

Re-creating the Past

On the Quality of Archaeological Reconstruction on Gotland

Bodil Petersson

Re-creating the past in full-scale, open-air reconstructions has been done for a long time, but the phenomenon has been accelerating and changing character during the last two decades. The article examines how the reconstruction activities are motivated. Explicit aims are contrasted with implicit motives inherent in reconstruction. Public utility is proposed as an important excuse for the reconstruction activities. As a consequence of the relationship between explicit aims and public utility, we get a rigid form of quality thinking that expresses elitism. Instead of fruitless criticism we can express more clearly what we expect from a reconstruction, and why. Examples used are taken from the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea.

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THE VIKING VILLAGE

I knew there was a Viking village on Gotland. Beyond this fact I knew nothing about the village itself, however. I expected a place full of life. I could see myself mingling among happy tourists and active villagers demonstrating crafts and arranging competitions. I imagined myself being invited to take part in the exciting and varied everyday life of a Gotlandic Viking family.

When I arrived at the village one of the two villagers, both of whom were men, was at the entrance taking the admission fee. When his cell phone rang, he hurried off and hid behind the entrance shed.

Inside the earthen rampart, which was evidently built with the help of an excavator and which surrounded the village, I caught sight of a tired-looking guy dressed in something old and greyish with a rope round his waist. He asked if I wanted to try swinging

an axe against a tree trunk. Then he showed me his talents in spinning wool and working in the smithy. It was late in the summer and there were few visitors. The late season and fading enthusiasm was the reason, I decided, for the apparently weary staff. I went into the long-house where no obvious efforts had been made to hide the anachronistic traits of the sawmill-produced planks. In the centre of the hall there was a high settle with the brutal features of Odin carved in wood. Torches illuminated the interior of the hall. In one corner there was a small exhibition showing Viking life and reproductions of Viking artefacts. I began to feel gloomy about this Viking experience and decided to leave the place. But before I left, I asked for some pamphlets about the village and its activities.

When I read the colourful pamphlet, I was certainly happy not to have experienced the activities offered:

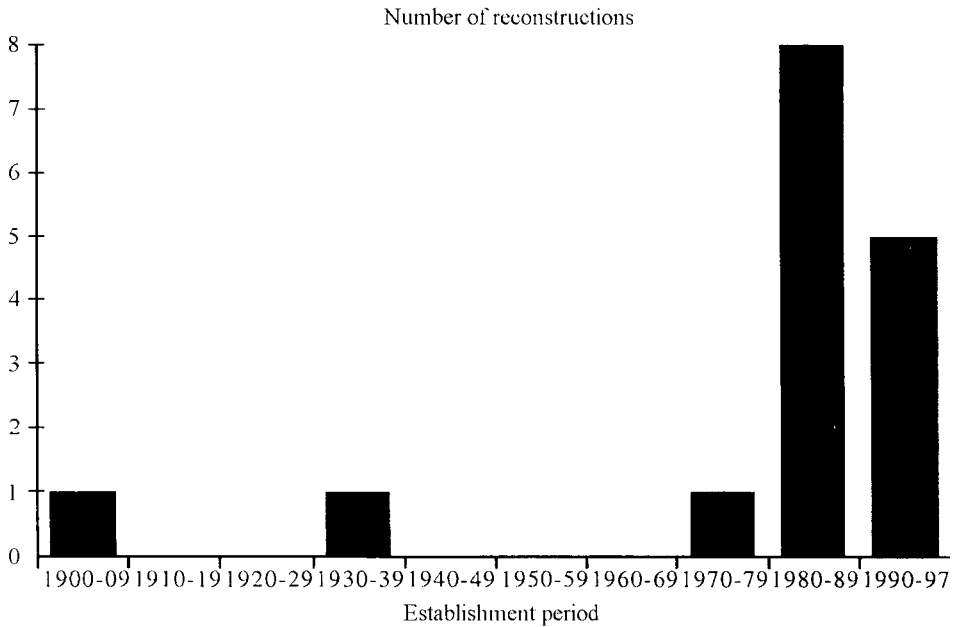


Fig. 1. Diagram showing when the reconstructions mentioned in the article were established.

“Erik Bloodaxe ruled his farm as a sovereign. The free men and women of his great clan were strongly united, and blood feud was always claimed if one of the clan members was killed.—Erik Bloodaxe and his men exchanged slaves and furs into silver coins.—A man of Erik Bloodaxe’s caliber can sure arrange great parties.—The evening begins with all sorts of martial games – throwing axes...and other exciting war games.—At the table we eat with our bare hands—One thing is certain – this will be an evening you will never forget!” (Vikingabyrn Gotland Information Folder n.d., author’s translation).

The programme of the Viking village is offered to schoolchildren and tourists as well as business companies. Perhaps Erik Bloodaxe’s party is well suited to the advertised “leadership development”, strengthening the team and showing who is the boss.

The impressions I had of the village made me reflect upon the relation between explicit and implicit purposes of the reconstruction

activities. The Gotlandic Viking village is certainly of a more peculiar type, but I am inclined to suspect that this reconstruction is not the only one to give ambiguous messages to its visitors. What shall I expect – science, education, tourism, experience, adventure, pleasure, anachronism, or disappointment?

In our time there is an accelerating tendency to re-create the past (fig. 1). With this article I wish to examine the following questions about reconstruction activities: How are the explicit aims of reconstruction activities formulated? What implicit purposes can be traced? What is the relationship between the explicitly outlined purposes of reconstruction and the modern utilitarian morality? Do the purposes affect the aspect of quality? What is good-quality reconstruction?

THE CONCEPT OF RECONSTRUCTION

First, however, I want to discuss the concept of *reconstruction*. It is a central concept in this connection, and it is not unambiguous.

In everyday speech reconstruction is used in a very wide sense. It refers to such different things as textual descriptions, drawings, small-scale models in museums, and full-scale representations in museums and outdoors. Reconstruction refers to copies, replicas, restorations, re-erected buildings and monuments, reconstructions made from fragments, and even imitations.

Reconstruction within archaeology today is carried out both as a science and as mediation. The word itself means rebuilding, reproduction, re-creation. Reconstruction is to present the past by refitting fragments with interpretations to fill in what is missing. Reconstruction has also been part of the history of archaeology since the 18th century (Pettersson 1998). It contains an ambition to rebuild or to restore something to its former state. It is usually done if something has been destroyed or severely changed. Within archaeology reconstruction is primarily associated with paper reconstruction or reconstruction inside the museum walls (Jacobsson 1995:33ff), often of smaller things such as pots, weapons and clothing. But even indoor exhibitions of whole milieus are frequent, where huts and living areas are presented often together with smells and sounds.

There is also a theoretical aspect of the concept of reconstruction. In connection with building restoration there is an extensive discussion among architects concerning the meaning of different relevant concepts. Michael Ottosen discusses the different values of restoration. Ottosen uses the concept of restoration as overarching, comprising such phenomena as reconstruction. He refers to concepts arranged on a scale according to the degree of intervention:

- put in order
- preserve (maintain, protect)
- restore (re-represent)
- renovate (renew)
- copy (imitate)

- reconstruct (rebuild, put parts together to a whole)
 - modernise (without consideration for history)
- (Ottosen 1984:3).

From this we can conclude that to reconstruct is far more intervening than to restore. Reconstruction is often done from much slighter traces than those in restorations. This fits well with the state of most archaeological traces that constitute the basis for reconstruction.

During the 19th and well into the 20th century there was immense discussion on how to restore the past, in particular the medieval buildings. There was a schism between antiquarian-orientated advocates (e.g. John Ruskin in England, and later Alois Riegl in Germany) and those purporting the norms of unity of style in building restoration (e.g. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc in France). The antiquarian-orientated advocates were aiming at historical preservation, while the unity-of-style advocates were more concerned with the unity and purity of style, to restore something to its former glory (Kåring 1992:24, 59ff, 187ff, 312ff). This schism has relevance for the reconstruction activities of today. In our time there are both reconstructors who have a cautious attitude, and those who primarily care about presenting a vision of the past in which historically authentic details do not matter as much.

In this article I use the concept of *reconstruction* as a comprehensive label for the ambition – for the purpose of science, mediation, tourism, or adventure – to re-create the past in full-scale, open-air context. This delimitation is made so that I can avoid the discussion of traditional museum mediation and go a step further to discuss relatively new forms of reconstruction activities used for a wide range of purposes. My use of the concept is close to the everyday use of the word, which contains different elements as mentioned above. In my discussion I do not have direct use for the division among replica, copy, and

reconstruction. But I avoid using the concept of restoration since it primarily concerns objects, often buildings still standing, where the state of preservation is much better than in the case of the reconstructions I study. They have other qualifications with regard to the state of preservation.

RECONSTRUCTION ON GOTLAND

The island of Gotland has quite a number of archaeological reconstructions (fig. 2). To introduce the reader to the existing phenomena, I will give a short presentation of the reconstructions. They are full-scale, open-air reconstructions. They have all been built or performed during the 20th century. Some of them were erected or performed earlier in the 20th century, others are from the late 1990s. They cover a period from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages. The reconstructions are either built or performed. Some are permanent, others are temporary. Some are mobile,

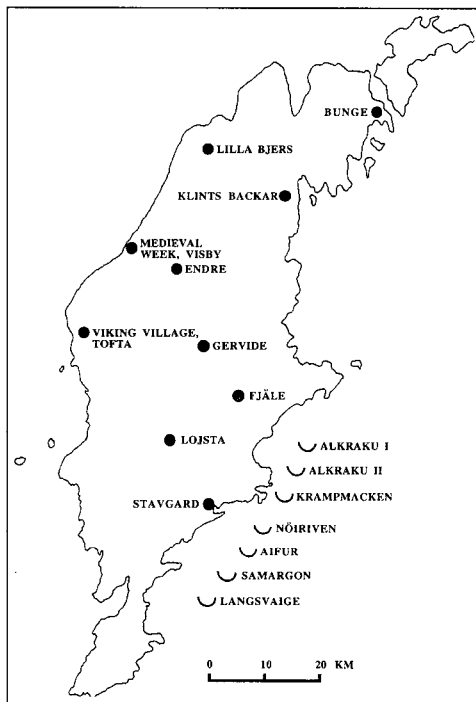


Fig. 2. The island of Gotland with the reconstructions mentioned in the text.

others are stationary. The variety is great.

I have chosen to put the reconstructions into four different groups. The *settlement* group of reconstructions contains such elements as houses, churches, walls, banks and ramparts, strongholds, cult sites, pasture and arable land. The *monument* group includes graves, standing stones, cult houses and stone settings. The *communication* group includes boats, wagons, bridges, roads, harbours and shipyards. The *event* group includes markets, plays and experiments. Of course there are some overlappings. The categories offer only a general outline of reconstruction activities.

Settlement

The earliest example of settlement reconstruction on Gotland, and also in the whole of Sweden, is the *Lojsta* hall. It was erected in 1932 to try the building technique discerned during an excavation of a "giant's grave" near Lojsta. The giants' graves are house foundations from the Iron Age, around 0-600 AD. After excavation the reconstruction was erected on top of the ancient stone remains, that is *in situ*. Even the high settle was placed on top of a stone base interpreted as the place for it. The original floor layer was sealed with an earthen layer on top, so that the archaeological site would not be disturbed by the reconstruction activity. The experiment was conducted by the art historian Gerda Boëthius and the archaeologist John Nihlén, with the aid of the Lojsta society for local history (Boëthius & Nihlén 1932:342ff; Nylén 1966:188f).

The *Stavgard* Iron Age area contains reconstructions from the period 500 BC - 1050 AD, that is, covering the whole Scandinavian Iron Age. The period includes the Viking Age, but at Stavgard they do not use the "Viking" label. The activities started in 1976 when a group of schoolchildren and their teachers tried to learn something about how people lived during the Iron Age. By chance they found a silver hoard from the 11th century AD. For this they got a reward from

the authorities. They decided to use the money to make a trip to the famous reconstructed Iron Age village of Lejre in Zealand, Denmark. The visit to Lejre inspired the teachers and schoolchildren to establish an Iron Age village for school-educational use. The different reconstructions at Stavgard consist of a long-house, a baking house, a cooking house, a fireplace, a smithy, ovens, kilns, a picture stone and a sacred area (Stavgard Information Folder n.d; *Populär Arkeologi* 1987:34).

At *Fjäle* there are reconstructions of medieval buildings in the countryside, namely an early medieval farmhouse and a barn. The reconstructions were made in the mid-1980s under the supervision of the county administrative board of Gotland. The buildings were erected in the immediate vicinity of a large area with ancient remains of houses from about 100 AD until the 14th century. Part of this area was excavated under the guidance of the human geographer Dan Carlsson in the 1970s (Carlsson 1979:127ff; Carlsson pers. comm.). The reconstruction is referred to in the recently established *Viking Heritage Database* (VHD) as a Viking reconstruction, but at a closer look it becomes evident that the *Fjäle* reconstructions are actually classified as “early medieval” (VHD 1997).

Gervide is a reconstructed Iron Age farm. It consists of two buildings: a dwelling house and a barn. The houses were erected in the mid-1980s. The reconstruction was carried out under the supervision of the county administrative board of Gotland. Another two reconstructed buildings are being planned, together with the establishment of arable land next to the farm. The prototype of the houses and the cultural landscape is situated next to the place of reconstruction. The *Gervide* Iron Age farm is of the same character as *Fjäle* and dependent on the same initiative related to the county administrative board (Carlsson pers. comm.).

The *Viking Village* on Gotland, in *Tofta* parish, is a reconstruction of a Viking long-

house surrounded by a smithy and an out-house. The houses are encircled by an earthen rampart that delimits the village area. The Viking Village started its activities around 1990 as a private limited company (Vikingabyn Gotland Information Folder n.d.; Carlsson & Söderberg 1995; VHD 1997).

Monument

At the *Bunge* Open-air Museum there is a number of reconstructed prehistoric graves. The museum opened in 1908 and the graves were reconstructed and re-erected from the very beginning. The monuments span a period from the Bronze Age to the Viking Age. They comprise examples of ancient monuments from Gotlandic prehistory. They are not original *in situ* graves; they either have been moved to the place from cemeteries that have disappeared because of development, or they have been erected as an example of the existing grave-types on Gotland. People involved in the activities of moving and reconstructing the graves and stone settings include the elementary-school teacher and museum founder Theodor Erlandsson, the amanuensis and later professor of folklore research Nils Lithberg, and the lecturer and subsequent professor of archaeology Mårten Stenberger (T. Erlandsson 1980:42ff, 1958:6ff; A. Erlandsson 1976:2ff; *Bunge-museet* n.d.; Blomberg pers. comm.).

The wheel-cross grave from the Iron Age cemetery at *Lilla Bjers* was excavated in 1982-83, since the road next to the cemetery was being rebuilt and broadened. Because of the interesting pattern in the construction of the grave it was moved and reconstructed and is now possible to see at Stenkyrka Folk Museum in close connection to its original find place. The reconstruction of the grave was undertaken by the Swedish Central Board of National Antiquities' archaeological department on Gotland (RAGU), and it was financed by the Swedish national road administration on Gotland (Wickman-Nydolf 1983:112ff).

Communication

On Gotland there are a lot of people interested in ship-building. The island is situated in the middle of the Baltic Sea, and with that comes an interest in communication across the sea and how transport was conducted.

The Viking ship *Krampmacken* was built in the years 1979-80 by the archaeologist Erik Nylén and his friends. The prototype for the ship was a boat find made in the 1930s in the lake Tingstäde Träsk in the northern part of Gotland. The boat find was dated to the transition period between the Viking Age and the Middle Ages. Another source of inspiration was the picture stones on Gotland which depict ships with sails. Once the ship was built, it sailed through the eastern parts of Europe and Russia along the rivers to finally reach the Black Sea and the city of Miklagård/Istanbul. The journey was carried out during the first half of the 1980s. It was not an easy task, since political systems in the countries of eastern Europe at the time were not automatically positive to such a travel route. This ship experiment was an adventure to be remembered by all the crew members (Nylén 1983, 1987; Sjöstrand 1988). It is shown not least in all the succeeding boat-building projects carried out in *Krampmacken's* wake. All other Viking ships built on Gotland after that, such as *Nöiriven*, *Aifur*, *Samargon* and *Langsvaige*, were more or less inspired by *Krampmacken* and its travels. Each of these ships has been built by people with connection to the *Krampmacken* project.

Nöiriven is a Viking ship built in 1990. The project was led by the fisherman Erik Johansson, who was a member of the *Krampmacken* crew during its expedition to the Black Sea. The ship was built as an improved version of *Krampmacken* (Nylén 1987:264; *VHD* 1997).

Aifur, the Viking ship named after a rapid in the river Dnjepr, was built and sailed eastward along the eastern European and Russian rivers to the Black Sea. The basis of

the reconstruction was *Krampmacken* and an excavated boat from the boat-grave cemetery in Valsgårde, north of Uppsala in eastern central Sweden. *Aifur* was built in 1991-92 by the Gotlandic boat-builder and fisherman, Jan Norberg. The drawings were made by the boat club "Aifur" (Carlsson & Söderberg 1995; Edberg 1994, 1998; *VHD* 1997).

Samargon was completed during the first half of the 1990s, and reconstructed as a so-called *knarr*, a trading boat from the Viking Age. It was Erik Johansson who, again, after he had been involved in building *Nöiriven*, wanted to use his newly won skills in ship-building to make his own Viking ship. The prototype of *Samargon* was ship representations on Gotlandic picture stones (*VHD* 1997).

The latest, most recent Viking ship built on Gotland is *Langsvaige*, launched in 1997. The project was once again related to *Krampmacken*. The ambition was to build a ship that was larger than *Krampmacken*. All the people involved had participated in the *Krampmacken* project many years ago (*VHD* 1997).

A boat-building project somewhat different from the above-mentioned Viking examples, but still with some resemblance to them, is the building of *Alkraku I* and *II*, two log boats built as outriggers, an example of possible boat-types in use during the Stone Age. The source of inspiration when building the boats was ethnographic analogy with boat-building traditions in the South Sea Islands and motifs from rock-carvings in southern Scandinavia. The reconstructions were made by Sven Österholm from Gotland within the project "The Stone Age on Gotland" together with the Scanian project "The Past in the Present". It was the latter project that provided the economic prerequisites and the building place for the boats. The experiments with building and sailing the log boats were conducted primarily in the years 1986 and 1987. The sailing routes tested went from Gotland to Öland and along the coast of

Öland to the mainland of Sweden (Österholm 1996, 1997).

Event

The events on Gotland are of very different character. The Torsburgen wall experiment was done to see whether lime was formed when burning a stone-and-timber wall resembling that of the Iron Age hillfort of Torsburgen. Calculations were made concerning the number of workdays it might have taken to build a wall like Torsburgen. The experiment took place at *Klints backar* in a parish near a limestone quarry in the year 1980 and was conducted by an archaeologist from Uppsala University, Johan Engström (Engström 1982, 1984).

The Middle Ages is the period in Gotlandic history that has the greatest impact because of the annual *Medieval Week* arranged in *Visby* and in later years also on Gotland as a whole. This arrangement started in 1984 as an initiative by the former county antiquarian on Gotland, Marita Jonsson, and it has since been established as an annual event (Jonsson 1990). It is in fact an occurrence beyond classification, but its annual appearance makes it best fit into the category of events. Many people all over the island and even all over the world that have an interest in the medieval way of life, visit Gotland during this week in August every year. Not least the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) constitutes a great visual and contextual base for the experience of medieval atmosphere during the week (Gustafsson 1995). Lots of activities keep people busy the whole year round in study circles and projects related to Medieval Week. One example of activity is the manufacturing of costumes in medieval style for people to wear during the week (Gutarp 1994). The so-called "Stiftelsen Byggnadshyttan", an institution on Gotland that takes care of the medieval buildings' restoration all over the island, is also part of the arrangements during Medieval Week. During my visit to Gotland and Visby

in August 1997, Byggnadshyttan performed an experiment with a lime kiln before the public to test an authentic method of producing lime for use in mortar. Medieval Week engages local government institutions as well as private groups and individuals. The fact that the town of Visby with its well-preserved medieval character was put on the World Heritage List in 1995 has undoubtedly meant a strengthening of the medieval profile of the whole island (Edlund 1996; Tchudi-Madsen 1997:166ff). Each year this profile is accentuated by Medieval Week.

Another event related to the Middle Ages is the performance and documentary filming of a medieval mass in *Endre Church*. This was done in 1989 as a joint project involving the County Museum of Gotland, the Swedish Central Board of National Antiquities, and the Swedish Adult Education Company (Sw. *Utbildningsradion*). The minister and scholar of medieval history, Anders Piltz, held the mass. He worked with experts on different subjects such as liturgy, church inventories and their use, and the laymen's roles during the mass (Helander *et al.* 1993:9ff).

EXPLICIT AIMS OF RECONSTRUCTION

I have tried to find some essential motivations overtly used to explain why a reconstruction is made. As a guideline I have used the categorizations of two scholars who specialize in reconstruction activities, namely the American historian Jay Anderson and the German archaeologist Claus Ahrens. Anderson divides "living history" activities into mediation, science and play/game (Anderson 1984). Ahrens has almost the same categories for "archaeological reconstructions" with the exception of the last one. He mentions mediation/education, science/experiment and commercial reconstructions (Ahrens 1990). I agree with the science and mediation categories. Aside from these two I have established two other categories, namely tourism and way of life. Tourism is partly related to Ahrens' commercial category, and

way of life is partly related to Anderson's play/game category, but I find my two categories more suitable than the preceding because they relate to explicit phenomena in our time such as cultural tourism and role-playing societies like the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). I have thus established four categories of explicit aims of reconstruction, exemplified in the following:

- reconstruction as science
- reconstruction as mediation
- reconstruction as tourism
- reconstruction as a way of life.

Science

Scientific experiment in archaeology is closely associated with an established method within the natural sciences. This kind of scientific archaeology found its broader way into archaeology thanks to the impact of New Archeology during the 1960s and 1970s. Within this methodological approach lies a wish to control and repeat a course of events. Because of the close connection with the scientific approach of New Archeology, the crucial point in experiment in archaeology lies within the field of economical and technological "processes". A "process" is something expected to be controllable. The experimental archaeology approach existed also before New Archeology, even though it was not formulated in the same way (Sehested 1885; Boëthius & Nihlén 1932).

Lojsta hall is one example. It was erected to show how a roof truss might have been designed on top of a stone base. It was an experiment, since the purpose was to discuss the roof construction and not to use the building for mediation or tourism.

The Torsburgen wall experiment was primarily an attempt to answer some scientifically formulated questions concerning the wall of an archaeological monument and how it was constructed and treated. It was a typical test inspired by and within the tradition of New Archeology and the experimental app-

roach of the natural sciences.

Alkraku I and II were experiments carried out to show the possibility of getting information about the past through ethnographic sources combined with other clues, in this case how people during the Stone Age transported themselves across the sea.

Mediation

Mediation in archaeology was for a long time restricted to the world of the museum. In the last twenty years the sector of mediation has widened, not least in open-air arrangements (Andersson *et al.* 1995). One common purpose of mediation is educational, to give schoolchildren knowledge of archaeology. Another reason is to give the general public the possibility to obtain knowledge about the past.

Stavgard is an obvious example of how a single school activity develops into a continuous reconstruction activity with the aim of educational mediation primarily for schoolchildren. But even though it is intended for this group of people, the place is open in the summer to the public at large. Interestingly, however, the staff at Stavgard do not put up a lot of signs announcing its existence, since they believe that it is up to the interested public to find their way there (Stavgard guide pers. comm.). They obviously do not need tourists to make the activities succeed financially. Evidence of this attitude is also the above-mentioned fact that they do not use the "Viking" label in spite of its well known power to attract tourists.

The wheel-cross grave at Lilla Bjers has been moved to a place which makes it possible for people to see how a rather unique Iron Age grave was constructed. Today it is situated within the area of the Stenkyrka Open-air Museum so that it can be seen together with houses from historic times on Gotland, almost in the same way as the prehistoric cemetery at the Bunge Open-air Museum.

Tourism

The third main purpose of reconstruction activities has economic and personal instead of scientific or educational implications. As a tourist attraction the reconstruction can perhaps attract enough people to make a place or region interesting within the tourist industry. The individual also makes a choice whether or not to take an interest in the so-called cultural tourism. Tourism as a category therefore belongs to two different spheres at the same time, namely the economic and the personal.

Fjäle is an example of reconstructions being used as educational sites for the public, who can visit areas with remnants of old cultural landscape. The two early medieval houses reconstructed in Fjäle stand next to the cultural landscape which contains remains from the past that can not be deciphered by the untrained eye. The reconstructed houses are an aid to understanding the past. Even though the houses are not made “living” with people and interiors, they illustrate at least some part of the past to the public at large and even to archaeologists.

Way of life

People who engage in reconstruction activities often have a personal reason for it. The wish to experience the past as a vivid reality is expressed by many people who choose to do reconstruction. Often it develops into a hobby and becomes a way of life, for example, to travel between annually recurrent medieval markets to engage in activities or to practise craftsmanship in a medieval context. The adventure of sailing across the sea with a newly built Viking ship is a challenge for many people. Way of life may overlap part of the tourism category, but it is more deeply felt because it is not a single opportunity but a permanent interest that generates activity.

The ships Nöiriven, Aifur, Samargon and Langsvaige have all come about as an effect of the Krampmacken project. I prefer to categorize these subsequent projects as “way

of life” and “adventure”, since it is members of the Krampmacken expedition who have continued to build ships. Building and sailing ships seems to have become a second identity for the crew members. They build, they travel, and they write books and articles about their ships and travels. It has become a separate genre, a life-style. My reason for not including the Krampmacken project here will be explained later.

EXPLICIT VERSUS IMPLICIT

To show how explicit aims work together with some yet undefined implicit purposes within one and the same reconstruction activity, I will exemplify with four different reconstructions: the Viking ship Krampmacken, the Iron Age sites of Stavgard and Gervide, and Medieval Week. These four are all more ambiguous in their character than the above-mentioned examples related to explicit aims. They are hard to put into one category of explicit aims.

Krampmacken

The Krampmacken project is the first reconstruction of a Viking ship on Gotland. It should be noted that the reconstruction was made around fifty years after the prototype, the Bulverket boat, was found, and was probably an effect of the growing knowledge in Scandinavia about boat construction in the Viking Age thanks to the finds and activities concerning the Skuldelev ships in Roskilde Fjord in Denmark in the late 1960s (Olsen & Crumlin-Pedersen 1969). The reconstruction of Krampmacken was done in the first half of the 1980s when the reconstruction boom had started.

Krampmacken is officially called a “scientific experiment” in the report on the first half of the project, edited in 1983 (Nylén 1983:6). It is also referred to as an important and impressive part of the strivings to investigate how the Vikings made their way along the rivers in eastern Europe to Bysans (Vadstrup 1993:65ff).

The Krampmacken project was initiated within the Swedish Central Board of National Antiquities' archaeological department on Gotland (RAGU). The leader of the project, the archaeologist Erik Nylén, was at the time head of the department. He was also named professor of archaeology in 1984.

Nylén has taken part in the debate concerning the subject of experimental archaeology and archaeology as a science (Nylén 1987:10ff). He criticises what he calls the "complicating and theorizing that have characterized the subject [of archaeology] for decades". He considers himself as a find-positivist and well familiar with the archaeological material. He describes experimental archaeology as practical tests based on finds and facts. He points out that the serious scientific researcher must tell enthusiastic amateurs that "it must not be done in this way" – it is not permissible to mediate a severely wrong picture of the real circumstances. Nylén points out the affinity between experimental archaeology and natural science (Nylén 1987:15).

Nylén's words are promising because the Krampmacken project really seems to have the values of scientific archaeology in the form of experiment. And all the published books and articles on the subject also show the scientific ambitions. But what is said, written and done in between?

In a publication from a conference on boat replicas, we can discern some arguments revealing the complexity of purpose. Nylén is criticised by his colleague from Roskilde, Ole Crumlin-Pedersen. He says that Krampmacken is an unfortunate combination of two totally separate time periods, namely the 8th century and the 11th century. Nylén's defence is that, "I must admit that we have very little to build this experiment on because in the whole of Sweden, if we omit the Fotevik ships and these are Danish ships and not Swedish ones, very little is left" (Nylén 1986:112f). Here he emphasizes a nationality that might not have been very relevant at the time, but

which is very important for Nylén in his argument for why he has chosen Gotlandic remains and traces from totally different contexts to build his ship.

Nylén's own publications on the subject are rather revealing. The report from 1983 is written in a joking manner, often pointing out the Viking character and mentality acquired by the crew during the adventurous travel. Pictures are shown of a "Viking pack of wolves around beautiful female slaves" and of "naked rowing" (Nylén 1983:86, 95). Needless to say, all of the crew were men. The report mediates an obvious wish to tell a Viking story in which the author and his crew all seem to have adopted an identification with the supposed Viking mentality. Both text and photographs tell this male and brutal story of hard life as a Viking. All of this could of course be related to the obviously ambivalent archaeologist Nylén, who on the one hand propagates for the empirical approach and on the other hand legitimizes Viking myth by exclaiming, "Does research have to be boring?" (Nylén 1983:5).

To contrast Nylén's own words, I read a book about Krampmacken's eastward expedition by two of Krampmacken's crew members, both amateurs at the time. This book is much more of a poetic contemporary travelogue. It is rather free from the macho style inherent in Nylén's opus. Instead it observes the crew as well as the people that they meet along the travel route. The book contains reflections upon the political system in eastern Europe at the time: "We are travelling in a Europe where the borders are moved after each war so as to secure occupation for cartographers and incomes for publishers of geographical productions" (Sjöstrand 1988:117, author's translation).

Regarding boat replicas and reconstruction, there has been an intense debate on quality. The maritime archaeologist Christer Westerdahl has said about the Krampmacken project that it is "the worst Nordic example" of an attempt to build a Viking ship, because

the prototype Bulverket boat was too fragmentary and probably also of Slavonic origin (Westerdahl 1994:98). Also Westerdahl takes up the question of nationality as an important argument against the project.

Nylén himself still has no problem concerning the classification of his Krampmacken project. As late as 1996 he writes about “more or less serious projects with the purpose to re-create the Viking Age — In this jungle of ‘projects’ ranging from pure more or less carnival-like enterprises with a strong local patriotic tone to those of pure commercial interest, it is possible to discern a few where pure scientific aims dominate” (Nylén 1996:117, author’s translation). Of course he includes his own project among the scientifically oriented ones.

Stavgard and Gervide

On Gotland there are two Iron Age reconstructions of settlements that are totally different in character. Still, both can be categorized as mediation in an educational sense. Stavgard has mediating ambitions primarily concerning schoolchildren. It has a well-planned school programme. The staff is dressed up in Iron Age clothing. The place is filled with narrative and the guides also discuss beliefs related to the picture stones. Thus it is not only technique that is presented here.

As a visitor I was told the story of the Gotlandic farmer Stavar and his silver hoard by the guide. It is a local myth that fits well as an expression of pride over the regional Gotlandic identity from the Iron Age until today.

Completely different from Stavgard is Gervide. It is a reconstruction of two Iron Age houses belonging to a farm with fences, arable land and pasture. Here nothing is done to the interior of the houses. No activities are going on. It gives a very naked and empty impression. It expresses an empty past. Perhaps it is scientifically tolerable in this form because the reconstructions do not show anything

directly wrong. But the emptiness underlines a prejudice against the past which is very common among the public at large, namely how primitive it must have been in prehistory. The emptiness could have been an aspect of good quality since it does not consciously add fuel to the creation of myths, but instead it creates another fictive image.

Not much has been written about Stavgard or Gervide. This indicates that they are not considered to belong to the scientific sphere. Mediation is seldom written about or analyzed. Reconstruction places that are mediated today but were written about a great deal earlier, have often started as a scientific experiment.

Medieval Week

Explicitly and officially Medieval Week has been used as a main tourist attraction on Gotland since 1984. The event is assigned to the second week in August so as to prolong the tourist season, and it has been a complete success. And of course all these tourists do a lot more than just take part in the medieval arrangements. They sleep, they eat, they buy, and they travel around the island. Initially Medieval Week was confined primarily to Visby, but in later years it has spread all over the island. During the week there are arrangements from the north to the south. Most activities in the countryside focus on markets, music and on church-related ceremonies (*Program* 1997), not on specific peasant activities.

Medieval Week is an event that gives the tourists a vision of the past in well-suited surroundings. The town of Visby and the island of Gotland provide unsurpassed coulisses for playing games related to the Middle Ages.

In a book about Medieval Week the question is posed, “Where did the idea come from...”? The explanation given is that Gotland and Visby have a rich history and many historic monuments. It has a “medieval atmosphere”. In order not to be like tourism

all over the world, the tourist board and the antiquarian authorities together chose to build up tourism around the medieval theme, considered to be “new” and “unusual” (Jonsson 1990:99).

The history told in the events during Medieval Week relates to the year 1361 when the Danish king Valdemar Atterdag came to Gotland and extorted payment from the burghers of Visby. This act of oppression against the rich town of Visby is an excellent background for the manifestation of regional independence today.

When Valdemar came to Gotland he first confronted with armed peasants outside Visby's walls. The peasants defended the island and may have hoped for some aid from the burghers, but the latter did not come to help. Around 1800 men died and were buried outside the town wall (Jonsson 1990:103). This confrontation and “regional betrayal” between burghers and peasants is passed over in silence during Medieval Week. The so-called Valdemar cross marking the place where the men were buried has no part in the activities relating to Valdemar and the Gotlandic people. To a large extent it is a peasant-free story that is told, in spite of the fact that the majority of the medieval population on Gotland were peasants.

When people dress up, many of them do it as burghers. There are few peasants. The knights and ladies are all the more frequent. The younger generation is not content with identifying themselves with well-situated burghers. They want to play the role of noblemen and -women. They are part of a common idea about the Middle Ages more than part of a specific Gotlandic history. Many of the knights and ladies belong to the Society for Creative Anachronism, SCA. They manifest the obvious wish for role-playing and they have chosen a good playground with a genuine atmosphere. For them, travelling to Gotland from all over the world to take part in Medieval Week activities is not done out of Gotlandic regional interest but out of the

wish to play. The ethnologist Lotten Gustafsson has described the role-playing, through which the actors search for genuine experience during the week (Gustafsson 1995). It seems to be important to protect the atmosphere so that adults as well as children get the opportunity to enter into the world of the Middle Ages. This protected atmosphere is exactly what Visby provides during the week in August.

The fact that Visby is now on the World Heritage List is important for cultural tourism, and it is a good incitement for coming arrangements in connection with the Middle Ages theme. Throughout the year the county museum in Visby arranges conferences with a medieval theme under the slogan: “With our aid your conference will become historic”. Food, tournaments and old Gotlandic games and handicrafts are on the programme.

IMPLICIT AIMS OF RECONSTRUCTION

As we have seen in the examples above, there are constant meetings between explicit aims and implicit ones in the reconstructions. In trying to discern obvious categories of implicit aims, I find the following:

- reconstruction as cultural identity
- reconstruction as a wish to play
- reconstruction as commercial interest.

The first implicit theme, *cultural identity*, covers a lot of different uses of the past. It can represent everything from regional pride and identity to racism and political supremacy expressed in terms of cultural identity. Among other social anthropologists, Jonathan Friedman has reflected upon this phenomenon, which he understands as an effect of the crisis of modernity (Friedman 1994:17ff).

The second theme is *a wish to play*. At first it seems to be related to the explicit aim called *way of life*. My distinction here is based upon the concept of morality, to which I shall return below. Way of life is related to hobby and interest; the wish to play, on the other

hand, has no good moral reason, and it is suspect as an explicit category because in a world ruled by utility it is not accepted to play for the sake of playing alone. Johan Huizinga has reflected upon the concept of play/game as a genuinely cultural activity. Play/game is often interpreted from its apparent opposite: seriousness and labour (Huizinga 1945:55). From this point of view the moral content of play/game is inferior.

The third implicit reason for reconstruction is *commercial interest*. Of course there are overlappings with the explicit tourism reason. But while tourism is something good both for the economy and the individual, the commercial interest is “pure” economy. It is not often seen as morally defensible when related to cultural issues. Instead commercial interest must be put under the tourism label. This is done by the economist Peter Bohm, who has written about tourism from a purely political-economical point of view: “To obtain an economic optimum concerning the production of tourism services in Sweden it is thus a question of trying to identify those product variants that for a proper cost gain the demands of the tourists, and at the same time trying to minimize the production costs for these services” (Bohm 1990:127, author’s translation).

The Viking Age and the Middle Ages are well known to attract great interest. This fact is expressed on Gotland by Krampmacken and Medieval Week. The reason for the popularity of these periods is probably the possibility to combine explicit and implicit purposes within one and the same reconstruction activity. This ambiguity is needed to attract as many people as possible.

Like the “good” explicit aims – science, mediation, tourism, way of life – the above-mentioned implicit ones contain more of ambivalence. This has to do with our views of the use of such aims. A morally indefensible use of cultural identity can be racism. To play as an adult human being is not really

accepted in our society. And to intermingle commercial interests with cultural matters is not very respected, at least not as a leading reason.

To illustrate more clearly what I mean, I have found an article by the economic historian Svante Beckman. He discusses utility aspects on human action. He has formulated the “Svante law”, social norms for human action, as follows:

1. You shall behave in a motivated way
 2. You shall have strong motives
 3. You shall have explicit motives
 4. You shall have respectable motives
 5. You shall have the right motive for the right action
 6. It is of greater value to act out of utility and norm than out of pleasure and need
 7. You shall not act out of pleasure alone
- (Beckman 1997:7, author’s translation).

Public utility becomes an important excuse for reconstruction activities in our time. Not to put a clearly defined utility label on your activities can be the same as asking for a reputation of bad quality. Therefore, the Krampmacken project is labelled as science and Medieval Week as tourism, in spite of their complex character.

It becomes obvious that respectability depends on the observer, on whether he/she is the tourism manager, the financier/sponsor, the archaeologist, the museum official, or the visitor. Within the sphere of each observer there is a separate list of precedence concerning qualities, which complicates the discussion.

GOOD QUALITY RECONSTRUCTION

Public utility is utility without the dark shadows of misuse represented by the more ambivalent implicit purposes. Science! Mediation! Tourism! Way of life! All these explicit aims are accepted as public utility. And therefore we agree to see quality in them. They represent absolute purposes, each one good in itself. But combined with each other

they lose their respectability and turn into the field of ambivalent, sometimes bad-quality, reconstructions. If, for instance, you try to combine science with any one of the other three explicit aims, then the scientific aims are automatically being questioned.

The only way to close in on the problem is to learn how to use the “quality” stamp. Then we can free reconstruction activities from hypocrisy and allow combination forms, provided we are aware that reconstructions always combine purposes, something my examination has showed very clearly.

We are necessarily confronted with our own ideas and shortcomings when we try to visualize and sensualize the past. As long as reconstruction remains two-dimensional on a book’s page it is not dangerous and does not challenge our preconception that we are capable of re-creating the past by using a source-critical standpoint. There is pronounced criticism of reconstruction activities among archaeologists (cf. Näsman 1986; Edgren & Herschend 1987), since the purpose of many of the newer reconstructions is not purely scientific. As archaeologists we want reliable reconstructions. Therefore we primarily reconstruct things related to some kind of work, such as households with cooking and weaving and surroundings with arable land and pasture for cattle. When, as is becoming more and more usual in all sorts of reconstruction as well as in research, we start to reconstruct art, religion, symbols, and sensations, we find it strange and unscientific.

Svante Beckman reflects upon cultural heritage in an ironic manner. His main points of criticism are very much in accordance with the presented implicit purposes. He criticises the use of cultural heritage for identity purposes, whether they are national or local. He expresses his disgust ironically when commercial interests use experience and identity as a way to force money out of culture. He also ridicules people as unreflecting consumers of experience (Beckman 1993:28f). Beckman’s example shows a

typical researcher’s rather elitist defence of good quality and taste, based on his judgement that a crisis is occurring in our post-modern society (Beckman 1993:39). I would dare to call his attack “class-related” in the same manner as the tourism example we shall see below. Are the different uses of the past really a threat?

RECONSTRUCTION AS HISTORY AND HERITAGE

I started this article by presenting my own experience from visiting and reading about the Viking Village on Gotland. The village may seem to be an obvious example of bad-quality reconstruction. It repeats an all too often used conception of Vikings, it has no major claims on authenticity, and it continues to tell old sagas about the Viking Age. But it also has the ambition to show everyday work at a Viking Age farm.

The analysis in this article has shown that most of the reconstructions have explicit as well as implicit purposes at the same time. Therefore it is not possible to put an equal sign between what is said about a reconstruction and how it really turns out. Quality does not seem to have much to do with whether there are amateurs or professional archaeologists conducting the activity (cf. the *Krampmacken* project). Yet this is often claimed by archaeologists (cf. Andersson & Olausson 1996). I find it rather obvious that archaeologists are worried that compromise, simplification, and divergence from scientific results will appear in mediation situations such as reconstructions. The archaeologist’s fear is a fear of the uncontrollable. Or as Camilla Caesar has pointed out: a threat against the archaeologist’s profession and identity (Caesar 1997:32).

The geographer David Lowenthal distinguishes between “history” (read “archaeology”) and “heritage”. History is the scholarly enterprise that “explores and explains pasts”, while heritage “clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes...” (Lowenthal

1997:xi). In this scheme most of the Gotlandic reconstruction activities must be called “heritage”. But within the realm of archaeology the distinction between fact and fiction is hard to maintain. From a source-critical point of view almost everything in an archaeologically based reconstruction can be dismissed as fiction (read “bad quality”). This is sometimes done, especially by archaeologists themselves. Curiously enough, the criticism often does not include the two-dimensional reconstructions made in books, either as texts or drawings. The distinction between archaeological fact and fiction is actually difficult to discern immediately.

All reconstructions contain “history” as well as “heritage” in the Lowenthal sense. We do not have to claim one or the other just to guarantee good quality in reconstructions. Instead we as users, visitors, tourists, critics, or researchers must put the following questions to ourselves: What kind of quality do I demand? From what point of view? Do I have explicit and/or implicit purposes behind my demands for “good quality”? What are my ideals? It is in fact the conception of “bad-quality” reconstruction that makes it possible for each of us to formulate alternatives. Probably reconstruction would be boring if it was adapted to suit, say, professional archaeologists.

Reconstructions are part of the growing sector of cultural tourism. As the anthropologist Inge Damm points out concerning the cultural tourism sector, it is sensitive to mass effect. If cultural tourism becomes commonplace it loses its exclusive cultural value (Damm 1995:26f). I think this is one aspect of the criticism against reconstruction.

It is easy to find fault, and much harder to find valid alternatives and at the same time be tolerant of who may be permitted to do reconstruction and of what reconstruction is. But who is to give permission, and for what? The ethnologist Orvar Löfgren writes of tourism that it has been exposed to elitist critique from the beginning. When the tourism

reserved for the upper classes gradually turned into a pleasure for the majority of people, it became disregarded (Löfgren 1990:40ff). The same is valid for museums and reconstructions. We must be aware of the elitism and utilitarian morality that characterize the criticism. It is of greater importance that we can judge each reconstruction according to its ambition, appearance, and impression. We must also consider the visitor’s own judgemental ability regarding quality. And we must be aware and also respect that different users have different claims, exactly in the same way as you choose to go sunbathing in Mallorca, look at paintings in Florence, or camp in the wilderness (Löfgren 1990:32ff).

RE-CREATING THE PAST

The supposedly dangerous thing concerning reconstruction of the past can be formulated with the aid of David Lowenthal. “History” is when we see the past as “the other”. “Heritage”, among which are reconstructions, becomes an equality of then and now, “they” become “us” (Lowenthal 1997:139). But is it dangerous and wrong? Jay Anderson, who has focused on the theme of “living history” in his book *Time Machines. The World of Living History* (1984), is of the opinion that living history in different forms is not a “lunatic fringe” but “a medium of historical research interpretation and celebration that is absolutely right for our times” (Anderson 1984:189). Even though he is a historian, he respects a kind of empathy that challenges everyone involved and is as important as understanding (Anderson 1984:191).

Kevin Walsh, on the other hand, has expressed sharp criticism of so-called heritage centres and open-air museums in our (post-) modern times (Walsh 1992:94ff). He sees empathy as a dangerous thing, excluding questions and criticism, promoting escapism and the idea that time travel is possible and that history becomes constructed as a single historian’s monopoly (Walsh 1992:102). He

means that it is dangerous when it becomes difficult to discern education from entertainment. He discusses the possibility to relive the past; that many heritage centres have the ambition to give the visitor a “first-person” experience, while a former “third-person” interpretation would be more accurate (Walsh 1992:101).

I see an important difference between *experiencing* and *living* the past, between third-person and first-person achievements. Experience does not necessarily mean that I as a visitor am part of history. That is more explicit in “living” the past. I mean that it is possible to distinguish between places that go in for experience, and places that want the visitor to “live” in the past. And I do not think that either of them is wrong. The conflict here is at the level of single heritage centres and open-air sites that reconstruct the past. Some have not decided what form the place should have. I think that is part of the ambiguity of for example, the Viking Village on Gotland. Are we as visitors “others” who come there, or are we members of Erik Bloodaxe’s clan? It is better that each place decide which direction should be taken.

But I am optimistic about the aims of experiencing history, and I am positive to the alternative it comprises to the traditional, sometimes dull, museum exhibitions with their supposedly objective attitude. As I see it, we are dealing with a hermeneutic understanding derived from practice and experience within the realm of “living history” activities from experiment to re-enactment. And it is an understanding that accepts the “play with history”, or re-enactment, as one way to reach an idea about the past. This wide and tolerant perspective, represented by Jay Anderson, is the best way to tackle and understand the

concept of quality within the complex, extensive and expansive world of reconstructing the past.

The advantage of re-creating the past with the help of reconstructions is that they invite you to *an archaeology of the senses*, that is, that all senses are allowed to be used in the encounter with the past. Reconstructions encourage an active, four-dimensional, do-it-yourself participation in the essence of interpretations of material culture. Reconstructions inevitably reveal the misconceptions and obscurities inherent in written interpretations.

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ABBREVIATIONS

SCA=Society for Creative Anachronism
VHD=Viking Heritage Database

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Blomberg, Maj-Gun, Bunge Open-Air Museum, 1998-03-16.
Carlsson, Dan, Gotland University College, 1998-03-26.
Stavgard guide, Stavgard Iron Age area, 1997-08-05.

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