

The Tarsoly – the Magyar Pouch in Viking Graves

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The tarsoly (pronounced tar-SHOY) is a pouch characteristic of the ancient Magyar peoplesⁱ of the Carpathian Basin of Eastern Europeⁱⁱ, a confederation of which became the Principality of Hungary in AD 895 or 896.

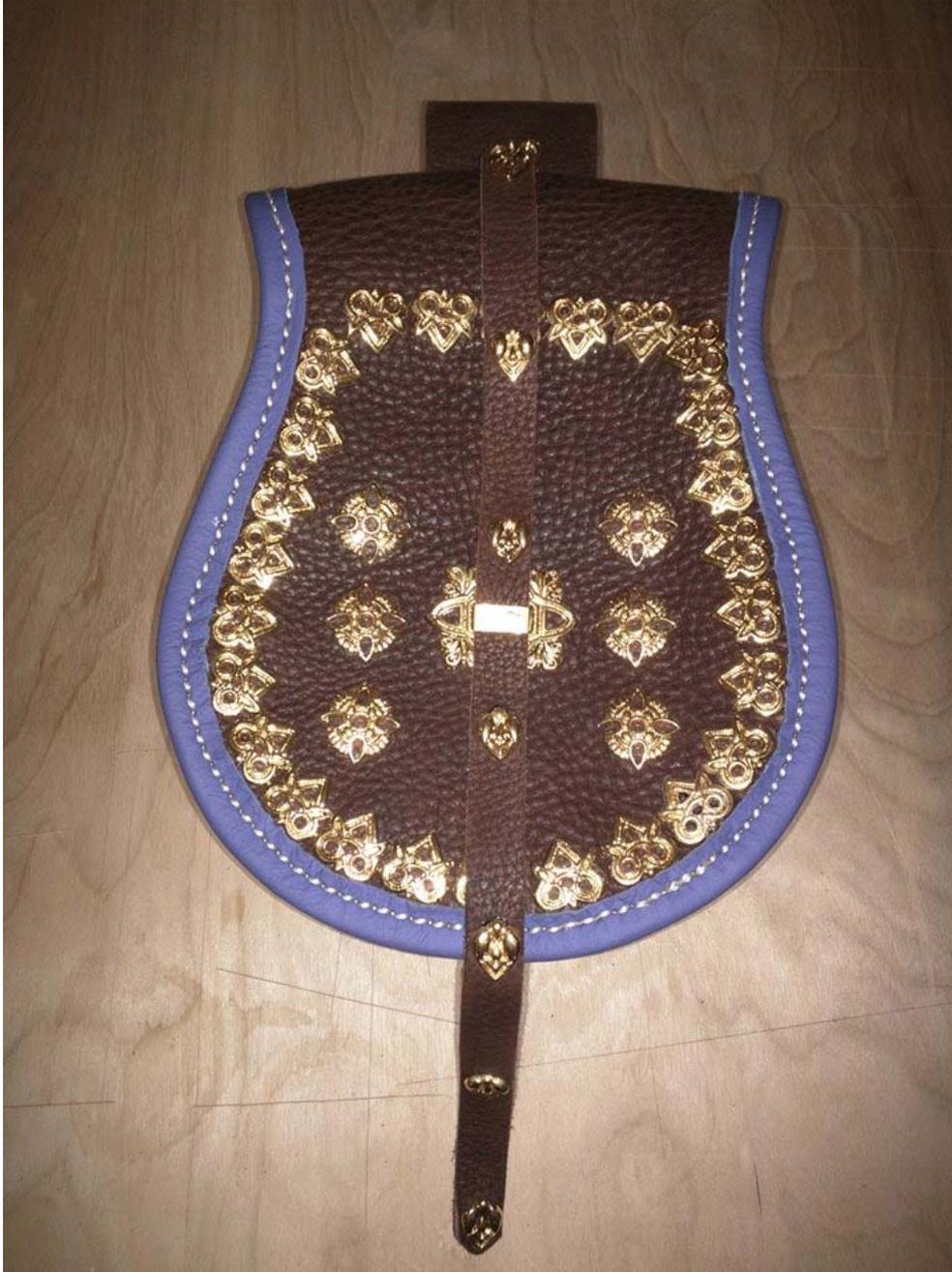


Fig. 1: The author's own tarsoly, brown and blue cowhide with gilded hardware.

We have evidence of substantial contact between the Magyar and Viking peoples, particularly between Swedish Rus Vikings. Archaeological grave finds in Birka, Sweden, have revealed typical Magyar accoutrements such as belt mounts and tips (many re-worked into pendants), Magyar-type quivers and archery thumb rings, and complete tarsolysⁱⁱⁱ. There are obvious Magyar artifacts in burials Bj93, Bj904, and Bj154^{iv}

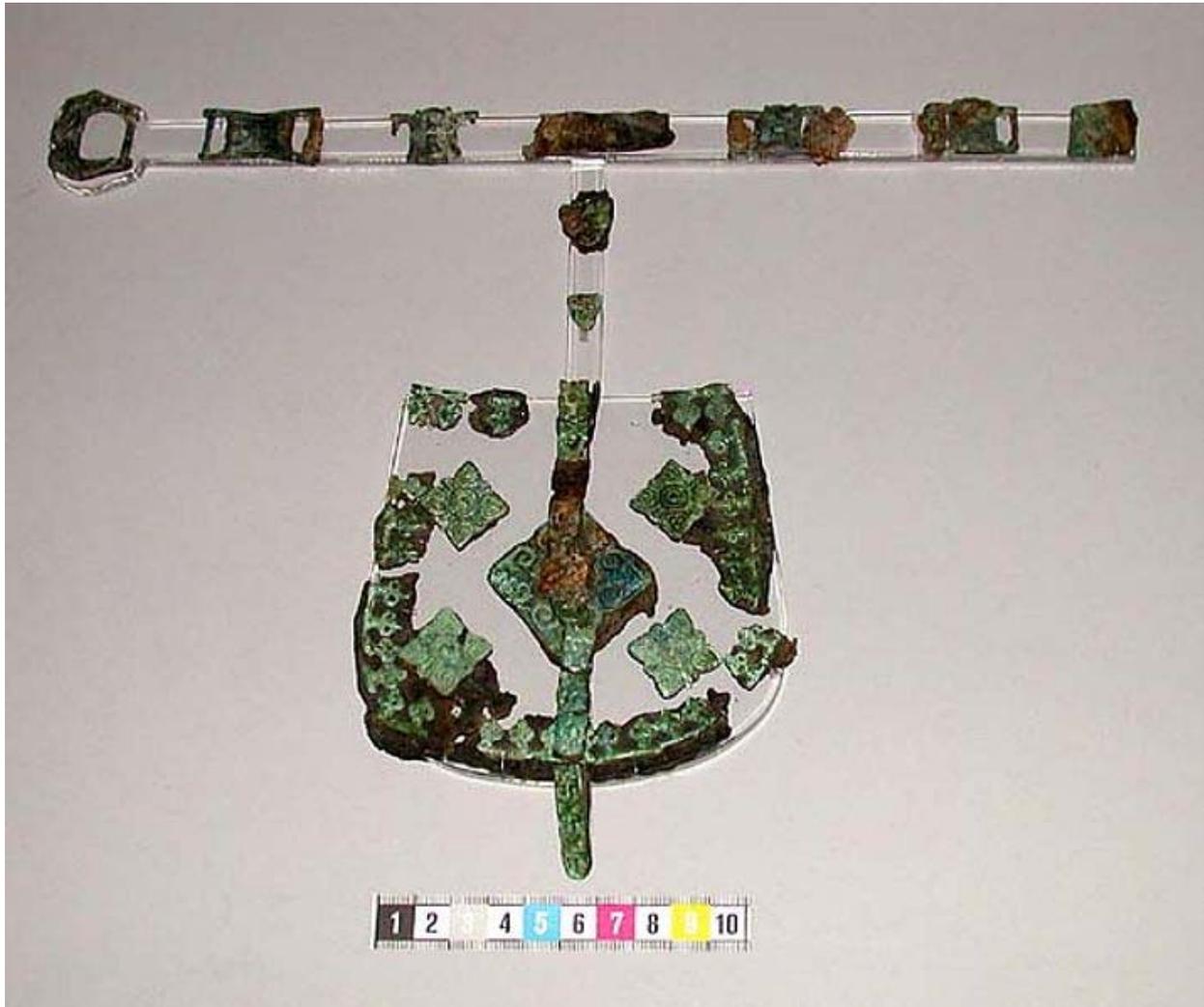


Fig. 2: Belt and tarsoly found at Birka, from Swedish History Museum^v

I was asked to contribute to a kingdom-wide project called Team Norse, to create historically-accurate Viking Age clothing for King Gareth and Queen Juliana's reign in Æthelmarc, AS 52. The project needed a belt and pouch for King Gareth, and a bag for Queen Juliana. I chose to make a tarsoly pouch from Birka, as they are documentable to the period we were aiming for.

To make my replica, I first sourced hardware from a well-regarded vendor, Armour & Castings in the Ukraine. They produce replica hardware of this find already^{vi} and I have used their products in the past, so I know their quality. I also procured red and white

commercially tanned and finished cowhide for the body of the pouch, ensuring the vibrant red and white needed to represent Æthelmearc, and also ensuring that no pigments would rub off onto garb.



Fig. 3: Hardware for this project, as received from vendor

Construction of a tarsoly is straightforward: one piece of leather forms the back of the pouch and the front flap, a second piece forms the front of the pocket, and a rectangular gusset is sewn in between. Finally straps for the belt loop and closure are added, and the metal hardware installed. To give the piece a more finished look, edging is sewn to all exposed edges.

I chose to make this pouch somewhat larger than extant pieces, to accommodate modern necessities such as a smartphone, keys, and wallet.



Fig. 4: Completed tarsoly for King Gareth of Æthelmearc



Fig. 5: Side view of completed tarsoly



Fig. 6: Interior shown with banana for scale.

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- ⁱ <http://www.tarsolyosok.hu/eng/atarsoly.htm#fent> Retrieved 12/7/17.
- ⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principality_of_Hungary Retrieved 12/7/17.
- ⁱⁱⁱ DIE ARCHÄOLOGIE DER FRÜHEN UNGARN, Tobias Bendeguz, Dec. 2009.
- ^{iv} Arbman 1940; 1943; Fodor 1996a; Hedenstierna-Jonson / Holmquist Olausson 2006.
- ^v <http://mis.historiska.se/mis/sok/bild.asp?uid=32492> Retrieved 12/7/17.
- ^{vi} <https://armourandcastings.com/product/rt04-birka-tarsoly-set/> Retrieved 12/7/17.