



THE SAGA OF FRÖJEL

Michael Dower

I am the herald, high is my helmet, hearty my greeting :
From Fröjel with friendship we come to this meeting.

Six countries we come from - that's Sweden, Estonia,
Hungary, Latvia, England, Slovenia.
Our names are Kristina, Nan, Michael and Age,
Jane, Usha, Inese and Zoltan. A Saga
We offer of visits to Vikings and harbours :
From Fröjel we offer the fruits of our labours.

Fröjel is a parish, with 300 people :
They live on a plateau looking out to the sea.
The dominant building's a church, with fine steeple
The land full of forests, with thousands of trees.

Farming has faltered in Fröjel, and few are the farmers,
But the strength of the scene is the people and fine panoramas,
Remarkable views over reed beds and rocks to the strand
With beaches of shingle and seaweed and sand.

Above them are woodlands of tall Gottish pine
With shades of fine grassland where people recline,
And that's where the tourists to stay are content
In their summer house, caravan, chalet or tent.

The offer to tourists is simple. The beach
Is close to the campsite. By boat you can reach
The islands of Karlsö. By horse you can ride
Through woodlands and meadows. A graduate guide
Can show you the graves of the Vikings who died
When the harbour of Fröjel was Gotland's main pride.

Jane Wright

Freja I am, the goddess of love and fertility.
Long before concepts of sustainability,
People would worship my brothers and me -
Frej was his name - and our role was to be
The focus of marriage and procreation
To ensure the survival of Gotlandish nation.

Fröjel takes its name from my own Holy ground
And that's where the symbol, the maze, may be found.

The labyrinth of Fröjel
Is a mystery to tell
It could symbolise a female,
A tree, or just a he-male
Or be seen as a sea-shell.
The lines are marked by stones and grass :
Between them, you can gently pass
On curving paths, and cast a prayer
To Odin, Thor, and Frej and Freja.

The labyrinth lies in the churchyard of Fröjel,
Next to the church, which is its main jewel.
For eight hundred years the high church has given
God's path to the people, prepared them for Heaven....
Christ on the crucifix, carved with a dozen disciples
To tell the great story for those who could not read the Bible.

From the Church, a fine view out to sea,
Over meadows where once the waves used to be,
The land having risen, the sea has receded
So Fröjel has failed, where Visby succeeded.

The harbour which bustled ten centuries ago
Is now a green meadow where wild flowers grow.
But farmers, when ploughing, turned up ancient rings,
Buckles, brooches and axeheads - wonderful things
Which attracted the notice of scholars, like Don
(who spoke at our Summer School). He then took on
The notion of digging, to show what had gone.

He worked with the village, the History group,
Persuaded the owners to let them dig up
What lay under sections of garden or field,
To see what this village of Vikings would yield.
Archeology students from countries abroad,
Keen to discover their share of the hoard.
Uncovered a treasure of brooches and bones,
Of axes and spearheads, of pictures on stones,
Of pottery, pendants and stirrups and shells.

And now, these things can all be seen
In the old school house, well displayed
To show how people worked and played,
How they fought and loved and died
And passed their mediaeval lives beside
The Baltic shore, and used the tide
To sail to distant lands for trade.

Age Tekku

I am a crayfish, cousin of the lobster.
I may look rough, but I not a mobster.
I live in ponds made by a businessman.
I fit into his most ambitious plan.

He bought a rundown farm, which had some pits
Where clays was dug for making bricks,
For he could see that clay would hold the water
To make the crayfish ponds. He sought a
Site where many lakes could be created.

He brought a digger in, and excavated
More than a dozen ponds, and used the spoil
To build low hills, with reasonable soil
Where he could put in many trees and bushes
(Including rhodendrons bought from Scotland,
A very curious bush to find in Gotland!).

The lakes are rich in water reeds and rushes
And that is where we live and breed and grow.
We try to grow quite slowly, for we know
When we get big we will be caught and eaten!
There is a great demand for crayfish meat in
Stockholm and in other wealthy places
Where people like to feed their wealthy faces!

Meanwhile we try to stay unseen
By all the visitors who come to stay
In cabins which the businessmen has placed
Around the ponds. They may sit there all day
Or walk around and watch the fallow deer -
A very pretty sight : they come quite near
The fences when a bell is rung.
They do not seem to know their time will come
To feed a deer-meat barbeque :
But even if they knew
They probably would go on being deer
And show no fear.

We are a bit distressed by what we hear :
The businessman has plans to make a space
Where folk will come to feed their face
With - you can guess - crayfish and vodka !
It makes us grow quite red
To think of what will happen when we're dead
And some quite drunken visitor will munch
All our sweet flesh to make his lunch!

Kristina Öhman (mare) and Nan Dower (foal)

I am a horse, a mare of course.
I live in Fröjel on a farm
With forty others and some ponies,
Grazing fields of which the owners
Are two ladies - mum and daughter.
They protect us from all harm.

We feed on grass and meadow hay
And often we can spend all day
On the sea-meadows near the water
Among the flocks of geese and swans -
A surface good to gallop on.

In the summer we are working,
Like the islanders around us,
For the visitors have found us
Good for riding on the trails.
Our shoes are shod with iron nails.
We go in groups, we can't be shirking.
We travel through the fields and tracks
With lively children on our backs
And sometimes heavy ladies who
Do not know what they should do!

I have a foal, a lively soul.
In colour she is blond and dappled.
She likes to eat the fallen apples.
When she is older she'll succeed
The older mares who've ceased to breed
Because each generation's able
To carry guests and fill the stable :
So Gotland is sustainable.

Zoltan Trombitas

I am a goose, or rather a gander -
That`s a male goose, so you understander.
I come in the summer with two hundred others,
My father and mother, my sisters and brothers
To Gotland for grazing on maritime meadows...
When the sun is so high you can hardly see shadows.

When we fly in a skein over Gotland`s green trees,
And our feathers are cool in the Gotlandic breeze,
We look down on the tourists, so earthbound below,
On their summer migration from Stockholm or Oslo
And see them relaxing or grazing on meat
(for us vegetarians, that is no treat)
but we see they enjoy it ... the huts are so neat,
set among pine-tree, with grass at their feet,
Fröjelgården offers a pleasant retreat.

The lady who runs it, Birgitta by name,
Could see its potential the day that she came
To work for the owner, who ran it not well
And lost lots of trade and decided to sell.
But she said, 'let me rent it for 5 years to start'
And now she`s the tenant, the place looks quite smart,
The bedrooms are clean and the food is a treat.

Birgitta has shown that she has the abilities,
Now she has plans to improve the facilities
With toilets and showers and washing-machines
For the neighbouring campers to keep their clothes clean;
And she has the ambition to open a pub
But the state regulations are strict - there`s the rub -
So it may take a year to get permits for that.

When we come back next year on our summer migration
Perhaps she`ll have answered her high expectation.
Meanwhile we are happy to fly without booze,
For drink is not part of the food of a goose !

Urška Suhadolc

I am a house, an adventurous house.
I do not stay still, I can move like a mouse.
If you think that is odd, allow me to expand.

I was built long ago by a trade union band
In a holiday camp on the west Gotland coast.
But then the Trade Union gave up the ghost,
The holiday camp was abandoned and closed
And I sat there quite empty, I dozed!

At last, I was seen by a chap from Fröjel,
A sharp travel agent who runs things quite well,
Who thought he could give this old house a new life,
So he bought me for nothing. He took out his knife -
Well, his powerful saw, to be truthful to tell -
And he cut me in three, so the pieces were small
And loaded each one on a lorry to haul
Across the whole island, and rebuilt me here,
In an Aquadrome camp with a view of the sea.
He nailed me together and made me quite trim,
With curtains and bedspreads all chosen by him.

I am full through the summer from week twenty-four,
But I close in late August, and am active no more
Until the next June, when the fun starts again.

I'm glad to be useful, it's good for my pride
A house is no use, if it's not occupied.

Inese Turkupole

I am a cat, I live with a vet :
I came as a patient, I stay as a pet
And now I`m a guide to the hamsters and horses,
The cows and the calves, the turtles and tortoises,
The ponies and puppies, the hounds and the hogs,
The sheep and the goats, the ducks and the dogs
Who visit the vet to be rid of their sores,
To ease their arthritis and sharpen their claws.

The vet`s an outsider, but married to Berit
Who was born on the island, so he can inherit
Some goodwill from locals, delivering lambs
And treating their horses and ponies and rams.

In summer his trade includes second-home owners
Whose view of the vet is that he is a bonus
Who looks at their pets for their annual test
Of internal worms, teeth, fleas and the rest.
He charges them less then the mainlanders do
But more thean he charges the islanders too.

Tha vet is a star. He appears on TV
As a vet and a Gotlander, eager to see
More visitors here. He`s an entrepeneur,
Who wants to attack the things which deter
Young people from living in this lovely land.

So he bought an old building and took it in hand
To convert into flats which young folk could afford.
In addition in Visby he is the landlord
Of a complex of factories, houses and flats.
In fact he`s so active some folk thinks he`s bats.
But the best thing about him from my point of view -
If it`s okey by you - he`s a lover of cats!

Michael Dower

**The Gotland folk are mixed-up folk,
Their DNA reveals
The Baltic was their mating-ground :
They went to countries all around
From Poland to Estonia,
From Finland to Lettonia,
To find their husbands and their wives
Through leading complicated lives ...**

**And that explained their welcome to
The mixed-up, multi-national crew
Of Euracademy, that's me and you
And you, and you, and you!**

Michael Dower, August 2002

EuracFröjelsaga