

Special Guest Lecture:

Iron production and mountain marketplaces in Norway in the Viking and Middle Ages

From: assoc. Prof. Dr. **Kjetil Loftsgarden** (University Oslo)

The thousands of iron production sites scattered across the mountain and valley regions of Norway are testament to a massive surplus production from the latter half of the Viking Age throughout the High Middle Ages. Archaeological and historical sources indicate that this production was carried out by singular farms. Still, the amount of iron produced surpassed both local and regional demands and constituted a regional and interregional commodity in the period 950–1300 AD.

Seasonal mountain marketplaces are seen as integral to the increase and eventual mass production of iron in the Viking period and Middle Ages.

The marketplaces enabled an inland population to

obtain both the products they needed and those they wanted, and gave the populous communities along the coast — the medieval towns, the royal and ecclesiastical elites — access to the resources and commodities from the hinterland via trade networks flowing through these marketplaces.

This study shows how farmers in marginal agricultural areas could provide a surplus of iron. The substantial production of iron in the inland shows a willingness to risk valuable time and resources. The risk lay on the farmers, but so did the possible gains. The extent of the iron production alone suggests that it was a risk worth taking.

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Universität Innsbruck,
Ágnes-Heller-Haus,
Innrain 52a

1. Stock,
Seminarraum 6

