

Over their dead bodies: Facial reconstructions, ethics, and national storytelling at museums

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Abstract

Museum displays of forensic reconstructions of human remains objectify once-living human beings and happen without their consent. As museum objects, realistic-looking sculptures and 3D digital reconstructions are narratively and conceptionally powerful representations of individuals who lived in the territory of what is today a modern nation-state. Current changes in attitudes towards museums' uses of human remains invite consideration of museums' tendency to represent such ancient humans as national ancestors who are similar to people today. Taking a Cultural Studies analytical approach, this paper discusses the ethics and narrative properties of facial reconstructions and 3D animations of both archaeological and historical human remains at selected museums in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. The analysis draws on scholarship, observations of actual and virtual museum displays, news reports, and museum websites to consider the ethical and narrative implications of displaying life-like renditions of pre-nation-state individuals within the context of national storytelling.

KEYWORDS: Facial reconstructions, human remains, museum, ethics, national storytelling

Introduction: Reconstructions and representations

It has become increasingly common for national, archaeological, and ethnographic museums in Europe to display facial, and sometimes full body, reconstructions of humans in the form of head sculptures (busts) and 3D digital displays. The methodologies used in reconstructing archaeological and historical human remains overlap with those used in forensic crime investigations. The aim is to make anatomically correct representations of dead individuals based on their remains. Since archaeological and historical skeletal

remains are often degraded or incomplete, the forensic artist may supplement anatomical measurements from contemporary people or, if available, from the deceased's contemporaries. Thus, it is prudent to regard facial reconstructions of humans from archaeological sites as approximating scientifically sound likenesses to the deceased rather than as actual portraits (Wilkinson, 2010). This paper will examine examples of both unknown ancient people (Blair Atholl Man, Cheddar Man, Vistegutten, and Tollund Man) and historically known people (Birger Jarl and Richard III) to discuss, firstly, how facial reconstructions are infused with artistic and cultural interpretations that have significant narrative properties. Secondly, the paper will consider the ethical dimensions of reconstructing, displaying, and narrativizing such figures without any form of consent – literally over the dead bodies of the deceased.

As prominent parts of museum exhibits, head sculptures and 3D digital reconstructions based on skeletal remains are narratively and conceptionally powerful representations. In comparison to the anonymous-looking bare bones of skeletal remains on display in traditional museum exhibition cases, reconstructions are intended to invigorate the dead as relatable, once-living human beings so as to give museum visitors the impression of standing face-to-face with real-looking people from the past. Owing to advancements in scanning, digital technologies, and DNA readings of skin tone, hair, and eye color, contemporary reconstructions of human remains look quite realistic. They are rendered with affective facial expressions, situational body poses, period clothing, and other physical details that add character and make them look life-like and, thus, relatable. They create the illusion that one can literally look an individual from the past in the eye.

Figure 1 shows craniofacial anthropologist and forensic artist Chris Rynn's 2017 digital reconstruction of Blair Atholl Man's remains, which were uncovered in a long cist burial in the Scottish Highlands north of Perth in 1986. Muscle attachments can be detected on the cranium, while pegs are used to estimate tissue depth. The position and shape of the ears, the width of the lips, and the soft tissues around the eyes and nose are estimates. Facial grooming, hair style, and facial expression are artistic interpretations. It is important to keep in mind that "the creation of the face from the skull is a procedure of *approximation*" (original emphasis, Buhan & Nardoni 2018, p. 256). Nonetheless, Rynn's reconstruction is clearly a persuasive one, although Blair Atholl Man's exact real-life appearance cannot be determined.

Figure 1

Digital facial reconstruction of Blair Atholl Man, ca. 400-600 CE, by Chris Rynn, Perth Museum. Source: Strickland (2024).



Perceived life-like facial reconstructions like Figure 1 have important narrative properties that seem to “speak” visually and aesthetically across the ages, not only as representations of real deceased individuals with recognizable, unique facial features, but also as representations of national ancestors. This creates the impression that the ancient deceased are knowable for us in contemporary society and, hence, that they connect our contemporary national identity meaningfully to the people who once lived in the territory of what is today a modern nation-state. As the following discussion and comparison of specific examples of such museal narratives show, national museums tend to represent reconstructed ancient people as linked culturally, ethnically, and historically to contemporary citizens in an effort to bring the past closer to the present. However, national identity is a recent cultural construction (Anderson, 1983). Moreover, the reconstructed ancient people may not have direct kinship lineages that connect to people living the same territory today, and their culture, language, and self-perception predate how contemporary people see and express themselves (Warren, 2022). Studies of ancient genomes show repeated population turnovers in postglacial Northern and Western Europe (Allentoft et al., 2024; Irving-Pease et al., 2024). The complexity of human migration and cultural identity formation does not support the notion that today’s nation-state citizens have descended directly from the people who lived there thousands of years ago.

Thus, caution should be taken to avoid narratives of national longevity by claiming reconstructed ancient people as “one of us” (Morris, 2018) or “someone we might meet on the bus” (Berlinske, 2018) simply because such reconstructions look anatomically similar to modern humans.

The instability of national origin narratives should be noted by museums and curators who interpret and disseminate information about the past to the public. Blair Atholl Man is a case in point. He was first assumed to be a local Pict from Perthshire, a region which takes pride in its Pictish heritage and the Picts’ famous “enigmatic symbols and inscriptions” (Morez et al., 2023). A headline in *The Scotsman* confidently proclaimed, “Face of ancient Pictish man digitally reconstructed” (The Newsroom, 2017). However, recent analysis of the strontium and oxygen isotopes in Blair Atholl Man’s teeth has revealed that he was not local after all and most likely not even Pictish. He apparently came from the west coast of Scotland, possibly one of the western islands or even Ireland, but “was buried according to funerary customs practiced by the Picts,” according to archaeologist Kate Britton (Geggel, 2021). The narrative of him being a local Pict from Perthshire suddenly made way for different models of interpretation and knowledge production: human mobility, migration, and cultural assimilation.

Facial reconstructions and 3D images of archaeologically sourced human remains are part of museums’ knowledge production about human history and a nation’s past. However, despite their aura of scientific objectivity and supposed distance to the shifting sands of politics and popular culture, European museums are not immune to the current political contentions about ancestry, race, ethnicity, national identity, citizenship, and the right to belong. Like other institutional sites of knowledge production, museums present information from particular points of view that reflect specific ideological lenses and choices (Vogel, 1991). The old binary of “us” and “them” rears its head when museum exhibits tell the story of ancient human remains found in what citizens today think of as a well-defined national territory. The facial reconstructions may or may not support popular perceptions of what a person from a certain nation typically looks like. The idea that ancient peoples of different cultures and appearances once made their home in the same territory as today’s modern society often comes as a surprise to the public, and the media play an important role in conveying and interpreting that information. I will therefore include examples of press coverage in my discussion of facial reconstructions of both ancient and historical people.

Figure 2

Head sculpture of Cheddar Man, ca. 8,000 BCE, by Alfons and Adrie Kennis, Natural History Museum, London. Source: McKie (2018)



A case in point is the nearly complete skeleton of the 10,000-year-old Cheddar Man found in Somerset, England in 1903. The 2018 facial reconstruction (Figure 2) by paleontological artists and sculptors Alfons and Adrie Kennis created quite a stir in the popular press because of the bust's skin color (McKie, 2018). DNA analyses of other Mesolithic human remains in Western Europe indicate that these postglacial people had a brown complexion, blue or green eyes, and wavy black or dark brown hair (Irving-Pease et al., 2024). Like Cheddar Man, these hunter-gatherers were anatomically fully modern humans (*homo sapiens*). Steven Clarke, director of the documentary *The First Brit: Secrets of the 10,000 Year Old Man* produced by BBC's Channel 4, made an attempt to downplay the focus on Cheddar Man's skin color. He said to BBC News, "I think we all know we live in times where we are unusually preoccupied with skin pigmentation" (quoted by Rincon, 2018). Ian Barnes, professor at the Natural History Museum, where Cheddar Man's bust is displayed, also attempted to divert the focus on skin color *per se* to Cheddar Man's overall difference from modern-day Britons. *The Independent* quotes Barnes as saying, "for me, it's not just the skin colour that's interesting; it's that combination of features that make him look not like anyone that you'd see today. Not just dark skin and blue eyes... but also the face shape. So all of this combines together and make him just not the same as people you see around today" (quoted by Baynes, 2018). It's not clear

what Barnes means by “people you see around today,” especially in the context of a multiracial society like today’s United Kingdom. Addressing the race issue directly, archaeologist Tom Booth reflects on the way Cheddar Man’s complexion had been politicized within both left and right wing debates about immigration by pointing out that Britain has a deep history of population diversity (Wolinsky, 2019).

Suffice it here to observe that before DNA testing, Cheddar Man—like Blair Atholl Man—was believed to be a local man with direct descendants in Somerset where he was found. After DNA testing, this ancestry is revealed to be much more complicated (Charlton et al., 2022). However, in the spirit of embracing racial diversity, local Cheddar resident Rachel Andrews declares, “what’s colour got to do with it?” She continues, “there’s a really good, strong community spirit around here. We all look after each other and he’s definitely one of us” (quoted by Morris, 2018). Such diverting points of view exemplify how scientific knowledge production intermingles with popular culture and local pride in perceived ancestry with locally found ancient skeletal remains. These statements also demonstrate the narrative power of facial reconstructions to forge meaningful emotional bonds between ancient people and citizens in the present nation-state.

Museum curators must consider how a visual reconstruction of a person from the past may impact museum visitors’ and local residents’ perception of themselves and more broadly how such reconstructions align with, or challenge, political debates in contemporary society about migrants, national borders, and citizenship. Consequently, complex questions about national identity and belonging extrapolate from present-day politics and concerns about immigration, citizenship, legality, asylum, and residency into the past by prompting questions such as: how do the reconstructions of skeletal remains that predate the modern nation-state participate in validating contemporary ideas about nationality and belonging? What is their storytelling function within the overall context of the museum as a site of cultural authority and its aura of historical accuracy? To what extent is it feasible to assume that the reconstructed dead are representative of national ancestors? Indeed, do the reconstructions depict actual dead persons, or should museums rather emphasize that the reconstructions contain a significant element of artistic interpretation?

Agenda and argument

These questions guide the agenda for this paper. I will start by outlining my analytical lenses and addressing ethical concerns before I proceed to discuss selected examples of 3D digital reconstructions and head sculptures. There are two central premises for my

argument. First, that forensic reconstructions of human remains objectify once-living human beings and happen without their consent; and second, that as museum objects, these reconstructions have both intended and possibly unintended narrative meanings that emerge in the cognitive and emotional responses they effect in spectators. Taking a Cultural Studies approach, I will draw on observations I've made at Silkeborg Museum (Denmark), Hå Gamle Prestegård Museum (Norway), the Museum of Medieval Stockholm (Sweden), and King Richard III Visitor Centre (England) as well as the way these museums present themselves and their uses of facial reconstructions on websites and in the news. My observations are based on a small, but representative, sample of contemporary facial reconstructions, and do not attempt to provide a comprehensive catalog. I choose to focus on the reconstructions of the faces of Tollund Man (Denmark), Vistegutten (Norway), Birger Jarl (Sweden), and Richard III (England) because they have been featured extensively in both popular and scholarly media, and because they are associated with the type of national storytelling and knowledge production occurring in museums today. Moreover, all the reconstructions discussed in this paper come from whole, or near whole, skeletons, indicating that the holistic level of personhood is comparable between them as opposed to reconstructions based on fragments only. While personhood and the human rights associated with it may seem like an elusive concept to consider in conjunction with long dead persons, contemporary concerns about consent and the dignity of the dead must nevertheless prompt museums to consider if research and display of deceased individuals should continue, or if human remains "should be buried or otherwise respectfully be disposed of" (Monroe, 2025, p. 40). The remains of Birger Jarl and Richard III have been reburied. None of the ancient people have been reinterred or otherwise disposed of. My aim is to invite discussion and consideration about the ethical and representational dimensions of reconstructing life-like replica of dead individuals and incorporating them in museal narratives about nations and people.

My overall argument is that the appropriation of the remains of the dead to construct narratives about contemporary nation-states and national identity in museum exhibits poses an ethical dilemma. Specifically, in regard to the dead body's integrity, I argue for museum exhibits to acknowledge the cultural value and innate dignity of the human remains used for reconstructions as well as to provide transparency about the remains' provenance and handling. It is museums' responsibility to care for these remains and body parts in a proper, ethical manner. Historically, many archaeological human remains have been violated, dismembered, and manipulated not only at the time of their death and later exhumation, but also in the name of scientific study and exhibition—in-

cluding, problematically, to support racist ideologies about “the sub-human nature of non-Europeans” (Swain, 2016, p. 170) and to construct an evolutionary distance between contemporary Europeans and their supposedly primitive “cave man” ancestors (Berman, 1999, pp. 288–289).

A basic tenet for my approach is to acknowledge the innate sanctity and dignity of the dead, regardless of their provenance, age, or the condition of their remains (Dias, 2015). As Morris Tidball-Binz, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, states, “... the protection of the dead connects to the protection of other human rights” (2024). Given the advances in Western educational institutions’ and museums’ recognition of the human rights violations resulting from colonial looting and culturally inappropriate handling, storage, and showcasing of human remains from Indigenous and non-Western cultures, similar acknowledgment should be extended to the human remains excavated from Western archaeological and historical sites.

Analytical lenses

As a Humanities scholar, I employ an interdisciplinary Cultural Studies lens to examine the production of meaning and the ethical aspects of reconstructions from human remains. I claim no expertise relating to the highly specialized work in anatomy, orthodontics, osteology, anthropology, archaeology, and forensic sciences that go into creating life-like replica of the dead. My focus is on what these reconstructions seem to “say” as artfully crafted objects with narrative properties, how their meanings are produced within the context of museums, and why a consideration of ethics is important in the broader societal context of representation and national storytelling.

Despite the ever-expanding production of knowledge and pseudo-knowledge on various popular online scientific and cultural platforms, museums still retain high social status as institutions of cultural authority and knowledge construction. Andromache Gazi points out, “for the larger part of the visiting public, museums are places of truth. People come to museums to see the ‘real thing’ . . .” (2014, p. 7). The “real thing” is an ambiguous term, yet important to explore in conjunction with the busts, sculptures, and 3D portrayals of once-living human beings. As Walter Benjamin elucidated in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” the aura of the “real” (which he called “authenticity”) is inseparable from “the uniqueness of a work of art” (Benjamin, 1968, p. 223). Each facial reconstruction of a long-dead person is unique, both as a work of art and in its implied representation of a specific person. In their dual ca-

capacity of *objects d'art* and scientifically rendered representations, "... reconstructions tend to fix strong visual images in the visitor's mind and are thus responsible for creating or perpetuating myths and illusions" (Gazi, 2014, p. 6).

A Cultural Studies lens is helpful in examining the myths and illusions that produce the knowledge, national storytelling, and meaning-making occurring in the reconstruction and exhibition of human remains. Cultural Studies takes an interdisciplinary view on the construction, dynamics, and understanding of how social and material things interact. I am indebted to the theorization of objects and the "social lives of things", as Arjun Appadurai (1986) phrases it, by Pierre Bourdieu, Jane Bennett, and Bruno Latour, among others. Another source of theoretical inspiration is Laura Mulvey's (2000) analysis of visual pleasure and the way the human gaze upon things is loaded with gendered, cultural, and historically embedded norms and values. We generally "see" things—that is, we cognitively understand them—from the perspective of our own individual time, place, and experience. As anthropologist Judith C. Berman observes, "readings of images are psychologically, culturally, and socially conditioned and may bear only a contingent relationship to reality" (1999, p. 288).

To summarize: first, despite their life-like appearance, facial and body reconstructions of archaeological skeletal remains are museum objects. They are obviously not real people, but made to look life-like and, hence, create the illusion of being "the real thing" (Gazi, 2014, p. 7). "It's well understood among museum professionals that people like to look at bodies", including replica of actual bodies that have been artistically enhanced to look life-like rather than dead (Monroe, 2025, p. 38). Being objects, such reconstructions don't have autonomous ontological existence (Schwarte, 2019), nor do they contain actual human body parts. In the process of their making, skeletal remains are scanned, copied, digitized, and modeled, but no human bones are physically incorporated into the material interpretation of the dead person's appearance. Reconstructions are commodified objects (Appadurai, 1986) housed and displayed within museums, where they function as "actants", Bruno Latour's term for "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others" (1996, p. 7), in museums' production of cultural heritage, in particular narratives about identity and the nation-state. Importantly, the forensic methods used to create these sculptures and 3D images imply a measure of authenticity and, therefore, a certain truth about what long-dead individuals were like by way of their recreated looks. Thus, when seen from an object-oriented perspective (Harman, 2018), facial reconstructions at museums exert a force, or what Jane Bennett calls "thingly power" (2010, p. xiii),

which—unlike the Kantian concept of the thing-in-itself as a neutral, value-free entity—are imbued with narrative agency and have efficacy as storytelling devices.

Second, busts, figures, and digital displays of deceased people are material objects. Their perceived life-like humanity is animated by the viewer's gaze and perception (Mulvey, 2000). As the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1981) observes, we experience the world through our own bodies and gravitate towards other bodies that look relatedly human and show familiar feelings and expressions. Merleau-Ponty states, "our gaze, prompted by the experience of our own body, will discover in all other 'objects' the miracle of expression" (1981, p. 197). This "miracle of expression" is what engages the viewers into gazing at reconstructed sculptured faces, looking for signs of familiarity, personhood, and character. The face is the singular outstanding part of a human body that is most associated with our personal identity, both as gendered individuals who are recognizable within a community and more broadly as generic representatives of a specific racial or ethnic group. In our faces, the eyes are of particular importance, not only as so-called mirrors of the soul, but as anchor points for recognition and interaction. The thing-power (Bennett, 2010) that energizes the reconstructions' agency is a function of the face-to-face relationship with the spectator. In understanding this relationship, it may be helpful to recall another phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl's, concept of *Bildbewußtsein* [image-consciousness], which denotes experiences in which we become aware of something by way of a physically embodied representation of it (1904/1905). As an experiential concept, *Bildbewußtsein* relates to Mulvey's (2000) concept of visual pleasure and the power of the gaze.

Ethical concerns

Tampering with the remains of the dead is an issue of cultural and ethical concerns, and hence the reason for giving this paper the title "over their dead bodies." Facial and body reconstructions occur without the consent the dead or their kith and kin. It is an ethical concern for the integrity of the body when skeletal remains are manipulated and separated into parts for transportation, study, display, and reconstruction. Just as museums need to address the provenance of other objects in their possession, so do they need to respect the integrity of the remains of deceased humans in their care. It is therefore relevant to address questions about ethics in consideration of museums' uses of dead bodies, reconstructed or otherwise displayed, to support particular narratives about national origins, ancestry, and validation of territorial sovereignty.

Figure 3

Full body reconstruction of Vistegutten [the boy from Viste], ca. 6300-6000 BCE, by Oscar Nilsson, Hå Gamle Prestegård Museum, Norway. Source: Amundsen (2023).



Due to museums' unique societal position as "places of truth" (Gazi, 2014, p. 7) and knowledge production about the past, it is their responsibility to construct exhibits and convey meaning about the dead on display as accurately as possible. The popular press abounds with pseudo-scientific narratives that frequently distort or misrepresent information. For example, inaccurate use of national adjectives constructs faulty narratives about national ancestors. Figure 3 shows the photo and headline from a Norwegian popular science website called forskning.no. The featured reconstruction of the so-called Vistegutten [the boy from Viste] from Rogaland, Norway, was done by Swedish sculptor and forensic artist Oscar Nilsson in 2023. Nilsson built the sculpture based on the boy's skeletal remains. Figure 3's headline reads: "This is what a Norwegian boy looked like 8,000 years ago." It might be more appropriate for it to read, "this is what a teenage Mesolithic boy found in Norway might have looked like." It is misleading to use the nation-state designation "Norwegian" to describe this boy who lived thousands of years before the creation of Norway.

On FaceBook, Nilsson explains that the sculpture's "brown eyes, the intermediate skin tone and the dark brown hair is based what [sic] other findings from the same region and time. His own DNA was not well preserved enough to tell about his colours" (Nilsson, 2023). However, two other markers of perceived difference have generated both scientific and popular attention: Vistegutten's diminutive height and his cranial deformation. Although he died at about the age of fifteen, Vistegutten was only about 125 cm tall. His skull was oval-shaped due to scaphocephaly, a congenital deformity (University of Stavanger, 2011). Despite these two anomalies, he appeared to be in good health at the time of his death. Yet, speculation about how these anomalies might have impacted his social life influences Nilsson's reconstruction of his body. When working on the sculpture, Nilsson "could not get rid of a feeling of a lonely boy" (quoted by Geggel, 2023), and this feeling informed Nilsson's artistic rendition of the boy's rather sad expression of caution and longing, and hence Nilsson's efforts to give the sculpture a facial expression of loneliness. Such an artistic choice makes the reconstruction communicate a relatable emotion and hence appeals to the viewers' empathy. Whether it is ethical to represent Vistegutten in this manner is a different matter.

In Norway, ethical concerns about the display and dignity of human remains have prompted the formation of an advisory board, Skjelettutvalget [the skeleton advisory], which advises institutions and individuals about the display, research, and storage of human remains ("Om Skjelettutvalget", 2019). For decades, Indigenous groups, both in Norway and elsewhere, have protested the exhumation, sale, study, storage, and display of human remains at Western institutions. Important legislation such as the 2004 Human Tissue Act in the United Kingdom, the 1990 Native American Grave Protection Act in the United States, the revised International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics guidelines from 2006, and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums and Collections from 2013 now provide somewhat clearer parameters for dealing with the remains of the dead (Licata & Monza, 2017). However, unless the remains come from recognized burial sites, including pre-Christian European sites, addressing the inherent sanctity of the dead body remains elusive at many institutions. Some regard this as a violation of the dead and advocate for the reburial of human remains that are kept in museum collection storage (Licata & Monza, 2017). Others argue that archaeological human remains are cultural assets and should be available for study, education, and display (Gazi, 2014). In an open letter announcing the American Museum of Natural History's decision to remove all human remains from display, museum president Sean Decatur assesses, "none of the items on display are so essential to the goals and narrative of the exhibition as to counterbalance the ethical dilemmas presented by the fact that human

remains are in some instances exhibited alongside and on the same plane as objects” (Decatur, 2023). Across Europe, some ethnographic museums, e.g. the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England, have begun to remove human remains of non-European persons from display and to repatriate the remains. However, there appears to be little effort made to address the ethics for handling, studying, or displaying the remains of locally found ancient, nameless persons.

Another dimension of the ethics involved in displaying reconstructions based on human remains is the intention of making ancient people—and their feelings—appear to be knowable to us today simply because they look similar to contemporary humans. Archaeologist Kristine Orestad Sørgaard, who advised Nilsson on Vistegutten’s living conditions in the Mesolithic, thinks that his reconstruction “is a great reminder that people in the past were very much like us, despite living in a world very different from our own” (quoted by Geggel, 2023). In the next section, I will discuss this issue in conjunction with sculptures and 3D digital reconstructions of Tollund Man, a bog body found in Denmark, and two historically known people: the Swedish statesman Birger Jarl (ca. 1210–1266) and the English king Richard III (1452–1485).

Discussion of examples of facial reconstructions

The desire for sameness: Tollund Man

Figure 4

Tollund Man, ca. 405–380 BCE. Source: Museum Silkeborg, Denmark, n.d.



Among ancient human remains found in Europe, the face of Tollund Man is undoubtedly the most familiar and relatable (Figure 4). His remarkably well preserved 2,400-year-old body was discovered in 1950 during peat-cutting in Jutland, Denmark. He was naked except for a leather belt around his waist, a leather cap, and the braided leather noose with which he was hanged. Hanging would have caused his tongue to distend. Evidently, his eyes and mouth were closed postmortem, and his body was arranged in a curled-up position, then lowered into the bog (Museum Silkeborg, n.d.). Archaeologists at Silkeborg Museum, where Tollund Man is exhibited, consider it most likely that he, like the other bog people of that region and period, was sacrificed in a ritual. Former museum director Christian Fischer explains that even though some of the bog bodies show evidence of postmortem violence, their entire bodies were placed in bogs instead of being cremated, which was the common mortuary custom at that time (Fischer, n.d.). Tollund Man's body does not bear detectable traces of postmortem violence in the immediate aftermath of his death, but in consideration of the ethics of archaeological dealings with human remains, attention should be drawn to the extensive post-discovery dismemberment and invasive probing that his body has undergone.

The peaceful demeanor of Tollund Man's face (Figure 4) betrays the continuous prodding and dissection of his remains. At the time of his discovery in 1950, his body underwent a regular autopsy at Bispebjerg Hospital near Copenhagen. His internal organs from that autopsy are still missing (Museum Silkeborg, n.d.). The body was subsequently dismembered for study and conservation treatment, which at that time still was under development. His head, feet, and a thumb were conserved most successfully, while "the rest of the body dried out" (Museum Silkeborg, n.d.). The dismembered parts of his body were kept at various Danish museums and medical institutions until the 1980s when then-director of Silkeborg Museum, Christian Fischer, located them and initiated a recreation of the body for exhibit at the museum (Museum Silkeborg, n.d.). However, the Tollund Man's right big toe and his internal organs were still missing. In 2016, the daughter of one of the original conservators returned the sawed-off big toe to the museum. Her father had had a habit of keeping parts of the archaeological remains he helped conserve (Museum Silkeborg, n.d.). The intrusive examination of Tollund Man's body continues to this day. Tollund Man's remains have been, and continue to be, handled and dismembered for study with little attention to the ethics of doing so.

An aura of mystery and tongue-in-cheek humor accompanies the ways that the study of Tollund Man's remains are communicated to the Danish public. For example, the online newsletter from the Faculty of Health at Aarhus University announces in a headline,

“Tollund Man’s head scanned in secrecy at Aarhus University,” followed by an article opening with this statement: “it is not every day that a severed human head is transported through Jutland in the trunk of a Volkswagen Golf Estate” (Rønn, 2024). This kind of faux-humorous narration is not unusual. Tollund Man’s head is periodically examined—in decapitated condition—and scanned as new technology develops (Museum Silkeborg, n.d.). Silkeborg Museum director Ole Nielsen implicitly acknowledges the invasive nature of such examinations, when he says in relation to the latest scan, “we wouldn’t dream of forcing his mouth open to see his teeth, but now we can see them on the scan” (Rønn, 2024).

To date, Tollund Man’s remains have been separated and reassembled to be X-rayed and scanned several times, and various samples from his body (hair, nails, skin, and bones) have been Carbon-14 dated and analyzed for chemical isotopes. These procedures have yielded some information about his diet and general health. The contents of his stomach and intestines have shown what he ate for his last meal and revealed the presence of intestinal parasites (Woytowich, 2023). In 2015, Tollund Man’s feet were sent to Paris to be microCT scanned at the Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle, where it was determined that he had plantar warts and what the blood vessels and internal structures of his feet looked like (Barone, 2017).

Other examinations of Tollund Man’s body include unsuccessful efforts to determine his DNA by extracting material from his femur (Levine, 2017). The latter procedure was part of The Genomic History of Denmark, an interdisciplinary research project aimed at identifying “Danmarks arvemasse” [Denmark’s genome] in ancient human remains found in Denmark to determine “if we contemporary Danes are related to him” (author’s translation, Statens Naturhistoriske Museum, 2013). Such effort to establish kinship and national longevity supports Joshua Levine’s point that “in the absence of hard evidence, the temptation to weave bog bodies into a national narrative prove[s] hard to resist” (2017). The study of Tollund Man thus ranges from gathering archaeological and scientific data pertaining to his life in the Iron Age to the desire to validate contemporary Danes’ national identity. There is clearly much national interest, both scientifically and in the media, for Tollund Man, “who looked pretty much like you and me,” to “reveal his secrets” (Levine, 2017).

Figure 5

Tollund Man in 3D digital reconstruction by Philippe Froesch (left) and full body sculpture by Alfons and Adrie Kennis (right). Source: Museum Silkeborg, Denmark, n.d.



In 2018, Silkeborg Museum joined the quest for displaying facial reconstructions by commissioning forensic artist Philippe Froesch to create a 3D digital animation of Tollund Man based on skull scans (Figure 5, left). Tollund Man's skull had shrunk about 12% while submerged in the bog. Using a digital model, Froesch resized it and added muscle tone and soft tissue. The animation shows Tollund Man turning his face slightly, blinking his eyes, and making eye contact with the camera. His unsmiling facial expression is somber, perhaps even dour. His hair and eye colors are approximations. According to museum director Nielsen, these colors are chosen to represent a "leverpostej-agtig, nordisk type" [liver paté-like, Nordic phenotype] (author translation, quoted by Melander, 2018). Nielsen's humorous colloquial expression, "liver paté-like", is a commonly used idiom for something slightly boring, bland, and common-place, in particular for hair that is darker than blond, but lighter than brown. In other words, the museum apparently wanted to portray Tollund Man with the observable characteristics of what they believed was an average, contemporary Scandinavian male.

In 2021, Silkeborg Museum acquired a full figure sculpture of Tollund Man made by brothers Alfons and Adrie Kennis (Figure 5, right). The Kennis version is much more expressive than Froesch's 3D reconstruction. Figure 5, right, shows Tollund Man smiling, his face deeply wrinkled, and his raised eyebrows and light blue eyes exuding

mirth and friendliness. His hair, eyes, and complexion have a lighter color tone than Froesch's version. The full-body pose appears to be a self-embrace, which signals a non-violent demeanor. In comparison, Froesch's version looks much less friendly, and also more muscular and powerful. Tollund Man's face is broader and stouter looking in Froesch's version, while the Kennis brothers give Tollund Man a narrower face and a slighter, more vulnerable appearance. Neither version portrays a specific moment in Tollund Man's life, but simply aims to show a life-like representation of the corpse (Figure 4).

When comparing Figure 4 to the two recent interpretations of Tollund Man in Figure 5, it becomes evident that even though craniofacial reconstructions are based on detailed anatomical studies, artistic interpretation plays a decisive role in the final product. The real Tollund Man (Figure 4) is the shrunken, mummified museum object kept in a museum display case, while the two avatars in Figure 5 aim at engaging museum visitors with the experience of seeing him life-like, simulating a "real" living person with relatable feelings and expressions, rather than as a mysterious, mummified corpse with closed eyes.

As noted in the discussion of Blair Atholl Man, Cheddar Man, and Vistegutten, there is a great desire for establishing sameness between the reconstructed faces and people today. When Tollund Man's cranium was CT scanned, digitally sculpted, and put on a 3D digital screen in 2018 at Silkeborg Museum (Figure 5, left), museum director Nielsen told the press, "we now have a face that looks like someone we might meet on the bus, on the train, or at a café" (author's translation, quoted by Berlingske, 2018). Tollund Man obviously lived far removed in historical time and cultural space from today's urban comforts. Yet the museum director's emphasis on the 3D images' relatability to contemporary Danes ("we") and Tollund Man's appearance as easily fitting into the modern context of public transportation and café life suggests that sculpted reconstructions of ancient humans derive their primary meaning from their immediate relatability to contemporary people and that they only secondarily are representations of actual human beings from a specific time in (pre)history.

Notably, Nielsen's statement echoes what Orestad Sørgaard said in reference to Vistegutten: "people in the past were very much like us" (quoted by Geggel, 2023). This rhetoric of innate sameness is often repeated when museum professionals describe facial reconstructions to the public. It touches an important key in museums' orchestrations to represent ancient humans as understandable and emotionally relatable to people today. Clearly, the archaeological record shows that human migration, settlement, culture, and

life conditions in Northern Europe are very complex (Allentoft et al., 2024). Thus, museums should use caution in presenting ancient people as fully understandable for us today only because they look anatomically like us. Graeme Warren uses the phrase “like us, but not like us” to point out that while there are numerous physical similarities between past populations and contemporary people in Europe, there are also significant cultural differences (2022, p. 5). However, the differences in historical time, language, culture, technology, and physical appearance between humans who lived thousands of years ago and people today are subsumed under museal discourses of fraternal sameness. This rhetoric could owe itself to a general desire in European museums’ knowledge production to downplay the effects of cultural diversity and migration in contemporary societies in favor of a more inclusive view of a commonly shared humanity that transcends historical, geographical, and cultural differences similar to the “imagined communities” that conceptually hold together modern nation-states according to Benedict Anderson (1983).

Whatever the reasoning is, it is worthwhile contemplating this construction of sameness within the context of national narratives and the assumptions upon which they are articulated. As Gazi cautions, museal displays and facial reconstructions “select and organize information, compress time and space” in order to tell a story about the past that is compelling and easily comprehensible (2014, p. 6). Facial reconstructions and their implied sameness to humans today are important actants in this narrative because, as Figures 4 and 5 make evident, the contemporary reconstruction of anonymous human remains like Tollund Man involves not only forensic science, but also a good deal of artistic interpretation. Like the construction of museum exhibits in general, the artistic interpretation of archaeological remains reflects “our beliefs, our assumptions, and our image of the world” (Gazi, 2014, p. 7). This also becomes evident in the facial reconstruction of historically known persons and the more culturally appropriate handling and reburial of their remains.

The desire for accuracy: Birger Jarl and Richard III

Craniofacial anthropologist Caroline Wilkinson believes that greater artistic license is warranted in archaeological reconstructions of unknown persons like the ones discussed in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 5. Their facial recognition is “not the primary objective and producing the *most likely depiction* may be more important than individual identity” (emphasis added, 2010, p. 244). What constitutes the “most likely depiction” seems to mean that the forensic artist has license to speculate about things like facial texture and ex-

pression; hair, eye, and skin color; haircut and facial grooming; tattoos, jewelry, and attire. As observed in conjunction with the two recent reconstructions of Tollund Man (Figure 5), the artists' interpretations of Tollund Man's still existing face (Figure 4) are quite dissimilar, and neither version appears to look exactly like the actual face as it appears today. On the other hand, Nilsson's rendition of Vistegutten with an expression of loneliness (Figure 3); the Kennis brothers' depiction of Cheddar Man with a whimsical, suppressed smile (Figure 2); and Rynn's passport-style portrait of Blair Atholl Man looking confidently into the camera (Figure 1) all demonstrate artistic interpretations that speak meaningfully to people today because the reconstructions' facial expressions show familiar feelings and mannerisms. Consequently, the factual accuracy of the reconstructions may waver in favor of an artistic presentation that aligns with contemporary cultural mannerisms and, hence, persuades today's museum visitors that these ancient humans really were "just like us" (Berman, 1999, p. 288).

However, a different rhetoric emerges in the context of historically known people, especially politically powerful individuals who were part of the nation's ruling elites and have deep roots in the formation of the modern nation-state. Their individual identity is an extension of their historical fame, social position, personhood, and other characteristics that make them unlike other people. Their facial reconstructions come with historical baggage such as possible living descendants, written records, descriptions, stories, anecdotes, artifacts, images (paintings and other portrayals), and hence require a different level of representational authenticity.

What is perceived as accuracy in the portrayal of historical persons depends on the historical moment and the artistic methods available. Accuracy is of special interest when it comes to reconstructions of controversial historical persons, whose appearance and reputation the public may already have encountered in educational settings, literature, book illustrations, monuments, or media. The recent facial reconstructions of the Swedish statesman Birger Jarl and the English king Richard III will serve to illustrate how accuracy in representation overlaps with ethical issues and national storytelling at museums. The discourse of sameness ("just like us") that dominates the portrayals of ancient humans like Cheddar Man, Vistegutten, Blair Atholl Man, and Tollund Man is conspicuously absent from the aura of historical authenticity embedded in the discourse of unique individuality surrounding Birger Jarl (Figure 6) and Richard III (Figure 7 and 8).

Birger Jarl

Figure 6

Birger Jarl, ca. 1210–1266, stone corbel, Varnhem Abbey, ca. 1270 (left). Source: Wikipedia (2024). Head sculpture by Oscar Nilsson (right), Medeltidsmuseum, Stockholm. Source: author photo.



The medieval Swedish statesman Birger Magnusson (ca. 1210–1266), best known in the historical record as Birger Jarl (*jarl* means earl or duke), is a central, sometimes maligned, figure in Swedish history. Through his strategic marriages first to Ingeborg Eriksdotter, sister of Swedish king Erik Eriksson, and later to Danish dowager queen Mechtilde of Holstein, he became the ancestor of future kings of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. When king Erik Eriksson died without leaving any sons, Birger Jarl ruled the kingdom as guardian of his own and Ingeborg's underage son Valdemar Birgersson. He was instrumental in consolidating various chiefdoms into the kingdom of Sweden, colonizing and Christianizing parts of southern Finland, instituting legislation and taxation for the entire kingdom, and increasing trade with Lübeck in the Hanseatic League (Lindström and Lindström, 2006). He is also said to have founded Stockholm (Project Runeberg, 1996). Some medieval chronicles describe him as a ruthless man of power, while other sources praise him as a reformer of law and policy.

According to *Erikskrönikan* [Erik's Chronicle], Birger Jarl was buried at Varnhem Abbey in Västergötland (Project Runeberg, 1996). However, the precise location of his grave was lost for centuries (Malmström et al., 2012). In the 1920s, floor renovations at Varn-

hem Abbey revealed a grave containing the skeletons of two males and a female, assumed to be Birger Jarl, Mechtilde, and Birger and Ingeborg's son Erik Birgersson (Malmström et al., 2012). Given new developments in genetic testing, the Varnhem grave was reopened in 2002 to ascertain who the deceased were. Osteologist Torbjörn Ahlström (2006) used DNA analysis to confirm that the two males were father and son, and that the woman was unrelated to them both. Scientists conclude that the remains "belong to Birger, Erik, and Mechtild [sic], or to three individuals with the exact same kind of biological relatedness" (Malmström et al., 2012).

With his weighty presence in medieval Swedish history, Birger Jarl's persona is subsumed under the mantle of Birger Jarl, the iconic statesman. All existing illustrations, sculptures, and monuments represent him in the role of founding national father: stern, commanding, and visionary. No known portraits of him were made while he was alive. However, a stone corbel in Varnhem Abbey, "reckoned as the oldest portrait in Sweden" (Malmström et al., 2012), was carved not long after his death (Figure 6, left). "Twelfth and thirteenth century sculpted heads in Scandinavian churches... have been interpreted as representations, or portraits, of specific rulers" (Eriksen, Holmqvist & Bandlien, 2020, p. 10). Figure 6, left, literally portrays Birger Jarl as a pillar of the church. The stone head is an idealized portrait of the great statesman, showing him with a bold gaze, well-defined eyebrows, a mouth set in a determined mien, and a strongly defined, clean-shaven chin. The hair is neatly styled with curls. On top of his head is an earl's coronet decorated with stylized strawberry leaves in the continental style alternating with ornamental rose heads.

In 2010, Medeltidsmuseet [The Museum of Medieval Stockholm] commissioned forensic artist Nilsson to make a bust of Birger Jarl for the 800th anniversary of his birth (Figure 6, right). The replica is constructed from scans of Birger Jarl's cranium taken at the 2002 reopening of the grave in Vadstena. In an interview with Sveriges Radio, Nilsson assesses that the reconstruction is 80% accurate in portraying Birger Jarl. He says that the bust's hairstyle was inspired by the stone sculpture in Varnhem Abbey ("Looking into Birger Jarl's Eyes," 2010).

The bust is expressive and situational, showing Birger Jarl caught in a moment of hesitation, looking upwards with a somewhat worried mien, and his mouth slightly open. Unlike other artistic representations', including the stone sculpture's, efforts to portray Birger Jarl as an unflinching nation builder, Nilsson humanizes him with thinning hair, wrinkles, bags under his eyes, and an expression of hesitation. The coronet is not placed

on his head, but in front of him, perhaps to emphasize his controversial relationship with the crown, alongside a replica of his skull, which is the basis for the reconstruction.

Sveriges Radio's interviewer asked if Nilsson aimed at giving Birger Jarl a "Nordic appearance". Nilsson rejected this, saying that he thinks his rendition of Birger Jarl "looks more like an English footballer" ("Looking into Birger Jarl's Eyes", 2010). Nilsson's humorous response may have been intended to deflect the ethnic (and implied nationalist) agenda about a specific Nordic appearance also mentioned in conjunction with reconstructions of Tollund Man (Figure 5). However, there is notably no mention of Birger Jarl looking "just like us." Medeltidsmuseet's director, Solbritt Benneth, notes that he was a man of great political power. She says, "looking at [Nilsson's reconstruction] you can see that he had the character features of a very stern and controlling man" (author's translation, quoted by Borg & Wadebäck, 2010).

There is an important difference in the ethical handling of archaeological versus historical human remains. Upon discovery, Tollund Man was treated as an object of study with little regard for the dignity of his body, which was dismembered and stored in various locations. In comparison, since the discovery of the triple grave at Varnhem Abbey, the safekeeping of Birger Jarl's remains has been overseen by the Abbey, which prevented relocation of his skeleton to Stockholm. When the grave was opened in the 1920s, the current Stockholm city hall was under construction. The builders desired that Birger Jarl's remains be reinterred in the capital which he is said to have founded. An elaborate black tomb topped with a golden statue of a knight in shining armor was built at the foot of the city hall's tower. However, it remains empty to this day. Varnhem Abbey refused to transfer Birger Jarl's remains from the place he chose to be buried, thus ensuring that his wish to rest at Varnhem among the medieval kings of Sweden be honored ("Birger jarl & kungagravarna", n.d.).

Richard III

The medieval English king Richard III (1452-1485), aka Richard Plantagenet, is one of the most vilified kings in British history. He was suspected of orchestrating the disappearance, and likely murder, of his two nephews to usurp the throne (Ashdown-Hill, 2018). He was only king for two years and the last king of the House of York. His name and historical record were tarnished by writers seeking to glorify the subsequent regents from the House of Tudor. His ill repute as a hunchbacked villain owes much to Thomas More's scathing description: "little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right" (quoted by Baker, 1997, p. 749). More's insidious

defamation, in turn, became the basis for William Shakespeare's demeaning portrayal of him in *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*, in which Richard III soliloquizes, "every tongue brings in a several tale / and every tale condemns me for a villain" (Shakespeare, 1997, Act 5, Scene 3). He fell at the Battle of Bosworth Field after he lost his horse on the marshy ground. This inspired Shakespeare's famous line, "a horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!" (Act 5, Scene 4). Henry Tudor's men immediately killed him. His body sustained multiple blows and stabs, including an "insult injury" to his buttocks, and his naked body was slung across a horse and paraded through Leicester (University of Leicester, n.d.). His body was buried without coffin or shroud in "the church of the Franciscan friars in Leicester. The friary was dissolved and the grave lost until 2012" (University of Leicester, n.d.).

The remarkable discovery of Richard III's skeleton under a parking lot in Leicester in 2012 has energized popular and scholarly interest in his person and tragic fate as the last English king to die in battle. Extensive genetic testing, genealogical research, and anthropological study of his remains have yielded insight into his health and historical time, some of which corroborated with the historical account of his appearance. Notably, the exhumed skeleton shows that he did have, as the historical record indicated, a severe spinal deformity due to scoliosis causing one shoulder to sit higher than the other (Appleby et al., 2015). After multiple scientific examinations, scans, and collection of genetic material, Richard III's earthly remains were placed in a coffin on a hearse, paraded through Leicestershire, and reinterred with ceremonious pomp and circumstance in Leicester Cathedral in 2015. Hundreds of people lined the route and threw white roses (symbols of the House of York) on his coffin (Sky News, 2015).

As with Birger Jarl, there are no existing portraits of Richard III from when he was alive, but there are two paintings of him from the 1500s, one at the Society of Antiquaries and another at the National Portrait Gallery in London (Figure 7, left). Wilkinson's 2013 craniofacial reconstruction aligns closely with the latter portrait, featuring the same hair color, Prince Valiant-style haircut, and similar attire (Figure 7, right). Wilkinson's reconstruction is based on measurements taken of Richard III's cranium, in which his protruding Habsburg jaw apparently is more prominent than on the painting. Noticeably, in comparison to the painting, the sculpture seems to show Richard III as younger-looking with fewer creases on his face, a healthier complexion with rosy cheeks and a meeker, more pleasant expression with slightly downcast eyes.

Figure 7

Richard III, 1452–1485, oil on panel, unknown artist, National Portrait Gallery (left). Facial reconstruction by Caroline Wilkinson (right), King Richard III Visitor Centre, Leicester. Source: University of Leicester, n.d.



In 2024, after ten years of research by the Voice for Richard Team in affiliation with the Face Lab at Liverpool John Moores University, Richard III's voice has been recreated with 90% accuracy and is featured in a 3D digital animation (Detrow & Fink, 2024). Theatrical linguist Yvonne Morley-Chisholm explains, "this is the new science of Historical Human Reconstruction or Postmortalism using an avatar of the real King based on the reconstruction of his head" ("My Kingdom for a voice!", 2024). The avatar, based on an actor's enactment, delivers a speech Richard III gave in 1483, in which he bestows the titles of Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester upon his son, Edward of Middleham (Figure 8). The avatar speaks with a medieval Yorkshire accent in a pleasant, lyrical, soft tone. To accentuate kingly power, the avatar wears a crown identical to the one worn by the actor Harry Lloyd, who played Richard III in Stephen Frears' film about the Leicester excavation, *The Lost King* (2022).

Figure 8

Richard III voice animation. Screen shot by author. Source: “My Kingdom for a voice!” (2024).



The narrative power of the voiced, animated avatar of Richard III in Figure 8 is more moving than the bust alone (Figure 7, right), but the animation also raises the ethical question about the extent to which reconstructions accurately represent the real, historical person. The bust of Birger Jarl (Figure 6, right) is exhibited with two artifacts that symbolically narrate his connection to political power (the coronet) and the dispute over his remains (the skull). That exhibit invites viewers to think about what kind of man he was, rather than telling them what to think. In contrast, the narrative embedded in the reconstruction and animation of Richard III (Figure 7, right and Figure 8) seems much more intentional and aimed at representing Richard III in a positive light. Admittedly, Richard III is a more divisive national figure, even posthumously, than Birger Jarl ever was. Perhaps that explains how invested Wilkinson, Morley-Chisholm, Phillippa Langley (who initiated the search for Richard III's grave), and other historians and experts are in changing the negative narrative associated with him. For example, in commenting on Wilkinson's reconstruction (Figure 7, right), Langley says, "he's very handsome. He looks like someone you could just talk to. He doesn't have the face of a tyrant" (quoted by Toon & Stone, 2016).

This urge to read a non-tyrannical character into Richard III's "handsome" reconstructed face or the pleasantness of his voice raises a red flag about the narrative power of facial reconstructions and the types of narratives they produce about long-dead persons. As mentioned earlier, museums need to acknowledge that reconstructions happen over the dead bodies of people, whose remains become reimaged and reconfigured into a contemporary museum exhibit and its narrative agenda. In Richard III's case, the coopera-

tion of multiple scholars and scientists has produced impressive results in locating his grave and treating his remains with dignity, but the pro-Ricardian partisanship detected in the facial reconstructions suggests that such museum objects may create new sets of “myths and illusions” (Gazi, 2014, p. 6) about this controversial historical character rather than clarity about the so-called “real King” (“My Kingdom for a voice!”, 2024).

Conclusion

It can be argued that head sculptures and 3D forensic digital reconstructions of cranial remains invigorate the dead as once-living human beings and make them seem relatable to people today. At the same time, these reconstructions are museum objects, which do not have autonomous ontological existence. Their meaning is activated in relation to the spectator and the knowledge production associated with social and cultural concepts and ideas about nationality, history, ethnicity, and the historical person’s character. My title “over their dead bodies” is intended to be a reminder that such reconstructions occur without the permission of kith and kin, or the deceased individuals themselves. This poses an ethical dilemma for the extent to which museums, today, should use the remains of long-dead people to construct narratives about nation, history, and identity without also clearly informing visitors that the reconstructions have a large element of artistic interpretation.

“Every image embodies a way of seeing” (Berger, 1972, p. 11), and every way of seeing is embedded in historical and cultural contexts. No matter how anatomically correct facial reconstructions are in 3D or sculpture, or how realistically they depict the deceased person, they “speak” to viewers today through culturally and historically filtered ways of seeing (Berger, 1972; Berman, 1999). They are artifacts designed to be activated in the spectator’s emotional and cognitive response. Portrayals of historically known persons are particularly interesting because they often exist in several versions from different time periods, and each version reflects the perception of that person within a specific time period. In other words, portraits are never objectively neutral. They are cultural artifacts and imbued with the “thingly power” (Bennett, 2010) that moves and engages the viewer with “the miracle of expression” (Merleau-Ponty, 1981, p. 197). Museum reconstructions of archaeological and historical persons are both *objects d’art* with specific aesthetic qualities and culturally charged conveyors of historical narratives about nation and identity.

AI disclaimer

The author declares that no generative artificial intelligence was used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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Povzetek

Muzejske razstave forenzičnih rekonstrukcij človeških ostankov objektivizirajo nekoč živa človeška bitja in se odvijajo brez njihovega soglasja. Realistično upodobljene skulpture in 3D digitalne rekonstrukcije so kot muzejski razstavni predmeti narativno in konceptualno močne upodobitve posameznikov, ki so živeli na ozemlju današnjih nacionalnih držav. Trenutne spremembe v odnosu do uporabe človeških ostankov v muzejih vabijo k razmisleku o nagnjenosti muzejev, da takšne prдавne ljudi upodabljajo kot narodne prednike, ki so podobni današnjim ljudem. S pomočjo kulturološkega analitičnega pristopa članek obravnava etiko in narativne lastnosti rekonstrukcij obrazov in 3D animacij arheoloških in zgodovinskih človeških ostankov v nekaterih muzejih na Norveškem, Švedskem, Danskem in v Združenem kraljestvu. Analiza temelji na znanstveni literaturi, opazovanju dejanskih in virtualnih muzejskih razstav, medijskih novicah in spletnih straneh muzejev, z namenom razmisleka o etičnih in narativnih posledicah prikazovanja realističnih upodobitev posameznikov iz časa pred nastankom nacionalnih držav v kontekstu nacionalnega narativa.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: rekonstrukcije obraza, človeški ostanki, muzej, etika, nacionalni narativ

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