

CULTS AND BELIEFS

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SACRED TREES AND GROVES IN THE NORTHERN TRADITIONAL CULTURE

The work is based on empirical field materials from a study of the cultural landscapes and rural historical settlements of the Russian North (Arkhangelsk region and Karelia). The rural landscape is a cultural phenomenon that combines a natural and historical-architectural territorial complex rooted in traditional culture. Sacred, sacrificial, treasured or revered trees and groves are just a few examples of natural sacred objects that are (or were) widespread in the traditional cultures of various ethnic groups, particularly in Russia. Most information about them has been preserved in the zone of coniferous and mixed forests. In some regions (for example, in the Caucasus, Siberia, the Volga region and the European North) sacred groves have been preserved and are still in use today. The sacred groves were a hallmark of the traditional culture of the Russian North (most of the preserved groves are located in the Kenozersky National Park). The sacred trees also include roadside trees, the sign trees called “karsikko” by the Finno-Ugrians and “zalaz” by the Russians, and a special group of trees with negative, witchcraft semantics. Construction rituals acted as an integral sign system through which peasants protected their sacred values. The choice of trees used in wooden architecture was of great importance for construction, both practically and symbolically.

Keywords: Russian North, building rituals, sacred trees, holy groves

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