

News from Sweden #5
Nyheter från Sverige

Here's a little history regarding our ancestors in Europe, not those alive or recently passed. This is a short history about our Viking ancestry, whose DNA continues to influence our characteristics, personality and even health.

Populating the northern regions began to reoccur at the end of the Paleolithic Ice Age, when the ice began to retreat, completed a few thousand years later. People moved further north as conditions improved. The earliest findings of humans in Scandinavia were the Bromme Culture who came from Mesolithic (late Paleolithic) an area now known as Ireland. These people were hunter-gatherer tribes who either hunted, farmed or fished for a living. Evidence indicates they were living in the area at least 11,500 years ago.

The ice had covered most of the northern hemisphere including the lower portions of the USA. The current geologic time is called the Holocene Epoch or Age of Man, misleading since the five or more human-type animals had been around for five to seven million years. Hominids were walking around Africa on two legs making crude stone tools 2.5 million years ago. Homo Erectus starting walking out of Africa about 1.75 million years ago. Anatomically modern humans who may or not be the latest human format, called Homo Sapien Sapien, made it to Europe around 50,000 years ago. They met other groups of hominid relatives called Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals. The moderns and the two other groups lived, apparently, peacefully together for over 7,000 years, and they mixed. Evidence of this has been found in burial sites where hybrid remains have been uncovered and in the DNA of today's populations.

Neanderthals were likely outcompeted for resources and absorbed into the modern's society, the last distinct tribe died out about 40,000 years ago. Neanderthals lived in Europe among Cro-Magnon tribes and used the same burial sites. Cro-Magnon evidence has shown they were in Europe at least 48,000 years ago. Both of these groups buried their dead and had sophisticated skills and societies. Many of us have small traces of DNA from those folks since they mixed with each other as well as with anatomically moderns. DNA scientists speculate that modern humans may have another human type DNA within them in addition to Neanderthal called Denisovans. So far no evidence has been found that Neanderthals or Cro-Magnons lived in the Scandinavian Peninsula. Evidence has been found that they were living in Les Eyzies, Dordogne, France and northern Germany and just south of the modern border of Denmark. Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons were intelligent, made sophisticated tools and weapons, were very strong and enormously flexible and adaptable. They were, interestingly, physically able to have lived in the colder regions of Scandinavia but did not. Scientists speculate the Denisovans the likely progenitors of modern Orientals. No evidence has been found that they made wine and cheese although they look much like modern day French persons.

New evidence comparing DNA across populations and 'visited' by our boat-rowing-relatives has shown that 'Viking' populations were much more diverse than previously thought, alarming news for purists, but not astonishing if you think about it. We got around. We started to sail out and about from the Scandinavian Peninsula after horrible weather conditions negatively affected farming. In the years 535-536 CE El Salvador's Ilopango volcano erupted causing a world-wide catastrophe that seriously affected human existence in Scandinavia and in parts of Eurasia. The drastic weather event lasting several years nearly wiped out the population by causing crop failures, famine, tribal infighting and considerable

chaos in the region. This disaster was followed (541-542 CE) by the Justinian plague, a black pandemic, the periphery of which reached into Scandinavia racking further hardship on the populations of Northern Europe.

Tribal people living in large family-like groups were desperate for some means of supporting themselves besides ripping off their neighbors and stealing their women although that is still a favorite pastime. Hunter-gatherers or farmers, living in the Nordic region since the last glacial period nearly 12,000 years ago, had found their sea legs most notably recorded by exploits during the 900-1000 CE, however they had been rowing and sailing around for a long time. The Tanum petroglyphs in Sweden from Bronze Age show depictions of similar boats and similar rowing technics. The river boats, made famous in Viking lore, had been the usual means of getting around and trading since the Bronze Age. There were many types of vessels from small to large with different purposes, from trade to war. The term Viking has been interpreted by different cultures meaning 'to go a sailing' or 'pirate' or a Scandinavian. It is an old Norse word really intended to mean 'to travel'. With admirable navigating skills, intuition and experience we could transverse the open seas, and so began our European and Western odyssey lasting to the present.

Most Swedish Vikings were not the barbaric and ruthless conquerors as TV shows would have it, just a bunch of farmers looking for new markets reopening ancient trade routes. The same cannot be said of the Danish and Norwegian Vikings, who were actually the mafia and pirates of this time period. History shows that some Swedes joined these raiding parties. The designation as raiders and pillagers belongs to them all. The Danish Vikings sailed down the Atlantic coast to coastal islands in and around current Great Britain and surrounding isles. The Norwegians mostly went west across the North Sea populating every Island between Norway and the American continent (unnamed until the Middle Ages). The

The Swedes went east, across Europe and south to the Middle East. Norwegian Vikings reached and colonized Labrador around 970 CE after they had colonized Iceland and southern Greenland. New evidence shows they built an outpost on Baffin Island where they met indigenous peoples. They lived in Greenland farming and fishing for over 500 years selling Walrus ivory in European markets. Bad weather and the loss of the Ivory business to cheaper African ivory drove most of them to return to Iceland and Norway but that occurred after Erik the Red and his crew had set foot on Labrador. They are thought to have met the Newfoundland Beothuk indigenous people already living there. There were a few skirmishes reported between Vikings and the indigenous populations, settling soon into a trading partnership. When we look at depictions of each group and their respective odors, fright would be a mild term to describe the moment. These Norwegians were not conquerors.

Discovery and populating the Americas is an interesting story, different from the understanding by most people. A single population of Middle Easterners migrating across southern Siberia 30,000 years ago during the last Ice Age were able to cross the into North America about 16,500 CE years ago over Beringia or Bering land-bridge into North America about 16,500 CE years ago after the glacial melting. They slowly migrated their way down the western coast over thousands of years. They were the first, according to current evidence, to populate the Americas. This was the West Coast migration. Their genes are found in Native Americans. This group is also the likely the progenitors of Eskimo and Inuit tribes in Canada and Greenland. Polynesians Islanders apparently crossed the sea reaching South America in 1200 CE around modern Peru.

Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian explorer, hypothesized an astonishing idea for his time: that the land 'discovered' by Columbus in 1492, was part of a separate continent. Columbus

had actually run aground on island of 'Hispania' currently called Hispaniola (Greater Antilles) where Haiti and the Dominican Republics are today. He never reached North or Central America. He has been discounted as a discoverer of the American continent. The only thing he and his crew accomplished was spreading VD and measles among the native populations killing them all off, same as Cortés and other 16th century Spanish Conquerors/explorers in South America in the 1500s. Leif Eriksson Day is celebrated by knowledgeable people. The USA, unfortunately, still has a holiday called Columbus Day. It is being proposed to call this holiday Leif Eriksson Day although the Siberians need some recognition too.

The Americas on the Eastern seaboard had been colonized by Norwegian Vikings. Bjarni Herjólfsson and his crew first spotted the North Coast of Labrador after surviving a North Sea storm and missing his destination Greenland. He wanted to go ashore, but his crew was exhausted after months lost at sea and wanted to return Greenland. He sold his boat to Leif Eriksson. Leif had heard Bjarni's story and sailed out for the new land the beginning of several years of life in Labrador and a working outpost for needed iron and trees essential for boat repair. Many voyages and stories are found in the Sagas. This was five hundred years earlier than the Italian. Apparently the haughty folks of the Middle Ages did not read their history.

The Labrador outpost began the first known habitation of the American continent by Europeans in the area now called L'Anse aux Meadows near the northern tip of Newfoundland. A second colony has been found south of the first. These first Vikings also sailed along the Eastern seaboard calling the new land 'Vinland'. Grape seeds were found at the Labrador site during excavations. At the time grapes only grew along the St. Lawrence river area. Some scientists speculate Vikings and indigenous populations traded and grapes were in the bargain. There are four indigenous tribes in the Provinces Newfoundland and Labrador today: the Inuit, the Innu, the Mi'kmaq and the Southern Inuit of NunatuKavut (formerly the Labrador Inuit-Metis). The Vikings did report meeting an indigenous group of Inuits in Greenland calling them 'Skrælings' because they smelled. The Vikings were known for their obsession with cleanliness.

Thus folks, it was the Siberians and Norwegians that founded the American continent. Believe it or not, there is a highly controversial account of a Viking Rune stone found in Alexandria, Minnesota called the Kensington Runestone.

These facts also mean that the coasts of the American continent were reached by diversely different ethnic groups vastly separated in time. By the time English colonialists reached the Eastern shores in the 1600s the continent had hundreds of tribal groups speaking over 1000 different languages. The area now called the Canada and USA had been previously occupied by European fur traders since the 1400s. The Bering Sea migrants have been genetically traced to the indigenous American populations, although now the gene pool has become a separate haplogroup due to isolation. Their DNA now has three Ancestral lineages: Siberian, East Eurasian and Ancient North Eurasian. These early Siberian migrants spread throughout the Americas about 16,000 years ago. Today in the USA there are 11 million people who claim Scandinavian ancestry, of those almost 5 million each of Swedish and Norwegian ancestry.

The Swedish Vikings are called Varangians and sometimes the 'Rus', Baltic peoples migrating eastward to what is now called Russia. They built Kiev a Russian city still showing remnants of its Viking history. The Varangian Rus eventually made their way as far south as Istanbul some staying and becoming guards or slaves for the Sultans. Occasional skirmishes occurred when meeting other tribal groups along these routes as you might expect

defending their territory. Keep in mind, slavery was part of the deal, a common cultural and business practice for thousands of years. It was very much a part of the Viking cultural scene. Some of those boat-rowers were slaves. Vikings mated with slaves from most of the areas they visited. Consequently, people tracing their DNA to Vikings actually belong to one of many haplogroups, the most common is I M253. The Swedish Vikings reached Istanbul in the 11th century. Beside mixing, they were primarily interested in silver coins, to bring home and make jewelry. You can visit these treasures in the Viking Museum in Stockholm.

The Nordic countries consist of Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Greenland, and the autonomous countries such as Åland, Jan Mayen and Svalbard Islands (the location of the world's seed preservation vault). Vikings visited 37 different places or countries in their day and significantly influenced all of them in culture, warfare tactics, language, business and building practices. Historians suggest the Era faded after Christianity and European culture was introduced in the 11th Century. However, we know the inside story, we are still around.

The latest comparative DNA study has revealed folks buried in Scotland were locals who lived the 'Viking Way'. Many had darker skins and brown hair. The gene mix included Asian and Southern European admixes. In the early days it was the locals who did the raiding of their neighbors, just another way to make a living. Today's Brits have about 6% Viking DNA. In Sweden it ranges from 10-30% depending on the analysis company. Blue eyes were seen all around the Middle East and elsewhere after a genetic mutation about 10,000 years ago, migrating north as more people traveled and mixed with each other. We are all relatives, skin and hair color and other physical characteristics a matter of time spent locally while engaging in our favorite pastime, mixing. The more people stay in a location the more certain physical characteristics are manifested and exhibited. Lighter skin (lower melatonin) and other traits like height including the ability to digest milk is the result of changes in adaptation to the northern climate and favoring lighter skins that absorb sunlight and Vitamin C. Old Norse, also known as *Dönsk tunga/Norrœnt mál*, a North Germanic language was spoken by the Vikings in Scandinavia, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and parts of Russia, France and the British Isles settled by Vikings. Indo-European languages were spoken in Europe about 4500 years likely by the Yamnaya herders from the steppes of the Black Sea.

The Viking population was not a homogeneous group or an equal-opportunity organization. The culture and society consisted of a hierarchy of four social classes: The lowest group were the slaves (Thralls) brought from other tribes or captured in raids and who did the most of the work; next were the Karls (Middlemen); then the Jarls (Nobelmen) and at the top where the Royals, such as the Kings and Queens (a later strata). The Viking men could be blacksmiths, jewelers, weapon makers, fabric makers, potters, bone carvers, bakers, fishermen, hunters, warriors, sailors, boat-builders, leather workers, wooden bowl makers, and more. Viking women ran the farms and were the matriarchs, artisans, traders and travellers accompanying the men on raids in battle. They held the keys to the farm and were called Shield Maidens in battle. Marriage was considered a business transaction between families. Divorce was possible when the marriage was unhappy. Social rules tolerated men's adultery but prohibited divorce because a husband was unfaithful. The husband could have concubines and sex slaves. Yet, having sex with the wife of another man was a serious crime. The punishment could be castration or even death. A woman was expected to remain faithful due to the lack of birth control and Viking obsession with lineage. As with many societies it was the way to prevent illegitimate children. Viking

women did however engage in extramarital sex. Cheating may cost her the humiliation of having her hair cut off in public or worse sell her as a slave or maybe even kill her. There is much more to learn about this complex society.

Modern Swedes, excluding non-genetic portions of the current immigrant population, are decedents of three tribal groups: the Svear, who inhabited Svealand (land of the Swedes in South Central Sweden) and who are one of the progenitor groups of modern Swedes; The Geats (Goths) some of whom may have lived on the Island of Gotland and the Gutes who lived along the Baltic Sea in South Sweden just above the province called Skåne. All were North Germanic tribes around the early CE.

Our town is called Upplands Väsby, 27 kms north west of Stockholm, in an area referred to as the Östra Svealand region, central to Viking homesites. There is a homestead nearby called Gunnes Gård, named after Gunne the wife of Vibjörn who farmed there. It is located in a park called Vikingagården containing graves sites from both the pre-Christian and Christian Eras. Early Vikings had a complex polytheistic system of Gods and minor Gods responsible for different aspects life. After Christianity took hold in the society (12th century) many Vikings were not sure that a single God could do the job. So, they covered themselves by practicing both forms of religion for a while. Vikings were especially respectful of their dead relatives hoping they had moved on to Valhalla. To be assured a place in Valhalla one had to die in battle. Be kind and respectful to a Viking, one may be a relative.

heil og sæl (Viking for 'be healthy and happy'),

Viking Carl and Vikingar Ingrid