

ISAAC OLSEN – THE FIRST MISSIONARY AMONG THE SAMI PEOPLE IN FINNMARK?

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Abstract

This article deals with Isaac Olsen, a Norwegian who was an itinerant catechist and teacher among the Sami people in Finnmark, Northern Norway. The author claims that Isaac Olsen, as a forerunner to the Sami missionary Thomas von Westen, in fact was the first missionary among the Sami people in Finnmark. Isaac Olsen came to Finnmark just after 1700, learned the Sami language and started his work among the Sami population in Eastern Finnmark. He got to know the Sami people well, and they gave him information about Sami pre-Christian religious practice, among other names of places of sacrifice. These names, in addition to many other pieces of information, were written down by Isaac Olsen in a copybook that has been preserved. The article discusses in great detail the contents of this book, which contains valuable knowledge about Early Modern Sami culture and religion. Isaac Olsen, also as a pioneer, translated Danish religious texts into the Sami language, called to Copenhagen to perform translation work by the Missionary College.

Keywords

Isaac Olsen, Eighteenth Century, Northern Norway, Missionary among the Sami people, Preacher, Teacher

Introduction

Early missionary activity in Finnmark is normally associated with the name of Thomas von Westen (Skjelmo and Willumsen 2017). He was employed by the Missionary College in Copenhagen and undertook his missionary work among the Sami population in Norway from 1716 until his death in 1727 (Skjelmo and Willumsen 2017, 122). There was, however, a prelude to this mission, showing that there was an interest in missionary activity in Finnmark that preceded Thomas von Westen's efforts by many years.

This prelude is related to Isaac Olsen. He was a Norwegian person, working as a teacher and catechist in Finnmark at the beginning of the eighteenth century. His work may be seen as a contribution to the 'Long Reformation', which is the main theme of this book. This term emphasises that Reformation in northern Norway developed as a long-term process of transition of religious ideas (Bergesen 2016, 7). It has been pointed out that it took a long time in Norway to get formal institutions in place and 'to get learned and lay alike, reformed' (Berg 2017, 112). According to specific perspectives, it is possible to say that the Reformation was not fulfilled until the pietism in the 1700s, or the lay movement Christianity in the 1800s. In any case, among the various research topics to be covered by the study of the Long Reformation, the missionary initiatives towards the Sámi during the 1600s and 1700s are to be included.

Isaac Olsen's achievement is on one hand related to the missionary work among the Sami people in Finnmark, on the other hand to his documentation of religious practice among the Sami people, not least his texts dealing with places of religious sacrifice. This article will mainly focus on Isaac Olsen's work as a teacher and catechist. He was strong

in his Lutheran belief, and saw his efforts in Finnmark as part of his duty to serve his fellow-beings with good deeds. The core ideas of Lutheranism; grace as an emancipating force, and salvation by belief alone, were also his fundament (Leirvik 2016, 394.). He was firm as a rock in his conviction that the Holy Gospel would have its effect in the long run. Isaac Olsen's personality and talents corresponded with the Reformation's emphasis of the Word. The Word should be given priority. No other arrangement might compete with the Word. And the Word corresponded with the Scripture. 'The cleaned religion's source was the Word, as it in first instance comes to the fore in the Bible (The Holy Script) and thereafter in preaching (The Holy Speech)'.¹ His goal was to transmit the Word to the Sami people, and he used his entire understanding of teaching, preaching, and language to reach this goal. His conviction and insight was that the only possible way to reach the people he wanted to reach with the Scripture, was to use the Sami language. Isaac Olsen's role during the Long Reformation in Northern Norway is in my view characterized not only by his profound Christian faith and his dedication to the task of conveying the Christian message, but also by his everlasting belief in the possibilities of language. Supported by the formulations in his own texts, particularly in the first part of his copybook – a handwritten script preserved today – he shows a strong oral talent in his teaching and preaching.

As the highest authority of the Church, the King in Copenhagen issued religious as well as political directives. King Christian IV issued the Church Ordinance of 1607, which became an important document. This was followed by the Instructions on Church Discipline in 1629, which was incorporated into the Laws of Norway of 1687. The King was also a driving force in the missionary efforts. He sent the theologian Povel Resen to Finnmark in 1706–1707 to investigate the conditions of the Sami population and other matters, and Resen wrote a report from his journey. There were others who also pointed out the need for education and catechization in Norway's northernmost county. The Bishop of Nidaros, Peder Krog, made numerous visitation journeys to Finnmark, in 1696, 1699, 1705 and 1708. After his journeys, Peder Krog wrote letters and reports to Copenhagen underscoring the need to build schools and churches in Finnmark. In 1711, the Instructions for the Guardians of the Holy Days [Forordning om Helligdagsvektene], a collection of injunctions and provisions regarding holy days, were published. It included a stipulation of punishment for those who failed to observe the Holy Days. In addition to these documents, a report, also referred to as a relation, about the conditions in Finnmark was penned by Pastor Ludvig Paus in 1712 (Skjelmo and Willumsen 2018, 134).

Organised missionary activity in Norway started after the establishment of the Missionary College in Copenhagen in 1714. At that time, the Missionary College was already engaged in missionary activity in Tranquebar in India. In addition to its activities among the Sami population in Norway, the Missionary College would also engage in mission in Greenland. After being appointed leader of the mission in Norway, Thomas von Westen established his base in Trondheim, where he established two seminaries for the purpose of training missionaries, catechists and teachers for the mission in Finnmark. However, Thomas von Westen had a forerunner, Isaac Olsen. From the early years of the 18th century, he travelled around as a teacher and preacher in the areas where Thomas von Westen later would set to work. When the terms 'forerunner to Thomas von Westen'

¹ Orig. 'Den rensede religionens kilde var altså Ordet, slik det i første omgang kommer til uttrykk i Bibelen (Den hellige skrift) og dernest i forkynnelsen (den hellige tale). Ref. Rasmussen 2017, 66.

and ‘preacher’ are used about Isaac Olsen in this article, it is based on the fact that Isaac Olsen was formally employed as a catechist among the Sami people in Finnmark eight years before Thomas von Westen was installed in his position as leader of the mission in Norway by the Missionary College in Copenhagen. On 9 July 1708, bishop Peder Krog from Nidaros, then travelling in Finnmark, issued an Instruction stating that ‘Isaac Olsen should *continue* with the information of the Sami people and *catechize* the people, in particular the youth, in every way that he would find most suitable, and with the greatest diligence and industry’ [Author’s italics].² It becomes clear from this wording by the use of the verb ‘continue’ that Isaac Olsen was going to proceed with a work that he already had started. The quotation from Isaac Olsen’s Instruction in addition makes clear that part of his work was to catechize. This is repeated and emphasized in the Instruction when it comes to the methodological part of this document, how to work with catechisation (Isaac Olsen’s copybook, Part II, p. 333–334). Based on the wording of the Instruction, it is correct to say that Isaac Olsen was a teacher and a preacher. As a catechist, he particularly used the Postils and the Catechism. Half of his work was decided to be the work of a catechist, teaching the Word of the Bible, a work with a different aim than an ordinary teacher’s work. This gives reason to call Isaac Olsen a missionary, in the understanding that he was a person installed to preach the Christian religion among the Sami people. The life and work of Isaac Olsen is the core of this article.

Isaac Olsen

Isaac Olsen was born sometime around 1680 and went to Trondheim Cathedral School. Shortly after 1700 he came to Finnmark as a house teacher for the children of the vicar and dean Trude Nitter in Kjølvik on Magerøy island. At that time there were no educational institutions for young people in Northern Norway; formal education was considered a benefit that was reserved for the sons of high-ranking civil servants. The job of a private teacher was to prepare young people to sit for external examinations at a cathedral school. At this time there were four cathedral schools in Norway: Kristiania, Kristiansand, Bergen and Trondheim. The northernmost one was in Trondheim.

In 1708, Isaac Olsen was formally instructed by the Bishop of Nidaros to serve as a teacher in eastern Finnmark. He had already travelled widely as a teacher among the Sami population in eastern Finnmark, and had learned the Sami language. In addition, Isaac Olsen acquired broad knowledge of the area’s geography through his travels. For example, he accompanied the bailiff Hans Soelgaard as a guide and interpreter on an official journey across the border to Russia. Olsen’s work as itinerant teacher lasted until 1716. He then met Thomas von Westen, who was on his first missionary journey in the north (Skjelmo and Willumsen 2017, pp. 123–160). In 1716, Isaac Olsen accompanied von Westen south to Vedøy island and onwards to Trondheim, where Olsen participated in the training at the seminaries that von Westen had established. He also translated religious texts into the Sami language. Isaac Olsen stayed in Trondheim a couple of years, before being summoned by the Missionary College to go to Copenhagen to present a

² Orig. ‘Jsack olßön skal continuere Ved finnernis information (...) og Catichzere Folckene og Særligen Ung Domen, alt som hand kand fore finde ded meste gavnligt at Være, med aller störste fliid og Vindskibelighed.’ Ref. Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, Isaac Olsen’s copybook, Part II, p. 332; Skjelmo and Willumsen 2017, 127.

relation – a report – on the conditions among the Sami people of Finnmark. He would also continue his work on translations into Sami.

Isaac Olsen's copybook

Isaac Olsen left behind a handwritten copybook of nearly 1000 pages, which is kept in the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. This original manuscript is not registered in any catalogue. Only parts of this copybook have been published in print. The book is a collection of various types of texts, most of them authored by Isaac Olsen himself, with some additions made by public officials. In addition, the copybook contains some religious texts as well as some transcripts of vernacular culture. The copybook was filled in the years 1703–1717 and thereby represents a period of early missionary activity that has been little studied in Norway. Isaac Olsen's copybook provides insight into the learning, beliefs and fields of activity of this early missionary worker.

References to Isaac Olsen's copybook are occasionally found in academic literature about early mission in Norway in general and Thomas von Westen's activities in particular. The term 'copybook' may merit a more detailed explanation, since this is not a copybook in the sense used in the archives, copies of outbound letters from an institution. In this case, it includes a variety of texts mainly penned by Isaac Olsen himself. It is a compilation of highly diverse texts: his job instruction from the Bishop of Nidaros; notes related to cultural history, such as Icelandic texts and the runic alphabet in Icelandic and Norwegian; some notes that most likely was used for teaching purposes; a petition to the authorities regarding his own situation; letters to the governor and dean of Finnmark; translations into Sami of Christian literature, such as hymns and The Lord's Prayer; and drafts of *relations*, reports on the situation among the Sami of Finnmark delivered to the Missionary College in Copenhagen.

The first part of Isaac Olsen's copybook is interesting in several respects. The historical knowledge that Isaac Olsen displays in this part, might to a certain extent have been inspired by Trude Nitter's knowledge, since Isaac Olsen stayed at the beginning of his time in Finnmark in the house of Trude Nitter as house teacher. Trude Nitter had a close relation to the royal historian Þormóður Torfason (1636–1719), known as Torfæus, who lived great parts of his life in Norway. Torfæus made an effort to save manuscripts from the middle Ages, and translated older Icelandic texts into Danish. Trude Nitter had been scribe at Torfæus before he was installed in Kjelvik in Finnmark (Lampe, 1898). While Nitter worked with Torfæus, he shall have translated from Latin some Norse Middle Age scriptures, for instance parts of Egil's saga. It might be interesting to reflect upon the question whether Nitter's work with Norse literature and sagas could have influenced the first part of Isaac Olsen's copybook, which is the part with the strongest historical content. It is possible that Isaac Olsen might have read some of these historical documents when he stayed with Trude Nitter in Kjelvik. However, the first part of Isaac Olsen's copybook has very much his own stamp of the text. His own views and opinions come to the fore, and the perspective is absolutely the perspective of a teacher. The text is apparently written in order to be a support for his teaching. The content of Egil's saga is not prominent in the first part of Isaac Olsen's copybook. Therefore, I think that if Isaac Olsen read historical texts shown to him by Nitter, these texts have been more of an inspiration for Isaac Olsen to write about the Norse mythology and kings than elements of Nitter's texts. A very strong and independent voice is heard in Isaac Olsen's texts. All texts written

by Isaac Olsen are found in his copybook; there are no published texts by Isaac Olsen which do not have this origin. His handwriting is very steady and easy to recognize. The first part of the copybook is clearly written in Isaac Olsen's own hand, and it is consistent what regards content and form. Whatever his inspiration has been in order to write the first part of his copybook, the knowledge has been internalised by Isaac Olsen, and the content made his own.

The texts in the copybook were written in Finnmark as well as in Vedøy and Trondheim. From the time it was written, Isaac Olsen's copybook have had a vagrant existence. Before 1764 it had come into the possession of the student, later vicar, Henrik Lind. He gave it to Hans Hammond as a basis for the preparation of *Den Nordiske Missions-Historie i Nordlandene, Finnmarken og Trundhiems Amt til Lappers og Finners Omvendelse, fra første Begyndelse indtil hen udi Aaret 1727* [The history of missionary work in the counties of Nordlandene, Finnmarken and Trundhjem to secure the conversion of the Sami, from its very beginning until the year of 1727], which was published in Copenhagen in 1787. According to Adolf Steen, the copybook subsequently lingered in obscurity until it was deposited in the former Museum of Ethnography and used by professor O. Solberg for his textual criticism in *Nordnorske Samlinger* [North Norwegian Collections] (Steen 1954, 27, note 3). However, Just Qvigstad was in possession of the book before it was donated to the Museum of Ethnography, according to a statement made by Qvigstad himself in 1903 (Qvigstad 1903, 84).

Who could have had direct access to Isaac Olsen's copybook? Taking a historiographic approach, Hans Skanke's *Epitome Historiæ Missionis Lapponicæ* (1730) would be the first work that would come to mind. Skanke's original document is found in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, and the manuscript was published in print (Skanke 1943, 179–224).

Isaac Olsen's notes were also of interest to Major Peter Schnitler, who was engaged in surveying of the national borders on the North Calotte, a preparatory work for the Lappish Codicil of 1751 (Hansen and Schmidt 1929–1985, 13–16; Pedersen 2006). Schnitler's border examination protocols, originally written in the period 1742–1745, were published with comments and annotations in three volumes by the Norwegian Institute for Historic Documents over the years 1929–1985. First to be published was Volume II in 1919, edited by Just Qvigstad and K.B. Wiklund. Next came Volume 1 in 1962, edited by Kristian Nissen and Ingolf Kvamen. Volume III appeared in 1985 with Lars Ivar Hansen and Tom Schmidt as editors. For this volume Hansen wrote a comprehensive introduction.³ Kristian Nissen may possibly have been in possession of Isaac Olsen's copybook (Nissen 1960, 53–55).

The next person who with certainty followed Schnitler as an early reader of Isaac Olsen's copybook, was Hans Hammond. In his comprehensive work *Den Nordiske Missions-Historie* [The History of the Nordic mission] (1787), on which he worked for several decades, information gleaned from Isaac Olsen's copybook is clearly present and regularly shines through in Hammond's description of the prelude to Thomas von Westen's missionary activity in Finnmark. Moreover, Hammond has included a transcription of a text drawn from Isaac Olsen's copybook, dean Ludvig Christian Paus' Instructions for the Guardians of the Holy Days (1711) (Hammond 1787, 28–24). Daniel

³ In the introduction, pp. VII–XLIV, Lars Ivar Hansen explains historical background, taxation and the last phase of the work on the drawing of border between Norway and Sweden.

Thrap also refers to Isaac Olsen's writings, which is underscored in this way: "Until this time in Trondhjem nobody has cared about the Lapps," says Isak Olsen in his Description of the Nordlandene [the Northern districts] of the 27th of November 1718'.⁴ One of the ways in which Isaac Olsen showed that he cared about the Sami was his commitment to teaching, as pointed out by Povel Resen after his journey to Finnmark in 1706–1707. Resen had been sent there by the King in Copenhagen to gather information about the northernmost part of the realm. Resen writes: 'The best educated of all the Lapps that I encountered were in the province of Varanger (...) The congregation of Lapps have been so well educated that they are not only better versed than many other [sic] Norwegians in their Christian faith, *but in addition so nicely civilised that it is quite pleasant to converse with them*, and it would be desired that similar efforts be undertaken in the other fjords.' [Italics in the original.]⁵ The literacy of the coastal Sami youth is also pointed out: 'It will cause astonishment to hear that Isak Olsen has taught a considerable number of the young coastal Lapps to write, what surely very few Norwegians at that time could do.'⁶ When Resen points out Isaac Olsen's learning as early as 1706–1707, it sends an early signal to the authorities about the key position that Isaac Olsen already then by force of his knowledge and attitude had obtained as a pivot in the collection and dissemination of new information about the Finnmark region – a viewpoint that Thomas von Westen and the mission leaders in Copenhagen would come to share. In the same way as Resen, Thomas von Westen immediately after his arrival in Finnmark on his first missionary journey in 1716 came to understand the scope of the educational work that Olsen had undertaken. On 4 July 1716, von Westen gathered in Vadsø 'the entire host of the Varanger Sami, those [who] had been Isak Olsen's disciples'.⁷ von Westen was impressed not only by Isaac Olsen's factual knowledge about the people and culture of Finnmark, but also his skills in the Sami language, a skill that he had started to acquire immediately after his relocation to Finnmark. To von Westen, who was linguistically interested as well as skilled, it was essential that Isaac Olsen's language skills also manifested themselves in written work. As soon as the two of them were back and settled in von Westen's vicarage on Vedøy island in the Møre region, von Westen 'therefore let Isak Olsen spend parts of the winter 1716–1717 at Vedø in translating the Catechism and Symbolum Athanasii into Lappish' (Thrap 1882, 48). A similar interest in Isaac Olsen's knowledge can be seen in Copenhagen. Thrap states that the Missionary College in Copenhagen, as well as the King, already in 1716 expressed their great confidence in Isaac Olsen's skills and capacity: 'The college, however, had already on the 23rd of December 1716 requested

⁴ Orig. «'Til denne Tid ved Trondhjem har ingen kjæret sig om Lapperne', skriver Isak Olsen i sin Underretning om Nordlandene af 27de Novbr. 1718.» Ref. Thrap 1882, 51.

⁵ Orig. «De bedst informerede av Lapperne, som jeg forefandt, var udi det Annex Varanger (...) Menigheden av Lapperne saa smugt har informeret, at de ikke alleniste findes bædre end mange andre [sic] Nord-Mænd udi deris Christendom, *men endog saa smugt civiliserede, at det er noget behageligt at conversere dem*, og var at ønske, at der blef deslige Anstalt gjorde i de andre fjorder.» [Orig. kursiv]. Ref. Thrap 1882, 51.

⁶ Orig. «Det maa vække Forundring, naar man hører, at Isak Olsen har lært adskillige af Sø-Lappernes Ungdom at skrive, hvad vist meget faa Nordmænd paa denne Tid kunde.» Ref. Thrap 1882, 51.

⁷ Orig. «den hele Skare av Varanger-Finnerne, de [som] havde været Isak Olsens Disciple». Ref. Thrap 1882, 56.

the promised report on the drawing of borders in the Sami territories (Isak Olsen's health permitting), especially since His Royal Majesty is similarly anticipant.'⁸

The next person to read Isaac Olsen's copybook was Just Qvigstad, who reproduced extensive text fragments from it in published works (Qvigstad 1903, 3–5; Randulf 1903, 6–63; Qvigstad 1903, 64–68; Knag 1903, 68–82; Qvigstad 1903, 82–90; Olsen 1910, 3–101; Qvigstad 1926, 317–356). Qvigstad made a painstaking review of the language and content of the copybook, manifested in a considerable amount of comments and annotations. Qvigstad's own considerable knowledge of Sami language, culture and religion emerges clearly in his publications. One of Qvigstad's early works describes the Nærø manuscript, 'A relation concerning the Sami, in both Nordland and Finnmark', originally written by the vicar of Nærø, Johan Randulf (1723) (Qvigstad 1903, 6–63).

Later, O. Solberg and Martha Broch-Utne at the former Museum of Ethnography have had access to and actively worked with Isaac Olsen's copybook. Broch-Utne has transcribed passages from the copybook, which were used as a basis for publication of the articles 'The Sami pagan places of worship' and 'Relation about the idolatry and delusions among the Lapps' in the series *Nordnorske Samlinger* [North Norwegian Collections] (1934), for which an introduction to Isaac Olsen's work also exists (Solberg and Broch-Utne (eds.) 1938, 134–140). Included in *Nordnorske Samlinger* is also a manuscript by Jens Kildal.⁹

Inspector General of Churches [Generalkirkeinspektør], Erich Johan Jessen, who for a period held an office that was short-lived, 1737–1791, is a name that is occasionally associated with the body of descriptions that exists with regard to the religious beliefs of the Sami. Jessen wrote a treatise concerning the heathen religion of the Norwegian Sami.¹⁰ According to Qvigstad, however, his thesis is in its entirety based on Hans Skanke's manuscript 'Epitome' (Qvigstad 1903, 88). In light of the studies of relevant manuscripts concerning the early missionary activity in Finnmark, it can be seen that among the contributors to this field there has been great interest in having their names associated with the publication of original source material.

Turning to more recent research, we can see that excerpts of Isaac Olsen's copybook are known to and have been used by a number of researchers who have studied the numerous forms of expression of the Sami culture. Ørnulf Vorren and Hans Kristian Eriksen refer to Isaac Olsen's copybook in their work on Sami places of sacrifice (Vorren and Eriksen 1993). A new publication on Isaac Olsen has been released with the title *Samemisjonæren Isaac Olsen (1680–1730) og hans «Underdanigst undrettning om Norlandenne» (1718)* [The Sami missionary Isaac Olsen (1680–1730) and his 'Humble description of Nordlandene [the Northern districts]' (1718)]. This manuscript, which

⁸ Orig. «Imidlertid havde kollegiet allerede 23de Decbr. 1716 utbedet sig den belovede Efterretning om Grændse-Skilsmissen i Fin- og Lapmarken (om Isak Olsens Helbred det tillader), helst som Hans Kongelige Majestæt og er den samme forventendes.» Ref. Thrap 1882, 47.

⁹ *Nordnorske Samlinger* have published following texts by Jenes Kildal which are related to the early mission work: «Epitomes pars tertia. Thomas von Westens undersøkelse til runebombens forklaring», vol. 5, pp. 225–244; «Tredie Anhang. Runnebombens betegnelse, med sine characterer og fortolkelse», vol. 5, pp. 245–247; «Fjerde Anhang. Recension af alle Lappiske Ord og Terminis, som i Missions-Historien ere anførte», vol. 5, pp. 248–256.

¹⁰ Part of Leem 1767.

deals with the Southern Sami region, has been published in book form by the editor Anders Løøv (1994).¹¹

Three recent research contributions refer to Isaac Olsen: Alan Hutchinson's chapter on Sami mission and Sami policy in *Nordlands historie* [The history of Nordland county] (2015) (Hutchinson 2015, 185–207), Siv Rasmussen's doctoral thesis 'Sami integration in Norwegian and Swedish churches in the early modern era: A comparison of Finnmark and Torne Lappmark' (2016)¹² and Dikka Storm's article 'The Complex Religious Situation in the Mission District of Senja and Vesterålen in the Early Eighteenth Century' (Berg, Bergesen and Kristiansen (eds.) 2016, 173).

Isaac Olsen's view on mission

Close reading of the copybook's content gives us a broad impression of Isaac Olsen as a missionary worker. He was active as a catechist and was formally instructed by the Nidaros bishop to preach and teach the Word of God. His views on mission emerge clearly in the first section of the copybook, wherein his own attitude as a narrator towards the told comes to the fore. By drawing a historic link to Norse mythology, where Odin is the powerful wizard, Isaac Olsen creates a link to traditional Sami religious practice, which is a pre-Christian faith. The challenge that the missionaries encountered in Finnmark encompassed the old pre-Christian faith that continued to find expression in Sami religious practice. This notion is a recurrent topic in Isaac Olsen's copybook. According to Isaac Olsen, catechization among the Sami population took place in the encounter with a pre-Christian religion.

Isaac Olsen's view on mission had as its basis the Bible's Mission Commandment. The most important factor which carried his missionary work, was his own faith. He wanted to spread the Word of God to the Sami people in their own language. When it came to language, he was strongly convinced that the catechization should be performed in the mother-tongue of the people he worked among. This is exactly the same view that we see exemplified in Thomas von Westen's missionary work (Skjelmo and Willumsen 2017, 136–137). It is further the same view that was held by the Missionary College in Copenhagen. When they started their mission in Tranquebar in India, the missionaries had to preach among other in the Malabar language. There is no doubt that in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the claim that missionaries should use the mother-tongue of the people in areas where they worked, was carried through by the Missionary College in Copenhagen. Every people should have access to Christian education in their own mother-tongue, according to the Lutheran view.

This view related to language also comes to the fore in the considerable work that was laid down by the Missionary College in translation of religious literature into various languages. As for translation of religious literature into the Sami language, Isaac Olsen was the very first to do so, both psalms and other religious texts. His competence in the Sami language was considered as valuable, and therefore he was called down to Copenhagen to contribute to translation work. Thus, in this respect, he was a pioneer.

¹¹ Published by Samien sijte, Snåsa.

¹² About Isaac Olsen, se pp. 57–60.

Educational texts

The first section of Isaac Olsen's copybook contains texts that probably were adapted for teaching purposes. In light of the development and sequence of the texts in the copybook, the first section is likely to have been written during his first years in Finnmark.

The first section of Isaac Olsen's copybook has never previously been published. In his article 'Written sources to the Lapp mythology' (1903), Qvigstad refers to the first section of the copybook – pages 1 to 195 – as a 'historic introduction of no value' (Qvigstad 1903, 84). This assessment is debatable, since this section contains valuable material related to cultural history. In addition, and by way of the notes he has entered, most likely for educational purposes, Isaac Olsen shows the breadth of his knowledge, and through his selection of material he demonstrates his skills in pedagogical adaptation. When Qvigstad disregarded the first part of Isaac Olsen's copybook, it might have to do with Qvigstad's focus of interest, namely the information written down by Isaac Olsen about Sami places of sacrifice. The historical texts in the first part of the copybook, had quite another character, as these texts were not written down related to geographical excursions, but were characterised of historical knowledge within a pedagogical frame. It is likely that Isaac Olsen had obtained his knowledge of Norse mythology and Norse kings from his own education or may be from published books in Trude Nitter's library.

The texts in the first section of the copybook mainly have a historic content and are strongly national in character. The target group is most probably children. There are texts about Norse kings, royal lineages and Nordic history. The narratives of these historic characters have a biographical form – a type of storytelling with details that colour the description and make it easy to remember by the audience. The narrative style is personal; Isaac Olsen's own opinion of the historic characters come into view. He shows his skills as educator by making use of knowledge, imagination and a flair for narratives for the benefit of his students. Details and dramatic events and situations are duly embellished to spice up the story.

Moral parables

In addition to the didactic material, the first section of the copybook contains narratives with an obvious moral objective. Examples include the stories of 'The Disobedient Son', 'The Swallowed Needle', 'The Speaking New Food' and 'A Half-Shilling'. Most likely, these narratives are intended for children as well as adults, and they have a clear and obvious message. These texts are most likely transcriptions of narratives drawn from the popular oral tradition. By living at a vicarage in Finnmark, as Isaac Olsen did during his first years in this region, he was in an environment where lots of people came passing by and where the oral narrative would have been the main form of entertainment. When Isaac Olsen committed these narratives to paper, they must have reflected what he personally found interesting, but also what he wanted to communicate to others. These written moral parables also show that he was keenly attentive to oral narratives that were circulating, and that he was able to pick up what might be suitable and relevant for communication to new listeners.

Texts for entertainment

Another aspect to emerge in the first section of Isaac Olsen's copybook includes texts for entertainment purposes. He has noted down questions and riddles, runic characters and mathematical conundrums, as well as good advice and folk remedies. In other words, the private teacher has taken note of a number of amusing elements and aspects of how people interact, that may be well suited as entertainment. The content of these texts was probably not intended for children. For example, we are presented with a method for making snuff out of tobacco leaves, as well as instructions for storing tobacco to keep it fresh. Various types of spices that can be used as additives and are obtainable from pharmacies are described, along with their price. There is also a text that describes how stale beer can be made fresh again, as well as a recipe for 'making distilled spirits tasteful and pleasant. Take dried lem(m)on peel and put it in the bottle with some sugar and a little saffron, ground nutmeg on distilled spirit gives a very pleasant smell and taste' (Isaac Olsen's copybook [hereafter IO copybook], Part I, 257). Another good advice is to take a spoonful of spirit in the morning and then fast for one hour, and with God's help this would help prevent disease.

Amusing elements such as riddles and mathematical conundrums are also found in this section of the copybook, possibly for use in social contexts. We also find a calendar with the names of all months with two dates stated for each month. This is followed by an account of days that are considered inauspicious. However, Isaac Olsen expresses his scepticism of such superstitions; he does not consider it an 'article of faith' (IO copybook, Part I, pp. 261–262).

Linguistic development

The first section of the copybook also shows how Isaac Olsen starts to acquire knowledge of other languages. His own academic background consists of no more than an unfinished Cathedral School education, and his knowledge of other languages would hardly have been substantial at the time he arrived in Finnmark. The copybook shows that he engages with a number of different languages and alphabets. He reproduces texts in what he describes as Norse, Latin, Sami and Kven. He starts by reproducing 'the old Gothic or Nordic Runic a.b.c.' (IO copybook, Part I, p. 243). These are followed by the old 'Gothic and Icelandic Runic letters' (IO copybook, Part I, p. 241). Then follow two lines of majuscules, two lines of minuscules and another two lines about how the runic characters relate to the Latin minuscules. He then proceeds to use the characters he has shown by demonstrating how The Lord's Prayer is written in different languages, with added comments and explanations. First, The Lord's Prayer is written in Icelandic (IO copybook, Part I, p. 242). Then follows a Gothic version, and finally 'The Lord's Prayer in Lappish, with Lappish or Kven(n) Run(n)ic letters' (IO copybook, Part I, p. 245).

To teach himself other languages, Isaac Olsen attempts to establish a linguistic structure on the basis of his existing knowledge and ability to systematise. He does so at a level that he masters and with the aid of a known and specific text, The Lord's Prayer. This is also an example of how he starts to record 'Lappish or Kven(n)' words the way he has heard them spoken. Isaac Olsen expands this activity in Finnmark by linking spoken words to letters or other characters, in this case what he refers to a 'Run(n)ic letters'. He later succeeds in learning the Sami language at a level that actually makes him the foremost expert on the Sami language of his time among Norwegian-speaking academics

resident in Finnmark. This indicates that he possesses an intuitive knack – a good ear – for languages. Combined with his skills in systematisation and rendering of spoken language in writing, his efforts to learn the Sami language bear rich fruit and later take him to Copenhagen as a sought-after skilled translator. The Missionary College in Copenhagen requests his services as a translator of religious texts and supplier of knowledge on Sami issues in Northern Norway. Knud Leem, who continued Thomas von Westen's work with the seminaries in Trondheim, also made use of Isaac Olsen as a teacher of the Sami language. Knud Leem was later to become Norway's first professor of the Sami language.

The first section of the copybook allows us to witness the initial stages of Isaac Olsen's acquisition of language skills. This shows that a person with great enthusiasm and formidable energy and commitment has entered the stage. His linguistic development is linked to his ambitions regarding the work he has set out to do in Finnmark. He wants to be a teacher, but he also wishes to go beyond this, both for his own sake and for the population he has set out to serve.

Personal experiences

In the second section of the copybook, Isaac Olsen enters a different narrative mode. Where the first section mainly provides a glimpse of Isaac Olsen's work as educator and communicator of academic literature written by others, the second section enters a phase where his own narrative voice emerges clearly – a change towards a greater degree of self-confidence and faith in his own skills and beliefs that are worth communicating. He describes this change in himself as follows:

In the following, I will now write up my own account, and not copy other men's writings or the stories they tell, but write only about what I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears and what I have personally experienced among the Sami, I must speak thereof, who have seen and heard and experienced that it is so, because nobody knows it as well as I do, and no man has seen and heard and experienced it as well as I have, and nobody has stayed with and travelled among the Sami in the same manner and for as long as I have, and been in every man's house and understands their language as well as I do, therefore I will now speak the pure truth and how things are among the Sami and how they live. (Qvigstad 1910, 10)

This passage shows that only few years after his arrival in Finnmark, Isaac Olsen has confidence in his knowledge about and understanding of Sami society. He is aware of his own capital, and he knows that he is a sought-after person with a reputation that reaches all the way to Copenhagen because of his special and laboriously accumulated insight.

Isaac Olsen's appointment

Most likely, Isaac Olsen started to take an interest in expanding his geographical area of activity relatively quickly after his arrival in Finnmark. Five years after arriving, he was in Eastern Finnmark working as an itinerant teacher and preacher among the people of the Varanger region. He had with him an instruction from the Bishop of Nidaros, Peder

Krog, who had been there on a visitation journey.¹³ The instruction shows that in light of information obtained from his collaborators in Finnmark, Peder Krog had identified a specific person who would attend to the education of the Sami. The first point in the instruction goes as follows:

Isaac Olsen shall continue with the education of the Sami, and after he has travelled round the villages of Varanger he shall in time move to Tana and then to Laksefjord and Porsangerfjord to catechise the people and the youth in particular, with the greatest diligence and industriousness, in the way that he might find to bring the greatest benefit.¹⁴

This instruction largely deals with education, and by using the term ‘catechize’ emphasises catechization as part of a teacher’s tasks. Religious education in the early 1700s also included literacy, and after the introduction of absolute monarchy in 1660, a unified church service arrangement was both proclaimed and established in Denmark and Norway. The injunctions published through church ordinances were very detailed and were intended to ensure approximately identical religious instruction for the people of the union Denmark and Norway.

Peder Krog’s instruction, referred to above, encompasses not only matters pertaining to the content of the teaching, but also the practical arrangements for Isaac Olsen’s work, related to subsistence and accommodation. The parents of the children who were taught should maintain Isaac Olsen for up to a week for each child. In addition, his salary would be paid out of the funds of Vadsø Church. The instruction also imposed on Isaac Olsen to report directly to the Bishop at least three times annually about the progress that was made, ‘of how the word of God is spread and the Sami comply with the teaching’.¹⁵

Another aspect of Isaac Olsen’s work that was stipulated in Peder Krog’s instruction involved recruitment of talented young people to further education: ‘He shall take care to identify some young boys that are quick learners and encourage them to pursue higher goals, so that they may acquire a taste for virtue and reading and an urge to be willingly employed for greater learning and perfection in the schools.’¹⁶

Isaac Olsen is also a trusted person when it comes to enforcing provisions pertaining to local church matters. Some of the documents that have been included in the second section of the copybook are associated with the provisions in the prevailing church ordinance on guardians of the Holy Days; i.e. that some persons are appointed to take a special responsibility for ensuring the observance of holy days. This issue is included in Isaac Olsen’s copybook because one of the documents concerns him and testifies that he is a person of some standing. On 4 August 1711, dean Paus and county governor Lorch

¹³ Instrux dated July 1708.

¹⁴ Orig. «Jsack olþön skal kontinuere Ved finnernis information, og naar hand Endnu faar om farit böygderne udi Varanger, skal hand Effter Haanden for föye sig ind udi Thanen og siden udi Laxe fiorden, og Possanger fiorden, og Catichzere Folckene og Særligen Ung Domen, alt som hand kand fore finde det meste gavnligt at Være, med aller største fliid og Vindskibelighed.»

¹⁵ Orig. «om hvor ledis Guds ord, haver frem gang og finnerne Retter Sig Ved under Visningen.» Ref. IO copybook, Part II, p. 334.

¹⁶ Orig. «Hand skal beflitte sig at udfinde Nogle unge Drenger som haver good nem(m)e og op muntre dem til noget høyere, saa de faa smag paa dyd og læsning, og faa Lyst til at Empløyeres Villigen til store Lærdom og fuld Komenhed udi skolerne.» Ref. IO copybook, Part II, p. 334.

signed an instruction in Vadsø, stating that Isaac Olsen and the local vicar should monitor compliance with the provision on guardians of the Holy Days. Violators of the provision should first be given a brotherly warning. If the violations persisted, the violators should be severely punished, with the pillory, neck irons and other ‘harsh punishments’ commensurate with the nature of the crime. The instruction has this conclusion: ‘May God the Almighty help these Guardians of the Holy Days and give them strength, may he govern them by His holy spirit, so that they should understand their godly office.’¹⁷ In alliance with the local vicar, Isaac Olsen should now investigate, point out and help punish those who violated this ordinance. Both documents mentioned above show his standing among higher church and state officials.

Sami places of sacrifice and Sami sorcery

A topic that has figured in research on early missionary activity includes Sami places of sacrifice and Sami sorcery. Places of sacrifice have been described by researchers including Just Qvigstad (1903, 1910, 1926), Adolf Steen (1954) and Vorren and Eriksen, *Samiske offerplasser i Varanger* [Sami places of sacrifice in Varanger] (1992) (Qvigstad 1903; Qvigstad 1910; Qvigstad 1926; Vorren og Eriksen 1992). In Isaac Olsen’s copybook, this topic is raised for the first time in the second section. Olsen describes in detail – on the basis of inspections – Sami places of sacrifice and landmarks. According to Steen, altogether 112 places of sacrifice between Varanger and Kvænangen are recorded and named in Olsen’s copybook (Steen 1954, 27). In addition, Isaac Olsen describes the precautions and customs that are observed by travellers passing by these locations (IO copybook, Part II, 297–332). This is not least interesting with regard to women. From Loppa and Stjernøya island it is said about passing such sacred places that ‘on Stjernø island’s Gomaldack peak, women must not come ashore or pass by in an uncovered state’ (IO copybook, Part II, 302). The same is said about sacred peaks nearby: ‘On Sörö island’s Andot near Sörvær, Stallo Passe off the island in the same lands, they are so holy that women must sit under a cover’ when passing by.¹⁸

Sorcery is referred to in the copybook partly by listing the names of demons, ‘the names of the demons that are among the Sami and reveal themselves to them and serve them and teach them sorcery.’¹⁹ The first demon names to be listed are ‘Noide, who is their teacher, Noide gadze, Julle gadze, Toento, Wuocko, Passe alma’ (IO copybook, Part II, 296–297). Approximately 40 names of various demons are listed. Most likely, Isaac Olsen had a strong interest in sorcery, and through his recording he has learned that Sami cosmology included a great number of demons. In addition, his recording of the names of demons shows that he is taking pains to record the spoken word accurately, but with his own orthographic solutions, for example the combination ‘ck’ for ‘k’ as seen in the word ‘Wuocko’. We can see a scientific practice whereby Olsen attempts to establish the closest possible connection between what he can hear and what he writes down.

¹⁷ Orig. «Imidlertid staa Gud allermægtigste disse Hellig dags vægtene krafteligen bie, hand regiere dem med sin Hellig aand, at de saa maatte forstaa deris gudelige Embede». Ref. IO copybook, Part II, 296.

¹⁸ Orig. «Paa Söröen andot ved Sörvær, stallo Passe uden for öen paa sam(m)e land, de ere saa hellige at kvinder maa side under et dekke» når de farer forbi. Ref. IO copybook, Part II, 303.

¹⁹ Orig. «Nafnene paa de Dievele som er iblandt fin(n)erne og aabenbarer sig for dem og tiener dem og lærer dem troldom.» Ref. IO copybook, Part II, 296.

A list such as the one described above reveals little about Isaac Olsen's own opinions about sorcery. Some other entries, however, including a letter dated in Vadsø on 15 August 1710 and signed by Isaac Olsen, shows clearly that he believed that Sami sorcery was real and that he was exposed to it himself because he had become the object of Sami hatred. He addresses the authorities like this:

(...) have I over these years been persecuted by them to such an extent that they have been ready to kill me on several occasions, and I still fear for my life, since they have obviously decided to kill me this year unless they can have me dismissed by the authorities before the year ends; they say that with my learning I have brought all manners of misfortune upon them; so in order that I shall not be put to death by sorcery or by violence I am forced to seek the powerful protection and refuge of the authorities against these barbarians, otherwise I assume that they either find it urgent to grant my request, or else I will need to leave them altogether and go to the county governor and the Bishop to denounce their heathen brutality against me, such is the Sami's persecution and hatred of me.²⁰

In light of these formulations it appears as though Isaac Olsen not only believes in the effects of sorcery; he is directly frightened of the forces to which he feels exposed. He also refers the Sami practice of sorcery to heathendom, to pre-Christianity. This is an important element in Olsen's notions about his activities. His work as a teacher, evangelist and catechist was directed towards a population that had not accepted Christianity. As regards the Finnmark authorities, they did in fact respond to Isaac Olsen's request and instructed the Sami to comply with the instruction that had been issued originally.

Official documents

The second section of the copybook contains a number of documents that are of a more formal nature. Among them is a letter from the King, dated 18 November 1707, the year after the royal envoy Povel Resen made his journey to Northern Norway to collect information on the Sami population, their way of life and beliefs. In this letter, the King states that the Sami in both Finnmark and Nordland are 'poorly grounded in their Christian faith' (IO copybook, Part II, 258–262). The King also makes justified proposals to establish churches and schools. The response to this royal letter comes in the form of a comprehensive *relation* signed by county governor Erich Lorch and published at Alta court of law in 1708 (IO copybook, Part II, 262–276). The *relation* provides detailed descriptions of the geography and location, as well as the organisation of and the ideas that underlie the purpose of the construction, which are catechisation and education. The places mentioned include Tana, Porsanger, Reinøy, Vadsø, Talvik, Masi and Varanger. The royal letter and the *relation* are both entered into Isaac Olsen's copybook in a handwriting other than that of its owner. The content of these documents must have been

²⁰ Orig. «(...) er Jeg i Dise aar Voren i saadan forfølgelse hos dennem, at de mange gange har været beraad at slaa mig ihield, og gaar Jeg endnu paa mit lif, som de Visselig har besluttet at slaa mig ihield i aar, hvis De ickke faar mig af øffrigheden Dette aar afskaffet formedelst, sige de, Jeg med min lærdom har for aarsaget dem ald U-lücke her over, at Jeg icke med Troldom eller haandslag skal blive af dage taget, Nödes Jeg at söge øfrighedens kraftige *protect* og beskiermelse mod Dise barbarer, ellers formoder Jeg de gunstige lader sig Være angelegne eller og Jeg maa aldelis forlade Dennem og för föie mig til stift Amtmanden og biskopen saadan deris Hedinske *brutellit*et mod mig at angive, saadan Finnernis förfölgelse og had imod mig.» Ref. IO copybook, Part II, 339.

of key importance to Isaac Olsen, since they deal with areas in which he will work as a teacher, preacher and catechist over the following years.

Demons and places of sacrifice

The third section of the copybook again turns to sorcery and places of sacrifice. The naming of the demons starts like this: 'Names of the demons that are among the Sami and reveal themselves to them and serve them and teach sorcery.'²¹ The list repeats the names of demons recorded in the second section of the copybook.

The list of places of sacrifice bears the headline: 'Names of the Sami places of idolatry and sacrifice in Varanger' and includes the Sami places of sacrifice that Isaac Olsen has recorded and that Solberg published in *Nordnorske samlinger* [North Norwegian Collections]: Varanger, Tana, Laksefjord, Porsangerfjord, Kvalsund, Alta, Loppa, Bersfjord, Stjernøya and Kværnangen. This text runs over five pages in the copybook, and Isaac Olsen has signed his name at the end. These place-names form the foundation of absolutely all scholarly research performed on Sami sacrificial places.

References to women in association with places of sacrifice are made here as well. These are linked to sacred places in Loppa and at Stjernøy island, and the formulations are nearly identical to those we saw in the second section of the copybook. About Loppa it is said that: 'All these are so sacred that women may not go ashore, and they may certainly not pass by in an exposed state.'²² About Stjernøy island it says that 'women may not come ashore or pass by in an exposed state.'²³

The Reformation anniversary 1717

In association with the celebration of the anniversary of the Reformation, a day of thanksgiving and prayer was held across Denmark, Norway, Iceland and the Faroes. The intention was to celebrate in an identical fashion in all countries. On 5 November 1717, a document issued in Copenhagen has been included in the copybook under the heading 'Collect': 'God our Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank thee for having liberated us from the power of darkness and let us enter the realm of thy beloved Son, and that thou for two hundred years have let us keep thy precious word in its right and holy meaning' (IO copybook, Part III, 31). The document contained a prayer of intercession for the King and Queen, the heir apparent and two royal princesses, for whom it is to be prayed: 'Bless both the Royal Princesses with all kinds of spiritual blessings in the heavenly good things in Christ Jesus, let it be thy will to make them good, because they fear thee as their only and supreme God! Thy mercy be upon them, because they put their faith in thee (...)' (IO copybook, Part III, 37). The programme included divine service on the days 31 October, 1 November, 5 November and 7 November. In the programme for the anniversary Sunday we find prayers, hymns and Bible verses for use in the sunrise service, morning service, midday service and evensong. Among the hymns, we can mention songs of praise such as 'Oh Lord, We Praise Thee', 'My Hope and Comfort and All My Faith', 'My Soul Now Praiseth the Lord', 'We thank Thee, Our Dear Lord and Father', 'Keep Us, Lord, in Thy

²¹ Orig. «Nafnene paa de Djevle som er blant finnerne og aabenbarer sig for dem og tiener dem og lærer trolddom.» Ref. IO copybook, Part III, 24, paginated with pencil.

²² Orig. «Alle disse ere saa hellige at qvinder maa icke Kome paa land, langt mindre maa de fare blotte forbi.»

²³ Orig. «qvinder maa icke Kome paa land eller fare forbi blotte.»

Word' and 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God'. The prayers also encompass people in the other Nordic countries and plead for hope and comfort in times of war, destitution and disease: 'So help us that we may all congregate in thy eternal realm, where the rightful celebration is held among the many thousands of birds, among the spirits of perfect justice, where there shall be no sorrow, no sigh shall be heard, but white and joyful beings will sing the song of the land and be filled with eternal joy' (IO copybook, Part III, 30).

Heavenly letters

One distinctive document entered into the copybook is a so-called 'Himmelbrev'. This is a letter that is alleged to have been written by Jesus and sent out by the angel Michael.²⁴ The letter was originally written in German and has been translated into Danish: 'This letter is written and hangs in the air in golden characters'.²⁵ Only those who believe in the letter's existence can receive it: 'To the one who wants to write it down or read it, to him it bends down and reveals itself, but from anyone who scorns this letter, it flies away into the air.'²⁶ The letter contains admonitions regarding orthodox practices; the Holy Days and church attendance must be observed, profanity is forbidden and nobody should adorn themselves with 'borrowed plumes' or engage in arrogance or idolatry. The letter has a protective effect: 'Whoever has this letter in his house or on his person shall suffer no misfortune; No passing thundercloud or lightning will do him any harm, and from fire, water, sun and iron and all other threatening calamities, he shall be safe and free.'²⁷ Failing to comply with the letter could entail consequences: 'If you fail to do as I now command, I will send over you and the Earth pestilences, war, hunger and poverty and many other punishments and plagues so that you might understand and heed it.'²⁸ The letter also had importance for the afterlife: 'The one who bears with him this letter and reveals it to the children of man, he will earn a great reward and a joyful departure from this world.'²⁹ At the time, such heavenly letters were a well-known element of popular culture.

Isaac Olsen's contribution to the Reformation

In his life's work, Isaac Olsen gave a major contribution to education, catechisation and translation. His copybook provides the most concrete documentation of all his contributions. His viewpoints are extremely interesting with regard to both educational

²⁴ The name of the angel is written in different ways: Mickel, Mickael, Mickæl.

²⁵ Orig. «Dette bref er skrevet og henger i Lufften med gyldende bogstaver». Ref. IO copybook, Part III, 49.

²⁶ Orig. «Hvem det Vil enten udskrive eller Læsse, Den bøyer det sig ned til, og aabner sig self til hannem, men hvilcken som dette bref foragder, den flyer det ifraa udi lufften igien.» Ref. IO copybook, Part III, 49.

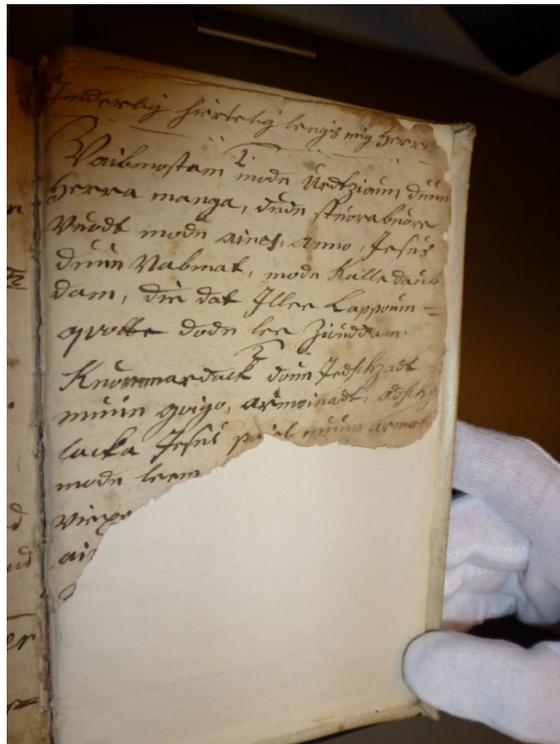
²⁷ Orig. «Hvo dette bref haver i sit huus eller hos sig bær, den skal ingen skade Vederfares Ingen torden sky heller liun Jld Naar den overgaar skal giöre hannem skade, han skal og for Jld Vand soel og Jærn og alle andre over hengende onde ulycker Være sicker og frie.» Ref. IO copybook, Part III, 45, paginated with pencil.

²⁸ Orig. «Dersom i det iche giør, det Jeg nu Befaller eder, da Vil Jeg skicke over eder og Jorden Pestilentze, Krig, hunger og dyrtid og mange andre straf og plager, saa i skulle det forstaa og følge.» Ref. IO copybook, Part III, follows after p. 49, paginated with pencil.

²⁹ Orig. «Hvem dette bref ombær og hos sig haver og for Meniskens börn det aabenbarer, den bekommer end gaad løn og en glædelig afskee af denne Verden.» Ref. IO copybook, Part III, 45, paginated with pencil.

activity and catechisation. Isaac Olsen was the first to think organisationally around the provision of education to a Sami population that was scattered across numerous settlement areas in Finnmark. He was intent on coping with the challenges involved in such teaching activities. In addition, he was the first to preach the Gospel orally to his students in the Sami language, and he was the first to translate parts of the Catechism and hymns to a Sami language. Isaac Olsen played a key role as an early missionary worker. This shows that we may possibly refer to Isaac Olsen as ‘The Apostle of the Sami’ – a title that otherwise is bestowed on Thomas von Westen.

As regards Isaac Olsen’s contributions to the Reformation, we can distinguish between his years in Finnmark and the subsequent years. In Finnmark, he preached Lutheranism to the Sami population. He acquired invaluable knowledge about the Sami language, Sami beliefs and culture. He was the first itinerant missionary who met the Sami population. After his stay in Finnmark, Isaac Olsen contributed to the Reformation through his educational activities as well as translation and information work. He taught future missionaries at Thomas von Westen’s seminaries in Trondheim. He was summoned to Copenhagen by the Missionary College to be an informant and to work on translations of religious literature into Sami. With his Sami language skills, he assumed a highly prominent position as a translator of religious literature from Danish into Sami, including hymns. The final page in the copybook testifies to this; it is a translation of the hymn ‘Inderlig hiertelig lengis mig Herre’. Most likely, this is the first ever example of a Danish hymn to appear in Sami translation.



The last page of Isaac Olsen’s copybook.

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