Editorial

THE CHANGE OF RELIGION in the Viking Age – illustrated on the front page – is the subject of the two opening articles in this autumn issue. When the Viking Age began around 750 AD, most of Europe had already been converted to Christianity. In Scandinavia this process of transformation went on for several hundred years and the first churches were not built until around 1100.

In the article Choosing heaven Gun Westholm tells about the Viking-age Norse Aesir cult – that, in turn, replaced an older fertility religion – and about its origin and myths that might very well be depicted on Gotlandic picture stones.

But how was the change from the old pagan faith into Christianity brought about? You will find some answers in the article The cross and the sword where Alexandra Sanmark discusses the strategies of conversion in different places in medieval Europe.

From Orkney we have received an interesting contribution to the debate about whether the Vikings integrated with the indigenous Pictish people on the island or slaughtered them, when they took over the islands. Perhaps recent excavations can lead to new approaches to this debate.

But who actually were the Vikings? To find the answer to this question you must read the article, The Worlds of the Vikings, by Malin Lindquist!

And as usual, you will find plenty of good reading for the dark autumn nights in this issue, so curl up and enjoy it!

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Words of Wisdom

The ignorant booby had best be silent when he moves among other men,
No one will know what a nit-wit he is until he begins to talk;
No one knows less what a nit-wit he is, than the man who talks too much.

From Hávamál
(Words from “The High One”)
When the Viking Age began in about 750 AD, Scandinavia was among the last of the heathen outposts in Europe along with the Baltic, Russian and Slavic areas east of the Elbe.

Before the Aesir Gods

In Scandinavia belief in the Aesir gods was the prevailing religion before the Christian message slowly won territory during 11th century. Many believe that the religion of the Vikings arose as a unique phenomenon in northern Europe.

But the Aesir cult was a warrior religion that had several equivalents in both Europe and Asia, religions that had replaced other much earlier, peaceful beliefs with clear ties to agriculture and fertility. In these very old forms of religion, the chief god was often of the female sex – Mother Earth – and a good yearly crop and high yields from the livestock were the main purpose for worship.

Female goddesses dominated Europe’s and Asia’s religious beliefs until approximately 5000 BC, then a slow change seems to have begun. The fertile areas of the plains people were taken over by warlike nomads and cattle herders from the mountain regions. These tribes had male chief gods who honoured warring activities and warriors who had fallen in battle. Later on some of the war gods came to be called Zeus, Jahve and Odin.

Outside Scandinavia, Odin was called Wodan/Wotan among the Germanic tribes, Godan among the Langobardi and Woden in England. Both Woden and Donar – Thor – are mentioned as early as the 6th century on the continent. Odin and Zeus have many common qualities, as do their respective wives Frigg and Hera.
There are also resemblances between other Aesir gods and the Greek gods of Antiquity. The story of creation in our Nordic mythology has many parallels in the ancient myths of India and Iran. According to the poetic Edda, a human-like giant is created – Ymer – from the vapour from the huge cold abyss Ginnungagap and the heat of its opposite Muspelheim. At the same time the first cow Audhumbla is created.

The equivalent to Ymer in the old Indian Veda manuscripts is called Yama, and Yima in the ancient Persian legends but it is still the same story! In India the cow is referred to as the source and mother of life. In the Indian epic Mahabharata portrays two heirs – the blind Dhritarashtra and the honest Vihara bearing close similarities to Odin’s sons, the blind Höder and the honest Balder. In the Nordic story, the blind Höder is persuaded to shoot an arrow of mistletoe at his brother, while the Indian equivalent tells about a dice game that ended with catastrophic consequences. In both cases the situation leads to the disintegration of the whole world order.

After the end of the world – Ragnarök – a new world is born. The same cyclic view of time exists in India and Greece as well as in India. One can also see linguistic resemblances between Greek, ancient Indian languages and the Germanic languages.

It is obvious that the Aesir cult derived its main features from many religions in Southern Europe and Asia. It is uncertain where the cumulative faith originated, but we can very sure that it is a religion that immigrated to Scandinavia!

But there was a religion in Scandinavia even before the Aesir cult. We know about this religion only through sacrificial finds, graves and from illustrations on the Gotlandic picture stones. Written sources are lacking, with one exception. The Roman historian Tacitus described the northern Germanic tribes’ relationships and religion in his work, Germania in 98 AC. He mentions two goddesses among the Germans: Isis and Nerthus. Isis seems to be strongly influenced by her Egyptian namesake – a maritime goddess, with temples in the mouths of rivers and a ship as symbol. She has been assumed to be the model for the goddesses Frigg and Freyja in the North. According to mythology, Freyja was the daughter of Njord of the Vanir race, and a sister to Frey, who owned the remarkable ship Skidbladne.

"Nerthus, who is the same as Mother Earth, believes that she intervenes in people’s lives and travels in procession among the people.

The same cyclic view of time exists in Iran and Greece as well. One can also see this cult of the northern Germanic tribes can be linked to the peat corpses that have been found within Danish and North German territory in silted-up lakes.

Nerthus – Njärd (the Aesir Njord) seems to be a Nordic fertility goddess and the first ancestress of the Vanir.

**Picture stones as sources of knowledge**

The oldest Gotlandic picture stones from the period approximately 400–600 AD have symbols that can be linked to an old agricultural cult rather than a warrior religion. These feature sun discs with swirling wheels that seem to stand for movement, pairs of animals that symbolise rites unknown to us, possibly illustrated to promote a plentiful crop or show ritual animal baiting.

Another motif on the picture stones from this period is fine-looking boats with high stem-or sternposts and Rudders. Above the ships’ middle section there is a superstructure with circles on it. The sun that fills nature with new life every spring probably became a symbol of resurrection even for the dead people, perhaps the struggles of the animal pairs is meant to be a struggle between life and death or between summer and winter and the ships with their crew can depict a journey for the souls of the dead to the country of the sun or the realm of death. The circles perhaps indicate a tribute to the dead – wreaths of honour.

It is not surprising that the inhabitants of Gotland, located in the middle of the sea, long cherished an ancient agriculture
and fertility religion that also included ships.

Even on picture stones dated to as early as 400–500 AD, there are pictures that lead thoughts towards the mythology of the Vikings. The stone from Auster in Hango has a sun wheel and probably the stem of a ship, fig. 2. Above the sun drawing there is a man facing the open mouth of a great beast that closely resembles a centipede. Several have wanted to interpret the picture as an early depiction of Sigurd facing the dragon Fafne. Another interpretation is Thor struggling with the snake from Midgård.

An almost identical stone was found while restoring Martebo church in 1971. On the Martebo stone the whole ship is preserved while the dragon/snake's upper body has been chopped away, but otherwise it is the same motif. The saga about Sigurd Fafnesbane is recorded on Iceland and was spread widely in Scandinavia and Germany during the Viking era and later.

Is the Auster stone's motif a sign of the onset of the Aesir cult's war and warrior worship? There are other examples on stones from same era that show armed men: on a stone from Vallstenarum in Vällstena they carry spears and shields, and on a picture stone with early runes from Martebo church there are riders with spears and shields next to the sun wheel.

**Snake cult?**

On several of the old type of stones three filled circles occur: Martebo church, Bro church and on the big Sanda stone. That all three circles should be symbols for the sun and resurrection seems unlikely.

On the stone from Martebo a snake winds around the left lower circle, fig. 3, and on the Sanda stone snakes entwine themselves around the both lower circles that lack rays. Is it earth that is meant under the sun wheel – one to two worlds – Midgård – entwined by the Midgård snake, one of Loke's evil sons?

Moreover, later the Sanda stone has been "scribbled on"; a tree with clear roots stands on a line with a dragon – possibly the world tree Yggdrasil and with a dragon-like character that can possibly be interpreted as the snake Nidhögg, gnawing on the tree's roots.

During the 6th–8th c. the circles disappear from the picture stones and are replaced by illustrations of sailing ships, birds and snakes. Pure "snake stones" now appear. The most well known is the stone from Smiss in När, fig. 4, where a sitting woman with an artistic hairstyle holds a snake in each hand under a so-called triskele with three snakes.

On the stone from Sandegårda in Sanda a snake-like character with two distinct snakes on either side can be seen, fig. 5. Snakes are clearly important in the prehistoric religious world on Gotland.

Besides Midgårdormen (the Midgård snake), Eddan also mentions the snakes Goin, Moir, Gråbak and Grafvöllund, except Nidhögg, down in Nifelheim under Yggdrasil:

="More snakes lie under the ash tree called Yggdrasil than what each silly monkey believes", according to Eddan.

Both the snake-stones above are dated to the period 500–700 AD and we are now approaching the beginning of the Viking era. On at least two of the Viking-age stones both the woman with snakes and the cluster of snakes exist:

On the Hunninge stone from Klinte a snake woman stands watching a battle scene. In the next picture a man lies among a number of snakes in a hole or on a yard. A woman stands at the entrance to the yard, fig. 6.

On the stone from Smiss in Stenkyrka a woman with a snake in her hand is walking in front of a row of soldiers. In the badly damaged frieze above this a snake pit with a man in it can be discerned, fig. 7.

Snakes have been found in the Gotlandic mythology for many hundred years! Snake pits occur in the Icelandic sagas - Ragnar Lodbrok and Gunnar Gjukeson both met their destiny in a snake pit in the saga of Ragnar Lodbrok -
If dragon- and the snake-stones are early signs of Aesir religion, this means that the transition from the old fertility – and agricultural cult to the Aesir cult was a process that took several hundred years! When the Aesir religion is described in Eddan at the beginning of the 13th c, the author – Snorre Sturlisson had access to stories that depicted the final phase of Aesir religion before it was officially crowded out by Christianity. Then it had probably undergone a long, slow transition.

The Nordic Aesir gods

The Viking-age gods stemmed from two races – Aesir and Vanir.

The word Aesir comes from an old word for “god”. According to Eddan the Aesir include most of the gods: Odin, Thor, Tyr and others, twelve gods in total. They are mostly war gods to be appeased by weapon sacrifices among other things. According to Snorre’s Edda, fourteen of the goddesses are called Asynjor (Aesir goddesses) for instance Frigg and Freyja.

The names of the Vanir are considered to be related to the Roman goddess of love Venus (the Greeks’ Afrodite) and the ancient Indian word vanah = desire and they constitute their own race of gods. They were the gods of reproduction and they ruled over weather, fishing, shipping, seeding and harvest. They seem to be the remains of an ancient agricultural mother-earth cult. This also includes Njord (see above) Frigg, Frey and Freyja. Among the Vanir are also those versed in magic, who can grant success in battle and who devote themselves to love magic.

The Aesir and Vanir fought against each other but gradually tired of battle, held a peace meeting and sealed the peace by both sides going up to a vat and spitting in it, according to Eddan. The Aesir god Odin married the Vanir goddess Frigg and they had two sons, Balder and Höder, amongst other children.

Odin is the highest and eldest of the Aesir. He rules over everything and the other gods may be powerful, but they all obey him as children obey their father… Odin is called universal father because he is father to all the gods, according to the Edda.

Sacrificial finds

The Gotlandic Viking-age picture stones are difficult to interpret but probably give us pictures of sacrifices, gods and goddesses, valkyries and Valhalla. Among the sacrificial scenes the Hammar stone from Lärbro is the one most often portrayed – with a human sacrifice on an altar-like arrangement with man carrying a spear in front of Odin, fig. 8.

In Gutasagan is written: "They sacrificed their sons and daughters and livestock as well as food and drink. They did this because of their false belief. The whole country (Gotland) had the greatest human sacrifice. Normally each of the three regions held their own sacrifice."

Archaeological finds also imply that people were sacrificed during the Viking Age on Gotland. In Lillmyr in Barlingbo, just next to the Gotlandic Allting’s meeting place in Roma, parts of humans have been found, along with remains of horses and lambs. In the same marsh,
odd spearheads and at Gane in Bål, a Vendel-age bracteate and ten Viking-age spears were found. These weapon sacrifices are connected with the Odin cult (see front page).

But the largest site of Viking-age weapon-finds on Gotland is Gudingsåkrarna, northwest from Vallstena church. Since the 19th c. over 500 weapons have been dug up from the drained marshland here – mostly spearheads, but even swords and forging equipment such as raw iron and forging tongs. On other occasions silver has been found here along with spearheads and scythes. At an excavation during the 1930s, 8 spearheads appeared stuck into a circle approximately 1.5-meter radius and with a horsehead-shaped stone in the middle.

While it can be suspected that the weapon sacrifices were offered to Odin and possibly also to Thor, probably the sacrificed scythes are meant to appease the god Frey. Frey was the god of love who gave peace, pleasure and good crops. Adam of Bremen writes at the end of the 11th c.:

“If an epidemic or famine threatens, you should make sacrifices to Thor’s statue, if a war is imminent, to Odin, if a wedding is to be celebrated, to Frey.”

Besides Gudingsåkrarna, scythes have been found in ways that can be interpreted as sacrifice: four scythes bound together with two chisels and a cutting instrument have been found at Findarve in Rone and eight scythes, two raw irons, three forks and a key at Bringes in Norrlanda. Small miniature scythes have been dug up at Stenbys in Lokrume.

One more group of finds of a sacrificial character must be mentioned – iron rings that were found in stone mounds and bogs. The largest find comes from Dune in Dalhem, where approximately 1400 rings of different sizes lay neatly in different layers with earth in between. We cannot link the ring finds to any specific god, they are assumed to be a very ancient relic with roots in a Bronze-age cult.

The god Thor with power over thunder is portrayed on a picture stone from Alskog church and possibly even on a stone chest from Sanda cemetery with his weapon, the hammer Mjölner. Fragments of a similar picture stone from Hemse seem to have same motif. On the both the later stones, the hammer is more like a club. Mjölner can also be portrayed as an axe.

While miniature Thor’s hammers are a repeated find from graves on the continent, they are very rare in Gotlandic graves. On the other hand there are four silver Thor’s hammers in Gotlandic silver treasures from the late Viking Age (Alveskogs in Eke, Mickels in När, Gerete in Fardhem and Kvie in Othem).

In the Gotlandic graves, amber amulets were sometimes placed at the feet of the dead or on their breasts. In male graves, they were shaped like a little axe and in female graves they have a conical shape with a groove. Small block stools of silver and amber have also found. The axes as well as the block stool can be linked to Thor’s cult. Thor is portrayed sitting on such a stool on a find from Lund. The small amber amulets have their equivalents in Latvia.

A few amulet rings of iron and bronze with small miniature objects on each have been found on the island – from Riddare in Hemse comes a ring with horse, spear and sword and from Sandegård in Sanda another with some rings, a block stool (?) and an animal.

Silver Hoards

Burying sacrificial finds meant to appease the gods seems, therefore, to have been a common phenomenon on Gotland. It was even more common to place silver hoards under the floors of the buildings. Up until the present no less than about 750 Viking-age silver hoards have come to light on Gotland!

Many explanations as to why these treasures have been left buried until our time have been searched for: they were hidden away; those who knew about the places died and took their secret with them to the grave; they were payment for a future bride purchase that was never used or that the silver was intended as blood money to get someone out of a difficult situation.

But the burying of silver can also be connected with the Aesir cult! If there was silver laying under the floors in at least every other farm on Gotland, this could not have been unknown to the other inhabitants of Gotland. Every abandoned house would have been searched by relatives or others!

Another explanation can also exist, that has to do with the life after this. In Snorre Sturlasson’s Ynglinga saga there is a chapter about the laws Odin made for the people: Odin made in his country the same laws about the laws Odin made for the people: Odin made in his country the same laws that had applied among the Aesir. He ordained that all dead men should be burnt and their properties to be carried onto the funeral pyre with them. He decreed that each and everyone should come to Valhalla with the wealth that he had on the pyre; he should also enjoy that which he had dug down in the ground.

Here we get another explanation for the hoards – they were intended for life in Valhalla!

We can imagine that the farmer, when he knew the end was near, took away as much of the family’s fortune that he believed he would need in his next life and placed this under the floor. Perhaps this took place in ceremonies with families present – the contents in the urn or the box showing of course the position which
he had achieved during his life. Perhaps, his son, in turn, placed silver in the same urn when he approached old age. The important thing is that nobody could take up the silver, even if they knew that the silver lay there! Then, the dead ancestors would get into trouble and incur the terrible revenge of the dead and Aesir gods!

**Aesir and Christianity**

Snorre’s Edda was written down during Christian time and there are many parallels with biblical texts in the stories. But there are also many similarities with ancient Persian and ancient Indian mythology and we can assume that the Aesir religion was a mixture of old beliefs with Euro-Asian origins and new Christian elements.

Information from archaeological sources on Gotland shows that Christian objects existed on the island as early as the 9th century onwards. Gutasagan describes that Christian areas existed within Gotland’s trading areas throughout the whole Viking era:

> “Even though the Gutes were heathens, they still sailed with merchant products to all countries, Christian and heathen. Then the merchants witnessed Christian customs in Christian countries. Then some of them allowed themselves to be baptized and brought Christian priests to Gotland.”

Nothing would indicate dramatic events in connection with the conversion to Christianity. Many things imply, on the other hand, that heathens and Christian lived peaceful side by side for a long time. During the 11th c. Christian crosses and rune texts with Christian messages became more and more common. The oldest churches on Gotland are dated to about 1100 AD. Gutalagen formulates the formal Christianising of Gotland – the law begins with:

> “This is the first in our law, that we should say no to paganism and say yes to the Christian faith and all believe in a God Almighty…”

But all expressions of the old religion did not disappear immediately. The faith in – and the dread of – the old Aesir gods lived on in folklore and customs for a long time. Thor is the Aesir, whose name and characteristics seem to have survived the longest in folk religion and well into historical time he has been invoked in order to protect houses and people during thunderstorms.

With the introduction of Christianity even the goddesses disappeared. God was now naturally male. Maria is admittedly Jesus’ mother, but no goddess! But in everyday religion, the Blessed Mary got to bear Freyja’s role as a symbol of fertility, see the front page. She was also worshipped as a kind of mother goddess and alleviated at childbirth pains, thereby also replacing Frigg. In many places she also got to take over the power over the weather, crops, fishing and livestock from the ancient gods and goddesses.

**Literature and References**


**About the author**

Gun Westholm is the Senior Curator and responsible for the exhibitions at the County Museum of Gotland. She is an archaeologist and the author of numerous articles dealing with the Viking and Medieval history of Gotland. Her thesis dissertation on Viking-age Visby was published in 1989.
The Cross and the Sword –

Strategies of conversion in medieval Europe

This is the first of two articles where Alexandra Sanmark discusses the conversion processes in medieval Europe (that took place when Christianity was introduced in Europe). The second will be published in VHM 4/2005.

“Baptismal” rune stone (no. U 896) moved from Häga village in Bondkyrko parish. Photography Annika Larsson

By Alexandra Sanmark

Christianity in Europe was spread on a wider scale by kings and aristocracy. Missionaries who were active in areas where there was no Christian king could convince smaller parts of the population to become Christian. They could not however transform the old pagan society into a Christian one. This was instead achieved by Christian rulers assisted by missionaries.

This pattern can be clearly seen through comparative studies of Christianization in Europe, and will here be demonstrated here by examples from the conversions of Sweden, Saxony, Frisia and Anglo-Saxon England.

There were however also some important differences between the conversions of these areas. Sweden and England became Christian countries through the actions of native kings, above all. These men seem to have spread the religion with the help of loyal magnates, without the use of military force. Frisia and Saxony, on other hand, were converted by the Frankish military conquest.

Sweden

In Sweden the first Christian king was Olof Skötkonung, who was baptised around the year 1000. After this event, Christianity was gradually spread across the country.

This was the result of the actions of Olof Skötkonung and his successors, who introduced the religion through the local things, with the support of loyal magnates. In this way, Christianity trickled down to the lower sections of society.

Before the time of Olof Skötkonung we know that missionaries, such as Ansgar, had been active in Sweden, particularly in the town of Birka. These missionaries had however been only marginally successful. They did not manage to convince any of the kings at Birka to accept baptism, and as a

Rune stone from Focksta, Uppland, with a clearly visible cross. This kind of rune stone is undoubtedly linked to Christianization. Photography Annika Larsson

http://viking.hgo.se
In today's Netherlands and northern Germany respectively) in the 7th and 8th centuries was very much different. These areas were conquered by the Frankish empire and the population was forced to accept Christianity as part of Frankish lordship. The Frankish armies were accompanied by bishops, who settled in the newly won areas.

Before this time, missionaries had preached in Frisia without secular support. They did not however manage to convince the Frisian kings, nor any larger parts of the population, to be baptised.

"Mission by word – Mission by sword"

In the 1930s and 40s, scholars attempted to divide conversion into a number of different categories. The conversions of Sweden and England were classified as "mission by word", i.e. conversion through missionary preaching. The conversions of Saxony and Frisia were categorised as "mission by sword", i.e. conversion through military force.

This approach is however far too simplistic. The main problem is that it does not take into account the political force exercised by secular rulers in more peaceful conversions.

A more useful way to study Christianization is to see the different types of conversion as part of a spectrum, where some kind of force is always present. This can range from mild political pressure to full war.

We must also remember that the many advantages that could be gained constituted another significant factor for the spread of Christianity. Christian rulers furthermore

**The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms**

The conversions of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms seem to have been similar to the conversion of Sweden.

The first Christian king, Ethelberht of Kent, was baptised in 597 by the Roman missionary Augustine. Ethelberht was married to Bertha, a Frankish Christian princess, and was therefore most likely positive towards Christianity even before Augustine's arrival. It may even have been him who invited the Roman missionaries to Kent.

It was moreover Ethelberht and other powerful kings, who spread Christianity on a larger scale to the different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Political pressure was placed on the weaker kings until they agreed to be baptised. Once a king had been convinced to receive baptism, missionaries were sent to his kingdom to preach among the greater population.

Political pressure was not however the only reason why the lesser kings accepted Christianity. There were also significant political, economic, and social advantages to be had, such as stronger trade links, Latin learning and new technology.

**Frisia and Saxony**

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used material rewards in order to make Christianity more appealing. The Frankish rulers, for example, offered positions of power and wealth to the Saxon leaders who accepted them as overlords and thus also Christianity.

Since these rewards were not directly connected with the Christian teachings, rulers could give Christianity added attractions, which missionaries were unable to offer.

**The use of force**

The medieval Church accepted the use of violence in conversion. From the time of ancient Christianity, missionary work had been seen to contain two goals. These were the positive goal of the acceptance of Christianity and the negative goal of extinguishing non-Christian beliefs and cults. These goals have also been named “Christianization” and “depaganisation”.

In the 5th and 6th centuries, force could not be used in Christianization. The reason for this was that acceptance of Christianity should be a fully voluntary act, which should take place before baptism. For the goal of depaganisation, the use of force was allowed, and even invited.

Gradually, the Church began to accept the use of force even in the pursuit of Christianization. At the end of the 6th century, Pope Gregory I recommended levying fines on those who were not baptised, so that they would be compelled to be baptised.

In the 7th century, the Church condemned forced baptism, although recognising it as valid. It was moreover stated that a person who had been forcibly baptised must also be forced to remain a Christian.

Over the course of the Middle Ages, therefore, baptism became the primary goal for missionaries. Once the people in an area had been baptised, the missionaries would have more opportunities to give them Christian instruction.

Medieval sources called a person a “believer” from the very moment of her or his baptism. This means that the medieval meaning of “conversion” is different from the one we are used to today, i.e. an inner
change of faith. It is clear that Christian faith was of little importance for the spread of Christianity in the Middle Ages.

In order to further demonstrate this, we must take a closer look at baptism as a tool for conversion.

**Baptism**

The sources contain many descriptions of baptisms. Most of these accounts tell us about mass baptisms that were carried out soon after the missionaries’ arrival in an area. The evidence suggests that in order to receive baptism, converts were only required to recite the baptismal formula. This included the rejection of the devil and the declaration of faith in God and the Holy Trinity.

There seem to have been occasions when missionaries required even less than the baptismal formula. The Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface complained that there were priests who performed baptism, without first asking their subjects about their belief in the Christian god.

One reason for the lack of pre-baptismal instruction was presumably insufficient manpower. We are told that the missionary Augustine baptised more than 10,000 people on Christmas Day 597. Boniface is also reported to have baptised thousands. Although the numbers of people in such accounts have most likely been exaggerated, it is clear that there were few missionaries in relation to the population in these areas.

In Saxony during the reign of Charlemagne, forced mass baptisms were organised in combination with the extension of Frankish territory. Moreover, around 785, Charlemagne issued a law, which made the refusal of baptism punishable by death. The enforcement of such measures clearly did not leave any time for pre-baptismal instruction.

The Anglo-Saxon monk, Alcuin of York, who was Charlemagne’s leading advisor on ecclesiastical matters, was worried about the performance of the mission in Saxony and in particular about the “hasty baptism of pagans who knew nothing of the faith”. Of the few recorded cases of more personal instruction, almost all involve rulers or members of the aristocracy. Anglo-Saxon kings, such as Ethelberht, receiving instruction from missionaries who spent time at the royal courts.

Frisian nobles also kept missionaries in their households. In these areas therefore, it seems to have been possible for highly appointed men and women to gain a deeper knowledge of Christianity before their baptism.

In Saxony, on the other hand, the local rulers were forcibly baptised, in much the same way as the rest of the population. It is unlikely that Christian instruction played any significant role in these cases.

There is no evidence of forced baptism in Sweden. However, even here, most of the population appear to have received little pre-baptismal instruction, as the number of clergymen was rather low. Rimbert, who wrote the Life of Ansgar, reported that on several occasions Birka was without a priest for many years. Adam of Bremen, a German canon who wrote in the 1070s, tells us about German priests who were appointed to episcopal sees in Scandinavia, but who never took up their positions.

It is therefore likely that missionaries had to preach to large audiences and they were probably not able to dedicate much time to pre-baptismal instruction. Their primary aim, or wish, may thus have been to baptise the population quickly, as missionaries in England, Saxony, and Frisia had done.

**Prime-signing**

There was however one important difference between baptism in Scandinavia and in the other areas discussed in this article. In Scandinavia in the 10th and early 11th centuries, prime-signing was practised in addition to full baptism.

We are told that Ansgar baptised many at Hedeby in Denmark, but also that “countless numbers” were prime-signed. The prime-signing ritual was constituted by the introductory part of the baptismal rite, and those who had received it were allowed to go to church and take part in Christian life.
This practice had its roots in ancient Christianity when it was believed that everyone should learn about Christianity before they were baptised. This learning period should last a maximum of three years after the initiation ritual. In Sweden, this period seems at times to have been much longer.

The texts on several rune stones in Uppland tell us about people who died “in white clothes”. This probably refers to the baptismal robes, which the baptised should wear after the ceremony. It is therefore likely that these people had been prime-signed and were baptised just before their deaths.

There seem to be at least three explanations as to why some people preferred prime-signing to full baptism. One reason was that people wished to be baptised and cleansed from their sins just before their deaths, as suggested by the Upplandic rune stones. These people were hoping to go straight to paradise.

A second explanation could be that it provided a good option for those who were not entirely convinced that they wished to be baptised.

The third explanation, which occurs in Egil Skallagrímsson’s saga, is of a more practical nature. Here it was stated that Torulf and Egil were prime-signed in England so that they would be able to work for the king. This was the custom among both traders and men who were employed by Christians. The saga explicitly stated that as prime-signed Torulf and Egil could be together with both Christians and pagans and “believe in that which was best suited to their mood”.

The practice of prime-signing may have meant that parts of the population in Sweden at times had greater opportunities to receive pre-baptismal instruction than the people of England, Frisia, and Saxony. It must however also be remembered that we do not know how many of the prime-signed were eventually baptised.

Moreover even in Sweden, the leading layers of society are likely to have received a more thorough Christian instruction than the wider population. The low number of clerics in relation to the population means that in many cases the majority of people may not have come into close contact with a missionary priest until after Christianity had been declared the “official” religion in their district. When these people finally did meet missionaries, they are likely to have accepted baptism as a matter of course.

Preaching

Medieval writers stressed the importance of preaching for successful conversion, and this is mentioned in almost every account of missionary history.

One such example is found in a letter from Pope Vitalian to Oswiu, King of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria. In this letter, the pope promised to select a suitable man as archbishop, who could “root out” the pagan religion “by his preaching and with the help of the word of God”.

However, if we think about the importance of kings for successful conversion and the formulaic baptism by missionaries, it is clear that the overall significance of preaching and instruction in medieval conversion is doubtful. Another factor that supports this is that sermons do not seem to have become a fixed part of the Christian service in Sweden until the end of the twelfth century.

Conclusion

The most striking variances between the conversions of Sweden, England, Frisia and Saxony appear to have been the degree of force, and the use of either forced or voluntary baptism.

However, through the comparison between these areas, it becomes clear that irrespective of the degree of violence employed, the wider population could not exercise much choice in whether to accept or reject Christianity.

Moreover, since the missionaries’ principal aim was to baptise the population as quickly as possible, there does not seem to have been much time for instruction before any type of baptism.

Altogether, this shows that the distinction between forced and voluntary conversion was rather blurred. It is clear that personal religious conviction did not play any significant part in the early stages of Christianization.

We will see this more clearly in the next issue of Viking Heritage when early Christian legislation in Scandinavia will be discussed. These laws were not concerned with people’s Christian faith, but instead aimed at making sure that their lives conformed to a Christian lifestyle.

About the author

Alexandra Sanmark studied medieval history and archaeology at the University of London. In 2003 she finished her PhD thesis, Power and Conversion – A Comparative Study of Christianization, which has now been published by Uppsala University. Since then she has been a visiting scholar at the Centre for Viking and Medieval Studies in Oslo and she is currently the Course Coordinator for the interdisciplinary Masters programme Viking and Early Medieval Studies at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History in Uppsala. Her present research project concerns administrative organisation and itinerant kingship in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages, and involves excavation and mapping of thing sites and ancient roads.

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The tidy metalworkers of Fröjel

Ny Björn Gustafsson & Anders Söderberg

In the summer of 2000 an intriguing find was made during excavations by the Fröjel Discovery Programme, Gotland, Sweden. In a pasture known as “Irma’s hage”, which had never been ploughed, traces of a metal workshop were uncovered.

The settlement and cemeteries of Fröjel are well known thanks to several previous articles in Viking Heritage Magazine. Over the years, more and more information about the site has been collected through excavations. The surveyed and excavated area is mainly situated within tilled farmland and thus the context is disturbed above a certain depth. However there are more or less undisturbed areas at Fröjel. One such area, "Irma’s hage" or officially Bottarve 1:19, was excavated in the late summer of 2000. Several possible traces of houses were visible even with the turf still intact. One of the better defined of these would-be houses was selected and a trench was laid out.

The workshop site
The trench was, in turn, divided in two equally large sub-trenches separated by a 10 cm wide baulk. Early on in the excavation a three-sided stone foundation was noted – its larger stones clearly visible above the turf.

Three layers could be identified in the trench and debris from several crafts, such as glass beads and antler and metal shavings, was found. In addition to this, two well-defined furnaces were found, one in each sub-trench (fig. 1). The furnaces had been filled in and in the fill material several pieces of moulds and hearth lining as well as 11 crucible fragments and two intact crucibles were found along with slag, undefined burnt clay and charcoal. Two samples of charcoal were later radiocarbon-dated and yielded a rough dating for the workshop. The sample from the furnace in trench 5:2 could be dated to AD 970–1160 (68.2 % accuracy) and the one from the furnace in trench 5:2 to AD 1110–1230.

Examination of metallurgical ceramics
The moulds, crucibles, hearth lining and slag from the Fröjel workshop were examined during the spring of 2005 as a part of the project “Metallurgical ceramics 800–1200”. The study also included material from Sigtuna (Kv. Trädgårds- mästaren, excavated 1988-1990) and Skänninge (Skänninge Kriminalvårdanstal, excavated in 2003).

The basic aim was to try to establish whether specific crafts could be connected
to specific levels in the hierarchies of the contemporary society. This can be dealt with in several ways. We chose to study metallurgical ceramics – a find category that we today know is more diverse than it was earlier thought to be.

Crucibles and clay moulds are well known and accounted for, but there are several other types that have been identified during the last decade. Within the project we have surveyed two of these lesser known find types: heating trays and brazing packages, the latter divided into the sub groups box-shaped brazing packages (mainly deriving from padlock brazing) and melting bowls deriving from manufacture of weights.

These types of ceramics represent separate techniques but they also have several features in common. One such similarity is the high degree of heat exposure – the surfaces of the fragments found in archaeological contexts are generally quite glazed or vitrified. This, in turn, means that the often small and fragmented shards of metallurgical ceramic could be – and are – mistaken for slag. This is rather unfortunate since slag seldom attracts any greater interest from researchers. It is generally just weighed and dealt with quantitatively, whereas metallurgical ceramics, when dealt with qualitatively, can yield much information.

Instead of generally stating that “forging occurred” on a site, several metallurgical techniques such as brazing, plating, parting and case hardening or box carburisation can be identified, hence broadening the understanding of what really took place on the site in question.

Cupellation hearth lining
The Fröjel workshop showed none of the find types mentioned above, except for a vague fragment of a brazing package. But another, and from a specifically Gotlandic perspective, interesting type of metallurgical ceramics was present: a multitude of very heavy greyish fragments of hearth lining (fig. 2). When examined more closely it could be established that they probably contained copper oxide, and their weight alone indicated that they contained quite substantial amounts of lead.

The fragments’ origin was beyond a doubt – they had formed the lining of a cupellation furnace. The colour of the
Only pure metallic silver will be left in the material. When the process is finished, the impurities will stay absorbed in the lining, which is why this type of hearth material is surprisingly heavy.

**Casting moulds**

The fragmentary clay moulds from the site were not part of the study. Nevertheless a basic examination of some of the better-preserved shards yielded interesting information about the actual production in the workshop. Especially since lots of them were found in the fillmaterial from the cupellation hearth pit, we considered them highly informative (fig. 4 and 5).

By means of wet clay we were able to get positive copies of the negative impressions of the moulds. Some of these clay positives showed a rather striking resemblance to Gotlandic bronze and silver arm rings. To some extent this was to be expected since the arm rings in question were very common during the late Gotlandic Viking Age. Additionally a concentrated find of small silver shavings were found in what was once the southwest corner of the building, indicating that silver items really were worked there.

It is tempting to assume that the shavings came from the process of retouching various pieces of jewellery – the last and crucial stage during which the jewellery was finished for circulation. Hence we might see the full chain of production in one small location at Bottarve 1:19 – old silver was refined in a cupellation hearth, the refined silver was melted and cast in the shape of native jewellery which was, in turn, prepared for circulation just a couple of feet away from the furnaces.

This is of course a quite obvious line of production, but finding evidence for all the stages preserved in one workshop is highly unusual.

In order to confirm that the moulds in question were really used for casting silver objects, the mould- and crucible fragments will be analysed at the Archaeological Research Laboratory later this winter.

**A tidy workshop**

The title of this paper is "The tidy metalworkers of Fröjel", as the finds from the very building were very sparse. This is not uncommon. The 1990–95 excavation of the 8th–9th century metal workshops in the Black Earth of Birka revealed very clean interiors and the workshop waste, like fragments of moulds and crucibles were found in rubbish heaps outside, in the passages between the town yards. The metalworkers were careful about keeping their working areas clean.

As the Fröjel excavation mainly examined the actual house site, it didn't reveal the waste depositions that are probably still buried a few meters away. Despite this the collected traces of activity reveal lots of information about the workshop.

The possible handling of large quantities of silver at a very advanced technical level, combined with the fact that the workshop was situated in the periphery or even outside of the Fröjel market area is interesting. So are the traces of a permanent workshop building at a later phase.

Who managed such a workshop? The combination of large quantities of precious metals and high technological know-how indicates a connection to the highest and administrative levels of society. The possible production of arm rings with a likewise possibly standardised high silver content at Fröjel, leads our thoughts towards a managed production of highly valued objects which could even be considered as primitive currency.
According to the finds, the workshop also produced glass beads and antler combs, as was the case with a contemporary royal workshop on the mainland: the mint of King Olof Eriksson Sköt Konung in Sigtuna. Viking workshops weren’t strictly specialised yet, not even the workshops of kings and obviously not even a workshop with the dignity of a mint.

**Tube-shaped clay packages**

We also made a brief examination of the finds from Bottarve 1:17, representing the activities in the centre of the Fröjel harbour and market area. Obviously many handicraft activities had also been taking place there; making these finds good references to the materials from the workshop in Irma’s Hage.

A very special sort of ceramic packaging material for metallurgical processes found here is a large fragment of a tube-shaped clay package (fig. 6). This is a common but not yet satisfactorily interpreted type of package found at several sites throughout Western and Northern Europe dating from the Migration Period and into the later Middle Ages.

They often seem to be connected with forging, and according to imprints of bindings inside the tubes, they could possible originate from the clay cases used in box carburisation of steel for tools and weapons.

In early 12th century the priest Theophilus describes the process in his book "On Divers Arts"; “…smear them with old pig fat and wrap them around with leather strips cut from goat skin and bind them with linen thread. After this cover them individually with kneaded clay, leaving the tangs bare. When they are dried, put them into the fire, blow vigorously, and the goatskin will be burnt. Hastily extract them from the clay and quench them evenly in water. Then take them out and dry them at the fire”.

Still more information to interpret

Obviously, there is a lot of information still to be retrieved from the materials collected in the Fröjel Discovery Programme. Our project is an example of the work that takes place after the actual excavation, which is mainly a phase of collecting objects and registering information.

The main part of the work takes place afterwards, in the examination and interpretations that can put life and colours into, for instance, some dull rows of stones enclosing a tidy area containing two pits and a few rather obscure pieces of ceramics and slag. This is in fact the most thrilling part of archaeological work – and the most time-consuming.

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**References / Additional reading**


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[Häftet: "Ridanäss", Vikingahamnen i Fröjel. Visby. --- The main part of the work takes place afterwards, in the examination and interpretations that can put life and colours into, for instance, some dull rows of stones enclosing a tidy area containing two pits and a few rather obscure pieces of ceramics and slag. This is in fact the most thrilling part of archaeological work – and the most time-consuming.]

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The Worlds of the Vikings
– an exhibition at Gotlands Fornsal, Visby

By Malin Lindquist

The Viking Age
The raid on the Lindisfarne monastery off
the coast of Northumberland in the
summer of 793 is generally accepted as
the beginning of the Viking Age. For
about 250 years the Scandinavians
dominated practically all of Europe. The
end of this splendid time is marked by the
fatal defeat of the Norwegian King Harald
Hardrade, when he attempted to conquer
England in 1066. These raiding
expeditions in western Europe have given
the Vikings their reputation as wild
plunderers and warriors.

However, Nearly everybody was a
farmer in those days. Their world was
their farm. They were all-round
handymen – as indeed Gotlandic farmers
always have been. They tilled the land and
tended their livestock. The women’s main
duty was the house and home. Children
had to contribute to the family livelihood
as soon as they were able.

However some managed to expand
their realm. Travel was imperative, not
only for practical reasons; it was part of a
man’s upbringing to have travelled far and
wide. “He who has not travelled has learnt
nothing and knows nothing about people”
can be read in Havamal.

For those who left, the world really did
become bigger. It stretched from Ireland
in the west to Russia in the east, from
Iceland and Greenland in the north to
Greece and Istanbul in the south-east.

They headed east and they headed
west. Those who could not find their
livelihood in their own countries
evacuated to Iceland and onward to
Greenland and Newfoundland. They set
out to find a new homeland, thus
constituting our first emigrants. Some
went plundering in the rich countries
such as the towns, monasteries and
churches in England, France and Spain.
Others went on trading journeys through
Russia to faraway trading markets.

There are numerous theories on the
underlying causes of the Viking-age
expansion. A crying need for land,
overpopulation and internal conflicts may
have constituted some of these causes.

Over the sea
That the Vikings’ sheer skill in building
seaworthy sailing ships was the key to
their successful expansion is a generally

“He who has not travelled has learnt
nothing and knows nothing about people”.
From Hávámal.

The big world – the enticement of the
Orient. From the exhibition.
Photo Raymond Hejdström
accepted claim. The Viking-age shipbuilders were undoubtedly skilful. They built different types of boats for different purposes. Never have more beautiful or more utilitarian boats been produced in Scandinavia.

Warships, or long boats, were up to 20 metres or more in length. Narrow, slender and elegant in design, they were able to carry a crew of up to 60 men with weapons and horses.

Trade ships were broader and deeper, built with cargo-carrying capacity in mind – 20 to 30 tons was not uncommon. They could even transport a family complete with household goods and livestock across the Ocean.

Smaller, lighter and shallow-draught boats were used for trading trips along rivers and lakes. They had room for 10 to 12 men onboard.

Experience had taught them to navigate according to natural elements – the currents, the direction of birds in flight and the stars at night.

The small world
During this period many acres of land were claimed for cultivation. Of the cereal crops, barley was the most important grain. Cultivated root vegetables and greens included cabbages, onions, beans, turnips and peas.

The animals were smaller than those with which we are familiar today. They provided food and raw materials, such as hides, feathers, horns, antlers and fleece. They were used as draught and riding animals. Animals also featured as status symbols and were significant in various aspects of religion. This was particularly true of the horse.

The amount of livestock on a farm depended on the area of available pastureland. The livestock inventory also determined the acreage of tilled land, since animal dung was used to fertilize the fields.

Diet was based on the farm’s own animals and crops, which were supplemented by the yields from hunting, fishing and gathering. Primary produce was dried or smoked. Salt was still a rare commodity. Honey was the most common sweetener. The most common fare on the Vikings’ table was porridge and bread, accompanied by meat, fish or vegetables, according to season and supply.

The core of society was the clan and the family. Their realm was the farm, which satisfied all their needs. Inheritance determined possession – then as now.

These people were not Vikings!

The big world
Countries such as England, France and Spain enticed the Vikings with their towns, monasteries and churches, whose riches were ransacked by the formidable Danish and Norwegian Vikings. These raiding expeditions in Western Europe have given the Vikings the reputation of wild plunderers and warriors and also their name.

Only those who participated in plundering expeditions in affluent Europe can rightly be called Vikings. They were probably a minority among Viking-age people.

Only one Gotlander is known to have taken part in these raids. It was Helge from Hablingbo parish on whose gravestone is written: “Vatair and Helgair have erected the stone after Helge, their”
father. He had gone west with the Vikings.”

He was a Viking! The word Viking means someone fighting at sea, a pirate.

From eastern Sweden, possibly mainly Gotlanders, young men set out on far-flung trading expeditions eastwards to places such as the Bulgar bend on the River Volga and Miklagard (the Swedish name for Constantinople, known today as Istanbul).

This is where goods were exchanged – Nordic weapons and furs for the coveted silver, which was transported home in vast quantities.

Those people were not Vikings!

The Oriental sources differentiate between the Vikings and the Varangians. The Scandinavians, who went East to trade were called Varangians by the people they met. One interpretation is that it originally is a Scandinavian word meaning sworn or under oath. These Scandinavians, who headed east, are known as Varangians.

Cultural clashes

Merchants who travelled to these foreign markets met people from near and far. They met other cultures, other religions, and other languages. How did this affect them and how did they communicate, on the whole: how did they manage?

Of course it is impossible to answer these questions. According to Ibn Fadlan, an Arab who met these Norsemen, there were interpreters but I can imagine that they developed a kind of “pidgin-language” just like all people who travel have always done. The dream of doing good business also unites people and they always find ways to communicate.

Bulgar by the bend of the River Volga was, according to Ibn Fadlan, a market place were “they all live in tents that are decorated with oriental carpets”. He also tells that the Nordic merchants built wooden houses by the river. The place was probably also filled with sheds and bazaars. The area around the town was good for trading; people came from all around with all kinds of goods to sell. Merchants from the Caliphate, perhaps even China could offer silver, silk, and other luxurious objects for furs and weapons.

Here our Nordic traders moved among people, doing business. Among others they met the Arabian emissary, Ahmad ibn Fadlan ibn al-Abbas ibn Rashid ibn Mohammed, called Ibn Fadlan for short. Admittedly, he described them as “stray donkeys” and “getting drunk day and night”, but he also reported that he had “never seen such perfect bodies; they were like palm trees, tall, blond and ruddy”.

Famous is the description of a Varangian funeral and how slaves, food and drink are carried on board and how they set fire to it all which highly astonishes the Arab. Perhaps even more interesting is to hear what the Norsemen had to say:

“You Arabs are really stupid. You take the person you love the most and put him into the earth and insects and worms will eat him. We burn him rapidly in a fire and he will go directly to Paradise.”

This is not what we, in modern terms, call racism – this is more of a cultural clash between sophisticated Muslims and (in their eyes) barbarians from the North!

Halvdan in Miklagård

Miklagård was the magnificent capital of the Byzantine Empire, the centre of Christianity with churches and palaces, art and culture and a pleasant climate. This walled town had about 100,000 inhabitants. Birka’s estimated population at the same time was one thousand.

This golden city must have impressed the Nordic visitors! Imagine the impact of the bazaars! There were – just like today – a throng of people and goods from the Orient, Africa and Europe. A successful deal resulted in the acquisition of luxury goods such as ivory, cloth, spices, silver embroideries and gaudy glass beads, rock crystal and cornelian, which were then conveyed home to the North.

Some of these Varangians probably never returned home. One of them might have been Halvdan – he who carved his name in runes in one of the balustrades in the Hagia Sofia church in Constantinople. What did he think standing in the galleries following the orthodox service? Maybe he hesitated about whether to stay or to go home. If he stayed he probably became a soldier in the Emperor’s
The Worlds of the Vikings

The exhibition “The Worlds of the Vikings” opened May 15, 2005 in the County Museum of Gotland. It will be open till the middle of May 2006. At the same time the Spillings Hoard is on display in the Treasury.

The exhibition wishes to change the common picture of the Viking as a warrior and a plunderer. It presents him as a farmer, merchant and sailor.

The name refers to the different worlds in which the Vikings lived. In one, “the small world”, the realm was the farm, which satisfied all their needs. Nearly everybody was a farmer and all-round handymen – as indeed Gotlandic farmers always have been. The core of society was the clan and the family.

However some of them managed to expand their realm. Young men set out on far-flung trading expeditions to places such as the Bulgar bend on the River Volga and Miklagard = “the big world”.

Some probably never returned home, but many did, bringing with them a considerable fortune, some of it displayed in the County Museum of Gotland.

Malin Lindquist

About the author

Malin Linquist is well known to the readers of VHM as she has contributed several articles over the years. In her daily work she is the senior curator and responsible for the archaeological collections at the County Museum of Gotland. She has worked as an archaeologist for many years, mainly on Gotland.

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Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce AD 300–900

This is an important and well-documented book that has been well received by international professional press. The inquiry ranges over half a millennium, and covers all of Europe with some slices of Asia and Africa. The author has collected and analysed a great deal of written and archaeological primary source material from those parts of the world.

Thus the book exceeds the Viking world in both time and space but McCormick also introduces an important new concept The Northern Arc, which is a new trade route between the North Sea and the Orient. It runs via southern Jutland across the Scandinavian Peninsula or via the Baltic, along the Russian rivers to Byzantium and the Caliphate. This route was opened by Frisian and Oriental merchants, who had the necessary geographic know-how, during the 9th century and was the economic prerequisite for trading places like Haithabu, Birka, Paviken, Novgorod and Kiev.

McCormick shows that the trade between northern Europe and the Orient flourished during the final centuries of the first millennium. This is contrary to the Pirenne thesis from the mid-20th century, which says that Islamic expansion in the Mediterranean disrupted commerce.

Regrettably, one of McCormick’s conclusions is that Europe’s most abundant product around 800 was the Europeans who were sold as slaves to the more advanced economies of Africa and Asia.

The European economies did engage deeply with those of the Muslim world and Byzantium. Birka was an important place because it was situated far outside the range of Christian jurisdictions, which meant that the treatment of even Christian slaves was uninhibited.

One of the book’s shortcomings is that a result of the trading activities – Islamic coins is not discussed in full regarding Scandinavia. One reason is obviously that we still lack a handsome survey of those finds, but actions to correct that should be taken in Scandinavia.

This book ought to be read by everyone engaged in studies of the Viking-age economy.

Carl Löfving

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Malin Linquist is well known to the readers of VHM as she has contributed several articles over the years. In her daily work she is the senior curator and responsible for the archaeological collections at the County Museum of Gotland. She has worked as an archaeologist for many years, mainly on Gotland.

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New book!

Written by Michael McCormick.
Published by Cambridge University Press. 2001.
ISBN 0-521-66102-1

Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce AD 300–900

Written by Michael McCormick.
Published by Cambridge University Press. 2001.
ISBN 0-521-66102-1
The main issues on the agenda were naturally the final reports, the summing up of project activities throughout the last three years. Also, tangible results like the new Sagalands book, the Sagalands map, the website etc. were on the agenda.

The main purpose of having a meeting in the Faroe Islands was of course to visit our Faroese partners: the National Museum of the Faroes and the Faroese Tourist Board and look at the projects they have been running on the islands of Sandoy and Skúvoy.

These two islands lie south of the main island Streymoy, where Tórshavn is situated. Sandoy is quite a large island and a major agricultural area, whereas Skúvoy is a rather small island with a current population of around 40 persons.

Skúvoy

During our excursion day, we headed for Skúvoy from Tórshavn on an early Sunday morning, arriving there in perfect sunshine. Then we made our way from the village, lying above the landing place, up through the relatively steep river valley,
which is the main agricultural area, towards the top of the island. The landscape rises quite steeply from sea level to almost 400 metres above sea level, and on the top you can see that the other side of the island is a vertical cliff wall.

The view of us on the top reminded me of the story of Asterix meeting with the Vikings. There it is told that the Vikings knew no fear, even when throwing themselves off such high cliffs.

There is, in fact, a Saga relating to Skúvoy and a Viking jumping off the rocks into the sea and swimming to the distant Suðuroy, where unfortunately, he was killed. The story refers to Sigmundur Brestisson, who was sent to back to Faroes by Olof Tryggvason to try and christen the Faroese. Trondur in Gota chased him and forced him to escape by jumping into the sea. The whole story appears in the *Færeyinga Saga*.

A stone with an engraved Celtic-style cross on the old graveyard on Skúvoy is attributed to Sigmundur.

**Sandoy**

On Sandoy, the regional tourist board has developed a Viking, or rather a Fairy trail. Guided walks are already offered along this trail, which includes stops where stories from the Sagas, but even legends, myths, and other stories are told. Work is in progress to produce very attractive signboards at these locations, so that you can also do the walk on your own.

During our stay on Sandoy, we had the pleasure of paying a visit to the village of Sandur. Here, excavations around the church have shown a series of churches on the site, and current excavations in the vicinity of the church have revealed cultural layers of around 2 metres. It is probable that Sandoy was an important centre in the Faroes from the Viking times onwards.

At the small village of Dalur we were invited to a traditional Faroese Sunday dinner, with soup, lamb and rhubarb pudding, followed by a long session of traditional Faroese songs and dance.

**Kirkjubø**

Our programme also included a visit to Kirkjubø, the traditional seat of the bishops of the Faroe Islands. Here, the oldest church on the islands, the Olof’s Church, a stone church dating from the 12th century, and the ruins of the St. Magnus Cathedral, built in the 13th century stand alongside the manor house. This house is composed of several older houses built together, and in the oldest part, the large hall, we had a superb
dinner, followed by story telling and traditional dancing.

The public seminar
As usual, the programme also included a seminar open to the public. This seminar was held in downtown Hotel Hafnia and quite a few local people attended.

The lectures included papers by Símun V. Arge, an archaeologist at the National Museum of the Faroe Islands. He spoke about the archaeology/early history of the islands of Sandoy and Skúvoy.

Later, Olga Biskopstø from the Outer Islands Committee told us about the work this association of people living on the outer islands of the Faroes is currently doing to promote development of the outlying islands including Skúvoy.

We also had a paper by Niels Halm, the Director of the Nordic House in Tórshavn, discussing festivals and events and the opportunities for the Sagalands network to join what they are doing at the Nordic House.

A new Sagalands project
Among the other important issues discussed at the meeting were the ideas of developing an extension proposal to enable the network established during the last years to be maintained until a new main project can be launched. It is suggested that the current project be extended for another 1 1/2 years. During this period, a new project proposal will be developed.

This new project was also discussed at the meeting. It was agreed that the new Sagalands project will have a broader scope than just the Viking period, but that it will still focus on culture- and heritage-based tourism.

The final meeting of the current Destination Viking Sagalands project will be held in Newfoundland, Canada, September 15–22.

It is likely that a few new partners will join the Sagalands project during the extension project, and I do hope that none of the current partners will jump off the cliffs either, but stay on together with the other fearless Vikings to face a new and exciting stage in the history of the Sagas!
There has long been discussion as to what happened to the original inhabitants of Orkney when the Vikings took over. Did they intermarry peacefully? Or, did a more sinister fate befall them?

Experts are divided on the subject. It has been claimed that there was continuity between the Pictish and Viking inhabitants in the archaeological record.

By contrast the placename record does not bear this out – recent research by the Shetland archivist, Brian Smith compares the placenames of Orkney with those of Tasmania, where an alien race systematically exterminated the local population, replacing local placenames with English ones. The overwhelming number of placenames in Orkney derives from the Old Norse, with almost no evidence for names of an earlier time.

The main written source for the Viking invasion of Orkney comes from the Orkneyinga Saga, in this we are told that King Harald Fairhair led an expedition against Viking raiders based in Orkney and Shetland. There is no mention made of the original population.

The only reference to an earlier people comes from the late 12th century Historia Norwegiae (a near contemporary of Orkneyinga Saga, it was compiled from earlier unknown sources). In this it claims that Orkney was inhabited by Picts and Papae (priests), referred to as two races, but then described in such a way...
as to render them part of a mythological past, rather than real people.

The reality of the Picts is undoubted. These were the people inhabiting Orkney from the 4th to the 8th or 9th centuries AD. Then, Orkney was a distinct and outlying part of a much larger kingdom and references from the mid 6th century tell of Orkney's minor king or "regulus" at the court of the "potentissimus" or most powerful, Pictish King Bridei who also held hostages from Orkney at his court.

The Picts are most famous for their sculptured stone work – in particular their enigmatic symbol stones. Although there would always have been volatile political relationships between potentates, the evidence of the sculptured stones found in Orkney that bear identical symbols to many found elsewhere in the heartlands of Pictish Scotland, clearly demonstrate that the islands were thoroughly Pictish at the time of the Vikings arrival.

At risk of over-simplifying argument, it can be said that archaeological evidence for the continuity of the Pictish people at settlement sites is based on Pictish artefacts being found in Norse style (rectangular) buildings, and to a lesser extent on Viking material being found in Pictish (curvilinear) buildings.

An interpretation of cultural continuity, based on material apparently alien to the style of building it is found in, is questionable. It seems reasonable to suggest instead that this kind of finding could have stemmed from Vikings using abandoned buildings or taking material which had originally been Pictish and using it for themselves. An example would be a particularly long-lived round Pictish house, excavated at Pool in Sanday that was still being used as an outhouse, well into Norse times.

The most frequently found material on Pictish sites is pottery. The absence of pottery, a basic cultural artefact, during the earlier Viking period is noticeable throughout the islands. Pottery returns, in a different form and fabric only in later Viking (Norse) times.

If there had been a Pictish population contemporary with the Vikings and even if they were enslaved, one could expect that they would continue to make and use pottery for themselves at least, as they always had. This very basic change in material culture would suggest that the Picts were driven from the islands or slaughtered.

Pictish burials are not common in Orkney. Burial in long cists (stone-slab lined graves containing bodies laid out straight) occurs, in both pagan and possibly Christian contexts during this period.

At Moaness, Westness, Rousay the cemetery is more famous for its pagan Viking burials, particularly a very rich woman's burial including a raided or traded Irish brooch. But the burial ground is also adduced as an argument for continuity, since the majority of burials there were Pictish, in long cists orientated east-west (so possibly Christian) and were left undisturbed by the later Viking burials.

This lack of disturbance has been held to be a signifier of respect by the Vikings for their Pictish neighbours. However, the Pictish graves were marked on the surface, and easily avoided. They did not hold any grave goods or treasure, and there seems to be no good reason why they should have been disturbed. By contrast one of the pagan Viking graves (which had contained goods, presumably) had been dug into.

The dates for the Pictish style graves and the pagan style Viking graves do not apparently overlap. (With the proviso that the calibration curve at about 1000 AD is particularly flat, and uninformative!) The...
Westness graves can therefore equally well be held to support the idea of Picts being wiped out once the pagan Vikings had properly arrived.

Recent research has suggested that some Pictish combs were made from Reindeer antler – which was not available in Britain. This has been interpreted as indicating trade between Scandinavia and Orkney before the Viking invasion. The land-hungry Vikings could have become familiar in this way with the political geography of the rich cattle lands of Orkney.

The peripherality of Orkney to the main Pictish kingdom, which was equally being raided by Vikings, but also pressed by Scots, could have meant that the Orkney Picts were left to defend themselves. A local population distributed amongst islands was for the most part, probably easy pickings.

Historia Norwegiae says of the Picts that they were “only a little taller than pygmies [who] accomplished miraculous achievements by building towns, morning and evening, but at midday every ounce of strength deserted them and they hid for fear in underground chambers.”

Written only a few hundred years after their defeat this story reinforces the “otherness” or non-human attributes of earlier inhabitants - whose humanity was and perhaps had been, irrelevant to their conquerors? A folk memory recorded on the island of Rousay in the late 19th century echoes this claim.

The story goes that “It was a tradition of the first coming of the Norse men to Rousay, when the fairy people made such a show of glittering spears on the hillside above Trumland that the Viking ships sheered off and departed. They returned, however, and drove out the old people of the island, who migrated to the west side of Rousay, and there made themselves underground dwellings.”

Both of these references suggest that the earlier chambered tombs, earth houses (underground chambers) and ancient houses buried through time were considered to be the homes of the Picts. The term ‘Picts houses’ is still used in Orkney to refer to any ancient building, no matter what period they date from. Another story that was recorded in the late 19th century tells how the Picts were driven from the coastal sites to the parish of Harray in the centre of the West Mainland. The Vikings led an attack from the east and west, eventually defeating the Picts to become the undisputed masters of Orkney. Like all folktales, it is very difficult to say how old it really is; was it an account of a final battle, the culmination of Viking warbands killing or displacing the original population, island by island, or a 19th century invention?

A recent DNA study of today’s population of native Orcadians and Shetlanders showed that a very high proportion was descended from Norwegians. This genetic research is just another piece of the jigsaw; another clue as to the fate of the Orkney Picts who stood and watched the sails of the Viking longships appearing over the horizon.

Further reading:

About the authors
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How to make the Iron Age come alive – Theatre and re-enactments at Gene Iron-age farm in northern Sweden

by Maria Blomster

Since the 6th century farm was reconstructed in 1990, making prehistory come alive has been quite a natural task at Gene Iron-age village in the province of Ångermanland, in northeastern Sweden. The creation of Iron-age roles and re-enactments have been integrated as a natural part of and a kind of precondition for the development of activities and daily life on the farm, as is the case in few other reconstructed prehistoric farms. The roles have also functioned very positively in ensuring social and mental integration among the people working at Gene.

Background and history
The ancient area of the Gene farm, situated about five kilometres outside the town of Örnsköldsvik in northern Sweden, was discovered by mere accident in the 1970s. The municipality intended to build apartments in the forested area of Genesmon, but thanks to a known and partially excavated grave field with 13 grave mounds in this area, archaeologists were forced to do an excavation first.

During this excavation a unique prehistoric sedentary settlement was found and dated to the Scandinavian Roman Iron Age period (0–600 AD). Traces of two longhouses, each 40 meters long, were found with the post-holes and walls clearly indicating how the houses had been built.

The excavation prompted a rethinking of the archaeology of the middle and northern parts of Sweden at that time. Until the 1970s, scholars believed that only groups of hunters and gatherers had lived in northern Sweden during the Roman Iron Age. However the unique artefacts found at the Gene settlement such as iron tools, bronze-casting forms, agricultural tools, and glass-beads from the Middle East, indicated a technologically advanced society and that the people at Gene had lived as farmers with quite large herds of livestock.

Both the family members and their livestock lived in the longhouse, which was divided into 7 different parts. The first longhouse was dated from 0–300 AD and the second from the period 300–600 AD.

Two barns, a pit-house for linen weaving, a bronze-casting house, an extremely large unique smithy with four fireplaces and even more buildings were found. When the smithy burned down the roof of turf and birch-bark had been excellently preserved thanks to a coaling process after the fire, and under the roof the blacksmith tools were found.

Based on all these facts, the Gene farm was a very large farm for the time with about 15 inhabitants, most certainly a wealthy chieftain’s farm where agriculture, fishing, livestock-breeding, advanced handicraft technology and contacts with other cultures were all part of daily life.

How to recreate Iron-age life?
After the years of excavation a foundation was made, and the reconstruction of the farm started in 1990. In reconstructing the Gene farm the aim was to create the best and most authentic farm as possible based on the documented excavation and archaeological findings.

With this technical authenticity it also became natural to think about the other side of the coin: the authenticity of the Iron-age people and Iron-age living! How did they live their daily lives? What did they wear? What did they talk about and think about? The last question we can only imagine.

Very soon it became necessary to create a sort of historic daily life at Gene, naturally with archaeological facts as a starting point, but more and more aimed at creating an Iron-age atmosphere for Gene Iron-age Village’s many visitors, such as schoolchildren, tourists and companies. This cannot always be accomplished with the help of archaeological facts alone.

However archaeology helps us to understand some of the relationships
between different family members during the Iron Age. One example of this is that the farm chieftain could be either a woman or a man, since the 13 ancient grave mounds in the area contain both men’s and women’s graves.

We also know that people in these days lived mostly at peace with each other and therefore probably had maids instead of slaves.

Moreover the Icelandic Sagas tell us about the sorcery (völva) existing in the prehistoric society as a medium between the world of the humans and that of the prehistoric gods. In the Sagas we also find names of people, names that probably have been used even in the Iron Age, a few hundred years before the Viking Age.

The creation of a family
Based on these facts, gradually a family with names was created by the people working at Gene. When they started work, everyone was given his or her own role in the family and a personal name. The chieftain's name was Sixten, his wife Hägvid and their four children Harald, Sigrid, Sigvald and Sibbe.

The character of the real person simply formed the character of the Iron-age one, and many of the people working at Gene have kept their names for many years. Some have identified with their role so strongly that it has been nearly impossible for them to have a separate identity.

Other persons have, however, changed roles over the years, or new roles have been created when needed. Other than the six family members there has been a grandmother, maids, labourers and neighbours from the neighbouring farms, Bäck and Vågsnäs, all with their own personalities. In this way a sort of unwritten, invented history has been created at the farm.

Re-enactments
The unique thing about Gene Iron-age village has been the fact that the visitors have always experienced Iron-age life when visiting Gene, since the staff are always acting in their roles when working and wearing Iron-age clothing. Depending on who has been working, the visitors have met different family members playing their own role.

Above all, in the summer when there are activities and guided tours for visitors every day, the roles have become clear in the short re-enactments (role playing), arranged during all guided tours. These re-enactments can be recurrent ones, used day after day or year after year, but some of them can also be created here and now, depending on the specific occasion. For example, dialogues between two or more people in the family are always spontaneous and just like it could have been in real Iron-age life.

The special thing about the re-enactments at Gene, however, is that the people act in their Iron-age roles, but the next second leave these roles to talk to the visitors in the present. This becomes especially obvious during the guided tours when the guides switch between the present (when telling facts) and Iron-age times (when acting in a role).

The Gene play – living history at its best
During the latest years, there has been a need to develop the history of the Gene family. A real family history is very dynamic, and naturally that was also the
Another reason to develop history was also that new people became employed at Gene, creating new characters and happenings in the family.

Therefore, in 2001, the Gene play had its first performance on an outdoor stage outside the longhouse at Gene Iron-age village. The reason for this first play was actually the visit of a group of delegates from the network of prehistoric villages in Sweden (Nätverket Sveriges Levande Forntid). The play, which was a sort of welcome to the group, was a success and after that theatre as a form of living history attracted a great deal of attention in many prehistoric villages all over Sweden.

The actors in the play were the whole staff group of amateur actors, as well as children and horses, about 20 persons in total. Since the joy of creating theatre together was so great, new plays with new happenings were written the following summers. These were then performed for the public, with tickets sold for the performances.

The first play dealt with a new happening in the family at Gene: The oldest son Harald’s fiancé, Ísgerð, arrives at the farm from another province in Sweden to live with Harald and his family at the Gene farm. Confusion and envy, but even friendship, all were given a face in an Iron-age way. Ísgerð brought several people with her to the farm, among them her brother Ísbjörn who decided to stay at Gene and become a blacksmith.

In the following plays of 2002, 2003 and 2004, the plot evolved. Harald and Ísgerð got married and their conflicts with the neighbouring reindeer, non-agriculture culture were some of them.

In 2004, men from the King’s army (hirden) invaded the Gene farm on horseback, trying to force the men of the farm to join the army to go to the Roman Empire.

In all the plays, the aim has been to present as good archaeological facts as possible. Research has therefore been a natural part of the work in creating true-to-life situations. When we are unsure of how to do something, we have just left that happening and chosen another archaeologically safer one. Iron-age clothes and good properties have, of course, been a natural part of the plays, as well as showing different social status between different people. This has been accomplished most easily with clothes and colours.

In addition to this archaeological side of the play, however, the Gene play, with hundreds of visitors over the years, has been a fantastic instrument to use in creating our own Iron-age Saga. Finally it has fulfilled its aim in an excellent way; to create living history in a place where written sources are missing and thus recreate Iron-age life in modern times.

For further information
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Maria Blomster is a museum educationalist and has worked with programs and activities for schools, companies and other groups. She has been one of two people responsible for developing the year-round activities at Gene Iron-age village over the past four years. At the moment she runs her own company - AGMA- Forntid och Äventyr.
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Vikingarnas språk 750-1100
(The language of the Vikings)

Written by Rune Palm
Published by
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ISBN 91-1-301086-7

What do we really know about Viking Age? Much is based on a romantic view of history and disconnected facts from Sweden’s period as a great power and the 19th century. But language doesn’t lie. The runic stones in our country give solid evidence of how people talked, wrote and the way they lived. Through them we can obtain knowledge about our history.

There is a good supply of reference material: more than 135,000 words and 3,300 preserved Nordic inscriptions from 800 to around 1100 AD are available. The runic stones dominate in the provinces of Uppland, Sörmland and Östergötland, but many inscriptions are found even outside Scandinavia.

Vikingarnas språk describes the development of the history of language and gives a lesson in how to read runes and interpret the Eddic poems.

The work is a readable, scientific account of the Viking-age language, society and culture. Vikingarnas språk is only available in Swedish at present.

The author Rune Palm is a runologist and senior lecturer in Nordic language at the University of Stockholm.
The dust jacket of the book reads: "Viking Empires is a definitive new account of the Viking world. From the first contact in the 790s, this book traces the fascinating history of the Viking Age from the North American seaboard in the west to the Baltic States in the east.

- An illustrated history of five hundred years of Viking civilisation
- A ground-breaking global perspective on the Viking Age
- Integrates social, political, cultural, economic, maritime and military history with archaeology, literature and religion to offer a rich account of the rise and fall of the Viking empires.

Indeed it is an interesting and comprehensive book, but only for those parts of the Viking world that are examined. The global perspective is lacking because almost all the Scandinavian activity east of the Baltic is omitted.

The reason may be that the direct Viking activity there is difficult to trace in written sources. Certainly the origins of the Rus are obscure, but Scandinavians and Frisians were important actors along with Finnish, Slavonic and Oriental peoples when the trading route between the Baltic and the Orient was opened up during the 9th century. The large hoards of Islamic coins, especially on Gotland, are proof of this.

This route was crucial for the Viking-age economy in southern Scandinavia. It is named “The Northern Arc” by Michael McCormick in his book, which was published as early as 2001 (Look for the review of this book in this magazine). Neither the hoards nor McCormick’s book are discussed in the volume.

The main viewpoint for Viking Empires is the North Sea and the Atlantic area viewed from Ireland and Scotland. The developments in these parts of the globe are related in full. This includes the colonisation of Iceland, Greenland and Vinland in North America. Even the necessary conditions for this – ships and seafaring are thoroughly discussed in different chapters.

A new and important perspective of the book is summarised in the chapter Scandinavian and European integration: reform and rebirth. It is stressed that the Scandinavians from the Migration Period to the Middle Ages were a part of the larger European economy. In this chapter the early medieval Danish rulers, the Scandinavian archdiocese and the Crusades are discussed.

As usual there are a few errors in the text but in my opinion the book is well documented - west of the Baltic.

CARL LÖFVING
“Golden old men” found in eastern Norway

A tremendously unique discovery has been found in Norway. “This is a find made only once in a lifetime”, says Professor Heid Gjøstein Resi, the woman in charge of the excavation.

The eleven small golden reliefs, dating from 600-700 AD, are only about 1,1 centimetres in size and the most intact object depicts a couple, possibly the mythological figures Fröy and Gerd. It is believed they were used as a form of payment or offering at rituals.

The latest finds in Norway were unearthed on Lofoten in the 1980s and the biggest collection ever, around 2,300, was found on the Danish island of Bornholm. Similar finds have also been made in Sweden.

Archaeologists will resume digging in the spring and then the location site will be made public.

Source: Aftenposten

Women on Viking raids

Viking warriors were homemakers who couldn’t wait to ship their wives over to settle the lands they had conquered. Scientists from Oxford University have discovered from studying Scots of Viking ancestry in Scotland and Orkney, that there must have been far more Viking women in the Dark Ages settlements than originally presumed.

By sampling 500 residents of Shetland using a toothbrush to extract some of their saliva, the scientists were able to identify genetic traits in the Scots, which they share with modern-day Scandinavian populations.

By examining two elements of DNA, one that passed from father to son and one passed down the female lineages, they could work out the gender balance of the original Viking populations.

The study showed that the genetic balance became more male orientated the further away from Scandinavia; colonial strongholds would have been safer the closer to home they were.

Source: Svenska Dagbladet

Two ships leave Gotland for faraway rivers

As a small event in the Viking Year 2005, two famous Viking ships met at Slite, Gotland, on July 5. Their chiefs, Dotes on Krampmacken and Carl Bråvalla on Viking Plym, had agreed to show how their men met to sail eastward together.

Krampmacken – the unique famous replica ship from Gotland with sailing memories from Miklagård and Viking Plym – the beautiful ship of splendour, now the oldest one sailing in the world. Together they made a quite spectacular pair.

Viking Plym, built in 1912, with features like the Gokstad ship (but not a replica of it), is made for ten rowers. Krampmacken was built in 1979–80; its shape is based on a traditional design and built with six boards and nine frames.

At Slite the ships were filmed by a Japanese film team from TBS Vision and a cameraman moved between the two ships and a following boat. The two ships will be shown together with scenes from both Birka and Gotland.

Carl Bråvalla

Scandinavian cooperation on the Iron Age

Power, myths and monuments – is the name of a new cultural historical cooperation between the Scandinavian countries. Using information technology, it is possible to take a virtual journey through our Nordic history.

Gamla Uppsala, Sweden, Midgard Historic Senter in Norway and Kongerens Jelling in Denmark all have something in common – the Scandinavian Iron Age. Recently these three sites were granted project funds from the Nordic ministerial council to present our common Iron-age history.

Planning is underway for an interactive digital product to give visitors a deeper knowledge of the connection between these different Iron-age societies. The visitors will also be able to penetrate deeper into different time periods, look at archaeological finds and ancient monuments, learn more about the legends around the sites, and much more.

The interactive product will be accessible in the different museums and on the Internet. The project is planned to run for three years.

Source: Riksantikvarieämbetet
The summer is over and the organizers of the many Viking events can now relax after quite a hectic period.

The Viking Year 2005 on Gotland (see previous issues of VHM) is not over yet but so far the results have been positive. All in all the Viking theme has been a successful venture.

The Viking village in Tofa and the County Museum of Gotland have had an increasing stream of visitors during the summer. The theatre performance in När “The Snakewoman’s children” was very popular with its audiences, the Althing in Roma will have a follow-up next year, hopefully a whole week, people came from the whole island to take part in the Viking market in Slite, not to mention the archaeology sessions for children in Fröjel which were fully booked every day.

Dan Carlsson, the project leader, is very satisfied with the outcome of the year. There has been vast interest shown and it will continue to grow. Journalists and film teams from France, Belgium, Japan, Switzerland, Germany and Italy have visited the island during summer to write about and document Gotland Viking Island. Now it is time to reflect upon how we will continue to develop the Viking theme on Gotland; this is just the beginning!

The Battle of Hastings 2006

A re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings will take place on October 14–15, 2006 on the site of the original battle in England. Re-enactors from all over the world will participate in this open event and in habit the large Living History encampment.

In the year 2000 about 1500 persons in costume took part. Eleven hundred of these were warriors from 16 different countries. The coming event is expected to be even bigger!

The site custodians, English Heritage, have appointed The Vikings re-enactment society in charge of the event. The Vikings are the oldest and largest Dark-age re-enactment society in the UK, founded as early as 1971.

A website with all the details for attending the event is now available. There you can find clothing and costume guides, combat rules and requirements and lots more.

For further information: http://hastings.vikingsonline.org.uk

Symposium about the Bayeux tapestry in Denmark

A three-day symposium called The Bayeux tapestry – an embroidered chronicle from the Viking Age will take place in the National Museum in Copenhagen on February 8–10, 2006.

The symposium will be held in conjunction with a separate exhibition about the famous Bayeux tapestry and its close ties to Scandinavia, starting in the beginning of 2006 at the National Museum in Copenhagen.

The Bayeux tapestry is one of the most important and magnificent documents in Europe. This excellent, beautiful embroidery is 70 m long and ½ m high and describes the invasion of England by William of Normandy at the battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066 in images and with short Latin texts.

Several interesting lectures will be held during the symposium. Further information from the co-producer Folkuniversitetet: www.fukbh.dk or www.natmus.dk

The cast of “The Snakewomen’s children”, the great Viking theatrical success on Gotland this summer.

Photo Catharina Lübeck

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A 1000 year-old church found in Skien, Norway

The remains of what seems to be Norway's oldest church have been found. Experts now believe that Norway was Christian long before Håkon the Good, Olav Tryggvason and Olav Haraldson began their missionary raids. It would likely push Christianisation back to the 800s.

Researchers have also found two Christian graves from 885-990 at the same site, which may indicate that there is another church. "There might be about 1000 people buried here over a period of 400 years", says Brendelsmo, an archaeologist at the Foundation for Cultural Heritage Research. The site is currently destined to become a park.

Source: Aftenposten

A little knight on horseback – a chess piece?

Recently an amateur found a little knight on horseback using a metal detector in north Nottinghamshire in England. The find is puzzling archaeologists; it is startlingly similar to chess pieces found hundreds of miles away in 1831, on a beach on the Isle of Lewis. The Lewis chessmen, made of walrus ivory, are thought to be part of at least four different sets. Therefore dozens of pieces are missing. The knight can't be one of the missing pieces since he is made of copper alloy, but his helmet and shield are very similar to those of the Lewis knights. The style suggests a late 11th or early 12th century date.

A oddity is that x-ray and metal analyses have shown that the piece was once soldered onto something else and the face is too corroded to tell whether it was as vivid as those of the Lewis soldiers, biting their shields in rage or terror. The knight has no great commercial value, but is of immense historic importance.

Source: The Guardian

A new silver hoard was found on Gotland in May 2005, see VHM 2/2005. Now the find place has been fully investigated.

The first 30 coins were dug out of the ground by grazing cows, so the hoard is now called "the cow-find". It consisted of 185 Arabic coins spread in the ground. Many of them are Russian imitations of Arabic coins of that time.

Photo: Sky High Entertainment

The IMAX movie Viking: Journey to New Worlds – now in Stockholm!

The Viking film for giant screens, Viking: Journey to New Worlds, is making its way around the world. Now it has come to Cosmonova in Stockholm.

The film tells the history and culture of the Vikings, about how and why they explored and colonized land towards the West. The film is about 50 minutes long and, among many other things, we can follow Leif Erikson on his voyage over the seas to North America, 500 years before Columbus crossed the Atlantic.

Cosmonova, a part of the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm, is the only IMAX-cinema in Sweden, as well as the largest planetarium with astronomy performances.

“The cow-find” – 185 coins in the silver hoard

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Destination Viking Living History around the Baltic Sea

A new Viking Route book is out!

When the Council of Europe established the European Viking Route in 1996, the sites included were presented in the book, *Follow the Vikings*, edited by Dan Carlsson and Olwyn Owen.

Then, in 2001, the first regional route within this European Route was established, namely the Western Viking Route. This route was the immediate result of the North Sea Viking Legacy project, financed by the Interreg IIC North Sea programme. This route was also presented in a book, *Destination Viking Western Viking Route*, edited by Marita Engberg Ekman.

When the North Sea Viking Legacy project ended in 2001, several partners felt that work should continue, and in 2002, a new project called Destination Viking Living History received funding from the Interreg IIIB Baltic Sea programme. This project has focused primarily on the presentation of living history at reconstructed Viking villages, and these villages as well as a number of Viking-age sites in their vicinity are now being presented in the third Viking Route book: *Destination Viking Living History around the Baltic Sea*.

This guidebook, also edited by Marita Engberg Ekman, is the same pocket size as the Western Viking Route and has a similar layout. It presents Living History museums in five countries: Russia, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

The book begins with a brief introduction of the project by Björn Jakobsen, project manager, and Geir Sør-Reime, project consultant, followed by a short introduction to the Viking period by Dan Carlsson from Gotland University, one of the project partners.

There is a thematic approach to each chapter. The book opens with Avaldsnes, the first Royal throne of Norway and presents the early history of the Norwegian kingdom and Avaldsnes as a Royal manor, followed by a presentation of the Viking village there and all the Viking-age remains still to be seen in the surrounding area.

The book continues to Ale along the Göta River in Western Sweden, narrating fascinating stories about the struggle between the Nordic kingdoms for the control of this important trade route and border area. A new Viking village is now being constructed in Ale along the river.

Moving further south, the book stops at Fotevikens Museum in Scania, southern Sweden. Here, one of the largest Viking-age Living History museums has been constructed. The chapter on Foteviken also tells the story of the oldest urban settlements in Scania.

We then jump to Trelleborg on Seeland in Denmark. Here we can read of the impressive fortifications built around AD 975 in the areas controlled by the Danish kingdom at that time. Naturally the main centre of attraction is Trelleborg itself and the fascinating story behind the excavations and reconstructions at this site.

Returning to Sweden, the book then takes us to Storholmen Viking Village in east Mid-Sweden. Their chapter focuses on the links between Sweden and the areas to the East during the Viking period, whereas the chapter on Gunnes gård slightly further west concentrates on runic stones found in the area.

We then move eastwards to the Viking island of Gotland. Here the island’s wealthy Viking past is presented, with hoards, picture stones, burial mounds and fortifications in abundance.

Then follows a chapter on Ukranenland in Germany and how a group of enthusiasts there have managed to create a reconstructed Slavonic settlement along the Ukra River. The relationship between Slavonic tribes and Scandinavians in this area is also highlighted.

The final chapter is about Russia, with a special focus on the early Scandinavian influences at Starya Ladoga and in Novgorod. Again, the interaction between the Scandinavians and Slavonic peoples is of major interest.

Geir Sør-Reime

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