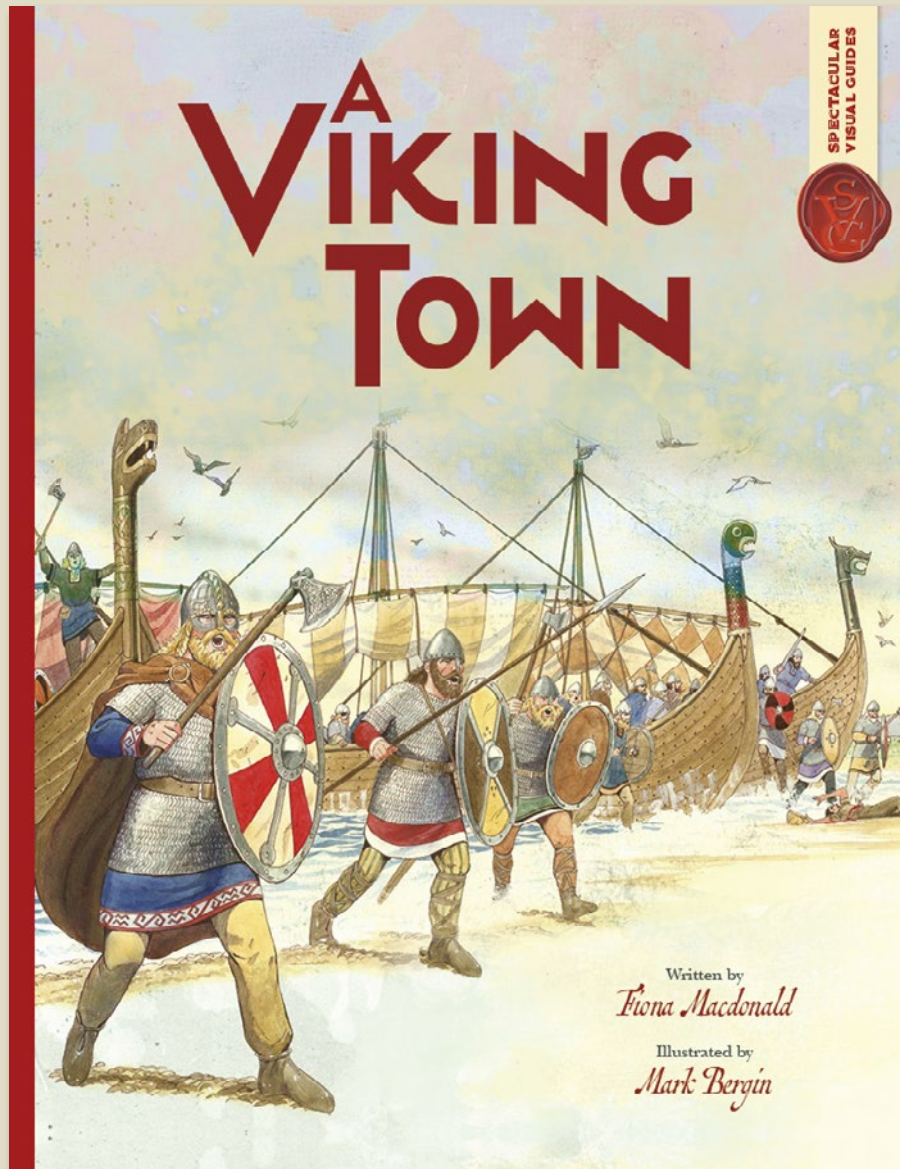


Spectacular Visual Guides: Viking Town



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THE VIKING WORLD

The Vikings lived in northern Europe, in the countries known today as Sweden, Denmark and Norway. They also established colonial settlements all around the shores of the Baltic Sea – as far as present-day England, Ireland, Rome, Latvia, France and Greece. The Viking colonies had lived in the cold northern regions for centuries, but from around 800 to 1100 the Viking people were more adventurous 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.

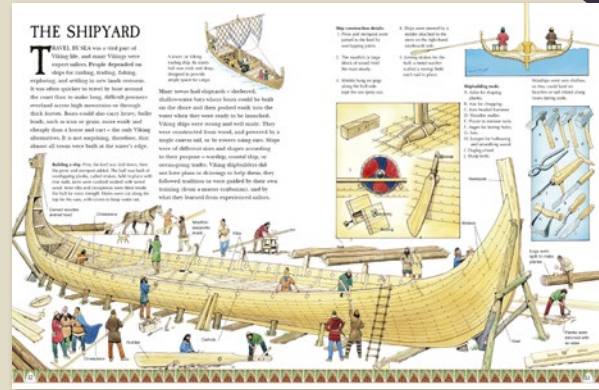
Some adventurous Vikings travelled further. They sailed hundreds of miles west, and across the Mediterranean. A few even reached America. Viking merchants made long sea journeys from Britain and along the coast to Italy and Portugal, where they set up trading centres to buy goods from India and China. They also made the long journey eastward to the city of Constantinople (Istanbul) in Turkey.



TOWN DWELLERS

WIKING LIFE IN a Viking town – a cluster of wooden houses and streets, together with people such as farmers, sailors, hunters and merchants, who were used to life in the forests and on the mountains. There might be a church and perhaps a schoolhouse, but the most important people in town, such as kings and lords, lived in the town's most important buildings. They might own the town, but they were not the town's rulers. In each Viking town, people made and sold their own goods, such as wool, iron, silver, gold, and other metals. In the 10th century, the king of Denmark was called Knute. He had a church in his town, but he did not make laws.

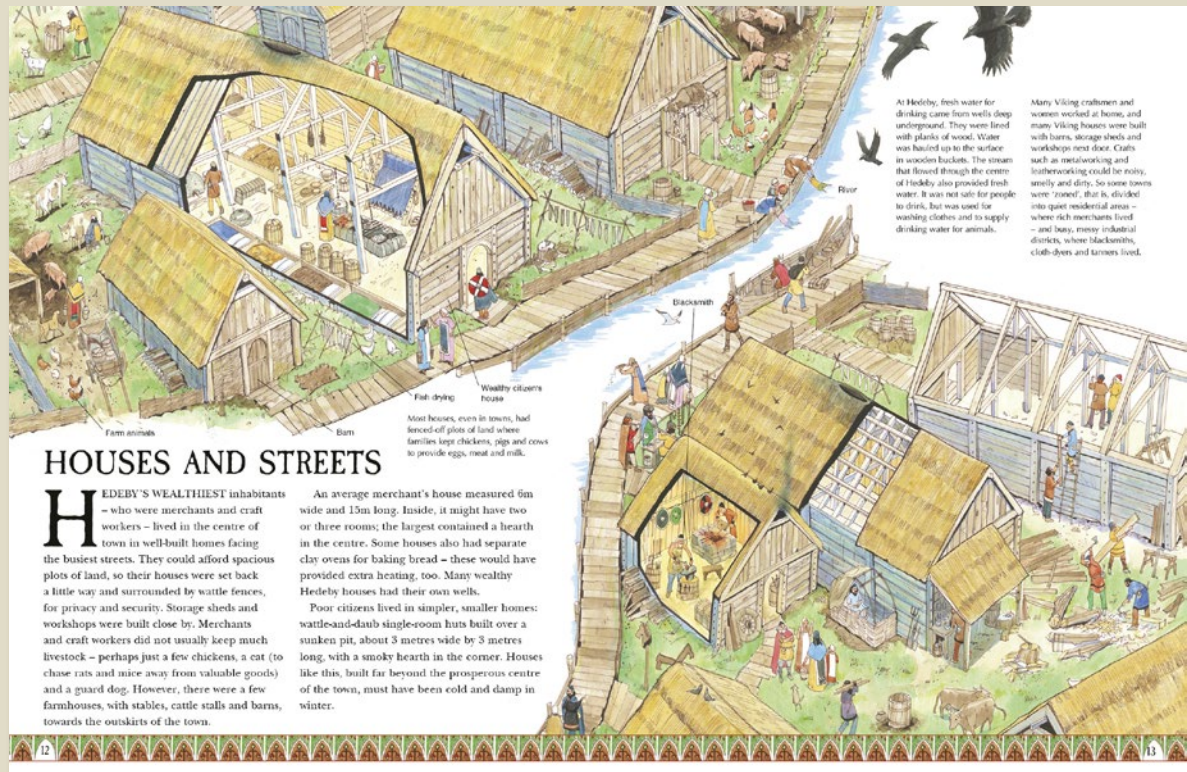
Most towns-dwellers were rich, but others were poor. Each citizen had their own work to do. Some were farmers, some were sailors, some were hunters, some were merchants. Each man also had his own work to do. Some were farmers, some were hunters, some were merchants. Each man also had his own work to do. Some were farmers, some were hunters, some were merchants. Each man also had his own work to do.



THE SHIPYARD

TRAVEL BY SEA was a vital part of Viking life, and most Vikings were expert sailors. People depended on ships for trading, fishing, exploring, and sailing to new lands overseas. It was often easier 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 iron, lead, wax, such as tallow or grease, more wood, and things than a horse and cart – the only Viking alternative. It was surprising, therefore, that almost all towns were built at the water's edge.

Most towns had a shipyard, a sheltered, shallow-water bay where boats could be built on the shore and then pushed out into the water when they were ready to be launched. Viking ships were strong and fast. They were constructed from wood, and joined by a simple system called lap joints. These were made of different sizes and shapes according to their purpose. A simple wooden slipway or cradle was used. Viking shipbuilders did not have plans of drawings to help them. They followed traditions or were guided by their own feelings. Their ancient traditions, and the fact that they had no written records, meant that the few boats that survived were made by hand.



HOUSES AND STREETS

HEDEBY'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 13m 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.

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 bars, 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, noisy industrial districts, where blacksmiths, cloth-dyers and tanners lived.

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