

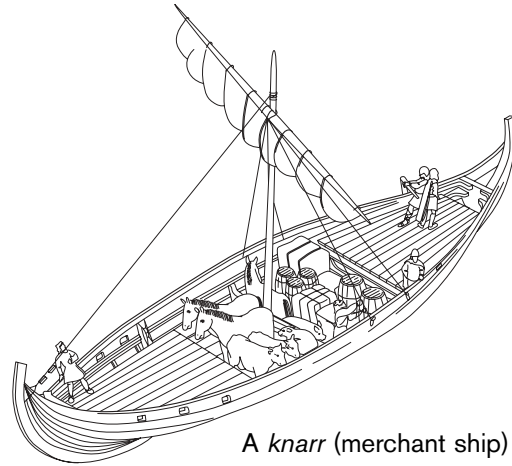


Vikings as traders

The Vikings were not only raiders and invaders but traders as well. Their *knarrs* (merchant ships) were designed to transport bulky goods.

Why did the Vikings want to trade?

- The Vikings needed different things from those which could be produced or found in Scandinavia.
- They also knew that other countries wanted things which were common, or only found, in Scandinavia.



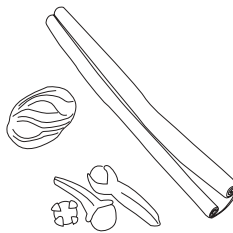
A *knarr* (merchant ship)

What did the Vikings want?



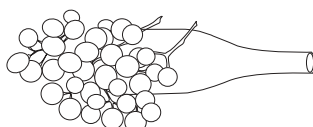
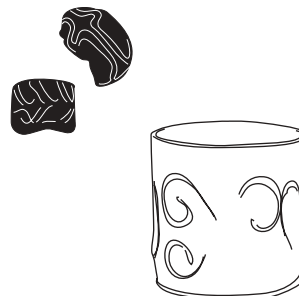
- One of the most important things the Vikings imported was **silver**.
- **Arab coins** were not assessed in terms of their monetary value but by their weight in silver. The heavier the coin the more valuable it was to the Vikings.
- They would melt the coins down and forge them into jewellery. The more silver a Viking had, the greater his social standing.

- The Norse traders also wanted **spices** to flavour their very bland and salty foods. These were obtained from Chinese and Persian traders who would meet with the Viking traders in Russia.



- **Silk** was also a very important commodity. This again illustrated status and was used as cloth by the very rich in Norse society. Silks from both China and Byzantium (modern Istanbul) have been found in Viking excavation sites across Scandinavia.

- **Glass** was also much prized by the Norsemen. This would be made into beads for decoration. These have been found in their thousands.
- Glass cubes or broken bits of glass were melted down and moulded around an iron rod. Recent excavations in a bead-makers workshop in Ribe (Denmark) revealed broken beads, discarded glass and drops of molten glass.



- **Wine** was imported from France and Germany for wealthy Vikings to drink as an alternative to mead.



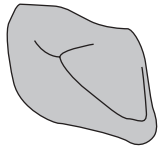
What did the Vikings take to trade?

- In order to obtain these items Vikings had to trade items from their homeland as exports.



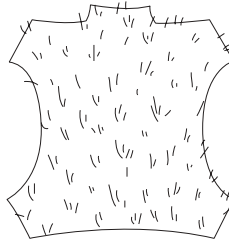
- **Soapstone** was exported to Iceland and Jutland. The Vikings used this material like pottery.

- **Whetstones** were exported and used for sharpening weapons, tools and knives. We know this was used as a trading commodity because a ship carrying a large cargo was found 15km away from one commercial centre called Kaupang (Norway).



- **Amber**, the fossilized resin of the pine tree, was frequently found on the Baltic coastline.
- The Norsemen believed that it was a gift from the gods and treasured it. The amber was worked into beads and ornamental objects before being traded.

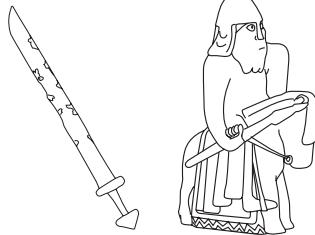
- **Fur** was also exported as it provided warmth. This would include the furs of pine martens, foxes, bears, otters and beavers.



- **Woollen cloth** was of high quality as the Vikings were skilled spinners and weavers.



- Vikings captured many **slaves** on their raids, sometimes monks and clergymen. They were traded with Arab merchants for silver.



- The Vikings also took **walrus ivory**, **wax**, **salt cod** and **weapons** for trading.

Viking trade was not a simple two-way process. The traders journeyed across Europe trading as they went. In this way they would obtain and exchange many different types of goods – honey, glass and pottery vessels, metals and animal furs.

The Vikings travelled by sea to France, Spain and Portugal, then round into the Mediterranean to Italy. They also travelled across to Russia and eastern Europe and the Middle East by river. If necessary to they would carry or roll their ships across the land to the next river. The design of their ships was an important factor in their success.