Reconstructing the Costume of the Viking Age

By Viktoria Persdotter, archaeologist and craftsman

I am an archaeologist and craftsman who spends a great deal of time reconstructing Iron Age artefacts and the manufacturing techniques used. I have taken a special interest in the reconstruction of the Viking Age costume, working with metal, leather and textile techniques. During my various experiments and research I have more than once wondered at both the Viking Age costume itself, and the ways in which it is interpreted today.

For a long time the Viking Age has been, and still is, a very popular period to interpret in different ways. Costumes are an important way of creating an atmosphere when putting a prehistoric period on display, but sadly, much too often, routine habit and ignorance work together to create far from acceptable costumes and jewellery.

Trying to reconstruct Viking Age clothing is far from easy. Both textiles and leather are easily perishable materials, and only fragments remain of original clothing. The usually well preserved metal fittings, like buckles and brooches (usually made from bronze), can provide hints through their shapes and positioning about how costumes were fastened. In many cases, due to metal corrosion, the textiles underneath and around the metal objects are well preserved.

To be continued on page 3....
EDITORIAL

Before I mention the contents in this issue of the newsletter, I would like to report a few changes in our organisation.

First of all I would like to mention that we have a new collaborator. She is Marita Engberg Ekman who will have the main responsibility for the material and aim and direction of the newsletter from now on. I am not leaving the newsletter completely but will devote much more of my time to the Viking Heritage Server & Database. Marita has already managed to find a lot of interesting material for this issue, which you will soon experience. If you would like to get into contact with her, send an E-mail to Viking Heritage (viking@hgo.se)

The second change is that we moved our office to a new building in the beginning of August. We are now working in the so-called Donner’s House in the old part of Visby. This house has a long and exciting history. The earliest part of the house was founded before the famous city wall. During the Middle Ages it was used as a warehouse, and in the 18th century it became the home and main office for the Donner mercantile family, giving the house its present name. It has also housed businesses such as a post-office, central bank and a telegraph.

Now to the contents in this issue. You will be able to read the second part of the article “A Viking Saga - a story of prehistories” by Anna Kallén. The article discusses the Romanticist image of the Viking, this time with emphasis on “Politics and the Stories of Prehistory”. There will be an article on one of the exciting excavations made in Iceland during the last year. One article deals with Viking Age dress. Many of you have contacted us for information concerning the silver treasure that was found in Othem on Gotland this summer. In this issue we will give you some short information about the exciting find. A longer article is being written at this very moment but it will not be published until the next issue in December.

As usual there is also information on an upcoming exhibitions, conferences and new books. You will also get a suggestion for a Viking Age feast and a few words of wisdom from Havamål that we hope you will carry with you until the next issue of the newsletter.

I wish you pleasant reading!

Olle Hoffman
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Words of wisdom

Cherish those near you, never be
The first to break with a friend:
Care eats him who can no longer
Open his heart to another.

From “Hávamál” (Words of The High One)
Reconstructing the Costume of the Viking Age
By Viktoria Persdotter, archaeologist and craftsman

Continued from front page.

There are also many pictures of humans from this period, but they are usually strongly stylised, and it is therefore hard to detect the finer details of the costumes. Also in the saga literature, costumes are mentioned sporadically.

When reconstructing the Viking Age costume, one must also bear in mind that what today is regarded as "vikingish" and often seen in popular interpretations of this period, in most cases, has no archaeological counterpart. There are just no traces of things like battle-helmets fitted with cows' horns, metal bras, furry leg-wrappings made from sheepskin with the woolly side out and clothes made from sackcloth from the Viking Age (and not from any other prehistoric period either).

Another popular myth concerns the filthy and unhygienic Viking Age. Judging from archaeological and written records, the hygienic conditions at that time were reasonable. On the Viking Age farms it was customary to have a bath-house, and in saga literature bathing and washing is often mentioned. During the Viking Age, most people lived on solitary farms, which also meant that they lived under far better hygienic conditions than the later inhabitants of the crowded medieval towns did.

In order to produce as authentic reconstructions of the clothing as possible, it is not enough, however, just to study the archaeological finds. The Viking Age costume is namely not a phenomenon on its own, but a part of the society where it was made and worn. The Viking Age costume is a direct product of the technology, access to raw materials, aesthetic values, living conditions and ways of showing social rank and affiliation of its time.

There were no uniform costumes in the Nordic countries during the Viking Age either. Clothing could vary greatly according to local traditions, season, occasion, social rank and personal taste. It is also of greatest importance to carry out the reconstructions using a high standard of craftsmanship, so as to obtain an acceptable result from technical, archaeological, aesthetic and practical points of view. When museums and similar institutions make reconstructions, different "simplifications" and "improvements" are often made, both regarding construction and materials. But in most cases trying to make prehistoric clothes more practical to make and wear has the opposite effect in the end. Since I, myself, usually wear Viking Age clothes and shoes made in as authentic models and materials as possible, in my daily life and work, I can testify from experience that those clothes are both practical and comfortable to wear. In many ways they are superior to modern clothes, especially as I spend a lot of time outdoors working close to an open fire.

During my work with various ancient techniques, I have noticed that the distinct shape of the seat in the Iron Age trousers found in Danish and German bogs is most likely a direct result of the working position used at this time. When I work with wood, bone and antler, I usually sit on the floor or ground, using my feet and legs as extra hands to hold the work-pieces. I also use the same working position when working with other ancient techniques like glass bead making and sewing. Nowadays this working position is seldom seen in the western world, but it is still common in other parts of the world, like rural areas in Africa and Asia.

Sitting on chairs is a rather recent invention, and most likely Iron Age people mainly worked on floor- and ground level, which is also indicated by the low, almost ground level located hearths of the living houses as well as the workshops. The squatting position was not only used by professional craftsmen, but also in the everyday household and farm work. I am quite convinced that this working position is the reason to why the Iron Age trousers found in the bogs of Thorsbjerg, Damendorf, Marx-Ervel and Daetgen have their distinctive seat construction.

The Thorsbjerg trousers, back and front

The Damendorf trousers, pattern of construction

The same kind of seat construction as in the Iron Age trousers can also still be seen on the trousers of the traditional Sami (ethnic minority in northern Scandinavia and Russia) costume. In the traditional nomadic Sami culture no chairs were used, and hence the squatting position was common.
As seen in the drawings above, the trousers are narrow-legged, wide in the seat area and made without the median seam seen on modern trousers. I know from experience that modern trousers with a median seam in the seat will crack from the stress put on them by working in a squatting or sitting position. This is just one example that shows that Iron Age clothes were neither undeveloped, nor primitive, but a product well adapted to the living conditions of their time.

In this article, I have tried to present some of the problems and possibilities connected with the reconstruction of prehistoric costumes in general, and the Viking Age costume in particular, as well as pointing out the importance of practical experiments as a method of understanding ancient costumes. I hope that I have contributed to evoke thoughts and reflections on this matter.

In the next issue of "Viking Heritage Newsletter" I will further describe and discuss the female costume of the Viking Age. If you have any comments or questions, you can contact me at the following address:

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Drawings are done by
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A VIKING SAGA
— A STORY OF PREHISTORIES —

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POLITICS AND THE STORIES OF PREHISTORY

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that my purpose in presenting this more or less modern myth of prehistory is not primarily to level criticism against any of the individual archaeologists that have been quoted or referred to, nor to deny the importance of their work. However, quoting the words of Michael Rowlands: "Naivety of course does not represent ignorance. It refers to an unreflective mode of practice that takes for granted the axioms on which established work predetermines the value of future knowledge" (1994:129). Naivety is an explanation for the sometimes remarkably unreflected political colouring of the results produced by even the most prominent archaeologists. But naivety can no longer be used as an excuse for lack of self-reflection, at least not in a discipline that has lately been so very concerned with the impact of its ideological bases.

Therefore, on the level of critical awareness and responsibility for their public representations, there is an inherent critique of scholars who have been taking part in the creation and reproduction of these stereotypes without the self-reflection due to both their academic discipline and their standing.

The most recent archaeological research is more than ever before concerned with the vulnerability of the historical sciences; the fact that narratives of the past have been and are often today used for political purposes to legitimize claims for territory and indigenous rights, but also to give legitimacy to racism and repression. Such a view also implies that there are many possible alternative versions of what happened in prehistory. Just as the world today is complicated and complex, so was the prehistoric world. Therefore any story about it (scientific or not) is, of necessity, selective. There is no longer one single dominant version of the past to rely on, as before when there was an almost total domination of what has been called the history of the middle-aged English speaking white male. In a world with many young post-colonial states and officially multi-ethnic societies, where prehistory is used in the creation of identity, there is now a great variety of different parts competing for attention (Eriksen 1996:17, 116; cf Rowlands 1994:134 ). I have therefore chosen to use the word myths and prehistories as general terms for these narratives that are created with indispensable help from archaeology.

Let us return for a moment to naivety. It would be equally naive of me to set myself up in judgement of other scholars, as an all-seeing narrator independent of my own historical context (cf Kohl & Fawcett 1995:6ff, for critique see LAW 1997:166f, 182-4). Following many of the archaeologists, anthropologists and historians that have lately been concerned with the relations between politics and (pre)history, I see archaeology as being partly about science, partly about politics, or in other words, stories constructed for present purposes within
the constraining frames of the known material culture from the past (Lowenthal 1985; Kristiansen 1992; Samuel 1994:8, 15; Silberman 1995; Eriksen 1996; LAW 1997:174f, 182-4). Since this implies that all narratives of the past are context-sensitive, constant scholarly criticism and revaluation of these narratives from outside their own specific contexts is necessary in order to minimize the risk of verifiable abuse of the past for political purposes. Such criticism is made possible through the analytical perspective that comes with distance, either in time or in space, and therefore value judgements such as of 'good' and 'bad' nationalistic use of the past can only be valuable for what they say about the specific situations in which they themselves were produced. Thus the Viking Saga as well as this short story should be seen as examples characteristic of the societies that fostered them, from a discipline that inevitably influences as well as is influenced by its political and social setting.

The modern myth of the Vikings was, as we have seen, born within a long and strong tradition of political use of the past. The impact of the Viking saga is made possible by a so-called fictive kinship (Anderson 1991, Eriksen 1996:56f) or the kinship myth (Brown 1994:5). This fictive kinship is part of the glue that holds an imagined community together: a family metaphor that makes individuals feel related to other, fictive or real, members of an ethnic group or nation state, from the past or the present. David Brown explains it in psychoanalytic terms: "The ethnic ideology is made concrete for the individual in the form of specific myths and symbols which are attached to a particular cultural group. The myth of kinship thus grants the individual his own specific name, 'history and destiny' (Brown 1994:6, my italics). On the most fundamental level such prehistories are born out of a need for construction of identity (cf Rowlands 1994), and it can in this case be seen as a myth of origin for a national character (cf Frykman 1993:136; Brown 1994:20). This can to some extent explain the similarities in the expressions of these stereotypes. The

But we see that in spite of the growing critical awareness within the archaeological discipline of the political use of the past, popular representations such as The Viking Saga show not even a shred of such critical thinking. For some reason the critical discussions stay behind shut doors within a very small group of initiated scholars, while the pictures that reach the public arena are as stereotyped as ever before. The same scholars who write critical articles for other scholars to read, allow themselves to be used on the TV screen to reproduce myths such as the Viking Saga. Raphaël Samuel distinguishes between official and unofficial knowledge about history, and he mentions television and multimedia as powerful mediators in the production of unofficial knowledge today, not least for children. The past seems revived when reconstructions become virtual reality (Samuel 1994:13,17f,35,39). And this production of unofficial knowledge totally lacks the critical consciousness of the official knowledge produced within the historical disciplines. This is indeed alarming, for recent history of ethnic and other political conflicts show many examples of that it is the unofficial knowledge of the past that really matters.

In ending this short discussion I wish to emphasize that being critical is of course not equivalent to being negative. By my promotion of a critical approach to all prehistories presented, I certainly do not mean that these myths are all bad and should be extinguished in favour of something safer and better. That would be to make a problem out of what is inevitably a part of the archaeological discipline, which in turn would imply that there was a solution to that problem. The Viking Saga was shown to have been very much dependent on the different historical contexts it has appeared in, and it must be remembered that seen from within each of these contexts that expression has been logical and true. We can never predict what will be said in the next generation about the prehistories we produce today, and therefore, we must always be prepared to be critical as well as be criticized. That goes for all narratives of the past; academic and non-academic, dangerous or innocent.
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I wish to thank Carl Olof Cederlund for letting me use his article prior to publication, and I am also grateful to Sally Mavor for revising and commenting on the English language.

This was the second and last part of the article. The article can be read in its entirety in Aktuell Arkeologi VII, 1999. Eds: Patrik Nordström & Marie Svedin. Stockholm Archaeological Reports No 36 (pp 5-15). Stockholm
Big silver hoards found on Gotland once again!

Two huge silver hoards were discovered just 2,5 metres apart in the same field in Othem, Gotland this summer. They have been taken to the Historical Museum of Gotland, where they will be totally excavated during the autumn. The hoards are big with an estimated weight of 10 - 12 kilos, making them the largest ever found in Sweden. The treasure-trove consists mainly of bracelets, silver bars and Arabic coins, preliminarily dated to the first and middle part of the 10th century.

The next issue of the Newsletter promises more information about the treasure find. The archaeologist, Jonas Ström from the Historical Museum of Gotland, will then tell us more about the examination of the hoards.

Masculine – feminine
– human at Kopparsvik

By Malin Lindquist, senior curator, Gotland’s Fornsal: The Historical Museum of Gotland
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The gravefield at Kopparsvik situated to the south of Visby is one of the largest Viking Age gravefields on Gotland. It is also one of the few Gotlandic gravefields that has been completely investigated. It was investigated during 1964-66 prior to the construction of oil cisterns at the harbour.

About 350 graves were investigated but the gravefield is estimated at containing about 400 graves originally. The dead were buried in the gravel on the former beach and were originally placed in a SSW – NNE direction. However the positioning in the graves varied; some lay on their backs, some on their faces, on their sides, with the legs pulled up and some had their legs straight etc. The skeletons were well preserved and showed that 75% were men and the rest women. Noteworthy is that in the part of the gravefield situated closest to Visby as many as 90 % were males while there was a 50-50 distribution among the skeletons in the southern part of the gravefield. No children’s graves were found.

More than 1000 artefacts, mainly jewellery and tools, were retrieved for custody. Some graves were very richly endowed while others yielded only a few artefacts, but everything was of the finest quality.

It seems to have been a peaceful population. Weapon graves were rare. One male’s grave contained a scale and a number of weights, articles of major importance for a trader, and a Christian cross was found in one of the female’s graves. The contents were quite homogeneous in the rest of the graves, and, to all appearances, seem to be produced on Gotland. The female graves each contained sets of jewellery so similar that one almost can refer to a Gotlandic fashion: animal headed- and boxed brooches, needles etc. The male graves also contained standard equipment consisting of ring brooches, belt buckles, -dividers and -metal tips.

Who were the people buried in the grave? This question is of course impossible to answer. It is obvious that the gravefield had a direct connection to the society that was to become Visby, as is the fact that the artefacts found in the graves are of an unmistakable Gotlandic character.

During the final months of the decade (October 2, 1999 - January 30, 2000) Gotland’s Fornsal, the Historical Museum of Gotland, will exhibit a subjective selection of the most spectacular and beautiful artefacts from this gravefield.
An archaeological excavation at Snorri Sturluson’s farm in Iceland

By Margrét Gilvadóttir, archaeologist, E-mail: gmargret@hotmail.com

A farm called Reykholt.
Reykholt is located in the middle of the wide and prosperous valley Reykholtsdalsur in Borgarfjörður, western Iceland. The history of the site is firmly linked to the historian and politician Snorri Sturluson who came into possession of the farm in 1206 and lived there on and off until his dramatic slaying there in 1241. Reykholt is not one of the so-called settlement farms listed in Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements), but it must have been settled soon after the initial settlement which is thought to have taken place in the 9th century. It is mentioned in Landnámaðbók, on one occasion as the home of Pórður Súlvason who lived in the 11th century; on another as the site of a warm spring bath used for bathing by the neighbouring settlement farm Breiðabólstaður that owned the land at the time. The earliest documentary reference to a church at Reykholt is a charter dated to the 1180s.

Why investigate?
This summer, 1999, the writer of this article participated in an archaeological excavation at Reykholt. Snorri Sturluson’s eventful life and dramatic death have been a topic for vigorous discussion and research for Icelanders and others. He is widely known for his books, “Edda” and “Heimskringla”, for example. This historical significance and the fact that Reykholt is probably among the earliest farms settled in the country, with continuous occupation until this day, are two of the major reasons for the interest in studying the farm-site. The settlement of Iceland is also closely linked with the history of Scandinavia and forms part of the cultural history of the North Atlantic as a whole. A comparison of building techniques, ways of living and contacts is an important factor in the investigation at Reykholt.

Previous and present excavations.
The first archaeological excavation known to have been carried out at Reykholt took place in 1941 when the passage leading from a warm hot spring bath (called Snorralaug) to the farm was excavated and reconstructed. It had been discovered when a sports hall was built in 1934 to the east of the school. The school is a large building on the same farm-mound as where Snorri’s farm is believed to have been.

Between 1987 and 1989 minor excavations took place. In the summer of 1998 the excavation area was re-opened and extended and that work carried on this summer under the auspices of The National Museum of Iceland. A group of five Icelanders, including Dr. Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir, PhD as director of the excavation, a Scot, a Canadian and a Dane worked hard there for six weeks.

The valley and the weather.
Concerning the weather, always a subject for discussion: it varied from good to very good and from bad to very bad! It could sometimes change so that one day we were working in heavy rain and wind with barely 10 degrees C. and the next day working in warm sunshine and 25 degrees C. Not only that, there were a few days when we got all kinds of weather on one and the same day. Although there were also longer periods of both sorts, that is a normal Icelandic summer.

The surroundings are beautiful; the site is situated in a valley with hills and large mountains to the east where two glaciers can also be seen in clear weather. The white steam from the nearby hot-springs winds its way up into the sky. And of course, the herd of horses by the farm where every now and then one of them can be heard neighing.

In good weather the sight of the hot-spring steam and the glaciers made it
The odd stone-construction seen from the slope of the shaft. One suggestion is that it might be a part of Snorri Sturluson's fort. Photo: Margrét Gilvadóttir

all worthwhile and we forgot the worst moments: with ice cold water dripping or beating into your eyes, finding its way down the back of your neck and sticky mud all you could see. The sun shines very strongly in Iceland and can dry up raindrops quite quickly.

**Some results so far.**

Only a fraction of the archaeological remains at Reykholt have been investigated so far. The site is rich and complex with the farm-mound, the passage leading from Snorralaug and its surroundings, and the old church site and cemetery as main areas of interest.

So far the investigations have revealed cultural deposits descending to a depth of 1 - 2m from the surface. There are overlapping building phases spanning the period from the initial settlement, in the 10th or 11th century, until the 19th and 20th centuries. A primitive fireplace and turf walls with the landnám ash (volcanic ash from the time of the country's settlement), and a passageway farm from the 17th /18th century were found among many other building constructions.

The passage leading from Snorralaug is shown to be at least 38 m long with a turn at the end and some stone steps at that turn.

This summer a remarkable stone-construction appeared; there are no previous examples of anything like it in Iceland. There are some speculations about whether it might be the stronghold of Snorri mentioned in the Sagas. He was a rich and powerful man with many enemies so at his time it might have been wise. The question remains to be answered as do so many others concerning the complicated site.

Among the artefacts, not many considering the time span, are for example millstones, ceramics, chalk-pipes, a bracket lamp, and then bones, textiles and others.

**To be continued.**

Reykholt is one of the historical sites in Iceland visited by a large number of tourists, both Icelanders and foreigners, every summer. This summer there were guided tours of the excavation area which were very much appreciated.

Plans are now underway and a first workshop has been held with a number of specialists from a variety of countries to create a multidisciplinary research project on this historic site. Reykholt seems an ideal place for an interdisciplinary study of that kind.

Visby, 8. sept. 1999,
Margarét Gilvadóttir.

Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir and Kristján Aaronson taking a vertical photograph at the east part of the excavation area. Sigurður Bergsteinson is carrying the total station. Photo: Margrét Gilvadóttir
Scandinavians doing Russia
Part two, a thousand years later

By Peter Larsson, Ola Korpås, Annie Johansson, Mattias Johansson.
Students at The Gotland College of Higher Education, Visby, Sweden

The following article is about an archaeological journey made by some Swedish students following the tracks of their ancestors. The trip lasted for three weeks, which must be considered a short period of time compared to the journeys undertaken by the Vikings about 1000 years ago. Instead of a ship we travelled by car, of course a Swedish one. We were four students from the Gotland College of Higher Education, all of us with different specialities in the archaeological field and at different levels of education. (To be exact, there were six students from Sweden participating in the REACH-Project, (Regional Exchange in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage), but, since the other two travelled by plane and train, this article mostly deals with the car and its passengers).

The REACH-Project is a regional exchange program between the Gotland University College and museums and institutions in Western Russia and Latvia. Both students and teachers participate in the exchange facilities. The program is based on direct contact between the participating institutions and financed by the Swedish Institute in Stockholm.

Our first goal was to clear the Finnish/Russian border, which we had no problem doing. The next was to drive through St Petersburg without any mishaps in order to get on the Moscovicwashway, which we finally did. Road signs for tourists inside the city haven’t highest priority and for awhile we were absolutely lost. Since three of us had visited St Petersburg during 1998 we knew that if we could only find the Neva river we would be able to navigate ourselves out of town. After awhile we figured that since it was evening and we were supposed to be heading south, the sun should be in the west, i.e. to our right. So, by navigating by the sun through St. Petersburg we found the Neva River and our way out of the city. A couple of hours later we were sound asleep in our tents in Gorodische, Novgorod.

The excavation in Gorodische, or Holmgard as the Vikings called it, was led by archaeologist Kirill Mikhailov under supervision of Prof. Nosov. The first day we were guided around the settlement and learned that Holmgard is not to be equated with Novgorod, as so many scholars claim. According to what we learned, the Viking site of Holmgard existed side by side with the Slavic town of Novgorod and that Holmgard could never have existed without the permission of the Slavic chiefs in that region. This sounds reasonable given that you can actually see the town of Novgorod from Holm-

gard and vice versa.

Holmgard is situated upon a hill with lower land surrounding it. The site is situated about four kilometres south of Novgorod and according to our hosts the Vikings sailed around Novgorod. This was done in order to avoid the riskier part of the Volchov River near Novgorod. Holmgard is very strategically located at the middle of a junction between Ilmen Lake and a conglomerate of rivers which even today have names from the Viking-age, such as Varjager River and Slave River.

During the 9th-12th century Holmgard was an island in the middle of the Volchov River and linguistics suggest that the name Holmgard means a “gard (settlement) on a island”. The lower lands surrounding the hill are very often flooded during the spring which most certainly must have been a problem for the inhabitants at that time.

A channel built in the early 20th century destroys part of the Holmgard site today. On both side of the channel there are a lot of surface finds, such as beads, ceramics and so on from the late Iron Age/early Middle Ages but artefacts from the late Stone Age have also been found. We were a bit

The picture shows Oleg’s grave mound in Staraya Ladoga, a “sopka”. Photo: Peter Larsson.
surprised to make some finds ourselves. The wet conditions of the site are very good for preserving organic material. During our stay some interesting artefacts were found. One of the more interesting finds was a wooden comb in excellent condition. Mr Mikhailov's opinion is that this comb is made of local material, which makes it very special. Part of a Slavic compound bow was also found indicating that the integration between the two cultures did exist. Besides all the well-preserved wooden material, we found several pieces of rope, excellent work that was practically undamaged. Since we found no traces of buildings and the fact that the excavation site was located just outside of the wall surrounding the settlement, the general opinion was that this was some kind of rubbish place.

After a week we left for Ljubitzino, located ca 150 km northeast of Novgorod. Here Prof. Konetski led two excavations, one of a Kurgan that is a Slavic grave mound from the 6th-7th century and the other of an hill fort from the same period. The reason for our visit to this site was that another group of Swedish students, participating in the REACH-Project, were here. The area around Ljubitzino is very rich in Kurgans and the subsequent burial type, Sopkas. Prof. Konetski had the kindness to take us out on a very interesting excursion in the area. He told us the differences between Kurgans and Sopkas and showed us some different types of examples within the two groups of burial mounds. Kurgans are the older of the two types of graves and consist of low, flat mounds of different shapes while the Sopkas are very high and pointy. One of the Kurgans he showed us was 120 metres long, the longest mound in Russia.

The two types of mounds are the subject of many different discussions within the archaeological field in Russia and the ideas of their origins are almost as many as there are archaeologists. One of the ideas is that the people in the area had their own type of burials, the Kurgans. After a while, perhaps after contacts with incoming Slavic culture, the way of building mounds changed to the Sopka type. This could even indicate some kind of contact with the Scandinavian culture, even though Scandinavian mounds from the same period have a rounder shape.

Another area that is rich in burial mounds is the Ladoga District, around the Ladoga Lake. In Staraja Ladoga we participated in an excavation led by Dr. Borostavskij and Prof. Kirpichnikov. It was the second time we were there but this year we started on a new excavation to investigate the old fortress of the village. Therefore we excavated a higher level of the stratigraphy, (15th-16th century), in order to get down to the more interesting layers of next year’s excavation. However, we did find some Viking materials, for instance beads, because of the mixed layers. Staraja Ladoga is located a few kilometres down the Volchov River from Ladoga Lake and is considered to be the first stop for the Scandinavians on their route towards Holmgard and Kiev and so on. According to the legend, this was the place where Rurik founded the state of Russia. There are many traces of Scandinavian influences in Staraja Ladoga, thought to be founded in 753 AD. Even today, one street bears the name of Varjager Street, where Varjag is the Russian name for a Viking. Close to this street there was an excavation, in which a building interpreted as a pagan Scandinavian temple was found.

There are many churches in Staraja Ladoga, which seems to be the case in every important town/village in Europe from this time. One of the most interesting churches in Staraja Ladoga is the Church of St. George. The wall inside the church still displays original paintings from the 12th century. One of the paintings is of St. George and the dragon but instead of killing the dragon, which is the case in the Western European legends, here he is only capturing the dragon.

Russian archaeology is today in a period of change, from the old Soviet way of thinking towards developing a new scientific Russian method. An earlier problem was also the language barrier, which is now diminishing. Therefore it is important for us to take part in this development and support it under their supervision. The West Russian cultural heritage is also a part of the Scandinavian cultural heritage.

Peter Larsson

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Sigurd Fafnisbane’s Saga

By Don MacDonald

The saga of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, Andvar’s cursed gold, and Regin’s revenge on his brother Fafnir - is the drama played out every summer at Sundbyholm in the heart of Sweden. This drama dates back to the Viking era and is depicted on the famous stone carving nearby that is the source of inspiration for this production by THEORIKA-teatern and a vast number of amateurs and enthusiasts.

The Sigurd carving is renown for its beauty and extensive pictorial account of the Sigurd legend. The story, as retold in the drama, is one “of greed and vengeance, of gold and blood, of honour and betrayal”. When Andvar’s gold treasure is stolen, he curses it and its owner for all time. The gold leaves a never-ending trail of death behind it and at the climax Sigurd is the bane of Fafnir, who lies in watch over the gold for which he killed his father and betrayed his brother.

Such is the story, told in a Viking setting by the Sejd or Seeress, in whose mind the legend is once again played out. The Sigurd legend was ancient and renown even in Viking times; in fact, it has been told with variation throughout the Germanic world. It is found in the Edda, it became part of German heritage in the Nibelungenlied, it even inspired modern-day author JRR Tolkien to write his famous “The Lord of the Rings”.

It has been my task to translate the play, written by Theresia Holmstedt Jensen, into English, making it accessible also to foreign visitors to this historic site. The original text is not in archaic Swedish, but nevertheless full of old fashioned expressions and colourful metaphors, so translating it has not been without its problems. I have tried to maintain the colourful tone and feeling of antiquity, without making the translation too high-flown or difficult to understand. The author and I are happy with the final result, and the players too have been enthusiastic. “Sigurd Fafnisbane’s Saga” in English will have its premiere performance sometime in 1999, and is available for groups upon request. The production is mobile, and the company hopes an international tour will be possible as the interest for this remarkable spectacle reaches new heights.

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Photo: Rolf Jarhem
A Viking Feast in your home!

Why not invite some of your friends to a Viking meal? From the book *Vikingarn gästabud* (The Viking Feast) by Michael Fant, Roger Lundgren and Thore Isaksson, reviewed here in the Newsletter nr 5/98, we have chosen four dishes for your Viking feast.

The recipes are adapted to modern appliances such as an electric oven and present-day ingredients. This means that the recipes are not too difficult to cook and the ingredients should be easy to find all over the globe. We hope that these dishes will make your Viking feast a culinary experience for both yourself and your friends!

*All recipes are for 4 persons.*

**Starter: Green soup**

100–150 grams of fresh, parboiled spinach or about 200 grams of deep-frozen whole leaves of spinach
10 cm of the white part of a leek
1 litre good bouillon
1 dl finely chopped parsley
Dash pepper
Dash ground ginger
2–3 egg yolks
1 dl cream
Grated nutmeg

Clean and rinse the fresh spinach or thaw the frozen. Rinse the leek and slice thinly. Bring the bouillon to a boil and add the spinach and leek. Let boil for 5 minutes. Add the parsley and boil together a few more minutes. Season with salt, pepper and ginger. Whisk the yolks with the cream in the bottom of the soup tureen. Pour in the soup while whisking briskly. grate some nutmeg over the soup and serve it with a good bread.

**Main course 1:**

**Chicken Stew with beer**

1 chicken, about 1 kg
3–4 carrots
3 yellow onions
1 turnip, about 1/2 kg
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
A little black pepper
Thyme
6–8 whole allspice
1 bottle (33 cl) dark beer

Chop the chicken into 8 pieces. Peel and cut the vegetables into pieces. Fry the chicken in butter, about 5 minutes on each side. Season with salt and pepper and place in a pot. Add the vegetables, thyme, allspice and beer. Let boil for about 15 minutes. Serve the dish with bread and/or with the next recipe.

**Main course 2:**

**Honey-glazed root vegetables**

1 turnip
2–3 carrots
1 slice of white cabbage
1 leek
butter
honey
salt and pepper

Peel the root vegetables and cut them into pieces. Boil together in slightly salted water about 5 minutes and drain. Fry the root vegetables in butter until soft. Let the leek fry with them at the end. Add some honey and stir the dish carefully. Season with salt and pepper.

**Dessert:**

**Pancake with blueberries**

2 1/2 dl white flour
(or 1 dl wholemeal flour + 1 1/2 dl white flour)
1/2 teaspoon salt
6 dl milk
2 tablespoons butter
2 dl blueberries

Turn the oven on to 225° C. Whisk the batter together without the butter and stir in the blueberries. Melt the butter in a heat-resistant baking pan and pour in the batter. Bake it in the middle of the oven for about 20 - 25 minutes until the pancake has a nice colour. Cut it into pieces and serve with some jam.


*Translation of the recipes:*

Marita Engberg Ekman

*Photo: Lennart Hanson*
Digging for Vikings in Wales

A team of archaeologists from the National Museums & Galleries of Wales has carried out an excavation of a Viking settlement in Llanbedrogoch, Anglesey, Wales in August and September this year. The site was discovered in 1994, when, among other things, three Viking-type lead weights were found. The site has a complex history with traces from different periods of prehistory including the Viking Age. This was the fifth season of digging at the site, and the work will continue next year. We hope to obtain more information about the Vikings in Wales in a coming issue of this Newsletter.

For more information:
http://www.nmgw.ac.uk

International conference on Vikings in Normandy

An international conference "The Vikings' Sea Heritage in Western Europe" is taking place in Normandy, France, Sept 30 - Oct 3, 1999.

Well-known experts from many countries will hold talks about different aspects of the Vikings. The topics include: The Vikings and the peoples of Europe, The Viking ship and the sailing traditions of Europe, The Vikings and life at sea, and The Viking presence in place names.

The conference is organized by the Hague District and the Office Universitaire d'Etudes Normandes of the University of Caen (Normandy) with the support of the European Union, the Scottish Place-Name Society and the Tourist Office of La Hague.

Vision Gotland

1010 "The dream of the Vikings"

This autumn, all the county museums of Sweden and the Nordic Museum in Stockholm will open exhibitions on the theme Faith in the Future. At the turn of the century, and now also a millennium, there are always thoughts and reflections about the future, both expectations and anxieties. In the project Faith in the Future, one of the tasks is that the museums will shed light on the visions of older times and narrate the results to the public.

As a part of this project, The Historical Museum of Gotland (Gotlands Fornsal) will, among other exhibitions, show the exhibition Vision Gotland 1010 "The dream of the Vikings". On the eve of the last millennium, Gotland entered upon the largest business boom in its history. Signs of the wealth from the Middle Ages can still be seen all over the island. This exhibition will show how the Vikings might have envisioned the future in the year 999 AD. Among other things a Viking ship will be on display.

The exhibition is open daily throughout the autumn.
Viking Millennium International Symposium

The Viking Millennium International Symposium will take place in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, during eight days of activities, September 16-24, 2000. The symposium will examine the history, culture and society of the Vikings, who became the first European settlers in the New World and the first Europeans to make contact with the indigenous people of the Americas. The unique archaeological evidence of their ancient settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland - a National Historic Site and a World Heritage Site - will also be studied.

The Viking Millenium International Symposium will be a key component of the provincial festivities, Vikings! 1000 Years! to be celebrated throughout the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the year 2000.

The symposium will gather Viking experts and international scholars to discuss many aspects of Norse culture during the period of exploration that spurred the New World journeys of Leif Eriksson and his family. Visits to four important locations are also included in the programme as well as entertainment and events highlighting the rich history and culture of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Honorary Patron of the Symposium is Helge Ingstad, who, with his wife Anne Stine Ingstad, first excavated the L'Anse aux Meadows site. Speakers will include Magnus Magnusson, Benedict Ingstad, Gwynne Dyer and Birgitta Wallace. As a Viking scholar or as an interested member of the public you are invited to participate in this international symposium.

For further information contact http://www.vikingsymposium.nf.ca/.

New book!


Vinland, the good. The voyages of the Norsemen to America during the Viking Age. Publisher: Atlantis.)

Mats G Larsson is a senior lecturer of Archaeology at the University of Lund, Sweden and his speciality is the Viking Age. His special interest is the relation between the archaeological remains and written sources, especially the Icelandic sagas.

The sagas tell us that the Vikings went on several expeditions to new countries in the west, called Helluland, Markland and Vinland. Vinland was known as the country of wild-growing grapes, self-sown wheat and a hostile people, in the original sources called "skraelingar". In the sixties it was confirmed that the Vikings came to America, when archaeological excavations in L'Anse aux Meadows on Newfoundland unveiled a Nordic settlement from the Viking Age.

In this book Mats G Larsson tells us about his research for Nordic settlement in different places along the coast of New England and Nova Scotia. For many seasons he has investigated the coast based upon a close study of the original literature sources. The results of his search are presented in a fascinating way in the book. The book also includes new translations, by the author himself, of the two main sagas about the voyages to Vinland, "The Saga of the Greenlanders" and "Erik the Red's Saga".

Four books about the Vikings have been published earlier by the same author and the same publishing company, Atlantis.

Secret Whisper - a travelling exhibition

In connection with the celebration of the new millennium at Medborgarplatsen in Stockholm, Sweden, an exhibition called "Secret Whisper" will be shown in Medborgarhuset. Four artists and designers have been inspired by the ornamental art of the Vikings and the Lapps, by the beauty of the runestones and the multicultural meetings and influences that took place inside and outside the Nordic countries the years around 1000 AD.

The name of the exhibition, Secret Whisper, refers to a whisper that is becoming louder in North Europe - a whisper about the culture of the Viking era as an exciting time with an outstanding and humorous artistic expression. This exhibition will show another image than the traditional, that the Viking era was not only brutal, rude and male primitive. It will put forth the fantasy - the sensualism of the females and the "traveller's" several meetings with other cultures, from the Orient to the Lapps and the Eskimos in the north.

The four designers, Valentina Kuprina, Elsebeth Lavold, Christine Keefel and Alf Johansson, use materials such as Chinese silk, wool, cotton, linen and yarn from India. From these they have made stage costumes, paintings on silks, mats and knitted garments. With their art they show a new aspect of the Nordic heritage now expressed in a modern artistic language:

Secret whisper is a travelling exhibition. For further information please contact:

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VIKING HERITAGE
a network for Viking-related knowledge

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.

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