

RESEARCH

Fire in Copenhagen and Stockholm Indridason's and Swedenborg's "Remote Viewing" Experiences

ERLENDUR HARALDSSON

*Department of Psychology, University of Iceland, Reykjavik 101, Iceland
erlendur@hi.is*

JOHAN L. F. GERDING

Leiden University, and Parapsychology Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Abstract—This paper presents two historical cases of remote viewing. The Icelandic medium Indridi Indridason described in Reykjavik in 1905, through a drop-in-communicator, a fire that was burning in Copenhagen. Emanuel Swedenborg described in Gothenburg in 1759 a fire that raged near his home in Stockholm. There are striking similarities between these cases which took place before radio or telephone communication existed between Reykjavik and Copenhagen, and between Gothenburg and Stockholm. The correctness of the descriptions was verified when news arrived in Gothenburg and Reykjavik. Indridason's communicator spoke a Copenhagen Danish, gave his name as Emil Jensen, and claimed to have been a manufacturer. He described a fire in a factory that was taking place during the sitting and said that it was brought under control before the sitting was over. Many persons witnessed these descriptions, and written accounts were deposited with the Governor of Gothenburg and the Bishop of Iceland. A Danish newspaper arriving in Reykjavik weeks later described a fire in a factory at Store Kongensgade. Indridason's researchers did not attempt to verify Emil Jensen's identity. Search in Danish archives a century later identified an Emil Jensen, a manufacturer, who lived most of his life on Store Kongensgade.

Keywords: remote viewing—Indridason—Swedenborg—Kant—mediumship—drop-in communicator

Introduction

The Icelandic medium Indridi Indridason (1883–1912) is primarily known for his physical phenomena; levitations of himself—some in full light—and movements of objects, among them musical instruments which were being played upon at the same time. Light phenomena were also prominent, as were direct voices and loud singing, sometimes more than one voice at a time, raps, knocks, gusts of wind, and odors, to mention some of the phenomena

(Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1989; Hannesson, 1924). There were, however, also reports of some remarkable mental phenomena.

At a sitting with Indridi Indridason on November 24, 1905, a personality spoke “through” Indridason who had not previously appeared at the sittings. No one at the sitting recognized him or knew anything about him, and so he falls into the category of a drop-in communicator (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975). Speaking Danish, he introduced himself as Mr. Jensen, Jensen being a common Danish surname. On this occasion, Jensen spoke of a fire in Copenhagen, which is more than 1,300 miles from Reykjavik.

Accounts of Witnesses

There are three accounts by witnesses of this incident: Harald Nielsson, Einar Kvaran, and Mrs. Kvaran. Nielsson describes it as follows:

The first evening he [Mr. Jensen] manifested himself through the medium, he told us that in the half-hour pause while the medium was being allowed to rest in the middle of the sitting, he had set off for Copenhagen and had seen that a factory was on fire in one of its streets. He told us that the firemen had succeeded in conquering the fire. At that time no telegraphic connection between Iceland and the outside world had been established, so there were no means of hearing about that event.

This happened on 24th November 1905. The next day I went to see the Bishop of Iceland, the Right Reverend Hallgrímur Sveinsson, who was my uncle, and stated to him what Jensen had told us, and asked him to write it down and be a witness, whether it proved true or not. At Christmas the next boat came from Denmark, and my uncle looked with curiosity through the Danish paper, *Politiken*, and to his great satisfaction observed the description of the fire. Both day and time was right. Jensen was also right about the factory. It was a lamp factory at 63 Store Kongensgade [a major street in Copenhagen]. (Nielsson, 1922:456)

Kvaran gives a somewhat more detailed account in a lecture given at the Danish Metapsychical Society in Copenhagen. He writes:

He [Jensen] told us that he had come directly from Copenhagen, and that there was a fire there: A factory was burning. The time was about 9 o'clock when he came. Then he disappeared and came back an hour later [about 10 o'clock]. They [the firemen] had conquered the fire by then, he said. We did not have any telegraph at that time, so we had to wait to have this statement verified. But we wrote down his account and kept the document with the bishop [who had taken part in earlier sessions with Indridason]. With the next ship [from Copenhagen], the papers brought us the news that there had been a large fire in Copenhagen that evening—in Store Kongensgade, I think—where amongst other things a factory had burnt. It also said that at about 12 o'clock the fire had been extinguished. As you know, the time is about 12 o'clock here in Copenhagen when it is 10 o'clock in Reykjavik. (Kvaran, 1910:46)

One witness, Mrs. Kvaran (Thordarson, 1942:102), reports that the bishop who had attended some sittings with Indridason was known to subscribe to *Politiken*, the leading Danish newspaper. Hence he was chosen to be a witness and to keep a written document about Jensen's statements about the fire. It was expected that if there were a fire of any consequence in Copenhagen it would be reported in *Politiken*.

Accounts of the Fire in Danish Newspapers

On Saturday, November 25, there was a report in *Politiken* of a major fire in Copenhagen. It reads as follows in an English translation:

Factory Fire in St. Kongensgade: Copenhagen's Lamp and Chandelier's Factory in Flames

This night about 12 o'clock the janitor of number 63 Store Kongensgade discovered that there was fire in Copenhagen's Lamp and Chandelier's Factory that is located on the ground and first floors.

He called the fire brigade and soon fire extinguishing carriages from Adelsgade Fire Station and the main Fire Station arrived under the direction of Fire Chief Bantzen. The first floor was already ablaze with powerful flames reaching out of the windows and breaking the glass in the windows on the second floor where there is a factory for making cardboard boxes.

The Fire Brigade quickly attached two hoses to fire hydrants. One of the hoses had to go across the street so all tram traffic came to a halt. The water from the two hoses soon subdued the fire but then it was discovered that the fire had gone through the ceilings to the floors above the factory . . . [There follows a detailed description of the work of the fire brigade]. In about half an hour the fire had been diminished to such an extent that the firemen could enter the premises. Then it became obvious that the fire had caused quite substantial damage. Walls and floors had been burnt out and both stocks and machines of considerable value had been destroyed. There was still fire in some places. . . . Around one a.m. some of the firemen and equipment were able to leave but a fairly large number of firemen had to remain at the location for a further hour and a half.

Berlingske Tidende, Denmark's second largest newspaper, also reports on the fire in the Copenhagen Lamp Factory:

This night around twelve o'clock the firebrigade was called to Store Kongensgade 63, where fire had broken out in a house in the backyard in the warehouse of the Copenhagen Lamp Factory. The fire had spread considerably when the fire brigades arrived from the Main Fire Station and Adelsgade Station. Still, the firemen managed to get the fire under control in about an hour. The damage was substantial.

In 1905 the time difference between Reykjavik and Copenhagen was two hours and fifteen minutes. Nielsson gives no exact time for Jensen's

statements about the fire, only that it occurred during a pause for the medium to rest, which would presumably have been rather late in the session which took place on Saturday evening. The sittings started at eight and lasted up to a few hours. (One five-hour sitting is reported.) Kvaran writes that it was around 9 p.m. when Jensen told them about the fire, and then an hour later that the fire had been brought under control. The time in Copenhagen would then have been 12:15. According to the newspapers the fire brigades were called about 12 (9:45 p.m. in Iceland) and they had the fire under control half an hour (*Politiken*) to one hour (*Berlingske Tidende*) after their arrival. Kvaran's timing comes quite close.

When considering this case, the question inevitably arises: How common were newsworthy fires in Copenhagen at the beginning of the 20th century? The first author consulted *Politiken* in the Kongelige Bibliotek in Copenhagen. In a period of four weeks, two weeks prior to the fire in Store Kongensgade, and two weeks after, four fires were reported. Only the fire at Store Kongensgade 63 is reported to have started in the late evening, at 9:45 p.m. Icelandic time. The other fires were in the morning and at 6:45 and 7:15 in the evening Icelandic time. The factory fire gets the most coverage in *Politiken*, was the largest, and caused the most damage, the others being minor and quickly extinguished.

Jensen not only gets it right that a fire took place in Copenhagen on November 24, 1905, but also that it started late in the evening Icelandic time. He correctly states that the fire was under control about an hour later. Jensen correctly identifies the fire as in a factory, and it was the only factory fire during the month we examined. These are four features of the fire. There is no report of Jensen describing on any other occasion events happening far away.

The second question concerns Jensen's identity. Was there in Copenhagen any Jensen who was a manufacturer, or were there perhaps several of them? Did he or any of them have ties to the place of the fire? The only information given in the accounts of Nielsson (Nielsson, 1922) and Kvaran (Kvaran, 1910) is that Jensen was a manufacturer [fabrikant]. Furthermore, Kvaran (Kvaran, 1910) describes him as a clothing manufacturer and a native of Copenhagen which—he writes—was easily judged from his “genuine Copenhagen accent.”

The Minute Books of the Experimental Society, which was founded to investigate the mediumship of Indridason, had been lost for decades when Gissurarson and Haraldsson (1989) wrote their monograph on Indridi Indridason. Two of the Minute Books turned up a few years later. Regretfully the first pages are missing and the Minutes start with a sitting on the December 4, 1905, ten days after the sitting in which the fire was described in Copenhagen. There can be, however, no doubt about the timing and the essential features of this extraordinary case because of other documents that have already been described. Additional information is given in the Minutes for a sitting on

December 11, 1905. Jensen appears again and revealed his Christian name as Emil, along with some other specific statements. No attempt was made to inquire if such a Jensen had lived in distant Copenhagen that required a major sea voyage to reach. Indridason, who died when he was only 28 years old, had never been to Copenhagen.

The first author made a search in the State and City Archives in Copenhagen. Only one Emil Jensen turned up who was registered as a manufacturer. In the census of 1885 he was living at Store Kongensgade 68, close to number 63 where the fire broke out. Further research revealed that he had earlier lived at Store Kongensgade 40 for some thirty years where his father and he ran a business selling spices. He is last registered in 1898 at Fredriciagade 16 which street crosses Store Kongensgade and is only 300 m away from the house where the fire broke out. He died in August 1898. In short, Jensen had strong ties to the location of the fire in Store Kongensgade.

At the sitting on December 11, 1905, Jensen makes several quite specific statements about his life that those around Indridason seem to have paid no attention to, and that no one tried to check or verify. Very promising research on these statements is in progress and will be reported on at a later date.

Several questions inevitably arise. Is this a case of clairvoyance by the medium, or an out-of-the-body experience with a perception of a fire in distant Copenhagen, or a case of spirit-communication? Why should Indridason go to a place to which he had no relationship and had never visited? Let us assume for a moment that Jensen existed as a discarnate entity communicating through Indridason. As a former citizen of Copenhagen, who had been a manufacturer, he may have felt compelled, during a pause from mediumistic work with Indridason, to return to Copenhagen to observe an event that must have been important to him and to many people he knew as it took place in a street where he had spent most of his life. Jensen quite obviously must have had a much stronger motivation to follow the development of this fire than Indridason.

Jensen soon became an important figure in the mediumship of Indridason and was considered responsible for attempts at materializations. At many sittings, Jensen was seen by many sitters appearing in a "luminous, beautiful light-pillar," usually very briefly but several times during the same sitting and at various locations in the hall. This "pillar of light" was larger than Jensen and emitted some light in such a way that Jensen and Indridason could sometimes be seen side by side at the same time (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1989:82–85). Both hands of Indridason were at the same time being held by a witness to exclude the possibility of fraud. It is reported that at times, when Jensen was not visible, his hands could be touched, or sitters felt his touch on various parts of their bodies. The light appearances seemed to be particularly painful to the medium who while in trance could be heard moaning and screaming with pain.

The Fire in Stockholm

Indridason/Jensen's description of the fire in Copenhagen inevitably brings to mind the famous case of the Swedish scientist and seer Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), who is reported to have described a fire that raged in Stockholm during his visit to Gothenburg in 1759. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant asked a friend, an English merchant whom he held in high regard, to investigate three of Swedenborg's presumably paranormal cases during visits to Gothenburg and Stockholm. (Who he was is a matter of debate by historians of Swedenborg's life.) One of these three cases, the fire in Stockholm, is relevant to this paper. The Englishman's report to Kant is lost, but Kant describes this case in a letter to Fräulein Charlotte von Knobloch in 1763. The relevant passage in his letter reads as follows in an English translation:

The following occurrence appears to me to have the greatest weight of proof, and to place the assertion respecting Swedenborg's extraordinary gift beyond all possibility of doubt. In the year 1759, toward the end of September, on Saturday at four o'clock p.m. Swedenborg arrived at Gothenburg from England when Mr. William Castel invited him to his house, together with a party of fifteen persons. About six o'clock, Swedenborg went out, and returned to the company quite pale and alarmed. He said that a dangerous fire had just broken out in Stockholm, at the Södermalm, and that it was spreading fast. He was restless and went out often. He said that the house of one of his friends, whom he named, was already in ashes, and that his own was in danger. At eight o'clock, after he had been out again, he joyfully exclaimed, "Thank God! The fire is extinguished three doors from my house." The news occasioned great commotion throughout the whole city, but particularly amongst the company in which he was. It was announced to the governor the same evening. On Sunday morning, Swedenborg was summoned to the governor, who questioned him concerning the disaster. Swedenborg described the fire precisely, how it had begun, and in what manner it had ceased, and how long it had continued. On the same day the news spread throughout the city, and as the governor had thought it worthy of attention, the consternation was considerably increased; because many were in trouble on account of their friends and property, which might have been involved in the disaster.

On Monday evening a messenger arrived in Gothenburg who was sent by the Board of Trade at the time of the fire. In the letter brought by him, the fire was described precisely in the manner stated by Swedenborg. On Tuesday morning the royal courier arrived at the governor's with the sad news of the fire, the loss which it had occasioned, and houses it had damaged or ruined, not in the least differing from that which Swedenborg had given at the time when it happened, for the fire was extinguished at eight o'clock. (Trobridge, 2004:228–229)

According to Kant's letter, the news arriving from Stockholm verified Swedenborg's description of the fire in much the same way as Indridason/

Jensen's account was confirmed when the next ship arrived in Reykjavik. The distances are such that there can be no question of normal communication of any kind.

Is anything written in contemporary records about the fire in Stockholm? On July 23, 1759, the Stockholm newspaper *Post Tidningar* (the oldest newspaper in the world, some argue) reports on a great fire that took place in Stockholm:

Last Thursday the 19th of this month at 3 o'clock in the afternoon there broke out a serious fire on Södermalm at Beswaers-Backen. The existing wind increased during the fire so that the flames spread quickly and far, and 20 blocks of houses between Södermalm's Torg and Hornsgatan, including the Maria Church, burnt down completely, besides six other blocks inclusive of the Iron-Weight being partly damaged. The fire lasted until four o'clock on Friday morning when 250 houses had been burnt down. There being a great number of wooden houses, a longlasting previous drought, and lack of water where it was most needed, and a general shock from the fire, were the main reasons why the fire spread so widely. (Translation by the first author)

Hvad Nytt i Staden, a newspaper published in Gothenburg, gives a more detailed report on this fire on July 30, 1759. These details are not relevant for the purposes of this paper. According to this report, too much fire used for baking in a wooden house started this fire, and a strong wind. It is mentioned that this fire was believed to have caused more devastation than the great Clara conflagration that took place much earlier.

Neither the weekday nor the month of that fire corresponds to the date given in Kant's letter to von Knobloch where Swedenborg is said to have arrived in Gothenburg toward the end of *September* on *Saturday*. This is likely to have come from Kant's English friend and does not speak for his competence or diligence as an investigator (Broad, 1969). Or, is it possible that Kant did not bother to re-read the English merchant's report when he wrote to von Knobloch and thus got the weekday and the month wrong? Kant was not a perfectionist when it came to dating for his letter to von Knobloch is also obviously wrongly dated but easy to correct and of no consequence. Although Kant writes in the letter that he does not fully trust his English friend's ability in this kind of investigation, he nonetheless is convinced that the reported case is true.

The first author and Adrian Parker visited Landsarkivet in Gothenburg to check the *Tolagsjournal* which records customs paid by incoming ships to the city. Swedenborg is generally assumed by to have arrived by ship on the 19th of July 1759. The archivist told us that the recorded dates are not for arrival but the levied taxes. Hence it is not possible to date exactly the arrival of these ships. One ship from London, *Brigg Isabella*, was taxed on July 23. If Swedenborg arrived with this ship it is impossible to know. No record was kept of passengers.

In Kant's letter to von Knobloch, it is stated that Mr. William Castel invited him to his house. We searched for any record of him. The name is obviously not Swedish, perhaps English, and there were many English merchants in Gothenburg at this time. Archivist Ulf Anderson checked all books of documents he could think of, registers of English clubs, records of loan guaranties, business disputes, bankruptcies. Nor was there any record of this family name in the files on births, marriages, or burials in the English Church of Gothenburg. Still, this does not exclude the possibility that William Castel lived for some time in Gothenburg. It is well-known that Swedenborg had many friends in Gothenburg, particularly among leading persons in the flourishing East India Company (Hjern, 1990). The first formal organization of his New Church (Nya Kyrken) was established in Gothenburg.

In Stockholm the first author met with the two leading Swedish scholars on Swedenborg's life and work, Reverend Olle Hjern of the Swedenborgian Church (Nya Kyrken), and Professor Inge Jonsson, a former Rector of the University of Stockholm. They knew of no new evidence related to the case of Swedenborg's vision of the fire in Stockholm. Broad (Broad, 1950, 1969) did a thorough investigation of this case, and nothing new has emerged since then. Another writer and scholar, Göran Arkert of Jaerna, has searched for documents related to Swedenborg in the archive of the Governor of Gothenburg in this period, Johan von Kaulbars (personal communication with Arkert in 2009). Nothing was found relating to this case, but according to Arkert looking for such a document was like looking for a needle in a haystack (personal communication with Arkert).

Discussion

We find several similarities regarding the cases of Swedenborg and Indridason/Jensen:

- Both men tell of two or more observations of the fire with some time in between.
- In their last observations, both report that the fire has been brought under control.
- Many observers were present, fifteen with Swedenborg and several if not many sitters with Indridason. (Their exact number is not mentioned.)
- Those present were so impressed with the description of the fires that they selected two highly placed individuals to be witnesses, the Bishop of Iceland and the Governor of Gothenburg.
- They waited for the news to arrive from Copenhagen, which is more than 1,300 miles away, and from Stockholm, which is 245 miles away.
- In both cases the site of the fire is emotionally associated with the percipient (if we assume Jensen to be the percipient in the latter case) as it was close to their homes and in neighborhoods where they knew many persons.

There are also obvious differences between the two cases. Indridi was in trance and one of his trance personalities described the fire, whereas Swedenborg was apparently in his normal state of consciousness. We should, however, notice that Swedenborg wanted to be alone as he went outside to have his impressions of the fire. Either Swedenborg wanted to concentrate undisturbed, or had to go into an altered state of consciousness when he communicated with deceased spirits, in which case we come close to the situation of Indridason. Here we can only speculate. Swedenborg was famous for his alleged communication with the deceased. No reason is given why Swedenborg went out and told the news when he was back among the guests.

There are two reports of statements made by Swedenborg himself about his vision of the fire. The more important one is in a letter from his friend Springer, a Swedish diplomat in London, to Abbé Pernety who incorporated the account into the preface of his French translation of Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*. It reads as follows: "I asked Swedenborg whether it was true, as I had been informed, that when he was in Gothenburg . . . he had foretold to his friends, three days before the arrival of the post, the precise hour of the great fire that happened to Stockholm. To which he replied that it was exactly true" (see Tafel, 1875, Vol. II, Part I, p. 631).

A German physician, Jung-Stilling, writes in his *Theorie der Geisterkunde*: "As so much has been written and is being said in favour of, and opposition to, this extraordinary man (Swedenborg), I consider it my duty to make known the pure truth regarding this, since I have had an opportunity of knowing it pure and uncontaminated" (Jung-Stilling, 1808:90). He continues: "Swedenborg arrived at Gottenburg from England with a company of travellers. There he stated, he had been told by angels, that a fire was raging in Stockholm, in such and such a street. Stockholm citizens were among the company, who were startled at the news. Soon he entered, and said that they need no longer be uneasy, because the fire was extinguished. On the following day they learnt that all was true. This story is certain and true." Regretfully, Jung-Stilling does not reveal the source for his description.

In Swedenborg's case it is obvious that he had a motivation to follow the fire in Stockholm as he lived there and it threatened his home and property. In the case of the fire in Copenhagen, who should have a greater motivation to observe the fire, Indridason or Jensen? If we tentatively assume that they were two different personalities, namely, that Jensen was not just a split-off part of Indridason's mediumistically highly gifted personality but a real entity, the answer must obviously be the Copenhagenener Jensen. These questions about the reality of trance personalities are hard to answer, and have been at the core of psychical research since its very beginning. These incidents in the lives of Indridason and Swedenborg are examples of extraordinary remote viewing, as

we now call it, or of travelling clairvoyance, or spirit-communication. From the motivational factor it may be argued that it points toward Jensen being a person independent from Indridason.

Gerding (2009) gives an interesting account of Kant's reflections caused by his investigation of the Swedenborg cases and how his views oscillated and changed over time, evidently without any new evidence turning up. Kant takes a much more critical view of Swedenborg's three psychic feats in his book *Träume eines Geistersehers erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766) than in his letter to von Knobloch. In this book, which was published three years after the letter was written, Kant gives a shorter description of this case, which nonetheless in his eyes still was beyond doubt (Kant, 1766(2):355,356). Notes taken by his students also show that in his lectures he expressed a more positive view of Swedenborg's feats than he did in his published *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (Kant, 1766/1964:152–156). There is clearly a difference in his public and more private and “unbuttoned” views (Gerding, 2009).

Modern discussions about the reality versus impossibility of psi seem like distant echoes of Kant's reflections. On one hand Kant takes an almost identical view to Hume when he writes in the *Critique* “even the wildest hypotheses, as long as they are physical, are more tolerable than a hyperphysical hypothesis” (Kant, 1781:A772,A773,B800,B801). But in *Dreams* Kant also expresses a different view: “I am sceptical about each one of them individually, but ascribe some credence to all of them taken together” (Kant, 1766(2):351). Perhaps the following quote best describes Kant's dilemma in dealing with the paranormal: “Philosophy often finds itself seriously embarrassed when it is confronted by certain stories; it is unable either to doubt some of them with impunity or to believe others without being mocked” (Kant, 1766(2):353).

Swedenborg became famous among his contemporaries for his claims of being able to communicate with spirits of the deceased and angels. After his study of Swedenborg's cases, Kant argues that “departed souls and pure spirits . . . may indeed act upon the spirit of man, who belongs with them, to one great republic” (Kant, 1766(2):341). Hence we can assume that Kant would have considered it a serious possibility that Jensen might be a real entity, just as he seems to have assumed that spirits had revealed to Swedenborg that a fire was burning in Stockholm. Kant also feels compelled to add:

I must confess that I am much inclined to assert the existence of immaterial natures in the world, and to place my soul in the class of these beings. . . . the reason which inclines me to this view is very obscure even to myself, and it will probably remain so, as well. (Kant, 1766(2):327)

Our unexpected new finding that Jensen lived close to Store Kongensgade 63 adds a striking similarity to the Swedenborg case. The fire took place in the immediate neighborhood where Jensen had lived all his life and where his family was living.

Could there be a normal explanation of the two cases assuming that they occurred as described? An interesting advantage of these historical cases over comparable current cases is the impossibility of fraud and/or leakage based on modern communication equipment. Such equipment (telephone or telegraph) was not available in the case of Indridason and did not yet exist in the times of Swedenborg. A potential explanation is that Swedenborg and Indridason had accomplices who started the fires at predetermined times so that they could impress those around them. This possibility is so absurd that it can safely be excluded.

Kaare Claudewitz of Copenhagen suggested that Indridason might have read an obituary on Emil Jensen in a Danish newspaper. We jointly checked his possibility. No obituary on Emil Jensen was found in *Politiken* or *Berlingske Tidende*. Besides, Indridason did not know Danish, was only 15 years of age when Jensen died in 1898, and only a handful of people in Iceland, at best, subscribed at this time to a Danish newspaper.

We have here two historical cases of extraordinary awareness of events taking place at great distances. Both of them display the importance of motivational factors as these events were highly relevant to the persons who experienced them. One of the cases clearly opens up the important and controversial question, who is the percipient, the living Indridason or the deceased Jensen?

Notes

- ¹ Arkert has just written a novel on Swedenborg's experience in Gothenburg, a fiction based on facts as far as they are known: *En Märkelig Historia—Swedenborg's Vision 1759* and *A Remarkable Story—The Vision of Swedenborg 1759*, both 2010, Visby, Sweden: Books-on-Demand, ISBN 978-91-633-5382-6.

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