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Editorial

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Editorial

We are excited to share with you a new issue of *Current Swedish Archaeology*. We hope that this year's archaeological research and debates will engage and inspire, generating new insights, fostering reflection and perhaps even prompting action. *Current Swedish Archaeology* has long treated archaeology as a socially embedded practice, and the journal has repeatedly served as a forum for explicit engagement with political, institutional, and cultural debates within and beyond Sweden. Examples include the 2011 keynote that addressed the Swedish political situation in the context of the rise of the radical right, and the 2017 volume's discussions of archaeology's role in museums and in legislative frameworks that shape democratic processes.

This year's keynote, written by Marte Spangen at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway, continues and develops this long-standing engagement. It concerns the possible roles of archaeology and cultural heritage in contemporary society, and how they may contribute to sustainable and just futures. Entitled *Participatory Archaeology for Heritage Preparedness: Addressing the Wicked Problem of Anti-Democratic Discourse*, Spangen addresses contemporary global challenges posed by authoritarian and anti-democratic movements. She provides an elegant examination of the ways in which archaeology may mediate social and political processes within a multifaceted democratic discourse.

While some archaeologists may be unsympathetic to the idea of the discipline's involvement in contemporary politics and see themselves as neutral researchers (e.g. Knutson 2024), it is important to note that archaeology and archaeologists are always implicated in such processes, in one way or another. Indeed, early archaeologists such as Oscar Montelius (1843–1921) and Hans Hildebrand (1842–1913) were politically engaged, in the sense that they sought to use their societal positions, and, at times, pre-historic material culture as evidence, to influence the political debates of their own time. Both, for example, supported and actively advocated the emancipation of women, including women's suffrage. Later, Hanna Rydh

(1891–1964) made substantial contributions to addressing pressing societal issues related to poverty, equality, and peace, as well as to debates on democracy. She also drew international attention to these concerns, for example through her service as a delegate to the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations, whose central aim was the promotion of world peace (Arwill-Nordbladh 2005). In addition, she observed and commented on the significance of climatic change during archaeological fieldwork conducted abroad. Seemingly, Swedish archaeologists have long been motivated to contribute to the resolution of challenges that, to varying degrees, have threatened democratic and inclusive societies. Today, while some of these threats persist, others have taken new forms, necessitating novel approaches and strategies.

Spangen proposes in her keynote that today's global problems associated with increased anti-democratic and authoritarian forces could fruitfully be addressed through participatory archaeology. She departs from a self-reflexive and purposeful approach, drawing on experiences from Indigenous archaeology and Saami archaeology specifically. In this framework, active knowledge production involves so-called non-professionals working in dialogue with archaeologists, fostering mutual respect and reciprocal learning. Spangen further argues that archaeology must dare to be explicitly political. She introduces *heritage preparedness* as a form of cognitive and social resilience; the capacity to engage critically with contested pasts, identities, and values, rather than merely protecting predefined heritage objects. Framed as a response to 'wicked problems' (complex, open-ended challenges with no clear or final solutions), it is suggested that archaeology cannot "solve" democratic erosion, but can contribute through 'small wins' (modest, concrete interventions that foster dialogue, trust, and tolerance of disagreement). While acknowledging that participatory archaeology in Scandinavia remains limited in scope, she maintains that such practices can establish vital arenas for democratic dissensus and long-term societal resilience.

The messages in the keynote are taken up and productively complicated across the responses, which collectively underscore both the promise and the frictions inherent in participatory and Indigenous archaeology. John Schofield situates contemporary global crises as interlinked 'wicked problems' that demand urgent but non-linear responses, supporting Spangen's claim that participatory heritage practices can strengthen democratic discourse even when problems are ultimately irresolvable. Harald Fredheim expands this discussion through examples drawn, among other places, from New Zealand, examining how heritage practices can foster trust while also raising critical questions about the evolving role of archaeologists in democratic discourse. Wisely, he cautions against uncritical transfers of par-

ticipatory models between different social and political contexts. Together with insights drawn from Tara Johnson-Comerford, Fredheim highlights the demanding nature of participatory archaeology: in fact the emotional and personal labour involved can be so substantial that participants may ultimately choose not to engage. Changes may be challenging and require labour. This might help explain resistance to reform, to the reordering of power relations, and to shifts in sites of knowledge production – challenges that participatory archaeology must confront rather than gloss over.

Several respondents further extend Spangen's argument by situating participatory practice within other urgent contemporary crises. Charlotta Hillerdal foregrounds the urgent threat of climate change. Drawing on long-term collaboration with an Indigenous community in coastal sub-Arctic America, she demonstrates how effective community-based archaeology combines a clear sense of purpose with flexibility, responsiveness, and sustained listening. In this perspective, participation demands humility, patience, and a willingness to remain open to being changed by the collaboration itself. Following, Charina Knutson and Mattis Danielsen emphasise the risks involved when participatory and Indigenous archaeology unfold within unequal institutional frameworks. While such approaches aim to redress colonial power imbalances, they remain limited within development-led archaeology in Sweden and Norway, where most archaeological work occurs. Indigenous archaeology, they caution, is a high-stakes arena for public disagreement, as debate can undermine trust, exclude Saami voices, and expose Indigenous communities to hostility. To mitigate these risks, they call for stronger Saami representation in archaeological practice and education, and for archaeologists to develop cultural competence and conflict-management skills. Carl-Gösta Ojala similarly sees Indigenous archaeology as a critical, decolonizing practice that emphasizes collaboration, power awareness, and engagement with living Saami communities, while also urging continued critical reflection on representation and participation. Importantly, he highlights the responsibility of universities, museums, and archaeologists to act through education, communication, and ethical practice, while also recognizing archaeology's potential to both empower and to do harm in contemporary society.

In her concluding response, Marte Spangen returns to these concerns, stressing that meaningful inclusion must navigate complex political realities, such as land rights and colonial legacies, while avoiding tokenism or the exoticization of minority groups. Ultimately, the exchange reinforces her central claim: that archaeologists inevitably function as social mediators, and by intentionally embracing inclusive practices at the local scale, they can – through small but consequential interventions – help cultivate the tolerance and community-building necessary to sustain modern democracies.

Connecting to the broader theme of anti-democratic forces and violence, the first research article by Julie de Vos, *Today Emperor, Tomorrow Beggar ...*, presents the results of archaeological investigations of the World War II Sølund Camp in Denmark. The camp held German civilians, a category of internees largely absent from public awareness and historical narratives. By foregrounding the material traces of everyday life in the camp, de Vos illuminates the marginalized experiences of these refugees, positioning the camps as tangible manifestations of the institutionalized 'states of exception' in modern systems of governance.

Questions of identity and belonging are approached from a different angle in the second research article, *Do You Want to Know Who You Are?* by Kristian Kristiansen et al. Drawing on a nationwide survey of nearly 900 individuals in Sweden, the authors examine why people pursue personal DNA ancestry testing and how test results might shape attitudes towards history. The findings indicate a difference between an interest in individual family genealogies on the one hand and engagement with collective national history or ethnonational identity on the other. It is implied that the connection to contentious discussions regarding ethnonational identity remains subdued in the context of personal DNA testing.

We find *Elks on the Loose* as the third research article. Authors Pernille Pantmann and Pernille Bangsgaard shift the focus of the issue to much earlier periods while engaging with questions of temporality, materiality, and social memory. The authors examine the deposition of antique elements, here elk bones, in Funnel Beaker wetland contexts in North Zealand, Denmark. They demonstrate how direct AMS dating can uncover long-overlooked traditions of temporal reuse, offering fresh insights into how Neolithic societies related to time, physical objects, and the reproduction of meaning across generations.

As always, we also offer insights into exciting new research in the form of reviews and notices. Nils Anfinset makes important observations in his review of *Nordic Bronze Age Economies* by Christian Horn, Knut Ivar Austvoll, Johan Ling and Magnus Artursson. Peter Skoglund, in turn, delves into Fredrik Fahlander's recent book *Ecologies of Bronze Age Rock Art*. Sven Kalmring's encompassing book *Towns and Commerce in Viking-Age Scandinavia* is reviewed comprehensively by Christoph Kilger. Keeping to the theme of the Viking Age, Charlotta Hillerdal synthesizes and reflects on the two hefty volumes of *Northern Emporium*, edited by Søren M. Sindbæk. Ulla Nordfors and Ronan James O'Sullivan present thoughtful observations in their review of the book *Critical Perspectives on Ancient DNA*, edited by Daniel Strand, Anna Källén and Charlotte Mulcare. Finally, Bodil Axelsson shares her thoughts on Ulrika Söderström's recently defended doctoral thesis *Kulturarv som resurs i socialt hållbar stadsutveckling*. Among

the notices, you will find information about *Ostlänken*, a large-scale linear archaeology project involving four counties in Sweden and c. 700 archaeological sites. The first notice, by Göran Gruber, Magnus Johansson and Tom Carlsson, presents the scientific coordination of the project. The second, by Göran Gruber and Thomas Johansson, summarizes the project's communication efforts.

Lastly, a note on the development of *Current Swedish Archaeology*; we will continue to publish research articles online-first but will expand the practice to also include notices and reviews from 2026. You are welcome to submit your manuscripts throughout the year! We offer a speedy peer-review process, complimentary language revision, online-first publication, and Open Access to serve a wide interested international and national audience.

Elisabeth Niklasson & Ing-Marie Back Danielsson
editors of *Current Swedish Archaeology*

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