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Divided we stand? Some opinions about trends and developments in Scandinavian archaeology 1970-2000

Asking for an outsider's view of Scandinavian archaeology often triggers a polite response that includes statements about discursive homogeneity, solid empirical foundations and open-minded theoretical concerns. In the archaeological literature Scandinavia is also regularly narrated as the geographical region outside the Anglo-American world where the theoretical currents of processualism and postprocessualism had their greatest impact. However, this idealized picture of a "straight" regional archaeology that is internationally minded, theoretically progressive and yet still firmly empirically grounded, runs the risk of concealing some major concerns, tendencies and conflicts experienced in contemporary Scandinavian archaeology. Thus I shall start this paper by presenting some views that may modify and complicate the image of a Nordic archaeological canon.

According to several commentators we have witnessed a widening gap in Scandinavian archaeology since the 1980s. While the archaeological discourses in Sweden and Norway reflect an increasing concern with theoretical and political issues, a development which some like to pigeon-hole as "postprocessualist", Danish archaeology is often depicted as more "down to earth", concerned with practical research and as remaining faithful to the "Nordic" tradition in archaeology (Gräslund 1989; Madsen 1995; Näsman 1995; Olsen 1997).

Without taking the national or geographical connotation too far, which is obviously an oversimplification of the internal diversity in these three countries, I still think it is possible to see a divide between two generalized positions or attitudes in contemporary Scandinavian archaeology, each of them of course containing a wide range of perspectives. One position asserts Scandinavian or Nordic archaeological autonomy and difference, and in one way or another emphasizes the interpretative constraints immanent in the source material. The archaeologists who subscribe to this position see their own work as a continuation of the great achievements of Scandinavian archaeologist of the past. They consider their allies to be in continental Europe rather than in the Anglo-American world. The archaeologists associated with the other position are less concerned with Scandinavian tribalism, they acknowledge foreign influence and enjoy international theoretical networking, which to a considerable degree is oriented towards the Anglo-American world. They further maintain that our knowledge claims about the past are constrained and enabled, not only by data, but also by socio-political issues, traditions and theoretical discourses in the present.

The difference between these two positions may further be characterized by the way they conceive of and emphasize tradition, especially in their rhetorics. The first position claims that there is a genuine and living Nordic or Scandinavian archaeological tradition which must be maintained and defended. The other position raises doubt about the

authenticity, homogeneity and vitality of that very same tradition. Curiously, research history and detailed studies of the disciplinary past have been a far more important research subject within the latter position than in the former (e. g. Johnsen 1992; Myhre 1994; Svestad 1995; Brattli 1995; Gillberg 2001; Gustafsson 2001; Andrén 1997; Opedal 1999; Hesjedal 2001).

In what follows I shall first try to explore the narrative configuration of this debate, and to expose some of the different opinions and inconsistencies in the representation of the recent disciplinary past in Scandinavian archaeology. In the final part, I shall try to say something about why the proposed divide developed and why there seems to be a certain “geo-political reality” attached to it.

Rhetorics and narratives

According to the American meta-historian Hayden White historiography and historical synthesis is characterized by the creative dimension that the historians bring to their narratives. To write history is inevitably to combine known or found fragments (facts) with ultimately unknown and thus invented wholes (White 1973; 1978). These wholes takes the forms of stories that necessarily must be different from the “lived” past, for the simple reason that the past was not configured as stories with beginnings and ends, problems and solutions. White therefore defines history as a narrative discourse of which the contents are as much invented as found. In order to appear plausible and readable, the historical narrative has to appeal to certain pre-existing plot-structures, allegories and tropes that make it recognizable and familiar in the culture it is addressed to.

In this sense, the writing of disciplinary history, even the very recent or contemporary one, probably does not differ very much from the writing of the history of nations, political movements and marginalized groups: the ideologies, arguments and explanations chosen requires various emplotments and metaphors to work properly. They appeal to certain story types or poetic configuration that affects sympathy, solidarity, identity in a culture or a segment of that culture. A figurative language helps to make the disciplinary past familiar, containing villains and heroes, failures and successes. Thus, the history of archaeology may be narrated as a romance, a comedy or a tragedy all relative to the perspective of the narrator.

Some recent Scandinavian contributions can be used to illustrate this point. In 1989 the Swedish archaeologist Bo Gräslund, professor in Uppsala, published a paper on the purpose and use of archaeological theory (Gräslund 1989). Here he attacks the “theory mongers” (read: postprocessualists) for using a mystifying and incomprehensible language that excluded most archaeologists from debating and opposing their arguments, and which also – and maybe as the main motivation for it – functioned to conceal their own erratic thinking. He makes himself the spokesman of what he terms a large silent majority of Scandinavian archaeologists which are repressed by this self-proclaimed theoretical avant-garde. Gräslund specially directs his attack on the Scandinavian practitioners of postprocessualism, whom he describes as unstable characters, easy to baffle and who are immediately led astray as soon as a new English or American Saviour enters the stage with his seductive philosophical bait.

Gräslund narrates a story containing good guys and bad guys. The bad guys are played by the Anglo-American theoreticians who invade our territory and the even worse fifth columnists of local deserters who surrender to this occupation force. The good guys or the patriots are played by the traditional empirical archaeologists who remain the faithful defenders of the Nordic tradition. It all culminates in an imaginary folk court where a captured theoretical archaeologist has to defend his mistakes to the patriots ("why do you use so strange words when you are writing"; "Don't release him before he has declared what he means or revealed that he is unable to") (Gräslund 1989, 50; Olsen 1989, 117).

In 1995 another Scandinavian archaeologist, Ulf Näsman, from Århus in Denmark, published a paper with the telling title "Is there a Nordic tradition in contemporary Nordic archaeology?" (Näsman 1995). He begins by confirming this, and that he himself confesses to a living Nordic tradition with its 19th century roots. According to Näsman the Nordic tradition is characterized by taking as its starting point the possibilities given by the source material itself, not in any theoretical constructions. His paper is written partly as a response to the presentation of Scandinavian archaeology given by the Norwegian archaeologist Bjørn Myhre in the Hodder edited volume, "Archaeological Theory in Europe" (Myhre 1991; Hodder 1991). Näsman thinks Myhre excessively underrates the importance of the Nordic tradition and he fears that many non-Nordic readers may get the impression of a subordinate archaeology which faithfully and uncritical follows in the footsteps of Anglo-American archaeology. This is wrong because, as he insists, the majority of Nordic archaeologists follows in the tracks laid by their own ancestors. "The Nordic archaeologist", Näsman writes, "does not fall down on his knees on the first bid offered by any new theoretician" (Näsman 1995, 15). He is further characterized by Näsman as a democratic and egalitarian person "who does not uncritically subordinate himself within a hierarchical system such as in the German tradition". According to Näsman, Denmark is the stronghold of the Nordic tradition, because archaeology there has maintained the integration of theory, method and material in education, management and actual research. Unfortunately, Norwegian and Swedish archaeology have departed from their roots and made themselves vulnerable to the twist and turns of theoretical fashion.

Näsman rates the Nordic tradition among the great traditions of European archaeology, alongside the German, the French and the English. However, he ends his paper by expressing his concerns about how much longer this Champions League position can be kept. Because as he says, "The Nordic tradition is threatened by decay and destruction ... (and) the greatest threat of all is that so many archaeologist within Scandinavia turn their back on the Nordic tradition and search for new ideals in the Anglo-American world" (Näsman 1995, 15).

In these two papers, as in other narratives from the patriotic camp, the Nordic-tradition-as-hero is a constitutive element of the story. This strong plot gains particular symbolic power by being attached to influential political metaphors of independence and self-defence with their implicit connotation of the "nation" and the "people" which has to be defended against the evil forces from outside. These metaphors are further supported by other allegories and tropes, such as the biological subtext of healthiness versus contamination and infections. Reacting both to the new archaeology and more recently to postprocessualism, the archaeological patriots have been particularly fond of representing their agenda as fighting for the lives of innocent young people who may be beset by the devilish tempters (Becker 1979; Hagen 1986; Gräslund 1989). In certain circles, theoretical

archaeology and postprocessualism in particular, has got a drug-like image – “the intellectual equivalent of crack”, as the ultra conservative historian Geoffrey Elton once remarked about the dangers caused by “postmodernist theories” influencing his own discipline. “Any acceptance of those theories – even the most gentle and modest bow in their direction – can prove fatal” (Elton 1991, 26; quoted after Jenkins 1995, 68). The solution and the only cure lies in the proper, adult study of the past.

Is there a Nordic tradition in archaeology?

As we all know tradition is something to be taken seriously. It is not something you either have or do not have. One of the most valuable insights of the late hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer is that understanding is affected by our effective historical consciousness: when we try to understand a historical phenomenon, we are already subject to the “effects of history”, including the history of research and our personal biographies (Gadamer 1981; Johnsen / Olsen 1992). Thus, our archaeological practice is inevitable affected and informed by frames of meanings, objectives and rules handed to us by the past. Still, we carry out our archaeological practice in a late phase of that age which is termed modernity, and if reflexive knowledge and consciousness is a diagnostic feature of modernity (Habermas 1985; Giddens 1990), we must also accept our ability and need for a critical reflection on our traditions: how they emerged, have been sustained and are mobilized for present conducts and political agendas. Tradition does not have a justification that is outside of judgement (Johnsen / Olsen 1992).

The question about a Nordic or Scandinavian tradition in archaeology has from the patriotic camp been framed as how to defend a unified and honourable tradition from outside intruders, especially from the Anglo-American world. However, one may ask to what extent this particular notion of a unified Nordic tradition is a recent construction to support current archaeological agendas; in other words, an “invented tradition”? (Hobsbawm 1983). According to Hobsbawm: “Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, [...], which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a *suitable* past” (Hobsbawm 1983, 1; my emphasis).

Or less suspicious, is that which is referred to as a Nordic tradition in fact a regional South Scandinavian or Danish tradition or paradigm? In a recent review of a Danish monograph (Jensen 1997), Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, herself a Dane working in Cambridge, wrote that “the strengths of the book, as well as its weaknesses, derive from how it is based upon what can be identified as a Danish tradition of archaeology. It helps to secure our knowledge about that period, while giving less sustenance to our concern with what this was all about” (Sørensen 1999, 122). According to Sørensen the monograph represents a “catalogue genre” initiated in the late 19th century and still characteristic of Danish archaeology, in fact part of its present hallmark (Sørensen 1999, 120-121).

Anyway, only a quick glance at the history of Scandinavian archaeology will reveal that dissonance and opposition is not exactly new issues on the agenda. At least it is

not difficult to identify dissenters to the party line long before the New Archaeology, not to mention postprocessualism, gained any influence in Scandinavia. We may mention prominent Nordic archaeologists such as A. W. Brøgger, G. Hatt, A. M. Tallgren, G. Gjessing (Brøgger 1925; Tallgren 1937; Gjessing 1951; 1977; Hansen 1984). During the early 1960s one of the most hard hitting attacks on the Nordic tradition also came from within. The Swedish archaeologist Mats Malmer claimed that Scandinavian archaeology was characterized by an "intuitive impressionism" and by a lack of debate prompted by the unquestioned trust in authority (Malmer 1963). However, Malmer's critique and his rigorous positivist approach to classification did not produce much stir. As noted by Leo Klejn in his seminal paper from 1977, Malmer's work "fell into world archaeology like a multiton bomb into a peaceful swamp and either did not explode or, if it did explode, did not provoke a war because of the enemy's unprepared state" (Klejn 1977, 6).

This lack of response and of a principal debate about the goals and nature of archaeology, is also emphasized by several other dissenters. The Norwegian archaeologist Arne B. Johansen narrates his encounter with Nordic archaeology as a young student in the 1960s in the following way (Johansen 1982, 213): "In this situation there was a lot to wonder about for one entering without any academic background: first and overall you noticed how much implicitly was taken for granted or at least never said. At times I had the feeling of confronting a closed circle or a guild with secret rules and a secret language ... They were discussing excavation reports, finds and typology, but never why human behaviour should be typologized at all ...".

According to Johansen the very proof of achieved archaeological maturity was to become like this yourself. Thus, the Nordic tradition may be represented by a very different emplotment: one in which it constitutes the villain of the story. In this configuration, the Nordic tradition comes to represent the taken for granted way of doing archaeology, the "doxic" mode which despite the different forms of opposition raised by a number of dissenters survived as "normal science" in Scandinavia to the 1970s (Keller 1978; Myhre 1991; Johnsen 1992; Olsen 1987).

New archaeology: selective memories?

In the post-1980's rhetorics Danish archaeology is often represented as having carried on the Nordic tradition and as having had the courage to resist foreign theoretical influence. This resistance is even claimed to have prevented the influence of processualist thinking in Danish archaeology: "The processualism of the 1970s and 80s had a limited impact on Danish archaeology ... Danish archaeologists never felt comfortable especially with American studies" (Madsen 1995, 13).

However, if we look back at the 1970s and early 1980s and evaluate impact of the new or processual archaeology in Scandinavia, a different and more complicated picture emerges (Jensen 1993, 10; Hedeager 1999, 22-23). Because, despite the avant-garde pockets of processualists clustered around the *Norwegian Archaeological Review* environment in Bergen and Carl Axel Moberg in Gothenburg (Johansen 1969; Moberg 1969; Odner 1972; Tosi 1981, 16; Myhre 1991), it is within Danish archaeology that

we find some of the most consistent, rigorous and internationally acclaimed processual analysis in Scandinavian archaeology, as represented by the works of Kristian Kristiansen, Klavs Randsborg and Jørgen Jensen (Kristiansen 1978; 1978 a; 1981; 1982; Randsborg 1974; 1980; 1981; 1982; Chapman / Randsborg 1981; Jensen 1979)¹. Thus, it was hardly accidental that it was two Danish archaeologists who co-edited the Scandinavian processual manifesto, the one and only volume of *New Directions in Scandinavian archaeology* from 1978 (Kristiansen / Paludan-Müller 1978).

It is also interesting to note how the work of these young Danish processualists provoked much of the same reactions and rhetorics from the archaeological establishment as the one uttered from those who more recently have taken to the barricades to defend the Nordic tradition from the “theory mongers”. And how the Danish processualists in a similar vain expressed their distrust in Danish archaeology which they thought of as dogmatic, traditional and out of touch with the fashions of international archaeology (Hedeager 1999, 22). “We have to realize”, Kristian Kristiansen wrote in 1978, “that Danish archaeology – with a few exceptions – today mainly has international status in Denmark” (Kristiansen 1978, my translation).

In 1993, summarizing 25 years of Danish archaeology, Jørgen Jensen writes about this conflict and the Anglo-American influence. He emphasizes the renewal of Danish archaeology that took place by the end of the 1960s, when a new generation emerged from the universities. And he continues: “This was a generation which was open to the very important influences which reached Denmark at that time from American and British archaeology. There was a talk of a “New Archaeology”, which was greeted with deep scepticism by the archaeological establishment in this country. This was because the new ideas turned particularly against the methodological constrictions which had been characteristic of the discipline ... Taking inspiration from the social sciences, English-speaking archaeologists, and later Danish ones also, sought to impart to the study of prehistoric societies an ecological and social-anthropological perspective” (Jensen 1993, 10).

Jensen points to the emergence of a new generation of graduates as a precondition for the introduction of a new archaeology in Denmark. This generation did not see the influence from England or USA as a threat to Danish archaeology, but as a source for development and empowerment (Hedeager 1999). Thus, the reputation of Danish archaeologists as the constant defenders of Nordic archaeological respectability seems somewhat exaggerated – even if it may be claimed that what took place during the 1970s and early 1980s was just an episode, an innocent affair or a flirt, and that all these restless youths now are back in the old groove.

¹ Several other Danish archaeologists may be included in this list, such as Lotte Hedeager. However, I consider her works (as well as the works of Kristian Kristiansen from the early 1980s onwards) to be more influenced by structural marxist thinking and her later works also reflect a move towards contextual and symbolic approaches (e. g. Hedeager 1990; 1997).

Postprocessualism: divided we stand?

When the theoretical movement that later was labelled postprocessual archaeology started to stir up the disciplinary water in the early 1980s, we witnessed a strange disparity in the Scandinavian reactions and attitudes. While the new or processual archaeology in Scandinavia had remained the activity of powerful individuals and avant-garde environments more or less equally distributed among the three countries, postprocessualism brought about a geographical bias. While Norwegian and Swedish archaeology after some hesitations proved to be very receptive to the symbolic and critical approaches launched under the postprocessual label, Danish archaeology remained reluctant and dismissive.

I think there are several reasons for this disparity. The fact that Danish archaeology by the end of the 1970s still was engaged in a polemic between processualists and traditional archaeologists, may have made the sudden advent of postprocessualism a bit inconvenient (Kristiansen 1978; Becker 1979). Archaeologists who had built up an image as rebels and revolutionaries opposing a reactionary regime, now faced the uncomfortable situation of they themselves being accused of advocating functionalist and positivist approaches to which no progressive politics was attached. Scandinavian processualists had so far been amazingly successful in avoiding the positivist stigma by using the trick of attaching it to the inductive empiricism of the traditional archaeology (Kleppe 1975; Jensen 1993, 10-11; Madsen 1995, 13-14), and narrating their own processualism as part of the anti-authoritarian and anti-positivist movement (Olsen 1997, 55). Suddenly everything was messed up.

Thus, in his review of recent Danish archaeology, Jørgen Jensen describes the post-processual encounter in the following way: "At the theoretical-methodological level, in Denmark the end of the 1980s witnessed a certain loss of impetus. The influence of English-speaking archaeologists has declined. This is particularly because British archaeology have developed in directions which are remote from Danish Archaeology... Danish archaeology has not felt particularly attracted to the new tendencies in Britain, but has to a greater extent found a community of interest with north-west German and Dutch archaeology" (Jensen 1993, 11).

It may have significance that several well known Danish archaeologists, that have been more sympathetic to postprocessualist perspectives, today have taken positions outside Denmark, such as Kristian Kristiansen in Gothenburg, Charlotte Damm in Tromsø, Lotte Hedeager in Oslo and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen in Cambridge.

Norway is probably the Scandinavian country where so called postprocessual approaches most rapidly became influential. Starting off as a radical fringe movement attached to the University of Tromsø in the 1980s, postprocessual approaches are now deeply integrated into research, teaching and curricula at all Norwegian universities (Olsen 1987; 1999). Without being able to go into any details, I think an important explanation for this receptivity is to be found in two conditions that brought about important changes in Norwegian archaeology during the 1980s (Olsen 1997, 69-72). One was the emergence of gender and feminist issues in Norwegian archaeology, a development that was propelled by the organization "Women in Norwegian archaeology" (K.A.N.) and their journal which became an important forum for theoretical debate (Mandt 1995). Since much of the feminist critique in this phase was directed towards

the positivist conception of science, postprocessual archaeology was by many conceived of as a natural ally. The other condition that led to a more radical Norwegian archaeology and thus to more receptivity to postprocessual thinking was the intense debate during the early 1980s about Saami political rights and their status as an indigenous population in Norway. The hot tempered public and academic debate forced archaeologists to rethink issues related to science and society, and to critically evaluate the role of their own discipline within present structures of power (Schanche / Olsen 1983; Olsen 1986; Olsen 1997).

The disparity in the Scandinavian response to postprocessual thinking and theoretical archaeology in general is probably also caused by the infra-structural differences in terms of university education and access to academic positions. During the 1980s and 1990s academic archaeology was a fast growing discipline both in Norway and Sweden, which contrasts with the situation in Denmark with only two university departments. Prompted by regional politics and large numbers of students, several new universities and departments teaching archaeology have been established in Norway and Sweden since the 1970s (Welinder 2000). The rapid growth in academic archaeology made it possible for new generations of archaeologists to be employed and gain influence, including the more theoretically oriented. It also led to mobility in Norwegian and Swedish archaeology, and a globalization of the teaching departments with many researchers from abroad being appointed. What all this adds up to is a less disciplined, less controllable, and less predictable archaeological environment that makes it difficult to stick to clearly defined traditions, also theoretical ones. It necessarily promotes plurality rather than sameness.

Conclusion: archaeologies beyond resistance and roots?

Since the 1980s we have witnessed the emergence of a more complicated and theoretically diverse archaeological environment in Scandinavia. In my paper I have focused on how present agendas and stances influence how this new disparity is narrated – on the plots constructed and the metaphors mobilized. My exposition may illustrate how the vantage point of the observer not only affects the representations of the distant past, but also seriously shapes the retelling of our own involvement in and experiences of a recent disciplinary past.

At the beginning of a new millennium we are well into the process of resettling within this new Scandinavian archaeological landscape. An environment where the practice of archaeology hopefully does not imply the necessity to swear allegiance to a strict theoretical regime or to any regional canon, but where we have accepted to live with difference – with the other. We may also hope that our contemporary life in a globalized world will provide us with quite different metaphors for our archaeological conducts than those of resistance, tradition and roots. In the same way as globalization has made it impossible to pretend that cultures exist apart, that creolization is an exceptional case, and that place is a self-evident reference for cultural distinctiveness and belonging, we may as well stop thinking of the archaeological world as an archipelago of detached and clean islands of theories, practices and traditions (Olsen 2001).

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