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Víking — 'rower shifting'?

An etymological contribution[1]

There is an extensive literature on the etymology of *víking* f. 'freebooting voyage' and *víkingr* m. 'sea warrior', but none of the well-known suggestions are satisfactory. However, a more plausible explanation was presented by Bertil Daggfeldt as early as in 1983 (Daggfeldt 1983), but is not very well known (None of the following knows about it: Hødnebø 1987, Holm 1988, Hødnebø 1988, Bjorvand and Lindeman 2000: 1050–51, Grønvik 2004). Daggfeldt "suggests a possible derivation from Old Swedish *vika* ('turn, shift; Old Norse *vikja* [sic]) meaning the shifts of oarsmen (and also the distance at sea between two shifts). 'Vikings' would then be 'men rowing in shifts'." (Daggfeldt 1983: 92) I agree with Daggfeldt's idea, but his formulation of it can hardly be correct, so in the following, I will try to refine and complement it.

1. Other explanations and their shortcomings

First, I will discuss the most important of the earlier explanations. The most common theories are that *viking(r)* is derived:

1. From the feminine *vík* 'bay' — the Vikings would seek shelter in bays and attack merchant ships from there, or make land raids from there (Munch 1852: 455, Falk and Torp 1903–06: 982, Hellquist 1948: 1342. For further references, see Askeberg 1944: 115, note 2). In this theory, mainly the masculine *víkingr* is taken into account.
2. From *Vík(in)* f. 'The Norwegian Skagerrak coast' — the first Vikings came from there. (Hellberg 1980, Hødnebø 1987. For references to previous literature, see Askeberg 1944: 116, note 3). In this theory as well, mainly the masculine *víkingr* is taken into account.

[1] Oddvar Nes, University of Bergen, and Tori Heide, Minnesota, read through a preliminary version of this article and gave me valuable comments — Oddvar on my reasoning and Tori on my English. Thank you.

3. From the verb *víka*[2] in a sense 'withdraw, leave', referring to pirates who withdraw as soon as they have got their booty (Richthofen 1840: 1149, according to Askeberg 1944: 120). In this theory, too, mainly the masculine *víkingr* is taken into account.
4. From a feminine *vík* derived from the verb *vík(j)a*, with the meaning 'deviation, detour' (Askeberg 1944). This would be the original sense of the feminine *víking*, and from it, the masculine would be derived. A *víkingr* would then be 'a person who makes a detour from home' (Askeberg 1944: 181).
5. From the verb *vík(j)a* in a sense 'to travel, to go'. *Víkingr* would then mean 'a man who makes a journey abroad' (Munske 1964: 124). In this theory, again, mainly the masculine *víkingr* is taken into account.
6. From Old English *wīcing* *f./m. The Old English feminine is formed from the verb *wīcian* 'to lodge, take up one's quarters; to camp, encamp', referring to 'the act of settling (temporarily) in a place' (Grønvik 2004: 6, 8, 13). The masculine, on the other hand, is formed from the neuter *wīc* — which the verb *wīcian* is derived from — in the meaning 'a temporary abode, a camp, place where one stops, station' (ibid: 11). The reasoning behind both terms *wīcing* (*f. and m.) is that the Vikings often would camp ashore at night and dwell temporarily at places along the coasts. The words originate from the peaceful Merovingian age, when the sea voyages of the Norsemen were less warlike (ibid: 12). The Old Norse words are loan-words from Old English. (The noun *wīc*, which the verb *wīcian* is derived from, is a loan-word from Latin *vīcus* in the late Roman age.)

The explanations 3., 4. and 5. have a weak position compared to the other two, but are highly relevant to this article. For sources and other explanations, see Askeberg 1944, Hellberg 1980 and Hødnebø 1987. Explanations not mentioned here, are in those texts demonstrated to be unacceptable.

Now an evaluation of the above-mentioned suggestions: No. 1. has the problem that the Vikings could hardly be more connected to bays than other seafarers were, because all seafarers seek shelter in bays. Actually, according to the sources, the Vikings would typically operate

[2] I use the form *víka*, which was the most common Old Norwegian form of the verb. The forms *víkja*, *víkva* and *ýkva* are westerly and secondary forms, analogous from verbs like *syngva* (later *syngja*) and *søkkva* (Bjorvand and Lindeman 2000: 1050). Therefore, they are etymologically less interesting.

from islands and headlands, which are more easily defendable from non-seafarers (Askeberg 1944: 166–67). No. 2. has the problem that the sources give no indication whatsoever that the Vikings were associated with the Norwegian Skagerrak coast in particular (Cf. Hellberg's 58 page attempt to demonstrate such an association.). In addition, people from *Vik(in)* are called *víkverjar* or *víkverir* in Old Norwegian as well as Old Icelandic sources (Fritzner 1883–96 III: 943, cf. Askeberg 1944: 116). It is also a problem that the name *Vík* sometimes has a definite article, *Víkin* (Askeberg 1944: 172, Aune 1997). This indicates that the name is not very old (Askeberg 1944: 172, cf. Rygh 1898: 12), but in English sources, *wīcing* can probably be traced back to the end of the 7th century (Hellberg 1980: 59), and for phonological reasons probably existed in the Anglo-Frisian protolanguage, possibly as early as in the 4th century (see below). This makes it unlikely that *víking(r)* / *wīcing* is derived from the place-name *Vík(in)*. The place-name *Vík(in)* is hardly that old, and there is no reason to believe that people from that area played a prominent role in the naval operations of that time. Another problem is mentioned by Hellberg, himself a supporter of the place-name derivation theory: In Old Norse, *ing*-derivations are made only from composite place-names, like *hvalnesingr*. Derivations from non-composite place-names have *-ungr*, and therefore, people from the *Vík(in)* area should be called **víkungar* (Hellberg 1980: 70–71). To solve this problem, Hellberg suggests that the formation *víkingr* is borrowed from Old Danish, which did not have such a limitation. But this is not convincing. A more serious problem, which explanation 1. as well as explanation 2. faces, is the relationship between the two forms *víkingr* and *víking*. If *víkingr* is primary, how could *víking* be derived from it? Askeberg says: "I do not know any example of a masculine *ing*-derivation having given origin to a feminine *nomen actionis* that expresses the person's action, and such a formation seems unreasonable. A *hildingr* m. 'king' can not be supposed to have given origin to a **hilding* f. 'the quality of being a king' etc" (Translated from Askeberg 1944: 173[3]). Neither Hellberg nor Hødnebø has presented a convincing solution of this problem. Their main argument is that the other explanations of *víking(r)* are also imperfect (cf. Hellberg 1980: 77–78 and Hødnebø 1988: 149–50).

Explanation 3. is basically that *víkingr* means "withdrawer". I do not

[3] "Något exempel på att en maskulin *-ing*-avledning gett upphov till ett aktionellt femininum, som uttrycker personens handling, känner jag inte till, och en sådan bildning förefaller också orimlig. Ett *hildingr* m. 'konung' kan icke tänkas ha gett upphov till ett **hilding* f. 'egenskapen att vara konung' osv."

find this convincing, because withdrawal can hardly have been the most characteristic trait of the Vikings. Explanation 5. has a more formal semantic problem: The verb *víka* is not supported in the meaning 'to travel, to go'. There are also formal objections to these two explanations. Askeberg points out that deverbative *ing*-derivations are considered younger than the word *víkingr*, and that it is unlikely that feminine verbal abstracts in so early times could be formed from strong verbs, like *víka*. He also says that if *víking* is derived from the verb *víka*, we should expect variants **víkving* and **ýkving*, because the verb *víkja* has parallel forms *víkva* and *ýkva*. But such variants are not known. (Askeberg 1944: 174–75) Hellberg has another objection: Derivations from strong verbs get the suffix *-ning*, so if *víking* was derived from *víka*, it should have been **víkning* (Hellberg 1980: 75, based on Olson 1916: 441).

Explanation 4. faces the problem that the basis for it, the feminine **vík* 'deviation', with a long vowel, does not exist. The word is well known, but it has a short vowel, *vik*. Fritzner's single example of it with a long vowel is probably an error (Hødnebø 1987: 10, Hødnebø 1988: 147, cf. Fritzner 1883–96 III: 941). *Víking(r)* must be derived from a word with a long *i* (*í*).

According to theory no. 6, *víkingr* would essentially mean 'a camper, a short-time dweller'. But this can hardly have characterized the Vikings, because it is not likely that the Vikings more than other seafarers of their time would prefer to sleep ashore or for other reasons dwell temporarily at places. Another problem is that the noun *wīc*, which the masculine *wīcing* is supposed to be derived from, does not have a meaning 'a temporary dwelling' as opposed to 'a permanent dwelling, farm, town'. To the contrary, *wīc* encompasses all these meanings (Hall 1960: 406). Actually, Wadstein, who also suggested that *wīcing* m. was derived from *wīc*, suggested that it originally meant 'city dweller'! (Then 'seafaring merchant' then 'pirate'. Hellberg 1980: 26.) On this background, it seems unlikely that people would use a derivation from *wīc* to characterize non-permanent dwellers. In addition, it appears unreasonable to assume different origins for the feminine word and the masculine word (**wīcing* f. from the verb *wīcian*, and *wīcing* m. from the neuter *wīc*.).

2. The rower-shifting explanation

Daggfeldt develops Askeberg's explanation (no. 4. above), and suggests: "a Viking — a shift-rower, 'a person who recedes at the rowing'"

(Daggfeldt 1983: 92[4]). Daggfeldt's starting point for this is the Old Norse nautical distance unit, *vika sjóvar* (*sjávar*), which literally meant "a sea's shift", referring to the distance covered between two shifts of rowers. Daggfeldt points out that there is a linguistic link between the feminine *vika* and the Old Swedish verb *vika* (Old Norse *vík*[*j*]*a*). Apparently, to shift at rowing was referred to by this verb, which means 'recede, turn to the side, give way, yield'. On this basis, Daggfeldt suggests that the masculine *víkingr* is derived from the feminine *vika*. This would fit because "rowing was a heavy and tough work that during long periods of time would dominate a Viking's life", Daggfeldt argues (translated from ibid.: 93). Daggfeldt also refers to West Germanic evidence that the word "Viking" is older than the Viking age, and mentions that the word occurs in "the Old English poem Widsith from the 8th century, which deals with circumstances in the 6th and 7th centuries" (translated from ibid.: 93). On this basis, Daggfeldt connects the word "Viking" with the Migration period: "The phenomenon, "The Viking raid", itself is also supported in the literature long before our Viking age. Forays with rowing vessels with a warlike purpose, among other things, were done within the West Germanic area, the British Isles, the North sea coast and the coast of the southern Baltic already during the Migration period." (translated from ibid.: 93[5])

I agree with Daggfeldt's essential idea. Actually, Jon Bojer Godal and I were developing this same idea when I realized that Daggfeldt got at it first. However, Daggfeldt can hardly be right in the details, and there are certain things to add to his presentation.

Daggfeldt only takes into account the masculine, *víkingr*. The feminine *víking* is as important, and it cannot be derived from the masculine. About this there can be no doubt, cf. Askeberg's statement above. On the other hand, a masculine *víkingr* 'sea warrior' could well be derived from a feminine *víking* denoting an activity. Old Norse parallels to such a development would be *vellingr* m. 'pottage' from **velling* f. 'boiling'; *geldingr* m. 'a castrated ox or ram' from *gelding* f. 'castration'; *endrbœtingr* m. 'a thing repaired' from *endrbœting* f. 'making good again'; *klíningr* m. 'buttered bread' from **klíning* f. 'buttering of bread'; *fœðingr* m. 'a person born in a certain place' from *fœðing* f. 'birth'; and *fléttingr* m. 'braids' from **flétting* f. 'braiding'. On the basis of this the feminine *víking* should

[4] "viking – skiftroddare, 'en som viker vid rodden'".

[5] "Själva företeelsen vikingatåg finns också belagd i litteraturen långt före vår vikingatid. Strandhugg med roddfarkoster i bl.a. krigiskt syfte gjordes inom det västgermanska området, de brittiska öarna, nordsjökusten och i södra Östersjön, redan under folkvandringstid."

be the primary form, with the probable meaning 'shifting'. In that case, to *fara í víking* originally meant literally "to go shifting". The masculine *víkingr* would then be secondary, derived from the abstract feminine denoting the activity. The fact that in the oldest sources, the Old English and Old Frisian ones, only the concrete masculine (= Old Norse *víkingr*) is supported, does not contradict this, because only a fraction of the words that existed are handed down to us.

Although the verb *víka* and the feminine *vika* belong to the same root, *víking* (or *víkingr*) cannot be derived from *vika*, like Daggfeldt suggests, because *víkingr* has a long stem vowel (*í*), whereas *vika* has a short one (*i*). It makes no difference that the variation in vowel length is only an ablaut shift, like in *skríða* str. vb. 'to move slowly forward' and *skriða* f. 'an avalanche'; and *ríða* str. vb. 'to ride' and *(kveld)riða* f. 'a (night)rider (a witch)'. If one added the suffix *-ing* to *vika*, one would get **viking* not *víking*. Accordingly, if *víking* is derived from the root *vík-* that we find in *vika* f. and *víka* vb., it can formally only be derived from the verb itself or from the feminine *vík* 'bay' which is a derivation from the verb. The first alternative seems tempting at first glance, because the formation of abstract feminines from verbs by the suffix *-ing* is very common in Germanic languages. A feminine *víking* 'shifting' derived from the verb *víka* 'to shift' would then be straight-forward — like for instance the English noun "running", derived from the verb "to run." Cf. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon's remark that the feminine *víking* seems to be derived from a verb (1989: 1135) and Grønvik's similar statement (Grønvik 2004: 6). Compare also Middle Low German *wikinge* 'Weichen; Verzicht, Cession' (Lübben 1888:581), which seems to be derived from the verb *wiken*, and likewise Modern Norwegian *vikjing* f., corresponding to the verb *vikja / vika* (Aasen 1873: 931). But the age of the formation *víking* makes this explanation improbable, as Askeberg and Hellberg point out (see above). As it seems, the Proto-Germanic suffixes **-ingō*, **-ungō* were originally used for forming abstracts from adjective stems and noun stems. Then, secondarily, they were also used for derivations from weak verbs (because a verb that was derived from the starting-point noun could be [mis]understood as the basis for the *ing-/ung*-derivation), and finally for derivations from strong verbs (Olson 1916: 439–40). Old English was still at the second stage, with *ing- (ung)*-derivations only from weak verbs (ibid.: 440. This is not an argument against Grønvik's theory, because Old English *wīcian* is a weak verb.). In Old Norse, there are probably no attested *ing*-derivations from strong verbs (cf. Askeberg 1944: 175. I agree with Askeberg that Falk's examples *heiting* f. 'threat' and *hverfing[r]/*

hvirfing[*r*] 'a circle' are uncertain, because they could be derived from *heit* n. pl. 'promises, threats' and *hverfr* adj. 'shifty'.). When this kind of derivation appears in Old Norse, it has the form *-ning* (cf. Hellberg above). — As we have seen, in English sources, the word *wīcing* (m.) can probably be traced to the end of the 7th century (Hellberg 1980: 59). But probably the word is far older (although Daggfeldt's argument [cited above] is invalid; the fact that "Viking" occurs in stories about circumstances in the 6th and 7th centuries does not demonstrate that the word existed in the 6th or 7th century). In Old Frisian codices from the 13th century, which probably originate from the 11th century, the form is *witzing* and the like (Askeberg 1944: 141–45). The *tz* derives from the *k* palatalized before front vowels. This innovation is considered to originate from the time of "die englisch-friesische Gemeinsprache" (Siebs 1891: 746), which seems to be before the emigrants left for England (cf. Kluge 1891: 836), because Frisian and English have the innovation in common (but in Old English *wīcing*, the pronunciation of the *c* does not emerge from the spelling[6]) and because in some words, the palatalization presupposes an *i* that was early apocoped in English (ibid). Luick believes that the palatalization originates from the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century (Luick 1921: 266–67). When we consider that only words and word-forms present in the language *before* the palatalization have got the palatalized pronunciation (for instance not *kin* and *king*, which got the front vowel from the later *i*-umlaut; < **kunja* and < **kuningaz*), this means that the word "Viking" (**wīking*/**wīkingō*?) probably was present in West Germanic in the 4th century — consequently before the Germanic invasion of England from around the year 450 onwards. At such an early stage, it seems improbable that a derivation with the suffix **-ing*(*ō*) could be made from a strong verb (**wīkan*) in West Germanic or Proto-Nordic.

There is, however, another possibility. *Vika* in *vika sjóvar* 'the distance between to shifts of rowers' is derived from the verb *víka*. Derived from this verb is also the feminine *vík* (Bjorvand and Lindeman 2000: 1049). In literary times it is found only in the sense 'bay', but when it originally was derived from the verb, the meaning obviously was close to that of the verb. Compare the following strong feminines which, like *vík*, correspond to the singular past tense of the verbs that they are derived from (*Vík* originally had a diphthong; cf. ibid and the past tense *veik*, from *víka*.):

[6] Modern English does not have a palatalized pronunciation in the word *Viking*, but this form of it is a modern loan from Old Norse, cf. the single *v*.

ríða 'to ride'	*reið* 'riding; wagon'
klífa 'to climb'	*kleif* 'steep slope'
bíta 'to bite'	*beit* 'grazing; pasturage'
líta 'to look'	*leit* 'a search'
skríða 'to move slowly forward'	*skreið* 'moving forward; a flock /shoal moving forward'
drífa 'to drive like spray'	*dreif* 'scattering, a spray'
grípa 'to grasp'	*greip* 'a grasp'
sníða 'to slice'	*sneið* 'a slice'
brjóta 'to break'	*braut* 'a road' (made by "breaking forward")
fljúga 'to fly'	*Flaug* 'flying, flight'
kljúfa 'to cleave, split'	*klauf* 'cloven hoof'
rjúfa 'rip up'	*rauf* 'a rift, hole'

As we can see, the nouns refer to the act of carrying out the verbs, or something or somebody carrying out the verbs, or something resulting from carrying out the verbs. (Compare Olson's statement about the group that *vík* belong to, 1916: 127 ff., 341 ff., 363 ff.) The essence of the verb *víka* (*wīkan*) seems to be 'move or step aside, turn to the side' (cf. Fritzner 1883–96 III: 942 f., Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1957: 716 f., Söderwall 1884: 968, Aasen 1873: 931, Bosworth and Toller 1898: 1213, Askeberg 1944: 180–81). Hence, a *vík* is actually a place where the land turns aside. (Hellquist 1948: 1341 and Askeberg 1944: 178 have approximately this explanation.) A corresponding meaning of the verb was still reflected in Old Norse, in the idiom *landi víkr* (impersonal construction) 'the land recedes' (cf. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1957: 717). On this background, the original or essential meaning of *vík* might have been 'something turning aside' or even 'the act of turning aside', i.e. more general meanings than the passed-down *vík* 'bay'. This may be supported by the fact that in Norwegian place-names, *vík* in many cases refers to other topographical formations than bays, like river bends and inward curves on hills (Rygh 1898: 85, cf. Askeberg 1944: 178). If **wīk(ō)* in the 4th century had such a general meaning 'something turning aside' or 'the act of turning aside', then possibly **wīking(ō)* 'turning aside, shifting' could be derived from it. In that case, the meaning of the derivation comes very close to the word that it is derived from, but that is not unusual with this kind of derivation. Compare Old Norse *harmr* 'grief, sorrow' and *hǫrmung* 'grief, affliction'; *háð* 'scoffing, mocking' and *háðung* 'shame, disgrace'; *fundr* 'finding, discovery' and *funding* 'finding'; and *heit* 'promises, threats' and *heiting* 'a threat', etc.

I would now like to add some aspects to the semantics of this inter-

pretation. In my opinion, it is crucial for the "shifting" etymology that the word "Viking" originates from the time before the sail was taken into use by the Germanic peoples. This makes the background of the word quite different from the Viking age background that we usually imagine. In those days, rowing gave the *only* propulsion, and long voyages, even across the North sea, were undertaken by rowing (cf. Myhre 1996). On such voyages, the shifting of rowers must have been a dominant ingredient. The longer one rows, and the more tired one gets, the more the shifting of rowers will dominate ones impression of the journey. When rowing across an ocean (like the North sea), the shifting of rowers will be even more central to the impression of the voyage, because it is not possible to anchor and get a good night's sleep. It could be possible to use a drift anchor and let the crew sleep, but because an ocean crossing is dangerous and there was no weather forecast, one would probably want to take advantage of good conditions and keep going non-stop. In that case, even the nights would be cut into shifts of probably approximately two hours. (An average cruising speed of 3 knots would be realistic, and then it would take a couple of hours to cover an "average *vika sjóvar*" induced from the information of Rasmussen et al. 1975. Cf. Morcken 1983: 258.) On this background, it should be possible that this kind of voyage was referred to by the shifting of rowers. This would be parallel to the Scandinavian reference to "fishing" as "rowing". In many places on the coast of Northern Norway today, a question like "Skal du ro?", literally "Are you going rowing?" is not even ambiguous. In most situations, the interpretation "Are you going fishing?" is the only one possible. Also in Modern Faroese and Modern Icelandic, "to row" (*rógva, róa*) in many cases means "to fish (in an open boat)" (cf. Jacobsen and Matras 1961: 335 and Sigfús Blöndal 1920: 657). This is because although the rowing is only a consequence of the intended activity, it would dominate most fishing trips in a traditional craft because the greater part of it would be spent rowing. (On rare occasions only would it be possible to sail most of the distance and back again.) Another parallel is the Swedish reference to "studying, getting an education" as "reading". "I study in Paris" would be expressed as "Jag läser i Paris", literally "I read in Paris", even if the actual study contains only a minor portion of reading (like for instance on the study of the fine arts). Even in this case, the activity is referred to by (what is usually) the dominant ingredient of it.

Even if rowing and hence shifting of rowers must have been far more important in people's notions of long-distance sea voyages when people had no sails, "rowing" and "rowers" is still very important in the medieval

terminology of the *leiðangr* 'fleet of conscripted warships' (Old Danish *leding*, Old Swedish *leþonger*). In Old Norse, a crew member of a warship was called a *háseti* (Fritzner 1883–96 I: 739), literally 'rowlock sitter', or *hǫmlumaðr* (ibid II: 183), literally 'rowlock man'. The original meaning of *hamla* (cas. obl. *hǫmlu*) is 'oar loop'. In Old Swedish, the word for this is *hamna*, and in Old Danish *havnæ*, and these words became the words for the administrative unit that the *leþonger/leding* system was based upon. In Hälsingland in Northern Sweden, the word for this administrative unit was *har* (= Old Norse *hár*), literally 'rowlock'. (Hafström, et al. 1961: 96–97) The interesting thing is that despite the fact that the whole point was to have ships with *soldiers* on them, the soldiers were called "rowlock men" and similar things. This could originate from the rowing-ship times (such terminology can be very conservative, cf. that crew members in Norway have been called *håsetar* until modern times, on the *jekter* [f. pl.], which are impossible to row!). But it could also reflect the conditions of the Viking Age or the Middle Ages, because while merchants can simply wait for favourable winds, a navy needs to perform its operations when it is needed, and thus, in pre-engine times, rowing power was imperative.

Vika 'the distance between two shifts of rowers' demonstrates that the verb *vika* (*wīkan* etc.) could be used in the sense 'to shift'. This needs an explanation, because I find no examples of this verb meaning 'to shift'. The explanation is probably that the essence of the verb is 'to move or step aside, to turn to the side', and this is how the shifting of rowers would be done. The shifting would probably be done without stopping rowing, because there is no need to stop, and in many situations stopping will be inconvenient or unacceptable. In addition, if one stops in order to shift, everybody will have to shift simultaneously, at least on one side (or many of the rowers will hit their mates in their backs). But from my own experience from rowing traditional Norwegian 40–50 feet *fembør(d)ingar* (m. pl.) and Viking ship replicas (with as many as 18 people rowing at the time), I know that on voyages it is hard to get the whole shift ready completely simultaneously. There will usually be someone who has forgotten to pass water, or is not finished repairing his pants, or whom the skipper needs to see, and so on. During a two-hour rowing shift (which a *vika sjóvar* probably was), sometimes some of the men will need to get away for similar reasons. This will certainly be the case if the ship does not have enough men for two full shifts, because in that case not all the men can change each time. Because of this, one would probably shift in a way similar to how it is

often done on a *fembør(d)ing*: While rowing is going on, a rested rower will slip down on the thwart beside the tired rower, near the board, where the moving oars will not hit him. As soon as he has grasped the oar, the tired rower will (when the other ones are reaching forward for the next stroke) move aside on the thwart, towards the centre of the boat (and thus get away from the moving oars — not unlike what one does when skipping). At the same time, the rested rower will move over slightly to the spot where his mate was sitting. In this way, shifting of rowers is "seamless", and the essence of it is the moving aside, which is the essential meaning of the verb *víka* (**wīkan* etc.). This would be the original sense of the feminine *víking*.

Then I would like to sum up the arguments for the oar-shifting etymology of *víking(r)*:

- None of the other explanations are acceptable. The sources do not associate the Vikings with *Vík(in)* or with bays, and if such an association was attested, it could only account for the masculine *víkingr*, not the feminine abstract *víking*. There is no reason to believe that Scandinavian seafarers were campers or short-time dwellers more than other seafarers were, and if they were, a derivation from the word *wīc* 'a camp, dwelling, town' would not distinguish them as such. Finally, we must assume that the feminine *víking* and the masculine *víkingr* are derived from the same source.
- The oar-shifting etymology solves the formal problems, because then, the feminine is primary, and from that, the masculine can easily be derived.
- We know that the word "Viking" originates from the times before the sail was taken into use in Northern Europe. The oar-shifting etymology is based upon a positive linguistic connection between the root *vík-* (as in *víking[r]*) and a phenomenon central to pre-sail sea voyages, namely the shifting of rowers, reflected in the word *vika*. Thus, this etymology fits the age of the word(s) and the seafaring technology of that age.

According to this etymology, the association of the word "Viking" with Nordic peoples is secondary. It seems reasonable to assume that originally, a word **wīking(ō)* f. 'shifting (of rowers)' would refer to any sea voyage (but perhaps warlike sea voyages in particular); and **wīking(aR)* m. (sg.) probably to any man who went on such a voyage. In the oldest English sources (as presented by Askeberg 1944: 146–49), *wīcing* does not seem to refer to Nordic peoples in particular. This is what one should

The Nydam ship was found in Southern Jutland in 1863. It has recently been dated via dendrochronology to 310–320 AD, and the deposition in the bog where it was found is likely to have taken place 340–350 AD. The picture shows a German replica of the ship, built in 1935. (From Åkerlund 1963: 47. Photograph in Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum.)

expect, because in the Migration period (which the oldest sources tell about), Nordic peoples were not the foremost sea-warriors. To the contrary, it was the West Germanic-speaking peoples who rowed to England and conquered the country. Yet we know that in this period, there was extensive contact across the North Sea and along the shores of Northern Europe. Therefore, and because in the 4th century, Proto-Nordic and West Germanic were rather close, it seems to be futile to ask where the word "Viking" originated within the North sea area.

If the term *víking* (**wīking[ō]*) originates from the 4th century, then ships like the Nydam Ship would be the "Viking ships" in the original sense of the word.

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Abstract

This article supports the essence of Daggfeldt's little known 1983 suggestion that there is a connection between the word *víkingr* and the nautical distance unit *vika* f., which originally denoted the distance between two shifts of rowers. "Vikings" originally meant 'men rowing in shifts', Daggfeldt argues, and points out that the word in Old English sources is supported in pre-sail times. But while Daggfeldt only mentions the concrete masculine *víkingr*, which he derives directly from *vika* f., Heide argues that the feminine abstract *víking* is primary and cannot be derived from *vika*. It can only be derived from the verb *vík(j)a* 'move or step aside, turn to the side', which *vika* f. is derived from, or from the feminine *vík* 'bay', which is derived from the verb and consequently has an essential meaning 'something turning aside' or 'the act of turning aside'. The latter is the most probable, because *vík(j)a* is a strong verb and *ing*-derivations from strong verbs seem to be a late innovation, and for phonological reasons, the word "Viking" probably was present in West Germanic already in the 4th century, Heide argues. In that case, the masculine concrete's association with Nordic peoples is secondary, while the feminine abstract may have had the meaning 'warlike sea voyage' all the time. Because of the early dating of the word(s), there should be no reason to postulate borrowing of it/them, because Proto-Nordic and West Germanic were so closely related.