

MISCELLANEA

OSCAR MONTELIUS' VISIT TO LITHANIA IN 1876, NECROLITHUANICA, AND THE CREATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE COLLECTION AT THE MUSEUM OF NATIONAL ANTIQUITIES IN STOCKHOLM

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Introduction

In 2007, Linnæus (Carl von Linné) and his disciples are being celebrated all around the world, wherever they were once scientifically active. Another world-famous Swedish systematist was Oscar Montelius (1843–1921), who may well, within the field of archaeology, be compared to Linnæus. Thus, he also merits being remembered during this jubilee.

Montelius travelled widely. He spent several years abroad on archaeological study journeys. He was generally accompanied by his wife Agda (1850–1920, née Reuterskiöld), who acted as a highly qualified assistant and secretary. On their journeys, she kept a careful diary, with innumerable interesting details, most of which are not mentioned in her husband's official travel reports.

To the readers of *Archeologia Baltica* it may come as a surprise that there exists a report on a study journey made in Lithuania by the young Montelius couple in 1876. Their visit took place between 13 and 18 August that year, and is worth some attention, as it contributed substantially to the creation of an international comparative archaeological collection at the Museum of National Antiquities (Statens Historiska Museum) in Stockholm. The reason was that, on this stay, Montelius, quite by chance, took the opportunity to acquire the archaeological collection of the then well-known and recently deceased Lithuanian scholar Carl von Schmith. Among Montelius' acquisitions was also a manuscript called *Necrolithuanica*, with von Schmith's

descriptions and comments on the said collection, and also of the collections in Vilnius. *Necrolithuanica* has recently been published in an interesting commented facsimile edition (von Schmith 2006; Lamm 2007b).

In the following pages I shall present an almost verbatim translation into English of the section of Agda Montelius' diary that deals with the visit to Lithuania. But first, I shall discuss the journey and the creation of the comparative collection.

The journey of 1876 and the von Schmith Collection

According to the protocols of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the museum's acquisition of the collection took place at a suggestion made by Montelius on 21 August 1879 in his account to the Academy of his journey. Having described his acquisitions and argued for the foundation of a comparative collection, Montelius offered the Academy his collection for what he paid for it (Lamm 2007a).

In his account, all the museums, collections and conferences that Montelius had visited on the journey are mentioned. It is apparent that he had not only devoted himself to archaeological studies, but had also been very active as a collector of antiquities. He wrote:

“As far as possible, on the spot, I have tried to get a more complete knowledge about the archaeological literature of the different countries than what is generally possible in other ways. I have also tried to acquire

quite a few smaller and greater archaeological publications, some with great difficulty, as they were not available in the bookshops.”

He continued:

“As a basis for closer studies, I have brought with me notes on some 10,000 archaeological objects kept in the various archaeological collections, as well as about 2,000 drawings executed by myself [in fact, most of them were drawn by his wife] and photographs of these objects. Furthermore, I have succeeded in acquiring, partly by purchase but also as gifts, many antiquities, originals or copies, the latter made of plaster or tin foil. Most of these antiquities are found in Lithuania, where in Kowno I bought an entire, fairly important collection, the owner of which had recently passed away. Most of the plaster casts were acquired in the museums in Copenhagen, Mainz, Munich and Budapest. These casts are often made with great ability, painted, and even at a close distance so closely resembling the originals that they can fully replace them for study.”

Montelius finished his account thus:

“When, one day, it is possible to arrange a museum for comparative archaeological research, I offer the Academy, if it so chooses, to acquire for what I paid for them all the originals and copies I have now collected or will then have collected.”

As has already been mentioned, the Academy accepted Montelius’ offer, and his collection became the basis of the comparative collection of the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm (Statens Historiska Museum). It was inventorised as No 6565. With time, the collection grew considerably, partly by excavations and active collecting abroad, by T.J. Arne, F. Martin and others, in places like Cyprus, the Crimea, Iran, Norway, Siberia and Ukraine. There were even suggestions to start an independent museum for the collection, or to turn the Historical Museum into a universal archaeological museum, a “Swedish Antiquarium” in Arne’s words. These plans were, however, abandoned, and instead the comparative collection was split up, becoming parts of new specialised museums, such as the Mediterranean Museum and the Museum of East Asian Antiquities. But that is another story (Arne 1936; Lamm 2005).

Agda Montelius’ Lithuanian diary

Oscar and Agda arrived in Lithuania by train on 13 August 1876, and left the country on 18 August. Let us now examine the events there as described by Agda in her diary.

August 13

At half past one in the morning we arrived in Vilna. After I had had tea and Oscar meanwhile had seen to the luggage, we took a carriage whose driver insisted on taking us to the Hotel London; however, we insisted, and eventually arrived at the Hotel Europa. Though it was fairly difficult to make ourselves understood in European languages, we got a rather decent room for one rouble and fifty kopecks and went to bed.

In the morning Oscar left to reconnoitre, which kept him very busy. Eventually, he got hold of a certain Dr de Berg from the observatory in the same building as the museum, and a German vicar named Brinck, who was very favourably disposed towards us.

August 14

In the morning Oscar went to Berg, who accompanied him to Dobransky, a member of the museum staff who could show him the exhibitions (the director, Golowat-sky, was away). In the meantime, the Reverend Brinck and a Finnish colonel called Lundh came to see Oscar, a visit he repaid in the afternoon to Brinck’s. He accompanied him about the town, hunting for an illustrated folio by Tyszkiewicz, who founded the collection in Vilna, which had simply been taken from him by the Russians, as they felt he had done his collecting for political purposes. This publication was available neither in the museum nor elsewhere. Brinck came up with Oscar for a while in the evening, and invited us to tea at his house on Tuesday.

August 15

We spent the whole morning working together in the museum. In the afternoon, we played *béziq*. After that, we went to the Brinck family, where we met a lot of people, among others a general with his wife and children, Dr Shachmann (an old and jolly medical military officer), and an officer in the Engineers, Lutzow, a rather decent chap, according to Oscar. Mrs Brinck was kind and nice, but looked very weak: she is expecting a child soon, she already has five, the oldest eight years old!

They talked about a private collection kept in Kowno, three hours’ from here, and wanted Oscar to go there. He felt rather inclined to go when he heard that the collection was for sale and might get destroyed.

August 16

Back working in the museum in the early morning, from whence I left rather soon, not feeling too well because of the time. At two o'clock Oscar returned, quickly deciding to leave for Kowno on the half past two train and *putzweg* he was gone. He inspected the collection and decided to buy it for 120 roubles. Then we went to the Reverend Kluge, who had arranged a great ball to celebrate his wife's birthday. Oscar had the opportunity to impress upon the young ladies a healthy reverence for the ability of Swedish gentlemen to dance the polka. Spoke much with a Baroness Yxkull, a very educated and intelligent woman.

August 17

At half past two in the morning, when new candles were put in the candlesticks and they were having their *abendessen*, he left for the station. At six he appeared at the hotel and went to bed. At ten, however, he was back in the museum, and I too. After finishing our work at two o'clock, we had dinner as usual at the hotel for one rouble a head. After that, Oscar had a nap, and so we played *béziq* until about five when we climbed the mountain to see the Botanical Garden and admire the view. From there we went to bid the Brincks farewell.

Vilna is located in a rather hilly and thus quite beautiful area on the banks of the rivers Vilia and Viteika, the latter dividing in two arms just by the Botanical Garden, then it twists through a high wooded sandy ridge, from the top of which you have the most beautiful view over the town and its surroundings and the broad River Vilia. In general, the whole of the part of Russia that we passed through by rail was extremely ugly, vast deserted plains as far as you could see, only here and there covered with low forest and rarely broken by clumps of higher trees.

August 18

At half past eight in the morning we left the dirty Jewish town of Vilna and the Russian Empire proper. At four we passed the small River Naret and very soon arrived in Lapu, the first Polish station, where we saw our own decent letters again. Polish is written in a nice way, and though it was placed below the Russian Lapy, we were happy to see it. The journey went quickly, as we read, played games, ate chocolate, etc. So we spent the time until we arrived in Warsaw at half past seven.

Agda Montelius' diaries are often entertaining, and offer many otherwise quite forgotten details about the couple's journeys, as well as her husband's work and scholarly contacts. Her narrative about their stay in Lithuania is no exception to that rule. Her account is only marred by the comments on 18 August, seemingly expressing both anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Her diary notes and the other documents in the archives of the Academy offer new and valuable knowledge about early archaeological contacts between Sweden and Lithuania.

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