Editorial

Dear Subscriber,

A new year and new fresh ideas of what is to come. From our side, we know that the Viking Heritage Magazine will be coming to you as usual this year and, as far as we can foresee, for years to come. We begin the year with the aim of reaching many more subscribers and developing the Magazine, both by expanding the content as well as our covering of different activities on the Viking theme.

To enable us to reach our goals, we have re-organised our operations and also increased our staff. Mia Göransson will be working with us for the next 6 months, both with the database and the Magazine. Alexander Andreeff, whose main task is to adapt the results from the excavation at Frojel (http://frojel.hgo.se) to a Visitors’ Centre, will work partly with marketing the Magazine. Here we would like to ask all our subscribers to help us become a worldwide magazine, by getting more subscribers, but also by telling us about new interesting discoveries, news or research results concerning the Viking world. For those of you who manage to get 3 new subscribers, a genuine gift awaits you.

At the moment, we are working on publishing a book about Viking attractions in the North Sea region as a part of our co-operation with North Sea Viking Legacy. Next autumn we are also planning to produce a book of the most interesting articles during the last 5 years of the magazine, as a sort of celebration of our 5th anniversary.

We hope you will enjoy our first issue for the year 2001.

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Words of Wisdom

“It is best for man to be middle-wise,  
Not over cunning and clever:  
The learned man whose lore is deep  
Is seldom happy at heart"

From Hávamál  
(Words of “The High One”)

About the front page:  
Silk painting based on the rune stone from the Island of Lidingö, Stockholm. Read more on page 22–23. Artwork by Valentina Kuprina / Photograph by Manx National Heritage
Two small open boats with square sails cut through the waves. The speed is great, the waves even greater. Huge mountains of green sea are towering up on the starboard aft quarter. The boats are rolling and yawing, even if the small sail only half up the mast helps steadying the vessel’s movement. The people on board hang on. It’s misty, and the horizon where the sky meets the sea is only a couple of hundred yards ahead. The strong wind is from the northwest. Rain and spray soak everything. This is a demanding sea; cold, wet and exhausting. It doesn’t give much leeway and the people aboard have to know exactly what to do. Hovedsman and crew are on the alert the entire time, playing hide and seek with the big waves, just like the Vikings experienced the North Atlantic Ocean a thousand years ago.

Olaf Engvig with his family and friends made four voyages without map and compass to test Viking navigation. The journeys are shown in this map. These are the impressive facts:
- 78 days at sea
- 3700 nautical miles covered
- 8 countries and 105 township or cities visited
- It was all done in the original open longboat “Hitra” a boat of Viking design.
- This all-original longboat is 138-year-old, 29 feet long, and has 10 oars and a square sail.

Map revised by Therese Lindström

By Olaf T. Engvig

This time the boats carry no map or compass, no watch or any other 20th century equipment to tell where we are and where we are heading. For the first time in hundreds of years, small, open longboats propelled by a single square sail and oars alone have set sail from Norway to try to reach small islands way out into the ocean to the west. It is a minor target, but the navigator is confident that he will find the way without aid. He has been trained in Viking navigation by experienced navigators since he was a young boy. If the wind and the weather hold up we will reach the islands in less than a week. If not, we will sail straight out into the North Atlantic with several thousand miles ahead to the next land. It is a daring challenge, but we know, like the Vikings did, that if we get lost we could always turn around. Norway will be to the East all the way. It is such a huge target that no one can miss it.
The Vikings rationally judged chances of success or failure. They were expert seamen. Sailing was their area of expertise. They would usually not take on a task that was not feasible. In raiding, they had the option of hit and run as they had the superior craft. At sea, they would go as far as they liked. Common Viking sense was applied in navigating. They would set out in hope of obtaining something, see someone or find resources that could help support their barren life in their cold and rocky home called Norway. With a good boat, good provisions and sturdy clothing they sat sail out into the ocean knowing that they would find land if the wind and weather would cooperate.

The Boat’s Origin
Our Viking boat is very old, but in original and seaworthy condition. It is not a Viking replica, but an original open Norwegian longboat built, down to details, the same way as a Viking boat is built. A famous boat builder, known to make superior boats, built it in 1863. This boat has survived all this years because it was an excellent vessel. When the original owner discovered that he had a boat with better sailing ability then all others boats of the fishing fleet, he saved and protected his boat. He only took it out of the shed on special occasions. It could be staying inside for years at a time. No one could overtake his boat when he sailed it. This was an important status maker along the Norwegian coast. Like the farmer that had the swiftest horse, it was prestigious to have a Viking ship. It was too much "a copy" of the open longboats still in use on the coast of Norway where “Hitra” was built. Was someone playing the scientists a trick by burying an old boat a hundred years before? The important thing to keep in mind is that this boat was constructed more than 20 years before the very first Viking ship was discovered and excavated. The boat’s builder in Åfjord, Norway would have had no knowledge of how the Vikings constructed their vessels. In 1863 the general belief was that a Viking ship was a sophisticated vessel with a lot of extras added to make them even more impressive, much like the horns on the helmets. Contemporary paintings depict this common opinion. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many refused to believe that the Gogstad Viking ship, when excavated in 1880 as the first rather complete hull, was a real Viking ship. It was too much "a copy" of the open longboats still in use on the coast of Norway where “Hitra” was built. Was someone playing the scientists a trick by burying an old boat a hundred years before? For the excavators this was not an issue. There were many other genuine Viking artifacts and valuables found along with the ship. This was "the real thing" and the world finally learned how Viking ships were constructed. Our boat is built in the same way with the same details. It is the missing link and represents the good alternative to all modern day copies and replicas of different Viking ships.

Contrary to the ship itself, no informative samples of Viking rig, rigging and sail are found until this day. Modern replicas of Viking ships are equipped with an adjusted 19th century rig, adapted from the one that is the original in our boat. We believe that rather than trying to conduct this experiment with the use of a modern replica, we would do it simple and use this old, original and traditional open longboat that had been used for transport just like an average open Viking boat would have been used. We would not equip our boat with modern gadgets that so many modern Viking voyagers do. Some Viking voyages include a warm and dry shelter on board with radio and stereo music, a galley for hot meals and dry underwear and a dry bunk, a diesel engine for propulsion and electricity for all the navigational aid needed. Nothing is farther away from the sailing of the Vikings. The possible exception was Magnus Andersen back in 1893. He and his men sailed the very first replica ship the "Viking" to the World Fair in Chicago. In my opinion that first voyage is the most scientific Viking sailing done in a replica ship. "Viking" was built by a shipyard and sailed by professional seamen that had practical experience. Captain Anderson did use some adaptations and additional equipments. He stated that a true Viking sail should be done without these alterations.

Testing Theories
We wanted to pick up where captain Andersen left; go back to the roots or the original as far as we could and start from there in a simple manner. It was nothing very spectacular about our sailing, but it did get some coverage from local media that sympathized with our little group and our brave and daring voyage. Also, we had done a couple of previous long distance sailing without modern gadgets, except for life saving equipment, so I felt confident that the sea and the sky would guide me as it guided people in the old days when they traveled far

Meeting of two aristocrats. The clipper ship “Cutty Sark” at Greenwich is another square sailer built only six years after the “Hitra” was built.

Photo: Olaf T. Engvig
13 year old Gunn Engvig is commanding the traditional longboat “Hitra” from 1863 off the coast of Belgium.

Photo: Olaf T. Engvig

out to sea without support equipment. The old navigators depended solely on their knowledge, experience and intuition to find their way under various conditions. They only feared the storm with breaking waves, and didn’t want to get lost in the fog.

Our claim is that this way is the more rightful approach to obtain information about Viking sailing and navigation. It took me a whole life from early childhood to educate, prepare and motivate myself. My father, Thormod Engvig, a professional navigator, taught me to tell time without a watch, to always know directions or “to keep a compass inside my head” at all times, on sea and land, and to feel confident in an open boat at sea. I learned square sailing from Jacob Kvithyll, better known as ”The Last of the Vikings”. He was an old man living in my community when I grew up, and I was his only student. This happened before I went to the cadet ship at the age of 15 and continued on to a tanker as a seaman. I had worked my way around the world before I was 17, and I managed to sail in motor ship, steam ship and windjammer while still a teenager. Later during my sociology studies at the University of Oslo I interviewed old seafarers, boat-builders and fishermen along the coast. Old people along the coast told me that they never had a compass or carried a watch, to always know directions or “to keep a compass inside my head” at all times, on sea and land, and to feel confident in an open boat at sea.

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The Viking Way

After several years of sailing my own boat “Hitra” I knew her speed and way of performance under different wind and weather conditions. I finally decided I had the theoretical and practical background and the knowledge needed to sail “The Viking Way” a thousand years after the real Vikings. David Lewis’s books on traditional navigation in the South Sea inspired me. To sail straight out into the North Atlantic Ocean with absolutely no navigational instruments or aid whatsoever also required Viking studies, philosophical thinking, motivation and practical working on all aspects of the venture. I also needed time for planning and preparations, including talking people into going with me on this scientific mission.

Most of all, I needed tow ships. That was my biggest worry. The following vessel should, of course, be of the same type, design and rigging, to reenact Vikings going abroad. Vikings often sailed together in more than one ship. That meant the follower could not be a modern boat with engine, a film-crew and sail did not last long after they got an engine installed. The vessel coming was the sturdy motorboat.

The second boat

I had a beautiful boat in my boat shed in Rissa, however, but it was not seaworthy. That was the follower I would like to use. It was built in 1872, only nine years after the “Hitra” and less than two feet shorter. It was made as the last boat built by the boat builder who built “Hitra”. It was a most daring construction, and was his most prized creation, the finest boat ever made in the district, according to legend. But it had a bad reputation. The owner was advised not to use it without enough ballast as it could turn over. He went sailing one day in strong wind with his young son. The boat flew across the waves, and then it capsized. The father drowned, but his son got up on the bottom, hung on to the keel and was saved. This happened about one hundred years ago. The son put the boat back in the shed and left it there. He never took it out again. It was used as storage for old fishing nets. His son was an older man when the roof of the shed caved in one stormy winter with much snow. No one cared to do anything with the roof or the boat. When I learned about it around 1970, it was rotting away fast. I went there and found a beautiful boat. It was 27 feet long, looked like a gondola and had 8 oars. It had absolutely gorgeous lines and appeared as if it hadn’t been used. But the bottom was quite rotten, even if the keel was good. I bought the wreck, took all the old nets out of it and discovered that the boat was in a bad state of decay and definitely not seaworthy, but I still wanted to save this gorgeous, sharp-looking boat if it was possible.

In the local store I found a roll of sturdy construction plastic. I got the plastic under the keel and eased it up the sides and nailed it down on each side. I carefully launched the boat and it stayed dry! It was strange to see kelp and the bottom of the fjord right under the keel when I got on board. We took the longboat under tow and moved her the 18 nautical miles to my home where it went inside my boathouse. I later shipped it over
land to my local boat restorer, Roald Olden in Afland. He priced the beautiful boat, but refused to restore it. He said, “It is to far gone. It is not possible. I’ll copy it. I can make you a brand new boat, using all the measures and particulars of the old one. I will also take off the good pieces and use them on the new boat.” It was basically no way the old boat could be saved. There was falling apart from rot right before our eyes. An exact copy of the boat was made during that winter. The boat builder did a very fine job of copying the old original from 1872, but only two genuine parts from the old one was put on the new. The “Froya” were rigged and made ready to go as the following ship for the “Hitra”, with me responsible for finding our way across the open ocean as hovedsman on the “Hitra”.

Coastal Navigation
I considered myself well prepared. Some years before I had sailed the boat around the coast of Norway from the island of Hitra outside the Trondheimsfjord without much more than the Norwegian Automobile Association’s road book, with the maps of all major highways in the country but with a rather coarse outline of the coast. We depended on the old knowledge that the Vikings had: Norway would be to port all the way. We followed the coastline and our major means of establishing position were the many ferry paths we had to cross. They were outlined in the road book. This first long haul taught me what an amazing vessel I had. The “Hitra” flew along the coast under her sole square sail with a fine breeze from the North all the way to the Ness or Lindesnes as the South tip of Norway is called today. As we rounded the headland, the wind sprang up on the west and took us straight into Oslo in 12 days and four hours, mostly sailing by day only. We did 4.2 knots average for the voyage.

Keeping gear and logbook dry was difficult. Protecting gear from wet summer rain and spray from the sea became a major task. We learned how we could use the sail as a tent for a night’s stopover and some hours of sleep in the boat. Our greatest surprise was our performance compared with modern crafts along the coast. Summer traffic was busy in some areas. To our great delight we showed fishing boats, modern yachtsmen and other crafts that we had the speedier vessel. Over and again we left other boats behind when the wind gave us a good push. It got to the point where I was offering to tow modern yachts as we speeded past their bow. We were in the oldest boat afloat and no one could beat us. That was a story well worth writing home about. So we did, and magazines published our articles.

Around the North Sea
To show the world how amazing this old boat design was by doing greater deeds became the new challenge. When the British came to Norway asking for support for the Viking dig at Coppergate in York, England, I was more than happy to offer my support during a Viking sail to England. I would only be using the old Viking merchant Ottar’s description of how to go there. The English King’s recorder wrote it down. This report gives a simple and useful description we intended to use. Basically it says: Keep land to the port all the time and don’t go in where a lot of water goes into the land. That would obviously be the Baltic Sea. So we sailed around the North Sea as Viking Ottar did.

Our verdict is that Ottar was right. It was quite simple. Even if I remembered the basic outlines of the North Sea by heart, as also a Viking navigator would have done, the key was to hug the coast until the white cliffs of Dover could be seen far away in the distance. That would be to starboard. To get the land to port we then had to turn the “Hitra” north again. From now on we had England to port as we had Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Belgium and France to port before we got that far. The goal of the mission was to promote the Viking excavations at Coppergate. All major media in the countries mentioned got a visit from this very old boat and its young crew, handing out information and asking for support. My only crewmember was my daughter Gunn. She was 13 years old. The story became one of the highlights in Northern Europe that summer, and York Archaeological Trust got another year from the developers to finish the excavations at Jorvik, the Viking-name for York.

We used 38 days on that voyage, and stopped over a day or two in places like Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Breskens and London. The greatest challenge was to get safely across the English Channel. We were almost hit by enormous merchant ships speeding out to sea, big ferries and hovercrafts. The Vikings would not have had that problem! The only time en route we were confused was when we headed for the river Medway instead of the Thames going up to London. By chance I shouted to a fishing vessel and he pointed out the right course. Our greatest pride was when we sailed up to the dock at Greenwich where the world-famous clipper ship the “Cutty Sark” is berthed in dry-dock. She is a full rigged square sailer, with her sail and rigging based on the principles used in my boat and the Viking ships. Most of all, these two proud and speedy square sailers were built in the same decade. The “Hitra” was built in 1863 and the “Cutty Sark” was built in 1869. The latter has not been to sea for many years. To have an original and complete square sail boat sailing all the way from Norway to visit a contemporary must be a case for the Guinness Book of Records. But they missed it!

“"The Nice Viking”
It is 1.200 years since the Vikings landed at Lindisfarne and raided the monastery on that island. Today this incidence stands as an overture to a Viking age full of raiding, pillaging and plundering. During our 38 days of sail around the North Sea in a rather small open boat, Gunn and I had time to think more about how the Vikings got to the British Isles. It’s believed that Jorvik had some 10,000 Viking settlers that made a significant impact on the city’s life from crafts and trade to administration and
At Langesund, travel over land was difficult and exhausting. They were living by the fjord, bay or "vik", dependent on their boats than they are today. Viking age, Norwegians were much more prosperous place. They brought their skills along with their most important belongings, like craftsmanship tools. Some items we brought were exactly the same as the Vikings had brought, according to the finds from the excavation.

I believe many emigrating Vikings could have used their small open boats. We have shown that this is not very difficult. Our main argument for this theory is that in the Viking age, Norwegians were much more dependent on their boats than they are today. They were living by the fjord, bay or "vik". Travel over land was difficult and exhausting, and what a person could bring along was limited. The fjord was the Vikings' main highway, even inland lakes served the same purpose. Up until a hundred years ago communities across the fjord were closer than the neighbor over the mountain. The faering longboat was the "Volkswagen" of the Viking Age. It was needed for transport, communication, fishing, egg collecting, shuttling of wood and many other functions. Small boats like farings are easy to make and inexpensive compared to a large Viking ship. There would be relatively few larger ship built compared to smaller vessels. Like today, an average citizen could own a small boat. Many Vikings never got on board a big Viking ship. A good inshore vessel would be sufficient to move a family or some adventurous youngsters like us to Normandy or England, where they made friends and started families.

There is always the long road, and then the shortcut. Cutting straight across the ocean is quite another challenge than coastal or inshore sailing. Our boats are of the larger inshore types, rather small to use on the high seas. That didn’t stop me from trying to apply my navigational theories and test my navigational skills by ocean sailing. I had acquired a lot of experience with my boat during the previous voyages and felt that the vessel was good enough to stand this test. It would be a victory to have taken what we believe to be, the oldest known seaworthy vessel of this traditional Norwegian longboat type straight across to the other side only by sail. Shetland is the nearest land, laying only about 200 nautical miles to the west of Bergen. But these islands are small and without high mountains. If we missed them the next land would be America some 3000 miles away.

The Viking Way, part 2 will be published in the next issue of VHM

About the author:
Olaf T. Engvig grew up in Rissa, Norway where he was trained in navigation and sailing as a young boy. He went to sea and holds a deck officers license. He also has a Cand Philol degree in maritime history from the University of Oslo. He is an experienced square sailer and a writer with several books on maritime topics. At present he lives in Burbank and is working on the emigration from Scandinavia to man the Pacific Coast Steam Schooners. E-mail: omengvig@hotmail.com

Ancient remains from Iceland’s settlement period found in Reykjavik, Iceland

Archaeologists carrying out an excavation in Adalstraeti, in the old centre of Reykjavik, have found ancient remains dating back to the period of Iceland's settlement. Archaeologists believe that the finds, which were found underneath a wall of later years, are from the first farm in Reykjavik, built in the ninth or tenth century.

"Thus far we can only see the part where the new excavation-shaft cuts through it but we think it looks as if it could be the remnants of a wall. We can’t see a floor so we cannot determine whether this has been the wall of a house, a stone fence system around a house or part of a pen,"

says the archaeologist Mjöll Snaesdóttir.

It is not certain that there are many ancient remains in the area but earlier excavations have proved that there are remnants of houses from the tenth century in at least two locations in Adalstræti. Due to this, Mjöll says that this new finding did not come as a surprise but more as a pleasant confirmation of earlier suppositions.

The excavation is being carried out in chronological order and now remains from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are being examined. Because of this it is going to take some time before undivided attention will be given to the period of Iceland’s settlement. Seven to eight archaeologists are now working with the excavation.

From Morgunbladi 13/2 2001
This is the third and final part of the series of articles dealing with the phenomenon of slavery on Iceland in the Viking Age. The two previous parts were published in VHM 3/00 and 4/00.

Questioning the picture of slavery, we will now focus on the Landnámabók (landtaking-book) as one of our main sources for social structures during the colonisation phase. That book has been preserved in different editions/versions. However we should emphasise a lack of historical authenticity; in some cases texts exhibit the narrative-fictional style of the Sagas.

The Landnámabók’s prime concern is the first person present at a place colonizing land – or donating land to another. So as to leave no doubt about owner rights the book also mentions the generations to come, including the family tree; in that way the ancestor is not only placed locally but also genetically, so to speak. Slaves are only mentioned when of some importance in the course of the events. This means all cases when slaves were liberated and received land, when a freedman colonized land on his own, when an enslaved noblewoman was redeemed, when a colonizer kidnapped freedmen, when slaves ran away, when they killed their master or if anything out of the ordinary happened to slaves or freedmen. However thralls are never mentioned for their own sake. In many cases the main objective is to express contempt for slaves.

Fitting quite well into that picture, the late Viking version of the Landnámabók tells us about the importance of keeping the memory of the colonisation phase alive, “so that we can better answer strangers when they accuse us of originating from thralls or criminals”. The lack of this very preface in the two later manuscripts gives us some clue of how the importance of a proper ancestry had declined during the Sturlunga Age.

As further sources for the picture of slavery in Icelandic writing, Aríslendingabók and literary models from the Continent can be mentioned, remembering that both types of literature were accessible to the late medieval educated elite on the island. On the other hand, invectives about slaves were less exclusive, common knowledge to all Icelanders.

According to popular expression, slaves are not only fools, cowards and thieves but also extremely ugly. In that context our texts tell us with special affection about the dark skin and hooked noses of enslaved men. There are scholars who would like to see anthropological evidence in these descriptions, pointing out that many slaves had Celtic blood. However we must be extremely cautious with this kind of interpretations. More likely, the darkness is meant symbolically (a common theme not unknown in our own culture). This typified picture of slaves becomes part of the vernacular, a common phrase that was readily recognised by all listeners when used in literature.

We should recall that slaves are not mentioned in all the Sagas. The number of slaves depends on the story’s milieu. As is the case in the Landnámabók, slaves are never described for their own sake but in order to spur on the course of the events. We cannot suppose that all events are fictional; hence there is some strong evidence for embellishment by some authors.

A common theme, picturing the slaves’ stupidity is the stereotype of the delayed messenger. While a freeborn is able to distinguish between important and unimportant, a slave is not capable of such perception. In the Erbyggja Saga, Arnikol is killed by pursuing enemies just because the only surviving slave forgets about to send for help because haying seems a matter of greater importance to him. Quite interestingly, there is scarcely mention of a slave in the story’s prototype in the Landnámabók. Consequently, the author of the Erbyggja Saga has embroidered the original story with a thrilling episode and found the theme of the half-witted slave a suitable addition.

There is one more story from the Landnámabók that illustrates this narrative embellishment, telling us about a slave called Nagli who ran away from a bloody fight, crying and obviously deeply shocked. In the Erbyggja Saga however, Nagli is not only a coward but also an idiot. He misinterprets the result of the battle completely and is stupid enough to run away from people of his own party. While fleeing he meets two other slaves who, driven to despair, throw themselves off a cliff to death. For the audience the event was meant as an anecdote, but it shows us clearly how little value a slave’s life was supposed to have.

Contempt for thralls is also expressed, when old Egil (Egil’s Saga) takes revenge on his kind by hiding his treasures. Afterwards he proclaims the killing of the two slaves who had carried the box, which coincides perfectly with the laws about homicide (!), otherwise no further attention is paid to the destiny of those killed. Only thralls would be stupid enough to be killed by a senile, almost blind man...

The legal parallels indicate that there must be some connection to another text. And in fact, thanks to the Landnámabók we know about the colonizer called Ketilbjörn who killed his two slaves (in that case a man and a woman) in a similar situation. However the author shows hardly any signs of pity here either. A slave seems to be nothing but a tool, which one can get rid of at any time and without any bad conscience.

Saga literature has many examples of masters making their slaves commit crimes. In Njáls Saga, Hallgerðr a thoroughly evil woman, charges the slave, Melkôi, to commit larceny and arson. According to the listeners’ prejudice those were typical slave-like crimes. Nevertheless in the beginning even the inferior
Melkoff refuses to do such things, making Hallgerði appear even nastier.

Characterizing the master by describing his slave is a popular stylistic method in Saga literature. Thus one could describe any difference in character while pretending to speak about the freeborn in an objective Saga-style. Sometimes, it appears, the slave can be punished for his illegal actions. And in fact, according to law, a criminal thrall could be punished, having lost his rights to protection, similarly to livestock when they stray to a foreign meadow.

Two other well-known slave-themes in Icelandic literature are the “untied shoelaces” and “fatal presents” motives. This is self-explanatory through the ritual concept of a present as a sign of esteem between equals. Consequently, a thrall is excluded from such things to begin with. If not, the exchanged objects will be cursed. Melkoff’s arson is uncovered in this way, since he left his knife at the place of crime. We even know about another slave becoming the victim of his own weapon.

In the first chapter of the Gisli-Saga, Kol happens to be killed by the sword Gróðóð. To die by one’s own sword is regarded as a great shame and by doing that the deceased acts even more slave-like, so to speak. However his sword is found in a disastrous role even later on in the story.

Another slave in the Gisli-Saga, called Pord “the Coward”, was stupid enough to take Gísli’s coat for a present, getting killed in his place as a result. Hence the author doesn’t feel especially sorry for poor Pord: “his courage and his mind were each other very like— he didn’t have any”. Compared to that, the misfortune of the thrall Svart seems almost amusing to us.

In the Hávamál Saga Ísflíðings he is allowed to join the freeborn in their games. However Svart turns out to be terribly clumsy, tripping over his own shoelaces all the time. Apparently he simply is too stupid to tie them properly. But from the point of literature science that could hardly be a coincidence. In fact there are an over-proportionate number of slaves in Icelandic literature suffering from untied shoelaces. In Erbyggja Saga, an untied shoelace turns a slave’s fate around; he was sent out to murder someone else but ends up being killed. In Egils Saga a slave dares to treat a freeborn like an equal and challenges him to a duel: by killing the thrall while he is tying his shoes the freeborn expresses his contempt for slaves. Fair and gentleman-like behavior is reserved only for people of one’s own kind.

In the same way a freeborn can claim to be invited home by the house’s owner and not only by his slave. Naturally according to the nature of Saga literature, such a request is only made when someone is to be lured out for murder. Another narrative theme is insult. Calling one’s enemy a “Præll” is common author’s ploy to allow events to escalate. However it is rather unusual for a slave to join the fighting. If this is the case, freeborn and slaves only fight against equals according to Icelandic class ideology.

Until this point we have only stressed examples for a negative slave-stereotype. There are also some positive descriptions of slaves, however only when there is a need to provide contrast to a bad slave. Pity is shown only for some individual destinies, but never for slaves on the whole. There was, in fact, a vivid interest for enslaved noblewomen. However, thrall women are – probably due to a low number of surviving female slave children – very rare in Saga literature. Nevertheless we know over half of them by name, which indicates the narrative work done by the authors. In contrast, most slave men remain anonymous.

A certain interest on the authors’ part can also be perceived by reading about the chieftain daughters Melkorka and Arnheid (Laxdalssaga/Droplaugarsaga). Both of them are sensationally beautiful. Especially in Melkorka’s case it seems quite obvious that her entire description is contrived to prepare for the later uncovering of her true identity: she actually shows signs of some intelligence! Porel Krafla, on the other hand, was the son of an enslaved noblewoman. Throughout the story, his handsome is stressed such an extent that there is hardly any doubt that the average thrall is supposed to be rather ugly. Even the Varnsála Saga offers some fine examples of insult, when our hero is called an “ambúttarour”.

To summarize our investigation we can note that Saga literature developed a definite picture of slaves, with a given position in the narrative structure of the story, that being that a thrall is meant to be stupid, cowardly, thievish and ugly. One might wonder about the origins of that stereotype. In that context we should remember that there are a few centuries between the days the Sagas were meant to take place and the time they were written down. It seems quite unlikely that surviving invectives alone are to blame in filling that tradition gap. Probably we have to deal with the more complex formation of a narrative theme.

For some text examples we are able to stress the influence of other literal sources, like the Landnámabók, Ari’s Ísendigabók and the written law. Nevertheless the possibility that some continental tradition might have influenced Saga literature cannot be rejected either. Actually, one would expect all these books to be part of the average monastery library on Iceland.

Consequently, that very fact increases the probability of our hypothesis that Sagas were written in the monasteries, at someone else’s request. In this context we should make a remark of some interest: in Saga literature even representatives of the lower classes, such as beggar women, can act in slave-type functions. Furthermore there is hardly any clear distinction made between húskarl (= farm-hand) and Præll. From the perspective of the late medieval upper class such distinctions had simply lost their relevance: referring to the new ideology, freeborn were not regarded as equals anymore. On the contrary, a strong feeling of contempt had developed for all people “down there”, whether slaves or not!

Literature sources: Hastrup, Culture and society on medieval Iceland, 1985; Wilde-Stockmeyer, Sklaverei auf Island, 1978

About the author:
Michael Neib has studied Archaeology and Scandinavian studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin. In 1998 he continued his studies of Archaeology at the University of Stockholm and now he is a student of comparative religion at the same University. His special interests are: later Iron Age, ornamental art and iconography interspersed with religion and society.

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Stone was one of the most used raw materials in prehistory. Since stone is better preserved and doesn't decay as much as other archaeological artefacts like textiles, metals and wood, many of the stone artefacts survive the wear and tear of time. Therefore stones have great information potential. Viking-age studies have often chosen to analyse artefacts made of other raw materials such as wood and metals. We, on the other hand, wish to shed some new light on old stones.

Stone quarries in Hyllestad

Hyllestad, on the west coast of Norway, is an area where many stone quarries have been recorded. The village of Hyllestad is located by Åfjorden, just north of the estuary of Sognefjorden, about 90 km north of Bergen.

In the Viking Age and the Middle Ages quern stones (ancient hand millstones) were produced here, and more than 30 big quern stone quarries are registered around the 15-km long Åfjord. Some quarries are located close by the sea, while others are located high up in the mountains.

The quern stones had to be made of rocks or bigger stones and it was important to use suitable types of rock for this product. For instance these could be Mayen lava from the Rhine-area, schistose sandstone or muscovite-schist from Scandinavia. The natural precondition for the production of quern stones in Hyllestad has been the garnet-muscovite-schist rock, which is located around the north- and east sides of Åfjorden.

It is mainly the composition of the soft schist and the hard garnets that makes the rock so suitable for milling. The hard garnets were worn down more slowly then the schist, so that the surface of the quern stones remained rough, and made the stone effective for grinding.

In the Hyllestad quarries the quern stones were formed directly on the rocks, and thereafter broken off. Today we can still see the circles on the rock walls as a result of the production. In some quarries we can still find quern stones attached to the rock wall on which they were formed. For some reason these stones were never removed. Numerous large mounds of stone waste from this work surrounds the rocks, and make it difficult to see what the original landscape looked like prior to production. Visible traces tell us of an enormous activity that once existed here. The quern stones are not just located on land, but are also found in the sea. In Alverstaramen, north of Bergen, a huge number of quern stones were found in the sea. The stones were part of a shipload! Once a ship loaded with more than 500 quern stones from Hyllestad was shipwrecked here. However no traces remain of the ship today, only the quern stones remain.

The quern stones were widely distributed, and have been found so far in Denmark, Sweden, North-Germany, and the Faeroes and on Iceland. But how old is the production? There have been archaeological excavations in some of the quarries. The forthcoming results from this research will give us further information about the time of the production. Several quern stones of this origin have also been found in Bryggen in Bergen, and are dated to between 1100–1400. But production goes even further back. In Lund quern stones from Hyllestad are dated to the tenth century. In Sweden and Denmark these stones have been found in such numbers that they can be seen as a result of an organised trade that began in the late Viking Age.

Who were the people behind this large-scale production? Owning the kinds of rock suitable for quern stone production was probably a considerable source of income for the landowners. In the Middle Ages mostly tenant farmers lived on the farms where the quarries are located. This might give us cause to look for a bigger organisation or ownership behind the mining industry in Hyllestad.

However not only quern stones were produced here. Smoke vents and stone vessels were also made in these quarries, but the most enigmatic products from Hyllestad were the stone crosses.

Norway’s Ancient Stone Crosses

The largest number of stone crosses can be found in Ireland and Great Britain. About 300 are located in this area. There is a small offshoot of this sculpture tradition in Scandinavia. There are a few stone crosses in Denmark and Sweden. In Sweden most of these crosses are located on the islands of Gotland and Öland. Norway is quite special in Scandinavia, in terms of stone crosses. Here we find the largest number. We know of 62 well documented stone crosses.
Unfortunately we only have written accounts of some of these. Most of these crosses were located on the west coast of Norway, in the counties of Rogaland, Hordaland and Sogn og Fjordane. In Rogaland there are 24 well-documented stone crosses, while Sogn og Fjordane and Hordaland have 19 and 10 stone crosses respectively. It is interesting to note that Rogaland and Sogn og Fjordane also have the largest number of insular finds, i.e. objects from Ireland and Great Britain, in Norway.

The garnet-muscovite-schist rock in Hyllestad is easily recognized. Based on visual geological examinations of the surface of the stone crosses, many of these have been traced back to the Hyllestad quarries. About 20 of the 62 crosses in Norway were probably produced here.

Stone crosses are one of the largest sculptural manifestations we have from the Middle Ages. The West Cross at Monasterboice in Ireland is 6.7 meters high. In Norway the tallest are about 4 meters, though the Norwegian crosses usually range from 1.5 to 3 meters in height.

The crosses from Rogaland, Hordaland and Sogn og Fjordane have different shapes, although two types characterise many of them. First there is the Norwegian-Celtic type. These have straight arms with circled angles. In the other, the Norwegian-Anglican type, lines form half circles between the arms and the shaft. These types are clearly an Irish and British inspiration. In addition to these two types, we have some stone crosses that many call primitive. This rather derogatory term is based on their rough and simple shape. Perhaps different shapes represent different time periods?

Stone crosses are rather difficult to date. Usually there is little iconography and text that can give us any indication of time frame. Nevertheless it is generally agreed that most of the crosses from West Norway date back to the period between approx. 900–1100 A.D.

This is a very interesting archaeological period. It is characterised by the Viking raids, the state formation process and the change in religion from heathendom to Christianity. It is a period of great, dramatic changes. To find out why these stone crosses were erected, researchers have tried to connect them to the, at times, chaotic scenario.

There are many legends connected to the stone crosses. St Olaf is mentioned as being responsible for the erection of many of the crosses, e.g. the two stone crosses in Eivindvik, and Sogn og Fjordane. On his missionary journey along the coast of West Norway he stopped at several places to preach and perform baptism. At some locations, crosses were raised to hallow the area. Stories also tell of him shooting the red garnets into the crosses. Although these legends are very fascinating, scientists have focused on other aspects. First, they thought that some crosses were a kind of a memorial to the dead. We know, you see, that many of them were actually located on grave mounds. Later, however scientists have seen this as a symbol instead, telling others in the community that the family represented by the grave mound had converted to Christianity. Thus the cross became a vehicle for communication. By erecting such a large symbol, as indeed these crosses are, a very important message was conveyed. New results concerning the reasons why they chose to erect these crosses are forthcoming. New archaeological theory is included in this study with the purpose of seeing the crosses in a new light.

Are these old stones available today? Today, it is possible to visit many of these interesting locations. We recommend a trip to Hyllestad, where a stone quarry park is in progress. If you have a car, most of the stone crosses are easily accessed. The authorities in Rogaland have put up signs and information boards at the different locations. In tourist brochures from Sogn og Fjordane, you will also find some information pertaining to some of the crosses, e.g. Eivindvik and Svanøy. Otherwise we recommend making inquiries at the local museums.

About the authors
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One of the two crosses from Eivindvik. The cross is 2.85 meters tall. The cross was probably produced in Hyllestad. Photo: Kristine H. Gabrielsen.

Destroyed quern stone found during excavations in the quarries in Hyllestad. Photo: Irene Baug.
The holy king
Religion and royal power from Viking Age to Middle Ages

Den hellige kongen – The Holy King deals with the religious and political transition in Norway during the end of the 10th century and early 11th century. The concept of sacred monarchy connected the Norse religion with Christendom, and was the foundation for the success of the new faith and political centralisation. The Viking-age ideas, traditions and religious concepts regarding the holy king created the necessary conditions for development from the heathen Viking Age to Christian Middle Ages within Scandinavian societies.

The author investigates the importance of ideology and mentality; the signification of cultural believes expressed in Norse myths, symbols and rituals. She describes these subjects from a wide contextual and interdisciplinary view.

We who live in Scandinavia are well aware of the Vikings’ impact on England, Ireland and Scotland, as well as on the islands of Orkney and Shetland. But the Vikings also affected Wales in many ways, since Wales lay along usual important sailing routes. Mark Redknap, curator of Medieval & Later Archaeology at the National Museums & Galleries of Wales, has written a fascinating and beautifully produced book about the Viking history of Wales. The book not only concerns actual objects and events connected directly with Wales, but gives also a broad view of the Vikings in general. In line with this, a comprehensive time line in the back of the book shows the Viking events paralleled in Britain and Ireland on one hand and the continent on the other hand.

The reader is introduced to the earliest records of Viking in Wales, and can then follow the story through time in comprehensive and easy reading through the book. Chapters like "The First coming", "The later raids", "The End in Wales" carry the reader through the story of the Vikings in Wales. Parallel to this time line, there are chapters dealing with different aspects of the Viking and their world in a more general way, like "House and Home", "Dress", and "Death and Burial".

Putting all new evidence together in a book like this gives a very good picture of the historical traces of Vikings in Wales. Much credit must be given for the excellent illustrations in the book.

Dan Carlsson

How to sail the single square sail

Heritage News

Would you like to learn how to sail a Viking ship this summer?
A practical and theoretical course will be held at the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, Denmark this summer from June 18 – 22, in co-operation with the Danish National Museum’s Centre for Maritime Archaeology (NMF). An experienced crew from Viking Ship Museum will teach you how to handle boats and sail them. The course will be taught in English.

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The Mästermyr Project

BY DON PLUMMER

“A proposal to duplicate the chest and objects of the Mästermyr Find for display at the 2002 ABANA Conference in LaCrosse, WI.”

With these words a group of about 30 enthusiastic blacksmiths scattered across America have set out to test their blacksmithing skill at a Viking reproduction. In a spontaneous burst of energy that followed the ABANA (Artists Blacksmiths Association of North America) in Flagstaff, AZ this past July, a few individuals who regularly communicate on a blacksmith/metalworking internet site identified as theForge, decided to duplicate the items in this find.

The Mästermyr Find, as many of you may already be aware, occurred in 1936 on Gotland, an island off the coast of Sweden, when a farmer plowing a recently drained swampland was stopped by something buried in the ground. When he dismounted to identify the problem he found his plowshare entangled in an old chain. As he dug deeper he found the chain wrapped around a chest that contained the most wondrous things. It was a treasure chest… a treasure chest full of tools.

Subsequent investigations over the years by Sweden’s most learned archaeologists have identified it to be a tool chest from the Viking Age. The chest was full of over 130 tools and objects in use by blacksmiths and carpenters and is estimated to be nearly 1000 YEARS OLD! A book detailing this find was assembled in 1983 by Greta Arwidsson and Gösta Berg but it had gone out of print. The book was revived last year by Norman Larson of the Larson Publishing Company and it elicited quite a bit of interest in the blacksmithing community. So much so, in fact, that it incited the volunteers of theForge to recreate these items for the American public to see.

The proposal from theForge is to have volunteers form this site accurately recreate the artifacts of the Mästermyr. Find in order to:

1) provide the opportunity to investigate ancient manufacturing methods:

2) provide a traveling exhibit for the purposes of public education;
3) further an awareness and appreciation of the art and craft of blacksmithing;
4) demonstrate that theForge is a viable instrument for supporting and furthering the goals and interests of ABANA;
5) present blacksmithing as an ancient craft of profound significance to nearly all world cultures past;
6) present and showcase the talents of smiths from all regions in the states.

Through a selection process using the eGroups function available to the internet as well as its associated polling feature, individuals volunteered for specific item(s) to reproduce. Generally speaking, individuals selected items commensurate with their skill level. The selection process continued until all of the items were selected and there appeared to be an equitable distribution to all. Once the ‘controlled’ selection process was completed and “primary” artifact identified the participants were also encouraged to recreate any other item or items from the original collection as “secondary” artifacts:

Plans call for the project to be finished with the actual material work by 1/31/2002, leaving several months time to collect the items, mark each piece with a project touchmark, and finalize the collection’s ultimate disposition, which we hope will be to travel between various museums worldwide to serve as an instrument of public awareness, education, and edification.

Although we have not yet received confirmation from the ABANA offices it is hoped that they will provide the collection with its first public venue during the conference set for 2002 in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. It is believed that this collection of recreated artifacts to be especially appropriate given the long history of Scandinavian culture and tradition in this region of the United States.

Copyright: National Museum of Antiquities, Sweden

About the author:
Don Plummer is a part-time blacksmith and metal worker who supports this activity by working as an independent management consultant. He frequently write articles for the Anvil’s Ring which is published by the Artist Blacksmith Association of North America as well as for various local artists-blacksmith chapters. He has a couple of books published on colonial wrought iron and project management and live in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania with his wife and a one-eyed cat.

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The project was originally conceived by Robert Fertner at afertner@kscable.com and is being managed by Andy Vida who is at osan@netlabs.net. The site is being monitored and maintained by Phil Whitley at Pwwhitley@aol.com and Don Plummer's role in the project is as correspondent reporter.
Lindholm Høje
Monument and Museum

By Tommy Jensen

Lindholm Høje is one of the most beautiful ancient monuments from late Iron Age and Viking Age in Denmark. Standing at the top of the burial site you get a magnificent view of the many stone settings and can feel the locality’s connection with the Limfjord that has obviously been an important link to the outside world both internationally and regionally.

The Lindholm Høje Museum is discreetly located in the immediate vicinity west of the burial site. Inside the museum the visitor will experience a comprehensive exhibition showing the daily life and burial customs of the inhabitants of the village and its connections with the world outside Lindholm Høje.

From the museum café there is beautiful scenery southwest along the Limfjord and the marine landscape.

Lindholm Høje is situated in the northern part of Jutland, Denmark on the outskirts of Norresundby. From the centre of Aalborg, it is only 15 minutes by bus.

Background and History

Since the end of 19th century it has been known that ridges north of Aalborg held relics from our ancient time. In the summer of 1889 the National Museum in Denmark made the first archaeological excavations of two ship-shaped and one circular stone setting on the hills. But many years should pass before the decision was made to undertake a full-scale excavation of the whole area.

In 1952 the National Museum in Denmark in corporation with Aalborg Historical Museum started a large-scale excavation of Lindholm Høje that lasted for six years.

The result was the exposure of one of the most beautiful and imposing ancient monuments in Denmark from about 400 AD and into the 12th century. When the excavation was finished the whole area was seeded with grass and Lindholm Høje was protected as an ancient monument.

The very excavations and the remarkable results attracted enormous attention from both academic circles and among the locals.

In 1965 the first proposals were made to build a museum building and a small restaurant. Public interest in Lindholm Høje was so great that the municipality of Norresundby that owned the area decided to work for the establishment of public facilities. During the years up to 1989 many proposals for a new museum building were prepared but, due to financial problems, plans were not realised.

Then in 1989 the dream of a museum became a reality. In connection with its centenary celebration the largest industrial factory in Aalborg, Aalborg Portland Cement Factory, presented the city of Aalborg with a new museum building on Lindholm Høje. The responsibility of museum was then handed over to the Aalborg Historical Museum.

The official opening of Lindholm Høje Museum took place on June 16, 1992, after three years of organising and setting up an extensive exhibition, thus fulfilling a long-felt wish.

Lindholm Høje Museum today

The museum is today a well-organised site museum, a branch of Aalborg Historical Museum, with exhibition, film facilities, information, museum shop and café.

Visitors from all over the world come to this unique ancient monument.

Daily opening hours have been adjusted to meet different needs. Visitor frequency varies greatly depending on the season, with winter season the obvious down period. During this period opening hours are reduced. The museum is open every Tuesday and Sunday. On Tuesdays mostly schools and institutions...
frequent the museum and on Sundays the locals are likely to pay a visit combined with a cup of coffee in the museum café.

At the start of the summer season from Easter until high summer and from the last part of the summer season until the end of October mainly schools and groups visit the museum as a part of their studies. During the summer we have a large number of individual persons and groups from home and abroad.

It is very important for the museum to greet all our visitors with an introduction in mainly their own language. Therefore we have published a small leaflet in six different languages. The exhibition texts are only in Danish and have been translated into English, German and French.

Besides a joint brochure from North Jutland county and Aalborg Historical Museum a special brochure has been composed for Lindholm Høje with English and German subtitles. This brochure is a result of a close co-operation between the local Viking re-enactment group and the Viking plays on Lindholm Høje. This co-operation has been formalised in a working group with representatives from Aalborg Historical Museum, Lindholm Høje Museum, the Viking enactment group Lindholm Høje, the Viking performing group and the Department of Cultural Affairs in Aalborg.

Together this working group is trying to create some exciting activities based on the Viking Age.

The Viking re-enactment group, Lindholm Høje, organises an annual Viking bazaar where Viking re-enactment groups from all over the country gather to show their Viking-age skills and at the same time the Viking performing group stages an open-air theatre where the monument is part of the scenery. The story of the play is on the theme of the Viking Age on Lindholm Høje.

Midsummer Eve is also a recurrent event where the history and the character of the site add a special atmosphere to the evening.

The Lindholm Høje Museum has an important role in co-ordinating and acting as the gathering-place for the many different activities that take place during the year.

A main day-to-day activity in the museum operations is undoubtedly verbal communication where the monument combined with the exhibition provides a perfect frame for a living interpretation of the Viking Age. Schools and institutions use our guides as an integrated part of their lessons. The numbers of tourist groups, societies and private companies being guided in Danish as well as English language are increasing at present. Nowadays the Museum café is run by the museum, which allows for the possibility of combining a guided visit with subsequent dining in the museum café even outside opening hours. Interest in ordering a “museum evening” is increasing and societies and private companies in particular are taking the opportunity to offer their members or employees a cultural and culinary evening. The museum café is likewise used for seminars, meetings and lectures.

The Lindholm Høje Museum has gradually built up a large collection of video films on the subject of the Viking Age and the Iron Age. This collection is widely used by the many visiting school groups as a guided visit. It means that the duration of visits often is more than two hours.

Thoughts and Visions

A site museum is often based on a permanent exhibition that reflects a certain locality and period of time. The problem with this is that it can result in the exhibition becoming obsolete. However if the exhibition is able to maintain a high grade of quality and wide objectives, adjustments in terms of new archaeological interpretations will ensure its being continuously brought up-to-date.

Our exhibition still has excellent academic qualities and is able to present a good interpretation of Lindholm Høje especially the daily life in the Viking Age. It is vital that we retain the present...
level of activities where verbal communication plays a central role, as mentioned above.

We are looking for new video films for our collection and we are interested in any new information readers can supply us with. Video films in different languages are of great interest.

In the future I think it is very important to make a special effort for the adult public. Adults of today often lead very busy lives where there is less time for absorption. At the same time the group of adults who have retired from their active working life is increasing. In my day-to-day work I feel a growing interest among groups and societies in participating in museum arrangements where the verbal communication is the main venue.

I do believe that it is important that site museums create special exhibitions complementary to their permanent exhibitions. This could be a way of keeping up the interest of the local public. This kind of initiative will be relevant for Lindholm Høje Museum in the future.

Work at the museum includes re-enactment of the Viking Age and the Viking re-enactment group is an important supplement to our activities but it is not our goal to compete with the established historical villages or to aim for a permanent re-constructed environment at Lindholm Høje.

I think that the Internet will have a very central role in marketing Lindholm Høje Museum. A professionally-designed website will enable us to relay knowledge, create a dialogue and assist in planning a visit to the Lindholm Høje site.

Still I believe that the Monument, the exhibition and the original artefacts must be seen and experienced in person.

**About the author:**
Tommy Jensen is responsible for day-to-day management, employed at the museum since 1991. He has participated in the creation of the exhibition and organisation of the Lindholm Høje Museum. Among other duties he is involved in archaeological surveying. He is trained in shipping, and as a carpenter, construction technician and surveyor.

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**Viking Age Iceland**

**By Jesse Byock**

Published by Penguin, 2001

The popular image of the Viking Age is a time of warlords and marauding bands pillaging their way along the shores of Northern Europe.

Yet, as Jesse Byock reveals in this deeply fascinating and important history, the society founded by Norsemen in Iceland was far from this picture. It was, in fact, an independent, almost republican Free State, without warlords or kings, or even armies.

Combining history and anthropology, this remarkable study explores in rich detail all aspects of Viking-age life: feasting, farming and battling with the elements, the power of chieftains and the church, marriage, the role of women and kinship. It shows us how law courts, which favoured compromise over violence, often prevented disputes over land, livestock or insults from becoming "blood feuds". In fact, in Iceland we can see a prototype democracy in action, which thrived for 300 years until it came under the control of the King of Norway in the 1260’s.

This was a unique time in history, which has long perplexed historians and archaeologists, and which provides us today with fundamental insights into sometimes forgotten aspects of western society. By interweaving his own original and innovative research with masterly interpretations of the Old Icelandic Sagas, Jesse Byock brings it brilliantly to life.
Give us the myths!

One thing the Vikings were sure of was the value of old tales. They told them at their gatherings. They carved them in stone. They wrote them on parchment. Evidence can be found all over Scandinavia. The phrase on the Rök Stone - “sagum mogminni” – is just one proof of this. Varin, a father who has lost his son, writes the inscription. To honour his dead son Varin apparently makes several allusions to old tales. To him the tales seem to be much more than mere entertainment. But do we tell the tales of the Viking Age?

Anyone who has an interest in the old sagas and myths can easily find them. At the university library or historic bookstore we can find the Icelandic sagas and literature that help us study runic inscriptions. And certainly the sagas are scrutinised by linguists and saga experts all over the world. But is this really telling the tales?

The natural place to tell these tales would be at museums. But in most Viking museums the sagas – and on a more general level, storytelling – have been long overlooked as a way of getting to know the Vikings. Instead exhibitors pile up swords, old coins and other findings, expecting the visitors to look at them in awe. And do they? Quite often, they don’t. To them these are just abstract objects often without any context at all. There is no story connected to them and therefore they lose meaning. Even if every object cannot possibly tell a story, every Viking exhibition could include at least one Viking tale in one way or another.

The museums in Scandinavia have long formed a part of the academic world. Highly educated archaeologists and other scholars have put together these exhibitions, collecting all kinds of findings. The visitor is given facts on weight and date and style. The problem is just that the average visitor can’t take it in. A display of items is just not enough for him or her. They want to be thrilled; they want to enter a different world and a different time. This is just what storytelling does. Capturing the audience’s imagination it can make the past come to life.

Using the myth

When opening the Gold Room at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm in 1994 we produced a multimedia show based on the myth of Sigurd Fafniresbane as it is told in the Eddas and elsewhere. This saga to a large extent revolves around a gold treasure that once belonged to a dwarf. (Yes, Wagner used the same tale to compose one of the masterpieces of opera, the story of Siegfried and the Rhinegold trilogy.)

Using this myth we were able to convey to the audience the mystic qualities attributed to gold throughout the migration and Viking period. This – we felt – was an important complement in understanding the gold items on display. Gold was never just pieces of metal but a material embodied with all kinds of supernatural qualities. To illustrate the show we used the famous Sigurd carving on Ramsundberget in Sörmland, Sweden. In a way we recycled pictures almost a thousand years old! Many of the visitors mentioned the show as one of the highlights of their visit.

Today the trend at Scandinavian museums seems to be turning away from the sagas. The idea apparently being that they are not scientific enough. The newly opened museum in Old Uppsala, Sweden, illustrates this. This museum deals with the period just prior to the Viking Age. However the connection with the Viking-age Uppsala is obvious. Throughout the ages this has been the location for a large number of myths, be it Snorri’s sagas of the kings of the Ynglinga dynasty or Adam of Bremen’s vivid description of the pagan temple he claimed lay at Uppsala. The museum producers however have made their prime objective to deconstruct all these myths. None of them is true, and therefore not worth telling. A large effort actually goes into “killing the myths”!

To me this is a misunderstanding of just what myths are and how we can use them. I do not say they should be told as truths. Whether the Ynglinga king Domalde really existed and was sacrificed because of crop failure at Uppsala is not
the issue. The point is that for many centuries this myth has been told about Uppsala. It contains many of the ideas circulating at the time, the meaning of sacrifice, the role of the Uppsala kings, and the importance of the place itself.

The texts at the museum in Old Uppsala now mainly deal with what Uppsala was not. And how different groups from 19th century nationalists to the pro-nazis of the 40’s have misused it. This is, of course, a good cause but just what remains when all the myths are declared non-scientific and washed away?

The Anglo-Saxon world is better off in this respect. Generally they know the value of putting on a show and storytelling is regarded more as a resource. Re-enactment groups, historical plays or imaginative set designs at museums in Britain and the US help trigger the visitors’ imagination. Using new technology often comes natural in these countries. Or is it because many museums are run by private trusts that know that they simply must attract great audiences? At any rate, I believe this is the way to go. “Vikingar!” in Largs, Scotland, Jorvik Viking Center and Hastings have been in the forefront but their Scandinavian colleagues have been slow to follow. Many Scandinavians now find that they need to go abroad to get the most out of their “Viking visit” to a site or museum.

How to tell the tale?

What are we to do then? What should the aim be? The first step is mental. Museum managers, producers and architects must be aware of the value of the sagas and myths. These should be integrated parts of any Viking exhibition, regarded not as “old rubbish” but resources in opening the doors to our Viking past. Snorri and his fellow Icelandic writers are of course the prime source for this but not the only one by far. Almost everywhere in Scandinavia as well as in Great Britain and elsewhere there are local tales and traditions, monuments, grave mounds or rune carvings that can inspire writers and producers. Using this material will definitively add flavour to any Viking exhibition, making a place or event come to life.

There are different techniques that can be used to do the actual “telling”. One way is to rely on technology or multimedia. This technique stems from the now slightly old-fashioned slide show. The shows now being stored on CD and DVD often including moving images and computer design. This can be further expanded into full-scale multimedia shows, integrating film, light, sound, special effects, set design and props. A special showroom or theatre is generally the best way to stage these saga shows, putting the audience in a secluded place where the actual storytelling is not disturbed by hoards of visitors talking and walking about. (Unfortunately this showroom is seldom available. Exhibition producers have at best reserved a corner where they’ve written “multimedia” on their drawings. Here some media producer will be called in a few weeks before the exhibition opens to fill the corner with sounds and pictures that, unfortunately, quite often clash with the rest of the exhibition.)

But multimedia is not the only way. Staging a play, a monologue or using storytelling in guiding are other ways to introduce the telling of tales to the audience without relying on expensive technology. The actress Brynja Benediksdóttir put on the one-woman play “The Saga of Gudridr” in connection with the millennium celebration of the Vinland voyages. This monologue won much approval and in quite a simple way made the Vinland travels come to life from a woman’s viewpoint. Gudridr is more or less the main character in The Saga of Erik the Red, one of the sagas telling about how Icelanders travelled to Vinland. The play was primarily a theatre project but was performed in connection with various Vinland exhibitions in 2000. Tearing down the traditionally high walls between the museum world and the world of theatre is also a way of promoting storytelling in our museums.

There are even more possibilities. One is the use of audioguides, portable CD- or mp3-players, that can tell the tale “on demand” when a visitor wants to include a myth or two in their museums visit. Another unconventional way is simply to use set design in creating a “saga-like” environment without any actual words being spoken. In Iceland the farm of Stöng, known from Burnt-Njals saga, has been excavated and preserved. A reconstructed Stöng farm has been erected some distance from the actual site of the original farm. This reconstructed farm, together with the remains of the original site, is also a saga-like way of bringing the past to life. The surroundings and the saga ties, together with the splendid scenery carry the visitor back in time in a sense.

Una’s story

At present I’m involved in producing the content for a more advanced personal guide-device for the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. In June they will open their new Viking exhibition. The visitors will then be equipped with an electronic “message-pad” designed by Ericsson. The pad consists of a small portable screen that the visitors carry with them in the exhibition. The unit also has a little earphone connected to it. The pad uses the Bluetooth technique so everything is wireless and material is stored not in the message-pads but in a...
Hjalmar Olsson

About the Author:
Hjalmar Olsson is a freelance scriptwriter and producer with a focus on making the past come to life through drama and storytelling, often including modern technology. He is currently producing the content for an electronic message pad for the Museum of National Antiquities Sweden, as mentioned in the article.

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Viking Heritage Magazine 1/01

Genetic research for Vikings in Britain

BY MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM

In early July 2000 a study was announced in which it was proposed to use DNA analysis to help determine the Viking heritage of the British Isles. The study is being conducted by Professor Goldstein at University College, London the results of which may be reflected in an upcoming BBC television programme: "Blood of the Vikings". Professor Sykes, of Oxford University is also conducting a study that of the "Genetic Atlas Project" which, as part of its function, will also be looking at the Viking Heritage of the British Isles.

A nation-wide appeal was launched for male volunteers, as males hold both X and Y chromosomes and thus may be better in providing and overall picture of the pattern of male and female ancestral lines. The volunteers where selected from twenty-two specific towns and cities in the British Isles ranging from Stornoway to Penzance and including the Isle of Man and Ireland, comparative samples being obtained from other areas of Europe. The volunteers were provided with a DNA kit by which they would remove cells from the inside of their cheeks by a "mouth-swab".

Once Professor Goldstein’s study is completed, which should be around fifteen months from inception, the results should show fruition in "Blood of the Vikings", which should air mid to late 2001.

Archaeologist Julian Richards, who will present the documentary, hopes that the study will further illuminate this period of history relative to the Viking Age and their impact upon the British Isles including settlement patterns and interrelationships with its indigenous peoples.

I was fortunate to be able to speak with Dr. Sarah Goodacre who is involved in the "Genetic Atlas Project" and she related that the study is likely to build on the large amount of data that already exists surrounding the Viking Age, the study will hope to add a "genetic" element to same.

The study itself, while not specifically involved in the forthcoming documentary, has been ongoing for the last four years as part of the Genetic Atlas Project studying data not just pertaining to the Viking Period but hoping to develop a genetic map of the British Isles which will help to interpret what overall genetic influences (e.g. through invasions, immigrations etc.) there have been through time.

The tests are reliable insofar as their accuracy will, in a sense, tell us how the DNA between populations differ. The problem comes in interpreting what the differences mean. For example, if common Scandinavian DNA types are found in Britain this suggests that there has been a Scandinavian genetic input. However, since the Normans that invaded from the south were also of Viking stock then any Scandinavian genes could also have been introduced through this route, so the results will have to be approached with aspects like this in mind. The DNA analysis, when coupled with other forms of historical research, may be a way of reducing the number of equally likely hypotheses, although the full extent of the usefulness of a project such as this remains to be seen. At this stage it is unclear just how much DNA analysis will add to what is already known about the Viking Period but it has, by its nature, the ability to add to this knowledge.

There are several other groups researching human population genetics at the moment such as "deCODE" in Iceland (a commercial company) but the study at University College London is the only one being conducted in respect of the British Isles.

What are the hopes for the study? To be able to understand more about the forces that drive evolution per se, e.g. to discriminate between the elimination of types through chance (for example if population size becomes very small) and those driven by other processes (e.g. selective advantage) and how much DNA analysis will add to what is known. The accuracy will, in a sense, tell us how the genetic influences of different populations have varied through time, and by this we may be able to understand more about the forces that drive evolution per se, e.g. to discriminate between the elimination of types through chance (for example if population size becomes very small) and those driven by other processes (e.g. selective advantage) and how much DNA analysis will add to what is known.

There are several other groups researching human population genetics at the moment such as "deCODE" in Iceland (a commercial company) but the study at University College London is the only one being conducted in respect of the British Isles.

What are the hopes for the study? To be able to understand more about the forces that drive evolution per se, e.g. to discriminate between the elimination of types through chance (for example if population size becomes very small) and selection for particular types. It is further hoped that the study will be able to complement previous anthropological studies in an attempt to understand our recent and more ancient past.

About the Author:
Michael Cunningham is an archaeologist living and working in Ireland. He is also taking part in the study, although his main distraction is prehistoric Scandinavia. He is presently studying the Viking Age and its subsequent impact on North Western Europe.

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http://viking.hgo.se
The Iron Age site of Old Scatness is situated close to the southern tip of Shetland, the most northerly group of islands in Britain. At the centre of the site there is a broch, an Iron Age tower, found along the coastlines of the north and west of Scotland, and occupied about 2000 years ago. After the broch had gone out of use, the site continued to be occupied during the Iron Age, and a number of houses of assorted styles grew up around the tower.

Now, in spite of the lack of a typical Viking house in the excavated area, there is evidence that early Viking settlers to Shetland re-used several of the late Iron Age buildings in the village at Old Scatness.

Among the late Iron Age buildings there are at least two of a type known as “wheelhouses”, because they resemble the shape of a wheel in plan. One of these has been found to contain Viking objects: loom weights, steatite bowl fragments, bakestones and spindle whorls. The steatite bowls have been identified by steatite researcher Amanda Foster as having direct parallels to those found in graves in southern Norway and dated between 752-850 AD. A central long hearth in the building, contemporary with these finds, has been dated to between 850-960 AD by archaeomagnetic dating. Another wheelhouse may have been used in its later stages as a skeo, a building for drying or perhaps smoking fish. We have found the skeletons of the fish which had had their heads cut off, before being hung up.

Meanwhile a Pictish building nearby also contained several Viking objects including a steatite line sinker whose closest parallel comes from Rogaland. We also found similar objects made in ceramics, which suggests that the native population were adopting Viking ideas to their own crafts. These Vikings literally burnt their boats when they

Old Scatness – an Iron Age Village with Viking Residents?

Visitors view the site. Copyright: Shetland Amenity Trust
came to Scatness: the rivets from the clinker-built boat still lay where they had fallen into the fire as the wood burned.

When the Pictish building was abandoned, it was used to dump rubbish in. This midden infill contained evidence of flax, and is the first time that it appears on the site. Flax is a crop which seems to have been introduced into Scotland by the Vikings.

There is clear evidence of Viking settlement, both in terms of cultural association and due to the large assembly of Norse artefacts, some of which are associated with native objects. One possible explanation for this is trade between Pictish natives and the Vikings, although the amount of incoming goods would be considerable. Alternatively, it is entirely possible that we are seeing the colonisation of this high status Pictish farm, with rich farming lands, by the incoming Vikings. Old Scatness would be a very desirable place to live in. The intermixture of the two cultures could result from inter-marriage, slave taking or association with the local population. The implication is that Old Scatness may have been a native village with incoming Viking residents.

Old Scatness is being excavated by the University of Bradford as part of a wider heritage project, run by Shetland Amenity Trust. The project includes field survey, which is identifying other potential sites of Viking settlement in the area, as well as the earthwork remains of other periods. The project is also creating a visitor attraction at the site, with guided tours, living history, and exhibitions whilst the excavation is in progress. We are building and roofing replicas of some of the buildings which have been excavated. When the village excavation has been completed, next summer, areas of the site will be consolidated to allow year round public access.

Old Scatness is also being included in the Shetland-wide Viking trail, being put together under the Interreg North Sea Viking Legacy Project. Interpretive boards will be put up at number of Viking sites throughout the length of Shetland and leaflets will also help to guide people to some of the Viking/Norse highlights in the islands.

Contact address: Shetland Amenity Trust, 22-4 North Road, Lerwick, Shetland, ZE1 0NQ. Phone: 01595 694688

Sponsors:
BP Exploration Operating Company Ltd, EC Objective 1 Programme, Historic Scotland, Pilgrim Trust, Robert Kiln Trust, Scottish Hydro Electric Plc, Scottish Natural Heritage, Shetland Amenity Trust, Shetland Enterprise Company, Shetland Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council (Charitable Trust), University of Bradford.

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By Sue Palmer, Manx National Heritage

For the Winter exhibition at the Manx Museum, Manx National Heritage is featuring “Silk and Stone”, a display of silk paintings inspired by Viking rune stones. (See front page)

A series of over twenty stunning and brightly coloured painted silks adorn the gallery, incorporating Viking designs, mythological scenes and runic inscriptions.

Originally from Moscow, the artist Valentina Kuprina now lives in Sweden. After many years working as a dress designer, Valentina turned her attention to drawing and painting Swedish rune stones onto silk in 1995. Her work has been exhibited across Scandinavia and more recently in America.

The exhibition clearly illustrates the ancient links, both cultural and artistic, between the Isle of Man and Scandinavia. In addition to the paintings, examples of the many carved stones found in the Isle of Man are displayed alongside the silks. Legends such as that of Sigurd the dragon-slayer are therefore represented both in silk and stone.

Kirsty Neate, Curatorial Services Officer for Manx National Heritage and the organiser of this exhibition commented that “Valentina’s use of the finest Chinese silk as a medium to explore the runic stones is an interesting choice, contrasting the unyielding nature of the original stone used by the Viking craftsmen. Evidence suggests that many of the Viking stones were vividly coloured with natural dyes. Valentina’s dramatic paintings hint at the prospect of encountering brightly coloured stones eroded in the landscape over one thousand years ago”.

Associated with the exhibition, the Manx Museum is staging various events to coincide with the exhibition.

The sixth and final Board Meeting of the North Sea Viking Legacy Project was held in Norwich during the weekend of January 11-14.

As usual, representatives from the 20 partners in the project attended together with the permanent observers from the North Atlantic partnership, the Baltic Via Viking project and the Dutch Viking Foundation.

This meeting was hosted by our English partner, consisting of Norfolk County Council and Norwich City Council. The meeting venue this time was the City of Norwich with its profound Anglo-Scandinavian roots and heritage.

The programme started with a reception at The Guild Hall, hosted by the Lord Mayor of Norwich. The 15th-century Guild Hall, used as the City Hall for centuries, also hosts the largest collection of city regalia in Britain outside London.

The main sessions of the business meetings were held on Friday 12. Several important items were on the agenda. This being the last scheduled board meeting, the conclusion of the current project and ideas for the future were central themes up for discussion.

The North Sea Viking Legacy project has now been working for exactly two years, and will have an additional half year to conclude projects. After that, final reports will be produced and delivered to our funding agency, the Interreg IIC North Sea programme secretariat in Viborg, Denmark.

The reports from our 20 partners showed good progress and no doubt, all partners will have concluded their projects before 1st July this year.

North Sea Viking Legacy has been a co-publisher of the Viking Heritage Magazine during 2000 and will follow up this year. The Board was much happy to learn that means had been found to enable the magazine to continue publication throughout the year. It is our intention to find more permanent funding sources for the magazine as part of the new Destination Viking project.

Another co-operation project with Viking Heritage is a complementary volume to Follow the Vikings, where Viking sites around the North Sea not included in this volume will be published. This project is now progressing well. It is intended to market the two volumes as one package.

The next major event organised by North Sea Viking Legacy is a conference in Gothenburg 19-22 April 2001. The theme of this conference is cultural heritage and tourism. This will be a joint venture with BALDER, an Interreg IIC project of the Baltic Sea region. Via Viking is one of the component parts of BALDER.

The programme of the Gothenburg conference is now being finalised.

In co-operation with a project called "Kings of the North Sea AD 250-850" (an international exhibition project between six museums in five North Sea countries, focusing on the period between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Viking period), North Sea Viking Legacy is also hosting a...
at the Manx Isle of Man

Conference in Newcastle 29-31 March this year. The conference is called "Historic environments of the North Sea Region: Conservation and Interpretation. An international conference on spatial planning and the historic environment". The programme is now finalised and consists of 5 sessions. The sessions are called:

1. Approaches to the protection of the historic environment, with speakers from the five countries
2. Case studies, including a keynote address by Dr C Young, Head of World Heritage and International Policy
3. Cultural Tourism, Social Inclusion etc., including a speech by Stephen Harrison, Director of Manx National Heritage
4. Approaches to interpretation
5. Philosophy of Conservation.

Further details are available from the organiser, the Tyne and Wear Museums at: linda.green@tyne-wear-museums.org.uk

All partners reported good progress in the implementation of their quality improvement projects locally.

The document on Destination Viking was also discussed at the board meeting. Partners have now an opportunity to come up with comments and creative suggestions for the way ahead. The document will be discussed at the Gothenburg conference mentioned above. Here, new partners will also be invited. A summary of the Destination Viking suggestion appeared in the last issue (4/2000) of the Viking Heritage Magazine. In addition to the business meetings, the Board of course also had the opportunity of visiting the various projects included into the North Sea Viking Legacy in Norfolk.

In the previous issue of Viking Heritage Magazine, Michael Knights gave a presentation of the round-towered churches of Norfolk and their possible Scandinavian links. A visit to one such church (Forncett St Peter) was a natural choice as was a visit to the site where such a tower is being reconstructed, at the Swaffham Ecotech Centre.

A guided walk through the Anglo-Scandinavian parts of Norwich also featured prominently on the programme. A beautiful signpost with texts even in Danish has already been erected close to the centre of Viking Norwich. In addition, brochures for suggested walks through the Anglo-Scandinavian quarters of the City and Thetford are being prepared.

The projekt manager of North Sea Viking Legacy, Geir Sør-Reime, can be contacted at gsr@rk.rogaland-f.kommune.no

Language checked by Brian Ayers

This combination of art and archaeology has proved very popular with visitors to the exhibition which is on display until 3rd March 2001.

Website: www.gov.im/mnh
E-mail: enquiries@mnhm.gov.im

Legacy
January 2001

With the schools’ half-term holiday in February, Norse sagas will be brought to life through story-telling sessions, and inspired by the exhibition displays, children get their chance to take part in silk-painting workshops and produce masterpieces of their own.

From the exhibition at the Manx Museum. Copyright: Manx National Heritage.

The participants of the NSVL Board Meeting in Norfolk. Jan. 2001. Photo: Jan Lindh

The project manager of North Sea Viking Legacy, Geir Sør-Reime, can be contacted at gsr@rk.rogaland-f.kommune.no

Language checked by Brian Ayers

http://viking.hgo.se
New exhibition with the Viking-age Överhogdal tapestries as a focal point at Jamtli Museum in Östersund, Sweden

Mysterious and fascinating, the Överhogdal tapestries are enthroned in their display case at Jamtli, the county museum of Jämtland. The well-preserved tapestries are covered with figures and C14-dated to 800-1100th century. Obviously the creator wants to tell us a story, but which one?

Viking textiles found at archaeological excavations are often mouldered into shreds. But the Överhogdal tapestries were found above ground, in an old church shed. The cool, dry climate in the north of Sweden has kept the flax and wool in good condition and the colours radiant for one thousand years. Jamtli, situated in the town centre of Östersund, has now created an exhibition that places the weavings in their historical context. The exhibition opened in February 2001 and was an instant success, perhaps because of its unusual interpretation. Jamtli has put name and faces on the normally rather anonymous Vikings.

– We have chosen nine Viking-age characters from the province of Jämtland. Some of the characters are modelled on individual figures from legends or Icelandic sagas, others are imaginatively created from actual grave findings, says Ulla Oscarsson, producer of the exhibition.

– The characters have been carved out from giant wooden blocks. The three-dimensional figures present history in full relief, making it very vivid to the imagination, she continues. Archaeological findings are displayed around each character. Next to “The Craftsman” is the remarkable collection of tools found in a grave in Drocksjön, from the province of Härjedalen. Beside “The Maid of Virgin Hill” character a large amount of jewellery is displayed, as well as newly-produced Viking clothes for visitors to try on.

Motives from the Överhogdal tapestries are painted on the walls – motives that in some way or another relate to the character next to them.

So what do the motives on the Överhogdal tapestries mean? No one knows for sure. Some scientists mean that the tapestries show Ragnarök (doomsday), as predicted in Voluspá. Others see motives from the Christian apocalypse, or from the Völsunga saga (Sigurd, the dragon-killer). We strongly recommend you to visit Jamtli and see for yourself – maybe you will come up with the final interpretation!

For the second time in modern times a large Viking market is to be arranged on the island of Åland in the Baltic Sea. The location for the market is an area rich in ancient remains between the old thing’s place and 28th of July you will be able to carry on battle at Svolder in the year 1000.

At the Hlödver Viking market on the 27th and 28th of July you will be able to carry on trade in salt, fish, meat and furs just like they did in the Viking Age. There will also be plenty of handicrafts made of metal, wood, wool and other raw materials on sale – many from other Viking villages will attend the event.

The two market days will be both fun and instructive - but most of all unforgettable.

Welcome to Saltvik in Åland!
For further information:
www.goaland.net
www.turistforbundet.aland.fi
E-mail: Johanna.enberg@turist.aland.fi


Part of the Överhogdal tapestries. In 1910 the Viking-Age tapestries were found in a church shed.

Photo: County Museum of Jämtland
New exhibition at the Birka Site Museum in Sweden this summer

This summer visitors to Birka will have the opportunity to see an exhibition about the defence system and military organisation of the town. Birka was the first urban settlement in Sweden and an important port of trade on the lake of Mälaren in the vicinity of today's Stockholm. Rimbert's Vita Angarii mentions that "the Nordic apostle" Ansgarius visited Birka twice during the 9th century.

The exhibition shows the results from the latest excavations on the island conducted by Lena Holmquist Olausson, University of Stockholm. She and her staff have excavated a large longhouse, believed to have been a part of the so-called Garrison (see Viking Heritage Magazine 3/2000). Presumably it was here that the guards protecting the hill fort and town resided.

The archaeologists have found spectacular findings of weapons, armour and ritual deposits within the longhouse that has been interpreted as a great hall for the warriors. These artefacts and reconstructions of two male dresses with weaponry and equipment are on display at the Site Museum from mid-May until the end of the tourist season, September 23.

www.raa.se/birka

Fire festival on the Shetlands

On the 30th of January a Viking long-ship was torched in the centre of Lerwick. The townspeople of Lerwick were celebrating their annual fire festival, Up-Helly-Aa. The tradition of a fire festival during mid-winter has been held since at least the 19th century in villages at the Shetlands. Every year the Up-Helly-Aa group builds a new galley that is burnt after a grand procession through the town with its members dressed up in Viking costumes.

www.shetland-tourism.co.uk

Sensational findings at Kaupang in Norway!

New excavations at the Viking-age trading port of Kaupang in southeast Norway seem to rewrite the country's early history. What was considered previously to be a seasonal trading centre could now turn out to be the nation's oldest permanent town. Dagfinn Skre, who is in charge of the excavation that started last May and will continue for two years, says that the first year produced evidence that Kaupang was inhabited all year round. Living quarters and craftmen's workshops are among the new finds at Kaupang and archaeologists have also discovered a large chieftain's or king's hall 1.6 kilometres north of the settlement.

For more information: www.kaupang.uio.no

New exhibition - The Vikings in Ireland

The Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, Denmark, has opened a new exhibition “The Vikings in Ireland” about the Scandinavian impact on Irish culture and history.

An exhibition dealing with the period before the Vikings arrived in Ireland, crafts and trade in Dublin, and the meeting between Irish and Scandinavian cultures is on display until the end of 2001. There are more than 250 items shown, among them jewellery, weapons, everyday objects and tools. Among the most splendid items are the crozier from Clonmacnoise and the Soicél-Molaise reliquary box/shrine.

Dublin plays a special role in the exhibition due to the fact that the Vikings founded the town. Skuldelev 2, one of the ships on display in The Viking Ship Museum, may in fact have been built in the Dublin-area in the 1040's. The ship is a unique example of one of the considerable contributions made by the Vikings to Irish culture, the art of shipbuilding. The ship was found in the Roskilde Fjord and is evidence of the direct link that must have existed between the two major towns of Dublin and Roskilde at the end of the Viking Age.

Graffiti depicting a Viking ship on a piece of wood, found during the excavations at Dublin, Ireland. Photo: Werner Karrasch. Copyright: Vikingeskibsmuseet, Roskilde.
**Remarkable rune-stone find on Visingsö, Sweden**

If Anna Öddeén hadn’t started to study archaeology this remarkable stone would perhaps have been standing as a farm door support for a few more centuries. But her archaeology studies made her remember the stone she played around as a child on the island of Visingsö in Lake Vättern, where people have lived since the Stone Age. After 25 years she found it again, even though it had been moved during the time. She contacted the county museum in Jönköping and the museum contacted Helmer Gustavson, rune expert at the Central Board of National Antiquities of Sweden, who took the stone with him to Stockholm.

– At first I suspected that it could be a counterfeit, but now I’m sure that it is a real rune-stone from the 9th century with similar runes to those on the famous Rök Stone, he says. And he adds; this is a sensation!

It is a thin, brownish grey sandstone with some copper in it. It is 66 centimetres long, 18 centimetres wide and 10 centimetres thick. There are no runes on the broadsides, only on the edges. The surface of one of the broadsides is worn, as if the stone has spent a couple of centuries of its long existence as a doorstep.

– I’ve never seen a stone similar to this one, but the oldest ones have strange shapes, Helmer Gustavson says, and thinks that the Visingsö stone may have been erected as a heathen grave-stone.

The inscriptions are what make this stone sensational. The runic inscriptions on one side of the stone is “hanauilk” and on the other “sakumthatlikihal”. Professor Frands Herchend has interpreted the text as:

“Hana vil ek sakum that liki hai” – I want this due for her crime, a stone for the corpse.

The inscription can be interpreted as a death sentence according to Professor Herschend, a woman was judged for a crime and a stone erected over her grave. The writing, chiselled in short-twig runes, could perhaps also be interpreted as an invocation for the deceased to rest in her grave and not haunt the living.

Helmer Gustavson calls the stone an incomparable find. The stone is one of the oldest rune-stones ever found in Sweden, at least 1200 years old. Unfortunately the stone from Visingsö no longer stand where it once was erected. The stone has no adornments with dragons or snakes as the rune-stones from the 11th century, but it has similarities with other very old rune-stones from the Swedish region of Östergötland. Older runic inscriptions exist, but they are made on loose objects, not on fixed stones.

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**Alsnu ship crew comes to life**

**BY BÖRJE WENNERBERG, HOVGÅRDEN ADELSÖ**

The island of Alsnö/Adelsö, Sweden, lies in the heart of the former Svitjod. The island next to it is Björkö with its ancient trading place, Birka.

Last autumn, after hundreds of years, a ship crew was once more established on Alsnö - this time as a peaceful preservation of the Viking culture and shipping tradition and not as a part of the Ledungen. The ship crew was founded on Alsnö thing mound and the ceremony was concluded by the act of passing a large drinking-horn among the company, with every man pouring a few drops upon the red sacrificial stone before raising the horn in a toast expressing his expectations of the recently formed ship crew.

The Alsnö ship crew of today has Alsnö Point at its disposal, an area meant to be a meeting-place for people interested in Viking culture.

The crew has not yet got a ship of its own but the members hope that their location in the middle of Lake Mälaren will tempt other crews to land with their ships and camp for a couple of days for some social intercourse with likeminded.

Every ship crew seems to have problems gathering enough men to row and sail a ship. Alsnö ship crew with its meeting-place on Alsnö Point might be the solution – here ships will be able to find people who are not afraid of blistering their hands.

Nowadays it is possible to put ships up for the winter and repair them at the beach on Alsnö Point. In the future building ships will also be possible.

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**Alsnöhornet (The Alsnöhorn)**

There are plans to arrange an annual sailing-race for Viking ships in the future – Alsnöhornet. A drinking-horn, ornamented with curvilinear animal-style decorations, is going to be used as a challenge trophy awarded to the winning ship.

“One that day on Hovgårds Bay you’ll be able to see ships with hoisted sails and water foaming around their stems. In the quiet bright summer evening you’ll hear the rhythmic sound of oars that powerfully take the ships home to the cape after a day’s sailing. After dusk people will gather around flaming bonfires to eat and drink while they sing, brag and enjoy themselves.”

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http://viking.hgo.se
Concerning the existence of children

This is a reply to the debate article "Children – they did exist!" published in Viking Viewpoints, VHM 4/00.

The exhibition at Gotlands Fornsal – Children – did they exist? is not primarily meant to impress either Victoria Persdotter, archaeologist and craftsman, or scientists. It is not even meant to impress children but rather to explain the fundamentals of archaeology in a simple way to children. It is not meant to be the scene of scientific theories but to be the starting point for different pedagogical programs where children together with a museum teacher can talk about children’s situation today and in past times and hopefully learn something about archaeology. What is more natural in this "time-journey" backwards than to present some of the prehistoric children found on Gotland without engaging in "hair-splitting".

The target audience of this exhibition is children, knowing that they have a tendency to want to concentrate on one or few things. Respect for small human beings is the reason why the exhibition deliberately is rather small and intense with short, questioning texts, encouraging them think for themselves. Why tire out little children, who are perhaps visiting a museum for the first time? This is not the place to discuss the situation of prehistoric children, which seems to be Victoria Persdotter’s main goal. The idea of child, childhood and youth differs from time to time and a final definition does not exist. Archaeologists and historians therefore deal with alternative definitions of children.

The examples given show very clearly the difficulty in interpreting the material. The five year-old from the 9th century with the jewellery of an adult woman, who was she and what was her place in society? Please note there is no given answer.

Nowhere is it announced the children were not allowed to be children – but they were not allowed to be only children. Nowhere is it announced that children had to carry out practical, physical work but that they had to contribute to family support. The problem of today is that children are not "of any use" in that respect.

The word child-labour, used once, explaining how fine jewellery might have been manufactured, has bad connotations and could have been avoided.

However, the question Children – did they exist? does receive an answer: – Of course – there have always been children but we have not always been allowed to be only children. We had to contribute to supporting the family as soon as we could be of any use. But playing was also a way of learning about adult life.

I would suggest Victoria P look at the exhibition and read the texts through the eyes of a child and not of an adult specialist.

Malin Lindquist
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VIKING HERITAGE
A network for Viking-related Knowledge

The objectives of the network are:

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- To co-operate with schools, universities etc. in the field of education and training in the study of the Vikings.

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