In the shadow of the Middle Ages?
Tendencies in Gotland’s history-writing, 1850–2010

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Previous research on history-writing and other forms of the use of history has so far to a large extent analysed national and ethnic identities and their formation through narratives of the past.¹ Other territorial identity projects have been less studied, relatively speaking. Still, the importance of the past is just as obvious in local, regional, and supranational identity projects.² The latter have largely used similar mechanisms as those used in the nationalist projects, at least on the discursive level. Not only do geographical and contemporary cultural aspects delineate the regional ‘us’, but, more than that, do so by telling and retelling a common narrative about the past. ‘We’ have always lived here, ‘we’ have shared a common destiny down the centuries.

In this study, I will analyse regional identity construction on Gotland. Gotland is the largest of all the Baltic islands, with a population of some 57,000 and a land area of 3,000 km². It is one of Sweden’s twenty-five historical provinces (landskap), and constitutes a separate county (län). The province of Gotland also includes some smaller islands. The only inhabited one is Fårö, a separate parish at Gotland’s north-eastern edge, with some 550 inhabitants and a land area of 114 km². Some of the uninhabited islands—Gotska Sandön, Stora Karlsö, and Lilla Karlsö—have nevertheless played a role in regional topography and history-writing, thanks to their distinctive landscape and as somewhat exotic places where historical events of the more curious and thrilling kind have taken place.³

¹ Among numerous examples, see, for example, T. Eriksen 1993; Fewster 2006.
² Aronsson 2004, 133–43.
³ Källgård 2005, 206 ff.
It has often been rightly said that Swedishness was created by explicitly adding together its constituent provinces. The clearest example of this is the central plot of Selma Lagerlöf’s schoolbook *Nils Holgersson’s wonderful journey through Sweden* (1906–1907) where each province is added to the next. Their regional particularities are only beneficial at the national level—Sweden becomes a collection of provincial characteristics.\(^4\) Thus, the provinces have generally not been viewed as anti-national in Sweden.

It should be noted that regional identity in Sweden has been almost totally centred on the historical provinces (landskap)—even though they lost their administrative status in the seventeenth century. Since that time, the counties (län) have been the essential administrative regional units, with separate government representatives. In the 1860s, the so-called county councils (landsting) were created, a form of municipal government that to this day is responsible for healthcare, local transport, and so on. The county councils are in most cases geographically identical with the counties. In recent years, some county councils have been merged into regions (regioner), and at time of writing there are plans to redraw the administrative map of Sweden once again, this time merging more counties into larger regions. However, this on-going development will not change the historical provinces, which remain the focus of cultural identities (although there are a couple of notable exceptions). Still, the relations between provinces and the administrative units are hard to study in the case of Gotland, where province, county, and even municipality include exactly the same territory.

Some of the Swedish provinces have a stronger identity than others. In many cases, it exists in parallel to a strong connection to the national identity. Not least, Uppland and Dalarna have (in different ways) been singled out as symbols of the true Swedishness. Uppland has been hailed as the cradle of the ancient Swedish kingdom, the seat of Sweden’s archbishop, and (a part of) the capital. Dalarna has played the role of the home of the true, nationally minded Swedish peasantry. When Sweden was threatened, the peasants of Dalarna to a man marched to the rescue of the Swedish freedom, according to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nationalist Swedish history-writing, especially in the narratives about the uprisings of Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson, Sten Sture, and Gustav Eriksson (later King Gustav I Vasa) against the Danish-led Kalmar Union in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Today, the sort of history-writing

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5 The names of the two northernmost counties—Västerbotten and Norrbotten—are generally used for their respective inlands, even though that is the province of Lapland. As a matter of fact, two Swedish counties (län) have taken the names of historical provinces since the 1990s: Kopparbergs län was renamed Dalarnas län, and Skåne län resulted from the unification of Malmöhus län and Kristianstads län.

6 In 1971, Gotland’s various municipalities were centralized into one: Gotlands kommun (Gotland Municipality). As a result, the hitherto separate Gotland County Council was dissolved. In 2011, the municipality of Gotland changed its name from Gotlands kommun to Region Gotland.

7 Edquist 2004; Rosander 1993.
that focuses on distant political developments is less common. Even so, Dalarna is still a symbol of a vague Swedishness in folklore and traditions. The Dalecarlians are seen as sturdy and steadfast, and ‘Swedish’ folk culture is often stereotypically located to Dalarna.

Some other Swedish provinces, where the regional identities are particularly cultivated, have a more problematic relationship with the Swedish national state. Skåne, Jämtland, and Gotland all to some degree breed a sort of partial independence towards the rest of Sweden, rooted in the fact that they stood outside the Swedish realm in the past. In the case of Skåne, it is strongly emphasized that the province was part of Denmark until 1658, and that in many ways it still has a culture and traditions that makes it somewhat different from the rest of Sweden. Jämtland also became part of Sweden in the seventeenth century, and there is a strong notion that there was once a medieval, democratic, peasant state there, independent of both Norway and Sweden.

Finally, Gotland is perhaps the most ‘different’ Swedish province. Even though, with a few exceptions, Gotlanders identify themselves as Swedes, the islanders have a strong regional identity. One reason for this is the obvious geographical distinctness: it can only be reached by air or by sea—the ferry crossing to the mainland takes around three hours. But perhaps the most distinct nucleus of Gotlandic regional identity is its history. Before the fourteenth century, Gotland was largely autonomous, with only a loose connection to the Swedish kingdom. After 1361, Gotland was attached to Denmark, and a period of economic stagnation ensued. In 1645, Gotland passed to Sweden.

As we shall see, this otherness is often used as a positive mark of the island. In history-writing, Gotland has often been treated as something peculiar, not least thanks to its history. The flourishing city of Visby is often singled out as one of the key ports of the Baltic Sea from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. Concerning even earlier eras, there is a strong notion that Gotland was an independent republic, governed by free and equal peasants who were engaged in long-distance trade, especially to the east. The ancient Gotlanders or Gutes (gutar) are usually described as a nation of their own, separate from the mainland Swedes (svear) and Geats (götar), and with their own language.

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8 F. Persson 2008.
9 Häggström 2000.
The questions and the literature

The broad outlines of Gotland’s history-writing are quite well known; the more detailed nuances, not so. I wish to shed further light on some of the more important ones. How did regional self-perception change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? To what extent was there a wish to mark Gotland’s distance from the rest of Sweden? And were there any attempts to link Gotland to other geographical entities in and around the Baltic Sea instead?

When dealing with islands, the recent advent of ‘island studies’ or ‘nissology’ should be mentioned. Much of that research focuses on discourses and metaphors, stressing that islands are more metaphors than reality, and that these discursive structures to a large extent frame our understanding of islands, whether from within or outside. For example, in the eighteenth century there was a shift in understanding from seeing islands as symbols of cooperation and sources for new futures and utopias, to the still dominant discourse that islands are remote, exotic, isolated, and alienated. However, the present study’s main concerns, from an analytical point of view, are regionalism and the uses of history. It is highly probable that an island such as Gotland forms a more distinct regional identity thanks to its relative isolation, and that makes it suitable for a study of the relations between region and nation.

Earlier research has to some extent analysed Gotlandic regional identity, primarily in connection to its folkloric aspects such as *gotlandsdricka* (a malted beer) and *varpa* (a stone-throwing game reminiscent of boules). The ethnologist Owe Ronström has in a number of works studied the different ‘mindscapes’ of Gotlandic identity, especially focusing on their everyday use in society. In doing so, he has studied the present-day use of medieval history, something that has also been analysed in a couple of monographs about Visby’s annual Medieval Week. Carina Johansson has studied the iconic images of contemporary Visby, which concentrate

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11 For example, Baldacchino 2008; Baldacchino 2007.
12 For example, Fletcher 2008. For a critical view, which stresses the physical reality of islands that should not be shadowed, see Hay 2006, 29–30.
14 For example, Salomonsson 1979; Yttergren 2002.
15 Especially Ronström 2008.
16 Gustafsson 1998; C. Johansson 2000c; Gustafsson 2002a; Gustafsson 2002b; Sandström 2005.
entirely on its medieval heritage, leaving the vast majority of its people and history in shadow. There are even more studies on the effects of the discourses of the tourist industry—all serving to create a widespread image of Gotland as something exotic, where the peculiarities of the island’s nature and historical monuments are the most mentioned.

Thanks to especially Johansson and Ronström, the historiography and heritage construction of Visby is fairly well known. There are also a number of studies of individual historiographers, such as Per Arvid Säve and the like, who have been influential in creating a Gotlandic historical narrative. The island’s heritage institutions have also produced history about themselves.

The anthology *Kulturarvets betydelse* (2000) analyses present-day heritage projects and the general public’s reactions to them, covering the Medieval Week, the Bunge Museum, the Bläse Limeworks Museum, and other places. There are also some studies of the academic narratives about Gotland, where Nanoushka Myrberg criticizes on-going tendencies to overestimate the ‘uniqueness’ of Iron Age and medieval Gotland—a tendency that sits well with tourist interests, for which it is important to show a glorious and spectacular past. The uniqueness of Gotland rather lies in the fact that so much of its built heritage still survives, for example its medieval churches.

Thus, Gotland’s history-writing has only been partially analysed, and it is my purpose in this essay to shed further light on its general tenor.

Methods and primary sources

Gotland has a rich vein of history-writing—the most of all the Baltic islands, in fact. Thus, there are a vast amount of sources available for

17 C. Johansson 2009; see also C. Johansson 2006.
18 See Rossipal 1996 for a study of (predominantly mainland Swedish) informants’ associations with the word ‘Gotland’.
19 Gislestam 1975 (from Strelow to Carl Johan Bergman); see also Körner 1984, 10 ff.; and Nerman 1945 (concerning Gotland’s prehistory). Further, there are articles about individual writers: Gerentz 1989 on Richard Steffen; and Palmenfelt 1993 on Säve (with précis of Säve’s description of Gotland’s history, 53 ff.); see also Lindquist et al. 1992.
22 Myrberg 2008.
study, since the books and articles on Gotland’s history can be numbered in thousands. For centuries, there has been a separate history-writing tradition on or about Gotland. The main bulk of this history-writing has been produced since the late nineteenth century, a time that has seen a large number of monographs published on Gotland’s history. Dozens of these are general descriptions of Gotland’s general history, while a great deal has been written about more specific topics.

At Almedalsbiblioteket—Gotland’s main library—there is a particular collection of Gotlandica, that is to say literature from or about Gotland. A part of this, also called Gotlandica, is now a separate sub-database of the national Libris database, organised by Kungliga Biblioteket (the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm). I extracted all 4,253 titles that were part of the latter collection on a certain date: 20 March 2010. Even so, some cases were found where ‘obvious’ titles that should be part of the Libris Gotlandica had been left out.

That quantity of literature is easily sufficient to create a good picture of the writings on Gotlandic society and history. A large portion of the Libris Gotlandica consists of books and articles on everyday politics, healthcare, geology, and so on. At the beginning of my research, I planned to apply quantitative analyses to the different texts by marking them according to themes, chronological scope, and so forth. However, I realized that it would be too big a task for this relatively limited study. Still, the Gotlandica collection has proved an important step in narrowing down the potential source material.

The most important material for this study are the books about Gotland that deal with the island as a whole, and that are not limited to some specific subject or historical period. Even so, I have also used a lot of other texts as well, in order to complement the main source material. Even so, because of the limits of the study, there are important books and authors that are not represented, especially from the academic field of history-writing. Sometimes the Gotland books are explicitly historical in character, and, where not, they generally include chapters on Gotland’s history. There are different categories of Gotland books, some being

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23 Gislestam 1975; see also Sjöberg 1963, foreword.
24 Existing bibliographical works have also been helpful, for example, Bergh, Engeström & Rydberg 1991.
25 For example, works by the likes of the archeologist Nils Lithberg, the philologist Herbert Gustavson, the teacher and amateur historian Åke G. Sjöberg, and the church historian Sven-Erik Pernler.
schoolbooks, and others having been produced by learned societies or for the benefit of tourists. Some were written by academics, some by journalists, and still others by educationists. I will briefly present the major groups of authors and types of historical works concerning Gotland, and, in some cases, their relative chronological importance from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Gotland’s history-writing before the nineteenth century falls outside the scope of this study. However, some of those texts have been central to the island’s historical consciousness into our own day, since they are continuously quoted and discussed. That is definitely the case with Gutasaga—a short supplement in a fourteenth-century manuscript of Gutalagen, the medieval Gotland law book. Probably composed in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century, Gutasaga starts with a highly mythical description of the genesis of Gotland and its first inhabitants: Þieluar (in modern Swedish Tjelvar or Thjelvar) and his descendants. It continues that Gotland became overpopulated, whereupon a proportion of the people had to emigrate. Gutasaga also explains how Gotland became part of the Swedish kingdom, and how it was Christianized.  

In the sixteenth century, the Gotlandic priest Nicolaus Petreius (Niels Pedersen) wrote a Latin chronicle connecting the Goths of the Roman epoch with the Gutes of Gotland. Another work of history, the Cronica Guthilandorum or Den Guthilandiske cronica by Hans Nielsson Strelow, published in Danish in 1633, rapidly gained iconic status in Gotlandic historiography, not least concerning the medieval history of the island. Strelow today is generally considered to be highly tendentious, but he obviously used sources that have since disappeared. Another early text is Haquin Spegel’s Rudera Gothlandica (1683). The authors of the seventeenth century often relied on Gutasaga, which was regarded as an important state document. Among the Danes (Strelow) and the Swedes (Johan Hadorph), Þieluar was claimed to have come from Skåne and Östergötland respectively, in order to prove Gotland’s correct national affiliation.

26 For the text with commentary, see Lindkvist 1983. The name Gutasaga is not original; the philologist Carl Säve invented it in the nineteenth century. 
29 There were also attempts to identify ancient Atlantis with Gotland; see Sjöberg 1963, 7. 
30 Gardell 1987, 11–12.
The pioneers

The nineteenth century is sometimes called ‘the century of history’. The growth of nationalism and other territorial identity projects brought with them an interest in the origins of nations and ethnic communities, and the historical consciousness as a whole was part of a new framework of consciousness, a modern spirit which evolved in the wake of the American and French revolutions and the dissolution of the feudal system.

There was a wave of interest not only in the history of states and nations, but also in the ‘genuine’ popular culture. In the surviving remnants of an old, ‘real’ folk culture, untouched by modernity and the emerging industrial society, the true essence of the people was to be found. This romantic interest in ‘the people’ was in the beginning almost exclusively organized by educated and/or wealthy townspeople. Gotland was no exception.

In the nineteenth century, there were a number of domestic Gotlandic ‘amateur historians’ who were deeply engaged in the project of strengthening the historic consciousness of the island. In many ways, it was they who founded the modern tradition of Gotlandic history-writing. The foremost of these pioneers were all schoolteachers: Per Arvid Säve (1811–1877), Carl Johan Bergman (1817–1895), and Alfred Theodor Snöbohm (1819–1901). While Snöbohm was a rural elementary schoolteacher, Säve and Bergman both worked at the Visby gymnasium, whose staff in the mid nineteenth century played a crucial role in Gotland’s cultural life, far beyond the walls of the school.

Per Arvid Säve was raised in an educated family in Visby. His interests were cultural history and gathering various legends and myths in the countryside, many of which dealt with past event in Gotland’s history. Most of them were not published in his own lifetime, so they did not influence history-writing directly. However, Säve’s other writings had a

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31 M. Persson 2007, 95.
34 His brother, the philologist Carl Säve, was also an important figure in Gotland’s intellectual life. He was a professor at Uppsala University, and edited Gutalagen, published in 1859, coining the term Gutasaiga in the process (Gislestam 1992, 22; Palmenfelt 1993, 38 ff.).
vast influence from the very first. His many ‘sagas’ were mostly ethnological studies, sometimes using legends and stories he collected—and they mainly dealt with Gotland’s relatively recent past. The saga concept had a wide meaning for Säve, including tales from the past, his own memories, and information from the literature. The term saga was directly taken from the Norse tradition.\textsuperscript{36} They were largely addressed to an audience on the mainland—only ‘Hafvets och fiskarens sagor’ (1880) was first published on Gotland.\textsuperscript{37}

Among Carl Johan Bergman’s works on Gotland’s history, one can mention the short general history \textit{Gotlands geografi och historia i lätt- fattligt sammandrag} (1870); the compilation of shorter essays, \textit{Gotländska skildringar och minnen} (1882); and a book on Visby (1885). All these works were ran to several editions.

Alfred Theodor Snöbohm is best known for his general work about Gotland, \textit{Gotlands land och folk} (1871). It was one of the earliest books on Gotland’s entire history, ensuring him a high status in the historiographical tradition of Gotland ever since.

**The Friends of Gotland’s Antiquities**

Gotlands Fornvänner (the Friends of Gotland’s Antiquities) was an association founded in 1874 on the initiative of Per Arvid Säve and other influential local intellectuals. The following year, they founded a museum dedicated to Gotland’s cultural history, Gotlands fornsal (lit. the Hall of Gotland’s Antiquities), situated in the centre of Visby.\textsuperscript{38} Gotlands fornsal is today Gotlands Museum, the official regional museum. The initiative and ideas behind it were typical of the age, when the rise of regional museums and a folk revival were seen in Sweden as elsewhere.\textsuperscript{39}

Säve wanted the museum to be a folkloric collection of the Gotlander’s culture. However, in the early twentieth century, the centre of gravity in the activities of Gotlands fornsal shifted to the prehistoric and medieval

\textsuperscript{36} Nyman 1992, 33.
\textsuperscript{37} English translations of the titles of published works are given in the list of works cited. Säve’s sagas were \textit{Skogens sagor} (1866), \textit{Strandens sagor} (1873), \textit{Handelns och näringarnas sagor} (1876, partly published), \textit{Åkersn sagor} (1876), \textit{Gutarnas forn- och framtidssaga} (1878), \textit{Hafvets och fiskarens sagor} (1880), \textit{Jaktens sagor} (1940) (Palmenfelt 1992b; Palmenfelt 1993, 49–50).
\textsuperscript{38} Palmenfelt 1993, 71; <http://www.gotlandsmuseum.se/om-museet>.
\textsuperscript{39} Salomonsson 1992; Nyman 1992.
periods. In 1910, Gotlands Fornvänner was transformed into a fornminnes-
förening (antiquarian society)—in order to get government funding it was
obliged to be responsible for Gotland’s antiquities. A number of sites and
buildings were donated to Gotlands fornsal, and Gotlands Fornvänner
today still owns a large number of buildings all over the island. A great
many excavations around Visby also highlighted the emphasis on older
history.\footnote{Föreningen Gotlands fornvänners fastigheter’ 1998; Mattias Legnér, lecture given
to the Per Årvid Säve-symposiet at Gotlands museum, 28 September 2011.} Since 1929, the Friends of Gotland’s Antiquities have published
an influential annual journal, Gotländskt Arkiv (‘Gotlandic Archive’),
which is partly learned, partly popular in character. Articles on archaeology
are especially common.

In many ways, the nineteenth-century pioneers created what one
might call a dominant Gotlandic historiography that has survived to
today, albeit with many internal differences and contradictions. It has
been reproduced in various regional books and articles, by prominent
history-producing institutions as well as by independent actors, firmly in
the grip of the dominant discourse or ideology. There are some recurrent
topics in the island’s regional history-writing. From the very start there
has been a division between an internal, ‘agrarian’ discourse, focusing on
the local cultural history of later centuries, and an externally oriented
‘medieval’ narrative, concentrating on the island’s more distant glory
days. It is these details that I will now unravel.

The local heritage movement

As we have seen, ‘pioneers’ such as Säve and Bergman largely concen-
trated their efforts on Gotland’s cultural history, rooted in a Romantic
notion of the countryside and its people. Folk culture was vanishing, and
the feeling was that it had to be saved, at least by identifying what still
remained and getting it down on paper.

In the late nineteenth century, a great many people joined in the work
of this folk revival, intent on saving and cultivating the old ways. For
example, Mathias Klintberg (1847–1932), a teacher at Visby Gymnasium,
was passionately interested in Gotlandic peasant culture, and was a keen
collector of local dialects. Among his works we find Spridda drag ur den
gotländska allmogens lif (1914).\footnote{Klintberg 1914; see also the posthumous Klintberg & Hedin 1983.}
A central figure in this was Theodor Erlandsson (1869–1953), an elementary schoolteacher. He has been called ‘Gotland’s Hazelius’, after the Swedish folklorist Arthur Hazelius, who founded Skansen, Stockholm’s famous outdoor museum, in 1891. Erlandsson set up something similar, an open-air history museum in Bunge in the north-east of the island, in 1907. At the same time, the focus of Gotlands fornsal’s activities shifted to the Middle Ages, as we have seen. Thus, some kind of a division of labour was created between Gotlands fornsal and initiatives such as Erlandsson’s, which were predominantly organized in the countryside.

Erlandsson also wrote a number of books on various aspects of Gotlandic folklore, not least the three volumes with the typical title *En döende kultur: bilder ur gammalt gotländskt allmogeliv* (1923–46). Furthermore, he collected what could be called contemporary folklore, for example in a 1928 book of stories about Gotlanders who had left the island to go to sea or to countries far away. Last but not least, Erlandsson also wrote a general history of Gotland for the young, *Gotland, dess historia och geografi i lättfattligt sammandrag för fosteröns barn och ungdom* (1900).

In the same epoch, the island’s local heritage movement was established. The two first local heritage organizations were founded in 1918, and in 1936, Gotlands Hembygdsförbund (the Gotland Heritage Association) was founded. The latter today is an umbrella organization for 73 local heritage associations and 31 other associations on the island. From 1979, it has issued the journal *Från Gutabygd* (‘From Guteland’).

The local heritage movement is responsible for a vast amount of local history-writing, but typically about a certain parish or village. There are also many amateur historians writing this kind of history, for which there is a flourishing market on Gotland, as well as in the rest of Sweden.

**Professional historians**

The scholarly history-writing about Gotland—long produced on the mainland of Sweden—was not slow to single out the island as unique. For example, in the historian Hans Hildebrand’s *Svenska folket under hednatiden* (1866, 2nd edn. 1872), there was a specific chapter covering Gotland.

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42 Gislestam 1996.
43 Erlandsson 1923; Erlandsson 1935; Erlandsson 1946.
44 Erlandsson 1928. Another work by Erlandsson was the historical novel *Farman-nasagor* about Gotland in the Middle Ages (Erlandsson 1949).
45 Norrby 1986; <http://www.hembygd.se/gotland>.
In the twentieth century, Swedish archaeological research, conducted by mainland institutions such as the universities of Uppsala and Stockholm, used Gotland more than any other Swedish region as a research field. To some extent, this was also the case with studies of medieval art and architecture, thanks to Gotland’s rich built heritage, especially its churches. Out of the 95 churches on the island in the keeping of the Church of Sweden, 92 are medieval.\textsuperscript{46} There are many reasons for this interest in Gotland, but an obvious case is the fact that the historic monuments on the island have been much better preserved than on the mainland (partly thanks to long periods of economic stagnation and a fairly low increase in population).\textsuperscript{47}

Many of the prominent scholars who have worked on Gotland’s history have been archaeologists, including Birger Nerman (1888–1971), John Nihlén (1901–1983), and Mårten Stenberger (1898–1973), or medieval historians such as Hugo Yrwing (1908–2002). There have also been many art historians, especially those specializing in the Middle Ages, for example Johnny Roosval (1879–1965) and Bengt G. Söderberg (1905–1985). Many of the academic researchers also worked up general histories of Gotland; Söderberg wrote many books on Gotland’s history, for example.

At least in the beginning, most of the academics who specialized in Gotland were born and raised on the mainland. Some of them worked for a time on Gotland, for example at Gotlands fornsal in the case of Stenberger (1934–45), or bought holiday homes on the island, as Roosval did.\textsuperscript{48} Some were born Gotlanders, but moved to the mainland in order to get an academic position, while maintaining their research interests in their native island; early examples are Carl Säve (1812–1876), a professor in Uppsala, and Söderberg, who got his doctoral degree in Stockholm.

With time, native Gotlanders became more prominent among the experts on the island.\textsuperscript{49} In later years it has become possible to find work as a researcher on the island: the department of archaeology at Stockholm University had a branch in Visby, and in 1998 the independent Högskolan på Gotland (Gotland University College) was founded, although in 2013

\textsuperscript{46} Lagerløf et al. 1971, 16.
\textsuperscript{48} The so-called Villa Muramaris in Visby: <http://www.muramaris.se>.
\textsuperscript{49} For example, the historians Carl Johan Gardell and Jens Lerbom and the ethnologists Ulf Palmenfelt and Owe Ronström.
it lost its independence, and as Campus Gotland became part of Uppsala University.

**Popular works**

In the late nineteenth century, tourists began flooding to Gotland. That was helped by initiatives mainly by Visby traders all of whom were members of the influential society De Badande Vännerna (DBW, ‘The Bathing Friends’), founded in 1814. DBW had organized schools, a bank, and a botanical garden in Visby, and not least, has been an arena for networking among men of economic or cultural influence on the island. That there was an organized ferry service between Gotland and the mainland from the 1860s was, of course, an important requisite for this development. In the tourist discourse, Gotland, and especially Visby, was depicted in exotic terms. Its medieval ruins and historic monuments were no longer considered an environmental problem, but instead something to romanticize and preserve. In the 1920s and 1930s, tourism was given another boost, partly on the initiative of the shipping company, Gotlandsbolaget, and its long-time director Carl Ekman, or ‘Gotlandskungen’, ‘The King of Gotland’. The Swedes—who had more leisure time, and by the 1930s a fortnight’s holiday by law—were to get to know Gotland. Roses were planted in the old town of Visby to make it more picturesque. The tourist posters displayed the slogan that would become so well known: Visby was the ‘city of roses and ruins’.

The tourist industry had been organized by a variety of associations. In 1896, Gotlands turistförening (Gotland’s Tourist Association) was founded. Today it continues to publish brochures and even books on Gotland’s history. Some have been quite ‘touristic’, with extensive advice on accommodation and eating, while others are more standard textbooks on Gotland’s nature, culture, and history, such as historian Carl Johan Gardell’s *Gotlands historia i fickformat* (1987).

* Svenska Turistföreningen (STF, the Swedish Touring Club), founded in 1885, has also promoted Gotland’s tourism and history with different types of texts, publishing yearbooks about the island (1940 and 1966), as

53 Gardell 1987; for the GTF, see *Gotlands turistförening 75 år* (1971).
well as many travel books that have run to several editions. The latter were largely written by two of the leading figures of Gotland’s modern history-writing tradition: Söderberg and the artist Maj Wennerdahl (b. 1939). Among their products are general introductions, as well as shorter tourist guides and more essayistic books.\(^{54}\)

Guidebooks have been published by many different bodies: national and Gotland tourist associations, conservation authorities, the municipalities, and so on. Another one of Söderberg’s books, Strövtåg i Gotlands historia (1971), published by the local publishing company Gotlandskonst, is typical of the genre. It presents the history of Gotland in a geographical disposition, dealing with events in the past in different parts of the island, brought together as a route for the tourist to follow.\(^{55}\)

There have also been books for visitors written by individuals.\(^{56}\) Some of these Gotland books are of a more personal character, being largely essays such as Lisbeth Borger-Bendegard’s Kära Gotland! En personlig kärleksförklaring (1993).\(^{57}\) A related category are the coffee-table books, which primarily consist of pictures and photographs, generally of ‘typically’ Gotlandic things such as rauks (sea stacks), churches, and limekilns.\(^{58}\) Some of the older ones were published as part of larger national series. The publishing company Allhem in Malmö, for example, produced a number of folio-sized books on different Swedish provinces, presenting their history in pictures. Gotland got its book in 1959: Gotland – ett bildverk with an accompanying text by Söderberg.\(^{59}\) Another phenomenon in the mid twentieth century was the ‘book film’, a large picture book presented in strict chronological order like pages in a newspaper, mostly covering themes such as the labour movement and the temperance movement, and Gotland’s recent history got its share in Från fars och farfars tid: en bokfilm om gutarnas ö (1959) and Från fars och min tid: en bokfilm om Gotland 1915–1970 (1972).\(^{60}\)

\(^{54}\) For a general introduction, see B. Söderberg 1948. For brief tourist guides, see Nihlén 1930; B. Söderberg 1949; Hamberg 1970. For collections of essays, see B. Söderberg 1975; Wennerdahl 1985.

\(^{55}\) B. Söderberg 1971.

\(^{56}\) For example, Carlén 1862.

\(^{57}\) See also Lundqvist & Lundqvist 1972.

\(^{58}\) For example, Laago & Sjöstrand 1995.


\(^{60}\) Från fars och farfars tid: en bokfilm om gutarnas ö (1959); Från fars och min tid: en bokfilm om Gotland 1915–1970 (1972).
Yet another genre is what might be called ‘saga books’. They are collections of essays that deal with myths and stories—the ‘sagas’. Among them, real historical events are mixed with legends—from Gutasaga to the sort Per Arvid Säve collected in the nineteenth century. An early example is Bergman’s Gotländska skildringar och minnen (1882), and later ones are Nihlén’s Sagornas ö: Sägner och sagor från Gotland (1928), as well as two subsequent books in the same series, Söderberg’s Gotlands sällsamheter – sagor och sannsagor från gutarnas ö (1975) and Wennerdahl’s Sällsamheter på Gotland (1985).

In recent decades, national popular education societies and local heritage associations have issued a large number of books concerned with different provinces. Among them, of course, are some covering Gotland. The largest popular education organization, Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF, the Workers’ Educational Association), has published three different books on Gotland, all written by amateurs, through its publishing company Brevskolan (later Bilda). The first one was the aptly named Gotland (1981), written by Janne Werkelin (b. 1948). Ulf Bergqvist and Maj Wennerdahl wrote Gotland: den förhäxade ön (1987) where the latter wrote the sections on Gotland’s history. Wennerdahl’s portions of that book were the basis for the third book, again entitled Gotland (2001).61

Other organizations have contributed to the list of publications. Gotland (1981) by the journalist Stig Arb (1928–2003) was part of a series of province books produced by Riksförbundet för hembygdsvård (the national association for the preservation of the local heritage movement),62 and Gotland – navet i havet (1994) by Stig Jonsson (1927–2010)—also a journalist and a local politician—was said to have been written at the behest of ‘various educational organizations’.63

The dividing line between the different types of author and entity as I have described them here is only for the sake of discussion. In reality, it was not that strict. Many academics, Nihlén, Roosval, and Söderberg among them, wrote popular histories of the island. There are also some general but somewhat more academic works, such as the anthologies Historia kring Gotland (1963) and Gutar och vikingar (1983). The latter was explicitly about the Viking Age, but the former, typically, was about

63 S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 5 (‘på uppmaning av olika studieorganisationer’).
the Middle Ages, even though the title gives the impression that it is a general history.

Last but not least, the largest history work ever published about Gotland was issued in 1945, celebrating the third centenary of Sweden’s possession of the island: the two-volume *Boken om Gotland*, with over 1,100 pages and almost 50 articles by the leading experts of the day about Gotland’s history and contemporary society. The archaeologist Mårten Stenberger covered Gotland’s prehistory, and scholars such as Sture Bolin, Elias Wessén, Sune Lindqvist, and Adolf Schück other aspects of Gotland’s oldest past. In the second volume, the bulk of authors were amateurs—mainly teachers. Typically, only 2 of the 32 authors were women (the historian Toni Schmid on monasteries, and Ulla Melin on Gotland’s crafts).

Schoolbooks

There are also a number of school textbooks on Gotland’s history. Erlandsson’s *Gotland, dess historia och geografi* (1900), mentioned earlier, was followed by four further editions, the last in 1946. Another, *Gotland: läsebok för skola och hem*, came in 1924, edited by Johannes Linnman. Intended to be read ‘in the home’, it was a compilation of shorter essays, poems, and accounts of the island’s history and nature. In the later twentieth century, more schoolbooks followed. In the 1990s, Lars Olsson (b. 1933) and Roger Öhrman (b. 1937) wrote *Gotland: förr och nu* (1993, 2nd edn. 1996), the latter being responsible for the historical sections. At the same time, Öhrman was also writing an ambitious history book about Gotland, *Vägen till Gotlands historia* (1994, ‘The road to Gotland’s history’), published by Gotlands Fornvänner in collaboration with a local publishing company that specializes in school textbooks. Öhrman had earlier written about Gotland’s history in a brief essay about Visby, and a shorter schoolbook in the 1980s. Otherwise, he has written a great deal about local Gotlandic history, especially a series of books about the area around Slite in the north-east of the island. Olsson, meanwhile, has

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64 The book was published in an Uppsala publishing house’s Hembygdsböckerna series, which covered most of the Swedish historic provinces (landskap), issued in 1918–48.
65 Uhr 1957.
66 Öhrman 1994; Olsson & Öhrman 1996.
written another textbook on Gotland, *Efter Tjelvar* (2003), intended for young schoolchildren.\(^{68}\)

**Gotlanders or mainlanders**

What differences have existed between the descriptions written by authors based on Gotland, and those written on the mainland in Swedish nation-state context? Is it at all possible to make such a distinction? Many prominent writers down the years have been scholars who themselves come from the mainland, while native Gotland ‘patriots’, such as Per Arvid Säve, by studying at mainland universities have been educated into a shared National Romantic tradition, which they later adapted to conditions as they found them on their home island.

The academic or literary histories, produced by scholars and museum professionals, were often written by mainlanders, even though they frequently had some form of anchoring on Gotland by residence or work. Among the non-academics, their Gotland origins played a larger part. It would be difficult to distinguish the historiography between the one produced by mainlanders and the one written by Gotlanders. Thus, there is no clear border between local Gotlandic history-writing and mainland history-writing about the island.

A special category among the Gotland authors are the *sommar-gotlänninger* or ‘summer Gotlanders’, a term used for those mainland Swedes who spend time on Gotland (mainly in the summer), having bought houses there.\(^ {69}\) They are much in evidence in Visby as well as in the countryside. The most famed summer Gotlanders were Olof Palme and Ingmar Bergman, who both had houses on Fårö.\(^ {70}\) Among the Gotland authors, we have already noted the example of Johnny Roosval, and later examples are Stig Arb (1928–2003) and the journalist Lisbeth Borger-Bendegard.\(^ {71}\)

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\(^{68}\) L. Olsson 2003a, with four accompanying booklets covering Visby and different parts of the island (L. Olsson 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2003e).

\(^{69}\) The term has 6,310 Google hits (22 November 2011). The Öland equivalent, ‘*sommarölänninng*’, with 8,190 hits, is even more common, while similar terms include ‘*sommarskåning*’ (180 hits), ‘*sommaruppläänning*’ (0), ‘*sommarsörmläänning*’ (5), ‘*sommarstockholmare*’ (86), ‘*sommarjämte*’ (9), ‘*sommarvärmläänning*’ (30), ‘*sommarvästgöte*’ (0), ‘*sommarhällänning*’ (341), ‘*sommarsmåläänning*’ (8), and ‘*sommarspanjo*’ (2).

\(^{70}\) Other famous summer Gotlanders include the politician Ingvar Carlsson.

\(^{71}\) Arb 1981, preface; Borger-Bendegard 1993.
As Owe Ronström pointed out, however, the distinction between mainlanders and Gotlanders is an important factor in Gotland’s regional consciousness and self-image. The fact that the island’s ruling elite when it comes to industry and government has long consisted of incomers has added to the common impression that Gotland is somewhat inferior. Leif Yttergren has also noted that Gotland’s regional identity is almost solely centred on cultural concerns, not political ones, which makes it very different to, say, Åland. Yttergren finds one reason for this in the fact that the separate Gotlandic identity is strongest in the countryside, which in turn has been weak in political and economic matters.

Gotland history-writing analysed

I will begin the analysis of the treatment of the island’s past in Gotland publications by sorting out the main narratives, of which there are two principle strands: Gotland’s medieval glory and, mainly concerning more recent centuries, its cultural history.

In many of the Gotland history books, there is a noticeable quantitative predominance of older history, especially the Iron Age (c.500 BC–AD 1050) and the Middle Ages (c.1050–1520) see Appendix 1, which gives the number of pages of history of various epochs in fifteen typical Gotland books). This is what I would term the medieval narrative, which is most pronounced when Gotland is presented to a wider readership, whether in mainland Sweden or abroad. It amounts to the official historiography. Typical examples are the works of Bengt G. Söderberg, whose books have a marked concentration on the Middle Ages. For him, the period before 1361 was the obvious ‘age of greatness’ for Gotland. He pointed out that it was its medieval history that attracted tourists to the island in the mid twentieth century.

One of the reasons for this was that a large proportion of the academic experts on Gotland were archaeologists. Medieval art history is another such field with a concentration of specialist expertise, partly explaining why the ‘official history’ of Gotland in many respects is centred on

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72 Ronström 2008, 176 ff.
74 See also Yttergren 2002, 29; Bohman 1990, 187.
75 B. Söderberg 1949, 40 (‘Storhetstiden’), 93–4.
prehistory and the Middle Ages. The largest number of scholars and experts specialize in those areas.

The oldest history books from the nineteenth century, such as those by Snöbohm and Bergman, were rather detailed when it came to the ‘dark’ period of Gotland’s history—that is between 1361 and 1645. However, this cannot in any way be explained as reflecting a more positive view of the period. Instead, a more probable explanation is that those history books to a large extent leaned on known sources and historical accounts, and for the late Middle Ages and the early modern period there were simply more facts known. Not least, there were Strelow’s often-cited seventeenth-century histories, which were very detailed about these epochs. Later on, knowledge of the history of the earlier periods has increased, thanks to the voluminous archaeological research on the island.

A more ‘indigenous’ tradition in Gotlandic history-writing mostly emanated from the folklore movement. There, the cultural history of the island stands in focus, especially the Gotland of peasants in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. I would call this the folklore narrative.

Between the medieval and folklore narratives stands a ‘modernist’ narrative, which is more concerned with the modern age, but still deals extensively with social and political matters. It is not specifically folklore-oriented. The more modern the history, the more likely it will cover subjects such as the industrialization of Gotland, or migrations within Gotland, immigration, emigration, and the like. Such topics might be most interesting for those already ‘inside’, but apparently are not considered something for tourists or outsiders, being thought typical for any province or local community in Sweden or elsewhere. It does not distinguish Gotland from the rest.

This modernist stream of narratives is thus more focused on other areas of Gotland’s history, and more targeted at a Gotland audience. Of the voluminous Boken om Gotland (1945), with the break between its volumes falling in 1645, the second volume which covers the period 1645–1945 is the longer of the two. Normally that would be the case if we were looking at a national Swedish history, or even other provinces’ histories. The first volume, ending in 1645, also deals to a relatively large extent with topics such as the peasants’ history and internal territorial divisions, more typical of traditional local history.\(^\text{76}\)

\(^{76}\) Steffen 1945a; Berg 1945; Svahnström 1945.
Otherwise, an emphasis on more recent periods of history is obvious in schoolbooks and other books addressed to a local audience, examples being Roger Öhrman’s *Vägen till Gotlands historia* (1994) and Stig Jonsson’s *Gotland – havet i havet* (1994). The former includes a longish section on modern society and history, with topics such as the demographic development of the twentieth century and modern political history. Meanwhile, as we will see, while ‘indigenous’ Gotlandic history-writing has had much to say about recent centuries in the island’s development, the ‘external’ or tourist discourse, in focusing on prehistory and the Middle Ages, is often sketchy when it comes to later periods.

The medieval and folklore narratives, as well as the alternative modernist narrative focusing on modern Gotland, should be seen as centres of gravity; there are few books that exclusively belong to this or that narrative. For example, the medieval and folklore narratives can co-exist in the same book, even if one of them usually is the stronger. In the following, I will describe the main subjects in Gotlandic history-writing. I have divided the material chronologically, so that texts from the period that ended in the 1970s are considered first, followed by developments in history-writing from the 1970s to the present day, the reason for this choice of watershed being that until the 1970s there was a ‘classic’ Gotlandic history-writing, which is fairly easy to summarize despite its many guises, but after that, the situation became a little more complex and history-writing more diverse. Within these two main chronological sections, I first deal with the main topics of the medieval narrative, and then with the ways other aspects of Gotland’s past have been treated.

The medieval narrative, c.1850–1975

An important element in chronological narratives is the attempt to establish origins. Origins can be of different kinds: the origins of the country itself, the origins of a certain cultural trait, or the origins of its people. This is central to most history-writing when it comes to identity production, and it is of course also the case with Gotland.77

77 Öhrman 1994; S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 92–6; see also Uhr 1957, for although it covers the standard ground, with its emphasis on Gotland’s long history and an extended description of Visby, modern Gotland with its agriculture and industry dominates the text.

78 Edquist 2009, 28–31 and literature cited there.
The impact of Gutasaga

The fact that, in Gutasaga, Gotland has its own origin myth dating from the Middle Ages—the only Swedish province to do so—has unsurprisingly facilitated the development of a Gotlandic historical consciousness in modern times. Several elements in Gutasaga have been central in the narrative of Gotland’s history up to the present day—despite the fact that its content was certainly suited to the need in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to emphasize Gotland’s relative independence from the Swedish kingdom. Regardless of whether the elements in the story were taken as true or not, they have at least been discussed. This particularly applies to the treaty with the Swedes and the sections on Christianity. The fact that there are very few written sources for Gotland’s history before the twelfth century has obviously made Gutasaga all the more important.

Gutasaga tells how the first humans came to the island, which until then sank into the sea by day and rose out of it by night. First came Þieluar (Tjalvar), whose son Haþbi (Havde) and his wife Huita Stierna (Vita-stjerna) were the ancestors of the Gutes. The couple's sons Guti (Gute), Graipr (Graip), and Gunfiaun (Gunnfjaun) partitioned the island between themselves. Some time after that, the island became overpopulated, at which point every third Gute, chosen by lot, was forced to emigrate. They first resisted, barricading themselves in Torsborg—usually identified with the Iron Age fortress of Torsburgen. After that, they went to Fårö, and from there to Hiiumaa, up the River Daugava, and so to Greece (Byzantium).

In the nineteenth century, Gutasaga was still being treated as an accurate source regarding Þieluar and his descendants. In Alfred Theodor Snöbohm’s Gotlands land och folk (1871), they were described as the very first Gotlanders. They were supposed to have come from the south along with the Geats (götarna, who were at that time seen as equating to the Goths, goterna) in the dim and distant past.79

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, source criticism led to a more jaundiced view of these strongly mythical elements in the opening of Gutasaga. It was claimed that there was perhaps a glimpse of historical truth in the narrative of emigration in Gutasaga, a memory of the Gutes’

79 Snöbohm 1871, 73–8; see also Säve & Bergman 1858, 3; Carlén 1862, 40; Bergman 1870, 53–4. At the same time, Odin was still generally viewed as a historical king of Sweden (Edquist 2009, 132).
participation in the great migrations. However, many authors continued to use the origin story in *Gutasaga* for its educational value. In Carl Johan Bergman’s *Gotländska skildringar och minnen* (1882), it was stressed that Þieluar symbolized hard work, and that the account of the treaty between Gotland and the Swedes called to mind the island’s bonds with the rest of Sweden. Another example is Theodor Erlandsson’s *Gotland – dess historia och geografi för fosteröns barn och ungdom* (1900), where ‘real’ history was interwoven with stories from *Gutasaga*, which were printed in a different font size and style.

Well into the twentieth century, some researchers tried to rehabilitate *Gutasaga* as a historical source, especially concerning later developments such as the migration myth. But above all, the elements of *Gutasaga* have continued to be widely used, especially in more essayistic forms of history-writing, as a form of aesthetic decoration. An example is the archaeologist Mårten Stenberger’s account of the island’s prehistory in the book on Gotland by the Swedish Tourist Association (STF) in 1940. There, he finished his account of the first inhabitants of the island after the ice melted with the words: ‘Thjelvar [Þieluar] must have been that old.’ It was also not surprising that the extensive coffee-table book *Gotland – ett bildverk* (1959) began with *Gutasaga* in its entirety. In the accompanying text by Bengt G. Söderberg, *Gutasaga* was repeatedly cited as a kind of interesting spice. It has a particularly prominent place in the ‘saga’ books, being the oldest of the Gotlandic legends.

**Ethnic origins**

What then of the ethnic origins of the present-day Gotlandic population—the Gutes? In the nineteenth century, in Sweden as in most other European countries, there was a growing tendency to emphasize that most Europeans were of the Indo-European family of peoples, originally sharing the same language, religion, and race. The Indo-Europeans—with subgroups such as the Latin peoples, the Greeks, the Slavs, the Celts, and

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80 Bergman/Rosman 1898, preface, v, 85–6 (in this case, Rosman’s posthumous edition, which claimed that the parts on the oldest history had been totally rewritten).
81 Bergman 1882, 1–9.
82 Erlandsson 1900, 5 ff.; Erlandsson 1920.
83 Stenberger 1940, 55 (‘Så gammal måste Thjelvar vara’).
84 *Gotland – ett bildverk* (1959), 7–10, 90, 131–2; see also, for example, B. Söderberg 1949, 8 ff.; Uhr 1957, 6.
85 B. Söderberg 1975, 6 ff.
the Germanic peoples—were supposed to have immigrated to Europe long before the birth of Christ. This was also the time when the prehistoric epoch was divided into the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, and the transitions between these periods were long explained by population changes.\(^\text{86}\)

By the mid nineteenth century, this explanation of ancient history was on the point of being generally accepted among educated people. One of its chief representatives in Sweden, Hans Hildebrand, stated that the theory of immigration in Gutasaga was mythical and not true, but he also claimed that the Gutes (gutarna) were a Germanic people distinct from the Geats (götarna) and Swedes (svearna) on the mainland.\(^\text{87}\) Thus, it was only natural that this form of explanation also informed contemporary history-writing by those based on Gotland. In Snöbohm’s Gotlands land och folk (1871), the difference is made between Geatic (Götiska) and Germanic (Germaniska) peoples. However, they were all members of a large ‘Indo-Germanic … ur-tribe’, who celebrated fire, just as Gutes in later periods did. The Gutes—a specific tribe among the Geats—were said to have immigrated from the south a few centuries before Christ. In Bergman’s Gotlands geografi och historia i lättfattligt sammandrag (1870), the Germanic Gutes (Gutarna) were claimed to have entered Gotland at roughly the same time as its tribesmen, the Geats (Göterna), immigrated to the southern part of mainland Sweden. They both came from the Black Sea, although it was hard to tell when.\(^\text{88}\)

Per Arvid Säve claimed that the Gutes (gutarna) came to Gotland with the Iron Age; they pushed aside the more raw and uncivilized tribes of the Stone and Bronze Ages. He depicted the Gutes in a way typical of the time, in a Social Darwinist, highly ethnocentric manner with racist overtones: ‘the blue-eyed and fair-haired Gutes of Geatic kin, who were more cultivated, used tools of bronze, iron, etc.’\(^\text{89}\) Erlandsson claimed in 1900 that the Germanic Gutes had moved to Gotland at the beginning of the Iron Age, around the beginning of our era.\(^\text{90}\)

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\(^{86}\) Edquist 2012.

\(^{87}\) Hildebrand 1872, 195, 197; for ethnicity, see also Hildebrand 1866, 69–70.

\(^{88}\) Snöbohm 1871, 76 ff., quote at 78 (‘Indo-germaniska … urstam’); Bergman 1870, 53–4.

\(^{89}\) Säve 1979c (1880), 7–8, 16 (‘de blåögda ljushåriga gutarna av götisk folkätt, vilka hade högre odling, brukade don av brons, järn o.s.v.’); Säve 1980 (1876), 35 ff.; Säve 1983, 12; see also Palmefelt 1993, 53 ff.

\(^{90}\) See, for example, Erlandsson 1900, 5; Erlandsson 1920, 5.
There were also supposed to have been migrations in the opposite direction. Even as late as the mid twentieth century, researchers such as Söderberg and Stenberger claimed that the Goths had emigrated from Scandinavia—probably including Gotland—towards the Black Sea in the first centuries of our era.  

Trading on the age of greatness

The golden age of Gotland’s past has long been placed in the Middle Ages, when the island was said to have been a largely independent state that controlled the Baltic trade, bringing riches to the island, and not least enabling Visby to be a wealthy centre of commerce. The medieval paradigm of Gotlandic history-writing means that these topics dominate representations of the past. Sometimes the history-writing about Gotland’s Middle Ages was rather ‘dry’ and antiquarian in character, but often it had an explicit purpose: to let the Gotland of today bask in its glorious past.

‘Gotland’s age of greatness’ was the name given to the two centuries after the introduction of Christianity in Alfred Theodor Snöbohm’s Gotlands land och folk (1871). That was also a ‘golden age’, when the country ‘enjoyed the blessings of peace and liberty’. Snöbohm emphasized, however, that Gutasaga spoke of Gutnish (related to the prehistoric and medieval Gutes) commercial expeditions back in pagan times, stretching back to the days when the ‘Geatic tribes’ had migrated to the north. Snöbohm claimed that there was an extraordinary thirst for freedom on Gotland, which he connected with its position in the middle of the sea and the tradition of trading voyages:

The sea creates daring and freedom-loving men, for the open sea is the home of the brave and free. This love of the open sea with its fresh life of adventure has in the Gutnish people preserved that strong love of freedom and independence, which has made the

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91 Stenberger 1940, 64 ff.; Stenberger 1945b, 79; B. Söderberg 1949, 26.
92 For example, Lindström 1892 and 1895, works by an amateur historian (a retired paleontologist) with no evident interest in conjuring up character or interest.
93 Snöbohm 1871, 105 (ch. 5) (‘Gotlands storhetstid’, ‘guldålder’, ‘njöt fredens och frihetens välsignelser’).
94 Snöbohm 1871, 91 (‘Götiska stammar’).
independent Gutnish yeomen, the proud Gutnish Vikings—the free sons of the sea—unwilling to submit to the will of a lord.\textsuperscript{95}

Even though the Gotlanders had signed a treaty with the Swedish kingdom, according to \textit{Gutasaga}, Gotland remained virtually independent until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Gotlandic histories regularly stress this independence and its importance for Gotland’s central position in the medieval Baltic. This narrative has been reproduced in most of the history-writing, with the exception of more recent academic studies, which often question older romanticizing ideas.

The medieval glory of Gotland can be said to have rested on two pillars: economic conditions, and socio-political circumstances. Gotland was not only a centre of trade, making the island rich; it was an independent, peasant-dominated republic. These two topics have been combined in various ways. Nineteenth-century writers were not slow to emphasize the importance of trade in the history of Gotland—striking, when one considers that this was a time when state and politics otherwise dominated history-writing. The island was then a waypoint on the trade route between East and West, Carl Johan Bergman stressed in 1858.\textsuperscript{96} This explanation was also the norm in mainland historiography of the time: Hans Hildebrand, for example, wrote in 1872 that Gotland had been the mercantile centre of the Nordic countries long before the Viking Age.\textsuperscript{97} Theodor Erlandsson also stressed that the Gutes very early on had gathered ‘extraordinary riches’ and came in contact with the Romans, Greeks, and Arabs—more or less by themselves, since they were de facto independent from the Swedes. And the highlight was the period 1000–1361: ‘The age of greatness’.\textsuperscript{98} Similar formulations about Gotland as a major hub of Baltic trade were the rule during the early twentieth century too.\textsuperscript{99} Usually said to span roughly the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, many also argued that Gotland took a leading role in the region in the

\textsuperscript{95} Snöbohm 1871, 91 (‘Hafvet uppmamar djerfva och frihetsälskande män, ty det fria hafvet är de tappres och fries hem. Det har varit denna kärlek till det fria hafvet med dess friska äventyrarelif, som hos Gutafolket underhållit den starka kärlek till frihet och oberoende, som vållat att de sjelfständige gutniske odalmännen, de stolte gutniske vikingarne – hafvets fria söner – ej velat underkasta sig en herrskares vilja’).

\textsuperscript{96} Säve & Bergman 1858, 2–3; see also Bergman 1870, 56–7.

\textsuperscript{97} Hildebrand 1872, 195, 197.

\textsuperscript{98} Erlandsson 1900, 5–6 (‘enastående rikedom’, 5), 11 (‘Storhetstiden’); Erlandsson 1920, 5–6, 12.

\textsuperscript{99} Bergman/Rosman 1898, 92; Roosval 1926, 8
Viking Age or even earlier. For example, when the art historian Johnny Roosval wrote a tourist guide to Gotland’s historic remains, published in 1926, he said that in the later Iron Age Gotland had played the leading part ‘in the all-Nordic culture’.100

In the inter-war period, there was an increasing interest in the remains of what was considered to be Gutnish equivalents to other trading towns around the Baltic, such as Birka, Hedeby, Wolin, and Truso. At Västergarn, money was given in 1932 by Gotlandsfonden (a foundation started in 1925 using Wilhelmina von Hallwyl’s donation to Gotlands Fornvänner to strengthen Gotland’s heritage) for excavations in the area, which were resumed later in the twentieth century.101

The image of this golden age was not unambiguous, however. Per Arvid Säve’s description of these times almost amounts to alternative history-writing. The age was entirely bloody and dark, he wrote. *Strandens sagor* (1873) describes Gotland’s relations with surrounding societies as a catalogue of violence, brutality, and war, stretching well into Säve’s own age: he uses examples from the Viking Age, the Middle Ages, and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gotland’s neighbours were brutish, but the Gutes themselves were no better. Their culture was shaped by the violent peoples from the far shores of the Baltic, but also by the sea itself—‘their mother, the stormy sea’.102 This had turned the Gutes into ‘a true sea people’; often every second farmer son went to sea, fishing or setting sail for distant parts.103 They ruthlessly robbed and looted visiting seamen or ships that ran aground, showing no mercy. Time itself was the explanatory factor for Säve, who used the term ‘the ages of darkness’.104 The ‘old times’ were ‘evil times’, with no society to speak of and a great deal more wilderness.105 In his final words, though, Säve underlined that these dark times had been replaced with something

100 Roosval 1926, 8 (‘i den all-nordiska kulturen’).
101 <http://www.gotlandsfonden.se/>; Floderus 1934; Nerman 1934; Lamm 1980.
102 Säve 1979b (1873), 166 (‘sin moder, det stormfulla havet, av vars grundlynnne och danad deras väsende är sammanblåst’).
103 Säve 1979b (1873), 169 (‘ett sannskyldigt sjöfolk’).
104 Säve 1979b (1873), 172–3, quote at 172 (‘mörkrets tidsåldrar’). For examples, see Säve 1979b (1873), 176–7 (Fårö farmers killing others on Gotska Sandön), 177–8 (robbers on Stora Karlsö), 178 ff.
105 Säve 1979b (1873), 159 ff., quote at 159 (’De gamla tiderna voro allestädes onda tider, ty samhälle fanns ej, eller var det en vildmark’).
better, and that the inhabitants of the more central parts of Gotland never took part in such sea robbery.\footnote{Säve 1979b (1873), 211.}

It should be noted that this narrative was not in the least disparaging of the other, more romanticizing accounts of Gotland’s past that were produced in Säve’s own time. The positive and negative aspects of the distant past complemented one another—a tendency not unique to Gotland. Pre-Christian religion and culture, for example, were generally depicted in both dark and bright colours at the same time. It was barbaric, brutal, and dark, but, equally, it was something national and Germanic.\footnote{See Wickström 2008.}

Independent Gutes

Generally speaking, Gotland’s history-writing has identified the Gutnish farmers as the driving force in the Gotlandic trade. Thus, there is an obvious link between the image of Gotland as a strong and wealthy trade centre, and that of Gotland as an independent peasant republic.

Above all, it has been constantly stressed that Gotland in its golden age was in most practical affairs a politically independent entity, even though it was formally attached to the Swedish kingdom. To explain the nature of the link to Sweden, Gutasaga has been the main source. There, the story of the great emigration was followed by a description of how Gotland was linked to the Swedish kingdom, the result of a treaty in pagan times, when Gotland’s representative Avair Strabain from the parish of Alva secured military support from the Swedes in return for an annual tribute. This narrative has constantly been used and discussed in Gotlandic historiography. The actual story of Avair Strabain tended to be taken as true, above all when pushing the idea that the union with the Swedes was mutual: the Gutes voluntarily entered into the treaty, and afterwards they could concentrate on their mainly peaceful endeavours, while benefitting from the military protection provided by the Swedes.\footnote{Säve & Bergman 1858, 3–4; Bergman 1870, 54; Thordeman 1944, 12 ff.; Schück 1945, 180–1.} The upshot was that it made Gotland in effect ‘a free and independent country, a small state of its own’, in the words of Snöbohm.\footnote{Snöbohm 1871, 94 ff., quote at 96 (‘ett fritt och sjelfständigt land, en liten egen stat’); Erlandsson 1900, 7, 13–14 is similar; see also Bergman/Rosman 1898, 87. In Schück 1940, 80, 83–4, 89, another theory is added—that the treaty with the Swedes in the
Gotland was basically independent until the late thirteenth century, when Swedish influence grew.

Thus Bergman stressed that ‘the island had its independent constitution, its own rulers or judges, and was thus only a protectorate under Sweden’. He also gave the example of the Gotlanders making treaties with Henry the Lion, the mighty duke of Saxony and Bavaria in the mid twelfth century. Bergman 1870, 54 (‘ön hade sin sjelfständiga författning, sina egna styresmän eller domare, och var sålunda endast ett skydds-land under Sverige’), 58.

Bengt G. Söderberg, meanwhile, said that the voluntary union with the Swedes was one of the most important events in the history of Gotland, and accentuated the division of labour between the warlike Swedes and peaceful Gutes. It is made into something natural and extra-historical. Incorporation into the Swedish kingdom was rational for the Gotlanders; it was ‘a Gotlandic strategy of trade politics’ to buy peace in exchange for military protection. B. Söderberg 1949, 36 (‘ett gotländskt handelspolitiskt drag’).

The depiction of Avair Strabain—one among the most credible in Gutasaga, according to Söderberg—‘is also consistent with the ancient Gotlandic attitude and mentality: rather appeal to the silver-scales than the sword’. B. Söderberg 1957, 31 is similar; Gotland – ett bildverk (1959), 131–2; B. Söderberg 1975, 228–9 (quote at 229).

The differences between the interpretations have generally concerned the actual date of the treaty with the Swedes. In the nineteenth century, the treaty was generally thought to have been agreed in the Viking Age. Snöbohm 1871, 95 (late tenth century); see also Thordeman 1944, 12 ff., who chooses not to guess when it could have happened.

That interpretation has also been the most common in the twentieth century. However, in the 1920s, another opinion emerged, which has had quite a few followers. The philologist and archaeologist Birger Nerman linked the story in Gutasaga about an ancient emigration with the union with the Swedes. Nerman is mainly known for his thesis that the Swedish kings of the largely mythical dynasty of the Ynglings—Aun, Egil, and Adils—were historical figures during the fifth and sixth centuries, and that they had been buried in the famous ‘royal mounds’ at Gamla Uppsala. Nerman wrote a series of popular historical works based on his research, and it seems that his theories (as well as similar ones put forward by his
colleagues) of an ancient Swedish empire with roots deep in the Iron Age had a substantial impact in Sweden, not least outside academia.\footnote{Edquist 2009, 132–3; Edquist 2012, 45 ff.}

Nerman devoted considerable attention to Gotland. He began his research career in the 1910s by studying the island’s Iron Age, when he established radical changes in the archaeological material from the sixth century. In a paper from 1923, he came to the conclusion—by linking Gutasaga, Rimbert’s Vita Anskarii, and Wulfstan of Hedeby’s often-cited travel account from the ninth century—that a large number of Gotlanders must have emigrated to areas east of the Baltic in about AD 500. Shortly afterwards, Gotland was incorporated into the Swedish kingdom. Nerman was inclined to take traditionally disputed written sources as gospel, if he could link them to archaeological evidence. The case of Gutasaga was yet another ‘example of how saga traditions, which have long been regarded as historically worthless’ were found to contain historical truth when matched with the archaeological material.\footnote{Nerman 1923, 71 (‘exempel på, hur sagotraditioner, som länge betraktats som historiskt värdelösa’).}

Some researchers followed Nerman’s reasoning, for example fellow archaeologist John Nihlén, as will be seen. Other colleagues of Nerman’s such as Sune Lindqvist, however, did not embrace the theory that Gutasaga could be interpreted as meaning that the Swedes had conquered the Gutes in the sixth century.\footnote{Instead, Lindqvist pointed out that Gotland later was a rival to Birka (Fornvännen 28 (1933), 187, review). The argument that the emigration story in Gutasaga reflected true events around AD 500 was believed to be probable by, for example, Wessén 1943, 299–300. See also Tiberg 1944.} Nerman’s emigration theory was then thoroughly criticized in 1943 by the historian Lauritz Weibull, who argued that the story in Gutasaga about overpopulation, drawing lots, and emigration was a typical ancient and medieval learned tradition. Elements of the story could even be found in Herodotus, Weibull claimed.\footnote{Weibull 1943. In the anthology Historia kring Gotland (Sjöberg 1963), Nerman took the opportunity to defend his old argument (Nerman 1963), which was printed next to a reprint of Weibull’s original article.} Lauritz Weibull and his brother Curt were forceful advocates of a more telling criticism of literary sources for prehistoric and medieval events, which meant that they rejected the possibility to say almost anything of certainty about Swedish political history before the eleventh century. However,
many archaeologists, with Nerman in the forefront, continued to use such methods for decades to come.\textsuperscript{118}

In general, subsequent academic history-writing has generally been very sceptical of the theories of a Gutnish emigration during the Migration Period, even if Mårten Stenberger and Elias Wessén referred to this interpretation in \textit{Boken om Gotland} without overt criticism.\textsuperscript{119} There are, however, other elements of Nerman’s research on Gotland that have been more long-lasting, primarily his account of the supposedly Gutnish and Swedish colonies in present-day Latvia in the seventh and eighth centuries, to which I will return later.

Nerman’s view that Gotland’s incorporation into the Swedish kingdom came as early as the sixth century did find some followers. Drawing on a different selection of new research findings, Richard Steffen claimed in 1943 and 1945 (\textit{Boken om Gotland}) that it was beyond doubt that the island had been conquered or at least invaded by the Swedes, specifically those from Uppland, in the late sixth century, and that there were clear similarities between the Mälaren culture and the new Gotlandic culture after that.\textsuperscript{120}

A peasant democracy

One of the most enduring ideas about Gotland’s golden age is that there must have been an egalitarian and democratic agrarian society—a ‘peasant republic’. That view was based mainly on \textit{Gutalagen} and the absence of an aristocracy and direct royal control. Alfred Theodor Snöbohm, in \textit{Gotlands land och folk} (1871), described pre-Christian Gotland (as well as the rest of Scandinavia) as a ‘pure democracy’ in which ‘the people themselves possessed the power and the government, and exercised it’. This free independence continued after Christianization, and lasted into the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{121}

Bergman wrote of ‘a republic of free peasants’.\textsuperscript{122} Not surprisingly, Erlandsson was at pains to point out that the Gutes who plied the trade routes over the Baltic Sea were all country-dwellers: it was peasants who

\textsuperscript{118} Edquist 2009, 132–3; Edquist 2012, 44–5 and literature cited there.
\textsuperscript{119} See, for example, Stenberger 1945b, 93–4; Wessén 1945a, 153–4.
\textsuperscript{120} Steffen 1943, 49 ff (he did not mention Nerman, though); Steffen 1945a, 226.
\textsuperscript{121} Snöbohm 1871, 85 (‘ren demokrati’, ‘folket sjelft innehade makten och styrelsen samt utöfvade den’), 116 ff.
\textsuperscript{122} Bergman/Rosman 1898, 90 (‘en republik af fria bönder’).
led the Gotlandic trade republic. Gunnar Jonsson argued in the STF yearbook of 1940 that, because of the island’s ‘popular constitution’, the free, equal men ‘regardless of barriers and decrees by lords’ could conduct trade. In *Boken om Gotland* (1945), its trade and peasant society were accentuated in the foreword: ‘that impressive breed of merchant farmers … virtually controlled the trade of the Baltic Sea and Russia’.

Similar descriptions of the socio-political conditions in medieval Gotland were the rule. Bengt G. Söderberg underlined medieval Gotland as a continuation of the prehistoric societal order. It was ‘a virtually autonomous state, a kind of peasant republic’ with ‘a free peasant population that had given themselves a social structure and laws’—‘a democracy without a concentration of power in any single hand’. This was in tune with the then prevalent view in Sweden, where the medieval provincial laws were considered to reflect an ancient legal system with roots in a pre-Christian yeoman democracy. Still, Söderberg emphasized that it was propertied peasants who controlled this democracy—it was in fact a true class society. The last remark, that the democratic peasant republic was not for everyone, has often been made. But even so, the emphasis remains: Gotland was democratic and independent.

Gotland between East and West

A central element in the discourse of a democratic, farmer-controlled, peaceful, and equal Gotland as a trade centre was the island’s extensive contacts across the Baltic Sea. In the nineteenth century, it was stressed

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123 Erlandsson 1900, 12 (‘De gutar, som upprättade dessa äldsta handelsförbindelser, voro bosatta på landsbygden’).
124 G. Jonsson 1940, 182 (’folklig författning’, ’oberoende av herremäns skrankor och påbud’).
125 Nylander 1945, 8 (’handelsböndernas imponerande släkte … praktiskt taget behärskade Östersjöns och Rysslands handel’).
126 See also Roosval 1926, 7 (’frì republik’); Nerman 1942, 246; Nylander 1945, 8; Schück 1945, 179 (’denna gotländska folkrepublik’).
127 B. Söderberg 1948, 108 ff.; B. Söderberg 1949, 42–3; see also Schück 1940, 89.
128 B. Söderberg 1949, quotes at 40–1, 41, 42 (’en praktiskt taget autonom stat, ett slags bonderepublik’, ’en fri bondebefolkning som givit sig själv samhällsform och lagar’, ’en demokrati utan maktkoncentration i någon enskild hand’). He also used the term ‘peasant state’ (’bondestaten’): *Gotland – ett bildverk* (1959), 143.
130 B. Söderberg 1948, 110–1; B. Söderberg 1949, 42.
131 For example, Wessén 1945b, 169 (’det gutniska samhället var en demokratisk bonderepublik, men endast bönderna hade full medborgarrätt’); Jakobson 1966, 16 ff.
132 See, for example, G. Jonsson 1940, 201.
that the Gutes had important contacts eastwards when the island was a
trade centre in the early Middle Ages. The written sources bore witness to
Gotlandic trading factories in Novgorod, as well as strongholds in the cities
of the Baltic’s eastern shore, such as Riga in the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{133} Such
local patriotism was very evident in Erlandsson’s \textit{Gotland, dess historia och
geografi} (1900). Not only were the Gutes a dominant element in Novgorod,
but he also stressed that Indian and Persian riches could come to Europe by
one of two ways, through Venice or through Gotland.\textsuperscript{134}

These narratives of Gotland’s eastern contacts were shaped at a time
when Scandinavian history-writing overall turned its eyes towards
relations across the Baltic Sea in the Viking period. Towards the end of
the nineteenth century, so-called Normannism—the idea that Scandi-
navians had founded the Russian Empire—gained greater currency. It
was a notion that sat well with increased nationalism and, in some cases,
to growing anti-Russian feeling in Swedish conservative circles.\textsuperscript{135}

The Swedish archaeologist who devoted most energy to Viking
Scandinavian influences in Russia, Ture J. Arne, organized repeated ex-
cavations in Russia during the first half of the twentieth century. He
claimed Scandinavian archaeological finds at a number of sites along the
river routes to the east, and saw them as evidence of a fairly large exodus
of people from Sweden in the ninth and tenth centuries.\textsuperscript{136} Arne was for
his time relatively reluctant to make far-reaching ethnic and national
capital out of his findings. Yet, his research was generally viewed as con-
firming the sizeable influence of the Swedes in the East during the Viking
Age. He also gave Gotland a central role: even if the wealth was perhaps
not so equally distributed across the island in the Viking Age, ‘the entire
island of Gotland was a large trade republic’.\textsuperscript{137}

Arne emphasized that the Viking Age was characterized by its Eastern
or Oriental cultural impact on present-day Sweden.\textsuperscript{138} That was especially
the case on Gotland, where the influence remained long afterwards: ‘The
Byzantine and Persian motifs, which penetrated into Sweden, survived
the Middle Ages and were further enriched thanks to Gotland’s relations

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{133} Bergman 1870, 60–1; Snöbohm 1871, 109 ff.; Bergman/Rosman 1898, 89–90;
Bergman (1885) 1901, 5–6.
\item\textsuperscript{134} Erlandsson 1900, 11–12.
\item\textsuperscript{135} Edquist 2012; see also Latvakangas 1995; Gustin 2004, 59–86.
\item\textsuperscript{136} Arne 1917, 62.
\item\textsuperscript{137} Arne 1931, 295 (‘Hela ön Gotland var en stor handelsrepublik’).
\item\textsuperscript{138} See, for example, Nihlén 1928b, 42 ff.; Nerman 1942, 176, 248–9.
\end{footnotes}
with its large neighbour to the east.\textsuperscript{139} Arne was also among the first who in the 1910s highlighted the Byzantinesque murals in a number of Gotland’s medieval churches, for example in Garda and Källunge. Another was the art historian Johnny Roosval, who specialized in church art in medieval Gotland.\textsuperscript{140}

However, in the early twentieth century, these Eastern influences were only traced in art and architecture in Gotland’s churches, according to the researchers. Christianity itself did not come from the East. When the adoption of Christianity is discussed, the explanation given in \textit{Gutasaga} to this day plays a key role in the representations of Gotland’s religious transition. According to \textit{Gutasaga}, the Gutes embraced Christianity because of the Norwegian king Olaf II Haraldsson (St Olaf), who introduced the new religion during his stay on the island in the early eleventh century. Just as in the case of the annexation to Sweden, the importance of \textit{Gutasaga} has gone largely unchallenged, since there are virtually no other written sources about this event. Thus, both Bergman and Snöbohm followed \textit{Gutasaga} closely.\textsuperscript{141} In the twentieth century, scholars highlighted the similarities between church regulations on Gotland and in Norway, and thus confirmed the importance of Olaf Haraldsson, an example being Elias Wessén in \textit{Boken om Gotland} (1945).\textsuperscript{142}

The history-writing about relations between Sweden, Gotland, and the lands to the east of the Baltic Sea generally depicted the Scandinavian peoples as the active ones, and those in the East—Balts, Slavs, and Finno-Ugric peoples—as passive recipients. Birger Nerman had lots to say on this matter. In his nationalist history-writing about Swedish penetration in the East, Gotland played an important role. In the 1920s, Nerman claimed that, mainly on the basis of \textit{Norse literature} and \textit{Rimbert}, the Swedish kingdom had expanded to the eastern Baltic coast as early as the seventh century. Soon, he was able to strengthen this hypothesis with fresh archaeological finds. In the years 1929–32, he excavated various sites along the eastern Baltic and East Prussian coast. Based on grave finds near

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{139} Arne 1917, 62–3, quote at 63 (‘De bysantinska och persiska motiv, som trängde till Sverige, fortlevde under medeltiden och riktades ytterligare genom Gotlands förbindelser med det stora landet i öster’); see also Arne 1931, 296 who argues that rich finds of silver at Hemse ‘indicate an unusually strong contact with the Orient’ (‘tyda på en ovanligt stark kontakt med Orienten’).
\textsuperscript{140} Arne 1917, 76–81; Roosval 1913; Roosval 1917.  
\textsuperscript{141} Säve & Bergman 1858, 3–4; Bergman 1870, 54 ff.; see also Snöbohm 1871, 97 ff.  
\textsuperscript{142} B. Söderberg 1949, 37–8; Wessén 1945a, 159–60.
\end{footnotesize}
the Latvian coastal town of Grobiņa (better known internationally by its German name Grobin), Nerman felt able to prove that a Swedish–Gutnish colony had lasted there from about 650 to 800. Swedes and Gutes had different roles, according to Nerman’s interpretation of the cemeteries in Grobiņa: the Swedes stood for the military fortifications, while the peaceful Gotlanders were engaged in trade.

Nerman was convinced this proved the existence of a Swedish Baltic Empire, and he soon developed a grand theory of ‘Sweden’s first age of greatness’ (‘Sveriges första storhetstid’), which became the title of a popular history book in 1942. The seventh- and eighth-century Baltic empire was followed in the ninth century by an even greater ‘development of strength’ in the Swedish state, which led to the founding of the Kievan Rus. During this first stage, the Russian state was nothing less than ‘a sort of Swedish colony.’

Nerman’s claim that there were Gotlandic colonies on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea in the seventh and eighth centuries was generally taken at face value in subsequent history-writing. It was rarely questioned. However, Nerman’s more far-reaching theories of a Swedish Baltic empire before the Vikings have seldom been espoused. One who did, however, was John Nihlén, who is best known as the leading representative of the Swedish local heritage movement from the 1930s to the 1960s. Between the wars he worked as an archaeologist on Gotland, where he was a driving force in the founding of Gotland’s regional heritage organization in 1936. He wrote essays and popular historical overviews such as Under rutat segel: svenska äventyr i öster from 1928. Nihlén followed in the Nerman’s footsteps regarding the Swedish–Gutnish division of labour in the sixth century: the Swedes were responsible for the military and dynastic elements, while the Gotlanders were enterprising merchants. Together, they went on to expand eastwards with a joint force. (It should be noted that even before the

143 Nerman 1942, 14 ff., 25 ff.
144 Nerman 1942, 72 ff., 92–114, 115 ff., 122 ff., 126 ff., 135, quotes at 115 (‘kraftutveckling’) and 135 (‘ett slags svensk koloni’); see also Nerman 1930.
145 Schück 1940, 80, 83; Stenberger 1945b, 95–6. From the first, Nerman’s theory that there were Gotlandic colonies in Latvia came in for detailed criticism, for example Yrwing 1940, 53 ff.
146 Nihlén 1982 (with a preface by Gunnar Svahnström and Sven-Olof Lindquist); Norrbys 1986, 10.
147 Nihlén 1928a, 20–33.
excavations at Grobiņa, Nihlén sided with Nerman over the pre-Viking Age expansion eastwards.)

According to Nihlén, then, the Swedish Baltic Empire was in fact founded long before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. That entity instead built on a ‘Greater Sweden’ that had formed during the Viking Age and earlier. Nihlén devoted a good deal of space to Gotland in his book *Under rutat segel*. The island was a centre of world trade, and above all it took Swedish influences to Novgorod.  

Nihlén also speculated that as early as AD 500 the Gotlanders had begun to pave the way for their eastward voyages by establishing colonies across the Baltic Sea. He guessed that the ‘Rus’ of the Arabic sources might in fact have been Gotlanders.  

Indeed, in a guidebook to Gotland published by STF in 1930, he wrote that it was the Gutes together with Swedes from Uppland who had probably founded Russia.  

Gotland’s role in the expansion eastwards across the Baltic was thus that of a trade centre. Gotlanders were the peaceful ones, the ‘good cops’ if you will. This was well suited to the mid twentieth century, when Swedish history-writing more than ever before emphasized its non-violent aspects, especially trade.  

Nerman claimed that the Swedish expansion towards Russia in the Viking Age was an economic endeavour, intent on tapping the vast riches of Byzantium and the Caliphate. The goal was to take the leadership in world trade. According to Nerman, Sweden’s political influence in the East dried up during the first half of the eleventh century, however, although when it came to trade Gotland would maintain and even advance its leading position until the fourteenth century.  

The Gotlanders ‘from time immemorial had primarily been merchants’, and Nerman praised their ‘outstanding entrepreneurial spirit and skill as organizers of trade’. The Gotlanders in fact formed the trade

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149 Nihlén (1928b, 171, 173–4) also implied that Stavr, a name for heroes in Medieval Russian epic poems (*byliny*) was identical with Staver den store, a legendary Gotlandic hero.
150 Nihlén 1930, 26.
152 Nerman 1942, 163, 177 ff., 184, 196 ff.
153 Nerman 1942, 7–8, 206 ff., ch. 7.
154 Nerman 1942, 218 ff., quotes at 226 (‘i alla tider främst varit handelsmän’) and 250 (‘enastående företagaranda och smidighet som organisatörer av handeln’).
bridge between East and West that the Swedes had sought to accomplish in the Viking Age.155

This combination of nationalism and an emphasis on the role of trade and commerce in history was also to be found in the work of the contemporary historian Sture Bolin. In an often-cited article from 1939, he asserted that Sweden and its waypoints in Eastern Europe—the conquered ‘stora Svitjod’ (‘Great Svitjod’) —emerged as the centre of world trade during the Viking Age by dint of connecting Western Europe and the Caliphate. Bolin argued against the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne’s thesis that trade between the Orient and Western Europe across the Mediterranean Sea had fallen to a minimum by the eighth century, for he believed that Mediterranean culture continued to flourish even after the Arab conquests—it even grew, thanks to silver flooding in from Central Asia, brought in by the Arabs. However, in the ninth century a new direct trade route opened between Scandinavia and the Arabs through Eastern Europe. It was in this context that Gotland in particular played an important role. In Boken om Gotland (1945), Bolin repeated his thesis, concentrating on the important part played by Gotland in this world trade system, since it was already a centre of Baltic trade.156

Paradoxically, Gotland was often simultaneously viewed as having a strikingly insular character in the late prehistoric epoch: Gotlanders went abroad and they organized trade, but they did not let anyone in. Nerman stressed that Gotlandic culture during the late Iron Age was unusually distinctive.157 Roosval explained Gotland’s peculiar culture by pointing to ‘the insular nature of the land’.158

In the middle of the sea

Gotland’s status as a trade centre has often been read far back into prehistory, not only into the Viking Age, which saw a very large influx of Arabic silver coins to Gotland, but also earlier into the Bronze Age. Arne argued that even before the birth of Christ, Gotland had been the centre of ‘the international trade in Northern Europe’.159 Others went further. In the mid twentieth century, Mårten Stenberger and Bengt G.

155 Nerman 1942, 242.
156 Bolin 1939; Bolin 1945, quote at 127; see also Yrwing 1940, 16 ff.
157 Nerman 1942, 37, 42.
158 Roosval 1926, 7 (‘landets insulära natur’).
159 Arne 1931, 291 (‘den internationella handeln i Nordeuropa’).
Söderberg wrote in their bestselling popular works that the beginnings of Gotland’s role as a trading nation could be identified several thousand years back in history.¹⁶⁰

In *Boken om Gotland* (1945), Stenberger identified Visby and Västerbjär in the parish of Gothem as ‘Gotland’s first trading places’ in the Stone Age.¹⁶¹ He, like many of his contemporaries, stressed reason and rationality as the driving forces in historical evolution. Thus, *homo economicus* was made into something natural and extra-historical.¹⁶² Gotland’s lively contacts with surrounding areas, which continued into the Bronze Age, were said to show that there ‘must have been a distinctive mercantile ability as well as skills in boatbuilding and the art of navigation’.¹⁶³ Gotland was ‘a centre that had learned to take advantage of its naturally allotted trade position in the Baltic’. As early as the Bronze Age, everything was in place for ‘Gotland’s first age of greatness’.¹⁶⁴ After the *second* age of greatness during the Roman Iron Age, a period of decline followed during the Migration Period. But soon after that, in the seventh century, the island’s third and most important age of greatness began, reaching its height in the Viking Age and Middle Ages, when peasant-led Gotland became the Baltic region’s leading trading power.¹⁶⁵

In a similar way, Söderberg stressed that Gotland’s position as a trading centre was thousands of years old. During the Stone Age, the so-called Gothem people became Gotland’s ‘first merchant farmers’. They laid the foundations for nothing less than a ‘societal construction of peculiar structure, which was to endure for three thousand years, at certain periods taking the lead in Northern Europe’s economic life’.¹⁶⁶ Thus, he had constructed a continuity in Gotland’s history, and the Gutes’

¹⁶⁰ Some researchers felt it was difficult to know *anything* about the island’s role as a trading centre before the twelfth century (Yrwing 1940, 21 ff., 37, 40).
¹⁶¹ Stenberger 1945b, 50 (‘Gotlands första handelsplatser’).
¹⁶² See also Hall 2000, 270–7.
¹⁶³ Stenberger 1945b, 68 (‘måste ha funnits utpräglat merkantil förmåga liksom kunnighet i farkostbyggandets och navigeringens konst’).
¹⁶⁴ Stenberger 1945b, 68–9, quotes at 69 (‘en central, som förstått utnyttja sin av naturen anvisade handelsposition i Östersjön’, ‘Gotlands första storhetstid’).
¹⁶⁵ Stenberger 1945b, 80, 96 ff.; see also Stenberger 1940, 72, 78.
¹⁶⁶ B. Söderberg 1948, quotes at 62 (‘första handelsbönder’, ‘en samhällsbyggnad av egenartad struktur, som skulle äga bestånd i tre tusen år och under skilda epoker bära ledarskapet i Nordeuropas ekonomiska liv’); B. Söderberg 1949, 16 is similar; *Gotland – ett bildverk* (1959), 97.
expeditions in the Viking Age were simply an extension of ‘their old routes to the East’.

Stenberger too was eager to discern ancient traditions of Gotlandic expansion eastwards. In *Boken om Gotland*, he dated Gotland’s Eastern influences as far back as its greatness as a trading nation: the Bronze Age. At that time, Gotlandic culture was not only open to external influences, it was also ‘expansive’. Gotlanders headed for the eastern shores of the Baltic, where Stenberger identified Gotlandic stone ships—almost at the same location where the Gotlanders and Swedes settled in the seventh century, at the beginning of Gotland’s third age of greatness:

Gotlandic colonization in Latvia during the Vendel Period [c. AD 550–800] can, despite its brief existence, be claimed to have been the prelude to the vigour and mercantile expansion that characterized Gotland during the Viking Age and Middle Ages.

It was, however, only in that period that Gotlanders settled in the East. Otherwise, they concentrated on ‘trade hegemony in the Baltic area’, according to Stenberger. Bengt G. Söderberg—the leading Gotlandic popular historian of the mid-twentieth century—also emphasized this Gotlandic infiltration during the Bronze Age. He too followed Nerman by pointing out that ‘the Gotlanders crossed the sea, founding colonies at Grobin in Latvia’. Söderberg saw a very long chain of unbroken development that led to what was of course the most important part of Gotland’s history: the Middle Ages.

The city, the Germans, the decline

As we have seen, Gotlandic history-writing held that the island, even after the alliance with the Swedish kingdom—whenever that happened—was

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167 B. Söderberg 1949, 20 ff., 36–7, quote at 36 (‘sina gamla färdvägar österut’); see also B. Söderberg 1957, 32; *Gotland – ett bildverk* (1959), 128.
168 Stenberger 1945b, quotes at 70 (‘expansiv’) and 96 (‘Den gotländska kolonisationen i Lettland under vendeltid kan trots dess begränsade beståndstid sägas bilda upptakten till den kraftyttring och merkantila expansion, som kännetecknade Gotland under vikingatid och medeltid.’); see also Stenberger 1940, 72.
169 Stenberger 1945b, 105–106, quote at 106 (‘handelshegemonien inom det baltiska området’).
170 Stenberger 1945b, 70–1, 95; B. Söderberg 1949, 20 ff.
171 B. Söderberg 1949, 35 (‘gotlänningarna går över havet och anlägger kolonier vid Grobin i Lettland’).
more or less autonomous well into the Middle Ages. However, by the late thirteenth century that started to change. The good times were about to end.

What tourists on Gotland today see, and are supposed to see, are artefacts that largely date from the very late period of Gotland’s putative age of greatness: the old town of Visby and its well-preserved city wall, and, beyond, the almost one hundred medieval stone churches dotted across the Gotlandic countryside. The old churches are almost always mentioned in the Gotland books, and there are also popular publications specifically about them.172

Ever since the nineteenth century, medieval Visby been a tourist magnet. It is therefore natural that there has been a great deal of history written specifically about Visby,173 and that the general history books about Gotland as a whole tend to dwell on the city.174 Often when it is described, the focus is on its days as a wealthy Baltic entrepôt, especially in the thirteenth century, as is evident even today in the surviving buildings, church ruins, the city wall, and other remains. Sometimes, the continuity is stressed between Gotland’s central role in the Viking Age and Visby’s importance afterwards.175

Ironically, Visby’s well-preserved city wall is generally considered an effect of and a symbol of the internal divisions on the island, the embodiment of city versus country. It is often said to have been erected to protect the city from the countryside, after a conflict had arisen between the two in the late thirteenth century. A key role is often attributed to the ‘outsiders’—foremost among them Visby’s German-speakingburghers, who were generally said to be the ones who pushed Visby towards the Hanseatic League. In the 1280s, the Gutnish burghers of Visby followed suit and chose to join the Hanseatic League, distancing themselves from the rest of Gotland. In 1288, a civil war broke out, with

172 Lagerlöf, Hallgren & Svahnström 1971; B. Söderberg 1978; see also Visby stift i ord och bild (1951); Roosval 1952.
173 Guidebooks that emphasize the old town are Bergman (1885) 1901; Wåhlin 1924; B. Söderberg 1972 (similar format to B. Söderberg 1971). Books dominated by pictures, with a similar focus on the medieval remnants are Romin & Bergman 1891; Österlund & af Ugglas 1914; Lundberg et al. 1939. Personal accounts and essays, still mostly relating to medieval history and/or the city inside the wall are Eckhoff 1925; Ludin 1966. Some history books treated the Middle Ages and later periods roughly equally, for example, V. Johansson 1950; while a work that mostly deals with Visby in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is Bohman et al. 1964.
174 Typically, some books name both Gotland and Visby in the title, for example, Öhrman 1973.
175 Fritzell 1972, 14 ff., 21–2.
Visby pitted against the rest of the island. Soon after, Visby’s importance diminished, and Lübeck took over the leading role in the Baltic trade.

It might be expected that Gotlandic history-writing would play down the level of internal Gotlandic division. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, the civil war of 1288 is usually described as a struggle between the townspeople (both the German and the Gutnish burghers, who chose to make common cause against the rest of Gotland) and the countryside, with the Swedish king as the winning party. It has even been claimed, as in Folke Ludin’s collected essays on Visby from 1966, that there is still to this day a rivalry between Visby’s inhabitants and other Gotlanders—but it was worse in the Middle Ages.

Theodor Erlandsson, with his emphasis on Gotland’s agrarian culture, gave his full attention to the divisions between country and city in his history-writing. Anti-German tendencies were also evident in his *Gotland, dess historia och geografi* (1900), which all but argues it was the German interest in controlling trade that led to the establishment of Visby, the power of the Hanseatic League, and the civil war of 1288. As Visby grew rich, the countryside grew poorer, and it was only very recently that the hostility between them finally evaporated. However, Erlandsson wanted to have his cake and eat it, so he included the city wall of Visby as an example of the high level of spiritual and artistic achievement of medieval Gotland.

The disaster of 1361

The fourteenth century is generally described as the period when Gotland’s and Visby’s ascendancy crumbled and was exchanged for decline. Trade routes were redrawn, leaving the island in a backwater, and there were disasters such as the Black Death in 1350, which according to legend turned whole parishes into wasteland.

The most notorious series of events, one has become the symbol of Gotland’s bad fortune in the late Middle Ages, came in 1361. In this

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176 Wåhlin 1924, 13 ff.
178 Erlandsson 1900, 12, 14 ff.
179 Erlandsson 1900, 14.
180 Erlandsson 1900, 17.
181 B. Söderberg 1948, 115 ff., 172 ff.; B. Söderberg 1957, 35; *Gotland – ett bildverk* (1959), 44. Carl Johan Bergman had argued as early as 1858 against the normal dating of Visby’s decline to 1361—it was rather later developments when trade routes
year, the Danish king Valdemar landed on Gotland with an army and
defeated a Gotlandic peasant army in a couple of battles in the coun-
tryside, and then finally outside the walls of Visby. Then the Danes entered
the city, plundered it according to some, and placed Gotland under the
Danish crown. These events gave rise to a number of legends, many of
which were compiled and printed in the nineteenth century, adding to the
modern remembrance of those events.

Many of the events during the summer of 1361 have become corner-
stones in the standard accounts of Gotland’s history. In a national
Swedish context, as is especially the case with the supposed plunder of
Visby, this was chiefly thanks to the artist Carl Gustaf Hellqvist (1851–90)
and his historicist, National Romantic painting Valdemar Atterdag
brandskattar Visby 1361 (‘Valdemar Atterdag holding Visby to ransom,
1361’) which was completed in 1882. It is still one of Sweden’s best-known
paintings, an iconic image not only of Gotland’s medieval history, but also
of the Middle Ages as a whole. The painting shows the Danish king,
Valdemar, sitting on his throne in a square in Visby, watching as his
soldiers oversee the collecting of goods from the population. In the
foreground, a sad-looking Visby woman with her little baby symbolize the
innocent victim. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at
roughly the time when history was also reproduced in books about
Gotland and Visby, 1361 was labelled an ‘unforgettable year of mis-
fortune’.

From a Gotlandic perspective, the Battle of
Visby, fought before the
city walls at Korsbetningen on 27 July 1361, is today perhaps the most
iconic event. Gotland’s peasant army was massacred. Soon after the battle,
a stone cross was erected at the scene, with an inscription in Latin: ‘In
Anno Domini 1361, on the third day of Jacob’s Day [27 July], the Gutes
fell at the hands of the Danes in front of Visby’s walls; pray for them’.
According to legend, 1,800 Gotlanders fell in battle. In the early twentieth
century, some of the mass graves were excavated, revealing the direct
evidence of hundreds of the slain: the corpses of badly equipped soldiers,
jumbled together, seemingly confirming the legends about the event and

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its magnitude. It was soon revealed that many of the victims were the very young and the very old.\textsuperscript{183}

The events are often described at length in Gotlandic histories, which tend to stress the tragedy of the occasion, with ordinary Gutes putting up brave resistance with no chance of defeating the professional Danish knights, who slaughtered them en masse. In Boken om Gotland (1945), an entire chapter was given over to the battle, including the grim details of the mass graves. Its author, Bengt Thordeman, who had been part of the research team that investigated the mass graves at Korsbetningen and had written a book about the Danish invasion, claimed that the battle was a drama of freedom, still living in memory after six centuries: ‘The battle was lost—the men fell—the land was ravaged—a flourishing culture was destroyed. But the people saved its soul.’ It is a cult of the heroic defeat, just as the loss at Kosovo Polje is a central element in Serbian nationalist history-writing: ‘After 600 years, we are proud that the defeat on 27 July 1361 is a page in the annals of Sweden.’\textsuperscript{184}

According to legend, the burgheresses of Visby stood on the city walls, looking on as the Danes slaughtered the Gutnish peasants. This has been seized on in the history-writing, even though it is not certain that it happened exactly that way—it was the ordinary country people who had to make the sacrifices, while the well-fed townspeople were left sitting pretty. It certainly fits the typical dualism between country and city, in this case between the honest and brave Gotlandic yeomen versus the foreign-influenced, sophisticated, and overly civilized urban population.\textsuperscript{185}

**Pirates, Danes, and stagnation**

Mathias Klintberg pointed out in 1909 that by the sixteenth century, Gotland had been reduced to being an ‘insignificant part of larger units’. The days were long gone when ‘the Gutes single-handedly concluded

\textsuperscript{183} Clason 1925; Thordeman 1928; Thordeman 1944. The Latin inscription runs ‘Anno domini MCCCLXI feria tertia post Jacobi ante portas Wisby in manibus danorum aeiderunt gutenses hic sepulti, orate pro eis’.

\textsuperscript{184} Thordeman 1945, 254 (‘Striden förlorades – männren stupade – landet härjades—en blomstrande kultur förintades. Men folket rädde sin själ’, ‘Vi äro efter 600 år stolta över att nederlaget den 27 juli 1361 är ett blad i Sveriges hävder’); see also Thordeman 1928, 4; Schück 1945, 197; Thordeman 1944.

\textsuperscript{185} B. Söderberg 1975, 24 ff. There, as in many other places, it is said that the dramatic events were naturally the stuff of legend and immediately became traditions that have survived into the modern age. For the age-old literary and ideological dichotomy of country and city, see Williams 1973.
treaties with other peoples, princes, and mighty cities’. The period from 1361 to 1645 is generally described as a period of decline. There were no more churches built in the countryside, and Visby experienced a series of disasters, culminating in 1525 when the city was sacked. The period is generally divided in two; before 1525, with a mess of different rulers, and after 1525, when Gotland was more firmly under direct Danish rule.

Concerning the tumultuous late medieval period, Gotlandic history-writing has had a tendency to stress the fact that pirates were harboured on Gotland, using it as a base to plunder ships in the Baltic. In Erlandsson, the period 1361–1525 was boldly characterized as ‘Sjörövfaretiden’—the Pirate Age. Söderberg characterized the epoch in an even more colourful way: it had ‘the character of a thrilling pirate novel, not without its picaresque elements’. The reign of the Victual Brothers on Gotland in 1394–8 was responsible for turning Gotland’s history into a ‘pirate novel’, continuing later with ex-king Eric of Pomerania, who ruled the island in 1439–49. Adolf Schück emphasized that the Victual Brothers’ leader, the former Swedish king Albert (Albrecht von Mecklenburg), was a ‘hated German usurper’ and that his followers on Gotland were ‘pirates’.

There were points of light, though. Among the large number of pirates and noblemen passing in review in Gotland’s history during this epoch, generally described as selfish and eager to line their own pockets, there are some exceptions. The Teutonic Knights, who liberated the island from the Victual Brothers in 1398 and ruled until 1408, have generally been praised in Gotlandic history-writing as good and popular rulers. At the end of this period there was the Danish nobleman Søren Norby, who is often described at length. He was sent to Gotland in the late 1510s to be Denmark’s representative on the island, but in the bitter conflicts between Denmark and Sweden in the early 1520s, Norby above all is said to have
acted independently, as a sort of Gotlandic ruler. He has also generally been seen as a colourful person, and benevolent towards the Gutes.192

The Danish era—a term which is mainly used for the period 1525–1645—has been perhaps the most overlooked in Gotlandic history-writing. As mentioned earlier, the nineteenth-century books on Gotland’s history by Snöbohm and Bergman included fairly detailed accounts of various events and figures in the period. But in the twentieth-century history-writing, the epoch has been ignored. In general histories, it often summarily noted that Gotland, like the rest of Denmark, turned to Lutheranism, that the taxes rose, and that there was general stagnation, even if there were attempts to develop the sandstone industry.193 There were exceptions, though. When the schoolteacher Rudolf Björkegren (1869–1964) devoted the larger part of his book Gotländskt: några bilder från Gotlands medeltid och danska tid (1951) to ‘Gotland during the Danish period’, it was considered to be ‘the first comprehensive account of the Danes’ domination on Gotland’.194

Cession to Sweden

In 1645, Gotland was ceded to Sweden by the Treaty of Brömsebro. In older history-writing, this event was regularly described as a restoration of a normal state of affairs, a reunion, when Gotland’s natural belonging to Sweden was finally recognized. In nineteenth-century historiography, it was considered totally natural that Gotland was destined to be a Swedish province. In Octavia Carlén’s Gotland och dess fornminnen (1862), it was said that by about AD 1000, Gotland had to seek the protection of the Swedish king. The Swedish king thereafter justly intervened in the conflict in 1288, when Hanseatic Visby tried to impoverish Gotland’s peasants, who, however, were not without guilt in the conflict. The non-Swedish period after 1361, the ‘year of misfortune’, was racked with oppression,

193 For example, Bergman 1870, 72 ff.; Erlandsson 1900, 26–7; B. Söderberg 1949, 86; Jakobson 1966, 23–4.
194 Björkegren 1951, 79–240 (‘Gotland under danska tiden’), back cover (‘den första utförliga berättelsen om dansknas herravälde på Gotland’). He had previously written shorter books on the Danish period and the years under Soren Norby (Björkegren 1928–31; Björkegren 1949).
problems, corruption, until the island at last in 1645 was reunited with its motherland.\textsuperscript{195} Bengt Thordeman wrote in 1944 that Gotland would soon have become an integral part of the Swedish kingdom earlier, had it not been for the events of 1361 and on. Its final integration into Sweden was therefore simply delayed.\textsuperscript{196}

There was a much less enthusiastic account of events in Theodor Erlandsson, who argued that the Gotlanders did not welcome the return to Sweden; even less so because their new masters did not for long mean a fresh start for the island. Nevertheless, the change of ruler meant unification with their natural motherland:

At last, Gotland had been firmly united with the country to which it principally belongs by nature. In the beginning, however, this unification caused a harmful interruption of people’s development. Gotlandic civilization had never ever been Swedish, but had been independent from the start. Therefore, there was also long a general dissatisfaction with the new order.\textsuperscript{197}

In \textit{Boken om Gotland}, the events of 1645 were again described in two different ways. Adolf Schück was triumphant in the final words of his essay on Gotland’s political history up to 1645. He said that after Gotland’s inhabitants had sworn allegiance to the new country, they were ‘adopted as fully responsible citizens of the motherland, which for nearly three centuries had felt the loss of the legendary island of the Gutes as a stinging pain’.\textsuperscript{198} In another essay, however, Richard Steffen gave a bald account of the actual events, noting that the population, which felt itself to be neither Swedish nor Danish, were indifferent to the change.\textsuperscript{199} Thus, the annexation of Gotland in 1645 to Sweden was hardly a triumph, but rather it stopped things getting any worse.

\textsuperscript{195} Carlén 1862, 12–3, 154–5, 168 (‘olycksåret’); see also Bergman 1870, 75.
\textsuperscript{196} Thordeman 1944, 17.
\textsuperscript{197} Erlandsson 1900, 30 (‘Ändtligen hade Gotland blifvit fast förenadt med det rike, hvartill det af naturen närmast hör. I början åstadkom dock denna förening ett skadligt afbrott i folkets utveckling. Den gotländska civilisationen hade aldrig någonsin varit svensk utan från början själfständig. Därför rådde också länge allmänt missnöje med den nya ordningen’).
\textsuperscript{198} Schück 1945, 225 (‘upptagas som fullmyndiga medborgare i det moderland, som i snart tre sekler känt den sägenomspunna gutaös förlust som en stingande smärta’).
\textsuperscript{199} Steffen 1945c, 10 ff.
How then did writers describe events after 1645 up to their own time? Many of them—especially the Gotlandic ones—claimed that for a long time after 1645, the new Swedish masters cared little for Gotland. Erlandsson was harsh: during the eighteenth century, Gotland was in terrible shape, devastated by plague, crop failure, poverty, and the generally misled governments of Sweden for much of the century. Söderberg also wrote that for a time after 1645 Gotland was treated as a colony, and in the 1670s Visby was in a state of deepest misery. There are clear echoes of the Gotlandic inferiority complex towards the Swedish mainland and Stockholm, and the anxiety that mainland Sweden looked down on Gotland and the Gutes. That sentiment was clearly visible in the works by Per Arvid Säve, for example.

For some short periods, Gotland’s belonging to Sweden was threatened. Danes occupied the island in 1676–9, while in 1808 there was a brief Russian occupation, the latter with practically no violence involved. Especially in the oldest history-writing, these events were described at reasonable length, but for Söderberg in the mid twentieth century, they were less important—the 1808 events almost comical. Both Erlandsson and Söderberg claimed that Gotland’s population welcomed the Danish invaders in the 1670s. The island was also affected in later wars: during the Crimean War, British warships used Fårösund as a naval base, even though Sweden was formally neutral, and during the two world wars, the island was somewhat isolated.

In many histories, especially those written in the ‘medieval tradition’, the period after 1645 is dealt with quite rapidly. But even here there is a dominant narrative, with some recurrent themes. The introduction of the lime industry, the industrious and enterprising governors of the eighteenth century, and the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century local merchant capitalist families of Donner and Dubbe are stereotypically and briefly mentioned.

There are also people who have gained the status of heroes in the more recent past. Per Arvid Säve described the state governor in 1766–88, Carl Otto von Segebaden (1718–95), as the hero of Gotland’s history. He

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200 Säve & Bergman 1858, 4 (only after c.1800).
201 Erlandsson 1900, 30, 33–4; B. Söderberg 1949, 89; see also V. Johansson 1950, 69 ff.
203 Bergman 1870, 78–9, 80 ff.; Erlandsson 1900, 31, 35 ff.; B. Söderberg 1949, 90. 93.
204 B. Söderberg 1949, 90 ff. For Jacob Dubbe, see also B. Söderberg 1975, 73 ff. Pelle Sollerman wrote about Dubbe in three novels in the 1940s.
introduced the modern age to backward Gotlandic society: reason, science, and development. Säve’s descriptions of Segebaden in Åkerns sagor and other publications have all the ingredients that the later accounts contain. The man came to Gotland, introduced agrarian reforms and a new crop—potatoes—and, not least, oversaw the construction of a modern road system almost from scratch, where earlier it had been very difficult even to go on horseback between the parts of the islands. Säve did not spare his words when describing Segebaden:

the most fortunate man that the government so far had sent for the care and progress of Gotland … It was he who was capable of breaking the old habits and first spurred on agriculture and water management in the area, and that in all respects: one can say that here he ended the past age and introduced a new era.

Segebaden led the backward population as a patriarch, but sometimes he had to use force; however, Säve stressed that it was necessary for the Gotlanders’ own good:

For he, a great and fortunate man, far ahead of his time, in many cases saw the approaching social perils, and clearly understood the needs of the place and knew his strengths, which he used as a man for the perpetual benefit of the place, … he knew how to use his wisdom and patience to enlighten the simpleminded, encourage the timorous, and frequently succeeded in frightening away ignorance by sheer force of will.

Segebaden’s ‘seed corn’ and the ‘patriotic endeavours’ of Gotland’s Rural Economy and Agricultural Society (Gotlands läns hushållningssällskap) hit home with the population. Säve also stressed that not all Gotlanders

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205 Säve 1979a (1873), 120–37, 161, 251–7; Säve 1980 (1876), 120–37, 161.
206 Säve 1980 (1876), 120–1 (‘den mest välsignade man och i stort verksamme hövding, som styrelsen dittills sänt att vårda och förkrova Gotland … Det var han som mäktade bryta de gamla vanorna och först gav lyftning åt åkerbruket och hushållningen inom orten och det i alla riktningar: man kan säga, att han här avslutade de gamla åldrarna och införde ett nytt tidevarv’).
207 Säve 1980 (1876), 122 (‘Ty han, en stor och välsignad man och långt framom sin tid, förutsåg i flera fall stundande samhällsvågor samt fattade klart ortens behov och kände sina krafter, dem han brukade som en karl till ortens evärdeliga gagn, … han förstod att med klokhet och tålmod upplysa de enfaldiga, uppmuntra de rädda och mäktade oftast med sin kraftiga vilja skrämma fäkunnigheten’).
208 Säve 1980 (1876), 161 (‘utsäde’, ‘fosterländska bemödanden’).
were backward-minded; there were also some Gotlandic farmers who were in the forefront of turning from ‘simple-mindedness’ to ‘reason’. Bergman also wrote about Segebaden that he was ‘probably the most excellent and active of all the island chiefs’; that he was a benevolent guide for his people; even that he was the island’s equivalent to Sweden’s sixteenth-century king Gustav I Vasa, generally described as the country’s founding father. As in Säve, Segebaden embodied the beginning of a new and better time for Gotland. With him, the dark period that had begun in the fourteenth century was finally over:

When Segebaden left Gotland in 1788, he had managed to waken in its enfeebled people a greater thirst for activity and understanding of their own power, for which reason he saw the dawning of a new and better time for our island. … Long was the night that fell over Gotland after the bright, industrious days of our Middle Ages. With governor Segebaden came the dawn of a new day for the Gotlandic people.

Segebaden’s reforms in the eighteenth century are a continuing element in the history-writing, its main message being the importance of enlightened leaders being able to pursue reforms and efforts leading to growth, even if at the time it was against the will of the majority of Gotlanders. Segebaden is a symbol of the future, and is never seen as an ‘outsider’ trying to curb the Gotlandic spirit. On the contrary, his efforts were for the benefit of the island.

Jakobson, who emphasized the independent spirit of the Gotlandic peasants in his Gotland – landet annorlunda (1966), also used Segebaden

Säve 1980 (1876), 151 (‘enfalden’, ‘förstånd’).
Bergman 1870, 83–4, quote at 83 (‘troligen den ypperste och verksamaste af alla öns höfdingar’). In Snöbohm (1871, 300), however, Segebaden is described only very briefly, but still as an excellent governor.
Erlandsson 1900, 34–5, 37, quotes at 35, 37 (‘Då Segebaden år 1788 lämnade Gotland, hade han lyckats väcka det förslappade folket till större verksamhetslust och insikt om egen kraft, hvarför med honom gryningen till en ny bättre tid för vår ö inträdde. … Lång var den natt, som efter vår medeltids ljusa, verksamhetsrika dag föll öfver Gotland. Med landshöfding Segebaden inbröt gryningen till en ny dag för det gotländska folket’). John Nihlén also used the Gustav I Vasa metaphor, and claimed that Segebaden was Gotland’s ‘father of the nation’ (landsfader) (Nihlén 1929, 178–9, quotes at 178, 189).
See also Uhr 1957, 8 who stresses Segebaden’s efforts in building the Gotland’s roads; for similar, see B. Söderberg 1948, 210–11; B. Söderberg 1949, 91; B. Söderberg 1975, 191–2.
in order to point out that the local patriotism of the Gutes must not get too strong. The good minority, who did not resist Segebaden’s reforms but instead accepted them, consisted in those who had not been shaped and influenced by the sea robbery and general disorder during the Danish period.²¹³ Thereby, he also managed to explain the excessive local patriotism with external, non-Gotlandic factors.

The cult of Segebaden was the rule, but there were exceptions. Not that he was described as insignificant or in a negative light, but that he was relegated to being just one among many important persons. In Boken om Gotland (1945), the description of Segebaden by the historian Leif Dannert is markedly reserved. Segebaden is named as one of the three most important people for the development of the island in the eighteenth century, all of them governors, but he is mentioned only briefly.²¹⁴

Still, modern Gotland has been relatively downplayed in the more ‘official’ Gotlandic history-writing. Some aspects of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gotland have entered the ‘hall of fame’ of Gotlandic history and heritage, most notably the stone houses in the countryside built in the eighteenth century, and the limekilns from the same period and later. A large part of the guidebooks, especially those for tourists and other outsiders, stressed iconic Gotland: the Middle Ages in Visby and the countryside churches, the stone houses, the limekilns, the fishing villages, all the prehistoric monuments.²¹⁵ But there was still little said about the island’s most recent history. In 1959, a ‘book film’ about Gotland’s nineteenth century was published, covering different aspects of the island’s history between 1801 and 1915. In the foreword, Bengt G. Söderberg—rightfully—claimed that Gotland’s thirteenth century is generally much better known than the nineteenth century. Therefore, that ‘void in Gotland’s cultural history’ had to be filled.²¹⁶

²¹³ Jakobson 1966, 24–5 (who also emphasized that Segebaden was his century’s great man on the island).
²¹⁴ Dannert 1945, 51–2.
²¹⁵ In tourist guides such as Hamberg 1970; or personal essayistic guides such as Lundqvist & Lundqvist 1972.
²¹⁶ Från fars och farfars tid (1959), 7 (‘tomrum i gotländsk kulturhistoria’). It was followed by Från fars och min tid (1972), covering the period 1915–70.
The folklore narrative, c.1850–1975

Owe Ronström claims that there are two main representations of Gotlandic history nowadays. Medieval Gotland means Gesellschaft: it is inclusive, individualist, urban, and somewhat elitist. Outsiders have claimed that they can say ‘we’ about Gotlanders going east in the Viking Age, but not concerning the eighteenth-century peasants. Then there is the other main narrative, about the old Gotlandic peasant society, mostly concerning the seventeenth to early twentieth centuries. That narrative is mostly local and symbolizes Gemeinschaft: it is exclusive, a version of the past more specifically suited for people who are ‘genuinely’ Gotlandic.217

The latter narrative has its equivalents in several other regional and national narratives, but the contrast with the Gesellschaft mythology of the Middle Ages is more peculiar for Gotland.

This division seems to have been consolidated at the turn of the twentieth century. Visby was then branded a centre of commerce, an urban symbol, while the Gotlandic countryside was fixed in a folkloric and National Romanticist manner typical of that age. Before that, the difference does not seem to have been so big. Per Arvid Säve concentrated on contemporary history, for example the changes in farming and the draining of the bogs.218 Carl Johan Bergman gave a fair deal of attention to the periods following 1361 in his textbook in 1870, even making the time between 1361 and 1645 into two different chapters, while the period before was only one chapter, as was the period 1645–1870.219 Much of his collection of historical essays, Gotländska skildringar och minnen, consisted of the more recent folkloric history, about folk games, peasant weddings, but also other events and artefacts from periods after the medieval golden age, such as the death of Søren Norby, more recent buildings in Visby, and so on.220

But as we saw above, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the important institution of Gotlands Fornsal turned its focus more specifically towards the pre-historic and medieval periods. And there was a

217 Ronström 2008, 238–49. Lotten Gustafsson (2002a, 71–2) also argues that there were two somewhat conflicting legacies.
218 In Åkerns sagor and Skogens sagor; see Palmenfelt 1993, 77–85.
219 Bergman 1870.
220 Bergman 1882.
growth in the number of academic researchers studying Gotland, a majority of whom were experts on the earlier parts of the island’s history. That helped the agrarian and folklore narrative develop into a more independent and internal affair.

Perhaps the single most important person responsible for producing and reproducing that aspect of Gotland’s past was Theodor Erlandsson, the schoolteacher mostly known for founding the open-air museum in Bunge in 1907 (Bungemuseet). He claimed that the old Gotlandic peasant culture was a ‘dying culture’. Indeed this was the subtitle of a series of books from 1923 to 1946, covering mostly folklore, manners, old dialects, and other aspects of cultural history up to the nineteenth century. Erlandsson claimed that Gotland had had a more egalitarian social structure than mainland Sweden. Even though there were both peasants and labourers on the farms, they worked together and acted as equals. However, in modern society that had changed. Workers and employers no longer greeted one another, and this was obviously against the Gotlandic soul. Therefore, the Social Democrats had nothing to do on Gotland, he claimed in 1935.

That explicitly conservative aspect of the folklore narrative was not the rule. As most folklore projects with the aim of strengthening the identity of a people, be it in a national, ethnic or regional context, the general tendency was to present it as something above politics, something that everyone could feel at home in. As we shall see, agents belonging to the political Left have also reproduced the folkloric aspects of Gotland.

Folkloric Gotland has been nurtured not least by the local heritage movement, gathering artefacts from the past in local open-air museums and the like. Another part of the narrative is peculiar of Gotland, namely the interest in regional folk games such as varpa, stångstötning, and pärk. Historian Leif Yttergren has observed that the folk games of Gotland are rarely mentioned in the dominant Gotlandic historiography, which predominantly deals with the Middle Ages. At the same time, they have a strong position in the regional identity, often being a field of conflict between the island and the mainland.

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221 Erlandsson 1923; Erlandsson 1935; Erlandsson 1946. The Bunge museum was soon hailed as an important part of the island’s culture (see, for example, Linnman 1924, 258–72).
223 Yttergren 2002, esp. 29.
Some people have tried to bridge that gap between the external medieval paradigm and the internal folklore paradigm. Henning Jakobson wanted to show that other side of Gotland for the mainland Swedes in his book *Gotland – landet annorlunda* (1966). His focus was Gotland beyond Visby, coastal Gotland. Jakobson pointed out that Gotland was first and foremost a peasant country, and described much of it in a traditionally nationalist and Romantic way, for example by stressing the Germanic spirit of the Gutnish peasants.\(^{224}\)

The content is often the same in the folklore tradition as in the medieval tradition. In the folklore tradition, though, there is a bigger emphasis on the legends and myths themselves, rather than the actual events. The Danish invasion in 1361 is the most obvious example of where the folklore tradition deals with different legends. However, the different aspects—myths and historical truth—were not contradictory, instead they complemented one another.

Folkloric Gotland, with its sagas and legends gathered by people such as Säve, Bergman, and Erlandsson, has made it possible to present Gotland as an ‘island of sagas’, both including the prehistoric and medieval legends and folklore of more recent times. A genre that we might call the ‘saga’ books, where the main topics are legends, myths with or without historical truth, is to a large part focused on the period after the Middle Ages. The above-mentioned books by Säve and Bergman fall into that category, which could also be said of Nihlén’s *Sagornas ö. Sägner och sagor från Gotland* (1928). However, the latter deals to a large extent with earlier history, leaning on myths from prehistoric and medieval times—the tales of *Gutasaga*, and the pre-Christian religious myths that are to be seen on the Iron Age picture stones.\(^{225}\)

**Shipping and fishing**

For islands, contact with the surrounding sea are naturally obvious. However, compared to some other Baltic Sea islands, such as Åland, marine activities such as shipping and fishing have played a relatively minor role in the history-writing of Gotland. If you Google ‘gotländsk sjöfart’ (Gotlandic shipping) you get 54 results, whereas ‘åländsk sjöfart’ (Ålandic shipping) gets 6,350 results.\(^{226}\)

\(^{224}\) Jakobson 1966, 28–37, esp. 29.

\(^{225}\) Nihlén 1928a; see also below for B. Söderberg 1975 and Wennerdahl 1985.

\(^{226}\) Date of analysis 6 August 2011.
The fact that fishing, with the exception of a period in the last century, has never been a main livelihood for the Gotlanders is an important factor. There are a lot of fishing villages on Gotland; however, the fishermen in the past relied on farming as their primary livelihood. Even so, in the modern age, the old Gotlandic fishing villages are almost fully part of the historical Gotlandic ‘canon’—they are remarkable physical remnants of the past, hard not to miss.  

Gotlandic shipping is indirectly covered in the dominant narrative of prehistoric and medieval greatness, highlighting the merchant farmers who sailed the Baltic Sea. There is a specific word for these trading farmers—the farmän (lit. ‘travelling men’). Still, the main focus has remained on Gotland itself; the travelling Gotlanders in question were after all peasants, rooted on their native island. In the yearbook about Gotland from the Swedish Tourist Association (1940), Erlandsson stressed that Gotland had always been a peasant country. The well-known glory days of Visby only lasted a couple of centuries, and the Gutes who made the island a centre of trade were peasants—not merchants as we know them.

Säve dealt with these aspects in two of his ‘sagas’, Havets och fiskarens sagor on the Gotlandic fishing, and Strandens sagor mainly about the more bleak and violent aspects of contacts with others across the sea or on the island’s own beaches, with sea robbery exemplified, for instance, by the story how the people of Fårö killed their competitors from Roslagen in mainland Sweden when fighting for the control of Gotska Sandön.

Otherwise, the narratives have been more positive, trying to capture the heritage values of these elements of Gotland’s history. In the schoolbook Gotland (1924), the fishing culture is covered at the start of the narrative, right after a traditional opening about Gotland’s oldest elements: the rocks and the sea. The fact that Gotlandic fishing villages unlike the ones in mainland Sweden, lack year-round residential homes is made into another characteristic of Gotland—something to be proud

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227 See, for example, guide books such as Se Gotland (2006), where numerous fishing villages are included.
228 Erlandsson 1940, 221; see also the fictional work Erlandsson 1949.
229 Säve 1979b (1873); Säve 1979c (1880).
230 Säve 1979b (1873), 176–7; see also, for example, Bergman 1882, 277–8; Linnman 1924, 142–4. Even if it has been said that Säve played down the negative aspects of wrecking, it is still a rather dark description (Palmenfelt 1993, 70 ff.).
of. A similar thing can only be found on the ‘sister island’ of Öland. However, the Ölandic fishing villages were ‘never as neat and orderly as the Gotlandic ones’. In *Det gotländska vikingaarvet* from 1928, Erlandsson claimed that most books about Gotland said very little about the Gotlandic *people*, especially not those many who had left the island for a life abroad or at sea. He set out to remedy that by presenting examples of Gutes travelling to North America and other far-flung places.

As we have seen, an entire period in Gotland’s history—the tumultuous epoch from 1361 to 1525—has been associated with pirates. In Erlandsson’s history, the period was even called *Sjöröfvaretiden*—the Age of Pirates. However, that also meant that Gotlandic piracy was generally seen as something that came from outside. The pirates were ‘the others’. By connecting them to the turbulences of the late Middle Ages, they—the Victual Brothers, Erik of Pomerania, and others—came to symbolize the island’s general decline after 1361. The works by Säve can be seen as something of an exception; a bleaker view of the Gotlanders’ past, where the islands’ inhabitants were not that much better than the outsiders.

Some Gotlanders have also gained semi-heroic status thanks to perceived criminal acts connected to the sea. The Gotska Sandön tenant Petter Gottberg (1762–1831) has become legendary thanks to history-writing, being sort of a piquant curiosity. His story was told by Per Arvid Säve and then by many others: Gottberg was supposed to have lured ships into running aground where he killed the crew and looted the wrecks. For example, the novelist Helmer Linderholm wrote two novels about this alleged robber and pirate, *Vrakplundraren* (1970) and *Vrakplundrarens dotter* (1972).
Nature and history united

The quest for origins is not only a matter of ethnicity and socio-political unities. In historiography, there has also been a constant concern with giving Gotland the earliest possible origin—in nature itself. It is most evident in the more popular and overtly identity-generating texts. For example, a schoolbook from 1924 starts with the chapter ‘Sea and beach: How Nature formed Gotland’. Popular books on history typically begin with sections on geography and nature; for example, *Boken om Gotland* (1945) emphasized that the Gotland rocks were formed 300 million years ago. Thus, history is united with nature itself.

So, there is a connection between Gotland as a natural phenomenon and Gotland as a socio-historical entity—at least in books that try to capture the essence of the island. The various depictions of Gotland put the emphasis on different aspects: some concentrate on nature and landscape, some focus on cultural heritage and history, and others combine them roughly equally.

In books such as Carl Fries’s *De stora öarna i Östersjön* (1964) and Siv and Key L. Nilson’s *Gotland – bilder från en ö* (1976), nature is the centre of attention. They are filled with lots of images, which still are easily read as specifically Gotlandic—rauks, meadows (*ängen*), and remnants of bogs (*myrar*) intermingled with pictures of Visby’s medieval culture, where limestone combines nature with culture.

Modern history-writing, c.1975 onwards

Previous analysts have noted that the Gotlandic regional identity seems to have been strengthened in the late twentieth and early twenty-first

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236 Linnman 1924, 7 (‘Hav och strand. Hur naturen danat Gotland’); see also Klintberg 1909, where the chapter ‘Gotlands tillkomst och daning’ (‘Gotland’s origin and moulding’, 1–62) is followed by chapters on the Stone, Bronze, and Iron ages (63–77, 78–84, 85–112), and finally the historical time after AD 1050, with a watershed in the 1520s (113–59, 160–75).

237 Pettersson 1945, 13, 16; see also Uhr 1957, 5–6. This tendency in history-writing has also been noted in Häggström 2000, 72 ff.; Wallette 2004, 313; and Edquist 2009, 140–1.

238 See also, for example, S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 115–33 on meadows, flowers, etc. There are also books entirely on its nature, for example, Ohlsson 1944, who calls for the preservation of nature, not least the bogs (*myrar*) (see ibid. 35–54 for Lina myr).
centuries. The revitalization of the folklore elements such as Gotlands-
dricka and local games is one example.\textsuperscript{239} This awakening of regional
identity is, however, a worldwide phenomenon, and it is difficult to say
whether the growth of identity production on Gotland has been either
greater or less significant than in other places.

Overall, the production of history in the last three or four decades is
more heterogeneous and ‘democratized’ than before, which also is a
general phenomenon. Academic history is more marginalized, and more
diverse. ‘Ordinary’ people write history far more than before, through
study organizations or by themselves.\textsuperscript{240} Heterogeneity and demo-
cratization are important elements in what is sometimes labelled a
contemporary postmodernist or late capitalist history culture. Another
important trait is the seemingly constantly growing economic influence
in historical culture and identity-making, where history is sold to tourists
and used for marketing and branding. In short, the identity-making and
entertaining values of history are heralded more than ever. The
ideological effect of this postmodernist history—being the ‘cultural logic
of late capitalism’\textsuperscript{241}—is obvious: non-controversial narratives of history
are naturally promoted when the purpose is to entertain or to sell a
‘historical trademark’ to tourists.\textsuperscript{242} As we shall see, historical culture on
Gotland is more diverse in our own time, and at the same time traditional
narratives are reproduced in very stereotypical ways.

Medieval dominance

In recent decades, the Middle Ages remain at the centre of the ‘official’
history-writing and other uses of history on Gotland. At least that is the
case when the island has been presented to tourists and people generally
interested in history from the mainland and abroad. Visby’s city wall and
church ruins, the monastery ruins at Roma, and the almost one hundred
medieval stone churches remind us of what is usually described as
Gotland’s golden age. It is therefore no coincidence that Visby and
Gotland since 1984 have hosted a well-visited Medieval Week, which
attracts considerable attention.

\textsuperscript{239} Salomonsson 1979; Yttergren 2002, 24. The old Gotlandic games are sometimes
discussed at length in the histories, for example, S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 166 ff.
\textsuperscript{240} See Edquist 2009.
\textsuperscript{241} Jameson 1991.
\textsuperscript{242} For example, Walsh 1992; Samuel 1996; Samuel 2000; Lowenthal 1998.
The dominance of the Middle Ages is clearly visible in many contemporary works on Gotlandic history, for example those written for a national Swedish audience by the tourist or popular education agencies. Two of the three books issued by the Workers’ Educational Association’s (ABF) publishing company Brevskolan (later Bilda) are good examples. There, prehistoric times and Middle Ages are dealt with in great detail, while the centuries afterwards are very briefly described. Of course, these books have long thematic chapters that deal with contemporary Gotland, but more recent events are still treated as something else than *history.*

There are also a great many books about Visby from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many of which have a tendency to stress the medieval period. However, there are some exceptions.

The majority of researchers on Gotland have specialized in the prehistoric and medieval periods. Many archaeologists have continued to work on Gotland, engaging in debates on for example the meaning of the sheer number of silver hoards from the Viking Age, mainly filled with Arab coins. In 2008 much of the Swedish National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet) was moved from Stockholm to Gotland, a manoeuvre

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243 Bergqvist & Wennerdahl 1987, 42–3; Wennerdahl 2001, 72–83. Bergqvist & Wennerdahl 1987, 45; and Wennerdahl 2001, 79–80 have about only one page on the nineteenth century. Only in the latter work is there a specific chapter on the twentieth century (ibid. 80–83). The third book, Werkelin 1981, gives more space to later centuries, but, equally, the description of some events of the prehistoric and medieval periods are among the most traditional in modern Gotlandic history-writing. See also Bohman 1990, 187 who stressed that most general histories of Gotland had not covered the modern social and political history of the island—his own works did, however. He also noted that *Boken om Gotland* (1945) covered modern social and political history fairly well.

244 Longer textbooks: Svahnström 1984; Yrwing 1986 (only the Middle Ages). Guidebooks that emphasize the old town: Falck 1991; Svensson 1998; see also Forsberg 1983 (based on a newspaper competition, with small details from around the old town—including from the twentieth century—for readers to explore and find). Coffee-table books: Mogren 1992 (amateur, mostly contemporary pictures); M. Jonsson 2000 (official). Mostly covering Visby of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Söderberg N. 1985; Falck 1988; Sjöstrand & Hallroth 1998. Confident ‘amateur enthusiasts’ (see below), often giving traditional accounts of the past: T. Gannholm 1994d; Wase 2005 (see ibid. 5 for his claims to be the leading expert on medieval Gotland following the death of Hugo Yrwing). Specifically on the city wall: Ludin 1980 (amateur guidebook); Erikson & Falck 1991; Falck 1994 (the two last the products of a campaign to ensure the preservation of the wall). For schools on Gotland: Bohman 1983. There are also more official, antiquarian accounts of Visby, with shorter sections that tell its history chronologically: *Visby: staden inom murarna* (1973); Engeström, Falck & Yrwing 1988.

245 The interpretations are different. Frands Herschend (1979), for example, claimed that Gotland’s silver hordes should not be interpreted as signs of war and unrest, but
for regional politics, but also because of Gotland’s traditionally central role in the antiquarian discourse and praxis.

Of course, there are historians who have specialized in later periods of Gotland’s history, and some of them have also written general Gotlandic history. Even so, the book *Gotlands historia i fickformat* (1987) by the historian Carl Johan Gardell, who wrote his doctoral dissertation about Gotland’s seventeenth century, leans toward the medieval paradigm, at least in the chronological sense. Gardell’s narrative is in all aspects modern and lacks all traces of historical romanticism, but the time frame is still concentrated on prehistoric and medieval times.

The origins of Gotland?

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the discourse about the Gutes, and other Scandinavians being Germanic peoples and/or Indo-Europeans who had migrated some time in the distant past has more or less vanished. An exception can be found in the first of ABF’s three province books about Gotland, from 1981. It is the most striking example among latter-day popular province overviews that carry the older style of historiography into our days. The book mostly deals with present-day Gotland, with focus on politics, economics, and societal issues; however, in the middle section of the book there is a history chapter in which it is claimed that Goths immigrated to Gotland in the Migration Period (375–500). The reasoning is partly based on history-writing from the late nineteenth century:

> In the Germanic Migration Period, 375 to the sixth century AD, Goths ‘for real’ populated Gotland. From the Black Sea mainly Germanic peoples and Goths went north. The Germanic peoples halted at what is now Germany, while the Goths continued north to what is now Denmark, Sweden, and Norway (Gothenburg—the Goths’ castle, Västergötland—the land of the West Goths, Östergötland—the land of the East Goths, Norway—the land of the North Goths). When the Germanic peoples turned away into Germany, a group of Goths headed out to an island in the Baltic Sea, which they made their own, the land of the Goths (Gotland).

rather that they had been means of exchange between Gotlanders, which could be a sign of a certain prosperity.
That the Gutes are a branch of the great Gothic tribe is shown among other things by the language of the Gutes, that is to say Old Gutnish, and their ancient habits, customs, and laws. Like the rest of the ancient Indo-Germanic tribe, the Goths who emigrated to Gotland worshipped fire and a number of Gutes who have been associated with fire. Even well into the nineteenth century, the belief existed that fire protects against witchcraft.

You can trace the division between ‘Goths’ and ‘Germanic peoples’ in Snöbohm’s *Gotlands land och folk* (1871), as well as the words about ‘Indo-Germans’ and their cult of fire. Werkelin also claimed that the Gutes immigrated from the south a couple of centuries BC. Perhaps that was an influence from Bergman’s *Gotlands geografi och historia i lättfattligt sammandrag* (1870), where the Gutes are said to have come together with the Goths from the Black Sea—however, without dating the event. The argument also seems to have been inspired by the early twentieth-century academic discussions about various ‘returns’ of Germanic tribes to Scandinavia from the south during the Migration Period.

Apart from this, the outright *ethnic* discourse of origin has vanished, but a more ‘non-ethnic’ discourse is prospering. Up to the present day, history-writers have tended almost unthinkingly to describe the population of Gotland in prehistoric times as ‘Gotlandic’, even if they have not entered into any speculation about their language or ethnic belongings. Throughout the twentieth century, it was considered perfectly normal and natural in this way to make ‘Gotlanders’ into something eternal, something that has existed for many thousands of years. From the very beginning of Gotland’s history as a country inhabited by humans, there

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247 See, for example, Arne 1917, 35; Lindqvist 1922.
were also Gotlanders.248 There are exceptions though—such as Gardell’s *Gotlands historia i fickformat*, where Stone Age people are referred to as ‘Gotlanders’ in quote marks.249

The non-ethnic discourse about the origins of Gotland’s inhabitants is flourishes just as much as the other origin discourse, about Gotland as a natural entity. It is regularly claimed that the island was formed when the rock solidified, for example that the fossils and rauks of Gotland are more than 400 million years old. Then, Gotland was reborn when the ice melted and the first rocks—‘the highest parts of Lojsta’—stretched up above the water 11,500 years ago. It seems as if this discourse of natural geographies has become more common recently. Where it has become a bit controversial to talk about ancient ethnic or national continuity, it is still fully acceptable to highlight the continuity in nature itself. The function is the same: to create the notion of eternity for a specific territorial division, stressing its great age.250

The romance of Old Gotland

Academic research in history, archaeology, and the humanities has undergone a quite radical change in the last couple of decades. There has been a general shift towards using theories, often taken from the social sciences. There is a growing willingness to question and deconstruct the ways that research and academic historiography has nurtured ethnic and national identity projects. Many accepted truths have been attacked and deemed ideological anachronisms. That is also evident in the case of Gotland, especially when it comes to its much vaunted golden age in the prehistoric era and Middle Ages.

The traditional image of medieval Gotland as an egalitarian peasant republic still exists in the research community, but now rather as a minority position. The discourse that the Gotlanders were a ‘free and independent’ people with no royal power above them, and with relative equality, is to be found even among researchers in the late twentieth and

248 For example, Stenberger 1945b, 47; Werkelin 1981, 41; Wennerdahl 2001, 24 (‘gotlänningsarna’).
249 Gardell 1987, 15 (‘gotlännningar’).
early twenty-first centuries.\textsuperscript{251} One can also discern it in other contexts, for example in the assumption that the Christianization of Gotland—as in Iceland—was accomplished through a ‘common and democratic decision at the thing’.\textsuperscript{252}

However, many professional historians and archaeologists have in recent decades directed devastating criticism against the old standpoints. When the professional archaeological review \textit{Meta} devoted a special issue in 1990 to Gotland’s Viking Age and the period immediately following, Anders Broberg pointed out that there were still large areas that were poorly studied, even though so much research had been produced about Gotland during those epochs. First and foremost, researchers had studied artefacts, monuments, and chronological problems, but had done little to analyse the character of society, the structure of settlements, and the conditions of production.\textsuperscript{253} He claimed—tellingly—that the main question of debate, was now whether Gotland had been ‘an egalitarian peasant republic’ or ‘a strongly socially differentiated society’.\textsuperscript{254}

Anders Carlsson claimed that some researchers, for example his fellow archaeologist Gun Westholm, still seemed to presuppose that Gotland during the Viking Age had been a wealthy, peaceful, and independent peasant republic, with no magnates and little social antagonism. Westholm defended herself and struck back. She criticized Carlsson’s view that there was a small elite of magnates (‘\textit{stormän}’) on Gotland in the Viking Age, and branded his suggestions as ‘mainland-based theses’ that ignored local circumstances. There was no nobility, but instead a class of wealthier farmers who made collective decisions.\textsuperscript{255}

The debate on the egalitarianism of old Gotland has also been visible among historians. The doctoral dissertations of Carl Johan Gardell and Jens Lerbom, who studied sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Gotland, were both attacked by historian and archivist Tryggve Siltberg. The latter

\textsuperscript{251} Yrwing 1978, 89; Nylén 1979, 12; Östergren 1983, 37 (‘fritt och självständigt’); Westholm 2007, 50 ff.
\textsuperscript{252} Trotzig 1983, 393 (‘gemensamt och demokratiskt tingsbeslut’). The similarities with Iceland had earlier been stressed in Schück 1940, 80.
\textsuperscript{253} Broberg 1990, 2; see also Carlsson 1988, 7.
\textsuperscript{254} Broberg 1990, 3 (‘en egalitär bonderepublik’, ‘ett starkt socialt differentierat samhälle’).
defended the idea that the old Gotlandic peasant society had been relatively egalitarian, and that Gardell and Lerbom had been too radical in revising the picture. Gardell and Lerbom more or less openly identified Siltberg as a proponent of the traditional view. The former claimed that the meagreness of source material for Gotland’s history before the seventeenth century had helped nourish the notion of the peasant republic.256

If we turn our eyes to the non-academic history-writing, the picture is a little different. Roger Öhrman stressed in Vägen till Gotlands historia (1994) that it was ‘perhaps … not entirely correct’ to call Gotland a peasant republic, but still it mirrored society quite well. At the same time, he emphasized that medieval Gotland had large social differences between the classes.257 In the schoolbook Gotland förr och nu (1996), Öhrman used the term ‘peasant republic’ as a name of the period—1050–1525.258 The vision of a peasant republic is, thus, tenacious and recurs constantly in contemporary popular surveys, albeit with a standard reservation that Gotland nevertheless was a class society.259

One of the most traditional accounts can be found in the artist and writer Erik Olsson’s Gotland vår hembygd (1985). He starts by claiming that ‘our homestead and our history is our pride’, and that the Gutes have been a free people, thanks to the sea that surrounds ‘us’. We sent out Avair Strabain in the ninth century ‘in democratic order’ to get protection from Sweden, but we kept our independence, Olsson claims.260

Another standpoint that has been attacked by researchers is the one about Gotland and Visby as important centres of trade. No one claims that the island was unimportant, but the excesses are criticized. Hugo Yrwing in his book on Visby’s medieval period from 1986 harshly critical towards those who said that Visby had been an international centre of trade—that was to exaggerate. He was especially critical of Gunnar

256 Gardell 1986; Lerbom 2003; Siltberg 1989; Gardell 1989, esp. 387–8; Siltberg 1990; Siltberg 2006; Lerbom 2006; see also Siltberg 1993.
257 Öhrman 1994, 72–3, quote at 72 (‘kanske … inte helt korrekt’).
258 Olsson & Öhrman 1996, 66–7 (‘bonderepubliken’); see also Öhrman 1973, 15, where it is emphasized that Gotland continued to be a ‘free and independent peasant republic’ (‘fri och självständig bonderepublik’) after the treaty with the Swedes, ruled by the self-owning peasants with no interference from any king. In a similar vein, Funck et al. 1984, 14 write that the Gutes would not give up their ‘ancient freedom and independence’ (‘urgamla frihet och självständighet’).
260 Erik Olsson 1985, 8 ff., quotes at 8 (‘vår hembygd och historia är vår stolthet’, ‘oss’, ‘i demokratisk ordning’).
Svahnström’s recent book on Visby’s history, whose medieval part he deemed was of almost no value.\textsuperscript{261}

Recent popular history is not as explicit as before about Gotland’s historical greatness as an international trade centre. However, there are clear reflections of the previous historiography. In Brevskolan’s history books, it is said that the Gotlanders had extensive contacts in the Middle Ages, centring on trade. It is also stressed that the Gotlanders were a peaceful people during the Viking Age and the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{262} The dichotomy between peaceful Gutes and warlike Swedes has survived well into our time. Archaeologist Ingmar Jansson, for example, stressed the Gotlanders as peaceful on the basis that swords are not found in the graves after c.900.\textsuperscript{263}

There were still tendencies to extend Gotland’s position as a centre of trade far beyond the Viking Age. For example, it was argued that by the Middle Ages, the Gotlanders had already for more than a thousand years been engaged in transit trade.\textsuperscript{264} Another history book, \textit{Gotland – navet i havet} from 1994, boldly stated that the Gutes have been a ‘travelling people’ for seven thousand years. And during the Middle Ages—Gotland’s golden age—the island was ‘the hub of the sea’.\textsuperscript{265}

More recent popular history-writing also tends to follow \textit{Gutasaga} in its story about Gotland’s voluntary treaty with the Swedish realm—even if the actual time of the event is placed differently.\textsuperscript{266} Otherwise, the popular historiography of the late twentieth century is rather sceptical towards \textit{Gutasaga} as a historical source. However, it is generally regarded as an important text that at least has the function of giving colour to the historiography.\textsuperscript{267} Academic surveys such as Carl Johan Gardell’s

\textsuperscript{261} Fritzell 1972 is also mentioned as an example of that exaggeration; Yrwing (1986, 338–350, particularly 339, 350) also says that Svahnström leans toward Strelow.
\textsuperscript{262} Bergqvist & Wennerdahl 1987, 28 ff., 32.
\textsuperscript{263} Jansson 1983b, 242–3.
\textsuperscript{264} Bergqvist & Wennerdahl 1987, 37.
\textsuperscript{265} S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 14, 22–3, quotes at 14 (‘resande folk’) and 23 (‘navet i havet’); see also Funck et al. 1984, 13 who stressed that Gotland was at ‘the centre of world trade’ (‘i världshandelns centrum’) a couple of centuries after the discovery of silver in Central Asia in c.700.
\textsuperscript{266} Even same author can give more than one date for the treaty, from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. Hence Wennerdahl 1985, 29–30, 205; Bergqvist & Wennerdahl 1987, 31, 39; Wennerdahl 2001, 43–4 (see also Wennerdahl 1985, 124–5). See also Öhrman 1973, 15; Arb 1981, 68.
\textsuperscript{267} See, for example, Wennerdahl 1985, 29–30, 153, 159, 165, 231–2; Wennerdahl 2001, 6; M. Jonsson 2000, 23. The status of \textit{Gutasaga} is also obvious in newer schoolbooks,
Gotlands historia i fickformat start with Gutasaga. However, it is explained as a typical medieval origin story, and he describes how Gutasaga was used in the conflicts between Sweden and Denmark in the seventeenth century.268

Among academic researchers, it might be possible to discern a tendency in recent decades towards a growing recognition of—or wish to stress—Eastern influences in prehistoric and medieval Gotland.269 While it was the rule before to stress how Swedes and Gotlanders more or less had colonized the East, it is now more a question of accentuating different forms of interaction and cultural blending. Common features between for example Gotland, Finland, and the present-day Baltic states are identified.270

Johan Callmer has stressed that the late Iron Age ethnic groups around the Baltic Sea were small but numerous—for example, there were a lot of them within the borders of what was to become Sweden. He has emphasized the Ålanders as a link between the Finnish and Scandinavian areas, in a network of connections that also included Gotland and the present-day Baltic republics.271 Callmer claims that the contacts between Gotland and the eastern Baltic area had the paradoxical effect of rendering Gotlandic culture in part very strict and unwilling to be influenced by other cultures.272

Gotland often stands in the centre of the discussions about cultural contacts across the Baltic Sea. Ingmar Jansson has emphasized that Gotland at the same time had a very marked individuality, and very lively contacts with others, out of necessity. Even if Gotland shared most common traits with Scandinavia, the similarities between Gotland and the eastern Baltic areas were greater than those between Scandinavia and the

which are named after Pieluar (L. Olsson 2003a, 3, passim), or otherwise is constantly cited (Funck et al. 1984).

269 For Bulverket, see, for example, Bendegard 1983; Manneke 1983, 72.
270 Thunmark-Nylén 1983a, for example, 182; Lehtosalo-Hylander 1983; Callmer 1992; Gustin 2004, 83–4; see also Bozena Wysomirska in her review of Inger Österholm’s dissertation Bosättningsmönstret på Gotland under stenåldern (1989) in Fornvännen 86 (1991), 129 where she calls for a greater emphasis on Gotland’s Stone Age contacts in all directions, pointing out that, thanks to its position, Gotland had been open to cultural impulses in all eras. Gotlandic folk sagas, she notes, had many Danish, German, Baltic, and Russian equivalents, with no equivalents on the Swedish mainland.
271 Callmer 1992; Callmer 1994; Callmer 2000; see also Gustin 2004, 62 ff.
272 Callmer 1992, 104; Callmer 1994, 60.
eastern Baltic areas. That was the likely reason for Gotland to develop an extensive transit trade, probably long before the Viking Age.273

Few researchers in recent decades uphold Nerman’s view that there was a proper Swedish and Gotlandic colonization of the eastern Baltic coast before the Viking Age.274 Jansson is quite cautious: at most, there was some Gotlandic emigration to the east, for example to Grobiņa.275 Others have been more critical. In the 1980s, Anders Carlsson claimed that until further notice one had to give up the idea of Gotlandic colonies at Grobiņa and Elbląg. Objects that looked Gotlandic, could instead be interpreted as the native population had bought or in other ways obtaining objects with a Gotlandic provenance or just a Gotlandic style.276 Another alternative has been to stress the mixture itself at Grobiņa and similar places between ’Baltic, mainland Swedish, and Gotlandic’.277

More recent works of popular history are generally silent on the alleged Gotlandic migration to the eastern Baltic coast during the seventh and eighth centuries, although it is usually mentioned more in passing as a historical fact, that Gotlandic merchants made their homes there.278

In the recent decades, it is only in popular historical overviews that we can find the remaining traces of Birger Nerman’s theories of migration in the Migration Period, leaning on Gutasa. An example is Stig Jonsson’s Gotland – navet i havet, with the story of the Swedish-speaking inhabitants of the Ukrainian village Gammalsvenskby, who had come from Dagö in the late eighteenth century, but who were given the chance to move to Sweden in 1929. The majority of them settled on Gotland, and Jonsson interpreted this as their return to Gotland; the ‘ring was closed’, since the Dagö Swedes originally were supposed to have emigrated from Gotland in the Iron Age.279

275 Jansson 1983b, 216 ff. Jansson (1992b, 62, 74 ff) wrote of a probable Scandinavian population around Grobiņa, while at the same time being critical of Nerman; see also Jansson 1992a, 74; Thunmark-Nylén 1983b.
276 Carlsson 1983b, 194; see also Gustin 2004, 60; Carlsson 1983a. Stalsberg 1979, 157–8 also pointed out that very few Gotlanders seem to have travelled east.
277 Gustin 2004, 83–4, quote at 83 (’baltiskt, fastlandssvenskt och gotländskt’).
279 S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 14–15, 89 ff., quote at 91 (’slöts ringen’); see also Fries 1964, 193 ff. who, without mentioning Nerman, agrees with his hypothesis of emigration via Torsburgen.
In the second half of the twentieth century, some researchers have gone further than the previously mentioned discourse on Eastern cultural influences in the question of the medieval Gotlandic churches. They have also raised the question of whether present-day Sweden—and especially Gotland—was Christianized from the east. Late in his career Ture J. Arne was one of them, and in our time for example the art historian Erland Lagerlöf (b. 1928) has emphasized the eastern–Orthodox hypothesis. However, many researchers tend to stress that we know nothing for certain about any Eastern church missions to Sweden and Gotland. Especially in the case of Gotland, the religious transition seems very obscure, and some researchers claim that the process might have lasted almost into the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{280}

However, there is a striking absence of these newer theories in the popular press, in which the explanation mainly refers to the story of Olaf Haraldsson in \textit{Gutasaga}—no matter whether it is taken to be true or not.\textsuperscript{281} However, sometimes it is stressed that the Gutnish Vikings must have met Christianity during their trade expeditions ‘in the South–East’—obviously meaning the Byzantine Empire, or later Russia.\textsuperscript{282}

It is in popular history-writing that we still find the traditional tragic dramaturgy of Gotland’s fall from glory to decline and turmoil in the late Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{283} The internal conflict of 1288 is generally blamed on the city of Visby, but especially on foreign influences: the Germans and the Hanseatic League. They had increased their influence in the city, thanks to ‘good organizational skills and German thoroughness’, and then tried to diminish the power of the Gotlandic countryside. For example, in \textit{Gotland—navet i havet} (1994), the Germans’ influence in Visby was labelled a cuckoo in the nest. The main winner was the Swedish king.\textsuperscript{284}

The events of 1288 were the first ‘outburst of unrest and war’, beginning an age of ‘disasters and decline’, Maj Wennerdahl claims. It signalled

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{280} Lagerlöf 1999, 16–21, 26–37; see also Janson 2005. For criticism of the Eastern theories, see, for example, Trotzig 1983, 386, 388; see also Yrwing 1978, 150. For other discussions on Gotland’s Christianization, see, for example, Thunmark-Nylén 1989a; Thunmark-Nylén 1989b; Carlsson 1990; Wase 1995. See also Edquist 2012, 112 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Bergqvist & Wennerdahl 1987, 34 ff.; S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 30 ff. See also Arb 1981, 68; Werkelin 1981, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{282} Öhrman 1973, 14–15, quote at 15 (‘i sydost’).
\item \textsuperscript{283} Arb 1981, 72–8.
\item \textsuperscript{284} S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 45, 49, 54–5, quote at 49 (‘god organisationsförmåga och tysk grundlighet’). Nylén 1979, 12 describes Visby as ‘cuckoo in the Gotlandic nest’ (‘gökunge i det gotländska boet’).
\end{itemize}
the ‘final divorce between city and countryside’, even though ‘the peasant republic’ still would have 80 years left of ‘peaceful activities’, still visible in the most glorious epoch of church constructions. Öhrman stressed that the civil war in 1288 was an unhappy event that left seared the ‘Gotlandic people’s soul’ for centuries to come. It was also the beginning of more sinister times. The plague came in 1350, being one of two disasters, the other happening in 1361.

The events of 1361 were, according to Stig Arb (1981), ‘touching evidence of the willingness of the peasant state to defend itself’. Öhrman tells the story at length, first the legends, then the historical sources, concluding that we ‘probably’ can count the following as a historical truth: ‘Visby’s shameful capitulation’. Erik Olsson boldly complains that the ransom of Visby has attracted more attention than the Gutes’ loss of life. Other accounts—though less condemning in words—still give a lot of space to events, describing the brutality in detail. That can be contrasted to Hugo Yrwing’s major book from 1986 on Visby’s Middle Ages. In that dry and academic account, the events of 1361 were depicted as only a few among a vast number of links in the historical chain.

1361 more than ever lives on as the symbol of Gotland’s Middle Ages, and it is no coincidence that the Medieval Week in Visby has that year as the focal point. Archaeologist and Gotlands fornsal employee Gun

288 Arb 1981, 77 (‘gripande bevis för bondestatens försvarsvilja’).
289 Öhrman 1994, 120 ff.
290 Öhrman 1994, 122 ff., quote at 123 (‘nog’, ‘Visbys gentemot landsbygden skamliga kapitulation’); see also Öhrman 1973, 19 where Visby’s citizens ‘are said to have’ (‘får … ha’) stood on the city walls, doing nothing, and “The city–country rivalry was still strongly felt” (‘Rivaliteten stad–land kändes ännu stark!’); similarly Funck et al. 1984, 20; Olsson & Öhrman 1996, 75; see also Nylén 1979, 12.
292 For example, Svensson 1998, 153 ff.
293 Yrwing 1986, 157. Still, he called the Victual Brothers pirates (‘sjörövare’, 177), and concerning the split between Visby and the rest of Gotland, he claimed that the Visby Germans had got what they wanted (115). His book was marketed as covering the previously overlooked history of Visby after 1361 until the 1530s (Yrwing 1986, back blurb).
Westholm wrote a book about the events in 1361, also describing the aftermath with Gotland declining into poverty.²⁹⁴

The latter is also a continuing theme in the history-writing: in the fourteenth century, a pretty miserable period began; the economy went downhill, and the island occasionally functioned as a pirate nest for more than a hundred years after the disasters of the fourteenth century.²⁹⁵ The complexity of the time after 1361 is generally emphasized, not least that there were a lot of pirates. The chapter in Roger Öhrman’s *Vägen till Gotlands historia* (1994) is typically called ‘privateers and pirate castles’, with accounts of the tumultuous period of the Victual Brothers, the reign of Erik of Pomerania, and so on. He, like previous history writers, pointed out the good exceptions, not least the reign of the Teutonic Knights, over whose departure in 1408 the Gotlanders were said to have felt sorry.²⁹⁶

**Modern histories of modern Gotland**

In newer popular history-writing, the period following 1645 is usually described in roughly the same ways as before. It is claimed that the Gotlanders themselves did not care for their new masters—they had grown used to being part of Denmark.²⁹⁷ It is also stressed that Swedish officials were not very interested in Gotland; for example it is sometimes mentioned that no Swedish king visited the island before 1854.²⁹⁸

In Roger Öhrman’s *Vägen till Gotlands historia* (1994), there is much more space for the latest centuries—even for the period after 1945, with topics such as the development in schools, local politics, demographics, and administrative divisions.²⁹⁹ However, even there many of the elements are roughly the same ‘as usual’: popular topics such as sandstone mining³⁰⁰ and the lime industry³⁰¹ are covered in detail. There is also a short description of the Russian occupation in 1808, told as something hilarious rather than dangerous.³⁰²

²⁹⁴ Westholm 2007.
²⁹⁷ S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 66–7; Öhrman 1994, 150. See, for example, Wennerdahl 1985, 177 for a typical account of Jacob Dubbe.
Modern history books regularly deal with transportation between Gotland and the Swedish mainland—first with the risky mail boats long into the nineteenth century, and the introduction of the regular steamboat traffic in the 1850s and 1860s.\textsuperscript{303} Still today, the ferry transportation is a much-discussed topic, being a constant source of discontent.\textsuperscript{304}

The big hero of earlier Gotlandic historiography, the late eighteenth-century governor Segebaden, is nowadays seldom viewed in the same way as before. But when he is mentioned, remnants of earlier discourses are visible. He often rates a brief mention as someone industrious who wanted to develop the island.\textsuperscript{305} It is also said that the Gotlandic farmers only afterwards ‘realized the value of all these proposals’.\textsuperscript{306}

However, the main bulk of history-writing on the modern period in Gotland is not presented in general Gotland books, but mostly in specialized works about various aspects of its history, specific places, parishes, people, or industries, as we shall see in the section ‘The third narrative’. The history of Gotland’s popular movements, for example, is regularly downplayed in the general books.\textsuperscript{307}

Amateur enthusiasts, enthusiastic amateurs

A category of its own might be called the amateur enthusiasts: amateur historians with often far-reaching interpretations of history. In the late twentieth century they have been more visible, thanks to the general diversification of history culture and the quantitative growth of history production overall. What I mean by this category are not the ‘ordinary’ local historians, but the kind of history writers who display a sharp antagonism against ‘established’ history-writing. Their aim is to finally present the hidden, suppressed account of the past that the dominant historiography

\textsuperscript{303} From 1858, there was regular boat traffic even in winter, while the still dominant shipping company Gotlandsbolaget was founded in 1865 (Gerentz 1945, 418–19; Gardell 1987, 132; Öhrman 1994, 209–210).
\textsuperscript{304} S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 96–101 (with a distinct pro-Gotlandic flavour, pointing to uncompetitive pricing and poor timetables).
\textsuperscript{305} Bergqvist & Wennerdahl 1987, 43; S. Jonsson et al. 1994, 45; Wennerdahl 2001, 74.
\textsuperscript{306} Öhrman 1994, 171 (‘insåg värdet av alla dessa förslag’), in a short section (169–71) on ‘powerful governors’ (‘kraftfulla landshövdingar’), but much like Dennert he seemed to downplay Segebaden. (In Öhrman 1973, 23 ff., an account of Gotland after 1645, Segebaden is not mentioned at all.)
has tried to conceal. They are often driven by a strong regionalist sentiment, and the enemy is centralist, Swedish historiography.

Sometimes the antagonism is subtle, as with the Visby physician Folke Ludin, who has written a couple of guidebooks. One of them is about the city wall of Visby; he stresses that he, like ordinary townspeople, chooses to call it a *ringmur* (lit. ‘ring wall’) unlike the *experts* who call it a *stadsmur* (‘city wall’).³⁰⁸

Contrary to the common form of amateur history, which mostly deals with local history and particular objects, normally in fairly contemporary history, these historiographers take on old and classic topics in history. In Sweden, this kind of history-writing is best known in the province of Västergötland, where a group of amateur historians have claimed that the origins of the Swedish nation in fact were situated there, not in the Mälaren valley in the vicinity of Stockholm and Uppsala.³⁰⁹

But there are also examples on Gotland. The most outspoken of the Gotlandic amateur enthusiasts today is Tore Gannholm (b. 1940), who is noted for his radically regional patriotic historiography, emphasizing the independence and glory of Gotland through the ages—especially in older times. His father Karl Erland Gannholm had similar interests and engaged himself in the debate on so-called grooves (*slipskåror* or *sliprännor*).³¹⁰ In that debate, some amateur historians have adopted a harsh tone towards the academic experts, who are described as too learned to have any common sense.³¹¹

Tore Gannholm has cast his net wider than his father, and has dealt with almost every aspect of Gotland’s early history. He has studied the prehistoric political frictions between Gotlanders and Swedes, written in a spirit reminiscent of the nationalist archaeologists such as Birger Nerman during the first half of the twentieth century. Gannholm’s magnum opus is a general Gotlandic history, which was first published in 1990 with the title ‘History of the Gutes’, and in an enlarged version in 1994 named ‘Gotland – The Pearl of the Baltic Sea’. For Gannholm,

³⁰⁸ Ludin 1980, 11.
³⁰⁹ Janson 1999.
³¹⁰ K. Gannholm 1974; K. Gannholm 1987; see also T. Gannholm 1994d, 30 who presents as fact that the grooves were ‘astronomical calendars’ (‘*de astronomiska kalendrarna*’), the oldest dating back to 3200 BC.
³¹¹ Larsson et al. 1986.
Gotland’s history really ended when the island was finally ‘annexed’ by Sweden in 1679.\textsuperscript{312} Gannholm states that since he is a ‘consultant in problem solving’, he knows how to ‘distinguish what is related and essential’ in a historical material, and he emphasizes that he is an ‘old Gute with my roots deep down in the story told’.\textsuperscript{313} In 1992, he published the Old English epic \textit{Beowulf}, with the subtitle ‘the national epic of the Gutes’.\textsuperscript{314} The \textit{geatas} of \textit{Beowulf} have generally been interpreted as either Jutes (\textit{jutar} from Jutland in Denmark) or Geats (\textit{götar} from southern Scandinavia), but Gannholm was certain that they in fact were—Gutes. He also claimed that Avair Strabain probably was identical with the epic’s hero, \textit{Beowulf}. Thus, the treaty with the Swedes had taken place in the sixth century.\textsuperscript{315} Gannholm has characterized the entire period from 1000 BC to AD 1300 in the following way: ‘The Gutes dominate trade in the Baltic Sea and seems at times to have a monopoly on this. Gotland is the centre of the Baltic culture.’\textsuperscript{316}

In shorter pamphlets, he has also covered the history of Visby, the origins of the Swedes (originally Heruls, who immigrated to Scandinavia in the sixth century), and the Baltic trade and the Hanseatic League in the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{317} As for Visby, Gannholm emphasized—following Strelow—that the city was founded in 897, and is thus the oldest city in the Baltic area. It was also an important centre long before the Germans arrived in the twelfth century and took over. He also claims that Visby merchants formed the nucleus when Stockholm was founded in 1252.\textsuperscript{318}

Gannholm’s history-writing is well known on Gotland, but it has been somewhat marginal, as a kind of curiosity. It has not influenced the dominant history-writing on the island, for example the one displayed in other authors’ works or in the activities of Gotlands fornsal.

\textsuperscript{312} T. Gannholm 1990, 170; T. Gannholm 1994a, 217, back cover (‘annekterade’).
\textsuperscript{313} T. Gannholm 1994a, 11 (‘konsult i problemlösning’, ‘urskilja vad som är relaterat och väsentligt’, ‘urgute med mina rötter djupt ner i den historia som berättas’).
\textsuperscript{314} T. Gannholm 1992.
\textsuperscript{316} T. Gannholm 1994d, 30 (‘Gutarna dominerar handeln i Östersjön och tycks tidvis ha monopol på denna. Gotland centrum för Östersjökulturen’). Just like Mårten Stenberger, Gannholm claimed that there were three different ages of greatness in Gotland’s history: 1000–500 BC, 100 BC–AD 500, and AD 600–AD 1300 (T. Gannholm 1990, back cover).
\textsuperscript{318} T. Gannholm 1994d, 1, 3, 5, 9, 12 ff.
The two dominant narratives

At the turn of the millennium, there were still two dominant narratives on Gotland: the medieval one and the folklore one. The relationship between them is not easily summarized; sometimes they are entangled, in other instances, contradict one another.

An example of the former is the handbook and history guide *Vägen till kulturen på Gotland* (1987 and several further editions), issued by Gotlands fornmal. It tries to address a wide range of historical phenomena, from prehistoric remains to modern villages developed around railway stations. In the book, emphasis is laid on peasant society in history, such as remnants of old farms. The emphasis, however, is limited to the Iron Age and the Middle Ages. It is stressed that Gotland has a particularly well-preserved cultural landscape for favourable historical reasons in relation to the rest of Sweden. These reasons, though, are of a socioeconomic nature: sparse population and large urban continuity, lower population growth, the opportunity to cultivate the bogs instead of meadows, and so on. The explanation does not link Gotland’s peculiarities to ‘ethnic’ reasons, such as a specific historical consciousness or the piety of the Gotlandic people. There is no historical romanticism of the traditional kind, but instead a mainstream, modern heritage ideology: it is considered important to preserve the island’s historic remains, and it is stated that currently many good efforts are being made in this direction.

The tourist guidebooks are regularly filled with a similar sort of condensed version of the island’s past, containing both the medieval and folklore narratives. A mainstream history is transmitted, with all the standard topics: the city walls of Visby, the large number of medieval churches, fishing villages, limekilns, medieval and eighteenth-century stone houses, Iron Age sites, and so on. A similar mix is reproduced in schoolbooks, where old games and the old dialect *Gutamål* is presented for children, along with essays on Gotlandic nature, limestone, and industry, Visby as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the like. The same can be said about Roger Öhrman’s voluminous history of Gotland from 1994. Even if the Middle Ages took up relatively few pages compared to many other Gotland books, he still gave a lot of space to classic themes

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such as medieval Visby and the rural churches. Thus, the two narratives were intertwined somewhat.

This is also the case in the later versions of ‘saga’ books, such as Söderberg’s *Gotlands sällsamheter* and Wennerdahl’s *Sällsamheter på Gotland*. There is no chronological disposition; instead there is a geographical one. The reader is taken on a journey through the parishes of Gotland, and presented with legends and histories from all ages—from the Stone Age to the twentieth century. However, the bulk of the stories are from later centuries, about villains, robbers, ghosts, and legendary personalities. We are also told about Segebaden, Søren Norby, and the Gotska Sandön robber Gottberg.322 There is also a predilection for disasters, such as the catastrophe of the Danish–Lübeckian navy in 1566, or the details of an infamous mailboat crossing in the winter of 1830.323

Wennerdahl’s *Sällsamheter på Gotland* (1985) was released by the same publisher as Söderberg’s decade old *Gotlands sällsamheter*. However, it was even more modern, with a greater focus on for example twentieth-century writers, such as the poet Gustaf Larsson.324 She also dwelt on the history of Gotland’s popular movements, popular education, railways, and suchlike.325

Another typical example of the mixture of medieval and folklorist narratives is *Gotland vår hembygd* (1985) by the artist and writer Erik Olsson. The paintings and texts in the book deal with the fishing villages and life at sea, along with pictures of peasant culture from the past centuries. The beginning of the book deals with medieval Gotland, Avair Strabain, the battles in 1361, and the old churches in a starkly regionally patriotic way. However, there is no trace of the real, modern Gotland, not a word about industrialization or contemporary life.326

Carina Johansson notes that the stereotypical images seem to have been strengthened in the representations of Gotland. For example, in the mid twentieth century, windmills were often depicted as typical for the

322 B. Söderberg 1975, 42 ff., 115–16, 191–2, 200 ff., the last a thieves’ on Stora Karlsö, earlier described in Säve 1979b (1873), 177–8.
323 B. Söderberg 1975, 51 ff., 204–205.
325 Wennerdahl 1985, 28–9, 33 ff., 180 ff.
326 Erik Olsson 1985; see also Erik Olsson 1990, a cheerfully burlesque collection of modern legends and tall tales of interesting people and events.
Gotland countryside; now, however, windmills are limited to Öland, and are seldom seen in Gotland narratives.\textsuperscript{327}

There are many signs that medieval Gotland and Visby have been further strengthened as symbols of Gotland’s past in recent decades, with the rise of cultural tourism that is profiting by the stereotypes—the history that is already well known. So, in a society where the historiography is democratized and made more heterogeneous, there is a simultaneous opposite trend: using history to brand and exploit traditional identity projects.\textsuperscript{328} In Visby, the Middle Ages have gained grounds in the last decades. In 1984, the Medieval Week (\textit{Medeltidsveckan}) was launched in Visby which eventually extended to the whole island.\textsuperscript{329} A decade later, there was rapid and successful application to make the historical centre of Visby a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A small group in the heritage bureaucracy at the municipal and county level managed to obtain official protection for a variety of medieval buildings in Visby. Owe Ronström states that this has resulted in a sort of theme town, one of many different but still streamlined heritage sites that follow a fixed template. In ‘medieval’ Visby, diversity and dissonance are vanishing.\textsuperscript{330}

As is often the case nowadays, official heritage and history policies are openly pursued as cooperative projects between state and municipal agents, museums, corporate interests, and local heritage associations, with the common denominator being the ambition to attract even more tourists and investors to the island.\textsuperscript{331} Gotland is no exception to the prevailing ideals, according to which heritage and cultural identity are important for a region’s economic prosperity.\textsuperscript{332} In a document listing the ‘strategies’ for ‘Gotlandic Heritage’ for the period 2004–2008, issued by a project group appointed by the municipality, county, Gotlands fornsal, and Gotlands hembygdsförbund (Gotland Heritage Association), it was emphasized that contemporary heritage work (\textit{kulturarvsarbete}) should focus on areas, not objects, and that heritage should be a development resource. Heritage was claimed to be a positive factor for the well-being of the residents, as well as

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\textsuperscript{327} C. Johansson 2006, 53.
\textsuperscript{328} Edquist 2009, 310–1.
\textsuperscript{329} Gustafsson 2002a; Sandström 2005.
\textsuperscript{330} Ronström 2008; see also Gustafsson 2002b; C. Johansson 2009.
\textsuperscript{331} Oscarsson 2006. A number of recent heritage projects, mostly in the countryside, have been covered in Johansson et al. 2000
\end{flushleft}
attracting new islanders and investors.\textsuperscript{333} The document mentioned various examples of Gotlandic heritage worthwhile using in this work—a good example of the amalgamation of the two dominant narratives: the medieval churches, the Gutamål dialect, the folk games, collections of people’s memories, photographs, and objects, animal breeds and plants specific to the island, the World Heritage Site of Visby, and the cultural landscape with old farms, fishing villages, and prehistoric relics.

Branding is also important in these matters. Gotland in 2008 was officially branded ‘the magical island’ in a document drawn up by a group made up of representatives from the municipality, enterprise, cultural associations, and Gotland University. It was considered important to widen the image of the island—no longer should Gotland be an island only symbolizing summer and holidays. But what about Gotland’s past—was there any ambition to use that in any other way than before? Hardly. The extremely vague document—typical for branding strategies—only notes that ‘heritage’ and ‘world heritage’ are among Gotland’s positive assets. There is no mentioning of a wider conception of what Gotland in fact means when it comes to history.\textsuperscript{334}

But there are also conflicts today between the medieval and folklore narratives. In contemporary heritage matters, some observers have noted a conflict between the city (Visby) and the Gotlandic countryside.\textsuperscript{335} Carina Johansson cites complaints that the island’s medieval heritage, centred in Visby, is being strengthened at the expense of its folkloric heritage. Staff at the open-air museum at Bunge claim that fewer tourists visit their museum. As of 1980s it is no longer the case every Gotlandic schoolchild gets to visit the museum. They feel that the concentration on Visby, utilizing its new status as a World Heritage Site, has put the countryside in the shadow.\textsuperscript{336}

There are also many voices from the countryside, or claiming to be speaking for the countryside, that criticize the Medieval Week in similar words. They say that it is primarily something for educated people in Visby, many of whom are also mainlanders in origin. The artist Erik Olsson has been outspoken about the fact that the tragedy of 1361 was

\textsuperscript{334} Vision och varumärkesplattform för Gotland – den magiska ön (2008).
\textsuperscript{335} Kriström 2000, 83.
\textsuperscript{336} C. Johansson 2000b, 38, 40.
celebrated—he wondered if that would have happened in the case of Pearl Harbor.\footnote{Gustafsson 2002a, 119 ff.}

The events of 1361 are still vivid to the Gotlandic population, Lotten Gustafsson notes—perhaps because of the very stark reminders in Gotlands fornsal of fallen peasant soldiers, and thanks to the popular legends. It is therefore not surprising that 1361 was chosen to be the year reenacted in Medieval Week, since it is possible to use different angles and perspective in the story, with different actors in focus, and different endings.\footnote{Gustafsson 1998; Gustafsson 2002a, 99–129.} In comparison with the painting of Carl Gustaf Hellqvist, nowadays the open nationalism and blind faith in the past is missing.\footnote{Gustafsson 2002a, 106.}

However, Medieval Week as an event means that the greatness of medieval Gotland and Visby is pronounced. Gustafsson connects that with a generally growing appreciation of the Middle Ages. That period is no longer the Dark Age, but instead an epoch of light, culture, and international trade. The cult of the Middle Ages is sometimes associated with the dominant EU ideology of regionalism and supranationalism. There, the Middle Ages are seen as an epoch, before the nation-states came into existence, when trade connected different regions rather than states.\footnote{This kind of rhetoric is also seen among participants in Medieval Week; C. Johansson 2000c, 96.}

The Germans and the Hanseatic League have traditionally been seen as ‘the bad guys’ of Gotland, even if the spectacular riches of Visby were a result. Due to late twentieth-century European integration efforts, there have been projects to revive the idea of the Hanseatic League and similar aspects of medieval history. That could also be used as a new trademark for Visby and Gotland. Those ideas are also prominent in ideas such as those behind the (new) Hanse, a network founded in Zwolle in 1980, with 176 member cities and towns.\footnote{Gustafsson 2002b, 39 ff.; <www.hanse.org>.} It has revived the idea of ‘Hanseatic days’, with one held in Visby in 1998. A little earlier, Visby took the slogan the ‘Hanseatic town of Visby’ (Hansestaden Visby). Another Hanseatic Day is already scheduled for Visby for 2025.\footnote{<http://www.hanse.org/en>, s.v. ‘2025’.
The Baltic Sea perspective

In the 1990s, there was also greater interest in the Baltic connections, for example leading to various kinds of cooperation between Gotland and the Baltic republics. Gotland was at this time often referred to as ‘the hub of the sea’ (navet i havet)—a slogan repeated in the book by Stig Jonsson, published in 1994.\(^\text{343}\)

That development was of course a result of the fall of the Berlin Wall. After that, the Baltic Sea region could now be seen as an integral whole, which united more than it separated. The B7 Baltic Islands Network was founded in 1989 as an organization for cooperation between the seven largest islands in the Baltic Sea: Åland, Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, Gotland, Öland, Bornholm, and Rügen. The organization has mainly dealt with issues of political and economic issues, striving for common strategies across the political divisions.\(^\text{344}\)

That ambition was also visible in the history writing, and the number of books with a truly Baltic perspective has increased. Before, there were only occasional initiatives. During the inter-war period, the local amateur historian Per Josef Enström wrote Östersjön: strövtåg och drömmar i hansestäder och andra gamla städer (1929), with essays about places around the Baltic Sea—Gotland, Germany, and the Baltic republics. There has also been a more Swedish Baltic Sea perspective, when Öland and Gotland are mentioned in the same breath, as is evident in books such as Carl Fries’s De stora öarna i Östersjön (1964).\(^\text{345}\)

Then at the end of the 1980s, the Nordic Institute on Åland—a cultural institution subject to the Nordic Council of Ministers—took the initiative by commissioning a common history for the Baltic Sea islands, just at the time when the islands were seeking closer cooperation in trade and tourism. The Danish teacher, novelist, and schoolbook author Søren Sørensen (b. 1937) was recruited to write the general history book Öarna i Östersjön – förr och nu about six Baltic Sea islands—Åland, Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, Gotland, Öland, and Bornholm (not Rügen, though). The book had a cross-Baltic editorial committee, with Gotland being represented by the head of Gotlands fornsal, Sven-Olof Lindquist.\(^\text{346}\)

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\(^{344}\) <www.b7.org>.

\(^{345}\) Enström 1929; Enström 1967; Fries 1964.

\(^{346}\) Sørensen 1992, 4.
Öarna i Östersjön – förr och nu deals with the islands’ history from the beginning to the present age. The main difference from regular history books is that the islands are discussed as a group, albeit ‘one by one’ when necessary. The similarities between the islands are underlined, for example concerning nature itself and how it has affected human society in the Baltic region. Naturally, though, since the book relies on existing books and research, traditional topics in historiography reoccur. For example, where Gotland is concerned, Mårten Stenberger is quoted as claiming that Gotland had a ‘second age of greatness’ around the birth of Christ, when ‘the Gutes founded colonies in East Prussia and Courland’.

In the early 1990s there was also a schoolbook issued in Sweden with a focus on the history of the Baltic Sea, which was quite unique. Still, these efforts from the leading political and heritage institutions on the major Baltic Sea islands in the early 1990s were really an elite project. It found few counterparts in the more popular history-writing, which mainly takes a local perspective, and, where not, it looks towards the Swedish mainland. From Gotland’s horizon, when you look across the sea you generally look towards mainland Sweden, the place with which Gotlanders have so many more contacts and relations than with other countries. Contacts with other parts of the Baltic area are limited. At the time of writing, there is for example no regular ferry service between Gotland and other countries.

Which mainland?

Thus, a dominant trait in Gotland’s history-writing is that Gotland is primarily viewed relative to the rest of Sweden. When one talks about ‘the mainland’ (fastlandet), it goes without saying that it is the rest of Sweden that is intended—never, for example Latvia, 150 km away and closer than Stockholm. Of course it is natural enough for the epochs when Gotland actually did belong to Sweden, but more questionable when writing about pre-Christian times, let alone the period 1361–1645.

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347 For example, Sørensen 1992, 9–30 for brief discussions of the limestone industry and stone as building material for houses.
348 Sørensen 1992, 36, 40 (‘andra storhetstid’, ‘gutarna grundar kolonier i Ostpreussen och Kurland’).
350 See, for example, Erik Olsson 1983, a book on Gotland’s ships and harbours from the Viking Age to the present, which stresses Gotland’s position in the middle of the Baltic Sea. That said, the focus is wholly on Gotland—the Baltic Sea is only something that happens to surround the island.
A similar recurring tendency in the descriptions of Gotland is to emphasize its peculiar character, making it unique in a Swedish setting. That is also evident when the island is viewed from a mainland perspective. Stig Arb’s *Gotland* (1981) is one of many books written by mainlanders who regularly visit Gotland, he being a typical ‘summer Gotlander’. Arb begins his book by stressing ‘the un-Swedishness of the landscape’ that clearly emerges as ‘we spot the Visby Coast from the ferry’. In a similar manner, Carl Fries’s *De stora öarna i Östersjön* begins by considering the contrasts between the coastlines of the mainland and of Gotland: low-lying rocks versus steep limestone cliffs.

We have seen that history-writing has tended to emphasize that Gotland was more or less independent during the Middle Ages. That independence was especially viewed in relation to mainland Sweden. However, after Gotland’s ‘dark’ period from 1361 to 1645, the island returned to Sweden, a point at which, few history writers stress Gotland’s independence in matters that really count—only the cultural peculiarities are allowed to prosper. The story of Segebaden, the late eighteenth-century governor who introduced a great many modern habits and technologies, stands out: Gotland was a weak province that could not do well on its own. The Gotlandic independence was after all a thing of the past.

For pioneers such as Säve, the Swedish connection was not at all a problem. And in the more recent histories of Gotland, modernity was in fact introduced from the mainland. Säve quoted Segebaden—*the* modern hero of Gotland’s history, who had hoped that it would turn into a rich and prosperous province of great importance *for the entire Swedish fatherland*. For Erlandsson too, Segebaden was the person who finally remade Gotland as a developing province, and even if the first part of the Swedish rule after 1645 had been quite bad, in the present Gotland was firmly attached to Sweden, ‘our new but still original fatherland’.

There is almost a kind of colonial discourse that can be paralleled with classical Western descriptions of the ‘Orient’. It had its golden age in the Middle Ages, when it was equal to or even superior to the West. However, afterwards the East went into decline, and for later periods the roles were switched. Then, the West could be the benevolent teacher of the East.

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351 Arb 1981, 9 (‘det osvenska i landskapet’, ‘vi från färjan siktar Visbykusten’).
352 Fries 1964, 11 ff.
353 Säve 1980 (1876), 214.
354 Erlandsson 1900, 40 (‘vårt nya och dock ursprungliga fädernesland’).
the same manner, development and civilization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had to come from the ‘West’ in the case of Gotland, from enlightened mainland government officials.

Metahistory, or the history of Gotland’s history

Finally, there is growing interest in Gotland’s history-writing as a form of cultural history itself. Texts such as Gutasaga and figures such as Strelow, Säve, Snöbohm, and Bergman have become important parts of the Gotland canon, which is one of the elements that today shapes perceptions of Gotland’s heritage.

The first history writers have often been cited and reused in later historiography, not least in the ‘saga book’ genre. There the connection between the earliest and more recent Gotlandic history-writing seems particularly obvious and direct. It was not only a matter of quotations and re-usages of topics and examples—there was also a frequent reuse of whole stories. Söderberg’s Gotlands sällsamheter, for example, directly lifts stories straight from Bergman.\(^355\)

Another important instance of the interest in older Gotlandic historiography is the tendency to republish older historical works; hence the edition of Haquin Spegel’s Rudera Gothlandica (1683) in 1901. Gutalagen and Gutasaga have been published on a number of occasions, and the same goes for Carl Linnaeus’ description of his journey to Gotland (and Öland) in 1741, which has been reprinted in more than 10 times from the late nineteenth century up to after 2000. A local publisher, Barry Press, republished Strelow’s Cronica Guthilandorum (1633) in 1978.

The works of the ‘classical’ history writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have also been reprinted. The collected works of Per Arvid Säve were republished a couple of times (1937–1941 and 1978–1983), including some texts that had never been printed. From the 1970s onwards, a number of classic Gotlandic history works were reissued: Säve and Bergman’s Gotland och Wisby i taflor in 1975, Bergman’s Gotländska skildringar och minnen in 1976, Snöbohm’s Gotlands land och folk in 1975, Gustaf Lindström’s Anteckningar om Gotlands medeltid in 1978, and Theodor Erlandsson’s En döende kultur in 1975 and 1981.\(^356\)

\(^{355}\) B. Söderberg 1975, 48 about a horde found in a church ruin in the sixteenth century.

\(^{356}\) Other examples are Hans Hildebrand’s Från forna tiders Gotland (1909/1910) in 1993; J. N. Cramér’s En gotländsk postfärd och En natt på havet (1872) in 1982; and Albert Engström’s Gotska Sandön (1926) in, for example, 1941 and 1992. Essays by
There are various institutions with an interest in Gotland publications. The regional public archives of Gotland—Landsarkivet i Visby—have issued a number of reprints and books about earlier historians. They have regarded it an important matter to raise awareness of earlier historical works that were not accessible enough. Therefore, they translated the works of the sixteenth-century pioneer Nicolaus Petreius (Niels Pedersen) and issued a volume about Alfred Theodor Snöbohm.

A related phenomenon is the printing of older forms of archival material, maps, and the like, for the benefit of future history-writing. Gotlands fornsal has in the series Acta eruditorum Gotlandica (1984–) printed older source material, laws, and regulations. Others have issued for example the three-volume Revisionsbok för Gotland 1653 and Sören Norbys räkenskapsbok för Gotland 1523–24, useful not least for local historians.

The third narrative

Books such as Vägen till kulturen på Gotland are a form of amalgamation of the two narratives (medieval and folklore) that have dominated in Gotland’s history-writing. The real ‘other’ is the history-writing that is different from both of those two. That historiography might be called the third narrative.

Owe Ronström has highlighted the deep division between an established image of Gotland, with a focus on its medieval greatness or folkloric peasant culture, and a more truly ‘internal’ memory culture, where more recent and non-official aspects of history are emphasized, often with a stress on everyday life. For example, modern Visby outside the city wall is a typical arena for this memory culture. He calls this extramural district

Per Josef Enström were reprinted in 1970 (Romantikens ö: Gotlandsvandringar och drömmar) and 2004 (Gotländska vandringar: bland ödekyrkor och gamla gårdar).


See also Georg Westphal’s Utkast till ekonomisk beskrivning över Gotland (1779) in 1982.
'a country in-between’ that is absent from most representations of Visby and Gotland.\textsuperscript{360}

However, that kind of history is to be found—at least partially—in the more ‘internal’ mediation of history on Gotland. The popular education and local heritage movements can be said to represent an at least partially alternative sphere in historical culture, where other aspects of Gotland’s past are highlighted to a greater extent. There are no strict boundaries between this sphere and the dominant narratives. On the contrary, there are strong similarities and overlapping areas of interest between them. The history-writing of the popular education and local heritage movements—especially in the landscape descriptions produced by these movements or their publishers—nowadays takes part in the reproduction of the traditional image of Gotland’s past, and we have already seen examples where for example the discourse on medieval greatness is reproduced.

In the periodical \textit{Från Gutabygd}, published by Gotlands hembygdsförbund (the Gotland Heritage Association) from 1979 onwards, a fairly modern historical content dominates. It is a different story of Gotland compared to the one presented to tourists, and it is far more varied. On the one hand the movement has firm foundations in the early twentieth-century Romanticism of agrarian and premodern culture in the countryside, and on the other hand there has been a growing interest in the ‘everyday’ history of the recent past, of industries, shops, schools, transportation, and the like. Thus, there is an old ‘Erlandsson paradigm’ which has to a certain part been modernized and extended to the more modern aspects of life.

\textit{Från Gutabygd} mainly consists of traditional cultural history, with a preponderance of articles on agrarian culture from the seventeenth century onwards. Other popular themes are the popular movements and the history of schools, as well as elderly people’s memories of their childhood. There are articles on the use and subsequent drainage of Gotland’s bogs, and about the limestone and sandstone industries. Attention is also paid to the history and efforts of the organizations themselves: there are many articles about prominent local historians and local history museums. A similar tendency (although I have not had the possibility to further investigate it) characterizes the large number of local

\textsuperscript{360} Ronström 2008, 60–1, 64–5, quote at 64 (‘mellanlanden’, a concept taken from Dag Østerberg). Ronström uses the examples of the humorous recording artists Smaklösa (‘The Tasteless’) and histories of Sixties’ Visby (Ingelse 1997).
history books, which normally deal with a specific parish and have been written by one or many amateur historians, often connected to a local heritage association.

The popular education associations also entertain a particular version of Gotland’s history. They have largely dealt with more recent history, where for example study circles have done research on the match industry, brewery, fishing, and shipping—sometimes also publishing their results in book form.\footnote{See also the ABF-sponsored Britse 1999, although this was a private project.}

Furthermore, there are many individuals writing about Gotland’s history from this more ‘internal’ aspect. Journalist Arvid Ohlsson, for example, wrote the history of Gotland’s lime industry from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries in a book published in 1964.\footnote{Ohlsson 1964.} Schoolteacher Lennart Bohman (1921–2005) has written a number of books and articles on the social and political history of modern Gotland, not least the history of political institutions and various organizations. In a similar vein, he has written about the nineteenth-century Visby.\footnote{Bohman 1962; Bohman et al. 1964; Bohman 1981; Bohman 1990.}

A more recent example is Anders R. Johansson (b. 1948), who since 1984 has edited the journal Haimdagar with articles about various aspects of Gotlandic history. He has also published a number of books on various aspects of Gotlandic history, mostly about the last 400 years, from the local history of the parish of Hellvi, to the history of the workers’ movement on the island.\footnote{Until 1997, Haimdagar was a supplement to Sockennmagasinet Hellvi-nytt, the magazine of the local heritage association in Hellvi. Haimdagar is now also a publishing company, publishing local and regional history books, but also other genres. In 2006, Johansson was awarded the Rudolf Meidner-priset by the Labour Movement Archives and Library in Stockholm.}

Among an even younger generation, we find Martin Ragnar (b. 1972), born in Visby but now working on the mainland, who has written a number of local history books about Gotland.\footnote{<http://www.gotland.net/bo-leva/arkiv/unikt-gotlandicabibliotek-doneras-tilllandsarkivet>.} For example, he has studied the Lummelunda paper works, and the gasworks in Visby that existed until 1954. He writes from a pure and simple fascination with the subject, but also from a conviction that modern welfare is grounded on industrial production, not ‘Internet consultants’ build webpages for one another.\footnote{Ragnar 2007, 7 (‘internetkonsulter’); Ragnar 2008.} He has also published extensively on the railways on Gotland,
presenting his results with lots of details, accounts, and photographs from archival sources.\textsuperscript{367}

It is also in these environments we mostly find history-writing about Gotland’s contacts with the sea—shipping and fishing.\textsuperscript{368} There is also a shipping guild in Visby with a long history: Skepparegillet i Visby was founded in 1682, which today functions as an association for those interested in shipping history.\textsuperscript{369}

All these authors have mainly written various kinds of fairly ‘regular’ history, based on archival studies and the results of previous researchers, with the main purpose being to present the facts about a specific subject. A slightly different genre that has grown more common is a more explicitly personal version of the past. These books often deal with history seen in terms of the authors’ own life stories, or their older relatives.\textsuperscript{370}

All these examples constitute what I have previously called a \textit{people’s history}, which has slightly different distribution channels to the better-known official histories.\textsuperscript{371} This is not at all specific to Gotland—it is much the same in the rest of Sweden and in other countries as well.\textsuperscript{372} We are dealing with a kind of division of labour, where different aspects of history are distributed through different channels. One should not simplify—it is not the case that people who are active in the popular education and local heritage movements are unilaterally interested only in Gotland’s recent and/or everyday history, while scientists and tourists are passionate about ancient and medieval times, old stone churches, and the independent peasant republic. It is rather a question of differences in emphasis. As we have seen above, quite a few contemporary books issued by the popular education movement have also reproduced a traditionalist history-writing. That indicates that the ‘alternative’ people’s history has not changed the overall picture presented in the tourist guides and reference works. That Gotland would have had prehistoric and medieval grandeur and independence can of course be claimed to be based on

\textsuperscript{367} For example, Ragnar & Hardings 2002.
\textsuperscript{368} Olsson Elov 1983; \textit{Fårö batsmän} (1996).
\textsuperscript{369} Its history is covered by Rosman 1932. As of 1951, it has published a members’ periodical.
\textsuperscript{370} See, for example, Elov Olsson 1983 (mainly on the life in fishing and shipping); Sjöstrand & Hallroth 1998 (an essay on life in early twentieth-century Visby); Gahnström 2007; Emilsson 2007.
\textsuperscript{371} Edquist 2009.
\textsuperscript{372} Eriksen et al. 2002.
wishful thinking and anachronisms, but the attraction of that kind of history-writing can hardly be overestimated.

The implications of the dominant medieval narrative

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Gotland has been graced with a history-writing that stresses its glorious past, including the golden age when the island was at its peak. On Gotland, this is dated to the Middle Ages, an era whose remnants today attract tourists from far and wide. The island’s role as an international trading centre has always been accentuated, as has the notion that Gotland, at least until the thirteenth century, was a democratic agrarian society where common decisions were made at the things. This last discourse is a version of the myth of the ancient Germanic peoples that ultimately goes back to Tacitus.

There has also been much made of the idea that the Gotlanders were a peaceful people in their age of greatness, contrasted to the more warlike Swedes. Gotland was given an important role in the description of Scandinavian adventures in the East during the Viking Age—even if they dealt in trade rather than war and the foundation of nation-states. Until recently one has, generally speaking, emphasized that the Gotlanders, like other Scandinavians, were active in relations across the Baltic Sea. They were the expanding part. Eastern cultural influences on Gotland—if they have been discussed at all—have been explained as a result from trade relations that Gotlanders themselves had instigated. The traces of Eastern Christianity on the island in the Middle Ages, as was already being noted in research in the early twentieth century, have only in recent years been more emphasized.

Contemporary research on Gotland during the Viking and Middle Ages is mostly cautious when it comes to ethnicity. Therefore it is difficult to find more open reminiscences from earlier, more grandiose modes of history-writing about Gotland being the centre of world trade or an independent peasant democracy. When the research was popularized, it more often alluded to ideals such as ‘strong women’ or multiculturalism, or it stressed Viking cuisine with lots of tips. Nevertheless, the narrative of the democratic peasant republic is still being repeated, mainly in

373 Janson 2005; see also Edquist 2012.
popular works, although usually with the qualification that the island was also a class society.

Those who today write the history of Gotland cannot be expected—if they are not themselves researchers—to be fully up to date with the current research. That kind of historiography uses the old and cumulative knowledge as a memory bank to draw on, and hence nineteenth-century history-writing can in some cases live on in our time, with theories that have long been out of fashion in the academic community more likely to be replicated in other contexts.375

The Middle Ages have in many ways been useful for creating and reproducing collective identities. It is a borderland between history and myth: to some extent, we know what happened during the Middle Ages, but at the same time the standard picture is full of myths and fictional images. In most European countries, the Middle Ages are the principal period considered in the search for the origins of contemporary national identities.376 In many cases, for example Gotland, that is also the case for the regional collective identities.

On the whole, local and regional identities seem today to be regarded as less dangerous and controversial than national identities. It is therefore easier to pass on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century myths of origin when they are centred on provinces and local communities, while the same rhetoric linked to the nation is readily associated with all the evils that nationalism has brought.377 But, if we move from the level of rhetoric, it is not at all certain that regional identities are really becoming stronger at the expense of nationalism. All the same, the Gotlandic regional identity in most cases serves as a complement to Swedish national identity. And just as Swedish nationalism generally is a banal nationalism in the words of Michael Billig—a national ideology reproduced every day in seemingly harmless forms such as flying the flag, singing the national anthem, and in all forms of everyday practices reproducing the difference between Swedish and non-Swedish—

375 The same can be said of Gutasa, which in itself is an example of the tenacity in historiography all the way from medieval times to the present. Since there are not so many other sources to use for such central themes as the Christianization of Gotland and the island’s connection to the Swedish kingdom, it is understandable that the saga continues to be a sort of mythic framework in the understanding of the island’s earliest history.
376 Geary 2002.
Gotlandic regionalism is mostly a banal regionalism. It is seldom aggressive or overtly xenophobic, but nevertheless it is a doctrine about us being something different from all the others.

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Appendix 1: The disposition of fifteen typical Gotland books

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\(^1\) Books that have no chronological element have been omitted, for example Linnman 1924.
\(^2\) Including picture stones, rune stones, and Christianization.
\(^3\) Including the events of the summer of 1361.
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