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## THE BUILDING AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

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### *Abstract*

Buildings are indeed mute, yet many historians and architects claim that they can nevertheless speak. The challenge is to understand their language. This thesis examines the building as a source of knowledge. Setting out from a repertoire of historical investigation methods used by professional actors within the field of architectural conservation, the thesis deals with the question of what standard buildings can teach us about the past. What can buildings say, and to whom?

The thesis is based on a case study of the national cultural reserve of Örnans in the region of Skåne in the south of Sweden. Örnans serves as a laboratory for action-based research and involves both conservationists and craftsmen. The unit of analysis is not the site in itself but the context and process of investigation. The process is examined from three perspectives, which correspond to the layout of the thesis: the forensic perspective on material culture, the source pluralism perspective, which refers to the possibility of combining information from multiple sources, and the actor perspective, which sheds light on how the actors involved influence the investigation. A theoretical platform is given by Carlo Ginsburg's perspectives on diagnosis through clues and Martin Weaver's approach in 'forensic conservation'.

The results constitute a set of reflections and judgements on a range of different survey methods and sources. In focus are working methods that facilitate an increased exchange between practice-based research and research-based practice. The forensic perspective activates the building as a source of knowledge, and by combining different approaches it is possible to shed light on the history of the building from many different angles. Inquiry of historic construction, material use and signs of toolmarks, tested through processual reconstruction, is a method that has been systematically examined. The conclusion is that this method requires craft skills, yet it also opens up for cross-disciplinary work and thinking.

The results articulate the importance of a heuristic approach. As conservationists and architectural historians we need to oscillate back and forth between the details and the whole, between observations and logical reasoning and between a physio-technical and socio-cultural perspective in order to uncover the layers and traces of the history of a building.

Keywords: Architectural conservation, historic buildings, building survey, survey methods, historical sources, building documentation, mapping, architectural drawing, architectural analysis, forensic conservation, reconstruction, historical work process, traditional building craft.

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