



This bird bone whistle, found at York, is 18.1cm long. It is a common Viking Age item. (Hall, p. 115)

Music in the Viking Age

Panpipes, bone flutes, bone whistles, and lyres are the instruments that survive from the Viking Age. No one is sure what Viking music sounded like.

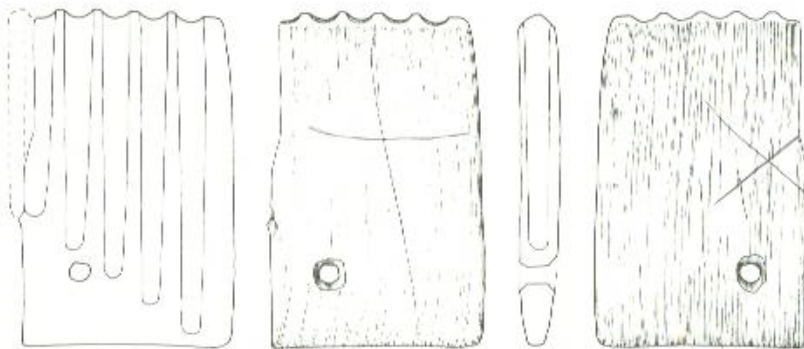
Writing about the York dig, Richard Hall states: "...a unique discovery, is a set of panpipes made from a small slab of boxwood.... Holes were bored to different depths into the slab, and then the top of each hole was bevelled slightly to allow the player to sound the individual notes more easily and comfortably." The other hole is thought to be for a string to pass through in order to hang up the pipes.

Bone flutes, like one found at Sigtuna, Sweden, were made from the long bones of birds or animals and had varying numbers of finger holes (Graham-Campbell, CAotVW, p. 64). They were played like modern recorders, though with a shorter musical scale.

The Anglo-Saxon lyre (pictured left) was reconstructed by the British Museum, based on small pieces of maple wood found at the Sutton Hoo burial. The Museum curators used the 8th century Vespasian Psalter as a guide (Carver, p. 29-30). The 2.7cm high bridge of a 10th century wooden lyre was found at York (Hall, p. 115). Lyres might have been played as an accompaniment to skaldic verse or singing.

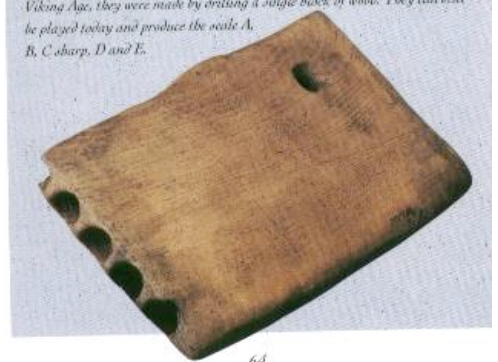


Anglo-Saxon lyre
(Carver, p. 32)



The York 10th century panpipes are made from a piece of boxwood 9.5cm high. After being cleaned of dirt, this set could still produce a five-note scale from A to E (Hall, p. 116).

► Panpipes from 10th-century Coppergate. The only surviving pipes from the Viking Age, they were made by drilling a single block of wood. They can still be played today and produce the scale A, B, C, sharp, D and E.



A photograph of the York panpipes (Wooding, p. 64).