



Tales of Ancient Worlds

The Mound of Surprises



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DIGITAL ACADEMY

The first thing to appear as archaeologists dug down into the grassy mound was the unmistakable green tint of bronze that had been long buried. The team from the National Museum of Korea were excavating Tomb 120 in Gyeongju, the ancient capital city of Korea's Silla kingdom.



What they had just found was a bronze shoe. “Bronze shoe? Can’t be comfy!”, I hear you say. You’re right – but these shoes weren’t made to be worn, they were offerings to be placed in the tombs of Silla nobility.



The most famous artefacts to ever be found at Gyeongju were tall gold crowns decorated with green jade. They were worn by the Silla kings sometimes in the years 400 CE to 600 CE – the crown jewels of ancient Korea.

These were found in the early 20th century, but Korean archaeologists had decided to dig in some of the tombs again, which is why they found themselves looking at the bronze shoe.



Why would archaeologists excavate the same tomb twice? Well, in the past archaeologists didn't have the same technology we do now, and to be honest they were often just focused on finding treasure, not understanding history (remember the guy who blew up the Nubian pyramids?)

So, archaeologists frequently go back and reassess what was found before with new tools and an open mind.



It was just as well they went back. Outside the tomb they found huge piles of jars. One contained 7700 animal bones! These were probably left at a later date by people wanting to remember those buried in the tomb.



What's interesting is that these rituals were never written down and weren't discovered by the first excavation. It turns out that in ancient Silla, people commemorated the dead in exquisite style.

Inside the jars were the remains of really expensive foods like sea urchin, dolphin and even pufferfish – a fish so poisonous that if it's not prepared correctly, whoever eats it will end up in a tomb themselves!



The Age of Vikings



Today, the Vikings are remembered as the fiercest of fierce warriors. Sea-faring raiders from Scandinavia with their hearts set on stealing your gold, burning your church and giving you a good bop on the nose.



While this may be true, Vikings were so much more than that. They were also poets, traders, farmers and explorers, the Viking age lasted from about 700 CE to 1100 CE.



The Viking World

The Vikings were amazing explorers. From their home in Scandinavia, they sailed as far as North America in the west and Iraq in the east.



Runes

The Vikings had an alphabet made up on letters called runes, which they cut into stone or wood to commemorate important events, or sometimes just to say things like, “Haermund Hardaxe carved these runes.”



God of Thunder

Thor was the Viking god of thunder and defender of Asgard, the realm of the gods. With his mighty hammer, Mjolnir, he fought a snake so big it wrapped around the entire world!



Fun and Games

Vikings loved games and tricks. In Scotland, a large collection of chess pieces was discovered. There's even one biting his shield - maybe as a sign of ferociousness!



Normal People

The word “Viking” means a raider – it was a job description. But not all Vikings raided. Most of the time they were farmers, not fighters and they loved to sing epic poetry! Viking women weren’t just stuck at home either – they could become successful businesswomen.



Ships and Trading

The Vikings sailed the world in incredible longships, crossing oceans and going up rivers. They weren't any rooms, though, so it could get cold on board. They would trade goods – such as jewellery, amber and even seal fat – with people across Europe and parts of Asia.



The Buried Viking Ship



According to legend, in 1870, a farmer from Oseberg called Johannes Hansen, left his home in Norway, and sailed to America seeking his fortune. One night he met a fortune teller who told him, "Return to Norway.

There are treasures enough on your farm. Just dig below the hill." Johannes had no idea how right the fortune teller was. He ignored the suggestion and sold the farm.



Thirty years later, in 1904, archaeologists Gabriel Gustafson started excavating the hill as it was in danger of being destroyed by treasure hunters. As his team dug down, they found a curved piece of wood. Incredibly, this was the prow of a Viking ship! Gustafson knew this could mean one thing only: beneath this hill an extremely important Viking was buried.



The archaeologists dug down further, eventually revealing an entire ship.



On board was absolutely everything a Viking would need to enjoy the afterlife: bed, treasure chest, intricately carved wagon, expensive boats, farm tools, 15 horses, 6 dogs, 2 cows and even 3 sleighs (because even when you're dead, sledging is great fun). But who was buried in it?



In the centre of the boat lay two women, one about 70 years old, the other about 50, in Viking society, woman could become rich and powerful – it's even possible that the older woman buried in the boat was a mysterious Norwegian Queen name Asa.



We may never know for sure, but it's fun to daydream!





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