

veracity. Ahrens, in a final chapter called 'Sense and nonsense in reconstruction', criticizes the use of machine-cut timbers, telegraph-poles and inappropriate construction techniques. But he also shows us, right at the beginning, that some nonsense has been rather more serious. The formative psychological potential of the medium was not lost on the Nazis; the development of reconstruction archaeology owes much to the ambitious German work of the pre-War period. An appreciation of this must cause us to pause in the face of any reconstruction.

It was in this period that the ostensibly Rössen settlement at Mettnau was built. The Mesolithic, Ur-German hunter-fishers were provided with 14 oval huts made of hazel twigs in which were beds and storage rooms. A large, central hut housed the village 'Führer'. A 'Neolithic' farmstead was built next door, complete with upstairs master bedroom, looking more like an expensive modern conversion of a medieval tithe-barn than our idea of a longhouse. Visiting Mettnau in 1938, Joachim Beneke concluded that 'The foundation of the open-air museums must be viewed as one of the most distinguished examples of the National Socialist representation of the past'; through them people could appreciate the high culture and seminal influence of the German farmers in social evolution – 'the Roman world empire would, without the Nordic squirearchy [*Herrenschafft*] of former times, never have existed.'

Thus we are unsettled at the outset. Ahrens' delineation of the transparently political motivation behind Nazi reconstructions primes us to wonder what modern ideological programmes lie buried in more recent efforts. It becomes clear that full-scale

reconstruction, once beyond the technical question-answering of experimental archaeology, may be able to remove our conceptual blinkers to some extent, but, at the same time, is a mentally constraining, politically situating medium. Despite the attempt at veracity of the play-acting 'living in the past' at Lejre and elsewhere, no stillborn children lie in the rubbish, no families fission. The 'house' is still the house, familiarly referred to in our own language. No rôle is anything other than a modern rôle with a rustic accent.

Although he does not mention the new façade at New Grange specifically, Ahrens makes clear that he considers such reconstruction a 'falsification of history' (p. 177). The author refines his thinking in concluding that 'every reconstruction is a product of its time', that the reconstructors and audience are hemmed in by inevitable subjectivity, and that we have no way of knowing if the practical architectural solutions (*Vernunft*) that are second nature to us accord with the culturally-defined sensibilities of the prehistoric people we attempt to second-guess. The book ends with the emphatic repetition that 'we will always remain people of the 20th century'.

This seems to me to be an important book. It is unusual, accessible and lucid. It at once provides a thorough general survey of the phenomenon and addresses the broader philosophical, practical and historical issues raised. It will be essential reading for the reconstructions specialist. However, it deserves – and should reach – a far wider audience.

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