

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

# Viking and Norse Materiality in the North Atlantic: Developing New Approaches and Integrating Research Frameworks

Birmingham (United Kingdom), 29 November - 01 December 2010

## Scientific Report

Convened by:

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## Executive Summary

The workshop was held from the 29th November to the 1st December at the University of Birmingham. Initially the workshop had been organised to run in April 2010, although the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökul volcano in Iceland resulted in the workshop being reorganised due to travel disruption. This reorganisation meant that a small number of the original participants were unable to attend the meeting, but others were able to make the later dates. The final workshop included 18 participants, including representatives from Ireland, Iceland, Faeroe, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Denmark, the UK and one from the USA. The delegation represented a range of heritage professionals, postgraduate researchers and academics, representing the Academy, National and Regional Museum Professionals, and including colleagues from Commercial Organisations and Independent Researchers. This cross section of specialists working with material culture gave us a unique opportunity to discuss developing research frameworks concerning Viking and Norse materiality in the North Atlantic region, with implications for research, working practice and dissemination.

The workshop was framed around a series of case studies followed by themed discussion, aimed to highlight and inform areas considered to be of prime importance to the development of a robust research framework. The sessions were outlined as follows:

**Case study 1: Past and present research in the UK (Dr Colleen Batey)**

Discussion 1: Identifying past and present research across the North Atlantic Region

**Case study 2: Creating a Museum for the North Atlantic; visualisation and material culture studies (Dr Amanda Forster)**

Discussion 2: Reference collections, representation and accessibility in the North Atlantic

**Case study 3: Contact; Hanseatic expansion into the North Atlantic (Dr Natascha Mehler)**

Discussion 3: Integrated approaches and research opportunities

**Case study 4: Towns and industry; industrial processes and material culture at Kaupang (Dr Unn Pedersen)**

Discussion 4: Industry and science; new analysis and old questions

**Plenary: What next? Developing a research framework for material culture in the Norse North Atlantic**

Each Case Study consisted of a 30 minute paper presented by an invited speaker with an aim to sparking discussion, providing evidence for new ways of researching material culture or suggesting ways of disseminating and widening participation of the Viking and Norse artefactual record of the North Atlantic. The Case Study was followed by direct questions relating to that paper and then a related open discussion amongst the group. In some discussions, the group took the opportunity to simply outline work being undertaken in their research area or country whilst others took a more proactive line in future development of a research framework and what form this may take. The final session allowed the group to reflect on the previous discussion, and to consider how an *effective* collaborative network might be developed and promoted in the future.

During the meeting, the question of how this ESF exploratory workshop could progress was discussed. There was strong support for continuing communication routes between participants and also for opening up the network to include more postgraduate researchers, academics and heritage professionals working in relevant areas. It was also agreed that the ESF Workshop should produce some direct output; a position paper will be prepared by Batey and Forster, with contributions from participants, in order to provide an up-to-date account of material culture studies in the region and outline possibilities for future research development and dissemination.

## **Scientific Content of the Workshop**

### **Session One**

Case study 1: Past and present research in the UK (Dr Colleen Batey)

Discussion 1: Identifying past and present research across the North Atlantic Region

**Batey** provided a detailed examination into materials-based research undertaken in the UK concerning Viking and medieval objects either directly or indirectly relevant to the study of the North Atlantic region. A survey of past and present research highlighted the shifting focus of artefact studies and avenues for development. The most prominent theme of development is the facilitation of fuller discussion of artefacts between colleagues. The NABO framework provides a regional focus but has not been ultimately successful with regards to artefact-specific studies (as opposed to, for example, studies of archaeofaunal assemblages). There are groups, however, which do provide useful and workable models of communication between specialists working across large regions (such as the ICAZ worked bone group). Further developments to consider include the development of databases of material (discussed in Session Two), the support for specialist and scientific analysis of material (discussed in Session Four) and the question of training for new students and researchers (discussed here).

The discussion that followed this session concentrated on a country-by-country breakdown of current and recent research in relevant topics. The overwhelming impression was the sheer quantity of research being undertaken far exceeded expectation, and that perhaps one of our major problems is not the lack of research but our awareness of it. It was suggested that a major Workshop Output should be a formal assessment of material studies within each relevant area, which would contribute to a bibliography of research and also highlight those researchers that should form part of a materials network. This could be published on the NABO website, or perhaps a website dedicated to a North Atlantic materials network (see below, Workshop Outputs and Future Directions).

## **Session Two**

Case study 2: **Creating a Museum for the North Atlantic; visualisation and material culture studies (Dr Amanda Forster)**

Discussion 2: **Reference collections, representation and accessibility in the North Atlantic**

**Forster** raised the question of provision of an artefact reference collection for the medieval North Atlantic – a region dispersed across a wide geographic area and many international boundaries. A digital collection was postulated, taking the form of an online and freely available e-Museum, utilising visualisation and 3D representation of objects and allowing researchers to gain access to objects and data archived in other countries. The collection would also provide a bibliography of relevant materials, offering direct access where possible and especially to unpublished works.

The discussion that followed raised a number of issues which need to be fully considered prior to the development of an online reference collection;

**Reference Collections:** do we really need them? On the question of building a reference collection there was general agreement that some form of reference collection would provide a useful tool for both professionals and non-professionals. A best practice model for the inclusion of find data was outlined; full context/ site information, images (both photographic and drawn), distribution maps of raw materials and redistributed finds.

There was some concern that such a collection may be too limited and specialised, and would only be useful if it was regularly updated.

**Museum Collection Databases:** National and Regional museums already hold comprehensive databases of their collections. It may be possible to link into these datasets from a central web-based collection, but would need to allow for update and changes within those collections. Problems would arise with consistency of terminology and the idea of developing a materials thesaurus and glossary (to be used for the online reference collection) was postulated. This would then link into Museum Collections and allow for differences in terminology in established collections. Providing direct links into Museum Databases would prevent the Collection from becoming too distinct from the actual objects held in museums.

**Wiki Collection Development:** issues of input and verification. Any collection which provides a dynamic input allowing individuals to upload information would require verification from a central body or individual. Any such development would thus need to identify a verification process with formal agreement from individuals or museum based groups. This aspect of the collection would need to be fully supported (including funding for time) and formally agreed with participating museums and individuals if developed.

**Bibliographic Database:** the proposal of a bibliographic database was well-received, with real interest in the provision of materials summaries provided by recognised experts and links to unpublished works (where available and appropriate). This is something which was suggested as a formal output from this workshop (see below).

### **Session Three**

Case study 3: Contact; Hanseatic expansion into the North Atlantic (Dr Natascha Mehler)

Discussion 3: Integrated approaches and research opportunities

**Mehler** introduced the group to ongoing research into the Hanseatic expansion into the North Atlantic, based on two international collaborative projects with researchers based in between the University of Vienna, University College Belfast, Stavanger Sjøfartsmuseet, Kulturhistorisk Museum, University of Oslo, Foroyar Fornminnisafn and Fornleifastofnun Íslands. The project is examining the development, operation and impact of European trade of two areas in the North Atlantic - Iceland and Shetland. In the early 15th century both were part of the Danish kingdom but, with the pledging of Shetland in 1469, it passed to the kingdom of Scotland, and led to the opening of trade to Hanse merchants. The lifting of Danish restrictions on Icelandic trade in 1490 had a similar effect.

The project aim is to examine selected places of trade between merchants from the south and the sub-Arctic populations to elucidate the method of operation of commerce. The objective will be to survey and classify trading sites in Iceland and Shetland during the period ca. 1400-1700. Sites will be identified using historical sources and place-names, and located in the field using the normal archaeological techniques of aerial photography and field inspection of earthworks. The survey will be undertaken using differential GPS to map the sites in relationship to the local topography with the further objective of identifying sites for future investigation by excavation.

Whilst the project itself is chronologically pushing our medieval area of interest into far more recent periods, the international scope of the research, the resources with regards to funding opportunities and the practical realities of running such imaginative and ambitious field-led investigation provided an inspirational start to the discussion session on integrated approaches to international projects.

**Chronological and Geographical Boundaries.** The ESF workshop and its participants work within the North Atlantic region and within the Viking and Norse periods – but the actual spatial and temporal boundaries of the grouping were seen as a very subjective topic. Whilst there was some support for creating a far more chronologically specific group (for example, from AD800-1200), it was felt that the advantages of looking beyond fixed boundaries had a lot to offer. With regards to geography, it was also clear that the concept of a fixed boundary would not be necessarily helpful – especially when considering the role of portable antiquities in the North Atlantic region. Rather, it was a felt a central focus for the group (both chronologically and geographically) would allow cohesive and effective discussion, but that the boundaries should not be fixed but allow appropriate flexibility. A formal research grouping would, therefore, need to take this into consideration.

**International collaboration and project development.** It was felt very strongly that the role of international communication in the development of research projects within the region would prove pivotal in future research development. The encouragement of open discussions within the ESF Workshop format allowed participants the opportunity to

approach themes from a range of angles, often uncovering a need for further research into areas with common methodologies but across international boundaries. A central website which could provide a conduit for information regarding new funding opportunities and also link into individual specialists (and through to already available profiles online) was considered to be a useful starting point in facilitating research development.

#### **Session Four**

**Case study 4: Towns and industry; industrial processes and material culture at Kaupang (Dr Unn Pedersen)**

**Discussion 4: Industry and science; new analysis and old questions**

**Pedersen** presented an impressive survey of the non-ferrous metalwork recovered from recent excavations at Kaupang. Detailed studies of the waste material, supported by archaeometallurgy and ceramic petrology, led to a better understanding of the production processes, the availability of raw materials and the skills of the metalworkers. A comparison with finished products from graves, hoards and settlements shows that the artisans produced jewellery and tools for several different social groups. The study has also shed light upon similarities and differences in non-ferrous metalwork in the Scandinavian Viking Age towns. The paper highlighted how technical aspects of craft activity can contribute to a better understanding of the metalworkers and their social roles and networks and how the study of craft activity can contribute to the understanding of social life in the Viking Age towns. This work was very much undertaken as a scientific analysis and study – gaining as much information from the material remains as possible. The results of the findings fully demonstrate the importance of the comprehensive study of artefacts, including raw materials and waste products, and their interpretation within their local, regional, supra-regional and international contexts.

Rather than a formal discussion on the nature of scientific analysis, the group considered a country-by-country outline of current scientific research would be more appropriate, and would mirror discussions in Session One (above). This outline will provide a starting point for the publication of a survey of materials-based research in the North Atlantic region (see outputs).

#### **Session Five**

**Plenary: What next? Developing a research framework for material culture in the Norse North Atlantic**

The plenary session gave participants the chance to reflect on the previous two days and highlight the main points derived from the workshop discussions. Potential outputs for the workshop were postulated and the next stage(s) in the development of a materials network outlined. All agreed that the meeting had been a useful event, and provided a refreshing approach to the facilitation of open discussion and questioning. With this in mind, further discussion-led meetings were requested which could be directed towards specific themes relevant to the study of the medieval North Atlantic (see below).

## Workshop Outputs

There was an agreement amongst participants that the Workshop should produce direct outputs and be submitted for publication by the end of 2011. These will include:

- Batey and Forster to pull together a position paper drawing together the themes and opportunities discussed at the meeting which cross material, chronology and geographic groups working in the North Atlantic
- Participants (and invited contributors unable to join the workshop) to write up material and/ or regional position *summaries* to highlight ongoing research and research opportunities.
- Material and/or regional specialists to provide signpost bibliographies to relevant published works and reference material.
- Bibliographic directory of published work to be published online
- Development of a gazetteer of current research and unpublished work (including both MA and PhD) to be made available via the North Atlantic Biocultural Organisation (NABO) website.

## Future Directions

The overall consensus from the meeting was a need to expand the network and cast the net wider with regards to individual participants. It was agreed that the grouping should not be overly narrow with regards to chronology and geographic region, concluding that our area of interest underwent a long process of change and development through the medieval period (from AD800-1400) but that later medieval and even post medieval periods could well cast light on materiality across the region.

The establishment of a materials research forum should be a priority with the clear directive of providing a communication route between a dynamic network of researchers. The forum would then be used to populate and provide;

- a project database of relevant and ongoing work (georeferenced if possible)
- a communication route for international research funding opportunities
- a link to individual specialists for advice and the circulation of ideas
- the identification of research projects for MA, MPhil and PhD studentships
- the provision of access to unpublished research projects
- links to pre-existing groups and networks (eg Finds Research Group, IfA Finds Group, NABO, Medieval pottery Research Group)

A series of collaborative meetings should be developed with an emphasis on discussion of themes. A follow up meeting for the ESF Workshop, using a similar format, would examine

the theme of *Innovation versus Tradition*. This would encompass processes of knowledge and physical exchange; regionality and the importance of locality; cultural adaptations and the use of continuing artefact types into modern times. Such a forum would also provide a hub for various ongoing and new research projects to exchange news and ideas, encouraging and maintaining high levels of knowledge transfer between researchers. The group will be seeking funding from various sources to support the development of the network over the coming months.

This model of knowledge exchange within the group could also be extended to other researchers working in relevant fields. This would enable the group to organise meetings designed to inform the research forum on specific topics. For example, it was highlighted that the major research from Dorestad should be represented in our discussions, and that the role of the Carolingian culture and its impact on Scandinavian material culture and expansion into the North Atlantic should be considered.

It was felt that once such a group was established, positive moves towards the development of a formal research framework which would be both sustainable and effective would follow naturally. Research projects could then be developed in tandem, working together and exchanging information readily. Finally, the development of a reference collection for the North Atlantic was seen as one project that should continue to be actively developed to the advantage of the whole group.



## Final Workshop Programme

### Main Objectives of the Workshop:

To bring together artefact specialists from the North Atlantic region to develop a multinational research framework concerned with a shared cultural heritage across the northern periphery of Europe. The meeting will address issues of publication, accessibility and encouragement of new researchers whilst avoiding duplication of research across international boundaries. It will review current knowledge, highlight new research, technological and analytical opportunities and introduce a forum for knowledge exchange.

#### Monday 29 November

Morning	<i>Arrival</i>
14.00	<b>Introductory briefing, Aims of the Workshop</b> <i>Amanda Forster, University of Birmingham</i>
14.15	<b>Presentation of the European Science Foundation</b>
14.30	<b>Case study 1: Past and present research in the UK</b> <i>Colleen Batey and Elizabeth Pierce, University of Glasgow</i>
15.15	<i>Coffee</i>
15.45	<b>Discussion 1: Identifying past and present research across the North Atlantic Region</b>
17.30	Close

#### Tuesday 30 November

09.30	<i>Coffee</i>
10.00	<b>Case study 2: Creating a Museum for the North Atlantic; visualisation and material culture studies</b> <i>Amanda Forster, University of Birmingham</i>
10.45	<i>Coffee</i>
11.15	<b>Discussion 2: Reference collections, representation and accessibility in the North Atlantic</b>
13.00	<i>Lunch</i>

14.00	<b>Case study 3: Contact; Hanseatic expansion into the North Atlantic</b> <b>Natascha Mehler</b> , <i>University of Vienna</i>
14.45	<i>Coffee</i>
15.15	<b>Discussion 3: Integrated approaches and research opportunities</b>
17.30	Close

### Wednesday 01 December

09.30	<i>Coffee</i>
10.00	<b>Case study 4: Towns and industry; industrial processes and material culture</b> <b>Unn Pedersen</b> , <i>University of Oslo</i>
10.45	<i>Coffee</i>
11.15	<b>Discussion 4: Industry and science; new analysis and old questions</b>
12.30	<b>Plenary: What next? Developing a research framework for material culture in the Norse North Atlantic</b>

## Final List of Participants

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## Statistical Information

Country of origin

Austria	1	Denmark	1	Estonia	1
Iceland	2	Ireland	2	Norway	3
Sweden	1	United Kingdom	4	United States	1

Gender

Male: 10

Female: 8