Discussion regarding the south-east origin of the Sámi

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Abstract

The area of the Sámi has shrunk as time has passed. The question of their origin is topical especially in areas where there is no longer any Sámi population today. Their ancient area can be outlined by toponymical data. Sámi place-names cover Fennoscandia, as well as partly also the neighboring regions in NW Russia. Archaeological data can be linked to toponymy, but only under certain preconditions. The very important prerequisite is that the spatio-temporal dynamics in layers of culture will coincide with the dynamics in the development of toponymy.

Russian researchers divide the place-names of NW Russia into four successive layers: Volga (Volga-Oka), Sámi, Baltic-Finnish, and Russian. The two last-mentioned strata are generally correlated with the Russian peasant culture (since ca 1300 AD) and the culture which according to ceramics in Ladoga burial mounds can be dated to late medieval times (900–1100 AD).

At Lake Onego in SE Karelia, altogether nine successive cultural types have been studied. Here the most ancient layer of place-names, i.e., the Volga layer, can be in general correlated with the Net ("Textile") Ware culture (ca. 1600–500 BC). Its origins can be traced to the upper Volga region because the preceding Late Eneolithic culture has different dynamics of formation.

Sámi place-names correspond in general with the Iron Age local cultures of the Anan'ino layer (ca. 500 BC – 1500–1300 AD), but partly also with the aceramic culture (ca. 900–1400 AD). The earliest Sámi place-names revealed by toponymists are found near the SE border of the area in question (i.e. the Vologda region and the southern Arhangelsk region). In other words, they are in the area of the Pozdnekargopolskaja culture in Karelia. The mixed culture of SE Sámi was formed of the substrate southern (the upper Volga) and alien eastern (the Kama) component. As far as other areas inhabited by Sámi speakers are considered, the substrate components may be different.

Keywords:
toponymies, material culture, comparative methods.

Introduction

The area of the Sámi population has shrunk considerably as time has passed. Today the origin of the Sámi is a key issue in their prehistory, especially in the regions where they have disappeared. Despite the presence of a common ethnonym, the Sámi never formed a well-developed

Fig. 1. The SE and eastern borders of Sámi place-names (after J. Saarikivi 2006b).

socio-ethnic unity. Nevertheless, their language has survived because of the contrast with the background of neighboring languages. It follows that ancient Sámi can be defined as a **language** unit. The central problem in this article is the identification of the ancient **material** culture of Sámi speakers, particularly in the eastern and south-eastern areas previously occupied by them.

Some archaeological theories of Sámi origin – to a variable extent – show the typical imperfections of the culture-historical approach in archaeology. As an example I would like to mention the straightforward equivalence of various grouping criteria that are imposed as the symbols of ethnic identity. There is also the elusive homogeneity of conditional classification units such as groups or cultures (see Note 1 in this ar-

ticle). In my view, we can discern Sámi speakers in general since the time when their linguistic independence began to form. This does not necessarily depend on their self-identification in the past.

In other words, the ancient area of Sámi-speaking peoples can be outlined by the remains of real languages, i.e. their toponymies. Sámi place-names cover Fennoscandia, as well as partly the regions of Arhangelsk, Vologda, and St. Petersburg. They are also dispersed in the Upper Volga region (e.g. Leskinen 1967; Nissilä 1975; Matveev 1979; 2001; 2004; Mullonen 1994; 2002; Aikio 2004; Saarikivi 2006a; 2006b) (Fig. 1). Researchers of place-names, toponymists, cannot usually date either single prehistoric place-names or their classification units. The relation between toponymies and the distributions of material culture is a problem of comparative analysis.

More or less well-dated archaeological materials can generally be linked to the Sámi toponymy. But first of all, one has to define the basic formal congruence conditions. For this purpose, we need to choose spatial areas where the chronological sequences of classification units in culture and toponymy are the most differentiated. The comparisons are then made between complete sequences. It is assumed that the positions of large units of both sequences should coincide. This is the indispensable condition of identity – but it is insufficient. The congruence between layers will be more reliable if the spatio-temporal dynamics of formation are more or less similar in both / all cases. It is recommended to compare stylistic, and not adaptive, elements of culture, and in toponymy the lexical composition is in the foreground. This is the main condition of identity.

In some cases, the spatial distributions in culture and toponymy would not coincide, because the conditional status in the different scientific hierarchic groupings is incomparable or because there were differences in their dynamics of formation. Furthermore, there are usually no distinctive dividing lines between neighboring cultural or toponymical areas. On the contrary, relatively wide transition zones are revealed. Therefore the selective linkage of small-scale entities like single types or small units of place-names with "groups" of people and their "cultures" could be ineffective or even incorrect.

In my study, the comparative analysis of large classification units – toponymical and culture-historical areas / layers – and the exclusion of identified non-Sámi cultural layers seems to be successful. Then the points are focused so that they allow describing the process of layer formation through the regularities of spatio-temporal changes within large entities. It is important to have the descriptions of the origin of each layer by the component analysis. In actuality, the different layers can be studied to different degrees. There are many blank spots and different groupings that lower the validity of inferences. In any case, we get background for discussing the language identity of some ancient cultural layers / areas.

Place-names in NW Russia

The whole body of place-names in NW Russia is rich and long-term. Russian toponymists divide it into four successive layers:

- the ancient (Volga or Volga-Oka)
- the Sámi
- the Baltic-Finnish
- and the latest – the Russian.

Comparison of the layers in question with archaeological units is effective in south-eastern Karelia, just near the southern margin of Sámi toponymy. In this study, I exclude from consid-

eration the two uppermost layers in time: the Russian and the Baltic-Finnish. The Russian stratum is generally correlated with the Russian medieval peasant culture (since ca. 1300 AD). Baltic-Finnish peoples did not inhabit SE Karelia in the Late Middle Ages. A. Turkin (1985: 55) dated the Baltic-Finnish, mostly Old-Vepsian loan-words in the Komi language to the period ca. 800–1100 AD. Thus, the Baltic-Finnish layer in SE Karelia can be linked to the early medieval culture. The hand-made ceramics correspond to the finds in Ladoga burial mounds, and date to ca. 900–1200 AD. Some archaeologists regard it as Old-Vepsian (see: Kosmenko 1993: 198–199). According to the distribution of corresponding place-names, the medieval Vepsians adapted to the inner regions while Karelians settled near the White Sea coast (Matveev 2004: 198–203).

Sámi toponymy and the Anan'ino culture

Around Lake Onego

In the Lake Onego catchment, a sequence of nine cultural layers has been studied well enough for argumentative discussion (see: AK 1996). Sámi did not live in SE Karelia and neighboring southern regions in the Middle Ages, except for sparse groups of nomadic hunters and fur traders who formed the aceramic culture (ca. 800–1400 AD: Kosmenko 2004). They could not have formed a dense stratum of Sámi place-names there. Hence, the Sámi culture can generally be identified there by comparing Sámi toponymy with the so-called Anan'ino layer of the Iron Age culture. It is dated from ca. 2500 BP to 1400–1300 BP (Fig. 2). In this case, the positions of both sequences – the toponymy and material remains – do coincide.

I have divided the Anan'ino layer around Lake Onego into two fuzzy-edged conditional "cultures" (Kosmenko 1993: 89–174). The Pozdnekargopolskaja (Late Kargopol) culture covers the eastern part of the lake catchment and several neighboring districts of the Arhangelsk and Vologda regions in the upstream of the Onega River, including Beloozero. The Luukonsaari culture formed in the western part of the Lake Onego catchment and in SE Finland.

Both entities are the conditional classification units that reflect the spatio-temporal stages of the Anan'ino cultural area formation. Their common trait is the combination of alien (eastern) and local (western) features in pottery, as well as the predominance of imported bronze decorations of the Kama-Ural types. From the eastern areas westwards, the main trend of spatio-temporal transformation is the disappearance or technical and structural simplification of eastern non-adaptive elements such as Anan'ino cord motifs in pottery design. A lack of eastern bronze decorations can be observed, too. The situation will be comprehensible when we take into account the lack of any well-expressed interactions between the Upper Volga and Lake Onego regions in the Iron Age. In other words, the southern marginal districts of the Vologda and Arhangelsk regions have been out of the scope of interaction (see Manjuhin 2002: 125–135).

Not being a linguist, I shall not discuss such important problems as the shapes of substrate lexical components that occur especially in the peripheral regions of the area. I will not touch upon the divergence process in the languages of ancient Sámi, either. I cannot but note common traits in the formation of the SE Sámi language and culture. The dynamics of Sámi layer formation have not been described by toponymists in detail. In any case, we know that the general trend of its spatial changes is that the features

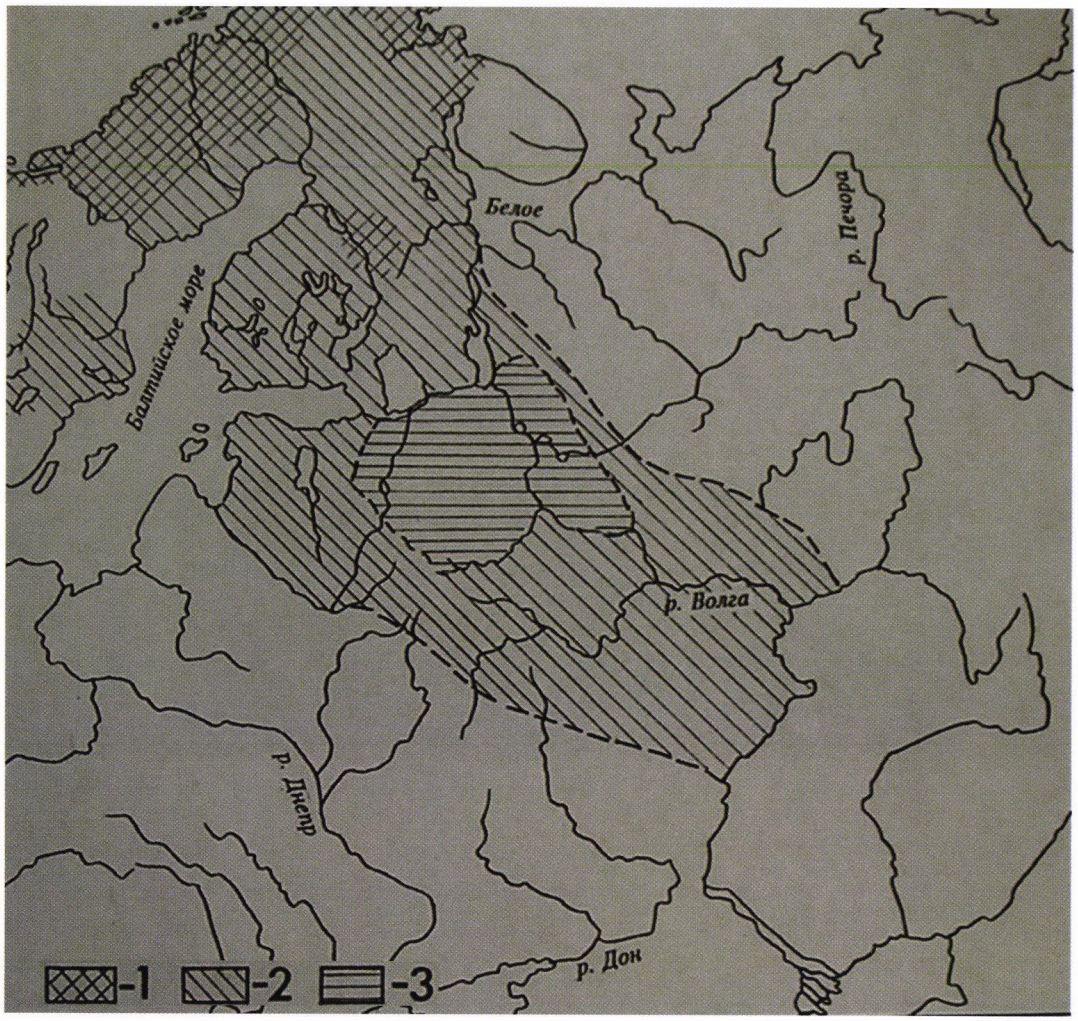

Fig. 2. The area of Net ("Textile") Ware of the Bronze Age

1 "Imitated" Textile Ware
2 Typical Net Ware
3 area of Net Ware in the early stage

of modern Sámi languages gradually disappear to the southern and eastern borders of the corresponding fuzzy-edged area of Sámi place-names (Saarikivi 2006b).

Thus the ancient eastern and southern Sámi languages at the margins of the area seem to be "atypical" ones. It is unlikely that the Sámi languages would have spread in the southern regions of corresponding toponymy as the result of Sámi migration from the northern direction (Saarikivi 2006b: 224). I do not know any archaeological evidence of such migrations, either. Consequently the present Sámi languages seem to be formed relatively recently and they contain a substrate lexical component (see Aikio 2004; Saarikivi 2006a; 2006b).

Toponymists point to a difference between Sámi place-names in the northern and southern areas of their range. Both in NW Russia (Matveev

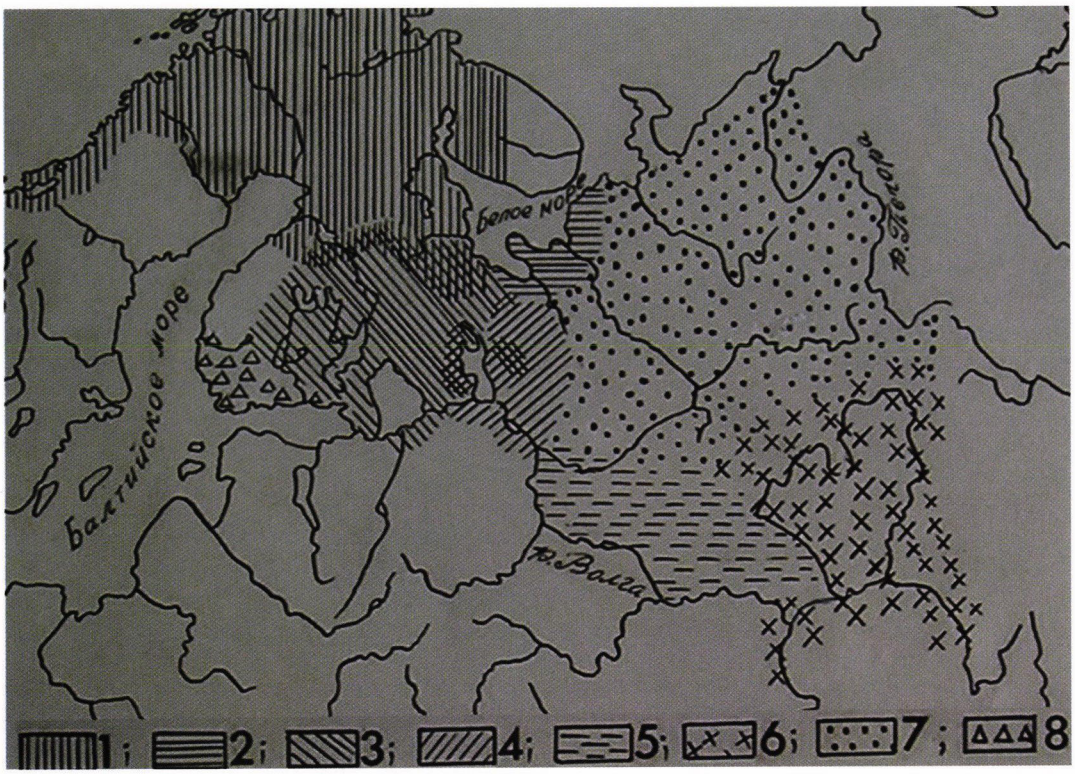

Fig. 3. The local cultures of the Anan'ino layer (Iron Age)

1 = ceramics of "Arctic" type
2 = Late White Sea culture
3 = Luukonsaari ceramics
4 = Late Cargopol
5 = culture of Ahmyilovo type
6 = Anan'ino culture
7 = cultures of NE Russia
8 = Morby culture

1979: 9) and in southern Finland (Aikio 2004; Saarikivi 2006b: 222), there are features of the ancient Sámi languages that cause them to differ from the present Sámi languages of northern Fennoscandia. According to I. Mullonen (1994: 117–121; 2002: 180–182), the earliest Sámi place-names are scattered along the SE margin of the area, mostly at the Upper Onega watershed, including Beloozero. J. Saarikivi (2006b: 223) supposed that the Beloozero, as well as the Tver and Novgorod regions were in a sense the centre of early Finnic and Sámi language formation. Mullonen (2002: 181) stated that in the SE part of the range, no "proper" Sámi language existed, but its earliest stage that was closer to the Pre-Sámi language. There is no distinct dividing line between Sámi and Volga layers of toponymy in this region, either, because of the powerful substrate language of the Volga type (Mullonen 2002: 182). Besides, we should keep in mind some place-names with old ethnonymic roots: the linguist D. Bubrih (1947: 18) mentioned *Som(b)-, Som-, Siam-, Sum- (Somba, Sámina, Siamozero, Sumozero),* which are scattered around Lake Onego.

The earliest features of the Anan'ino culture are evident in the Pozdnekargopolskaja culture: the highest percentage of typical Anan'ino stylistic elements is found there. These are for

example cord motifs in pottery design and the shapes of pots. Other peculiar "eastern" details are "collars" and bulges on the necks of vessels (Kosmenko 1993: 89–140; Manjuhin 2002: 125–135). Furthermore, imported bronze decorations of eastern metal types have been found mostly in the area of Pozdnekargopolskaja. Also the substrate component has its earliest shape here. It is closest to the earlier Net ("Textile") Ware, as well as partly to the Bronze Age cultures of the Middle Volga region (e.g. Prikazanskaja) (Kosmenko 1993: 131–138).Towards the west and NW, the Anan'ino features decrease, and respective elements in pottery design disappear or are replaced with a series of simplified modifications. The latter prevail in the Luukonsaari culture.

White Sea coast

In contrast to the features described above, the Pozdnebelomorskaja (Late White Sea) culture of the southern White Sea coastal area contains at least twice as many typical Anan'ino cord motifs as the Pozdnekargopolskaja and 20 times as many as the Luukonsaari culture (Kosmenko 1993: 174–187). In this area, there are but a few substrate elements of Net Ware culture, but features of NE Bronze Age cultures like Lebjažkaja are abundant.

I have presumed that the above-mentioned differences reflect the different origins of Early Iron Age cultures in southern Karelia on one hand and in NE Karelia on the other hand. The cultures of southern Karelia originated eventually in the Kama-Middle Volga area, whereas the culture of the southern White Sea coast formed mostly on the basis of Bronze Age cultures of NE regions of European Russia. However, all the Iron Age cultures have the common Anan'ino component of eastern origin.

Comparison with the Volga region
(Figs. 2 and 3)

The cultural difference between the southern Sámi and the Finno-Ugrians of the Volga region grew over time due to the increasing divergence in their economies and lifestyles. The Sámi population in Karelia drifted in the direction of hunting specialization and a nomadic lifestyle, while settled Finno-Ugrians in the Upper Volga area practiced agriculture and stock-breeding.

It is now reasonable to touch upon the problem of the cultural identification of the most ancient Volga place-names. They are dispersed northwards from the Upper Volga region (Serebrennikov 1955: 19–31). They cannot be correlated with the cultures of the Iron Age, because there is no archaeological evidence of migrations or close interactions between Karelia and the Upper Volga region during this period. Quite the contrary: the regularities of spatial changes are different in the two layers in question.

There are no grounds, either, for juxtaposing the Volga layer of place-names and the cultural layer of the Eneolithic with asbestos- and organic-tempered ceramics of the so-called "Classic" type in Karelia. Some Russian archaeologists suggested that the Eneolithic culture of the Volosovo (Halikov 1969: 170–187; also see Bader 1972; Tretjakov 1966) or Garino ("Turbino") type (Pankrušev 1975: 201–206) had spread from the Middle Volga or Kama regions to NW Russia. The reasoning for such migrations is invalid without descriptions of the spatio-temporal changes within the Volosovo-Garino area. I share the opposite view that supports the East-Baltic origin of this culture (Krajnov 1981: 5–20; Kosmenko 1993: 195; Carpelan & Parpola 2001: 88), because in the western regions this layer contains amber and stone artefacts of East-Baltic types. Further

arguments are the existence of similar types of pit-houses, some epineolithic elements in pottery design, and several early C14 dates (ca. 4700–4400 BP) (Kosmenko 2004). Some linguists have supposed and tried to distinguish the "Palaeo-European" loans of unknown origins in Sámi languages and toponymy (Aikio 2004; Saarikivi 2006b: 170–171).

Hence we do not compare the Volga layer with the Eneolithic culture. However, I can correlate it with the Bronze Age Net Ware culture. In southern Karelia, it is C14-dated between ca. 3600–2260 BP (Kosmenko 1996; 2004).

Initially the Net Ware culture formed on the basis of three local cultures in the Upper Volga region (Pit-Comb ceramics, Pozdnjakovo, Čirkovo). These components are the most explicit at the Upper Onega River (Manjuhin 2002: 66–72). In SE Karelia they are less explicit, and they gradually become indistinguishable in western and northern Karelia (Kosmenko 1993: 77–87). Besides, there is no visible substrate Eneolithic component in the Net Ware of Karelia. It appears only in northern and western Fennoscandia, mostly as asbestos and organic temper in ceramics and as some elements in pottery shapes and design. The origins and spatial dynamics of Net Ware culture and Volga toponymy coincide in general, i.e., they are synchronous and may belong to the same population.

Conclusion

In outline the following picture is shaped:

The spatial dynamics of Sámi toponymy and the western cultures of the Anan'ino layer of the Iron Age have generally similar regularities. They mark the specific features which gradually increase to the western and northern periphery of the areas. Some local modifications of the stylistic elements of eastern origin appear in the mixed western cultures of this layer, i.e., in eastern Fennoscandia and the neighboring regions. Their number increases westwards. In northern Fennoscandia, only modified substrate cultural elements prevail, though.

The most specific Sámi languages have formed in the northern part of the area. But from the perspective of culture and language drifts, the SE part of the fuzzy-edged area of Sámi place-names could be within the zone of the initial forming of Sámi ethno-linguistic groups. The SE Sámi were initially close to the Finno-Ugrians of the Middle Volga region before the cultural and economic divergence began to grow and increase with time. The differences in the culture and language of S and N Sámi formed and increased in the Iron Age.

To all appearances, the Sámi were initially not a homogeneous people in the sense of their origin. On the contrary, the peculiarities of substrate components in different regions catch the eye. This idea should be examined further by means of the detailed description of components in culture and toponymy and the analysis of their spatio-temporal dynamics within the area of ancient Sámi speakers.

Endnote

The "western" theory (e.g. Šumkin 1990 and Nuñez 1998, etc. in Itämerensuomi – euroopalainen maa 1997; RPNE 1998) was based mostly on the ancient West-European racial features of the present northern Sámi population. It cannot be extended without special reasons to the origins of Sámi language and culture. The "eastern" theory was grounded on the assumption of pioneer Sámi migration from NE Europe in the Early Mesolithic, but this background is unproved (Pankrušev 1977, I).

The variants of the "southern" theory do not explain how and when the "eastern" traits appear in the present Sámi / Baltic-Finnish race and languages (e.g. Moora 1958; Meinander 1973; Carpelan & Parpola 2001, etc.).

Some archaeologists accepted the conclusion drawn by anthropologists about the mixed origins of Finno-Ugrian peoples. They described the Sámi origin as the process of local and alien cultures merging in the Iron Age (Kosmenko 1993; 2006; Manjuhin 2002). For the comprehensive critical analysis of the primordial (evolutionary) approach to the ethnic identity and the culture-historical approach in archaeology, see Jones 1997: 65–72.

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