

When the Inhabitants of Tornio Wrote to the Czar: the Sense of Belonging to the Swedish Kingdom in Northern Finland in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century (abstract)

During the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, the areas inhabited by the Finnish-speaking tribes were incorporated into the Swedish realm with the exception of Eastern Karelia. When the first known peace treaty between Sweden and Novgorod (Russia) defined the boundary between these powers in 1323, not only Eastern Karelia but also Northern Finland was left to the Russians. However, Finnish settlers had already crossed the border defined in 1323, and they continued to do so even after the peace treaty. This caused from time to time violent conflicts between the settlers and the Karelian-Russian merchants in the course of the fifteenth century, as the latter ones regarded the northern parts of the east coast of the Gulf of Bothnia a part of the Russian realm. Thus, the Finnish settlers lived in a dangerous no-man's land far away from the central authorities.



Tornio as pictured in Olaus Magni Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus (1555).

The study focuses on one peculiar document, dating to Naantali 6 March 1514 (FMU VII 5711). The document tells us about a letter that the populace of Tornio, Northern Finland, had sent to the Czar in order to get back the valuables that had been taken away from their church during one of the Russians' or Karelians' plundering expeditions. The contents of the letter had been dictated by a merchant from Stockholm and the letter was a forgery in the sense that it was written in the name of the Swedish regent, the Swedish archbishop and whole of the Swedish privy council. The forgery is interesting, since it contradicts the contemporary views on Russians as a savage and untrustworthy people: the Finnish colonists obviously believed or at least hoped that the Czar, despite the adherence to a different faith, would be as

righteous as the Swedish kings and regents were believed to be. At the same time, the document tells us of the distrust of these people in their own government's ability to act on their behalf.

Marko Lamberg

Dept. of History, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Language consultants: Charlene and Jari Eloranta.