

A VIKING BED

Extrapolating Measurements for the Construction of an Artifact

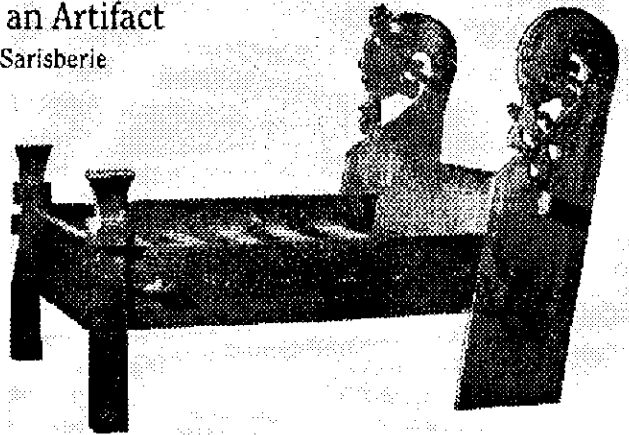
by Lord Aelfric of Sarisberie

My first SCA pavilion was a 12' x 14' Viking tent, a scaled down version of the one from the Oseberg ship find. But I always wanted the bed too.

After years of other slat and rope beds I finally decided to do it. I took a photograph of the reconstruction of the bed from the Osberg ship and scanned it into my computer. From text in one book on the find I learned it was about six feet by six feet. Since it was, as pretty much all furniture of the time, custom built for its owner, and in this case specifically for its female owner, I was not surprised the inside length would be only about five feet or so. I also noted in my varied reading that this type of bed was not considered common for useage in a home, that it was made to break down for transport and wouldn't serve the same as a domestic bed. [Perhaps at the turn of the millenium they would still sleep in pallets at home (in a longhouse the host often had a closet-like sleeping area for privacy while everyone else was out in the open) but if not the beds may have been more like the fourteenth century one I found in a web site supporting a Viking CD-ROM.]

I opened the scan in a program allowing scaled rulers, in this case Canvas 3.5.4 for the Macintosh (I had had some pretty bizarre numbers trying to use their version 5.0). Experimentation with an auto-dimensioned line for the length of the bed, which I knew to be about six feet, and various scaled rulers lead me to the one needed. I only worked in one plane so as not to encounter problems with depth and perspective. The scale necessary turned out to be 1.01" = 1'-0". [I later rescanned at a higher resolution and scaled the picture before dimensioning and this resulted in a different number, but the process was the same.]

Then I began to apply additional measurements to that front picture plane of the photograph to obtain the original proportions. I quickly realized that there were going to be some minor problems with perspective causing differing measurements at head- and



footboards, but they turned out to be relatively minor and accountable to individual excentricity if I so chose to call it. The overall measurements would hold to the proportions I was trying to retrieve. I was able to extrapolate all the measurements I wanted—width of boards, height of dragon heads, mattress level, etc.—from the original in correct proportion. I will later chose to either glue up boards to suit these measurements or try to adapt the result into more standard modern materials.

Once the original measurements were recorded I played with the scale again to see what would change if an inside length of six feet three inches were applied, making it the same as the double mattress I wanted to use. Then I merely decided upon the width I wanted, as that would not really effect the rest of the design, and applied it to my final plans and its dimensions.

In any case I will be building a sample out of pine this Spring and using it over the Summer to determine if it provides the comfort, aesthetics and pack-worthiness to be built to that design out of hardwood. Any changes will be made before investing the time and money on a finished hardwood product, probably of ash and oak, two of the most used woods in the Viking carpenter's repertoire.

What follows is the fruit of my labor. The plans and the final measurements I derived will appear next time. I will be using to construct my own bed for the upcoming season. I hope you enjoy it as much as I expect to.

