

HISTORISKA MUSEET

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITIES IN FUNERARY PRACTICES AND MATERIAL CULTURE

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BIRKA, RUS' AND NORDIC GENTES – identity, self-image and cultural expression in Viking Age Sweden



AIM & HYPOTHESIS:

- New and deeper view of what Birka represents, how we can define it's inhabitants and what this means for Viking Age Sweden.
- Archaeology as a field of research can contribute to the ongoing discussion of identity.



MAIN QUESTIONS:

- How did the inhabitants of Birka consider themselves and their environment?
- How and in comparison to what was affinity defined?
- What are the implications of this in the interpretation of Birka and Viking Age Sweden?
- How does the archaeological material reflect identity and self-image?



A COMMON SCANDINAVIAN CULTURE ... OR NOT?



- Groups of people and social affinity
- Birka – an economical hub, but not a political and administrative centre
- Regional collective identities – and other, totally different, affinities
- Rus' in Birka – the urban way of life



GENTES AND THE ISSUE OF GROUP IDENTITY

- Defining a self, a group and others
 - IDENTITY
 - SELF-IMAGE
 - AFFILIATION
-
- Is it traceable?
 - MATERIAL CULTURE AND IT'S CONTEXT
 - IMMATERIAL CULTURE – SOCIAL PRACTICES
 - WRITTEN SOURCES



SEARCHING FOR IDENTITIES IN FUNERARY PRACTICES AND MATERIAL CULTURE

THE BURIALS

The produced image of how they perceived life and wanted to depict themselves.



THE TOWN-AREA

Everyday life and activities

FORTIFICATIONS

A perception of the outer world, the estimated threat and societies level of organisation.

A particular group of people – the warriors – who enjoyed a special status in society and was part of a vast network of contacts.

MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL CULTURE



- IDENTITY THROUGH MATERIAL CULTURE

Identity in archaeological contexts directly linked to the feeling of belonging (Diaz-Andreu; Lucy).

ethnicity – status – gender – function

- IMMATERIAL CULTURE AND THE TRANSFERENCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND BEHAVIOR

Social practices that discern one group of people from another.

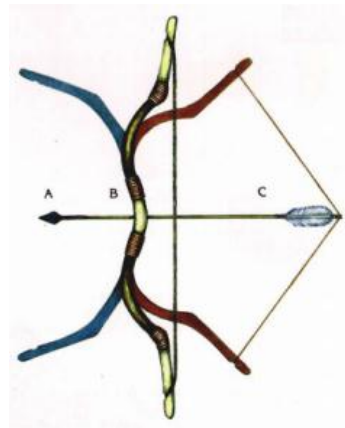
Transfer – contacts - cultures

What does import of different types of culture (material and/or immaterial) tell us about the character and quality of contacts between cultures?

CONTACTS ON DIFFERENT LEVELS: THE BIRKA – MAGYAR EXAMPLE

- Advanced knowledge and social practices, together with material culture

transfer, adaptation, development



UPDATE APRIL 2011

- Project: Birka, Rus' and Nordic Gentes
- Duration: 2011 – 2013
- Funding: RJ Riksbankens jubileumsfond
- Placed at the **National Historical Museum** in Stockholm

Traces of contacts – Magyar material culture in the Swedish Viking Age context of Birka

Birka seminar – papers on ongoing Birka studies/research

DEALING WITH THE
ARCHAEOLOGY OF IT ALL

Infrastructural project – Birka as a source for research.
Building a digital research platform.