

Report 3, 24th of July

Houses, graves and blown up stones!

Dear friends,

When we started the excavations this year, I had rather high intentions, saying that I would have one report each week. But as you have seen, I haven't been able to fulfil my intentions. A trip to Italy to discuss an exhibition about the Vikings, that we are going to have in the town of Capua, interfered with the writing of reports. Lots of good food, nice wine, and an extremely friendly reception, made me forget Fröjel for a week.

Anyway, the work at Fröjel has gone on all the time, and thanks to very good excavators, we have come rather far. As you might remember from my first report, the aim of this year's excavation was to find out more about a possible harbour place, and also to learn more about the oldest phase of the settlement, meaning the time around the 7th to 8th century. We have also been working in areas between those we excavated in earlier years, with the aim of getting a better picture of the structure of the settlement.



Now, let me begin with the question of the “harbour”. From an aerial photo taken in 1989, we could see, close to the former shoreline, some strange dark spots in the form of round dots, some 2-3 metres in diameter (picture above). The situation in the landscape indicated that it could be traces of a jetty or something in connection to a harbour. However, the excavation turned out to show that it was something completely different. In our trench we found one of these dots, and after some days of excavation we got a rather good idea of what it was. It was places where someone had blown up big stones, and buried them on the spot. Remember that we are in a cultivated field, and to make the agricultural work easier, someone had blown the big stones to pieces. So much for a Viking Age jetty! Anyway, we also found several postholes in the area, a couple of fireplaces, bones and a weight of lead. And still, we haven't got a good explanation why these huge stones had been laying in a row. Archaeology is like that many times.

About the oldest settlement

From the beginning, I have thought that the oldest part of the settlement had been in the north, while here we have found artefacts from the 6th and 7th centuries. However most of these artefacts seem to have come from destroyed graves, so it has up to now been questionable if the northern area really had been the oldest part.

Looking for the earliest phase of a settlement is always tricky, not at least because later occupation tends to destroy earlier records. With the help of Jonas Ström from the Historical Museum we got some different ideas of where the oldest part of the settlement has been situated. He found, close to

each other, three Arabic silver coins from the end of the 8th century in an area we never had thought of. It was much more to the west of the main settlement area, and also in a lower area than the settlement from the 10th and 11th century. This was a bit astonishing, while we have to remember that we have a land elevation on Gotland about 2-3 metres in a thousand years. However, more and more we have come to realise that the situation in the Viking Age was different. The warm climate meant that the water level actually rose far more than was compensated by the land elevation, so we actually would have the older settlement (of the 7th and 8th century) laying below the younger settlement, in contrary to what one would believe.



Some of the coins found during the excavation this summer. Above the 3 Arabic coins from the area of the former shore line. They are from the end of the 8th century or the beginning of the 9th century. The coins below are German coins and from the 11th century, found at the central part of the settlement area. Photo D. Carlsson.

So, we changed the area for our investigations concerning the early phase of the settlement to a more westerly situation. So far, we have found some smaller artefacts, among them a conical bead from the 7th or 8th century, but also a half coin from the 11th century. Besides a smaller amount of artefacts, we have also revealed several smaller postholes. They are all of the same size, and have probably been used for posts in connection with drying of fishing nets.



The settlement pattern

The main part of the excavation so far has been in the central part of the settlement, with the aim of getting a clearer picture of the settlement pattern, and also of the extension of one of the cemeteries in the area. The excavation has been separated in two areas, some 200 metres from each other. In the southern part, we have discovered several houses, and a very rich material dating the settlement to the 11th and 12th centuries. Huge postholes, and clay floors give a good indication of the extension of the houses.

Among the artefacts, we have found several coins from the 11th century, but also an Arabic coin from the 9th century. Several small, but well preserved locks, as well as keys and other household artefacts. Steve found one of the most fascinating objects. It is a brooch in the form of a person holding two snakes or dragons, biting his or her head. The figure resembles to a very high degree an image on a picture stone, found in the eastern part of Gotland.

Steve, to the left, found one of the most fascinating objects. A human figure, holding two snakes or dragons in the hands, biting the head of the figure.





Erik, to the right, is working on a grave. Photo Dan Carlsson

Some of the artefacts found during the last weeks. Upper left shows a lens made of rock crystal (to the left) and a half finished rock crystal bead to the right. Upper right shows a running dog, probably a decoration for a purse or a belt. It is made of bone, and about 2 cm long. Lower left, a well preserved ring needle made of bronze, then a spindle whorl made of stone, and far right a beautiful strap end, decorated in late Viking style. All the objects belong to the 11th and 12th century. Photo D. Carlsson



The cemetery

In the northern part of the settlement area, there is a cemetery from the 8th to the 10th century, overlaid by a settlement from the 11th century. So far, we have just started to open up some of the graves we have found in the trench. They are typical for the area and the time period, and consist of inhumation burials in the ground, covered with stone packings. However, there is one grave that differs very much from the other ones. It is round, and very big; some 8 metres in diameter with a circular stone wall around the inner part consisting of very huge stones.

Next week will be the last week for the archaeological course, and it will mainly be devoted to finishing the graves, and to document all the postholes and other constructions in the different excavation areas. Then I guess, that some of us have to use one more week (at least) to finish it all, because it is always on the last day of the excavation that we come across something strange, meaning that we have to go on digging.



The picture to the left shows two graves. Karin and Angela are on their way to open one of the graves. Steve has found a well preserved skull in the southern grave. Photo Dan Carlsson

New silver hoards, again!

There is no place in northern Europe where we find so many Viking Age silver hoards, as on the island of Gotland. All together, there are about 700 hoards of silver and gold artefacts from prehistoric time, most of them being silver hoards from the Viking Age. Normally, one new silver hoard is found every year. This year will be somewhat extraordinary. In early spring, one new silver hoard was found in the southern part of the island. A week ago, two new hoards were found in the eastern part of Gotland, just 3 metres apart. The two hoards consist mainly of arm rings and silver bars, and weigh about 67 kilos all together, the biggest hoard ever found in Sweden.



One of the silver hoards contains mostly arm rings and silver bars. To the right, one of the many well decorated arm rings. This one is very broad. The other hoard consists mainly of Arabic silver coins. Photo Dan Carlsson

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