Russia.



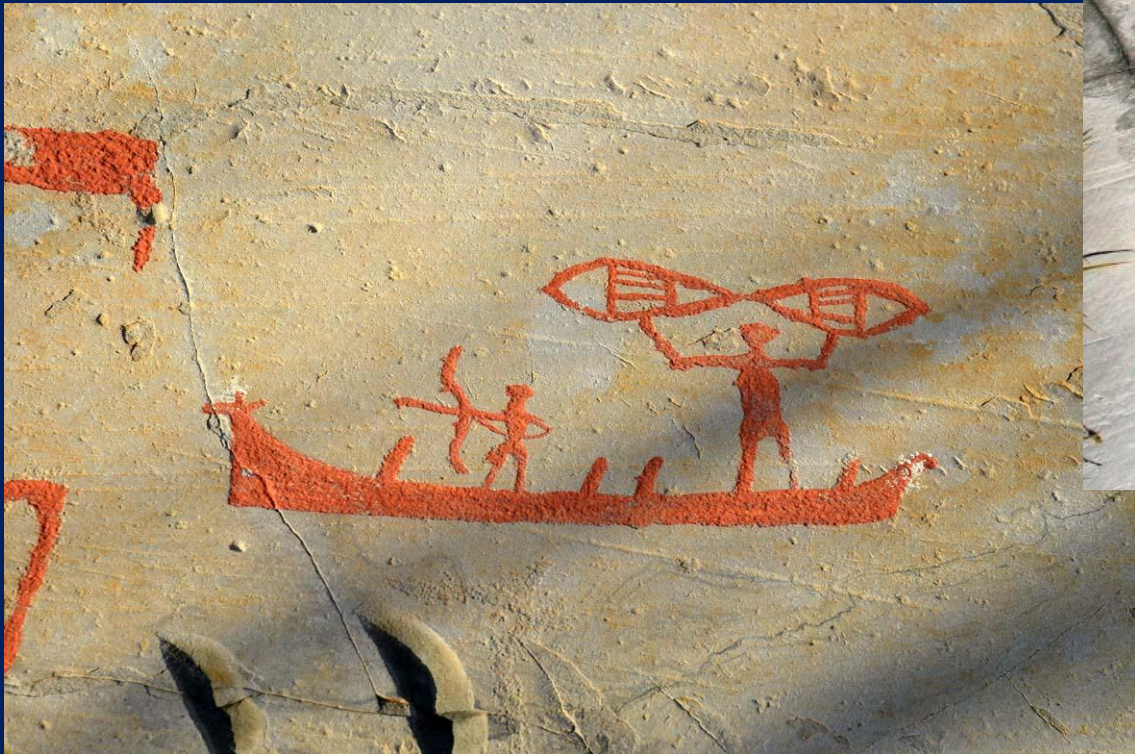
Petryglyphs are known by archaeologists to be common in early Sami culture.

Some of the oldest carvings have been dated back to 6,000 years ago.

One of the most significant finds were the carvings found in Alta, Norway.

Over 6,000 carvings were found between 1966-1978

This earned the locations spot on the UNESCO's world heritage list





As the climate shifted, to the arctic tundra that is today, the Sami returned to a more Nomadic lifestyle.

These people migrated with the reindeer and elk.

They hunted and gathered for their food and often only would take with them what they could carry.

This led to the favored usage of temporary shelters that were easy to put up and take down such as the Goathi, and Lavvu

*The Lavvu was a tent-like structure made from sticks and reindeer hide, traditionally. It had an opening in the top for smoke to exit when a fire was lit in the center*

*The Goathi was a more permanent structure made with sticks, packed with mud and moss, designed to handle the arctic weather very well*





They dry and salt the meat to make Suovas,

They drink the reindeer's milk and make cheese and butter with it.

Finnbiff- Sami Reindeer Stew

Finnbiff is also a method of preparing the meat wherein you freeze the meat and cut it thinly whilst it is still frozen.

Make gahkku, thick flatbread

They also eat reindeer meat and cheese soaked in coffee as a treat. (Kaffeost)

They even use the blood to make blood pancakes. (Blodplättar)









## Nutuka

These Sami boots are made with reindeer hide and stuffed with straw for added insulation during the subzero temperatures of winter.

The curved toes are designed to keep ski straps in place.

The Sami have used skis for centuries and are often credited with the invention of skiing

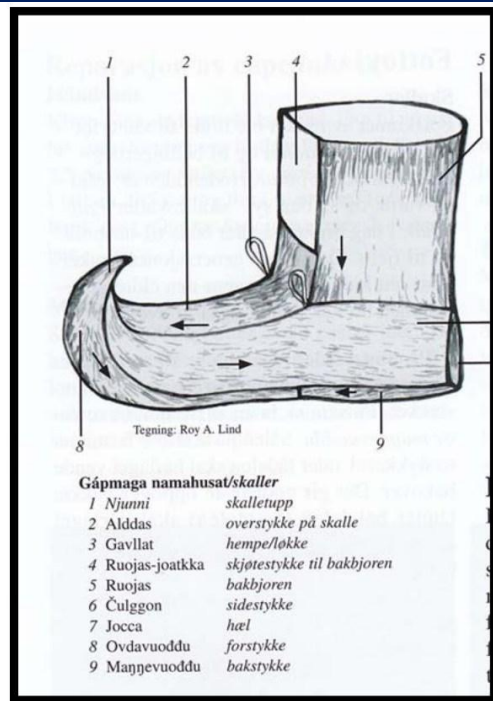


Diagram of reindeer skin winter boot, showing direction of fur layout. In: Maret Haetta and others, *Håndbok I Duodji*, Nesbru, Norway: Vett & Viten, 2007, p. 130.



# *Gákti*

This is the iconic traditional dress of the Sami People.

The Gakti is an extremely special garment, as the colors, patterns, and decorations can identify someone's marital status and geographical origination.

[More on the different Gakti](#)



Unfortunately, much like appropriation of the Native American traditional clothing and headdresses, occasionally non-Sami people will don traditional garments and act out fake rituals for tourists.

This, obviously, is harmful to the Sami people, as it perpetuates untrue and harmful stereotypes about these people.

The men in the picture are Finnish and wearing Fake Gakti





Samis hunt, track and herd reindeer the typically move in a Siida.

A Siida group of families herding reindeer together.

Tasks are all split up among its members and every decision is voted on democratically.

In a modern context, Siidas still organize and regulate the industries using their traditional principles, however now they operate more like a Union.

Right now about 50 Siida control the reindeer rights and territories under the Sameby system in Sweden. Both Finland and Norway use similar practices.

Finland, Norway and Sweden now have Sami Parliaments called samediggis.

These are elected bodies of Sami representatives that advocate for the rights and interests of the Sami People.

The effort to install such a parliament in Russia is still ongoing.

The old Sami believed in Animalism, a religion characterized by a belief in close, almost magical ties between humans and animals, especially wild animals.

The Sami believed in three worlds:

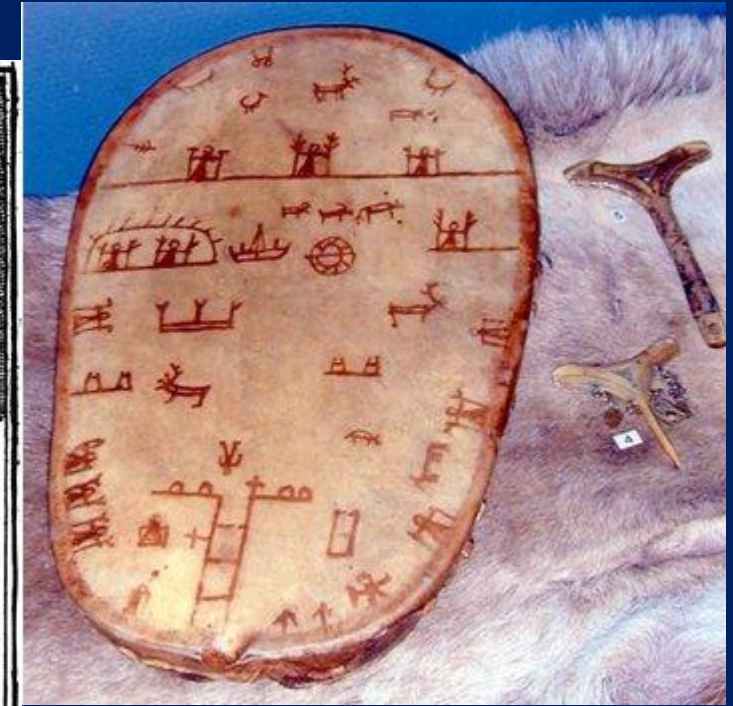
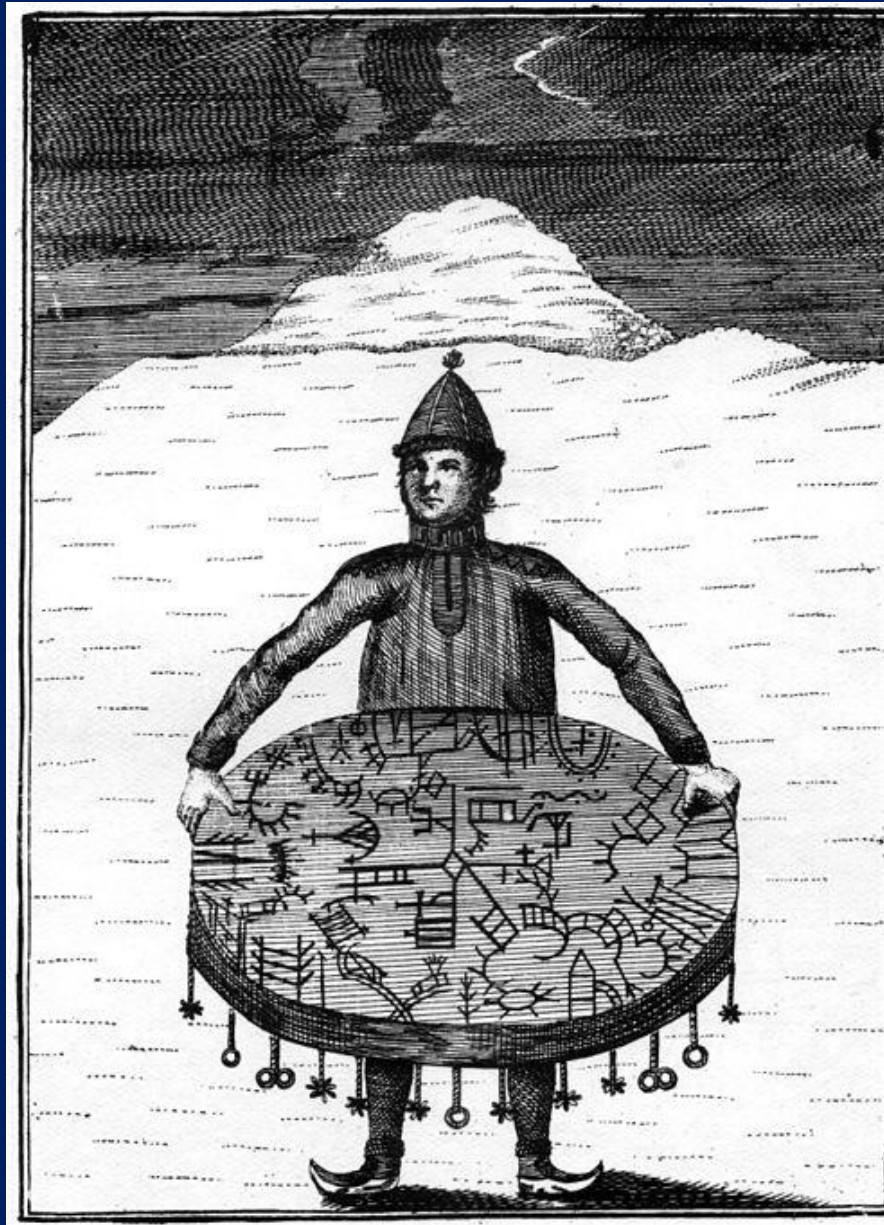
The upper world, the world of the gods,

The middle world, the world of the humans and animals

The underworld, the land of the dead.

The Noaidi were shamen that were believed to be able to travel between the three realms by falling into trances. They would achieve this with chanting, drums and amanita muscaria mushrooms.

The Noaidi were the doctors and performed all of the rituals.





# Yoiks (Joiks)

