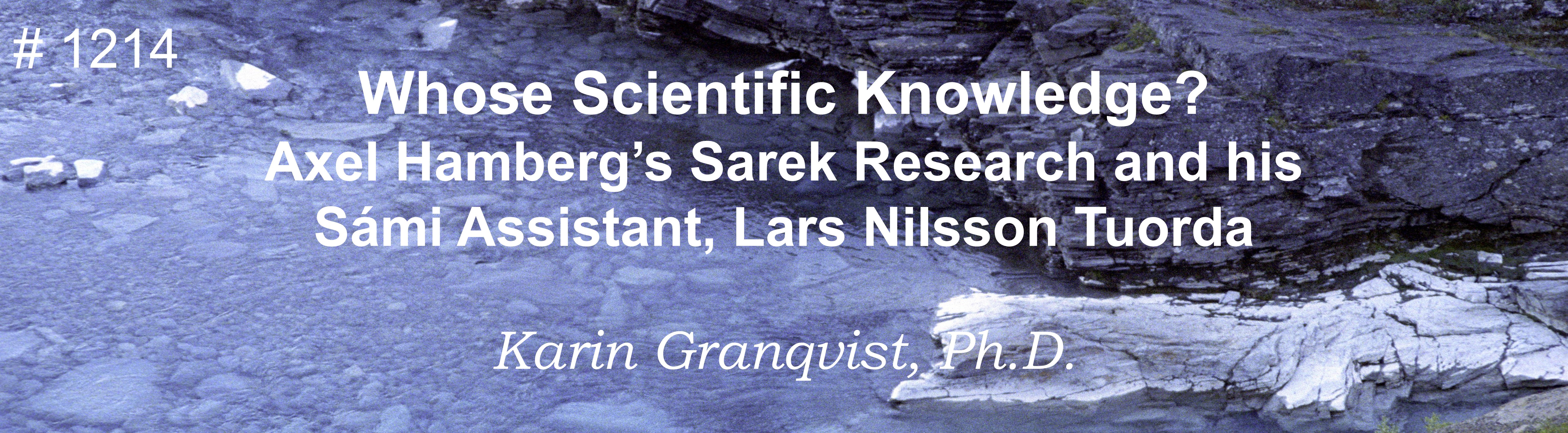




Whose Scientific Knowledge? Axel Hamberg's Sarek Research and his Sámi Assistant, Lars Nilsson Tuorda

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I.

Axel Hamberg and the Sarek research

Axel Hamberg (1863-1933) is known for his geological and hydrological research in the high mountain massif Sarek in the north of Sweden. It started in 1895 and ended in 1931. The research was focused on glaciological field studies, precipitation, evaporation, temperature, solar time, and in the Rapa river water-levels and water-speed.

His presence in this area for two or three months at the most, often just in the summers – combined with the necessity to have continually registrations on an annual basis using field research instruments – created a need to hire assistants. The logistics of transporting food, instruments and tents during his field research trips also made it necessary to hire helpers such as carriers.

II.

Lars Nilsson Tuorda's Tasks

Lars Nilsson Tuorda (1858-1930) became one of Hamberg's most hired assistants among several. Tuorda made most of the glaciology studies in the Sarek research – ice-core studies, snow depth and evaporation registrations on the Sarek glaciers – but he also became involved in the meteorological and hydrological studies of the mountain area.

Already in 1899 he became responsible for organizing Hamberg's field research trips, which involved hiring other assistants such as carriers and reindeer-drivers. The animals were used as transport animals in the Sarek research organization. He also functioned as a guide for Hamberg and on some occasions as a carrier. For some time did he also herd Hamberg's reindeer that had been bought in order to get out of the hiring-business. When the well-known small huts in Sarek were built in 1902 and in 1911-1915, he functioned as a builder amongst others. The most famous hut is the Pårtetjåkko Observatory. Later he maintained the huts. Washing and drying equipment such as tents and reindeer-skins became other tasks he undertook. He was also assigned financial responsibilities.

III.

Tuorda the Invisible

In Hamberg's many publications on the results of the Sarek research – such as his dissertation from 1901 and articles on the subject glaciers in Sarek – Tuorda was never mentioned by name. Tuorda's great efforts in field – summers as well as winters, doing field research studies as well as many practical tasks – were passed by without a note in Hamberg's official and scientific publications on field research in Sarek. Only in the snow- and rain precipitations studies did Hamberg mention that he had Sámi assistance.

IV.

Tuorda quits – and Sarek Research changes

Lars Nillson Tuorda quit his service for Hamberg in 1916 after a feud with Hamberg and other scholars stationed in Sarek at the Pårtetjåkko Observatory (built in 1911, manned from 1914). After that, he just worked occasionally in the Sarek research organisation for a couple of years.

The aim and direction of the whole Sarek research effort changed after that: the glaciology studies vanished and research became focused on the huts that had been built in the area (1902, 1911-1915). These became the site of field station research, and ambulatory field studies disappeared.

V.

Why the Invisibility of Sámi Assistance?

Glaciology's National Importance

Glaciology had great importance for the self image of Sweden as a nation. It placed Sweden on the map as one of the few nations in Europe as well as in the world that held the „reminiscences“ of the last ice that had covered the northern hemisphere. Sweden became known as “the original cradle” for remnants of that last ice age, in addition to Norway and Switzerland.

The Scientist as a Hero

In Sweden the image of the scientist that of a hero – a trend that had started with Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld's arrival from the Northeast passage journey in 1880. This constructed image was emphasized by the scientific idea of man's individual struggle with nature, an idea applied to scientists themselves, as they were represented as men doing research under conditions of constant battle with a great, harsh, awesome, and pristine nature.

VI.

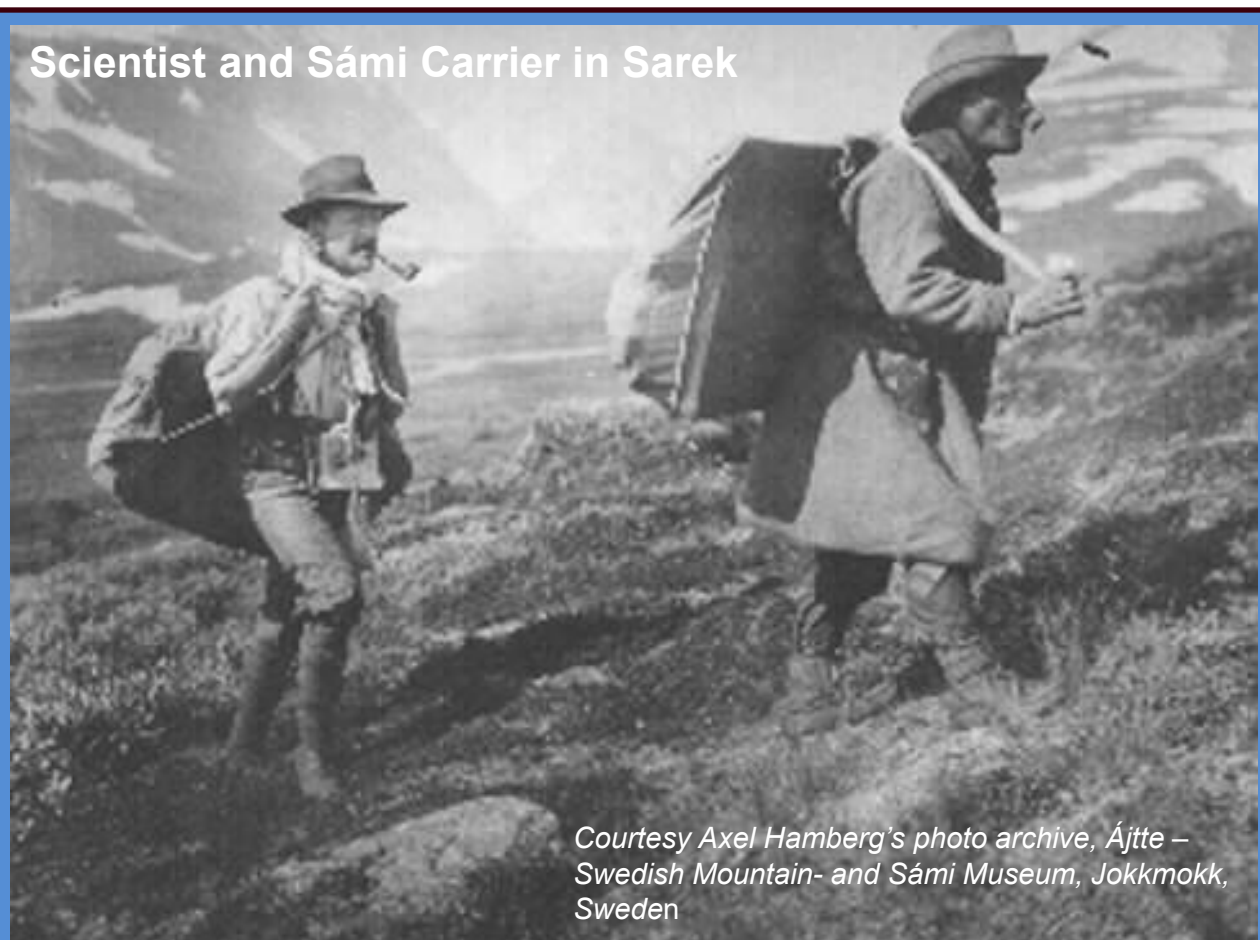
Science – No Place for Indigenous People

The symbolical and national value glaciology had for Sweden's self image as a nation – combined with the idea that the scientist was a hero and that science encompassed an individual feud with nature – led to invisibility of Sámi assistants such as those Hamberg employed. In that context could glaciological scientific results never be publically revealed to be a product of Sámi field research work.

The invisibility of the great work of assistants such as Tuorda was a consequence of upholding an image of the scientist as „A Hero“ and the idea that scientists had extracted field research results during their individual, ongoing battle with nature. Hamberg made a career accumulating knowledge using a process, a system, and an organization, that was far from entirely his own doing and making.

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Courtesy Axel Hamberg's photo archive, Ätte – Swedish Mountain- and Sámi Museum, Jokkmokk, Sweden



Photos, top & bottom: Karin Granqvist



Courtesy Axel Hamberg's photo archive, Ätte – Swedish Mountain- and Sámi Museum, Jokkmokk, Sweden