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## Öland and Eketorps fort in the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century

### Facts

Öland was a central area during the Iron Ages and the Middle Ages and had commercial relations and other connections with the regions around the Baltic Sea. The people on Öland were christianized around 1000 AD and during the 12<sup>th</sup> century a lot of stone churches were erected. People lived on their farms in the villages, breeding the cattle, growing corn and fishing. Some of them were wealthier than the others, making their fortune on trade and warfare.

Öland was one of several kingdoms in the Baltic Sea region, each kingdom with its own leader. Other kingdoms were the Danes, the Vends (northern Germany), the Gotlanders and the Curonians. In what was to become Sweden there was a struggle for power between the dynasties of Sverker and Erik.

In the year 1167 the king Karl Sverkersson was assassinated by Knut Eriksson who then became king. The brother of the murdered king, Johan Sverkersson, didn't want to give up the crown. His sons Burislev och Kol continued the struggle. Burislev lived most of his time on Öland. The military leader of Knut Eriksson was Birger Brosa.

In the end of the 12th century some of the forts on central and southern Öland were re-erected: Gråborg (called Backaborg), Triberga fort, Bårby fort and Eketorps fort (probably called Gräsgård). The forts were rebuilt as military garrisons with soldiers and cavalries. The main fort was probably Backaborg on central Öland.

Eketorps fort was built for the first time in the fourth century as a gathering place for the people on southern Öland (Eketorp I). In the beginning of the fifth century the fort was extended and strengthened as a part of the defence on southern Öland (Eketorp II). Farms with their families and cattle lived inside the fort. This fort was abandoned in the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Around 1170 AD the fort at Gräsgård was restored (Eketorp III). A military garrison moved in. Barracks were built for the soldiers as well as stables for the big number of horses and a couple of smithies outside the wall. In one part of the fort the commander had his house. The food for the soldiers were made in a big kitchen, centrally located. There were also some women and children inside the fort. The officers had most probable their families. The women made the cooking and the feeding as well as the production of clothes, textiles and blankets that the soldiers needed. This military garrison continued for maybe fifty years, some decades into the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Eketorps fort was excavated by archaeologists 1963-1974. In the middle of the 1970s the fort was partly reconstructed, most of the wall and some houses. In the western part of the fort the Iron Age houses were erected, in the eastern part the military garrison with the commanders' house.



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## Scenario, Gräsgård 1170 AD

The fort in Gräsgård is rebuilt as a part of the defence on southern Öland. Another three forts on southern and central Öland are also rebuilt. The work on the forts is extensive. The barracks are constructed, the wall is heightened and strengthened. An outside, lower wall is about to be finished as well as the smithies. Women are employed to make clothes and blankets for the soldiers. The military garrison is about to move in.

The times are turbulent. King Karl Sverkesson has been murdered by Knut Eriksson. His nephew Burislev has sworn to take revenge. Burislev is the man behind the building of the forts on Öland. His headquarters is on Backaborg on middle Öland. Burislev is ruling not only Öland but also the regions of Småland and Östergötland. So far has the Danish king Valdemar supported him and the dynasty of Sverker in the struggle for the Swedish crown.

In the year 1169 Valdemar and his commander bishop Absalon, conquer and burn down the fort on the island of Rügen in the southern part of the Baltic Sea. Now they are on their way to Öland with many soldiers, hopefully with peaceful intentions. But you can never know. The king Knut Eriksson with his earl Birger Brosa is also threatening the strongholds of Burislev in Östergötland and on Öland.

The work on the fort in Gräsgård is intensive under the leadership of the commander Emund Stålhammar. He is preparing for an attack and has decided that everybody has to help finishing the wall, build new houses and make the fort stronger. The peasants are ordered to come to the fort for day-works. Maybe some of them even want to join the cavalry or take other kind of jobs in the fort. Soldiers and craftsmen are going to be employed as well as cooks. It could perhaps be safer to live inside the walls. If you are skilled enough maybe....

### Roles

The students are sons and daughters of the farmers who are ordered to work on the fort.

The museum staff is the people in the fort.

The group from South Africa are either people from Courland who like to settle or crusaders from the Holy Land.

### Key questions

- How to deal with war? Practice with the weapons, negotiate, fears ...

### Activities

- Practice as soldiers, archery
- Cook, make bread
- Wood work/ Blacksmith work
- Build on the wall



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### **Time plan**

- 09.30 Preparation
- 10.30 The students arrive, introduction  
Change dresses
- 11.00 Time travel, prayer
- 11.15 Activities start
- 12.30 The meal
- 13.10 Time travel back  
Reflections
- 13.30 The students leave  
Wash up

2008-08-27

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## Role cards

### Crusaders

You are crusaders who have been all the way to the Holy Land. You have taken part in many fights and are on Öland to show how to fight and use the weapons. You have also seen big forts on the continent and know how to build strong fortifications and organise a military garrison.

You have met many Muslims and learnt a lot from them about the organisation of war and how to fight. But also about life and faith. There are many stories you can tell from your travels and battles.

Names: Henry, Arthur, Aron, William

### People from Kurland/Courland/Kurzeme, on the Eastern shores of the Baltic Sea

The small kingdom of Courland was situated in today's Latvia inhabited in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by the curonians.

The curonians has a lot of contacts with other parts of the Baltic Sea. Some of these contacts are hostile and the curonians have a reputation as warriors and excellent sailors. They fight and burn villages on the islands in the Baltic or along the coastline and they make alliances with other kings along the coast. Sometimes they take captives and bring them to Courland. Other contacts are more friendly. Some curonians emigrate to other regions in the southern part of the Baltic Sea.

You are a group of curonians who left your homeland some weeks ago. You have heard about Öland and the good conditions for farming and are interested to settle. Some of your neighbours have been on Öland, maybe to plunder and they have talked a lot about the nice island.

You have crossed the Baltic Sea on a small ship and arrive on the southern tip of Öland. When you see the fort you walk up and ask if you could come in and talk to the chief.

The commander is very suspicious. He has a bad experience of curonians. He doesn't know if you are enemies or if he can trust you. But he brings you inside the fort and will try you out, what your skills are. He will decide later if you will stay or not.

You could be man and wife, brother or sister or just neighbours. You make up your character and your skills. Maybe one of you is a good fighter and can be a soldier in the garrison or is a craftsman that can build new houses in the fort. And the women are good in cooking or know everything about wounds and medicine. Or maybe you want to start a farm close to the fort.

Also think about the key questions.

Male names: Peniķis, Vidiņš, Dragūns, Mudite

Female names: Ineta, Agrita, Zinaida, Jeva, Elita

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### **Cooks: Ester, Ingrid, Anna, Theresa, Christina**

You say you are from far away and want to have a job as cooks in the fort. You tell us that you have served in many forts on the continent and can make almost any food. Last year you heard about new forts being built on Öland and got curious to see the country far up in the north.

But at the same time you act a little bit strange. You ask many questions about the life in the fort, how many soldiers, how the wall is built, how the defence is organised. You also ask about the life on the farms on Öland. Maybe you are a spy?

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