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A large-scale meeting of Nordic and Russian historians, philologists and archaeologists in Arctic Norway *

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Abstract. The history of Russia and Norway and their areas in the Arctic and Russian-Norwegian relations are traditionally important for the residents of both states. Opportunities to present new documents and materials, to discuss the significance of centuries-old ties between Russia and Norway, especially in the North, are not provided so often. In early April 2019, a large-scale scientific seminar of Russian and Scandinavian historians, philologists, and archaeologists was held at the University of Tromsø — the Arctic University of Norway. It was precisely dedicated to the issues listed above. One of the reasons for the meeting was the jubilee of the Honorary Doctor of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Professor J.P. Nielsen. Also, the seminar hosted the presentation of a collective scientific collection written by associates of J.P. Nielsen from various countries — “In the North, the East and the West meet.”

Keywords: *Russian-Norwegian relations, North of Russia and Norway, Arctic territories, cooperation in historical science, good neighborly relations, an international seminar in Tromsø.*

April 2019 may well go down in the history of the Russian-Norwegian and even Russian-Scandinavian scientific relations in the social and humanitarian sphere. On April 4, 2019, in the Arctic part of Norway, at the University of Tromsø — the Arctic University of Norway, a large meeting of historians, linguists, and archaeologists from Russia and the Scandinavian countries was held. The reason for such a meeting, attended by about 200 people, was the Jubilee of Professor Jens Petter Nielsen. Besides, the meeting coincided with the presentation of a scientific collection written by colleagues of J.P. Nielsen — “In the North, the East and West meet”.

So, in early April 2019, colleagues, partners, and collaborators of J.P. Nielsen, arrived in Tromsø from capitals and different towns of the North: from the Russian Federation (Moscow, St Petersburg, Murmansk, and Arkhangelsk), and Norway (Oslo, Longyearbyen, Bergen, Bodø, Alta, Kirkenes, Vadsø, Vardø, and Tromsø) and Sweden (Stockholm). This meeting took place in the form of a scientific seminar and was called a “jubilee seminar”. It became a kind of international celebration of Jens Petter Nielsen and an acknowledgment of his scholarly merits.

Since 1990, J.P. Nielsen is a professor (“International relations, polar research, the study of the North”) at the Department of History (since 2016 — Department of Archaeology, History, Reli-

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gious Studies and Theology) University of Tromsø (since 2014 — University of Tromsø — The Arctic University of Norway).

His research interests have, for almost 45 years (since the beginning of the 1970s) been focused on three essential areas: Russian (and Soviet) history and historiography, the history of the North-Norwegian and Norwegian-Russian relations, with an emphasis on the northern and Arctic areas of the two countries. Over the years, first at the University of Oslo, since 1990 at the University of Tromsø — the Arctic University of Norway, Jens Petter has participated in a significant number of international, national and regional research projects. More than 2/3 of his historical themes cover the 19th — the beginning of the 21st century. His work also includes such areas as organizational, educational, scientific assistance of young scientists. From year to year, J.P. Nielsen plays a leading role in conferences, seminars, and meetings; he has reported on various issues in the history of Russian-Norwegian relations in many cities of Russia and Scandinavia.

In 1998, Professor J.P. Nielsen became an Honorary Doctor of the Pomor State University named after M.V. Lomonosov in Arkhangelsk. This title was confirmed once again in 2015 after the renaming of the university as the Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after Lomonosov. Thus, he has been an Honorary Doctor of this university for more than 20 years. Jens Petter has also, for many years, been a member of Academia Borealis, the North Norwegian Academy of Sciences, as well as member of The Norwegian Scientific Academy for Polar Research, and, in Arkhangelsk, a member of the editorial board of the peer-reviewed scientific journal “Bulletin of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University”. Series “Humanities and Social Sciences” and the editorial board of the peer-reviewed scientific journal “Arctic and North” (both issued in Arkhangelsk).

Since the 1980s, Professor J. P. Nielsen has taught at different universities in Norway and Russia, been responsible for relevant studies of bachelor, master and doctoral students in Norwegian, Russian and English; for a number of courses on the history of Russia, the Russian and Soviet historiography, the history of the Arctic and the Northern Sea Route, Norwegian-Russian relations in the 19th — beginning of the 21st centuries.

In September 2018, a collective monograph “Getting closer: Norway and Russia. 1814–1917”, edited by Jens Petter Nielsen (published in Russian in 2017 by the Moscow publishing house “Ves Mir”) received a special award from the Association of Book Publishers of Russia as the “Best book (published in 2017) contributing to the dialogue of cultures”¹.

The book was written by 17 historians from Russia and Norway within a joint megaproject called “Neighbourly Asymmetry. Norway and Russia. 1814-2014” (see below). In November 2018, Professor J.P. Nielsen received a letter of appreciation from the Rector of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov (NArFU) for his significant contribution to the development of scientific and educational cooperation between NArFU and the University of Tromsø

¹ Sblizhenie: Rossiya i Norvegiya v 1814–1917 godah. Pod red. J.P. Nil'sena (per. s norvezhskogo yazyka s dopolneniyami kollektivnoj monografii “Russland kommer nærmere: Norge og Russland 1814–1917”) [Nielsen J.P., ed. Convergence: Russia and Norway in 1814-1917 (translated from Norwegian with additions “Russland kommer nærmere: Norge og Russland 1814-1917”. Oslo, Pax Forlag AS, 2014, Vol. 1)]. Moscow, Ves Mir, 2017, vol 708, no. 1. (In Russ.)

— the Arctic University of Norway in connection with the 25th anniversary of the cross-border cooperation between the two university-partners.

So, at the international seminar, which took place on April 4, 2019, at the Arctic University of Tromsø, it was possible to hear many colleagues of J.P. Nielsen speaking. One of the first to talk about the dynamics of Russian historians cooperation with colleagues from the Nordic countries over the past 30 years was A.A. Komarov — leading researcher, head of the Nordic Center for History and the Baltic, Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences and a professor at the University of Tromsø — the Arctic University of Norway. He could surprise the audience with memories of some innovative Norwegian-Russian projects. First, it was the research mentioned above, the megaproject in history “Neighbourly Asymmetry. Norway and Russia. 1814–2014”, carried through in 2008–2014². Numerous publications had appeared recently in Norwegian, e.g., the diaries of A.M. Kollontai in the period when she was Soviet envoy to Norway (1922–1930) and a collection of archival documents on the history of the Soviet-Norwegian relations. Besides, Alexey Komarov underlined the results of various discussions, meetings, conferences, in tandem with Norwegian colleagues, attended by both well-known historians and recent graduates. One of the most important meeting places, he said, is the international Kirkenes seminars of historians from Norway and various Russian scientific centers. They were named after the location of the first seminar — Kirkenes, in 2002. This kind of tradition got the support of the Consulate General of the Russian Federation, located directly at the border with Russia, the Norwegian town of Kirkenes.

In 2017, the sixth and so far most recent seminar was again organized in Kirkenes. This time the organizer was the Barents Institute — an institute which is a part of the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education of the University of Tromsø — Arctic University of Norway. The sixth Kirkenes seminar gathered more than thirty historians from Russia and Norway. They presented new documents and materials about the centuries-old good neighborly relations between Russia and Norway, esp. in the North. Academic organizers of this workshop in addition to A.A. Komarov and J.P. Nielsen were Professor V.V. Tevlina (Northern (Arctic) Federal University, University of Tromsø — The Arctic University of Norway); Associate Professor V.A. Karelin (St. Petersburg Military Institute); Associate Professor Marianne Neerland Soleim (University of Tromsø — The Arctic University of Norway) and Professor Sergey G. Verigin (Petrozavodsk State University). It is noteworthy that the Kirkenes Seminar in 2017 was devoted to the 30th anniversary of cooperation between historians of Russia and Norway, established in the wake of the Perestroika in 1986–1987. The next, the seventh, Kirkenes seminar is scheduled to be held in Arkhangelsk in 2020.

The presentation by NArFU Professor V.I. Goldin at the jubilee in Tromsø was devoted to the peculiarities and prospects of interaction between the Arkhangelsk historians and Jens Petter

² See more about the course and results of the project: Goldin V.I., Zaykov K.S. *Norvegiya i Rossiya: 1814-2014. Itogi megaproekta [Norway and Russia: 1814–2014. The results of the megaproject]. Voprosi Istorii [Questions of History]*, 2019, no 3, pp. 103-109. (In Russ.)

Nielsen as coordinator, initiator, and participant of joint projects on the study of the regional history of the Russian North and the North of Norway. Vladislav I. Goldin paid attention to joint book publications, especially on the history of the North, issued in Norwegian, English, and Russian in the 1990s — 2010s as the result of the joint efforts of humanists on both sides of the border. He emphasized books published within the Russian-Norwegian historical project “Neighbourly Asymmetry. Norway and Russia 1814–2014”, viz. works on the history of Russian-Norwegian relations. Among them, he mentioned books like “Caution & Compliance. Norwegian-Russian Diplomatic Relations 1814-2014” (2012); “Net Severa, a est' Severa”. The manifold ideas of the North in Norway and Russia” (2016) and other publications³.

V.I. Goldin also named several significant initiatives in cooperation between Russian and Norwegian historians taken in the late 1980s in the Arctic North of both countries. In this case, the Arkhangelsk Oblast has always played a unique role. Goldin noted the influence of Scandinavian scientific conferences, held in the form of international meetings of scientists from Russia and Scandinavia, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Among them is the “Conference for the Study of the Scandinavian countries and Finland” traditionally held in Russia since the 1980s. They have repeatedly been organized in Moscow, Arkhangelsk, Petrozavodsk, and other cities of Russia, with the active participation of the Institute of World History, Pomor State University (now NArFU), and other universities in Russia. At the same time V.I. Goldin reminded the audience that Professor J.P. Nielsen, in the 1980s — 1990s, was a permanent member of the organizing committee and co-coordinator for several conferences. “It is a hope that this kind of forums can return,” — he said in the conclusion of the speech. The professor also read solemn greetings to the participants of the meeting and personally to J.P. Nielsen from the NArFU Rector, Professor E.V. Kudrjashova, and all the university staff.

Joint international meetings of historians, philologists, and archaeologists held repeatedly in Moscow with the participation of Professor J.P. Nielsen were mentioned by Professor Tatyana Jackson, the Institute for World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. T. Jackson has long collaborated with Jens Petter. She noted that at the very beginning of the 1990s when the above-mentioned conference on the history of the Scandinavian countries and Finland was held at the Russian Academy of Sciences for the first time, with the participation of colleagues from Moscow, St Petersburg and other cities of Russia and Scandinavia, J.P. Nielsen took part and gave a presentation. Besides, Tatyana Jackson named exciting articles about the North and Russian-Norwegian relations, published for more than 20 years in Norway in the English peer-reviewed scientific journal “Acta Borealia”. Colleagues from scientific centers of Russia and Norway have repeatedly published there, incl. Professor Nielsen, who (in 1999–2003) was one of the journal co-editors.

³ Bones S., Myklebust K.A., eds. Caution & Compliance. Norwegian-Russian Diplomatic Relations 1814-2014. Oslo, Orkana Akademisk, 2012. 202p. Myklebust K.A., Nielsen J.P., Tevlina V.V., Komarov A.A., eds. Niet severa, a est' severá. [About the diversity of concept “Northernness” in Norway and Russia]. Moscow: URSS, 2016. 288 p. (In Russ.)

Among the speakers at the jubilee seminar in 2019, one can also distinguish professors from the University of Tromsø — the Arctic University of Norway, Stian Bones, and Kari Aga Myklebost. Their joint speech concerned the analysis of scientific relations between Russia and Norway after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the search for areas of mutual interest in humanities, especially outlined at the turn of the century. They also noted his “art of wording and ability for decades to pave the way through the high waves of interstate historical research”. They also emphasized the decisive role of Jens Petter Nielsen in “the quality educational reform”.

Two speeches at the seminar were devoted to the experience of the joint long-term study of documents stored in the Russian archives on different aspects of Russian-Norwegian relations. We are talking both about ties between Norway and tsarist Russia, but also about Norwegian-Soviet historical relations. This experience was analyzed by professor Sven G. Holtsmark from Oslo and associate professor from St. Petersburg Vladimir A. Karelin. As a result of the cooperation between Russian and Norwegian historians, two extensive collections of documents have been published. One of them is called “Norway and the Soviet Union 1917–1955. A foreign policy documentation” (there is both a Norwegian and a Russian edition), and the second — “Old’ Russia and “new” Norway. Russian-Norwegian relations 1905–1917. A collection of documents” (In Russ.)⁴.

No less remarkable and exciting were speeches that focused on specific historical topics. Associate Professor Marianne Neerland Soleim from the University of Tromsø — the Arctic University of Norway highlighted main issues in field studies related to the Second World War and the commemoration of Norwegian-Russian military history in the post-war period. Dr. art. Marianne Soleim is a former student of Jens Petter Nielsen. She has been studying the fate of Russian prisoners of war in Norway (1941-45) for more than 20 years, working for the immortalization of the memory about them. The achievements of Marianne Neerland Soleim have resulted in positive feedback from Russia, among other things, a letter of gratitude from the President of the Russian Federation. In 2014–2017, Marianne Neerland Soleim was Director of the Barents Institute at the University of Tromsø — the Arctic University of Norway, and now she is an Associate Professor at the same university, at the Institute of Archeology, History, Religious Studies, and Theology.

Professor Einar-Arne Drivenes and associate professor Harald Dag Jølle, both from Tromsø, focused on the topic of the history of the polar regions since the 1970s. The speakers noted the role of Professor Jens Petter Nielsen as a polar historian, a connoisseur of northern subjects, who has participated in several projects related to the Arctic. Associate Professor of Murmansk Arctic State University M.B. Ilyicheva, in the same way, spoke about the importance of studying the history of the Kola Peninsula and the Murmansk Territory in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and what Russian and Norwegian historians had obtained in this respect through their cooperation.

⁴ Chubaryan A.O., Riste U., Komarov A.A., Lebedev I.V., Holtsmark S.G., Korobochkin M.L., Roginskiy V.V., Egge O., eds. *Sovetsko-norvezhskie otnosheniya. 1917-1955. Sbornik dokumentov* [Soviet-Norwegian relations. 1917-1955]. Moscow, ELIA-ART-O, 1977. 683 p.; Karelin V.A., Nil'sen J.P., eds. *“Staraya” Rossiya i “novaya” Norvegiya. Rossiysko-norvezhskie otnosheniya 1905–1917* [“Old” Russia and “new” Norway. Russian-Norwegian relations 1905–1917]. Moscow, LENAND, 2014. 400 p. (In Russ.)

The former Norwegian ambassador to Russia, Øyvind Nordsletten, said a few words devoted to J.P. Nielsen and, at the same time, mentioned the numerous joint publications, seminars, and meetings of Russian and Norwegian historians after the demise of the Cold War. Nordsletten is a unique person. He served twelve years altogether as Norwegian Ambassador in Russia and then as Norwegian Consul General in Murmansk. He was one of the architects behind large scale exhibition, "Russia — Norway: Through Centuries and Borders," launched in Oslo and St Petersburg in 2004-2005 to commemorate the centenary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1905. Øyvind Nordsletten mentioned this exhibition with enthusiasm. Moreover, not the last role in making this exhibition, as the speaker noted, belongs to the engine of these processes — J.P. Nielsen. By the way, Øyvind Nordsletten himself became an important actor in the breakthrough for economic, cultural, and other cooperation between Russia and Norway, which came after the breakdown of the Soviet Union.

During the seminar, a Festschrift with the title "In the North, the East, and West meet" was presented⁵. It was published in Norway by the publishing house Orkana Akademisk. Editors were Stian Bones and Kari Aga Myklebost. We can not describe the entire contents of this book, with articles written in four languages: Russian, English, Norwegian, and Swedish. We will only note that it is dedicated to honoring the years of the professional activity of Professor Jens Petter Nielsen as a humanitarian, a historian, a scientist, and a historian-teacher. The book contains 25 articles, placed in six sections and dedicated, one way or another, to the diverse scientific topics that have been treated by Professor Nielsen himself and his Norwegian and Russian colleagues. The monograph looks like a significant publication; it presents unique scientific materials on several topics with photographs and maps covering almost 500 years of historical development in Norway and Russia. It deals with Russian and Soviet historiography; the history of Russia and Norway separately, esp. in the 20th century; Norwegian-Russian relations with a focus on the North and the Arctic parts of the two countries; the development of the Northern regions of Norway.

At the end of the Festschrift, there is a bibliography of Professor J.P. Nielsen's publications. It appears that over the years of his activity (since the 1970s — present), he has had about 300 publications in different languages (Norwegian, Swedish, Russian, English, and German) and various publication channels in Norway, Sweden, England, Russia. Among them, we find nine monographs written by J.P. Nielsen, 128 co-authored books, and 25 books where he was editor or co-editor. Such research activity, basically related to the two neighbor states, Russia and Norway, and to the international relations in the North of Europe, is impressive, and this was emphasized both by speakers during the jubilee session and by authors in the Festschrift.

So, the scholarly meeting of researchers from Russia, Norway, and Sweden in Tromsø in April 2019 was not only about the activities and indisputable merits of Professor J.P. Nielsen. It also gave people an opportunity to summarize what had been done on a range of issues in the his-

⁵ Bones S., Myklebust K.A., eds. *In the North, the East and West meet*. Stamsund, Orkana Akademisk, 2019. 408p.

torical relations between Norway and Russia - and to outline the prospects for new joint projects and cooperation between Norwegian and Russian historians in the future.