

# Vikings in the East

700-1000



**SILK ROAD**  
VIRTUAL MUSEUM

The Vikings in the East, also known as the Rus, were prominent Norse traders and explorers who navigated the Volga and Dnieper Rivers, forging connections between Scandinavia, the Byzantine Empire, and the Islamic world. Renowned for their extensive trading activities, they dealt in valuable commodities such as furs, slaves, and precious metals.

These Vikings established significant trade routes and settlements, fostering cultural and economic interactions among diverse societies.

Their presence and influence were instrumental in shaping early medieval trade networks, leaving a lasting impact on the regions along the Volga and Dnieper Rivers and beyond.

The exhibition exhibits the kind of goods traded in both directions and looks more closely at the Viking taste for silver. Working with an international research project based at Oxford University, it casts new light on the beginnings of Viking trade with the East.

It also changes the perspective on the relative importance of trade with East compared plunder and tribute from the West towards the Viking accumulation of wealth (i.e. silver).

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## FEATURED IN THE MUSEUM



### STORA HAMMARS I

Lärbro parish, Gotland, Sweden

Original Height 150cms

The Viking "Stora Hammars I" stone is an intricately carved picture stone located on the island of Gotland, Sweden, dating back to the 8th or 9th century. This stone is one of the most famous of its kind due to its detailed depictions of Norse mythology and daily Viking life. The stone has six panels, each portraying different scenes in bas-relief.

One prominent scene shows a dramatic human sacrifice, possibly illustrating a ritualistic hanging, with a man bound and hanging from a tree. This may be a reference to Odin's self-sacrifice to gain wisdom. Another panel depicts a warrior with a long sword, accompanied by Valkyries, the mythical figures who chose those who may die and those who may live in battles.

Other scenes include warriors on horseback, suggesting themes of battle and heroism central to Viking culture. A large, serpent-like creature winds through the stone, representing the Midgard Serpent from Norse legend. These rich carvings provide valuable insights into Viking beliefs, warfare, and their ceremonial practices. The "Stora Hammars I" stone remains a significant artifact for understanding the complex tapestry of Norse mythology and the cultural practices of the Viking Age.



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## VIKING SHIPS

The ships that sailed the Viking's Ocean voyages are themselves the stuff of legend. Often 25 metres long and weighing several tons, their keels themselves were objects of functional and beautiful design. However, they were not made for being carried any distance overland, nor were they suitable for shallow water. The river voyages to the East a smaller, flat-bottomed boat (with a false keel for protection) was required. The Skuldelev 3 was the smallest of five ships discovered in Roskilde Fjord, Denmark in 1957. All ships were rescued and are now in the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde.

The oak timbers of Skuldelev 3 were dated back to 1040. It was probably a coastal trader in the Baltic Sea waters – 14 metres long, 3.3 metres wide with a draft of only 90cms. There was room for 4-6 oars (2-3 on each side). In 1984, the museum shipyard completed a reconstruction, named Road Edge. It was ships like this, possibly even lighter and smaller, that sailed the Volga and Dnieper rivers. The Virtual Museum present a miniature/reduced version of the reconstruction.

## PERMIAN RINGS

Swedish History Museum, Stockholm

The Viking silver Permian rings exquisite examples of Viking craftsmanship and trade. Found in the Perm region of Russia, these rings feature intricate designs with twisted silver wire and elaborate knot patterns.

Made in standard weights, they likely served as both jewelry and a means of payment, reflecting the extensive trade networks and cultural exchanges between the Vikings and Eastern Europe.



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## VIKING SWORDS

Length 94 cms

Left: State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia

Right: Smolensk Historical Museum, Russia

Viking swords were designed for slashing and thrusting, featuring a wide blade, a fuller to reduce weight, and a sturdy crossguard. They balanced sharpness with durability, crucial for combat. In the 9th century the Franks banned sword exports, to curb Viking raids. Nonetheless, high-quality Frankish blades were coveted by Norse warriors and Vikings continued to acquire these weapons through trade and plunder, and sell them to their trading partners in the East.

## SILK FRAGMENTS

Museum of Cultural History, Oslo,  
Norway.c55000/371, 2, 7, 11, 15, 16, 12/1, 31, 32,35,  
39

Much of the silk found in Viking tombs comprises thin strips likely sewn onto clothing. Originating from Central Asia via the Silk Road, the quality is not the highest. The original colors have faded over time, even since their discovery. Fortunately, we still have coloured drawings made at the time to reference their original appearance.



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## HELGÖ BUDDHA

Statens Historiska Museer, Stockholm, Sweden

The Helgo Buddha, found in a Viking-era settlement in Sweden, is a remarkable artifact linking Scandinavia to the Silk Road.

This 6th-century bronze figurine, probably made in Kashmir, on the Indian/Pakistan border, symbolizes the vast trade networks of the time.

Despite its age, it retains intricate details, offering a glimpse into the cultural exchanges between distant civilizations.

Click here or go to  
<https://silkroadvirtualmuseum.com/vikings-in-the-east>  
to enter the Museum

