Chapter 37
Scandinavia

Stefan Larsson

Scandinavian archaeology has been influenced by three important factors: its embrace by the state, its terrain, and its methodological innovations. The position of Scandinavian archaeology within the state administration descends from the frequent, long, and bloody conflicts between Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland. The number of monuments that could be claimed was instrumental in the diplomatic game of the day: the most venerable history gave a higher ranking at peace negotiations. In short, Scandinavian archaeology is the offspring of an "antiquarian arms race." The Danish legal tradition goes back as far as medieval times: all "treasure" found is the property of the King, while in the Swedish tradition, which has been a reference for both the Norwegian and Finnish legislation, sites and monuments belong to the state. Sites and monuments are to be protected or, if this not being possible, recorded professionally, thus making it a public responsibility to maintain a body of archaeologists. The overwhelming majority of excavations are performed within this legal administration, resulting in large-scale archaeological projects, today aided by digital recording (Fig. 37.1).

Archaeological deposits in Scandinavia vary from Paleolithic deposits and large Mesolithic dwelling sites of the Ertebølle culture, to the heaped clay Bronze Age burial mounds of Jutland ("the mound people," Glob 1974), to large-scale settlements, votive deposits in bogs, ship burials, shipwrecks, and large-scale central places of the Iron Age to early trading and manufacturing centers of the Viking Age. In upland areas, settlements and burial mounds remain visible above ground level. In lowland areas, they have been located by intensive surveys (Welinder 2009).

Scandinavian innovations include the development of typology, large-scale survey, and different approaches to excavation. Typology became something of a Scandinavian speciality, starting with C.J. Thomsen's (1788–1865) presentation of

S. Larsson (✉)
Swedish National Heritage Board, Lund, Sweden
e-mail: stefan.larsson@raa.se

© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2015

M. Carver et al. (eds.), *Field Archaeology from Around the World*,
SpringerBriefs in Archaeology, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-09819-7_37

Fig. 37.1 A large-scale excavation of the medieval village of Örja, just outside Landskrona, Sweden (Photo by Thomas Hansson, Swedish National Heritage Board)

the "three-age system," i.e., the division of prehistory into the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, which was developed indirectly from the taxonomy developed by C. Linnaeus and his disciples. The system was gradually refined during the course of the nineteenth century by, among others, J.J Worsaæ (1821–1885), S. Müller (1846–1934), and B.E. Hildebrand (1806–1884). Particularly influential was the concept of chronological evolution to explain the changing forms of artifacts by O. Montelius (1843–1921) (Fig. 37.2).

Since all archaeological remains were (and are) regarded as the cultural property of the state, large-scale surveys pursued the goal of total record. This has empowered geographical methods of historical analysis, such as Bjørn Myhre's early medieval kingdoms in Norway, drawn by Thiessen polygons from hierarchies of burials, ship-sheds, and hill forts (1987), and Åke Hyenstrand's use of Sweden's Ancient Monuments Register for tracing regions and socioeconomical systems (Hyenstrand 1984).

In excavation, Scandinavian archaeologists have been influenced by both the German approach, which divides a deposit into horizontal and vertical slices ("schnitt"), and the British, which gives primacy to the stratification. However, it was the pioneering work of Gudmund Hatt and C.J. Becker in the 1930s and 1940s that led to the development of large-scale open area excavations. These were applied in particular to prehistoric and medieval settlements where survival may be little more than postholes and ribbons of small stones left by turf and timber buildings. These techniques were taken up in Britain and spread widely in Europe. On site pioneering methodologies by Scandinavian archaeologists include the excavation of huge preserved timber ships and their contents from mounds at Gokstad and Oseberg (see Gansum 2004), the recovery and analysis of bog bodies (Asingh and Lynnerup 2007), and the lifting of an entire *burial chamber* at Medelpad, Sweden, in 1952 (p. 169). Modern pioneers have been contributing in particular to the development of methods of electronic *remote mapping*.

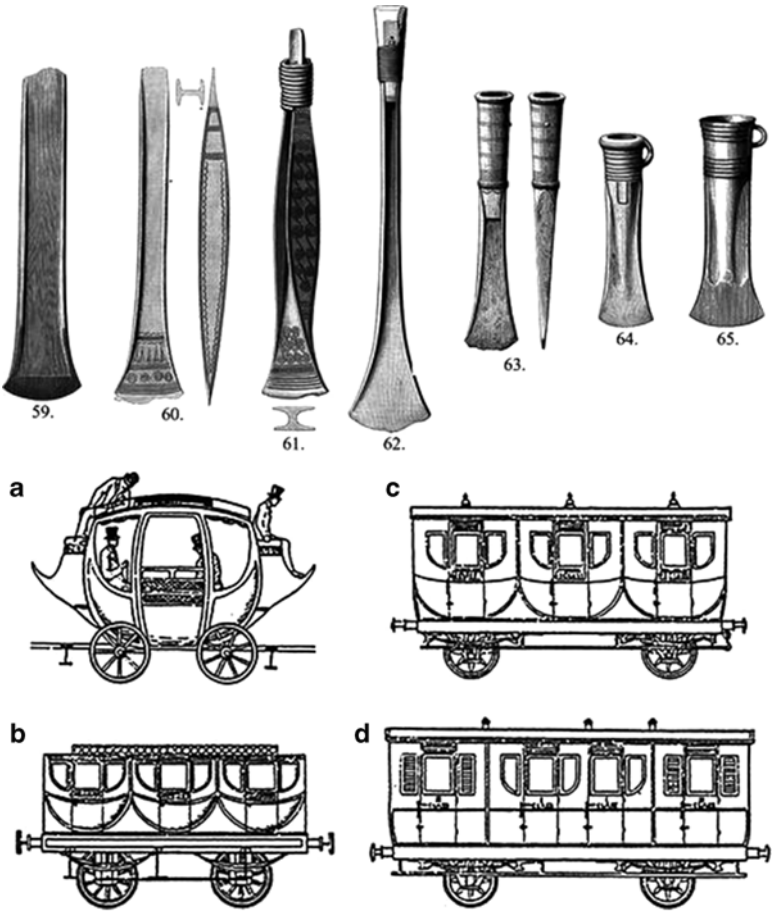

Fig. 37.2 Oscar Montelius (1843–1921) used the evolution of carriages, from horse drawn to railway, to illustrate how artifacts develop through time. The method allows an artifact type, and assemblages of artifacts, to be assigned to a particular period

Information relevant to this section will be found in EGA under Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea Region; Scandinavia/Northern Europe: Historical Archaeology.