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*Afloat and Aflame: Deconstructing the Long 19th Century Port City Gothenburg through Newspaper Archaeology*

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Studies of marginalization and material and social conditions of the working poor are still rather rare in Scandinavian historical archaeology. Unlike in anglophone scholarship, where these research subjects are well established and primarily explored in urban settings (for example Yamin 1998; Mayne & Murray (eds) 2001; IJHA 2011; Owens & Jeffries 2016), in the few Scandinavian studies that exist, focus is on rural areas (Lihammer 2011; Sethre 2017; Hansson et al. 2020a; Hansson et al. 2020b; Svensson et al. 2020) or institutions (Nielsen & Hansen 2017). Inspired by the international scholarship, Martina Hjertman's PhD dissertation entitled *Afloat and Aflame: Deconstructing the Long 19th Century Port City Gothenburg through Newspaper Archaeology* draws attention to urban marginalization and disenfranchisement using novel methods of analysis. The thesis focuses on the processes, discourses and materialities of marginalization

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in the late eighteenth–early twentieth century Gothenburg, as reflected in and shaped by the city’s newspapers. The case study is Majorna, one of Gothenburg’s neighborhoods. During the long nineteenth century, Majorna develops into a dynamic port and industrial area drawing attention of the city’s entrepreneurs and investors, and attracting diverse groups of unskilled workers, laborers, craftsmen, and servants – those ‘of little note’, to use the term that the author operationalizes.

Traditionally, the studies of marginalization and poverty in historical archaeology are undertaken using a combination of excavated artefacts and buildings, landscape surveys and an array of historical records. This approach allows for grasping lived realities, consumption patterns and material practices as well as contextualizing poverty in time and space. That standard approach was unattainable in this case. The lack of archaeological excavations and surveys of standing structures dated to modern period in Majorna, which the author partly ascribes to the legal stipulations of the Swedish heritage legislation (Sw. *Kulturmiljölagen*), which does not protect post-1850 monuments and remains, steers the author towards other sources and methods. The bulk of these sources are digitized issues of 12 different newspapers published in Gothenburg between 1749 and 1906 approached through a lens of newspaper archaeology. The material is massive, as Majorna is mentioned in over 60,000 instances. Inspired by American and British historical archaeological research (Mayne 1993; Beaudry 2014; Gaff 2016), the author conducts a discourse analysis she calls a ‘text-cavation’. She excavates the newspapers, mindful of the socio-cultural contexts and genre, uncovering narrative layers of Majorna, the material, spatial and social descriptions of this nineteenth-century suburb.

The aims of the thesis are ambitious and multifaceted. The analysis centers around several research questions: of the significance of newspapers as sources for historical archaeology in general and the studies of urban poverty and marginalization in particular; of a discursive construction, representation, inclusion and exclusion of individuals, groups and urban neighborhoods in those newspapers; of counter voices and their narrative strength; of social norms and ideals, their materialization and role in shaping the narratives published by the newspapers; and, of the role of newspapers as world-makers, their ability to create and promote a specific version of the world.

The thesis consists of 11 chapters, including introduction, presentation of sources, methods and theoretical concepts (chapters 1–4), historical background (chapter 5), analytical chapters (6–9), discussion, conclusion and summary in Swedish (chapters 10 and 11). The investigation tackles several themes that dominate representation of Majorna in newspapers during the studied period. The sources strengthening the points are carefully chosen and, importantly, include not only the perspectives of outsiders but

also voices of residents of Majorna. These constitute important counter-narratives and grant a voice to those considered in the historical archaeological scholarship as ‘of little note’.

Chapter 6 focuses on the shifting and discrepant ideas of what Majorna was in terms of geographical and social space expressed in a variety of journalistic forms: house advertisements, petitions, opinion pieces and editorials. This investigation reveals that the popular image of Majorna was inconsistent, intensely debated and continuously negotiated throughout the period. The same impression is given by a cartographic material explored in parallel to newspapers. Utilizing letters to the press and police reports, that start to be published in the city’s newspapers from 1839, chapter 7 explores representations of the social landscape of Majorna. The author concludes that from 1830s and onward, the newspapers operate with a specific discourse associating the suburb with alcoholism, vagrancy, and misery – a result of low moral standards and parental neglect of the residents. Exploration of urban fires and connected security and donation cultures are the subjects of chapter 8, in my opinion the strongest and most interesting chapter. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fire reports were published in newspapers and developed into their own journalistic form, as disaster narratives followed by lists of lost and found and relief petitions. These sources are extremely interesting in terms of shedding light on the material and social conditions of Majorna’s residents, and, as pointed by the author, they contradict the image of the neighborhood as nothing but misery, poverty and squalor, socially and geographically distant from the inner Gothenburg. Chapter 9, the last analytical chapter, focuses on the genre of travelogue, a popular feature of newspapers in the 1850s–1860s and the turn of the century. A thorough application of discourse analysis allows the author to point out that this form creates its own master narrative of Majorna as a distinct and mostly negative other, as an anachronistic place characterized by poverty and neglect. Operating with well-understood symbols and vocabulary, travelogues create Majorna as a coherent world and more than any other journalistic form, they have an impact on the public image of the suburb.

There is no doubt that *Afloat and Aflame* is an important contribution to the development of methods in historical archaeology as well as to the studies of discourses and processes of urban marginalization. The recent mass digitalization of newspapers opens new avenues for research in historical archaeology. The material allows for asking new types of questions about narratives and counternarratives and for uncovering perceptions, vocabularies and voices that are less visible in other types of sources. Hjertman’s dissertation is very successful in illustrating these new opportunities. It demonstrates convincingly the value of newspapers for understanding spatial, physical and cultural realities in the past and as a unique source

for identifying common representations of places and social conditions as well as finding individual voices of those historically considered as ‘voiceless’. The author stops short of a critical reflection whether and how this new source challenges the notion of poor as ‘of little note’ (defined, following Elizabeth M. Scott (1994:3) as ‘... those considered of little importance, not worthy of “notice”, by the dominant social, political, and economic group in a past society. ... those considered not worth “noting” or writing about, those who therefore are not as visible to us in the written records we study. ... those written about less frequently, or little “noted” by historical archaeologists’). My takeaway is that both the dissertation and newspapers as a source provide a stimulating invitation to question the common disciplinary perception of working-class poor and other marginalized individuals as ahistorical ‘voiceless’ or ‘of little note’, or at least to reformulate the meaning of those concepts.

The author succeeds in demonstrating that newspaper content is a viable and rich source for helping to answer archaeological questions about, for example, organization of landscape and domestic space, material practices and culture of working-class suburbanites, although her reflection on this subject is only superficial. For the most part, the author skillfully maneuvers through the different journalistic genres recognizing their specific forms, contexts and aims, and proficiently operates with the critical discourse analysis. By doing so, and by paying attention to temporal changes in the prevailing discourses, she is able to highlight the role of newspapers as worldmakers, this is to say, their role in influencing and shaping public debates and views of the suburb. Surprisingly, however, there is no critical consideration of the agendas of newspaper owners and editors and how their socio-political views and economic interests might have influenced the content and narrative they chose to promote. Such a consideration would have further contextualized the creation and promotion of specific narratives of Majorna and added a nuance to the understanding of the processes of worldmaking the newspapers were involved in. There is also no discussion about any possible difference between narratives of Majorna in the suburb’s newspaper *Forposten* and the newspapers published in inner Gothenburg. Being such an original study introducing new sources and ways of approaching the subject of marginalization, it is also unfortunate that the author does not present and discuss the practical methodological steps of selecting and processing newspaper content.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the thesis is a valuable addition to the historical archaeological scholarship, a step towards exploring poverty and working-class urban neighborhoods in Sweden, Scandinavia and beyond. It is an exciting exploration of newspaper archaeology and successful exposition of newspapers as a unique and fascinatingly rich source of

information. The term of ‘text-cavation’ for conducting critical discourse analysis works well as a metaphor here, and if newspaper archaeology emerges as a subfield, there is a potential to develop the term to encompass a distinctively archaeological method of reading and analyzing texts, which is implied by the author. Since the move towards digitalization of newspapers (and other sources) is global, the study has a potential to inspire a wider international group of scholars to tap into them, to text-cavate and uncover new voices from and meanings of the past.

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