

The politico-religious landscape of medieval Karelia

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In historical sources the Karelians appear in the 12th century although archaeological excavations suggest that the amalgamation of groups of Baltic Finns, centered on the Karelian Isthmus, that came together from east and west respectively to form them originated in the late Iron Age and early Viking Age. Accordingly they were from the start recipients of impulses from both east and west, a phenomenon that continued throughout the medieval period and ended with their physical division between what became a politico-religious division of Europe between east and west, lasting until today. The article concentrates on the role played by the landscape, situated on an important passageway of international trade and close to two growing neighbouring powers, Sweden and Novgorod, that profited from this trade route but at the same time became ever more opposed to one another as result of the crusading movement of the Latin Church.

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Introduction

The role a landscape has played in the politico-religious context of a region of course varies according to which period of its history we are looking at. As far as Karelia in the Middle Ages is concerned, we can say that it is determined by these factors at least; the physical features of the landscape, the climate, the pattern of settlement in the region, and the role the region has played in a larger historical context.

As regards the physical features of the landscape, the position of the Karelian centre on an isthmus, the Karelian Isthmus, between Lake Ladoga with its many river connections to Russia and beyond to the Caspian and Black Sea regions, is undoubtedly of the utmost importance, linking as it does this vast territory with Northern and Western Europe via the Gulf of Finland. In the late Iron Age and well into the Middle Ages, this isthmus might even have been seen as an island with the Neva as its southern coast and the two outlets of the River Vuoksi into Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland, respectively, as the northern coast. Another important feature was that the River Vuoksi, before it divided itself into the two out-

lets, connected this Karelian 'island' to the large inland lake district of Lake Saimaa with its easy passages to other more distant lake and river systems.

The climate played its role in defining two quite distinct seasons in which these features could be utilised by human settlers; by boat in the summer or sledge in the winter, thus making it possible to cover considerable distances in each season. Furthermore, the climate ensured that it was worthwhile taking advantage of these possibilities. Some of the finest fur pelts could be obtained in the winter season; berries, wax, and other forest products could be gathered in the summer season; while hunting and fishing could be practised in both seasons. Consequently, these were good conditions for the local population to secure its livelihood.

At the same time such a location between Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland placed the Karelian Isthmus in a key position in the transit area of one of the major trade routes of medieval Europe. Indeed this position seems to have been one of the factors that determined the pattern of settlement in the region and the composition its population.

The archaeological finds from the Karelian Isthmus clearly reflect the connections the local population had forged with international trade already from the so-called Merovingian period. They include, as noted by Pirjo Uino, a great number of “multinational prestige objects”, which she quite rightly sees as evidence of the prominent role Karelia had played in the Merovingian period a role it continued to play throughout the Middle Ages (Uino 1997, 202).

The origin of the Karelians

The identity of the Karelians, that is, the ethnic elements, which came together to form a distinct Karelian culture, has always been eagerly discussed. To clarify this process many kinds of archaeological, linguistic, ethnographic and historical evidence have been advanced. Here is not the place to enter this discussion. The present view, however, seems to be that what we can call proto-Karelians – perhaps of similar origin to the Vepsians – must have inhabited the Ladogian shores of the Isthmus since the early Iron Age. The rise of international trade attracted a colonising movement from the west of Tavastian (Häme) elements. This resulted in an amalgamated population during the Merovingian and Viking Ages that eventually produced a distinct culture, which clearly distinguishes itself in 12th century archaeological finds and which we label Karelian (this discussion is summarised in Uino 1997). It was approximately at the same time that the term ‘Karelians’ first occurs in Russian and Norse sources.

Settlement in medieval Karelia

The pattern of settlement in Karelia through out the Middle Ages is insufficiently known about. The information that archaeological excavations have provided only concerns the early period. Still, excavations have so far not been systematically carried out over the whole region thus the picture they present is rather patchy. More informative are the cadastral books (*pistsovye knigi*) from the period after Novgorod’s fall in 1478. The place-names they list are, however, difficult to pinpoint in the landscape as identified settlements. The attempt made by J.V. Ronimus in 1906, made on the basis of poorly edited texts, does cast light on

the problem (Ronimus 1906a, 1906b), but his results can in many respects be disputed. In this context it is a major problem that the edition from 1851 and 1852 (*Vremennik... 1851, 1852*) on which Ronimus based his work is in badly need of a contemporary and professional replacement that utilise the possibilities of internal dating of various parts, separating the basic text from later interpolations.

The impression we get from these sources is, however, one of fairly evenly dispersed settlements, with a concentration close to – although not exactly along – the shores of Lake Ladoga and, not least, along River Vuoksi. Here we also find major settlements like Käkisalmi (Korela or Korel’skii gorodok). They give us a clue both to the location of settlements and regions of political importance, – not least the distribution of fortifications like Käkisalmi itself, Tiurinlinna on the River Vuoksi and the fortifications in Kurkijoki and Sortavala (see locations on map in Uino 1997, 77).

The emergence of states in the region

In the early stages of the Viking Age, when the trade route between east and west became of paramount importance in the region, the location of the Isthmus in relation to the trade route makes it cogent to suggest that the Isthmus and its population could have become the core of an embryonic state formation. However, this did not happen. Instead it was other centres along the route, Birka in the west and Staraja Ladoga in the east that took on this function.

One reason for this could have been that the population on the Karelian Isthmus was more centred on the Vuoksi link between Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland than the Neva link: the former we can safely assume was favoured by international trade, since it shortened the route. Therefore the political centres from, which the regional states arose were not Karelian but Swedish in the west and the more multiethnic – but eventually Slavonic – Russian in the east. Since the Karelian Isthmus retained its importance for the international trade route, – not least because it was possible to control the route from the Isthmus – it is not surprising that both emerging and expanding states, Sweden and Russia, should wish to control the Isthmus.

Karelia and Novgorod

The relative proximity to what became the Novgorodian city-state meant that Karelia became loosely linked to Novgorod during a process, for which we have hardly any sources. When Karelia does appear in Russian sources, from 1143 onwards, this link seems already to have been established. Presumably, however, the Karelians were a relatively independent agent. This is indicated both by Russian sources and by the parallel information in Norse sources. In these there is no indication of this link to Novgorod. The reason for this may, of course, be that Norse sources first of all reflect mutual contacts in regions to the north, far from Novgorod. Later, in the 14th century, we do have evidence that Karelians acted as agents for Novgorod also in these northern parts.

This early link to Novgorod did not substantially influence Karelian culture. Especially there is little evidence that Novgorod (itself christianised from Constantinople in the late 10th or early 11th century) attempted or even wanted to attempt to introduce the Christian faith to the Karelians. The text in the *Lavrentievskaja Chronicle* under the year 1227, which does claim that almost all Karelians were baptised that year by Prince Iaroslav, is the result of an interpolation in the original chronicle text, one clearly disproved by later evidence of widespread paganism among the Karelians (Lind 1994b, 35–46). This does not, of course, mean that Christianity and Christian culture were unknown to the Karelians, but to the extent to which there were Christians among the Karelians seems to have been the result of individual choice rather than a Russian mission.

Karelia between Sweden and Novgorod

The relationship between Karelia and Novgorod hardly changed up to the latter part of the 13th century. At that time, however, things began to happen as result of the expansion of the other emerging state, Sweden. By the 12th century Sweden had become a fairly firmly-knit state. Perhaps after having vacillated between east and west – an early Orthodox stage in the christening of the Swedes was argued by Anders Sjöberg (1985) –, finally the Swedes had fully adopted Christianity from Rome. Soon after, the Swedes started to ex-

pand eastwards along the ancient trade route. This expansion coincided with the rise of the crusading movement in the Baltic region from the mid-12th century, which was soon to create a hitherto unknown confessional animosity between Scandinavians and Russians (Lind 2001b). Through a succession of campaigns, which took the form of crusades, the southern part of present-day Finland was gradually incorporated into Sweden. Thereby Finland also became firmly linked to the western Catholic Church. Apart from a military presence, Swedish church organisation in Finland may have even, in fact, preceded secular organisation.

By the end of the 13th century this expansion had reached the western part of Karelia. From 1292 to 1301 the Swedes attempted to establish themselves in strongholds on the Karelian Isthmus. The location of these strongholds clearly indicates at what the Swedes were aiming: the control of Novgorod's western trade. Thus in 1293 the Swedes founded (or conquered) Viborg (now Vyborg), situated on an island in the western outlet of River Vuoksi; in 1294/95 they conquered the fortress, Käkisalmi, on an island in the eastern outlet of the River Vuoksi, which fortress they were, however, unable to hold more than a year. Finally, in 1300, helped by a master of fortifications from Rome, they built a fortress in the estuary of the Neva with the proud name, Landskrone (Crown of the land). This, however, they also lost the following year (Pipping 1921, 75–104; Novgorodskaja... 1950, 91–92, 327–331). Had the Swedes been able to hold these two outlets they would have been able to win control of Karelia in its entirety.

After the Swedish setbacks in Käkisalmi and Landskrone, hostility between Swedes and Novgorodians continued; neither side was, however, able to win a decisive victory. In the course of these wars a growing Karelian dissatisfaction with the link to Novgorod became apparent. In a document preserved from approximately the same time, a prince whom Novgorod had installed in Karelia was accused of gross mistreatment of the region (Valk 1949). In 1314 the Karelians in Käkisalmi rose against the Novgorodians, inviting the Swedes in (Novgorodskaja... 1950, 94).

The Swedish–Novgorodian Peace Treaty of 1323

Having more or less exhausted themselves, Sweden and Novgorod decided put an end to the wars, and concluded the Peace Treaty of Orekhovets (in Finnish Pähkinäsaari, in Swedish Nöteborg) in 1323. Orekhovets was a fortress the Novgorodians had built in 1322 on an island at the inlet leading from Lake Ladoga to the Neva. It was clearly a counter-move to the Swedish attempt at establishing themselves in Landskrone. Thus from Orekhovets the Novgorodians were able to control navigation at this end of the Neva just as much as the Swedes would have been able at the other, had they been able to hold Landskrone. In the treaty Novgorod ceded three *pogosts* or *gislalaghs* to Sweden – the first indication of an administrative division in Karelia, which we find fully developed in the cadastral books at the end of the 15th century. As result of the treaty the two parties established a well-defined territorial border, which cut through the Karelian Isthmus. Thereby it also cut off one part the Karelian community from the other, leaving the main inhabited centres with Käkisalmi on the Russian side.

This division took little account of Karelian interests, although access to specific Novgorod Karelian hunting grounds immediately to the west of the new border were safeguarded in the treaty, which also had clauses which, it seems, secured access to their hunting areas to the north of the Karelian Isthmus (Gallén & Lind 1991; Lind 2000a). This was, however, counterbalanced by a desire on Novgorod's part to impose now stronger control over Karelia in order to quell further Swedish expansion into Karelia. Therefore the Novgorodians installed the first of a sequence of Lithuanian service princes in Karelia in the early 1330s, who were enjoined to live off contributions from the Karelian population. This Novgorodian initiative, however, soon sparked off a new Karelian uprising in 1337.

According to the Novgorod Chronicles, the Karelians in Korel'skii gorodok now slaughtered not only the Novgorodian and Staro-Ladogian merchants in the town but also Christians in general, so once more the Karelians called the Swedes to their aid. After almost two years of war, a preliminary peace was signed between the Novgorodians and local Swedish authorities on the strength of the 1323 Treaty. Interestingly

enough, however, the Novgorodians seem not to have been satisfied with this. Therefore, according to the chronicle, the Novgorodians explicitly wanted to bind the Swedish king to a special agreement concerning the so-called *Kobylytskie Karely*.

This is the first time this group of Karelians appears in the sources. And from the fact that Novgorodians demanded a special agreement concerning them, we may assume that they had in some way instigated the uprising. But who were they? The name, possibly derived from Russian *kobylya*, has led to the theory that they were horse-breeders, a theory that is reflected in the Finnish and Swedish translations of Kobylytskaia Korela, *Tamma-Karjala* and *Sto-Karelen*. Be that as it may, with regard to the place where these mystical Karelians lived, the Cadastral Books of Votskaia Piatina from 1494 to 1505 give a clue by listing a number of locations close to the 1323 border at the sources of the two small border rivers, Saijanjoki and Okhta "on *Kobylytskie*" (Vremennik... 1851, 1852). From this we may assume that the Kobylytskie Karelians lived on both sides of the new border. Therefore they were most affected by the establishment of a state border in their midst. Whether they were distinguishable from the other Karelians in other ways we cannot know.

The result of the meeting between the Novgorodian envoys and the Swedish king was that a further clause concerning the Karelians was added to the treaty, which bleakly stated:

If our Karelians escape to your side, then kill or hang them; if yours escape to us we will do likewise, then they shall not cause enmity between us. Those, however, who have been baptised in our faith we shall not hand over, but there are only few of those left, since they are all dead due to the wrath of God. (Novgorodskaaia... 1950, 348–350)

This addition to the treaty clearly shows the extent to which the Karelian community had become squeezed as a result of the struggle for control between the Swedes and Novgorodians over the waterways through their territory. It also shows that they were considered, as it were, expendable.

Christianity among Karelians

The additional clause also clearly shows that the Karelians on the Russian side were on the whole not Christians. Concerning the Swedish Karelians of this we have no direct evidence, but when the

later Saint Birgitta Ulfsdotter in the early 1340s urged King Magnus Eriksson (the same in whose name the 1323 and 1339 treaties had been concluded) to seek out and convert infidels in the east, if necessary by force, the Swedish Karelians are not mentioned as targets so presumably they were already considered Catholic Christians.

Urged on by Birgitta, who in a number of revelations claimed to have received directions from the Virgin Mary for a crusade against the pagans in the east, King Magnus in 1346 started planning the so-called Fourth Crusade. The directions Birgitta communicated to the King included plans for setting up a bishopric in the region (Pirinen 1987, 41; 1988, 46–53). Although Magnus, as Birgitta had suggested, launched his crusade with an invitation to the Russians to discuss their respective confessions, his actual – or at least most important – goal was the same as it had been for his predecessors: to gain control over the waterways between Novgorod and the west. King Magnus did send out armed detachments to convert Ingrians to the south and the Karelians around Käkisalmi, nevertheless his main thrust was directed against Orekhovets, which he was able to take and hold for about half a year before the Novgorodians forced him out (see Lind 1991, 2000b, 2001a).

The beginning of an Orthodox mission among the Karelians

This confessionally motivated campaign from the Swedes does not seem to have incited the Novgorodians into immediate action on account of the religious affinities of their Karelians. Rather these were left unattached as far as Russian Orthodoxy was concerned. This *laissez-faire* attitude, however, changed at the end of the 14th century, perhaps provoked by a surge in colonisation from the Swedish side towards the east as well as northwards into hitherto uninhabited areas bordering on the Lake Ladoga region. Here the Novgorod Karelians either still had their hunting grounds or where they had to pass through in order to reach them.

This colonising movement might easily have put the loyalty of the Novgorod Karelians in doubt. The Karelians who lived on either side of the border did of course talk the same language; they did share a common heritage; they did cooperate in the exploitation of the north. What es-

entially determined to which state they belonged was to whom they paid taxes. However, to the west the loyalty of the Swedish Karelians seems now to have been based on a shared Catholic faith. A similar link did not bind the eastern Karelians to Novgorod. In case Novgorod was unable through sheer power to keep its hold over its Karelians, it would be only a small step for the Karelians to swap allegiance from Novgorod to Sweden, transferring at the same time their landed possessions to Sweden – especially if Sweden was able to protect them against Novgorodian retaliation. If such a change of allegiance, in view of the ongoing Swedish colonisation of the north and northeast, also meant that it became easier for the Karelians to continue their traditional exploitation of this region, it was even more tempting for them to step over on the Swedish side.

The danger of losing its northern territories and losing its Karelians by leaving them religiously unattached to Novgorod finally seems to have dawned upon the Novgorodian authorities in the early years of the 15th century. With the discovery some years ago of *The Tale of the Valamo Monastery* we have unexpectedly come into possession of a detailed account of Novgorodian religious countermeasures to the Swedish expansion (first published in Okhotina 1993 [with English translation] and later in the fundamental study by Natalia Okhotina-Lind in Okhotina-Lind 1996).

Sometime towards the end of the 14th century, possibly in 1389, a group of monks from Novgorod settled on a small island, the Holy Island (Sviatoi ostrov), in the Valamo Archipelago in the northern part of Lake Ladoga and founded the Valamo Monastery, dedicated to the Saviour (Sviatyi Spas). They were led by one Ephrem, later in 1407 founder of the Perekomskii Monastery to the south of Novgorod and venerated as saint under the name Ephrem Perekomskii.

Novgorodian authorities do not seem to have been involved in this early monastic foundation. Rather it was the result of some new spiritual hesychastic influences in Novgorod from Greece, urging monks to move into the wilderness away from the cities. Approximately at the same time, in 1393, the same influences induced Arsenii Konevitskii, who had previously lived on Mount Athos a centre of Hesychasm. He launched his monastic foundation, Konevitsa Monastery, dedicated to the Holy Trinity (Troitskii), on another island in Lake Ladoga, Konev (Horse) Island. In time this development coincided with the destruction

of 24 monasteries around Novgorod in 1386 by the Novgorodians themselves, who by this measure hoped to stop Dmitrii Donskoi from using the monasteries in a siege, when he approached the city with his army. Consequently, there must have been an abundance of homeless monks in Novgorod at the time (Lind 1994c).

The new monastery on Valamo, however, met with hostility from the Karelians living on the main island of the archipelago, who in the Tale are depicted as savage pagans. Therefore Ephrem, sometime before 1407, decided to give up and leave the region. One of his companions, however, Sergii Valaamskii, chose to continue monastic life on Valamo; he now turned to Archbishop Ioann III of Novgorod, asking his support in an attempt to enlighten "the demon-worshipping Karelians". The Archbishop's response was swift. He immediately engaged the civil authorities of Novgorod, who turned over full authority on the Valamo Archipelago to Sergii. The authorities supplied Sergii with ample means for building a new monastery and also sending military forces that could secure the hand-over of authority on Valamo to Sergii. When it turned out that the Karelians would not voluntarily agree to be expelled, they were overcome by the Novgorod forces and driven out after many had been killed: "And there was a great fall among those vile sorcerers and they [the Novgorod forces] defeated them and killed many by the hand of the Almighty Christ and God, and thus the envoys soon drove them out from the island", as the English translation of the Tale reads (Okhotina 1993, 127).

It is obvious that the transfer and renewal of the Valamo Monastery on Novgorod's part was now a state affair, and that this initiative from of the Novgorodian civil and ecclesiastic authorities virtually amounted to a counter-crusade. The danger now felt in Novgorod from western expansion found expression also in the bizarre Russian apocryphal text, the *Testament of the Swedish King Magnus* that was composed soon after 1400, probably in Valamo Monastery. This text was included in a large number of Russian chronicles under the year 1352 (Lind 2000b, 2001a).

The landscape and the monastic foundations

We have already seen how two monasteries around the year 1400 were founded on islands

strategically linked to the Karelian centre, yet still at a safe distance. They were followed by a third island-monastery almost a century later, the Troitskii Sennianskii on the island Heinäsaari (or Heinisenmaa), close to Käkisalmi, but still at a distance of some thirty kilometres from the town (Okhotina 1993, 129). This happened after the Grand Prince of Moscow had subjugated Novgorod, thus it was a Muscovite and grand princely sponsored foundation.

This location of the early monasteries could perhaps be seen as part of a deliberate strategy utilising features of the Karelian landscape to bring Orthodoxy close to the Karelian centres without exposing it too much to Karelian hostility. On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that locating monasteries in such isolated spots, away from inhabited centres, was a common feature of the Hesychast movement of the monasticism of the time. A third consideration might, however, have played a part in siting at least the monasteries on the Valamo and Konevits Islands, namely that these islands may have served as centres of Karelian paganism. With regard to Valamo, this is certainly indicated in *The Tale of the Valamo Monastery*. While the very name of Konevits Island has been seen as representing a horse cult in connection with the renowned Horse Stone (Kon' kamen') (Bermash & Ieromonakh Arsenii 1993, 4). The fact is, however, that the stone seen from one side looks remarkably like the large head of a horse, which might easily be sufficient reason for the island's name.

Christianity in Karelia during the late Middle Ages

No contemporary sources indicate to which extent the Orthodox Church succeeded in combining politico-religious propaganda with the holy war it had inaugurated with the second foundation of Valamo Monastery. Both the pressure and threat from Sweden, however, diminished during the 15th century, when Sweden was weakened by internal conflicts in connection with its position in the Kalmar Union with Denmark and Norway. From the cadastral books, which Novgorod's new Muscovite overlords had compiled at the end of the 15th century after Ivan III had finally subjugated Novgorod in 1478 and now wished to weaken the old Novgorod aristocracy by re-allocating their estates, we learn that the Karelians

had by then at least formally been baptised, since all names of the inhabitants of the region are given in Russian Orthodox form.

Just the same, a generation later when the pressure from a rejuvenated Sweden under Gustav Vasa (1523–1560) once more made itself felt, church authorities in Novgorod again worried over the state of Orthodoxy in Karelia. The great Archbishop of Novgorod, Makarii, from 1542 Metropolitan of Moscow, as well as his successor, Feodosii, sent out priests to inspect the religious situation in the region in the 1530s and 1540s. As a result both found the situation gloomy from the church's point of view, although in the meantime monasteries had been founded in both Orekhovets and Käkisalmi itself – they are recorded in the cadastral books from c. 1500. The Karelians still used their pagan altars; they still had their pagan priests (arpas); they did not observe the Christian fasts and feasts; and when their women gave birth to children, they first summoned pagan shamans who gave the newly born pagan names before they called upon the Orthodox Priests (Kochkurkina et al. 1990, 60–72; note the misplacement of text on p. 65 line 6 and 66 line 31).

According to the two archbishops, the remedy was to reactivate church authorities in the region. Now they should seek out centres of paganism and stamp out pagan practices, where they occurred. They should increase the number of church services locally, while elevating their level especially on the great church feasts. Particularly they should celebrate liturgies for the Saints and great miracle workers, and in order to engage the Karelian population, local saints should be created and promoted. While Arsenii Konevskii was venerated, probably prior to the church councils in 1547 and 1549, Aleksandr Svirskii was, it seems, canonised in 1547. And before 1552 not only the highest church authorities but even Tsar Ivan IV himself, later to be known as the Terrible, engaged in having the relics of Sergii Valaamskii sought out and transferred to Valamo. Here they were translated together with the relics of his Igu-men-successor, German, thereby instituting a double cult that was to prove the most popular of all Karelian cults.

In connection with such investigations into Karelian paganism, we also learn how features of the landscape and nature played a role in pagan cults among Karelian and other Finnic peoples along the western border: there people are said to have venerated “everything as God” forests,

stones, rivers, swamps, springs, mountains, hills, the sun, the moon, the stars and lakes (Kochkurkina et al. 1990, 64–65). Thus the central church authorities moved the offensive against Karelian paganism from the island monasteries, engaging it wherever it appeared, and mobilising local priesthood in the fight. In contrast, the old Christian centres, the island monasteries, were turned into specifically Karelian saintly places of worship: Konevitsa focused on the veneration of Saint Arsenii and Valamo on the double-saints Sergii-German Valaamskie.

Karelian landscape as seen by medieval Russians

Seen from Russia Karelia as such did not represent a specific type of landscape. On the other hand medieval Russians did see Karelia as part of a specific type of landscape different from the Russian, a landscape we might label Fennoscandian. But let me first quote the Russian author of *The Tale of the Valamo Monastery*, who shortly after 1558 wrote this account of the landscape in which Valamo Monastery was located.

Thus, here lived a Chud' [Finnic] people, that sat from Rus' along the *Nemetski*-Swedish Sea, starting from the Livonian land and even to Kargapol', in the Nemetski land to the *Polnaia* and *Velikaia Reka* which they say is 60 versts [verst = 1.067 km] wide. It flows from the Gulf of the Kaiano Sea [Gulf of Bothnia] to the Swedish Sea. This Chud' people lives on a multitude of sweet waters in enormous forests and has a multitude of fish and is rich with skin from beautiful animals, but it did not yet recognize its Creator and Lord...

It is said in the tales of the old men that in the ancient time the holy sacred apostles were sent by Jesus Christ our God to preach among all people. Of these one from the twelve, Andrei, Peter's brother, was in our Russian land and preached the divine words in the well-known Great Novgorod. And while sailing on the immense Nevo Lake [Lake Ladoga] he looked to the north on the Karelian side and spoke like this: “as new Canaanites, godless people of magi live there, but in the future two torches will shine among them”. This, they say, Christ's Apostle spoke about the glorious and great monasteries, Valamo and Konevits. Both these monasteries were erected on islands in that large Lake Nevo in the Karelian land and greatly shone through virtues of fasting, according to the prophecy by the Holy Christ's Apostle Andreas, as it is now known to everybody. Now, this land God has enlightened through the holy baptism.

This greatest Lake Nevo is 300 verst long. In width this lake from the greatest river Svir' [Syväri] to Orekhovets from where the great river Neva flows to the White Sea, which is also called the Swedish Sea after the surrounding land, Sweden. Yes, as said, in width between the aforementioned rivers this lake is 100 versts. The Creator's mighty Godly wisdom encircled the northern and deepest side of the lake with the highest stone cliffs like a wall for the waters to run down in a slow and solemn procession: all their decided quantity. The low southern shores of that lake are encircled by sand. Such a great lake is filled by 140 rivers and thousands of springs. The great Onega Lake, which has a length of 300 versts and is replete with much water, falls through the great Svir' River into the great Lake Nevo. Likewise Il'men's water flows through the Volkhov into the same lake. From the Nemets [i.e. Swedish or Finnish] sides a lot of water enters the same lake through Uusjärvi from the north. Being so big and deep the lake is like a sea; its water is sweet and healthy. In it lives an inexhaustible amount of different types of fish and also animals.

In the northern end of the lake in the Karelian land there is a large island, called Valamo, about which we shall now speak. This island is located 30 versts from the northern coast, the distance from both the western and eastern coasts is 40 versts. This big island Valamo is by the Creator made very beautiful and high; by nature of stone with many forest and waters, creeks and bays are without number. The circumference of the island measures 30 versts. Surrounding it are 70 small islands; like chickens around the hen are these small islands placed around the large island and of the same stone, some with forest, others bare. Some are extremely small, others big. They are so close to each other that in one verst there are 20 and more of them, lying amazingly like bread. (Okhotina 1993, 124–125)

The author was obviously fascinated by the landscape he described. It is a type of landscape medieval Russian authors even coined a name for, to which our author also refers in the beginning of his text, when describing how the Gulf of Bothnia, the Kaiano Sea, was linked to the Baltic or Swedish Sea through a large river labelled *Polnaia*. This is not a river that corresponds to our usual notion of a river, since it is presented as being no less than 60 kilometres wide. And the only geographical locality it can refer to is the Finnish Archipelago that at Åland separates the Gulf of Bothnia from the Baltic Sea proper. Sailing through such a landscape could give the impression of sailing through a river, always being close to the shores. This understanding of the concept Polnaia River (*Polnaia reka*) is confirmed, if we analyse all the contexts in which it appears in Russian sources. In these it is never used about

landscapes in Russia itself. On the contrary, we only find it used in Fennoscandian contexts: these include the Valamo Archipelago itself in the above-mentioned Testament of the Swedish King Magnus; the island landscape at Turku twice, first in the Novgorod Chronicles under the year 1318 and then again in a document from 1441; in Russian chronicles it appears once more in connection with the Russian raids into Finland in 1495–1496, where the Polnaia rivers are used as a contraction of Finnish river systems running to the Gulf of Botnia; from 1559 to 1585 a Polnaia is mentioned three times at the Arctic Sea in the archipelagoes of the Varangerfjord. Finally it appears as a major border river, *Polna flu (Polna reka)*, between Russia and Sweden in the map from 1542 by Anton Wied, which was based on information he received from the Russian aristocrat, Ivan Liatskii, originating at a place near the White Sea and flowing into the Gulf of Finland. Of course such a border river never existed. On the other hand, to the north of the Karelian Isthmus the island landscape of Lake Saimaa, through which the border ran, was exactly such a landscape that a medieval Russian might label Polnaia River.

Considered in their own right each mention of the Polnaia Rivers is confusing because it is never possible to identify any one of them with a specific river. Only when we view them together, taking into consideration the approximate region where they are located, can we see how this particular Russian usage, possibly reflecting the semantic contents of the adjective *polnaia* (full, powerful, opulent), was formed to describe a type of landscape that was not found in Russia but was typical of large parts of Fennoscandia (e.g. the archipelago landscape), a landscape that during of the 19th-century Romanticism came to be so closely linked to Finnish national identity (Lind 1994a, 155–170). It is interesting to note that Russians became aware of this distinct feature of Finnish landscape approximately 500 years before the Finns themselves started to use it as a forceful symbol, as part of their national identity.

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