**Kola** is a town in the northern part of the Murmansk Oblast, located near the mouths of the Kola and Tuloma Rivers flowing into the Kola Bay. It is adjacent to the southern part of Murmansk city.

Kola has been known as a settlement since 1556. It developed into a base of Murmansk fishery. In 1565, there were only three households, in 1574, growing into 44, and, in 1608, 83 households. Until the second half of the 19th century it was the only settlement in the Barents Sea coastal region with a permanent population. It was, until the beginning of the 20th century, regularly visited by fishermen who annually travelled from the Pomor villages to the Murmansk coast and back. Kola was a Russian settlement, both in terms of the ethnic origin of its population and in terms of local traditions. The Finnish scholar Elias Lönnrot, who visited Russian Lapland in 1837, was surprised at the number of different ethnic groups in this area. People spoke many different languages creating a serious “linguistic obstacle” for an unacquainted traveller. It was only in Kola, as Lönnrot later recalled, that he “started to speak Russian”.

Kola became a stronghold of Russian statehood in the north of Europe. From the 1560s until the foundation of Arkhangelsk (in 1584) it was an important centre for international trade in the Russian North. In the years 1582–1858 and 1883–1899 it was the administrative centre of the Kola district (уезд). In the years 1582–1713, the residence of the governor-general in the region, known as the Kola voivode (Kolsky voyevoda), was situated in Kola. In the years 1583–1584 a fortress, Kolsky ostrog, was built in the town. The fort had six towers armed with cannons. The total length of the walls around the fortress was 510 meters. In 1589, 1591 and 1611 the citizens, hiding behind the walls of the fortress, successfully repelled the attacks of Swedish troops. In 1599, Kola was visited by Christian IV, King of Denmark. In accordance with his plans to annex Eastern Lapland to the Danish Kingdom, he tried to persuade the residents of Kola to become subjects of the Danish crown, but they refused. The years 1698–1699 saw riots started by streltsy, a unit of the tsar’s troops, who were dissatisfied with voivode I. Voronetsky’s arbitrary rule. They were brutally suppressed by the authorities. During the Northern War (1700–1721), the Kola fortress was rebuilt by a decree of Peter the Great in order to increase its defence capacity.

In the 16th century Kola began to gain importance as a religious centre. In fact, even before the town itself appeared, Feodorit, a Russian Orthodox missionary, had been active in its territory: he mastered the Sami language and translated a number of prayers and the commandments of Christ. Feodorit converted the local Sami to Christianity in 1532–1533 and founded a monastery which, however, did not remain for very long. Around the year 1581, a new Peter and Paul’s Monastery was opened in Kola. In 1590, it was joined by the surviving monks from the Pechenga monastery ravaged by the Swedes. The year 1606 saw a merger of the two monasteries into the Kola-Pechenga monastery which existed until its closure in 1764. In 1684, a magnificent monument of wooden architecture was built in Kola – the Resurrection Cathedral. The temple was 37 meters high and was decorated with 19 cupolas.

In the 17th century Kola became a place of exile for those who fell foul of the country’s political regime. In 1674, the schismatic Mavra Grigorieva was burned at the stake here. During the rule of Catherine the Great, a number of convicted rebels close to Yemelyan Pugachev, the leader of a massive peasant uprising, were exiled to Kola. The use of Kola as a place of exile reached its peak at the turn of the 19th century, after which the number of exiles...
sent to Kola declined.

Kola was visited by famous explorers and scientists. In 1597, the surviving participants of Willem Barentsz’ expedition arrived there. Mikhail Lomonosov, who was to become a great scientist and founder of Moscow University, repeatedly visited Kola in his early years accompanied by his father, a Pomor fisherman. In 1769, Stepan Rumovsky, professor of astronomy, observed the transit of Venus across the solar disc at a temporary observatory set up on Mount Solovaraka in Kola. In 1765 and 1766, Kola served as a point of departure for two polar expeditions, headed by Vasily Chichagov, organized in order to find a sea route to the east.

In 1782, the population of the town consisted of 806 people. In 1785, Kola was granted its own coat of arms representing a whale with a human face. By the beginning of the nineteenth century regular troops had been withdrawn from the town. Its defence was handed over to the so-called “invalid squad” made up of retired soldiers. In 1809, Kola was attacked by British troops, ravaging the North of Russia. The unarmed local people did not put up any resistance to the British, thanks to which the town was saved.

In 1854, during the Crimean War, the British attacked Kola for the second time. This time, the local residents refused to negotiate. A British corvette, HMS Miranda, entered Kola Bay and bombarded Kola with cannons for 20 hours. The town was almost burnt to the ground. The Kola fortress, the Resurrection Cathedral, many houses and buildings belonging to the citizens were destroyed by the fire. After this disaster, the soldiers of the “invalid squad” and the exiles were withdrawn from the city. In 1858, Kola lost its status of an uyezd centre. The authorities suggested that the residents of the devastated town should move to other places, offering an allowance for this purpose to those who needed it. However, many of the townspeople refused to leave the smoldering ruins of their homes “out of love for their homeland”, as they wrote in an explanation. Many of those who left the town later returned. Disregarding withdrawn troops, government officials and exiles, only a quarter of the local residents left the completely ruined town for good. The town quickly recovered, and, in 1883, it regained the status of an uyezd centre. According to the 1897 census, 615 people lived in Kola. The basis of the town’s population was formed by families with local roots. Out of the 109 families living in Kola in 1901, almost half had settled there before the fire of 1854. The population of the town remained virtually unchanged in number after having once again (in 1899) lost its uyezd centre status, which this time was transferred to the new town of Aleksandrovsk, founded on the shores of Catherine’s Harbour (Yekaterininskaya Gavan’) in the Kola Bay. In the years 1867–1927 the institutions of the Kola-Lappish rural district (Kolsko-Loparskaya volost’) were situated in Kola.

During the Soviet period, Kola developed as a satellite of the city of Murmansk. A macaroni factory and a furniture factory, as well as a brewery and a gypsum plant were built there. In 1927, Kola became the centre of the Kola-Lappish District (Kolsko-Loparsky rayon), which has been known since 1936 as the Kola District (Kolsky rayon). By 1989, the town’s population had reached 16,500 people. In the year 2000, Kola was admitted to the Russian Union of Historical Cities and Regions. At present, it has several historical monuments: an ancient Cross (Putny krest’, 1635), a stone Church of the Annunciation (1807), the stone building of the former District Treasury (Uyezdnoye kaznacheistvo, 1807), the remnants of an old cemetery.

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References and Suggestions for Further Reading

