PRIDE

Sweden, colonialism and the museums

MÅRTEN SNICKARE

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Foreword: The deadly sins in our time

Envy, gluttony, greed, pride, lust, sloth and wrath – what is the importance of the seven deadly sins, organised 1,500 years ago by Pope Gregory the Great, in contemporary Sweden? Is devoting seven essays to them really justifiable? After all, we live in one of the most secular societies in the world, a society where hell seems more likely to be the name of a nightclub than a place for sinners. Living out your lusts is not just permitted, it is considered healthy. Letting go, feeling pride, earning money and eating well are also things we value – we treat ourselves, and of course we're worth it!

At the same time, there are indications of a return of morals. The climate crisis and the lifestyle changes that must result from it, increased inequality and people with unimaginable wealth, combined with refugee flows and wars close to Sweden, are contemporary phenomena. They have led to us increasingly talking in terms of morals, at least if we are to judge by the daily press. A simple search of Swedish newspapers shows that the use of the word "morals" has increased tenfold since 2014.

Another sign of the reappearance of morality in public debate is the role played by shame in what is called cancel or call-out culture. There has been an increase in public humiliation, shaming, through the emergence of a new, internet-generated social control. Moreover, online humiliation has become a strategy for various groups to effect change, as a form of modern, shame-driven consumer power. Although most people see dangers in allowing shame to drive public discourse, there are those who argue that it can be a good thing, an effective way of changing people's morals and behaviour.

Good and evil are increasingly referenced in politics, but what some people perceive as good is perceived by others as virtue signalling – and what is that if not pride? Regarding some people as completely shameless can, on the other hand, be seen as part of the same trend. Incidentally, the word shameless was hardly used at all in the early 2000s, but has occurred more frequently since 2014. There are people who argue that we are living in a post-post-political world, a hyper-political era, in which everything is politics and can thus be categorised as good or bad. Involvement is just a click away, but is just as fleeting as love on Tinder. Mass movements die as quickly as they form, and the result is a type of overheated discussion that covers everything but has no depth, which quickly states whether something is right or wrong or good or bad, and where anyone who ends up on the wrong

side of the line can suffer the keelhauling of public opinion.

From this perspective, there is reason to return to the mortal sins and their moral claims. Also, sins and vices are individual; the aim of refraining from sin is personal salvation, not collective change. This emphasis on our own behaviour and our personal morality is symptomatic of the individualism of our time, and the focus on sins thus suits an era that celebrates the ego.

However, the deadly sins have always had an undeniably collective dimension. In 2008, when the Vatican launched seven additional deadly sins, the aim was to adapt them to contemporary global reality and to emphasise the people's social interactions: polluting the environment, morally dubious experiments, bioethical violations, drug abuse, creating poverty, excessive wealth, contributing to social inequality.

It is also worth remembering that the deadly sins are not really about the worst things humans can do, as even in the Middle Ages there were worse things than sloth and lust. Rape and murder were far more serious crimes, but the deadly sins were considered dangerous because they risked enslaving us to our own emotions, destroying our rationality and creating an addiction to the thrill of sin. The deadly sins threatened to consume us. And, like the modern, upgraded deadly sins, the old deadly sins have always referenced the sins and misdeeds that threaten to

tear society apart, and those emotions that threaten to entice us away from the good and the just.

Doesn't this sound urgent? In this essay collection, seven scholars have used their research as a basis on which to tackle a deadly sin, to test the sins' relevance in our time and to discover what they can teach us – about ourselves and about society.

In this essay, art historian Mårten Snickare looks backwards, tracing pride in both colonialism and in the colonial heritage that colours contemporary Sweden. The seventeenth century's self-assumed notion of the white man as conqueror of the globe still haunts our museum displays. Even when objects are repatriated, there is the idea that "we know best" – quite simply, pride is hard to lose.

The editors

Colonial pride

> What am I to celebrate? Stockholm's ships that will cover the whole sea or the boats with linen sails that will move quickly over the whole ocean, serving the Gothic people [. . .] Open your recesses, you land of India! Draw out your hidden treasures, you continent of America! [. . .] Clap your hands, you land of Sweden! Gold is dug out for you among the mountains of Nabathaea. The land of Panchaea flourishes for you! Ormuz sends rubies, and the banks of Ganges send glowing jewels here. Whatever Guiana keeps buried and hidden, whatever the oysters on the shores of Saida give, what fertile Guinea, what barbarian Congo has, everything will serve your needs, fortunate Stockholm.[1]

When were these lines written, with their scent of the *One Thousand and One Nights* and their promises of treasures from the most distant lands? And what is this era they describe, when the world's oceans were full of ships from Stockholm and the Swedish capital was filled with riches and delicacies from all the corners of the world? The first question is easy to answer. The words were written and declaimed by the historian and poet Andreas Stobæus in 1672, as part of the festivities for the accession to the

Swedish throne of 17-year-old Karl XI. It is thus a poem celebrating a Swedish king during what is usually called the Great Power Era, a period in which the kingdom stretched far outside Sweden's current borders and Swedish armies were feared on European battlefields.

The second question is more complicated. Strictly speaking, there has never been a time when Swedish merchant ships dominated the world's oceans, when the world was simply waiting to send its precious goods to the Swedish capital. Of course, Stobæus knew this. His poem is an example of *hyperbole*, exaggeration used as a rhetorical device, in this case to emphasise how rich and prosperous the Swedish kingdom was – or would be – under its new monarch. Hyperbole is characteristic of seventeenth-century European art and culture, the era that is also known as the Baroque. One Swedish example is the architect and officer Erik Dahlbergh's *Suecia Antiqua et Hodierna* (Ancient and Modern Sweden): a book containing hundreds of etchings, in which the nobility's palaces have been given extra towers and wings and the gardens seem to extend into eternity, while the city's small wooden buildings are replaced by magnificent stone ones. Another is Uppsala professor Olof Rudbeck's learned multi-volume work *Atlantica*, which proves that Sweden is the mythical Atlantis, the source of all human culture.

In another sense, however, Stobæus's poem bears witness to something real, namely the European – and Swed-

ish – colonial expansion which accelerated in the seventeenth century. And, not least, the emerging colonial worldview in which Europe – and Sweden – increasingly defined itself as the centre of the world, while the rest was seen as a barbaric periphery to be civilised and Christianised, but above all exploited. The finds of silver in present-day Bolivia and Mexico were a key driver of the early Spanish colonisation of South and Central America. Similarly, finds of silver and other minerals fuelled the seventeenth-century Swedish colonisation of Sápmi. This parallel between Spain and Sweden is not mine; it was made as long ago as 1635, by Privy Councillor Carl Bonde who, in his enthusiasm for new finds of silver in the mountains of Lappland, wrote to Lord High Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna: "It is hoped here, with God's help, that this will become the Swedes' West Indies, to benefit them as the King of Spain [benefits from the West Indies]."[2]

Pride is a fitting name for the European colonial project. Pride, or *superbia*, which several Christian authorities – from the eighth-century Saint John Climacus to the twentieth-century theologian C. S. Lewis – have identified as the worst, most profound of the deadly sins, and the cause of the other six. Pride is the devil's most distinctive characteristic. This may seem strange: pride – isn't that a virtue rather than a sin? But this pride is the inflated pride that manifests itself in excessive self-promotion, combined with contempt for everyone else. Related words are

arrogance, egotism, hubris, megalomania. Someone who is prideful can never have enough, and instead believes they are entitled to more power and greater riches at the expense of others. Ultimately, it is about opposing God, and there is a parallel here with the Ancient Greek *hubris*, which meant the human striving to emulate and surpass the gods. Those who are guilty of hubris inevitably suffer nemesis, the punishment of the gods. The Bible says something similar about pride: "Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Prov. 16:18–19). And the opposite of pride is humility: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Strangely enough, these words of warning do not seem to have worried the kings and colonisers of the strictly religious Swedish and European seventeenth century. Colonial pride took shape and grew stronger over centuries of violence and oppression, often in the name of the true faith, as well as European Enlightenment and civilisation. Conquering and taking control of others was not only Europeans' right, but also their duty: "The white man's burden", as it is expressed in Rudyard Kipling's famous poem from 1899.

Colonialism elevated pride to a global level; it was no longer just individuals who challenged God, it was all of Europe. Colonialism also entailed the ruthless exploita-

tion of the Earth's resources, or God's creation if you wish: the minerals of the mountains, the trees of the forests, the fish of the seas, and eventually the fossilised deposits below the ground and the ocean. We are now paying a heavy price for this exploitation in the form of an environmental and climate crisis, which seriously threatens our existence. Pride goes before a fall.

Sweden and colonialism

So, what role does Sweden play in this history of colonial pride? Hardly any is the answer if you look at the usual historiography. One explanation is that Sweden has never been particularly successful at conquering and controlling territories across the oceans, the most recognisable form of colonialism.

Another, at least equally important explanation, is the Swedish self-image that took shape in the mid-twentieth century: the image of a progressive welfare state and a broad-minded world conscience, one that cared for the poor and oppressed wherever they were – also a form of pride, in the guise of a modern welfare state.

Naturally, such a prideful self-image is difficult to reconcile with historical facts about the active role of the Swedish merchant fleet in the transatlantic slave trade, the Swedish state's exploitation of labour and natural resources, or the forced Christianisation conducted by the Swedish church. Best not to talk about these facts too much. As recently as 2013, historian Gunlög Fur felt compelled to point out how even mentioning

Sweden's history as a colonial power remains controversial.[3]

Contemporary scholarship defines European colonialism not simply as the military conquest of distant lands, but rather as a set of practices and strategies through which European states, in collaboration with private financiers and corporations, sought control over territory, labour, natural resources and trade routes, as well as over religious beliefs, education and cultural expression. And Sweden has played an active part in this project, since at least the early seventeenth century and its annexation of Estonia, Livonia and Ingria. A little later, in 1638, Sweden – with the support of Dutch financiers – founded Nova Suecia, a colony at the mouth of the Delaware River in the east of North America, specialising in trade in tobacco and fur. In the 1640s, Swedish merchant ships entered the lucrative transatlantic slave trade and a trading station was established in what is now Ghana. The American colony and the African trading post were fairly brief Swedish possessions as, after a few decades, they were conquered by the superior Dutch colonial power. About a century later, Sweden re-entered the slave trade due to Gustav III's 1784 acquisition of the Caribbean island of Saint-Barthélemy – he acquired the island from France in exchange for French trading rights in Gothenburg. Gradually, this new Swedish colony became increasingly unprofitable for Sweden and it was returned to France in 1878.

The truly successful and long-lasting Swedish colonial project is aimed at Sápmi, and began on a large scale in the early seventeenth century. However, although the Swedish treatment of Sápmi exhibits most of the characteristics of colonialism – conquest of territory, aggressive settlement policies, exploitation of natural resources, forced labour and forced Christianisation – calling it by its proper name is still not a given. Sometimes the term "internal colonialism" is used, as if there was some natural law that made Sápmi part of the Swedish nation state from the very beginning. However, the Swedish colonisers of the seventeenth century seemed to have been clear about it, judging by the quote from Carl Bonde, who saw a direct parallel between the Spanish colonisation of the West Indies and South America and the Swedish exploitation of minerals in Sápmi.

In Sápmi, Swedish colonial pride continues into our own time. One recent example is the Swedish government permit, issued in March 2022, that allows the British prospecting company Beowulf Mining to proceed with plans to mine iron ore in Gállok, northwest of Jåhkåmåhkke (Jokkmokk), despite the proven negative impact on Sámi reindeer husbandry and UNESCO's assessment that mining operations would damage the Laponia World Heritage Site.[4]

Colonialism, the objects and museums

Stobæus' Baroque hyperbole, which I quoted at the start of this essay, thus testifies to a material and historical reality: Europe's colonial expansion in the seventeenth century entailed the circulation of goods and objects on an unprecedented scale. Ever-increasing flows of commodities, staples, luxury items and collectibles travelled along the new trade routes, often with Europe as their final destination. And even if Stockholm was not the absolute centre of events that Stobæus' words wish to suggest, Sweden was a very active participant in the global colonial circulation. Tea, coffee and eventually cocoa became popular status symbols for Swedish elites, as did spices, silk fabrics and porcelain. Stuffed animals and dried plants from distant continents found their way into the collections of Swedish royalty, aristocrats and university professors, along with artworks, religious objects, weapons and costumes from distant places and cultures.

Colonialism as a European (and Swedish) project is thus, from its very beginning, intertwined with the museum as an institution. Europe's early museums, *Kunstkammern*

and armouries (the boundaries were fluid) were boosted by an influx of extraordinary natural and cultural objects from the colonies, while new colonial enterprises were motivated by European elites' desire for rare collectibles. Once in place in museums and *Kunstkammern*, these objects helped to shape and communicate a colonial worldview. They materialised and manifested the difference between *selves* and *others*, whose religious objects became material evidence of the idolatry that must be stopped, while the collections as a whole formed an image of Europeans' supposed right and duty to collect and organise the world around themselves. If colonialism can thus be described as Europe's pride in relation to the rest of the world, European museums are its material manifestations. Pride, we could say, built what we now call our cultural heritage.

Visitors to Skokloster Castle, between Stockholm and Uppsala, can obtain an idea of what such an early museum could have been like. The castle, which was built by Count Carl Gustaf Wrangel, is largely preserved as it was when Wrangel died in 1676. The fourth floor houses his collections. The library sets the tone: with its extensive collection of travelogues, descriptions of foreign countries and continents, maps and globes, Wrangel signalled that his interests extended far beyond Sweden's borders. The whole world was his concern. This continues in the armoury, next to the library, where large collections of

weapons and armour sit alongside natural objects from remote places, such as a stuffed armadillo and a blowfish that hang from the ceiling, and cultural objects, such as a hammock from South America and a well-preserved seal-skin kayak from Greenland. A chest in the innermost room of the armoury contains a number of items from North America, probably a gift from Johan Printz, governor of the Swedish colony of Nova Suecia: a wooden battle club decorated with copper wire, two hemp harness straps patterned with porcupine quills, and four curious fur items decorated with wolf teeth and shells – possibly components from a single ceremonial costume.

The objects in the armoury can be described as a materialisation of colonial pride, in which the European colonisers, like self-proclaimed gods, order and categorise the world around them. Wrangel, a major player in a European colonial power, used these objects to stake claim to the world and make clear his own place at its centre. The objects from North America establish a direct material link between his castle in Uppland and Swedish colonialism.

The armoury at Skokloster is a unique example of a well-preserved colonial museum from the seventeenth century. In most other cases, objects collected during Sweden's early colonial expansion have been transferred between different museums and contexts. Through these institutional and conceptual shifts, the objects testify to

the long and intertwined histories of museums and colonialism. Two examples can serve as clarification: a tomahawk from North America, exhibited at Etnografiska museet in Stockholm, and a Sámi ceremonial drum that is now at Nordiska museet. With their origins in completely different parts of the world, these objects are united by their somewhat parallel histories: both were acquired in the seventeenth century by Swedish collectors, directly due to Sweden's colonial expansion; both have since been transferred between museums and exhibitions in the Swedish capital. The tomahawk and the drum therefore both carry with them traces of the history of Swedish colonialism. In their current locations, they raise questions about the museums' colonial heritage, but also about their possible futures. In this way, they both shed light on the colonial pride that still largely characterises Swedish museums.

The first example – a North American tomahawk

Johan Printz, governor of Nova Suecia 1642–1653, seems to have been interested in the indigenous peoples' material culture. He was also keen to stay on good terms with his noble patrons in Sweden and therefore acquired a number of artefacts, which he sent as gifts from the colony to royals and members of the nobility. These items included a tomahawk, a type of cutting weapon that often carries symbolic connotations of war and peace.[5] Exactly how it was acquired is unknown, but it did take place as part of a colonial power relationship in which Printz had the advantage.

The materials and design of the tomahawk indicate it originated close to the Swedish colony, perhaps in the Lenape culture along the lower Delaware River. Its elegantly curved handle is carved from a brown hardwood, probably hickory, and it was once richly decorated with wampum, small cylindrical beads made from the shell of a mollusc typical of the North American east coast – most of the beads have now fallen away. Wampum was ascribed a high value by the indigenous peoples of the east coast,

suggesting that this tomahawk was intended for aesthetic, social and perhaps ritual purposes, rather than as a weapon to be used in battle. It was a status symbol.

A sleek iron axe head is attached to the handle by thin leather straps; iron was not part of the material culture of North America's indigenous peoples, so the axe head testifies to colonial contacts – probably with Sweden, then the world's leading iron exporter (two Swedish blacksmiths are known to have lived in the colony). Another sign of colonial contact comprises the greenish glass beads visible here and there among the remaining pale wampum beads on the handle. Glass beads arrived in the Americas with the colonisers, and were commonly traded between colonisers and indigenous peoples. Deeply rooted in an indigenous tradition of applied art, warfare, ritual and social manifestation, the tomahawk appears to have been involved in a world of colonialism and trading from the very start.

In the mid-seventeenth century, the tomahawk appeared in Sweden, at Visingsborg Palace, whose owner, Per Brahe the Younger, was Governor Printz's main patron in the Swedish aristocracy. From the 1680s, it was in the royal collections at the Royal Palace in Stockholm, on show in the Royal Armoury, a combination of an armoury and royal museum. Removed from its original context, that of ritual and social manifestation in northeast America, the tomahawk now found itself on the other side of the

Atlantic, surrounded by firearms, swords, armour, carriages, jousting props, royal costumes, bearskins, animal horns and diplomatic gifts from near and far.

In its new position, at the centre of Swedish royal power, the tomahawk was given new roles. It became a colonial trophy, a materialisation of the extent of the Swedish Empire. It also served as a metonymy, or sign, of the American indigenous culture; a tomahawk soon came to symbolise the supposed savagery and violence of the indigenous population, which in turn appeared to justify the excessive violence of the colonisers.

The tomahawk also became an object of knowledge. The idea of mapping the world formed part of the European colonial project from the very beginning; here, an object like the tomahawk had an essential role as empirical evidence of what was foreign and different. By exhibiting and displaying the tomahawk, the Swedish king manifested his place at the centre, with the right to order the world around him.

Still, such reasoning should probably not be taken too far. Seventeenth-century Europe was indeed a place of power and brutal colonisation – a time of pride, but also a time of wonder and epistemological crisis: the unified European church had been torn apart by the Reformation; the emergence of the natural sciences challenged parts of the religious worldview; encounters with new continents forced the reformulation of old truths about the world.

Pride and wonder – this ambivalence is also visible in Karl XI's armoury, where an expanding colonial worldview met an exploratory openness and playfulness, with fluid boundaries between different kinds of objects: natural objects placed alongside cultural ones, weapons and armour mixed with costumes and tournament props, European artworks juxtaposed with non-European ones with no clear hierarchy. This suggests that the tomahawk was not yet stuck in dichotomies, such as centre/periphery or self/other. This was undoubtedly occurring as part of an ongoing game of identities, in which one or more *selves* were tested against various *others*, and where European pride was gradually being shaped. However, the playful and diverse exhibition practices that characterised the Royal Armoury and other contemporary exhibition spaces suggest a perception of the world as more enigmatic, fluid and open than in the centuries that followed.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the seventeenth-century armouries and *Kunstkammern*, with their diversity and associative composition, were replaced by the modern Western museum and exhibition system that, in principle, still prevails. In brief, this deals with demarcation, categorisation and hierarchisation. The most important boundary was that drawn between nature and culture; in the history of Swedish museums, this evidenced through two major new museal institutions in Stockholm in the nineteenth century: the Swedish Museum of Natural

History, which collected natural specimens, and National-museum, which collected cultural artefacts. So where did the tomahawk and the other colonial objects end up? At the Swedish Museum of Natural History, beside stuffed animals and dried plants. They were categorised as *nature*, while the concept of *culture* was reserved for the European artworks and artefacts collected at Nationalmuseum. The ambivalence that characterised the art gallery of the seventeenth century had been replaced by clear-cut dichotomies and hierarchies – colonial pride no longer had space for wonder or nuance.

In the late nineteenth century, *ethnography* emerged as a new academic discipline and museal category. In 1900, an ethnography department was established at the Swedish Museum of Natural History and, a few decades later, the tomahawk and other non-European artefacts were removed from the museum's collections to form the basis of the new Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm. They were thus categorised as ethnographic objects, material traces of geographically and/or temporally distant cultures. This was in contrast with *art*, a category reserved for European objects, in which each object was awarded autonomy and an intrinsic value. In that way, colonial pride was even more clearly incorporated into the European knowledge system and two of its most important institutions: the museum and the university.

As an ethnographic object, the tomahawk's task was to

convey knowledge about a long-lost indigenous culture on the east coast of North America. The historical dimension was missing – the tomahawk and the other ethnographic objects seemed to float in a motionless, indeterminate past. Equally absent was the role and involvement of the museum in (colonial) history; the museum was a transparent mediator of supposedly objective knowledge about other cultures.

Change only occurred at the end of the twentieth century, when the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, along with similar museums in the West, began to take a self-critical, self-reflective look at its own history and activities. The provenance of ethnographic artefacts, their journey from their makers and original users to the museum, became hot topics. In 2002, the Museum of Ethnography opened its *Med världen i kappsäcken* (With the World in a Backpack) exhibition, which focused on the objects' journeys to the museum. The tomahawk and its equivalents were now presented as examples of colonial transactions.[6]

Med världen i kappsäcken remained for twenty years, closing in August 2022. However, the tomahawk had moved to a new long-term exhibition in 2008, *Nordamerika* (North America), where it remains. This exhibition is a traditional historical exposé from pre-colonial times to the present day; it does address colonialism, but not in relation to the museum itself as a colonial institution.

The tomahawk is displayed in a stand dedicated to seventeenth-century encounters between Swedish colonisers and North American indigenous peoples. It is included in an ensemble of diverse objects: weapons, fishing equipment and costume details from the Lenape culture, but also a model of one of the ships that carried Swedish colonists to America, and copies of portraits of two Lenape chiefs, painted by the Swedish artist Gustaf Hesselius in 1735, almost a century after the Swedish colonisation. Rather than an object in its own right, the tomahawk is reduced to one example of Swedish colonial acquisitions; its label presents the names and dates of no fewer than three Swedish royal collectors before mentioning that the tomahawk may have been acquired from the Lenape or Susquehannock tribes. The tomahawk is not given the opportunity to speak for itself or say anything important about its possible origins and makers. After decades of self-reflection and postcolonial critique, colonial pride is still evident in the museum's displays and exhibition texts.

The second example – a Sámi ceremonial drum

During the second half of the seventeenth century, Sweden's colonial grip on Sápmi tightened, not least the religious oppression of the Sámi people. Priests and colonial officials used every means at their disposal to eradicate Sámi religious practices that coexisted with the Christian religion. The Sámi's ceremonial drums were at the front line, as they played an essential role in Sámi religious and cultural life but were described by the colonisers as tools of the devil. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of drums were confiscated by Swedish priests and officials. Many were destroyed. At the same time, and apparently paradoxically, the Sámi drum emerged as one of the most desirable collectibles for the Swedish and European elites. At the end of the seventeenth century, a Sámi ceremonial drum was an almost obligatory element in the collections of Sweden's nobility. Around 1670, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, count and influential politician and official, acquired a drum for his *Kunstkammer* at Makalös (meaning 'extraordinary'), a magnificent Renaissance palace in the centre of Stockholm.[7]

The drum's design indicates it originated in the area around Jåhkåmåhkke. Nothing is known about its makers, but they appear to have possessed deep knowledge of their physical environment, allowing them to choose appropriate and hardwearing materials. The body of the drum is carved from a burl on a pine tree, a growth on the trunk that has hard and durable wood. The drumhead, made from reindeer hide, is attached to the body with pegs made of birch, a strong wood that is abundant in the mountains. The figures on the drumhead – people, gods, animals – are drawn using a mixture of ground alder bark, which produces a brown-red colour. The drum was clearly designed to withstand years of use: to be held in one hand and played with the other. Playing the drum, along with jojking and sometimes dancing, was a way of connecting with the gods, as well as of finding good hunting grounds, easing a woman's labour pains or curing sick reindeer.

But, around 1670, the drum was taken from its ritual, social and musical context in Sámi culture and put in a completely new environment. In De la Gardie's museum or *Kunstkammer* it was placed next to rarities such as a wampum-adorned box from North America, a microscope, the head of St John the Baptist on a platter(!) and a unicorn horn(!).[8] In this context, the drum became evidence of a diverse, enigmatic existence, as well as a sign of its owner's status as a refined aristocrat with knowledge

of the world. That it also, like the tomahawk, served as an object of knowledge became clear when De la Gardie lent it to the Uppsala professor Johannes Schefferus, who was looking for objects as material sources for his book on Sámi culture and history. The book, *Lapponia*, published in 1673, became a European bestseller, with De la Gardie's drum appearing in a woodcut in the chapter on ceremonial drums.

The drum's role as an object of knowledge was reinforced when, after De la Gardie's death, it was transferred to the College of Antiquities, whose purpose was to study Swedish history and preserve Swedish archaeological remains. Much later, the collections of the College of Antiquities formed the basis of the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm.

The first decades of the twentieth century saw a period of increased colonial oppression of the Sámi, with compulsory relocation, intensified exploitation of natural resources on Sámi land, as well as skull measurements and other humiliating physical examinations in the name of science. At the same time, Swedish institutions' interest in Sámi culture was growing, and the often heavy-handed acquisition of artefacts gained new momentum – a clear parallel to the late seventeenth century. Nordiska museet became the primary museum of Sámi culture in Sweden and, in 1939, Ernst Manker was made the first curator to have special responsibility for the Sámi collections.

Accompanied by numerous Sámi artefacts from the Swedish History Museum, the drum was transferred to Nordiska museet, where it became part of a long-term exhibition, *Lapparna* (The Lapps) which opened under Manker's direction in 1947.

Lapparna was followed by two long-term exhibitions at Nordiska museet, both giving the drum a central place: *Samer*, which opened in 1981, and *Sápmi*, which opened in 2007. A comparison of the exhibitions shows a change in the relationship between the main Swedish museums and Sámi interest groups. In 1947, a few Sámi people helped with practical details, such as how to correctly attach packing bags to a stuffed reindeer featured in the exhibition, but the authority of the Swedish museum was not questioned, and the exhibition also received a favourable reception in the Sámi press.[9] In 1981, when *Samer* opened, the political and cultural climate had changed, thanks to global decolonisation and the emergence of a post-colonial critique. Globally, indigenous peoples were demanding self-determination and the rights to land, history and cultural heritage. At a late stage, Nordiska museet invited the National Association of Swedish Sámi (Svenska Samernas Riksförbund) and the Sámi Association in Stockholm (Sameföreningen i Stockholm) to collaborate on the new exhibition, but their dialogue collapsed and the whole project was delayed by a year. On its opening, the exhibition received immediate criticism from Sámi

spokespersons, and throughout the 1980s relations between Nordiska museet and Sámi interest groups were tense.

The *Sápmi* exhibition, in 2007, was part of a self-critical turn in which Western museums began to scrutinise and make visible the part they play in the narratives they convey. The tone was set by a number of questions written on the walls: "Whose history?" "Whose voice?" "Whose objects?" A reference group comprising representatives of Sámi cultural and political institutions participated in the planning and preparation, making an impression on both the exhibition and the exhibition catalogue, where members of the group and other Sámi voices reflected on their history of colonial oppression and liberation, as well as on individual objects. The drum was given a prominent place in its own display stand in the centre of the exhibition, and its label broke with the authoritative and explanatory tone that characterised the previous exhibitions. Instead, the visitor encountered personal reflections from three members of the reference group, providing a picture of the significance of the ceremonial drums in the Sámi people's past and present:

> Many have tried to understand what the symbols and pictures on the Sámi drum mean. "Are they gods, people, animals, symbols, maps, life stories, relatives — or just pretty decoration?" Victoria Harnesk asks. "Things that contrast with the West's usual images and assumptions are

> considered deviant and inspire curiosity," Ingmar Åhren thinks. "This is what inspired the idea that the drum was associated with sorcery, but that's not the case." Sonia Larsson has another experience. "The drum is magical to me. Being able to travel to different worlds with it appeals to me," she says and tells about a drum journey that she took part in under the guidance of a present-day nåejtie (medicine man or shaman), "a traveller in the two worlds", who can place himself and others in a trance.[10]

Alongside this collage of voices was another text, a quote from a letter written by Artur Hazelius, the founder of Nordiska museet, to a colleague travelling in Sápmi in 1891:

> Among the most important things to ask about is everything relating to the Sámi cult or religion, superstition and the like. Most desirable, then, are Lappish drums and their accessories, *sieidi* (cult images, of which you should take with you as many as you can find, as well as agree on their transportation). Make precise notes of all traditions connected with them.[11]

In the quote, Hazelius appears as the paradigmatic coloniser/collector and the museum in Stockholm as the obvious place for the collection and organisation of drums and other religious objects associated with Sámi religious practices. However, his letters also express the attraction of the drums, their ability to arouse the colonisers' desires.

Together, the texts positioned the drum in a forcefield of attraction, fascination, exploitation and the struggle for the right to definition, a struggle in which colonial pride meets increasing resistance from the victims of colonial oppression. Still, none of the texts addressed the specific object in the display, the visual and material character of that individual drum, or its specific history.

The *Sápmi* exhibition closed in February 2022. Instead of a new exhibition about Sámi culture and history, the plan is to include Sámi material culture in an upcoming long-term exhibition on 500 years of everyday life and people in the Nordic region. The drum's future is currently unclear.

The museums' present and future – pride or humility?

Two different objects, two different histories. However, side by side, the tomahawk and the drum demonstrate that the history of European colonialism and of the museum as a European institution are inextricably intertwined. And that Sweden has played a part in both ever since the seventeenth century.

The tomahawk and the drum turn out to have originated in colonial conflict zones, and both were acquired (with or without force and coercion) by Swedish colonisers and incorporated into Swedish museum collections. Both have travelled through the changing museum system, from the seventeenth century's *Kunstkammern* and armouries, private and exclusive but also characterised by diversity and openness, to modern museums, public but characterised by categorisation and hierarchisation. Ever since they first appeared in Swedish museum collections, some 350 years ago, the tomahawk and the drum have been interpreted within the framework of a colonial worldview, with all its attendant universal claims, a supposedly objective perspective and a self-assumed right

and obligation to collect and organise the world, to tell stories about others.

For a long time, this order of things, this colonial pride, was taken for granted from a European (and Swedish) perspective, as the colonial worldview was so deeply rooted in European self-understanding, indeed in the very idea of Europe. However, conditions changed towards the end of the twentieth century, following the global wave of colonial liberation and the emergence of post-colonial critiques. Even if socio-economic inequality in the world still largely follows the old colonial borders, and although the world can be described as neo-colonial rather than decolonised, maintaining a colonial worldview has become increasingly problematic, especially for a public institution such as a museum. The colonial traces in Western museums are a growing problem, indeed they are the biggest problem that museums must deal with if they want to remain relevant cultural institutions.

How can we progress our ideas about the tomahawk, the drum and other colonial artefacts in Swedish museums? What possible futures can we see? Are there any paths that lead away from the colonial pride that has characterised and, in many ways, continues to characterise the museum as an institution?

One obstacle to be overcome is the authority that has been a natural element of the European museum. With what right do European curators in European museums

decide how to display non-European artefacts, and the narratives in which they should be inserted? If museums want to remain relevant voices in the cultural discourse, they must abandon their interpretive prerogative and open up to collaboration and shared authority. Replace pride with humility. This is a question of justice, but also a of enabling a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the artefacts on display, by allowing different experiences and perspectives to intersect.

One example worth highlighting is *Ongoing Africa*, a long-term project at the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, described on the museum's website as an attempt "to enhance new perspectives on the African continent with and by Swedes of African origin".[12] The project includes workshops, lectures, exhibitions, artistic practices and other forms of exploration of the museum's African collections, conducted by Afro-Swedes in collaboration with museum staff. One aim is the creation of new knowledge about African artefacts in the museum, but other aims are to establish new relationships and collaborations and to make the museum artefacts accessible and relevant to new audiences. In *Ongoing Africa*, the museum takes a step back, relinquishing some of its accepted institutional authority and making room for multiple voices and practices around the museum's objects.

The most debated issue today is that of the ownership and restitution of artefacts. With what right do Western

museums possess the most exquisite objects, created and used by indigenous peoples or former colonies? There are almost daily media reports of demands for restitution made by indigenous peoples or groups in the former colonies and addressed to Western museums. Discussions have long been dominated by legal perspectives. Can it be proven that the object in question was acquired illegally? Who actually has the legal right to it? Recently, an eye-opening question was formulated by the Canadian art historian Ruth Phillips, who specialises in the art of North American indigenous peoples: "Where do these objects do the most good?"[13] This question is interesting because it takes the discussion beyond the realm of law, but also because it recognises the agency of the objects, alongside the human actors who demand or resist their return. Objects such as the tomahawk and the drum are not just passive items, moved hither and thither by human actors, they are themselves actors with the ability to do something, and they can do more or less good depending on the pace and context.

So, where would the tomahawk and drum do the most good? I would suggest that they would do so in places where they can establish strong, fruitful relationships with other objects, people and landscapes. Places where they can become nodes in dynamic networks of meaning, value and knowledge. An interesting example is the large group of Sámi ceremonial drums that were moved some

twenty years ago from Nordiska museet in Stockholm to Ájtte Museum in Jåhkåmåhkke. In addition to the powerful symbolic value in returning the drums to the cultural and geographical area in which they were originally created, used and given meaning, their presence has also proven important for local practices in the arts and applied arts: students on the handicraft and art education programmes at the Sámi education centre across the street from the museum found inspiration for their own creativity in the drums' shapes, materials, techniques and figurative expressions.[14]

Furthermore, I would like to suggest that the tomahawk and the drum would do most good at the heart of the current debate on museums' present and future. They have been shuffled around, between institutions and categories; they have been defined as rarities, exotica, natural objects, ethnographic objects, primitive art… They carry the experience of transcultural translations and displacements and have had to learn to navigate through ambiguous borderlands. Using these experiences, objects like the drum and the tomahawk can teach us a great deal about Western museums' arbitrary boundaries and blind spots. If we listen to them carefully, they can tell us that colonial pride remains a part of the European museum as an institution – a necessary insight and a point of departure for the re-evaluation of museums that must take place.

Notes and image sources

1. Andreas Stobæus, "Augur Apollo", in Andreas Stobæus & Maria Berggren, *Two Panegyrics in Verse*, doctoral thesis, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1994, p. 83.

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3. Gunlög Fur, "Colonialism and Swedish History: Unthinkable Connections?", in Magdalena Naum & Jonas M. Nordin (eds.), *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, New York: Springer, 2013, p. 25.

4. On UNESCO's criticism of the planned mining activities, see "Uttalande av Anna-Karin Johansson, generalsekreterare på Svenska Unescorådet, med anledning av Unescos utlåtande om gruvdrift i Kallak", 8 June 2021, https://unesco.se/uttalande-av-anna-karin-johansson-generalsekreterare-pa-svenska-unescoradet-med-anledning-av-unescos-utlatande-om-gruvdrift-i-kallak/ (accessed 11 February 2023).

5. Tomahawk in wood, wampum, iron and leather, 44×33 cm, Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, inv. no. 1889.04.4179.

6. Wilhelm Östberg (ed.), *Med världen i kappsäcken: Samlingarnas väg till Etnografiska museet*, Stockholm: Museum of Ethnography, 2002.

7. Goavddis, Sámi ceremonial drum in pine, birch, and reindeer hide, 40×27×10 cm, Nordiska museet, Stockholm, inv. no. 228846.

8. Göran Axel-Nilsson, *Makalös: Fältherren greve Jakob De la Gardies hus i Stockholm*, Stockholm: Monografier utgivna av Stockholms kommun, 1984, pp. 253–275.

9. See, for example, Lennart Wallmark, "Om Nordiska Museets nyordnade lapska avdelning", *Samefolkets egen tidning*, no. 3, 1947, pp. 20–21.

10. Copy of exhibition text from *Sápmi*, Nordiska museet 2007–2022.

11. Ibid.

12. *Ongoing Africa*, Museum of Ethnography, https://www.etnografiskamuseet.se/en/exhibitions/ongoing-africa/ (accessed 11 February 2023).

13. Oral statement by Ruth Phillips at the workshop on "Repositioning Native American Art in the 21st Century Museum", Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 24 June 2022.

14. Conversation with Anna Westman Kuhmunen, curator at Ájtte – Svenskt fjäll- och samemuseum, 23 January 2018.

Image sources

pp. 26–27: Tomahawk, wood, wampum, iron, hide, 44 × 33 cm, eastern North America, 17th century. Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, 1889.04.4179, photo: Tony Sandin, 2002 (CC BY-NC-ND).

p. 36: Goavddis, or Sámi ceremonial drum, pine, birch, reindeer hide, 40×27×10 cm, Lule Lappmark, 17th century. Nordiska museet, Stockholm, 228846, photo: Karolina Kristenssen (CC BY-NC-ND).

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond: promotes, inspires and participates

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) is an independent foundation with the goal of promoting Swedish research in the humanities and social sciences. The foundation was established through a resolution in the Swedish Riksdag in 1964, when a donation from Riksbanken (the Swedish Central Bank) was approved and the statutes adopted. RJ's establishment was part of the tercentenary celebrations of the world's oldest, still operating, central bank. These celebrations also included the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel and the bank building on Brunkebergstorg, Stockholm. By establishing a foundation, the Riksdag and the Riksbank hoped to benefit a pressing national cause: scientific research linked to Sweden.

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In 2022, total funding for research and collaboration amounted to more than SEK 500 million. Hundreds of researchers in these disciplines have received grants for conducting research, building infrastructures and networks, establishing new contacts and participating in conferences and seminars, as well as in public debate.

RJ 2023

The Deadly Sins in Our Time

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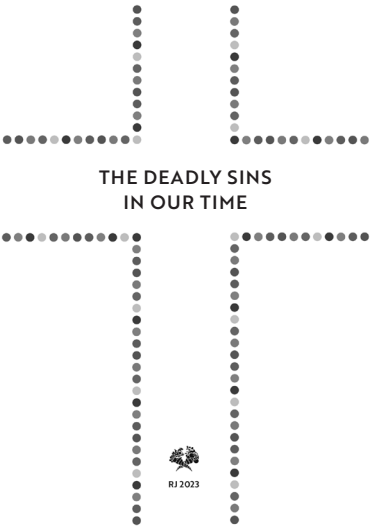

Can we speak of Swedish colonial pride? The label of the deadly sins is certainly a good fit for the former European colonial project: exploitation and delusions of grandeur combined with contempt for the other. Sweden's role in this story may appear limited, but if we turn our gaze to Sápmi we could argue that colonial pride has continued into our time.

What role have museums assumed in this story? How should they relate to all the objects collected from other cultures that are now housed in their collections? Should seventeenth-century Sámi ceremonial drums be displayed – or returned? Where do they bring the most benefit? Can pride be replaced by humility?

In 2023, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond is issuing a collection of essays on *The Deadly Sins in Our Time*. Art historian Mårten Snickare writes about Swedish colonial pride, from the seventeenth century to the present day.

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