Memories of a holy place

The role of the past in the past is a fairly new topic of research. The strict stratigraphical and chronological thinking in archaeology created an articulate linear conception of time within the discipline. Archaeologists created contemporary contexts, where artefacts and structures from other times than the one in question were seen as anomalies and disturbances. However, the awareness today of the multi-temporal character of existence is both a tool for source criticism and a new perspective for interpreting the past (Olivier 1999). This poster will deal with references to the past during the medieval time in a very special site, *Ullevi*, in eastern central Sweden **(figure 1)**.

Ullevi was archaeological excavated during 2007 and astounding and absolutely unique ritual milieu from 550-750 after Christ was documented. This will however not be the focus of this poster but instead how people several centuries later were creating memories by physically and spatially relating to this place. At the same site there were also a settlement from the 14th and 15th centuries excavated. How and why did people in a Christian era construct or recreate memories about a heathen cult-site?

Reflections of the past in the past

Is it possible to capture the meaning and role of the past during medieval times? Richard Bradley draws attention to a problem with the research in prehistory on this theme, in that the theoretical abstractions are hardly connected to the empirical evidence (Bradley 2002: preface). He says that the real source for how people in the past conceived their past, which is the practices, is overlooked, (ibid:14). I agree that analysis of practices is the most productive way to reach the immaterial worlds of ideas and conceptions of the medieval era.
The practice of reuse has seldom been studied in a framework of ritual theory (for exceptions see, e.g., Gosden and Lock 1998), even though it is implicitly analysed as a kind of ritual (Bradley 2003).

In this poster reuse is seen as a ritualized practice within the concept of "ritualization", the way a practice becomes ritualized. In her influential thoughts about ritual practice, however, Catherine Bell does not present a general but a culture-specific definition of ritualized practices. "Ritualization" is less about autonomic rituals and more about methods, traditions and strategies in a social context (Bell 1992). She also emphasizes ritual as a "labour" instead of a "symbolic and idealized expression" (ibid:viii). In that sense the ritualized practices are materialized or made concrete in a way more apt to the empirical evidence of archaeology.
A complementary and in many respects interrelated theoretical basis for studying reuse of the past is the concept of "social memory". The extensive research on this theme, ever since its "forefather" Maurice Halbwachs, has been focused on the creation of memory as a strategic

practice within a social context (e.g. Halbwachs (1941, 1952) 1992; Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Hallam and Hockey 2001) (figure 2). We can see an increased interest in these theories in archaeology at the end of the twentieth century (e.g. Rowlands 1993; Holtorf 1997; Bradley and Williams 1998; van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Part of this interest is due to the fact that "the past" gets a role in the society if these theories are considered.

This poster ends with some short reflections about memory making in relation to times of change, hierarchies of pastness and practices of interpretation.

The Cult-place during 550-750 after Christ

The ancient place-name, "*Ullevi*" has survived until today and was even used as the name of the farmstead that was lying at this place in modern times. It consist of the name of a deity named "*Ull*" which was worshiped during the period before the Viking-era in above all eastern Scandinavia and "*Vi*" which is the word for a holy place.

The natural components in the landscape have supposedly been very important when choosing this place. An elongated rock is lying in the middle of the site like a nave of a wheel. The rock was enclosed with fences of wood and stone. Several hearths for lightning and ritual-cooking were placed inside and just outside the enclosure. The rock was dividing the site in two halfs, but at one location there was a natural gate through the rock leading up to the highest spot and to a most remarkable construction of stone. It was a kind of a stone-filled platform, ca 100 m2 in size. The platform was elongated in the end with two stone rows, looking like a pair of arms enfolding the rock. Within this arms were four postholes supposedly traces after a small building **(figure 2)**. In the vicinity of the platform was nearly 100 amulet-rings found (**figure 3).**

When Ullevi was abandoned the cult-place was closed in a ritual manner by covering the platform by a thick silt-layer. This was requiring a large work-effort to complete.

The Medieval settlement during the 14th and the 15th centuries

We do not have archaeological proof of any activity at the cult-place from the Viking-era and onwards, therefore it is likely that the place of Ullevi was abandoned during or immediately before that time-period (around ca 800 after Christ). If that was the case it took a long time, at least 500 years, until the place was being used again during the 14th century.

Why did it take such a long time? Was it because the memory of this holy place was shaped and reshaped during centuries and maybe prevented another use and activity than the original one? During the later part of the Viking era Scandinavia was Christianised. How did that affect the memories of a heathen cult-place?

The people who choose to settle at Ullevi in the 14th century must have represented an upper social stratum of the society at that time. The finds of weapon and riding-equipments are indicating that. Even though they seem to have had a strong social and political position they were very strongly governed by their memory of Ullevi. This is shown in the archaeological records. The buildings were placed on top of the old platform and not in the southern slope just below, which was a much better building-area and above all a characteristic building-localisation of that time **(figure 4).**

Why did they choose the exposed and windy site on top of the platform? We can only speculate, but it seems as if they had created a memory and consciously related themselves to that long ago abandoned but not forgotten place. Maybe that memory of the past strengthened their position in the present and in the future.

Overlaying the ritual platform can be conceived as a ritualized way of constructing memory and oblivion performed by the inhabitants of the settlement during the studied period.

Times of change

Hypothetically the ritual practice of overlaying in Ullevi took place during a period when this family was establishing a position in society or when the position was threatened. This is a time when the past had a special essence in the dynamics and tension between change and continuity. This is a perspective often used in archaeological research of the phenomenon of reuse. In times of change "the past" is regarded as a social and political resource with the ability to legitimize the order of society or create an identity (e.g. Gosden and Lock 1998; Theuws and Roymans 1999; Edmonds 1999; van Dyke 2003). A new order can be questioned and must be rooted in a supposed tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

I do not believe, however, that it is deterministic or universal that people in periods of drastic change are more inclined to construct and use memories. Instead it is totally determined by context, which also includes the meaning of the practice. Nevertheless, the overlays during both the Migration and the Viking period hypothetically have a common denominator, indicated by the use of special types of graves and houses, which supposedly are material expressions of legitimacy and identity.

Hierarchies of pastness

Hypothetically there was a hierarchical way of looking at the past and the creation of memory during the Medieval Age. There could have existed several memories with different time depth and they could have been created in specific contexts. In *Ullevi* there seem to have been a certain past that were connected to and perhaps reserved for a special social groups in the society, the mythic past for example. These groups may have been in possession of places with certain potentials, for example a certain time depth. Patrick Geary talks about control of and access to the past and the material culture: "How these tangible or written relics of the past were preserved, who preserved them, and who could therefore make them disappear were thus fundamental aspects of power and authority" (Geary 1994:7). In this respect the oblivion is an important aspect of remembrance. There are always processes of negotiation concerning what will be remembered or forgotten. The one who decides about the memory and owns the past had power over the future.

Practices of interpretation

Richard Bradley discerns three important processes in the practices of reuse, connected to the reason for the phenomenon: "interpretation, confrontation, and legitimation". The concept of "interpretation" is exemplified by such different practices as assimilation or combination, destruction, modification or reshaping. All of them imply some kind of interpretation of the material culture being reused (Bradley 2002:122ff). The interpretations connected to the practice of overlays can in very general terms be characterized by the concepts of "association" and "dissociation". "Association" creates a sense of affinity and recognition

while "dissociation" is a construction of alienation. The creation of memory or oblivion is based on these two ways of comprehending the world.

The fact that there might have been several contemporaneous and perhaps competing pasts is connected to the interpretative and constructive aspect of reuse. The ritualized practice of overlaying is only one of several strategies for creating and recreating political and sacred authority, social structure and perceptions of group identities, memories and histories.