

Summary

Looking back

Travelling in the world of reconstruction has been an experience. It has been useful and amusing, theoretical and practical. It has been about research and mediation, and it has involved reason as well as emotion. It has to varying degrees contained politics, knowledge, and adventure. Reconstruction through time is a mix of narratives about possible and impossible attempts to reconstruct, from scientific experiment to bringing the past to life for the public, by glorifying individuals and nations.

Archaeology and reconstruction

Reconstruction of the past has existed since a very long time. During the latter half of the 20th century we have seen an explosive growth of reconstructed prehistoric villages and buildings, ship reconstructions, markets and festivals on historical themes. My own fascination with the phenomenon, combined with the rapid acceleration of the number of reconstructions in recent years, is fundamental for my choice of subject. This area of study is important for both research and popularization, but has largely been overlooked.

The purpose is to study imaginations of the past as they are mediated through reconstruction. This study is a survey of the history of reconstruction and its practice today, its form and content emanating from the three perspectives of *politics*, *knowledge*, and *adventure*. It crosses boundaries and has a qualitative intention, and I study phenomena from presentation and re-enactment to experiment and research. The main questions are: How has reconstruction been formed since the 17th century until today? How are poli-

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tics used within reconstruction? Is it possible to reach knowledge through reconstruction? What makes reconstruction an adventure?

The main conceptions are *reconstruction*, *experiment*, and *re-enactment*. Experimentation is an aspect of reconstruction, usually seen as connected with research. Re-enactment, on the other hand, is generally seen as connected with popularization. Reconstruction is not to be understood literally. Reconstruction is creative interpretation emanating from the values of the present day. This study starts from full-scale reconstructions such as buildings, ships/boats, crafts, markets and festivals. The reconstructions can be divided into three categories: *settlement*, *transport*, and *event*.

Reconstructions of the past include the periods from the Iron Age up to the Middle Ages about 1530. The sources of my work I have found in literature, on study visits and on the Internet. The outlook is the observer's and the reviewer's. Geographically I confine myself to present-day Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Reconstructions are not a specifically Nordic phenomenon, but internationally they have sometimes had Nordic models.

The background in research history and my sources of inspiration are the self-examination of archaeology and the perspective of intellectual history, research about popularization, museology and what has been written up to now about reconstruction. The study brings together different subjects such as history, museology, ethnology, cultural studies and research on tourism. My private background can be found within the subjects archaeology, medieval archaeology, and history of ideas.

Histories of reconstruction

The historical overview covers the period from the beginning of the 17th century up to 1964 when Lejre Historical-Archaeological Experimental Centre was established in Denmark. The centre of Lejre has been and is still an important source of inspiration to many of the present reconstructions in the Nordic countries and around the world.

During the 17th and 18th centuries Romanticism and politics made their imprint on Nordic reconstruction. The royal power and

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the nobility created monuments of the Grand Old Days. The monuments consisted principally of megalithic graves and runestones, sometimes in combination with each other. The chambered barrow of Julianehøj in Jægerspris Slotspark in Zealand was reconstructed in a classical manner and stones were erected on the top of the grave. They showed a royal lineage back to the Viking Age.

To bring to life the past they also arranged royal tournaments in medieval style in connection with coronations and other festivities. The Swedish kings Gustav II Adolf and Gustav III arranged such tournaments in the 17th and 18th centuries. A close relationship to the past and glorification of the power were clear elements in the arrangements. At the same time there were examples of experiments already during the 17th century. Olof Rudbeck Senior experimented on moving large ships on land by rolling them on logs.

With the industrialization in the 19th century the importance of experiment increased. The Danish king Frederik VII had proposals formulated as to how chambered barrows once were constructed without modern aids. Frederik Sehested carried out experiments with the help of prehistoric stone tools to show that it was possible to build houses with them. Sophus Müller took an interest in the possibility of decorating bronze without the help of iron. Bringing the past to life had its missionaries in the 19th century, even if it was not within archaeology. Artur Hazelius founded the open-air museum Skansen in Stockholm in 1891, a living presentation of Nordic peasant culture. The open-air museum formed an important source of inspiration for exhibitors of peasant culture, but also for those who wanted to reconstruct and bring to life still more ancient times. From Norway sailed *the Viking*, a reconstruction of the newly excavated Gokstad ship, over the Atlantic to the USA and Chicago to take part of the World's Fair in 1893, which was arranged in memory of Columbus's discovery of America. *The Viking* was an early example of adventure in reconstruction, represented by the seafaring nation Norway.

The reconstructions of the early 20th century emphasized both the primitiveness and the grandeur of the past. In 1920, together with Eric von Rosen, Ernst Klein accomplished an experiment at von Rosen's property, where two persons led a Stone Age life. What

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they carried out was both an experiment and an attempt to make vivid the Stone Age way of life, and the result was a series of articles in a paper and in a popular book. Stone Age life was a clear expression of a longing for a simpler life.

On Gotland John Nihlén and Gerda Boëthius in the 1930s took an interest in the remains of house foundations of stone. Especially they took an interest in roof constructions. Beside the architectural shell of Lojstahallen the seat of honour was built as the only part of the interior. This calls attention to the grandeur, as well as showing the obvious interest in architecture. The reconstructed Kivik tomb from around 1930 in Scania was also an expression of grandeur, because the monument gave prominence to the international contacts and the inspiration from the Mediterranean area. Reconstruction before World War II often had a tendency to show primitiveness as well as grandeur. In Denmark Gudmund Hatt carried out a reconstruction of an Iron Age house at the open-air museum Hjerl Hede in 1938. The house bore a strong resemblance to the ethnologically known houses on the moorland of Jutland, where the simple life was practised.

Thor Heyerdahl began his adventure voyages with the balsa raft *Kon-Tiki* in 1947. Many of his successors were in the sphere of archaeology, for example the initiators of the Viking ship *Hugin* of Denmark and *Ormen Friske* of Sweden, both launched in 1949.

In Draved Skov in Southern Jutland experiments with ancient burn-beating were made in the 1950s to compare the resulting pollen content with that of ancient times. Authentic tools of stone were used to cut down trees. Scientific methods were an active ingredient in the study of the past.

The finds of ships in the Roskilde fjord in 1962 gave full speed to the reconstructions of Viking Age ships, both for scientific purposes and to give the opportunity for people to be together. The Historical-Archaeological Experimental Centre in Lejre was founded in 1964 by Hans-Ole Hansen. Here an interest in scientific methods was combined with archaeological and ethnological interest in people's daily life during the Iron Age.

The main features of the history of reconstruction in the Nordic countries during the 17th and 18th centuries were consequent-

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ly Romanticism and politics, with the upper layer of society practising reconstruction. Elements of experiment existed. During the 19th century the interest in technical aspects increased, but it was still the nobility and royalty who carried on reconstruction. At the end of the 19th century reconstruction was given further inspiration by Hazelius and the re-enactment of peasant culture for the public by the open-air museum of Skansen. Industrialization went hand in hand with the increasing interest in regional history. In the 20th century reconstruction was accepted both as popularization and as research. The foundation of Lejre Historical-Archaeological Experimental Centre in Denmark in 1964 was the beginning of a substantial increase in the number of reconstructions in the Nordic countries, but also all over the world. The inspiration came from Lejre.

To exaggerate the tendencies somewhat, there is a focus on experiment in Denmark, on adventure in Norway and on reconstructing everyday life in Sweden. The histories of reconstruction are very disparate, but right from the 17th century the ingredients of politics, knowledge and adventure were present in reconstruction.

Reconstruction and politics

Archaeologists have for a long time discussed the use of archaeology in connection with politics. This self-examination is there today as a conscious self-critical attitude towards the subject and has increased ever since the 1970s. At the same time there are characteristic features of political use in our time which have to do with an unreflecting use of maps. It is especially evident when modern national boundaries are permitted to play a part in descriptions of the past.

The national self-image of Denmark appears clearly in the reconstructions of the Viking Age. The Trelleborg house, the Jelling stone, the bridge at Raving Enge near Jelling and all the reconstructed Viking ships indicate this fact. Reconstructions from the Viking Age have been made throughout the 20th century and must be seen as a result of a longing for a golden age and an era of greatness, when the Danish either acted as conquerors or united the kingdom. The Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde and the many recon-

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structed Viking ships from there are thus very much founded in the Viking Age as a national era of greatness.

Next to the Viking Age, the era which plays the greatest part for the picture of the nation in Denmark is the Iron Age. With the Lejre Experimental Centre as a striking starting point, a series of Iron Age villages have grown up in which modern people can live as Iron Age people during their holidays. Historians have pointed out the connection between a peasant identity and Danishness. This connection seems to influence the representation of the Iron Age.

Also the Norwegian self-image is strongly characterized by the Viking Age. With the *Viking* as a pioneer and Thor Heyerdahl's adventures as a model, there have been many Viking Age reconstructions of ships. Ragnar Thorseth has undertaken voyages round the world with the ship *Saga Siglar*, and the ship *Gaia* has preached world peace, environment and children's rights all over the world. The ship *Embla* has been used as a symbol of women's rights and equality. Also in Norway the Viking Age is no doubt a national era of greatness, which dates back to the Norse saga tradition.

In Sweden the Viking Age is of current interest as a time of action. The male Viking here represents the entrepreneurial spirit of the tradesman combined with a life as farmer. The Swedish Viking is a headstrong and energetic merchant and farmer.

Locally reconstructions have a clear political function too by strengthening the identity of a place. Initiatives by local authorities, private individuals and associations encourage the shaping of a local identity, tied to prehistory and history by reconstruction. Trelleborg in Scania, for example, by means of the reconstruction of a "trelleborg", a Viking Age fortress, has acquired a prehistoric identity to connect to, which is evident also from the name of the town. In Svedala in 1996 and Kalmar in 1997 the Kalmar Union was celebrated with festivals and markets with the Middle Ages as a theme. In Kalmar the event has since been held annually. Bronseplassen in Aust-Agder is a family project with an ecological profile, where a privately run Bronze Age farm also is of use to the community by attracting of tourism. In Västraby in Småland a local history association has built a Stone Age house for educational purposes.

The building of a regional identity is more obvious in recon-

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struction. In Denmark the regions (Roskilde and Southern Jutland) help to strengthen the national identity, while the Norwegian (Rogaland and Nordland) and the Swedish (Gotland and Scania) regions strengthen their role vis-à-vis the state authority in their respective countries. Here regional identity is contrasted with the national identity.

From a European point of view it is chiefly the Bronze Age and the Middle Ages that give European associations in connection with archaeology and reconstruction. The periods serve as an expression of a common European identity. The roots of the European way of life are sought in the Bronze Age and as regards trade during the Middle Ages the prominence is given to the European identity once more. Locally, the reconstructions of the Bronze Age perhaps do not have any clear European profile, but they are often financed by money from the European Union. Medieval arrangements, on the contrary, have sometimes got their names from European connections, such as the "Europæisk Middelalderfestival" in Horsens. Also the Viking Age has a European and also a broader international stamp. The male heroes of the Viking Age are more and more looked upon as energetic merchants than robbers. The capacity to go all the way to America is also something that is given prominence to as an achievement.

The political perspective shows the importance of politics in reconstruction both nationally as well as locally and regionally. Nationally the identity of a country is emphasized and reconstruction may therefore be supported by national funds. A regional reconstruction seems to be able to get support from other authorities, for example the EU, to underline the regional perspective. Locally there is an interplay between local politics geared to tourism and an increased interest in the district and enthusiasts who want to reconstruct a local or individual past.

Dimensions of knowledge

The dimensions of knowledge in reconstruction can be captured in the following pairs of concepts: *research and popularization, theory and practice, reason and emotion, utility and pleasure.*

To present knowledge in reconstruction more closely I have cho-

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sen to start from two examples of a discussion, in which the involved parties take up different points of view as to the content of knowledge in reconstruction. The first deals with the reconstruction of the fortress of Eketorp on Öland, the second is about the reconstruction of Viking Age ships.

The reconstruction of the Eketorp fortress started in 1978. The purpose was to have both research and popularization of the past at the same place. Criticism of the reconstruction was voiced by Ulf Näsman, who said that there should be no compromising on the quality of the reconstruction. He demanded exactness in the exercise of ancient techniques on the basis of archaeological documentation. According to him, archaeology should be the primary foundation for interpretation. Bengt Edgren and Frands Herschend took a more pragmatic attitude. They emphasized the hypothetic nature of the reconstruction and the need for intuitive interpretations and entering into prehistoric man's way of thinking and acting. Two traditions of knowledge clashed over the reconstruction of Eketorp fortress. The debate has been going on ever since.

Reconstruction of ships is chiefly based on finds of Viking or medieval ships. These finds have been relatively well preserved and successfully excavated and documented. Since 1962, when the Skuldelev ships were dug out, the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde has formed an important basis for the reconstruction of several Viking Age and medieval ships. A debate has been going on between the ship reconstructors of Roskilde and the mainly Swedish reconstructors, who build their ships on the basis of rather fragmentary information, and who look upon the travelling in itself as a significant part of their experimental work. In Roskilde a technical and scientific perspective dominates, and tests of sailing trips are carried out to make clear the capacity of the reconstructed ships. The two stances represent different ideals of knowledge. The scientific-technical direction emphasizes the importance of authenticity in the material and the approach, building on a foundation of genuine documentation in connection with archaeological investigations. The other line puts the travelling in itself, the expedition and the adventure in the first place, and regards the techni-

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cal authenticity as of minor importance.

To simplify, the different ideals of knowledge which form the basis of the debates about Eketorp and ship reconstruction could consequently be called scientific and humanistic respectively. While scientifically minded reconstructors focus on methods, controllable and repeatable experiments and technology, the humanistic reconstructors want to recreate action with the stress on intuition and feeling insight, in an endeavour to understand how people lived and acted in the past.

Within archaeology there are also different ideals of knowledge, in which experimental archaeology is a positivistic epistemology, while a humanistic epistemology has not been quite established in the field of reconstruction in archaeology.

To find out how a synthesis of scientific and humanistic ideals of knowledge could come about, there is a philosophic discussion on "knowledge in action". Here practical knowledge is emphasized, which is also interpreted by Bengt Molander as situated in a field of tension. "Knowledge in action" should thus combine the practical performance of, for example, a handicraft, with the feelings which are within the craftsman himself. To put it simply, technology and humanism have a possibility to cooperate.

Authenticity seems to contain just as much a "feeling" of the authentic as the authentic in itself. The belief in genuineness can legitimate an emotional attitude towards the past, which otherwise would not be accepted. Authentic reconstruction might at first seem like a contradiction, but in connection with reconstruction it is precisely experiences of genuineness that are created, which give the visitors entrances to the past. It may, however, be difficult to separate reconstruction from pure falsification. It depends on the producer's purpose, on the continued use of the reconstruction and on the context in which it will be used.

One dimension of knowledge is its communication to the public. Reconstructions are experiences pertaining to the senses. At the same time archaeology is characterized by an anxiety that reconstruction on a full scale would give inefaceable pictures of the past and hence be dangerous for the public. But I am of the opinion that archaeologists need to have greater confidence in the capaci-

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ty of the observer to see through pictures as well as three-dimensional representations of the past, not only descriptions in the form of a text. The academic tradition has given priority to text. Reconstruction on full scale upsets that order.

One attitude to reconstruction is that it is certainly good for adult education and informative but it can also be on the verge of vulgarity. There must not be any elements of commercialism in the activity, so that the reconstruction will be accepted as knowledge. The usefulness is in opposition to commercial interference.

The tension between research and popularization is linked to the one between theory and practice. Reconstruction is theories converted into practical action. It is just as often research which also turns into or is communication. The mixture of directions may be understood as negative, but it is important to capitalize on the positive effects which can be the result.

David Kolb has discussed the conditions of learning. He formulated the basics in a "learning circle" which contains concrete experience, reflecting observation, abstract and generalizing thinking and practical action. His theory of learning is relevant to reconstruction, as it in itself comprises concrete experience, theorizing and concrete action alike. Here the dynamics of knowledge is represented, which is felt to be important for an integration of the tensions, namely research-popularization, theory-practice, reason-emotion and utility-pleasure.

The possibilities of reconstruction lie in showing instead of proving. First we don't have to demand of a reconstruction that it must prove a truth; it may instead show a possibility. This means that the reconstructor must be able to be satisfied with some uncertainty which is inherent in the experimental search for knowledge. Secondly, the reconstruction often gives more of a snapshot, a glance, into a period than traditional archaeological descriptions. An archaeology of the moment can be used and does not always have to be followed by those longer chronological presentations which archaeologists often present. Thirdly, the reconstruction is spatial. It is possible to approach it physically and to understand buildings, events and sometimes also landscapes and environments in terms of spatialism and many senses. Seeing, hearing, feeling and smel-

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ling are the keys to a broader understanding of the interpretation.

The knowledge in reconstruction, at last, depends on the ideal of knowledge cherished by the observer or the practitioner. It is obvious that there is a chasm between the scientific and the humanistic ideals of knowledge, and it would be good if it could be bridged over. It is good that anyone who wants to reconstruct is allowed to do so, and that the activity is not regulated. Consequently not only academically educated archaeologists but also able craftsmen and enthusiastic amateurs have had a possibility to consider the past. Owing to the fact that different experiences meet, the result will be more varied, perhaps not always the best, but at least not conform. And a commercial basis for an activity does not mean that it is not of good quality.

Time-travelling adventures

The adventure in connection with reconstruction is tied to the wish to go back into the past. The past is suitable as a destination. The adventure can involve anything from drama and excitement to an alternative daily life, which builds on a different way of life from our modern one. Parallel with the aspiration for authentic properties it is necessary that the participants have a certain measure of playfulness. Johan Huizinga's theories about man's need to play is a fine starting point to determine the importance of playing for both children and grown-ups.

The forms of travelling can be moving in space, moving in an inner dream world and imagination, or the outer and the inner travel can be combined and become a time-travel. A reconstruction is something to which you can go, which is a movement in space. The prerequisites for time travel are there, certainly, but imagination and inner travel are also needed to complete the journey.

The vehicles in time travel are *buildings*, *transport* and *event*. The buildings in the form of houses, huts, mansions or fortified buildings form the limits for habitation with all that it means of everyday life, but also festivity or siege. Transport, mostly in the shape of reconstructions of ships, creates the conditions for adventurous travels. Everything from the dugouts of the Stone Age via the longships of the Viking Age to the cogs of the Middle Ages are obtai-

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nable. The ships carry their stories with them. The reconstructions derive their excitement from the adventures in which they have participated. Events comprise markets, festivals, carnivals, processions and tournaments. The events go beyond everyday life and do not have to be attached to stationary reconstructions. Instead they are often, like medieval festivals, connected to a local story. The three means of transport are not clearly delimited, but merge and overlap. But the means of transport are there and set the tone for the adventure in time.

The journey to the Stone Age brings us close to nature, shows us techniques in the form of craftsmanship, and presents an egalitarian society, where the perspective of authority is absent.

The journey to the Bronze Age combines an ideologically and ritually coloured nearness to nature, ecological perspectives and ritual fertility cult. The journey to the Bronze Age will thus be a trip to cult, ecology and fertility.

The journey to the Iron Age is characterised by everyday life and dwelling, farming and livestock breeding. It happens that families, especially in Denmark, spend their holiday as a prehistoric family on an Iron Age farm. Their task, besides living in an Iron Age way, is to communicate their experiences to the visitors to the reconstructions. The conclusion is that everyday life and everyday work are the key words of the travel to the Iron Age.

With the journey to the Viking Age the world of the traveller widens, as the travelling physically has the character of transport on a ship. Often reconstructions of Viking ships are used as means of transfer in both time and space. The meeting points, to which the ships sail, are markets and festivals with a Viking Age theme. There are modern rune cutters, who produce runestones for the needs of our time. The adventure is like a trip at sea or along rivers. Traditionally the journey to the Viking Age is therefore a commercial trip or a voyage in the wake of ancient war or plundering expeditions. But the Viking ships of today are also used to symbolize peace on earth, women's strength, children's rights and contact between people. Thus the commercial travels of the Viking Age are transformed into a kind of missionary travels. To sum up, the journey to the Viking Age has themes like trade, martial expedi-

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tions and peace on earth.

The journey to the Middle Ages is in increasing demand. It often takes place with the aid of the event as means of transport. Medieval markets and festivals form the background to life in the Middle Ages. But places with reconstructions of buildings have also come to form this kind of background. Associations that have specialized in medieval life or in holding tournaments are important for the atmosphere. The journey to the Middle Ages is much concerned with festival, costumes, socializing, trade and knights. Merchants and nobility dominate throughout, even if there are priests and peasants here and there. The trip takes people to culture and contrast, with contrast standing for hierarchies, power and clear gender differences.

Time travel can be a lifestyle and a hobby, escapism or relaxation and longing for the unique adventure. There is a clear chronological change from the Stone Age up to the Middle Ages which proceeds from nature to culture. The means of transport in the form of buildings, transport and event, each in its own way sets its stamp on the form and content of the journey. The time travel contains politics, knowledge and adventure at the same time. The three perspectives coexist. Here it is evident that it is not possible to see one perspective divorced from the others.

Imaginations of the past

There are striking similarities in the representation of rustic life around 1900 in comparison with how we around 2000 also bring the past to life, but with the focus on much older times. The vanishing of the old peasant culture around 1900 led to an increasing interest in the life of the farmers in historic times and the rebuilding of houses in open-air museums like Skansen. Today the re-enactment of the past is not done by rebuilding, but by a kind of creative activity, whereby "old" buildings are built and life and customs that we have not experienced are created. In those days open-air museums were created and later folk museums, but now prehistoric villages and farms are established.

Around 1900 industrialization and urbanization meant that the peasant culture was near its destruction. Today global conflicts are going on with displacements and streams of refugees as a conse-

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quence. Today too, feelings of rootlessness occur, which probably lead to the increasing interest in re-creating a distant past.

Around 1900 it was the genuine things that had priority in the form of buildings, clothes and objects. Today objects are created anew and buildings and environments are emphasized more than objects. There is a parallel within archaeological heritage management, which has gone from protecting historical monuments to comprising historical environments as a whole.

Around 1900 re-enactment was a way to protect a culture threatened by destruction. Today re-enactment is chiefly an individual way to experience something. Personal satisfaction or the way to self-fulfilment seem to be weighty reasons today.

In my analysis I have discerned levels of re-enactment from signs via marking, contours, building, building with a museum, furnished building and furnished and actively presented building, inhabited building to historical theatre. This scale can be due to economic priorities, but just as much to courage. How far dare those responsible go in an interpretation of the past?

Authenticity is of importance to the experience of the past in reconstruction. Authenticity can give a solid and obviously useful background and a basis for reconstruction. But it can just as easily upset the activity if the demands for the authenticity of things cannot be combined with the experience. If the playing is not more important than the detail, the detail can kill the play.

Reconstruction as a medium has advantages and disadvantages in relation to, for example, museum exhibitions. The advantages are its naturalness in the encounter with the past. An abstraction is transformed into an experience appealing to the senses. There is also a possibility for the interested public to participate in reconstruction. As an amateur it is often possible to take part in the making of a reconstruction. This is more difficult in traditional media such as museum exhibitions, where everything is managed by professionals. The amateurs get a chance to win respect for their knowledge. Also fields that traditionally are beyond the limits of archaeological schooling, such as craftsmanship, can have their place and contribute to new knowledge.

The disadvantages of reconstruction are their tendency to repeat

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clichés, reproducing obvious myths. There is also a vulnerability as a result of the forms which the reconstructions take on. Societies and foundations without a particularly long continuity stand behind the activity, which can end when enthusiasts move or give up, when political majorities are changed in a municipality or when unemployment is turned into its opposite and the former cheap labour is not available any more. A disadvantage can be the naturalness with which the reconstruction influences all the senses. The reconstruction easily leads to identification, not contrast or alienation, and hence it does not encourage people to question things. The greatest advantage, the sensuality, can perhaps also turn into the largest disadvantage.

If stereotyped pictures of the past can be counteracted, the reconstruction is an excellent form of both archaeological presentation and creative experiments. Reconstruction brings the suggested theoretical interpretations to a head. If the uncertainty of the interpretations is presented the observer is activated and a dialogue between the visitor and the reconstructor can arise. Reconstruction provides space for the participation of the public, a possibility which does not exist within the limits of traditional museum activity or academic research.

It is obvious that reconstruction reflects its own age. The past is the mirror of the ideal and discussion of the time of the reconstructors. But reconstruction can also constructively turn established representations of the past upside down.

*Översatt av Birgitta Håkansson och Lennart Petersson,
granskat av Alan Crozier*