

# Saami

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*\* Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

*\* Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Sámi religion, Circumpolar Religions, Religious Group, Lutheran, Christian Traditions

Historically, the Saami are a society of reindeer pastoralists who reside near or north of the Arctic circle in what is now Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Some Saami settlements are nomadic and others are permanent. The regions occupied by the Saami are collectively known as Sapmi or Same-eatnam (Anderson and Beach, 1996:1). This entry focuses on ethnographic evidence collected among the Saami in the Könkämä District of Sweden from 1948-1952, at which time forced assimilation had resulted in mass conversion of the Saami from the traditional shamanic religion to Lutheran Christianity, as well as population loss, increased sedentarization, and loss of historical political structures (Anderson and Beach, 1996:2-7). While there is little explicit information on religion amongst the Saami for the time and place focus of this entry, religion appears to have been important in everyday life for the entire community. Church attendance was regular, as well as rituals such as baptism and confirmation. Reindeer herders worked in multiple shifts on holidays, with churches holding multiple ceremonies to accommodate them (Pehrson, 1957:14). For the Saami, religious beliefs are inseparable from almost all aspects of social life. Therefore, this entry considers the religious group to be coterminous with the society at large.



Date Range: 1935 CE - 1960 CE

Region: Könkämä District, ca. 1950

Region tags: Europe, Scandinavia, Northern Europe, Finland, Sweden

Könkämä District, Sapmi, Sweden, ca. 1950

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.
- Source 2: Murdock, George P. 1962-1971. *Ethnographic Atlas*. *Ethnology* 1-10.
- Source 3: Murdock, George P., and Suzanne F. Wilson. 1972. "Settlement patterns and community organization: Cross-cultural codes 3." *Ethnology* 11(3): 254-295.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ep04-000>
- Source 1 Description: Anderson, Myrdene, and Hugh Beach. 1996. "Culture Summary: Saami." *New*

Haven, Conn.: HRAF.

– Source 2 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ep04-006>

– Source 2 Description: Pehrson, Robert N. 1957. "The Bilateral Network of Social Relations in Kōnkämä Lapp District." In *Indiana University Publications*, vol. 5:x, 128. Bloomington, Ind.: [Indiana University].

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: "The ecstatic shamanic tradition has been subsumed but not utterly eradicated by state churches, whose missionizing nominally converted most Saami areas by the end of the eighteenth century. Most Saami belong to the evangelical Lutheran faith of the dominant culture . . ." (Anderson and Beach, 1996:7).

↳ Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (Resolved Rating), "Internal warfare seems to be absent or rare (original code 1)" (Ember and Ember, 1992; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (Resolved Rating), "External warfare seems to be absent or rare (original code 1)" (Ember and Ember, 1992; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– Yes

Notes: "Then, in addition to frequent church attendance, the [Saami] participate in the important rites-des-passage of Scandinavian culture: baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial" (Pehrson, 1957:14).

↳ Assigned by participation in a particular ritual:

– Yes

Notes: "Then, in addition to frequent church attendance, the [Saami] participate in the important rites-des-passage of Scandinavian culture: baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial" (Pehrson, 1957:14).

Does the religion have official political support

– Yes

Notes: Because religious beliefs are inseparable from almost all aspects of social and political life, this entry considers the religious group to be coterminous with the society itself. Therefore, it is assumed that the religion has political support.

↳ Are the head of the polity and the head of the religion the same figure:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 757, Political and Religious Differentiation, political and religious leaders are distinct (Ross, 1983; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 193

Notes: "In 1951--the base year of the present study--there were 193 persons and 12,045 reindeer administratively assigned to Konkämä Lapp [Saami] District" (Pehrson, 1957:3).

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Notes: According to Murdock and Wilson (1972, Column 6, Large or Impressive Structures), "There are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings" (Murdock and Wilson, 1972:259, 267; note: equivalent to SCCS variable 66).

# Beliefs

## Burial and Afterlife

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: "Then, in addition to frequent church attendance, the [Saami] participate in the important rites-des-passage of Scandinavian culture: baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial" (Pehrson, 1957:14).

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: "Then, in addition to frequent church attendance, the [Saami] participate in the important rites-des-passage of Scandinavian culture: baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial" (Pehrson, 1957:14).

↳ Secondary burial:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable, 1850, Secondary Bone/Body Treatment: Original Scale, secondary contact with the body or bones of the deceased does not occur (Schroeder, 2001; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 238, High Gods, a supreme high god is "Present, active, and specifically supportive of human morality" (Murdock, 1962-1971; retrieved from Divale, 2004. Note: equivalent to Ethnographic Atlas column 34). However, supernatural beings are not described in depth.



A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 238, High Gods, a supreme high god is "Present, active, and specifically supportive of human morality" (Murdock, 1962-1971; retrieved from Divale, 2004. Note: equivalent to Ethnographic Atlas column 34).

## Practices

### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– Yes

Notes: "Then, in addition to frequent church attendance, the [Saami] participate in the important rites-des-passage of Scandinavian culture: baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial" (Pehrson, 1957:14).

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– Yes

Notes: "Then, in addition to frequent church attendance, the [Saami] participate in the important rites-des-passage of Scandinavian culture: baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial" (Pehrson, 1957:14).

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– Yes

Notes: "Finally, the cultural year of Könkämä has two important ceremonial occasions: Christmas, which coincides with the autumnwinter migration into the forests, and Easter, which coincides with spring-winter migration back into the mountains" (Pehrson, 1957:14).

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– Yes

Notes: "Ritual kinship bonds may also increase the solidarity of the working group" (Pehrson, 1957:38).

↳ Fictive kinship terminology widespread:

– Yes

Notes: "Ritual kinship bonds may also increase the solidarity of the working group. In situations where kinship ties are absent but required, the Christian institution of godparenthood . . . provides these ties" (Pehrson, 1957:38).

## Society and Institutions

### Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A band

Notes: The Saami do not have jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community (SCCS Variable 237, Jurisdictional Hierarchy Beyond Local Community; retrieved from Divale, 2004). Murdock and Wilson (1972; Column 10: Descent) indicate that the Saami have bilateral descent without kindreds. Additionally, the Saami live in exogamous communities without localized clans or lineal kin groups (Murdock, 1962-1971, columns 19, 20, 22). Information on jurisdictional hierarchy and kin ties indicates that the Saami are most accurately characterized as a band.

### Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

– I don't know

Notes: Ethnographic evidence indicates that institutional care is provided for the elderly, but it is not clear if it is provided by the Saami: ". . . the former leader of Band A, now lives in the Queen Victoria Home for [Aged] Lapps [Saami] in Karesuando (he is rheumatic) but his wife, . . . his son and present band leader, . . . his brother-in-law and assistant band leader, . . . frequently travel there to consult him on major matters of policy" (Pehrson, 1957:82).

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

Notes: Ethnographic evidence indicates that institutional care is provided for the elderly, but it is not clear if it is provided by the Saami: ". . . the former leader of Band A, now lives in the Queen Victoria Home for [Aged] Lapps [Saami] in Karesuando (he is rheumatic) but his wife, . . . his son and present band leader, . . . his brother-in-law and assistant band leader, . . . frequently travel there to consult him on major matters of policy" (Pehrson, 1957:82).

## Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– Yes

Notes: "Nowadays, children between the ages of eight and fourteen are attending the Nomad's School in Karesuando for about eight months out of the year" (Pehrson, 1957:96).

## Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 90, Police, police functions are not specialized (Tuden and Marshall, 1971; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "Thus, pasture trespass is rare in Norway because of topographical barriers and because the Swedish and Norwegian governments assign [Saami] to specific grazing districts and fine them if their reindeer trespass into other districts" (Pehrson, 1957:104).

## Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 149, Scale 1 [of Cultural Complexity] - Writing and Records, mnemonic devices are utilized, but no writing or records specific to the religious group (Murdock and Provost, 1971; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "The original [traditional proprietary] marks seem to have disappeared in the 19th century (possibly owing to the spread of literacy) among the Lutheran [Saami], who instead use their initials . . ." (Pehrson, 1957:548).

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: Because the religious group is coterminous with the society itself, this entry assumes that the religious group provides food for itself. The Saami depend primarily on pastoralism (SCCS Variable 206, Dependence on Animal Husbandry), with hunting (SCCS Variable 204, Dependence on Hunting) and fishing (SCCS Variable 205, Dependence on Fishing) as secondary means of subsistence (Murdock, 1962-1971; retrieved from Divale, 2004. Note: equivalent to Ethnographic Atlas column 7).



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Hunting (including marine animals)
- Fishing
- Pastoralism

Notes: The Saami depend primarily on pastoralism (SCCS Variable 206, Dependence on Animal Husbandry), with hunting (SCCS Variable 204, Dependence on Hunting) and fishing (SCCS Variable 205, Dependence on Fishing) as secondary means of subsistence (Murdock, 1962-1971; retrieved from Divale, 2004. Note: equivalent to Ethnographic Atlas column 7).