

Birka

On land | Sweden | about 750-975 CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

Viking graves at Birka held silk from China and a ring engraved in Arabic.

Read the story

Birka was founded around 750 CE on the island of Bjorko. It became one of the most important trading towns of the Viking world. Boats came along the rivers and lakes from the Baltic Sea, bringing goods from far away.

Merchants traded furs, iron and amber for silver coins from the Islamic world, glass, wine and fine cloth. Around 830 CE, a Christian missionary named Ansgar came here to preach, and his visit was written down.

Archaeologists have found about 3,000 graves around Birka. One famous grave held a warrior with weapons and a game board, and DNA testing in 2017 showed the warrior was a woman.

How it ended

Birka was abandoned around 975 CE. One idea is that the land slowly rose after the Ice Age, making the harbor too shallow. Trade also moved to other towns, like Sigtuna.

Key words

- merchant: a person who buys and sells goods
- amber: fossilized tree resin, often golden and used for jewelry
- missionary: a person sent to spread a religion

Wow facts

- A silver ring found in a grave has an Arabic inscription.
- People skated on the frozen lake using skates made of bone.
- A famous warrior's grave turned out to belong to a woman.

Talk about it

1. What do objects from faraway lands tell us about the Vikings?

2. Why is it important that DNA tests changed what we thought about the warrior grave?

Try this

Draw a map of Birka as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. **What kind of town was Birka?**
 - A. A Viking trading town
 - B. A Roman fort
 - C. A Maya city
 - D. A Greek temple
2. **What did DNA show about the famous warrior grave?**
 - A. The warrior was a woman
 - B. It was a horse
 - C. It was empty
 - D. It was a king from Rome
3. **What were Birka's ice skates made from?**
 - A. Animal bones
 - B. Steel
 - C. Plastic
 - D. Glass

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/birka/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. Birka was a major Viking trading center.
2. A. In 2017, DNA showed the warrior was a woman.
3. A. People made skates from animal bones.