

2-10-2011

The Vikings and Their Outreach: From Buddhas to Butternuts

Russell Poole

The University of Western Ontario

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/englishpres>

Citation of this paper:

Poole, Russell, "The Vikings and Their Outreach: From Buddhas to Butternuts" (2011). *Department of English Presentations*. 2.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/englishpres/2>

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



Meaning of “viking”

- Not an ethnicity

Meaning of “viking”

- Not an ethnicity
- Rather, a livelihood or way of life on the part of self-selecting groups

Meaning of “viking”

- Not an ethnicity
- Rather, a livelihood or way of life on the part of self-selecting groups composed of:
 - (dominantly) Mainland-Scandinavian speakers of Proto-Norse (= ancestor of Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faroese)

Meaning of “viking”

- Not an ethnicity
- Rather, a livelihood or way of life on the part of self-selecting groups composed of:
 - (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

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding
- mercenary warfare (e.g., serving in the Byzantine emperor’s “Varangian guard”)

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding
- mercenary warfare (e.g., serving in the Byzantine emperor’s “Varangian guard”)
- alliance-forming and influence-broking

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding
- mercenary warfare (e.g., serving in the Byzantine emperor’s “Varangian guard”)
- alliance-forming and influence-broking
- gift exchange
- trading

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding
- mercenary warfare (e.g., serving in the Byzantine emperor’s “Varangian guard”)
- alliance-forming and influence-broking
- gift exchange
- trading
- farming

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding
- mercenary warfare (e.g., serving in the Byzantine emperor’s “Varangian guard”)
- alliance-forming and influence-broking
- gift exchange
- trading
- farming
- fishing

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding
- mercenary warfare (e.g., serving in the Byzantine emperor’s “Varangian guard”)
- alliance-forming and influence-broking
- gift exchange
- trading
- farming
- fishing
- crafts, e.g., smithing

Viking livelihood

Classic “mixed-income” type:

- raiding
- mercenary warfare (e.g., serving in the Byzantine emperor’s “Varangian guard”)
- alliance-forming and influence-broking
- gift exchange
- trading
- farming
- fishing
- 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. Förum aptr, þar es órir
eru, sandhimins, landar,
lötum kenni-Val kanna
knarrar skeið en breiðu,
meðan bilstyggvir byggva
bellendr ok hval vella
Laufa veðrs, þeirs leyfa
lönð, 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 Wonderstrands 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.

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 (i.e., long after early C11th Norse contact).
- Transplanted and propagated by Indigenous peoples; trees cultivated handy to villages.
- Nuts must be picked promptly once ripe, since oils become rancid.

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.
- Transplanted and propagated by Indigenous peoples; trees cultivated handy to villages.
- 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.
Opt, en okkr bað skipta,
Ottarr, 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, Ottarr, just as we would a father's legacy: my speech is ended.'