

SPECTACULAR
VISUAL GUIDES



A VIKING TOWN



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GREENLAND



Inuit peoples



ICELAND

Iceland was a Viking colony, settled by farmers from Norway around AD 874. They drove away the Christian hermits – monks from Ireland – who lived there.

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Route of Leif Eriksson's voyage



Native American peoples

NORTH AMERICA

VINLAND (NEWFOUNDLAND)

Around AD 1000, Viking adventurer Leif Eriksson set out from Greenland to look for a mysterious western territory, reportedly seen by Bjarni Herjolsson, a travelling Viking merchant. Leif reached North America, and set up camp in a place he called 'Vinland' (present-day Newfoundland). He was the first-known European to set foot in America, almost 500 years before Christopher Columbus made his more famous voyage.

THE VIKING WORLD

The Vikings lived in northern Europe, in the countries known today as Norway, Denmark and Sweden. They also established scattered settlements all round the shores of the Baltic Sea – in present-day Lapland, Finland, Russia, Latvia, Estonia and Germany. The Vikings' ancestors had lived in this cold northern region for centuries, but from around AD 800 to 1100 the Viking peoples grew more numerous and more powerful. In search of land for farming, they migrated to Scotland, Ireland, eastern England, Iceland and Greenland, and set up new Viking kingdoms there.

Some adventurous Vikings travelled further. They sailed hundreds of miles south, and into the Mediterranean. A few even reached America. Viking merchants made their way through dense Russian forests and along frozen rivers to Kiev and Novgorod, where they met Middle Eastern traders with goods from India and China. They also made the long journey overland to the city of Constantinople (modern Istanbul).

The Viking homelands were neighbours, but each was very different. Norway was wild and mountainous, with deep fjords along the western coast. North-western Sweden was also mountainous, but there were lakes, woods and meadows in the south and east. Denmark was low-lying, with sandy heaths and fertile fields.



VIKING HOMELANDS

DENMARK

GERMANY

AFRICA

ARABIA



At Hedebý, fresh water for drinking came from wells deep underground. They were lined with planks of wood. Water was hauled up to the surface in wooden buckets. The stream that flowed through the centre of Hedebý also provided fresh water. It was not safe for people to drink, but was used for washing clothes and to supply drinking water for animals.

Many Viking craftsmen and women worked at home, and many Viking houses were built with barns, storage sheds and workshops next door. Crafts such as metalworking and leatherworking could be noisy, smelly and dirty. So some towns were 'zoned', that is, divided into quiet residential areas – where rich merchants lived – and busy, messy industrial districts, where blacksmiths, cloth-dyers and tanners lived.

HOUSES AND STREETS

HEDEBÝ'S WEALTHIEST inhabitants – who were merchants and craft workers – lived in the centre of town in well-built homes facing the busiest streets. They could afford spacious plots of land, so their houses were set back a little way and surrounded by wattle fences, for privacy and security. Storage sheds and workshops were built close by. Merchants and craft workers did not usually keep much livestock – perhaps just a few chickens, a cat (to chase rats and mice away from valuable goods) and a guard dog. However, there were a few farmhouses, with stables, cattle stalls and barns, towards the outskirts of the town.

An average merchant's house measured 6m wide and 15m long. Inside, it might have two or three rooms; the largest contained a hearth in the centre. Some houses also had separate clay ovens for baking bread – these would have provided extra heating, too. Many wealthy Hedebý houses had their own wells.

Poor citizens lived in simpler, smaller homes: wattle-and-daub single-room huts built over a sunken pit, about 3 metres wide by 3 metres long, with a smoky hearth in the corner. Houses like this, built far beyond the prosperous centre of the town, must have been cold and damp in winter.

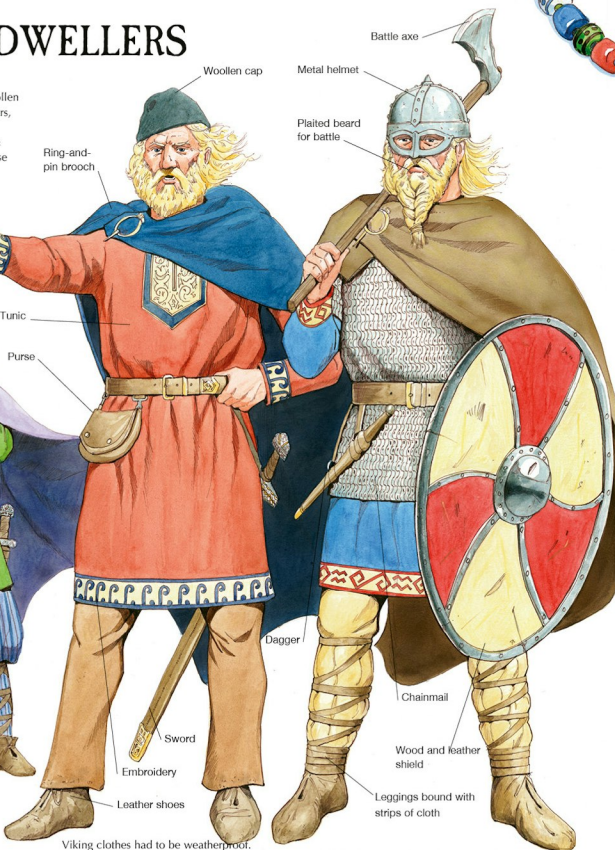
Most houses, even in towns, had fenced-off plots of land where families kept chickens, pigs and cows to provide eggs, meat and milk.

TOWN DWELLERS

This jarl can afford a fine woollen tunic with embroidered borders, and a thick cloak. In winter, he will wear furs. He carries a magnificent sword, and a purse full of silver coins.



This travelling merchant is wearing Slav-style baggy trousers and hat. Vikings captured the Slav peoples of eastern Europe to sell as slaves. Our modern word 'slave' comes from their name.



Viking clothes had to be weatherproof.

Men and women wore thick knitted socks. Leather for shoes was waterproofed with seal blubber.

Warriors wore chainmail armour or thick leather jerkins, and carried helmets, shields and swords.

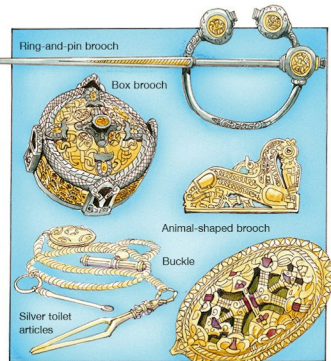


Men and women liked to wear jewellery. It looked good, and displayed their wealth. This necklace is made of glass beads, gemstones and fragments of finely worked silver.

Men pinned their cloaks with ring brooches. Rich women wore buckles to fasten their tunics, and box brooches, with beauty aids like tweezers hanging on silver chains.



Viking women wore several layers of clothing for warmth. First, a long dress of linen or wool, then an over-tunic, then a cloak. They might wear loose trousers underneath their dress. Married women covered their hair with a scarf.



WHO LIVED in Viking towns? Mostly craft workers and traders, together with people such as butchers, bakers, builders and money-changers, who were useful to them or their businesses. There might be a few farmers and perhaps a few fishermen, too. Evidence from Kaupang in Norway reveals hardly any permanent house-sites, just rows and rows of merchants' stalls. There were certainly houses at Hedeby, but excavations in the town's cemeteries show that many important people in society, such as kings and jarls (lords), were missing from the community. They might visit the town, and offer it protection by their warriors, but they did not live and die there. In early Viking towns, priests, monks and nuns were often absent, too. In 827, a Christian missionary called Ansgar built a church at Hedeby, but he did not make many converts.

Some town-dwellers were rich, but others were very poor. Rich citizens lavished their money on magnificent display. Viking men as well as women enjoyed wearing fine, fur-trimmed clothes and eye-catching jewellery. Rich men also liked expensive, well-made armour and swords. But an old Viking story tells how poor people, unfree servants and slaves had to make do with tattered cast-off clothes.

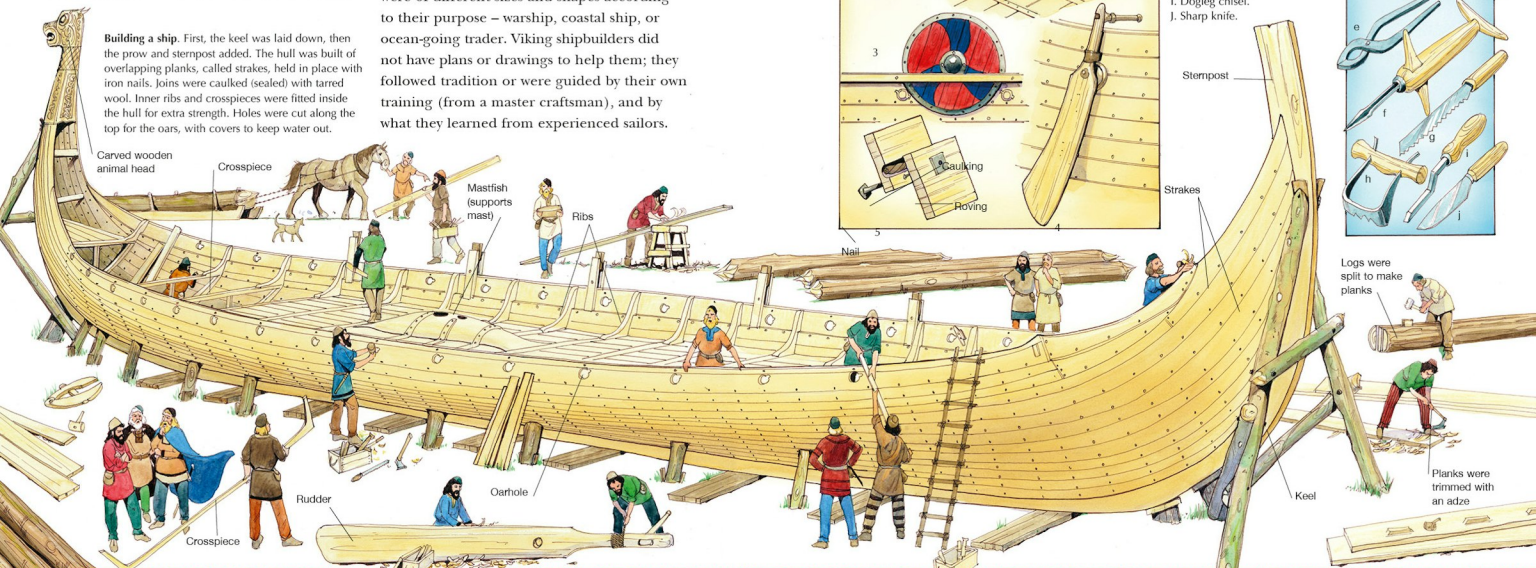
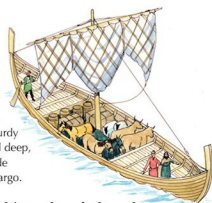
THE SHIPYARD

TRAVEL BY SEA was a vital part of Viking life, and many Vikings were expert sailors. People depended on ships for raiding, trading, fishing, exploring, and settling in new lands overseas. It was often quicker to travel by boat around the coast than to make long, difficult journeys overland across high mountains or through thick forests. Boats could also carry heavy, bulky loads, such as iron or grain, more easily and cheaply than a horse and cart – the only Viking alternatives. It is not surprising, therefore, that almost all towns were built at the water's edge.

Building a ship. First, the keel was laid down, then the prow and sternpost added. The hull was built of overlapping planks, called strakes, held in place with iron nails. Joints were caulked (sealed) with tarred wool. Inner ribs and crosspieces were fitted inside the hull for extra strength. Holes were cut along the hull for the oars, with covers to keep water out.

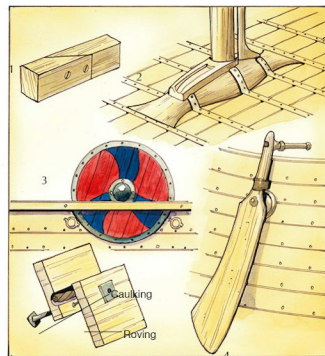
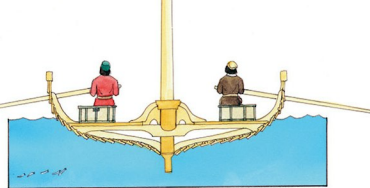
Many towns had shipyards – sheltered, shallow-water bays where boats could be built on the shore and then pushed easily into the water when they were ready to be launched. Viking ships were strong and well made. They were constructed from wood, and powered by a single canvas sail, or by rowers using oars. Ships were of different sizes and shapes according to their purpose – warship, coastal ship, or ocean-going trader. Viking shipbuilders did not have plans or drawings to help them; they followed tradition or were guided by their own training (from a master craftsman), and by what they learned from experienced sailors.

A *knorr*, or Viking trading ship. Its sturdy hull was wide and deep, designed to provide ample space for cargo.



Ship construction details:

1. Prow and sternpost were joined to the keel by overlapping joints.
2. The mastfish (a large block of wood held the mast steady).
3. Shields hung on pegs along the hull side kept the sea spray out.
4. Ships were steered by a rudder attached to the stern on the right-hand (starboard) side.
5. Joining strakes for the hull: a metal washer (called a roving) held each nail in place.



Sternpost

Strakes

Keel

Oarhole

Rudder

Crosspiece

Mastfish

Ribs

Carved wooden animal head

Crosspiece

Keel

Sternpost

Strakes

Keel

Oarhole

Rudder

Crosspiece

Mastfish

Ribs

Carved wooden animal head

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