The Process of Accessioning of Archaeological Material in the Nordic Countries

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Abstract
Disposal and deaccessioning are difficult subjects in the museum and archaeological field. Archaeological material in museums grows only with time and increased number of excavations. Therefore problems are rising in the museum field. In this thesis disposal and deaccessioning of archaeological material in the Nordic countries is studied. The main question is: How is the disposal of archaeological material in the Nordic countries handled? Legislations of the countries and museum policies were studied with disposal or deaccessioning in mind. Questions were sent to a museum in each country to get first hand information about the subject. Disposal of archaeological material is not handled in the same way in the five countries. Two of them, Denmark and Norway have similar systems. But the other three have another process in these matters. The word disposal seems not to have the exact same meaning in all of the countries. In this thesis it is argued that there is no theory that has a clear solution about what disposal of archaeological material is. I have come to the conclusion that this is an issue that has to be handled in the museums and the first step is to have a clear policy on disposal and deaccessioning in the archeological field.

Eventuell abstrakt på svenska

Ämnesord
Gallring, museer, arkeologi, nordiska länderna.

Key words
Deaccessioning, Disposal, Museums, Archaeology, Nordic countries.
# Table of contents

Preface 4
1. Introduction 5
   1.1 Aim and Research Questions 6
   1.2 Limitations 7
2. Theoretical Frames 8
   2.1 Disposal and deaccessioning 8
   2.2 The Selection Process 9
3. Research Field 12
4. Methodological Frame 15
5. Disposal Practices in the Nordic Countries 18
   5.1 Denmark 18
   5.2 Finland 20
   5.3 Iceland 21
   5.4 Norway 23
   5.5 Sweden 25
   5.6 Results of the Interviews 26
6. Discussion 29
7. Conclusion 34
8. References 36
   8.1 E-mail Interviews 38
   8.2 Internet Sources 39
Preface

I want to thank Päivi Pykälä-aho at Museovirasto (the National Board of Antiquities) in Finland, Jon Anders Risvaag at Vitenskapsmuseet (Museum of Natural History and Archaeology) in Trondheim Norway, Mads Runge at Odense Bys Museer (Odense City Museum) in Denmark, Anna Lísa Rúnarsdóttir at Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (the National Museum of Iceland), Berit Schütz at Upplandsmuseet (the Uppland Museum) and Gunnar Andersson at Statens Historiska Museum (the Swedish History Museum) in Sweden for answering my questions about the museums where they work. For helping me to get in contact with museums in each of the Nordic countries I want to thank Jannie Amsgaard Ebsen, Isto Huvila, Cecilia Rodehn and Brynja Björk Birgisdóttir. My supervisors Inga-Lill Aronsson and Yvonne Backe Forsberg were very helpful in the process of this research and encouraged me. For that I thank her. Last but not least I want to thank my family and friends for their help, and for being patient and supportive.
1. Introduction

My interest for the subject of this thesis originates from my years of handling archaeological material in the National Museum of Iceland, where I have been an employee since 2005. One of my tasks was to work with archaeological material, sometimes in very bad condition. In 2001 there was a significant fund set up for archaeological researches in Iceland, called Kristnihátíðarsjóður, to celebrate the 1000 years of Christianity in Iceland. Many excavations were funded by this fund. As a result of it the size of excavations and number of artifacts grew extensively. According to the legislation the archaeological material had to be treated and handed over to the National Museum of Iceland for preservation. I worked with archaeological material from these excavations while preparing an exhibition in the National Museum in the beginning of 2009. That was the reason I got interested in the process of newly excavated archaeological material becoming a part of the museums collection and decided to do the following research.

In this thesis I will describe and analyze the problems that museums encounter when they receive large quantities of archeological material from excavations. I will do so by studying the collection policy and practice of museums in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) when it comes to the process of receiving archaeological material from excavations. Also I will study the national legislations, regulations and guidelines connected to archaeological material in each country.

The number of archaeological excavations becomes higher and higher every year in most countries and as a result more and more archaeological material has to be preserved. This is a problem that has been in the making for decades. More and more excavations are carried out and therefore the problem gets larger every year. It seems that archaeologists in the US have become more aware of this problem.¹ In this thesis the focus will be on the Nordic countries when it comes to disposal and deaccessioning of archaeological material in the process of excavation until the material becomes a part of a museum collection.

Susan M. Pearce has been a leading researcher in collection studies for years. More than 20 years ago she published the monograph *Archaeological Curatorship*. One chapter is devoted to the main topic which I have chosen, “The disposal of archaeological material”.² In this chapter Pearce describes the problem muse-

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ums face, to take into their collection a mass quantity of archaeological material from excavations.³

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

This thesis focuses on the disposal and deaccessioning of archaeological material from the time of excavation until the time the finds become a part of a museum collection. Because of this focus the topic will be to research how and what is to be kept for the future as a museum artifact from archaeological excavations. Also, the topic will be the relationship between the archaeologists who work in the field and museum employees that receive the material from the excavations. Of course, there are large quantities of archaeological material that fit the description given in this thesis and already are in museum collections. But the aim is to study material that is in the process of becoming a part of museum collections. My aim is also to develop a theoretical frame for preliminary disposal. Deaccessioning of artifacts, that are already a part of museum collections, is a different subject in many ways and has to be treated differently. So the main aim is to look into the relationship between archaeologists and museum curators when it comes to the process of excavation to preservation.

In the previously mentioned chapter in Pearce’s book she describes three phases of the problem. These “...three important facets, involving the public, the law, and the operation of the curatorial principle in real museum situation.”⁴ I will touch on the two last mentioned. I will look into the laws that deal with the subject in each country. I will also look into the discussion of disposal of archaeological material inside the museum and the archaeological field.

I will also in my thesis interpret the meaning of “the disposal of artifacts” in each of the five Nordic languages with the aim to get a deeper meaning of the definition of disposal and deaccessioning and how this matter is handled in each country. My main question in this thesis is: How is the disposal of archaeological material in the Nordic countries handled? To answer this question I will look into the museum field in each country and the legislation that goes with that. There I will look for the mentioning of disposal and deaccessioning of archaeological material.

⁴ Susan M. Pearce (1990): Archaeological Curatorship, p. 75.
1.2 Limitations

Disposal and deaccessioning in museums is an extensive field. In this thesis I only study a small part of the field or the archaeological material. I will focus on the material that has just been excavated and is in the process of becoming a part of a permanent museum collection.

When it comes to theory it is necessary to research the material that has been written about the collection in general. The disposal or deaccessioning issue is put into the collection’s theoretical frames in general, as deaccessioning or disposal has not been discussed much in a theoretical perspective.

One restriction of this thesis is geographical. The focus is on the status of disposal and deaccessioning of archaeological material in the Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Their history and their archaeology have much in common. Therefore, these countries make a suitable group for the study as they are also highly related when it comes to social and political structure. This will be the first time that this area, as a whole, is studied with disposal or deaccessioning of archaeological material in mind. Only one museum in each country is studied, except in Sweden where there are two. The answers should nevertheless give a clear image of how the matter of disposal or deaccessioning is handled in all five countries.
2. Theoretical Frames

For a long time disposal and deaccessioning has been a taboo topic in the museum sector. As mentioned before, there have been discussions over time within the museum world about the problem of disposal and deaccessioning.

This thesis is only concerned about archaeological material or “authentic artifact” as Susan M. Pearce (1995) describes it in the chapter “Collecting as medium and message” in the book *Museum, Media, Message*. There included are natural specimens that are usually taken during archaeological excavations.

2.1 Disposal and deaccessioning

Disposal of archaeological material takes place before the material is registrated into the museum. On the contrary, deaccessioning is the term that is used when artifact is taken out of a registrated collection and disposed of.

Disposal and deaccessioning are very important tools in collection management, but may not have been used as such in the past in museums. Usually disposal and deaccessioning are done to save money and space in the museum. But in most cases there is no legislation about how this should be done. Museums should have a clear structure regarding disposal and deaccessioning. Like Nick Merriman (2008) argues in his article, “Museum Collections and Sustainability”, we have to face the fact that we cannot keep everything. I think this is a very important statement that both archaeologists and the museums have to face and come to terms with. He says that we have to look at the museum as an ecosystem and try to make it sustainable.

In Geoffrey Lewis's (2003) “Deaccessioning and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums” there is an interpretation of deaccessioning:

Deaccessioning - the permanent removal of an object from a museum collection - appears to contradict a basic museum duty, which is to hold collections in perpetuity. There are cases,

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however, where deaccessioning seems desirable. The conditions under which this may be possible, and the procedures to follow, are the object of ongoing debate.\textsuperscript{11}

Like stated in Lewis’s definition it seems to be in contradiction to the role of a museum to dispose of artifacts. But it also says that there are situations where it is desirable to do that.\textsuperscript{12}

In “Deaccessioning: The American Perspective” Marie C. Malaro (1991) defines deaccessioning as “...the permanent removal of an object that was once accessioned into a museum collection”.\textsuperscript{13} That is, in fact a shorter version of ICOM’s interpretation of the word. The main point that Malaro wants to make is that deaccessioning is permanent. But Michael R. Hilton (2009) thinks that Malaro’s definition deals with works of art, but is not feasible for archaeological material. In “Limited-provenience Collections” he argues about Malaro’s definition. But Hilton puts out his own definition of deaccessioning of archaeological material that is the following, “the permanent disposition of a collection or a portion of a collection from the ownership and custody of a curatorial facility or government agency.”\textsuperscript{14} Hilton’s definition is more open than Malaro’s, for he does not discuss museums solely. He also explores “...a collection or a portion”\textsuperscript{15} that refers to the fact that archaeological material is rarely just a single artifact. All these definitions are in essence homogenous. Deaccessioning is the action of taking an artifact or material permanently away.

2.2 The Selection Process

In “Deaccessioning and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums”, Geoffrey Lewis (2003) argues that with the newly excavated archaeological material:

One current issue relating to deaccessioning from collections is the physical and cost implications that arise with the bulk storage of material from large-scale archaeological excavation. Is there a case for selective deaccessioning from existing collections or, for that matter, only selective accessioning of newly excavated material? These are issues requiring considerable specialist, professional judgement.\textsuperscript{16}

There are a number of reasons for disposal or deaccessioning of archaeological material in museums. One is that it is neither rational nor practical to preserve

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Geoffre\textyr{y} Lewis (2003): “Deaccessioning and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums”, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Geoffre\textyr{y} Lewis (2003): “Deaccessioning and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums”, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Michael R. Hilton (2009): “Limited-Provenience Collections”, p. 289.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Michael R. Hilton (2009): “Limited-Provenience Collections”, p. 289.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Geoffre\textyr{y} Lewis (2003): “Deaccessioning and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums”, p. 3.
\end{itemize}
large quantities of the same material. If the material is well documented there is no need to preserve more than a few samples for if policy makers were to decide that everything was to be preserved, museums and related institutions would soon fill up and cost would increase considerably. An important question is put forward in Tony Reichhardt’s (2007) article “The Difficulties of Deaccessioning”: “If all the items are exactly alike, what is the point in curating mass quantities of them?”

In my opinion the lack of decisions regarding disposal is a two-folded dilemma. Firstly archaeologists are afraid of losing some information if they dispose of any material. I think that it is also fear that controls the lack of deaccessioning in the museum field when it comes to disposal. Secondly museum employees are afraid that by making decisions of disposing of something they are making a decision that will be frowned upon in the future. For that reason the problem is thriving on fear. Simon J. Knell (1999/2004) says in the book *Museums and the Future of Collecting*:

> The lesson that we cannot fully preserve (either by collecting or keeping or by future interpretations) the past or the present, or know the future, actually removes some of the fear we might have about getting it right. If individuals construct their own sets of values, there is no such thing as a correct decision about what should be collected.

We can never be sure that we are making the right decisions, but the decisions have to be made.

Patricia Ainslie (1999/2004) wrote “Deaccessioning as a collections management tool.” She states that: “Deaccessioning of collection is not about lowering standards. It is dependent on good judgment and responsibility, and being true to core values and beliefs.” It is right in the sense that the deaccessioning can make the collection more efficient. Ainslie also states: “Deaccessioning is about making difficult, but realistic decisions in the interests of the museum and its community.” Therefore museums are not doing any harm by practicing disposal or deaccessioning. It does not have to be negative to go through a collection and dispose of things if the decisions is made in accordance with structured criteria. Each museum should develop its own criteria.

2.2.1 The Nordic countries
Disposal and deaccessioning of archaeological material does not seem to have been studied much in the Nordic countries. But disposal and deaccessioning of

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museum material in general have been studied in the Nordic countries. The problem of disposal in museums and the fact that museum storage space is expensive is brought up in an article by Johan Hellekant (2011) in SvD Kultur March 9th 2011. There he discusses the possibilities museums have to get rid of unwanted things from their collections.21

One thesis was written about disposal from cultural historic artifact collections at the institute for ABM at Uppsala University. Therese Sandberg (2003) wrote that thesis as a magister project in 2003. There she looks into how regional museums in Sweden handle disposal of museum artifacts. There she mainly studies how disposal of artifacts should be carried out. But the focus of her study is solely on historical artifacts, not archaeological.22

The subject has also been studied in Norway. Lars G. Norheim (1997) studied the topic in his research called Rettslige skranker for museenes avhending av museumsgjenstander. There the matter of museums getting rid of material is discussed more broadly.23 In 2010 there was a thesis submitted at the University of Telemark on the subject of disposal.24 Astrid Margrethe Strømsnes (2010) also wrote a thesis on this matter at the University in Bergen in 2003.25

An article by Annette Vasstrøm (2004) called “At indsamle - og kassere - kulturarv” was published in Danske museer in 2004. There passive collection is the main subject and examples of disposal of museum artifacts in Denmark mentioned.26

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22 Therese Sandberg (2003): Gallring i kulturhistoriska museers föremålssamlingar, p. 4.


25 Strømsnes, Astrid Margrethe (2003): “SLIK ER DET MED MUSEER...” OM MUSEER OG INNSAMLINGSPROBLEMATIKKEN.

3. Research Field

In Michael R. Hilton’s (2009) article “Limited-Provenience Collections: Their Research Potential and the Implications for Deaccessioning Policies and Regulations” he studies the deaccessioning of archaeological material. Hilton describes his goal as to evaluate “…deaccessioning practices and discusses potential implications for limited-provenience collection”. Hilton argues that “no reputable museum or repository takes the issue of deaccessioning lightly”. Therefore the matter has been the primary focus of articles, journals, book chapters and conferences in the museum field all over the world. But it does not seem to be many solutions to the problem. The main solution that has been suggested is policy making about disposal and deaccessioning within the museums.

It seems like there is a difference between the meaning of disposal in museums in Europe and in America. Geoffrey Lewis (1995) claims that “In Europe there is a strong presumption against disposal, in contrast to the circumstances and practice in the US”. This problem seems to have been discussed much more thoroughly in North-America than in Europe. A much greater number of articles and other publicized material are to be found on the west side of the Atlantic Ocean than on the east side. An example of this discussion in the US is Tony Reichhardt’s (2007) article in American Archaeology, “The Difficulties of Deaccessioning”. On the front page of that article Reichhardt takes on the problem covered in this thesis: “A curation crisis is forcing museums and archaeologists to grapple with the vexing problem of how to responsibly dispose of unwanted archaeological items.” The article addresses many issues related to the problem of museum receiving archaeological material. As an example of the issues he raises in his research is the lack of legal framework for curators to follow when it comes to disposal of archaeological material in the US. He discusses the “…ever-shrinking museum space”, meaning that more and more material is been kept in museum storages. Reichhard also questions the research value of preserving a large quantity of archaeological material.

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Marie C. Malaro’s (1991) “Deaccessioning: The American Perspective” focuses on the perspective of deaccessioning in America. Malaro discusses, among other things, that when deaccessioning is handled both legal standards and ethical standards have to be kept in mind.\textsuperscript{34} In previously mentioned book \textit{Museums and the Future of Collecting} is a chapter called “Deaccessioning as a collection management tool” by Patricia Ainslie.\textsuperscript{35} These are only a few examples of published material on the issue from North-America.

In 2003 the National Museum Director’s Conference in the UK published the article \textit{Too Much Stuff? Disposal from Museums}. It is “intended by the National Museum Directors’ Conference as a contribution to\textsuperscript{36} the debate of disposal in museums. In the previously mentioned book \textit{Museums and the Future of Collecting} Janet Owen (1999/2004) publishes the chapter, “Who is steering the ship? Museum and archaeological fieldwork”. The chapter was an inspiration for this thesis. In this chapter the relation between the archaeologists and museums in UK are discussed. The question is raised who is actually in charge when it comes to material that comes from archaeological excavations. There Owen says that museums “must have an active role in the collection of archaeological material”.\textsuperscript{37} That is true, museums are where the archaeological material will end up being preserved.

In Adrian Babbidge (1995) article “Disposal from Museum Collections: a note on legal considerations in England and Wales” in \textit{Museums Journal}. There he presents a similar research as discussed in this thesis, but focuses on England and Wales. The legislation is explained. Babbidge argues that the legal status of museums in the United Kingdom is not clear. But it has to be kept in mind that the article was written almost 20 years ago.\textsuperscript{38}

In 2003 \textit{ICOM NEWS} published an issue focusing on deaccessioning. There Frank Bergevoet (2003) wrote “Taking Stock: Deaccessioning in the Netherlands”. There Bergevoet says that in the late 1990’s the museums in the Netherlands “realised that it was necessary to question the unlimited growth of museum collections and to advocate smaller ones of a higher quality”.\textsuperscript{39} In the article he argues that The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage made, in 1999, guidelines for the disposal of museum objects.\textsuperscript{40} Those guidelines seem to have been


\textsuperscript{36} National Museum Director’s Conference (2003): p. 3.


republished in 2006.41 In that same issue of *ICOM NEWS* was an article by Michel van Praët (2003) “The New Law on “Museum of France””.42 So the problem has been discussed in many countries in the world.

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4. Methodological Frame

During the research process I did a literature review of published material related to my study, both books and journals, as well as of unpublished documents such as yearbooks. I tried to make as extensive and open search for material as possible and narrowed the search down afterwards. I also did a review of the legislation in the Nordic countries. I studied policy papers from museums and research that had previously been done in the field. I performed e-mail interviews with museum curators in the five countries. Attached to those e-mails was a letter describing my research and included four questions. The questionnaire was sent to Museovirasto (the National Board of Antiquities) in Finland, Vitenskapsmuseet (Museum of Natural History and Archaeology) in Trondheim Norway, Odense Bys Museer (Odense City Museum) in Denmark, Ólóminjasafn Íslands (the National Museum of Iceland), Upplandsmuseet (the Uppland Museum) and Statens Historiska Museum (the Swedish History Museum) in Sweden consisting of four main questions. These museums were mainly chosen because it was easy to find contacts that were willing to help me gather information for my project. All of these institutions answered the questionnaire. It gave me an easy but credible access to information about the countries in question. Although I just sent the questionnaire to one museum in each country, except in Sweden where there are two, the answers give a clear image of how the matter of disposal and deaccessioning is handled in each of the five countries, though different museums in each country might operate in a different way.

In my research I use a comparative method\(^\text{43}\) to compare disposal and/or deaccessioning of archaeological material from excavations in the Nordic countries. Using that method I compare the answers to the questionnaire I sent to the museums. I will also study and compare other matters mentioned in the answers, such as polices of the museums and national legislation.

**Question 1**

Does the museum have a defined policy regarding how it receives artifacts/material from archaeological excavations? If so, is it possible to see that policy?

The question was supposed to find out if museums have a written policy of how they receive newly excavated material from archaeological excavations. It is important because it puts the action of making the material part of museum collection into a certain work process. In short terms, I tried to verify if the museums

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have a policy about this subject in general. I was also interested to see the policies, if they existed.

**Question 2**
How is the disposal/deaccessioning of archaeological material from excavations handled in your museum? Is it done by the archaeologists? Before the material becomes a part of the museum collection? Or after the artifacts become a part of the collection?

Here the object was to map the process of material being excavated and to the point of the material becoming a part of a museum collection. I wanted to determine how the work of disposal or deaccessioning of the material happens and where in the process if that is before the material is registered into the museum or after the material has become a part of the collection. The comparison in this question is more complex than in question 1. I also want to see who carries out the selection, if it is done in the first place. I also wanted to get the timeline of the process when the disposal takes place.

**Question 3**
Is there a legislation about how to take care of archaeological material after excavation in your country?

This is a simple question to help me figure out the landscape of the archaeological management in each country. I compared if there is an existing legislation in the country concerning the handling of archaeological material after excavations. I also look to see if there are any legal grounds for deaccessioning or disposal of archaeological material.

**Question 4**
Does the museum take into their collection material like soil samples and animal bones from archaeological excavations?

I want to know if the research material as mentioned above is taken into the museum collection. It is a comparison of the yes and no factor of that answer.

There was also a space left for comments from the museums in addition to the questions. It was to get open answers and receive additional information if there was something special in these matters in each country that fell outside of the questions.

It was decided not to ask in details about the quantity of the collection in the museums or how much material they dispose from their collections. In some cases
there is little to be known about the actual size of the collections, because the museums themselves do not have a clear count of what they possess. Therefore it is difficult to see the statistic of the disposal. This research focuses on whether the museums or the archaeologists are disposing of material and if there is any legal framework for disposal.

A guiding question in this thesis is whether the museum personal or the archaeologists dispose of the material, and if there is a legal framework to use as a guideline for this disposal practice.
5. Disposal Practices in the Nordic Countries

The five Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden have a similar history and consequently similar archaeological material. Iceland is an exception, for no archaeological material from Stone Age, Bronze Age or early Iron Age is to be found there. The countries have also similar political and social systems. That is the reason why I decided to study disposal and deaccessioning in all of these counties and make a comparison.

The following coverage is based on legislations, policies, literature, definitions and questionnaires that were sent out to the museums in each country and the information gathered from their answers. In the Nordic countries the processing of archaeological material from excavation to museum collection is analyzed.

The contacts were Mads Runge, Senior Curator of Archaeology at the Odense Bys Museer (Odense City Museum) in Denmark. Päivi Pykälä-aho, Manager of Archaeological Collections at Museovirasto (the National Board of Antiquities) in Finland. Anna Lisa Rúnarsdóttir, Head of Research and Collections at Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (the National Museum of Iceland). Jon Anders Risvaag, head of the Archaeological and Antropoligical Collections at the Vitenskapsmuseet (Museum of Natural History and Archaeology) in Trondheim, Norway. Gunnar Andersson, Senior Curator at at Statens Historiska Museum (the Swedish History Museum) and Berit Schütz, Head of the Collection department at Upplandsmuseet (the Uppland Museum) in Sweden.

5.1 Denmark

The Danish word for disposal of artifacts is “kassation”. The word stems from the word “kassere” which means to discard. So the meaning that is put into the word is to throw something away, therefore disposal in Danish is very final.

In Denmark, archaeological excavations are carried out by the museums and all archaeologists who work on excavations in Denmark are therefore employed by the museums. As a result the problem addressed in this thesis does not exist in Denmark. “The museum” goes out to excavate, it handles the process and in the end the material becomes a part of its collection.\footnote{Mads Runge 26.04.2012.} Accordingly, there should be no dispute between the archaeologists and the museums of which archaeological material should be kept as part of museum collection. I therefore believe the goal for everybody involved is to do what is best for the museum, regarding research and collection.
The National Museum of Denmark is the head museum in the cultural history field. But it does rarely carry out archaeological excavations, usually local museums take care of archaeological excavations. When it comes to deaccessioning of artifacts in Denmark the orientation is in the hands of recognized public museums under the Ministry of Culture in Denmark. If a Danish museum wants to dispose of material that is already in its collection it has to send an application, stating the reasons why the material is to be disposed, to Kulturstyrelsen (the Danish Agency for Culture). There are national standards or rules in Denmark as to how to preserve and register archaeological material. Kulturstyrelsen is an official organization that is the authority in these matters. It seems to be the common way to think within the Danish museum world that disposal should happen before the material becomes a part of the museum collection. Danish museums have also the authority to dispose of material before it becomes a part of their collection. If the disposal is done before the material is registered into the museums collection it does not apply to the Danish museum laws. So the museums in Denmark should have all the tools in their hands to use disposal and deaccessioning as a collection management tool.

I contacted the Odense Bys Museer to learn about their disposal practices. The museum practises disposal of archaeological material if the disposed material does not meet the requirements the museum sets in its collection policy. The museum has had a big project that consists of going through the old collections with deaccessioning in mind. In the Odense Bys Museer, a museum curator educated in archaeology handles the disposal. In the museums policy of collection is stated in the museum’s year plan. There it says that material is not added to the archaeological collection unless the material is scientifically important, historically important and in harmony with the rest of the museums archaeological collection. Since 2007 the museum has not taken into their collection flints or pottery unless they have a value for dating or a function. Human remains from excavations are sent to the Panum Institute that is a part University of Copenhagen and animal material remains are handed to the Zoologiske Museum.

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46 Kulturstyrelsen:


49 Kulturstyrelsen:

of Copenhagen University. Consequently the museum does not take in all the material from archaeological excavations, but selects what should be kept in the museum collection based on a confined scale.

5.2 Finland

In Finland there are several words covering the English concept of disposal of artifacts. “Järjestely tai sijoittelu” means organizing or reorganizing. “Käyttö tai määräämisvalta” means usage or authority. “Myynti, luovutus tai siirtäminen” means selling, assignment or relocating. “Jakaminen/antaminen” means sharing/dividing or giving. “Pois heittäminen tai hävittäminen” means throwing away or destroying. Clearly there is no one word in Finish for the act of disposing of an artifact, but a number of concepts that deal with it.

The legal framework in Finland concerning archaeological material is quite old or from 1963. But it has been updated several times. The legislation is called Muinaismuistolaki in Finnish (The Antiquities Act) and “Lag om fornminnen” in Swedish. The second chapter of the act is about artifacts but there is nothing mentioned about disposal in the law.

Museovirasto (the National Board of Antiquities/NBA) in Finland is responsible for archaeological culture heritage. The board is a part of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The NBA does rescue excavations, that is if something unexpected archaeological happens in Finland a team from the NBA is responsible for it. The Board also controls a unit that is funded through external financing. Its main purpose is to take care of large and important excavations in Finland. Museums, universities and archaeologists that work in the private sector can carry out excavations and other archaeological fieldwork in Finland. The NBA also supervises and gives permissions for all archaeological excavations in Finland.

So in a way, the NBA is on both sides of the table when it comes to archaeological excavations in Finland.

I contacted the NBA for information about the archaeological field in Finland. Suomen kansallismuseo (the National Museum of Finland) is one of the National Board of Antiquities departments. The museum holds the collections even though the unit Archives and Archaeological Collections governs the archaeological ma-

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52 Päivi Pykälä-aho 09.05.2012.
54 National Board of Antiquities in Finland: http://www.nba.fi/fi/index.
55 Päivi Pykälä-aho 09.05.2012.
This unit is a part of the Department Archives and Information Services. The National Board of Antiquities has a written policy, called SALAVA or Suomen Arkeologian kenttätöiden Laatuvaatimukset (Finland Archaeology quality requirements), that concerns the standards of excavation activities and dealing with artifacts. This policy includes information about how to treat archaeological material from the time it is excavated until the time it becomes a part of a museum collection.\(^{56}\)

According to NBA “Most of the archaeological objects found in Finland are catalogued into the collections of the National Museum”.\(^{57}\) In Finland, archaeologists make the decision about what archaeological material is brought to the museums from the excavations and what is analyzed. In all archaeological research there is a budget that is marked for this. Archaeological material is checked when the catalogue is done and again when it is numbered. Numbered finds are checked again when they are accepted into the collection of the museums.\(^{58}\) So there is a defined process when it comes to disposal of archaeological material in Finland. There are many gates that the material has to go through before it becomes a part of the museum collection.

Disposal is practiced in many steps from the excavation to the museum collection in Finland. The first phase is during the field work, the second when the finds are cleaned, the third during conservation, fourth when the registration is prepared and the fifth and final phase is when the artifacts are numbered in the museum. But deaccessioning of archaeological material that is already a part of the museum collection is usually not a common practice.\(^{59}\)

5.3 Iceland

In Icelandic the word disposal of artifacts is “grisjun”. It comes from the verb “grisja” meaning to dispose of something and stands for something to be taken out to make more room for what is left, for example when trees are cut down in a forest to make better living conditions for the remaining trees. The word has therefore a rather positive meaning.

In the beginning of 2013 three new laws came into effect. First, new law regarding the museums in Iceland, “Safnalög”\(^{60}\), replaced another law with the same

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\(^{56}\) Päivi Pykälä-aho 09.05.2012.

\(^{57}\) National Board of Antiquities in Finland: http://www.nba.fi/fi/index.

\(^{58}\) Päivi Pykälä-aho 09.05.2012.

\(^{59}\) Päivi Pykälä-aho 09.05.2012.

name. Secondly “Lög um þjóðminjasafn Íslands” legislation about the National Museum of Iceland. Thirdly, “Lög um menningarminjar” which could be translated as the Cultural Heritage Act. The two latter replaced on the first of January 2013 “þjóðminjalög”.

The only mentioning of disposal in the new museum laws is in chapter 5, paragraph 17. The head museum in each field is given authority, with a review from the Museum Council, to decide what is disposed of from the museum collections. These museums are the National Museum, the National Gallery and the Icelandic Museum of Natural History. But it is not allowed to dispose of museum artifacts unless there is a very good reason for it. In the laws there is no mentioning of disposal of archaeological material after it comes out of the ground.

“The National Heritage Act states that all archaeological material must be handed over to Minjastofnun Íslands (The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland), which in turn hands it over to the National Museum of Iceland for safeguarding.” The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland “is the central authority for protection and management of archaeological monuments and sites in Iceland”. The Cultural Heritage Agency has regulations that states that all artifacts must be conserved before handing it over to the National Museum of Iceland.

Another legislation, that is concerned about this subject, is the “Lög um þjóðminjasafn Íslands” (law about the National Museum of Iceland). In this law there is no mentioning of the word “grisjun”. That is in a way very understandable because this law is supposed to protect the material that comes out of the ground. But the issue of disposal of archaeological material is more of a museum matter.

The National Museum is the head museum in the cultural history field in the country. In its policy for the years 2010-2014 it states that the museum is going to work on disposal procedures for the museums in the country. I sent my questionnaire to the National Museum. In Iceland, archaeological material is primarily managed nationally by the National Museum that preserves and curates it. The only exception is when local museums carry out the excavation themselves. Then they occasionally preserve the material from their own excavations. The National Museum has been working on a document that lists the requirements for the re-

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63 Safnalög: http://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2011141.html.
64 Anna Lísa Rúnarsdóttir 16.05.2012.
67 Safnastefna á sviði þjóðminjavörslu fyrir árin 2010-2014, p. 15.
ceiving of archaeological material into the museum. As the Cultural Heritage Act, took effect in January 2013, it gave the museum legal basis for these requirements.68

The National Heritage Act states that the National Museum of Iceland is required to preserve/curate all archaeological material in its possession.69 Therefore disposal or deaccessioning of archaeological material has not been practiced by the museum. But the museum has disposed of archaeological soil samples and permitted analyses of older samples where destructive methods were used. These samples had been kept for years in bad conditions and “were deemed damaged for further use”. An experienced archaeologist carried out the assessment and had consultation from a specialist in soil analysis. The disposal was done by sieving the samples for artifacts.70

The previously mentioned Cultural Heritage Law states that archaeological artifacts are artifacts that are over 100 years old.71 “There are examples of artifacts being collected and documented as part of the finds record of the archaeological research project that are younger than this.”72 These artifacts have, for the reason of being a part of excavation collection, made it into the museum collection. The dating of artifacts is not always complete before the material becomes a part of the museum collection. “So there are no formal procedures in place at the museum to carry out a selection at the point of arrival or later”.73 So the previously mentioned problem of artifacts that are not defined as archaeological because of age exists at the National Museum of Iceland. Artifacts that are not archaeological are kept as archaeological in the museum storage and have been registered into the museum.

5.4 Norway

The Norwegian term for disposal of artifacts is “å kassere”, that is very similar to the word in Danish. The word stands for discarding or getting rid of something. Another word that is sometimes used in this sense in Norwegian museums is “avhending”. That means that the artifact is not a part of a museum collection anymore. Therefore the Norwegian terms that are used for disposal are very final.

68 Anna Lísa Rúnarsdóttir 16.05.2012.
69 Þjóðminjalög: http://www.althingi.is/lagas/131b/2001107.html.
70 Anna Lísa Rúnarsdóttir 16.05.2012.
71 Frumvarp til laga um menningarminjar: http://www.althingi.is/altext/140/s/0370.html.
72 Anna Lísa Rúnarsdóttir 16.05.2012.
73 Anna Lísa Rúnarsdóttir 16.05.2012.
The Cultural Heritage Act in Norway is called “Lov om Kulturminner” and is the only legislation about archaeological material in Norway. The word disposal does not seem to be mentioned in this legislation.74

Riksantikvaren (the Directorate for Cultural Heritage in Norway) is responsible for archaeological monuments and sites in Norway. The organization is under the Ministry of the Environment. Each county in Norway “has a duty to employ officers who are responsible for cultural heritage conservation in connection with the administration of cultural affairs generally”.75 So the Riksantikvaren only takes care of archaeological places, not the artifacts. But there are five archaeological museums in Norway and they are responsible for the curation of archaeological artifacts and material.

All archaeological excavations in Norway are done by the five archaeological museums. They are Kulturhistorisk museum in Oslo, NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet in Trondheim, Arkeologisk museum in Stavanger, Bergen Museum and Tromsø museum.76 These five museums are all a part of a university in the respective cities.77 The only exception of this is excavations in the medieval parts of the oldest towns in Norway.78 They are carried out by The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) that “is an independent non-profitable institution dedicated to preservation and sustainable management of cultural heritage”.79 So all archaeological excavations in Norway are done by official organizations. Therefore the archaeological material is in the hands of the same organization from excavation to preservation in Norway, just like in Denmark. There are no special laws for the museums in Norway, but the laws that apply for them are a part of the act relating to universities and university colleges.80

The year 1537 is important in Norwegian archaeology. That is the year that marks the automatic protection of artifacts. Artifacts that are dated before that year are automatically protected, but the year marks the end of the middle ages in Norway. Other artifacts that are also automatically protected are coins dated before 1650.81

75 Riksantikvaren: http://www.riksantikvaren.no/English/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=2818.
76 Jon Anders Risvaag 04.05.2012.
78 Jon Anders Risvaag 04.05.2012.
80 Jon Anders Risvaag 04.05.2012.
I contacted the Vitenskapsmuseet in Trondheim Norway. The museum has no written policy that clearly states how to receive newly acquired archeological material, except a description of procedures of findings on excavations included in their excavation manual. But the museum is working on a written manual about new archaeological material.\textsuperscript{82} The museum does not practice disposal or deaccessioning of archaeological materials. However it is well within the museums mandate to do so, but has only sporadically been used on newer poorly documented materials prior to inclusion in the collections.\textsuperscript{83} So disposal has been practised there in the safest way possible, before the material becomes a part of the museum. It is up to each individual project manager to sort and discard of unwanted material before it becomes a part of the collection.

\textbf{5.5 Sweden}

In Swedish the word “gallring” means disposal of artifacts. The meaning that is put into that word in Swedish is the action of thinning or organizing things. The word is also used in Swedish for the thinning of forest areas. So the word has, like the Icelandic word “grisjun”, a rather positive meaning.

The law about how to treat heritage remains like archaeological material is called Kulturminneslagen (the Act on Cultural Heritage). Therefore there is no mentioning of disposal of archaeological material within the Swedish legislation.

Riksantikvarieämbetet is the name of the Swedish National Heritage Board. That board is the authority office in Sweden that takes care of archaeological matters. In a report from Riksantikvarieämbetet a disposal plan is presented in the appendix. This plan was made by Societas Archaeologica Upsaliensis (SAU). The plan goes through disposal depending on the material of the artifact. In this same appendix it says that material that will be disposed of should be destroyed. Also there is a paragraph stating that no disposal should happen unless the material has been documented and a note should be made in the find list if material is disposed of.\textsuperscript{84} It seems that some kind of disposal of archaeological material occurs in the field in Sweden.\textsuperscript{85} In my opinion it is a procedure of high quality.

I contacted Statens Historiska Museum. The museum has a written policy that states how to receive newly acquired archeological materials. They have distributed the document to archaeologists that excavate in Sweden and it can also be

\textsuperscript{82} Jon Anders Risvaag 04.05.2012.

\textsuperscript{83} Jon Anders Risvaag 04.05.2012.

\textsuperscript{84} Utredning om urval av arkeologiska fyndmaterial p. 45.

\textsuperscript{85} Fynden – källmaterial för framtiden: p. 23.
found on their website.\textsuperscript{86} In that document the term disposal is mentioned on two occasions, but there is no clear guideline provided how to dispose of material from an excavation.\textsuperscript{87} Disposal and deaccessioning have been debated in Statens Historiska Museum recently. There has been recognized that they have to dispose of artifacts, but have not been doing it to any significant degree until now. The selection of what is kept after excavations is always done by archaeologists.\textsuperscript{88} The museum prefers that the material is disposed of, if needed, before the material enters the museum collection. The museum’s goal is to “establish such a good and close contact with the excavators and inform them that they are the ones best suited to do the disposal with references made to their excavation plan”.\textsuperscript{89} Statens Historiska museum does not take into their collection soil samples “...unless they have been floated/analyzed and are important for the result and interpretation of the excavation”.\textsuperscript{90} But the museum takes into its collection animal bones from excavations.\textsuperscript{91}

I also contacted Upplandsmuseet in Sweden. They preserve an archaeological collection from the Uppsala county. They also carry out their own excavations in the Uppsala county. At that museum disposal of archaeological material is practiced, mostly by the archaeologists doing the excavations. So most of the disposal takes place in the field. The museum does not dispose of any artifacts or material that has been taken into their collection. A disposal policy is in the working process.\textsuperscript{92}

5.6 Results of the Interviews

In Denmark local museums carry out archaeological excavations. Museums in Denmark should have all the tools in their hands to use deaccessioning or disposal as a collection management tool. In the Odense Bys Museer disposal of archaeological material is practiced. A museum curator with an archaeological education handles the process. The museum has a written collection policy which includes their policy on disposal. New archaeological material is not registered into the

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\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{86} Gunnar Andersson 15.05.2012.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{87} Regler för inlämning av arkeologiscka fynd till statens historiska museer (SHMM): http://www.shmm.se/Documents/regler_anvisningar/Inlamningfynd.pdf.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{88} Gunnar Andersson 15.05.2012.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{89} Gunnar Andersson 15.05.2012.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{90} Gunnar Andersson 15.05.2012.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{91} Gunnar Andersson 15.05.2012.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{92} Berit Schütz 26.04.2012.}
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museum unless it is scientifically or historically important and in harmony with the existing museum collection.

The National Museum of Finland is a department in an organization named Museovirasto. The organization supervises and gives permissions for all archaeological excavations in Finland. There is a written policy, called SALAVA, that among other things concerns the handling of archaeological material from excavations. Disposal is practiced in many steps on the route from excavation to the museum collection in Finland. So there are many checkpoints for the artifacts to go through from excavation to preservation.

New laws concerning the heritage sector in Iceland took effect in the beginning of 2013. The National Museum of Iceland is the head museum in the cultural history field and is the only real archaeological museum in Iceland. The museum is now working on a document that lists the requirements for the receiving of archaeological material into the museum. Disposal of archaeological material is not practiced in the museum.

Five archaeological museums in Norway carry out archaeological excavations. Archaeological material that is dated earlier than the year 1537 is automatically protected. Vitenskapsmuseet in Trondheim is writing a policy about newly acquired archaeological material, but they already have an excavation manual.

Statens Historiska Museum in Sweden has a written policy about the receiving of newly acquired archaeological material. Disposal has not been practiced to any degree at the Statens Historiska Museum, but they are hoping to build up a good connection with the archaeologists concerning the matter. Upplandsmuseet is in the process of making a policy. Their disposal of archaeological material is practiced, but only on material that has not yet been registered into the museum collection. Most of the disposal is done by archaeologists in the field.

The countries subjected in this research have some kind of legislation when it comes to preservation of archaeological material. The legal frame is similar in some ways, but not in others. Sweden and Norway have in common that they do not have any certain legislation about their museums. Nevertheless all the countries have some legislation that protects archaeological material. But there are very few mentioning of deaccessioning or disposal in their legislations. They all have some kind of a governmental institution that is the authority in cultural heritage management. What the museums in the five countries have in common is that they always end up taking care of the material that comes from the excavations.

In Denmark and Norway the status for disposal and deaccessioning is different from the other Nordic countries. That is because the archaeological excavations in these countries are carried out by the museums. Therefore the archaeologists are a part of the museum staff and the museums are responsible for the excavations. Because of this there is a better understanding that disposal or the action
of sorting the material is necessary before the material is registered into the museum collection. This system seems to work in the two countries.

Disposal is handled in a different way in all of the five countries. I believe that in Denmark they have succeeded the most in handling disposal of archaeological material. They have the policy of not taking in certain archaeological material unless the material has a clear research purpose. The Odense Bys Museer has even taken on a big project going through their collection and is doing deaccessioning of archaeological material from their collection.
6. Discussion

As I mentioned earlier in the research, deaccessioning and disposal has been a delicate subject in the museum field for a long time. But rising problems have forced a discussion on the matter in the museum field. Museums have started to realize that they have to take a stand in these matters. There seems to be an awakening in Nordic museums regarding disposal and deaccessioning. Some of them are in the process of making policies concerning disposal of archaeological objects.

The word disposal does not seem to have the exact same meaning in all of the Nordic countries. In Finish there is no one word for the concept, just many different words that have a different meaning in connection to disposal. In Norway there are at least two words used to describe the thought of disposing of an artifact. Some of the words that are used for disposal in the countries are negative and final, but others have positive meaning to them. Therefore it can be seen that the action is sometimes, when the word is positive, looked at as necessary, done to improve the collection.

I argue that none of the theories that have been mentioned above provide a clear answer about what disposal and deaccessioning of archaeological material is. In his definition Lewis (2003) is too vague when it comes to handling the subject. Malaro (1991) and Hilton (2009) do not bring any clear solution for the museums that are handling the disposal or deaccessioning. All of these theories can be used but they are not efficient enough. Therefore I put forward my own theory about what disposal of archaeological material is. Without any doubt the action is permanent, like stated in the theories above. Of course it is also the duty of museums to preserve their collection. But here I am concentrating on material that has not yet been registered into a museum, so consequently, I will take the deaccessioning out of the equation. Disposal of archeological material from excavations is the permanent removal of material that has no research value anymore and has been documented.

It looks like there has been some awakening in the museum sector in the Nordic countries recently. Museums, that do not already have a written policy about receiving newly excavated archaeological material in their collection, are in the process of making one. This development should make the process receiving newly excavated archaeological material into the museums easier.

We have to face the fact that it is expensive to store artifacts. Therefore we have to make a decision about what should and what should not be kept. Accordingly, we have to take difficult decisions about disposal of things that are not
worth being kept and realize that we cannot keep everything forever. The deaccessioning of artifacts from collection is something that has to be evaluated regularly. There is a chance that the decision will be looked at as wrong in the future. But despite that museums should not be afraid of making decisions about disposing of archaeological material.

I have come to the conclusion that this is a matter that has to be handled inside the museum sector. But archaeologists also have to discuss the matter. The museums and the archaeologists have to have a dialogue and find the best way in each area or country. In the previously mentioned chapter in Archaeological Curatorship Susan M. Pearce makes a good point about the archaeologist maybe having to make a compromise for the community. But I also think that the museums have to lead the way and be active participants when it comes to this work. The discussion that has taken place in the museum world about disposal of archaeological material mainly focuses on the material that is already registered in museums. But to control what comes into the museums should be just as, or even more, important in the discussion. There we can try to make informed decisions about archaeological researches that have just taken place.

Soil samples are taken during archaeological excavations for research purpose. But sometimes they are not processed in the post excavation work. Thereafter they are stored in the museums and over time they lose their scientific value. It is normal that some samples find their way on to the museum shelf in small quantities. There can be a new technology in the future that will be better equipped to process them. But it is not acceptable to the museums when they receive soil samples in very large quantities. There are cases where the samples are much larger than necessary for the intended analysis. This kind of archaeological material can quickly fill up the storages in any given museum.

To evaluate museum collection with disposal in mind is very time-consuming and as a result very expensive. Therefore it is necessary to weigh the gaining of the disposal against the time it takes. With that said I conclude that it is a better choice to make the disposal before the artifacts, that are registered into the museum, become a part of the museum collection. This can be done in cooperation between the archaeologists and the curators with guidelines as a working tool. As has been mentioned before, museums do not take disposal or deaccessioning

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lightly, at least not when it concerns artifacts that are already a part of the collection.\textsuperscript{97}

In *Archaeological Curatorship* Susan M. Pearce states: “Each eligible museum must have at least one archaeologist with “professional curatorial training’.”\textsuperscript{98} This is probably not realistic in all museums. But the museums that take care of most of the archaeological material in the Nordic countries should be large enough to have an archaeologist with museum experience to be able to carry out such tasks. I think both museums curators and archaeologists have to work together when it comes to collection policy/strategy of archaeological material. One has to look at both sides, the preservation and the research.

It seems that in most cases the problem is that disposal of archaeological material is not taking place between the excavation and the material becoming a part of a museum collection. I think that money sometimes is a significant factor in this matter. Archaeological researches or rescue excavations do rarely have financial means to analyze all the material that has been excavated. Material or artifacts that can be found in mass quantities in excavation can for example be nails, Stone Age flints and animal bones. The best way to handle these things should be documenting them thoroughly in the field both with registration and photography, and then to dispose of them. It is, without a doubt, best for the museum to dispose of the archaeological material before it comes a part of the museum collection, after that it is more difficult to dispose of it. So with this said, museum are only doing good by practicing disposal. It does not have to be negative to go through a collection and dispose of things if the disposal is based on a well-founded collection plan or strategy. In *Museums & Galleries Commissions, Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections* (1992) the problem is touched upon. “There is still no professional agreement on the extent to which archaeological archives may or should be sampled and disposed of by excavator or museum.”\textsuperscript{99} I think there is a large difference between disposal of archaeological material and for example artifacts that are collected from the community. Museums cannot select what comes out of the ground, but they can select what comes from the community. Therefore the problem of disposal of archaeological material is in some way very different from the same work with other possible museum material.

The purpose of keeping the artifacts is sometimes lost when there is a lack of information about them. Therefore the research value of the material is less than if something is known about it.\textsuperscript{100} What is the purpose of keeping things when there is little or no information about them? The reason the information is missing could

\textsuperscript{97} Susan M. Pearce (1990): *Archaeological Curatorship*, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{98} Susan M. Pearce (1990): *Archaeological Curatorship*, p. 100.


be that there never was any from the beginning or it has been lost. If that is the case the artifact can not be used for researches.

There are situations when artifacts are not even archaeological, meaning they are not old enough to be registered in archaeological excavations. Museums should not have to keep artifacts as a part of an archaeological collection that does not fit the description of being archaeological in the sense of age, and could also be found or even still in use in the society that the museum serves. The museum should rather use its storage space for same kind of artifacts that are in better condition than the one found in the ground.

In the article “Museer tvingas gallra bland föremålen” by Johan Hellekant (2011) there are six methods mentioned regarding disposal of artifacts. I do not agree that all of these methods apply to archaeological material or artifacts. The first method is to give the material to another museum. This could be a possibility with archaeological material, but probably not the best way. It is also not sure that another museum wants to take in a mass of material that maybe has a limited research purpose. The second method is to sell the material in the open market. Inside the museum world it is usually greatly frowned upon proposal to sell museum material, so this way would probably be met with stern resistance. The third possibility is to exchange material with another museum. Like the first way, it is very unlikely that another museum wants the material. The fourth method is to destroy the material. This should be done with archaeological material to prevent it from contaminating later sites. The fifth is to give the material back to the original owner. That is of course not possible with the archaeological material for obvious reasons. The sixth possibility is to use the material for educational purposes. This is a very interesting way of using artifacts otherwise useless if carried out in the right way.

In the previously mentioned chapter in the book Archaeological Curatorship Susan M. Pearce (1990) makes a good point about the archaeologists having to make a compromise for the community. That is to make the selection of what should be kept. It is expensive for communities to preserve artifacts, therefore the compromise must be made. In a certain way this is right. Archaeologists have to face the fact, like museum curators, that this is a problem that will only grow with time unless we find a solution. Both parties have to act without fear when they make decision and weigh up all possible outcomes. In this chapter Pearce also

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discusses how important it is that the disposal of newly excavated archaeological material happens before the material is registered into the museum.¹⁰⁶

To answer the question I started out with it can be seen that museums in the Nordic countries usually do not have a clear effective policy about disposal or deaccessioning of archaeological material. The lack of legislations seems to be a widespread problem when it comes to deaccessioning or disposing of archaeological material.

7. Conclusion

It is clear that in the Nordic countries there are at least two systems when it comes to the process of including archaeological material into a museum collection. The first one is based on active participation by the museums in the complete process, from excavation until the material is included in a museum collection. Norway and Denmark handle their archaeological material in such a manner. There the museums carry out the excavations and are also responsible for the preservation. It is my conviction that museums in Denmark have shown professional courage by making ethical decisions about disposing and deaccessioning archaeological material that does not have any research purpose. In the other system museums are mainly the recipients of the material. That is a different system that needs more structure and rules, which are usually in the form of legislations, regulations, guidelines and policies. But they are not to be found everywhere.

I argue that the most important thing for the museums to do is to have a clear policy about how they take new archaeological material into their museum. That is because there has to be a clear working process for both the archaeologists and the museum’s curators to follow. There seems to be some awakening when it comes to making such policies in museums in the Nordic countries. I hope that this awareness about policy making in the museums will lead to the result that the archaeological collection in the museums will become more organized in the future.

I also think the method of having the archaeologists themselves disposing of, or take care of, the material from the excavations before they become a part of the museum collection is important. The reason is that archaeologists who have been working with the material previously should have the best overview of the research collection. In this matter the museums and the archaeologists most likely aim for the same goals, to make archaeological collections in the museums better registered and more organized. But the governmental institutions and other officials also have to cooperate by making the rules.

The issue of disposing of archaeological material can not be a taboo anymore within the museum- and archaeological field. Some actions have to be taken and therefore legislations, regulations, guidelines and polices have to be made about the issue. If nothing is done the problem will just grow with time. Material that has no clear purpose of preserving becomes a part of museum collections and therefore it becomes much harder to discard of it if needed later or wanted. The problem then only gets more expensive for the museums and therefore also for the community with each passing year.
It is my hope that in the future all of these countries have established efficient regulatory that tackle the problem of disposal and organizing of archaeological material from excavations. That would lead to better archaeological collections for everyone, the curators of the museums, the archaeologists and the public.
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40