



Culture: New Viking Treasure Discovered in Norway

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Gilded glass beads found in the dig.
Photo: Jonas Haarr Friestad
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The unseasonably warm weather might make meteorologists, climate researchers, and even the odd man and woman on the street a tad nervous. But field archaeologists, digging through what would normally be frozen solid earth covered in a thick layer of snow in the middle of the Norwegian winter, might be excused for thanking God, or **Odin**, the king of the old Norse gods, for the helping hand.

On the second of January, scientists from the archaeological museum in Stavanger, Norway made a major discovery of what is believed to be a Viking burial site at Frøyland in the western parts of Norway. The grave sites excavated so far date back to the 8th and 9th century and are very well preserved.

When the scientists started the excavations a week ago they didn't need to dig to deep before they uncovered three graves not far apart.

In one of the three graves, a noble woman's grave, the archaeologists found amongst other things four pieces of jewellery, pearls, gilded glass beads, a knife and a number of other household utensils.

"I'm surprised, no shocked and I have never seen anything like it in my 28 years as an excavator," said the senior archaeologist, Olle Hemdsdorff, working at the site. *"The very size, quality and craftsmanship of these jewelleries are stunning,"* he continued.



This bronze brooch with decorative bear`s heads at the ends, found in a boat burial, probably belonged to a woman in the 800-900s AD
Photo: Jonas Haarr Friestad
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So far more than 100 items have been unearthed and carefully brought to the Archaeological Museum in Stavanger for registration and further processing. Amongst those items was a brooch made of bronze with bear heads at each end and a bowl shaped brooch for women from the Merovingian times, usually worn in pairs to fasten an over-dress or apron.

Some of the items, when they were lifted from the ground, even had traces of textiles, from the clothing they had originally been fastened to, which is highly unusual. Due to the high acidity in the soil in the western part of Norway, most perishable substances dissolve rather rapidly in the ground, leaving only the materials least prone to decay and corrode.



Field assistant Angunn Skeiseid hands archaeologist Olle Hamdorff a blue glass bead, which was once part of a woman`s necklace.
Photo: Jonas Haarr Friestad
(Click for larger image)

by volunteers from the local **metal detectorist club**. More often than not, the relationship between archaeologists and detectorists is a tad strained. Detectorists have been accused, and some times justly so, of going rogue with their equipment and a shovel, and digging a "test-pit" or two under cover of darkness.

It was also discovered that the grave site was littered with rivets, of the sort used to hold together the planks in the hull of Viking ships, showing that this was a boat burial, where the deceased was placed in a boat pulled ashore and covered with a mound. **Hemdsdorff** said they're expecting to make more find in the days ahead.

Parts of the grave are not yet uncovered. We have to move slowly, as the wind is picking up to a storm in the area.



John Kvanli and Morten Eek from the local metal-detectorist club searching the spoil heap
Photo: Jonas Haarr Friestad
(Click for larger image)



(R) Bowl shaped brooch worn by women in Viking and Merovingian times to fasten an over-dress or apron. (L) How it looks when cleaned and worn. (Click for full image)

The archaeologists were originally looking for bronze and iron age remains, when they stumbled upon the graves.

The finds were made in Frøyland, in Time, in the shire of Rogaland, about twenty kilometres south of the city of Stavanger, and ten kilometres from the coast. The name of the estate, Frøyland, is undoubtedly based on the name of the Norse god Frøy (Frey), a fertility god, and the brother of Frøya (Freya) the goddess of love.

A stone phallic symbol had been removed from the farm in the past. And the museum is now frantically searching for clues as to its whereabouts.

So far they have found three graves, that of the woman, a man, buried with his spear by his side, and a child. The two first graves were both boat burials. The site had once been marked with a mound, since removed. But despite more than 105 years of

ploughing, the graves themselves seem to be intact.

Early last century there were reports that locals had found and removed axes, swords, pot-shards and the skeletal remains of both humans and horses. But the archaeologists are hopeful there are more finds yet to be made in the area.

This area of western Norway was strategically important for the seafaring Norsemen, and comparatively densely populated. Just recently **Olle Hemdorff** was involved in the discovery of the residence of the first king of a united Norwegian kingdom **at nearby Avaldsnes**. The same area also yielded clues that pre-viking Norwegians might have **served in the legions** of the late Roman empire.

Norwegian Language Video on the find from Norwegian Public Broadcasting NRK

