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Johan Turi. 2011. An Account of the Sámi

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Johan Turi. 2011. *An Account of the Sámi*. Translated by Thomas A. DuBois. Chicago: Nordic Studies Press. 221 pages. ISBN: 0-9772714-5-5.

In the year 1904, on a new rail line constructed to connect the new mining industry in Kiruna to the ports of Luleå and Narvik, a chance meeting on a train between Sámi hunter Johan Turi and the Danish ethnographer and artist Emilie Demant (later Emilie Demant-Hatt) led to the first secular book ever written in a Sámi language, *Muitalus Sámiid Birra* (*An Account of the Sámi*). Turi was born in Guovdageainu, Norway, but later moved with his family to Gárrasavvon and Čohkkeras, Sweden, as a result of border closings that impacted reindeer migration routes. He bore a great curiosity for and knowledge about Sámi culture, and he had firsthand experience with the catastrophic outcomes of Swedish policies upon Sámi people. With the assistance of Demant, Turi crafted a work in line with other ethnographic collaborations focused on Indigenous culture keepers, like *Life of Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak* or *Black Hawk* (1833), *Life among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (1883), or *Geronimo's Story of His Life* (1905). In addition to the 1910 publication of *Muitalus Sámiid Birra* (first published in English in 1931 under the title *Turi's Book of Lappland*), Turi went on to write *Sámi Deavsttat* [*Lappish Texts 1918–1919*] with nephew Per Turi and the travelogue *Duoddaris* (1988) [*From the Mountains*] about his accounts guiding for the British travel writer Frank Hedges Butler. Each volume offers profound insight into Sámi lifeways around the turn of the twentieth century—each in a distinctive fashion.

An Account of the Sámi stands as a poetic masterpiece, drawing on traditional aesthetics of Sámi storytelling, yet repurposing them carefully to advance a distinctly Sámi agenda within broader Nordic and European society. The work is rich in the description of Sámi folklife, including reindeer herding, hunting, trapping, and migration; on the complex dynamics of the political and regional conflicts of the day (including, memorably, his take on the Guovdageaidnu Rebellion); and on the complex ways that Sámi people practiced medicine—practices which translator Thomas DuBois and Jonathan Lang have elsewhere demonstrated remarkable degrees of biochemical efficacy (2013). Turi also includes sections dedicated specifically to Sámi singing and courtship, along with a variety of legends, about the powerful and dangerous *stállu*, the ruthless marauding *Čudit*, the mysterious *ulddat* and *hálđi* spirit beings, and about the supernatural feats of powerful *noaidit*. The legend chapters in particular dramatize Sámi relationships with emergent colonial power structures: the violent *stállu* wants to marry your daughter; the *Čudit* will mercilessly slaughter

villages; and the *noaidi* still has powers to best the newly arrived and sometimes hostile Christian faith.

Additionally, fourteen examples of Turi's artwork depicting Sámi life are reproduced here, with supplemental visual analysis provided by DuBois. DuBois also provides a short introduction which provides additional biographical information about Johan Turi, along with the influences and impacts of the book. A short glossary of Sámi words and a list of referenced place names also supplement the original texts.

DuBois' masterful translation has methodically re-introduced this important and foundational Sámi book to an English-speaking audience. DuBois translation is drawn from Turi's original manuscripts, as republished in North Sámi by Michael Svonni in 2010, with annotations that include and contextualize supplemental textual content that appeared in earlier published versions of Turi's work. In particular, the 1931 English translation by Elizabeth Gee Nash includes previously unpublished materials, which were most likely drawn from Demant's field notes. With his translation, DuBois produces supremely readable translations that reflect insider sensitivities toward Sámi aesthetics, interpretative paradigms, and emotional affect. Accordingly, Turi's own personality shines through in DuBois' translation, which had been lost in earlier published versions of this work. Indeed, this shift is significant and of critical importance, allowing space for Turi to exist as an individual artist and community member, and not simply as a spokesperson for all Sámi people.

DuBois' translation offers a significant contribution to the field of Sámi studies in English and has since its publication helped spark a series of subsequent translation projects that bring Sámi primary texts to English, including Barbara Sjöholm's translation of Emilie Demant-Hatt's *By the Fire* or my own translation of August Koskimies and Toivo Itkonen's *Inari Sámi Folklore: Stories from Aanaar*. Pairing well with the aforementioned texts, with Sjöholm's translation of Demant-Hatt's *With the Lapps in the High Mountains* (1913), or with DuBois' guest edited special issue of *Scandinavian Studies* (2011) dedicated to Turi's work, *An Account of the Sámi* is essential reading for any course on Nordic folklore, literature, and cultural studies wanting to engage with Sámi authors, traditional culture, or politics at the turn of the twentieth century.

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