



The Museum of National Antiquities in Sweden and its national agenda: an overview of the 1900-1970 period

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Abstract

How has a national narration been established and reproduced at Sweden's central museum for Prehistory and the Middle Ages, the Museum of National Antiquities (MNA, today named the National Historical Museum)? The chronological framework for answering this question here relates to the period from 1900 to 1970 with an emphasis on the 1920-50 period, the foundational time of the Swedish Welfare state. During these decades the MNA changed on many levels, including a new building and a new organizational structure, which entailed a change of exhibitions as well. At the same time the museum presents a remarkable continuity with regard to its objectives and agenda.

During most of the 20th century the link between statistically processed object types and ethnographic interpretations was and is a discursive construction. However, the situation between 1900 and 1950 was unique with regard to the MNA exhibitions and the ideological profile of archaeology. What flourished then was an archaeology that might be characterized as nationally romantic, culturally conservative and racial, and one might add that this changed only gradually in the wake of the Second World War. Still, and despite certain sympathizers of Nazi Germany amongst its practitioners, Swedish archaeology cannot be compared to that developed in the context of Nazi ideology. It did not advocate or actively support racial war, euthanasia or aggressive racial hygiene (Baudou 2002). Nevertheless, Swedish archaeology formed part of an international context, where cooperation and correspondence between researchers, not least German ones, were a natural part of the practice. This article provides a brief outline of the theme of national identity and archaeological representation in Sweden, mainly through an interpretation of the displays of the early 20th century in the MNA.

Introduction

The Museum of National Antiquities (hence MNA, today named the National Historical Museum) was from the beginning in 1866 a national museum for pre-history, and thus a museum for research and exhibition that visualized and exemplified theories and perspectives in contemporary archaeology. As demonstrated by Fredrik Svanberg, Swedish archaeology was in the early 20th century more than “influenced” by physical anthropology research. In the discipline’s own perception of its history it was maintained for a long time that it had not been interwoven with physical anthropology and/or race biology. A closer look clearly shows that early archaeology was both theoretically and practically collaborated with physical anthropology in this period. Svanberg points out that the main objective of archaeological practice before and after 1900 was the search for “Sweden and the origin and evolution of the Swedes”. Previous references to “our ancestors”, “peoples” and “tribes” progressively adopted such terms as the “the Nordic type”, “Germanic tribes” and sometimes with explicit racial references. The basic idea was that the Swedish people, equal with the concept of a now existing Swedish majority culture, originated from primeval times, making it unique in the world, because it had in large developed independently of other European high cultures. Furthermore, Swedish culture, Aryan or Germanic, was not just unique, but compared to that of other peoples it also constituted “an advanced culture”. Svanberg terms the research carried out in accord with this discourse as “ideological racism, without a specific race concept” (Svanberg in Print: 11-27). Science journalist, Maja Hagerman has called the same phenomenon “contextual racism” (Hagerman 2006).

By the 1900s’ Swedish (and Danish) antiquarian research was at the international front of archaeological method and theory. The archaeologists Hans Hildebrand (1842-1913) and Oscar Montelius (1843-1921), in turn Director-Generals of the Central Board of National Antiquities as well as directors of MNA (Hildebrand was Director-General of National Antiquities between 1879 and 1907, and Montelius took over the position from 1907 to 1913), had both attained international reputation as leading researchers in archaeological dating thanks to their use of the so-called typological method. This method focuses on statistical mappings of the style-related attributes of ancient finds, and on combining the analysis with field contexts in order to establish chronology.

Most of the research took place in storage departments where the objects were arranged and studied, which thereafter resulted in exhibition displays, where the artefacts were shown according to the typology and culture determined by the researchers. There is reason to claim that from 1870 onwards there was established a kind of normalized practice of archaeology and antiquarian research that lasted until the 1970:s (Lövgren 1996:32f; Pettersson 2005: 326). By this I refer to the fact that academic research often took place *in* the museums and that the curator often were both an acknowledged scientist as well as an employee at the museum. The archaeologist and Director-General Hans Hildebrand, referring to new evolutionary archaeology, declared in 1880: “Only after beginning to study the *types* with regard to their character and development has the study of material culture become a science; and our times have to strive to make this stage [in the archeology field] wholeheartedly enter the typological stage.”(Hildebrand 1880:54) Ancient history, including the Viking period, the Middle Ages, as well as medieval church art, was

exhibited at MNA with scientific pretensions, either in cabinets with typologically and geographically arranged objects, or by church artefacts arranged by style and functional-oriented categories. Characteristic of this visualization of material culture was the idea that human culture could be traced, analyzed and displayed with the support of statistically classified archaeological findings. Even the Viking Age concept was actually coined by Oscar Montelius, in a popular science publication edited in 1872, where he used ancient finds as evidence of saga narratives of the lives of seafaring heroes (Hagerman 2006: 276). Hence, culture could be observed and interpreted *through* artefacts, which conversely meant that the way things were arranged structured the imagined “culture”.

In another study Fredrik Svanberg has convincingly demonstrated that the actual collecting systems and practices in fact dictated the way prehistoric culture was categorized and exhibited. He even goes as far as claiming that the classification systems, after they were established, dictated both analyses and concrete activities in the museums: “It will be through the classification systems of the collections that objects and history will be viewed, staff will be hired, and current practices will be decided on.” (Svanberg 2009: 57)

The aim of MNA’s activities was, as Hans Hildebrand himself had vigorously declared, to give a complete picture of the nation’s cultural life during its various stages of development (Svanberg 2009: 47). This vision progressively expressed a permeated ‘research program’ emerging step by step. The leading actors of MNA had, in addition, managed to motivate state authorities and civil servants to look upon the reassessment of the past through the materials of archaeology as a state concern, leading to the passing of government acts on heritage preservation in the 19th century (Molin 2003). The acts guaranteed, for instance, that all ancient finds of scientific or aesthetic importance were to be included in the Museum’s collection. This did not, however, take place without conflicts with private archaeologists, who publicly questioned the monopoly of the state. Nevertheless, in the long run, the centralization strategy prevailed and *everything* of major importance was to be gathered at MNA, where leading antiquarian scholars established themselves. Its displays came to express a programmatic argumentation about the homogeneity, long-lastingness and distinctive character of the Swedish people and Swedish culture.

The National Historical Museum and its permanent exhibition 1900-1970

MNA is a national museum whose physical location has changed during its existence. The museum opened in 1866 on the ground floor and in the basement of the National Museum, which is still located right across from the Royal Palace. In the late 1930s the collections and staff moved from the premises of the National Museum to the present venue in the district of Östermalm. The activities of the “new museum” were officially inaugurated with the exhibition “Ten Thousand Years in Sweden” in 1943, which will be described below.

In the early 1900, three museums in Stockholm were charged with the task of representing the nation’s cultural history: the National Museum, MNA, and Nordic Museum (founded by Artur Hazelius). Arranged in accordance with the academic disciplines that still use artefacts as their source material, the National Museum is today a museum for art history, MNA is basically an archaeological museum, while the Nordic Museum is primarily an ethnological museum. However, the two latter museums also have a clear focus on art history, as well as general history.

The old museum

The aim of the museum and its collecting process was explicitly “patriotic”, as was explicitly reflected in the exhibitions. The principle of organization was the chronological-typological arrangement of finds displayed, in combination with a geographical division according to Sweden’s provinces related to an (imaginary) Swedish cultural landscape. The new archaeological periodization i.e., the division into the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages were regarded as evolutionary stages in the cultural development of the ancient Swedish people. The exhibition sections followed this tripartite division, and further divided material into research-related sub-periods. Physically, the exhibition was presented in large broad and tall cabinets, flanked by display cases, all filled with row after row of artefacts divided by type. The pedagogical idea was that the visitor should follow the nation’s cultural and material development from the Stone Age to the Modern Age (from 1919 with a break at the Middle Ages) by following this chronological and thematic trail from room to room.

Each cabinet was geographically labeled, “Skåne”, “Halland”, etc., at the top of its middle section. Sub-divisions of the Stone Age were referred to in the frame above some cabinets, for instance as “Younger Stone Age. Period I. The era of the thin-necked flint axe and round stone axe”. The signs and the museum display indicated that the type categories were ways of labeling the underlying cultural history dimension that permeated the exhibition rooms. Only the initiated visitor could, however, “see” this culture, for example by watching long rows of thin-necked flint axes.

The display cases were supplemented by such as elements as a couple of models of especially famous ancient monument areas, such as Ales stenar (‘Ale’s Stones’) in Skåne. The model of a bronze tumulus was also shown, as well as full size copy of the Rök Stone, the rune stone showpiece. There were scarcely any instructive texts or maps – a visitor outside the narrow circle of experts need to be guided physically, or to consult the written guides which were printed and revised regularly from the early 1870s onwards. Fredrik Svanberg sums up how an ideal visit was expected to take place through the exhibition rooms:

In the old exhibition at the National Museum you entered, after passing two anterooms, the big Stone Age Hall and then passed through a gallery where you met first the Bronze Age, next the Iron Age on the island of Gotland, and last the Iron Age on the Swedish mainland [...]. You then entered the Viking Hall with its coin cabinet in an adjacent gallery (the location of the coin cabinet shifted over time). Finally you visited the big “Church Hall” or “Deep Hall”, called so because the floor was depressed (now housing the museum shop and other activities), where medieval and modern objects were exhibited. This overarching disposition differed somewhat at the opening in 1866 but was fully implemented by the time of the first written guide published by Montelius in 1872 and only slightly altered before the museum moved to Narvavägen [in 1939, RP]. The changes implied a gradual thinning out of objects in the early 20th century to make the museum easier to grasp. (Svanberg 2009: 48)

The initial ambition had been to arrange and show *everything*, but as collections grew this became a practical impossibility. The new strategy adopted in the early 20th century was thus to arrange part of the collection in storage rooms, another part in special study collections for experts, and a further part in pedagogically arranged “public sections” for regular visitors.

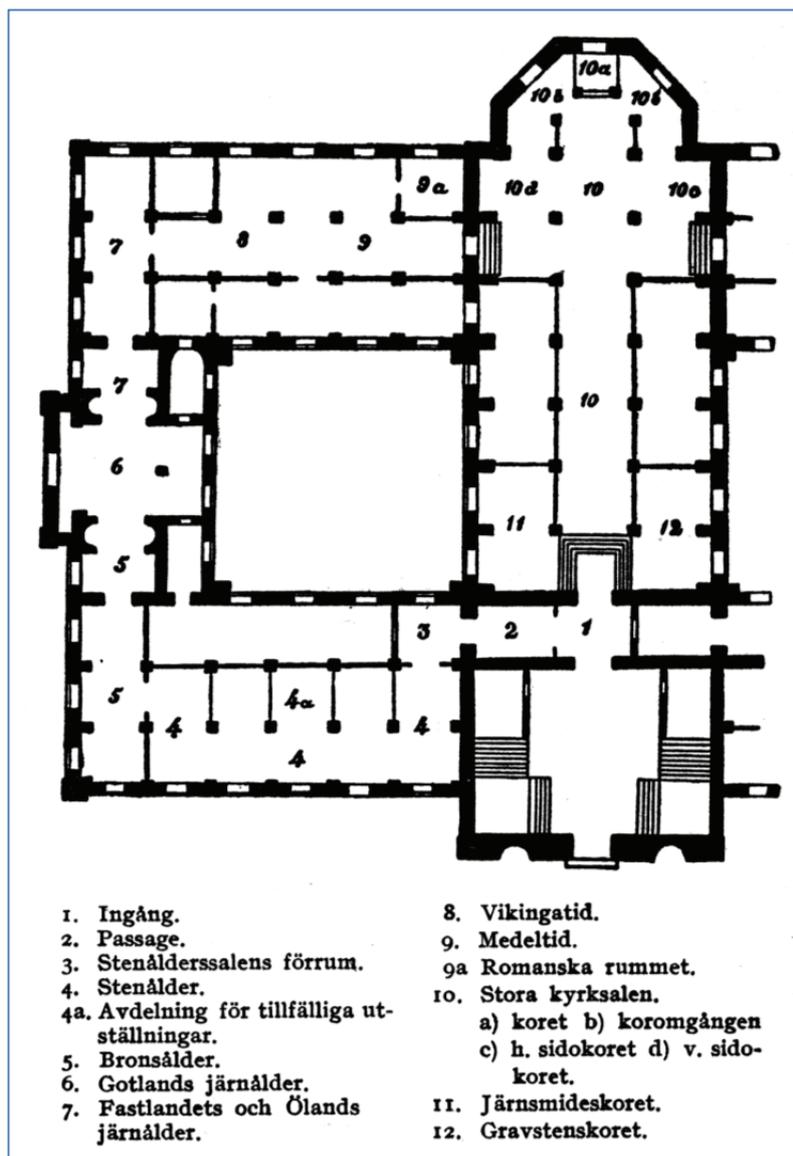


Figure 1: The Historical Museum exhibition on the ground floor of the National Museum in 1929 (according to the back cover of the collection guide). [Copied from Svanberg 2009 p. 49.]

Translation: 1. Entrance 2. Passage 3. Stone Age Hall Anteroom 4. The Stone Age 4a. Section for Temporary Exhibitions 5. The Bronze Age 6. The Gotland Iron Age 7. The Mainland and Öland Iron Age 8. The Viking Age 9. The Middle Ages 9a. The Romanesque Room 10. The Big Church Hall a) The Chancel b) The Ambulatory c) The Right Side Chancel d) The Left Side Chancel 11. The Wrought Iron Chancel 12. The Tombstone Chancel.

As Director-General of National Antiquities between 1923-46, the ambassadorial art historian, Sigurd Curman (1879-1966) took the reins, and piloted a long period of reorganization and modernization. Ten years in office as Director-General Curman stated his vision of the public museum's role in popular education:

A museum should try, by systematic studies and collections, to solve certain specific problems; it should make its collections intelligible to the general public, school children in particular, through lectures, demonstrations and similar activities. Special exhibitions should create opportunities to study for those interested. Only then will a museum become what it

could and should be, a *living institution*, which effectively promotes the knowledge and understanding of its field of activities. (Curman 1933: 34)

Thanks to Curman's authority, his instructions became the norm for MNA's internal work as well as for how the new county museums should be built and maintained (Laine 1985: 138f).

At the same time Birger Nerman (1888-1971), Professor of Archaeology, published his work *Det svenska rikets uppkomst* ('The Rise of the Swedish Kingdom', 1925), where he applied an interdisciplinary approach – in sharp contrast to the strict source critical methodology of C. Weibull, a contemporary historian – in using ancient historical sources as well as Icelandic sagas to analyze archaeological material. Nerman's former fellow student and current colleague Sune Lindqvist (1887-1976) also specialized on the *Beowulf* poem and on nation-building theories. The latter was a popular theme. Ever since the early 1880s when the archaeologist Knut Stjerna excavated some spectacular graves at Vendel church in the province of Uppland, an event that gained considerable media attention. Archaeologists speculated about the existence of a loosely coherent state with its center at Old Uppsala as far back as the 6th century AD. This Proto State was called "Sveariket ('the realm of the Svear)". A main line in Lindqvist's and Nerman's research was to search for empirical evidence of the Svea state and its unique people. That Sweden was among the oldest nations in Europe was a frequent assertion. Both these archaeologists were, at least in the 1920s, employed as scientific experts at MNA. Furthermore, Nerman became Director of the museum from 1938. As professor and teacher Lindqvist gained an influence over "nearly the whole of the Swedish archaeological post-war generation" (Nerman 1925: 267; Hyenstrand 1996: 2, 17, 92).

With Lindqvist and other archaeologists employed at the museum, Curman prescribed changes to the ground floor exhibitions. An aesthetic approach to the display of objects now became important in the new arrangement: creating air and space around the ancient finds was part of a novel modern object language that was not only to convey facts from antiquarian science but was also designed to communicate even more forcefully than before, aesthetic, normative and national values to a broad audience. At the same time instructive texts and maps began to be used to pedagogically reinforce the arranged items. Several innovations, like reconstructions of helmets and shields found in graves, were also exhibited as a complement to the authentic objects (Curman 1928: 9f; Nerman 1946: 203f). This became the initial phase in an attempt at implementing contemporary socio-political visions about making use of exhibitions to raise the general educational level.

Still, it was obvious that the older scientific exhibition paradigm had not been abandoned. The exhibits were primarily treated as objects for research and collecting and as arguments for an assumedly fact-based analysis of ancient times. A chronological-typological section was once more set up, as well as a display case for objects of a "technical" interest. In another place of the exhibition the important land-rising theories developed in cooperation with geologists became the starting point for presenting the age and the provisional location of ancient finds.

Some of the objects were now arranged like goods in a shop window. This may be considered as an expression of "the Curman generation's" way of attributing an added cultural value to the ancient objects beyond their established archaeological value. Giving the archaeological objects a new aesthetically and artistically valuable dimension meant strengthening yet another aspect of the complex national "reverence value". The display technique thus re-established the national

romantic and the emotional as well as the approaching functional and “propagandistically pedagogical” value. Copies and reconstructions reinforced the latter feature, as did the space now reserved for temporary exhibitions (Pettersson 2001: 131; Thordeman 1946: 136).

New study collections were introduced as a complement to the public sections; the latter now displayed the showpieces, i.e. those artefacts that were thought to most clearly reflect the historical development of culture (or the panorama of culture) that the archaeologists wanted to convey. The actual result was an even more idealized picture of the past than before. With the thinning out of the cabinets to the benefit of the showpieces, Birger Nerman’s and Sune Lindqvist’s national romantic picture of Svea chiefs, and the supreme style and taste of the enterprising Vikings was “proved” by the empirical authority of the displays. Hence the visitor was now able to *view history as it was*, and even to compare the native heritage with the “level” of other civilized peoples.

The new museum

Not long after Curman took over the chair, he also started working for a new, more spacious, building for MNA including rooms for the administration (SOU 1925:15: 123-128). Curman’s principal views about the design of the building had been spelled out in a proposal dated January 1928, where the social and educational function of museums was described: “The development from a royal cabinet of curiosities, designed for the diversion of a select few, to a scientific research institute has gone further to make museums into institutions for popular education, for the purpose of serving in the widest possible way all layers of society and their desire to gain a knowledge of the development of the history of mankind and the fatherland in various fields” (Curman 1929: 22). The foundation stone of the new building was laid in 1934. With the new Historical Museum the social pedagogical function would be fulfilled. Curman’s objective was to recapture and visualize “the fairly unique position that the society of the Swedish people occupies in the world.” To Curman, Swedish culture and its heritage was not only unique, but constituted the very driving force and motivation for the preservation of ancient monuments:

Few, if any of the other European peoples are likely to have settled permanently within their present boundaries for such a long time as the Swedish people. Everything indicates that its people have in the past millennia always been free and independent, developing a culture that has compared well with that of southern, climatically favoured countries.

All of this should be possible to illustrate in a clear and instructive manner, in a new, spacious and well-organized museum thanks to which the knowledge of these circumstances will become public property, all the more easily grasped as they have become visible to the eye. And it must without doubt be looked upon as being of the utmost importance from many points of view that all classes of society should be enlightened about the main lines of our development history, the connection between the past, the present and the future, the laws of evolution and the importance of the labour of bygone generations. Such knowledge may constitute the safest foundation for a sound love of the fatherland and a sensible civic spirit.¹ (Curman in His Majesty’s proposition, Nr 98, 1929, 1929: 23)

Curman’s view of Swedish cultural heritage, of the role of MNA in educating the people, and of the importance of making as many as possible aware of the homogeneity of Swedish culture are here motivated with reference to “the laws of evolution”. When the very same passage was reprinted in the exhibition catalogue published for the inaugural exhibition of the new museum in 1943 Curman had, however, added a conclusion directly borrowed from Oscar Montelius: “[...]”

as well as of the remarkable continuity in our society's multi-millennial existence (Curman 1945: 22)". It was the history of the development of a people, the evolutionary process of culture, which was to be given even stronger emphasis at the new MNA. For this vision Curman received political support (Riksdagens skrivelse Nr 176, 1929). On April 17, 1943, the King opened the exhibition "Tiotusen år i Sverige ("Ten Thousand Years in Sweden)" and hence officially inaugurated the new building of the National History Museum.

Ten Thousand Years in Sweden

The main agenda of the inaugural exhibition was to illustrate something like a general mustering of the competence of Swedish museums in exhibition pedagogy as well as mirroring recent experiences in antiquarian research. The result was that a number of novel museum pedagogical approaches were tried.

The Stone Age:

The Stone Age section was planned in detail by the archaeologist Axel Bagge (1894-1953). He had a modern approach. In an internal memorandum from 1935 he even included film projections and slide shows in the exhibition rooms. It also appears that Bagge was deeply involved in the constantly recurring issue of the racial identity and settlement area of the ancient "Swedes". In his memo he states that: "the human skeletons from the Stone Age and the associated presentations of racial issues, diseases, etc., might be placed in this department". The section he was referring to was the part of the Stone Age exhibition dealing with "Trade in the Stone Age". The typological method applied to single ancient finds was to be followed according to tradition, but not too explicitly: "The typological approach is, however, at present in low esteem in Swedish archaeology and may often be said to be of nothing but historical interest and for this reason should perhaps therefore not play a too predominant and consequently too misleading role in a methodological section." (Bagge 1935, ATA). Bagge instead advocated an "ethnogeographical" display principle based on illustrating cultural circles chronologically and geographically in their spatial extension.

Bagge's in many ways innovative concept of exhibition transformed the Stone, Bronze and Iron Age sections, allowing them to appear as pedagogical and empirical statements for a cultural analysis that was characterized by nationalistic and to some extent also race oriented perspectives. Like his colleagues Lindqvist and Nerman, the fact that Bagge held a skeptical view of typology as an illustrative principle for the exhibitions was probably related to the view that this method of organizing and displaying artefacts did not clearly prove and demonstrate the notions of human and cultural areas that they wished to illustrate.

The exhibition was no longer organized by province and object type. Naturally, the tripartite period system remained, but each department was divided according to cultural history themes like ancient technology or trade and industry. The naming of "cultures" shown was however still linked to types or finding-places of typical artefacts: the "Pitted Ware Culture, the Aunietz Culture, the Boat Axe Culture", etc.

A scientific approach, analogous to that of the natural sciences, permeated the sections. Considerable space was, for instance, devoted to new geological findings and their importance for archaeological dating as well to the views of ancient landscape. Many illustrations highlighted

the effects of the continental ice sheet, supplemented by a whole wall of relief pictures showing the withdrawal of the ice across the Scandinavian Peninsula.

Among the pedagogical innovations were, for example, beside the display cases, jutting out (and mountable) placards with clear eye-catching headings and a brief informative text, sometimes supplemented by a few illustrative pictures. One example of a placard about the Older Stone Age (supplemented by a case containing selected type samples of artifacts):

STONE AGE POTTERIES

Probably operated by women, as among present-day primitive peoples.

The vessels were made by hand without a turntable and were burned in open fireplaces.

The above picture shows a present-day primitive pottery.

Worth noting, along with the gender aspect and the obvious ethnocentric touch, is that the analysis here as in many other parts of the exhibition alluded to a comparative ethno-archaeological method. Ancient domestic culture was compared to “present-day primitive peoples”. Another example is an exhibition item with shafted stone axes from the Swedish Stone Age, parallel with a placard containing the text: “Stone axes shafted by present-day Stone Age peoples”. The immediate purpose was of course to illustrate usage and techniques, but it also involved an indirect didactic reference to the cultural evolutionary outlook that permeated all the exhibition sections. “Cultures” were represented by (race-specific) peoples and these were characterized by their particular techniques, crafts and styles. Some peoples obviously still remained at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder, thus offering an opportunity to study their “primitive” techniques in analogy with ancient Swedish artefacts.

Didactically, the starting point of the Stone Age section was the grand Palaeolithic perspective. Building on contemporary knowledge of paleontological and archaeological periods, the whole of a shorter wall introduced the visitor to the evolutionary perspective: “THE EMERGENCE OF MANKIND”. Three main races were shown, with the Swedish proto-human, naturally, descending from the Cro-Magnon race:

THE PALEOLITHIC ERA

EUROPE'S OLDEST STONE AGE

Pithecanthropus erectus, the erect ape man

Neanderthal Man, the main race of the Older Paleolithic culture

Cro-Magnon Man, the main race of the Younger Paleolithic culture

A second shorter wall fulfilled a tradition from the early days of the museum by displaying a so-called comparative collection. A grandiose suite of pictures was shown containing explicit parallels between ancient native Swedish culture and famous “high cultures”, for example “South Scandinavia and the Middle East c. 8000 to c. 1500 BC.” The message was crystal clear: Swedish antiquity was compared and put on an even level with, for example, Mesopotamian and Egyptian high culture. This kind of comparison was in itself a further sign of the view that “cultures” can be observed and ranked by means of a battery of empirical facts. The function of the

comparative collection was to place “our” native culture in relief to other cultures, further reinforced and motivated by the notion that every cultural pattern was characterized by a “people”, a “tribe” or a “race”. Another aim, apparent from previous exhibition guides, was to emphasize that ancient Swedish culture, at least periodically, had maintained a high ‘international standard’ during several prehistoric periods. As had been established in the museums display tradition, showpieces from the Bronze Age, for instance, were presented as culturally equal to finds from Mycenae in Greece. And archaeologist did not hesitate to act as arbiters of taste in connection with such ranked evaluations: “The big dress pins with bowl-formed heads are grotesque examples of the taste corruption of the late Bronze Age” was how Sune Lindqvist could express himself in the museum guide from 1929 (Lindqvist 1929: 16).

Ancient man had always been the focus of archaeological research; still, this human being had scarcely been visualized in the MNAs early exhibitions. It may be argued that this circumstance changed drastically with “Ten Thousand Years in Sweden”. For instance, many functions of the artefacts were now illustrated by simple human shaped cardboard figures that were holding them. The fact that most stone axes on display now were shafted was also a simple way of changing the tone of the exhibition language. By visualize the artefacts as ancient man-made tools, they changed connotation from a previous role as scientific type samples in a typological oriented taxonomy. The technique of using knock stones, for example, was now accompanied by illustrative pictures flanking the authentic objects. A third novel approach exemplifies the analogies drawn between ancient objects and anthropological culture; it was the use of pictures of how contemporary “primitive peoples” used the corresponding artefacts to illustrate the cultural pattern of prehistoric Sweden.

The Middle Ages

When it came to planning for the medieval and the modern sections, the artistic or aesthetic element was apparently given higher priority than the more scientific and pedagogical approach of the prehistoric ones. Here the artefacts were arranged to “speak for themselves” without learned comments, or teaching placards. This fact aroused some criticism in the press, but the curators justified themselves by claiming that they had not had enough time. An equally plausible explanation is, however, that the *aesthetic* approach to medieval cultural history had already been firmly established thanks to the commitment from Curman and his colleagues from the 1910s onwards to promote medieval church art as a national heritage. Hence the Romanesque and Gothic halls were designed as church replicas in order to match the exhibits. Pedagogical texts or slide presentations were in 1943 (and still into present days) notably absent, especially in the medieval section. Peter Aronsson has suggested that this take on mediaeval heritage has a special function in dealing with the potentially problematic heritage of Catholicism in Protestant countries, transforming it into an aesthetic heritage that is hence valuable rather than representative of a dangerous other (Aronsson 2011: 60-83; Aronsson, 2012, in prep).

As in Curman’s previous church restorations, the aim was to achieve a contemplative atmosphere, an effect that Curman probably considered at least as essential as the factual scientific information value (Tegnér 1997: 555ff).

Ten Thousand Years in Sweden – a symbolic exhibition

Finally, the exclusive elements, the showpiece exhibitions, should be mentioned. A gold and a silver room were prepared for a burglary-safe display of the museum's most precious ancient treasures. These were later supplemented by a silver- and goldsmith gallery. In these rooms the medieval showpieces could be shown in illuminated display cases and thereby function as public magnets. This meant increasing entrance revenues, while simultaneously demonstrating that the value of the Swedish heritage was not solely of a spiritual nature.

“Ten Thousand Years in Sweden” remained for decades the model for designing permanent exhibitions in the new county museums round the country. According to Fredrik Svanberg, most of the arrangement for the exhibition remained into the new millennium 2000: “[...] albeit with modifications in 1951 (the Younger Iron Age), 1958 (the Older Iron Age), 1974–1977 (the Younger Stone Age) and 1978 (the Older Stone Age) and other minor changes. [...] In the 1980s the Older Stone Age hall was converted into a cafeteria and the Stone and Bronze Ages were squeezed together into the prior Younger Stone Age hall. In the former Bronze Age hall an Iron Age house was erected that visitors could walk into, in addition to other pedagogical installations.” (Svanberg 2009: 53)

Physical anthropology at the National History Museum

Physical anthropological allusions in connection with exhibitions have so far been illustrated by seemingly rather ‘harmless’ examples. However, “Ten Thousand Years in Sweden” included a glass case containing nine craniums together with references to the characteristic forms and racial types of the skull bases. The shapes of the exhibited craniums were elucidated by an illustrative placard showing the differences in skull base profiles between oblong and more rounded skull shapes. The display case was labeled: “Stone Age Swedes. Late Neolithic Period c. 1800-1500 BC”. It seems that the case had already been completed and exhibited in the old museum. It was arranged in the 1920s’ by Carl Magnus Fürst (1854-1935), an anthropologist who had, together with Gustaf Retzius (1842-1919), made a name for himself through an internationally noted study of 45,000 military conscripts for *Antropologia Suecica*, a race biological work (1902). The display case, which had apparently been considered so indispensable that it had been moved (in the 1943 war year) from the old museum to an even more central and illuminated place in “Ten Thousand Years in Sweden”, also turns out to have been left unchanged in the exhibition up until the 1970s’.

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The subject of the collaboration between archaeology, osteology and the physical anthropology and race biological research of the time has for a long time been either more or less neglected or rejected as a basically insignificant aberration in historical work about the disciplines involved. For my part, however, I adhere to Fredrik Svanberg’s interpretation that the archaeologists were not only “affected” by physical anthropology, but that anthropological and racial research was *justified* through the observation of skeletal archaeological material and supported by archaeologists’ sometimes race-biologically suggestive culture analyses. In short, archaeologists and physical anthropologists collaborated in matters that benefited and justified both professions in a symbiotic sense. Although one should add that not all osteological research was about race issues.

By the 1943 inauguration exhibition racial research had existed in Sweden for over a hundred years, so the MNA display case, with its racially categorized craniums, was related to a well-established scientific discourse. Well into the 20th century, race determination based on osteological studies of bone fragments (especially skulls) was a conventional element in archaeological investigations – combined, of course, with other and more recent techniques, methods and analyses of artefact categories. Allusions to race and culture based on skeletal materials can be found in archaeological texts as late as the 1970s, and further on.² The aspect of historic time and cultural estrangement seems to be a critical factor in accordance to understand why these kinds of associations still can be articulated. Present day DNA based analysis on paleontological finds of proto-mankind species and also *Homo sapiens*, fall under the category of natural history and are therefore still open for racial categorisation (Aronsson 2008, NHIST/ESF conference paper). It seems that we tend to equal humans to animals, given an enough ancient time relation.

Fürst and Retzius' internationally recognized *Antropologia Suecica* (1902) was in many ways the logical outcome of an established field of research. The study had been preceded by Gustav Retzius' historical synthesis *Crania Suecica Antiqua*, published in 1899. For the latter work none less than Oscar Montelius himself had contributed by collaborating and by supplying craniums that had been unearthed. Montelius had by then been long convinced of the racial and long-lasting purity of the Swedish race. After the turn of the twentieth century a regularly recurring picture of what characterized Swedish cultural history was established. It included characteristic stereotypes such as the Swedes' love of freedom (with reference to the historically free peasantry) coupled with references to race biologically physical attributes like oblong skulls, blond hair, blue eyes and tall stature. The quintessence of this anthropological Swede was sometimes summed up by the "Nordic type" epithet, in the sense that 'the majority Swede' both biologically and culturally was heir to the Germanic peoples and, prior to that, to the Cro-Magnon human race (Hagerman 2006: 341).

Oscar Montelius was indeed inspired by the issue of race and culture from an ethnographic point of view and the former Director-General of the MNA stated his opinion on a 1917 article. His argumentation set up Swedish cultural history in contrast with the Continental Migration Period and considered its impact on the primeval population of the Scandinavian Peninsula:

In Scandinavia, too, migrations certainly entailed changes, but of a more passing character. The great emigration temporarily deprived or almost drained many areas of their population. But no Slavs were able to intrude here. As time passed, the gaps left by the emigrants were filled by peoples of the same blood as the other inhabitants of the country. For this reason the Scandinavian countries, not least large areas on the Scandinavian Peninsula, are in our days inhabited by peoples whose Germanic blood is purer than anywhere else in the world. (Montelius 1917: 412)

Montelius' arguments fitted into the debate about the nation's "ancestors" which had been going on for decades. He was sharpening his analysis by moving his time horizon for cultural genesis further back in a similar article in *Nordisk tidskrift* ("Nordic Journal") in 1921:

We are thus entitled to say: Our ancestors have lived here in Sweden for 15,000 years. When they arrived, what is now called Sweden was uninhabited. We possess a country that we have not taken from any other people. We Swedes have “made” our country ourselves, developed land and roads. Such acts of taking possession are exceptionally noble! (Montelius 1921: 408)

Montelius’ long time perspective supplemented the usual reference to the Germanic peoples prevalent in contemporary research on the so-called Cro-Magnon race. About this human type the reader is told that it was a “fine, quite advanced, long-headed race”, which had thus immigrated to the empty land as a result of the withdrawal of the continental ice sheet. The Nordic Cro-Magnon people had subsequently, by natural “differentiation” and *not* by any further immigration, evolved into the Germanics, who populated Scandinavia and the northern part of present-day Germany. However, the Germanic race remained most intact in Scandinavia without being either touched or mixed with the Finno-Ugric race eastwards in Finland.

Montelius texts were designed to be popular with a wider audience than that of archaeologists alone (his scientific texts were strictly focused on typological artefact issues). His reasoning, constituted a defense of the idea of a historically unbroken homogeneous folk culture. The self-assured tone needs to be considered in the context of the logical problem that the assertion of a Swedish culture of unity poses in light of the demographical fluctuations of the Migration Period that were well known among professional antiquarian researchers. The circumstance that all race research actually rested on a methodological and theoretical quagmire and that renowned researchers in anatomy and physiognomy had by the 1900 turn of the century rejected factors like head shape or hair colour as statistically viable racial characteristics, does not seem to have made any impact on those researchers whose minds were already set. On the contrary, a person like Gustav Retzius was able to ‘calibrate’ the fundamentally vague statistics from the study of the military conscripts in order to create a statistical bias towards long-headedness (Hagerman 2006: 341). However, not everyone in the Nordic archaeology context did agree with the hypothesis about the assumed purity of the “Nordic type”. The Danish archaeologists Sophus Müller and Johannes Brøndsted were among those who had declared the population continuity issue unsolved and possibly even unresolvable (Moberg 1948: 290). But these researchers were in minority; few had enough scientific capital (or a safe employment) to claim Montelius wrong.

MNA’s first exhibition guide appeared in 1872, written by Oscar Montelius. These guide books were reviewed from time to time to bring them up to date with the advances of research. According to Fredrik Svanberg’s study, references suggesting that Stone Age people were of the same race as today’s Swedes began to appear in texts from the late 1880s onwards. By the turn of the century vague hypotheses supported by skull based studies were transformed into professed certainties (Svanberg in print: 15f). The updating and publishing of guides ceased between 1912 and 1923, likely due to fact that the directorship of MNA was mildly expressed vague during the 1910:s – this because of the long lasting illness of Bernard Sahlin, Director-General after Montelius. However, the new guide written by Sune Lindqvist in 1923, somewhat unexpectedly, contained no reference to physical anthropology and skull shapes. Nevertheless, in Lindqvist’s 1929 *Vägledning genom samlingarna, från forntiden* (‘Guide to collections, from Antiquity’) the familiar arguments returned, without any critical reservations whatsoever. The visitor was now instructed to start the tour in the Stone Age Hall: “In the display case to the left skulls and skeletal fragments from the Younger Stone Age can be seen. Even at this early time the number of ‘long-

headed' Nordic skull shapes predominate [...], proving that the composition of the race then inhabiting Sweden was the same as the one now constituting the majority of the population. An entirely different 'short-headed' type also existed very early on [...]. At the far right can be seen a skull from Alvastra, which shows clear signs of scalping performed with flint arms." (Lindqvist 1929: 3f)

Without any doubt the visitor was supposed to see and experience that it was *our* history that was chronologically displayed here. The exhibition he referred to was the new displays in the old museum, which by then was completed with Fürsts arrangement for showing race oriented skull shapes. This is the story behind the case containing the ancient skulls:

In 1927 Carl Magnus Fürst gave a talk at the 50th anniversary of *Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi* ("The Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography"). One of the problems he emphasized concerned the status and administration of skeletal Swedish collections. Fürst made various requests for improving the situation. He wanted, for instance 'to have at his disposal in the National History Museum a display case to arrange anthropological material for the Stone Age section, namely cranium types and bones...' This request was granted by Director-General Curman, and in 1927 or 1928 the Stone Age Hall was refurnished so that Fürst could arrange a case with a central position in the hall.



Figure 2: The National Museum Stone Age Hall after the 1928 rebuilding. The display case arranged by Carl Magnus Fürst occupies a central position in the middle of the three display cases along the wall to the right. Photo by H Andersson from the History Museum Picture Archives in the Antiquarian Topographical Archives at the National Heritage Board. [Copied from F. Svanberg in print, p. 18.]

By 1928 the display case received an even better position, which could not possibly be missed by visitors, i.e. in the anteroom of the big Stone Age Hall [...]. The showcase probably remained there until

the museum moved to Narvavägen in 1939. At least it is mentioned in guide books as late as 1937 [...]. In the new Narvavägen exhibition, *Ten Thousand Years in Sweden*, a similarly arranged case was placed in a prominent position near the windows overlooking the yard in the Younger Stone Age Hall. (Fig. 3). (Svanberg in Print: 18f)



Figure 3: Racial theory as displayed in *Ten Thousand Years in Sweden* in the Younger Stone Age Hall in 1960. The contents of the display case are basically the same as the arrangement made by Carl Magnus Fürst in 1927 or 1928, which in turn derives from a 1920 book written by Fürst. Photo taken by Nils Lagergren from the History Museum Picture Archives in the Antiquarian Topographical Archives at the National Heritage Board [Copied from F. Svanberg in print, p. 19.]

In a popular-science overview from 1920 Fürst made downright racist speculations about how the long-headed “aristocratic” Nordic race type had coexisted in the Stone Age with a short-headed type assumed by Fürst to represent a “despised” human race. In the overview the (paradoxical) message which had by the time evolved into something of a mantra in racial hygiene contexts was also repeated: the Nordic race is, on the one hand, *immediately* threatened by modernity with imminent miscegenation, while the historical analysis, on the other hand, supposed to point out a strange and *resistant* homogeneity of the race, from the Stone Age till the present time.

Axel Bagge, who was responsible for the MNA Stone Age section, laid special emphasis in the exhibition catalogue for *Ten Thousand Years in Sweden* on the importance of craniums for interpreting racial affiliation. He also repeated the notion that the Swedish race used to be even purer in ancient times and that as far back as the Stone Age “we” were blond and blue-eyed, concluding with this noteworthy sentence: “On the whole the Scandinavian peninsula is the area where the Nordic race is best preserved.” (Bagge 1945: 70)

In his article Fredrik Svanberg states that these explicit links between archaeology and physical anthropology seem to have abated after Second World War:

Race research was clearly communicated in the museum exhibition in the display case with short and long skulls, curiously enough, as late as around 1970. By then people in the museum had long ago forgotten the actual importance of the display case. In an interview from 2009 Lars O. Lagerqvist, museum lecturer in the 1950s and 1960s, described how he refrained from lecturing about it, because “he did not really believe in it”, but:

‘I always used to take school classes there, because they are always so interested in skeletons. So I guess they might look at it. But I did not go into long and short heads and so on at length.’

Thus ended, as a comical but in fact dreadful feature for school children, the actual meaning of which had been lost, i.e. the nearly half-a-century-long museum display of the research results of Carl Magnus Fürst, anatomist and race researcher. (Svanberg in print: 21)

Physical anthropology and archaeology – trifle or mainstream?

The question may of course be asked how representative C.M. Fürst’s and Axel Bagge’s cultural analyses of a physical anthropological nature were at the time. In this overview I have indicated that they were far from alone in articulating this kind of interpretation. The fact is that researchers who had the will, courage and career opportunity to take up a more critically tentative attitude were in clear minority. In an interesting article from 1948 the archaeologist and museum pedagogue Carl-Axel Moberg asks the question, which also formed the title of his article: “Were the Stone Age people in Sweden really our ancestors?” For understandable reasons Moberg takes a highly diplomatic approach to earlier theories and standpoints. His basic outlook is that the question is highly relevant, but that his agenda is to point out that earlier cocksure analyses of population continuity were in fact based on vague empirical material. Moberg begins by stating that the reason why the notion of a homogeneous Swedish culture from the Stone Age onwards had had such an impact was largely because Oscar Montelius had forced the issue in such an authoritative manner. At the same time Moberg points out that Montelius’ argumentation and conclusions were not primarily based on “archaeological evidence”, but on “anthropological” osteology of a fundamentally rather uncertain character. Montelius’ archaeologically founded evidence had been based on the observation that the ancient finds per se did not seem to *contradict* the idea of population continuity (Moberg 1948: 290).

As an example of a more critical attitude to the issue Moberg mentions the historian Sture Bolin and his relativist standpoint in *Skånelands historia* (“The history of Scania”) from 1930. Neither were all of the archaeologists convinced of the Montelius perspective, even though there was scarcely anyone who delivered a clear criticism. An analysis unique for its time was offered by the Lund professor of archaeology John-Elof Forsander in the late 1930s. Forsander’s popular history presentation of Sweden’s prehistory in *Svenska folket genom tiderna* (“The Swedish people down the centuries”), edited by Ewert Wrangel (1938), is by today’s standard strikingly ‘neutral’. It contains no allusions to ancient races as culture carriers, but the presentation is much more nuanced and devoid of value judgments than the analyses that used to be offered by the MNA researchers. The population in the Stone and Bronze Ages is, for instance, referred to as a “northern European culture circle”. Nor does Forsander see any reason due to recently observed find categories to speculate in terms of race or “culture contradictions”, as the variations might as well derive from ethnogeographical changes within the groups (Forsander 1938: 35).

Nonetheless, even though it may be noted that some archaeologists in the “southern province”, and even at the MNA, expressed criticism of and disgust at standardizing a race oriented Swedish nationalism, everyone seems to have accepted the notion that mankind could be divided into racial types and that skeletal material could provide the relevant knowledge. Even Forsander states in his chapter on “the Germanics” that current research did not yet know for certain whether this people was identical “with regard to race and mentality” with the Nordic peoples on the Scandinavian peninsula (Forsander 1938: 178). Another example mentioned by Fredrik Svanberg is the observation that the MNA archaeologist Ture Arne in an article from 1943 begins by defending his own archaeological and osteological racial analyses, and then immediately goes on to comment with irony and disdain on the current Nazi belief that racial affiliation expresses something about individuals’ mental disposition (Svanberg In Print: 24). Like Sigurd Curman, Ture Arne was in fact a strong active opponent of Nazi Germany and its ideology, which demonstrably did *not* mean that the two were critical of their own museum’s display case with its racially oriented skulls. How should this be interpreted?

The answer will be the obvious one: nobody questioned the fundamental idea of historically evolved human races (as it would have overthrown the interpretative frame of decades of archaeological collecting and research). It was the step from thinking in racial terms to using this ‘knowledge’ as a weapon for political and/or social oppression that divided the opinion of researchers. The cranium display case was MNA’s most explicit example of cultural analysis marked by physical anthropology. Nationalist, gender-related, ethnocentric or sometimes straightforward race biological allusions also existed, as we have seen, in other parts of the exhibition. However, the MNA exhibitions in the new and old museums were not aggressively delivered propaganda pieces. As indicated by the cited interview with Lars O. Lagerqvist, it was probable that not all museum employees gave much thought or commitment to these aspects. How the visitors in turn experienced the issue can be no more than food for speculation.

Archaeology historians like Evert Baudou have noted that Swedish archaeology did not display the same kind of theoretically and methodologically biased research as was current in Nazi Germany: “The leading Nordic archaeologists around 1900 chose research topics with a national background, but their results were guided by scientific methods. In theory and method the archaeologists worked with scientific stringency, but in the analyses they might have overstepped the mark.” (Baudou 2002: 58). In another article Baudou chooses, rather than nationalism and race research, to refer to researchers’ personal interests and “scientific curiosity” as the “driving forces” behind archaeology (Baudou 2005: 1). The same viewpoint is held by Baudou’s contemporary, art historian Anders Åman in his book on Sigurd Curman from 2008. (Åman 2008: 237).

It is true that Swedish archaeology did not apply the invented and aggressively political antiquarian research that was conducted in Germany in the wake of G. Kosinna (1858-1931). Kosinna’s research had been based on a geographical and chronological search for a proposed Germanic ancient homeland, which after his death escalated to ‘bad science’ – the German archeologist then as a rule, under the Nazi-regime, collected ‘evidences’ that was predicted and dictated on forehand. This way of ‘bias-science’ was, amongst others, criticized by the scientists from MNA in Stockholm. But the odd overstepping the mark for the Swedish archeologists that Baudou refers to is misleading. The fact that archeologist’s speculations about ancient cultures

were based on prejudices about human races and their different characters was integrated as an actual core for the research. It was hardly a matter of odd oversteps when, for example, notions about ancient 'swedes' skull shape and hair color still in 1945 could be printed without reservations in the exhibitions catalogue for Ten Thousand Years in Sweden.

In my opinion, the method and theory applied by the archaeologists of the time cannot be separated from their conclusions or the contextual power inherent to the arenas where their conclusions were presented. It is of relevance that physical anthropology research was allowed a place in Sweden's central museum for archaeological and historical research. It is also relevant that the "facts" presented by anthropologists and archaeologists were disseminated in race biological surveys and in various educational contexts (Rydén 2001: 148; Lundborg 1927: 12, 15). In fact, I am critical of the argument that holds that personal interests and scientific curiosity are the primary "driving forces" of any disciplinary research area. This is like suggesting that personal interests can flourish *outside* or independently of factors like ideological nationalism or, for that matter, careerism, competitiveness and even coercive collegial loyalty.

To begin with one can argue that there is of course no reason to deny that the scientific and personal interest of the individual researcher *was* not actually behind the enterprise of mapping the physical anthropological and culturally evolutionary prehistory of the 'Proto-Swede'. For archaeologists like Oscar Montelius it was, in my view, a personal agenda – the subject being, if you prefer, his "driving force" (alongside documented personal ambition and the striving for a position in society). Secondly: researchers, science and national museums do not exist outside of historical, social and cultural context. In short, I consider the question itself of the possible importance of nationalism as a scientific driving force as vain, since nationalism should be looked upon neither as a theory nor as a method to be considered, approved or rejected in analogy with other kinds of academic standpoints. The mechanisms of nationalism or, for that matter, racism operate on a more unconscious and tacit level than what is explicitly applied in archaeological or anthropological theories about human cultures. Fundamental values and ideology lie, so to speak, behind and will largely become visible mostly through linguistic or visual 'signals' – or they will be revealed by the very choice of research area. *Why* was, for instance, research on Bronze and Iron Age tumuli considered so important to the archaeologists of the early 20th century?

To conclude on the MNA's national and cultural narration, I would say that the actual paradigmatic shift from a traditional positivistic and materialistic approach to cultural history, to a post-modern (or post-processual) tentative interpretation, has developed only recently – mainly in the later part of the 1990's. The museum is in fact right now struggling with readings from research in material culture and national representation. The archaeologist Charlotte Fabech at MNA gives, as an example of the latter, an ambivalent analysis about the present state of multicultural and global aspects. She partly seems to look back in envy at the 'good old time' when archaeology could deliver a single coherent national synthesis (Fabech 2005). As the museologist Hilde S. Hein concluded already a decade ago, the cultural policy of the past few decades' focus strongly on the visitor and his or her democratic right to "experience" – regardless of ethnicity, gender, class or education – which has changed the traditionally authoritative role of the museum. "[M]useums have descended from the heaven of authoritative certainty to inhabit the flatlands of doubt." (Hein 2000: 142).

Conclusions

Referring to the museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill the national narration may be interpreted as a modernist attempt at order and control (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 24). On the basis of the vision to interpret and visualize the people's territorial and historical mutually interwoven histories, narratives were created about the characteristics and advantages of the authentic Swede. Referring to a set of structured keywords from A. Appadurai (1981: 201-219), I will summarize the national narration that inspired the MNA archaeologists throughout the major part of the 20th century. Under the items below I will also indicate some of the themes that this study, for reasons of time and space, has *not* included:

1. "Authority". By this is primarily meant discursive authority – who has or have the right of interpretation and in what way is the arena, the actual validity of the message, legitimized? Here my study has demonstrated that the MNA archaeologists possessed the dignity of nationally leading researchers and that their exhibitions legitimized broadly anchored notions of Swedish and human culture. [It need hardly be mentioned that MNA represented an institutional authority directed towards the general public.]

2. "Continuity". Here Appadurai refer a) to the possible existence of a discursive consensus about the notion of historical continuity – as an instance of this my study has clearly exemplified the endeavour of Swedish archaeologists to find and maintain that there exists a cultural connection between prehistory and the present time. By not only asserting the existence of continuity in customs and manners, but also notions of an 'intact' biological race, the figure of thought of cultural homogeneity was reinforced.

Further, Appadurai use "continuity" to refer b) to a direct analysis of a national genesis myth like the one handed over by Swedish archaeologists. Such a narration may provide an image of the historical growth of culture as characterized either by flux and long coherent lines, or by disturbances, migrations and setbacks. My study indicates that the early 20th century was characterized by a "master narrative" whose wish to establish factors pointing towards homogeneity and long-lasting cultural stability predominated. This should be set against 19th century national self-images, which were in general more diffuse, often comprising considerably more factors such as migrations, wars of conquest between various "tribes", or speculations of a direct influence from appropriate European "high cultures" (such as the Celtic, Mycenaean or Phoenician cultures).

The 20th-century aspiration towards a homogeneous cultural self-image is expressed, for instance, in archaeologists' systematic marginalization of the cultural heritage of the Sami (which has *not* been included in the study). Examples of this historical "oblivion" are found practically everywhere among the MNA research and exhibition activities; In Sune Lindqvist's *Vägledning genom samlingarna* ("Guide to the collections") from 1929, the first mention of the Sami does not occur until page 29 in the chapter on the Middle Ages, under the topic of "a place for pagan rites".

As a final observation the present study has *not* included *the social aspects* encouraging the self-image of cultural homogeneity, racial aristocracy and agrarian freedom. During an epoch stamped by two world wars, mass emigration, political democracy and radical modernization it is scarcely far-fetched to interpret the research-related self-image as a conscious or

unconscious striving to create a national identity and stability. Conclusions in that direction have been made by Peter Aronsson, among others (Aronsson 2008: 187-212).

3. "Depth". This concerns the aspect of how chronologically comprehensive the national narration is taken to be. Is the identity sought after in historically close epochs, or even in contemporary times, or is the forming identity located to prehistoric times? In the present study we have seen that the starting point of 'Swedishness' in a physical anthropological, archaeological and ethnogeographical sense originated in prehistory. In the late 19th century MNA archaeologists dated the by then established starting point of Germanic Swedishness to the Iron Age. At the beginning of the 20th century the dating of corresponding ancient Swedish culture had been transferred back to the Late Stone Age. Like the earlier aristocratic passion for genealogical heredity, age-old cultural descent was used as an argument for the national "right of possession".

Part of the chronological depth is also the notion of specific key periods in the past. Researchers at MNA kept holding forth, in writings and exhibitions, the Middle Bronze Age and the Iron Age Viking Period as high-culture periods. Today the Viking Age (c. 850-1066 AD) still occupies a disproportionately large exhibition area in the museum and a disproportionate number of books for sale.

4. "Independence". This term implies the necessity of separating periods and/or regions from one another in the imaginary chain of national and cultural development. For Swedish cultural heritage preservation it is a well-known fact that the view of what is national used to be regionally divided. From the turn of the twentieth century onwards there was a clear tendency visible among researchers, local history preservationists and intellectuals to look upon the basically administrative regional divisions as "natural" cultural regions. Every region represented its specific form of culture, preferably originating in ancient times, possibly with an unbroken line from the Stone Age. Taken together, these were, however, the defining parts of the Swedish cultural landscape (with its political borders dating from 1809). MNA's initial exhibition principle involving display cabinets divided by province clearly mirrors this cultural self-image. The transformation of the inaugural exhibition in 1943 according to a more thematic exhibition principle in turn reflected the strong centralization of cultural heritage preservation at the time. The image of 'Swedishness' was by then assumed to have been definitely assessed; the 'only thing' that remained was to illustrate the research results as pedagogically effectively as possible.

The delimitation also applied to the view of prehistory, where the Stone, Bronze and Iron ages were in turn divided into sub-periods. This, too, may be exemplified from Lindqvist's museum guide (1929): "*The Younger Stone Age Third period* is characterized by the broad-headed axe and sometimes goes by the name of the Passage Grave Period after the stateliest grave type." (Lindqvist 1929: 6). This act of materialistic periodization created a feeling of researched order and of observed progression of cultural evolution. Since the culture-historical interpretations were derived from studies of artefacts, the visitor could literally *see* cultural progress. Newer, more advanced styles had followed upon older and less developed ones. However, the researchers' notion of this cultural evolutionism was *not* characterized by an altogether linear process. In analogy with Oswald Spengler's contemporary epic on the cyclic development of western culture, archaeologists were able to identify periods of rise and

fall within each era. The Bronze Age, for instance, presented a cultural boom in its middle period, to subsequently relapse into barbarism before rising anew in the Vendel period – towards the crescendo: The Viking Age! Besides, speculations about cultural influences were heated issues, such as the question as to whether the Bronze Age high culture was the effect of native or foreign cultural importation. Oscar Montelius' conclusion that the development was natively Germanic put the lid on any continued open debate about that particular aspect.

To conclude, “independence” may also be interpreted as a discursive endeavour to qualitatively separate ‘Swedishness’ from ‘foreignness’. In combination with the notion of culturally profiled human races this sense of national exclusiveness sometimes took on almost (tragi-)comical proportions. The cultural debate of the early 20th century included, for instance, established cultural anthropological ideas about the distinction between the Swedish (Germanic, long-headed) and the Finnish (Finno-Ugric, short-headed) “racial groups”. In a lecture given in 1897 Oscar Montelius claimed that the Finnish race had received its culture via Germanic peoples who had emigrated from ancient Sweden. This lecture, which was published the following year in *Finsk Tidskrift* (‘the Finnish Journal’), naturally awakened strong reactions among Finnish archaeologists and antiquarian scholars. The subject was debated for decades among antiquarian researchers and cultural historians. The one camp comprised those who wished to lean on Montelius, who had maintained in an even more self-assured analysis from 1917 that the ancient Stone Age “Swedes” had not only transferred culture to Finland, but had ever since stopped mixing with those Finnish “tribes” but lived, “exactly as today” side by side with them. The other camp consisted of Finnish scholars who, not surprisingly, did not wish to interpret the finds as suggesting that the primeval Finnish population had been incapable of creating its own culture (Jensen 2009). At the same time it should be noted that neither camp questioned the anthropological dimension which constituted a fundamental element in the debate. Both sides accepted the notion of physical anthropological race distinctions. Finland’s most celebrated archaeologist at the time, J.R. Aspelin, did extensive research on the assumed Finno-Ugric culture area and also laid the foundation of museum collections of a national character (Pettersson 2001: 251).

Note

- ¹ All quotation from Swedish sources has been translated by Staffan Klintborg, to whom I am grateful.
- ² For example K-G Selinge, “Människan i landskapet: Förhistoriska kulturmiljöer i Jämtland och Härjedalen”, *Formvårdaren* 1976:14.

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- Axel Bagge, "Kortfattat förslag till disposition av stenålderns skådesamling i nya Statens historiska museum i enlighet med ritningarna av den 1 augusti 1935", ATA, kapsel Aa 3, "MNA" Basutställningar, FIII a:1.