



TRAVELLING VIKING AGE

40th INTERDISCIPLINARY VIKING SYMPOSIUM

Edited by Dorthe Dangvard Pedersen & Jesper Hansen



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Preface

Travelling Viking Age

40th Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium - 3 May 2023

Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm, Jesper Hansen & Dorthe Dangvard Pedersen

The theme of the symposium was *Travelling Viking Age*. The concept of travelling is closely connected to the history and research of the Viking Age, and it is widely known from written sources such as Ottar's and Wulfstan's travel descriptions as well as Saga-texts and early chroniclers such as Saxo or Adam of Bremen. In this symposium we wanted to broaden the concept of travelling considerably and in addition to travelling of people we wanted to address infrastructures related to sea- and land-travel as well as travelling objects and resources, travelling of thoughts, ideology, language, and literature as well as concepts of organizing society in a broader sense in early urbanity including systems of taxations and coinage etc. All concepts and approaches, however, from an overarching perspective on travel and the dynamism inherent in this concept.

We thank those who presented their research at the symposium and those who contributed manuscripts to these proceedings.

On behalf of the Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium working group

Maritime Mindscapes: using experimental archaeology to reconstruct Viking Age seafaring routes

Greer Jarrett



Fig. 1. The Norðvegr. The black rectangle indicates the area within which the sailing trials took place. The two major voyages conducted for this study are indicated by red and green lines. The names in bold indicate havens that are known to have been used during the Viking Age or High Middle Ages, whilst those in cursive are put forward as potential additions in the light of the project's trials.

Abstract

In this paper I evaluate the feasibility of reconstructing Viking Age sailing routes through experimental and ethnographic fieldwork onboard traditional Norwegian boats, focusing on aspects of Viking Age route choice, risk judgement, and the location of possible anchorages and harbours. The goal with this approach is to reconstruct the 'scapes' of Viking Age seafaring: the seafaring routes and environments, as well as the practices and worldviews of a maritime society. It is argued that through this approach, we can discover not

only where people travelled, but also what these journeys were like, what understandings of the world they were entangled in, and how these afforded the practices observable in the surviving evidence. Some elements and aspects of these scapes survived in relatively unaltered form into the 20th century, allowing us to employ them as analogies for Viking Age affordances, and reconstruct possible maritime itineraries along the Norwegian coast.

Introduction

By the Viking Age, the western coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula was a profoundly interlinked region, dominated by magnates and petty rulers whose power was founded upon agricultural lands and the control of the sailing route known as the *Norðvegr* (Iversen, 2020: 290; Skre, 2014: 42–43; Storli, 2007: 86) (Figure 1). This route continued to play a determining role in European history over the next twelve centuries, transporting people, animals, ideas, and goods from reindeer antler to natural gas. The evidence for its use during the Viking Age comes from a range of disciplines (history, archaeology, place-name studies, genetics), but is usually limited to a point of origin and destination for the data in question, rarely shedding any light on the voyages and voyagers that bound the Viking world together across its vast seascapes (e.g. Heen-Pettersen, 2014; Hedenstierna-Jonson, 2016; Margaryan et al., 2020).

Here, I would like to present an approach that attempts to address these gaps in our knowledge by exploring the *Norðvegr* from the perspective of the sailor (Heide and Planke, 2019). I have recently taken part in a series of experimental voyages along the Norwegian coast in traditional Norwegian boats, descendants of the clinker tradition that underlay the maritime character of the Viking Age. The aim of this paper is to evaluate whether the perspective of the traditional sailor, gained (albeit only partially) through these voyages, can be used as a window on the travelling Viking Age. This evaluation is presented as a tentative ‘proof of concept’ from which further experimental and analytical research will follow. First-hand sailing experiences are compared with archaeological, historical, toponymic, and environmental evidence for Viking Age seafaring. I argue that traditional Norwegian seafaring practices can serve as analogies for similar activities from the Viking Age, allowing us to reconstruct the most

frequented sailing routes from this period, and even suggest which harbours and anchorages were used.

A shared maritime worldview in the Viking Age?

The first step for this study should be to establish whether sufficient evidence exists to speak of a shared maritime culture along the *Norðvegr* in the Viking Age. Only if this is the case will it be possible to compare this with the experimental and experiential results from the recent trial voyages. Despite the large geographical area under consideration and the hindrances to travel posed by the harsh climate, the coastal communities of western Scandinavia seem to have been thoroughly interlinked since at least the Late Iron Age (Iversen, 2020, p. 295; Østmo, 2020, p. 10). By the time the merchant-explorer Ottar visited the court of King Alfred of Wessex in the late 9th century, the inhabitants of this region had a common name, *Norðmaðr*, reflecting a conception of geographical unity either in the mind of the scribe or in the account given by Ottar himself (Bately, 2007: 40–50; Storli, 2007: 85; Skre, 2014: 35). In either case, it seems likely that a “feeling of community” existed throughout this seascape, based on shared practices and movements (Storli, 2007: 85). Such connections would have been strengthened by a similar range of subsistence patterns, considerable genetic continuity since the Bronze Age, and the use of a common language (Ling et al., 2018: 509).

A shared maritime heritage is also evident in the creations of the Viking world, be they place-names, writings, or artefacts. Several scholars have pointed to the use of unique names for important landmarks both in Scandinavia and in the territories settled overseas, reflecting a common maritime cosmology throughout these areas (Stylegar and Grimm, 2003; Westerdahl, 2005; Kruse, 2020).



Fig. 2. Stad from onboard Båra, June 2022. The Åfjordsbåt used during this voyage was surprisingly comfortable in the large swell common around exposed headlands like this one, and throughout this project's fieldwork it proved safer to sail further out to sea rather than directly under the land, as this minimised the risks of katabatic gusts and strong currents.



Fig. 3. Such unpredictable winds recently resulted in the capsize of a fembøring off Kunna in Northern Norway. Photograph courtesy of HRS Nord-Norge (No. 330 Squadron RNoAF).

Norse creations such as the ship-prow engravings presented by Heen-Petersen in this volume, the common maritime motifs and *kennings* in the surviving poetic corpus (Jesch, 2015), and the mental geography of Icelandic medieval writers (Jackson, 2009), all point to a shared tradition of maritime practice, and intertwined with this, a common understanding of maritime space.

Seafaring worldviews then and now

The data-gathering exercises for this project consisted of a series of experimental sailing trials and trial voyages throughout the *Norðvegr*. These were undertaken onboard traditional clinker-built, square-rigged fishing and trading

boats from Trøndelag known as *Åfjordsbåter* (Figure 4). The trials ran between September 2021 and July 2022 and ranged from one-day excursions to multi-week expeditions, covering the Norwegian coast from the Lofoten archipelago to Bergen (Figure 1). The aim of this fieldwork was to identify the primary factors that influenced navigational choice before and during sailing voyages onboard *Åfjordsbåter*, as an understanding of these would allow for the reconstruction of sailors' decision processes. If sufficient parallels between the practices of *Åfjordsbåt* sailing and those of the Viking Age could be established, then an understanding of these traditional decision processes might serve as a foundation for suggesting which routes and havens were most likely to have been frequented in the Viking Age. To fulfil the research

objective, I gathered qualitative and quantitative data regarding how and why certain routes were chosen, focusing on environmental and technical factors (wind and sea conditions, visibility, boat performance) as well as cognitive and social ones (experience, morale, skill, judgement). Data-gathering followed the guidelines set out by Englert (2006) and Bischoff et al. (2014), with the assembled dataset consisting of field notes, photographs, and video footage, interviews, wind and weather readings, 3D models of the boats, and a GPS track of each voyage.

A fundamental finding from this fieldwork was the observed development both within myself and among the crew of a new way of thinking and doing at sea, tightly bound to the practices and environments of traditional Norwegian sailing. I would argue that this occurred through the gradual, collective attunement to a new way of perceiving, acting in, and thinking about the seascape, what Eldjárn and Godal refer to as a *veremåte* (1988a; 17) (Ingold, 2000: 166). This ‘maritime cultural mind-scape’, as I have called it elsewhere (Jarrett, 2025, forthcoming), seemed to be intimately tied to its context of use, with a strong inter-dependence between understandings of maritime space and the

traditional practices of *Åffordsbåt* sailing (Hutchins, 1995). The conception of travel, for example, was bound to the inherent uncertainty of sailing a boat without an engine, creating a conditional and tangential attitude to route-planning and navigation which anticipated changes of itinerary and destination at any moment. Mental attitudes and sailing practice were also evidently connected in the relationship between the boats’ sailing capabilities and the risks posed by different areas of the Norwegian coast. *Åffordsbåter* are built with light and flexible hulls with very shallow draft, allowing them to ride over the large swell typical along exposed coastlines, but making them very vulnerable to strong currents and katabatic winds (*fallvind*), which are most prevalent in narrow sounds and fjords (Figures 2 and 3). This points to a different assessment of danger and risk than that which might be made when travelling in a modern sailing boat.

The data gathered during this project revealed that the primary affordance of route choice before and during the voyages was a judgement of perceived risk, which was often made collectively, or at least in consultation with the most experienced crew members.



Fig. 4. A smaller *Åffordsbåt* known as a *fyring*, in Rissa, Trøndelag, September 2021. The parallels with the surviving evidence for Viking Age boatbuilding are apparent in both the hull shape and the rig. Photo courtesy of Tora Heide.

When considering different routes, individuals conceived of possible itineraries as a sequence of named landmarks, with their own associated level of danger taken from previous experience or second-hand information. In this way, navigating the *Norðvegr* became a qualitative assessment of potential pathways, reliant on the collective wisdom necessary for success in the face of uncertainty. The clear relationship between this judgement-based navigation and the vessels upon which it occurs, and in turn, the similarities between these craft and the boats of the Viking Age, makes it very tempting to apply this ‘mindscape’ to studies of Viking Age seafarers and seafaring. However, such direct and uncritical application may be unwise; instead, I believe it will be more fruitful to take a comparative approach, considering both continuity and change in attitudes and approaches to the sea and sailing throughout the history of maritime travel along the *Norðvegr*.

The Maritime Cultural Mindscape and the evidence for Viking Age sea-faring

So far I have suggested that Viking Age communities throughout the *Norðvegr* shared an understanding of maritime space and mobility, and have briefly described some aspects of the traditional sailing perspective that emerged during the project’s trials. In the following section, I examine the core elements of maritime heritage along the *Norðvegr*, comparing the data gathered during the project’s voyages with our evidence from the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages. The aim here is to identify which aspects of traditional seafaring may represent continuities or at least enduring agents that would have also afforded mobility patterns in the Viking Age. These can then be used to reconstruct sailing routes and itineraries from this period.

The seascape

The sea is a constant, all-encompassing presence for those living along the west coast of Scandinavia. Since long before Ottar’s time, the sailing route along this coast had provided

access to the wealth of the Arctic and a connection southward into European networks, creating an axis of trade, travel, and interaction that remains in use today (Meulengracht Sørensen, 1995: 48–49; Storli, 2007). When compared to agricultural and industrial landscapes, the maritime environment displays less signs of recent transformation, and this apparent stability may have contributed to other cultural continuities along its length. The actual extent of environmental change is often hard to assess: marine temperatures and salinity levels seem to be similar today to those of the Early Middle Ages (Haine, 2012: 104–105), but notable changes in relative sea-level have occurred, primarily due to isostatic rebound (see Changes, below). In terms of prevailing wind and weather patterns throughout the year, the summer is dominated by successive low-pressure systems circulating up the coast, bringing south-westerly gales interspersed with brief periods of light and often unstable northerly and north-easterly winds (Binns, 1980: 193). Spring and autumn sailing involves rougher conditions, with frequent rain, sleet, and even snow, but also stabler winds due to more frequent high-pressure windows (Englert, 2007). In winter, the short daylight hours and frequent storms, along with the increased strength of katabatic gusts (due to the greater change in temperature between the sea and the snow-covered mountains) means that both the effort and danger involved in covering even shorter distances is greatly increased.

Wind and air pressure patterns from the Viking Age are difficult to reconstruct, but written sources such as *The King’s Mirror* describe similar weather and seasonal windows as those experienced during this project’s voyages (Larson, 1917: 87–90). *The King’s Mirror* and the *Vinland Sagas* also present a remarkable understanding of currents and tides, as well as the movement of whales, fish, walrus, seals, and sea-ice (Larson, 1917: 90–102; Pálsson and Magnusson, 1965). This deep acquaintance with marine life and environmental patterns echoes the knowledge recorded among whalers and fishermen in the North Atlantic in the 19th century (Scoresby, 1820). The evidently long

tradition of attendance to such rhythms was likely due to the equally enduring affordances and risks inherent when sailing in square-rigged, clinker-built boats.

The documentary sources also refer to the great danger of sailing near land, suggesting a possible preference for outlying havens in this period (Kruse, 2020, pp. 176–177; Marcus, 1980, pp. 104–105). This seems to align well with the location of the royal manors linked to Harald Fairhair in Hordaland, which display a marked preference for outlying coastal areas when compared to centres of mobility and trade from before and after the Viking Age (Skre, 2014, pp. 37–38). This preference may be tied to the aforementioned risks posed by narrow fjords and sounds when sailing in vessels of the kind used in the Viking Age. From this perspective, we may wish to imagine that the preferred location for a harbour or anchorage in the Viking Age was one that served as a safe haven between exposed and sheltered sections of the sailing route. These different kinds of seascapes posed different but equally serious challenges and may have often involved waiting for favourable conditions and the help of local pilots before proceeding with the voyage.

Boats

Norway possesses a rich and diverse heritage of traditional boatbuilding, with different regions displaying diverse but related responses to the needs of maritime life (Godal, 1986). This diversity is undoubtedly not a recent phenomenon, and it would be unwise to imagine a common *Urform* from which all recent boat-types descend (Frog, 2020, p. 571). Instead we should envision an equally wide variety of vessels existing in the Viking Age, but with certain physical features being shared across space and time (Eldjárn, 1995, p. 28). The boats used in this study are reconstructions of fishing and trading vessels from the late 19th century, but their basic structural elements already

existed in the Viking Age (Figure 4). Boats from both periods were built from the keel up as a double-ended shell of overlapping planks, into which frames are inserted to provide strength and stability. The rig consists of a loose-footed square sail controlled by sheets, the *bolina* and the *priar*, and hung upon a yard which is attached to the single mast with a parrel. The mast rests upon a sturdy mastfish and can be lowered easily by loosening the shrouds or the forestay. Aside from the sail, the boat is equipped with several pairs of oars, allowing for travel against the wind and for manoeuvring in an out of harbours (Christensen, 2007; Eldjárn and Godal, 1988a, 1988b; Engvig, 2001a, 2001b).

Structural similarities are matched by remarkable continuity in performance and handling. Several scholars have identified common estimations of average rowing and sailing speed for various kinds of vessel from medieval written sources, along with a common understanding of average distances covered, just like the modern idea of “an hour’s drive”. These estimates are similar to the average speeds attained during the voyages conducted for this study: average rowing speeds oscillated around 2 knots, while average downwind or broad-reach sailing speeds were approximately 5 knots for the *fembøring* and 4 knots for the *fyring* (c.f. Englert, 2015, 2007; Indruszewski and Godal, 2006, p. 24; Morcken, 1978, p. 56; Sæther and Eldjárn, 2002). When these voyages lasted more than a day, a system of watches was established by dividing the crew into two halves: this too is documented in medieval sources as being a long-established custom (*sjømenns skikk*, Salvesen, 1969, p. 116), and Ravn (2016) has argued that such a system was in place onboard the *Skuldelev 2* longship in the 11th century.

The enduring nature of Norse seafaring practices is also evident in the survival of specific terminology across time and space. Many of the terms used onboard Åfjord boats have clear Old Norse roots (the classic example being *styrbord*, from ON *stjórnborði*), but even more

remarkable is their survival up to this day in a wide range of European languages (Martese, 2019; Sayers, 1997). In some regions where Norse influence was particularly enduring, unchanging terminology was accompanied by equally long-lasting practices: the medieval Gaelic poem *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill*, for example, describes similar practices onboard Highland galleys as those known from traditional Åfjord boat sailing, even mentioning the same slipknot for securing the mainsail halyard (Macaulay, 1996; Parsons, 2013, p. 31).

Places and mnemonic names

Evidence for continuity in naming traditions extends beyond the boats to include the land- and seascape as well. The ancient origin for names of prominent landmarks along the *Norðvegr* has recently been discussed by Østmo (2020). Westerdahl (2010a, 2010b, 2005) has also argued for strong toponymic continuities, and has identified a naming pattern for prominent maritime landmarks that seems to apply across Scandinavia. Placenames were used by sailors as mnemonic anchors through their incorporation into songs, poems and stories, which often presented places sequentially, providing a way to remember entire itineraries without the need for a map (Brink, 2019). This can be seen in poems collected by ethnographers in the last century (e.g. Morcken, 1978, p. 46), but such mnemonic techniques may also appear in medieval texts, such as the *Landnámabók* (Pálsson and Edwards, 1972): from the perspective of a mobile, seafaring society, the opening chapters of this book can be read as a series of stories designed to give meaning to land- and seemarks across Iceland.

Navigation

Although the importance of oral culture and unique placenames is a largely accepted part of

Viking Age navigation, other elements of this tradition have been more divisive. The results of this project's voyages and the evidence for environmental and toponymic continuity point to a set of navigational methods that neither encouraged nor required the development of instruments. The primarily coastal nature of navigation along the *Norðvegr* seems instead to have promoted a tradition based on memorised sequences of landmarks, which was then exported into the North Atlantic, where islands served as similar directional aids (Schnall, 1975, p. 181). This can be seen, for example, in the famous description of the voyage from Norway to Greenland found in the *Landnámabók* (Pálsson and Edwards, 1972:16). The argument for non-instrumental navigation is reinforced by other experimental voyages in Scandinavia and the North Atlantic, which have proven that time can be estimated while at sea to within 15 minutes (Börjesson, 2009). This allows for accurate estimations of midday, allowing sailors to follow a particular line of latitude by measuring the height of the sun above the horizon at this time. In areas that lack the monumental landforms of the Norwegian coast, an equally rich toponymic tradition seems to have existed, but in this case related to underwater features such as sandbanks, as evidenced by Roger of Howden's 12th century description of the sailing route along the east coast of England (Hughes, 2012; Kemp and D'Olier, 2016). The strong magnetic variation noted in high Atlantic latitudes by William Scoresby in the early 19th century (1820) may have contributed to maintaining this non-instrumental tradition into recent times.

Risk-based judgements

We can now turn to the factor that was identified as the primary determinant of route choice during this project's sailing trials, namely the judgement of perceived risk. Although Ottar's account (Bately and Englert, 2007: 40–58) does not refer to this kind of judgement directly,

several second-hand sources do highlight wise judgement and reasoned choice as important traits of skilled navigators. In the entry for the year 862, the *Annals of St Bertin* tell of the Danish fleet that had been raiding along the Seine, which upon reaching the sea, “split up into several flotillas which sailed off in different directions according to their various choices” (Nelson, 1991, p. 98). The variety of directions chosen indicates that route-choice was not environmentally determined and included an element of human choice. The word for choice used here is *visum*, which may indicate the importance of perceived phenomena in making these decisions. The narrator of *The King’s Mirror* also emphasises the importance of attendance by advising his son to “mark the movements of the ocean and to discern how its turmoil ebbs and swells”. In this way he will “learn thoroughly when to look for dangerous seasons and bad routes, or when times come when one may risk everything” (Larson, 1917: 83, 90).

But perhaps the most direct evidence of risk judgement in a Norwegian seafaring context comes from the anonymous *Historia de profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam*, an account of a Danish expedition in the late 12th century to take part in the Third Crusade. The author compares the ill-fated Danish crusaders, who shipwrecked off the coast of Norway after departing impatiently under unfavorable weather conditions, with their more successful Norwegian contemporaries, “whose ability to rightly judge the route and the sea was reliable thanks to their long experience and frequent sailing” (Gertz, 1922: 480, translation by Stephan Borgehammar, personal communication 2022). First-hand, practical experience seems, therefore, to have been a central and long-lasting requirement for accurately judging and managing risk throughout this challenging seascape (Figure 5).



Fig. 5. Collective judgement of perceived risk in action. The author and crew on Trondheimsleia, June 2022.

Changes

This range of remarkable continuities should not blind us to some major changes that affected seafaring both during and after the Viking Age. Following the same themes as above, we can begin with environmental change: here the most notable transformation along the *Norðvegr* is the

result of post-glacial land upheaval, resulting in a coastline that is currently 3-5m below the level known from 1000 AD (Creel et al., 2022; Pässe and Daniels, 2015). The greatest changes have occurred in the inner fjords, but even along the outer coast some of the shallower channels and sounds used in the Viking Age could not be

explored during this project's trials. I intend to follow up this preliminary study with a reconstruction of relative sea-levels from the Viking Age to further evaluate possible routes and havens.

Travelling along the *Norðvegr* a thousand years ago involved a range of risks, both real and imagined, that were not present during the recent trials. This region was a thoroughly militarised zone in the Viking Age, with the sea-kings and the haphazardly-emerging kingdom exercising their power through naval dominance (Iversen, 2020, p. 290; Østmo, 2020, p. 17; Skre, 2014, p. 39). Certain harbours would have been unsafe or at least unwelcoming for shipping from opposed regions, and hostile ships or fleets must have been an additional, unpredictable threat at all times (Heebøll-Holm, 2020). Other entities that today would be considered mythological were clearly also present in Viking Age mental geographies, although it is difficult to assess the extent to which experienced sailors like Ottar believed these to be tangible elements of reality (Frog, 2020, p. 680; Meulengracht Sørensen, 1995, p. 53). Despite the cosmological changes introduced by Christianity, some of these entities survived into recorded tradition, such as the figure of the *draug* (Mathisen and Sæther, 2018). However, we should not presume to understand the complex entanglement of mythological forces in the everyday practices of Viking Age sailors, but we can at least recognise the role of different cosmologies in shaping conceptions of seascape then and now.

As for the boats and their sailing, the striking continuities outlined above must be weighed against several technological developments that occurred in Norwegian boatbuilding between the Viking Age and the late 19th century. Of these, the shift in the position of the rudder is perhaps the most discussed (Nielsen, 2009: 265; Thorseth, 1986: 82), with modern authors concluding that this marks a notable improvement in performance (although it is interesting to note that Andersen, whose transatlantic voyage aboard *Viking* in 1895

employed professional sailors, considered the difference in steering capabilities between a side-rudder and a stern-rudder to be minimal (Christensen, 1986)). Other changes that have been less discussed and are harder to quantify include the differences in stem-carving (Heide and Planke, 2019), the varying levels of hull flexibility when using rivets versus cleats and lashings (Morrison, 1978), and the use of hemp line and linen sailcloth rather than the lime-bast, walrus hide, and wool which seem to have been staple materials for Viking Age rigging (Christensen, 1979). In terms of practices onboard, the most anachronistic and transformative element of this project's trials was the use of the weather forecast. The constant availability of accurate meteorological information provided a level of certainty and security when making navigational decisions that cannot have been present in the minds of Viking Age sailors. This was considered to be a necessary anachronism, as ignoring the forecast would have represented an unacceptable risk to the vessel and the crew. The largely educational or scientific purpose of these trials and the modern and literate cultural background of the crew also contrasted with the experiences of Viking Age sailors (Meulengracht Sørensen, 1995).

Applying the Maritime Cultural Mindscape to the Viking Age: risks and potentials

The comparison above is intended to pinpoint which elements of the seafaring 'mindscape' revealed in the recent trials may have had parallels in the maritime worldview shared throughout the *Norðvegr* in the Viking Age. It is this worldview that promoted and constrained culturally-specific patterns of movement, and therefore understanding it is a vital foundation for discussions about Viking Age routes and itineraries (Bekker-Nielsen, 1988: 160). In our attempt to reconstruct this Viking Age worldview and its afforded movement patterns, we may be aided by the inherently conservative nature of fishing and sailing culture. As

Westerdahl (2005: 40) argues, maritime traditions are more resistant to change than land-based ones due to the comparatively stable environment upon which they rely. It is therefore more likely for ancient cosmologies and worldviews to survive in maritime environments than in the more volatile contexts of elite, urban, or industrial culture. The communities inhabiting the *Norðvegr* experienced several major changes during the lifespan of traditional sailing and boatbuilding discussed here (ca 800-1920 CE), with some of these beginning during the Viking Age itself, such as Christianisation and the development of the stockfish trade (Solli, 1996: 90; Bagge, 2005; Storli, 2007; Perdikaris and McGovern, 2009; Wickler and Narmo, 2014). But as has been recently discussed by Frog (2020), practical and cognitive elements of Viking Age culture may have survived if they remained applicable in their context of use, with their constant application enshrining them in trans-generational knowledge despite broader changes in society and culture occurring around them. Cases of this phenomenon, which may be useful for reconstructing Viking Age maritime movement patterns occur in the evidence presented above. These can be collected into three categories:

1. The tradition of building and sailing clinker-built, square-rigged boats, and the consequent similarities in relative risk and opportunity in different kinds of seascape;
2. The surviving corpus of placenames for important land- and seemarks, and their sequential and storied incorporation into oral culture;
3. The navocentric orientation and navigation system, the conditional and tangential conception of sea voyages, and the process of route-choice based on judgements of perceived risk.

With the addition of a seemingly similar natural environment (although with a changed coastal topography), these represent the primary

parallels that exist between the affordances of traditional Norwegian sailing and those of Viking Age seafaring. At this very preliminary stage, I have employed these parallels to identify a number of anchorages and natural harbours along the Norwegian coast that may have been attractive for seafarers from the Viking Age, but that have received little attention from Viking Age research. I have presented these in Figure 1, along with several known sites that display evidence for maritime activity during the Viking Age or shortly thereafter, selected for comparison. These possible havens were all visited during the project's voyages but require further analysis in relation to documentary and cartographic sources, as well as an accurate reconstruction of their physical topography during the Viking Age (Figure 6). For now, the location of these havens seems to fit well with other studies of interaction from the Viking Age, such as Sindbæk's (2013) network analysis approach, as well as displaying parallels in other seascapes of the Viking world, such as the west coast of Scotland (Macniven, 2020).

Finally, it may be worth considering how the maritime worldview of Viking Age seafarers clashed with contemporary land-based ontologies, embedded as they were in such profoundly different worlds of practice, belief, and experience. Alcuin's shock at the Lindisfarne raid, and his belief up until this event that no "such inroad from the sea [*navigium*] could be made" (Whitelock, 1955: 776), may be more than dramatic hyperbole, pointing instead to the way in which different worldviews present different possible courses of action. Adam of Bremen's confusion in recording the sailing times from Ålborg to Iceland (2002: 217) may also derive from a misalignment between different understandings of space and travel (Morcken, 1978: 12). Such ontological clashes are evident today in the conflicting understandings of space and place that underlie struggles for indigenous land in many areas of the globe (Chao, 2017; Hirt, 2012; Pearce and Louis, 2008). It may therefore be fruitful to explore patterns of movement and action in the Viking Age as being afforded by equally diverse

worldviews, shaping the record that we study today by constructing a range of understandings of possible choice and action. To do this we will need to look beyond the conventional techniques of representation and mapping that prevail in

western science, and explore other ways of recording, analysing, and communicating Viking Age seafaring as a thoroughly dynamic, attentive, uncertain, storied, and peopled experience.



Fig. 6. Tarva, one of the potential havens suggested by this study. It is located at the entrance to the Trondheimsleia from the North, and offers sheltered mooring and access to fresh water, making it a possible destination for Viking Age seafarers. May 2022.

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Supplementary Data

The complete dataset from the sailing trials and trial voyages conducted for this study will be included in the author's doctoral thesis, which will be published in 2025.

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Viking-Age Ship Prow Engravings on Travelling objects: A brief introduction to current research

Aina Heen-Pettersen



Fig. 1. Location of Skei in Trøndelag, Central Norway. Map by the author.

The concept of Viking-Age travel is archaeologically manifested in many ways. This includes Viking-Age and Medieval ship engravings (usually referred to as ship graffiti); this is a widespread phenomenon found on portable objects and in many ecclesiastical buildings in Europe, including Ireland, Norway, Denmark and the Baltic (see McCormick &

Kastrup 2016, Westerdahl 2013 for an overview). Nonetheless, most academic attention concerning this phenomenon has focused on ship engravings from the 11th and 12th centuries onwards (especially from ecclesiastical buildings), while the earliest Viking Age cases are generally only described and briefly discussed. My current research

therefore centers around these earliest cases and uses a find from Skei, Trøndelag in Central Norway (Figure 1) as a starting point for considering ships and ship prows inscribed on 'travelling objects' from early Viking-Age contexts in Scandinavia. The work is very much at an early stage, and this short paper provides a brief introduction to some of the finds and ideas that were presented at the 40th Viking Congress and which will be the subject of further investigation in the future.

Skei, Trøndelag

The find from Skei, Trøndelag comprises runes and overlapping ship prows engraved on the handle of an Irish copper-alloy ladle. It was placed in a female inhumation burial at the large barrow cemetery at Skei, Trøndelag, where more than 120 visible barrows and other grave monuments have been identified. Skei is one the biggest surviving barrow cemeteries in Norway and is the largest Iron-Age cemetery in central and northern Norway, north of Oppdal. Despite its size, the cemetery is not particularly well published or well known outside Norway. The same is true for the ladle which has only been published in a popular science magazine in 2008 (Hagland & Stenvik 2008) (Figure 2).

The ladle itself was placed in the cist burial of a long mound. The find of a Berdal Type 1A oval brooch, probably produced in Ribe, indicates that the burial event happened sometime around AD 800. The ladle is therefore one of the earliest known examples of ship prow engravings on a portable object in Scandinavia. Within the burial, the ladle was found at the foot end, together with a large hanging bowl (Irish), a small copper-alloy bound bucket (Insular), a whale bone plaque, a wheel-shaped brooch and the remains of a bridle (Stenvik 2001). While ladles made of iron are common from Viking-age Norway, the find from Skei is one of only 15 examples made of beaten copper-alloy manufactured in Ireland. These are mainly found in female burials, often forming part of a set of

serving equipment together with other vessels, as is the case from Skei.



Fig. 2. The Skei ladle. The engravings are today hardly visible. Photo: O. B Pedersen, Trondheim University.

In its current condition, the runes and ship figures are rather difficult to detect. Indeed, the engravings were not identified when the ladle was initially conserved in 1989, and it was not until 2006 that they were noticed. For that reason, these significant details were not included in the original publication of the burial (Stenvik 2001). While difficult to see, the runes and ship prows are carved in a prominent position on the top of the ladle handle and may have been far more visible when originally added to the object (Figure 3). The ship figures consist of two, possibly three overlapping ship prows. Two of the three prows are very similar in terms of style and shape, and appear to be made by the

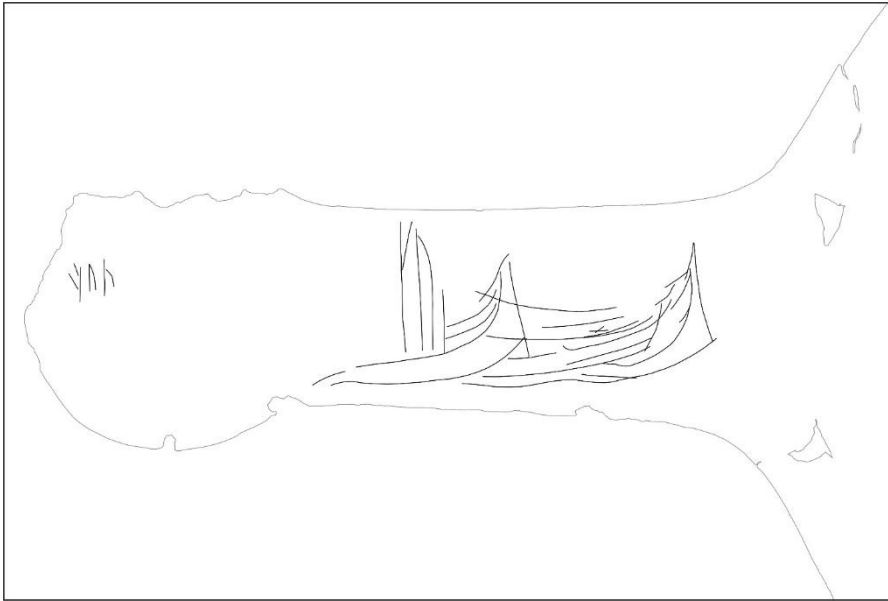


Fig. 3. Detail of the preliminary interpretation of the figures on the ladle. This interpretation differs slightly from Hagland & Stenvik 2008. Illustration by Philip Wood.

same hand. Each figure is approx. 3.5 cm long and shows a raised stem and a couple of planks. Despite a slight overlap, the two figures are carved side by side. The third prow is only slightly raised and thus differs from the first two. In addition to the prows, there are two small areas, no more than 1 cm long, of engraved runes. One set of runes is found near the terminal

of the ladle and comprises three runes, which probably represent the first three runes of the Futhark alphabet. There are also three further rune-like figures which appear to be placed directly on one of the ships. As discussed by Hagland, these rune-like figures are far more difficult to interpret (Hagland and Stenvik 2008).



Fig. 4. The most northerly find of early ship figures from Bleik, Andøya in Northern Norway. Photo by: June Åsheim, Tromsø University

Further work

While ship engravings are fairly common in Scandinavia, the Skei ladle belongs to a small

corpus of only ten early examples dated to the period from c. 800-1000. This low number contrasts with the numerous finds from the

medieval and later periods. When the phenomenon of ship engravings is treated in archaeological research, the earliest cases are typically grouped and discussed together with the much later examples, including those from ecclesiastical buildings (e.g Christensen 1995). However, separating the earliest cases from the rest of the corpus is necessary to investigate the underlying reasons and background of how and why this tradition arises in the first place.

Over the years ship engravings have been interpreted rather differently. When Blindheim in 1985 investigated finds from medieval stave churches he suggested that these were carved with a magical or apotropaic intention (Blindheim 1985). This line of thinking was largely dismissed in the following decade when ship engravings were addressed in connection with the influential publication 'The ship as a symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia'. Instead of regarding these engravings as magical, they were instead largely viewed as random sketches, engraved without religious meanings (Christensen 1995, le Bon 1995). In contrast, recent scholarship has been more in line with Blindheim's interpretations, seeing the practice as votive acts in connection with sea journeys, assigning a profound meaning to the practice of engraving ships and ship prows (Westerdahl 2013, 344; Moss 2014, 93; McCormick & Kastrup 2016, 88; Heen-Pettersen & Murray 2018, although see Thomov 2014, 184 for a different view)

The current research on the earliest cases follows the latter tradition: Can the figures represent material traces of ritual activities connected directly to sea journeys? A noticeable trait for most of the early ship figures is their presence on ritual significant objects such as the Shetelig sledge in the famous Oseberg Ship burial, or objects materiality materially associated with the sea or travel, including a fishing net sinker from Roaldsnes, Møre and Romsdal, a walrus ivory box from the Oseberg ship, a piece of whalebone from Bleik in Northern Norway (Figure 4), and the Oseberg ship itself. Some of the objects that have clearly travelled over a longer distance by sea. This includes the presented Skei ladle, an Irish reliquary

discovered somewhere in Western-Norway (see O'Meadhra 1988), and a soapstone vessel, probably produced in Norway, which was lost or thrown overboard in the harbour of Birka in the late 900's (Kalmring et. al 2021, 101-102). In other words, the earliest cases with ship prow engravings can in many ways be regarded as 'travelling' objects. The association to the sea and sea journeys are in many cases striking and appear to be more than mere coincidence. This provides added dimensions to the interpretative framework for these early ship prow engravings. While some of the ship figures have been described and illustrated before, they have mostly been considered in isolation to the objects on which they were engraved. In contrast, the future work will investigate how the engravings and artefacts can be linked together and viewed as objects with distinct materialities and biographies reflecting ritual practices. By relating the finds to ritual practices and itineraries, this material has potential to provide further insight into how people in Viking-Age societies viewed and interaction with the sea.

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Fæsted in all its glory - foreign finds in a local context

Lars Grundvad

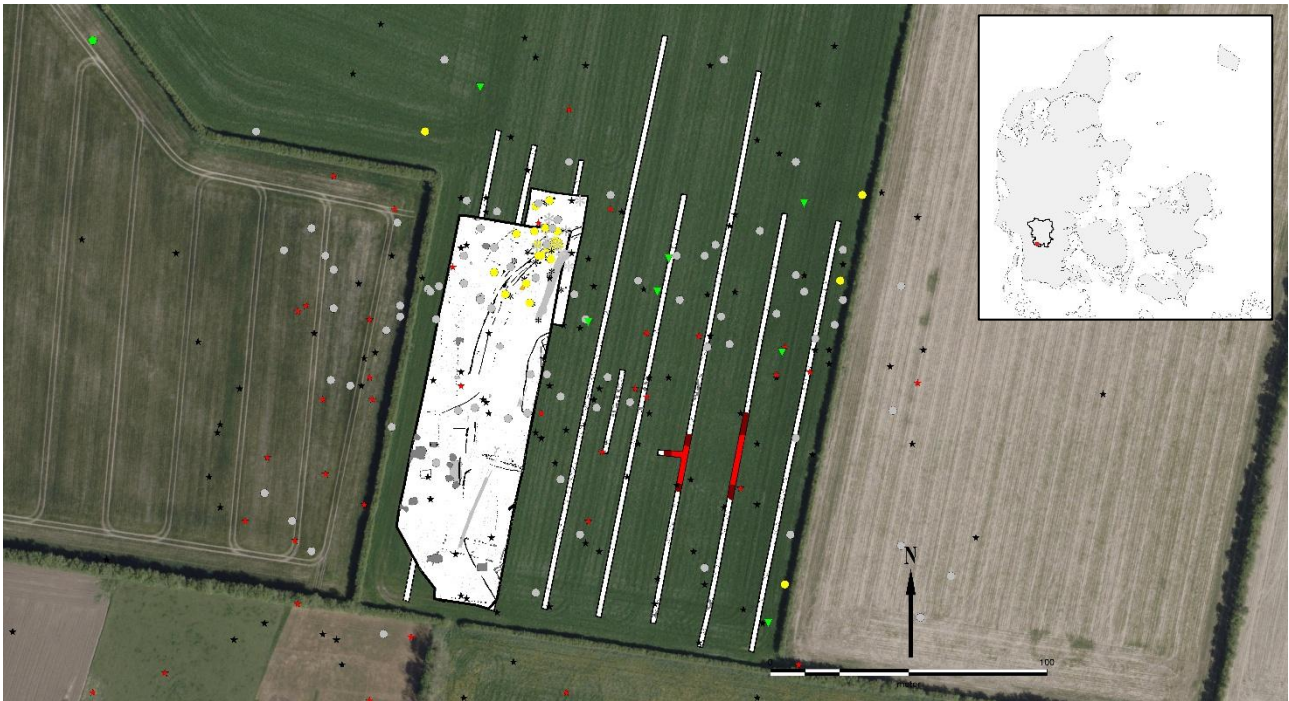


Fig. 1. Map showing the surveys and finds at the elite residence at Fæsted. Red shows lead weights, yellow is gold finds, grey is silver artifacts, and black stars are bronzes. In the upper right corner Fæsted is marked with red on the map where Vejen municipality is shown in black. Graphics: Lars Grundvad, Museet Sønderkov.

Abstract

The elite residence from the Late Germanic Iron Age and Viking Age at Fæsted was only discovered as recently as 2016, thanks to the use of metal detectors by amateur archaeologists. The first remarkable discovery was the Fæsted (gold) Hoard, which has since been the subject of several academic analyses. The subsequent excavations and metal detector surveys have resulted in the discovery of hundreds of metal objects, such as jewellery and coins, most of which should not be considered a part of the

famous Fæsted Hoard. These finds offer insights about their contemporary society and will therefore be the focus of this presentation. The aim is to present the finds and their overall spatial context, as well as to show how artifacts were traded to and from the elite residence and its immediate vicinity. By simply looking at the provenance of the objects, a quite extensive international network becomes apparent, which perhaps somewhat unexpectedly particularly points east. Likewise, national networks can be revealed by studying the data. If the Fæsted Hoard is to be included in this analysis, it only

seems to emphasize the previous results. The hope is thus, with the Fæsted finds as a case study, to show and analyse an aristocratic network, reaching quite far in the contemporary known world. Hopefully, the study can later be compared with the compositions of the find materials from the other Viking Age elite residences in Southern Scandinavia.

Introduction

Since the discovery of the gold hoard from Fæsted in 2016, the hoard and the specific artifacts have undergone several academic studies with a focus on describing the hoard itself (Grundvad & Poulsen 2021), the origin and contexts of the gold artefacts (Grundvad 2023a) and its testimony in a religious light (Grundvad 2023b), as well as its role in the Jelling dynasty's part of their creation of Denmark (Grundvad & Knudsen 2017). Similarly, it has been argued that the site is part of an elite residence roughly dated to the period 600-1000 AD; namely an unusually extensive manor strategically located near traffic hubs in the hinterland of Ribe, which housed great wealth as well as monumental hall construction and a presumed hargh (Grundvad 2024a). All analyses have been prepared as if they were separate chapters in an overall publication on the Fæsted Hoard and its contexts. Thus, this article can also appear almost independently as a chapter in the analysis and narrative of the importance of Fæsted (and Harreby) in a South Jutlandic sacral, power landscape (Figure 1).

To place the gold hoard in perspective, it is necessary to examine the other artefacts found at the site, especially the metal finds, which were primarily discovered by amateur archaeologists with their metal detectors. In addition, there is a small amount of glass artefacts, which can also tell a great deal. The purpose of this article is to present the material evidence of the Fæsted elite

residence so that this can be used in later analyses of similar sites. Similar work has previously been conducted for the Tissø complex (Baastrup 2012, 271 ff.; Baastrup 2014) and for the residence at Gl. Lejre (Baastrup 2012, 187 ff.) and the present work should be seen as inspired by these; however, supplemented by an actual presentation of the number of artefacts and percentage distributions of given find groups, thereby achieving a greater transparency that will be useful in future analyses of the elite residences of the North in the period from the Late Germanic Iron Age to the Viking Age (c. 600-1050).

It should be noted that data gathering has stopped at the beginning of 2023 and that it extends back to 1911, when the first part of the Fæsted gold hoard was discovered.

The elite residence at Fæsted and Harreby as context

Approximately 12 kilometres east of the town of Ribe, the villages of Fæsted and Harreby form the center of the many surveys that have been carried out in the area since the Fæsted Hoard was discovered and excavated in 2016. The site is still far from being fully excavated, but an archaeological trial excavation combined with two actual excavations have shown that the site is characterised by the presence of a very extensive residence, the dating of which seems to cover parts of the 7th century until the end of the 10th century, where the gold hoard together with an immediately contemporary silver hoard seems to represent the last period of use of the residence, which must therefore be placed in the last third of the century.

Both treasures were found in separate pits only 17 metres apart, each located near a northwest gate in a multi-phase fence. The gates are distinctive with circular post markings at the ends of the fences. To the west, the fences define the courtyard in a large, curved shape, which to

the north seems to end at a now completely vanished L-shaped rampart (Grundvad and Poulsen 2024), which extends more than 700 metres to the east from the site of the residence and approx. 1100 metres to the north again, measured from the pits with the hoards. The southern end of the courtyard fences is not recognised, and nothing is known about the other boundaries of the courtyard, so the actual shape of the courtyard cannot yet be determined, but the rounded shape to the west seems to indicate a circular enclosure. The spatial distribution of the metal detector finds seems to show that the residence extends only a short distance into the southern and eastern fields. Within the enclosure, a roughly centrally located, almost monumental hall with curved long walls and sloping support posts along the walls and gables has been found (Grundvad 2024a). The west end of the hall seems to be connected by a characteristic inner, deeply founded wooden fence, which has created a presumably sacred enclosed area. Southeast of the same hall, a large area characterised by black-coloured stones and fire-affected fill has been identified; a presumed hargh of the same type as is known from the excavations of the contemporary residence at Gl. Lejre (Christensen 2015; Grundvad & Albris 2020). Furthermore, a seemingly less extensive hall has also been excavated, where the excavations of the walls turned out to contain forged iron spirals of a type that is so far only known house wise from Høje Sal in Uppsala (Ljungkvist & Frölund 2015, illustration page 20; Ljungkvist & Frölund 2018), which testifies to Fæsted as being

associated with an absolute elite. Furthermore, there are numerous pit houses west of the fences, which probably reflect the site's use as an assembly site in connection with pre-Christian religious practises as well as crafts and trade (Jørgensen et al. 2011).

The sites at Fæsted and Harreby are characterised by being strategically located in relation to a primary transport route in inland Jutland. The route is reflected in the burial mound lines, which clearly reveal a route that runs through the fields where the elite residence is documented. Furthermore, the residence is located roughly in the centre of a narrow corridor in the landscape, which was bounded to the west by wetlands such as Fæsted Mose (bog) and to the east by the Farris forest, which stretched all the way to Kolding Fjord. This corridor was visually dominated by the elite residence, which must have been impressive to behold when travelling from south to north and therefore looking at the farm from a south-facing elongated hill, and the aforementioned rampart, but also by the north-south oriented rampart. By controlling this landscape corridor, the residents of the manor managed to dominate all inland traffic in Jutland, and it can be assumed that this particular region was ideal for collecting taxes from travellers, which was probably a primary cause of the great accumulation of wealth that characterises the material culture at Fæsted and Harreby.



Fig. 2. Silver finds from the elite residence at Fæsted. Finds that are linked to the treasure finds from the site are not included. Note the great versatility. Photo: Silja Arnfríðardóttir Christensen, Museet Sønderkov.



Fig. 3: Silver hoard dated to the second half of the 10th century. Excavated in situ in a pit near a western gate at the elite residence in Fæsted. Photo: Silja Arnfríðardóttir Christensen.

The artefact material

The metal find material from the overall investigations at the site is relatively extensive even though metal detector surveys and reconnaissance have only been possible sporadically since the discovery of the Fæsted Hoard - the crops have only allowed for short search periods. Despite the short time horizons of these amateur archaeologically driven investigations, approximately 500 artefacts have been discovered, all of which are included in the following study. It needs mentioning, though, that it has only been possible to “fully” determine sites/regions of production of approximately half of the finds. Furthermore, it should be noted that artefacts from the archaeological excavations at the site are also included in the analysis. Finally, it is also noteworthy that for a majority of the artefacts, it is often the silver finds (Figure 2) that are revealing in the analysis, although a number of bronze objects as well as a few glass and basalt finds also testify greatly regarding the networks of the era.

In the following, the different find types/groups, their numbers, and their origins will be presented. In terms of origin, it can be beneficial to present some groups together region-wise, which will generally be evident in the following provenance determinations – thus, it is often impossible to determine specific production sites, whereas it is often possible to identify a region as a place of origin.

The Middle Eastern finds

The largest group of finds in terms of quantity must be considered of Eastern or Middle Eastern origin, where especially fragments - both deliberately cut and randomly fragmented - of dirham have been found in large numbers. In fact, out of 155 silver finds with this overall provenance, only three cut Permian rings do not belong to the group of coin finds. The coins are

documented in varying degrees of fragmentation, and it should be emphasised that only three approximately whole dirhems have been found at the site. Of these, one was gold-plated, and another was pierced, reflecting that they were both used as pendants. The remaining 149 coin finds consist of more or less fragmented coins. The number is unusually high for the South Jutland sites, but there is a significant "source of error" in the shape of two hoards, which were partly discovered in a pit located only 17 metres from the gold hoard and partly in the form of silver finds from the gold hoard context itself. The silver hoard consists of 104 pieces of silver (Figure 3), all of which were found in situ, scattered vertically and horizontally in the pit fill. Of the more than one hundred artefacts in this deposit, 93 appear to be dirhems. The treasure must be dated terminus post quem to the 960s, when the youngest coin was struck. The same applies to the gold hoard, which also contained seven dirhem fragments that helped to date the deposition of the gold and silver. It can thus be seen that at least 100 dirhem finds out of the site's 152 must be related to the two hoards, and it must be noted that it is possible that a certain proportion of the other dirham finds were ploughed up from their depositional contexts, whereby a very large percentage of the many Middle Eastern finds represent two actions rather than one per lost object. Furthermore, it has not been determined whether the coin fragments can be refitted, which potentially also could reduce the number of imported coins at the residence. Their representativeness may therefore be weakened. However, it is important for the components of the analysis to be viewed quantitatively and thus assessed solely on their number and their dating.

The continental artifacts

Somewhat unexpectedly, only a relatively low number of metal finds of continental origin have been found at Fæsted and Harreby; thus, only seven identifiable finds, all of which are silver

coins dated to the end of the 10th century or from around the turn of the millennium (Figure 4). Of the seven, the majority are determined to have been minted in present-day Germany. Of these, one was found in the silver deposit mentioned above. This occurrence of continental coins

should be expected for a site located so far south in Jutland. In addition, eight relatively simple enamel fibulae of the type most often labelled Carolingian-Ottoman from the Viking Age, which are considered to be continental in origin, have been found (Baastrup 2007, 4).



Fig. 4. A selection of continental coins, glass finds and the Destelberger fibula from the Fæsted residence. Photo: Silja Arnfríðardóttir Christensen.

One group of finds to be included here is Rhenish basalt, which was discovered during the examination of the hargh mentioned above. A possible continental find is a Destelbergen brooch with cross motifs and inlaid blue glass; a type rarely found in Denmark. It should be mentioned that the overall distribution of the artefact type has not unequivocally clarified the origin of the fibula type, just as it has not yet been dated more precisely than to the Early Viking Age. The fibula is included in the percentage provenance analysis as being of continental origin. A final group of finds to be mentioned here are the drinking glass fragments from elite residence; these include shards of hollow glass bowls with yellow mouldings of

reticella ornamentation, which may be either Frankish or Anglo-Saxon, and which are dated to the Late Iron Age and Early Viking Age. Similar examples have been found in Ribe's cultural layers (Feveile 2006), and the examples known from Fæsted/Harreby were likely traded from the markets in Ribe. In her PhD thesis from 2012 (Baastrup 2012), Maria P. Baastrup has shown that continental and insular imports are documented quite frequently at the eastern Danish elite sites, but this is not the case at the Fæsted residence, where only 18 finds of continental origin have been recorded so far.



Fig. 5. The two most significant insular finds from the elite residence at Fæsted; a silver coin struck around 940 AD and a bronze bell, whose distribution suggests an origin in the Danelaw. Photos: Silja Arnfríðardóttir Christensen.

Insular imports

It has been stated above that Viking Age elite sites and elite residences house a relatively large amount of artefactual material originating from the British Isles (Baastrup 2012; Baastrup 2014). Analyses of elite residences in eastern Denmark, in particular, have been the reason for this result, as they have so far been subjected to the strongest academic studies, which, however, must be concluded not to apply to the Fæsted residence. On the contrary, the Fæsted site is characterised by only five metal finds that can be linked to the British Isles, for two of the artefacts more precisely to the Danelaw, which raises the question of whether the find material represents a foreign material culture? The two finds are partly a unique and almost intact silver coin struck under Sigtryg II Sigtryggson in York around 942 AD, and partly a peculiar type of bronze bell (Grundvad 2024b; Figure 5), which is labelled Anglo-Scandinavian as their distribution suggests a production origin in the Danelaw, England, from which 42 pieces were known in 2021. The type is also known from

Hedeby and in two examples from burials in Iceland (Schoenfelder & Richards 2011), which also shows that the bells were traded from the west to the Nordic countries. In addition, it should be mentioned that the reticella-ornamented glass mentioned above may also originate from the British Isles. That it is the East Danish elite residences that are so westerly and continentally orientated may seem paradoxical when the West Danish Fæsted residence is clearly orientated towards the east and southeast according to this study.

Looking slightly beyond the residence at Fæsted, it can be noted that the only piece of insular metal import from Vejen municipality besides those mentioned above is recorded at Sønder Hygym, only about 2 km northeast of the residence in focus here. This insular find is not included in the percentage distributions to be presented later, but it does, however, indicate an overall picture of a material culture in western Denmark that does not correspond to that of eastern Denmark.



Fig. 6. Example of a presumed Baltic Sea region produced chain and penannular brooch fragment of presumed similar origin. Photo: Silja Arnfríðardóttir Christensen.

Baltic artefacts

The Baltic artefact material is also characterised by a relatively low number of objects. Thus, there are only two “Baltic” finds from the elite residence at Fæsted (Figure 6), one of which, a sturdy but fragmented braided chain, should only be considered as probably related to the Baltic Sea region including the eastern Danish islands, (eastern) Sweden and Finland as well as perhaps originating from the gold hoard, as suggested by their distribution in the plough layer. The chain type is typologically related to the Baltic Sea regions (Wiechmann 1996 Karte 96), which is why it should be mentioned here, but the type may have been produced elsewhere or domestically. The second find is an ornamented penannular brooch fragment adorned with a characteristic multi-sided knob. The piece was probably deliberately cut with the purpose of trading. Finno-Ugric and Baltic brooches of this type are often characterised by such knobs, which can be located at the ends of the buckle or on the ring itself, which is the case with the find from Fæsted-Harreby.

Nordic produced artefacts

The second largest group of artefacts in terms of origin is considered Nordic/domestic, i.e.

artefacts that can be determined to be native to the Nordic developed material culture in terms of style and dating in the period under consideration (Figure 7). The fact alone that the residents of elite residence produced their own press dies for precious metalwork meant that it was to be expected that there would be a larger proportion of "domestically" produced metal finds among the material from Fæsted, but it is surprising that the domestic metal objects "only" make up 38 individual finds of the determinable material, but it is also noteworthy that only one find number among the domestic finds appears in the form of coins, while the other provenances are reflected predominantly by coin finds. However, meanwhile the other provenances are reflected predominantly by single coin finds, it is noteworthy that the domestic coin finds reflect yet another coin hoard consisting of Ribe coins of the type KG5 or KG6 (determined by curator at Museum Vest, Claus Feveile). All other domestic metal finds appear as jewellery, of which a fairly large proportion appear in the shape of silver objects such as cut arm rings, pendants, three-foiled fibulae, etc. while the smaller, remaining quantity appears as ordinary mass-produced bronze jewellery such as equal-armed fibulae, three-foiled fibulae and disc fibulae, pendants and other jewellery, strap ends,

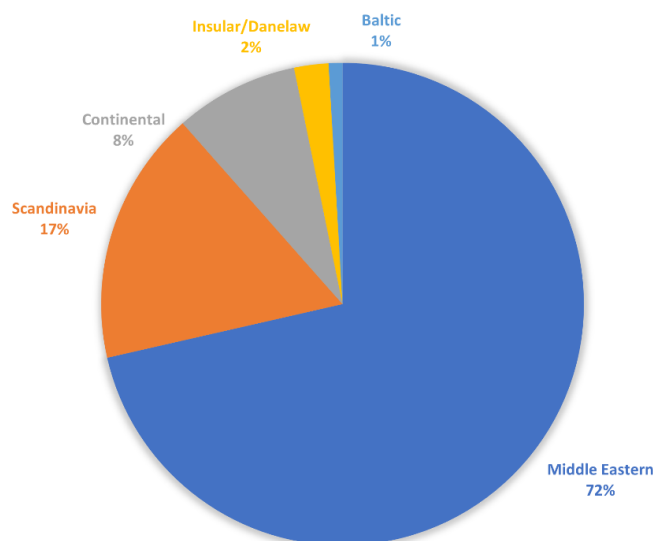


Fig. 8. Provenance determination of artefacts from Fæsted. Non-provenanced artefacts are not included. Diagram: Lars Grundvad, Museet Sønderkov.

The networks

That the elite site at Fæsted was part of a wide-ranging network is evident from the many artefacts. However, compared with the results presented by Maria P. Baastrup on the presence of continental and insular imports in Viking Age Denmark, it is evident that Fæsted's insular artefact material is far from reflecting the picture from Tissø and Lejre, which are otherwise comparable eastern Danish residences. This reflects that the Emporium Ribe does not appear to have functioned as a gateway for insular products for the owners of the elite residence. That Ribe would otherwise constitute a so-called gateway community is clear from Baastrup's analysis - ergo, the material from the Fæsted site stands out from an otherwise well-defined trade network. In other ways, Baastrup's studies fit well with what can be observed at Fæsted and the immediate neighbourhood. Thus, Baastrup shows, as mentioned, that in the hinterland of the given Eastern Danish elite sites there are often extraordinarily rich continental imports, e.g. Carolingian silver such as the Duesminde treasure from Lolland or the elaborate, continental silver cup from Fejø (Baastrup 2014, 362 ff.). While Fæsted's immediate vicinity is not characterised by decidedly large quantities

of Carolingian silver jewellery and fitting, it is worth mentioning that there is a styx from Ribe Nørremark, which is situated only 11 km due west of Fæsted, and this is consistent with Baastrup's interpretation of Ribe as a gateway community.

As the percentage provenience determinations show (Figure 8), the residence at Fæsted was quantitatively much more orientated towards the east and south-east, which is reflected in the large quantities of Middle Eastern silver. Only relatively few coins have yet been dated at the National Museum, but the dating so far shows that the many Kufic coins and their minting years seem to reflect the otherwise normally seen pattern in the Nordic material; namely that the Kufic coins flowed northwards in thousands in two general waves (e.g. Sindbæk 2005, p. 217; Moesgård 2018, p. 137). However, there is an extraordinarily large number of Middle Eastern silver finds at Fæsted, which is clearly apparent when compared to the region's other contemporary metal detector sites - this will be shown later in this article. This two-part occurrence must also be considered a possible reason for the presence of the otherwise limited amount of Baltic imports documented at Fæsted, as studies have shown that the first wave of

Middle Eastern silver seems to have travelled through the trading town of Truso in present-day Poland, while the latter was more closely oriented towards the Gulf of Finland and its rivers (Moesgaard 2018, 137). From there, the silver travelled along the routes through Russia and from there south-eastwards. Thus, the Baltic finds could easily have been traded by the same routes.

When comparing the network shown above with the network testimony of the Fæsted gold hoard, it should first be noted that the origin of the gold objects can be viewed in two overall ways. On the one hand, it has been argued that several pieces of jewellery were produced according to archaic ideals, and on the other hand, clear inspiration has been sought in continental and Byzantine elite jewellery use and fashion. The reason for the given designs should likely be seen as an expression of a search for politically charged, visual legitimisation of the early Jelling dynasty (Grundvad 2023a). Furthermore, the origin of the gold jewellery can also be partly placed in order to understand the relationship

between royal power and place of production. Here it is particularly interesting that most of the provenance-determinable gold artefacts are likely to have been produced either in the royally administered Haithabu or at the elite sites at Gl. Lejre (Grundvad & Nielsen 2023; Grundvad 2023b) or Tissø (Fabriciusen-Nielsen, Holst & Grundvad 2023). This shows that the components of the treasure seem to reflect a distinctly domestic production, probably carried out by royal craftsmen. This contrasts with the many individual finds in silver and bronze, which were to a greater extent domestically produced by local craftsmen who did not focus on royal legitimacy or alliances.

The fact that the jewellery designs are clearly inspired by foreign ideals only helps to emphasise the special status of the gold treasure as a highly unusual discovery in terms of composition, just as it helps to emphasise that the many unique gold items are produced to visually distinguish themselves from the otherwise mass-produced merchandise from, for example, Ribe, Hedeby, etc.

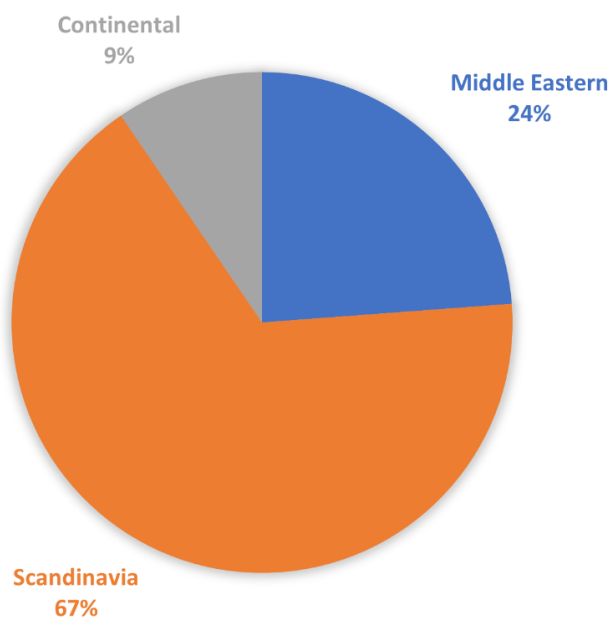


Figure 9. Diagram showing the percentage provenance distribution for 22 artifacts from the site at Øster Lindet, located a few kilometres east of Fæsted. Diagram: Lars Grundvad, Museet Sønderkov.

Fæsted compared to a neighbour site

To put the material culture of the elite site in perspective, it may be relevant to compare it

with the material from a nearby contemporary site. As a case study, a site south of the village of Øster Lindet has been chosen, which, like Fæsted, was discovered due to metal detector

surveys and subsequently examined by a traditional archaeological trial excavation (Hansen & Grundvad 2021). Significantly fewer objects from the Viking age have been located at Øster Lindet than at the Fæsted residence, but in terms of both objects and buildings, the sites are comparable dating wise, and since they are also located in relation to the same routes in the landscape, it seems reasonable to make the comparison (Figure 9).

There are remarkable quantitative differences, especially for the Middle Eastern artifacts, which are represented in significantly smaller percentages than the Scandinavian material. Thus, Middle Eastern objects found at Fæsted represent 72% and Scandinavian objects only 17% of the analysed finds, while at Øster Lindet, only 24% of the metal objects are Middle Eastern, while 67% of the metal discovered is domestically produced. The elite site is thus characterized by almost three times as many Middle Eastern finds in percentage terms, and correspondingly only a third as many domestically produced metal objects, which indicates that the elite sites were characterized by an extensive network, while the more ordinary settlements were clearly more oriented towards domestic products. It is also somewhat interesting that there are more continental objects at Øster Lindet in percentage terms than at Fæsted. However, the actual numbers for both sites are so low that this picture can quickly change. According to Søren M. Sindbæk's analysis of trade and routinization in the Viking Age, this reflects a study of the influence of West Danish trading towns on the material culture of the surrounding settlements (Sindbæk 2005, 124); thus, it has been shown that the trade goods of given towns are more frequently seen in given catchments than goods from more distant regions. This shows that the seats of the elite were much more oriented towards the international, distant networks than the domestic ones when it came to the more "normally" seen items, i.e. when it wasn't about the gold that was

produced domestically for very specific purposes.

Conclusion

Based on the above observation that the Øster Lindet site seems to represent a normal relationship between a trading city (Ribe) and settlement, an interesting final question arises: why are the trade goods from Ribe hardly reflected in the material of the elite site at Fæsted, which is much closer to Ribe than Øster Lindet? The answer must be that the inhabitants of the elite sites were more oriented towards international networks; being able to show that they were outward-looking, that they were knowledgeable about conditions in the known world of the time, and that they had the resources to act in these networks was more important for the elite in the Late Germanic Iron Age and Viking Age than it was to show that you were inward-oriented in the everyday productions of the local markets. If you were a part of the elite, you also had to be able to show it through imports as well as luxury Nordic goods, the latter of which were produced by selected specialists.

The fact that it was the international networks that were significant at the Fæsted residence is reflected in the percentage distribution of production sites, where imported goods take up more space than domestic products, and where, unlike the East Danish elite residences at Tissø and Gl. Lejre, were oriented towards the southeast and east. However, it is important to emphasize that "ordinary" metal objects have also been found at Fæsted. But the question is whether these items were lost by the visiting ritual/assembly participants, who probably used the pit houses that were outside the elite site's fence. It is certainly striking that a very large proportion of the domestically produced ordinary metal finds are most often found towards the periphery of the residence at Fæsted, precisely in the areas where the pit houses are found. Similarly, it is striking that the same types

of objects are found at the other metal detector sites in Vejen municipality, such as the site at Øster Lindet.

The chronological development of imports/exports to and from the elite residence area shows quantitatively that there is a significantly higher incidence of imports in the latter half of the Viking Age than in the older half, which may indicate that the position of the residence in the international networks became increasingly evident. However, this is not the case if you look at the quality of the imports. For example, the previously mentioned disc on bow brooch is an expression of great wealth and the brooch shows that the users of the elite residence were already part of an extensive network around 700 AD. This situation become even more evident if the find material from the Iron Age sacred site at Fæsted, Stavsager Høj, is added. The findings from there also indicate that Fæsted was an important part of a large network through which Roman goods were exchanged for services and goods.

The material culture at the elite residence has thus been presented and analysed, thereby clarifying the above. It is the hope that similar analyses can be conducted at the other Nordic residences. It will be interesting to see whether western Denmark was in fact as oriented towards the east as seen at Fæsted, just as it will be interesting to see whether the eastern Danish sites are so consistently oriented towards the west and the continent. A better understanding of these networks will undoubtedly reveal a great deal about regional affiliations, alliances, and communication, which will tell us a much about the networks of power in the Late Germanic Iron Age and Viking Age.

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40 years travelling the Viking Age

Else Roesdahl

I was asked to conclude the 40th Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium with an essay entitled *40 years travelling the Viking Age*. This subject could of course, be approached in many ways. I am not going to talk about how and where Viking Studies should travel in times to come – others can do that much better than I can. Instead, I shall take a largely personal approach, briefly discussing aspects of:

- The early ‘travel’ history of these symposia,
- The popularity of Viking studies,
- The importance of travel for the understanding of the Viking Age – recounting some of my own travels and visits to Viking sites,
- One far-travelled Viking Age artifact: The Bamberg Casket.

The history of the Interdisciplinary Viking Symposia

It all started in 1982, in Odense, with a symposium on aspects of Vikings in England, organized by the Old Norse philologist Hans Bekker-Nielsen & the language historian Hans Frede Nielsen. Lectures were given by place-name scholar Gillian Fellows-Jensen, by the historian Niels Lund, and the English language scholar Torben Kisbye. The Universities of Odense (now Southern Denmark), Copenhagen and Aarhus were, then, involved from the beginning.

The symposium was a great success, and it was decided to make it into a series. The next

symposium took place the following spring (1983) at the Moesgaard Institute of Aarhus University – again with three lectures, and now more disciplines were involved: besides history (as before), also archaeology and history of law, while subjects varied from Viking military organization to the burial custom of the Danish riders’ graves and law in the Danelaw.



Fig. 1. Publications of the lectures at four Interdisciplinary Viking symposia. Each university had its own colour: yellow for Odense University (now University of Southern Denmark), blue for Aarhus University (the symposia took place at the institute at Moesgaard), red for Copenhagen University, and green for Kiel University. Photo Else Roesdahl.

It was decided that the organization of these symposia should be simple: they should rotate

between the three universities involved and should last one afternoon or a bit more. They should be organised by two representatives from each university and should be published cheaply and in a not too time-consuming way before the next symposium. Publications should be edited by the organisers of the relevant symposia – this was before peer reviews and the system of publication ranking! For many years, the reports were therefore typed-written texts published in A5 size by Jens Velle's publishing firm *Hikuin* and my Department of Medieval Archaeology at Aarhus University (Figure 1).

More disciplines eventually joined the symposia – many of us saw great benefit in interdisciplinary cooperation, and the symposia developed into inspiring annual meetings for disciplines like history, place-name studies, archaeology, runology, Old Norse studies, history of religions, history of languages, history of law, etc. And it became a useful meeting place for museum and university people throughout the country. Other Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian scholars also learnt about these symposia, reading the publications and occasionally attending meetings. Important personal networks developed.

Slightly later, the Christian-Albrechts-Universität in Kiel and the Gottorp Museum in Schleswig asked to join us; the first German symposium took place in 1990 in Kiel. Academically, it was interesting, but the distance and public transport to Kiel or Schleswig were a problem for some participants, and the number of Danish participants was often small.

Gradually, foreign colleagues were invited to lecture. The languages of symposium lectures and the published articles were in Danish, English, or German. Also, a symposium usually covered several topics – lectures might be on anything 'Viking'. Just occasionally, there was a specific theme.



Fig. 2. In central Aarhus, Vikings with shield, axe, and helmet allow pedestrians to cross the streets – signaling the town's Viking origin. Photo Else Roesdahl 2023.

For many years, the symposia were truly interdisciplinary. But this has changed. Today, archaeology – with its steady growth of new evidence – dominates. Also, current archaeology tends to favour cooperation with the natural sciences at the cost of the humanities. I hope that broad interdisciplinary interest will be strengthened at the symposia – and in general Viking-Age research.

Otherwise, the symposia have successfully taken up the challenges of changing times. Many features have been adapted. The current organization is stronger; there is usually a single theme, as opposed to stray subjects. Publications appear on the net; there is a homepage; invitations are spread electronically, etc.

In conclusion, I find it truly amazing that we can celebrate the 40th Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium. These symposia still seem to fulfill functions. Many congratulations to the organizers!

Viking popularity

Vikings are famous. Not least for their travels to foreign lands – north, south, east, and west – and for their discovery and settlement of new lands in the North Atlantic and beyond, which is one of their most admired ‘achievements’. Vikings are, further, celebrated for their art, technology, and trade, etc., and for their obviously violent raids along European coasts and rivers, and their conquests of England and Normandy, and other places (Figure 2).

However, in the light of the current ‘woke’ movement, which condemns European violent behavior (past and present) elsewhere in the world, like imperialism and the slave-trade, an article in the newspaper Politiken (22 April 2023) discussed whether we should, consequently, condemn and abolish Vikings.

Should we take a moral view and boycott the popular and ‘violent’ Vikings? Or, as suggested by the author of the Politiken article (Booth 2023), provide better information on the background and general context of the cruel deeds of Vikings, and of many others in the past? However, as also said in this article, the idea of a Viking boycott because of their cruelty is probably unrealistic. Privately, I would favour the idea of giving popular outreach on Vikings a good holiday, and for some time focus on other periods.

My own travels to Viking sites during the lifetime of the Interdisciplinary Viking symposia

Nobody has yet, to my knowledge, objected to the Vikings as travelers – a new TV series on this has just started (spring 2023), focusing on travel in rough seas on the way to Newfoundland, in a modern boat, and featuring Rane Willerslev and others, including Jeanette Varberg being very seasick.

Some of the great experiences in my own life were travelling to places far from Denmark, which were visited by Vikings, or where they went to live. The new environments must often have been great challenges for them, and many of these places still have clear marks of Vikings.

These travels have been crucial for my understanding of the Viking Age and have given me some sense of the ‘otherness’ and differences from the homelands, which they must have felt, and of distances (although I often used airplanes and not ships to get there). Such travels also gave me some feeling of ‘the spirit of the place’ – *stedets ånd*, as expressed by Knud W. Jensen, the founder of Louisiana. I have tried to express some of this in my writings and in photos in books and articles (including Roesdahl 2012; 2016. Detailed references to individual sites may be found on the net or in various handbooks).

In the following, I shall take you on a tour to selected Viking places, starting at Borg in the Lofoten islands, north of the Arctic Circle, where I was involved in the excavations of a chieftain’s farm in the 1990s. It is on a very Norwegian island with high mountains, Vestvågøy, which is situated fairly close to the Norwegian mainland but very far from Denmark.

The chieftain’s main building turned out to be 83 m long – the longest known Viking building, with space for humans at one end and animals at the other. It had curved sides, and the walls had been isolated with turf. The building was situated high in the landscape, as fit for a chieftain’s residence. After excavation, it was reconstructed nearby (Figure 3).

Fragments of imported luxury items were found, such as sherds of Tating pottery, glass vessels, and glass beads, demonstrating links to foreign



Fig. 3. The reconstructed chieftains' residence at Borg in Lofoten. Excavations took place in the 1980s, and the reconstruction was built nearby shortly after. The building was 83 m long and held living quarters as well as space for animals. Photo David M. Wilson 1998.



Fig. 4. The dramatic landscape at Thingvellir in Iceland, where the Thing meetings for the whole island took place annually. The white flagpole (center) marks the mound from where the central proceedings likely took place. Photo Else Roesdahl 2009.

lands including the Rhineland and England, probably by way of south Scandinavia. Further, the finds demonstrated the chieftains' taste for Scandinavian elite culture, and the character of the site seemed in many ways to fit the home of the chieftain Ohthere, whose well-known

account to king Alfred of Wessex also describes his sea journey from Northern Norway to Hedeby around 890. The trade goods mentioned there must also have been the source of the Borg chieftains' wealth: particularly walrus ivory and fur – although the excavations revealed no trace

of this (Stamsø Munch, Johansen & Roesdahl (eds.) 2003).

Next stop is Iceland, with Thingvellir (Figure 4), where Icelanders met annually for their Thing meetings, at a naturally shaped theatre in the dramatic volcanic land, which they settled in the

late ninth century, and where saga literature and poems were later produced. For me, another great moment occurred in Reykjavík, where I was taken to the safe room at the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar and allowed to hold *Codex Regius* in my own hands.



Fig. 5. Brattahlid, present-day Qassiarsuk, with light snow. Here, Erik the Red built his farm around 985, when Scandinavians first settled Greenland. The site is on the shore of the Eriksfjord, present Tunulliarfik (here with icebergs) opposite the airport at Narsarsuaq, from where the photo was taken. Photo Else Roesdahl in early September 2008.



Fig. 6. The land at L'Anse aux Meadows, at the northern tip of Newfoundland, with a reconstructed Norse house from around the year 1000. Photo Else Roesdahl 2000.

Viking also took me to Greenland, which was settled in about 985 by Erik the Red (a most disagreeable man by today's standards). But it is fascinating to visit his farm Brattahlid and see the reconstruction of his wife Tjodhilde's church, and floating icebergs in the Fjord (Figure 5) – and to read the saga of Erik the Red

on site, and to realise how isolated it was from the rest of Scandinavia and even Iceland.

On we go to North America, to the Viking site at L'Anse aux Meadows at the northern tip of Newfoundland, from around the year 1000. I arrived a thousand years later, with a congress.

The site is convincingly interpreted as a ‘base camp’, a place from where expeditions to investigate the lands further south took off. One of their houses is now reconstructed (Figure 6). I was lucky to get two visits, because our return plane was much delayed by fog. Four of us went again to the site and could peacefully ‘take it all in’ and get a feeling of the land and the sea and conditions there, and I took some quiet moments to read bits of the Vinland sagas.

The site is a windy and rather rough place with a wide view of the sea, and the small island Belle Isle, which helped them to find the site on arrival. The beach – not an easy place to land – provided some sort of protection against attacks. It was fascinating to imagine the people who had

been here and who are mentioned in sagas, like Leif the Lucky and Thorfinn Karlsefni and his wife Gudrid, who gave birth to a son there. It was ‘historiens vingesus’.

To the west I went to Scotland, and to the Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland. In Orkney, we experienced the importance of weather and sea currents for communication between the islands – ships being the only means of communication, as until recently also in the Faroes. And there was Ireland, and in England the Viking heritage in York and other towns, and Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture and an amazing number of Scandinavian placenames in the countryside and even in towns (Figure 7).



Fig. 7. Signpost in Yorkshire, Northern England. Slingsby and Kirkby are Scandinavian placenames; the others are Anglo-Saxon. Photo Else Roesdahl 1988.

Germany was always Denmark’s important neighbor and had a tremendous cultural impact. One important site is Quedlinburg, in former East Germany. During the tenth century, Ottonian rulers, like Otto the Great, held prestigious meetings for the nobility and celebrated Easter here, together with envoys from many countries, including Denmark in 973. The founder of the dynasty, Henry the Fowler, who died in 936, was buried here in a predecessor of the present church on top of one of two big rock outcrops (Figure 8).

Otto the Great himself was buried in nearby Magdeburg, in a church with architectural details brought from Rome, signaling his empire’s roots. Many features and ideas at Harald Bluetooth’s contemporary Jelling must have been inspired by Quedlinburg and Magdeburg – and transformed into Nordic architecture and Nordic ideology (Roesdahl 2023, 121).



Fig. 8. The present St. Servatius Church at Quedlinburg in Eastern Germany. Henry the Fowler, father of the emperor Otto the Great (died 973) and his wife were buried here, and an important imperial nunnery was founded. Later abbesses included Beatrix, granddaughter of Cnut the Great, see fig. 9. Photo Else Roesdahl 1988 from the other of the town's two significant outcrops.



Fig. 9. Beatrix's gravestone in the crypt of St. Servatius Church at Quedlinburg. She was the only grandchild of Cnut the Great, and one of the German emperor Henry III's daughters. She died 1062 after having spent most of her short life as abbess in Quedlinburg. The stone is from the early twelfth century. Photo Elmar Egner.

A gravestone in the crypt in Quedlinburg also revealed to me that Cnut the Great had a grandchild: the daughter of his daughter Gunhild, who died early, and the later German emperor Henry III. Little Beatrix became abbess of the imperial cloister at Quedlinburg at the age of seven, and died in 1064, some twenty-four years old. Her gravestone (Figure 9), which is placed next to those of two other abbesses, is half a century later. Beatrix was largely forgotten in Scandinavian history, and I am rather pleased to have given her a small place there (Roesdahl 2018, 115-121).

In Normandy, which was settled by Vikings around 911, it was amazing to see so many

Danish placenames in the countryside, which very much resembles Denmark. And it was amazing to experience the political and military drama illustrated on the 70 m long Bayeux tapestry. Further south is the lovely Loire valley, which then, as now, produces splendid white wines, and salt. That visit made me understand why some Vikings settled there in the ninth century.

In Eastern Europe, it became possible to visit the early Russian towns of Staraja Ladoga and Novgorod, and to have a look at Gorodische – along the enormous Russian rivers, which brought so much silver and other riches to Scandinavia. And which also brought goods and

people south to Kyiv and to fabulous Byzantium. In 2019, just in time, I went to Kyiv and saw its Hagia Sofia Church and the Dnepr River – the great Viking way to Byzantium (Figure 10).

I visited Byzantium/Istanbul for a few days in the 1960s, but many Vikings went and stayed for some time and saw Hagia Sofia, where some left runic inscriptions. A famous ‘souvenir’ from the Vikings’ eastern activities is now in *Venice*:

runic inscriptions on a great marble lion (Figure 11). It was taken from Piraeus, the harbour of Athens, by the Venetians in 1687 – they stole sculptures of lions, the symbol of their saint St. Marc, all over the Mediterranean. The inscriptions are very damaged, but a decade ago they were partly deciphered and published: it has some male names and was written in several stages in the eleventh century.

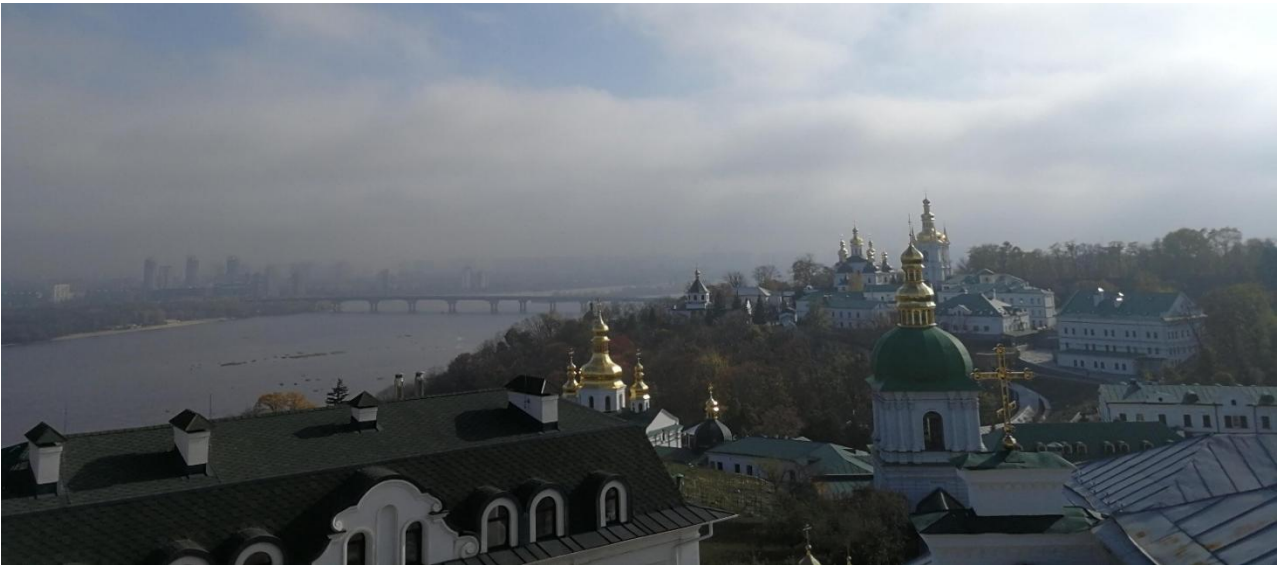


Fig. 10. Kyiv. View of the great Dnjepr River and the Cave Monastery, where the historian Nestor allegedly wrote his chronicle on the early *Rus* realm. Photo Else Roesdahl 2019.



Fig. 11. Huge antique marble lion taken in 1687 by Venetians from Athen’s harbour, Piraeus. It is now at the Arsenal in Venice. On it are runic inscriptions carved by Scandinavians in the eleventh century, and only recently has it become possible to read parts of them. Photo Else Roesdahl 1988.

Córdoba in southern Spain was, together with Byzantium, the greatest town and cultural center in Viking Age Europe. A good decade ago, I visited the town and its incredible mosque, which was built in stages between the time of early Ribe and of the Jelling monuments – and archaeology and written sources demonstrate that there was contact with Denmark!

After being pensioned, I finally went to Samarkand and Tashkent, in present-day Uzbekistan, where so many dirhems found in

Danish and Swedish tenth-century silver hoards were produced. Earthquakes have destroyed much of the towns, but Samarkand has an enormous tell, while grand monuments from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (Figure 12) illustrate the enormous wealth at such international trading centers in Central Asia, which linked India and China with western parts of Asia and Europe by land. This lasted until after the Portuguese discovered the sea route from Europe to India and into the Arabian Gulf around 1500.



Fig. 12. Registan in Samarkand with buildings from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries demonstrating the enormous riches of the town. Photo Jens Roesdahl Lange 2012.

A far-travelled Viking artefact – the Bamberg Casket

The casket (Figure 13) is now in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich and can be traced back to St. Stephen's Church in Bamberg, where it was in the early nineteenth century. It is an exquisite casket with Mammen style carvings on walrus ivory panels, and gilt mounts. It is closely related to the lost casket from Cammin (Kamień) near Wolin and the present Polish-German border, and to the Hungarian saint St. Stephen's sword in Prague, and a small reliquary in the treasury of the royal basilica of San Isodoro in León, Northern Spain – I travelled to León to see

this (Roesdahl 2010a). Those four artefacts are clearly of Scandinavian origin and from the late tenth century, and I have suggested they were gifts from a Danish king, probably Harald Bluetooth, to princes and kings in other parts of Christian Europe (Roesdahl 1998; 2010b).

The Bamberg casket has never been lent to exhibitions, and only the outside and its later history have been published (Muhl 1990). But some years ago, David M. Wilson and I suggested to the Museum in Munich that it should be published in detail, and the proposed joint project was positively received. In 2014 and 2015, we therefore went to Munich and were

very kindly permitted by Dr. Matthias Weniger to study the casket inside and outside and to take some photos, while various problems, including a series of technical analyses, were discussed, information was shared, and meetings with other museum staff were arranged. We also

exchanged relevant literature, including articles on excavated Danish parallels to the Bamberg casket's shape and original lock mechanism (Jeppesen & Schwartz 2007; Juhl 2012). It appears that the ingenious but fragile lock allowed the entire casket lid to be lifted off.



Fig. 13. The Bamberg casket. The sides are *c.* 26 cm long. The four protruding mounts decorated with a mask, one at each side, are part of the lock. Photo Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.

A full investigation of the casket would, however, be a comprehensive and time-consuming undertaking involving other departments at the museum, and other institutions. Finally, the museum decided not to prioritize the project, which was consequently dropped. Hopefully, it will be revived one day. Here, I will share some of our observations on this splendid and far-travelled Viking artefact of probable Danish origin, and some perspectives:

It is a square box with a curved top and sides *c.* 26 cm long (Figures 13-15). It is made of wood covered with panels of walrus ivory and gilt copper-alloy mounts, some of which are in the form of animal heads. On top is a polished stone. The original keyhole is near the top, but at some stage it got a new lock and a keyhole on the side (details in Muhl 1990). The material of the panels has been discussed. But based on my

familiarity with walrus tusk, and discussions with an experienced carver of walrus tusk and of other tusk, tooth, antler and bone materials, Lene Stevns Jensen, a close inspection of the panels including their sizes leaves in my opinion no doubt that it is indeed, as usually thought, walrus ivory – a rare material at the time (cf. Roesdahl 2005). Scientific analysis would, of course, provide a definitive answer.

The casket's interior was unknown, and it was fascinating to have it opened. But not much to see there, as most of the surface was covered by some sort of nineteenth-century wallpaper (Figure 14). Further studies, of course, imply that this should be carefully removed. But it was clear that the visible traces of the original lock were paralleled in the excavated Danish caskets,

while the screwed-on hinges are fairly recent; the secondary lock is still in place.



Fig. 14. The interior of the Bamberg casket with its present lining and hinges. The secondary lock-case is not seen on the picture. Photo Else Roesdahl 2014.



Fig. 15. The base of the Bamberg casket. Photo Else Roesdahl 2014.

The base was made of one piece of wood and may be suitable for dendrochronology (Figure 15). Results may also be gained from the casket's sides. Such investigations would be extremely interesting – and a dendro-provenance might indicate where the casket was produced: perhaps in Jutland, at Jelling? It also appeared that the base had once been covered with something – technical analysis would probably reveal what it was, and possibly remains of a picture or an ornament? Potentially, much crucial information could be gained by detailed analysis.

From what we know today, it may, however, be suggested that the casket was in fact the wrapping of the real gift, now disappeared (cf. Webster 2012, 53, 58), and that it was preserved in Germany because it was considered a wonderful and exotic piece of art, which was later seen suitable for secondary use as a container for holy Christian relics. But what was the original gift in the box? I guess it was something of Scandinavian origin, which would be splendid and exotic for a German ruler – any suggestions?

End words

Looking back, I have been lucky to be able to 'travel' widely within the Viking World: geographically as related above, and also within the various genres of Viking studies and activities: academic research and publications in books and articles; surveys concerning both Denmark and the wider Viking World; exhibitions in Denmark as well as in England, France and Germany; excavations in Denmark and elsewhere; interdisciplinary work; work on the reception of Vikings throughout times; teaching new generations of archaeologists, and lecturing at all levels; involvement in the

copying Viking artefacts and a church; radio and television interviews, etc.

Through this work, I met numerous colleagues from universities, museums, and other institutions in many countries and became part of a wide network, which is the background of much of my Viking work. Many of these colleagues became friends. The various activities taught me a lot, and my work on the Middle Ages helped to set the Viking Age in perspective. I also experienced the dramatic political changes and the emergence of new states and the fall of The Wall in 1989, while organizing a major international exhibition to which 15 countries contributed, including Estonia and Latvia, the former DDR, Poland, Russia and Ukraine (Roesdahl (ed.) 1992). Altogether it has been hard work, and a fascinating and mostly very enjoyable journey, for which I am very grateful.

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