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Facing the Inevitable

Using the modern practice of Döstdning to understand Ättestupa

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Abstract

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Ättestupa has been a contentious practice ever since the translation of Gautreks saga. This senicide practice has largely been viewed as a parody of the culture of Västergötland and has received little attention. But with new interest in the modern practice of Death Cleaning, we might finally understand Ättestupa as a real tradition. By understanding the placement of burden, and views of suicide, as well as the investigation into the material world around aging and death Ättestupa can be viewed as the ancestor to Death Cleaning, and thus as a window into this past practice. By comparing these two practices we also build a framework for how modern death practices can be used to understanding the archaeology of aging and beyond through the use of various archaeological approaches that take into account different sources of knowledge and the different ways that these sources can be approached.

Keywords: *Ättestupa, Death Cleaning, senicide, archaeology of aging, materiality*

Nyckelord: *Ättestupa, Döstdning, senilitet, arkeologi av föråldrande, materialitet*

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1. Introduction

Around the middle of autumn, 2017 I received word that my grandparents on my mother's side had decided to leave their current home with the intent of moving into a retirement or assisted living community. I was a bit surprised, but I had also seen this coming. They were getting older and had some issues in the recent past with their current home. Being far from home studying in Sweden for my masters I was unable to help in the eventual move. But the timing of all of this was impeccable. I had begun the process of planning out a research topic with my advisor. We had settled on the idea of exploring how studying something new could help in understanding something quite mysterious from the past. This topic had come about with the publication of a Swedish book looking at how Swedes prepare their homes when they are aging and preparing for what is to come next. The similarities with what was going on with my own family is what would help to establish what would come about for this master's thesis.

Famous Japanese author, Haruki Murakami once wrote on death and its relation to life. He spoke on how death is not in opposition to life or against it but is an integral aspect of it. The two cannot exist without the other. I mention this quote because it will come to define what my research is focused upon. When thinking on death we imagine what comes afterwards, we think about what will happen to a person. We focus our attention less on the process and more on the inevitable result, but what is going on during the lead up? What cultural and personal details and events transpire while coming to the realization of what is to come? To some, these questions are resolved in ways that many of us today might find odd. To many the thought or burden of waiting until the end for themselves or their family members is too much, they want to, for a lack of a better term, get it over with. This decision is what we call senicide. This is the practice of suicide, killing of, or abandoning the elderly. Though a somber topic, it is one that sheds light into a culture and the way they view the process of aging and death. In this thesis I wanted to investigate further into this topic that lacks a body of research that it deserves, so that these processes might become more familiar in academic and wider understanding. But there is mention of senicide, all we have to do is look to the past.

Back in the mid-17th century a relatively small and unassuming saga was translated into Swedish and gave rise to a concept later termed: Ättestupa. In the saga family members speak of a cliff where Ättestupa is performed. Where the elderly go to die. This senicide practice of elderly going over cliffs grabbed the attention of all those that read it and lended itself to a fascination with the past and what pre-Christians might have been doing with the elderly. Though in itself fascinating, many if not all questioned the legitimacy of this saga and of Ättestupa, but can we see

and understand this practice as more than just myth? To get at this question I turned my attention to a new book that had been published in Sweden talking about a Swedish concept known as Döstadning or Death Cleaning entitled *The Gentle Art of Death Cleaning*, by Margareta Magnusson. This idea was focused on how as someone who is growing older and less able might go about organizing and cleaning their home so that when they pass, their family has less material burden to worry about. This old idea having been published for the first time in a little self help stylized book brought me to the question of how I or others could study modern practices like this to understand similar practices of the past. Exploring Ättestupa poses a challenge for archaeology because it is a cultural practice of the past that leaves little to no trace of existence in the form of material culture, but by looking at modern forms, such hidden cultural aspects can be better understood.

With Ättestupa and Death Cleaning in mind, the next step was how to understand and fit these into wider concepts of archaeological theory and work. Once again focusing my attention on areas previously neglected, the theoretical framework of the archaeology of aging made for a perfect background. This field seeks to conceptualize and gather evidence into how aging, the process of aging, and views of aging were understood in the past both through cultural and material ways. So, by taking these two different but connected practices, I wanted to ask the question of what Ättestupa and Death Cleaning can tell us about the archaeology of aging.

Having these questions and a desire to add to a small body of literature, I structured my thesis and research around better understanding these cultural phenomenon's through an archaeological lens while also keeping this idea that death is not in opposition to life but is an integral aspect of it. It means something different to everyone, but it has and will always have strong cultural and emotional spheres surrounding it. With this background and these questions as the framework for this study, the aim for this thesis is to explain that through the study of modern end of life practices like Death Cleaning, we can begin to understand how past practices of senicide like Ättestupa shifted into what they are today, as well as beginning to understand the cultural and archaeological significance of these past practices.

Since this thesis breaks from the normal mode that many archaeological theses take I needed to make a few adjustments to the norm to allow the flow needed to discuss my topic and explore it in detail. First, I will present the theoretical framework that my research and larger topic fits within while also presenting the methodology for exploring these frameworks and the topic. I will then go into background discussion on the two topics of Ättestupa and Death Cleaning. This will allow the reader to frame their understanding of the topic by reading into the history and cultural phenomenon that these two practices present. This also allows for me to present the general views and ideas surrounding the topic that will come into play in the next section.

Next, I will present the main discussion of the thesis. This will consist of two parts each focusing on Death Cleaning and Ättestupa respectively. In the first section I go into two cases of Death Cleaning, one being the interview I conducted and the other being from a literary work. This will then form into a small discussion on the topic. Afterwards I move into the discussion on Ättestupa. This section will focus on the source criticism that is prevalent for the topic and is

needed to discuss the topic in its entirety. Then I will discuss how by understanding the past through the present through these two topics we might build better understandings of difficult topics such as senicide, Ättestupa, Death Cleaning and beyond. From here, to finish out my research and thesis I discuss how this information and frame of work might be used moving forward in the wider concept of archaeology. This connection is key because of the difficult theoretical and knowledge pool that my topic fits in within archaeology. I will then summarize my thoughts in a conclusion for the reader.

2. Theory and method

Referring to the questions I posed in the intro, when conducting this research, the theoretical frameworks related can be reduced to three concepts: materiality, senicide, and the archaeology of aging. The theory of materiality is especially important when viewing this research and the topics I discuss later because of the importance of the relations between objects and people. For my research, this theoretical framework comes into play mostly with the idea of Death Cleaning since it largely deals with the relationships that people have with their material world. Materiality is the understanding that we as humans prescribe much of our in-material ideas and expressions through materials. Meaning that our objects have much more meaning than symbolic or functional. They are the mixing of peoples and things. With the framework of Materiality being the focus of many new studies that seek to explore this relation and the complexity found with it (Attfield, 2000; Meskell, 2004 and 2005; Miller, 1998 and 2005). I use materiality in my research because it allows us to understand the process of organizing and ridding oneself when we have reached old age, of the materials and objects in our lives. The process is never as easy as “I use this object over this object”, the history and meaning of each item has impacts upon a person far beyond symbolic or functional use. They have shaped that person in some way. By looking at Death Cleaning through materiality, we might be able to understand similar processes in the past. Since these processes leave little trace, by studying the present through Materiality, we can get a sense of the cultural and personal engagement in these end of life practices and the associated objects.

The second theoretical framework I will be working with surrounds the ideas of senicide and suicide within a cultural and personal context. Though this theoretical framework is touched upon very little in archaeological works, it is necessary to understand and use when discussing *Ättestupa* and its cultural contexts. Though much of the theoretical work done on suicide and senicide comes from psychology, many look at this phenomenon through cultural lenses to try to understand and quantify its place within society both past and present. Early research done by Durkheim helped us to understand the various reasonings behind suicide. These ranged from reasons purely internal and self-focused, to reasonings as I will discuss later where the good of the community, etc. is the focus (Durkheim, 2002). Other work on suicide has begun to look at how suicide was seen and engaged with in past societies. Works like Minois' *Historie du Suicide* and the classic *Biathanatos* by Donne sought to explore suicide in the past and to explain how it was viewed (Donne, 1930 and Minois, 1996). They helped to lay the foundation for how many works moving forward viewed and worked with the topic. They challenged negative notions and showed the commonality of suicide in the past. Marsh, 2010 would then go onto to write on how past views and cultural forces

have influenced modern thought on the topic of suicide. From here we get a plethora of works focused on suicide in terms of its impact and cultural influences today. These works call into question governmental, cultural, and other views and how they impact different communities (Hume, 2005 and Lester, 2008). All these works highlighted lay the foundation for the theoretical framework of suicide that looks at the causes and cultural views of the topic, but also frame it in how we can understand the topic as a cultural phenomenon. Alongside this is the much smaller framework of senicide or geronticide. This is specific to suicide of the elderly on their own accord or by others. Work on this is largely divided into works wishing to describe and discuss the phenomenon in terms of its cultural reasoning and see it as an outcome of views upon age and aging (Brogden, 2001) or they look at it in terms of its placement within views and discussions surrounding euthanasia. Though this topic is hotly debated, the topic of senicide is largely discussed in terms of its morality and lawfulness (Post, 1991). This area of suicide studies is key when using the theoretical framework of suicide, because it largely informs how senicide was viewed, and thus how it is viewed and discussed today. These are important in my research, since they inform how we might investigate into *Ättestupa*, alongside how we view end of life practices.

The final theoretical framework I work with in this research is differing views and uses of archaeological thought. These include the archaeology of aging, feminist archaeology, and to a lesser degree indigenous archaeology. To begin with, the archaeology of aging seeks to explore the process of aging and of childhood. These topics, as is the rest of the frameworks I mention here, are relatively recent, but have spurred much debate and discussion within archaeology. In the past, elderly and the young were seldom looked upon and lacked any real investigation. With contemporary works, these groups, especially the elderly have been looked upon in their standings and value within past societies (Gilchrist, 2007; Lucy, 2007; Welinder, 2001). These works expand and explore what can be learned about past societies by studying the material world surrounding the elderly. These works are vital in understanding *Ättestupa* and Death Cleaning because of the very nature of the two practices. They are focused upon the cultural views and placement of elderly within society both past and present.

The second archaeological framework is centered around feminist archaeology. This subset of archaeology seeks to explore worlds and people less focused upon in standard archaeological discourse. This can range from women in the past, to work investigating the domestic sphere or the complex spheres of daily life (Allison, 1999). Death Cleaning and *Ättestupa* would fall into these categories because of their role and placement in society and because of the people who perform them. Feminist archaeology is also concerned with the ways in which archaeology is presented. For my research I sought to explore the topic personally and to write in a more engaged one on one way. Straying from the standard form of archaeological written works, this allowed me to expand upon my topic and to explore such a complex phenomenon in a complex way. To a lesser extent, but worth mentioning is the final archaeological framework I utilize, which is indigenous archaeology. This recent framework is largely focused upon work being done in places where the rights and importance of indigenous communities is vital in any work being done in relation to them (Atalay, 2006). But, the core uses, and values of this framework comes into play

elsewhere, and especially with my own research. Though my work did not work with or focus upon indigenous materials or communities, the approaches and views I worked with and have my academic background in are related with indigenous archaeology. When viewing Ättestupa, most of the knowledge of it comes from written and previous oral sources. These sources in many cases lack any focus due to tendencies to avoid unsubstantiated written or otherwise related knowledge. Though saga criticism does not work with or mention indigenous archaeology, the use of this framework alongside this criticism enables further research and better uses of the oral and written traditions that are the sagas. The final aspect of indigenous archaeology I will use is the importance of low impact archaeology. This type of archaeology seeks to lessen the impact of excavation or research (Gonzalez, Kretzler, and Edwards, 2018). As I will go into further later in my Moving Forward chapter, by exploring other avenues of research and by including modern practices in better understanding past phenomenon's that lack hard archaeological evidence, we can learn so much more about the past and lessen the physical or emotional impact that archaeology in many cases causes.

The methods I have used in conducting this research largely focused around the concepts of Ättestupa and Death Cleaning. To fully understand Ättestupa, I decided to conduct an in-depth archival and literature research. As the topic of Ättestupa is one that has been of little focus in archaeological and other forms of research. Research led me to most if not all works of literature and otherwise that discuss the topic due to the limited research that has been conducted on the topic and thus the reasoning for the small reference pool. Most of these consisted of Swedish works that discussed the topic when the interest in the Swedish Welfare State was at its highest in the 1960s and 70s. Many of these also needed translation work that was done by me and with translation aids online. The second aspect of research into Ättestupa was relating to the mentioning of Ättestupa in the Gautreks saga and related source criticism of the saga. Through this research I was able to gather the limited written existing knowledge of Ättestupa so that I might be able to shed new light on the topic.

As for Death cleaning, the methods I chose was literary research alongside a semi-structured interview. I chose this form of interviewing because of the flexibility and the ability of this type of interview to allow for various avenues of discussion based upon what I or even the participant sees as important (Birkmann, 2015: 286-288). This interview was held online using skype and consisted of an hour-long discussion with two breaks. Before the interview I had sent over a list of questions and topics I wished to discuss, so that the participants could read them over and send any feedback they had. At the start of the interview I asked the participants if I could record the interview both visually and auditorily. I recorded using the record feature of skype alongside an Olympus WS-852 Dictaphone. These recordings were stored in a labeled file in an external hard drive. The participants chose not to have their identity hidden. The interview was transcribed by me and can be found in appendix 2 for further reading. As for the literature on the topic, there is only one written source. This being the published work under the same title as the practice and thus was the central literary work I focused upon for Death Cleaning. The methods used for the rest of the research consisted of more literary and archival work alongside translation when needed.

3. Background Discussion

3.1 Death cleaning

My first interaction with Death Cleaning came long before ever having heard the phrase. Having living relatives on both sides of the family who are of the age of retirement and even the end of their life in some cases, the idea of preparing for death, preparing for the years leading up to the end was not unheard of for me. As family members got older, they naturally went through the processes of organizing, cleaning, and reducing. But I never had a phrase or word to describe what they were doing. Then in October 2017, Margareta Magnusson published her work: *The Gentle Art of Death Cleaning*. This little book put the Swedish word of Döstadning (Death Cleaning) into the global lexicon. Having not existed before in Sweden as a word but as an act, the word and act soon took hold in other countries through the popularization brought on by her book. The word itself according to Magnusson's own words is, "removing unnecessary things and making your home nice and orderly when you think the time is coming closer for you to leave the planet" (Magnusson, 2017, p. 1). This word and act as stated exploded in popularity, spawning articles, videos, and even an American Comic strip by Gary Delainey and Gerry Rasmussen called *Betty*, diving into one woman's process of discovering the word and enacting it upon her own life. This book and outside material that has come about due to the publication, are all that can be found on the topic as of now. Due to this, I will discuss here the background we can draw from Death Cleaning, based upon these small sources, its impact and the world/culture that surrounds it. This will all allow us to understand what Death Cleaning is, and its place within Swedish society.

First, we should dive deeper into what Death Cleaning is. Magnusson's book presents to the reader what Death Cleaning is by using example. The example she dissects and discusses is her own process of Death Cleaning. She creates a dialog on each area of her cleaning and presents it in a way so that the reader might be able to do their own Death Cleaning. It is written with the intent of being a guide book for this process. Being the sole work on the topic this provides an incredible start to understanding the subject. When reading, you can feel her going through the cleaning and how it affected her, and other's lives. You get an intimate look into the material cultures associated with modern life, old age, and Swedish Death cleaning. She brings up personal stories associated with objects, their meanings, and even descriptions. This gives us the archaeological angle in which we can view Death Cleaning. Because of how she writes her book, we can begin to see its parallels with other material cultures found today and, in the past, associated with old age and death. But before diving too much into the cultural context and meaning I'll give a brief overview of the process of Death Cleaning Magnusson writes.

She starts by focusing on the areas where one might be able to get rid of temporary excess. These areas are basements, cupboards, attics, anywhere that storage is the central theme. In these areas we like to store objects that might have seasonal use or were used at one point but are no longer needed. This is an easy start to Death Cleaning because there usually lacks a lot of meaning associated with these objects and most of the time, they are there simply because we never get around to removing them. Next, she looks at how we can begin to organize and sort every object in a space into categories. By placing objects into categories of different levels of need and want, one can start to see patterns and where the most focus is needed once getting into deeper cleaning. The next two stages are the process of discussing what you are doing with family and friends and to also bring them into the process. Talking to others about Death Cleaning is one of the most difficult steps, but also, in my mind, is what makes Sweden ideal for such a practice and term such as Death Cleaning. For many talking about the inevitability of one's own life is a very difficult situation and for some a taboo subject. Sweden and Scandinavia have famously been always seen as a place that is more comfortable with death than most of the Western world. A great quote on this comes from the Betty comic earlier which after describing what Death Cleaning is, her husband asks how death figures into it, she retorts: "Its Swedish. Death figures into everything" (Delainey and Rasmussen, 2018). The other side of this step is bringing in others to your Death Cleaning. She mentions how by talking with her family and those around her, she was able to find good homes for much of her stuff and how the process became much easier when she had more help. This step is key as well for the rest of the family since many of the objects being given away or sorted have emotional weight for them as well. It is important to take their memories and emotions into account for organizing these objects.

The next step was to reflect upon one's self. This step is more of an aspect that should be mixed within the rest of the steps because even though the process is ideally to make things easier on yourself and others, its still a difficult and sometimes insurmountable task. Coming to the realization that you will not live forever and needing to get rid of years of memories and events can be very difficult emotionally and physically. She mentions a few times that the less time Death Cleaning lasts the easier all of it becomes, but also to not be afraid if it takes a few years to complete. Enjoy the process and remember all the good it will do. The final stage is by far the most difficult. It is going through the objects that hold the most weight in terms of memories. She mentions that these are best kept for last since they will take up most of the time and effort. Getting rid of family photos, heirlooms, family specific objects, etc. can take ages to sort, organize, and get rid of because of the weight of each object. By having them at the end it also gives you time to reflect and grow upon what these objects represent and mean to you and your family. She mentions how this final stage will be the perfect ending to your cleaning since the process of sorting through these will let you enjoy their meaning, cry, laugh, etc. as you remember what they represent and will make the entire process worth it. These are the steps outlined in Magnusson's book as to how she suggests one goes about the process of Death Cleaning. Within this she goes in depth into her own experience with loss, family, and cleaning but also emphasizes how important the cleaning is. Its important for the participant to go through it, but also its important on its main principle: that

Death Cleaning is to lessen the burden that is placed on your family when you pass and can no longer keep your objects. This emphasis will be touched upon later but is key to understanding Death Cleaning and the history and surrounding culture of it from both inside Sweden and out.

Next, let's investigate the cultural background of Swedish Death Cleaning through how the elderly are taken care of and seen within modern Swedish society. According to the website, Pension Watch, which is a global database run by HelpAge International, 25.6% of Sweden's population is over the age of 60, with current pension being given when one retires at the age of 64. This age was recently changed from 61 to 64 to raise the pensions available and make them more secure for current and future recipients according to a 2017 article by the Swedish online news source: The Local. This age requirement for pension is similar across Europe with most in the mid-60s as the requirement for retirement. I bring these numbers in because the issue of pension and retirement is largely what surrounds such issues as Death Cleaning. When one gets to the point where this Death Cleaning is needed, they must also deal with the financial and political role of being retired or elderly. This point will become more apparent in the next discussion but is relevant here because it helped to shape our understanding of old age in the modern world and what might lead to Death Cleaning and the like. Death Cleaning is present and acknowledged in Sweden because of how the elderly have been treated today and, in the past. This also relates to how modern material cultures have made such practices a must in terms of surplus, and also how we face death towards the end of our lives. From this I will go in-depth as to a possible precursor to Death Cleaning: Ättestupa.

3.2 Ättestupa

Having gone over the background and what Death Cleaning is, let us investigate its precursor. Ättestupa is both an act and a place. The two together involve the precipice itself (the Ättestupa) and the act of jumping or being thrown off this cliff. An early depiction of this cliff was included in discussions on early cultural traditions of the area in fig. 1. This practice falls under the category of senicide. Senicide is where the elderly commit suicide or are aided in due to their physical, mental, or economic burden upon themselves or their families. Ättestupa, being the Swedish version of this, involved the elderly participant in pre-Christian and post-Christian society finding themselves to be a burden on their family. From here they would set their affairs in order, and with family most likely, perform Ättestupa. It was not seen as a negative action, but rather a release for them and their family. What we know about this practice comes from a rather small pool of sources



Figure 1. An Ättestupa cliff. By Willem Swidde from Dahlbergh, E. (1705). *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*.

which provides some big issues, mainly that it is widely seen as a mythical practice. Ättestupa due to its nature leaves no physical evidence of it occurring in the archaeological record, and when it was at the height of its supposed usage in Swedish society, there lacked written records of it. This has lead academics today to look at it more as a story or myth that has woven itself into Swedish cultural history, especially in terms of the pervasiveness of folklore found through Sweden as it entered the modern era. But this is where I will begin to deviate from the written material on the subject, though this will be covered much later in this thesis in the discussion. What we do know though largely comes from oral traditions, place names, a saga, and the few academic sources found today. First, I will go into its original source material: the saga.

Gautreks saga is the original source material that mentions the practice of Ättestupa. This saga as with other sagas, has history back before any of it was ever written, most likely as an oral tradition, then was later written down as a part of the Icelandic Sagas. Gautreks saga is believed to have been written in Icelandic sometime around the 14th century and follows the humorous story of King Gautrek of Götaland. It has a longer and shorter version, with the shorter being seen as the original/eldest of the two versions. In Pulsiano, Acker, et al *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, we get a nice summary of the saga, but also a look into how it is viewed academically. Though here we will only focus upon the first part since that is where our mention of Ättestupa lies. The rest of the saga follows his story and later lends itself to *Hrólfs Saga Gautrekssonar*. In summary: “the first part deals with King Gauti of Gautland (Sweden), who is lost in the forest and is given shelter by a most peculiar family, they think it such an outrage to have to feed a guest that they decide to throw themselves over a cliff called Ättermistapi (Family

Cliff). The daughter Snorta, however, bears Gauti a son, Gautrekr, and comes to live with him” (Pulsiano, P Acker, et al, 1993: 224). The beginning part of the saga is famous for its over the top nature in terms of how the family wishes to perform Ättestupa, due to such trivial matters such as not having enough perceived food, or money. The saga is a very interesting read and provides a bit of a different look into the world where the sagas originated from, for the most part they focus on great people or the stories of the gods, but here we see a much more satirical view of contemporary people and their world views.

Here I will discuss the section of Gautreks saga that I translated which can be found in appendix 1. I provided this section to pull specific examples from the text but also to provide reference to the reader who wishes to read the section in full. In this section of the saga we can see the mention of Ättestupa in terms of each family member performing the act. Each one goes about it in odd ways. The two parents start things off and mention how they went cheerfully and gladly to Oden even though their initial reasoning for performing Ättestupa was based upon rather silly reasonings. This point touches on the role of Ättestupa within aging culture of pre-Christian Sweden, in that the act of Ättestupa was seen not as a negative act, but one that would ultimately gain you favor in the eyes of Oden. What follows is a series of each other family member, save Snorta, choosing to follow the footsteps of their parents after trivial losses and mistakes. This aspect detracts from the idea of Ättestupa, since they are doing it more in an act of comedy and sorrow instead of its true purpose as a way out for the elderly. For some of the family members, their choice for Ättestupa comes from thinking their wealth is forsaken because of snails climbing over their gold, or another thinking their crops were ruined since a bird had eaten tiny amounts from the field. These cases are meant to exacerbate the satirical feelings that the story is trying to get across. But this saga also brings us back to one of the major issues seen with Ättestupa. Does this saga, and this mention of a satirical family represent Ättestupa as a part of society? Going back to the encyclopedia, we get a clear-cut image of how many view this saga in terms of its reliability compared to the rest of the Icelandic sagas. “As a historical source, Gautreks saga has no importance. It was probably primarily meant to be ‘kätlig frásogn’ (an amusing story)” (Pulsiano, Acker, et al, 1993: 224). Does this saga because of its nature lack any historical or cultural importance, especially when viewed in terms of its creation and origin? Might this saga simply have been a way of making fun of the people who believed in such acts? This is a question I will dive deeper into, later, as it will become of great importance when we analyze it as an important cultural relic that has influenced today.

Next, let us investigate the academic and cultural relevance of Ättestupa in contemporary society. After initial responses to the idea of Ättestupa when the saga was first translated, little has been discussed on the idea, that is until major discussion was occurring around Sweden in the 1960s surrounding the ideas of the modern welfare state. One such example came from the comedic radio program *Mosebacke Monarki* who likened Ättestupa to the Swedish pension system known as ATP by referring to it as ÄTP. By replacing the A with Ä, they made fun of the system by referencing Ättestupa as the primary source for this system. This and other mentions of the pension system alongside Ättestupa were aimed at presenting the pension system of the time as

effective as leading the elderly to the cliffs to jump. Along these similar veins came academic works focusing on the topic, especially in terms of the modern pension system of the time that I will mention further later when discussing Ättestupa. These works by Odén and Lo-Johansson would help to lay the foundation of how Ättestupa would come back into the academic world, while the radio series and other sources would cement Ättestupa into public views of aging in Sweden. In later years Ättestupa would take hold in the punk rock scene in Sweden, being prominently featured in the album *Forever* by the Holograms and even being the name of Swedish musician Viktor Ottosson's band. In Ättestupa by the Holograms the songs main chorus consists of the phrase "I'm so tired" (Holograms, 2013), possibly referring to the idea that for many elderly when they reach an advanced age where life is difficult, they might seek an ultimatum like Ättestupa. Similar mentions and cultural references abound especially in Sweden of Ättestupa due to its dubious origins and emotional impact, and as time has gone on, its importance has begun to be seen and used by many outside of Scandinavia.

To further explore the cultural significance of Ättestupa, here I will discuss in part other examples of senicide that is found today and in the past. These examples come from other cultures around the world but hold very similar meanings and cultural views and thus provide an alternative look into this phenomenon. An example of this is what's known as *Thalaikoothal*. This practice comes from the Tamil Nadu state in India. This practice is found mostly amongst the poorest who find that their elderly parents or grandparents have become a burden upon them (Chatterjee, 2014). The practice is carried out using a method that, in terms of law and moral judgement, would be defined under senicide. It is carried out by a family member when, "an extensive oil bath is given to an elderly person before the crack of dawn. The rest of the day, he or she is given several glasses of cold tender coconut water. Ironically, this is everything a mother would've told her child not do while taking an oil bath" (Shahina, 2010). I use these two sources to discuss the methods used for this practice because they continue to go onto the negative aspects of this practice and how, "Thalaikoothal lay in the indefinable space between crime and desperate acts of poverty" (Shahina, 2010). Now this article looks at the complexity of the practice within the communities that continue to use it regardless of the laws that India has placed, while Chatterjee, 2014 looks at the negative aspect of it from a law perspective. In discussing the poorest communities in India, they begin their argument with this: "most people think that their aged parents are becoming burden for them. And thus, various crime against senior citizen has also increased day by day. This is a challenging issue for the government to protect the senior citizen of the country and to help them to lead rest of their life with dignity" (Chatterjee, 2014: 2006). By looking into this cultural practice from a legal stand point, which feels not all dissimilar from views associated with pension and end of life care that I will discuss in terms of Sweden later, we can begin to understand why practices like this and others are problematic to many. This blends quite well into the euthanasia debate that has been going on for years in Europe and the Americas. Killing the elderly by their own volition or against their will is a difficult subject to tackle, and an even more difficult topic to create laws around, but they can open our views into past practices, where sentiment was quite different, but today harbors that uneasy feeling.

To bring into this a more historical practice let us investigate *Ubasute*. This practice, much like *Ättestupa*, is seen more as a mythical practice, but regardless has had some amount of cultural impact. *Ubasute* translates quite literally to: dumping the old woman and refers to the act of a son taking their mother, or father on their back as they climb a mountain and leave their aging parent in the open air to die of starvation or exposure. It also should be noted that both terms in their original usage, are used as proper nouns, usually a mountain or cliff (but I will not be exploring this aspect but was worth mentioning). This practice comes from Japan which has been known for having a long history of high respect for the elderly and senior family members, but as noted by Robert Ono in his article on historical imagery of the elderly, there are times when poverty and hard times fall onto working class individuals (usually farmers) where when the time comes that a family member is simply too old to continue working and thus burden their family, that they might be left to die (Ono, 2015: 20-21). The origins of this word and practice can be traced as Ono has pointed to poems and sources written in the Heian period (794-1185 CE). These early sources range in meaning with many conflicting in the true angle that was taken in how the word is used, but they all point to difficulty in it. *Ubasute* was not an easy choice if it truly ever was used, there is a feeling of defeat in this action, this has a slight sense of similarity with *Ättestupa* with the saga mentioning it in terms of people being defeated by some actions and choosing to partake in it, or like with *Thalaikoothal*, that holds plenty of moral and emotional baggage especially in terms of people looking in. And this brings me back to the point made earlier in conjunction with the laws surrounding euthanasia, in that regardless of if these practices were real or not, they hold a complexity to them that is hard to miss. For what little work has been done on them, they deserve much more of our attention because of this complexity and relevance in our understandings of past cultures and how we reflect on the elderly living and dying today.

4. Discussion

4.1. Death Cleaning

4.1.1. Interview

Back when formulating the research topic for this thesis my grandparents went through a process that I would begin to understand as a form of death cleaning without it being labeled as such. In the fall of 2018 my grandparents on my mother's side decided to move out of their condominium and relocate to an assisted living facility or retirement home. This move was done for a couple of reasons, which they get into during the interview. These two reasons were because of age and an injury sustained from my grandmother while she was walking down the stairs in their previous home. For the sake of this research I decided to interview someone who was close to me personally since the topics I wished to discuss are difficult ones to traverse. Fully realizing the biases that might have come out of interviewing family, this enabled information and understanding that might not have been accessible had I interviewed people I had little personal contact with. As I will discuss later in this section, my grandparents were able to share very specific personal information that I then was able to analyze and fit into the wider context of Death Cleaning.

Over the months as they decided on the move and finally made the move and the process associated with it, I spoke with them on my budding research topic and we together realized many of the similarities that they were facing with my work on Swedish Death Cleaning. After some planning we were able to have an interview over skype where I asked about their process, reasonings, and material possessions. This occurred not long after their move which worked greatly since the move and process were fresh in their minds. The transcription of the interview can be found in appendix 2.

They began with asking me to specify exactly what Death Cleaning was because they had a general idea but had not investigated into Magnusson's book. They also stated that they were "not sure if we are death cleaning, but we know we are downsizing and preparing for the end of life. We kind of steer away from those words." This point was one that they would bring up a few times during the interview, that they tried to steer away from mentions of death or the like. I think this was more for the rest of the family, since such topics about parents or grandparents are difficult to deal with and to hear, but they themselves seemed quite comfortable with the reality of what they were doing and why. After explaining the process, they agreed that they were doing exactly what Death Cleaning entailed, just that they had different ideas of its wording and practical sense being

outside of the Swedish culture. The first point that they brought up was the changing situation in their life. This entailed them feeling that the home was much too large for them to deal with and care for fully, but also how they started to focus on the things that they had the time and energy for and how the list of those things diminished as they got older. This was spurred on also by events that had happened to people around them of the same age. My grandmother spoke on two of her friends whom had suffered injuries while doing basic tasks within their homes and how difficult it was for them to deal with that. Alongside this was a question of how to move forward with your life when such things have and might happen. This really changed how they felt about their own home and situation and pushed them to consider admitting their own weaknesses in terms of health and age, leading them to move into a more accommodating place.

After this I asked them how they felt about this move and what did it mean to the two of them. My grandmother started with: "I think one of the things it means is freedom and another thing is recognizing that I'm 78 years old how long can we play Russian roulette?" She then turned and asked my grandfather, his response was similar: "There is a resistance to getting older, but that's inevitable. You still must face it which is difficult. So, you can make the moves but if you don't, then it gets you in the end. It piles up. We are trying to make it easier for us and for the rest of the family by making these moves. Like Death Cleaning." These points of freedom and making the right choice and aiding in lessening the burden for families is what *Ättestupa* and Death Cleaning are all about: the taking of one's own age and life into one's own hands, and the emphasis on how you might affect your family when you have passed. In looking at similar situations within and without Death Cleaning, these two points make up the majority of how people feel about their actions as they age. These thoughts of "I want to make this decision, it shouldn't be our kids doing that" and how this will affect my children when I pass, really define what it means to Death Cleaning. This point is brought up once again later when I asked them how others in the housing facility felt about the move that they had done. Most all have spoken on this point of wanting to make the decision for themselves, a way for them to keep their independence as people while giving up much of it. They did mention though that a few had changed their mind along the lines of "I am not ready yet" but would eventually be forced to make the move because of health or family issues that arose. My grandmother spoke on this point saying that, that was not something that she wanted to happen, especially after her fall which broke her right humerus as well as her failing eyes. Those medical things scared her, made her really think on this decision to face what was happening and to move forward with it. "Even though I'm fine now, if it gets worse, I don't always want to be dependent on him (my grandfather). It makes you think. You face those issues. Life's conditions force you to make the move."

Next, we focused on the objects that they chose to keep versus those given or thrown away as well as other family member's feeling towards the process and objects. I first began asking how they went about deciding what to keep and what to pass on or get rid of all together. Their core concern was the size of their new apartment. You must be able to fit what you have in a much smaller space than before. With this in mind, many larger objects had to be passed on due to lack of space for them. My parents would get my grandmother's clock and piano, this was in part

because my mother is the eldest child and plays the piano. Another aspect of this that came up was that my grandmother's husband married in and thus we have two different families associated with my grandparents. The clock has been within my grandmother's family for a few generations and thus they felt it best if it stayed within the family. From this we can see two aspects that many families who engage in Death Cleaning go through. First is how to pass on very specific items such as a piano. Out of the rest of my family, only my mother plays it, and thus this decision was somewhat easier to make. When items of unique value come up while Death Cleaning, their meaning as an object comes largely into play and thus must be given accordingly if given at all. Many of these objects might never leave the participant in Death Cleaning or make their way into other family member's homes or given away due to their unique value. Sometimes within families the tastes or hobbies of the participants don't have meaning for other family members, and thus very specific and important items might never be passed along.

The second aspect is family specific objects, meaning things that have been passed down from generation to generation, or simply parent to child. These types of objects can be very easy to place or some of the most difficult. Luckily for my own family this never came up, but for others object with this level of importance can have very negative effects upon families depending on how they are dealt with. These objects do have inherent value but much more on the historical or familiar role over practical in many cases. In this case it was a large grandfather clock that was owned by my grandmother's parents. The clock was much too large for their apartment and thus due to the familiar value needed to be passed onto one of her children, and thus it ended up in my parents' home. These types of objects as we will find out when looking deeper into Magnusson's book are ones that usually are picked first to be moved and into who's hands or can be some of the most contentious objects in terms of giving up and who will eventually receive it.



Figure 2. Parish podium. Measures about 1 meter tall. Photo taken by participant.

Moving beyond these specific objects that were passed on, we discussed items that were too important to let go of. Objects that will remain with my grandparents until they pass. They spoke on an armoire that held significant value only to them because of its history and making, but with this object they were planning in advance to make sure they could keep it anyway. They wanted to make sure it would fit within their new apartment since it had such value for them. Many of their other objects that they simply could not pass up were smaller and ranged from purely symbolic or significant, to purely useful. Certain objects were kept to uphold the lifestyle that they were used to, while others are items that will remain important to them until the end. Such an item was a podium that they brought up (Fig. 2). It was a small wood pillar that belonged to a parsonage where my grandmother had grown up. The building where the pillar came from was burned down and this wood pillar was given to her afterwards. To them it held significance beyond many of the other items they owned, but they acknowledge that outside of them or us, it is simply a weathered chunk of wood. They made sure to point out that all the items they kept and chose not to give away was decided by both and thus held importance for both.

Finally, we discussed a bit about the rest of the family's feelings about their move and their involvement. They made sure that both sides of the family were involved in seeing the process of choosing the new apartment all the way up to helping them move in. With each move that they have done, they have made sure that family knows fully what is happening and that they are doing it with family in mind beyond their own reasonings. They stated that no one said that they shouldn't

have done this or that, and that the consensus was that this was a smart move that benefits everyone. Part of this process that made things much easier too was that the place they were moving from held no familiar significance such as the childhood home or anything like that, which in many cases makes the move so much more difficult, since that history is hard to let go of. In terms of feelings towards the objects that were given out to family and those kept or donated, there was no animosity. Everyone understood and supported their choices which made the process so much easier on them. In the end they felt this move was supported by everyone in the family and felt good in their own choices in the matter. They had a very successful Death Cleaning.

So, how can we understand this case in the wider concept of Death Cleaning, and even *Ättestupa*? As I stated earlier, the core value in these two practices and in this case study is that those involved (the elderly) are making their own decision before too much stands in their way, or they are attempting to have their own independence before their own bodies, minds, or others take that independence of choice away from them. My grandparents had begun to see the reality of aging with her injuries, the injuries of friends around them, and the difficulties with daily life in their old situation. In a recent master's thesis on homicide and suicide perceptions from written and some archaeological sources of the Viking world, there is mention of a number of cases of suicide in sagas (Nagel, 2018: 29-48). These sagas include: *Hávamál*, *Ynglinga*, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Gylfaginning*. The author brings up interesting aspects of these sagas in how we can interpret views of suicide in the Viking world, but also how they might have been viewed by the Christian authors that would later pen these sagas. In relation to many of the suicide cases in these sagas, they come about due to a failure of revenge or ability such as age or sickness as seen in *Ynglinga* with Odin, Haki in *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, Njáll from *Brennu Njáls saga*, and Eyvindr and Gauti from *Vatnsdæla saga*. Though each case is slightly different in the how's and why's they all are as mentioned by Nagel, acts that stem from failure and/or from age. I bring these cases up because the author also brings up the work of Carol Clover who in her work: *Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe*, states how in the age that the sagas focus on, there was a lack of a male-female division that many cultures have, but instead there was a binary division based upon ability. There were the strong and then there were the weak or those lacking in ability (Clover, 1993: 363-387). This division is important as Nagel brings up that in each of the cases I mentioned, the motive behind these suicides might have stemmed from this belief in strong versus weak, and thus these suicides were undertaken as a way to make sure one did not fall into the weak side of this division. With Haki he was unable to live up to his standards as a great berserker and thus killed himself instead of changing positions and facing the ridicule he might have seen. As with Njáll he was unable to fulfill a personal oath to avenge his son due to his old age, and thus killed himself by remaining within a burning building. These motives though not always expressed deliberately, are ones that hold onto these beliefs from the time, but also show evidence of writer bias that comes about. The suicide is not expressed in terms or themes from the time but have evidence of Christian angles such that Njáll after dying is found unburnt from the building, meaning he died from his own actions, but also that his faith allowed him to go beyond simply burning.

I bring these points up since this feeling of wanting to take action before something happens is quite evident in my interview. Though revenge and fear of being seen as weak does not factor in, the idea of making the decision to decide on your life before ability or otherwise makes that decision before you is quite prevalent in both *Ättestupa* and Death Cleaning. They both are predicated on the individual in question deciding on how they approach the end of their life, preferably before life decides. This can be seen in how my grandparents began to think about their move when injuries occurred to them and their friends. Towards the end of our interview my grandfather said something that really struck me, both in terms of its meaning but also how it defines both practices alongside many other end of life practices: “in a nutshell is cooperating with the inevitable.” By performing Death Cleaning, or any other similar practices you do have to come face to face with what it means for your life, but it is also an acceptance of action or independence. It was their cooperation, not someone else putting it upon them, it was their choice to make these actions before they no longer could.

Having discussed this interview and its relations with the two practices in terms of cultural or anthropological process, how does it relate with the material culture or in terms of archaeological understanding. A point I would like to bring up here but will be discussed further when I investigate *The Gentle Art of Death Cleaning*, is the idea of how Death Cleaning is a modern practice that cannot be practiced fully in times past. Death Cleaning is a product of excess in our modern times, especially in terms of the material culture of the home. With my grandparents, they spoke on how many trips they took to donation centers or drop off areas. There comes a point when you sort through the accumulation of decades of living that you realize how much is not needed for daily living or as significant items in your life. Much of this includes clothing, seasonal items, and general excess. These items for the two of them were easy to get rid of and took little emotional toll. But what about everything else they had to pass on or decided to keep? Going back to the piano and grandfather clock, these two items held very significant meaning to both grandparents. They had been in the family for many years and in the case of the piano was a part of the identity of my grandmother. In fact, this identity was so important that she made a point of buying a keyboard she could fit in her new apartment, just so that she could carry on with her identity of playing music. These two items had to be passed down from the start simply due to space. This choice makes it fairly easy to give up since they both had come to terms with the fate of the two, but still made for very difficult choices. These items had to be given to like minded people who would care for and see them in similar lights. When comparing this to past attitudes we can begin to see the connections with the significance of elder members of society passing down valuable objects. As archaeologists many times these objects hold little inherent value to those uncovering it many years in the future, but after inspection, especially in terms of dating, their importance is laid bare. This can be seen in the use of coins or jewelry that might have originated decades or even generations before yet were deposited with individuals or by happen stance that bear little or no relation at all with the object’s origins.

The next objects I would like to shift my attention to is those with the strongest material significance like their podium and armoire. These two remained with them and as I stated will

probably be with them up to the end. In the case of the armoire it holds meaning in its history but also very much so in its outward appearance. Being of fine craftsmanship, it holds significance because of its making and artistic value. This draws direct parallels from archaeology in that within rich graves such as those of Valsgårde we find an excess of finely crafted materials. Examples of this would include the beautifully crafted horse bridle that was found in Valsgårde 14 as seen in Fig 3. Artefacts: 745, 746, 750, 751, 753, 765, 766, 754, 758, 759, 761, 767-785, 787, 789, 793, 806, 807, 1255-1278, 1281, and 1282 make up a headpiece and bridle that was located where the horse's neck or mane would have been. It consists of leather straps with bronze and silver ornamentation (Nordahl, 2018: 40-42). Though the bridle and headpiece are nothing spectacular compared to what has been found in other boat graves in the area, I bring them up as an example because they, like the armoire are pieces that are both practical in daily use but are marked by their craftsmanship that give them value to anyone looking at them. Their usefulness is important, but it comes almost as secondary to how they look and the time that went into the creation. Now the podium is something far more difficult to understand in archaeological contexts and is apart of great themes of debate. The podium's value is only inherit to my grandparents, and to some degree the rest of my family that knows about it. In my grandmother's own words: "someday it will just be wood junk to somebody but to us it has meaning." They decided to keep it because of her history with it and its connection to her childhood. If this object were to be passed on outside of family its value might come down to its usefulness and thus lose all significant original meaning. In terms of archeological similarities in every single site ever found that contains material remains, there is some amount of meaning that is lost upon the researchers. He can infer what some object's meanings are, but lacking the direct personal contact, we will never be able to fully understand its personal value. Though heavily debated and important to study, I believe every archaeologist understands this disconnect and the importance of it. Most objects in our lives we keep with us and maybe have with us in the end have a value beyond the physical nature of said object. Its value is culturally or personally based and many times beyond what anyone, even our contemporaries can understand.



Figure 3. Headpiece with bridle. Drawing by H. Faith-Ell. From Nordahl, 2018.

4.1.2. Published Knowledge

My first encounter with Death Cleaning came about when I saw an article online discussing the recently published work of Margareta Magnusson entitled the *Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning*. Though a short work of only 127 pages, its contents grabbed my attention alongside many around the world as Scandinavian customs and ideas (especially words like lagom and hygge) had seeped into modern living and lifestyle. Though Death Cleaning was a bit different. Its focus was upon prepping for the end of your life and how to ease the process, particular in terms of your material footprint, upon the rest of your family as they dealt with what came afterwards. Though I was unable to speak with Margareta, her book provides the perfect information to her own process and experience with Death Cleaning, and thus in similar fashion with my interview with Death Cleaning outside of Sweden, I will investigate the contents of the book and provide analysis on its context within wider material and cultural end of life practices like Ättestupa.

The author begins by giving a general overview of what Death Cleaning entails and the meaning behind it. This largely stems from the wanting to organize and declutter one's life in a way that the rest of the family has less to deal with once the person organizing passes on. A focal point of this is how this should not be a sad topic, nor one kept to one's self. It is a chance for

family to discuss important things especially in terms of aging and how to move forward. This point is reflected in *Ättestupa* in how the practice should be viewed. Its not one of negative and sad notions, but one of honor and self-pride. Death Cleaning allows the person participating to organize what they have and give importance to what they do with their material possessions. In relation to family this is also how the author begins to describe the process. Looking at ways to begin the long process, the inclusion of family is vital when able. Even mentioning to family in passing that one is Death Cleaning allows for open dialogue when the time comes for the family to become more involved. It also provides a nice framework for the one participating since it gives them a sense of beginning and figuring out their own start to Death Cleaning.

As a reference in explaining how to Death Clean the author goes into her personal involvement with Death Cleaning. Her own experiences were quite varied and came about due to different reasons. One of the times came about when her husband died. As she dealt with the morning process and trying to move on with her life she found it very difficult when surrounded by her husband's objects, his memories, and the large home that the two of them shared. "I realized that I had to find a new home quickly, a place where there would be fewer memories and that would be more manageable for one person to look after" (Magnusson, 2017: 33). Part of this sentiment was apart of the core of the Death Cleaning looked at previously in the interview. When suddenly faced with a living space that makes for difficult daily activities or movement, the prospects of keeping such a place becomes difficult. In both cases the people involved decided to move into smaller and more fitting spaces that allowed for their ease of daily access. The second sentiment is one that is difficult to truly understand from the participant's point of view, but not entirely impossible to explain. Once her husband passed, the space and many of the objects that inhabited that space came to hold and signify the memories that the author had with her husband. By living in the space and seeing/experiencing the space she was inhabiting the memories that were locked there. Hallam and Hockey word this quite nicely: "The multiple and ambiguous meanings that we find inscribed in space, place and objects, although diverse, all share a fundamental role in creating and sustaining temporally located relationships between the living and the dead – and further situate the living in relation to their mortality" (Hallam and Hockey, 2001: 85). Though her own mortality might not have come into play in this situation, the objects and space were associated with the dead through their keeping of memories, and thus the author sought to move into a different space and to Death Clean so that the memory heavy objects were no longer keeping her from recovering from the death of her husband. From there she began her Death Cleaning process by systematically organizing and cleaning room by room.

A point the author brings up in relation to looking back on her third Death Cleaning was the issue of how to discuss the process. Her emphasis laid upon the disconnect that many generations have especially in terms of difficult conversations such as Death Cleaning. Since the book is a guide to help those thinking of Death Cleaning, she frames it in a way so that the reader might understand how to undertake this difficult step. She states that many of the thought processes of children as their parents age is the amount of material items their parents have accumulated. This is something that even I think about on some occasion though my parents own Death Cleaning is

many years in the future. The number of items we collect and store throughout a lifetime makes for difficult situations especially when the previous owners are no longer around. The burden of these objects is passed, which is at the core of understanding Death Cleaning. How to lessen the burden when so much is already being placed on those remaining. By participating in Death Cleaning, it aids in the burden that will eventually be passed on, but it also allows a possible opening of dialogue between child and parent. It provides a basis for understanding what holds meaning to whom and also a possible connection with the process of aging and dealing with the inevitable. As mentioned throughout the book and touched upon briefly by my interview, the beginning of Death Cleaning did open this conversation of who should get what and why. It brings up new meaning for objects or establishes what was already there. The passing of these objects from one generation to another is essential to the process of aging and of Death Cleaning. It not only begins the lessening of burden by preparing families in a way that they might hold onto significant objects, but also establishes the importance of passing an item from one family member to the next.

Her final point in the book is touching upon objects that hold immense weight upon one's life in terms of memories and significance. This entails letters, photos, and other items of small but significant importance. These objects are smart to wait until the end to tackle since they most likely will take up large swaths of time. The author notes that as the person engaging in Death Cleaning, it is important to focus upon one's self sometimes. To take time with items that hold a special place for you. To spend time reminiscing and in some cases of letting go. As my own grandmother on my father's side ages I have noticed an emphasis on her sorting through her old photos. As we gather for Christmas each year she takes special pride in handing out folders of old photos to each family member. This is her own form of Death Cleaning. She spends a lot of time finding and organizing these photos, and I imagine lots of time thinking on every one. Then to sort her own life, but to pass down the memories that she holds dear, she passes on the many folders, and watches with smiles and ever ready to provide stories or help when asked for. I mention this example because it shows the importance of this step in Death Cleaning. By being able to spend time with objects that hold years if not decades of memories or stories, those involved are able to organize the final steps of their Death Cleaning, but also take time for themselves to think back on their life. To end with, the author discusses what will come next once you have finished your Death Cleaning. For her it was planning out even further what will become of her and her materials, but also of celebrating what she had accomplished. The feeling of relief and joy that washed over once her Death Cleaning had been finished came from finishing such a large task, but also of how much help it will provide in the future. Knowing her family will be better because of this is truly cause for celebration.

Death Cleaning to Magnusson is a process that holds meaning deeper than one can see at first glance. It is a process that takes ample time and effort due to its nature of preparing one's life and material world for those that will inherit and keep it. By using her own examples, the author provided a window into the significance and steps needed to those wishing or thinking of taking their own steps into Death Cleaning. Beyond her own life examples, the presentation of the topic

through a self-help type book lays the foundation for future Death Cleaners as they now have a guidebook for organizing their material world towards the end of life.

4.1.3. Discussing Death Cleaning

Having gone over the two cases of Death Cleaning, what can we learn about the practice and its wider implications for archaeology and *Ättestupa*? Firstly, Death Cleaning is all about our interactions with our material worlds. The most obvious of this is the interactions and relationships that we have with our materials when we are getting older and thinking about what comes next. The second is the relation between our objects and those that will receive them or have them thrust upon them. These two relations are important to think about in terms of materiality because they hold very different meanings. For family or friends, these objects can either be received graciously because of familiar history or the like, or they are handed off with animosity because of family disconnect or a sense of being forced to take “the leftovers”. Therefore, the idea itself of Death Cleaning is key in the material relations we have once our elders have passed. As I have mentioned many times in this chapter, the core belief of Death Cleaning revolves around the idea of lessening the burden placed upon family. By participating in cleaning, organizing, and getting rid of their material world, these elders are acting to lessen any animosity or further emotional burden that their family might feel once they have passed.

As for the participant, their relation and interaction with their material world might come with this desire to lessen impact, but it also comes with the weight that is present when going through your life by the objects that might define it or have been present along the way. In both cases I investigated, there was a sense of extreme weight in coming to terms with certain objects. These might be simple things like a wood podium or old photos, but these objects represent so much more than what they are initially. Sometimes these objects simply cannot be let go of, their role as a time capsule for memories, people, or events make these objects some of the most important things in our lives, but in other cases they are let go. Detaching oneself from such objects comes with a great deal of stress, sadness, or even happiness, but why is this? Why would someone be able to remove objects of significance importance? Death Cleaning shows us a very difficult subject that all of us will have to deal with at some point. We must realize that as we near the end of our life, the things we carried through all those years, hardships, and happiness at some point must be passed on or let go. In my mind, this process of Death Cleaning is one of the best ways for us to start coming to terms with the inevitable. For many it is an emotional process that can be undertaken at one’s own pace and can be very relaxing and therapeutic. During this time beyond the organizing, the mental process of moving forward can truly be undertaken and help to make the inevitable easier to accept.

The relation between objects and people is a very complicated matter in which both benefit and dictate the other. Our objects define us, and we define our objects. But how does this play out in the past when we had significantly less objects at our disposal? Meaning could Death Cleaning exist at the same time as *Ättestupa*? I do not believe so, but as I will discuss further, *Ättestupa* is there for the same reason. Its role in society is twofold. It is meant to lessen burden upon families,

especially when one member cannot produce work or income, but consumes work and income. They either choose or are told to partake in an action that will help their family even if it is a difficult emotional choice. The second role is one that we will never know if true, but one that had to have been there, is that the decision for Ättestupa, the process of reaching the cliff, and the final moments, must have been a way like Death Cleaning for the individual to come to terms with the inevitable. Though very different and of significantly less time, the process surely plays that similar role of preparing mentally and emotionally to face what lies ahead.

My final point here I would like to bring up is that if there were ever a case to show how much importance we give objects and how much importance they give us, then Death Cleaning would be an ideal example. If you look around your material world, how much of it could you give up now. For some it might be most, but for many there would be objects that would be very difficult to give up, or if given up there would be regret that follows. Now imagine this over a life time. All of those objects might hold onto ideas and memories of times, peoples, or places past. They mean so much more than the material they are made of. They are memories, and they are emotions. Everything we interact with in our life whether daily or only a few times has some sort of impact, many quite little, but many, much more than we can even think of.

4.2. Ättestupa

4.2.1. Was Ättestupa practiced?

Before I lay out my findings and why they support the existence of Ättestupa in pre-Christian society, I will dive into two of the major source criticisms for Gautreks saga and the practice of Ättestupa. These two criticisms explore the saga and practice in their own ways but fit into the larger theory that due to various reasons, they are unreliable, and the practice of Ättestupa would not have been a practice before the translation and wide spread knowledge of the saga.

As a reminder, here I will provide a brief summary of Gautreks saga as it is the center piece in both sources of criticism and will be discussed in terms of its contents and origin. The section of the saga that mentions Ättestupa begins with a king engaged in a hunt. He becomes lost in the woods and comes across an isolated farm where he meets the inhabitants. The king spends the night with one of the daughters of the farmer and conceives a child who later is called Gautrek. The next morning the parents perform Ättestupa because of various reasons that the daughter: Snotra mentions the night before. They set their affairs in order so that when they have died their children will inherit their possessions. As time goes on the rest of the family except Snotra perform Ättestupa but for very silly reasons such as believing they have lost their gold due to a snail. After this, Snotra and her son go to the King and the story continues.

The first source criticism for the existence of Ättestupa is by Birgitta Odén in her article *Ättestupan - Myt Eller Verklighet?* Where she questioned if the practice was a myth or a reality. The central topic she brings up is the legitimacy of sagas as sources of past information. In the article this is looked upon through the lens of the history of the translation, teaching, and views of

the saga. This debate persists far beyond what I will be looking at, but it is especially relevant with Gautrek's saga in that much of its content is seen as comedic (Pulsiano, Ackor, et al, 1993 and Milroy, 1966 to name a few) and is used as a method of critique, citing that the source has less legitimacy. This stems from the idea that the stories within this saga are meant as a form of entertainment and thus cannot be used as reliable sources for events or views in the past. As to the legitimacy of this saga in understanding Scandinavian history, there has been many books and articles touching upon this saga and many others, but I will not go in depth with this as I am simply using Odén's work as a frame of reference as critique. For Odén this saga was seen as a strange and bizarre piece of work that managed to receive serious attention by scholars after its translation and was incorporated into folk studies of the time (Odén, 1996: 224-226). This aspect is important in understanding one of the major critiques of this saga and why its legitimacy is in question. During the time period from the 17th to the 19th centuries we know that a substantial amount of scholarly work, especially in terms of history and archaeology was aimed at bringing the past and mythical past into nationalistic narratives. Though much of the focus is upon the growth of nationalism and the usage of sagas in Icelandic history in the 19th century, Jesse Byock's analysis of the focus upon sagas as nationalistic devices is applicable since much of the same pressures and outcomes were happening across Scandinavia. These sagas were becoming more reliably available to people outside of academia and thus reached a much wider audience for the first time. To those reading them they portrayed grand feasts, battles, family lineages, and an idea past of strong peoples (Byock, 1992). A key importance of them was that for the modern-day people of that time who were poor or in decline due to political or economic processes, these sagas showed a past full of wealth and ideal visions (Karlsson, 1987). Because of all this, those who worked with and translated sagas were faced with needed to elevate these sagas to the status of world literature (Byock, 1992), and for them to stand as testaments to what they represented for the nation. As time went on and nationalism began to focus upon different aspects of its people as sources of pride, much attention was placed upon the rural. Known as the "Rural Idyll", this idealization of rural spaces and those who lived in them allowed nations to look even further inward and to uphold communities that held little attention in the past. But this attention idealized what was rural over what largely was rural. As mentioned with the Icelandic sagas, the poor and declining communities looked to the past to find their ideal, but now they had become it alongside their ancestors. They began to see rural for what they wanted to see it: romantic, nostalgic, peaceful, and tranquil (Mingay, 1989). This is central to understanding Odén's criticism of Gautrek's saga because it comes about when these nationalistic ideas and goals were present within Scandinavian society. The saga was translated in the 17th century and gained quite a lot of traction in the coming centuries since it fits within that idea of an idealized rural past. As we will see in the other source criticism, this point is central in understanding why this saga has many issues when looking at it for historical information.

The second source I will be looking at is Henrik Damberg's *Ättestupan-en verklig sed fran forntiden eller sent uppkommen tradition*. Or Ättestupan: a true tradition from the past or a late tradition. His article looks into the two theories revolving around the saga: that the saga discusses

a practice that was practiced in places like Västergötland and that the practice of Ättestupa came about solely after the translation of Gautrek's Saga in the 1600s. Much of the criticism here is along similar lines to Odén in that they question the relevance of the saga as historical evidence. He discusses them alongside other "Icelandic Fairy Tales" that take Icelandic places and stories and place them into other Scandinavian communities like Denmark and Sweden. These stories usually revolve around Vikings interacting with trolls or giants (Dammborg, 1994: 17). He also goes to say that a page in the saga makes clear that this saga is meant to be a form of parodying of Västergötland and the people who live there. The area where these people live and thus where Ättestupa would have been found was densely forested that made movement difficult; quoting that these people found here would have been those "who fled from public roads after something unjustified" (Dammborg, 1994: 17-18). This statement is quite interesting since it seems to point towards a people who have fled from those places and people seen as "civilized" into these forests for little to no reason. This point is confirmed when the author again questions if the saga was written as a way to show how dumb these people were or if there is fact behind their practices (Dammborg, 1994: 18).

Than in a very similar manner to Odén, the author looks at the saga as a form of propaganda that came out of the nationalistic culture that the saga might have been translated in. This comes from the sort of idealizing and fascination with places like Västergötland which were part of these idyllic rural spaces, but also how they fit into the wider lens of saga scholarly work during this time that sought the glory of the past through these written sources. So, how might we be able to view this saga and the tradition of Ättestupa that it presents? A sentiment stated by both authors is that we can take the saga for what it is and look deeper into its meaning and relevance, but the fact is that we really cannot know for certain because of a lack of concrete evidence. There are no earlier written sources on the subject, and as Odén stated: "No skeletons of old have yet been found with damage to skull or extremities which indicate cases of high altitude" (Odén, 1996: 229). So, knowing this can we relegate Gautreks saga and the practice of Ättestupa to myth written to enhance the rural spaces of nationalistic Sweden that would later lead to an early form of the Mandela effect where one individual recalls something from the past that did not happen but them and those around them feel it to be true? Was Ättestupa practiced? I believe there is much more to this saga and the practice than what we have previously thought, I reason that new ideas of past practices and new knowledge of current practices in Sweden allow us to take a second look at Ättestupa as a pre-Christian practice and not a myth.

When approaching the Gautreks saga or another saga for historical meaning beyond its literary value, there are articles, books, and entire careers dedicated to investigating this, but how might we look at Gautreks saga in a new way that lends itself to understanding the practice of Ättestupa that it presents us with? In a recent lecture given by Maths Bertell, he presented information and goals on future work he wished to undertake. He was considering a new idea that had been presented in relation to south east Asian religious and ideological frameworks. From work on this he came up with a term and new way of understanding religious variation in pre-Christian Scandinavian society. He called it *Religiolects*. This term and framework considers religions as

“local and/or social variants that fit within wider religious concepts” (Bertell, 2019). He presented this as a way to dive deeper into understanding the variations we see with hall culture and fertility/outdoor religious ceremonies, but also presented an idea that fit nicely with how we can view Gautreks saga as a historical source. In his explanation of how we can apply religiolects, he brought up Eddic poems and other sagas. When viewing these documents as religiolects we need to understand them as “individual echoes of religiolects” and as “echoes of the past, but also of its time” (Bertell, 2019). This is key in understanding Gautreks saga especially because of its contentious past. So, using this frame work let us investigate how me might go about understanding and applying Gautreks saga.

We know that the saga was written sometime in the late 14th century and was later translated into Swedish in 1664. This puts the saga into two times where the content would have been shaped by the time when written. The later being in a time period when it is easy to see how its contents could take on different forms conforming with national values and cultural ideas. But we must also look at its first documentation as a source for echoes of the time and as possible views into the hinterlands of Västergötland.

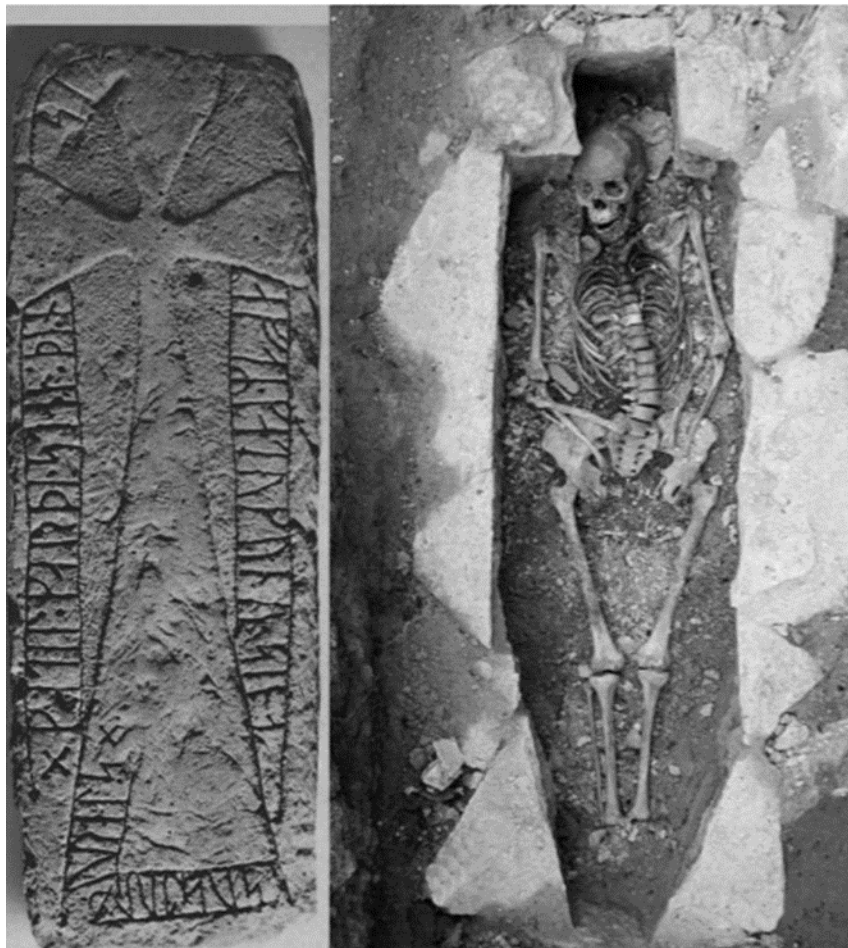


Figure 4. The tomb stone engraved in runes and a cross with female skeletal remains. Photo by Tony Axelsson. From Vretemark and Axelsson, 2008, p. 215, *fig. 4*

Like the large expansion of any religion, the process of conversion is never linear or easy to understand. As seen throughout Christian history the process of conversion largely consisted of the melding of local traditions and religious practices/ideas with newer Christian beliefs and ideas (Andrén, 2006 and Jones, 2014 look at the various ways that pre-Christian and Christian religious practices usually overlapped and mixed at various points in early conversion). This was no different for places like Västergötland where the Christian conversion would have been steady over time. With the help of excavation at the site of a Cistercian monastery in Varnhem, Sweden in 2005, archaeologists have been able to better understand the process of Christianization in the area. Through their findings they were able to determine that Christian influence was evident and strong in 9th century and was encompassing by the mid to late 10th century (Vretemark and Axelsson, 2008, p. 217). This came from extensive excavation of the cemetery a few meters from the cellar/foundations of the monastery. One of these graves (Fig. 4) and tombstones clearly shows a cross framed with engraved runes. This site helped to establish the strong presence of Christianity in the area and how it was expanded. This site is integral to understanding specifically the Christianization of Västergötland since it shows us that Christianity was well established by the time Gautreks saga was written. Though Christianity was widespread throughout Scandinavia by the time when the sagas were being written we know that remnants of pre-Christian society and religious beliefs still lingered and influenced those who lived in the rural spaces of Sweden. Going back to the idea of religiolects and the importance of Västergötland, we can see how this might come into play in terms of documenting Ättestupa.

If we look today at the place names associated with Ättestupa that remain today, meaning the cliffs from which the terms has its meaning. These cliffs are all located within Southern Sweden and tend to cluster around lake Vänern and Vättern (appendix 3). These sites are significant in their location due to their proximity towards bodies of water, which among all of the Scandinavian countries was significant to pre-Christian communities. Water and the water's edge played significant roles in the placements of graves, features, and even heaps of FCR (fire cracked rock). "the role of water...was probably key in determining where cult places and millennia-long traditions were established" (Kaliff and Oestigaard, 2017: 129). Water was so much more than markers in the landscape or resources, they played an important role in the religious and spiritual lives of the people of the past. These cliffs alongside the rural aspects of Västergötland, lend themselves to an idea of a true hinterland. As mentioned in the criticism on page 37, there is a line in Gautreks saga that mentions people fleeing from public roads and in the beginning of the saga and throughout there is mention and hinting at the location being amongst the back woods and out of way places. So, having in mind the strong Christian presence in Västergötland and the secluded nature of many who lived there, we can begin to understand how the idea of religiolects might come into play. Because of these environmental pressures there is reason to believe that the religion that was present to many in these types of communities would have been one of mixed pagan and Christian beliefs. So, using religiolects to understand the saga in terms of its relation to the culture that wrote it we can assume that maybe too many places like Västergötland might have been seen as backward places that held onto too much of the past in the 14th century. I mention this because

of criticism based on the idea of the saga as satirical and almost making fun of the people involved in the story and thus Ättestupa. If we look at the saga the way that many criticize it then why don't we try to fully understand why this might be the case. This thinking also can lend us into understanding how Ättestupa could have been a latent belief from pre-Christian society because of the pockets of older traditions that hold on even in the face of widening Christianization.

As mentioned before, the cliffs associated with Ättestupa are found in and around Västergötland as well as being the central place mentioned in Gautreks saga. Moving past the debate over the saga and its reliability, I will look at this region and Ättestupa through the same lens of religiolects since this provides further support for understanding how such a practice might have been present before Christianization. Referring back to the lecture given by Bertell, we must understand Scandinavia in terms of how its religious ideas and ideologies would have varied while still being within the realm of widespread similarities. As discussed when investigating the examples of Death Cleaning on page 25, there were general ideas of how honor was kept and given for aging individuals in pre-Christian society. These ideas of being strong and not being reduced to status of weak or unable would have been ideas shared across Scandinavia which is seen in ideas of Valhalla and the fore mentioned hall cultures. In Gautreks saga, each member who is performing the Ättestupa proclaims how it will allow entrance to Valhalla and been seen as a great act in the eye of Odin. Might this not be an example of religiolects? Having the same core value in strength and not wanting to burden when elderly, while also differing in how to achieve this for individuals who are unable to fight in war or gain access to this death status. Though no mention has been found of Ättestupa outside of the saga, we can agree that if the practice was practiced, it most likely was specific to the rural spaces of Västergötland.

In keeping with criticism of Gautreks saga as a source of historical information or valuable views into cultural practices even of the time, I will next present cases where similar criticisms were challenged due to further archaeological and investigative work. The first example I will discuss is the Håga site in Uppsala, Sweden. This burial complex found in Uppsala dates to the Bronze age and seems to have been used in various ways throughout this period and into later periods. The site is significant in its extensive contact networks with the south, east and north but also for the richness of the grave goods that it contains (Kaliff and Oestigaard, 2018: 13-15). In their book diving into the history of interpretation and documentation of the Håga site, Kaliff and Oestigaard take a considerable look at the various angles that have been taken for the site both in terms of archaeological work and historical documentation. One of the avenues they discuss is the relevance of the Hervavar saga. The saga details the history of the family of Hervör and Heidrek and the many generations of the family. Its relevance to the Håga site comes in the form of a mention of King Björn building a farm at a place called Håga outside of Uppsala: "King Bjorn strengthened that town, is that Haugi is called; he was called Björn at Haugi. With him was a Bragi poet. Eric was the son of a great-great-grandson, who took his place after his father at Uppsala" (Hervara saga og Heiðreks). Now this section of the saga does seem to have come from a later time than the main body of the saga but regardless it presents us, as discussed in Kaliff and Oestigaard's book a view into an archaeological site. I bring this example into this discussion

because the saga and its translation was key in understanding a very real site from bronze age Sweden. The authors go as far to say that the translation of the saga was the catalyst for all studies after the 17th century on the Håga site (Kaliff and Oestigaard, 2018: 193). Later in the book they mention that regardless of the criticism of the later parts of the saga and the view of the saga as entertainment over history, the saga aligns with what is known of the site and its importance. It also, as stated before helped to influence future works on the site. This is key in looking at Gautreks saga for very similar reasons. Though Gautreks saga lacks any concrete archaeological space to tie to unlike Håga, it does present an idea of how these sagas seen as entertainment pieces might have more value hidden underneath. The Hervavar saga provides us with a real-world example of how a saga might be used in tandem with archaeological or historical work to better understand a phenomenon or culture from the past, but also provides a hopeful remark in how sagas like these maybe be used as jumping off points for future work to investigate areas with little emphasis.

In a similar vein to looking at the Håga site, there for a long time there was a lack of understanding or even of an interest in cult houses and their usage after Christianization. There had been some interest, but work had not considered the continuity of these buildings until much later. But work done by Anders Kaliff and Julia Mattes began to shed light on the subject and how this continuity could be seen. In their work discussing this idea they mention how Adam of Brevin had mentioned in his 4th work that there was a large temple located in Uppsala which had also been the site of a church. The location of the temple and later church had been a topic of debate in the early years of academic study in Uppsala, but never went much further (Kaliff and Mattes, 2017, first chapter). Their research would go on to present and establish the idea that many of the cult houses of pre-Christian Sweden would be continuously used as Christianization entered and became the earliest churches with many lasting until today. Their work also investigated into the prevalence of Norse religious imagery and stories that were present in many of the wood carvings that adorn the walls, and entry ways of many churches. These ranged from serpents to images of Sigurd cooking the heart of Fafnir. Another example came in the form of concrete archaeological evidence from a site in southern Sweden. South of Uppåkra parish work was being done on a small high timbered house that upon further excavation showed a sequence of houses that almost perfectly matched one another, totaling seven stages of building. It ranged from the Roman Iron Age all the way to the early Viking Age (Larsson and Lenntorp, 2004). The excavation of the building showed that little variation as found from house to house in layout, even when form changed as time went on. This work lended itself to this idea of continuity over time with these cult buildings and their relevance even as their usage shifted. I bring up this idea of cult houses and continuation because though of very different relevancies and contexts, the idea of Ättestupa follows in similar form. There is little to no discussion on the topic, yet it has been mentioned and debated in the past. Cult houses hold more relevance and concrete groundings than Ättestupa, but as we have seen just because it is not discussed or seen as unimportant, does not mean that it is not there. Ättestupa and its origins, as I will mention later fall into this continuity that we see with the cult houses. Though it originates and is strongest in a pre-Christian context, its usage and themes hold still in slightly different manifestations, but more on this later.

My final point on explaining how we might look at Ättestupa as a real practice is the strong presence of similar acts found throughout the world. Earlier in the background discussion I brought up two other practices of senicide: Thalaikoothal and Ubasute. I will not discuss these two further, instead I will bring in a few more examples and discuss the idea and practice of senicide and how it relates with Ättestupa.

The first case of senicide I will address is brought up by Odén in the same criticism. There she mentions that within Eskimo culture in Greenland they practiced similar forms of senicide that performed a similar function and role for their elderly as did Ättestupa for the Swedes. This is interesting in that she also states that they would have had contact by the time of the writing of the saga (Odén, 1992: 228), which is well documented through anthropological, archaeological, and genetic means (Eriksson, et. al. 1986 and Persson, 1969). The practice of senicide within Eskimo culture in Greenland as well as within much of their territories was mixed and much more complex than Ättestupa. In their anthropological study in the 1940s, Leighton and Charles focused upon the Eskimo communities living in and around St Lawrence Island, Alaska in the United States. In their study they came across the various views and methods used in the senicide found there. The practices were very limited in usage by the time of their study but also were quite contentious in the past between different communities. Though when they were practiced and accepted they fell into similar cultural and ethical veins as Ättestupa. “An important characteristic of most of these Eskimo patterns is that they were relatively non-ritualized. They tended to be individually-performed events, only occasionally supported by incipient social rules and proscriptions as to how the suicide should be accomplished” (Leighton and Hughes, 1955: 328). As with Ättestupa, these senicide practices were largely individual and came down to the choice of the person based upon their own ability and view on their place within society. The way that these senicide practices differed from Ättestupa was in how they were done. The researchers noted how the actual senicide was carried out in various ways depending on what the person preferred but also what community they were a part of. Some went by hanging inside or outside of the home, while others had family members use a knife or rifle (Leighton and Hughes, 1955: 328). Though Eskimo senicide is far more complex than what I have related, I investigated it here minimally so that we might have an understanding of the types of similarities and complexities that are found in senicide practices of the past but also ones that extend to today. Ättestupa would have fallen within the same realm of complexity in motive and person struggle if not in practice.

The final senicide practice I will bring up is one that is occurring today in farming regions where economic stability is never fully present. In 2014 an article was published in China detailing the rise of suicide rates among elderly in rural spaces. Data supported this, showing that in the last two decades rates had rose from 100 to 500 per 100,000 (Fei, 2014). The reasoning behind this is that within these farming communities there has been a lack of economic or social support from families due to major shifts that have happened in these regions over the last few decades. These families are simply unable to care for their elderly and pensions systems have been failing alongside this. Thus, the elderly have turned towards senicide but as with many senicide practices, though stemming from serious issues, the practice itself does not hold similar views to

these people. “It seems that death is nothing to fear, and suicide is a normal, even a happy, end” (Fei, 2014). Senicide practices today carry the same meaning that is found in practices of the past and can give us a view into why these practices would have been viable and help to shed light onto why in the first place. Many of them stem from economic reasonings and are seen in a positive light by those who practice them, even if from the outside they are seen as outlandish or cruel.

Having presented these alongside the senicide practices discussed earlier in the background discussion, as well as investigating further into the saga that brought *Ättestupa* to more modern consideration, can we with any strength say that *Ättestupa* was indeed practiced and not simply a myth? Going back to Odén, I don’t think we can ever definitively say so since no skeletons from the past have been found showing evidence of fall trauma in enough cases (Odén, 1992: 229). But in lacking hard archaeological truth, we can still view past practices like *Ättestupa* for the cultural phenomenon’s that they might have been. With the amount of overwhelming evidence of senicide and how it pertains so much more to the cultural past over the material past, we can and should try to investigate further into these practices because of what they can tell us of a group of people. Gautreks saga just like any other saga carries the history of its writing and translation, but it gives us a glimpse into what might have been happening along the cliffs of Västergötland. Its oddity of a story shows a people who wish to achieve an honorable death by way of *Ättestupa* for reasons that fit within wider perceptions of life, death, and honor within pre-Christian society. But I think we can go further than looking to the past to understand *Ättestupa*. As of late there has been growing interest in the practice of Death Cleaning in Sweden. This practice though focused upon the material world, fits within the same realm of *Ättestupa* and many other senicide practices. In my opinion it is the catalyst for better understanding the personal experience of *Ättestupa* and as a remnant of the practice.

4.2.2. The Past Through the Present

“Facing the inevitable.” This phrase mentioned by my grandfather in our interview is what really outlined how I believe Death Cleaning to be the modern descendant of *Ättestupa*, and oddly enough the thematic precursor to *Ättestupa* in the idea that it is preparing for what is to come. In this section I will go into my results discussing the cultural and moral connections that Death cleaning has to its ancestors like *Ättestupa*. As a modern and more sympathetic approach to the elderly aging, Death Cleaning provides an insightful look into past practices of facing death and aging.

To begin with, I noticed a common thread that has woven its way into every practice of senicide as well as Death Cleaning, that I have investigated. This idea of not wanting to be a burden upon family or the community around. This idea also extends into what was discussed in my interview with my grandparents, that this burden also comes with the price of trying to take action before it is too late. Before we dive into these concepts of burden, we must look at the cultural views of the elderly and their position within society. This is because these views largely dictate why senicide and other phenomenon’s like Death Cleaning occur. The term that has come to define the prejudices against the elderly came to be known by Robert Butler who called this idea *ageism*.

This term can be summed into “prejudicial attitudes toward the aged, toward old age, and toward the aging process, including attitudes held by the elderly themselves” (Butler, 1980, p. 8). Ageism is something that today within the Western world and beyond can be found in many views of aging and the elderly. These views extend to different lengths but still lay the foundation for how many view old age. This is important for understanding Death Cleaning and ultimately *Ättestupa* because of this idea of being a burden in your old age. The burden of elderly upon their own family and community is far more complex though than simply being a product of ageism, but it can stem from this idea. In the case of the two examples of Death Cleaning I discussed, these ideas of burdening did not come from a place of my own family or the family of the author having negative views of the ones who Death Cleaned, instead they took it upon themselves to take action in their own lives as a way to keep independence but to also lessen any impact that their death would have upon the rest of the family. These examples though are not applicable to every case.

When researching various ways that elderly have been treated towards the end of their lives, I came across an interesting term that lent itself into this idea of ageism in both terminology and in actual practice: *granny dumping*. This practice is also interesting in viewing the feeling of burden that many experience in a more modern context. The term relates to a phenomenon that has been recently recognized that refers to the act of families leaving their elderly in hospital emergency rooms and not returning for them (Conard, 1992). This phenomenon comes about for the same reasons that many other senicide like practices are performed: the idea of burden. For those that leave their elderly in these hospitals, their reasoning is because of health concerns but also stems from a feeling of a burden that they cannot bear. I bring this example into this discussion concerning ageism and senicide because it, like Death Cleaning provides a more modern concept of how and why these practices are performed. In this case it rests solely upon the family who is unable to carry “a burden” but in the case of Death Cleaning, it falls upon the elderly as they see a need to lessen the burden they will place when they pass. But how can we use these to understand burden when looking at the past like in *Ättestupa*? From the few academic and historical works focused on *Ättestupa*, we get a sense that there would have been a mix of cases where the family felt the weight of burden or that of the person performing the *Ättestupa*. In some cases, the family would have been present to begin and encourage the process while in others the individual would have gone on their own as a way to receive honor for Valhalla usually reserved for those who died in battle (Lo-Johansson, 1949).

Continuing the theme of burden, when looking at the two Death Cleaning cases, burden was a powerful theme that were the core elements of each example. In the case of my interview with family, their fear of burden was more upon what would happen if the one or the other had a serious medical issue like what happened with my grandmother’s fall. Secondarily was the feeling that since both sides of the family had their own busy lives, they did not want to place themselves upon any house and thus shift their burden for others to deal with. This primary burden also came with a fear that marks the precursor to Death Cleaning. That is independence in action and ability. If we take a step back and look at Death Cleaning as a physical activity, then there is an understanding that it must be undertaken while ability is still there. The needed ability to sort and remove objects

from photos to furniture requires some amount of physical and mental ability that in many cases cannot be found when of great age. This feeling was felt by both of my grandparents, as their initial move and start of their own version of death Cleaning occurred when faced with the possibility of inability in the coming years. In the book on Death Cleaning the extension of the title clearly states a desire to “free yourself and your family from a lifetime of clutter” (Magnusson, 2017). The emphasis of burden is placed upon the feeling of success as the participant is able to declutter their life and make things more manageable in their daily life, but also so that when they pass, family has less material and emotional burdens to bear. To bring this full circle back towards Ättestupa and the past, we know the importance of ability in pre-Christian Scandinavia as mentioned with the emphasis upon strong versus weak in society. Burden would have been especially key since it fell upon one of two people. The burden of lack of ability fell upon many who felt like they failed their family or what they had done in life, as seen with many of the sagas mentioned. As well as burden felt by families who had elderly unable to be seen with honor by their surrounding culture, or economically when families were unable to provide for a member who could not provide for the family in return. Studying Death Cleaning as a modern example of Ättestupa gives us a connection of the importance of burden when looking at senicide and end of life practices. When looking culturally the placement of burden does come with influence of ageism as seen with the divide in past Scandinavia but is also understood as within the realm of looking at the people as a whole. In his ground-breaking, 1897 work, Émile Durkheim discussed the various reasoning behind suicide. One is what he calls *altruistic suicide*. This is when suicide is carried out as a way to benefit a cause or the society around them (Durkheim, 2002). Ättestupa in most cases would have fallen within this definition, and even though not suicide, Death Cleaning has similar goals in mind. It is a practice that is meant to benefit not only the participant, but almost more importantly those around them.

So, how do we get from the elderly jumping from high cliffs to the elderly going through their material possessions in an effort to organize their life and thus their death so that family has less burden when sorting through what remains of their material life? An obvious but largely misunderstood reasoning is that any practices of suicide is looked down upon and in many cases illegal. This was still largely the case in pre-Christian societies but did not hold the same religious weight. In the case of Ättestupa, it was practiced before the Christianization of Sweden, but also remained in regions less connected with more urban spheres. But as it has been understood, many times Ättestupa was meant as a way for the individual to take responsibility for their burden. This meant that in many cases this practice could have been understood more as homicide than suicide, while still falling under the sphere of senicide. An aspect of Ättestupa I have yet to discuss is the use or belief in the Ättestupa klubb or club. Referring back to Lo-Johansson, this was a large wooden club that would have been used alongside many Ättestupa cases. Its use was so that the family could kill the elderly. This though lacking the aspect of the cliff, was considered part of Ättestupa but placed the cause of death upon the family (Lo-Johansson, 1949). An example of this club can be found in the Norsdiska Museum in Stockholm, Sweden. The weighted club comes from 1699-1737, was carved from a fir tree, and measures 22.6 cm long and 2.4 cm wide. When

the club would have been used, along the shaft family members would have held it in order of age, with the oldest (not performing Ättestupa) placed nearest the end and thus closest to the one dying. This ordering of people would have helped solidify the idea of family members releasing burden and shifting along the lines of burden being placed. I bring up this concept and aspect of Ättestupa as a way to understand how within Sweden we have a shifting of views on the elderly through religious and cultural lenses, but also how the core values, like the placement of burden as discussed previous, are still evident and have carried on to modern times.

Back in my section looking at the validity of Ättestupa, starting on page 35, I briefly discuss the idea that for much of Scandinavia, and especially Sweden, there would have been a fair amount of mixing of pagan and Christian religious views, customs, and beliefs. This was further evident in the cult houses I discussed. This is key in understanding how Ättestupa could have been a living tradition in the past as mercy killing or suicide, but also shows how it might have ended up morphing into Death Cleaning. In a recent study looking at modern suicide rates amongst religious groups and countries, they found, when looking at Christian groups, that those countries and communities more tied to Catholicism and stronger faiths in Christianity lead to less suicides (Gearing and Lizardi, 2009). This they believe because of the strong negative connotations associated with suicide amongst the catholic church, but also because they believe there is stronger support networks for those more associated with the church. If we look into the past, these same negative views of suicide would have existed but most likely would not have been shared by the pre-Christian Scandinavians. Thus, when Christian ideas would have been spreading amongst the people, these views would have become muddled. This is also when I believe acts like Ättestupa might have shifted to include things like the club because views of suicide far outweigh views of homicide within the Christian community. I state this due to the various methods and ways that Christians in the past have engaged in religious crusades or wars for religion like in the Thirty Years War. When in the right context and with the right idea behind it, Christianity has endorsed methods of homicide, but this seems to not extend into suicide. The major reasoning behind this, is that within the Christian realm of faith, when one dies they are judged before God for their actions and life. If the cause of their death was on their own accord, then this is deemed as severe sin. Though not mentioned explicitly in the bible, there has been extensive teaching by religious leaders in the past on the subject including St. Augustine who argued that one must not killing, which included own life (Kennedy, 2000). So as a living tradition that managed to survive far beyond the Christianization of Sweden, we can see how this tradition would have survived in theme and idea, but time went on would have undergone extensive change. As Christianity and Protestantism took hold of Sweden, these changes would have become more drastic as older more extreme pre-Christian religious practices would have been phased out. But how does this leave us with Death Cleaning. Though probably not the direct result of Ättestupa, it fills a similar function as mentioned above, but also comes from the same values of family, community, and aging. Though elderly are not seen as weak as they would have been in the past, there is a general sense of where the elderly fit within their families and society instead of how these things fit within the

sphere of old age. Death Cleaning is an extension of this idea in that it provides a way to lessen burden, but also to prepare one's self for death as well as to prepare family.

Having looked at these concepts, what can we learn about Ättestupa by looking at Death Cleaning? For the sake of this research, I focused upon Death Cleaning in terms of its relation to Ättestupa but also to how when looking at the materiality of the practice can inform us to how end of life practices for the elderly are related to their material goods. In my section looking at Death Cleaning cases, the process of organizing through objects and the memories they carry is central in understanding the process. Physical space, in the case of my grandparents mattered, but memory was central. One of the difficulties in studying Ättestupa is that there is no physical or material evidence. By nature, it is a practice that lacks much in evidence beyond cultural significance and mention. This is where practices like Death Cleaning come into play. Going back to Guatreks saga there is mention by the daughter who the king bears a child with, that her parents before performing Ättestupa divide up their belongings and land (Gautreks Saga, Snerpa, translated by author). This is a sentiment that is carried by the rest of the family as they perform their own Ättestupa and this is where Death Cleaning comes into play. Might these family members have performed their own versions of Death Cleaning? Their process matches the same ideas that are core in Death Cleaning. They organize what they own to each family member to make sure no member feels left out or forgotten, but also make it so that the family does not have to deal with these affairs on their own. This process matches almost exactly with what is undertaken with Death Cleaning. The saga fails to mention how long the parents have meant to perform Ättestupa but with such a decision it must have been sometime from concept to execution. In this time, they would have thought through and organized what little they had. With this in mind, we can see how studying Ättestupa through the lens of Death Cleaning can help us to better understand the process and meaning behind it. Death Cleaning provides a look into this past practice in terms of mental approach, reasonings, and interactions with their material world.

But, taking this concept and route of study further, what can Death Cleaning tell us about the past and how it has formed into what we have today? For this research I set out to explain further what Ättestupa was and how might we approach it from the lens of today. Death Cleaning came about as an ideal phenomenon to use as a basis for looking into the past in views and methods surrounding the end of life for the elderly. As previously mentioned, there are a number of other practices that are quite similar in function and outcome to Ättestupa in both present day and in the past. These practices have had some focus but lack any real in-depth analysis due to the controversy surrounding them due to their nature, or because of their lack of hard material evidence when looking at past practices. By seeing the process of aging and interacting with their material world through Death Cleaning, we can begin to understand the emotional and cultural views and methods that elders have and would have gone through. This idea can extend to all senicide practices because they all fill similar rolls for the elderly and their place in society.

Death Cleaning can also tell us about how these views and methods change over time. Back in my interview and in Magnusson's book, the concept of taking charge of one own's life and death is very important to many in the present day. This idea of independence over dependence in

old age is also what drove many in the past, but to slightly different ends than we see today. Using *Ättestupa* and other practices we see this taking charge of life and death in old age comes more from the idea of one own's place in their family or wider society. They don't want to be dependent upon their family because of the pressures that presents, whether economic or emotional. Their taking charge is seeing the issues that are presented when they rely solely upon their family for daily life. This idea has stuck but also shifted over time as we today are more dependent in areas of the world more economically prosperous. Our thoughts of independence in old age shift towards what makes things easier for myself, and as an extension my family. So, what do we gain by using Death Cleaning to understand *Ättestupa*? We gain a window into a very difficult past for archaeology to study. We gain a window into the thoughts and cultural methods of dealing with the inevitable on our own as well as with those around us. We can begin to approach the process that leads up to what we can study which is the material world left over from the process of death.

5. Moving Forward

Having discussed in detail what Ättestupa and Death Cleaning entail in terms of their social and practical roles within past and present society, how might we understand them in terms of their relation and relevance within greater ideas of archaeology as well as how might this research be used moving forward. Within the last few decades, ideas surrounding cultural archaeology has shifted with new themes and ideas from feminist and indigenous archeological practices. Many of these ideas focus upon individuals in the past who have received little attention, including the elderly. These ideas and works include such works as the *Archaeology of Old Age*, by Welinder, *Aging and Generational Relations over the Life Course*, by Hareven, and *The Archaeology of Age*, by Lucy. These works and many others will provide the basis on which I discuss Ättestupa and Death Cleaning in terms of what they can tell us about the archaeology of aging and how they might be used to better understand a process that is quite difficult to study within the archaeological record.

Having looked at the comparisons and ways to study Ättestupa through Death Cleaning, how does this fit into the wider scheme of the archaeology of aging? Works done on the topic look into how the elderly were viewed in the past, how they lived out their lives, and how they are represented in the archaeological context. By exploring senicide as I have done, I sought to explore how by using modern views and practices, we might explore a bit more into how these elderly faced the inevitable in the past. Ättestupa comes as an important aspect of the archaeology of aging, because of its lack of focus, but also because of its role as an example of senicide. When looking at past peoples, the role of the elder within a community is vital in understanding how much of that community functions in daily life and how they view their members as they age. When these elders reach the end of their life and decide on their own or with pressure from their family to end their life and ease any tensions or pressures that their family or community felt, there are much wider cultural implications that must be studied and understood. Archaeology is not fully equipped to study these implications unless different avenues are examined. By exploring ideas of the archaeology of aging, we can investigate into how and why the elderly were seen the way they were, and possibly why they would choose to engage in senicide like Ättestupa. The flip side of studying Ättestupa through the archaeology of aging, is that the material history is just not there as of now. The prospect of studying this phenomenon through excavation is near impossible, but that is why I have brought in Death Cleaning. This practice does have a material record and is contemporary, which means we have direct access to those participating. Using Death Cleaning as a catalyst to study Ättestupa allows us as archaeologists to explore cultural worlds that we are ill

equipped or have pushed aside in the past. Using the present to help understand the past gives us a glimpse into how we might expand upon the archaeology of aging and further explore the complicated relations that people have with their elders.

Referencing back to work done in Indigenous archaeology, the two areas where I see the most practical use of my work in my future archaeological endeavors is the use of oral (in this case oral then written down as a saga) references in understanding events, people, or places of the past, alongside the ever-growing importance of low impact archaeology. In my section looking at whether *Ättestupa* was practiced or not in chapter 2, much of the criticism was based upon the original material that described the phenomenon. Though *Gautreks saga* is a written source, it like most all sagas were based upon oral traditions that were later transcribed (Lönnroth, 2008). Though the transcription and translation of many sagas like *Gautreks saga* have difficult histories of their own based upon the views and attitudes of the times when they were interacted with, their relevance and usage, as stated, are vital in understanding much of what was happening in the pre-Christian and Christian Scandinavia. Oral traditions are on the rise as relevant avenues within modern archaeology as more and more researchers are listening to communities and using them to explore the past (Echo-Hawk, 2000 and Damm, 2005). By using these oral traditions, archaeologists are able to build stronger ideas of what was going on in the past for those who were involved based upon what they were telling each other in their free time. Though difficulties still arise through this method, the benefits of using and understanding these oral traditions help to give a sense of events or things in the past that are sometimes very difficult to see or study in the archaeological record.

The second point I would like to bring up is the growing importance of low impact archaeology. This seeks to explore the archaeological record while leaving as little impact as possible. Much of the time this refers to as little excavation as possible, or the use of surface collection, but also refers to how archaeologists work with a community and seek to make their stance there as little as possible (Gonzalez, 2016). I bring up this example because what I have done for my research and thesis, I would categorize under low impact archaeology. With the small scope of this project aside, the work I have done left no impact upon any area and has sought to work with a community rather than establish myself within one. By exploring a past practice through modern day examples, I sought to lay out a way for archaeology to explore the past through material and cultural worlds while also keeping any impacts to a minimum. Moving beyond this research, this idea of connecting the past through cultural and material lenses can be applied to many cultural phenomenon's around the world that have a hard time being studied within classical archaeology.

The final aspect of the relevance of *Ättestupa* and *Death Cleaning* within archeology that I will discuss is what these practices can tell us about what we do not find within burial contexts. What I mean by this is that in my research I have concluded that these practices give us great insight into the process that individuals and families go through at the end of life. Since these practices revolve around the organization of material goods before the end of life, I theorize that they can provide a window for researchers into what items simply cannot be lost due to familiar or economic value to the grave. This area along with my conclusions in this matter are purely

theoretical due to their nature and the nature of this project but can and should be applied since little has been done in this regard. Using ideas surrounding material culture and social dimensions in relation to the process of aging and burial, I will dive into how these ideas can be applied to what is missing in burial records.

Within archaeology, work on burials is one of the oldest and most covered areas due to the nature of burials themselves. They contain vast amounts of material remains and equal amounts of information regarding the cultures/peoples involved. But what is not looked upon in these sites as much is what we do not find. This idea has not been explored as much because it is quite difficult since the lack of information is what is the central focus. How can we study what is not there? This is where *Ättestupa* and Death Cleaning come into play. In this thesis I have shown how we can understand wider concepts of aging and material culture at the end of life and how we can study practices like *Ättestupa* which have complicated pasts by looking at modern day practices that have concrete evidence. Having done this and shown how the modern material culture gives us insight into material culture in end of life practices from the past, I wish to progress this into other burial contexts through theoretical frameworks.

As I have discussed in chapter 1, the central idea surrounding Death Cleaning is the idea of independence and removing the guilt of burden. These ideas follow *Ättestupa* quite closely, especially in terms of burden, but what I have also theorized from these practices is the idea of family relation to material culture. Family relation and importance plays a major roll in how objects are divided when an elder of said family passes. In Death Cleaning this can be understood in terms of what objects are given out and which remain with the elder until their final days. With *Ättestupa* this is a part of the process of the setting of affairs. So how can these concepts be used when understanding what we do to find within burial sites?

My theory here is that using these practices we can see what is valuable to the elder and what is valuable to the family and thus might or might not be placed in the grave. When looking into past peoples we universally understand that the number and quality of items owned was quite different then what we have today. They would have been much less numerous and far more valuable due to a host of reasons such as creation process and overall daily value. What I mean here is what would have been too valuable for a family to give up for the burial? This value could be from familiar value, but most likely would have related to what is too useful or important to lose. In many sites and studies, we find that individuals are buried with the tools of their craft and thus hold special meaning for the person being buried and allow them to continue in the afterlife (Jørgensen, 2015 and Peška, 2016 as a few examples). These burial sites contain many of the tools of trade that their owners would have used in life. Ranging from simply tools to more ornate or significant items in the craft. But might some of these tools be of great importance and value? Might others be unable to lose these objects due to their importance within that trade? Looking back at graves like the ones found at Valsgårde, we know that wealth and extensive wealth at that was often used in conjunction with graves. Many valuables were burned alongside their owner and kept in the burial, but this was not the same for all buried. Not all had lavish lives with lavish goods that could be given to the funeral pyre. In much of Scandinavia there is a real lack of graves

associated with lower classes, slaves, and children (Price, 2008: 259). This comes from a combination of lack of social status and the ways in which lower class funerals would have been carried out. They would have had cremations, but their remains would not have been dealt with in similar ways to ones we find in the archaeological record. This comes as interesting for me since their funerals would have contained very little in terms of material possessions. As pre-Christian Scandinavians were very religious and held their burial beliefs in high esteem as seen in wealthy graves, the lack of items might have had a purely religious connotation. But could this also stem from the idea that giving up what very little a family had for the passing of an elder, etc. been too much for the family? The amount of valuable materials to those in the past would have been very minimal for most of the population simply due to access and economic means. Meaning the amount, they could spare, even for something so important as a funeral, would have largely depended on who they were and their place in society. This concept is predicated upon the idea and belief that the objects being given up for funerary purposes also have value outside of this context, which most archaeologists would agree with. Thus, if they have value outside of this context, then there must be some level of these objects being valued higher than their symbolic meanings. Might this cause issues for those of less economic standing in regards to what they are willing to give up? Where does the line for symbolic and practical end for those with little to give? Though this theory needs further study if such a study could be undertaken, I present it alongside my research because I stand that it is an interesting avenue to take the work that I have done.

6. Conclusion

What does it mean to come to the end of life, to face what is coming ahead? Well, to paraphrase my grandfather, its cooperating with the inevitable. It is coming to terms with what is to come and to deal with what comes before that. Ättestupa and Death Cleaning are routes that people take to face and deal with the inevitable. But they are also so much more than just personal paths to the inevitable. They are also products of the surrounding culture and views of the process of aging. They are windows into the material cultures leading up to death. They connected cultural phenomenon's that allow archaeology a glimpse into the material and cultural worlds of the elderly as they plan for the end. In this research I sought to explain the importance of studying the problematic practice of Ättestupa by investigating into the contemporary practice of Death Cleaning. By doing this I have shown how we might begin to study Ättestupa not just as a satirical joke in an old saga, but as a cultural practice that has lasting effects today. I have also shown how the archaeology of aging in conjunction with this type of research can allow archaeologists new avenues of research when looking at practices of the past that are difficult to study through excavation. All of this culminated in exploring the ways that we can use contemporary practices to help explain the past and how this can be expanded upon in new areas of research. So, in short, this thesis aimed at explaining, proving, and exploring Ättestupa and its modern counterpart: Death Cleaning.

7. References

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8. Illustrations Table

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Appendix 3. The red dots mark place names that use or reference Ättestupa today. Though many more places might hold similar names, these are well known today. Credit: Google Maps

9. Appendix

9.1. Appendix 1

Those brothers went for Ætternisstapa

Now, when Snotra came home, her father sat over there money, and said, "With us we have become very great when the king has come to our habitation and eaten up to us a great possession and that of us I cannot see that we can keep everything from happiness for the sake of sake, and I have borne all my possessions, and I am going to divide them upon my sons, but I and my wife and my slave to Valhallar, I cannot help my servants pay their faithfulness, but he goes with me. Gilling will have my ox in good and his Snotra his sister. "I will have my golden sledge and my hjort his sister. My sister Sisters is crazy. But I ask you, my children, that you do not increase your woes so that you cannot hold my inheritance for that. "

And, when Skafnörtung had talked about what he liked or liked, they all went to Gillingshamar, and led the children their father and mother down before Ætternisstapi, and they went glad and cheerful to Odin.

Now that the sisters were in a farm, they seem to need to optimize themselves. Then take a look and spit your way, so that they do not come to sleep. They believed that they would not multiply. Snotra found by herself that she went with a child. Then she threw her mouth in the mouth, so that she could get a hand. She made as she waited. But when Gillingr woke up or rushed to sleep, he shoved his hand and came to her cheek.

And when he woke up, he said, "Here's the unreal thing I'm going to do to make you a grandmother. You seemed to be much darer than yours."

She answers: "Do you know this as you may."

He replies, "I will not do that end, because it can never be hidden, since people are multiplied."

A little later, Snotra gave birth to one skilled boy and gave his name and called Gautrek.

Gillingr said, "There is a great deal of sorrow now, and now cannot be concealed, and I will go to tell my brothers."

They said, "All of the things we now want to get lost by this kind of thing we are concerned with, is a big breach of law."

Gillingr said:

"Home Liga

and I weak to my hand,

and I coming to a woman's cheek;

small drugs

proclaim the sons of the people,
that's why he was Gautrekr's goat. "

They could not know him if he repented and never wanted it to happen. He said he would like to go for Ætternisstapi and said that he thought that he was crazy. They asked him to wait for us to wear more.

A crowd sat down for days, and brought his gold bars wherever he went, and one day he fell asleep and woke up that two snails crawling over his gold. He stayed in a dark night with gold, and he seemed to have a great thirst.

He said, "There is a great deal of damage, and if that happens more often, it will not be good to go to Odin, and I will go before Ætternisstapi, and will not be more often for this kind of food, for the age has become evenly black my stuff, since my father shared me money. "

He tells his brothers this bitterness that we had borne and asked them to divide their inheritance. He said to them:

"Short snails
do you eat my stones,
now we want to be hated;
I will snap a little bit,
because snails have
dented my gold. "

Then he went to his wife at Gillingshamar and then went to Ætternisstapa.

It was one day that Imsgull walked around his fields. He saw a bird called a sparrow. He was now looking harmless, walked with the field, and saw that the bird had taken one's ear out of his feild. Then he said,

"That was a spell,
ok spore of water
in the field of Imsguls;
axi was treasure
there was grain,
That will be a cowardly race too slow. "

Then he went to his wife, and they went happy for Ætternisstapi and did not want to get more of such harm.

Gautrek was out when he saw the ox good. He was sjau winter. He realized that he laid the bull with a jerk to death. Ok, Gillingr saw this, he said,

"Young boy
kill an ox for me;
these are deadly madness;
I will never own
then equally
grip, though I'll be old. "

He said, "Now is not a condolence."

Then he went to Gillingshamar and went there for Ætternisstapi.

Now they were two, Snotra and Gautrek, her son. She lives, both of them, and they go to bed when they find Gauta King, and he is good at his son. He grew up there with his father's cousin, and was in a hurry of all maturation, and now it seems like some winter, until Gautrek was very perfect for maturation. Then King Gauti took charge and called his friends. (Gautreks Saga, Snerpa, translated by author).

9.2. Appendix 2

Interview with Carol and Tom Tamparo

These two are my grandparents back home in the US, and I wanted to interview them since they recently had done something along the lines of death cleaning. They had moved into a retirement home that was quite a bit smaller than their previous home. Parts of the interview I have taken out since they consisted of conversation to catch up and about what was going on with family, etc. My grandmother speaks for most of the time.

(Participant): One thing Karl is you probably need to describe what Death Cleaning is. Because we are not sure if we are death cleaning, but we know we are downsizing and preparing for the end of life. We kind of steer away from those words.

(Interviewer): It's pretty similar to what you actually doing. The way the book described it, it's more like how I am going to prepare what I have for when I'm older. So, downsizing into a retirement community or things like that fit the description. Why I thought the two of you were perfect since you had to prepare to move into your new place.

(Participant): In fact, then that is exactly what we have been doing. It all started when we decided to leave the house. When you are thinking this place is too big and it takes too much time to take care of it, but I never thought I'd leave that house, but we were ready. Situations change and your ability to take care of certain things diminish as far as how much energy you have to do that. So, you might as well consolidate your energies and enjoy other things that you like to do. But other people have really stimulated us in this process. Either negative or positive. When we were in the first house, my good friend Marilyn who lived close to us, had ankle surgery and they lived in a split level, but I watched her crawl up her stairs to go to bed and back down to go to the kitchen, and tom and I began to look at the old house and think, we would really be in trouble with all the stairs. Hm, this is not the best of things for us to have to think about, and it gets more difficult over time to deal with those things. It's just more obstacles in your situation. We had a friend who broke her leg trying to take her laundry down the stairs and was alone all day before she could get to the phone. There is a spread about how you feel about those things, many people are in denial because they don't want to admit they are getting older and can't take care of what they were taking care of. And then later they get in trouble because they can't deal with it. So, there is a practical and psychological aspect of downsizing and cleaning up your situation as you get older. But you were the first one to use the words death leaning for us haha, we had not heard that term before.

(Interviewer): It seems like it's a new term but the act, etc., is not so new. As I've been looking into it, it seems obvious that everyone all over the world do something similar, but its people here in Sweden that began to give a term and started doing it as something I will be doing and to give it a term.

(Participant): The other thing, Karl, is we did this shortly after we got married (some 30 years ago) we established a will and a durable power of attorney for health care who will take care of us if something happens to one of us, and pay bills, etc. and that's important earlier on in life, we have

kept that active and in fact its time now since we moved to update a few things, since we don't have the house as an asset, so those are things you need to change. Some people might do a better job at that then say the downsizing. We have seen lots of people here, we usually ask what made you decide to do this, or what do you like best, and without question, I have yet to hear someone say they are sorry they did it. You hear people, oh my gosh I brought too much, I need to get rid of more stuff, but.... there are multiple aspects of death cleaning, you must get at it from different angles. There is a shifting of wealth to a younger generation since you don't need it all, then eventually they will get what you have left. Or you are just throwing a lot of responsibility on them. A lot of couples don't do anything, so when they pass they shift all the responsibility to their kids, etc. a lot of times they don't have time to do that and their own life.

I'll give you a negative example, my same friend Marilyn and her husband lived in the same house for 45 years and they don't want to leave, he is dealing with a serious life threatening disease that will take his life, so they did a move into assistant living and she is the unhappiest she could be. They haven't sold the house and their daughter is living in it now. So, she goes back every chance she has. They have downsized a little bit, but the time is coming that he will be gone, and she has to make a decision, and they is no way she will be able to take care of that house. They had funds to, but they are not people to release their funds likely. So, they are caught where she is very unhappy, and he is very ill. That's the consequences of not looking at reality and seeing what you need to do, being in denial.

(Interviewer): What did it mean to the two of you going through this? I feel like it was not as big of a move as from your original house, but still a bit one. Kind of your last move.

(Participant): I think one of the things it means is freedom and another thing is recognizing that I'm 78 years old how long can we play Russian roulette? Haha. How about you tom? There is a resistance to getting older, but that's inevitable. You still have to face it which is difficult. So, you can make the moves but if you don't, then it gets you in the end. It piles up. We are trying to make it easier for us and for the rest of the family by making these moves. Like death cleaning. That's what it's about. I think related to that, is the fact that both Tom and I felt like we wanted to make the decision, it shouldn't be our kids doing that, now our kids get along well, but you are talking about two blended families which could cause issue. And we didn't want any of that to happen, we didn't want a sudden death and for family to come in and take care of everything. That's why we have the legal aspects, so there is no question. So, no arguments, it helps the whole family. but how we feel. It's scary, it is scary to do this. It's scary to, you know we don't own any property except our personal belongings, we don't have equity in a home, so that's a scary aspect. The good feeling about it though is the unloading is the release of these things, you are not hanging on, you are just releasing then you feel okay. And that's a good feeling. You sent us a question asking what objects were the easiest and most difficult to get rid of. The hardest probably was the piano (she had a baby grand piano that she ended up giving to my mother who plays piano) when we were thinking of doing this, we knew we couldn't take the piano. We wanted to make sure that your mom and family could take the piano and to give it a good home. I said to your mother, Jayne I think you are ready to have the piano. Even though it was hard to see it go out the door, we knew

where it was going, we watched your family prepare for it, and okay so it's good, I let go of something that was precious to us, but we also saw it go to someone who would really love it, take care of it, and use it. And that's what it should be. So other things, I don't know if there was anything else that was hard, but any other questions?

(Interviewer): So, focusing on the objects, obviously the piano was an important one because of the meaning to you and to my family, but how did you go about choosing what to keep and get rid of? What goes to family and what are objects that family will like or what things did family say yes, I want this haha

(Participant): There is a practical aspect to what you can fit in this apartment haha. So that helped us decided on what needed to go, but you know your mom and dad got the piano, and the grandfather clock. It came from my parents, so it seemed right to stay on my side of the family (then goes into which family objects went to who) we really asked everyone what in this house is something you would like to have. There were somethings that I thought they would like, and they ended up not. We have a big enough family that we could spread it all out.

Break 16:07

(Participant): How about you Tom, giving up your tools and gardening stuff? There is some stuff I'm not going to be doing as much anymore so I got rid of a lot of tools. Your dad got most of them. But I also kid of spread it out and sent some to the kids, because we are not going to be doing a lot of that stuff now, life styles change. You have more time to read books or go visit, travel, look at things yeah.

(Interviewer): What were somethings you donated to outside the family?

(Participant): Oh my gosh we got rid of a lot, Goodwill got a lot. I think we took 10 or 15 loads to Goodwill. A lot of clothes. Things that, when going through drawers, etc. and think when was the last time I used this, is it still good, yes, can someone else benefit from it, yes. All of it could be used. But we also went to the dump quite a bit. I didn't think we could gather that much stuff in all the years. Everything must have gone in and nothing out haha. We gave a lot of Christmas stuff away, to some who wanted it or not then donated. (they mention how they figured out what they would need for decorating their new place to keep.) it was hard giving some of that stuff away because it had the memories. So, we downsized a lot, it will be a lot less work at Christmas for us (every year a lot of the family goes to their place to celebrate) but we held onto some important things.

(Interviewer): What were some things you knew had to stay with you? No matter what

(Participant): Well the armoire had to stay, that was a special one we had done by an artist. We wanted to keep that, so we converted it to put the china in there. And we did a lot of planning before to see what would fit the space. So, we planned out with pieces of paper for furniture to see. It helped to see what would fit and how it would fit. Otherwise the things that were important to us where little things, useful stuff, we knew we had to keep. Sometimes pictures were hard to let go of, we knew we didn't have enough wall space. So those were the things I think Karl, but so far, we haven't really missed anything. (little story where they realized they had gotten rid of cords they were going to use but didn't have). Now the interesting thing now, when we look back to the

day we moved in here. A family member asked where such and such should go? Just put it here, but we quickly ran out of space to store. We held onto the stuff we really wanted and what we could fit in here. There are different things around here like the podium that we put flowers on. It came from Raymond Nebraska. It was in the parsonage where I grew up and when they burned it down, someone saved me that pillar. So that has been around for years. Someday it will just be wood junk to some body but to us it has meaning. Stuff that we picked out together and stuff we each have had.

(Interviewer): How did family feel about this process?

(Participant): They liked it. I think great. They were very happy, I don't think any family member, they were attentive. They must have thought this was big. They all saw the place (those who could) before we had made our final decision. So, they all came and they all helped. So, I think that's good, nobody was saying we wish you hadn't done this. The fact that really none of the family lived with us in our last home made it easier since no one could say you are getting rid of the family home. We didn't have any of that also when we moved out of the old home. I think the other thing is that no one in the family are selfish, that says that should be mine, I want you to do that, etc. makes it easier on us.

They have activities here, the people have been pretty nice, which helps a lot. Stuff that stimulate us, opportunities to do whatever, had a movie night last Friday. And that's a key point for a lot of people. Many times, they get isolated living by themselves, where here there is a lot of interaction, you'll never been without someone being around. There is always someone watching out for us here, can't have family do that all the time. There is a lot of people living single here in this building, so it helps. But I don't think they would ever feel alone here. If say I should go first, where would Tom feel the most comfortable. Where would he have the most opportunities, and same vice versa. They have nursing care here in the building and its close by so that if one was okay health wise and the other one help, then they can go to the nursing part of the building and visit them every day. then afterwards they can return to their apartment.

Break 30:44

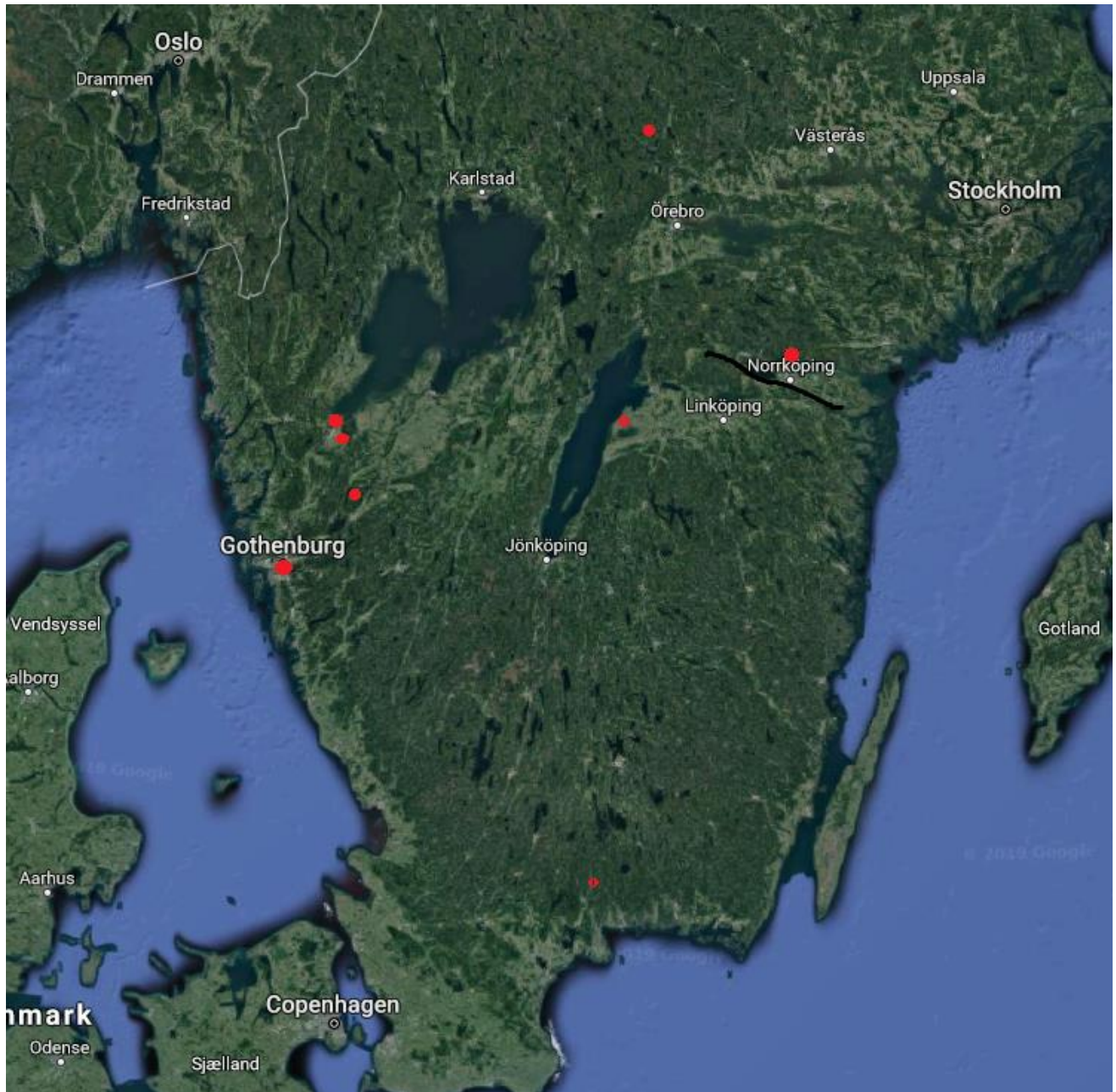
(Participant): The other thing Karl is that families have changed. There isn't any kids or family that we could move in with. Or no one that could come and take care of us. They all have their own jobs, their own responsibilities, their own jobs. People are more mobile, they move away, they make changes with their family. (they were a bit curious about how things were here in relation).

(Interviewer): What is the consensus amongst the people you have met there? Did most of them move in on their own, or due to health reasons or family reasons?

(Participant): More their own choice I feel. And that they want to make their own moves. They don't want the family making the moves for them. Although there is a woman upstairs that I feel didn't make the choice. She moved from Missouri and is a long way from home and her friends. Her son lives here in Seattle and her only child. She has not been making the best adjustment. She doesn't like the food so doesn't go to dinner and doesn't go to the events. But she is an exception. A few moved in but then backed out. They were a bit more independent, so they decided to change.

Though we have heard stories of many who said I'm not ready yet, then they eventually decide to move. Sometimes it takes something to make the move happen. (for my grandmother it was a mix of her fall that broke her right humerus and her being diagnosed with Maclear degeneration – eyes failing-) and that scared me. That made me think, even though I'm fine now, if it gets worse, I don't always want to be dependent on him (my grandfather). It makes you think. You face those issues. Life's conditions force you to make the move. We were talking about your questions and we were thinking about what would be the toughest. If something should happen and we can't take care of Toby (their small dog), giving up a pet would be difficult. If we knew it was coming, we knew life was short that we needed to take care of that, that would be awfully hard. But it's our letting go of that, it was easier for stuff, but that's a bit different. In a nutshell is cooperating with the inevitable. But none of it was easy. Once the decision was made it was okay. The indecision is the most painful part of life for anyone. Once you make it relieves the stress.
(transcribed by author).

9.3. Appendix 3



The red dots mark place names that use or reference Ättestupa today. Though many more places might hold similar names, these are well known today. Credit: Google Maps