Editorial

Dear Readers,

WELCOME TO THE LAST ISSUE OF THE YEAR!

This time the theme of Vikings in North America is in focus and I am sure you will find plenty of interesting reading. I would like to call special attention to Birgitta Linderoth Wallace’s article, Vikings in North America – New and Old, dealing with the many alleged Viking finds “over there”. And of course you will find articles about the much-discussed Kensington Runestone, in the headlines right now, exhibited and investigated by leading experts in Sweden.

The Vikings travelled and expanded in all directions and as usual we follow their example of being curious and eager to explore something new. Take a look at the beautiful spoons from Poland and participate in the manners and customs of diet and table-service in Wolin. Don’t miss the exciting article about Viking-age horse graves in Lithuania, either.

I also would like to inform you that Maj-Britt Andersson, who has been responsible for subscriptions from the start, has retired. Thank you Maj-Britt for the great job you’ve done keeping all our members and the administration in good order!

And last but not at least, to all of you from all of us, Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year!

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Editor

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About the front page
The Leif Eriksson rune stone, raised at L’Anse aux Meadows on July 28, 2000. Read more on page 23. Photo: Kalle Runristare

Words of Wisdom

WORLDLINESS

The traveller must train his wits.
All is easy at home.
He who knows little is a laughing stock amongst men of the world.

From Hávamál
(Words from “The High One”)
North Americans have harboured a special fascination with Vikings for over a century. The interest is not scholarly but a popular preoccupation with the image of Vikings as freedom-seeking adventurers and pioneers, aggressive, strong, handsome, and bold, always exploring new horizons, the ideal of a man. In many ways this represents the male ethos in white America, which explains why the topic of Vikings is especially popular among American men.
settling in Minnesota and surrounding states from the 1850s on, the quest for Vikings migrated to the Middlewest. National Romanticism flourished in the Scandinavian homelands, and Vikings represented their glorious past. It was this view of history the immigrants brought with them. New publications of the Vinland sagas appeared in English and Norwegian in the 1880s, and, in 1893, Captain Magnus Anderson sailed a replica of the Gokstad ship to New York, with much fanfare and publicity, heightening the Viking frenzy.

The Kensington stone
In November (or August) 1898 a sensational find was made. On a farm at Kensington in central Minnesota, a Swedish immigrant stone mason-turned-farmer found a runestone embedded in the roots of a tree. The farmer was Olaf Ohman, an immigrant from Forsa in Hälsingland, Sweden. Local people came to see the stone and the stump of the tree, which had grown over it. Translations were soon printed in Svenska Amerikanska Posten, Skandinaven, and the Minnesota Journal.

In late February 1899 the stone was shipped by train to Professor George Curme of the Department of Germanic Languages at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. As the train approached, the Chicago newspapers heralded the sensational find, and Professor Curme’s excitement. His excitement turned into disappointment as soon as he saw the stone. The inscription, which bore the date 1362, was written in modern Swedish, not medieval, and the runes were more similar to 18th and 19th – century than medieval Swedish runes. The cuts were fresh, breaking through the weathered surface of the stone. However, to make sure that his observations were correct, Curme had the stone photographed and sent the photographs to the most eminent Norse scholars and runologists of the day, among them Adolf Noreen in Sweden, Ludwig Wimmer in Denmark, Gustaf Storm and Sophus Bugge in Norway. The unanimous verdict was that the inscription was modern.

The stone was returned to its finder. There it rested until 1908, when a young Norwegian-born amateur historian by the name of Hjalmar Holand "rescued it from oblivion" and published a book on the stone in which he declared that the inscription was genuine. The Scandinavian scholars were wrong. Holand devoted much of his life to the promotion of his views on the stone, producing five full-length books, and innumerable newspaper articles and lectures. His work received much attention.

In 1908 first the Norwegian Society of Minneapolis, then a prominent Scandinavian philologist at the University of Illinois, George T. Flom, and finally the state-sponsored Minnesota Historical Society launched investigations into the finding circumstances of the stone, and the personality of its finder. While the Norwegian Society believed that the inscription might be genuine, Professor Flom concluded that it was modern in language as well as in runes. The official verdict of the Minnesota Historical Society was that its authenticity could not be proven. A geologist as well as others who examined the stone, commented on the freshness of the rune cuts. Undaunted, Holand continued his work, over the years publishing what he presented as corroborating finds such as axes, spears, and swords, and sites where the Norse ship supposedly had been moored. His work has been taken seriously by many and is frequently cited as proof that the Norse penetrated the Middlewest.

By now, there are innumerable claims for evidence of Norse penetration into North America: more than 50 sites, over 100 inscriptions, and about 75 artifacts. In the 1960s, I was assigned by Carnegie Museum of Natural History to make a systematic investigation of all these sites, inscriptions, and artifacts, a study that I have kept relatively à jour with later developments in this field. When I began my study, I was aware that a similar investigation had been published in 1951 (English version in 1954) by Professor Johannes Brandsted, then Director of the Danish National Museum. I deliberately did not consult it, until I had viewed all the evidence myself. The following is a representative selection of the purported evidence.
Knowledge of runes

Knowledge of runes in Scandinavia after the Middle Ages is not as esoteric one might imagine. Writing with runes persisted. Runes continued to be used in certain areas of Sweden and Norway throughout the 19th century, particularly in Alvdalen, Dalarna, not far from Ohman’s home community of Forsa. Runic calendars such as this 1884 example now in Mora Museum, Dalarna, were in use until modern times. Some of the Kensington runes, such as ‘X’ for ‘A’ are characteristic of these late runic letters.

There was also a romantic interest in runes and runestones, evident in a runestone from Frösön, Sweden, erected in 1835 with the inscription: Den XXVII augusti MDCCCXXXV konung Carl XIV Johan belade här Jemtlands krigare (On the 27th of August 1835 King Carl XIV Johan here greeted the warriors of Jämtland).

Lately the Kensington inscription has received a new army of enthusiasts proclaiming the inscription to be genuine. Foremost among them is Richard Nielsen, a petroleum engineer with no linguistic training or knowledge of old Scandinavian languages. Although every Norse linguist has pinpointed the inscription as modern (Prominent among them are Oluf Rygh 1899, 1911; Sophus Bugge 1899, 1911; Gustaf Storm 1889, 1911; Adolf Noreen 1906, Helge Gjeising 1909; Gustaf Flom 1910, Chester N. Gould 1910, Magnus Olsen 1910; Gisli Bothne 1910; Marius Haegstad 1911; Ludwig Wimmer 1911; Otto von Friesen 1911; Sven B.F. Jansson 1949; Harry Andersen 1949-50; Erik Wahlgren 1958; Aslak Liestøl 1966; Claiborne Thompsen 1970s; James Knirk 1990s; B. Wallace 2000), Richard Nielsen, undaunted, has scoured medieval diplomaria and other documents for corroboration that the forms on the stone could be medieval exceptions from the norm. If Nielsen is right, the whole inscription is a collage of unique anomalies.

New Petrographic Studies

In the year 2000 the stone was subjected to a new petrographic study by Scott Wolters, a private geologist in St. Paul, Minnesota, and this study has now received wide publicity in Sweden. The study concludes that the runes do indeed cut through the weathering of the surface of the stone. Wolters calls this the “retooling” of the runes and says it must have happened shortly after it was found, presumably before the stone arrived in Chicago. The stone is currently being reexamined by Swedish geologists.

The Kensington Stone and Its Finder

Two things make it quite clear that the inscription is a joke, not a recording of a 1362 event: Ohman himself, and what is probably a paper draft of the inscription. Ohman has been portrayed by Holand and his followers as an uneducated, rough farmer, who could barely read or write, honest but dumb. People who knew Ohman, had a different view. His handwriting was schooled as can be seen from the examples that survive. He was known to send excuses in verse for his children to their school.

Unlike many of his neighbours, he was an avid reader and subscribed to Svenska Amerikanska Posten, which regularly published articles on matters of Swedish history. Many of these he cut out and assembled in a scrap book which has survived.

One of his best friends was Sven Fogelblad, a former Lutheran minister, educated at the University of Uppsala, who was deeply interested in Ethics and Philosophy and published a number of articles in the Svenska-Amerikanska Posten. These were also cut out by Ohman, who, according to his daughter, was interested in theosophy and "things of India.". The articles carry titles such as Vad är sanning? (What Is Truth?), Hvad menas med anarkism? (What Is Meant by Anarchism?), En utredning om fornuftets natur (An Analysis of the Nature of Intelligence), Bildning och kunskapsbeär (Education and the Thirst for Knowledge), and Uppäckts af bibliska minnesmärken i Palestina (Discovery of Biblical Antiquities in Palestine).

When Svenska Amerikanska Posten published Oscar Montelius’ Svenska Historia (History of Sweden) as installments from the fall of 1897 to February 1898, Ohman cut them out and had them bound into a book, signing his name and the date 1898 inside it. Both the articles and Montelius’ History are complex reading. The Montelius volume has 2312 illustrations, many of which are burial mounds and other antiquities. There are detailed discussions of runes and development of the Scandinavian languages. It also talks about Vinland voyages and refers to the Newport Tower.
Since 1891, Ohman also owned *Den kunskaprike skolmästaren* (The Knowledgeable School Master) by Carl Rosander, a book on Swedish language and language development. Among other things, it shows how the Lord’s Prayer changed over the centuries, from 1300 to 1646. In the language sample for the year 1300 is a phrase found on the Kensington stone, *Frælse os af illu. Amen*. The book also contains detailed discussions of the changes in runic writing. Ohman himself admitted that he knew something about runes, and coming from Forsa, he certainly had seen the nearby runestones there.

He was reasonably successful financially, at least until he bought his farm. Originally not a farmer but a stone mason and construction worker, he had saved enough money to return to Sweden for two years in 1884. He bought the farm in 1889, ten years after first arriving in Minnesota.

With his friends he was quite a joker, and Emil Mattson, the son of a neighbour, told of his grin showing a mouth full of white teeth. The same person testified to his skill with a chisel as Ohman helped his father drilling stones so that they could be blasted and used in building foundations. Another neighbour, John P. Gran, believing he was dying, confessed to his son that he had helped Ohman make the inscription.

**The paper copy of the inscription**

A paper copy of the inscription suggests that the stone was a planned joke. The author must have had detailed knowledge of runes since the copy includes accurate but alternate forms of runic spelling. The copy was mailed to *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* on January 1, 1899. The text, which was said to be a copy of the inscription, was in turn mailed to Professor O. J. Breda of the Scandinavian Department of the University of Minnesota.

It is uncertain who made the copy. The newspaper editor said that it was Ohman,
who sent it via John P. Hedberg, a real estate, travel, and insurance agent in Kensington. The paper later published a similar but different copy on February 28, much closer to the inscription than the first sketch.

The text on the paper copy is the same as on the stone. The spelling differs significantly. The variations, marked with rectangles in the illustration, include the following:

- NORR on the stone is written as NOR on the paper, followed by ‘;’ which separates all the words. On the stone, the second R has been written over the : sign.
- FRO on the stone is FROM on the paper. Whoever “copied” the inscription, be it Ohman or someone else in the local community, knew the correct rune for ‘M.’
- ENO on the stone is PE NE on the paper. Both are valid ways of writing “this”, and the person who changed ‘O’ to ‘E’ was familiar with the rune for ‘E’.
- The stone has RÖDE, the paper ROHDE. This is an example of silent correction, where the meaning, but the rune for Ö is so different from the rune for O that it cannot be a copyist’s error. The rune for Ö is in fact a post-1500 Dalecarlia rune.
- RISE on the stone is RESE on the paper, again with the correct rune for ‘E’.
- A couple of other minor deviations could be dismissed as a copyist’s error, for instance the common Dalecarlia rune for ‘A’ on the paper has two dots added on the stone, making it into an Å. However, the variety of legitimate alternate spellings suggests that this could have been a draft prepared for the inscription by someone intimately familiar with runes.

The Paul Knutsson letter

A letter signed in 1354 by King Magnus Eriksson of Norway is claimed to be historical verification of the Kensington expedition. The letter authorizes his birdman (retainer) Paul Knutsson to sail the royal knarr to Greenland for the honour of God… and for the sake of our predecessors, who in Greenland established Christianity and have maintained it to this time, and we will not let it perish in our days (English translation by H. Holand.).

According to this theory, the expedition, under Paul Knutsson, arrived in Greenland and, with the West Settlement abandoned, with rumours that the Norsemen had converted to a heathen religion, set out in pursuit. Travelling via Hudson Bay and various rivers, large and small, the expedition finally met its sad fate in Kensington.

The rumours of heathendom are now seen as an indication that the Greenland Norse chieftains persisted in their old pattern of control of the churches, a pattern that would appear pagan to the Norwegian church establishment.

The Paul Knutsson letter, which became known among Viking enthusiasts via Gustaf Storm’s 1888 Studies on the Vineland Voyages, is not an order to save Christianity among the Greenlanders. It exists only in a much later Danish translation, which, as has been pointed out by the runologist James Knirk and others, is faulty. The King’s interest in Greenland was potential taxes. King Magnus was in debt to the Pope, having used tithes to pay for a war with Russia instead of forwarding them to Rome. The letter is not a royal command but a protection letter, corresponding to a modern passport. There is no evidence that the expedition ever took place, let alone continued beyond Greenland to North America!

Another Runestone in Minnesota – The Barrett Lake Runestone

The interest in runic writing in the area is illustrated in the Barrett Lake runestone. This runestone was found in 1949 on a hill near Elbow Lake, not far from Kensington. The text states

ÅHR 1876
4 JUNGFUR
SAT LÄGER PÅ DHENA KULE
(Year 1876; 4 maidens; had a camp on this hill).

After a flurry of newspaper interest, the finder, a farmer by the name of Victor Setterlund, admitted to carving the stone.

Cluster of Norse Finds

Throughout North America there are three concentrations of artefacts, inscriptions, and sites reputed to be Norse: New England, with a subgroup in Oklahoma, the American Middlewest, and the Canadian Arctic. In addition there are also the finds from the L’Anse aux Meadows site in northern Newfoundland – which will be presented in a separate article.

The evidence in New England and Oklahoma is associated with the Vinland voyages and of a presumed 11th century date. The evidence in the Middlewest is generally referred to as “Viking” but is supposedly of post-Viking 14th century date, supporting the claim that the Kensington stone is genuine. Only the Arctic finds are plausible evidence of the Norse, lying in close proximity to the Greenland settlements.

Reputed finds of Viking Age or older finds

New England and Oklahoma

Carl Christian Rafn concluded that Vinland would be found in New England. His idea was uncritically accepted and still is. His chief criterion was the position of the sun on the shortest day of the year as stated in The Greenlanders’ Saga: the sun rose at the time of the morning meal and set at the time of the afternoon meal. The timing of meals can hardly provide a precise calculation for daylight hours. All we can say is that the shortest day of the year was longer than in either Greenland or Iceland.
Newport Tower
Carl Christian Rafn suggested that a small stone tower in Newport, Rhode Island, was a Norse round church. Extensive archaeological excavations in 1948 to 1949 yielded only mid-16th century and later material. In the late 1990s a Danish-Finnish research team confirmed the Colonial provenience via radiocarbon analysis of gas trapped in the mortar. The Danish architectural historian Johannes Hertz determined that the tower was built on the model of a windmill designed by Inigo Jones at Chesterton in Warwickshire, UK.

Heavener Runestone
A runic inscription was discovered in the late 1890s on a large, naturally upright slab of sandstone on the Poteau Mountain near Heavener, Oklahoma, close to the point where Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas and Louisiana intersect. The runes are in the Old Futhark except for two from a Viking Age futhark. This kind of mix is common in “modern” runic carvings, for instance in a boundary marker erected around 1900 at the farm Hesselberg in Ringerike, Norway, and others at Nølgården and Öxsjön in Västergötland, Sweden.

The Heavener runes can be read as either GAOMEDAT or GNOMEDAL. The letters are said to have had lichens growing on them at one time. When I saw the inscription the lichen was gone, but this could be due to the varys studies that had already gone on by that time.

The carver of the runes is unknown. Nomadal is a modern, i.e. post-1500 Norwegian name, its older equivalent being Naumdalir.

In the 1720s there was a German settlement led by a Swedish captain, Charles d’Arenbourg at present-day Hahnville, Louisiana. The two localities are connected via rivers. Could there have been a Norwegian in the settlement? It is more likely that the

Follins pond
The American writer Frederick J. Pohl believed that remains of posts in a gully at Follins Pond on Cape Cod formed the shoring for Leif Eriksson’s ship. The posts have been radiocarbon dated, by three separate radiocarbon laboratories and found to be no older than about two hundred years. Historical records show that the gully was a repair area for whaling and fishing boats in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Tor Bay Axe
Axe found at Tor Bay, Nova Scotia, said to be Viking. The semi-circles and dots on the blade were interpreted as secret magic runes from the Old Futhark, stating FHA BLE, meaning “Inscribed with magic runes to give divine protection.”

In reality, the marks are typical maker’s marks, touch marks. Axes of this shape were not made before the 17th century. They may have been used in whaling, to cut up the carcasses, as was done in the 19th century on the American west coast.
runes were carved in the 19th century, when interest in runes and things Norse blossomed in Scandinavia. There were Norwegian settlers in Texas from the 1840s on, and the Civil War also brought many Norwegian-born soldiers from the Midwest to the south.

Richard Nielsen believes that the text dates from around AD 600 and says that it is Primitive Germanic for GLOME fi, meaning Glom’s valley. One cannot help wondering how the Norse would have got there at a time when they barely had sailing ships, let alone ones that could cross an ocean.

The most recent, equally implausible, theory is that the inscription is a secret monument to the French explorer La Salle who died in the Poteau Valley in 1687.

The Poteau Inscription
A second inscription was found at Terry Hill, Poteau, near Heaven, in 1967. In this case the carvers also came to light when they read about the find in the media. Two boys, who had seen a picture of the Heavener runes in the local press, had carved them in the late 1930s, after they had their interest sparked by a movie about the Vikings.

The Beardmore find
Genuine Viking Age artifacts have been found in interior North America. This is a Norse sword, dating from the 9th or 10th century; an 11th-century axe, and a rangle, a rattle possibly used on horses.

A prospector claimed that he had found the objects in a grave on his mining claim near Beardmore in the 1930s in western Ontario. It was later proven that they had come from the basement of the prospector’s landlord. The landlord had obtained them from another tenant, a young Norwegian, Jens Bloch, whose father Andreas Bloch, a well known illustrator of heraldry, had owned a large collection of archaeological and historical weapons before it became illegal for private individuals to do so.

The Yarmouth stone
This stone from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, has been regarded as a runestone since the 1860s. The signs, which consist of irregular grooves and pits do not bear any resemblance to runes.

The Byfield runestone
The grooves on this stone at Byfield, Massachusetts, one of several similar stones, have been interpreted as the runes for JARTAR VAGR ØN SITU, translated into “Overland route, on set the stone.” In reality, the grooves are glacial striations, which have eroded. Examination of the stone reveals that the wide grooves continue to expand and end in finer cracks.

The Manana inscription
This “inscription” on Manana Island, outside the coast of Maine, is believed to be a runic inscription saying “I Veigle lay seven years, year Jesus 32 (1031 A.D.).” The sentence makes no sense. The cracks are neither runes, nor man-made. They consist of natural furrows, criss-crossing a red basalt vein enclosed in a large outcrop of bedrock. The furrows have eroded faster than the surrounding rock. A similar phenomenon at Runamo in Blekinge, Sweden, was also mistaken for a runic inscription in the 19th century when runology was in its infancy.
The Grave creek tablet

The small tablet found in 1838 in a huge indigenous Adena burial mound, the Grave Creek Mound, in Moundsville, West Virginia, caused quite a stir. It has been interpreted as Phoenician, Etruscan or Celtiberic by some, as Norse by others. According to the latter it contains the runes for “I knelt on meadow island, Ann’s Yule site, which is now a sanctuary that hoards holy thing.” All indications are that the tablet is a fake made to stir interest – and revenue – for the mound and the museum established inside it.

To be continued in the next issue, VHM 1/2004.

The Kensington Runestone now exhibited in Sweden

A sensational find or a hoax? This question has been discussed for more than one hundred years and is still as hot a topic as ever. In the year 1898 a farmer, Olof Öhman, found the stone in the roots of a tree on his farm in Kensington in Minnesota, USA. According to the carvings on it, the stone is from 1362 and carved by Norsemen from far away. For the first time the stone is now on display in Sweden, at the National Museum of Antiquities in Stockholm.

The exhibition

The Kensington runestone attracts great attention from both the public and press in Sweden. It has been discussed in newspapers and magazines and is now famous even in Sweden.

The opening ceremony of the exhibit took place at the museum and Mr Charles A. Heimbold Jr, U.S. Ambassador to Sweden, held the inaugural speech.

In his welcoming remarks Mr Kristian Berg, Director General of the Museum, stressed the fact that, whether true or false, the Kensington runestone acts as a strong symbol for identity – and as a cultural heritage – for many Scandinavian-American immigrants and their descendants in the USA.

Besides displaying the runestone, the exhibition shows some other interesting artefacts like rune calendars with pentadic (Roman) number symbols and some copies of finds from L’Anse aux Meadows Viking-period settlement in Canada.

Examinations

The day after the opening a conference about the stone was held at the Museum. It will also be examined by leading Swedish geologists and runologists during its time in Sweden.

A scientific reading of the stone has already been done by a group of runologists led by Henrik Williams, professor at the Dept. of Scandinavian Languages at Uppsala University, Sweden. The runologists did not find any sensational new readings but consider the earlier American examinations as correct on the whole. Yet, some interesting observations were made. Some small mistakes were found as well as their noticing that the carver of the stone was not a clever rune carver. But primarily they discussed

BY KALLE RUNSRISTARE,
RUNE CARVER

On October 17, 2003 a group met to study the well-known Kensington runestone in the National Museum of Antiquities in Stockholm. As a present-day rune carver my mission in this group was trying to interpret the work with the help of my own experiences and knowledge.

The rune inscription of the Kensington stone is well composed, the lines are even and the surfaces have been used fully. I judge that the rune inscription was planned in advance then painted on the stone to be later cut.

At least two cape chisels have been used. A pointed one for the dots and the bow parts on some of the arms of the runes. The other had a 5 mm broad edge and was used mostly for straight chopping notches, but also for bowing arms with less successful results. Even if the tools were small, the runes were too detailed for the stone not to break during the work, and nearly all the runes had the surface cracked between body and arms.

On line 2 a new problem seems to emerge. A part of the surface of the stone, where line 2 naturally would have started, could have been changed. Perhaps the rune carver discovered too late that the area had a “miss”, a loose cavity. To avoid this delicate area the runes on line 2 and 3 can have been moved to the right, where the runes that lost their places were instead pressed into line 4 and

About the author

Birgitta Linderoth Wallace is Senior Archaeologist Emeritus with Parks Canada in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Born and raised in Sweden and educated at University of Uppsala and Kansas University, her expertise has focussed on the Norse in North America. She has been responsible for much of Parks Canada’s archaeological work at L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site. Before coming to Canada, she was employed by Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States. While there, she conducted a systematic investigation into all reputed evidence of the Norse throughout North America. This article reports on some of that evidence.

REFLECTION
how to interpret the meaning of the runes. The conclusion of the runological investigation is that there are many reasons to go on researching the stone.

A preparatory geological examination of the stone has also been done. Earlier this year American geologist Scott Walter has carried out an investigation that shows that the stone has been exposed to natural forces for many hundreds of years, which could imply that the stone is older than the 18th century. In his investigation he compared the decomposition of the stone with gravestones from the 19th century.

Swedish geologist, Runo Lövendahl says that the stone is worth another investigation. This applies particularly to the shape of the runes, possible supplementary workings and chemical transformations. Unfortunately earlier cleaning, washing with different kinds of detergents and plaster casts will make further investigations more difficult. He and his group hope to be able to study the stone more closely in January, before it travels back to the Runestone Museum in Alexandria, Minnesota.

The riddle of the Kensington stone
Is the stone from 1362 as carved on it, or is it a fake from the 1800s? The answer to the riddle of the Kensington stone has been sought for more than one hundred years.

Immediately after Olof Öhman found it, it was judged to be a fake by experts in USA. Öhman got the stone back and placed it face down outside an outhouse as a step on which he frequently straightened out nails. An amateur researcher, Hjalmar Holland, traced it and bought the stone for a few dollars. He carved his initials in it and then commenced a life-long tour with it. Öhman was never freed from his label of forger.


The Swedish National Museum of Antiquities has published a special issue of "Historical News", all about the Kensington Runestone. This issue (both in Swedish and English) can be downloaded from www.historsk.se

For more information, see
• In this issue, the article Vikings in North America by Birgitta Linderoth Wallace.
• VHM 2/2002
• www.runestonemuseum.org

In the next issue VHM 1/04 we hope to be able to publish some results from the latest investigations of the stone.

Kylen Runristare has a website, available also in English www.runristare.se

UPON THE KENSINGTON RUNESTONE

especially lines 5 and 6. From line 7 and on it looks like the original painting is the basis for the carved runes.

Interpretation of this part can become clearer upon later examination, hopefully done by the beginning of 2004, before the stone leaves Sweden.

Whoever carved the Kensington stone was most likely inexperienced. If the same carver had cut one more stone, the runes would certainly have been bigger and more well carved. The poorly carved runes of the Kensington stone do not exclude that the rune carver is well informed of runic letters, it only shows that the carver was unfamiliar with cutting in stone.

Just cutting the Kensington stone ought to have taken one to two days. Adding the time for planning and the time it might have taken to change the placement of the rune inscription, the whole task should have taken almost a week, maybe more, depending on the extent of planning.

Maybe the Kensington stone's greatest worth is as an unsolved mystery…

During the last hundred years many have spent a great deal of time researching both the emigration from the North Europe during the 19th century as well as the possibility that the Norse visited North America long before Columbus. Maybe this research would not have taken place if the Kensington stone had not been carved.

I, myself, think that the group of Norse who settled in the north of Newfoundland in the 11th century went further south. We know that they both had the contacts and possibility to travel further, so there ought to be more to find in North America.

Maybe not until the military's satellite images with high resolution are combined with advanced computers that the traces of the Norse can be discovered in the landscape, settlements, graves and wharf foundations to unveil where the Norse went. Perhaps not until then can the riddle of the Kensington rune stone be solved.

http://vikings.hgo.se
By John S. Hull

In Canada, the Learning and Enrichment Travel Alliance (LETA), established in 2002, argues that today’s traveler is seeking experiences, which will provide them with a greater insight, increased understanding and a personal connection to the people and places visited. Trends in

Meeting point of different times...

Photo: Courtesy of the VTTA.

the growth of tourism reveal that travelers are increasingly interested in vacations with authentic, hands-on or interactive learning experiences featuring themes such as adventure, anthropology, archaeology, arts, culture, cuisine, forestry, nature, spirituality, sports, wine and wildlife.

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador on Canada’s east coast, one of the popular travel destinations is the Viking Trail. The Viking Trail encompasses the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland and southern Labrador. It is the province’s largest themed touring route, a driving route of approximately 550 kilometers. Boreal forests, alpine plateaus and sub-Arctic terrain support a diverse flora and fauna. Icebergs and whales are common in the summer months.

There are numerous points of interest including two UNESCO World Heritage Sites. At Gros Morne National Park of Canada, the geology of the park illustrates the concept of plate tectonics, one of the most important ideas in modern science while at L’anse aux Meadows National Historic Site of Canada, the earliest known European settlement in the New World highlights the Viking lifestyle, artifacts, and the archaeological discovery of the site.

The rich natural and cultural assets of the Viking Trail have brought an increasing number of visitors to the region.

From 1996 to 2000, the provincial tourism industry grew by approximately 40% with 416,500 non-resident visitors spending $287 million (Cdn). During the same period, visitation at Parks Canada sites along the Viking Trail reflected provincial growth trends.

The Viking Site at L’anse aux Meadows witnessed the most dramatic increase in visitors from 20,000–35,000. The 2000 Millennium celebrations, marking the arrival of the Vikings in North America in 1000 AD, helped to spur growth and interest in the region. As a result, in 2003, even with the SARS scare in central Canada and the events in the Middle East, visitation levels continue to match 2002 levels as other regions of Canada are witnessing declines in visitation and revenues.

In an effort to help manage tourism development along the Viking Trail, the Viking Trail Tourism Association (VTTA) was founded in 1988. The association represents the interests of approximately one hundred and fifty businesses that are committed to developing a sustainable industry of the highest possible quality.
Based Travel Opportunities

through partnership.

The VTTA promotes and markets the region primarily through media and travel trade programs and is now working with communities and organizations along the Viking Trail and internationally in developing high quality experience-based travel opportunities for visitors.

In August 2003, the VTTA and Parks Canada will organize a weekend of Viking activities at L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site and Norstead.

In 2004, through a partnership with Parks Canada and the Destination Viking Sagalands project based in Iceland, a “Sagas of Discovery” learning vacation will offered. The seven-day tour will include informative lectures by Viking specialist, Dan Carlsson, Assistant Professor at Gotland University and coordinator of Council of Europe’s Viking Routes Initiative. There will also be supplemental programs by Parks Canada specialists.

The VTTA and Parks Canada will also host a workshop in November 2004 on Viking interpretation and training techniques for the Destination Viking Sagalands project partners.

Through these recent initiatives, the VTTA is hoping to increase local revenues, provide employment opportunities and promote local partnerships to strengthen the tourism industry on the Viking Trail. Creating an international network of contacts is also a priority to increase local knowledge and understanding of Viking history and exploration and to provide high quality experiences for visitors.

**About the author**

John S. Hull, completed his Ph D in tourism geography at McGill University in 1998 and is the Executive Director of the Viking Trail Tourism Association in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Email: jhull@vita.nf.ca
The third ordinary partner meeting of Destination Viking Baltic Stories proved to be a very intensive and productive event, where the participants, at some point dressed up as thralls, really had to work for their food!

By Geir Sør-Reime
Senior Advisory Officer, Rogaland County Council (Norway), Project Consultant to the Destination Viking Project

Destination Viking Baltic Stories is a project focusing on Viking history presented by living re-enactors, Vikings, at reconstructed Viking farms. It has now been running for a year. At this third partner meeting, it was time to look back to assess what we have achieved so far, and to look forward, to assure that the project will fulfil its obligations and objectives within the coming two years.

Before the meeting started, Mr Kaare Johannessen, Curator of the Museum at Trelleborg welcomed the delegates from Sweden, Norway and Denmark to the museum and served mead as a welcome drink.

Immediately thereafter, the first working session commenced. After a short introduction by Mr Björn Jakobsen, the project manager, Mr Kim Nyborg from the Museum at Trelleborg reported and led us through the discussion of Work Package 3, replicas and re-enactors.

The discussion centred on a number of issues, several of which were discussed in more detail at the concluding seminar. The question of quality is a vital one for museums/villages working with re-enactment. As many re-enactors are volunteers, an awareness process is necessary to raise the level of quality understanding. The network would like to produce a number of guidelines/recommendations and fact sheets that could facilitate this process.

The discussions continued with the other Work Packages. Work Package 1 deals with house reconstructions. Thomas Sundsmyr and Kristina Carlsson from Ale Municipality reported. They have adapted the quality assessment manual to their reconstruction project, and have found the simplified and revised version of great value. A seminar on reconstructions will be organised in conjunction with the next ordinary meeting in Ale in May 2004.

Work Package 2 deals with sites and monuments from the Viking Age. Several partners have already started working on their own local/regional Viking routes, linking their Viking villages/museums with remains from the Viking period in their vicinity. Svend Rosborn from Foteviken Museum reported that he has taken overall photos of all villages participating in the
Trelleborg

project, and of numerous other Viking sites.

Work Package 5 concerns marketing. Several initiatives have already been taken, and our partners will now revise their marketing strategies to incorporate the Destination Viking potential.

The Work Package 4 projects of the planned book on Viking attractions around the Baltic Sea and supporting this magazine fit well into the marketing strategy of our project.

While at Trelleborg, the partners were also taken on a full-day excursion in the surrounding area. We started in Korsør, the town where we stayed. This town was founded around 1380 as a royal stronghold and trading town on Storebælt, the sound between Seeland and Funen.

Then we went on to the town’s immediate predecessor, the township of Tårnborg, “Tower Castle”. Only a huge heap remains of the royal castle here, built around 1200. The town itself was probably established around 1050 AD. It lies a bit up river from Storebælt, and the problems of access for larger ships were the probable reason for its move to Korsør around 1380.

We went on to see the site where the Viking-age seasonal trading settlement was located, at Hyllehavn (Elder Harbour). On route we looked into Gørlev Church, where a huge stone with two long runic inscriptions was found underneath the entrance in 1921.

Our next destination was the royal farm beside Lake Tisso. At the main farm, Fugledegaard, several huge Viking-age buildings remains have been unearthed. The manor was at its height around 900 AD, although the oldest houses here date from around 650 AD. The settlement here lasted until around 1020–30 AD. A new manor was established close by around 1100. One interesting point is that the buildings found beside Tisso constitute the models for the house reconstructions currently being built in Ale municipality, one of our partners.

Next stop was at Lejre, the centre for archaeological research and experiments. Here we looked closer at their educational area, and also at their living history concepts.

Our final stop was the Viking Ship museum in Roskilde. The reconstruction of the Skuldelev 2 ship is currently nearing its completion, and is already a very impressive sight.

As a farewell from Denmark, all participants assembled in Viking costumes for a guided tour through the Trelleborg area, including the museum, the fortified settlement itself, the reconstructed house and the educational area. The finale was a big Viking feast in the Trelleborg house.
Ancient handicrafts part VI

From Ale Viking Age Project

Reproducing tools using evidence from ancient wooden artefacts

By Johannes Jägrud and Magnus Börjesson
Carpenter and Instructors for construction of the Ale Viking Age Farmstead

Ale Viking Age Project
The Viking Age farmstead is now starting to take shape up on the hill! The project is called Ale Viking Age and is being run by the municipality of Ale, Sweden, in collaboration with the European Social Fund (ESF). The municipality of Ale lies along the Göta älv river, about 30 kilometres north of Göteborg (Gothenburg).

We are building a post and plank building, which will be a craftsman’s workshop, and a stave-structured dwelling house. Our construction work is based on authenticity following the latest scientific research into handicraft traditions according to a specially formulated quality concept where all work is carried out in consultation with constructors, archaeologists, carpenters and project managers.

Recreating Viking-age tools
We have been working for more than two years on the Ale Viking Age Farmstead project and, during this time, the task of constructing our wooden structures has presented us with numerous different problems that have needed solving. In many cases, we already know what the results should be, but we don’t know how to achieve them. We have arrived at the results by meticulously studying different tool marks. However, we only have vague ideas when it comes to the actual appearance of the tools.

By means of a longer process that has involved studying marks and traces made by tools in medieval archaeological finds or surviving ancient buildings, we have now succeeded in recreating credible Viking-age tools. In consultation with our archaeologist, we are also studying finds of Viking-age tools that could very probably have left such traces.

It might seem a simple matter just to make an identical copy of these tools. In most cases, however, the original tool is in pieces and corroded, and any wooden handle that the tool might have had is now missing. This makes the process much more difficult. The most important parts of cutting-edge tools, such as the shape of the edge, its length, curvature or which side the bevel is on, are the ones that disappear first since they are usually the thinnest parts. Which means that even reproductions have to been tested for some time before achieving satisfactory results. The edge often needs to be altered. In some cases, it is necessary to forge the entire tool again until it proves more functional.

The project is working in collaboration with a skilled blacksmith, with whom we have discussed our ideas and thoughts on the purpose and aesthetics of the tools. As a result of these discussions and thanks particularly to the smith’s tremendous, personal interest in the purpose and use of the tools, we have been able to achieve some highly successful results.

We have to adopt a slightly different method of approach in those cases where we don’t have any tool finds to rely on. In order to be able to understand what the tool ought to have looked like, it is necessary to have considerable craftsmanship experience as well as

When the surface is illuminated at an oblique angle, it is possible to see the furrows made by the draw knife along the sides of the groove. Photograph: Magnus Börjesson.

Spoon auger, spokeshave. Lying at the bottom draw knife. Copyright: Ale Viking Project.
knowledge of the characters of wood and metal. There are many obvious aspects hidden in the practical purpose and aesthetics that even the experienced artisan is unable to fathom, which consequently means that some of the prototypes turn out to be no good at all.

Programme

In order to achieve the most credible results possible, we have chosen a method of working that consists of several stages. First of all, we ask ourselves the following question: What is the purpose and do we have any idea of what the end result should be?

Then we peruse literature and visit museums and surviving ancient building (e.g. stave churches) in search of useful information. Can we find any evidence of the tools that were used? If we do manage to find something, we then try to imagine what the tool that produced these traces and evidence might have looked like. To be able to do this, it is essential to be knowledgeable in the nature and character of the wood and know what happens, for instance, when different types of tools are used? Was the surface of the wood cut, shaved, scraped or sawn? We then try to get hold of tools from archaeological finds that match the ideas we have about the tool’s appearance and use. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we don’t.

Some examples:

Draw knife

We needed a tool to make the groove (a longitudinal channel) on one side of the stave boards that we will be using to make the walls of the dwelling-house. We were able to see, in some of the stave churches that still exist today, that some boards had been worked using a small, curved, cutting tool. On the basis of this discovery, we started to look for finds of iron that may possibly have been used for this purpose.

One tool that might have been used for this could have been a gouge, but since the tool marks are also clearly visible on the side of the groove on some of the material we examined, we can eliminate the gouge as an alternative here.

After searching through literature, on the Internet and having discussed the matter with other craftsmen, we found something that may possibly have been used. The Swedish Museum of National Antiquities houses the entire "Mästermyr" find, see VHM 3/2000 (eds. note), which includes a 120–150 mm long and 10–15 mm wide iron object, with a small, flattened hook at one end. The tang is bent at an angle of about 30 degrees some 30 mm from the hook’s outer edge. This small tool, termed a ‘moulding iron’ by the museum, is probably the one we were looking for. We consulted the blacksmith about this tool, discussed how it may have been made and our thoughts on the appearance of the blade.

On our first attempt at reproducing this tool, the bevelled edge was on the outside of the hook. This proved to work well for making grooves that were slightly wider than the tool itself, but not for making such narrow grooves as those we needed to produce. These are only 20–22 mm at the widest point and become narrower deeper down. So instead, we had to make the bevelled edge on the inside. This was a fiddly and time-consuming job that had to be done using a small, round file and a little, semicircular whetstone. The end result was exactly what we were looking for. Long, fine, semicircular, deep cuts both on the sides and along the base of the groove.

On several of the older stave boards that we examined, the groove was wider a bit further down and, since the tool’s cutting part (hook) makes it possible to cut along the side of the groove, it was also possible to achieve this or rather an effect that comes of its own accord depending on the character of the wood.

Our end results closely matched the finds and the boards that we had studied. This means that it is highly likely that the tools discovered at Mästermyr could have been used for this very purpose.
Spokeshave
After visiting different medieval timbered and stave churches in Norway and Sweden, we were able to establish that, after they had been hewn, the wood surfaces had been planed. We can see that the finished surfaces in churches demanded greater care and precision than those in secular buildings.

For us, this was an extremely interesting discovery, because the project had decided that the surfaces we would be working on should be made as smooth as possible. When we scanned the planed surfaces of the preserved medieval wooden material, we could establish that the marks made by the plane were somewhat concave and we could see that the plane had jumped slightly, creating horizontal lines that gave a wash-board effect. The surfaces were gently undulated in depth too, which implies that the tool had a short sole.

We guessed that this had been achieved using something similar to a spokeshave. We found out that a steel blade dating from the 980s had been found at Trelleborg in Denmark. Unfortunately, however, the handle or shaft of the tool was completely missing. According to the researchers at Roskilde museum, this steel was used solely for spokeshaves.

In consultation with our smith, we reproduced some very functional steel planes. When it came to the shape and design of the original steel blade, our interpretation was that the cross-section of the tangs had been rectangular and slightly conical, which made it easier to attach the steel without using wooden wedges. No shaft had been found, but sound, practical experience stands in good stead.

We experimented with the steel blade's angle of attachment and the angle of the sole, persevering until we achieved the best result, which was when the steel was pushed right down to the bottom so that the corners of the bit were bearing on the sole with a long edge on the outer side of the steel. When the steel had become shorter through wear and grinding down, the sole had to be planed down to the right level instead of moving the steel out and wedging it in place.

Drill
Building construction is about putting a number of parts together to make larger, more or less complex structures. One way of joining these parts is to dowel or nail them together. This method of joining almost always requires there to be round holes in the wooden sections. And in order to make round holes, you need some sort of drill or auger. What did a drilling tool or auger look like in the Viking Age, and how effective were they?

To find out what the Viking Age drill looked like and gather more details than the archaeological finds could give us, we first tried studying holes. A hole is actually just a specific point at which some material is missing. Yet a hole can also tell us quite a lot about the appearance and use of the tool that made it. It can be very difficult to see tool marks inside a hole and it is therefore preferable to saw through the hole to produce a cross-section. With a bit of luck, you are then able to see the marks made by the rotational movement of the tool, how much was cut away with each turn and what the cross-section of the drill looked like (if the hole does not go all the way through).

Drilling tools from the Viking Age have been discovered at a number of sites, including Mästermyr and Hedeby, so there is good evidence of what these tools looked like. But how were they used and how were they honed? To answer these questions, it is important to study the holes that were created using so-called 'spoon augers'. We had augers of different sizes made and honed them to see if the results corresponded with the discoveries we had made when studying artefacts. If we weren't satisfied with the results, we simply honed the auger slightly differently and tried again.

We have found both drills and holes that have been of parallel thickness and conical. The conical drills are much heavier to use for boring since the sides of the drill also have to be made for cutting and a wooden cross-shaft, or auger, had to be used.

On the other hand, the conical drill makes a tapering hole provided you don't drill all the way through. This allows you to hammer in a wooden nail that, thanks to the tapering shape of the hole, sits firmly in place without the need for any wedges. This saves a lot of work and it is not so important for the wooden nail to be of an exact size. In Granhult's church, dating from the 1200s, the ceiling rafters are joined together using this very technique.
A “Northern Periphery” project: The Viking Trail

Conservation of an early Norse farm at Narsaq, South Greenland

BY HANS KAPEL AND RIE OLDENBURG

Background
At the millennium celebration of Leif Ericson’s voyage to Vinland much attention was directed to the two most important groups of ruins found in the former Eastern Settlement, the Norsemen’s Brattahlid and Gardar (present-day Qassiarsuk and Igaliku). These two have already been subjected to thorough archaeological investigations.

Gardar was excavated by the National Museum of Denmark in 1926 (Poul Nørlund and Aage Roussell), while the excavations in Brattahlid took place in 1932 (Poul Nørlund and Mårten Stenberger). Once the excavations were completed, the two ruin sites were restored according to the standard of the day. Efforts at upkeep since then have been modest. Resource allotments over the years for this purpose have been very limited, a fact clearly evident at the ruin sites as they appear today.

There is a need for thorough and contemporary restoration and care of the Greenlandic cultural heritage, comprising not only Norse ruins, but certainly also the numerous findings that witness to the various aboriginal population waves that have found their way to Greenland long before the 10th century settlers came from Iceland.

The National Museum & Archives of Greenland has the general responsibility for the protection of Greenland’s cultural heritage. Notwithstanding, over the last few years, a couple of local (municipal) museums in South Greenland have taken it upon themselves to remedy the lack of initiatives in highlighting the historical landmarks that are hidden away under the sod and heather. For example, since 1998, Narsaq Museum has prepared a project, the goal of which is to restore the ruins of one of the of the oldest Norse settlements in Greenland, the so-called Landnáma Farm, right in the middle of Narsaq town.

Here, we want to relate the preliminary investigations that have taken place, as well as the plans for a more formal conservation in the years to come.
The Landnáma Farm in Narsaq

Since the end of the 19th century, it has been known for a fact that the Norsemen settled on the lowland promontory at the site of present-day Narsaq (in Greenlandic, "narsaq" means "plain"). Recent discoveries show that aboriginal hunters had been living in this area long before the Norse settlements, but no traces of their dwellings are to be found any longer. Until the mid-20th century, Norse ruins could still be seen where Narsaq cemetery is now located. Unfortunately, because of the rapid development of the township, all such remains have now disappeared. However, the location of the Norse farm can still be observed on aerial photos, and the light of a late afternoon sun still makes its contours vaguely discernable in the terrain.

In the 1950’s, another group of ruins were found above the shoreline of a shallow bay on the southern edge of town. The findings took place during construction work in connection with building a sheep slaughterhouse. Unfortunately, the remains of these Norse buildings were so badly eroded that they were deemed unfit for research. Consequently, they were exempt from the otherwise automatic legal conservation clause that is meant to protect all important findings of an archaeological nature.

Vebæk’s excavations

When, a few years, later people began to dig up dirt for their private gardens at that same place, many interesting things were found. The National Museum was called in, and authorities agreed to re-evaluate the matter to see whether these ruins might qualify for conservation measures after all.

In 1956, the archaeologist, C.L.Vebæk initiated a closer investigation of the finds. The largest of the ruins proved to be the habitation unit of the farm, and it did not take long time to verify that, in fact, it was in a much better state for conservation than originally estimated. Also, local conditions for the preservation of organic materials proved to be unusually favourable, and the ruin actually did contain a considerable number of interesting finds. However, in other respects, the archaeological challenge turned out to be much greater than first estimated, and as it turned out, there was neither time nor money to complete the excavations that year.

Due to the size and expense of this project, progress has been slow. Until 1964, only the farm dwelling and one small stable had been excavated. In the area as a whole, remains of no less than 10 buildings have been identified. However, to this day, only one of these ten has been formally protected. The rest were considered destroyed and were deemed to have no historical value. At the termination of this round of investigations, the excavated sites were left without cover of any kind, and use of the area was left to the discretion of the slaughterhouse.

For a number of reasons, the results of Vebæk’s excavations were not published until 1993. Inspired by his work, and further motivated by the growing number of tourists showing an interest in the history of Greenland and its heritage from the Middle Ages, Narsaq Museum decided to look into the possibility of a full-scale restoration of the ruins. Especially the dwelling house is interesting because of its many unique architectural details, as shown by Vebæk’s excavations. A plan for the restoration of that ruin was adopted, and preliminary investigations were conducted in 1998. Since then four seasons of archaeological work have been completed in order to verify exactly how much of the original structures has survived.

Preliminary investigations

Since the completion of the excavations in 1964, the site has changed in appearance. Today, only someone with Vebæk’s working papers at hand and who knows the history of the place, will be in a position to identify the various remains. The deepest of Vebæk’s excavation ditches have been filled up, and low mounds indicate the house-walls of old. The exact position of the walls is clear only in the northern part of the ruin where stone structures prevail.

The primary goal of the preliminary investigations has been to relocate the rest of the excavated buildings and examine their state of conservation. It has proven necessary to conduct extensive trial excavations in the uneven surroundings of the ruin in order to establish exactly what part of the terrain contains remains of the original buildings, and what on the other hand turns out to be nothing but recent mounds of dirt.

These preliminary excavations have presented new data, capable of supplementing earlier observations. Also, samples collected throughout the process will hopefully be able to shed some light on the exact dating of the various sections of the building. The work was completed in the summer of 2003, and the way has now been cleared for the restoration proper of the ruin.

The architecture

The basic design of the structure, as well as the fact that this dwelling house has been built apart from the buildings connected to the farm’s economic activities, indicate that we are dealing with a very early settlement. Vebæk’s work has established that it is a two-storey building in question. Vebæk himself thought that the middle part of the structure – containing the fireplace – must have been the first built. He saw it as the remains of a traditional longhouse of the type that was in use during the very first settlement period, a view corroborated by several of the archaeological finds. Later on, the southern room would have been added, and later still, the addition to the north.

Recent C-14 datings have proven that the oldest building blocks date from before 1000 AD, i.e. all the way back to the time when Eric the Red settled in Greenland – a fact which lends even more importance to this ruin.

Vebæk’s work has brought many unusual details to our attention, such as the in-house stone-covered sewer system. Undoubtedly, the general humidity of the terrain being a general problem, the primary function of this system has been to contain the water that kept seeping down from the fields above the house and prevent it from flooding the floors.

It seems that the settlers had been able to turn the liability of uncontrolled water abundance into an advantage. Water supply for the household was never a problem, and at the same time, the ditches under the floor level have taken care of the surplus water, assuming a sewer function of their own.

The documentation left by Vebæk seems to show that the house ruin was dug all the way through down to the floor level. But with the work now completed, it seems that actually many of the stone-covered ditches were left untouched.

Restoring the ruin

Existing plans to restore the ruin imply that all traces of earlier excavations and later use of the area be removed. The idea is to clean up the floor in all the rooms so as to expose the water supply and sewage system, the fireplaces and other noticeable architectural details.

For the most part the walls have been built using turf and stones and have only been conserved a few places. When the restoration is completed, new low turf walls (one meter high) will show their position. The trial excavations of 2002 and 2003 have demonstrated that in spite of Vebæk’s thorough investigations, valuable finds are still to be made.

Cleaning up the floor, as explained above, will be done manually as a purely archaeological challenge, whereas levelling the terrain outside the walls of the old building will, for all practical purposes, be undertaken using appropriate machinery.

"The Viking Trail"

Restoring the Landnáma Farm is part of a Narsaq Museum project called “Saga and Storytelling”, sponsored by the Northern Periphery Programme and financed by EU. This project also deals with the popularisation of Norse history in a new information centre, in various websites and in a number of new and innovative tourist initiatives. Among the latter, so-called “cultural trails” also give rise to economic development at a local level.

At the same time, a restored Landnáma Farm will function as an integrated part of the general development and improvement of the service extended to that well motivated group of tourists who take a special interest in Norse history – a timely service to supplement the offers which the municipality of Narsaq has already assembled in a program called “Viking Trail – Greenland”. That trail leads on to far-flung places, in the great fiords and mountainous expanses of South Greenland and further afield, wherever the Vikings went.

In this way, the Northern Periphery Programme affords us a possibility of enhancing the quality of our local work, while at the same time giving a small museum the opportunity to take part in trans-national cooperation together with partners from the entire North Atlantic area.

About the authors

Archaeologist Hans Kapel is former museum inspector at the National Museum in Copenhagen.
He leads the work of restoring the Landnáma Farm in Narsaq on behalf of Narsaq Museum, and has been in charge from its commencement.

Rie Oldenburg is the manager of Narsaq Museum, NPP-partner.
Norstead, A Viking Port of Trade

Out of the exhibit case and into the hands of visitors...

BY ANGIE ELLIOTT,
MANAGER NORSTEAD

L’Anse aux Meadows, NL Canada – It seems that the community of L’Anse aux Meadows in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador Canada has its own little Viking trade town. Norstead, a recreated Viking Age port of trade is a living history attraction that is owned and operated by the Viking Trail Tourism Association.

The attraction was developed as part of the Vikings! 1000 Years Celebrations held in 2000 to mark the 1000 year anniversary of Leif Eiriksson’s arrival to Vinland. It was part of a series of events that saw nearly 200 international Viking re-enactors live on site for intervals of two weeks and saw 13 Viking ships from all over the world participate in the Viking Sail fleet. Two of the ships included the Lisendijngur, which now resides in Iceland and the Snorri, which now calls Norstead her home.

Norstead, A Viking Port of Trade was created to take history out of the exhibit case and place it in the hands of visitors. Costumed interpreters are situated throughout the site to interpret a range of activities as they relate to the Viking Age. One can visit the Chieftain’s Hall and listen to mysterious Viking tales told by the Chieftain or learn to cook a flatbread over the open fire. The blacksmith demonstrates iron forging and how various implements were made.

One can step aboard our full-scale replica Viking ship, Snorri, and learn how the Norse mastered the North Atlantic by using a simple notched stick to measure distance by the stars. Our potter moulds clay into pottery the way Vikings did and our spinner spins sheep fleece into yarn using a drop spindle. The yarn is then dyed using local plants and berries and woven into cloth at the loom.

Being that Norstead is a Viking living history attraction, the site depicts life as it would have been in any of the Scandinavian countries circa 790-1066 AD.

The site is inhabited by some 15 costumed interpreters who bring it to life using first and third person narration. These interpreters were all trained in Heritage Interpretation at the College of The North Atlantic in nearby St. Anthony. They were then all instructed in “Interpreting the Viking Age” by a member of the Ontario Scandinavian Canadian Association from Canada. During the training, all participants were taught a variety of skills as they relate to the Viking Age and have since each concentrated on making one or two of them their area of expertise at Norstead.

Norstead is currently in its 4th season of operation and visitation has already seen a 20% increase from last season. The attraction is partnering with the L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site of Canada, the only authenticated Viking settlement in North America, on a number of new initiatives. Now visitors can purchase a coupon that will allow access to both sites. As well, the two sites will be developing joint training workshops for interpreters and are also taking part in the Destination Viking Sagalands Project.

Staff of Norstead and the L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site of Canada have traveled to Europe twice in 2003 to take part in a series of workshops on saga trails and Viking museums. The visits have been a great learning experience and staff are looking forward to the next workshop in the Shetland and Orkney Islands in January 2004.
What do you imagine when you hear the word “Viking”? If what you think of is a warrior, a raider, and a looter, you might want to be in Philadelphia next April for a different, more modern view of Vikings and their international culture.


Vikings traded and settled from Russia to North America, and founded or contributed to societies in Iceland, Russia, France, Ireland, and the North Atlantic islands. They made important advances in navigation and ship building, founded a democratic society in Iceland, and that culture produced the sagas about life in Iceland and elsewhere in the Viking world that people still read today.

This symposium will examine several aspects of Viking history and culture that are overlooked by the prevailing popular image of Vikings merely as warriors and raiders. Topics include Viking nation-building (Russia), the democratic culture of Iceland that produces the sagas, important ship building and navigational advances, the roles women played in Viking society, and Norse efforts to settle in North America around the year 1000 C.E.

The program features prominent students of Viking culture from Canada, Sweden, and the United States. Birgitta Lindroth Wallace will speak about The Archaeology of L'Anse aux Meadows, and Norse Efforts to Settle North America. Dr. Wallace, formerly a Parks Canada archaeologist, is well known for her study of the Viking site at L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland. William Miller, University of Michigan Law School, will speak about The Icelandic Culture That Produced the Sagas. John Hale, University of Louisville, will present Viking Ship Construction and Navigation. Jenny Jochens, Towson University, will speak about Women in Viking Society. Dan Carlson, Center for Baltic Studies, Gotland University, Sweden, will discuss The Eastern Face of Viking Culture: Founding Russia, Exploring to Constantinople. Ruth M. Karras, University of Minnesota, will provide a summary of the day’s program.

The Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation has provided major funding for the symposium. It is also supported by generous grants from the Elis Olsson Memorial Foundation, Volvo Group North America, Inc., Viking Termite & Pest Control, Inc., and other corporate sponsors.

For information about the symposium, contact:

The ASHM, American Swedish Historical Museum
1900 Pattison Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19145, USA
Phone 215.389.1776, fax 389.7701, email ashm@libertynet.org
website: www.americanswelsh.org
LEVS, Leif Ericson Viking Ship, Inc
Phone 302.656.3257, fax 656.8414, email info@vikingship.org
website, www.vikingship.org

The Leif Eriksson Runestone

The Leif Eriksson runestone is certainly one of the most recent runestones to have been raised in North America.

On July 28, 2000, the Viking Trail Tourist Association (VTTA) in Newfoundland had this rune stone raised at L’Anse aux Meadows to commemorate Leif Eriksson’s exploration of North America. This happened the same day as several Viking ships sailed into the bay where Leif Eriksson is supposed to have landed.

The stone was chiseled by a rune carver, Kalle Runristare, in Sweden on the island of Adelsö, 50 km west of Stockholm in Lake Mälaren. It was then shipped by boat to Canada.

The rune stone is a beautiful piece of Vätö granite weighing nearly two tons. On top is a solar compass, a copy of a find from Greenland, surrounded by sunrays, or a cross, if you prefer. Everything is suspended from the rune-carrying dragon. Under the solar compass, there is a Viking ship, a copy of the VTTA logo. VTTA = Viking Tourist Trail Association.

The inscription reads:

VTTA and Barbara Genge raised stone to commemorate the exploration of North America by Leif Eriksson in the year one thousand. Kalle rista.

(rista = carve)

At that time Barbara Genge was the Executive Director of the Viking Trail Tourism Association in Newfoundland. The “Kalle” in the inscription is Kalle Runristare on Adelsö. His rune stone workshop is located near Adelsö’s ancient monument area and Viking-period royal residence (Hovgården). This area, together with Birka, the Viking town on the nearby island of Björkö, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Adelsö Historical Society’s museum and Café Uppgården lie near the workshop.

On Kalle’s website you can follow the story of the stone www.runristare.se
Click for Vinland 1 and 2.
A California Runestone

By Birger A. Pearson
Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies
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On a visit to Sigtuna one fine day in June 1981, I stopped to admire a beautiful runestone in front of St. Per’s ruined church. I was intrigued by its text, in eleventh-century Futhark: ...nuntr * lit * raisa * stain * dhina * at * sik * kuik...n *.

"[An]und had this stone set up for himself while he was still al[iv]e." I took a picture of it, and said to myself, "I’d like to have a stone like that some day."

Anund’s stone inscription is not unique. I know of four other examples with the same formula, all four set up by Jarlabanke at Täby, in Uppland. (See Sven B. F. Jansson, Runes in Sweden, pp. 108, 121.)

Fast forward to April, 1994. I had just retired from my professorship and moved to a country home outside of Escalon, California. I received a telephone call from my son David, then working as a plumber on a job site at Oakhurst, near Yosemite, California. "I found a great piece of granite for your runestone," he said. I rented a flat-bed truck, drove up to Oakhurst, and my son had the stone placed on the truck. (He paid the operator of the crane a six-pack of beer.)

I brought it home, dug a trench, and slowly lowered the stone into the trench. A neighbor came down with his tractor and righted the stone into position. My son David volunteered to chisel the inscription for me.

Using Anund’s stone as a model, I traced the inscription inside a coiled serpent, with a square cross (crux quadrata) within the coil (see photo), using a red felt pen. David “carved” the stone by hand with steel chisels and a hand sledge. The inscription reads: *** Birkir * lit * raisa * stain * dhina * at * sik * kuikuan * tauit * risti ***, “Birger had this stone set up for himself while he was still alive. David carved.” I added the last two words to credit my son for all of his work.

David worked on the stone in his spare time, and it was finished in June. I call it "Fridhemstenen" (The Fridhem stone) after the name we have given to our place. We had a dedication party at Fridhem soon after, led by the local godhi (myself), with readings from Havamål, “consecration” with the sledge serving as a Thor’s Hammer, and libations of beer poured out of a drinking horn. It was all in good fun, which even our local Lutheran pastor enjoyed. The congregation consisted for the most part of svenskättlingar (Swedish descendants), but we did include a couple of Norwegian friends.

I suppose that people who drive by our place don’t know what to make of my runestone. After all, there aren’t many like it in these parts. Some probably regard it (and its owner) with some suspicion. But I’m happy to tell its story to whoever is interested.

The golden vane from Söderala – a living historical play!

By Rolf Bergstedt,
alias Gånge-Rolf

Legend tells that a Viking longboat was caught in a storm on the Baltic Sea 1000 years ago. Desperately the crew prayed to Odin and Thor for their lives but nothing remarkable happened. Then the chieftain remembered the White Christ and promised to give away the gilded bronze vane to the first Christian church they came across if they were rescued. The prayer was answered in a miraculous way and they reached land at Söderala.

The drama is based upon this legend and about 40 amateurs perform the play in open air during summer season. At this first year’s performance about 550 persons attended the drama!

Please contact the tourist office for details of the next year’s performance, accommodation, sights worth seeing in the area etc.

Phone +46 270 753 53
Email: info@turism.soderhamn.se
www.soderalaflojeln.sida.nu

http://viking.hgo.se
Very often we read about the great events, battles or persons in the Viking Age but books keep quiet about the fundamental parts of everyday life like food and eating. Although we don’t know very much about the kitchens of this time, the rich source materials dealing with the preparation of victuals and the quality of the tableware sometimes suggest the great importance the eating ceremony had in everyday life. The high artistic and symbolic quality of the tableware is also very often evident. The aim of this article is to describe the diet and tableware of inhabitants in Wolin during the Early Middle Ages (8-12th century).

Victuals
The sources of our information about the diet in the early medieval times are historical and archaeological.

Some messages helpful for reconstructing the Slavic diet are mentioned in Ibrahim ibn Jakub’s and Herbold’s historical texts. The first of them writes: “... they sow twice a year: in the late summer and in the early spring and they harvest twice. They sow mostly millet...”

And Herbold writes: “the soil is very fertile for the different grains, vegetables and seeds; any area has plenty of honey, pastures and grass...” and in the other place: “for the butter from cows and milk of sheep, for fat lambs and rams, for the abundance of honey and wheat, hemp and poppy and different kinds of vegetables, for plentiful fruit-trees...” and also: “the whole region abounds with deer, aurochs, wild horses, bears, boars, hogs and different other wild animals”.

Knowledge about the diet of this period is based on the results of archaeological excavations. From archaeozoological, ichthiological and paleobotanical research we can distinguish dietary components like animals, fishes, grains, fruits, vegetables and herbs. Next to ceramics, animal bones are the most common archaeological artifacts from the settlement levels in Wolin. Animal bones, fish bones and botanic materials are fundamentally significant as the source of information about the early medieval diet.

The conclusion of the archaeozoological research of the animal bones from Wolin is – the basis of the meat diet was domestic animals. The importance of wild animals was very exiguous in Wolin.

Among the remains of domestic animals from Wolin are the following species: swine (Sus domesticus), goat (Capra hircus), sheep (Ovis aries), cow (Bos taurus), horse (Equus caballus), dog (Canis familiaris) and cat (Felis ocreata domestica). Among the bones of the wild animals are the following species, which could be only a supplementary dietary component: wild boar (Sus scrofa ferus), deer (Cervus elaphus), elk (Alces alces), aurochs (Bos primigenius), roe (Capreolus capreolus), bear (Ursus arctos), wolf (Canis lupus L.), otter (Lutra lutra L.), seal (Halichoerus grypus), fox (Vulpes vulpes), beaver (Castor fiber), hare (Lepus europaeus) and rat (Mus
Fig 5. The Fresendorf type vessel is very characteristic for Slavic ceramic workshops of early medieval Wolin. We know the same pots from the excavations in Scania, Birka, Hedeby and Kaupang (the second half of the 9th century).

Fig 6. The Woldegk-type vessels are the next example of the high quality ceramic production from early medieval Wolin.

Fig 7. The large Weisdin-type vessel for preservation the root materials and food (11th century).

We can suppose that wild animals were mainly the source of raw material like hides and fur, fat and antlers.

The majority of artifacts from the excavations in Wolin are objects connected with fishing and fish bones (fig. 1), which must have been an important component of diet. In the result of ichthiological analysis, the following fish species were distinguished as the most common: bream (Abramis brama), roach (Rutilus rutilus), zander (Stizostedion lucioperca), perch (Perca fluviatilis) and western sturgeon (Acipenser sturio).

Knowledge about the grains, vegetables, fruits and herbs from Wolin is the result of paleobotanical research. Among grains were the following species: rye (Secale cereale), wheat (Triticum aestivum), barley (Hordeum vulgare vulgare), oats (Avena sativa) and millet (Panicum miliaceum). Flax (Linum usitatissimum) was probably used for oil production. The very important dietary component was fruits like: cherry, plum, apple, nut, pear, raspberry, blackberry, strawberry and bilberry; and vegetables like: sorrel, radish, carrot, celery, parsley, lentil, buckwheat and savoy cabbage. Among numerous herbs is chamomile.

Although the dietary components mentioned above were very rich and numerous, our knowledge about the bill of fare is relatively slight. Archaeological evidence such as a bronze kettle (fig. 2), three ovens and grain-grinding mill (fig. 4) say something about the means of food preparation but unfortunately nothing about the victuals.

Table service

During the archaeological excavations in Wolin numerous objects connected with
the tableware of this period were discovered. Unfortunately there is no furniture like the tables among a great quantity of very well-preserved wooden artifacts. The tableware from Wolin is very rich and is represented by ceramic vessels, wooden bowls, knives, spoons and ladles made of wood and bone.

First of all the Slavic southern coast of the Baltic sea and Wolin was the production place of the very good ceramic until the end of the 10th century. The high quality aesthetic Slavic vessels (fig. 5 & 6) are in great contrast to the contemporary primitive Scandinavian pottery. The collection of vessels is dominated by pots of different sizes. Bowls are very rare though they are a bit more common in the 11th and 12th centuries. One of the functions of ceramic vessels was the preservation of root materials and food. This function led to large vessels often very beautifully decorated with plaited ornamentation (fig. 7).

Drinking cups, bowls and plates were mostly made of wood. Archaeological evidence has the other components of tableware like spoons (fig. 8) and knives (fig. 9) too. In the second half of the 10th–first half of 11th century many of them were very often beautifully decorated.

Based on the numerous source materials for food preparation and the quality of tableware, the bill of fare and the food flavors should be very special too.

About the author
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Viking-age Horse Offerings in Lithuania

Text and photos by
Mindaugas Bertašius

Introduction
There is only a little information about Viking routes and Viking monuments in the territory of Baltic tribes, which were living in the East Baltic. Some aspects were ascertained by the results of archaeological investigation from Trusso (Poland, near Elblag), Grobinia (Lettland), Kaup-Wiskiauten (present-day Russia, Kaliningrad region). Remnants of old Viking colonies, established since 7-8th century were found. The material gained mostly from earlier investigations is more or less published. Meanwhile, the archaeological investigations are continuing every day and new material is emerging all the time.

It is known that Viking travelers were seeking for new ways to reach the Far East. Rivers constituted the main overland routes. Thus often main archaeological sites, like cemeteries, settlements and hill-forts or single artifacts, are situated on the banks of rivers. The lower Nemunas (Memel) – from the Baltic coast to Middle Lithuania (Kaunas region) – was of great importance at all times for the Baltic region. This area can be perceived as a constant contact zone, where people wandered and wares have drifted. Access to water and favourable environmental conditions in the river valley determined human activities. The river valleys may have been a contributing factor to arranging the settlement network system; the river being the only means of communication.

But not only material objects reached the Middle Lithuania region by river. Different cultural traits reached this region by this route, different patterns of burial rites and models of social life wandered to remote lands. No doubt the Baltic Sea, but even the coastal river net connected the tribes. During the Christian Iron Age this region could profit from a geopolitical and geographical situation. This is especially noticeable during Viking period.

All Northern Europe had seen economic growth, including establishment of trading centres along the coasts and rivers in the Baltic region (Roedahl 1992). That kind of communication determined the multi-ethnical structure of settlers in the Middle Lithuania – data of burial rituals, imported goods, specific details and commodities of life give us material evidence of the multi-ethnic population in this region.

Great variance in burying customs among the Baltic tribes is characteristic. However when investigating the Middle Lithuania burial rites we sometimes find unexpected similarities. Some burial rites are comparable only within extremely remote regions. It is impossible to examine the nature and structure of all burial rites that reflect the complicated network of Baltic connections. It could be a good pattern when considering a population’s mobility. Decoding symbols is the most challenging task for the archaeologist studying burial rites and I would like to disclose one expressive and demonstrative ritual – the horse-offering ritual.

Horse-offering ritual
There are well known horse-offering rituals in some regions of Europe (Müller-Wille, 1972; Oexle 1984). Very expressive such rituals appear in the Scandinavian world and in the East Baltic populated by Balts.

Balts’ territories have a peculiarity – a
large amount of horse bones are found in burial grounds. In this area horse burials have been known since the period of Roman influence (2nd–4th cent. A.D.). In the Early Middle Ages a horizon with an abundance of horse graves was found in some areas settled by Balts’. This is most characteristic of Prussians (Sambia – Samland peninsula, 5th–11th c.) and the population of Middle Lithuania in Kaunas region (8th–11th c.), fig. 1.

Some burial grounds were investigated during the few last decades. But principally new material was obtained through the investigations of the newly discovered burial ground of Marvêlé in Kaunas. More than 1300 graves, inhumations and cremations dated to 2nd–12th century and an abundance of horse graves were investigated there (Bertašius 2002).

Both human and horse burials of this period are not exactly dated, since dating principles are not consistent. Human graves are usually found separate from horse burials, which causes difficulties when comparing burial items. Some authors regard the territory of Balts’ as a kind of “fashion designer” for the custom of burying horses and bridling mode for neighbouring countries, which makes comparison and identification of burials more complicated.

Horse burials from the 8th–11th century reflect the territory of Middle Lithuania most significantly. Regional differences are obvious. The largest burial grounds of this type are located in Kaunas district. Abundant horse graves have been excavated there. The number of buried horses is sometimes absolutely staggering. For instance, 185 burials containing remains of 217 horses have been investigated at Veřšvai; 236 burials containing remains of about 290 horses were excavated at Marvêlé burial ground (both in Kaunas); and 236 burials at Pakalniškiai near Kaunas. On the Balts’ territories, a similar phenomenon is only noted on old Prussian lands (today the region of Kaliningrad) – in some burial grounds of old Sambia (Samland) where the number of horse burials exceeds 100.

As the horses were usually buried in a separate section of the cemetery, they have no relation to the human cremations and this raises some problems when dating those graves. The location of the section of the cemetery containing horse graves usually varies in respect to human graves – north, south (Pakalniškiai), west (Veřšvai), east and west (Marvêlé). Sometimes, this burial group forms a separate cluster; sometimes, it is a narrow line. The archaeological material allows the supposition that a horse had been a ritual offering.

Horse graves
During the excavation of the Marvêlé burial ground, the distinctive burial indications have been fixed. Several horse burial types have been defined on the basis of the archaeological data. A common horse grave is when the whole horse was buried (Fig. 2). Sometimes there is only a head or a head with forelegs, or scattered horse remains in a burial are found (Fig. 3).

Burials of the first type are common in Lithuania, Prussia and are rather frequent in Europe. Most frequently in these cases a horse was squeezed into a small oval pit (measuring 1.05–1.7 to 0.43–0.8 m). In the burial the croup (hind quarters) of many horses has been noticed to be higher than the head. It was predetermined by the oblique (irregular) shape of the pit – its bottom gradually slants in a western direction and the western slope is absolutely steep. The pit has also a deeper part. Fig. 4.

The shape of the pit is directly associated with the funeral process. When burying a horse its head is always located in a deeper part of a pit and a horse skeleton is nearly always west-northwest-oriented, with the croup 0.05–0.6 m higher than the head, quite close to the former burial surface.

By means of reins and bridle bits (and nearly all horses are buried with bridle bits) it is possible to place a live horse in a position that prevents it from climbing out. Horse skeletons in graves were found on their stomachs, with their legs tightly pressed, the head under the breastbone (sternum), indicating that they were probably buried alive (some of the horses were buried with a sack over their head at Veřšvai cemetery). The described situation suggests the idea of performing some kind of ritual, as only an exhausted horse could be forced into the pit.

The data from historical sources are of particular interest in this respect. The Aestii (old historic name of Baltic tribes) rituals prior to cremation are mentioned in Vulfstan’s stories and are included in King Alfred’s edition of Orosius’ “History of the World” (9th c.). Horse races and games are also discussed. Later (13th–14th c.) Peter von Dusburg writes that before ritual horse offering Prussians and Lithuanians “run the horses off their feet to such an extent, that the animals can hardly stand” (Dusburgietis, 1985).

Likely a horse exhausted by such games showed less resistance to being pushed into the pit. Similar ritual horse races are known among some Caucasian nations; they were organized by Greeks and Romans. Horse racing is well known among Scandinavians.

The manner of burial corresponds to the beliefs of various nations, that the world of the dead is the place where the sun sets and a horse escorts the dead to Eternity. The western orientation of the
horse burials in the Middle Lithuania confirms this.

The other burial group is distinguished by ritual offering of separate horse parts: the head and forelegs, the hindquarters (croup). In the major burial grounds in the Kaunas region these graves comprise 14–15 % of all horse graves. In some cemeteries they dominate. Such isolated pits containing animal remains are regarded as ritual offering pits. It was much more usual to bury the head separately (even 12.5% in Nendriniai burial ground) or both the head and forelegs (Marvelė - 20 burials, 10 %). Such a manner of burial testifies to the presence of funeral rituals, maybe a long complicated ritual by the grave.

Different parts of horses were buried in cemeteries and according researchers of mythology this had particular ritual meaning. We will never be able to discover more details of this ritual by archaeological means, only a few glimpses of the ritual could be reconstructed by investigated material.

In another type of burial, horse remains are scattered in a definite area. Burial items, together with the bones of one or several horses, are usually scattered in the area measuring 0.8–1.2 x 1–2.2 m, in one, or more layers, 0.15–0.4 m thick, or even more, sometimes up to one meter. The areas where this type of grave is encountered in separate sections of cemeteries testify to simultaneity and distinctly original tradition. The burials usually contain skull, neck, leg bones and their fragments. Sometimes on the bone surfaces signs of chopping are evident. Ribs, *thoracic* and *lumbar* vertebrae are found less frequently. The graves are found in the largest burial grounds of Kaunas region. In various burial grounds they comprise 17 % (Veršvai, Graužiųai, Pakalniškių) to 28 % (Marvelė) of the total number of graves.

The distinguished Arabian traveller and envoy, Ibn Fadhlān, who attended a Viking funeral on his travels, describes a ritual horse offering in the account of his travels along the river Volga. Archaeological finds confirm that the burial rites witnessed by Ibn Fahdlān were similar to those used in Scandinavia (Roesdahl 1992:157). Meanwhile from the investigated material from Marvelė we have a fascinating data about burial rites, as performed in the Volga region according to the words of the aforementioned Arab envoy.

It was confirmed osteologically that remains of two individuals are most frequently found (40 % of the third group of burials; Bertašius&Daugnora 2001). Occasionally, the remains of three individuals are found in the graves of this type. It is interesting to note that the graves containing remains of two horses included dogs’ bones too. Therefore, it is possible to draw an important comparison with Fahdlān’s impressions from a Viking funeral: “...a dog was brought, chopped into two (parts) and thrown.... Two horses were taken..., then chopped with swords”*, all of that was left as food for a buried individual (Kovalevskij 1956).

Analogies of ritual horse offering of this kind are rather widespread. The nearest are found in old Prussian burial grounds (Hollack 1908). Graves of this type are known in north Russia, near the Volga (Golubeva 1981), where Viking-age graves related to Viking voyages are known. Archaeological data in Scandinavian countries testify to horse chopping for ritual offering, here the horse was the sacrificial animal of the warrior and aristocratic class (Medieval Scandinavia 1993).

Eating horse meat was part of the sacrificial meal that took place near the grave. It is not known whether the sacrifice was personally offered for

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*Fig 4. Horse skeleton in the pit with irregular shape.*

*Fig 5. The present-day native Lithuanian horse originated from Viking-age Middle Lithuanian horses.*
recollection of the deceased, or if it was an institutionalised offering that happened methodically. Perhaps there was a traditional day of deceased like in today's Lithuania the Day of Deceased on November 2nd (the day when it is believed that dead people's souls appeared and took part in the Holy Supper in the evening).

**Institutionalised ritual**

The character of graves testifies to a complicated burying ritual. The form of grave and burying peculiarities (careful burying of the horse in the small pit, definite situation of graves) give evidence that burials were performed according to a certain ritual. Separate pits for offered animals in some of the Middle Lithuania cemeteries have testified that bloody rituals for mentioning of the dead took part there.

Finally, on the one hand, the horse testifies supplying the dead with wealth, common in the surrounding society, on the other hand the horse burials show the bloody ritual at the grave. Great importance was namely attached to those rituals in Middle Lithuania. Often horse sacrifices were connected with a sacrificial meal establishing a communion among the participants. Considering the partial horse offerings (such as heads and forelegs) we could assume they were offered for the gods.

Evidently the sacrifices were linked to important occasions that helped to emphasize the cultural identity of local society. It is something like an “ethnic practice”, through the reiteration of the ties that joined the members of community (Pohl 1991). The reality of that connection must be re-created by ritual activity in the everyday life of the community. We could see a deliberate selection of some rituals that build up the tradition.

* Translated from Russian text by author.

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**About the author**

Mindaugas Bertašius, Dr. Department of Philosophy and Cultural Sciences at the Kaunas Technological University. He has worked as an archaeologist for twenty years, mainly in Kaunas region (Middle Lithuania), has a research interest in archaeology of Viking-age and mediaval town archaeology. Email: mbertas@takas.lt

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**WANTS TO DNA TEST A VIKING QUEEN!**

** Were the two females found in the famous Oseberg-ship in 1904 related, or was it a queen and her slave? **

The board of the Oslo university cultural historic museum – Vikingskipshuset (Vikingshiphouse), wants to use modern DNA-analysis to solve the 100 year-old mystery. When the ship-grave was first discovered in 1904, remnants of two skeletons were found. Both were female, one 60-70 years old and the other 24–40.

But ever since, the relation between the two women has never been made clear, nor which of them could possibly be the queen. Today's scientific methods could offer a solution and help determine if there is any relationship between the queen from the Oseberg ship and whoever her companion was.

– We have referred to them as queen and slave all these years, but we don’t know if our interpretation is correct, says Arne Emil Christensen, archaeologist at the University's cultural historical museum/Vikingskipshuset.

– We know from historical sources that during the Viking Age people were sacrificed to follow their masters in death. We have an Arabian description of a Viking burial on the Volga river from the 10th century, which tells us how a slave was sacrificed. From Denmark we have a Viking grave with two males, where one of them had bound hands and had been decapitated. One of the females from the Oseberg ship could be such a sacrificed slave. But she could just as well be a relative or family member.

After the excavation in 1904 the remains of the two women were in storage for a long time, until they were brought back and reburied in Oseberg mound in 1948.

– They were put in twin granite sarcophagi, says Christensen. – We don’t know whether the coffin was lead-lined for the sake of preservation. Both skeleton remains were fragmentary. The skeleton of one of the females was relatively complete and contained among other material, bones and knuckles with traces of rheumatism and also the top part of the cranium. From the younger woman, the lower jaw was preserved with abrasion marks on the teeth from a metal toothpick, possibly silver. To carry out the DNA-analysis the grave must be reopened. It is of course an open question if it is possible to obtain DNA from such old material, but it would be desirable.

– Financing for the analyses still remains to be found. It shouldn’t be a problem to localise and reopen the grave. If the DNA-analysis could give us a concrete answer, it would be a step on the way to answering who was buried together with our greatest national historical treasure, says Christensen.

Source: www.alfenposten.no

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http://viking.hgo.se
“I’d like to have a Viking boat”.  
“Do you think we could build one?”  
“Sure, they did it a thousand years ago with hand tools. We can certainly build one with our modern tools!”

With these few simple words and a “mild” misconception about the complexity of these ancient boats, my friends and I set out to build a replica of the Gokstad Faering. That was about two years ago, and we have just finished the planking and moved her out of my garage. The time between has been filled with a lot of discovery, training, problem solving, frustration and huge amounts of satisfaction!

We quickly found that a number of people were interested in the project. Their skill range varied from those who had never picked up a woodworking tool to those that were skilled carvers. None of us had ever built a boat, but there was a lot of enthusiasm for building this one. So, we forged ahead and now have an almost completed faering, which we call “Blackbird”.

We started by consulting two publications, both unfortunately out of print:

Had it not been for the National Maritime Museum Monograph, I do not believe we could have built this replica. We are indebted to Mr. Bruce Blackistone, founder of The Longship Co., Ltd, for supplying us with an original of this publication.

Using the National Maritime Museum Monograph, important components of the faering were scaled-up from the original drawings and diagrams. This was done by marking a grid on the drawing and transferring the measurements to a full size grid to make a pattern. A two-dimensional pattern was made for the carved stems, and patterns were made for each of the cross-sections taken from the replica built by the museum.

We decided to make two faerings. The first would be made from easily obtained modern materials, while the second would be made in a more “period” manner after we had a better understanding of how a faering was built.

The first step was to construct the carved stem pieces. Laminating five three foot long pine 2 x 12’s with marine grade epoxy gave a wooden block thick enough for the stems. From these blocks the stems were carved using a combination of modern power tools, including a chain-saw, and several more traditional tools, mainly gouges, chisels and an adz. The difficulty in translating two dimensional photographs and drawings into a three dimensional object proved quite challenging. In the end, two nearly identical stems were completed and attached to a keel made from a single length of 1 x 12 pine lumber.

Regarding the process of carving the stems, we can offer very little advice. It is a task that has to be performed to be understood. It would certainly help to examine an actual stem during the carving process.

The lessons learned are:
(1) Don’t use pine for the wooden block. It has turned out to be very unsatisfactory for this purpose, tending to split along the grain, which generally runs off of the stem at an angle. Thus far we have been able to repair these cracks with epoxy putty.
(2) Have the people doing the carving under constant supervision by someone with a thorough understanding of the three-dimensional carving process.
Constructing a pattern for the strakes involved clamping a piece of masonite (a 1/8 inch thick fiberboard that is fairly flexible) against the keel and holding it tightly against the plywood cross-section forms. This usually required two people with a third person marking where the strake should be at each form. “Connecting the dots” from each of the cross-section forms with smooth curves formed the pattern. After cutting the pattern, it was again fitted against the keel and forms to insure a proper fit.

Using the pattern, the strakes were easily cut from 3/8 inch thick exterior grade plywood. Because the plywood was available only in eight foot lengths, each strake has two scarf joints. The front and rear portions of the strake were first riveted in place and the center section was added last. This permitted close fitting of the strakes against the stems.

Because the stems were not correctly shaped, attachment of the strakes directly adjacent to the stem without a large gap between the strakes was frustrating. Improper stem shape required the strakes to be bent into multiple curves to obtain a tight fit. Frustration mounted because the clamps would not adequately pull the strakes together.

Then it was discovered that using wedges between the clamps and the strakes permitted much closer fits because the pressure could be applied exactly where needed. Unfortunately this put tremendous strain on the stems, which cracked in two places. Epoxy was used to repair the splits.

Currently all of the strakes are riveted in place. The remaining work is to install the ribs, install a top rail to hide the plywood edge, install the kabe, caulk the seams, and apply a couple of coats of paint. An epoxy paint will be used as the base coat to seal the wood because she will be in and out of the water frequently.

Although the original did not have evidence of a mast or sail, a removable mast is also planned. The first launching will be in the spring of 2004.

The task that was started so easily is now nearing completion. It was definitely not what we expected. Almost half of the original time spent was in group discussions – trying to understand the design and how to translate the plans into reality. A lot of time was spent teaching people the proper understanding in the future.

Making the strake pattern from masonite. Photo: Guy W. Tessum.

Viking Age Vessels is an organization dedicated to building and operating vessels of the Viking Age. Our members study and practice the skills needed to achieve that end. We are also available for demonstrations of Viking boat-building and Viking life.

VAV currently has a single chapter, VestRus Viking Ships. VestRus is group of persons interested in sailing and building Viking boat replicas. Our geographic area is roughly Southeast Ohio, including parts of Kentucky and West Virginia, USA. Since we will be navigating on rivers and lakes, we are the Western Rus, or VestRus.

The purpose of Vest Rus Viking Ships is to promote, encourage and provide the opportunity for development of knowledge and skills in the building, sailing, and maintenance of replicas of Viking Age ships and boats of northern Europe.

For more information please visit our websites:
http://www.vikingagevessels.org or http://www.vestrusvikingships.org
International courses offered by Gotland University

Viking Archaeology and Advanced Archaeological Field Methodology, 10 points (15 ECTS)

Summer 2004

On the southwest shore of Gotland in Fröjel parish, one of the island's largest and most important Viking-age harbour and trading places has been found. The site was swarming with activity over a period of 400–500 years. Along the shoreline of Gotland some 60 conceivable harbour places have been found, some are small fishing hamlets and some are much larger, like Fröjel.

For several years, Gotland University has been running a research programme with the aim of investigating this Viking port of trade. Contemporaneously with this research an international archaeological field course has been carried out. The aim of the course is to investigate the social patterns and physical structures of the site using advanced archaeological and human geographical field methodology.

The harbour extends over an area of approximately 100,000 m² and was used from late 6th century to the end of 12th century AD. So far, about 1500 m³ have been excavated and the excavation has produced a rough idea of how the harbour developed and expanded. Remains of buildings have provided an insight into the settlement pattern and three different grave fields have also been located. The research at Fröjel intends to throw light upon the development of Gotlandic society during the Viking Age.

Much emphasis is put on the use of GIS (Geographical Information System) and the use of digital techniques for surveying, landscape reconstruction, documentation, photography, analysis, presentation and visualization using virtual reality and 3D modelling.

The overall aim is to give an introduction to the Viking-age period and provide practical and circumstantial knowledge of advanced archaeological and human geographical methodology.

The course is divided into two units: the first unit begins with two weeks of literature studies, followed by five weeks of practical field investigations combined with lectures.

The second part is three weeks long and focuses producing a paper on a chosen theme connected to the course. The first two and last three weeks are Internet-based.

The literature as well as teaching will be in English.

Date: June 7th–August 15th (Week 24–33).

If you are interested in more information concerning earlier excavations at Fröjel please visit our homepage at http://frojel.hgo.se. Click on "join us".

Introduction to osteology, 10 points (15 ECTS Credits)

Summer 2004

The course provides an introduction to the human skeleton and how relevant information can be extracted from it, as well as knowledge of the skeletons of the most common mammals in the Nordic countries. Furthermore, knowledge regarding osteological documentation problems and taphonomical processes is offered.

The course is divided into two units, a theoretical one, which is provided via the Internet, and one involving practical training.

A first part deals with human osteological theory and methodology, including practical training in the various elements of the skeleton: physical and chemical characteristics; as well as methods for the determination of sex, length, and age of death. Pathological changes and activity marks on the skeleton are presented.

A second part provides knowledge of animal osteological theory and methodology, and includes practical training in determining the specific traits of the most common species in the Nordic fauna. Finally, a third part concerns the specific problems of osteological documentation at archaeological excavations, as well as taphonomical processes, i.e. what happens to human and animal skeletal material before and after it ends up in the ground, either from graves or settlements.

The Viking Society – General Course, 10 points (15 ECTS)

Spring and Fall 2004–2005

This course is an introduction to the Viking-age society and its development. The course is interdisciplinary and, through primary and secondary sources, analyses the Vikings and the Viking Age. It is divided in two main parts: Who were the Vikings? and The Viking Homelands.

The aim of the course is to diversify the term Viking and an overarching view of the Scandinavian Viking society through literature studies and chats. Issues to be discussed are the physical remains found in the landscape and theoretical issues such as social change and cultural interchange.

For further information about the courses, prerequisites and downloadable application forms please visit Gotland University’s homepage at www.hgo.se, click on "English pages".
The ancient mystery of the “Blond Eskimos” of the Arctic solved by DNA?

An ancient mystery of the Arctic may have been solved when anthropologists from Iceland released their research results with DNA-material about the Inuit from the north of Canada, the so-called “Blond Eskimos”.

According to the Icelandic sagas, the Norse in Greenland met people who belonged to different cultures. On the other hand the Inuit also tell legends of ancient meetings with people from other cultures. The legends tell of Inuit, living in the central Arctic, with distinct European features like fair hair, beards and blue eyes.

The Norse explorations westward from Greenland took place in the 9th and 10th centuries. By the 15th century all the settlements mysteriously disappeared and the fate of the Norse settlers is still unknown. One possibility is that they simply disappeared through mingling with the origin population.

The tantalizing stories about the “Blond Eskimos” originate from earliest Arctic explorations. To state one example, the famous Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson heard a rumour from a whaling captain about European-looking Eskimos living among the Cooper Inuit close to what we now call Cambridge Bay in Nunavut. Stefansson, who wished to become famous, took advantage of these rumours to raise funds for an expedition to the area. In the first decade of the last century he caught up with the Inuit he was looking for. In his Journal he wrote: “There were three men here whose beards are almost the same colour as mine and who look like typical Scandinavians… One woman has the delicate features one sees in Scandinavian girls…” and so on. He also speculated about the origin of these Inuit and thought they descended from inhabitants of the Norse settlements, which had disappeared.

Anthropologist Gisli Palsson from the University of Iceland in Reykjavik, with the help of anthropologist Agnar Helgason, has now applied DNA-technology to Stefansson’s speculations. During 2002 his team were in Greenland and in Cambridge Bay to gather saliva samples from 350 Inuit to compare them with genetic markers known to have been prevalent in medieval Scandinavia.

The samples have now been analysed and the preliminary finding negate the blond Inuit legend. The two scientists say that their DNA tests have now failed to find any evidence that the Europeans mingled genetically with the Inuit. Helgason says: –“Stefansson’s hypothesis doesn’t seem to be supported by the data. But I wouldn’t want to give a final death certificate for Stefansson’s hypothesis at this point in time.”

Source: CNEWS, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
It doesn’t very often happen that a modern doctoral thesis can be read like a so-called good book. One criterion for a good book is that you want to read it from cover to cover at one sitting. Bodil Petersson has succeeded in making good literature of her doctoral thesis. This is my first and lasting impression.

Besides a feeling for style and a superb use of language, naturally the choice of subject adds to this impression. To quote the blurb on the back cover: “Never has the interest in creating milieus from the past been as great as it is now. Viking villages are springing up in several places and the number of medieval markets is increasing all the time. Even Stone-, Bronze- and Iron-age settlements and milieu are now being reawakened. Behind this expanding phenomenon, a combination of research ambition and a desire to spread this knowledge to the general public is flourishing”.

That this really is an expanding field is evident from the more than three hundred objects on the list of reconstructions of lost objects and environments in the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The author herself admits that the list included in the thesis appendix is not complete and needs to be updated with new objects, as they appear each year.

In order to examine the critical aspects connected with the subject of reconstruction, the thesis must be read several times in the usual manner, i.e. underlining, comments in the margin and attached notes.

In the introductory chapter, Archaeology and reconstruction, the author establishes the structure of the thesis. This is based on three perspectives: politics, knowledge and adventure, which correspond to the concepts of reconstruction, experiment and bringing to life where the latter two are subtypes of the overall reconstruction concept. Unfortunately here we encounter a divergence from the strict trinity in the concept organisation.

Reconstruction can mean both recreating in general as well as building specific objects and milieu. This leads to a certain terminological muddle. In terms of what has been reconstructed and where this has been studied, we return once again to a harmonious triad. The answers are: buildings, transportation and happenings in Denmark, Norway and Sweden respectively.

The following chapter, Stories of the reconstructions, presents a number of examples of reconstructions from the 17th century up until 1964 when what is now called Lejre Forsøgscenter in Denmark was founded. This centre has been used as a model for many reconstructions in our time. The author therefore allows the centre’s establishment to act as a link to the three following chapters, which are based on thematic perspectives.

Seen from a political perspective, the Viking Age is used to create an identity for the Nordic countries vis-à-vis Europe and the EU. Vikings and the Viking Age are often seen as a common Nordic affair but at the same time the Viking is extremely nationalised. In Denmark the nation- and boat-builder is prominent, in Norway the seafarer and adventurer, and in Sweden, the businessman and trader. According to the author the national Viking can be roughly classified in these terms, which is clearly manifested in the world of reconstructions.

It is interesting that the national image of the Viking Age repeats itself in the choice of world heritages in each respective country: the Jelling monument and Roskilde cathedral emphasize Denmark as a consummate nation with royal continuity, Urnes stave church stands for the genuine Norwegian, while the Swedish world heritage sites, Birka-Adelsö and Visby, focus clearly on trading contacts to the east and south far beyond the Baltic region.

The regional identity reflects different
humanistic tradition wishes to understand the conditions people lived under and how they acted in the past. In reconstruction, an attempt is made to present living conditions of the past.

Time travel adventure is the third chapter with a thematic perspective. Using reconstruction as a means of conveyance, the trip combines time and space, providing an inner journey simultaneously. The transportation is physically, mentally and time-related all at the same time. It is possible to roughly divide the reconstructions into three categories: buildings, transport and happenings. The author's aim in making the division is to show that each category provides its own special framing of the journey in time.

Reconstructions reflect their era. The longing, visions and dreams that can be found in a period are distinctly expressed in our images of the past. Bodil Petersson has, in an excellent way, described and analysed the way we handle our relationship with and how we use the time that has been – our past.

By Sven-Olof Lindquist, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Human Geography, Centre for Baltic Studies, Gotland University.

In the chapter, Dimensions of knowledge, there is an exciting discussion concerning the value of reconstructions in terms of science and conveying knowledge. The discussion is centred on Ekotorp fort on Öland and reconstructions of Viking-age boats.

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A sketch of a runestone in the Moesgard Museum, Aarhus, Denmark, depicting a fearsome mask to frighten evil spirits from a fallen Viking. We offer this dramatic piece as a brooch or pendant.
Swedish schools receive multimedia CD about the Viking Age

The Swedish Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm has recently distributed a multimedia compact disc, “Vikingarnas tid” (trans. Viking Age) to Swedish elementary and secondary schools. The CD is based on the material from the museum’s exhibition “Vikingar”, (trans. Vikings) that opened in 2001, and is produced by the museum with financial assistance from Fortum (a leading electric energy company in the Nordic countries).

– Our hope is that the CD will become an aid in teaching about the Viking Age by supplying the teachers with texts, illustrations and films, says Kristian Berg, head of the museum. This is the second CD we send out free to schools, and the previous CD “Vikingarnas Birka” (trans. Birka of the Vikings) was very appreciated.

The CD is the basis for problem and pupil-oriented, multidisciplinary teaching. The material consists of texts, maps, pictures and films together with a searchable database containing almost 2000 artefacts. The pupils can, for instance, learn how runestone carving was done, or about various Viking routes. The “Viking Age” CD can be installed on the computer’s hard drive, and upgraded over the Internet and the museum’s website in contrary to the previous one (Birka of the Vikings).

And in order to further assist teachers, the museum’s Internet educational advisor has developed a Web-based guide for the teachers (see http://www.historiska.se/vikingar). The guide shows the teacher how to use the CD in the classroom, for example in different themes.

– We are happy to be able to support history teaching in school and see this as an important element of our community efforts, says Merrill Boman, Fortum’s trademark manager. Of course it is a great delight for us to cooperate with the Museum of National Antiquities in giving away this complete multimedia compact disk to the schools.

The work with the CD is a part of the museum’s aim to reach more public through different media. Thanks to digital media technology the entire country can access the museum’s collection and exhibitions. The CD also doubles as a digital exhibition catalogue for the visitors.

Source: Statens Historiska Museum, The Museum of National Antiquities

A letter to our readers

What size were East-going ships?

“In July 2003, when we displayed our small ship, Viking Plym (11 m) in St Petersburg (see VHM 3/2003) we told all visitors that her size is historically correct, in that they had to be small to be hauled on land past Russian rapids.

But some sources tell that they might have been a bit bigger than this – at least travelling as far as the Neva entrance. Perhaps the Svea Vikings arrived in ledung ships? If a “hundare” had to man four ships as we are told in our sources, meaning 25 men onboard, a ledung ship must have been 12–15 m long.

If they arrived in these ships they would have had to change to smaller ones for the river part of the voyage. This possibility is mentioned in literature.

And now my question:

Have ships of this size been found anywhere – and if not WHY?”

Please answer to Carl Norberg info@vikingplym.org

For further info www.vikingplym.org
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