

# Viking Ships

Kjartan Magnusson, of P.O. Box 599, Reykjavik, Iceland, writes: I always read your journal with great interest. When reading the article by Mr Richard Swartzbaugh (Volume X, Number 4), wherein he cites Spengler on the Viking ships, a point of some interest came to my mind. I think that it is generally asserted that the Viking ship was a purely Nordic invention not directly derived from the types of ships used in the Mediterranean in ancient times. The many great advantages of the Viking ship have been proved in recent times by the sailing of a replica of the famous Gokstad ship to America. The construction of the hull frame is based on the principle of seaming by leather ropes (neither wooden nor metal nails being used), which points to skinboats similar to the curragh as their forerunners. (One tends to disbelieve the evolutionists' theory of a hollowed tree bole as the prototype of all ships.) All this I assume that you know, but perhaps not that ships or boats of the exactly same type as the Viking ships were used in Mesopotamia 700 years before Christ, or even earlier according to a relief from the North palace of Assurbanipal in Nineveh, now in the Louvre. That is what came to my mind when reading Swartzbaugh's article. I think that from this fact many of the special features of the Viking ships could be explained, such as their shallowness, their long and narrow hull, their light weight. All these features made it easy to haul the ships across land—a fact which is frequently mentioned in the old sagas. The Viking ships are not of the type which one might have expected to be built for ocean sailing, though they were also very good for that. Thus it seems that the Viking ships reached Scandinavia over the mainland via the Great Russian rivers (the southern part of Russia is in the old books named Sweden the Great). Also, many words and poetic expressions relating to the Viking ships might be explained from their originating for use on rivers along with horses on the land. I am inclined to think that here lies the key to many riddles in the history of our forebears. In this connection I may mention that one great riddle regarding the Nordic Vikings' navigational ability has recently been solved. According to the old Icelandic books they possessed a stone which they called "Sólarstein" — a solar or sunstone by which they were able to locate the direction of the sun in cloudy weather by looking through it. A Norwegian aeronaut has now pointed out that this must have been a crystal which could "polarize" the light by the same principle as is now being used in the ultra-modern "solar-compasses" in the aeroplanes on the North polar route when the magnetic compass is out of action.

# Journals Received

## GENUS

Journal of the Italian Committee for the Study of Population Problems and of the Italian Society of Eugenics, Editor: Corrado Gini, Via delle Terme di Diocleziano 10, Rome, Italy. Price 3000 lire; U.S. \$6.

Vol. XXV, Nos. 1-4, 1969.

Contents: A Monte Carlo Simulation of Human Reproduction, by John C. Barrett; Gainful Occupation and Motherhood — The Position of Women in Hungary, by Egon Szabady; Nuzialità, natalità e cicli brevi dell'economia — L'esperienza italiana tra il 1863 e il 1965, by Antonio Santini; Recenti variazioni dei modelli di nuzialità in Italia, Paolo de Sandre.

## RACE

Journal of the Institute of Race Relations. Published quarterly by the Oxford University Press. Price 20s.

Vol. XII, No. 2, October 1970.

Contents: Law and the Unequal Society: Discriminatory Legislation in Rhodesia under the Rhodesian Front from 1963 to 1969: Part 2, by Claire Palley; The British Conservatives and the Racial Issue in the Debate on Decolonization, by Dan Horowitz; Patterns of Friendship Choices in an Ethnically-Mixed Junior School, by M. O. A. Durojaiye; Racial Discrimination by British Employers, by C. Selby Smith; African and European Social Clubs in Rural Ghana, by A. F. Robertson.

## ETHNOLOGY

A quarterly journal of cultural and social anthropology, published by the University of Pittsburgh, 4200 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213. Price \$5 per year.

Vol. IX, No. 3, July 1970.

Contents: The Samoan Funeral in Urban America, by Joan Ablon; Dual Organizations in Southern Ethiopia: Anthropological Imagination or Ethnographic Fact, by Ammon Orent; Exposure and Seclusion: A Study of Institutionalized Isolation Among the Mehinacu Indians of Brazil, by Thomas Gregor; Bajau Sex and Reproduction, by H. Arlo Nimmo; Structure and Variability in the Jale Kinship Terminology: A Formal Analysis, by Klaus-Friedrich Koch; Subsistence Economy and Supportive Practices: Cross-Cultural Codes, by George P. Murdock and Diana O. Morrow.

## JOURNAL OF RACIAL AFFAIRS

Published by Uitgege deur SABRA, P.O. Box 2768, Pretoria.

Vol. XXI, No. 1, January 1970.

Contents: The Agricultural Potential of the Bantu Homelands, by Dr J. H. Grobler; The Future Role of the Bantu in Public Administration, by Prof. dr P. J. Coertze; the Vhavanda of Vendloland; Book Reviews, etc.