

# Things that time forgot

## Native American objects in Danish Museums Problems and possibilities

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**Abstract:** *We present a hitherto unresearched part of a shared Danish and American cultural heritage: Native American objects in Danish regional museum collections. Thus far, we have identified more than 200 Native American artefacts in 27 local museums, largely a result of Danes abroad privately collecting in the late 1800s and 1950s–70s. The majority of these artefacts, many of which are prehistoric in age, have never been displayed and have lingered in storage since they were accessioned, understudied and often unrecognised for what they are. Recent deaccessioning pressures from the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces potentially place these objects at risk of destruction, making the discussions presented here a timely issue. These Native American objects, like the unknown numbers of other non-Danish artefacts held by regional museums, hold tremendous potential to elucidate overlooked parts of Danish museum history, trans-Atlantic networks and interconnectedness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as rich material cultures originating far from Denmark. We argue that this perspective is highly relevant and should be utilised in Danish museums, as it begets reflections on Danish glocal identity and society in a post-colonial world.*

**Keywords:** Danish regional museums, Native American artefacts, glocal, legacy material, deaccession, repatriation, biography.

The focus of this article is a hitherto unresearched part of a shared Danish and American cultural heritage: Native American objects in Danish museum collections. The National Museum of Denmark has a large collection of systematically amassed Native American objects in the ethnographic section featured in several recent exhibitions (Gabriel 2016), but this article rather asks how we

should deal with the plethora of Native American objects lingering often unregistered and forgotten in the collections of local Danish museums. The curation crisis and the possible ramifications make this a timely issue, as museums are currently pressured into drastically reducing their collections. However, these objects also pose an important opportunity to explore a little-known part of

58 Danish modern history, global engagements and colonial attitudes.

The national narrative of Denmark as a small, progressive and democratic country, an advocate of social justice and humanitarianism is thriving. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, Danish national identity, a product of early twentieth century veneration of domestic rural culture and rhetoric of disengagement with the world, is based on “the hierarchical notions of superiority in relation to geographically and historically remote places” (Olwig 2003:210). We have witnessed this notion being still operational. As a fellow student remarked to Ahlqvist during a discussion about several contemporary indigenous cultures: “They are more primitive than us”.

These constructed national narratives and identities coupled with the absence of a key decolonizing moment in Danish history (and until recently serious engagement with postcolonial perspectives) lead to reductive and selective public views of Danish colonial history and global entanglements. This view downplays the Danish role in colonial exploitation and is marked by lingering patronizing attitudes and racism permeating language and popular culture. It manifests itself, for example, in heated debates about how several commercial products “cannot be racist” (Danbolt 2017), and in the resistance that several Danish politicians across the political spectrum seem to share in regard to demands for an apology for the Danish role in the institutionalised slavery in the Danish West Indies (Almbjerg 2017, Lægaard 2017).

A nationalistic tendency of prioritizing a homogenized version of Danish history and culture restricted to the boundaries of the current nation state may even be evident in the mission and practices of many Danish museums

as well as in recently published guidelines regarding curation by the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces (Kulturministeriet 2003, Kulturarvsstyrelsen 2005a, Kulturarvsstyrelsen 2005b, Kulturarvsstyrelsen 2006). Some of these issues are deeply rooted in Danish museum history and the role of cultural heritage which might have contributed to their prevalence in Danish mind-set today (Olwig 2003:207–209, Høgh 2008, Gabriel 2016:276–278, Kristiansen 2018). However, recent publications might hint at a counter-reaction and rising interest in debating issues of colonial past and its lingering legacies (e.g. Lagerkvist 2008, Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012, Naum & Nordin 2013, Bodenstein & Pagani 2014, Nonbo Andersen 2017, Nonbo Andersen & Jensen Smed 2017). The present article is aligned with these critical debates. Focusing on Native American objects stored at regional museums, we argue that these objects have a potential to tell a nuanced story of Danish global engagements and colonial worldviews and as such question a narrow understanding of local and national history.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research presented here was initially sparked by a few unexpected finds of Native American artefacts in Museum Skanderborg’s collections, a museum largely focused on documenting the local history of the area. Therefore, it was of great surprise to come across thirteen arrowheads (fig. 1) apparently from the Archaic (c. 8000–1000 BCE) in North America (Kongsted 2015) and an additional collection of 21 arrowheads from Texas. Likewise, a copper tanged point from the Ontario area as well as two apparent Native American Californian abalone pendants turned up in the oldest parts of the muse-



Fig. 1. "Foreign Arrowheads" (No 1446X8). The arrowheads were part of what later became the founding collection of Museum Skanderborg. In 2015, they were identified as Northern American Archaic points by Dr. Erick Robinson, University of Wyoming, Laramie (Kongsted 2015). Photo: Media Department – Moesgaard Museum.

um's collections. Initial research indicated that many other local Danish museums had possible Native American artefacts in their collections.

As Danish regional museums generally focus on local archaeology and history, Native American objects have so far not been studied or displayed and are often poorly recorded. This has made it very difficult to gain an overview of the Native American material in these collections. Therefore, as an initial step to this research we scoured through the online catalogue of museum collections (*Museernes Samlinger*; Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen 2018), using search terms such as *Nordamerika*, *Amerika*, *Indianer*, etc. Based on these findings, we also contacted several museums which identified additional artefacts not recorded in *Museernes Samlinger*. Our limited search identified more than 200 artefacts in

27 regional museums.<sup>1</sup> However, it should be emphasised that these 200 objects likely represent only a small proportion of the Native American and ethnographic objects that are actually present in museum collections. In many cases when we contacted museums about a given object, we were told that the museum had many more similar objects, sometimes even from the same collector, that were not registered in the *Museernes Samlinger* database. These correspondences indicate that there is more material in the museums than the publicly available database suggests. Recognising the potential problems with generalised search terms, as well as the fact that many museum collections are simply not uploaded to this database, this article should be viewed as a pilot study. It should also be stressed that many Native American objects are not recognised and registered as such,

and some of the objects discussed here were found purely by coincidence. The fortuitous and unsystematic nature of these discoveries emphasizes that this material is likely much more common than may first seem and is possibly found in most, if not all, Danish regional museums, likely totalling hundreds or even thousands of artefacts that are largely unnoticed. Thus, in the future it will be of great benefit to perform a thorough examination of museum's storerooms to gain a more comprehensive picture of the Native American material held in Danish regional museum, the issues they face and the historical value they hold.

#### **THE COLLECTING OF NATIVE AMERICAN OBJECTS IN THE PAST**

The collecting of Native American artefacts has a long history in Europe going back to Christopher Columbus' first trip across the Atlantic Ocean in 1492 and was initially exclusively associated with aristocracy and scholars. Collected American objects were treated as curiosities and served a purpose of documenting the strangeness and exoticism of the newly discovered lands (Feest 1993, 1995, Yaya 2008). Denmark was no exception to this tradition. The Museum Wormianum housed twenty-five Native American and Greenlandic objects in 1654, and the royal Danish "Kunstkammer" even had an "Indian Cabinet", where American as well as other "exotic objects" were held (Feest 1995, Hejlskov Larsen *et al.* 2008:504). Among these Native American rarities were "Indian" and "Brazilian" pipes (Feest 1995:338), ball-headed clubs as well as a "stone-bladed weapon with inlaid wampum and copper" (Feest 1995:339).

By the nineteenth century the rationale for collecting American ethnographic and

archaeological objects had shifted. It was now driven by an impulse to preserve relics of the supposedly disappearing peoples, along with a wish to capture representative material assemblages of American 'cultures' and provide comparative material for the study of European prehistory (Feest 1993, Krech III & Hail 1999). This went hand in hand with the development of museums as institutions. The beginning of the nineteenth century marked extensive changes for the cabinets in the Danish royal collection. They were separated and transferred to the first museums in Denmark, which were established during this period (Hejlskov Larsen *et al.* 2008:505). More publicly accessible than their predecessor, these early museums played a major role in developing Danish identity and nationalism during the 1800s, which was further cemented by the entry of C.J. Thomsen (1788–1865) in the recently established Royal Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities in 1816. Thomsen played a crucial role in opening up these collections to the public and in stimulating the public culture of collecting (Hejlskov Larsen *et al.* 2008:510). Danes were encouraged to participate in the preservation of Danish cultural heritage by handing in antiquities and reporting the location of ancient monuments. It generally seems this request was honoured as there was a steady flow of objects from private hands to the Royal Commission and later the National Museum in the 1800s (Hejlskov Larsen *et al.* 2008:508–509). This flow and subsequent studies of objects from a comparative perspective led to the eventual implementation of the Three-Age System in 1837 (Eskildsen 2012:39).

Of particular interest to this article is the fascination Thomsen also had with ethnographic objects. In 1839 he became the manager of the ethnographic collections

originally from the “Kunstkammer”. During the following years, he eagerly engaged in the collecting of ethnographic objects, mainly from the Danish colonies, as he was apparently acting on a plan to extend these collections into a Danish Colonial Museum (Bahnsen 1888:3, Eskildsen 2012:40–41, Gabriel 2016:276). “The ethnographic section was just the one that Denmark, as a maritime state with colonies, ought, and could with least expense, raise to a pitch of some pre-eminence”, as Thomsen stated in the preface for his catalogue of the ethnographic collections (Thomsen 1862 in Bahnsen 1888:3). Thomsen’s ethnographic collections grew exponentially during the 1800’s, aided by Danes migrating or traveling abroad, who were willing to collect and send artefacts to Denmark (Gabriel 2016:276).

Ethnographic objects also served as analogues for Danish prehistoric objects. Thus, in The Royal Museum of Nordic Antiquities (later the National Museum of Denmark) in the 1830s stood “in the stone as well as the bronze section [...] a cabinet with objects from South Pacific Islands and other foreign countries for comparison with our own objects” (Petersen 1845 in Eskildsen 2012:40). Thomsen remarked in his *Kortfattet udsigt* (Brief Outlook) in 1836 that “objects from countries outside of the North [...] serve to elucidate Nordic antiquities – for example, stone objects from South Sea Islands and from savages in North America” (Thomsen 1836:67). Such comparisons came to play a significant role in developing the Three-Age System to also encompass global development, as ethnographic objects in the museum were not organised by geographical region or date but rather “level of technological development” (Eskildsen 2012:41). Thus, a narrative of a global gradual progress of civilisation based on the presence or absence of metal casting technology was conceived.

By this logic, Native Americans were classified amongst peoples that did not process metal, and thus were to be regarded as on the bottom of civilisation (Eskildsen 2012:39–43, Gabriel 2016:276).

This perception of a social evolutionary continuum in the school of Tylor and Morgan (see Tehrani 2010) persisted with Thomsen’s successor, J.J.A. Worsaae (1821–1885). Exhibitions featuring “warrior shirts, clubs and scalps” aided in developing a public image of “the brutal savages of North America”. This perceived ‘primitiveness’ of Native Americans as well as a general fascination were also exemplified in a number of human zoos in Denmark during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (The Hagenbeck Era; see Andreassen 2016:8–31). These human exhibitions allowed the audience to “experience” the lives of these “exotic and savage” cultures (Andreassen 2016) rather than merely seeing their objects through a display case. Some ethnographers and museum employees during this period apparently acted on a perceived need and a wish to document cultures that were thought to be destined to disappear (Gabriel 2016:276). Though later diffusionist approaches to these collections as well as general discussions of museological representations of “the Other” in the twentieth century led to an arguably more nuanced display of non-Danish cultures (Gabriel 2016:276–277), some remnants of the public image of Native Americans disseminated in the late nineteenth century might still be witnessed in the present public perception in Denmark. Now, Danish museums have an opportunity to offer a new perspective on non-Western peoples by giving them a voice (e.g. Gabriel 2016), and by acknowledging the diversity of Native American cultures and objects in museums both on a national and local level.

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Besides the state-driven collecting of Native American artefacts and the resulting collections in the National Museum today, private initiatives to such collecting practices seem to have been in place during the same period. Two general waves of private collecting of Native American objects may be discerned, i.e. the second half of the 1800s up until around the turn of that century which coincides with large-scale migration to the US and Canada, as well as in the 1950s–70s. These objects were then sent or handed over to local museums and thus may largely be regarded as a result of passive collection.

In order to understand the initial wave of collecting Native American artefacts, the general drive for collecting and preserving cultural heritage in nineteenth century Denmark should not be underestimated. Encouragements to collect, styled by the Royal Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities as a patriotic duty, influenced the interests and practice of assembling Native American objects. Unlike systematic collections resulting from scientific expeditions, objects arriving at the smaller, regional institutions were oftentimes a result of anecdotal and indiscriminate collecting. These were, for example, different forms of souvenirs – tourist art produced by Native American craftspeople or Native American objects picked from the ground – procured by sailors, merchants and others visiting or migrating to America (Henningsen 1968, Phillips 1999, Austbø 2012).

Native American stone tools, especially arrowheads, seem to have been favoured as they are the most common (circa 70 per cent) Native American material in Danish local museums, at least in our sample. The

majority of these stone artefacts appear to be of archaeological origin and were probably found as stray finds. In addition, several museums have pairs of moccasins in their collection, mainly privately collected c. 1850–1910. Native American jewellery, ceremonial pipes and miniature stone totem poles were further collected during this period and appear in several museums. Apart from this, there are several one-offs, such as the above-mentioned abalone pendants (fig. 2), a papoose held at Marstal Søfartsmuseum (N°08216), a silver bracelet (fig. 3) held at Vendsyssel Historiske Museum (197370145+) and a stone hammer from a burial also at Vendsyssel Historiske Museum (1953/0425+).

One major drive for collecting Native American artefacts seems to have been a wish to document ones' travels or the experience of migration and a new home. Importantly, rather than being kept as souvenirs, these objects were often sent back to Denmark, preferably to a local museum in the town where the collector grew up. Notably, the renowned journalist, author and photographer, Jacob Riis (1849–1914), who emigrated from Denmark to America in 1870 came across a number of Native American arrowheads in 1883/1884 (fig. 4). Although Riis had not lived in Denmark for many years, he decided to send these artefacts to the Antiquarian Collection in Ribe, his home town. In a letter, he explained that he found the objects on a hike in Long Island and apparently believed the collection in Ribe would have an interest in them (Søvsø & Just 2014) (fig. 5). It is remarkable that even so many years after leaving Denmark and apparently perceiving himself as an American (e.g. Riis 1901), it was somehow still a reasonable response for him to send these objects to Ribe.

A 24 cm-long tanged point of copper from Pass Lake, Ontario, Canada illustrates similarly



Fig. 2. Obverse and reverse of two classical abalone pendants from Central/Northern California currently in Museum Skanderborg's collections (No CH2/84.2-3). Such pendants had been in the use for several hundred years before the arrival of the first Europeans in the late eighteenth century and were produced by a variety of ethno-linguistic groups. Later this type of pendant was traded widely both between Native-Americans and Europeans and European museums (Professor Les Field, University of New Mexico, pers. comm. 2018). Photo: Media Department – Moesgaard Museum.

close ties to the community the collector grew up in. Aage Nielsen, originally from Illerup, Denmark, found the point in “uncultivated soil” after immigrating to Canada in 1949. Nearly twenty years later, the point was given as a gift to Museum Skanderborg even though Nielsen had not lived there for a long time and never moved back to Denmark. However,

passing away in 2007, his last wishes were to be cremated and buried in Illerup (The Chronicle Journal nd). The point was registered in Museum Skanderborg's database as a “copper knife”, but upon further analysis it rather appears to be a tanged point dating to the Old Copper Complex (fig. 6). As such, it belongs to the first well-documented copper working culture in North America, which dates circa 4000–1000 BCE (Ehrhardt 2009). Besides being an important archaeological object and probably the only of its kind in Denmark, this tanged point embodies a global attitude that seems to have characterised many of these private collectors (Lagerkvist 2008).

Some Native American artefacts have also been accessioned as a result of active collecting. In 1954 the secretary of Chemung County Historical Society in New York contacted P.V. Glob at Aarhus University, apparently acting on an article on “prehistoric man in Denmark” by Glob in *National Geographic Magazine*, March 1954. The historical society asked for “two or three samples of your polished flint hatchets,

Fig. 3. Silver bracelet held at Vendsyssel Historiske Museum (197370145+). It was apparently hand-made by a Native American who gave it as a gift to a woman whose relative handed it in to the museum in 1973, circa 120 years later. Photo: Media Department – Moesgaard Museum.



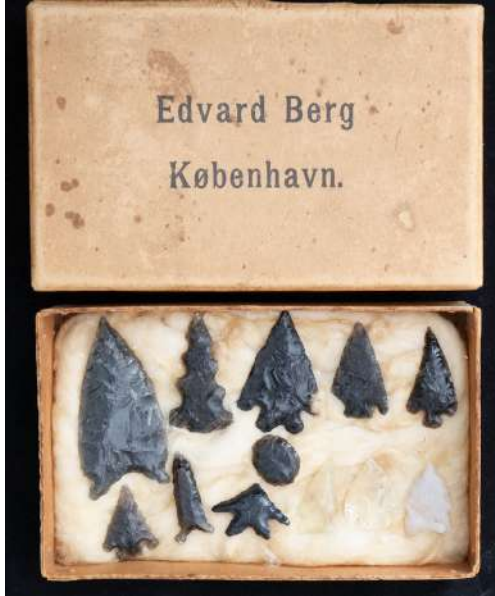


Fig. 4. Native American arrowheads and a scraper (No ASR 21M79F) collected by Jacob Riis in 1883 by his own account. Currently in Sydvestjyske Museer's collection. The white chert points on the right are typical points found on Long Island dating to c. 3000 – 1500 BC. The remaining black obsidian points are also types that are not normally found on Long Island and are likely from elsewhere (Dr. Christina Reith, New York State Museum, pers. comm., 2018). Photo: Florian Saur.

and samples of your flint arrows and spears". In return they were "willing to exchange anything of our collection you want". We do not know how Glob responded, but four months later the Society once again sent a letter to Aarhus, this time to Poul Kjærum, who became the director of the Forhistorisk Museum (Prehistoric Museum, later known as Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus) also in 1954. The letter stated that "the stone instruments, flint axes etc." had been received by the Society and were thought to be "rather beautiful specimens". Unfortunately, the Neolithic/Bronze Age stone tools and all of

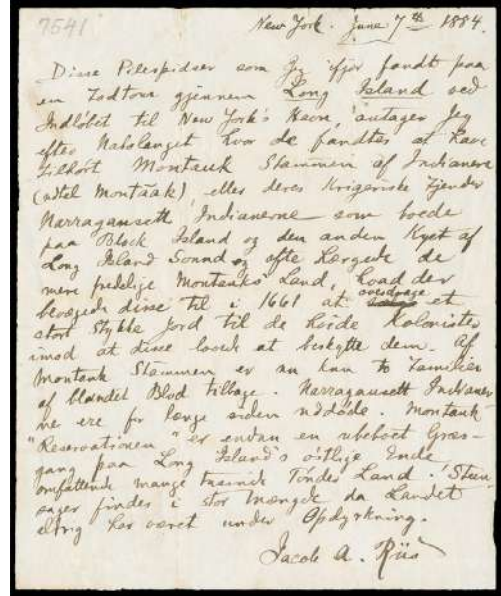


Fig. 5. Letter from Riis to the Antiquarian Collection of Ribe (No 7541) accompanying the arrowheads. Photo: Media Department – Moesgaard Museum. It reads:

"New York, June 7th 1884  
 I found these arrowheads by the inflow of New York harbour on a hike through Long Island last year. Due to the find location I assume they belonged to the Montauk tribe of Indians (pronounced Montauk) or their brutal enemies, the Narragansett Indians, who lived on Block Island and the other coast of Long Island Sound. They often ravaged the more peaceful Montauks' land, which led to the Montauk handing over a large part of their land to white colonists in 1661, who in return promised to protect them. Only two families of mixed blood are still alive in the Montauk tribe. The Narragansett Indians became extinct long ago.  
 The Montauk Reservation is still an uninhabited pasture in the Eastern end of Long Island consisting of many thousand acres of land. Lithics are plentiful, as the land has never been cultivated.

Jacob A. Riis"

Translation Laura Ahlqvist.



their associated information were subsequently sold to a private collector in Arkansas when the objects were deaccessioned in 1999. A month after the Neolithic objects had been received, the Society sent as “part payment for the fine prehistoric specimens” from Denmark, 38 prehistoric objects from the Lamoka site radiocarbon dated to c. 6000 BP. Mainly lithics were exchanged (arrowheads, spearheads, stone axes), but seven bone awls and one tooth bead were also included (fig. 7). Kjærø responded that “the things supply a fine parallel to our late stone age cultures and will be good material for our comparative exhibition”. 100 years after the comparative exhibitions in The Royal Collection of Nordic Antiquities in Copenhagen, the Prehistoric Museum in Aarhus apparently applied a similar approach to exhibiting Native American artefacts in a Danish local museum. From a present-day point of view, the letter correspondence also provides an interesting glimpse of a culture of remarkably unbureaucratic exchanges of museum artefacts across large distances, as well

as the attitude of American archaeology pre-NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, see Trope & Echo-Hawk 1992).

The examples above highlight multiple and complex meanings of Native American objects for Danish collectors and their potential to enlighten historical and cultural aspects of Danish engagements with America and Native Americans. These objects, treated collectively or as individual assemblages and analysed alongside diaries, letters and other narratives can contribute to a better understanding of the perceptions of and interactions between Native Americans and Danes travelling to and settling in America. A major moment in Danish direct engagement with the continent happened in the 1860s–90s and took a form of large-scale migration. This migration coincided with Native American removal, colonial appropriation of indigenous lands, reservationisation and the final stages of the Indian Wars fought west of Mississippi River – a destination of many migrant families enticed

*Fig. 6. Obverse and reverse of the so-called “copper knife” in Museum Skanderborg’s collections (No. 32/77a). Photo: Media Department – Moesgaard Museum.*





Fig. 7. Assorted box of the artefacts from the Lamoka site (c. 6000 BP) exchanged between Chemung County Historical Society in New York and Moesgaard Museum in 1954 (No EA12). Photo: Mathias Bjørnevad.

there by the Homestead Act of 1862. These tense and complex realities coloured attitudes towards each other. The collected object and archival material can be productively used to highlight intricacies of these histories and their modern legacies. Such a perspective was utilized by, for example, Sarah Hill (1996) in her examination of early nineteenth century Cherokee baskets from the collection of the Moravian Historical Society (donated later to the Peabody Museum at Yale University). Her object and archival studies identified the likely makers and collectors of the baskets and produced a rich story of the lives and agency of Cherokee women as well as intercultural relationships between the indigenous woman who produced the baskets and the German missionary woman who collected them –

relationships extending beyond the boundaries of nation, race and class. In other studies, also focusing on unsystematically gathered Native American objects in regional and municipal museums in Germany, Christian Feest (1987, 2007) documented the considerable scale and diversity of artefacts assembled by German mercenaries participating in the late eighteenth century American Revolutionary War. The analysis allowed him to reconstruct the geographies of German presence in America, trace the development of tourist art produced by indigenous artists, as well as consider aesthetic tastes of the collectors and various types of interactions between the mercenaries and indigenous peoples.

The Native American objects might also be treated as biographical tools narrating

the individual and collective stories of mobility and encounter. As ultimately most of the discussed objects reflect long-term attachments to Denmark, they can be used to draw attention to the difficulty of migration, and a sustained relationship with as well as continued importance of the homeland. Such a narrative potential of souvenirs brought from travels or sent to families and communities back home (to be later donated to the museums) is discussed by Anne Tove Austbø (2012, 2013). Focusing on nineteenth century souvenirs lingering at the storage rooms at the Stavanger Maritime Museum, she interrogates the dominant museological approach that labels these objects as difficult and hard to exhibit due to the perceived randomness of their acquisition. She argues that these objects can be engaged to research and that they communicate deeply personal and human stories of memory, longing, departure and homecoming, of curiosity and cross-cultural meetings in the era of high colonialism, of migration and communication – themes that also affect modern lives in a global and hypermobile world (Austbø 2013).

These objects can also serve as vehicles of critical engagement with the question of popular and ethnographic construction of Native Americans. The general two waves of Native American artefacts entering into local Danish museums coincide with a wide-spread European fascination of Native American cultures, which especially took off after 1850 and again in the second half of the twentieth century. As discussed earlier, the human zoos, even featuring “Sioux Indians” and “Cowboys and Indians” also had their peak from the late 1880s to the early 1900’s. Widely published and even incorporated in Danish schooling as popular excursion destinations, these exhibitions would have acted as a pervasive means to reinforce

stereotypes and strengthen the fascination with “the Other” (Andreassen 2016). Popular and one-sided representations of Native Americans are further found in a very well-known Danish classic from 1955 (*Far til Fire på landet*), as well as in the so-called “Spaghetti Westerns” from the 1960s and early 1970s, which were also very popular in Denmark. Perhaps related to this, playing “cowboys and Indians” was a popular pastime for Danish children in the second half of the twentieth century. These connections between popularity of ethnographic shows, collecting Native American objects and their display at the museums in nineteenth century Europe was investigated by Raymond Corbey (1993). He placed them in the same narrative plot of civilizing, imperialist and racist discourse produced and consumed by the European middle classes.

In addition, this material can be used to provide insights on Danish museum history, especially on the development of regional museums that have often been overshadowed by research into the National Museum and its collections. Moreover, it can provide insights into current Danish museum politics and decision making. Thus, such material has significant multi-scalar research and dissemination potential, especially telling the stories that have gone largely overlooked.

### THE CURATION CRISIS AND NATIVE AMERICAN OBJECTS

The presence of Native American artefacts in Danish local museums pose a peculiar quandary to the purview of many museums, as these tend to focus on local history and its artifactual evidence, understood narrowly as events that happened within the borders of the region for which a museum assumes antiquarian responsibility. This might not seem

like a problem, yet recent developments in Danish cultural heritage management as well as a nationalistic wave affecting both the public and academic spheres (Chernilo 2006, Fischer 2016, Sørensen 2016) potentially put such objects in the crosshairs between conflicting interests in the Danish cultural sector.

In 2003, the Danish Ministry of Culture published a report evaluating challenges facing the cultural heritage sector (Kulturministeriet 2003). Pointing at the mounting costs of curation and difficulty in securing optimal storage conditions, the report suggested adopting a curation prioritisation scheme based on the objects' culture-historical value and research potential (Kulturministeriet 2003:24–26). Based on their relationship to the history of Denmark (in its current borders) the scheme divided museum objects into four categories of artefacts: of outstanding, important, limited and less important national heritage value. The objects of lesser importance included unsystematically and passively collected artefacts that were then singled out as possible targets of deaccessioning. The report's recommendation became, to some degree, incorporated into practical working plans of the museums. Partly to address similar issues, in 2005 the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces (part of the Danish Ministry of Culture) published a report stating that many objects in Danish museums had been collected without consideration of the museum's purview. This was seen as being especially linked to passive collecting in the past (Kulturarvsstyrelsen 2005b). As a result of this, Danish museums were by the same Agency advised to review their collections and to deaccession objects that do not correspond to the museum's remit. Other arguments for deaccessioning could be lack of provenance, poor preservation, lack of historical value or if doublets of the

objects already existed in said museum or others (Kulturarvsstyrelsen 2005a, 2005b). The deaccessioned objects might be given to other state-authorized museums if these were interested, but not sold or gifted away to anyone but the original donor. Importantly, the Agency gave museums the option to destroy objects that failed to live up to the museum's standards (Kulturarvsstyrelsen 2006).

Even though such proceedings need approval by the Agency for Culture and Palaces (Kulturarvsstyrelsen 2006), this perspective on the future of Danish cultural heritage understandably worried many museum employees (e.g. Vasström 2004, Hadsbjerg 2008, Schaumburg–Sørensen 2010). Today, the guidelines have been implemented in Danish museum practice and even feature in many museum agendas (e.g. Skanderborg Museum 2014:12, Museum Nordsjælland 2015:12, Museum Sydøstdanmark 2017:26–27). A recently published summary of the curation strategies and deaccessioning practices at the Museum of Lolland-Falster, for example, illustrates how these new guidelines may look in practice. In 2016, the museum deaccessioned 1000 objects out of 4000. In selecting the object for further curation, it prioritized those related to the agricultural history of the islands, recognized as the region's 'DNA' (Buur 2017). An inspection of the development in museum deaccessioning processes in 2009–2015 showed that the number of deaccessioned objects has grown exponentially from 779 in 2009 to 8374 in 2015. 90 per cent of the deaccessioned objects in 2015 were destroyed. These were mainly objects dating c. 1800–present day (Spurlin-Roe 2016:61–71). These figures, however, only account for objects that have been previously catalogued by the museum, as unregistered objects do not need to be recorded when they are destroyed. Therefore, it is possible, even



*Fig. 8. Native American objects from Texas likely dating to the Archaic (c. 8000-1000 BC) (No E1.1-24). Part of the founding collection of Museum Skanderborg, held in a box labelled “ethnography” within a larger box labelled “curiosities”. This box also included pottery from Jericho (No U1. 1-24) as well as iron-tipped arrows and an axe allegedly from the Republic of the Congo (No E1.25-69). Photo: Media Department – Moesgaard Museum.*

likely that many objects have been destroyed without any record of the objects ever existing. This may be particularly relevant for many Native American objects as they do not easily fit into the standard recording procedure at many regional museums and they were often collected at a time when records may have been more inconsistent.

This development in cultural heritage management in Denmark could put some of the Native American artefacts, which lack information about provenience or context, at risk. While more information than “merely an address of the doner” (Hadsbjerg

2008:45) is known for many of the objects, different standards for when something is unprovenanced might exist. Thus, it is not uncommon for archaeologists to perceive an object as an un-contextualised stray-find, even when a rough find location is known. It is very unlikely that, for example, the arrowheads from Long Island in Ribe will be deaccessioned merely because the find location is very broadly described, but how will similar material that happens to be donated by a less famous person be treated? Or material that is just recorded as “found in America” or as “Indian arrowhead” or even as “possible Indian arrowhead”?

Furthermore, the demand by the Agency for Culture and Palaces for a link between the museum's area of responsibility which is focussed on the history of the local area and the collected objects is troublesome given that many Native American objects can seem to have little to do with the Danish local history. In the past the 'exotic' nature of such artefacts was highly valued, but now it can make these objects problematic and at risk of destruction. We would argue, however, that they do form an underappreciated and important part of the local history of the area and the museum itself. These objects were collected from thousands of kilometres away by local residents or expatriates and were then often specifically sent back or brought to their local Danish museum. Thus, the collectors, the Danish museums and the objects became a part of local and global networks. The reasons why these objects were collected, sold/donated and accessioned as well as how these exotic artefacts were utilised or forgotten by the museums are all part of an important global and local story that has largely been overlooked by Danish regional museums.

Research directly on the museum collections and the collection strategies is one obvious but underutilised response to some of the problems associated with the guidelines Danish museums are subjected to. As we show here, even preliminary research may add historical value to such material (see also Voss 2012, Svanberg 2015), and in the case of these foreign objects they can become tied to local history and thus fall under the focus of Danish regional museums. Importantly, such research might also enable these objects to be part of engaging exhibitions highlighting global narratives even in small communities, an angle that only rarely seems to be explored in local museums. Not only do these objects in

fact have a justification in the museum, they also illustrate parts of history that have so far barely been told.

### REMNANTS FROM COLONIAL TIMES

The normative approach to cultural heritage that is highlighted in the above, is inherently entangled with some of the earliest museological initiatives in Denmark. The Native American objects and the stories of migration and cross-cultural encounters that they represent stand in contrast to these rather strong nationalist premises that also Danish archaeology is founded upon (Høgh 2008). However, another and very timely benefit of implementing a more diverse perspective on Danish national heritage is the contrast this would provide to several other aspects of public opinion which tend to become more nationally and locally focussed at present. Indeed, a wave of populist nationalism is currently sweeping across Europe and the United States (Fischer 2016, Sørensen 2016). Methodological nationalism, which is arguably also evident in Scandinavian and Danish research, assumes that a nation-state is the natural form of a modern society and as such (inadvertently) regards Western societies as the baseline of success to which every alternative is measured (Chernilo 2006, Eriksdotter & Nordin 2011). Besides being part of our nineteenth century Eurocentric baggage, this simplifies non-Western cultures and perhaps aids in maintaining a certain image of "the Other". Native American artefacts in Danish museums might provide a new angle of research, not only into museum collections but also into museum attitudes as well as reflect and challenge our own nationalistic prejudice in Danish archaeological research.

The few Native American artefacts that are in fact recognised as such in Danish museums

are mainly categorised as ethnographic objects, which is another practice that perhaps ought to be questioned. For example, the collection from Lamoka site (c. 6000 years old) is part of the ethnographic collections at Moesgaard Museum and an assemblage of probably Archaic (8000–1000 BCE) arrowheads in Museum Skanderborg reportedly from Texas, is categorised as ethnography (within the main category of “curiosities”) (fig. 8). There are many other such objects, prehistoric in age, classified as ethnography in Danish museums. Such casual classifications are often arbitrarily applied and have their basis in colonial attitudes, with European prehistoric artefacts considered as archaeological, and from outside of Europe often considered ethnographic and so flatten or erase the histories and indeed prehistories of non-western societies (cf. Wolf 1990). It is, therefore, worth considering which and *whose* notions of culture govern such classification systems. On a practical level, museums mainly deaccession and destroy objects from recent history (Hadsbjerg 2008:44, Spurlin-Roe 2016:71), so it further endangers Native American objects if they are perceived as modern rather than archaeological objects.

When discussing the relevance of Native American artefacts in Danish museums, Greenlandic objects ought to be considered as well. Greenlandic Inuit culture is viewed as part of Danish cultural heritage whereas Alaskan and Canadian are not (fig. 9). Greenland’s recent history as a Danish colony as well as continued close ties to Denmark financially and politically apparently justify that hunter-gatherer cultures from one region have a place in Danish museums, whereas related and contemporary hunter-gatherer cultures from neighbouring regions do not. Thus, recent colonial history still governs Danish museum practice, superimposing old imperial

borders on non-Danish areas. The National Museum of Denmark repatriated circa 35,000 objects to Greenland between 1984 and 2001, a process later referred to as *Utimut* (return/coming home), which is one important step to processing the challenging colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland. Extending this gesture to other problematic colonial artefacts in Denmark seems like a natural way to proceed (see Gabriel 2010). Lack of uniform museum legislation in Denmark dealing with repatriation and inexperience in processing such cases on the level of local museums may be a potential hindrance, and to our knowledge, as of yet local museums have not engaged in repatriation cases. The issue of repatriation of indigenous objects is a complex one with many potential ramifications and is worthy of a detailed and nuanced discussion, which is unfortunately outside the scope of the current paper.

In the United States, repatriation claims have mainly addressed human remains and sacred objects rather than arrowheads and traded jewellery since NAGPRA was implemented in 1992 (see Cryne 2009). As it happens, the Danish Medical Museum (Medicinsk Museion) actually holds a so-called “Indian skull” (No MM 386:2014 G) in its collection, and, pushing aside potential issues with establishing cultural affiliation, it is highly likely that there would be a significant interest of several Native American groups to have this repatriated. Furthermore, many Indian reservations are currently looking into establishing local museums, and there might be an interest in having material repatriated as so much has left Native American land and even the United States. Especially if these objects are actually at risk of being destroyed, there could be a strong drive to have any Native American object returned – even stray finds such as arrowheads (Professor



Fig. 9. These arrowheads (the collection of MKH – not inventoried ethnographical collection) are held in the Greenlandic collections Museum of Koldinghus’ collections, however someone clearly believed that they were not Greenlandic and as they wrote “Non-Greenlandic” on the bag they are kept in. Does whether they are Greenlandic or Native American or something else make a difference for the value of these objects and their justification within the museum’s collection? Photo: Connie Ramskov, Museet på Koldinghus..

Jen Shannon, University of Colorado Boulder, pers. comm. 2017).

### CONCLUSION

Danish regional museums are obligated to focus on the local history and archaeology of the area so perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of objects within the collections, on exhibition and featured in research, are local. However, within these collections lie also a number of non-Danish objects that have gone largely overlooked and forgotten and are at risk of destruction. In this paper, we have focussed on just one class of this material, the Native American objects. The 200 objects identified

by the authors, likely represent just a small fraction of the material actually present in Danish regional collections, as the database used to conduct the pilot study is incomplete. Furthermore, the majority of Danish museum staff specialise in Danish history or archaeology, so non-Danish material is at risk of going unrecognised especially if it lacks suitable documentation. In some instances, we happened to stumble across probable Native American objects described or pictured in old museum inventory lists or in old displays, though they were not recognised as such, further highlighting the need for a more detailed study of the material.

These objects tell a story of collecting



practices and colonial attitudes working on different levels of society, attitudes that Denmark has still not succeeded in revealing and coming to terms with (see Olwig 2003, Danbolt 2017). A focus on collecting Native American artefacts might have served to perpetuate progressivist notions of “the Other” and “the savage Indian” as windows into Danish prehistory (e.g. Bahnson 1888, Eskildsen 2012). Other motives for collecting might have been a wish to document cultures apparently destined to go extinct as well as a fascination with “exotic” souvenirs.

The many Native American artefacts in both national and local Danish museums hold research potential in disseminating a more nuanced image of the diversity of Native American cultures than has often been displayed in Danish museums, taught in schools or held in the common mind-set. These have largely focussed on a simplistic picture of Native American groups of horse riding, bow shooting Plains Indians or, as portrayed in earlier seminal research publications and museums, as Stone Age primitive peoples comparable to what Scandinavians were like thousands of years ago. Changing such perceptions might be worked towards through co-curation/collaboration (e.g. Gabriel 2016), and through Danish local museums exploring parts of recent Danish history that have barely been addressed. The objects are a manifestation of a plethora of rich material cultures originating far from Denmark, of trans-Atlantic networks and interconnectedness, of Danish engagement with Native American culture, and of migration as well as the imperialist attitudes of Danish expatriates that maintained close ties with their homeland. These narratives deserve a place in future exhibitions as well as ongoing research. Yet, recent pressures from the Danish Agency for

Culture and Palaces for museums to reduce their collections, potentially put some of these artefacts acutely at risk, especially, if they are not recognised for what they are. Therefore, research into this aspect of Danish history is a timely issue. It urges an increasing focus on culturally diverse representation in public spaces as well as a demand for old colonial countries to address the problematic aspects of their past.

Finally, practices of collecting “the Other” were not limited to Inuit and Native American material in Denmark, and many of the discussions touched upon here could and ought to be addressed in regards to other colonial material in Danish museums. Important initial steps have been taken, but there is significant scope and a need for these questions to be debated in Danish museums, research as well as the public sphere.

## NOTER

1. De kulturhistoriske museer i Holstebro Kommune (Holstebro Museum), Den Gamle By, Furesø Museer, Glud Museum, Horsens Museer, Marstal Søfartsmuseum, Medicinsk Museion, Middelfart Museum, Moesgård Museum, Muse@um (Skive Museum), Museet for Varde By og Omegn, Museet På Koldinghus, Museum Lolland-Falster (Stiftsmuseet), Museum Midtjylland, Museum Mors, Museum Skanderborg, Museum Sønderjylland (Arkæologi Haderslev), Museum Sønderjylland (Kulturhistorie Aabenraa), Museum Sydøstdanmark, Museum Vestsjælland (Holbæk), Museum Vestsjælland (Odsherred Kulturhistorie), Nordjyllands Historiske Museum (Aalborg), Nyt Viborg Museum, Odense Bys Museer (Arkæologi), Ringkøbing-Skjern Museum, Roskilde Museum, Sydvestjyske Museer (Ribe) and Vendsyssel Historiske Museum.

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