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A Footnote to Scandinavian Herpetology: Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius and his Quest for the Dragon or Lindworm

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Abstract. Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius (1818–1889) was a pioneer in Swedish ethnology. His booklet *Om Draken eller Lindormen* [On the Dragon or Lindworm], a memorandum to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, first printed in 1884 with a second revised edition in 1885, was intended as a contribution to natural science as well as ethnology. After having collected numerous eyewitness accounts, he concluded that a snake, known for hundreds of years as a *drake* [dragon], *lindorm* [lindworm], or *hjulorm* [hoop snake], up to six meters long and "thick as a man's leg," sometimes also with long hair or scales on its neck looking like a horse's mane, still existed in the Swedish forests. This article describes his unsuccessful attempts to obtain a type specimen and interest naturalists in his project.

Keywords: Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius, dragon, lindworm, lindorm, serpent dragon, cryptozoology, cryptid, ethnology, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences

Introduction

In connection with the bicentenary of the birth of ethnologist Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius (18 May 1818–5 July 1889) (Fig. 1), I edited a third edition of his booklet *Om Draken eller Lindormen* [On the Dragon or Lindworm], providing illustrations and extensive annotations (Hyltén-Cavallius & Malm, 2017). 'On the Dragon or Lindworm' was privately printed in two editions by Hyltén-Cavallius, in 1884 and 1885, as a memorandum to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Although intended as a contribution to natural as well as cultural history, his collection of eyewitness accounts also became a pioneering work in cryptozoology, the science—many would say "pseudoscience"—of cryptids, or undiscovered animals.

It was not until 1959 and 1983, respectively, that the terms 'cryptozoology' and 'cryptid' first appeared in the literature (Rossi, 2015: 573, 577). A number of zoologists had, however, long before that collected data about mysterious creatures. One of them was Anthonie Cornelis Oudemans (1858–1943), a Dutchman, who during the years 1889–1892 brought together depictions of huge sea snakes (Eyndhoven, 1944: 3). His exhaustive treatise, *The Great Sea-Serpent* (Oudemans, 1892), in which he argued that the animal in question was an unknown kind of seal, *Megophias megophias* (= big snake), was published in English (and, revised by Anton Stuxberg [1849–1902], in Swedish 1896). It is today regarded as a foundation of cryptozoology. Although Hyltén-Cavallius' publication preceded Oudemans' by eight years, it has remained largely unknown, or at least unread, by herpetologists and cryptozoologists outside Scandinavia (for an exception see Meurger, 1996). The obvious reason is that it has only been available in Swedish, rather than that a zoologist did not write it.

It might, therefore, be a good idea to let an international readership know about Hyltén-Cavallius and his "crypto-herpetological" project about the 'serpent dragon' as we can call the elusive reptile in order to avoid the cumbersome expression "the dragon, lindworm, or hoop snake" and confusion with the mostly two- or four-footed winged dragons of medieval thought. The word *drakorm*, which is Swedish for 'serpent dragon,' was mentioned by some of Hyltén-Cavallius' informants and is also used in contemporary archaeology (e.g., see Johansen, 1997).

To be more precise, there are two questions to be dealt with here from biographical and bibliographical points of view: (1) why Hyltén-Cavallius, as an ethnologist, took it upon himself to try to convince natural scientists that a giant snake existed in Sweden, and (2) how his booklet was perceived by contemporary zoologists and cultural historians.

From Ethnologist to Cryptozoologist

Hyltén-Cavallius was an ageing and crippled, but by no means feeble-minded, scholar when he compiled the report about the serpent dragon. He was born in Vislanda, a parish in the province of Småland, southern Sweden, as the son of a rural dean and his wife. At an early age he became interested in documenting before it was too late, the rapidly changing or disappearing local traditions that he regarded as important. In his autobiography (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1929, dated 1882) he describes how he first studied in the cathedral city of Växjö. Then at Uppsala University where he took his M.A. degree, having written a thesis about the local dialect of his

Fig. 1. Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius, photographed in Hanna Forthmeiier's studio, Växjö (at that time spelt Wexiö), Sweden. (P. G. Vejde's photo collection from Skatelöv, Lund University Library.)

native home. After that, he had been an assistant librarian at the National Library of Sweden, director of the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, Swedish-Norwegian *chargé d'affairs* at the Imperial Court of Brazil, consul-general in Rio de Janeiro, and for almost twenty years, the landlord of Sunnanvik in Torne, Skatelöv parish, Sweden. He had also written ethnological works and plays in historical settings, and founded societies for science and art as well as the first Swedish provincial museum, Småland's Museum in Växjö.

His ethnological research had been focused on Småland, especially the administrative county districts known collectively as Värend (or Wärend), inhabited by the Virde people (plural, Virdar/Wirdar, 'bold or honorable men'), described in a two-volume landmark monograph 1863–64 and 1868 which also included folkloristic information about snakes, lizards, and amphibians. During his travels in this part of the country, he had been told about a snake so huge that it could tear down trees and shape a whole riverbed. This, together with stories about how it could bite its tail and roll like a hoop—as a so called *hjulorm*, 'hoop snake'—or after shifting its shape, fly at night dropping sparks of fire—both of which he dismissed as pure myths and fantasy or misinterpretations of a natural atmospheric phenomenon. But one remarkable fact remained: he met people who swore upon their honor and immortal soul that they, or someone they knew well, had not only *seen* the dreaded creature but in some cases even *killed* it after a dramatic fight. Judging from the vivid and in his opinion credible accounts, Hyltén-Cavallius came to the conclusion that the legendary dragon of the Vikings and medieval heroic poems, although depicted in exaggerated ways, actually still existed in the Swedish forests and ought to be tracked down by zoologists. This is how he described the species:

> He usually grows to a length of about 10 feet (c. 3 m); but specimens of up to 18 or 20 feet have been observed. The body is thick as a man's leg or a man's thigh. The color on top dark, on the belly yellowish and flaming. On the neck of old specimens there is occasionally a cover of long hair or scales, which in the older folk legends invariably is compared to a horse's mane. The head is flat, round and pug-nosed, with a forked tongue, the mouth full of white shining teeth, and the big eyes protruding with a frightful sparkling gaze. The tail short and blunt, and the entire shape of the animal is heavy and ungainly.
>
> In its disposition this snake is very wild and becomes horrible through its strength and aggressiveness. When he is disturbed, he makes a loud hissing sound and begins to contract its body until it is coiled. After that he suddenly raises himself on his tail, to a height of 4 to 6 feet and moves with a wide-open mouth towards his enemy. His scaly body is so hard that even the scythe scarcely can cut him. During the fight he spits out a very venomous liquid, and if he is killed the carcass emits an extremely acrid and repulsive stench.
>
> The dragon dwells in cairns and stony settings, in wild and solitary places close to marshes and lakes. He has particularly often been seen in the rocky hills and forests to the east of lake Åsnen. He has also been seen swimming in the lakes Yen, Rottnen and Helgasjön. He then holds his head about two feet above the water and moves forward with the same winding locomotion as the common grass snake [*Natrix natrix*] (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885a: 4–5 [from the introduction, dated 29th of October, 1883]).

Hyltén-Cavallius then stated that he, as a non-zoologist, was unable to ascertain the objective validity of the narratives that he had collected, but felt obligated to let the highest natural scientific authority of Sweden know about them and judge if they were worth some further consideration. If so, he wrote, the informants ought to be interrogated by a zoologist, and a proper reward offered for the killing and delivery of the riddle's *corpus delicti*:

Fig. 2. A wooden serpent dragon, originally used for guarding the cash-desk in a shop. It was collected by Hyltén-Cavallius who donated it to the museum he founded in Växjö. (Photo courtesy of Jörgen Ludwigsson, Kulturparken Småland AB.)

> If in this way—sooner or later—the most horrible and famous reptile of Nordic prehistoric times should be restored to our fauna, this would be a gain for, at the same time, natural history and cultural history, and would serve to encourage younger ethnologists' research on the Swedish legend (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885a: 6 [from the introduction dated 29th of October, 1883]).

Sadly enough, this Swedish giant snake (just like Oudemans' snake-like seal) still awaits scientific discovery.

Serpent Dragons in Cultural History and Early Herpetology

During the Bronze Age, people in Southern Europe traded with people in Africa and Asia as well as Western and Northern parts of Europe, including the British Isles and Scandinavia (e.g., see Kristiansen & Larsson, 2005). Very likely, stories about pythons, spitting cobras, horned vipers, monitors, crocodiles, and other reptiles that certainly existed, and must have sounded somewhat terrifying, reached the Nordic peoples via these networks. For instance, a more than three thousand years old petroglyph in Tanum, Bohuslän, on the west-coast of Sweden, shows a man with his arms lifted above his head while standing in front of a big snake. This has been interpreted as an illustration of the Mesopotamian myth about how a serpent stole the plant of eternal youth from king Gilgamesh (Jägerbrand, 2010: 19). What the artist who made the picture called the creature in question is unknown, but it was probably not 'dragon.' That word (from Greek, *drákon*; or Latin, *draco*), with the connotations 'monstrous snake' and the ability 'to see clearly' (referring to the reptile's deadly glance), appears to have been taken up in Old Swedish at a much later date, towards the end of the Viking era, as *draki* (Bernström, 1980: 268; Hellquist, 1922: 99).

Lindorm, on the other hand, is a Germanic word, in Old Swedish *lindormber* (Hellquist 1922: 411). It is a euphemism used in order not to mention a dangerous being by its real name. *Lind* is an old word for snake and a tree (*Tilia cordata,* the linden or lime-tree in English) with the common meaning 'pliable' (as in the Swedish verb *linda*, 'to wind or wrap,' such as a rope made of linden bast), whereas *orm* (Old Swedish, *ormber*) originally referred to a worm as it still does in Danish (Hellquist, 1922: 410, 552; Bernström, 1982: 177). It can also be noted that the lindworm is not called "Lindschlange" or "lind snake" in Germany/Austria and the British Isles, where it reportedly also lived, but *Lindwurm* and *lindworm/lindwyrm*, or only *worm/wyrm*.

But such linguistic connections have been forgotten with time and were entirely unknown to the Swedish peasantry of the 19th century. Instead, according to the folk etymology, this animal was called *lindorm* because it had been born out of the trunk of a linden, and it could take children who came too close to such a hollow tree (records in the Folklore Archive, Lund). In a note to a narrative about a man who shot a big snake that had climbed a tree, Hyltén-Cavallius (1884b) wrote that it was common knowledge that the lindworm was often found in trees and especially old lindens.

Another common belief (traceable to the Near East) was that a man who buried valuables in secrecy, could be transformed into a serpent dragon after death and would then be lying upon the treasure, spitting poison towards those who approached it (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1863–64: 461; Sydow, 1917: 112–114). Serpents on rune stones and snake-shaped pieces of jewelry found in mounds of stone, as well as horrifying depictions of dragons and evil snakes in the Bible and churches, were then connected to stories about this beast. As a result, dragons made of wood and with or without wings were, for example, during Hyltén-Cavallius' school years in the 1830s, often placed over the counters in Växjö in order to guard the money (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885a: 89) (Fig. 2).

His sources of knowledge about the living prototype was, however, not limited to oral traditions in Sweden. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, a number of works on natural history had included information about dragons that allegedly existed in various parts of the world. For instance, in *Serpentum et Draconum Historiae* (Aldrovandi, 1640) and *The History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents* (Topsell, 1658), Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605) and Edward Topsell (c. 1572–1625) devoted 115 and 15 pages respectively to such monstrous beings. Serpent dragons also found their way into works written by Swedes, as most notably seen in the imaginative and dramatic woodcuts that illustrated the history of Nordic peoples by the former Swedish Catholic

Fig. 3. Frode or Fridlev killing a dragon with a mane on its neck, according to a woodcut in Olaus Magnus' *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (1555).

dean Olaus Magnus (1490–1557), printed in Rome 1555 (Olaus Magnus, 1555: 182–189) (Fig. 3). In the first Swedish book on natural history, *Physica* by astronomer Sigfrid Aron Forsius (c. 1560–1624), written around 1611 but not published until 1952, the dragon and lindworm were described as two different species, the latter being of such an enormous size that it occasionally killed and ate sheep, calves and other cattle (Forsius, 1952: 271, 275). He also wrote that snakes with "mane around the neck" could be encountered in cow-houses and on old plots of land (ibid.: 275).

During the enlightenment, naturalists were less prone to perpetuate such absurdities. Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778), for example, although being a Virde himself, did not write anything about the serpent dragons of Värend (Broberg, 2008: 30). And yet, interestingly enough, to this very day a hill in Sannaböke, not far from his childhood home in the village of Stenbrohult, is known as *Drakabacken*, or 'Dragon Hill.' He could hardly have grown up in the area without hearing the well-known story about how a man named Ingemar Larsson in the 1620s had killed a serpent dragon there and returned home with the treasure of silver that it had guarded. The cudgel said to have been used by the dragon slayer was donated in 1884 to the museum founded by Hyltén-Cavallius who also mentioned the story (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885a: 5). In fact, at the bicentenary of Hyltén-Cavallius' birth, I met an elderly woman who claimed that she owned a spoon from this dragon's treasure.

Unlike Hyltén-Cavallius, Linnaeus did not take these types of stories seriously. Nevertheless, after having seen a seven-headed hydra and other "dragons" being displayed as highly valued natural curiosities, he found it necessary to point out in his *Systema Naturae* that all such monsters were either falsifications or figments of the imagination—otherwise humans would not have been able to inhabit the earth (Linnaeus, 1735: 10, 1766: 358; Wahlgren 2012: 8–9). On the same page he then used the name *Draco volans* ('flying dragon') for the very first lizard that he listed in the book (Linnaeus, 1735: 10). This Southeast Asian species can glide like a "real" dragon, using wing-like lateral extensions of skin, but has a modest length of 22 cm and lacks the ability of dropping sparks of fire.

The poor crofters of 19th century Värend had of course not read what Linnaeus had written in Latin (and could often not read at all). He was, therefore, not to be the last fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences to hear rumors about dragons of his native home district or elsewhere.

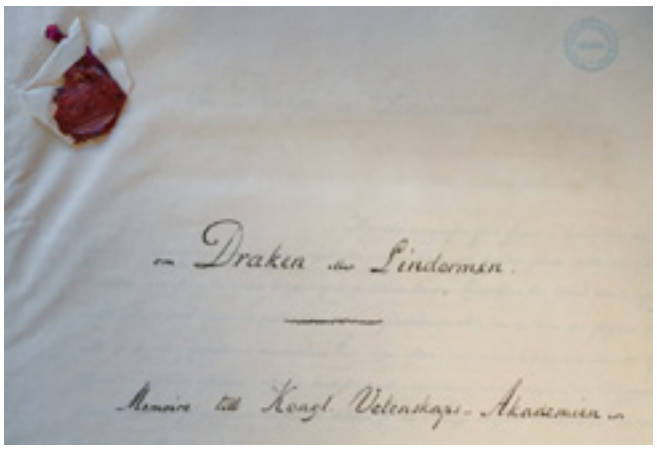

Fig. 4. The cover of the hand-written memorandum that Hyltén-Cavallius compiled in 1883–84. (Photo courtesy of Maria Asp, Center for History of Science, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.)

The First Edition and the Offer of a Reward

Just before Christmas in 1883, the Royal Academy of Sciences received a first hand-written report about the mysterious snake from Hyltén-Cavallius (Fig. 4). On the 11th of January, a polite letter from Fredrik (Frits) Adam Smitt (1839–1904) (Fig. 5), curator of vertebrates at the Swedish Museum of Natural History, confirmed that it had been received and read for the learned society (Smitt, 1884). This had taken place at its first meeting in 1884, on the 9th of January, and in the record it was simply stated that Smitt had reviewed the memorandum (Kongl. Vetenskaps-Akademien, 1884, 1: 1). Nothing was mentioned about how the audience had reacted.

In his letter to Hyltén-Cavallius, Smitt explained that in his opinion "fantasy had played a major part in the visions, but it would of course be foolish to doubt all probability of the existence of something new that we do not know anything about," and he added that his museum would offer "one hundred crowns for the delivery here of the first specimen of the dragon that exceeds the length of 8 feet" (Smitt, 1884). To clarify the matter, the secretary of the Academy, astronomer Daniel Georg Lindhagen (1819–1906), mentioned in a letter on the 1st of February 1884 that according to Smitt the animal in question had probably been a grass snake, "which sometimes occurs in a quite big size, although hardly of such colossal dimensions as attributed by the folk tradition," adding that the only way to find out the truth was for someone at a museum to examine a killed specimen (Lindhagen, 1884).

A month later (on the 4th of March, 1884), Hyltén-Cavallius wrote to his old friend Johan August Ahlstrand (1822–1896), librarian at the Academy, that so far he had been able to obtain sixteen sworn depositions regarding the serpent dragon from reliable persons, and he asked for advice about where to get them published (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1884c). No letter with a reply has been retrieved,

Fig. 5. Fredrik (Frits) Adam Smitt (1839–1904), who presented Hyltén-Cavallius' memorandum 'On the Dragon or Lindworm' to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. (Image Collections, Lund University Library.)

but whatever it may have been Hyltén-Cavallius soon decided to print the report privately. The next month he let another friend, George Stephens (1813–1895), professor of English language and literature in Copenhagen, Denmark, and many years previously his collaborator in collecting Swedish folk songs and tales, have a look at a first draft. At the same time, perhaps encouraged by Smitt's offer, he mentioned that he had decided to offer "a reward of 100 kr. [kronor, or crowns]—that ought to be at least one thousand" (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1884d).

Stephens lent the draft to archaeologist and numismatist Christian Herbst (1818–1911), inspector at the National Museum of Denmark. According to Stephens, Herbst had said that Hyltén-Cavallius "ought to offer a reward of 1000 kr., *not* 100 kr. He has spoken to Steenstrup and others, and, if you can in this way get the *corpus delicti* the natural-history museum here will gladly give you 1000 kr. or even 2000 kr. for it, as will any other museum in Europe. All you have to do is to make a water-tight wooden case for it, put it in, and fill it up with *simple* brandy—you can then send it whither you will" (Stephens, 1884).

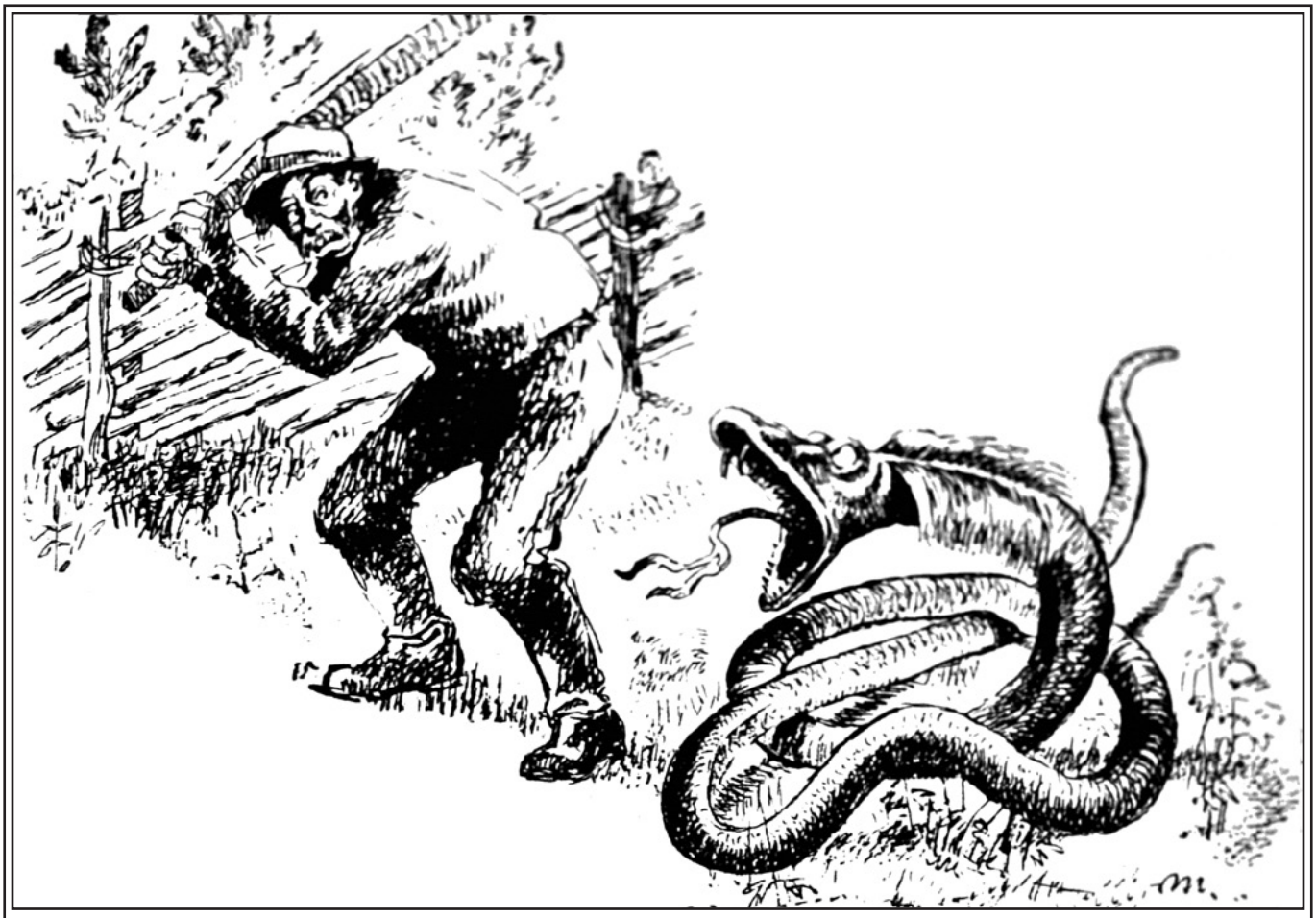

Fig. 6. The peasant and the serpent dragon. (Nils Möller, in *Levande Livet*, 1948.)

"Steenstrup" was Japetus Steenstrup (1813–1897), director of the museum mentioned by Stephens and also, a foreign fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences since 1857 (Dahlgren, 1915: 141). Thus, three of the academy members—Smitt, Lindhagen, and Steenstrup—did directly or indirectly support the quest for the giant reptile, although this was not the same as saying that they believed in its existence. If it did exist, obtaining such an animal would mean a tremendous zoological feat—and if it did not, no expense was necessary.

In May and June 1884, Hyltén-Cavallius announced that any person who could deliver a serpent dragon to his estate, freshly killed or pickled in schnapps, would receive "from one hundred to one thousand crowns, depending on the size and other conditions of the specimen." A leaflet with this information was sent to all the churches of Värend, to be posted on their bulletin boards (Swahn, 1989a: 72). He also intended to distribute a few hundred copies of the booklet to soldiers in the region, hoping that one or more of them would be able to supply him with something to offer the eager museum directors (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1884c). An advertisement in the local newspaper let others know that a copy of the report could be purchased in Quiding's bookshop, Växjö, at one crown apiece (Smålandsposten, 1884a).

Soon thereafter, cartoonists and newspaper journalists began to ridicule the peasants who searched the dense forests with gun in hand, tempted by the promised reward—an enormous amount in those days (Fig. 6). When Hyltén-Cavallius opened the local newspaper, *Smålandsposten*, on the 26th of July 1884, he could for example read the following, written by an anonymous jester, under the sensational caption "The Lindworm is Found and Exhibited in Växjö:"

> The day before yesterday the monster was pulled in a hay-cart right through the town. His color was coal-black, had a nose pointed upwards, was 14 feet long and not less than 10 feet in circumference. Moreover, he was hard as a board and had a very solid, but yet slender build. Quite contrary to given instructions, one did not intend to put him in alcohol, but in water in a big lake not far away from here, where he will be—rowed with two pairs of oars. That it was the "real lindworm" one could clearly see, because the name was painted with big letters on the bow (Smålandsposten, 1884b).

Hyltén-Cavallius himself was far from amused by such nonsense and felt particularly mortified by the fact that the naturalists—his primary target group—proved impossible to convince about the credibility of the twenty depositions

that he, with the most serious intention, had forwarded in his memorandum.

Most annoying of the naturalists was Hjalmar Mosén (1841–1887) (Fig. 7), a former research assistant at the Swedish Museum of Natural History who was mainly known as an expert on mosses but who had also encountered a number of different snakes during an expedition to Brazil in 1873–1876. He felt impelled to publish *Ormhistorier* ('Tales about Snakes'), the first book originally written in Swedish about snakes from all over the world.

Although writing mostly about the biology of real snakes, Mosén could not refrain from mentioning the rumors about lindworms with a mane and make fun of those who had described them. It would be a good idea, he suggested, if someone in Värend could obtain a specimen for a museum or, almost as good, purchase a camera and be able to take a photograph of the reptile. The informant could then show what he had seen instead of pledging his honor. In doing so, he would also do science a great favor, because no one had "even with a magnifying glass yet been able to detect a hair on any of the 700 species of snakes of the known world" (Mosén, 1885: 55–56).

In his list of non-venomous snakes, after *Tropidonotus* [*Natrix*] *natrix*, he then specified its vernacular Swedish name as "Snok, **Lindorm**," that is, 'Grass-snake, **Lindworm**' (ibid.: 101). This was the only instance in the entire book where he used extra bold type.

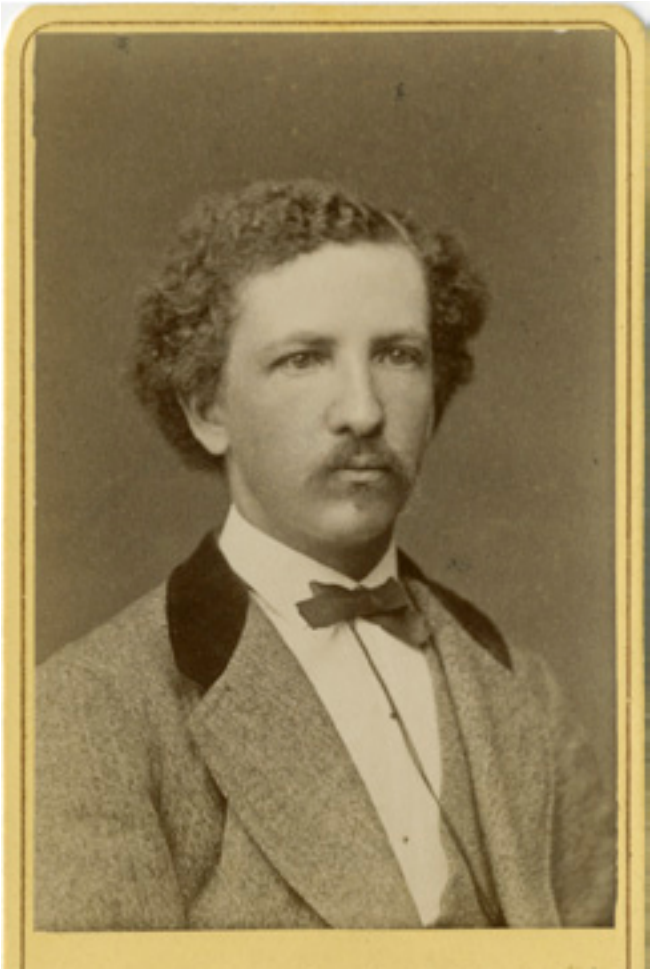

Fig. 7. Hjalmar Mosén (1841–1887), bryologist and herpetologist. (Alvin, Uppsala University Library).

The Second Edition and its Sequel

Such indolence was more than Hyltén-Cavallius could endure. He now revised his booklet and added another twenty-six eyewitness accounts, making it more than twice as long (Fig. 8 and 9). In a postscript he stated that he did not wish to tire his readers with an additional couple of dozen narratives at his disposal (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885a: 84).

In a letter, sent together with the revised memorandum to the Academy in October 1885, Hyltén-Cavallius wrote that "the existence of the animal cannot be doubted by anyone" who read the many stories that he had been able to gather after "an extensive and laborious research" (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885b). What he had now compiled, he explained in his postscript with direct reference to Mosén, was so unambiguous that "the learned conceit should no longer be justified to deduce that the most feared beast and most warlike symbol of the old Nordic peoples, the Swedish dragon and the Danish lindworm, was a harmless *grass snake*, while she laughs at our country's legends and mocks respected people because of their stories." (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885a: 85).

On one point he did, however, agree with Mosén: it would (as had also been suggested by Smitt, Lindhagen, Stephens, and Steenstrup) be of a tremendous value for science to acquire a specimen of the giant reptile. August Quennerstedt (1837–1926), professor of zoology and later (1891–1895) Vice-Chancellor of Lund University, was of the same opinion. During a meeting in Lund, on the 12th of November 1887, with a society for the history of Småland, he made the remark—according to one of the participants, Axel Ramm (1858–1929)—that the dragons were probably nothing but old grass snakes. But in case the legendary creature really existed, he would be willing to pay some hundred crowns for it, because he would then be able to write an important paper (Ramm, 1887). Unfortunately, due to the lack of a type specimen, no such paper was ever written.

In the mean-time, reports had piled up on Hyltén-Cavallius' desk together with encouraging letters from a network of like-minded antiquarians and collectors of folk tales, but not from a single naturalist. "Stories about the lindworm that ought to be printed," a note by Hyltén-Cavallius (n.d.) in a collection of nearly 50 unused letters, received between November 1883 and July 1888, indicates that he might have planned to publish a third edition. According to a letter in 1886 from his friend, artist and ethnologist Nils Månsson Mandelgren (1813–1899), for instance, two huge snakes had been shot at Kolmaden to the east of Gothenburg in 1885, but none had been seen since then, although people had been searching the area eagerly in order to get the promised reward (Mandelgren,

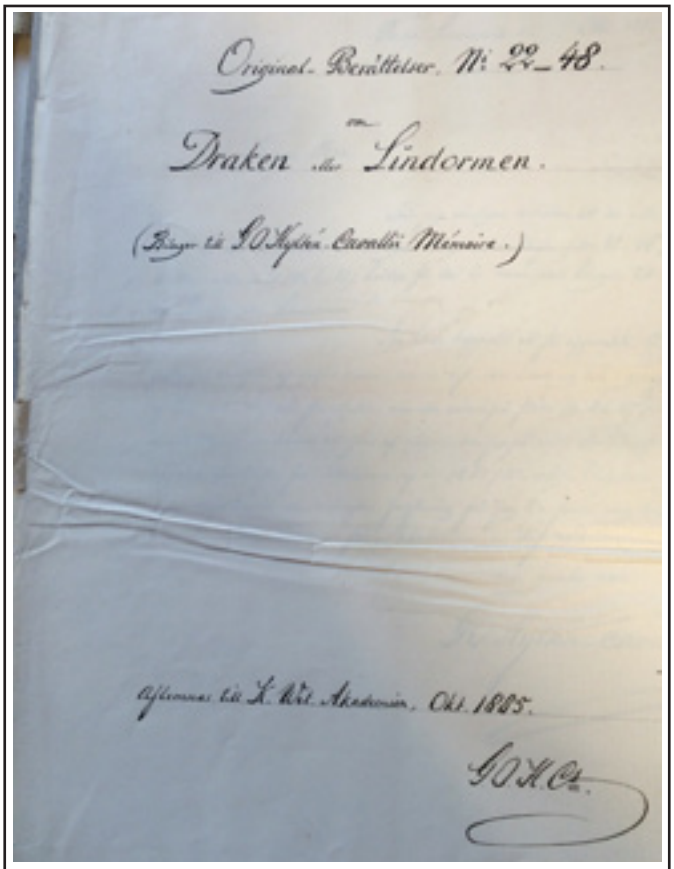

Fig. 8. The hand-written cover of the new collection of eyewitness accounts: 'Original Narratives, No. 22–48. On the Dragon or Lindworm. (Appendices to G. O. Hyltén-Cavallii Memorandum.) (To be delivered to the R. Academy of Sc., October 1885. G.O.H.C.)' (Photo courtesy of Maria Asp, Center for History of Science, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.)

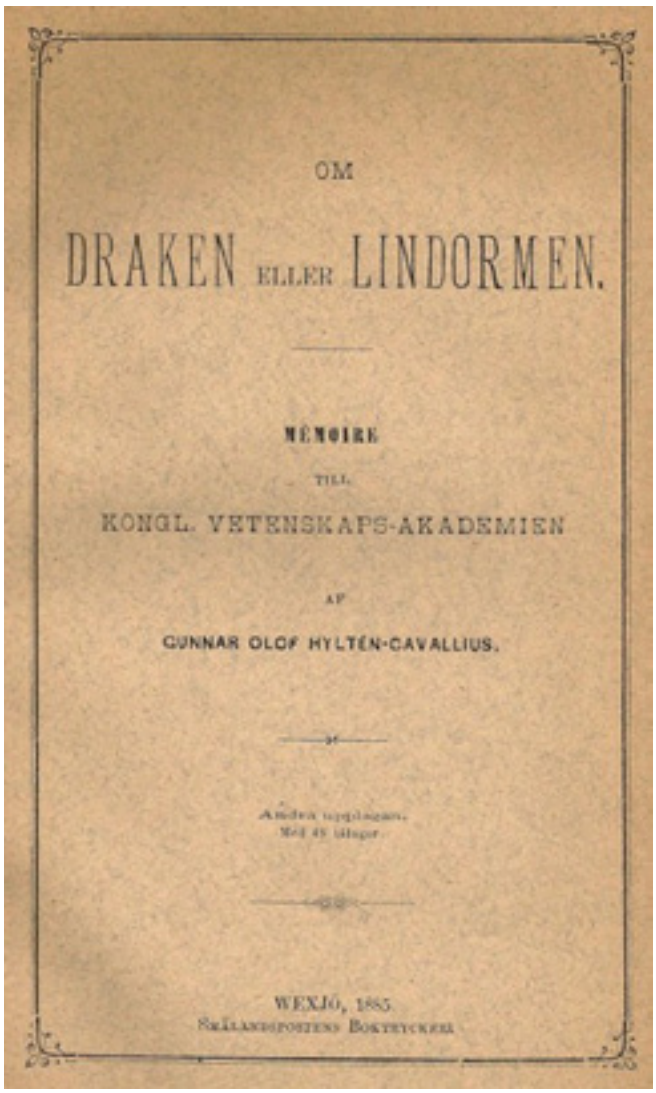

Fig. 9. On the Dragon or Lindworm. Memorandum to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences by Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius. Second edition. With 48 appendices. Växjö, 1885. Smålandsposten's printing works.

1886). Judging from such letters, it would only be a matter of time before the museum directors could start their bidding for a specimen, and as Pontus Erland Fahlbeck (1850–1923), a historian and political scientist, wrote, it would not be risky at all to offer an even higher reward (Fahlbeck, 1885).

But—alas!—until his death in 1889, Hyltén-Cavallius waited in vain for someone to knock on his door and deliver the corpse of a serpent dragon. According to a humorous writer of popular science almost one hundred years later, the amount offered by Hyltén-Cavallius was, however, "an important effort, because it resulted in the terrifying monster ceasing to appear" (Sjögren, 1980: 39).

On the contrary, though, it was reportedly observed by dozens of people (including my own paternal grandfather's sister) from the southernmost to the central parts of Sweden, and in a few cases even killed, during the next one hundred years (Malm, 2017). In fact, as late as 1989 folklorist Jan-Öjvind Swahn (1925–2016) stated that he occasionally received letters from people who claimed that they had almost hit such snakes while driving their car (Swahn, 1989b: 152). What kinds of animals that had actually been encountered—e.g., otters, polecats, badgers, capercaillies, sheatfish, or unusually large grass snakes—and what significance alcohol or hallucinations may have had on the "observations" is another story.

Final Comments

Hyltén-Cavallius wrote about the serpent dragon several decades before the terms 'cryptozoology' and 'cryptid' were coined. Yet, he did everything "right" from a cryptozoological point of view: He documented what his informants told him, compared it with other old or contemporary evidence, tried his best to obtain a type specimen, and forwarded the reports to the highest scientific authority for further investigation. It appears as if he had expected his project to become the crowning glory of his

life-time achievement and, as he expressed it in a letter to his friend Ahlstrand (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1884c), it was all for the honor of old Värend, the part of Sweden so close to his heart.

"Dragons," it has been argued, "have always been elusive" (Hogarth & Clery 1980: 20). That it all ended in failure may therefore not appear as a surprise. And, after all, snakes comparable in size and behavior to a hybrid between a python and spitting cobra (with a mane or crest), could not possibly survive for long in the harsh Swedish climate. It should be added, however, that not all cryptozoological endeavors have been in vain, or that eyewitness accounts that appear improbable always are without some interesting grain of truth. A good example is how the Swedish author and explorer Rolf Blomberg (1912–1996), after being told about a giant "frog" that could reach a weight of up to "2 quintales," nearly 100 kg, in 1950 discovered the Colombian giant toad (*Rhaebo* [*Bufo*] *blombergi*), which certainly does not come even close to such a size but still is among the biggest tailless amphibians of the New World (Blomberg, 1956: 92–104; Myers & Funkhouser, 1951).

Blomberg was, in a way, immortalized through the scientific name given to the big toad he found. Something corresponding *could* have happened to Hyltén-Cavallius, if he had been able to deliver a Swedish giant snake, pickled in schnapps, to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

In the end, however, he actually *did* get his dragon. The evidence is clearly visible to anyone who makes a visit to the old cemetery in the Värend parish of Skatelöv, where a magnificent, six meter tall memorial stone was erected over his grave on the 5th of July 1894, five years after his death (Fig. 10). The money, contributed by a number of sponsors in order to cut, transport, decorate, and erect it (the latter took eight men seven days) was about 800 crowns (Tornehed 1996). This was equal to the reward offered by Hyltén-Cavallius for the *corpus delicti*. The motif on the stone, reminiscent of depictions by the Vikings and even Babylonians, is as fitting as can be: a serpent dragon, biting itself in its tail (Fig. 11).

Fig. 10. Hyltén-Cavallius' memorial stone on a picture post-card produced by Joh. Johanson in Växjö and dated 1903. (P. G. Vejde's photo collection from Skatelöv, Lund University Library.)

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Fig. 11. The dragon or lindworm that bites itself in its tail was designed by Johan August Malmström (1829–1901), an artist who often chose subjects from Nordic mythology. (Photo courtesy of Christer Lindberg, Lund University.)

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