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Press Materials: <http://thirteen.org/pressroom> or <http://pbs.org/pressroom>

Secrets of the Dead: Viking Warrior Queen

*Premieres Tuesday, July 7 at 8 p.m. on PBS (check local listings),
pbs.org/secrets and the PBS Video app*

Synopsis

In 1878, archaeologist **Hjalmar Stolpe** uncovered a grave containing a large number of weapons and the skeletal remains of what seemed to be a great Viking warrior. For a century, people assumed the body was male until the 1970s when **Berit Vilkans**, a young researcher, observed the bones had female characteristics. In 2017, a team of Swedish geneticists proved through a DNA study that the great warrior wasn't a man, but a woman. Join this team of experts as they examine the DNA results and complete a field investigation, uncovering the truth about the only archaeological discovery of a female Viking warrior and battle strategist known to date.

Short Listing

Join a team of archaeologists examining the history-changing grave of a female Viking warrior.

Long Listing

Join a team of archaeologists as they examine one of the most significant Viking graves ever found and test the DNA of the remains of the female warrior buried inside, rewriting our understanding of Viking society.

Running Time: 60 minutes

Film Interviewees

- Alban Gautier - Historian
- Anders Götherström – Geneticist
- Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson - Archaeologist
- Anna Kjellström - Osteo-Archaeologist
- Maja Krzewińska - Geneticist
- Peter Johnsson - Swordsmith
- Lucie Malbos - Historian
- Neil Price - Archaeologist

Noteworthy Facts

- Nearly 20 miles from Stockholm, Björkö, Sweden, is a small island just two miles long and a half-mile wide. From 750-950 AD, it was home to Birka, one of the most powerful towns in the region and one of the major centers for trade in the Viking world. Today, Birka is the most important archaeological site of the Viking Age, as it is home to 3,000 graves, more than half of which have not been excavated.
- In 1878, Swedish entomologist, archaeologist and ethnographer **Hjalmar Stolpe** and his team found a grave with two horses buried beneath a large block of granite. The grave was numbered Bj 581: Bj for Björkö and 581 because it was the 581st grave unearthed by the archeologist. Inside the grave, Stolpe's team found 40 of the 206 bones that make up the human skeleton.
- Bj 581 contained a stockpile of medieval weapons, including a shield, a knife, a bow and arrow, a spear, an axe and a sword, all of which indicated that the grave belonged to a great warrior. Each object was logged, and the bones were placed in bags and stored at the Swedish History Museum.
- In 1975, nearly a century after Stolpe's great discovery, osteo-archeologist **Berit Vilkans** took on the task of cataloging the contents of many Viking graves, including the skeletal remains of Bj 581.
- After completing her examination, Vilkans noted the bones belonged to a person of average height, that the forearms were thin and slim, suggesting those of a female and that the remaining pelvic bone was characteristic of a woman, rather than a man.
- Skull bones have certain gender-specific characteristics and could have confirmed Vilkans' theory but were missing from Bj 581. As a result, in 1975, the identity of the body in Bj 581 remained male in the Swedish History Museum records.
- In 2017, a team of geneticists from Stockholm University took on the difficult task of mapping the DNA genome of Bj 581's human remains in an attempt to identify the person's sex. After separating the human skeletal DNA from everything else that remained on the bones after being buried in soil for more than 1,000 years, the scientists were able to examine a small sample of surviving genetic material. The

remains contained two X chromosomes, but no Y chromosomes, proving the body was that of a woman.

- Analysis showed that a trained warrior used the weapons found in Bj 581; they were not ceremonial. While wealthy women of this time were often buried with their jewelry, Bj 581 was instead buried with tools of violence and warfare.
- Bj 581 was marked with a granite stone on top that was 8 feet wide, indicating that this was an unquestionably important grave. The grave was also buried with a pouch containing gaming pieces and dice, and by her side, there was a gaming board, all of which are items commonly found in graves of high-ranking military commanders of that era.

Series Overview

As one of PBS's ongoing limited primetime series, ***Secrets of the Dead*** is a perennial favorite among viewers, routinely ranking among the 10 most-watched series on public television. Now in its 18th season, ***Secrets of the Dead*** continues to captivate PBS viewers on air, online and beyond, using the latest scientific discoveries to challenge prevailing ideas and share fresh perspectives on historical events. ***Secrets of the Dead*** has received 10 CINE Golden Eagle Awards and six Emmy nominations, among numerous other awards. The series is available for streaming simultaneously on all station-branded PBS platforms, including PBS.org and the PBS Video app, which is available on iOS, Android, Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV and Chromecast. PBS station members can view episodes via Passport (contact your local PBS station for details). ***Secrets of the Dead*** is a production of THIRTEEN PRODUCTIONS LLC for WNET.

Websites: <http://www.pbs.org/secrets>, [@secretspbs](http://www.facebook.com/SecretsoftheDead), [#SecretsDeadPBS](https://www.youtube.com/secretsofthedead), <https://www.youtube.com/secretsofthedead>

Production Credits

Secrets of the Dead: Viking Warrior Queen is a Peignoir Prod and BONUM production for RMC Découverte, in association with THIRTEEN Productions LLC for WNET. Directed by Aleksandar Dzerdz and Gautier DuBois. Written by Aleksandar Dzerdz, Gautier DuBois, and Alain Zenou. Narrated by Jay O. Sanders. Enora Contant and Aleksandar Dzerdz are executive producers for Peignoir Prod. For ***Secrets of the Dead***: Stephanie Carter is executive producer. Stephen Segaller is executive in charge.

Underwriters

Funding for ***Secrets of the Dead*** is provided by public television viewers.

About WNET

WNET is America's flagship PBS station: parent company of New York's [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), the statewide public media network in New Jersey. Through its new [ALL ARTS](#) multi-platform initiative, its broadcast channels, three cable services (THIRTEEN

PBSKids, Create and World) and online streaming sites, WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to more than five million viewers each month. WNET produces and presents a wide range of acclaimed PBS series, including *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *PBS NewsHour Weekend*, and the nightly interview program *Amanpour and Company*. In addition, WNET produces numerous documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings, as well as multi-platform initiatives addressing poverty and climate. Through THIRTEEN Passport and WLIW Passport, station members can stream new and archival THIRTEEN, WLIW and PBS programming anytime, anywhere.

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