

THE VIKING AGE – IN FACT AND FICTION

35. TVÆRFAGLIGE VIKINGESYMPOSIUM

35. Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium, Wednesday, 4 May 2016, 11:00-17:00, Aarhus University, Campus, Tåsingeade 3, Bygning 1441, lok. 112, (Auditorium 2).

Program

11:00 Jens Peter Schjødt & Søren M. Sindbæk: Welcome and introduction

11:15-11:45 Anna Lihammer, (Riksantikvarieämbetet, Sweden): Vikings in science, popular science and fiction – some viewpoints

11:45-12:15 Sophie Bønding (Aarhus Universitet): The Golden Past and the Glorious Future: N.F.S. Grundtvig's Re-Actualisation of Old Norse Mythology

12:15-12:30 Discussion

12:30-13:45 Lunch

13:45-14:15 Are Kolberg: There is Power in a Cohort.

14:15-14:45 Johnny G.G. Jakobsen (Copenhagen University): Donald Duck and the Vikings

Discussion: 14:45-15:00

15:30-16:00 Henning Kure (mythologist, writer of Valhalla): Thor in Utgard. Looking for the fact of fiction

16:00-16:30 Thomas Roger Henrichsen (Danmarkshistorien 2017, Danmarks Radio): Based on a true story...or how Harald Bluetooth ended up in his underwear in the forrest of Moesgaard

Discussion: 16:30-17:00

End: 17:00

Abstracts

Anna Lihammer, (Riksantikvarieämbetet, Sweden): Vikings in science, popular science and fiction – some viewpoints

The presentation discusses the similarities, differences and possibilities of doing science, popular science and historical fiction. Is there, necessarily, a mutually beneficial interplay between popular fiction and archaeological science concerning the theme Vikings – or are the risks concerning, for example, its impact on research, archaeology/heritage management or the growing stereotypification of the Vikings? What does a beneficial interplay look like? What can research learn from fiction regarding the making of stories and where is the border between fact and fiction? Are there alternative ways to research and write history inspired from fiction?

Sophie Bønding (Aarhus Universitet): The Golden Past and the Glorious Future: N.F.S. Grundtvig's Re-Actualisation of Old Norse Mythology

In this paper I will address the role of Old Norse mythology in the creation of Danish communal identity in the mid-19th Century, at the time when the absolute monarchy was being challenged by ideas of democracy, resulting in the formation of the constitutional monarchy, manifested in the Constitution of 1849. My focus is on the ideas of the Danish polymath N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), who saw the Old Norse myths, originating from the pagan past, as a cultural resource for the creation of a collective identity among the Danish population. Within the theoretical frameworks of Anthony D. Smith's concept of ethno-symbolism (2009) and Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory (2011) I will examine Grundtvig's ideas about the awakening of the people by means of a re-contextualization of the Old Norse mythology. Basing my analysis on the text *Brage-Snak* (1844), a collection of manuscripts from a series of public lectures on Old Norse and Ancient Greek myths, I will pay special focus to the interplay between the golden past and the present in Grundtvig's vision of a glorious future for the Danish community. I will argue that his effort to re-appropriate the mythology can be viewed as an attempt to create a collective consciousness, an authentic Nordic mentality, to be propagated among the population in order to foster a sense of belonging. This, in turn, had the purpose of underpinning the communal identity to make sure the community proved strong, durable and united in the face of political upheaval.

Are Kolberg: There is Power in a Cohort.

When you hear the word Viking Age, there is a high likelihood that you will associate it with a dark and lawless age, set in Ultimo Thule, in which individual warriors fought for personal glory, perhaps even doing so in a drug induced state of fury. Inevitably, the berserkers spring to mind, sometimes sided by images of warriors in horned helmets, reflecting the imagery presented to us in various mass media. This type of imagery can at least be traced to the Victorian era, probably helped by 18th century Swedish natural historian Samuel Ödmann who, by drawing analogies to Siberian shamans, hypothesised that the berserkers were in fact in a state of trance induced by eating mushroom. In my paper I wish to go beyond the myths and fiction in order to convey a more nuanced picture of the development of early Scandinavian warfare with an emphasis on Norway and the Viking Age. The archaeological evidence suggests a highly organized society in which justice and equality did matter, a tale supported by the written sources and the historic record. Although some of the early sagas in fact do mention berserkers and men clad in wolf and bear pelts, this is most likely to be ascribed to origin myths and warrior cult. My idea is that there is a distinction to be made between the realms of mythology and actual warfare. The latter may have been very much inspired by Roman warfare. Battles were fought in closed formations; lines divided into cohorts, and with standardised equipment. Going on individual rampages would probably not help you win a battle; there was power in a cohort. As for the realm of myths and warrior cult, this does not rule out organised warfare as mythology and traditions always have been important. This was certainly important within the Roman legions, some types of legionaries would actually dress up in animal pelt (remember that the wolf was an important animal, connected to the very birth of Rome as well as to the god of war Mars). Myths and traditions still matter in modern day society. In fact, as I'm arguing, the roots of social organisation and the Viking Age/early medieval proto states in Scandinavia and Norway may be traced back to the Younger Iron Age, if not even earlier. I will induct my theory from a host of different sources ranging from early texts to archaeological finds, among which standardised arms play a major role. One of my arguments is that a

high numbers of specific arms dictate specific tactics. One the oldest laws in Norway states that a battle able man should be equipped with a spear, a sword or axe, and a shield. This is clearly meant for closed formations. Furthermore, there has been a lot of renewed focus on the high degree of social organisation in Viking Age Scandinavia, but warfare seems to some extent to be neglected.

Johnny G.G. Jakobsen (Department of Nordic Research, Copenhagen University): Donald Duck and the Vikings
Vikings have always been a popular topic in many fictional genres. This includes one of the probably most influential sources of literature in twentieth-century Denmark, which has had a huge impact on generations of Danish children (and some adults) since its first publication in 1949: the Donald Duck-magazines. Even though Donald Duck himself appears to live in a present-day-like community (mainly the city of Duckburg), and generally seems to harbour but little historical interest, he one way or the other surprisingly often has encounters with Viking Age-issues or even actual Vikings. Based on years of intensive studies, this paper aims to present and discuss the following key questions concerning Vikings in the fictional world of Donald Duck: How are Vikings and the Viking Age portrayed in Donald Duck-stories – and have this changed over time? How often do Vikings occur in the life of Donald Duck – and does this vary according to the geographical distribution of publishing houses (are they, for instance, more seen in Scandinavian publications than in Brazilian ones)? And how does the present-day Duckburg community appear to relate to its own Viking Age past – if it indeed has one? The presentation will be illustrated with a series of highly relevant and informative image examples from the Donaldistic sources, as collected through my many years of studies, and special focus will be directed at a couple of particularly classic meetings between Mr. Duck and the Duckburg Vikings.

Henning Kure (mythologist, writer of Valhalla): Thor in Utgard. Looking for the fact of fiction
The Danish comics series Valhalla (15 vols, 1979-2009) is a work of fiction based on Old Norse mythology, which in part can be argued to constitute a fact of the Viking age. Examining why Valhalla is different from its source material, leads us to intermedial and transmedial processes. These processes may throw some light not only on the way we imagine and narrate the past in other ways, such as interpretations of archeological artifacts, but also on the very nature of fact and fiction.

Thomas Roger Henrichsen (Danmarkshistorien 2017, Danmarks Radio): Based on a true story...or how Harald Bluetooth ended up in his underwear in the forrest of Moesgaard
Interpreting history always carries the risk of losing your way in the fiction of imagination - and yet (or maybe exactly for that reason) facts and fiction has been inextricably tied together up through time. How does this relationship challenge us, as modern storytellers, when we want to pass on the scientific knowledge we have about our common past to an audience, who has to navigate in an ever more impenetrable and 'noisy' marketplace? During the production of Danish Broadcast Corporations upcoming national history series - "The Story of Denmark" - we battle to meet these challenges every day on many different levels...because which considerations should we do, when we try to get under the skin of our national heritage and our audience at the same time? And how do we balance between the historical correctness of the past and the recognition of being human in the present?