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DOKUMENT OM DE RYSKA SAMERNA OCH KOLAHALVÖN [Documents on the Russian Saami and the Kola Peninsula]. Leif Rantala (Editor). 2006. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland (Publications in Education 15). 156 p, soft cover. ISBN 952-484-022-7. €18.00. doi:10.1017/S0032247406305992

The Saami, the indigenous inhabitants of northern Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula have been divided by a number of cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries through the ages. Perhaps the most significant line of demarcation has been that between the East and the West, resulting in the present situation, in which the Saami of Russia have been largely isolated from their western kinsmen since the beginning of the Soviet era. Even though the times have been changing, one of the major obstacles to mutual understanding is the fact that nearly all Saami studies conducted in Russia have been published only in Russian, and only a few western Saami — laymen and academics alike — master the language. For these very reasons, Leif Rantala, the lecturer in Saami language at the University of Lapland (Rovaniemi, Finland), has now compiled a number of Russian documents on Kola Saami and translated them into Swedish, a language understood by virtually all western Saami scholars and, hopefully, by many other potential readers as well.

The book, entitled *Dokument om de ryska samerna och Kolahalvön*, consists, quite literally, of miscellaneous documents on the Russian Saami and Kol'skiy Poluostrov. The main focus of the collection is on the life of the Saami and their fate during the first decades of the Soviet regime; however, the reader also gets glimpses of similar experiences of local Komi and Nenets who had migrated to the area in the nineteenth century.

One cannot deny the importance of making the contents of the book available outside Russia, but it is sad to say that the editorial work could have been done a lot more carefully. The main obstacle in approaching the book is that its content is highly inconsistent. A part of the manifold documents gathered in the book have already been published elsewhere — during the period from 1840 to 2004! Another part of the writings seem to be previously unpublished, but more than once the reader is left to wonder where the original Russian manuscripts could be located. The genres vary from travel accounts to Soviet examination records and letters to newspaper editors, and the contents of the book have not been arranged in any

kind of logical (that is, chronological, alphabetical, or topical) order. Moreover, it is quite difficult to identify the less-known authors whose first names are initialized throughout the book.

Despite the editorial shortcomings, the book as a whole certainly fulfills its stated aim of making the recent history of the Kola Saami better known in neighboring countries. The main contribution of the volume is that it offers a unique — albeit rather incongruous — collection of detailed documents that shed light to what really happened among the Soviet Saami before the Second World War. The central figure in the book is Vasilii Kondratyevich Alymov (1883–1938), a Russian ethnographer and government official who actively and enthusiastically worked for Leninist national policy by striving for the development of Saami literary languages, educating the first Saami teachers, improving communication and sanitary conditions on the Kola Peninsula, and so forth. As an ethnographer, Alymov studied and promoted the local culture and its transition to the new era; his interests covered both material and spiritual culture, from the collectivisation of reindeer herding to collecting and publishing folkloristic material that he considered fragments of the Saami epic.

In addition to the two articles and a letter written by Alymov himself, the volume includes three retrospective articles — by V[ladimir?] Sorokazherdyev (2003, 2004) and S[tanislav?] Dashchinskiy (s.d.) — on Alymov's life and work and his ultimate fate as a victim of Stalin's purges in 1938. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, as much as one-third of the publication consists of detailed records of the interrogations (from February to October 1938) where Alymov and many of his associates were accused of a counter-revolutionary plot to foment interethnic tensions on the Peninsula and eventually to establish an independent Saami state. Having been subjected to torture, Alymov finally signed the imaginary charges of conspiracy and was executed near Leningrad on 22 October 1938. By that time, his invaluable ethnographic collections in Murmansk had already been destroyed by the secret police, and his published work was suppressed for decades.

Other documents in the collection include two reports and some additional demographic statistics based on two expeditions made in 1933. The main purpose of the journeys was linguistic: many distinct varieties of the Saami languages were spoken in the area, and it was important to find out what kind of — and how many — literary languages were needed. According to the reports, the work progressed quite rapidly, and the Soviet Saami soon got their own literary language based on the varieties that are considered as dialects of the Kildin Saami language. As soon as the new alphabet and the first spelling books were created, they were followed by contemporary propaganda, such as a translation of a brochure entitled 'What has the October Revolution given to the working Saami?'. Nevertheless, as with many other minority languages of the Soviet Union,

the literary use of Saami ended as abruptly as it had begun — within five years, the newly emerged Saami-minded intelligentsia of the area was fully silenced and destroyed.

In the last article of the book — apparently the only one written exclusively for this collection — the editor tells one more sad story from the lives of the Soviet Saami: a fragmentary biography of Maxim Antonov, who was born on the Kola Peninsula in 1919, was captured as a prisoner-of-war by the Finns, then served as a soldier in the Finnish army and as an informant for Finnish linguists, and died in exile in Sweden in 1983, without having had any contacts with his relatives since 1941. Finally, the book is concluded by a bibliography of the non-Russian literature on the Russian Saami.

Books such as this are not very suitable for critical review in the normal sense of the word, as the authors have not written their contributions to be published in the present collection. In fact, a significant part of the content was not meant to be published anywhere, especially not in a foreign language in a foreign culture — and least of all after the fall of the Communist regime. Nevertheless, the specific value of the book is that the editor has carefully translated and made this unique and otherwise inaccessible material available anew in its original form. True, the content of the book is thoroughly depressing, but it is precisely this kind of candid documentation of the lives of individuals that enables us to understand more deeply the traumatic past of the indigenous peoples of the Soviet north. (Jussi Ylikoski, Giellagas Institute for Saami Studies, PO Box 1000, 90014 University of Oulu, Finland.)

SCOTT'S LAST BISCUIT: THE LITERATURE OF POLAR EXPLORATION. Sarah Moss. 2006. Oxford: Signal Books. xii + 251 p, illustrated, softcover. ISBN 1-902669-87-8.
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Literary and cultural critics have been relatively slow to engage with narratives of polar exploration. Particular regions (such as Canada's far north) have certainly attracted attention within national contexts, but broader attempts to trace the ways in which Arctic and Antarctic travel has been imagined and represented have been few. The last decade has seen increased interest in this area — publications such as Francis Spufford's *I may be some time: ice and the English imagination* (1996), Bill Manhire's anthology *The wide white page: writers imagine Antarctica* (2004), and Peter Davidson's *The idea of north* (2005) testify to this; but much remains to be done. Sarah Moss' *Scott's last biscuit* is a timely addition to the field.

Scott's last biscuit is a book 'about the literature of polar travel, about why polar travellers continue to write as the last candle gutters and the frost-bitten hands jerk the pencil stub, and about why and how we consume their writing' (page x). 'Literature' here is defined broadly; the

analysis moves fluidly between medieval sagas, travellers' tales, official exploration accounts, poems, and novels (all written, as Moss acknowledges, from a Western, largely European, perspective), with the emphasis mainly on non-fiction writing. While it had its origins in a doctoral dissertation, *Scott's last biscuit*, like Spufford's book, is aimed primarily at a popular readership; lists of sources are provided, but no footnotes or detailed citations. And like Spufford, Moss oscillates between north and south polar travel tales without making much distinction between the two, although she gives the Arctic the lion's share of the book. Her historical sweep, however, is broader than Spufford's, ranging from tenth-century Norse texts through well-known explorers' accounts such as those by William Edward Parry, Robert Falcon Scott and Richard E. Byrd, to a 1960s Mills and Boon's novel, *Arctic nurse*. Her approach is also catholic, combining examinations of famous exploration narratives with micro-histories of more obscure adventures and close textual analyses of relevant documents.

These broad parameters mean that comprehensiveness is impossible, and Moss does not aim at it. She structures her book thematically, dividing it into six parts, each of which consists of a series of vignettes drawing from a variety of historical and national contexts. Little attempt is made to synthesize these six parts into a broader whole, although they overlap with and inform each other in productive ways. Moss begins her analysis not with the typical heroic polar journey but rather with an attempt by Europeans to live permanently in remote Arctic regions. She relates the establishment and mysterious decline of Norse colonies in Greenland, arguing that their stories offer 'a compelling mixture of homeliness and strangeness' (page 56). Part two moves on to more recent, temporary attempts to inhabit the polar regions: Parry's and Fridtjof Nansen's very different shipboard winters in the Arctic, and Byrd's famous season alone in the Antarctic. Part three looks at explorers who narrate their own grim conclusions. The meaning of any expedition, Moss observes, lies in its story returning to those back home, even if many or all of its participants do not. This is followed by a section focused on the Franklin expedition and its aftermath. Moss reflects on the ongoing urge to exhume dead bodies that has characterized responses to the disaster, conveying both the surreality and the cultural relevance of its various episodes very effectively. She pays particular attention to the intimate relationship between text and body: the corpse of John Hartnell, twice exhumed and twice autopsied, is 'a book by many hands... a palimpsest' (page 159). The fifth part of *Scott's last biscuit* looks at female polar travellers. Given that most previous cultural histories — even those, such as Lisa Bloom's *Gender on ice*, that take the gendered nature of polar narratives as their topic — have concentrated on men and masculinity, Moss' sensitive attempts to trace individual women's experiences of high-latitude life are a welcome contribution. The final section gives brief but often illuminating analyses of imaginative responses