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Borg Mesch

The Role of a Culture Broker in Picturing the North

ABSTRACT This paper examines the role of Borg Mesch (1869–1956) in the development of a nascent tourist industry in the North of Sweden. The concept of culture broker is used to clarify Mesch's varying activities as a photographer, outfitter, and guide in relation to two different clienteles: Swedes from the south of the country and international tourists from England and elsewhere. The history of Svenska Turistföreningen (the Swedish Tourist Association) in facilitating tourist activities in northern regions is described.

KEYWORDS Borg Mesch, Svenska Turistföreningen, history of tourism, history of photography

A fiddle was hanging up, and Mr. Mesch and myself took it in turn to play. It had been made by the man of the house, and had quite a good tone. Mr. Mesch also sang Swedish and Finnish songs, and can play the piano very well. His grandmother was Scotch, and he was born in Dalecarlia. He is an officer in the Swedish Army, and well knows the manners and customs of the Lapps. His business is that of a photographer in Kiruna, and he is known all over Sweden. He lived some time in America, and speaks English fluently.

Frank Butler (1917: 113)

Vuosttas go Borg Mesch fotograf válddii mu, go son oaččui meari daihe gohččumuša ožžon, ahte vuolgit engelas hearrá mielde de son siđai mu vuolgit sutnje engelas hearráin reaisoguoibmin.

[‘From the beginning it was the photographer Borg Mesch who selected me to accompany him and an English gentleman on a journey to which Mesch had been invited.’]

Johan Turi (1988: 153)

Det är snart 20 år sedan Mesch kom hit upp till Kiruna, eller som det på den tiden kallades Loussavaara. Han har sett “berget” tagas i bruk, sett de första rallarna komma, sett banan längre och längre sträcka sina stålarmar upp mot Riksgränsen.

Rallarbarackerna och livet à la Wild West med kortspel och litrar och mångfaldiga slagsmål ha passerat revy för hans ögon, han har upplevat hur Kiruna blev samhället med gator och vattenledning, elektriskt ljus och biograf och hur lapparnas rike blev trängre. Mitt upp i detta har Mesch levt och iakttagit.

[‘It has been almost twenty years since Mesch came up here to Kiruna, or Loussavaara, as it was then called. He has seen the “mountain” exploited, seen the arrival of the first railroad workers, seen the railway stretch its iron arms farther and farther up toward Riksgränsen [on the Swedish-Norwegian border].

The navvies’ barracks and their Wild West life of card-playing, drinking and frequent brawling paraded before his eyes. He has experienced the transformation of Kiruna into a community with streets and water lines, electric lights and a movie theater, and has seen the realm of the Sami narrowed. Mesch has lived and observed amidst this all.’]

Ossian Elgström (1929: 6)

Few names are as closely associated with the mythic image of the Swedish far north as that of Borg Mesch (1869–1956), professional photographer, tireless mountaineer, and pioneer tourism provider of the city of Kiruna. Mesch’s photographs gave Swedish readers of the early twentieth century vivid portraits of the striking landscape and cultural diversity of the region, and his work found its way into publications in England, the United States and elsewhere. For those individuals who travelled to Kiruna to see the wonders of the North firsthand, it was often Borg Mesch who acted as guide or advisor, providing both the experiences and the pictures (prototype postcards) that the travellers had come to collect. In the following pages, I present Borg Mesch as a culture broker within the early tourist industry of Northern Sweden. Drawing on the biographical works of Elgström (1929), Anderson (1986), and Hedin (2001), and examining Mesch’s relations as related in the works of Frank Butler (1917) and Johan Turi (1988), I hope to sketch the role of one man in establishing the touristic image of the North of his day and of generations after.

My aim in examining the career of Borg Mesch is not primarily to cele-

brate an individual of importance in North Swedish history but rather to offer insight into the important but often overlooked history of tourism in the north, a topic at the heart of any modern appraisal of the north as a space and place. Before proceeding to a discussion of Mesch's life, then, I wish to survey the question of North Nordic tourism today and the theoretical questions that scholars have raised in examining modern tourism in general. I begin by quoting a recently published photo essay of travel in Northern Norway, focusing on the tourist's experiences on a dog sled safari:

When I was younger, I saw a video of thick-coated huskies pulling sledges across snowy mountains. These elegant canines commanded respect and admiration, but growing up in Malaysia, the Arctic was an unreachable and exotic place for me, and an encounter with these furry creatures was nearly impossible. So when I went to Tromsø, in Northern Norway, it felt like a dream come true. Seeing the stunning landscape of fjords, mountains, alpine trees and the Norwegian sea was an extraordinary visual feast, but my real Arctic adventure began when I met my canine heroes. (Hiew 2013.)

Dog or snowmobile “safaris,” cross-country and “extreme” skiing, ice hotels, gourmet dinners of reindeer and arctic char, and viewings of the Northern Lights—the list of prime activities for the winter tourist to the Nordic far north became well established in the closing decades of the twentieth century and opening decade of the twenty-first. Yet as the musings of the Malaysian travel writer quoted above reveal, or the very term *safari* makes clear, the tourist image and experience of the northern districts of Norway, Sweden and Finland is not today altogether historically informed or specific to the locale. Neither dog sledding nor the building of houses out of ice—to take two prime examples—can be characterized as ancient or traditional parts of Nordic life. So in a sense, the tourist experience of the North (as, perhaps, virtually *any* tourist experience anywhere) is in part fictive: a creative construction aimed at bringing to life experiences that already reside in the imaginations of tourist clients but which require logistic skill, a particular locale, and appropriate personnel to make a reality. In the ideal case, if the tourist experience is successful, and the clients are pleased, they will be more likely to share news of their experience with co-workers, family, and friends, propagating the expectations that brought them north in new minds and generating new clientele in the future. Conversely, if the dreams that are dreamed of really *don't* come true, tourist clients are likely to spread word of their dissatisfaction far and wide. Travel writer Michael Lewis spares little in denigrating a Norway that proved too rainy and too boring for his tastes, labeling his experience “a Norwegian comedy or errors”

and disparaging reindeer meat as “greasy and tough and disgustingly gamy” (Lewis 1997). In the competitive world of mass tourism, where impression is everything, the work of the tourist industry aims at instilling, confirming, and producing positive images of the locale, so that customers will continue to willingly exchange money and time for the chance to experience a given place and culture firsthand.

Ever since Jafar Jafari founded the journal *Annals of Tourism Research* in 1973, researchers across a broad range of disciplines have examined the phenomena of tourism from the varying perspectives of touristed communities, tourists, and tourist providers. Dean MacCannell’s seminal study of 1976, *The Tourist. A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, made the fledgling discipline better known to the wider academy, and focused attention particularly on tourism as an element of modernity through a process by which the “traditional” and “authentic” become commodified as items to be enjoyed and consumed by a newly mobile, urbanized middle class—the chief object of his study (MacCannell 1989). Scholarly attention toward all aspects of the tourist/tourist provider/tourist locale relation has accelerated in the past two decades, with numerous edited volumes and studies appearing (Smith (ed.) 1989; Abram *et al.* (eds.) 1997; Baranowski & Furlough (eds.) 2001; Smith & Brent (eds.) 2001; Cartier & Lew (eds.) 2005; Gmelch (ed.) 2010). Tourism in the Nordic region has been examined as well, for example by Roel Puijk in an insightful examination of the development of tourism in Ullvik, Norway (Puijk 2001), and by Orvar Löfgren, in a history of tourism as an element of Swedish nation building (Löfgren 2001).

Scholars after MacCannell embraced attention to tourism as emblematic of the “postmodern” condition, particularly through its ever mounting level of contentment with surfaces and images (Baudrillard’s “simulacrum”) and economic consumption as chief devices of—or substitutes for—the direct experience of other peoples, places, and cultures, that is, the prime motivation of the touristic desire in the first place (Baudrillard 1994; Baranowski & Furlough (eds.) 2001; Cartier & Lew (eds.) 2005). The reenactments, reconstructions, simulations, and souvenir generation of the open air museum, theme park, or computer game, scholars argue, have enticed the tourist into an increasingly fictive realm of imaginary relations in imaginary places, with ever dwindling concern for the past ideal of authenticity or the direct interaction with other people (Stewart 1984; Davis 1997; Gottdiener 2001; Tangherlini 2008; Tangherlini 2010). The modern tourist to Spanish Toledo, for instance, can purchase swords made in imitation of the now thoroughly mythic Knights Templar (a monastic military order whose actual existence ended in the early fourteenth century) or the even more fictive characters of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, particularly as drama-

tized in Peter Jackson's films. In this way, the concrete historical cityscape of Toledo, preserving many elements of its medieval existence, as well as the long history of the city as a center for artisanal metal smithing, become not objects of touristic attention in themselves but rather the context for imagining largely imaginary characters and narratives suggested by the locale. Such a development has much in common with the depiction of northern Scandinavia as a land of dogsleds and ice hotels but it differs markedly from the North that Borg Mesch sought to supply to early twentieth-century clients, as we shall see.

While researchers in anthropology and cultural studies have traced the (d)evolution of tourism into the present day, historians have pushed the focus backward in time toward the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when elite Grand Tour tourism became broadened to the middle class through advances in transport technology and a resultant reduction in travel costs. In this process, historians have shown, travel writing became a key genre for popularizing and also emblemizing touristic travel. In her seminal work *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt examines the role of travel writing in encoding colonial perspectives on subjugated peoples and places (Pratt 1992). Tourists from colonial powers, such as Great Britain, sought to enact their country's supremacy through the places they visited, the attitudes they displayed, and the attention they received. The postcolonial legacies of such writings have been explored by numerous subsequent writers (Clark (ed.) 1999; Walton (ed.) 2005). As we shall see, this historical perspective, evident also in Löfgren's overview of Swedish tourism (Löfgren 2001) as well as Maja Hagerman's examination of discourse concerning the Swedish landscape (Hagerman 2006), provides a valuable perspective for understanding the work of Mesch and the writings of the English and Swedish tourists discussed below. For many in Mesch's day, tourism to the North was an act of intense cultural and political meaning.

The construction of the Arctic as an imagined space within textual and visual representations, as well as within tourism, has received important attention as well. Influential in tracing visual images is King and Lidchi's edited volume *Imaging the Arctic* (1998). As the authors of the volume demonstrate cogently, visual images—both photographs and film—served as powerful emblematic tools in early twentieth-century Canada, defining the North and its denizens as exotic and simultaneously underscoring Canadian hegemony and control over the region. In his studies of contemporary tourism in Alaska, Mark Nuttall has examined the ways in which both state organizations and indigenous communities have approached the questions of representation and entertainment in designing and providing tourist activities for travellers to the state (Nuttall 1997). Daniel Chartier

has explored the gendering of the arctic found in literary representations of the region, demonstrating the penchant of writers to portray the region as a privileged site of masculinity, where women are decidedly out of place (Chartier 2008). Seija Keskitalo-Foley has examined the ways in which creative writers, social scientists, and ordinary residents have conceptualized Finnish Lapland, and the contending, often mutually exclusive perspectives of locals and non-locals regarding the region and its cultures (Keskitalo-Foley 2006). She, too, points to questions of wildness and masculinity as privileged viewpoints on the region and the ways these are challenged, particularly in the autobiographical writings of women. Tim Frandy has explored similar rifts in Sami and non-Sami perspectives on the North of Finland, its natural resources, and its culture (Frandy 2013).

Finally, the concept of the culture broker informs the following discussion of Kurin (1997) and Smith (2001). As Smith details, the culture broker operates in the social space between “host supply” and “guest demand,” negotiating relations that will prove profitable for all involved. Their task is to “study, understand and represent someone’s culture (even sometimes their own) to non-specialized others through various means and media” (Kurin 1997). From a specifically Sami perspective, Cathrine Baglo has examined the roles of Sami entrepreneurs in representing Sami culture to the outside world through participation in “living exhibits” in European museums, fairs, and zoos (Baglo 2011). It is this combination of canny judgment and careful weighing of choices that I hope to explore here: Mesch’s work in formulating usable approaches to two different tourist clienteles, one domestic, the other foreign.

Historical Background

While the above works help contextualize my approach to Mesch and his career, it is also clear that Mesch’s work was shaped by the history of prior representations of the North and the rise of the beginnings of a tourist industry through the activities of English fishermen. I summarize this history below before turning at last to Mesch himself.

For most people at the outset of the twentieth century, as for today, the Nordic far north was a land known of largely through images and texts. Olaus Magnus’s 1555 *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (Olaus Magnus 1555), Johan Scheffer’s 1673 *Lapponia* (Schefferus 1673) and Carl von Linné’s 1732 *Iter Lapponicum* (Linné 2005) had established the region as a place of marvelous landscape, unusual flora and fauna, and exotic Sami in the minds of educated Europeans. The Grand Tour of eighteenth-century English aristocrats made few stops north of Paris, and the far north of Scandinavia remained a remote and seldom visited region for most other than mer-

chants and scientists. At the very outset of the nineteenth century, however, the Italian nobleman Joseph (Giuseppe) Acerbi traveled to the region and penned his own exuberant account of the natural and cultural wonders he found there. Aware of the unorthodoxy of his choice of destinations, Acerbi writes in his introduction:

It may possibly excite curiosity to know why a native of Italy, a country abounding in all the beauties of nature, and the finest productions of art, should voluntarily undergo the danger and fatigue of visiting the regions of the Arctic Circle. He promised himself, and he was not disappointed, much gratification from contrasting the wild grandeur and simplicity of the North, with the luxuriance, the smiling aspect, and the refinements of his own country. He was willing to exchange, for a time, the beauties of both nature and art, for the novelty, the sublimity, and the rude magnificence of the northern climates. (Acerbi 1802: vii.)

Acerbi's work, and other travelogues that followed, established the far north as a land of masculine pleasures: of "danger and fatigue," "wild grandeur and simplicity." As Chartier (2008) has indicated, for Acerbi, as for many who came after him, the North is a place to go in order to be a *man*.

With such a characterization in print, and the trout and salmon streams of England and Ireland becoming crowded with gentleman anglers following in the footsteps of Izaak Walton, it was only a matter of time before the magnificent salmon rivers of Scandinavia were "discovered." Beginning with Sir Hyde Parker in 1836 (Lloyd 1854: 244), a long litany of British gentlemen came to the "pristine" rivers and mountains of Northern Norway and Sweden to practice salmon fishing, bear hunting, and other aristocratic pastimes. Their enraptured praise for the region and its offerings, building on Acerbi's account, attracted more and more British visitors, many of whom wrote books of their own (Lloyd 1830; Bilton 1840; Lloyd 1854; Newland 1855; Kennedy 1903; Pottinger 1905). In 1848, Frederic Tolfrey published *Jones's Guide to Norway*, a practical guide for the now numerous fishermen headed to the country (Tolfrey 1848), and in 1850, the Englishman Thomas Bennett opened a travel agency in Christiania—the first travel agency of any kind in the Nordic region—to help facilitate the tours of his countrymen (Harangen 2013). By the turn of the century, with increased regulation and a now voluminous Nordic competition for prime fishing spots, this English craze had largely subsided. Nonetheless, it had changed forever the practice of sports fishing in the region and Nordic views of how to experience the region's natural areas.

With the spread of fly fishing to the Nordic region and the example of wealthy Englishmen as models, Scandinavians of aristocratic and middle

class status began to take interest in the natural areas of their countries. The year 1866 saw the founding of Den Norske Turistforening ['The Norwegian Tourist Association'], and a Swedish counterpart—Svenska Turistföreningen (STF)—was established in 1885. The goal of both organizations was the same: to facilitate enjoyment of the countries' mountainous and wild areas through the establishment of trails, cabins, and other facilities. As Löfgren notes:

The tourism pioneers of the early mountaineering clubs [...] saw their task as a patriotic one. Bringing wilderness tourism to their fellow citizens was a way of producing a deep and more emotional attachment to the nation. (Löfgren 2001: 143.)

Cabins, overseen and supplied with wood and water by selected local caretakers, ensured that hikers could find a safe place to sleep even in the dead of winter. Boats stationed at key places along trails helped hikers navigate the mountain region's many lakes and rivers without the toil of portaging their own crafts. Such infrastructure, along with optional guides for hire and detailed maps and trail markers, sought to ensure a safe and affordable mountain holiday for any physically fit member of the public. In Sweden, an annual publication *Svenska Turistföreningens årsskrift* ['The year-book of the Swedish Tourist Association'] communicated news of the organization's ever-expanding amenities to members at large, and aimed at encouraging Swedes from the more densely populated south to venture forth and discover their country, whether by coming to the far north, or increasingly by experiencing other parts of the country as well, where similar STF projects were underway. With evident pride, a note in the 1912 issue of the journal, signed F. W. (for Folke Wancke, the organization's treasurer) states that the STF membership had now reached 54,000, comprising persons of all social classes, and representing fully one in every hundred Swedes (F.W. 1912: 340). Everything was now set for North Swedish tourism to take off, provided persons of sufficient entrepreneurial and/or patriotic spirit stepped forward to begin to truly make use of the fledgling infrastructure.

With these theoretical and historical groundings in place, we may at last turn our attention to the figure of Borg Mesch. It was within the early twentieth-century world of nascent tourism and the simultaneous rapid industrial development of the region through mining and railroads that Borg Mesch came to work, establishing a photography studio at Kiruna in 1901, only one year after the city's founding as the site of the newly established Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag mine. Mesch was well suited to his eventual role as culture broker, having both developed important relations with several prime movers in Swedish art circles and having spent time as

a tourist himself in the distant United States. Born in 1869, in Sundsvall, a town in Medelpad (*not* Dalecarlia, as he perhaps told Butler) Mesch grew up the son of that city's chief architect and planner in a family with close ties to Gunnar Hyltén-Cavallius (1818–1889), a major figure in the development of Swedish interest in its folk traditions and peasant culture (Hedin 2001: 11). Mesch became an apprentice photographer in the city of Gävle in 1890, making friends there with another young photographer (later renowned painter) Carl Larsson (1853–1919), with whom he remained friends throughout his career (Hedin 2001: 21). Between 1891 and 1897, Mesch emigrated to the United States, staying with various of his siblings who had relocated to Denver (Colorado), Portland (Oregon) and Austin (Texas). He took photographs of frontier life and Indians and even traveled to Hawai'i for a time (Hedin 2001: 33). It was in the United States that Mesch came into contact with the photographs of Edward S. Curtis (1868–1952), whose depictions of Native Americans proved of profound influence in Mesch's later work among Sami, Finns, and Swedes in Northern Sweden. This influence becomes obvious when one compares Mesch's image of a Sami mother and child published in a 1917 issue of the American *National Geographic* magazine with Curtis's portrait of a Hupi mother and child from 1907 (Figs. 1 & 2).

Mesch's photo appears in an anonymous photo essay of European mothers entitled "Madonnas of Many Lands," highlighting the crisis of the ongoing European war (Anonymous 1917). The captions for the photos provide no names for any of the women or children depicted (see further discussion below); presumably, the women were to be seen as emblems of their cultures, not as individuals. In this sense, Mesch's style, borrowing from Curtis, displayed the combination of predictable exoticism and seeming objectivity, which the emerging genre of ethnographic photography valued.

Between his first visit to Kiruna in 1899 and the year 1939, Mesch produced some five thousand glass plates, all of which were eventually donated to the city by Mesch's son Hjalmar Mesch (Hedin 2001: 149). An additional seven thousand portraits are recorded in his account books from the years 1924 to 1940 but have not survived.

From the time of his arrival in Kiruna, Mesch became an active member of the STF, contributing to its work in several ways: promoting the north of Sweden as a site of winter sports, especially mountaineering, producing inspiring photographs of the region's magnificent mountains and panoramic views (photographs which Mesch termed *motiv* ['subjects']), and depicting the region's various inhabitants through warm and engaging ethnographic portraits that Mesch termed *folktyper* ['national types'] (Hedin 2001: 183). Mesch traveled the countryside to capture images of Swedish, Finnish, and especially Sami people alongside their homes and workplaces. He also invit-



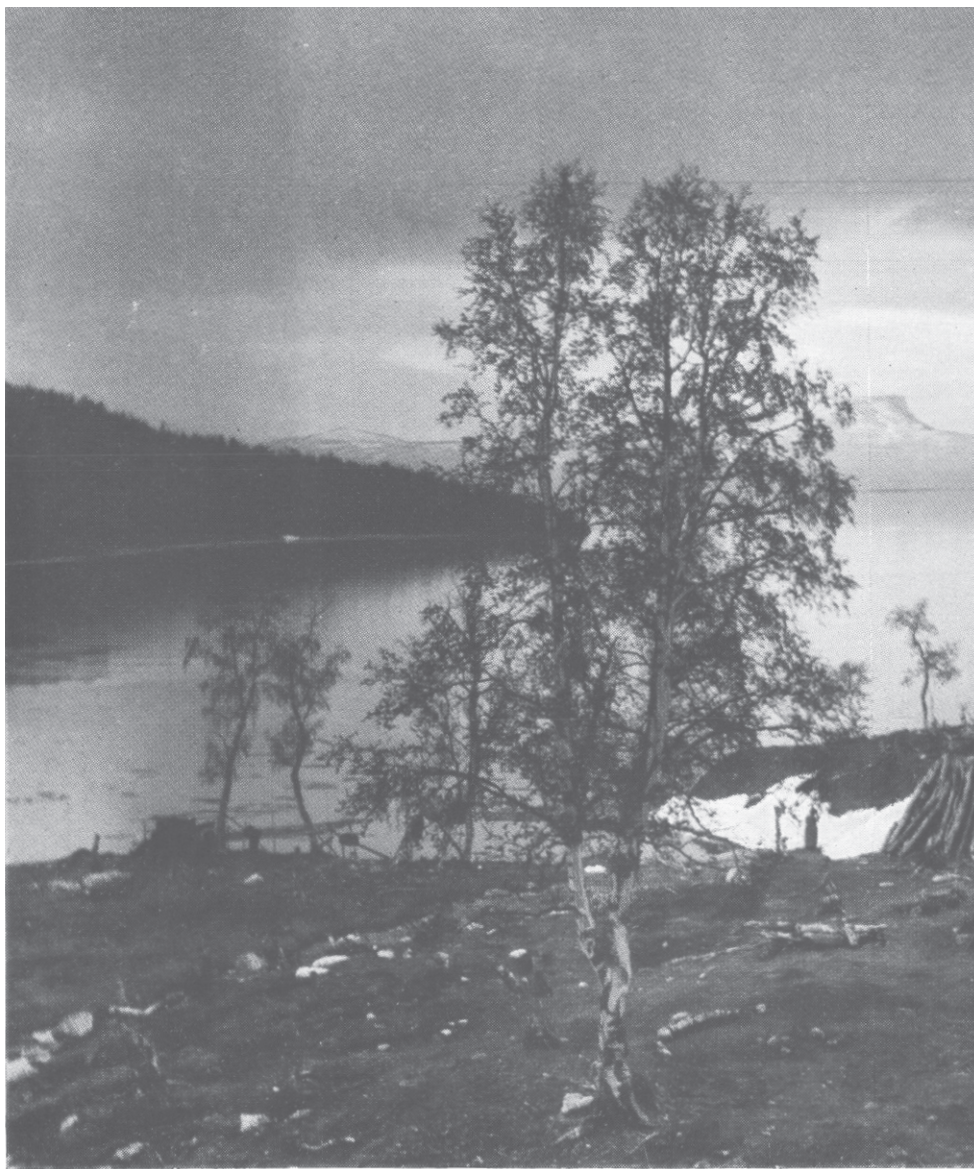
Fig. 1. Lapland mother. Photo: Borg Mesch.

ed Sami to his Kiruna studio to be photographed in front of painted backdrops of winter scenes or forests. Numerous of Mesch's photos found inclusion in the pages of STF's annual journal: Ruben Mattson's 1902 article "Till kyrkhelgen i Jukkasjärvi" ["To the church festival in Jukkasjärvi"] (Mattson 1902: 319–331), for instance, includes photographs by Mesch depicting the Jukkasjärvi church from the outside and inside (the latter during a service),



Fig. 2. Hupi mother. Photo: Edward S. Curtis

the tourist hotel in Kiruna, and the Kiruna hospital, the latter set against the stunning vista of a snow-covered Mount Luossavaara (Mattson 1902). A 1912 issue of the journal opens with a Mesch-produced panoramic view of Lake Torneträsk, with the emblematic Čuonjávaggi/Lapporten mountain formation in the background and a Sami camp in the foreground (Fig. 3) (Mesch 1912: Pl. 1).



UTSIKT FRÅN PÅLNOVIKEN VID TORNE TRÄSK, LAPPLAND

Fig. 3. Torne Träsk, Lapland. Photo: Borg Mesch.



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BORG MESCH fot.

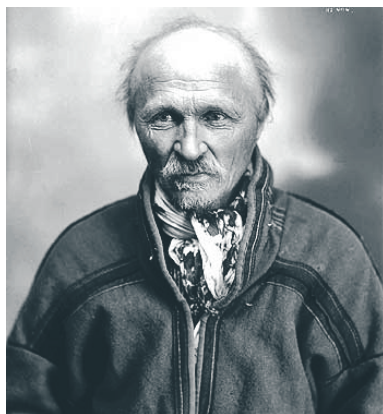


Fig. 4. Portrait of Johan Turi.
Photo: Borg Mesch.

The same issue includes under the title “Svenska folktyper IV” [‘Swedish national types IV’] (Boheman (ed.) 1912: 331–337), five of Mesch’s Sami photographs, including the portrait of his friend Johan Turi (1854–1936), whose book *Muitalus sámiiid birra* [‘An account of the Sami’] (1910) had appeared only two years before, the first book ever written in Sami language (Turi 1910).

Especially important for Mesch’s reputation was an exhibit organized by the STF in Stockholm in 1903, presenting photographs from all over Sweden. Of the 651 photos included in the exhibition, 58 were by Mesch (Hedin 2001: 184). He became known nationally as “fjällens fotograf” [‘the photographer of the mountains’]. In 1919, Mesch would take part in another exhibition entitled “Svenska Folktypuställningen,” [‘The exhibition of Swedish national types’] which was installed in Stockholm, Uppsala, Gävle, Visby, and Gothenburg (Hedin 2001: 246). This exhibition, dedicated to exploring the “racial” characteristics of Sweden’s regional populations, enjoyed the warm support of Prince Eugen, himself an avid landscape painter. Mesch received first prize in the exhibition, receiving a commemorative certificate designed by Ossian Elgström and signed by the prince as well as the artists Anders Zorn and Carl Larsson.

Mesch as a Career Man

Although it is tempting to view Mesch as a patriotic visionary in step with the wealthy founders of the STF in Uppsala and Stockholm, he was also quintessentially a businessman, seeking to make a living for himself and his family in the context of the fledgling community of Kiruna. During the

period from 1911 to 1918, Mesch earned an annual income of between three and four thousand kronor (Hedin 2001: 156). A good part of that income was made through the production and sale of photographs, including those that appeared in *Svenska Turistföreningens årsskrift*. The organization sometimes commissioned Mesch to take specific photos needed for its pages: in 1903, for instance, the organization requested views from the top of Mount Kebnekaise, which Mesch undertook to obtain on a trek with the sportsman Baron Frits af Sandeberg (Elgström 1929: 12). In correspondence with K.B. Wiklund in 1926, Mesch notes “Jag har aldrig ‘frigivit’ någon av mina lappmarksmotiv” (Hedin 2001: 161) [‘I have never given one of my Lappmark *motiv* photos away for free’]: insisting that Wiklund pay for the use of one of Mesch’s photos in Wiklund’s new schoolbook for Sami children. Photographs of northern nature and culture were Mesch’s bread and butter, and he stopped at little to obtain them. The stories he told to Elgström include a harrowing account of his attempts to photograph a bear close up (Elgström 1929: 63–64), and reveal his constant attentiveness to the people he meets and whether their behaviors warrant a photograph. Upon meeting with a farm family returning from the wedding of their youngest daughter in Jokkmokk, Mesch states (in Elgström’s retelling): “en pittoresk samling voro de, hade det inte varit så illa skumt, hade jag begärt att få ta en plåt av sällskapet” (Elgström 1929: 69) [‘a picturesque company they were, and had it not been so dim out by then I would have wanted to take a picture of them’]. In coming to the village of Aktsek, Mesch follows some of the local Sami to an ancient offering place beneath the peak Skerfetoppen. He notes: “Jag tog en bra plåt av det heliga stället” (Elgström 1929: 84) [‘I got a good photo of that holy place’].

In the quest of this income, Mesch could at times become quite insensitive: Elgström relates a story of Mesch attempting to photograph a Sami reindeer roundup at Rávttas, outside of Kiruna, sometime in the 1920s. When the Sami asked, on religious grounds, that they not be photographed, Mesch refused to put his camera away, stating: “Jag svarade, att enligt lag äger ingen rätt att hindra en annan i hans lovliga näringsfång och att jag hade lika stor rätt att fotografera, som de att skilja renar” (Elgström 1929: 130) [‘I answered that by law no one has the right to hinder another in his lawful pursuit of a living, and I had as much a right to photograph as they had to sort reindeer’]. The Sami responded to Mesch’s recalcitrance by trying to ruin his photos by building smoky fires and eventually by physically attacking him and his assistant. Mesch obtained a few photos but then had to retreat to the home of a local Sami, who seems to have smoothed over the conflict between Mesch and the offended Sami. No doubt in part because of such difficulties, and in part owing to the cumbersome nature

of the glass plate photography that Mesch practiced throughout his career, Mesch opted at times to simulate natural scenes in his studio. Johan Turi figures in a number of such staged photos, stabbing a wolf skin, dressed in winter gear, and performing other traditional activities. Whether or not Mesch paid Turi for such modeling is not clear, but Mesch notes that he had paid other Sami for sitting for photographs over time (Elgström 1929: 132). A good photo—suitable as a souvenir for tourists, and nearly infinitely reproducible—could prove a valuable commodity for an enterprising photographer like Mesch. In his examination of Mesch's many preserved photographs, Hans Anderson notes also the frequent appearance of Marja Sunna of Bolnuluokta, along with her children. Sunna, who appears in the "Madonnas of Many Lands" photo reproduced above (Fig. 1), seems to have been a favorite subject for Mesch (Anderson 1986: 34–35). Presumably her personal appearance, stoic expression, and willingness to allow herself to be photographed made her an apt choice for the photographic images Mesch wanted to amass.

As Elgström's collection of anecdotes shows (Elgström 1929), Mesch supplemented his work as a photographer by organizing and leading treks into the wilderness or up mountains for wealthy outdoorsmen from the south of Sweden. Sometimes he was in charge of hiring the expedition's carriers, acquiring its provisions, and planning its routes. In other cases, he accompanied climbers as their photographer, documenting their triumphs, on occasion for the pages of *Svenska Turistföreningens årsskrift*. In 1920, Mesch climbed the Akka massif with H.N. Pallin (1880–1953), who named one of the peaks—Borgtoppen—after Mesch (Elgström 1929: 78).

In his anecdotes, Mesch details his work as a tourist outfitter. He tells of haggling with Sami guides for reasonable carrier rates for his clients (Elgström 1929: 24, 50). He recounts hiring a hound for a bear-hunting client—the famous hunter, writer, and photographer in his own right Bengt Berg (Elgström 1929: 59). Such dealings are profitable to the service providers, but Mesch sees it as part of his duty to prevent gouging and keep prices reasonable. Once, when he requests a ride to Paittasluspa from a farmer's son passing with a horse and sleigh, the young man asks him what he is willing to pay for the ride. Mesch recounts "Jag blev arg och frågade om han någonsin förlorat en krona på mig" (Elgström 1929: 50) ['I grew angry and asked if he had ever lost a krona on my account']. Later, after making a difficult crossing of a river on thin ice in the dark of night, Mesch reaches the boy's farm, where the farmer has set out lights so as to guide Mesch in his direction:

Glad blev jag, men så kom jag att tänka på pojken och hans beteende och detta förtröt mig till den grad, att jag beslöt gå förbi, och så smög

jag mig utom gården och stack ut i natten i riktning mot Laukoluspa-gården, där en finne, som hette Eriksson hade sitt tillhåll. (Elgström 1929: 51.)

[‘I was glad, but then I started to think about that boy and his behavior and it annoyed me so much that I decided to pass by, and so I snuck past the farm and headed out in the night toward the Laukoluspa farm, where a Finn named Eriksson had a place.’]

In a world in which farmers could hope to supplement their income by offering occasional hospitality to tourists passing by, punishment for the boy’s greed is visited upon his family: Mesch chooses to lodge elsewhere that night, and may well advise clients in the future to do the same.

On those infrequent occasions in which Mesch’s clientele includes women, Mesch depicts himself fearing for their welfare (Elgström 1929: 51), and even when his clients are male, he shows great concerns regarding their safety and peace of mind (Elgström 1929: 26, 32). On at least one occasion, Mesch recounts carrying a melon and sugar in his pack as a treat for his clients once they reach the top of Kebnekaise: “Jag hade som överraskning tagit med mig en melon, denna och en påse strösocker satte sprätt på sällskapet, för man törstar på fjällfärder. Du må tro att glada blevo de” (Elgström 1929: 54) [‘As a surprise, I had brought along a melon: that, along with a bag of granulated sugar, put life into the company, because one gets thirsty on a mountain climb. Believe you me, they were glad to get it’]. Like a thoughtful modern outfitter with a stock of power bars, Mesch thinks of his clients’ likely needs and seeks to ensure that they enjoy their adventure.

In all these activities, Mesch played the role of an attentive wilderness guide, making arrangements that would largely isolate his Swedish clientele from the region’s Sami and Finnish inhabitants and ensure that paying customers experienced the salubrious and inspiring nature that STF literature had prepared them to expect. It is striking how little commerce there appears to be between Swedish tourists and Sami inhabitants, apart from that carefully managed by Mesch. This same tendency is evident in the pages of *Svenska Turistföreningens årsskrift*: authors sometimes seem to go out of their way to emphasize the fact that Sami are extraneous to their adventures, or decidedly less accurate than a good compass and map. In the 1909 issue of the journal, for instance, authors Valdemar Langlet and Otto Sjögren praise the helpfulness of Sami on their trek from Kvikkjokk to Abisko, including youths willing to row for long distances for modest pay, or Täbblä, a genial caretaker of one of the organization’s cabins, who speaks a humorous form of Sami Swedish, keeps the cabin tidy, provides wood, and

offers guests such items as raw goat milk (Langlet & Sjögren 1909: 275). But the authors note on the other hand, that “Lappen, som flyttar i öster och väster, känner nästan aldrig nejder norr och söder om sin flyttväg” [‘the Sami who migrates east and west knows next to nothing about tracts to the north or south of his route’] (Langlet & Sjögren 1909: 277). The traveller is better off trusting his own instincts and STF materials than relying on a Sami for advice, since the Sami are largely mired in a narrow set of traditional activities. The same issue of the journal includes an article on humorous errors in speech, custom or manners among Jämtland Sami, errors that the author states are probably characteristic of Sami in general (Jämte 1909: 250). Sami mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, and behavior are held up for ridicule as signs of a humorous and simple folk. For Swedes, it seems, the Sami are a source of amusement at best, and irritation at worst, and part of Mesch’s work seems to have been to help his clients have their mountain experiences with a minimum of displeasure at the region’s indigenous population.

In stark contrast, Mesch catered to other clients who not only tolerated sight of the Sami but actively hoped for contact with them. Already in his 1854 *Scandinavian Adventures*, English lord Llewellyn Lloyd notes his admiration of the sight of Sami and reindeer:

A large herd of rein-deer traversing the open country, or the surface of a frozen lake, as the case may be, where the Lapp is changing his encampment, is a very magnificent sight [...] It is not surprising that the Lapp is proud of his riches. Even the sight of one of these great herds of rein-deer causes the bosom of the mere spectator to swell with emotion, and what must therefore be the effect on the owner himself? (Lloyd 1854: 229.)

Lloyd recounts the (regrettably unsuccessful) attempts of noble English lords to introduce reindeer to their estates (Lloyd 1854: 234), and opines that the practice of reindeer husbandry should be introduced to Canada, where the species already exists in wild form (Lloyd 1854: 235). These attitudes contrasted markedly with those of Swedes of the time, who tended to see Sami herders as backward and as a source of problems for local farmers, as Johan Turi notes with passion in his *Muitalus sámiid birra*. When dealing with English clients, then, Mesch had to come up with different services.

With his good command of English from his American sojourn, his affable disposition and musical talents, Mesch could present himself well as a tourist guide for international clientele (Hedin 2001: 243). One of his most prominent customers was Frank Hedges Butler (1855–1928), a wealthy Englishman who hired Mesch to help him realize a reindeer and skiing trek across northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in the

years 1913 and 1914. Butler wanted to experience the North in a uniquely Sami way, and viewed a winter trek on skis and reindeer sled as the optimal experience. Through the literary products of Butler's two expeditions—his own travel account from 1917 and Johan Turi's Sami-language account published in 1931 (Butler 1917; Turi 1931)—we obtain valuable portrayals of Mesch from men who knew him. Here, Mesch was tasked not with minimizing but with optimizing his customer's contacts with Sami. Mesch's hiring of Turi helped accomplish this goal, while also introducing Turi to the role of tourism provider, a trade he subsequently embraced as a supplement to his own income later in life (DuBois 2012). Mesch instructed Turi to spend all his spare time with Butler and acted as the unobtrusive but essential interpreter between them. Turi writes:

Gal mon gullen álo ságaid visot dohko gos hupme sámi ja suoma, mon gii ledjen dulkan go bodiimet suopmelaččaide, de mon ferten dulkot ruotagillii ja de fas leai iežá B. Mesch gii dulkui ruotas engelasgillii ja son leai hui buorre ipmirdit mu heajos ruota ja norgga dárui maid dárbbasii. (Turi 1988: 156.)

[‘I heard lots of news from everyone who spoke Sami and Finnish, since I was the interpreter when we came upon Finns. I had to translate into Swedish and then it was B. Mesch who translated from Swedish into English. And he was very good at understanding my poor Swedish and Norwegian as was needed.’]

So unobtrusive was Mesch's offices in this regard that Butler eventually became convinced that he could understand Turi without the Swede's help, a misconception that led to difficulties later in the expedition, as we shall note below.

Turi was not the only Sami person Butler met: the expedition had a series of local Sami herders who came along on legs of the journey, renting their reindeer and sleds for the Englishman's use and comprising an essential part of the expedition. Yet it was Turi who communicated directly with these other Sami on behalf of Mesch and Butler, interpreting their different dialects of Northern Sami and eventually also their Skolt Sami with apparent ease. And it was largely through Turi's network of friends and relatives that the expedition was able to locate and photograph Sami who still wore traditional dress (Turi 1988: 155–156). At Mesch's behest, Turi acted as cook and cultural informant for Butler at every turn (Turi 1988: 156–157), and Butler writes of Turi with great affection in his account:

My faithful Lapp, Johann Thürri, came with me to interpret the Lappish language, and to help in many other ways—valeting, driving the

pulka with the baggage and provisions. He was also a splendid chef, and knew the best part of the reindeer meat to buy for the stew-pot. Thürri also knew a good fox or wolf skin, and bought me several very fine blue fox-skins caught in traps by the Lapps. (Butler 1917: 139.)

From Turi, we know that Mesch received ten kronor per day for his work, plus honoraria for any photographs that Butler chose to include in his book (Turi 1988: 157). Butler describes both Mesch and Turi warmly in his account, recommending them to readers as useful guides: "Travellers visiting these parts cannot possibly do better than try and obtain the same linguists, especially for Norwegian and Swedish Lapland" (Butler 1917: 99–100). He also notes, "Herr Borg Mesch has a photographic studio, where some good photographs of Lapp life can be bought" (Butler 1917: 194). An expedition such as Butler's of twenty to thirty days would net Mesch at minimum between two and three hundred Swedish kronor, roughly five to ten percent of his annual income at the time. The unique and engaging photos that Butler gained from his travels into Norway and Finland proved valuable commodities for future publications, bringing Mesch to sites he would not otherwise have access to in the company of his friend Johan Turi, who could act as an interpreter with local Sami.

Mesch's success in providing Butler with a presentable and entertaining Sami interlocutor eventually backfired, however. As the company neared Russia, Butler grew convinced that he could manage with Turi alone, provided he found an interpreter of Russian as well. So, after locating a Russian interpreter for the purpose at Vadsø, he abruptly dismissed Mesch from his service. Mesch, outraged at his summary dismissal, and clearly hoping to continue the journey into Russia—thereby obtaining yet more valuable photographs—attempted to thwart his customer's decision by removing Turi from his employ. Writes Turi:

Ja go B. Mesch dan gulai, de son sidai ahte mon galggan maid báhcit, muhto ii dat luoitán mu báhcit. Son dajai ahte jos mon bázán, de in oaččo báلكká oppa reaissus ge ja de mon ferten lohpidit, ahte mon čuovun mielde. (Turi 1988: 177.)

['And when B. Mesch heard that, he wanted me to stay behind as well, but he [Butler] wouldn't allow me to stay. He said that if I stayed behind, I would not get any pay for any of the journey, and so I had to promise to accompany him.']

Butler's highhanded decision proved foolish, however, since the Russian interpreter hired in Mesch's place seems to have disappeared early on after

the company's entry into Russia. Turi found that he had no trouble communicating with the Skolt Sami of the region, who provided the company's reindeer and sleds and who were able to translate the Russian they heard to Sami. Turi writes:

Muhto gal leai oppa bahá gielain birget, go engelas humai su giela ja Ruoššariikkas hupme ruoššagiela. Muhto ruošša sámít máhtte ruoššagiela ja sii dulkoje munnje go mii bodiimet sámegielain oktii ja mon fas dulkojin engelasii. Muhto dan in dieđe got dat lea ipmirdan, go son leai engelas ja mon sápmi. (Turi 1988: 179.)

[‘But the language situation was difficult, since the Englishman spoke his language and the Russians spoke Russian. But the Russian Sami knew Russian and they interpreted for me into Sami when we met and then I translated into English. But I don’t know how much he understood, since he was English and I Sami.’]

An examination of Butler's text shows that he understood little if anything that Turi tried to tell him. Although Turi learned a great deal about Nenets culture from his Sami guides (Turi 1988: 178) and observed in detail aspects of Nenets harnessing and dress when the company encountered a Nenets man during their journey, Butler seems to have been left in the dark concerning this important group of migrants to the region, describing the man as a “Russian Lapp with a curious head-dress” (Butler 1917: 58) while including a photograph that reveals the man's Nenets identity. Butler further reports that the village of Skolt Sami that the company visited was named “Skolteby”—that is, clearly Turi's attempt to explain in Swedish that it was a “Skolt village” (Butler 1917: 56).

If Butler understood how irritated he had made his guide Mesch, he does not seem to have acknowledged it in public. Turi writes of their departure:

No de dal moai vulggiime Čáhcesullos Girkonjárgga guvlui ja Borg Meschii dajaime “báze dearvan.” Ja son bázii Čáhcesullui veaháš ahkitlaš mielain, go sutnje attii gissii. Ja de Butlar čuorvvui “mana dearvan!” Muhto dan in dieđe maid son jurddašii. (Turi 1988: 177.)

[‘So we then left Vadsø in the direction of Kirkenes and we said good bye to Borg Mesch. And he remained behind at Vadsø a little miffed at being so abandoned. And Butler called out “Goodbye!” But I don’t know what he [Mesch] thought of that.’]

In his book, Butler makes no mention of the disagreement, and has only words of praise for Mesch. Of the departure he notes simply: “Here our

Swedish interpreter, Borg Mesch, left us, as he could not speak Russian" (Butler 1917: 139). Mesch's reputation is thus spared in print, and he could hope that other wealthy readers of Butler's privately published account would follow suit in time and hire him again for such a journey.

The English fascination with Sami and reindeer continued. A generation later, Olive Murray Chapman sought to repeat Butler's *Through Lapland with Skis & Reindeer*, writing her own account entitled (somewhat derivatively) *Across Lapland with Sledge and Reindeer* (Chapman 1932). Now, however, she found the well-developed northern tourist industry in Stockholm and Oslo uniformly disapproving of her proposal. She recounts the outraged pronouncements of one of the travel agents she approached about her plans. Sputtering in vexation he cries: "No, no! What you propose to do is an adventure, not an ordinary tourist's journey. We cannot help you here at all nor be responsible" (Chapman 1932: 3). As Chapman notes, however: "It was just the 'adventure' aspect that so strongly appealed to me, and I felt that somehow or other a way would be found if I still persevered" (Chapman 1932: 4). Chapman did indeed succeed in her desires, finding Sami guides of her day willing to follow in the trail blazed by Mesch and Turi. Chapman's difficulties in dealing with the later tourist industry illustrates a key strength of Mesch: he met his clients where they were and delivered them the experiences they hoped to find.

"Muhto Mesch ge, son birgii seamma go sámít ja son leai hávski álo" (Turi 1988: 168) ['But Mesch, he managed as well as the Sami did and was always pleasant']. So writes Turi about the man who introduced him to the tourist industry. In some ways the discussion of imaginary spaces that occupies modern research on tourism would have seemed strange to Borg Mesch. After all, the elements he struggled with in his long career of mountaineering and photography were anything but simulacra: his anecdotes to Elgström tell of harsh winters, dangerous falls, near brushes with death, and utterly exhausting work. The North of his treks is wild and dangerous, fierce and beautiful. Yet at the same time, Mesch understood the process of image making and he knew the tasks he was involved in as a photographer and booster of the Swedish north. His pictures of landscape and of people helped create in his countrymen a feeling of a timeless, mystical north, one that had already existed and would always exist as the birthright of every Swede. Of course, neither the people nor the landscape that he photographed proved quite so enduring: the Sami way of life would endure many changes and limitations in the decades that followed, as would that of the Swedes and Finns of the region. Buildings moldered away or were burned. Even the great mainstays of the landscape, like the magnificent falls at Stora Sjöfallet, were to face destruction in the name of hydroelectric power, in-

dustrial development, and now climate change. The very city of Kiruna that Mesch saw grow faces imminent relocation, the victim of the success of the mine that led to the city's original founding. In a world of such massive and manifest physical and social change, it is the images of the North that remain constant, those that Mesch and his contemporaries selected and celebrated. In a sense, the trend toward fictive imagery of the North and its provision to willing tourists was already developing in the glass plate photography of Borg Mesch, *fjällens fotograf*.

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