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THE PROTRACTED SÁMI REFORMATION – OR THE PROTRACTED CHRISTIANIZING PROCESS

In this article I will discuss the contact the northernmost Sámi had with Christianity before the year 1700, and provide an overview of the situation in northern Fennoscandia from the Middle Ages up until the beginning of the eighteenth century. The greatest emphasis is on Finnmark County in Norway and the former Torne *lappmark*, a Swedish administrative area. Until 1751, the Sámi in the northernmost *siidas* (communities) of the Torne lappmark paid taxes both to Sweden and to Denmark-Norway, but Sweden was responsible for ecclesiastical services. The larger part of this region devolved to Denmark-Norway through the border treaty of 1751, while a smaller part south of Deatnu/Tana River devolved to Sweden and became part of Finland from 1809 onwards.

The title *The Protracted Sámi Reformation* may inspire questions such as is it possible to talk about a Sámi Reformation and were the Sámi Christianized before the Lutheran Reformation? I shall try to answer both of these questions in the course of this article. The latter question will be discussed more directly at the beginning, together with other problems to be addressed when studying the history of Sámi Christianization. At the end of this work, I shall use a case study from Várjjat/Varanger to show how Catholic traces survived in Sámi culture as late as the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

Were the Sámi Christianized before the Lutheran Reformation?

The two oldest sources to mention Christian Sámi are the *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* written by Adam of Bremen in the 1070s and the anonymous Norwegian book *Historia Norwegia* from around 100 years later. A number of other medieval sources tell of the Christianization of the Sámi in Scandinavia.¹ Several scholars have pointed out that in some regions the Sámi converted to Christianity as early as the Middle Ages, though they have different opinions about how widespread the Christianity may have been. Oluf Kolsrud wrote an article in 1947 in which he focused on Christianity among the Sámi before the eighteenth-century Sámi Mission.² He was followed by

1 Mundal 2007 p. 111ff.

2 Kolsrud 1947.

Adolf Steen in 1954, whose monograph about Sámi Christianization and the Mission includes a chapter about Christianity before the time of the Sámi Mission.³ Both authors assume that the Sámi in Hålogaland (the outer coast of Nordland and southern Troms) came into contact with Christianity at the same time as the Norwegians in this region. Else Mundal and Lars Ivar Hansen are among those who offer more recent opinions in this discussion. Hansen says that the Sámi who lived in the border areas between the Sámi and the non-Sámi population were exposed to Christian influences and a mission offensive as early as the High Middle Ages.⁴ Mundal believes that Adam of Bremen was writing about the Southern Sámi, whom she estimates to have been converted to Christianity at the same time as other people in Scandinavia, while the Sámi in the north converted later. Her conclusion is that most Sámi had been baptized by the end of the Middle Ages.⁵

These opinions contradict the most popular view of Sámi Christian history in Norway which, in brief, holds that Thomas von Westen Christianized the Sámi and was succeeded by Lars Levi Læstadius, who created the Sámi version of Christianity. Thomas von Westen was the leader of the Lutheran Sámi Mission, which was started in 1714 by the College of Missions in Copenhagen. This view of the conversion of the Sámi in Norway is strongly connected to the Mission and its leader. Norwegian – and Sámi – schoolchildren have been taught, and are still being told today, that von Westen was “the apostle of the Sámi”.⁶ A search for his name on the Internet reveals a large number of websites telling the story of the man who brought the Christian faith to the Sámi. More than a hundred years later, a conservative Lutheran revival movement arose in northernmost *Sápmi*: Laestadianism. This movement was founded by Lars Levi Læstadius, a local parson in northern Sweden on the border with Finland, and it soon spread to Finland and northern Norway. In Norway, the movement became most widespread among the Northern Sámi, the Lule Sámi and the Kvens. Even today, many Sámi and Kven people identify themselves as Laestadians, or they have a Laestadian family history. These two Pietistic-Lutheran movements still seem to colour the view of Sámi Christianization and Sámi Christianity. This view is reflected in schoolbooks, on the websites of Sámi institutions and in lexicons. Even though some of these sources also mention that the Catholic Church made attempts to Christianize the Sámi during the medieval period, the results are often described as unsuccessful or as superficial in their influence.⁷

3 Steen 1954 p. 60

4 Hansen and Olsen 2004 p. 318.

5 Mundal 2007.

6 <http://www.secto.no/gem/servlet/getGemObject?id=9369> (accessed 18 June 2013), Einarsen 2009 p 44.

7 <http://www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=doLink&famId=251> (accessed 18 June 2013).

Defining conversion

In some instances, the reason for these two contradictory views is to be found in different definitions of conversion, authors seldom clarify which definition they are using. The definition of conversion was not the same in the medieval Catholic Church as in the eighteenth-century Pietistic Lutheran Mission. During the medieval period, it was sufficient to participate in the Catholic minimum demands of baptism, confession and Communion to be regarded as a Christian.⁸ This provided the Sámi with the opportunity to continue to practise their indigenous religion at the same time as being integrated within the ecclesiastical system. By contrast, the Pietistic Sámi Mission focused much more on each person's individual faith. Practising the Sámi religion was strongly forbidden, although the death penalty had been repealed. This may explain how it is still possible to talk about the conversion of the Sámi people during the eighteenth century, i.e. 650 years after the Christian Sámi are mentioned in a source for the first time. Many authors seem to use the same definition of conversion as in their sources, without making this clear. In my opinion, the definition of conversion used by the Pietistic missionaries is less suitable for use with reference to the Middle Ages. Instead of "conversion", I think it is better to refer to "integration within the ecclesiastical system".

Moreover, during the period after the Lutheran Reformation, but before the Pietistic movements arose, some authors questioned whether the Sámi had the right kind of Christian faith.⁹ It should be noted that many of the sources dating from both the Middle Ages and the early modern period describe the Sámi as heathens, magicians and sorcerers who practised sorcery and worshipped their own indigenous gods and goddesses. Many of these same sources, particularly those dating from the early modern period, also tell of Sámi participation in the Church. Scholars have interpreted this as the Sámi participating in two different religious spheres: the Christian sphere and the Sámi sphere. In the Christian sphere the Sámi were baptized, went to services, got married and were buried according to Christian rites.¹⁰ The children were given Christian names allowed by the Church. In the Sámi sphere, they practised their indigenous religion, including the use of the shaman drum and sacrifices to gods and goddesses at the sacred sites. Returning home from church after a baptism, they washed the Christian name off the child and gave it a Sámi name.¹¹ This interpretation is undoubtedly correct, but these should not be regarded as two totally separate religious spheres with no influence

8 Hansen and Olsen 2004 p. 321.

9 See for example Schefferus 1956; Storm 1881 p. 399.

10 Rydving 2010 p. 39.

11 Rydving 2004 pp. 115–122.

on one another. Different sources dating from the early modern period indicate that elements of the Catholic faith were incorporated within Sámi culture, even within the Sámi religion; and on the other hand, some elements of the Sámi religion were brought into the Church. Scholars have mostly made use of this source material to study the Sámi religion, whereas less attention has been paid to Catholic traces and the syncretic aspects of this religious practice. Later in the chapter, I shall show how Christian symbols on a shaman drum have been interpreted as a way of concealing the symbols of the Sámi religion. Before I say a little more about the Christianizing process and the neglect of Catholic traces in Sámi culture, I should like to note two other problems concerning the study and presentation of the history of Sámi Christianization: geographical differences and the national perspective.

Geographical Differences

It is important to be aware of geographical differences when discussing Sámi Christianization and integration within the Christian Church. As we have seen, some scholars assume that groups of Southern Sámi in the interior of Sweden and Norway, and Coastal Sámi in the outermost parts of the southern regions of northern Norway, may have converted to Christianity as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Sámi in the regions I am studying (Finnmark and the Torne *lappmark*) may have come under influence of the Catholic Church from the fourteenth century onwards, but there have been differences within these regions as well. Although the Christianizing process started in the south and on the outer coastline in the north, where the Sámi lived close to the Norse people, the process did not always go from south to north. The early establishment of churches in some northern locations may have led to local integration within the Catholic Church at an earlier stage than for Sámi located farther south. I consider that not only the location of the churches but also elements such as livelihoods and topography played an important role regarding the timing of integration within the Church, as well as influencing the strength of the integration. This may explain why the Mountain Sámi in Rounala in the Torne *lappmark* may have been Christianized as early as the Middle Ages, at the same time as there may have been some “pockets” where Christianity was introduced or accepted much later than among their neighbours.

A National Perspective

Another issue is that the Christianizing process is often described from a national perspective. However, this perspective is often of little use when studying the history of Sámi Christianization because of the indistinct borders, the mobility of the Sámi and their integration in different trading networks, which put the Sámi in contact with representatives from the Danish-Norwegian, Swedish-Finnish and Russian-Karelian areas. One example is the presentation of the Sámi Mission. Thomas von Westen has

been called “the apostle of the Sámi”, often without mentioning the fact that he and his missionaries worked only in Norway, and it is rarely noted that most of inner Finnmark (Guovdageaidnu, Kárásjohka and the southern part of Deatnu) belonged to the Swedish Church until 1751(1754)¹². When Thomas von Westen arrived in Finnmark in 1716 to convert the Sámi, the Sámi of inner Finnmark had already been integrated within the Swedish Lutheran ecclesiastical system for at least a hundred years.

Medieval Churches in Northernmost Sápmi

When the first church on Tromsø Island was built in about 1250, it was the northernmost church in Norway. The establishment of a church here represented something new, with its location a little to the north of the Malangen fjord, which has been regarded as the northern boundary between the Norwegian and the Sámi.¹³ Sources relate that this church was located close to the pagans “...juxta paganos”,¹⁴ interpreted as both the Sámi and other non-Christian people. Vardø Church was established in north-east Finnmark about 50 years later, in 1307.¹⁵ It is possible that other churches along the coast of Finnmark were also built in approximately the same period. There were 17 churches and chapels in Finnmark by 1589, and 11 of these were medieval in origin.¹⁶ All the churches were situated in fishing villages along the outer coast. The establishment of these villages and churches is connected to the commercial fisheries that developed during this period, and Norwegian expansion into Finnmark. In recent years, new studies have shown that the Sámi also took part in fishing activity on the outer coast, where they settled either permanently or seasonally.¹⁷ The Sámi in Finnmark probably encountered Christianity for the first time in these fishing villages.

The first churches in northern Sweden-Finland were built along the Gulf of Bothnia during the thirteenth century, when churches were established in Kemi, Torneå, Luleå and Piteå.¹⁸ Särkilax Chapel in the Torne Valley, dating from the fifteenth century, was the first church of medieval origin in this region not to be situated on the coast.¹⁹ The oldest church in the Torne *lappmark*, a region with solely Sámi inhabitants until the late seventeenth century, was the Rounala Chapel close to the present-day border between Sweden and Finland. The church is said to have been built by three Christian Sámi brothers, who cut the timber on the Norwegian side and brought it with them

12 This region devolved to Denmark-Norway through the border treaty of 1751, but the Swedish vicar stayed in Guovdageaidnu until 1754.

13 Hansen and Olsen 2004 p. 78.

14 Hansen 2012 p. 312.

15 Storm 1888 p. 74.

16 Hansen 2012; Trædal 2008 pp. 169, 174.

17 Bratrein 1998 pp. 117–118.

18 Westin 1962 pp. 157–159.

19 Slunga 1993 p. 285.



Bishop from Ingøy church, Finnmark, 1500. Transferred to Tromsø Museum (Tromsø University Museum) from Måsøy church in 1889. Photo: Siv Rasmussen 2013.

the long way over the mountains.²⁰ The Rounala Sámi travelled every summer to the Norwegian fjords for the fishing. This little chapel has usually been connected with the chaplain Michael H., who in the mid-sixteenth century worked as a priest among the Sámi in the Torne *lappmark*.²¹ This hypothesis has been re-evaluated in recent years, because radiocarbon dating of skulls from the chapel graveyard has provided a dating that goes back to the Middle Ages.²² Perhaps the Sámi of Rounala brought Christianity with them from Norway as well as the timber, for instance following contact with the medieval churches in Tromsø and Lenvik.

Medieval Sources

The Norwegian king, Håkon Magnusson (1299–1319) issued in 1313 a royal decree (amendment), which granted the Sámi a reduction in penalty fines 20 years after they converted to Christianity.²³ A similar decree was awarded to the Sámi in Sweden by the Swedish king, Magnus Eriksson, in 1340.²⁴ In the middle of the fourteenth century, the Archbishop of Uppsala baptized about 20 Sámi and Finnish people in Torneå Church.²⁵ This is the oldest source to mention baptizing of the Sámi. The most well-known attempt to Christianize the Sámi on the Swedish side during the Middle Ages was undertaken by a Sámi woman, Margareta, who in 1389 appealed to Queen Margareta and the Archbishop of Lund for help in converting the Sámi. This resulted in a letter in Latin, in which the queen requested the Sámi to convert to Christianity. The letter was sent to the Archbishop of Uppsala and the Captain of Korsholm Castle in Osterbothnia.²⁶ Korsholm Castle was the medieval administrative centre of northern Sweden-Finland on both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia. Sending the letter there indicates that the intension was to Christianize the northern Sámi as well, not just the southern Sámi. This request probably did not achieve the desired results, since twenty years later the same Sámi woman once again asked the authorities for help with Christianization. A missionary by the name of Torsten was sent to *Sápmi*, where he was also instructed to build chapels.²⁷ Around hundred years later, the Swedish King Gustav Vasa, in a letter to Pope Hadrian VI dated 1523, promised to convert the heathen Sámi. In 1526, a friar from Vadstena Monastery named Benedictus Petri was sent to the Vicar of Luleå to act as his chaplain.²⁸

20 Ibid. p. 292.

21 Ibid.

22 Information from Thomas Wallerström January 2011.

23 Hansen and Olsen 2004 p. 318.

24 Steen 1954 p. 56.

25 Westin 1962 p. 195.

26 Westin 1962 p. 195.

27 Ibid. pp. 195–196.

28 Ibid. pp. 257–259.

On the Norwegian side, Archbishop Erik Valkendorf had visited his Vardø parish in the north-east in 1512. Some years later, he wrote in a report to Pope Leo X that all the Sámi south of Vardø were Christianized. According to Valkendorf, he himself converted many of those who had been heathens from idolatry to belief in the one God.²⁹

Post-Reformation Churches and Sources

Even though medieval sources are sporadic when it comes to information about the Sámi and Christianity in Norway, there are even fewer sources from the first century after the Reformation in 1536–37. An anonymous source written by a clergyman in (western) Finnmark at the end of the sixteenth century maintains that the Coastal Sámi under 40–50 years old were Christianized, while the Mountain Sámi had no proper knowledge of God.³⁰ Another clergyman, Peder Claussøn Friis, in his book *Norriges Beskriffuelse* (1613), provides information about the Sámi and their religion. In his opinion the Sámi are heathens, practising idolatry and sorcery, even though he says that the Coastal Sámi allowed their children to be baptized and participated in services and Holy Communion. Mountain Sámi children were also baptized; some parents travelled to the churches in Nordland with the children, some to a clergyman, Anders, who had been parson for 30–40 years in Norrbotten at a place called *Pytte*. Other children were said to be baptized by the clergy from eastern Finland who came every winter to the mountain region.³¹ *Anders in Pytte* probably refers to Andreas Nicolai (Anders Nilsson) in Piteå, who was parish priest from 1566 until 1593. In addition, he was a preacher for the Sámi in the Pite and Lule *lappmarker*, and he spoke the Sámi language. Andreas Nicolai was also known as a *birkarl* (merchant), as the wealthiest parson in northern Sweden and as a member of a Swedish border commission in the north.³² Friis' reference to the clergyman from eastern Finland who visited the Mountain Sámi must either be a misunderstanding or it refers to the original home region of the clergyman. Swedish sources say nothing about a clergyman travelling every winter from eastern Finland to northern Sápmi. However, parish priests, or more often chaplains, from the parishes around the Gulf of Bothnia visited the Sámi regions every winter. All these parishes belonged to Uppsala diocese except for Kemi, which belonged to the Åbo (Turku) diocese. Nevertheless, many of the clergymen in Torneå were originally from the Finnish side.

We know nothing more about the work of Benedictus Petri in northern Sweden, but King Gustav I (Vasa) continued the work of the Mission after the Reformation in 1527,

29 Kolsrud 1947 p. 4.

30 Steen 1954 pp. 67–68.

31 Storm 1881 pp. 399–400.

32 <http://www.solace.se/~blasta/herdamin/pitealands.pdf> Bygden 64–69, Westin 1965 pp. 12,18.

as did his sons and further successors.³³ Three sources from the sixteenth century tell of clergymen who were responsible for ecclesiastical services in four different Sámi regions (*lappmarker*). In 1559, King Gustav I ordered the chaplain Michael H. in Torne parish to make sure that the Sámi in the Torne *lappmark* obtained a truthful knowledge of God, baptism and Christianity.³⁴ In a letter dating from 1574, King John III commands the clergymen of Kemi parish to visit the Sámi in the Kemi *lappmark*.³⁵ The parish priest of Pite, Andreas Nicolai, became responsible for the Pite and Lule Sámi in 1587.³⁶ It is safe to assume that both Michael and Andreas's work in the Sámi regions started long before the year of the sources. According to the letter from John III, the chaplains in Kemi were already used to visiting the Sámi, though the king thought they did this mainly to trade with the Sámi.

A new organization of the Swedish *lappmarker* was introduced by King Carl IX at the beginning of the seventeenth century, which should be viewed in connection with his Arctic Ocean Policy.³⁷ One church was to be built in each *lappmark*. Because of the long distances involved, two churches were built in the Torne *lappmark*, one in Eanodat/Enontekiö, soon called Márkkan/Markkina, and another one in Čohkkeras/Jukkasjärvi.³⁸ The Torne and Kemi *lappmarker* had their own Sámi-speaking preacher, Georgius Henrici (Jören Henriksson) from 1607 to 1614. According to his own statements, he visited each *siida* in his huge parish three times a year.³⁹ The authorities wanted the preachers to live next to the churches, but this policy was less successful. After this period, either a chaplain from Övertorneå or the parish priest of the Nedertorneå Parishes (predating Torne Parish) was responsible for the Sámi. The most remarkable was Johannes Torneus, who published a Book of Common Prayer in Northern Sámi.⁴⁰ In 1673, the Torne *lappmark* was divided into two parishes (*Koutokeino Pastorat* and *Jukkasjärvi Pastorat* in Swedish). Besides the Guovdageaidnu *siida*, *Koutokeino Pastorat* also included Ávjovárri (present-day Kárášjohka) and the two *siidas* in Deatnu/Tana valley that are today divided between Norway and Finland: Deatnu *siida* and Ochejohka.⁴¹ A parish priest lived in Guovdageaidnu the whole year round and visited the other communities regularly. Small timber or turf huts were used for services until proper churches were built in both Guovdageaidnu and Ohcejohka at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The other parish, *Jukkasjärvi Pastorat*, included the old *siidas* Diggevárri, Siggevárri, Rounala, Suovddisjávri (Suonttavaara) and Bealdovuopmi. From this time onwards, a parish priest lived in Čohkkeras/Jukkasjärvi, while Eanodat/Enontekiö had a chaplain.⁴²

33 Steen 1954 pp. 94–97.

34 <http://www.solace.se/~blasta/herdamin/nedertornea.pdf> Bygden 242

35 Fellman 1910 p. 15.

36 <http://www.solace.se/~blasta/herdamin/pitealands.pdf> Bygden 65

37 Westin 1965 pp. 3ff, Nordberg 1973 pp. 15.

38 Nordberg 1973 pp. 12, 28.

39 Ibid. p. 308.

40 Ibid. p. 353.

41 Steen 1954 pp. 97–98.

42 Slunga 1993 pp. 291–293.

Schools for Sámi children were established in Piteå in 1617,⁴³ and in Liksjuo/Lycksele in 1632. The school in Liksjuo/Lycksele, where the younger Sámi obtained an education, lasted for 200 years.⁴⁴ Many of the Sámi worked as teachers and as vergers or sextons. Some even studied theology in Uppsala and returned to the Sámi regions as clergymen. This school seems to have had little impact in the Torne *lappmark*, which had only one Sámi clergyman during the seventeenth century, *Olaus Sirma* who was originally from the Kemi *lappmark*.⁴⁵



Sodankylä old church, built in Lapland, Finland in 1689. Photo: Siv Rasmussen 2005.

What was happening at the same time in Norway? During the seventeenth century, the Bishops of Trondheim made sporadic initiatives to incorporate the Sámi to a greater extent within the Lutheran Church. Most of these efforts were made in the Southern Sámi region, not far away from Trondheim, during the 1630s. Other attempts were made by bishop Erik Bredal, particularly during his residence and that of his students in Trondenes in the years 1658–1659.⁴⁶ None of these attempts seem to have included Finnmark. However, this does not mean that the Sámi in Finnmark lived totally outside the ecclesiastical system. Even though some of the Coastal Sámi lived in villages on

43 Forsgren 1988 p. 6.

44 Ruong 1969 pp. 68–69.

45 Ibid. p. 69, Slunga 1993 p. 294.

46 Steen 1954 pp. 74–75.

the outer coast, the largest Sámi communities during this century were in the fjords. However, it was not unusual for the Sámi to participate in services in churches on the outer coast. In addition, the parish priests had to visit the nearby Sámi community two or three times a year. Nevertheless, only one proper church was built for the Sámi in Finnmark during the seventeenth century. This was Sværholt Church at the peninsula between the Porsanger fjord and Laksefjord.⁴⁷ It is first mentioned in 1668, but may have been built as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was said to have been built for the Sámi in Laksefjord, but was actually used by the Porsanger Sámi as well. We do not know who took the initiative concerning this establishment. In connection with a graveyard on an island in the Porsanger fjord, the local Sámi constructed a little building, called a *messehus* in Norwegian, which was used for church activities.⁴⁸ Unconsecrated buildings were also used for services. During the latter part of the seventeenth century, the parish priest of Vadsø visited the Varanger Sámi three times a year, when services were celebrated in two government owned turf huts, *Amtmannsgammen* (that of the district governor) or *Kongsgammen* (that of the king).⁴⁹ On Isnestofte in the Altafjord a similar, unconsecrated turf hut was used for services.⁵⁰

As we have seen, the first churches in northernmost Fennoscandia were built in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Sámi living nearby probably came into contact with the Church and with Christianity from this period onwards. Some of them were also integrated within the ecclesiastical system, but few details are known about how and when this happened.

A Case Study from Varanger – the Varanger Sámi and the Noaidi Anders Povelsen

Varanger is a region with a long Christian history, due to the establishment of a church in Vardø in 1307. The church here may have been dedicated to St. Olav, which was the most popular name among the male Sámi in Varanger during the sixteenth century. However, the Sámi of the Varanger region were still regarded as heathens by the Pietistic Lutheran missionaries 400 years after Vardø Church was built and 200 years after Archbishop Valkendorf's visit. The Norwegian Isaac Olsen was a teacher of the Varanger Sámi from 1703 to 1716, just before the Sámi Mission started its work there in 1716. He learned the Sámi language and became familiar with local Sámi traditions, including religious traditions. His manuscript "Om Lappernes vildfarelse og overtro" (On the delusions and superstitions of the Lapps) is regarded as one of the best sources of knowledge about the indigenous Sámi religion. In addition to descriptions of *noaidi*,

47 Trædal 2008 p. 282.

48 Ibid. p. 287.

49 Niemi 1983 p. 320.

50 Nielsen 1990 p. 152.

or shamans, and other aspects of this religion, he tells of Lent traditions, which were clearly influenced by the Catholic faith.⁵¹ Olsen was aware of the Catholic roots of these traditions, but he thought that both the Catholic traditions and the elements of the indigenous religion were the work of the Devil. The missionary Elias Heltberg also tells of a very strong Lent tradition, which the Sámi were afraid to break. For instance, it was forbidden to eat meat on Christmas Eve. The Sámi also celebrated Catholic holidays.

All the Sámi in the Varanger region were baptized at this time, and they attended Communion and services at least three times a year when the parish priest of Vadsø came to the inner part of Varanger. Many even attended the church in Vadsø, around 40–50 km away, which they probably looked upon as their proper church. Vadsø Church was built during the 1570s.⁵² We know that the Coastal Sámi in Finnmark paid tithes from at least 1567.⁵³

A Sorcerer or a Catholic?

The trial of an old Sámi man, Anders Povelsen, in February 1692 is the best-known witchcraft case relating to a Sámi in Norway. He was apprehended in the inner part of Varanger and taken to Vadsø, charged with possessing and having used a shaman drum. In the courtroom, the drum was placed on a table and when Povelsen picked up the drum he made the sign of the cross both for himself and over the instrument. He recited the Lord's Prayer in the Karelian language before continuing with his own prayer in the Sámi language.⁵⁴ During the trial, he was asked about the meaning of the symbols on his drum and he ascribed Christian meanings to most of the figures. He was probably reported by the local Sámi in Varanger, who did not accept his type of syncretic religion.

Anders Povelsen was born in the Torne *lappmark* in Sweden, but had moved as an adult to the coast of northern Norway, where he had lived both in the province of Nordlandene (today Nordland and Troms) and the province of Finnmark. Only during the last decade of his life did he appear in sources from Porsanger and Varanger, and the neighbouring *siida* of Ohcejohka in the easternmost part of the Torne *lappmark* and Guovdageaidnu Parish. Povelsen and his family probably obtained access to grazing land for the reindeer through his local son- and daughters-in-law. Povelsen seems to have been a newcomer to the whole region, not just Varanger. He is usually assumed to have been from Ohcejohka⁵⁵, but I believe he was from Diggevárri in the southern part of the Torne *lappmark* and his family probably had some connection with the nearby Lule Sámi *siida*, Gáidum. The reasons for this are the terminology Povelsen uses in his

51 Qvigstad 1910 pp. 22–23.

52 Niemi 1983 p. 208.

53 Norske lensrekneskapsbøker 1548–1567, 1943 p. 219.

54 Willumsen 2010 p. 385.

55 Hagen 2012 p. 17; Solbakk 2009 p. 28.

explanations concerning the drum and the fact that one of his sons moved to Diggevárri shortly after the trial, where he even paid taxes in Gáidum for a couple of years.

Anders Povelsen had moved to Varanger the same year that he was brought to court. One of his daughters and her husband lived there already, which probably made it easier for Povelsen and the other members of his family to make the move. A son, two daughters and a son-in-law moved with him. They had lived in Porsanger for some years, where two other sons and a grandson were living. Other Sámi in Varanger reported to the Danish-Norwegian authorities that Povelsen owned a shaman drum and that he had used it.⁵⁶ There seems to have been a reaction against this newcomer and his religious practices, which were unlike the local ones. Shaman drums are very rarely mentioned in seventeenth-century sources from Finnmark. Knud Leem, who was a missionary in Porsanger and parish priest of Alta during the 1720s, maintains that the Sámi in Finnmark did not use shaman drums but lids.⁵⁷ In the Swedish *lappmarks*, drums were still in use in the eighteenth century. During the 1680s, the authorities made an investigation into shaman drums. In Čohkkeras/Jukkasjärvi eight men admitted to having used a drum, but only to do good things.⁵⁸ Surprisingly, they did not pursue the investigation in the *siidas* in the northernmost Torne *lappmark*, where the Sámi paid taxes to both Denmark-Norway and Sweden.

The Drum

Anders Povelsen's explanation of the figures on his drum is one of few explanations given by a Sámi who used and owned a shaman drum. Most of his explanations were ascribed with a Christian meaning, but until recently these explanations of the symbols have been reinterpreted as figures from the Sámi religion, or dismissed as incorrect, or explained away as a cautious calculation or an attempt to disguise the Sámi religion. Håkan Rydving discusses how Povelsen's own explanations have been almost totally neglected by scholars, because they did not agree with opinions of what 'should' be pictured on the drum: *Sámi gods and mythological characters*.⁵⁹ Ernst Manker is the most prominent scholar who has tried to reinterpret the symbols on the drum.⁶⁰ Rydving compares Ernst Manker's (EM) interpretations of the drum symbols with Anders Povelsen's (AP) explanations. Some of them are presented here in the form Rydving presents them in his book *Tracing Sámi Traditions, in Search of the Indigenous Religion among the Western Sámi during the 17th and 18th Centuries*.⁶¹ The transcriptions in

56 Hagen 2012 p. 15.

57 Leem 1767 p. 467.

58 Larsen and Rauø 1997 p. 156.

59 Rydving 2010 p. 50.

60 Manker 1950: p. 430 ff.

61 Rydving 2010 pp. 48–49.

brackets into modern Sámi are by Rydving. SamN means Northern Sámi, SamL is Lule Sámi and SamS is Southern Sámi.

- AP: Ilmaris, storm and bad weather.
EM: The wind, Bieggolmai [SamN Bieggolmmái].
AP: Diermes[SamN. Dierpmis], thunder.
EM: Thunder, Tiermis [SamN. Dierpmis], with his hammer
AP: Wild reindeer.
EM: Whether the figure actually represents a wild reindeer, *godde* [SamN. *goddi*] or a tame male reindeer, *sarva*[SamN. *sarvvis*], is difficult to say. Maybe it should be conceived as a sacrificial animal.
AP: God's child
EM: A correspondence to Radien-pardne [SamS Raedienbaernie], "the ruler's son", in Christian interpretation "God's son."
AP: God the Father.
EM: Corresponding to Radien-attje [SamS Raedienahtjie], "the ruler's father", in Christian interpretation "God the Father".
AP: Cathedral
EM: The Christian Church ...perhaps... a reflection of the *saiivo* [Sams. saajve] concept (holy mountain or lake).
AP: St. Anne, Mary's sister.
EM: A female divinity, one of the Akkas [SamN.sing. Áhkká], maybe Maddarakka [SamS. Maadteraahka].⁶²
AP: Mary, Christ's mother, God's woman.
EM: A female corresponding to Sarakka [SamS. Saaraahka].⁶³
AP: Christmas Days, the Christmas men.⁶⁴
EM: The three holiday men, *ailekesolmak* [SamS. *aejlegesálmah*, SamL. *ájlesálmma*, SamN. *basseolbmát*].
AP: The church.
EM: A church ... possibly originally a place of sacrifice.⁶⁵

62 SamN. Máttaráhkká

63 SamN. Sáráhkká

64 Anders Povelsen's own explanation of these symbols is translated into English in this way by Katjana Ewwardsen (in Willumsen 2010 p. 382): *Three figures of humans whom he calls Julle Peive, [or] Julle masters. They are Christmas days or Christmas masters who rule over Christmas. Oucht Jule Peiv is the master of the first Christmas day, Gougt Jule Peive is the master of the second Christmas day, Gvolme Jul Peive is the master of the third Christmas day.*

65 Rydving 2010 pp. 48–49.



Copy of Anders Povelsen's drum, exhibited at The Sami Collections in Karasjok.
Photo: Siv Rasmussen 2012.

As we can see, Manker consistently renders Povelsen's explanations less Christian. The saints, St. Mary and St. Anne, are interpreted as female divinities in the Sámi religion, Máttaráhkká and her daughter Sáráhkká. The church and the cathedral are not just themselves, in Manker's opinion, but are perceived as reflections of sacred places in the Sámi region.

If Anders Povelsen was from Diggevárri in the Torne *lappmark*, Čohkkeras Church (Jukkasjärvi) would have been his nearest church. In the court, he talked about his local church, where he and other people used to give tallow candles, money and other items to the Church. The church was built after the Lutheran Reformation, but Catholic traditions indicate that the Sámi here had already been under the influence of the Catholic Church to some extent. Parish priest Samuel Rheen reports from the Lule *lappmark* that the Sámi had special rituals on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, when they made offerings to the "Christmas People": spirits whom they believed wandered in the woods and mountains.⁶⁶ Like the Varanger Sámi, they observed Lent at Christmas and did not eat any meat for two days. As we can see, symbols and rituals from Catholic Christianity were incorporated in the indigenous religion.

66 Schefferus 1956 pp. 149.



St. Anna and Virgin Mary, at Keminmaa old church, Finland. Photo: Siv Rasmussen 2010.

Conclusions

In this article, I have indicated a number of problems concerning the study and representation of the conversion or Christianization of the Sámi: definitions of conversion, geographical differences and national perspectives. The process, particularly in schoolbooks, is often presented without any consideration of these aspects of the matter. The common view in Norway still seems to be that the Sámi were converted by Thomas von Westen and his missionaries at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Little attention is paid to Sámi integration within the Catholic Church during the medieval period or within the Lutheran Church after the Reformation and before the Sámi Mission. Nor is it recognised that the Swedes established churches in their Sámi regions from the beginning of the seventeenth century, even though this region included the three largest Sámi communities in present-day Norway.

At the beginning of this work I questioned whether it is possible to speak of a Sámi Reformation, and whether the Sámi were Christians prior to the Reformation. I have pointed out that their conversion, or integration within the ecclesiastical system, occurred at different times in different parts of *Sápmi*. However and as my presentation shows, even in the northernmost part of western *Sápmi* the Sámi were probably integrated within the Catholic Church, or at least were strongly exposed to Christian influence, during the late Middle Ages. Traces of Catholic origin in both the Coastal Sámi district of Varanger in Norway and the inland Sámi region of the Lule *lappmark*, in Sweden during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, indicate that the Sámi there had still not become 'good' Lutherans almost 200 years after the Reformation. In that sense, we can talk about a protracted Reformation, and also a protracted Christianizing process.

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