

Ethical issues in the semi-darkness: Skeletal remains and Sámi graves from Arctic Northern Norway

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In this article, we wish to shed light on the research history and discuss the ethical implications of research on Sámi skeletal remains. The aim is to contribute to the Norwegian debate on research and research history, by means of issues raised and cases dealt with since the appointment of the Norwegian National Committee for Evaluation of Research on Human Remains in 2007-2008.

Formally, the committee is an advisory body, appointed by the Ministry of Culture, and its members cover a variety of academic subjects. The committee's main task is to discuss and safeguard ethical considerations in every research project involving human remains, in addition to issuing general statements and arranging meetings and conferences. The majority of the cases that the committee have considered so far concern ancient human

remains—i.e. remains from the Middle Ages or earlier. Research projects should not go ahead without approval from the committee, and there is cause for particular concern if there is reason to suspect that the material has been acquired unethically or is without proper documentation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Today the term ‘research ethics’, as used by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2006), refers to a diverse set of values, norms and institutional regulations that help constitute and regulate scientific activity. Scientific knowledge is important, but we need to be aware of the ethical issues when conducting research on human remains. Ethics may be operationalised as a tradition of good research practice. Good research practice entails that the aims of research do not violate current common morality and respect for human dignity.

As stated by the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer in his hermeneutics, our understanding is affected by our effective historical consciousness: when we try to understand a historical phenomenon, we are already subject to the ‘effects of history’, and the awareness that we are historical beings (Gadamer 1975:267, Olsen 2002: 216). If we continue this reflection, it means that we are affected by the history of research and frames of meanings, objectives and rules handed to us by the past (Giddens 1990 in Olsen 2002). This means that we must also accept our need for a critical reflection on our traditions: how they emerged, have been sustained and are mobilised for present conduct and political agendas. Tradition does not

have a justification that is outside judgement (Johnsen & Olsen 1992:430-432).

Taking Norway as an example, the Sámi people has previously been defined as less developed than the Scandinavian cultures, standing outside the emerging nation state. During the previous two decades there has been an ethnic revival and a strengthening of cultural and political rights of indigenous peoples around the world. Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination is of special significance in Norway due to their experience of "Norwegianisation" and marginalisation.

Today's research has a long tradition and practice, and has grown in step with the development of ethical guidelines. Not that many years ago, however, ethical principles were understood somewhat differently from how they are seen today, for example with the reburial issue which has been discussed over the past 15 years (Hubert & Fforde 2001:1). Like other peoples, indigenous peoples, including the Sámi people of the Arctic, have now obtained cultural rights to formulate research policies and ethical issues concerning the treatment of graves and burial finds. To understand the shift towards new ethical considerations in the management of human remains and in the treatment of the Sámi graves and burial finds, we must take into consideration some historical and ideological connections and causes.

SÁMI SKULLS AND SKELETAL REMAINS IN THE SEMI-DARKNESS

In early Scandinavian anthropology, history and archaeology, around the mid-1800s, the Sámi were seen as the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia, a remnant of a primitive Stone

Age population that lived in Scandinavia before the immigration of metal-using Germanic peoples (Storli 1993, Hansen & Olsen 2004). However, these theories came to an end when archaeological research established itself as an academic discipline around 1900. This was the period when classification of prehistoric material, languages and human races became a major topic of research, and a new interpretation of prehistory emerged. The connection between race and culture was raised as an important question by academics in the Nordic countries as well as in Europe (Kyllingstad 2004, 2008). This shift led to a new way of organising knowledge in which people who were earlier considered to be fundamentally the same or similar, with a common origin, gradually came to be classified as different, based on biological and racial differences.

This was a commonly accepted academic practice in European research, where colonial ownership and the relation to ‘the Other’ were discussed. According to E. Said (1978), the Europeans divided the world into two parts: the east and the west, or the Occident and the Orient, or the civilised and the uncivilised, an artificial boundary based on the concept of them and us, or theirs and ours. The idea that races were still in a process of formation gave birth to political thoughts of racial segregation, which in Norway led to the establishment of the Advisory Board for Racial Hygiene appointed by The Medical Association in 1908 (Schanche 2002:49). The picture of the Sámi as the original Stone Age people did not fit in with a view of a common ancestral branch. How could the Scandinavians, seen as a culturally developed people at the top of the evolutionary

chain, share a common ancestor with the Sámi, who at time were seen as a primitive, undeveloped and static human type? This was one of the many premises that would characterise the research debate which led to a shift in the scientific explanation of the origins of the Sámi. From around 1900, new paradigms were established based mainly on specific skull measurements performed on living people as well as on human remains.

An important type of archaeological material, which was used to describe the Sámi as a primitive race, were the Sámi skulls from Northern Norway and Northern Sweden. In order to compare the Sámi skulls with skulls from south Scandinavian Stone Age graves, a new empirical material was needed, which in turn led to a less than ethical research practice. During a long period, from the late 1800s until the 1940s, a large-scale trade in Sámi skulls and a series of violations of Sámi burial grounds took place in Northern Norway and especially in the county of Finnmark. The first publication appeared in 1878, containing measurements and descriptions of 14 skulls, three of which came from graves at Mortensnes in the Varanger Fjord in Finnmark (Sellevold 2002:60). Later, around 1900, excavations in churchyards were carried out and led by researchers from the Anatomical Institute (AI), and despite objections from the local community, the grave looting continued on a large scale into the 1920s and 1930s (Schanche 2000). Today, only a couple of the old Sámi churchyards remain untouched by this desecration.

Skeletal parts from graves were systematically collected in order to obtain research material for establishing the racial origin of population groups. Skulls in particular were popular, since

it was believed that racial characteristics were most strongly expressed in the skulls (Sellekvold 2002:60). The shape of the skull, for example the index describing 'long skulls' or 'short skulls', was thought to indicate a set of psychological characteristics. Theories claimed that the 'long skulls', belonging to the blond Nordic race, were the supreme products of evolution both corporally and spiritually. Races lacking the proper characteristics were, on the other hand, doomed to remain primitive. It could now be reasoned that the Stone Age had been sustained by Germanic long skulls, and (based on skull measurements) that the Sámi had arrived at a far later date. They were thus portrayed as a static, doomed and dying element from the past, with no ability for independence or development (Schanche 2002:48).

MANAGING THE SÁMI SKELETAL MATERIAL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

The Sámi skeletal material collected during the late 1800s and early 1900s is today still kept at the Anatomical Institute, part of the University of Oslo. At the end of the 1990s, a couple of high-profile cases involving Sámi skeletal remains in the AI, but also the treatment of the skeletal material more generally, triggered a need for new guidelines concerning the management of this material at the AI.

In 1996, the University of Oslo decided to return two Sámi skulls to the Sámi Parliament for reburial. These were the skulls of Aslak Jacobsen Hætta and Mons Aslaksen Somby, who had both been sentenced to death and beheaded in Alta in 1854, after the so-called Kautokeino uprising of 1852. This is an event

which has inspired a lot of research and many theories as to its background (see, for instance, Zorgdrager 1997). The result of the uprising was at any rate that some of the local Sámi killed the shopkeeper and the sheriff, burned down the shop and flogged the vicar and his family. A couple of the perpetrators were killed by other Sámi, most were apprehended and sentenced to long prison sentences, while two of them were sentenced to death and beheaded. Their bodies were buried at the churchyard in Kåfjord in Alta, while their heads were dispatched to the Anatomical Institute in Oslo. This was contrary to the Criminal Act of 1842, which prescribed that executed individuals should be buried (Lønning et al. 1998:9). About 100 years later, their families started a process to have the skulls returned for burial. It was then discovered that only Somby's skull was still at the AI, while it was unclear what had happened to Hætta's skull. Nothing happened, however, until a formal request was sent to the university in 1996, demanding the return of Somby's skull and that Hætta's skull must be found and returned.

At the same time, the Sámi Parliament asked for the establishment of a working group whose task should be a review of the skeletal material in the AI as well as a proposal for how the material should be treated in the future. This request was partly based on concerns raised by an article by two scientists from the Forensic Institute (Depuy & Olaisen 1996), who had carried out DNA research on serum samples collected in Inner Finnmark in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as research carried out on human material from other parts of Norway. The samples were analysed in order to contribute to different hypotheses

regarding the ethnic origins of the Sámi, and the scientists planned to continue studying ‘ancient bones which hopefully will add valuable contributions to the knowledge of the history of people living in these areas’ (Depuy & Olaisen 1996; see Harg 1999:52). Samples had already been extracted from some of the skeletons at the AI, but the scientists were unable to extract viable DNA, and the research was abandoned.

**THE COMMITTEE FOR ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR THE
USE AND MANAGEMENT OF SKELETAL MATERIAL IN THE
ANATOMICAL INSTITUTE (THE LØNNING COMMITTEE)**

In 1996, the university returned Somby’s skull to his family for reburial, and a search was instigated for Hætta’s skull. The search showed that both skulls had arrived at the AI in 1854, but that one of them had been dispatched to Copenhagen University in 1856, in return for two Inuit skulls, and was now in the Anthropological Laboratory there. The skull was returned to Norway in 1997, and later that year both skulls were formally buried at the churchyard in Kåfjord. (Harg 1999:41-43, 52)

At the same time, a committee was appointed whose task would be to develop guidelines for the use and management of the skeletal material at the AI (Harg 1999:43, footnote 6). The committee, commonly called the Lønning committee after its chairman, included a representative from the Sámi Parliament (Lønning et al. 1998:2). It started its work in 1997 and decided to concentrate on the Sámi skeletal material in particular. The aim was to develop new guidelines for this collection, which first of all had to be ethnically identified.

The committee also discussed who had legal ownership of the skeletons at the AI (Lønning et al. 1998:12f.). They concluded that the university owned everything that had not been deposited from other institutions. The deposited material forms quite a large part of the collection, as all Norwegian university museums have transferred most of their skeletal finds to the AI for storage, in addition to skeletal material from urban excavations carried out by the Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren). The AI only manages the collection on behalf of the university, so it is the university that has the right to make binding decisions about all or parts of the material. There was, however, more doubt about the skeletal remains which had originally been excavated according to the Churchyard Act of 1897, some of them from Sámi churchyards in Finnmark county, since the Act prescribed reburial after the necessary investigations had been carried out. The committee decided, however, that it was not so much legal ownership as modern considerations of ethical, historical and political principles that ought to guide the management of the collection.

As for the deposited material from the other university museums, it would be up to these institutions to decide what should happen to their material, perhaps in cooperation with the Sámi political authorities when appropriate. The material included the Eastern Sámi skeletons from Pasvik, excavated in 1958 by Tromsø Museum. The reason why the Pasvik graves were excavated as late as 1958 was that the river islet where they were buried was due to be flooded by hydroelectric development in the Pasvik River. The skeletons were meant to be reburied at a nearby churchyard, and this was in fact what happened to the

post-cranial parts of the skeletons, which were buried in a collective grave at nearby Svanvik churchyard in 1963. The skulls, however, were passed on to the Anatomical Institute.

The Lønning committee report gives a detailed presentation of laws and regulations from other parts of the world, which regulate how skeletal remains from indigenous peoples are managed in other countries (Lønning et al. 1998:15-17). Best known among these laws is perhaps The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which has influenced legal regulations elsewhere, but which has also led to discussions and controversies. The best known example is probably Kennewick Man, a possibly 9,500 year old skeleton found in Kennewick in Washington in 1996. In accordance with NAGPRA regulations it was handed over to the local Native American tribe who wanted a quick reburial. This, however, led to repeated and vocal protests from scientists in particular, who argued that the age of the skeleton made it very unlikely that it had any relationship to the modern Native American tribe, and also made it a vital piece of evidence in the study of the first immigration of people into the North American continent. For scientists, it was thus unethical to destroy this unique source material by reburial. In 2004, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that claims about a cultural link between any of the Native American tribes and the Kennewick Man were not genetically justified, allowing scientific study of the remains to continue. Kennewick Man is most likely related to the ancient Jomon, who also were the ancestors of the Ainu people of Japan (Powell and Rose 2004).

A somewhat similar question of return and reburial of skeletal

material has recently come up in Norway as well, since the Orthodox Church in Norway, supported by the Norwegian Church, in 2007 requested the return of the Eastern Sámi skeletons from the Orthodox churchyard in Skoltebyen in Neiden, Eastern Finnmark. A working group was convened by the University of Oslo, including representatives from the two churches as well as the Sámi Parliament and the university, and concluded in 2008 that the request should be granted. Prior to the return, however, samples were to be taken from the skeletons in order to facilitate future research on the material. The skeletons were reburied on 25 September, 2011.

The Lønning committee also based its discussions on the international obligations that Norway had signed throughout the 1990s, recognising the Sámi as an indigenous people in Norway through the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169, and likewise on the institutional power and authority that had been or would be devolved to the relatively newly appointed Sámi Parliament. First of all, the Sámi material in the collection at AI had to be identified and physically separated from the rest of the material. The identification was done by two of the committee members, Audhild Schance and Torstein Sjøvold, in 1996 (attachment 2 of Lønning et al. 1998). Their work was based on information in catalogues and register cards. The result was a list of 687 catalogue numbers.

Secondly, it was recommended that access to the Sámi collection should be restricted to scientists from the Medical Faculty at the University of Oslo, from the archaeological teaching institutions and research institutes, and individuals employed in heritage management as part of their work. Students from the

same institutions would be allowed access at the behest and recommendation of their supervisors. Everyone else would have to apply for access (Lønning et al. 1998:20-23).

The committee further recommended that any research carried out must conform to ethical norms for Norwegian research generally. Special permission would be required in order to extract samples, for instance for DNA testing or dating, since this involved destruction of material. It was suggested that decisions would have to be made by the board of the Medical Faculty, but only after recommendations from a medical or research ethical committee. Research on deposited material would in addition require permission from the original owner institution. The material would normally only be made available at the AI, and even if it could be borrowed for short periods for research elsewhere, this did not include exhibition purposes.

The Sámi material would be physically separated from the rest of the collection, and would be kept locked away out of sight for visitors to the AI. Any application for research on this material would need approval from the Sámi Parliament, as would access to the material for anyone outside the groups of scientists and professionals listed above.

Another recommendation was that any descendant in a direct line should have the right to claim identifiable remains for reburial, whether they be Sámi or non-Sámi. In special cases, the university could grant the same right to more remote relatives. This was because the Sámi family system includes other family relatives than the Norwegian one.

If the Sámi Parliament wanted the skeletal material returned for storage elsewhere, this could be granted by the board of the Medical Faculty, with no further say for the university. If reappropriation meant making the material inaccessible for future research, the AI would be allowed to secure a sample of the bones before handing them back. The same would apply if they had to return material to any of the depositing institutions.

Finally, the committee concluded that the skeletal collection at the AI needed a full review carried out by staff from the AI, the university museums and the Sámi heritage management council (Samisk kulturminneråd). The aim was to physically separate the Sámi material, identify deposited material, identify archaeological finds which had followed the skeletons to the AI, and update the registers and catalogues, not least about how much was still retained of the individual skeletons.

The recommendations of the Lønning committee were approved by the University of Oslo in September 1999 as temporary guidelines for the use and management of the skeletal material at AI. At the same meeting, the university extended the same apology to the Sámi Parliament as had been made by the AI earlier that year, for the way Sámi human remains had been collected and treated by its staff over a long period of time.

**THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE FOR
EVALUATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC VALUE OF THE COLLECTIONS
AT THE ANATOMICAL INSTITUTE**

When the recommendations of the Lønning committee were circulated to a number of institutions for comments before being

finally accepted, several of the institutions questioned the scientific value of the collection at AI (Lønning et al. 1998:47-50). They pointed out that the AI was not a museum but a storage institution, and that information regarding the context and provenance of finds was lacking for large parts of the collection. The University of Oslo agreed that a full review of the collection would be needed in order to bring it up to a museum standard (Harg 1999:55), but since this was a large and comprehensive task, the university needed to know whether the collection had a scientific value which justified the expense involved.

A second committee was therefore needed, one which could evaluate the scientific value of the skeletal collection for research within all relevant fields (Harg 1999:56). This second committee was appointed in November 1999 and carried out its work over the winter of 2000. The committee's tasks also included the physical separation of the Sámi material at the AI. In its principal work, however, the new committee faced a dilemma (Holand et al. 2000:7-8): evaluating the scientific value of the collection ideally required that a full review of the collection had taken place, while the purpose of the evaluation was to provide the university with enough arguments to decide that the collection was valuable enough to justify a full review! The committee therefore had to evaluate the collection as though the review had already taken place. The evaluation also had to take into account the collection's potential value for a number of different subjects: anatomy, medical history, and culture historical subjects such as archaeology. The value of the collection had to be measured against its potential for producing both new and relevant knowledge.

The critical factors were identified as date, representativeness, the condition of the material, provenance and anthropological data. Among the most problematic aspects was the unethical acquisition of large parts of the material (Holand et al. 2000:19ff), which was divided into seven categories, dependent on its origins: donations, traded material, exchanged material, corpses received for use in education and research, skeletal material received from the police, excavations carried out by staff from the AI, as well as depositions from other museums or scientific institutions, i.e. mainly archaeological material.

The donated and exchanged material was extremely heterogeneous, with little information about original context, and came mainly from countries outside of Norway. The traded material consisted mainly of an old private collection with no information about context, and the corpses came mainly from prisoners who had died of natural causes or been executed in fortresses and prisons in the 19th century. The archaeological material was generally better documented, but also came from very different sources. It included Sámi skeletal material from Finnmark which was bought at the end of the 19th century from private excavations with some description of context, as well as material from excavations carried out by the AI at Sámi grave- and churchyards in the early 20th century, again with a basic recording of context. Best documented was the deposited material from the other university museums and from urban excavations in the 19th and 20th century, although the reliability of the documentation varied with the date of the excavations. In addition, not all skeletal material recovered through a given excavation had been handed

in to the AI, while the AI had discarded as irrelevant some of the material received. In 1992, there had been a trial review of some material in the AI that originated from the County of Hedmark, comparing information in the AI with that in the University Museum in Oslo which held the excavation reports and any additional finds. This showed little confluence of information between the two institutions. It was difficult to say whether all skeletal material handed in to the AI still existed, and with the skeletons were other types of finds which should have been in the museum (Holand et al. 2000:26-27).

The scientific committee's evaluation of the material in the AI was sober, but merciless (*ibid.*, 2000:32). It concluded that the collection represented the history of physical anthropology for better and for worse. The acquisition methods employed to establish the collection would have been totally inadequate and unacceptable today. This created a fundamental problem regarding the provenance, finds context and basic archaeological data for the material. The birth of the collection was also characterised by an unacceptable disregard for the attitudes of the local populations, in particular the Sámi, affected by excavations and removal of skeletons. The origins and composition of the collection, with its emphasis on skulls, displayed an old-fashioned physical-anthropological and scientific view, based on deterministic racial typologies and barren craniometry.

Such attitudes were not intrinsic only to physical anthropology, but existed in other professions as well. The character of the material used in physical anthropology does, however, exemplify these attitudes particularly poignantly, and this gives

the collection value as a historical document. Its main drawback is the general lack of recorded context. This may not, however, affect all studies negatively, and may even be remedied through a thorough review of the collection. Research on the material up to the point of the investigation was described by the committee (*ibid.* 2000:28) as mainly publications on biological variety and function, as well as morphological descriptions based on geography, ethnicity or chronology. The collection had also been used for comparative studies of living populations and for clinical studies.

The conclusion of the committee regarding the scientific value of the collection was that it is of considerable value for culture-historical/archaeological studies, medical/biological studies, and for scientific theory and history. While this value is not fully realised due to the lack of documentation for parts of the material, such documentation should be possible to acquire (Holand et al. 2000:33). A total review of the collection was calculated to require about two years' work. The University of Oslo undertook a review of the material in 2005 (Pedersen 2005).

The committee did, however, find the question of unethical acquisition of parts of the collection particularly challenging. It therefore recommended establishing which parts of the collection fall into this category, noting that remedying the situation might involve a number of measures, including reburial, deposition elsewhere, or continued storage at the AI. Future researchers must also be made aware of the situation. Research on these parts of the material could be governed by a research ethical committee, as suggested in the temporary guidelines for the collection

and by the National Research Ethics Committee for Medicine (NEM) in 1999. NEM accepted that the question of whether to allow research on unethically acquired material did not have a simple answer, but recommended that an independent ethical committee should evaluate whether such research was justifiable. NEM therefore recommended that the university should initiate the process required to appoint a national ethics committee whose task it would be to evaluate all research projects involving skeletal material before they were undertaken (<http://www.etikkom.no/no/Vart-arbeid/Hva-gjor-vi/Uttalelser/NEM/UtNEM980817/>).

The scientific committee supported this suggestion and requested particularly that Sámi research milieus be represented on such a committee, and that the mandate of the ethics committee be formulated in such a way that it would not clash with the right of the Sámi Parliament to approve or disapprove of the use of Sámi skeletal material.

The Norwegian National Committee for Evaluation of Research on Human Remains was finally appointed by the Ministry of Culture in 2007 and started its work in 2008. The authors of this article represent the Sámi research milieus on the committee, which has also established good working relations with the Sámi Parliament (Ekern 2009a).

RESEARCH ON SÁMI SKELETAL REMAINS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

One of the effects of early 20th century research on skulls and on human remains has been to construct an image of the Sámi as

a people without history, as well as a set of stereotypical images of Sámi livelihood, settlement and culture. In archaeology, this stereotyping of a group or a people can be seen as an act of simplification. It involves reducing a multitude of qualities into a few factors that are deemed essential, innate and natural (Baglo 2001:37). Stereotyping has also been a central discursive strategy in the colonial world's exercise of power against 'the other' (Bhabha 1994). To be effective, stereotypes must be constantly repeated and confirmed—preferably without anyone having to express them directly. The naturalised and stereotypical images produced about the Sámi contributed to essentialising, epitomising and consolidating ideas about race and culture, and thus in the end to legitimising politically oppressive programmes such as 'modernisation', 'assimilation' and 'Norwegianisation' (Baglo 2001:37).

In spite of the fact that the historical situation in Norway was created by the presence of two ethnic groups, the Norwegian and the Sámi, only the former has been honoured with a 'History' in connection with the period of nation-building from 1905 until the late 1980s. The Sámi vanished into the domains of ethnography during this period, and became a people without History (Olsen [1986] 2007). From the early 1900s to the 1970s the prevailing hypothesis was that the Sámi had immigrated from the north and east with their reindeer, at a very late phase, i.e. the 15th century. It was only during the 1980s that new hypotheses were put forward by a few archaeologists calling attention to the notion that the Sámi history extended far back in time. This implies that the Sámi origins in Scandinavia go much further back than

the old written sources from the first millennium AD, where the Sámi are described as ‘the Lapps or the Fenni’, groups that inhabit the true north (Hansen & Olsen 2004:48).

These are important topics which are still debated today in various political and popular forums, when questions concerning Sámi rights to land, water and natural resources are disputed. One of the major relevant political developments so far in this century has been the introduction of the Finnmark Act in 2005, giving the population in the County of Finnmark greater influence in the administration of land in the county. Discussion and recognition of existing cultural and historical rights is an important element, but there are many political groups and individuals who claim that the Finnmark Act is based on misinterpreted historical rights for the Sámi. These allegations sometimes go hand in hand with a desire to close down the Sámi Parliament and are often based on the question: Who came first, the Sámi or the Norwegians? In this way, a research history where human remains and Sámi skulls were measured and classified in a search for racial origins and characteristics, contributes to throwing long shadows into today’s political debate. While academic archaeologists repudiate national myths of a Nordic-Germanic people, such ideas can have a powerful afterlife in the popular mind and, in more hidden ways, persist even in academic discourse (Mulk 2009:199).

FROM SKULL MEASUREMENTS TO DNA AND ISOTOPE ANALYSES—THE EMPEROR’S NEW CLOTHES?

In recent years, research on skeletal remains has developed a number of new scientific approaches which may answer

questions that could not have been answered previously and were perhaps never even asked. In particular, research on human DNA and stable isotopes has proved successful in developing ever new angles on the general questions of population movement and relationships. A search for 'DNA analysis' on Google provides 10.6 million hits while 'stable isotope analysis' gives 1.1 million hits; and these are just the English language ones.

Since population movement and relationships to neighbouring groups have always been important parts of the research discussion about the Sámi, one might expect these new tools to be widely used in research on Sámi skeletons as well as on living people. However, if isotope analysis is linked to the Sámi population this gives only a handful of Google hits from Sweden and Finland, and although there is a much larger number of articles on Sámi DNA, they all tend to originate from sources and research institutions outside Norway. Norwegian Wikipedia summarizes DNA research on the Sámi like this (<http://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samer>, accessed 28 December, 2011; our translation):

[T]he origin of the Sámi has been of special interest in genetic research since the 1990s, because the Sámi are genetically the most different from the rest of the European populations. Research on the North Sámi populations in Sweden, Finland and Norway, and the East Sámi populations in Finland and Russia, shows some genetic variation between the Sámi groups, but a large degree of common descent. Mitochondrial DNA among the Sámi seems to be mainly (95.6%) of European descent, probably from the Iberian peninsula, with only the remaining 4.4% of a Siberian-Asiatic descent. Male Y DNA indicates that 29.8%

originate from the Iberian peninsula and 58.2% from Eastern Europe (Tambets 2004). There is even a genetic link to the North-African Berber population (Achilli 2005). Other studies indicate that the Sámi have no close relatives (Cavalli-Sforza 1994, Niskanen 2002) and that they separated from today's European populations about 10,000 years ago (Chikhi 1998). The nearest of the remote relatives are the Finns (Meinila 2001), and the Sámi are no closer to the Siberian peoples than the rest of the European populations (Niskanen 2002).

Even though Wikipedia may not be absolutely accurate and up-to-date, the summary points to a number of potentially interesting questions with wide implications for how the Sámi and the other Scandinavians see themselves and each other. The question is whether any of them have surfaced in research on the Norwegian Sámi skeletons. In an article in *Forskningsetikk* (Ekern 2009b), the Sámi Parliament (SP) lists the only four applications which they have received in the period 2001-09 for research on Sámi skeletons (two of them from foreign institutions):

1. A study of body proportions relating to cold climate adaptations (2001): The application was turned down for various reasons, including lack of knowledge about Sámi cultural history and awareness of the earlier stereotyping of the Sámi.
2. Hip dysplasia in Sámi infants (2008): The application was turned down because the Sámi Parliament doubted the basic assumption, and because the application did not include ethical considerations.
3. Changes in bone substance over time (2008): The application was granted, since it related to potential changes in bone

substance for people going through climate change, and it was thus seen as relevant today.

4. 14C-dating of 10 skeletons from the East Sámi churchyard in Neiden (2009): The application was granted, as it would provide information about the age of the churchyard, before the skeletons were returned for reburial.

None of these applications address the topics that have dominated DNA and isotope research over the last 10-20 years, i.e. population movement and relationships. The question is ‘Why’? Does the lacuna imply a lack of interest in such questions among Norwegian researchers, or could it be that the controversy surrounding the Sámi skeletons, ever since the 1990s, and the rules and regulations limiting access to them, act as a deterrent to *any* research on Sámi skeletons? Wasn’t the intention rather that research should be carried out according to ethical guidelines that did not repeat the mistakes of the past, and that the Sámi themselves should have the right to judge whether new research projects fulfilled these criteria? There does not seem to have been a general wish for less research; on the contrary, many Sámi are curious to see what modern research can contribute to the old debate about the ‘otherness’ of the Sámi. Researchers may, however, have interpreted the debate differently and decided to avoid potential controversy by not using Sámi remains.

So, the emperor may indeed have new clothes, but does he dare to wear them?

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