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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

The Jubilee Year of 2020 at Lofotr Viking Museum

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After several years of archaeological excavations at Borg in Lofoten in the 1980s, Lofotr Viking Museum was established in 1995. The excavations uncovered an 83-meter longhouse dated to the Viking age. A copy of this longhouse, together with a copy of the Gokstad Viking ship, were built to make the core of the new museum above the arctic circle. Lofotr Viking Museum grew bigger as the years went by – both regarding building area, outdoor and indoor activities as well as visitor numbers. 2019 gave us about 105,000 visitors – all time high! - and we were looking forward to celebrating our 25 year jubilee in 2020 with lots of different, new events for a large audience. Then came the 12th of March, and all cultural activities were shut down

due to the pandemic. Our visitor number dropped to 45.000 in 2020. Even so, we are optimists on behalf of all outdoor museums.



Our visitors love to observe Vikings in play and at work, as well as participating in different activities themselves.

Demonstrations and activities are done in an authentic way, in an authentic environment – to the degree health and safety regulations permit.

The Archaeology at Borg

The largest longhouse found from Viking age Scandinavia is sited at Borg in Lofoten. The house had five rooms, consisting of living-quarters, banquet hall and byre/stable, as well as main entrance room and storage (Johansen and Munch 2003, 17; Roesdahl and Wilson 2003, 19-20).

Finds from the longhouse excavations have helped the archaeologists to understand how the different parts of the longhouse at Borg were used. Among the finds were objects needed for handcraft and the making of food, such as spindle whorls and knives. Luxury items like glass, Tating ware, an harness mount and gold-foil plaques indicated great power and wealth at Borg during the Viking age (Munch 2003: 241–256).

The gold-foil plaques that were found at Borg probably show the god Odin and the giant woman Skade facing and embracing each other. We believe that the Viking chiefs at Borg had the perception that they descended from Odin and Skade. The divine origin would legitimize the Viking chief's power and position. The gold-foil plaques were found under the pillar where the throne stood (Munch 2003: 259).

Other Reconstructions and Replicas at Borg

“Lofotr” – a replica of the 23 meters long Gokstad ship, set sail in 1992. A smaller boat, with five pairs of oars that was found together with the Gokstad ship, was also built.

The museum's second Viking ship is “Vargfotr” – a smaller version of the Gokstad ship.

Over the years we have spent a lot of time understanding the Viking ship's construction. Through experiments, our captain has achieved quite a unique knowledge of sailing a Viking ship.

In the harbour area at Borg, several boathouses have been registered but none of them have been “full size” excavated (Nilsen 1997). Our reconstruction of a boathouse is based on the data from an archaeological excavation in Rogaland in the southern parts of Norway (Mikkelsen 1996, 33).

The forge was built in 1997 and was later modified and repaired. The building is derived from different sources and common sense, utilising a way we think the Vikings would have worked.

When the Vikings decided how to build, they would have considered both the function of the building and the local building resources available.

Dissemination and Visitor's Experiences

At Lofotr Viking Museum we tell the story about people living at Borg during the Viking age, and of course their connections to other societies in Scandinavia and Europe. We try to reach as many different visitors as possible by presenting the knowledge in a variety of ways. Our audience may choose to use their own smartphones as audio-guides, but we also offer guiding by people dressed in Viking's clothes. The visitors may join banquets with plays, archery and axe throwing, Viking ship sailing and a variety of other activities. We offer food made from Viking age resources, and we give demonstrations of Viking handcrafts. The handcrafters' production adds to the museum's equipment of all sorts – such as shoes, clothes, pots and pans, knives, jewellery etc. - and part of the craft production is sold from the museum's shop. Last, but not least, the exhibition of archaeological objects found during the excavations at Borg contribute to a deeper understanding of the Viking's way of life.

Experimental archaeology is part of the museum's activity as well. The results may not always be obvious to our visitors, but they are implemented in sailing, cooking and so on. When handcrafters do their experiments, they involve the visitors by demonstrating. This year we plan for experimental production of Viking musical instruments, presuming that the lifting of pandemic restrictions will allow it.

Our visitors love to observe Vikings in play and at work, as well as participating in different activities themselves. Demonstrations and activities are done in an authentic way, in an authentic environment – to the degree health and safety regulations permit.

The Jubilee Year of 2020

In 2020, Lofotr Viking Museum had been developing the museum area and the experiences of 25 years, and we were ready to give our audience lots of new jubilee events, one new event on the 25th each month throughout the year.

Sadly, by the 12th of March the pandemic had hit us, and the museums had to stay closed for a few months. We were able to reopen again in June with activities that were adapted to strict pandemic regulations. Some of the jubilee events could go ahead as planned but with a limited number of participants. We were able to give outdoor guided tours, a couple of mini seminars and a few events for children.

The annual Viking festival during five days in August is popular among all age groups and Nationalities. This event was one of those cancelled in 2020. Even if the festival is an outdoor event, we do not expect permission to have such huge amounts of people in the area this year either.

Due to travel restrictions in Europe, we went live on Facebook with videos and “questions and answers”. Live streaming works very well when we are not able to meet in person, but we believe it works better among colleges who are exchanging knowledge. For tourists who, to a larger degree, wish to participate in activities and feel the atmosphere, the on-site experiences are better than live streaming.

Lofotr Viking Museum went from 105,000 visitors in 2019 to 45,000 in 2020. We will probably have to wait for a while before it is safe for groups of people to meet again.

Meanwhile it makes sense to develop the outdoor areas, where there is space for more visitors than indoors. Museums are not all about indoor exhibitions. Outdoor areas may very well be used for a variety of activities and learning experiences. It might take some time to get back to normal, but one day soon we will be able to meet again.

🔖 Keywords [archaeological open-air museum](#)

🔖 Country [Norway](#)

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Gallery Image



FIG 1. THE CHIEFTAIN AND WIFE. PHOTO BY KJELL OVE STORVIK

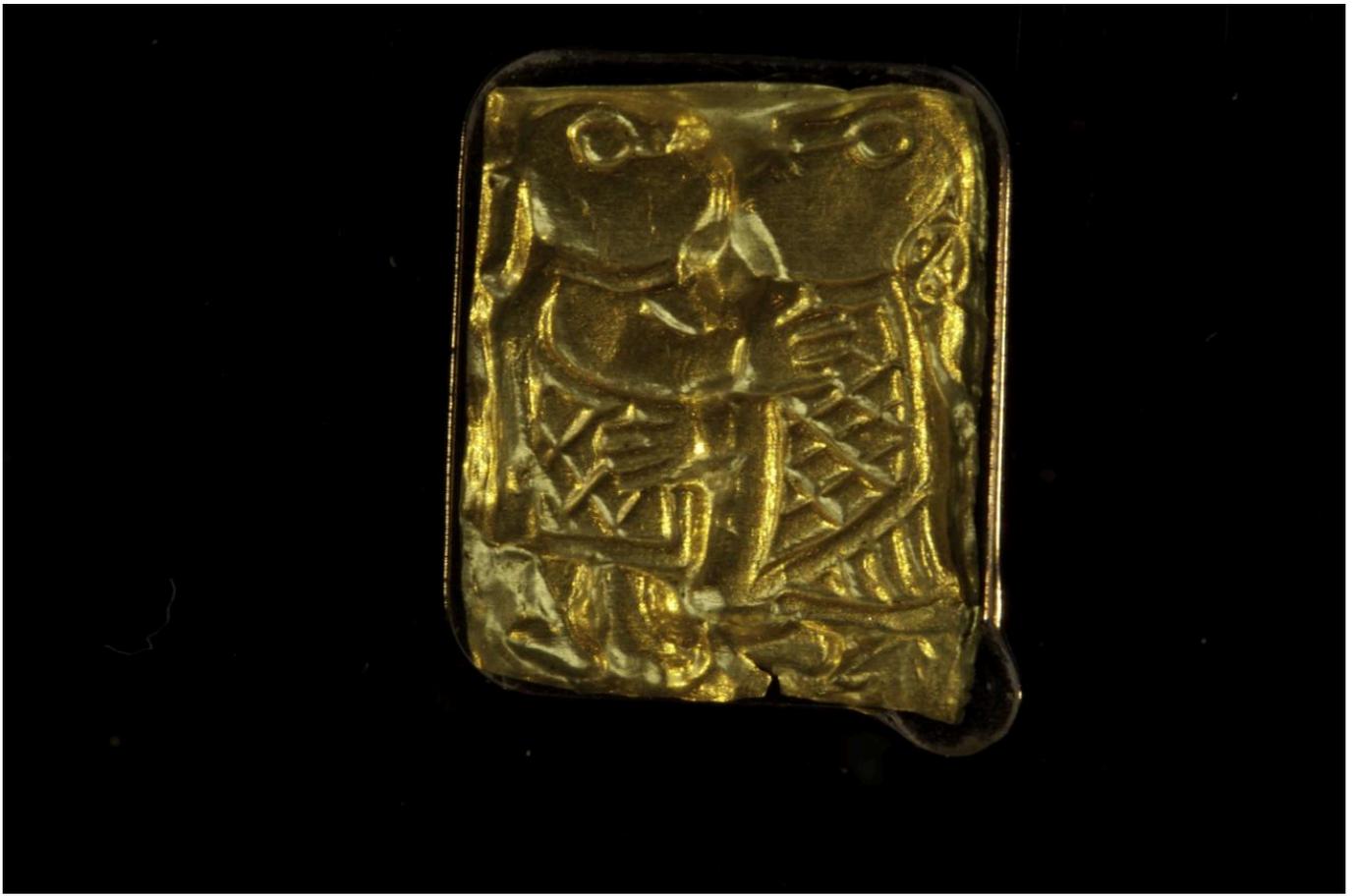


FIG 2. GOLD FOIL PLAQUE. PHOTO BY KJELL OVE STORVIK



FIG 3. VARGFOTR SAILING. PHOTO BY KJELL OVE STORVIK



FIG 4. RECONSTRUKTED BOATHOUSE. PHOTO BY KJELL OVE STORVIK



FIG 5. THE FORGE. PHOTO BY REBECA FRANKO VALLE



FIG 6. BANQUET. PHOTO BY KJELL OVE STORVIK



FIG 7. SCARY VIKINGS. PHOTO BY ANDERS BOTNMARK



FIG 8. THE BLACKSMITH. PHOTO BY REBECA FRANKO VALLE



FIG 9. BREWING BEER. PHOTO BY REBECA FRANCO VALLE



FIG 10. JAN JABLONSKI PREPARING SHOES. PHOTO BY REBECA FRANCO VALLE



FIG 11. KIM HOLTE COLORING YARN. PHOTO BY REBECA FRANCO VALLE



FIG 12. MAKING SOUP OUTDOORS. PHOTO BY REBECA FRANCO VALLE



FIG 13. MARIE WALLENBERG WITH OSEBERG COPY. PHOTO BY ANDERS BOTNMARK

