

Artefacts from the Black Earth of Björkö (Birka) from Hjalmar Stolpe's excavations in the 1870s. (Catalogue published in 2018)

A short companion to the Swedish text

Hjalmar Stolpe (1841–1905) excavated c. 4,500 sq. m. of Birka's Black Earth in the 1870s. The artefacts were in storage in Stockholm until the 1940s, when the finds were examined, catalogued and drawn by the antiquarian Erik Sörling (1881–1961) at the National Historical Museum. However, his work was never printed and was only available for research in a manuscript form.

In 2018, an edited version of the catalogue was finally published by the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Uppsala University. It is a book of 390 pages.¹⁾ Most catalogue figures may be self-explanatory for scholars in the field. Nevertheless, as the catalogue's text is in Swedish, some explanatory notes and translations may be useful.

Following a preface and some information about Sörling's original work, the book is divided into eight parts.

1. Silverskatten = The silver hoard	p. 17
2. Vapen, häst och ryttare = Weapons, horse and riding gear	p. 23
3. Handel = Trade	p. 37
4. Smycken och dräkt detaljer = Jewellery and costume accessories	p. 45
5. Personliga bruksföremål = Personal appliances	p. 115
6. Redskap och verktyg = Utensils and tools	p. 299
7. Käril = Vessels	p. 325
8. Diverse = Miscellaneous	p. 357

The artefacts are presented with the drawings on plates to the left of each spread, and the corresponding descriptions to the right. When necessary, descriptions are continued on the following pages. The scales of the drawings are indicated in the text as 1:1, 2:3 etc. Not all artefacts are drawn. Artefacts without drawings are indicated in the text by "Ej bild" = No picture.

The artefacts from Stolpe's investigations in Birka's Black Earth are kept at the National Historical Museum in Stockholm (acronym SHM) under a common inventory No. 5208 with sub-numbers from 1 to 2592. Only the sub-numbers are used in the catalogue. When compiling the catalogue, Sörling further sub-numbered some finds that consisted of more than one item.

For example, see the Silver hoard, the Catalogue's pp. 18–21:

No. 3 Ett järnfat = an iron plate

No. 3:1 Armring = a bracelet

No. 3:2 Armring = a bracelet etc.

Consequently, these artefacts should be referred to as SHM 5208:3, 5208:3:1, 5208:3:2 etc.

In addition, some other inventory numbers appear in the catalogue, denoting various additions to the Museum's collections before 1950. They are finds bought from locals and stray finds, originating in Birka's Black Earth. These additions can be recognized as they all are numbered from 7187 onwards. For example, the sword on the catalogue's pp. 22–23 should be referred to as SHM 9289. All inventory numbers are listed on pp. 11–12.

Roman numerals sometimes appear in texts. They are Stolpe's notes regarding the trench in which the find in question originates. Sometimes depth, in feet, is also noted. See for example p. 25, find No. 25: VI, f. 2 fot djupt = trench VI, found 2 feet deep.

The locations of Stolpe's trenches in the Black Earth were poorly documented and uncertain for a long time. Lately, they have been successfully researched by Björn Ambrosiani and his collaborators. See Ambrosiani: Stratigraphy Vol. 1. Birka Studies, 9. Stockholm 2013.

1) ISBN 978-91-506-2715-2. The Catalogue is also available as a web publication:

www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1254146/FULLTEXT01.pdf

An accompanying Studies volume of 90 pages was published at the same time,

ISBN 978-91-506-2716-9. Web publication: www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1254153/FULLTEXT01.pdf



Abbreviations

avb. = drawing, picture
best. = consisting of
br. = wide, width (cm)
d. = diameter (cm)
f. = found
gr. = gram
h. = high, height (cm)
l. = long, length (cm)
nuv. = present
SHM = National Historical
Museum
tj., tj. = thick, thickness (cm)
v. = weight (gram)

Artefacts and some key words

ämne = blank
ända = end
armbygel = arm-ring
armring = arm-ring
ask = box
avspjälkad = flaked
bärnsten = amber
barr = ingot
ben = bone
bergkristall = rock crystal
beslag = fitting, mounting
bit = piece
blad = blade
bleck = strip, plate
bly = lead
borr = drill
bränd/t = burnt
brodd = crampon, spike
brons = bronze
bryne = whetstone
däggdjur = mammal
doppsko = chape
dräkt = dress, garment
egg = edge
ej bild = no picture
eldstål = fire-steel
fågel = bird
förarbete = unfinished
förgylld/t = gilt
fot = foot, feet
gjuten/t = cast
gjutform = mould
gods = ware
guld = gold
hål = hole
hammare = hammer
hänge = pendant
holk = socket
horn = antler
huvud = head

intryck = impression
islägg = bone skate
jämn = even, smooth
järn = iron
kalk = lime
kam = comb
kant = edge, rim
kärl = pot, vessel
kedja = chain
kittel = kettle
klumpig = clumsy, irregular
knapp = button, stud
knopp = pommel
kniv = knife
konisk = conical
krok = hook
kullrig = domed
lås = lock
lätt = light
lera = clay
lerkärl = clay pot
liten = small
mejsel = chisel
mynning = rim
mynt = coin
nål = needle
nålhus = needle case
nit = rivet, clench bolt
nyckel = key
öga = eye
ojämn = uneven, rough
öra = ear
örslev = ear pick
oval = oval
pärla = bead
pil = arrow
pilspets = arrow-head
pjäs = piece
plåt = sheet metal
platt = flat
pryl = awl
pyndare = steelyard
rembeslag = strap mount
remändbeslag = strap end
ring = ring
ringnål = ring pin
ringspänne = ring brooch
rör = tube
sax = scissors
silver = silver
sisare = shears
skadad = damaged
skaft = handle, helve
skära = sickle
skärva = shard
sked = spoon
skiffer = slate
sköld = shield

slagg = slag
sländtrissa = spindle-whorl
slät = flat
slida = sheath
små = small
smal = narrow
smycke = jewellery
sölja = buckle
spännbuckla = brooch
spänne = brooch
spelbricka = gaming piece
skål = pan
spetsig = pointed
spik = nail
spjut = spear
sporre = spur
stav = rod
sten = stone
stor = big
svärd = sword
syl = awl
täljsten = steatite
tånge = tang
tärning = dice
ten = rod
tenn = pewter, tin
trind = round
tung = heavy
våg = scale
välvd/t = dome-shaped
vävtyngd = loom weight
vikt = weight
yta = surface
ytter = outer
yxa = axe

Colours

blå = blue
brandgul = orange
brun = brown
fläckig = spotty
genomskinlig = transparent
glänsande = shiny
grå = grey
grön = green
gul = yellow
lila = violet
ljus = light
mörk = dark
röd = red
skimrande = shimmering
svart = black
violett = violet
vit = white