

PREHISTORIC VIOLENCE AS DIFFICULT HERITAGE

Sandby Borg – A Place of Avoidance and Belonging

Gustav Wollentz

Despite an increased focus on heritage connected to violence within archaeological research projects, there has been no proper focus on the rediscovery of prehistoric massacres, from the perspective of difficult heritage. Most likely, the temporal distance involved has led to the assumption that such research is superfluous. The ongoing excavations of an Iron Age massacre in the ring fort of Sandby Borg, on Öland, Sweden, challenges the validity of such an *a priori* assumption. This paper focuses on Sandby Borg through interviews conducted with the local population who grew up near the ring fort. The interviews reveal how new narratives and relations to the past have been created through the discovery. The results call for us to move away from a linear and chronological understanding of difficult heritage, in which time is approached as gradually ‘purifying’ difficult heritage, towards understanding ‘dissonance’ as inherent in each site of heritage, which can be used as a resource.

Keywords: difficult heritage, dissonant heritage, temporality, prehistoric violence, memory studies, folklore, Sandby Borg

Graduate School Human Development in Landscapes
Kiel University
Leibnizstr. 3, 24118 Kiel, Germany
gwollentz@gshdl.uni-kiel.de

INTRODUCTION

Despite an increased focus on the heritage connected to violence within recent archaeological research projects (see for example Moshenska 2012; Saunders 2012; González-Ruibal & Hall 2015; González-Ruibal & Moshenska 2015; Sørensen & Viejo-Rose 2015a; Seitsonen & Koskinen-Koivisto 2017), there has so far been no proper focus on the rediscovery of prehistoric massacres, from the perspective of difficult heritage, defined here as how to stage and present a violent and/or otherwise unsettling past in the present. Considering the growing body of literature focusing on prehistoric violence (Keeley 1997; Otto *et al.* 2006; Harding 2007; Schulting & Fibiger 2012; Ralph 2013; Varberg 2014; Price *et al.* 2017; Horn & Kristiansen forthcoming), studying these sites from the perspective of difficult heritage appears all the more relevant. The lack of such research is most likely due to the assumed temporality of such a heritage. The proverb that ‘time heals all wounds’ may have supported a general assumption that research about difficult heritage in the distant past is superfluous. Therefore, the field has limited itself to modern or contemporary sites of conflict (Macdonald 2009), or merely reserved it for spectacular exceptions, such as the famous battle of the Teutoburg Forest, AD 9, between Roman legions and Germanic tribes, which was



Figure 1. Sandby Borg from above. Photo: Sebastian Jacobsson.



Figure 2. Skeleton from Sandby Borg. Photo: Daniel Lindskog.

highly politicized and mythologized during the 19th century building of the German nation up until the fall of Nazi Germany (see for example Baltrusch *et al.* 2012). However, the excavation of the Iron Age ring fort of Sandby Borg (figure 1), located on Öland, south-eastern Sweden, challenges the validity of such an *a priori* assumption of heritage.

In 2011, a horrible massacre most likely consisting of several hundred individuals, including children, was discovered inside the ring fort of Sandby Borg, which was in use during the 5th century AD. The massacre is currently being unearthed through excavations conducted by Kalmar County Museum (Victor & Dutra Leivas 2011; Victor 2012, 2014, 2015; Victor *et al.* 2013; Pappmehl-Dufay & Alfsdotter 2014; Gunnarsson *et al.* 2015; Alfsdotter *et al.* forthcoming). The individuals who were the unfortunate victims of this massacre are found on the streets or lying inside the houses, without any proper burials or treatment of the dead (figure 2). Furthermore, the discovery of seven relief brooches of gilded silver (figure 3), most of them deliberately deposited in specific spots inside the houses (Blohmé *et al.* 2011; Victor 2015:101–102; Fallgren & Ljungkvist 2016), as well as numerous other prestige objects including two Roman solidi and an elaborate gilded sword fitting, raises the question why the fort was never used again nor carefully plundered of its riches. The excavation leader Helena Victor suggests that those who wished to bury the dead in an appropriate fashion may have been stopped from entering the fort by a physical presence on site (Victor 2015:115). Adding to



Figure 3. One of the relief brooches. Photo: Daniel Lindskog.

these enigmas is a story which has been circulating through media and among the local population since the start of the investigation, stating that the fort has been a place of avoidance in the landscape ever since the massacre, up until present times. These issues lead to poignant questions concerning violence, memory and landscapes. Consequently, this paper will not focus on the specific details surrounding the Iron Age massacre (see instead Victor & Dutra Leivas 2011; Victor 2012, 2014, 2015; Victor *et al.* 2013; Pappmehl-Dufay & Alfsdotter 2014; Viberg *et al.* 2014; Gunnarsson *et al.* 2015; Alfsdotter *et al.* forthcoming), but on the site as present-day heritage, and on the intricate connection between violence, memory and landscapes.

VIOLENCE, MEMORY AND LANDSCAPES

A decision to focus on these connections was made because massacres, such as the one discovered in Sandby Borg, may fundamentally alter the relationship to a landscape. There is anthropological research showing how war and violence can affect the perceived stability and temporality of a particular place, influencing everyday life and habits (Jansen 2009; Carabelli 2013; Palmberger 2016). Even though there are only a few studies focusing more specifically on the memory of violence during prehistory (Goldhahn 2009, 2012), there is no reason to believe that

this only relates to modern cases. Furthermore, these aspects are closely tied to the spatial and embodied dimensions of memory (Halbwachs 1980:66; Connerton 1989, 2009). Violence may lead to a wave of memorials being built in a landscape, which causes an increase in activities and engagements (see for example Duijzings 2007). These practices often serve to achieve a sense of closure and regain stability, enforcing certain views of the past while silencing those views which are regarded as unwanted (Trouillot 1995; Anheier & Ray Isar 2011; Sørensen & Viejo-Rose 2015a). However, violence may also lead to narratives of silence; to the neglect and avoidance of a particular landscape (Connerton 2009:16–17, 2011:51–82), forming what can be termed ‘places of avoidance’ in the landscapes or so-called ‘negative spaces’ (Munn 1996). Here, the memory of violence is maintained through incorporated (embodied) habits in the landscape (see Connerton 1989). Such incorporated practices of avoidance may be actively chosen (Wollentz forthcoming), or they may be enforced.

To be the victim of violence, or to experience family and friends succumbing to it, may lead to passivity, silence, apathy and a need to reclaim a sense of agency, justice and truth (Arendt 1968:104; Jackson 2013:103), in which the heritage can play a role. Nevertheless, wartime violence is in itself a performative act, which often aims to make manifest, to make solid and thereby conjure up, the fugitive and elusive presence of certain values and identities of ‘us’ and of ‘the Other’ (see for example Herscher 2010:91). However uncomfortable such a fact may be, heritage is also created through violence and destruction (Holtorf 2015). After all, heritage is no longer fundamentally concerned with beauty, monumentality and endurance, aspects which have been prevailing ever since the 19th century within the so-called Authorized Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006; Sørensen 2013). Instead, in the last few decades there has been a move away from seeing heritage as a fixed entity with unchanging properties. Indeed, heritage is now approached as both inherently intangible and inherently dissonant, created and sustained through meaningful engagements with places, monuments and objects (Smith 2006; Kisić 2016). Violence may not be the kind of engagement that we would favour, but it does add new meanings and values to heritage. As Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose have written, conflict ‘engenders new sites and adds new symbolic dimensions to existing ones even as others are destroyed and disappear’ (Sørensen & Viejo-Rose 2015b:8).

If we approach the excavation process as a transformative practice which alters the meaning we give to material culture (Lucas 2001), we have to ask ourselves what kind of role the rediscovery of a long-

forgotten massacre may have for the local community. Certainly, for every excavation, new values and meanings are created, leading to new engagements with the past. As Gavin Lucas phrased it: ‘The moment we put a pick in the ground, we are potentially bringing something new into the world, something that has never been seen before. Of course the objects we dig up were once part of another cultural system, but as soon we dig them up, they become something different because they enter a new cultural system’ (Lucas 2001:42). This is not a trivial statement, on the contrary, understanding and evaluating these newly created meanings and values is crucial when presenting and developing the site as heritage (for discussions of the values of heritage see Avrami *et al.* 2000; Smith *et al.* 2010; Alexandersson *et al.* 2011; Wollentz 2014a, 2017). Therefore, the question addressed in this paper is what kind of meanings have been created through the rediscovery of the massacre in Sandby Borg, with a particular focus on the relationship to the landscape itself among the local population who grew up close to the ring fort.

BACKGROUND

The focus on Sandby Borg from the perspective of difficult heritage became increasingly relevant due to the above-mentioned stories circulating of a long-term avoidance of the fort. These stories started to be expressed to archaeologists from the moment that the massacre was discovered in 2011 and they have persisted up until today. It is mainly the older generation that has expressed these views (Gunnarsson *et al.* 2016:9). Even though the excavating archaeologists have been intrigued and fascinated by these stories, they have also been hesitant to accept them at face value without more thorough research being carried out on the matter. Not surprisingly, perhaps, a more outspoken approach has often been taken by the different media outlets reporting the site (for example von Reis 2014). In the *Archaeology Magazine*, published by the Archaeological Institute of America in February 2016, the following can be read:

Whatever happened at Sandby Borg seems to have left a lasting scar on the island. Villagers in nearby Gårdby remember being told by their parents not to play near the fort’s ruins, and, according to local legend, the town’s churchyard is haunted by ghosts from Sandby Borg. (Curry 2016)

Despite the frequency of people telling archaeologists that they avoided the ring fort as kids, and the presence of this myth spread through media, there are no written records of such a practice in previous accounts.

The first written descriptions of the ring fort (Rhezelius 1634; Hilfeling 1796; Sjöborg 1822; Ahlquist 1827) focus on the physical aspects of the fort, especially on the number of entrances and the visibility of house foundations. The immediate proximity to the sea has caused Sandby Borg to be interpreted differently than other ring forts on Öland which are located inland and in many cases were even used until medieval times with certain gaps in activity (for general information on the ring forts on Öland see Stenberger 1933:213–252, 1966; Näsman 1984; Fallgren 2009). In 1972, the archaeologist Margareta Beskow wrote the following about Sandby Borg:

These conditions [referring to the defence constructions directed inland] and the proximity just next to the sea give the impression that the defence has been directed towards an enemy coming from the inland, rather than a coastal intruder. Maybe it was not people from Öland that kept Sandby Borg, but a foreign colony that had settled there? (Beskow 1972:36, my translation)

The prevalence of seeing Sandby Borg as an alien element in the Iron Age of Öland, possibly inhabited by foreigners, was also common among my interview partners, as will be presented later. The massacre seems to have occurred at the end of the 5th century AD, a period characterized by the fall of Western Rome which decreased the influx of Roman *solidi* entering the island, and led to large-scale movements of people (Victor 2015:115). Furthermore, the period after the massacre signified a considerable decrease in activity on the island of Öland (and other parts of Scandinavia), as well as what has been interpreted as a widespread and severe climate crisis, possibly starting in 536 AD (Gräslund 2008; Gräslund & Price 2012). For the folklore surrounding Sandby Borg, John Larsson, born in Södra Sandby in 1895, has produced our most reliable documentation. Larsson represented the Swedish National Heritage Board in the region, and in 1960 he wrote down his memories and knowledge about the Gårdby-Sandby community (Larsson 1960). In this document, he elaborates on the stories he has collected surrounding Sandby Borg, involving strange lights above the fort and the presence of trolls and little people. The most prevalent one is that of a wagon with gold that can be found inside the fort. In one interview I was told that the treasure can only be discovered if specific conditions are met, involving two white oxen, midnight and complete silence. Folklore about the possibility of finding treasure in archaeological remains or the presence of strange lights above them seems to be commonplace all over the world and may often go back to medieval times (see for example Burström 1993:17–21; Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 1999a). Furthermore, it is fairly common to hear stories warning people not to dig into archaeological

remains in search of treasure, including the threat that any person doing so would be brutally punished. This type of story seems to be especially common concerning prehistoric graves, and it may be based on a fear of ghosts coming back to haunt the living if disturbed (Zachrisson 1996:100–102). In 2014, the archaeologist Sophie Vallulv went through all known written documents about Sandby Borg, and concluded that remarkably few stories have been written down about Sandby Borg considering the huge impact the massacre must have had on the local community (Vallulv forthcoming).

NARRATIVES AND CHRONOTOPES

It is by studying narratives that I will approach the issue, involving different ways of narrating the past in order to make it meaningful in the present. Such an approach is beneficial, since it is through the construction of specific narratives that the past reveals itself most profoundly and influences the present. Furthermore, these narratives unavoidably include silences (Trouillot 1995:25; Wertsch & Billingsley 2011), which are sometimes actively produced and may not be enforced. In such a way, silences are in themselves neither positive nor negative but an essential category in each narrative, and fundamental for understanding the meaning and relevance of the narrative. Silences can be incorporated into bodily practice (Connerton 1989; Connerton 2009:16–17), for example through the avoidance of certain places, as is evident through spatial taboos among the Warlpiri Aborigines in Australia (Munn 1996). These silences may even form parts of narrating your own life history in the way you choose to, which is fundamental in regaining a sense of agency – especially if you narrate incidents strongly connected to periods of helplessness and powerlessness (Jackson 2013:70–74).

As Michel-Rolph Trouillot points out (1995:30), the physical remains of the past help create these narratives. In fact, a sense of place and a sense of time are necessary components in the narratives constructed. The close link between spatial and temporal relations within narratives can be approached through the concept of chronotopes, outlined by the Russian literature professor Mikhail Bakhtin: ‘We will give the name chronotope, (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships’ (Bakhtin 1981:84). This concept, which builds upon Einstein’s theory of relativity, is useful when trying to understand the relationship people have towards specific places and how this relationship ties to different temporalities. Bakhtin also states

that it is through the intricate space/time relations, that ‘time’ becomes visible and concrete:

We cannot help but be strongly impressed by the *representational* importance of the chronotope. Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins. (Bakhtin 1981:250)

Bakhtin focuses his research on novels, but the concept of the chronotope is also applicable to other types of constructed narratives (see for example Aronsson 2009:17; Guttormsen 2013; Goldhahn 2015).

The narratives constructed are closely tied to memories. The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1980) perceptively recognized the significance of space for locating, defining and giving direction to our memories (see also Connerton 2009), i.e. in order to form them into narratives. The implication of this recognition is that each memory has to be located within a spatial and temporal framework. Furthermore, it is these frameworks that give the fragility of memories the perception of endurance. As expressed by Halbwachs: ‘Now space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings’ (Halbwachs 1980:139–140). Furthermore, Paul Connerton (1989) distinguishes between two forms of practices in which memories are preserved: incorporated and inscribed. Inscribing practices are the act of trying to preserve, trap and store information by physical means, i.e. through written means or through the building of monuments. Incorporating practices are messages imparted by current bodily activity, a memory that is embodied and acted out through everyday and standardized activities. In this way, Connerton shows how memory is profoundly incorporated (embodied) and maintained through habits within a physical environment. In turn, the environment does not simply serve as a passive backdrop, but also plays a role in influencing these habits (see Mitchell 2000:94–95). In consequence, different practices within a landscape can generate different pasts, and following Bakhtin’s development of chronotopes (1981), engage with and generate different concepts of time through the construction of narratives.

Others have shown how the mechanisms of producing temporal distance or proximity are crucial when analysing the engagements people have towards difficult heritage (Macdonald 2006:22, 2009:80–101, see also Meskell 2002:571). A sense of temporal and geographical distance can be actively produced, because such a production may serve a certain need within a given time (Wollentz forthcoming). However, the

production of distance also involves implications. The anthropologist Johannes Fabian has shown that the practice of temporally dislocating people into a time other than now has served a role in a process of ‘Othering’, within the discipline of anthropology. As Fabian puts it: ‘When popular opinion identifies all anthropologists as handlers of bones and stones it is not in error; it grasps the essential role of anthropology as a provider of temporal distance’ (Fabian 2014:30). It would be safe to say that Fabian here includes archaeology as a sub-field of anthropology within the four-field approach common in the United States. Providing temporal distance may be particularly convenient in the context of massacres including uncomfortable emotions and engagements with the past. Whether it be convenient or not, such a temporal distance carries implications with it.

A site of difficult heritage, such as Sandby Borg, must be studied from the different spatial/temporal relations that can be traced within the narratives constructed. Through the interviews conducted, I aim to study in more detail how Sandby Borg is made meaningful through the construction of narratives, and the implications of these narratives when developing the site as heritage.

FOLKLORE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The approach to temporality and difficult heritage seems to be different when studying indigenous heritage, in which the distinction between the distant and the recent past appears to be of less relevance specifically concerning the emotional impact of the site (see for example McMillin 2006). This may be based on the common notion that ‘indigenous’ people have a different way of relating to the past, and thus to temporality, than that of ‘western’ people, which also has to be respected within heritage management (Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 1999b:17). This may be a valid assertion, but it is also crucial to recognize that a distinction between ‘western’ and ‘indigenous’ may not be a clear cut or self-evident dichotomy as regards, for example, temporality. Instead there may be benefits in approaching the processes of making heritage meaningful as a form of ontological pluralism in order ‘to acknowledge the heterogeneity between and across these various domains of practice which undermines and complicates such simple dichotomies’ (Harrison 2015:28). In other words, it is not self-evident why temporality should be seen as gradually decreasing the difficulty concerning European heritage but not concerning heritage in other parts of the world. After all, in Europe too there is a wide range of different attitudes towards the past, of which

the so-called ‘enlightened academic way’ represents only one of many (Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 1999b:17).

Such an assertion can be directly related to the Sandby Borg case study. Folklore is an attitude towards the past which is often regarded as unscientific and thus as an alternative to academic approaches. In fact, folklore and archaeology was separated with the birth of archaeology as a distinct academic discipline during the 19th century. Subsequently, archaeology and folklore came to be developed with often contradictory attitudes towards time. As argued by Mats Burström: ‘While dating and chronology are essential in archaeology, they are of minor importance in folklore tradition’ (Burström 1999:33). This has led many archaeologists to be either disdainful or negligent towards folk traditions. Nevertheless, the stories told around the past and its archaeological remains are part of the processes which make the heritage meaningful for people (Burström 1993, 1996; Holtorf 1996, 2000–2008).

It is around 1500 years since the gruesome massacre in Sandby Borg occurred. If the alleged long-term avoidance of the place is as old as the massacre, it poses significant questions surrounding the transmission of memories. There has been a considerable amount of debate about how long a memory, for instance concerning a specific turbulent incident such as a massacre, can be held ‘intact’ through generations without the use of written means (Vansina 1985; Nunn & Reid 2015). The historian Roger Echo-Hawk states that it has to vary between contexts, and continues with the mind-boggling assertion that historical information generated through oral traditions cannot go longer back than 40,000 years (Echo-Hawk 2000:274). On a similar note, Patrick Nunn & Nicholas Reid (2015) have argued that stories surrounding the rising sea level among the Aborigines in Australia, can possibly be referring to approximately 7000 years back in time, when the sea level reached its current stage. However, there are also anthropological studies showing how oral traditions are always in transformation and are therefore never fixed or static. They inevitably change since they are part of a living tradition (Barth 1987). Based on the need to scientifically approach folk traditions, different methods of evaluating the longevity of such traditions have been developed (Vansina 1985), but these seldom focus on incorporating practices, such as a practice of avoidance, but instead on the transmission of oral stories.

When post-processual archaeology became increasingly influential in the 1980s and 1990s, folk traditions were yet again considered of scientific value. However, the focus had radically shifted. Instead of studying folk traditions in order to find out information about the past, and thus proving or disproving the accuracy of the oral traditions, there was a

desire to recognize other ways of making archaeology meaningful than the academic way, and thereby create a dialogue about the past and move towards a more inclusive archaeology (Layton 1999:31). As Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius Holtorf expressed it: ‘when meaning is taken as the most significant aspect of folklore, the question of its authenticity becomes moot: if it has become part of the folk tradition about the past, it is part of that tradition whether or not its origins are in literature or commercial invention’ (Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 1999b:12). This approach went hand in hand with a general criticism in archaeological theory against considering only the construction of monuments and their initial phases as meaningful, while neglecting subsequent uses and meanings, i.e. disregarding the full life-history of archaeological remains (Burström 1993, 1996; Burström *et al.* 1996; Holtorf 1996; 2000–2008; Bradley 2002; Hållans-Stenholm 2012). Thus, in order to paint a more fair and complete picture of the meaning behind heritage, folk traditions, regardless of their possible historical accuracy, should also be taken into consideration.

METHOD

As a member of the Sandby Borg project (see www.sandbyborg.se) and as part of my PhD project carried out at the Graduate School Human Development in Landscapes, Kiel University, I investigated more thoroughly the links between memory, violence and landscapes by conducting interviews with people who grew up close to the ring fort. Other aspects of developing Sandby Borg as heritage are currently being studied through target groups by Bodil Petersson and Carolina Jonsson Malm at Linnaeus University and Kalmar County Museum. Furthermore, Fredrik Gunnarsson at the Kalmar County Museum is working on the digital communication of Sandby Borg (Gunnarsson *et al.* 2016). Their research is still in the process of being finalized, and will not be included in this paper (however see Pappmehl-Dufay & Söderström 2017 for a perspective on Sandby Borg and digital media).

In preparing the fieldwork I worked closely with the excavation leader Helena Victor who initially suggested interesting people to interview. The interviews were all carried out in the summer of 2016. Every person interviewed usually had further recommendations of people, making it possible to move from one person to the next one, a so-called snowball method. The area around Sandby Borg is not densely populated and my general focus was on the people who were born there and who had spent a long life living around the fort, i.e. the older generation. This focus

was selected for two reasons: (1) It was primarily the older generation who had expressed to archaeologists that they were told to avoid the fort as kids (Gunnarsson *et al.* 2016:9), and (2) The older generation often displayed a larger degree of interest in the local history and heritage. In particular cases, however, younger people were interviewed as well. The interview data consists of 21 individuals, and all interviews were qualitative in nature. I choose to stop interviewing people when individuals started to repeatedly suggest interviewing people I had already spoken to. Each interview generally lasted between one and two hours and they were all carried out in Swedish. The transcripts presented in this paper are translated into English by myself. The interviews were recorded and thereafter fully transcribed.

The general questions asked in each interview were the following: (1) Did you hear any stories of Sandby Borg when you were growing up? If so, which ones and who told them? (2) Did you visit the site as a child? If so, what did you do while visiting it? (3) Do you have any particular memories of going there? (4) How did you react when you found out about the massacre? (5) Is there anything particular that fascinates you about Sandby Borg? (6) Do you still visit the site? If so, how do these visits make you feel and what do you do there? Furthermore, each interview included additional questions depending on the specific dynamic of each interview. It was also of interest to me to allow everyone to discuss Sandby Borg from the point of their own interests as well, without unnecessarily directing the conversation. In such a way, I was given insights into which aspects they valued (or did not value) about Sandby Borg, and which perspectives they had on the site as heritage more generally, without forcing my own views upon them.

A PLACE OF AVOIDANCE

What initially drew me to carry out the interviews was the alleged practice of avoidance, and the possibility of a so-called ‘scar’ in the landscape (see Storm 2014:3–8 for a theoretical discussion of the scar metaphor in landscapes) prevailing for more than 1500 years (Wollentz 2014b). Such a phenomenon would emphasize that the incorporating practices of memory is at least as significant as the inscribing practices, if not more so (Connerton 1989). Currently, we do not know if there were any forms of deliberate physical reminders of the massacre left in the landscape after it happened (Victor 2015:115), which may also have served a role to remind people for a certain amount of time. When I interviewed people I chose not to pose a direct question about avoidance, but instead asked

more general questions concerning what it was like to grow up near the fort and what kind of stories they may or may not have heard. Nevertheless, I soon came to realize that the issue of avoidance was often one of the first aspects people mentioned whether any questions relating to it or not were asked. In some cases it was even brought up during the phone call in which I asked if the person wanted to be interviewed or not. Consequently, the alleged practice of a long-term avoidance is very well-known among the local population. In fact, not a single person interviewed was not aware of it, but, as we will see, another question is whether they already knew about it before the Sandby Borg project was widely reported on in the media. Furthermore, it was an issue that clearly intrigued and fascinated the people who grew up near the fort.

Despite the myth of avoidance being known among every individual interviewed, it was highly disputed. Indeed, a majority of those interviewed actively contested that such a practice of avoidance had ever existed. As this man in his mid-60s, living in Skarpa Alby, told me:

GW: Did you ever go to Sandby Borg?

[..] I was over there [as a kid]. And we were down at the fort as well. But I don't remember anything about any stories. About ghosts or anything else. [...] Those stories seem to have been invented in the present ... I was about to say.

GW: In the present?

Yes, you hear a lot more now. Once the fort became hotter. But what is ... I don't know. [sounding sceptical]

GW: In which circumstances do you hear this?

Well, now people say that it was one of those places that no one dared go to, and all kind of things. But there was nothing like that when we grew up.

This can be understood as a counter-reaction to the widespread myth of avoidance. In most cases the interview partner continues by mentioning his/her own nostalgia-tinged memories of visiting the place as a kid, which often involves playing in the fort, swimming in the water off the fort, and spending precious time with family and friends. For several people living nearby, it seems to have been a favourite location, not necessarily for the sake of the ring fort itself, but for the beautiful nature, the sea and the possibility of finding some privacy in contrast to the more frequently visited swimming and sunbathing destinations further north. These memories are mentioned to me as if they are threatened and have to be defended. This may not be surprising considering how these memories contrast against the image often presented in media (for example von Reis 2014; Curry 2016), in which pictures

of a scarred and avoided landscape are singled out. This has even led some people to conduct their own research on the question, including calling other friends who also grew up close to the fort. As this male pensioner, who has been highly engaged in the local community during his life, explained to me:

Well, as I told you, as a small kid I lived over there, and stayed there. But this ... that you were supposed to keep away from the fort, I never heard anything about that. And I have asked older people as well, who have lived nearby, and they haven't heard it [either]. [...]

GW: Where have you heard this?

Well, it's a myth that has come forward, right. That this massacre existed in oral tradition, throughout all these centuries. But that is simply impossible. I don't believe in it.'

There were even individuals who suggested that the archaeologists themselves had invented the 'myth' of long-term avoidance in order to gain publicity for their research.

Henning West, who was the local priest in the fifties and early sixties, allegedly delivered religious sermons in the fort on several occasions, such as on Ascension Day. Furthermore, in August 1959 he staged a theatre play in the fort named 'Hemkomst' (Homecoming), taking place during the Viking Age, and including Christian messages (West 1959; Nilsson 2009). The play was very well attended and most people I interviewed remember it or have heard of it, and in some cases even played a role in it. Additionally, several people interviewed mention that the church in Sandby, finished in 1863, was built using stones from Sandby Borg. Adding to these religious connotations, I also interviewed one woman, now in her mid-40s, who got married in the fort in 2005. The woman grew up south of Gårdby, and her parents were also from the region. She expressed it in the following way:

I wanted to be there because I didn't want to be like everyone else, and my husband is an archaeologist [...] and to convince an archaeologist you have to pick a fort. And then we decided to find a beautiful spot on Öland [...] and Sandby Borg is super-super beautiful. But now, in hindsight, I am super happy that we stood on top of the wall, towards the water. So we haven't been standing on any dead person.

These examples do not rule out that there might have been a long-term practice of avoidance as well. After all, I did interview people who had been told to avoid the fort as kids, but most often it seemed to be because of parents being afraid of snakes or the depth of the water. Only

in one interview did my interview partner insist that his mother had had difficult feelings about Sandby Borg. Still, those with most knowledge about the local history were also the ones most sceptical about a practice of long-term avoidance.

It is impossible to either rule out or prove that such an embodied practice of avoidance has been present up until today. Yet, it is clear that a myth of long-term avoidance is much better known *now* than before the start of excavation in 2011. When asked about their memories of Sandby Borg most people described the place using the terms ‘the memory is the same regardless of my age, it simply existed there’, ‘it is a place that has always been there’ or ‘It has just existed there [...] I grew up with Sandby Borg.’ For most people it was a taken-for-granted place that was ‘simply there’, and connected to beautiful nature and personal memories of friends, siblings, parents or grandparents. If we analyse this through the concept of chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981) outlined previously, this is a chronotope that exists in a continuous and never-changing present, a chronotope which is located close at home, within a beautiful landscape, connected to friends and family, happy memories, a time which moves at a very slow speed of peaceful tranquillity. To analyse it further, this chronotope represents a time and a place which is connected to the feeling of belonging for my individual informants (Jansen 2009). However, with the start of excavation and the widespread circulation of a new story about long-term avoidance, people suddenly seem to feel a need to defend this chronotope to me, as if to give legitimacy and value to their own happy recollections of visiting the site.

The narrative of long-term avoidance can be seen in the light of violence being an act with the potential to disrupt narratives and feelings of continuity, as the anthropologist Michael Jackson has stated (2013) building on the work of Hannah Arendt (1968). Focusing on how life ceases to be narratable in the light of crisis and violence, Jackson writes: ‘In death or disaster, succession or seriality give way to simultaneity. The present is stuck like a gramophone needle in the groove of one fateful moment in the past’ (Jackson 2013:103). Evidently, violence is an act which is especially emotionally disruptive, with the capability to ‘produce long-term ontological changes in the subject’ (González-Ruibal & Hall 2015:152). However, there are several different forms of violence (Žižek 2007:8–13) involving different emotional responses, with the potential both to break up narratives and to create new ones in the process. This needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the narratives surrounding Sandby Borg, while keeping in mind that even the rediscovery of a massacre creates new narratives and engagements with

the past. Based on my interview data, one possible explanation may be that the rediscovery of such a gruesome massacre led some people to give new meanings to previous memories of visiting the site, i.e. of re-interpreting the meaning of previous memories. These new meanings were spread through media and led to a widespread narrative of long-term avoidance, which in turn is challenged by a majority of those interviewed, who do not feel it corresponds to their own childhood memories. It certainly shows that the discovery of the massacre in Sandby Borg has created new myths as well as new relationships to the past and to the landscape, but these have not been accepted freely as there are areas of contestation.

DIFFICULT HERITAGE

This leads us to the poignant question of how the local population related to the discovery of the heritage of the recently unearthed massacre. Did they perceive it as difficult, and if so, how and when was this difficulty expressed? The bride, for one, did seem to worry about where she had stood during her wedding ceremony, retrospectively. When asked how they reacted when they got to know about the discovery, the most common response was ‘fantastic’, ‘exciting’ or ‘great fun’. Later on in the interview, when I asked whether people found the discovery of the massacre somehow uncomfortable, difficult or unpleasant, the most common response was one of surprise. Many people even told me that they had never thought about the site as difficult at all, and often people responded as if the very question was asked in the wrong way. For example, this elderly man currently living in Färjestaden seemed to be perplexed by the idea:

GW: Did the discovery of the massacre ever feel unpleasant?

No, I have never reflected on that ... No, I have not.

GW: Because it was a long time ago, maybe?

Well, it's normal that you discover dead bodies. Not that many in the same place, perhaps, but I was at the excavation and I was looking at the skeletons there, and I took a good photo ... but I have never made any kind of special reflection upon it. No. Partly because it was a long time ago, and also, as the girl [the guide] said, we didn't know them. [laughter] So no, I can't say I have.

Contrary to feelings of difficulty, I noted a great deal of engagement and excitement, especially when trying to interpret the event, but also

related to the bodies themselves, as this elderly woman living in Gårdby expressed to me:

GW: Do you think there is something unpleasant in the discovery as well, or is it more exciting?

No, I didn't find it unpleasant. But I found it so fantastic that these bodies have been lying there for all these years. It was not far below the surface! I found that amazing. [Showing me photos that she took of skeletons]

Cornelius Holtorf has studied how archaeologists are commonly portrayed in popular culture as detectives (Holtorf 2007:75–84), and I noted that people could carry on for a long time trying to come up with theories, in some ways taking on the role of archaeological detectives themselves. Of course, sometimes the theories were unfeasible, but it was amazing to see the depth of engagement and participation in interpreting the past among the people interviewed.

There are specific instances when questions of continuity with the past are made relevant. The people interviewed often expressed pride in the discovery of the massacre in Sandby Borg and how such a huge and important discovery can occur in such a small and unimportant community. In such a way, it is pride in the regional identity that is being expressed. In general, questions of local or non-local identities are most likely the singular issue that intrigues the people I interviewed the most, especially whether those who were killed were from Öland or not. The question was often raised in the interviews whether those who lived in the fort were locals, or if they were from Denmark, Germany, the Baltic countries or from the Roman Empire, which is also, in a more nuanced way, an issue which interests archaeologists (for example Beskow 1972; Wallén-Widung 2016). However, some of the people interviewed are not only interested in discussing whether locals or non-locals were killed, but also whether their own DNA can be tested to see if linkages can be made to the dead. It thus becomes a regional identity very much tied to ethnicity, or a perceived ethnicity of being from Öland or not, that can possibly be traced very far back. Unfortunately, such ideas of ancient linkages are usually quite static, exclusive, with an essentialist view of ethnicity (Brubaker 2004:11; see also Högberg 2016), while heritage rather benefits from being developed as dynamic and inclusive (Kisić 2016). Nevertheless, discussions of identity and ethnicity are part of what makes Sandby Borg meaningful in the local community. In such a way the site holds potential for problematizing and critically discussing such socially relevant issues.

Despite the initial response of my interview partners, it would be simplistic to claim that Sandby Borg is never emotionally 'difficult' for

people. It is when the deaths of possibly hundreds of people are suddenly made more tangible and when individuals come forward from the collective that a feeling of unpleasantness or even horror may strike people. In other words: when death is reduced from numbers to individuals. When I elaborated in more detail about the people who were killed, my interview partners often responded with a sigh of horror, as if suddenly feeling slightly ashamed at the previous excitement they expressed. It is also clear that it is easier to be touched when physically visiting the ring fort, especially when excavations are taking place, possibly related to the ‘power in place’, as Edward González-Tennant phrased it: ‘we dwell in places and places dwell in us’ (see González-Tennant 2016:237).

Emotions of sadness or horror may trigger a different kind of reflection through the heritage that puzzle-solving does not. One example is when one of my interview partners went from talking about what happened in Sandby Borg to a reflection on the horror of war and how it changes people. This is not about morally claiming that one way of engagement with heritage is superior to another, rather, both detective work and deeper reflections are important aspects of making Sandby Borg meaningful, and there is great potential here to develop both these aspects in connection with each other without ruling one of them out (for a discussion of different registers of engagement surrounding heritage, see Smith and Campbell 2015).

THE PRODUCTION OF SPATIOTEMPORAL DISTANCE

The fact that local pride and the tracing of ethnic identities were significant among some of my interview partners, does not mean that the past was conceptualized as close-at-hand. On the contrary, and perhaps surprisingly, when first confronted with the event, it seems as if the past is very much made into, using the words of David Lowenthal (1985), a foreign country, a past which is detached and unconnected to the present. When people were speaking about the massacre at first, it was often as if they were trying to solve a detective mystery seen on television. Furthermore, if we look at the chronotope (Bakhtin 1981) within this narrative, it seems as if the incident is not only located far away in time, but also far away in space. When trying to solve the mystery, people often drew parallels to the war in Syria, which from one angle is highly logical since the war in Syria is happening at the moment in the world, and within a globalized world with a large degree of movement of people, these events in Syria may feel very close at hand. However, follow-

ing the seminal work of Johannes Fabian (2014) there is no coincidence in how place and time is employed. Certain places can be employed in order to make an ‘Other’ out of the past (and the people living within that ‘past’), just as a certain pasts can be employed in order to make an ‘Other’ out of a place (and the people living in that place).

It can be important when discussing the site to use examples from Europe as well, for example from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Finland and Sweden, in order to challenge the boundaries constructed between the past and the present, the close and the far-away, and between ‘us’ and the ‘Other’, that we so often construct around certain events. Sometimes this happens unconsciously in order for us to keep them at an emotionally safe distance. Previous research has shown how temporal distance can be actively produced (Macdonald 2006:22, 2009:80–101), but it can also be challenged. After all, heritage *needs* to have its rough edges visible, and it needs its inherent dissonance to be out in the open in order for it to be socially relevant and ultimately emotionally engaging (see for example Kisić 2016:31). In other words, there lies a great potential in attempting to tear down these boundaries. For one, it would be a moral responsibility to do so. Archaeologists like Alfredo González-Ruibal have argued that archaeologists’ primary ethical role in society is to reclaim the neglected, silenced and often forgotten memories and in such a way give a voice to the subaltern (González-Ruibal 2008:248–249, 2014:13). However, by attempting to tear down these boundaries, a greater value can be given to the site in the present as well. This is not about stating that the past is the same as the present, but about trying to deconstruct some of the ‘Otherness’ of the past. By focusing on individuals and trying to make the past alive and tangible, as near and close at hand as possible, certain ideas and reflections can be triggered, for instance concerning memory, time, violence and the value of human lives.

CONCLUSIONS

The heritage of Sandby Borg illustrates that also prehistoric massacres might be understood as a form of difficult heritage, meaning that the ‘subfield’ cannot solely be restricted to examples of modern conflict (González-Ruibal & Hall 2015). Yet the larger temporal distance involved leads to a different range of engagements with the heritage (Smith & Campbell 2015), which demands other forms of responses when developing the site as heritage. There are a multitude of relationships to Sandby Borg among the local population that lead to diverse narratives interpreting the past. There are also areas of contestation and contradic-

tions between these narratives. An alleged practice of long-term avoidance has been widely reported since the discovery of the massacre. Yet, such a long-term practice is contested by most of the older generation, who feel that it contradicts their own childhood memories. This highlights how the discovery of prehistoric massacres can lead to new narratives and engagements with the recent past, too.

If we unravel the narratives into two main ones, there is initially a narrative of visiting the landscape over the years. This is a narrative of peaceful tranquillity and beautiful nature, connected to home, friends and family; the feeling of belonging in a specific place and time (Jansen 2009). As a chronotope, this narrative exists in a continuous and slow-moving present, which has always existed and is taken for granted. However, this narrative is simultaneously challenged by a new widespread myth of avoidance of a wounded and scarred landscape and therefore in need of defence. Secondly, there is the narrative born through the excavations in 2011 and as a chronotope it is often located far away in time and in place, at a safe distance detached from the present. Within this chronotope, both temporal and spatial distance is produced. It leads to a great degree of engagement and a desire for puzzle-solving. However, the distance is challenged when the past is suddenly made tangible, individualized and close at hand, where senses of horror, sadness, empathy and deeper reflections can be triggered. Both these narratives exist simultaneously for people. They work in a dynamic relationship with each other and with the landscape itself. They are sometimes tied to questions of pride and identity, and often lead to strong emotions and commitment in the heritage. They can be used a resource when further developing the site as heritage.

Discussing negative heritage and its connection to temporal relations, Lynn Meskell suggested that:

only time transforms negative or dissonant heritage into the romantic monuments and theme parks of collective nostalgia. Ancient sites are *purified* through the march of time and the cultural amnesia that accompanies temporal passing. How can we define or apprehend an arbitrary moment in time that transforms the product of the past into an object of heritage? (Meskell 2002:571, my emphasis)

Meskell suggests that the passing of time works to purify dissonant heritage, and thus transforms products of the past into objects of heritage. But what makes the case of Sandby Borg thought-provoking is that it illustrates how temporal progression can, and arguably should, be challenged. It calls for us to move away from a linear and chronological understanding of difficult heritage, in which time is approached as gradu-

ally ‘purifying’ difficult heritage, towards understanding ‘dissonance’ as inherent in each site of heritage. Furthermore, this very dissonance can be used as a resource for triggering different sets of engagements and responses (see also Kisić 2016:31). Ultimately, it may be the so-called purified sites of heritage that should worry us the most, rather than the difficult ones, because purity may not mean harmless innocence, it can also mean the silencing of the uncomfortable and the unwanted out of a fear of the more socially and emotionally challenging encounters with heritage.

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