

# Swedish Society, Swedish Archaeology, and the Public Debate

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During the 1980s Swedish archaeology expanded as concerns its financial resources and personnel involved in archaeological activities. Little archaeology is performed in Sweden today that is not explicitly or implicitly part of the state administrative and antiquarian system of cultural resources management.

The above social setting of Swedish archaeology is discussed among Swedish archaeologists. However, Swedish archaeology takes otherwise little part in the day-to-day public discussion on the present and future Swedish society. On the other hand, long-term trends within this debate are reflected within the internal archaeological debate.

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The question is: Does Swedish archaeology take part in or influence the public debate in the Swedish society? The answer is of course "yes", so the next question is: In what way? And the next one: Does Swedish archaeology influence the present and the future of the Swedish society? This essay will hint at answers to the latter questions by surveying the Swedish archaeological literature from the time period 1986-1990. In the first hand I have excerpted *Nordic Archaeological Abstracts* 1986-1990. In addition, I have used my memory and that of a few colleagues. Certainly there are other books and articles that deserve, but cannot be given, mention here.

## 1986-1990 IN RETROSPECT

The second half of the 1980s was a period of exceptional economic boom, when skilful, enterprising people with the appropriate image and influential friends could make easy money, or at least so it was said. It was also a period of economic change. Restriction

and regulations that had been in use for decades were abandoned, and groups with an economically, socially, and politically weak position saw their existence threatened. The new Manchester liberal spirit won the parliamentary election in 1991, and the liberal and conservative parties could form a new government with the implicit help of a new right-wing party. The political program "A New Beginning for Sweden" was set into motion.

In 1991 the unemployment rate started to accelerate from about 100 000 to an alarming 200 000 in a single year. Today, 1993, there are 600 000 unemployed. For the first time in decades the percentage of women with jobs has decreased, from 91% to 87%. The annual deficit in the Swedish budget was nil or insignificant until 1990. Today it is one of the biggest in Europe. The ideological threat of neo-liberal change from the late 1980s has for many become economic reality during the last few years.

Thus, the time period 1986-1990 was a

period of optimism and progress but also a period of misgivings for some. It has to be remembered that it was a period very different from what was to follow. The "Swedish Model" concept of social security was still an honorable concept, not a nostalgic one (Elmbrant 1993).

#### WHAT TO DISCUSS?

In 1989-1990 the journal *META* contained a debate on chaos theory, initiated by Jes Wienberg (1989) who had read a number of books and articles by James Gleick, Sverker Sörlin and others. Two different views became evident in the course of the debate (*META* 1989, 1990):

- (1) It is of interest and importance within archaeology to discuss ideas and opinions currently discussed also outside the discipline of archaeology.
- (2) The archaeological discussion should not be influenced by ideas from outside, e.g. from the natural sciences, but discuss on its own terms.

I have no idea which view is shared by most professional archaeologists in Sweden, although my guess is that the silent majority pays lip-service to the first view. An honest explicit example is the concluding paragraph of a short introductory textbook on post-processual archaeological theory by Mats Burström (1989a:26). He states that it is a social responsibility to scrutinize the public use of knowledge, ideas, and concepts derived from archaeological practice.

So the obvious question is: Is this done? Does archaeology take part in or influence the public discussion in other ways, or not?

#### THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE

In Sweden archaeology is closely related to, and to an immense and incalculable extent dependent on, the administration of the set of laws on the protection, management, and public service associated with the historical monuments, archaeological sites, and cultu-

ral landscape (Baudou 1987:34). In this sense there is no relation between archaeology and society in Sweden; archaeology *is* society. Swedish archaeology is irrevocably intermingled with the Swedish society, especially with its bureaucracy. During the time period in question the staff of central archaeological and antiquarian state institutions in Stockholm was about 700 persons, and the local organisation in the provinces was expanding. The total sum of money spent by Swedish archaeology in 1990 was about 200 million Swedish kronor (30 million US dollars at that time), of which less than 10 % was spent by the university institutes. The 1980s saw an apparently unlimited increase in archaeological whereabouts and items on the agenda: field-work, financial resources, number of staff members, commissions and affairs (Randsborg 1990: 158-160).

It is little known how this way of organising archaeology as an administrative system on a national scale affects archaeology in Sweden. Anyhow, the dominating archaeology with its administrative basis can be studied in annual reports (e.g. Modig 1987, Andrae 1991) and in reports with a longer time perspective (e.g. Andrae *et al.* 1987, cf. Welinder 1988b). There are dozens and scores of field-work reports (e.g. Riksantikvarieämbetet 1987) and summaries according to provinces or other small areas (e.g. Beskow Sjöberg 1987, Hedman 1988, Löthman 1988, Gotländskt Arkiv 1990, Golabiewski Lannby 1990, Norman 1990). These local reports may contain data and ideas of interest, when the field-work in a defined area is defined as a research project and summarised, evaluated, and interpreted accordingly (e.g. Hemmendorf 1989a, b, Modig 1990, Västgöta-Dal 1990, Weiler 1990).

This kind of administrative archaeology certainly needs a continuous discussion on what kinds of data are collected and what kinds are not, and on how the data are pro-

cessed to become of interest for various purposes (e.g. Gustavson *et al.* 1986, *Det dolda kulturlandskapet* (1987), Bennett *et al.* 1988, Kyhlberg *et al.* 1988, Cederlund 1990). In Sweden, central to this discussion are problems concerning the kinds of archaeological knowledge needed for the rescue activity and other antiquarian tasks (e.g. Hørlück Jessen 1986, *Samhällsplanering och kulturminnesvård* (1986), Biörnstad *et al.* 1987, Lundström 1988, Lundström & Naess 1988, *Dokumentation och restaurering* (1989), Trotzig & Vahlne 1989; much of the space of the journal "Kulturminnesvård" ("Kulturmiljövård") is devoted to this theme, e.g. 1986, 1990). The discussion also includes the educational role of archaeology at large (e.g. Adolfsson 1987, Hyenstrand 1990, Andersson & Hall 1990, Nordbladh 1990, in the schools (e.g. Hyenstrand 1989a), and at the universities (e.g. Welinder 1990b). Swedish archaeologists seem to have one of the shortest formal university educations in the civilized world (Randsborg 1990:158-160).

One issue discussed is the relation between academic university archaeology and the dominating administrative archaeology. Evert Baudou, in a summary of options on various aspects of archaeology asked for from the university institutes, advocates a position of cooperation (Baudou 1987:28). He especially stresses and exemplifies research at the university institutes, which will be of use to the administrative archaeology and to society at large (1987:30, 37-39). Klavs Randsborg, too, stresses the cooperation between academic and administrative archaeology. He regards archaeology as having entered a post-academic era and wants to see fundamental research strengthened (Randsborg 1990:161-162). Gundela Lindman states that questions of interest to archaeological research should also be of interest to the general public (1990). Åke Hyenstrand explicitly sees archaeology as a social and public activity. He advocates an

archaeology that is integrated into the public debate (Hyenstrand 1988a:13-15). Unlike Evert Baudou he tends to hope for an archaeology that is less of a servant to the rest of society.

There are few advocates of academic university archaeology as an independent analyst, commentator, and reviewer of the mainstream administrative archaeology. There are also few advocates of an independent, intellectual position in relation to the public debate on archaeology and society at large. The rare examples, besides Hyenstrand (1988a) referred to above, are Burström (1989b) and especially Welinder (1987).

#### WHAT WAS DISCUSSED?

A few topics on the political agenda discussed in the newspapers are also found in the archaeological publications.

There is a handful of scholars studying the specific Saami life-style and cultural landscape in Sweden (e.g. Bergman 1990; see also Lars Forsberg in this volume). A controversial point is how to distinguish Saami sites and artifact assemblages from Germanic or Nordic ones during prehistoric and early historical times (e.g. Zachrisson 1988). This received more than scholarly interest, if the issue ever had but that, when archaeologists were called in to perform as experts by both the plaintiff and the defendant in the current lawsuit on the traditional use of the reindeer pasture-land in the province Härjedalen.

A general discussion on the concept of ethnicity was, however, not remarkably evident within Swedish archaeology (Ortman 1989) during the time period in question. The next five-year survey will demonstrate whether or not the problematic debate on immigration policy and the problematic integration of refugees into the Swedish society will have increased the interest in ethnicity.

More to the fore than the archaeology of ethnicity and the specific Saami archaeo-

logy is still the specific Swedish archaeological subdiscipline of "Archaeology of Norrland", the Swedish name for the main part of Sweden north of the provinces of Uppland and Dalarna. When the Department of Archaeology at Umeå University was founded in the mid-1970s, a Norrlandic chauvinism was well understandable, and a decade later it was well earned (Baudou 1986, 1990). Today it ought to be abandoned like all other kinds of nationalist and chauvinist archaeology (Arkeologi i Norrland 1986).

Unfortunately, since the notorious year 1989 ethnic and nationalistic chauvinism, in some parts of Europe combined with warfare, has spread. In Sweden this is seen as a growing xenophobia, or plain racism, directed against South-European and non-European immigrants.

Accordingly, the concept "Sweden" and above all "Swedish" have come into focus as the opposite of "outside Sweden" and "non-Swedish". The relation between Sweden and various parts of Europe and the rest of the world attracts interest, as does an archaeological discussion of Swedish identity, or European identity - Sweden applied for membership in the Common Market in 1991 (Burström 1989b). The Common Market concepts of "region" and "centre-periphery relations" were introduced into Swedish archaeology (Baudou 1989, Randsborg 1990:162-163). "Centre-periphery" was the main theme of the Nordic Archaeological Conference in Trondheim in 1989 (Wik 1991). Sweden is already part of a number of archaeological regions in the Common Market sense of the term, e.g. a region around the Bothnian Sea (Bottnisk kontakt 3, 4), in addition to the traditional Nordic cooperation. A new region seems to be forming across the Baltic (Estland 1990).

Swedish archaeology is poorly equipped to take part in these kinds of discussion. The problem is not merely to avoid unconsciously forming nationalism, chauvinism, and racism, but also to balance Swedish

identity against European and non-European relations, including migration, with the stress on tolerance and integration.

When this article is printed it will be known whether or not Sweden joined the Common Market in 1995. One group, many members of which see the Common Market as a threat to their economic independence and life-style, is women. Feminist archaeology is commented upon by Tove Hjørungdal in another article in this volume. Here I will merely mention that questions about power relations within the institutionalised archaeology and the relation between this archaeology and the rest of society have been raised from a gender perspective (Lagerlöf 1990, Lindman 1990, Odelberg 1990).

"Power relations" became an analytical concept during the time period. Generally Swedish archaeology - like archaeology in much of the rest of Europe - became more interested in relations between humans than between humans and their environment. One of the annual archaeological seminars at the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Lund was devoted to the concept of power (Larsson & Ryberg 1991), and the term "power" was seen in book titles (Hyenstrand 1989c).

The power relations within the discipline of archaeology itself were also discussed as concerns the distributions of resources among both individuals and institutions (Baudou 1987:27, Redin 1988). Ideological power is perhaps still more crucial. In a contribution to a debate on the technical language of the theoretical archaeology initiated by Bo Gräslund (1989) in the journal *Fornvännen*, Björn Olsen stressed that the holder of a professor's chair has a privileged position in a debate of this kind (Olsen 1990:116-117).

The debate on idealism and materialism as the basis for understanding social change, initiated by Eva Myrdal Runebjer (1990) in the journal *Folkets Historia* (1991), also

raised the question of who decides what is to be regarded as acceptable archaeology. By the way, one of the articles commented upon in this debate is Larsson (1987). In this article Thomas B. Larsson somewhat exaggeratedly juxtaposes the cultural ecological archaeology of the 1970s to an ideological archaeology. In retrospect it can be seen as an early post-processual article. At the time it was classified as Marxist-materialistic.

Power relations and suppression of opinions within Swedish archaeology are worth discussing. A few years ago I asked a group of research students to write articles on whatever they liked, without restriction for publication in *Fornvännen* to mark the beginning of the new decade, the 1990s. One of the students answered (Welinder 1990a): "But we cannot write uninhibitedly! Anyone familiar with Swedish archaeology and its organization knows it is impossible...". The democracy introduced into the academic world during the 1970s has broken down, if it ever functioned efficiently.

In a society there are ideas and thoughts that are not explicitly discussed. They are implicit in the discussion inasmuch as they guide inherent long-term trends in how the members of the society act and interact. I have been told that the late 1980s was a time when people became interested in religion, spiritual values, and mysticism, although I did not notice much of it myself. Anyhow, another two of the Lund seminars were devoted to graves (Iregren *et al.* 1988) and religion (Larsson & Wyszomirska 1989).

#### FROM "KULTURMINNESVÅRD" TO "KULTURMILJÖVÅRD"

In spite of the efficient Swedish antiquarian bureaucracy, it is not known how many historic and prehistoric monuments and sites there are in Sweden. This is not even known as concerns the various records of the various antiquarian institutions (Selling 1989). The number of sites and especially the

number of types of sites has increased immensely during the last few decades. The self-evident implication in combination with the environmental thinking of the 1960s and 1970s is that the cultural management has changed its focus from individual sites to sections of landscapes. That is what is inherent in the above heading:

Sw. *kulturminne* = Eng. historic (or prehistoric) site.

Sw. *miljö* = Eng. environment

Sw. *vård* = Eng. protection and management  
Symptomatic is that the journal "Kulturminnesvård" (1988) in 1989 changed its name to "Kulturmiljövård" (1989). A new subdepartment was organised at *Riksantikvarieämbetet* (The Central Board of National Antiquities) in 1987. Among its tasks was to list landscape sections of national interest from a historical and cultural point of view. Today there are 1700 entries in this record, divided among all provinces of Sweden, with individual cultural-historical descriptions (e.g. Olsson 1990). This is so far the official way to handle the change from the protection and management of monuments and sites to the management of the total Swedish landscape and cultural environment as concerns its contents of historical and cultural values.

#### FROM ECOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY TO SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

At the same time as the administrative archaeology changed its interest from monuments and sites to landscape sections, the university archaeology abandoned its interest in environmental archaeology to start exploring the post-processual interest in social interaction and power relations beginning in the mid-1980s (see the article by Björn Varenius in this volume). At the onset of the 1980s a typical title of a volume of papers read at a seminar was "Society and environment. On interpretation in anthropology and archaeology" (Hjort 1983). Towards the end of the decade a typical

title ran "Theories on societies and material culture" (Hyenstrand 1988b).

This change in interest was evident already at the Norwegian national seminar in Trondheim in 1983 (Welinder 1984), and it was highlighted at the Nordic TAG conference in Umeå in 1987 in the session on "Symbolism and Archaeology" (Engelstad 1987). My own 1986 book *Det arkeologiska perspektivet* (The Archaeological Perspective) may be regarded as summarizing the cultural ecology of the 1970s and early 1980s, and as putting forward questions concerning alternative ways of looking at long-term change (Welinder 1986, Hyenstrand 1989b).

The protection of the natural environment was ranked as the second most important social and political problem by the Swedish voters in a Gallup poll before the 1985 parliamentary election. In 1988 it was ranked as the first. Seemingly, the administrative and antiquarian archaeology was more in step with the current public opinion than the university archaeology. However, general popular textbooks emerging from both antiquarian and university institutes use the environmental interest to find willing readers (Burenhult *et al.* 1988, Blomkvist 1990).

#### LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY

Sweden has an eminent tradition of landscape archaeology based on the state antiquarian records of monuments and sites, an efficient interdisciplinary network (e.g. Königsson 1986, Gräslund *et al.* 1990, Myhre *et al.* 1990), and generally large finan-

cial resources for field-work. The archaeological tradition, which started at least as far back as the 1930s, and the human geographical tradition, which started in the 1960s, have now merged into one tradition, which is well on its way of becoming fully integrated into the routine antiquarian administration of the cultural landscape (e.g. Petré 1987, Sporrang 1990, Widgren 1990).

There is an enormous potential for a joint environmental protection and cultural-historical landscape management in the post-processual archaeological view of the man-landscape relations (Gren 1990). Seeing humans as actively creating an experienced landscape (Welinder 1988a) ought to be more beneficial than seeing humans as adaptive parts of ecosystems (Hubendick 1986).

#### CONCLUDING REMARK

Swedish archaeology is in some respects very much a part of the Swedish society. Since the 1987 law on the management of natural resources (Sw. *naturresurslagen*) archaeology is a part of the planning of the future society, not just the administrating of the present. There is a running discussion on how this planning and administration can be best conducted.

There is less discussion of the Swedish society itself based on the specific way of archaeology to look at humans and societies. And in this discussion Swedish archaeology performs more like the barge than the tow-boat.

*English revised by Laura Wrang.*

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