

Krister Stoor

Carl Linnæus from a Sámi Point of View

“It was many summers ago and many winters have passed since the southerner visited us. It has been so long a time that my memory is a bit fuzzy. Well, a young man came wandering up to our country, this was when we still called our land ours. This man’s name was Carl and he he told us that *monno kona-kasa álmai*, I am the king’s man. He also said *i mon håla sami giela*, I do not speak the Sami language. He also asked us about what our words are for penis and the word for the womens *membrum genitale mulierum*. I must say, we thought him a strange man.”

The above paragraph could have been a description by a storyteller, telling the tales of Carl Linnæus in the middle of the eighteenth century. Linnæus was not the first explorer who visited Sápmi – Sámiland, so meeting strangers from the south was not an unusual experience. Travellers like Regnard, Mortrayes, Acerbi, von Düben, von Hülphers are just a few who have written reports from their journeys in the north through the centuries. Their descriptions of their meeting with the natives of the north are not always pleasant reading. They have been criticized by other scholars and by Sami authors, such as Karin Stenberg, a forest Sámi woman who wrote a book together with the Swedish author Valdemar Lindholm *Det är vår vilja / Dat läb mijen situd* [That is our will]. Stenberg’s and Lindholm’s view of ethnographers goes like this:

These outsiders coming to our country, with their heads filled with high self-esteem. Carrying their cans of food. They do not speak our language, they do not walk the woods or the mountains with us. They have to be transported, financed by the government and books, selling their truths about the Sámi. (Lindholm, 1920:7)

This is not really the case of Linnæus, he did not bring cans of food and he was not transported on his journey in Lapland. One of his Sámi phrases he learned was *vuopteh pieopmov*, sell food. Apparently he relied on the local communities to buy supplies for his travels. Linnæus' book of his journey, *Iter Lapponicum*, is one of several descriptions of Sámi ethnography from the eighteenth century. A decade later, Peter Schnitler began documenting the circumstances of Sámi life in the the mountains, on what was later to become the border between Norway and Sweden in 1751 (Schnitler, 1929). The Church ministers, pastor Pehr Högström in Gällivare (1980 [1747]) and pastor Pehr Fjellström in Lycksele (Fjellström, 1981 [1755]) have contributed books as well. Fjellström was the director of the Skytteanska skolan from 1719 and he succeeded pastor Ola Gran as minister of Lycksele parish, whom Linnæus mentions in his diary. Fjellström did probably meet Linnæus in person in Lycksele, even if he is not mentioned by name. However, Linnæus sense for detail in his *Iter Lapponicum* is very impressive, combined with pastor Nensén's field notes and documents on Sámi life around the 64th parallel to the Arctic Circle, they have proven a great source of ethnographic information. It is of great importance for the future research on the eighteenth century life in the north.

Linnæus' *Iter Lapponicum* gives us important information, from his visit to the church of Jättendal, Hälsingland, where he met seven Sámi who owned approximately 60 to 70 reindeer. He asked

them what they were doing down at the Swedish coast in the summer time which indicates that Linnæus was very knowledgeable of the Sámi nomadic culture, about how the nomadic reindeer herders move to summer grazing in the mountain during June, July and August. Their answer was that they have always been there at the coastal area. This raises the question of who they were? They said they were born at the Bothnian coast and wanted to stay there forever. Are these people forest Sámis or did they perhaps combine maritime subsistence activities with reindeer herding? Did Linnæus meet one family or was it representatives from many families? Anyway, 70 reindeer is not a big herd to subsist on for many families. Probably, reindeer herding was a complementary income.

When Linnæus made his walkabout in Lapland, one has to remember that there were no roads and hardly any people, except for the Sámis who lived in the area. In the year 1750, there were less than eighty settlements in the entire Lapland: In 1700, it had been only seven settlements in Åsele and Lycksele lappmark (Arell, 1979:22).

From the Sámi point of view, one has to question Linnæus' route. Traveling in a wild country without roads, in the early summer May-June, when the rivers are flooding, even the smallest creek becomes a wild river, the snow cannot carry you or your burden, the rivers are dangerous to cross or to ford. It would have been much better to come and visit in the fall, when the land is drying up and the rivers are easier to row upon. However, Linnæus as a botanist, was of course interested in flowers and early summer is a good time for a botanist to make excursion into unknown land. When he arrived in Västerbotten, he travelled up the Ume River and finally reached Lycksele village. This is in the area of the forest lappby Umbyn, a forest Sámi district that does not exist anymore.

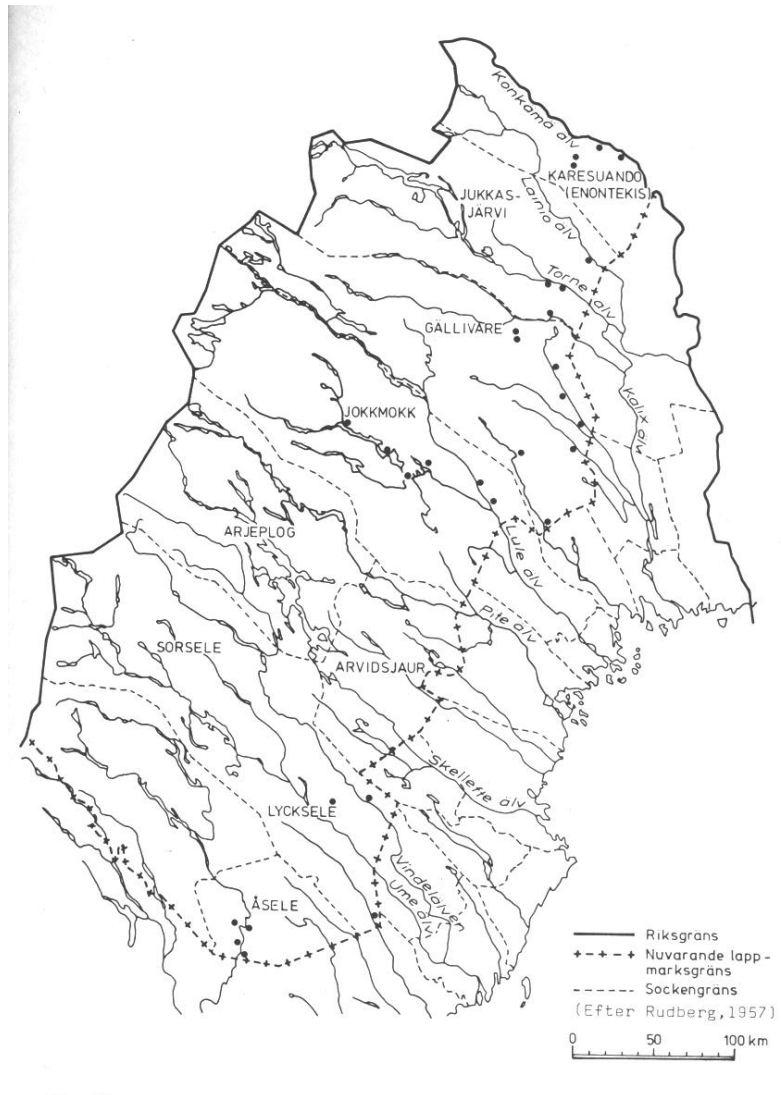


Fig. 1. Settlements in Lapland 1700 (Arell, 1979:25)

They were then in the middle of the pike fishing season. The forest Sámi do not herd reindeer in the month of June. Linnæus made field notes and one interesting observation is his note on the ownership of reindeer and what status that means for every family. He divided them into three categories, the worst-off (*sämsta*) owned 50-100 reindeer, the wealthy owned 300-700 reindeer and the rich owned more than 1000 reindeer. If we compare Linnæus' figures with Kristoffer Sjulsson's figures from the beginning of the 19th century, almost hundred years later than Linnæus, we see that he has five categories, beggars (*tiggarlapp*) owned less than 10 reindeer, the poor owned less than 100 reindeer, the comfortable (*bärgad*) owned around 200 reindeer, the wealthy owned between 200-500 reindeer and the rich owned between 500-1000 reindeer (Pettersson, 1979:265). Being wealthy in Linnæus perspective meant owning more than 300 reindeer, and in Sjulsson's perspective more than 200 reindeer. So, a reindeer herding family was rich for Sjulsson if they owned 700 animals, but only wealthy for Linnæus. Is this a result of different perspectives or had the living conditions worsened in the 19th century? One other fieldnote Linnæus makes is how Swedish settlers use water for fishing that belongs to the Sámi inhabitants, who paid tax for their land (*skatteländ*) to the Swedish Crown. The settlers did not pay any tax to the crown or to the owner of the land. Linnæus sees one of the first results of Swedish colonisation of Sápmi-Sámiland and of how the Sámi are losing their rights to lakes and land.

Linnæus continued his journey up the Ume River. He had to cross marsh land and barren ground, and he described the country as being uglier than Styx. He was walking in marsh land still covered with ground frost. His guides were tired and they seemed to be lost.

He meets a woman, but who is she? Is she a Sámi woman or is she a ghost, a spirit, or from the underground people *gádnehat*, *uldá*,

saivo, who comes as a warning? They could take you to their supernatural world. I do not think she was a ghost, probably an ordinary woman with a sick husband who followed the guide who brought her with him to Linnæus. Her voice is soft and her words are filled with criticism against the Church.

O du stackars karl, hvar för en svår ödets hvilkor har drifvit dig hit ingen för vågat sig, jag har ännu ej sedt främat. Du stackars karl hur har du komit hit äller hvar vill tu, ser tu hvad for boningar vij hafvom, ser tu med hvad for möda vij kunnom koma till kyrkian. (Linnæus, 2003:53)

[Oh, you poor man, what command of a heavy fate has driven you here where no-one before has dared to come? I have never yet seen a stranger. You poor man, how have you come here and where do you wish to go? Do you see what kind of dwellings we have? Do you see how difficult it is for us to come to church?]

She does not just pity Linnæus, who has come to a place where no man, at least outsiders, had ever come before. She is criticizing the Swedish church who makes people travel and ford rivers to get to the church in June. Linnæus also mentions this about other Sámis after the hard journey he is now facing. This woman is advising Linnæus to go back and she is selling him a piece of reindeer cheese. It is clear that this woman has a certain position in the local society and an educated conjecture might be that she is *Rike-Maja*, a very famous shaman who lived in this area. She was in her 70s in 1732 and she lived until 1757. For a young Swedish man in his 20s, an old woman fifty years older than him must have been ugly. However, she convinced Linnæus to turn around and go back to Lycksele.

The next time Linnæus approaches Sápmi is a few weeks later, when he arrives at Jokkmokk, just north of the Arctic Circle. Nature is not hostile this time, and the infrastructure is better,

because of the silver mining industry in the area. His walking long distances of 40-50 km in one night is impressive. He seems to have a joyful time, and he describes reindeer husbandry. Linnæus stays a pretty long time around the lake Virihaure. The reindeer milking culture is highly developed, both men and women are milking the reindeer does. His descriptions of the reindeer milking procedure are almost as good as Israel Ruong's texts based on Jonas Eriksson Steggo's information about reindeer milking from the Arjeplog mountains in the twentieth century (Ruong, 1944). Linnæus says:

Aldrig såg jag något folk hafva så goda dagar som lapparna, om somarn äta mjölk 2 gånger om dagen, då miölkas, äller ostemus och valla, sedan sittaa i roo och vetta eij hvad de skola giöra. (Linnæus, 2003:133)

[I never saw anyone have such a good time as the Lapps. In the summer, they have milk twice a day when they are milking, or making cheese, Then, they sit around in peace and don't know what they should do.]

Linnæus transcription of the Sámi *yoik* is interesting. He mentions it as a *vuolle*, he understands the difference between *yoik* (to sing) and *vuolle* (a song). What he hears, however, is only the vocabularies, *jejee vu vu aa vujàà, ai/ Teelee, Talii e eee, u au Tali Tuun, T etc. lei* (Linnæus, 2003:144). The words do not make any sense, but the connection with the next page in his diary, the courting, makes perfect sense. Courting songs are the most usual songs of all in the entire Sápmi. One can find many details about traditional knowledge, some of them are forgotten and reindeer herders still use others today. The ability of tracking people by using reindeer dropping is still in practise. Linnæus' guide squeezing a reindeer dropping and smelling it for the purpose of reaching the family is a perfect example of traditional knowledge (Linnæus, 2003:103). One issue not very well known today any more is Linnæus' description of the women's monthly period. He notes that girls in their 20s menstru-

ate only in the summer (Linnæus, 2003:134).

The man we got to know as mister Linnæus left us for his travels northward bound. Did we know a different man? He had recognized us as Zabmiletz, *Sápmelaš*, and he also recognized our land as Zaminetnan, *Sámecatnam*. We will keep his memory with us for a long time, not too hard when we see him wearing our traditional clothing on a picture. *Nu dat fál lea!* And so it is!

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