

Carl-Gösta Ojala & Jonas Monié Nordin SÁMI ARCHAEOLOGY IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: HERITAGE, INDIGENEITY AND POLITICS

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In April 2014, we presented a paper in the session ‘Sámi archaeology and postcolonial theory’, organized by Marte Spangen, Anna-Kaisa Salmi and Tiina Äikäs, at the 14th Nordic Theoretical Archaeology Group Conference in Stockholm. It was an interesting session, with a positive atmosphere and with discussions covering many different topics within Sámi archaeology. After the session, we were invited to publish an article in a special issue, edited by the session organizers, on Sámi archaeology and postcolonial theory in the journal *Arctic Anthropology*. The resulting article was called ‘Mining Sápmi: Colonial Histories, Sámi Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden’ (Ojala & Nordin 2015). The discussion in the article takes its starting point in our joint research project ‘A colonial arena: landscape, people and globalization in inland northern Sweden in the early modern period’, which aims to explore the colonial history in the Swedish part of Sápmi in the 17th and 18th centuries, focusing in particular on early modern mining and industrial colonialism in Sápmi.

As we understood it, the very idea of the special issue was to stimulate debate, and therefore we welcome Bjørnar Olsen’s contribution to this debate, not least considering that he has been a central figure in the history of Sámi archaeology. We do need much more debate on Sámi archaeology, and its place in the general archaeology and heritage discourses in the Nordic countries and Russia.

In his discussion article in *Fennoscandia archaeologica*, Olsen reads our article as a criticism of Sámi archaeology (Olsen 2016: 215–9).

In his view, the readers of the special issue in *Arctic Anthropology* ‘get the rather dismal impression that Sámi archaeology is neither very theoretically minded nor internationally oriented’ (Olsen 2016: 215). ‘Though less explicitly stated,’ he writes, ‘Ojala and Nordin leave a similar impression of Sámi archaeology as somehow out of tune with and/or inferior to postcolonial and indigenous archaeology conducted elsewhere’ (Olsen 2016: 216; the similarity implied is with Spangen et al. 2015 and Gjerde 2016).

However, our intention was never to criticize Sámi archaeology as a field, but to criticize the lack of attention and research on the colonial history in Sápmi in Sweden, as well as the lack of debate in Sweden on Sámi land and cultural rights. We also aimed to situate the colonial historical processes in Sweden and Sápmi in a wider historical archaeological context. Rather than criticizing earlier achievements in Sámi archaeology, we wanted to underline the potential of historical archaeology to contribute to the understanding of the early modern colonial histories and relations in Sápmi. Furthermore, we wanted to point to the possibilities that developments in historical archaeology and Indigenous archaeology elsewhere in the world could bring to the field of Sámi archaeology.

Olsen is absolutely right that a text can convey messages which were completely unintended by the authors, and Olsen is free to read our text as he wishes. Still, it is surprising that Olsen only very briefly mentions, and never really engages with, what our paper is actually about (that is, the colonial past and present in Sápmi,

the exploitation of natural resources in Sápmi, and debates on Sámi land and cultural rights in Sweden). When reading his critical comments, the readers probably get the impression that our article in *Arctic Anthropology* is filled with criticism of earlier research about Sámi history and prehistory, which is actually not the case.

Much of Olsen's critique against our text boils down to the view that we 'misrepresent and ignore much relevant research conducted over the last decades' (Olsen 2016: 216) and that we have not given enough credit to earlier archaeological research on Sámi history and prehistory, not least in Norway.

We certainly had no intention to downplay the achievements by many archaeologists within Sámi archaeology. We are well aware of the many research projects and publications that have emerged at least since the early 1980s in this field (see Olsen's article for plenty of examples, but also e.g. Ojala 2009; Hansen & Olsen 2014). Of course, we could have been clearer about our position in relation to earlier research, and our article would perhaps have been better if we had included more of the earlier relevant contributions, which Olsen points out repeatedly in a rather polemic manner. So Olsen is right in pointing out these imbalances in our text. However, it was never our aim to produce a research history of earlier Sámi archaeology. When we were asked to contribute to the special issue, as one contribution among others by researchers from Sweden, Norway and Finland, we never saw it as our task to give a fundamental review of earlier research, in the manner that Olsen does in his paper.

That said, we wish to underline that we find such a research historical investigation of the field of Sámi archaeology to be a very relevant and important research task. Carl-Gösta Ojala has discussed research historical perspectives on Sámi archaeology in length in his doctoral dissertation (Ojala 2009). Sámi archaeology, as Olsen also states in his discussion paper, is indeed significant from a theoretical perspective and certainly of international interest, not least because it is engaged in contested issues dealing with nationalism, indigeneity and the politics and ethics of archaeology. We share Olsen's view of Sámi archaeology as an important field of study, which should be of much interest and

relevance for archaeology in general in the Nordic countries, and indeed elsewhere in the world.

In our discussion about Sámi archaeology, our aim was, first and foremost, to discuss the situation of *Sámi archaeology in Sweden*, in relation to the understanding of the complex colonial histories and relations in Sápmi. It should be underlined that the political situation in Sweden is not very favorable for the Sámi population with regards to land and cultural rights. There are several present-day conflicts over land rights, with roots in the colonial policies and practices of the Swedish state from the 16th century onwards. In Sweden, Sámi land rights is a much contested issue today. One of the most obvious examples concerns the conflicts over mining and other exploitations of natural resources in the Sámi areas, which forms a starting point for our article. In recent years, there has been a boom in mining activities in the Sámi areas in northern Sweden, which has led to many protests from Sámi groups. These protests are part of an ongoing struggle from Sámi activists and the Sámi Parliament to gain more self-determination and to have Sámi land and cultural rights acknowledged in Sweden. In this struggle, the colonial history is central, as well as the understanding of the concept of indigeneity in the Swedish context. And archaeology is in the middle of it all. Here, we actually think that there can be a lot to be learned from positive as well as negative experiences in other parts of the world, where archaeology has been contested and involved in conflicts over land and cultural rights of Indigenous people. But this does not at all mean that we find Sámi archaeology to be 'inferior to post-colonial and indigenous archaeology conducted elsewhere' (Olsen 2016: 216).

Another contested issue, which we also raise in our article, concerns the collections of Sámi human remains in Sweden, which were gathered (in different ways, through archaeological excavations and more or less obvious grave plundering, or as anatomical specimens, bought or traded) to anatomical and racial biological collections in the 19th and early 20th century. In recent years, increasing demands to repatriate and rebury the Sámi human remains have been put forth by Sámi activists as well as by the Sámi Parliament. We are well aware of the fact that the Sámi Parliament in Norway has responsibil-

ity for parts of Sámi heritage management, but this is *not* the case in Sweden. And yes, we do think there is a lot to be learned from the Norwegian experiences. However, in Sweden these debates have not moved much forward in the last decade (although there are some interesting recent developments on the political level), and there remain many issues of principal character which need to be discussed.

Another related example is the implementation of international law, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples from 2007, with several paragraphs concerning cultural rights of Indigenous peoples, which needs to be discussed much more in-depth in Sweden. These declarations (such as, for instance, paragraph 12 about the rights of Indigenous peoples to the repatriation of their human remains) have *not* been implemented in Sweden.

One important issue that we wished to highlight in our paper is the relationship between ‘postcolonial archaeology’ and ‘Indigenous archaeology’, which we see as central for the question posed by the editors of the special issue about Sámi archaeology and postcolonial theory. If we are to discuss postcolonial theory in relation to Sámi archaeology, we also need to discuss Indigenous archaeology. Indigenous archaeology is a specific development in archaeology, which has been much debated internationally (see further e.g. Smith & Wobst 2005; Atalay 2006; Bruchac et al. 2010; Nicholas 2011; McNiven 2016; Hillerdal et al. 2017) – but which has not been much discussed in Sweden. In our mind, it is not a matter of whether earlier research in Sámi archaeology has been theoretically informed or not, or if we are ‘impressed’ or not with ‘what has happened elsewhere’ (Olsen 2016: 218). Rather, it is a question of the role of indigeneity in archaeology and heritage discourses and a question of the understanding of the colonial past and present, and the notion of decolonization, in Sápmi. In our article, we wished to highlight these issues – contested, controversial and of great importance in Sweden today.

The Indigenous movement today is global, and the developments – positive as well as negative (of course depending on your viewpoint) – for instance in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, have great importance in other

parts of the world. Also, much of the literature in the field of Indigenous archaeology comes from these English-speaking countries, for instance concerning repatriation and reburial debates. National legal frameworks, such as NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) in the USA, are also very relevant in this context. Here it is important to underline that the Sámi have played an important role in the global Indigenous movement for a long time. And there are certainly archaeological approaches in Sápmi which can be considered as part of an Indigenous archaeology movement, with focus on community-based and community-initiated archaeology, as we also pointed out in our paper (see e.g. Ljungdahl & Norberg 2012; Barlundhaug 2013; Norberg & Winka 2014), although they are not commonly ‘branded’ as such. An interesting question is why we so seldom talk about Indigenous archaeology in Sápmi. Certainly, Sámi archaeology would have much to contribute to the international debates on archaeology and indigeneity.

We find it difficult to understand why it should be considered as a problem to be interested in the developments in the field of Indigenous archaeology in countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia. This does not mean in any way that the achievements in, for instance, Norwegian archaeology is diminished. Of course, there could be a danger that these English-speaking settler states will have a too dominant position in the debates in other parts of the world (which we also pointed out in our paper, but which Olsen sees as a ‘paradox’). But that should not stop us from studying the developments in this field. Despite Olsen’s criticism, we would still argue for the need to view Sámi archaeology and historical archaeology in Sweden and the Nordic countries in a global perspective.

Our intention was to emphasize the possibilities of an archaeology, engaged with these contested issues, to contribute to the understanding of colonial histories and relations, and the connections between past and present.

Also, it is important to note that historical archaeology in the Sámi areas in Sweden is not very well developed, and that in the historical archaeological field in Sweden, Sámi archaeology has not been much acknowledged. One aim with our contribution was to situate the colonial

practices of the early modern Swedish kingdom in a global historical archaeological context through bringing early modern Swedish colonial policies and practices into a more international debate. As we have already stated, we absolutely agree with Olsen on the amount of important research in the field of Sámi archaeology during the last four decades. However, there is a general lack of research covering the medieval and early modern periods in Sápmi in Sweden, within archaeology as well as history. With our paper we have tried to examine forces such as colonialism, globalization and mass-consumption of the early modern period and their roles and consequences in the Swedish part of Sápmi. These are issues that are rarely discussed in historical archaeology in Sweden (see however e.g. Nordin & Ojala 2017). Here, we think it is important to look out into the world to places where historical archaeology and its entanglements with the politics of archaeology and identity have been more discussed. Once again, as with Indigenous archaeology, this does not imply that earlier work within historical archaeology in Sápmi should be considered as inferior.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that, although we feel that Olsen has at least partly misunderstood the aim of our paper, we do recognize the importance of more discussions about Sámi archaeology, its research history, present conditions and positions, and future possibilities. However, although Olsen lists many important contributions in Sámi archaeology, Sámi history and archaeology still remains an understudied field in the Nordic countries and Russia (in comparison with other aspects of the history of these countries) and much more research is needed. In Sweden, this is definitively so. Sámi archaeology as a field has a much weaker position in Sweden than in Norway. More collaboration between archaeologists in the different countries in Sápmi is also much needed in order to better understand Sámi histories, the politics of archaeology, and the connections between past and present in Sápmi. And also, we should add, to uphold Sámi archaeology as a ‘critical force’ in Nordic archaeology. The national borders are still of profound importance, much more than they should be. Maybe that is one of the most important ‘lessons’ to be learned from this exchange

of views with Bjørnar Olsen. Let us hope, and work, for more of cross-border discussion and collaboration in the future.

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