

The Plants Used in a Viking Age Garden A.D. 800-1050

Summary

Premedieval horticulture in the periphery of Europe may show interesting connections with the development of gardens in the more central parts of the continent.

The Vikings

Overpopulation in the Scandinavian countries created the Viking society, whose tradesmen, settlers and sea warriors had a considerable influence on the European countries. In return, influenced by what they saw, they brought back goods of all kinds, probably also seeds and possibly plants.

Sources and data on gardens and garden plants

1. Literature : Eddio pomo, c. A.D. 700 - the late 1200s Sagas, medieval epic prose, written down A.D. 1150 1350. Both Icelandic.
2. Statute (laws and rules) : The Norwegian landscape (district) laws, the oldest dating back to c. A.D. 960, but only in writing in the 12th Cent. Enclosed gardens of various types (angelica, onion, cabbage etc.) were protected by law against theft and damage.
3. Archaeological finds : The most reliable source, but in the past little attention was paid to the plant fossils. The most important Norwegian find is the Oseberg ship burial, the mound excavated in 1904. Seeds of agricultural and horticultural plants were found and examined (Holmboe, 1927).

The plants

Based on the highly varied source material mentioned above, a list of names of plants found in Viking age gardens may be presented :

Angelica, *Angelica archangelica*
 Onion, *Allium* sp.
 Cabbage, *Brassica oleracea*
 Turnip, *Brassica rapa*
 Pea, *Pisum* sp.
 Bean, *Vicia faba*
 Cress, *Lepidum sativum*
 Hemp, *Cannabis sativa*
 Flax, *Linum usitatissimum*
 Woad, *Isatis tinctoria*
 Hop, *Humulus lupulus*
 Apple, *Malus* sp.
 Plum, *Prunus* sp.

Probably growing wild: Hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*), grown in a Viking age garden, or in the outfield. Walnut (*Juglans regia*) probably introduced as a tree, combined with import of fruit.

Living traditions

The small, enclosed garden containing plants for food and other practical uses, can still be seen in the Norwegian countryside. It is often rectangular or square in shape and is detached from the farm house. Is this the last remains of the Viking horticultural traditions, or is it the surviving prototype of a garden, found all over the world? Only international research can answer these questions.

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