

International Memory of the World Register  
**Sophus Tromholt Collection**  
(Norway)

2012-30

**1.0 Summary (max 200 words)**

*The records nominated consist of a collection of photographic prints in a portfolio and glass negative archive by the scientist and amateur photographer Sophus Tromholt. Tromholt spent almost a year (1882- 1883) in Kautokeino, Northern Norway, as part of the First Polar Year, monitoring an aurora borealis observatory. During this time, he photographed the indigenous population of the Sami especially in the community of Kautokeino, but also extensively in the whole Sami area from the Norwegian coast, through the inland of Norway, Sweden and Finland and to Boris Gleb on the Russian side. The photographs show landscapes, villages, cultural observations, but most importantly, portraits of the Sami population. These portraits are unique in their individualistic and humanistic approach, a first in picturing the Sami as being something more than racial stereotypes and exotic objects for tourists.*

*The portraits are shown with the full name of the portrayed person, the images have therefore been used in genealogical research and have a real importance for the local community.*

*The images are most importantly a source to the international concern for indigenous populations and their portrayal as "the other". Tromholt's images are important historical and political records in this debate.*

**2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)**

*Bergen University Library, Special collections*

**2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage**

*Owner*

**2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)**

*Randi Taxt, Library director and Solveig Greve, special collections department head.*

**2.4 Contact details**

*Name*

*Solveig Greve*

*Address*

*Bergen University Library, Box 1208, 5015 Bergen, Norway*

*Telephone*

*(+ int) 47 55 58 25 20*

*Facsimile*

*Email*

*solveig.greve@ub.uib.no*

### 3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

#### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Sophus Tromholt Collection

The collection consists of

Photographs from Kautokeino, Northern Norway and the Sami part of northern Finland and Russia.

1. Photographic gelatine glass negatives, (1882 -1883).
2. Original portfolio of mounted albumen prints from "Billeder fra Lappernes land" -Tableaux du Pays des Lapons", published 1883
3. Sophus Tromholt: *Under the Rays of the Aurora Borealis, I-11, London 1885,*
4. Sophus Tromholt: *Under Nord/lysets Straa/er. Copenhagen 1885,* (Danish version of the former)

Record number: Negatives 231, Prints in portfolio box 189

4 Negatives from the same series but used by Knud Knudsen as postcard-negatives

Motifs: Photographic images of: landscapes, ethnological documentation, portraits of the Sami people, northern lights- (Aurora Borealis-) documentation, drawn and rephotographed in the portfolio.

Author: Spophus Tromholt, pioneer astro-physicist and participant of observation project of aurora borealis in Kautokeino, Finnmark, Norway, during the polar year 1882-1883 . Amateur photographer of excellence.

Uniqueness of the collection: The negatives have their original number scratched on the emulsion side of the negative, the ones published in the portfolio have titles in Danish and French. The portfolio box with contents exists in two other Norwegian museums in Norway, (Bergen University Museum and the folk Museum, Oslo and also in the Ethnographic Museum in Copenhagen). Some of these portfolios are incomplete, as is the University Library portfolio. The negative collection in the University Library is, almost complete.

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#### 3.2 Catalogue or registration details

Identification details:

The portfolio and the negatives have a different provenance, and their signature are therefore different: The negatives: They are numbered according to the original sequence given by the photographer, with

the library prefix: UBB-TROM-(001 – 332)

The image-database ([www.ub.uib.no/bilder](http://www.ub.uib.no/bilder)) use these same signatures. The images from the negatives have their titles from the titles in the corresponding portfolio-prints.

The portfolio: *Billeder fra Lappernes land. Tableaux du Pays des Lapons*

The portfolio have the number UBB-BS-FOL 621-(001-187)

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#### 3.4 History/provenance

Provenance:

The portfolio is part of the collection of the Bergen Museum Library, and is a gift from Sophus Tromholt 1883.

The negatives were sold by Tromholt to the local photographer Knud Knudsen some time in the 1890's. The company used some of them in their postcard-series. The complete Knudsen archives were partly bought (in 1975) and partly received as a gift from the company Photo Knudsen 1992, by the Bergen University Library

The books are part of the book-collection of the Library.

#### **4.0 Legal information**

##### **4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)**

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Name	Address
University of Bergen Library	University of Bergen Library, Box 7800, 5020 Bergen

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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
(+int) 47 55 58 88 00		post@ub.uib.no



1882 – 1883 as part of a string of circumpolar observation posts.

His plan was to photograph the aurora borealis, but failing this for technical reasons, he went ahead and used his camera to document his environment and the people he met there and on his travels.

The geographical scope of the international polar year created his interest for the whole of the region and the cultural diversity of the Sami population. Although spending most of his time in Kautokeino, he travelled extensively through the whole of the northern Scandinavian / Finland and Russia.

The Sophus Tromholt images are therefore of more than national importance. The Sami people homeland stretches from the coastal district of Norway, through inland plains of Norway, Finland and Russian Boris Gleb, and parts of northern Sweden. The grazing grounds of the Sami's reindeer traditionally followed no national borders. Even after the laying down of the borders, there is a strong Sami cultural community across the area.

Before the 1980's, knowledge of Sophus Tromholt and his work was restricted to the astro-physicist international science community in which he is regarded as a pioneer.

His photographic images have lately gained in importance among historians of the Sami, the local community of Kautokeino, and the international photo-historical community.

Images have been used locally both in high-school and college education and in genealogical research among the Sami for the last 50 years. Internationally, the interest for and impact of historical records of indigenous people have given the Tromholt-images an improved status in research from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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### 5.3 Comparative criteria:

***Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)***

#### **1 Time**

The images of Sophus Tromholt, especially the portraits of Sami, are as ethnographic images go, far beyond its time in humanity and humanistic, individualistic approach of imagery.

As such, they are a first in Scandinavia. Generally, this was a time when racial documentation and exoticism was the norm in photography of indigenous people. (See also the recommendation of professor Peter Larsen, attached.) It must be noted that Tromholt's images are published with full name of the portrayed, instead of the customary and general "a lapp".

#### **2 Place**

*Does the document contain crucial information about a locality important in world history and culture? For example, was the location itself an important influence on the events or phenomena represented by the document? Does it describe physical environments, cities or institutions that have since vanished?*

The images are the first as a photographic survey of the Kautokeino local community. Kautokeino was a community far from the main route of the Norwegian population, inhabited by Sami and only a few Norwegian authority persons.

#### **3 People**

*Does the cultural context of the document's creation reflect significant aspects of human behaviour, or of social, industrial, artistic or political development? Or does it capture the essence of great movements, transitions, advances or regression? Does it illustrate the lives of prominent individuals in the above fields?*

The Sami is, and was, an ethnic minority in Norway as in Sweden, Finland and Russia. Throughout the Finnmark plains of Norway, however, the Sami were in the majority, their culture was the dominant local culture. There are several distinct Sami languages, but across the Northern plains there were dialects within a shared language. Across the Nordic countries, important cultural variation exists, the livelihood

being fishing, fur trapping, sheep herding and the life as semi-nomadic reindeer herders. With Kautokeino as his base, Tromholt documented his extensive travels across the Sami-land, photographing these cultural variations. The Sami of Kautokeino were culturally and linguistically connected across the Sami inter-national area of Sami-land and Kautokeino Sami were his guides during his travels. His photographs from Kautokeino is still the most varied and extensive in his production.

The image collection represents a meeting point between the indigenous population of the Sami and the representative of an urban, European cultural elite. Tromholt was a foreigner, he was a scientist, working with strange scientific apparatus, directed towards the sky, he was called "the star-gazer" by the locals. The images represent his journey into this for him strange social and physical landscape and documents his increasing understanding of the Sami culture. See also the picture of his observatory, where he is photographed in traditional Sami attire.

#### **4 Subject and theme**

*Does the subject matter of the document represent particular historical or intellectual developments in the natural, social and human sciences? Or in politics, ideology, sport or the arts?*

The Tromholt collection is a time-window into the culture and living conditions of the people living in the far north of the Scandinavian peninsula and Russia. As photography it is a "here and now" record, it is important as a contrast and continuation of the Sami culture of today.

#### **5 Form and style**

*Does the document have outstanding aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic value? Or is it a typical exemplar of a type of presentation, custom or medium? Is it an example of a disappeared or disappearing carrier or format?*

Technically, the paper-images are albumen-paper, which is a process used from the 1850's to into the 1920's. The process gives photographic images of unusual beauty, but unfortunately is also subject to chemical degradation and fading. Fortunately, these images have been kept in a dark portfolio box, (see attached picture-folder) and the fading is therefore limited. The negatives are glass gelatine negatives, which are more durable. Most of these are in mint condition and are expected to stay so, being stored in climate-controlled conditions.

Visually, the images are of an outstanding beauty, particularly the portraits of the Sami. They are respectful and strong character portraits, in the best tradition of European early portrait-photography.

The pictures cover several genres: Landscapes, buildings, Sami farms, Sami ethnographic material culture, pictures from travels through the Sami area and portraits. The landscapes are descriptive, but with a scientist's interest in the main geographical aspects, like the river and riverbank, the sandy areas, the vast plains and the placement of villages in the physical landscape. In his photographs of Sami material culture and Sami farms, he is particularly interested in the living quarters, the farmhouses, the temporary tent-dwellings, the storing of hay. The reindeer are shown both as trekking animals and also as a herd, resting. His culture-registration images also include Sami skiing, coastal Sami fishing and the important market-places.

He enjoys picturing social groups of people, like the picture of the minister and the congregation in front of the Kautokeino church, or the whole class of school-children of Kautokeino, with their teacher. He has learned the art of posing groups of two, three, five and six from his photography teacher, the studio photographer Marcus Selmer, and he poses the population of Kautokeino in the snowy outdoors as if they were groups in an Bergen photographic studio.

His greatest contribution to the photo-history and the history of Kautokeino are the unique portraits of the Sami. These images are mostly close up, therefore showing an abundance of details in clothing, embellishments and tools. Interestingly, the men are posed in a variety of angles, from straight on through a three-quarter angle and an occasional profile. Several of the pictures are also taken from a low standpoint, giving the sitter an imposing powerful stance. The women are posed straight on, giving the close-fitted caps a beautiful framing around their faces. Also, the gaze of these women are direct and unworried, sometimes even flirty, and often show more self-assurance than other women in portraits from urban studios of the 1880's. They suggest a culture of greater equality between the sexes than the "civilized" western-european culture. All the portraits are open and inviting, evidence of a photographic situation of rare equality between photographer and sitter. This is the main quality and uniqueness of Tromholt's portraits.

The recommendations from art historian and professor Peter Larsen and also from Director Ingrid M.

Nilsson, Preus Museum, witness the artistic quality and style of the Tromholt work.

As shown, the images in general have a great value as sources to the life of the Sami, and also as sources to comparative historical studies of indigenous populations of the arctic regions. Still, in modern research, as a photographic source to the "colonial gaze" or the lack thereof, Tromholt's work presents a fertile source for investigating the history of inter-culture communication and colonial history.

#### **6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:**

*Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – does documentary heritage have an emotional hold on people who are alive today? Is it venerated as holy or for its mystical qualities, or revered for its association with significant people and events?*

Kautokeino at this time (the 1880) was a meeting point and administrative centre for the Sami. The greater part of the portraits have been taken during the festival of Easter, when the rein-herders gathered in Kautokeino. The images are of people who, as semi nomads, retain limited personal physical records and documents. The images are even more precious for the present Kautokeino population considering how little was left of private possessions after the systematic burning of parts of Northern Norway (and also Kautokeino) during the Nazi raids during the World War II. (See also the attached recommendation by Ole Henrik Magga).

### **6.0 Contextual information**

#### **6.1 Rarity**

Sophus Tromholt's project as such was a rarity in his days. His unique position as a scientist in this community, and his close connection to the Bergen Museum, made it imperative for him to publish the portfolio of images in 1883 and the book about his travels in Kautokeino, the Aurora Borealis observations and astro-physical calculations. The publications are rare, but not unique. Together with the negatives, however, the complete Tromholt-collection has a status as unique records of early Sami culture.

#### **6.2 integrity**

The components of the Tromholt collection has different provenance but they are also part of a whole. The single record comments and completes the others; information lacking in the negative-collection can be found in the books and the portfolio, and images lacking in the portfolio and books exist as negatives. As such it is a comprehensive whole.