# "Lapps" and "Lapp" objects in northern and western Karelia

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#### **Abstract**

This paper deals with the essential and intricate problem of the term Lapps in Russian Karelia. Many researchers from Russia are inclined to think that the term is also applicable to ancient monuments. Thus the term Lapp antiquities would be relevant. The author states that there is no clear archaeological evidence to support this opinion. On the contrary, the existence of connections between sources of Sámi settlement in Karelia and archaeological sites still remains to be proven in the future.

# Keywords:

Lapps, *lop* (*lopar*), Karelians, stone constructions, pits, dwellings, ethnicity.

## "Lapps" in Karelia: written sources

Every researcher working with Iron Age and early medieval materials in Karelia faces the so-called "Lapp question". There are different opinions about the time when Lapps lived in Karelia, as well as about their monuments that have remained in this area.

Lop (Lapps) mentioned in written sources of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries are usually identified with the Sámi. The same holds true for artefacts of "pre-Novgorodian period" in Karelia, in the

case that they are found in connection with "Lapp antiquities". These assumptions are based on the idea that the terms Sámi and Lapps are equivalent and that an earlier "lopar race" inhabited a wide area from the Barents Sea to the Baltic Sea. The eastern border of Sámi settlements would run towards the Severnaja Dvina River and the Mezen River (Carpelan 1979; 1982: 47; Kuznecov 1990: 21–23; Lukjančenko 1983: 88, 91; 1990: 211; Žukov et al. 1999: 4). The period from the middle of the last millennium BC to ca. 1000 AD is supposed to be "Sámi" in Karelia (Arheologija Karelii 1996: 379).

Many researchers point to the fact that the main difficulties are linked to the methods of working with sources: written, linguistic, archaeological, and anthropological. Paleolinguistic data does not have any clear chronological attribution and therefore cannot be considered seriously. One cannot conclude from the wide-spread of the toponym *lop* that the Sámi inhabited large areas in old times. The conclusion that Sámi toponymy does exist in the Leningrad and Vologda regions of the Russian Federation arouses curiosity.

Archaeologists from Finland also note that the southern border of the area of "Sámi" toponymy does not coincide with real archaeological finds that may be connected with the "late Sámi Iron Age". Such artefacts are known in northern Fennoscandia only (Carpelan 1979: 143–144).

As far as the possible existence of "Sámi" monuments in southern and central Finland is considered, we can merely make suppositions. Ideas concerning trade in the past and stages of "a mixture of newcomers and the indigenous population" are no more than hypotheses, because there is no archaeological evidence.

Since the time of D.V. Bubrih, it has been traditionally believed that the Sámi past is part of the development of the origins of peoples who are now living in Karelia. However, no concrete anthropological material on the mixing of the Karelians and the Sámi is found there. The "northernmost" cranial "Karelian" series is distinguished by a more "conservative" complex of features than the "Lapp" one (Hartanovič 1991; 2002: 62). In order to find "traces of paleo-European population" (in earlier terminology: "Finno-Ugric population"), the phrase "according to archaeological materials..." is frequently used. But archaeological finds are dated by comparative chronology, and in many cases their ethnic ascription to this period has not been strongly proven. There is no category of "Sámi" artefacts within the borders of the region. We cannot equate an ethnic group with an archaeological culture.

There are very few pieces of written evidence, and even they are contradictory. The term "lop" mentioned in documents from the 15<sup>th</sup> century applicable to Karelia should be understood as a geographical concept without ethnic meaning. Western Karelia in the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries was inhabited by a settled population of "lop" who differed from their neighbours, the peasants, in skills and type of settlements. Little is known to support the idea that "Lapps" in Karelia would be equal to "forest Sámi". In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the opinion could be found in Russian scientific literature that *tšud* is equivalent to 'prehistoric' and *lop* would mean 'northern' or 'northern man'. That is why these terms should not be

linked with concrete ethnic groups (Lihačev 1887: 170).

R.B. Müller thought that the terms *lop*, *lopjane* are not clear in 16<sup>th</sup>-century documents. In her opinion, these words meant all inhabitants, mainly the Karelians, who lived in the Karelian Pomor'e and Lopskie pogosts (Agrarnaja istorija 1978: 82). The terms *koreljanin*, *tšudin*, *lopar* most probably have a geographical, not ethnic meaning. Some scholars agree with this opinion (Agapitov & Loginov 1992: 63; Paranin 1990: 63–65; Šumkin 1990: 122–123).

In his famous daily records, *Podyennye zapiski* G.R. Deržavin noted that the Karelian population from the northern part of the Povenetsky uezd of the Oloneckaja province was similar to their neighbours, Russians, and *olontšane*, in language, clothes, and way of life. At the same time, Deržavin always called them *lopljan* (Epštein 1987: 12–119).

During his visit to Pjaozero Lake in 1837 E. Lönnrot wrote:

"dwellers of villages located along the southern shore of the lake use the name *lopari* for all people who live on the northern shore, although the same Finns live on both shores. Beyond the villages of Ruva and Tumča, the northernmost Finnish (Karelian) settlements in Russia, is Kotalamppi (*lop* living in *vezha*), but it does not mean that only *lopari* live in the *vezha* there" (translation: Julia Kozhevnikova 2007; revised by Sarianna Silvonen).

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dwellers of central Karelia

"called themselves *lappalažet* in Karelian and *karely* (Karelians) in Russian" (Konka 1980: 4).

The Russian population often used the term *lopar*, meaning the indigenous peoples of Karelia and the Kola Peninsula. For example, *nency* who lived by the Mezen river and on the Kanin Peninsula were called by this name as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lukjančenko 1983: 90).

Today we cannot answer the question of the ethnicity of the population that inhabited the area of current Russian Karelia before the active migration of the Karelians from the Karelian Isthmus towards the north in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nevertheless, it is possible to agree with the idea that the *lop* mentioned in chronicles would be an "original historical-ethnic phenomenon on the European map of the Middle Ages" (Ovsjannikov 1985: 88).

# Lapp antiquities in Russian Karelia: pits and stone stoves

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Finnish scholar-travellers who often visited Russian Karelia wrote that the northern Karelians spoke of clearly visible "lopar stoves" and "lopar pits", and they used the concept "lopar antiquities" (Juvelius 1889; Pääkkönen 1898). "Stoves" might have belonged to dwelling remains and "pits" may have been remnants of dwellings, hunting traps, or some household constructions. These were found by Finnish ethnographers by a few lakes along their travel routes (e.g. in Kiiti, Kimas, Kontokki, Kostomukškoe, Kento, Kojvas, Kujto).

The most numerous category of "lopar antiquities" in Russian Karelia were "lopar stone stoves". Juvelius (1889: 38) describes them as follows:

"stoves are located along the shores of lakes, often they are covered with ground and moss, and big trees grow on them. Sometimes remnants of a rectangular log structure with a stone stove in the corner can be seen, but mostly it has disappeared without a trace. Sometimes smallish pits can be found close to a stove, probably used as places for keeping food." (translation: Julia Koževnikova 2007, revised by Sarianna Silvonen).

It is impossible to say whether all the stone structures mentioned in the sources really were remnants of stone stoves. Single groups of "boulder cairns" consisting of one or two structures are known by the Keret and Kem rivers (Sopossalmi, Belyj Porog), by the Alajärvi and Tungudskoe lakes, etc. Usually they stand close to the water's edge, at the point where rivers run from lakes, or on capes (Šahnovič 2005: 260–276). Stone "cairns" may also provide evidence of iron-working, and other stone remnants of small iron furnaces may have survived, too.

In general it is difficult to speak about the functions of constructions without their archaeological excavation. Often they are the remnants of a foundation of wooden structures ("navigation", "border marks", crosses etc):

"On the ground stands the old wooden cross surrounded by boulders from below [...] and hung with rags of different colours [...]. The Karelians are very religious, and the crosses can be seen everywhere along roads. The distances between settlements are great here, 30–50 versts and more, nobody has measured them exactly. Instead of verst-posts there are crosses that mark the half-way and quarter-way points. Every traveller tries to stop at a cross and leave a rag or a stone as a memento" (Olenev 1917: 72).

"Crosses are usually erected at places where a road turns or fishing is good" (Kamenev 1910: 15).

The ethnographers from Finland cited the above idea that "lopar pits" were more widespread features than "stone stoves". "Lopar" depressions could be divided into two groups: large and deep ones

"1,5-3 cubits deep, rectangular, 4-10 cubits long on each side, ... evidently it has been a dwelling" (Juvelius 1889: 40, 42),

and shallow oval "deer pits".

One of the pits from the first group described by S. Juvelius was found and documented by the expedition of the Karelian State Regional Museum on Kento Lake in the Kalevalskij district in 2003. It is located at the Kento XX site and has a rectangular shape and flat bottom and is

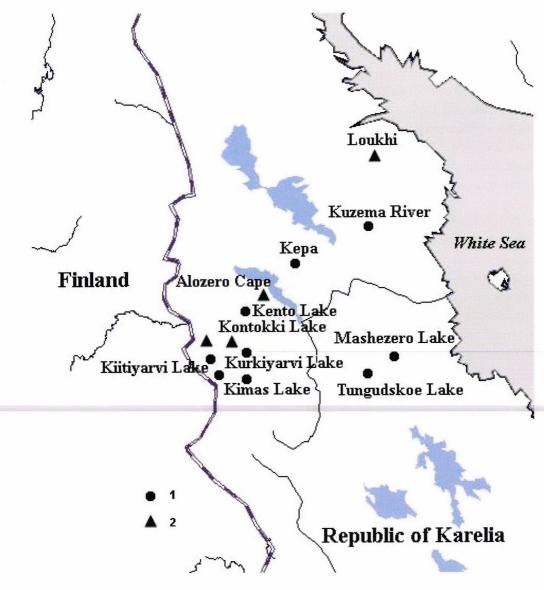


Fig. 1. "Late" archaeological sites in Northern and Western Karelia. 1 (circles) – hunting pits 2 (triangles) – settlements

1.3 m deep. Its external outline is 6 m x 7.5 m and internal 4 m x 5 m respectively. Close to this "lopar pit" there are two fairly low oval depressions (2.5 m x 2 m x 0.4 m) and remnants of a "stone stove". It is possible that these structures are not concurrent.

I have found a corresponding "lopar pit" only on the northern shore of Pizanec Lake in the Muezerskij district. A "funnel-shaped" depression analogous to the "pit" in question was found and documented at the Early Iron Age settlement of Berezovo XII in the Belomorskij

district (Žul'nikov 2003: 110). These are probably "iceboxes" for keeping food. However, some such depressions may be supposed to be remnants of "late" dwellings, for example, a "*lopar* pit" on an island near the village of Boknavolok (Kostomukškij district) described by Juvelius and located at the Eneolithic site of Lietesuari II (Žul'nikov 2003: 111).

The second type of features, "deer pits", which are often seen in Fennoscandia, are the remnants of systems of traps for passive elk and reindeer hunting. The roundish depressions are 3 m in diameter and 0.5–0.6 m deep. They are located either one by one, in groups of two or three pits or as systems of up to 25 pits along narrow corridors on sandy islands, capes, and coastal terraces.

The first Russian archaeologist who paid attention to "hunting pits" in Western Karelia was N.N. Gurina. In the beginning of the 1950s, she documented three depressions close to the site of Nogeruksa I by the Kimas Lake (Gurina 1961: 180). For a long time their function was not clear. They were supposed to be Stone Age house depressions.

Four objects of this type have been excavated in Karelia: Tunguda XXIV, XXV, and XXIX (Šahnovič 1993: 60–67).

In total, only 14 sites of this type are known in Karelia: two systems of pits in central Karelia (Lake Tungudskoe, Lake Mašozero), a few in western Karelia (the lakes Kurkijärvi, Kiitijärvi, Kento, Kimas, Limsamo, and Repojärvi), in the western White Sea region (River Kuzema), and in the north-western Ladoga Lake region (Lake Jänisjärvi). In addition, some oval-shaped depressions located close to house constructions of large settlements in central Karelia and the western Ladoga Lake region are likely to have been special places for keeping food (Žul'nikov 1999: 38). The small number of documented hunting

pits in Karelia is a direct consequence of the lack of archaeological work in potential areas.

In Finland, scholars date hunting pit systems to the 9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries and categorize them as Sámi antiquities. However, there is no concrete evidence that these objects actually belonged to the Lapps in either northern Finland or Karelia. In Fennoscandia, pit-traps date from the late Mesolithic period to the late Middle Ages. The most ancient known data is from the bottom of the pit in the Puolanka Hautola site, northern Finland (7310±100 BP, Hel-4044, Korteniemi & Suominen 1998: 60).

When the pits were built remains an open question, and the ethnicity of the author describing the sites may affect the interpretation. As early as 140 years ago, local legends that linked these constructions with the "Lapps" were criticized (Juvelius 1889: 40). In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they had an "old" appearance and the northern Karelians did not know anything about their builders.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, researchers noted that *lopar* hearths were always located in the central part of dwellings. Stone stoves are larger than hearths and may be connected with the Karelian tradition. Systems of "deer pits" have been forgotten since large-scale deer breeding began to develop in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

It is interesting to note that according to Juvelius, the Karelians did not know any places of "lopar burials or sanctuaries". The Finnish scholar himself thought that a stone structure on the cape of Akkoniemi near the channel between Lake Pisto and Lake Ohta was probably a "lopar seid" (Juvelius 1889: 42). Two seids ("boulders on legs") have been found on the rocks to the north of the village of Pjaozerskij at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is also a seid on the Nuorunen mountain (Louhskij district) and about 60 seids on the Kivakka mountain (Paanajärvi National Park in Louhskij district).

## Archaeological investigations of "late" Lapp / Karelian sites in northern and western Karelia

In 1993-2006, the archaeological expedition of the Karelian State Regional Museum carried out an inventory of "lopar antiquities" on a few lakes within a radius of 50-70 km from the town of Kostomukša. Most of the discovered features date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to modern times. In northern and western Karelia, only four "late" features were investigated. In 1999, A.M. Spiridonov studied a group of stone structures on the north-eastern shore of the Kiitijärvi lake. 20 km to the west of Kostomukša. This "burial complex Kamalahti" is located 1 km from the edge of the water on the south-western slope of a hill. The total area of the site is up to 5000 m<sup>2</sup> (ca. 100 m x 50 m). The group consists of not less than 30 piles. One pile (0.4 m-0.6 m high, 3.6 m x 2.8 m in area) was excavated. No artefacts were found. The leader of the expedition is not sure about the age, functions, and cultural attribution of the feature (Gorkovec 2003: 318-321).

#### Kontokki V

In 2003, the "late" depression at the Mesolithic site of Kontokki V was investigated by the Northern Karelian Archaeological Expedition of the Karelian State Regional Museum. The depression is rectangular (5 m x 7 m) and 0.4 m deep. The long side is parallel to the shore, which is located at a distance of 20 m. The "entrance" could be seen on the surface already before the beginning of excavations. The excavation area (59 m²) covered the whole of the house depression, as well as a zone around it. In the centre of the depression, there were traces of a modern campfire, probably from the 1970s. There were no stones there. After the removal

of the moss, stripes of wooden dust (0.5 m–0.6 m wide and 0.05 m thick) were exposed. They marked "walls" and right angles of the structure. The "path", which is 0.5 m wide, runs towards the inclined "entrance". The "bottom" was flat, without traces of artificial constructions. There are no finds.

Concluding from the observations, the building technique of the house at Kontokki V can be described as follows: first, a natural depression on the shore was deepened (ca. 0.6 m). Logs for walls were laid around the perimeter of the artificial rectangular depression (5 m x 4 m). The entrance towards the lake was in the centre of the southern wall. There was no evidence of earth or turf on the exterior of the walls or on the roof.

There was a household pit 2 m to the west of the entrance and a fireplace 10 meters away, closer to the lakeshore. The absence of a "stone-stove" or other fireplace inside the house is probably due to the function of the house as a summer dwelling. In comparison to other known pit-houses, it is of modest size, and the wooden walls were a light construction leaning on a frame.

Similar dwellings are known from some Sámi settlements of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Finnish, Swedish, and Russian Lapland. In these cases there was a fireplace inside the house. According to ethnographic data from northern Karelia in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Karelians stayed in similar houses (without a fireplace) during the summer while making charcoal and resin.

#### Tunguda

On the northern shore of Lake Tungudskoe (Belomorskij district, Republic of Karelia), altogether four depressions have been excavated by P. Pesonen in 1988 and by M. Šahnovič in 1990. These belong to the same hunting system consisting of 21 pits at the Mesolithic sites of Tunguda XXIV, XXV, and XXIX (Šahnovič 1993: 60–67). The investigated oval pits (4 m x 4 x m x 1.5 m) have vertical walls and a pot-shaped bottom. There were no finds. In one case, traces of an upper covering of a trap were discovered.

Remnants of some kind of unusual construction were found in a depression at the Tunguda XXV site. It may be reconstructed as follows: the vertical walls and the flat bottom of a round pit (3.4 m in diameter and 1.6 m deep) were covered by birch bark. There was a rectangular wooden box  $(1.85 \text{ m} \times 0.8 \text{ m} \times 0.5 \text{ m})$  on the bottom. The content - whatever it was - had been wrapped in bark. On top of the box there was a cupola-shaped "vault" made of birch bark. Over the pit there was a cone of poles (Šahnovič 1993: 63-65). The structure was interpreted as a burial. A corresponding case is the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>century burial at Kuzomen II on the south coast of the Kola Peninsula (Gurina 1981: 66-69). Another possibility is that the construction is an example of how people used a previous hunting pit as a food storage site.

#### Alozero

The cemetery of Alozero is located on the northern shore of Juljajärvi, 18 km to the south of the village of Kalevala. It is 750 m<sup>2</sup> in area (50 m x 15 m). This village cemetery was discovered by the ethnographical expedition of the Kainuu Museum (Finland) in 1994. The Karelian State Regional Museum and the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) have

conducted excavations there in 1997 and 2005. In the excavated area of 48 m<sup>2</sup>, in total 39 Orthodox burials were investigated. The finds – crosses and fragments of ceramic vessels – allow us to date these graves between the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We can say that the cemetery belonged to a rural community of the northern Karelian ethnic group without any "Lapp" features. The latter conclusion is based on cranial materials (Šahnovič & Hartanovič 2002: 102–111)

#### Louhi I

In 2000, the archaeological expedition of the Karelian State Regional Museum discovered and documented the Louhi I settlement (Lake Maloe Panovo), which lies 2.5 km to the southwest of the village of Louhi. The remnants of a frame and three pit-houses had been built on the flat sandy shore there. The outlines of all the pit-houses were rectangular (4 m x 5 m x 0.6 m). Inside the pit-houses there are no "stone stoves". Closer to the shore, the traces of a building of modest size (4 m x 5 m) were found. It had a well-preserved stove (3.5 m x 2 m x 0.5 m) made of big, flat, raw stones. To the west of the houses there were four deep pits (2 m-2,5 m in diameter). This monument was interpreted as a summer settlement of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. No analogies for this monument are known in Karelia. The stove bears some similarity to the Sámi "stone stoves" in Russian Lapland in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### Conclusions

In Karelia, there is no data that would allow identification of the "lop" ("Lapp") material remains of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries as belonging to the Sámi. The "lopar antiquities" of western and northern Karelia, which were described in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during ethno-

graphical expeditions and which in those days were linked with local traditions, may have belonged to the Karelians of the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Louhi I settlement and the dwelling at the Kontokki V site may be preliminarily considered as features with certain similarities with Sámi dwellings in Lapland. But a clearer answer to the question of the ethnic attribution of the "Lapp" structures should be given only after archaeological excavations.

Archaeological and anthropological materials do not prove the hypotheses about a widescale Sámi colonization of Karelia or active participation of the Sámi in the genesis of the Karelians in the Middle Ages.

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