

ARCHAEOLOGY AND DEMOCRACY

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For me, museum archaeology is a question of democracy. Unfortunately, this good intention is not entirely compatible with the growth of commercial funding we find in archaeology today. The underlying concept behind *Länsmuseer* (county museums) and their archaeological expertise is that this expertise should be available to everyone wherever they live in the country. There are several reasons for this. Qualified archaeologists are needed to help private individuals with applications for building/planning permission on sites with ancient monuments or prehistoric remains; to answer questions on local history from the general public; and to help with lectures, talks, exhibitions etc. This expertise should be readily available across the entire country. The same is true for municipalities, regional boards and all types of associations that need professional advice. They also have the right to regionally-based expertise. This aspect of archaeological heritage is often provided by a nationwide network of qualified archaeologists whose positions are funded by government grants. However, there is also a need to provide archaeological expertise within limited time frames for investigations that go beyond this remit to encompass archaeological activity as stipulated by the Historic Environment Act. *Länsmuseer* that run commer-

cially-funded archaeology units are often the ones that can take on such jobs at short notice.

At this point, I should make it clear that my point of departure is the situation in the northern half of Sweden. Here distances are great, there are numerous minor reports and investigations and large excavations are relatively few. This means that commercially-funded archaeology is a precarious economic commitment and the number of available archaeologists small. In order to manage such variation in archaeological activity, while retaining high professional standards, the limited resources available have to be utilized effectively and efficiently. This is one of the problems. To avoid contravening the rules of procurement in a competitive context there should be no overlap between the grant-funded and commercially-funded archaeological activities of a museum. Many museums have solved this problem within budgetary and administrative frameworks by creating separate units of commercially-funded archaeology with their own budgets; others have abandoned commercially-funded archaeological activities altogether. Demonstrating that commercially-funded archaeological activity is not subsidized by grant-funded activities ought not to be difficult, in theory. Demonstrating that grant funding does not contribute in any way to commercially-funded activities is almost impossible given the need for expertise of various sorts to evaluate and suggest plans of excavation and the need to pool various competences. This is certainly the case when the archaeologists at any given workplace are few in number.

These problems in the internal workings of museums have a parallel in the relationship between *Länsstyrelser* (County Administrative Boards) and museums. The report *Uppdragsarkeologi i tiden* (SOU 2005:80) states that museums have ‘an advantage over other investigative institutions since their status as consultative bodies has, already during the process initiated by *Länsstyrelsen*, brought them into close contact with the object of tender’. It also states that it is not ‘suitable for *Länsstyrelsen* to approach a county museum or its equivalent for advice etc., when the matter is one in which the commercial unit at the museum can be one of the bodies competing for the tender’ (SOU 2005:80 *Uppdragsarkeologi i tiden* 2005:143). Should the expressed intent of the legislation be followed slavishly, then, the combined qualifications and knowledge of the prehistory of a particular area available for a particular project will not be utilized. This in turn can lead to an impoverishment of the archaeological services provided, which would not be beneficial to the aims and needs of any party. Expressed more succinctly, the archaeological qualifications and knowledge associated with the museums become, in themselves, a problem.

In recent years, the long-term aims of cultural heritage have been more difficult to achieve within the framework of commercially-funded archaeological activities at museums. What I am referring to is the aim that as many people as possible should participate in and be included in the work of cultural heritage. To achieve this requires a long-term initiative in which museums have a clear advantage. The trust and continuity required for the plausible achievement of these aims are generated by the museums being *in situ*, having knowledge of the region and with the opportunities to establish long-term contacts with the local population. This particular aspect of wider participation is less well achieved within the current arrangements for commercially-funded archaeology. Since such a large proportion of archaeological activity that takes place today is carried out on a commercial basis, what the general public may find interesting and exciting has to be determined by profitability. It has been demonstrated that the demands for a high level of scholarly expertise in conjunction with competitive efficiency is difficult to combine with the aims of long-term inclusivity. In a competitive structure with many small commissions, this is clearly the case. Should a large volume of archaeological activity in a region be run on a commercial basis then, unfortunately, we cannot provide access to archaeology in the manner we are required to do.

There is no doubt that much of the commercially-funded archaeology that is carried out today is better than it was thirty years ago. Stricter regulations and competition have undoubtedly contributed to this. Nor is there any doubt that more people have access to the results. Participation and inclusiveness, if by this we mean that ordinary people are actually involved in creating archaeology and, thereby, also contributing to the writing of history, appears much more problematic. That expertise in the region can be seen as an undesirable competitive advantage is equally problematic. It is here that I identify the major problem for achieving the ideals of museum archaeology. Good museum archaeology presupposes smooth cooperation between grant-funded and commercially-funded archaeological activities. But if we are to abide by current legislation and directives, it is just this that is put in doubt. We find ourselves in a paradoxical position in which the aims and guidelines for actively preserving cultural heritage are counteracted by cultural heritage legislation. With demands for greater professionalism and corporate organization, the museums face a new reality. The worst-case scenario is that commercially-funded archaeology will be separated completely from the museums. A museum archaeology that meets the aims of cultural heritage policies requires fieldwork, research and cooperation between grant-funded and commercially-funded activities. It is difficult to see an alternative.

I recognize that Sweden is a geographically long country and that economic resources, projects and the numbers of archaeologists are unevenly distributed. Some of the problems I see from my northern Swedish window are probably not relevant to other parts of the country. But this is where democracy or a democratic perspective is so vital, in order to counteract this inequality.

REFERENCE

Uppdragsarkeologi i tiden. 2005. Statens offentliga utredningar 2005:80. Stockholm: Fritzes.