

Magnus Alkarp

*Det gamla Uppsala. Berättelser & metamorfoser kring en alldeles särskild plats.*

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Review by Anna Lihammer

Old Uppsala is not just an important ancient heritage site. It is also a place that has had central importance in myths and legends of more recent times – in research and local history as well as in darker contexts such as nationalism and Nazism. For centuries it was *the* national monument of Sweden and the ancient Swedes, thereby constituting a national symbol. But like many other national monuments, the site of Old Uppsala has also become somewhat of a monolith where archaeological research and knowledge are concerned. The image of Old Uppsala has in many ways existed outside and parallel to other research. For example, although archaeological research of the last 50 years clearly contradicts early formation of the kingdom of Sweden and the existence of powerful “Svea” kings in the Iron Age, there are no signs that the general image of Old Uppsala has changed profoundly.

Magnus Alkarp’s PhD thesis, *Det Gamla Uppsala. Berättelser & Metamorfoser kring en alldeles särskild plats* (“The Old Uppsala. Narratives and metamorphoses concerning a very special place”, my translation) tries to reach behind all the myths, legends, theories and practices that have concerned and affected the image of Old Uppsala. The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how this image has been formed and changed during different eras, to follow the theories and discussions about Old Uppsala and place them within their historical and contemporary contexts. Deconstructions and the identification of er-

rors are therefore not the focus, but rather a quest to understand how different ideas have originated and developed and exactly what in the archaeological material has given them legitimacy. In short, why does the present image of Old Uppsala look as it does?

Alkarp's investigation focuses on two periods, one that starts with the 17th century and lasts until the beginning of the 18th century, and the other a period from the beginning of the 19th century and into the middle of the 20th century. The thesis consists of 457 pages and is divided into an introductory part, a number of chapters on Old Uppsala arranged chronologically, and a concluding part. The book is well composed, but some additional orientation at the start would have helped.

The changing image of Old Uppsala is followed through an impressive amount of written sources, the making of history, detailed biographies of its interpreters, and occasionally also the development of the archaeological material from the site. It is an interesting and intriguing approach, and one that should be applied to many other monumental heritage sites. The vivid language and detailed descriptions of individuals make the thesis easy and pleasurable to read, but occasionally also create question marks in the mind of the academic reader. Sometimes it is hard to find the references for Alkarp's descriptions of what these people really thought and felt. I have no doubt that Alkarp knows his sources and has evidence for what he has written, but the scientific reader who would like to evaluate this material sometimes finds this difficult.

One of the studied eras includes the decades before and during the Second World War and the clearly nationalistic approach to Old Uppsala (and a number of other monuments) that developed during those years. During the last two decades, a debate has been going on concerning the relations between Swedish archaeological scientists and Nazi Germany before and during the war. One side has claimed that most of the famous Swedish archaeologists (and Swedish archaeology at large) were Nazi friendly or even convinced Nazis during these years, and another side has taken a completely opposite approach claiming there was almost no Nazism at all in Swedish archaeology, but a nationalism that can be explained by the wartime context rather than by Nazism or racism (cf. Welinder 1990, 1994; Werbart 1999, 2000; Baudou 2000, 2001).

Though Alkarp's thesis concerns Old Uppsala rather than the wider Swedish context in general, the part in it that analyses the 20th century obviously relates to this debate and most clearly since Alkarp dis-

cusses the role and actions of Sune Lindqvist, a central figure in the debate, in more detail than anyone else before. Alkarp's admirable research on Lindqvist, drawing on a range of previously more or less unknown sources, is a centerpiece of the part of the thesis that concerns the 20th century and seems to prove beyond doubt that Lindqvist was not inclined to co-operate with the Nazis but rather the opposite. While presenting a lot of new evidence and while proving Lindqvist was not a Nazi, the book still leaves some questions unanswered. For example, if he had no sympathies for Nazism, why did Lindqvist lecture in the Manhem organization and write in the Germanen-Erbe periodical? As always, a profound analysis such as Alkarp's opens up for further questions.

The overall Swedish debate on the 1930s and 1940s has hitherto focused on what relations Swedish archaeologists had or did not have with Nazi Germany, but this question should rather be seen against a much wider background of nationalism and racism in archaeology during the period from around 1900 and up to the war, which still lacks a profound overall treatment. Swedish archaeology in general was deeply infested with these ideologies, which started long before the Nazi party came to power, and as the case of Lindqvist exemplifies it was not directly related to Nazism at all. That wider context should be the central object of study and debate, rather than the interesting but non-central questions of whether specific individuals had Nazi sympathies or not. Alkarp does a good job clarifying the situation concerning many of the brown connections, and could not have done more within his frame of study. But there are still many blanks to fill in concerning the bigger picture.

To conclude, Alkarp has made an important, profound and very interesting contribution to the understanding of Old Uppsala and a large number of its interpreters and their wider contexts. More national monuments should be treated in this way. The new information on early 20th-century archaeology, and on Sune Lindqvist and the 1930s and 40s Uppsala seminar more specifically, is important and will be of great value for future research and debates. Many questions remain and Alkarp's work raises new ones, which is a very positive thing to say about a dissertation.

## References

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