

# The Sami Drum from Oracular Rituallity to Musical Performance

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## Abstract

The Sami are the only indigenous people formally recognized in Europe, nevertheless, this significant acknowledgment came only in relatively recent times, after centuries of forced assimilation policies and thanks to crucial fights for self-determination and identity recognition. Oral musical traditions played a primary role in the Sami self-determination processes. The musical repertoire of the Sami is built on the joik chants, traditionally sung a cappella by a single individual. During the 1970s, the *joik* rose from the silence imposed by colonial domination. This happened through the alteration of some traditional musical parameters and the resistance of others. Among these changes, the introduction of the Sami drum in the instrumental sections of the *modern joiks* is particularly meaningful. This article intends to offer a contribution to the historical and cultural analysis of the refunctionalization of the usage of the drum in Sami society. Starting from an overview of the traditional uses and values of this percussion within the *noaidi* shamanic rituality, mostly based on existing ethnographic and archaeological results achieved by various international scholars to date, the study of some significant musical examples will follow to better understand the most recent introduction of the Sami drum in the musical culture of *modern joik*. Primary sources collected in Sápmi in the summer of 2019 will be integrated to the current state of the art in order to analyze the major transformations and the refunctionalization which allowed the Sami drum to break free from the condition of marginality imposed by the dominant Fennoscandian culture, thus becoming a propeller engine for the most contemporary form of indigenous identity expression: *modern joik*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Sami land, called Sápmi, extends almost entirely north of the Arctic Circle across the national borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula, in Russia. Although often used as a synonym for “Sami”, the exonym “Lapp” was introduced by the first non-Sami travellers and settlers, acquiring over

***Il tamburo sami dalla ritualità oracolare all'esecuzione musicale.*** *I sami sono l'unica popolazione indigena ufficialmente riconosciuta dall'UE. Questo importante riconoscimento, tuttavia, è arrivato solo in tempi relativamente recenti, dopo secoli di politiche di assimilazione forzata e grazie a decisive lotte per il riconoscimento identitario entro cui specifiche tradizioni musicali hanno giocato un ruolo determinante. È questo il caso del repertorio orale degli joik, canti tradizionalmente eseguiti a cappella da singoli performers. Negli anni Settanta, infatti, lo joik è diventato il simbolo della resilienza sami nei confronti della violenza subita e del "silenzio" imposto dalla dominazione coloniale. La ricomparsa dello joik nel contemporaneo soundscape sami è caratterizzata dall'alterazione di determinati parametri musicali e la resistenza di altri. In questo vivo e dinamico clima di creatività culturale, l'introduzione del tamburo sami nei diversi organici strumentali che oggi accompagnano i modern joiks è particolarmente significativa. Con il presente articolo si intende offrire un contributo all'analisi della rifunzionalizzazione del tamburo nella società sami. A una panoramica storico-culturale, ricostruita sui risultati etnografici e archeologici raggiunti da diversi studiosi internazionali, sugli utilizzi e sui valori tradizionali di questa percussione nella ritualità sciamanica del noaidi, seguirà lo studio di alcuni esempi musicali significativi per la comprensione degli esiti della più recente introduzione del tamburo sami nella cultura musicale del modern joik. Si affronteranno, integrando all'attuale stato dell'arte anche interviste originali raccolte in Sápmi nell'estate 2019, le maggiori trasformazioni e rifunzionalizzazioni che hanno consentito al tamburo sami di rompere la marginalità e lo stigma imposto dalla dominante cultura Fennoscandinava. Questa condizione di marginalità, si cercherà di dimostrare, è diventata un vero e proprio motore propulsore per la più contemporanea forma di espressione dell'identità indigena sami: il modern joik.*

## Introduction

More than any other cultural element, in Sápmi the Sami drum underwent a radical creative refunctionalization passing from having a leading role in the ritual performance of the *noaidi* to being the protagonist of the musical performance of the artist. The emergence of the Sami drum in the contemporary indigenous musical context took place in the wake of cultural processes of resilience and continuity carried out against the secular Fennoscandian colonial assimilation. A decisive role was played by the Sami oral musical tradition of the *joik*, which opened up crucial communication channels with the dominant culture.<sup>2</sup> Combining these chants with other musical elements derived from global modernity, a young generation of Sami *joikers* managed to tear down the atmosphere of mistrust and fear generated about the *joik* itself, pointed out for three centuries as an immoral practice by the Church and some converted Sami.

Subjected to a comparable fate, *joik* singing and drumming were harshly hindered and persecuted, from the XVI century, by the joint action of the Lutheran and Læstadian Churches and the Fennoscandian Crowns. This oppression reached its apex towards the

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time a different cultural value with a pejorative meaning. The same applies to "Sápmi" (endonym) and "Lapland" (exonym). The recent use of terms and names from Sami languages denotes the primary political value that the indigenous language has in the self-determination processes. Below I will use the endonyms while the exonyms will be left as such within the quotations or to indicate regions, provinces and counties of Fennoscandia, as in the case of Finnish Lapland.

<sup>2</sup> For a musical and anthropological analysis of *joik* and *modern joik* see Renzi 2019; Jones-Bamman 1993; Moore 2004.

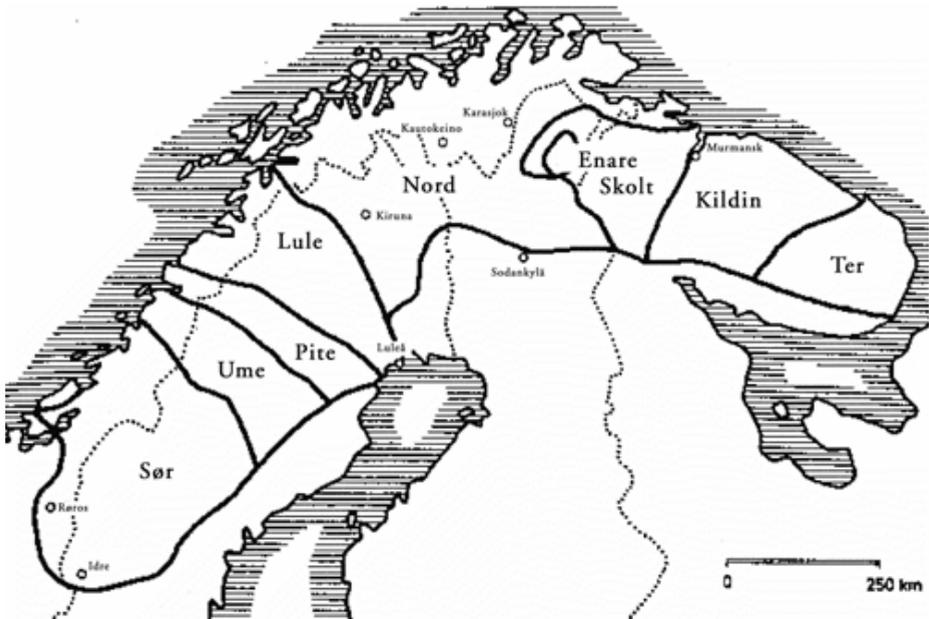


FIGURE 1. Sápmi borders according to the subdivision of Sami dialects (Ligi 2016: 222).

end of the XVIII century, with the confiscation and the burning of the drums and the death sentence of some *noaidi*, main actors of Sami rituality. In response to the relentless colonial coercion, these important cultural elements were concealed from public life and conveyed silently within the family, often away from inhabited centres, in the middle of the tundra, during the seasonal reindeer migrations.

It was not until the sixties of the XX century, with the birth of the first international indigenist organizations and the first measures in defence of indigenous peoples, that Sami people proudly returned to the public sphere, undertaking less mistrustful intercultural dialogues with the dominant culture. In this lively panorama of cultural, political and social reaffirmation, in an unprecedented modern guise, *joik* has become the symbol of Sami cultural resistance and resilience, capable of defining a shared community *sound-scape* even beyond the internal boundaries of Sápmi (Fig. 1).

Nevertheless, the Sami drum was brought back to the public scene not before the 1980s. The weight of the religious antinomy and the resultant atmosphere of “terror” drastically delayed the reappearance of elements linked to the indigenous cult. Like the *joik*, also the drum has been proudly introduced in staged performance and recordings by some important Sami artists involved in the revitalization of their cultural heritage. This reintroduction, not clear from inner social contrasts and oppositions, took place through a radical refunctionalization of the instrument, from ritual to musical,<sup>3</sup> which

<sup>3</sup> The distinct use of these two terms should not necessarily be seen like irreconcilable cultural practices

stands beside neo-shamanic activities that arose globally from the syncretic “nativistic” climate of the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

The crucial distinction between the religious ceremonial usage of the drum and its essentially musical beating needs an introductory overview of the main aspects of the ancient Sami religion, then moving on to the analysis of the ritual use and the ergology of the instrument. A quick examination of the contextual transformation that occurred after the religious encounter will allow to conclude, finally, with the description of the contemporary function of the drum, as it is inserted in the wide and creative panorama of today’s Sami musical culture.

### The role of the *noaidi* in the ancient Sami religion

The “ancient Sami religion”<sup>5</sup> was a complex of symbologies, beliefs, representations and ritual experiences that, in pre-Christian times, were developed and organized by Sami within a more or less coherent orientation of thought able to define the surrounding environment and the relations undertaken with it, sometimes adopting a specific interactive position towards forces superior to human.<sup>6</sup> Due to the significant geographical extension of Sápmi, it was not a unitary and dogmatic “doctrine”, but rather a set of territorially variable practices within which a common nucleus of original symbolic and cosmological meanings was shared (Hætta 2005: 7). This nucleus, element of extra-regional and extra-temporal connection, allows us to treat the ancient Sami religion as a more or less organic cultural phenomenon.

It is a wide range of religious developments of which, however, there are limited reliable sources describing the Sami *Pantheon* or the innumerable ritual activities connected to it, due to the partial oblivion caused by the intense work of Christian conversion and colonial domination (Ligi 2016: 158). As suggested by Jones-Bamman, the written sources are mostly represented by missionary accounts whose finalistic translation of the Sami deities within a cosmologically Christian system require cautious readings (Jones-Bamman 1993: 67, Rydving 1997: 29, Hætta 2005: 7). These data are often supplemented by the folkloristic collections of the lappologists of the mid-1800s, also not always reliable due to their comparative interpretations accomplished in reference to other forms of neighbouring religious experience, in particular those of the Ural-Siberian area (Jones-Bamman 1993: 238-243). However, starting from the second half of the twentieth century, it was shown that the Sami religion was shaped by a variety of cults and beliefs closely connected with nature, with the landscape, with the periodic articulation of seasons and the related main

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and functions. Nevertheless, it is the Sami themselves who refer to the musical use of the drum appealing to the most recent artistic performances, distinguishing them from the ritual function of the instrument in the ceremony of the *noaidi* (Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman, personal communication, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> For a definition of “nativistic” see Fabietti 2015: 301.

<sup>5</sup> *Noaidevuohhta* in northern sami language (Solbakk 2007: 22).

<sup>6</sup> For the definition of “religion” see Comba 2008: 3; Fabietti 2015: 275; Hætta 2005: 8.

hunting and breeding activities.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, it was a religion founded on an animistic perception of the universe which took shape in the mythological narrative and in the shamanic rituality, prerogative of the spiritual authority of the *noaidi* (Hætta 2005: 7).

In the ethnographic literature about Sami beliefs, the complex and delicate concept of shamanism has assumed a preponderant position in the discussion of the native religious system.<sup>8</sup> Following his research among the Sami and other circumpolar indigenous populations, Åke Hulkrantz defined shamanism as a complex system of symbols and ritual activities closely related to a «very ancient hunting culture» (Hulkrantz 1991: 9),<sup>9</sup> meaning the shaman as «a social functionary who, by the aid of his helping spirits, attains ecstasy and thereby establishes relations with the supernatural world on behalf of the members of his group» (Hulkrantz 1973: 34). These definitions are also supported by Ernst Emsheimer, who adds to the previous definition the value of the authority of the shaman *noaidi* in safeguarding and periodically reactivating the cosmological and mythological repertoire of the community within he operates (Emsheimer 1988: 145-146). Finally, according to Gianluca Ligi, the *noaidi* was «a sort of medicine-man, that is a shamanic ritual operator who [through the self-induction of an altered state of consciousness] was able to make out-of-body journeys to foresee the future and above all to heal other members of the community» (Ligi 2016: 175). Concerning this very last point, after a long description of the main traditional medicinal remedies, the Sami writer Johan Turi underlines, from his emic point of view, that «if one knows what is written so far [...] and equally does not recognize the illness of the person, then he begins to think that it is a deadly disease, or that the person is possessed by ghosts [...], and this is a job for the *noaidi*» (Turi 1991: 149).

This composite set of descriptions, in addition to defining the main functions of the *noaidi*, makes explicit the high social value these figures reached within their *siida*,<sup>10</sup> a fundamental ceremonial unit within which, under certain circumstances, the *noaidi* assumed the role of spiritual leader of the community. The ceremonial instrument of the *noaidi* was the drum (*goávddis*) whose percussion was able to induce him into a state of trance, causing the detachment and the reunification between soul and body (Solbakk 2007: 24, Hætta 2005: 21). Furthermore, the drum had an important divinatory function related to hunting and breeding activities, as well as it had the value of “compass”, through the illustrations on the drumhead, for orientation during seasonal migrations.

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<sup>7</sup> Today, more than ever, Sami people claim to need to talk about themselves and their traditions without a Western academic mediation. This is especially evident in the most recent film and documentary production of the International Sámi Film Institute, which shows a growing willingness to narrate in first person (Elle Márjá Eira, cover letter introductory to the Sami short films for the exhibition *Una finestra sul Nord – IX*, Florence, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019).

<sup>8</sup> About the complexity and ambiguity of the term “shamanism” see Reinhard 1976.

<sup>9</sup> About the relations between shamanism and hunting culture see also Comba 2012.

<sup>10</sup> The *siida*, generally restricted communities (20-40 individuals who shared cognatic and bilateral kinship ties), were social units with a weakly stratified structure that, in order to reduce the massive “ecological stress” imposed by the surrounding environment, cooperated seasonally in the main hunting and breeding activities. Ligi defines *siida* as «residential groups of cooperating families» in which «leadership was exclusively family oriented» (2016: 175).

The accounts of missionaries, as representatives of the Western patriarchal order, reveal only some ritual performances led by male actors of the society. However, various historical and archaeological sources prove that the training and the activity of the *noaidi* were not precluded to women.<sup>11</sup> Novices were initiated to become shamans only as a result of a supernatural vision, which in certain circumstances revealed their future “assistant” spirit (*noaidegázzi*).<sup>12</sup> The hard apprenticeship aimed at familiarizing with the use of the drum, with the ceremonial formulas, with the communication between self, the community and the *noaidegázzi* (future assistants), as well as with the separation of the *noaidi*'s soul from the body during the ritual *trance* (Solbakk 2007: 24). The *noaidi* operated on behalf of their own community assuming, through extra-ordinary experiences, the role of mediators between society and supernatural forces. Through mythological narration and ritual performance, the *noaidi* ensured the periodic re-consolidation and re-construction of the cultural substratum of the community. Furthermore, through the ritual performance, the Sami shaman was capable to affirm and sometimes even impose those founding values of the society which aimed at its protection, cohesion and continuity.

## The Sami drum within shamanic trance and oracular rituality

Likewise other circumpolar populations, as well among the Sami the rhythms of shamanic rituality were marked by the percussion of the drum which, thanks to the rich figurative system shown on its membrane, could assume a wide spectrum of functions and meanings (Hultkrantz 1991: 9). In particular, by triggering the ceremonial trance with the drum, the shaman was able to bridge the seemingly intangible division between the physical world and the other world.<sup>13</sup> From ancient oral narratives, it appears that the Sami believed that «human beings were composed of two parts: the body souls and the free souls» (Lehtola 2002: 28). Through the neuro-physiological effect caused by the sound combination of drum percussion and intense vocal activity, the *noaidi* untied the two souls, allowing the “free soul” to take on a new form capable of penetrating the other world and obtaining the information sought to restore disturbed harmony (*ibidem*).

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<sup>11</sup> The *noaidi* Anders Poulsen stated that he learned his job from his mother (Solbakk 2007: 22).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the final sequence of the Sami movie *Ofelas* (Gaup 1987), in which Aigin, the protagonist, has the vision of a massive white reindeer bull, the spirit protecting the previous *noaidi* of the community, Raste. This event symbolizes the passing of the torch and the initiation of Aigin (1:17:30): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZuWDiyddMQ>> (last accessed: January 2021).

<sup>13</sup> The Sami traditionally organized their own universe in a three-level structure that could be synthesized in “the world of the living” (middle world), the “world of deities” (upper world) and the “world of the spirits of the dead” (underground world). However, some oral sources from different communities often report the existence of *saivo*, an “inverted world” (upside down) below own feet and reachable through immersion in special sacred lakes with an “open bottom”. Finally, the case of a five-sphere cosmology has been found pictured on a Sami drum skin (Ante Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019; Rydving 1991: 42; sources also reported at Samiland Museum in Levi).

Far from being passively “possessed” by the helpers (assistant spirits), the *noaidi* “transform” themselves into them through a process of active “incorporation” of these supernatural powers aiming to free the soul from the physical world.<sup>14</sup> In order to “incorporate” the helpers, the *noaidi* invoked their assistance through ritualized forms of *joik*, the formula of which was repeated meticulously, clearly and tenaciously, gradually increasing the vocal intensity and the rhythmic one of the drum in a *crescendo* inevitably directed to the sinking of the soul, the so called *de čáknjalii*. In this way, the *noaidi* were performers of their altered state of consciousness and aimed to achieve a psycho-physiological balance suitable for welcoming the *noaidegázzi*.

In the reports about *noaidi* rituality, there is an emphasis on spatial division in two distinct assemblies which collaborate for the success of the session: a “visible” assembly, which included the *noaidi* and two young assistants, and a “not visible” one (if not to the shaman) which included the *noaidegázzi* and other non-earthly figures (Solbakk 2007: 26). Escorted to the other world by the invisible assembly, the *noaidi* abandoned their body in a condition of deep trance, while the young assistants sang, cyclically and in unison, a ceremonial *joik* which helped the *noaidi*’s soul to find the way back. Moreover, through these *joiks* the assistants of the *noaidi* constantly reminded them what their task was. With this in mind, Jones-Bamman mentions the occasional participation in unison of the entire audience in the *joik* in conjunction with the most important and dramatic social shocks (Jones-Bamman 1993: 106-107).

In addition to the trance-induction function for which the drum was metaphorically described as the “sled of the *noaidi*” (Keski-Säntti *et al.* 2003: 122), the Sami shaman drum could be used by the *noaidi* with oracular function, within which the percussion determined the divination of important themes for the social life in the *siida*.

In shamanic trance the *noaidi* did not necessarily communicate a message to the rest of the community, while the divination activity always placed the emphasis on the communicative aspect. In this perspective, the drum was the oracle, the source of knowledge, while the shaman performed the function of *medium* and interpreter of what «whispered» by the instrument (Hætta 2005: 21).

The movie *Ofelas* (1987), by Sami director Nils Gaup, offers an interesting artistic reconstruction of the divinatory action of the drum from an emic point of view, thus allowing an effective «cross-mediatic» introduction of the main formal aspects and contents of oracular rituality. During the fifth sequence, the young hunter Sierge discovers the traces of a large bear (*dárfföt*), a sacred animal for the Sami whose hunting required a quite considerable ceremonial effort: it was necessary to take numerous precautions and respect strict taboos. Sierge’s finding leads the entire community to convene the *noaidi* Raste in order to begin the preparations for the bear hunt with a divination session. Subsequently, inside a *lavvu* tent, the heads of families sit around the fire observing with apprehension the *noaidi* who

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<sup>14</sup> About the distinction between episodes of shamanic trance and possession trance see Rouget 2019: 40-45.

beats his drum to find out if the hunt would have taken place under good or bad omens. A close-up of the drum shows the evolution of the divination. Before beginning the percussion, the *noaidi* had placed a brass ring (*vuorbi*) on the skin of the drum, which had the peculiar function of oracle.<sup>15</sup> The *noaidi* begins to systematically beat the instrument, held parallel to the ground, striking it with a peculiar mallet called *bállin*. Doing so, the rhythmic vibration of the membrane causes the movement of the indicator which draws a precise path full of meanings intelligible to the *noaidi*. The shaman's interpretation of the brass ring's movement takes place according to the oracular symbols impressed on the membrane of the drum. Once a valid response is obtained, the *noaidi* interrupts the percussion and places the indicator on the spear of the one who had discovered the position of the bear. Being a positive response, the group of hunters and the *noaidi*, following a precise ceremonial order, go together towards the place where the animal has been sighted.<sup>16</sup>

Although with some slight variations, the short sequence described above can easily be transposed to other important divination performances in close relationship with hunting, reindeer migration, supernatural cues and the concerns of the entire *siida*. Besides being specialists in trance and inter-dimensional travel through the percussion of their "magic" drum, the *noaidi* were also the most authoritative social agents regarding the activation of this oracular tool and the interpretation of its responses. They thus assumed a double mediumistic and liminal position, both in reference to the physical world and to their society.

Some sources demonstrate a more widespread and common use of the drum as divination object among the members of the *siida*. According to the Sami anthropologist Louise Bäckman, the use and ergology of the Sami drum have undergone a significant transformation coinciding, in terms of time, with the socio-economic change of the *siida* from «hunting society» to «reindeer-breeding society» (Bäckman 1986: 258). The analysis on the reproductions of the oldest drums, almost certainly belonging to the hunting society, have shown marked connections with a symbology related to trance and otherworldly travel compared to what is offered, otherwise, by the more recent drums, related to reindeer herding and breeding activities. The poor and ambiguous sources available do not allow us to give a certain answer to both the possible coexistence and temporal disjunction of the two uses of the instrument during the Sami cultural history. However, some accounts dating back to the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries demonstrates how the drum and the *vuorbi*, used during the divination, were not a prerogative of the *noaidi* but of all the family heads of the *siida* (Hultkrantz 1991: 12). As Jones-Bamman theorized, the professional skills of the shaman were required when the community faced issues that affected the fate of the whole *siida*, while the less specialized family heads used

<sup>15</sup> The *vuorbi* (in some regions called *árpa*) could also have a triangular shape, while its composition could vary from wood, to brass, to reindeer horn. The etymology of the word *vuorbi* is linked to that of "fate" or "lot" (Joy 2014: 137).

<sup>16</sup> Gaup 1987: 11:26-16:54: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZuWDiyddMQ>> (last accessed: January 2021).

their tool only for routine family matters. Another theory is supported by Bäckman, according to which the drum could be used occasionally within the family as a temporary oracle, pending a complementary and definitive consultation carried out by the *noaidi* (Bäckman, Hulktrantz 1978: 85-86).

As Francis Joy pointed out, the Sami felt and still see nature as a huge source of inspiration that provides a solid architecture for creativity and for the expression of the spiritual aspects of their material culture (Joy 2014: 118). In the holistic perspective of religion, sacred symbols and places (the *seita* stones, the *saivo* lakes, the icons on the drum...) convey the main cosmological concepts, which were organized and ordered through mythology and oral narration (such as the short tale of Seïde-Kouïva)<sup>17</sup> and performed periodically through the percussion of the drum in the *noaidi*'s rituality, which transmits these meanings to those who attend it.

Therefore, the role of the *noaidi* was a simple extension of a wider understanding of the world, active both on the level of social experience and on that of individual experience. However, precisely because of their centrality in social rituality, the *noaidi* were those who held the *axis mundi* of the Sami cosmology, the *goavddis*.<sup>18</sup> On the leather of these drums, the shamans created a native representation of the Siida territory, a real “cartography” expressed through meaningful symbols and icons, a peculiar interpretation of the landscape and the cosmos (Keski-Säntti *et al.* 2003: 122, Ligi 2016: 177).

## Drum ergology and cosmological mapping

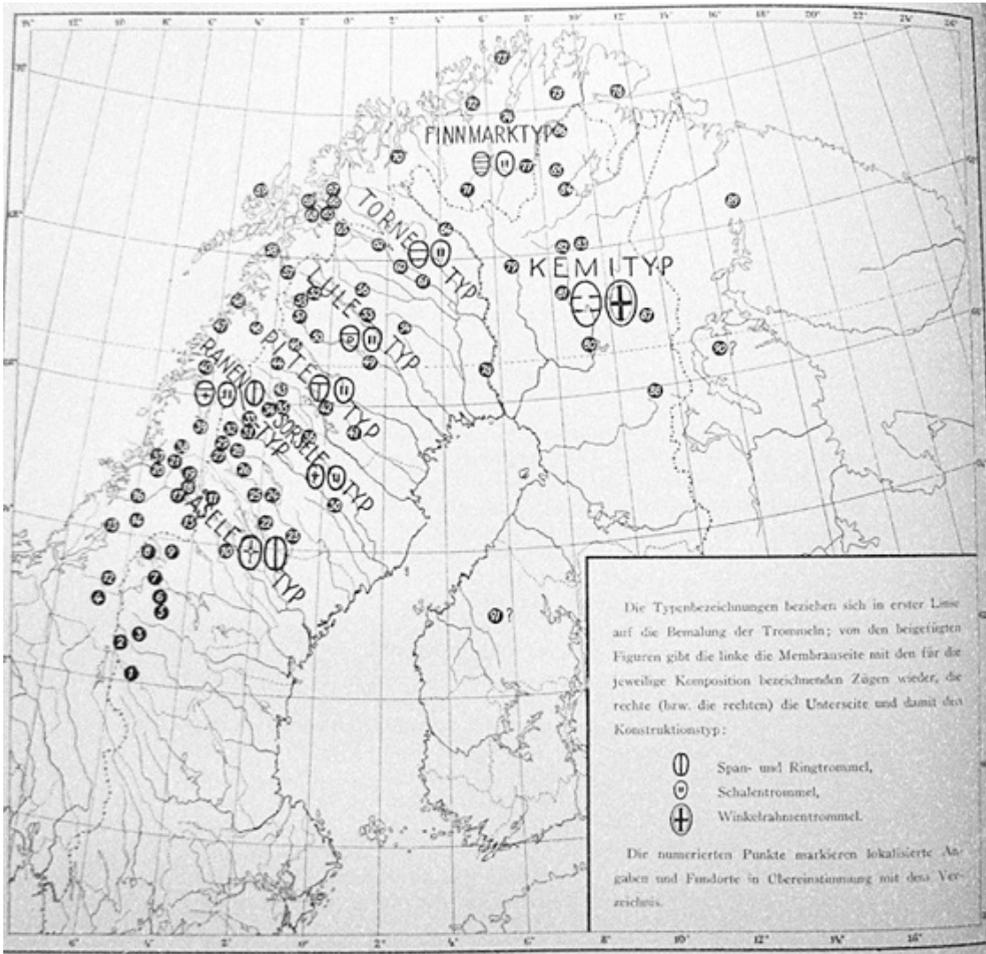
Sami drums consist in a heterogeneous division of oval membranophones and according to their construction they can be classified into *bowl-shaped* drums and *frame-shaped* drums. The first, historically widespread mostly in the northern regions of Sápmi, are called *goavddis*, while drums of the second type, *gievrie*, have been found in southern Sápmi and in the Finnish municipality of Kemi. However, there are some ergological exceptions that make this division more complex and wider. A further classification can be made according to the figures engraved on the drum's membrane. Stretched on the wooden structure of the drum, the reindeer tanned leather was, in fact, ritually decorated with a red pigment obtained by chewing or boiling the alder bark. Comparing the schemes of the figures pictured it was possible to interpret the spatial and temporal origin of the 73 drums whose skin has survived to this day,<sup>19</sup> also allowing an iconographic interpretative approach to the ceremonial use of the instrument.<sup>20</sup> The combination of

<sup>17</sup> It is an Eastern Sami narrative about the birth of the sacrificial stones, called *seita* (Tchakhotine 1997: 34-40).

<sup>18</sup> As for the definition of drum as *axis mundi*, it is a social media communication from Francis Joy.

<sup>19</sup> These drums are now exhibited in various museums around the world, in particular those in the Scandinavian area. One of them is exhibited in the Museo delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari “Lamberto Loria” in Rome.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Manker described and catalogued all the so-called “71 remaining drums” in his monumental



**FIGURE 2.** Map of the archaeological finds and regional variations of the drums cataloged by Manker in his 1950 monography.

the structural and figurative aspects found in the few surviving drums prompted the formulation of various hypotheses on the plausible connection between the linguistic and handicraft division of the territory, also focusing attention on the variability of shamanic activity in the vast territory of Sápmi (Fig. 2).

Firstly, taking into account the bowl-shaped type, the peculiar “cup” structure of the drums derived from the use and smoothing of natural gnarls present on certain pines, spruces or, above all, birch trees. From the same trees also came the wooden part of the

work *Die Lappische Zaubertrommel*, in which two volumes (1938 and 1950) he meticulously described the construction and use of the drum, and eventually he gave a meaning interpretation of the figures engraved on the skin of the instrument (Manker 1938; 1950).

frame-shaped drum, whose traditional structure was obtained from the ovoid curvature of a rigid strip of wood. This was kept in the desired shape thanks to a thin and smooth birch bough which, set along the longitudinal axis, also acted as a handle; while in the bowl drums the handle was hollowed into the gnarl. In the latter case, during the beating these openings also became important sources of resonance in a percussive body which, otherwise, would have had a «perhaps too weak» sound (Kristoffersson 1991: 173).

*Noaidi* generally adorned the back of their drums with carvings, little metal foils, patches and bones, teeth and claws of hunted animals. These amulets were essential to propitiate certain spirits and reject others, but also to record the professional successes of the shaman. These variety of objects also considerably expanded the instrument's sound spectrum, adding more shrilling metal tones to the low frequencies of the main percussion. The search for the right wood in order to obtain a rich and powerful sound was fundamental for the catalytic function of the instrument during the shamanic trance ritual, while this careful sound research was not considered during the construction of drums for divination purposes. In the latter case, in fact, the sonic importance was replaced by the figurative one represented by the pictographs on the membrane and the movement of the *vuorbi* pointer on it. However, the value of a richer and more powerful sound has generally been ascertained by analyzing the membranes of the remaining drums. The relatively constant presence of signs of wear in common incidental points, in fact, denotes a conscious effort by the *noaidi* to strike the particular areas that correspond to the harmonic nodes, so as to generate frequencies and energies suitable for trance induction (Kristoffersson 1991: 171). In this account, according to Rolf Kristoffersson's organological studies, the *noaidi* developed a decisive sensitivity for the recognition of the most eligible sounds. Such an auditory training may have been an integral part of the *noaidi*'s apprenticeship and initiation (Kristoffersson 1991: 172).

Finally, a special "T" or "Y" shaped mallet called *ballin* was used to strike the drum membrane. This was obtained from a bent antler of a reindeer chosen ritually among those not castrated (Hætta 2005: 14). Sometimes, the part of the *ballin* that hit the drum's skin was covered with the fur of reindeer, bear or another wild mammal.<sup>21</sup>

As for the enormous figurative system that has survived to the present day, we can ask ourselves how we can fill the exiguity and ambiguity of historical sources regarding one of the most important aspects of Sami material culture. In fact, many scholars have often relied on comparative analysis drawing inspiration from the symbols found on the drums of other populations in the circumpolar area. This way, attention has been paid to the form leaving out a deeper contextualisation, thus making an overall vision of the cultural phenomenon in question impossible. In order to reach a more complete understanding of the figurative choices of the *noaidi*, the studies concerning the form and the material culture of the Sami must be integrated with the content aspects coming from the oral

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<sup>21</sup> Ante Aikio, Bigga Aikio, personal communications, Levi, 2019.

narrative and, as underlined by Ligi, from the observation of the landscape intended as a culturally built place. In this perspective, the *goavddis* has recently been interpreted as a “cognitive map” for the *noaidi*, thanks to which they were able to orientate themselves «between the three levels of the universe» (Pentikäinen 1998: 39). This map, says Keski-Säntti, «was created by an individual shaman’s spiritual journeys», which symbolic experience and graphic translation were essential for the geographic and cosmological orientation of the whole community (Keski-Säntti *et al.* 2003: 120-122).

The definition of map, as a graphic representation aimed at an easier understanding of space, reveals its relativistic position as a social construct. Between different cultures the graphic representations of the same territory can vary considerably both from a figurative point of view and from its use (Keski-Säntti *et al.* 2003: 121). According to the theories of Keski-Säntti, Lehtonen, Sivonen and Vuolanto the drum of the *noaidi*, its percussion and the illustrations engraved on its skin worked in unison as a multisensory map. The esotericism of the figures created by the *noaidi* on their personal experiences determined, after their death, the definitive disappearance of the paths outlined in life. However, although less commonly, this “sole” experience of the universe could be inherited by giving the drum over to the apprentice (Keski-Säntti *et al.* 2003: 121-122). By interpreting the drums as cognitive maps it can be argued that the instrument contained an effective description of the space that combined the visible world of the landscape with the non-visible world of cosmology, two constantly overlapping worlds.<sup>22</sup>

As for the iconographic nature of the figurative system, the drums can also be classified by studying the arrangement of the images on the skin. In particular, the central figure of the sun (*beaivi*) predominates among the southern drums, mostly represented in rhomboid shape with four long rays that extend from the centre forming a cross (Fig. 3).

Generally, a myriad of figures float around *beaivi*. These have been interpreted over the years as divinities, spatial indicators or everyday scenes. They are mostly anthropomorphic figures, reindeer, other animals, places and objects, variously arranged on the drum’s skin, the understanding of which was probably a prerogative of the *noaidi*. Sacred places, houses and other stylized figures were arranged on an uninterrupted line on the edge of the drum which determined a precise and original interpretation of the surrounding universe. Even among the drums of northern origin the “rhomboid sun cross” had a decisive role. However, their characteristic feature was the peculiar graphic division of the membrane in sectors, each containing a different set of characters, objects and places. Compared to the “southern” drums, these figures were less fluctuating and therefore more anchored to the lines. This graphic division, which has been mostly interpreted as the Sami representation of a layered organization of their universe, can also vary considerably depending on the origin of the drum.

According to Håkan Rydving, during the most significant and upsetting contrasts of the XVII and XVIII centuries between the Sami and the Christian religious authorities,

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<sup>22</sup> As for the definition of cognitive map confront Keski-Säntti *et al.* 2003: 122; David Lee in Johnston *et al.* 1994: 355, 377-378; Black 1997: 1.

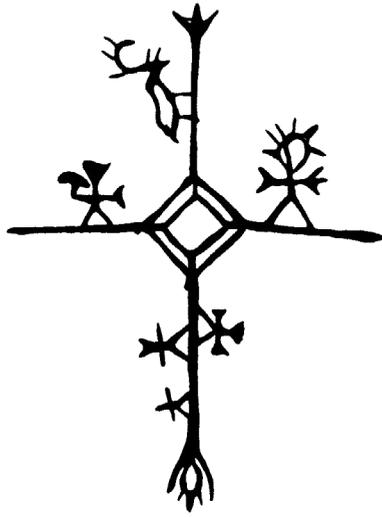


FIGURE 3. In Manker 1938, Drum n. 30.

the first reacted to the harsh coercion of the latter considering the drum as an instrument and symbol of resistance (Rydving 1991: 29-30, 32). The huge extent of ecclesiastical repression against the *noaidi* and their drum, often referred to as their “Bible”, is now well known.<sup>23</sup> This coercion, which has been intensified from the end of the XVII century and lasted until about the second half of the XIX century (Rydving 1991: 30),<sup>24</sup> involved the confiscation and burning of the drums, as well as the desacralization of the sacrificial places (*seita* stones and *saivo* lakes) and, at first, even the death sentence of some *noaidi* (Solbakk 2007: 19, Joy 2014: 156). The total lack of understanding of the cultural aspects of the Sami by ecclesiastical authorities was opposed to indigenous syncretic attempts, whose religion did not forbid the inclusion of Christ to the already large Sami *pantheon*. According to Rydving, if we compare the first descriptions of the drums<sup>25</sup> with the specimens that escaped the devastation of the XVII and XVIII centuries, we can find substantial figurative differences. If in the first centrality was given to animals (reindeer, whales, birds...) and means of transport (boats, skis...) figures linked to the shamanic journey and to the assisting spirits, in the most recent drums it is possible to find a representation, which was sometimes “overcrowded”, of houses and symbols that seem to refer to the Christian cross (Fig. 4).

<sup>23</sup> The missionaries quickly discovered, in fact, how important the drum was for the *noaidi*, to the point of being ethically defined as their “sacred writing” (in contrast to the parallel description of it as the instrument of the devil). See Solbakk 2007: 30.

<sup>24</sup> See also the interview with the shaman and reindeer herder Lauri Ukkola. See Joy 2014: 135.

<sup>25</sup> The oldest known description of a Sami drum and its use dates back to the end of the XII century and is found in *History Noruegiae*. The instrument is here described as «a small boat; sieve-shaped and full of several small figures: whales, reindeers and men on skis, and even a small rowboat». See Joy 2014: 120.

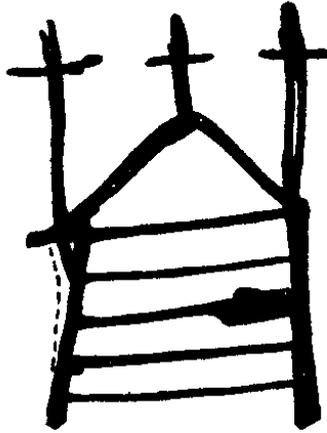


FIGURE 4. In Manker 1938, Drum n. 71.

These figures, interpreted by Manker in mythological terms, could however be a result of the syncretism generated by religious contact (Rydving 1991: 34-37). In fact, Rydving argues that these symbols could be expedients made by some Sami to escape the harsh inquisitorial control. This would probably also apply to the division into three or more cosmological levels, typical of the northern drums (Rydving 1991: 42). On the skin of the drum, therefore, one would no longer see only Sami divinities, but also a first indigenous representation of the “other”, as well as the native perception of the conflict between traditional belief and the imposition of a new religious system.

To conclude, combining the perspective proposed by Rydving with the cartographic theories of Keski-Säntti, it is possible to conceive the drum, map of the Sami universe, as an indicator of the intense transformations of the “sense of places” which the landscape has undergone over time. The traditional sacred places, *seita* stones and *saivo* lakes, have been supplanted by churches and cemeteries on which crosses, Christian symbols, stand out.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, by assuming this perspective, drums are witnesses to the irreversible Sami sedentarization process. Where the imposition of a sedentary lifestyle model has superseded the previous nomadic hunting and gathering system, the role of the shamanistic activity has gradually lost its original value as regulator of the life cycle of society. By sentencing the *noaidi* to death and by burning their drums, the Church tried to «kill the indian who is within the indians» (Comba 2012: 76) by imposing an alien, exclusive worldview that would sink the Sami traditions into oblivion. However, this has not happened, at least not completely. Although shamanism has been almost completely forgotten over the centuries, many Sami families hid their own drums for

<sup>26</sup> The first archaeological evidence of the symbolic use of the Christian cross in Sami burials dates back to the XIII century (Härger 2019), while the construction of the first stable churches is attested between the XV and XVI centuries (*ibidem*).

an indeterminate period of time, keeping the sound and the rhythm in their memory and «the blood of shaman drummers in [their] veins».<sup>27</sup> It is for this reason that the members of certain families still constantly offer sacrifices at the *seita* rocks or *saivo* lakes wishing for luck.<sup>28</sup> Because, as evidenced by the “Rocking Sami” Sven-Gösta Jonsson in his famous radio hit *Vid foten av fjällen* (1959), «I [Sami] still know where they once stood» (Jonsson 1959).

«They destroyed our magic objects. They were unable to destroy our roots» (Meri 1978).

## Rising from the ashes: Sami neo-shamanism

*Deep inside his heart he saw a landscape. On a mountain a man was sitting by a stone.  
He had a halo around his head. It was Jesus who sat there. Then Jov came walking.  
Jov and Jesus were good friends, had much to talk about. They were often together in the  
mountains where they gained strength to help people. Jov had the drum with him.  
They were sitting there talking about it (Gaup 1988: 121).<sup>29</sup>*

In the long lifetime of Sami culture, one of the most recurring aspects is the extraordinary ability of this people to adapt to the transformation of the surrounding environment. This is a central and decisive aspect also for many other indigenous peoples characterized by non-sedentary life models. This is all the more evident in the case of peoples, such as those in the circumpolar area, forced to constantly harmonize their *in-der-Welt-sein* with the often harsh climatic conditions. Similar processes of adaptation and negotiation can also be found in the incompleteness of the missionary conversion and assimilation, which ended with a syncretic “indigenization” of Christianity (Comba 2012: 76).

The social control policies dictated by the colonial authority, and the corollary episodes of internal structural violence, had established a climate of terror in which the use of the Sami drum had been deeply discouraged and demonized even more vehemently than *joik* performances. Faced with the lack of understanding and the intolerant cultural raid by the Scandinavian populations, the Sami understood that to preserve a substantial part of their culture it would have been necessary to hide it from the public sphere, at least until the times were more encouraging.

In the 1980s, following the same period of “reviviscence” and cultural creativity

<sup>27</sup> See Ebba Westerfjell in Ragazzi 2012: 16.

<sup>28</sup> During fieldwork this has been reported more than once. However, the request for anonymity is an indication of how deeply this activity is still strongly opposed by the local Church (anonymous, personal communications, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Ailo Gaup exposes his perception regarding the incorporation of Christian religiosity aspects into Sami cosmology. It is interesting to notice how, despite the harsh coercion of the Church, Gaup describes Jesus as a positive figure who can provide important spiritual support through his own strength, just like many other Sami deities do. Written evidence of shamanic-like relationships between Christ and membranophones can also be found in the Mediterranean area and in the Middle East (see Staiti: 60-62).

within which the *joik* managed to return to the public sphere, Sami people found the opportunity to reaffirm not only their political and cultural identity, but also spiritual identity. The fertile starting ground was the unprecedented global phenomenon of “intercultural shamanism”, theorized in 1980 as *core-shamanism* by Michael Harner in his famous comparative monograph *The Way of the Shaman. A Guide to Power and Healing* (Fonneland 2018: 2). The definition of core-shamanism refers to a universal set of practices, rituals, habits and naturalistic worldviews which appear to be shared by different shamanistic forms around the world. The global outreach of this phenomenon is clarified by its principles, which are not connected or limited to a specific cultural group (Wallis 2003: 21, Comba 2012: 93, 96-98, Fardon 1995: 194-197).<sup>30</sup>

Sami neo-shamanism had the purpose of giving new life to the ancient ceremonial practices and customs within the processes of national construction. This happened, on the one hand, in close interdependence with other world shamanistic traditions (among which Native American ceremonialism stands out), while on the other hand it drew directly from the historical, archaeological, linguistic and ethnological sources available on Sami culture. For this reason, rather than a cult of revitalization, it would be more accurate to speak of “re-creation”, or “invention” of culture: a perspective which, in the case of the Sami, has openly assumed a spiritual attitude on certain occasions “essentializing” and “nativistic” (Fabietti 2015: 300-301). On a practical level, the comparative approach, as a contingent tendency of core-shamanism, was often combined with the aforementioned ethnographic and historical sources, as in the case of drum percussion.<sup>31</sup> However, the lack of written accounts and musical transcriptions of the traditional rhythms and uses of the Sami drum before its persecution meant a major comparative tendency in the artistic resilient process of the creation of modern drumming (Moore 2004: 111-112).

Among the Sami, as a result of the current cultural and spiritual destigmatization processes, neo-shamanism has found significant support from the young generations but also from some «longtime *seita* stone visitors», able again to beat the drum without the ancestors’ fear of the violent colonial inquisition.<sup>32</sup> Although some contemporary “shamans” refer to themselves as professional healers and spiritual agents, Sami neo-shamanism is not intended to be an initiatory path to the traditional profession of *noaidi* (Solbakk 2007: 41-57, Jones-Bamman 1993: 70, Sexton, Buljo Stabbursvik 2010: 571-589). It is

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<sup>30</sup> Archaeologist Arith Härger rather refers to neo-shamanism, or “intercultural shamanism”, as a creative need of contemporary Western society which, having deprived itself of a genuine spirituality, seeks to «adapt shamanism to the needs of modern daily life» <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPBFXAvn-5Lo>> (last accessed: January 2021).

<sup>31</sup> The theorization of Sami neo-shamanism was mainly the work of the Sami writer Ailo Gaup. In addition to his decisive theoretical contribution, Gaup’s greatest contribution was that of having explicitly knocked down the walls of the still firm religious stigma.

<sup>32</sup> Bigga Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019. As for the diffusion and recognition of neo-shamanism among the Sami, for example, the Isogaisa Festival is a renowned intercultural and international event that has been held in Sápmi every year since 2009. The festival promotes the diffusion and performance of the main worldwide shamanic activities through the organization of workshops, live music, healing sessions (Fonneland 2018: 2).

rather a way to regain spirituality and adopt sustainable ways of life which counter the dominant one, imposed by the consumer society. In this regard, the aspects of traditional local and global shamanism have been adopted, remodeled and re-functionalized to the present times and needs.

All this inevitably involves important transformations of meanings and perceptions of the symbols. Nowadays, landing at any airport in Sápmi, everyone is immediately submerged by figures belonging to the traditional iconography of the “magic” drum. At the same time, the same symbols are studied by children in schools, within drum-making workshops.<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, the traditional iconography of the drum is transferred from the spiritual to the purely touristic level, on the other it takes on a pedagogical feature of identity building. Whether it is to fuel tourism, thus attracting global attention to the indigenous issue, or to emancipate and de-stigmatize their own culture from within, the Sami provide the recent phenomenon of neo-shamanism with an ongoing support. This occurs concretely through the artistic experience of painters, photographers, handicraftsmen, stylists, directors and, as regards the drum, through the creativity of Sami musicians.

### From the shaman to the musician: modern drumming

The re-functionalization of the drum, from ritual to musical,<sup>34</sup> took place in the same dialectic perspective of production of *locality* and *global* reception typical of neo-shamanism. As previously mentioned, between the 1970s and 1980s, a part of the new generation of Sami artists who actively contributed to the *joik* revitalization also tried to rediscover and reactivate the drumming practice within the same atmosphere of identity reconstruction. However, due to the little knowledge about the ancient technique and the radical transformation of the historical context, the new vitality of drumming was possible through the assumption of a wider intercultural gaze and a “creative syncretism” (Moore 2004: 56). The versatile percussive nature of the Sami drum has thus determined a multifaceted artistic research towards other oral cultures in which drumming is considered an essential element of rituality, spirituality and music performance. In this perspective, the percussive traditions of some American and African indigenous peoples have provided a solid starting point both for the *creation* of an artistic experience that, although not traditional, can be considered properly Sami, and for the musical entry of the Sami drum in the wide stylistic and instrumental panorama of *world music*.<sup>35</sup> Being adopted by Sami musicians as “hybrid” and relatively recent musical instruments, in a way, the

<sup>33</sup> Bigga Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> These two cultural functions are not necessarily to be intended as antithetical and non-complementary. However, a lot of Sami themselves don't consider drumming part of their traditional music culture, rather, they claim it as a modern creative phenomenon (Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman, personal communication, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> About world music and Sami music see Erlmann 1996: 468; Moore 2004: 145-149.

new drums are not as much bound to traditional formulas and schemes as the *joiks* seem to be within their modern practice. The contemporary processes of creative production are witnessed not only in soloistic percussive practices, but also on an organological level, with the transformation in shapes and figurative systems, with the introduction, for example, of rattles placed on the edge of mallet's handle,<sup>36</sup> or in function of the role of the percussion within larger ensembles ([Audio example 1](#)). The percussive sound of Sami drums, in fact, may replace the one of drum sets or electronic beats, while the latter may introduce synthesized sounds or eclectic percussive variations of the Sami drum in studio recordings or staged performances<sup>37</sup> ([Video example 1](#)).

Not all Sami agree on the first artist who introduced the drum in the modern indigenous musical repertoire. This is challenging to try to define the composite approaches through which Sami musicians have related to the drum and have included it in their artistic production since its immediate introduction. Despite the heterogeneity of the stylistic and conceptual solutions found, the starting point common to all the artists mentioned below is the close relationship between the newborn percussive musical practice and the vocal practice of *joik*, both in traditional and modern ways.

The first case is represented by the pioneer of *modern joik*, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. In his vast and eclectic experience of artistic and cultural renewal, Valkeapää has been able to valorise the sound of the drum in an original way both for the enrichment of the instrumental ensemble and for the catalyzing of community feelings and shared memories.<sup>38</sup> In Valkeapää's recordings, the Sami drum joins a wider percussive ensemble, alongside *timpani*, *bongos*, *congas*, *tablas*, *gongs*, complete jazz drum sets and other idiophones and membranophones. Moreover, with the introduction of a rich orchestral body, electronic instruments and various traditional instruments from all over the world (*m'bira*, *bansuri* flutes, *oud*...), the more recent experimental production of Valkeapää can be fully included in the global phenomenon of *world music*. However, despite his syncretic musical approach, the properly Sami indigenous meaning is constantly reinforced and sustained through the vocal performance of the *joik* and the poetic and "mythological" content within the lyrics he composed himself. This is evident and clear in the *Govadas* suite,<sup>39</sup> a modern *joik* that exceeds half an hour in duration and is dedicated to the drum of the *noaidi* and the figures represented on it (Valkeapää 1988). The recording starts with a drone in F-sharp performed in a bass *gyuto*-style choir which immediately introduces the percussion that sustains the *joik* modal improvisation for the entire duration of the track. The drum punctuates the eight notes in a flexible pulse, often far from metronome precision, coordinating it with rolls and counter-times performed on other membranophones

<sup>36</sup> Bigga Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> See respectively the cases of the single [Suvva](#), released by Ante Aikio in 2019, and of the tracks [The trance](#) by Frode Fjellheim's Transjoik (1997) and [Hunka Lunka](#) in the version recorded by the heavy metal band Shaman, but formerly part of the musical repertoire of Niiles-Jouni Aikio and his daughter Maaren.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*; Bigga Aikio, Niiles-Jouni Aikio, Ante Aikio, personal communications, Levi, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L83OeejaffE&t=44s> (last accessed: January 2021).

(*tablas*, *timpani* and *bongos*) in a wider percussive framework. That of *Govadas* is not an attempt to reconstruct the soundscape of *noaidi* rituals, but rather a musical offer to the mythical and spiritual past of Sami people, which should not be condemned to oblivion.

Within the same complex soundscape of *world music*, also the world-renowned singer Mari Boine brought the Sami drum onto the stage as a “percussion between percussions”, engaging a peculiar and conscious pan-indigenous perspective aimed at the political conflict for the emancipation of peoples oppressed by colonial domination.<sup>40</sup> The biographical vicissitude of Mari Boine, who saw her indigenous identity severely suffocated in her youth by a permeating Christian reality, is characterized by a late learning of the practice of *joik* and of the main aspects of traditional Sami spirituality. This acknowledgment occurred independently on university textbooks and thanks to an intense participation in indigenous political activism (Franssen 2019: 56-58).<sup>41</sup> The vocal and percussive style of Mari Boine is therefore characterized by a composite use of several singing traditions from different oral cultures of the world, in particular those of the native peoples of North America. Although the shape of Mari Boine’s drum can somehow be traced back to the southern Sami tradition, she beats the skin directly with the palm of her hand without the mediation of any mallet, whereas in traditional percussion this had a central role ([Video example 2](#)).

A significant percentage of Sami audience and musicians consider *Dolla* (Fire, 1992), the first album published by the female trio Angelit Tytöt (Girls of Angeli),<sup>42</sup> the milestone of Sami modern drumming, as well as an incredible interpretation of new and traditional *joiks*.<sup>43</sup> The absence of a church in the small village of Angeli (Utsjoki Municipality), where the trio was formed in 1982, and the consequent distance from ecclesiastical authority seems to have allowed an undisputed entry of the Sami drum within the local musical performance.<sup>44</sup> *Dolla* immediately aroused considerable media interest which led Angelit Tytöt to international success. The incision is characterized by the presence of new and traditional *joiks*, sometimes with a simple harmonic accompaniment on the guitar. The three voices referred to a young and brilliant traditional timbre, while within the musical plot the leading role was entrusted to the percussion of the Sami drum which, unlike the aforementioned cases of Valkeapää and Mari Boine, often appears as the only percussive accompaniment to the *joik*. On more than one occasion, the Angelit Tytöt also seek a richer and more complex sound through the introduction of other ethnic percussions such as *djembe*, *darbuka* and other membranophones of central-northern Africa (this is the case of the tracks *Geatgi*, *Giddat*, *Ingunaganda*, *Muitalan*). However, it is in the tracks in which the *joik* is sustained by the sole percussion of the Sami drum that the music most effectively reveals the deep intimacy with the spiritual and mythological past of Sami people. Thus,

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<sup>40</sup> Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman, personal communication, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> The peculiar music experience of Mari Boine has been studied extensively in Kraft 2015 and in Hilder 2014.

<sup>42</sup> During *Dolla*’s recordings, the members of the group were Ulla Pirrttijärvi, Tuuni Länsman e Ursula Länsman.

<sup>43</sup> Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman, Ante Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

FIGURE 5. Excerpt of the melodic and drumming lines which characterize the *joiik Dolla*, by Angelit Tytöt.

the *Dolla joiik*,<sup>45</sup> title track of the incision, not only evokes the fireplace in the middle of the *lavvu* tent, but also «the fire that is inside each of us. The energy we do not see. If you close your eyes you can hear your own fire – your energy» (Fig. 5).<sup>46</sup>

The piece opens with a delicate and meditative tinkle of rattles which is quickly swallowed up by the deep vibration of the drum membrane. The percussion starts from a *pianissimo* characterized by a slow and mild pulse that, once paired with the melodic and metric structure of the *joiik*, it evolves both in terms of dynamics and rhythm. This defines a fast 3/4 circular meter accented on the strong beat and sometimes even on the third beat, with a slight propulsive stroke preliminary to the return of the strong beat. A rhythmic formula today among the most common used within the *joiik & drumming* repertoire, a fact that once again demonstrates the pioneering value of the Angelit Tytöt's work (Audio example 2).

As for the melodic line of *Dolla*, it is a *joiik* created by Sara Máret Gaup and performed by the Angelit Tytöt in a semi-traditional way, partly with solo voice, partly in chorus, while the third voice whispers the same syllables creating a slight counter-time with the main melodic line.<sup>47</sup> In the pieces by Angelit Tytöt the descriptive value of the *joiik* and the ecstatic power of the drum are combined providing the Sami listener, more or less aware of the cultural codes proposed by the artist, an intimate deepening of the memory of a mythical and tragic past. Through this self-reflexive experience, the listener manages to reconcile identity and spirituality. Somehow, distancing themselves from *world music* trends and embracing a creative context closer to the traditional *joiiks a cappella*, Angelit Tytöt have indirectly spread on an international level an unedited exotic image of Sami music linked to the percussion of the “Shaman’s drum”. The music of this young trio, which on the emic sphere was the result of innovativeness and a creativity fully immersed in the flow of present times, was misheard by global tourism as the expression of remote, ancient times, often indistinct from other indigenous musical and ritual traditions from North America and Siberia. Despite the digital music diffusion has a key role in the promotion of Sami culture and its acknowledgment outside Sápmi, the unjustified “exo-ethnic” projection has sometimes led to equivocal parallelisms or even to

<sup>45</sup> <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cg95wSVFSHA>> (January 2021).

<sup>46</sup> From Angelit Facebook page: <[https://www.facebook.com/pg/angelintytot/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/angelintytot/about/?ref=page_internal)>

<sup>47</sup> The processes of *joiik*'s musical and cultural continuity and the definition of the traditional and modern features of this musical practice are reported in Jones-Bamman 1993; Moore 2004; Renzi 2019.

real cultural “thefts”. This is the case of the song *Ly-O-Lay Ale Yoya* (*The counterclockwise circle dance*), recorded by the German band Sacred Spirits on the 1995 album *Chants and Dances of Native Americans*. The vocal line of this song does not belong to either the musical culture of a Native American population, as suggested by the title of the album, let alone the creative production of the band itself. It is, in fact, a modern and “alien” interpretation of a traditional personal *joik*<sup>48</sup> entitled *Normo Jovvna* and interpreted and recorded by several Sami joikers, both in traditional way and as a modern *joik*.<sup>49</sup>

A little later is the last case taken into consideration, that is the peculiar formula of *joik* and *drumming* proposed by Niiles-Jouni Aikio who from his former hometown Ivalon-Mátti, a small village in Finnish Sápmi, managed to reach the global audience during tours in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America. His approach to drum percussion allows an original analysis within the perspective of the contact between tourism and tradition, often permeated by the exotic taste of outsiders.

Inspired by the artistic innovations introduced by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää,<sup>50</sup> in the 1970s Niiles-Jouni Aikio started his musical career as a joiker by singing both traditional and new *joiks*, as well as some Finnish folk songs, accompanied by acoustic guitar. He immediately achieved a positive response from the Sami and non-Sami public. However, during a conversation in August 2019, Niiles Jouni told me that:

It was during my first live performances abroad that the international audience began to ask me to bring the drum to the stage and play with it [...]. Furthermore, outside the Sápmi this stereotype that Sami people *joiks* while beating the shaman drum had spread during the same years. Although these requests were built on a stereotype not corresponding to reality, I accepted them as a personal challenge of musical experimentation and I introduced the drum into my own *joiks*. And it was a great choice [he laughs...] because I immediately started getting many more live shows abroad than I had when I only played the guitar.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless of the important international success obtained, Niiles-Jouni’s choice to welcome the drum into his musical performance reflects the acknowledgment of the deep and vital historical-cultural value that the drum and *joik* represent for the professional experience of a reindeer herder artist.

The drums used by Niiles-Jouni are of the frame-shaped type and are built by Anne Marjomaa, who studied the handicraft construction techniques while attending traditional and neo-shamanistic Sami fairs.<sup>52</sup> Having lost its primary ritual function, today Sami drums are built according to their musicality. Their structure and decorations vary considerably

<sup>48</sup> The *joiker* Ante Mikkel Gaup defines a well-executed personal joik as «a detailed portrait of an individual» (Jones-Bamman 1993: 130).

<sup>49</sup> Renowned are the modern interpretations of Piera Balto, Mathis Hætta and the Angelit Tytöt group as well.

<sup>50</sup> Niiles-Jouni Aikio, Ante Aikio, Bigga Aikio, personal communications, Levi, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Niiles-Jouni Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Anne Marjomaa, personal communication, Kõngäs, 2019.

from handicraftsman to handicraftsman. The wooden body of the modern drum is less oval-shaped than the traditional one and is often made of plywood. The handle still consists, as in ancient drums, of smooth birch branches embedded perpendicularly along the main axes. The tanning of the reindeer leather requires considerable effort and, for this reason, nowadays this exercise is often replaced by the purchase of already tanned leather.<sup>53</sup>

Although definitively modern in construction and sound, on the iconographic level the new Sami drums clearly refer to the traditional figurative symbolism of the ritual tool of the *noaidi*. The pictures are now impressed on the skin of the drum through the traditional use of pigments produced from the boiling of the birch bark, or through the more modern application of acrylics along carvings on the membrane.<sup>54</sup> These symbols, once central elements of the religious ceremonial context, today assume a fundamental value of *identity storytelling*. From an emic point of view, these contents are aimed at the memory of the shared past, while in the eyes of outsiders they are aimed at the distinction between the Sami drum and those of other circumpolar traditions ([Video example 3](#)).

Today the drum is an essential element in Niiles-Jouni Aikio's musical performances, to such an extent that he «no longer *joiks* without his own drum».<sup>55</sup> His artistic production is constantly stretched between tradition and interculturality, between emic message and satisfaction of the outsider's exotic taste. In this perspective, his pieces can be divided into two macro-categories: on the one hand the *joiks* related to his activity as a reindeer herder, to nature and the landscape, and on the other the popular songs with *joiks* "as refrains", which report his experiences around the world.<sup>56</sup> In relation to the first category, *Gumpe* is a traditional-style wolf's *joik* accompanied only by the drum percussion.<sup>57</sup> The vocal introduction, with the onomatopoeic imitation of the wolf howling, has a phonosymbolic value that enriches on the expressive level the already self-sufficient musical description of the *joik* (Jones-Bamman 1993: 129-139). After that, the drum begins to draw a percussive figure in triple metre, alternately accenting the first two beats and then all three. During the first melodic introduction of the *joik*, this peculiar rhythmic figure leads to a new compound figuration identifiable as a 2 + 3/4. To conclude, in *Gumpe* the percussion of the drum follows and supports the metric structure of the melodic line, thus amplifying the descriptive power of the rhythm, a central element within the vocal tradition of the *joik* (Fig. 6).

## Conclusions

If once the drum provided the fundamental elements to the *noaidi* in order to orientate themselves between the visible and the non-visible worlds, nowadays, as a musical

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*. See also Joy 2014: 144.

<sup>55</sup> Ante Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> On the distinction between *joiks* "as refrains" and "accompanied" *joiks* see Renzi 2019.

<sup>57</sup> <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKG3E-fgkEk>> (January 2020).

**FIGURE 6.** Rhythmic and vocal complexity of the joik *Gumpe*, by Niiles-Jouni Aikio. It is possible to notice the extensive use of “acciaccature” and mordants which performed in order to amplify the expressiveness of the joik by imitating the wolf’s howling.

instrument and storytelling device, it has become one of the major elements of Sami material culture through which Sami artists manage to orientate and re-place themselves within the modern world and society. However, if on the one hand the Sami drum was easily and quickly able to fit into a global listening soundscape, its reception by the local community is still controversial, if not sometimes strictly hindered. This is more evident where the presence of the Lutheran and Læstadian Church has been larger in the past. The young joiker and percussionist Bigga Aikio, Niiles-Jouni’s daughter, states that «in the Kautokeino municipality [Finnmark, Norway] to beat the drum in front of an audience is still a daring experience, which often ends in episodes of [suffered] verbal violence, sometimes racially motivated». <sup>58</sup> In these areas, the use of the drum is a taboo still deeply rooted in the mentality of both Scandinavian and Sami citizens. The feeling of fear towards the “instrument of the devil” is often linked to the lively presence of the traditional figures on the drum membrane, elements still merely only associated with the pagan past. However, as already mentioned, today the figurative system primarily takes on a crucial function as an identity marker and catalyst. Some Sami drummers even choose not to depict any symbology on the membrane of their drum as it is assumed exclusively for the acoustic-musical value of its deep properly Sami timbre. <sup>59</sup>

According to the famous joiker Wimme Saari, many Sami people still use the drum only in a private setting, away from prying eyes. He stated that:

To use the drum is something very intimate, today more than ever. I have never used it [the Sami drum] in my music because for me it is something useful to heal... through its listening. And when I use it, I do it when no one is there, for its action to be more effective. Furthermore, I think there is still some fear behind the use of the drum [in public settings]. <sup>60</sup>

Contemporary to this trend towards concealment and privatization of performance, many Sami teachers are trying to promote creative school projects aimed at the peaceful discovery and approach to the drum and its symbolism by young Sami people, sometimes

<sup>58</sup> Bigga Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Ante Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Wimme Saari, personal communication, Inari, 2019.

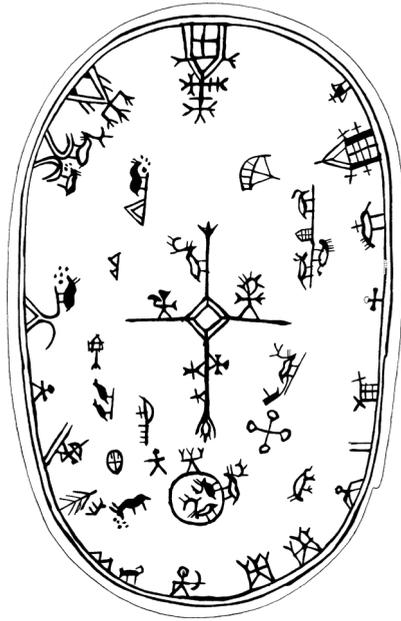
through handicraft workshops for the construction and the decoration of the drum, as well as for its musical study. It is a process of cultural de-stigmatization in all respects similar to the one started in the 1970s towards the *joik*; a “pedagogical struggle” against the violent and traumatic experience of colonial and religious assimilation. It is interesting to notice that Sami girls and boys, in their innocence, are now the ones who encourage the most conservative Sami adults to cut down the taboos against the drum. In particular, it is during local festivals and fairs, moments of collective extra-ordinary aggregation *par excellence*, that young people always have the opportunity to go on stage and perform both *joik* and drumming before some “big names”. On the stage, children become bearers of the contemporary Sami cosmology ([Audio example 3](#)). As *noaidi* once did, they show the community their vision of the world far from the fear and discrimination that characterized the previous centuries, as well as they outline their original creative paths capable of opening up to a more effective communication with “other” worlds.

The history of the Sami drum, as a symbol of cultural expressiveness, tragic condemnation, misunderstandings and, more and more recently, a symbol of resistance, pride and determination, seems to metaphorically reflect, together with the *joik*, the broader and holistic historical vicissitude of the Sami in Sápmi. A vicissitude of painful assimilation, of resilience, of internal contrasts, as well as of reconquest and, above all, of regeneration. Although it has changed radically and rapidly over the past three centuries, Sami culture is today more alive and vital than ever thanks to the extraordinary resilience of this population towards the most difficult and unpredictable situations that history can offer.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> I would like to express particular gratitude to Niiles-Jouni Aikio, who through his music, which I discovered during my first journey to Finnish Sápmi in 2003, he introduced me to this boundless soundscape which is Sami music, both modern and traditional. Ante Aikio, Niiles-Jouni’s son, played a larger role than anyone offering himself as mediator during conversations with Niiles-Jouni in Levi, in Finnish Sápmi. I would also like to thank him for the long conversations we had both regarding modern joiks and the traditional and modern use of the drum. Thanks are also due to Bigga Aikio and Anne Marjomaa, Niiles-Jouni’s daughter and partner, who provided me with important information regarding the creation of new joiks and the construction of modern drums. The joiker Wimme Saari, the musician Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman and the journalist and poet Inger-Mari Aikio were so kind to spend time answering my questions despite their busy schedules. I would also like to acknowledge Researcher Francis Joy of the University of Lapland whose communications on shamanism and the use of the drum played a crucial role in this article. To Ville Vuolanto, Professor within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tampere, who generously provided me with important bibliographic sources regarding the shamanic use of the Sami drum and its “cartographic” meaning. Acknowledgment also to the Samiland Museum of Levi (Sirkka), the RiddoDuottarMuseat of Guovdageainnu (Kautokeino), the Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat of Kárášjohka (Karaskjok), the SIIDA Museum and the Sajos of Anár (Inari) which allowed me to gather significant ethnographic, audio and visual sources. In conclusion, I would like to thank Professor Nico Staiti, whose passion towards ethnomusicology prompted me to get closer and deepen this field, as well as he made this research possible.

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**FIGURE 7.** Example of “southern” drum’s shape and figurative system represented on the membrane of Manker’s Drum n. 30 (Manker 1938) found in Fолddalen (Norway). Its first account dates back to 1727 (Henneberger Museum, Meiningen).



**FIGURE 8.** Manker’s Drum n. 71. A “northern” bowl-shaped drum owned by the noaidi Anders Poulsen in the XVIII century. Dimensions: 43.8 x 32.8 x 9.9 cm (Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat Museum, Karasjok).



**FIGURE 9.** Frames from the Sami movie *Ofelas* (Nils Gaup, 1987). The *noaidi* beats the drum to find out if the bear hunt would have taken place under good or bad omens.



**FIGURE 10.** Mari Boine's drum and percussive style during the performance of *Gula Gula* at the Ijahis Idja festival (Inari, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2019, frame from Video example 2).

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**FIGURE 11.** Angelit Tytöt trio (Ulla Pirrttijärvi, Ursula Länsman and Tuuni Länsman), in Angelit 1992 (booklet).



**FIGURE 12.** Niiles-Jouni Aikio during one of his tour in Africa (Dar es Salaam, 2013, photo: courtesy of Aikio family).



**FIGURE 13.** Niiles-Jouni Aikio joiking and playing his drum in Vuotso (10<sup>th</sup> August 2019, frame from video by N. Renzi).



**FIGURE 14.** Wimme Saari joiking at the opening stages of Ijahis Idja festival (Inari, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2019, photo: N. Renzi).

## Audio examples

**1. [Two excerpts from the performance of Bigga and Niiles-Jouni Aikio at the Vuohču Sámi Márkanat.](#) [01:27]**

The peculiar sound of the rattle introduced by Bigga Aikio on the edge of her mallet's handle is combined with the deep vibration of the skin of the drums. The two *joiks* are respectively adapted from Mari Boine's *Sáráhka viina* (*Sáráhka's wine*) and Inga Juuso's *Silkeárpput* (*Silken threads*). Recorded by Nicola Renzi in Vuotso, Sodankylä municipality, Finland. 10<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

**2. [A recent example of the 3/4 drumming formula offered by Ante Aikio in the second half of his joik Jurddarávdnji.](#) [01:42]**

Live performance at SAJOS, Inari, Finland, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020.

**3. [Sami children \(Helli and Biret Ingermaria\) joiking and drumming on the stage at the beginning of Vuohču Sámi Márkanat concert.](#) [01:47]**

Recorded by Nicola Renzi in Vuotso, Sodankylä municipality, Finland. 10<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

## Video examples

**1. [Bigga and Niiles-Jouni Aikio on the stage of Vuohču Sámi Márkanat performing the joik version of Lady in black, by Uriah Heep.](#) [00:46]**

The track was rearranged as *Nisson Čahppes Biktasiinnes* by Shamaani Duo, founded by Bigga's sister Maaren Aikio and metal singer Jonne Järvelä. Video by Nicola and Massimo Renzi. Vuotso, Sodankylä municipality, Finland. 10<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

**2. [Mari Boine performing Gula gula with her band on the stage of Ijahis Idja festival.](#) [08:46]**

She brought *joik* and drumming within the world music soundscape. Video by Nicola Renzi. Inari, Finland. 16<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

**3. [Niiles-Jouni Aikio on the stage of Vuohču Sámi Márkanat performing Áillohaš joik.](#) [01:24]**

Video by Nicola and Massimo Renzi. Vuotso, Sodankylä municipality, Finland. 10<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

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