

Report 8, 23rd of August 1999

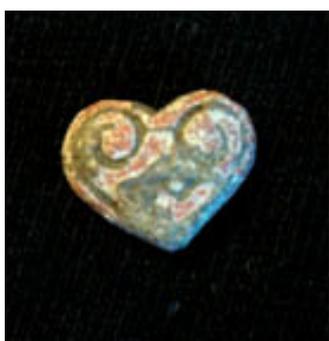
More artefacts

An excavation of a place like the harbour and trading place at Fröjel of course will result in a tremendous lot of material, not at least animal bones. We have during the excavation this year collect and register several hundreds of kilos of animal bones and slag and about 3-4000 artefacts. To take care of all this material and to analyse it and in the end publish it, is a tremendous work. And it would be impossible without the help of the archaeology students at Gotland University College. As a part of their education, they have to make some minor research projects, and several of these students have been working with material from Fröjel. I am utmost grateful for their work, without which I wouldn't have been able to keep up with the publication of reports.

During the autumn, I will transform as many as possible of these students reports into pdf files, and put them on our home page to download. sorry to say, they are all in Swedish, but normally there is an abstract and some times also a summary.

In the meantime, I will go on to publish reports from this years excavation. In one of my earlier reports, I said that we run out of time, and that we have to spare the huge grave in the form of a stone circle to next year. However, with the help of students from Gotland University College, we will excavate that grave in September. So, if you follow my reports, you will be able to find out in the end of September what was inside this very fascinating grave.

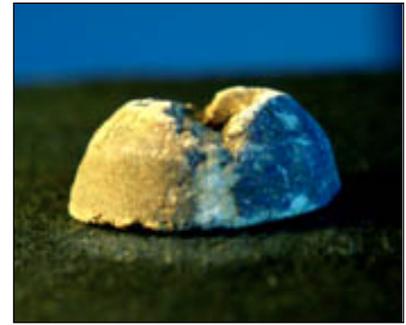
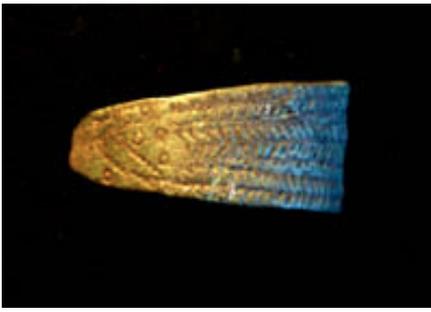
In the meantime, I have another report about artefacts found this year. As I said above, we have found something like 3-4000 objects. Most of them are small iron objects, to a high degree nail and rivets. But we also have found huge quantities of bronze objects. I will also put forward the question



of dating objects, while I got a rather interesting mail from Doug Strong, asking about belt decoration in Fröjel in comparison to belt buckles he had found in Bulgaria.

A very common type of artefacts that we find at Fröjel are different forms of belt decorations and strap ends. Most common are small rectangular bronze plate, about 2 cm long and half a centimetre width, like the one above, seen from two sides. They are normally fasten with bronze rivets. It seems that bronze mountings have been extremely common, not only for belts, but also for all kind of decorations, on wooden boxes, on equipment, like knives etc., and we find hundreds of pieces of this kind of artefact.

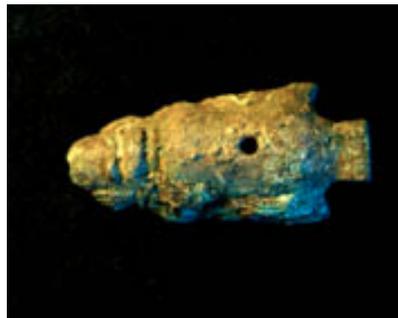




Also common on Gotland are so called oriental belt decoration, like the hart shaped bronze objects to the left above (scale little bigger than 1:1), and also strap ends of the kind displayed to the right. This one is made of silver. Photo D. Carlsson



Most of the artefacts from the excavation this year dates to the 11th and early 12th century, except for the graves in the northern area of the settlement. Above to the left is a piece of a typical decorated Viking bracelets made of bronze and dating to the 11th century. Top middle is depicting a very well preserved lock from 12th century, and to the right is a small spindle whorl made of amber. As I have said earlier, we have found many traces of rock crystal in the area, from raw material to finished beads and lenses, like this one to the right. Further to the right is a head of a dress pin from the 11th century. Photo D. Carlsson



We have found astonishing few weapons at Fröjel, in the graves, as well as in the settlement. Except for a small axe, and small pieces of a lans, the only objects that might be connected to war are about 40 arrowheads. One object found this summer is the figure to the right. It is a decoration from a spear in the form of a bear, made of bronze.

Dating of objects

One crucial part of all excavation is to get a firm dating of graves, settlement, different structures etc., to then be able to interpret the development of a site. In the absence of written records, we have to depend on archaeological investigations, combined with different modern dating methods like C14-dating, or, in lucky circumstances, dendrochronology. C-14 dating has the problem of being not too accurate, and it is also to a very high degree dependent on that you know exactly what you are dating.

For some areas, the artefact material is so complete and huge, and there are so many valuable investigations of the material, that you actually can have as good dating with the artefacts as with C14. One of these areas is Gotland. During the last one hundred years, there have been a tremendous lot of investigations of the artefacts. This has meant that we, at least for most of the Iron Age, actually can date objects inside a time span of about 50 to 100 years. This means that we actually have a better measurement in the objects than from C14-dating, and it helps us very much to follow the development on the islands closely.

The reason for this rather exact dating is the insight into the development of the style of specific artefacts over time. Then as now, fashion changed. And this has meant that for certain periods of the Iron Age, from around the birth of Christ to the end of the Viking Age, we can actually follow the development of different kinds of artefact. The reason behind this whole story is that nowhere in Scandinavia, have we found so many artefacts from the time in question. There are actually more objects found on Gotland during Viking Age, than for the rest of Sweden.

To give you an example of how a specific artefact changed through time, I will give some examples of the so-called animal head brooch, that only exist on Gotland. We can follow the forebear of the typical Viking Age animal head brooch some 5-600 hundred years back.

But there are also other questions connected to the development of fashion. We can many times see how one piece of jewellery obviously spread over a huge area, and that the exact dating in the different areas is not that easy to understand. Some days ago I got an e-mail from Doug Strong, giving examples of belt buckles found in Bulgaria, more or less of the same shape and pattern as the one we have found in Fröjel. But while we date them in Fröjel to the 11th century, he was thinking of the ones from Bulgaria to be from the 15th century. What we maybe see here, is the development over time of a rather common artefact. Because, when you look closely at the belt buckles from Gotland and the ones from Bulgaria, it is rather clear that they are not exactly the same, even if some of them seem so. The pattern of decoration differs, as do the form. I will give you some examples below, and you can judge by yourself.

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The animal head brooch has a very long story. I would say, it starts already in the Migration period, or even before. That means that we actually can trace the typical female brooch for the gotlandic woman almost 500 years back.



During the 8th century, the brooch has the form furthest to the left in the photo. The next one has lost the holes, but they are still visible in the form of "eyes". The second one can be dated to AD 725-800, as also the third one. Through time, the brooch change both size and paten, and get more and more elaborated. The fourth from left is from around AD 800 -900.

The lower row should be read from right to left, meaning that the right one is the oldest. It is decorated in what is normally called animal style. The brooch can be dated to the period AD 900-1000. The last one has lost very much of the decoration, and it is rather "simple" in style, normally that might be called a degenerated style. It can be dated to around AD 1000-1100. The figures are from the thesis of Anders Carlsson (Carlsson, A. 1983. Djurhuvudformiga spännen och gotländsk vikingatid. Stockholm Studies in Archaeology, University of Stockholm. There is an English summary).



These are all so called belt buckles of "Oriental Style". We actually are not quite sure they are coming from that area, or if they were made on Gotland with the Oriental pieces as a prototype. They are very common on Gotland, as well in the Baltic States and Russia. By all means, they reflect to a part the extension of the contacts between Gotland and the Baltic States, as well as with the Russian Empire around Novgorod and Kiev. The belt buckles of this kind are on Gotland dated to the 11th century, mostly because they have been found in graves from



that period. Now, if we compare these tiny small objects with what have been found in Bulgaria, as can be seen in the pictures to the right (the two at the bottom), there are clearly some resembles. But they are supposed to be from the 15th century, four hundred years later. Now, how are we going to understand these differences in time?

Well, one thing is clear; they are not exactly the same. Could this reflect the difference in time and fashion? Or are we dating the objects from one of the places wrong, or is it a combination of both. This is at the moment hard to say, but I want to point to the importance of getting as good as possible dating of objects, to understand the spatial diffusion of the objects and style.

Finally, I would also like to point to the importance to study archaeological questions in a much wider spatial sense that we normally do, while both people and fashion didn't stop at borders.

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