At least since the 1970s, claims for repatriation of items and human remains have been a part of the struggle for self-determination among indigenous people all over the world. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples from 2007 is a result of these efforts for self-determination. Repatriation of cultural remains of indigenous people can be viewed from three perspectives:

1. The perspective of power
2. The perspective of reconciliation
3. The perspective of knowledge

From an indigenous people’s horizon, the perspective of power includes several aspects. In the postcolonial epoch, decolonisation of the administrative system is a part of the political
process. Decolonisation, however, consists not only of political acts for self-determination, but also efforts for decolonisation of the human mind. Access to one’s heritage is a part of this. Striving for power and self-determination can also include religious claims. Thus, demands for reburial of human remains may be put forward by religious or ethno-political organisations.

Reconciliation is related to political and religious repression in the past. The aim of the reconciliation politics of today is to make things better in the future and leave the dark sides of history behind.

Empowerment and knowledge are essential aspects of the struggle for self-determination among indigenous people, and access to the cultural heritage is important in this. Heritage is a part of cultural identity on an individual as well as on a group level. Research in archaeology and history can also give new perspectives on the background of today’s situation and make it easier to look forward to the future and find new solutions.

THE LOSS AND RECLAIMING OF SÁMI CULTURAL HERITAGE
As a result of the colonisation of Swedish Lapland, the main bulk of Sámi cultural heritage material was brought to museums or private collections in other regions or other countries. The formal starting point for this colonisation may be seen as the decision in AD 1605 to establish specific church sites, a new administrative order, and market places controlled by the Swedish kingdom. Paganism was punished and shaman drums and other items were systematically collected or destroyed by Lutheran priests. After this early period of colonisation, a period of private collectors and museums collecting Sámi cultural heritage followed in the 1800s.
Repatriation and access to the Sámi cultural heritage is an important task for the Ájtte Sámi museum in Jokkmokk. When the museum opened in 1989, the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm provided a deposition of their collection of Sámi items to the new Ájtte museum. The Ájtte museum is the principal museum in Sweden for the Sámi culture. The role of the museum is not just to reproduce and present a once and forever fixed cultural identity, but also to play a part in a reflective discussion on Sámi history and identity.

In 2006, the Sámi Council of the Swedish Lutheran Church put forward a claim for repatriation and reburial of all Sámi human remains stored or exhibited in Swedish institutions. Their claim was that all Sámi human remains should be reburied according to the rituals of the Swedish Church. This was intended as an act of reconciliation between the Swedish Church and the Sámi people (Ekström 2006). Whether the human remains belonged to Christians or pagans was supposed to be of less importance in such a symbolic act of reconciliation. The human remains which could not be identified on an individual level were to be reburied in a mass grave, somewhere in Sápmi or in the Uppsala clerical centre. However, this resolution has caused some debate, because it is said by some to demonstrate a lack of respect for human remains from pre-Christian periods or remains of persons with other or no religious beliefs.

In a declaration from 2007, the Sámi Parliament in Sweden put forward a claim for repatriation and the possible reburying of all Sámi human remains in all institutions and
museums. The Sámi parliament recognised that more efforts were required to identify Sámi human remains, especially in the collections of the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. In the museum’s survey of their collections of human remains of indigenous peoples, the Sámi human remains were not listed. As a result of this unsatisfactory situation, the Museum of National Antiquities set up a working group with participants from the Sámi parliament, the Ájtte Sámi museum, and staff from the museum.

THE ROUNALA CASE AND THE NEW DATING OF THE HUMAN REMAINS

My discussion will now focus on the human remains from the Rounala burial site in northernmost Swedish Lapland (Figures 1 and 2). These remains have sparked an intensive debate in Sweden (Björkman 2009).

Figure 1. The Rounala site is situated alongside one of the main trade routes between the Bothnian Gulf and North Atlantic. (The figure is reprinted from Gunnar Hoppe: Vägarna inom Norrbottens län—Studier över den trafikgeografiska utvecklingen från 1500-talet till våra dagar. Uppsala, 1945; Geographica - Skrifter från Uppsala Universitets Geografiska Institution Nr 16.)
From historical sources it is known that a Lutheran chapel was situated in Rounala at the end of the 1500s (Wiklund 1916). Following an instruction in AD 1606 by the Swedish King Karl IX, a new Lutheran church was built in Enontekis (Anderzén 1989). The written sources inform us that the chapel and burial ground at Rounala were successively abandoned during the 1600s and finally during the 1700s. Nothing is known from written sources about the earlier history of the place.

As a result of an archaeological excavation by Eskil Olsson in 1915, a total of 21 skulls and some skeletons from the Rounala site were brought to the university in Uppsala. It was supposed that the skulls and skeletons were remains of a Sámi population buried at the Lutheran churchyard during the late 1500s and 1600s. The purpose of this excavation was to provide Sámi skulls for the university’s anatomical collection. As a result of a serious fire in
1892, the collection of Sámi skulls in the anatomical institution was destroyed. The excavation and new sampling campaign were rooted in the ideas of racial biology in the early 1900s. In 1996, part of the anatomical collection in Uppsala was given to the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. Twelve skulls and some parts of the skeletons have now been identified in the museum collection in Stockholm.

When the working group started the survey and dialogue about the human remains in the collections at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm, the group came to the conclusion that the excavation at Rounala was questionable from an ethical point of view. The excavation provided a clear example of the ideas and practices of racial biology concerning the Sámi people. The human remains may even belong to a time when names of Sámi families in the area are known from taxation lists. So far, repatriation and even reburying seemed to be a fair and relatively unproblematic act.

Only later was the working group informed about the sampling and analysis for radiocarbon dating and stable isotope analysis by Professor Kerstin Lidén at the University of Stockholm and Thomas Wallerström at the University of Trondheim, carried out some years earlier. It had hitherto been assumed that the human remains belonged to the period around AD 1600. The preliminary radiocarbon analysis, however, indicated a dating as early as the 1200s or 1300s. Comparable Sámi burials from this period are unknown in Sweden. Even more surprisingly, the site may have been an inland Christian underground burial site from medieval times.
The general opinion among researchers is that a medieval Sámi ethnic identity was formed in contrast to the Nordic societies that had become parts of Christianity (Hansen and Olsen 2004:140, Welinder 2008:129). This view has been fundamental to our understanding of the formation of Sámi ethnicity. In this context, the results from the Rounala analysis raise some questions. As no comparable burials are known in a Sámi context, there may be doubts about the ethnic identity of the remains (compare Schanche 2000). The Sámi population from that time is generally described as pre-Christian pagans with burial customs different from the Christians. The ethnic identity becomes more problematic with an early dating and no comparable graves from a Sámi context (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Typical Sámi over ground burial constructed of flat stones on a rocky island in an inland lake. (Photo: Kjell-Åke Aronsson.)
However, these datings also raise the possibility that other assumptions in earlier research are incorrect and can be questioned. This opens up new perspectives on medieval Sámi history. Christian contacts and influence may be dated back in time. The early Lutheran missionaries of the 1600s described the Sámi people as pre-Christian pagans. Probably, the Lutheran church and its missionaries had their own reasons for viewing the situation in this way. In this light, the descriptions might have been intended to make their roles as missionaries seem more heroic. These aspects of the Lutheran mission have been discussed by Granqvist (2004) among others.

However, the Sámi population may also have had earlier contact with, and influence from, the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Indeed, some priests were also aware of the possibility that the Sámi were influenced by Christian beliefs much earlier than the Lutheran mission. Hollsten (1768) discusses some information and traditions relating to missions and priests during the medieval Catholic period. He also describes some specific cultural traits indicating early contacts with the Sámi population.

RESULTS FROM STABLE ISOTOPE ANALYSIS OF THE ROUNALA HUMAN REMAINS
As mentioned, sampling for stable isotope analysis was also carried out on the Rounala human remains by Professor Kerstin Lidén. In archaeological research, stable isotope analysis from bone collagen is commonly used to investigate human living conditions in the past. The analysis can give information about the
kind of food that was consumed and from which region it came. Carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis can aid our understanding of the role of marine and terrestrial resources and the role of wild and cultivated plants in the diet of ancient human populations. Sulphur isotope analysis can give information on movements at an individual level. The content of sulphur can give information about whether a person has stayed throughout life in the same place where they were born or if they moved as an adult.

The results from the analysis of the Rounala human remains show that the diet was a combination of marine and terrestrial food. Reindeer meat was part of the diet but not very important. The sulphur values indicate that two individuals came from another region. All individuals have now been radiocarbon dated with corrections for a marine reservoir effect. Most of the individuals pre-date the time of the chapel in the mid 16th century. The datings also indicate continuity in the use of the burial site from the 14th to the 18th centuries. Males and females, juveniles and old people are represented. However, a much larger group should be expected for such a long period of time. What happened to the rest of the population? Did Eskil Olsson, inadvertently or not, leave parts of the site unexcavated? Or does this population represent the social and clerical elite of the contemporary society? This may be the case. According to the 17th century narrative of the vicar Tornaeus in Tornio, the old priest Dn. Georgius was buried by him in Rounala. This was Georgius’ last wish. However, for those individuals buried 300 years earlier our knowledge is still very restricted. The possibility that the Lutheran chapel was established at an older pagan burial site must not be disregarded.
Such symbolic acts were more the rule than the exception when the Christian church established its power.

A researcher in Sámi history is usually of the opinion that the social structure of siida societies and territories was established in the Sámi settlement areas during the medieval period (Hansen and Olsen 2004:93-103). It is supposed that the inland resources became more intensely exploited when the inland siida territories were established. The Rounala siida is supposed to be a typical inland siida territory from this period. Other researchers have questioned this view and see the siida territories as resulting from intervention and administrative organisation enforced by the Swedish and Russian states at a later period (Aronsson 2009, Eidlitz Kuoljok 2010). The Rounala burial site can also be discussed from this alternative perspective.

What about the formation of inland territories and intensified utilisation of the resources of the interior, as the analyses demonstrate a combination diet of marine and terrestrial food? The results from the analysis of samples from the Rounala human remains contradict established opinions about Sámi medieval history. Nor does the Rounala burial ground correspond to the general opinion on medieval Sámi burial customs. However, it must also be taken into consideration that the general view on Sámi medieval history and ethnic identity is a construction based on a rather weak empirical basis.

**NEW CLAIM ON THE SKULLS AND SKELETON**

When information about the dating of the skulls and skeletons reached the public, a new claim for more research was
raised by Kvenlandsförbundet, an organisation representing the so-called Kvän ethnic group in Norway and Sweden. The Kvän group in Sweden are mainly descendants of the Finnish speaking population of the Tornio river valley. This opinion of the Kvän group was also recognised at the Ministry of Culture when they decided not to repatriate the Rounala remains for reburying. The Minister of Culture Lena Adelssohn Liljeroth also mentioned the Kvän group when she informed the media about the government’s decision (16 July 2009). ‘This is very important for us’ was the comment from Vice-Chairman Gertrud Monlund of the Kvenlandsförbundet. Wallerström has discussed the problems related to identifying past ethnic groups. The ethnicities of our own time have not been exactly the same through history (Wallerström 2006). The new knowledge about the dating of the Rounala remains has also aroused new interest in research among the inhabitants of the small villages close to the Rounala site. A local association called ‘Rounala lappby’ named after the old siida territory Rounala has also contacted the museum in Stockholm and asked for more research into the prehistory of the area.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
Who has the right to the skulls and skeletons from Rounala from an ethical point of view?

How far back in time does a religious, political or ethnic group have an exclusive right to decide about remains from a distant past? Religion, politics and ethnicities have shifted throughout history and different ethnic groups of today can
also have a common history in the past. At least in terms of the language, the Sámi and Kvän populations have a common Finno-Ugric origin. The starting point for the dialogue about the human remains at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm was the claim for repatriation and reburying by the Swedish Lutheran church in 2006. However, the main part of the human remains seems to belong to a time long before the Swedish Lutheran church existed and even before the Swedish Kingdom acquired control over the area in question. So far this claim can be questioned. Even more questionable is the proposal for reburials at the clerical centre of Uppsala or at some other place. One of the 17th century burials may be the priest Georgius. We know it was his last wish to be buried in Rounala. If he can be identified, his last wish must be taken into ethical consideration.

The results of the scientific analysis of the human remains from Rounala have definitely provided new information about this burial site. The results so far also raise questions and doubts about the established views on Sámi medieval history. Does anyone have the exclusive right to decide on the ‘correct’ and ‘final’ opinion about the human remains from Rounala? No one can with certainty state that they are ‘my’ ancestors. Is reburying the remains in the earth, thus putting a stop to research and scientific discussion, the best decision in this situation? To obtain more knowledge about what the Rounala site represents, new archaeological investigations are necessary and also more analysis of the skulls and skeletons. More research may also reveal new surprises contradicting established views.
EPILOGUE: WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE HUMAN REMAINS FROM ROUNALA?

The Swedish Sámi Parliament in 2009 presented a claim for repatriation to the Swedish Government doc.no. 2009-648). With reference to the scientific importance and well-preserved status of the human remains from Rounala, the Sámi Parliament considered deposition to the Ájtte museum a plausible solution, acceptable also from an ethical point of view. The remains will be accessible for scientific research but the Sámi Parliament will have control through an ethical framework and committee.

As a result of this claim, the Museum of National Antiquities decided to transfer the human remains from Rounala to the Ájtte museum in Jokkmokk. The Ájtte museum is an independent foundation by the Sámi organisation Svenska Samernas Riksförbund (SSR), Same Ätnam, the municipality of Jokkmokk, the county of Norrbotten and the Swedish state.

According to the ICOM ethical rules, the Ájtte museum is responsible for taking care of the human remains from Rounala. The scientific analyses hitherto have demonstrated the importance of the human remains for research and for rethinking Sámi medieval history and, in a broader sense, the medieval history of northern Fennoscandia. Further research may also open up for serious dialogue.
REFERENCES

For information about the decisions from the Swedish Sámi Parliament see: www.sametinget.se


