



Ulla Mannering

Fashioning the Viking Age

In September 2018, a new three-year research project (2018-2021) funded by the Velux Fonden was launched at the Department for Ancient Cultures of Denmark and the Mediterranean at the National Museum of Denmark. The general aim of the project *Fashioning the Viking Age* is to create new and archaeologically well-founded interpretations and reconstructions of Viking Age textiles and clothing.

By combining the latest knowledge of Viking Age textile and skin production in southern Scandinavia with analysis of a selected range of contemporary textile finds, the project will renew the dissemination of textile, skin and clothing design and transform this data into a format that can be used in exhibitions, teaching and popular visualisations of multifaceted life in the Viking Age.

In Scandinavia, the Viking Age is generally defined as the last period of the Late Iron Age ranging from AD 800 to 1050 (Jensen 2013). Even though the Viking Age is often treated and understood as a period with its own unique cultural development, its textile production was deeply rooted in the process and design traditions of the preceding period (Bender Jørgensen 1986). In order to understand the developments in textile production and clothing design that took place during the Viking Age, it is necessary to include data from earlier periods (Mannering 2017; Mannering & Skals 2018). Likewise, in recognition of the fact that the developments recorded in Viking Age cloth culture also had an impact reaching beyond this period, materials and sources from after it will also be included in the project (Østergård 2004). The project covers the period from AD 650 to 1200.

Most archaeological material and finds relating to the Scandinavian cloth culture is unequally represented in different contexts and geographical areas. In this project, the team will primarily work with finds

recovered from southern Scandinavia and present-day Denmark. This decision is based on the fact that regional differences in Scandinavian cloth culture are not yet fully documented and understood, and this presents a task beyond the scope of this project.

In popular dissemination, the term “Viking” is often used to denote the population living in Scandinavia during the Viking Age. In fact, this term was only used to describe the warriors and seafarers who raided and traded from their north European homelands across wide areas of Europe (Croix 2015). Today, the idea of the wild and fiery Vikings who created wealth and fame is cultivated in popular dissemination. But, at the time, the majority of the population lived and worked as farmers, fishermen and craftsmen in small-scale societies that depended on self-sufficiency. In this society, clothing, textile and skin production were integrated into agriculture, and it is the outcome of this and its associated cloth culture on which the project will focus.

In the Viking Age, society was divided into hierarchical segments defined by status and profession, and this structure is also visible in textile and skin production (Andersson Strand 2015). Textiles were needed and produced in many different qualities and for different purposes: clothing, the household, for warfare, transportation and trade. Glass beads, gold, silver and silk, commodities that played an important part in the clothing construction and the display of status and wealth, were traded from the south, most likely in exchange for slaves and fur from wild species such as beaver, fox and sable which were hunted in the northern regions of Scandinavia and Russia (Kovalev 2001; Vedeler 2014; Mannering 2015). It is the sum and meaning of all this data, which will create a new and clearer perception of Viking Age textile, skin and clothing production.

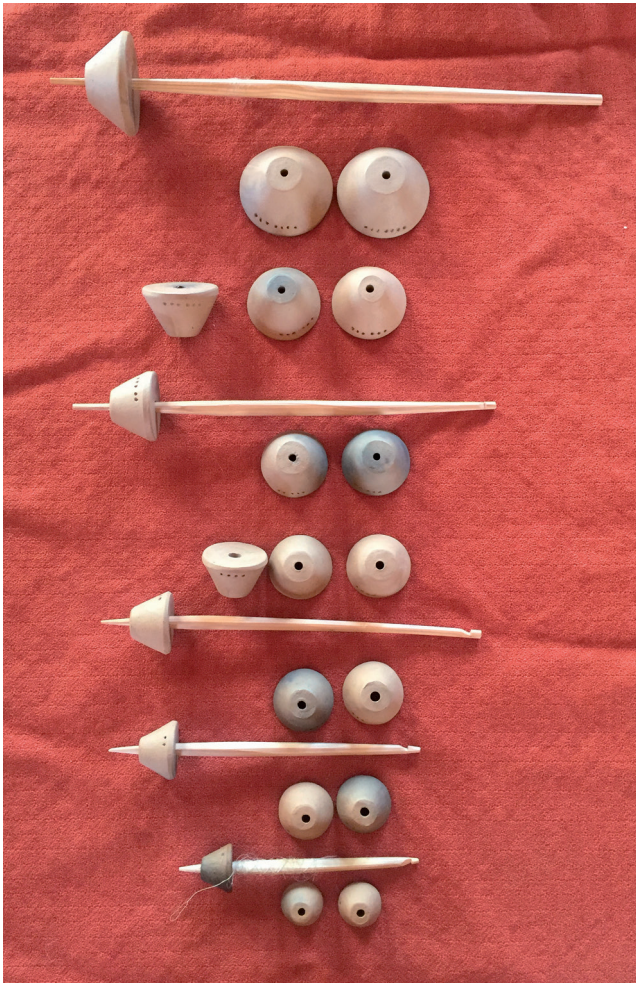


Fig. 1: Reconstructed Viking Age spindles and spindle whorls to be used in textile experiments in part 1 of the project (Image: Ida Demant)

The outcomes of the project will be achieved through the work and results of three sub-projects. Part 1: **Viking Age Textile Production** takes as its starting point the analyses of known archaeological finds of tools, textiles, skins and fibres from graves and settlements (see, for example, Bender Jørgensen 1986; Hägg 1984, 1991; Andersson 2003). These results will be combined with controlled fibre sorting, spinning (fig. 1) and weaving experiments in order to create a variety of textiles samples that convey tactile and visual aspects of the Viking Age cloth culture.

In Part 2, **Viking Age Male and Female Clothing**: Two reconstructions of complete men's and women's outfits will be produced. The reconstructions will primarily be based on data selected from the textile and skin fragments found in the Mammen and Hvilehøj (fig. 2) grave finds in Jutland, Denmark (Iversen et al.

1991; Krag & Ræder Knudsen 1999).

In Part 3, **Viking Age Clothing Catalogue**, the team will review the many different sources linked to Viking Age clothing design, including archaeological, iconographic and written sources (see, for example, Mannering 2017). The product will be an online open-access catalogue providing a new and updated foundation for future interpretations and reconstructions of Viking Age clothing in different societal and status groups.

In today's digital world and with the speed of information circulating in various international media, it is important to provide up-to-date information to aid understanding of the importance of archaeological finds and materials to the scientific world and the general public. Our past is fragmented and incompletely preserved, and it is our responsibility as researchers to make sense of and interpret it. This is definitely not an easy task, and it is difficult to answer in a single sentence the frequent question: "What did the Vikings wear?" Through the three sub-projects, we aim to provide well-founded and robust answers with new data to underpin our textile and clothing interpretations; data that have, for a long time, been demanded by fast-moving media, living history museums and reenactors. Thus, the project will, through its many different parts, give Scandinavian Viking Age textile research renewed focus and impact, and result in a new visual and tactile understanding of textile production and clothing which can be used in museums, media, research, and by the broader public.

The project is a cooperation between Ulla Mannering and Charlotte Rimstad, from the National Museum of Denmark, Eva Andersson Strand, from the Centre for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen, and Ida Demant, of Land of Legends in Lejre, Denmark (fig. 3). Irene Skals, who will undertake fibre analyses is also a member of the team, together with Luise Ørsted Brandt, who will analyse skin samples from selected finds from the Danish Viking Age. Lise Ræder Knudsen, who is a tablet-weaving expert, and other specialists including craftspeople, many from the Land of Legends, will be in charge of dyeing, embroidery, sewing leather, and the production of accessories and textile tools.

Follow the project at the CTR homepage (ctr.hum.ku.dk) or on Instagram@fashioningthevikingage. We also welcome applicants for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowships. If you have a research idea that falls within the scope of this project, pre-applications can be forwarded to evaandersson@hum.ku.dk at the latest by 1 April 2019. Applicants will be included in



Fig. 2: Textile and skin fragment found in the Hvilehøj women's grave dated to the 10th century AD (Image: Roberto Fortuna, National Museum of Denmark)

the CTR Marie Skłodowska-Curie workshop to be held later in the spring.

The project also invites masters students to choose topics related to the Viking Age for their final dissertations such as cloth cultures, tool technology,



Fig. 3: The project team (left to right) - Irene Skals, Ida Demant, Eva Andersson Strand, Ulla Mannering and Charlotte Rimstad (Image: Charlotte Rimstad)

textile production, or written sources related to clothing etc.

In the autumn semester 2019, the team will give a course in *Textile Archaeology – a Hands-on Approach* with the focus on this theme.

Fashioning the Viking Age also collaborates with the newly established network **Cloth Cultures in and Beyond the Viking Age** initiated by Eva Andersson Strand at the Centre for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen in collaboration with Ulla Mannering from the National Museum of Denmark, Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson from University of Uppsala, Amica Sundström from the Swedish History Museum, Stockholm in Sweden, and Marianne Vedeler from the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo in Norway. The aim of the network is to conduct front-line investigations and dissemination of scientific studies of clothing, household textiles, and textiles for warfare and trade. The network also offers a forum for discussion and dissemination (for more information see ctr.hum.ku.dk/people/ctr-networks/cloth-cultures-in-and-beyond-the-viking-age/).



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