

Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Berlin

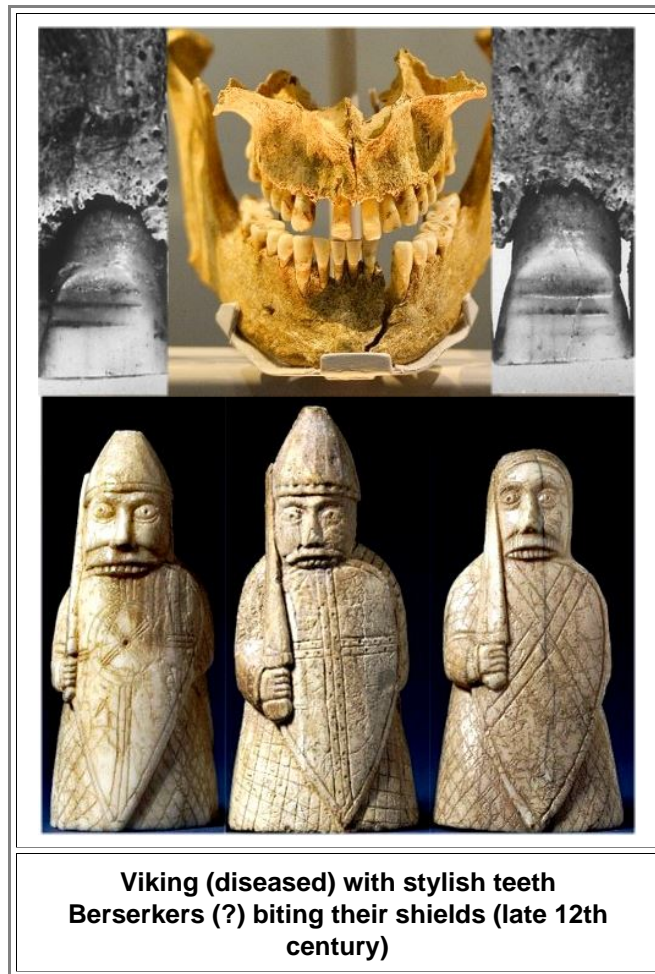
"The Vikings" Special Exhibition from Oct. 2014 - Jan. 2015 in the Martin-Gropius-Bau

I must report with regret that [once more](#) a major exhibition, orchestrated by a major museum, put form above function. The typical signs are

1. Bad lighting. The museum has succumbed to the "**keep-things-in-the-dark disease**" like so many others [1](#). Two examples for that:

- The famous skull with the filed teeth was put on a lightbox, i.e. illuminated from behind. The marks on the teeth were completely invisible.
- The equally famous figures from a game were not prominently displayed. These figures were carved from walrus tusks and show three guys, probably [berserkers](#), biting into their shields. It didn't matter, however. If you found them you couldn't see much; they were so badly illuminated that they were almost invisible.

Since you can't properly see these items in the exhibition, I show them below:

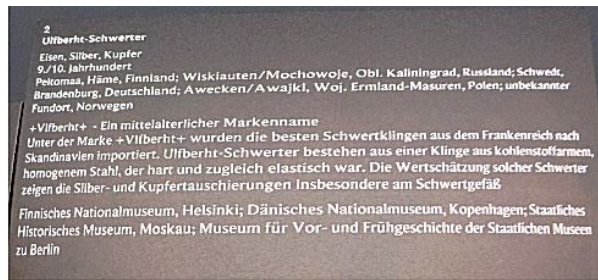


2. Wrong information. The pictures below tell it all:



Ulfberht swords in the exhibition

[Large picture](#)



Ulfberht swords and the explanation going with it

Translations:

+VLFBEHRT+ a medieval trade name.

The best sword blades from the Frankish empire were imported to Scandinavia under the trade name +VLFBEHRT+. Ulfberht swords consist of a blade made from carbon-poor, homogeneous steel that was hard and at the same time elastic. That those swords were highly valued is demonstrated by the silver- and copper engravings, especially on the hilt.

It is hard to put more nonsense into so few words. Let's see if you got it all:

- The swords were not imported but exported to Scandinavia. That's just a grammatical mistake. However, they weren't exported either in the normal sense of the word since this was [strictly forbidden](#).
- The blades are *carbon lean*? They are rather very high in carbon.
- Hard and elastic is nothing special for steel.
- The swords were valued because of the "Ulfberht" inscription, rather clumsily done in most cases, and not because of pretty noble metal parnaphelia.
- There is never a silver or copper engraving on an Ulfberht blade. The sword in the middle in the picture above is an exception. It looks like it has the whole "Ulfberht" inlaid in silver (in a garbled version), thus implying that it is a [late fake](#). However, it might be real "VLFBERHT". The silver was put there (painted on, more or less) by some over zealous museum curator in recent times.
- The Ulfberht swords shown (altogether 7) actually had rather plain hilts, while some of the normal swords had very elaborated hilts.

More to the Ulfberht's can be found [here](#).

No more need to be said, except that taking pictures is forbidden for no clear reason.

Nevertheless: Go see it, if you can. They do have a book!

1) Other museums / exhibitions that have succumbed to the "keep-things-in-the-dark disease" are

- [Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Berlin](#)
- [Württemberg State Museum](#)
- [Neues Museum Berlin](#)