

The Ruin as Phantasmagoria: The Faces of Nordingrå kyrkoruin

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In the north of Sweden, in the landscape of Ångermanland, along The High Coast which is part of the World Culture Heritage there are several preserved ruins of medieval churches. Their visibility in the landscape attracts visitors, and some of these ruins are currently used during the summer for masses and concerts. In this paper I will focus on the ruin of the mediaeval Nordingrå church and investigate its transformation from the abandoned church in the 19th century to the tourist site of the 21st century. In my investigation of the history, function and meaning of the ruin I will use the notions of reflexive and restorative nostalgia as used by cultural theorist Svetlana Boym¹ and draw inspiration from Walter Benjamin's use of phantasmagoria in his work on Paris, *Arcade Projects* or *Passagenwerk*.² Since 2018 the ruin is illuminated by an artwork, hence the site has been emphasized in order to attract and engage tourists passing by.

The High Coast owes its name from the uplift of the ground after the last ice age, which slowly left the area approximately 9,500 years ago. Even today the ground is rising with almost a centimeter annually and throughout the centuries this uplift has transformed the landscape in a very visible way.

Ruins of medieval churches in Ångermanland are often situated in almost the same location as the more recent, 19th century churches that replaced them. In some cases, the abandoned medieval church has not turned into a ruin, but was revitalized in the 20th century with the discovery of its value as cultural heritage.³ The history of these ruins is neither dramatic nor exciting – they simply belong to a medieval heritage that was degraded during the 19th century due to lack of maintenance and bad construction. They were often built in stone and traces of historical expansion can easily be detected. The additions were probably a consequence of a growing congregation. We can also see a link between the old and the new church not only in that they accompany each other on the same location, but also in the objects that were transferred to the new church. Altarpieces, baptismal fonts, sculptures, and church silver are all part of the medieval heritage in the new setting. In the north of Sweden, or Norrland as it is called in Swedish, few remnants of medieval times are to be found. The region used to be sparsely populated in the Middle Ages, but the network of churches along the coast and rivers tells a story of a slow growth of population that gathered in villages, of which a few would later become cities, while others just disappeared. What is interesting is that these deserted or ruined churches were brought back to life as the heritage movement of the 1930s rediscovered them, identifying their historical value as memorials of a medieval past, and started a renovation process.

The medieval ruin of Nordingrå church is situated by a former sea bay that became a lake, Vågsfjärden, due to the ground uplift that occurred two centuries ago. The areas of the old

1 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 354.

2 Walter Benjamin, *Passagenarbetet: Paris, 1800-talets huvudstad*, Vol. 1 and 2 (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2015).

3 Anna Elmén Berg, "Ödekyrkor i Norrland: Kyrklig förnyelse, kulturminnesvård och kyrkorestaureringar vid 1900-talets början" (PhD diss., Umeå University, 1997).

and the new church are well visible from the shores of the lake and the water was possibly a common transportation route for church visitors in earlier times, who came by boat during the summer and sledge during winter.⁴ The main coastal road of Norrland passed by the church in the Middle Ages and sources mention archbishops travelling this road to visit the churches already during the 14th century.⁵ Today's road is no longer the main route, but is connected to the highway E4 about ten kilometers to the west.

Between the old and the new church, the so-called church stables, used by the members of the parish not only for their initial function, but also for social and commercial activities,⁶ are arranged in a row. Burial mounds, possibly from the Iron age, have been detected in the area and link the site with pagan or early Christian times.⁷ The actual ruin consists of a foundation in stone supported by brick masonry from excavations and renovations during the 20th and 21st centuries. A cross in the east marks the location of the altar, and in the former narthex a collection of headstones, formerly integrated in the floor of the old church, is exposed.

Coined in the 17th century, the notion of nostalgia, from Greek *nostos* meaning "homecoming" and *algia* or *algos* meaning longing, despair, or sorrow, was used to describe the uneasiness of soldiers fighting far away from home.⁸ Nostalgia was at the time a medical condition, whereas later in history it became a notion connected to a longing for the past. However, as we can understand from above, nostalgia has not only to do with temporality, it is two folded, also relating to a spatial aspect. In the book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Svetlana Boym describes nostalgia as "a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life."⁹ With this description in mind, Boym points at the cinematic image as a reference. We could think of how architecture has the capacity of using the double exposure of temporality – intermingled past and present, while being at the same time site specific, which can play an important role in the nostalgic anxiety about a certain place. Boym distinguishes two types of nostalgia: "Restorative nostalgia stresses *nóstos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *álgos*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately."¹⁰ When we talk about ruins, both types of nostalgia are relevant, but bear a different significance.

The notion of *phantasmagoria* on the other hand can be used for describing the effects and illusions that create a dramatic effect in the open space where the ruin finds itself today, becoming the place where Middle Ages meet contemporary technologies of display. Walter Benjamin uses this notion in describing how the phantasmagorias of Paris in the 19th century, such as the world exhibitions, transformed the visitors not merely to spectators but commodities.¹¹ We can transfer this idea into the tourist sector of today, where tourist sites are being created to attract and capitalize on the spectator. In the article *Spatial Phantasmagoria: The Mediatization of Tourism Experience*, André Jansson states that "We live in an era of simulations – one in which concepts like 'home' and 'authenticity' are problematized."¹²

4 Gunnar Nordlander, *Kyrkstallar och kyrkfärder i Nordingrå* (Nordingrå: Nordingrå Hembygdsförening, 1986), 21-25.

5 Per Näsström, *Norrstigen: Den första landsvägen mellan Härnösands och Sundsvall: Stora vägen / Kustlandsvägen genom Nora / Nordingrå* (Härnösand: Hanabergsförlaget, 2006), 42.

6 Nordlander, *Kyrkstallar och kyrkfärder i Nordingrå*, 8.

7 Britta Wennstedt Edvinger and Marianne Jämtsäter, *Fornlämningsområdet till Nordingrå kyrkoruin: Rapport från Arkeologisentrum 2010:4* (Östersund: Arkeologisentrum, 2010), 14.

8 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 3.

9 Ibid., xiv.

10 <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/nostalgia-svetlana-boym.html>, accessed April 15, 2023.

11 Benjamin, *Passagearbetet*, vol. 1, 86.

12 André Jansson, "Spatial Phantasmagoria: The Mediatization of Tourism Experience," *European Journal of Communication* 17:4 (2002): 430.

In the *Swedish Historic Environment Laws*, ruins are a category under “ancient remains of human activities in ancient times that have been created through the practices of times past and have been permanently abandoned.”¹³ All remains of buildings are included but a few are defined: “...ruins of fortresses, castles, monasteries, church buildings and defenses, as well as other buildings and structures...”¹⁴ Of historical interest is that ever since the 1666 first law on cultural heritage in Sweden, ruins of the same categories as defined above have been protected.¹⁵ However it is not until the second half of the 19th century that a scientific interest in ruins and the cultural heritage engaged architects, antiquarians, historians, and artists. Some ruins were more valued, such as the medieval Hanseatic town of Visby on the island of Gotland, “discovered” in the early 19th century and considered more a monument than living heritage.¹⁶

Apart from the general understanding of the ruin as a decayed building for various reasons, from lat. *Ruina*, meaning catastrophe, ruins can point to significant cultural aspects, as underlined by archaeologist Alain Schnapp, “From Buffon to Simmel, the ruin is considered to be a fragile equilibrium between nature and culture, materiality and immateriality, memory and forgetting.”¹⁷ When looking into the history of the old church in Nordingrå, there are three critical periods, which reflect the value and meaning of the medieval heritage; first, the abandonment and oblivion of the early 19th century; second, the excavation during the 1930s in a time when vernacular architecture was at stake due to urbanization and modernism. The third period, and the main topic for my contribution, is the recent restoration in the late 2010s, which is not only preserving but also bringing the Middle Ages back to life. Here we are reminded of Boym’s understanding of nostalgia as restorative or reflective: “Restorative nostalgia evokes national [or local, authors remark] past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory.”¹⁸

The Swedish National Heritage Board has a public remit to promote living cultural heritage that is preserved, used and developed and is the authority that supervises the work of the counties.¹⁹ In the case of the ruin in Nordingrå, the first excavation was carried out in the late 1930s and was documented in 1940 by The Swedish National Heritage Board with funding from the Local History Society of Nordingrå. During the 1920s and 1930s, the workforce of relief work supported major excavations and conservation projects in the sector of cultural heritage and assisted The Swedish National Heritage Board in funding these kind of projects.²⁰ In Nordingrå twelve conscripts were part of the crew. The report written by the responsible Chief County Heritage Advisor Bo Hellman talks about the process, the findings, the different construction periods, the history of the church according to archive material and the conservation work done to preserve the ruin. Among the findings were 387 coins, a gold ring, glasses, one pair of glasses dated to 1749, pearls and chains, etc. Also, material from the church itself or from its function such as hooks, window glasses, handles of coffins, hymn book buckles and more were found.²¹

13 <https://www.raa.se/in-english/cultural-heritage/historic-environment-laws/historic-environment-act-1988950/>, accessed March 15, 2023.

14 Ibid.

15 Erik Wegraeus, “Ruiner,” *Kulturmiljövärd* 3 (1997), 1.

16 Lars Cnattingius and Nanna Cnattingius, *Ruiner: Historia, öden och vård* (Stockholm: Carlssons bokförlag, 2007), 92.

17 Alain Schnapp, “What Is a Ruin? The Western Definition” *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* (Spring 2018): 170.

18 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.

19 <https://www.raa.se/om-riksantikvarieambetet/det-har-gor-riksantikvarieambetet/>, accessed April 25, 2023.

20 Cnattingius, *Ruiner: Historia, öden och vård*, 92-93.

21 Bo Hellman, *Utgrävningen och konserveringsarbetet av Nordingrå kyrkoruin, Nordingrå sn, Ångermanland* (1940), digitally archived at the County Museum of Västernorrland: <http://media.murberget.se/rapport/data/2/127e9e8e-aef5-495e-bb05-4abaa25768ae.pdf>, accessed April 25, 2023.

Middle Ages in Sweden is the period from the introduction of Christianity to approximately the reformation in the first half of the 16th century when King Gustav Vasa broke the bonds with the pope, introduced the evangelical Lutheran church and founded the Swedish Church. Hereditary monarchy and centralized authority and bureaucracy were introduced at the same time.²² Norrland was at the time inhabited by the indigenous Sami people but the land became more and more colonized by southern settlers, who first settled by the coast, then also by the big rivers.²³ Examples of churches built in stone with origins in the 12th century, such as the medieval ruin in Nordingrån, show how the north was slowly populated. These churches were single nave rectangular structures with or without an apse.²⁴

The reformation begun in 1527 and had consequences for the religious life both on a national level and in a local context. By the end of the 16th century all monasteries in Sweden had been slowly dismantled and it was not until 1951 that monasticism was re-introduced in the country. The church became independent from papal Rome and was elevated to a state church in 1536 by the king. For the local church activities, it meant that Swedish became the language used in the church, the priests were allowed to marry, and the sacraments were decreased to two: baptism and communion.²⁵

However, there were only minor changes that were reflected into the actual architecture and the iconoclasm. The church interior was subject to a slow transformation in the centuries to come. Side altars were removed but the sculptures of saints were preserved. The baptismal font was moved to the choir and benches for the congregation were installed as well as a pulpit for the sermon. Perhaps the most symbolical change was the separation between the nave and the chancel, the rood screen, which during the centuries to come was deconstructed and transformed the relation between the priest and the congregation.²⁶

In the case of the medieval church of Nordingrån at least three stages of expansion were uncovered in the excavation. The first stone church was square, 7 x 7 m, with a rectangular choir in the east measuring 6 x 5 m. These smaller hall churches are said to be related to the Order of the Cistercians who were established in Sweden from the 12th century.²⁷ In the last decades of the 13th century major changes were made; the church was prolonged towards the east and the plan was turned into a rectangle. A narthex was added to the southern wall towards the church stables. This form is considered a typical medieval style in the region and there are a few well preserved examples in the area still in use.²⁸

By the end of the 1400s, the church expanded again, this time towards the west, and it was also broadened towards north. It measured 28 x 16,4 m, making it the largest church in the north of Sweden, with more than 600 seats. The last refurbishment was made in the end of the 17th century when the incorporated sacristy was relocated to a separate, added volume built in timber, on the north façade.²⁹ During this period the church was transformed from catholic to protestant, which probably contributed to changes of the interior. However, the excavation report does not reveal any such changes.

In the 1790s, the medieval church was condemned in a protocol by the county administration in Härnösand, which stated that the church was in a fragile state, the seats were too few for the congregation and therefore a new church should be built. The process ahead was slow for

22 Dick Harrison and Bo Eriksson, *Sveriges historia 1350-1600* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2010), 467-472.

23 Dick Harrison, *Sveriges historia 600-1350* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2009), 203-209.

24 Fredric Bedoire, *Den svenska arkitekturens historia 1000-1800* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2015), 15 and 30-31.

25 Marie-Louise Rodén, "Reform eller revolution? Ett kyrkligt uppror som förändrade Europa," in Harrison and Eriksson, *Sveriges historia 1350-1600*, 477-492.

26 Bedoire, *Den svenska arkitekturens historia 1000-1800*, 188-189.

27 Sven Bäckström, *Nordingrån kyrka och fiskekapell* (Nordingrån: Nordingrån Hembygdsförening, 2015), 8.

28 Ibid., 11.

29 Ibid., 12-13.



Fig. 1: The ruin with the new church of Nordingrå and Vågsfjärden, April 2023

different reasons. Lack of finances due to bad harvests, problems with transportation of material due to the land uplift and administrative challenges caused a delay. The decision to build a new church was not taken until 1820; the new edifice was inaugurated in 1829. The archives hereafter do not testify about the old church, but the few notes in the cashbooks of the church reveal that both objects and some construction materials were sold.³⁰ Boym refers to this period as the time when nostalgia was not only introduced, but also institutionalized in museums, monuments and memorials: “The sense of historicity and discreteness of the past is a new nineteenth-century sensibility.”³¹ However, this new sensibility had not reached the north of Sweden and the parish in Nordingrå.

This moment is the beginning of the medieval church as a ruin. Many of the more precious objects were moved to the new church as the older structure was left to its fate. Amongst them most impressive is the altarpiece which was produced in Brussels in the early 1500s. Some of the figures in this altarpiece will later become main characters in the illuminating project that was installed in the ruin in 2018. From the same period originates a golden procession crucifix and the wooden sculptures, where, among others, Maria with the child and the Swedish Saint Bridgit are represented.³² It is relevant to point out that during the time the church was decorated with prominent art, Reformation was initiated and implemented in Sweden.

Today the ruin is open all year; snow cover makes it however inaccessible and almost invisible during the winter. The cross is the only element signaling its existence during winter, and when the snow melts, the historical site reappears. In the summer period the whole setting – from cemetery mounds belonging to the old church, which are almost attached to the ruin via the church stables, to the new church by the waterfront – composes a timeline of sacred space. The ruin plays a specific role as it lays bare in front of the other built objects and the scenery could very well be a romantic landscape painting with a dramatic ruin acting as a *memento mori*.

The excavations of the 1930s rewrite the history of the church and village, together with other findings in the north of Sweden. In Ytterlännäs, further west in Ångermanland, the deserted medieval church was renovated in 1938-1939 and the rich decorations of the church, in

30 Hellman, *Utgrävningen och konserveringsarbetet av Nordingrå kyrkoruin, Nordingrå sn, Ångermanland*.

31 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 15.

32 Bäckström, *Nordingrå kyrka och fiskekapell*, 26-37.



Fig. 2: The interior of the ruin, April 2023

“peasantry rococo,” were restored and nationally acknowledged.³³ These findings were relevant for the historiography of the area. During a century, the old church of Nordingrå was transformed from being depreciated and buried under grass to an upgraded historical testimony and notional monument of the past. Using Boym’s concept of restorative nostalgia, the ruin at this point functioned as a way of rebuilding the lost home or patching up memory gaps.³⁴

We should bear in mind that Sweden was rapidly urbanized during the first half of the 20th century, bringing major change to the rural provinces that became depopulated. Hence it is relevant to talk about a nostalgia attached to the ruin of the old church in Nordingrå since it was mediating a historical phase of growth and prosperity, where the medieval church had been one of the largest in the north, with 600 seats. It is as if the present evokes history and the reasons for this are varied, or as Boym puts it: “Nostalgia is never literal, but lateral. It looks sideways.”³⁵

When a ruin, a cultural heritage, is excavated and reconstructed, the reasons differ. One of them is powered by individual initiatives such as the local history movement or the Swedish Church, further supported by law, in this case, the Historic Environment Laws. The act of both excavating and conserving have scientific value and the documentation made by the Chief County Heritage Advisor Bo Hellman is a good example of a report that describes the site and the findings. But what follows when the area is refitted after the excavation is dealing with a monument. The ruin at this point became a monument where the past was merely a longing, or possibly a restoration of a past that was not clearly presented.

With Boym’s concept of nostalgia we could see another shift occurring in the 2010s, one regarding the perception and use of the ruin. Since the High Coast was constituted as a World Culture Heritage in 2000, it attracted more and more tourists, and the tourism sector became an economic factor in the area ever since.³⁶ At the same time, The Swedish National Heritage Board follows goals which clearly focus on visitors and tourism:

33 Elmén Berg, “Fem ödekyrkor i Norrland: Kyrklig förnyelse, kulturminnesvård och kyrkorestaureringar vid 1900-talets början”, 195-197.

34 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

35 Ibid., 354.

36 <https://www.hkdest.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Hoga-Kusten-i-siffror-2019-1.pdf>, accessed January 24, 2023.

- a sustainable society with a great diversity of cultural heritage sites which are to be preserved, used, and developed;
- people's participation in cultural heritage management and their potential to understand and take responsibility for the cultural heritage;
- an inclusive society with the cultural heritage as a shared source of knowledge, education, and experiences;
- a landscape management perspective in which cultural heritage is utilized in the development of society.³⁷

In all these goals, outreach to society is included. But the question is of course how to do it? In 2010 a new archaeological investigation was made by *Arkeologisentrum norr* at the request of the County of Västernorrland, with the aim "to clarify the relationship of the ancient remains to the topography and the surrounding environment, the ancient remains' state of preservation, experiential value, scientific value and its representative value".³⁸ The investigation concludes that the supportive brick walls were severely damaged and that the ruin seemed to be neglected altogether.³⁹ Its function as a memorial had obviously been lost, together with the care for the construction and the emotional purpose of commemoration. In the report, several different cultural and historical values are stated to be relevant. The values are divided into three categories: document values (the physical and archival presence): building history, building technology, architectural history, society history, social history; experience value: patina, environmental, identity, continuity, tradition, and symbolic values; empowering values: authenticity, rarity, representative and pedagogical values.⁴⁰

These categories clearly show how cultural heritage today is valued in relation to the spectator's experience, which is also clearly stated in the conclusion:

"The church ruins in Nordingrån differ from many others due to their accessibility, their cohesive environment, and their location in a world heritage site. With simple means, the ruin can be given a significantly higher experiential value and form a destination for cultural tourism, namely through renovation of the ruin, which is also necessary from a conservation point of view, and through an information program comprising, for example, signs and other information material."⁴¹

In 2016 the County of Västernorrland received funding from The Swedish National Heritage Board for rehabilitation and conservation works. The project was initiated the same year with tourism as a focal point. This new direction attaching value to the site as a tourist destination is also described by Boym: "The ruin is an obvious example of the age value, but the value of the ruin itself changes through history."⁴² The project initiated by the parish consisted of two parts, one of which dealt with the restoration and accessibility of the site, and another that included an artistic project with illuminated portraits of figures from the old altarpiece from the 16th century that is in the new church.⁴³

The artistic project created by artists Lisa W. Carlsson and Janne Björkman was called "Fem ansikten" which translates to "Five Faces" and included five close up portrait photos in color.⁴⁴

37 <https://www.raa.se/in-english/swedish-national-heritage-board/assignment-of-the-swedish-national-heritage-board/>, accessed April 15, 2023.

38 Edvinger and Jämtsäter, *Fornlämningsområdet till Nordingrån kyrkoruin: Rapport från Arkeologisentrum 2010:4*, vi.

39 Ibid., 9

40 Ibid., 21.

41 Ibid., 27.

42 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 79.

43 <https://7an.se/artikel/2017-11-01/ljus-och-konst-lyfter-den-medeltida-kyrkoruinen-i-nordingra>, accessed March 22, 2023.

44 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasternorrland/nu-invigs-kyrkoruinen-i-nordingra>, accessed March 22, 2023.

As mentioned earlier, the altarpiece or reredos consisting of both painting and sculpture was made in the late Middle ages in Brussels and brought to Nordingrå in the same period; however, either for the purchase, or for the shipping and installation in the old church the exact dates remain unclear. In 1961, the Swedish art historian Gunnar Lindqvist analyzed the reredos, highlighted the larger paintings and attributed them to Bernard van Orley (c1487-1541), who was one among several Flemish painters inspired by contemporary artists such as Raphael (1483-1520). In the introduction, Lindqvist clearly states that the sculptures of the reredos are of minor quality and follow a scheme of figures trusty the Brussel sculptor Jan Borman (c1479-1520).⁴⁵

The five portraits are very expressive, individualistic portraits that stand out amid the poor quality of the sculpture in spite of their small size. They are transformed from being static figures to alive personalities and it is as if the photos catch on a situation and become documentary. Neither of the portrayed individuals looks straight towards the viewer; their gaze is introvert or beyond the onlooker, creating a specific atmosphere of distance. The figures of the reredos are centered around the biblical situation that is played out in the three different frames; Golgotha, Via Dolorosa and Pietà, which is the focus of their attention.⁴⁶ This distillation of history not only simulates but also alters the meaning and context of the biblical figures.

The portraits are displayed on the inner walls of the ruin, framed with a golden passepartout and an outer black frame. A cable from the ground connects each of them to electricity. There is neither any introduction nor any signs to learn from or follow and the connection between the origin of these portraits and the reredos in the actual church is blurred. In the dark, the portraits are lit up and transform the ruin into a light up space. The displayed photos almost function as smaller altars but the simplicity of the installation does not encourage prayer or worship, but rather a procession route that could be either liturgic or museal. I would like to argue that the ruin simulates both a past home and the idea of authenticity with this illuminated display. While uncovering these simulations, we might be able to rethink the ruin. In "On the Concept of History" Walter Benjamin states that: "History is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogenous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now [*Jetztzeit*]."⁴⁷ The historical materialism of Benjamin generates a possibility where the past, i.e. the images of the figures from the reredos, is questioning the history of the ruin of today, as well as the history of the spectator.⁴⁸

Maria's figure with white skin, blue and clear eyes full of grief, her tight red lips express sorrow and even though her face is a mere fragment of the Pietà scene, one is affected by her emotions. John the Baptist is recurring in all three scenes in the reredos and is easily recognized by his brown robe, golden curls, and sharp eyebrows. He looks straight at the spectator with a gaze that conveys uncertainty and disbelief. Mary Magdalene has golden braids shaped into curls by her ears; she is pale and fragile but with an intense gaze directed a little bit upwards. The fourth portrait is of Jesus; his pain is expressed through his enlarged eyes and scratches on his cheek. He is caught in a moment of resignation. The last portrait is an unknown figure, probably a woman, with golden scarf and red cheeks and lips with a remote gaze. By fragmenting and recontextualizing the Medieval altarpiece, we could argue that this double exposure of time, past and present, emphasizes both restorative and reflective nostalgia by reconstructing the past but also generating a longing for old times.⁴⁹

However, we should also look upon this installation as a way of attracting visitors or tourists and the spectacle of light is a treat for the discoverer, that passes by on the main road. The

45 Gunnar Lindqvist, "Altarskåpsmålningar av Bernard van Orley i Nordingrå," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 30 (1961): 1.

46 Bäckström, *Nordingrå kyrka och fiskekapell*, 30-31.

47 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>, accessed January 2, 2024.

48 K.-M. Son, "Walter Benjamin's Politics of Experience," *Constellations* 20 (2013), 615-629.

49 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.



Fig. 3: Maria in Pietà

reconstruction of the past is interesting as it brings the Middle Ages back to life as a display, or as Boym puts it:

“Nostalgic reconstructions are based on mimicry: the past is remade in the image of the present or a desired future, collective designs are made to resemble personal aspirations and vice versa.”⁵⁰

When Walter Benjamin analyzes 19th century Paris, he traces the signs of modernity in built structures, new technology and phenomena such as consumerism through the idea of phantasmagoria. I would like to argue that the artistic installation in the ruin of the old church in Nordingrã is a phantasmagoria where the gaze now belongs to the tourist and where both the ruin and the spectator are actors and commodities in the realm of the tourism sector. The double exposure of temporality is clear with a medieval past of the stone walls and a present in the display of historical artefacts amplifies the enactment of the phantasmagoria, as a commodity on display. The ruin is no longer a monument, but a site for illusions, consumption of experience as a commodity where the reproduction of the small figures in the reredos are enlarged, personalized. The phantasmagoria of the ruin is also related to the notion of restorative nostalgia where the Middle Ages is mimicked in an idealized moment in the 1500s, with the five portraits almost embodying church visitors from the past. We encounter the same expressions as they did and through the enlargement they are almost at human scale; and with this follow the recognition and propinquity that reinforce the phantasmagoria.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 354.

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