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## Swedish Archaeology in the 1980s

by ÅKE HYENSTRAND

The basis for archaeological research is affected by different traditions and regional variations. Research in different countries cannot be usefully compared without examining its foundations. In Kristian Kristiansen's analysis in *JDA* vol. 3, 1984, there is much which could apply to Sweden, and a good deal which does not. The process leading to an interplay between antiquarian and university research which occurred quickly in Denmark has been going on in Sweden for the last 25 years. This has to do with major differences in legislation and social structure.

Denmark has been a very important bridgehead in Scandinavia for the European tradition of archaeological "Siedlungsforschung", and later also for New Archaeology (NA). A superficial view, would suggest, however, that NA in Denmark has caused considerably more disagreement and is considered more revolutionary than in Sweden. There may be special reasons for this, to be sought in different backgrounds.

Archaeological research to scientific standards reflects common scientific trends, adopting concepts which by the time they are generally accepted in the archaeological context may already be outmoded outside it. Antiquarian activity also reflects society's attitudes, economic conditions, and political ideology. Both sources of influence may be seen distinctly at work in the Swedish archaeological system. The ancient monuments law, after numerous precursors finally codified in 1942, affords prehistoric remains unequivocal protection. It manifests therein a strong state apparatus and centralized organization, represented as far as antiquarian activities are concerned in the Central Board of National Antiquities (*Riksantikvarieämbetet*). With this background, it has been natural since the 1930s to plot all ancient monuments on the official maps (economic maps), a circumstance which led to a nationwide inventorization of ancient monuments to a fixed standard.

The law on ancient monuments and basis for a strong protection of our cultural heritage was passed in Sweden at a time when agrarian society was still intact. It was hardly possible in the nineteen-twenties, -thirties and -forties to envisage the strong expansion which would occur in the -sixties and -seventies. This was not unique to Sweden, but resulted here to a particularly marked degree in an enormous expansion in archaeological activity. Over a period of 25 years, the find material, due to the large number of emergency digs, has been greatly multiplied. The situation may to some degree be compared to that in the USA after the intensive archaeological relief work of the 1930s.

Archaeological research in Sweden follows the same traditions as in Denmark, i.e. it is material and settlement directed, seeking to chart prehistory and cultural history. This circumstance formed the basis of the expansion mentioned above. A large number of young archaeologists with a traditional education found employment. They were to carry out an archaeological documentation to the highest standards, based on the old tradition. That the solution to research problems was to be found in the material was scarcely questioned; NA had as yet no marked influence.

To this was added the conservation of ancient monuments and land utilization planning which during the 1970s was a further manifestation of a strong apparatus of state. A strengthened organization with even more archaeologically trained persons in the system was the result.

Much of the resources of archaeological research have since the 1960s, been expended on a number of projects, mainly of an inductive nature and based on large investigations and material. These, too, have been based primarily on the old tradition, and extremely important results have been obtained. But during recent years, a stronger element of interplay between theory and practice has been in evidence.

NA began to affect archaeological teaching in the years around 1970. In 1969 was published Carl-Axel Moberg's primer *Introduktion till arkeologi*, for which the work of David L. Clarke and Lewis Binford had been the major source of inspiration. From 1970 and on, the Nordic contact seminars proved a source of inspiration for many students of archaeology.

At the institutes in Gothenburg and Umeå, NA came to play a major role in teaching, while Marxist ideology periodically dominated the discussion. This situation is known from many places in Europe and from many disciplines.

During the 1970s, there were thus tendencies towards conflict, both between the youngest generation of students and the young generation who had found work during the days of the "gold rush", and between different members of the "establishment". These differences were toned down, however, and did not lead to any real confrontation. The new thinking soon affected all groups (with some exceptions), not least within the ancient monuments service.

Swedish archaeology is dominated today by scholars and practical archaeologists educated in the traditional "paradigm", who have with positive criticism step by step adopted NA and other forms of theories and methodologies. The situation could be compared to that described by Kristiansen for Denmark: 'Tradition is very strong, and most archaeologists belong to it, with only a small group of "pure" New Archaeologists.' The situation could be characterized as a "hybrid tradition". There are several reasons for this, in particular numbers, a quantitative attitude and the developed settlement archaeology.

Archaeology in Sweden is a many-faceted system, both horizontally and vertically. An authoritative direction has long been lacking. The research concept has strongly expanded in step with the expansion of antiquarian archaeology. Different directions have been developed with different degrees of receptiveness for new thinking.

During the 1960s a quantitative view of the source material with concomitant demand for fixed definitions was accepted (cf. Mats P. Malmer). The ancient monument register's structure and accessibility to analysis contributed to this.

At the same time, settlement research was developed, largely as a result of investigations in connection with land development and in conjunction with the comprehensive picture obtainable from the register of ancient monuments. Research pursued this line further during the seventies, inspired by culture-geographical research and parts of NA. System analysis employing models was employed and explanation was a central concept. Increasing interest was displayed in social units and their influence on the environment. This accorded with the needs of the conservation service for information before environmental planning could be effected.

Thus the 1970s were to some extent a time of upheaval. This was reflected in, for instance, Carl-Axel Moberg's criticism of archaeology in 1978. He pointed out that find positivism, among other things, prevented research from developing. The situation was, however, considerably more complex. Several monographs from the late 1970s and early eighties showed that the new thinking was beginning to gain ground. That the need for an analysis of research directions was beginning to be felt is shown by the fact that the Central Board of National Antiquities and other authorities commissioned a report, prepared by Bo Gräslund (1981). Briefer analyses have been presented by Agne Furingsten, Åke Hyenström, and others. The

volume *Swedish Archaeology 1976–1980* (1983), published by the Swedish Archaeological Society and with important contributions by among others Hans Andersson and K.-G. Selinge, may also be mentioned.

The Swedish archaeological system should thus be well analysed. It is increasingly obvious that its variety is an advantage, not a disadvantage, as was perhaps thought around 1980. This variety is manifest in different ways, in organization with interplay between antiquarian activity and the university institutes, in regional and local variations, and in the subjects of research.

The organization consists of three parts: the antiquarian authority responsible for investigation and inventORIZATION (Central Board of National Antiquities, county councils), the museums (National Museum, regional and municipal museums, etc.) and the university institutes. All these authorities have research responsibilities, and a duty to inform the public and the administration. Although there is co-operation between them, it can be improved. It should be possible to develop circulation of personnel inside the system, and after-training. The system is sluggish, bureaucratic and overburdened, and an active pursuance of research problems and effective research are therefore necessary.

The university institutes of Stockholm, Lund, Gothenburg, Uppsala and Umeå are located in different regions, each with its own peculiarities and research basis. This leads to a certain differentiation, but an absolute research responsibility within the region in question must be avoided. The size of the country and peripheral location in Europe offer special possibilities, for example the study of regional variations and long periods, study which would be of general importance. This situation has not been fully exploited, however.

In many ways, the Swedish archaeological system appears to be extremely well equipped: with 300 persons employed, a well-documented source material and strong legislative basis, with strong support from the populace for cultural protection and environmental planning, and with a strong but little stimulated public interest. But the situation is not entirely in balance. Apparently good possibilities are counteracted by certain circumstances: the education system, lack of formulation of research aims, and weak internationalization.

The Swedish education system is no longer internationally outstanding. This circumstance must also affect archaeological training, since it is necessary to pay more attention to quantity than to quality. The strong expansion also resulted in a slackening of the requirements for research qualification before employment, otherwise the need for personnel could not be met. This, in conjunction with the traditional training of staff, means that present resources cannot be exploited to the full in theoretical discussion. This has also resulted in a relatively weak international orientation and very sporadic participation in international debate. To all this is added the fact that it has not been possible to assuage the great public interest in Sweden's prehistory through presentation of research results in popular form, although major efforts in this direction have been made during recent years.

All these problems are well known, and there are clear signs

of reform, but the situation today is that the archaeological system in Sweden is unwieldy and featureless and plays no active role in public debate. This may well be a superficial picture – it is always difficult to judge the present than see the historical background. It is probably too early to judge the effects of the upheavals of the sixties and seventies. These changes mainly work in a particular direction, towards the creation of a “three-dimensional paradigm”. Landscape and environment are kept in the centre and accorded a decisive role in explanation theory. This is undoubtedly a one-sided approach; in today's situation, it is therefore important that alternative research be conducted in a wider context, for example more socialarchaeological and structuralist.

In Sweden, as in the rest of the Nordic countries, archaeology is experiencing an unprecedented generation reshuffle. It is still too early to judge its importance for the future. It should, however, at the least warrant a more intensive Nordic co-operation at all levels, which now seems more necessary than ever.

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