

Luobbal Sámmol Sámmol, Samuli Aikio 1937–2022

The well-known expert and pioneer of Saami studies Luobbal Sámmol Sámmol, Samuli Aikio, left us on 31 August 2022 to join his wife and elder son on the other side.

Sámmol was born on 11 May 1937 in Ohcejohka (Utsjoki, Finland) in the northernmost part of Sápmi. He was the fourth of eleven children that his parents Luobbal Sámmol, Samuli and Karin Sofia Aikio (née Helander) were blessed with. The family lived a materially humble but culturally rich life that was based on customary Saami livelihoods. His father was widely known as a clever man, a skillful craftsman and excellent storyteller.

As it soon became obvious that the younger Sámmol was especially gifted, the idea of sending him off to higher education presented itself. At the age of 14 Sámmol moved to Helsinki for secondary, and later, higher education with economic support from the Society for the Promotion of Sami Culture (Lapin sivistysseura). Despite this unusual background, he graduated in 1957 as one of the best students in the Munkkivuoren yhteiskoulu. As Sámmol recounted, the idea to send him away for schooling was accepted by his father because Sámmol was sickly as a child and therefore seemed unlikely to become a tough worker. However, it is more probable that his father realized the true potential of his son and the possibilities of higher education.

In Sámmol's childhood it was not uncommon that children in Ohcejohka got only a few years of elementary education, regardless of the fact that six-year public schooling was in principle compulsory. To obtain secondary or higher education, one had to move far away from home. In addition, young people with higher education were not likely to get a job near home. This meant that a large part of the most talented young people moved away permanently. For Sámmol, as for many other contemporary Saami, higher education meant the beginning of an unwanted in-betweenness. On one hand, he was a Saami with a very traditional background and a strong connection to his people and home, but on the other hand, he was a member of the urban academic intelligentsia. Throughout his life he fought to bring these worlds together.

Sámmol ended up living in Helsinki for some twenty-five years. During high school and in the years that followed, he was not yet a passionate promoter of Saami issues but instead planned a completely different career.

He worked for instance as a journalist at the Finnish News Agency STT. However, he soon understood that there was so much to improve in the situation of the Saami, and so few educated Saami to drive these issues, that he decided to get involved in the Saami movement.

From the mid-1960s Sámmol was very active in the Saami political field, promoting Saami language and culture. Especially issues related to education and the status of the Saami language were close to his heart. During the 1960s and 1970s he was the secretary of the Helsinki-based Nordic Saami Council (Sámiráđđi) and the Society for the Promotion of Sami Culture, as well as chief editor of *Sabmelaš* (*Sápmelaš*), the only Saami-language magazine published in Finland at that time. As a Saami and a confident and knowledgeable speaker, he was a sought-after presenter and interviewee at various public events and in the media, a role that he took already as a high school graduate in 1957. He also participated in several official advisory boards that investigated the situation of the Saami people.

At the same time Sámmol worked as an assistant at the department of Finno-Ugrian ethnology at the University of Helsinki and continued his university studies of ethnology and Finno-Ugrian languages. He graduated in 1977 with a Bachelor of Arts. During his studies he actively collaborated with many well-known researchers. He worked especially closely with Professor Erkki Itkonen and with assistant and researcher, later professor, Pekka Sammallahti. All the classic figures in Saami studies, such as T. I. Itkonen, Karl Nickul, and Robert Crottet, were part of his network of contacts. Of his fellow Saami activists, he helped for instance Nils-Aslak Valkeapää with the new North Saami orthography used in Valkeapää's first collection of poems *Giđa ijat čuov'gadat* (1974).

During his time in Helsinki, Sámmol contributed to many significant publications in the field of Saami folklore, literature, and music studies. He edited several books, such as *Sabmelašžžai maidnasak já muihtalusak – Lappalaisten satuja ja tarinoita* by Pedar Jalvi ('Saami Fairy Tales and Stories', 1966) and the award-winning anthology *Skabmatolak: Sabmelaš kirjjalašvuođa antologiija – Tulia kaamoksessa: Saamelaisen kirjallisuuden antologia* ('Fires in the Polar Night: An Anthology of Saami Literature', 1974) with Erkki Itkonen and Pekka Sammallahti. Another award-winning bilingual pair of books was *Girdinoaiddi bárdni: Sápmelaš máidnasat* and *Lentonoidan poika: Saamelaisia satuja* ('The Son of the Flying Witch: Saami Fairy Tales', 1978), a collection of traditional Saami

folklore selected from scientific material that he edited with his wife Annukka. He also translated books, such as Johan Turi's classic *Kertomus saamelaisista* (1979, original 1910; this book has been published in English translation in 2012 as *An Account of the Sámi*).

Sámmol was also an active fieldworker who collected, for instance, place names, folklore, and traditional music in Sápmi, on his own and in cooperation with other researchers, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, his contribution to the collections of the Names Archive at the Institute for the Languages of Finland (Kotus) is huge, with more than four thousand collected Saami place names from Ohcejohka and Aanaar (Inari).

In 1975 Sámmol was offered an opportunity to move back north: He started to work at the Sámi instituhtta (Nordic Sámi Institute), an all-Saami research institute in Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino). At the Institute he began, with other Saami researchers, to develop the new field of Saami history that interpreted the events of the past based on Saami understanding and perspectives. He continued this groundbreaking work for the rest of his life and published several books and articles in the field. Probably the best known among them is *Olbmot ovdal min: Sámiid historjá 1700-logu rádjái* ('People Before Us: The History of the Saami until the 1700s', 1992).

In 1981 the Institute for the Languages of Finland founded a researcher's position for Saami language planning and consulting. This position was not filled until 1987 when Sámmol took it up, and it was based in Ohcejohka in accordance with his wish. He held the post until the turn of the year 2001–2002. During his years in this position, he made a significant contribution to the field of Saami language, helping ordinary and professional language users with questions concerning spelling, inflection, new and old terminology, and neologisms, as well as with demanding translations. He also participated in translating the Bible and worked with the National Land Survey of Finland (Maanmittauslaitos) when Saami place names were added on maps and new orthographies applied. One of his contributions most remembered by the public was his participation, year after year, as an expert on the national radio program *Mistä sanat tulevat – Gos sánit bohtet?* ('Where do words come from?'), where people could call in and ask about words and names.

As a scholar Sámmol represented a holistic view and saw the benefits of multidisciplinary approaches, including also artistic approaches. This was of course based on his own versatility and artistic abilities as a true

renaissance man. As a linguist, he is best known as an expert in the field of Saami onomastics. His writings on the history of Saami family name and personal name systems reveal a vast understanding that took decades of work to achieve. His last great contribution to Saami onomastics was the comprehensive book *Davvisámi báikenamat* ('The North Saami Place-names', 2017), which can be seen as his testament to younger researchers. However, Sámmol's love for nature and his excellent command of his mother tongue resulted also in wide collections of traditional Saami vocabulary dealing with names and terms connected to birds, plants, snow, weather, and salmon.

Sámmol's work reached the wider public and other researchers, and it was also noticed outside the Saami and academic communities. He was awarded the Order of the Lion of Finland on 6 December 1994, and in May 1998 he was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Oulu, where he had worked for a short period as an associate professor during the 1970s.

For younger colleagues Sámmol was always a very warm, compassionate, and supportive person who never judged anyone by their looks. Probably due to his own multifaceted personal history, he never seemed to make preliminary judgments based on person's background, ethnicity, or language. Instead, what really mattered for him was genuine passion for science and knowledge. He was always ready to help with difficult questions, but he never insisted on his opinions if they were felt unwanted. His humbleness in acknowledging his own (seldom made) mistakes was exceptional.

In his last years Sámmol suffered from serious illnesses, but the joy brought by his grandchildren who lived nearby always made his eyes sparkle with happiness. Sámmol was laid to rest in Ohcejohka on 25 September 2022. He is deeply missed by colleagues, friends, and relatives alike.

Vuoiŋas dál ráfis, sophos.

Taarna Valtonen