



Front page photo:     Displaying some of the paradoxes of the modern Viking: Old-looking items such as drums, sword, knife, horn, antlers, glass and silver. Some of these are copies of archaeological finds. As a contrast, there is also social media, a fiction/fantasy book, playing cards and a ‘new design’ Black Tower carton of wine.

# PREFACE

This thesis is based on fieldwork at “*Bardrsundr Museum*” from March until August 2015, and first of all I would like to thank the staff and volunteers who quickly included me in their work and lives.

I also want to give a big thanks to my supervisor(s) Mary Bente Bringslid (and Eldar Bråten) who were supportive and excited about the thesis from the very start. Thank you to Sam Dunn for inspiring me to study anthropology and to write about something I am passionate about, and thank you to my mother, father and siblings for always having been there for me. Thanks to M.B.F., K.O. and A.C.R. for constructive feedback.

Last, but not least, thank you to my best friends, you know who you are. Thanks for all your support through thick and thin and for all the help you have given me. And a special thanks for the beer (and mead) you’ve shared with me.

This is for the people who inspired me to time travel.

“Everything not saved will be lost”.

Nintendo “quit screen” message<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dedication from *The End Games* by T. Michael Martin.

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# SETTING THE MOOD

I'm standing in an open field. Around me I can see tents, most of them beige and with wooden framework. Some of the wood has dragon heads carved at the top and intricate designs going down the posts. It reminds me of mythical creatures like Jormundgandr, the snake that reaches around the world and bites itself in the tail. The smells are a mix of animal droppings, smoke from bonfires and fried meat. Or is it fish? Some of the tents are open and I can see small groups of people sitting around large round pots hanging from forged hooks over the fire. It's early in the morning; most people have probably not woken up yet and are still sleeping in their wooden beds hidden behind linen hangings attached to the wooden poles inside the tent. Someone makes a loud snore. I move closer to the camp. Someone is singing. It sounds familiar, like a folk song my mother sang to me when I was younger.

I sit down next to an older woman. She's holding a large bone needle and she is using it to bind together loops of thick woollen yarn<sup>2</sup>. The yarn is yellow and uneven in colour. "Dyed with birch," she says and keeps on stitching the yarn together. Over and under threads of yarn that have already been attached. "Socks for Olav. He will never have cold feet again." I sit there on a reindeer skin for a while, observing the woman, the camp and the few people slowly moving through the camp site. Maybe they're going to wake up their friends, go for a swim in the fjord that lies 200 meters down the hill, or maybe nature is calling.

A man walks up to the middle of the camp and yells "They're coming in an hour, everyone! Time to get ready!" The older woman looks up, smiles at me with a cheeky smile and says "Have you had coffee yet? Better do it now before they come". I nod and ask her if I can use her cauldron to boil some water. "Yes," she replies, "but you'd better get some more firewood. The fire's about to go out."

I walk through the camp to where the firewood is stored. It rained last night. I can feel it under my shoes, and the pool of water at the north western side of the camp is proof. My shoes are getting wet, and the firewood looks soaked. I take a few logs and carry them back to the fire. "The wood is wet," I say and put it down next to the fire. "Well, just take my axe and chop it up into smaller bits. It'll burn". She points to the chopping block a few meters

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<sup>2</sup> A technique known as nålebinding, or needle-binding. I have been told that it is still used by non-reenactors who want something creative to do when flying because knitting needles are forbidden. A small (and blunt) bone needle is, however, permitted.

away, and I take the largest log and start chopping. It's a heavy axe and I struggle a little with it, but it doesn't take too long before the log is 8 smaller pieces of wood. I put them on the fire, and soon they catch fire and the smoke rises higher than it did before. I hang the cauldron from the forged tripod and pour water from a plastic bottle. The bottle feels out of place, unnatural. Like it's not supposed to be there, almost illegal. I put it away. 50 minutes left. Now I just have to wait for the water to boil. I get up from the wooden bench and look around. More people have gotten up now. Wooden boxes are being carried out of tents and more fires have been lit. Breakfast. I can smell bacon and eggs. A child is crying and a dog is loose. Its owner is running after it and catches its leash. The child cries, "I don't want this! I want normal food!" His father smiles, puts down his wooden bowl filled with something I can't see properly. Oats and milk, maybe? He walks into their tent and comes out with a plastic bag of apples and some oranges. He empties the contents into a large ceramic bowl. "Ok, you can eat the oranges. But before they come, okay?" The child looks content, takes an orange, sits down on a reindeer skin and starts peeling. He throws the peel into the fire in front of him. His father crumples up the plastic bag and hides it in a leather bag fastened to his belt.

A group of four people have gathered in the largest tent. It is at least 40 square meters. They're discussing how they are going to go about the day. Who's going to stand where and who is going to do what. "Where are the fire extinguishers?" one of them asks, and another points at one of the corners of the tent. I can see the large red fire extinguisher, half hidden under a sheep skin. "We need to move it closer to the fireplace. It's the law, and better safe than sorry". The others nod, and it is moved a few meters away from the fireplace. They start putting things on the tables. They are facing out of the large tent. The long side open to the middle of the market.

"The water is boiling!" the woman calls and I walk back to her little camp. I find my ceramic cup that was given to me yesterday. It was made by a very talented ceramist who is also staying in the camp. "We have to take care of our young ones, you know," she had said and winked when I wanted to give her my 50 kroner note. I use a wooden spoon to scoop coffee out of the glass container. *Nescafe Gull* the label says. I use a large black ladle to put the boiling water into my cup and sit down on a reindeer skin next to the fire. I warm my hands on the cup while I blow away the steam. "PLASTIC ALARM! Half an hour left, everyone!" the woman from before yells. "Chop chop! Sunniva, can you take the first shift in



the ticket tent?" A woman in her 20s looks up from her mobile phone and nods. "Good. It's only for an hour, then I'll get someone to take over".

The camp is now buzzing with life. Some people are wearing colourful dresses or tunics. I see mostly earthy colours like brown, beige and green. But a few individuals are wearing red and blue, combined with large amounts of brooches and glass beads. Other people come out of their tents wearing jeans and sweatshirts. A couple of little girls are running around in wellies, pink tights and dresses beautifully embroidered with simplistic animals. It looks odd, out of place.

A man walks up to me and asks, "Aren't you going to change into your costume?" I look down on my jeans and sweatshirt and answer that I will, but I just need to drink my coffee. He smiles and says, "When the pin of the last brooch is fastened, that's when you've properly gone back in time, to the Viking age."

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Research questions and aspects

Before my fieldwork at the living history museum (hereby also called *Bardrsundr Museum*<sup>3</sup>), my planned research revolved a lot around the popularity of reenactment and how these people embody knowledge about the past and contemporary identity by living out Viking history. This research question changed a lot over time, and I found other research questions that were potentially more relevant or interesting to me. My ethnographic data led me to decide on main topics and themes revolving around finding out how living history museums and reenactors would minimise the distance between the past and the modern by taking use of the past in the modern day. I also wanted to discuss how the modern Viking community has grown from modern individualistic ideas and therefore is a fundamentally modern concept. I wanted to examine the means the living history museum and Viking reenactors use in order to create authentic feelings of the past and how they take use of a “time travel” effect and create alternative realities. In relation to these research questions I have been very interested in researching the many different paradoxes within museums and reenactment. These can be found on several levels, especially the dichotomy between the old and the new, the reenactor and the tourist, and the ahistorical historicity that is reenactment.

This thesis thematises the role of the museum and how it, through hundreds of years, has changed from not only being concerned with material things, but also how immaterial heritage, that which is intangible, emerged in museum history. This is emphasised by UNESCO’s convention which protected both material and immaterial heritage. The thesis considers the dangers that lie within the futile attempts to save history and the past by saving things in a museum or by building monuments, and demonstrates how both reenactors and living history museums try to embody the museum item and bring them into the now instead of seeing the items as things from a distant time. I look at how the age of the historical Vikings is romanticised to become an ideal and fetishized time concerned with aesthetic beauty, handicrafts and family values: a functioning democracy with noble moral codes. I also discuss how the Viking community has grown out of a modern individualistic idea of

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<sup>3</sup>Pseudonym

collectivism and acceptance of eccentricity. This is a thesis about togetherness, social processes, nerds, dreamworlds, timelessness and spacelessness.

### **Background for the choice of themes**

My personal background for the choice of these themes and the reason for my interest on these topics comes from my volunteer-work and summer jobs at museums from a relatively young age. Since I was 17, I have worked as a tour guide for both Norwegian children, older foreign tourists and everyone in between. One of these jobs was at a small living history museum in Western Norway which was part of The Museum of Archaeology in Stavanger. It was through this museum that I first began to learn about Viking reenactment. The reenactors I met gave me inspiration to try crafts and to make my own Viking clothes. I soon became active in the Viking community, especially through my great interest in the craft called “tablet weaving.” I went to Viking markets and found the lifestyle to be very fascinating. My bachelor essay, written at the University of East London. Particular interest was given to a subgenre of metal music that incorporates folk music and Viking/Medieval/Historical inspiration. It was through this research that my interest in these topics grew to eventually become this thesis.

## **CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **First impressions**

”Imagine the Viking age, ca. 1000 AD. Then add slightly more modern buildings. Split into different arts and crafts. Then add people. Then add modern tools like chainsaws, miniature tractors and screwdrivers. This was my site today. Feels slightly surreal, and I can't quite put my finger on it.” (Extract from field notes. Day 3).

I always imagined Sweden to be very much like Norway, with lots of mountains. I had been to Sweden several times before, but never the South. As I flew to Copenhagen and from there went by train to Scania, Sweden, I was confused whether or not I was still in Denmark. I never imagined it to be so flat. On my bus journey after the train, I observed grave mounds.

Many of them. That is when I realised that I was in the right place. This felt like a good place to do this study because it felt old in an odd way. When I left the bus, I immediately felt the smell of horses. Finding *Bardrsundr Museum* wasn't difficult and I was quickly installed into the room I was to stay in during fieldwork. It was a small room with two bunk beds. During my stay there were only a few weeks in total where other beds in the room were used by other volunteers. I did not get to see the Viking town until the day after:

“We went out a door (by now I was lost. This building is a labyrinth!) and came out close to the gate into the actual Viking Town. It was really windy and cold, but didn't stop the place from being even more exciting and beautiful than I imagined and had seen in pictures. There are a lot (!) of buildings, and each have a significance”

(Extract from field notes. Day 2).

### **Methodological approach and my position in the field**

In the field, I very quickly began using the participant observation method (Bernard, 1994). This was because I was so quickly put into work by the other people at *Bardrsundr*. I had, after all, volunteered to help out at the museum during my fieldwork. My initial idea was to use participant observation in order to study the daily life of the contemporary Vikings. This changed somewhat when I found out that so much of my work in the first half of the fieldwork would mostly be maintenance with the use of modern tools and clothes. The positive side of this, however, is that it made me conscious about how much *Bardrsundr Museum* did to prepare for the summer/tourist season and how much goes on behind the scenes of the living history museum. The second half of the fieldwork, during the summer, was spent in the Viking Town and visiting Viking markets, showing visitors around the Town and demonstrating crafts (especially tablet weaving). There were days when there were very few visitors. I spent much of these days talking to the other volunteers at the museum and learning what they did and how they had ended up at *Bardrsundr* in the first place. As a participant observer (with a lot of focus on participant), I already had, and made, Viking clothes that made me fit into the milieu. Many of my clothes, however, were somewhat too

“rich”<sup>4</sup> for the town which displayed a poorer and farming-based community, so I often ended up borrowing clothes from the museum.

I took use of O’Reilly’s (2012) guidelines in my participant observation and interviewing: “Watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts - in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3 cited in O’Reilly, 2012, p. 2)

I conducted a relatively large amount of unstructured and semistructured interviews, some of which were recorded and later transcribed onto paper. The least formal interviews were the conversations I had with fellow volunteers and workers at the museum and markets. I sometimes wrote down key words during/after, but this happened rarely when I was a participating Viking in the village and markets. The informal interviews also fit in better contextually overall. My recorded interviews were often done outside of the museum/market setting, while sitting in a café or restaurant. The ones done in the town or at markets were conducted after closing time (when there were no tourists). *Bardrsundr Museum* and my interviewees were given information about my project and they were also given my contact information. I therefore, on a couple of occasions, received lengthy emails which expanded on my interviewees initial answers to my questions. I also had conversations via Facebook and Skype.

Because I started fieldwork relatively late (beginning of March until mid-August), I got to know some of my informants beforehand. I did this at both the museum and at markets. These, so-called, gatekeepers (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 91) often had high status or were well known in the group, so this way I could get the snowball rolling and through them, get to know the rest of the people.

I worked almost 8,5 hours as a volunteer every weekday. This was particularly heavy work the first three months because of the cold weather and heavy wind. For a while, I managed to write fieldnotes after the long workdays, but at one point I needed to negotiate with the management at *Bardrsundr museum* in order to be “allowed” to leave my shifts early so I would have time and energy to focus on fieldnotes and interviews. It took a while until I got into a good habit, and in the end, I felt I had a good amount of control.

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<sup>4</sup>See chapter 4, page 94.

## Challenges, ethical issues and considerations

The first challenge I had with this fieldwork was that *Bardrsundr* was season-based. It did not open for tourists until early summertime. I was therefore worried that I would end up doing nothing until summertime. As I have noted above, I could not have been more wrong. I was put to work early (however, with completely different things than I expected). All this “modern” work may have changed my research to some extent because the museum was given an equal amount of focus as the Viking reenactors. Because of these two very different perspectives, I was able to see the two in relation to each other, to my research’s advantage.

At many points during my fieldwork, I felt like I was employed at the museum rather than doing anthropological fieldwork there. Although I did not receive any money for my volunteer work, I did receive free accommodation (my only expense was food) and some special treatment during events at the museum and markets such as being invited to Viking feasts, parties and events held at/by the museum. This made it difficult to ask for free time to write field notes or any other help, because I felt that my work at *Bardrsundr* was payment for accommodation. In conversation with some of the employees at the museum, I finally managed to negotiate a work plan that worked well for me. However, I did struggle with bad conscience for this at several occasions.

### *Alcohol*

In the Viking community, alcohol is a large part of social interaction. The settings in which I talked to my informants often involved a glass or two of beer or other alcoholic drinks. My participant observation at *Bardrsundr museum* and Viking markets was often done in the evenings when the groups gathered around bonfires with songs, alcohol, drums and food. Therefore, if an informant showed any signs of inebriation and said something interesting that would be relevant to me in the future, I would always make sure to talk to them about it the day after or on an occasion when alcohol was not involved. During inebriated states, I would also always make sure I talked to people who knew about my fieldwork beforehand and who had been given informed consent. It must be mentioned that I, at a few occasions, also was one of the consumers of alcohol during these social gatherings. This was especially the case when I was surrounded by informants who I had gotten to know very well. Not only did this consumption allow for me to enter the group as a participant, but it may have worked in my

favour to be accepted socially among the, often younger, informants who participated in late-night drinking.

### *Anonymization*

Anonymization is and has been a great concern for me before, during and after fieldwork. First of all, I have given all names as well as the museum pseudonym names, and I have chosen to not state the names of the markets I did some of my fieldwork at. However, as the Viking community is a relatively small group, and because I met people with personalities that would easily be recognised by their friends and that often are known in the community, there is a chance that they can be recognised in the text. My informants have a large amount of knowledge about the community and they seem to be very self-aware. They are often highly educated people, they are interested in this project and have on many occasions said that they would love to read it. It has therefore been important to me to inform the people I mention in this thesis of my intentions of doing anthropological fieldwork and writing a thesis.

### *Being a “native”*

Another anonymization-related challenge and ethical consideration is the fact that I, to some extent, am a “native”<sup>5</sup> to the group I have been studying. Before the start of the project I had not been anywhere near as active in the Viking community as I was after I decided to write about Viking reenactment and living history museums, but I had a relatively large amount of knowledge from earlier work in a different museum and having been to 3-4 Viking markets. This may have assisted in my choosing to conduct fieldwork in a museum completely unknown to me. I had, however, never heard of *Bardrsundr Museum* until the start of the Masters course, which made it appeal more to me as an anthropological study. In this way, I could go there and “start over” - as an outsider.

This said, being both an outsider and a native also worked in positive ways, as it gave me an opportunity to see the community from both sides right away. It became easy to

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<sup>5</sup> A «native» can be described as someone who has been in the Viking reenactment community for at least a few years, who has knowledge about both the Viking age and how reenactment works in their local groups, and who has acquired a considerable amount of Viking *stuff* (for example clothing, equipment, tent, etc.).

position myself in a way that I felt would benefit the fieldwork, and I was able to change this position as I went along. It also became easy to fit into the group(s) right away.

Anthropologically, I was studying the familiar (as opposed to a group unfamiliar to me) (Bailey, 2007, p. 38), but being in a different country at a museum I had never been to, I felt I had a good balance between being familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

### *Always seeing the positive sides, not the negative*

As the Viking reenactment community is fairly small, I didn't have to look far to find common connections between people I met during fieldwork and people I already knew. Because so many people have shown interest in the project and will recognise themselves (not necessarily personally, but in general), it has been important for me to keep discussions of the community and museum on a neutral scale. My general perception of the community is inherently positive, but this does not mean that it doesn't have problematic sides as well. As you will see in my discussions, I have touched upon some controversial and/or damaging aspects of the social community that is Viking reenactment (see particularly chapter 4, page 88), but have not expanded on them to a large extent. This is both to protect sensitive information and to avoid making the thesis 50% longer.

### *Other*

I chose to be relatively visible on Facebook and social media. I did, however, not use my full name. The use of Facebook was important to me because social media is, as I will expand on in this thesis, important to Viking reenactment and living history museums.

I took quite a lot of photos during fieldwork. In this thesis, however, I will not show clear photos of faces, in consideration of anonymization.



## INTRODUCTION OF FIELDS AND PERSONS

### Description of area

“We have the place, but you are the concept!”

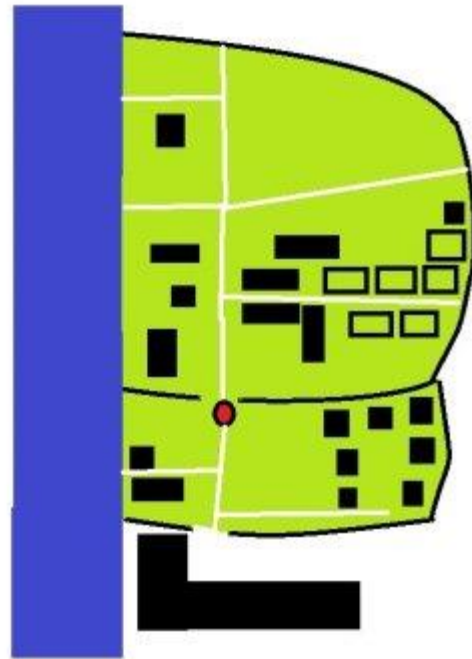
- *King Rangvaldr*

*Bardsundr Museum* opened just over 20 years ago. It is a communal museum in Sweden and they describe themselves as an archaeological open air museum. It was originally built to show the history of the area in relation to the Viking and middle age.

*Bardsundr* has previously been run with many employees, but has in the later years based itself on volunteer work from interested Viking reenactors, students and others. The Viking museum consists of a Viking town with ca. 10 houses built in different styles from around 800-1200 AD. It also has a gate, streets, outhouses and a watch tower, and it is surrounded by an earth wall. Behind the main houses it also has lots where some of the volunteers are in the process of building little huts for their own use, or where they set up their Viking tents during the summer.



Entrance to the Viking town. Photo by A. Økstra.  
03.03.15.



Map/graph of *Bardsundr Museum*

The entrance to *Bardsundr* is inside the large office building (bottom of map) which has 21<sup>st</sup> century offices, a small kitchen, a large meeting room, a reception and a museum shop which sold various souvenirs, jewellery and small things. They had a café which sold ice cream, soda, coffee, sandwiches etc. There was also a small “classical museum” exhibition which was meant to introduce the Viking age and the Viking town by showing a short documentary film, displaying some of the archaeological artefacts found in the near areas, and photos of Vikings in the town.

Between the museum entrance and the South gate that leads into the city (red dot), you will find the experimental workshop and a place of offering to the Norse gods on the right side, and a small grouping of houses on the left side. This area is described by *Bardrsundr* as the pre-Christian age, while the town itself is Christian.

Beyond the map, towards the south, you will find the parking lot and lots of small huts. Some of these are for tourists (often unrelated to the museum, rented out as summer huts), a volunteer house where I lived during my stay, repair shops and workshops for the blacksmith and woodworkers. Next to the parking lot you will also find a large building which has recently been renovated after a flood. It might not look it from the outside, but it is a beautiful banquet hall on the inside, furnished with mostly wooden walls, bars, tables and benches. The hall has been named after Odin's hall in Norse mythology, Valhalla. It is often rented out for parties such as weddings and birthdays, but my most fond memories of it were the Viking feasts that were held there during my stay.

### **Description of markets**

During my fieldwork I visited several Viking markets in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and these are the ones I will be describing in this thesis. These varied in sizes from 20 to 600 Viking reenactors. Most of these described themselves as “Viking markets”, but a few of them were more flexible when it came to the time they wished to convey and were therefore described as “Viking- and medieval markets”.



*Viking market in the middle of the city. Photo by A. Økstra. 04.07.15.*

### **Introducing central persons**

Here I will introduce a few people that have been central informants and inspirations for this thesis. These people show the characteristics of the Viking community in many different

ways and are keys in understanding the social community. All the informants referred to here and in the thesis have been given pseudonym (Viking-inspired) names.

### *Arngeirr*

I met *Arngeirr* at the end of the summer of 2014, at a small Viking market in Sweden. He was one of the people who had travelled

furthest to attend the market, a distance equivalent to approximately 6 hours of

driving. My first impression of him was that he was quite intimidating, as he sat around the fire wearing his Viking clothes made of leather and fur. His head had no hair, but his face wore a large white beard. People I had already gotten to know at the market didn't hesitate to introduce me to him, and I learned quickly that he was not nearly as intimidating as he had seemed at first glance. He had a boyish grin when he talked about things that he thought were interesting, which wasn't rare. Whenever I talked to someone about theories regarding Viking reenactment, history or archaeology, I was told to go ask *Arngeirr*. He was almost regarded as an oracle when it came to knowledge about all things Viking. His motif for doing reenactment was a mixture of an interest in history, curiosity, religion and for expression of creativity.

I only had the chance to extensively talk to *Arngeirr* once during my fieldwork. This happened the last day of a beautiful market in Sweden in the autumn of 2015. We had taken cover from the rain and sat down on two beautifully carved chairs in a tent that faced out toward the market where people were still running from tent to tent to take cover from the rain that we had been promised would wait until the morning after.

### *Gunnhild*

During a group interview in June 2014, I asked a group of 5 people if they wanted to try to define a modern Viking. The first answer I was given, was the name "*Gunnhild*". She continued by justifying why *Gunnhild* was her ideal modern Viking: "the thing about



*Viking women watching the fighters. Photo by A. Økstra. 11.04.15.*

*Gunnhild* is that she tries to incorporate it into her daily life. So she consciously takes back those ways of seeing life, and tries to put it into a modern setting. So when you pack up your tent and take off your Viking clothes and go back to the modern, you still have a lot of things in your daily way of doing things”.

*Gunnhild* is Danish, she has 3 children (2 boys and 1 girl) and is married to a Norwegian Viking reenactor. All her children are active as reenactors to some extent, and especially her youngest. She is also openly Ásatrú and practices the religion. For her youngest son’s confirmation and his birthdays, she and her husband have given him almost exclusively Viking-related gifts, such as a tent, wooden bed and clothing. Her wedding a couple of years ago was also done “the Viking-way”: with Viking clothing, Ásatrú ceremonies and a big party.

I’d known *Gunnhild* for about a year, and during a Viking market when I had just started my masters course at UiB, I was telling her that I was struggling to figure out what I should write my thesis on. That was when she threw out her arms and said “Study this! Study us!” pointing toward the people sitting around the area working on crafts and the people walking by. I have since gotten to know *Gunnhild* as a reenactor who manages to incorporate Viking reenactment into her daily life quite naturally. The best way to describe her might be “down to earth”; she is friendly, practical, sensible, caring, intelligent and very loving toward her family, friends and everyone she meets on her path. In conversation with her, she has told me she grew up in the underground punk society in Denmark, and I think in some ways that has contributed to her ending up in a rather “alternative” community like the Viking community, at least that is what she has implied on several occasions.

### *Steinvor*

*Steinvor* was one of 7 German Viking reenactors who came to *Bardrsundr Museum* to live and work for a week in May 2015. We, who worked at the museum, were informed of this a couple of weeks before their arrival, and were very much looking forward to meeting them. My first impression of them was the huge green army truck that rolled into the parking lot one morning when I was drinking my coffee on the stairs of where I lived. I exclaimed to my friend, “Are we going to war?” He laughed, but in some ways I was not mistaken. Some of these reenactors were fighters. In fact, most of them were. One of their tasks during their stay was to present fighting done the Viking way. *Steinvor* could be described as the “mother of

the family”, although they were 3 couples and 1 man. She was a children’s teacher, had long red hair and a round and lovely face that always smiled. One of my co-workers told me how she had received hundreds of emails before their arrival where they wondered what was okay in the Viking village and what was not, authenticity-wise. One email had been about to what extent they could use modern sewing needles, a topic we also discussed in the Viking town one day. I feel this shows the extremities that reenactors go to in order to reach a high amount of authenticity; down to the smallest detail.

*Steinvor* was also the person in the group who spoke the most English; therefore she often ended up translating German for me. After they left, she sent me a long email reflecting on their stay and extending on some of the answers I had been given during our group interview at the end of their stay.

### *The King: Rangvaldr*

When I was setting up the details for my fieldwork in Southern Sweden, I only had contact with *Rangvaldr* once. At all other times I was communicating and planning my fieldwork with other staff at *Bardrsundr Museum*. On 11th May 2015, I got the chance to sit down with him in his office to have a long interview about him, the museum, its development and his visions for the museum’s future. His office could have looked like any other office if it wasn’t for the large amount of different Viking age and medieval age things standing around in the room. There were weapons on the walls, wooden chests along the perimeter, some clothing articles hanging around and figurines of Norse gods among other decorations. Many people have expressed that he looks like Santa Claus. He has medium length white hair and a white beard. When dressed as a Viking, he also wears a lot of red colours. This is the king; The Viking-king of Sweden (despite his Norwegian/Swedish heritage). In the 1980s he became involved with a project to find and preserve Viking ships in Southern Sweden which triggered the eventual opening of *Bardrsundr*.

*Rangvaldr* was very good at changing his accent and whenever I talked to him he would change his accent to match mine. This meant that whenever I asked him about something, he would suddenly switch from the Scania accent to the Stavanger dialect, surprising me a little bit every time because I was so used to hearing Scanian everywhere. He told me that his Viking interest might have started in Norway as a child because he used to walk in the mountains and along fjords with his father as a child, often doing things in old

fashioned ways. He said that in some ways he's been living a Viking life since he was very young, but might not have understood it until much later. However, what was missed was the atmosphere, "To sit in a lovely environment and look out on the water and drink instant coffee..." *Rangvaldr* doesn't like coffee, but he told me that wasn't the point.

Another reason for his interest in Vikings was his great curiosity and the will to learn new things, "I've always loved and done crafts and have thought, 'can I make that sort of thing?' or 'how does that work?'" He has a great interest in blacksmithing and even has a smithy set up at home, but has recently been doing mostly administrative work for the museum.

When I started my plans to do this fieldwork, I was looking for a museum that had activity all year round. When I first heard about *Bardrsundr Museum*, I read an article describing how the king and his family lived in the town 365 days a year and lived off the land. However, this turned out to be untrue. When I asked him about it he answered, "Uhhmm... No." What he did do, though, was bringing some of the peace of the place home with him. The Viking town and its history and serenity gives him peace of mind.

### *Hrodleif*

*Hrodleif*, a Swiss Viking, had been talked about at a lot of different Viking events through the years, but I didn't meet him until a few months into my fieldwork. I had been told beforehand to look after my braid. I had no idea what they meant by that, but it became clear when I met him. As I walked into the office and met him for the first time, he greeted me, we exchanged names and then he asked if he could pull my braid. I let him, and it was just a careful tug. On his Facebook profile he has hundreds of photos of him pulling girls braids. It was his thing, it seemed, and I quickly discovered that *Hrodleif* had many 'things'.

*Hrodleif* stayed in one of the Viking houses for the whole summer. I almost never saw him dressed in modern clothing. He was in charge of the boats and he regularly went fishing. He was also in charge of looking after the chickens. He had a thick Swiss-German accent and he could repeat the same phrases *many* times a day: "It's hard to be a Viking," "Yes yes yes," and "I am a man of results!"

The most interesting thing about *Hrodleif* though is that he's a slave trader. No, not the kind that you might be thinking about right now. He travels to Viking and medieval markets in Europe (and the world) with his slave trade company, sets up his tent and often a

small podium, and then he catches girls (often tourists and visitors at the market). Then he sells them back to their friends, family or sometimes to participating Vikings trying to overbid their family. He told me that the most he had gotten for a girl was around 1000 Swedish kronor, when her boyfriend constantly had to overbid a Viking who also tried to buy her. As this is his business, he keeps the money. At the large Viking market at *Bardrsundr Museum*, I often saw him standing on the bridge above the South Gate with a net, looking for “young and well-shaped girls” (his words) to throw his net over and sell at the market. It was a good laugh, but I always watched myself when walking through the gate, sometimes running as fast as I could.

### *Sindri*

The blacksmith at *Bardrsundr Museum* quickly became a good friend and informant. He taught me a lot about blacksmithing, but also about building techniques, glass/amber bead making and much more. He was originally from Lithuania, but had lived in Sweden and Denmark for over 10 years after getting into the Viking community. His crafts were widely known all over Northern Europe and he was constantly working on something new.

*Sindri* told me that his reason for doing Viking reenactment was to express all the creativity he felt that he had always had. His mother had also been relatively active in the Viking community in Lithuania, so his life as a Viking reenactor started very early.

### *Alfhild and Asgrim*

*Alfhild* and *Asgrim* are actually my neighbours from where I grew up. They went to the same school as me when I was growing up, but they were a few years older. I always knew that they were into Heavy Metal music and had gone to festivals all over Europe, and that we therefore had a lot in common. It was through the music that they got into Viking reenactment and traditional handicrafts. I didn't really get to know them until about a year ago, when I found out that *Alfhild* did the same handicraft as me: tablet weaving. This made us get together one day, and we started talking about Viking crafts. She showed me the Viking camp they had built on their property, and told me about their dream of making a little Viking farm that could be showed to tourists and school children in the immediate area. *Asgrim* turned out to be an amazing Viking furniture carpenter, builder and woodcarver.

After getting to know them, I have met them at quite a few Viking markets, and more to come.

Who would have thought that the people I grew up next to would also become Viking reenactors? I feel this says something about what creates social relations in the Viking community. The world seems very small.

## INTRODUCING TOPICS: WHAT IS (VIKING-) REENACTMENT?

### **Reenactment**

It is difficult to say exactly how far back the history of reenactment goes. It has for centuries been rather common to stage historical events, and particularly the medieval period has been the topic for much reenactment around the world from early on. In his description of the history of reenactment, Howard Giles (Eventplan.co.uk, ?) explains how the concept of reenactment is one as old as civilization itself. Examples of ancient reenactment is that of the Romans who would re-fight past victories in the Coliseum, and medieval tournaments which can be seen somewhat closer to a sport than reenactment. Particularly medieval and civil war reenactment are the topics especially popular today. Giles describes the modern interest having started with American Civil War reenactment in the United States, starting a trend which spread to Europe. Under-genres of reenactment come in large varieties, most notably and important to this thesis, that of living out history and, perhaps, battle reenactment. Schneider (2011) points out that the term ‘reenactment’ “has entered into increased circulation in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century art, theatre, and performance circles” (p. 2), and that this practice has greatly expanded in performance-based art as well as started a trend in museums, theme parks and preservation societies.

Common for reenactment is the personal connection with historical characters. History and its representation through museums, books and films is often characterised by central historical persons and events, something that makes it impersonal because it rarely represents laypersons, farmers and poor people. This might be one of the reasons for the popularity of historical fiction, a topic I will be discussing later in this thesis. Historical fiction and reenactment allows for a personal experience and it gives voice to laypersons and marginalised people.



Although the use of the word ‘reenactment’ needs to be problematized (see later in this chapter), the word itself gives some explanation as to what the notion means: acting out past events. In conversation with fellow students and with my informants we have discussed the difference between reenactment and *LARP* (live action role-playing). *LARP* is often characterised as acting out a fictional character in a fictional setting. It often has set rules and pre-written characters, as well as a game master who to some extent controls narratives and game development. As *LARP* has evolved and become very popular over the years, it covers much ground, both that of fantasy and that leaning toward historical reenactment. In some ways, it might be possible to say that some strands of *LARP* can also be characterised as reenactment. Typical to *LARP* is the creation of a character different to yourself. Although this *does* happen in some types of reenactment, my informants often distinguished between reenactment and *LARP*. Viking reenactment is a type of reenactment that to a great extent bases itself on personal experiences as well as historical authenticity. One of the distinctions between reenactment and *LARP* is that the former is an extension of the person and the latter is an extension of the role.

Vanessa Agnew (2004) first of all describes reenactment as *fun*:

“As anyone who has swabbed decks and gone aloft knows, reenactment is fun. It indulges the twin passions of work and play, which are generally divorced from each other. It licenses dressing up, pretending and improvising, casting oneself as the protagonist of one’s own research, and getting others to play along” (Agnew, 2004, p. 327)

She goes on by explaining that it is a “combination of imaginative play, self-improvement, intellectual enrichment and sociality,” (p. 327) and that the interest for reenactment is increasing. The increasing popularity of reenactment can be seen through mediums of a wide variety, for example that of reality television, living history museums, local performances and tourism. Describing reenactment in detail would be a great task because of “its diverse history-themed genres – from theatrical and ‘living history’ performances to museum exhibits, television, film, travelogues, and historiography” (Agnew, 2004, p. 327). In order to shorten this discussion, Agnew has found the common methodologies, modes of representation and choice of subject matter.

### *Civil War reenactment*

The most well-known form of reenactment might be the US Civil War battle reenactment. The American civil war was fought between 1861 and 1865 between Confederacy and the Union, or the *South* and the *North*. It caused the death of over 600 000 people. The source of the conflict varies from historian to historian, but “slavery, territorial expansion, the rise of industrial capitalism and other factors” (Schneider, p.8) stand as central sources. In 1913, 48 years after the battle ended, elderly soldiers met again on the Gettysburg battleground as the start of Civil War Reenactment. The popularity didn’t start until the last people to remember the time began passing away, around the 1950s, in order to remember the time. At the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in 2013, there were more than 10 000 reenactors participating and 200-300 000 spectators attending (Gast, 2013). Although this sounds like a lot, reenactments of the war in previous and later years have been similar in size and organisation. As well as battle reenactment, there is also a large degree of ‘normal life’ reenactment or *living history* at these events with focus on life in war camps and the life as a woman.

Civil War reenactment has primarily had white participants, but the later years have seen an increase in participation of African Americans. According to Freeman (2011), this can to some extent, be attributed to the film *Glory* from 1989. I have found that films, TV-series and books also to a large extent have influenced the amount of participants in Viking reenactment, which is a topic I will expand on in this thesis.

### *Norwegian Spel Tradition*

Similar in some ways, but also arguably vastly different, is the Norwegian *spel*<sup>6</sup> tradition as written about by Anne Kathrine Larsen (2010). She describes the increase of locally based historical plays in Norway with “origin in actual or invented historical events located in the area” (p. 83). In some ways they can be described as a ritual performance in a community because of their annual or biennial execution. Larsen puts forward the idea that these plays do not only display the past, but “their underlying message is of current interest. They are mediums whereby the past is seen through the ideological and moral lenses of the present,

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<sup>6</sup> ‘spel’ means ‘play’ in Norwegian.

creating memories for the future” (ibid.). This is also the case for US Civil War reenactment as well as most kinds of reenactment. The particular events often mirror political and socio-economic on-goings.

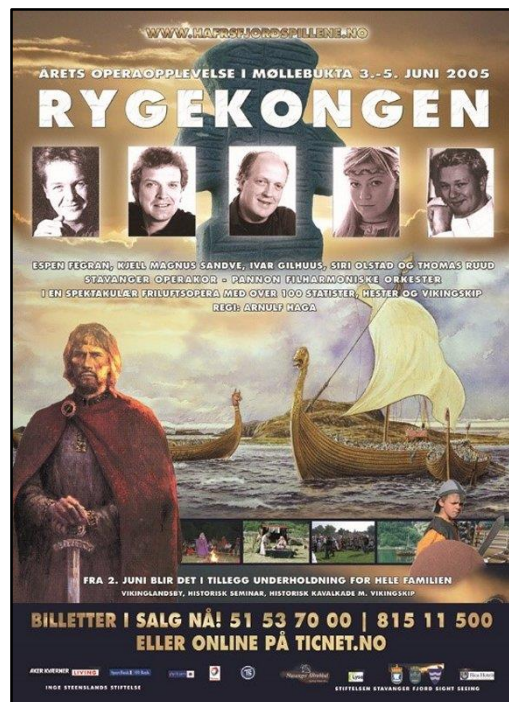
The *spel* tradition is, according to Larsen, characterised by the use of local history, travel and a communal touch. They take use of an event or history from a certain time connected to the area where it is performed (often outside). Participants or the audience might need to travel to get to the place of the performance and they may be guided through areas central to the historical event before or during the *spel*. The plays are often performed by local amateurs and the use of local groups (bands, associations, children...) is not uncommon.

Larsen also discusses the experience of the *spel* as liminal (Turner, 1967) where the viewers are

“preparing for the drama to come through a gradual immersion into the context of the play, and also

giving time to digest the impressions afterwards through a gradual removal from the play” (p. 85). Viking markets and living history museums are often also placed in historically relevant places, to some extent out of the beaten track. When seeing the market or the museum as well as the *spel* as something liminal in itself, “the journey to and from can be seen as rituals of separation and inclusion” (ibid.), both for the reenactor/actor and the spectator/visitor/tourist. The journey becomes part of the historical play and it uses a ritual organisation as a rite of passage.

The Viking age has been subject in local plays like this. An example of this is *Hafsrfsfjordspelet*, which was held in Stavanger, Norway, in 2005 and 2006, and attracted thousands of spectators. The *spel* was combined with a Viking village and market with participants from all over Europe (Sola Historielag, ?). Despite plans to make it an annual tradition, it was only held twice, but an annual Viking market is still held in Hafsrfsjord.



Poster for Hafsrfsfjordspelet 2005. From: <http://www.solahistorielag.no/cmsmadesim/index.php?page=avisartikler-fra-sola-1912-1970>

## Viking reenactment

Viking reenactment focuses mainly on the time period between 790 and 1066 AD (museums and markets often seem to be rather flexible when it comes to inclusion of the Iron Age and the Middle Ages). It is first of all very popular in Scandinavia, but also in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. Viking reenactment groups can also be found in places it would not be directly expected, such as Japan, New Zealand, Mexico, Romania and many more. It ranges from private small groups to open air museums to television programs. In Scandinavia, it has also become a central part of the tourism business.

In this section I will split Viking reenactment into four groups: fighting, crafting, socialising and religion. These are the main reasons people join Viking reenactment groups. While some people are interested in a combination of all four of them, some reenactors decide to stick to just one or a couple. Some aspects of the groups fit in with each other. Although I here have described four different groups, there is one common denominator: The interest in history and particularly the Viking age. The initial historical interest in some way or another leads to the joining of a Viking reenactment group:

### *Fighting*

The first thing a lot of people think about when they hear the word “Viking,” is fighting. The Vikings are widely known as extremely skilled warriors, but in varying degrees of positivity. In reenactment, a central part is that of learning to fight with weapons characteristic of the Viking age such as swords, shields, axes, spears and bows and arrows. It is particularly boys and men who are interested in this aspect of reenactment, but you will also find many girls and women lined up on the battlefield, side by side with the men.



*Meeting for Viking fighters at Bardrsundr Museum. Photo by A. Økstra*

This group is the one most characterised by acting and it is more closely related to *LARP* than the other groups. The Viking reenactors in this group have very important rules and patterns that are followed when training. Viking fighting has a few popular fighting styles that are followed to great accuracy. The main reason for this is that the weapons are made of *authentic* material and has the potential to seriously (and mortally) hurt the opponent. Viking fighting is made up of routines and can be described as ‘show fighting’. Professional fighters who participate in battle reenactments are able to read their opponent’s body language which is carefully constructed to show where and how they will hit their opponent. Watching fights like these was, to me and many others, incredibly fascinating, as skilled fighters can move extremely fast over an extended period of time. As this is more closely related to acting, they also fake deaths and getting hurt, often in very exaggerating ways to entertain the audience. It is not rare to see actual blood in serious battle/fighting reenactment.

### *Crafting*

The Vikings were very skilled when it came to crafting high-quality handicrafts, and because Viking reenactment is very focused on ‘material culture’, crafting might be the group that attracts the most people to Viking reenactment. At a market, you are likely to see almost all kinds of crafting central to the Viking age: woodwork, textile and blacksmithing. In woodwork you will find everything from building houses to making wooden needles. In textile you will find spinning, weaving, sewing, dyeing, needle binding and everything in between. Blacksmithing entails the making of items from simple nails to luxurious jewellery. Crafting within Viking reenactment is often characterised by techniques that have disappeared from the modern world. Examples of this includes using plants to create colour on yarn and textile, needle binding which has almost disappeared in favour of knitting and crocheting, and making things that used to be made by hand that are now made by machines, like nails, trousers, and the smoothing of wood panels.



*Tablet weaving. Photo by A. Økstra, 19.05.15.*

Cookery is also included in this category and the use of different ingredients is under much discussion at Viking events. The use of the potato is often discussed and whether it is historically correct to use it in Viking cooking, but it is, in fact, not.

Viking crafts are important in creating relations within the Viking community. Trading between crafters is very common, and many crafters create *items* in order to sell or trade with *other* reenactors. People often specialise in one kind of craft because it limits the amount of money spent on other materials due to trading. Reenactors who do similar crafts often go out of their way to learn from other people, and are almost always happy to teach those who are interested, whether they are tourists or other reenactors.



*Viking cooking class. Venison, onions, mushrooms, roots, etc. Photo by A. Økstra. 18.04.15.*

### *Socialising*

To me, one of the most attractive parts of a Viking market was the thought of sitting around a bonfire at night to socialise with other people. In Norway, this was often called “bålkos” which is a word that could often be found on invites to small Viking markets. The bonfire is a central point of the socialising, and depending on the Viking market, everyone would often gather around one large bonfire in the evening to spend time together. Playing games was also popular, often having to do with physical strength, speed or pain tolerance.

There are those who do Viking reenactment simply because they feel it is a special kind of socialising with likeminded people and this had originally been the reason *Alfhild* and *Asgrim* joined a Viking community. Reenactment is a very *social* hobby, in some ways because of the limited use of modern technology. You are ‘forced’ to sit down and talk to people. Many of my informants have expressed how Viking reenactment allows them to slow down. In some ways, it helps



*Bonfire. Photo by A. Økstra. 13.06.15*



one slow down and take life at face values and puts focus on being together with other people.

Music and song also proved to be very important at the events I went to during my fieldwork. Using traditional drums in a social setting, particularly around a bonfire combined with song, was very important to some because it created a special kind of atmosphere. Singing was also very popular. A lot of the songs that were sung in the evenings were folk songs in varying degrees of oldness, but also modern songs. Classic rock songs were a significant genre, for example the British rock band *Queen*.

From my ethnographic material, alcohol proved to be *extremely* central in Viking reenactment, and an evening without being asked to taste something homemade is almost non-existent. During evenings at *Bardrsundr museum* and at markets I have been asked to taste homemade mead, beer, wine and much more, of varying alcohol percentages. Similar to cooking, brewing your own alcohol is a topic of much discussion among those who do it. I was told that one of the reasons they find it so fascinating is because of the law during the Viking age that you were supposed to brew a set amount of alcoholic beverage before Yule (“Christmas”), or you would receive a large fine.

The people found in the socialising group within Viking reenactment are almost always also engaged in one or more of the other groups (religion, fighting or crafting). People who are only participating because of the social interaction are sometimes looked down on. These were sometimes referred to as ‘party Vikings’ or ‘Majorca Vikings’. They have been described as people, often younger of age, who drink copious amounts of alcohol, talk and sing loudly, might not have fully authentic Viking gear, and do not help in organising or cleaning up after themselves. Being described as a party or Majorca Viking seemed to be taken as a great insult, implying that one is not anywhere near *authentic* enough to be fully accepted into the group.

### *Religion*

Although it is not as common in the Viking scene as it might seem, religion is also one of the reasons some people join a Viking community. Norse paganism/religion, or *Ásatrú* as I will hereby call it, is a religion that goes by many names: Forn Sed, heathenism and Germanic neopaganism, among others. The past decades have seen a growth in the dedication to *Ásatrú* of different forms and *Ásatrúar* (people who practice *Ásatrú*) can be found at most Viking-

related events. Many of my informants told me they were *Ásatrúar*, but to varying degrees. *Arngeirr*, for example, had strict distinctions between reenactment and religion, and during *Blót* (offering to the gods or spirits), he was dressed in modern, but ceremonial, clothing. He later told me this was because he saw reenactment as playing, but he took his religion seriously and considered his religion to be set in 2015, not in the Viking Age.



*This place of offering is still used by Ásatrúar. Photo by A. Økstra.*

I have experienced *Ásatrú* to be a very flexible religion. *Ásatrúar* take from it whatever fits their own life situation and their own beliefs, be it a belief in physical gods or more as spiritual guidelines. After a *Blót* that was set next to an old monastery, *Gunnhild* told me that she had felt the underground spirits wanting to come up through the earth. She had not experienced them to be malicious even though we were on Christian ground. As a person with great respect for religion, although non-religious, the feeling of standing in a circle during *Blót* and toasting to the gods, is a very special feeling. I, like many others taught me, go barefoot to feel extra close to the earth.

## **Problematisation**

The notion of *reenactment* needs to be problematised. One reason for this is because the notion gives the impression of the word ‘acting’. This is a word that Victor Turner also problematises in *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982), where he explains that ‘acting’ is an Anglo-Saxon word which is ambiguous, “it can mean doing things in everyday life, or performing on the stage or in a temple. It can take place in ordinary time or in extraordinary time.” (p. 102) Turner further explains other uses of the word, but mainly it can be seen in two ways: Acting in a theatrical sense and acting in the sense of ‘doing something’. The extent of acting in a theatrical sense, in reenactment, depends on the type and setting. For example, US Civil War reenactment often specifically reenacts an historical event, making less room for fiction and fantasy and putting much emphasis on exact authenticity and historical correctness. In this sense, this type of reenactment may be used in relation to theatrical acting. A medieval or Viking market can be seen as more *casual* (and, importantly, spaced over a period of many



centuries) and gives room for own interpretation and fantasy, and is therefore acting in the sense of “doing something” and/or representation of another (historical) person.

Kobiałka (2013) also describes reenactment in itself as “a deeply ahistorical category” (p. 159), a topic I will come back to in chapter 5 of this thesis. His point here is that reenactment of the past is paradoxical because the past can never be re-made. In conversation with both informants and academics, it has been suggested to me that what these people are doing is not theatrical acting but rather ‘living history’. They use the Viking age as inspiration for a post-modern alternative living. There is a danger in calling this representation of history ‘living history’ because, philosophically, the past cannot be presented in a historically authentic light. The historical things used in reenactment will automatically become something else because it is now found in a different context, “[...] the items are recontextualised through movement in time and space” (Rio, 2002, p. 71, my translation<sup>7</sup>). The items can never *be* ‘Viking’, but they can be ‘Viking-like’; the context creates the thing.

The Viking market is a type of social gathering with focus on being together with friends, family and likeminded people. It is unlike theatrics but has some of the same features, namely that of placing itself in a setting different to current events and time. It is a way of carrying out daily life of the historical Vikings and ‘doing something’. In Tuner’s definition, it can be seen as “a way of working or moving, like a body’s or machine’s ‘action’” (1982, p. 102)

The reason I have chosen to use the term ‘Viking reenactment’ instead of ‘living history’ in this thesis is simply because it is the notion mostly used by the people themselves when they describe what they do. Some of my informants have had some introspection on the use of the word, but it continues to be the universally defining term, despite its problems. Another reason for my use of the word is to separate Living History Museums and Viking reenactment, as these sometimes need to be distinguished from each other.

The main difference between reenactment and living history is that living history is categorised as a more ‘true’ representation of history with the use of people of all social classes, for example a king, royalty, guards, farmers, beggars, etc. I have found reenactment to be more concerned with trends and ‘reenactorisms’, such as large amounts of embroidery, tablet woven belts and trims, simplistic interpretations of patterns and inspiration from countries/times unconnected with the Vikings, which is why it cannot be said to be ‘living

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<sup>7</sup> «[...] gjenstander rekontekstualiseres gjennom forflytninger i tid og rom.» (Rio, 2002, p. 71)

history'. They take historical freedoms and use archaeological sources to make up their own interpretations (historical freedom). Similarly, LARP and cosplay (Helgesen, 2014) are non-historical (often concerned with the future) and may picture fictional characters. An example of more historically correct (authentic) living history, is the museum, *Bardrsundr*, which wanted to display people of a poor social class.

## **Authenticity**

In addition to the notion of 'reenactment' as a commonly used word, 'authenticity' and 'authentic' was given a considerable amount of attention in my field and among informants. Thus, it is necessary to discuss why and how this word was used. Through my ethnographic fieldwork, I most commonly heard the word used as a synonym to 'historical correctness'. The definition of historical correctness and authenticity in this sense, was connected to the use of the right material. In the case of clothing, to be authentic meant that the tunic/dress/trousers needed to be of the right material (most often wool or linen) and hand-sewn. In order to go the next step and be even more authentic, the cloth could be hand-woven and coloured with natural dyes. All 'authentic' things had to be of a hand-made nature, preferably also made with historically correct tools. In addition, if one was able to combine ones whole gear into one small(er) time-frame<sup>8</sup> and limited to one country or, even better, county, this was much admired. In other words, 'historical correct' and 'authentic' were words used to describe how closely related or alike the item, event or action was to the portrayed time period.

There was also such a thing as authentic experiences and feeling. To the modern Vikings, this was often feelings of quietness and of being able to distance oneself from modern technology such as clocks, phones, cars and the sounds of these. A typical authentic experience was related to mystique and that of sitting around a bonfire together with likeminded people, listening to old folk songs and rhythmic drumming and quiet whispers of talking people. While many of my informants found this experience to be one of the more authentic parts of a Viking market, others saw this as less authentic because it was also concerned with the drinking of inauthentic (alcoholic) drinks from inauthentic bottles. Because this experience was outside of opening hours at the market or museum, focus on the

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<sup>8</sup> As will be seen through discussions in this thesis, Viking reenactment is not purely limited to a couple of centuries.

use of historically correct things was not as important as it was during open hours. When there were visitors, particular care was given to hiding things which were clearly ‘modern’.

Feelings of authenticity seemed to be relative to the individual, and new reenactors are easily forgiven for inauthenticity. However, you are expected to build up your knowledge about authenticity and your gear along with it. Shoes seem to be one of the last things acquired by a new reenactor, as these are expensive and/or require a considerable amount of tools and work to make. It is not rare to see reenactors in full Viking gear, wearing sneakers. Sometimes these are wrapped up in cloth to conceal their modern quality.

“The worst thing about Viking reenactment is all the fiber,” She holds her nose and waves a hand in front of her face to indicate the smell of flatulence, “But I guess that’s authentic!”

(Conversation with reenactor at *Bardsundr Museum*, July 2015)

# CHAPTER 2: MUSEUMS

## HOW MUSEUMS EXPRESS TIME AND THE PAST

I barely remember the first time my mother took me to a museum. I could not have been much more than 5 years old and the only things I can remember were the huge rooms that could probably have stacked 3 normal rooms on top of each other. They were minimally equipped with glass cases containing small rusty items that looked insignificant and like something I could find daily in my sand box at home, or washed up on the beach. The items seemed insignificant then and it wasn't until much later that I learned to appreciate *things* the way they were represented in their glass cases. It was at least 10 years later that I realised that a glass case around a simple item raised the thing's significance, value and meaning.

During a group interview in April 2015, *Hrodleif* told me that he had made a habit out of going to history museums whenever he would find one. This is how he would gather information, see the things he wanted to make and acquire when he could afford it. His problem, however, was that he didn't want to, and wasn't able to, spend many hours at these museums because eventually he would run out of things to see and he would have walked through all the rooms using nothing but his eyes. He told me that he felt like these museums were two-dimensional as opposed to the Viking markets and living history museums which he experienced as three-dimensional. At the markets he was able to use all his senses to experience new things.

Putting historically interesting and relevant items in glass cases can be considered a way of saving memories, but this display also creates a distance from the past, making the museum experience somewhat of a paradox. This is not inherently negative, but it does create an "us" and "them" dichotomy that many reenactors find problematic. In this chapter I will discuss the traditional museum and their presentation of time and items. I deliberate on the notion of museology and the importance of history. In relation to the traditional museum, I compare this to the living history museum and its connection to reenactment. Reenactors in a living

history museum can be compared to that of a traditional glass display, but there are also factors that go beyond how we see items in the traditional museum. Particularly Paul Connerton has expressed that modernity has a certain fear of forgetting the past. This has resulted in the rapid building of monuments (and museums), “many memorials are, admittedly, powerful memory places. Yet their effect is more ambiguous than this statement might imply. For the desire to memorialise is precipitated by a fear, a threat, of cultural amnesia.” (Connerton, 2009, p. 27).

### **What is time, and what is the past?**

“The question of what historical time might be belongs to those questions which historical science has the most difficulty answering.”

(Koselleck, 1985, p. xxi)

Before going into how museums enhance feelings of time and the past, it is important to understand what time is. In Scandinavia, USA, Britain and other north western European countries, almost everything people do is based on a linear concept of time. One makes appointments and are expected to be on time for these. We need calendars in pocket-form in order to not show up too early or too late for arrangements that might have been agreed upon weeks or months ago. We become angry over buses being five minutes late and curse the bus company for making us wait. “It affects health, well-being, concentration, creativity” (Johansen, 2001, p. 11, my translation<sup>9</sup>).

The study of time is one that has concerned scholars in a wide variety of studies. *The Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology* (1986) states that the study and the concept of time is a topic that has received much attention from anthropologists, and that “perceptions of time, like those of space, are culturally relative and culturally conditioned” (Seymour-Smith, 1986, p. 278). Anthropologist Anders Johansen, In *All Verdens Tid* (2001), takes up the concept of time and how one doesn't have to travel very far to find societies where it would seem like people have all the time in the world. He studies how people's perception of time influences their existence. In contrast to the linear concept of time, Southern Europe, for example, has a

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<sup>9</sup>«Det går ut over helse, trivsel, konsentrasjon, kreativitet» (Johansen, 2001, p. 11)

more flexible concept of time, while in traditional civil societies there is a focus on a cyclical concept when it comes to religious and ritual life (Johansen, 2001, p. 13).

In an interview with *Steinvor*, she expressed how time was of great importance in hers and her group's way of reenacting. She and her 6 other German friends who came to stay and live in *Bardrsundr* museum for a week, explained to me that besides the relatively strict morning procedure where they had to make sure to hide away any modern stuff, they would usually not even know what time it was. This wasn't a problem for them. She told me that they never had to be ready for certain things at certain times and that this was a relaxing and liberating feeling. *Steinvor* and her group had been going to many Viking markets which had big events such as battles and demonstrations where they were fixed into a schedule, but staying at the museum was a different experience. It was comfortable. Besides the fixed schedule, she also expressed that at markets one could spend many hours making food and it didn't really matter if the food was ready at 7 or 8 o'clock.

*Steinvor:* I think it's very important that when you are in 'Viking time' or in a Viking place, you don't have that time stress. You know, in normal life you have that 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock, and so on. So you don't have that when you're a Viking, and I try to take that with me into my normal life. Like, I try to eat when I'm hungry, I try to do things 'on the weekend' instead of a set time. I try to not have so much stress, and I try to sometimes say "today I can't do that and nobody will die if I do it tomorrow". And for me, that's a bit Viking, a bit like reenactment. (Recorded interview, 31.05.15)

Scandinavia (and Germany, where *Steinvor* is from) normally has a linear concept of time. It seemed that both *Steinvor* and other Viking reenactors I encountered wanted to adopt a more flexible and even cyclical concept of time when they are reenacting, and to use this as inspiration for their daily lives outside of reenactment. An example of their cyclical concept is the *Ásatrú* following of the seasons. This is to honour and ask the gods to give them, for instance, a mild winter or a fruitful harvest, similar to agricultural seasonal cycles.

There is also some difference between the feelings of time during the day time and night time at the museum and at markets. While in the day time there are some responsibilities of following a carefully planned program directed towards visitors and in the

night/evening time, one does not have this pressure. The difference between day and evening/night is also important to feelings of *authenticity*.

In Frode Molven's chapter in "Tingenes Tale" (2002), he looks at how Moltke Moe describes hearing the song *Draumkvedet* sung in a poor smallholding by an old songstress. Molven writes:

"Contemporary time, which is lousy and inconsistent, is compared to the past, which is wonderful and simple. [...]The song creates presence and glimpses of something that cannot last; time passes and the presence is slipping. The basic premise here is that the past is lost, it can only emerge in such sublime glimpses."

(Molven, 2002, p. 168-169, my translation<sup>10</sup>)

His description reminds me of the many times I experienced hearing folk songs sung around bonfires at Viking markets and how they created an atmosphere which expressed feelings of pasts and present. This is not only the case for folk songs, but also for reenactment and living history museums in themselves. They are a strange conglomeration of times, focusing on contemporary trends, playing on people's imaginations (fantasy) and using actual archaeological/historical evidence, sometimes from widely differing places in time. He describes the past as being "wonderful and simple," which is one of the main attractions of Viking reenactment. It is a simpler and slowed-down society. Molven goes on to say that the past can be reawakened, but not repeated. Repeating the past would be impossible, but in order to understand it, and to understand ourselves, it needs to be reawakened. "The past is gone, but it has noticeable remnants which stimulate the imagination and a yearning for presence" (ibid., p. 169, my translation<sup>11</sup>). Molven's (2002) descriptions of *Draumkvedet*, and the use of the past in reenactment also shows a weakness in the modern conception of linear time, as the past becomes part of the now.

Paul Connerton, in his essay *How Modernity Forgets* (2009), expresses how, like the title indicates, modernity has a tendency to *forget* the past. He explains that people in contemporary times are losing their ability to preserve the historical past and that there is a

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<sup>10</sup>«Samtiden, som er elendig og sprikende, settes opp mot fortiden, som er vidunderlig og enkel. [...]Sangen skaper nærvær og glimt av noe som ikke kan vare; tiden går og nærværet glipper. Det grunnleggende premisset er her at fortiden er tapt, den kan bare tre fram i slike sublime glimt» (p. 168-169)

<sup>11</sup>«Fortiden er borte, men har sansbare levninger som stimulerer forestillingsevnen og nærværslengselen» (p. 169)

decreasing capacity to link modern-day experiences to earlier generations (Connerton, p. 2). Even though he expresses that there is a kind of collective amnesia, he explains that there is some consciousness about it in the form of fear. “A fear that is awkwardly expressed in the taste for the fashions of earlier times, and shamelessly exploited by nostalgia-merchants; memory has thus become a best-seller in a consumer society” (Le Goff, ?, cited in Connerton, 2009, p. 3). Later in the book, Connerton discusses the emerging trend of putting up monuments in order to desperately try to save the past.

“The relationship between memorials and forgetting is reciprocal: the threat of forgetting begets memorials and the construction of memorials begets forgetting. If giving monumental shape to what we remember is to discard the obligation to remember, that is because memorials permit only some things to be remembered and, by exclusion, cause others to be forgotten. Memorials conceal the past as much as they cause us to remember it.” (ibid., p. 29)

Connerton uses the example of monuments put up in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany and Central Europe, displaying athletic and healthy bodies. What these monuments prove is that there was a great denial about the *millions* of war-wounded people at the time (p. 29). These monuments can be seen as an over-the-top gesture towards a time that shouldn't be forgotten. Not only do they embellish the truth, but the monument is also evidence that modern people try to prove to themselves that they are not forgetting. This is the *paradox* of the museum: We use museums/monuments to try to save the past, but by *having* to save the past, we are already forgetting. Building monuments will also highlight modern times by making something to compare itself to. The classical museum and the monuments therefore enhances and compares the difference between the now and the *then*, while the living history museum and the Viking reenactors take the *then* and makes it the *now*: they embody the items and make it theirs instead of a distant memory.

### **Museology and the museum as an institution**

The presentation and teaching of knowledge is the foremost principle of the modern museum. It functions as a way for people to learn about the past. *Gunnhild* once said to me, “Humans are unique because we have the possibility to learn from the past. We wouldn't be where we



are now if we hadn't learned from it" (interview, 20.02.16). Even though modernity has a tendency to forget the past (which is why the past 100 years have seen so many monuments being built), museums are and will be important in order for society to understand our, and others, cultures across space and time. Johansen, Losnedahl and Ågotnes (2002) in their edited book *Tingenes Tale: Innspill til Museologi*, express in the first sentence of the introductory chapter that the museum business bases itself on *three types of knowledge*. First, knowledge about the materials and items the museum manages, and their historical contexts, is needed<sup>12</sup>. Second, knowledge that preserves the items and facilitates the right kind of communication<sup>13</sup>. Third, knowledge about museology itself and the museum's history, institutional values, ideology and, of course, its communal role.

“The museum business has, like any other business, a need for a meta perspective: It needs to be able to see itself in the light of history, as changeable; it needs to be able to see itself, in a way, from a distance, with the outsider's eyes, as wondrous. This is the task of museology. It is, first and foremost, not out to contribute to the museum's knowledge production, or to ensure the practical conditions of it: It asks itself what a museum is, why we have it, how it works, what it's good for.”

(Johansen, Losnedahl, Ågotnes, 2002, p. 8. My translation<sup>14</sup>.)

The collection and documentation will never end, as changes in time and science methods, etc., will always have an impact on knowledge. The museums and its methods need to change and adapt to its audience.

Modernity's tendency to forget the past (Connerton, 2009, see above) also plays a part in why reenactment and living history museums have become so popular. The living history museum and the Viking market can be seen as the monuments built in order to try to save the past. This type of presentation of knowledge of the past also challenges the paradox of museums distancing themselves from the past by saving it. Performing and representation in *this* type of museum and market takes the item (read: the copy of the original item) out of the

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<sup>12</sup>Art history, ethnology, archaeology

<sup>13</sup>Conservation and documentation theory, museum pedagogy, architecture of exhibitions.

<sup>14</sup>«Museumsvirksomheten har, som enhver annen virksomhet, behov for et metaperspektiv: Den trenger å kunne se seg selv i historiens lys, som foranderlig; den trenger å kunne se seg selv liksom på avstand, med den utenforståendes blikk, som forunderlig. Dette er museologiens oppgave. Den er ikke først og fremst ute etter å bidra til museenes kunnskapsproduksjon, eller sikre de praktiske betingelsene for den: Den spør seg hva et museum er for noe, hvorfor vi har noe slikt, hvordan det virker, hva det skal være godt for» (p. 8)

classic museum context and takes use of it the way it was originally thought to be used. Through these actions, the items come alive in the present by creating motion and connotations with the past in the present and it extends the life of an item. Later in this chapter, I use the example of the tortoise brooch. Reenactment has extended this brooch's life by taking use of it again, rather than leaving it in a classic museum glass case. The brooch's life is embodied.

The interactive museum tells us about modern society's need for first-hand experience in order to find it particularly interesting and actively learn. "The strong individualism in Western societies requires the individual to seek exclusive experiences in order to stand out from the masses" (Welk 2004, p. 81, cited in Richards, G. & J. Wilson, 2004). The emergence of interactive museums has come at a time in the modern era where there is an acceleration of societal ideas. This has given a need for the individual to "look back, towards a previous society, with greater continuity, firmer values and a slower pace" (Ronström, 2007, p. 287, my translation<sup>15</sup>). The rapidly changing Western society is becoming more and more different to what is thought to be "traditional society". It is becoming increasingly important to people and museum institutions to represent the past through medias that follow contemporary technology and interests.

### *Museology*

Despite the history of the museum going back centuries, the museum is also a key feature of the modern. To use a quote by Donald Preziosi, an American art historian:

"We live today in a profoundly museological world – a world that in no small measure is a product and effect of some two centuries of museological mediations. Museums are one of the central sites at which our modernity has been generated, (en)gendered, and sustained over that time. They are so natural, ubiquitous, and indispensable to us today that it takes considerable effort to think ourselves back to a world without them, and to think through the shadows cast by the massive and dazzling familiarity of this truly uncanny social technology. Our world is unthinkable without this extraordinary invention" (Preziosi, 1996 cited in Marstine, 2006, p. 1)

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<sup>15</sup>"Med accelerande samhällsföreställningar föds ett behov av att blicka bakåt, mot ett tidigare samhälle, med större kontinuitet, fastare värden och långsammare tempo." (p. 287)

Objectively, a traditional museum could be seen with a child's eyes as in the introduction of this chapter: rooms filled with *stuff* which at first glance seem like insignificant items from a distant time. At second glance they can be seen as authentic and pure, "unmediated anchors to the past" (Marstine, 2006, p. 2). The museum contains a collection of items which open up for individual associations. The items have a denotative and connotative meaning, a discussion in which will be found below. Today, anyone can visit a museum to experience a feeling of passed time. However, this is/has not always been the case.

The first collections that resembled a museum were private collections intended for only a person, family or an institution, from 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and later. However, throughout time these turned out more and more public. British cultural historian, Charles Saumarez Smith (1989), expresses that the purpose behind going from private collections to more public museums was to change the meaning of the artefact. By doing this they could provide it with the possibility of being seen by a larger proportion of people who would in some way or another "obtain some form of educational benefit from the experience". (1989, p. 6). In this way, "knowledge was to be promoted through the study of three-dimensional artefacts for the benefit of the public in a collection which was expected to be established in perpetuity" (p. 7). Saumarez Smith goes on to note on the four primary characteristics of the definition of a museum, characteristics that over time had become accepted and promoted by the government:

"The first is that the collections on display should in some way contribute to the advancement of knowledge through study of them; the second, which is closely related, is that the collections should not be arbitrarily arranged, but should be organised according to some systematic and recognisable scheme of classification; the third is that they should be owned and administered not by a private individual, but by more than one person on behalf of the public; the fourth is that they should be reasonably accessible to the public, if necessary by special arrangement and on payment of a fee" (p. 8, 1989).

Very early on in the history of the museum, it became a main source of knowledge and aimed to educate those who had the opportunity to visit. From a very early stage, the artefacts were pulled out of their original role as "fragments from a shattered historical universe," (ibid, p. 9,

1989) and instead used as indicators and metonyms for comparative study; they were used to compare the then and the now, often strengthening the temporal distance.

### *The shrine-ness of the museum*

*Bardrsundr museum* and its non-religious (non-Ásatrú) volunteers often made the museum seem more sacred to the visitor than it actually seemed to be. This was to attract an audience who was interested in the mystique of the Viking age. It was done by making stories and places in the museum which concerned Norse Gods or other spiritual figures. Marstine (2006) expresses how the museum can be seen from many angles depending on the discipline, “Most commonly heard are the metaphors of museum as *shrine*, [...]” (pp. 8-9, my italicising). These are not exclusive and they overlap. She exemplifies that a museum might “profess to be a shrine but financial issues are still central – they’re just hidden from public view” (p. 9). This is the case for many Scandinavian living history museums.

One of the most important ways to envision the museum is as a shrine and as a sacred space, “It is a place of sanctuary removed from the outside world. Museum collections are fetishized; the museum as a shrine declares that its objects possess an aura that offers spiritual enlightenment as it inspires platonic values of beauty and morality” (Marstine, 2006, p. 9). The museum creates the shrine-illusion by taking use of architecture that imitate classic views of that which people associate with spiritual values, such as churches and temples and ornamental niches. They build up a museum frontstage which enhances the historicity of the objects (Marstine, 2006, p. 10). The traditional museum and the living history museum can be seen as a shrine by those who base their reenactment upon the items in the museum. The living history museum or the Viking market is a shrine to the native of the Viking community because it is, historically, the ideal time and space to be in when it comes to reenactment. The museum and its items, being the closest to a historical ‘home’, can be seen as holy for the reenactors. In *Bardrsundr Museum*, the town itself could be seen as a shrine, but there were also things that seemed more holy than other things, as for example the rune stones which were painted with red pigment and often told a story about historical people from the area. These were toasted to during large events. They were also never moved. The shrine-ness of a museum shows through things which seem to be taken out of context and given new meaning as something which cannot be treated like other things.

## *Contextualising*

In Peter Larsen's chapter of *Tingenes Tale* (2002), he tells of the experience of visiting Solvang in California. Solvang has a typically old Danish flair, and Larsen visited a museum where he came across a bread machine exactly like the one he remembered his grandmother using in the 1950s. The things in the museum had in a very short distance of time gone from everyday items to museum items; from being something common to being an anchor to the past, a meaningful monument (Larsen, 2002, p. 28). While Larsen saw the items as tools, the museum (and most of its visitors) saw the items as "abstract, metonymic symbols" (p. 29) with aesthetic qualities. Janet Marstine writes: "The museum as a shrine leads viewers to assign meanings to objects totally unrelated to their original function or intention" (2006, p. 9). The curator at the museum in Solvang sees the bread machine, but only its aesthetic qualities. She is unable to see the connotations and the use that Larsen knows. He has an embodied relationship with the thing, while the curator is only able to see it from the outside.

Our understanding of the objects inside a museum have a lot of conditions, especially the representation inside the museum. Not only can there (rarely) be faults in representation, but the way that the objects are seen by people is subjective. Perhaps most notably, our perception of authenticity is context sensitive in that contemporary perspective plays a large role in what is and feels authentic. Another perspective for our understanding of an item is by denotative and connotative signs<sup>16</sup>, meaning an item's literal meaning, but also what it represents. It is not necessarily the curator that puts the item into context, but it is be further interpreted by the visitor.

In the Viking town one could find small and large stones engraved with runes and figures. Denotatively this is exactly what they are: stones with engravings. Connotatively they are also what Marstine (2006) noted as "unmediated anchors to the past" (p. 2); they represent whatever the rune inscriptions say or the figures they picture. The items made by *Sindri* the blacksmith, are not only knives, fire strikers or jewellery; they also represent knowledge from 1000 years ago, carefully constructed techniques, expertly built forges, and large amounts of time, resources and cooperation with other people. The blacksmith builds up an experience around the thing and learns about it by teaching himself the practice in a work situation. Similarly, the rune stones act as anchors to the past depicting stories about gods and

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<sup>16</sup>Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*.

spiritual beings and awaken feelings of holiness. This is one of the connotations of the rune stones and depending on the individual, these connotations can be vastly different.

The museum locale, surroundings and setting also have a lot to say about the item itself. For example an item such as a brooch from the Viking age dug up by archaeologists in a field known for Viking-related items. This so-called tortoise brooch was used to hold together straps of fabric that went over the shoulders of a female overdress (see photo). By putting this item in a museum, it shows that this is an exotic and strange item that is no longer used in modern times. Placing it in a glass case proves that the item is definitely from a distant time.

In a way, placing the brooch in the museum is also an attempt to save the past. It is an attempt to not forget about the item and what it was once used for. A room filled with artefacts from a distant past is a shrine dedicated to the time in order to save a memory. However, having to save the past also shows that it is a distant memory, creating a paradox. In comparison, by placing the brooch on the hangerok on a real-life woman representing a Viking woman from year 1000, the living history museum or the market diminish the feeling of seeing the item from the outside. The item becomes a part of contemporary time inspired by the past instead of a mythical strange item lying still in a glass box. In this way, *Sindri* showing, testing and teaching blacksmithing to visitors and other Viking reenactors reduces the paradox. The past comes to us instead of having to be seen from a very far distance. The past is being embodied.

In Knut Rio's chapter in *Tingenes Tale* (2002) he describes how he, during work at Bergen Museum, was set to collect items from Oceania, label them, photograph them and look for documentation about their arrival in the museum. He was also set to describe the context of the item groups (2002, p. 56). He tells the reader that he found the social life of the items just as interesting in the museum context as they would have been 200 years ago in Oceania. He challenges an idea of an item having only had an authentic self when it was in its original setting. "Instead of telling stories about the Others, they could tell something about ourselves and our history" (Rio, 2002, p. 57, my translation<sup>17</sup>). He goes on to discuss the life



An example of a "tortoise brooch" used to attach the "hangerok".  
Photo by A. Økstra. 11.02.16.

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<sup>17</sup>«I stedet for å fortelle historier om de Andre, kunne de fortelle noe om oss selv og vår historie» (Rio, 2002, p. 57)

and cultural biography of things and says that things always have sets of meaning, but that these meanings are in constant change as the things move in time and space:

“Through their lifetimes, things are woven into different cultural contexts, in widely different personal fates, and in relations that stretch across borders of ethnic, geographic and temporal natures. They are therefore fundamentally loose – they change ownership, they change roles, they change status depending on what purpose they are used for or what they figure as” (Rio, 2002, p. 58, my translation<sup>18</sup>)

The items found in the museum are taken out of historical context and into the museological context. Representation and contextualising is central in understanding what an item is. The items put in the museum can be compared to the painting by René Magritte called *The Treachery of Images*: “*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*” (this is not a pipe). The item is taken completely out of context by being represented without any of its historical meaning and authentic nature. It is *only* a picture. The reenactor takes an item and reinstates it into a more authentic setting instead of seeing it as *only* an item. His/her items are not the original items, but the use of the *thing* together with other (related) things brings to life that which up until that moment had seemed irrelevant. In this way, the item changes its connotation over time, because it is in constant change.

## History Matters

In 2014 I went to Xi’an in the Shaanxi province in China to see the Terracotta Army. It was winter and pollution in China was at its worst, so inside the largest building you could actually see the mist hanging over the statues like a soft blanket. In some ways this showed me the vast size of the museum and excavation site. The army was discovered in 1974 and it is estimated that it contains over 8000 soldiers, plus hundreds of other figures. They were made in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to portray the army of the first Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang (Encyclopedia.com, 2004). Excavation of the site is still going on today. The reason I mention this museum is that such a huge museum, where they have already found so many

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<sup>18</sup>“Ting blir gjennom sine livsløp innvevd i forskjellige kulturelle kontekster, i vidt forskjellige personlige skjebner, og i relasjoner som strekker seg på tvers av grenser av etnisk, geografisk og temporal rolle, de skifter status alt ettersom hvilke øyemed de blir brukt i eller hva du figurerer som.» (Rio, 2002, p. 58)

artefacts, *matters* to the development of understanding the past and to us as human beings. This is the case for all excavations all over the world: it's exciting, we learn from it and we learn more about ourselves. The past is sometimes a mystery, and that is why it *matters*. Archaeological excavations like the one in Xi'an can help in filling in holes in history that were mysteries before. Learning about history connects us through time, and connecting the past and the future is essential in learning the conditions of being human. We know the present by knowing the past.

It might be wrong to claim that history matters a great deal to the individual as Viking reenactors do have a *particularly* great interest in history compared to the average person. One of my informants, who is also a student of neurochemistry, said "humans are unique because we have the opportunity to learn from the past. We would not have been where we are right now if we had not learned from history" (interview, 26.02.16). In Paul Connerton's book *How Modernity Forgets* (2009), he says, basing himself on Hobsbawm, that the past is becoming less important to the modern person than it used to be:

"The destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in"

(Hobsbawm, 1994 cited in Connerton, 2009, p. 2)

I was a bit surprised when someone expressed to me that not everyone is as interested in history as I am. It took me some time to realise that she was very right. My informants do seem to have a particularly large interest in history, archaeology and related topics. When it comes to this sort of knowledge, they are very curious, and on several occasion I have been told by my informants that outsiders often see them as a bit 'weird'.

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter, we have seen that people's perception of time influences their existence. To the Viking reenactor, one of the beauties of taking back the past is its very different conception of time and how it passes. We know that repeating the past would be impossible,



but in order to understand it and to understand ourselves, the past needs to be reawakened. This is especially because modern Western society has a tendency to forget. The society tries to remember by saving the past in a traditional museum landscape. Not only does this create a wrong picture of the item itself because you do not necessarily see the item being used and in its natural surroundings, but it also creates an 'us' and 'them'-dichotomy with huge temporal distances. This is the paradox of the museum. As you will see in the next chapter, Viking reenactors and the living history museum have taken it upon themselves to minimalise the distance between the then and the now. In order to save the past in a safer way, the reenactors and the living history museums create an environment that pulls the viewer into a past instead of viewing it from the outside: they embody the past.

## CHAPTER 3: EMBODYING HISTORY

When I first went to Sweden to do my fieldwork at *Bardsundr Museum*, I met a large amount of reenactors who had specialised themselves in different types of crafts. Because I knew very little about blacksmithing, and because I am a curious person, I quickly got to know the resident blacksmith, *Sindri*<sup>19</sup>. He was very eager to show me how to do simple tasks such as making nails or Thor's hammers<sup>20</sup>. Over a period of 6 months he would also explain in detail how the iron was smelted, how the components of the iron is different, making it possible to make beautiful intricate patterns (called pattern welding/Damascus). He also told me about how he had taught himself blacksmithing with the help of other hobbyist blacksmiths. Today, *Sindri* is one of the most well-known Viking blacksmiths, and one would have to look quite hard for a Viking market where one of his knives *cannot* be found.

During a post-fieldwork visit he suddenly tapped me on the shoulder and wanted to show me something new he was working on. We went to the smithy in the Viking town (where we a few months ago had knocked out a large wall in order to make it possible to have more than one forge in the small house and to open up the space so more people could view as he worked). *Sindri* then told me he had a new hobby: glass beads. I watched as he made colourful beads over a tiny clay oven with the help of a few other people, while discussing with the others how to make the best beads; how to prevent them from cracking, how to make them as round as possible and how the historical Vikings would have made the patterns. A few hours later at the office, I found him in front of a computer, looking to buy glass rods so he could continue experimenting with his new hobby.

I'd like to use *Sindri* here as an example of the extreme curiosity for new and unknown things in Viking reenactment. A reenactor who finds something that is interesting to him/her, will research it for days and weeks and try to get to know everything they can about it. During opening hours at *Bardsundr*, *Sindri* worked in the smithy where he would mostly make fire steels (*eldstål*) which could be made within minutes while the visitor watched. He also

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<sup>19</sup> Old Norse name: The spark sprayer.

<sup>20</sup> Mjölner, the hammer of Thor the thunder god. Often worn as a pendant/necklace.

demonstrated how one could use flint and the fire steel he just made to make fire. When there were few visitors, he could be found making other items and experimenting with methods. He would also have a display of knives, spears and swords he had made and he invited people to try out the techniques he showed them.



*A blacksmith's display at a Viking market. Photo by A. Økstra, 14.06.15.*

It was a beautiful morning at the museum, and I walked up in the Viking town. I had been set to demonstrate tablet weaving to tourists this day, and brought with me colourful yarn and the square wooden tablets I used in order to weave. Considering how nice the weather was, there weren't many visitors, so *Sindri* and I chatted while we did our crafts; me in the grassed area outside the smithy and him by the forge in the smithy. I listened to the rhythmic sounds of steel hitting steel and the chirping of birds sitting in the willow trees behind me. A person turned around the corner and I recognised him as a friend of *Sindri*. He greeted us and entered the forge. As they chatted and joked I immersed myself into the weaving. Fifteen minutes later, *Sindri* tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to close my eyes and hold out my hand. His friend was giggling and I looked suspiciously at him, thinking it was a bug. "Come on, do it," he said and curiosity got the better of me and I did as I was told. I felt something small and cold land in my hand and he asked me to open my eyes. In my hand was the smallest fire steel I had ever seen. The usual ones were around ten centimetres in length. This one could not have been more than two centimetres. I looked up at him and he proudly said, "I made the world's smallest fire steel!" He took it from my hand and pulled a flint stone out of his pocket, "Look!" he said and hit the two against each other. I could clearly see the sparks. He took a handful of dry grass and slowly and steadily he managed to light it on fire. His friend kept on giggling and said, "Come on, *Sindri*, We can make an even smaller one!"

This is what the life in *Bardrsundr* living history museum was like during opening hours. When there were visitors they would be given the attention. When there were not, all attention would be given to crafts and experiments. There were many different craftsmen who did crafts like silver/tin smelting and jewellery making, shaping of amber, dying clothes with natural ingredients, woodworking, weaving, sewing, etc. Every visitor at the museum was invited to watch and try.

As learning about history and our ancestors through mediums of living history museums and Viking reenactment has over time become more and more relevant and popular, films and TV shows portraying history have appeared. Some of these come in the variety of reality shows focusing on competitions, for example the Norwegian shows *Anno*, *Farmen* and even *Alt for Norge*, in which people compete by doing historical crafts or tasks without using modern technology. These shows actualise historical times and make them relevant to today's youth through popular television. Not only do they appeal to a modern fascination with reality shows, but they may also convey important information about our past, historical information which young people today might conceive as uninteresting or irrelevant if found in a traditional museum.

The up and coming popularity of historical reality shows may act as a kind of resistance to modernity's tendency to forget the past. While I do not know if this is conscious or subconscious by the producers of the TV-shows, this type of productions can act as memorials in the sense of Paul Connerton's words: "The desire to memorialise is precipitated by a fear, a threat, of cultural amnesia." (2009, p. 27). Almost exactly like the thousands of monuments built to save the past, the historical reality shows demonstrate a desire to save the past. Many of the historical reality shows portray smallholdings and a struggle to get by with what people had at the time and what they were able to grow and make themselves. Because of this, this kind of popular culture and actualisation of history display a 'healthy' mixture of rich and poor.

The past can be taught in many ways and at a time where traditional museums are out of fashion, the museum as an institution have taken to present the past using other means of presentation, such as modern technology, interactive exhibits and by letting the visitors see the museum with new eyes. Many museums have gone from putting emphasis on the object to focusing on experience. The growing number of living history museums, which let visitors and classes of children *learn by doing*, intensify the experience and increase interest in learning.

## From classic museum models to living history museums

The classic museum landscape with focus on material objects has recently been challenged by immaterial values: the past needs to be experienced in order to fully understand it. Instead of seeing the object enclosed in a glass box, one can now see it being made and used the way it was *then*. This has also appealed to tourists, especially because ‘experiencing the authentic’ has become increasingly popular, especially within backpacker culture. One of the reasons behind the change from glass case-museums to interactive museums is the Information/Computer Age. All information is available on the internet and on television, so spending money on travelling to a museum to see stand-still objects you may already have seen online seems like a waste of time and money if you do not also experience something new. Living history museums and authenticity tourism are exotic solutions to a luxury problem many tourists have today; you have seen everything that was easy to get to, so now you have to find ‘creative’ ways to have new experiences. To be subjected to what everyone else has experienced is not good enough either: it needs to be exotic. And what could be more exotic than (metaphoric/symbolic) time travel?

Even though open air museums open up for new experiences, these, like the classic museum model, cannot stay static. They constantly need to change to conform to contemporary cultural values in order to keep people interested. Living history museums have a very paradoxical structure as they struggle to stay authentic and on-point when it comes to the time it represents while also keeping up with contemporary interests and values by following popular culture. They play on popular culture such as reality shows focused on competitions in old crafts, but also high-budget Viking- or Medieval-inspired historical dramas like *Vikings*<sup>21</sup> and *Game of Thrones*<sup>22</sup>. When being invited to events at museums or markets it is not rare to see descriptions such as ‘Come see how Ragnar Lothbrok actually lived’ or ‘Experience what inspired George R. R. Martin’. Popular culture like this matters to the way history is disseminated in the museum. People want to have ‘authentic’ experiences,

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<sup>21</sup>*Vikings* bases itself on the story of historical being Ragnar Lothbrok. While the TV-show is called a “drama” it takes up historical events, but is often described as fictional in nature. There is much discussion in the Viking reenactment community whether or not *this or that* is historically correct.

<sup>22</sup>*Game of Thrones* is a fantasy drama focusing on many different characters in a fictional world, based on the books by George R. R. Martin. Much of the inspiration behind the books and TV-show is based on medieval history.

however, authenticity is relative to the eye that sees. The museum has to assess and reassess how to show the museum to the visitor and how to appeal to all ages.

In conversation with the king of *Bardrsundr Museum, Rangvaldr*, he told me how the idea of guiding has changed a lot over the years. When the museum started up they had a few guides who spoke different languages (mostly Swedish, English and German) and they would stand on duty when there were visitors. Each guide would have to guide groups up to five times a day and were exhausted by the end of a shift, so they knew they needed to make a change somehow.

*Rangvaldr*: We have a ‘levandegörande miljö’, school milieu, activity milieu, because you can't enter a house and suddenly see a whole school class sitting in there working on something. You get the picture that, ”oh, they had children working at that time?” Which they probably did, but that's not the point. But it creates the wrong picture. So there's a lot of things we do to try to make it look proper.

When seeing that other museums took use of a more “levandegörande”, making the town come alive, (disseminational) town life where the visitors were not guided but rather walked around experiencing and learning from craftsmen, they decided to adopt this method.

*Bardrsundr museum* has in the last few years experimented with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person dissemination to see what appeals most to the visitors.

They also go out of their way to set up activities for children, and they have a tight partnership with other local businesses. This way they can collaborate with other companies and set up events which appeal to a wide audience. Arranging farmers markets, stag/hen nights,



*Company event. Rope-pulling activity. Photo by A. Økstra. 22.05.16.*

weddings, Christmas parties for corporations, etc., invites a wide variety of people into the museum. This creates both income and strengthens visitor numbers as well as memories for

the visitors in hopes of coming back with friends and family. *Bardrsundr Museum*, like many other museums, invites different groups for different custom-made events, for example for the Ancient Order of Druids. The museum would arrange an array of happenings, from simple to what was rumoured to be *very* bizarre.

One evening, I was invited up into the Viking village to attend a corporate event. There were at least 60 people from the corporate (a company unrelated to historical/Viking dissemination), and they brought with them a large load of various alcohol and 5 female servers. The employees consisted largely of men, except for two female employees. Some of the museum employees and volunteers had prepared various activities such as axe throwing and rope-pulling, and the visitors were split into teams who competed with each other. They were also given blue overalls and a belt which represented some kind of simple Viking clothing. Their five servers also dressed in Viking clothes, but wore these in a more 'sexy' fashion and putting these on in the 'wrong' way. I specifically remember one of them wearing a Viking stocking on her head.

### **Tourism and the search for the authentic**

*"The strong individualism in Western societies requires the individual to seek exclusive experiences in order to stand out from the masses"*

(Welk 2004, p. 81, cited in Richards, G. & J. Wilson, 2004)

The past few decades have seen an extreme increase in the numbers of tourists and especially *backpackers* all over the world. Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, in their book *The Global Nomad* (2004) discuss this growing popularity as a reaction to "the alienation of modern society" (p. 3). They state that travel is a central part of the postmodern world which is defined by the restlessness and increased mobility of today's society. Basing themselves on MacCannell, they say:

"Tourism has become an icon of the rootlessness and alienation of modern life. The search for meaning in modern societies encourages pilgrimage to the sites of differentiation created by modernity and a search for the 'primitive' and pre-modern

cultures it has displaced. The disappearance of pre-modern cultures makes them all the more attractive as sites of tourism consumption and distinction – a chance to see the past before it disappears.” (Richards, G. & J. Wilson, 2004, p. 4)

Backpackers often seem to be compared and compare themselves to mainstream tourism which often seem to have negative connotations in backpacker culture: “Naïve, superficial and destructive to the social structures and ecosystems in the host regions” (Welk 2004, p. 84). When speaking to a good friend of mine, she told me how she had gone on holiday with her family and they had ended up in a resort in a country she had been rather excited to see. However, the resort was filled with people from almost exactly the same place she was from, with the same background. The all-inclusive holiday included food that she was only too familiar with already: English/continental all-day breakfast and pizza/burgers for dinner. She came home feeling like she had spent 6 hours on a plane just to go about her daily life in a significantly higher temperature. What was the point, she wondered. It would seem that people are becoming too comfortable in their normal setting. So comfortable that they take this comfort with them on holiday. In comparison, backpacking appears to take the person (at least slightly) out of the comfort zone in a search for new experiences. Younger people have tried to distance themselves from mainstream tourism/holidays, and this might be one of the reasons for the still rising trend of backpacking. This type of travel is concerned with low-cost travel/housing, often over a longer time and focused on experiencing local culture: the search for “primitive” (see quotation above) and pre-modern societies. The rising popularity of backpacking can be seen as a response to the negative connotations people have with tourism, even though backpacker tourism is in itself a contradictory term (Welk 2004, p. 83).

*Rangvaldr:* So there's a big mix [of different people in reenactment], and if you look at the last 15 years, it's fantastic! There are the Norwegians who live in Germany, the Frenchmen who live in Finland and so on. It's been so mixed the last years, just like what happened in the Viking age. People move around. Backpacking has become so popular. People take the money they have and use them to travel, instead of getting their drivers licence. Do you have a drivers licence?

*Me:* No. But I've been travelling...

*Rangvaldr:* [Laughs] Well, there you go! For my generation the most important thing was the drivers licence. But in your generation, it's different. If you had your



driver's licence, you could move around. But now that won't stop you. Instead of then moving 20 miles, you would rather move 200 000 miles now. It's a different proportion. At the same time, when people put on their Viking clothes they get into a different role. Maybe they have a boring job, you know, standing by a noisy machine or something, every day, but here they have different opportunities, as well as getting a lot more friends. (Interview, 11.05.16)

Similarly to backpacking, living history museums and Viking reenactors put much focus on experiencing new (but old) things. The definition of Viking reenactment is related to learning about a distant culture vastly different from our own. The living history museum also attempts to leave the mainstream museum behind and focus on both contemporary interests of authentic experiences, and to stay historically correct. The reenactors do not seek to make great change in the world, but instead to make a change in themselves; learning from past cultures about alternative/simpler ways of viewing life. Like backpackers, the reenactors get a feeling of alienation (Welk 2004, p. 85), which is actually one of the *reasons* to travel/reenact. Many reenactors are proud of their “weirdness” and actively seek out childishness and play. Both backpackers and reenactors “will fully re-integrate after returning home” (ibid.). They do not clash with modern society, but may start to live a slightly different lifestyle: “Backpacking is merely a stroll into non-conformism, a countercultural ‘picnic’ – a break from the backpacker’s own conformist life” (Welk 2004, p. 85).

To use an example, after the group interview with the six German reenactors who came to *Bardrsundr Museum*, one of them sent me a long email which she ended by saying: “So, I’ll stop rambling now, send you this long mail and get on with my work - washing the dirty clothes, putting away the reenactment things, tidying up...”. I feel this sums up what reenactors do after coming home from a day, weekend or months of Viking reenactment. They clean themselves up, wash their clothes and tidy up all the things that are directly related to reenactment. They re-integrate into the modern Western society after a countercultural ‘picnic’ (Welk 2004, p. 85). Whenever I would walk into someone’s (modern-style) office at *Bardrsundr Museum* there would be wooden chests along the walls, weapons on the walls and animal skins draped over chairs. When visiting one of the *Bardrsundr* employees’ house, I found that her apartment was not dissimilar from her office. She had wicker baskets chock-full of thick yarn for needle binding and knitting, sheep skins in her sofa, little

figurines of Norse Gods standing in between her many books, and a large wooden shield placed on the wall over her bed. This was the case for most of the reenactors I visited. They would not leave the Viking world completely behind, but rather show off their favourite things in their house. From personal experience and the tourists and backpackers I have met, they do similar things: hang up photos or souvenirs from the places they've been, etc. Many reenactors I have met before, during and after my fieldwork are or have been backpackers, and vice-versa. The two groups seem to pull people who have similar interests and views of the world (religiously, politically and/or culturally), and feel that they are outside the norm when it comes to self-presentation and in experiences of an 'exotic' kind.

The exotic and its definitions have been a subject within anthropology for decades. Bruce Kapferer is one amongst many anthropologists who have discussed the use of the word 'exotic' and previous anthropologists' tendencies to use it "with reference to materials collected far away from the metropolises" (Kapferer, 2013, p. 815). The use of the word is often associated with racist beliefs and colonialist associations. The 'exotic' used to be defined as "that which was not Euro-American and which did not exhibit the rationalisation of science" (Kapferer, 2013, p. 817). In these terms, peoples/cultures defined as exotic were marginalised and justified to be dominated by Euro-America. Kapferer introduces the term "scientific exotic" (p. 818) and refers to Lévi-Strauss who refused the use of exoticism as a mode of domination. Lévi-Strauss therefore in some ways redefined the exotic, "Through the mediation of Lévi-Strauss's kind of anthropology, the exotic, those disempowered, dismissed, and excluded in the course of the march of progress, are yielded critical place in the general understanding of human being" (Kapferer, 2013, p. 819). Anthropologists and others find the exotic interesting because the place/culture/person is in some way dissimilar from what is seen at home; the alterity. The exotic in Levi-Straussian terms doesn't marginalise other cultures, but embraces them on their own terms. Anthropology went from Eurocentric/ethnocentric views to a more culturally relativist understanding.

Since people by nature are curious animals, backpackers will seek out experiences which contrast "the strong individualism in Western societies" (Welk 2004, p. 81). That which is exotic can be seen as relative, depending on the individual. As an example, for an Australian backpacker, seeing snow for the first time could be considered exotic, while for a Norwegian person snow is part of life at home. Othering and orientalism are important factors to the 'exoticism' of an experience. In today's Western society, where conformism is by many seen as negative and boring and where distances and borders don't seem to matter

much anymore, there is a search for the ultimately exclusive experience (that not everyone else has experienced too). Then, what is more exotic than (metaphoric/symbolic) time travel?

“The disappearance of pre-modern cultures makes them all the more attractive as sites of tourism consumption and distinction – a chance to see the past before it disappears.” (Richards, G. & J. Wilson, 2004, p. 4)

Reenactment and living history museums can work in ways of being able to experience pre-modern cultures even after they disappear. As it would seem that post-tourists have a hunger for authentic experiences that are defined as more ‘primitive’ than one’s own culture, then this sort of time travel is exactly within what they seek. However, as the museum displays a past that has already passed, this kind of authenticity is staged. The museum and the Viking market need to work hard in order to uphold the tourist’s expectations of authenticity. The living history museum and the Viking market looks more authentic to the visitor if they maintain *every* standard of authenticity. There is a strive for upholding the visitor’s expectations of authenticity, but this definition of authenticity is not the same for the visitor as it is for the reenactor. It is not strange, then, that some (most?) Viking reenactors experience a more true feeling of authenticity after the museum/market closes for the day. This feeling of authenticity is linked to the amount of historically correct items, a particularly mysterious atmosphere and, especially, the socialising and being together in a different way than what you are used to. One informant told me that it is in the evening, when plastic bottles come out and after a few drinks, that she felt the Viking market felt the most authentic:

*Alfhild:* “I think it’s the atmosphere. Like, there are no distractions, maybe especially when you’re a little drunk. You kind of forget about all the other things and you become less aware that it is make-believe when you’ve had some to drink. Especially when people sing. There are so many details, and that makes it feel like it isn’t choreographed. It’s more natural. People aren’t in the ‘show-off’-mode, but they enjoy themselves together. Like, the ‘show-off’-mode shows a lot in the fighters: they make it look brutal for the tourists and the children, not for us. In the evening it feels more authentic because there isn’t any pressure to show off or to pull in more tourists. Maybe it’s a bit weird that, to me, it

feels more authentic in the evening, when there are more modern things out...” (Interview, 20.02.16)

This demonstrates that the museum and the market are made both for the tourist *and* the visitor, but in exceptionally different ways. Tourists are extremely important in the museum industry, including *Bardrsundr Museum* and Viking markets, and without tourists there would be considerably less income (and considerably fewer museums). The popularity growth in Viking reenactment has the tourist industry to thank. However, a reenactor and a tourist experience authenticity in vastly different ways. To the Viking reenactor, it is the details that matter, but to the tourist it is the entire experience. The reenactors in the museum/market inspire people to become new reenactors. In a group interview at *Egiltorp Viking market* I asked what was the limit between being a visitor and Viking, and what they thought about visitors who came to markets wearing a simple (not historically correct) Viking dress. I got a lengthy but interesting answer from one of the reenactors in the group:

*Sindri:* “I like those people a lot. Because you can see that they are juuuust about to join us. So we just have to give them a little push. The fact that they do it show that they are *very* interested in what we are doing. So I think they are charming and cute. The cutest was when we went to *Ivarness* and there was a boy who came over and looked at what I was doing all three days, and it wasn't until the last day when he dared to come over and say anything. His mother was with him on the fourth day when he finally came over, and he had a huge fascination with blacksmithing, it was the coolest thing he had ever seen. Hitting steel. So when he came over, I recognised him but he had been so shy all the time, when he came over we had lit up the fire and everything with steel in it. And I let him hit the steel with a hammer, and I think I made his whole summer holiday. Hitting glowing steel three times, it made the whole festival. And I think that kind of people are the most fun tourists, but the ones who come here in a Viking shirt they've bought at a museum, they have a bit of the same thing. So I think it's more fun to talk to those people than those who came here because they had nothing else to do.” (Interview, 12.09.15)

The tourists play many important roles: potential future Viking reenactors, entrance fee-paying customers, customers for the salesmen and traders, and last but not least, willing pupils. To the tourists and their experience of the museum or market, it is not only the objects that form their impression of it as a whole, but also what they can be taught, what they feel, hear, smell and see: the immaterial. The visitor/tourist is not necessarily most interested in history, but often more interested in *histories*. They want to experience unique incidents and stories. They can do this by speaking to the many different people in the museum or at the market. They see, smell, try and feel things first-hand as opposed to history which is written down beforehand and is often unrelatable. The tourist industry seeks out good histories instead of the field's authoritative history.

One morning in the Viking town, an employee at the museum and myself were approached by a group of four men in their 20s. They were dressed in modern clothing and asked us about the possibility to stay a couple of nights in the town the following days. The museum employee seemed to instinctively reply “no” before she told them that they needed to have the necessary equipment and experience in order to stay in the houses. When they told us that a couple of them were experienced reenactors, she looked a bit embarrassed, but told them that they would have to send her an *email* and discuss details before they would be allowed overnight access to the town. Viking reenactors with a few years of experience are able to rent Viking houses for free if they should wish to do so, but have to make sure to know the rules given to them by the museum.

The living history museum is meant for both the tourist and the reenactor. *Bardrsundr Museum* would not have existed without the tourists, but it would not have existed if it had not been for the reenactors either. It is built up to create a space for both groups, even though they are polar opposite. The two groups complement each other by creating a paradox: a meeting between the old and the new. The living history museum also invites people in by following contemporary interests of experience-based and exotic tourism; experiencing what it is like to travel in time.

## Immaterial heritage and experimental archaeology

*“The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ (‘immaterial heritage’) means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”*

(UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Article 2, 2003. My brackets.)

The first time I heard about the notion of *immaterial archaeology* a few years ago, I was very confused. At that time, I thought of archaeology as a study of cold hard old things carefully dug up from the earth by people with a long education in the field of archaeology. It was difficult to get my head around the fact that there was an aspect of archaeology that was non-physical, intangible.

*Sindri* was one of the many talented crafters I met at *Bardrsundr Museum* and at Viking markets, and he took use of and displayed the correlation between material and immaterial archaeology and knowledge in crafts:

He sets up a stall at a Viking market and displays the things he has made, the tools he has used, and welcomes the viewer to watch and to try out the techniques. Not only does this teach a forgotten past, but it gives the blacksmith an opportunity to test the tools and techniques. He might even realise the use of the tool must be done differently than was originally thought by the archaeologists. This is experimental archaeology and the trying and testing is immaterial archaeology: the knowledge connected to the *tradition of things*. In this way we not only learn *about* our ancestors, but we learn *from* our ancestors, and we make history by discovering it. Tradition is both continuous and in constant change. If the present does not keep up tradition and if we don't make the tradition our own, it will die out. Tradition is similar to the Ship of Theseus paradox (later explored in chapter 5, p. 110), and it needs to adhere to contemporary interest.



*Sindri working on another experiment. Photo by A. Økstra. 08.06.15*

How much would we know about the past if we only based history on written sources or other first-hand evidence? *Sindri* told me he had done quite a bit of reading about blacksmithing. He had spent time going to museums, carefully studying the items, but he had to experiment, try and fail, before he came to the level he is currently at. One can base theories off some of the written sources and the found items, but the theories about how they were made and used still need to be tested in order to fully understand them and for people to learn more about related subjects. Immaterial heritage/archaeology and experimental archaeology bases themselves on learning by doing. We cannot save nor make history if we do not learn it. *Sindri* made his own version of history by trying and failing at the theories he made up as he went along with his craft.

In 1995, UNESCO showed through a report that they wanted a broader concept of culture (Aasheim, 2013). Through the report it is understood that in the concept of culture they wished to include “anthropological ideas of culture as knowledge, performativity and social process” (ibid, p. 3). However, as the concept of culture is relative to who gets to define it, and because it in the report was treated as such a static concept, something needed to be done.

In 2003, UNESCO held a Convention concerning the protection of “intangible cultural heritage”, hereby called immaterial heritage or immaterial archaeology by me<sup>23</sup>. The purposes of this Convention were:

- (a) *To safeguard the intangible cultural heritage;*
- (b) *To ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;*
- (c) *To raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;*
- (d) *To provide for international cooperation and assistance.*

(unesco.org, 2003, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>)

The Convention can be split into 5 domains:

*Oral traditions and expressions, including language*

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<sup>23</sup> The Norwegian word for intangible cultural heritage is “*immateriell kulturarv*”. “Immaterial heritage/archaeology” were also the words used by my friends and my informants.

*Performing arts (traditional music, dance and theatre)*

*Social practices, rituals and festive events*

*Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe*

*Traditional craftsmanship*

(unesco.org, 2003, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/1com>)

In Norway, this convention was ratified in 2007, and in Sweden in 2011. In 2010, Norwegian anthropologist Odd Are Berkaak did an analysis of the Convention. Whereas his main task in this paper is “a cultural academic study of the Convention texts juridical parlance” (Berkaak, 2010, p. 6), it also puts emphasis on how and why it is an important initiative for the protection of Norwegian cultural heritage. As can be seen in the definition of immaterial heritage at the beginning of this subchapter, material things are also included in the protection of immaterial heritage. Berkaak points this out early on and explains that this bears witness to an unresolved distinction between these two aspects of heritage (p. 7). He goes on to write that what makes tradition come alive is precisely the fact that the aspects belong together as a natural whole for the users. (p. 7). Later in the paper he describes material and immaterial heritage to have a semiotic bond (p. 15). This has clear lines to Roland Barthes *Mythologies* (1957) and the correlation between denotative and connotative signs. The material item acts as the word, or the literal meaning: the denotation. To use an example, let’s take a Thor’s hammer pendant and say it was made by *Sindri* the blacksmith. Without connotation, this is just an item, a pendant. However, *with* connotation, the item also has emotional and ideological associations which are relative to the individual, as with Larsen’s experience with the bread machine (Larsen, 2002, pp. 27-29). To the blacksmith, the pendant might say something about his blacksmithing skills and inspirations that made him make this pendant in particular. The buyer of the pendant might have connotations to a story about Thor the thunder god she was told when young, or she might associate it with the many symbolic meanings behind the use of a Thor’s hammer pendant. In this way, semiotics matters greatly when it comes to an item’s identity and the protection of material *and* immaterial heritage are two sides of the same coin. Handmade items like this often have a



*Simple Thor’s hammer around the neck of a reenactor. Photo by A. Økstra, 12.05.15.*



wider background story than machine-made items. To take *Alfhild* as an example, she would sometimes point at a reenactor walking past us and point out that “oh! That’s one of my tablet woven belts!” and be able to tell me when and where she had made it, what technique she used and what she liked about that particular belt. The trading and selling/buying inside the group makes it possible to see little stories like this throughout the living history museum and Viking markets.

The 2003 Convention has made for the protection of many different kinds of immaterial heritage across the world. In Norway the protection has revolved much around initiatives in relation to song, dance and food traditions, shielings<sup>24</sup>, Sami-traditions, as well as the protection of old kinds of handicrafts like the bunad<sup>25</sup>, building of boats and buildings, ceramics and musical instruments (Kulturrådet, 2015). Norges Husflidslag which is a non-governmental organization (NGO) of UNESCO, has taken it upon themselves to teach some of these handicrafts to old and young people. Most of these handicrafts do not go as far back as the Viking age, but at least one of these crafts is Viking age-related: needlebinding. In conversation with someone doing this craft, I was told that she had been refused to bring her knitting needles on a plane trip. She then found out that her bone needle for needlebinding was not a problem for airport security. That was how she had gotten into this craft, and now she never goes on a plane without yarn and her bone needle.

There are problematic sides of this protection of old crafts. While many crafts are accentuated and sometimes made popular again, it is on the expense of other less popular crafts which are still in danger of dying out. Another problematic side is that some (however, very few) crafters are hesitant to teach their speciality onward to other people in fear of it meaning that they will not earn as much for their craft as before. The market for handmade fabric, woodwork, blacksmithing and other crafts is fluctuating because prices for these various crafts change from country to country and person to person.

In 2012 there was a court trial going against Nille Glæsel for having copied the design of a hangerok (tube-shaped dress with straps over the shoulders) made by Aase Folkvord. This struck some fear in many Viking reenactors as the dress is often used by female reenactors and Glæsel losing this trial would mean that Folkvord would have the exclusive rights to this historical dress (Tvedestrandsposten, 2012). To the relief of many reenactors across the world, Glæsel won the trial with a definitive answer that she had not copied the

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<sup>24</sup> “Stølskultur”

<sup>25</sup> The Norwegian national costume.

dress and that she would not have to stop selling the book in which she describes patterns and recipes for different types of Viking clothing (ibid.) The relief of having won the trial meant that nobody became the sole owner of an important piece of Scandinavian heritage and reenactors could go on doing this type of experimental archaeology. It meant that an important bit of history was not limited, but could be spread, and it meant that reenactors could go on making their own interpretations of the hangerok (the denotation) and also *learning about it* (the connotation). The past belongs to everyone.

The biggest Blót<sup>26</sup> I ever went to was at a Viking market in Western Norway and with around 50 participant reenactors. Everyone was standing in a circle and there was a small bonfire in the middle. Many of my informants were attending, and there were also a large amount of people (also some tourists) who had never experienced a Blót before and who stood there expectantly. One of the first things the leader of the Blót said was that the circle was now closed and the only ones allowed to leave were children and dogs. After calling for the gods<sup>27</sup>, the mead was sent around the circle in a large drinking horn and half of the people there said a word or more (in the form of “thank you!” or “This is for you, Freya. I want to thank you for letting me find my husband”, etc.). After the Blót was over, I heard from quite a few people who were not very experienced in the Viking community that they had found the rite frightening and that it had made them very put off by the whole situation.

In conversation with some of my more experienced informants, we agreed that it would indeed seem frightening to a newcomer because the Blót is/was made to seem much more frightening than it had to be. It was made ceremonious and solemn by the leaders and attenders that talked. What does not help in this context, is that some outsiders confuse the word Blót with “blod” (blood), making the mental image of the Blót much scarier than it really is. I believe many Viking reenactors and Living History Museums play on this solemn and mystifying of the religious world. This would be quite natural for believers of Ásatrú, but the mystifying is also done by non-believers. My informants told me that it created a special type of ambience that, to them, was attractive. The Blót is a special kind of immaterial

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<sup>26</sup> Ceremony and sacrifice to the Norse gods and spirits.

<sup>27</sup> A blót is rarely held for all the Norse gods at once, but rather, the one or couple that feels right at the moment or that has something to do with the time of year, etc.

heritage as it, instead of being based on something material, is both a call for the Gods and also used to create a historical atmosphere which cannot be likened to many of the other events at a Viking market or in “modern” religious circles. It is understandable that, to an outsider, this ceremony would indeed be quite fear-provoking.

Another way of conveying immaterial heritage is through making a community. Whereas the Viking community is very much based on history and knowledge, the making of a strong community is equally important and attractive. The thought of a community which focuses on being together with likeminded people and which is *also* focused on authenticity is appealing for many people. The historical aspect of reenactment feels more authentic because it is a social community on top of an interest-based group.

In the ‘setting the mood’ introduction of this thesis I tell a story about how I find myself at a Viking market. The text shows that she, after we had only met briefly the previous day, takes care of me and shares her food and drink. A complete stranger walks up to us, sees my modern clothing and asks me, with a smile, whether or not I will soon change into my Viking clothes. There are much less inhibitions to talk to strangers because the reenactors *know* that sociality is the foundation of Viking reenactment.

### **The will to learn**

“I do it because I think it’s fun. The social aspect of it is very good. I started because I wanted to know how much tools you needed to take with you to go in a boat from Norway to England in year 1000. So I think it's about a historical interest that is often considered a bit weird, or an interest in fighting that goes over to being a historical interest, or a craft that has something to do with interest. I think more people join because of interest in things like that instead of because they're simply interested in Vikings. But yeah, they're rather interested in something that has something to do with the Viking Age, and it makes them come into contact with us. And they discover that “I can learn something here! AND have fun!” And they discover that they can either sell or teach others what they have learnt. You sort of get this two-way joy (toveisglede) because you get the knowledge and you can show it off, that you actually know something. I think that's key.”

(Interview with *Arngeirr*, 13.09.15)

There has been a great general interest in showing off artefacts from distant times or unknown places, either in private collections or in large public museums, for as long as at least 2 millennia. These items have received the kinds of connotations that can be taken from an item displayed the way it is in the traditional museum. The living history museum and the reenactor has taken the item and given it *use* and *purpose*, expanding the connotations the user *and* the visitor have of the item.

People have an extreme will to always learn something, and we want answers to questions even *if* it does not benefit us in other ways than community and/or pure joy. In relation to the above quote from *Arngeirr*, the Viking community awakes a particular interest in handicrafts, history, archaeology or similar. These are all somehow represented in the living history museum and the Viking market in some ways or another. *Bardrsundr Museum*, for example, showed off crafts by placing skilled craftsmen in the town. History was conveyed through either leaflets or told by the workers and volunteers. Archaeological artefacts, which some of the things in the town based themselves on, could be found in the small “traditional” museum inside the modern museum building.

The community creates an even stronger will to learn because you are taught from the start that learning it can benefit you, especially because it gives you the opportunity to teach it onwards to other people. Importantly, learning a skill or craft might benefit you when it comes to status in a group, or even in the earning of money.

What is important to pull out of what was said by *Arngeirr* is his use of the word two-way joy, or “*toveisglede*”. I have experienced this joy first-hand and it can be seen in almost every craftsman in the Viking community. As I have mentioned before, I am relatively experienced in a craft called tablet weaving. At *Bardrsundr Museum* and at the Viking markets I have experienced the joy of both getting to weave it, learning more about it, teaching it to others and learning more about it from people who know more about tablet weaving. From others, *Sindri* has learnt trade secrets from the world of blacksmithing and he gets to show and tell people who are interested in the craft, perhaps creating a new hobby for the viewer.

### **The living history museum as a shrine**

*Bardrsundr* living history museum could be seen from two angles: the contemporary Vikings that stay there from time to time are there in order to fulfil an image that was originally

wanted/created by the museum. **Or/and**, it was created by contemporary Vikings in order to have a shrine which could double as a museum in order to create income and, importantly, rise popularity. The museum has both a commercial purpose *and* an emotional/spiritual purpose for the reenactors. The ‘shrine-ness’ of it can be seen in many different ways, but especially through the latter. Although the place identifies as a museum, it has, over time, become a meeting place, a shrine, even a kind of Mecca for travelling Viking reenactors. This is especially the case during the Viking market that is held in June which in 2015 welcomed around 600 Viking reenactors from all over the world. The reason for the place becoming so popular may have a lot to do with advertising (by leaflet, social media and word of mouth), but it may also have a lot to do with architecture and the way the town is laid out. It *looks* old and it *feels* old. It has details that other Viking markets might not have as they are often placed in areas that do not have an attached inhabitable Viking town. Even strategically placed details have an old feeling to them and I could easily imagine a town being very similar 1000 years ago. Examples of these details are wood carvings which look weathered and old, but still as beautiful (if not more) as they would have been when they were made.



Wood carving detail. The Midgard Serpent? Photo by A. Økstra. 07.03.15.

The Viking town (within the town walls) is set to the Christian age at the very beginning of the Middle Ages. This does not mean that there is much focus on the Christian god, as it seems to be merely mentioned in passing. Instead, it could be seen as a shrine in that it is a meeting point dedicated to the historical people of the Vikings, the ancestors, a group of people that are honoured, heroised and *almost* worshipped<sup>28</sup>.

The most shrine-like place at *Bardrsundr Museum* is the place of offering, “offerlunden,” in which little gifts are given to the Norse Gods by people who are merely interested in the religious ways of the Vikings, but also *Ásatrúar*. On one occasion, another volunteer and I were set to tidy up in the houses after a long winter, and we found many things left over from the previous season: Beer cans, whisky glasses, potato chips bags, etc. Most notably, we found two large legs of lamb hanging from a string in one of the rooms. It

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<sup>28</sup>Honoured, heroised and worshipped in that the historical Vikings and the 1000 AD period is seen as an ideal age with optimal use of handicrafts, social status and a “golden age”. This view might be slightly problematic for a variety of reasons, and it is a topic I will be looking at later in this thesis.

smelled *awful*, like cat urine, and our first thought was to throw it away. That is not what happened. We were told, by *King Rangvaldr*, to take them to the place of offering and hang them up for the gods. I am not one to question authority, but it did strike me as odd, as it had seemed that offerings were mostly items that had personal cost or value. To this day, as far as I know, the bones from the legs of lamb are still dangling from that tree, stripped of meat by crows or other creatures. While this ‘offering’ was not done during opening times at the museum, I believe the reason *Rangvaldr* wanted us to hang them up was mostly for a visual statement: something to show tourists, not the *Ásatrúar*.



Place of offering. Photo by A. Økstra. 20.04.15.

Other places and things in the town that can be associated with that of a shrine or holy thing, are for example the rune stones. During events these rune stones have mead or beer poured over them (in rather large amounts) by those who wish to honour their ancestors<sup>29</sup>. A large human made mound of dirt behind the town is tried to be kept free of running and playing children. I was told it is the grave mound of an important king, and the children were threatened by telling them that if they were not careful, the hands of the dead would come out of the earth and grab their legs. I was told, later, that the mound of dirt was made as a joke on the *King* only a few years ago. He had not been happy about it.

The museum tries to incorporate detail and feeling to the items and buildings. *Bardrsundr* museum and town as a shrine and a place of pilgrimage for Viking reenactors may be an image originally created by the museum itself. However, on a late summer night, with a large bonfire roaring and people sitting around it on reindeer skins wearing Viking clothing and drinking *something* (it could well be Cosmopolitan cocktails<sup>30</sup>) from ceramic cups, I'd say their initial creation of a shrine dedicated to the historical Vikings as heroes, still *feels* very authentic.

During an interview with the King, *Rangvaldr*, I asked:

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<sup>29</sup> Alcohol offered to gods and spirits.

<sup>30</sup> I have seen many Viking market merchants who sell leather/wood covers that fit exactly around beer/cider cans. Many people drink home-brewed mead, but more people drink beer, cider or cocktails that are not known from the Viking age.

Me: When you are at home and living your modern life, what do you bring home with you from the Viking age? Is there anything special?

Him: You yourself have been up there and... If you sit down on a bench and look out, then... Even if you don't live there all year round, you get an hour or so every day where you just sit there and watch and just enjoy it. And you get the influence from the old times, and the feeling... And it's amazing when you are in a place where there are no cars or no modern influence. You understand? You park a bit away, and you walk away from the modern things, and the tempo of everything just slows down. You get this peace of mind. And no matter how much stuff you have going on, you get this feeling of harmony.<sup>31</sup>

Me: A bit like meditation maybe?

Him: Yes, a bit like that. I've heard so many people, especially businessmen, that come here and they say, "This place... I can just sit here a whole day and just watch!" And that's a thing that I bring home with me... That it makes you feel well.

(Recorded semistructured interview, 11.05.15)

Living history museums may differ in the age and people they wish to convey, they differ in size and shape, but what they have in common is what is hidden from public view; current research, keeping up with the public's changing trends, financial issues, staff, volunteers, etc.

### **The Viking Age from other perspectives**

As I have already showed on several occasions, there are many reasons for joining a Viking reenactment group, and people have vastly varying interests both within the group, and in their daily life outside of reenactment. I have mostly focused on reenactors themselves so far and their view and thoughts of this perhaps strange interest. As with any community there will always be people, outsiders, who see the community as either threatening or as having world views that are not consistent with reality. This can be related to the 'will to learn' and of course interests. People have different areas of interests, and will, unfortunately, sometimes believe almost anything they read. We also understand academic texts in different ways depending on our area of interest. This is why Viking history and Viking reenactment

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<sup>31</sup> This particularly shows the romanticising of the Viking age. In the actual Viking age, the town would have had much tensions and stress. See chapter 4, page 87 for more.

have sometimes been misused and misunderstood through the years. Here are some examples:

### *Raping and pillaging*

The Vikings, because of their limited ability to write down their own history and stories, are most often described by those they attacked, for example the Monks of Lindisfarne. They have acquired a reputation as rapists and violent blood thirsty humans with no respect for other people's lives (Winroth, 2014, p. 8). Through a thousand years, this is still a reputation that has stuck to the idea of the Vikings and it is a reputation that many reenactors still are associated with. The reputation might be a bit stuck in people's psyche and seeing persons dressed in more or less "primitive" clothing and carrying weapons, is and probably always will be seen as violent and *scary*. I observed on many occasions during my fieldwork, reenactors who purposely used this reputation in order to scare (and in turn, impress!) audiences. This was for example fighters who would run towards the crowd with swords and shields raised while screaming, or blacksmiths going a little bit out of their way to put soot on their faces to look more mysterious and look frightening while making extra large sparks from the fire and the bellows.

Some of the reputations of the Vikings are not entirely untrue as they had many methods of torture, they sold slaves, etc. These facts were also incorporated by *Bardrsundr*, markets and reenactors, for example by the slave trader, *Hrodleif*, who would pull young girls up on a podium at almost every Viking market he went to and proceed to sell them (with actual modern money) to the highest bidding person watching. *Bardrsundr Museum* also had a square dedicated to that of torture methods. The square displayed different techniques of torture, from being put in the pillory or stocks, to being chained and sold, to having to carry two large rocks attached to a chain that goes around the shoulders (typically a punishment for women). If a group of adults were guided around the town, they could be told about even more gruesome capital punishments such as the Blood Eagle<sup>32</sup> and practices of breaking every bone in the body.

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<sup>32</sup> "King [Ella] was taken captive. Ivar and the brothers now recall how their father had been tortured [in the snake pit]. They now had the eagle cut in Ella's back, then all his ribs were severed from the backbone with a sword, in such a way that his lungs were pulled out there". There is quite a lot of discussion about whether or not this capital punishment was used (much) by the Vikings, or if it instead is made up. The sources about it were written centuries after it happened (Winroth, 2014 p. 37-39).



The reason for having this square and the reason why reenactors still play on the violent reputation is because people find this thought-provoking. The amount of violence of the Viking age is one of the main justifications for it being so different than contemporary age and that is why it is interesting to many people.

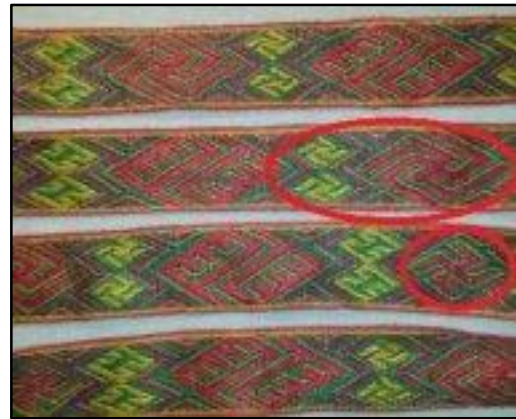
*Arngeirr* told me that he had once met a group of young men who had been travelling to different Viking markets. He and the people around him had experienced them as having ‘shady’ intentions. Later in the evening, they were told by the men that their reason for doing reenactment was because ‘raping and pillaging’ was accepted in this community. My informant explained that after the chief of the Viking market had received complaints from other attenders and having been approached by female reenactors who were very upset, the police were called and the group of men were forcefully removed from the market.

### *Abuse of Viking reenactment*

Early fascists were intrigued by Nordic mythology, and the links between fascism/neo-nazism and Nordic mythology are still very visible. The most famous example here might be that of the SS, named the “sig rune” which symbolises victory (sieg). This rune and many others are still used by fascists today.

The vast majority of Viking reenactors I met said it is very rare that you will meet someone who have racist or anti-feminist views. I have also been told by my informants that they will distance themselves from people who express these views very quickly. I have heard stories about reenactors’ personal photos being used in Nazi propaganda. In a radio interview by Evensen Giæver (2015), the interviewee, previously the leader of Trondheim Vikinglag, tells the interviewer that photos from her blog have been taken. These have been edited with slogans such as “save our heritage” and “Aryan queen”, and posted in Facebook groups connected to nationalist fascist groups. What this does to the Viking reenactor community, is that in a small interest-based society, the photos which then (after being edited) link reenactment and Nazism are seen by a large amount of people, creating associations between the two. The associations between the two have also made it difficult for reenactors to take back symbols that originally had positive meanings during the Viking age, such as the already mentioned S-rune, and very importantly the swastika. This symbol is found all over the world, and is/has often been associated with luck. It can also be found on many artefacts from the Viking age and was, first of all, a symbol for the sun, but might also

have had something to do with protection, luck, power, etc. To me, the most known item is a tablet woven belt from 5<sup>th</sup> century Norway. One informant told me that there were people in Scandinavia who dedicated their lives to hiding and saving ancient artefacts with Nazi-related symbols on them from fascists during the World Wars, this belt included (see photo).



*Copy of the tablet woven belt from Snartemo, 5th century Norway. Woven and photo by A. Økstra. 11.02.16.*

In later times there have been some media coverage of the “Soldiers of Odin” in Finland and other countries who say they patrol the streets in order to protect the streets from “the threat of Muslim immigration” (Stryhn Kjeldtoft, 2016, my translation). There is no reason for them to associate themselves with a Norse god, especially because the belief in Ásatrú never actually reached Finland, but also because there is no evidence that the historical Vikings were sceptical of Muslims at all. In the article referenced to above, it is theorised that the use of “Soldiers of Odin” as a name, is an attempt to associate themselves with symbols connected to right-wing extremists and neo-Nazi groups in Europe. The Soldiers of Odin recognises that they are a nationalistic group, but say they have no connections to fascism or Nazism. Norse mythology and the symbols of the Vikings have been used by many different groups to promote racist and eugenic ideas, even before it was used by the SS. This has been and still is a problem for modern Ásatrúar, who will tell you that Odin is not first and foremost a warrior god, but the God of *Wisdom/knowledge*, and he is closely followed by his ravens Huginn and Muninn, *thought* and *memory*.

#### *Relatively common misunderstandings*

This glass case could be found in *Bardrsundr Museum* (see photo). The sign above it said “The Vikings didn’t have horns on their helmets: if you have horns on your helmet, take these off when you are visiting the museum. You can leave your horns in the museum shop



*Display at Bardrsundr. Photo by A. Økstra.*

while you are visiting – if you do this you will get an ice cream!”

There are many other misapprehensions about the Vikings, some of which I have already touched on in this project: violent, murderous, blonde and dirty. In reality, they were often farmers and traders, relatively peaceful (in comparison with other civilisations of the time), understanding and appreciative of other cultures, and actually quite focused on cleanliness.

Quite a few of my informants have told me about being compared to Native Americans, and this is something I also experienced on one occasion. This seems to happen mostly at small Viking markets where tourists accidentally happen upon the camp. Reenactors are approached by visitors and asked questions like “how is the government treating you?”, “what’s it like living in these tents in the winter?” and “do your children go to school?” These questions are often met with confusion and laughter. While some of the reenactors play along with this ‘ignorance’ by telling the tourists that their children are home-schooled in a Viking school tent, etc., most of them have become relatively used to these questions and will carefully try to explain the difference between a Viking and a Native American without making the tourists embarrassed.

The historical Vikings are also often put into one group and as one nation. The fact is that people in Scandinavia differed both physically, in their intentions and their trade routes. The Norse were commonly farmers and fishermen who travelled west. Swedes were farmers who often travelled east for pillaging and trading. The Danes were also farmers, but craved more farmable land, and travelled south and southwest to England. Of course, they did not exclusively travel in these directions.

## **Chapter summary**

The museum as an institution has existed for a few thousand years and it has gone through drastic and important changes. The museum’s tendency to save memories by putting things in glass boxes in order to not forget the past, is a paradox in itself because by doing so, we are distancing ourselves from it. The whole museum experience becomes a paradox. In order to go one step further than the traditional museum, living history museums and Viking reenactment have lessened this paradox by pulling the viewer into the past instead of seeing the past from the outside. They embody the past by taking the old items (read: copies of them) and using them in their crafts and ‘daily Viking-life’ with a regard to reduce the ‘us

and them'-feeling. Living history museums and Viking reenactment *also* have a paradoxical structure in that they struggle to stay authentic and on-point in the time they represent and need to keep up with contemporary interests and values. Nonetheless, they have taken the museum to a higher level, introducing the embodiment of the past through the use of items such as clothing and tools. They also let the viewer use all their senses in order to have new experiences. They take items and give them use and purpose and they expand connotations the user *and* the visitor has of the item as opposed to the connotations they would have had in a glass box. Not only does reenactment of the past create theoretical connotations and subjectivity, but it creates practical experience and embodiment of the past. By constantly being changed and because the reenactors embody the items in regard to their own interests and interpretations, Viking reenactors and living history museums are subjectifying and individualising this type of history. By doing this, the items are contextualised to fit modern people reenacting the past. Objects are context-sensitive and they are subject to change in time and space. The reenactors and their things are copies of the past, but in a modern world. As copies, they will bring forward feelings of oldness and are able to represent the past. They can never *be* Viking, but they can be *Viking-ish*. (Viking-) reenactment and living history museums do not only represent the past in many different aspects, but they also represent contemporary times and contribute to our understandings of modernity and individualism.

# CHAPTER 4: REENACTMENT: AN EXPRESSION OF MODERN INDIVIDUALISM?

## VIKING REENACTMENT'S POPULARITY

"I always come back to the features and problems of our modern age: everything seems to be dependent on technology. Moral and spiritual values often seem to be lacking or arbitrary or replaced by material values, people quite often feel they are only one of millions and can't do or change anything that really matters." (Interview with *Steinvor*, 31.05.15).

In this chapter I will discuss reenactment's recent popularity and associations with (post)modernity and extreme individualism. Through my ethnographic material, it became clear that group affiliation is one of the drives that are attractive in Viking reenactment. Later in the chapter I will also go about discussions on the attractiveness of the Viking age specifically.

### **Individualism as an aspect of modernity**

Society is made up of the interactions between people. Simmel (1971) describes this by saying that "the significance of these interactions among men lies in the fact that it is because of them that the individuals [...] form a unity, that is, a society" (p. 23).

Simmel follows the development of the modern kind of individualism from its beginning, during the Italian Renaissance. He studies the "inner and external liberation of the individual from the communal forms of the Middle Ages [...] These had, as it were, allowed the boundaries of the individual to become blurred, suppressing the development of personal freedom, of intrinsic uniqueness, and of the sense of responsibility for one's self" (Simmel, 1971, p. 217).

The start of the renaissance and modern individualism allowed the individual to be more visible and showed the value of uniqueness, a point I will also be discussing later in this chapter, with focus on Ann Branaman and her discussion of Goffman's Presentation of Self

in *Everyday Life* (2010). By the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Romanticism, much emphasis was put on freedom, especially during the French Revolution, visible through the banning of unions in order to protect individual rights. According to Simmel it was the contradiction between equality and the freedom of individuality that was essential to the conception of individuality in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. He also points out that feelings of equality over time fed the ego to become independent to the point of wanting “to distinguish themselves from one another” (p. 222).

Hahm Chaibong, a previous professor of political science, looks at individualism with more political eyes and discusses that while being a product of modernity, individualism is also “modernity’s most ambiguous achievement” (Chaibong, 2000, p. 127). Even though it has been responsible “for political freedom, economic prosperity and self-expression” (ibid.), it can also be said to be accountable for segregation, alienation and the loneliness of modern people:

“By unleashing individual creativity, it has fostered the spirit of enterprise and adventure, but it has also encouraged people to become selfish and self-centered, unwilling or unable to contribute to the public good.” (Chaibong, 2000, p. 127)

Chaibong’s statements are interesting and relevant here because they express the ambiguity of individualism, an ambiguity that will show through my discussions of Viking reenactors who can be expressed as adventurous and creative, but also somewhat alienated and active self-promoters in social media.

Social anthropologist Henrietta Moore (1994), in her discussion on embodied selves, expresses that it has previously been popular to think in Maussian terms of the self being a social product, and, in likeness to Simmel’s arguments above, the individual being a modern construct. In these terms, “individualism was thought to be a feature of modern societies” (p. 32). This has been a continual discussion in anthropology for a long time. The problem with individualism is that persons bound to a collective group also “have the appropriate capacities for agency and intention” (p. 33). There is resistance to the theory of the body as “the source of identity, or that experience (both of self and of the world) is not always possessed by or located in an interior self” (ibid.). The individual stands as a contrast to the social group, but these are not independent from each other. In accordance with Moore's discussion on the self

and the social, it can be argued that society helps create/shape identity. The African<sup>33</sup> proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" may have a point, as modern extreme individualism in some ways can create identity crises for a lot of young people because of the millions of choices and paths that are open to one person.

The "it takes a village"-proverb applies well to the Viking community in at least two ways. The first is that at *Bardrsundr Museum* and the Viking markets I went to, children were not necessarily looked after directly by their parents, but the children sought after children of their own age and would play together in groups of two to ten at the same time. In the absence of modern technology such as phones and laptops, they had to find other ways of playing, which the children who had been in the community for a long time were very familiar with and would get the new kids to play along. They would, without help from their parents, make competitions such as rope-pulling and play-fights, and they would try to teach the other children simple handicrafts which their parents or the community had taught them. Seeing knives in the hands of young children was not rare, and their parents would not necessarily be in the near area, but other adults who were in the immediate area would glance up at them from time to time, making sure that everything was alright. The adult reenactors seemed to not be worried about their children climbing trees, carving wood or poking fires. Adult tourists who brought their children along to the market appeared surprised by this. I remember *Gunnhild* explaining the relaxedness about their children doing "dangerous things" with another proverb: "A burnt child dreads the fire"<sup>34</sup> and telling me that this was the best way for her children to learn. This way, the children were allowed to do and to go anywhere in the museum or at the market, as long as there was *someone* from the community in a relatively near vicinity.

Not only does the "it takes a village"-proverb apply well to the Viking community and their ways of collectively looking after children, but the proverb also applies to new reenactors. With the help of the whole community, with their respective specialities in crafts, fighting, socialising, religion and knowledge, a new reenactor would quickly get to know any area of reenactment they might be interested in. The whole 'village' would raise the reenactor to become aware of the importance of authenticity, being able to experiment with crafts and to get to know the community as everyone else knew it.

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<sup>33</sup> At least said to be African, although this is somewhat uncertain.

<sup>34</sup> "Brent barn skyr ilden".

It seems like society is going in a more individualistic direction. This is especially the case in the Nordic countries where,

“Despite the common perception of the collectivist nature of the Nordic welfare state, what is perhaps even more remarkable is the extent to which behind the *Gemeinschaft* of the so-called ‘homes of the people’ one finds a *Gesellschaft* of atomized, autonomous individuals.” (Trägårdh, 1997, p. 253).

One of the complications often found in modern society is that there is a ‘hidden’ criticism toward individuality and achievement. Believing that you are better than others is looked down on. In the Viking community it is, for example, almost mandatory to teach onward the new techniques you’ve learned. This is an unspoken rule, but if you are found keeping trade secrets or refusing to teach others parts of the handicraft you know, you will quickly be seen as selfish. In a modern society obsessed with success and with a socio-economic hierarchy, the thought and message of these contradictions is potentially destructive. There is an emergence of individualistic tendencies grown out of the Nordic/Swedish autonomy, concerned with promotion of oneself, selfishness, egoism (Trägårdh, 1997, p. 262) and to paint a rosy picture of oneself both on social media and in social life. The underlying guilt tripping for having reached higher up in the hierarchy than others will create guilt for the preoccupation of comparison with others and, in actuality, might create conflicts in an egocentric society based on self-promotion and flattery. Trägårdh describes how Swedes “are encouraged from a very early age by their parents to be independent and to see in work, rather than in social relationships, the primary source of fulfilment, self-realization, and happiness.” (ibid, p. 269), but he goes on to say that the early transition from dependence on family to individuality, “‘becomes the source of a great deal of anxiety and resentment’, later transformed into both a heightened sensitivity to failures in performing in school and at work.” (ibid.) You are to be better than others, but at the same time not. This type of double communication seems to have a great impact on, especially young, lives.

### **The presentation of Self in Everyday Life**

Initially, sociologist Ann Branaman (in the book *The Contemporary Goffman* edited by Hviid Jacobsen, 2010) experienced Goffman and his work with frontstage/backstage dichotomies to



be overly concerned with caring about what other people think about you, rather than people being themselves/authentic. Branaman expresses how she at first found Goffman's talk of frontstage/backstage off-putting, as she thought this way of thinking should be limited to mainly theatre:

“So, reading Goffman for the first time, it seemed to me that his writings depicted a social world in which people were excessively image-conscious and whose lives revolved around strategically and selectively hiding and showcasing. And, what is worse, it seemed that Goffman thought this was all natural, normal and necessary” (ibid, p. 232).

Branaman states that she, at that time, believed that the self was constructed privately, and therefore, that Goffman saying that ‘teams’ and ‘audiences’ played part in the construction of the self, was contradictory to what she herself thought was true. However, twenty-something years later, Branaman carefully reread *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and found that, contrary to initial thought, she did not experience Goffman to deny authenticity or the value of honesty (2010, p. 234). She states that Goffman's point was, “that both honest and dishonest performers rely on the same dramatic techniques to establish the ‘reality’ of the images of self they portray and the definitions of situations they advance” (ibid.).

Furthermore, she realised that, depending on the person, some can be perceived as inauthentic or as portraying a false self even if they are acting honestly. “Performances are authentic if the performer *and* the audience believe them to be” (p. 234). In this way, Goffman analyses, theatrics aside, “how inequalities in social status, power and resources constrain the selves people are able to present and have supported by others in everyday social interaction” (Branaman, 2010, p. 236). Goffman, in actuality, is illuminating the serious effect that denounced characteristics, low status and/or lack of power and resources will have on the way people manage to uphold an image of self, and that stigmatised people are and will be worse off in a social setting. The position of the individual in this social hierarchy will depend on his or her ability to enhance strengths and diminish weaknesses.

Over a period of a couple of decades, perhaps ca. half a century, there has been a significant change in the nature of personal life and self-identity in advanced capitalist societies (Branaman, 2010, p. 239), a change which has been the topic of much writing by a multitude of social theorists. This ‘detraditionalisation’ or individualisation, the age of

globalisation, has allowed for a more individualised identity, making it possible for a person to live his/her life as they wish without being greatly socially stigmatised. The age of globalisation and the new individualism has decreased the degree that judgement from others plays on our own identity construction, but Goffman's observations still stand to quite a large extent, "that people do require at least some social validation to sustain, even in their own very private minds, a desired self-image" (Branaman, 2010, p. 247).

New individualism has allowed people to go slightly outside of the norm without having to be socially stigmatised, but that those who do stray from the social norms, also struggle to maintain a self-identity on the ladder of social hierarchy. In addition, people experience to be perceived differently by others than what they thought about themselves, which is a clash that is difficult to undergo. Impression management is more common for these individuals, but is not unproblematic, especially because the new individualism has introduced a wider array of "alternative standards of worth" (ibid.). However, this has helped those who fall outside the main standards, to seek together with those who share these diminished individualities. It may have been part of the rapid creation of 'subcultures' which are concerned with small groupings coming together for common interests and lifestyles, such as music, film or fashion. Even in the Nordic/Swedish autonomous society, concerned with independence (Trägårdh, 1997, p. 262), there seems to be an endeavour to try to find 'your people'; people one can identify with.

In my fieldnotes I have on multiple occasions written things like "must find out what she does outside of reenactment", "I didn't expect him to work in the oil industry" or "why doesn't anyone really talk about their actual day-job?". This says something about impression management and how much social identity matters to people in the different communities. In a Viking reenactment group, you first of all want to be identified as a reenactor, not the fact that you work in the oil industry. Not only is the oil industry or most other paying jobs probably vastly different from what people do during Viking reenactment, but it is also completely beside the point: the amount of time spent talking about job-related topics could instead have been spent on learning a new craft or telling a younger reenactor about one of the lesser known Norse Gods. During fieldwork I tried to ask a few people about social stigmas and if they felt like they were labelled as "nerds" or "strange" outside of reenactment. While some admitted that they had, from a young age, been outcasts of one sort or another, the other part told me that they'd never really seen themselves as pariahs of any kind. One informant said:

“It probably depends on what kind of life you live normally, what kind of job you have, what defines you, how far away you are from the “down to earth” setting... I think that a lot of people appreciate that about the Viking life, that it's better to have the two instead of incorporating them into each other. It's a break from every day.”

(Group interview, 17.06.15)

So, some reenactors had no problem incorporating reenactment into their daily life, such as in the case of *Gunnhild* who decorated her house with her Viking gear among other things. Others felt uncomfortable doing so, preferring to keep the two worlds separate. As I said above, the new individualism has allowed people to be more explicit about being outside of the social norm, but it does not necessarily mean that everyone does it openly. The reenactors use impression management in order to either keep Viking-life and job-life separate or in order to incorporate the two in a way which makes them comfortable.

### **Physical appearance and self-identity**

Branaman (2010), discusses the idea that physical appearance plays part in self-identity, a notion that I have clearly recognised in reenactment, especially because clothes and physical authenticity is such an important factor to acceptance into the community. The odd thing about reenactment is that physical appearance and the amount of historically correct clothing is connected with knowledge. The social hierarchy that comes with authentic and beautiful clothing, is based on the knowledge that the reenactors build up over time. This beautiful clothing is often seen as such because reenactors, after a while in the community, learn to recognise good handicrafts and learn to see the amount of time or money spent on a particular thing. During an autumn Viking market in Eastern Sweden, I sat down with *Arngeirr* to conduct and record a semistructured interview. It was a rainy day, and the other people in the camp had taken cover in the larger tents, all of them chatting and doing crafts and asking the 3-4 visitors that had found their way there in the rain, to sit down and chat with them. The interview with *Arngeirr* revolved a lot around how and why people join Viking groups and how they learn handicrafts or get particular interests within the community. Towards the end of our conversation he told me that he had the impression that the people who enter the Viking community or are on their way into it are very surprised

about how easy it is to join, and that it surprises them how much they can do themselves. The new reenactors are told to first go and buy some material and then come back to be shown how to make the thing they want to make. *Arngeirr* sat in a large wooden chair with carved mythical animals. I always saw him wearing clothes made of leather, which seemed to be relatively rare as most people were wearing wools and linens. “Even I have sewn my own clothes! Because I can’t afford to buy it. It’s hand sewn, damnit! It costs money! (Dritdyrt!)”. One of my favourite things at Viking markets was coming across older bearded men who were discussing fine sewing, embroidery and tiny intricate glass beads. I suppose it felt like a paradox to see these scary-looking Vikings talking about crafts that have previously been associated with women’s work. Seeing this type of scenario was a very new kind of beautiful to me. He continued talking about sewing:

“You know it yourself, like the jacket you are wearing there is hand sewn wool, there’s easily 800 kroner in material, and 10-15 hours of sewing. You can’t afford to buy that yourself. Then there’s only one thing to do: Find needle and thread and do it yourself! But they sit there ready to teach you. You just have to say ‘I need something like that’, and they say ‘come on, I’ll show you!’. Then there’s an evening of sewing and suddenly you’re good at it. Then you surprise a lot of people...”

I looked at my yellow twill-woven coat that I had spent hours trying to figure out how to cut the material and how to sew it together. With some observation and help from other people and after looking at photos of other reenactors on Facebook and Pinterest<sup>35</sup>, I managed to stitch it together to become a jacket that I was actually very pleased with. *Arngeirr* touched the hem of his light-brown leather tunic and said, quite proudly:

“I’ve managed to sew this myself. And that’s pretty cool. And after an evening of poking yourself in the finger and swearing, you get to know people! So yeah, it’s a beautiful group of people. (Interview, 13.09.15)

I observed *Arngeirr* getting many compliments at markets for his home-sewn leather clothes, and other reenactors did not hesitate to walk up to him and ask him questions about who had

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<sup>35</sup> Photo sharing website.

made them, how much it costs and how hard it was to sew into thick leather. Viking reenactors appear to self-identify through a system of crafts and knowledge, and the 'hierarchy' is based on time and *things*. A person who quickly becomes skilled in a certain craft will swiftly climb up the social ladder, but can be weighed up or down depending on how approachable, pleasant and/or how much knowledge they possess. Creativity is therefore just as important as knowledge and 'niceness'. While a bit intimidating at first glance, *Arngeirr* turned out to have both knowledge and creativity, and he was more than happy to pass these on to old and new reenactors.

In the year of 2016, the way self-identity is viewed has changed to a relatively large degree compared to the time when Goffman wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in the late 50s. Goffman gave us a model for how the person (actor) was in charge of their own identity through social interaction with others and that self-identity therefore was largely shaped by others. New theorists, however, discuss the possibility that we shape our own identity and that people generally have more choice today when it comes to *who* they want to be. Whereas there is an increased privatisation of the self, "identity is never unilateral" (Jenkins, 2008, p 42). British sociologist Richard Jenkins looks to Goffman when he states that even though we have most of the control when it comes to how we present ourselves to others, we can never be absolutely sure whether or not we are perceived and interpreted that way (2008, p 42).

This increased privatisation of the self may also create a new kind of desire for communities that match our own self-identity, communities that may strengthen identities that while alone might seem vulnerable. Jenkins (2008) bases himself on Karl Marx when he discusses collectivity in relation to its internal and external dialectic/group identification and categorisation (p. 43). I mostly focus on group identification (internal), in which individuals with similar traits/identities come together. As Jenkins says, "we all belong to some groups", be it ethnicity, friendships, families or peer groups, etc. (2008, p. 11). Recognising likeness and difference is important in the creation of community, and community is also important in the creation of identities. Identifying likenesses is key to both getting to know one person and in getting to know a group of people and feelings of belonging in that group. In modern individualism, with the individual being more focused on their own self-made identity, it has become easier for him/her to both create themselves and to seek out persons and groups (subcultures) with much more similar traits (that previously had been somewhat stigmatised) than before modern individualism. This has made it simpler to refuse groups which

specifically asks one to change, but instead seek out other groups which match one's own identity, beliefs and morals.

### **Problematizing romantic views of the past**

It must be expressed that even though traditional values, collectivism and a general past may so far seem like an ideal world for the reenactors, this way of romanticising the past is not unproblematic. People often have a way of thinking of the 'good old days', without considering the negative aspects: traditional societies are often also characterised by lack of women's rights, poverty, violence and illness. For example, to the historical Vikings, slave trade was not unknown. During their raids, they didn't only take valuables such as silver and gold, but they stole people as well. The use of horrendous torture methods are also a sign of the repressiveness of the Viking age. While these are topics that are often discussed between attendees at Viking markets, they are, understandably, never displayed to full extent.

“But their core values (*verdigrunnlag*), like it was allowed to beat a man to death, so, their basis in law, we cannot do that, but to show our tents, show our gear and to show the production of things, how things are made and all that, that is something we can do. But we can never show off their way of thinking. Then we would've been arrested all of us. Momentarily. It's true that reenacting is a sort of acting, it's a play, but where we want the visual to be in the main frame. Their way of thinking is impossible to show.”

(Interview with *Arngeirr*, 13.09.15)

Many reenactors do wish to display some of these sides of the historical Viking age, as for example *Hrodleif* (see chapter 3, page 73), but in a much more playful way. This lightheartedness of such a serious topic may display the need to show reenactment and also the historical Viking age in a more positive and romanticised way.

It was my impression that my informants seem to have a very good idea of what reenactment means to them and they have a great deal of introspection. It might be for this reason that whenever I have asked them whether or not they would, given the chance, travel back in time to experience the Viking age first hand, they have answered “no.” However, the difference between men and women's opinions on this question changes a bit: while men on *some* occasions have expressed that they would indeed time travel, women almost

exclusively say that they would not. Even though women in the Viking age had much more rights than after Christianity was introduced in Scandinavia, during the Middle Ages, social norms and mentality concerning hierarchy is not something that is missed by Viking reenactors. “There are some things left that we do not do when being Vikings” (interview with *Steinvor*, 31.05.15). This means that they are almost completely aware of the ahistorical historicity of reenactment, and that they do indeed reenact a glorified version of the past. In a short online interview in October 2015, *Gunnhild* noted that what was so captivating and attractive about this age, to her, is the aesthetics of the era, and to socialise with others who appreciate the aesthetics, crafts and knowledge of the time.

I have created a relatively romantic picture of the Viking reenactment community so far, but only slightly touched upon the problematic sides of this small interest-based society. This is not necessarily accidental, as reenactment *does* focus mostly on the positive sides of the historical Viking age. However, this does not mean that Viking reenactment always is a walk in the park. I will therefore tell a story which hints to the dangers of such small groups:

The Viking community is big and small at the same time. Rumours would spread like wildfire and ‘everyone’ would know about other people’s sexual relationships or disputes. From time to time, this made it seem like the question of quarrelling, love or sex was a difficult topic because it was not between two people, but rather a concern for the whole community. Jealousy and the talking behind other people’s backs seems relatively frequent. Everyone knows everyone in their small communities and there is rarely more than one degree of separation from Viking group to Viking group. The good friends you acquire in a social setting stand extremely close to you. On a few occasions I heard about friends offering other friends to “beat up” people who had crossed them. Someone considered to have crossed the line when it comes to things that are deemed to be unforgiveable in this group, such as cheating on their partner or doing drugs, etc., will receive extreme attitude. One of my informants at a Viking market in Denmark who I had gotten to know at *Bardrsundr Museum* over an extended period of time came to me one evening and told me, “The amount of care I’m getting after having had a hard time this week is overwhelming. So many people are coming over to me to show their support. It’s so beautiful!” She had recently left her husband of many years after he had cheated on her. I was told that her husband had been disliked by many of the reenactors, but tolerated because he had been with

her. She was highly respected by many because of her skills in different handicrafts and story-telling. I spent much of the evening together with her and saw a large amount of people coming over to her, hugging her, joking with her and giving her a lot homemade alcohol of various kinds. Her husband was bad-mouthed by almost everyone who showed her support, including a big burly man who said “he deserves a good old beating, that man!” After quite a lot of alcohol, some of the other male reenactors tried their luck at flirting with her.

This shows how the Viking market was made up of mutual respect, but also showed many signs of rumour-spreading, bad-mouthing and jealousy.

For a long time, I thought that *Hrodleif* was joking when he would say, “It’s hard to be a Viking” many times a day. I discovered, after a while, that there were deeper reasons for him saying this. The small community intrigues made it hard to be a Viking emotionally. The constant strive to be historically accurate and to have the right clothes and gear for reenactment was hard. Many of my informants mentioned the expression ‘post-festival depression’ for the feeling after a Viking market was over. They would feel lost, missing their Viking friends and be very sad to leave (there was crying). What is more, “it’s hard to be a Viking,” is especially true for the historical people living in Scandinavia between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Escape from modern individualism**

*Steinvor* expressed that we have a constant need to stress less and we have a need to get out of the stressful environments we live in where everything is supposed to happen very fast. This fast-paced modern society can in many ways be both confusing and depressing and it can be difficult to escape this modern situation concerned with only yourself. Contrary to Hobbes’ opinion that man by nature was a solitary animal (Hylland Eriksen, 2013, p. 37), Aristotle was one of the first people to express that “man is by nature a social animal” (Aristotle et. al.) and those who are able to live outside of society are either beasts or Gods. As social animals there has been, over time, a gradual change from total dependence on social groups to individual freedom (especially in the Western world), as discussed by Simmel (1971) and Branaman (2010). Individual freedom can be said to be a social norm and you are expected to be able to both exist and also to *succeed* jobwise and moneywise on your



own. The constant pressure to *be someone* in the Western modern society can lead to insecurities and identity crises among a large amount of people who might not feel they are able to reach the enormous heights expected of them, heights that seem to get higher and higher by each generation.

It would seem that the emergence of social groups concerned with family values and group mentality are an answer to modern individualistic ideas concerning the independence from others because individual creativity has encouraged people to become more self-conscious (Chaibong, 2000, p. 127). The reenactors I have met during my fieldwork put much emphasis on *being together* with other people.

The aesthetics of the Viking age also play a large role as attractive aspects of the age can be taken out of context and put together to represent a beautiful (but perhaps fake) image of a time concerned with unity, family values and the beauty of nature. Modern society has made individualistic thought possible and accepted, but at the same time, the importance of community has not changed.

### **Enhancing strengths, diminishing weaknesses**

The 'fake' and beautiful/exotic representation of Vikings in Viking reenactment can also be seen in individual persons as the reenactor often enhances attractive or clever characteristics of themselves to create a strong figure. In accordance with Goffman's views on frontstage/backstage dichotomies of personalities in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), this way of presenting oneself in a community is completely normal. However, according to Branaman (2010), the creation of a self with dependence on the community is more characteristic of circa half a century ago and that we recently have embraced a more individualistic and independent self. This change in attitude has made it possible for people to choose almost exactly how they want to shape themselves both as individuals and in a social setting. This shows particularly through the use of, for example, Facebook, where you are able to choose who sees what you post, you can "unfriend" people that you no longer want to interact with and join online groups of people whom you have something in common with. This way, you (and the community you choose to have around you) shape your identity both online and in real life. Yet, social media also proves that people sometimes define themselves and their 'popularity' through the amount of 'likes' and recognition from other people.

In Viking reenactment, one very rarely finds underdogs (meaning insignificant persons), as all reenactors will play on their strong sides and place themselves in subgroups where they have a certain strength. By placing themselves in subgroups that enhance their vigour, they can overpower weaknesses that are more exposed in modern life. The composition of strong characters can create an aesthetically beautiful image of reenactors as intelligent people in touch with nature, but it may also create conflicts when it comes to the clash between strong personalities, especially because “most of us are not prepared to sacrifice control over our own identities” (Branaman, 2010, p. 250). Another explanation for many reenactors having such a strong personality is that reenactment is a *choice* and a *hobby*.

“When you do something you want to do, you do something that you know you are not bad at. So, then you act out your strong sides. You don’t have a hobby if you don’t think it is fun”  
(Interview with *Arngeirr*, 13.09.15).

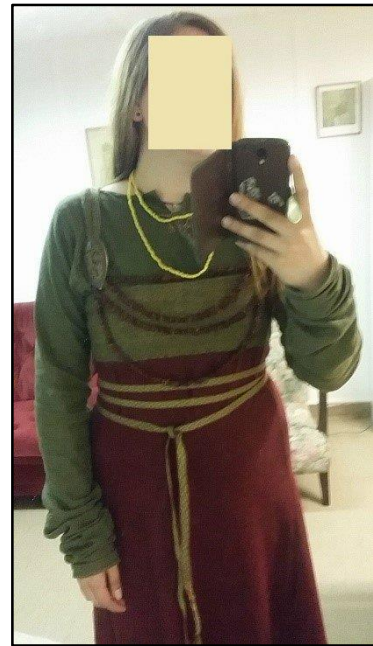
Examples of these conflicts between strong personalities can be disputes between persons who have been in the community for a long time and who want leader roles or simple disputes like being asked to do something differently by a leader, and not wanting to be told what to do.

### **The Viking age meets Facebook**

“Reenactment would not be nearly as fun without modern technology!”  
(Unstructured group interview, 17.06.15)

Even though the reenactors I have met put much focus on authenticity and seem to want to move away from modern individualism and modernity’s influences, one modern invention seems to be extremely important to reenactors: the internet. Social media is used by almost all reenactors (they are modern people, after all). Mobile phones and cameras could be seen in the hands of reenactors at even the most historically correct events I went to. During an interview in June 2015, one of my informants exclaimed, “I think I’d get withdrawal sickness if I had no electronics”, after which another person told me that she thought Viking

reenactment would not be nearly as popular if it had not been for modern technology. Modern individualism, in its ‘flaw’ of making the individual self-centered, may have helped in creating the technological society we live in today where to promote oneself online, for example on Facebook, is a norm. The amounts of groups on Facebook concerned with interest in the Viking age, history, reenactment, etc., is overwhelming, and they are joined by thousands of people from all over the world. Viking reenactors also post a large amount of photos of events, markets and museums online, including “Viking selfies”. The popularity of Facebook and other social media among reenactors can show that they are essentially modern people living a “normal life” outside of reenactment.



*One of my own «Viking selfies».*

I have come across discussion posts on Facebook hundreds of times, where the use of an item found by archaeologists and from the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century is being discussed by laypersons who disagree with a scholarly explanation of the use of the item. Many times a day, I see reenactors who post photos of their Viking gear in groups concerned with the accuracy and authenticity of clothes or items made to reflect the Viking age. Social media is being used as a place for practicing of experimental archaeology, but also to promote oneself, the group and the hobby to other people. Crafters create pages dedicated to their own handicrafts, making their audience much larger than if they had not. Their items are now reachable by people from all over the world, not only the people they meet at markets, museums and events. Modern technology has been a huge part in making reenactment of the past more popular: *The past would be nothing without the modern.*

One evening, after a wedding party in the banquet hall near the museum, I was invited by a group of Viking reenactors who had rented a house for the weekend in the Viking village. When I arrived, smoke was pouring out of the wide-open door (it was quite cold outside), and the reenactors told me that they were struggling with getting the indoor fireplace to work the way it should. It was filling the house with smoke, instead of rising up through the smoke vent. It was dark out, and they had lit many candles. But the smoke was too thick to be able to see anything. The best solution to this was that everyone took their mobile phone out to turn on the flashlight app. The

app was also on many other occasions used when a reenactor needed to go outside to use the toilet. When the smoke eased up, my “host” found out that we needed music. We had no drums or other historically correct instruments and nobody was in the mood for singing. So he turned on *Spotify*<sup>36</sup> on his phone and we listened to *Black Sabbath*<sup>37</sup>.

Viking reenactment is a relatively modern phenomenon, and this is especially visible through how reenactors use modern technology and aids to make Viking things, and to do research into authenticity. Modern technology is used to research old technology. The popularity of Viking reenactment, which has grown immensely in the past ten years, may owe its popularity to social media, TV and film.

### **Why exactly the Viking age?**

The feeling of being one individual amongst millions of people can be destructive in itself. The search for communities where one can be seen and heard is necessary, but why exactly *Viking* reenactment?

Modern society is very concerned with new types of technology and material values. My own generation barely remembers a time when the internet was completely out of reach. However, at a Viking market in Norway in 2014, I met a group of Viking reenactors who have since become informants for this project. One of these is Swedish Sami and during a group interview he told us that in our generation, he was the only person he knew who had a childhood completely distanced from modern technology. “I view the Viking markets as a little bit of a nostalgia thing, because I remember large parts of my childhood where I was sitting in this lavvo with a bonfire” (Interview, 17.06.15). Even though I myself don't remember a time without the modern types of technology, does not mean it is far out of reach. Nostalgia for the past does not necessarily need to be about a lived past, but also the longing for a historical past as explored later in this thesis

My reasoning for mentioning nostalgia in its generality is because modern individualism has created a need to look back to simpler societies where life was about being an essential part of a group, or rather, a part of the puzzle. In the Viking age, say year 1000,

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<sup>36</sup> App for streaming music.

<sup>37</sup> English rock band, formed in 1968.

you would have needed the help and expertise of more than one person, yourself, to build a sustainable home that would last for hopefully more than one generation. By being part of a group, you would be appreciated for what you do or what you know, and you can, with the help of other people, find your place in the society, completing the puzzle.

Why is it so popular to reenact the *Viking age*? I fear the answers might be as many as there are Viking reenactors. However, I have found four common denominators: historical freedom, absence of Christianity, handicrafts and roots/heritage.

### *Historical freedom*

There are not many written sources or tangible evidence from the Viking age. However, the absence of evidence might work in the reenactors favour, as it gives a lot of freedom of interpretation. Most archaeological finds from the Viking age are from rich graves where kings, queens or other important people had been buried. This means that most tangible sources of Viking age clothing and tools are based on rich people. In reenactment, this can be seen through the amount of people dressed in colourful clothing such as red and blue, colours that were very hard or expensive to make during the Viking age. For example, a way of making the colour red is by using cochineal, an insect that was not commonly found in Scandinavia at the time, but seems to have been imported from further south. There are no written sources of how much and when cochineal was first introduced in Scandinavia, so people interpret the sources however they want. If they feel like wearing red, they do so. This was especially the case at Viking markets where the use of red, blue, silk material, etc. was very common. A rather common rule seems to be that as long as one can justify it with historical background, one is free to wear it. *Bardsundr Museum* and their faithful volunteers, however, had a system based on three statuses, and therefore had a type of hierarchic system based on time, services and knowledge:

*Träl/thrall:* As you join the volunteers at the museum, you start out as a thrall. You belong to a free Viking and you are employed by him/her and their family. After doing a variety of tasks decided by them (planting a set amount of plants, building, etc.), you can be promoted to “bryte”.

*Bryte/servant:* As a bryte you are not a free man/woman, but you have reached a certain position in the community and have more rights than a thrall. It is your owner that decides when you get to become a bryte.

*Fri/Free:* After a certain time as bryte, you can apply to become free. The village council will then decide if it is time. An important factor to the decision is whether or not you have acquired the appropriate Viking clothing. As a free man or woman, you are supposed to always set a good example for the Viking community. You can also get your own plot of land in the village.

I have chosen to see *Bardrsundr Museum's* system as an answer to the reenactment community's tendency to almost always dress up as rich people. As a museum promoting the Viking age, they have the responsibility to show different sides of life in the Viking age, so having everyone dressed in large amounts of colours and jewellery and equipped with ornate swords would be unnatural and 'unauthentic'. Giving different roles to different people is, according to *King Rangvaldr*, a large part of "levandegörandet" (interview, 11.05.15); of giving life to the town.

At markets this is not a concern that is considered much, but many individuals who have been doing Viking reenactment for at least a few years seem to have some insight on how much "bling"<sup>38</sup> (jewellery, embroidery, silk...) is appropriate. The general acceptance, however, is that as long as you don't wear something that can definitely be pointed out as "modern", you are a reenactor. Being able to put reasoning behind the use of an item is also important.

### *Absence of (modern) Christianity*

The second reason for the popularity of Viking age reenactment is the absence of Christianity and to some extent religion in its entirety. During Medieval times in Europe, Christianity played a large role in people's lives, and Christianity has in some ways been part of constructing social life in general, creating morals, traditions, etc. In reenactment one will

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<sup>38</sup> The word "bling" is a word I've heard used by a lot of reenactors, both positively and negatively, but for the most part the latter. It is often used by one reenactor about someone else on the over-excessive amount of jewellery, embroidery or other embellishments they are wearing. Reenactors who are very concerned with historical accuracy are often critical to large amounts of "bling", especially if many people are wearing much of it. The word is also used as an umbrella term for embellishments of different kinds.

find Christians, agnostics, Ásatrúar and many other religions, but, with the exception of Ásatrú, religious belief is often a topic that is neither discussed nor really matters. It has happened on a couple of occasions, that after coming home from Viking markets, I have found out that some of the most dedicated reenactors are deeply Christian. At first this was very surprising to me, but over time it has come to be a relatively common realisation. I have also met a lot of Ásatrúar of differing kinds. What is not surprising is that some Viking reenactors choose Ásatrú as their religion. Some of them confess that it is indeed a strange belief to have in 2015 and that ‘normal’ people often think it is a strange and ‘nerdy’ thing to believe in. Reenactment might play a large part in normalising Ásatrú. It must be added that there are those who actively separate reenacting and their belief in Ásatrú, such as *Arngeirr* who, during Blót, changed over to modern ceremonious clothing instead of his Viking clothes. He felt the need to distinguish between reenactment and his religion, saying that reenactment was fun and his religion was serious.

Reenactment has no direct religious influence, something that works in its favour, inviting people of all kinds of backgrounds to join. This might also be a large part of the reason behind the Viking age being such a popular topic in TV, film and historical novels, as the absence of large modern religions invites all kinds of watchers and readers. The Vikings, historically known as heathens/pagans and warriors, are heroes (or villains, depending on the observer) uninfluenced by religion and local politics, something that cannot often be said of other historical figures.

### *Handicrafts*

Modern technology has taken over for traditional crafts that used to be done by hand. Many reenactors join groups in order to learn crafts such as tablet weaving, needle binding, weaving, woodwork done by hand, blacksmithing and much more. Music, fighting and cooking can also be put under this category. The rising popularity of eating clean, slow cooking and organic food



*Anthropologist in the field, tablet weaving. Photo by M.B.F., with permission.*

production are often topics of conversation between those who gather around a large iron pot above a bonfire to discuss whether or not potatoes or sweetcorn are authentic enough for the Viking age. The use of plants, mushrooms or animals are discussed in detail: their use in dyeing, eating and brewing, etc. While there are many exceptions, it is often women and girls who

gather around a table to teach each other to needle bind or to discuss the authenticity of tablet weaving patterns, while men and boys are more fascinated by crafts such as bow-making or blacksmithing. Although there is a certain division between the sexes, it is not at all frowned upon when a man decides to learn embroidery:

“There might be a bit of an old fashioned sex segregation where women are actually a lot better than most of us men to sew, they are better than us men to make that type of small-scale crafts. And that’s just the way it is, and the way it’s become. But no woman is refused to join the fighting or to do blacksmithing. But it seems we have different interests, and we continue doing them. So sometimes I’m wondering if the women might think it’s nice to be allowed to be a woman too... Yes, but wearing trousers isn’t a requirement. But if they come here in trousers, then they are allowed to do that.” (Interview with *Arngeirr*, 13.09.15).



*Trying to recreate a broken baker oven using the best solutions we could come up with. Photo by A. Økstra. 22.03.15*



*Dyeing clothes. To the left, clothes dyed with red onion peel. To the right, with yellow onion peel. Photo by A. Økstra. 03.07.15*

Old handicrafts that are now done by machine are treasured in the Viking community and a lot of emphasis is put on teaching it to younger people in order for the craft not to be forgotten over time. The awareness of this comes from many sides, but particularly after the UNESCO Convention concerning immaterial heritage in 1995. I remember specifically a conversation where I was told that before Viking reenactment became popular, needle



binding was nearly forgotten and only very few people in Scandinavia knew how to do it. In recent times, needle binding has been rediscovered and there are a large amount of different stitches that have been found again. Many people also swear to needle bound socks, mittens or other clothing instead of crocheted or knitted items, saying that they are warmer, keep longer or simply look better. This is also the case in other crafts: Hand-made is said to be better than machine-made.

### *Roots and heritage: the Golden age*

The fourth and last reason is heritage and roots, especially in Scandinavia. It might also be the most important reason for general interest in the Viking age in Scandinavia, outside of reenactment as well as inside. Through world history, the Scandinavian countries have but one golden age, the rest of the time being rather neutral in politics and development of technologies. This Scandinavian heyday is cause for pride, celebration and identification. A large part of the tourist industry in Scandinavia revolves around Viking history and artefacts in museums showing off the beauty and importance of this age in the Nordic countries.

While the Vikings are still sometimes seen as violent and bloodthirsty northmen, they have in the last few centuries started to “represent a more unambiguously positive image: we like to think of them as youthful, courageous, and exciting adventurers devoted to travel and exploration” (Winroth, 2014, p. 8), which most likely appeals to both young and old adventurous people today. The violent image of the Vikings can in many ways be said to be true, but compared to other events during the time, for example the actions of Emperor Charlemagne, this was not necessarily strange behaviour for the time being. But when looking beyond their violent reputation, historian Anders Winroth also explains that:

“The Viking Age was also a moment of great cultural, religious, and political achievement. Intense Scandinavian contacts with Europe unleashed not only the ‘fury of the Northmen’ onto their European victims, but also a battery of European cultural and political influences on Scandinavia. The people of the European North responded in creative ways. Literature flourished, especially poetry of a complexity seldom rivalled. During the Viking Age, Scandinavians experienced a great boom in decorative art, much of it produced by artisans and craftsmen in the thriving trade towns of the region or at the courts of ambitious rulers.” (Winroth, 2014, p. 10)

For a brief period, Scandinavia can be said to have been in charge of trade, politics and art, high up on the technological ladder. This is something that modern Scandinavians have *not* forgotten. Viking reenactors have often pointed out to me that the reason they reenact is to ‘take back’ the Viking Age from those who see historical Vikings as anti-heroes. They also have a need to take it back from fascism and the use of Viking symbols to promote racist beliefs (see chapter 3, page 74). They want to put focus on the aforementioned aesthetics, family values and romantic (or overly romanticised) collectivism. To Scandinavians, the Viking Age is “one of the most unique and interesting periods in history,” (Winroth, 2014, p. 12) and these are only some of the reasons why so many identify with and celebrate this historical time.

### **Historical fiction**

The popularity of reenactment can be compared to the rising popularity of historical fiction novels and TV-series. Getting to know personal narratives in a book helps give extra colour to historical events. Academic history rarely conveys emotional lives of the persons it investigates, leaving history books ahuman and exempt from sentiment. Historical fiction with personal narratives makes it possible to identify with the protagonist and the human experience. This is also what reenactors do, and particularly Viking reenactors. The historical freedom lets them reenact a past that can be interpreted in accordance with their own identity.

This leads me back to the topic of glorifying the past. Nostalgia has been typically seen as memories of a lived past, for example childhood and a time where things were ‘simpler’ in one’s own life. However, in later times it has come to have a wider meaning, namely that of a “longing for a lost place and, especially, a vanished time” (Ange & Berliner, 2015, p. 2). This will, in fact, extend the definition of nostalgia to describe what it actually is: a distorted memory of the past, near or distant in our timeline. Nostalgia often describes positive aspects of the past (although, not always), and it works as a utopia of the mind. We create a space in time concerned with memories that lock out negative aspects, creating the perfect scenario of the past that is not completely historically correct. Recalling a past is continually changed through personal experiences and historic representation. Historical fiction where you bond with protagonists and what they go through, can and will alter how you relate to that past. Similarly, if you see a picture of yourself from when you were little,

do you really remember that day, or have you created a scenario around seeing the picture?  
How much of the story behind it has been altered over time?

“... a fixed past is not what we really need, or at any rate not all we need. We require a heritage with which we continually interact, one which fuses past with present. This heritage is not only necessary but inescapable; we cannot be seen as integral to the meaning of the past, rather than subversive of its truth, we may breathe new life into it.” (Lowenthal, 1997, p. 410)

Viking reenactors act out a carefully constructed history-inspired fantasy world made up of nostalgic memories, (seemingly) free from extreme individualism and (some) modern technologies. To them, it is a kind of utopia.

### Chapter summary

At the beginning of this chapter I quoted *Steinvor* and her view of the modern age; that we have a dependence on modern technology and lacking moral and spiritual values. In the same interview, she also said that reenactment was a way to connect herself to what she saw as elementary things, “history, nature, close people, your basic needs, being creative, productive, active and being yourself” (Interview, 31.05.15). These were things that she considered necessary in order to



*Horned Viking rubber duck during Viking battle. Photo by Dawid Kobińska, 2013, p. 157.*

feel authentic. Viking reenactors try to take back these elementary things, and many of them do so in their daily modern lives as well. It is an answer to modernity’s ideas of an individualistic, fast-phased society, and it tries to take back some of the pre-Renaissance collectivistic ideas of family values and group mentality as opposed to today’s individualism and ideas of the Nordic/Swedish individual independence (Trägårdh, 1997, p. 262). Modern individualistic ideas are deeply implemented in historical reenactment, which can be seen through self-promotion on social media. As modern people and as individuals constantly seeking new knowledge, it is not strange that they, as Viking reenactors, would take to

Facebook and other social media to come into contact with people with the same ideologies, values and dreams. Neither is it strange that it is the *Viking* age they seek to, as it is a historical time which, in reenactment, gives a large amount of historical freedom, absence of (modern) Christianity, a large focus on handicrafts and the idea of a Nordic golden age. Viking reenactors, with their great sense of introspection and as a relatively modern and ahistorical phenomenon, might be an expression of modern individualism and modernity, but it is also made up of a great deal of individualistic and modern concepts, making Viking reenactment a paradox in itself. It is a clash between times and places, costume and items representing a multitude of countries<sup>39</sup> and a time spaced as wide as from the early Iron Age to the 21<sup>st</sup> century (that is, over 2000 years of history) and even fantasy-inspired. It could be said that Viking reenactment is ultimately timeless and spaceless.

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<sup>39</sup> One of the most commonly used chairs in Viking reenactment has never been proven to have been made in the Viking age in Scandinavia, but it is rather a simply put together chair that is still made and used in some places in Africa. The reason for its' wide use in reenactment might be its simplicity and it is often justified by saying "it's too simple to not have been made in the Viking age".

# CHAPTER 5: HISTORY OR FANTASY?

## Utopia and Nostalgia

The ‘setting the mood’ subchapter at the beginning of this thesis is made up using observations and first impressions from both *Bardrsundr Museum* and Viking markets in Scandinavia. The conversations are based on things that have been said during interviews with modern Vikings I have met during the fieldwork period. This text shows the absurdity of the mix between historical ages, which is a paradox I have previously discussed and that I will continue discussing in this chapter. The text also shows the nature of a modern reenacted Viking market. The songs sung are often old folk songs, but these are rarely as old as the Viking age. The use of ‘modern’ things such as plastic bottles and the eating of oranges or other ‘unauthentic’ things/foods is done by almost everyone, but it is done in a flash of a moment and hidden from view of people who are not Viking reenactors or, if discovered, joked and justified with playful remarks and humorous explanations.

I’d like to express the likeness reenactment has to Austdal and Helgesen’s discussion on steampunk and cosplay in *Norsk Antropologisk Tidsskrift* (2015, 3-4[26]), where nostalgia and utopia are central to the debate. Viking reenactment, like steampunk, draws on the impact of new technologies by making up alternative and non-realized time lapses (2015, p. 214). They are also alike in that they do not struggle to copy an exact time (Steampunk takes inspiration from 19<sup>th</sup> century England), but rather to take inspiration from a point in time and express the past’s positive sides. Viking reenactment romanticises the Viking age and its aesthetics. “Steampunk and other movements founded on ‘nostalgia’ is not necessarily a definite quest back to the past world, but it could equally be a complex temporal configuration where there are future(s) which establish the ‘framework’ for action” (p. 215).



*Viking with rubber shoes. Photo by A. Økstra. 16.04.16.*

On these terms, both steampunk and reenactment have a basis in the past, but its framework is the now or the future. The Viking community is, to a reenactor, a kind of utopia. Similar to steampunk, it idolises and fetishizes the aesthetics of a historical time. What is more, Viking reenactment idolises collective ways of thinking. Because it is a relatively small community, it makes the individual more visible in the group, and everybody gets to contribute. In this way, it is a functioning democracy. While feelings of fellowship with others and being together is important to the utopic qualities of Viking reenactment, individual self-realization is equally important. It lets the reenactor have their own individual projects together with other people. In Foucault's *On Other Spaces* (1986) he defines utopia as "sites with no real place," and "fundamentally unreal spaces" (1986, p. 24). While reenactment is 'timeless and spaceless,' it is also a physical action. It may therefore, instead of utopia, be defined as heterotopic, "effectively enacted utopia," and places which are "absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about." Like the cemetery or the library, it is a space with many layers of time and it is "unlike ordinary cultural spaces" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25).

Nostalgic moments can be found often and on many occasions, such as that of the Sami Viking reenactor in chapter 4, page 93. I also experienced and noticed people having nostalgic moments on many other occasions, such as older visitors reminiscing after seeing the use of a spinning wheel or someone needle binding and remember learning it when they were young or seeing their grandmothers using the same methods. Folk songs were often sung by the bonfire and these were of varying 'oldness' but never as old as the Viking age. These songs, whether the listener was four or eighty years old, brought back nostalgic memories. "Ohhh, I haven't heard that song since my mother sang it to me when I was a child!" was not a rare remark to be heard, followed with closed eyes and a content smile. On one occasion I ended up talking to a middle aged woman originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had come to *Bardrsundr Museum* as a tourist and discovered that we were using quern-stones to grind wheat into flour. She was able to tell me that, at home, very similar stones could be found still used or lying around that were used for the exact same purpose up until this day. On another occasion, I was sitting in the Viking town at *Bardrsundr Museum* working on a Viking shirt for one of my male co-workers. I had also displayed a nearly 10 centimeter wide and 2 meter long tablet woven belt next to me. I was then approached by a young Indian woman who asked me if she could try on the shirt. I told her it was a men's shirt, but let her try it on. After pulling the shirt over her head, she took the tablet woven belt and draped it over one shoulder, across her body and down to her hip,

giving me associations with the South Asian sari. She also told me that it was similar to what she and her family on some occasions would wear.

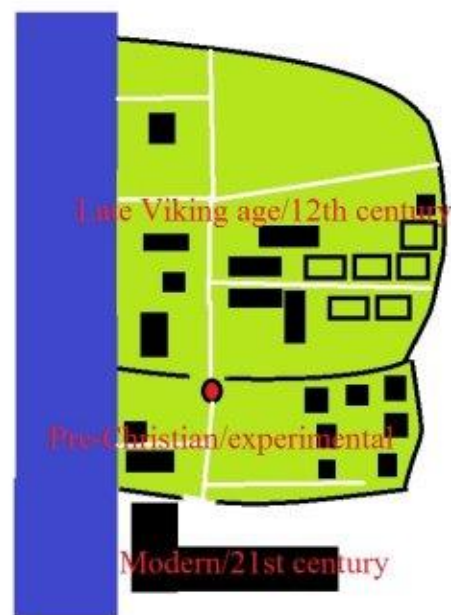
To me, these experiences brought forward thoughts of the modern way of thinking that the Viking age and the past in general was a primitive age. In a way, these women telling and showing me the likenesses between the Viking age and the 21<sup>st</sup> century in various places of the world, gave me the possibility to diminish the spatial and temporal dimensions that before had seemed so enormous.

### Rite of Passage: Time Portals

The last sentence in the “setting the mood”-text is based on a question I have continually used in my interviews. One of the answers I was given was as follows:

Me: So, is there a particular time where you think “now I'm modern, now I'm a Viking!”?

Asgrim: Yes! When the pin on the last brooch is fastened.



*Bardrsundr* consisted of 3 time periods (see photo) and it used what can be described as time tunnels to distinguish between them. The main museum building with its cafe, reception and offices is clearly set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but as you walk through to the other side of the building one immediately sees elements of another time. A rune stone painted with red paint tells of the historical significance of the area. This area, the in-between the museum building and the Viking village, is used as an introduction to the Viking age. The area is described by *Bardrsundr* as the pre-Christian age. It has a place of sacrifice to the Ásatrú gods (still used), a group of small houses also reconstructed to fit pre-Christian age. This area outside the South Gate is not as strict when it comes to the use of modern tools. This comes rather naturally as the modern museum building and the view to the nearby farms etc. cannot be avoided. A ‘historical workshop’ has been placed outside the village walls. This little area is

made for school activity and craft workshops. The buildings and tools are relatively simple but modern in most of their construction.

The South Gate (marked with a red dot) acts as a time portal into the Viking village. During tours the guide will stop at the entrance of the village and tell tourists that they are about to enter newly Christianised times, mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. During the summer, the village is filled with people dressed in historically accurate clothing doing authentic crafts or 'simply existing', as well as having people conveying the history from a modern point of view.

Events and activity in the Viking village depend on the time of year. In July 2015, *Bardrsundr Museum* received groups of eight to ten 16-18 year olds who were there to do their summer job. One of their jobs was to act out small scenes to make the village come alive with people, voices and activities. Examples of these are collection of tax and the blacksmith pulling out an infected tooth. One day, I walked into the Viking town and overheard annoyed voices. I asked what was going on, and the person in charge of the students told me that one of the girls had refused to remove her makeup while she was dressed in historical clothing and working in the town. Therefore she had been made to pick rubbish in the parking lot where she could wear all the makeup she wanted.

In June, *Bardrsundr Museum* received around 600 Vikings to participate at the Viking market. People from all over Europe (there were also rumours of a Japanese Viking, but unfortunately I never met him) gathered in and around the town to live out their lives as Viking reenactors.

The Viking town can be said to be a *sacred space* when it comes to the use of authentic materials. The use of the notion of sacred space is not accidental here, as the Viking town with its large market can be compared to a religious site both in that it has an offering place for *Ásatrúar*, and also because reenactors make their journey/pilgrimage there every year. The importance of authenticity beyond the South Gate makes the transition as you walk through the gate a rite of passage. Now, it is important to mention that as a museum there will always be difference in the person's commitment to a "Viking life" and to "historical consciousness". Some visitors have little to no interest in the museum and can have been dragged along by friends who have some interest in history and Vikings. To these people, the gate is seen as nothing but a gate separating two spatial areas. However, in this case, I am focusing on the reenactor's perspective, who walks through the gate and sees, not a museum, but a different time secluded from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Inside the village, every detail is as historically accurate as possible, down to the wooden nail that holds the planks together.



Knowing this, the persons in question are incorporated into a new status and group: as a Viking in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>40</sup>. On the topic of territorial passage, Van Gennep (1960) discusses how "whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds" (p. 18). The gate acts as a time portal between two historical times. The village can be seen as a sacred space separated from the outside world and modern influence. "In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always remember that the threshold is only a part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of waiting, and of departure – that is, rites of passage" (Van Gennep, 1960, p. 25). As a time portal and a rite of passage, it was also possible to 'pollute' the mindset the reenactor used to time travel.

*Bardsundr Museum* was very clear about the rules of using 21<sup>st</sup> century things inside the Viking town. To prevent the pollution of the 11<sup>th</sup> century town, they had made a small 'outside room' inside the village which was not too visible for the visitors. This was called the 'pig house' (grishuset) and was meant for essential modern tools (hose, saw, screwdriver, etc.) and it was also meant for smokers. It was a time lock. If employees or volunteers were caught using a phone or smoking in the Viking village outside of the pig house, *King Rangvaldr* would *not* be happy. This was to uphold standards of authenticity, but also to prevent breaking the mindset of time travel.

#### *The preliminal, liminal and postliminal phase.*

For a reenactor, the time portal can act as the liminal phase of a passage from one state of being to another. They leave behind the modern setting (preliminal phase) and become a modern Viking (postliminal). Whether this portal is a gate or the act of changing from modern clothes to Viking-clothes is irrelevant. Instead, during this time, he/she is neither one thing nor the other, "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." (Turner, 2008, p. 95). The postliminal phase is when the person has entered through the gate, or "when the pin on the last brooch is fastened," as he/she is incorporated or reincorporated into the society.

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<sup>40</sup> As mentioned earlier in this thesis, *Bardsundr Museum* and their dedicated volunteers split people into 3 status groups: träl, bryte and fri (slave, servant, free).

In Turner's (1979) article on comparative symbology, he discusses the differences and similarities of liminal and *liminoid*<sup>41</sup> rites of passage. Whereas a liminal rite of passage is mandatory, a liminoid rite of passage is more on a par with a *choice* to go from something to something different, related to play and leisure. However, distinguishing between the two can be difficult, and I feel it is especially difficult in the context of the time travelling Viking reenactor<sup>42</sup>.

The liminality of Viking reenactment can also be seen as the whole experience itself. In this way, the entrance to the market or the museum is the preliminal stage and the act of being a Viking reenactor is a liminal period. Consider the definition of a liminal stage as “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” (Turner, 2008, p. 95). Where being a reenactor is timeless and spaceless, it makes visiting the living history museum or Viking market as a reenactor a liminal period in itself.

One of my informants once expressed that he felt that it was his modern everyday life that was a kind of role play where he was not himself. He felt like he was being his full self during reenactment, “It's not like we feel like we have to play a role when we're reenacting, it's more like the other way around” (Recorded interview, 31.05.15). Going by this, some reenactors I met seem to believe that their ‘true’ life is the one they live during reenactment, thereby making modern life the liminal period.

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<sup>41</sup> "In complex, modern societies both types coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism. But the liminal -found in the activities of churches, sects, and movements, in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, masonic orders and other secret societies, etc. -is no longer society-wide. Nor are liminoid phenomena which tend to be the leisure genres of art, sport, pastimes, games, etc. practised by and for particular groups, categories, segments and sectors of large-scale industrial societies of all types. But for most people the liminoid is still felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice, not obligation. The *liminoid* is more like a commodity - indeed, often *is* a commodity, which one selects and plays for - than the *liminal*, which elicits loyalty and is bound up with one's membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group. One *works at* the liminal, one *plays with* the liminoid." (Turner, 1979, p. 54)

<sup>42</sup>Although this particular rite of passage can be seen as optional and to some extent/people a game or hobby, you will also find those who emerge themselves deeper into the rite of passage and who, for example during religious rituals such as Blót, can feel the presence of other beings such as Gods or spirits. To them, this is not a game or pastime, it is their physical and spiritual life. This is why I will not describe the rites of passage as liminoid *or* liminal, as this is relative to the reenactor. It also seems to depend on the time and place. Some markets and museums take better use of the time portal effect, while others do not put the same amount of focus on it.

## Fluctuating realities – the time paradox

In the conclusion of Kobińska's (2013) paper on historical reenactment and contemporary Vikings, he states that the main *problem* with historical reenactment is that to re-enact the past is in itself "a deeply ahistorical category" (p. 159). However, through findings in my fieldwork, the point of reenactment is not to actually *be* a Viking. Every reenactor knows that he/she is reenacting a past that wasn't reenacted *then*. When asked if they would want to go back in time if they had the chance, most answered that they would not. Nor is it possible to 100% immerse yourself in a reality completely different to the contemporary world. In June 2015, I sat down with a group of informants in a restaurant in Eastern Norway, after a Viking market. I asked them if there was a particular point before reenacting where they thought "now I'm modern, now I'm a Viking". This brought up a long conversation:

*Yrid:* I remember discussing that everyone knows that it's 'fake'. Everyone knows that it isn't Viking age. Nobody thinks that 'now, we're in the actual Viking age'. This is just reenactment. You're reminded of it all the time, that we're modern people. Just people saying 'Oh, I like your clothes!' If it was the Viking age you might have heard that too, but not as much...

*Ranveig:* And then we go to Rema 1000, and eat burgers and all kinds of stuff, so it's not exactly camping. It's not "friluftsliv" (outdoor recreation)... There are a lot of modern things in a Viking camp that will remind you of the modern.

*Asgrim:* Well, the aim is to have a market that looks and feels a bit like what we think it was like when the Vikings went to a Viking market.

*Ranveig:* But I can't do a time travel because I am constantly reminded of the modern age. If we had put the market in the middle of the mountains with a little lake and stuff, then maybe. With no electricity and everything.

*Iðunn:* I think I'd get withdrawal sickness if I had no electronics.

*Gunnhild:* I actually think that if it had been so strict that no electronics were allowed at all, that Viking reenactment wouldn't have been as popular.

*Asgrim:* Absolutely not! It's like a museum landscape.

*Ranveig:* Yeah, I feel a bit like an animal in a zoo when the tourists walk around and take pictures.

(Recorded group interview, 17.06.15)

The vast majority of people I have met during my fieldwork are people who have done a lot of research on Norse history and mythology, if not academics of history, archaeology, anthropology, etc. They are well-read people who to a large extent know what they are doing when they are reenacting. Many of them are also self-proclaimed ‘nerds’, often ending a long discussion by saying things like “Yeah... As you can tell, I'm a bit of a nerd”. All my informants know it is not physically possible to go back in time, but that doesn't necessarily stop them from doing it:

"Within contemporary physics as we know it, there is no time travel [...] The problem is however that physical reality is not the only way of understanding reality, and it may not even be the one that is most significant to human beings. Reality can also be defined as the sum of human experiences and social practices".

(Holtorf, 2009, p. 34)

The question of “what is reality?” is hard to answer. If I were to even *try* to answer this question in this thesis I'm afraid I would go on forever. However, I have reason to believe that ‘reality is relative’ might be a fitting statement. On the topic of time travel it would be difficult not to mention the film *Back to the Future* from 1985. The title itself creates a paradox: It suggests that the future is in the past because it has already happened. It also suggests a causal loop (or a bootstrap paradox) in which a future event is caused by a past event which was caused by the future event. The relevance of this discussion is that reenactors reenact a past which has been made and determined much later. Reenactment has also created a lot of Viking history through (modern) experimental archaeology. So, without the past we would not have the future, but without the future we would not have the past.

“People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but *actually*, from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint, it's more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly... time-y wimey... stuff.” (Doctor Who, 2007, season 3 episode 10)

There is also a problem with the objectiveness of history. The Vikings were and are known to have attacked monasteries and churches that did not have the power to defend themselves, but the monks and clerics were highly literate people whose literary works describe the hostility of their attackers (Winroth, 2014, p. 12). While this is an exception to the ‘rule’ that

history is written by the victors<sup>43</sup>, it shows that historical sources are not and perhaps *cannot* be completely objective. The history of the historical Vikings is not complete, but has been built on by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and others over time, making the fullest picture of the Vikings the one we have today. This is the case for all history of all time: History is created in the now, not in the *then*. Holes in historical knowledge can be used by reenactors by giving them room for interpretation and historical freedom. This interpretation and freedom is most often backed up by close examination of existing archaeological and historical sources, but is also heavily influenced by modern thinking.

My informants were completely aware that they in no way were able to actually go 1000 years back in time, but this does not stop them from doing it. This type of time travel does not require a T.A.R.D.I.S.<sup>44</sup>, DeLorean<sup>45</sup> or Time-Turner<sup>46</sup> that is, a physical time machine, but rather the ability to enter a different mindset. The use of time portals are instruments to strengthen the feeling of going from one mindset to another. While reenactors are usually playing versions of themselves, they are wavering between two worlds, where many modern principles are left behind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and appreciation of Viking age ideologies, aesthetics and authenticity are strengthened.

### **Other Paradoxes and contradictions**

The paradox concerning ahistorical historicity in Viking reenactment and Living History Museums as discussed by Kobiałka (2013) is not the only paradox found in this type of community. There are other very important contradictions that are open in view for reenactors and visitors. These are contradictions and paradoxes that obscure the view that reenactment of the past can be or is in some way or another, authentic or *true*.

#### *Old versus new/modern*

A paradox found in living history museums is the one concerning old versus new. It is old and modern at the same time. Classic examples of this problem is the Ship of Theseus which

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<sup>43</sup> The source of “history is written by the victors/winners” is unknown, but is known most notably from Walter Benjamin and Winston Churchill.

<sup>44</sup>The time machine from British TV-show Doctor Who. T.A.R.D.I.S stands for “Time And Relative Dimension in Space”.

<sup>45</sup> The time machine in the Back to the Future films, built from a DeLorean DMC-12 car.

<sup>46</sup> The time-travel necklace Hermione uses in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.

raises the question whether or not a ship is the same if it has had all its parts replaced over time, or Grandfather's Axe which has a new handle and a new head and the question of whether or not it can be the same axe. Similarly, can a museum placed on original grounds be the same house? This is an example of ahistorical historicity, as the house was not originally a museum. After hundreds of years buried in the earth, only minimal parts are kept in the



*Past meets future. Photo by A. Økstra, 09.04.16.*

same place, and even those parts may have changed over time. Valuable or important archaeological artefacts are moved to museums and most of what is moved never finds its way back to the original ground. What then is the significance of the place, if it has neither original objects, nor its original uses? The answer here can be linked to that of immaterial archaeology and therefore, of course, the UNESCO convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003): that which is *not palpable*. This is why heritage is not just objects, but also things that need to be experienced, tried out and tested. It ranges from learning how thread and square wooden tiles can become an intricate belt (tablet weaving), to learning old folk songs originally sung by the skáld<sup>47</sup>. Immaterial cultural heritage, as discussed in chapter 3, is about tradition and embodying the

past. I believe this is why living history museums are getting more and more popular, especially in Scandinavia, as interest in heritage grows. Viking reenactors try to take back old handicraft traditions, world views and collectivistic ideas. They see beauty in handmade things such as tools, buildings and jewellery. These things make it possible to see all the work that has gone into making the items. This way, immaterial cultural heritage makes it possible to learn from and about our ancestors.

### *Tourist versus Viking*

As tourists are such a vital part of the living history museum, they will always be visible in the museum terrain. The museum needs to uphold standards of modern interest and

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<sup>47</sup>Viking/middle age poet.

contemporary cultural values. It needs to appeal both to the tourist and the Viking reenactor and they are both equally important in the museum landscape, but in very different ways. The reenactor is one of the symbols of the old: what people were like in the past. He/she reenacts both for him/herself, for other reenactors, for the museum and for the interested tourist. But the tourist isn't just a visitor either, but he/she is (embodies) the modern. For other non-reenactor visitors in the museum, the tourist acts as a contrast and they are therefore important museum objects in themselves. The tourist and the Viking are polar opposites, and they are both used to show the vast differences between the *then* and the *now*.

### **The importance of material culture**

Viking reenactment is often considered a primitive kind of camping. Camping today is concerned with tents, sleeping bags, camping stoves, etc. In other words, modern camping involves a lot of gear. Viking reenactment, although seen as primitive, involves even *more* gear. The tent is very large and heavy, you need multiple animal skins and blankets to keep warm, not to mention quite a few layers of clothing. You also need all kinds of equipment to make fire, firewood, food, etc. While the Viking age is idealised/romanticised as being 'simpler', its reenactment is concerned with *things*. In order to uphold standards of authenticity, the reenactor needs to collect a large amount of material things to climb in the social hierarchy.

Material things are needed for three different reasons. The *first* is 'props'. These are often banners, chests or blankets to hide modern things under. They are also decorative clothing, flowers and statues. These things create a frame for the situation and puts the viewer into the 'mood' of the Viking age. The *second* material group is 'survival', in which you find warm clothing, tents, sheep skins, food, cooking utensils, etc. These are the essentials to keep you warm and fed. The *third* group is 'activities'. They often consist of things such as crafting tools, games and song books. These things are meant for both the reenactor and the visitor and are ways of socialising and connecting with other people and to teach visitors about the Viking age.

Simplicity is not what Viking reenactment is about, although it wishes to promote a simpler way of living. Some of my informants told me they had to drive two cars in order to get all their things to the Viking markets and one informant said she needed to get a new, bigger, car so she could continue with this hobby. People who dislike the materialistic

obsessions of modern society seem to seek back to ‘less materialistic’ ways of living. This is a paradox, as Viking reenactment seems to be, if not more materialistic as modern society, just as concerned with material things. Having as many things as possible is encouraged and celebrated. Even the liminal transition, especially visible through what *Asgrim* said, “when the pin on the last brooch is fastened,” shows how material things is key to the time travel experience that Viking reenactors have.

## Nerds

The vast majority of Viking reenactors I have met find pride in being weird, strange and/or nerdy. They acknowledge that their hobby or lifestyle is different from other people’s and that those who are unknown to the community will definitely think that it is a peculiar way of spending the weekend or summer. Viking reenactors have friendships and relationships outside of reenactment as well as inside, and some of them told me that their enthusiasm for the lifestyle was often met with scepticism from outsiders. The reason for this scepticism might be based in the many misconceptions people have about the historical Vikings as violent and dirty, and in the worst case, modern Vikings related to fascist ideologies. Many of my informants had therefore taken it upon themselves to proselytise for Viking reenactors to those who had gotten the wrong idea. Some informants did express that they found themselves sometimes not being taken seriously, for example if during a Viking market they went to the supermarket to buy supplies. They would be aware of people staring at them, children pointing and tourists walking up to them laughing and wanting to take photos. However, my informants said that most of the time they would laugh along, smile at people who stared and even walk up to them and invite them to visit the market. The reenactors would wear their Viking clothes ‘out of context’ with pride and many of the people I met in Norway told me that they had made it tradition to wear Viking clothing on the Norwegian Constitution Day, 17<sup>th</sup> of May, as an alternative to the traditional bunad<sup>48</sup>. This was justified by telling me that the Viking clothing said more about Norwegian heritage than the bunad did and was a way of taking back the bad reputations the Vikings have upon them, but also a way of showcasing and advertising for the upcoming Viking season. While most of my informants told me that they were proud to be weird and that they had, from a young age, been labelled

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<sup>48</sup>The Norwegian national costume.



as nerds or odd (some of them had been bullied from a very young age), some of them told me that they had never in their life been labelled as outsiders.

It would seem that the change in the nature of personal life and self-identity in the last 50 years (see chapter 4, page 84) has allowed for a more individualised identity. Social stigmatisation on the basis of gender and race has decreased to a relatively large degree, as well as stigma concerned with going outside of social norms. While individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are freer to shape their own identity, they are also able to come together in groups of people who identify with each other. This creation of social groups has become increasingly possible in the age of globalisation, through social media and diminished distances of travel.

Being comfortable with being labelled as nerds, strange, odd or weird is also strengthened by group affiliation, making the individual feel less alone: there is community in otherness. This and the other statements above can easily be applied onto other subcultures such as the Punk or Heavy Metal communities, steampunkers, gamers, etc. Especially the former, punk subculture, stands out because it was/is concerned with preservation of creative freedom and the retaliation from traditional forms of art, beauty and music. It was also heavily influenced by a DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic which is similar to that of reenactment which has inspired for (and vice-versa) ‘modern’ movements of slow food, home grown/organic foods and zero-waste, dumpster diving and other types of anti-consumerism. These subcultures were also visible among many of my informants, for example through *Gunnhild* who had grown up in the Danish punk society and adopted a ‘down to earth’ mentality which consisted of using aspects of the Viking community in her daily life as well as at Viking markets. What is different about Viking reenactment as a subculture compared to others, is that it consists of people of all ages. A large amount of defined subcultures are concerned with ‘youngsters’, teenagers and the under-30s. At *Bardrsundr Museum* and at markets, I met month-old babies and up to 90-year olds, all dressed in Viking clothing.

Group affiliation has made people who stray from norms more comfortable with doing so, and this seems to be especially true for those who have passed puberty. It must be said that for many younger people it is still difficult to be labelled as different. This is seen in for example gamer culture where girls are still taunted and often looked down on as lesser gamers than boys, sometimes told to be there for the attention and not the gaming. While female gamers have become more and more accepted among this group dominated by boys and men, there is still a huge amount of shaming. It is my (and many of my informants) hope

that normalising nerds through Viking reenactment across the gender and race spectres will work in overcoming stigmas concerned with that of being ‘weird’.

## **Playfulness**

Viking reenactors are playful and *Bardrsundr Museum*’s events were often characterised by many different activities that were supposed to bring out the visitors playfulness. There were competitions which involved all ages, such as rope-pulling, balancing on logs, bow and arrow contests, traditional board games, etc. The reenactors also had a way of making up stories which seemed to fit them there and then, for example at one Viking market where I met a carefully planned character who I was told was an Arab who had come to visit (he was actually Swedish). The management of the Viking group had planned this character because they needed a way to justify the making and drinking of coffee, and the fact that he was the designated medic of the market. He was dressed in clothing I assume were typical of the geographical area around year 1000, and much joking was done around him. Other stories were made up around the use of different known-to-be modern or unauthentic things such as oranges, bananas, jeans, books, cars and so on. I heard, for example, reenactors calling their car for their horse, having traded oranges with a Chinese woman in Miklagarðr<sup>49</sup> or having a time travelling Viking tent so they could go to the 21<sup>st</sup> century to pick up jeans. Stories like this could be heard many times a day and it was sometimes dramatized and laughed about for hours or days afterwards. They would navigate within the given frame and make up these stories to fit them into their image of authenticity. Authenticity is relative.

My informants never really seemed bothered by being labelled as “weird”. In fact, they often seem proud of being different. *Alfhild* told me that she had a theory that people of the Millennial generation have some kind of ‘growing pains’<sup>50</sup> She told me that she and most of the people she knew had had such an easy childhood that some of them simply refused to grow up properly, and they weren’t even slightly afraid of expressing this fact. “It’s important for our generation to be a bit childish” (interview, 20.02.16). Childishness, play and “being weird” (ibid.) had been almost taboo when she was a teenager, but after the age of 20 it became okay again. She told me how she and her friends would express this playfulness at the museum and at markets. It would seem that the threshold into the spatial area liberated

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<sup>49</sup> Old Norse name for Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>50</sup> “Voksesmerter.

them from their inhibitions and they were able to play as if they were children again. In a recorded interview, one informant, a big burly man with a 40 centimeter beard, tells me about the fun and jokes he is going to do at the soon upcoming Viking market:

“We want to do this joke thing. Viking joke. Like, you hear a phone and you pick up this wooden piece. And we're going to buy these plastic worms that are two meters long and put a string through them and put a plastic cup in both ends. Phone. And then we can ‘connect to other people’ by just putting other cups on it. Just to make fun. So we'll do that. And I sat down with a friend and discussed a few fun things we want to do. I was thinking we could have this flat screen TV and use it as an iPad. This person is supposed to show all the things that are wrong. He's just going to run around and do weird stuff. The joker of the town. He picks up the phone and says, ”Oh, hello Odin!” and stands there talking to the old god.”

(Recorded interview, 25.04.15)

His plans do not make a large amount of sense, but he wanted to show the difference between the modern and the old and act them out as if he had completely misunderstood the differences between the ages. He wanted to play with the frames he was given, where the paradoxes came together and created a mixture of time.

### **The rest of the year**

My fieldwork was done from the beginning of March to mid-August. This was a conscious decision, as I wanted to experience most of the summer season at *Bardrsundr Museum*. The Viking community is the most visibly active during the summer season. This does not mean that it does not shape and impact their lives the rest of the year. Fieldwork in March and April consisted of seeing and helping the museum prepare for summer; fixing, tidying, building and planning.

I was told to have a look at the water hose in the historical workshop. The issue with the hose has been discussed over and over again. A little reluctant at first, I started off trying to figure out the problem. I can't say I've ever been a very good plumber, but after an hour of work and becoming wet all over, lifting heavy water-soaked wood

and screwing and unscrewing hose bits, I actually managed to fix the whole thing.  
Phew. (Extract from fieldnotes, 15.04.15)

Viking reenactors and their communities are active during the winter season. Compared to the summer, there are not many markets or large events at this time, but Viking life in the winter is characterised with a lot of ‘preparing’; doing handicrafts, fixing broken items, meetings, planning the upcoming season, brewing beer and mead and reading. The Viking communities arrange indoor courses for crafts and training for fighters. As it is a close-knit community, many of ones friends in reenactment are also ones friends outside of it. The winter season can be characterised as a liminal period of time; of waiting, ‘life on hold’.

### **Chapter summary**

Utopia is the future and nostalgia is the past. Viking reenactment is a combination of these two. It is a longing for a past time and its (imagined) good qualities, homesickness, and it is a wish for the future to revive the same good qualities. It is also an imagined time period, where the museum, the markets and the reenactors use thresholds and portals to create visualisations of time travel where they enter a mindset where focus on historical things and authenticity is important. The Modern Viking knows that she is modern, and she cannot completely escape from modern things. Eventually she has to go back to modern life, use a modern tool, buy something from the supermarket or see a mobile phone. Western modern society is not made up for people to exclusively live ‘primitive’ lives, and through my ethnographic fieldwork, it does not seem like the Viking reenactors want this either. Instead, they want the future to capture what they consider good values of the past; that which is achievable and desirable, ideal type values like social aspects and family values, aesthetics, knowledge and handicrafts. In Viking reenactment, the past and the future are two sides of the same coin. Its timeline is non-linear and a sort of mythical conglomeration of times; timeless and spaceless.

# CONCLUSIONS

The paradoxes of a modern Viking are many, and here I will summarise the arguments and conclusions from this thesis' chapters. Subsequently there will be a discussion of what can be taken from this thesis, and main conclusions.

In chapter 2 and 3 I discussed the changes that museums have gone through, from the classic museum layout to interactive museums and living history museums. I argued that people's perception of time influences their existence. Going by the Western linear understanding of time, repetition of the past is impossible. In order to understand it, however, the past needs to be reawakened. This led me to discussions on whether the immaterial, such as knowledge and practical skills, plays an equally large part in heritage, and especially Viking reenactment, as material *things* do.

I have argued that traditional museums create a paradox where putting items in glass cases is an attempt to save the past, but by doing so they create distance between the now and the then. Living history museums and Viking reenactment minimises the gap between the past and contemporary age by taking items into use and letting the visitor and the reenactor experience the past first-hand instead of from a distance; they embody the past.

Similarly, I have argued that the building of memorials and monuments (for example museums) can be seen as futile attempts to save a disappearing past, a past that is in even greater danger of disappearing because modernity and all that comes with it is making people forget it. There is also danger in this kind of saving memories in that that they often embellish the truth by representing positive and romanticised sides of history. This is the paradox of the museum: we use museums and monuments to try to save the past, but by actually *having* to save the past, it shows that we are losing it.

I have demonstrated that Viking reenactors often reenact the positive sides of the Viking age, but this is not to say that they do not know of the negative sides. The situation is that most evidence that exists from the Viking age are from rich graves, and they depict a wealthy lifestyle. There aren't many archaeological finds that show the poorer lifestyles of the Vikings and because of this, in order to stay authentic enough, most Viking reenactors copy clothes, items, food, etc., from these wealthy graves. There is, however, no denial among my informants, that the historical Vikings had slaves and that many people during this

period suffered deaths at young age, incurable diseases and crippling poverty. This is often discussed among reenactors and, for example in *Hrodleif's* case, sometimes displayed in a more playful way. It seems that most of my informants recreate the Viking age to fit their own idea of a sort of ideal world inspired by the Viking age, but romanticised, where everyone is equal. They create a type of Utopia which incorporate unity, family values and skill-based fame (money isn't that important). In this way it is a functioning democracy with noble moral codes.

In chapter 4 I discussed how Viking reenactment might be a reaction to the modern society's ideas of an individualistic and fast-phased world. While individualism brought self-expression, political freedom and economic affluence, it also came with loneliness and selfishness. This led to questioning of identity related to an obsession with individual success a success which often is extremely difficult to achieve. I find Goffman's argument that stigmatised people are going to struggle in social situations is slightly outdated but still relevant, as the age of globalisation has allowed for a type of individualised identity. I suggest that Viking reenactment has reached such a high popularity in the last few decades because it has become more socially acceptable to have interests outside of the norm and/or *being different*.

Reenactment is a product of modernity and individualism at the same time as it strives for an ideal collectivistic society, which is yet another paradox to be found in the Viking community. The relative acceptance of eccentricity has given people more choice to be and do whatever they want without being greatly socially stigmatised, and it has made for a creation of smaller communities/subcultures which match our own self-identity and enhance it.

As a small interest/hobby-based community, every person becomes a part of a puzzle, where each individual joins the group(s) due to one or more of the four common denominators: historical (creative) freedom, absence of modern Christianity, handicrafts and roots/heritage. I ended the chapter by suggesting that Viking reenactment is a clash between times and places, costume and items representing a wide variety of countries of origin. It represents a fusion of epochs in that it takes inspiration from the Iron Age up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century: over 2000 years of history. Reenactment is also fantasy-inspired, which would mean that Viking reenactment is ultimately 'timeless and spaceless'. Its use of time and space is ambiguous and relative.

Chapter 5 led me to a discussion on whether or not Viking reenactment can be said to be a recreation of history, or if it should be considered more on the side of a fantasy world. The Living History museum is one of these ambiguous times and places, as it not only has houses from many different countries and historical ages, but it also has a modern museum building. *Bardsundr Museum* actively represented two different historical ages (Pre-Christian Viking age and the late Viking/Medieval age). The small amount of archaeological evidence from one exact decade is too little to go by in order to start a museum. Both reenactors and museums need to enhance and even exaggerate the epoch they/it tries to represent by making educated guesses (historical/creative freedom). They also make use of effects which strengthen the experience, as for example time portals and the red painting on rune stones. Every Viking reenactor knows that it is not physically possible to go back in time to the Viking age to experience it first-hand (and most of them wouldn't do it if they could), but this is no hindrance: They do travel in time. This is done with the use of a bit of history-knowledge, some imagination, quite a large amount of material things and by constructing a threshold which works as a symbolic time tunnel. This type of time travel does not require a physical and functional time machine. However, the threshold and the ability to change ones mindset *is* the time machine.

The mashup of many times and places is what makes the living history museum and reenactment so interesting and popular. They have a kind of historical freedom that is difficult to find elsewhere. Modern technology, such as the use of mobile phones, cameras, Facebook and Twitter also enhance the experience and promotes it further on to people who come across it online. All my informants were very self-aware when it comes to what they are doing. The point of reenactment is to be your ideal self with your own idea of the appreciation of aesthetics, beauty, crafts and knowledge. The point is also, of course, to be together with likeminded people.

Being a Viking reenactor is to completely immerse oneself into a fantasy world of an authentic historical period. In the past decades this has become socially acceptable: individualism has created new types of collectivism. Reenactment can be seen as an answer to modern ideas of an individualistic fast-phased society, an attempt to take back family values, authentic aesthetics and romanticism. It is not about being an exact copy of historical figures, but rather to adopt the positive and attractive sides of an old culture. Living history

museums and reenactors strive to save history in a responsible manner. Another aspect is the will and desire to take back family values and security in this cold individualistic world. Those who seek living history museums and who do Viking reenactment are people who have a specific dream revolving more around a Viking age-inspired life. They seek the past's aesthetics, crafts and, especially, the social life which is concerned with *just being together*. They enjoy being a big family which fit together like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

Reenactment and living history and the museums and people dedicated to it, contribute to museum development by embodying the past and bringing it to the future. They embrace the values and romantic sides of the Viking age through material and immaterial subjectification. Museums, living history museums and reenact all complement each other and are necessary for each other in order to keep dissemination of history as *true* as possible. Museums are the anchor necessary for reenactors to keep standards of historical authenticity. Without them, living history museums and reenactors would have much less to base themselves on, and historical freedom would lose its ground. Living history museums put focus on experiencing the past first-hand, by making a world in which the person gets to see, feel, hear, smell and touch the Viking age, 1000 years after its end.



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