

THE PHENOMENON OF KARSIKKO-ZALAZI IN THE RUSSIAN NORTH

The Russian North, as it is known, has absorbed a wide variety of elements of Finno-Ugric languages, material culture, rituals, beliefs and perceptions of the world around it. There is nothing surprising here, since if we look at the map of Eurasia we will see that the Russian North is a narrow strip wedged into the vast expanse of the Finno-Ugric north from Norway and Northern Sweden to the Ural Mountains and deep into Siberia. But this is a global view. If we consider only the north of the European part of Russia, the picture will be quite different, since the territory called today the Russian North extends from west to east for about a thousand kilometers. So it all depends on the perspective.

One of the most interesting phenomena of Northern Russian culture, which has ancient roots, is the sign tree (called 'zalaz' in Arkhangelsk and Vologda regions, from the verb 'to climb', while an identical phenomenon in Karelian and Finnish was called 'karsikko', from the verb 'karsia' — 'to cut off branches' or 'karzat' — the word used in many Northern Russian accents. Zalaz is known in various localities in fishing practices, in funeral, wedding, and recruitment ceremonies, etc. Many cherished groves and individual revered trees were also zalazi-karsikko. Geographically, the phenomenon covers the entire territory of the Russian North from the Karelian coast of the White Sea to the Arkhangelsk Leshukonye on the border with the Komi Republic (see Konkka 2013). Speaking about the whole territory in the North and adjacent areas where the sign tree phenomenon has been observed, it starts in Northern Norway (Finnmarken) and Central and Northern Sweden and extends through Eastern Europe and the Volga region to Siberia to Yakutia and further to North America among a number of tribes.

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For Citation: Konkka, A. P. 2023. The Phenomenon of Karsikko-Zalazi in the Russian North. *Herald of Anthropology (Vestnik Antropologii)* 2: 22–34.

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