

# OLD UPPSALA AND BEYOND

June 29, 2012 Asa M Larsson Anglo-Saxon, Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Early Medieval, Excavation, Iron Age, Medieval, Osteology, Prehistory, Viking Archaeology, Åsa M Larsson, County Museum, Europe, floor layer, Gamla Uppsala, Germanic paganism, headache, Iron Age Europe, Jonas Wikborg, Kerstin Westrin, Medieval literature, National Heritage Board, SAU, Scandinavia, Sofia Prata, Sweden, the Heritage, Tumulus, Uppland, Uppland County Museum, Uppsala, Uppsala County Board, Vendel, Viking, Viking Age cemetery



*Kerstin Westrin and Jonas Wikborg, assist projectleader, excavating a pit house at Old Uppsala. Olle Heimer is looking through the contents of the floor layer. Photo: Asa M Larsson*

Rescue excavations – the curse and boon of our profession. We may bleed for the heritage sites that are lost forever, but without the expansion of modern society we would get very little chance to peek into prehistory on a grand scale. This summer there are a lot of archaeologists crawling around Gamla (Old) Uppsala in Sweden, the idyllic suburb north of present day Uppsala, where the impressive great burial mounds of some undisclosed Iron Age VIPs still stand.

Urbanisation came late to this part of Northern Europe, but Uppsala was probably one of the first places in Sweden where this happened, sometime in the Early Middle Ages (or Late Iron Age as

the period is still called here in Scandinavia). Exactly when – and how – is a matter of fierce debate, so you can imagine the gleeful joy with which archaeologists here greeted the fact that the railroad drawn straight through Gamla Uppsala needed to be expanded. It's a massive project involving thousands of square meters of Iron Age and Medieval settlement sites as well as an Iron Age cemetery. It is also one of the most protected heritage areas in Sweden, so the project is a **collaborative effort** involving our own firm SAU, the Uppland County Museum, as well as the archaeological unit of the National Heritage Board. The more the merrier!

Not that *I* get to stick my fingers into the rich, dark culture layers with amulet rings and bear claw clasps, stuck behind a desk as I am doing administrative work as usual. But I manage to sneak out now and then and visit my colleagues in the field. So far the SAU team have found parts of a smithy and several pit houses, as well as long houses from the Vendel and Viking periods (c. 550-750 CE and 750-1050 CE respectively). The cremation cemetery that was identified in a field during last year's test excavations has turned out to be much larger and more well preserved than we had expected – which is fun but, as we all know, also a bit of a headache for the County Museum that oversees the excavation. The osteologists from SAU will have their hands full, analysing all the cremated human and animal bones.

Still, contrary to popular opinion not all archaeologists are out in the field during the summer. Some have been chained to their desk to finish up a report on sites in that we excavated a few years ago. These Bronze and Early Iron Age sites and burials in Northeastern Uppland were established during a period where the region changed from archipelago, to coast, to inland due to the shore displacement going on since the end of the Ice Age. Today we were frantically double



*Sofia Prata, osteologist at SAU, is excavating a burial urn with a cremation from the Viking Age cemetery at Old Uppsala. Photo: Asa M Larsson*

and triple checking the text and illustrations before handing in the manuscript to the Uppsala County Board, who will decide if it can be published.



*Celebrating with ice coffee and cherries – 'cause we earned it!*

Afterwards we celebrated. On Monday we continue with other projects at hand, or in a few cases, actually take a vacation...

If you find yourselves in the vicinity of Uppsala this summer and autumn, be sure to visit us – we have guided tours in English as well.