



**The University Centre in Svalbard**  
**Written exam SH-201 The History of Svalbard (re-sit)**  
**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, hours:**

Permitted aids: *none, except dictionary between English and mother tongue*

*The exam is a 3-hour written test. It consists of two parts: Part I is a multiple-choice test of factual knowledge. **This sheet with answers to part I shall be handed in.** Part II (see below) is an essay part where you write extensively about one of two alternative subjects. You may answer in English, Norwegian, Swedish or Danish.*

*Part I counts approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  and part II counts  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the grade at the evaluation, but adjustment may take place. Both parts must be passed in order to pass the whole exam.*

**Part I: Multiple-choice test. Make only one cross for each question.**

1.	In which year do Icelandic annals first mention the name "Svalbard"?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1094	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1194	<input type="checkbox"/> 1249
2.	Who made the first recorded visit to Bjørnøya?	<input type="checkbox"/> Hudson	<input type="checkbox"/> Poole	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Barentsz
3.	Who ran the whaling station "Smeerenburg"?	<input type="checkbox"/> Basques	<input type="checkbox"/> British	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dutch
4.	Which species was <u>not</u> hunted on Svalbard?	<input type="checkbox"/> Blue whale	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spermaceti	<input type="checkbox"/> Bowhead
5.	Which period had the highest number of Norwegian wintering trappers?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1850	<input type="checkbox"/> 1850-1900	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1950
6.	When was the first International Polar Year?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1872-73	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1882-83	<input type="checkbox"/> 1896-97
7.	Who tried to fly from Svalbard to the North Pole with an aircraft in 1909?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wellman	<input type="checkbox"/> Amundsen	<input type="checkbox"/> Byrd
8.	When was the Svalbard Treaty signed?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1914	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1920	<input type="checkbox"/> 1925
9.	Which was the first Russian coal mine?	<input type="checkbox"/> Pyramiden	<input type="checkbox"/> Barentsburg	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grumant
10.	When was Store Norske nationalized by the Norwegian state?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1933	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1976	<input type="checkbox"/> 1991
11.	The Soviet Union demanded a revision of the Svalbard Treaty at one point – when?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1924	<input type="checkbox"/> 1935	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1944
12.	In 1996 a large scientific infrastructure was opened on Svalbard – which one?	<input type="checkbox"/> UNIS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EISCAT	<input type="checkbox"/> ESRO

**Part II: Choose and answer one of the following questions:**

**A. The discovery of Svalbard**

William Barentsz is usually attributed the honour of discovering Svalbard. Give an outline of this Dutch expedition and its historical significance. Discuss alternative hypotheses with regard to the first discovery of the islands. Why has this been a debated question?

*or:*

**B. Longyearbyen: the development of a local community**

There has been more or less permanent settlement in Longyearbyen for over a hundred years. Describe the development from mining camp to modern local community with emphasis on economic activity and social structure. Discuss to what extent Longyearbyen today is a "normal" community compared to towns of similar size on the mainland.

## A. The discovery of Svalbard

In 1594, 1595 and 1596 Dutch expeditions were sent out to search for a North East Passage. The prime motivation was to find an alternative sea-route to the Far East to promote trade. The navigator Willem Barentsz took part in all three expeditions, and during the first he sailed far north along the west coast of Novaya Zemlya. In 1596 a more easterly course was chosen, based on advice from Peter Plancius. On the 9th or 10th of June Bjørnøya (Bear Island) was discovered. Continuing north the two ships met the pack ice at 80°. Having turned east and south they sighted – and named – the North West corner of Spitsbergen on 17 June. Sailing southwards Barentsz made an outline map of the coast. Back at Bjørnøya the two ships parted; Jan Cornelisz Rijp's ship went north again before returning home, while Barentsz turned east, eventually reaching Novaya Zemlya. In late August the ship froze in and the crew of 17 had to move ashore and winter on 76° north. Five men, including Barentsz, died during the winter and spring and was buried on-shore on Novaya Zemlya, but the remaining 12 managed to row and sail back to Russia, where they met a Dutch ship. In late October they were back in Holland.

The map that was published a year after Barentsz' death in 1597, as well as Gerrit de Veer's (1598) famous account of the expedition, leave no doubt that the land discovered was Svalbard, or more precisely the north-western tip of Spitsbergen – the largest of the islands in the Svalbard archipelago. Parts of what seems to be Barentsz' original logbook was published in 1613 by Hessel Gerritsz'. Spitsbergen was the name the expedition soon attributed to the land, although on the map from 1598 it is called "Het Nieuwe Land" – the new land. The map also shows that Barentsz and his colleagues traced the west coast of Spitsbergen before they sailed southwards again to Bjørnøya, which they had already discovered a week earlier on their way up.

The Dutch discovery in June 1596 is thus a historical fact. Thus Barentsz' discovery is only a hypothesis in the sense that it maintains that the Dutch actually were the first. There are three alternative hypotheses:

### *The "Stone Age" hypothesis:*

The possibility of pre-historic settlement was put forward as early as the late 19th century (C.S. Hansson, 1899), but systematic archaeological investigations began only in the 1950s. Based on interpretations finds of flint fragments archaeologists Christiansson and Simonsen in 1970 suggested the existence of a Neolithic (3000 BC) settlement on Svalbard. Other archaeologists have rejected this hypothesis, first and foremost because there is no evidence of settlement or dwellings. In 1997 a large archaeological field project was carried out in the Bellsund area, and previous flint finds were also reexamined (H.B. Bjerck). The project concluded negatively with regard to a Stone Age settlement.

### *The "Viking" hypothesis:*

Icelandic annals record "Svalbard found" in the year 1194, and there is also mention of a "Svalbard" in sailing directions from the 13th century. Furthermore, a mythical Svalbard is mentioned in some parts of the saga literature. It is, however, not established that this corresponds to the islands we today call Svalbard, even though that has been a popular theory in Norway, endorsed by among others Fridtjof Nansen. No material evidence (graves, objects, settlements) has yet been found on Svalbard to substantiate this idea. On the other hand, it is probable that Norse sailors possessed the navigation capabilities required to sail in Arctic waters.

### *The "Pomor" hypothesis:*

Russian historians and archaeologists argue that Pomor trappers exploited Svalbard long before Barentsz. This hypothesis was presented – not coincidentally – already in the late

19th century, at the same time as Norwegians “rediscovered” the Norse Svalbard. Written evidence is scarce and requires interpretation. Archaeologist V.F. Starkov has dated timber in Pomor sites on Svalbard to mid-16th century and also made other finds he believes corroborate this hypothesis, such as inscriptions and objects believed to be of 16th century origin. Most western scientists have been sceptical towards the evidence. Dendrochronology is an accurate way of dating wood under certain conditions, but it remains to be proved that the buildings themselves were erected on Svalbard shortly after the timber was cut. The Pomors probably did have the experience and ship technology to sail to Svalbard in the 16th century; after all, they went to Novaya Zemlya and regularly navigated in Arctic waters.

*Why has this been a debated question?*

Geographical exploration is closely connected with national as well as individual prestige and honour. To a certain extent first discovery may also be a relevant legal argument in acquisition of territorial rights, which in turn is important with regard to economic exploitation. Thus, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the question of who actually had discovered the archipelago played a role in the diplomatic struggle for supremacy on Svalbard between England, the Netherlands and Denmark-Norway. It was access to the natural resources, first and foremost whaling products, that spurred this national competition. However, Svalbard soon became recognized as *terra nullius*, no man’s land, and exploited as an international commons.

When the legal status of Svalbard came on the political agenda in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the question of first discovery surfaced again, with clear nationalistic overtones, particularly in Norway and Russia. However, the public and academic debate about who came first to Svalbard did not have a large bearing on the diplomatic negotiations that took place between 1910 and 1920 about administration and sovereignty on the archipelago. It was rather a matter of cultural heritage and national self-esteem, the establishment of tradition.

Among the existing hypotheses about the discovery of Svalbard, it is only the “Stone Age” hypothesis that does not have a relation to national history traditions. The “Barentsz” tradition in the Netherlands does not rule out earlier visits, but underlines the uniqueness of the Dutch discovery. The “Viking” and “Pomor” hypotheses, on the other hand, are clearly linked to cultural nationalism in Norway and Russia respectively. Before 1920 and the Svalbard Treaty it was deemed important to find evidence that could underpin a future claim to sovereignty, or at least construct an image of traditional usage. After the sovereignty issue was solved by Norway’s take-over in 1925, the question of first discovery has had few or no political or legal implications. Hence, it is more a question of national pride and prestige.