



British Museum exhibition 'Vikings: life and legend' – chairman's remarks

Speaker: **Carl-Henric Svanberg**

Title: **chairman**

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Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellences, lords, ladies and gentlemen.

In the beautiful catalogue produced for this exhibition there is a map. It shows the Viking world at its greatest extent

From the Barents Sea to Brittany, from Kiev to Greenland – the Vikings' influence stretched for thousands and thousands of kilometres.

And looking closely at the extent of this world, you can see my home town of Porjus in Lapland, north of the Arctic circle, right at the very epicentre of that world.

At least through my eyes! So I am a proud Viking myself.

And I am very much a trader, not a raider.

This exhibition will widen our understanding of the Vikings, beyond the violent and dramatic picture that has been painted so vividly over the years.

Yes, they were great warriors. But so were most other explorers and conquerors.

This exhibition shows the many and different shades of Viking life.

Farmers, traders, artists, explorers, politicians, as well as warriors.

It was a true civilisation with a true culture. Not words normally associated with Vikings.

And perhaps, above all, the exhibition shows Vikings as craftsmen of the highest order.

Their longships were masterpieces of their time and could reach speeds of 15-16 knots in the right winds, competitive for their size even today.

The Vikings also had impeccable style. In fact they were quite vain.

They were known for good hygiene, impressive clothing and their long, well combed hair. Not only did they have a sword hanging by their waist belt, but also a comb.

So there are many stories to tell and many more from new discoveries in this exhibition.

We in BP are also explorers, traders and seafarers.

Our success is also built on people and technology coming together to accomplish great deeds in distant lands.

In today's world, such deeds, or projects as we call them, must be based on partnership, mutual advantage and strong relationships.



Back to the Vikings. Not all were the same.

The Norwegian Vikings rowed across the oceans to get to Iceland and America.

And the Danish Vikings who were the ones who came to Britain, they were all great fighters.

But the Swedish Vikings went up the rivers into Russia and down the rivers to Constantinople, now Istanbul. When you go by river you know you have to come back the same way.

If you make trouble on the way down you should expect trouble on the way back. So they had to build good relationships wherever they went.

I hope that tells you something about Swedes and how we look at the world and our place in it!

All joking aside and for any Danes and Norwegians here tonight, let me just say that we fought our battles too, just not along the rivers.

We all like to build good relationships and we love good stories.

Before I finish I want to congratulate the brilliant storytellers who have brought this very special exhibition not only together, but to life.

I commend the international partnership between the British Museum, the National Museum of Denmark, and the National Museums in Berlin.

And those many, many others around the world whose contributions have made this exhibition possible.

I congratulate the curators Gareth Williams and Thomas Williams, and all of the team at the British Museum.

And in particular, the museum's renowned director, Neil MacGregor. Together you have done an outstanding job.

I am personally delighted that BP has been able to play a part – to help make this exhibition possible.

It is the latest in a long line of arts and cultural activities that we at BP are pleased to support.

A line that stretches back over 35 years in the UK, connecting over 50 million people with extraordinary cultural experiences.

The BP exhibition: Vikings: life and legend is a great addition to that line.

On behalf of BP, thank you very much.

Skål.