

Current Archaeology:

The Silver treasure from Viggbyholm

Found the summer of 2020

In collaboration with The Archaeologists



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Viggbyholm of the Iron Age

The name Viggbyholm probably comes from Vikby – the village by the bay. When the archaeologists began the excavation in the summer of 2020, the site appeared to be a farm with an associated burial field from the Late Iron Age. There were traces of residential buildings, pit houses for cooking and crafts, a granary and garbage disposal.

The farm had been used for several centuries. About thirty remains of houses peeked out just below the ground surface. During the Viking Age, the farm became larger, and a new type of house was built – pit houses with sunken floors and an oven in one corner. There were four pit houses and the ovens had walls of edged stone slabs. Burnt grains and pieces of bread were found outside the best-preserved oven, showing that the house functioned as a baker's hut.

New buildings were later built on top of the Viking Age house foundations. However, there was a gap between the Viking-era farm and the later construction phase. From this time, the archaeologists found amulet rings of iron, arrow heads and the decommissioned silver treasure. According to archaeologist John Hamilton, this may have been a time of ritual depositions. Gifts were offered to higher powers or buried as a way to communicate with the dead.



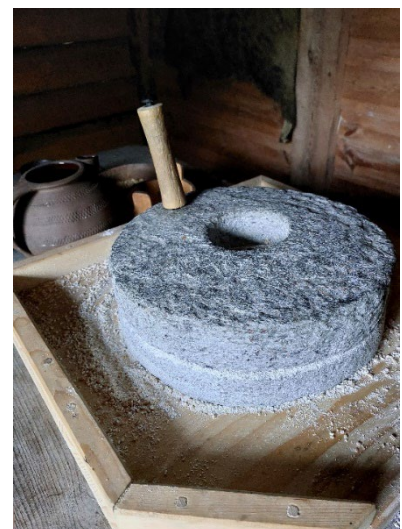
Picture.
Excavation of
a sunken
floor house
at Viggby-
holm.

1. Rotary quern and the baking of bread

In the center of the farm plot, a large amount of burned grains was found. A granary, one of the farm's most important buildings, probably stood here. The archaeologists also found rotary querns near the pit houses, which testify to cooking.

Within the farm area, several worn and broken parts for millstones of the rotary quern type were found. Grinding grain into flour in a hand mill was heavy and monotonous work, but a prerequisite for the bread to be baked. The archaeologists also found traces of malting, when grains are soaked and turned into malt, indicating that beer was also produced on the farm.

The many buildings and the handling of food and drink indicate that the farm became a gathering place over time. Feasts were arranged there for the village's well-to-do.



Pictures 1–2. Rotary quern (1), upside, and a reconstructed rotary quern.

2. Pot with stone lid

In an area with several gray stones, a stone of reddish granite was visible. The stone looked charred, as if it had been burned a lot. The ground had been examined with a metal detector which showed that something exciting was under the stone. Even so, it was a surprise when the archaeologists lifted the stone. A clay pot was seen there, and in it objects of silver.

The pot was filled with silver objects, one of which is completely unique! In the case of treasure finds, preserved containers, especially ceramics, are unusual. A pot with a stone as a lid gives associations to a burial urns with a so-called lid stone.

The pot was a used kitchen utensil and sooty after being used for cooking. On the inside of the pot were preserved food remains.



Picture 1. The red stone is visible inside the circle.



Picture 2. Possible shape of the pot.



Picture 3. The silver treasure after the stone lid was lifted.

3. A bag with silver

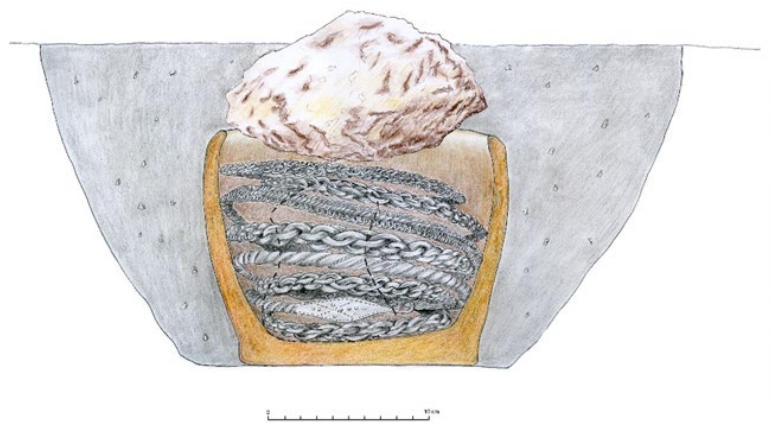
In the pot were eight necklaces placed on top of each other. Placed inside the necklaces were two bangles of twisted and braided silver, inside them was a bag of fabric with twelve coin pendants piled high. At the top of the bag was a small amulet ring and two silver beads.

That parts of a bag made out of fabric was found preserved in connection with a silver treasure is unique. When silver begins to break down, it precipitates silver ions. Thanks to the fabric's contact with the silver in the bag, the textiles have been preserved.

The bag was made of several types of fabric such as linen and silk, which shows that it was well-made! The silk fabric, which is now brown, is of a type of weave called samitum which could be beautifully colored with different patterns.



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Illustrations 1–2. The reconstructed bag and its content. By Franciska Sieurin-Lönnqvist, Arkeobild.

4–7. Jewelry, beads and an amulet

The silver objects in the treasure were made by skilled craftsmen. Who once owned the jewelry, and how it was used before it was buried, we cannot know.

Necklaces (4) and armrings (5) of these types have been found in many silver hoards but never in graves. The necklaces are made in the same style, but some are braided, others twisted. Some have patterns of lines and dotted circles on the end plates.

The amulet ring (6), placed at the top of the bag, is an unusual find in a treasure but similar rings are sometimes found in graves. They are interpreted as a type of magical protective object that was common during the Late Iron Age. Amulet rings are available in various designs and sizes and are usually made of iron.

The silver beads (7) have applied silver threads of various kinds. One bead has been gilded and has a twisted silver wire tied through the hole. A textile cord was preserved inside of the bead.



Pictures. Silver jewelry from the treasure.

8–19. Coins from distant places

In the bag there were 12 coins, made into pendants, from European and Islamic coins. The oldest coin is from 904 AD and the youngest from 997 AD. The coins in the treasure come from different parts of the then known world; Persia, Bavaria, Bohemia, Normandy and England. The coin from Normandy is completely unique of its kind.

The largest coins were at the bottom of the stack in the bag and on three of the coins pieces of the bag have been preserved. The coins were collected over time. It was common to choose exotic, clear, and fine coins to make into pendants. Coin pendants have often been part of necklaces and possibly functioned as amulets.



Front

Back

About the coin (8):

Dirhem
Isma'il ibn Ahmad, al-Shash
Samanid coin
Year 292 AH (904/5)

The loop with stripes is silver but the rivet is copper.
On one side, the text is right in relation to the loop.

About the coin master:

Isamail ibn Ahmad was ruler and Persian emir of the Samanid Empire between 892–907 with its capital in Bukhara. He is described as generous, brave, fair and cultured. Isamail ibn Ahmad was born in the Fergana Valley in 849 and died in Bukhara in 907. He was buried in the Samanid Mausoleum.

Today, he is depicted on modern banknotes.



Front



Back

About the coin (9):

Dirhem
Manisur ibn Nuh
Samanid coin, Samarkand
Year 358 AH (968/9)

The pendant is riveted on the coin regardless of the motif. The riveted loop is made from a Western European coin. A line on the coin shows that the loop was cut off when it was attached to the coin. There is also an extra hole in the edge.

About the coin master:

Manisur ibn Nuh was a Persian emir of the Samanid Empire 961–976 and he died in 976.



Front



Back

About the coin (10):

Dirhem
Coin master unknown
East European, Rus
Type Rispling S249.
Date ca 950

Both the rivet and the loop with stripes are silver. The motif is upside down.



Front



Back

About the coin (11):

Dirhem
Coin master unknown

Both the rivet and the loop with stripes are silver. The loop is riveted regardless of the motif.

The coin was at the bottom of the pile and on the coin was a piece of fabric, samitum, which was preserved from the bag.



Front



Back



About the coin (12):

Dirhem
Mu' min ibn al-Hasan
Eastern Europe, The Volgabulgars
Date, ca 975

Both rivet and loop with stripes are in silver. One loop faces down. There is also another hole in the coin.

About the coin master:

Mumin ibn al-Hasan was Bulgarian. He was emir around 970–987.



Front:
*.HEINRICV (recumbent S)
[D]VX in the middle a
cross with dots, a circle
and an angle in the
angles.*



Back:
*REGINA CIVITA
(recumbent S) and in the
center a temple with
ELLN.*



About the coin (13):

Penning
Henrik II of Bavaria
Bavaria, Regensburg
Year 985–995

The loop is made from a clipped silver coin, possibly of an Otto-Adelheid type, Hatz III-IV, minted from 983. The loop is riveted on regardless of the motif.

About the coin master:

Henrik was Duke of Bavaria. He was born about 951 and died in Bad Gandersheim on August 28, 995.

Henrik belonged to the Ottonian dynasty and was married to Gisela of Burgundy. They had five children, including the son Henry II who became Holy Roman Emperor.



Front:
.HEINRIC[V] (recumbent reverse S) DVX – in center a cross with dots, a circle and a blank field.



Back:
R./N[A] CIVITA (recumbent S) and in center a temple with ECCO.

About the coin (14):

Penning
 Henrik II of Bavaria
 Bavaria, Regensburg
 Year 985–995

Silver rivet and loop. The loop is not from a coin and is riveted on regardless of the motif.

About the coin master:

See coin 13



Front:
+RI(C or H)ARDV(recumbent S) and a cross with crescent in center.



Back:
+RDC(mirror C)MCORI. In the center a recumbent S surrounded by three triangles and a recumbent E above.

About the coin (15):

Penning
 Rikard I of Normandy
 Normandy, Rouen
 Likely 990

The copper alloy rivet and eyelet have disappeared. The front motif hung almost upright.

About the coin master:

Richard I of Normandy, also called Richard the Fearless, was a count. His years of office were 943–996.

He was born in Fécamp on 28 August 933 and died on 20 November 996.

Rikard had about 14 children. One daughter was Emma of Normandy, who became Queen of England three times. She was first married to Ethelred the Volatile and had a son Ethlred II and then married to Canute the Great.

Richard was thus the father-in-law of King Ethelred II – coin master for two of the other coins in the hoard.

ATTENTION!
 The coin from Normandy is completely unique. Only one similar coin has been found, long since lost, but depicted in a book from the 18th century.



Front:
+CIV(mirrored
D)[..]V[..](lying H) and a
cross with a circle and
three dots around.



Back:
+(mirrored D)O+V+[...]
V[..](lying H) and a cross with
two circles, a dot and a
bend in the angles.

About the coin (16):

Penning
Boleslav II of Bohemia
Bohemia
After year 985

The rivet and loop are in copper alloy and there are also two extra holes in the edge of the coin. On one side, the cross is almost upright.

About the coin master:

Boleslav II was a duke and politician and belonged to the Přemyslid dynasty. His years of office were between 967–999.

He was born in Prague 927/28 and died on 7 February 999.



Front:
+ÆÐ[EL(here is the
loop)]RED REX ANGLO,X
and a portrait bust.



Back:
+[S](PE?)ARTINC M' O
NORÐPI and God's hand
surrounded by alpha and
omega.

About the coin (17):

Penning
Ethelred II
England, Norwich
Coin maker Svertingr
Ca 979–985

The copper riveted loop is made from a cut coin. The coin was at the top of the bag and had silk fabric on one side.

About the coin master:

Ethelred II was king of England twice, between 978–1013 and 1014–1016. He was the son-in-law of Richard I of Normandy.

He was born in Wessex on 8 June 968 and died in London on 23 April 1016. He was married first to Ælfgifu of York and then to Emma of Normandy, daughter of Richard I. He had 15 children.



Front:
 +ÆDELRAED [R]EX ANGLORX
 and a portrait bust holding
 a sceptre.



Back:
 +GOD M-O GIF[E]LCES
 with a double lined cross
 in the center with CRVX in
 the angles.

About the coin (18):

Penning
 Ethelred II
 England, Ilchester
 Coin maker Goda
 Ca 991–997

The riveted loop is made from a
 cut coin.

About the coin master:

See coin 17



Front:
 +ÆDELRAED REX
 ANGLORX and a portrait
 bust holding a sceptre.



Back:
 +LEOPOLD [M-]O PINT
 and a double-lined cross
 with CRVX in the angles.

About the coin (19):

Penning
 Ethelred II
 England, Winchester
 Coin maker Leofweald
 Ca 991–997

The riveted loop is made from a
 cut coin which is probably an
 Ethelred coin with the inscription
 CRVX. The rivet is in silver. The
 loop is riveted without regard to
 the portrait of the king.

A piece of silk fabric from the bag
 had been preserved on the coin.

About the coin master:

See coin 17

20–21. Pollen and grain

In addition to silver, the bag also contained another kind of treasure – pollen from the Viking Age. The pollen has stuck to the fibers of the linen fabric and thus has been preserved to this day. Analyzes show many plants from the landscape around Viggbyholm that people have collected and used. The use of medicinal plants and household plants was important during the Viking Age.

Paleoecologist Jonas Bergman tested the presence of pollen on the bag. The results showed that there were traces of many plants from different plant environments. It indicates that several of them have been collected. Among other things, pollen was found from Ribwort plantain, Yellow rattle, Bride's buttons, Heather and Moose grass. Several of the plants are mentioned as medicinal herbs in medieval written sources. In the pot there were also leftovers after cooking, cereal grains (shelled grains) and coal from a hearth.

Pollen analysis is an old method of analysis, but it has not been used very often in connection with archaeological finds. This case is probably the first time that the method has been used to analyze pollen residues on fabric in a silver hoard.

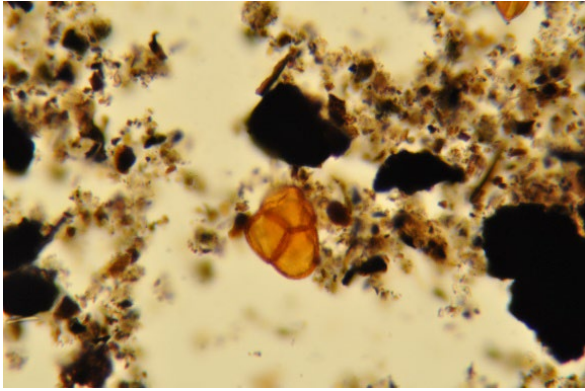
Archaeobotanist Jens Heimdahl has analyzed remains of shelled grains and food crusts in the pot, as well as small pieces of textile found in the pot, one of which is probably wool. A piece of brown moss was also preserved. Possibly the moss was part of the arrangement of the hoard, as a moss bed for some of the objects.



Picture 1. Pollen of Arnica Montana, Yellow rattle.



Picture 2. Pollen of Bride's buttons.



Picture 3. Pollen of heather.



Picture 4. Brown moss preserved by the silver.



Picture 5. Shell grains preserved in the pot.



Picture 6. Charred food crust from the pot.

Medicinal plants and household plants around Viggbyholm

Pollen table

Växtgrupper	Pollentyper	F 843	Läkeväxt	Hushållsväxt
		Krukboten låg god (antal)		
	Björk	2		
	Gran	1		
	Tall	17		
Träd/buskar	Hassel	1		
	Rönn	1	•	•
	Fläder	2	•	•
	En	1	••	
	Ljung	6	•	
Odlade växter	Vete	4		
	Korn	4		
	Obestämd säd	8		
	Morot	1	•	•
Betesmark/Äng	Gräs	25		
	Syror	4	•	
	Slättergubbe	1	•	
	Svartkämpar	2	•	
	Brudbröd	6		•
Fuktäng	Älggräs, brudbröd	4	•	•
	Gullris, korsört mfl	3		
	Ranunklar mfl	1		
	Vitsippa mfl			
Ogräs/Ruderater	Gråbo, malört	4	•	
	Röllika, renfana mfl	1	•	
	Svinmålla mfl	3	•	•
	Groblad	7	••	
	Maskros, fibblor	2		
	Trampört mfl	1	•	
Allmänna kulturväxter	Åkerkulla mfl	1		
	Floc kblommiga	2		
	Nejlivväxter	1		
	Snärjmåra	3		
	Ängskovall mfl	1		
Övrigt	Nysört	2	•	
	Vitmossa	1		
	Stensöta	3	•	
	Ormbunksväxter	3		
	Ephedra	1		
	Obestämda pollen	32		
	Pollensumma	154		



Picture. Carrot. Dioscorides from the Codex Juliana Anicia. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Carrot (*Daucus carota*, wild; *Daucus carota sativus*, cultivated). In Old Swedish Mororot

The carrot may have been a cultivated or wild-gathered carrot. The carrot has been a plant used in the Nordic countries since at least the Roman Iron Age (100–400 AD).



Picture. Franz Eugen Köhler, Köhlers Medizinal-Pflanzen, Public domain, by Wikimedia Commons

Yellow rattle (*Arnica montana*)

It is also called Hästfibbla and is now red-listed in Sweden. It is an important medicinal plant with wound healing, antiseptic and anti-inflammatory effects. Formerly used in chronic catarrh. It helps the tissue to regenerate and is suitable for the treatment of impact, fall, stab and cut injuries – perfect for Vikings! Both the dried flower in decoction or tea and the root can be used.



Picture. Moose grass. Ivar Leidus, CC BY-SA 3.0

Moose grass (*Filipendula ulmaria*)

Elk grass contains salicylic acid, which is good for headaches, and it is antipyretic. It is fine to use the whole plant and drink it as a tea. Elk grass is common at settlements and was common in Viggbyholm. Its older names are meadow grass, beer grass, and switchgrass. It has been collected and used as a beer spice, where especially the flowers have been used. But it is also later described as a medicinal plant.



Picture. Bride's bread. Ivar Leidus, CC BY-SA 4.0

Bride's buttons (*Filipendula vulgaris*)

Burnt root tubers of the rose plant bride's button have been found in many graves during the Iron Age but it is uncertain how it was used. The root is edible and tasty.



Picture. Yarrow. Franz Eugen Köhler, Köhler's Medizinal-Pflanzen, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Yarrow is native to temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere. It is good to rub into the skin to prevent insect bites and has a long history of medicinal and culinary use. Its health benefits include use as a remedy for wounds, fever, digestive issues, and more.



Picture. Plantain from Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Public domain, by Wikimedia Commons.

Plantain (*Plantago major*)

Plantain with the meaning "gro" means healing = healing leaf! Like a band aid! Plantain is one of the most described medicinal plants already in the early Middle Ages.

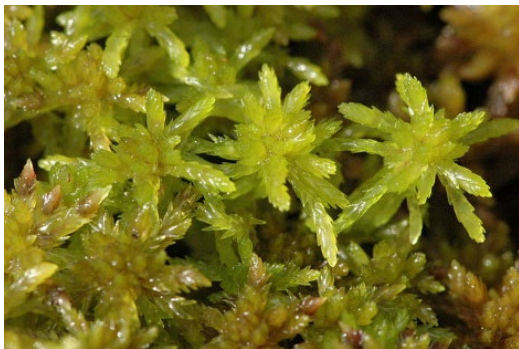
It probably grew around the yard as a weed, but was most likely collected and used in wound treatment. One of its older names is "läkisbladh" which clearly points to this use. The root can also be used as medicine.



Picture. Barley. CSvBibra, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Barley (cf *Hordeum*), in Old Swedish Bjugg

Carbonized grains of the shell grain type were found in the pot and they were the most common type of grain during the Iron Age.



Picture. *Sphagnum flexuosum*. James Lindsey at Ecology of Commanster, CC BY-SA 2.5

White moss (*Sphagnum*), in Lulesami Darffe

White moss grows on marshland and is not, as the name suggests, a white plant. It occurs in green, yellow, pink, red and brown and becomes whitish only when it dries. There are about 45 species.

White moss is one of the Nordic region's most important plants, which has been used for thousands of years. When it rots and dies, it becomes peat and peat too has been an important building material in ancient times.

The moss has a very good absorption capacity when the water is squeezed out and they have dried. They are also antiseptic and have therefore been used, among other things, as bandages, in nappies, as sanitary napkins and as toilet paper. Peat can also be used as insulation in houses.

22. Amulet rings of iron

During the end of the Viking Age, the farm was abandoned. From the time after there are traces of various cult acts are instead visible in the area. About 30 iron amulet rings with different types of pendants have been part of the cult. They were laid out and deliberately left at some of the remaining house foundations of the former farm.

Some of the pendants resemble scythes which may have symbolized a wish for a good harvest addressed to the god Frö. Amulet rings with strung smaller rings can be connected to the gods Ull or Odin.

Most of the amulet rings were found as separate objects, but one find was made where several rings were gathered together in a small pit. These amulet rings can be found in the stand. They have an unusually large variety of pendants, i.e. amulets. There are sickles, Thors hammers, spears and rings.



Pictures. Amulets of iron.

Interpretations of the silver treasure

The treasure in Viggbyholm was buried at a time when the farm was abandoned, and amulet rings made of iron began to be laid out in the area. Different interpretations of why the treasure was deposited give different answers.

A common theory is that treasure was hidden away during troubled times. Another possibility is that some treasures were offerings to the gods.

Another interpretation is that someone buried the treasure in order to bring it with them to the next life. In Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga saga*, chapter 8), it is told about "Oden's Law," which states that everything you take with you into the grave (on the pyre), or bury in the earth while you live, you will take with you to the realm of the dead, Valhalla.

The silver treasure in Viggbyholm can be linked to cooking and medicinal plants. The healing arts of the Viking Age included plants and magic. Jewelry sets with coin pendants and amulets often appeared in women's graves. The jewelry is sometimes interpreted as magical items for influential women who were believed to have supernatural abilities. Could the burial of the treasure with its pot and contents be linked to such an influential woman with healing skills?



