



Fröjel Newsletter, Volume 2, Issue 1

Welcome!

Welcome to the second Fröjel Newsletter. This time, and for some numbers to follow, I have chosen to display some of the results from the work at Fröjel, carried out during the short summer periods between 1987 and 1990. These results will be published in a book in the beginning of this year, sorry to say only in Swedish at the moment. But I plan to have it in English before the summer.

The main part of this Newsletter is devoted to the items of bone and antler found at Fröjel. But there are also some remarks about the next summer's excavation, where I invite you all to take part in our research project.

We offer, as last year, the possibility for anyone to take part in our excavation of the Viking Age harbour at Fröjel. Most of our effort next summer will be devoted to the question concerning the harbour itself, with its jetties etc.

I hope you will enjoy this second Newsletter. At the same time, I would like to wish you all a Happy New Year, and may it be a very prosperous year for you all.

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The excavations in Fröjel 1987 - 1990

The accomplishment of the excavations

As you already know, last summer, I started new archaeological excavations of the Viking Age harbour at Fröjel, on the island of Gotland, Sweden. These investigations are a direct continuation of the trial excavations we carried out in the years 1987 to 1990. Hopefully, I will be able in a couple of months to publish the results from these trial excavations in a book. The excavations took the form of archaeological courses in collaboration with the residential college for adult education in Hemse, southern Gotland. All together, we come to investigate some 290 m², which of course is only a drop in the ocean while the total settlement area is of around 50.000 - 60.000 m².



Some of the participants in the excavation at Fröjel 1990. This time, we investigated a Viking Age house from the 11th century. Photo D. Carlsson.

Excavations were carried out in different parts of the settlement area, to get a clear view of the settlements extension in time and space, and to get an idea of the settlements structure.

The first years excavations were carried out close to two smaller roads running through the area, one in the north and one in the south. This meant that our excavation areas, all together about 80 m², were spread out with a concentration to the north, and the south area of the settlement, as it can be detected by the phosphate mapping. The distance between the two excavation areas was about 300

metres. From the spread out of the excavation areas, we got a good indication of the extent of the settlement area.

During the following two years, we extended the excavations to the middle of the settlement area, but we also continued with search trenches, with the aim of finding the limit of the settlement, both in space and time. To investigate the question of the settlement being laid out according to a regularly plan, we extended the central excavated trench to cover some 140 m².

The last year, meaning the year 1990, the main point in the investigation was around the school and the schoolmaster's house, not far from the 12th century church in Fröjel. We know by the fact that many artefacts from Viking Age had been found in the area, that it might be the place for an early churchyard, or at least the place for Christian burials. To follow up the this question, a north south trench was laid out over parts of the schoolyard. As a result of this, we found 7 skeleton, all laying in an east-west orientation, with their heads in the west; clear signs of a Christian way of burial.

All archaeological excavations come up with something unexpected. So also in this case. During the very last weeks in 1990, we carried out a trial trench of a strange small plateau, in the corner between the schoolmaster's yard and the old road passing the area. There were no sign at the surface of anything peculiar under the turf, but it turned out that immediately under the turf, there were remains of a very well built stone building, consisting of one meter wide walls of stones. To that must be added that under the house, there was a stone built cellar, with a well-laid stone floor and numerous artefacts.

In spite of the rather small area we came to excavate during these years, one must say that the results from the excavation was more than we could dream of. Besides the traces of an immense settlement, we discovered two, above the surface, invisible cemeteries. We also made some trial excavation of an early Christian churchyard with late Viking Age graves and the ruin of an Early Medieval building, obviously the vicarage in Fröjel.

All together, we found something like 6000 artefacts, not counting many kilos of bones, flint, slag, charcoal and burnt clay. The artefacts resembles to a very high degree what have been found in other, contemporary places around the Baltic Sea, not at least Paviken and Bandlundviken on Gotland, Birka and Sigtuna in the Middle Sweden area, and Novgorod in Russia. The material in Fröjel clearly shows the international character of the place.



Two animal headed brooches from one of the female graves investigated in 1988. These brooches are typical for the Gotlandic woman in the Viking Age. These are from the 10th century, and made of bronze. Photo Dan Carlsson.

If one put all the results together from the four years of excavations in Fröjel, We can conclude that the oldest activities in the area can be dated to the so called Vendel period (550 - 800 AD), even from a little older period (6th century), when one include a brooch from the 6th century. The harbour and trading place at Fröjel comes to an end during the 12th century. The main point of activity seems to be 11th century.

Bone and antler handicraft

Introduction

Bone and antler from wild animals, as well as from domesticated animals have been an important part in all handicraft during prehistoric times and make up an extensive proportion of material found at all trading places from Viking Age. It is normally a well preserved material, but often we do have problem to distinguish what is to be seen as "normal meat bones" from what is reduced and semi-manufactured products, for instance from the making of needles.

An important question in this respect is if the material can give any idea of the questions concerning local production, or if the artefacts have been imported as finished products.

The total material from bone and antler handicraft coming from the excavations in Fröjel during our trial excavations between 1987 and 1990, are all together 205 posts, which is about 3% of the total material registered. I will in the following pages give some information about the artifacts we have found at Fröjel made of bone or antler, to give you an idea of what the material in a place like this looks like.

Combs

The combs can be divided in different groups, according to form and constructions. There are two main categories; the single comb, and the double comb. Then the single combs can be divide in several under groups, but for simplicity, I put them together.

Single sided combs

All together, there were 9 single sided combs discovered at the excavations (maybe 7, while two fragments were found very close to each other, and might be form the same comb). One almost complete comb was found (F3723). It was 17 cm long, with sides put together with bronze rivets, at a distance between them of 1.3 - 2.0 cm apart.



One of the very well preserved single sided combs. This one (number F3723) was 17 cm long, and made of bones with bronze rivets. Drawing Marie Östberg.

At the far end of the combs sides, there were three diagonal lines and inside these lines made in an angle. One parallel line runs along the combs long sides. The teeth of the comb is coarser on one side, and thinner on the other side, as is normal for this kind of combs.

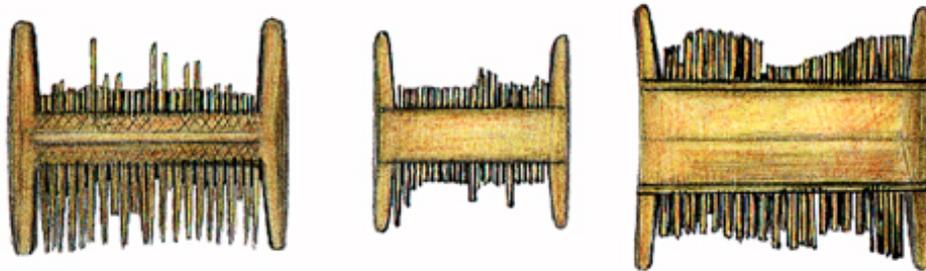
Among the single sided combs, there are two more combs with ornamentation, one of them put together with bronze rivets in a tight row. It is ornamented with a line along the two sides of the comb (F1099). The other has rivets of iron, and is ornamented on the middle of the comb with four transverse lines (F3744).

The remaining is combs are not having any ornamentation. All of them have bronzes rivets, and one of them is hexagonal in cross section.

We have also found some pieces of comb cover, one of them having ornamentation in the form of dots and circles (F2323). We have not been able to find out if some of the combs and the comb covers belong to each other. The fragments are all too small.

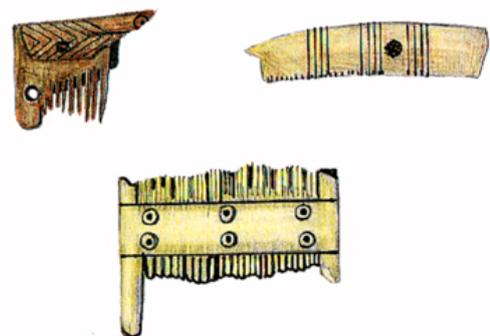
Double sided combs

Another usual form of comb in Fröjel is the double sided comb. All together we found 7 combs of this kind, of which two are rectangular with straight sides and a rhomboid cross section. They are decorated with parallel lines at the base of the teeth. Two other combs are like these ones, but with a little more concave sides. One very worn out comb with a flat cross section has an ornamentation in the form of two parallel lines along the base of the teeth, and there is also a hole for hanging the comb in a belt or alike.



*Three examples of double sided combs, found in the cultural layer at Fröjel. Scale 1:1.
Drawing Marie Östberg.*

The combs are made of antler and in one case maybe of bone. The most common material at this time for making double sided combs was the antler of elk. If this is the case in Fröjel, we haven't been able to find out. Among the artefacts, there are several fragments of half finished combs, as well as raw material in the form of an antler top of red deer (F3769). All this gives a clear hint that combs have been manufactured at the site.



Some other examples of combs from Fröjel. Two different kinds of single sided combs at the top, and a broken double sided comb at the bottom of the picture. Drawings Marie Östberg

The forms of the combs, specifically the double sided combs, can be seen as international. They are in use in most part of northern Europe at this time. The single sided combs are as a rule older than the double sided combs, which means that the single sided combs at Fröjel are from the Viking Age in general, while the double sided combs are from Early Middle Ages.

Pins and prickers

An extensive material of worked antler and bones are made up of needles and prickers of different forms and design. All together, we found 26 needles with a hole in the end, 17 without this hole and also 6, what we call prickers.



Some of the pins and prickers found in Fröjel. All together we found something like 40 pieces. Scale 1:1. Drawings Marie Östberg

Beside these, we also found a huge amount of fragments of needles (30 pieces). We do have a problem here, because many times it is very difficult to separate a needle or a pricker from a natural bone.

The needles are made of bone, antler or ivory. Ivory in this connection means the tooth bone, in this case probably from the tooth of a walrus. Most of the different types of needles can be found on every Viking Age, or Early Medieval settlement. In the case of prickers, the same type has been in use from the Stone Age to the Late Middle Ages, meaning that it is impossible to get a clear dating of this kind of artefacts.



Gaming pieces and dices

Two onion-shaped gaming pieces and one dice are part of the artefacts found in Fröjel. The gaming pieces both have a small hole in the bottom. They are 2,5 cm high. The dice is small, almost cubic and with the eyes placed one against two, three against four, and five against six.



Two playing or gambling pieces comes from the cultural layer. They are of a sort rather common in Viking Age. Made of bone. Scale 2:1.

Drawing Marie Östberg.

Both the gaming pieces and the dice are made of bone. The gaming pieces are probably elaborated, which can be seen from the hole in the bottom of the pieces. The dice is of the younger kind and belongs to Early Middle Ages, in this case probably the 12th century.



A dice from Early Middle Ages, around the 12th century. It is of a sort were the number one is in front of two, three of four and so on. Scale about 2:1. Drawing M. Östberg

Spindle-whorls

Spindle-whorls and loom weights of bone, clay or stone are among the most common finds on settlements from the Iron Age. Equipment as spindle-whorls are seen as a sign of a permanent settlement.



Three examples of spindle-whorls found in Fröjel. These ones are made of bone. Scale 1:1. Drawings Marie Östberg.

In Fröjel, we have come across all together 18 pieces of spindle-whorls. Thirteen of these are of stone, which means limestone, and 5 of bone. Most of the latter category are made of the joint-capsule of cattle.

Miscellaneous

Besides clearly recognisable objects, one always finds a number of artefacts which are very difficult to explain, either because they are not known from earlier excavations, or because it is just a fragment of an object.



Among many different things found in Fröjel, we have found four pieces of bones with drilled holes. One of the bones is obviously from a bird. One interpretation that is easily at hand is that it is some kind of flutes, while we know that they existed during the Viking Age. But it can also be a weaving shuttle of a kind that still exists on Island. Or it might also be a kind of spool of thread.



One of the many strange artefacts made of bone that we have found. It is rather small, and the reverse side of it is flat. It has obviously been fasten to something as a kind of decoration. Scale 2:1. Drawing Marie Östberg.

Semi-manufactured products and raw material

An important part from many trading- and manufacturing places is the debris, which comes out of the production of different artefacts made of bones and antler, as well as from metalworking. Fröjel is no exception to that role.

A substantial number of artefacts (about 50) are of the category semi-manufactured items, as from comb making and making of pins. There is, among many others, a 6 cm long piece of a red deer antler(F3769), another piece of a cut off tip of another red deer antler (F3774), a cut off piece of an epiphyte of a cow (F3779).

All these debris point to the conclusion that it has been an extensive manufacturing of different items in Fröjel, not at least combs. And some of the material has been imported, because there are no elk or red deer on Gotland, and never have been.