Birka, on the island of Björkö, was one of the earliest, true urban centres of the North and one of the most important towns in the Viking world. It was also an important harbour and entrepôt for international trade and shipping. Many merchants and craftsmen lived and worked there.

Christian missionaries, led by St Ansgar came to Birka from Bremen in the 9th century, but Birka never became a Christian community. Pagans and Christians lived side by side until the end of the 10th century.

Today Björkö is a rural idyll with pastures, cornfields and juniper-clad hillsides. An island known for its rich flora.

Excavations on Björkö have given us a clearer picture of Birka and the Viking Age. After the most recent excavation (1990-1995) we know more about the plan and the structure of the town. At the same time we have come closer to the people and the everyday life they lived in Birka.

In July this year a new visitors’ centre at Birka will open, where, for the first time, the archaeologists’ new picture of the Viking town of Birka will be presented. Large-scale models will recreate the harbour with the ships from near and far, life in craftsmen’s quarter and the splendour of the king’s power. Finds will be exhibited, which are rarely shown in other museums.

Travel back to the Viking Age. Visit the museum and see how people lived in Birka more than a thousand years ago.
EDITORIAL

This is the first number of Viking Heritage Newsletter. It will be published four times a year, and sent to all the members of the Network. Viking Heritage Newsletter will be what you all make of it. That is to say, that we very much depend on information and material from you to make it interesting.

The main aim of the newsletter is both to be an information channel about the latest research results from studies of the Vikings from different parts of the world, and to be a forum for discussions and information about Viking Heritage Management, specifically about the different sites selected by the Council of Europe as being the Highlights of the Viking World. The guide-book Follow the Vikings, which will be printed in August this year and will be a member gift to the members of the Viking Network, is dealing with these sites.

We are most interested in having information about new development in these selected sites, but also about other scientific and informative development of the Viking heritage.

This, our first number of Viking Heritage Newsletter, is very much dedicated to the Viking history of Eastern Europe in the form of some shorter articles about recent knowledge and research in this area. It is a well-known fact, that it is heavily influenced by the Vikings, and we know of many finds of Viking artefacts, especially from places like Novgorod and Staraya Ladoga in Russia and Grobina in Latvia. However I believe that the very amount of traces from Eastern Europe is unknown to many of us.

Today, when it is far easier to travel in Eastern Europe than before, together with a growing co-operation between Western European universities, scholars and counterparts in Eastern Europe, the knowledge of Viking history is changing at an extraordinary pace.

History of the world of the Vikings

As a part of the Council of Europe’s project Cultural Routes, a group of Viking experts from different countries has selected 50 sites as Highlights of the Viking World. The selected sites represent both authentic monuments, full scale reconstructions, museums, visitors’ centres and living theatre. Many of them are well-known visiting places, such as the town and museum of Hedeby in northern Germany; the Viking settlement at L’Anse aux Meadows at the northern tip of Newfoundland in Canada and the Viking ship museum in Roskilde in Denmark.

Some of the sites selected among these 50 highlights are on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. In fact, the first cultural heritage site to be selected was the Viking settlement at L’Anse aux Meadows. Other places are the Viking town of Birka in Sweden, the Stave church in Urnes Norway, and the latest cultural heritage site is the Jelling monument in northern Jutland, Denmark.

Many of these 50 sites are constantly changing and making improvements in their display. At Ribe in Denmark, there is a very new museum, as well as at Trelleborg, one of the selected ring forts from Denmark. Last year was the inauguration of a reconstruction of the longest Viking house (83 metres) ever found, in Borg at Lofoten in northern Norway.

In July this year a new visitors’ centre at Birka will open, displaying the history of the town, not at least through the results of the last six years of excavations conducted under the leadership of Björn Ambrosiani. In the museum you will find the harbour of Birka with ships from different parts of the world. The crowd of people and the royal splen-

dour of Adelsö, where the king was placed, will be made alive through large scale models.

The next number of Viking Heritage Newsletter will be dedicated to illustrate the changes that have taken place among these 50 highlights of the Viking world in the last years, or are planned to take place in the near future.

Anyway, I hope you will enjoy the reading. But it has to be said again, to make the Viking Heritage Newsletter into something more than a local newspaper, you will all have to take part in the creation of the newsletter, and we clearly need your help. We would appreciate any information you can compile about new excavations, exhibitions, museums and so on, but also, of course, improvements of existing visiting sites. But we would also very much like to have minor articles of new and interesting research into the history of the Vikings and the Viking time. We would like you to write in English and will have an English-speaking person to check the texts. We would appreciate illustrations to join your material.

Dan Carlson
President
The present state of knowledge in the proposed research field

Many successful interdisciplinary projects between archaeology, geology and paleobotany have been undertaken on Viking Age and Early Medieval urban sites in the Scandinavian, Slavonic and Finno-Ugric areas around the Baltic Sea. They have yielded important scientific information about the environmental conditions for the development of agriculture and settlement, the process of urbanisation and the human impact on the landscape. This situation contrasts sharply with that in the territory of the ancient Balts, where such investigations on Late Iron Age sites are almost unknown. To catch up this lag an interdisciplinary research project is now being designed. The initiators are eager to establish contacts and receive comments.

The proposed research area and sites

A control area, some 50 x 50 km wide, covering three Curonian sites (each with a hill fort, an unfortified settlement and a cemetery, partly excavated and dated to c. 600 - 1200 A.D.) was chosen for detailed study. The area is administered by Latvia (2/3 around Grobina in the Liepaja district) and by Lithuania (1/3 with two sites - Apuolë in Skuodas and Impilis in the Kretinga district).

Archaeological and historical background

The material wealth of the Curonian Iron Age culture was enormous. There is hardly any known cemetery in Curonia dating from the 3rd century A.D. where Roman coins were not found.

In A.D. 600 the Curonians were one of the leading tribes among the Balts. Prior to the 7th century their contacts with their neighbours across the Baltic sea, in Gotland and Central Sweden, were occasional.

The situation was changed by Scandinavian activity along the Curonian coast in the period 650 - 850 A.D. Commercial relations between the local population and newcomers from the West are indicated by finds at the first Scandinavian trading post in Grobina, as well as at Truso and Wiskiauten in Prussia, later in the 9th - 10th centuries.

The Late Iron Age was a period of remarkable development which resulted in intensified agriculture, urbanisation and the formation of early states. Urban sites, battles and skirmishes in Curonia in the mid 9th century are recorded by Rimbert in "Vita Sancti
processes there. The geomorphologi-

cally well exposed Baltic shore lines

impact on the environment. The most

Holocene sequences of deposits.

tigraphical problems.

Having more or less complete strati-

geologically the area belongs to the

Eastern European platform. A compli-

cated structure of the bedrock with

Devonian, Carboniferous, Permian,

Triassic and Jurassic layers of very diffe-

rent composition characterises the area.

There are thick Quaternary deposits

from several glaciations. The

Quaternary deposits and the land

forms are the immediate geological

environment for all human activities in

the present as well as in the past. The

beginning of the East Baltic Late Iron

Age coincides with an intensive human

impact on the environment. The most

interesting features in this respect are

the late glacial and post-glacial

Holocene sequences of deposits.

Having more or less complete strati-

graphic sections with deposits of late

glacial and interglacial date, the region

also contributes to the solution of stra-

tigraphical problems.

The region is particularly interesting

in terms of late geological history with

deposits and land forms characteristic of

marginal zones between the main-

land and the sea, and of the specific

processes there. The geomorphologi-

cally well exposed Baltic shore lines

provide a good basis for land uplift stu-

dies. The elevation of the land influen-

ced on human activities almost from

the beginning and must therefore be

closely studied.

The sediments deposited after the

final ice recession in the area have pre-

served the latest records of environ-

mental changes best of all. There are

marshes, due to underlying fine-grai-

ned Quaternary deposits, which there-
The proposed research will continue the Swedish-Baltic tradition of joint projects started by Professor Birger Nerman, Professor Francis Balodis and General Vladas Nagevicius in Grobina and Apuolé in 1929-1931.

**Summary description of joint proposal**

The relatively well developed Scandinavian model of co-operative interdisciplinary research in archaeology is still little known in the Eastern Baltic. The agricultural development and early urbanisation of the Balts has been studied almost exclusively from an archaeological and historical point of view.

The chosen area is suitable both archaeologically and geologically. The chronological framework from c. 600 - the beginning of Scandinavian activity, to 1200 A.D. - the German conquest, was a time of economic development, urbanization and the formation of an early state.

**Chosen sites:** Grobina has a famous Scandinavian archaeological material. Rimbert’s “Seeburg” and “Apulia” - Apuolé indicates that 9th century Curonia was becoming urbanised and still in the sphere of Viking interest. The third site, Impiltis, seems to be the largest ancient monument in the area - a well built hill fort with 5 ha settlement and a large cemetery. The local Quaternary deposits and land forms are the immediate geological environment for all human activities in the past. Investigations in the above mentioned area are also important for the obtaining of purely geological information.

Current human activity in the above mentioned area needs to be controlled in the environmental and cultural spheres. The main objectives of the proposed interdisciplinary research are: climatic changes, differences in the techniques of land use, the range of cultivated crops, and the changes in the local economy.

The main significance of the proposed research is that it will enrich the data bank of the Baltic Sea region. It will also give local scientists experience of interdisciplinary research. It is necessary to note that the proposed project will continue the Swedish-Baltic joint projects started in the early 1930’s.
Belarus and Scandinavia have had close historical links in many periods of their history, with contacts dating as far back as the very beginning of the Slavic period in Belarus.

Previous research has already established that many processes took place simultaneously and followed identical patterns in Slavic and Scandinavian countries.

According to latest historical research, the Varangians (Vikings) penetrated this region at virtually the same time as the Slavs. Indeed, the territory of Belarus was fully settled by the Slavs relatively late - in the 9th to 10th centuries, when the Norse world was at its height.

A Russian chronicle tells that the Krive region (referred to as Krivich), the neighbouring Smolensk region and some other population groups in the northern regions of Eastern Europe came under the control of the Varangians, and reports that, dissatisfied with the tributes they were forced to pay, these dependencies united and drove the Varangians back overseas. This indicates that, prior to this event, the Varangians had managed to take control of a significant part of Eastern Europe, including a part of Belarus.

Later historical developments, such as the establishment of Russia and the gradual expansion of its rule over vast stretches of territory, did not lead to a cessation of these contacts, but, on the contrary, to their reinforcement and diversification.

The Rulers of Polotsk

There is still considerable controversy surrounding the identity of the first rulers of Belarus’ most ancient city, Polotsk. One Russian source, a manuscript describing the invitation of the Varangians to Russia, notes that Rurik began to build cities and distribute them amongst his men: “one gets Polotsk, another Rostov, the next Belozerovo” (Poveet’...., 1950:315).

According to this manuscript, in the year 980, Ragvalad supposedly came from overseas to rule Polotsk. However, Ragvalad is a figure of legend, and the historical literature gives different interpretations of his origins. Thus, although the majority of historians tend to define him as a Varangian, others consider him to be of Baltic Slav origin.

It is also unclear whether at that time the principality of Polotsk was an independent state forming part of one of the Varangian kingdoms or whether it was one of the lands of the Kievan state.

The latter would seem more logical in view of the events which occurred in that year. When a power struggle broke out between two of Yaropolk’s sons (Vladimir, Prince of Novgorod and Yaropolk, Prince of Kiev) Vladimir seized Polotsk with the help of Varangian detachments, killed Ragvalad and his two sons, forcibly married Ragneda, and later became the Prince of Kiev.

The Varangians in a power struggle

There is also evidence to support the thesis that the Varangians were involved in a power struggle between Prince Brachislav Isaslavich of Polotsk and Prince Yaroslav of Kiev in 1021. The Varangians provoked Brachislav to attack Novgorod, which was supported by Yaroslav. Yet, at the decisive stage in the key battle near the river Sudomir, the Varangian detachment deserted Brachislav, leaving Yaroslav the clear winner. The events are related, albeit somewhat inconclusively, to the Saga of Edmund (the manuscript itself makes no mention of the Varangians in connection with the events).

Varangian guards in the Russian army

As elsewhere, principalities in Western Russia probably had professional Varangian guards, which formed part of the Russian army. This may explain the presence of the Viking remains dating from the early period of Russian history which have been found in or near the territory of Belarus. These include the famous Gnezdovsky barrow, a Varangian burial site, which is located in the Smolensk area close to Belarus, and other remains discovered in Belarus itself.

Common trade interests

However, links between the Slavs and Scandinavians were mainly established and developed around common trade interests. A good deal of work remains to be done on late 9th-century and early 10th century trade. It is known that the main trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks passed through the territory of Belarus. It probably existed before the establishment of the ancient Russian state, but enjoyed still greater success and acquired national importance when the Slavs reached the Upper Dnieper region.

Many ancient Russian settlements of the municipal and castle type sprang up along a short stretch of the route in the 11th and 12th centuries, including Orsha, Ordsk, Kopys, Rogachev, Wishchin, Streshin and Rechnitsa, almost all of which have been excavated to some extent.

After the Magyars isolated Western
Europe from Byzantium in the 10th century, Kievan Russia became the main supplier of Byzantine goods to the West and North Europe.

However, relations between states by the Seljuk Turks and the appearance of nomadic tribesmen, the Polovtsy, on the southern borders of Russia. With the resulting end to the inflow of Arabic silver, or dirhems, the Varangians' interest in this trade route declined.

**Trade relations with Western Europe**

Later, in 1204, Byzantium fell to the Crusaders, causing a major shift in the nature and direction of Russian trade, with increasing importance being placed on trade relations with Western Europe.

The Western Dvina was one of the many variants of the famous trade route linking the Varangians and the Greeks, and its importance increased as trade with the East declined. The river also provided access to the lands of northern Russia. Consequently, both the Polotsk and Smolensk princes were interested in this route.

The policy of the Polotsk princes was largely determined by their aspiration not only to possess and subordinate the great trade route, but also to guarantee its security. They managed to gain full political control over the Western Dvina River, right up to its mouth, thus providing Russian and other merchants with the most convenient access to the Baltic Sea.

**Technical safety**

Some sources suggest that the Polotsk princes also gave consideration to the technical safety of navigation on the Western Dvina and organised the clearing of underwater rocks and large boulders from navigation channels. Large boulders carved with crosses and the name of the Polotsk Prince Boris (dated to the beginning of the 11th century) are cited as evidence of this theory.

**A remarkable document**

The agreement between Smolensk, Riga and Gotland (1229) is one of the most remarkable documents of the 13th century. On the Russian side, it was signed by the Prince of Smolensk, who also signed on behalf of the Polotsk and Vitebsk princes. The agreement, which some historians believe to have been based on still earlier agreements concluded between Polotsk and the Livonian Order, incorporated a number of norms from the “Russian Law” or “Pravda”, a comprehensive code in force throughout the territory of ancient Russia. It lists all the possible offences connected with the pursuit of trade by foreign or native merchants or related persons, including: murder, mutilation, abuse practices, moral crimes and failure to respect credit commitments and guarantees. The agreement bears witness to the highly evolved legal culture of the time, as well as to the strong, reliable and traditional links between Western Russia and its Baltic neighbours.

**Wealthy towns in Gardarika**

On the one hand, foreign merchants were attracted to the wealthy Russian towns, whose praises were sung in the Viking sagas about “Gardarika”, the Viking name for Russia. On the other hand, Russian merchants navigated the Baltic Sea and kept a permanent storage base on the island of Gotland, where silver and silver articles were brought from Middle Asia and Iran. The main attraction of Russia for Western merchants was its furs. For instance, Sviatoslav, one of the first Russian princes, lists the main goods exported from Russia as amber, fur, honey, wax and timber. Amongst other furs exported from Russia, the 10th century Arabic author Al-Mukadasy...
names beaver, fox and hare from Belarus, which was densely forested. The importance of fur is demonstrated by the fact that the princely tribute was counted in fur in exchange for silver coins. Buried hoards of Eastern coins are evidence of active trading across Belarus. Some of these hoards comprise tens of thousands of coins weighing up to several kilograms. For instance, the cache found near Kazyanki village in the Polotsk region, buried around the year 1040, consisted of 7588 dirhems from the Arabic Caliphate and weighed a total of 20 kilograms (Rybacovitch 1974).

From transit to export

With the rapid development of Russian towns, the handicrafts trade gradually began to shift from transit to export. For instance, a “Russian cloth” is mentioned among the textiles imported to Italy. This probably refers to flax, which had been grown in Belarus since neolithic times. The collection of flax cloth as a tax is mentioned in the Statute of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavovich (1136), who also ruled over the Eastern part of modern Belarus and its towns along the river Dnieper.

Most Slavic exports to the Baltic went to the population of the Baltic Slavs in Scandinavia and lower Germany. An agreement concluded in 1299 mentions silver vessels, which were purchased from the Russians by “Germans” - a word often used to cover all foreigners living in Russia. Russian enamelled goods and earthenware reached as far as Sweden (Rybakof 1948). There is also some evidence that Russia exported iron locks, along with other complex metal articles, one example of such a lock having been found in former Czechoslovakia.

ULFBERT, the popular swords

As far as imports, swords, often found in 9th and 10th century barrows were a major trade item. The most popular imports were the “ULFBERT” swords made in lower Germany or Flanders. According to one theory, only the blades were imported, the handles being made and attached locally. One of the earliest examples of a 10th century sword was found in Belarus, in the town of Polotsk, during excavations on the site of a destroyed burial ground. It was complete and bore the “ULFBERT” mark. Another 10th century sword, bearing a horse-shoe shaped mark, was found in Grodno and, according to Tkachev, may have come from Scandinavia. Other finds of possible Scandinavian origin in Belarus include a sword embossed with metal-work patterns in the shape of a figure of eight from a barrow near Bragin in the south of the country as well as two swords found during the excavation of a warrior’s burial site in a park in Grodno (1993: Arkehealgiya i Numzitmatika Belarusi:424-425).

Other metal gods

With reference to metal goods, mention should also be made of a helmet discovered in Slomin (1993, Arkehealgiya:575), a shell-shaped fibula found in the 11th century stratum in Braslav (1993, Arkehealgiya:96) and a Scandinavian silver pendant of the “Bore” style with a predatory animal design, discovered among 9 pendants from the 11th century burial ground at Išbišche.

Non-ferrous metals were also imported. Finds at Volkovysk and Grodno, respectively, suggest that highly artistic carved goods made of horn and bronze aquamanils, or water carriers, were also imported from the West from the middle of the 12th century.

Finds in rural barrows

Western imports were mainly concentrated in towns and farmsteads, but some finds have also been unearthed in rural barrows. For example, over 100 bones with inscriptions and drawings were found in the settlement of Maskovichi in the Braslav region in the north of Belarus. The inscriptions are composed of single and joined letters along with a number of Scandinavian Runic characters. On one bone, which the excavation leader, L. Duchits, dates to the 13th or 14th century, there is a drawing of a boat with human figures in it. Two fibulas of Scandinavian design were found amongst the material of ancient Russian or Feudal origin (Duchits 1981, 1991). At another rural burial site, the 11th century Ludchitzy Barrow in the Bykow district on the right-hand bank of the Rydysa River, a cast bronze figure of a man with a sword, representing a Viking, was discovered in a woman’s tomb, together with the human remains (1993. Arkehealgiya:374).

Scandinavian connections

The third main trade route followed the Pripyat River. Interesting finds connected with the Scandinavians have recently been made in this area, including a Scandinavian iron fork and the end of a scabbard, made of bronze. The Pripyat route was the shortest route from the Middle Dnieper via the Neman River to the Baltic Coast and Gotland (IovA.V., Vyargy V.S. 1993).

Clearly, archaeological evidence of the Varangian’s presence in the territory of Belarus is still scarce, mainly consisting of single finds which can be attributed to the trade between the Varangians and the region. No exclusively Varangian settlements or barrows have yet been found, but this can be partly explained by the lack of research on this period. There is no doubt that further archaeological research will unearth new evidence of this kind.

Future research

The Viking issue cannot be restricted to research into the traces they left in Eastern Europe and their role in the region. There is equal interest in the influence of the Slav peoples and their culture on the Scandinavian world.

Consequently, future research into the “Viking Routes” should also include the following goals: further classification of Viking remains in Eastern Europe (including Belarus); the study of Russian imports to Scandinavia; further research into the chronological aspects of the routes; a comparative study of common historical processes; the organisation of joint archaeological research, both in terms of surveys and excavations; the publication of findings; the organisation of regular scientific conferences and symposia; the popularisation of the results of research on this topic to aid international understanding and the development on special tourist circuits along the ancient routes.
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Iov A.V., Vjargej V.S.


Rjabcevich V.N.


Rybakoff B.A.


**Additional Notes**

**TOPOGRAPHY OF THE SCANDINAVIAN FINDS IN BELARUS**

1. Maskovichy, hillfort, Braslav district, Vitebsk region

Excavations have shown that the settlement, situated on the eastern shore of Lake Debra, was founded during the Iron Age (Dneprodvinsk Culture). It was fortified with an outer wooden wall in the 11th and 12th century and subsequently became either one of the border fortresses of the Prince of Polotsk, a farmstead-castle or a trading station.

1. A disc brooch.
2. Over 100 bones with inscriptions and drawings were found in the settlement of Maskovichy. The inscriptions are composed of single and joined letters along with a number of Scandinavian Runic characters. On one bone, which the excavation leader, L. Duchits, dates to the 13th or the 14th century, there is a drawing of a boat with human figures in it.


1. A disc brooch, similar to the one in Maskovichy, was found in the 11th century stratum.

3. Chernevichy, Glubokoje district, Vitebsk region.

1. A round fibula (ampulla ?).


1. A bone flute with inscription.
2. Silver badge (plaque)
3. One of the earliest examples of a 10th century sword was found in Polotsk, during excavations on the site of a destroyed burial ground. It was complete and bore the "ULFBERT" mark.

5. Vitebsk.

1. A complete set of weights (?) from a loom was found near the 12th century Blagoveshenye church.


1. A sword from a barrow.

7. Isbishche. Logoyks district, Minsk region.

1. A Scandinavian silver pendant of the "Borre" style with a predatory animal design was discovered among 9 pendants from the 11th century barrow.

8. Grodno.

1. A 10th century sword, branded with a horse-shoe design.
2. Two swords were discovered during excavations of a warrior’s grave in a park in Grodno.

9. Ludchityz, Bykhov district, Mogilyov region.

1. A cast bronze figure of a man with a sword, representing a Viking, was discovered in the grave of a woman, together with the human remains, at an 11th century barrow site on the right bank of the Rdytsa River.


1. A pendant

1. A helmet.


1. A pendant.


1. The end of a scabbard.


1. A pendant (or a fibula?).


1. A sword encrusted with metalwork patterns in the shape of a figure of eight from a barrow near Bragin.

17. Bragin, district, Gomel region.

1. A helmet.

**FINDS ON DISPLAY AND MONUMENT TO VISIT**

Most of the Viking finds mentioned above are on display in the following places:

- The National Museum in Minsk
- The Museum of the old Belorussian Culture at The Belorussian Academy of Science in Minsk.
- The Braslav and Polotsk Museums in Vitebsk region.

For people interested in the Viking History, The Hillfort Maskovichy is possible to visit in the landscape. The place is beautifully situated five km from Braslav.
Certain Historical Facts on the Routes of the Vikings on the Belarussian Territory

By Sergej Tarasov (translated from French by Michelle Smith)

Scientific researches such as T. Jackson (Moscow), specialized in Scandinavian countries, have noted that among the various routes to Greece utilized by the Varangians, the oldest one is the Dvinsk route which passes through Polotsk. This is due to the fact that Polotsk was known in Scandinavia as being the large centre of a powerful kingdom. One of the princes of the region, was Prince Ragvalad who had come from the seas beyond and ruled Polotsk around AD 970.

Among the various opinions and theories put forth, we will make use of the chronicles’ testimony and assume that Ragvalad was a Varangian who had come from the province of Rogaland in Norway. It is with Ragneda, the daughter of Ragvalad, that the creation of a state in Belarussia coincides with the creation of states in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and of the Southern Slavs.

The first arrival of the Varangians in Belarussia can be dated to the end of the 8th century and at the beginning of the 9th century. This is apparent on Arabic coins, dyrems. The moment of climax may have come in the 10th century.

From the mouth of Dvina to Polotsk

Caravans loaded with goods coming from Gotland and Birka would start at the mouth of the Dvina river and travel to Polotsk. This route offered trading posts along the way. One of these settlements was located in a fortified building in Lake Derba. Lake Derba is connected with the Dvina by the river Drouja, also known as Mascotchi (Maskovitsy) in Belarusian archaeology. Several Scandinavian objects have been found there: Weapons, brooches etc. The most interesting discovery has been an important quantity (approx. 100) of animal bones displaying drawings and texts.

The gold treasure from Nijeny Zamak

That particular route lead to Polotsk. The city and its surrounding areas have revealed treasures from the 10th century and the first half of the 11th. One of the treasures found at Verhni Zamak (910 a.) included pieces of silver, similar to those found in the silver hoards of Gotland, and the coins from Medieval Denmark.

A very interesting gold treasure was uncovered at Nijeny Zamak, consisting of six gold items of 958°, the total weight of which was more than 300 g. A 10th century playing ball, arrowheads, several decorative objects and jewellery are currently all on display at the Museum of Polotsk. They testify to the Scandinavian presence in Polotsk.

Scandinavian craftsmen on the Dvina Route

The Dvina route of the “Varangians to the Greeks” went through Polotsk, and continued on through Vitebsk, Smolensk, Voscha, Lukamve, Maguilev, Ragalchev, Jomel as well as other old towns of Belarussia. Between the Dvina and the Dnepr, another route could be taken, the most common of which was located in the vicinity of Kaspli, Luchos, and Ousjatsky rivers. Recent research has revealed that traces of the ancient routes have been preserved until now. This is apparent in the kourganes stones, as well as traces on the ground where boats had been dragged.

Along these Viking trade routes were numerous Scandinavian craftsmen. Their presence can be observed in the archaeological material: weapons, coins, spinning whorls, artisanal pieces made of bone decorated with the Jelling beast, pendants, small sculptures, and stones with Runic inscriptions.
revealed the remains of a stone wall surrounding the city, dating back to the 11th century. It is plausible that the Scandinavians were so impressed upon seeing these ramparts that they described them as complete with watch towers.

Two main travelling routes

The Saga of Eidmond offers a fairly detailed account of the political and military relationships between Polotsk and Kiev in the first half of the 11th century, where the Varangian mercenaries played an active part.

The routes passing through Nieman and Pripat were less well known. The mouth of the Nieman is located approximately at the same distance from Gotland as is the Dvina’s. This detour encompassed the lands of the Dryguivatchis with the cities of Mensk, Zaslavié, Grodna, Vavkravisk, Sloni, Berasté, Pinsk, and Tourav. At the intersection of the Bong, Pripat, and the Nieman rivers there existed fortified commercial centres. Thus, it is possible to identify two main routes which connected the Baltic to the Black Sea: 1) Nieman-Rosse-Jacelda-Pripat-Dnepr; 2) Dnepr-Pripat-the lower section of the Jacelmda-small rivers-lake Vgonavskae-Stchara-Nieman.

Many parallels

On this route archaeologists have discovered at Vavkavisk, Kombatchina, and near Pinsk evidence of a Scandinavian presence: spear heads, with silver inlay and ornament, very similar to those found on Gotland and Sweden from the 10th century.

At Navagrodak, Franopal spear heads with silver ornaments as well as the sheath of a sword were uncovered. This particular sheath has existing parallels in Sweden, Gotland, Iceland, Finland and Latvia. Pendants decorated in the Borre style were retrieved at Valkranisk, Slonim, Maisseevitchen, and are similar to pendants found in Eastern Europe at Gnesdávě, near Smolensk and at Izbitcha near Lozoisk. A unique piece was discovered at Gorodischo in the vicinity of Pinsk: a trident with its handle bent back. Such tridents are common among grave offerings from Sweden and Eastern Europe.

Scandinavian lifestyle, a strong influence

During the archaeological excavations at Vavkavisk and Navagrodak several chess pieces were found depicting Vikings armed with shields, as well as other domestic Scandinavian objects.

Thus, the archaeological and historical sources testify to an important Scandinavian presence and infiltration into Belarussia, linking the Baltic Scandinavian world to the Black Sea, Byzantium and the Arab Caliphates.

Furthermore, we may suggest that the route of the “Varangians to the Greeks”, (the Polotsk region as well as the county of Tourov), was an inviting area for the formation of political centres and states. There is no doubt that Scandinavian lifestyle influenced all aspects of life, military, legal as well as religious.
Viking ship picture discovered on a bone

A new find of a ship picture carving on a cow’s rib bone is reported from excavations in central Sigtuna. The bone was found in the Professorn site in 1995. It carries a simple picture of a ship of the Viking Age type, apparently in rough seas. The rigging of the ship is enigmatic with a mast and sail appearing as a triangular figure. On the reverse side of this bone, the late Runic alphabet is carved, together with a composition of triangular figures. The bone can be dated to the 12th century, both by stratigraphy and by analysis of the runes.

Another bone, found in 1990 in the Urmakaren site, also outlines a ship of the Viking Age type. The reverse side of this bone carries a carving of a lion with its head turned, a picture strikingly similar to motifs on baptismal fonts produced in 12th century Sigtuna.

According to archaeologists Sten Tesch and Rune Edberg at the Sigtuna Museum, the carvings may be interpreted along a Nordic tradition where a king or prince created loyalties by distributing wealth, such as ships. This tradition is regarded as strong in early Sigtuna as indicated, among other finds, by a rone-bone prizing the king’s generosity.

They also suggest a possible interpretation of this ship-carving in a Christian framework of symbols, i.e., the Trinity.

Viking Routes in Russia and Georgia studied on the spot

A new booklet from Sigtuna Museum offers thrilling new information on the Viking Routes in the ex-USSR. Two Swedish archaeologists report from two separate surveys during 1995.

In the summer of 1994, a small reconstructed Viking Age ship, the Aifur, successfully made the passage from Sigtuna in Sweden to Novgorod in Russia. According to the plan, the expedition will continue on the traditional Russian inland waterways towards the Black Sea. As a preparation, the archaeologist Rune Edberg in the summer of 1995 went on a short trip to Russia to explore various conditions along the rivers, such as currents, depths and necessary portages. Except for some rapids the river Lovat seems to be navigable for a vessel as small as the Aifur all the way to a portage in the neighbourhood of the village Prud near the Belarus border. The portage, to the lake Uzmen, is about 5 km long. From there the river Uzvyatya offers favourable downstream conditions till it reaches the river Dvina. After following the Dvina a very short distance, it is necessary to choose a tributary, the Kasplya, upstream. This river seemed to be readily navigable to the city of Kasplya and even further upstream if the water level is high. The small rivers Udra, Katynka and others in the Smolensk area were explored during the survey and several possible portages in connection with them are considered in Edberg’s article.

The archaeologist Mats G Larsson made a similar trip to Georgia to explore the places known from Ingvar the Far-traveller’s adventures in the 1040’s. Larsson’s survey was made as a preparation for a planned expedition through Transcaucasia from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea with a boat of the Viking Age type. Larsson explored rivers and mountain passes involving the Rioni and its tributaries in western Georgia. The Kura in the eastern part of the country was investigated together with the water-dealer between them, the Likhi mountains. The investigations showed that it would be possible to row and sometimes tow a boat about 170 kilometers upstream the Rioni and its tributary the Kvirila to Shorapani, the ancient end point for small ships. From there the boat probably must be towed in the water for another ten kilometers and then transported over land to the Kura for about 45 kilometers. Only a short part of that distance is uphill and the gradient rarely reaches 10% or more. If efficient methods for land transport are available and with oxen as draught-animals the transport
over the mountains would probably not cause any major problems. The navigation downstream the Kura may sometimes be difficult due to the strong stream and the many sand banks in the river, Larsson concludes.

The booklet, “Vikingavägar i öster” is published in Swedish with abstracts in English, and costs 40 SEK plus postage and can be ordered from Sigtuna Museum, Box 13, 193 21 Sigtuna, e-mail sim@nordm.se.

Precious golden Viking Age finds to be exhibited for the first time

The Viking Gold from the bottom of Lake Mälar is the title of a special exhibition this summer in Sigtuna. It opens June 1 and closes September 29. The exhibition highlights archaeological finds of gold, runes, rings, pearls and other thrilling objects from the Sigtuna excavations during the last years. The “Ingegerd” ring found last summer (named after King Olof’s daughter Ingegerd, who was married to Prince Yaroslav in Russia in 1019), will be shown as well as other recently found, still more remarkable and precious objects. This exhibition is in the Exhibition Hall, Stora gatan 56B (just 100 metres from the Museum). The Museum and the hall is open every day from 11 am to 4 pm, closed Mondays September – May.

Sigtuna Museum on the Internet

Information on the permanent and temporary exhibitions and archaeological research at the Sigtuna Museum is now available on the Internet. A list of archaeological and historical literature and reproductions of Viking Age jewellery and souvenirs for sale is also presented on the Net. The Sigtuna WWW pages are found with Swedish and English versions at http://www.telemuseum.se/museer/sigtuna/sigt.html.

A Swedish Viking Expedition from Novgorod to the Black Sea

A small reconstructed Viking Age ship, the Aifur, in 1994 successfully made the voyage from Sigtuna in Sweden to Novgorod in Russia.

The voyage will, according to plan, continue in the summer of 1996 with an aim to reach the Black Sea. If successful, this will be the first Scandinavian expedition in modern times to make the complete route “from the Varangians to the Greeks”.

The vessel will be transported to Novgorod and a crew of nine will row it upstream the river Lovat to the portages north of Smolensk. The expedition is scheduled to start about June 10 and reach Kiev in the Ukraine after eight or nine weeks. The continuation to the mouths of the Dniepr will take at least a further three or four weeks. The distances are great: the river route from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea is about 2600 kilometers long.

A Viking souvenir – in silver or bronze

The Sigtuna Museum and silversmith Nils Nisbel are proud to present a beautiful copy of an extraordinary archaeological object, found in central Sigtuna. The original piece is made of elk’s horn and depicts a male figure with long, twisted moustaches and a conical helmet. It dates from the 11th century. The copies are available in silver, as an amulet to be carried on a necklace (height: 35 mm) for 495 SEK or as a bronze table figurine (height: 62 mm) for 395 SEK. The jewellery can be ordered from Sigtuna Museum, Box 13, 193 21 Sigtuna, e-mail: sim@nordm.se.
BOOKS AND JOURNALS

The Archaeological Monuments of Grobina (Latvia)

Already in the 1930, there were excavations in the Grobina area in Latvia, as a result of a co-operation between Sweden and Latvia. During the last years, there have been more excavations and work on the site. Among other things, a picture stone of typical Gotlandic style has been found.

Valerij Petrenko and Juris Urtans are the authors of a short book of the archaeological monuments in the Grobina area. An important part of the book deals with the excavations of three cemeteries, with a huge part about Scandinavian material from the Mälar area in central Sweden and the island of Gotland. From around 1930 until 1985, only minor excavations took place. In 1985, an extended archaeological project started, aiming among other things to find out the extension of the cemetery at Grobina. By these investigations, it is now clear that the cemetery which Nerman investigated, and which he estimated to consist of c. 400 graves, in reality consisted of c. 2000 graves. The cemetery is hereby almost a parallel to the cemetery “Hemlandet” at the Viking town in Lake Mälar, Birka, just west of Stockholm, Sweden.

The book, consisting of 19 pages, is illustrated with drawings, maps and photographs in black and white. It can be ordered from The Historical Museum in Stockholm, Box 5405, S-114 84 Stockholm. Tel +46-8 7839000.

“Austrvegr”

A couple of months ago, the first number of a new journal was published. The magazine is devoted to cultural differences and contacts between East and West (for the territory from Scandinavia to the Ural). The first number of the magazine contains 11 articles written by scientists from Estonia, St. Petersburg and Moscow. Some of them are connected with Viking history in the Eastern Baltic region and Russia. Two articles with special interest to Viking history could be mentioned.

The Eastern Way in the Baltic-Finnic Perspective, by E. Tönisson.

Historical events of the Age of the Vikings in Northern and Eastern Europe. The main axis of which was the Eastern Way connecting different lands and peoples has mainly been seen in the light of feats carried out by Scandinavians and East Slavs. The role of Baltic-Finnic peoples has been left out of the limelight, apparently because they did not command the art of writing, to be used as a source of their national history. In this article an attempt has been made to fill this gap on the basis of archaeological finds, which in the author’s opinion offers good opportunities for the purpose.

Viking Town on the East-West-Route of Eurasia, by A. Kirpichnikov.

Near the mouth of the River Volkhov in the Leningrad Region nearly 160 archaeological, architectural and art monuments have survived on an area about 10 hectares in size. Also the cultural layer is 3-5 metres thick, having been deposited in the period from the 7th to 17th century. Only 5 % of the area has been investigated by archaeological methods and even so the amount of information obtained is tremendous.

Ladoga, one of the oldest Russian towns and the seat of Ryurik, was founded in the middle of the 8th century on the Viking trade route. Since 1972 an expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Material Culture has been stationed at Old Ladoga. A number of imported Scandinavian artefacts have been found, as well as Runic inscriptions, neckrings decorated with Thor’s hammers, weight of oriental origin, glass ornaments, beads, Baltic amber. Traces of various artisan workshops have been found (bronze, glass, leather and bone working). In excavations in 1991 the foundations of a two-room house were found with an iron-smelting furnace beside it. It has become evident that the riverside plots in Ladoga were long and narrow, and arranged perpendicularly with the river Ladozhka, as has earlier been observed in excavations of a Viking Age site at Ribe in Jutland. The author invites everybody to take part in the excavations in Ladoga in the summer.
SHORT News

Viking World Museum
In 1892, the Viking longship “Viking” was built in Norway, as a copy of the Gokstad ship, found in 1880 in a burial mound. The “Viking” ship was sailed to Chicago for the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and given as a gift to the Chicago Park District. The ownership was transferred to the American Scandinavian Council some years ago. They are co-trustee with the Chicago Park District and have plans to acquire a permission to build a Viking World Museum on the lake front on a site close to the entrance of Navy Pier.

The Museum will have the form of a huge gravemound, covered with turf and with some openings of glass. It is planned to have two floors, with an exhibition covering the whole geographical world of the Vikings. If it will come through, it will be the first Viking Museum, displaying the whole of the Viking world.

Vikings in the Land Down Under By Pye Skaanvad
Throughout the world, there is a growing interest in Vikings. Even Australia, a country halfway across the globe and far away from the Vikings’ original home land, has a Viking club now. Saga Vikings is a newly established Viking club at Woody Point, near Brisbane, Australia.

Visti Skaanvad, originally from Denmark, emigrated to Australia 14 years ago. After participating in several Viking meetings Visti was inspired to start a Viking Club in Queensland.

Saga Vikings was established in November 1995, and has already 20 members including some Scandinavian immigrants, but the majority are Australians with an interest in Viking heritage.

In the initial stages of establishment, the group is busy researching the Viking era, making outfits and learning new skills and crafts. The group’s eventual goal is to build a long boat for fun cruises along the Australian coast.

There is also a hope that the Redcliffe City Council will allow the Saga Vikings to build a traditional Viking house near the beach.

In an attempt to be as authentic as possible, the group’s greatest challenge will be the practicality of living like Vikings in one of Australia’s hottest states where the average temperature is 28° C all through the year.

DIARY

A Viking Week in Värmland, Sweden 8-13 of July 1996
During the summer of 1995, there was an arrangement between the two municipalities of Arvika and Säffle, on the Viking theme. Several Viking ships participated in the celebration and many other activities took place.

Now, it has been decided that this event should be repeated. Besides the Vikings ships, there will be exhibitions, training in sailing a Viking ship, seminars and a Viking play. For more information, please contact Marianne Sönnebo, Tveta Asketan 2, S-661 94 Säffle, Sweden tel +46-533-602 71.

The building of a replica of a 6th century ship
At the Genesmon in northern Sweden, the archaeologists have reconstructed an Iron Age farm from the 6th century. In 1996, there are plans to build a replika of a 6th century ship, as a form of experimental archaeology. For further information, please contact Carl Anders Gerstel, Gene fornby, S-892 43 Domsjö, Sweden. Tel +46-660-537 10, fax +46-660-537 20.

Vikings ‘97
In the year 997, “The Danes went around Devonshire into the mouth of the Severn and they ravaged Cornwall, Wales and Devon”.

This is the background for a planned celebration of the people of West Devon to commemorate the Viking raid of AD 997. The celebration will be in two parts. A major conference is planned in spring 1997. It will include guest speakers and site visits. A Scandinavian fortnight is planned in the summer. It will be largely based on arts and include food, literature, music, theatre, cinema, visual art, dance, crafts etc. The final will be “The Invasion”. “In an exciting and powerful event, Viking long boats will once again be seen gliding up the river Tamar before landbattles are re- enacted between Viking raiders and Saxons fighting to protect their homeland”.

For further information, contact Dr. Tom Greeses, 39 Bannawell Street, Tavistock, Devon, PL 19 0DN, England. Tel +44-1822-617004.

Excavation of Viking sites in 1996
Continuing excavations at Birka, Sweden
During the last six years, extended excavations have taken place at Birka, the most important Viking town in Sweden in the 9th and 10th century. With the 1995 years campaign, they have come to an end. But already in June this year, new excavations will take place, though on a smaller scale. This time, the excavations will be carried out around the fort in the southern part of the town area. For further information, contact Lena Holmqvist Olausson, at Stockholm University, Archaeological Research Laboratory, S-106 93 Stockholm, Sweden. Tel +46-8-162178, or fax +46-8-612 48 57.
The objectives of the network are:

- To develop and maintain the Council of Europe’s Viking Routes project.
- To co-operate with schools, universities etc in the field of education and training in the study of the Vikings.
- To collect information of present Viking history activities, and to distribute information about Vikings and their history.
- To create a fund for The Annual Viking Management Prize to the best Cultural Heritage Management of Viking History.

In promoting these aims, VIKING HERITAGE has begun an information service for its members with the newsletter Viking Heritage Newsletter. It will organize conferences and seminars and act as a monitoring and advisory body on all issues relating to an enhanced understanding of the Viking history, operating at both international and national levels.

The Interim Board responsible for initial tasks:
Björn Ambrosiani, Ute Drews, Juris Urtans, Dan Carlsson, Maj-Britt Andersson and Christina Söderberg.