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# Writing the Viking Age into existence

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Joonas Ahola, Frog & Clive Tolley (eds.), *Fibula, Fabula, Fact: The Viking Age in Finland* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society 2014). 519 pp.

Pierre Bauduin & Alexander E. Musin (eds.), *Vers l'Orient et vers l'Occident: Regards croisés sur les dynamiques et les transferts culturels des Vikings à la Rous ancienne / Eastwards and Westwards: Multiple Perspectives on the Dynamics and Cultural Transfers from the Vikings to the Early Rus'* (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen 2014). 500 pp.

Nancy Coleman & Nanna Løkka (eds.), *Kvinner i vikingtid / Vikingatidens kvinner* (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press 2014). 381 pp.

Ildar Garipzanov with Rosalind Bronté (eds.), *Conversion and Identity in the Viking Age* (Turnhout: Brepols 2014). 256 pp.

Henriette Lyngstrøm & Lasse C.A. Sonne (eds.), *Vikingetidens aristokratiske miljøer: Tekster fra et seminar i seed-money netværket Vikingetid i Danmark, Saxo-Instituttet, Københavns Universitet den 29. november 2013* (Copenhagen: Saxo-Instituttet 2014). 120 pp.

Shane McLeod, *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England: The Viking "Great Army" and Early Settlers, c. 865–900* (Turnhout: Brepols 2014). 325 pp.

Anders Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2014). 304 pp.

Although never long absent from the popular imagination, the past few years have seen a rekindling of the popular historical interest in the Viking Age, with, for example, television shows such as the aptly named – and quite fictional – *The Vikings* on the History Channel, or the

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more recent program, *The Last Kingdom* (BBC America and BBC Two), which tells a tale about the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex and its inhabitants' encounters with the Vikings ("Danes"). Even the Swedish public service broadcaster, *Sveriges television* ("Sweden's Television"), has jumped on the bandwagon with the two-part documentary *Sanningen om Vikingarna* ("The Truth about the Vikings") which aired earlier this year.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Scandinavian "Viking" mythology in particular has inspired artists, composers, and novelists over the past few centuries, while the Viking re-enactment community is thriving, demonstrating further that the Vikings are alive and well in the public imagination.<sup>2</sup> At present, two Swedish touring exhibitions entitled "We Call Them Vikings" are making their way around the world. One of the aims is to "bust the myth" of the stereotypical "Vikings" being "barbarians with horns on their helmets".<sup>3</sup> As the archaeologists Sami Raninen and Anna Wessman have stated, "The Viking Age is media-sexy..."<sup>4</sup>

Within the western scholarly community, interest in the period has produced a more or less steady flow of research in various disciplines since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and there are numerous official networks connecting scholars. One is the Viking Society for Northern Research (originally founded in 1892) which also publishes *Saga-Book*; another is the regular

1. The presenter, Kristina Ekerö Eriksson (née Svensson), has also written a popular history book on the Vikings together with Dick Harrison, which focuses on the individuals that can be discerned in both the historical and archaeological sources. See Kristina Svensson & Dick Harrison, *Vikingaliv* (Stockholm 2007).

2. Some of the usual suspects include the Swedish painter Carl Larsson, the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, and the German composer Richard Wagner, with a new addition to their ranks being the British-American cult author, Neil Gaiman, who will be releasing his version of Nordic mythology next year (2017).

3. See the description of the exhibition at the Canadian History Museum, <<http://www.historymuseum.ca/vikings>>. The exhibits originated at the Swedish History Museum, see <<http://historiska.se/vikings-on-tour>>. See also "Vikings: The travelling exhibition", <<http://www.vikingsexhibition.com/vikings-exhibition.html>>. The tendency still remains in the museum world to describe all Scandinavians during this period as "Vikings", while the etymology of the word *viking* from *vikja* suggests that it was exclusively used in reference to seafaring warriors and not to everyone in the population. Of course, semantics change and the use of "Vikings" to refer to all Viking-Age Scandinavians is widespread. Some might perhaps see it as a losing battle, but it is nonetheless important to be aware of this distinction. It is also important to note that this list is by no means exhaustive, and its purpose is merely to give an idea of the plethora of recent, popular history and fictional works on the Vikings. There are, for instance, also a number of well-researched historical novels set in the period, including those by Victoria M. Whitworth (*The Bone Thief* 2012 and *The Traitor's Pit* 2013).

4. Sami Raninen & Anna Wessman, "Finland as a Part of the 'Viking World'", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) p. 327.

International Saga Conference.<sup>5</sup> In more recent research, an interdisciplinary approach has often been applied, for example in studies with gender or religious perspectives. A recent example which emphasizes the importance of being aware of gender biases, and continues work started by Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh and Birgit Sawyer among others, is the inclusion of a feminist reading of previous research on Viking women in the open-access "Dangerous Women Project" at the University of Edinburgh.<sup>6</sup>

As stressed in several of the newly published works that will be considered below, being consciously aware of the historiography and motives behind the formation and study of the period known as the "Viking Age" is of extreme importance. These perspectives help provide a more nuanced view of the past. New initiatives in disseminating information about research in the field of Viking studies also include the "World Tree Project", a digital community collection archive to be used in the teaching and scholarly study of the Viking Age. This project seeks to engage academics, museums, and heritage experts in this endeavour, as well as encourage the involvement of the public.<sup>7</sup> Another example of engaging with both the public and scholarly community is the "Icelandic Saga Map" project which is in the process of creating interactive maps of the locations mentioned in the sagas.<sup>8</sup> As the Vikings seem to attract a diverse lot, this sort of responsible public engagement by the scholarly community is desirable.

The aim of the following research review is to provide a critical overview of some of the more recent research trends within Viking studies, as exemplified by these seven recently published volumes.<sup>9</sup> Most of these volumes were written with a specialized or general academic audience in

5. <<http://www.vsnr.org>>. The next Saga Conference will be held on Iceland: <<http://sagaconference2018.hi.is/front-page>>.

6. See <http://dangerouswomenproject.org/about/> and Marianne Moen, "Women in the Viking Age then and now. Powerful then, dangerous now?" <<http://dangerouswomenproject.org/2016/08/22/women-viking-age>>. Moen is also a contributor to *Vikingatidens kvinnor*, see "Women in the Landscape", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 121–147.

7. See <<http://www.worldtreeproject.org/about>> and the upcoming conference, "Rediscovering the Vikings: Reception, Recovery, Engagement" at <<http://www.worldtreeproject.org/conference>>.

8. So far, the *Íslendingasögur* ("Sagas of Icelanders") have been mapped and work has started on *Landnámabók* ("The Book of Settlements"). See <<http://sagamap.hi.is/is>>.

9. The research review has been limited to literature submitted to *Historisk tidskrift* in 2014.

mind; however, one is clearly aimed at the general public. All except one of the works with an academic focus contain collections of articles, written by various scholars with diverse expertise, and as such, these volumes represent a plethora of material – all of which unfortunately cannot be covered in detail in this review. As is becoming more common in the field of Viking studies, these works reflect the interdisciplinary spirit of the field and combine research from archaeology, history, literature, numismatics, onomastics and toponymy, and even palaeoecology.

*When and where was the "Viking Age"?*

In a western and Scandinavian perspective, the Viking Age started with the first mentions of those infamous raids off the east coast of England at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and ended in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, usually said to be in 1066 with the death of Harald Hardrada at Stamford Bridge and the later victory of William of Normandy. It is clear that, in the construction of this period, historical documents and political events were the most important factors taken into consideration. The dating of the period places the Viking Age firmly into a western context and provides it with a western orientated perspective. As pointed out by Joonas Ahola and Frog in their introduction and further discussed by Sirpa Aalto, the dates commonly accepted for the Viking Age do not fit the situation in all parts of Northern Europe, and especially not in their geographical area of study, Finland. As they state, after being established, periodizations are maintained as categories for information and are rarely re-assessed. Instead, Ahola, Aalto and Frog call for a new system of dating in Finland which fits the local archaeological record, while at the same time they acknowledge the need to use the standard dating in communication with other scholars in the west.<sup>10</sup>

In one of the other works considered here, the dates of the Viking Age also appear to be slightly flexible. Several of the articles in *Vers l'Orient et Vers l'Occident...* consider Norsemen, also called "Vikings", up to and including the 12<sup>th</sup> century in terms of their adaptation to Christian life and the Scandinavian influence on graves in the south-west Baltic (Slavic

10. Joonas Ahola & Frog, "Approaching the Viking Age in Finland", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 35–44, esp. 36, 44; Sirpa Aalto, "Viking Age in Finland? Naming a Period as a Historiographical Problem", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 139–154. Many of the chapters in this volume reiterate the problems with existing dating systems but unfortunately do not adopt and apply the three new "Finnish Viking Ages" proposed by the volume's editors.

areas).<sup>11</sup> In fact, students and scholars of the Viking Age are very aware that groups of Scandinavians were active both to the west and the east, although a lot of focus has been placed on the western expansion and contacts, probably due to previous limited access to source material and scholarship in, for example, Russia. In addition to studies orientated towards geographical movement which focus on Viking so-called "areas of influence", research on the Viking Age can be divided into many themes or foci, including – but not limited to – gender and culture studies, political power and the elite, mobility and the Viking diaspora, and religion.

### *Cultural history and the gender perspective: Viking Women*

The introduction of a gender perspective to both historical and archaeological research on the Viking Age has provided an important perspective on what has often been assumed to have been a male-dominated period. One of the volumes considered here, *Vikingakvinnor*, is dedicated entirely to research on women in the Viking Age. In the introduction, and in connection to the ongoing discourse on the varied past of the period's historiography, the editors explain that the art for the volume was chosen from the years 1850–1910 due to how this period in particular has had a profound effect on the way we see Viking women today.<sup>12</sup> In terms of scholarship, its contributions range from the problematizing of the stereotypical Viking woman to a discussion of textiles and textile production, the study of the actions of women in the public sphere – including at the Þing and in the conversion process – and a reflection on Viking ideals for women, as well as the possible connections between Nordic and Sámi women.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the sagas, Auður Magnúsdóttir contests the stereotypical image of the "strong woman".<sup>14</sup> She indicates that these sources emphasize the fact that women's work was in the household and in pro-

11. See Judith Jesch, "Christian Vikings: Norsemen in Western Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 55–60; Felix Biermann, "Early Medieval Richly Furnished Burials in the South of the Baltic – Symbols of Ethnic Identity of Expressions of Social Elites under Pressure?", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 61–69. In fact, a strong sense of periodization can only really be found in *The Age of the Vikings*, which is possibly due to it being aimed at the general public.

12. Nancy L. Coleman & Berit Ås, "Forord", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) p. 8.

13. For the latter, it does not appear that Nordic women influenced gender roles and daily life for Sámi women. See Inger Zachrisson, "Samiska och nordiska kvinnor", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 243–167.

14. Auður Magnúsdóttir, "Kvinnor i sagorna", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 59–81.

duction, e.g. weaving; however, work also depended on to which class one belonged, and upper-class women would find hay raking or milking beneath them. It was possible for women to do men's work, but not vice versa. In a legal and cultural sense, women were subordinate to men, but that does not mean that they were passive actors in society.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of the traditional association of Viking women and keys, two researchers offer different interpretations regarding the keys, as well as fish-hooks, found in many graves.<sup>16</sup> Firstly, Annette Frølich reassesses the material from Hedeby by comparing it to the medical instruments from Helgö. The fact that medical books are known from Anglo-Saxon England lends support to the idea that a number of so-called "keys" or "fish-hooks" found in the town of Hedeby can be re-identified as knives for blood-letting (a common medical practice until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>17</sup> This conclusion provides a new dimension to the understanding of who was living in Hedeby from about 800–1050, as it suggests that a doctor might have been practicing in the town during the Viking Age. Secondly, in her article, Pernille Pantmann provides a more balanced interpretation of the role of women in Viking Age society by reassessing the deposition of keys in female burials. These "key women" were given a symbol which might not necessarily have tied them only to the household but could also have marked them as "wise women" – important and with a special status in society.<sup>18</sup>

With regards to the mobility of women, one of the analyses presented in *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England* involves the determination of the biological sex of the migrants (osteological, based on grave finds). The conclusion is that a significant proportion of the migrants were also female, contrary to a tenet of migration theory and commonly held assumptions about the composition of the great army.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, in *Fibula, Fabula, Fact...*, Elina Salmela mentions a discrepancy in the genes of the population in the south-western versus the northern and eastern part of Finland during this period, which could

15. Auður Magnúsdóttir, "Kvinnor i sagorna", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 68–69, 73–75, 80.

16. Annette Frølich, "Vikingernes 'nøgler' – er ikke altid nøgler... og deres 'lystre' ikke altid til at fiske med...", in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 113–119; Pernille Pantmann, "Nøglekvinderne", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 39–56.

17. See the figures in Frølich, in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 115, 117

18. "den kloge kone". Pantmann, in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 49–52.

19. McLeod (2014) pp. 96–98, 101.

have been due to male-dominated migrations from other areas.<sup>20</sup> It is clear that more research is needed on the mobility of women in this period.

### *Political power and the Elite*

In general, historical research has often focused on the elite in society. Considering the available sources for this period, which include elite burial practice and chronicles written for the elite, it is perhaps not surprising that this is also the case for the Viking Age. One of the volumes under consideration explicitly names this theme in its title, *Vikingetidens aristokratiske miljøer* ("The Viking Age's aristocratic environments"), and thus, focuses on current thought and the problematizing of aristocratic environments in Viking Age Denmark from both a historical, but especially, archaeological perspective. One of the most intriguing contributions to this volume was written by an archaeologist and technical designer who has considered the practical problem of heating and ventilating smoke from the large halls and village houses usually associated with Viking Age rulers, with particular focus on the well-known hall in Lejre (Denmark) and a house found in Hedeby.<sup>21</sup> This article also considers the incredibly large amount of wood needed for heating large halls and concludes that, if archaeological reconstructions of the heights of these halls are correct, they would not have been very warm, +6–7° C, while the more modest village houses could be warmed up more easily.<sup>22</sup> Emphasis is also placed here on the amount of combustible material required and how the ability to control and acquire these materials is a further elite identity marker.

Another article in *Vikingetidens aristokratiske miljøer* discusses the archaeological investigation of the region around the previously known elite centre at Jelling.<sup>23</sup> The finds from the surrounding area have been

20. Elina Salmela, "The (Im)Possibilities of Genetics for Studies of Population History", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 357–358. Otherwise, the contributions to this particular volume focus more on the methodology of the various disciplines which have studied the period and how they need to work together in order to provide a more clear picture of the Viking Age and do not address gender studies as such.

21. Elizabeth Rüssel Palm, "Røg- og varmeforhold i Lejrehallen: Varmetabsberegning og røgsimulering på digitale rekonstruktioner", in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 11–19.

22. Rüssel Palm, in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 16–17.

23. The National Museum of Denmark's Jelling Project was carried out in collaboration with Vejle Museums and Aarhus University. See Charlotta Lindblom, "Jelling – fund og kulturlandskab i det locale område", in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 21–31.



placed in context in order to identify any possible connections to the old royal centre and the conditions which allowed it to develop into a centre of political power. It appears that it was an elite settlement even in the Early Iron Age, exemplified in part by the find of 7<sup>th</sup> century gold coins. Jelling's influence on the surrounding area is reflected in the weapon and horse rider graves, while the inhabitants of the nearby manor in the Elbo Valley could have interacted with the political centre in Jelling.<sup>24</sup> This article provides an idea of the development and geographical analysis of the placement of centres in the region, something debated in relation to the Jelling dynasty and earlier rulers in what became the kingdom of Denmark.

This contribution to the research on Jelling is also related to several of the other articles in the volume, for example the chapter on the possible ways in which Harald Bluetooth collected taxes, the importance of coins as not just silver but as a symbol of the king himself, and the importance of clothes in signalling to which class or community one belonged.<sup>25</sup> All of these articles in *Vikingetidens aristokratiske miljøer* present new research and as such, provide a valuable contribution to an ongoing scholarly discussion of the Viking Age elite.<sup>26</sup>

With its emphasis on rulers and the elite, *The Age of the Vikings* places itself firmly into traditional historical discourse on the Viking Age. For instance, the ruler's "hall" is the point of departure for the entire survey, and Winroth argues for a clear connection between this residence and all subsequent activity commonly associated with the Viking Age, especially raiding.<sup>27</sup> It is unfortunate that the information provided by Lindblom in her discussion about Jelling (see above) was not available to Winroth as it would have enhanced his overview of this centre of political power.<sup>28</sup>

24. Lindblom, in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 28–31.

25. Rikke Malmros, "Harald Blåtands skattevæsen?," in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 51–58; Jens Christian Moesgaard, "Kongen, magten og pengene," in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 45–50; Anne Hedeager Krag, "Internationale dragtsymboler i aristokratiske miljøer," in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 33–41.

26. Providing English summaries would have been enhanced the value of this volume and enabled this research to reach a wider audience.

27. Winroth (2014) pp. 1–8.

28. Winroth (2014) pp. 147–149. Although this particular omission could not of course have been avoided, in general this entertaining and very readable book provides a mix between detailed critique and oversimplification of certain aspects of previous research. The new (albeit speculative) interpretation of the Rök rune stone is also missing from Winroth

Although not exclusively focused on the elite's role in migration to England and the activities of the "great army", McLeod's research does by nature of the questions he poses discuss the origins of the leaders of the armies that invaded the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the chapter on the role of client kings in the areas conquered by Viking armies analyses the benefits of this policy in terms of administration and relations with the local elite.<sup>29</sup> The practice is placed in the context of the larger study on these proto-historic migrations and is seen to support the conclusion that many of the great army's members came from Frisia or Ireland. Moreover, attention is paid to the political innovation and acculturation of the migrant Scandinavians.<sup>30</sup>

*Mobility and the Viking Diaspora: going west or east*

Another of the common themes found in research on the Viking Age stresses the importance of the mobility networks that existed and were further developed throughout the period. In some cases, the expansion is connected with trade and in other cases, the emphasis is on raiding and invasion.<sup>31</sup>

A unique approach is taken in the study of the western expansion in *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England*. In this innovative study, McLeod applies modern migration theory to the evidence for the proto-historic Scandinavian settlement in England. His critical reflection on migration theory's applicability to proto-historic migration will benefit similar migration research and one of his conclusions is that not all tenets of migration theory can be applied to pre- and proto-historic migrations without first considering the actual evidence at hand.<sup>32</sup> Scandinavian migration to England in the 9<sup>th</sup> (and early 10<sup>th</sup> century) is identified as a "spike" in a long-term trend. Some of the migrants were

(2014, pp. 218–220) as it was first published in 2016. See Per Holmberg, "Svaren på Rökstenens gåtor. En socialsemiotisk analys av meningsskapande och rumslighet", *Futhark. International Journal of Runic Studies* 6 (2015, publ. 2016), pp. 65–106. However, mention of the actual finds (albeit not plentiful) of musical instruments from the Viking Age could have been included (cf. Winroth (2014) p. 240).

29. McLeod (2014) pp. 173–203.

30. McLeod (2014) pp. 205–242.

31. Both approaches are found in Winroth's (2014) survey.

32. McLeod (2014) e.g. pp. 282. McLeod tests each tenet using the written and archaeological, and some place name, evidence.

what he terms "career migrants", from Frisia and the Irish Sea area, as many of these individuals were prepared to settle and adapt in order to make a living, e.g. in minting and pottery.<sup>33</sup> In addition, McLeod presents the reader with a thorough, critical overview of previous research on the Viking Age in England.<sup>34</sup>

On the other side of Europe, *Fibula, Fabula, Fact...* provides a scholarly introduction to current research from a number of disciplines about the inhabitants of what is now Finland and Karelia during the Viking Age, their connections to the actual Scandinavian Vikings, and a problematizing of the four Iron Age "cultural areas": Åland Islands, the western area, the eastern area (i.e. Karelia), and the northern area. A consideration of Finland and Karelia's role or place within this historical context concludes that there was a general trend towards increased mobility in many of the communities throughout the Baltic and not just among the well-known Vikings; in fact, many of the inhabitants of this large area might not even have dealt with Scandinavian traders directly but through middlemen.<sup>35</sup> In terms of where the actual Vikings went in Finland, attention is paid to Åland which appears to have had the most contact with Sweden, while the trade centre Staraya Ladoga with its start by the 750s, shows signs of interactions with Scandinavia and the Finnish north.<sup>36</sup> A good example of the combination of historical and archaeological sources is in the analysis of the contacts with the elusive "Bjarmaland", mentioned by the Norwegian trader Ohthere, which considers the similarities between artefacts in the White Sea area and the stray finds in northern Finland – a possible link between the two areas. The chapter also highlights the intricacies of and difficulties with

33. McLeod (2014) e.g. pp. 281–284. Although he admits that many women were among the migrants, he always lumps these among the non-combatants in the army, which might not be entirely accurate.

34. McLeod (2014) e.g. pp. 11–22 (chapter 1). See also his discussion of David W. Rollason's argument about the influence of the archbishops and the impotence of the Scandinavian kings in York. McLeod instead concludes that they were all involved in decision-making. McLeod (2014) pp. 239–241.

35. See e.g. Sami Raninen & Anna Wessman, "Finland as a Part of the 'Viking World'", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 327–346; Lassi Heininen, Joonas Ahola & Frog, "'Geopolitics of the Viking Age?'" in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 303–308.

36. Raninen & Wessman, "Finland as a Part of the 'Viking World'", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 327–346; Johan Schalin, "Scandinavian-Finnish Language Contact in the Viking Age in the Light of Borrowed Names", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 399–436.

identifying historical places or peoples in the archaeological record.<sup>37</sup> Overall, the Viking Age was seen as a "pivotal era of transition" and a "significant period" in the east, while the north was integrated into the "space of Europe" over the course of the period.<sup>38</sup>

Despite claims to the contrary in *Fibula, Fabula, Fact...*, in some more recent survey works, there is also a greater awareness of and intentional focus on the eastern perspective of the Viking Age. For instance, *The Viking World* provides a fairly recent academic survey of the most prevalent themes in Viking studies on Finland and Russia. In addition, Winroth mentions trade in the east in a chapter of his *The Conversion of Scandinavia*.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, the volume *Vers l'Occident et Vers l'Orient...* provides a number of perspectives on Scandinavian settlement in areas both east and west – and south. For instance, based on archaeological research, an article on the settlements south of the Baltic Sea examines the interactions with the Western Slavs and concludes that Scandinavian settlement was dependent on whether or not local political organization and culture were compatible with the settlers.<sup>40</sup> Two other contributions consider the tradition of the establishment of Scandinavians in Normandy and the colonization myth that has arisen about that area.<sup>41</sup> In fact, there is no archaeological evidence for Scandinavian-specific settlement; instead, Normandy had already started undergoing settlement changes before the arrival of the Vikings. It appears, therefore that their assimilation into the Frankish world must have been rapid. The "myth-busting" of the Scandinavian colonization of Normandy is

37. Mervi Koskela Vasaru, "Bjarmaland and Contacts in the Late-Prehistoric and Early-Medieval North", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 195–218.

38. Joonas Ahola, Frog & Clive Tolley, "Vikings in Finland? Closing Considerations on the Viking Age in Finland", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 500; Lassi Heininen, Joonas Ahola & Frog, "'Geopolitics' of the Viking Age?", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) p. 316.

39. Anders Winroth, "Trade in Eastern Europe", in *The Conversion of Scandinavia* (New Haven, 2012) pp. 92–101; Stefan Brink & Neil Price (eds.), *The Viking World* (Abingdon/New York 2008).

40. Søren Michael Sindbæk, "Scandinavian Settlement South of the Baltic Sea", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 168–176.

41. Vincent Carpentier, "Dans quell context les Scandinaves se sont-ils implantés en Normandie? Ce que nous dit l'archéologie de l'habitat rural en Neustrie, du VIIIe au Xe siècle", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 187–198; Vincent Carpentier, "Du mythe colonisateur à l'histoire environnementale des côtes de la Normandie à l'époque viking: l'exemple de l'estuaire de la Dives (France, Calvados), IXe–XIe siècle", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 199–213.

undertaken by comparing place-names with their palaeoenvironmental context. The result of this approach is the dismissal of the colonization thesis, stressing that the role of the Vikings in the development of this area was passive.<sup>42</sup>

*Religion: pre- and post-conversion*

Studies on the conversion and Christianization of the Scandinavian homelands formed the basis of a major research project in the 1990s, and a more recent survey based on this theme can be found in *The Conversion of Scandinavia* (New Haven 2012). Furthermore, the conversion of Scandinavians in the diaspora, such as England and Ireland, has also previously been the subject of both historical and archaeological research. Studies on these topics can be found in most of the volumes included in this overview.

As suggested by the title, *Conversion and Identity in the Viking Age* provides a number of perspectives on how conversion was connected to identity.<sup>43</sup> Although some chapters contain a re-evaluation of previous research, the volume as a whole provides new perspectives on the topic. The emphasis in a number of articles is that conversion is not simply an individual act, but also involves communities. Discourse on conversion cannot be limited to just a political decision, mutual benefit, or religious experience; a number of elements are always at play. Thus, Christopher Abram applies the anthropologist Harvey Whitehouses's "modes of religiosity" to the conversion period and analyses pre- and post-conversion beliefs in light of their adhering to "doctrinal" or "imagistic" characteristics.<sup>44</sup> The social and political advantages of conversion for the elite in the Scandinavian homelands is also addressed – in particular in the attractiveness of the religion to men.<sup>45</sup> The overarching discussion in this volume, which also comprises conversion in the Faroes

42. Carpentier, "Du mythe colonisateur à l'histoire environnementale des côtes de la Normandie à l'époque viking: l'exemple de l'estuaire de la Dives (France, Calvados), IXe–Xle siècle", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) p. 212.

43. It also includes an assessment of previous scholarship on the topic, see Haki Antonsson, "The Conversion and Christianization of Scandinavia: A Critical Review of Recent Scholarly Writings", in Garipzanov & Bronté (eds.) (2014) pp. 49–73.

44. See Christopher Abram, "The 'Two Modes of Religiosity' in Conversion-Era Scandinavia", in Garipzanov & Bronté (eds.) (2014) pp. 21–48, esp. 25–44.

45. Ildar Garipzanov, "Christian Identities, Social Status, & Gender in Viking Scandinavia", in Garipzanov & Bronté (eds.) (2014) pp. 137–165.

and the Isle of Man, includes the "contact phase" and "cultural negotiation phase" of conversion and provides an analysis of how contacts were made, a brief consideration of how space was Christianized, and how identity was formed through interactions with others both pre- and post-conversion.<sup>46</sup>

A brief consideration of Christianity contributing to a shift in identity is also found in *Fibula, Fabula, Fact...* with regards to the spread and assertion of western Christianity. In the case of Finland, this establishment had been achieved by the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup> In another chapter, the Christianization is boiled down to a bureaucratic "mechanism". The idea is presented that the new religion did not allow for practical rituals – e.g. for good health or protection from unseen malicious creatures – and thus, conversion could not have been exclusive to traditional rituals.<sup>48</sup> While the adoption of Christianity did vary locally and traditional practices or traditions remained after conversion, elements of the religion, including the cult of saints, could have most certainly offered a substitute for dealing with activities and concerns in practical, daily life.<sup>49</sup> Whether or not they were adequate or acceptable to the converted population is another matter.

The shift from the Old Norse religion to Christianity is often seen as a question of power politics. Examples of this approach are found in Winroth's book where the conversion is strongly connected to the already prevalent gift-giving culture in the region, and in Maj Helqvist's analysis where it is seen as a meeting between two cultures and two power ideologies.<sup>50</sup> However, in addition to the traditional power struggle, it is possible to distinguish individuals – including women – involved in the shaping of new traditions in the wake of the conversion.<sup>51</sup>

46. For a summary, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "Conversion and Identity in the Viking-Age North", in Garipzanov & Bronté (eds.) (2014) esp. pp. 227–243.

47. Lassi Heininen, Joonas Ahola & Frog, "Geopolitics' of the Viking Age?", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 296–320, esp. 309.

48. Joonas Ahola & Frog, "Approaching the Viking Age in Finland", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 68–69.

49. Claims to the contrary in Ahola & Frog, "Approaching the Viking Age in Finland", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 68–69. The contents of the later collections of miracle stories from Scandinavia attest to the possibility (but not the probability) of this shift.

50. Maj Helqvist, "To verdener – et skifte i vikingetidens magtideologi", in Lyngstrøm & Sonne (eds.) (2014) pp. 83–88, esp. 85; Winroth (2014) esp. pp. 145–156, 199–211.

51. Gro Steinsland, "En kvinne velger gudsbilde", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 149–165.

In *Vers l'Orient et vers l'Occident...*, Judith Jesch and Lesley Abrams contribute further to the dialogue on the conversion and Christianization of the Vikings.<sup>52</sup> Jesch stretches the Viking Age to the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the analysis of the poetry that was inspired by two separate expeditions undertaken by King Sigurdur of Norway and Earl Rögnvaldr of Orkney, respectively. Her focus is on cultural interaction – especially that through contact with cultures during crusading – and how that helped stimulate the development of a new, Christian culture. This new culture focused on travel for religious (spiritual and cultural) reasons, as opposed to the previous focus on raiding and trading. In turn, Abrams stresses the importance of not generalizing when it comes to the conversion and Christianization of the Viking world. In her article, she focuses on the early Scandinavian settlements in Britain and Ireland, concluding that interaction with the locals in Scotland (exemplified by Barra) could have led to conversion, while in Ireland it seems to have led to further religious divergence until at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> In England, stone sculpture provides evidence of co-operation between converts and churches.<sup>54</sup> In both of these contributions, the fluidity and adaptability of Viking culture is stressed.

In turn, McLeod addresses the question of how Scandinavians adapted to Christianity so quickly in the British Isles and suggests that the question had previously been posed incorrectly. Instead, the acculturation process might have been assisted by the fact that most Scandinavian migrants would already have been exposed to Christianity before joining the great army. If they came from Frisia or Ireland, they would have been aware of the religion and they might even have encountered its followers on a daily basis. If they came from the Scandinavian homelands, the missions to, for example, Birka, Hedeby and Ribe had already begun before the great army first invaded England.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, child burials seem to

52. Judith Jesch, "Christian Vikings: Norsemen in Western Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> century", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 55–60; Lesley Abrams, "The Conversion of Scandinavians in Britain and Ireland: an Overview", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 327–337. For changes to Scandinavian paganism in Eastern Europe, see Alexander E. Musin, "Les Scandinaves en Roussie entre paganisme et christianisme", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 311–326.

53. Abrams, "The Conversion of Scandinavians in Britain and Ireland: an Overview", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 329–334, 336–337. However, cf. McLeod (2014) pp. 270–272.

54. Abrams, "The Conversion of Scandinavians in Britain and Ireland: an Overview", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 337.

55. McLeod (2014) pp. 256–258. The relatively new finds from Varnhem from the 9<sup>th</sup> century (graves) could have been added to strengthen McLeod's argument on this point. Cf.

indicate that the Christianization of some customs occurred quite early on. In addition, McLeod provides a reassessment of the "destruction" of St Wystan's in Mercia, suggesting instead that the Scandinavians re-purposed sections of the church (and used the cemetery themselves), and reminds the reader – in a vein similar to Winroth – that Vikings were not the only ones who robbed churches in Ireland, Francia or England. In fact, armed bands of Christians were also responsible for similar behaviour.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the cult of St Edmund, an English king killed by Vikings, was initiated during Scandinavian control of East Anglia, and provides evidence for the fact that Christian influence and clergy remained in the area.<sup>57</sup> In essence, the diversity, mobility and interconnectivity of the Viking world is again stressed.

*Towards inclusivity and multidisciplinary in research on the Viking Age*

Historians often bemoan the lack of primary, written source material composed in Scandinavia for the Viking Age and Middle Ages. Even the rune stones – simultaneously monument and text – are mostly from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the period. There are, however, foreign (i.e. non-Scandinavian) sources, as well as local texts composed at a later date (such as many of the Icelandic sagas from the 13<sup>th</sup> century). Of course, the archaeological sources are much more plentiful, and thus, an interdisciplinary approach is often seen as mandatory in order to properly reconstruct the events of the Viking Age, while there is an understanding that a reliance on archaeological material is of vital importance.

All publications in this research review contain an interdisciplinary and/or geographically inclusive approach, with the exception of *Vikingetidens aristokratiske miljøer* which was produced for a Scandinavian audience in order to publish and bring attention to new research on Viking Age Denmark; however, it provides different approaches to the interpretation of what existed in an "aristocratic environment". It is also important to note that its contents are understandable and useful across disciplines.<sup>58</sup>

Lesley Abrams, "The Conversion of Scandinavians in Britain and Ireland: an Overview", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 327–337.

56. McLeod (2014) pp. 270–272. Cf. also Winroth (2014) where he states that the Middle Ages were violent in general, pp. 9–10.

57. McLeod (2014) p. 254.

58. However, all contributions are in Danish which could prove problematic for use by students and some scholars outside of Scandinavia.



The publication *Vers l'Occident et l'Orient...* acknowledges the need to bridge diverging international academic traditions and the contributions in this volume are an attempt to present local discourse in an international forum and create dialogues between these.<sup>59</sup> The volume itself brings together research from, for example, Scandinavia, England, France, and Russia, encompasses most of the main themes in research on the Viking Age in the west, east and homelands, and includes articles on the use of the Viking Age in later historiography.<sup>60</sup> An ambitious project, it even helpfully provides summaries of all of the articles in French, English, and Russian.

The stated purpose of *Fibula, Fabula, Fact...* is to provide an accessible, interdisciplinary volume to encourage cooperation across disciplinary boundaries as well as provide awareness of the sometimes complicated nature of Viking Age research in Finland. The volume includes articles from a number of disciplines, all of which provide a clue to the history of Finland's inhabitants during this period, whether it is the genetic make-up, the environmental conditions, or the language which they spoke. In addition, an examination of the use of mythology or folklore in the study of the distant past, including the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Kalevala*, is considered.<sup>61</sup> Its contents will be useful for any scholar or student interested in the circumstance of that region during the Viking Age.

One of the explicit aims of the volume *Vikingatidens kvinnor* is to raise awareness of ongoing research on women in the Viking Age and present the myriad of topics and perspectives that are possible in this field. This volume definitely provides an interdisciplinary perspective on Viking-Age women useful for both scholars and students and to some extent the general public. However, there is a possible language barrier for students or the public outside of Scandinavia, as many of the contributions are in one of the Nordic languages. Nevertheless, taken together, the contributions provide valuable interdisciplinary perspectives on a number of relevant topics, such as on the women of Birka, on the identities of

59. Pierre Baudin, "Introduction", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 15–17, 26.

60. See, e.g., Adrian A. Selin, "'Invitation of the Varangians' and 'Invitation of the Swedes' in Russian History: Ideas of Early Historiography in Late Russian Medieval Society", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 397–406; Leo S. Klejn, "Normanism and Antinormanism in Russia: An Eyewitness Account", in Bauduin & Musin (eds.) (2014) pp. 407–415.

61. Frog, "Mythological Thinking and the Viking Age in Finland", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 437–482; Joonas Ahola, "Kalevalaic Heroic Epic and the Viking Age in Finland", in Ahola et al. (eds.) (2014) pp. 361–386.

women, and on inheritance and ownership, as well as many others.<sup>62</sup>

With its rather narrow focus, *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England* does understandably not engage with research from the farthest eastern Scandinavian sphere. However, it is a product of interdisciplinary research and provides a new perspective on settlement in England and interconnectivity within the Viking diaspora. In contrast, despite its conventional organization of themes i.e. chapters focusing on raiding, settlement, and trade, *The Age of the Vikings* is exemplary in its inclusivity – both west and east are considered, and the important idea that war and violence were not foreign concepts to anyone in the 8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries is hammered home quite efficiently.

### *Conclusion – an enduringly vibrant field*

This research review has considered seven recent publications which approach the "Viking Age" from a number of perspectives common in the diverse field of Viking studies. First, the review reflects on whether the accepted dates of the Viking Age are appropriate in all regions or if some flexibility should be allowed. In order to illustrate the themes, a selection of examples was made from all of the valuable contributions featured in these volumes. Many of these works, but especially the aptly named *Vikingatidens kvinnor*, contain analyses of the role of women in the Viking Age. In some cases, the question of women's mobility during this time of voyaging has been raised, and it has been stressed that a re-evaluation of the stereotypical Viking woman is important. Both of these issues deserve further investigation.

Moreover, an enduring topic of interest in the field concerns political power and the elite in Viking Age society. The points raised in this topic often also re-emerge in two other themes: mobility and the Viking diaspora, and studies on religious beliefs and practices. However, it is important to remember other aspects of these studies, including the local variations and differing levels of impact. Thus, re-evaluation of previously held beliefs about the activities of the Vikings in the diaspora,

62. Including those mentioned above. Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson & Anna Kjellström, "The Urban Woman. On the Role and Identity of Women in Birka", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 187–208; Judith Jesch, "Women and Identities", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 169–286; Else Mundal, "Bakgrunnen for kvinnesynet i den norrøne kulturen", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 325–336; Birgit Sawyer, "Kvinnors arv och ägande", in Coleman & Løkka (eds.) (2014) pp. 339–355.

such as in Normandy, has in some cases shown them to be tenuous at best. In addition, considerations of individual identity and cultural affiliation are connected with both conversion and settlement or mobility.

Finally, all of the publications considered here apply some form of interdisciplinary approach or stress the need for multidisciplinary studies. Moreover, most attempt to give a geographically well-rounded perspective on the Viking Age. The trend towards engaging in multidisciplinary studies found in these volumes will most likely lead to fruitful future research.

It is very clear, even from this selection, that the field of Viking studies is incredibly diverse and innovative. It encompasses both the humanities and the natural sciences, and will continue to capture the imagination of scholars and the public alike for years to come.