

The Saami Drums and the Religious Encounter in the 17th and 18th Centuries

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In one Lule Saami tradition the term used for the pre Christian period is SaaL *goabdesájgge*¹ "drum-time", while the period of religious encounter and confrontation is referred to as "the time when one had to hide the drums" (ULMA Gruvvisare). A Saami awareness of the central role the drums played in indigenous Saami religion thus lived on long after their use had ceased. Most of the Saami oral traditions about drums, however, only refer to someone who had seen or heard about a drum and give little information about how drums were used or how the drum figures were interpreted (Hallström 1910b; Demant Hatt 1928). For the historian of religions, therefore, the traditions about drums are of much less value than, for example, those about sacrifice (cf Mebius 1972). When the drums are to be discussed, it is the written source material from the 17th and 18th centuries that we must use.

Several works on Saami religion have dealt with the drums (Reuter-skiöld 1912, 10 f, 115 ff, Itkonen 1946, 121 ff, Karsten 1955, 68 ff, Mebius 1968, 13; Bäckman 1975, 38 ff, Lundmark 1982, 8), but their value as sources is debatable. As silent, non-written sources they are impossible to interpret and use without help from the written source material. Depending on how the written sources are valued, what analogies are used etc, the significance of the drums and drum figures in studies of Saami religion varies. Both individual drums and drum types have been dealt with,² as well as single motifs and drum figures.³ My purpose here, however, is to discuss the essential difficulties and

¹ Saami words are written in accordance with the present literary languages.

² See, apart from Manker 1950, 137 ff and the literature referred to there, the more recent interpretations of the South Saami drum type (Nootboom 1961; Bergsland 1956-78, 456 f, Sommarström 1985; Sommarström 1987) and drums No 45 (Lundmark 1983) and No 53 Pentikäinen 1987.

³ Different motives are discussed in Manker 1950, 15 ff. More recent examples are

prerequisites in using the drums and the drum figures as sources. In order to do this, it is necessary first to outline the confrontation of the Saamis and the authorities over the drums, and how the Saamis defended their use of them.

1 The drums as symbols of Saami resistance

From the end of the 17th to the middle of the 18th century much of the confrontation between indigenous Saami religion and Christianity was focused on the drums. To be sure, the Saamis of both Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland had been christianized for decades. They were baptized, married and buried according to Christian ritual. Many of them met the clergyman only once or perhaps twice a year in connection with the markets, it is true, but they were nevertheless integrated into the ecclesiastical organisation. Quite a few Saamis used both drums and the old sacrificial sites, however, and this state of things was discovered on various occasions during the decades around 1700. The main problem for the Church authorities turned out to be that of making the Saamis abandon their indigenous religious customs, not making them believe in, or at least learn to repeat Christian dogmas by rote, or getting them to perform certain rites in the churches. From the end of the 17th century, an intense period of propaganda and coercion began to make the Saamis abandon these non-Christian elements in their religion. Special attention was accordingly paid to the drums.

The role of the drums as symbols of Saami resistance is well attested in the sources from the 17th and 18th centuries. For the Saamis, the drums represented their threatened culture, the resistance against the Christian claim to exclusiveness, and a striving to preserve traditional values — i.e. “the good” that had to be saved. For the Church authorities, on the other hand, the drums symbolized the explicit nucleus of the elusive Saami “paganism” — i.e. “the evil” that had to be annihilated.

To give an idea of this confrontation it will be sufficient to provide illustrations from court records. These records are important, as it is through them we have access to Saami attitudes towards, and interpretations of, this religious encounter.

studies on the skær motif (Manker 1952; Lid 1956) the “realm of the dead” motif (Strömbäck 1956; Ränk 1981, 14 ff), sun figures (Sommarström 1967; Lundmark 1982, 39 ff), the equestrian motif (Mebius 1968, 116 ff, Ränk 1981, 28 ff) and moon figures (Lundmark 1982, 71 ff).

In the winter of 1671 many "sorcerers were revealed" in Kemi *lappmark*⁴ (northern Finland) They were forced to hand over their drums, which are reported to have been so big and wide that they could not be removed, but had to be burned A Saami, who in the records is called Aikie Aikiesson, was sentenced to death, but he died before he was executed Hence, the authorities could not use the execution as the warning they had planned (Tornæus 1772, 22; Handlingar 1910, 385)⁵ Two decades later, however, they would have their opportunity, although in another region

If one is to believe the records preserved, it was the Pite Saamis who were most explicit in their defence At the sessions in Arjeplog in February 1682 the Saamis protested They refused to obey exhortations to abandon the customs of their forefathers, and declared that — in future — they also would summon their gods (ULMA Trolldomsrannsakingar, 143 f)⁶ This type of argumentation was by no means uncommon, although only in exceptional cases was it as outspoken as this Very occasionally it even happened that a drum was protected by force: when the clergyman, Petrus Noræus, in Silbojokk (also in Pite *lappmark*) deprived a Saami of his drum, he was attacked on his way and the drum was recovered (Handlingar 1910, 339 ff)

During the second half of the 1680's, the hunt for drums was intensified in Sweden-Finland The penalties for possession and use were reinforced, and the Saamis were exhorted to hand in the drums to the district courts⁷ Furthermore, the authorities searched for a scapegoat as a warning to others; in the "Relation om Lapmarkernes Gudztjänst" [Account of worship in the *lappmarks*] of 1686 the Härnösand consistory wrote: "If someone is found to have trafficked with such gross idolatry as to merit capital punishment, it would be meet that such a person were presented and there *in loco* suffered his punishment as a warning to others, which would much ease the work, since the Lapps in themselves are trembling and fearful" (Handlingar 1910, 371)

At one District Court, "an old, good-tempered man" explained in

⁴ Swe *lappmark* denoted an administrative district within the confines of Sweden-Finland inhabited by Saamis (Lapps). In the 17th century the *lappmarks* were (from the south) Ume, Pite, Lule, Torne and Kemi

⁵ Record from the District Court of Kemi *lappmark* 8 March 1671

⁶ Record from the District Court in Arjeplog 7 Feb, 1682 Cited in Edsman 1985, 129 f

⁷ As means of evading the decree, there is evidence at least in Jokkmokk that newly made drums were handed over to the authorities, while the old inherited ones were kept ULMA, Trolldomsrannsakingar, 414

court that the Saamis used the drum “in the simple belief and opinion thereby to obtain good fortune or otherwise learn whether some good or evil fortune is approaching them, before they betake themselves to the woods in order to catch animals or otherwise practise their fishing []” (Bergman 1891, 222 ff)⁸ The same ideas reappear in Saami arguments in other places, too. In Jukkasjärvi it was said that they “to this day used drums or kábdes [SaaL *goabdes*, SaaN *goavddis* ‘drum’] in simple mindedness only, after the ancient custom of their forefathers, with the purpose of gaining good fortune”, and in Jokkmokk that they had “hitherto used drums, with which they however said that they had not done anything evil, but merely wished to see beforehand what evil or good would befall them, likewise how it would fare with their forest hunting and fishing and also with their livestock” Only in the easternmost Kemi *lappmark* were the drums no longer in use, because of the zealous activity of the clergyman, Gabriel Tuderus, in the first half of the 1670’s (Bergman 1891, 224 ff)⁹

An argument sometimes used was that the drums only functioned as a type of compass, and therefore should be allowed. Olof Sjulsson, county sheriff from the *lappby*¹⁰ of Vapsten, “[] was bold enough to make an excuse for the Lapps, that they did not mean much with their drums, but that these were like a compass for them in the wild woods” He wrote a petition in 1688 and pleaded for the right of the Saamis to use the drums. His petition provoked quite a number of responses, the authors of which wondered how a person with several years of varied schooling could have such “wicked” views (Steuchius 1983, 82; Handlingar 1910, 343 ff). The Saami arguments on behalf of legalizing the use of the drums were received with astonishment and dismay — the lack of understanding for Saami views was total¹¹

⁸ Record from the District Court in Lycksele 11 Jan, 1687

⁹ Record from District Courts in Jokkmokk 27–28 Jan, 1687, Jukkasjärvi 31 Jan, 1687 and Sodankylä 4 March, 1687; the Jukkasjärvi record also in Handlingar 1910, 388

¹⁰ Swe *lappby* was the official designation of a group of Saamis with their lands. The division probably had its roots in the indigenous Saami *siida* organization.

¹¹ Apprehension over the drum among the clergy was at that time rather uniform. It was called “the bible of the devil” (Kildahl 1910, 89), “instrument and tool of Satan” (Forbus 1910, 87), or “their devilish instrument []” (Randulf 1903, 29). Later, there are also examples of a more understanding attitude. When the outspoken Lule Saami, Anders Ersson Snadda, in the 1740’s tried to explain what negative consequences the religious encounter had had in his region, he was in the favourable position of being able to speak to the broad-minded Per Högström. Snadda explained to Högström that his father “used the drum (kobdas [SaaL

In 1688 the county governor and the bishop (Swe *superintendent*) made a journey of inspection through the *lappmarks*. The Saamis were summoned and threatened with "temporal and eternal punishment" if they did not hand over their drums and "idols". Persons who delivered their drums "confessed that they had been seduced by their forefathers, not knowing anything but that it was permissible to use such drums"; those who were denounced but denied possession were brought before the district court sessions. Several were sentenced to imprisonment and flogging, but no one to death (Kruse & Steuchius 1910, 330 ff). One of the Saamis who handed over a drum in this year was the Pite Saami, Lars Nilsson. When he later lost his son, he used a drum in a futile effort at bringing him back to life¹². He was prosecuted, but at the district court sessions he explained outright that he would "observe and use the custom of his forefathers, in spite of what higher or lower authority in this case would now or in the future prohibit him from doing". He was sentenced to death, the judgement was ratified by the court of appeal, and he was thus decapitated and burnt at the stake "together with the tree idols he had used and the divination drum and the tools belonging to it". The execution was held in the presence of his kinsmen, who had been summoned to attend. Thus Lars Nilsson died a martyr to his religion. The authorities had obtained the example they wanted, and the local clergyman (the above mentioned P. Noræus) wrote afterwards that he hoped it should "be a notable force and warning for other idolaters and such sinners" (Bergman 1891, 230 f). To the best of my knowledge, Lars Nilsson was the only Saami ever executed on religious grounds.

goabdes]), and was well; he himself had now put it aside, but found himself not understanding anything else, but soon having to walk before others' doors [] He feared that [his *lappby*] Kaitom would soon be waste, if people continued to discard the old customs" (Högström 1774, 34 f.). Högström's explicit opinion was that "godlessness [i.e. the opinions of atheists and deists] is for our race infinitely more harmful than superstition [to which he reckoned Saami religion] itself" (Högström 1990, 66). He thus defended the Saamis against much of the prejudice to which they were exposed.

¹² Cf. Randulf's story about the Saami Johannes from the parish of Ranen in Norway, who as late as 1718 was saved by his father with the help of a drum. In this case, the father had to give his life for the son before the latter recovered. Another difference from Arjeplog was that in Ranen the drum was handled by a brother-in-law. Even though the father was a great "Noyde" [SaaS *nåejtie*], it was according to his belief not possible to ask the drum himself when it was his own son who was ill. Randulf 1903, 19 ff.

in Sweden-Finland¹³

After the trials in 1688 and the following years, very little attention was paid for some decades to the christianization of the Saamis. The authorities thought that the intense campaign had brought an end to the use of the drums. The Saamis were now considered to be good Christians. Not until the Norwegian missionary, Thomas von Westen, revealed the truth of the matter in his letter to the Swedish clergy in 1723, and a schoolboy at a court in Lycksele in the same year reported a Saami who had used the drum,¹⁴ did the church authorities pay renewed attention to the religious situation of the Saamis. Several Saamis were denounced in Lycksele in 1723 and 1724. They justified their use of the drums to find out about their hunting, their journeys, or their fishing. Since these persons had been so young — some of them not even born — during the time of the inquiry of 1688, they were sentenced to relatively mild punishments (fines or — for lack of means — flogging, and of course the surrender of the drums). Both in 1723 and in 1724 official letters were sent to the clergy in the *lappmarks*, requesting an intensified search for drums and persons using them (Reuterskiöld & Wiklund 1913, 130 ff)¹⁵ To return to the terms of the Lule Saami tradition mentioned in the introduction, “drum time”

¹³ This is a noteworthy state of affairs at a time when witch-trials were common, and a rabid Lutheran orthodoxy was the ideology of the authorities. The reasons might — as pointed out by Bill Widén — have been political (cf the contemporary idea of constitutional law that inhabitants in border districts should get milder treatment than those living in the core areas of a country), fear of Saami “witchcraft” and violence, or, due to the lack of contact between the clergy and the Saamis. Widén 1962, 164 f, Widén 1980, 268 f

¹⁴ Saamis who acted as informants and revealed persons who continued to adhere to the indigenous religion are naturally described positively in the ecclesiastical annals — those reported are scarcely likely to have had the same opinion. Caution increased. When Per Högström wrote his description of the *lappmarks* in the 1740's, he admitted that he had never seen any Saami drum, but his opinion was that it had not gone completely out of use “even though, because of the severe inquisitions which have been conducted in connection with it, they no longer use it, except clandestinely. Those who use it, do so in such silence, that scarcely even their own people get to know about it, as they know it is a matter of life and death, and that they could easily be reported by others who do not use them.” Högström, 1747, 203

¹⁵ In Norway the penalties for “idolatry” — the use of the drum was reckoned in this category — had been repealed through the intercession of Thomas von Westen. He believed that it was not possible to obtain the confidence of the Saamis in order to influence their religion if they were afraid of punishments. In Sweden, the dean of Nedertorneå, Henrik Forbus, petitioned unsuccessfully in 1727 for the penalties for “idolatry” to be repealed in Sweden too. Bergman 1891, 231 f

seems to have been modified to "the time when one had to hide the drums" at different points of time in the different *lappmarks*: in the 1670's in Kemí, about 1690 in Pite and in the 1720's in Ume. Later, the drums also had to be hidden from kinsmen — and women.

The above examples illustrate how interest was focused on the drums during this period of intense religious confrontation. The Saami arguments which have been preserved in the court records clearly show that the drums were used in an ecological and economic context. This is in accordance with Martin P:son Nilsson's interpretation of the drums as a "repetitorium of the practical life" (Nilsson 1916, 309), but contrary to the traditional view of them as mythological compendia. The statements by those who used the drums are the starting-points for any understanding of the role of the drums in Saami society. Other assumptions easily lead to speculations and unreliable interpretations.

2 The drum figures as source material

From the point of view of their source value the Saami drums might be compared with other religious icons. They may be said to stand somewhere between, say, the Scandinavian rock carvings of the Bronze Age and today's religious pictures of Australian aboriginals. There are no contemporary interpretations of the Scandinavian rock carvings and they are therefore either ignored (as impossible to interpret) or interpreted with the help of analogies from much later written sources, whereas it is possible to get an interpretation of an Australian stone arrangement or a painted *churunga* by asking the artist. Most drums are in this respect as silent as the rock-carvings from the Bronze Age, but some explanations and early interpretations of drum figures have been preserved. At least some of these have been made by the help of the artist and ought therefore to be reliable. Not all the drum figures then are "pictures without a commentary by the producer of the pictures", but in spite of this they can "lead the interpreter dreadfully astray" (Mebius 1968, 13).

If one compares the earliest description of figures on a Saami drum with the figures on the drums preserved from the 17th and 18th centuries, the differences are striking. The only figures on the drum described in *Historia Norvegiæ* from the end of the 12th century were animals (a whale and a reindeer) and means of conveyance (skies and a boat with oars), probably representing the helping spirits and facilities

the SaaN *noardi* used on his ecstatic journeys (*Historia Norvegiæ* 1880, 86; Nor transl in *Den eldste Noregs-historia* 1921, 17)

Most scholars believe — referring, amongst other things, to *Historia Norvegiæ* — that the original function of the drum was as a means of assistance when the *noardi* had to fall into ecstasy, while the use as a means of divination was secondary, owing to either Scandinavian or Christian influence (see for example Hultkrantz 1978, 53 f)¹⁶ Also the drum figures have been understood as Scandinavian loans, for example as imitations of rock-carvings (Bing 1922), the pictures on the Gallehus horns (Reuterskiöld 1928), runes (Agrell 1934) or the symbols of the zodiac (Sommarström 1987)¹⁷ To me, these connections seem anything but completely clear. It is no longer a matter of course to interpret elements in Saami culture as loans. The drum figures could as well be seen as a Saami innovation. The few figures on the drum described in *Historia Norvegiæ* are in sharp contrast to the rich worlds of figures on the drums preserved. My hypothesis is a proposal to perceive the drum figures as an internal Saami development, to see them as a consequence of the encounter with a religion making demands for exclusiveness, thus forcing reflection about their own religion together with a need to structure it. The cosmos was possible to grasp through its microcosmic representation (cf Wiklund 1913, 178) on the drumhead. Through the figures of “the others” on the drum, the alien and coercive world of the Christians also to some extent became possible to understand (cf fig 1).

2.1 Preparation

Against this background it is clear that using the drum figures as sources is both a difficult and delicate task. In order to interpret them it is necessary to clear away much earlier interpretative lumber. The first requisite is an “Entmythologisierung”, a clearing away of the mythologizing interpretations which see most of the drum figures as “different mythological characters from the Saami religion” (Steffensen

¹⁶ Contrary opinions are Steen’s idea about the divinatory use as original (Steen 1960, 3) and Emsheimer’s view that the drums were originally used for apotropaic rites (Emsheimer 1964, 31)

¹⁷ In some rare cases the Saami drum figures have been used to throw light upon phenomena among neighbouring nations. Cf for example Friis’ theory about Kalevala’s *Sampo* as a drum (Friis 1868; Friis 1871, 47 ff), or Kabell’s interpretation of the Old Scandinavian poems known as “shield poems” as descriptions of drums (Kabell 1980)

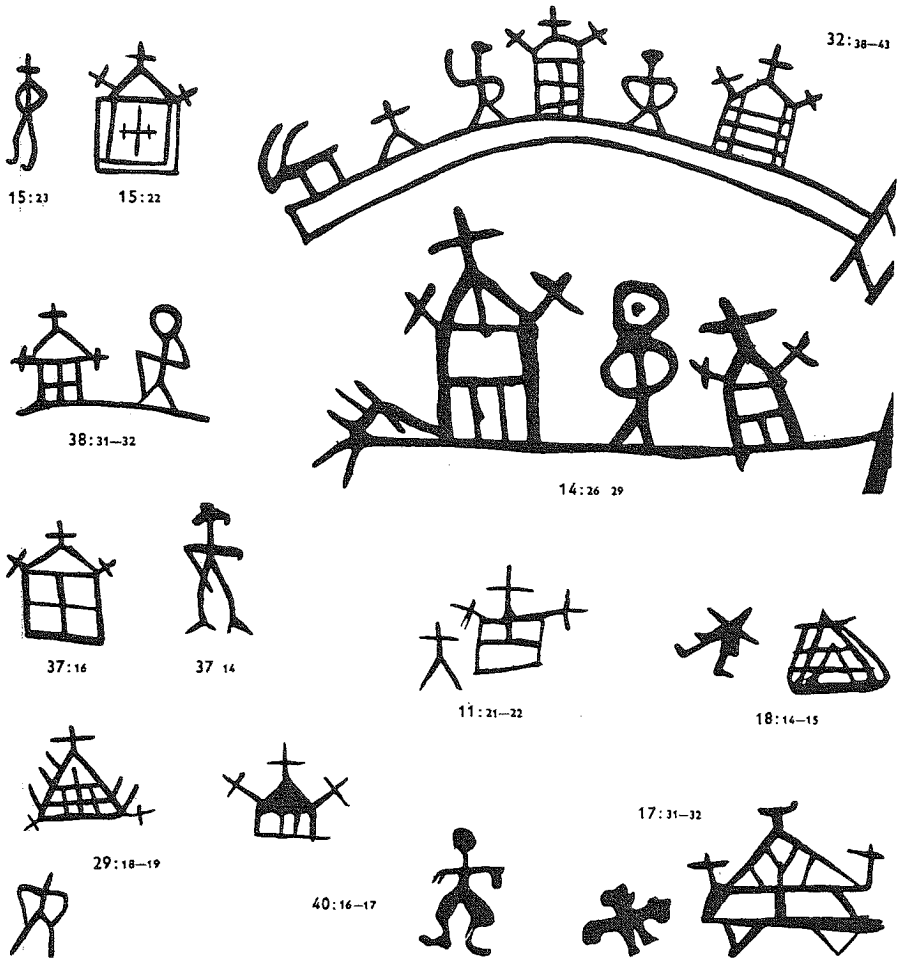


Fig 1 "The settlement or the church village with buildings, men, cattle etc , the figures are often placed along a line called *ristbalges* [SaaS *ristbaelkies*], Christian path" (Manker 1950, fig 34)

1985, 107) Instead of the 17th and 18th century explanations of figures as illustrating hunting, fishing and reindeer herding, Manker for example tries to find a more cultic or mythological meaning, and instead of figures of Christian phenomena he finds pre Christian Saami characters. The owner of drum No 30 (Fig 3) explained, for example, that figure No 5 represented "the sun if it will shine and it will be fair weather", while Manker interprets it as "probably the wind, Bieggolmai [SaaS *Bieggkálma*] or Bieggagalles [SaaS *Bieggkegallies*], who usually stands at this place". Figure No 12 is said by the owner to be a "ferry boat", but by Manker "the boat offering", No 17 is according to the owner a "'Finn' [Saami] in an 'ackja' [Saami sledge]", but according to Manker "the assumption is not unreasonable, that we are here witnessing the [] owner of the drum, on a major duty in the spirit world []". Drum figures that in the sources are said to represent Christian phenomena are often reinterpreted as figures from Saami mythology. On drum No 71 (Fig 2), figure No 7 is in Manker's view not a cathedral, but perhaps a reflex of the notion of *sáiva* (the world of the spirit helpers in Saami belief), No 9 is not St Anne, but the goddess *Máttaráhkká*, No. 10 not St Mary, but a counterpart to the goddess *Sáráhkká*, etc. Even though we are well aware of the fact that Saami religion at the time when the drums were collected was by no means uninfluenced by Christianity, many interpreters have tried to explain away the figures which do not represent Saami mythology. Both St Mary and St Anne (as well as many other Christian saints) were well known to the Saamis, as is shown by their representation on Saami calendars from the same time period (Granlund & Granlund 1973, 76 ff). The "Christian" figures have however been explained as political calculation or they have been dismissed as obviously incorrect. According to Ljungberg "the confusion of pagan and Christian pictures shows with clarity the magical character of the drums. In a living cultic use, such a form of syncretism does not occur" (Ljungberg 1947, 149). Reuterskiöld, for his part, asserts that it is no wonder "if one or other *náide* [SaaN *noaidi*] considered it safest to adopt the Christian god on his drums" (Reuterskiöld 1912, 11), whereas Nilsson believes that the drums illustrated a wonderful ability to mix pagan and Christian, to mask one's religion during inquiry (Nilsson 1916, 307). The reductionistic procedure of removing those elements in the sources considered to resemble — and consistently interpreted as being borrowed from — Scandinavian or Christian religion, in order to gain access to "the primordial Saami religion" is, in my opinion, not convincing.

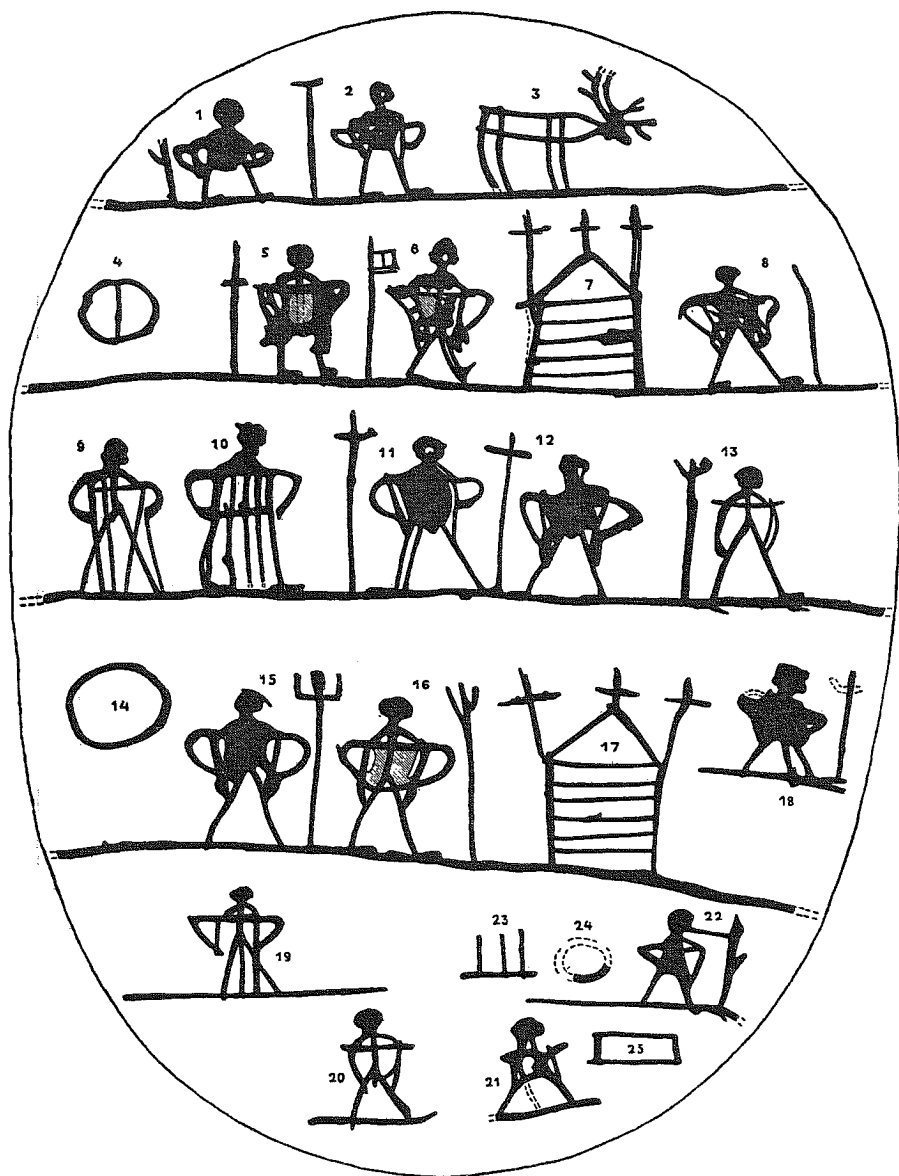


Fig 2

Fig 2 Comparison of the owner's own interpretation and a recent interpretation of drum No 71 (Manker 1950, fig 153) Explained by the owner Anders Poulsen in 1691 Abbreviations: AP = Anders Poulsen's explanation (according to Kildeskrifter 1903 68 ff) EM: = Ernst Manker's interpretation (Manker 1950, 430 ff)

1 AP [] ilmaris, it is storm and bad weather [], EM: the wind, Bieggolmai [SaaN *Bieggolmmái*] []. 2 AP [] diermes [SaaN *Dierpmis*], it is the thunder [], EM: the thunder, Tiermes [SaaN *Dierpmis*], with his hammer 3 AP: [] it is a wild reindeer [], EM whether the figure actually represents a wild reindeer, godde [SaaN *goddí*], or a tame male reindeer, sarva [SaaN *sarvuis*], is difficult to say Maybe it should be conceived as a sacrificial animal 4 AP: [] it is the sun [], EM: the sun Beve [SaaN *beawi*] 5 AP [] it is God's child [], EM: a correspondence to Radien pardne [SaaN **Ráddebárdni*], "the ruler's son", in Christian interpretation "God's son" 6 AP [] it is God the Father [], EM: a correspondence to Radien attje [SaaN **Ráddeáhčči*], "the ruler's father", in Christian interpretation "God the Father" 7 AP [] cathedral [], EM: the church of the Christians [] perhaps [] a reflex of the saivo [SaaN *sáiva*] concept 8 AP [] Engil [angel], it is God the Holy Spirit [], EM: [] a correspondence to the third person in the Radien-group, Radienakka [SaaN **Ráddeáhká*], in Christian interpretation, the Holy Spirit; a servant under Radien-attje (?). 9 AP [] St Anne [] Mary's sister [sic!], EM: a female divinity, one of the Akkas [SaaN sg. *Áhká*], maybe Maddarakka [SaaN *Máttaráhká*] [] 10 AP: [] it is Mary, Christ's mother, God's woman [] EM a female being corresponding to Sarakka [SaaN *Saráhká*] []. 11-13 AP: [] it is the Christmas days, the Christmas men [], EM: the three holiday men, ailekes olmak [SaaS *aajlegesálmah*, SaaL *ájlesálmá*, SaaN however **basseolbmát*] [] 14 AP [] the moon, EM: the moon, manno [SaaN *mánnu*] or (older designation) aske [cf SaaS *aske*]. 15-16. AP [] people going to church [], EM: [] a parallel to corresponding figures in other regions 17 AP [] church [], EM [] church [] possibly originally a place of sacrifice 18 AP: [] one, who [] wants to go to church, EM see fig 15-16 19 AP [] the woman of the bound devil [], EM: [] maybe one of the Akkas [SaaN. *Áhká*], Uksakka [SaaN *Uksáhká*] [] 20 AP: [] a devil [] and illness, EM: a correspondence to Rota 21 AP [] the devil, who is loose and reigns in hell and hovers around in the world [], EM: an evil demon [] originally belonging to the Akka group (?; see fig 19) 22 AP [] the devil, who was bound when God created the world [], EM: bound evil demon, the lord of the underworld [] originally perhaps the noid [SaaN *noaidi*] 23 AP: [] the fire of hell [], EM: fire (?) [] 24 AP [] the tar cauldron of hell, which boils man's soul in hell, EM [] maybe the drum of the noid [] 25 AP [] the grave of hell [], EM: grave, possibly originally denoting Jabmi aimo [SaaN *Jábmeáibmu*], the realm of the dead, or saivo [SaaN *sáiva*] []

Fig 3 Comparison of the owner's own interpretation and a recent interpretation of drum No 30 (Manker 1950, fig 111) Explained by the owner Bendix Andersen and Jon Torchelsen at the beginning of the 18th century Abbreviations: BA/JT = Bendix Andersen s and Jon Torchelsen s explanation (according to Kildeskrifter 1903, 65 ff, "Finn" or "Find" is here the old Nor designation for Saami) EM =

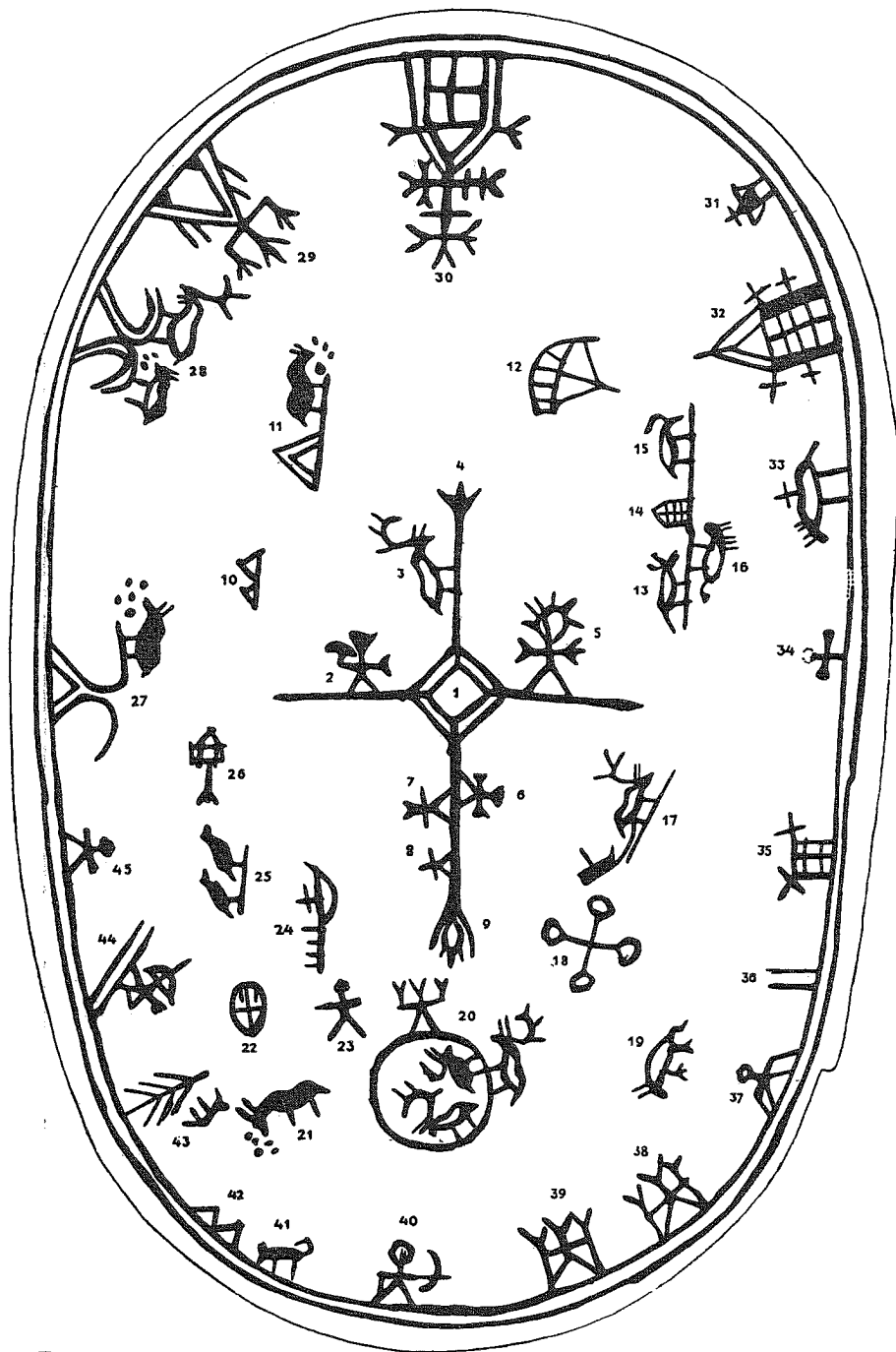


Fig 3

Ernst Manker's interpretation (Manker 1950, 307 ff)

1 *BA/JT* -, *EM*: the sun, *Beve* [SaaS *bejjie*] 2 *BA/JT* the devil, *EM*: the thunder, *Horagalles* [SaaS *Huvrengaallies*], with the thunderbolt, the hammer. 3 *BA/JT* the reindeer which has been lost in the fells, *EM*: probably reindeer as game or perhaps a sacrificial animal. 4 *BA/JT* -, *EM*: a conclusion of the ray, which perhaps aims at its spreading 5. *BA/JT* the sun if it will shine and it will be fair weather, *EM*: probably the wind, *Biegg-olma* [SaaS *Bieggkålmaj*] or *Bieggagalles* [SaaS *Bieggegaallies*], who usually stands at this place 6-8 *BA/JT* (6) "Gand Find" who has learned to send out "gand" [evil power], (7) "Finn" searching for the lost reindeer, (8) -, *EM*: The three ailekes-olmak [SaaS *aajlegesålmah*], the holiday men 9 *BA/JT* -, *EM* as fig 4 10 *BA/JT* "Finn" village, *EM*: Lapp village with cots 11 *BA/JT* if the wolf has been in other villages and done damage to the reindeer, *EM*: [] rather a bear eating berries 12 *BA/JT* the ferry boat, *EM* the boat offering 13-16 *BA/JT* the settled country, that is villages where the peasants live, *EM*: the settled country or the church village with houses (14) and cattle: goat (15), cow (13) and horse (16) 17 *BA/JT*: "Finn" in "ackja" [Saami sledge], *EM*: perhaps [] the vehicle the Lapp travels daily in, but the assumption is not unreasonable, that we are here witnessing the noid [SaaS *nåejtie* 'the Saami "shaman"'], the owner of the drum, on a major duty in the spirit world, driving with his noid-herke [Not a SaaS. word SaaS *hærkie* means 'horse', not 'castrated reindeer (used as draught animal)' as SaaL *hærgge* A SaaS equivalent would be *nåejtiesråantjoe*] 18 *BA/JT* "gand" fly to hurt people, *EM*: "Hexenschuss" [bewitching power], "gand" fly 19 *BA/JT* the "goup" [probably lynx] animal, *EM*: lynx or another predatory animal 20 *BA/JT* the fence where the "Finns" have their reindeer collected [], *EM*: enclosed pasture for reindeer with herd and herdsman 21 *BA/JT* the bear, *EM*: bear eating berries 22 *BA/JT* the drum whose figure indicates whether the drum predicts truthfully, *EM* the drum seen from underneath [] 23 *BA/JT* one "Finn" comes to visit another, *EM*: probably the noid [cf 17] 24 *BA/JT* fishing boat with the net behind, *EM* fisherman with boat and net 25 *BA/JT* birds' courting-ground: a place [] where [gallinaceous birds] during springtime come together and court with one another, *EM* forest birds on their courting-ground 26 *BA/JT* the storehouse, built in the forest on 4 at the top lopped-off trees 10 à 12 ells from the ground, where the "Finn" hides his provisions and best articles [], *EM*: *njalla* [SaaS *njalle* 'storehouse on a pole'] on a well-rooted pole 27 *BA/JT*: the mountain where the reindeer go, *EM*: predatory animal in the fells, bear or wolf 28 *BA/JT* the wolf and the reindeer in the fjeld, *EM*: one of the figures in the Lappish trinity [] maybe originally *Radien-akka* [SaaS *Raediænaahka*], "the ruler's old woman" or wife 30 *BA/JT* God, the Father, *EM*: the main figure of the Lappish trinity, *Radien attje* [SaaS *Raediænaehtjie*], "the ruler's father" [] 31 *BA/JT* [the figure is missing], *EM*: maybe a servant of fig 32 32 *BA/JT*: God's son, *EM*: the third figure in the Lappish trinity, *Radien-pardne* [SaaS *Raediænbærne*], "the ruler's son", God's son. 33 *BA/JT* if old horses are shot dead at the farmer's [], *EM*: Rota mounted 34 *BA/JT* "gand" fly to harm the cattle, *EM*: [] [Andersen's and Torchelsen's] interpretation [] is to be regarded as the right one [] 35 *BA/JT* church, *EM*: probably Christian grave or burial ground, originally *jabme aimo* [SaaS *jaamæhaajmoe*], the Lappish realm of the dead 36 *BA/JT* the "Finns'" burial ground in the fells, which is often

in a cleft or cave, where they place their corpses, dressed in everyday dress, *EM*: Lappish grave 37 *BA/JT* the "Finn" bitch: the "Finn" woman, *EM*: probably the wife of the Lapp (the owner of the drum) [] 38-40 *BA/JT* the men who guard the reindeer (38-39), the "Finn" goes hunting (40), *EM*: Sarakka [*SaaS Saaraahka*] (38), Uksakka [*SaaS Oksaahka*] (39), Juksakka [*SaaS Juoksaahka*] (40) 41 *BA/JT* ermine, *EM*: the dog at home by the cots 42 *BA/JT* the "Finn" cots, *EM*: camp with cots. 43 *BA/JT* trees in the forest; the squirrel [], *EM*: squirrel in a spruce 44 *BA/JT* the "Finns" go bear-hunting, *EM*: hunter with bow out hunting 45 *BA/JT* "Finn" woman plans to go to the storehouse, *EM*: perhaps Lapp woman at home, corresponding to the man out hunting

Secondly, an "Enttheologisierung" would be necessary. A re-evaluation of the early sources shows that it is necessary to take the theological position of the source authors into close consideration. We have to reckon with the fact that the interest of the missionaries in mythology and their theologizing interpretations were, more than is generally assumed, determined by opinions of alien religions at that time. Anker Steffensen has forcefully — but probably quite correctly — even supposed that "the Saami world of gods first and foremost [is] a result of the way the missionaries interrogated the Saamis" (Steffensen 1986, 96). To take just one example, the question about the grouping of the world of gods in several layers. This grouping of the Saami deities in the sources (it varies in different places) is usually taken as proof that the Saamis made a division of the cosmos similar to that of several Siberian peoples. According to this argument, drum No 71 plays a certain role as the only drum which has the drumhead divided into 5 spheres. The owner's explanation of the figures is thus completely ignored. It is however doubtful whether it is possible to draw these conclusions. The division of the Saami gods into groups instead probably exemplifies von Westen's knowledge of the learned groupings of gods prevalent in his day. K. B. Wiklund has already indicated this, although his argument that the system demands "a higher stage of culture" (Wiklund 1910b, xxxv; cf. Reuterskiöld 1912, 74 ff) than the Saamis' must of course be rejected. He refers to Franciscus Pomey's, *Pantheum mythicum, seu fabulosa deorum historia*. But, Pomey's grouping into *Dii Cælestes*, *Dii Terrestes*, *Dii Marini* and *Dii Inferii* (Pomey 1701, [xv]) is hardly the one adopted by von Westen. In any case, drum No 71 provides no clarification of whether the Saamis (or some group of Saamis) regarded the world as divided into five layers or not.

Thirdly, the drums have to be regionalized and typologized. This

is an important task¹⁸ One cannot compare all the drums with one another, without really considering where they came from, but must restrict comparisons to within regions Some of the sources already emphasize the regional and individual variations of the drum drawings,¹⁹ and in this century the drums preserved have been classified regionally (Hallström 1910a; Wiklund 1930; Manker 1938, 82 ff) A simplification of the prevalent classification is to divide the drums into Southern, Central and Northern Saami drums: nearly two thirds of the more than seventy drums preserved are Southern Saami, nearly one third Central Saami and about one seventh Northern Saami There were also drums among the Eastern Saamis, but no drum from the Kola peninsula has been preserved and nothing is known about the type(s) used there

An awareness of the regional differences is not however sufficient, as there also were distinct types within the different regions, in addition to great individual variation A source from the early 1690's mentions two types with different functions and states that the figures on the two types were different (Steuchius 1983, 82), and the Pite Saami Anders Hultlock commented on the drum that had been bought by the inspector of mines, Hans Philip Lybecker, saying that it was only "a half drum," used to seek fortune with regard to fish, birds, reindeer and other forest animals He therefore drew for him a "true drum" on paper (Manker 1935, 101)

2 2 Basis

Most of the early interpretations of the Saami drum figures are secondary in the sense that they have been made by persons who had never used any drum It is notable, however, that (at least) two explanations by owners have been preserved; but these two explanations have been almost totally neglected, as they do not agree with opinions of what "should" be pictured on the drums: Saami gods and mythological characters I see no reason, however, to disagree with K B Wiklund, who, commenting on the owner's explanations of the figures on drum No 30, states that these "were undoubtedly correct and true in their time, and it is by no means impossible that they were so too for the maker of the drum" (Wiklund 1910a, 92)

¹⁸ This was already emphasized by Hallström 1910a and Wiklund 1930, 91 ff

¹⁹ E g Graan 1983 11; Randulf 1903 21 Skanke 1945 181; von Westen according to Hammond 1787, 446

From the point of view of source value there are four groups of drums: (1) preserved drums with explanations by the owner; (2) preserved drums interpreted by someone other than the owner (or by an unknown interpreter who might have been the owner); (3) lost drums for which drawings and/or interpretations are preserved — it is not known if these were made with the help of the owner or not, although none of them were expressly made by the owner;²⁰ (4) preserved drums without contemporary interpretations

Of the first group, drums with explanations by the owner, only the two drums mentioned in the previous paragraph — No 30 and No 71 — are preserved. Drum No 71 is probably from Ohcejohka (Fin Utsjoki) and had been made and used by Anders Poulsen who lived in Varanger (in Norway). He had, according to his own testament, learnt to use the drum from his mother. This is striking, as women — at least young women — were forbidden even to touch the drums. Probably Poulsen's mother had already reached the menopause when she started to use the drum. Anders Poulsen was sentenced to death but was killed by "a madman" before the execution had been carried out. The drum is a unique specimen, the only one of its type, and it cannot therefore be used as a model for interpreting other drums. It is even uncertain whether, as is usually assumed, it represents a special Finnmark type of drum. It is more possibly an example of a very personal drum type.²¹ It must be taken into consideration, however, in the discussion of religion in Finnmark at the end of the 17th century. Drum No 30 is different. It is of a common type, the South Saami drum type with its characteristic sun rhomb. The owner of this drum was one Bendix Andersen from the county of Nordtrøndelag (Norway), and the drum had been in his family for generations.²² There are five drums in the second group, drums with interpretations by someone other than the owner; No 1 (interpretations on the drumhead, probably from 1688, and by the first vicar

²⁰ That these drawings, unfortunately, are not absolutely exact and reliable is shown by the differences between the two drawings of the drum discussed in the Nærø manuscript (cf. *Kildeskrifter* 1903, 63 f.), and also by the drawing of drum No 30, which differs from the drum itself in several points (cf. *Kildeskrifter* 1903, [64a]).

²¹ Cf. the discussions of Poulsen and his drum in Agrell 1934 135 ff., Itkonen 1946, 132 ff., 145 ff., Karsten 1955, 80 f., Edsman 1982, 47.

²² It was common for the drums to be inherited — the older the drum, the more effective it was considered to be — but there are also isolated reports according to which drums were placed on the grave (Handlinger 1910, 309) or in the grave (Itkonen 1946 165, note 1) on the death of the owner.

of Lycksele, Olaus Stephan Graan, himself of Saami stock), No 22 (some figures interpreted on the drumhead), No 31 (some figures interpreted, possibly by Thomas von Westen), No 39 (most of the figures interpreted on the drumhead, probably during the first half of the 18th century) and No 45 "Linnæus' drum" (interpreted about 1730 by the missionary, Arvid Thuresson Bistock, and the clergyman, Zacharias Plantin)²³ The third group, interpretations and drawings of lost drums, consists of four drums: "Lybecker's drum", "Rheen's drum", the drum of the Nærø manuscript and the "Skanke Jessen"-drum For the rest of the drums, no contemporary interpretations are known, i e they belong to the fourth group (Manker 1950, 139 ff)²⁴

Of the interpreted drums, six (No 1, No 22, No 30, No 31, No 39, the "Skanke Jessen" drum) belong to the Southern Saami type, four (No 45, "Lybecker's drum", "Rheen's drum", the drum of the Nærø manuscript) to Central Saami types and possibly one (No 71) to Northern Saami types

2.3 Interpretation

When the symbolic character of the figures is discussed, it seems suitable to use a simple semiotic screen in order to make clear where the problems of interpretation are (Fig 4) If drum figures are regarded as conventional, it means that they are based on tradition — and therefore also possible to understand for others than those who drew them, if the interpretative code is known The figures on at least the Southern Saami drums are set out according to a certain conventionality, but, as Louise Bäckman has emphasized, the drums "expose conceptions of an individual character that makes it very hard to interpret them as hiding a common religious belief system"

²³ Early interpretations — or rather; learned speculations — of a more dubious value also exist for drums No 43 (interpretation in Rudbeck 1689) and No 64 (one figure interpreted in Schefferus 1673, the whole drum interpreted in Rudbeck 1689)

²⁴ Schefferus' drums B and D "Utterus' drum" (possibly in accordance with Manker, not a real drum but a compendium of drum figures) and Olof Rudbeck's speculative interpretations of five lost drums have no source value but are nevertheless interesting for the history of ideas

		1 iconic	2 justified	3 arbitrary
A	causal	A1	A2	A3
B	conventional	B1	B2	B3

Fig 4 Types of figures (cf Malmberg 1973, 26)

(Bäckman 1987, 57) These causal signs are unique and impossible to interpret with any certainty

If the distinction between conventional and causal figures can help us in grading the strength of arguments based on drum figures, the awareness that the figures could be both iconic, justified and arbitrary demand great circumspection in any attempt to interpret the figures. Is, for example, figure No 3 on drum No 30 iconic (a reindeer), justified (if so, the reindeer figure pictures something else with some connection to a reindeer — in the same way as a cross can represent Christianity) or arbitrary (it could then illustrate anything)? Is there any other way to obtain an answer than to use the interpretation of the owner, who states that the figure represents “a reindeer which has been lost in the fells”? What reason is there to doubt this information, and interpret the figure as “[] perhaps a sacrificial animal”?

In any case, the possibility that figures depend on general or regional patterns, i.e. on a comprehensible convention, is diametrically opposed to the possibility that they are unique and casual inventions of the artist. When figures resemble something, they are seemingly easy to interpret. But, it is by no means certain that our notion of resemblance agrees with that of the maker and users of the drum. To be aware of these difficulties is extremely important. It is all too easy to build whole systems of interpretations on ready-made ideas about the drums, systems which are self-confirming because of the multitude of possible interpretations of each figure. Instead of starting from such an idea, however well-founded it might seem to be, the only accessible method is in my opinion to start from the other end, with a critical evaluation and comparison of the preserved Saami explanations and interpretations of single drum figures.²⁵

²⁵ By contrast with Reuterskiöld's opinion that the notes on the drumheads “are

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The drums had a twofold role to play in the religious encounter. They were both foci of the confrontation and sources documenting and structuring it. The fight between old and new beliefs is to some extent possible to follow in the records from the district and county courts. These records give us access to Saami arguments and views of the importance of the drums in Saami society. The function of the drums as instruments for a Saami description of the encounter is more difficult to make out. The drum figures are difficult to interpret and there are a number of alternative ways of understanding their meaning. It is therefore material that can only be used with utmost caution. I have here pointed to one alternative, where the starting-point is a regionalization of the drums, combined with what I have called an "Entmythologisierung" of current interpretations and an "Enttheologisierung" of the information from the source authors.

Both the drums and the Saami explanations and interpretations of them came into existence during the most intense period of religious encounter. It seems very likely that an awareness of this fact would give us better possibilities in analysing the sources and in composing our lamentably fragmentary picture of the religious ideas and practices of the Saamis during both "drum time" and "the time when one had to hide the drums".

Bibliography

ABBREVIATIONS

Fin	Finnish
Nor	Norwegian
SaaL	Lule Saami
SaaN	Northern Saami
SaaS	Southern Saami
Swe	Swedish

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[] without real value for the interpretation of the drum, as they only illustrate that the Lapps when sober do not reveal the real meaning of the characters" Reuterskiöld 1928, 213 f, cf Kildeskifter 1903, 67

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