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*De obesuttnas arkeologi: Människor, metoder
och möjligheter*

(Eng. *The Archaeology of the Dispossessed*)

Riksantikvarieämbetet/Swedish National Heritage Board

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In 2014, the Swedish cultural heritage legislation concerning ancient monuments (Kulturminneslagen §2, SFS 1988:950) was changed. The old law, which in principal constituted protection for all permanently abandoned physical remains of human activity, was changed, and an age-limitation was established. In the new law, physical remains post-dating 1850 are no longer automatically protected. The background to the changes in legislation was the liberal governments' (2010–2018) wish to support land owners' claims for expanded control over the lands (cf. RAÅ 2018:7).

Remains connected to the forest industry (charcoal- and tar burning), industrialisation, the agricultural revolution (crofters' dwellings) were, in practice, seldom documented and rarely protected by the old system, meaning that they rarely were examined with archaeological methods, or that the existence of these monuments had any influence over infra-structural development. The change in legislation paradoxically led to a drastic change in antiquarian praxis, contrary to the legislators' aims and wishes. During the

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last eight to ten years, Swedish archaeological concern with remains from the early modern period has grown considerably, and historical archaeology (the medieval and post-medieval periods) is probably the dominant field in the cultural heritage management and the antiquarian system; a situation which is not mirrored in education and research in archaeology at the Swedish universities.

As a result of these drastic changes – the introduction of an age limit for protection of monuments – the research project, *The archaeology and cultural heritage of the dispossessed* (funded by the National Heritage Board 2017–2019), set out to provide new knowledge about of the poor and marginalized of the early modern and modern societies. That is, about the ones that archaeology has found so hard to locate and study in meaningful ways, and a group whose cultural heritage now was considered a heritage to be protected. How had Swedish archaeology dealt with the early modern poor, with what methods, and what practices? The project collected data, and methods related to historical archaeologies of this non-homogenous group, with a focus on the national antiquarian system and its implementation. The project published several papers in both English and Swedish, they organized seminars, and they also published this highly accessible and important book.

The Archaeology of the Dispossessed is divided into six chapters and is provided with two appendices. Chapter 1: The dispossessed and historical archaeology, discusses concepts and perspectives: who were the poor, what is/was poverty, how should we describe them, and how can we trace that through archaeology (a scientific discipline historically driven by search for objects and valuables)? The chapter includes a discussion on Swedish historical archaeology of the early modern and modern periods and its relation to international research. Here the authors introduce issues on power and materiality as discussed by the Annapolis school of historical archaeology, the wider debate on historical archaeology of dispossession in historical archaeology, and that of the archaeology of the institution of slavery. It is striking how limited Swedish archaeology of poverty and class has been in an international perspective. A comparison to industrial archaeology confirms that (pp. 122–134). Despite its long and ample industrial history, Swedish archaeology has not yet developed a more specialized industrial archaeology.

Chapters 2 and 3 present the antiquarian practice: what has been done, and where do we find the results? These chapters are most welcome not only for civil servants in the cultural heritage management system, but also for students at all levels, seeking sources and perspectives for essays and further studies. In chapter 4 the authors delve deeper into important aspects of the cultural heritage and the history of the dispossessed: the biologi-

cal heritage (plants, flora, trees), the rural slum, the aristocracy's crofters, the urban poor. Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion. Here the authors return to three important results that sprung from earlier chapters: firstly, the complex and inconsistent bureaucratic aspects of the antiquarian system; secondly, the high potential of historical archaeology through the method of triangulation that provides with new and pertinent knowledge concerning the substantial, yet heterogenous group of dispossessed of the early modern and modern societies, in the towns, in the industries, and in the rural settings. Thirdly, and finally, they conclude that poverty and dispossession is not an easy thing to define, understand, and to work with – but of the utmost importance for a more democratic and more representative study of the more recent past.

One of the many strengths of this book is the presentation and critique of the antiquarian practice concerning the material heritage of the poor. Too often sites with material remains of the dispossessed have been neglected by the antiquarian system, both on an administrative level and on the practitioner's level (the rescue archaeology firms). This is apparent in local lack of interest, systemic unawareness of historical archaeological methods, and structural neglect of the heritage of the dispossessed. The authors point to worldly aspects, such as the use, and non-use of headlines and keywords in reports and how that limits accessibility. A typical large-scale rescue archaeological excavation in Sweden often include remains from several time periods. Prehistoric sites may be in focus for the archaeologists, and the results from the concurrent excavation of a croft or a saw mill, may in the technical report be played down in favour of the prehistoric sites' (pp. 53–57). More telling and discouraging are examples of the cultural heritage management system's neglect of the physical remains of society's poor – but the book also presents several good and important examples. Four cases, both successful and not so successful, are presented in the appendices, together with a very valuable 'handbook' of best practice. The latter will be of great importance for the local, regional and national heritage management, and for students, and also in teaching.

The Archaeology of the Dispossessed provides an important contribution to Scandinavian archaeology and cultural heritage management. It is a handbook to be used in the day to day task of historical archaeology. It is thorough, well-written, well-illustrated, and thought-provoking despite its humble tone. Praise aside, there are two aspects that could have been addressed. The book is featured by a landscape perspective of archaeological remains. Several good examples (and some not so good) are presented at length. The use and construction of space on both micro and macro levels are presented with several well-chosen examples, from, for instance, crofts and remains of rural slum. But what about the role of material cul-

ture? What can the material finds, the material culture, or the lack of finds say about poverty? Examples are given, but one would have wanted more. How can assemblages of ceramics and other indications of consumer culture be understood in terms of class, culture and degrees of poverty? And, how can the material culture be understood in relation to written and depictive sources?

Another point is the lack of multicultural perspectives. The authors state that the Sámi past is too complex to be addressed in this context (p. 7), and that many results were not accessible at the time of print (2020), which is understandable, yet regrettable. But what about the Roma historic experience? It is exemplified by the Snarsmon-project in Bohuslän (Andersson 2008), important and relevant studies, but it could have been given more room. Historical archaeology not only gives us tools for a deeper understanding of the more recent past, it gives us tools to understand its complexity. It is often the written record and the oral traditions that provide sources to identify the physical remains of the Roma camp, the Sámi dwelling or the Dutch industrial workers cabin – but we need archaeology to unfold a deeper understanding of past lifeways and social and cultural practices – and the multi-cultural aspects of the past, and present.

These critical points are however marginal. *De obesuttnas arkeologi* is an important contribution to the swiftly expanding field of historical archaeology, and a very accessible introduction, a handbook, and a tangible companion to Swedish cultural heritage management. Read it and use it!

References

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