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Gustavianum Museum, Sweden

*The role of university museums in documenting contemporary science and humanities*

*The Fyris River Sword Project, Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala University*

Museum Gustavianum opened in 1998 as a showcase of Uppsala University. The Museum is situated in the oldest preserved university building, from the 1620s, and with the beautiful Anatomical Theatre on the top of the building. The collections cover art, numismatics, archeology, Egyptology, prehistoric Nordic finds, history of science...

As a University museum, we are working with the PAST, the PRESENT and the FUTURE. In other words, we are working with and promoting ongoing research continuously in what we call 'mini exhibitions', using one showcase in the permanent exhibition hall, or 'hot spot' exhibitions, on our 'hot spot platform' a roll-up, a computer and a small showcase for one object. We invite different departments and scientific fields to display their research – and as a bonus they get trained in exhibition techniques and public engagement (PE). Every third month we arrange a new exhibition often on very contemporary and cutting-edge research. For example, when bird flu was spreading all over the world we made a 'hot spot' exhibition on ongoing DNA hen research.

Museum collections are expensive and for some of us (Medieval universities), with collections going back to medieval ages, the collections are a heavy 'burden'. There are always questions about costs for storage facilities when it comes to budget planning. Deaccessioning non used parts of collections is a 'hot' issue. Museum Gustavianum has huge archeological collections and archeologists tell us that it is important to keep the collections intact; they mention the importance of contexts that can be gathered from within the collections and the danger of getting rid of items that seem unnecessary and only keeping the finest exhibition quality specimens. But to have the necessary funding we need to make the collections useful! And how can we best make use of that which is our most valuable resource? There are of course many options to us.

**The first** and more obvious, are public exhibitions, both permanent exhibitions or smaller rotating temporary exhibitions. This is by far the most important and best use of museum collections.

**A second** possibility is by making collections available for limited use as teaching tools, at university level or otherwise, in order to create an interest in the past. This is possibly an ideal use of the collections as they serve to popularize both the museum and the collections.

**A third** way, as ideal as the second, is to encourage research. This way, the items are used, work is created, money is brought into the museum with researchers and when articles are published, it brings free publicity as well. I will now give an example.

The *Fyris River Sword Project* is a research programme that was initiated in March 2006. The project focuses on several medieval swords that were found hundred years ago in the Fyris River in central Uppsala and are presently under the care of Museum Gustavianum. The goal of the project is to contextualize the swords as much as possible and to facilitate a better understanding both of Uppsala's early history and of the swords themselves. The project team consists of three senior researchers – two archeologists and one medievalist/Latinist.

The project started with articles aimed at raising attention to the swords both among researchers and the public. Another part of the project was to produce an exhibition in the museum.

The museum exhibition, *Swords from Sweden's turbulent infancy*, opened in June 2007 and lasted until January 2008. It was the first time that these particular swords were shown to the public. Armory, weapons, medieval warfare and bones from the medieval battlefield were also displayed in the exhibition. The purpose was to contextualize the swords as much as possible. The exhibition made use of a carefully chosen replica sword and armor so that visitors could benefit from a hands-on experience and thus better understand the swords on display. During the exhibition, three different medieval 'theme days', with popular lectures, medieval activities such as sword fighting, medieval music and a medieval fashion show, were organized. That year, the Museum had the best attendance of any museum in the Uppsala area (47,000 visitors, 170,000 visitors if one includes guests). This exhibition played an important part in making that happen.

More articles are coming and cooperation has been established with several other universities and museums, and specialists like linguists, Latinists and medievalists, are involved. Subjects of future articles will include, among others, metallurgy, historical contextualization of sword inscriptions with religious undertones, the link between medieval European coin stamps and sword inscriptions, as well as popular articles about the Uppsala swords.

This is how just one research project, with very limited funding and some highly motivated and dedicated individuals made our collections of antiquities more visible, accessible and useful – documenting contemporary science and humanity.

## STRESZCZENIE

### *Rola muzeów uniwersyteckich w dokumentacji współczesnej nauki*

Muzeum Gustavianum otwarto w 1998 roku. Będąc muzeum uniwersyteckim, nasz obszar działania nie ogranicza się tylko do przeszłości, lecz nasze zainteresowania ukierunkowane są również na teraźniejszość i przyszłość. Uniwersytet w Uppsali, założony w średniowieczu, zgromadził dużą i drogocenną kolekcję unikalnych eksponatów, którymi muzeum jest „obciążone”. W poniższym artykule zaproponowano trzy metody użyteczne w ocenieniu kosztów tworzenia i utrzymania kolekcji. Artykuł przedstawia również przykładowy projekt badawczy, ukazujący sposób, w jaki wyeksponowano kilka przedmiotów z kolekcji Muzeum Gustavianum.