

LARS-ERIK EDLUND &amp; OLLE SUNDSTRÖM

# A Great Inspiration to Us All

Special Issue in Honour of Professor  
Håkan Rydving's 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

In May 2018, Håkan Rydving turned 65. Together with the fact that there are no indications that he is planning on retiring any time soon, or even slowing down his working pace, this is cause for celebration. Ever since the founding of the *Journal of Northern Studies* in 2007, Håkan has been a member of our distinguished editorial board. As such, he has been an indispensable resource to us editors. His specialisation is inter- and multidisciplinary, has time-depth and covers a wide geographical area, particularly, but not exclusively, the circumpolar north. Thus, his scholarly competence spans the vast field of northern studies and our journal.

Håkan's research is in the intersection between linguistics and the history of religions, and rests on a wide expertise in Sami languages, history, culture and religion. Since the beginning of the 1980s, his publications have had an immense impact on all research concerning traditional Sami worldview and ritual, not only within the history of religions, but also in related disciplines such as history, church history, ethnology, archaeology, culture studies and others. Besides having thoroughly investigated specific topics within the history of Sami religion (religious change in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, conceptions of human beings and the relationship between personal name and identity, gender roles, divinities and other invisible beings, rituals, bear ceremonies etc.), he has made groundbreaking contributions to the methodology of studying Sami religion (see e.g., Rydving 1993a; Rydving 2010;

Rydving 2011a; Rydving 2013a). His methodological contributions concern especially source criticism of both the old written sources (Rydving 1995) and other source categories such as ritual artefacts (drums), place-names and sacred places (Kjellström & Rydving 1988; Rydving 2010). Håkan's interest in and wide knowledge of general theoretical problems in comparative religion has also resulted in seminal articles on essential concepts in the study of religion, such as "religion," "folk-religion," and "shamanism" (Rydving 2004; Rydving 2008; Rydving 2011b).

In his research, Håkan always draws empirically well-founded, balanced and careful conclusions. In doing this, he has accomplished reliable and lasting research results. That his doctoral dissertation, *The End of Drum-Time. Religious Change among the Lule Saami, 1670s–1740s*, has been published in no less than three editions (1993, 1995 and 2004), and still is an all but mandatory reference in other scholars' publications on Sami religion, speaks for itself. In the same way, none of the articles republished in the volume *Tracing Sami Traditions. In Search of the Indigenous Religion among the Western Sami during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries* (2010) have lost their topicality and significance, despite the fact that the first article was published as early as in 1987. The book is a showcase of Håkan's methodological and theoretical skills, applied to the study of Sami religion, and covering topics such as, for example, research history, source criticism, place-names, indigenous conceptions of the deceased and guardian beings, rituals of the noaidi, and evaluation of archaeological finds relevant for the history of religions. The volume on Sami mythology that Håkan is now preparing for the Finnish-Hungarian series *Encyclopaedia of Uralic Mythologies*, will no doubt also become a standard reference work for many years to come, as will his forthcoming comparative textbook on indigenous religions of the circumpolar north.

Within linguistics, Håkan has made original contributions not only to the fields of Sami onomastics and terminology relevant for the history of religions, as was mentioned above, but also to the methodological discussions in comparative dialectology through his book *Words and Varieties. Lexical Variation in Saami* (Rydving 2013b). For his merits as a linguist, he received the Jöran Sahlgren Award from the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy in 2015 for distinguished scientific contributions to Nordic onomastics, Nordic dialectology and Nordic folklore research.

As a bibliographer Håkan has compiled extensive bibliographies for the benefit of other scholars: *Samisk religionshistorisk bibliografi* ['Sami history of religions. A bibliography'] (1993b); "Bibliographia laestadiana selecta" (2000); *Samisk kyrkohistorisk bibliografi* ['Sami church history. A bibliography'] (2007; together with Leif Lindin).<sup>1</sup>

Håkan's expertise is, however, broader than his specialisation in Sami religion and Sami languages reveals. Due in no small part to his extensive language skills, he has been able to delve deep into such varying fields as Jewish, Islamic and Indian philosophy of religion, Old Norse religion, religion and politics, religion and the fine arts, method and theory in the study of religion, topics that he will hopefully continue to pursue in the future. But perhaps his wide range of competence and interests comes even more to the fore in his roles as teacher, supervisor and lecturer. He has been, and still is, a frequent and much appreciated guest lecturer not only at various universities in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, but also in non-Nordic countries such as the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Mexico, and the United States. To no one's surprise, in 2012 he was also elected "Best Lecturer in the Study of Religions" by the bachelor students at his home department, the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, University of Bergen, Norway. That he values the supervising of bachelor, masters and doctoral students as "the very core of the work at university, and our most important contribution as academic scholars and teachers" (Rydving 2006: 316) is obvious to anyone who has had the privilege to have him as a tutor in research work. His comments to students are always knowledgeable, sincere, respectful, and aimed at the learning process. And this goes for his comments on the texts of his colleagues as well. For we know that many senior researchers turn to Håkan—being the conscientious and thoughtful reader that he is—for guidance in various scholarly matters and to seek his comments on drafts.

In this issue, we have collected six articles and a number of book reviews from some of Håkan's friends and colleagues. The entire issue, including the cover, is thus dedicated to Håkan. The photo on the cover, taken by Arvid Sveen, whom Håkan has cooperated with (Rydving 2003), shows a Sami sacrificial stone in Lake Unna-Saiva, in the Lule Sami area—the very area Håkan studied in his doctoral dissertation published 25 years ago. We are sure we speak for all of us when we say that the reason for us compiling this honorary issue, and for the individual scholars contributing to it, is that Håkan has been a great inspiration to us all on so many levels. Congratulations on your 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, Håkan! We sincerely hope that you will have many years of fruitful teaching, supervising and research ahead of you.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Håkan's own bibliography, so far, can be found on his webpage [www.uib.no/personer/Håkan.Rydving](http://www.uib.no/personer/Håkan.Rydving); access date 8 June 2018.

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