

The Viking period

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Written sources, both Scandinavian and European have dramatised the Viking Age which in many ways have formed our conception of the period. It is an idealised and exaggerated picture, but the period nonetheless became an important part of our national consciousness and ideology in the 19th century and later. The intention with this paper is to focus on Norway in the Viking period.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes that in the year AD 789 three strange ships arrived at Portland on the southern coast of England where Beaduheard the king's reeve, rode out to meet them, as he thought they were traders, but he was killed. The chronicle adds that these were the first ships of Northmen, while other versions add that the men came from Hörthaland (Hordaland) a district of western Norway (Sawyer 1975:2). Later, in 793, Gods church at Lindisfarne was plundered and in the following year the same fate befell the monastic sites at Jarrow and Iona. As far as we know, all these early raids were the work of Norwegian Vikings.

Most of the contemporaneous written sources about Vikings are not Scandinavian but Christian and Islamic, written in a variety of languages. The only surviving Scandinavian writings are the runic inscriptions and the later Icelandic medieval sagas and poetry. What has to be understood is that chronicles or annals present us with a Christian one-sided political viewpoint of the Vikings.

Not all Scandinavians were raiders. Many were also settlers and traders. In the "Universal History of Orosius" presented to King Alfred of Wessex around AD 890 is an account of two travellers Wulfstan and Ottar, the latter a Norwegian from the far north of Norway. Ottar describes how he made his living and relates that a source of his income was tribute from the Lapps. Ottar also describes his journey southwards along the west coast of Norway to Hedeby in Sleswig. Ottar differentiated between Norwegians, Danes and Swedes, and he even mentioned the "Nordmannaland" the land of the Norwegians. Many of the chronicles call the Scandinavians pagans, barbarians, or people of the north of Danes, which covers people from all the Nordic countries. Irish chronicles sometimes distinguish between "White foreigners" the Norwegians and "Black foreigners" the Danes. The other account was from Wulfstan, an Englishman, who described his voyage from Hedeby to Truso near Vistula. Wulfstan also mentioned the customs of the Estonians (H. Sweet 1883). These glimpses of Scandinavia and the Baltic at the end of the 9th century are of great importance for the study of this period.

The name Norway, translated as "north way" – the sea route to the north coastal hinterland – indicates the maritime nature of the country. The meaning of

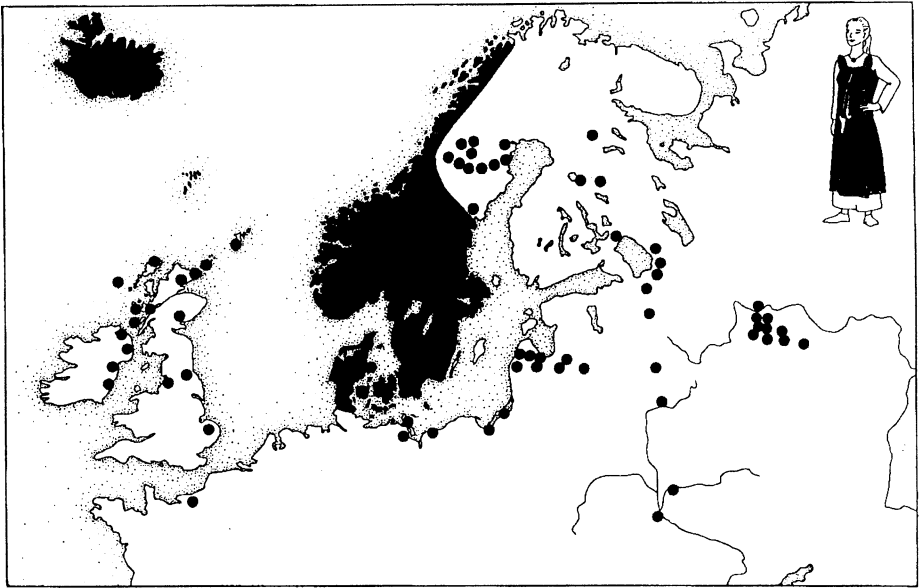


Fig. 1. Distribution of oval brooches

the word Viking has been much debated. Today there are two opinions. The one is that Viking is derived from the old Norse “vikingr”, meaning a raider or pirate. Scholars of the divergent opinion connect the word with the old Norse “Vik” meaning an inlet of the sea. The place name Vik is the bay and surrounding areas of Oslofjord in southern Norway. In that case “vikingr” must be referring to the inhabitants of that area (Hødnebo 1987:43ff).

The written records set the beginning of the period known as the Viking Age. It is normally dated to AD 800 – AD 1050 when people from the north: Denmark, Sweden and Norway, influenced Europe to the east and west. The Viking period is the last of the so-called prehistory of Norway, while within European history it is a part of the early medieval period. In the homeland of the Vikings the period came to an end in the first half of the 11th century, though Viking age traditions and culture persisted in some of their colonies – Scotland, the northern Isles and Iceland – into the twelfth century.

We cannot expect to find only one cause for a phenomenon as widespread and diverse as that of the Viking expansion. We have to look for varied reasons when trying to explain why the people of Scandinavia left their homelands and impelled themselves on their neighbours. The answer must lie in some common features in the nature of their social, economic development and their relationship with Europe. Which causes are we talking about? The situation in their own country should be clarified. Was it shortage of land and overpopulation, or was it the inheritance system – a system by which farming land was divided equally among sons could have resulted in too many farms that were too small and insufficient to make a living from? Was it a change/development in the pre-existing trade contacts between Scandinavia and Europe, or was it a better utilisation of natural

resources and a demand for this as trade products? Was it new technical skills which made transportation for traversing the sea possible? How was the political situation? Or could piracy due to wish for easy wealth the background? The quest for wealth could take form of direct plundering, tribute or appropriation of land. It is a combination of these factors behind the Viking movement. The factors affected each other and were steadily developing and changing through the centuries.

In the 9th century emigrants left Norway and went westwards and settled down on the Northern Isles of Scotland, the Faeroes and Iceland. In Scotland and the Northern Isles they had to fit in with the population. The Faeroes and Island were only inhabited by a few Irish monks or hermits when the settler arrived, while the archaeological material clearly demonstrate that the settlement goes back to the arrival of the Norse. The point of settlement is at the moment much debated. The discussion concerns absolute dating methods such as radiocarbon chronology and relative chronology and written sources (See Margret Hermans- Audardottir 1991, with comments by Crawford, Kaland, Mahler, Morris and Myhre 1993).

In the early 10th century the Baltic and eastern areas were popular for men who sought wealth by plunder. The silver supplies were, however, interrupted about 965 and the Scandinavians turned westwards. By the 10th century the Norwegian emigration to Britain and the north Atlantic isles was reduced. This is indicated by the relatively small amount of 10th century Irish and insular material that has been found in Norway compared to 9th century material. There seems to have been two purposes for the activity in the 9th century: to win land for settling or establishing a base in the west, as for instance in the Orkneys, from which they could continue to search for wealth. It should also be noted that most 9th century Vikings were pagans, but that in the 10th century many of the raiders were familiar with Christianity as they came from countries where their leaders had begun the conversion of their people.

Thirteenth century Icelandic writings narrate the discovery and colonisation of Greenland from Iceland by Erik the Red, and shortly after, around AD 1000, people sailed further west to Vinland. The Norwegian excavation at L'anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland suggests that this is the Vinland region. The settlement



Fig. 2. Jewellery from a richly furnished female boat grave from the 9th century at Vinjum, Aurland. Oval bronze brooches decorated with silver ribbon strings, beads of amber, silver, millefiori and glass. A third brooch, a quadrangular silver ornament (from a penannular brooch) and two bronze arm rings. Her dress was made of extremely fine diamond woven wool cloth. In addition, this the woman had an Irish bronze sprinkler, drinking horn with bird shaped bronze terminals, textile and household equipment. All the material together demonstrates a woman and family of high status. Photo. Bergen Museum.

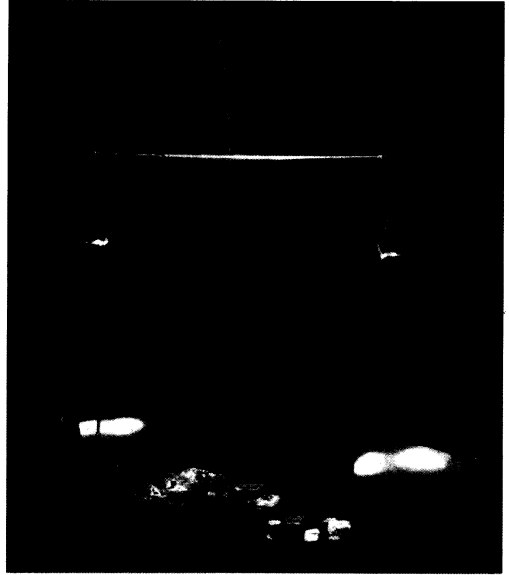
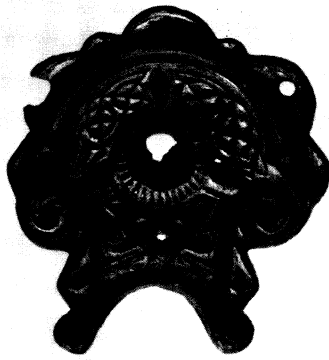


Fig. 3. Horse mount of gilt bronze reused as a brooch. Decorated in Irish style with animal, interlace and spiral ornamentation. From a female boat grave. Locality: Belle, Sogn (B5777). Photo. Bergen Museum. In total, 65 scales have been found in Norway. Of those 41 are from the coastline from the far north to south, with a concentration in Sogn in West Norway, mainly from the 10th century. The scale is of bronze with tinned bronze pans. The weights are a set of eight ranging from 2 to 43 mg. Date 9th century. Locality: Jåtten, Rogaland (B4772). Photo. Bergen Museum.

site is comprised of three dwelling complexes as well as a smithy and boat houses. The place was, however, only settled by the Norse for a short period, perhaps due to conflict with the natives, Indians and Eskimos (A. Ingstad 1977).

The homeland of the Norwegian Vikings is country of diversity, with a 1899 km long coastline from south-west to north-east, and strong topographic and climatic contrasts from west toward east. From the rough outer coast with islands, to sheltered fjords and valley districts, to inland barriers with high mountains, forests and bogs. The agricultural potential for tilling the soil was restricted but there was sufficient grazing area for animals. The geographical features of Norway divided the country into an eastern and western parts, divided by the north-south running mountains. However, from all the western areas it is possible to pass to eastern Norway by way of valleys and mountain passes. The population of the west looked inevitably to the west across the North Sea while the people of East Norway more easily looked both towards southeast and west. Despite this diversity it was a uniform cultural area of Norwegians living together and in close contact with the Sami population and their culture.

The population increased in Norway from the 8th century, which led to an expansion of existing settlements. Farms were divided and new ones were created in earlier inhabited areas. Many of the new settlements were small and later abandoned by the Black Death in 1347. Norwegian settlers continued their settlement overseas in Scotland, the northern isles, the Faeroes and Iceland.

Few Viking farms have been excavated in Norway, but Norwegian farms compared with those in the rest of Scandinavia and the new settlements abroad give a similar but somewhat varied picture of their houses. Generally, we see that they had houses or rooms for special purposes: dwelling houses, byre, barn and smithy. Concerning the construction of the house they do differ according to the building material available: wood, stone or turf.

The late 9th century farm at Ytre Moa in Sognefjord consisted of a complex of six scattered houses – dwellings, byre, stable and a smithy – without any visible connections between them. The houses were almost rectangular, with two rows of inner posts carrying the roof. The inner walls were of wood with a thick outer stone or dry stone wall protecting against wind, rain and snow (Bakka 1968).

At Borg in Lofoten is a Chieftain's farm with the largest Viking house found anywhere. The long house had a length of 83m and had four rooms, a central room, storerooms and a byre at the end. The central room was 1112 m² and was rich in finds. The walls were slightly curved with an internal row of posts, wooden walls and protecting turf walls on the outside. A large boathouse belonged to the farm. The central room, so rich in finds both of luxury from the continent – glass, gold and pottery – and various tools for daily life demonstrate that farming and fishing was the basis of the livelihood (Stamsøe Munch 1991). Similar building traits can be seen in the overseas settlement in the northern Isles, the Faeroes and Scotland. So far it is no evidence in Norway of houses built by wattle and daub technique as in South Scandinavia.

Objects from everyday life are found in the pagan graves and are a rich source of evidence of farming, fishing, carpentry, iron production, and cloth making. All these types of tools were recorded and put into typology and distribution by J. Petersen (1951).

The farming tools evaluated together with the results from modern interdisciplinary teamwork on farm sites have yielded information regarding farming methods, farm size and the use of outfields. The grains, seeds and pollen recovered provide information about grain cultivation, and the animal bones of husbandry, fishing and fowling. When archaeologists work together with historical and natural scientists it is possible to analyse the material more closely and obtain a more detailed understanding of how the Vikings farmed, treated the

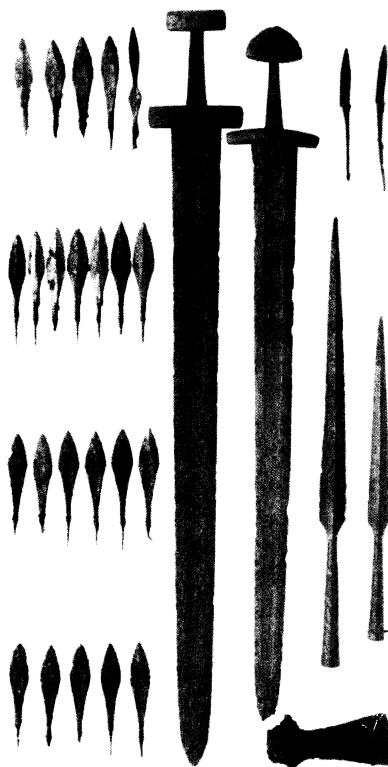


Fig. 4. Weapons from a male double grave. Two swords, two axes, two spears, shield boss, arrow heads and scissors. Date 10th century. Locality: Vangestad, Sogn (B9485). Photo: Bergen Museum

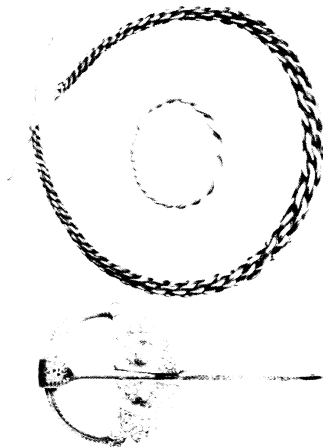


Fig. 5. Silver was one of the chief imports, mostly as coins converted into personal ornaments. This hoard from Hatteberg, Hordaland (B8377) consists of a silver neckring, gold arming and a penannular silver brooch. The brooch is a Norse product worked in an insular tradition. The hoard is most probably a man's personal ornaments. Dated to around AD 900. There were two traditions of penannular brooches in North Europe in the Viking period – the insular and the smaller Baltic type. *Photo. Bergen Museum*

pastures and outlying areas. Examples of such interdisciplinary investigations are the farm at Lurekalven (S. Kaland 1979, 1988, P.E. Kaland 1979, 1986, Kvamme 1982), Høybøen (Randers 1981) and Hoset (Farbregd 1977).

Traditionally, up to 1940, mountain pastures played an important part in farming. During the 1980's intensive research has been carried out in Sogn in Western Norway under the leadership of Bjørgo (1986) and Magnus (1986). Excavations of houses, pollen analysis and radiocarbon datings demonstrate that the mountain houses and highlands have been used in connection with summer farming. Many of the localities are in distant high lying valleys where traditional mountain pasturing is unknown today. By moving his animals and some of his family up to the higher grounds for summer farming the Farmer gained by producing winter fodder by his main farm. Also, Adam of Bremen in his description of Norway indicates that cattle breeding took place in remote locations (Fj. Tchan 1959).

Soapstone was a much utilised resource in western Norway, especially in the Hardangerfjord area. Quarrying and the manufacture of soapstone into products such as cooking vessels, net sinkers, moulds, loom weights and spindle whorls became important and gave a valuable source of income.

Many small houses or huts for fishing and sea mammal hunting have been recorded on the isles west of Bergen. Some places with up to 30 huts must have been fishing stations. Fish hooks, remains from daily life and bones of cod and herring are preserved in the culture layers. The layers are radiocarbon dated to the 8th to 11th century. The results are seen in connection with old tradition of people from the inner fjords who came out to the islands regularly for the productive cod and herring fisheries. In old Norse these men were called *fjadrnadr*, a man with his home in the fjords (Magnus 1974). The importance of fishing increased with the introduction of Christianity, when fish were needed on fast-days. The abundance of fish along the coast of Norway and the rich cod fisheries in the north were some of the background for the establishment of Bergen as a staple port and town with export of fish to England and Germany.

Iron and iron extraction has been in focus among archaeologists as it contributes to our understanding of Scandinavian history. Iron itself was available

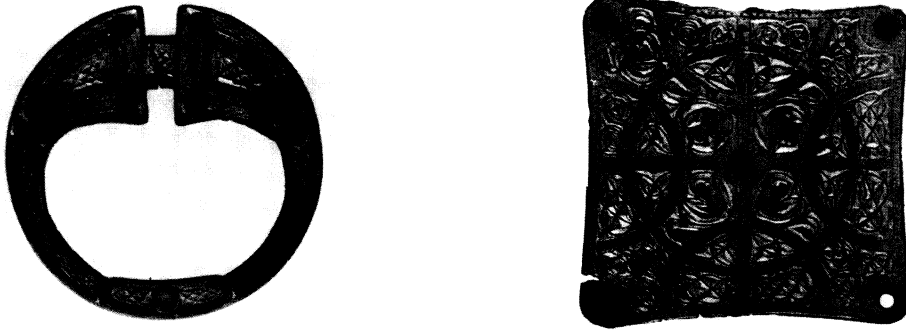


Fig. 6. Personal ornaments of insular origin. Anglo-Saxon gilt book mount from a holy book found in a woman's grave from late 8th century at Bjørke, Møre and Romsdal (B8256). Gilt bronze pennanulaer brooch, decorated with interlace and settings for amber and glass. Diameter: 88 cm. Locality: Eidfjord, Hordaland (B3872). *Photo Bergen Museum*

in the form of bog-ore deposited in the peat over a long period of time. There was a high demand for iron during the Viking period. The large amounts of iron tools buried with the dead and the iron used for rivets and anchors of boats make it clear that iron production was carried out in a large scale. Easy access to iron and thus iron tools facilitated the extension of new farms. It is clear that they both had the technology and organisation needed to make the production possible. Martens (1982) has been working intensively with the problems of iron production, and most of the result referred here are from her work.

Iron production centres cover large areas in the treeless alpine zone and are mostly associated with out-farms and pasture as well as the farms in the hinterland. How iron extraction and those who undertook it were associated with farming is a complex and important issue for Norwegian archaeology to solve. It will be necessary to study this in relation to other resources such as hunting, trapping and stock keeping.

A more technologically effective type of furnace with low shaft was taken into use by the beginning of the Viking period. Martens has tentatively calculated the iron production at Møsvatn by Hardangervidda between AD 950 – 1150 and arrived at a production of a minimum 4 metric tons. It is clear that iron was of no less importance for the development of towns in the medieval period than in the Viking period. Trade products consisted of unfinished objects. The many iron hoards can be divided into two groups: one consisting of axes and tools predating the Viking age and the other of Viking/Medieval date consisting of blooms and iron currency bars. Martens suggest that this is evidence of a transition to standardised trade commodities. Due to the distribution of iron localities and hoards it seems plausible to speak of East Norway as a production area and West Norway as a consumer area.

In Norway as many graves with smith tools have been found in inner fjord and valley districts as in the western part of the country. The graves contain mostly a variety of tools and witness a society of good economic standard with the smith as an important social class. Settlement patterns, however, varied from region to region. Place names studies have shown that many of the Viking

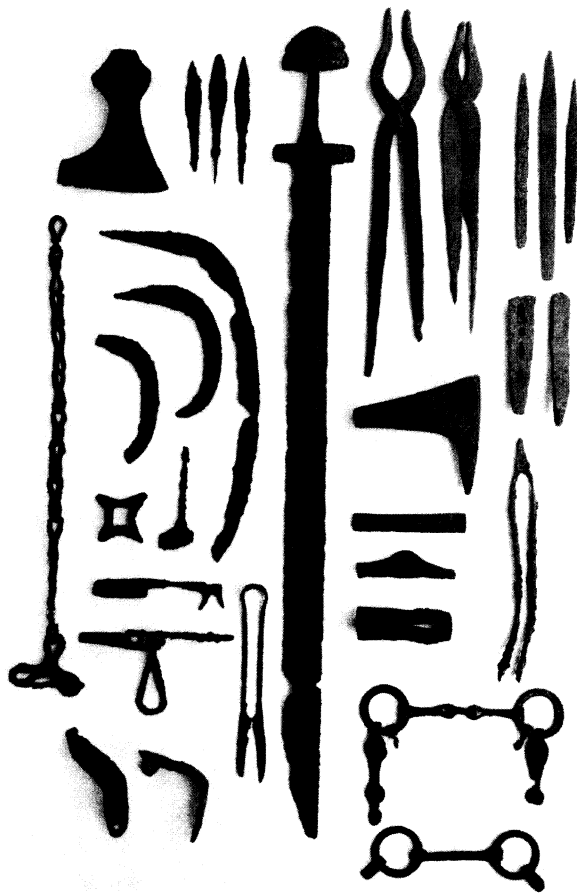


Fig. 7. Grave goods from a well equipped male grave with a weapon and a varied collection of tools for the smith as well as harvesting implements. Locality: Bø, Breim in Sogn and Fjordane. Date: 9th century. *Photo Bergen Museum*

habitations are older in origin than the Viking age. The Viking age and also early Christian time were a period of internal colonisation as well as emigration and new settlement abroad.

Evidence of worship can also be found in the farm names/place names. Almost all theophoric place names are farm names. Some of the gods names can be combined with farming activity. The god Thor, Njord, Ull and Frey can be compound with meadow (-vin), pasture (-vang) and field (-aker). Such names can imply a recognition of the gods ownership, or that the divine was hoped to be immanent on the place. The Norwegian scholar Magnus Olsen (1915, 1926) undertook intensive studies of farm names and their development and theophoric farm names and cult.

Boats

In a country facing the sea with many islands, penetrated by fjords and rivers, the boat had to be of vital importance. Without boats of different kinds life would have been unsustainable. Few families at the coast could have been without a boat. Boats were needed for communication and transportation, for fishing and sea mammal hunting, and they became an important symbol within their ideology and power, as witnessed by the ship and boat graves along the coast.

The most prominent ship graves of all are the Oseberg and Gokstad graves from South Norway, but also other ship graves are known along the west coast. The Gokstad ship was buried in a trench and a burial chamber constructed amid ship for a prominent man. Over the whole a large mound was erected. The ship was clinker built of oak, 23.3 m long and 5.25 m broad. It was steered by a rudder, which could be raised according to the depth of water. Fully laden with 10 tons the ship would only draw 90 cm. The ship could be rowed with 16 pairs

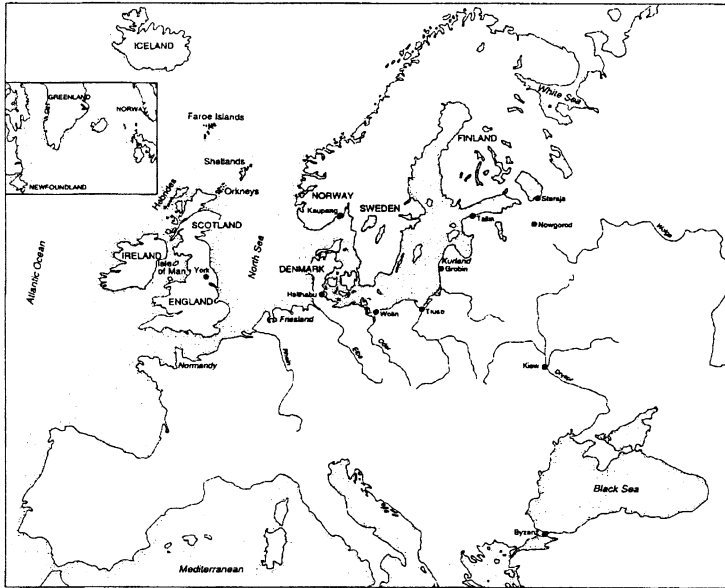


Fig. 8. Place names referred to in the text

of oars or sailed with a mast. Unfortunately no sail was preserved, but an idea is given us by the many Swedish picture stores with boat sail (Brøgger and Shetelig 1953, Sjøvoll 1957). The boat is dated to the 9th century.

The technical perfection of the Gokstad ship is a product of long tradition. The Viking activity overseas depended on these easily manoeuvrable ships. One can understand why Alcuin wrote in 792 after the attack at Lindisfarne: "*nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made*". Coastal crossing was hardly a novelty but maybe direct crossing of the north sea? Most of the boat burials found along the coast of Norway are vessels between 4 and 10 metres (Müller-Wille 1970, 162-180). In cases where the dead was burnt only the clinch nails used for fastening the planks of the boat are left.

The Vikings had a great variety of ships for different needs. In written sources such as the sagas several types are mentioned: long ships for war and haf ship or knarr as cargo ship. The ship finds from Skuldelev in Denmark visualise these types clearly. Crumlin Pedersen (1978:32-41) has pointed out that the hull of sailing ships is a direct development of a long established Baltic tradition, the novelty in the Viking period lay in the addition of mast and sail.

In his discussion of trade ships the Norwegian specialist A.E. Christensen is of the opinion that ships for trade and war were developed from a common type such as the Gokstad ship, and that the development took place mainly in the 9th – 10th century. The Danish specialists maintain, however, that they existed from the beginning of the Viking age. A key problem within ship technology is why Scandinavians were so late in adopting the sail. When and from where came the impulse? Christensen (1964:7-12) has pointed to the fact that boats of the cog type on 9th century coins are never shown with shields as support for the suggestion that they are cargo rather than warships.

Trade

Piracy gave sporadic wealth, but it was only trade that could give a more regular income. About the time of the earliest raids in the 8th century marketplaces were founded in Scandinavia. Trading took place in different milieus, from seasonal markets to settled towns. It was in the pre-Viking and Viking age that centres and towns emerged in Scandinavia and areas of the Viking interest; Ribe and Hedeby in Denmark, Dublin in Ireland and York in England.

In Norway the commercial centre at Kaupang south of the Oslofjord developed to international trade. The traveller Ottar visited this place in the late 9th century on his way from the north to Hedeby (Schleswig). Ottar said the place was called Sciringssheal and that it was a market. The name, Kaupang, means market in Norwegian. An archaeological investigation by C. Blindheim has identified the site by a sheltered bay. The investigations have revealed the market centre with houses, quays and fields and a hinterland with many graves rich in imported objects. The material – metal objects, glass, pottery and cufic coins – reflect wide contacts, from Ireland and the British isles to Rhineland and eastern Baltic. The Norse commodities traded at Kaupang included iron, soap stone, schist stone and maybe fur, all which are commodities from the hinterland. Production of beads of quartz crystal and amber as well as metal production took place at Kaupang. Compared to Birka in Sweden or Hedeby in Denmark (Germany today) Kaupang is to be considered as a more local market but with international connections (Blindheim 1974, 1978).

The Norwegian import of archaeological material was first dealt with as early as 1919, published in 1940 in *Viking Antiquities I-IV* by H. Shetelig in collaboration with S. Grieg, Johs. Bløe, A. Bjørn, J. Petersen and M. Olsen. The insular materials were considered again by C. Blindheim (1978) and E. Wamers (1985). Most of the insular materials include brooches, ecclesiastical objects, glasses, weights and scales and weapons. Many of the objects were taken from their original context, others were cut up and reused as ornaments. The material is mostly found along the coast of Norway up to Vesterålen in the north. Most of it arrived probably on the route from Scotland via the northern isles (Wamers 1985:45-48). This import shows an increase mainly from the late 8th century and 9th century. At the same time as Scandinavians had a demand for western goods, so had the European a demand for northern goods. This mutual interest encouraged a trade that in the end increased the wealth and power of chieftains. Again this (Sawyer 1982, 7) can be underlined with Ottars travel from the north to king Alfred with goods as walrus ivory, hide ropes, furs and down. The chieftain's farm at Borg demonstrated his wealth with glass goblets and gold from France.

Only a small fraction of the silver the Vikings obtained has been recovered, but enough has been found to leave no doubt of the silver wealth they obtained abroad in east and west. As their contemporary people in Europe the Vikings used silver as a standard of exchange. The silver was melted down to arm and neck rings, which could be cut to pieces as payments. Hack silver hoards are mainly from the 10th century. An example of a west Norwegian hoard is the Hattleberg hoard consisting of a silver neck ring of 403.5 gram, a gold arm ring of 10.62 gram and a silver pennanular brooch (Bøe 1934).

The Norwegian goods: steatite, hones, walrus tusk and rope, hide, furs, precious birds and down are not very exotic compared to the varied luxury goods we know came from the east and west. It took place, however, over long distances, it reached many and it was of economic value both within Norway and to other societies.

The internal trade between the regions of Norway was also an important background and reason for the establishing of markets and towns which grew up by the end of the Viking period. There probably existed more small places for exchange and trade. In my opinion the natural localities for such places should be sought where there are good connections to neighbouring areas, good sheltered harbours with easy access to the sea and not at least areas with stable settlement and hinterlands with resources to utilize.

Concerning trade and resource utilization, Myhre (1993:192-97) argues that the negative reputation of the Vikings in chronicles was because it was of importance to the Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian rulers to have control over important resources from Norway due to competition of power around the North Sea.

Burial customs

Late Iron Age and Viking burial customs are relatively uniform in Scandinavia. Characteristic are the rich and varied grave goods, both in terms of quantity and quality. The grave gifts are comprised of, in addition to personal belongings such as jewellery and weapons, all kinds of tools for carpenter, smith and farmer, as well as household utensils. The deceased could be placed in a "container", coffin or boat, bones from cremations the were put in a vessel, but for the poorest no traces are found. The burial could be placed in a mound or directly into the soil. One common practice in coastal Norway was to bury the dead in boats. The most famous are the aristocratic Gokstad and Oseberg ship burials, the more common are small boats from 4 – 10 m.

Much work has been and is constantly carried out based on the grave finds, for instance regional studies and social studies. As grave mounds may vary considerably in size from three to five and up to twenty-five metres in diameter, it has been suggested that the difference in size should be interpreted as evidence for a differentiated stratified society where the large ones symbolise the power of families (Ringstad 1986).

The grave material provides us with detailed information of clothing and its jewellery. Unfortunately the surviving material is primarily from the middle and upper class. The women wore a long loose fitting sark with sleeves, and over this a special type of garment with fastened on the shoulders with a pair of oval brooches. The distribution pattern of these brooches shows that they were a Nordic fashion which the emigrant women took with them. These brooches were of differing quality and were mass produced. By the 10th century there seems to be a break in the mass production. It would appear that, as people wanted better products, the brooches were made with new techniques and in better quality.

S. Fuglesang (1987) addresses the oval brooch material in detail to see whether it is possible to get a better understanding of manufacture and distribution between professional craftsmen and local producers. Together with the oval brooches are textile fragments from the dress. Analysis of these textiles (Bender Jürgensen 1990) has given us a new understanding of the very finest cloth. Earlier they were supposed to have been woven in Friesland, but now most probably in Western Norway where sheep stocks provided much fine wool. The whole production was probably organized by rich women and traded to Europe.

Likewise, J. Graham-Campbell (1987) has shed light over another popular brooch of the Viking period, the pennanular brooch type. One of his results is

that the ball type brooch was introduced to Norway at the end of the 9th century and copied and developed further in silver, bronze and iron.

L.H. Dommasnes has been working on the premise that wealth and status may be measured in the quality and quantity in grave gifts in the deceased's burial. The analyses of the graves provides evidence to suggest that a higher number of women reached position of prominence in the Viking age in western Norway than before. It is also demonstrated that there is an increase in the number of high ranking women graves from the 8th to 9th century and a decrease again in the 10th. Further, most high ranking women lived in the inner fjord areas. The explanation for this is that more men from these areas in the 9th century went away from home on expeditions of trade and plunder (Dommasnes 1982). The rich western material in high ranking women's graves is therefore to be explained by an extension of women's roles to include the management of the farm in the husband's absence.

An overview of Viking graves in West Europe was prepared by a group of Norwegian archaeologists from 1920 and onwards, and published as *Viking Antiquities*, a very valuable work. However, a modern revision is very much needed. Relatively few Norse Viking graves have been found in the new settlements of the Norwegian and Danish Vikings in the west. The explanation put forward is that they quickly abandoned their old burial custom, integrating and adopting Christian customs as witnessed by axes and swords found in churchyards (Wilson 1968, 295). Modern research in the Orkneys at Westness, however, has revealed a Viking settlement with grave fields from the 9th century with graves of different kind: boat burials, oval graves and simple stone lined graves both for men and women (Kaland 1973). This demonstrates that the settlers followed their tradition from Norway.

Personal armament was just as important to a man as his clothing. The laws determined which weapons a person should have according to his status. Only freeborn men were allowed to carry weapons. In Norway, sword or axe, shield and spear were required. They were called folk weapons. The most important of all weapons was the sword. It is the sword that is emphasised in poetry and sagas. Many had given names as for example King Håkon's sword, or Quernbiter – the best that ever came to Norway. In Norway analysis of the archaeological weapons indicates that the sword was the predominant weapon. Some two thousand swords have been found and about one thousand spears, while the opposite is the case in Sweden. How this should be interpreted regarding the society, economy and crafts is yet unanswered. Viking weapons were set into typological order and dated by J. Petersen (1919). Recently spearheads have been dealt with in more detail both typologically and chronologically by Solberg (1986). We may recall Ibn Fadlan when he described the impression of the Vikings by Volga in AD 922 telling that every man has an axe, a sword and a knife.

Religion

The poetry of the scalds is of great value to the understanding of the pagan religion and the people of the Viking time. The mythological poems are found in the Edda codex in *Hávamál* – which means the words of the high-one, Odin the chief of the Gods and the *Voluspá* – the Sibyll's prophecy. This poem describes the whole history of the gods from creation to the end of world order.

The pantheistic religion of paganism served a public function, but without a formal organisation where chieftains could act as intermediaries with Gods and spirits. Concerning the transition from paganism to Christianity Norwegian scholars tend to see it in terms of a conflict between two strong religions (Steinsland 1990:123-35). This stands in contrast to the traditional view which involves a long transitional period with regional differences depending on the political and social situation. It is, however, agreed between scholars from different fields that the change in religion was motivated and first of all carried out by the upper class of society, kings and chieftains – as a part of their ideology, politics and power.

The pagan resistance remained officially until AD 1030, where during the battle of Stiklestad the Christian king Olav Haraldson was killed after his return from the east. He would later become the Saint of Norway. The transition to Christianity was a process closely connected with the strengthening of royal power. Culturally the conversion resulted in the admission of the fullness of European culture.

Briefly, the circumstances that strengthened the Norwegian kingdom around AD 1000 and the assembly of the country should be noted. Norway had a family dynasty, where each king could continue and develop his father's work. The Norwegian kings were equal to other kings. Many of the kings were connected through marriage with other kingdoms: Denmark, Sweden, England, France, Sachsen or in the east Kiev and Novgorod. The king built his structure within the country in close co-operation with rich farmers or chieftains of local power and authority (C. Kragh 1996:177-79).

The king Harald Haråda made the last Viking raid on Western Europe when he tried to conquer England in 1066, but he was defeated and killed in the battle at Stamford Bridge. After this the following kings turned their effort towards organisation of churches, towns and trade within Norway.

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Vikingų laikotarpis

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Santrauka

Vikingų laikotarpis (793-1050) – tai pirmas rašytiniuose šaltiniuose paminėtas laikotarpis. Atradus Norvegijos vikingų laivų liekanas, iškilo Kultūrinio palikimo įstatymo būtinybė. Šio periodo istorija bei kultūra buvo ypač svarbios literatūrai ir menui, kurie savo ruožtu turėjo įtakos Norvegijos, kaip nacionalinės valstybės, susikūrimui 1905 metais.

Nors vikingų vardas ir veikla buvo įvairiais būdais prilyginami žiaurumui, negalima pamiršti, kad jie garsėjo ir kaip puikūs administratoriai, keliautojai, pirkliai, kolonizatoriai. Savo laivais kirsdavo Atlanto vandenyną ir pasiekdavo Grenlandiją bei Niufaudlendą, o rytuose perplaukdavo Baltijos jūrą. Upėmis vikingai pasiekdavo Novgorodą ir Kijevą, Viduržemio jūra prasiskverbė iki pat Bizantijos, būdavo dažni svečiai tarptautiniuose rytų prekybos keliuose. Jie turėjo savo kultūrą, tačiau tuo pat metu buvo atviri kitų tautų kultūrų įtakoms, naujoms idėjoms.

Skandinavų bendruomenės apsigyveno vakaruose, pietuose ir rytuose. Skandinaviški prekybos centrai ir miestai vystėsi tiek jų gyvenamose žemėse, tiek ir naujose teritorijose. Kūrėsi politiniai bei ekonominiai aljansai. Skandinavijos Vikingų laikotarpis buvo gerai išvystytos infrastruktūros ir plačių tarptautinių ryšių periodas. Visuomenės vystymasi tuo laikotarpiu vainikavo krikščionybės priėmimas ir vieno karaliaus valdomos valstybės sukūrimas.