

Göran Gruber

*Medeltider:*

*Samtida mobiliseringsprocesser kring det förflutnas värden*

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Review by Dag Lindström

For quite some years now there has literally been a boom in meta-perspectives on history and archaeology. In Sweden, Culture Studies (Tema kultur och samhälle) at Linköping University has become one of the leading research units within this field, with memory policies and contemporary uses of history as one of its main research areas. Göran Gruber has been a PhD student at this department, and his dissertation *Medeltider. Samtida mobiliseringsprocesser kring det förflutnas värden* (The Middle Ages. Contemporary Mobilization Processes around Values of the Past) inquires into the creations, presentations, and negotiations of values related to the medieval past.

Even though Gruber is an archaeologist by profession, employed by the Swedish National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet), this is not a study *in* archaeology. In part it is a study on archaeology, as archaeological excavations are of particular importance in this study. But it is not mainly a study on contract archaeology or the implementation of the Heritage Conservation Act. Instead, the author focuses on mo-

bilization processes, and how different actors (e.g. authorities, associations, private entrepreneurs, and media) make use of the Middle Ages, and how values and images of the past are established and negotiated.

The study is based on two cases. The first concerns an archaeological investigation in Vadstena. When a local industry expanded its factory plant in 2004, human skeletons from a medieval execution site and a burial ground were found. Initially the company was to defray the excavation and the preservation of the remains. This was later opposed by the company in a lawsuit, and in the end state authorities had to pay the bill. The whole course of events involved a number of actors representing various economic, political, legal and antiquarian interests. In the second case study Gruber analyses how the Middle Ages have been used as a resource in development strategies in the town of Skänninge. Contract archaeology was important also in this case, with the building of a new railway pass and the development of a larger project with both scientific and public objectives. This case also involves an initiative to promote tourism in the region. The analysis includes various actors with different agendas. The choice of Vadstena and Skänninge has not been random. Today they are both small, not to say insignificant, towns. But they both claim a more glorious, medieval, past. They were both much more important places in the Middle Ages than today; they are still usually associated with their medieval past, and they have even been considered as places of particular importance in the history of medieval Sweden.

Meta-studies often have a rather extensive theoretical approach, and this study is no exception. The development of cultural policy (or memory policy as Gruber prefers to call it) forms a wider context for this study. Cultural theory and theories about different uses of history provide analytical tools. Gruber is particularly interested in questions about the uses of history by others than professional historians and archaeologists or the official memory institutions. This includes studying the creation of values and meanings attributed to the past. Jörn Rüsen's discussions of esthetic, political and cognitive dimensions in the uses of history are important here. In his analysis, Gruber reformulates Rüsen's concepts as emotive, normative and cognitive values. He also relies heavily on Michel Callon and his sociology of translation (as a part of the actor-network theory), with problematization, intersement, enrolment, and mobilization as central concepts. These theoretical tools are used to analyse various actors and their behaviour and strategies within the processes of creating, displaying and negotiating meanings and values of the past.

Using a broad spectrum of sources (i.e. official reports, newspapers, internet pages, interviews, and participant observations) Gruber identifies three main processes of mobilization. The first concerns preservation. It is based in the Heritage Conservation Act, and in the use of scientific methods it emphasizes the cognitive dimensions of the past and is mainly promoted by public authorities and professional participants. The second process relates to a context referred to as experience. A more prosaic way of putting it would be tourism, pleasure and marketing. Commercial aspects are important here, but this process does not involve private entrepreneurs only. Local and regional institutions and officials are active as well. The third process relates to local policies. Politicians and the local administration, but also local entrepreneurs and other individuals, use the Middle Ages to enhance, for example, political aspirations, local identity, and local self-esteem. According to Gruber, these three processes are largely parallel, they seldom interact, and when they do it does not necessarily lead to integration; it rather creates a high degree of conflicts. The author argues that traditional institutional structures often are the creator of barriers and appear as a main obstacle to more creative cooperation and integration.

The author is not very explicit about his choice of cases. To what extent are they comparable? Is the intention at all to compare them, or is it rather to add information from two different cases? How far is it possible to generalize from these two cases? The reader is left with many unanswered questions. This unfortunate vagueness runs through the whole study. Generally the text could have been more focused and informative. That means a more frequent use of the delete button and establishing a more coherent structure. There is a strong focus on theoretical matters, but a lack of corresponding methodological discussion. Some of the theoretical concepts are not sufficiently explained either, and the main results could have been presented in a more clear-cut way. After reading this book several times, I still wonder if the author has really made a clear decision whether to discuss the changing conditions in contract archaeology or to study contemporary uses of the past. However, Gruber's dissertation is valuable reading for everybody interested in any of these matters. It is also refreshingly provocative in some of its conclusions, and it definitely has a potential to stir debate.