



KANSALLISMUSEO
NATIONALMUSEUM

Mäccmõš, maccâm, máhccan

KOTIINPALUU
HEMKOMSTEN
THE HOMECOMING

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SIIDA

Mäccmõš, maccâm, máhccan – Homecoming

Repatriation refers to the return of a cultural heritage to its land of origin, to its rightful owners, or to their heirs. The Sámi collection that has been in the custody of The National Museum of Finland has begun its journey home to Sápmi, the land of the Sámi, where the legacy of the collection belongs.

The over 2,200 items of the Sámi collection embody countless stories about their makers, owners and collectors. More than anything else, these stories teach us what literacy means: things that take years for a Finnish researcher to see in an artefact may be read in an instant by a Sámi from the form, material and technique of the item.

The relationship of indigenous peoples to their land is often put in focus. It is impossible to disconnect Sámi culture from the traditional lands of the Sámi. Culture is nurtured by the land, and the land speaks through culture. Only those who know the language of a culture can understand the message of the land.

Repatriation is not achieved merely by changing the ownership of an artefact – it is the outcome of confronting past mistakes and old burdens. We need to learn to look at our common history from the perspectives of both of our nations. We need to hear the voice that we have silenced for years.

A collection that has been away for a long time has begun its journey to Sápmi, the land of the Sámi. We now turn our eyes to the rest of the world, where numerous Sámi and indigenous items wait impatiently for their turn to come back home.

Salute to Sámi culture

The Homecoming exhibition is a tale of repatriation: the return of a cultural heritage. The Sámi artefacts collected in The National Museum of Finland over almost two centuries are returning to Sápmi, the land of the Sámi, and to the Sámi Museum Siida.

Homecoming is a tale of co-operation, of a new era, and of a world and attitudes that are changing. The exhibition is fundamentally about love and caring, as these artefacts have been made with love for use. Their homecoming will evoke emotions. The exhibition highlights issues related to how collections are acquired, which may also convey painful feelings and attitudes. At the same time, we can also be happy that this immeasurably valuable collection exists.

The Sámi Museum Siida rejoices at the homecoming of the artefacts. This repatriation makes it possible to display and examine the artefacts in the Sámi community, to return knowledge and to revive expertise. Sámi artefacts grow in significance when they are placed in the hands of the Sámi. Returned to its roots and home, the collection will come alive.

Repatriation is also an emotional undertaking for The National Museum of Finland. It means seeing the past through fresh eyes and questioning the usual narratives. It is touching to see how stories emerge around the items that are waiting to be repatriated, and how the history of generations is again reflected from their surfaces.

This exhibition is an homage to the Sámi cultural heritage. Before returning home and to their roots, the artefacts in the collection tell their story in the south once more.

The repatriation and the associated exhibition are not only the outcome of sustained co-operation between the Sámi Museum Siida and The National Museum of Finland, but also the beginning of something new. After creating a foundation, we can now begin to build on it.

Elina Anttila, Director General, The National Museum of Finland

Sari Valkonen, Museum Director, Sámi Museum Siida

Repatriation of artefacts: The image of new times

Indigenous peoples have the right to administer and present their cultural heritage in their own museums.

Repatriation, the return of artefacts, is both a concept and a principle whereby indigenous peoples have the right to manage and present their cultural heritage in their own museums. It is associated with a broader change in our way of thinking, and with the time of reckoning with respect to the history of creating a nation state. In the Sámi context, repatriation refers to the voluntary return of museum collection items to Sámi institutions. The repatriation process of The National Museum of Finland and the Sámi Museum Siida is a result of years of discussion between these two museums.

The artefacts to be returned are of great significance to indigenous peoples, whose history has seldom been recorded in writing. The items are vehicles of information on ancestors and their world-views, traditional knowledge and practical skills. They also provide answers to broader philosophical questions concerning such issues as humanity, people's connection to their land, and their ability to thrive as part of a chain of generations.

Since the 1960s indigenous peoples have increasingly defended their right to control their cultural heritage, insisting that collections kept in museums and other institutions be repatriated. The debate has grown stronger in this century, resulting in several instances of repatriation.

An investigation launched in Norway in 2011 led to decisions by the Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo and Norsk Folkemuseum on repatriation of fifty per cent of their Sámi collections to the Sámi museums of Norway. This process was called Bååstede (meaning "return" in South Sámi). An exhibition on the process was opened in Trondheim in 2017 when the Sámi celebrated the centenary of the first pan-Sámi conference. Guests included Director General Elina Anttila from The National Museum of Finland and Juhani Kostet, the then Director General of the Finnish Heritage Agency. Impressed by the exhibition, they decided to initiate concrete measures to repatriate the Sámi collection of The National Museum of Finland to the Sámi Museum Siida.

In Sweden, the repatriation of Sámi artefacts in museum collections has been discussed to some degree, with no repatriation taking place so far.

Museums in Finland do not house especially large collections of Sámi artefacts, probably because items belonging to the cultural heritage of the Sámi, who lived in the territory of modern day Finland, were mainly collected for Swedish and Russian museums before the Independence of Finland in 1917. With respect to other museums in Finland, the Museum Centre Vapriikki, the Hämeenlinna City Museum and the Finnish Forest Museum Lusto have donated their Sámi collections to the Sámi Museum Siida.

Eeva-Kristiina Harlin, Repatriation Researcher, Project Manager, Sámi Museum Siida

The foremothers' hat of pride – The power of repatriation

The Ládjogahpir, called a “horn hat” by neighbouring nations, was a headdress worn by Sámi women in the territories of Finnmark (Norway), Utsjoki, Inari and Enontekiö. Writings, descriptions, paintings and photographs concerning the hat suggest that it was used from the 1750s to the early 20th century. Use of the hat probably ended partly as a result of the ideal of an austere life in the Laestadian religious movement, with the generous decoration and impressive appearance of the hat considered unseemly. The Sámi women involved in the Laestadian movement actively engaged in abandoning the hat. Some Sámi women then began wearing a bonnet-like hat called jollegahpir that fitted snugly to the head and face, while others replaced the use of the horn hat with a scarf.

Visual artist Outi Pieski and researcher Eeva-Kristiina Harlin have examined the ládjogahpir hat in their art and research project, studying its form, history and tradition, as well as the prospects for its revival. This project has involved visits to museums in both the Nordic and other European countries to view collections and archives. Pieski and Harlin have also held workshops in which Sámi women have crafted these hats by a new method using patterns based on the project study of old ládjogahpir hats. Besides reviving the headdress tradition at these workshops, women have also shared their crafting skills, values, thoughts and aspirations. The project has also led to academic presentations, articles, performances, works of art and art exhibitions. Harlin and Pieski have dedicated the project and its results to the Sámi women.

Eeva-Kristiina Harlin, Repatriation Researcher, Project Manager, Sámi Museum Siida
Outi Pieski, Visual Artist

Documenting a culture doomed to oblivion

The Sámi collection of the National Museum of Finland comprises over 2,200 items collected between 1830 and 1998. The collection mainly comprises Sámi clothing and jewellery, household items and equipment used for travelling and transport. It not only informs us about Sámi culture, but also about the views of the majority population on this subject. It explains the ideologies and research trends of its time, and the early stages of Finnish museum work.

Sámi items were not yet collected systematically in the 19th century. Academic societies, universities and student associations accepted occasional donations for their collections from civil servants, linguists, folklorists and private individuals who had worked in Lapland. Sámi culture was regarded as a homogeneous but disappearing culture.

The busiest period of collecting Sámi artefacts began in 1894 when scattered museum collections were merged in the spirit of national romanticism into the State Historical Museum, which has been known as The National Museum of Finland since 1917. This period continued until the Second World War, and was characterised by field trips and expeditions to Sápmi, the land of the Sámi. Here, the primary focus was on Petsamo (Pechenga) and Skolt Sámi culture, which was viewed at the time as representing “the oldest and most genuine character of the Lapp people”.

In 1889 the following note was attached to the collection of Sámi items: “...one should perhaps not consider it a harmful shortcoming that the place of acquisition for each item has not been recorded, as the number and territory of actual Lapps is, as we know, by now very limited in Finland” (Benjamin Anneberg, B.A.). This attitude contributed to the fact that the connection of the museum’s Sámi items to the culture that had created them was broken.

Martti Linkola, a researcher at The National Museum of Finland, redefined the museum’s grounds for expanding its Sámi collection in the 1970s. It was no longer considered appropriate to collect and remove historical artefacts from the Sámi Area that were important to Sámi culture. Instead, the museum began purchasing new handicrafts and art and craft products based on old Sámi artefacts. Principal responsibility for documenting Sámi culture was transferred to the Sámi Museum Siida after its inauguration in 1998, and The National Museum of Finland ceased to actively acquire new items to its Sámi collection at this time.

Raila Kataja, The National Museum of Finland, Keeper of the Ethnological Collections

“The most researched indigenous people in the world”

Even in the 2020s a debate still continues in Finland concerning how little we know about the Sámi, despite the fact that researchers have been seeking a satisfactory answer to the question “Who are the Sámi?” for centuries. Our national institutions are filled with historical representations of the Sámi, and their shelves bulge with artefacts that belong to the Sámi. Archives, publications and studies are packed with pictures of Sámi whose empty eyes ask:

What are you looking for? Are you looking for an answer to “mystique”, “the magic of Lapland”, “a closed community”? We can supply no response to questions of this kind.

Amidst all of the questions and images associated with them, the Sámi are an Arctic indigenous people of some 100,000 souls whose traditional land, Sápmi, transcends the international borders of four countries. The traditional livelihoods of the Sámi, such as reindeer herding, fishing, hunting and handicrafts, sustain nine threatened Sámi languages. One becomes a Sámi and embraces Sámi culture through living in a Sámi community. It is time to update images of the Sámi to correspond to Sámi reality – not the dying but the living, not someone else’s but one’s own, not the Finnish but the Sámi reality.

Mihku-Ilmára Mika Petra // Petra Laiti, Sámi

Constructing images

The museum has played a significant role in creating a national image of the Sámi, as for many people contact with Sámi culture has been limited to museum exhibitions.

Most of the Sámi collection of The Finnish National Museum was acquired while Finland was seeking to form its identity as a nation state. The focus at this time was on uniting the country, and the Sámi and other minorities were considered ill-suited to the history of the emerging nation. Items were acquired for the Sámi collection primarily in order to define the Finnish character, with Sámi culture presented in the exhibitions of The National Museum of Finland as a whole that was separate from the common national narrative.

Following its inauguration, The National Museum of Finland presented exhibitions of Sámi culture for more than a century. The museum has played a significant role in creating a national image of the Sámi, as many people had no other connection to Sámi culture than these exhibitions. The exhibitions were nevertheless presented by the researchers and collectors of the museum, and accordingly represented the majority population's impression of the Sámi, as opposed to authentic Sámi culture. The exhibited artefacts had an impact in conveying a stagnant image of the Sámi. These were often the same items that, when collected, were understood to represent Sámi character in its earliest and thus "most genuine" form. The images that Finnish people have of the Sámi – and an exclusion of the Sámi voice – have characterised the way in which Sámi culture has been represented throughout our joint recent history.

Raila Kataja, The National Museum of Finland, Keeper of the Ethnological Collections

Exotification, Assimilation and Racism: The Legacy of Finnish Colonialism

Active efforts were made to forcibly assimilate the Sámi into the Finnish majority population.

Though the Sámi have been considered an inferior and dying culture for a long time in Finland, the majority population has always harboured a fascination with “the mystical residents of the North”. Sámi culture has been interpreted in a strange environment and from a non-Sámi perspective that has given it the appearance of colourful and exotic otherness. At the same time, an active attempt has been made to forcibly assimilate the Sámi into the Finnish majority population.

Unlike in Norway, the policy of assimilating the Sámi in Finland was never enshrined in national law. The Sámi were assimilated into Finnish culture nonetheless, though even today this policy is still often trivialised. Historical manifestations of the forced assimilation of the Sámi include the language policy of Finnish schools: Sámi children were not allowed to use their mother tongue at school, thereby compromising or even eliminating the children’s knowledge of their native language and cultural expertise. Use of land and the traditional Sámi livelihoods in Sápmi, the land of the Sámi have been under pressure for centuries, with measures that have impaired the prospects for earning a living through traditional Sámi livelihoods.

Sámi culture has been analysed, interpreted and exhibited for centuries through artefacts collected in Sápmi. Items that have been removed from their original environment have often been used to create stereotypical and racist images that still thrive. Cases of misuse of Sámi culture frequently arise in the media, though the Sámi have long sought to improve majority population knowledge of the Sámi character and of how to respect the cultural norms of the Sámi. Repatriations give the Sámi a chance to relate their history, create images of their culture, and pass down knowledge to their descendants on their own terms.

**Boles-Ovllá Ovllá Juha Ánne // Anni Guttorm,
Curator in charge of collections, Sámi Museum Siida**

Because it is right

The Sámi Museum Siida and The National Museum of Finland want to be pathfinders for other museums. Repatriation is a real and feasible alternative. We have agreed on repatriation together in this case; the solution has felt right from everyone's perspective. This has helped us progress through a long multi-staged process that called for close co-operation and planning.

This joint project of Siida and The National Museum of Finland is extensive enough to be internationally noteworthy, with almost the entire Sámi collection returned to Sápmi, the land of the Sámi. The symbolic significance of the repatriation is emphasised by the fact that the items have been returned by a national state museum. The decision to repatriate common cultural property has not been made merely by the museum, but by the national government.

All cases of repatriation in the world are unique and varied. At best even the process itself embodies the purpose of repatriation: re-evaluating history, bearing responsibility in an ethical way together, and recognising cultural rights. Nordic and other European museums still house numerous artefacts of the Sámi cultural heritage, with as many as 50,000 Sámi artefacts still in the hands of non-Sámi.

We hope that the Homecoming exhibition will enhance knowledge and appreciation of Sámi culture, as it is here represented just as the Sámi themselves want it to be represented. Any Sámi perspective on the collection will differ from the interpretations that were placed upon the artefacts when they were exhibited from the Finnish perspective of the National Museum of Finland.

This exhibition highlights the meaning of a cultural heritage to people and to identity even in general. Artefacts are not mere objects, but form a part of our roots, our cultural heritage, and our history. Repatriation is accordingly also a matter of cultural sustainability. We all benefit when everyone gets an opportunity to strengthen their cultural identity.

Elina Anttila, Director General, The National Museum of Finland

Sari Valkonen, Museum Director, Sámi Museum Siida

The stories of the artefacts and the value of everyday life

Despite their often troubled history, museum collections are important for indigenous peoples. A considerable part of the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples such as the Sámi has survived in collections. Though discussions of repatriation often emphasise the significance of sacred items, repatriation projects have shown in practice that practical, everyday artefacts very often generate the greatest interest.

Láhppon duojit, or “Lost Handicrafts”, was a project run by the Sámi crafts association Sámi duodji ry in 2014–2015. It sought to build a bridge between the contemporary crafting skills of the Sámi and the Sámi collections of The National Museum of Finland. The project revived old techniques and designs by modernising and adapting them to suit the present.

Revitalisation within the culture

Five Sámi duojárs (craftmakers) of varying age and from disparate cultural areas participated in the project. They visited the central repository of the Finnish Heritage Agency, studying artefacts in the Sámi collections of The National Museum of Finland that are considered extremely rare nowadays. Inspired by the items that they examined, they then designed new artefacts to craft in the project. The craftmakers asked to see pre-war items representing designs, patterns and techniques that are now rare or even lost. This makes the collection highly important and meaningful to the Sámi.

This exhibition now finally displays the items crafted in the project alongside the artefacts that inspired their creation. The knowledge of past generations is thereby combined with the skill of contemporary Sámi craftmakers that lives in the present and draws on traditions.

Eeva-Kristiina Harlin, Repatriation Researcher, Project Manager, Sámi Museum Siida