

Mission that leaves a mark

During the 12th century, Catholic monasteries were established along the Norwegian coast where there were already trading posts. Here merchandise changed hands; fur and skins for the traders, silver for the Sami. Silver with the Maria monogram, where the M stood for the Virgin Mary, was used as a means of payment but also gave the Sami protection. Belief in the Catholic Mary was not a foreign thought - in the Sami religion there were already goddesses who protected the family. In some areas, the Virgin Mary and the goddess *Sáráhkká* merged. The limited Catholic mission, however, did not leave deep traces, but it could lead to the conversion of individual people. Margareta from Jämtland already worked during the 14th century for the gospel to be preached among her countrymen.

In the 17th century, the Lutheran Church and the Swedish monarchy made common cause: the Church began a more systematic work to convert the Sami and the state established courts and market places in connection with the church building, the Church focused on preaching and baptizing people. Schools where children were taught Christianity became another way to make the Sami abandon their own religion. Church activities were concentrated in the winter months when they were in the forest country, near the market places. Then the priests could reach many, forest Sami and mountain Sami.

In the 18th century, above all in Sápmi on the Norwegian side, a new stage in the mission began. The Pietist movement had its breakthrough with the missionary Thomas von Westen as a central figure. If earlier they had been content with the Sami baptizing their children, listening to sermons and burying their dead, they now demanded an inner conversion of the individual person. The missionary von Westen began an outreach activity and connected Sami people who had already been converted. He used them to gain as much knowledge as possible about the old religion. He contacted those who were not yet converted and began intensive teaching. The people were not left alone and in the end he had broken them down

mentally. Then he entered into conversation with them, in which they confessed their errors. After leaving them in agony, to contemplate their sins, many thanked him for saving them from the temptations of the devil.

In the middle of the 19th century, the Laestadian revival swept over the northern parts of Sápmi. Many were carried away by Laestadius' sermons. The revival in many ways meant the end of the Sami religion, the end of the Drum Age.

For the Sami on the Kola Peninsula and in present-day Russian Karelia, the encounter with the church looked somewhat different. The first contact with the Eastern Orthodox Church came through the Christian settlers from Novogord who settled on the Kola Peninsula and displaced the Sami. When the Russian Orthodox Church was established in the 16th century, an active mission began. During the 16th and 17th centuries there were ten churches on the Kola Peninsula. They constituted not only an ecclesiastical, but also an administrative and economic power. The monks lived among the Sami and learned the language. They did not reject the Sami religion but used it in their conversion work. By the middle of the 18th century, almost all Sami on Kola were baptized and professed Christianity.