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Visible Archaeological Remains in Towns and Parks

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Abstract

This paper relates a specific and professional understanding of the nature of archaeological sites to management needs and approaches. It focuses on how the nature of the resource itself relates to a system of valuation, conservation and preservation. The perspective taken is that of the contribution of landscape planning to the development of tourism and heritage management. One of the central aims is to explain the visual values of archaeological remains in the landscape, relating them to the different measures of preservation available for archaeological sites. Examples are included from Latvia and other European countries.

Key words: Archaeological Sites; Preservation; Landscape Planning; Latvia; Urban Parks

This paper presents a schematic life-cycle for archaeological remains (see figure 1). Two general groups of visible archaeological remains tend to be of particular interest to tourists. These are, first, untouched earthworks or ruins with cultural layers; and, second, groups of sites with open excavations. Both these types are unique places with cultural significance and high aesthetic values.

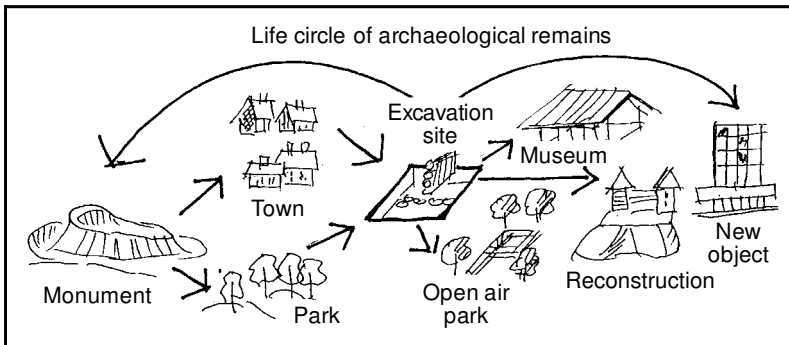


Figure 1. A schematic life-cycle for archaeological remains. [Mara Urtane].

The process of urbanisation of the landscape of Latvia was a complex one with great variations in the process in terms of time, space and intensity. Numerous archaeological surveys and excavations have been carried out to establish founding dates for Latvian towns. Greatest interest is devoted to Riga, the capital, which will celebrate 800 years of written history in 2001.

Archaeology in towns is mostly concerned with the investigation of cultural layers. But about half of Latvia's seventy towns also have archaeological remains with visible features within the town centre or visibly close by. These sites, such as hill-forts, mounds and the ditches of defensive systems form an unusual and impressive visual element in the townscape.¹

Thanks to their visual impact and sheer size, many of these archaeological remains still exist in the townscape structure. Also there seems to be a common tendency that the bigger the town or city, the less possibility there will be to see the visual evidence of the town's early beginnings—hill-forts or other earthworks. But the rapid development of archaeology as a science, and tourism as an activity of economic importance in some countries, have ensured that works of excavation and conservation to preserve and open up the uppermost cultural layer have inevitably taken place.

Towns located on the banks of rivers and lakes have always had an excellent opportunity to preserve archaeological remains in visual connection with the natural elements: for example Grobina² and Talsi³ in Latvia. Of course, urban change has affected the visual appearance of famous hill-forts in towns during their growth and sub-urbanisation (see figure 2). Hill-forts are interesting visual shapes in town skylines, but they are also useful points of view over the current town and its surroundings. About half the Latvian towns have this situation.

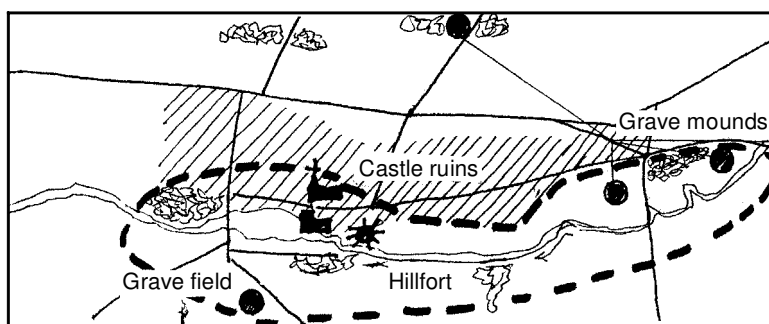


Figure 2. Grobina complex of archaeological sites in Latvia. [Mara Urtane].

¹ *Latvijas PSR arheoloģija*, Riga: Zinātne, 1974.

² V. Petrenko & J. Urtans, 'The archaeological monuments of Grobina', Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm; Latvian Cultural Foundation, Riga, 1995, pp. 3–19.

³ J. Asaris, 'Kurzemes pilskalni: kurzeme un kurzemnieki', in *Latvijas enciklopēdija*, Riga, 1995, p. 13.



Figure 3. Burial mound sites in Uppsala, Sweden. [Mara Urtane].

For the preservation of this first group of earthworks, landscape planning is important so that these archaeological remains can be included in large green areas and opened up visually to natural elements which determined the location of these sites originally such as water bodies and rivers, hilltops, slopes and valleys. Very good examples are in the surroundings of Uppsala in Sweden, where huge areas of burial mounds beside the town are open (see figure 3).

Many Latvian hill-forts have been continually in use during all the centuries until today. On some of them were built stone castles and manor houses, which were later surrounded with parks. But in many cases new manor houses or palaces were built in a more level place around the hill-fort, and the articulated earthworks were constructions included in the composition of the parks. It became the fashion in garden design to include historical elements, and in many cases earthworks, artificial ruins and grottoes were constructed within parks.

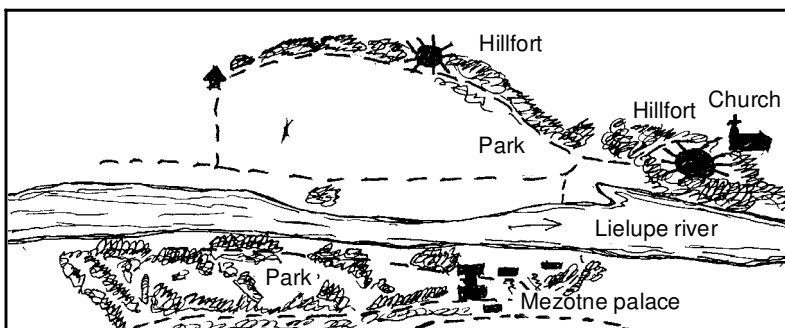


Figure 4. Mezotne park in Latvia with two hill-forts. [Mara Urtane].

A Latvian example of this process is Mežotne (see figure 4), where a manor house is built on one side of the river Lielupe with two hill-forts located on the opposite banks included in the park composition and used for relaxation by the owners of, and visitors to, Mežotne palace.⁴ The Koknese and Cēsis are also places where the archaeological remains of hill-forts and castle ruins can now be explored under the big trees of an old park in a man-made landscape of high aesthetic value.

The second case is where archaeological remains have been opened by excavation. Latvian open archaeological constructions, usually made from wood, with marked cultural layers, cannot be kept open for visitors owing to climatic conditions in the open air. All remains need to be kept covered. This is always very expensive but has been done in some cases.

In places where excavated constructions are left *in situ* and open to visitors, these areas become, after a period of time, green archaeological parks for the town. This was done successfully in Rome and Athens (see figure 5). But, of course, as with any public or private garden, it needs regular maintenance and financial input. But attractiveness to tourists can be enhanced on occasions by the use of reconstructions, sometimes directly on the site itself, and sometimes beside it. Closely related to such developments is the creation of archaeological parks.

The process of using archaeological remains for tourists and other visitors is clearly connected with economics. Two principles are worth mentioning. First, increasing the number of visitors means increasing also the design and planning and management of the site and the creation of additional facilities for visitors. In Latvia this often involves making a path or road to the top of a hill-fort, making stairs,



Figure 5. Ancient Agora site in Athens, Greece. [Mara Urtane].

⁴ I. Jānele, *Vecie lauku parki: daba un mes*, Rīga: Zinātne, 1981, pp. 46–52.

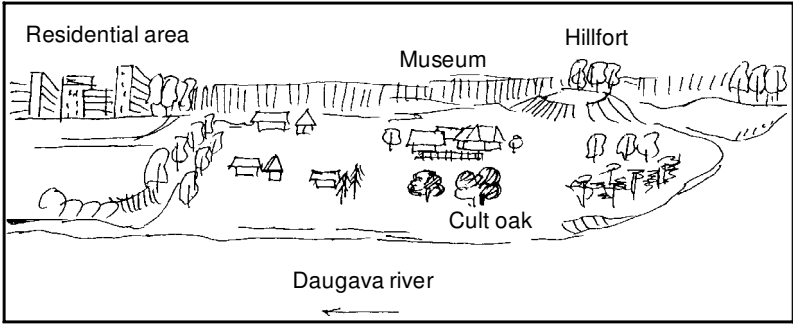


Figure 6. Aizkraukle town protected landscape area with hill-fort and museum in Latvia. [Mara Urtane].

creating open-air stages for performances, and planting trees on site and in the surroundings.

An example of this development is at Aizkraukle, a town with a complex of cultural monuments which are now included in a new park for the town, which serves as a landscape protection area for these monuments (see figure 6).⁵

Second, lengthening the time which visitors spend on the site is also important, and makes good economic sense, but it needs careful preparation installing information desks, creating seating areas and other facilities.



Figure 7. Stone constructions of burial mound in the countryside park, Denmark. [Mara Urtane].

⁵ M. Urtane, 'Towards new coastal recreation policy and implementation', Espo. 'Water and Waterscape in Urban Environment', *Forum Espoo*, 1998, pp. 45–47.

Danish countryside parks demonstrate good practice in persuading visitors to spend a long time near the archaeological sites. Wooden-paved paths lead over wet areas; there are information desks; stone constructions of burial mounds have been opened; and a swimming place and picnic site are provided in the vicinity (see figure 7). Another example is in the centre of Athens at the foot of the Acropolis, an excavated Agora surrounded by a fence. All round this fence are numerous restaurants with their terraces where tourists from many countries, as well as inhabitants of Athens, can enjoy their meals looking at the ancient Agora's stone construction, and at elements of the Acropolis. There are many good examples in Europe where archaeological excavated open constructions are included as elements, either outdoors or in the interiors not only of museums, but also of offices and restaurants.

Thanks to their visual impact and large size, some archaeological remains still exist in the landscape structure. The larger the town, the less likelihood there will be that these remain in good condition. The change of function of these archaeological sites, stressing their role as part of our cultural heritage and their contemporary uses, and the need to establish a strong relation with visitors, are key questions in many countries.