

# Playing Vikings

## Militarism, Hegemonic Masculinities, and Childhood Enculturation in Viking Age Scandinavia

by Ben Raffield

Although the Viking Age (ca. 750–1050 CE) is often characterized as a time of violence, significant questions remain regarding how conflict was conducted during the period. For example, there have been few attempts to understand the cultural norms, attitudes, and practices that drove individuals to participate in warfare. This article reports the results of a study that sought to shed light on this issue by considering the process of enculturation during Viking Age childhood. This was achieved by exploring how the influences of militarism and hegemonic masculinity conditioned those living within Scandinavian societies to participate in conflict from a young age. Through examining the archaeological and literary evidence for childhood pastimes, the study found that everyday aspects of Viking Age society reinforced militaristic, hegemonic hierarchies of masculinity. This can be seen, for example, in the form of toy weapons that were modeled on full-sized, functional weapons; strategic board games that conveyed messages regarding the ideological power of kingship; and physical games that provided opportunities for successful individuals to enhance their social status. The evidence therefore suggests that Viking Age societies perpetuated a series of self-reinforcing cultural norms that encouraged participation in martial activities.

The Viking Age (ca. 750–1050 CE) is often characterized as a violent time of Scandinavian expansionist activity. In western Europe, increasing raiding activity from the beginning of the ninth century onward would see viking groups establish colonies in the British Isles and Frankia.<sup>1</sup> In the east, the Scandinavian sphere of influence expanded into the Baltic, eastern Europe, and the Eurasian Steppe, precipitating the rise of a complex, multi-ethnic society known as the Rus', which would become a major player in eastern politics during subsequent centuries. The Viking Age, however, was also a time of political upheaval in Scandinavia, as regional polities and petty kingdoms expanded their influence through warfare and conflict. By the end of the period, increasingly powerful elites had established the first centralized Scandinavian kingdoms—the precursors to the modern-day nation-states of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Given the fundamental role of violence in driving social and political change in early medieval Europe, it is surprising that archaeologists have made relatively few attempts to explore conflict as a social phenomenon (for a few exceptions, see Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009; Price 2002; Raffield et al. 2016)

or to better understand the mechanisms that drove large numbers of people to participate in warfare. Important questions remain unanswered. For example, how were people conditioned to face the rigors of long-distance travel, violence, and the likelihood of death? How did prevailing social norms sustain cycles of conflict? In order to address these questions, this article focuses on the process of enculturation as it was experienced during Viking Age childhood. Enculturation is a term used to describe the process by which an individual learns the cultural requirements and socially acceptable values of a society in order to identify with and fulfil the roles required of them (LeVine 1990). The study will consider how this process intersected with two powerful and mutually reinforcing influences that were prevalent among Scandinavian societies of the time—militarism and hegemonic masculinity.

This study explores childhood enculturation through an examination of material and literary evidence related to play. Play is an important part of the enculturation process, as it allows children not only to interact with and comprehend the adult world but also to form subcultures that encode their own rules, biases, and social norms and to transmit these to other children (Handel, Cahill, and Elkin 2007). During the past (and as it is today), play was an important means through

1. The term “viking” is used here not as an ethnonym but rather to describe individuals and groups participating in seaborne raiding, piracy, and warfare.

**Ben Raffield** is a Researcher in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Uppsala University (PO Box 626, 751 26 Uppsala, Uppland, Sweden [ben.raffield@arkeologi.uu.se]). This paper was submitted 13 IX 17, accepted 1 V 18, and electronically published 12 XI 19.

which children learned about the roles that they would eventually fulfil as adults (Crawford 2009; Ember and Cunnam 2015; Hadley 2016; Mellor 2014; Orme 1995). The evidence associated with these activities—in this case toys and games—allows archaeologists to explore how children were introduced to adult roles, as well as the ways in which social norms were enforced (Coltrane 2006; Handel, Cahill, and Elkin 2007).

In developing the arguments presented here, this study draws on both archaeological and textual data. The latter includes contemporaneous historical annals and observations, in addition to later medieval European and Old Norse sources as well as the earliest Scandinavian law codes. While these texts provide invaluable insights into the early medieval world, it is important to acknowledge their limitations. Insular and Continental sources such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Annals of St-Bertin*, for example, project the inevitable biases of Christian scribes who were recording (and in some cases likely exaggerating) the activities of viking raiding fleets, as well as their lack of cultural familiarity with the groups that they were describing. As such, these sources are highly partial in their descriptions of viking activity. Source-critical issues also affect the use of Old Norse literary sources such as the Icelandic family sagas, *Heimskringla* (The sagas of the Norse kings), and various Eddic poems. The family sagas, compiled anonymously during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries (although some may have existed as oral traditions before this time), document the lives and conflicts of various families living in Iceland during the ninth through eleventh centuries. *Heimskringla*, written by the thirteenth-century Icelandic politician and historian Snorri Sturluson, charts the lives of the Norse kings from the legendary, prehistoric dynasty of the Ynglings to the historically attested rulers of the Middle Ages. The final source used here is the *Poetic Edda*, a synthetic collection of mythological and heroic poems of unknown origin that may preserve echoes of Viking Age (or perhaps even older) beliefs that survived as oral traditions before first being written down during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Opinions concerning the validity of Old Norse sources are divisive, and the long-running debates regarding their use have been documented by numerous scholars (e.g., Clunies Ross 1994, 1998, 2010; Larrington, Quinn, and Schorn 2016; McTurk 2005; O'Donoghue 2004). While the middle of the twentieth century saw scholars adopt an overtly critical attitude toward Old Norse texts, subsequent decades saw a reestablishment of trust in these sources. In a recent discussion of animated objects in Viking Age Scandinavia, Julie Lund (2017) has noted that this shift has precipitated the development of a “highly text-dependent, innovative Late Iron Age and Viking Age archaeology . . . where these written sources are used *analogically* with the archaeological evidence” (91), an approach successfully demonstrated in numerous studies (e.g., Gardela 2012, 2013b; Jesch 1991, 2015; Lund 2017; McAlister 2013; Price 2002, 2005; Raffield, Price, and Collard 2017a, 2017b). While these texts should not be taken as accurately documenting events that took place during the Viking Age, the identification of common patterns of behavior as they manifest in multiple sources can allow us to potentially

identify social attitudes and customs that medieval Icelanders found to be believable of their pre-Christian ancestors.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. After considering cultural definitions of childhood in the past, the discussion will go on to outline the relationships between militarism, hegemonic masculinity, and enculturation during the Viking Age, before exploring how these influences can be identified in the archaeological and literary evidence for toys, games, and physical activities. The next section will consider how and when children and adolescents might have first actively participated in conflict. The discussion closes with a reflection on disparate experiences of childhood and some final remarks.

### Children, Childhood, and Enculturation during the Viking Age

It is only in the last two decades that research into various aspects of Viking Age childhood has truly flourished. This has led to the development of studies focusing on social and cultural perspectives of children and how these were reflected in burial practices (e.g., Callow 2006; Eriksen 2017; Mejsholm 2009; Welinder 1997; Wicker 2012); on evidence for toys, games, and the agency of material culture (e.g., Gardela 2012; Hall 2014a, 2014b, 2016; McAlister 2013); and on the role of children as migrants (e.g., Hadley 2016, 2018; Hadley and Hemer 2011; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015). These studies reflect an increased interest in past childhood that can be charted more broadly across the discipline (see, among many others, Baxter 2005; Coşkunsu 2015; Dommasnes and Wrigglesworth 2008; Gilchrist 2012; Hadley and Hemer 2014; Murphy and Le Roy 2017; Sofaer Derevenski 2000).

How do we define and understand the concept of childhood as it existed during the Viking Age? In modern Western societies, children are often considered to become adults at the age of 18 years, a simplistic and arbitrary distinction that has no bearing on scientific or wider cultural definitions of childhood (Gowland 2006; Sofaer 2011). In archaeology and anthropology, childhood is conceptualized and defined in many different ways. For those working in bioarchaeology and osteology the term “child” is rarely employed; rather, scholars use terms such as “infant,” “juvenile,” and “adolescent” to describe individuals based on their skeletal morphology (see Halcrow and Tayles 2008:194–196). Unfortunately, however, there are no internationally recognized bioarchaeological standards for determining an individual's age at death. Rather, several methods have been proposed (e.g., Brickley and McKinley 2004; Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994). Bioarchaeological definitions of childhood, furthermore, can conflict with those employed by scholars working in the humanities, who often perceive childhood to be a cultural concept that varies diachronically and geographically. In many contemporary societies, the concept of “social age”—the normative behavior attributed to individuals of a certain age group—is an important factor in determining how an individual is perceived by wider society. Among the Ndumba of New Guinea, for example, Hays and Hays (1982) note that

an individual's chronological age is closely tied to behavioral expectations, the violation of which can lead to public shaming. In contexts where chronological and social age are not so closely tied, however, conceptual perceptions of childhood might be flexible, as adults tailor their expectations to each child's individual growth. In other cases, children become adults only once they have completed culturally prescribed rites of passage (Honwana 2006; Wessells 2006). In the case of the Ndumba, noted above, a man does not achieve full adult status until he is married, a rite itself preceded (usually by some years) by ceremonial traditions that mark an individual as eligible to marry (Hays and Hays 1982). Among the Gahuku-Gama tribes of New Guinea, Read (1952, 1965) noted that boys participate in several rounds of initiation rites over the course of almost a decade.

Numerous attempts have been made to define childhood during the early medieval period. Crawford (2007), for example, argued that in Anglo-Saxon England any individual aged over 10 years might have been considered an adult, while Hall (2014*b*) has suggested that childhood was separated from adulthood by a long period of adolescence, the length of which varied according to the individual. Stoodley (2000), in contrast, has outlined a number of age "thresholds," as seen in grave goods, which he argues reflected the status of the deceased. In the case of Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia, there is similarly no clear indication as to whether childhood was a fixed or fluid concept (see discussion in Halstad McGuire 2010; Lewis-Simpson 2008). Medieval sources indicate that childhood might have lasted from the ages of about 7–15 years (see Kanvall 1995; Mundal 1988; Myglund 2010)—an idea supported by the twelfth-century Icelandic *Grágás* laws, which imply that an individual was considered legally able to manage their own affairs once they were 16 years old (Dennis, Foote, and Perkins 1980, 2000). The *Grágás* laws, however, also state that a male aged 12 years or older could be punished for crimes (Dennis, Foote, and Perkins 1980), perhaps implying the existence of several age thresholds across which individuals transitioned at certain points in life (Halstad McGuire 2010). Thedéen (2009*b*) has similarly argued for the existence of age thresholds among Viking Age girls and women in a study of burial practices on the island of Gotland. Given that there was no Old Norse word for adolescence (see Larrington 2008), it may have been the case that Viking Age societies possessed no concept of adolescence at all. Children instead might have been perceived to simply become adults (Halstad McGuire 2010). Chronological age, however, would have been just one single factor that determined when an individual crossed a certain age threshold (Halstad McGuire 2010), and in this the concept of social age also might have been influential in determining how a child was perceived by wider society (e.g., Gilchrist 2012; Kaland 2008; Kamp 2015; Lewis-Simpson 2008). All of these arguments, of course, may grossly oversimplify relationships between culture and the human body, and it is possible or perhaps even likely that concepts of childhood varied across time and space, even within communities (Gowland 2006; Kamp 2015). Nevertheless, a Viking Age boy might have

been accepted as a "man" by around the age of 12 years (Batey and Paterson 2012; Callow 2007; Foote and Wilson 1979), and this could have been an important factor in governing an individual's involvement in conflict and warfare.

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to define what is meant by the terms "infant," "child," and "adolescent." When referring specifically to osteological material, infants are defined as individuals aged under 3 years, children as individuals aged 3–12 years, and adolescents as individuals aged 12–20 years based on the criteria outlined by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994:9). For the sake of simplicity, the same definitions are applied to more general discussions of both childhood and adolescence throughout the article, although it is necessary to recognize that individuals described as children according to these standards might have been considered as approaching or even having fully achieved the status of adults. These terms, therefore, should not be perceived as binding, and a measure of ambiguity should be accepted in their application to Viking Age material and cultural practices.

When considering how societies are conditioned for warfare, the study of enculturation provides insights into social attitudes that legitimize conflict and martial values. As noted above, enculturation is the process by which an individual learns the norms, behaviors, and boundaries that allow them to function within society. Enculturation takes place at multiple social levels (e.g., dyadic, household, peer group, community; LeVine 1990) and serves to influence an individual's perception of the self, including ethnic identity and language, ideological beliefs, and attitudes toward concepts such as gender (see Howard 2000 and references therein). Numerous arguments have been posited with regard to exactly how and at what rate enculturation takes place throughout the life course (e.g., Erikson 1950; Gilligan 1982; Gilligan and Lyons 1990; Mead 1934), but it is clear that the formative years of childhood represent an important stage in this process. While enculturation is to some extent an unconscious process, it is also reflective and innovative (Shimahara 1970). It is now widely acknowledged that children acquire knowledge and traits not only through the observation of adults but also through interaction with their peers and the world around them (Casey and Burruss 2010; Kamp 2015; Shimahara 1970; Weinreich 2009; Weisner 2015). As noted in numerous ethnographic studies (e.g., Casey and Burruss 2010; Ember and Cunnar 2015; Weisner and Gallimore 1977), children often spend significant amounts of time playing away from adults while being cared for by older children. This provides them with opportunities to mobilize their agency and through this to individualize the course of the enculturation process, not only by interpreting and adapting adult behaviors but also through the constant evaluation and reassessment of their own identity (Bird and Bird 2000; Damon 2006; Kamp 2015; Keith 2005).

Enculturation is often equated with socialization, a term used to describe how an individual is shaped to maintain relationships with and become accepted by a society or group (Damon 2006; Lillehammer 2010). From an archaeological perspective,

recent studies by Hadley (2016), Hall (2014*b*), and McAlister (2013) have discussed the imitative role of toys such as quernstones, ships, livestock, and weapons in socializing Viking Age children to the roles that they would perform during adult life. As we shall see below, however, toys and playthings also encode more subtle messages, such as expectations concerning socially appropriate behavioral traits and codes of conduct, which are also transmitted through use.

Given the close links between enculturation and socialization, this study does not consider enculturation to be a discrete phenomenon. Rather, enculturation is considered as just one of many concurrent processes that would have shaped an individual's perception of themselves in relation to wider society, with implications for the construction of attitudes, feelings, and characteristics that made up their personal identity.

### Children and Violence during the Viking Age

During the Viking Age, it probably would not have been uncommon for children and adolescents to be exposed to violence and conflict. At a time when regional elites were looking to consolidate and expand their power across Scandinavia, children undoubtedly would have witnessed and fallen victim to raids and attacks on their homes. There is also good evidence, however, to indicate that children experienced or actively participated in conflict outside of Scandinavia. Some, for example, were born into and lived among the large, migratory viking fleets that were operating in northwestern Europe during the ninth century (e.g., Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 2001; Hadley 2016; McLeod 2014; Raffield 2016; Richards 2004; Swanton 2000). These included the so-called viking Great Army, which was active in England during the years 865–878. Potential evidence for the children living among this group has been identified at Repton, Derbyshire, where the army established an overwintering camp in 873–874. During excavations adjacent to the Anglo-Saxon church of Saint Wystan in the 1970s, a fortified enclosure and a number of graves dating to the period were identified. Outside of the enclosure lay a mass grave containing some 264 individuals, immediately adjacent to which was a separate grave containing the skeletons of three children and an adolescent, argued by Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle (1992, 2001) to have been sacrificed as part of a rite linked to the closing of the larger grave. Two of the children were aged 8–11 years, one was aged 8–12 years, and the adolescent was aged around 17 years. While it is difficult to say whether these individuals played any kind of role in the Great Army's martial activities (though see discussion in "From Enculturation to Participation in Warfare"), previous considerations of children's experiences of warfare among this and similar groups (e.g., Hadley 2016; Hadley and Hemer 2011) have tended to present them as passive victims or observers of conflict. Few have given thought to the potential roles that children may have played as agents of violence themselves.

In recent years, the discovery of two late Viking Age mass graves from England, at Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth, and

St. John's College, Oxford, have provided more concrete evidence for the participation of adolescents in armed conflict. The mass burial from Ridgeway Hill contained the remains of over 50 decapitated individuals, with isotopic analyses suggesting that they were likely viking raiders killed while operating in southern England during the late tenth or early eleventh century (Chenery et al. 2014). Of the 36 discrete postcranial skeletons that could be assigned sex, three belonged to individuals aged over 45 years, six to those aged 36–45 years, nine to those aged 26–35 years, and 10 to those aged 18–25 years. Six individuals were classed as adolescents aged 13–17 years. The two remaining skeletons could not be assigned to an age range and were classified more generally as "adults." Of four further individuals of indeterminate sex, two were aged 13–17 years while two others were classified as "adults" (Loe 2014). At St. John's College, a broadly contemporary mass grave was found to contain 37 individuals who have been tentatively identified as viking raiders killed in or around the late Saxon burh at Oxford, although the difficulties of interpreting the results of isotopic analyses means that this interpretation has been challenged (see Pollard et al. 2012; Preston 2014). Of the 34 individuals whose skeletal remains were over 25% complete, four were aged 36–45 years, nine were aged 26–35 years, 16 were aged 20–25 years, four were aged 16–20 years, and one individual was aged 12–14 years (Falys 2014). While the broad range of ages within the Ridgeway Hill and Oxford graves, which peaks among young adults, is similar to the demography of later medieval battlefield mass graves such as those from Towton, United Kingdom, and Uppsala, Sweden, the average ages of death for those interred in the Viking Age graves are slightly younger than those from the later medieval period (ca. 25 and 26 years of age for St. John's and Ridgeway Hill compared to ca. 30 and 27.7 years for Towton and Uppsala). It is also worth noting that the Viking Age graves were the only ones to include individuals who were aged under 16 years (Loe 2014). It is uncertain, of course, whether the adolescents from Ridgeway Hill and St. John's College were supposed to have become involved in the violence that led to their deaths, but it would not be unreasonable to suggest that they had at the very least been present in some kind of indirect or supporting role (see discussion in "From Enculturation to Participation in Warfare").

Further, circumstantial evidence for the participation of children and adolescents in maritime activity (and therefore perhaps raiding) can be seen in the form of a footprint found carved into the deck boards of the Gokstad ship during conservation work in 2009. One of the best-known examples of a Viking Age longship, the Gokstad ship was constructed in ca. 890 and was used as part of a ship burial in Vestfold, Norway, ca. 910. The Gokstad ship is typical of the multifunctional, high-status vessels of the early Viking Age, which could be used to transport both cargoes and raiding groups. While the exact context in which the surprisingly detailed carving was made cannot be ascertained with any certainty, the size of the foot indicates that it may have belonged to a child aged around 10–12 years who perhaps attempted to stave off the boredom of



Figure 1. Outline of a foot found carved into the deckboards of the early tenth-century Gokstad Ship, Vestfold, Norway. The size of the foot (European size 35) may indicate that it belonged to a child. The carving was identified by conservator Inga Veia in 2009. Photo by kind courtesy of Vegard Vike, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. A color version of this figure is available online.

a long sea voyage by tracing around their foot with a knife (see fig. 1).

There is similarly good textual evidence for the involvement of young adolescents in conflict. Although the limitations of Old Norse sources must be kept in mind, the available data broadly support the archaeological evidence. In chapters 59–60 of *Laxdæla saga* (Kunz 2000b), for example, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir induces her sons to avenge the death of their father once they reach the ages of 12 and 16 years. In chapter 11 of *Jómsvíkingasaga* (Blake 1962), Sveinn begins his career as a raider at the age of 15 years, and in chapter 22 a precocious 12-year-old named Vagn is accepted into the warrior brotherhood of the Jomsvikings (membership of which was limited to those aged over 18 years) after he and his warriors defeat members of the brotherhood in combat. A 15-year-old named Þórðr Granason is mentioned as leading a body of men in chapter 40 of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (Scudder 2000), and in chapter 2 of *Vatnsdæla saga* (Wawn 2000) Ketill chastises his

18-year-oldson for not having already undertaken raiding and other dangerous exploits in order to seek wealth and honor. Early participation in warfare, however, was not universal; in chapter 1 of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, for example, Þórólfr begins his raiding career at the age of 20 years (Scudder 2000).

The data presented here imply that the age at which individuals first participated in conflict was heavily influenced by personal and situational circumstances. Given that the demography of the St. John's and Ridgeway Hill graves peak in the 16–25-year range, with the numbers of older individuals dropping off sharply after this, it should not be surprising that individuals that we would today recognize as children were present among armed groups. The conditioning of children to violence, therefore, must have begun at a young age.

### Militarism and Hegemonic Masculinity among Viking Age Societies

Before addressing the archaeological and textual evidence for Viking Age childhood, this study will now consider how the concepts of militarism and hegemonic masculinity contributed to the enculturation process and the preparation of individuals for future involvement in conflict.

#### *Militarism*

In its basic form, militarism is the extension of military or martial influence into civilian life (Thee 1980). Today, militarism takes the form of a package of ideas and perspectives that influence social attitudes and norms at all levels of society, such as through the promotion of violence in movies, video games, and the media, as well as through the celebration of military endeavours and military personnel at public events (Boggs and Pollard 2016; Enloe 2017).

While expressions of militarism inevitably vary, its influence is easily identified in historic and ancient contexts. In his discussion of militarism in post-Roman Europe, James (1997) describes a “militarized society” as one in which there is no clear link between “soldiers” and “civilians,” in which free adult men have the legal right to bear weapons, in which members of a certain class (usually the aristocracy) are expected to participate in warfare, and in which, as a result, the education of younger individuals, at least of a certain social standing, involves a martial element. The symbolism of warfare and military equipment, furthermore, is given a high prominence, and military matters represent both a substantial expenditure and a source of profit for elites.

In the centuries preceding the Viking Age, an ostentatious form of militarism arose in Scandinavia. Following the “Migration Period crisis” of the fifth and sixth centuries—a period characterized by political instability, warfare, and large-scale human migrations—social order in Scandinavia was radically reorganized. Power became based on the control of territory, leading to an increase in social stratification and the development of petty kingdoms in many regions (Myhre 2015; Price

and Gräslund 2015; Skre 2001). Hedenstierna-Jonson (2009) argues that during this period it was necessary to constantly prepare warriors to participate in small-scale, endemic conflict, which in many cases involved an element of ritualization that placed an emphasis on horsemanship and skirmishing. Evident importance was placed on visual expressions of elite power, resulting in the cultivation of an ostentatious martial identity that is reflected in the extravagant weapons and equipment that has been recovered from burial sites such as Valsgårde, Sweden (Arwidsson 1977). The rise of militarism and the growing power of the elite were reinforced by the concept of sacral kingship. The elite themselves performed the duties of ritual specialists by overseeing the management of cultic activities, a role reinforced by their patronage of the cult of the warrior god Óðinn (Hedeager 1997a, 1997b, 2011; Price 2002; Sundqvist 2002, 2012).

By the Viking Age, Scandinavian societies had become intensely militarized. It is during this period that we see an institutionalization of warfare alongside an increase in overseas raiding and militaristic expansion (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009). The oldest Scandinavian law codes, such as the Norwegian *Gulaping* and *Frostaping* laws and the Icelandic *Grágás* laws, first written down during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries but arguably based on more ancient legal concepts, indicate that free men had the right to possess weapons (Larson 1935:188, 319–320). Political hierarchies were dominated by successful war leaders, warlike values were instilled in children as part of their upbringing, and children would have been exposed to the presence of armed groups and the use of weaponry from a young age. The number of laws relating to blood feuds and different kinds of assault, such as those distinguishing between major and minor wounds (and the penalties for causing them) and those that differentiate between legally sanctioned killings and “murder,” indicate that violence was commonplace (see Dennis, Foote, and Perkins 1980). For the elite, the raising and maintenance of a retinue (Old Norse *lið*) represented a central aspect of political power (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009; Raffield 2016; Raffield et al. 2016), meaning that violence could be normalized as a means of social control. The deeply embedded nature of militarism during the Viking Age has been argued to be reflected in a visible decline in the extravagance of weaponry and armor in the burial record, with emphasis instead being placed on standardization and functional utility (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006, 2009).

There is also evidence to suggest that militarism and violence were normalized as part of ideologies that glorified risk-taking and death in combat. This is indicated in the Eddic poem *Grímnismál* (vv. 8–10; Orchard 2011), which states that those who died in battle were rewarded with an afterlife in Valhöll or Fólkvangr, where slain warriors would await the opportunity to aid the gods at Ragnarök—a preordained, mythical battle in which all life would one day be destroyed (Gunnell and Lassen 2013). To make one’s name and reputation through daring acts even if these resulted in death, therefore, was fundamental

to the martial psyche of the Viking Age. Further evidence for this is provided by textual sources, such as Adam of Bremen’s commentary on ritual activity at Gamla Uppsala, Sweden, in the eleventh century, in which he stated that the Swedes “worship heroes made gods, whom they endow with immortality because of their remarkable exploits” (bk. 4, chap. 26; Tschan 1959:207). If this evidence truly has any bearing on pre-Christian beliefs in Scandinavia, then the glorification of daring acts may have nurtured a sense of aggressive fatalism that encouraged individuals to distinguish themselves in warfare (Barrett 2008; Price 2002). To die in battle or while abroad, in a way that would be remembered, may have been perceived as an attractive alternative to an ignoble death of sickness or old age at home (Herschend 1998; Jesch 2001; Thedéen 2009a). This attitude is echoed in the Eddic poem *Hávamál* (v. 16; Orchard 2011), in which the god Óðinn states that “a senseless man thinks to live for ever if he bewares a war; but old age won’t grant him a truce, whatever spears may grant” (17). Evidence for the celebration and glorification of heroic deaths can be seen on runestones such as D295 from Hällestad, Skåne, on which the members of a retinue commemorated their lord, Tóki, who fell in battle at Uppsala. Another runestone (D279), from Sjörup, is dedicated to a man named Ásbjörn, who may have perished in the same battle. Both inscriptions state that the men “did not flee,” and Ásbjörn is remembered as having “fought as long as he had a weapon” (Jesch 2001:223, 225). The glorification of travel and warfare is similarly highlighted on a runestone from Grips-holm (Sö 179), Södermanland, raised in memory of two men named Harald and Ingvarr who both perished during an ill-fated expedition to the east in the eleventh century. The inscription on the stone states that the men “travelled valiantly” and “gave to the eagle” (Thedéen 2009a:67)—an allusion to killing enemies in battle—before their deaths.

#### *Hegemonic Masculinity*

Militarism is closely associated with the social legitimization of hegemonic masculinity—a dominant form of masculinity that many individuals strive toward but only a few attain. While hegemonic masculinity nominally places men in a social position superior to women, it also serves to create socially exclusive hierarchies among men through the marginalization and subordination of both femininity and nonconformist forms of masculinity (Connell 2000, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hooper 2001). Hegemonic masculinity, by its nature, forces all other men to position themselves in relation to the form of masculinity that is being promoted or honored at any given time. Traditional traits of hegemonic masculinity might include risk-taking, the enforcement of command structures and disciplinary hierarchies, physicality, aggression, violence, and overt expressions of heterosexuality (Hinojosa 2010). Lower-status men who conform to this status quo can receive benefits from those men who occupy the top of social hierarchies, thereby legitimizing and reinforcing the hegemonic status of

the latter (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Today, hierarchies of hegemonic masculinity can be easily identified in numerous contexts, such as militaries, militia organizations, and professional sports teams (Bickerton 2015; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Higate and Hopton 2005; Hinojosa 2010; Hooper 2001).

There is good evidence for a culture of hegemonic masculinity among Viking Age societies. While perceptions of masculinity were undoubtedly imbued with their own shades of nuance across space and time, cultural similarities in the material record speak to broadly homogenous attitudes toward masculinity and its associations with militarism (Hadley 2016:262). Political power lay in the hands of war leaders and their retainers, who were most able to exploit and perpetuate hierarchies of masculinity to reinforce their influence. Expressions of masculinity may also have been closely associated with religious ideologies that reflected the sacral power and status of the elite. It has been suggested, for example, that the mediating role that Germanic kings held between the gods and populations before the Christianization process was expressed sexually through demonstrations of masculinity and virility (Clunies Ross 1985).

In a study of Scandinavian burial practices in Viking Age England, Dawn Hadley (2008) has argued that the burials of two men associated with the ninth-century viking Great Army at Repton, Derbyshire, can provide insights into hegemonic hierarchies of masculinity. The burials in question were situated directly next to each other (see fig. 2) and contained male skeletons covered by a single rubble cairn. One of the graves (G511) contained a male aged 35–45 years who was accompanied by a sword in a fleece-lined wooden scabbard, two knives, two buckles, a silver Thor's hammer, and a boar's tusk placed between his thighs. The second individual (G295), who was aged 17–20 years when he died, was provided with only a knife. Both individuals bore injuries suggesting that they had died in combat; the man in grave 511, for example, had suffered a significant wound to the right thigh that would have severed the femoral artery (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001). Although the concept of the "warrior burial" has been problematized by numerous scholars (e.g., Gilchrist 1999; Härke 1990; Jensen 2010; Stoodley 1999; Whitehouse 2017), in this case it is difficult to suppose that these two individuals had not served in some sort of martial capacity. The disparity in the burial assemblages accompanying the individuals, therefore, is striking. Hadley (2008) argues that although the younger individual would certainly have been considered as having reached adulthood (and in this both individuals would have been seen as "men"), the more elaborate assemblage accompanying the older man in grave 511 might reflect an increased amount of time spent engaged in martial activities, allowing him to attain the masculine identity of the warrior. The paucity of goods afforded to the younger man buried in grave 295, in contrast, may indicate that he was not considered as having fully achieved this. This interpretation of course places emphasis on "achieved status" as the determining factor in the disparity between the two burials, and it is necessary

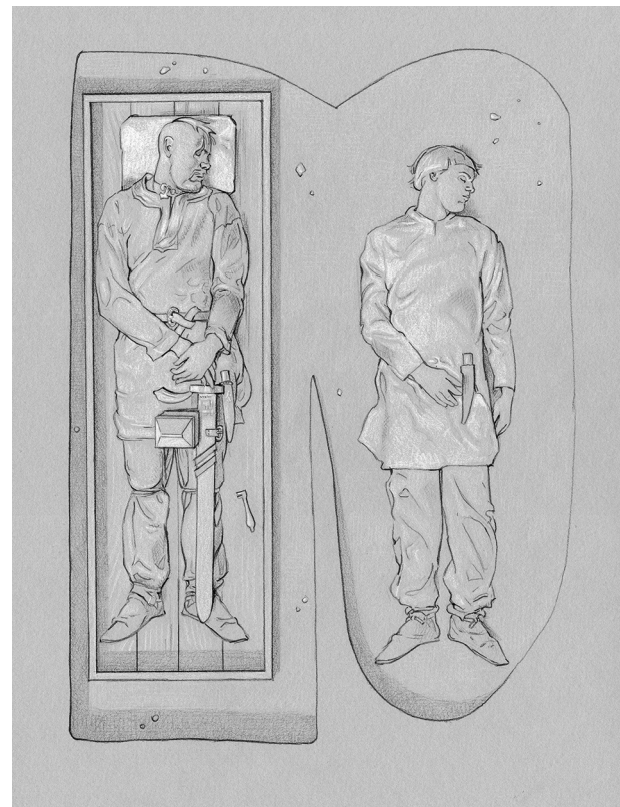


Figure 2. Reconstruction of graves 511 (*left*) and 295 (*right*) from Repton, United Kingdom. Illustration by Þórhallur Þráinsson. © Neil Price, used by permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

to recognize that the reasons behind this may be more complex. It is possible, for example, that the paucity of goods in grave 295 may indicate the relative social position of the younger man when compared with the older individual in grave 511, rather than reflecting their hegemonic status among warrior groups. It is also worth noting examples of younger children and adolescents, identified in both Viking Age and wider early medieval contexts, who were buried with weapons that they would have been physically unable to wield (see discussion in "From Enculturation to Participation in Warfare"). In this, many grave good assemblages likely embodied significant elements of symbolism. Nevertheless, the evident dissimilarities in the treatment of the men buried in graves 295 and 511 indicate a concern with martial expressions of masculinity, as well as careful choices regarding to whom this identity could be accorded in death.

When considered within a wider context, the perpetuation of hegemonic models of masculinity may have legitimized and fueled expressions of power and competitive behavior (Connell 2000), with significant implications for sociopolitical hierarchies and perceptions of gendered power. There has been some debate as to how gender was conceptualized and expressed among

Scandinavian societies (Back Danielsson 2007; Clover 1993; Norrman 2000). Carol Clover (1993) has argued that Viking Age societies possessed a “one sex” perspective of gender that, instead of polarizing femininity and masculinity, equated masculinity with power. As a result, expressions of masculinity were celebrated and emphasized. Clover’s hypothesis is borne out in saga narratives that contrast the Old Norse term *hvatr* (vigorous or manly), used most often in reference to men, with the term *blauðr* (weak or cowardly), which often refers to women. This implies that an individual’s status could have been positively or negatively influenced by words or actions considered *hvatr* or *blauðr* (see Clover 1993 and discussion below). This portrayal of gendered power aligns well with the concept of hegemonic masculinity because the competitive nature of masculine hierarchies would have encouraged individuals to constantly seek to enhance their status by discrediting others. The intense rivalries that could emerge as a result can be seen in the culture of insult, hypermasculinity, and feuding that abounded among Scandinavian societies. Eddic poems and the sagas are replete with examples of male antagonists exchanging insults (Old Norse *flyting*), which usually involved boasts of masculinity and the humiliation of one’s opponent, as in *Örvar-Odds saga*, *Hárbarðsljóð*, and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (Orchard 2011; Pálsson and Edwards 1985). Some insults, such as *nið*, which was associated with accusations of breaking taboos, cowardice, and/or sexual deviance, were so powerful that their use was mitigated by law (Almqvist 1965, 1974; Clover 1993; Meulengracht Sørensen 1980).

The influence of hegemonic masculinity is further illustrated when we consider gendered norms among Scandinavian societies. The roles of men and women were nominally well defined by legal codes and social conventions (Jochens 1995), and acting in a way deemed inappropriate to one’s sex resulted in significant social disapproval (although in certain cases this may have imbued some individuals with a strange type of power; see Price [2002] on men who practiced sorcery). In a society that promoted hegemonic cultures of masculinity, it should not be surprising to find evidence for the nominal regulation of gender roles or the subordination of both women and marginalized men who failed to live up to masculine ideals (Connell 2005). For men, acting in a way that was considered *blauðr* brought shame and disgrace. In *Kormáks saga* (chap. 13; Hollander 1949), for example, Bersi’s wife is able to legitimately divorce him after he receives a wound to the buttocks during combat. Other incidents in the sagas indicate that the charge of “unmanliness” and the threat of divorce were frequently used by women to incite men to undertake acts of violence (Anderson and Swenson 2002; Clover 1993; Jochens 1995). In *Grænlandinga saga* (chap. 7), Freydis threatens her husband with divorce if he does not avenge a fictitious assault against her (Kunz 2000a), while in *Laxdæla saga* (chap. 53), Þorgerðr tells her sons that they would have been better born as daughters in order to shame them into avenging the killing of their brother (Kunz 2000b). The fear of judgment for failing to act in an appropriately masculine manner can even be seen among Guðrún’s adolescent

sons in *Laxdæla saga* (chap. 60; Kunz 2000b). Having been shamed by their mother for indulging too long in children’s pursuits, the youths acknowledge that they are at an age where they will be judged if they were to fail to avenge their father’s death. This suggests that children and adolescents were aware of the need to cultivate and preserve one’s status within hegemonic hierarchies of masculinity from an early age.

For women, acting outside of nominal gendered roles also carried social and legal repercussions. The Icelandic *Grágás* laws, for example, prescribed that a woman who wore a man’s clothes, cut her hair short, or carried weapons should be sentenced to outlawry (Dennis, Foote, and Perkins 2000:219). Hegemonic hierarchies, however, are not static or monolithic (Connell 2005), and the perpetuation of a “one sex” model of gendered power might have cultivated a peculiar form of social fluidity that allowed some individuals to traverse gender boundaries (Back Danielsson 2007; Clover 1993; Norrman 2000). Just as it was possible for men to increase or lose their status through their words and actions, so too might some women have attempted to achieve social ascendancy by behaving in a way considered *hvatr*. The sagas indicate that some women who openly defied social conventions by wearing men’s clothing and carrying weapons, such as “Breeches Auðr” in *Laxdæla saga* (Kunz 2000b), were not only tolerated but also admired (Bagerius 2001). Other textual sources indicate that women participated in warfare as combatants, and in one case a woman is noted as commanding a viking fleet in Ireland (Bekker 1838–1839; Todd 1867). While such women might well have been a minority within Scandinavian society, these depictions are now potentially supported by a recent study of the human remains from grave 581 at Birka, Sweden. This burial, containing an individual accompanied by a sword, an axe, two spears, archery equipment, a knife, two shields, and two sacrificed horses, was long considered to be an archetypal burial of a male viking warrior. Recently, however, genomic analysis by Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. (2017a) has found that the individual interred within the grave was in fact female. Until now, the only archaeological evidence for armed women was a corpus of so-called Valkyrie brooches and pendants, known from across the viking world, and these findings therefore provide new impetus for the targeted reanalysis of other purported burials of women accompanied by weapons (see Gardęła 2013b; Pedersen 2014). These include two individuals, both of whom have been osteologically sexed as females, who were buried with weapons and other martial equipment in Hedmark and Nord-Trøndelag, Norway (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017b). While these burials must be interpreted cautiously, the obvious corollary of these findings is that some women were active participants in the martial cultures of the Viking Age. At present, we can only speculate as to whether these individuals were perceived as “women” or as “men” or whether they perhaps occupied (either permanently or temporarily) some kind of third gender (see Back Danielsson 2007; Norrman 2000), but they nonetheless indicate that gendered boundaries were permeable. While we should not suppose that participation in martial society ubiquitously



demanded active involvement in combat, these burials remind us that at least some girls may have been conditioned to adopt the persona or roles of the warrior.

### Enculturation and the Archaeological Record

Having discussed the mutually reinforcing influences of militarism and hegemonic masculinity among Viking Age Scandinavian societies, this study will now consider how these affected the process of enculturation during childhood. The discussion will explore both the archaeological and the written evidence for toy and miniature weapons, strategic board games, and competitive physical activities.

#### *Toy and Miniaturized Weapons*

Toys hold an important position in the construction of childhood (Crawford 2009). In addition to assisting with physical and mental development, they allow children to create a microcosm of adult society within which they can recreate and learn about the world through play. Archaeologists, however, have struggled to identify toys in archaeological contexts. Crawford (2009) has suggested, for example, that objects that initially seem to be children's toys might in fact represent ritual or votive objects, while Hall (2014*b*) argues that the function of toys and votive objects might have been interchangeable during the past. In an ethnographic study of children's play places in northern Ghana, Casey and Burruss (2010) noted a lack of a distinctive material culture associated with children's play. They found that instead of playing with purpose-made toys, children repurposed discarded everyday items for use in games, raising obvious questions regarding the potential survivability and visibility of material signatures for children in the past. Where toys can be identified and studied, therefore, these objects provide invaluable insights into the behavioral and learning processes that took place during childhood (Casey and Burruss 2010; Crawford 2009; Hall 2014*b*; McAlister 2013).

Numerous toys have been recovered from archaeological contexts across the viking world (for a summary, see Gardęła 2012). These were made from a range of materials, including wood, antler, bone, and bark (Callow 2006; Gardęła 2012), and include miniature weapons, boats and ships, horses and other farm animals, and miniature tools such as quernstones (McAlister 2013; Mellor 2014; Stummen Hansen and Larsen 2000), reflecting the importance of conflict, maritime travel, commerce, and agriculture among Scandinavian societies. Scholars (e.g., Hadley 2016; McAlister 2013) have noted that these objects—including those from Kievan Rus', where Scandinavian groups were absorbed into an eclectic ethnic and cultural milieu with heavy Slavonic overtones (Androshchuk 2013; Hraundal 2014)—are remarkably homogenous despite their disparate geographical origins, and as such they speak to a fairly broad and consistent material culture of childhood across northern Europe.

While toy boats, horses, and other farm animals may have spoken to the martial nature of Scandinavian societies if imagined to represent raiding fleets, cavalry, and raiding plunder, a corpus of wooden, miniature toy weapons are of special interest to this study. Toy weapons not only serve to introduce children to the form and function of military equipment but also encode messages that play a significant role in promoting and socializing them to the violence that abounds within masculine warrior cultures (Varney 2000). During the Viking Age, toy weapons would have similarly allowed children to gain insights into the martial culture of Scandinavian societies by imitating warriors and engaging in mock raids, battles, and killings.

Many types of toy weapons, including miniature swords, bows and arrows, axes, spears, and knives, are known from the Viking Age (e.g., Gardęła 2013*a*; Khoroshev 2007; Söderberg 2017). Miniature swords made of wood (see fig. 3), clay, and stone have been identified in archaeological contexts in Russia, Scandinavia, Germany, Greenland, the Netherlands, and the British Isles (Khoroshev 2007; Kotowicz 2008; McAlister 2013; Roesdahl and Wilson 1992). The "blades" are often between 50 and 60 cm in length, with the handles measuring 5–6 cm, making them appropriate for a child aged around 6–10 years. An interesting feature of some miniature swords, such as those

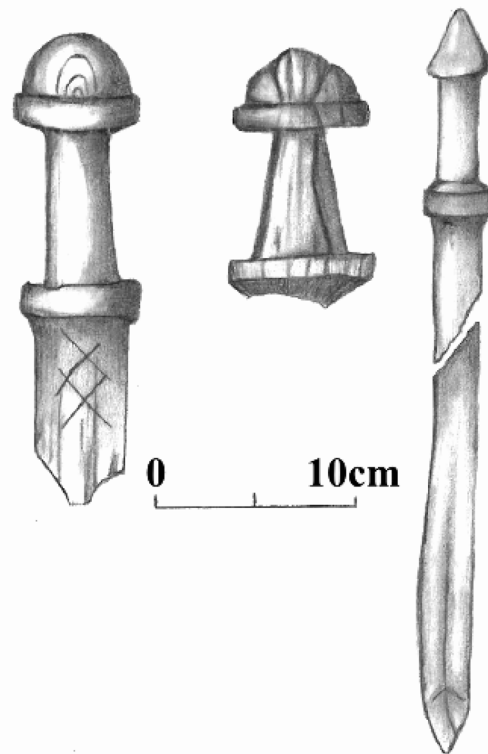


Figure 3. Toy wooden swords recovered during excavations at Novgorod, Russia. Illustration by Mana Dembo, after Khoroshev (2007:346).

from eighth- and ninth-century Staraya Ladoga and tenth- to twelfth-century Novgorod, both of which are located in modern-day Russia, is that they typologically correlate with full-sized, functional swords used in western Europe and Scandinavia at that time (Hall 2007; Khoroshev 2007). Those from Staraya Ladoga, especially, have been noted as closely resembling their full-sized, functional Frankish counterparts that were being used in Europe (Roesdahl and Wilson 1992:301). A small wooden sword from Fishamble Street, Dublin, has been similarly identified as resembling a Petersen's type O sword, which in itself represents over one-quarter of the full-sized viking swords that have been discovered in Ireland (McAlister 2013). This indicates not only that children wished to emulate the fashions of the warrior elites who epitomized the martial ideals of Scandinavian societies but also that toys were specifically manufactured to familiarize children with the style and form of weapons that they might one day have used (McAlister 2013).

As children grew older, they may have played with larger wooden weapons, and in regard to this it is worth noting a number of full-length wooden swords from early medieval Poland that have been argued to represent training swords for adults (Kotowicz 2008). There is no need, however, to arbitrarily situate these objects exclusively within the adult world. Although they are certainly larger than their miniature counterparts, these weapons may not have been perceived or used in a wholly different way, perhaps being manufactured for older children and adolescents to be used both recreationally and as training implements when required.

Although they cannot be considered strictly as toys, at this juncture it is also worth acknowledging the enculturating influence of functional miniature weapons, which may have been created for children as bespoke, scaled-down versions of those used by adults. A number of such finds are known, including a small tenth-century sword from Lough Gur, Ireland, and a small axe and spearhead from burials at Straumur and Grímsstaðir, Iceland (Callow 2006; Gardęła 2012; Peirce 2002). The sword from Lough Gur measures 76.3 cm in length with a grip of only 6.8 cm and is described by Peirce (2002) as a prestige weapon for a highborn child. The bespoke nature of these weapons certainly indicates that they would have acted as status symbols, and they may have been infused with ideas of what the child would have been expected to achieve in life—to be a successful warrior and perhaps one day a martial leader. An interesting parallel for these finds can be found in a sixth-century burial of a Frankish child (likely aged around 6 years) from Cologne Cathedral. The child was accompanied by a small *spangenhelm* of typical shape but measuring only ca. 17.5 cm in diameter. The helmet was made of horn plates held together by gilded bronze ribs and featured leather-lined cheek pieces, and as such it was not “functional” protective gear (Werner 1964); it seems instead to have been manufactured specifically as a status symbol, perhaps functioning in the same way as the miniature weapons noted above. It is important to note, however, that providing children with weapons gave them the power to express their agency in violent ways. In *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*

(chap. 8; Finlay and Faulkes 2011), the young Óláfr is described as using a small axe to kill the man who had slain his foster father. In *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (chap. 40; Scudder 2000), Egill is beaten and humiliated by an older boy named Grímr during a game of *knattleikr* (a ball-and-stick game). Following this incident, the aforementioned Þórðr Granason gave Egill an axe, with which he returned to the game field to kill Grímr. These encounters demonstrate how children had the capacity to be dangerous agents in their own right (Jakobsson 2003). Providing certain children with access to weapons, furthermore, may have placed them in a position of superiority to their peers, allowing the social hierarchies that governed the world of adults to be replicated among the young. This could have precipitated and legitimized the formation of rivalries, competitive hierarchies, and violent behavior among children.

#### *Lessons in Strategy*

While it is relatively easy to identify links between toy weapons and warrior cultures, other types of play may have conveyed more subtle messages. Strategic board games, for example, may have served to introduce children to the martial ideologies that underpinned Scandinavian social structures. The game *hnefatafl* stands out as having particularly militaristic connotations in this respect. *Hnefatafl* is played on a square latticed board between two forces of unequal strength. One force, comprising a king and their retinue, occupies the center of the board. They are outnumbered and surrounded by a larger force that lies on all four sides of the board, potentially reflecting a number of different battlefield scenarios (see Kimball 2013). It is thought that the objective of the game is for the player commanding the king's force to successfully guide the king piece to the edge of the board without being captured. Both gaming pieces and boards have been found in a range of occupational contexts ranging from urban settlements to overwintering camps associated with viking armies (Dobat 2017; Hadley and Richards 2016; Wallace 2016). They also feature prominently in high-status burials that contain martial equipment, including graves from Valsgärde and Birka, Sweden, and the mid to late eighth-century Salme II ship burial, Estonia (Arbman 1943; Hall 2016; Peets, Allmäe, and Maldre 2010; Peets et al. 2012). While gaming pieces and boards are predominantly found in male graves prior to the Viking Age, the recovery of these objects from later female burials suggests that these may have become gender neutral over time (Rundkvist and Williams 2008).

At present, only two burials of a child or young adolescent from the Viking Age have been found to contain gaming pieces. The first is that of a 12- to 13-year-old boy who was buried with weapons and other grave goods at Balnakeil, Scotland (Batey and Paterson 2012). Gaming pieces have also been found in the burial of a man, woman, and 10- to 11-year-old child at Scar, Orkney, but these are more likely to be associated with the adult male (Hall 2016; Owen and Dalland 1999). Although predating the Viking Age, it is worth noting a similar example

of a Migration Period burial—Bhr 1967:12—from Barshalder, Gotland, where a double cremation of an adult of probable female sex and a child or adolescent aged 5–14 years included a set of over 45 gaming pieces (Rundkvist 2003:198). This paucity of burials, however, should not be taken to indicate that children did not play strategic board games. There is a general lack of children’s burials in Scandinavia and in Scandinavian diasporic contexts before the Christianization period (Hadley 2016; Hadley and Hemer 2011; Mejsholm 2009), perhaps reflecting cultural perspectives of childhood that meant that infants, children, and perhaps even adolescents were less likely to be accorded formal burial (e.g., Eriksen 2017; Mejsholm 2009; Wicker 1998, 2012). Similarly differential treatment of infants and children has been noted in various ancient, historic, and ethnographic contexts (e.g., Becker 2007; Reynolds 1991). The vast majority of excavated burials, furthermore, have never been subject to detailed osteological examination. The perceived underrepresentation of children in the burial record is therefore potentially the result of numerous contributing factors.

Textual evidence indicates that children would have played strategic games from a young age. For high-status children, mastery of these games was a prerequisite for elite status (Gardela 2012), as reflected in the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* (v. 41; Orchard 2011:246), which states that aristocratic children “learnt to play, swimming and board games.” Later, in the twelfth century, a young Norwegian nobleman named Rögnvaldr, who would later become the Earl of Orkney, boasted that *tafl* was one of nine skills that he had mastered (Jesch 2006). This association between the elite and strategic board games may have reflected martial ideologies and the close links between political leadership and success in warfare. However, there is no reason to believe that individuals from across the social spectrum would not have played these games. While some gaming boards and pieces were status symbols in their own right (see, e.g., the board from Ballinderry, Ireland [O’Neill Hencken 1933] and the decorated glass gaming pieces from grave 644 at Birka [Arbman 1943]; see fig. 4), lower-cost alternatives would have been cheaper and easier to produce, and as such it is unlikely that gaming was a leisure activity associated only with the elite (Dobat 2017). There is no reason to assume that children would not have had access to these objects, and it is also important to consider that these games might not have required purpose-made equipment at all. It has been argued, for example, that the crudest “graffiti” gaming boards, inexpertly etched into pieces of wood or stone, might have been made by children, possibly in response to having been taught to play games by others (Hall 2014a; McGuire 2016). In these impromptu games, small stones or other objects might have easily sufficed as gaming pieces, the obvious implication of this being that board games could have been played anywhere, at any time. This means that evidence for gaming may be significantly underrepresented in the archaeological record.

For children and adolescents, playing *hnefatafl* may have conveyed numerous lessons, the most obvious of which concern the game’s strategic elements. The objective of the players,

to either capture or facilitate the escape of the surrounded king, and the unequal size of the opposing forces speak to the kind of challenges that might have been faced on the battlefield. As such, playing these games gave individuals the opportunity to show off their tactical skills and ingenuity to opponents (Dobat 2017). However, it is possible that more subtle messages were also being transmitted during play. Despite the numerical imbalance in the size of the opposing forces, it has been suggested that the rules of the game heavily favored the player commanding the king’s forces. If this was the case, then perhaps these games served in some way to reflect social hierarchies and political order, as well as to emphasize elite power (McGuire 2016). The symbolism of sacrificing the retinue to preserve the life of the king, furthermore, may not have been lost on players, reinforcing not only political structures but also ideological beliefs that championed death in battle. This potential link between board games and martial ideologies of kingship is further illustrated by the gaming pieces found in the Salme II ship burial. Here a “king” piece was placed in or near to the mouth of individual XII, a man accompanied by a double-edged sword with a gilt bronze ring hilt and an antler comb (Peets, Allmäe, and Maldre 2010). The particular placement of this object may have been intended not only to emphasize the higher status of individual XII in relation to the rest of the group but also to symbolize the disastrous consequences of failing to succeed in matters of strategy and warfare (Hall 2016). For children and adolescents who aspired to join warrior groups, the lessons learned when playing strategic board games may have been imbued with a very real significance.

#### *Physicality and Interpersonal Violence*

The third form of play to be considered here—competitive physical activities—leaves little to no archaeological evidence.



Figure 4. Gaming pieces recovered from grave 644 at Birka, Sweden. Photo by Ola Myrin, Swedish History Museum. Used under Creative Commons license. A color version of this figure is available online.

Handel, Cahill, and Elkin (2007), however, consider physical sports to be one of the most important links between the worlds of children and adults, as it encourages physical conditioning and leadership, team building and loyalty, and can breed competitiveness. It also promotes the achievements of successful individuals, thus serving to construct and perpetuate hierarchies of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

There is some evidence from early medieval texts to suggest that proficiency in physical activities was an important aspect of masculine prowess. Trials of strength and skill, for example, might have allowed individuals to demonstrate that they possessed skills that would have been useful within martial and maritime contexts. In this, it is notable that two further skills mastered by the young Earl Rögnvaldr, mentioned above, were shooting and rowing (Jesch 2006). Feats associated with swimming also feature in a number of Icelandic sagas (e.g., *Laxdæla saga*, chap. 40 [Kunz 2000b]; *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, chap. 58 [Byock 2009]), while the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* (v. 41; Orchard 2011:246) highlights this as an activity associated with elite children. The importance of proficiency in swimming and its association with masculinity and perhaps warrior cultures can also be found outside of Old Norse texts in sources such as the Old English epic *Beowulf* (ll. 503–513; Swanton 1997).

Various competitive physical activities, akin to what we might today call sports, are also described in Old Norse textual sources. These include *knattleikr* (mentioned above), a game that was not only fiercely competitive and physically challenging but also violent. These games were played only by boys and men, and it is clear that they often became outlets for aggression. Quarrels, serious injuries, and killings, even among children, are recorded in the literary sources. In addition to the incident involving Egill and Grímr in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, noted above, in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (chap. 15; Byock 2009) the 14-year-old Grettir is described as getting into a fight with an older boy named Auðunn during a game of *knattleikr*. Later in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, Egill's father became so enraged during a game that he killed a member of the opposing team (Scudder 2000). Other violent and potentially dangerous games included wrestling and “drowning competitions” such as that between Kjartan Ólafsson and King Óláfr Tryggvason in *Laxdæla saga* (chap. 40; Kunz 2000b). As Gilchrist (2012) has noted, during the early medieval period violent and aggressive pursuits and the brawling that they often precipitated acted as a kind of informal military training for youths that inducted them into martial cultures of hypermasculinity and violence. In *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (chap. 40; Scudder 2000), it is interesting to note that Egill is actually praised for the killing of Grímr by his mother, who states that her son has the makings of a future viking warrior.

One aspect of these games that might have increased their physical intensity was their tendency to be spectator events—the *knattleikr* games described in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* drew observers from the surrounding district, while a wrestling competition in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (chap. 72; Byock

2009) took place between the men attending an assembly. A number of saga accounts also note that women were often spectators (Gardeła 2012). Success in physical games therefore allowed competitors to enhance their social standing and to signal their potential readiness to participate in martial activities, and for older adolescents and adults this may have also functioned as a means of advertising their suitability to potential marriage partners. These confrontations, however, also brought with them the potential for public humiliation—something that might have greatly exacerbated antagonism among contestants (Larrington 2008). Again, children were not immune from judgment. In the incident between Grettir and Auðunn, noted above, the fight was initiated by Grettir who perceived that the older boy had intentionally insulted him by hitting a ball over his head and onto an icy lake (Byock 2009). In the case of the confrontation between Egill and Grímr, Egill was not only physically defeated by the older boy but also humiliated by the other children. His extreme reaction is mirrored in *Flóamanna saga*, in which Þorgils was excluded and goaded by a group of children when attempting to join in a game. Having been told by the boys that only those who had killed a living thing could join the group, Þorgils killed his stepfather's horse the following night (Perkins 1972:236). In *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (chap. 28; Byock 2009), the fully grown Grettir returned to Iceland years after his fight with Auðunn and immediately sought out his erstwhile opponent in order to settle their dispute. These reactions demonstrate not only the power of peer relations in establishing “normative” behaviors among children (see Baxter 2005; Kamp 2015; Underwood, Mayeux, and Galperin 2006) but also how hierarchies of power could be established at a young age, driving individuals to compete with each other. It is not difficult to imagine that rivalries would have intensified as children grew older and became both more physically capable and aware of the need to cultivate a reputation.

### From Enculturation to Participation in Warfare

Having explored some of the ways in which children might have enculturated to the martial values of Viking Age Scandinavian societies, it is finally necessary to consider how children and adolescents became inducted into conflict and warfare. As children grew up, the martial norms perpetuated by society would have become increasingly influential in shaping their perceptions of the world around them, preparing them for a potential future role in conflict. Playing with toy weapons, learning to master strategic board games, and participating in physically challenging games would have served to introduce children to martial ideals while conditioning them for hardship. For young children, the imitation of elders may have also played a central role in enculturation (Hadley 2016; Hall 2014b; McAlister 2013). In a modern context, anecdotal observations have been made of groups of children, armed with toy weapons, imitating adults conducting weapon drills at viking reenactment festivals. In these instances, children have been observed organizing their

peers into shield walls and practicing with weapons in just the same way as adults—a powerful reminder of the valuable lessons that can be learned through observation and imitation (Williams, forthcoming).

As children grew older, play and games would have taken on a new significance. Toy weapons may have become infused with new meaning as children became more familiar with martial culture, and some individuals may have been provided with functional miniature weapons that befitted their status. The later replacement of miniature wooden weapons with full-sized versions may have served to further familiarize children with the tools used in warfare, and these implements could have presumably been used for training (Kotowicz 2008). As has been noted in ethnographic contexts (e.g., Chagnon 1992; Meggitt 1977), this training might have initially taken place under the instruction of older family members who possessed previous experience of martial activity. The rigors of everyday life within agricultural societies would have also contributed to an individual's physical development, an argument perhaps supported by extensive biomechanical stress markers on the skeletons from Ridgeway Hill (Loe 2014). Of the eight adolescents from the mass grave, five exhibited Schmorl's nodes—a condition that is often linked to trauma and physical activities (especially during adolescence) such as contact sports (Resnick and Niwayama 1988; Waldron 2009). Four displayed Osteochondritis dissecans, which may result from repetitive micro-trauma. This is again a condition that is prevalent among individuals who engage in sport or other vigorous physical activities (Waldron 2009). Finally, one of the adolescents exhibited Os acromiale, a condition where the acromion process fails to fuse to the spine of the scapula. This condition is suggestive of considerable stress on the rotator cuff muscle during adolescence and was identified in a high frequency among individuals recovered from the wreck of the *Mary Rose*, a Tudor-period warship from England (Loe 2014). All three of these conditions were also identified in the skeletal assemblage from the later medieval mass grave associated with the Battle of Towton (see Knüsel 2000).

The acceleration of the enculturation process and perhaps the transition toward a martial lifestyle can be observed in the burial record. Some children and young adolescents, such as the 9-year-old boy buried in the richly furnished chamber grave 977 at Birka, were buried with full-sized, functional war gear. In this case, the boy was also accompanied by a sacrificed horse equipped with a bridle (Arbman 1943; Gräslund 1998). Given his age, however, the boy would not have been able to wield the equipment accompanying him with any effectiveness. It is possible, therefore, that the weapons and horse were included in the burial in an effort to present an idealized image of the mounted warrior that he might one day have become if he had lived to adulthood. Though less clear, a similar interpretation may explain the inclusion of sword and shield fittings in a cremation burial containing a woman and a child at Heath Wood in Derbyshire, United Kingdom, which was lo-

cated within a cemetery thought to be associated with the Great Army's occupation of Repton in 873–874 (Richards 2004). Parallels can also be found in the results of Heinrich Härke's (1990) study of over 700 weapon burials from fifth- to seventh-century England. Härke found that one in 12 of the individuals buried with weapons were aged younger than 14 years. While most of these individuals were accompanied by spears with smaller (and presumably lighter) heads in contrast to those accompanying adults, a number of individuals would not have been able to use the weapons accompanying them. These included not only very young individuals, the youngest of whom was aged 12 months, but also older individuals with severe degenerative conditions (see Härke 1990:35–36). In this, it is also worth noting that the 6-year-old child who was buried with the small *spangenhelm* at Cologne Cathedral, mentioned above, was additionally accompanied by a full-sized sword, a battle-axe, two spears, a bow with three arrows, and a large, leather-covered shield (Werner 1964). As Härke (1990) suggests, weapon burial rites carried great symbolic connotations, meaning that they could be used to convey a socially and ideologically powerful expression of "warrior status."

Another example of a child buried alongside military equipment, in this case that of the boy from Balnakeil, Scotland, demonstrates the complexity of the ideologies that were conveyed through burial rituals. The boy, who was aged around 12–13 years when he died, was accompanied by full-sized war gear, including a sword, throwing spear, and shield. Also deposited in the grave were gaming pieces, which, as previously noted, are frequently found in burials containing martial equipment. As in the case of grave 977 from Birka, the inclusion of these goods in the grave may have reflected aspirations for the boy's intended future role among society. Pathological examination of his remains, however, indicated that he had an enlarged right clavicle, humerus, and ulna, possibly as a result of overuse of his right arm (Batey and Paterson 2012:637). Today, this condition has been observed in individuals who regularly perform activities that favor a dominant extremity, such as professional tennis players (see Haapasalo et al. 2000). Could this indicate that the Balnakeil boy had been training for entry into martial life, perhaps with the full-sized war gear that accompanied him, when he died? If so, then he may represent an example of an individual progressing through a liminal phase of life that would have ended with his induction into martial society. Despite this, the Balnakeil boy perhaps still had some way to go toward fully achieving a warrior identity. In addition to the weapons and gaming pieces noted above, he was also accompanied by yarn and a needle case, an almost exclusively female grave good that is sometimes found in children's burials (Batey and Paterson 2012; Hadley and Hemer 2011; Halstad McGuire 2010). While there are many potential reasons to explain why such an object would have been deposited alongside the paraphernalia of war, it may reflect the Balnakeil boy's status within social hierarchies—perhaps his youth led him to be perceived as occupying a lower position on the spectrum of gendered power.

For some, participation in martial activities may have represented a social transition or culturally prescribed rite of passage that began at a young age. It is impossible to conceive, however, that children or the majority of young adolescents would have been able to efficiently function as combatants or crew members in a raiding fleet. Woolf (2017) suggests that one way of inducting children into martial society may have been to employ them in war bands as cooks or to maintain weapons and equipment in a function similar to that of later medieval pages. This would have provided children with their first immersive experience of warfare while, in principle, keeping them relatively free of the dangers of combat. Some older adolescents may have acted as weapon bearers, and it has been suggested that double graves containing an older individual alongside an adolescent, such as those from Repton and Île de Groix, Brittany, may contain individuals who served in this capacity (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001; Price 1989).

By late adolescence, it seems clear that full participation in raiding and warfare was not uncommon. For untested combatants, however, initiation into the martial life of a war band must have presented many challenges, as an inexperienced warrior would have inevitably faced opponents who were better physically conditioned and trained and with greater experience in warfare. As the demography of the mass graves from Ridgeway Hill and Oxford may imply, many individuals would not have survived their first forays into conflict.

## Discussion and Final Remarks

This study has sought to investigate how social and ideological norms among Viking Age Scandinavian societies conditioned populations to participate in conflict. In doing so, its aim was to expose the social mechanisms that may have underpinned warfare through a targeted study of childhood. The evidence discussed here indicates that Viking Age attitudes toward conflict and warfare may have been shaped by a deeply ingrained culture of militarism and hegemonic masculinity. These influences, embodied in a corpus of toy weapons and strategic board games, as well as various physical activities, legitimized a powerful suite of behaviors and social norms that promoted competition and risk-taking from an early age.

While this study has placed an emphasis on the unconscious aspects of enculturation and social conditioning, this process would have depended on myriad influences. Archaeological discussions often focus on the study of groups (whether these are families, communities, or entire societies), yet it is also important to acknowledge that children can shape their own individual process of enculturation by accepting, modifying, or rejecting cultural norms and socially sanctioned behaviors (see Damon 2006). We cannot assume, therefore, that all children would have aspired to participate in warfare and conflict, and in this the evidence presented above cannot be taken as universally speaking to a culture of aggression in Viking Age society.

Be that as it may, we cannot deny that the Viking Age was a violent time, marked not only by increasingly frequent con-

licts across Scandinavia but also by extensive raiding and warfare outside of the viking homelands. While the triggers and causes of the initial viking raids remain a matter of debate (see Ashby 2015; Barrett 2008; Raffield, Price, and Collard 2017a), the social norms and practices discussed here may well have contributed to the desire and perhaps the perceived need to engage in such activities. Participation in martial activities represented a means through which an individual could gain wealth and status, which in turn provided opportunities for social advancement, while for elites wealth and reputation represented the currency that allowed them to maintain political power (Raffield, Price, and Collard 2017a). Militarism and hegemonic masculinity therefore not only served the ambitions of war leaders who were looking to consolidate their power but may have also underpinned the overseas raiding and numerous civil wars documented in historical and literary sources.

Despite a surge of interest in the archaeological study of childhood in recent years, there is still much to learn about children and experiences of childhood in the past (Hadley 2016). The discussion here has not been intended to provide a conclusive evaluation of Viking Age childhood or of enculturation among Viking Age Scandinavian societies but, rather, aims to generate debate on an important but neglected topic by drawing on a range of evidence from across the viking world. It seems clear, however, that enculturation to conflict and warfare was influenced by cultural norms and attitudes that were communicated through everyday aspects of childhood. Toys, games, and physical activities acted as vehicles to convey social messages, and using or taking part in these represented the first steps that some individuals would take toward participation in conflict. It is anticipated that the continuing study of childhood, combined with that of prevailing social attitudes and conditions within the Scandinavian homelands, will allow us to better understand the mechanisms that drove raiding, warfare, and sociopolitical development during the Viking Age.

## Acknowledgments

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## Comments

### Leszek Gardela

Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures, University of Bonn, Am Hof 1d, D-53113 Bonn, Germany; and Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies, and Religion, University of Bergen, PO Box 7805, 5020 Bergen, Norway (leszek.gardela@daad-alumni.de). 30 IX 18

### Tomboys and Little Vikings

Playing in the streets of vibrant towns and ports of trade, Viking Age children would frequently see warriors from different corners of the world. Growing up in a martial society, even from afar they would immediately recognize the jingling of the armor and hear the boastful laughter of those who returned home with rich spoils. As the warriors passed by their homes dressed in lavish garments and carrying weapons crafted to perfection by outstanding blacksmiths, many children would look at them with awe and admiration, hoping to one day follow in their footsteps. In the evenings, sitting by the blazing fire in their houses, they would hear sagas and poems about gods and heroes, as well as captivating stories from distant lands that fired their vivid imaginations, embedding within their hearts and minds the heroic ideals they were expected to live up to in the years to come. From the earliest days of their lives, children would also be taught to understand that success does not come easy—the crimson stains on the decks of ships moored in the harbor and the screams of those who returned home with little more than severe battle wounds surely served as powerful reminders that everything in life has its price. In any case, for children growing up in the Viking Age, weapons and warriors—both real and imagined—were literally everywhere.

In his thought-provoking article, Ben Raffield guides us through the world of Viking Age children, focusing on how the environment they grew up in “reinforced militaristic, hegemonic hierarchies of masculinity.” He convincingly shows that “Viking Age societies perpetuated a series of self-reinforcing cultural norms that encouraged participation in martial activities.” By exploring archaeological finds related to play and setting them in the context of Old Norse textual sources and cross-cultural parallels, Raffield provides a compelling picture of childhood enculturation. The article addresses many important and previously overlooked issues, and in doing so it significantly nuances our understanding of what it meant to be a child in the Viking Age (for previous studies, see, e.g., Callow 2006; Eriksen 2017; Gardela 2012; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015; McAlister 2013; Mejsholm 2009).

Since Raffield’s article concentrates predominantly on the enculturation of boys, it feels appropriate to add a few brief remarks on whether a similar process related to girls as well. As we know, textual sources that illuminate aspects of childhood in the Viking Age are relatively scarce, and they often concentrate their attention on boys rather than girls, which makes any investigations into this topic very problematic.

However, recent surveys of archaeological and textual sources are beginning to show that there existed interesting connections between females and weapons in the Viking Age (Gardela 2013b, 2018; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017a). We see them clearly in the funerary evidence where women of various ages (notably, some of them in their teens) are occasionally buried with military equipment, such as swords, spears, axes, and shields. Interestingly, some female individuals are also accompanied by miniature weapons made of nonferrous metals and closely resembling their full-size counterparts (Gardela and Odeäck 2018). Opinions on this corpus of material are divided among scholars, and while some consider these finds as evidence suggesting a warrior identity of the deceased, others point out that weapons in female hands and in their graves may have held many other meanings.

In approaching this material, we should certainly avoid proposing one-sided and categorical views. But at the same time, we must remain open to the possibility that growing up in a highly militarized society may have spurred some girls to pursue masculine lifestyles that would have required getting familiar with the art of war. Indeed, a number of Old Norse sagas recount stories of tomboys who decide to become female vikings. Probably the most famous of them is Hervör, whose deeds are portrayed in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*. Brought up in the house of the jarl, Hervör was a child of exceptional beauty who also “was as strong as a man; as soon as she could do anything for herself she trained herself more with bow and shield and sword than with needle-work and embroidery. She did more often harm than good, and when it was forbidden she ran away to the woods and killed men for her gain” (Tolkien 1960:11). Hervör’s behavior was deemed highly inappropriate by many, but she could not see any other future for herself than to pursue the life of a viking. Since, as the saga clearly suggests, it was impossible to tread a warrior’s path as a woman, Hervör had to change not only her appearance (by wearing male clothing) but also her name; when she joined a group of vikings, she called herself *Hervarðr*. As we learn from the saga, the young warrior woman also engaged in many other activities that were characteristic of men, including composing poetry and playing chess.

A girl named Þornbjörg from *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* pursues a similar path; from the early days of her childhood she rides on horseback and learns to fight with sword and shield until she masters these skills. One day, when her father expresses his discontent and advises her to abandon these activities, she gives him a very bold reply: “Since you’ve been given only one life to govern this kingdom and I’m your only child and heir . . . it seems very likely that I’ll have to defend it against a few kings or princes, once you’re gone” (Pálsson and Edwards 1972:35). Although the stories of Hervör and Þornbjörg are preserved in sagas that portray events deemed to be legendary, it is possible that there is a grain of truth in them. It is not inconceivable that in a society constantly ready for war, “playing vikings” with wooden swords, boats, and other toys enhancing strategic skills would have been equally attractive for boys and girls. Tomboys or not, the process of

childhood enculturation would have prepared girls to step into a male role if necessary or desirable.

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### Shannon Lewis-Simpson

Memorial University of Newfoundland, 230 Elizabeth Avenue,  
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador A1B 1T5, Canada  
(smlewis@mun.ca). 15 X 18

The dual concepts of a militarized society and the prominence of the combat-ready, able-bodied, stoic (masculine) warrior are useful to understand certain aspects of viking society, but we must allow for and expect nuance in both the presentation of masculinity or masculinities (as the author rather optimistically does in his title) and the spectrum of soldiering and conflict in order to be open to new interpretations (e.g., Boothby 2014).

Raffield offers convincing evidence for adolescents and youths embedded in conflict. The carving of the foot in the decking of the Gokstad ship is the act of a small, bored person waiting for the chaos of conflict to begin. A day at sea can be like this, 23 hours of routine tedium and 1 hour of absolute mayhem. Raffield raises the potential for children to act not only as bored, terrified observers but as agents of violence themselves. The presence of adolescent skeletal remains found in the two mass graves at St. John's College, Oxford, and Ridgeway Hill is compelling, and I agree that the presence of such young people suggests a far earlier enculturation process to accustom them to being present in (international) theaters of conflict. It may be worth stating here that childhood trauma, including exposure to collective violence, can cause the traumatized to tend toward violent behavior, with witnesses having a "significantly higher likelihood of engaging in violence later in life" (Macinnes et al. 2016; Ross and Arsenault 2018:2737; WHO 2018). Witnessing violence might have been viewed as an effective means of enculturation in itself, a way to teach children not to be violent so much as to survive to grow to adulthood. One aspect not discussed, which perhaps needs to be, is the evidence for sexual play as a means of control in a hypermasculine militarized hegemony.

Raffield is mostly careful to use gender-neutral terms of "people," "individuals," and "children," but he does refer to a 9-year-old "boy" buried in Birka Bj. 977. Unless osteological remains have been genetically tested, it is pretty much impossible to assign sex to a prepubescent subadult. This description is suggestive of the inherent bias that exists in most investigations of viking conflict—that the ubiquitous warrior is male, and exclusively so. Instead of assuming that children = boys in terms of this study, we should consider the possibility that children who have been gendered feminine may have been purposefully inculcated. The Hårby female figurine and other amulets clearly showing armed female figures could represent not so much supernatural figures as didactic tools for encouraging and inspiring young girls to assume the martial rather than the marital role.

The recent publication of genomic evidence pertaining to another Birka burial, Bj. 581, also questions the exclusivity of the warrior as male (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017a). Or does it? The individual in Bj. 581 may have considered themselves not as female but as trans. The controversy surrounding the interpretation of this particular burial and reluctance to accept new interpretations is a metaphor for the process of transition itself: "As trans narratives express, the embodied practice of transition never ends. There are slippages backward toward old forms of life. Stubborn material traces endure" (Bychowski 2018:320). That trans and queer folk may have been able to assume certain social roles in the Viking Age does not negate the existence of a system of hegemonic masculinity; indeed, much of the evidence would strengthen the existence of this system, supporting the social argument proposed by Clover (1993) of a single gender whereby individuals were judged adequate, "something like masculine," or *hvatr*. Skaldic verse explicitly emphasizes masculinity in the context of ability and activity in both the warrior and the protectorate roles. But one might suggest, as does Jarl Torf-Einarr of ninth-century Orkney, that one's actions were more important than one's gender or sex:

Margr verðr sekr of sauði  
Seggr með fögru skeggi,  
en ek at ungs í Eyjum  
allvalds sonar falli

[Many a full-bearded man is noted for the [slaughter of] sheep, but I myself for the killing of the king's young son on the islands (Poole 1991:162)]

Being full-bearded and masculine was not good enough: one had to carry out specific and expected roles; otherwise, you were *blauðr*. Expected social roles were more diverse than being an active warrior on campaign: Viking Age conflict was more nuanced and strategic than merely beating people over the head with an axe. The children learned about all of this, whether they were trying to grow to adulthood in eighth-century Ribe or eleventh-century Greenland.

I do not agree with Raffield's binary assessment of these two terms *hvatr* *ok* *blauðr* as aligning with masculine and feminine, following Clover (1993). Consider, for example, the mid-eleventh-century skaldic verse of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, who speaks of *blauðum* or cowards:

Hann hefr fyr sæ sunnan  
—svá finnask til minni—  
opt með oddi keyptan  
auð, þars leitt vas blauðum.

[He has often purchased riches with his spear-point, south of the sea, where it was unpleasant for cowards; memorials of this are to be found (Whaley 2009).]

Cowardice and bravery were not limited to the feminine and masculine, respectively. We must remember that the sagas that



are so evocative in terms of human interaction and daily life, particularly for medieval Iceland, and that have largely shaped our interpretations of what was appropriate for each gender, are invented. Raffield argues that common patterns of behavior seen in many Old Norse saga texts and law codes “can allow us to potentially identify social attitudes and customs that medieval Icelanders found to be believable of their pre-Christian ancestors.” That is a very accurate statement, and the reader should be cautious of these medieval texts as being overly representative of Icelandic Christian beliefs, which are not necessarily universal throughout the span of the viking worlds. The sources suggest a relatively heteronormative binary rather than the emergent material actuality of a spectrum of gender, thus disallowing for trans and queer individuals in the record (see Blackmore 2011; Bychowski 2018; Raninen 2008; Solli 2008).

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### Kirsty E. Squires

Department of Criminal Justice and Forensic Science, Staffordshire University, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DF, United Kingdom (kirsty.squires@staffs.ac.uk). 27 VIII 18

In this paper, Raffield aims to explore the process of enculturation during Viking Age childhood, with specific reference to militarism and hegemonic masculinities. This research adopts a unique perspective on a subject area that is difficult to tackle, given the dearth of juvenile burials from the Viking Age. However, at its most basic level, this article does not provide the average frequency of infants and children from Viking Age cemeteries, a point that would further illuminate the rarity of young individuals interred with military accoutrements. Raffield also tackles the complexities of determining the point at which children became adults. If it is indeed the case that Viking Age children did not experience social adolescence or a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, then many of the “children” cited in this article may in fact be deemed adults (i.e., individuals over the age of 12 years) in light of the archaeological and literary evidence. However, as Raffield notes, the transition to adulthood may have been fluid as opposed to fixed and structured akin to twenty-first-century Western societies. This has been identified elsewhere. For example, in the late first century AD, Tacitus identified that boys of the Chatti tribe were emancipated when they were physically mature and capable of bearing arms—that is, once they had slain an enemy (Tacitus 1999:53). This implies that there was no fixed age when males reached adulthood; instead, the transition to adulthood was based on an individual’s ability to fight. If militarism was ingrained to the same extent in Viking Age society, then perhaps the martial skills of juveniles were the key factor that dictated when they could be classed as adults.

Given my interest in early medieval childhood, a number of points raised by Raffield struck a chord, as they exhibited similarities with the early Anglo-Saxon period in England. First, the social standing of juveniles is marked, and analogous, in the

burial record. In the early Anglo-Saxon period and the Viking Age, as Raffield explores in this research, younger individuals were more likely to be buried with a narrower range of weapons than adults (i.e., in the case of Repton, Derbyshire). Indeed, children may have been gifted small weapons, such as spears or small swords, so they could hone their fighting skills. As I have suggested in the context of early Anglo-Saxon England (Squires 2016), the fact that very few juveniles were buried with weapons may indicate that they belonged to kin groups that chose to display their identity through the use of weaponry, which could be attributable to their heritage, lineage, hierarchical status, or ascribed roles. In the current article, Raffield has highlighted that a similar mechanism may also have been in play during the Viking Age. This implies that individuals were assigned status and social roles from a young age. In contrast, juveniles belonging to kin groups that did not possess this “warrior” identity could attain this status only once they had entered adulthood, meaning that social stratification occurred from a young age and was likely to have influenced relationships and interactions between children within society. However, I do feel that Raffield could have drawn on the notion of assigned and ascribed status of children (in both life and death) further in this research (e.g., Gowland 2001), as this would have facilitated a deeper understanding of the differences between the societal positions of children in the Viking Age.

Notwithstanding the lack of archaeological data, I do feel it would have been of particular value for Raffield to outline the differences in weapon length found with various age groups—namely, infants, children, and adolescents—from Viking Age burials. From the early Anglo-Saxon period, a marked increase is noted in the length of spears as individuals passed through different age thresholds (Härke 1990; Squires 2016).<sup>2</sup> Raffield does suggest that “as children grew older, they may have played with larger wooden weapons” but does not elaborate on this point. A comparison of weapon types and sizes buried with children in the early Anglo-Saxon and Viking periods would be of great interest to scholars working in these areas.

Raffield touches on the presence of female weapon burials and the fact that some women were revered for their non-conventional societal roles through their participation in militarism. He goes on to state that “while we should not suppose that participation in martial society ubiquitously demanded active involvement in combat, these burials remind us that at least some girls may have been conditioned to adopt the persona or roles of the warrior.” However, there is no consideration about how these girls adopted such identities, as discussed in other recent work, such as Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. (2017a). Were they members of the social elite who would have been more inclined to participate in such pursuits? At what age did girls partake in training activities or warfare?

2. A similar observation has been made among contemporary cremation-practicing communities whereby urn height markedly increased as individuals passed through the life cycle (Squires 2013).

Were they allowed to pursue more masculine pastimes from a young age, such as swimming, physical games, and playing board games? Even though girls did not make up the majority of those involved in militarism and hegemonic masculinity, I would argue that their social roles, their social standing within their kin group and the wider community, and how they entered this lifestyle are of greater interest given their unique identity.

The original approach taken by Raffield in this paper makes it a refreshing contribution to the archaeology of childhood and Viking Age archaeology. It has not only highlighted a valuable, unique insight into childhood enculturation but also raised further questions about children in the Viking Age, their identities, and their involvement in militarism. Furthermore, Raffield's research also highlights the need for greater communication between scholars across related disciplines given the analogous social customs that we continue to see between past societies.

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## Reply

### Viking Age Childhood: A Response to Lewis-Simpson, Squires, and Gardela<sup>3</sup>

In conducting this study, my intention was to stimulate debates on militarism, gendered identities, and their implications for the lives of children in Viking Age Scandinavia. It is, of course, impossible to adequately discuss multiple social constructs and processes within the remit of a single article, and this work was envisioned as establishing a baseline for further discussion. As such, I would like to thank my colleagues for their thoughtful comments. Each author highlights a number of topics that demand detailed consideration, but unfortunately my reply must necessarily be brief.

My colleagues were remarkably consistent in drawing attention to questions of gender and their importance for the discussion of militarism and martial society in Viking Age Scandinavia. In his comment, Leszek Gardela argues for the need to specifically consider how militarism affected the enculturation process as it related to the lives and experiences of girls and women—a topic that I agree is certainly deserving of further exploration. While opportunities to undertake military training are likely to have been offered mainly to boys, Gardela draws attention to some interesting examples of young women who are described in the sagas as training in the martial arts. The impression given by the texts is that these women were subverting social norms, but was this necessarily the case? There is both textual and archaeological evidence to suggest that at

least some women were in fact able to participate in warrior society and that they could rise to positions of significant power within the martial sphere. Studying the means by which young women became enculturated to the warrior's life course would provide a much better understanding not only of the composition of warrior society but also of how the identity of the warrior itself was conceptualized and enacted, in different contexts, among communities. As noted by Kirsty Squires, this is a subject that should be accorded far more attention than it has been to date.

Debates surrounding this topic have greatly intensified as a result of the recent genomic identification of the female "warrior burial" Bj. 581 from Birka, Sweden (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017a; Price et al. 2019). While I agree that the grave is likely to have belonged to a high-ranking woman who lived the life of a professional warrior (see Price et al. 2019), it is important to consider how and why this person chose to do so and whether this individual's status and life course was representative of those of Viking Age women collectively. The case of Bj. 581 also raises questions as to what constituted a "warrior woman" during the Viking Age and whether these individuals were indeed regarded as women at all. In her comment, Shannon Lewis-Simpson argues that more must be done to consider the gendered pluralities of Viking Age warriorhood and to situate these discussions within the wider study of nonbinary lifeways. Certainly there is good evidence to suggest that some individuals—especially those engaged in certain occupations, may have considered themselves as belonging to a "third" gender (see Norrman 2000; Price 2002; Raninen 2008). Others may have possessed no fixed identity at all, allowing them to move between gendered boundaries to perform different roles, at different times, as seems to have been the case with Hervör/Hervarðr in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (see Gardela's comment). I respectfully disagree, however, with Lewis-Simpson's suggestion that the individual buried in Bj. 581 should be described as "trans." While it is important to consider how the identity of this individual was conceptualized, both by themselves and by wider society, there is little evidence to suggest that Viking Age communities would have recognized this term or perhaps even this concept in the way that it is generally expressed and understood today. Despite this, I would be excited to see this idea developed in such a way that it could be explored from an emic perspective.

Lewis-Simpson also raises some questions concerning my use of Clover's (1993) "one sex" model of gender. I absolutely agree with her assertion that all individuals—regardless of their sex or gender—were required to distinguish themselves and maintain their status through their actions. I am certainly not arguing for a binary model of gendered power whereby men were somehow automatically considered *hvatr*, women were automatically considered *blauðr*, and nonbinary individuals were excluded altogether. Rather, I am suggesting that a culture of militarism and hegemonic masculinity would have placed anyone who did not conform to hegemonic ideals (which could include women, nonconformist men, and

3. I am grateful to Liz Arkush for her insightful comments on warrior culture and martial societies and to Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson and Neil Price for discussing the findings from Bj. 581.

individuals who may have ascribed to nonbinary identities) at an automatic disadvantage to those who did conform to them—that is, members of the martial elite, their kinship groups, and their retainers. This was a model for social and political power that did not discriminate by sex or gender and that had implications for those occupying all levels of the social hierarchy.

Among the socially competitive societies of Viking Age Scandinavia, opportunities to participate in martial culture are unlikely to have been afforded equally. While it is important to recognize the potential for fluidity in hegemonic ideals as they manifested over time and between communities (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), prevailing social conditions would have invariably favored those who were members or associates of the political elite. Squires draws attention to the importance of “assigned status” and its likely influence as an important factor in the construction of hegemonic masculinities and an individual’s ability to pursue the warrior lifestyle. Archaeologically, the evidence for assigned martial status is most clearly seen in the functional miniature weapons and military equipment that seem to have been created for high-status children. This material would have served to formalize their position within an influential family group, providing them with status-enhancing accoutrements that singled them out as a member of the militarized aristocracy. For those who were not members of the elite, opportunities to pursue the warrior’s life course would have been more limited. Nevertheless, there may have been some room for these individuals to successfully navigate these obstacles. Those who possessed the ability to take what they wanted would have been the most successful, and this would have facilitated the development of a culture in which honor and status were sought and earned through participation in risky, extreme, and violent behaviors (see Ashby 2015; Raffield, Price, and Collard 2017a). This may explain why, in the written sources, those women who act *hvatr* are tacitly admired and sometimes even praised for doing so; they were clearly people to be respected and perhaps also to be feared.

Moving forward, it is clear that we still have much to learn not only about the militarized lifeways of children but also about hegemonic power, gender relations, and hierarchies—including hegemonic femininities and nonbinary gender identities—in Viking Age Scandinavia. As noted by Squires, there would be much to gain from situating the findings of this study within the context of broader discussions of childhood and militarism in early medieval Europe, and I would welcome further attempts to explore the themes outlined here from cross-cultural and comparative perspectives. This would create new and exciting opportunities to develop more holistic and nuanced models for the study of childhood development and enculturation in the distant past.

—Ben Raffield

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