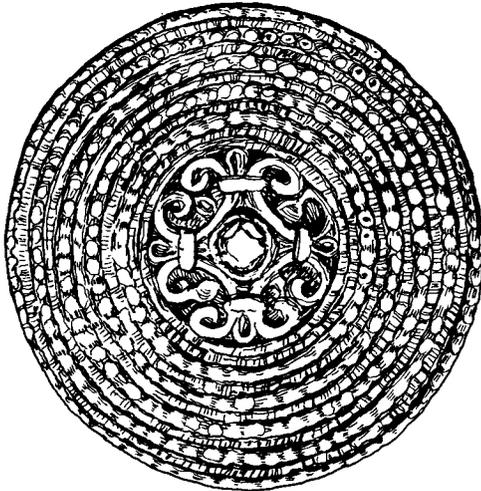




Dominic Tweddle

In Viking York, both men and women wore much more jewellery than is usual today. A man wore a brooch, usually shaped like a disc, on one shoulder to fasten his cloak. He also wore a pendant round his neck and had many finger-rings and arm-rings. His belt had an elaborate buckle and strap-end, and there were fine metal mounts to decorate his knife-hilt, sword-hilt and leather scabbard.



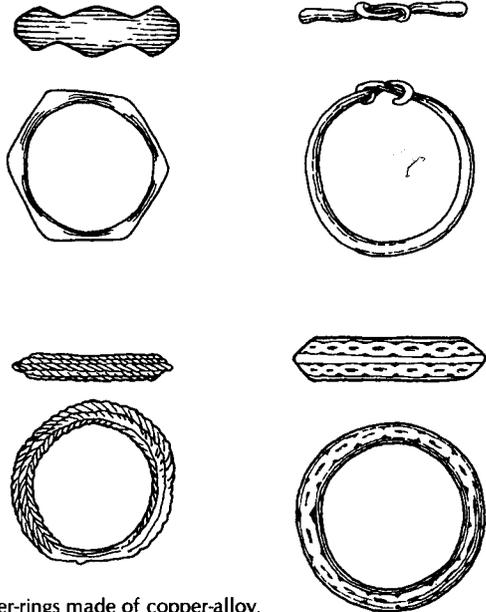
Lead-alloy disc brooch about 7 cm. in diameter.

Metal jewellery in York was often made of copper or lead, but silver was also reasonably common. Gold was even more valuable than now, and was mostly used for finger-rings which needed only a small amount. Glass too was used for finger-rings.

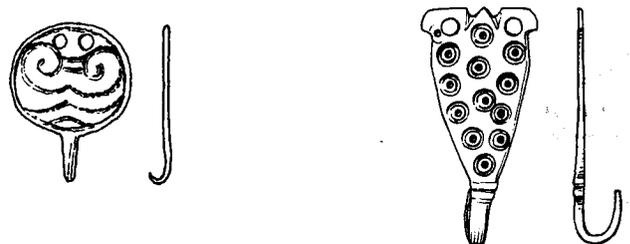
Women wore even more jewellery than men. Like a man, a woman would have a brooch, finger-rings and arm-rings, but she might also have metal ear-rings, and a necklace made of glass beads and lead pendants.

Amber and jet were used for jewellery too. Amber, fossilized pine resin, is translucent and ranges in colour from light yellow to dark orange. It is found in small pieces on the east coast of Britain, but it is likely that the amber used in Viking York was brought in from the shores of the Baltic, where it was more plentiful and was found in larger pieces.

Once the amber reached York, it was made into pendants, beads and rings. Pendants were the easiest to make. The craftsman roughly shaped a lump of amber of the right size, possibly with a saw; the amber then had a hole drilled through it so that it could be hung, and finally was polished with coarse sand and fine powder until it was flat and shiny. Beads were slightly more difficult to make. Again the craftsman cut a block roughly to shape and drilled a hole through it; but then it was made into its final shape by being turned on a bow-lathe before being polished. Wedge-shaped beads were made as well as round beads, and they would be mixed on a necklace, with perhaps a wedge-shaped pendant as the centrepiece.



Finger-rings made of copper-alloy.

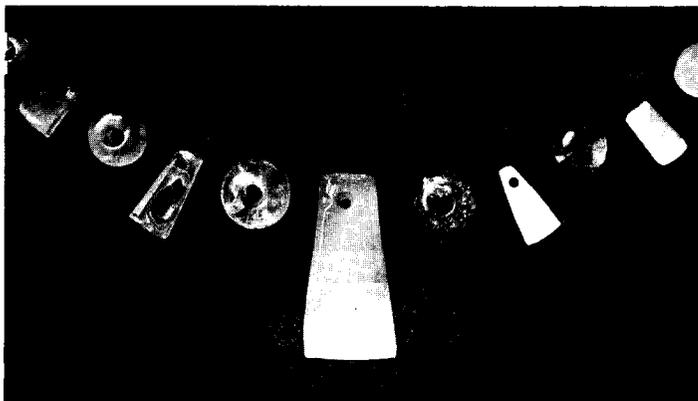


Hooks for closing garments.

For finger-rings, a large piece of amber was needed to begin with. This was cut up into slices with a saw, and these were then shaped with a chisel until they were roughly circular. These disc shapes were then put on the bow-lathe; the outside was polished and shaped, and the centre cut out to form a ring. The centre bit could later be used to make a bead. Half-finished rings have often been found in York, showing that craftsmen regularly made mistakes!



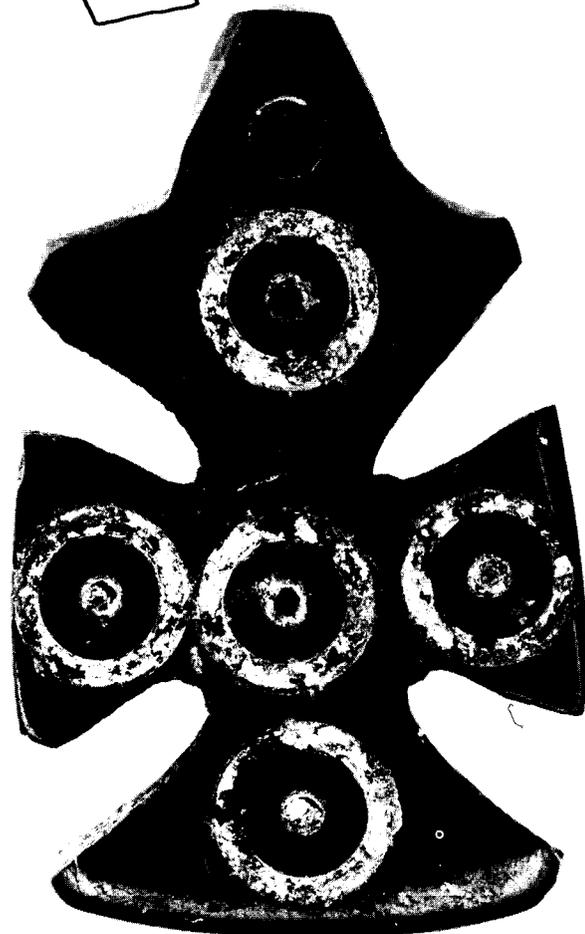
Turning amber on bow-la



An amber necklace.

Jet, a mineral similar to coal, was worked in much the same way as amber. It is black, shiny when polished, but also very light. It is rare in Western Europe, and the best source is at Whitby, only 50 miles from York. In Viking times it is likely that the jet was quarried at Whitby, and the small blocks taken to York for working. There, like amber, it was made into pendants and finger-rings, but it was also used for making playing counters and dice; even a jet spindle-whorl has been found. It is possible that the same craftsmen worked both jet and amber, since much the same methods were used for both.

Jet could also be inlaid, usually with tin, calcium carbonate or orpiment, a yellow mineral imported from France or Germany. The inlay was normally made up of dot and ring patterns.



Jet pendant inlaid with the yellow mineral orpiment.

The men and women of Viking York would have looked very gaudy to modern eyes, wearing their brightly-coloured clothes, glittering jewellery of jet, amber and metal. We even know that they had tattoos!