

**„The Apostle of the Saami”  
Thomas von Westen**

The beginning of the Saami written language coincides with the time of Christian missionary activities. When examining the Saami written language, for its historical presentation and in depth delineation of this period is inevitable. Following the Reformation, the Danish-Norwegian Lutheran Church also recognized the importance of talking to Saami people in their mother tongue. Missionary activities among the Saami can almost always be linked to a person and/or an ideological current. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, missionary work to the north also intensified in Danish-Norway, the ideological basis of which was the increasingly widespread pietism, and its central figure was the Danish missionary pastor Thomas von Westen (1682–1727).

Nothing proves the significance of Westen’s work better than the title of “Apostle of the Saami,” which can be found in almost every piece of the abundant literature about him. Recent biographies are already more critical of Thomas von Westen’s entrenched, almost fanatical missionary activity (e.g., his methods of proselytization), so the descriptions outline a rather contradictory image of a him. Nevertheless, his merits are indisputable: during his three northern missionary journeys (1716–1723), in addition to his missionary, proselytizing, church-organizing work, Westen also played a prominent role in the history of Saami education through the operation of the schools he founded. In 1717 he established a seminary (*Seminarium Scholasticum*) in Trondheim for the education of Saami-speaking missionaries, catechists, and teachers. Funded from his own resources, he also set up another school in his home, known as the *Seminarium Domesticum*. Here, young Saami boys received teacher training.

After his death, his schools ceased to exist, and due to the changed language and mission policy, Saami language education was suspended until 1752, when, under the leadership of Westen's disciple and friend Knud Leem (1697–1774) – continuing Westen’s traditions – *Seminarium Lapponicum* opened its doors. This was the place where the main Saami translations, grammars and dictionaries of the age were made. This era can be considered the first period of Saami written language.

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*Seminarium Domesticum*