



Things from the Town: Artefacts and Inhabitants in Viking-Age Kaupang (Kaupang Excavation Project) (Kaupang Excavation Project - Norske Oldfunn Xxiv)

Dagfinn Skre

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In this third volume deriving from the 2000-2003 excavations of the Viking town of Kaupang, a range of artefacts is presented along with a discussion of the town's inhabitants: their origins, activities and trading connections. The main categories of artefact are metal jewellery and ornaments, gemstones, vessel glass, pottery, finds of soapstone, whetstones, and textile-production equipment. The artefacts are described and dated, and their areas of origin discussed. The volume is lavishly illustrated. An exceptional wealth and diversity of artefacts distinguishes sites such as Kaupang from all other types of site in the Viking World. Above all, they reflect the fact that a large population of some 400-600 people lived closely together in the town, engaged in a comprehensive range of production and trade. The stratigraphically distinct layers from the first half of the 9th century allow us to put precise dates to the finds, and to the buildings and evidence of activities associated with them. The finds and structural remains make it possible to identify the activities that took place within the six buildings excavated. We can distinguish between some buildings that were only temporarily in use and others that were permanently occupied. Several of the temporary buildings were used by a variety of craftsmen while those under permanent occupation were houses, and only to a secondary degree workshops. Throughout the life of the town from c. AD 800-930, trade links with southern Scandinavia, the Baltic, and the Irish Sea would appear to have been strong. In the earliest phases of the town there was considerable trade with the Frisian regions, probably with Dorestad, but this link faded markedly in the second half of the 9th century, probably because of the abandonment of Dorestad. Within what is now Norway, Kaupang seems to have been supplied with goods from the interior of eastern Norway. Goods from around the western coasts of Norway, however, are practically invisible. Finds of personal equipment show that the inhabitants of the town were of diverse origins. Many of them were from southern and western Scandinavia, but there were also Frisians there. One house can be identified as that of a Frisian household engaged in trade. There were also Slavs in Kaupang, although it is not clear whether they were long-term residents.

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