

Vikings in the Baltic *- a prospect*



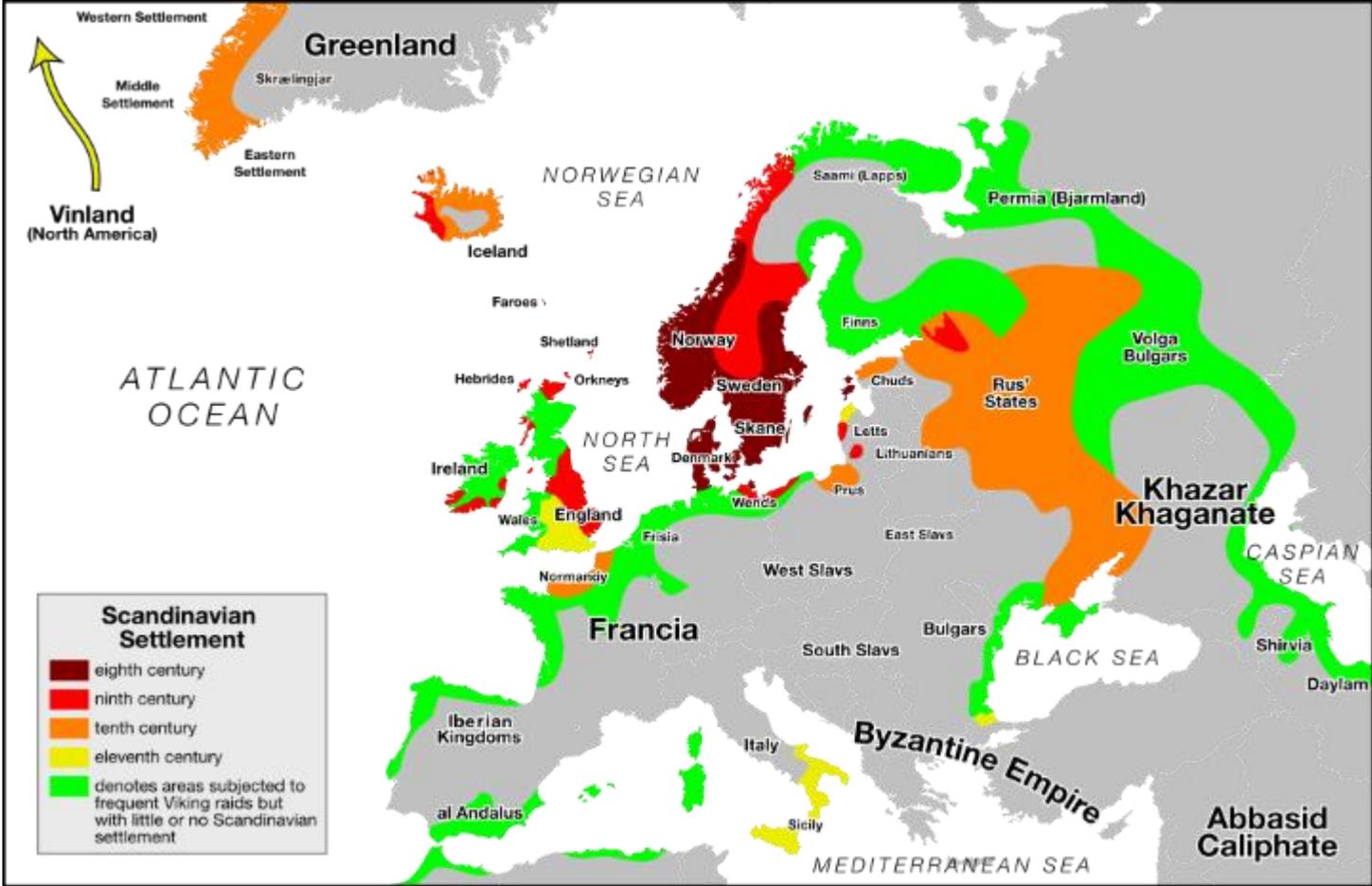
Travelling exhibition
Vejle – Visby – Novgorod

January 2016 –
January 2017

***Travelling exhibition: Vejle – Visby – Novgorod: opening in January 2016 – December 2016.
The exhibition is planned for 4 months at each museum.***

The concept and content of the exhibition will be the same at the three locations/museums - only the main language will differ between Danish, Swedish and Russian, though followed by subtexts in English.

The goal is to show cultural heritage at smaller local museums, which are in daily contact with the heritage area – areas that are not always equally available to the broad audience. Hereby a mutual understanding of our common cultural heritage will be created. The main target groups will be the inquisitive person and school children with an interest in history and school children.



The Vikings in the Baltic

The Storyline

The storyline for this international travelling exhibition is a result of a recent cooperation between local museums in Northwestern Russia, Sweden and Denmark. It will show some of the routes of cultural communication built by the Vikings. This exhibition will give the museums a platform on which they can display and exhibit their cultural heritage and items of great national and international value.

The exhibition will show the routes of trade and communication in the Baltic – created by the Vikings in the 8th-11th century AD. We will follow the Viking trails from the Baltic through the Finnish Gulf, Ladoga Sea and further down the Russian river systems. During these voyages trading and alliances occurred during these cultural meetings. Themes like governance but also daily life reflect the result of this meeting. But what were the premises for this active communication and expansion around the Baltic ?

The explanation for such an expansion should be seen in developments in contemporary society, especially in the supreme skills of shipbuilding and navigation. How did they navigate in these new territories and how did the cultural meeting take place. The exhibition will tell this story and will be highlighted by several archaeological finds.

*Themes:
Trade & Alliances
Cultural Meeting
Communication
Governance*



Lubozha treasure, Novgorod



Bronze pendant, Novgorod

Trade and Alliances

The overall communication as well as transportation was made possible by excellent maritime and navigational skills. Whether as colonizers, traders or warriors, Scandinavians reached almost every part of the old world and discovered lands in the new world. From the Nordic kingdoms, their ships penetrated the West European coasts, sailed through the Strait of Gibraltar into The Mediterranean Sea and, from there journeyed to Italy, Spain, Morocco and the Holy Land. From the Baltic Sea, they made way into the Continent, travelling up Russian rivers and waterways to the Black Sea and Caspian Sea – and all the way to Bagdad.

Ships

Long distance travelling was naturally made with the huge ships, which are so distinctive for the Viking Age and preserved in Vestfold in Norway and at the bottom of The Roskilde fjord. Remains of boats, rivets and nails have been found in large numbers at Staraja Ladoga and Gorodishe.

The Scandinavians used two kinds of ships to travel to the East. A smaller vessel, mainly meant for cargo carriage - mentioned as skipa and larger vessels, meant for the open sea, which were called knorr. When sailing down the Russian rivers, the large vessels were most likely changed into smaller and swifter- moving riverboats. Ship building equipment has been found from the site of Staraja Ladoga and it seems that this site also served as a ship-changing site.

Cultural Meeting



Valkyrie, Ruriko Gorodishe



Pendant, Ruriko Gorodishe



Gold plated brooch, Tingstäde - Gotland



Pendant with scandinavian ornamentation, Ruriko Gorodishe



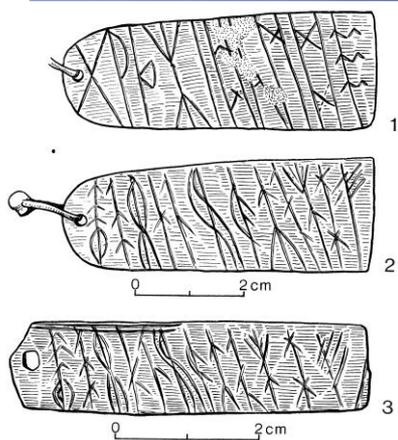
Cultural Meeting

The Baltic might be considered a huge melting pot for different cultural traditions and expressions during the Viking Age, but also a huge melting pot for different populations, both from Scandinavia and the local Slavic population. In prehistoric times the south-east going trading routes along the Russian rivers were an effective source of spreading and communicating information from a world far beyond the world known by the northern population. (exhibit exotic items – like the ape-cranium from Gorodishe)

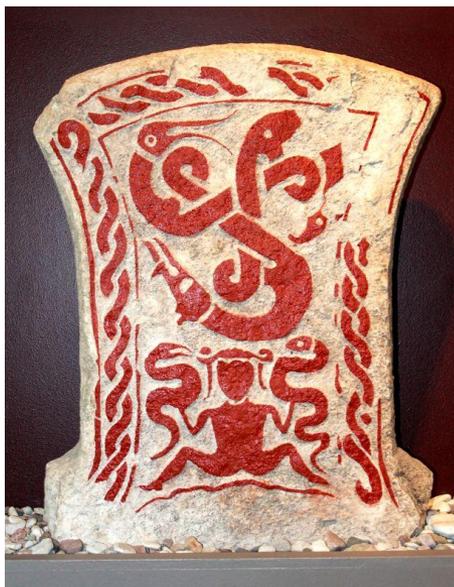
As to the names *Rus* and *Varangians*, they both signify people coming from one Scandinavia and moving to or settling in, another place. Sometimes they are associated with specific roles such as warriors or princely retinues, sometimes representing a complete community. The difference is that the term *Rus* encompasses men, women and children whereas *Varangians* includes only men, maybe mercenaries or a kind of professional soldiers. Both names occur in written sources. The name *Rus* appears in many Arabic sources, in Frankish Annals and in Byzantine sources. The meaning of the word *Rus* is by some scholars believed to derive from the Finnish word for Sweden – Ruotsi. The name *Varangians* is used in the byzantine sources, describing a Rus' army mentioned as the *Varangian guard*.
(exhibit Ulfbert-swords)



Communication



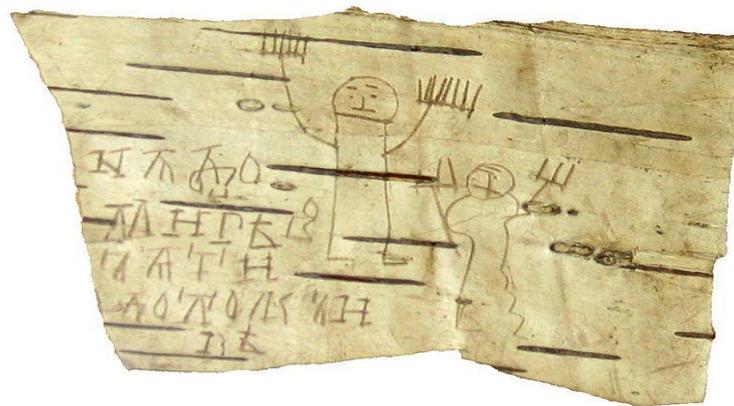
Pendant with runic inscriptions found in Ruriko Gorodishe



Picture stone from Gotland



Harald Blutooths runic stone in Jelling



Example of at birch bark letter (nr. 202) found in Novgorod

Communication

The hagiographic runic stones still stand like visible landmarks set by people during the Viking Age. The runic stones tell many stories about private family relations, ownership and expeditions. The runic inscriptions also give information about the development of a mutual Scandinavian language. Runic inscriptions also occur on other items, for example on a pendant with a ring found in Ruriko Gorodishe.

Means of communication reveal a new perspective when it comes to the Novgorod area. Here finds of birch bark letters with inscriptions and regular texts have been found since the 1950's. The information on these birch bark letters gives an insight into everyday communication, details of housekeeping, business orders, political news; they describe conflicts; they are wills, feudal engagements etc. The letters have mainly been written by ordinary people –both men, women and some children too, which reveals the level of literacy in small communities.

Governance



"Calling of the Varangians" (Russian Primary Chronicle)



Prince Vsevolod's seal, Novgorod

Governance & State Formation

Equally interesting is the ability of the Vikings to mediate and to govern. This seems to be a highly valuable asset, which is vividly described in different written sources such as in the "*Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*", *Heimskringla* and in the "*First Chronicle*", by Adam of Bremen and Snorre Sturlasson, in the Islandic Sagas. When it comes to historical sources, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* is the most quoted. The Chronicle was written by the monk Nestor in 12th century Kiev and tells the story of how the Kievan Rus' empire came to be. The famous "*calling of the Varangians*" describes how the Kievan Rus was founded by the help of "recruited" men from across the sea – called Rus. In 862 AD, Rurik, his two brothers were called from their home to settle in, what is now Russia in three different locations. The Rurikid dynasty is believed to have ruled Russia up to the 16th century.

The importance of Novgorod and Ruriko Gorodishe in the birth of the Russian State, as described, is quite parallel to the importance and role Jelling plays in the birth of the Danish State.

The exhibition Strategy

The exhibition is planned as a travelling exhibition and an idea is to have the main museum hosting the exhibition as well as a “satellite exhibition” at another location, showing one specific item and/or theme. Practically this means having one main exhibition in Vejle, Visby and Novgorod together with a smaller and more limited exhibition/ show case at another local museum or location connected to the local cultural heritage.

This way the exhibition will reach even further. The final strategy will be formulated jointly by the project group and the architect.

The Form/Design/Graphics

The goal is for the aesthetic form and expression to be as simple and clear as possible. The exhibition should be an interaction between a digital and an analog storytelling.

In the further work of realization of this exhibition, the concrete building up of the exhibition will be done in cooperation with an architect.

Artefacts on display:

A list of representative finds will be chosen to demonstrate the diversity and yet similarity in this geographical area. The artefacts will be connected to the general themes and topics in the exhibition – trade, alliances, cultural meeting, communication, innovation and governance. A number of these artefacts have a special story to tell, which can draw lines into present times. For example the birch bark letters and the theme of literacy. The process of storytelling could involve building dialogues between groups of artefacts. For example displaying the artefacts according to themes and subjects and arranging them storywise.

Didactics – a special approach

Мультимедийная панорама



Given the broad and international educational frame around the Baltic Sea, we see this travelling exhibition concept as a suitable platform to explore the perception of the different strategies for dissemination in the three regions.

Exhibition as a powerful source – a special approach to didactics

A special approach to Didactics:

Each country has a different tradition concerning dissemination and also quite different approaches to educational traditions as well as educational goals. When trying to create a common educational program for an international travelling exhibition, it will be essential to be able to work with the differences as well as the similarities between the regions. Recently a new National center for knowledge regarding education of History and Cultural Heritage “Nationalt Videncenter for Historie- og Kulturarvsformidling”, has been established in Denmark . This center will be engaged in working with topics concerning the didactics and the learning process in the discipline of History.

Dissemination – Mediation

We want to create an evocative atmosphere and construct an interpretive strategy to bring the premise for the storyline to life. We will work on the basic tools in both dissemination programs and the more specific educational programs by engaging the different senses: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning. A vast group of museums are currently using digital platforms. The digital concept is an effective and diverse media to use in exhibitions, though one should remember that the digital solution is not an innovation – merely a tool. A Travelling exhibition might also have certain limitations, when it comes to internet access in certain areas and therefore it is important to have a good balance between “hands on” mediation and the digital mediation. “Hands on” objects could be samples of fur, wax, a copy of a scale and an iron collar for slaves, silk etc. A copy of a small wax board would also be interesting, when it comes to telling the story about communication and literacy during the Viking Age. Here especially children could try writing messages with runes (like a google translator – only translating into runes) This creating a perspective to todays smartphones and tablets. At the same time the digital media gives other opportunities – like sharing an educational program, game, application etc.



*Cultural Tourism –
experiencing the authenticity in the
landscape*

View over Paviken, Gotland: A harbour dating from the 8th-11th Century AD.



Jelling, nearby Vejle showing showing the cultural heritage area with the two huge gravemounds, runic stones and church visible.



Ruriko Gorodishe - View from the Wolchov river

Cultural Tourism

We want to engage the local tourist agencies and to give them a platform at the exhibition to reach out across borders and to give an introduction to their respective areas. This can be done by showing a film of the sailing route from the bottom of the Finnish Gulf, Lake Ladoga and Staraja Ladoga, following the Wolchov River to Novgorod and Ruriko Gorodishe and Lake Ilmen. This travelling exhibition is a good opportunity to make a public & private partnership, where museums and branches “the tourist industry” can cooperate in promoting and marketing Cultural Heritage.



Purpose and effects

A valuable purpose of this conceptualization, is to create an inspirational, but yet solid foundation for the further development of a travelling exhibition. An obvious gain from this cooperation will be that new research crosses borders. The overall main purpose of this exhibition is to help creating a historical awareness of our common history and identity in the Baltic area. This will be valuable when building bridges between the past and the present and hereby hopefully creating ground for a common understanding, which may come to use when dealing with many of the present challenges in the Baltic area. This could be issues like environment or infrastructure. Bridging between past and present on these topics could help create a sustainable mutual awareness of our common past and future.

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Partners and stakeholders:

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Novgorod Museum (Russia)
Norden Association
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