

NETWORK for

Cloth Cultures In and Beyond the Viking Age

Resumé from

Workshop: Household Textiles

15th-17th October 2018, Stockholm & Sigtuna

Introduction

In October 2018 the network organised a workshop with the theme **Household textiles**

The aim was to explore the variety and function of household textiles in the Viking Age including the textiles` variety of functional areas, from practical purposes to storytelling and preservers of collective myths. Furthermore, the house as a three-dimensional context was considered and textiles became decisive elements in the shaping of a living space, not just in terms of functionality, but as a means of making a home. How was a room furnished and how did the people moving in the interiors of a house perceive it? where just some of the topics which were discussed.

Workshop participants :

1. Amica Sundström, Historiska Museet – **organizer**
2. Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, University of Uppsala & Historiska Museet- **organizer**
3. Ulla Mannering, Nationalmuseum of Denmark, Copenhagen
4. Ida Demant, Land of Legends, Lejre
5. Anna Beck, Museum Sydøstdanmark
6. Marianne Vedeler, Kulturhistorisk museum, Oslo
7. Eva Andersson Strand, Centre for Textile Research, Copenhagen
8. Linda Qviström, University of Stockholms
9. Anders Söderberg, Sigtuna Museum
10. Charlotte Rimstad, National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen
11. Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt, Riksantikvarieämbetet
12. Lisen Tamm, Sigtuna Museum

Short resumé

Monday, 15th of October

At 1 pm, most of the participants met at the restaurant *Elverket* in Stockholm. After lunch we went to the textile storage rooms in Historiska Museet, where Amica Sundström showed us many textile fragments from the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period, eg. the tapestry from Skog, the textiles from Birka and the clothing from Högum. After taking pictures and discussing the details of the weaving, sewing and the patterns, we went through the exhibitions to see furniture and decorations from the same periods. We finished with coffee and cake around 3 pm.

Tuesday the 16th of October

We met at 9.30 am in the textile storage rooms of Sigtuna Museum in Til. The day was dedicated to the workshop “Household Textiles in the Viking Age” and many interesting presentations were given.

Eva Andersson Strand began by presenting different sources to the use of household textiles – the archaeological textiles, the written sagas, the iconography and the preserved furniture. Many important questions: How were the tapestries used, what kind of other textiles were used in the houses, how did the use change through time and who made the textiles? The textiles from Overhögdal come “alive” when seen behind a fire. How were the textiles meant to be seen/experienced?

Marianne Vedeler talked about the placing and spatial function of tapestries. The Oseberg tapestries were excavated in 1904 and consist of more than 80 textiles fragments. The tapestries are quite narrow, between 16-23 cm, and consist of at least 3 different types, depicting processions. Perhaps they were placed near the king/chief and only used for special occasions. Through time, the tapestries became wider perhaps as a way of regulating the access to the story/history? The weaver can be seen as a manager of truth.

Linda Qviström talked about light and darkness in medieval buildings. In the Medieval Period it was not attractive to let too much light enter the houses. Narrow wall holes created enough light for people to orientate themselves, whereas larger windows were mainly used in representation rooms. Coloured window glass was used in churches. Darkness was not a problem, but affected the way people lived and placed their furniture. Everything had its place and work was adapted to the seasons and connected to social structures and everyday practices. A lot of the furniture had a 3D decoration, that could easily be found in darkness. Other senses than the visual were used.

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Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt had a presentation about Gotland’s picture stones, 700-1000 AD. The composition of the picture stones resembles the tapestries, both in symbols, format and interpretations. The motifs are sometimes difficult to interpret and the stones should ideally be watched in situ. By using a new camera and light method, it is possible to capture more details of the pictures. At the Overhögdal Tapestry, the word “Gudby” is written with runes underneath a house. Many of the motifs were created by using stencils, but there was also room for creativity. The motifs have long lives as common expressions.

Anna S. Beck took the discussion in a theoretical direction. She presented some results from her Ph.D., introducing us to the “Assemblage Theory” of archaeological houses. The house can be seen as an assemblage, with components (things, people, textiles ect.), relations and processes that all affect each other and need to be studied together. The assemblage changes with time. Things, incl. textiles, have a biography – a past, present and future that affects them. The textiles are components that are part of practices, they give the house meaning, hold memories ect. and create a home.

[Read more](#)

Anders Söderberg gave a short presentation of Sigtuna’s history. Founded around 970 AD, a Viking Age town. The houses were situated towards a main street – differently than in the earlier town of Birka. Finds of spinning and weaving tools, burned flax textiles, gold smith tools ect. Sigtuna may be an early king’s town, but the king’s residence is not documented.

Amica Sundström told us more about the textiles from Sigtuna. They were excavated with the single context method and documented carefully. Finds of tabby weave, basket weave, netting and small burned fragments with different textiles of each side.

Wednesday the 17th of October

At 9.30 we all met again in the textile storage rooms in Til, where we were allowed to see other finds from Viking Age Sigtuna, such as spindle whorls, loom weights, bone needles and bone combs. Afterwards, the presentations continued.

Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson gave a presentation about “House, hall and grave”. She underlined the importance of not only focusing on what is found, but also on what is not found during archaeological excavations. During the Viking Age, new house types emerged and the rooms changed. Smaller rooms can be created inside the house eg. by means of curtains. The hall was probably meant for special occasions only, used as a sort of stage for a play. The textiles could be removed and washed; they need to be cared for. Even in chamber graves, the decoration of the interior must have been important.

Afterwards, we were all separated into three discussion groups; one focusing on the small house, the other on the long house and the third on the hall. We discussed how and which textiles had been used in these three house types.

18th of October 2018/ Charlotte Rimstad



The participants

Future perspectives:

A session Household Textiles in and Beyond Viking Age will be organized at EAA 2019 in Bern for more information please see [Household Textiles in and Beyond Viking Age](#)

The organizers are:

Eva Andersson Strand, Centre for Textile Research, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Marianne Vedeler, Museum of Culture History, Univ. of Oslo, Norway

Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, University of Uppsala & Historiska Museet, Sweden