Press release 1 – ”The Viking from Fregerslev” Link to ”The Viking from Fregerslev” homepage”: [www.vikingfregerslev.dk](http://www.vikingfregerslev.dk) (use google translate button)

Link to teasermovie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=em4vP2EAkF8>

**Viking Age earl found in Jutland, Denmark**

**A unique Viking Age grave is to be excavated near the town of Skanderborg starting April 19th. The research project, which is called “The Fregerslev Viking – a powerful man”, is expected to reveal one of the richest graves from the first millennium during the era of the kings of Jelling.**

An archaeological excavation in the Hørning area close to the town of Skanderborg uncovered a remarkable burial site. Several large, adjacent burial chambers were found, and one of them has already yielded exceptionally rich artifacts. These artifacts reveal that the person buried here was one of the most powerful men in the kingdom during the late Viking Age. This man, presumably considered one of the king’s earls, was buried with a wealth of grave goods, some of which were necessary to travel to Valhalla, land of the dead.

This unique find will be the centre of a large-scale archaeological research project led by the Museum of Skanderborg. The project is called “The Fregerslev Viking – a powerful man” and is set to focus on Viking Age elite, power structure, trade, and society structure in a national as well as international perspective.

“Only a small part of the grave has been examined but April 19th we’ll start uncovering the rest of the Viking’s grave goods in an excavation managed by the Museum of Skanderborg,” said Ejvind Hertz, museum inspector and manager of the museum’s archaeological department.

The initial part of the project has just received full funding from the Augustinus Foundation, the A.P. Møllerske Støttefond foundation, the Agency for Culture and Palaces, and Skanderborg Municipality.

**The Viking’s horse as a symbol of power**

Project manager and archaeologist at the Museum of Skanderborg, Merethe Schifter Bagge, states, “The artifacts that we’ve already found are exquisite, gilded fittings from a horse bridle. This type of bridle would only be available to the most powerful of people in the Viking Age, and we believe it might have been a gift of alliance from the king. The fittings date to ca. 950 AD, which means that the Fregerslev Viking could have been the confidant of the King, Gorm the Old - or alternatively a rival.”

**Excited archaeologists**

The chamber burial site is unusually large so it might hold as many as three chamber burials. Soon the archaeologists will learn what they contain, and how many individuals are buried. The manager of the Museum of Skanderborg, Lene Høst Madsen, says, “This is going to be an extremely exciting excavation, as it’ll determine whether the Earl was buried alone or together with one or more family members. It could even be an unusually large grave complex containing all of the Earl’s equipment and perhaps sacrificed horses.”

The entire excavation will feature guided tours every day - keep updated at the website [www.vikingfregerslev.dk](http://www.vikingfregerslev.dk). Simultaneously some of the beautiful, gilded fittings will be exhibited at the Museum of Skanderborg between April 7th and May 7th2017.

**Press and contact**

A press conference will be announced later. Until then and for further information please contact:

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**Facts**

**1. The research project:**

The research project is a collaboration between Skanderborg Municipality, the Agency for Culture and Palaces, the National Museum of Denmark, the University of Aarhus, and the Museum of Skanderborg. The initial part of the project has just received full funding from the Augustinus Foundation, the A.P. Møllerske Støttefond foundation, the Agency for Culture and Palaces, and Skanderborg Municipality. This part involves excavation, scientific analysis and conservation of the grave finds. This will be followed up by part two, focusing on research and publications, and finally part three, which is exhibition and dissemination based.

**2. Similar graves:**

Burials in which influential males and riding gear have been placed in a chamber, are known from approximately 45 Viking Age sites from Southern Scandinavia, i.e. Denmark, Scania, Halland, Blekinge and Schleswig-Holstein. Many of these graves were inadequately excavated or simply cleared away, and as a result our knowledge about this type of grave is limited. The last time that a similar chamber burial was excavated was in 1983 in the Grimstrup area close to the city of Esbjerg.

**3. Unique research potential:**

This project is of immense research potential, as it will help explore the ritual burial practices of society’s wealthiest people in the late Viking Age. The use of 3D photogrammetry and CT scans of the grave, with its preserved organics and objects, will generate further knowledge about the exact content and structure of the grave prior to and during excavation. At the same time, the 3D documentation of the grave and its grave goods could potentially be useful for disseminationin the museum and future publications.

As this is the first time since 1983 that this type of grave has been excavated it provides a unique chance to apply state of the art technology in terms of recording, studying and preserving the finds. Hopefully, this will provide us with a more detailed understanding of the Fregerslev Viking and the burial practices of late Viking Age elite. Due to the richness of the grave and the preserved organics, excavation and conservation will be difficult and time-consuming, but at the same time it constitutes an unparalleled opportunity to research these objects and develop a methodology of doing so.

**4. The earl:**

The richly decorated bridle gives us reason to believe that the horse’s rider belonged to the top of society. In the Viking Age, the king represented the highest level of power; his role was determined by personal alliances, military force and foreign liaisons. The Fregerslev Viking might have been an “earl”, one of the king’s men and associated with a level of power just below the king’s. The earl controlled large areas of land and functioned as an army commander. Whether the Fregerslev Viking is in fact a known historical person or a legendary figure could potentially be revealed during the excavation. This might be possible if the grave yields unique finds such as objects with engraved runes or other special objects that might hint at the horseman’s identity!

**5. Grave goods and personal equipment:**

A regal horseman’s impressive grave might contain a sword, imported tableware, horse gear, spurs, a gaming board, an axe and a shield. Furthermore, we may have the opportunity to discover details such as the horseman’s clothes, sacrificed animals, DNA of the buried individual(s) as well as possibly his horse, the horseman’s last meal, etc. These results could lead to a better understanding of the burial practices, lives and social structure of the late Viking Age elite.

**6. What is a chamber burial?**

A chamber burial consists of a large wooden chamber with plenty of space for grave goods and personal gear. Even horses are known to have been included as a buried person’s grave goods. The chamber burials were often covered by a mound like it is known from the royal site of Jelling, Denmark.

**Expert statements**

“**The finds so far excavated can already provide the public with exciting new evidence of this stormy period of history, a story which can only be enhanced by excavation.”** Professor David M. Wilson, former Director of British Museum

**“This find represents an opportunity not to be missed. The Fregerslev horseman could become a key figure of our past like the Tollund man and the Egtved girl.”** Søren Sindbæk, professor, Aarhus University.

**“The Fregerslev site could generate important new knowledge about a very rare find category from the Viking Age.”** Anne Pedersen, senior researcher and museum inspector, the National Museum of Denmark.