

Excavating Postprocessually – A Theoretical Utopia or a Practical Reality?

A Discussion of Barrows in Skärstad, Småland

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Abstract

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From two points of departure, a postgraduate seminar and the excavation of a barrow in Skärstad, Skärstad parish in northern Småland, the author asks whether it is possible to excavate an ancient monument in a postprocessual way and if theoretical changes affect the methods used in excavations. These questions are studied through the history of research done on Swedish barrows from the Late Iron Age. The terms processual and postprocessual archaeology are discussed for the latest research done on barrows. These terms are then viewed in connection with the more universal terms modernism and postmodernism. These terms and what they stand for may be crucial for the way the ancient monuments are apprehended. The questions one asks about the monuments, the way one understands the world and how one thinks it is possible to gain knowledge about it, are of great importance for the methods one actually follows in the field situation. The author comes to the conclusion that the postprocessual theories are already being practised at archaeological excavations and are not confined only to the study chambers at the universities.

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Introduction

Some years ago a postgraduate seminar was arranged at the Institute of Archaeology in Lund. The title for the day was “Excavating Postprocessually”. The aim was to discuss whether the theoretical debate of recent years has influenced archaeological fieldwork. If it has, in what ways have the excavation methods changed? If it has not, how should theoretical archaeology and excavation techniques be united, or are they better kept separate? Are reports and publications on archaeological sites influenced by new theories, or should the basic archaeological work and publication be as void as possible of disturbing theoretical discussions? Are there different

ways of excavating features at all or is the choice of method independent of the theoretical viewpoint of the excavator and the chosen method just a mirror of the archaeologist’s competence? Can you dig in an explicit postprocessual mode, a processual mode or perhaps a gender-critical mode? These were some of the very difficult questions asked at the seminar. In fact, very few answers were provided. Of course the old trenchline between postprocess thinkers and post-hole diggers was present, even if it did not dominate the debate. Few practical examples were presented showing what may be called processual or postprocessual excavation and ex-

cavation techniques. This essay may be seen as my own belated response to the questions asked at the seminar. Before venturing on the trip I must emphasize that I do not intend to offend any fellow archaeologist when I call him processualist or postprocessualist or any other -ist in the essay. I will not choose sides as to what is good archaeology or what -ism is the most preferable. I must also emphasize that processualism and postprocessualism are two theoretical terms. In practice it is probably impossible to find any pure positions.

The barrows in Skärstad, Skärstad parish, Småland

It could be said that the postgraduate seminar was one starting point for me to begin reflecting on the field methods used by myself and other archaeologists. The other starting point was the excavation of two barrows in Skärstad in the northern part of the province of Småland. I was responsible for the excavation of one of them at two seminar excavations arranged by the Institute of Archaeology in Lund in collaboration with Jönköping County Museum in 1993–94. The second mound was excavated by Björn Varenius at Jönköping County Museum in 1985–86. The excavations are published elsewhere (Nicklasson 1996; Varenius 1996). In this essay the material will be presented briefly and then some problems in connection with the debate on postprocessual excavation will be expanded upon.

Skärstad is situated approximately 20 km north-east of Huskvarna, just a couple of kilometres from Lake Vättern. The area is called the southern Vättern district and has very fertile soils before the land sharply rises to the Småland Uplands. The Skärstad valley have more in common with western Östergötland than with the dark Småland.

Both of the barrows were badly damaged by recent ploughing. As early as the 1920s the site was reported by some persons in Skärstad with an archaeological interest to the National Her-



Fig. 1. Map showing Skärstad in northern Småland where I excavated a barrow in 1993 and 1994, one of the starting points for this essay.

itage Board in Stockholm. The mounds at this time were already ploughed out and damaged. Together with the landowner it was arranged that the mounds were not to be ploughed anymore. Some time, however, the ploughing of the mounds was resumed, and when the Skärstad valley was investigated for ancient monuments in the 1980s the mounds were totally ploughed out and badly damaged. Due to the bad condition of the two mounds and the possibility that they would be further damaged, the National Heritage Board raised funds for a rescue excavation of the two mounds. This is the background to the Varenius excavation in 1985 and 1986. The mound Varenius excavated demanded more effort to excavate than had been expected, and the other mound was left without being excavated. It was agreed with the landowner that no further ploughing was to be done on the remaining mound. In 1992 I was working as an archaeologist at Jönköping County Museum. I became familiar with the results of and report on Varenius' excavation. In 1993 I received a post as doctoral candidate at the Institute of Archaeology in Lund. One of my duties was to lead some of the



Fig. 2. The picture shows the slope where the barrows in Skärstad were situated. The barrow excavated by Varenius was immediately to the left of the barrow excavated on the picture.

seminar excavations. My knowledge of the remaining barrow in Skärstad and contacts with the landowner and the County Museum led to the excavation of the grave during 1993 and 1994. The mounds are described briefly here:

A1 (Feature 1). This was the mound excavated by Varenius. After the topsoil had been removed a damaged cairn about 16 m across was found. Beneath the cairn a thick cremation layer was found in the middle of the feature. It contained 5.8 kg of cremated bones, about 20 glass beads, two spindle whorls of sandstone, rivets and mountings for a chest or box, mountings for a drinking horn, and a pottery urn. The osteological analysis was carried out by Sabine Sten at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. The grave contained bones from a grown-up human, one horse, three dogs, a goshawk, and parts of a hen, pig and cattle. Judging by the

grave gifts, the grave should most probably be interpreted as a female grave, even if the osteological evidence was inconclusive.

A2 (Feature 2). This was the grave investigated by the seminar students and myself in 1993 and 1994. This grave had a somewhat more complicated construction. After the removal of the topsoil a round cairn about 15–20 m across was found. In the centre of the cairn an inner stone circle was noticed. This can be interpreted as a stone setting supposedly from the Early Iron Age. It contained a small amount of burned and cleansed cremated bones, but no usable finds or charcoal for dating. Under the south-west part of the cairn a big cremation layer was found. It contained about 10.2 kg of cremated bones, a knife, a pottery urn, nails and rivets, which were interpreted as the remains of a boat, in which the deceased had been laid. The

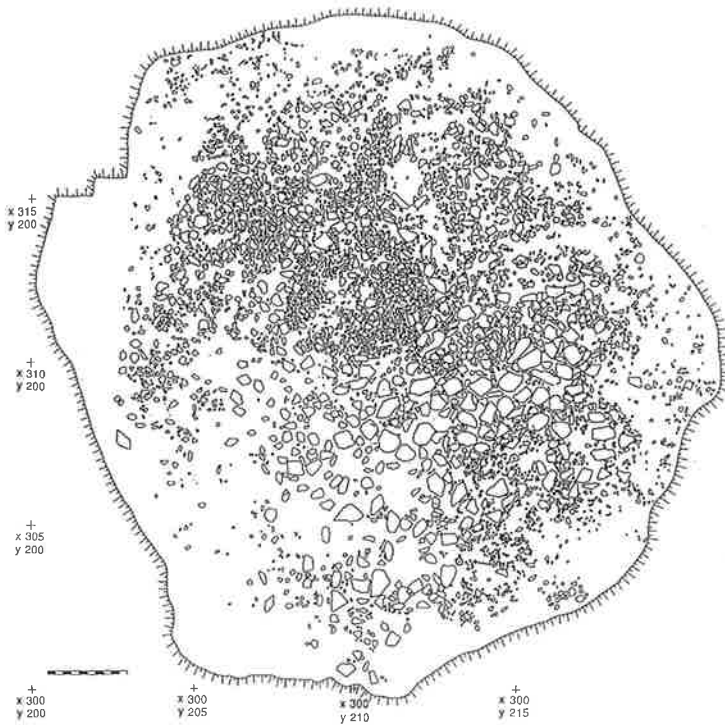


Fig 3. A drawing of the cairn in Skärstad A2, showing some of the details and different phases in the construction of the barrow. Notice the inner stone circle. This may originally have been a stone setting from the Early Iron Age. The big cremation layer from the Vendel Period was found under the south-western part of the cairn.

osteological analysis was conducted by Elisabeth Iregren at the Institute of Archaeology in Lund. It showed that the cremation layer contained the remains of a grown man, a horse, three dogs, a goshawk and an eagle owl and parts from a sheep or goat and possibly cattle too. The bones from the inner stone circle could not be analysed, but they clearly came from another burial. The mound could have contained yet another grave. In the northern part of the cairn a small number of cremated bones were found directly beneath the topsoil. This could have been the remains of a secondary grave dug from the top of the mound. When the earthen part of the mound was damaged by ploughing, most of this grave was destroyed in the process. None of the cremation layers could be more closely dated through their contents than to the Late Iron Age. Two samples of charcoal from the cremation layer in A2 were submitted to ^{14}C dating. Both turned out to be from the Late Iron Age. The most probable date indicated the Vendel Period, the 7th century AD. Since the mounds were very

similar to each other, they ought to have been built at the same period of time. It is very tempting to see the mounds as having been erected over a couple belonging to a chieftain family.

A periodization of barrow research

The postgraduate seminar and the excavations in Skärstad are the background to the discussion of archaeological method and theory. How could the excavation be used to analyse different modes of excavation? During my work with the report on the barrow I read a seminar paper of Kenneth Svensson, who discusses Vibyhögen, a barrow in Kalmar parish in Uppland (Svensson 1983). He makes a chronological and methodological division of the research and excavation concerning barrows in the Mälaren region in central Sweden. This could be a point of departure for the discussion of how postprocessualism has influenced the research and how different school of thought have superseded each other in the re-

search on barrows. One of the features of postprocessual research is to deconstruct one's own discipline and to look at the research process in a historical context. Only when I have placed myself historically can I really understand my own interpretations. Svensson's six phases are as follow:

Phase 1: the 17th and 18th centuries and the renaissance ideals of the Swedish great power.

Phase 2: the 19th century. National romanticism and the excavation of the monuments at Gamla Uppsala.

Phase 3: the turn of the century, the philological school and the attempt to determine the identity of the barrow inhabitants.

Phase 4: the first half of the 20th century. Problems and excavations.

Phase 5: the 1960s, barrows and the development of settlement archaeology.

Phase 6: the 1970s and 1980s. Barrows and the structures of society. (Svensson 1983, p. 3, table of contents, my translation and slight elaboration.)

Some of the phases overlap. Phase 4, for instance, can be seen as the practical side of phase 3. In this essay I am going to concentrate on Svensson's phase 3 onwards. Phases 1 and 2 could be seen as precursors of the scientific archaeology developed during phases 2 and 3. The early phases could be called antiquarian interest rather than archaeological research.

From Svensson's table of contents the following four phases, more consistent with the discussions I want to promote in this essay, can be extracted:

1. The early 20th century, ca. 1900–1940. The barrows as historical remains.
2. The period after the Second World War, ca. 1940–1970. The barrows as limited sources of information.
3. The 1960s and 1970s, ca. 1960–1980. The barrows as indicators of settlement and social structures.
4. The beginning of the postprocessual era, ca. 1980–.

It is important to recognize that the barrows as archaeological objects of research have had a crucial role in all phases, but in very different ways, as I am going to show. These phases can be seen as general trends for all the research on the Late Iron Age, even in research that does not discuss barrows. In this way my discussion of barrows may even be seen as a metaphor for the development of Swedish archaeology in general.

Phase 1. It is important to recognize that this phase inherits the national romanticism of the late 19th century. It is still the Swedish state formation process that is in focus. The perspective has however widened. The main question is now to find out which persons are buried in barrows in different places of Sweden. The persons are historical and the source are different kinds of written evidence about the Swedish Iron Age, for instance, Snorri Sturluson's tales, *Beowulf* and runic inscriptions. Svensson calls this the philological school of research, but I find it important to stress that during this period the barrows are seen as historical remains of deeds performed by heroic individuals. The importance of the philological base could be taken further too. Kossinna, one of the most famous and, in later days, infamous, German archaeologists during the late 19th and early 20th century, was a philologist before entering the discipline of archaeology. His school of thought was influential, not only in Germany, but also in Sweden. I think it is correct to see Kossinna's philological school of archaeology as an attempt to see archaeology as a continuation of written history in prehistoric times. A fact I find peculiar in this phase of archaeological research is that it is during these decades that most excavations of barrows were carried out. Svensson mentions eight barrows excavated in the lake Mälaren region between 1914 and 1939. Before that he mentions only three excavations and after 1939 only four barrows were excavated (until 1981, that is) (Svensson 1983, p. 24). The first of these late excavations was conducted in 1959, twenty years after the last excavation of the "Historical-Philological"

school. This fact is interesting to contrast with how the excavations were used in publications during this phase. As previously stated, the aim was to name the persons buried in the barrows and to identify places with barrows with places in the written sources. Examples of publications from this phase are Nerman's, with the following titles (in translation): "Which Kings Are Buried in the Uppsala Barrows?" (Nerman 1913), "Ottar Vendelkråka and Ottar's Barrow in Vendel" (Nerman 1917) and "The Royal Barrows on Adelsö and Sweden's Oldest Kings' Rolls" (Nerman 1918). Also to be placed in this school of thought is Lindqvist with his big publication of the excavations in the barrows at Uppsala and Vendel (Lindqvist 1936). One feature of this school was the debate between Nerman and Lindqvist concerning the dating of individual graves and the correct identification of the buried kings. The focus in the publications is less on discussing the material found by the excavations, and more on placing the barrows in a historical and philological context. Some discussions concerning the dating of the individual features were held. In just a few cases are the cremated bones and other contents in the graves discussed at length. During the first half of the century the discipline of osteology was only occasionally used to analyse cremation graves. As a result, very limited knowledge was gained of the cremated remains in the graves, since all of the barrows contain vast quantities of cremated animals and in many cases more than one human. This detailed knowledge was just not obtainable, and questions based on the bone content were therefore not even thinkable; if they had been, the development of osteology as a mean of analysing Iron Age graves would have been more rapid. This means that the physical remains in the graves are not really discussed except for decorated objects or objects of precious metal.

The next phase, phase 2, lasts from about 1940 until the 1970s, chronologically overlapping the next phase. This phase is characterized by the very limited research done on barrows.

This is coupled to a very small number of archaeological excavations of barrows, at least in the Mälaren valley. In other parts of the country, where the total number of excavated barrows from the Iron Age is considerably smaller than in the Mälaren region, comparatively many excavations were carried out during this period. Examples of this are Gävehögen in Halland (Augustsson 1976), Gunnerstad in Gamleby parish in Småland (Friberg-Johansson 1978), Ivla Ödegård, Ljunga parish in Småland (Anderbjörk 1947) and Prästgården in Hög parish, Hälsingland. This mound in its oldest phase is dated to the Roman Iron Age (Liedgren 1987). Perhaps best known are the three barrows at Högom, Medelpad (Ramqvist 1992). The smaller number of excavations in the Mälaren region could partly be explained by the shrinking total number of undamaged barrows and a policy on the part of the central authorities to save barrows from exploitation and excavation. During this phase the first rescue excavation of barrows in the Mälaren region was carried out. These are two barrows in Trosa-Vagnhärad parish in Södermanland, excavated by Särilvik in 1959. I think an explanation only on the grounds of a different view of ancient monuments does not cover the whole picture. During this phase there is a lack of paradigm by which to conduct research on barrows. They are no longer explicitly seen as the remains of chieftains and kings in the Iron Age, connected to the written historical sources about the kingdom of the Svear. No clear theory or conception as to what the barrows represent and by what lines research should be conducted on them, emerged during this phase. The barrows and the research done on them moved from the old core area in the Mälaren valley to the periphery in Norrland and southern Sweden. In these regions there was no tradition of research into kings, chieftains and political development during the Iron Age. It is only in recent times that this theme has developed, especially through the works of Ramqvist in Norrland (Ramqvist 1991, 1996). The hitherto prevailing idea of the barrows as historic

remains was diluted. In one sense, barrows went out of fashion. Many of the publications on the excavations of the barrows are surprisingly short during this phase. Examples of this are Lamm's publication in *Fornvännen* of the big mound from Spelvik (Lamm 1962). It consists of 23 pages. More than a third of the essay consists of pictures and the text consists to a large extent of a list of finds from the grave. There is little room for discussion. In the same year Särllvik published the two rescue-excavated barrows in Trosa-Vagnhärad in Södermanland, also in *Fornvännen*. She used only about four pages, pictures included, for the two graves (Särllvik 1962). One can argue that this is only a brief presentation in an archaeological journal. Against this stands the fact that these barrows were never published in any other way. One could perhaps suppose that the published essays on the barrows are only a part of the material and that the whole documentation is much more exhaustive. This supposition falls short too. The archive reports in, for instance, ATA and local museums are even shorter than the published essays. An example of this is Varenius' report on a barrow at Sorunda in Södermanland. It consists of four pages of written documentation, with two of the pages being the list of finds. The report also consists of four photographs and three drawings (Varenius 1960). Anderbjörk only uses one and a half pages to describe the mound at Ivla Ödegård in Ljunga parish, Småland (Anderbjörk 1947). With the report there are also a number of photos and drawings. It looks as if the ancient monument itself and what was actually found at the excavation is of very small importance when the conclusions are drawn. The conclusions themselves can in a sense be said to be small too. Perhaps this trend may be linked to a positivistic school of thought, in which results have to be presented free from interpretations, as raw facts. It is therefore better to show a drawing and some pictures without comments than to make interpretations that will not stand the test of time. The will to name the buried kings and chieftains is gone, as is the view of a self-evident Svear

kingdom. The problem is that there is no new ruling idea of what the barrows represents during this period. Instead one can notice a new tendency to write for posterity in the form of timeless presentations of facts. This school of research has received a great deal of criticism, especially from the postprocessual camp. On ethical grounds I believe that the school is of very high standard. One could compare the archaeology done after the war with the functionalist style in architecture. A house should be a house and be devoid of historical affiliations. There is an outspoken will to create something pure without falling into the pits that interpretation offers.

Only in the next phase, phase 3, from the 1960s and 1970s, was a new way of doing research on barrows found. This is the settlement archaeology that was (and is?) very strong in the Mälaren region. The most important works during this phase discuss the barrows in connection with the oldest known settlement patterns and divisions into parishes, hundreds and counties. Works by Ambrosiani 1964, Hyenstrand 1974 and Wijkander 1983 should be mentioned as the main works in this school of research. The seminar paper I use as background to this essay (Svensson 1983) is itself a good example of a work in this tradition. Very few excavations of barrows were carried out during these decades. This may seem somewhat surprising, as the barrows had regained their importance as a prime source of information. The interest now, however, was less focused on the barrows themselves than on their background. The background was supposed to be found in the economy of the Iron Age and social factors visible in settlement patterns and the division of the land. If one works by these premises, one does not have to excavate the barrow. It is more important to find the settlement and study the relation of the barrows to other monuments of power and administration such as early medieval churches and runic stones. The logical consequence of this line of thought is that when you have disciplined space in the

form of the relationships of different ancient monuments, you discipline society through the hierarchization and structuring of social space.

Processualism, postprocessualism, modernism, postmodernism

I think that contemporary archaeology has left the phases drawn up by Svensson in 1983 and entered a postprocessual vision of how research is to be carried out on barrows. Before analysing how I myself and my contemporaries have chosen to do research, I should probably state how I regard the terms processualism and post-processualism in a theoretical and philosophical sense. First I must state that the theories in archaeology are not isolated from the rest of society and theories used in other disciplines. I therefore think it is essential to place the ideas used in archaeology in a larger context. I believe that the major trends presented in phases 1–3, especially the last two, can be connected to what in the debate has been called “The Modern Society”. The first phase can be seen as a transition from an older romantic view of history and archaeology into what later becomes the modern view. This transition can be found in many fields in society from the period between the two world wars. Phase 2 can be connected with the logical-positivistic view that ruled most research in the period after the Second World War. The third phase is what we in everyday language call processual archaeology. Postprocessual archaeology, on the other hand, is closely connected with what has been known as “Postmodern Society”. The terms should not primarily be seen as a chronological division of our century. Postmodern ways of thinking can be traced far back in the intellectual history, and in many ways we are still very modern people. Instead the difference may be seen as a difference in the way of thinking and apprehending the world. This, I think, is very well expounded by the sociologist Bauman (1994, 1996). It must however be stated that the terms are problematic, and there are other ways of looking at them than I choose

to do, inspired by Bauman. The modern mind always looks for a final, scientific solution to the problem at hand. It is of the utmost importance to learn the inner substance of the world and what is common ground and universal to all human beings. This has hitherto failed, but a characteristic trait of the modern mind is to continue this quest for redemption and reconciliation. This can be seen both in the tendency to publish scientific reports without time-bound interpretations and in the processual way of structuring both space and the social world. The postmodern mind is born at the moment it realizes the failure of the modern way of thought. It mocks the modern way of seeking an all-embracing explanation for the things observed. Instead of looking for the total solution, the postmodern mind goes for details and fragments. It is happy to find that one fragment of the world fits into another, but it is never interested in looking for the whole picture of the puzzle. This basic attitudes toward the world also influence the way the archaeologists regard knowledge. The modern archaeologist is in this respect the optimistic person who never surrenders to defeatism. He works from a synthesizing and constructive point of view. Everything fits together and can be known. His instincts tell him that if only one more barrow were excavated every question asked would be answered. The problem is when this barrow has been excavated the questions are still unanswered and the process will begin again, if only one more barrow was to be excavated. In fact, even if all barrows in Sweden were excavated, the modern scholar would still be looking for objects that could answer the questions. Excavations could never really answer the questions because the answers are either already known or the questions of a nature that makes them impossible to answer at all. The fundamental insight is that there will always be another question to ask. This frustration leads to the awakening of the postmodern mind.

The postmodern archaeologist frowns upon the naïveté of his modern colleague. He works

with an analytical and deconstructive frame of mind. Nothing can really be known. The more we excavate, the less will in fact be known. The postmodern scholar can really be fascinated by the smallest of details. This is not because he is a better or more thorough archaeologist than the modern scholar. Instead this is explained by the fact that the world is built up of details which do not add up to a greater sum. The only thing that can be studied is in fact details. In his mind the newly excavated material never answers any questions. Instead it only show on the complexities of reality and the impossibility to know anything for certain. He often uses expressions like complexity, open-ended, pluralism and so on. If the modern archaeologist could not find his answer, the postmodern archaeologist never found the question.

Postprocessual excavation techniques or just another (better) way of doing things?

This is the philosophical background to postprocessual archaeology. When I now have come so far, how is the philosophy visible in the way I chose to excavate Skärstad A2? Is my way of digging and thinking about archaeology different from that of my predecessors? If the far-flung theoretical debate is to have any impact on the "real" archaeology in the trenches, something concrete must come out of the postprocessualists or it will be nothing but a beautiful construction only discussed at the archaeological departments in the universities. If this is the case, then postprocessualism will have no influence on the way the archaeological material is gathered at excavations and on the practical side of the discipline.

I think the project that really opened up the barrows for postprocessual research was the Big Grave Project (*Storgravsprojektet*), initiated at the Museum of National Antiquities and resulting in essays and papers by the osteologists involved, Sabine Sten and Maria Vretemark (Vretemark 1983; Sten & Vretemark 1988;

Sjösvärd 1989). Their publications were an important source of inspiration for me when I made up my mind concerning what method I was going to use at the seminar excavation when the cremation layer was encountered. I decided to excavate it in 0.25 x 0.25 metre squares. This was done on the basis of the assumption that the funeral pyre had been on the same spot that the mound was erected in. I think that this methodological choice is a postprocessual one. In earlier excavations the cremation layer was excavated in bigger portions like 1 x 1 metre or not separated at all. The inspiration came from Sjösvärd's report on a big mound in Vallentuna in Uppland (Sjösvärd 1989), where a portion of the cremation layer had been excavated in smaller units and a reconstruction of the placement of the bodies on the funeral pyre was carried out. Other archaeologists have also been influenced by the same methodological decision. In a barrow in Sollentuna parish, RAÄ 47, in Uppland the cremation layer was excavated in 0.5 x 0.5 metre squares (Andersson & Hedlund 1994, p. 16). The excavation took place in 1992. I think that this is the same postprocessual choice that I made. Of course one can argue that this methodological choice is a minor one. If I had not been aware of the Big Grave Project I would probably have excavated in bigger squares. The choice can be the result of coincidence. The discipline of osteology made a breakthrough a couple of years before I finished my archaeological studies, became a postgraduate student, worked in Jönköping, become a teacher on the seminar courses and ended up in Skärstad. To argue in this way I think is to accept the postmodern or postprocessual view of the world more than to say that I made conscious choices. This line of argumentation shows the postmodern belief that everything and nothing is connected, that our existence consists of small fragments that can be combined, but never be pieced together for an overall explanation. The interest in looking for a detailed view of the barrow itself is a postprocessual view, different from the processual thinking that involves exca-

vating, placing the ancient monument in a bigger context, discussing what really makes things happen and what is universal human behaviour, and then more or less forgetting the individual artefacts and monuments. Everything is measured against a known but unattainable ideal picture of what really happened. I think that the different archaeologies are present in the field situation and influence the methodological choices.

Postprocessual research on barrows

I believe that postprocessualism is present in the research process after the excavation too. The postprocessualist mind looks for the small solutions, the small connections and the individual. In this sense this line of thinking has much in common with the archaeology from the beginning of the century, the historical-philological school. I think that it is not by chance that many archaeologists nowadays look for the origin of archaeology and discuss what the gentlemen of old had to tell. This is due to an intellectual relationship. There are, however, very important differences. Since the postprocessualist cannot see the world as one and whole, he cannot fall prey to uniform diachronic explanations like history. He must look for synchronic solutions, such as symbolism and mentality instead. The artefacts are deprived of history, the flow of time stops, the world is remythologized. The result is a fascinating mix of total freedom and possibilities and lack of reality. This is nihilism, which may be the next turn the theoretical watercourse will take.

How is research on barrows conducted nowadays under this umbrella? What are the questions we decide are important to answer? What methods are used and along what lines of thinking is the research carried out? To illustrate this I of course put forward my own report on Skärstad A2 (Nicklasson 1996). Since this work basically may be seen as a report and since research only is present in it on a limited basis, I also want to mention two important works by

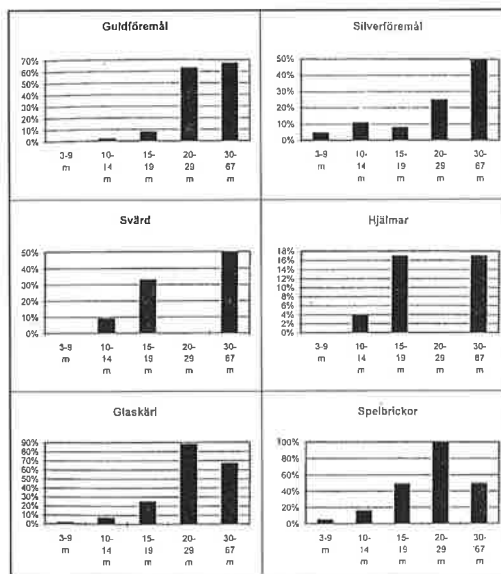


Fig. 4. Diagrams showing how details in the barrows are connected. >From Bratt 1996.

other archaeologists. The first is a paper by Andrén (1992), a well-known and established scholar. The second is the preliminary results of a very important project on burial mounds in the Mälaren region (Bratt 1996). What do these works have in common and what makes them postprocessual, whether deliberately or not?

I think that a common trend in these papers is the fundamental outlook that the relationship is a part-part relation. This I think differentiates the postprocessual line of doing research from the earlier modern trends. In those trends there was more of a part-whole relationship. The different barrows added up to a sum consisting of a known but unreachable total. This could in the early 20th century be the early Swedish kingdom. In the processual archaeology this was replaced by the economic conditions or the settlement pattern. The individual barrow was not important. It received a value only when the small feature was added to the total history or economy.

This is not the case in postprocessual archaeology. There are no big histories any more. There are no believable stories about some heroes who

founded the old Swedish kingdom during the Iron Age. There is no belief in regular patterns in economic affairs or in settlement patterns either. Instead the stochastic or chaotic patterns are considered to be the base for human action. Culture is seen as a vain attempt to cope with chaos, not as something originally human.

How is this reflected in the essays I mentioned above? I think that Bratt's essay contains good graphical presentations on this subject. It contains several diagrams where different features in the mounds and barrows are related to other features. For instance, the presence of gold, silver, gaming pieces and other objects is related to the diameter of the barrow. The diameter is put in relationship to the dating of the barrows. This is an example of what I call a part-part relationship. The different parts could be replaced by other parts and be put in relationship to still other parts. The combinations are endless, even if the "common sense" of the archaeologists puts some restraints on the relationships that may be considered. The different parts are then never added together to a grand total. I think Bratt's diagram is another feature of the postprocessual way of thinking. Earlier publications on barrows contained very few diagrams, and none of them is nearly as detailed as Bratt's. The concern with numbers in the postmodern world can almost be absurd. The fragments of the world must be measured and the higher number you are able to extract, the more significance is attached to the number. Since postprocessualists often discuss things that cannot possibly be measured, such as religion, ideology, power and so on, the numbers do not really tell us anything about what the archaeologist says he wants to say. Or can one measure immaterial things in numbers? In a positive sense they can be seen as interesting flashes of knowledge as to how a barrow's diameter relates to the presence of a sword in it. To put it negatively, the numbers can be seen as a conservative prophylactic mantra to assure that the fragments of the world are really real, even if the world itself has disappeared.



Fig. 5. Example of postprocessual fieldwork. The big cremation layer in Skärstad A2 is excavated in 0.25 metre squares under the supervision of the author.

Andrén's paper is somewhat different. He is not primarily concerned with barrows but discusses the transitions between this world and the world of the dead. His material is the Gotlandic picture stones which are put in relation to Vendel Period boat graves, mainly in Uppland. This is of course the connection between his essay and my own work. I interpreted Skärstad A2 as a boat grave with similarities to the famous graves at Vendel and Valsgärde. I also propose that the custom of burying in boats in barrows is more common than has hitherto been conceived. In many barrows with cremation layers, large numbers of nails and rivets have been found. These have seldom been interpreted at all. In many reports only the total number of nails and rivets is mentioned. No discussion of why the objects are present is conducted. Andrén's paper illustrates another side of the postprocessual mind. It is related to the view presented above that the world as a whole cannot be known. Andrén initially states that "I regard graves, first and foremost, as materialised ideology" (Andrén 1992, p. 33). Thereafter he admits the insurmountable problems of getting to know the world: "Having said this, I mean in no way that

problems concerning mortuary practice are solved. The statement is, at best, a starting point for interpretations of past worlds" (Andrén 1992, p. 33). Despite these statements that graves are most useful to discern the ideologies of the past and the doubts expressed that we will never be able to know, Andrén's paper abounds with interpretations of archaeological material and finds. He discusses the Gotlandic picture stones, boat burials, graves in carriages and also early medieval churches.

This makes us aware of another of the conflicts in the postprocessual mind, the conflict between the latent and the manifest, an age-old conflict in the history of philosophy. Andrén's answer to the challenge is to declare that through study of the manifest world it is possible to extract information, albeit inconclusive, about the hidden, latent world. This of course is a variation of Plato's famous cave. In fact it is not the manifest world that is the real world but it is the latent world that is the reality. This hidden world only shows itself in flashes of light in a mirror. This side of the postprocessual mind may be said to be very idealistic. The real world can of course be studied, but not to get to know it on its own terms or for its own sake, but to reach a hidden and true reality beyond our petty materialistic (modernistic) concerns. Gone is Svensson's "place in the history of research, its spatial, economic and social context" (Svensson 1983, title page, my translation).

Conclusions

Is it utopian to excavate in a postprocessual way or is it already a reality? I think some points may be made from the implications in the essay. Here I choose to divide the question into (1) the excavation with its methods; (2) the publication of site reports; and (3) the ancient monument, in this case the barrows, in a pure research context.

1. I believe that excavation techniques have been influenced by postprocessualism. The best example is that cremation layers have been exca-

vated in smaller and smaller units. This is coupled to better osteological methods and understanding of the content of the barrows. I doubt that this can only be explained by stating that we nowadays do better archaeology than our predecessors. I think it is the will to discern smaller details and new fragments of the world that has led to this methodological breakthrough. Other field methods not featured in this essay, and a method that has not hitherto been used very often in prehistoric contexts in Sweden is Harris's matrix and single context. These techniques may be also be called postprocessual. Through these methods one excavates happenings rather than structures. One's interest focuses on the small details rather than the big picture.

2. In the publication of site reports I am more doubtful about the role of postprocessual thinking. There are just a few barrows that have been excavated and reported during the 1980s and 1990s. In fact the only barrows reported during this time-span are the two barrows in Skärstad, the barrow in Vallentuna (Sjösvärd 1989) and a couple of mounds in Uppland. Older excavations have also been published (for instance Högom by Ramqvist 1992). One problem is that the difference between a site report and a scientific publication is nowadays hard to discern. In fact I believe that only the publications of Varenius and perhaps Andersson and Hedlund qualify to be called nothing but a site report. The latter excavation was expanded upon in Andersson *et al.* 1994. The fact is that barrows do not seem to be good objects to publish in traditional site reports anymore.

This leads to the another question: what is a traditional site report? This question is very interesting and could be the subject of another essay focusing on how ancient monuments have been reported and published during different periods. What kind of information did the excavating archaeologists think was vital and how was it published during different times? In this context I can only draw attention to the fact that there is a clear trend that the publications and site reports of barrows have grown bigger

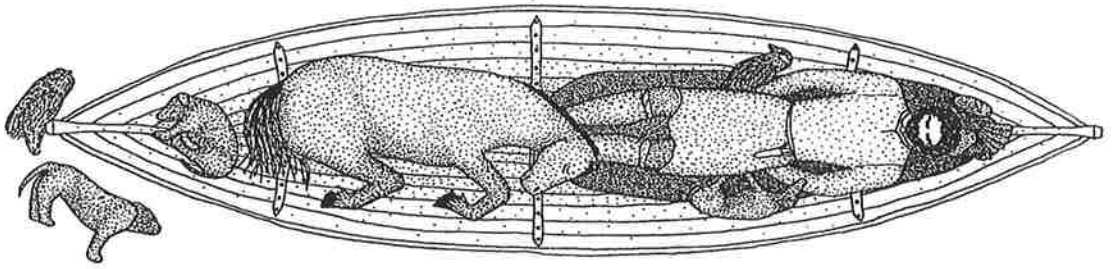


Fig. 6. A reconstruction of the Vendel Period grave in Skärstad A2. The excavation method whereby the cremation layer was excavated in small squares made it possible to reconstruct the placements of the different animal and human corpses on the funeral pyre. Drawing by Anna Lihammer.

and more exhaustive during the last two decades. This could possibly be a postprocessual trait. The interest in details may lead to better and more detailed site reports and publications. On the other hand, archaeology in Sweden has also grown as a discipline. There is more money for publication. The excavating archaeologists have better education than ever before, and so on. This may not be dependent on postprocessual theories. One should perhaps instead attribute the increasing professionalism to a general trend in modern society to divide topics and disciplines into smaller and smaller parts, making experts and specialists more and more important. In this way the question of publications and reports may be seen as reflecting the modern and postmodern societies on another level.

3. Clearly much of the research done at the universities nowadays should be called post-processual. In this essay I have discussed a couple of examples of postprocessual research done on barrows. What may perhaps be interesting to note is that postprocessual archaeology was almost exclusively born as a theoretical response and challenge to processual archaeology. It had very little to do with the practical sides of archaeology, and many of the prominent postprocessualists have been accused of being desk archaeologists and that their ideas may be interesting to read and discuss but with very small impact on mainstream archaeology. Of course, the same things were said about processual archaeology, which for a while now has been the

standard for archaeologists. It may be so that it takes some time for new ideas to reach archaeological practice.

To summarize: The postgraduate seminar asked the questions "Is it possible to excavate postprocessually?" "How does a postprocessual excavation differ from a traditional (processual?) excavation?" I think I have shown some examples of how postprocessual thinking has changed the methodology and excavation techniques in the case of barrows. The questions the postprocessual mind poses are better answered by the changed methods. This has possibly led to changes in the outlook on site reports and publications.

The final and most important question that should be asked in the essay is: "Is postprocessual and postmodern thinking good for archaeology?"

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