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ODENSE

CITY OF THE VIKINGS

**Nonnebakken is a
UNESCO World Heritage Site**

6 EXPERTS 6 STORIES

**MUSEUM
ODENSE**



**Erhvervsfremmestyrrelsen
Danmarks**

In Odense, traces of the city of the Vikings are interwoven with the present-day urban landscape. Stories of regicides, sacrifices, trading and power lie like shadows in the city streets, buildings and nature – and beneath your feet. The 1000-year-old roots of the city intertwine with key narratives from Denmark in the Viking Age and around the three significant figures of Odin, Harald and Canute. Each in their own way have left important traces in the city along with the thousands of inhabitants who have formed the city with their daily lives.

The world of the Vikings was far-reaching, and on Funen alone there are plenty of opportunities to see traces and objects from the Viking Age. Try visiting the ship grave of the Ladbj Viking Museum, the many graves from the Viking Age at the Langeland Museum, the runestone at Bhave Museum, the museum of the South Funen Archipelago, in Faaborg, or the reconstructed dwellings of earlier times in Odin's Odense.

Mikael Manøe Bjerregaard, archaeologist and museum curator

In the footsteps of the Vikings

If I feel like following in the footsteps of history, I often take a walk along Overgade and Vestergade. Here there are many shops and pedestrians – and the ghosts of the past are also present, for the street has been Odense's main trading street and backbone ever since the Viking Age. In actual fact, the street is one of the most important thoroughfares across Funen. About 2-3 metres beneath your feet lies the road surface of compressed pebbles that for more than 1000 years has led people from Nyborg through Odense and all the way to Middelfart. Just think of all the human lives that have walked along precisely this road: monks, traders, young children, housewives – and who else perhaps?

1



Kirstine Haase, research leader

The vanished church

Whenever I stand on Albani Torv, it strikes me that I am standing in the heart of Danish history. Here lies one of the country's first churches, and there are still traces of the 1000-year-old church a few metres under the present paving of the market square. You can see the traces marked by circles of iron in the paving that represent the wooden posts that were once the walls and columns of the church. The church was once the scene of a dramatic event, when the Danish King Canute IV was murdered by rebellious noblemen. He later became a saint – Canute the Holy – and was of enormous importance for the small Viking town of Odense, which gradually developed into one of the largest cities in the realm. He was celebrated every year on 10 July by markets and processions where his golden reliquary was carried around the city streets. There must have been plenty of bustling life and noise in the city in those days. Can you imagine what it was like?

2



Karsten Kjer Michaelsen, archaeologist and museum curator

Meet the king!

In the low-ceilinged, quiet crypt under Odense Cathedral, Skt. Knuds Kirke, there are two solitary reliquaries. They contain the early remains of the last Viking king, Canute the Holy, and his brother, Benedict. Whenever I stand looking at them, I cannot help thinking of the endless expanse of time that precedes our own time – as well as of the endless expanses of time and new history that lie waiting in the future, when we too are dead and gone long since. We are familiar with many skeletons from the Viking Age, but the crypt under the cathedral in Odense is the only place in the world where you can see the remains of a Viking king. Meet the king. Meet his brother. Travel back in your mind to that day in July 1086 when the fateful clash cost Canute, Benedict and 17 of their warriors their lives. Use your imagination, give your thoughts a free rein and sense the history of this unique location.

3



Poul Baltzer Heide, archaeologist and museum curator

City Miniatures

The models were created in 2019 by Museum Odense in collaboration with Swedish bronze casters Ludvig and Anders Ödman. Cast in weather-resistant bronze using the traditional cire perdue technique, the models are both detailed and durable. After rain, you can see water in the river, making the models even more lifelike. Each building and tree was meticulously carved in wax and assembled before casting, resulting in precise and impressive models. The miniatures show Odense in 988 and 1593, and clearly show the development of the city in that period.

4



Poul Baltzer Heide, archaeologist and museum curator

The oldest Odense

It is almost impossible to believe, but when you stand in Klaregade, surrounded by bicycles, tall city buildings and cars, you are actually standing in the very oldest part of Odense. This precinct lies on a promontory that juts out into the river, and it is also here that we find the oldest ferry sites across Odense River. If you had been standing here 11 centuries ago, you would have seen something completely different from now, but you would not have been on your own. Around you there would have been low, straw-thatched huts and slightly larger dwellings. There would have been children playing, adults chatting, craftsmen in deep concentration, young people in love – and all the other things that typify human life. Try standing here for a moment and imagine the sound of their voices from back then – what would it have sounded like? What voices do you think will one be able to hear when a further 11 centuries have passed?

4



Line Borre Lundø, archaeologist and museum curator

Odense's beginnings

By the swings on the flat expanse of grass between Nonnebakken and Odense River the children play, and all is peaceful. It is completely impossible to see that in the Viking Age there was presumably a sacrificial site here where people worshipped the most powerful god of Norse mythology, Odin. Whenever I stand here, I cannot help thinking of just how much this place has meant for the city. A place of sacrifice was then called a 'vi', and 'Odin's vi' gradually became the name Odense. Occasionally, people made pilgrimages to the sacrificial site down by the river, and special rituals were carried out in honour of the gods – perhaps even human sacrifices. Try closing your eyes and using your imagination. What do you think it could have looked like?

5



Mads Runge, management board member

The hidden circular rampart – a UNESCO World Heritage Site

If you stand on the corner of Hunderupvej and Nonnebakken and look up towards the distinctive white mansion of the Order of Odd Fellows, you are also looking at what remains of the largest and most important ancient monument: a Viking circular rampart. Today, all you can see is an upward slope, but there was once a huge complex here with a diameter of 180 metres and a five-metre-high rampart with a palisade. It was established by Harald Bluetooth at the end of the 10th century as one of five in Denmark. Whenever I stand here at Nonnebakken, I think of how this large fortification must have dominated all of Funen. I also think of all the finds that still lie there concealed and well preserved underground as a source that can provide us with even more knowledge about the Viking Age if we ever get to examine it more closely.

6



250m