



FORN VÄNNEN

JOURNAL OF
SWEDISH ANTIQUARIAN
RESEARCH



2020/2

Utgiven av

Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien i samarbete med Historiska museet.

Fornvännen finns på webben i sin helhet från första årgången och publiceras löpande där med ett halvårs fördröjning: fornvannen.se

Ansvarig utgivare och huvudredaktör

Mats Roslund

Vitterhetsakademien

Box 5622, 114 86 Stockholm

mats.roslund@ark.lu.se

Redaktionssekreterare och mottagare av manuskript

Peter Carelli

Vitterhetsakademien

Box 5622, 114 86 Stockholm

fornvannen@vitterhetsakademien.se

Redaktörer

Herman Bengtsson, herman.bengtsson@upplandsmuseet.se

Christina Fredengren, christina.fredengren@shm.se

Åsa M Larsson, asa.larsson@raa.se

Teknisk redaktör

Kerstin Öström

Grävlingsvägen 50

167 56 Bromma

kerstin@vinghasten.se

Prenumeration

Vitterhetsakademien

Box 5622, 114 86 Stockholm

e-post fornvannen@vitterhetsakademien.se

Bankgiro 535-3552

Årsprenumeration i Sverige (4 häften) 200 kronor, lösnummer 60 kronor

Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research

published by The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities

Subscription price outside Sweden (four issues) SEK 250:-

Box 5622, SE-114 86 Stockholm, Sweden

FORNVÄNNEN började utges av Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien år 1906 och ersatte då *Akademiens Månadsblad* samt *Svenska Fornminnesföreningens Tidskrift*, som båda tillkommit under 1870-talets första år. Förutom i Sverige finns *Fornvännen* på drygt 350 bibliotek och vetenskapliga institutioner i mer än 40 länder.

Tidskriften är referentgranskad.

FORNVÄNNEN («The Antiquarian») has been published by the Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities since 1906, when it replaced two older journals which had started in the early years of the 1870s. Outside Sweden *Fornvännen* is held by more than 350 libraries and scientific institutions in over 40 countries. The journal is peer-reviewed.

ISSN 0015-7813

Printed in Sweden by AMO-tryck AB, Solna, 2020

Debatt

Sumtangen, a medieval communal reindeer drive locality on Hardangervidda: reply to Svein Indrelid

For roughly seven years Svein Indrelid has ignored my critique of the picture he has presented, alone or as co-author, of the activities at Sumtangen in medieval times (Blehr 2012). Without doubt his silence would have continued if I had not once again heavily criticized his research in a new debate article, even more to the point (Blehr 2019), and thereby made him come up out of the trench. Though he now states that he wholeheartedly agrees with me that we as researchers have a responsibility to present a picture as solidly underpinned as possible, based on our limited data, I cannot see that he does anything but pay lip service to this ideal (Indrelid 2020). In the following I will point to weaknesses in Indrelid's way of arguing.

Was a special trapping technique used at Sumtangen in the second half of the 13th century?

All the articles Indrelid has written about Sumtangen, be it as the sole author, or as co-author, have focused on presenting the communal reindeer drives at the locality as having been carried out with a special trapping technique that was in use only in the second half of the 13th century. The technique *per se* is not explained to us. With the help of it we are told that entire large herds were driven into Lake Finsberg where they were killed by hunters in boats. In one of his articles (Indrelid 2010, p. 32) he characterized the hunts as a massacre, and he has also called it "industrial" (Indrelid 2013). He makes it clear that he sees an enterprise of such dimensions as having been far beyond the effort that could be organized in the local communities. What is more, communal drives killing entire herds seem to have been a rather unfamiliar method to the hunters from the local communities. This is because "during the Iron Age and Medieval times [they] commonly used bows and arrows or pitfalls, killing just one or a few animals at a time" (Indrelid and Hufthammer 2011, p. 51). Now, if communal drives killing

entire herds had been an unfamiliar method to the hunters from the local communities, who was it then who carried out the communal drives? I find that he here, as at most other occasions, does not present evidence for the conclusions he draws, but only presents them in the form of unsubstantiated statements.

The drift lines found by Jostein Bergstøl north of Lake Finsberg

I misinterpreted Indrelid when he said in his 2010 article that they had found a new communal reindeer drive at the lake. I thought that he made the drive I had found in the 1970s his own so as to make his article more interesting. I was mistaken, and I apologize for this. At the same time I find that Indrelid himself is to blame. In the article he wrote with Hufthammer he states, without any truth, that the "authors agree with Blehr that the presence of rows of cairns and also wooden poles on the north side of Lake Finsbergvatn to some extent verify *the ancient legend* concerning mass-hunt by use of drift lines" (2011, p. 49, my italics). As can be seen from the words in italics, he writes here as if there was only one communal drive at Lake Finsberg. This drive then would thus necessarily have had to be the one I had documented in the 1970s. Ironically, this is most probably correct, even though Indrelid in 2010 thought Bergstøl had found a hitherto unknown communal reindeer drive. What he had found was several rows of cairns and postholes north of Lake Finsberg. The western row ended just above Sumtangen, whereas the eastern one prevented the animals from moving to the eastern side of the lake. Øivind Bakke (1985, pp. 98–99) has convincingly argued that a communal drive could not have ended at the sound north of Sumtangen. The reindeer would therefore most probably, when they found the drift line blocking the migration towards the east, have moved on toward the west parallel to the shore. What Bergstøl had found

was, in other words, not a new communal drive, but new drivelines that would have guided the animals towards the already known drive locality, found by me, at Lake Finsberg.

How extensive was the hunt?

When it comes to the annual outcome of the hunt, Indreliid meets my critique by stating that exact numbers are not important; the main point is that the yield was very large. He thereby refrains from reflecting upon the difference between his own estimates and those made by the osteologist Liselotte Takken Beijersbergen who, unlike Anne Karin Hufthammer, has worked on the whole assemblage excavated at Sumtangen. Her conclusion is that a minimum of 15–23 reindeer were killed each year (2017, pp. 343, 353). This is a number decidedly lower than the 110–156 animals presented by Indreliid and Hufthammer. If Takken Beijersbergen's estimate is the most reliable, then Indreliid's description of the hunt as being on an almost industrial scale is not believable.

The four reindeer bones with runic inscriptions from Sumtangen

Referring to an overview of all the medieval runic inscriptions from rural contexts among the population on both sides of Hardangervidda in *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Indreliid considers it more likely that the four reindeer bones found with runic inscriptions at Sumtangen were carved by someone other than the hunters who had been present there. Of the inscriptions, 11 were from churches, whereas we are not told where the others, 14 in all, came from. Indreliid concludes that literacy hardly seems to have been widespread among the rural population on both sides of Hardangervidda in the Middle Ages. I believe he is right in this. Even if we limit literacy to just being able to write and read, probably very few in a rural setting at that time, apart from the clergy, were literate. But being able to write simple messages with runes on wood and bones, like the four we found at Sumtangen: "Aslak" (a name), "Åmund owns me", "Ottar owns" and "wise man" (on the same bone) and "God is almighty", obviously have nothing to do with literacy, they are just simple messages signalling ownership, belief in

God etc. The fact that not more than a total of 25 runic inscriptions from the surrounding area have survived decomposing should surprise no one. The four bones with runes from Sumtangen would have decomposed as well, had it not been for the special conservation conditions in the bone middens. I thus find no valid support for the conclusion that the bones with runic inscriptions found at Sumtangen would have been carved by townspeople, as Indreliid believes, rather than by the local hunters themselves. Neither do I believe that a gaming piece found in one of the middens at Sumtangen necessarily indicates the presence there of people from towns. What reasons do we have to belittle the intellect of the local hunters?

Was Landsloven (The Law of the Land) of relevance for the hunters at Sumtangen?

Jørn Øyrehaugen Sunde is a specialist when it comes to medieval sources. He has been told by Indreliid that the communal drives at Sumtangen were extensive, but carried out over a relatively brief period. To this he replies that it is: "an example of use of such a character and where the timing of its origin that the king must approve it" (Indreliid's translation). But if the communal drives at Sumtangen were neither as extensive nor lasted for such a brief period as claimed by Indreliid (cf. Takken Beijersbergen 2017) then the premises for the question are false and the answer without value.

The way the reindeer were butchered

Indreliid holds it against me that in my debate articles I have omitted to mention one of the most important arguments he believes he has put forward against a locally organized hunt: the way the reindeer were butchered. Why, he asks, did those who carried out the communal drives at Sumtangen in medieval time treat the kill differently from the way the hunters on Hardangervidda did in historical time? At Sumtangen the meat was cut from the bones during the butchering process, whereas the animals either would have been transported out in one piece or divided into shoulders, legs and ribs in historical time. As Indreliid sees it, it was the large amount of meat that had to be transported out from Sumtangen

after successful communal drives that made it necessary to keep the weight of it to a minimum if the intended destination was far away. This would have made it, in Indrelid's words, "worth the bother of cutting off the meat". However, if the destination had been nearby, as I have suggested, he finds it absurd that the hunters should have deboned the animals first. But, beside keeping the weight to a minimum regardless of the distance the meat was to be transported, and making it easier to pack the meat on horseback, the reason for deboning it might also have had to do with the drying of the meat (Indrelid 2013, p. 67), in order to preserve it better while it was waiting to be transported out. This is only a tentative hypothesis (what Indrelid calls "speculation" when presented by me), and we have no possibility ever to verify it. However, since the way the reindeer were butchered to Indrelid is one of the most convincing arguments that no local hunters were responsible for the hunt, I find that he indeed lacks convincing arguments for his cause.

Unsubstantiated statements

In his answer to my debate articles Indrelid states that I seem to accept some form or other of communal reindeer drive at Sumtangen. This in spite of the fact that I explicitly state in the debate article to which he refers that the "drive at Sumtangen consists only of a single line of cairns and frightening poles and shows that the reindeer entered Lake Finsberg in its western part where it is widest" (Blehr 2012, p. 118). Clearly I am referring to the Sumtangen area, not to the locality itself. He also states that I somehow had "conceived the idea that the hunt targeted bulls exclusively". He writes this in spite of the fact that I state in the same paragraph that an analysis of antler remains from Sumtangen had shown a slight overweight for bull antlers. Since a male dominance hardly was likely in an area used by fostering flocks, this indicated that the area was mainly visited by bulls. I therefore drew the conclusion: "in most cases it would have been bulls migrating south in the fall that were driven into the water" (Blehr 2012, p. 119). How Indrelid managed to transform this to say that I had "conceived the idea that the hunt targeted bulls exclu-

sively", he alone knows. A final example will illustrate how, instead of admitting that something he has stated is untrue when I caught him out, he turns it back on me, to make it look as if it is I who have presented something untrue. I have in mind the following statement: "it is not correct when Blehr in his summary of the 2019 article claims that Christie did not mention any legend concerning Sumtangen" (Blehr 2019, p. 244). I have never denied that Christie mentioned a legend. What I denied was that Christie had written down one (Indrelid & Hufthammer 2011, p. 46). The legend Indrelid here presents as Christie's is in fact nothing more than a modified version of the personal legend he had put together from legend fragments and own imagination for his article in the journal *Villreinen* (Indrelid 2010). His disregard of truth did not stop there. We are also told that "Christie's legend" was referred to in an article by Bakke (1985). Since no legend ever was written down by Christie, it is obvious that this is not true, nor can it then be true that it had also been cited by Haukenæs (1884), Bøe (1942), and Blehr (1973; 1982).

Some final reflections

Indrelid finds that my scientific arguments in the debate articles at times are overshadowed by an attitude that he sees as having little to do with what he considers serious research. What is more, he regards my disagreement with the conclusions he draws as verbal assaults, and sees them as being based on false claims and weak arguments. No doubt then, the different ways that Indrelid and I look at science are incompatible. I find it telling that he regards my evaluation of his research as verbal assaults directed towards him. This is of course not right, it is not aimed towards him as a person, but against his research. However, the fact that he takes my critique of his research personally tells me that he is unaccustomed to facing objections to the conclusions he has established as truth. I find this serious since it implies that he sees his reputation as a researcher as more important than the veracity of his research.

Let me end my reply to Indrelid here as I ended my latest debate article, and the way I started this one, namely, by pointing out for the third

time the responsibility we have as researchers to present a picture as solidly underpinned as possible, based on our limited data. I am in other words redundant in the extreme, but I feel that we cannot remind each other of this responsibility too often.

References

- Bakke, Ø., 1985. W. F. Korens innberetning fra Hardangervidda i 1840. *Hardanger* 1985. Norheimsund.
- Blehr, O., 1973. Traditional reindeer hunting and social change in the local communities surrounding Hardangervidda. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 6:102–112.
- 2012. Medieval reindeer drives at Sumtangen, Hardangervidda: Two interpretations. *Fornvännen* 107:115–122.
- 2019. Sumtangen, a medieval communal reindeer (Rangifer tarandus) drive locality on the mountain plateau Hardangervidda in Norway, once more. *Fornvännen* 114:242–247.
- Bøe J., 1942. Til høgfjellets forhistorie. Boplassen på Sumtangen ved Finsevatn på Hardangervidda. *Bergens Museums Skrifter* 21. Bergen.
- Haukenæs, T. S., 1884. *Natur, Folkeliv og Folketro i Hardanger*, første del. Eidfjord.
- Indrelid, S., 2010. Om reinsdyrfangsten på Sumtangen i gamal tid. *Villreinen* 2010:28–34.
- 2013. ‘Industrial’ reindeer hunting in the south Norwegian mountains in the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages. Grimm, O. & Schmölcke, U. (eds.), *Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD*. Schriften des archäologischen Landesmuseums, Ergänzungsreihe 7. Neumünster.
- 2020. Medieval communal reindeer drives on Hardangervidda, South Norway: reply to Otto Blehr. *Fornvännen* 115:43–50.
- Indrelid, S. & Hufthammer, A. K., 2011. Medieval mass trapping of reindeer at the Hardangervidda mountain plateau, South Norway. *Quaternary International*, vol. 238:44–54.
- Samnordisk runtextdatabas, Institutionen för Nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet. <https://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>, 2004.
- Takken Beijersbergen, L. M., 2017. Heaps of fascinating fragments: Reconstructing a Medieval reindeer population based on bone middens from the Hardangervidda high mountain plateau, Norway. *Acta Zoologica*, 98:340–361.

Otto Blehr

Körsbärsvägen 8

SE-114 23 Stockholm

otto.blehr@comhem.se