

THE CHANGING ROLES OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN SWEDISH MUSEUMS

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the position of archaeology in Swedish museums has gone through a series of structural reorganizations. There have been many previous reforms over the years, but recent developments are more substantial, and in some cases even involve the closing of archaeological research, fieldwork, outreach, and education at regional and local museums.

Historically, archaeology and archaeologists have had a prominent role in Swedish national and regional museums of cultural history. In the nineteenth century, scholars and museum workers were busy with typological and chronological endeavours, supplementing and organiz-

ing the collections. This early work by archaeologists and curators laid the foundation for both modern museums and archaeology as a scientific field (Nicklasson & Petersson 2012). This work gradually became more professionalized during the early twentieth century and the regional museums of cultural history were also reorganized in a nationwide system under the auspices of *Historiska museet* (The Swedish History Museum) and *Nordiska museet* (The Nordic Museum), both located in Stockholm. In the first half of the twentieth century, the number of regional museums increased and from the 1930s onwards many were turned into *Länsmuseum* (Regional County Museums) with the specific task of caring for the heritage of each individual county (Bergström & Edman 2005). These museums increasingly developed a professionalized regional management for heritage protection and conservation (Nilsson & Rudebeck 2010). Archaeological excavations and archaeological exhibitions were thus an essential part of these museums.

POLICY CHANGES AND NEW ORGANIZATION

The first publication of *MUS 65, Kulturminnesvård* (SOU 1972:45), represents a tipping point that changed the role of archaeology in the regional museums. The report introduced cultural heritage management as an explicit part of regional community planning. A new position as *Länsantikvarie* (Head Antiquarian) was established in each county, with the responsibility for new cultural heritage units at *Länsstyrelsen* (the County Administrative Board), working as the extended arm of the state at the county level (Pettersson 2003). This new organizational structure laid the foundation for the traditional distribution of roles between the County Administrative Boards (administration and control), the Regional County Museums (collecting and outreach) and the universities (research and education).

In the 1990s, *Riksantikvarieämbetet* (the Swedish National Heritage Board) started to put pressure on Swedish contract archaeology¹ to develop, from a previous focus on excavation and documentation to now also include research as part of the contract archaeological endeavour. This was a response to the government bill *Utbildning och forskning: Kvalitet och konkurrenskraft* (Prop. 1993/94:177), which declared that contract archaeology should be reconsidered as a research process. Contract archaeology units all over Sweden were now encouraged to

¹ Contract archaeology is called *uppdragsarkeologi* in Swedish. In English it is sometimes also translated as ‘development-led archaeology’ or ‘CRM archaeology’.

formulate so-called ‘scientific programmes’ that specified the goals for their business (Johansen 1998; Högberg & Rudebeck 2001). Although several actors in contract archaeology already had researchers employed and ran research projects (for example UV-Syd 1999; Rudebeck *et al.* 2001), the development of the sector towards research strengthened the knowledge production in many regional museums. When analysis and research now became an explicit part of the museums’ archaeological activity, more researchers were recruited. Also, employees were encouraged and given opportunities to take a doctoral degree. Many archaeologists at museums thus became quite well educated in relation to other museum staff (Nilsson & Rudebeck 2010).

In the mid 1990s the government presented another bill, *Uppdragsarkeologi m.m.* (Prop. 1996/97:99), which suggested that contract archaeology should be deregulated, and work in a system of contract-based market competition. Since *MUS65*, contract archaeology had been a non-profit enterprise in which *Länsstyrelsen* had full control over costs, and also assigned contracts for excavations to local or regional archaeological actors. Hence, suggestions made in *Uppdragsarkeologi m.m.* implied wide-ranging changes in how contract archaeology in Sweden was to be organized. The implementation of the measures proposed in the bill took time. But, after some years of amendment, contract archaeology in Sweden is now subject to market competition.

In the government inquiry *Uppdragsarkeologi i tiden* (SOU 2005:80) the purpose of contract archaeology was clearly formulated in relation to the goals of the national culture policy for the heritage sector. The proposal advocated that contract archaeology has broader purposes and responsibilities besides excavating, documenting and doing research. Consequently, in this bill it was suggested that contract archaeology to a higher degree than before should cooperate with the society outside archaeology. In this inquiry, *Länsmuseerna* are seen as natural collaboration partners for contract archaeology.

The broad ideas on cooperation with society expressed in *Uppdragsarkeologi i tiden* were never fully realized, however. Instead, in the following bill *Kulturmiljöns mångfald* (Prop. 2012/13:96), it was suggested that ‘some outreach (*förmedling*) of the results of an archaeological excavation to the general public and society as a whole’ should be included in excavation projects (Prop. 2012/13:96 *Kulturmiljöns mångfald* 2013:62). Today, Swedish contract archaeology follows this bill which comprises excavation, documentation, research, reporting to heritage bodies, and communicating the results to the general public. Another consequence of this bill is that *Länsmuseerna* no longer are considered as given partners for contract archaeology. This was criti-

cized when the bill was circulated for comments. *Länsmuseernas Samarbetsråd* (the County Museum Cooperation Council), for instance, stressed that the possibility of linking contract archaeology to the county museums ought to have been examined more closely (Prop. 2012/13:96 *Kulturmiljöns mångfald* 2013:63).

CONSEQUENCES

The changes made to Swedish contract archaeology sketched above have fundamentally affected the conditions for archaeology and archaeologists at the regional museums. In a contract archaeology market that is now subject to competition, companies are expected to have a full transparent economy. Everything has to be financed by contracts. No work is allowed to be subsidized by grants. One consequence of this is that the majority of archaeological units at the museums have been separated from the rest of the museum organization, mainly in the form of in-house contract archaeological companies. This has been organized in different ways in different regions. Some archaeological companies maintain their relation to a regional museum by way of ownership structures. In other regions, contract archaeology has been detached from the museum. As an effect, former museum archaeologists have started archaeological companies with no formal link to a museum. Consequently, the museums have lost much of the archaeological research competence built up since the mid 1990s.

The lost link to knowledge production based on archaeological research has in several cases led to a shortage of archaeological competence among the staff who administer archaeological collections. Equally, several contract archaeology companies have lost much of their relation to the museums and to the special competences the museums have. The traditional link between, on the one hand, archaeological fieldwork such as survey, excavation, documentation and research, and on the other hand, the archaeological work of regional museums, such as archive maintenance, collection management, working with exhibitions and public archaeology, has thus become weaker.

At the same time, several *Länsstyrelser* require that contract archaeology companies communicate their results of archaeological excavations in collaboration with county museums. In some cases, such cooperation between archaeologists and museum educators has led to outreach programmes that mediate new knowledge produced by the excavation project. In most cases, however, it tends to result in activities in which the archaeological excavation functions as a mere prop to mediate nar-

ratives about the past that were already known before the excavation started (see discussion in Malmlöf 2013). Broad cooperation with society outside archaeology, as envisaged in the bill *Uppdragsarkeologi i tiden*, is not included in today's contract archaeology.

From the development outlined above it is apparent that the role of archaeology in regional contexts has changed substantially. For the first time since the regional museums of cultural history were established in Sweden, archaeology and archaeologists no longer have a given role in the regional museums.

At the same time, recent years have also involved other changes. The archaeological excavation activity formerly pursued by *Riksantikvarieämbetet (Uppdragsverksamheten, UV)*, has since 2015 been transferred to *Statens Historiska Museer (SHMM)* in Stockholm. This means that *Riksantikvarieämbetet* has lost about a hundred archaeologists formerly employed at the authority, while *Statens Historiska Museer* have acquired roughly as many. Consequently, there has been a boost to an institution that traditionally has been strong in archaeological research and has always had archaeologists employed for research (Grundberg *et al.* 2015). At *Riksantikvarieämbetet*, which according to the government's new cultural heritage policy has been assigned the role as the consultative umbrella authority responsible for museum issues, much of its former contract archaeological competence has been lost.

Another change concerns the administration of museum collections. In the government cultural heritage bill, *Kulturarvspolitik (Prop. 2016/17:116)*, museums have been given extended mandate to manage processes of discarding artefacts in their collections (de-acquisition). This is seen as a necessary development by many museums, but also as a task difficult to handle in everyday practice (Sveriges museer n.d.). For museums with archaeological collections, however, such process of discarding artefacts can be especially difficult since many of them have lost much of their archaeological competence.

From what has been sketched above, we see a number of trends and changes concerning the role of archaeology in Swedish museums that may result in various predicted and unforeseen consequences. In this year's volume of *Current Swedish Archaeology* we have invited a number of Swedish archaeologists and researchers to give their views on this, and to discuss how they see the future roles of archaeology at Swedish museums: What are the consequences of the outlined trends and changes of the roles of archaeology at Swedish museums? What does the future for archaeology at Swedish museum look like? Are there new possibilities to be found in these developments? How can museum archaeology develop in the future?

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