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# The Vikings and Their Outreach: From Buddhas to Butternuts

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# THE VIKINGS AND THEIR OUTREACH

## FROM BUDDHAS TO BUTTERNUTS





How the Vikings may have seen themselves:  
as depicted on a C9th funerary monument ("picture-  
stone", *bildsten*) from Gotland, Sweden



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  - (dominantly) Mainland-Scandinavian speakers of Proto-Norse (= ancestor of Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faroese)
  - (secondarily) Contiguous peoples bearing other languages: Saami, Balts, Slavs, Saxons, Frisians

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- crafts, e.g., smithing
- poetry and (oral) narrative



C11th Resurrection egg from Ukraine,  
found at Sigtuna, a royal and trading centre in Sweden  
*At the "gift" end of the spectrum?*



*More plunder?* Silver bracelets and other C9th “bling” from the British Isles cut up into conveniently-sized “hacksilver” for use in barter



Polar bears from Greenland  
(and perhaps the Ungava Peninsula).  
*A trophy gift for emperors, kings, and popes.*



# Irish crozier and Coptic christening scoop found in association with the Buddha figurine



Emulation of a Buddha figure: handle attachment on a pail (bucket, *bytta*) found in the C9th Oseberg burial, to west of Oslo Fjord, Norway.





The Vikings were eclectic in their systems of belief. Viking After-worlds included, alongside the classic (native?) 'ship-setting',...





...entry to an After-world in the style of Near-Eastern religions (NB the costumes):  
from a C9th Gotland picture-stone





After-world voyage (?) in boat with sun-shade,  
as seen on the Nile:  
from a C8th(?) Gotland picture-stone



# Contact and trade/gift exchange in the “far west”?





L'Anse aux Meadows, NL 51 36'N, 55 32'W:  
a Norse "gateway" to Vínland ("Wine-land") from ca. 1000CE (990~1050).  
Location faces Strait of Belle Isle and commands access to Gulf of St Lawrence  
from the Atlantic Ocean.



Remains of turf-walled buildings at LAM: they might have accommodated 60-90 people, probably a mixture of leading settlers in Greenland and their slaves; distinctively Norse items were found in occupation layer.





LAM: Reconstructed Norse-style building: provision of such accommodation would require resources available only to magnates and kings.



## *Early Canadian Literature?*

Verses of complaint attributed to Þórhallr veiðimaðr “the hunter”: whose propaganda is he resisting?

1. Hafa kváðu mik meiðar  
malmpings, es komk hingat,  
(mér samir land fyr lýðum  
lasta) drykk enn bazta;  
Bílds hattar verðr byttu  
beiði-Týr at stýra,  
heldrs svát krypk at keldu;  
komat vín á grön mína.

People claimed that when I came  
here I would have the best  
drink; I think it right to  
condemn this land publicly.

Instead I have to use a bucket  
and crawl to a spring; wine  
does not cross my lips.

2. Föllum aptr, þar es órir  
eru, sandhimins, landar,  
lötum kenni-Val kanna  
knarrar skeið en breiðu,  
meðan bilstyggr vir byggva  
bellendr ok hval vella  
Laufa veðrs, þeirs leyfa  
lond, á Furðuströndum.

Let's go back to where our  
compatriots are; let our ship  
explore the broad sea-road,  
while rash warriors who praise  
these lands settle at Wonder-  
strands and boil up whale.

*Goods? Gifts?* Butternut burl and one of two butternuts  
from Norse occupation layer at LAM:  
burls (singular *mösurr* "mazer" in Old Norse) were used for prestige  
drinking-bowls presented by the king.





The Butternut = *Juglans cinerea* (a relative of the North American black walnut = Mohawk *akiehwa:ta*, French *noyau cendré*).

Butternut trees in Fredericton, NB



## Butternut facts and inferences

- Known for edible, flavoursome nuts with oil content of up to 60%.
- Reaches northern limit in SE Canada.
- Along the St Lawrence River, does not grow east of Tadoussac.
- Range expanded into New Brunswick region as recently as 600BP.

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- Transplanted and propagated by Indigenous peoples; trees cultivated handy to villages.
- Nuts must be picked promptly once ripe, since oils become rancid.

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- Nuts must be picked promptly once ripe, since oils become rancid.
- Norse voyagers not likely to have located the resource unaided.
- Most probably they derived it via trade or gift from indigenous peoples.



# Traditional pharmacology

## Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, MI



*The probable end-use of the butternuts:*

note the role of the king in the presentation.

First European poem about a Canadian commodity?

Sendi mér enn mæri  
– man þengill sá drengi –  
síð munk heldr at hróðri –  
hnytr þjóðkonungr – snytrask.  
Ópt, en okkr bað skipta,  
Óttarr, í tvau dróttinn –  
endask mál – sem myndim  
manndjarfr fǫðurarfi.

'To me the renowned king of the people sent nuts; this king thinks of his men; it will be a long time before I devote greater artistry to eulogy. The king, bold towards men, repeatedly bade us divide them between us, Óttarr, just as we would a father's legacy: my speech is ended.'