

# Toy Horse from Novgorod



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Arts and Sciences Competition  
Estrella War

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### Description

I have made a copy of a wooden toy horse, similar to one made in Novgorod in the 10<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### Details

The systematic excavation of medieval Novgorod began in 1932 and has produced a wealth of items, furthering the knowledge of that magnificent city. A significant number of household objects that have been found are children's toys. According to [Wood Use in Medieval Novgorod](#) (an excellent source) wood was one of the main materials used for toys. There are several different styles of wooden toy horses, some flat, some 3-dimensional, some with wheels.



Extant pieces ([Wood Use in Medieval Novgorod, CD-ROM](#))

### Period Construction

Most of the toys were not made by craft specialists, but rather by parents and family or the children themselves. This particular toy is not a difficult piece, and might have been carved during a long winter's day. The tools that would have been used include chisels and mallets, saws, draw knives, spokeshaves, saws, and carving knives. The wood they would have used would have been anything on hand, probably oak or pine.

### Reconstruction

I have made a toy horse, similar to some found in the excavation. I have done this using only hand tools. I chose to copy one out of the book, flat without wheels. This particular wooden toy horse is made out of pine, from a chunk of wood found in my stack of firewood. The piece of firewood was chosen for a relatively straight grain and few knots. It was split with a hand axe, and further split with froe and maul. The bark was knocked off with the hand axe.



The piece was then made smoother and flatter with a drawknife. It used a shave horse to keep the wood in place.



Once there was a flat surface on both sides, I traced out a horse and saddle with chalk, using chalk because I can't draw well and it is easy to rub off if I make a mistake. Once I got a design I liked, I traced it with a marking knife. Using a bow saw, drawknife, and chisels, I cleared away the waste from the design.





Getting closer to the knife line, I used chisels and a spokeshave to smooth out the piece.



### Discussion of Tools

Of the tools I used, the drawknife and axe are the most similar to what was used in the period. My chisels are also very similar, but the handles are plastic, not wood. My spokeshave is of a more modern design, with a brass body, rather than a wood body construction. Although they did use saws, there was no evidence of the frame. My bowsaw's frame type has been used since before the 1500's. The shave horse (bench) that I used is called an English bodger's bench, which is probably a 19<sup>th</sup> century design.



Tools used

### **Use of Item**

In Novgorod of the time, toys were miniatures of things children found around them. Toy horses, toy swords and axes, dolls, all were popular. These days, at SCA events where we try to recreate a medieval atmosphere, it behooves us to give our kids toys that they would enjoy and that will not wreck someone's medieval moment.

In conclusion, in doing this project I discovered what a joy it is to make toys. I plan on making more in the future, hopefully at an event, further creating a medieval atmosphere.

### **Bibliography**

Brisbane, Mark and Hather, Jon, *Wood Use in Medieval Novgorod*, Oxbow Books, Oxford, UK, 2007



Typical pre-Estrella scene: armor and camping gear piled up, last-minute projects scattered about, and Henry V on the TV.

