



Nordic News

240 Sparks Street, PO Box 55023, Ottawa, ON K1P 1A1

What Language Did the Vikings Speak?

(by Hilde Huus)

Canadian Nordic Society members and their friends enjoyed a private viewing of the Viking exhibit at the Canadian Museum of History on the evening of March 10. This was such a popular event that we had to reluctantly turn a few people away. Our quota was 76 people, and we filled it! Before we viewed this wonderful exhibit, we were given an introductory lecture by Dr. Dean Oliver, Director of Research for the Museum, followed by a question and answer period. One of the attendees asked a very interesting question: what language did the Vikings speak?

Dr. Oliver had already explained that the exhibit had been prepared by the the Swedish History Museum in Sweden, in partnership with MuseumsPartner in Austria, and that it focused on Viking finds in Sweden. But those of us who were of Norwegian or Danish background knew that some of the Vikings came from those countries as well. Dr. Teve Vidal, a CNS member and Viking scholar, was in attendance and was able to explain that the Vikings spoke Old Norse. He noted that Norway, Sweden, and Denmark did not exist as separate countries at that time. Scandinavia was made up of numerous “petty fiefdoms” loosely ruled by local chieftains or kings. Variations of what we now call Old Norse were spoken throughout the area. They were mutually intelligible, so they are considered dialects of Old Norse and not separate languages.

“How did they communicate with the people they traded with?” was the next question. The answer is that they would pick up enough phrases from the people they traded with to make themselves understood. Among others, they traded with Celts, Anglo Saxons, Franks, Hispanics, and Arabs. Then as now, some people seem to have a knack for learning languages, and we can imagine that the Vikings would have tried to ensure they had someone on board who had picked up some knowledge of the languages of their trading partners.

Of course, languages evolve and change considerably over time. Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish are still somewhat mutually intelligible, depending on the ear of the listener. Several years ago, when I was working at the Toronto Airport, an elderly Swedish couple who spoke no English came to my counter. They were very surprised when I started speaking to them in my English-accented Norwegian, but we were able to communicate with each other quite well. On the other hand, when

the annual planeload of Icelanders on their way to Gimli, Manitoba came through the airport, I listened closely but could not understand a single word they said. Icelandic can no longer be understood by Norwegian speakers who have not learned it. (Finnish, of course, did not evolve from Old Norse. It is more closely related to Hungarian and Estonian than to any of the other Nordic languages.)

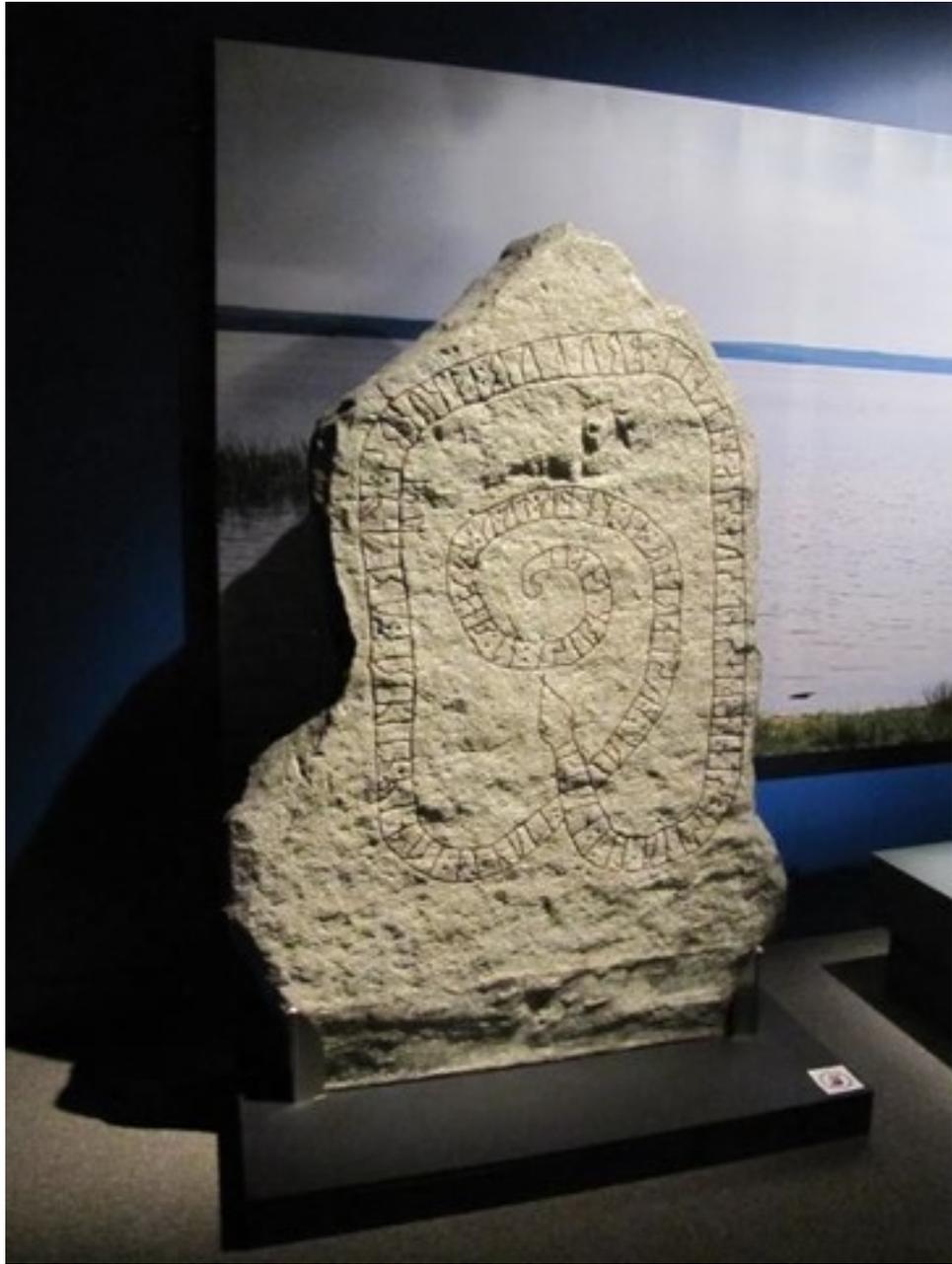
To realize how much a language can change over time, we have only to think about how different the English we speak today is from the English that was spoken in Shakespeare's day. This year is the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. To mark this milestone, the University of Ottawa is organizing on April 8 a reading of *Hamlet* in many different languages, including "Klingon". Canadian Nordic Society is pitching in by supplying native speakers of Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, and Norwegian. Each speaker will read a passage from the play in their native language.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "What is really best in any book is translatable - any real insight or human sentiment." Perhaps if he were alive today he would add "...any real insight, or human or Klingon sentiment" (but I doubt it).

Below are three photos from our Viking exhibition tour, taken by Peter Macnaughton:



The nails that held a Viking ship together are suspended by wires to show where they would have been positioned - a very imaginative way of demonstrating the building technique!



A Viking runestone



Sheila Hellstrom reads about a runestone. The exhibition was very informative, with lots of clear and interesting text about the objects on display.

Multilingual Reading of Hamlet *(by Tim Mark)*

The University of Ottawa of Ottawa is marking the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare with a series of celebrations. See:

<http://artsites.uottawa.ca/shakespeare-celebrations/en>

On April 8 there will be a reading of Hamlet in many of the 75 different languages into which the play has been translated.

CNS noticed that there were no readers from the Nordic countries. (Imagine no Danish reader. It would be Hamlet without the Prince, a real tragedy.) After canvassing the Nordic Embassies, CNS members and others, here are our readers:

- Oskar Ovind – Norwegian Bokmal. Oskar is a student and son of the Norwegian Ambassador.
- Martti Lahtinen – Finnish. Martti is a CNS member. He is looking forward to “hamming it up.”
- Marianne Bournes – Danish. Marianne volunteered thanks to the Danish Club and Vibeke Reid, President.
- Agnes Eva Volundardottir – Icelandic. Agnes volunteered thanks to the Friends of Iceland and Wendy Wynne-Jones, President.

Each person will read about 180 lines of Hamlet

The event is a reading, not a performance. The idea is to have fun. It is also a fundraiser for refugee students through the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), University of Ottawa Local Committee. Donations will be voluntary.

The reading will be on Friday, April 8 at 2:30 PM in Freiman Hall, 610 Cumberland Street, (Perez Hall).

Speaker Series

(The Speaker Series take place at the Officers’ Mess, 149 Somerset Street West)

His Excellency Sturla Sigurjónsson, Ambassador of Iceland to Canada will address the CNS on “Mutual Interests in the North: Iceland and Canada in the 21st Century” on Wednesday, April 20, at 7:30 PM.

Monthly Lunches

Canadian Nordic Society members meet for lunch once a month from September until June at the historic and beautiful Officers’ Mess at 149 Somerset Street West (just east of Elgin Street), Ottawa. Lunch tickets are purchased at the bar, on the left as you come in to the building. Please do join us! Lunch is served at 12:00 p.m. You may want to arrive a little earlier to meet and chat with other CNS members and their guests. The dates of the lunches for the rest of this season are April 4, May 2, and June 6.

Events of Interest to CNS Members

Free lecture related to Viking Exhibition:

Gunnar Andersson, Senior Curator at the Swedish History Museum will give a lecture entitled "A closer Look at the Vikings: Curator's Edition" on Thursday, April 14, at 7:00 PM at the Museum of History, Level 1, Douglas Cardinal Salon. Note that admission to the museum is free on Thursdays between 4:00 and 8:00 PM.

The Viking exhibition will close on April 17, so if you haven't seen it yet take this opportunity to visit the exhibition and get specialist knowledge from the experts.

RSVP at: rsvp-resourcecentre@historymuseum.ca or call: 819-776-8301.

European Book Club

The Ottawa Public Library's European Book Club will meet on Wednesday, April 20 from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Sunnyside Branch, 1049 Bank Street, to discuss "An event in Autumn", an **Inspector Wallander** short novel by Swedish Author **Henning Mankell**. This is a free event, and newcomers are welcome. Please see poster at the end of this newsletter for more information.

Finding the Kingdom of the Spear-Danes: The History and Archaeology of Beowulf (Carleton University Learning in Retirement Series)

Dr. Teva Vidal will be giving these lectures on Wednesdays, from April 20th to May 25th, 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM at Carleton University, Leeds House Building, Room 124. Fee is \$130.

The Old English epic poem Beowulf is a monument of early English literature. Yet its subject matter is Scandinavian, taking place in the bygone times of early Iron Age Denmark and in the southern-Swedish kingdom of the Geats. Beowulf's narrative is legendary, but what inspired the story? This lecture series looks into some of the possible historical antecedents, both places and characters, which may form a historical base to the poem. Focusing especially on the site of Lejre in Denmark and its environs, the lectures will also explore possible archaeological evidence for the pre-Viking Age setting of Beowulf.

If you wish to **register** or require **more information**, please contact the Learning in Retirement office at 613-520-2600 ext. 1756 or visit their website for other registration methods: carleton.ca/linr/registration/

Clifford Savage on Raoul Wallenberg during the Holocaust in Hungary *by Hilde Huus*

On February 17, 2016, retired high school teacher, linguist, and history enthusiast Clifford Savage provided the CNS with an illustrated lecture on Raoul Wallenberg. Mr. Savage clearly has a passion for this extraordinary subject and has acquired a detailed knowledge of the events of 1944 and 1945

in Nazi-occupied Hungary through extensive reading and research, including personal visits to Hungary.

Mr. Savage laid the groundwork for his talk by setting the stage in Hungary before Raoul Wallenberg arrived on the scene. We learned that the borders of Hungary had been considerably reduced by the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, the peace agreement to formally end World War I between the Allies and the Kingdom of Hungary. Hitler restored some of the lost territories back to Hungary and as a result, the Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy, in power from 1920 to 1944, was on good terms with Nazi Germany. It was not until March 1944 that the Nazis invaded and occupied Hungary and began preparations to annihilate its entire Jewish population. Adolf Eichmann was in charge and he worked with the co-operation of the Hungarian authorities. The process of first restricting the activities of the Jews and then rounding them up for transport to the concentration camps, where they would either work as labourers or be killed, began.

On July 9, 1944, Raoul Wallenberg arrived in Budapest from Berlin. He was a wealthy Swedish businessman who had done business in Budapest in the past. The Swedish government gave him a diplomatic cover, but he had actually been sent to Hungary at the behest of Jewish-American organizations.



Raoul Wallenberg's 1944 passport photo

Wallenberg was able to save an astonishing number of lives by creating very official-looking Swedish provisional passports, which he provided to Jews at every opportunity. He stockpiled enormous quantities of food to distribute to them. Even after the passports were no longer accepted, he used his ingenuity and bravado to bluff and bribe his way to saving countless more.

By late December, 1944, Budapest was encircled by Soviet forces. On January 17, 1945, the Soviets arrested Wallenberg and informed Sweden that he was in protective custody. His ultimate fate remains a mystery.

During the question and answer period that followed Mr. Savage's talk, we learned that a Hungarian Jewish survivor of the Bergen Belsen camp was in attendance. This was certainly a poignant moment for all of us there that evening. This survivor (unfortunately I did not get her name) noted that there will be a Round Table in Budapest on May 20 and 21 this year, with the aim of establishing once and for all what happened to Raoul Wallenberg. It was very clear to us all that Wallenberg is still greatly revered by those who survived due to his extraordinary heroism, as well as by their descendants. CNS President Tim Mark, in thanking Clifford Savage, noted that although it is very sad to hear about the grim events of the Holocaust in Hungary, the figure of Raoul Wallenberg remains as a beacon of hope in this grim chapter of European history.

Next Year's Council

Karin Birnbaum is heading up the Nomination Committee for next year's council. She and her committee members are accepting nominations. Members will have a chance to review the list of nominations and suggest any additions prior to the Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, May 18. Please contact Karin at karin@birnbaum.ca for additional information.

Got a Craving for Lutefisk?

If you get a craving for lutefisk now and then (and who doesn't?), I have good news for you. Eric Järvelepp reports that he has been to the Merivale Fish Market and Restaurant a couple of times.

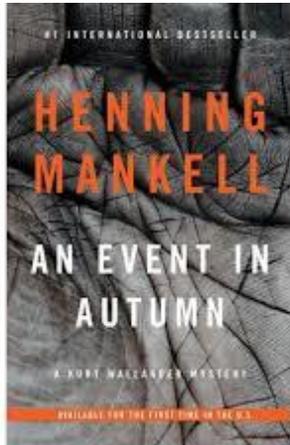
There is an elaborate fish counter. To my surprise, I noticed frozen lutefisk! It seems to be available year around. As the Finns would say: "For fishing, there is no need to go beyond the sea!"

Hours are: 11:30 to 9:00 P.M. five days a week, different on Saturdays. Years ago, under different ownership, their take-out service included fish soup. Address 1480 Merivale Rd., 613 723 2476. There are also three Lapointe fish stores in Ottawa.

Thank you Eric!



The European Book Club



April 20, 2016
6:00-8:00 pm

An Event in Autumn
by Henning Mankell (Sweden)

An Event in Autumn is an Inspector Kurt Wallander short novel by the bestselling author Henning Mankell. Soon after Inspector Kurt Wallander moves into a new house with a charming garden, he makes an upsetting discovery: there is a hand--indeed, an entire corpse--buried in a shallow grave in the garden. It's the responsibility of the local police to handle the investigation...but Wallander, even though busy with another case, is soon drawn into the search for the truth about his new home, and its previous owner.

Newcomers are welcome!

Succursale Sunnyside Branch
Program Room B
1049 rue Bank Street
613-730-1082

www.BiblioOttawaLibrary.ca

Contributions to Nordic News

We appreciate receiving your articles and news to include in the *Nordic News*! Please email them to the editor, Hilde Huus, at hildehuu@gmail.com

www.canadiannordicsociety.com

email: info@canadiannordicsociety.com

of Ottawa. “The last meeting of the Scandinavian Club felt like a funeral”, he recalls. “A new club, the Canadian Nordic Society of Ottawa, was founded”.



Join CNS

You can join CNS online, by mail, or in person.

Online

To join online, go to the CNS website (<http://www.canadiannordicsociety.com/join-cns.html>) and complete the membership form . Payment may be made through PayPal.

Note: it is not necessary to have a PayPal account.

By mail

Please print and complete the membership form below, enclose a cheque payable to the Canadian Nordic Society and mail to:

Canadian Nordic Society

240 Sparks Street

Box 55023

Ottawa, ON

K1P 1A1

In person

You can join in person when you attend one of our luncheons or speaker events. Please speak to any one of our Council members



Canadian Nordic Society

Box 55023, 240 Sparks St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 1A1
www.canadiannordicsociety.com

Membership Application/Renewal (membership year 1 September - 31 August)

Name(s) _____
Mailing address _____

Phone(s) _____
Email _____

Category of membership (check box)

- individual \$30.00
- family \$45.00
- student \$20.00

You will receive a receipt for your payment.

September 2015