

CONTENTS

This book is meant to be a short introduction to the religion of the Northern Sámi. The terms 'noaidi' and 'noaidevuohhta' are used as generic terms for the spiritual leader of the Northern Sámi and the religion itself. 'Noaidi' and 'noaidevuohhta' are interchangeable with the internationally used terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism'. For this book, however, we have chosen to use the Sámi terms.

I	INTRODUCTION – SOURCES	7
II	TERMS AND NAMES	13
III	NOAIDEVUOHTA AND NOAIDI	15
IV	GOAVDDIS THE DRUM	23
V	THE WORLD VIEW AND THE GODS	31
VI	SIEIDI – PLACE OF SACRIFICE	39
VII	SÁIVU/SÁVJU/SÁVJA – "PARADISE"	47
VIII	NAMES AND BAPTISM	49
IX	COURTING AND MARRIAGE CUSTOMS	53
X	ANCIENT BURIAL TRADITIONS/PRACTICES	65
XI	LITERATURE	70



Aage Solbakk was born in 1943 in Deatnu/Tana, Norway. He earned his Cand.philol. degree (History major, Sámi minor, Finnish basic courses). He is an historian, textbook author and local history book author. He has worked for many years as editor in Sámi publishing companies. He has published several textbooks. He lives near the Deatnu/Tana River and lives there as a salmon fisherman, wilderness practitioner and textbook author. He is a member of the Sámi Non-fiction Writers and Translators Association.

The book contains a number of Sámi words.

Please see below for a short introduction to Sámi phonetics:

á "accent-á", æ-like sound as in the English *bad, map*

c "tse", as the English *ts* in *tsunami, tutsi*

č "tsje", as the English *-ch, -tch* in *witch, kitchen*

z "eds", as the English *-ds* in *lads, heads*

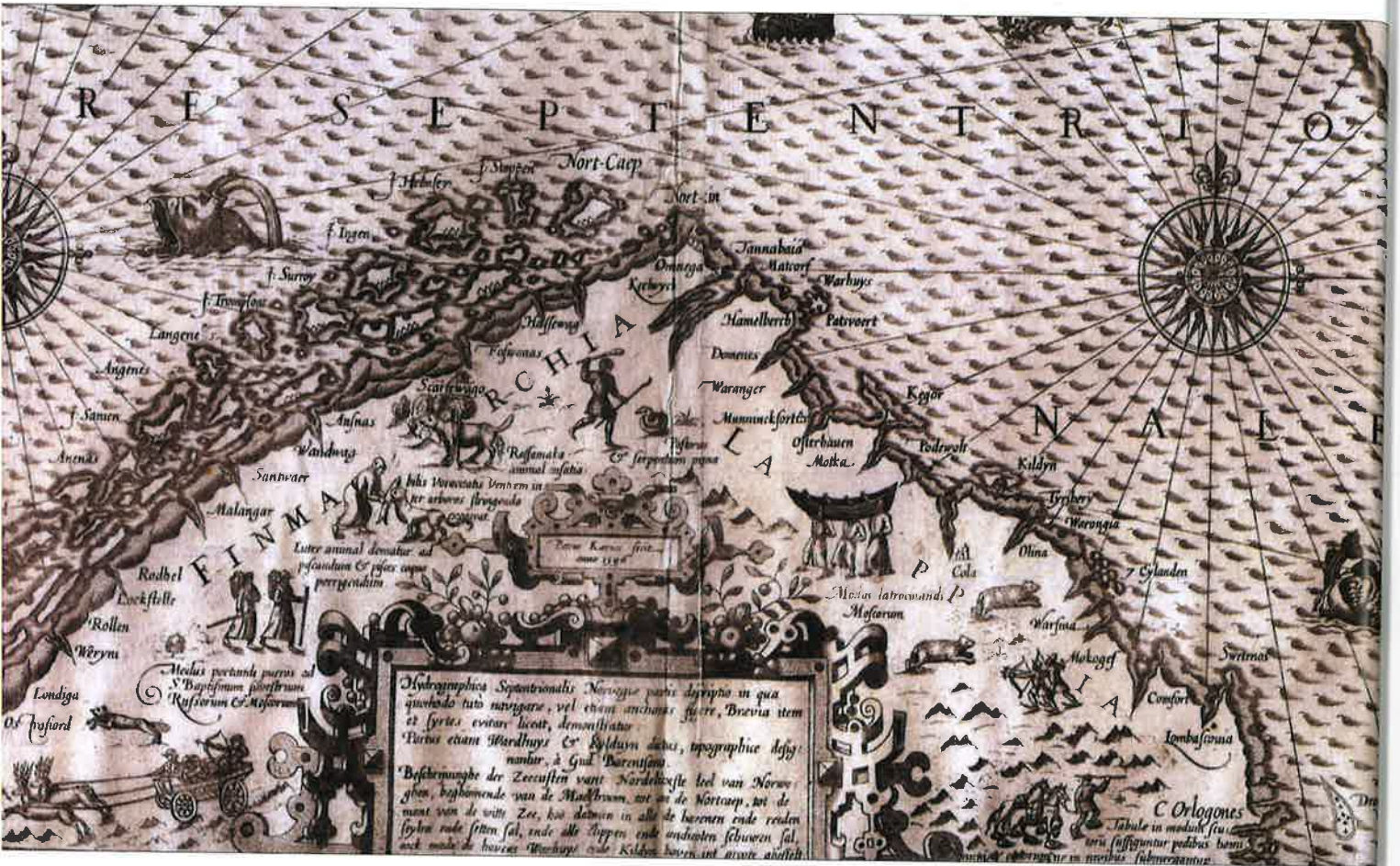
ž "edsj" as in the English *hedge, budget*

š "esj", as the English *-sh, sh-* in *smash, sure*

đ "de", as the English *th* in *father, there*

ƞ "te", as the English *th-* in *think, thought*

ŋ "eng", as the English *-ng* in *wing*



Perilous Finnmark, where Satan and his witches – the noaidit – reigned. Map: Lucas Waghenaer, 1596.

INTRODUCTION – SOURCES

There lived a man in Varanger by the name of Mathias Melchersen. He was married and could read books. In 1704, the noaidegázzi – spirit helpers – came to him and offered to teach him shamanism, the skill of the noaidi – Sámi shaman – which was his heritage handed down by his deceased ancestors. For he was born and bred to receive that skill. But he said no, he did not want to learn it even if he had been born and bred ten times to it. Also, he had a weak head that could not tolerate or grasp too many kinds of skills and exertions. He had just learned how to read books and could therefore not promise to learn shamanism because his head could not tolerate or grasp two kinds of skills. So they told him to believe only in his book and to die and see what benefit he had of it. Because now they were going to torment and beleaguer him to death since he refused to accept the good skill that had belonged to his forefathers and which they had used to help both themselves and their families in sickness, accidents and everything else bad, and to make a living and have a long and happy life. The man immediately became ill, and the noaidegázzi tormented and vexed him with many countless kinds of afflictions until he died of them (Isaac Olsen, p. 54. According to Brita Pollan, 2002).*

This is how Isaac Olsen tells the story about the Varanger Sámi Melker-Máhtte whom the *noaidi*'s *noaidegázzi* had killed. His records about Sámi religion, *Om lappernes vildfarelse og overtro (About the Lapps' Delusions and Superstitions)* (1716–1717), is one of the most interesting works concerning knowledge about the Northern Sámi *noaidevuohta* – spiritual life – during the *siida* (tribal) period. The sources that form the basis of the description of the Sámi *noaidevuohta* originate largely from Norwegian missionaries in the 1700s. One of the first was Isaac Olsen.

Isaac Olsen (ca. 1680–1730) came as a teacher to Varanger in 1703. He learned Sámi, and after five years in Varanger, his area was extended in 1708 to include Tana, Laksefjord, Porsanger and Kvalsund. Every winter, he also stayed with the Mountain Sámi. Between 1713 and 1716, he took three trips to the Kola Peninsula as an interpreter for the bailiff on his journeys to collect taxes. Isaac Olsen lived a toilsome and poverty-stricken life amongst the Sámi. Many

(*The word *gázzi* is today employed in the meaning of "household", this and that person with company; e.g. *áhčigázzi*: father and company)

235 Hand skal finger og klamme,
Løv dem og den slag, og fævere
sand skal lompe fangen, gan-
Nisbrum og klime Nisbrum offer
Det og det bifalden, og viden
Løv de skal Nisbrum, Løv fævere
besynderlig og særdelelig,
saa og de instrumenter og
midler, som de vil skal være,
saa som de klime lompe,
af de særdelelig slags Løv,
med skind gaa som en frem
og hamme af saavn givende,
de vil med og saa viden og
sagde, klime, skrabeforn,
eller fævere som det klime =
gaa skind, og de gaa forn som
bring til at bære skind med
og besynderlige Løv, saa og
misting klime, og klime =

Isaac Olsen's "Om Lappernes
Vildfarelser og Overtro (On
the Delusions and Superstitions
of the Lapps)" in his own
handwriting. (Løev 1994).

of the Sámi hated him because he disclosed their *noaidevuohhta* and sacrificial sites, and they made his whole life miserable for him.

In 1716, he became Thomas von Westen's associate and received this attestation from his boss: *Finnernes Sprog og Sæder veed han som en Indfødt (He Knew the Language and Traditions of the Finns Like a Native)*. The following year, Olsen also became a teacher, *informator lingvæ Lapponicæ*, at *Seminarium Scholasticum* in Trondheim (Mission School), which von Westen had established to train teachers and missionaries to work amongst the Sámi. But he never experienced any success in his new role. He was dismissed in 1720 and later became sexton at Vår Frue Kirke (Our Lady's Church) in Trondheim. He died in 1730.

Isaac Olsen writes spontaneously and directly about his own experiences amongst the Sámi. He admits that everything he experienced left a strong impression on him. And at regular intervals, he emphasises that everything he tells about is the Devil's work. About himself as observer and witness to the truth, he writes:

"Now, I... will not write according to other men's works or speech or myths, but only that which I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears... because no one has seen, heard and experienced it as well as I have... no one understands their language as well as I do" (Olsen, p. 10).

He grants that all his experiences have made a deep impression on him. From his Christian perspective, there was no doubt in his mind that the Sámi were the Devil's work. To quote history of religion scholar Brita Pollan (2007): "Without

his knowledge of the Devil of Christian faith, Sámi culture would not be comprehensible to Isaac Olsen. This is the key to the understanding of Sámi culture that he wished to promote. He does not seem to doubt that the Sámi of Finnmark were the Devil's chosen people, just like the Christians are God's chosen people". Also, in accordance with the prevalent thinking at the time, the centre of evil was located in the north. Finnmark was the entrance to Hell itself.

One of Olsen's students in Sámi was *Knud Leem* (1696/97–1774), who became a missionary and priest in Ávjovárri-Porsanger in 1725, in Alta in 1728, and in Avaldsnes in 1734. From 1752 until his death, he was Professor in Sámi at the newly established *Seminarium Lapponicum* in Trondheim. Already in 1748, Leem had published a Sámi grammar book. He published a small dictionary in 1756, and Luther's Catechism and an alphabet book in Sámi in 1767. He also started on a large dictionary project in collaboration with theologian and Porsanger Sámi *Anders Porsanger* (1735–1780). The first part was published in 1768; the second part was published in 1781 after Leem's and Porsanger's deaths. Leem and Porsanger were also the first to attempt to create a Northern Sámi orthography.

In 1767, Leem published *Beskrivelse over Finnmarkens Lapper (Description of Finnmark's Lapps)*, which also had a chapter about the Sámi beliefs and healing. In addition to his own observations, his descriptions about *noaidegázzi* are largely based on the material of Isaac Olsen and Hans Skanke, who in turn has Thomas von Westen as a source.

Hans Skanke (1679–1739) was educated as a theologian but was not a missionary. He knew some



Sámi, which he had learned from Sámi in Troms County. He kept mostly to his administrative duties at the Mission School, and remained a close associate and loyal friend of von Westen. Skanke visited both Troms and Finnmark counties.

After von Westen's death (1727), Skanke took care of the manuscripts he left behind and wrote a comprehensive history of the Finn mission with the Latin title, *Épitomes Historiæ Missionis Lapponicæ*. His recordings contain important information concerning the interpretation of the drum figures.

We get our most important information about the Northern Sámi *goavddis* – drum – from the sorcery case against the *noaidi* Anders Poulsen at the courthouse in Vadsø in 1692. The case is recorded by County Governor Lilienskiold in *Trolldom og ugudelighet in 1600s Finnmark (Sorcery and Ungodliness in 17th Century Finnmark)* (Ravnetrykk, 1998) and Circuit Judge Knag in *Niels Knags relasjon om Anders Povelsen fin* (Niels Knag's Account about

Anders Povelsen, Finn) (copy, National Archives, Tromsø). Utsjok-Varanger Sámi Anders Poulsen was arrested in Nesseby in December 1691 and sentenced to death by the court in Vadsø on 9th February 1692 for *diabolic sorcery*. The court's examination of him is an important source about the practice of shamanism as told by a *noaidi*, even though the examination is recorded by the Norwegian prosecuting authority and coloured by it. His drum was confiscated and sent to Copenhagen. Today, we find it in *Sámiid Vuorkádávvirat – The Sámi Collections* – in Karasjok, where it arrived in 1979 after having been in Copenhagen since 1694. Poulsen's *goavddis* is one

The map shows the important **Northern Sámi siidas** at the time of the hunter-gatherer tradition – before the national borders had been established (1751, 1826). The siida society had advanced over time to become a well-organised social organisation that protected the interests of the group as well as the individual. Kart: Davvi Girji.



Thomas von Westen (1682–1727), “Apostle of the Sámi”.

Thomas von Westen was a member of the group of Pietistic priests called *Syvstjernen* (*The Seven Stars*, [a.k.a. The Pleiades]) which formed the basis of the Sámi Mission (*samemisjonen*). In 1716, he became the president of the Lapp Mission (*Finnemisjonen*) (under the Mission Seminary (*Misjonskollegiet*) in Copenhagen) and the following year he also became Rector of the *Seminarium Scholasticum* (*Misjonsskolen*) in Trondheim, which trained qualified priests and teachers for the Sámi. In addition, von Westen established a *Seminarium domesticum* in his own home, where young Sámi men were trained to be teachers. The first student from East Finnmark was *Ivar Poulsen*, a Sámi from Nesseby, who became «Schoolmaster» for the Varanger Sámi. Thomas von Westen made two journeys to Finnmark (1716, 1718–19). He travelled first to Vadsø, then made his way westwards, fjord by fjord. During his travels he discovered that all the “Norwegian” Sámi, both the Coastal Sámi and the Mountain Sámi, were baptised and went to church at certain times during the year. A large number of the Sámi had learned some elements of the catechism by heart, but “they understood little or nothing thereof” («de forstod lidet eller intet deraf»). von Westen found that the noaidi still held a strong position among the Sámi who worshipped the gods of their ancestors. During his travels, von Westen collected a large number of drums that the Sámi had been forced to surrender. He used the drum figures as the basis for conversations with the noaidi about what they believed in. The drums were sent to Copenhagen, where they a few years later were lost in a big fire.

of the few drums where we have the owner’s own explanation of the drum’s symbols and figures.

The Nærøy Manuscript is an interesting original document. It was written by *Johan Randulf*, a pastor in Nærøy in Nord-Trøndelag. His document deals with Southern Sámi conditions. He understood Sámi.

Olsen, Leem and Skanke have all been familiar with the Swedish priest reports that are crucial to the knowledge about the Sámi religious practice.

These sources concern the clergy correspondence that was collected and edited by the German-born Swedish professor *Johannes Schefferus* (1621–1679). These were published in Latin in the book *Lapponia* in 1673, and later translated into German, English and Dutch. They were published in Swedish (under the title *Lappland*) in 1956.

Professor Schefferus’ chief informant on Northern Sámi affairs was *Johannis Tornæus*, who was the pastor of Lower Tårneå in the period 1640–1681. He travelled as a missionary all the way to Áyjavárri/Karasjok and Utsjok. He also translated the Swedish psalm book into Sámi under the title *Manuale Lapponicum*, a book numbering over 1000 pages. Schefferus used the Northern Sámi dialects of the Torne Valley as the point of departure for this translation.

Finally, we may conclude by stating that in the sources mentioned there is no concealing that Sámi religion has been viewed from a Christian perspective. Despite this observation, the sources nevertheless provide the basis for a broad presentation of the main characteristics of Sámi traditional religion at the time of the christening of the Sámi (Pollan 2007).



The sacred mountain **Murggiidgahperas** on the north side of Várjavuonna/the Varanger fjord. The mountain has the distinct shape of a human face. *Photo: Mihkku Solbakk.*