

The past in history: A study of the perception of antiquity and antiquities during medieval times up to the mid-eighteenth century.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is twofold, on the one hand to discern how prehistory was perceived in Sweden from medieval times up to the mid-eighteenth century, and on the other how antiquities were physically and mentally approached. The study is concentrated on the views of the scholars of the time, but to some extent also popular beliefs. The study is based on published texts as well as archive material and illustrations.

Part I gives a theoretical outline. In order to understand different views on prehistory and antiquities, I emphasise their relations to Christian historiography, with its nuances and change over time. Instead of searching only for characteristics for certain periods, diverging opinions have also been looked for, in order to illuminate the pluralism of interpretation that existed. One significant theoretical inspiration in this study is the ideas of Ludwik Fleck.

In *Part II* questions of how Swedish antiquity was looked upon during the period are explored. It is argued that there were different conceptions of prehistory which on the one hand, and basically, were based on different religious views, and on the other on subjective and on a smaller collective level shared interpretations. The Christian historiography and its influence on the interpretation of Swedish past is also emphasised and exemplified.

Another theme that is looked deeper into is the tradition of perceiving prehistory as a Golden Age, and its link with the so called 'göticism' is stressed. In the final chapters the growing source criticism and the secular view of the past that can be discerned during the second half of the 17th century and early 18th century, is discussed. I point at several factors as being of importance in this process, such as the growing criticism of older authorities, a changed view of mankind and its role in history, an altered view of the run of history (from mundus senescens to a more progressive one), a growing interest in cultural history and in natural law at the expense of the theocracy, and above all the gradual marginalisation of God in history.

In *Part III* the approach to antiquities during the period is explored; what was considered as antiquities, how they were interpreted, what terminology was used, how they were classified and perceived as sources for prehistory, how they were described in words and pictures, what criteria defined 'old age', the growing role of excavations, popular beliefs in the subject matter, etc. As in the rest of the thesis I've searched for characteristics for certain periods and changes through time, but also for diverging opinions. It is also emphasised that the same factors that influenced the conceptions of prehistory also had effect on the interpretations on antiquities.

Keywords: *history of archaeology, antiquity, antiquarianism, Ludwik Fleck, Christian historiography, göticism, Golden Age*

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