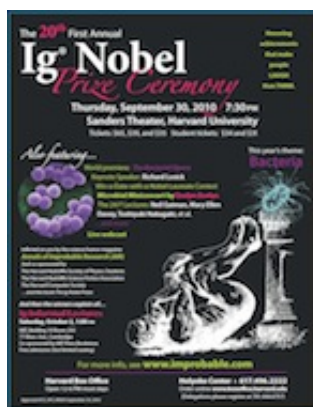


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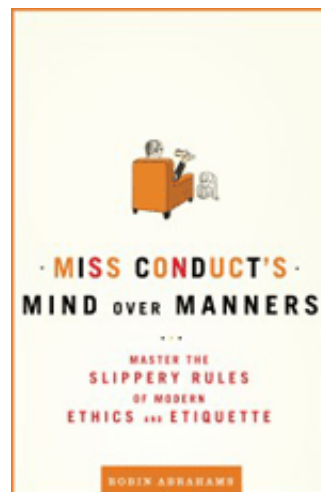
The 2010 Ceremony

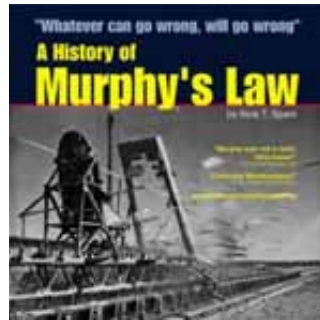


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Horvath: Like horseflies, like Vikings



[Dr Gábor Horváth](#) [pictured here], who discovered that white horses attract fewer flies ([described here a few months ago](#)), now may have shed light on an old, somewhat related question about Vikings.

The study is “On the trail of Vikings with polarized skylight: experimental study of the atmospheric optical prerequisites allowing polarimetric navigation by Viking seafarers”, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 12 March 2011, vol. 366 , no. 1565, pp. 772-78, which says:

Vikings might have been able to determine the azimuth direction of the Sun with the help of skylight polarization, just like some insects... According to this theory, the Vikings could have determined the direction of the skylight polarization with the help of an enigmatic birefringent crystal, functioning as a linearly polarizing filter. Such a crystal is referred to as ‘sunstone’ in one of the Viking’s sagas, but its exact nature is unknown. Although accepted by many, the hypothesis of polarimetric navigation by Vikings also has numerous sceptics. In this paper, we summarize the results of our own celestial polarization measurements and psychophysical laboratory experiments, in which we studied the atmospheric optical prerequisites of possible sky-polarimetric navigation in Tunisia, Finland, Hungary and the high Arctic.

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Posted by **Marc Abrahams** on **Monday, January 31st, 2011 at 2:44 pm** under [News about research](#).

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