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Angela Holmer with the bottom part of the picture seen. One can clearly see the ship with its sail.

The Excavation of the Viking Age harbour at Fröjel, Gotland

By Dan Carlson, associate professor, Gotland University College, Sweden

Project Setting
The Fröjel Discovery Programme that began in 1998, is a new type of culture project, i.e. a project with a comprehensive view towards the concept of Cultural Heritage. The project is intended not only to scientifically examine the Viking Age harbour at Fröjel, but also to mediate and help to bring the history of the Vikings on Gotland to life. The project is to a great extent a collaboration between local interest organisations and businessmen and the world of the scientists, with the main interest being in developing the area as a tourists’ site.

To be continued on page 3...
It is a great pleasure for us to present you with the last issue of Viking Heritage Newsletter for this year and this millennium. As you will see, it is filled with many interesting articles and news items.

We are now heading into the new year 2000 with a lot of millennium celebrations connected with the Vikings and their sea voyages planned around the world. I am thinking in particular of the large gathering of Viking Age ships in North America in the coming summer. With this in mind, it causes one to wonder about how the Vikings managed to navigate on their long sea journeys. In the article about Viking Navigation you might get a few answers. (If you would like to know more about the millennium events, please take a look in our database, http://viking.hgo.se, in the sections "news", "events" and Millennium Celebration site.)

In this issue you will also find some articles about archaeological excavations concerning the Viking Age. The first, as you can see on the front page, deals with the project Fröjel Discovery Programme, the project we know many of you readers follow with interest. You will receive a presentation of the project and a report on the latest results of this summer's excavation of the Viking Age harbour of Fröjel on the west coast of Gotland. The second article is about the excavation of a settlement complex taking place at Llanbedrog on Anglesey, Wales. This excavation, carried out by The National Museums & Galleries of Wales, is shedding light on the extent to which Viking people and their culture became integrated into native Welsh society.

As we understand from our readers' reactions, many of you are really interested in the reconstruction of different Viking Age handicrafts. Now you will find the continuation of the article from the last issue about Reconstructing of Costume of the Viking Age by Viktoria Pernodt. In this article she discusses the female costume.

Why not arrange a Christmas party à la Viking? Read about how the Vikings celebrated Jól, the celebration that became Christmas in the Christian era. You will get some suggestions here about how to arrange a reconstruction of the feast.

In this issue we also present the latest news on the big treasure troves found on Gotland this summer, a presentation of a Danish re-enactment group and a re-enactor's glimpses from one of the popular Viking markets last summer.

As the table of contents indicates, this newsletter is intended to be a forum for anyone interested in Viking-related issues. Contact with our readers is very important to us as we are dependent on your assistance in providing information and material to make as interesting a newsletter as possible, as well as in updating the database. Please feel free to contact us, we are very grateful to hear your opinions and ideas, and to receive notices and articles about current projects, events, new finds etc.

Here we would like to thank all those who have contributed to the newsletter in 1999. We hope you readers have been pleased with it. With your help we hope to become even better next year. Here's a tip for the coming year: a gift subscription to the Newsletter makes a very good present for a friend. You just have to contact us!

Everyone here at Viking Heritage would like to wish you all around the world a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and welcome to Viking Heritage Newsletter in 2000!

Pleasant reading!

Marina Engberg Ekman
Editor
Viking Heritage
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Words of wisdom
No man is so generous he will jib at accepting
A gift in return for a gift,
No man so rich that it really gives him
Pain to be repaid.

From "Háamadli" (Words of "The High One")
The Excavation of the Viking-Age harbour at Fröjel, Gotland

Summary of excavations during 1999

By Dan Carlsson, associate professor, Gotland University College, Sweden

Continued from front page.

The project intends to combine archaeological research with regional development, to the extent that a scientific research project will act as the basis for investment in the development and knowledge about the Viking Age in the area, and its becoming an attraction. The project aims briefly to:

* Through excavation of the Viking-Age harbour at Fröjel, increase knowledge of the extent, direction, organisation and development of Viking-Age trade on Gotland.
* Give visitors a special experience during the excavation period with different kinds of exhibitions; and after the excavations are completed in form of a well developed visitors' site.
* Function as a resource for education at Gotland University College, as well as for other schools through shows, exhibitions, information and active participation in the project.
* By inviting scholarship recipients to participate in fieldwork, become a link in international interchange between the countries in Europe on the theme of archaeology and cultural heritage.

Research program

The fact that the harbour at Fröjel was abandoned as early as the 12th century, and that the area is correspondingly little exploited, offers a excellent opportunity to study the development of a harbour of this character. New excavations can, above all, provide answers to the extent, direction and organisation of trading on Gotland, and in the Baltic area, generally speaking. For instance, we know very little about those who were responsible for trading. In general it is assumed that they were active Gotlandic farmers. The regular distribution of silver treasure all over the island offers some proof of that assumption.

New excavations would also provide important contributions towards answering questions about handicrafts and the production of goods. Earlier excavations show the extent of remains of iron- as well as bronze- and bead-handicrafts. Handicrafts of bone and antler are also richly represented.

The central focus in the scientific project can be summed up in four main points as follows:

* The internal development of the trading-place, regarding the extent, date and function at different points of time etc., as well as its relation to other similar places on Gotland and around the Baltic Sea.
* The extent and appearance of the harbour, i.e. questions about the landing stages, jetties, barrier-constructions, wrecks etc.
* The earliest phase of Christianity: the church, the vicarage and the cemetery. Former excavations indicate that, at some point, there has been a church with a churchyard below the brow of the hill where the present church is situated.
* The harbour and its surroundings. There are some signs indicating that several farms were established in connection with the trading-place during the Viking-Age - Early Medieval Ages period, but most of them ceased to exist when the harbour went out of use. The establishment of farms in the area should probably be seen as a direct result of the harbour's importance.

The 1999 excavation

The second year's excavation of the project was carried out between the end of June and the beginning of August last summer. All together, there were about 50 of us engaged at the same time. Among the participants were 15 from abroad, from USA, Canada, Australia, England, Germany and Norway, in addition to the many participants from Sweden. The excavation dealt mainly with two questions we wanted to penetrate: One concerned the settlement pattern and
the harbour, the other the cemetery located stratigraphically under the settlement. We know from earlier excavations that settlement was spread out over a large area, that it began as early as the late 6th century, and that the site was occupied continuously until the end of the 12th century.

The settlement pattern
From the beginning, I had considered the oldest part of the settlement to be in the north, since we have found artefacts from the 6th and 7th centuries in that area. However most of these artefacts seem to have come from destroyed graves, so until now it has been questionable if the northern area had really been the oldest part.

Looking for the earliest phase of a settlement is always tricky, not least because later occupation tends to destroy earlier records. With the assistance of Jonas Ström from the Historical Museum of Gotland and his metal detector, we received some different ideas of where the oldest part of the settlement was situated. He found three Arabic silver coins from the end of the 8th century, close to each other, in an area we had never before considered. It lay much more to the west of the main settlement area, and also in an area lower than 10th and 11th-century settlement. This was quite astonishing, even though we must bear in mind that the land elevation on Gotland is about 2-3 metres per thousand years.

However, we have come to realise more and more that the situation during the Viking Age was different. The mild climate meant that the water level actually rose far more than was compensated by the land elevation, so we would actually find the older settlement (of the 7th- and 8th-century) lying below the younger settlement, contrary to what one would believe.

Thus, we changed the area of our investigations concerning the early phase of the settlement to a more westerly situation. At the excavation here, we found some smaller artefacts, among them a conical bead from the 7th- or 8th century, and also a half coin from the 11th century. Besides a smaller amount of artefacts, we also discovered several smaller postholes. They were all about the same size, and were probably used for posts connected with drying fishing nets.

The main part of the excavation, which took place in the central part of the settlement, was aimed at obtaining a clearer picture of the settlement pattern, and also the extent of one of the cemeteries in the area. The excavation was divided into two areas, some 200 metres from each other. In the southern part, we discovered several houses, and very rich material dating the settlement to the 11th and 12th centuries. Huge postholes and clay floors gave a good indication of the size of the houses.

Among the artefacts, we found several coins from the 11th century, but also an Arabic coin from the 9th century. Several small, but well-preserved locks, as well as keys and other household artefacts were also discovered.

The cemetery
In the northern part of the settlement area, there is a cemetery from the 8th-10th century, overlaid by the 11th century settlement. The graves are typical for the area and the time period, and consist of inhumation burials in the ground, covered with stone packing. However, there is one grave that differs very much from the others.

It is round, and very large, some 8 metres in diameter with a circular stone wall consisting of huge stones around the inner part. All together, we have investigated, more or less, seven graves. Most of them seem to be females, seen from the artefacts they contained (animal head brooches, necklaces of glass beads, dress pins and so on).

One of the inhumation graves gave us quite a big surprise. We saw rather early that at the end of the grave and the stone packing covering the deceased, there was a stone slab of limestone. During the excavation it became clear that the slab was rather large, and there was another limestone slab at the dead person’s head.

After having cleared the skeleton as much as possible, we finally lifted the flat stone at the end of the grave, and to our great surprise it turned out to be a picture stone of a type that can be dated to the 8th and the 9th centuries. On it, there was a picture of a ship, and we could also see some people on the ship. The picture was surrounded by a decoration of lines along the outer end of the stone. Very soon, it became clear to us that the stone found was the bottom part of a picture stone some 1.6 metres high. We also realised that the missing top of the picture stone was actually the stone at the head end of the grave. We finally got that part out into the sun, too, and found it covered. However not so clearly, by some pictures, notably a horse and a female, probably a “Valkyrie”, offering a drinking horn to a person on his way to Valhalla.

The picture stone had a secondary use in the grave. It had been divided into two parts, with the head of the stone placed behind the head of the dead person, and the foot of the stone, at the end of the grave. Both pieces of the stone had the picture side turned towards the dead person. As I see it, it is quite certain that they used the stone in the grave for a specific reason, even regarding the position of the two parts.

In other words, I see the stone as a connection between the person for whom it was originally made and the person in the grave, a kind of symbol of personal relationships through the generations. The skeleton was very well preserved and it could have been a man, even if the body had no artefacts.
with him/her to give a clear idea of the person’s sex.

All together, the graves from this year’s excavation greatly supplement the results from our earlier excavations. Most of the graves investigated so far seem to contain women, even if we have found some men. A very interesting picture evolves around the huge stone circle. It looks as if it is a kind of central grave for the area, both by its size and form, and also because all the graves around this central grave seem to be orientated in a way of encircling the grave. The excavation later on in autumn gave no answer as to which the person might be, since we found only a skeleton without any artefacts.

Artefacts

Excavating a place like the harbour and trading place at Fröjel will inevitably result in a tremendous amount of material, not at least animal bones. During the excavation this year we have collected and registered several hundred kilograms of animal bones and slag and about 3–4000 artefacts.

Most of the objects are small tin, iron objects, but we have also found some rather interesting objects. These objects are dated mainly from the 11th century, but we also have some artefacts from the 8th to 12th century. The objects found haven’t changed the main conclusion concerning the activities at the site, but some new ideas have evolved. For instance, it is becoming more and more clear that crystal beads were being made at the site. Normally, we say that faceted crystal beads were imported from the Orient. But we have now clear evidence that they were actually making these kind of beads at Fröjel. All together, we found some 50 beads this year, mostly glass beads of different colours, but also some beads of other material.

One of the more remarkable artefacts found this year is three pieces of rock crystal in the form of lenses. Together with the beads and semi-finished materials we have found earlier, it is very clear now that rock crystal raw material was being imported to Fröjel to be used for making both faceted beads and obviously also rock crystal lenses. This type of lenses were usually mounted into necklaces, but they could also have been used both for burning lenses and for magnifying glasses. Where they got the raw material from is still a matter of discussion, but it probably came from the area around the Black Sea.

This year has also meant that we have found about 30 new coins, which means that we now have something like 100 coins from Fröjel. Most of the coins are German and mainly from the 11th century. But we have also found Arabic coins from the late 8th- or early 9th centuries.

Another very interesting object found this year was a small brooch. It is about 2 cm high, and made of bronze. It shows a man or woman, whose legs are transformed into the tails of two dragons or snakes. There is a close resemblance to an image on a picture stone from eastern Gotland, showing a woman holding two snakes that are biting her head, in her arms. A very common type of artefacts that we find at Fröjel is different form of belt decorations and strap ends. Most common are small rectangular bronze plates, about 2 cm long and half a centimetre width. They are normally fastened with bronze rivets. It seems that bronze mountings have been extremely common, not only for belts, but also for all kind of decorations, on wooden boxes, on equipment, such as knives, etc. We have found hundreds of examples of this kind of artefact.

On the other hand, we have found astonishing few weapons at Fröjel, in the graves or in the settlement. Except for a small axe, and small pieces of a spearhead, the only objects that might be connected to war are about 40 arrowheads.

Next year’s excavation

At the moment, we are planning next year’s excavation. As earlier, the excavation will be carried out in the form of field courses open to both archaeologists and amateurs. The excavation will take place in two forms. The first course will be open for anyone who wishes to join an archaeological excavation. There is no prerequisite of formal archaeological excavation experience; any one can take part. This course will be managed by Hemsö “folkhögskola” (Adult Educational College) and will take place between the end of June and the middle of July, as either a two- or a three-week course. The working languages will be Swedish and English.

The second course will take place between mid July and mid August, and is open only to archaeologists from all over the world. The working language will be English. The Gotland University College will arrange this course. For further information, please contact me at: dan@hgo.se, or visit our homepage at: http://frjel.hgo.se.

One of the more fascinating artefacts found last summer was this small brooch showing human figure holding two snakes or dragons. The brooch is about 2 cm high, and made of bronze.
"THE DISCOVERY OF AN EARLY BEARING DIAL". This exciting headline appeared in the British periodical, "The Journal of Navigation, No 3," July 1953. The author of the article was Captain Carl V. Sølver, director of the long established nautical supply company I.C. Weilbach in Copenhagen, and a well-known researcher into the history of navigation. Most practical navigators had high expectations that this archaeological find from Greenland would eventually provide the answer to how the Norsemen had been able to navigate the North Atlantic for more than 450 years. However, many years would pass, before Captain Sølver's theory could be confirmed.

"A NORSE BEARING DIAL". This headline appeared in January 1954 in No 1 of the same journal. Three commentators refused to see any sense in Captain Sølver's theory, and their comments were quite offensive. Unfortunately none of them seem to have had any experience of practical navigation, but apparently due to their status as Professors etc. most of their colleagues took the same standpoint. It is astonishing that very few listened to Commander W.F. May's comments. He had many years' experience in practical navigation and was positive to Sølver's theory. He suggested that navigational historians and practical navigators conduct further research. Fortunately this came about, but not until about 30 years later. The story goes as follows:

In 1948 the Danish archaeologist and historian, C.L. Vebæk, was excavating a Benedictine convent near the Uummannaq Fjord in southern Greenland. He discovered that the convent had been built on top of a former house, which had been covered by a landslide. Vebæk continued his excavations down into this older house, now dated to the landnám period around the year 1000. Among other artefacts, Vebæk found those shown in the photo No 1. Neither he nor his assistants had any idea of the purpose of these artefacts, and they were all sent to the National Museum in Copenhagen for conservation and further studies.

In 1953 Vebæk wrote an article for the British periodical, "The Illustrated London News". His article was actually about the excavation of the convent, but for some inexplicable reason the photo of the mentioned artefacts from the lower house was included. Today, we must consider this extremely fortunate. The Illustrated London News is read nearly worldwide, but the only reaction to the article came from a reader whose office was situated only fifteen minutes walk from Vebæk's office in the National Museum. It came from Captain Carl V. Sølver. Having read the article, Sølver immediately got the idea that the half-moon shaped disc in the photo could be part of a broken bearing-dial. The notches around the edge reminded him of how the early compass card was divided into 32 points.

Captain Sølver phoned Vebæk, and asked for permission to study the find closer. Vebæk was delighted that someone had finally come up with an idea of the find's use, and Captain Sølver was immediately invited to the museum, Vebæk handed him the half-moon shaped disc for examination, and Sølver took it to the window to study it in daylight. Then he said: "There is no doubt at all, this is a sun-compass, a bearing-dial". He then borrowed the broken disc, and had some plaster casts made of it. He also had a wood-carver to make a reconstruction of how he thought the object had appeared before it was broken, photo No 2.

At this time Captain Sølver was working on his book VESTERFEJEN about Viking navigation, and he now wrote one full chapter with illustrations, giving his interpretation of Vebæk's find. We, Captain Sølver's contemporary navigators, read his book with great interest. We learned for the first time that research was conducted on the fascinating history of Viking navigation. Captain Sølver's book VESTERFEJEN has since been the basis for many later studies, both national and international. As mentioned above, Captain Sølver also wrote an article for The Journal of Navigation, but due to the resistance it received from academic circles very little was heard of his theory for a long time.

Then in 1978, something happened which brought the disc back to light. The Swedish astronomer, Carl Roslund was researching the history of the practical use of astronomy throughout the ages. In his studies, he read Captain Sølver's book VESTERFEJEN, and in the photo of the disc, he discovered that a straight line and a curved line on the surface of the disc could be gnomonic lines. He therefore went to the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen and asked for permission to study the find more closely. As a result, he became convinced that the two interesting lines had been incised more than once. They were made for a purpose, and his opinion was that the disc had been used as a sun-compass - a brilliant idea.

The gnomonic lines are best understood by following how the sun's shadow of a vertical peg moves on a
level plane during the day. Anyone can make a sun-compass, and anyone can use it. Take a circular piece of wood about 10 to 15 cm in diameter and 1 cm thick. Place a gnomon of 1 to 2 cm in height in the centre. A nail can do, but a cone is better. Place the board horizontally, where the sun can shine on it all day long. In the morning when the sun begins to cast a shadow, mark the tip of the shadow, and continue to do so throughout the entire day. If you mark the tip of the shadow every full hour, you will also have a sundial showing your local time. In the evening, draw a line through all the marks, then you have the track of the sun’s shadow all that day, but in practice it is also valid for some days ahead, how many depending on the season. Mark the point where the curve is closest to the centre. Here the sun is at its highest and bears due south. Draw a line through this point and the centre. This is the north/south line from which the compass can be divided into degrees or compass points.

To use the sun-compass, stand in sunlight, hold the compass level and turn it until the point of the shadow exactly touches the gnomonic line, over the western half in the morning and the eastern half in afternoon, and the compass will show true directions. It is interesting to note that if you should happen to use a gnomonic line inappropriate to the date, in the forenoon you will be led a few degrees to one side of your intended course, but in the afternoon, the error will be compensated at the same degree. The distance loss is negligible.

Roslund’s theory aroused the interest of Vebæk and his colleague Thorbjørn Ramkou. The latter wrote the book, SOLKOMPASSET, about Roslund’s theory. At this time the author of this article had retired as a former navigator and ship’s captain, and I had become a voluntary assistant to the nautical department of the Danish Maritime Museum. Here I studied the history of navigation, and had the pleasure of finding Captain Solver’s plaster casts and his reconstruction of the bearing-dial in the museum’s collection. I heard about Ramkou’s book, and bought it. I became so interested in Roslund’s theory that I have been experimenting with it ever since.

Photo 2: The reconstruction of the sun-compass, according to Captain Carl V. Solver.

I constructed many sun-compasses and examined their performance and I was surprised by how exact and easy to handle they were. In 1984 I heard that the Norwegian adventurer, Ragnar Thorseth, had started his famous circumnavigation of the world in his ship, the SAGA SIGLAR. This ship is a reconstruction of the wreck No 1 in the Viking Museum in Roskilde. My friend, Max Vinner from this Museum, was invited to take part in the voyage from Reykjavik to Nuuk in Greenland. I asked Vinner whether he would be willing to test the performance of the sun-compass under realistic conditions during the voyage, and he agreed. I constructed some compasses for the appropriate dates and latitudes, and received some very encouraging reports from the navigators. The compasses had worked perfectly.

Since then I have had the performance of the sun-compass successfully tested by many navigators, on board both small and large ships. Some archaeologists were still sceptical. They had many other suggestions for the performance of the disc, and they claimed that the lines in the disc were simply “slips” of a knife used for cutting the disc. In 1988, we were a team of four carrying out experiments. We also had some interesting contacts with C.L. Vebæk, who was delighted to hear that we were experimenting with Roslund’s theory. For support we took contact with the Danish Forensic Police and asked them to give us an impartial examination. They kindly agreed, and gave us a full report and a series of photo. Part of photos No 3, 4 and 5 are shown here, and they clearly prove that the lines have been incised at least twice. They had been made for a purpose.

Vebæk and I were so delighted with this support from the police, that we decided to write a book with all the details and experiments. In 1999 we published our book VIKINGERNES KOMPAS (The Viking Compass), which aroused great interest. In 1991, I had a meeting with Professor Sean McGrail from the University of Oxford. I demonstrated the compass for him, and he was so impressed by its exactness that he suggested we should have our book translated into English. Professor Sean McGrail helped us with the translation, even writing the foreword to our English version THE VIKING COMPASS.

This English version gave rise to many international contacts, and we soon co-operated with researchers in Norway, Sweden, England, Germany, Spain, USA and Australia. Some of them made sun-compasses themselves, others had them sent from us. Most reports were very positive - in fact the

Photo 3: The Danish Forensic Police’s photo of the Uunartoq-find. Seen from the top, the first six compass lines are correctly made. In the bottom part there are some defects that seem to have been corrected by removing the point of 13 A.
only few negative reactions came from people with no experience at all in practical navigation. Some of the experiments should be mentioned:

In 1988, 2500 yachtsmen checked the performance of the compass in a race around the island of Sjælland. 116 reports were positive and only 3 sceptic. In 1991 two very realistic experiments were carried out in the North Atlantic. In the GAIA, built as a copy of the Gokstad-ship, Ragnar Thorseth had success with the compass, and at the same time the circumnavigator. Robin Knox-Johnston successfully proved the value of the sun-compass in his yacht SUHAILI on a voyage from the Shetland Islands to Greenland.

In 1993 the American senior researcher at NASA, H.D. Garner checked some of our compasses near Cape Horn. His results were questionable due to bad weather.

In 1995, Robin Knox-Johnston, now knighted as Sir Robin, ordered 2000 sun-compasses to be tested internationally by participating navigators at the Tall Ships' Race between Bremerhaven and Frederikshavn. The compasses were designed to be placed on top of a beer-bottle, which should be held with two fingers near the top. The bottle was then vertical and the compass level. The idea was a success, giving us many international contacts.

In 1996 Sir Robin checked the performance of a sun-compass of his own making for the BBC. On a voyage in his yacht SUHAILI along latitude 50 degrees north he sailed 50 miles, navigating entirely on wind direction and his sun-compass. He ended up less than a mile off his destination. Shortly thereafter this was shown on TV all over Europe and the USA, and I published a new English version of THE VIKING NAVIGATION with foreword by Sir Robin.

At a competition during The European Week for Science and Technological Culture in Lisbon in 1998, five students from Visby, Gotland, demonstrated the Sun-Compass. Their demonstration was so convincing that they won second prize.

In 1999 Sir Robin and the BBC contacted the Viking Museum in Roskilde. Together they chartered a Norwegian Viking ship and sailed from Bergen to the Shetland Islands. All navigation was based on a sun-compass made by Sir Robin, the wind direction and a sun stone. For some time during the voyage they had no sun, and the exciting vessel noticed that the Viking ship steered too far south. When the sun cast a shadow again, Sir Robin discovered the error. He adjusted his course and the ship landed very close to the intended landmark.

We will of course never be able to prove that this little wooden disc has really been used as a sun-compass, but the many successful experiments prove that it could have been used as one. Roslund's theory is hitherto the best one of explaining how the Norsemen were able to find their way across the North Atlantic for so many years.

The Viking Compas
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Phone: +45 4919 2367

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EXCAVATION OF A VIKING AGE SITE AT LLANBEDRGOCH ON ANGLESEY

By Mark Redknap, Curator of Medieval & Later Archaeology, National Museums & Galleries of Wales.

The island of Anglesey lies on the north-western tip of Wales, surrounded on three sides by the Irish Sea. In contrast with the high-peaked massif of Snowdonia on the mainland, it appears to be low-lying, with undulating green pastures. It has a rocky coastline, indented with numerous small headlands and coves, and some larger bays. Anglesey’s position, only 50 miles from the Isle of Man and 65 miles from Dublin, brought it historically into the ‘Hiberno-Norse’ world. Viking familiarity with the island is demonstrated by the place-names of Scandinavian origin which have been given to prominent coastal features: Anglesey itself (Ono-ga-e), The Skerries, Pscar, Priestholm and Osmond’s Ait near Beaumaris (Aamund-e yr). The distribution of known hoards of Viking silver in Wales is coastal in character. A remarkable hoard of five complete Viking silver arm-rings of Hiberno-Norse type, now in the collections of the National Museums & Galleries of Wales, was found in the 19th century on the south-eastern side of Red Wharf Bay on Anglesey. This group and the Cuerdale hoard in Lancashire (c. AD 905) have both been associated by researchers with events surrounding the expulsion of Ingimund from Dublin in AD 902/3. Two hoards have also been found in the vicinity of the site of St Deiniol’s monastery at Bangor, opposite Anglesey on the mainland (deposited about AD 925 and about AD 970).

Since 1994, the National Museums & Galleries of Wales have been excavating an intriguing settlement complex at Llanbedr-Goch on Anglesey which is revealing new details of life there in the 9th and 10th centuries, and shedding light on the extent to which Viking people and their culture became integrated into native Welsh society. In 1992, some metal-detected finds were identified from several fields near Red Wharf Bay. These included a penny of Wulfred of Canterbury (AD 805-32), Carolingian deniers of Louis the Pious (AD 822-40) and Charles the Bald (AD 848-77) and lead weights of Viking type. In 1994 a combination of geophysical surveying and trial excavation by a team from the Museum established the presence of a rock-cut ditch enclosing a large U-shaped area on a gentle slope facing south. A range of dates from the 6th to the 11th centuries was obtained by radiocarbon dating of the charcoal in its fills, while a post-hole cut into a rock-cut platform provided radiocarbon date range from the 8th to 10th centuries.

The site is situated on a carefully selected, sheltered location on a limestone rise, about 1000m from the sea, astride a natural route from the sheltered haven of Red Wharf Bay. A freshwater spring within the enclosure had been a focus of activity from as early as the Neolithic (c. 3300 BC), a period when most of the burial chambers on Anglesey are thought to have been built. A small number of artefacts and radiocarbon dates point to activity between the 1st and 6th centuries AD, but the nature of the site only becomes clear from about AD 600. During this phase, wooden dwellings were built in the mixed tradition of circular round-houses and rectangular halls, bounded by a ditch enclosing an area of about 10,000m2. During this period, the settlement appears to have been primarily agricultural, but by the 10th century it had developed into fortified settlement and multifunctional centre. At some point in the 9th century, the enclosure boundary was ‘upgraded’ into a defensive system with a massive solid dry-stone wall about 2.20m wide.

Despite terrifying attacks by Viking marauders, it is generally held that Wales successfully resisted yielding land to these invaders, in contrast to the other areas of Britain. The first recorded Viking raid occurred in AD 852 and annals record other attacks by Vikings on Anglesey and Gwynedd from AD 854 onwards.

Skeleton of an infant, found beneath that of an adult, in ditch fill at Llanbedr-Goch in 1999. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)
sufficient for a wall walk. This is substantially larger than any other enclosure walls that we know of on Anglesey, and can be interpreted in part as an expression of power to deter potential raiders, coinciding with the period of initial Viking raids on North Wales.

At about the same time, a change of building techniques occurred. At least three of the 10th-century buildings discovered so far utilised a sill-wall method of construction. Building 1 was about 11m in length, forming a single room where the whole family slept and ate, worked and entertained. Its principal features were a sunken floor and narrow, low walls of limestone blocks forming the foundation for a timber superstructure. Family and guests sat on simple low benches or wooden platforms, indicated now by raised areas of natural loam arranged along the walls around three sides of a hearth. This fireplace had a carefully laid rectangular setting of curb stones, and showed evidence of long use. Radiocarbon dates obtained from the hearth ash and associated deposits (c. AD 800-980) have now been refined by an archaeomagnetic date of c. AD 890-970 for its last period of use. The southern half of the building was flagged, and a stone-lined and capped drain kept the interior dry. While the house appears to have had a dwelling space in its northern half, no clear evidence was found for animal stalls or the regular overwintering of cattle or other livestock in the southern half. The floor in the dwelling space was 'clean', in that there was little organic debris or dung of any kind, only ash and charcoal from the fire.

The adjacent structure, Building 2, was also rectangular, sunken-floored, and 12m long. Its walls used the foundation bed technique recognised elsewhere: a low bedding of stone rubble set within a shallow foundation trench to support a wooden sill-beam. Charcoal samples recovered from the soil over the sunken floor have given a radiocarbon date range of c. AD 855-1000.

The site's zenith lasted from the second half of the 9th to the 10th centuries, when the interior contained rectangular long-houses and halls, some ranged along the inside face of the

defensive wall. Evidence has also been found for craft production, such as bronze casting, antler and leather working. The form of the settlement would appear to represent a new type site for 9th- and 10th-century Wales.

Who constructed these buildings? The building layouts show some similarities with contemporary structures in both Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon regions. However, differences exist in the position of entrances and internal roof supports which may be the components of a building tradition adapted to the local resources and environment. In the absence of more information on native building traditions at this period, it cannot yet be asserted that it represents a native type of building, but it is not unlikely that new features were taken up by the indigenous population as adaptations to local circumstance. There was at least one final structural phase within the enclosure, involving the construction of a large rectangular building (radiocarbon dated to c. AD 900-1080), with a slightly raised central hearth. After this phase of occupation, the area appears to have reverted to agriculture, which in time removed all surface traces of the former settlement.

Finds belonging to the Viking Age
phase of the site have more than doubled the total number of 10th-century artefacts previously known from Wales. They reveal clues as to the everyday function of the settlement, such as the working of leather (avils and socketed tools) and metal, the essential farming nature of the settlement (quernstones, grain, animal bone) and its involvement in trading activities (back-silver, lead weights). These finds offer one means of assessing the degree to which Scandinavian culture was assimilated into the society of north Wales. They suggest that the site attracted craftsmen and merchants as a component of Scandinavian economic and political activity in the Irish Sea area. This coincides with the rise in the volume of minting coins at Chester and the growing contact with Man and Dublin. The role of Scandinavian settlers and traders is not straightforward, but some objects recovered from Llanbedr-y-coed bear the unmistakable mark of the Hiberno-Norse style typical of the Irish Sea area, such as the off-cuts of silver ingot and arm-rings, decorated merchants' weights, ringed pins and buckles.

In August 1998, a remarkable discovery was made. The human remains of two individuals were found buried in the upper fill of a ditch, immediately outside the defensive wall. Contrary to usual Christian practice, both skeletons were orientated north-south. The more mature skeleton lay on its back, with slightly flexed legs; the younger skeleton was crouched, lying on its left side. Both individuals appear to have died prematurely, and to have been buried at the same time beneath a rough pile of stones in this unusual location, rather than in the local cemetery. A radiocarbon date indicated that that death occurred between AD 770-970. Charcoal recovered from the underlying ditch fill gave a radiocarbon date of AD 620-775, confirming that the ditch was silting up during the preceding century.

Excavations in 1999 have established that at least three more individuals had been buried nearby, in a similar casual manner, without care or ceremony. Once again, their orientation was north-south rather than east-west. A second infant was found in the upper ditch fill, orientated with head to south and feet to north. An adult had been thrown directly on top of this infant, this time with head to north. To judge from the unusual positions of the arms, the adult's wrists may have been tied behind the back.

All five individuals may have been interred at the same time, and no attempt appears to have been made to commemorate them or mark the location of their graves. A number of lines of inquiry are being pursued in order to establish age and cause of death, the probable date of death, whether any family links can be proven. Were they the unfortunate victims of violence? If so, who were the perpetrators? Vikings were not the only aggressors, however, for Mercians destroyed Degannwy in AD 823 and were campaigning in north Wales for much of the 9th century. Nevertheless, in view of Llanbedr-y-coed's prominent location, Viking attack and take-over of the site, albeit for a short period, are distinct possibilities. Ongoing study of these burials may provide clues to the identity of the individuals and the circumstances surrounding their deaths. The excavation will continue for two more years, and updates will be posted on the museum web-site (http://www.nmgw.ac.uk/archaeol/anglesey/).

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The Viking-Age Hoards from Spillings

By Jonas Ström, archaeologist, The Historical Museum of Gotland (GotlandsForval). E-mail: Jonas.strom@gotlandica.se

In the month of July 1999 two very big silver hoards were found in a field belonging to the Spillings farm in the parish of Öthern on the eastern part of Gotland, Sweden. The hoards, found only three meters apart, are exceptionally large and consist of Arabic silver coins and worked silver in the form of silver bars (cast elliptical pieces of silver that could be forged to bracelets and other pieces of jewellery), bracelets, (both open and closed armlets), some finger-rings and many silver rods (approximately 4 mm thick threads of silver). The hoards were brought in encapsulated in plaster de paris and are now being excavated on the premises of the Historical Museum of Gotland.

The first hoard is now partly excavated. From it we have extracted 122 bracelets as well as a couple of hundred silver Arabic coins. A massive layer of coins appeared at the bottom of this one. Beneath these is seen the remnants of a wooden box that was presumably the bottom of the container in which the treasure was kept. The ongoing excavation of this hoard has been interrupted for the moment in order to exhibit it in its present condition to the general public.

Hoard number two is still being excavated and up until now we have extracted approximately five kilograms of silver coins, consisting mostly of Arabic Umayyades and Abbasides coins from the 8th – 9th century. About ten Sassanides coins are from the 7th century and one Byzantine coin from 967 is the earliest coin found so far. This hoard also consists largely of bracelets, 117 so far, some fragments of jewellery and about ten finger rings.

The hoards will be exhibited in Gotlands Forval (the Historical Museum of Gotland) for one month, beginning January 1, 2000.

A new partner - North Sea Viking Legacy

From next year, 2000, Viking Heritage will begin collaborating with North Sea Viking Legacy. You readers will notice this in the next issue of the newsletter, as articles and other information from them will be published here.

North Sea Viking Legacy is a project idea within the framework of the INTERREG IIC programme for inter-regional co-operation around the North Sea basin. The project originated as an initiative of the Culture Committee of the North Sea Commission, and has been developed by the North Sea Secretariat for Culture and Tourism in co-operation with the Culture & Heritage Unit of the Regional Development Department of Rogaland County Council, Norway.
Reconstructing Female Costume of the Viking Age

By Viktoria Persdotter, archaeologist and craftsman

An aspect of the Viking Age costume I have taken a certain interest in, is the reconstruction of the female costume, regarding both the fabrication (casting, forging etc.) of the brooches and other costume jewellery and the construction of the garments themselves. In archaeological finds, as well as in the depictions of humans from this time period, many different types of female costumes can be detected although, as I mentioned in my last article, the finds and depictions are hard to interpret for many reasons.

The type that is most popularly reconstructed today is the kind of costume where the typically Nordic "twin-brooches" were worn. In English these brooches are often referred to as "tortoise shell brooches". The term is quite adequate, as these brooches in many cases are extremely thin and shaped like a tortoise shell, but there were also brooches of other shapes used in the same way as the tortoise shell brooches. The shape of the brooches varied geographically, and the tortoise shell-shaped ones were used mainly on the Swedish mainland, and in Norway and Denmark. On Gotland, animal head-shaped brooches were most common, and in the north of Sweden, as in Finland, round brooches were worn. As all the above mentioned brooches were used in pairs, I will henceforth refer to them as twin-brooches. The brooches are cast in bronze, and can be built up of two layers, gilded and decorated with silver plates, patterned in niello and twisted silver threads.

It is certain that the Viking Age twin-brooches were not used only as decorations, but served the purpose of holding a piece of clothing together. In graves, the brooches are found on the upper part of the body, and seem to have been worn just below the shoulders. Remains from the shoulder straps of the garment are in many cases preserved around the pins. The weight of the brooches, as well as their sturdy pins, indicate that they were used to fasten a fairly large and heavy garment. A popular myth about the twin-brooches, seen for example in comics and Wagner's operas, were used as a kind of metal bra. But a closer examination of the brooches, and the textile remains around them, soon reveals that such an arrangement is completely impossible.

Judging from bog finds, grave finds and depictions all throughout the Iron Age, a tubular skirt reaching to the armpits and held together at the shoulders by pins or brooches, seems to have been worn. Through the centuries the brooches grew bigger and bigger, were largest during the Viking Age and thereafter went out of use.

Decorative chains, rows of glass beads and pendants were often worn between the brooches. Tools like knives, keys, needle-cases, tweezers and...
car scoops could be attached by chains or band to the brooches. In the
Gotlandic costume a separate tool-brooch was used for fastening the tools
to the garment. A complete set of brooches, tools and beads is, for
obvious reasons, rather heavy. Sometimes a costume reconstruction,
seen mainly in books, suggests a front and a back piece held
together by brooches, flaring loosely without being joined
together at the waist in any way, but this is a most unlikely construction.
See picture below.

![Mainland costume with oval brooches](image1)
Drawing by Viktoria Persdotter

![Early Iron Age tubular skirts from Hulstropsten, Denmark](image2)
Drawing by Viktoria Persdotter

![Fibula from the pre-roman Iron Age](image3)
Drawing by Viktoria Persdotter

![Gotlandic costume with animal head brooches, bead spacers and fish head-shaped pendants](image4)
Drawing by Viktoria Persdotter

![Tool brooch from Gotland](image5)
Drawing by Viktoria Persdotter

![Tools: From left: needle case (Gotlandic find), scissors, bronze key, tweezers and knife (reconstruction of find from Birka)](image6)
Drawing by Viktoria Persdotter
It is hard to determine exactly what the garment worn together with the twin-brooches looked like. In my opinion, the brooches were used to fasten together the shoulder straps of a tubular skirt closed and widened at the sides by inserted gussets, or with open slits from the hips, and in most cases completely covering the lower part of the garment worn underneath.

It is likely that a tubular garment held together at the shoulders was worn with a belt both for warmth and comfort. A peculiar detail is that metal, bone or antler fittings from belts are rarely, if ever, found in female graves from this period. This probably means that a woven band or sash was worn, and, personally, I am convinced that an apron tied at the waist in many cases was a part of the female costume. Pictures which seem to indicate the presence of an apron, most likely tied at the waist, can be seen both on Gotlandic picture stones and silver jewellery from Tunå in Askå, Grödinge in Södermanland and Askå in Östergötland. It is not possible from these depictions to judge whether the apron extended up above the waist or not.

Note that the narrow piece of clothing adorned with horizontal stripes covers only the front of the costume. The pleated (?) garment seen behind, is to my opinion the lower part of the skirt with braces. The garment worn underneath the skirt is in this case not visible at all, except at the shoulders and sleeves. The skirt could well, as mentioned above, have had open slits in the sides, but the skirts seen on picture stones and silver jewellery all seem to have been closed at the sides.

Interpreting the female costume that was used with the twin-brooches is complicated by the fact that the upper part of the costume is hardly ever visible in the various depictions from this time. Women, as well as men, usually tend to wear a cloak over their shoulders, which completely hides the upper part of the costume.

However, far from all female graves are equipped with twin-brooches. This is often the case with otherwise richly equipped graves. The costume worn by the strata of the society, with extensive international contacts, most likely resembled the costume of continental Europe.

A set of twin-brooches, several rows of glass beads and pendants, tool chains or bands with tools hanging down from the shoulders to the waist, makes for a rather limited freedom of movement. This kind of costume was therefore most likely not worn in the daily farm- and household work.

There are also several depictions of women wearing a two-part costume with the skirt fastened at the waist, and on a wood carving from the Norwegian Oseberg ship burial, the skirt appears to be knee-length, a skirt length not usually seen in today’s reconstructions of the Viking-Age costume.

In this article, I have presented some of my thoughts about the Viking-Age female costume. My assumptions are based upon studies of grave finds and other finds of textiles and metal costume accessories, as well as depictions, but I am well aware that these sources do not represent the ordinary everyday wear of the Viking-Age women. Depictions are strongly stylised and hard to interpret, and it is also hard to judge if the costumes and brooches were arranged in the same way in the graves, as they were in life. The costumes found in graves must, however, have been worn on more than one occasion in life, as the metal brooches show signs of wear and repair.

The scenario often seen at re-enactment events, where all women walk around wearing oval-shaped twin-brooches, does not present a true picture of what it really looked like in the Viking Age. Instead we must allow for many different kinds of costumes and ways of wearing them, according to local customs, seasons, personal taste and social rank. Sadly, textile findings from this period are rather scarce as are simpler every day costumes and costumes fastened together by means other than metal brooches, so they will probably remain unknown to us.

With this article I hope to have contributed to evoke reflections over the Viking-Age female costume, and to inspire to further research and creation of costume reconstructions. If you have any comments or questions, you can contact me at the following address.

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A more and more frequent phenomenon can be experienced during the summer: the Viking markets. These are of varying quality, but the basic idea is that they enable ordinary people to visit a market that is in keeping with the time and see people in strange and, at best, historically correct clothes, while displaying up to date handicraft and other activities. The visitor will also have the opportunity to buy exotic and exciting objects with, at best, connection to the Viking Age. The Viking theme is popular and markets have mushroomed in later years. However there are a number of markets in Scandinavia that are especially well known, perhaps not as much to visitors as to those of us who “put on the show”.

I would like to relate a little about how I experienced one of these markets which took place last summer. My name is Ny-Björn. In the Viking world I am known mostly as Malle. When I am not travelling around different markets, I study Archaeology at the Gotland University College. However, first of all, I see myself as a Viking Age fanatic, having transcended the “interest” stage several years ago.

As many of you readers certainly know, there are several re-enactment groups round about in Europe, who have seen it as their calling to experience and act as intermediaries in practical Viking-Age culture. I am a member of one of the smaller groups in Sweden, Ranerna, that comes from Hamborgsund in the north of Bohuslän.

This summer it was time again for the market at Foteviken in the south of Skåne (Scania). Chieftain Björn had, as usual, invited Ranerna and many others to come to the Viking settlement of Foteviken for the opportunity of trading our goods and associating in an environment that is so strangely free of modern, disturbing elements, if you don’t count the Evil Dragon of Light now coiling across Öresund, Well, six of us brave ones from Ranerna, decided to go and we were picked up in Hamborgsund with our articles, tents and other more or less useful items. This was the first Viking market for the youngest one in the party, Alva Claesdotter, but as she was only 4 months old, we couldn’t ask too much of her.

At last we arrived at Foteviken and as usual in pitch-darkness. After we had raised our two tents, we went out on “the ritual round”. The round is the walk you take around the camp after everything has been set up. You get some idea about what the area looks like and, not least, you will see who else is there. These rounds tend to become really long, because you always meet somebody you know and certainly have to talk to about what has happened since last time you met. Re-enactment is a very summer-related activity, at any rate in Scandinavia, and that’s when you meet your friends from other re-enactment groups.

Well, morning came, the campers started to wake up and chieftain Björn treated us to breakfast. More and more people turned up and pitched their tents and sales stalls along the market place, which had been reconstructed inside the town wall. The year before, the weather had been windy, but this year hardly a breeze stirred. It became really HOT! At the market place there were only a few shady places. Soon more and more clothes made out of linen and, more or less up to date, Viking shorts became visible in the camp.

In the afternoon the first visitors came to the pre-market. I, myself, had not managed to bring so many goods, so in a few hours I had sold everything. This gave me the chance to walk around and have a look at the market and all the people, both sellers and visitors.

In the evening the customary “walk-around-the-hearth-feasting” took place. The normal procedure is that, armed with something to drink, you walk around visiting the people sitting around the hearths. When you have had enough of one hearth, you just walk to the next one where you will find some other pleasant company. Well, this is how the evening and most of the night passed.

On the next day, Saturday, the big market began. At the same time the competition of “Who will become the...
Viking of the year” started. This contest includes fish-throwing, rule the roost but on a skin and other more or less arduous games and battles. In 1998 Kaj from Ranerna won the competition, but this summer he was not able to participate, so we had to watch other prospective winners fight for the title.

That day was even hotter, like stepping into a sauna. Sunstroke was close and you had to keep your head covered and drink a lot of water. Due to the heat, everybody was quite tired out when the coolness of the evening came.

Now it was time for the BIG feast. Junior Sven, Chieftain Björn’s right hand man, celebrated his 50th birthday and he was honoured with a big banquet in Valhalla. Foteviken’s rather odd longhouse. Wine and beer flowed and spirits ran high. Maybe a little too high, the heat combined with the beer had, to say the least, a liberating effect on people’s mood. To crown it all off: smoked whitefish was served, SMOKED UNGUTTED WHITE-FISH! After this a fish-throwing war started, not unlike the antics of Asterix and Obelix. Many of us ran away back to the camp, not only from the smoked but now also flying projectiles. Some time later a heavy shower cooled down the high spirits. The rest of the evening and night continued in a quiet and pleasant way.

Dawn broke on Sunday and a pretty subdued company of Vikings had their breakfast and made themselves ready for the last market day. The weather was not as hot, but hot enough for Vikings. I helped my kinsman Ketut to keep an eye on his goods, but business was slow, and early in the afternoon people started to close down. We who were members of Ranerna stayed another night. The next day we went north, like many others, to Børre in Vestfold in Norway, to the next Viking Market. Some went by themselves and some went in a more adventurous way, on the Foteviken bus, the so called “Viking Express”. The passengers on that bus certainly had reason to ponder upon the validity of that name more than once, but that is no doubt another story...
BRIMIR - Experimental Archaeology Group from Denmark

(The Prophecy Of the Sorceress), which tells of the creation and destruction of the Norse universe in Ragnarok (the Twilight of the Gods). The poem concludes, however, that after Ragnarok, a brave new world will appear with many pleasant dwelling places. One of the new dwelling places is called Brimir, "and there ale, mead and good beer shall flow freely, so many want to make their abode there". When we sought for a name, we instantly knew that would be the place we would all wish to be!

The group believes in democracy but for practical reasons we have an elected group of "elders" who run the business of the group. The elders pass their wisdom by means of a (bi- or tri-) monthly newsletter and are elected at the General Meeting every winter. During the winter we arrange monthly meetings, with workshops, for the group.

When we created BRIMIR, we decided that we should limit the membership so that we could all sit around the same campfire at the same time, but now we may need a very large campfire as the group has about 50 members, including children. If you want to join the group, you should present yourself to our elected leaders, who can appoint you as a guest ("geste") of the group so you can participate in the activities of the summer season and see if you fit in. After a year the group will consider your case at the Annual General Meeting. At present the group consists of people from all over Denmark and people from Germany, Russia, Estonia (Holland) and we even have an Australian female Viking.

The group has very few rules, but we are most adamant on the point that no one may use the group to promote political or religious opinions (in other words, we are not Aesir-worshippers). We often meet people who think we are some kind of aboriginal Danes or a group that has spurned the blessings of modern society to live out our life in prehistoric seclusion. Such people even ask, "Are there many Viking reservations in Denmark?" "Don't you think, it is wrong to deprive your children of a modern education?" Such concerned people are always somewhat baffled or even disappointed, when we reveal that we all have ordinary occupations as well.

Our motto is: your work must be serious, but you yourself do not need to be serious while you're doing it.

BRIMIR VIKING CRAFTS is a Danish amateur society for the development and research of the everyday crafts of the Viking Age in Scandinavia. Like the Vikings of old, we travel in the summer, displaying our skills at Viking fairs at museums and similar places in Denmark and abroad. When winter rules, we further develop our skills and plan for the summer season.

We all love to travel, and when we arrive at local fairs, we raise our tents and create a Viking market, where our craftsmen, women and children show their skills as smiths, leather workers, coin minters, rune carvers, weavers and dyers, etc. We also have some competent tradesmen, who haggle with the visitors praising their goods, and both the tradesmen and craftsmen are always ready to spin a tale of the Vikings and their crafts. Curious visitors are always welcome, and you will find that we are very willing to answer questions. We do not, however, do formal theatre or battle re-enactments.

We have taken the name BRIMIR from the old Norse poem Völuspá, who can appoint you as a guest ("geste") of the group so you can participate in the activities of the summer season and see if you fit in. After a year the group will consider your case at the Annual General Meeting. At present the group consists of people from all over Denmark and people from Germany, Russia, Estonia (Holland) and we even have an Australian female Viking.

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We have taken the name BRIMIR from the old Norse poem Völuspá.

Rudolf Conijn, making combs of antler and bone using a Viking age drill. Photo: Brimir.
Christmas party à la Viking

By Robert Dahlström, e-mail: robert.dahlstrom@swipnet.se

Wintertime was the only period of the year when the Viking-Age inhabitants of the North had time to rest and feast. The fat cattle were standing in the barn, the corn was harvested and threshed, and the beer was newly brewed. Outdoors winter raged. Christmas was fast-approaching.

Jól

The word Jól = jul (Christmas) is very old and can only be found in North European languages. There are no explanations of the origin of the word, but most likely it is the name of this special feast. Well into the Middle Ages, celebrating "jul" (Christmas) was called "drinking jul". The first time it is mentioned in original sources is in the skald Harald’s poem about the battle of Hafrsfjord in the year 872. Drinking can possibly be connected with Odin, who was a prominent figure in the Viking-Age Jól drinking. One of Odin’s other names is Jólnir - the one who belongs to Jól. We don’t know why, but it might have something to do with the phrase Jólna stumbl = the ecstasy of Odin, Odin’s intoxicating liquor. Odin steals Oðrör and presents it to humans and gods. Oðrör - the one who gives ecstasy, sets the mind (Odhr) in motion - is the vessel containing the sacred intoxicating liquor or so-called poetic mead. The name Odin is also connected with this word. Furthermore, in the beginning, Oðrör seems to have been the name of the beverage itself and not the vessel. Drinking was very important during the celebration of Jól and the myth about Oðrör has many parallels in other cultures’ myths about the origin of intoxicating drinks. Maybe that is why Odin has an important role in the celebration of Jól. He was, as we all know, the one who gave us intoxicating drink.

Time

Present-day Vikings assign the time for the Christmas party/Midwinter sacrificial feast to the winter solstice, but that is the time for the Christian celebration that we now call "jul", or Christmas. By midwinter, prehistoric people meant the middle of the winter and not the darkest day of the year. Midwinter was the time when they had about half of the winter food supply and cattle fodder left, that is to say somewhere from the middle of January until the middle of February. We're not actually sure about when they drank Jól, but according to the saga of Hervar, it took place in the beginning of the Gjöge month, i.e. February, and this is supported by many other sagas.

Blot - Sacrificial feast

There have been discussions about whether or not sacrifices were made during Jól. In the saga of Hervar, King Heidrek took his biggest boar and sacrificed it to Frigg, according to ancient custom. This boar was brought before the king on "Jula afon", the evening before Jól. The boar was so holy its sacrifice was thought to endow the wisdom of making correct judgements in difficult cases. Promises and oaths were sworn while placing a hand upon the boar's bristles. Another saga that refers to sacrifices at Jól is the Heimskringla of Snorri. This saga tells that many different animals were slaughtered and their blood was spattered in the "hov", the outdoor temple of the heathens, and on guess with sacrificial brooms made like the brooms for holy water. The meat was boiled and eaten at the party. These descriptions have been written down by Christian people and therefore are not really trustworthy. Snorri has given us many splendid stories to read, but we cannot trust that everything he wrote was reliable and based upon facts. Fresh meat was not often eaten during the Viking Age, since meat had to be preserved by smoking or drying so as not to decay. Getting fresh meat for the party meant they had to slaughter, and we will probably never know if this is what has been noted as a sacrifice or if there really were secret heathen rituals.
The Jól party

The people of that time didn't eat and drink at the same time, as we do nowadays, but separated these two activities. The table was laid and food was eaten. The main meal drink consisted mostly of water, weak beer, milk or sour milk. When the meal was finished, the food was removed and then it was time for drinking. They had beer or mead (bottle wine) in abundance, but followed a special system of toasts. This system was also used at other celebrations and lasted long into the Middle Ages. Between the masts there were performances of speeches, sagas, poems, stories, songs and sports, chase or dancing games were played. All this was a great entertainment for the guests and it was an excellent forum for winning acclaim as a sportsman, poet or speaker.

Honour

Honour was very important to the people of the Viking Age. Honour was considered to be a person's sole possession, and you had to show yourself worthy of it. If you had gained honour, you had to maintain that standard of respect or increase it, because it was a disgrace if your reputation and honour began to decline. A good reputation would be remembered for many generations, while a bad reputation could lead to ostracism and shame for the whole family for just as long. Inviting guests to a big Jól party was one way of preserving and even increasing one's honour among subjects and friends. Just as it was honourable to invite guests, it could be honourable to receive an invitation. A simple soldier who celebrated Jól at the court of a jarl or a king, gained honour by attending such a distinguished party.

Full

A toast was called "full" - a filled horn. Most usually they drank 3-4 toasts to the gods and then went on to toasting memories. There are examples of at least nine toasts being proposed at large feasts before the party continued in a more unstructured manner. There were two ways of drinking a toast. Either you drank from the same horn which was sent around the hall, "Laget um lagom" (Sharing the vessel's contents all around the group from which the Swedish term "lagom" is derived, a special Swedish term meaning, "just right, just enough, or sufficiently, in moderation") or the private horns of the guests were filled and the toast was drunk in unison until "fullets är all" (all are full, "fullet" being Swedish for drunk), that is to say until everybody's drinking vessel was empty. Then they were refilled and a new toast proposed.

Some of the most popular toasts were:

Odin's "full" - to victory and the supremacy of the king. This was always first.
Njord's "full" - to the year's crops and peace.
Thor's "full" - to the year's crops and peace.
To toast all the gods - to the year's crops and peace.
Frey's "full" - to the year's crops and peace. This was often the last one.
"Bragafull" - Bragi's toast was drunk by bold men.

Till års ok fridar!

They didn't say "skall" (cheers) but "Till års ok fridar - till åring och fred" (to the year's crops and peace). This phrase which can be interpreted in a variety of ways was summarised by Helge Ljungberg in this way: "A good year, a good growing year, included life itself, a good year with both sunshine and rain, it was the rhythm of sowing and reaping, it was the well-being of the cattle in the barn, the bountiful game in the forests and fish in the rivers, but a good year was also evident at home in the cottage, a good wife, many children, on the whole everything to do with survival, the bare necessities and pleasures of life. Peace was more than freedom from battles and war expeditions, peace was harmony and good fellowship in the neighbourhood and wider society, peace was as important at happiness in being able to live."
Thus "drinking Jól" was to a happy coming year - to the year's crops and peace. This form has survived in Sweden long into the 20th century in the form of the toast "Gutar" - good year.

Memorial toasts

When the gods had been toasted it was time to drink to memories. These toasts were proposed in memory of and to honour the forefathers. Each toast was dedicated to a special person and served as a history lesson and declaration of ancestry. One could gain honour through one's honourable ancestors and also pay them respect.

New Year's resolutions

During the Viking Age, when honour was a matter of great importance, it was natural to raise a special honourable toast, Bragafull - the toast of fine deeds or Bragi's toast. During this toast men eager to gain honour, took an oath to carry out difficult deeds, something like today's New Year resolution. The difference was that everyone drank to this vow making it impossible to break one's promise without being seen as an infamous braggart. Vows sworn while intoxicated were binding. Breking a promise was a terrible violation. According to the Saga of the Jomsvikings, this was the way Sven Forkbeard got the Jomsvikings to join a war expedition. By tricking the intoxicated men into taking the Bragi vow that they could not then renounce.

Christmas presents?

As to the question if Christmas presents were handed out during the celebration, the answer is that presents were exchanged, but this had nothing to do with the celebration. The people of the Viking Age had a kind of gift economy, which meant that gifts were given to show somebody respect and honour or to gain honour or respect yourself. This was a way of making friends or the way chieftains rewarded the loyalty of their subjects. If someone received a gift, he was expected to give a gift in return. A yeoman giving a king a gift, could receive a gift in return which was many times more costly because the king wanted to increase the respect shown him. But a return gift that wasn't accepted, reciprocated or of equal value could lead to humiliation, discord and even war. There are theories about the gift economy being one of the factors that triggered off the
Viking raids, since kings and chieftains needed new and coveted objects to present as gifts to their soldiers and allies.

The end of the party
When the toasts had come to an end, the party continued in a less formal manner until the guests gave up and went to bed for the night. But don’t think that the party was over. In the morning the drinking of toasts began again, because a party was meant to continue for three to nine days. Of course this was tremendously expensive for the hosts, who had to pay for the food, drinks and accommodation of the guests, plus feed for the horses. If one couldn’t afford this, the cost could be shared between the great men. It was an honour to arrange this Jól drinking, and as has been said, honour was extremely important.

Drinking Christmas (Jól)
- a reconstruction of the Viking-Age Jól party

By Robert Dahlström

The host of the Jól (Christmas) drinking declares peace of Jól and blesses the food and the drink. The table is laid and the food is eaten. The mealtime drink is water, weak beer, milk or sour milk. When the meal is over, the table is cleared and it is time for the drinking. So-called toasts are drunk, where everybody’s drinking vessels are filled with beer, and the toast is proposed. Not until everybody’s drinking vessels are empty (lying on the table or turned upside down) will the vessels be filled again and the next toast proposed. You don’t say “skål! = cheers!” but “Til árs og frid!”.

Between the toasts, speeches, sagas, poems, anecdotes and songs should/could be performed and sports, riddle- and dancing games be played. This is done in such a way that everybody is able to participate in the activities. When the gods have been toasted, it is time to drink the memorial toasts. I recommend at least two.

Recommended toasts:
- Jólne’s full
- The toast to all gods
- Frey’s full
- To the memory of Snorri Sturluson – the author of Icelandic sagas.
- To the memory of Harald Hard-Ruler – the last Viking king who attacked England.

After this you are allowed to drink freely (i.e. without any pre-determined pattern), eat more food or play games like backgammon or dice. The party goes on until the beer is finished or the guests give up.

Silver figurine from Kinna, Oland, Sweden.
New book

**Europeans or Not? Local level strategies on the Baltic rim 1100-1400 AD.**


This book is the first report issued by the research project, “Culture Clash or Compromise? The importance of survival strategies in the Europeanisation of the Baltic Sea Area 1100-1400 AD”. The project, funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation with 14 million SEK over a four-year project period, involves 17 scholars, archaeologists, historians and human geographers, seated at 10 universities and colleges from all around the Baltic Sea. The headquarters is aptly located at the Gotland Centre for Baltic Studies, Gotland University College in Visby, Sweden. The project opens great opportunities for comparative research between the close neighbours surrounding the Baltic, which has been completely impossible for a long time due to well-known political circumstances.

In the 12th to 15th centuries the Old Europe expanded on many fronts into the countries of the North and East. Confronting this process was a common experience for the populations along the shores of the Baltic. The decisions made, either by clashes or compromises between European 'agents' and local people, have affected many things and circumstances that we take for granted today. The project focuses on the stress that people felt at the receiving end of this Europeanisation. The central questions are: How did the population, at different social levels, react to the impact of change? Which survival strategy did they choose? Clash or Compromise?

*Europeans or Not* contains 24 comparative studies of settlements (single farms, villages, hill forts etc.) on the local level, east and west of the Baltic, by both project members and other guest specialists. Here, in the first scientific report comparing daily life in local communities east and west of the Baltic, you will find the story of how peasants, part-time fishermen, traders and warriors of different ethnic backgrounds met the technologically superior and ideologically conceived European culture they could not successfully resist. The sources of the studies are written records, geographical material and archaeological evidence.

For further information about the book and the project, please contact: christina@hgo.se

The Rus Project on CD

Now there is also a multimedia CD of The Rus Project - in English. This high quality CD, the result of excellent work, was produced in co-operation with the students of the Department of Communication, at the University of Vaasa, as a scientific study. You can obtain this CD for the price of material and postage, i.e. about $6 ($35 Fin). Send an e-mail to (koivusalo@pp.qnet,fi) if you are interested.

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The Return of the Ships

"The Return of the Ships", the exhibition shown at the Museum of Birka last summer, is bethed for the winter at the National Maritime Museum in Stockholm.

Five models of Viking Age ships are part of the exhibition. Among them are models of the Norwegian ships from Gokstad and Oseberg. Some lectures on Vikings will also take place at the museum.

The exhibition is a collaboration between the National Maritime Museum and the Central Board of National Antiquities in Sweden. The exhibition will continue until August 30, 2000.

For further information: http://www.sshm.se
ANCIENT BIATHLON RELAY RACE for clubs/associations

Time: Saturday March 5, 2000, starting at 1 p.m. Place: Läntinen Pukkisaari, Helsinki, Finland

These ancient winter games, arranged for the first time last winter, were a success and the games will become an annual happening. The event was great fun. See photo gallery of previous race. It is becoming an international occasion. A French team of Normandic Vikings will be attending the games.

The coming race follows the same rules and principles as last year: Each association taking part enters a team of four persons. Each team should include at least one female. The participants should wear ancient clothing in Iron- or Viking-Age fashion. In a mass start the first member of each team skis around the island of Läntinen Pukkisaari, a distance of about 300 meters. When he/she arrives at the finish area he/she shoots two arrows with a longbow at a target, from a distance of about 15 meters. Missing the target means a penalty round of about 30 meters per miss. After this he/she hands over the skis and the stick to the next team-member waiting at the finishing line and sends him/her on a similar tour. The first team to complete the relay race is the winning team. Each team is allowed to use one bow, two arrows, one stick and one pair of skis. There are a number of these kits available from the arranger. A participating team may have its own set but the equipment must be home-made and ancient style, i.e. the skis should be of wood and only tar or skin is accepted as ski wax. There is prize ceremony and a feast following the competition.

Register for the event with Esko Posenen tel +358-41-5164326 or Fredrik Koivusalo email fredrik.koivusalo@huch.fi before February 20, 2000. A registration fee of 50 Fmk per team should be paid to the arranger Sormenly account Merita bank 101430-210258 (give the name of your team on the bank transfer) before this date. The fee includes accompanying feast with soup.

Vikings at Medborgarplatsen, Stockholm, Sweden

December 27, 1999 – January 6, 2000

For eleven days, Medborgarplatsen in the center of Stockholm, will be transformed into a Viking Village. In those days, a thousand years ago, people gathered together to trade, enjoy themselves and exchange knowledge and thoughts about life and destiny.

Medborgarplatsen is one of these sites for the people of today! You will be able to discover many different languages and ideas among the crowd. It will be just like a thousand years ago. Young or old - you will be able to join in.

In the centre of attention you will find the Skibladnir, a Viking ship (24 meters long and a width of 5 meters). The Vikings travelled east - west and south. Leif Eriksson sailed west with his Vikings a 1000 years ago. In the year 2000, the Skibladnir, will follow in the wake of Leif Eriksson.

A locker will be filled with a manifesto to the New World. The messages will be illustrations from schoolchildren in Sweden and contain our joint cultural- and environmental inheritance, The Earth. What can we do to live in peace and how shall we save environment?

Two Viking long houses (6x20 m) will be built to accommodate craftsmen and stalls. Iron casting, woodcarving, fabric- and jewellery making will be exhibited. A true rune craftsman will be carving a stone full of messages for the next generation.

Jesters and musicians will make appearances in the crowd every day. A larger performance will take place every day at 3 P.M.

Food from the Viking era will be on sale at the local innkeepers and smaller stands. Libraries will have small exhibitions about the Vikings, their stories and myths. Both children and adults will be able to try out Viking skates at the ice rink. Children can come to Björn's garden and play like the Vikings. Why not try throwing the "varpa" stone, rug-of-war etc…

A show including fire sculpturing, dancers and musicians will bring the Viking theme to an end on the 6th of January 2000.

For a full programme, please take a look at: http://www.stockholm2000.com/plasen.html
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 on present Viking history activities, and to distribute information about Vikings and their history.

In promoting these aims, VIKING HERITAGE has begun an information service for its subscribers with the newsletter Viking Heritage Newsletter. It will 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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