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The protection of movable cultural property in wartime: Pre-conflict planning in Sweden

Mattias Legnér 

Program in Conservation, Department of Art History, Uppsala Universitet, Visby, Sweden
Email: Mattias.legner@konstvet.uu.se

Abstract

Modern warfare has prompted states to protect collections of cultural property by evacuating them to safe locations at times of war. Building on previously classified documents in archives, inquiries and other sources, this article investigates how planning for such evacuation was carried out in Sweden from 1939 to the 1990s. After the end of the Cold War, existing evacuation plans were finally scrapped. Due to the worsening security situation in the region, Swedish heritage institutions today need to build preparedness anew. It is shown that the evacuation of large volumes of property out of cities for practical reasons never was a realistic scenario, but probably should be restricted to a minimum of carefully selected objects, records and books. The process of selecting, transporting, finding safe locations to take the property to, and determining how to monitor it needs to be carefully planned during peaceful conditions in order to efficiently safeguard the collections in wartime. The relationship between Swedish planning and the 1954 Hague Convention, and how other states can learn from this study, is finally discussed.

Introduction

In modern society, a substantial amount of tangible and movable cultural property is managed by institutions such as museums, archives, and libraries. There is often legislation and policies on how their collections are to be managed and protected from destruction. In the event of an armed conflict, certain policies may apply in order to meet the extraordinary conditions of war. It may be necessary, for instance, to evacuate parts of collections in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of an enemy or to protect them from the risk of destruction or damage. In other cases, collections may be kept safer by storing them *in situ* in specially built shelters.

The importance of protecting cultural property in an armed conflict is stressed in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Hague Convention).¹ The convention was created in the wake of World War II with its immense destruction of cities and illicit removal of cultural property. For many years, the convention did not directly affect protection in Sweden, the country being studied in this

¹ Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 14 May 1954, 249 UNTS 240 (Hague Convention).

article. Sweden participated in the first Hague conference but did not sign the convention until much later. Nevertheless, some of the principal arguments of the Hague Convention are reflected in the plans for the evacuation of collections that took place in Sweden during the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War meant that both civil and military defense was dismantled in a short period of time. Civil contingencies, within which the evacuation of cultural property falls, were largely dismantled. As Russian troops marched into Ukraine in 2014, this development was finally broken, and the Swedish Parliament decided to begin rebuilding the country's civil and military defense.² The present study, then, is relevant as it is a response to a need for better knowledge on how the evacuation of collections has been planned in the past and on what an international community can learn from it.

Aim

This article analyzes for the first time the regulation and planning concerning the evacuation of cultural property in the event of armed conflict in Sweden from World War II to the 1990s. Sweden did take part in the negotiations leading to the Hague Convention, but the government did not ratify the convention until 30 years later. During the Cold War, the Swedish government decided to develop a national policy independently of international development, whilst, at the same time, being aware of the convention's existence. Between 1939 and 1995, the military threats against Sweden changed several times, meaning that the shifting context of international security also affected planning.

Sweden is not unique when it comes to its planning efforts, nor for its hesitation in signing and implementing the Hague Convention. It is argued here that a wider international community may learn from the Swedish case. By studying the aims of Sweden's planning, how national legislation and policies emerged, and to what degree they related to the Hague Convention, we can better understand the pros and cons of the evacuation of cultural property. The article looks into planning concerning the collections of public museums, archives and libraries, but it does not include the protection of churches and their inventories since the Church of Sweden is an organization of its own partially guided by specific legislation.³

After a brief overview and critical discussion of current research, the sources of the article will be presented, followed by a description of the context in which the Hague Convention was constructed and to what extent it applies to this article. An overview of Swedish legislation and guidelines from 1939 until 1995 will provide the necessary background information to understand the rest of the article, and this is followed by a brief description of the military threats against Sweden that were identified in this period and how they influenced national security policies. The second half of the article is structured according to three critical themes: (1) prioritization and selection dealing with how to value and list collections; (2) the issue of establishing bombproof shelters for collections; and (3) the issue of evacuation versus *in situ* protection. These themes are interesting since they do not only refer to a specific national context but also should be of general significance to the international community. A concluding section discusses to what extent the Swedish experience may be particular but also how it relates to an international context.

Previous research on the evacuation of cultural property

There is a body of scholarly work on the issue of the evacuation of cultural property in European countries during World War II. Before the war's outbreak, national authorities

² Försvarspolitisk inriktning: Sveriges försvar 2016–2020, Prop. 2014/15:109, Stockholm, 2014.

³ About the protection of Swedish churches in World War II, see Legnér 2021; Legnér 2022a, 2022c.

throughout Europe began preparing for war by taking protective measures such as the evacuation of collections, the *in situ* protection of architectural elements, and the removal of stained glass windows from churches.⁴ These actions represented a hierarchy of heritage values in the sense that the most cherished treasures were subjected to protective measures, whereas the bulk of movable property was not protected against air raids. In Britain, some museum collections were taken from London to country houses and quarries.⁵ The same process took place in France, where castles in the Loire Valley were used for storing large amounts of art from the Louvre.⁶ Switzerland, which was a neutral country like Sweden, undertook the vast evacuation of stained glass from its parish churches to a central collection point.⁷ In Nazi Germany, however, the evacuation of museum collections was seen as a defeatist action that could demoralize the population and was not allowed until late in the war.⁸ In the Soviet Union, museum collections were hastily evacuated eastward to Siberia after the German assault in 1941.⁹ Italy applied a strategy of *in situ* protection of most archives and museum collections until the Allied invasion of 1943, when many collections were evacuated to countryside castles and abbeys.¹⁰

If quite a lot has been written about cultural property protection in World War II, there have been very few studies of how it was planned during the Cold War (1947–91).¹¹ This lack of attention may be explained by the fact that the Cold War in Europe did not necessitate any real evacuation of cultural property as well as by the secrecy surrounding much of the evacuation planning. There is, however, reason to study this period since the threat changed from a conventional air war to, ultimately, nuclear war and demanded responses in terms of specifically built, bombproof shelters for art and archives as well as extensive evacuation of cultural property.

Sources

The degree of secrecy surrounding evacuation planning in Sweden makes the researcher heavily dependent on written records kept in public archives. The planning of evacuation was an issue handled by the management of museums, archives, and libraries, which meant that knowledge was restricted to a small number of people at the very top of these organizations. The reason for such secrecy was in general the fear that criminals and agents of other countries could take advantage of the information if it was spread outside of a small circle. The same argument is still raised by many as the motivation behind the continued secrecy of evacuation planning.

One challenge of studying this topic, then, is the degree of secrecy that has characterized evacuation planning. According to Swedish law, records of public authorities can be kept classified for a maximum of 40 years given that their publicity would risk national security.¹² This law and its predecessor have been used to classify public records relating to evacuation and other safety measures. Records concerning the Cold War up until the early 1970s were recently made available for research, which has meant that the author is the first researcher going through these documents with a scholarly purpose. It should be noted that no

⁴ See, e.g., Nicholas 1994; Lambourne 2001; Brey 2009; Campbell Karlsgodt 2011; Bushart, Gasior, and Janatková 2016.

⁵ McCamley 2003, 81.

⁶ Campbell Karlsgodt 2011, 71.

⁷ Legnér 2022c, 131.

⁸ Müller-Kelwing 2021, 139.

⁹ Maddox 2011, 609.

¹⁰ Nezzo 2011.

¹¹ O'Keefe 2006 is an exception but does not offer an in-depth study of any country.

¹² Offentlighets – och sekretesslag, Doc. SFS 2009:400, 2009, ch. 15, para. 2.

currently classified information is revealed in this article since none of the records relate to current evacuation planning. The sources used here consist of public records (letters, non-printed reports, inventories, and plans) produced by authorities as well as published documents (reports, inquiries, guidelines) and different kinds of legal texts (acts, regulations, ordinances).

Several archives were used in order to cover the historical development of pre-conflict planning. The most important was the Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet (ATA), which is located in Stockholm. The ATA is the archive of the National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet or RAÄ), the national agency monitoring the implementation of legislation concerning cultural property. References to archival records are made explicit in the text and are thus not found in the footnotes or the reference list. ÄA 3 means Ämbetsarkiv 3 and ÄA 4 means Ämbetsarkiv 4. They constitute different parts of the great ATA collections and partially contain records from the same period. Another archive used was the Military Archives (Krigsarkivet or KrA) and the archive of the National Museum (NM), which is the government-funded national museum of art and design.

Protection of movable cultural property in the Hague Convention

When it comes to movable cultural property, the Hague Convention includes “works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above.”¹³ The parties that have signed the convention have an obligation “to prepare in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property situated within their own territory against the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict, by taking such measures as they consider appropriate.”¹⁴ The convention furthermore makes some provisions for the establishment of specially protected refuges and how the transportation of cultural property is to be secured in conflict, but these rules have so far not been tested.¹⁵

Even though Sweden participated in the Hague conference in 1954, the Swedish Parliament did not adopt the convention until 1984.¹⁶ Adoption was considered too costly for the government in the 1950s (ÄA 3, vol. F14:8, Gösta Selling, 10 September 1956). The armed forces were furthermore skeptical to ratification, arguing that Sweden already was committed to the Hague Regulations of 1899 and 1907 Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land, which provided some protection for historic monuments and scientific centers.¹⁷ For these reasons, adoption of the convention was delayed. In the mid-1970s, however, Parliament decided that it was time to reconsider the issue, and the RAÄ was given the task of inquiring into the consequences of adoption.¹⁸ In 1985, the RAÄ finally reported on the issue, supporting Swedish ratification of the Hague Convention (ÄA 4, vol. F21:1, 29 November 1985, 16).

¹³ Hague Convention, Art. 1.

¹⁴ Hague Convention, Art. 3.

¹⁵ Pollard 2020, 668.

¹⁶ Konvention och tilläggsprotokoll om skydd för kulturell egendom i händelse av väpnad konflikt Haag, Doc. SÖ 1985:7, 14 May 1954; see also Legnér 2022b, 125; Om vissa frågor rörande Sveriges samarbete med UNESCO, Sveriges riksdag, Prop. 1983/84:108, Stockholm, 1983.

¹⁷ Hague Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land 1907, 187 CTS 227. About the Hague conferences, see O’Keefe 2006, 22.

¹⁸ Utrikesutskottets betänkande i anledning av motion om anslutning till UNESCO-konventionen om skydd för kulturföremål vid väpnad konflikt, Doc. UU 1974:14, 1974.

Changing threats from World War II to the Cold War

During World War II, the destruction of a nation's cultural heritage caused by air war was a potential threat contemplated by experts and decision makers throughout Europe.¹⁹ In areas that were worst hit by military operations, such as cities in Germany and Italy between 1943 and 1945, bombing from the air devastated vast urban areas.²⁰ At the outbreak of the war, all of the Scandinavian countries sought to remain neutral, but only Sweden succeeded in this goal. Sweden was not unique in the way it organized its air raid protection but, instead, was inspired by the German model.²¹ Air raid protection was divided into two sections, one side that was privately organized and one that was organized by the state or by municipalities.

The international relations between the former allies quickly deteriorated toward the end of the war, resulting in the division of Europe between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. Starting in 1946, the Pentagon spoke of a future World War III as “a total war of destructiveness and intensity never yet seen.”²² Sweden was geographically positioned between these two blocs but aimed to remain independent of any security alliance. This required the country to build a strong civil and military defense on its own. In 1949, the Soviet Union declared that it had developed nuclear weapons, which meant that a future war between the East and the West could become extremely destructive. The period from 1948 to 1951 was the first time after World War II that Sweden prepared for war and when heritage institutions seriously contemplated possible future scenarios.²³

In the 1950s and 1960s, then, Swedish civil and military defense planned for the possibility of an extensive air war and even a nuclear war. As a consequence of the rapid urbanization following World War II, the challenge of protecting the urban population of Sweden became daunting. There were never enough shelters built in the cities to protect more than a small portion of the population.²⁴ Instead, most of the urban population would need to be evacuated long distances in the event of war, which was basically the same strategy that was applied to the protection of collections in the 1950s and 1960s. The organization of civil and military defense weakened as the threat of a Soviet assault on Sweden vanished in the 1980s. In the following decade, civil defense was completely scrapped and was followed by some years of confusion about what should be the objective of Swedish defense strategies.²⁵

Swedish legislation and policies on the evacuation of cultural property

The first act permitting the evacuation of cultural property in times of war was adopted in December 1939. It did not specify which collections were to be considered, except that government agencies with “archival records, collections and other objects” that should be evacuated needed to make plans for this possibility.²⁶ A plan included a list of the items to be evacuated, making provisions for their packing and transportation, deciding what staff would oversee the collections at its refuge, and making agreements with the owner of the site where the collection was taken. If a collection could not be evacuated, it should still be

¹⁹ Lambourne 2001, 42.

²⁰ Overy 2013, chs. 2, 5.

²¹ Bennesved 2021, 27.

²² Overy 2013, 429.

²³ For a general overview of Swedish preparedness at the time, see Sjölin 2014, 114.

²⁴ Sjölin 2014, 83.

²⁵ Engberg 2020.

²⁶ Med förslag till lag om undanförsel och förstöring, m.m., Doc. SFS 1939:948, 1939, para. 1.

protected as much as was possible.²⁷ Since the 1939 act was not very clear on how decisions regarding evacuation planning were to be made it did not work very well. All responsibility and all costs were assigned to the institution managing a collection. In 1944, a new act, the *Civilförsvarslagen*, was adopted with the intention of better coordinating civil and military defense.²⁸ The evacuation of cultural property was firmly placed within the duties of civil defense, but, for a long time, the issue of how to organize evacuation remained unresolved since the new act did not include collections in any clear manner and because the act of December 1939 remained valid.

The organization of civil defense in Sweden was the subject of a public inquiry in the 1950s. The final report included some suggestions for how to handle the issue of evacuation of cultural property.²⁹ Most importantly, it was suggested that the 1939 act be replaced with a new act that could give guidance on when evacuation was to be planned. All actors, including the state, municipal organizations, and private individuals, should be forced to protect valuable collections and to cooperate with National Board of Civil Defense (*Civilförsvarsstyrelsen*).³⁰ The agency was to be aided by a council where representatives of some of the largest heritage institutions were included. This council was installed and put to work in the 1960s.

The inquiry also suggested the building of bombproof shelters for collections, which clearly was a response to the wishes of the heritage institutions. One proposal forwarded and most strongly argued for by the RAÄ was the introduction of a small force of heritage specialists placed inside the military structure, inspired by the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives (MFAA) program of the allied forces in World War II. The director of antiquities was fully aware of the provisions of the Hague Convention, demanding that military forces should have specialists on heritage.³¹ He had been in contact with British experts inquiring about their experiences from the last war (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 25 April 1951). A draft instruction for these specialists produced by the RAÄ stated that each regional museum director (*landsantikvarie*) should be given this task in war and within his geographical area. The task was to inform the armed forces about cultural property that should be evacuated or protected in other ways and to cooperate with the police in issues regarding cultural property crimes (ÅA 3, vol. F 14:5, 16 February 1951). This proposal was partially carried out when a central function was introduced in 1959 to educate military personnel about the importance of respecting the natural and historic environment (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 11 and 27 February 1959).

As a result of this inquiry, the National Board of Civil Defense was ultimately divested of the cultural property issue. Instead, this issue was moved to a new national agency of economic defense. Beginning in 1962, economic defense was managed by the National Board of Economic Defense (*Överstyrelsen för ekonomisk försvarsberedskap* or ÖEF), an agency responsible for securing the supplies needed in society during war.³² Beginning in the 1960s, a divide began to develop in the war-time planning of evacuation. As a consequence of the inquiry on civil defense, the Act on Evacuation and Destruction was introduced.³³ For the first time, it became clear that cultural property belonged to the corpus of resources that

²⁷ Med förslag till lag om undanförsel och förstöring, para. 8.

²⁸ *Civilförsvarslag*, Doc. SFS 1944:536, 1944. About the act, see also Legnér 2022c, s. 388.

²⁹ *Civilförsvarets organisation: huvudbetänkande*, Doc. SOU 1958:13, Esselte, Stockholm, s. 192–98.

³⁰ *Civilförsvarets organisation*, s. 193.

³¹ Hague Convention, Art. 7(2).

³² Sjölin 2014, 116.

³³ *Lag om undanförsel och förstöring*, Doc. SFS 1961:655, 1961.

was crucial to society and needed to be protected in war.³⁴ This had not been stated clearly in the 1939 act or in the Civil Defense Act of 1944. A survey conducted by the RAÄ at this time showed that museums would rely on routines used in World War II. The result demonstrated that no planning for evacuation had taken place in these institutions between 1945 and 1960 (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 20 April 1960).

As a consequence of the new act, the ÖEF issued guidelines on how to plan for the evacuation of collections, which were entitled the *Anvisningar rörande planläggning för undanförsel av arkivalier, böcker, konstverk och kulturhistoriska föremål (Anv Ark)*.³⁵ The purpose of the *Anv Ark* was to clarify how the act should be implemented and how responsibilities were divided. The ÖEF should cooperate with the counties about the need for refuges but would also collect and approve plans from institutions managing cultural property. The preparation of an evacuation plan comprised a number of tasks to be solved, including the use of available staff, the procurement of packaging, and the planning of transportation.³⁶ The evacuation plan to be filled out by an institution was a table containing information on the collections to be included, the address where they were to be taken, how much time evacuation was expected to take, and basic information about the premises where the items would be brought and the personnel responsible for supervision at the new site.³⁷

By the 1980s, the *Anv Ark* had become obsolete due to a reduced level of military threat against Sweden. Provisional guidelines were developed that would replace the previous set, and these were supposed to be followed by more permanent guidelines.³⁸ The reduced threat of war at this time led to the integration of civil and economic defense. As a result, the ÖEF was replaced by a new agency, the National Board of Civil Contingency (*Överstyrelsen för civil beredskap* or *ÖCB*) in 1986. There was now uncertainty of how meaningful it would be to continue planning for the evacuation of collections in the event of armed conflict. The provisional guidelines did not result in any new plans, and the ÖCB finally instructed institutions to scrap their outdated plans and to wait for new instructions (RAÄ, Case no. 1529, 6 March 1989). The Ministry of Defense took over responsibility for a new set of instructions, which were issued in 1992.³⁹ These guidelines were based on a new Act on Evacuation and Destruction adopted the same year,⁴⁰ which finally resulted in an ordinance issued the following year.⁴¹

Since the ordinance did not give any instructions for how to prioritize and organize evacuation, the provisional guidelines remained the most extensive instructions available. The provisional guidelines instructed that all planning should be superficial and thus not carried out in detail as had been the case with the *Anv Ark* (RAÄ, Case no. 106-3025-1995, 9 June 1995). It was argued that more comprehensive planning was not meaningful since civil defense was dissolving rapidly and soon would be dismantled. In the mid-1990s, the ÖCB issued an extremely brief guidance on the evacuation of property that did not even mention cultural property.⁴² This was a symptom of the lack of civil contingencies in Swedish society following the Cold War. At this point, the RAÄ instructed heritage institutions only to make

³⁴ Lag om undanförsel och förstöring. The proposal was based on Kungl. Maj:ts proposition till riksdagen med förslag till lag om undanförsel och förstöring, m.m., Prop. 1961:202, 1961.

³⁵ Överstyrelsen för ekonomisk försvarsberedskap, *Anvisningar rörande planläggning för undanförsel av arkivalier, böcker, konstverk och kulturhistoriska föremål*, Stockholm (*Anv Ark*).

³⁶ *Anv Ark*, B:II:4.

³⁷ *Anv Ark*, Appendix 6.

³⁸ Överstyrelsen för ekonomisk försvarsberedskap (ÖEF) 1984.

³⁹ Undanförsel och förstöring, Doc. Ds 1992:27, Försvarsdepartementet, Stockholm, 15.

⁴⁰ Lag om undanförsel och förstöring, Doc. SFS 1992:1402, 1992.

⁴¹ Förordning om undanförsel och förstöring, Doc. SFS 1993:243, 1993.

⁴² Föreskrifter av Överstyrelsen för civil beredskap om undanförsel och förstöring, Doc. 1995:6, 1995.

lists of objects to be evacuated upon the event of an armed conflict. Planning had previously been much more detailed in the sense that packaging had been prepared, lists of property compiled, and the administration of each county had made agreements with the owners of properties to which the collections would be evacuated.

Prioritization and selection

In the event of a war, all collections of the museums, archives, and libraries of a country cannot be evacuated to safe places. There have to be priorities made of what to evacuate first and what has to be left in ordinary storage spaces until further notice. In reality, most of the state collections were never planned for evacuation since there were simply far too many objects, books, and records and not enough safe spaces to bring them to. As mentioned above, the evacuation of collections was already planned at the outset of the Cold War. In 1950, the National Board of Civil Defense instructed institutions to divide their collections into three categories. Category I would include items that should be taken to bombproof shelters in the immediate vicinity for as long as they were needed for the operation of an institution. In war, museums, archives, and libraries would gradually cease their operations until they were shut down completely. Once an institution had ceased to run, Category I items would be brought to a place outside of the war zone. Category II consisted of items that did not have designated spaces in shelters and needed to be evacuated further away, outside the reach of bombers. Category III, finally, included collections to be protected *in situ* – for instance, in the cellar of a museum building (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 5 April 1954).

Evidently, the heritage institutions had great difficulty restricting their need for evacuation. Curators understood collections as a whole and as being irreplaceable in their entirety (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 22 December 1950). When the state museums, the Royal Library, and the National Archive had made their evacuation plans, it turned out that the need for Category I space was three times the available space in bombproof shelters dedicated to cultural property within the city (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 21 June 1951, 6). Soon, one of the shelters was excluded since it was not safe enough, leading to a 20 percent decrease in available space. In total, 12,600 cubic meters were missing. The Swedish History Museum, for instance, wished to evacuate less than 20 cubic meters of their most valuable collections far away. Many more items, encompassing roughly 350 cubic meters, were supposed to be stored in an underground shelter in Skansenberget, located in Stockholm, and an equal volume of items was to be sent to the royal castle of Gripsholm west of the capital. Another 400 cubic meters of items were to be stored in the local shelter of the museum, which was not bombproof (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 14 August 1950).

The Swedish History Museum was just one example of an institution that had trouble limiting its need for evacuation. No less than one-third of its collections were to be moved out of the museum upon the threat of war (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, November 1951). In practice, every institution developed its own principles. The National Archive included as much as half of its collections as Category I items (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 30 June 1951). The Royal Library wished to evacuate all of its manuscripts and all books printed before 1700. The National Museum of Art argued that all “artworks of great national value as well as foreign works of the highest international class” should be listed as Category I.⁴³ Except for state institutions, there were also privately run museums in Stockholm, such as the art gallery Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde. The gallery appealed to the government to be included in the evacuation

⁴³ Anv Ark, Appendixes 7–10.

plans, but there was simply no space available in bombproof shelters (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 9 February 1951).

Institutions located outside of Stockholm did not fare better when it came to available shelters. The university libraries in Uppsala and Lund contain great collections of manuscripts and rare prints. In Uppsala, however, the library calculated that only 2 percent of its collection could be sheltered (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 21 June 1951, 12). The need for evacuation was never matched by the building of new bombproof shelters. According to the new act of 1961, state institutions would make inventories of collections to be evacuated, but they were expected to refrain from any excesses.⁴⁴ At this time, the directors seem to have sobered up compared to 10 years earlier and realized that the selection process needed to be severely restricted from the outset (ÅA 3, vol. F14:9, 20 November 1961, 5).

Shortly following the new act, the Anv Ark was developed to give more precise guidance and to balance the need of the different institutions against the availability of shelters. The apparent discrepancy between the needs for evacuation and the availability of transports and shelters was partially caused by these guidelines, which did not specify how to make priorities when designing evacuation plans. The volume that each institution wished to evacuate was to be decided by the ÖEF, the RAÄ, and the two institutions in combination. This meant that each institution independently surveyed its collections and decided its needs, ultimately resulting in relatively large volumes of collections to be evacuated. The ÖEF wished to see an “extremely restricted selection,” but this demand was never translated into volumes or mass, a fact that impeded efficient planning. The agency argued that “only those records or collections should be evacuated, that after a strict assessment of their importance to the public are in need of better shelter than can be offered at the storage site.”⁴⁵ According to the Förordning om undanförsel och förstöring, it was the task of ÖEF to issue precise instructions – there was no one else who could do that. However, such a critical assessment and adaptation of the evacuation plans was never carried out.

By the mid-1980s, the Cold War threat against Sweden had largely dissolved, and planning for nuclear war that could destroy the urban centers was no longer needed. The ÖEF established provisional instructions for collection managers that were intended to replace Anv Ark. In these instructions, the Hague Convention was briefly mentioned since Sweden had just ratified the convention.⁴⁶ The selection was still supposed to be very restricted, but the dilemma of how to make a realistic selection had not disappeared. The instruction on selection now stated: “Only such objects shall be selected that are of a great and unique value to the preservation of the nation’s historic, cultural and spiritual heritage, or for making reconstruction and the rebuilding of significant functions of society possible after a war.”⁴⁷

The principle for selecting collections and dividing them into different categories of priority was changed. Contrary to the plans made in the 1950s and 1960s, nothing was to be evacuated a long distance. The instruction said that property should still be divided into three categories according to their value to national cultural heritage, but it also included a detailed statement on how each category should be protected. Category I, then, consisted of objects that should be protected better *in situ*, for instance, by building a shelter around them. These were objects that were difficult to move, such as large stones or furniture. Category II were objects that should be moved to a less exposed location in the building, away from windows and, if possible, to the cellar or bottom floor.⁴⁸ Category III, lastly,

⁴⁴ Anv Ark, B:II:3.

⁴⁵ Förordning om undanförsel och förstöring, Doc. SFS 1961:656, 1961, para. 16.

⁴⁶ ÖEF 1984, ch. 8, s. 60, 32.

⁴⁷ ÖEF 1984, ch. 8, s 57, 31.

⁴⁸ ÖEF 1984, ch. 8, s 59, 31.

included objects that should be moved to a better-protected building in the immediate vicinity. Lists of collections according to these principles were to be established by the institutions, and packaging was to be arranged already in peace time. The dilemmas of the Cold War, then, were to be resolved by giving up the idea of evacuating large volumes of objects to bombproof shelters or shelters outside of the war zone and by protecting as much as possible *in situ*.

Building bombproof refuges

During the early years of World War II, a large underground shelter was built inside the large and rocky hill of Skansen (Skansenberget) in eastern Stockholm. Several museums were located very close to this shelter, the Swedish History Museum and Nordiska Museet being the two most important ones. The shelter began to be used in January 1942 (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 26 March 1952). Some collections were brought there, but only an extremely limited share of the collections of Stockholm museums could be sheltered there. The Skansenberget shelter continued to be used for storing collections after the end of the war (ÅA 3, vol. F14:8). At the same time, the Stockholm city archive gained a vast, bombproof storage space for its collections.⁴⁹ Both of these underground structures show the significance given to the safekeeping of elite objects and public archives in Stockholm during the war.

After the war, there were attempts to learn from the protective measures that had been taken, especially in Britain and Germany. During study visits, the historian Nils Hj. Holmberg gathered information about how British archives had been working on evacuation and shelters. Upon his return, he suggested the building of bombproof shelters adjacent to archival buildings. The National Archive, located in a late nineteenth-century building above ground, was “misplaced in the center of national authorities and just a few metres from the national railway.”⁵⁰ This was a strong reason for moving it further away from the city center, where the archive was located very close to the parliament, government offices, and the royal palace.⁵¹ These were buildings expected to be bombed already from the start of a war. Not just archives and museums but also libraries had proven to be at great risk during the war in Europe, with the complete destruction of many collections. The head librarian of the Uppsala University library suggested extensive microfilming of Swedish books and public records as well as the introduction of suburban book depots. In this way, large collections could be moved away from the exposed city center.⁵²

As a consequence of the rapidly increasing tensions between the East and West in 1948–49, state museums and archives started to prepare for evacuation. The government assigned the National Board of Civil Defense, the director of antiquities, and the director of the National Archive to develop a program for protecting collections in the event of war. Their most elaborate suggestion was to build more underground shelters for collections. The lack of any better protection than these ordinary storage areas was frustrating to many directors. One conclusion of the inquiry was that a decommissioned mine centrally located in Sweden should be turned into a shelter. If this was done, the elite collections of museums and archives could be brought there when necessary (ÅA 4, vol. F21:1, 12 December 1952). In addition to the mine, it would also be necessary to build shelters inside the existing institution buildings since some pieces of artwork were so fragile that they could not be transported far.⁵³

⁴⁹ Hedberg 2002, 152.

⁵⁰ Holmberg 1950, 145.

⁵¹ Holmberg 1950, 146–49.

⁵² Kleberg 1950, 152.

⁵³ Civilförsvarets organisation, 197.

The idea of adapting a mine was never realized, most likely due to the costs involved. There may also have been problems keeping a stable indoor climate. Experience drawn from World War II showed that artworks and archives could not just be carted off into underground spaces; there needed to be technology in place guaranteeing a suitable climate.⁵⁴ The biggest project for improving the protection of collections carried out during the Cold War was the construction of a new building for the National Archive, largely based on the idea of Holmberg. This meant moving the archive from the very center of the city to its outskirts and placing it underground. The new structure had six floors almost completely embedded in rock and below sea level. The underground levels were built as a freestanding tower structure below ground that would be resilient to a hit from a nuclear bomb. Protecting the collections that constituted the institutional memory of the Swedish state against a direct hit by nuclear bombs was the primary aim of this underground structure.

Compared to the National Archive, museums in Stockholm could not hope for any new bombproof shelters. The City Museum, however, was located just next to a decommissioned part of the metro. A shelter was built inside the tunnel for the elite items of the museum's collection.⁵⁵ During peacetime, the space was to be used for storing objects. Very soon, however, this shelter turned out to be too small, and its climate was not suitable. After a few years, the museum changed its mind and moved parts of its collection to a ground-level storage in the harbor area.⁵⁶ Apart from the brand new structure for the National Archive, the already existing shelter in Skansenberget was made considerably larger. The vast majority of museum and library collections in Stockholm, however, would need to remain in their buildings in case of a war due to the lack of transportation (ÅA 3, vol. F14:9, 30 March 1971).

Evacuation versus *in situ* protection

During World War II, two approaches to protection would be used in many countries, including Sweden. One focused on the protection of heritage objects on site, while the second one entailed evacuation to safe places (ÅA 3, vol. F14:2, 23 October 1939). The second approach involved evacuation and was built on ideas associated with how an air war would develop. Cities, harbors, and railway junctions would become the primary targets of an enemy air force.⁵⁷ If collections could be taken to smaller towns further inland or even to the countryside, they would be safer there, even if these locations themselves did not necessarily offer better conditions for safekeeping.

The plan for evacuation rested on collections being moved to monumental buildings owned by the government and located far from the capital and at some distance from the coast. State-owned castles with medieval origins were used since they were accessible, contained large spaces, and could be guarded. As some observers pointed out already in the interwar years, they also created risks, not least fire hazards (KrA, Luftskyddskommittén för offentliga samlingar, 29 November 1929).

No bombproof shelters had been built with the purpose of housing collections, so there really was no other option than using the castles of Gripsholm, Vadstena, and

⁵⁴ Pettersson 1943.

⁵⁵ "Utlåtande angående anslag för ett atombombsäkert luftskyddsrum för stadsmuseets elitsamlingar," Doc. Utl. 319 år 1964, 2562, Stockholms stadsfullmäktige.

⁵⁶ Wingren 1976, 79–82.

⁵⁷ Legnér 2022c, 39.

Läckö for housing parts of the elite collections of the state museums (KrA, Luftskydds-kommittén för offentliga samlingar, H6:12/1939). The elite items comprised roughly 1 percent of the collections. The rest had to be stored in the museum buildings, or close to them, for the duration of the war. The risks associated with evacuation would be evaluated before any action was taken since they could be substantial. Among such risks were the subjection of fragile objects to changes in relative humidity or temperature that could harm them. Furthermore, there could be accidents occurring during loading or evacuation or when moving objects to locations that risked being bombed or catching fire (ÅA 3, vol. F14:1, 8 November 1939). Local museums had also evacuated collections to parish churches, but these experiences were mixed. In some instances, everything had gone well, but, in other instances, documents had been damaged by the humidity, textiles had been damaged by mold, objects had disappeared (presumably stolen), and some had been damaged during transportation (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 5 February 1951). Evacuation had worked best in cases when it had been planned carefully before being carried out. If it was carried out in haste, museums realized that the risks could be considerable (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 5 February 1951).

Considering the risk of an invasion of Stockholm and the lack of local shelters, the Swedish History Museum argued in 1949 that complete evacuation was the ideal despite the considerable risks associated with this action. The director described a scenario in which the capital would fall at an early stage of a war following intensive air raids. Complete evacuation was however unrealistic. Large objects, such as stones of different kinds, would need to be left *in situ* but could be laid down with inscriptions facing the ground, and covered with gravel (ÅA 4, vol. F21:3, 19 November 1949). What made the prospects of evacuation even more grim was the fact that Stockholm museums had handed over large parts of the Skansenberget shelter to other parties after World War II. Now, the armed forces were renting parts of it for storing equipment. It seemed unlikely that museums could quickly regain these lost spaces if the city was threatened. An alternative option was described by the museum director. Since Stockholm was likely to fall early in a war, the elite collection should be evacuated to the western-most part of Sweden once the events reached a stage called *skymningsläge* (twilight mode), which was when Sweden would be neither at war nor at peace. In this situation, the director argued, it would still be possible to carry out evacuation. If also the western parts of Sweden were about to fall, some of the most precious objects should be evacuated abroad to Britain.

The director of the ATA came to a similar conclusion. Large parts of the collection of manuscripts and books needed to be evacuated out of Stockholm to a place outside of the war zone. The building where they were to be taken should be isolated, guarded, and heated. He declared himself willing to take the risk that the war zone would change and suddenly include the evacuated collections. Evacuation would be cumbersome and time-consuming, and, for that reason, it had to be initiated very early in a conflict (ÅA 4, vol. F21:3, 11 August 1950). One place where archives were planned to be evacuated was the medieval castle of Gripsholm, located west of Stockholm. Transportation there from Stockholm could be carried out by boat or using trucks. An evident downside was that the castle was not far from the capital and could easily be reached by bombers (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 13 February 1951).

Collections outside of Stockholm most often had to be planned for protection *in situ* since there were not shelters to bring them to. A survey carried out by the Swedish History Museum in 1960 showed that most museums would act precisely as they had done in World War II (ÅA 3, vol. F14:9, survey results). The museums thought that these often very simple routines had worked well in relation to the available resources. There were in most cases no

bombproof shelters to move objects to, so the most valuable items and archives would generally just be moved to the basement of the building in order to offer some protection against aerial attacks. For instance, the unique seventeenth-century collections of Skokloster palace would need to stay in their place north of Stockholm but would be guarded more closely (ÅA 3, vol. F14:9, 20 November 1961, 4). Another argument against large-scale evacuation was the need for museums to stay open to the public for as long as possible. In war time, it would be important for the moral of civil society that museums, libraries, and similar institutions could offer some distraction from the psychological pressures of war and act as places of gathering (ÅA 3, vol. F14:9, 17 November 1962).

The level of ambition for institutions located in Stockholm was much higher. In the long run, the level proved to be unrealistic since there would not just be a shortage of shelters in the event of an armed conflict but also of vehicles, fuel, and crews necessary for transportation. In the mid-1960s, the Ministry of Defense finally declared that collections would not be possible to evacuate from the capitol in an emergency. Priority had to be given to the evacuation of the population and military transports (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, March 1965). This circumstance certainly meant that planning had to be adjusted and that collections would need to stay put in Stockholm.

Interestingly, institutions did not accept the conclusion of the ministry but continued to work according to the 1964 guidelines. Large volumes would still need to be evacuated from Stockholm since almost nothing had been done to increase the space of shelters in the city that would be available for museums and archives (ÅA 3, vol. F14:9, 10 July 1967). According to the Anv Ark, every state institution should design its own evacuation plan, despite the discouraging message from the Ministry of Defense (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, submitted plans). The RAÄ still expected institutions to evacuate some of their collections in case Stockholm was to be emptied of its population. The Skansenberget shelter, in that case, would not be possible to use (ÅA 3, vol. F14:5, 31 March 1965).

By the beginning of 1973, the work had progressed so far that the County Administrative Board of Stockholm was able to present a comprehensive plan for the evacuation of the state museums (ÅA 3, vol. F14:9, 2 February 1973). It was the task of the county to coordinate the planning of these institutions. Most of the Stockholm collections to be evacuated were to be taken to one manor located just outside of the city, Lennartsnäs in Upplands-Bro. Another manor in the same area, Hätunaholm, would also be used. There was also Vadstena castle located further to the south of Stockholm. This site had housed collections from the National Museum of Art and the National Archive during World War II. The castle would need to be used again since it was available, was owned by the government, and could not be replaced with a bombproof shelter.

Modern shelters were still not available in the 1970s. Instead, the institutions were planning to reuse very old and often very badly heated, or unheated, buildings located in the countryside or just outside smaller towns. The old concept of making use of old masonry structures such as castles, churches, manors, and mills was abandoned in order to find buildings where the risk of fire was minimal.⁵⁸ During World War II, these types of buildings – palaces, castles, and manors – had often been requisitioned by the military in order to house headquarters and officers or to use them for storing military equipment or training personnel.⁵⁹ The records do not tell how these buildings were to be safeguarded once they had received the collections or how hostile military forces would be informed about these refuges and the need to protect them from military operations.

⁵⁸ Anv Ark, Appendix 5.

⁵⁹ Legnér 2022c, 320–22, 385.

Conclusions

According to the Hague Convention, museums, libraries, archives, and refuges containing cultural property can be assigned protection from military operations.⁶⁰ For Sweden, the convention has been of limited significance for the issue of evacuation and use of refuges, but since the mid-1980s, it has served to give the provisions for evacuation a basic level of legitimacy. According to the Hague Convention, cultural property should be protected from military operations unless there is “imperative military necessity.”⁶¹ Some states have argued that lists of cultural property should be submitted to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which then should transmit them to all parties that have signed the convention. Examples of this can be found in Switzerland as well as in Croatia, which during the Croatian War of Independence submitted lists of all its cultural property to the headquarters of the Yugoslav National Army.⁶²

In Sweden, evacuation plans have been kept secret in order not to publicize information about the evacuation of cultural property or the whereabouts of refuges. This was the routine in Sweden and elsewhere – for instance, in Britain during World War II.⁶³ Since Sweden did not sign the convention until 1984, the state was not required to make such information known to UNESCO or other contracting parties. Neither was there any way for the Swedish public to become informed about what cultural property was selected for evacuation. This meant that a very small group of museum and archive directors could decide, very much on their own, which objects and records were to be given extra protection in war. The advantages of making depots known were regarded as much less than the disadvantages. Even if it could be advantageous to make them known to an enemy in order to protect them from air raids, considerable disadvantages were identified. There were also the risks of theft, arson, or acts of terror that could be conducted not just by military personnel but also by civilians behind the front. The risks of openly transporting and then harboring cultural property in rural, often relatively remote, places were not addressed in the Hague Convention.

However, there was not consensus around the legitimacy of keeping the whereabouts of cultural property secret in Sweden. In the 1960s, the ÖEF argued that such a routine was not justified by the legislation on secrecy of public records since it was not evident that collections of art, books, and archives were of great importance to the defense of Sweden. Some state museums and the RAÄ argued against this, meaning that they needed secrecy in order to protect collections regardless of what the law said. Evidently, the latter party won out in this argument since museums successfully kept their evacuation plans secret for a long time to come. There has not been any debate in more recent time on whether information on evacuation plans should be kept secret or made public.

Even though Sweden did not adhere to the Hague Convention for a long time, leading heritage institutions throughout the country showed an interest in how cultural property had been protected during World War II. Studies of Britain and Germany concluded that specially constructed shelters located outside the metropolitan areas were needed. It was not sufficient to move collections to the safest parts of the regular storage spaces. These studies were furthermore inspired by the method of microfilming that was becoming commonly used in some countries, aiming at the creation of copies of public records and rare books. It is quite clear that these studies of actions taken in countries heavily affected by

⁶⁰ Hague Convention, Art. 1.

⁶¹ Hague Convention, Art. 4, para. 2.

⁶² O’Keefe 2006, 114–15.

⁶³ Pollard 2020, 680; Legnér 2022c, 84–85.

air war were important in the planning of cultural property protection taking place in Sweden during the Cold War.

A lesson partially picked up by Sweden was the importance of having expertise inside the military organization. The director of antiquities communicated with the British Museum about the experiences of the MFAA. He suggested that the Swedish armed forces should integrate specialists on cultural property working closely with military headquarters. It is worth pointing out here that the countries who had created the MFAA program – Britain and the United States – fairly quickly dismantled the organization and did not use their experiences from the war to sustain any military expertise on cultural property.⁶⁴ That Sweden did not introduce such an organization during the Cold War, then, was not something specific to the country but, rather, part of an international development.

Today, the conflict threats against cultural property are more diffuse than they were when the Hague Convention was created. Some scholars see the illicit removal of cultural property (such as illegal archeological excavations, looting, and smuggling) as the single greatest threat in the war against cultural heritage.⁶⁵ Ongoing conflicts, for instance, in Syria and Ukraine demonstrate, however, that extensive bombing and shelling of urban areas still are common and that the risk of massive destruction – deliberate as well as unintentional – of cultural property in an armed conflict should not be underestimated. Contemporary warfare also means that, increasingly, conflicts often are not fought along established frontlines. This is one reason why deciding the locations of safe refuges already in peacetime can be quite difficult or even impossible. This may be a strong argument to advocate *in situ* protection instead of transporting large volumes of very valuable and sensitive property to depots during a conflict.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, decisions on evacuation need to be well prepared and grounded before an armed conflict erupts. Experience from Sweden, as just one example, shows that collections often have had to stay in their new locations even when the threat has changed because transportation and alternative refuges may be lacking.⁶⁷ It is preferable to avoid transporting collections a great distance or keeping them in buildings that are not kept secured and managed on a day-to-day basis. Today, museums and archives require storage areas to keep a stable indoor climate with suitable temperature and relative humidity. Furthermore, they need to be safe against fire hazards and burglars, and they should be constantly monitored. These requirements can prove extremely difficult to meet if preparations have not been planned meticulously before the outbreak of a conflict.

The worsening security situation around the Baltic Sea and in Eastern Europe today has made the issue of pre-conflict planning more urgent again. The need to plan for protecting cultural property has reemerged in Sweden as a consequence of this international development, and it should also be of interest to other states. The ongoing war in Ukraine shows that cultural property is still poorly respected during conflicts, despite the fact that Ukraine and Russia have both signed the Hague Convention. The conflict has resulted in the illicit removal of archaeological heritage, the destruction of buildings and sites, and the looting of museums in territories occupied by Russia.⁶⁸

In Sweden, planning for the risk of conflict will mean that museums, archives, and libraries once again establish evacuation plans.⁶⁹ Today, there are, at the time of writing,

⁶⁴ Rush 2012; Stone 2012.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., O'Keefe 2006, 162–63, 196.

⁶⁶ O'Keefe 2006, 162.

⁶⁷ Legnér 2022c, s. 100–2.

⁶⁸ Busol 2020.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., RIR 2019.

no relevant guidelines, and a supportive structure for evacuation is largely missing. Knowledge on the advantages and disadvantages of decisions made during World War II and the Cold War should however be useful for future remedies. What is clear already is that there needs to be established a cooperation between the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, the armed forces, the county administrative boards, and the institutions managing collections. Finally, it should be said that the Hague Convention may have some importance in the future work since it gives legitimacy to the protection of cultural property in armed conflict.

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