

The seminar series

# Viking Phenomena: current research on late Iron Age Scandinavia

Introducing

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## **The all-speaking eye: Eastern imports and visual communication in Viking Age Sweden**

Amongst the thousands of Islamic silver dirhams found in Scandinavia, dated to the Viking Age (750-1050 CE), many show evidence of having been altered into worn ornaments. Whilst contemporaneous Byzantine and European coin ornaments are often interpreted as signifiers of Christian belief, the more numerous Islamic examples tend to be conceptualised as status symbols. This paper will reconsider Viking Age dirham ornaments, using them as a vector to gain insight into the possible meanings that Eastern objects gained – or retained – as they were appropriated into the Scandinavian milieu. Based on work undertaken for my MA thesis (completed at University College London in 2017), this paper will present the results of spatial and statistical analyses of Viking Age dirham ornaments found in present-day Sweden, seeking to identify and explain underlying spatio-temporal patterns. The results are then contextualised within existing literature, and used as a starting point in exploring the role of Eastern material culture as part of Viking Age Scandinavian visual communication: both internally within Scandinavian society, and as part of the mercantile relationships with their Steppe Nomadic and Muslim contemporaries.

**Key Words:** Viking Age, Sweden, dirhams, trade, visual communication

Welcome!

Neil, John & Charlotte