



POINTE-À-CALLIÈRE
Montréal Archaeology
and History Complex

YEARS
OF HISTORY
30

VIKINGS

DRAGONS OF THE NORTHERN SEAS

Exhibition until October 10, 2022



VIKINGS

DRAGONS OF THE NORTHERN SEAS

MAKING LANDFALL AT POINTE-À-CALLIÈRE!

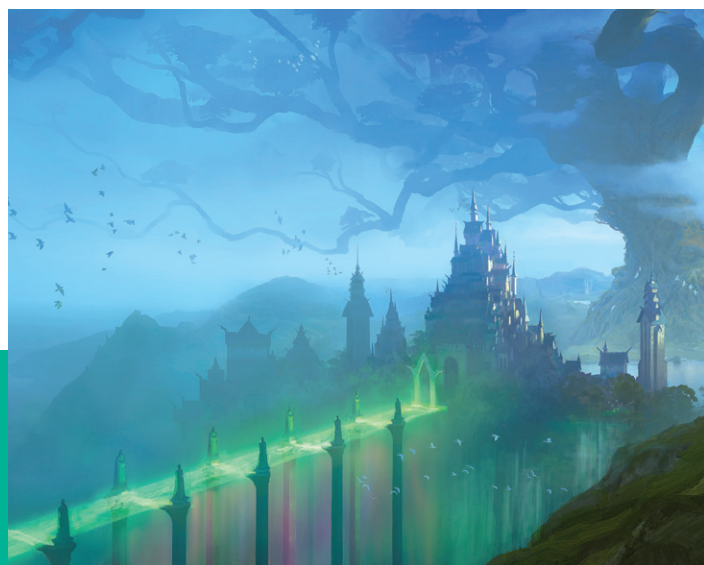
From the 8th century on, Vikings sailed the seas, carried out devastating raids, and set out to conquer great cities, playing a key role in European history. Today, the mere mention of their name—used to describe Scandinavian societies of the 8th to 11th centuries—fires the imagination, so strong is the impression they left behind! But what do we really know about them?

During the Viking Age, the Norse word “víking” was used in Scandinavia to describe people who went on expeditions abroad, by sea, to enrich themselves. Contrary to modern usage, it refers to a way of life or an activity, rather than to a people or a nation.

Artist's representation
of the Bifröst bridge
and Asgard, the world
of the gods.

Illustration by Gilles Beloeil
– Assassin's Creed® Valhalla

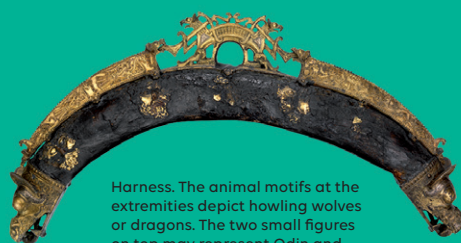
Presenting—for the first time in Québec—650 objects from the National Museum of Denmark's remarkable collection, the exhibition VIKINGS – Dragons of the Northern Seas paints a most complete portrait of this legendary people, immersing us in their fascinating world.



PART 01 ORIGIN SAGA

From oral tradition to literature

Icelandic sagas and Prose Edda, though written several decades after the end of the Viking Age, are invaluable sources of information on the mythology of Nordic societies. Blending myth and reality, prose and poetry, they set down in writing a vast oral work inherited from the Vikings. Passed down from generation to generation through the discourse of the scalds and through songs, the Vikings' cosmogony permeated their daily lives and greatly influenced their vision of the world. Other than through oral tradition, it was also brought to life in their art and their objects, in which divinities, animals, and mythical creatures are inextricably combined.



Harness. The animal motifs at the extremities depict howling wolves or dragons. The two small figures on top may represent Odin and the goddess Frigg.

Bronze and gold mounted on wood
Sillested Mark, Denmark
900–1000 CE



Borre Style pendant decorated
with a bear motif (associated
with Odin) or cat motif
(associated with Freyja)

Silver and gilt
Boeslunde, Denmark
800–975 CE



This large brooch with a dragon
head is unique in Scandinavia
and does not resemble any other
archaeological find, although its
style of ornamentation can also
be seen on some arm rings.

Gold and silver
Bornholm, Denmark
700–800 CE

PART 02

SAGA OF LIFE



Illustration by Tony Zhu Shuo - Assassin's Creed® Valhalla

Everyday objects, surviving evidence

As outward signs of wealth, Viking material possessions were substantial, sourced from their skilled and talented artisans, as well as from pillaging and trade. Social, economic, and political organization, the status of women, housing, occupations, leisure pursuits... Viking objects, jewelry, and finery bear witness to their daily lives and their status within the community.



Arm ring. Though they were common in Viking culture, we do not yet fully understand how they were used. Certain sources suggest that a chieftain would give his warriors rings to be worn visibly on the arm, symbolizing the bond between them, and guaranteeing their loyalty and obedience.

Braided silver
Højby, Denmark
Date unknown (Viking Age)



Key. After marriage, the wife became the bearer of the key to the household. This symbolized her status as manager of the domain. The key was worn outside her clothes to remain clearly visible.

Bronze
Date and provenance unknown
(Viking Age)

This fibula, typical of the Urnes Style, is found in several countries. It marks the end of the Viking Age.

Silver and bronze
Hasseris, Denmark
1040–1100 CE



PART 03

SAGA OF THE JOURNEY



Scale weight in the shape of an animal head.

Gilded silver
Date and provenance unknown
(Viking Age)

Off to conquer the world

The Vikings were highly skilled navigators, sailing the world, driven by a desire for adventure and the lure of profit. Many left their native Scandinavia to settle in newly conquered lands. Viking settlements can be found in England, Ireland, Scotland, France, the Netherlands, Russia, and even in North America—namely on the site of L'Anse aux Meadows, in Newfoundland. Their trade routes extended over thousands of kilometres. The biggest merchants travelled all the way to Constantinople and Baghdad, bringing back Arab coins in their bags.



Illustration by Raphaël Lacoste - Assassin's Creed® Valhalla

Brooch in the shape of a ship and horses or dragons. This horse-boat motif was very common in the Viking world and is sometimes associated with the god Freyr, who has a magical boat that folds up and fits in a pocket.

Bronze
Bornholm, Denmark
775–900 CE



Weather vanes mounted at the top of a ship's mast or bow indicated wind direction while adding a decorative touch to the vessel. This little horse would have been attached to an elaborate weathervane.

Gilt copper alloy
Lolland, Denmark
1000–1050 CE



Spindle whorl. As early as in 1021, Viking colonists settled in North America, in Newfoundland—several centuries before Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean. The Saga of the Greenlanders tells of how Erik the Red's son, Leif, was the first European to set foot on this "land of ice."

Soapstone
L'Anse aux Meadows, Canada
C. 1021
The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Museum Division



Illustration by Guang Yu Tan – Assassin's Creed® Valhalla

PART 04

SAGA OF THE END OF TIMES



Ulfberht sword. Used by elite warriors, it is said that these swords bore the first Western "brand name." The Ulfberht mark was a guarantee of quality, though it was occasionally copied.

Iron, crucible steel
Norway
9th or 10th century

The Vikings disappear...

In awaiting Ragnarök—the end of the world according to Viking mythology—death was an integral part of Viking life. A warrior's highest honour was to fall in battle, joining Odin in Valhalla. Vikings lived among their ancestors, buried with their personal belongings, evoking the gender, social class, and profession of the deceased. Burial mounds and tombs therefore dotted the landscape around the villages. Inhumation on a boat was considered to be the most prestigious funeral practice of all!



Ring pin with gripping beast ornamentation. Pins and brooches adorned the clothes of the deceased, whether buried or cremated.

Bronze
Sweden
850-950 CE



Disc brooch

Silver
Ketting, Denmark
875-925 CE

So, what became of the Vikings? In the 11th century, great kingdoms began to emerge in Europe and, little by little, Viking raids proved to be more difficult and less "attractive." Christianity took hold, to the detriment of the polytheist founding myths of Scandinavian culture. Lastly, Vikings adopted the ways of life of the regions in which they settled, blending into local populations. Nevertheless, their history and culture survive in our collective imagination, fuelling a fascination that has endured over the centuries. Still today, several cultural productions put Vikings in the spotlight: they remain a seemingly inexhaustible source of inspiration!

CREDITS:

Objects: © National
Museum of Denmark

Illustrations: Assassin's
Creed® Valhalla
– TM&Copyright © Ubisoft
Entertainment.
All rights reserved.