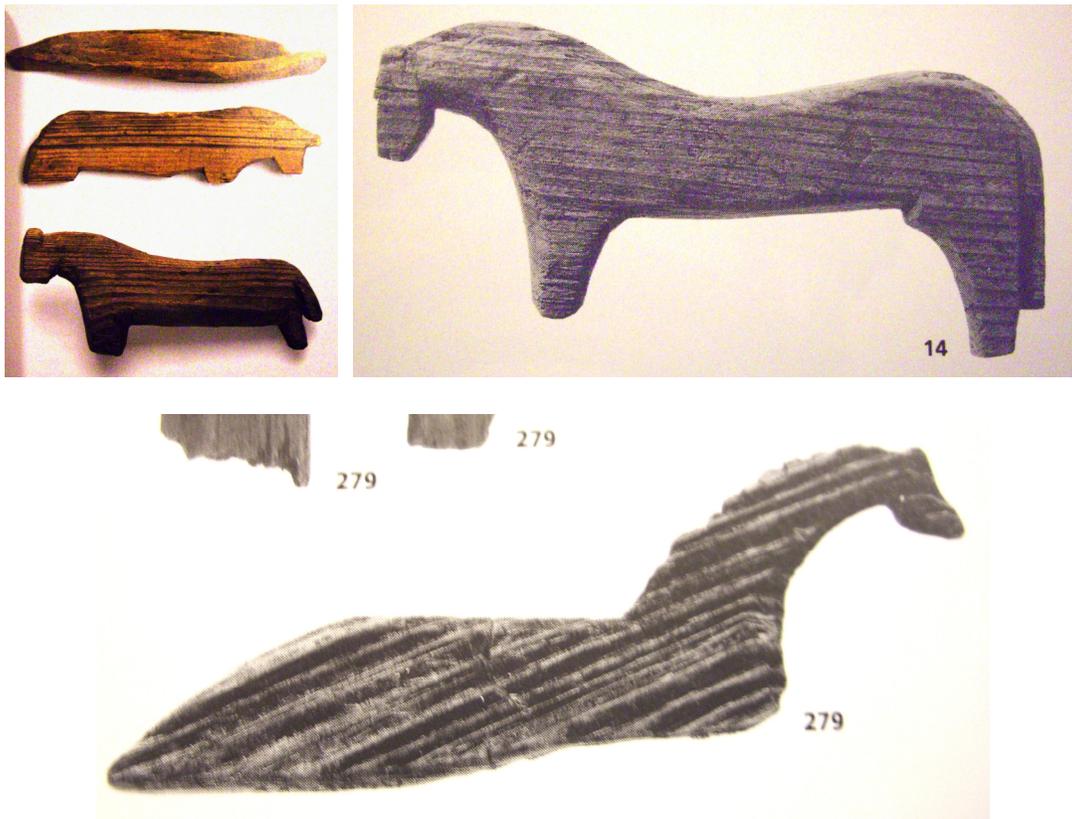


Animals

Toy Horses

Toy horses are common enough to deserve their own subheading. Horses seem to have most commonly been cut from planks as two dimensional silhouettes, but often have realistic anatomical details and may have originally been brightly painted. However, more elaborate examples of toy horses are known from extant examples or literary references. For example, in Chapter 12 of *Víga-Glúms saga*, there is a scene familiar to many modern parents. A young boy of about six years old decides that he has outgrown his bronze toy horse and gives it to a toddler, explaining that it is more appropriate to the younger child. (www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/games_and_sports.htm)



Top Left: Willow boat from Kvivik, Stallion from Kvivik, and a Norwegian horse. V2C

Top Right: Toy horse from Trondheim, Norway, c.1075-1125CE. V2C

Bottom: Wood horse from 8-9 century St Petersburg. V2C page 301.

I am particularly interested in the bottom example. The caption identifies this as being a horse, but with its long, lithe neck, it almost appears to be a dragon or sea serpent rather than a horse. The story of the Loch Ness Monster is a period story and dragons feature in multiple Viking tales, so it is possible that this could be some sort of monster instead of yet another horse.

There is an online tutorial for anyone wishing to replicate cutout wooden horses:
<http://www.angelfire.com/wy/svenskildbiter/Viking/vikhorse.html>

Other Animals



Left: Hedgehog or Pig from <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba103/news.shtml>

Right: Duck from Birka from <http://tinyurl.com/dxdrts>

The hedgehog predates the Norse period, but was just too cute to pass up. The chalk hedgehog/pig was buried with an infant near Stonehenge (c100BC).

The carved antler duck from Birka, however, is from within the proper Norse period.

There has been some speculation that a carved amber cat is some sort of votive item since it is made of a semi-precious material. However, while it is reasonably well done, it is not particularly finely made and I like to think that some doting Viking daddy carved it for his favorite daughter. (Amber cat illustrated in the article “The Importance of Amber” in the supporting documents)

Dolls

Dolls of common types (reconstructions) Doll clothes from the Caucasus, 8-9th century



Left: http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/games_and_sports.htm

Right: http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html/En/08/hm88_0_0_20_1.html

A variety of carved wooden children's toys from the period have been found, including dolls, horses, ships, and other figures. Sadly, I have yet to track down illustrations of the original doll finds, but at the above left are some reconstructions from the Hurstwic website. There is an example of a “stump doll” from 12th century Novgorod, but it is a simple style with the head and swaddled body carved out of a single block that easily could have been used for some time before that particular find.

One of the difficulties in identifying dolls is that they are sometimes misclassified as devotional items or house spirits and vice versa. For example – the doll clothes from Russia shown above are very complicated – they could either be from a figure used in some adult context as a votive item or the plaything of a very loved or spoiled little girl. Without knowing the context, it is impossible to say.

Balls

Balls are a universal child's toy and examples of leather balls of several different styles are known from Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval York. Balls could be made of two pieces, two pieces with a dart, three pieces, four pieces, or more. Balls were usually of leather and then stuffed with moss or a wood core. (See the supporting documents for options from York - L&L.)

The Hurstwic webpage also lists felt balls as a Viking plaything, but I have not actually found any independent verification of such.

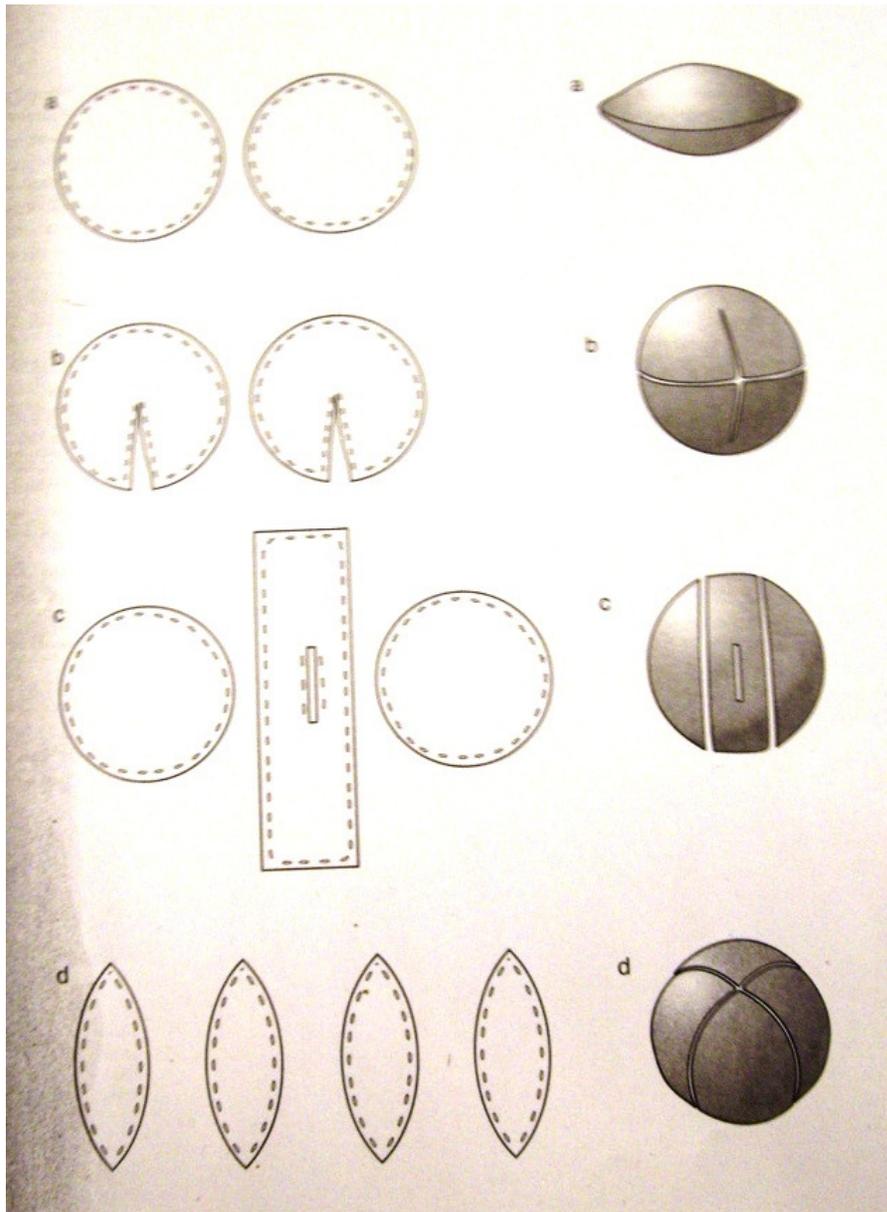


Illustration from York-L&L, page Figure 1728, 3407.

Additional Sources for Viking-era toys:

<http://www.regia.me.uk/pastimes.htm>

<http://aelflaed.homemail.com.au/doco/vikingtoychest.html>

<http://aelflaed.homemail.com.au/doco/dolls.html>

http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/games_and_sports.htm

Topics Not Addressed:

Wooden tops and musical instruments are other reasonably frequent finds. Some basic information is provided in the supporting documentation, but I have yet to carefully examine and summarize the material.

Likewise, dice, gaming boards, and gaming pieces are known from Viking or associated contexts, but these also could be adult playthings and so have not been evaluated or represented in this project.

Conclusion

What I once imagined to be a weekend's lark in the library has grown to be a year-long quest for information. While the information on young Norse of the Viking and medieval eras is scarce, it is a challenge worth perusing and collecting. Even now, many hours and dozens of pages later, I find that this subject merits further investigation.

Therefore, this remains a work in progress, particularly the organization of the bibliography and citations and the need to more fully integrate the information from some of the supporting documents into the project as a whole. I would also like to recreate some of the items that this research has brought to light, particularly the cradle found in the furniture section. (For the purposes of entering the Gulf Wars A&S competition, I actually have made a few examples of many of these finds. See separate reports of each of those items.)

And, of course, the archaeology of and scholarship on this period is always advancing and every year new information becomes available for evaluation and new inquiries into what it meant to be a Norse child in the middle ages.

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