

# Why so Many Viking Age Swords in Norway?

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*In memoriam Kasper Andresen (1925-2011)  
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## Abstract

*The overwhelming number of 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century swords found in Norway has tentatively been explained by the generous Norwegian burial rites. This explanation holds well when opposed to the Christian countries where grave goods were disapproved<sup>1</sup>. The explanation does not hold good when compared to the low number of swords found in other pagan countries, not even Sweden and Denmark, which were neighbors and culturally related to Norway.*

*Logically it does not seem reasonable that Norway should have had so many more weapons than Sweden and Denmark, not to mention the military superpower Frankia. All the same, it seems that a comparatively rather larger part of the adult and free men<sup>2</sup> were buried with weapons in Norway than in other countries.*

*Many swords reflect many swords, but few swords do not reflect few swords. Few swords reflect only how many swords were buried in graves and hoards, and also how many have been found and even taken care of, not how many there once were.*

*None of these thoughts explain why so many Norwegians were buried with weapons in the 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore I sought advice from my retired colleague Oddmund Farbrege, who for many years has studied the largest Iron Age cemetery in Norway, on Vang in the inland valley Oppdal, 120 km. south of Trondheim.*

## *Introductory note (Anne Stalsberg)*

During conferences in Torun, Poland, in December 2001 and in Sibiu, Romania, in October 2010, I presented papers on the question why so many 8<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> century swords have been found in Norway, using swords with blades marked Vlfberht as example, since 44 out of 166 known Vlfberht swords in Europe have been found in Norway. The question about the Vlfberht blades can, however, not be answered isolated from the total number of swords; when it is explained why so many swords *in general* have

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<sup>1</sup> Geibig visited some 600 museums and collections in West Germany when preparing his dissertation (Müller-Wille in the *Vorword des Ausgebers* in Geibig 1991).

<sup>2</sup> According to medieval Norwegian laws free and adult men were obliged to show their weapons at the weapon assemblies (Solberg).