



## The Bunkhouse Chronicle

Craig Rullman  
Columnist

### From the inside out

The discovery in 2013 of Roman coins under the Japanese castle of Katsuren on the island of Okinawa, now on display at a museum in the city of Uruma, is another important reminder that we never know as much as we think we do.

Roman coins in Okinawa?

Wherever we may have come from — and people will likely argue about that until our sun goes supernova — humans have been on the planet for a long time, and have been far more interconnected than we might fully suspect.

The coins found at Katsuren carry the stamp of the Emperor Constantine, who graciously lent his name to the city of Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople was once the largest and wealthiest city in Europe. History is at pains to tell us what a mighty city it was, how its famous walls offered effective defense for some 900

years. And, just to prove another point about impermanence, we also know that it eventually fell to the Ottoman Turks, and is today known as Istanbul.

By whatever name, this city has been a principle hinge-point of world history, and is also home of the Hagia Sophia, which has evolved from a Christian basilica to an imperial mosque to its latest fitting iteration: a museum.

Even more interesting is the Viking graffiti carved into its walls. There are two instances of Viking vandalism in the Hagia Sophia, and though scholars argue about precisely what is written (only portions of the runes are legible) it's their mere *existence* that I find interesting.

We know that Vikings had established a trade route on the Volga, and that Arab jewelry, Ottoman coinage, and Persian metallurgy made its way back to Scandinavia, where it is frequently unearthed in archaeological digs. We know that Vikings served as personal bodyguards to the Byzantine emperor and were known as the Varangian Guard.

The world was much better travelled than we often assume. The Arab Ibn Yacoub Al Tartushi, from the Muslim kingdom of Al Andalus — modern Spain — wrote about encountering Vikings on his travels through Germany over a thousand years ago. He decried the “artificial eye-makeup” worn by both the men and women, and

wrote: “I never heard any more awful singing than the singing of the people... It is a groan that comes out of their throats, similar to the bark of the dogs but even more like a wild animal.”

Cultural prejudices were as rich then as they are now.

All of this, and it is only the tip of a very large iceberg, has a point: The world has been interconnected — flat, as *New York Times* columnist and author Thomas Friedman might prefer — for much longer than we generally suppose. Empires of one kind or another have long had incredible reach. So today, when we talk about globalization, we might better remember it isn't precisely new.

Closer to home, we know about the native rendezvous, where even tribes hostile to each other would “bury the hatchet” long enough to swap trade goods. We know that native trade networks extended from the Oregon Coast to at least the Mandan culture of the Great Plains, as seashells that only grow in Oregon have been found at archaeological sites as far out east as the Missouri River. And it is quite likely those networks extended even further.

Why does any of this matter? Maybe it doesn't, much, except to illustrate something of the arrogance of our assumption to have been the first at everything, and our own permanence.

But as I suffered through the first presidential debate last Monday, squirming at the yawning vacuity of a

process that has produced such hopelessly cardboard candidates, I kept wondering about that Roman coin found in Japan, how it got there, who dropped it, and about the centuries that have washed over it as relentlessly as the tide. I thought about the empires that have risen and fallen and vanished while that coin sat there in the dirt, the Emperor's stamp slowly rubbed away by the friction of time.

I began to wonder how our approach to preserving this Republic might change if we were able — or made the simple choice — to see something of ourselves, our hopes, our designs, in the history of that coin. I'm not sure — and it may be a great human failing — that we are even capable of it.

As if to drive home that message, an Ottoman coin was also found under the Katsuren Castle.

There is an argument to be made that the Roman empire, whose fingers once touched the far reaches of the globe, didn't collapse in a cataclysm, so much as it began to slowly buckle under the weight of patronage and excess, leaving only traces of its existence in architecture and coins left scattered across the planet.

On our present course it seems fair enough to wonder if we won't also be remembered as a great thing that once was, our coins dug up in the ruins of one city or another. Not the first, but one among many, to have simply dissolved into the ages.

## Homecoming parade set for Friday, October 14

Sisters High School will host their annual Homecoming Parade Friday, October 14, at 4:30 p.m.

The parade will showcase many of the school's sports teams, several floats from the high school, as well as floats from the elementary and middle schools and the homecoming princes and princesses.

The event will last about half an hour and end in plenty of time for viewers to head over to the football game at 7 p.m. at Reed Stadium.

The parade will take place on Hood Avenue, starting by Ace Hardware and ending at Blazin Saddles.

*Salon Renaissance*

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