



Photo: © Foteviken Mu-

Who were the Vikings?

Originally from Sweden, Denmark and Norway, the Vikings were farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, and merchants who lived between the 8th and 11th centuries and embarked on extensive voyages in their famous long-ships for reasons that are still not completely clear. Possible motives include politics and the search for fertile soils and good pasture to feed a fast-growing, domestic population. Although best known for their attacks on foreign settlements, they also traded with and settled in other communities on their travels. They conquered much of the British Isles, Iceland, and Greenland; raided Spain and France; reached Russia and Constantinople; and became the first Europeans to arrive in North America.

Fierce and efficient in warfare, Viking warriors participated in many battles. While they never actually wore the fabled horned helmets we depict them with, they did carry a wide range of weaponry, mostly derived from hunting and farming activities – including axes, longbows, knives, and spears. The exception to this rule was their swords, which were skilfully crafted iron blades, decorated with bronze. On special occasions, they would feast on fish, seafood, wild boar and other roast meats, all washed down with whey, beer or mead (a strong drink made of honey). Their orally transmitted stories were replete with tales of giants, heroes and kings, as well as gods such as Odin (the god of war), Thor (the god of thunder) and Frey (who controlled the climate and land fertility). Gradually, however, the Vikings stopped travelling and also converted to Christianity, becoming part of Europe's feudal system.

Skåne connections

During the Viking era, Skåne's population was concentrated on the coast, with the area between modern-day Malmö and Trelleborg the most densely populated. Åhus and Järrestad to the east, Löddeköpinge to the west and Uppåkra, just south of Lund, were other important settlements. Stones with runic alphabet inscriptions and other finds indicate that Vikings from southern Sweden took part in many expeditions, says Profes-

sor Birgitta Hård from Lund University. Dr. Sven Rosborn of the Foteviken museum says Skåne Vikings even became bodyguards to one of the emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire, while others helped in attacks on England, Spain and France, possibly the raids that secured Paris in the 840s.

Meet the Skåne Vikings

Foteviken is a reconstructed Viking town located in Höllviken, 20 km south of Malmö, and is a centre for historic activities and re-enactments. Not far away is the Kämpinge Vall embankment, which was probably used as a customs barrier by Viking merchants. The nearby village of Skanör hosts Sweden's amber museum (this precious resin was known as "Viking gold"). The partly reconstructed Trelleborgen fortress is located in the centre of the town of Trelleborg and was erected by Danish King Harald Blåtand (Blue Tooth), who conquered Skåne and introduced Christianity to the area. About 25 km eastwards is an important 10th century Rune stone in Tullstorp churchyard, depicting a large animal and a warship.

Lund hosts the Historical Museum and the Cultural History Museum, which -- as well as being the second-largest, open-air museum in the world -- contains many Viking relics such as tools, furniture and clothing, as well as Rune stones. Other Rune stones can be found at Hällestad Church east of Lund; near the church of Simris on Skåne's eastern coast; and also close to Sjörup Church in Ystad Kommun. Gravesites exist at at Vätteryd; by the road between Höör and Hässleholm; and in Ale, near Käseberga in south-east Skåne. These contain stone ships in which the ashes of cremated Vikings were buried.

by David Stavrou

For more information visit the following sites:

http://www.foteviken.se/engelsk/index_e.htm

<http://www.trelleborg.se>

<http://www.lu.se/o.o.i.s/1149>

<http://www.kulturen.com/>