

Thomas Kamphuis

Vikings and even more..

*The objects of their time and the objects of the
peoples surrounding them in the Viking Age.*

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Photo front: horse harness decorative pendant in Ringerike decoration style; photo back: author at the Sjellebro stone in Denmark, August 2025.

For Martine



(photo: Anneke Ruys)

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Preface

When does someone's fascination start? We often know where something starts, but why, and precisely there, if it is precisely that which does not get a follow-up?

February 2017 my father passed away. In the preceding Autumn he wanted to look at boxes with me with all kinds of preserved memories of holidays. Fifty years of memories were stored in those boxes. Bearing in mind a man who kept everything – down to receipts for ice creams on a terrace – my interest was not in that at the time. It had to be looking at slides together, because that's what we had been planning for so many years. We were able to do it exactly twice before he became terminally ill.

I would have thrown the boxes in the waste paper bin, if it weren't for the fact that my sister pointed out personal things that had been preserved among the everyday things. For example, I came across a long-lost drawing made by myself during a summer holiday in the early eighties of a sun king.

No idea why I had drawn a sun king in that year and what inspired me, but he was there, and as detailed as in my distant memory. Including the intriguing caption *dipoirituhos fotorinapios*. An incantation ?



Sun/Inca King - drawing by the author

Intriguing is the axe, in terms of shape, which is of a Danish type.

I had never seen an axe from the Viking Age.

Drawing scenes from *Wicky the Viking*, completely personalized with dragons - probably originating from the dragon heads on the prow of ships from the cartoon series - with vague figures with horns on their heads had already started years earlier.



Drawing by the author

Often traveling starts in the head.

In 1988 I made a trip of my first holiday and savings to Lapland, Sweden to the land of the Sami. Evidently attracted by the distant, *the northern* certainly too. I visited a museum about the Sami in Lapland and was sold. Nowadays you often only see winter trips to Lapland with the northern lights and sled dog rides, but in 1988 only a summer trip existed under the light of the midsummer night sun. Definitely still an unusual destination. In remote places, the Sami still lived in sod huts, and even a teepee here and there. I was sold. Sold to what? The free life that these people radiated, the original style of living?



Sod hut and teepee in Padjelanta, Lapland, July 1988 (photos author).



In 1992 I lived in Zoetermeer – a place in the west of The Netherlands - and there was a so-called *Powwow* weekend. Again I was drawn to a distant culture, this time from North America. The Mohawk, the Shawnee Indians. The interest remained. After returning to The Hague in 2001, I graced the house with Indians (decorative) contemporary objects that I bought in a minuscule shop in the Molenstraat in The Hague (in The Netherlands).



Hopi Navajo in the Molenstraat in The Hague (photo author).

Around 2003 I started to delve into the early Middle Ages in North(western) Europe - out of an enormous boredom CAUSED by not very exciting work in the civil service. The fascination about the Vikings and the Viking Age arose. That fascination has turned out to be a permanent one. In addition to the Viking Age, I also dived into the Anglo-Norman - Romanesque - decoration style, directly following the Viking Age. In the late 11th and 12th centuries, influences from the time before that can still be seen. A few years ago I dived into the objects of the Finno-Ugric peoples and the so-

called *Permian Animal Style culture*. During the Viking Age (750 – 1100 A.D.), these objects were made in the far northeast of Europe and western Siberia. With this culture and objects, a circle is complete of which I never knew where it began and how it would end.

This book had been in my head for many, many years and was on the shelf for years due to another project - writing books on the history of the hamlets where I live. Now I finally found the time to finish and publish this 'Viking' book, first in Dutch, now, at last, in English. Hopefully interesting for the layman, but also for the more 'introduced' or expert in this field.

In this book I want to take you to the world of the Vikings, but also the surrounding peoples in the Baltic and Finnish regions and Finno-Ugric language areas as seen through the objects from this time. Precisely because the objects in this book show in all its glory the diversity of art styles and decoration within the broad spectrum of areas where the Vikings lived together with the peoples around them or with whom they traded, and a book like this does not exist in the genre, I hope that this will appeal to lovers of their (material) culture.

As mentioned, in addition to the objects of Vikings, objects of peoples (tribes) with whom the Vikings traded in the far north and northeast of present-day Scandinavia and far in the east, in present-day Russia, are also discussed.

For me, the attractiveness of the pieces is often formed by the regular occurrence of animal (similar) representations in the objects. Sometimes unambiguously assignable to a specific animal, sometimes animal-shaped - *zoomorphic* - and open to multiple interpretations.

The meaning of the (decoration on) artefacts often hides the mystery. We often do not know what the blacksmith wanted to depict. After all, *portfolios* did not exist at that time.

Writings were almost exclusively made by churchmen or in monasteries. Who looked at the pagans from the north with 'appropriate distance' and certainly did not show themselves to be automatic admirers of their material culture. At least, not in what we know in terms of writings. The Vikings were certainly not illiterate, but the runic script they used is still mainly limited and preserved on the rune stones in Scandinavia. There they tell us about everything and everyone, but not about the objects they left us.

The attraction is often in not knowing. In this time of wanting to know everything and not settling for less, a relief in my opinion.

I hope that your own imagination is as big as mine, and that you will let yourself be carried on a journey that began more than 1200 years ago and - as evidenced by the successive Viking exhibitions, both internationally and in The Netherlands and Viking series on TV and Netflix - is more fascinating than ever before.

Who, after all, doesn't want to be a Viking. Who, does not want to be free. Whether it can be put so prosaically and is experienced in time itself is a doubtful one, but this is the picture anyway.

Let's go on a journey...

Thomas Kamphuis, November 2025

Note:

Of course, consulted sources are included in this book. However, in order to maintain a certain reading calm, I have decided to mention these sources in the *Overview of consulted sources and literature* and not to include them per paragraph, which contains a reference. Where an opinion or theory is exclusively my own, it is explicitly included on the spot.

Definition

The Viking did not exist, and, according to the statement of the Dutch Queen Máxima – which caused a lot of commotion in 2007 about the Dutch man doesn't exist – still does not exist. The Viking Age does not exist either. At least: has the necessary nuances, which arise and develop over time.

Only recently - in 2008 - the discovery of ship's graves with typical Scandinavian shipbuilding, fallen warriors and typical Scandinavian objects buried near the town of Salme on the island of Saaremaa in Estonia, changed our image of the Viking Age. The forty-one warriors buried in two ships and the accompanying grave goods were dated to between 700 and 750 A.D. The bones of the warriors were analyzed and scientists determined that these men, who were difficult to distinguish from Vikings - more than 40 years before the monastery of Lindisfarne was attacked in 793 A.D. - were already active.

In short: when does a Viking start to become a Viking?



The former monastery in Lindisfarne, England, August 2009 (photo author).

In the time itself, roughly from 750 A.D. to 1100 A.D., *the men from the north* were referred to very diversely. I write roughly here on purpose, because in the literature a sharply defined period called the Viking Age is systematically mentioned as being from 793 A.D. – the Viking invasion of the English east coast at Lindisfarne to 1066 A.D. when at the *Battle of Hastings*, Harold II is defeated by William the Conqueror from Normandy. However, the end date of the Viking Age is a bit too centralistic from an Anglo-Saxon perspective. Let alone the wider ‘Viking world.’

The date 1066 A.D. is already a debatable one for two reasons. When Edward the Confessor died in 1066 A.D., we have to consider that in the eyes of some historians he was already more Norman than Anglo-Saxon.

As Levi Roach states in his book *The Normans... The forgotten descendants of the Vikings*:

'Edward the Confessor is best remembered as the last king of the native English line, a venerable dynasty that goes back to the West Saxon ruler Egbert, the grandfather of Alfred the Great. But Edward was more than the swan song of Anglo-Saxon England; he was also the first Norman monarch of the kingdom. Edward, half Norman through his mother Emma, had spent most of his teenage years and his entire adult life in Normandy prior to his accession to the throne. And as his reign would show, Edward was in many ways more Norman than English.'

Jim Badbury in *The battle of Hastings – The fall of the Anglo-Saxons and the rise of the Normans*:

'The most remarkable factor in Normandy's position in 1066 A.D. was its readiness to expand. Not only England, but also Spain, several parts of the Mediterranean, and especially southern Italy were to receive often unwelcome Norman visitors. Perhaps some latter-day Viking will-to-voyage endured in the only part of France where a Viking settlement had taken root; other French principalities, though equally interested in expansion, did not go so far afield in their ambitions.'

In short: were the Normans in 1066 A.D. French, or, despite being *Frenchified*, still vikings in heart and soul? The dividing line is not so unambiguous, let alone that it would be 'captured' in a year, based on one country.

In various places where the men from the north, or Vikings in behavior, roamed around after 1066 A.D., people continued merrily. On the Isle of Man, for example, an island in the Irish Sea, the argument was only settled – after centuries of fighting back and forth – at the *Battle of Skye Hill* in 1079 A.D. when the Norwegian invasion army led by Godred Govan subjugated the Manx population.



So-called ship's grave, Isle of Man, August 2019 (photo author).

Subsequently, this Norse domination continued for another two centuries. And what about the Viking pirates in Estonia who, under the leadership of the Estonian king Lembitu, were only subjugated by German knights at the beginning of the 13th century? On behalf of the Pope..

The Norse settlements in Greenland did not gradually disappear until the beginning of the 15th century, a final marriage took place in the church of Hvalsey in 1408.



Church of Hvalsey, Greenland, August 2018 (photo author).

Of course, there were also Vikings before 793 A.D., as the raid in 789 A.D. on the island of Portland near Dorset, on the English south coast, shows. Knowledge of the wealth in the Anglo-Saxon area existed centuries before that, through trade relations between what we now call England and the Scandinavian countries. And robbing each other is of course an everyday occurrence. In 793 A.D., the Viking did not suddenly proclaim himself a Viking. *Paganism* remained the longest in the interior, as evidenced by the popular belief

recorded in the interior of Scandinavia in the 17th and 18th centuries.

While the Viking was able to convert to the Christian faith admirably quickly - often out of opportunism - the people who stayed behind, especially in the interior, were certainly not Christianized so quickly. Paganism remains, finally, something of all times.

But in short: what do we mean by a Viking object? By this I mean: *an object that in terms of form and/or decoration style - here we distinguish the respectively Oseberg, Borre, Mammen, Jellinge, Ringerike, Urnes style - finds its origin in Scandinavia or is unmistakably derived from it in a hybrid form (Anglo-Scandinavian, Russian-Scandinavian etc.) and originates from the late 8th to late 11th century.* I will come back to this in detail in the chapter *Distinctive decorative styles.*

Be that as it may.. Eventually, Viking behavior disappeared and people were absorbed into the population or disappeared completely, as in the case of Greenland.

Old soldiers never die, they just fade away..

Of course, predatory behavior continues to this day, no Viking is and was guilty of that characteristic.

They, as well as the peoples with whom they surrounded themselves and traded in the country, sometimes far beyond their 'borders', left us beautiful objects.

Where did they come from and where did they settle?

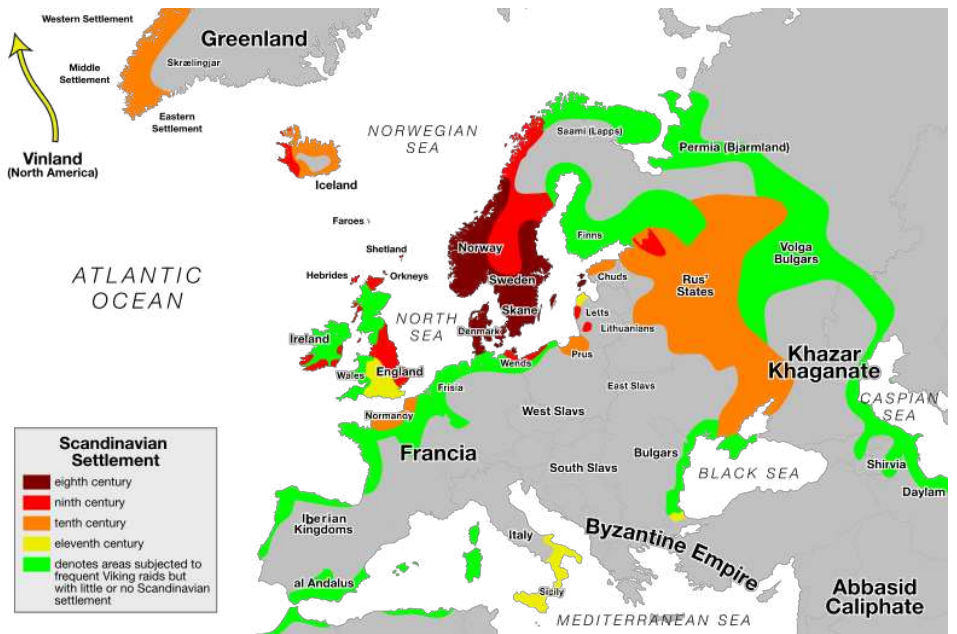
Vikings in the west

In England they were called the *Danes*, the Danes. In Ireland, the Norwegian settlements were called the Irish Norse settlements - *Hiberno-Norse*.

In the Anglo-Saxon areas, so-called *Anglo-Scandinavian* communities arose as in the Danelaw – literally; *where the laws of the Danes applied* - on the east coast of England.

An umbrella term is the Norsemen - *Norsemen* - for the Vikings who came from the west of present-day Scandinavia - Norway.

How and when the Vikings spread throughout the Northern Hemisphere and eastwards can be seen on the following map.



Map showing chronological time of Viking spread (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking_expansion#/media/File:Viking_Expansion.svg)

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Reconstruction of Tjodhild's chapel at the Norse settlement of Erik the Red in Brattahlíð, southern Greenland, August 2018 (photo author).



Ruins of Norse longhouses on Brough of Birsay, Orkney Islands, Scotland, June 2010 (photo author).

Vikings in the east

Russia is named after the *Rhos*, the *rowing men* from Sweden, who founded Kiev and eventually gave Russia its name. The Vikings were called *Varangians* by Greeks and eastern Slavs. A group within these Varangians would settle in Novgorod in 862 A.D. and thus pave the way for the foundation of Kiev in 882 A.D. There has always been a fierce debate in Russia whether the founders of cities such as Novgorod and Kiev were Vikings or not. From a nationalistic point of view, the emphasis is placed on the Slavic background of the peoples who founded Kiev (*'Kievan Rus was a loose federation of East Slavic tribes from the late 9th to the mid-13th century under the reign of Rurik'*).

The current war in Ukraine was caused by Russia, which still believes – at least: *Putin* – that Kiev is the cradle of the Russian Empire, and therefore inalienable. Which is nonsense, because what was later called Kiev was inhabited by Slavic peoples centuries before. Who didn't know a Russian, let alone that the word or concept 'Russian' was coined. The familiar is often distorted in this way – the moment something is given a name and a boundary is drawn. Suddenly there is something apparently, which previously had no name or was someone's limited property. It is the, time and time again, ever-recurring tragedy that haunts man since he chose to no longer remain a gatherer-hunter. A life, divided in everything, became possession and possession caused limitation.

And that boundary of the 'mine' caused an 'other side' where the grass was sometimes supposed to be greener and thoughts were imposed. If not willingly, then unwillingly. It is a bit of the still taught misunderstanding that either Columbus, then certainly the Vikings discovered America.

They only met the Indians.



Rus Viking mid-10th century from the Chernigov area (source: <http://museumok.ru/dospehi-russkih-knyazey-ix-xiii-vekov.html>)



Rus viking, Slavic woman with jewel dress - including a characteristic temple ring as a wear on the headband, at the temple - hence the name temple ring - the ear. 10th / 11th century (source: <https://studfile.net/preview/5454483/>)

However, the one who *supposedly united* these peoples was Rurik and is considered the founder of what is now Russia and Ukraine.

According to the 12th century *Nestor Chronicle*, Rurik belonged to the people of the Rus, a Varangian tribe that inhabited the area of Roslagen, in eastern Uppland in Sweden. In 862 A.D., Ladoga (modern Staraya Ladoga) came under his rule. Near Novgorod he built the *Ryurikovo gorodishche*, Rurik's fortified city.



Rurik's arrival in Novgorod (source: https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Sineus_and_Truvor?file=Prizvanievaryagov.jpg)

Rurik remained in power until his death in 879 A.D. His successors moved the capital to Kiev and were thus the founders of the *Kievan Rus*, which lasted until 1240 A.D. when it was overrun during the Mongol invasion. While there is debate about Rurik's origins, there are also historians who argue that his origins are mostly found in folklore and that he is just a legendary figure. It is possible that Rurik was the personification of the Scandinavian mercenaries and conquerors who invaded present-day Russia in the 9th century. Be that as it may, the archaeological discoveries made in Russia testify to a stylistic technical, albeit unique, *strong connection* with the Scandinavian art styles. The image of a Russian viking woman on the next page shows the similarities.



Clothing and jewelry dress Rus viking woman (source: Pinterest).



Clothing and jewelry costume Scandinavian woman in the Viking Age (source: Pinterest).



Map showing the main trade routes of the Varangians: the Volga trade route (red) and the Dnieper and Dniester trade routes (purple). Other trade routes in the 8th – 11th century are marked in orange (source:

<https://www.worldhistory.org/image/15546/varangian-trade-routes/>)

In addition, they traded extensively in a large area in the far north of Europe and the Baltic region far into Russia.



Map with the settlements of the Varangians and Rus mid-9th century A.D.

(source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Gar%C3%B0ar%C3%ADki#/media/File:Early_Rus.png)

The Finno-Ugric tribes. Tribes with which the Vikings traded

At the time of the Normans and Vikings - and long before that - peoples such as the Sami lived in the area we now - irreverently - call Lapland. Never let the Sami hear this, because for them it is a swear word – *Lapland*. In addition to the Sami, Balts, Finns and neighboring peoples lived in the so-called Finno-Ugric language area. Objects from these regions are also discussed. These peoples were therefore not Vikings. However, their jewelry is of a decided beauty, and because

they date back to the Viking Age in terms of time, I have also included them in this book. Also, because there are indeed parallels to be found in terms of shape.

Recent research shows that the influence of the Vikings on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea and present-day Russia was at least as significant as their westward influence in the North Atlantic area. Today it is partly a self-contained, culturally equal region, but the region actually falls into two separate halves. Estonia shows a close cultural affinity with Finland; Latvia and Lithuania are more linguistically and culturally connected. During the Viking Age this was no different and it is a misconception to impose a general Baltic archaeological culture on the present-day Baltic countries.

Two distinct regions can be identified in the eastern Baltic region. The Baltic-Finnish Iron Age culture can be found in the northern half of the eastern Baltic region and northwestern part of present-day Russia. The Baltic culture spread over the southern part, including northeastern parts of present-day Poland and partly White Russia. When we talk about *Baltic-Finnish*, we are referring to people who lived in the areas of present-day Finland and Estonia as well as the northwestern part of Russia. When we talk about the Balts, to name exclusively *ethnic* Balts, we are referring to inhabitants of what is now Latvia and Lithuania. In the Iron Age, Latvia was divided between a Baltic-Finnish and Baltic population. In the southern parts of the eastern Baltic region, other (Semigallians etc.) that are discussed in more detail below.

When it comes to the artistic influence on jewelry and the Scandinavian styles used, the following nuances can be mentioned; the only known Scandinavian settlements known in the territory of the ethnic Balts are located in the southern part of the eastern Baltic region. But, surprisingly, their cultural influence there has been limited to those settlements and not much further than a few tens of kilometers around those settlements. Scandinavians do not seem to have had a significant impact on the culture of the ethnic Balts.

Very opposite is the situation in the Baltic-Finnish coastal areas of Estonia, Finland and Latvia where a variety of Scandinavian attributes – from types of objects and ornamentation to specific burial customs – were adopted and made their own. The intriguing thing is that, as far as we know, these coastal areas, which harbored a decidedly strong cultural influence, did not have any Scandinavian settlements at all.

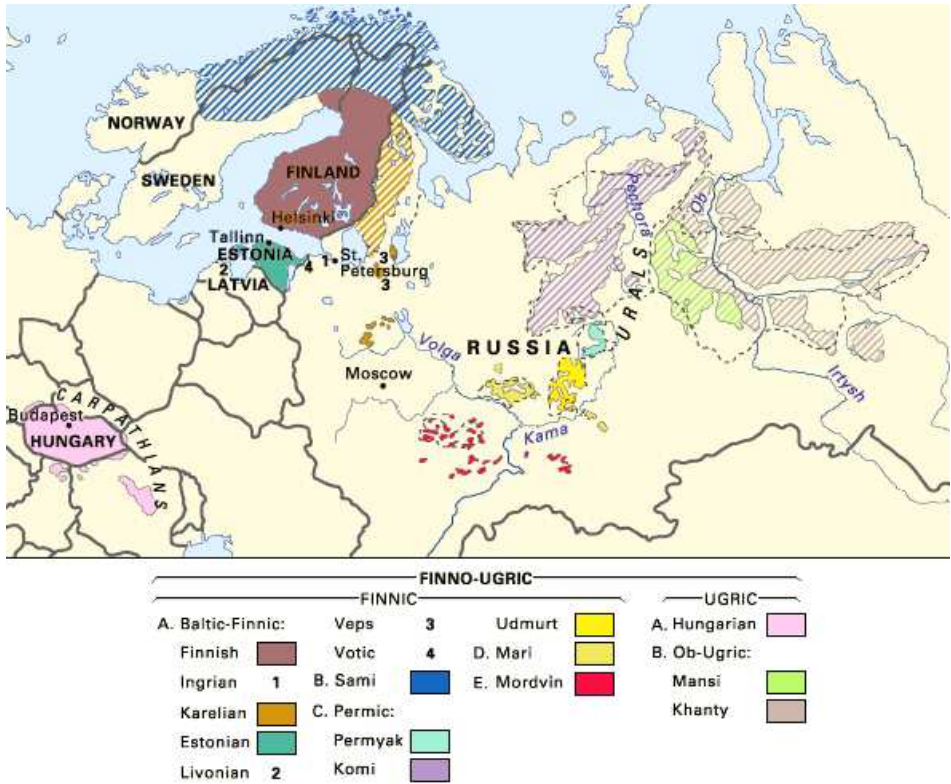
Cultural contrasts between the coast and the interior were evident in Finland where, during the Viking Age, Baltic-Finnish settlements gradually expanded northward into the areas where the Saami lived.



Finno-Ugric horse pendant- photographer unknown.

The animal-like – so-called *animistic* – design has parallels with the horse and rider brooches, which are known from Scandinavia as well as from the Merovingian period – 400 A.D. 750 A.D. Animism is not a religion in itself, but a characteristic of many religions in the world, such as shamanism, in vogue among many tribes from the far north and (north) east at the time of the Vikings. It is a nature religion in which spirit and ancestor worship are the most important. An animist believes in the existence of good and evil spirits, which can live in trees, animals and utensils. The spirits must be appeased by offering them sacrifices and holding rituals.

This shows the origin of the myths and sagas of the Nordic world of the gods and the experience of the faith in the time of the Vikings.



Map with overview of Finno-Ugric tribes at the time of the Vikings (source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Finno-Ugric-Language-Family-permission-requested-answer-pending_fig2_233993677).



Photo above and next page: Cemetery of Szatmárcseke, in the far northeast of Hungary, near the border with Ukraine: the oak grave monuments and the way of decoration still exude a Finno-Ugric / Slavic origin - now no more than 150 years old – May 2025 (photo author).



Compare the very simple but striking decoration with the objects found in Wolin, Poland and depicted later in this book (photo author).



Shamanic 'therianthrope' - half human, half animal - amulet from Permian region (west) Siberia 9th- 11th century A.D. (photographer unknown).

In the following pages I will briefly discuss the various tribes that lived in the time of the Vikings in what we now call the Baltic countries – the Baltic region. With which the Vikings certainly came into contact and traded.



Map with overview Baltic tribes 1200 A.D. (source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baltic_Tribes_c_1200.svg).

Curonians

At the time of the Vikings – and also in the centuries after the Viking Age – different peoples lived on and east of the Baltic Sea. These peoples have definitely come into contact with the Vikings and vice versa. Well known is the trading place of Grobina, which housed a Scandinavian colony before the middle of the 9th century, until trade moved further eastwards.

This trade did not "suddenly" start in or with the Viking Age; Trade relations existed in the earliest Middle Ages and before.

Among the *Curonians*, a tribe that existed from the 5th to the 16th century, there is a difference of opinion whether it has a Baltic or Finnish origin. Curonians and Vikings did not only trade with each other. Armed struggle between them took place over a longer period of time than the Viking Age alone. As early as 750 A.D., according to the *Norna-Gests þáttur saga* (ca. 1157), it tells of Sigurd Ring, a legendary king of Denmark and Sweden who fought against invading Curonians and Kvænir – a population group from northern Norway – in southern Sweden. When you read this you think 'What do you mean, beginning Viking Age 793 A.D.?', in more ways than one.

Rimbert's *Vita Ansgarii*, about the life of Bishop Ansgar, written in Hamburg-Bremen in the 9th century, tells of the attempts of the Danes and Swedes to subjugate the Curonians. The raid of King Olaf on the Curonian hill forts of Seeburg and Aputra in 854 A.D. is also described here. The *Saga of Egil* recounts, in long and detail, a Viking expedition (raid) to/in Curonia in 936 A.D. Conversely, the Curonians did not show any different behavior than the Vikings: until 1187 A.D., Sigtuna – Sweden's most important town at the time – was besieged by the Curonians, according to some sources. The Curonians were an outspoken pagan people, who worshipped pagan gods and their sacred animal, the horse.



Top and next page: clothing and jewelry among the tribe of the Curonians in western Latvia, at the time of the Vikings. In addition to long necklaces, wide spiral bracelets are characteristic of this clothing (source Pinterest).



Finnish woman in full jewelry ornament at the time of the Vikings. Characteristic is the richly decorated necklace ornamentation, consisting of several parts (source: Pinterest).

Semigallians

The Semigallians are a population group that lived in the south-central part of present-day Latvia and in the north of present-day Lithuania. They are known for their long-standing resistance (1219 – 1290) against German Crusaders and Teutonic knights during the Northern Crusades. As I will argue later, with this behavior and this history, the Semigallians together with the Curonians can certainly be considered *old school pagans* in the broader sense of the word. During the Viking Age, the Semigallians were involved in battles with the Swedish Vikings for control of the lower part of the Daugava River. In *Gesta Danorum*, literally: *Deeds of the Danes*, a patriotic work by the 13th century author Saxo Grammaticus, it is described that *the Viking Starkad defeated the Curonians, all the tribes in Estonia and the people of Sempala*. When Rurikid's Varangian successors tried to subdue the Semigallians, they violently defeated the invading army of Polotsk, led by Prince Rogvolod Vseslavich in 1106. It is said that 9000 of his soldiers were killed.

Livonians

Originally, the Livonians lived in two separate areas of present-day Latvia, one group in Livonia and another part on the north coast of what is called *Kurland*, in western Latvia. The latter group was called the Curonians, along with the Balts who lived there. The Livonians called themselves *rāndalist*, loosely translated: *coastal wanderers* and provided for their livelihood through fishing, but also agriculture and cattle breeding. Since they controlled an important trade route, the Daugava River, their culture had been highly developed through trade with the inhabitants of Gotland - an island near Sweden -, Russians and Finns, and, from the end of the first millennium AD, with the Germans, Swedes and Danes.



Geographical location Daugava River (source: https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westelijke_Dvina#/media/Bestand:Fluss-lv-D%C3%BCna.png)



*Daugava river (source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Skatu_tornis_Kr%C4%81slav%C4%81._-_panoramio.jpg).*

Selonians

The Selonians were a population group that lived in parts of Latvia and Lithuania. They lived until the 15th century in Selonia, located in the southeast of present-day Latvia and northeastern Lithuania. They eventually merged into neighboring populations. They spoke the East Baltic Selonic language. Little is known about the Selonians. There is little archaeological evidence and historical sources describe the region as 'sparsely inhabited'. They are mentioned only a few times in written sources. Archaeological data trace the Selonians back to the beginning of the first millennium AD when they lived on both sides of the Daugava River. Since the 6th and 7th centuries AD, their settlements have only been found on the left side of this river. The Selonic culture was strongly influenced by the Latgalian culture. Selonic and Latgalian ways of burial show little difference.

It is clear that all these above-mentioned tribes were culturally closely linked. The difference that is indicated today is this: Estonians are Finns (as Finns and Saami peoples are both considered Norwegian nowadays) and their language is a Finnish language. Latvians and Lithuanians are Balts who speak a Baltic language.

However, never call Finns and Balts Vikings! They will never accept that. They are completely unique peoples who existed long before the Viking Age - nevertheless could show clever Viking behavior! In other words: *what's (in) a viking?*

In terms of jewelry, we see a style and culture all our own.

Together with the Latgalians, they lived too far from the Baltic

Sea to be strongly influenced by Scandinavia, although ring-shaped open brooches and twisted (neck) jewelry also occurred here. They are also not mentioned as peoples or territory in Nordic sources from that time.



Characteristic jewellery of the Livonians at the time of the late Viking Age and 12th and 13th centuries. Oval brooches are also recognizable here, albeit in a much smaller form (source: Pinterest).

Latgalians

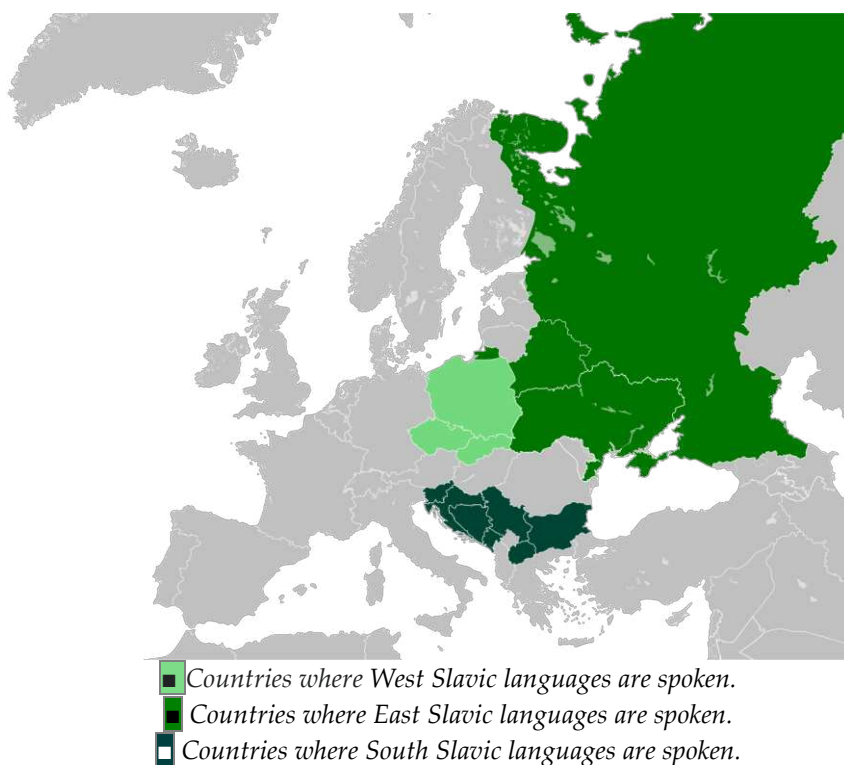
The Latgalians – their origin is unknown – lived east and southeast of the Gulf of Riga and are first mentioned in the 11th century.



Clothing and jewellery among the Latgalians from present-day Latvia, at the time of the Vikings. Large, twisted - twisted - neck rings and bronze 'embroidery' attached to the mantle are typical within this jewellery costume (source: Pinterest).

The Slavic peoples

The objects of Slavic peoples at the time of the Viking Age had their own style and decoration. Objects from the early Middle Ages found in, for example, Poland, are often mistakenly seen as Scandinavian or 'Viking.' An explanation of the how and why follows below. I will also come back to this later, with the so-called *showpiece spur end* of West Slavic (Poland) origin and a Finno-Ugric (Mari) pendant/amulet later in this book.



Source:

[https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavische_volkeren#/media/Bestand:Slavic_europe_\(Kosovo_unshaded\).svg](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavische_volkeren#/media/Bestand:Slavic_europe_(Kosovo_unshaded).svg)

Objects from the 9th to the 12th century from – in short – the Slavic area (including, in this case, Poland) were – and are – inappropriately referred to as 'Vikings', or 'from the Viking Age' or 'having a Scandinavian origin'. Either from a certain (political) agenda, or from ignorance or from a commercial point of view. Wladyslaw Duczko published an article in 2000 in which he investigated the archaeological traces of Scandinavians from the Viking Age in Pomerania – a province in Poland – and the presence of Slavs in Scandinavia. Analyses of organic tool grips found in Wolin in Western Pomerania and Santok in Lubsz Land led him to conclude that the decoration on these objects was reminiscent of the Borre style and was made locally by Scandinavian craftsmen who worked under the artistic influence of so-called Insular decorative traditions.

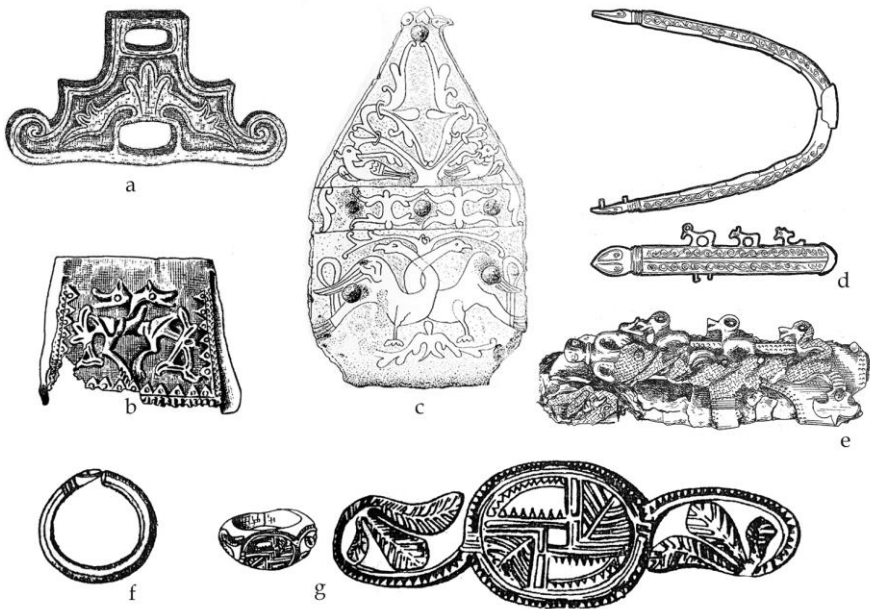
Duczko: 'It was undoubtedly introduced to the Wolin repertoire by a Danish artist who worked on the British Isles before coming to Pomerania.' Duczko referred to the decoration style as *The Pomeranian School of Scandinavian-Insular Ornamentation*.' Leszek Gardela - a Polish archaeologist specialized in research into Scandinavian and Slavic cultures, pagan beliefs and the material culture of early medieval societies in Central and Northern Europe - argues that this categorization miss the mark; 'While, objectively speaking, some of the specimens may appear 'Borre-ish', others (in fact forming the majority) do not really carry any of the diagnostic features that reflect Scandinavian stylistic conventions.'

On the contrary: their decoration style has much more in common with the decoration found on proven West Slavic objects – vessels - made of clay.

Subsequently, two other researchers of these objects, Filipowiak and Tochilova, argued that the term *Viking Periphery Art* was more appropriate, a hybrid style that combined Scandinavian and West Slavic stylistic features. Leszek Gardela argues that this term also does not do justice to the unique character of the objects, because: ‘Knowing that the Western Slavs from Pomerania had a sophisticated maritime culture and technology, enabling them to travel widely and maintain close interactions with other peoples around the Baltic Sea, one should seriously take into account the possibility that Viking Periphery Art was actually created by Slavs and as a result of their prolonged contact with Scandinavians.’

I endorse his opinion, only on the basis of the following objects depicted in the following drawing.

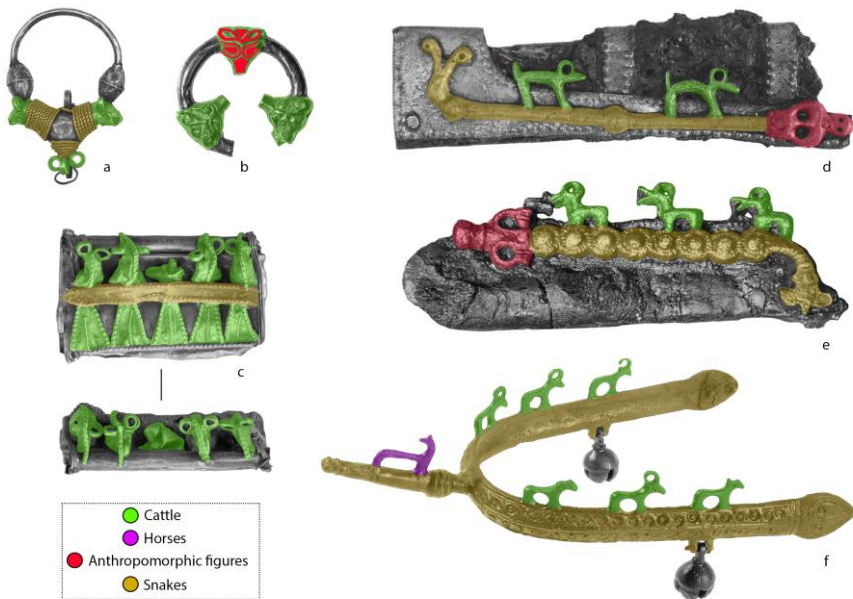
In the image on the next page we see various objects, both in shape and in decoration, that can be regarded as typical Slavic. The object a) shows a so-called *cheek plate piece* of the main carriage of a horse. The floral shape but also the shape of the cheek plate piece itself are very different from both the shape and the decoration on this type of object, found in (Anglo) Scandinavian areas or origin from there.



Object b) is a so-called *kaptorga* – a *kaptorga* was a small box for amulets and/or sacred herbs, which was worn around the neck by the Slavic population. The decoration shows two animal-like animals that have no basis in any decoration style in one of the well-known Scandinavian decoration styles from the Viking Age. Item c) is a beautifully decorated stirrup belt fitting piece. The decoration shows two swans wrapped around each other - presumably - with their necks in a floral style, which also has no basis in Scandinavian decorative styles from the Viking Age. Object d) shows a richly decorated bridle spur, which in terms of decoration – see also the ornamental equestrian prick's mark elsewhere in this book – has no analogy whatsoever with Scandinavian (style) objects and, according to Leszek Gardela, in terms of decoration and imagination, has its basis in Slavic mythology, in which – among other things – snakes play a leading role.

The objects e, f and g show the same completely different from the Scandinavian decoration styles, shape and decoration style that we see in the West Slavic objects.

The following image shows not only the decoration style of West Slavic artefacts from the Viking Age, but also an interpretation of the meaning of what is depicted, according to Leszek Gardela.



The 'visual grammar' of the West Slavic animal style in Poland. The illustration shows iconographic similarities between different types of archaeological finds: a – temple ring; b – belt divider; c – kaptorga; d-e – knife holders; f – zoomorphic trace. Visual design Leszek Gardela.

Illustration courtesy of Leszek Gardela ©

Leszek Gardela and Kamil Kajkowski, among others, believe that the depiction of figures on the spurs of splendid equestrian spurs found in Lutomiersk, Poland, represent a model of the pre-Christian Slavic cosmos. They identified the figures as cattle, snakes, and horses; animals that played a crucial role in the Slavic worldview. And they considered the wavy lines on the arms of the tracks to be water, an element that plays a prominent role in the aforementioned Slavic cosmogonic mythology. The horse on the spur stimulus is interpreted as a mediator who can travel between the worlds and as a being who took on the role of *psychopompos* or 'carrier of souls'. The cattle depicted on the arms of the tracks were seen as animal incarnations of human souls; Ethnographic sources suggest that the Slavs believed that after their death, they would turn into cattle and spend their days grazing on a supernatural pasture. The (winged) serpents on the belts of the tracks were seen by researchers as animal images or *avatars* of the divine adversaries of the cosmogonic myth - God and the Devil - who were engaged in a cyclical struggle for domination of the world.

The knowledge about typical objects from the (West) Slavic area could become corrupted or otherwise consciously difficult to understand. Through influences from both outside and within contemporary research. In the run-up to and in the Second World War – in this case Poland – was hit hard in more than one respect.

The Nazi regime became very interested in what was or could be in Polish soil. However, not for the glory of Polish historiography, but for the greater glory of the Germanic narrative. Intensive excavations took place and objects found were immediately marked as 'Scandinavian' or 'Viking', deliberately trying to strip them of their true origin, based on shape and/or decoration. In doing so, it deliberately portrayed

the Slavic culture as inferior to the Germanic culture. Even after the war, the term 'viking' was still a popular catch-all term for quite some time, because the mere mention of this word caused great excitement and the release of financial funds for the excavations. Only very gradually – and actually only in the first quarter of the 21st century – academic dissent emerged, the found objects were re-examined and provided with their correct apolitical context and stylistic decoration categorization.

Yet it could still change and around the turn of the millennium two Ukrainian researchers wrote about an object found in Ukraine in 1848 that it would not be authentic and must have sprung from a 19th century romantic idea and the need to link an appealing - supposedly contemporary - object to it. Did a political agenda also play a role in this, which did not want to accept objects found in Ukraine as being Slavic? This is the so-called *Zbruch idol*. What exactly is depicted on this – now proven to be from the 9th century – has always been and remains a subject of debate.

In addition, it sometimes seems, and this occurs on several levels in many scientific fields, that the firm conviction of one researcher sometimes has to be criticized by another who wants to unleash his or her own vision on it and thus wants to be immortalized. After all, a researcher who is not stubborn is not a researcher..