



Miōgarōr

Dig deeper



Thor's hammer

Who wore such amulets?

Both men and women could wear amulets of Thor's hammer. Some were made from simple materials like iron and lead, while others were beautiful silver pieces, suggesting they were popular across social classes.

Thor's magical hammer

Thor's hammer, named Mjöltnir, was crafted by dwarves Sindri and Brokkr. Given as a gift from Loki to Thor, it was magical. Amulets of this kind refers to Thor and his ongoing battle against chaos and could serve as protection against danger.

Finding Mjöltnir in the field

Thanks to more people using metal detectors in the last 10-20 years, many Mjöltnir amulets have now been found and added to museum collections in Norway.

An unusual combination

This Thor's hammer is unique because it's attached to an arm ring. Most of these amulets were typically worn as pendants in a necklace.

10th Century

Silver

Gjulem, Rakkestad, Østfold

C21828d



Odin sculpture

The long history of the Norse gods

This is the oldest object in the exhibition, made long before the Viking Age. The figure is interpreted as the one-eyed Odin, with the right eye being more prominent. It reminds us that the gods of the Viking Age have a long history.

A mysterious figure in the mud

The figure was discovered during a sewer excavation and was preserved because it was buried in clay. The site is about 200 m. from the shoreline in Skjebergkilen, Sarpsborg.

1700-year-old wood

Preserved wooden figures from the Early Iron Age are extremely rare. Wood decays quickly when exposed to oxygen. To be preserved, the object must be sealed in the ground. Clay and ancient peat are suitable for preserving wood.

A rare trace of Iron Age worship

The Roman historian Tacitus, in his work *Germania*, described how Germanic peoples placed sculptures of Odin and other gods throughout the landscape.

C. 300 CE

Oak

Skjeberg prestegård, Sarpsborg, Østfold

C38636



Fenrisulven

The sculptor of mythology

Fenrisulven is the only loaned item in the exhibition and the only modern artwork. Norwegian sculptor Arne Vinje Gunnerud took inspiration from ancient stories, especially Greek and Norse myths.

Norse beasts around town

Many of Gunnerud's sculptures can be found in the urban landscape. *Yggdrasil* (1981) is located at the National Archives at Sogndsvann, and *Vettløyse* (1980), showing Thor battling the Midgard Serpent, stands near the metro station at Tveita. A larger version of *Fenrisulven* stands outside the Norwegian Embassy in Tokyo, Japan.

The wolf in myth and folklore

The wolf has always been portrayed as a powerful and dangerous animal, and often appears in both myths and fairy tales. Even today, the wolf is both dangerous and interesting, and arouses strong emotions.

Arne Vinje Gunnerud

1977/78

Bronze

On loan from the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design.

MS-00374-1988



Spindle whorl and scissors

Spindle whorls and scissors in Viking graves

Spinning whorls and scissors are common in Viking graves. The spindle whorl is made of soapstone, which is easy to shape. Many scissors were for cutting wool, but this pair is likely too small for that and may have been used for crafts.

A magical process

Spinning transforms wool into thread, then into fabric. This transformation could seem almost magical. In Norse mythology, the Norns spun the threads of human life, determining how long people would live.

Head of the household

Spindle whorls are often found in women's graves, suggesting that women were responsible for making textiles. Even enslaved people might have helped with weaving sails and other textiles. Textiles were valuable in the Viking Age due to the time and effort required to make them.

Viking Age

Iron (scissors) and soapstone (spindle whorl)

Kvien, Vang, Innlandet (scissors) / Skjerve, Løten, Innlandet (spindle whorl)

C16882, C4569



The Vulu treasure

The mythical metal

Although archaeologists have not unearthed much gold from the Viking Age, it is frequently mentioned in stories as part of magical rings and other jewelry.

Gifts for friendship and loyalty

In Norse society, exchanging gold and silver rings symbolized loyalty between rulers and their subjects. Rings could also be a formal gift, linking individuals or families together.

Spectacular treasure of gold and silver

In July 1862, a shepherd boy was playing near the sea when his foot struck a shiny object. The boy found five rings of gold and silver. A tenant farmer later found the rest of the treasure.

Gigantic brooches

The large penannular brooch of silver weighs nearly 500 grams and measures 25 cm from top to bottom. They were used to fasten the outer cloak at the front of the chest.

Viking Age

Gold, silver

Vulu, Malvik, Trøndelag

C2919-2928



Sword

Pride of the Viking Warrior

Over 3000 Viking swords have been unearthed in Norway. These swords were forged from iron and steel. When new, this sword was shiny and sharp, and the grip was covered in leather or fabric.

Elite weapons

Most likely, only landowners had the right to carry weapons. Nobles and chieftains often had swords with beautiful decorations of gold, silver, and intricate designs. These prestige swords were often imported to Scandinavia from The Continent and The British Isles.

A battle-scarred sword?

This sword has an interesting detail. There are notches on the sharp edge, possibly from a blow by another sword. Perhaps the sword has been used in combat?

Masters of iron

Making a well-balanced sword which is good to handle and doesn't bend or break is a difficult task. The best swordsmiths were skilled professionals, selling their products throughout Europe.

950–1100 CE

Iron

Unknown find location

C280



Gaming pieces and dice

War games

Warriors enjoyed playing board games like Mill and *Hnefatafl*. At first glance, Hnefatafl resembles chess, but in this game, the king's bodyguards must defend a fortress against many attackers.

Why did they play games?

Graves with gaming pieces also contained weapons and cavalry gear, suggesting that board games were popular with the military elite. These games provided a way to show off military skills while also providing a chance to relax and have fun.

What was gaming equipment made of?

Gaming equipment was made of bone, antler, walrus tusk, or glass. Boards were made of wood, which decays easily. The only Viking Age gaming board found in In Norway featured Mill on one side and Hnefatafl on the other.

Mythologically significant

In the poem *Völuspá*, some surviving gods find game pieces in the grass after Ragnarok. They set up the pieces again, allowing the game of life to start anew.

800-950 CE

Antler/horn

Vestre Alfhaug, Ringsaker, Innlandet

C252 a,b, C253 a, b, i, l, m, q







Klekken runestone

An ever-lasting memory

The Klekken runestone is a “travel stone” that speaks of a person’s journey. Traveling (and returning safely!) required both bravery and resources, making it a prestigious act.

Who made the runestones?

In theory, anyone could make a runestone. However, during the Viking Age, few people could read or write, and even fewer could carve runes into stone. Making a runestone was a job for the expert.

Where were runestones placed?

Rune stones were often erected where many people could see and admire the stone – by a road or a bridge. Perhaps they were also painted in bright colors so they could be seen from a distance.

What did the missing text say?

Unfortunately, many runestones have been damaged over time so that parts of the text are missing. We can only guess what this person experienced or wanted to share. But it must have been worthy of a runestone.

1050–1200 CE

Sandstone

Klekken, Ringerike, Buskerud

C36687



Serpent head

A world premiere

In popular culture, Viking ships usually feature a carved serpent or animal head at one end. However, the original serpent head from the Oseberg ship—the only one of its kind—has never been exhibited until now.

The Oseberg ship on display

When the Oseberg ship was excavated in 1904, the serpent head at the front was so damaged that a replica was made. The replica was mounted on the ship for exhibition.

Fear and protection at sea

In the Viking Age, the serpent was a powerful and dangerous creature. Perhaps the serpent head was meant to protect the ship against the ocean's mighty forces. Sea travel was perilous, and many ships were lost.

A grave for powerful women

The Oseberg ship was built on the West Coast in 820 and buried 14 years later. The two women in the ship grave were provided with four sledges, a wagon, 15 horses, six dogs, textiles, and much more.

820 CE

Oak or beech

Oseberg, Tønsberg, Vestfold

C55000/2.1



Animal head

What were the animal heads used for?

Five such animal heads were found in the Oseberg ship. When they were discovered, the animal heads and the rattles were connected by rope. The animal heads had handles and were probably carried around. The rope was also connected to the wagon from the Oseberg find. Perhaps all these items were used in the burial ceremony?

The gaze of a predator

The animal heads look like predators, with open mouths, sharp teeth, and focused eyes. They feature small carved animals arranged in a continuous pattern, tiny figures with arms, legs, body, tail, and heads with large round eyes. They are called "gripping beasts" because of the way they hold onto each other.

Gripping beasts

Gripping beasts were common designs found on jewelry and other items, even on the Oseberg ship. Their precise meaning is still unknown; perhaps their interlocked hands and feet had magical "binding" properties?

Early 9th Century.

Copy in the exhibition made by woodcarver Sverre G. Sundby.

Wood (original), pear wood (copy)

Oseberg, Tønsberg, Vestfold

C55000/173



Rattle

The most exquisite rattle

This is one of five rattles found in the Oseberg grave. The handles were attached to a rope that ran through the mouths of the carved, wooden animal heads. This suggests they were used in the burial ceremony for the two women in the Oseberg grave. The beautiful decoration includes gripping beasts like those on the animal heads.

A true Viking mystery

About 300 rattles from the Viking Age have been discovered in Norway, but their purpose remains a mystery. Rattles have animal remains inside the handle, while others have metal chains. Perhaps they were supposed to hang from something.

Instrument, horse equipment, or something else?

The rings create a loud and clear sound, indicating that making sound was at least part of the rattles' purpose. Rattles are often found in graves alongside horse gear, suggesting they may have been used for riding or driving sleds or wagons.

C. 820 CE. Exhibition rattle replica made by Anders Helseth, 2025.
Iron, copper alloy, silver
Oseberg, Tønsberg, Vestfold
C55000/125.1



Oseberg wagon

A unique Viking wagon

The wagon was found in the Oseberg grave, Norway's richest and most famous Viking grave. It is the only preserved wagon from the Viking Age.

Mythological motifs

The entire wagon box is covered in carvings. One carving shows a man surrounded by serpents, possibly a scene from the story of Gunnar in the serpent's den. On the other side are nine cat-like creatures. Cats are Freyja's companion animals. Some have suggested the wagon may have been dedicated to her worship.

What was the wagon used for?

The wagon was probably reserved for special occasions. The grave where it was found also contained tapestry weavings depicting wagons, people, animals, and horses in procession, perhaps a ceremony or ritual.

Why make a copy?

It used to be common for museums to make copies of significant objects as backups in case of damage. Today, conservators prefer 3D scanning for documentation.

Original Early 9th Century. Copy made c. 1990 by woodcarver Bjarte Aarseth assisted by apprentice Ingvild Aunan.

Oak, beech, ash

Oseberg, Tønsberg, Vestfold

C55000/224.A.1



Sledge-pull

What is a sledge-pull?

A sledge-pull connects horses to a sled and could be at least two meters long. The sledge-pull from Borre is a fragment. The missing pieces are lost.

Discovery at Borre

In May 1852, antiquarian Nicolay Nicolaysen was called to Borre to survey an ancient gravesite. He found a damaged burial mound that had been used as a sand quarry. There was evidence of a large ship burial, but much of the grave goods were missing. What remained was mostly equipment for horses.

Fit for a Great House

The beautifully decorated sledge was owned by someone very wealthy. It was discovered in a ship burial with other prestige objects, suggesting it belonged to a rich and powerful person or family.

Iconic Viking design

The sledge-pull from Borre is decorated with small mounts of gilded copper-alloy featuring animal heads, masks, and knot patterns. This artistic style is called Borre style, after this find.

C. 900 AD

Likely maple or ash

Borre, Horten, Vestfold

C1803a







Historical
Museum



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