Restoration of flat textiles: ideological framework, ideas and treatment methods in Sweden before 1900

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Intellectual context, nationalism and patriotism

The modern restoration of textiles has its roots in the nineteenth century, when simple care and repair turned into a vocation. Before that time, many artefacts continued to be used in daily life, with little or no concern at all for their historical preservation. Gradually, techniques for restoring textiles were developed, based on ideas that some textiles were unique and culturally and historically interesting, and because of this they required special handling and treatment.

A prevailing conception of the nineteenth century was that ethnic groups could be characterised by their collective way of thinking (Hagerman 2006: 122–3). Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), considered to be the father of anthropology, argued that climate, customs, tastes, language and folklore created Volks (folk). Such a culture could be traced and interpreted a posteriori from traditional art objects such as excavated artefacts, runic stones and vernacular items. His ideas were amplified by German philosophers and by a number of their Swedish contemporaries, among them historian Nils Henrik Sjöborg, who founded the National Historical Museum (Historiska museet), and Bror Emil Hildebrand, the first national archaeologist (Hagerman 2006: 137). It was by learning from history that one could also get to know oneself – the motto of the national museum of ethnology (Nordiska museet).

The spirit of the time combined optimism with a growing concern over the loss of the past. Time was perceived to be running faster and more dramatically than ever before. While there was trust in new technology on the one hand, anxiety was also awakened among those who were nostalgic about the past. The quest to rediscover national identities led to interest in topics such as prehistory and the artefacts of a country’s tangible cultural heritage. In Sweden, such interest also served to reconcile the country for its loss of Finland to Russia in 1809. It also provided support for Scandinavism, a mid-nineteenth-century intellectual movement aiming at the unification of Denmark, Norway and Sweden politically, economically and culturally. New museums began to acquire series of representative objects, based on a romantic quest to assemble specimens of a glorious, more authentic past. In this context, the concept ‘museum’ includes scholarly collections whether private, national, local or regional, and community museums run by amateurs on a voluntary basis in which locals participate. To create ‘completeness’, artefacts were acquired and organised either typologically or chronologically in linear arrangements. Such collections needed protection if they were not to deteriorate due to neglect or the pace of modern life, and institutions were considered better able to safeguard collections than individuals. Moreover, the assemblage of large numbers of objects could facilitate scholarly research. Collections could also be put on public display for educational purposes if they were owned by institutions. In Växjö, the ethnologist Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius founded a museum of folklore. It has been considered the model for Skansen, the open-air museum that was the creation of Arthur Hazelius, whose father was an enthusiastic patriot and former member of the Manhem coalition, in which atmosphere he raised his son (Frängsmyr 2000: 20, 63–4). The creation of ‘histories’ may be symptomatic of nationalism. The National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet), founded in 1666, was commissioned to rescue antiquities that were at risk, as well as to shelter young boys and teach them about great Swedish men and their accomplishments. During the nineteenth century, museums were engaged in the collective shaping of the nation’s identity (Bohman 1997, 2010). Therefore, the national collection of trophies and banners played an important role in the making of Swedish history, according to Curman (1922). In this respect, trophies and banners were different from other textiles. The trophies were kept as witnesses of Swedish martial triumphs, but for a long time they were not restored to avoid tampering with the originals. Banners continued to be flown by troops until their repair was no longer possible, at which time they were discarded and became museum objects (Törnqvist 2006). The associated symbolism might explain the slightly different approach to the treatment of such artefacts compared with other kinds of textiles (Curman 1922; Blix 1999).

The National Museum of Fine Arts (Nationalmuseum) opened in 1866. The architect commissioned to design the building and its interiors was F.W. Scholander. He was replaced by a well-known German architect, A.F. Stüler, who had
designed churches in Berlin and Potsdam, the Stock Market in Frankfurt am Main, the Neues Museum, and the Altes Nationalgalleri in Berlin. Thus, in addition to anthropological and archaeological thinking, theories of museum architecture were at issue in the museum’s construction. The new building contained both the Royal Collection of Fine Art and Sculpture (Kungl. antikvitets-museum) on the upper floor, and the National Historical Museum and the Royal Armoury on the first floor.3

For centuries textiles were highly valued possessions in private households and textiles were an important industrial resource. This is indicated in contemporary legislation, inventory deeds, and other archival sources. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, factories in the early industry evolved as an administrative and institutional sector, independent of craft guilds under the jurisdiction of the National Board of Trade (Kommerskollegium). In the mid-eighteenth century, the textile industry employed 84% of the Swedish labour force. It was obligatory to collect and deliver to the state rags and other sorts of used clothing and fragments of fabric for the production of paper (Sjunnesson 2006). Textile fibre (lump) was used for high quality currency bills and writing paper even during the nineteenth century, when pulp could also be produced from wood. The value of textiles is also shown by their pricing at auctions and the volume of used textiles that circulated and were resold (Håkansson 2009). However, there was a period when the value of tapestries declined to the extent that they became rare, and thus it was perceived necessary by the end of the nineteenth century to safeguard them. ’In general old tapestries have been handled badly. The devastation has reached a point where homemade woven manor tapestries have become rarities’ (Mejborg 1887: 97). It is not surprising, therefore, that textiles have come to comprise a significant part of many museum collections. Both the nucleus of the Royal Armoury collection and the first object to be acquired by Arthur Hazelius for the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen), in 1872, were textiles.4

As a result, textile conservation and restoration in Sweden dates back almost 150 years. Conservation began when it became clear that the views, approaches, and skills required to treat a painting were different from those required to treat the walls of a common peasant house; or when it was apparent that cleaning a Neolithic axe required a different attitude and knowledge from that needed to clean a household lamp (Muños Viñas 2005: 2).

The same realisation applies to the restoration and conservation of textiles.
Three early conservators

Three men were the pioneers of textile conservation in Sweden during the second half of the nineteenth century: John Böttiger, Carl Anton Ossbahr and Baron Rudolf Cederström. All belonged to the upper middle class or the nobility, were related by family ties and happened to be employed at the same institutions; they also had strong social connections. There is documentary evidence of invitations to dinners, holiday greetings, meetings with mutual friends, exchanges on professional matters, alliances and topics of dispute.³

John Böttiger (1853–1936) studied art history at Uppsala and Lund universities, receiving his PhD in 1880. After working briefly at the Department of Applied Art at the National Museum of Fine Arts, he became curator of the Royal Collection at the Royal Palace, and in 1915 was named superintendent. He was the collection’s first curator to have a university education.

From the beginning of his tenure at the Royal Collection, Böttiger focused his interest on tapestries, which he considered fragile, realising that they had previously been exposed to unskilled treatment. In 1889, he was commissioned to register and describe more than 400 tapestries and published the result in four volumes (Böttiger 1895–1898). An inventory had already existed due to the effort of C.A. Ossbahr (see below), but it was far from complete. One immediate result of the publication was the opening of an exhibition of tapestries at the national museum of ethnology in 1902. The inventory has also been an extraordinary conservation resource for conservator-restorers who followed Böttiger, since it covers information on the condition of the tapestries. In order to conserve the tapestries in the best possible manner while they were continuously in use and on display, Böttiger maintained contacts with colleagues and institutions in Sweden and abroad, and systematic experiments were carried out in collaboration with them (SBL 1918: 183–90).

Carl Anton Ossbahr (1859–1925) became curator of the National Museum of Fine Arts in 1883, at a time when the Royal Armoury was part of the museum. Despite his lack of a formal higher education, he was soon entrusted with complete responsibility for the armoury. In 1892, he was promoted to deputy, and finally, in 1896, to superintendent. Ossbahr initiated the permanent exhibition of the Royal Armoury in the northeast wing of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, and is considered the father of collection management. He left the armoury in 1903 and moved to Italy, where he was later appointed chamberlain at the court of Queen Victoria. Ossbahr was recognised for his research on arms and for his knowledge of art history (SBL 1918: 399).

Ossbahr was succeeded as head of the Royal Armoury by his second cousin, Baron Rudolf Cederström (1876–1944). Before taking a degree in art history at Uppsala University, Cederström had worked for a year as assistant for the conservation of trophies at the Royal Armoury, a project sponsored by King Oscar II. Cederström was appointed amanuensis there in 1899, and became its superintendent in 1904. The museum’s activities expanded and improved under the directorship of Cederström, and he was later acknowledged as a leading museum technician. It has been claimed that Ossbahr served as Cederström’s mentor and encouraged him to take a scientific approach to conservation. Cederström might also have been aided and inspired by exchanges of information with European colleagues. He is known to have travelled (such as to Berlin) to study conservation and take part in experiments at museum laboratories. As a result, he introduced new restoration techniques, and he urged that methods should be tested prior to implementation. Both Cederström and Böttiger worked at the Pietas restoration studio in Stockholm, an institution dedicated mainly to the restoration of ecclesiastical textiles (SBL 1918: 195–200; Estham 1988). At Ossbahr’s request, Cederström drew up an inventory of Swedish and foreign banners and field standards, describing them and noting their condition (Cederström 1900).

As far as is known, Böttiger, Ossbahr and Cederström never carried out any practical conservation or restoration work, but employed a group of women trained in sewing (Fig. 1). Nowadays, textile conservation and restoration is a vocation in which women predominate, although the specialisation was developed during the late nineteenth century by men – all three men had a personal interest in tapestries and banners.

Textiles re-evaluated

Woven tapestries have long been considered the most valued of all textiles from an economic and artistic point of view. They were costly possessions often used outdoors on special ceremonial occasions such as coronations, weddings and festivities, or for welcoming distinguished visitors to a town. During the eighteenth century, their value declined for some undetermined reason, and on orders from King Gustav III some were used as carpets and nailed to the floors at Strömsholm and Gripsholm, two royal estates north of Stockholm. Others were sliced into pieces and used as restoration material for other tapestries (Fig. 2) (Vahlne 2004). Tapestries could also be refitted to rooms other than those for which they were originally designed. This required adjusting their shape or disrespectfully cutting them to new dimensions. Sometimes, excess tapestries were stored in the attic of

Figure 2 Restoration of a missing area by adding a piece from another tapestry, inv. no. Sko 01.316 (photo: Skokloster Castle, Skokloster).
the Royal Palace, where they were eventually rediscovered by Böttiger in deteriorating condition. Thanks to his intervention, pieces of tapestry were reassembled and the storage environment improved (Böttiger 1896).

At Skokloster, the Vallmo tapestry, depicting poppies, was registered as a carpet in a nineteenth-century inventory, which may explain why it is frayed (Dahlin 1987). Otherwise, the tapestries at Skokloster have suffered less deterioration as they have remained in their original location.

The Swedish State Trophy Collection contains more than 4,500 flags and banners related to crucial events in Swedish history. Due to increased interest in the nation’s heritage, this collection was transferred to the orangery in the Royal Garden (Kungsträdgården), after being kept in the palace of the De la Gardie family and elsewhere from 1691 to 1785. After another relocation, the collection was exhibited in the royal burial church (Riddarholmskyrkan), erected at the Franciscan monastery in Stockholm founded in 1270 by King Magnus III. In 1807, the congregation was dissolved, and caring for the collection of colours and banners eventually became the responsibility of the National Heritage Board (Petrelli 1901).

The trophies were displayed in tight bundles in the church on the principle that they were best kept in the same manner according to the tradition. In 1835, the church caught fire and the trophies had to be evacuated again. It was later concluded that they had suffered badly, not only from the fire but also from dirt and the inappropriate and uncontrolled indoor environment. Mould, moths and metal threads penetrating the fabric were signs of decay recorded by Petrelli, who was later commissioned to restore all the Swedish banners and about 100 of the trophies. He completed this project by the turn of the twentieth century, but wrote that the work was very difficult since many of the objects consisted of more than a 100 fragments that needed to be joined together (Petrelli 1901). Although the trophies were in very poor condition they were kept on display for more than a century. As the poor state of the trophies resulted in pieces breaking off, wire nets were hung from the ceiling to catch the falling fragments. Some pieces dropped to the floor and were collected in kettledrums, where they were found a century and a half later (Engquist Sandstedt 1999).

From maintenance to restoration and remedial conservation

The care of goods, artefacts and accessories has always taken place, to some extent, whether in private homes or elsewhere. The costumes at the Royal Armoury were the responsibility of the keepers of the Royal Wardrobe, and traces of their work, such as darning and mending, can still be observed. For centuries, bailiffs at Skokloster followed instructions dating from the seventeenth century stating that it would be appropriate if their wives took care of the textiles. During the winters when Skokloster was uninhabited by its owners, covers made of blue and white striped linen cloth were draped over the upholstery to protect it from unnecessary exposure to daylight and dust. Conversely, it was also common to bleach yellowed table linen in sunlight during the summer, a practice that continued into the nineteenth century (Hallström and Tamm 2004). Similar measures were probably carried out at the royal palaces by staff, but documents indicate that such work was also commissioned (Böttiger 1896).

Unfortunately, no written conservation reports in the modern sense exist from this period (the first textile conservation measure to be documented was at the Royal Armoury in 1907). The objects themselves can tell their stories, and some traces of anthropogenic changes can be observed in situ, while indications of other kinds can be found in contemporary documents.

Böttiger, Ossbahn and Cederström established conservation workshops for textiles with the support of King Oscar II, who agreed that measures should be taken to rescue these historical artefacts. His father, Oscar I, had already ordered the transfer of the Royal Collection and the erection of the new museum building mentioned earlier. The Royal Armoury collection had formerly been housed at many different locations, but as the number of museum objects grew the need for appropriate storage increased. Some items were kept at Ulriksdal Palace, a royal estate north of Stockholm. However, the indoor climate there was damp, as indicated in a memorandum dated 26 January 1847 (Riksarkivet, Lantförsvarsdepartementet 1847). Metals needed to be protected with oil, and wooden storage boxes had to be constructed. Corrosion needed to be removed before the arms in question could be exhibited to the public. The memorandum urged that improved storage conditions should reflect the value of the collection. A Danish rifle-maker named Schmidt, who had been entrusted with the care of weapons belonging to the Ministry of Defence (Krigs Collegium), made an offer to ‘free from rust and adequately conserve’ both arms and other metal artefacts in the Royal Collection for a fee of 40 RD Banco per month and accommodations. The offer was accepted, and Hildebrand, the director-general of the National Heritage Board, verified and praised Schmidt’s skill as the son of the warrant officer of the Copenhagen armoury (Tøjhuset) (Riksarkivet, Lantförsvarsdepartementet 1847).

In addition to arms, Ulriksdal also housed large quantities of textiles, some of which were listed in a protocol dated 2 March 1849. The accompanying invoice is for a total of 2,192 RDkmt for the ‘renovation’ of a number of textiles. Among the listed artefacts are six red velvet caparisons embroidered in gold, eleven richly decorated blue velvet caparisons with fringes, velvet cushions, a banner of silver fabric with coat of arms, two small hats of yellow velvet embroidered and with silver fringes, and two garnitures adorned with tinsel and lace (Riksarkivet, Lantförsvarsdepartementet 1849). All the items listed had been renovated by Philippe Privat. Details of the treatment are unknown, but Privat supposedly inherited formulas from his predecessor, Pierre Duru.

Since the king himself presided over all the meetings of the cabinet of ministers, he personally participated in decisions on the conservation of museum objects. On one occasion, representatives of the Royal Armoury asked for permission to use funds saved from lower than expected heating costs in the winter of 1888 to purchase display cabinets, since the budget for restoration could not be charged with such expenses (Riksarkivet, Eclesiastikdepartementet 1889).
Development of new restoration policies for flat textiles

Böttiger and Cederström studied different methods of restoration and established a code of professional conduct for those who engaged in such work. Ossbahr had begun his conservation career at the Swedish State Trophy Collection, where he used methods that were later refined by Cederström. The latter was criticised by his contemporaries for being overly cautious by insisting that techniques should be evaluated before they were used. His detractors also complained that he did not apply himself sufficiently hard. However, he had determined that some of the methods and materials used on banners actually damaged the textiles, and he pointed out that a number of banners reinforced on new fabric turned out to be in an even worse condition than before, as they were perforated by too many stitches. He wanted to await the results of experiments being conducted by Professor Rathgen in his Berlin laboratory, where a new and cheaper method to strengthen banners by using solutions of cellulose was being developed (Curman 1922).

Cederström’s reluctance to adapt untested methods and materials was based on personal experience. On one occasion, he decided to wash a suite of tapestries depicting rustic scenes that had been made for the coronation of Queen Kristina in 1650 and was now in the Royal Collection. Their colours had faded, giving their former green shades a bluish tint (due to low lightfastness of the yellow component). Because of this discoloration, the tapestries had previously been subjected to an attempt to enhance their colours. However, this washing changed the colours so badly that the result was criticised (G:son Berg 1988). Despite this mistake, Cederström seems to have been regarded as an authority on water washing of textiles. Torsten Lenk, one of his co-workers at the Royal Armoury, complained in a letter about a certain baroness who, unsatisfied with the condition of a freemason’s costume, wanted to unstitch the cape and soak it in water. Lenk categorically advised against this and alerted Cederström that the baroness would probably confront Cederström on his return to duty the following Monday to ask for ‘a second opinion’ (Riksarkivet, Brevskrivarregister 1924).

Mounting tapestries

Tapestries are often large and heavy, whereas banners can be very fragile due to their thin silk fabrics that are burdened by embroidery. Special care must be taken when handling or displaying such textiles or they may simply deteriorate by virtue of their own weight. During the nineteenth century, the traditional way of hanging tapestries was to sew metal rings or straps onto the upper edge, sometimes reinforcing them with a textile ribbon or leather strip, but often simply attaching them directly to the tapestry (Fig. 3). The rings or straps were hooked onto corresponding metal fittings fixed to the wall.
Remedial conservation

According to Böttiger, the routines for the care of textiles in the Royal Collection changed in the 1840s. At that time, Privat was commissioned to clean the tapestries (Böttiger 1896; Vahlne 2004). Between 1867 and 1869, the renovation work was continued by Privat’s widow, probably using the same methods (Böttiger 1896).

Böttiger appreciated the vacuum cleaner as a tool for cleaning fabrics and recommended it to replace the washing of textiles with water (Fig. 4). He also prohibited the lashing of tapestries with canes, denouncing it as an obsolete practice that should be abandoned.

One of the first vacuum cleaners in Sweden was purchased by the Dickinson family, owners of the Tjolöholm estate. Since many of their parlours were furnished with broadloom carpets, a horse-drawn vacuum cleaner was obtained from the Göteborgs Mekaniska Verkstad around 1900. It was too large to bring inside, so the unit was set up outside and long hoses were fed through open windows (’Tjolöholms slott’ 2012). Mrs Dickinson had been inspired to purchase a vacuum cleaner by a circular sent to her by the Liberty & Co. department store in London. A Swedish manufacturer constructed the device based on a British patent, since it had been ‘a great success … in Great Britain’. In 1904, a Swedish company (Svenska Vacuum cleaner aktiebolaget) also offered to supply Mrs Dickinson with a motorised vacuum cleaner (Kasper 2012).

Vacuum cleaners were marketed as an alternative to brooms and dustpans for private homes, offices, restaurants and museums. It was claimed that they were more effective, hygienic, light and easy to use. Vacuum cleaners could also replace housemaids who were becoming less and less affordable (Kungliga biblioteket, affärstryck).

Restoration

In 1744, the minutes of the building deputation of the Royal Palace in Stockholm mention a French tapestry weaver named Pierre Duru, who knew how to bring back faded colours and brighten darkened areas of fabrics without using water (Slottsbyggnadsdeputationens protokoll 1744). Privat may have continued to practice the same methods. Exactly how the colours were regenerated remains unknown, but it is speculated that paint or some kind of chemicals was used (Fig. 5) (Vahlne 2004). A collection of formulas for the enhancement of colours was in circulation at the time, although it was criticised by the head of Les Manufactures nationales des Gobelins, a tapestry factory founded in Paris in 1601 that supplied the royal court with high quality wall hangings. It appears as if the method was never improved since Böttiger was also very sceptical of the amplification of colours and criticised the result of Schultz’s renovation of about 20 tapestries belonging to the Royal Collection between 1861 and 1865, accusing him of having destroyed their beauty by using dyes (Böttiger 1896).

Most of the tapestries in the Royal Collection and at Skokloster still have patchwork visible on their reverse sides from early restorations (Fig. 6). Damaged areas were reinforced by linen fabric stitched from the obverse side. The Vallmo
tapestry retains patches made of upholstery cut from chairs, both as support materials and to fill in missing areas. It has been determined that the tapestry was repaired after the mid-eighteenth century, when it first came to Skokloster Castle, since the upholstery patches originally belonged to another artefact in the Skokloster collection. Linen patches on the same tapestry cover the pieces of upholstery, and thus must have been added later. There are records of a tailor named Alsén who was paid for mending tapestries and carpets for Skokloster over the course of 13 days in May 1825; some of these linen patches may be Alsén’s work (Dahlin 1987).

Another common way to fill missing areas in tapestries was re-warping and re-weaving (Fig. 7). These methods were used at Les Gobelins, as well as in Sweden. The work was done under the supervision of Böttiger at the Handarbetets väänner, a textile art studio and school for textile arts and crafts in Stockholm. In charge of the department for mending tapestries, started in 1895, was Ms Hamilton, who had received two months training in the repair and sewing studio at Les Gobelins (Nordiska museets arkiv, Årsberättelse 1895).

Flags, banners, and standards have been treated in various ways over the years and in a manner slightly different from other flat textiles. In the mid-1890s, a method that originated in Berlin was used for the restoration of a flag in the Royal Armoury collection. The flag was slipped into a pouch made of coarse textile netting (Fig. 8). In some cases, the support fabric was made of tarlatan, a kind of thin muslin woven of cotton or wool fibres. Other materials used to support silk banners so that both sides remained visible were tulle, a fine silk or synthetic net, or silk crepeline, a more delicate material with a tabby weave (Fig. 9).

Occasionally, banners constructed of two pieces sewn back-to-back were strengthened by introducing a full support between the two layers and stitching it in place from each
A problem with using an opaque fabric as a support is that it may discolor over time if not prepared with lightfast dyes.

Problems with poor quality treatments

Even after a long period has elapsed, the negative side-effects of previous conservation or restoration practices may cause unexpected difficulties and Böttiger, Ossbahr and Cederström were aware of some of these. Banners, flags and standards supported by other fabrics often exhibit a number of problems due to an inappropriate choice of materials or unskilled execution of restoration or conservation measures. Duru’s and Privat’s retouches and added colours might have little stability, and colorants may begin to bleed in contact with moisture or water.

Ossbahr believed that very dense fabrics, or those with high tensile strength, were inappropriate for use as support materials, although they had already been employed for such applications. A bitter dispute was raging in Germany at the time as to whether a more coarse net or tulle was the optimal material (Keyserlingk 1999). Ossbahr advocated very light, undyed materials, such as silk crepeline, so that both sides of a textile could be viewed (Kungliga biblioteket, Ossbahr 1894). Perhaps this is why Cederström preferred tulle despite it being too flexible (Cederström 1900).

Very coarse materials, such as the net shown in Figure 8, may have knots that can cause the formation of holes in the original fabric (Möller 1999). Even tarlatan and tulle can be too coarse to support some delicate materials (Figs 11 and 13). In long-term storage, or under pressure, textiles with added support materials can develop an indentation pattern caused by the woven structure of the support material (Fig. 8). Other
disadvantages of tulle and tarlatan are their tendency to be too flexible compared with the original fabrics, and the fact that they stretch or contract differently (Fig. 12). In effect, this can mean that the original material supports the reinforcing material rather than the other way round. The stitches attaching the supporting fabrics can also cause damages. Perforating fragile silk with stitches may leave holes that can become even more visible years later, as in the case of coarse nets.

Tension between fabric layers may cause damage if supported textiles are rolled up. The original is probably weaker than the supporting fabric and is, therefore, the more vulnerable of the two components. This hypothesis, presented by Curman in 1922, has as its consequence that conserved flat textiles should be hung, instead of being rolled (Curman 1922). (Nowadays, it is recommended that very fragile flat textiles be stored horizontally in large drawers or on shelves.)
Similarly, tension may also be a problem when patches and other supporting materials are attached in the wrong direction, compared to the weave of the original fabric. It is crucial to place both materials with their grain lines parallel, although this has not always been done, as can be observed on the object from the Skokloster collection (Fig. 14).

Figure 13 Fragmented banner supported by tulle that has become creased. The detail shows how fragments are attached to tulle with stitches, inv. no. ST 5:21:3 (photo: Army Museum, Stockholm).

Figure 14 Old support patch attached without regard to grain lines, inv. no. Sko 12.009 (photo: Skokloster Castle, Skokloster).

Conclusion

Contrary to possible general assumptions, many current conservation and restoration practices have their roots in the nineteenth century, or earlier. The negative effects of moisture and humid indoor climates on artefacts were known. Understanding of deterioration pathways might have been limited, but at least those in charge of collections seem to have had some general idea of such risks. Some materials for maintenance and preventive conservation used more than a century ago, such as water repellents, have remained almost the same. Artefacts were eventually stored in boxes or displayed in glazed showcases to prevent moisture and dust from coming into contact with vulnerable surfaces. An interest in evolving (and ‘modern’) technology existed, and awareness developed of the advantages of experimenting with samples before applying new methods on original artefacts. Successful experimentation also allowed sufficient time to pass before treating the artefacts themselves, in order to reveal any unwanted outcomes. For the same reason, not all artefacts were treated at the same time and with the same methods.

Historically, the skills and capability of individuals hired to do remedial conservation were occasionally an issue. The vocational training expected at that time was different from present-day requirements. Over time, the views, approaches and skills required have transformed expectations from routine maintenance into the vocation of textile conservation-restoration, a profession that specialises in textile preservation. As a result of this shift in attitude on the part of a handful of scholars, public interest in artefacts, such as tapestries,
banners and other textiles, has led to their rescue after years of mistreatment and neglect. We are now the beneficiaries of the increasingly detailed descriptions of artefacts and their condition, systematic experiments, restoration activities, publications and exhibitions that make up textile conservation today. Whether or not, or to what extent, signs of ideological considerations in the past, or old methods for treatment and secondarily added materials should be left in place is an issue that does not have one single and simple answer. The context in which objects have been preserved is just one aspect that needs to be taken into account when deciding where priorities for conservation and restoration should lie in the future. Knowledge of conservation and restoration history as such is thus beneficial.

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Notes

1. The Manhemförbundet existed between 1815 and 1823, but its ideas survived in a less organised way until the turn of the century. Several members of its counterpart, Götiska förbundet, played a vital role in public intellectual discussions on history.
2. Royal decree on the preservation of antiquities 1666 ahvs Kungl. Meytés Placaroth och Påhaldt issued in 1666 by King Karl XI.
4. The Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen was the forerunner of the national museum of ethnology (Nordiska museet), and at the National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet).
5. Letters, postcards, visiting cards and other notes and manuscripts sent to or from Böttiger, Cederström and Ossbahr are in the Department of Antiquities, Böttiger's personal archives, letters of the Swedish Academy of Sciences.
6. Parkhäll refers to this method without any further explanation or details.
7. Curman refers to this method without any further explanation or details.

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