

# SWEDEN

## Birka and Hovgården

### Brief description

The Birka archaeological site is located on Björkö Island in Lake Mälaren and was occupied in the 9th and 10th centuries. Hovgården is situated on the neighbouring island of Adelsö. Together, they make up an archaeological complex which illustrates the elaborate trading networks of Viking-Age Europe and their influence on the subsequent history of Scandinavia. Birka was also important as the site of the first Christian congregation in Sweden, founded in 831 by St Ansgar.

### 1. Introduction

**Year(s) of Inscription** 1993

#### Agency responsible for site management

- The National Heritage Board in Sweden  
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website: [www.raa.se](http://www.raa.se)

### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria** C (iii), (iv)

#### Justification provided by the State Party

As the most extensive and complex prehistoric site in Sweden, Birka is unique as a well-defined proto-town, mentioned already in Frankish sources c. 870 AD. The earliest known Christian congregation in Sweden is known to have been founded there by St Ansgar in 831. Its situation on a small island has preserved the entire site from modern planning and exploitation. The since 1931 on-going conservation work and its historic relevance makes it a well-known tourist-site. The historic connection with Birka and the since the medieval period well-known historic events at Alsnö hus make Adelsö Hovgården together with Birka to a unique unit in Swedish cultural history. *[sic]*

#### As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Qualities: The Birka-Hovgården complex is an important archaeological ensemble illustrative of the elaborate trading networks of Viking Age Europe Scandinavia, and their influence on the

subsequent history of it is also important as the site of the first evangelization of this part of Sweden.

Recommendation: that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria iii and iv:

Criterion iii The Birka-Hovgården complex bears exceptionally well preserved testimony to the wide-ranging trade network established by the Vikings during the two centuries of their phenomenal economic and political expansion.

Criterion iv Birka is one of the most complete and undisturbed examples of a Viking trading settlement of the 8th-10th centuries AD.

#### Committee Decision

Session (1993): the Committee inscribed the site on the World Heritage List under criteria (iii) and (iv).

- Statement of Significance does not adequately define and reflect the outstanding universal value of the site
- Text proposed by State Party
- UNESCO official description of site should be improved: State Party has provided suggestion

#### Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: a buffer zone has been defined
- An extension of the buffer zone is being considered

#### Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained
- No foreseen changes

### 3. Protection

#### Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- The Plan and Building Code (PBL); the General Plan; the cultural areas of national interest in the County of Stockholm
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

#### Actions proposed:

- Design Birka as a cultural reservation
- Timeframe: during 2005 a discussion will be commenced
- Action to be taken at a regional level

#### 4. Management

##### Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction (entrance fee), religious use, rural landscape, research and education purposes

##### Management/Administrative Body

- No formal steering group. Management through an "Administrative Board", not formally constituted
- Management by the State Party; management under protective legislation; management under contractual agreement between the State Party and a third party
- No site manager, but plans to appoint one
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national
- The current management system is not sufficiently effective

#### 5. Management Plan

- No management plan
- A management plan will be completed and adopted by December 2005
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: The National Heritage Board - the Antiquarian Technical Department and the Unit for Cultural Heritage Tourism

#### 6. Financial Resources

##### Financial situation

- Governmental administrative appropriation; entrance fees and the museum shop; external contributions through sponsors and funds
- Extra funding has not been drawn from World Heritage status
- Funding available for the adequate management of the site: insufficient;

#### 7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 1

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation, management, visitor management
- Average: interpretation; education
- Bad: promotion

#### 8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- There are introduction courses at employment; accessibility to the expertise and staff functions of the National Heritage Board, such as conservation, management of ancient monuments, web and personal issues; individual improvement plans are not practiced, but if the need arises shorter in-service training or other knowledge enhancing measures can be offered

#### 9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 62,000 in 2004 - tendency first increasing, but then slowly decreasing again and now less than at inscription
- Visitor facilities: on Birka: Guide activity; guideposts; footpaths and publications and maps for private exploration; museum; museum shop; café and restaurant; toilets, showers and washing facilities; guest port: at Hovgården: Guideposts; guide activity; café and dry toilet
- No tourism/visitor management plan

#### 10. Scientific Studies

- Studies related to the value of the site; archaeological surveys; visitor management; refuse and drainage investigation, ground care plan for part of the accessible area
- Scientific studies and surveys are the basis for the conservation work in Birka. One of the most important reasons for building the Birka museum was to allow the latest excavations and local research results to be mirrored in the exhibitions

#### 11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- There are not enough signs referring to the World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: local authorities
- Need for awareness raising
- No special events and exhibitions concerning the site's World Heritage status
- Web site available
- No local participation

**Education, information and awareness building activities**

- Targeted programmes for school children are offered to the shipping companies co-operating with the National Heritage Board at Birka and Hovgården. The programmes are intended for children of the age group 11 –12 years

**12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)****Reactive monitoring reports**

- N/A

**Conservation interventions**

- Landscape care, care of ancient monuments, forest care and public measures
- Present state of conservation: patchy

**Threats and Risks to site**

- Development pressure; environmental pressure; natural disaster; number of inhabitants; visitor/tourism pressure; lack of a research plan
- Within the buffer zone there is a certain risk of exploitation; exposed area regarding hazard of ground or forest fire; there is an increasing amount of traffic by leisure boats and regular passenger vessels in the strait between Birka and Adelsö. Too high speeds can lead to erosion of shorelines; transports of environmentally hazardous products also occur within the monument area and the buffer zone; the use of commercial fertiliser in the farming on the island may lead to leakage and over-fertilisation of certain parts of the island; in the fairway just outside of Birka, inside the buffer zone, some 4000 of these ships pass yearly to load or unload their cargo. On Björkö the risk of depopulation is a current threat since only ten people are registered on the island. If the island was to be totally desolate of its sedentary around-the-year living population, the natural use of the landscape would change and the area would lose continuous supervision and surveillance; a high frequency of visitors, especially in combination with unsuitable weather conditions like dry or too wet summers, the area runs a risk of ground wear. Changes in the agricultural support can in the future render industries unprofitable for single businessmen, which would alter the prerequisites for maintaining a continuous activity on the site; the lack of a research plan might lead to the loss of control over the archaeological excavations and that the antiquarian and research value are dug away

**Actions taken**

- Only in connection with the preparatory work with the periodic reporting report the above mentioned list of major risks and threats posed on the World Heritage has been phrased and compiled. We wish to create realistic and tenable measures to avoid them and the intention is therefore to include them in our maintenance plan

**13. Monitoring**

- No monitoring programme
- The National Heritage Board will initiate a project where a collected grasp of greater force than previously will be applied to the World Heritage Birka and Hovgården. The work aims at establishing clear and tenable visions and goals for Birka as a World Heritage. In order to work along the lines delimited both long- and short-term plans strategies will be established. Within this framework a formal system of directing should be established, including the measuring points for this should be discussed and possibly established

**14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions**

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, building a museum on the site
- Strengths of management: great efforts have been made to communicate the values of the World Heritage site. The building of a museum on the premises and guiding on an extensive scale has enabled the public to interpret the site and the National Heritage Board to conduct pedagogical activities. With this enormous interest in the site, the quality of the ground care has increased and a larger part of the site and its buffer zone is now accessible to visitors
- Weaknesses of management: short-sightedness in funding and the construction of the administrative organization of the National Heritage Board is a weakness; Dependence on shipping companies that sail on Birka; local involvement was low working at the nomination. This lack of involvement in the site has continued in a currently weak co-operation between local businessmen, inhabitants of the vicinity and authorities

**Future actions:**

- Revise the organisation and drawing up an administrative plan
- Timeframe: December 2006
- Activity does not require funding from World Heritage Fund