

Abstracts 41 Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium

Invited Keynote:

From Viking Phenomenon to the World in the Viking Age

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What exactly was the Viking Age? Is it a historical construct or was it an actual era, marked by events and processes whose beginning and end can be deduced from the historical and archaeological source material? With the starting point that the Viking Age was a real and definable time period, the main aim of the 10-year research project *The Viking Phenomenon* has been to try to understand its origin and underlying causes, seen in the wider perspective of "the Long Iron Age". As the project is now coming to an end, it is time to outline the preliminary conclusions, or rather insights into what caused the development that we identify as the Viking Age. As perhaps expected, there isn't one single cause or trigger, but rather a logical extension of multiple, intersecting, and gradual processes set in motion centuries earlier. While the Viking Age constituted a transitional period within Scandinavia with notable societal changes, much of what we see as characteristic of the era is connected to the interactions with the outside world, and the reactions and developments that these encounters brought with them. Would we even consider a Viking Age if we removed raids, campaigns and long-distance trade? Within the Viking phenomenon project, particular focus has been on the processes, events and the social organisation that gave rise to these activities. Raiding inside Scandinavia was nothing new, but what changed was the developing projection outwards. Similarly, long-distance trade continued along the same paths as during previous centuries, but now the Scandinavians moved closer to the source, cutting out the middlemen.

Textual sources of the time contain graphic accounts of how 'Vikings', in the broadest sense of the word, were perceived in the worlds they came into contact with. But what was the impact of the World on the Viking Age Scandinavian? The societies and cultures they encountered on their ventures provided them not only with desirable goods, but also with new ideas, practices, and knowledge that, in turn, influenced the social and economic development of their homelands. So far, interactions like these have mostly been studied from an inside-out perspective, where Scandinavia has served as a point of reference. With the *Uppsala Research Centre for the World in the Viking Age (WIVA)*, a centre of excellence funded by the Swedish Research Council, the aim is to shift perspectives. The centre forms a research environment where international visiting scholars and early career researchers will be able to explore the Viking Age diaspora in a truly global context.

Affect as effectuation: The enlargement of Viking Age button-on-bow brooches in eastern Middle Sweden

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This paper discusses button-on-bow brooches from eastern Middle Sweden, that change their affectual qualities during the formative transition from the Late Germanic Iron Age to the Viking Age. Specifically, the brooches recovered from the Viking Age may be significantly enlarged, compared to their Vendel period predecessors. At the same time, the actual number of button-on-bow brooches decreased in the area during the Viking Age, after which the phenomenon disappeared or went out of production or fashion. During the Viking Age, the button-on-bow brooch thus changed its relation to its previous self or selves (see also Bogost 2012), and of course also humans and non-human entities. Affect is a subject that has gained academic traction in the last decade or so (e.g. Massumi 2002, Stewart 2007, Thrift 2008, Manning 2016), although its interdisciplinary qualities and potential has only been modestly explored within archaeology. In the paper I discuss how a recognition of affect in our studies of material culture, here specifically button-on-bow brooches, can be a useful tool to unravel and explore changing power relations in different domains of society, thus of specific relevance in transitional periods, such as that from the Late Germanic Iron Age to the Viking Age.

References

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On the Cusp of the Viking Age – The Nabberör Boat Grave Revisited

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The importance of revisiting old excavations has long been appreciated in burial archaeology. The application of new perspectives and methods continuously reveal new data, which in turn revise and expand our knowledge. In this paper we present a re-analysis of the Swedish boat grave Nabberör on the Baltic island of Öland, excavated in 1938. It was dated to the 8th century CE and has long held a particular position in scholarship due to its anomalous nature with multiple buried individuals. This study presents a transdisciplinary reassessment of the grave resulting in new data and a new interpretation of the find. By adopting a multiproxy approach to the whole grave—employing archaeological, bioarchaeological, zooarchaeological, isotopic, and aDNA analyses—the human and animal remains as well as the artefacts are carefully re-assessed and re-contextualised. We are thus able to shed new light on the grave itself as well as expand our understanding of the boat grave custom on the cusp of the Viking Age.

Finding foreign footholds – on early naval installations in south-eastern Sweden

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The late 9th Century travel accounts by Wulfstan in the *Old English Orosios* is an important primary source for antiquarian research in Scandinavia. After an initial mention of Danish islands, he famously states that after Bornholm “...we had on our left the lands that by tradition have been called Blekinge, Möre, Öland, and Gotland, all these subject to the Svear”. Just how this Sveonic dominion was upheld has been discussed from numerous viewpoints, but in this presentation I aim to add a potentially important piece to the greater picture by discussing a number of possible naval installations in the abovementioned areas.

After an initial period of wide-eyed amazement, LiDAR-based survey has become a standard tool within landscape analysis. The National Swedish terrain model has opened for a greater visibility of archaeological remains, and renewed laser scanning has brought that features which were previously “pixeled-out” are now clearly visible even in the fixed standard views offered on-line.

Gotland will be re-scanned in 2024, but even in the present model three areas with parallel depressions, c. 15 m long, 5 m wide and 1 m deep, can easily be singled-out on the islands Stora and Lilla Karlsö, off the Gotlandic west coast. On northern Stora Karlsö, these depressions were described and test-trenched already in 1889, but additional excavations in 1929 and 1930 added to and complicated the picture. The results led Dr Hanna Rydh, inspired by contemporary discoveries at the famous Valsgårde cemetery, to interpret the depressions as boat graves. Other scholars have since disputed her results and rather sought to interpret the depressions and intermediate shingle walls as boat houses. But the location of these, vis-a-vis the surrounding landscape, calls for some thought. They are dug into and through fossile beach walls which via isostatic land upheaval is now located c. 6-7 m above the current sea level and 150 m inland. Nearby systems of parallel depressions, on the southern coast of the island and on nearby Lilla Karlsö, display similar placements in terms of altitude and distance to the present shoreline. Given that the local uplift is calculated to approximately 3-3,5 m during the last 1000 years, it can be assumed that these features were constructed well before the turn of the 1st millennium CE, possibly as early as in the Merovingian Period.

LiDAR-based survey of nearby coastal areas has recently yielded several strikingly similar installations at strategic locations on Öland and in the archipelago of Blekinge. These are still being assessed, but share many characteristics with the Kaslö facilities, e.g. series of parallel grooves laid out on altitudes which were close to but not directly on the shores during the Merovingian and Early Viking Period. This points to a possible common origin, which along with their locations to areas that are well suited to overlook and control the provinces mentioned by Wulfstan might suggest that they once acted as naval bases and Sveonic footholds.

Current archaeological paradigms for the discussion of the Viking-Age (c. 750-1050 CE) are framed almost exclusively by the study of elites. These were martial rulers, their kinship groups and retinues, and the aristocratic landholders who occupied the upper strata of Scandinavian society. The emphasis ascribed to these groups in both scholarly and popular literature reflects cultural historical perspectives dating from the 19th- and early-20th century, when antiquarians and early archaeologists sought to anchor the developmental trajectory of the Scandinavian nations within the prehistoric past. In traditional narratives of the period, Scandinavian society was often considered as comprising several well-defined social classes, ranging from rulers to unbonded farmers, and a broad social spectrum of lower-status and enslaved peoples. Although this model is now considered to be overly simplistic, it nevertheless speaks to and provides an insight into the entrenched relationships of asymmetrical power and inequality that shaped social interactions within prehistoric communities.

Today, the focus of research on high-status social groups continues to cast a shadow over the lives of the wider population, including members of the lower-status freeborn classes and semi-free, unfree, or enslaved peoples. There have been few attempts to identify and study the lives of subaltern groups, or to explore the conditions that allowed hierarchical social structures to be established and upheld across generations. In this paper, I will introduce a project designed to address these issues through a critical study of social inequality and marginalisation in the burial record. Focusing on cemeteries located in modern-day Sweden, the project mobilises Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence as a lens through which to examine and contextualise the study of bioarchaeological, material, and later medieval textual evidence. In addition to providing an overview of the project, the paper will also consider how the structural violence framework can be used to shed light on transformative processes taking place at varying scales of geographical resolution throughout the latter half of the First Millennium CE.