



Meeting at the Philosopher's Stone

The Encounter of Enlightenment and Indigenous Religion in Maupertuis' Expedition to Lapland (1736–1737)

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ABSTRACT Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis' famous scientific expedition to Lapland (1736-1737) had a considerable impact on Enlightenment thought, but not only due to its groundbreaking results in the fields of geodesy and physics. Given the popularity of his journey, the few and rather prejudiced references to the Sámi people and their religion also gained some significance. In his reports and in his self-presentations, Maupertuis used certain elements of Sámi life and religiosity in order to communicate his scientific and social message to the academies and the salons of Paris. Accordingly, the references to the Sámi are indispensable elements of the self-representation and self-reference of Enlightenment mind, intended to enhance and clarify its own standing. The article examines a situation of contact of a formally and religiously operating language of scientific polemics with religious phenomena that it interprets as 'primitive' or 'curious' and that it appropriates to its particular form of discourse. Here, intellectual religion meets a 'primitive' one as an object of description, and makes innovative use of its alien elements. The case study is concerned in particular with a special kind of application of the transcendence-immanence distinction involved in the contact situation, relating to the phenomenon of knowledge in form of the relation of the known and the unknown.

KEYWORDS Maupertuis, Enlightenment, Sámi religion, sieidi sites, Stone of Käymäjärvi

Introduction: Contact, Knowledge, and Typology

In the following, I am going to present and analyze a case study of a situation of religious contact with regard to its 'knowledge' dimension. i.e., that the situation of contact might be described with regard to themes related to knowledge. Here "the guiding question is: how does religion relate to cognition and patterns of knowledge and transform them into religious meaning" (Krech 2019, 4)? This perspective is justified by the sources themselves. Knowledge, and above all scientific knowledge, is a key feature of the object-language description of the contact situation. It leads us to an area of religious and colonial history that is not particularly

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well-known, i.e. Europe, more precisely its northernmost part, the area known as Lapland. Its key figure or main protagonist is the French author Maupertuis, or rather an intellectual movement that is manifested by his person. The contact examined here took place in the first half of the eighteenth century, at a time when Enlightenment started to dominate the intellectual sphere of Europe, shortly before it became the ideology of European rulers (i.e., the so-called Enlightened Absolutism/Despotism in Prussia—of which Maupertuis was a part—in Russia, in Sweden, and in Austria). It also took place in a significant context that essentially frames and influences its object-language descriptions, i.e., it occurred on a scientific expedition that is not primarily concerned with ethnographic or religious issues.

The following article focusses on the examination of the particular situation of contact between certain religious traditions. I am, therefore, *not* primarily elaborating on Maupertuis' journey as such, regarding the investigation of its history or its scientific purpose and result (these subjects have been exhaustively analyzed by Terrall 2002; Pekonen 2010; and Wagner 2004, on whose work I predominantly build). Accordingly, references to Maupertuis' philosophy, the history of natural sciences, and the history of scientific expeditions are *not* intended to contribute anything new to scholarship in these particular areas, but merely serve to illuminate the background of the setting of the situation of contact in order to scrutinize the type of contact. [2]

As we only have documents that are produced by one part of the encounter, the reconstruction must be an asymmetrical one, mostly referring to the impact of the contact on the enlightened (scientific) public. In this sense, we are facing a typical case of what is called 'indigenous religions' as defined by Bruce Lincoln, i.e., something that is [3]

notoriously difficult to locate, since most of our evidence is not the autonomous self-expression of an ab-original entity but a product of contact between indigenous cultures and encroaching others. Indeed, the very mediations that make these data available to anyone other than indigenes also render them most problematic (travelers' accounts, colonial archives, missionary reports, ethnographies, coauthored autobiographies, and studies by those educated in mission schools or Euroamerican universities). As a result, our view of the 'indigenous' per se is always refracted, if not obstructed: what we observe most clearly is not "the other" but the situation of encounter between that other and an exogenous intruder. (Lincoln 2012, 95) [4]

Accordingly, it is the type of contact that defines the parties contacting. Because of this, rather than directly witnessing a contact of religious traditions, we are confronted with the contact of a formally and religiously operating language of scientific polemics with phenomena interpreted as 'primitive' or 'curious,' and being appropriated to its discourse. What makes these phenomena curious, however, is in some significant cases a matter of the different religious backgrounds that, accordingly, must be scrutinized. Additionally, the genre of the textual source and its intended audience has to be examined; in this case scientific reports, mythological topoi, and religious language that are combined for presentation in an academy and, at the same time, in a literary salon. [5]

As such, the case study uses and exemplifies the idea of the necessity of a *typology* of religious contact due to the special status of the material examined. The situation of contact provides certain particularities. In our case, in a situation of asymmetric inter-religious contact, intellectual religion meets a 'primitive' one as an object of description, and makes innovative [6]

use of its alien elements (see Krech 2012, 207). The case study also describes a special kind of application of the transcendence-immanence distinction involved in the contact situation and relates to the phenomenon of knowledge, i.e., the relation of the known and the unknown. It shows that the sources display an essential role in measuring the contact situation due to its prevailing type. The asymmetry found here seems to be an integral (or even necessary) part of the typology.

Maupertuis: Science (and Religion)

Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1698–1759) is no longer a well-known figure of the European Enlightenment, at least in comparison with the usual suspects of this movement, such as Voltaire, Diderot, Locke, and Hume. Perhaps this is due to his being recognized rather as a man of science, for example as a mathematician, geodesist, astronomer, and natural scientist, than as a *homme de lettres* or as a philosopher. In fact, Maupertuis profoundly contributed to an amazing variety of scientific fields. Scientists and historians of science may acknowledge his contribution in developing the “Principle of least action” (see Pulte 1989). They may also remember him as “the man who flattened the earth” and, by doing so, promoted the triumph of Newtonian physics over Cartesian ideas on the European Continent, as by the early 1740s he was also known throughout the intellectual world of Europe as the main matador of Newtonian physics (Terrall 2002, 14). We will meet him in this capacity later on. Some consider him to be a predecessor of Darwin in his biological works that deal with subjects that may be related to today’s genetics. In philosophy, Maupertuis had a short but influential career as a philosopher of language,¹ fueling the German philosophy of language (prominently Johann Gottfried Herder’s) with topics awarded prizes by the Berlin Academy.² Historians might know him as the person who, in his capacity as the President of the Berlin Academy of Science, caused the final row between Frederick the Great and Voltaire in the so-called *Affaire König*, ending the latter’s sojourn at the Prussian court in 1753. Nevertheless, Maupertuis is honored as an important mediator of English, French, and German Philosophy and Science (see Casirer 1973, 114). He was also a corresponding mediator between the European intellectual public and the Sámi culture.

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Of course, in his time, Maupertuis was a very prominent figure, not least by being able to combine the capacities which modern times are more likely to separate in the process of intellectual specialization. “[I]n his day Maupertuis operated at the center of European scientific *and* literary life” (Terrall 2002, 8). Very likely to attract metaphorical interpretation with regard to his intellectual career, Maupertuis was born as a son of a French *Corsair*-merchant,³ who was able to provide him with education and independence, thus enabling him to start a career as a mathematician, a libertine, and a literary wit. What is relevant to know concerning the particular style of the source manifesting the situation of contact examined here is that in many of his works, Maupertuis combined scientific exactness and stylistic brilliance, or scientific report and adventurous travel literature. He even managed to combine philosophy, science, and erotica in his work promoting a theory of generation, most suggestively titled

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1 See the German edition (Maupertuis 1988).

2 On Maupertuis’ philosophy of language (with reference to his expedition to Lapland), see Paxman (1993, 31–33).

3 See the effective title of his latest popular biography: *Maupertuis. Corsaire de la Pensée (1698-1759)* in Bousquet (2013).

Vénus Physique. Particularly with regard to the situation of contact described in the following, Maupertuis therefore cannot be reduced to an all-round natural scientist.

Additionally, Maupertuis, although described as a rather difficult personality, displayed considerable talent in the art of networking, self-advertising, and self-promoting (see Terrall 2002, 32), a capacity that was indispensable in times that promoted the idea of *sociabilité* as the main habitus of an enlightened mind.⁴ Since 1723, he was a member of the *Académie des sciences*, since 1728 of the *Royal Society*. In 1746, he became President of the Royal Prussian Academy of Science and Belles-Lettres (see Pons 1976). One of the rules he introduced to the Academy was, quite in accordance with his own open-minded approach, that all meetings had to be plenary sessions, open to members of every class of the Academy (Aarsleff 1989, 197).

Now, what about Maupertuis' relevance for the study of religion? Of course, his position is far from outstanding, but rather exemplary. In general, the era titled 'Enlightenment' provided established and institutionalized religion in Early Modern Europe with a profound challenge that was, as such, well recognized by officials of churches. It provided an encounter to be reacted to both immediately and firmly. One main reaction was to stress the supposedly anti-religious character of the movement and its possible impact upon morals and politics (not to mention the dangers for salvation implied).

In matters of religion, Maupertuis, according to his preface to his *Essay on Moral Philosophy*, took the liberty "to write what he wanted to,"⁵ but he did not share the attitude of the later radical enlightenment, exemplified by his compatriot in Berlin La Mettrie, or the 'wicked philosophers' Diderot, Naigeon, or D'Holbach. Though he left no doubt that he preferred science and philosophy to religion—as President of the Berlin Academy he dreamt about attracting the *Encyclopédie* circle to Prussia and wrote: "Such a colony of refugees of reformed philosophy would be more useful than that of reformed religion"⁶—the latter, nevertheless, played a significant role in his thinking. His position towards the Christian faith is somehow ambiguous and dubious with regard to dogmatics, while he expressed his admiration for Christian morals for its consoling potential as well as for its social utility (see Tonelli 1987, 55). Christianity, according to Maupertuis, serves the universal pursuit of happiness best due to its claim for compassion. Rather than being an atheist, his scientific research led him to positions that are described by Giorgio Tonelli as "un déisme assez vague," i.e., a deism that is not built upon faith, but rather founded on rational grounds (1987, 56). His 'principle of least action,' considered by himself at the same time to be his most important achievement in physics as in philosophy, rather served him to enhance the probability of the existence of God, serving as proof by economic design, for the behavior of matter becomes teleological, and, as such, a testimony of God's wisdom (see Franzen 1988, XXVI). In his *Accord de différentes lois de la nature*, Maupertuis writes:

There is no doubt that all things are regulated by a supreme Being who, even as he imprinted on matter the forces that denote his power, destined it to execute effects that mark his wisdom; and the harmony between these two attributes is so perfect that undoubtedly all natural effects could be deduced from each taken

4 "Mathématicien et poète à ses heures, Maupertuis est surtout, en matière de communication, un fin stratège. Il a un art consommé du *scoop*, sait ménager ses effets et s'adapter au public" (Vasak 2014, 61).

5 "[...] je me trouvais dans des circonstances où je pouvois avec la plus grande liberté écrire tout ce que je pensois" (Maupertuis 1974, I:182–183).

6 Maupertuis to Algarotti 1752, quoted in Terrall (2002, 269).

separately. A blind and necessary dynamics follows the designs of the most enlightened and most free Intelligence. If our mind were vast enough, it would see the causes of physical effects by calculating the properties of bodies and by investigating that which is most fitting to carry out these effects. (Maupertuis 1974, IV:21; translation Terrall 2002, 179)

Given the close connection between natural science and philosophical-theological reasoning in Maupertuis' thinking, we may safely assume him, though predominantly a scientist and a philosopher, to be a possible part of a contact situation of certain religious traditions. [13]

The Expedition to Lapland

In the year 1736, an illustrious expedition, financed by the King of France, Louis XV, supported by the Swedish government, and eagerly observed by the scientific public, set out for the northern Swedish town of Tornio (Torneå). It gathered a number of the most esteemed scientists of the time under the command of Maupertuis. They were about to stay near a region that counted among the least known in Europe for a year with a sparse nomadic population that was, above all in the inland and despite all efforts of mission, still more pagan than Christian. Pagan elements persistently coexisting along with Protestant Christianity. [14]

Why was the remotest part of Europe interesting for eighteenth-century science? Apart from more pragmatic concerns, such as boosting Maupertuis' reputation in the scientific community as well as in the Parisian *salons* (features that are insistently stressed in literature on this event), the aim of the expedition was nothing less than to determine the shape of the earth. A scientific dispute between the academies of London and Paris focused on the question whether the earth was shaped like a lemon or a clementine. The quarrel became a matter of national interest, as the former was associated with ('French') Cartesian physics and the latter with ('English') Newtonian physics. In his *Philosophia naturalis principia mathematica*, Newton suggested the clementine shape, determining the shape of the earth as a rotating ellipsoid because of the force caused by the rotation of the earth. This idea challenged the (at last in France) formerly uncontested model of the elongated (lemon-shaped) earth. The shape of the Earth was determined by a method of measurement used by land surveyors or mapmakers, i.e., triangulation, turning the angles of a chain of connected triangles into distances (see Hecht 1999, 83–84). "If the sphere is flattened at the poles the meridians are no longer perfect circles, and the length of a degree (measured by the stars) decreases from north to south, and conversely for an elongated sphere" (Terrall 2002, 89). The method of measurement required clearly visible points on the Earth's surface, i.e., church steeples or, if there were none, hills and mountains which had to be cleared of trees. Not least, this preparatory work on mountaintops caused contact between the scientific aim of the expedition and indigenous religiosity. [15]

In the preface of his report on the expedition, Maupertuis characterizes its paramount importance in a truly all-compassing manner, claiming it to be useful for nothing less than all peoples and all times.⁷ Though the paramount aim of the expedition consisted in the geodesic measurement, it also contained elements that are of more interest for those working on situations of religious contact. Of course, the aims of the expedition, at least regarding the [16]

7 "Mais la détermination de la figure de la Terre est d'une utilité générale pour tous les peuples & pour tous les temps" (Maupertuis 1974, III:86).

expectations of its sponsors, were not purely scientific. They are also to be seen in the light of colonialism (Naum 2016, 493) as “part of the making of empires” (Nordin and Ojala 2018, 59). To the Swedish statesman Carl Bonde (1620–67), for example, Lapland could become ‘the West Indies of the Swedes.’ Additionally, due to the Gothicist ideology, Lapland could be exploited as a proof of Swedish preeminence (on Gothicism, see Neville 2009). Some decades later, the expedition was also in accord with the interests of the Swedish state in the period of its history that was called the ‘Age of Liberty.’⁸ At that time, Sweden, having suffered a devastating defeat in the Great Nordic War (1700–1721), and having irrevocably lost the status of a great power due to the conquest of its Baltic provinces by Russia, of necessity turned to internal development⁹ rather than outward expansion. Securing and colonizing¹⁰ the North therefore provided an opportunity to partly compensate the losses of the war, to stabilize the state, and to regain lost prestige (though on a different field than before; see Lähteenmäki 2012, 292). For this aim, Maupertuis’ endeavor could prove useful. Furthermore, the expedition came in handy to please Sweden’s only reliable ally in Europe, France, who quite literally financed Sweden through subsidies till 1766 (Roberts 2002, 19). In fact, the former Great Power of Gustav Adolf and Charles XII was little more than a French satellite state at the time the expedition took place.¹¹ Nevertheless, the “great majority of the political nation exulted the liberty of the Swedish constitution of 1720” (Roberts 2002, 59), preferring it to the absolutism and its outward glory displayed by Charles XI, and, above all, his son Charles XII. Treasuring the constitution also holds true for the Swedish Church, for it made ‘liberty’ an element of prayer (*To the Honor of Thy Holy Name, and the safeguarding of each and all of us in our blessed liberty*, see Roberts 2002, 59).¹² With regard to scientific progress, Sweden was clearly in the lead in certain fields in the age of liberty. To mention only the most prominent names: “Linneaus made Uppsala the botanical capital of Europe [...] Anders Celsius provided Europe with its first centigrade thermometer” (Roberts 2002, 215). Interestingly enough, both scientists mentioned here took part in expeditions to Lapland (Carl von Linné in his famous expedition in 1732) or were even members of Maupertuis’ expedition, in the case of Celsius.

8 On Sweden’s geographical, administrative, and not least ideological expansion to Lapland since the Middle Ages, see Mattson (2014, 327–41).

9 See Linné’s account in the *Iter Laponicum* on the (Finnish) settlers in Lapland: “Lapland ist an vielen Stellen von Neusiedlern bewohnt *id est Finnones*, die sich hier *jussu et permissu regis* niederlassen, Acker und Weide kultivieren, eine gewisse Steuer an die Krone zahlen, dann frei sind von allen anderen Abgaben, wie die Lappen; brauchen weder für Soldat noch Bootsmann aufzukommen; ist auch jedweder zufriedener, ob Krieg oder Frieden ist, denn sie haben nicht die geringsten Auflagen. Es bleibt ihnen überlassen, wo in der Lappmark sie sich niederlassen und das Land kultivieren wollen, so daß kein Zweifel ist, daß der größte Teil der Lappmark mit der Zeit Bauernland wird.“ (“In many of its regions, Lapland is inhabited by new settlers, that is by Finns, who, being sent and permitted by the king, settle there, cultivate fields and meadows, pay a certain tax to the Crown and, after that, are free of all other taxes as the Laps are; they do not have to pay for soldier or sailor; everybody is content in times of war and peace because they do not have the slightest obligations. It is left to them where they want to settle in Lapland and cultivate the land, accordingly, there is no doubt that the main part of Lapland will become farmland in due time.”) (von Linné and Carl 1987, 42) Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

10 On the need to rethink the colonial encounter and the contact between Christianity and Sámi religion as a complex two-way relationship, see Äikäs and Salmi (2015, 104).

11 See Roberts (2002, 16): “However unpalatable it might be, the men of 1721 had to face the fact that their country had quite suddenly sunk from the status of a major power to being one of the weakest of European states.” For examples of subsequent predominant French influence (the ‘French System’) on Swedish policy, see *ibid.*, 35, 36, 39, 42, 48. It was not before the peace treaty of 1762 with Prussia that the French connection began to falter (*ibid.*, 45).

12 The constitution, allowing the Established Church a great deal of participation in Parliament (71), was also described as a ‘Holy Writ’ by theologians, and to misinterpret it was considered heresy (see Roberts 2002, 65).

Due to their efforts, Lapland itself became “a natural, air-conditioned laboratory in which first hand observations could be made on weather conditions, the flora and fauna and the population of the region” (Lähteenmäki 2012, 292).

Reaching Stockholm on May 21, 1736, the expedition traveled by land to Tornio. They decided to do the measurements along the Torne river, and established the observation posts on single mountains and hills. Measurements were completed by the end of the year and the group had to spend the winter in the North till the breaking of the ice allowed the passage back to Stockholm. Using the free time in April 1737, Maupertuis made a small trip into the Torne Lappmark. On June 9, they started for Stockholm, reaching it on July 11, and finally returned to France. They arrived in Paris on August 20. Maupertuis met the king one day later and, on the 28th, was able to report on his successful journey, which seemed to finally corroborate his Newtonian ideas concerning the shape of the earth, at the *Académie*. [17]

One indispensable element of the Polar expedition was the propagation of its results in the aftermath. The public communication of the journey, the special way the expedition was described to attract publicity by Maupertuis and his scientific followers, i.e., the followers of Newtonian Physics, thus becomes an important element of the contact situation described here: a side-product of the expedition, though frequently referred to and conveniently accentuated by Maupertuis in central places of his accounts of the journey, was the encounter with indigenous people of the polar area, their behavior, their particular beliefs, and above all their fame.¹³ [18]

The Sámi Religion

The members of Maupertuis’ expedition met an indigenous population that was at the same time notorious and mostly unknown: the ‘Laplanders’ or Sámi. The Sámi peoples were and still are far from being unambiguous and have more than one language and one economic base. However, they were subject to (and product of) manifold forms of contact. Despite the popular cliché, nomadic reindeer herding was only one, though the most acknowledged, form of subsistence, but by no means the most original (Pentikäinen 1997, 79).¹⁴ Rather, it was the result of an encounter: “[T]he iconic feature of Lappishness—nomadic reindeer pastoralism—was the product of contact with the Swedish state” (Mattson 2014; see also Salmi et al. 2018). Administratively, the state, however, was not able to establish and guarantee stability in matters of the Sámi. In Maupertuis’ times, the region even lacked well-defined borders, being contested between the rival powers of Denmark (which ruled Norway), Sweden-Finland, and Russia. [19]

Of course, Sámi religion is equally diverse and fluctuant. However, there are certain common structures that might be highlighted with regard to the situation of contact described by Maupertuis. For a start, contemporary research stresses the importance of *space*, i.e., landscapes and sites for pre-Christian Sámi religion (see Kleppe and Mulk 2006, 367–68). Sámi religion evolved in a hunter-gatherer framework and was intimately tied to the natural en- [20]

13 Intra-religious encounter, mainly between Lutheran and Catholic Christians, is the main subject of Osmo Pekonen’s lavishly illustrated monograph on the journal of one of the participants of Maupertuis’ expedition, the *abbé* Réginald Outhier (Pekonen 2010).

14 With regard to Sámi religion, Pentikäinen distinguishes an earlier “religion of hunters and fishermen” up to the sixteenth century, and a later “religion of the reindeer nomads” after large-scale reindeer breeding was introduced. The reindeer religion, Pentikäinen argues, showed more Christian influence than the earlier religion, whose key figure was not the reindeer but the bear (Pentikäinen 1997, 79).

vironment, making the landscapes laden with religious significance (Bergman et al. 2008, 1). Due to the hunter-gatherer structure of Sámi society, knowledge of the sacred landscape was no elite phenomenon of religious experts ('shamans' called *noaidi /noajdde*), but widely shared as a perceived anomaly and liminality (Mulik and Bayliss-Smith 2007). Sámi religion, thus, is characterized by a more egalitarian structure than the overemphasis on the role of the shaman would suggest. Sacred places were tightly linked to everyday activities of the Sámi people (Kleppe and Mulik 2006, 369).

About the content of Sámi religion, Neil Kent, the author of the most recent cultural history of the Sámi peoples, is quite positive in his judgement: [21]

The old Sámi religion was animistic in its essence in that it was based on the belief that a form of pantheism infused the natural animate and inanimate world which made up the Sámi cosmos. The influences which emanated from this pantheistic world could be benevolent or malevolent with respect to mankind. (Kent 2014, 79) [22]

Again, the somehow blurry concept of animism in the case of the Sámi is closely linked to the concept of space: there are certain spaces within which humans and non-humans can interrelate in such a way that certain places themselves gather experiences and become social actors and beings, and that they are even able to communicate with people, establishing strong links to them (see Helander-Renvall 2010, 49). The reindeer, central to the nomadic way of life, was the principle focus within the religious pantheon and, thus, in spiritual beliefs and religious ceremonies (Kent 2014, 80). In accordance to Proto-Uralic cosmology, the Sámi believed in a world divided into three realms: the upper world (associated with the South and heavens), the Middle (human) world, and, separated by a 'river of blood,' the Lower World (associated with the North, cold sea, underneath).¹⁵ [23]

Nevertheless, the Sámi religion developed as a product of religious contact as well (of course).¹⁶ As Triin Laidoner put it: "[T]he early communities in Scandinavia were not immune to external influences and [...] they were characterized by strong trading relations and the exchange of religious and cultural experiences" (Laidoner 2012, 64). Scholars have little doubt that Sámi cosmology evolved in close interaction with other Eurasian hunting-societies in the post-glacial period (Mulik and Bayliss-Smith 2007, 98). Perhaps the Sámi culture even served as a hub between Norse and Siberian religion and culture (Laidoner 2012, 69; Tolley [24]

15 Vladimir Napolskikh, Proto-Uralic world-picture: A reconstruction, quoted in Mulik and Bayliss-Smith 2007 (2007, 106), see also Mulik and Bayliss-Smith's own reconstruction of the Sámi cosmology (2007, 108).

16 See Pentikäinen (1997, 322): "Seit prähistorischer Zeit befinden sich die Saamen im Kontakt mit vielen verschiedenen Völkern, insbesondere jedoch mit den Finnen, den Russen und den Skandinaviern. Seit dem 13. Jahrhundert hat die christliche Kultur sowohl aus westlicher als auch aus östlicher Richtung auf die Saamen eingewirkt. Folglich ist die Glaubenswelt der Saamen sehr vielschichtig. Es können gemeinarktische, skandinavische, ost- und westkirchlich-christliche und rein saamische Elemente unterschieden werden." ("From prehistorical times onwards, the Saames are in contact with many different peoples, in particular with the Finns, the Russians, and the Scandinavians. Since the thirteenth century, Christian culture from both the West and the East displayed influence on the Saames. As a consequence, their sphere of belief is very multi-layered. One may analytically distinguish commonly arctic, Scandinavian, Western and Eastern Christian and originally Sámi elements.") See also Pettersson (1987, 74): "To summarise the Nordic/Christian influence regarding the *sájvo* ideology, it is highly probable that we are dealing with an old Nordic loan of the concepts of the sacred mountains. The parallels between old Nordic sources on the one hand and Lappish ones on the other are so strong, that one is justified in assuming a Nordic influence. But it is only the external frames which have been borrowed, i.e. the ideas about the sacred mountains. The Lapps have then 'filled in' these frames with their own native, religious content, relating it to Saami ideas about the shaman's guardian spirits and other types of spirits."

2009). But Christianity also displayed an early influence. Early modern notions of pagan Sámi were “simplifications projected on communities with strong elements of Christianity, whether Lutheranism, Catholicism or Russia Orthodoxy, as well as syncretism and indigenous Sámi religion and tradition” (Nordin 2017, 4). As for the ‘hybrid’ forms of religious practice, “[a]lready during the period from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, it seems that the Sámi sacrificial rituals reflected the adoption of religious symbols from outside peoples, in particular Catholic Christians [...]” (Kent 2014, 85). In the Swedish part of Lapland, attempts were made to convert the Sámi at last since 1345, when the archbishop of Uppsala visited the Tornio area. There seems to be a crucial difference in the style of conversion the diverse Sámi peoples were subject to: on the one hand, they had to face an aggressive Lutheran mission¹⁷ performed by the Swedish state and seeking homogeneity (Pentikäinen 1997, 244–45),¹⁸ and on the other, they encountered the more moderate and generous mission of the Orthodox Church (Svestad 2011, 42). Around 1750, the mission of the Sámi, at least on the Kola peninsula, was considered to be completed (Kent 2014, 99). However, to win the Sámi over from their ancient beliefs proved difficult, as they continued to practice the rituals of the ancient religion (see Kjellström 1987). Sometimes, even the descendants of missionaries “imbibed Sámi spiritual beliefs and values,” thus “becoming integrated into Sámi society and culture” (Kent 2014, 94–95). In the course of time, however, the role of the Lutheran pastor, outmaneuvering the *noaidi* (Bäckman 2005, 37), became central to Sámi life, due to the close relation between church and state in Sweden: “the pulpit became the voice of the Crown, as well as that of God” (Kent 2014, 109).

A significant cliché about Sámi rituals and practices is their close association with the darkest forms of black magic. The reputation of the Sámi as mysterious neighbors and mighty sorcerers can be traced back to the first contact of Sámi and the Scandinavian Norse in the Viking period of 800–1000 (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, 109–10).¹⁹ “Along with sorcerers, witches also faced persecution, for the witches of Lapland were considered especially diabolical and their notoriety gave the region’s ill fame as a citadel of witchcraft” (Kent 2014, 106). In the 30 Years’ War, the victories of Gustav Adolf’s army were ascribed to the wheelings and dealings of Sámi witches: “In other words, the devil was at large in Lapland” (Ahlström 1971, XI). This image is of major importance for the general perception of the Sámi in the time of Maupertuis (see Burnett 2010), and he himself exploited it eagerly in his diverse presentations of his expedition. Following their fame as great performers of witchcraft, the Land of the Sámi people is, for both Christian believers and enlightened minds, a place of utmost darkness, to be enlightened either by faith or scientific thinking. [25]

Material Objects: Drum and Stone

As the ancient Sámi religion lacks self-description, its manifest (first-hand) sources are almost exclusively material objects.²⁰ Wooden objects have not survived in great number due to their perishable material, though as wooden idols and sacrificial platforms or sacred trees [26]

17 Beliefs of the Sámi were considered to be blasphemy, leading to executions of the practitioners of Sámi worship (see Olli 2008, 462).

18 Compare Mattson (2014, 320): “For centuries, Lapps provoked anxiety and fascination among Swedish rulers and philosophers from Kant to Rousseau. Yet despite the fame of its Lapp population, Sweden became the model of a homogenous, modern nation-state.”

19 On the possible relation of Sámi shamanism and Norse Mythology, exemplified in the figure of Loki, see Laidoner (2012, 81).

20 On the overall importance of materiality in the study of Sámi religion, see Svestad (2011, 41–42).

with carved human faces they played an important role in Sámi religiosity (Bergman et al. 2008). Research focusses mostly on two kinds of objects, i.e., drums and stones, that—in general—represent the Sámi views of time and space.

One and perhaps “the most emblematic early modern Sámi object” (Nordin and Ojala 2018, 67) and important element of Sámi material religion were the ‘magic’ drums (*guob’dá*) covered with a reindeer skin membrane, an appreciated souvenir of any Lapland expedition and a likely element of early modern curiosity cabinets.²¹ The drums even gained importance at a certain point of time in the ethnographic discussion, due to the Swedish ethnographer Ernst Manker’s two-volume work on *Die lappische Zaubertrommel* (1938 and 1950). These *Noaidi* drums (71 of them have survived in various museums), painted with symbols, are a vital source of information on the Sámi worldview. They are “a primary tool of spirituality and the expression of man’s place in the universe,” used as a shamanic instrument as well as a means of divination (Kent 2014, 201). The use of these drums relates the Sámi’s religious practices to Siberian shamanism.²²

Another element of Sámi religion still visible are sacred sites that are characterized by places marked by significant natural objects called *sieidi*/ *siejdde* sites (on the different types of *sieidi* sites, see Vorren 1987). There are two categories of *sieidi* sites, tree *sieidi* in wooded areas, and stone *sieidi*, predominantly in the arctic tundra (Pentikäinen 1997, 133). These stones mark the most common (Äikäs 2012, 18) form of offering sites closely related to the landscape; other forms are terrain formations or natural structures, such as, for example, the Ukonkivi on the rock island of Ukonsaari. A European visitor from the late eighteenth century, Giuseppe Acerbi, describes these sites as follows: “Several mountains and a number of rocks were esteemed by the Laplanders as sacred, and held in great veneration. They are distinguished by the general name of *Passe-warek*, which means *holy places*, and were formerly places of sacrifice and religious worship” (quoted in Kent 2014, 84). The *sieidi* sites usually consist of natural objects, such as stones, that are unshaped by human hands, sometimes interpreted as petrified living beings (Kleppe and Mulk 2006, 368). At these sites, combining religious ideas and economic functions, offerings (for example reindeer antlers and bones) were made, above all in order to ensure future hunting success (Salmi, Äikäs, and Lipkin 2011, 213 and 222). There seemed to be a reciprocal relationship between humans and the *sieidi*, the offerings being interpreted as gifts (or return of gifts) and not as sacrifices (Äikäs 2012, 18). An important element of the meaning of the *sieidi* sites seems to be its social function, manifested in their public character as open and well-known (Bergman et al. 2008, 19), thus ensuring remembrance and continuity among the Sámi (Salmi, Äikäs, and Lipkin 2011, 225). Ritualistic customs at the *sieidi* sites seem to have been highly personal and varied (Loeffler 2015, 74).²³ The *sieidi* formed integral regional networks (*vuobme*) that, as commonly shared (religious) knowledge, defined the space of movement of the prevailing related Sámi families (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, 101). During their period of use, i.e., from at least around 540

21 On the fascination of ‘Western’ visitors with the shaman’s drums, see Happel (2017, 200).

22 “Die Trommel besaß also eine [...] zentrale und komplexe Bedeutung [...]: Sie bildete den kosmischen Raum ab, in dem der Schamane sich bewegte, half ihm, sich in die dazu erforderliche Trance zu versetzen, rief seine Geister zusammen und diente ihnen wie ihm als abwehrsicheres Boot, Reittier und Transportmittel auf ihren Reisen durch die jenseitige Welt.” (“The drum had a central and complex meaning. It represented the cosmic space the Shaman dwelt in, it helped him to achieve the trance required to get there, it called together his Spirits, and served them and him as a secure boat, mount, and means of transport on their journeys through the world beyond.”) (Müller 2010, 78)

23 Accordingly, Loeffler concludes that “Sámi religion was personal” (2015, 75).

C.E. to the present (Salmi et al. 2018, 477 and 482), the *sieidi* are considered to be “a focal point of many north/south encounters” (Äikäs and Salmi 2015, 90).

Understandably, the *sieidi* sides, and the natural stones in particular, were a constant stumbling block for the Christian mission (Pentikäinen 1997, 253). After 1700, many sacred sites of the Sámi were desecrated by priests and fell out of use and into oblivion (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, 110), but some (as a sacred landscape) were also incorporated into Christian practices of worship as churches were built near the old *sieidi* sites (Äikäs and Salmi 2015, 103). [29]

Rock art, i.e., engravings and stone paintings,²⁴ is a decisive element of *sieidi* sacred places. They stress and mark the (religious) anomaly, or rather liminal meaning, of the space in question (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, 118). Petroglyphs (rock engravings) express “aesthetic and religious aspirations of the Sámi” and are found throughout the Sámi homeland (Kent 2014, 6–7). One special form of engravings will become important in the following. [30]

The Situation of Contact: The Expedition to Lapland in Reports

As the public interest in the Lapland expedition was immense (Hecht 1999, 81), its participants wasted no time publishing their prevailing results and reports of the journey. This is all the more important for Maupertuis himself, for whom the report of his adventure became an essential and even defining model of his further biography. He published his report in the year after his return to France: *La Figure de la Terre* (1738). The expedition, and in particular the reports on it, established a master narrative of his life; and throughout his later publications he frequently referred back to his Polar enterprise, replenishing his other works with the reminder of the hardships and successes of his daring adventure, thus in turn closely connecting his new works to his image as a daring and explorative mind.²⁵ In the following, I shall examine the prevailing sources of the expedition as the expressions of the situation of religious contact described. [31]

Maupertuis

Written Texts

Maupertuis addressed a general public with the results of his journey in a text titled *Relation du voyage fait par ordre du Roi au cercle polaire, pour déterminer la figure de la Terre*. Here, he successfully aims at combining different genres of writing, i.e., sober scientific report and exciting travel literature. [32]

For reasons of effect, to a certain extent Maupertuis also religifies a practical question of science, thus making it a pivotal question that decided on the further proceedings of the scientific community itself in general and of the *Académie* in particular (Wagner 2004, 65). His expedition was to decide on a fundamental question of physics itself: Descartes or Newton (Wagner 2004, 62)? After all, this question also touched matters of national pride, i.e., French or English domination of physics. Therefore, Maupertuis ‘conversion’ to Newton since his sojourn at London and the Royal Society in 1729 well deserved that name as he sides with the English against ‘French’ Cartesianism. Well-acknowledged by the *Encyclopédie*, Maupertuis [33]

24 Joy (2017) claims a close relation of rock paintings and the paintings on drums.

25 Terrall discerns the voyage as “the keystone of his life, a defining moment for his persona as a man of science” (Terrall 2002, 88).

was the first Frenchman to confess his Newtonism in public with his *Discours sur les différentes figures des astres* (published in 1732, see Wagner 2004, 51–52).

In his self-description, Maupertuis conspicuously stresses the hardships he endured to achieve his aim. This is not only done to enhance his reputation as a heroic scientist. Maupertuis goes one step further, for he does so by using well-known *topoi* of religion. Perhaps alluding to the region's bad reputation as a center of black magic, he even introduces the literary *topos* of the profound warning at the beginning of an outstanding adventure; in his case, the warning is uttered by the King of Sweden, Frederik I himself, who describes the journey to this remote part of his kingdom as so 'terrible' that he would rather relive one of his many horrible battles than go there.²⁶ In a letter written in 1736, Maupertuis characterizes the inhabitants of the region accordingly: "Tout le monde est bien persuadé en Suède qu'ils ont un fréquent commerce avec le Diable; je crois bien que si le Diable parlé à quelqu'un, c'est à des gens faits comme ceux-là."²⁷ [34]

Accordingly, to gain knowledge, he goes both into a desert (of ice) (Wagner 2004, 81) and (at least in winter) into utmost darkness, plagued by myriads of blood-sucking gnats, in sum: deep into a land of terror (2004, 86). The implicit allusions to Christ's travel with the devil are by no means arbitrary. To a certain extent, they are even expected by the readers, given the descriptions of other journeys to Lapland. Maupertuis' description of the hardships the traveler encounters in the country are well-affirmed by Linnaeus (Carl von Linné), who, in his famed *Iter Lapponicum*, facing the swamps and the mosquitos of the region, wrote, "A priest cannot describe hell in such a way that this country here would not be worse" (1987, 49). Moreover, with regard to one special, spectacular natural phenomenon, the *aurora borealis*, even Maupertuis himself is nearly ready to accept the superstitions of the common people, such as interpreting it as fighting armies in the sky (see Wagner 2004, 87). [35]

While religious topics used for self-description and self-promotion in Maupertuis' report on the expedition are very frequent, the amount of information on the Sámi peoples and their religious beliefs to be found in his books turns out to be a disappointment. The material is sparse, and, if mentioned, primarily used to add picturesque detail to an exciting narrative, i.e., without any systematic claim. [36]

The relevance of space in Sámi beliefs, however, was not unnoticed by Maupertuis, for he does mention the guardian spirits of certain places. Maupertuis calls them *haltios*. He describes the *Niemi* mountain (that was crucial both for scientific triangulation and, as a magic mountain, for indigenous religion) mixing his scientific report with mythical elements of both *les gens du pays* and Western European tales.²⁸ [37]

26 See Outhier (1754, 21): "[I]l dit à M. de Maupertuis que nous allions faire un terrible Voyage; que quoiqu'il eût été dans de sanglantes batailles, il aimeroit mieux aller encore à la plus cruelle de toutes, que de faire le Voyage que nous entreprenions [...]."

27 The Letter from September 20, 1736, published in the *Bibliothèque germanique*, is quoted in Pekonen (2010, 215): "Every Swede is well convinced that they have frequent dealings with the devil; I do quite believe that if the devil were to talk with somebody, it would be to people of their kind."

28 "Cette montagne, que les lacs qui l'environnent, et toutes les difficultés qu'il fallait vaincre pour y parvenir, faisaient ressembler aux lieux enchantés des fables, serait charmante partout ailleurs qu'en Laponie: on trouve d'un côté un bois clair dont le terrain est aussi uni que les allées d'un jardin; les arbres n'empêchent point de se promener, ni de voir un beau lac qui baigne le pied de la montagne; d'un autre côté on trouve des salles et des cabinets qui paraissent taillés dans le roc, et auxquels il ne manqué que le toit: ces rochers sont si perpendiculaires à l'horizon, si élevés et si unis, qu'ils paraissent plutôt des murs commences pour des palais, que l'ouvrage de la nature. Nous vîmes là plusieurs fois s'élever du lac ces vapeurs que les gens du pays appellent haltios, et qu'ils prennent pour des esprits auxquels est commise la garde des montagnes: celle-ci était formidable par les ours qui s'y devaient trouver; cependant nous n'y en vîmes aucun, et elle avait plus l'air d'une montagne habitée par les fées et par les génies, que par les ours." ("This mountain—

Though in some passages Maupertuis seems unable to escape the fascination of the landscape—“M. de Maupertuis fut enchanté de la Montagne de Niemi”, states Outhier (1754, 83)— in his various remarks on the ‘Laplanders’ in his other writings, he is, of course, far from being politically correct. “Contrasting them with his own sense of humanity and culture, he viewed them as a degenerate race made crude and short in stature by the rigidity of the climate, living like beasts in the forests, lacking settlement, and ‘continuously wandering in the deserts’” (Naum 2016, 497). Additionally, Maupertuis employs mythical elements of the encounter of (civilized) Europeans and (primitive) indigenous people in his report, i.e., above all the latter’s supposed interpretation of scientific practices as religion: [38]

Ils ont bien de la peine à deviner ce que c’est qu’un grand instrument que nous allons toujours portant avec nous, auquel nous bâtissons des temples sur les montagnes, où quelqu’un veille toujours auprès de lui chaque nuit, auquel nous n’osons presque toucher, et duquel nous n’approchons qu’en tremblant et souvent à genoux. Tout ce que pensent sur cela les plus sensés, c’est que c’est quelque divinité que nous adorons; mais pour les esprits forts, ils nous croient des fous.²⁹ (Maupertuis 2014, 116) [39]

One might add that the supposed veneration on the mountaintop could be in accord with the Sámi belief in sacred places and their guardian spirits. [40]

The Relation d’un voyage au font de la Lapponie septentrionale

For readers interested in the typology of contact situations, another text is of major importance: Maupertuis’ travel anecdote *Relation d’un voyage au font de la Lapponie septentrionale pour trouver un ancien monument*. Here, Maupertuis reports on a journey to the Torne Lappmark in April 1737 that he made the company of the Swedish astronomer Andres Celsius (1701–1744). The presence of Celsius was vital, for he, apart from his capacities as an astronomer, also commanded a profound knowledge of Northern languages and runic inscriptions, i.e., capacities Maupertuis considered to be useful for their task that was centered around a remarkable stone. As stone monuments (*sieidi* sites) are a decisive element of Sámi religiosity, this encounter might prove to be instructive. [41]

In his *Lettre sur le progress des sciences*, Maupertuis counts among the three ‘Chimeras of science,’ which one should be forbidden to waste time on, above all *la pierre philosophe* (the others being *la quadrature de cercle* and the *movement perpétuel*) (Maupertuis 1974, II:431). No wonder, then, that the report of the presence of one manifestation of the philosopher’s [42]

the surrounding lakes, and all the difficulties that had to be overcome to get there made it look like the enchanted places of fables—would be charming anywhere else than in Lapland: On the one hand, there is a light wood whose terrain is as ordered as the paths of a garden; the trees do not prevent one from strolling, nor from seeing a beautiful lake bathing the foot of the mountain; on the other hand, there are rooms and cabinets that seem to be carved out of the rock, and to which only the roof is missing: these rocks are so perpendicular to the horizon, so high and so plain, that they seem more like walls for palaces than the work of nature. Several times, we saw there, rising from the lake, those particular vapors which the locals call *haltios*, and which they take for spirits committed to guard the mountains: this one was formidable due to the bears which can be found there; however, we saw none, and it had more the air of a mountain inhabited by fairies and by geniuses than by bears.” (Maupertuis 1974, III:118–119)

29 “They had great difficulties in divining what this great instrument was that we took everywhere with us, to which we built temples on the mountaintops, where someone watched over it every night, which we hardly dared to touch, and which we never approached without trembling and often on our knees. The most sensible among them think it is some divinity that we worship, but the freethinkers simply think we are crazy” (translation in Terrall 2002, 127).

stone during his time in Lapland aroused Maupertuis' interest. He starts his *Relation* with the following words that deserve a close reading:

Pendant que nous étions à *Pello*, où se termine l'arc du méridien que nous avons mesuré, les Finnois & les Lapons nous parlèrent souvent d'un monument, qu'ils regardent comme la merveille de leur pays, & dans lequel ils croient qu'est renfermée la science de toutes les choses qu'ils ignorent.³⁰ (Maupertuis 1974, III:179) [43]

This short introduction sets the theme for the following report. Teasing the attention of the reader eager to gain knowledge with the prospect of a secret and all-compassing science, Maupertuis depicts his anecdote as an encounter of a special sort. Not only does Maupertuis remind the reader of his great expedition (with him as the heroic leader), but in these lines he also explicitly juxtaposes his own scientific approach (referring to his measuring task) and the knowledge manifested in a monument that later on turns out to be a natural stone. It is not by chance that the encounter with the report on this stone, representing (or rather, inclosing) the unknown knowledge of the indigenous people, takes place on a borderline (at the village of Pello) that symbolizes the borderline between the knowledge of science and the miraculous and wonderful knowledge of the Finns and 'Laplanders' that can only be considered to be a miracle. Of course, at once, Maupertuis is willing and able to cross the border and explore the kind of knowledge supposedly to be found in the monument.³¹ Again, the dangers and hardships of the journey to the monument, located in the very north and situated in a vast forest, are stressed: it is, above all, the danger to get lost in a frozen desert devoid of visible roads without "hope to find shelter/asylum (*asyle*)" in almost perpetual darkness. About 130 km had to be mastered in a *pulkas*, a traditional sledge in boat-shape (allowing Maupertuis to tacitly associate himself with the seafaring explorers). Boats were used by the Sámi as potent metaphors for transfer, transporting souls to the Underworld and back (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, 106). To justify his daring adventure, Maupertuis lists the uselessness of a period of free time, the curiosity "to penetrate right into the center of Lapland," the hope to see a unique item, and, finally, the fact that they were already used to pain and danger (Maupertuis 1974, III:180). It is, thus, in many regards a journey into the heart of darkness. Additionally, the 'Laplanders' accompanying the two travelers Maupertuis and Celsius provided them with their rich treasure of miraculous stories, not least discomfiting stories of travelers who were thrown into the lakes by mighty storms together with their sledges and reindeers (Maupertuis 1974, III:182–83). [44]

Quite in accord with the desert-like region without proper points of orientation, as they reached their destination the monument was buried in the snow, and even the 'Laplanders' had considerable difficulties finding it. In fact, they needed the help and the instruction of Maupertuis, who (in symbolic accordance with the torch of his enlightened mind) ordered a great fire to be lit to melt the snowy veil away and, by doing so, to expose the supposed marvelous item, said to contain unknown knowledge and great secrets, to the clarifying light [45]

30 "At Pello, where the meridian circle we measured is determined, the Finns and Laplanders often told us about a monument that they regarded as the miracle of their country and in which, as they believed, all the knowledge they were ignorant of is contained." On the enlightenment attitude towards the Finns as a "semi-civilization," see Halmesvirta (2012, 93).

31 Referring to older theories in the study of religion, Pekonen identifies the three classical levels of a *rite de passage* in the sense of Arnold van Gennep in Maupertuis' report: separation, liminality, and reincorporation (Pekonen 2010, 234–35).

of the sun: “Je fis ôter la neige, & allumer un grand feu pour fonder le reste, afin que nous pussions bien voir cette prétendue merveille” (Maupertuis 1974, III:189).³²

After the enlightening action was performed, the object was exposed to their examination. [46]
It could not claim significance by means of size, and its outward appearance left a somewhat ambiguous impression. Maupertuis describes it as follows:

’C’est une pierre, dont une partie de forme irréguliere sort de terre de la hauteur d’un pied & demi, & a environ trois pieds de long. [...] Au bas [...] sont quelques caracteres plus grands. Malgré toutes les marques que ces traits semblent donner d’avoir été graves avec le fer, je n’oserois assurer s’ils sont l’ouvrage des hommes ou le jeu de la Nature.³³ (Maupertuis 1974, III:189–190) [47]

What they found was the Stone of Käymjärvi (or Vinsavaara),³⁴ a possible *sieidi* site.³⁵ [48]
It was first reported by no one less than Olof Rudbeck himself in his *Atlantica* (containing the Gothicist myth of Swedish dominance).³⁶ It is no more than 52,5 cm high and 105 cm wide and seems to be broken into three parts. As such, the site seems to be an example of Victor Turner’s assertion about liminal spaces that are “extremely rich in in cosmological meaning, though often misleadingly simple in outward form. The symbolic vehicles may be unimpressive, but the messages they convey are highly complex” (Turner 1974, 196). Perhaps the stone, being held in esteem by the Sámi,³⁷ as Maupertuis reports, is in itself in fact an expression of a contact situation—if the inscriptions on it can be related to the runic Viking culture.

In any case, the stone was significant for the Sámi tradition in the time of Maupertuis’ [49]
expedition, as he is not reluctant to relate: “Si l’on consulte la tradition du pays, tous les Lapons assurent que ces caracteres sont une inscription fort ancienne, qui contient de grands secrets [...]” (Maupertuis 1974, III:190–191).³⁸

Moreover, that the stone in fact conveys highly complex messages holds true for the Sámi [50]
and the explorers alike. Not content with the social function of remembrance and continuity the sites have for the Sámi, Maupertuis investigates the meaning of the stone. After having described the object in great detail, Maupertuis scrutinizes the inscription resembling the

32 “I had the snow removed and made a great fire for melting the rest away; after that we were able to see that alleged miracle well.”

33 “It is a stone, part of which is irregularly shaped and comes out of the ground about a foot and a half high, and about three feet long. At the bottom [...] are some larger characters. In spite of all the marks that these lines seem to give of having been graved with iron, I dare not say whether they are the work of men or the whim of nature.”

34 On the stone, see the intense article by Herva et al. (2018). I owe the reference to this article to Patrick Krüger (Bochum).

35 Pekonen (2010, 223 and 229), supports the possibility. Compare also Herva et al. (2018, 6), who are more skeptical but also do not exclude the possibility of the stone in fact being a Sámi *sieidi* site.

36 On Rudbeck’s Gothicism, compare Neville (2009, 218–19). Herva et al. (2018, 2), describe Rudbeck’s influence on the reputation of the stone as follows: “Rudbeck acknowledged the monument in the second volume of *Atlantica*, albeit only vaguely, but this nonetheless gave a birth to a half-mythical ancient monument which has since continued to provoke the imagination for over 300 years [...]”

37 The stories concerning the stone the Sámi in Maupertuis’ report tell might be a good example of the fact that the prevailing “authenticity of the place seems to lie in the stories and current beliefs more than in a historical continuity or any specifically sacred aspects of the topography or nature it is situated in,” as elaborated by Aikäs and Spangen (2016).

38 “If one consults the tradition of the land, all Laplanders affirm that the marks are a very old inscription that contains great secrets.”

runic alphabet.³⁹ Regarding the characters, he is not sure if they are a work of men or rather *le jeu de la Nature* (Maupertuis 1974, III:189–90).⁴⁰ Additionally, even if they were the work of men, he is not sure if the characters mean anything at all, for even Celsius could not read them and found no resemblance to other runes. “Mais M. Celsius, fort savant dans la langue runique, ne peut lire ces caracteres, & les trouva différens de ceux de toutes les inscriptions qui subsistent en Suede [...]” (Maupertuis 1974, III:191).⁴¹

The ‘Laplanders,’ however, are quite positive that the characters are an inscription from very long ago and that they contain great secrets—which is skeptically commented on by Maupertuis when he asks about the significance an assertion of people could possibly have who do not know their own age and are ignorant even about who their own mothers were (see Maupertuis 1974, III:191). Accordingly, Maupertuis describes an encounter of traditions in his report and opposes two forms of knowledge about the stone, naturally to the disadvantage of Sámi knowledge. Not content with denouncing the expertise of the ‘Laplanders’ (knowledge about the unknown) on the possible meaning of the stone, Maupertuis then confronts the reader with his own speculation about the knowledge that might be manifested in it. If the stone really bears an inscription, Maupertuis concludes, it could be the oldest of the universe.⁴² Because the stone is situated in a region uninhabited by men, it must have been inscribed in times when there was a different climate in the region, possibly due to a change of the axis of the Earth itself. Reminding the reader of the phenomenon of fossils proving the change of Earth’s surface, Maupertuis, interestingly enough, refers to Scripture (*l’histoire sacrée*) and its account of the drowning of the biggest mountains into the sea (Maupertuis 1974, III:196). Transferring the theory of the stone to his own scientific endeavor, Maupertuis then speculates about an inscription of his own expedition to be found in a far future when the surface has again changed, leaving the inscription and its content incomprehensible, an unknown knowledge for a future generation of man.⁴³

[51]

Une inscription qui contiendra l’histoire de l’opération que nous étions allés faire dans ces pays, sera peut-être un jour quelque chose d’aussi obscure que L’est celle-ci: & si toutes les Sciences étoient perdues, qui pourroit alors découvrir, qui pourroit imaginer, qu’un tel monument fût l’ouvrage des François; & que ce qu’on y verroit grave fût la mesure des degrés de la Terre, & la détermination de sa figure?⁴⁴ (Maupertuis 1974, III:196)

[52]

In both cases, the reader is confronted with an interesting example of the paradoxical knowl-

[53]

39 On the ideological significance of runic writing, see Gothicist ideas: “Rudbeck asserted that runes comprised the most ancient writing system in the world, one from which the Greek alphabet was derived [...]” (Herva et al. 2018, 7).

40 In fact, Herva et al. (2018) consider the lines to be of natural origin.

41 “However, M. Celsius, who is very learned in runic language, could not read these marks and found them different from all inscriptions that exist in Sweden.”

42 In his *Dissertation sur les différens moyens dont les hommes se sont servis pour exprimer leurs idées*, Maupertuis promotes the theory of one original universal scripture that was, as it is related to human gestures, understood by every people. Remains of this scripture, according to him, can be found with ‘civilized’ peoples as well as with ‘savage’ ones (Maupertuis 1974, III:445–446).

43 On the philosophical implications of this conclusion (with regard to Leibniz’ thinking), see Hecht (1999, 91). To Hecht, Maupertuis introduces the metaphor of ruin into philosophical discourse, showing the irreversibility of events and the possibility of an irretrievable loss of knowledge that at the same time opens space for the emergence of novelty.

44 “An inscription that will contain the history of the operation that we went to in these countries will perhaps one day be as obscure as this one is: If all the sciences are lost, who could then discover, who could imagine,

edge of the unknown. For the Sámi, the stone and the inscriptions on it represent this knowledge as a petrified unknown, or rather unknowable knowledge. Maupertuis, in turn, having dismissed the Sámi interpretation of the stone for reasons of this people's 'non-enlightened' state of mind, speculates about such a representation in future times that would manifest as unknowable knowledge as well. Accordingly, the report describes possible ways of dealing with a transcendence-immanence distinction that, on the one hand, leaves the unknowable unknown, thus separating regions of knowledge, and on the other, tries to explain the fact that things are considered to be unknowable, thus transferring knowledge to another region.

However, the contact occurring here between enlightenment science and the Sámi religion is facilitated by the blank space that is represented by the unknown knowledge of the (*sieidi*) stone. This blank space allows the connection of Enlightenment's modes of explanation that are religified by Maupertuis' reports, on the one hand, and by the religious telos of his philosophy to a religious phenomenon of the indigenous people, on the other. As for a typology of contact, Maupertuis adapts Sámi knowledge and transfers it to his own frame of explanation and reference.

[54]

The Image

Another key source for the contact situation of Enlightenment and the Sámi religion is, in the case of Maupertuis, not a written text but rather an image (see figure 1). It was painted in 1739 by Robert Tournières, who had painted the Maupertuis family 25 years earlier. The painting was displayed in the Louvre palace in 1741 and appeared as the frontispiece to Maupertuis' collected works. As such, the portrait is a piece of propaganda, contributing to the discussion about the man and his work.

[55]

Here, the particular manner of how Maupertuis is portrayed is most conspicuous: "It was highly unusual to depict a man of science so elaborately, especially in a setting other than his study" (Terrall 2002, 161). The man shown in the picture ostensibly displays the insignia of his scientific triumph. With one hand, he firmly presses on the north pole of a terrestrial globe, thus flattening the earth. The other hand, in a gesture that is rather conventional for generals or conquerors, he points at a landscape of frozen mountains with observation points at the top.

[56]

There are many more political and social elements (intensely analyzed by Maupertuis' biographer Mary Terrall) present in the portrait. In the following, I will concentrate on the religious or religioid ones, and those important to a type of contact situation the picture expresses. The religioid, in the sense of sociologist Georg Simmel, is conceptually connected to religion proper insofar as it has the potential to develop into religion but does not necessarily have to develop into that specific direction (on this, see Tyrell 2018).

[57]

First, there is the picture within the picture, depicting a fur-clad traveler in a reindeer sledge. At least since Johann Schefferus' *Lapponia* (1673), the Sámi equipage became an emblematic motif of the country and Sámi life (Nordin and Ojala 2018, 74). The sketch of the boat-like reindeer sledge is therefore not only a folkloristic element, but also, in accordance with the Sámi interpretation of boats (sledges), a symbol for a transfer or transgression process (keeping in mind that *pulkas* were also used as coffins by the Sámi) (Svestad 2011, 46). To convey his (triumphant) scientific message, Maupertuis makes use of these elements of the

[58]

that such a monument was the work of the French; that what one sees there was the measure of the degrees of the Earth, and the determination of its figure?"



Figure 1 Robert Tournières: Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1740). Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten, GK I 10166. Licence: CC-0. Source: [Wikimedia](#).

Sámi tradition. Given the central religious significance of the reindeer to the Sámi, the fact that Maupertuis wears an elaborated reindeer garment (the reindeer is present several times), is perhaps an important element of the message; for Maupertuis again uses an iconic element of Sámi religiosity in order to achieve his overall aim of presenting himself as the hero of science. Sámi ‘superstition’ is, thus, instrumentalized in order to gain reliable knowledge and to present himself as the daring apostle of Newtonian physics.

A second significant element is the directing gesture that divides the painting into two parts, i.e., a dark and a light one, and at the same time transgresses the division. Thus, the space represented in the image is a directed space. This is, of course, a manifestation of the enlightening processes and a visualization of the *per aspera ad astra* idea (the frozen lands showing the hardships of the endeavor). But Maupertuis quite obviously also takes advantage of the traditional cliché that the inhabitants of the North, above all Sámi shamans, command great power in witchcraft. His journey is performed to lead from utmost darkness to brightest light, showing Lapland as it is and as proof of scientific truth (of Newtonian theory). [59]

But the whole setting of the picture also manifests another zone of transgression or an interface, using another axis (from foreground to background) as Maupertuis is standing in a window, gesturing both to the scene behind him and directing the view from darkness to light: Maupertuis brings light to the world (the general public he turns to) by wrestling it from dire and dark conditions. [60]

However, these conditions are not entirely denounced as they provide the ‘lightbringer’ with a distinctive mark easily recognized. As it becomes clear from the garment he is depicted in, Maupertuis wants to be remembered as the ‘hero-philosopher’ who was with the Sámi. To achieve his aim, Maupertuis (as Linnaeus before him) makes use of a form of cultural appropriation, i.e., colonial masquerade, in dressing in a Sámi reindeer coat and cap (Nordin 2017, 18). To achieve his aim, Maupertuis utilizes what he finds useful among the indigenous people, at the same time appropriating them for his purpose. In his letters, he even ironically toyed with the idea of becoming naturalized as a ‘Lapp’: “Si je pouvais chasser du mien les chimères des pays méridionaux, je pourrais être le plus heureux des Lapons du monde“ (Maupertuis 2014, 115).⁴⁵ [61]

Outhier

There are other texts that may supplement elements to Maupertuis’ account. Above all, there is the work of another member of the expedition, published shortly after the debate on Maupertuis’ journey. However, high expectations to gain knowledge about the ancient Sámi religion are equally disappointed, though the account is written by a professional of religion. [62]

Of Réginald Outhier’s (1694–1774) religiosity there can be no doubt (as Osmo Pekonen concludes shrewdly from his profession), as he is both a priest and a Catholic (Pekonen 2010, 80). However, more importantly, apart from being an *abbé* and close collaborator of an archbishop, Outhier was also a well-known scientist and a corresponding member of the Academy. In fact, posterity knows more about his scientific achievements than about his theological or religious views. Osmo Pekonen describes him as a “prêtre-savant scrupuleux,” “ni mondain ni dévot” (“conscientious learned priest neither worldly nor sanctimonious”) and as a moderate anti-Jansénist (2010, 93). [63]

Having designed celestial globes, Outhier also had considerable experience in the art of [64]

45 “If I could chase away the bad dreams of the southern countries from my mind, I would be the happiest ‘Lapp’ in the world.”

surveying and mapmaking (he published, for example, a topographical map of the diocese of Bayeux in 1736). It was this capacity that made him a member of the expedition. In 1744, he published his account of the expedition to Lapland, titled *Journal d'un voyage au Nord fait en 1736&1737*. Outhier, dispensing himself from theological considerations, wrote a journal as an exact travel account, describing the route, the locations, and the measurements performed in great detail, and he also showed considerable interest in the people the expedition encountered. Florian Wagner describes the *Journal* as being “remarkably plain,” i.e., as aiming at (positivistic) authenticity by being free of polemics against the scientific opponents of the endeavor (Wagner 2004, 151). To Pekonen, Outhier turns out to be a precursor of a scientific discipline not yet developed ,i.e., ethnography, in his journal (Pekonen 2010, 95).

Outhier’s *Journal* is written to help Maupertuis in the polemics surrounding the expedition [65] and confirms the latter’s report both with regard to content and stylistically. The *Journal* thus profoundly contributes to the religification of Maupertuis’ endeavor. Outhier describes the members of the expedition, and above all its leader, as scientific heroes on the search for the truth (that is no longer the privilege of the [religious] mind). In his preface, Outhier writes programmatically:

On y verra que la passion des sciences rend les hommes capables de grandes entreprises; & qu’elle pourrait, comme la gloire, avoir ses héros. Le détail exact de nos observations apprendra avec quel scrupule on traite aujourd’hui la recherche de la vérité [...].⁴⁶ (Outhier 1754, Preface) [66]

Regarding the religious contact between the mainly Catholic members of the expedition and the Lutheran environment in Sweden and Finland, Outhier tends to minimize the differences between the ceremonies of the two confessions, though at Tornio, he well recognizes the “Mosaïque culturelle” as the reason for religious tolerance between Lutherans, Catholics, and Orthodox (Pekonen 2010, 185). Pekonen also argues optimistically that the interest in the scientific outcome of the expedition seems to have prevented possible theological debates and built a solid ground for an ecumenical atmosphere in the time (2010, 199). [67]

Sadly enough, the focus on scientific results prevented a closer examination of local beliefs among the Sámi. Outhier, as a religious professional, is—in accordance with the leader of the expedition—remarkably silent about the Sámi religion (Pekonen 2010, 219). Moreover, he seems to be much less enthusiastic about his observations than Maupertuis himself. Outhier also relates an encounter with a *Haltios*, a guardian spirit of a certain place. He merely mentions that the mists arising from the lakes are considered to be spirits, one of whom acts malevolently against humans, capsizing boats and devouring the unfortunate passengers. In contrast to Maupertuis, he describes them quite soberly: “Nous vîmes dans ces Lacs, vers le Sud, s’élever des vapeurs, que quelques-uns de habitants prennent pour des esprits, & nomment *Haltios*. Les soldats qui nous servaient des Matelots & d’Ouvriers n’étaient pas si crédules” (Outhier 1754, 83).⁴⁷ He also describes some *sieidi* sites, considering them to be “rochers remarquables” (Outhier 1754, 80), among them the stone of Käymäjärvi (Pekonen 2010, 222). [68]

46 “We will see that the passion for science makes men capable of great deeds; and that it could, like glory, have its heroes. The exact details of our observations will show how scrupulous we are in our search for truth today.”

47 “We saw in these lakes, towards the south, rising vapors, which some of the inhabitants take for spirits and named *Haltios*. The soldiers who served us as sailors and laborers were not so gullible.”

Celsius

Hailing from a family of eminent Swedish mathematicians and astronomers, in 1730, Anders Celsius (1701–1744) was appointed professor of astronomy at Uppsala University. From 1732 onwards, Celsius travelled to the major centers of astronomy in Europe, buying astronomical instruments but also networking with other astronomers. During his trip to Paris in 1734, he established contact with Maupertuis and perhaps convinced him to perform the measurements in Tornio area (see Stempels 2011, 183). [69]

Celsius was well-acquainted with the future area of measurement. He had been informed on Lapland previously in a letter by Linné from 1733.⁴⁸ In 1733, Celsius published a scientific monograph on the aurora borealis, *Observationes de Lumine Boreali ab A. MDCCXXVI ad MDCCXXXII partim ad se, partim ad aliis, in Suecia habitas*. In contrast to Maupertuis' later quasi-religious fascination about it, he was actually the first to realize that the phenomenon had magnetic causes due to changes in the Earth's magnetic field. His joining the expedition in 1736 had profound impact on the future of astronomy in Uppsala. Having gained international recognition because of his participation, he managed to raise funds for the building of a new observatory that was finished in 1741 (Stempels 2011, 184). [70]

Celsius was deeply involved in the discussion on the shape of the earth and the dispute about the results of the expedition. Still in Pello, he published a monograph on the significance of determining the shape, *Ett brief till N.N. om jordens figure* (1736). The ideological struggle, however, did not leave him indifferent and he joined it with a religious furor. Andres Celsius published his *De observationibus pro figura telluris determinanda in Gallia habitis* in 1738. In his text, Celsius praises the *vir immortalis D. Isaacus Newtonus* (Celsius 1738, 2) before he violently attacks the Cassinis as the main scientific opponents of findings of the journey and rebuts their allegations systematically. In his considerations, however, he finds time to refer to the 'Laplanders' and their belief in spirits, thus managing to highlight the expedition's scientific accuracy by juxtaposing it to indigenous beliefs (Celsius 1738, 4). [71]

In a letter to the Royal Society, written in Tornio and dated April 9, 1737, Celsius, stressing the troublesome and dangerous journey in a 'small sledge made like a boat,' summarizes the expedition to the stone of Käymjärvi laconically as follows: "Upon our leaning Pello, I went nine Swedish miles farther North, to see a Monument, which is said to contain an Inscription in unknown characters. [...] I found the Stone, with some lines cut into it, which to me seem to have no Signification" (Pekonen 2010, 229). [72]

To the objective scientist, the lines on the stone, which the 'Laplanders' considered to convey unknown secrets, were not significant, though the stone itself might be 'remarkable.' Despite the fact that both Outhier and Celsius were somewhat less religiously engaged precisely as the scientists they presented themselves to be in their publications, they contributed to the situation of religious contact by opposing proper scientific work with unfounded ideas. In Maupertuis' reports, these elements are employed as well, but at the same time they are combined with certain religious allusions concerning the journey itself and the material provided by the findings of the expedition. [73]

Apostles and Argonauts: Descriptions by Enlightenment Thinkers

The religification of the material provided by the expedition proved to be as attractive as the [74]

48 Carl Linnaeus to Anders Celsius, 4 January 1733. The Linnaean Correspondence. Letter L 0023. At: <http://linnaeus.c18.net/> (accessed August 1, 2018).

results themselves. Regarding the expedition's descriptions by the Enlightenment matadors, the frequent use of religious or mythological concepts and notions is conspicuous. Obviously, the enlightenment thinkers considered it adequate to put their praise of the journey and its leader into religious language. Of course, this way of description is, to a certain extent, ironic. But it also exemplifies what was at stake within the Enlightenment movement. Maupertuis' journey to the Polar region was not least a question of belief. The grand old man of Enlightenment, Fontenelle, for example, wondered about the hardships of the journey into a wild and inaccessible land and asked, "And what glory must not redound to the new Argonauts?" (quoted in Terrall 2002, 92). Émilie du Châtelet (1706–1749), for instance, related the expedition to a religious description of the struggle in physics in one of her letters:

In this country, the Newtonians are regarded as heretics. Without doubt you know about the return of Monsieur de Maupertuis; the exactness and the beauty of his enterprises surpass even his own hopes. The pains he has suffered are worthy of Charles XII. [...] The old academy has risen against him, Monsieur de Cassini and the Jesuits [...] are reunited.⁴⁹

[75]

A religious war emerged due to the rise of a new way of thinking, comparable to the struggle of old and new (Protestant) belief. But it was Voltaire himself (who is alluded to in this letter) who glorified the expedition by means of an outright apology that strongly relied on religious and mythological allusions. Ironically meant or not, he turned Maupertuis into a crusader or a priest of the enthusiastically celebrated 'sect' of Newtonians (Terrall 2002, 83). After Maupertuis had convinced him about the truth of Newtonian physics, Voltaire wrote him a letter dated to November 15, 1732 in a manner that leaves little doubt about the significance of Maupertuis' revelations to his own thinking: "Your first letter baptized me in the Newtonian religion, your second gave me my confirmation. I thank you for your sacraments."⁵⁰ And: "I am your proselyte and do my profession of faith in your hands."⁵¹ Voltaire, having read Maupertuis' books on Newtonian physics in the way a believer reads the Gospel,⁵² and having published his own *Elements of Newton's philosophy* in 1738, was at this point in time in full accordance with the Newtonian Maupertuis and joined the public debate about the results of the expedition with the following lines, adapting Maupertuis' self-description and poetically leading it to its (religious) consequences, i.e., denoting and praising a religious hero of the highest esteem:

[76]

Revole, Maupertuis, de ces déserts glacés
Où les rayons du jour sont six mois éclipsés:
Apôtre de Newton, digne appui d'un tel maître,
Né pour la vérité, viens la faire connaître.
Héros de la physique, Argonautes nouveaux,
Qui franchissez les monts, qui traversez les eaux,
Dont le travail immense et l'exacte mesure
De la terre étonnée ont fixé la figure,

[77]

49 Letter to Algarotti, January 10, 1738 (Voltaire, Correspondence VII, 10, quoted in Wagner 2004, 113–14). On du Châtelet's relation to Maupertuis, see Rey (2019).

50 Voltaire, Correspondance II, 388 (Wagner 2004, 55).

51 Voltaire to Maupertuis, November 3, 1732 (Voltaire, Correspondence II, 382–383, quoted in Wagner 2004, 55).

52 Voltaire to Maupertuis, November 15, 1732 (Voltaire, Correspondence II, 389, quoted in Wagner 2004, 55).

Dévoilez ces resorts qui font la pesanteur;
 Vous connaissez les lois qu'établit son auteur.⁵³

Quite fittingly to his description of Maupertuis as an apostle, Voltaire also lamented about the 'persecutions' he had to suffer by his (scientific) enemies, thus additionally ascribing him the status of a scientific martyr (see Terrall 2002, 173). Though the Greeks made their Argonauts demigods, Voltaire wrote in a letter from May 22, 1738 to Maupertuis, he still lacked this honor, so his only hope was posterity.⁵⁴ [78]

Voltaire's engagement in the debate and his style of promoting Maupertuis is not to be underestimated and deserves closer attention for many reasons, not least with regard to the religification of Maupertuis' Polar expedition, as does his later attack on Maupertuis, culminating in the Berlin affair that did irreparable damage to Maupertuis' image (up to the very day). In 1752 (*Micromégas*) and in 1753 (*Diatribes du Docteur Akakia*), Voltaire published texts that ridiculed Maupertuis and his expedition to Lapland. His polemics aimed at the very religiously connotated image he himself helped to establish, i.e., the image of Maupertuis as the heroic apostle and martyr of Newton.⁵⁵ Maupertuis is described as a mere epigone devoid of original genius, his self-presentation as nothing but hubris (see Wagner 2004, 138–39). To Voltaire, Maupertuis' self-promotion as a 'Laplander' displays his self-unveiling as a mere barbarian, his religious self-description turning out to be a form of idolatry. [79]

Conclusion: The Contact of Enlightenment and Sámi Religion

Maupertuis' famous scientific expedition to Lapland had considerable impact on Enlightenment thought, not only due to its effects on the fields of geodesy and physics. It can be considered as a decisive event for the forming *République des Lettres* of Enlightenment Europe (Wagner 2004, 20). Given the popularity of Maupertuis' journey, the few and rather prejudiced references to the Sámi people and their religion also gained some prominence, for it is by using elements of Sámi life and religiosity in his books and in his (self-)depictions that Maupertuis transports his scientific and not at last social message to the academies and the Paris salons. As such, the references to the Sámi are indispensable elements of the self-representation and self-reference of the Enlightenment mind, enhancing its own standing. [80]

Of course, at least to devout adherents of postcolonialism today, this is easily dismissed as yet another example of European intellectual colonialism and orientalism; but historically and systematically, there is more to the Enlightenment-Sámi encounter than simply that. Given the fact that only the written sources of one part of the encounter exist, first of all, the type of contact that is manifested in the reports on the journey and the considerations about its significance have to be examined and typologically described (Krech 2012, 205–10). [81]

The Enlightenment-Sámi encounter as presented by the sources consists of a synchronic interreligious contact of a special sort. Maupertuis' writings as well as the other writings [82]

53 Voltaire, Oeuvres IX, 402 (quoted in Wagner 2004, 117). "Return, Maupertuis, from these frozen deserts. / Where the rays of daylight are six months eclipsed: / Newton's apostle, worthy of such a master's support, / Born for the truth, come and make it known. / Heroes of physics, new Argonauts, / Who crosses the mountains, who crosses the waters, / Whose immense work and exact measurement / Of astonished earth fixed the figure, / Unveil those springs that make gravity; / You know the laws established by its author."

54 Voltaire, Correspondence VII, 187–188 (quoted in Wagner 2004, 115).

55 The very possibility of describing Newtonianism in this religified form was supported by the fact that his 'scientific' view notwithstanding, Newton himself remained a devout Protestant, with a particular fixation on alchemy.

examined for rhetorical and literary purposes describe the asymmetric meeting of a more highly developed civilization and thinking with a profoundly primitive one, and are basically intended to highlight the former's scientific achievements. So there is some adaptive but transformative use of the elements (Krech 2012, 206) that are described as visibly alien within the general discourse of Enlightenment. However, due to their usage as a contrast, the alien elements are not entirely assimilated by the latter. Insignificant as it is presented in Maupertuis' reports, the Sámi culture nevertheless displayed some influence in the public sphere of enlightened Europe, stressing the achievements of a religified hero-philosopher. This is due to elements of Sámi culture inscribed in the discourse of the Enlightenment by Maupertuis and others reflecting on the expedition and its significance. Superstitious dark is enlightened to reveal things as they are—and this may well be a desert that requires hard work and endurance to gain knowledge. In the case of Maupertuis, the hero-philosopher's and his Enlightenment comrades-in-arms' travel descriptions and the hardships connected to it relate to cognition and patterns of knowledge and transform them into religious meaning (see Krech 2019, 4).

The scientific aim of gaining knowledge allows specifying the situation of contact by means of further typological consideration. In the situation of contact described here, a religified scientific discourse met an indigenous religion and reported on the latter, using elements of the religion as a starting point of further speculation (see the stone of Käymjärvi and Maupertuis' speculation hereon). Here, the prevailing application of the transcendence/immanence distinction regarding knowledge of the unknown becomes a *tertium comparationis* (Stünkel 2017) between Maupertuis and his Sámi guides. Moreover, elements of the other religion (or perhaps even the other religion as a whole, see the Sámi's supposed addiction to practices of black magic) are used as model forms with blank spaces to inscribe scientific hypotheses (see Stünkel 2019, 196–97). This particular practice may be described as an innovative (mimetic) use of alien elements in the established religion.⁵⁶ The case shows the fertilizing effect on the leading discourse—while at the same time not even trying to do justice to its counterpart. Accordingly, on a descriptive level, it may well be the case that in situations of religious encounter matters of symmetry do not matter at all, as their influence is measurable without it.

So religious encounter in the period of colonialism and scientific inattentiveness is not only something to lament about. Neil Kent's assertion about Enlightenment explorers such as Linné or Maupertuis is also valid for other asymmetric contact situations, “yet it was precisely these scholars, with all their flaws, who first attracted the interest and then respect of many peoples throughout Europe to the uniqueness and values of Sámi life and culture” (Kent 2014, 32). On the other hand, as Bruce Lincoln stresses, the focus on the situation of contact itself may be both beneficial for the scholar interested in the history of religions and the tradition qualified in the contact as ‘indigenous’: “Conversely, focusing on the encounter situation also helps us avoid theorizing an unrealistically pristine ‘indigenous’ and lets us appreciate that local traditions meet advancing world religions in situations of vastly unequal power, within which they mount certain kinds of resistance, while also making strategic accommodation at points they consider less than vital” (Lincoln 2012, 96). The subversive capacities of indigenous cultures, thus, should not be underestimated. Indigenous religion is not automatically victimized in situations of religious contact. Above all, the self-preserving processes of indigenous religions

56 See Krech (2012, 207): “The innovative use of alien elements in one's own tradition has a mimetic character in terms of its outer form. The meaning and function of the elements used, however, vary a great deal from the original context.”

[83]

[84]

have to be taken into account, as Tiina Äikäs and Anna-Kaisa Salmi have pointedly put it: “It is true that Sámi religion and material culture have changed as a result of colonization, but it should also be noted that changes have often happened in terms of and within the limits set by the Sámi religion” (Äikäs and Salmi 2015, 91).

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[85]

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