

Fröjel Discovery Programme 2000 Report 1

For the third year in a row, archaeological excavations have been carried out at the Viking Age harbour and trading place at Fröjel on the island of Gotland. The harbour settlement covers an area of about 60.000 m² and consists of extensive traces of settlement as well as of graves from the period about AD 600 – 1180.

This year's archaeological excavations concerned both houses and graves and were carried out during an 11 week long period of excavation. The excavation took the form of field courses for archaeology students from all over the world. All together, some 100 person took part in different courses connected to the archaeological excavations.

The excavations were rather extensive and all together 11 graves and remains from several buildings from Viking Age were investigated. The excavated graves can be dated to the 9th and 10th century and consisted, with one exception, of females, richly equipped with artefacts. The only man among the females was lying on top of one of the female graves, obviously with purpose. The osteological investigation indicates that the man and the woman under him might have been related to each other.

The females were as a role richly equipped with many well preserved jewellery like animal headed brooches, chains, knives and beads etc. The man, who was rather tall (some 180 cm) has been buried without any objects at all.

The investigation of the settlement gave a clear indication that the settlement had been laid out in a regular pattern along streets and allies in a town like pattern. Huge postholes indicated that several of the buildings have been of impressive construction and size. From the excavation, there are registered some 5000 artefacts, mostly of iron. The find material gives a clear indication of many different activities being carried out on the site, not at least handicraft in many different forms.

At the moment, we are carrying out the analyses of last summer's excavation, and at the same time we have started to plan next summer's field courses. Like this year, we will also next year have international field courses open to archaeology students and experienced amateurs from all over the world.



Two experienced excavators who have participated in Fröjel for many years; Sture Carlsson (to the left) and Leif Kindahl. Photo: Dan Carlsson



Mikke Brännström and Lotta Öhman working with the documentation of the house in the enclosed pasture. Photo: Dan Carlsson

During last summer's excavation, we had a short article every week in the local newspaper about the excavation and some of the artefacts we found. In a couple of reports, I will present a summary of the result of the excavation in 2000, and give examples of different kinds of artefacts from the harbour and trading place at Fröjel. A more elaborated account of the result will have to wait until the beginning of 2001, when Tove Eriksson and Carina Dahlström have finished the final report of last summer's excavation.

Week 26

This year's excavation started with the help of students from the College of Adult Education at Hemse. The excavations were mainly carried out in three different areas. First, we continued the excavations of the northern grave field, where the goal was to get a clearer picture of the spatial arrangement of the graves and the distribution between female and male graves. Secondly, we extended the investigated area in the south, with the aim above all to get a clear view of the orientation and extension of the settlement here.

A third area of investigation was a minor area in a closed pasture where we earlier only had made minor excavations. The advantage of excavating here is that the area never have been cultivated, meaning that all the traces of settlement and other activities are so much more untouched and to a much higher degree preserved until today. From the excavation at this site, it was clear that the material was to a very high degree in good condition. As an example, we found two fully preserved crucibles, something that would never be the case if we have found these artefacts in the ploughed area. With this first report, I will shortly present the results from the excavation in the pasture and to present some of the artefacts we found. During the excavation of the house in the pasture, it was soon clear that the house contained several rather unusual artefacts from the 11th and 12th century.



A well-preserved strap-end fitting made of bronze. Likely from the late Viking Age, the 11th century. Photo: Dan Carlsson

been found in the youngest layer at Eketorp, the fully excavated fortress from Iron Age on the island of Öland in the Baltic Sea.

Frequent objects in Fröjel are belt buckles of different forms and materials. Here a beautiful and well-preserved belt buckle of bronze, found by Lotta Öhman. Photo: Dan Carlsson



Leif with one of many finds of bells that we have found in Fröjel. They are usually of bronze but we have also found gilded bells.

Photo: Dan Carlsson

Among other things, we found a well-preserved strap end made of bronze, but also several finger rings as well as beads and many pieces of combs. One of the signet rings found had an inlay of a piece of blue glass. The finger ring can be dated to the 12th century. The same kind of finger ring have



Another very fascinating object found here was a pendant made of a coin, minted around the year AD 1000 for King Ethelred of England. The same kind of pendant was found at the very early Christian churchyard in the vicinity of the trading place, and partly excavated a couple of years ago. It is to be found in the garden of the school teachers house.

All together, the house excavated in the pasture was obviously a kind of a workshop for melting metals, dated to the 11th and the 12th century. In close connection to the investigated building, there are several other buildings, forming a line along the road that once past the area. None of these other houses have so far been excavated, but we might come back to this area the coming summer.



The house contained many complete objects, as this beautiful signet ring, mounted with a piece of blue glass. Photo: Dan Carlsson

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Dan Carlsson
dancarlsson@me.com