

VIKINGS

Warriors of the north. Giants of the sea

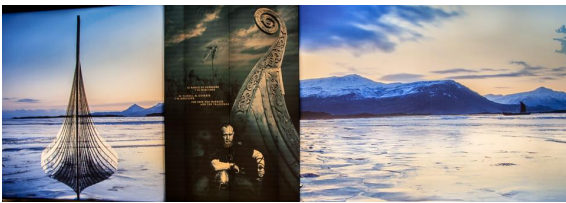


This exhibition presents the unique and fascinating world of the Vikings. The Viking Age (c. 8th-11th centuries) was a period when Scandinavians had a major influence in many parts of the world. During this period Scandinavia underwent substantial changes. It was a time of colonization, conquest and plunder, but also a period when towns with trades, specialized crafts, professions and communication networks were established. For centuries the Christian Church had been dominant on mainland Europe. Now it also displaced the old pagan faith of Scandinavia. The small fragmented kingdoms comprising Scandinavia were gathered in three larger kingdoms - Sweden, Norway and Denmark. This centralization of power led to major changes in society and an entirely new social structure. Denmark turned in earnest towards Europe.

The exhibition has 7 themes:

1. Introduction
2. A Wind Age – Ships, Sails and Sea
3. Connecting Continents – Traders and Merchants
4. With the Sword in the Hand - Warriors
5. Viking Way of Life
6. Power of Kings
7. Viking Mind – Gods and Beliefs





1. Introduction

This section introduces the visitor to the Viking legacy, time and place, geographical and historical orientation and which focal points the Viking Age represents – characteristics like the formation of the Danish state (The Jelling Dynasty, Harald Bluetooth, Denmark and Norway), the Danes are christened, the Vikings as founder of the towns and cities (home and abroad) - the earliest documentation of the Viking Age in Ribe AD 704-710 and internationally at the raid of Lindisfarne AD 793.

How the Vikings changed the world and what relevance do the Vikings have to us today will be an essential part of uncovering the question - What did the Viking era mean? The stereotype image of the Vikings which are often presented in European context is not correct and the exhibition will give a more nuanced picture of the Vikings as traders, settlers, explorers and highly qualified craftsmen, architects and engineers.

Key Objects



Brooch

Brooch depicting an eagle holding a man with its claws and biting his neck. Already in the transition period from the Iron Age to the Viking Age fascinating animal and human motifs adorned the jewellery of the time.

Film



A short introduction video introduces the visitor to the key messages of the exhibition



2. A Wind Age – Ships, Sails and Sea

In the Viking Age Scandinavians had a major influence on the development of many parts of Europe and western Asia. The technologically well-developed ships were a necessary precondition for this. It was the Vikings' impressive ships which made it possible to travel anywhere in the known world - from the North American coast in the west to the Black Sea in the east and from Greenland in the north to Spain in the south - either to plunder, trade, make war or settle.

Main Messages

- The ship was vital to the Vikings of Scandinavia. The region's long coastlines, inland lakes and many waterways made ships the most important form of transport.
- Archaeological finds show that the Vikings built a range of different kinds of vessels. Large, impressive longships, sea-faring cargo vessels, and smaller boats for fishing and transport in calmer waters.
- The ships of the Vikings can be divided into two basic groups: warships, which were long and narrow and built for speed, and cargo ships, which were more compact and could carry heavier loads.
- The Vikings sailed along the coast and across the open sea. We know of only a few artefacts from the Viking Age that could maybe have helped them navigate. The Vikings relied on their senses and knowledge of nature to find their way, but we cannot know for certain whether they used navigational equipment.
- We know little about life on board their ships; however, from written sources functions from words like skipari (crew), styresmand (captain) and matsveina (cook) are mentioned.
- The Viking Ship is one of the symbols of the Viking Age today, but it was also a powerful symbol during the Viking Age itself.

Key Objects



Joanna

The larger (6,5 m), full sized reconstruction of a Viking ship from Gokstad, an important find spot in Norway, where a large burial mound of a chieftain from the Viking Age with his large ship and several smaller boats were excavated.





2. A Wind Age – Ships, Sails and Sea

Films and Interactives

The Viking Ship:



Sea and Boats:



Build A Viking Ship:

Using a touch screen, the visitors are encouraged to collect the necessary resources and build a ship. They learn, among other things, how many trees had to be cut, the quantity of iron needed for thousands of ship rivets, and the amount of flax or wool that was used for the sail. They will learn that environmental issues were important during the Viking Age and their lifestyle had an enormous impact on the environment.

3. Connecting Continents – Traders and Merchants



The Royal power was consolidated and strengthened during the Viking Age, and the economic conditions increased. Greater and more sophisticated specialization in trade and production took place. Towns became centers of political, economic and social organization with trade and crafts as the central basis. Trading goods bear witnesses of both a substantial local demand and to the fact that all these towns were hubs for long-distance trade.

Trading, which characterized the Vikings' journey to the east, mainly occurred along the Eastern European and Russian rivers, and all the way to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, where they reached the Byzantine Empire and on to the Muslim Caliphate. They traded amber, salt, honey and wax, furs and slaves against payment in silver. The exhibition shows some of the many impressive treasures that bear witness to the Viking's trade and foreign contact. The exhibition also includes examples of the much exotic merchandise the Vikings' traded with.

Main Messages

- The trading routes of the Viking Age extended over vast distances. Archaeological finds in Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia show how far goods travelled to get to the North.
- The Viking Age was a time of flourishing trade. There was trade within the many village communities, but trading centers where goods from the entire known world changed hands also developed.
- Slaves, furs, silver and weapons were traded across long distances, and the merchant was a key figure in Viking Age society.
- Silver was Viking currency, but there was no monetary standard. The value of a coin was based on the weight of its silver.
- The Vikings were skilled traders who travelled far afield to buy and sell goods. Their large merchant ships made it possible to bring large quantities of goods from harbor to harbor. Some of the ships could carry more than 100 tons of cargo.
- In the Viking world slavery was seen as a condition of life. People only had value as members of a community or as kin.



3. Connecting Continents – Traders and Merchants



Key Objects



Currency of the Vikings

Silver was the main currency of the Viking Age. Goods were paid for in silver by weight. In a transaction the required amount of silver was simply cut off. Silver ingots and rings with smaller rings attached (payment rings) indicate that the owner of such items was affluent.





4. With the sword in the hand - Warriors



The warrior played a central role in the Viking Age, which was a very turbulent period of unrest and dissension. Written sources describe major Danish, Northmen (or simply pagan) Viking army and navy attacks on England, France, Spain and other countries. The size of the armies and the attacking techniques are not described in detail in the written sources, but the archaeological finds can help throw light on the warrior's equipment (weapons etc.) and fighting techniques (organization, technology, tactics, strategy, battles etc.).

The warrior, his equipment (rider, heavy and light armament), battle and infantry (duel, army against army, formation) will be a central part of the topic.

Main Messages

- Warriors played an important role during the Viking Age. They were recruited when young, then trained. If they were skilled enough, they became members of the king's personal army.
- Viking arms consisted of shields, spears, bows and arrows, axes, swords, chain mail and helmets. Little chain mail and few helmets have been found. The same is true of longbows, which were the Viking's only long-range weapon.
- Viking Age Warriors were light infantry, which combined with Viking ships made them a fast, mobile, military force. They could make surprise attacks with a few men, as well as wage war as regular armies.
- A period as turbulent and violent as the Viking Age demanded professional warriors. Mercenaries were in the pay of kings and princes and could earn both gold and glory.



4. With the sword in the hand - Warriors

Key Objects



Sword

The sword was an important requisite on many levels in the Viking Age. Swords were prestige symbols associated with kings and those in power.



Nørremølle hoard

Danegeld was the tax that foreign areas and people paid to the Danish Viking kings to avoid being attacked and looted.

Films and Interactives

The Warrior:



Personal equipment and weapons of the warrior:

Visitors will have the opportunity to pick up an accurate replica of a Viking Age sword and experience the weight and balance between sword handle and sword blade. They will understand that it is difficult and skill-demanding to handle a sword. Additional replicas of shield bows and arrows, chain mail, helmet, axe etc. will add to the realistic experience of being a warrior.





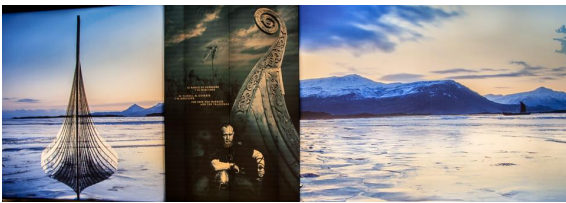
5. Viking Way of Life



The role of each person in society depended strongly on whether you were free or unfree, rich or poor, man or woman. All groups often lived together in societies where honor and family relationships played an important role. They were central and tied together by traditions and norms. The exhibition focuses on everyday life in the Viking's homelands - the lives of women and children with the daily household, cooking, clothing and textile manufacturing, organization, houses, agriculture, livestock, crafts for household use, leisure etc.

Main Messages

- The Vikings built different kinds of dwellings like longhouses, pit houses, town houses, smaller family houses and great, royal halls.
- Life in the Viking Age could be hard work. Periods of unrest, bad weather and failing crops left people hungry. But the sagas also tell of travels and feasts and annual assemblies, where people gathered from near and far.
- Most people lived in villages, with agriculture forming the basis for existence. The first towns in Scandinavia were formed between the Iron Age and the Viking Age. Towns were centers for trades and crafts and represented a gateway to foreign shores.
- During the 9th century the Vikings raided monasteries, churches and marketplaces along the coasts of Western Europe. The Vikings were influenced by developments in foreign countries and settled in new areas.
- Men and women of the Viking Age dressed according to their gender and income. Men wore tunics and trousers, and women a shift with a dress on top.
- The discovery of gaming pieces reveals that the Vikings played board games. From written sources we know that they played hnefatafl (sometimes referred to as King's Table) and nitavl (Nine Men's Morris), and chess. The Vikings also enjoyed athletics and other physical pastimes. Poems, stories and songs were passed on by word of mouth, and musical instruments from the Viking Age have also been found.
- The Vikings were skilled craftsmen. Their art was by and large the same throughout Scandinavia. Key motifs were winding, twisting bands, as well as snakes, birds, dragons and human figures.



5. Viking Way of Life

Key Objects



Urnes brooch

C. 1000 – 1150. The Urnes style has a three-dimensionality and lightness that distinguishes it from earlier animal ornamentation. The style is asymmetric, and often has a single, main motif that fills the entire surface. The animal figure in the center is depicted using thin and thicker lines, and its body twists in dynamic, swirling patterns. The slender face with almond-shaped eyes is in profile.



Key

Many keys dated to the Viking Age have been found in both female graves and as individual finds. Bronze, silver and iron keys – some made with supreme craftsmanship – was a status symbol worn by women. Often these were small pieces of art worn in a string attached to the belt and thus visible when the woman walked around.



5. Viking Way of Life

Films and Interactives

Daily Life:



Dress Up:

Replica clothes can be tried on. Afterwards visitors can take photos from them, dressed up as a Viking.



Norse Board Game:

One Viking Age board game is called Hnefatafl. Hnefatafl was not just for passing the time but was used to influence the fate of the players. Visitors are encouraged to learn the rules and to play the game on a touch screen. They will learn that this aristocratic board game is based on military strategy and they will need to cooperate by playing this fun game with a partner.

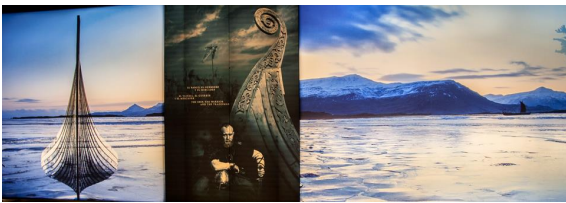




The Viking society was clearly divided into social classes. At the top the king was surrounded by an aristocratic elite. The free people constituted the majority of the community – they had the right to carry weapons and had the right to be heard at the and the annual assemblies, called “*The Thing*”. They were farmers, landowners, craftsmen, hunters, professional warriors and merchants. The unfree were brooch/ slaves who had no rights to decide over their own lives. They were either bought or brought back from raids around Europe. Many slaves were also born and raised in Viking homelands. Some were Scandinavians, taken in internal wars, some were Scandinavians having lost their status. The purpose of many of the Viking raids was to obtain slaves for their own use and for resale.

Main Messages

- From the 8th to the 11th centuries the Vikings left their mark on Europe as settlers, traders and warriors. More efficient farming, increasing royal power, and vulnerable European states opened Europe to Viking expansion.
- The remains of the residences of wealthy magnates, with numerous dwellings, stables, barns, workshops and storehouses, have been found in Lejre and Tissø, Denmark.
- During the Viking Age Scandinavia changed from being fragmented in smaller kingdoms to become the larger kingdoms that were the forerunners of present-day Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Harald Bluetooth was the first king to unite Denmark and Norway and succeed in marshalling the support of enough arms-bearing men to win the throne.
- The 8th to 10th centuries were a time of major change in Denmark. The first towns were founded, new fortifications were built, and existing ones were reinforced. The Viking Age marks the transition between the tribal society of the Iron Age and the centralized royal power of the Middle Ages.
- Harald Bluetooth’s unification of the kingdom of Denmark included a number of monumental constructions, for example, the fortified towns of Hedeby and Aarhus. Viking kings were capable of organizing the labor of thousands of men. These structures, which were built around 980, symbolize the power of a king who both controlled local conditions and ran foreign affairs.



6. Power of Kings

Key Objects



Golden Brooch

The Vikings were skilled artisans and the best of them lived and worked for the kings and queens of the time. The level of details exposed in the often small art works which has survived is incredible.



Cammin Shrine (replica)

The cammin casket is one of the most beautiful results of the craftsmanship of the Viking Age carver. The casket is decorated in the Mammen style. It was probably made at a royal Danish workshop in the mid-10th century, but ended up in Poland, possibly during the Viking Age itself. The casket may have accompanied a Scandinavian princess as part of her dowry. The original casket was kept in Kamien Pomorski Cathedral in Poland. The casket disappeared during World War II.

Films and Interactives

King and Power:



Nationalmuseum
National Museum of Denmark





7. Viking Mind – Gods and Beliefs



Odin, the supreme God of the Nordic pantheon, was god of war and wisdom and was particularly worshipped by the rulers of Viking society. The pagan gods had great influence on human everyday life, and it was therefore necessary through sacrifices to be on good terms with them. In this way it was possible to ensure peace, welfare and crops in the field.

The Vikings encountered Christianity in the countries to the south and west of Scandinavia, while monks attempted to convert them in the home countries. The transition from paganism to Christianity was slow and archaeological finds have revealed that both religions flourished side by side.

Main Messages

- The Jelling complex is one of the most imposing construction projects of the Viking Age. Harald Bluetooth was also behind this monumental construction.
- Christianity was officially introduced to Denmark in 965. The change in faith was motivated more by politics than dedication to a pious, Christian life.
- Beliefs, faith and religion were an important part of everyday life for the Vikings. In the early Viking Age people worshipped the gods and goddesses of Nordic mythology, where Aesir was the main clan.
- The Vikings encountered Christianity in the countries to the south and west of Scandinavia, and monks also attempted to convert them in their home countries. The transition from paganism to Christianity was slow, and archaeological finds reveal that both religions co-existed.
- The Viking Age graves we know of provide a unique picture of Viking life, as well as valuable information about the beliefs and traditions of the Vikings. The introduction of Christianity brought about a change in burial customs, with a steady decline in the number of grave gifts for the dead.
- Among the thousands of Viking Age graves that have been discovered, some stand out due to their size and riches. These large burial complexes provide us with valuable knowledge about the beliefs of the Vikings and the power symbols of the Viking elite.



7. Viking Mind – Gods and Beliefs

Key Objects



Mask

The mask is a recurrent theme in Viking art. Interlaced, folded, blinded masks were carved in stone and wood, put on jewellery, worn as amulets. Scary, wary, ecstatic, furious, wise, disordered masks.



Åby crucifix (replica)

The Åby crucifix is the oldest large-scale crucifix in Denmark and comes from Åby Church near Aarhus. The crucifix is from c. 1050-1100 and is made of gilded copper plates on a base of wood. It is only in Scandinavia that Jesus is depicted as this kind of king on the cross.



Jelling stone (replica)

The large Jelling Stone erected in 965 by Harald Bluetooth, son of King Gorm and Queen Thyra, tells of Harald's achievements in uniting Denmark and Norway and making the Danes Christian. This full-scale replica has been reconstructed to show the details and patterns depicted on the stone (Christ and the beast), and an interpretation of the possible original colors, which have eroded on the original stone. The actual rune stone can be seen at its find place in Jelling.





7. Viking Mind – Gods and Beliefs

Interactives



Quiz:

Toward the end of the exhibition, visitors are encouraged to examine newly gained knowledge about the Viking Age through a quiz on a touch screen. They will be asked to summarize what they have experienced. Have any stereotypes been quashed? What new facts were learned?

