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# Foreword

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*ASSAH* offers researchers an opportunity to publish new work in an interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary forum which allows for a diversity of approaches and subject matter. Contributions which place Anglo-Saxon England in its international context are as warmly welcomed as those which focus on England itself.

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The Editors are grateful to the contributors to this volume for their prompt and efficient responses, and to those peer reviewers who have taken the time to read and comment upon the papers in this volume. Thanks also go to the Marc Fitch Fund and to SLR Consulting for generous subventions towards the costs of the publication of this volume of *ASSAH*.

All papers for consideration for future volumes should be sent to the Editors:

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# Warriors, Heroes and Companions: Negotiating Masculinity in Viking-Age England

D. M. Hadley

*Detailed analysis of the construction of gender identities has transformed our understanding of many aspects of early medieval society, yet the study of the Vikings in Britain has largely remained immune to this branch of scholarship. In responding to this lacuna, this paper examines the gendered dimension of the funerary record of the Scandinavians in England in the ninth and tenth centuries, and suggests that the emphasis on masculine display, in both the burial and the sculptural record, is not merely a quirk of survival, but rather it has much to reveal about the negotiation of lordship in the context of conquest and settlement.*

## Introduction

For a generation of scholars gender has been an important analytical category. It is, as a result, now widely recognised that femininity and masculinity were not immutable organic categories, but that they were socially constructed, historically contingent and diverse. The plurality and fluidity of gender identities are increasingly being elucidated, as are the multifarious contexts in which they were constructed and contested. Gender is now also understood as a primary signifier of power in society, and as a mechanism of social inclusion and exclusion. The study of gender has accordingly transformed our understanding of many aspects of early medieval society.<sup>1</sup> However, the study of Scandinavian settlement in Britain in the ninth and tenth centuries has largely failed to absorb the insights of this generation of scholarship. A chapter in Christine Fell's volume *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* and Judith Jesch's book *Women in the Viking Age* both offered invaluable wide-ranging, interdisciplinary surveys of the role of women during the period of Scandinavian raids and settlement, but they were written at a time when researchers were principally concerned with increasing the visibility of women in the past, rather than with engaging in the construction of gender identities.<sup>2</sup> In developing the work of these two pioneers, and in seeking to respond to subsequent advancements in gender studies, this paper explores aspects of masculine identity in the context of Scandinavian conquest and settlement in England.

This focus on masculinity requires some justification,

since it may, admittedly, appear unnecessary. It is certainly difficult to dissent from the opening sentiment of Jesch's book that 'Vikings are irredeemably male in the popular imagination', and they are scarcely less male in academic preoccupations.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as is often the case when discussion of men dominates historical discourse, men tend to be, in the words of John Tosh, 'everywhere but nowhere', and the importance of disaggregating the generality that is 'men' has recently been stressed.<sup>4</sup> Studies of the multiplicity of medieval masculinities have been greatly influenced by the sociologist R.W. Connell's elaboration of the concept of 'hegemonic masculinities', in which attention is drawn to the ways in which societies often legitimize a dominant form of masculinity, to which few men are able or permitted to aspire, and which serves to marginalise or subordinate other masculinities and femininities.<sup>5</sup> The performative quality of masculinity has also been stressed in recent research, influenced in particular by Judith Butler's observation that 'gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time ... through a stylised repetition of acts', and many recent studies have subsequently explored the ways in which early medieval gender identities were constructed through, for example, clothing, gesture, and ritualised actions, including burials.<sup>6</sup> The present paper explores the role of funerary practices as a medium of social display in the wake of Scandinavian conquest and settlement in England, contending that they were contexts through which elite masculinity was renegotiated. Yet, as we shall see, despite the emphasis



on masculine funerary display, ultimately it was to be within the contexts of families that Anglo-Scandinavian acculturation was achieved.

### Masculinity and the Scandinavian burial rite in England *c.* 900

The burials of Scandinavian settlers in England have proved notoriously elusive, with the diagnostic evidence of cremations and inhumations accompanied by grave goods found at only *c.* 30 sites (Fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> The scarcity of such burials has been regarded as perplexing, especially in the light of the extensive Scandinavian influence on place-names and language, and it has frequently been understood as the result of the paucity of excavated burial sites of the ninth and tenth centuries and of the Scandinavian habit of burying their dead in pre-existing cemeteries, which, it has been stated, 'may explain the relative scarcity of Viking burials in England, since most of their burial places have remained in use down to the present day'.<sup>8</sup> Given the perceived limitations of the data set, the interpretive load borne by this funerary record has largely been restricted to mapping areas of Scandinavian settlement.<sup>9</sup> Recently, however, the social and political messages conveyed by these Scandinavian burials have begun to be explored, and it is worth briefly rehearsing these arguments before considering the gendered dimensions of this burial record.

Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle have argued that the late ninth-century funerary complex at Repton (Derbyshire), the site of a major Mercian royal monastery, was created in the context of Scandinavian political and military conquest. A small number of burials accompanied by grave goods were excavated near to the church, along with a former mausoleum containing the remains of at least 264 individuals, which was sealed by a low mound surmounted by a stone kerb. According to an antiquarian account, this deposit incorporated a central warrior burial; it was subsequently disturbed and this claim could not, thus, be confirmed archaeologically, but a number of artefacts, including an iron axe, seaxes, knives and a fragment of a sword, may have accompanied such a burial. The excavators have suggested that the putative central burial may have been for someone of royal status, perhaps Ivar *beinlauss*, one of the leaders of the viking 'great army' active in England from 865 and who died in the 870s, and was buried, according to saga evidence, in a mound. They have interpreted this funerary strategy as 'a ruthless assertion by the Vikings of their own ancient religion'.<sup>10</sup> Situated on a bluff overlooking the River Trent, this burial complex was certainly a highly visible symbol of the great army's occupation of an important Mercian royal and cult centre over the winter of 873–4, although whether it involved obliteration of the old order or, as Julian Richards prefers, a degree of accommodation, in which the new order was 'invested with the authority of the past', is debatable.<sup>11</sup> Nearby at Heath Wood, Ingleby

(Derbyshire) Richards has excavated part of a prominent hill-top cemetery consisting of 59 barrows, thrown up over cremated human and animal remains, from which Scandinavian-type metal items have been recovered. This cemetery is unique, and Richards suggests that it was created at a time of military activity, with those responsible for the site seeking to underpin a precarious position through 'a statement of religious, political and military affiliation', and one which was overtly pagan.<sup>12</sup> The funerary displays at Repton and Heath Wood represent different, if equally dramatic, responses to the circumstances of raiding and the early phases of conquest, and it has been suggested that the groups responsible were engaged in an ideological 'dialogue' with each other.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not this was the case, it is plausible that the statements of conquest made by these groups through funerary displays were intended for an indigenous as well as a Scandinavian audience, and this is probably true of many other Scandinavian-type burials, which were often in conspicuous locations, such as near churches or under mounds.<sup>14</sup>

These recent discussions are important advances in our appreciation of the burial record not simply as a conservative reflection of traditional Scandinavian practices, but as a flexible medium through which socio-political statements relating to group identity and conquest were conveyed. What has, however, largely escaped comment is the gendered dimension of the funerary record; yet the emphasis on masculine display is striking.<sup>15</sup> Almost all of these Scandinavian-type burials were of adults, and most were seemingly provided for men, or at least – given that osteological sexing has not been reliably performed on some of the skeletons from older excavations – contained items with strong masculine associations. These comprise, in particular, swords, shields, spurs, axes, military belt fittings and riding equipment. Examples include seven or eight inhumations accompanied by swords and other weapons, spurs, buckles, a whetstone and also the beam and pans of a set of scales discovered beneath the church at Kildale (Yorkshire); a burial encountered in the churchyard at Wensley (Yorkshire) accompanied by a sword, spear, knife and sickle; and an inhumation accompanied by a sword, spearhead, an axe, shield, gold buckle and Carolingian-style strap-end within a stone cist underneath a mound at Beacon Hill, Aspatria (Cumberland).<sup>16</sup> A burial at Hesket-in-the-Forest (Cumberland) produced a sword, a horse bit, an axe head, buckles, spearheads and a pair of spurs, and another at Claughton Hall, Garstang (Lancashire) contained a sword, spearhead, and a Carolingian baldric mount.<sup>17</sup> In addition, swords recovered from churchyards, such as Farndon (Nottinghamshire), Ormside (Cumberland) and Rampside (Lancashire), have been interpreted as having been disturbed from Viking-Age graves.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, female graves of Scandinavian type are rare and comparatively less well-furnished. The few examples include a female accompanied by oval brooches, an iron knife and key or



Figure 1. Map of Scandinavian burials. After J. D. Richards, *Viking Age England* (2nd edn, Stroud, 2000), fig. 63, with the addition of recently-discovered sites.

latch-lifter and a decorated bronze bowl from Adwick-le-Street (Yorkshire), and a female wearing a necklace of beads and silver pendants and accompanied by a knife from Saffron Walden (Essex).<sup>19</sup> In a small cemetery excavated recently at Cumwhitton (Cumberland) there were two female graves, one containing a jet bracelet and a belt fitting, and the other accompanied by an iron knife, a bead and a wooden chest with a weaving baton, although a pair of oval brooches founded prior to excavation by metal detectorists may also have originally formed part of this grave assemblage.<sup>20</sup> The discovery of a pair of oval brooches near to a sword at Santon Downham (Norfolk)

may have come from a grave, but the circumstances of discovery are poorly recorded.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the grave of a female at Repton, in a later phase than the other furnished burials, included an iron knife and a strike-a-light, but these artefacts scarcely distinguish it from burials with occasional small items that can be found across the country in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>22</sup>

There are several reasons for suggesting that this burial record represents more than the simple transference to England of normal Scandinavian funerary practices, and that burial strategies were deliberately modified in response to the circumstances of conquest and the processes of

making claims to land and status in newly-occupied territories. First, a recent survey of cemeteries dating to *c.* AD 800–1000 in southern Sweden (much of which was part of the Danish territories in the Viking Age) revealed that around half of burials had been accorded gendered assemblages of grave goods, typically with weapons in male graves and jewellery in female graves, but that the number of feminine burial assemblages was roughly three times that of masculine assemblages.<sup>23</sup> A similar pattern of greater visibility of feminine grave assemblages in ninth-century Jutland and the Danish islands has also been noted, although in those regions elaborately-furnished graves are generally rare before the tenth century.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, a study of ninth-century cemeteries in the Sogn district of western Norway revealed around three times more masculine than feminine assemblages.<sup>25</sup> In other parts of Norway, however, a more even distribution of masculine and feminine assemblages has been noted.<sup>26</sup> In this context, and even taking into account the evidence from the Sogn district, the overwhelmingly masculine display in the funerary record of the settlers in England is striking. Second, this masculine emphasis in England contrasts with the situation in other regions of Scandinavian settlement, such as the Scottish Isles, where female and, to a lesser extent, juvenile and infant burials of Scandinavian type are considerably more numerous, and there are roughly similar numbers of burials with masculine and feminine assemblages of grave goods, many of which are considerably more elaborate than most of the examples from England.<sup>27</sup> Third, other indications that deliberate choices were made about burial display in the context of settlement include the fact that Scandinavian practices such as boat burials have not been securely identified in England, but they do occur in both the Scottish Isles and the Isle of Man.<sup>28</sup> Thus, among the Scandinavian settlers in other parts of the British Isles, funerary displays signalling Scandinavian identity were apparently more distinctive and expressed more broadly in the burials of all members of the community than was the case in England.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, analysis of the admittedly limited funerary record from England suggests a disproportionate emphasis on masculine display, which was often allied to Anglo-Saxon strategies of social display through the location of burials in the vicinity of churches.<sup>30</sup>

What significance can we attach to these masculine displays? That they were more nuanced than simply reflecting the military status of the deceased is suggested by recent discussions of the mnemonic qualities of early medieval grave goods. Howard Williams, for example, has argued that the significance of weapons in burials derived from not only their association with male violence, which was an integral component of masculine identity, but also from their symbolism of social status and ancestral associations, and also their connections with particular deities, and links with smiths, who in Germanic mythology were imbued with mythical, sometimes shamanic, qualities.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Elisabeth van

Houts has demonstrated the ways in which the memories of individuals and events were often associated in the minds of early medieval chroniclers and will-makers with particular artefacts, which she has described as ‘pegs for memory’. Swords, she observes, were prized ancestral heirlooms because of ‘the memorial value attached to these weapons and the stories they generated’.<sup>32</sup> In this respect the presence among the burial assemblages of the Scandinavians of such items as Carolingian belt fittings and Anglo-Saxon swords and coins warrants further consideration.<sup>33</sup> Although it is impossible to know whether they had been acquired through warfare, purchase or inheritance, it is quite likely that such artefacts evoked particular associations with battles fought and past adventures.

Yet grave goods might also be chosen for their contemporary resonance. This is suggested, in part, by evidence that viking armies raiding in Frankia apparently prized Frankish military apparel, leading Charles the Bald in 864 to prohibit the sale of Frankish swords to the Northmen, who were apparently also keen to acquire Frankish horse-fittings.<sup>34</sup> Anne Pedersen has argued that the appearance of riding equipment in southern Scandinavian burials in the tenth century ‘may reflect a way of life comparable to or at least attempting to emulate western European court life’, suggesting that burial strategies could be employed to make contemporary political statements.<sup>35</sup> The burial record of the Scandinavians in England also has similarities with the coinage minted for Scandinavian kings in England in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, which likewise incorporated complex combinations of Anglo-Saxon, Carolingian, Christian and secular influences.<sup>36</sup> Mark Blackburn has argued that the designs of these coins were deliberately chosen as if to convince the kings of other realms, including Wessex and Frankia, that the new Scandinavian polities were ‘within the civilised community of Christian states’.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the readiness with which Guthrum, one of the leaders of the great army, took up the trappings of Anglo-Saxon kingship, including baptism; the minting of coinage on which he employed his baptismal name, Æthelstan; and the issuing of written legislation in collaboration with King Alfred, suggests that at least some of the Scandinavians were adept at adopting new forms of lordly behaviour.<sup>38</sup> We may quibble over whether lavishly furnished burials would have been understood as the attributes of a ‘civilised’ people by the Anglo-Saxons, but their contents, as also the locations of some near to churches, suggest that they were created by Scandinavian communities looking beyond the confines of the warband of which they were, or had been, a part. For their part, although the Anglo-Saxons may have long since given up burying their dead with lavish assemblages of grave goods, they would surely have understood elements of the symbolic repertoire of these funerary displays. In sum, it can be suggested that among the Scandinavian settlers, masculine funerary display was simultaneously

employed as a focal point for the construction of ancestral memories and as a medium for mediating the processes of conquest.

### Restricting Masculinity in the Burial Rite

This masculine emphasis was, however, only one part of the processes of conquest and acculturation. Despite oft-repeated comments to the contrary (see *Introduction*, above), it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid the conclusion that the burials of the majority of the settlers and their descendants must be found among the thousands of largely unfurnished late ninth- and tenth-century burials known from England. Burials of this date continue to be excavated at a regular rate, but the corpus of elaborately furnished burials has, with few exceptions, remained fairly static over recent decades, suggesting that the comparatively limited scale of furnished burials is a real phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> This is, indeed, a deduction that is beginning to be supported by stable isotope analysis (see below), revealing the presence of individuals born in Scandinavia among the unfurnished burials of cemeteries in northern and eastern England.<sup>40</sup> Among the majority of ninth- and tenth-century burials neither gender nor age normally determined the form of burial accorded an individual, and family status seems to have been an important factor determining burial provision, for the Scandinavians as much as the local population.<sup>41</sup> Consideration of this broader funerary landscape reinforces the impression that the burials of only certain Scandinavian males were elaborated as part of the process of conquest, and that only for a few of these was warrior status articulated in death.

This differential treatment is most strikingly demonstrated by considering the male burials excavated at Repton. Grave 511 was a lavishly-furnished burial containing a sword in a wooden scabbard lined with fleece and covered with leather, a necklace with two beads and a Thor's hammer, two buckles (one from a belt, the other for a suspension strap for the sword), two knives, a key, the tusk of a wild boar and the humerus of a jackdaw or raven, possibly in a bag or box.<sup>42</sup> The warrior status of the male interred in this grave was evidently being emphasized. Moreover, the Thor's hammer on his necklace and the bird bone, possibly evoking the god Odin who was associated with ravens in Scandinavian mythology, suggest that the powers of the gods were also being invoked for this man.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, the adjacent and subsequent male burial (grave 295) contained only an iron knife.<sup>44</sup> But for its location, this adjacent burial might not have entered the corpus of Scandinavian burials, since occasional examples of burials with knives are not unknown in many regions of later Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>45</sup> However grave 295 was clearly part of the same funerary display as grave 511. The two burials were covered with a single stone setting, while a 30 cm-square post-hole centrally placed at the east end of the two graves suggests that they were jointly marked

above ground.<sup>46</sup> That these two individuals were both of Scandinavian origins has recently been suggested by the application of stable isotope methods. This involves analysis of the oxygen and strontium isotopes laid down in teeth during childhood that derive from drinking water, which is regionally varied according to local geology, and which can reveal the regions in which individuals spent their early years.<sup>47</sup> This evidence demonstrates, thus, that neither Scandinavian origins, nor burial within a larger funerary display with a fellow Scandinavian, invariably qualified a man for elaborate weapon burial.

There are several possible reasons for the disparity between the funerary provision for the two men, including their relative social status and age, since the occupant of grave 511 was *c.* 35–45 years at death, while his companion was *c.* 17–20 years. As the excavators have asked, 'Do we see here an older warrior buried with his companion, his weapon-bearer?'.<sup>48</sup> Alternatively, having buried one of their number with an elaborate weapon display, perhaps it was not thought appropriate or necessary to consign another set of weapons to the ground, with status for the second interment being conferred, instead, through proximity of burial to the warrior display. The absence of elaborate display in the grave of the younger man is purely a matter for speculation, but it was certainly not because he had never fought, since he appears to have died from a cut to the right side of the skull and generalized trauma on his skeleton suggest that 'he had experienced great physical strain'.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, while his elevated social status may have determined the funerary treatment of the older male, the manner of his death may also have been a factor. He had been struck on the head, possibly being killed by the thrusting of a sharp object through the orbital socket. He had also experienced a massive sword blow to the head of the left femur, in an attack apparently made while he was on the ground, and cut marks on the lower vertebrae have been interpreted as possible evidence of disembowelling. This man had died violently, probably while in a vulnerable position, and the injury to his groin is notable, perhaps indicating that his genitals had been mutilated.<sup>50</sup> It is tempting to suggest that the emasculation – both metaphorical and literal – of this warrior in the manner of his death was a factor necessitating more elaborate funerary provision, and greater emphasis on masculine warrior prowess, than was afforded the male in the adjacent grave. The fate of the older man may also explain the presence of the tusk of a wild boar, with its known amuletic properties, placed between his thighs.<sup>51</sup>

An axe-head discovered among the burials to the south of the crypt at Repton may have been disturbed from a grave, as perhaps was an iron spearhead found to the north of the crypt, however aside from graves 511 and 295 only three other burials reportedly contained grave goods. These comprised a gold ring and five silver pennies (grave 529), a copper-alloy ring (grave 83), and a knife and a strike-a-light from the aforementioned female burial

(grave 203) in a later generation.<sup>52</sup> These have been labeled as viking burials by their excavators, and the skeletal remains of the male buried in grave 529 have, indeed, yielded a Scandinavian isotopic signature.<sup>53</sup> The male aged *c.* 50 years in grave 83, wearing a copper-alloy ring on the third finger of his left hand, was buried to the south of the chancel adjacent to a male aged *c.* 20 years, and there is an interesting parallel here with graves 511 and 295 on the north side of the church; each was interred in their own coffin but they were apparently buried simultaneously in a large pit.<sup>54</sup> Double graves of adult males are very rare in ninth- and tenth-century cemeteries in England,<sup>55</sup> and the presence of two among the earliest generation of Scandinavian settlers in England may tentatively be interpreted as emphasizing male comradeship, which was certainly an important motif among Scandinavian armies, according to the evidence of skaldic poetry and the inscriptions on Scandinavian runestones.<sup>56</sup>

It is apparent that for the majority of the Scandinavians buried at Repton warrior status was not the crucial identity being expressed in their burial provision, nor was 'Scandinavianness' being overtly articulated in all but a handful of graves. Nonetheless, burial near to a warrior, including grave 511 and the putative central burial in the former mausoleum, may have been important for conveying messages about the status and ethnic identity of the other Scandinavians who were buried at Repton. It is certainly not uncommon in the early medieval period for status to be conveyed by burial near to prominent graves, reflected in, for example, the Christian desire for burial near to the bodies of saints (*ad sanctos*).<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in the seventh century the most elaborate burials, frequently incorporating masculine grave assemblages and commonly under mounds, were often the focal point for clusters of other, less well-furnished burials.<sup>58</sup> Status for the latter was conferred through place, rather than manner, of burial. Nick Stoodley has argued that the restriction of the most elaborate burial displays in seventh-century Wessex mainly to males, in contrast to the practices of the fifth and sixth centuries when masculine and feminine displays were more equally found, was 'a direct consequence of the increasing stratification within society' which saw 'profound changes to the expression of gender as reflected through the burial rite'.<sup>59</sup> A similar restriction among the Scandinavian settlers in England *c.* 900 of the most elaborate funerary provision to a select group of males, around which other burials clustered, is perhaps also a product of conquest and social competition as the settlers competed to establish their authority. Warrior status may have been aspired to by many men, but was afforded in death to only a few, and this need not, as the evidence of grave 295 at Repton demonstrates, have derived solely from actual experience of fighting.

### Masculine imagery on funerary sculptures of the tenth century

In the tenth century there was a proliferation of stone sculptures in the regions of Scandinavian settlement, especially northern England, a small proportion of which incorporated armed men. While precise dating is difficult, it is generally thought that most of the sculptures with such images date to the earlier to mid-tenth century, and thus they probably largely post-date the furnished burials already discussed.<sup>60</sup> These 'warrior' images are diverse, and this suggests considerable experimentation by sculptors. Some of these armed men are depicted on horseback, as at Sockburn (Fig. 3), Chester-le-Street, Gainford, Hart (County Durham), Brompton (Yorkshire) and Crowle (Lincolnshire).<sup>61</sup> Others are standing, as on sculptures from Weston (Fig. 4), Middleton (Yorkshire) and Norbury (Derbyshire), while yet others are seated, as, for example, on another shaft from Middleton (where the sitting position is indicated by the foreshortened lower legs and the pellets above the shoulders which were possibly part of a chair) (Fig. 3) and on a shaft at Nunburnholme (Yorkshire).<sup>62</sup> Some of the men have only one weapon, such as Middleton 1 and Great Stainton (County Durham), while others have two or more, for example, Middleton 2 and 5 and Sockburn 7. Many are helmeted and some carry shields, such as Sockburn 3 and 5 and Alstonfield (Staffordshire) (Fig. 3).<sup>63</sup> A few appear to be engaged in combat, or possibly hunting (such as Sockburn 14) (Fig. 2) or even jousting (as at Neston (Cheshire), but most are inactive, such as the figure on Middleton 2 who is surrounded by, but not holding, his weapons (Fig. 3), and the figure on the Weston sculpture whose weapons hang down rather than being brandished (Fig. 4).<sup>64</sup> It is likely that workshops and individual sculptors were important in driving artistic styles, and Richard Bailey's study of the use of templates permits identification of the same sculptor or workshop behind warrior images at both Sockburn and Brompton, while two different warrior images at Middleton were constructed with the same template. The influence of the patron can, however, sometimes be discerned in evidence that single workshops, even individual sculptors, produced diverse monument forms.<sup>65</sup>

There are clearly similarities between the array of artefacts found in the more elaborate male graves and those depicted on the sculptures, yet the latter are seemingly related much more closely to the processes of integration and acculturation. The martial imagery on sculptures was firmly incorporated into Christian schema, and warriors are commonly juxtaposed with cross-heads, as on Middleton 2, and sometimes occur alongside ecclesiastical figures, such as evangelists and priests, as on shafts from Nunburnholme and Brompton.<sup>66</sup> Given these settings it is possible that the warrior images themselves sometimes possessed Christian connotations. It has, for example, been suggested that weapons might sometimes

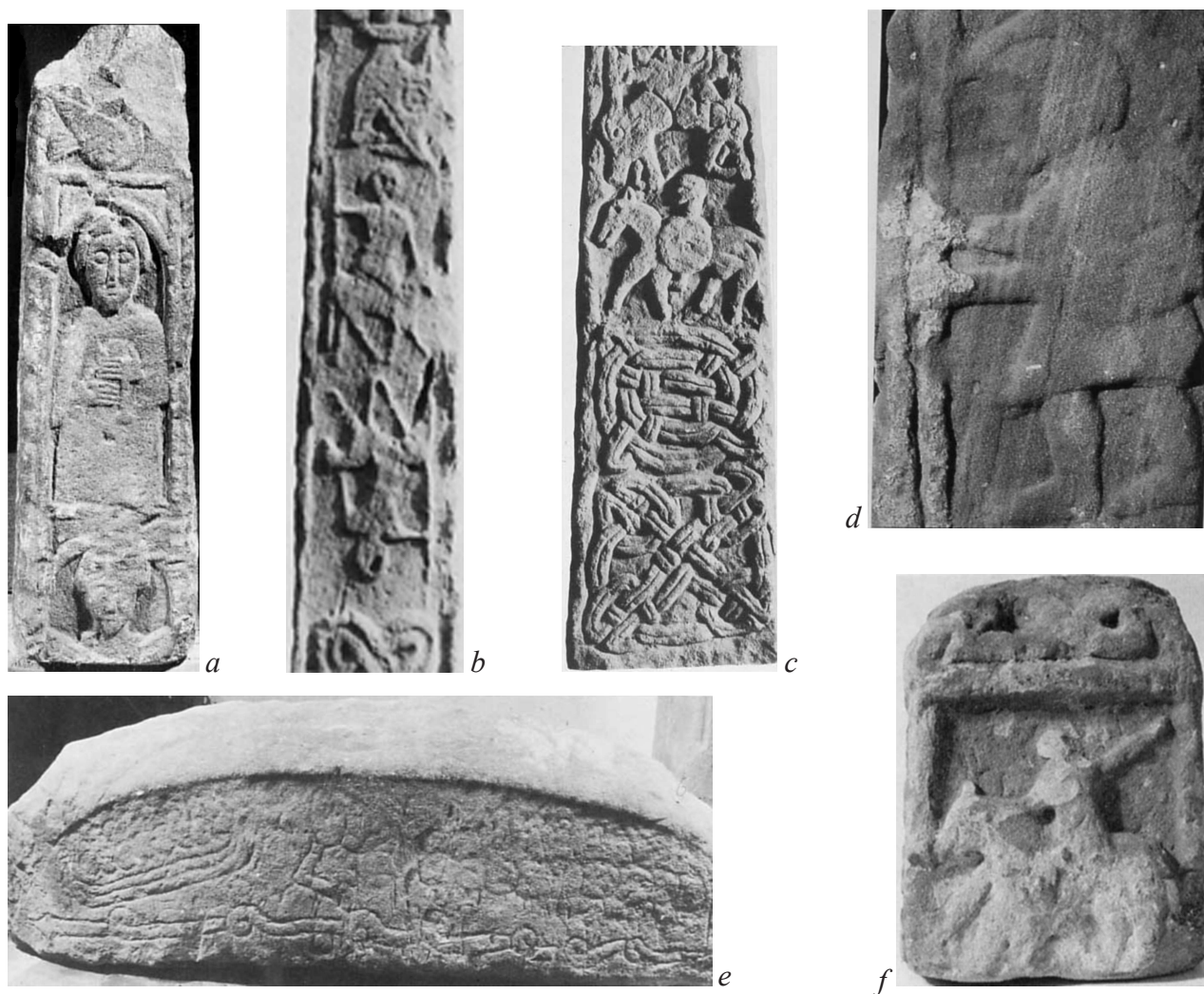


Figure 2. Sculptures with figural art: a) a priest (Brompton, Yorkshire); b) men armed with spears on horseback (Gosforth, Cumberland); c) a man with a shield on horseback (Chester-le-Street, County Durham); d) a man wearing a helmet and armed with a shield and spear (Sockburn, County Durham); e) eight figures in a boat bearing shields (on the left-hand side) and eight or ten standing figures also bearing shields (right-hand side), between which stands a figure raising one arm (Lowther, Westmorland); f) figure on horseback carrying a spear (Baldersby, Yorkshire)

have served symbolically as ‘weapons of faith’, and that the mounted horsemen may have derived in some way from Christian models.<sup>67</sup> However, as Bailey points out, when we find the horsemen engaged in the aristocratic pursuit of hunting or even jousting, as on a stone at Neston, a Christian model seems unlikely, and it need not be assumed that warrior figures could only find a place if they had specific Christian overtones.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, since such stones first aroused academic curiosity, there has been increased understanding that there is no necessary contradiction between Christianity and the aristocratic, martial ideal. As an analogy, Patrick Wormald argued that the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, with its mixture of pagan rites, secular subject matter and biblical references, could have been created and enjoyed within a monastic setting because of the ‘aristocratic environment of early

English Christianity’. Similarly, it can be suggested that warrior imagery on tenth-century stone sculptures reveals that the Church had once again strategically adapted itself to the aristocratic environment.<sup>69</sup>

Yet, although military deeds could find a place within an ecclesiastical context, there were undoubtedly those who disapproved. To continue the *Beowulf* analogy, there are hints that although heroic tales were known among monastic communities they were also frowned upon; Alcuin condemned the hearing of ‘the songs of pagans’ in monastic communities in a letter to the bishop of Lindisfarne c. 797, asking ‘What hath Ingeld to do with Christ?’<sup>70</sup> Similar misgivings may have been expressed at the sculptures with their secular imagery, perhaps fuelled by the recent, on-going and probably not always entirely straightforward processes of conversion

of the Scandinavian settlers, which doubtless resulted in churchmen being faced with a wide range of behaviour in the name of Christianity.<sup>71</sup> In areas of Scandinavian settlement the Church had undoubtedly suffered badly, both through direct attacks and the loss of land, and in many regions had probably struggled to be re-established. In this respect, it is significant that ecclesiastics are depicted more commonly on tenth-century sculptures than on those of an earlier date, perhaps indicating a greater need to reinforce their presence than in the past.<sup>72</sup> The sculptures thus appear to have been a medium in which the competing (male) influences in local society were articulated and negotiated, and they hint at the complexity of the processes of acculturation.

Whatever the Christian connotations of the sculptures, it is difficult to deny that armed figures must also have conveyed messages about the status and attributes of the person for whom they were commissioned. It is plausible to suggest that at least some of the warrior images were depictions of real men, perhaps serving as memorials to them. Indeed, a fragmentary inscription on a shaft from Crowle indicates that it was a commemorative stone, perhaps to one or more of the three men depicted, while the name Eadmund was inscribed, possibly as a secondary addition, above the armed warrior on horseback depicted on a shaft at Chester-le-Street (Fig. 2).<sup>73</sup> We should, however, remember that possession, use and deposition of weapons and armour were not unproblematic in the Anglo-Saxon period. In the society evoked in *Beowulf* weapons and armour, including helmet, spear and sword were certainly the markers of members of a warrior aristocracy, yet in reality possession of weapons alone is unlikely to have been sufficient to maintain status.<sup>74</sup> For example, the well-known early eleventh-century compilation on status (*Gebyncðo*) commented that even if a *ceorl* possessed a helmet, byrnie (mail) and sword he was not worthy of thegnhood unless he also had the requisite amount of land; that all thegns were necessarily well-equipped for battle is also to be doubted.<sup>75</sup> This clause from *Gebyncðo* serves as a reminder of the potential tensions over elite status, and this should caution against reading the military images on sculptures as necessarily confident images of lords; they may have been as much attempts to convince local society of the status of the patron or the person commemorated, although undoubtedly they had resources to have been able to have commissioned this sculpture.

It would be hazardous to attach significance to the distinctions in military apparel depicted on various sculptures, not least because some are by any standards crude products. The warriors are often depicted in constricted spaces with limited room for elaboration, and the impression conveyed by the weaponry would doubtless have been enhanced by the application of gesso and paint which does not now survive.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, the extent to which a man was armed would certainly have mattered in this society. At a later date, for example, the Bayeux Tapestry seems to differentiate between men with only

spear and shield and those fully armed.<sup>77</sup> Weapons were also important constituents of later Anglo-Saxon heriot payments, a duty paid to a lord, often the king, upon death, and which were diverse and gradually increasing during the tenth century. Nicholas Brooks has suggested that heriots may find their origins in the abandonment of the deposition of weapons in graves, arguing that previously there may have been tension between the requirement to equip the dead and the demands of lords for armed retainers.<sup>78</sup> If so, for a short time in northern England these tensions may have re-emerged given the Scandinavian inclination to bury weapons with the dead, and also to deposit them in bogs and rivers, especially as the settlers began to be acculturated to Anglo-Saxon norms of lordly behaviour.<sup>79</sup> We do not know whether heriots were paid in the regions of Scandinavian settlement in the immediate aftermath of conquest, but in the later tenth century heriots were less onerous in the Danelaw than in southern England, and Brooks suggests that either the Danelaw nobility were less well-armed or that kings were less able to exact such heavy payments.<sup>80</sup> Either way, when assessing the significance of weaponry on funerary sculptures we should bear in mind the potential tensions surrounding the possession of weapons and their fate upon the death of individuals in tenth-century northern England.

The armed men on tenth-century sculptures in northern England have attracted surprisingly little comment, but implicit in such commentary as there has been is that they arose out of the changed circumstances of a turbulent era and reflect the prominence of men in tenth-century aristocratic society.<sup>81</sup> Yet although the importance of weapons, armour and hunting to lordly status was scarcely an innovation, there is nothing inevitable about the appearance of such images on sculpture. There were few precedents among earlier sculptures, and the Scandinavians did not bring a widespread tradition of sculptural production with them, nor was figural art apparently common in their other artistic mediums.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, elite men fulfilled many roles in this era, and the emphasis on military apparel suggests that it was either particularly important to the status of the patrons and those depicted, or that this martial aspect of their identity was in some sense contentious. In a recent study of aristocratic masculinity in the ninth century, Janet L. Nelson has drawn attention to the dilemmas faced by elite males who had to negotiate the competing expectations of secular power and Christian models for behaviour, which included both physical and sexual self-constraint; in a number of cases rejection of the sword and sword-belt became a 'symbolic object of rejection' for men who were tormented by these contrasting demands.<sup>83</sup> We do not know who commissioned the sculptures incorporating armed men, but in considering their significance we would be advised to keep in mind that the period of Scandinavian settlement presented many challenges to elite men, of both Scandinavian and indigenous origins,

as the era witnessed many battles (the clashing of swords is a repeated motif in the panegyric to the English victors at the battle of Brunanburh in 937 incorporated in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle),<sup>84</sup> caused considerable political disruption, doubtless caused massive amounts of land to change hands, and brought together two differing religious belief systems which valorized competing dimensions of masculine behaviour. In this context, perhaps it is not surprising that a new demand to depict the attributes of aristocratic masculinity on sculpture emerged. It is also striking that these warrior images emerged at the periphery of royal authority, reinforcing the impression that they were less confident images of an established regime than the mechanism by which a new social order was reinforced.

There are also parallels to be drawn between the iconography of the figural sculpture and another medium of lordship, the coinage minted in York under Scandinavian rule in the early tenth century. The latter, while overwhelmingly assimilated to Christianity and Anglo-Saxon forms, also periodically incorporated items with secular connotations, including a sword, bow and arrow and a banner of the type displayed on a battle field, while other images, such as Thor's hammers and ravens, had links with battle as well as with Norse mythology.<sup>85</sup> Some of the most striking innovations in coinage occurred in the wake of regime changes. These include the inclusion of a hammer and a bow and arrow on the coins minted for Ragnall, who seized York *c.* 919, after which a sword was incorporated into the pre-existing St Peter's coinage, and the appearance of a raven on the coins of Olaf Guthfrithson, who captured York in 939, and is presented on his coinage in Norse as *cununc* (ON *konungr*) rather than Latin *rex*, in what Richard Hall has described as 'propaganda coinage'.<sup>86</sup> Thus, both sculpture and coinage were intermittently employed to display the attributes of lordship; in the case of coinage, which is more closely datable, this can be linked to times of considerable political change, and this may also have been a factor accounting for the sporadic appearance of warrior imagery on sculpture.

Depictions of Sigurd the dragon-slayer and Wayland the Smith were also innovations on tenth-century sculpture, although the stories from which they derive were previously known in England.<sup>87</sup> Richard Bailey has argued that such heroic scenes were not, as once thought, intended as celebrations of pagan culture, but were rather used to convey Christian truths.<sup>88</sup> For example, there are potential parallels between the Eucharist and Sigurd's enlightenment through consumption of the dragon's blood, which may have been made explicit when the lower part of an image of a mass priest on a sculpture from Nunburnholme was recut by another sculptor, who was also responsible for the addition of various ecclesiastical scenes, to make way for two figures interpreted as representing the Sigurd legend.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, while much later Norse poems and sagas elaborate an extensive train of events in the story

of Sigurd, and various versions of the story circulated, it is consistently the dragon-killing, heart-roasting and consumption of the blood that appear on sculptures in both the British Isles and post-conversion Scandinavia, perhaps precisely because these elements of the story can be incorporated into a Christian context.<sup>90</sup> Parallels also seem to have been drawn between the Wayland legend and Christian themes, as, for example, on the Leeds (Yorkshire) shaft where Wayland's flight is accompanied by Christian imagery of flight, including winged angels and St John's eagle (Fig. 3).<sup>91</sup> Recently Victoria Thompson has drawn attention to the links between Sigurd (whose foster-father was a smith) and Weland (the legendary smith) and Old English glosses on Biblical descriptions of Christ, in which he is transformed from an artisan into a smith, and she suggests that the two heroic figures may also have served iconographically as 'types of Christ'.<sup>92</sup> Yet while acknowledging these Christian connotations, we should not underestimate the capacity of those who commissioned sculptures to have purposefully requested images capable of eliciting diverse responses, and thus for heroic figures to have served simultaneously as commemorations of Scandinavian traditions, as didactic aids in the processes of conversion, and as reflections of masculine aspirations.<sup>93</sup>

### Women and the Family in Viking-Age England

The marginality of women in the symbolic language of sculpture is highlighted by rare exceptions, including the shaft from Weston on which a male brandishing his sword is grabbing or protecting a woman (Fig. 4), and a similar scene from Kirklevington (Yorkshire). On a sculpture at Lowther (Westmorland) a figure stands between two ships of shield-bearing warriors, which Bailey has suggested may be a scene from the legend of 'Hildir and the Everlasting Battle', given the similarities with a panel on a picture-stone from Lärbo St Hammers (Gotland), where the central figure is more obviously female; if so, the Lowther sculpture depicts woman as the nemesis of man, given Hildir's legendary role in provoking perpetual warfare.<sup>94</sup> While male ecclesiastical figures, saints and Christ continue to be depicted, Mary all but disappears from the sculptural repertoire until the end of the tenth century. This seems surprising given that she was potentially an appropriate image for circumstances of conversion, playing, of course, a crucial role in man's redemption.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, Mary does appear in the iconography and runic inscriptions on stone sculptures produced in Scandinavia following conversion. Birgit Sawyer has suggested that Mary may have had a particular appeal for female converts, and that she was consistently depicted as a mother rather than as a virgin, perhaps 'due to the high esteem in which fertility had been held in pagan Scandinavia'.<sup>96</sup> Thus, the absence of Marian imagery from the period of Scandinavian conversion in



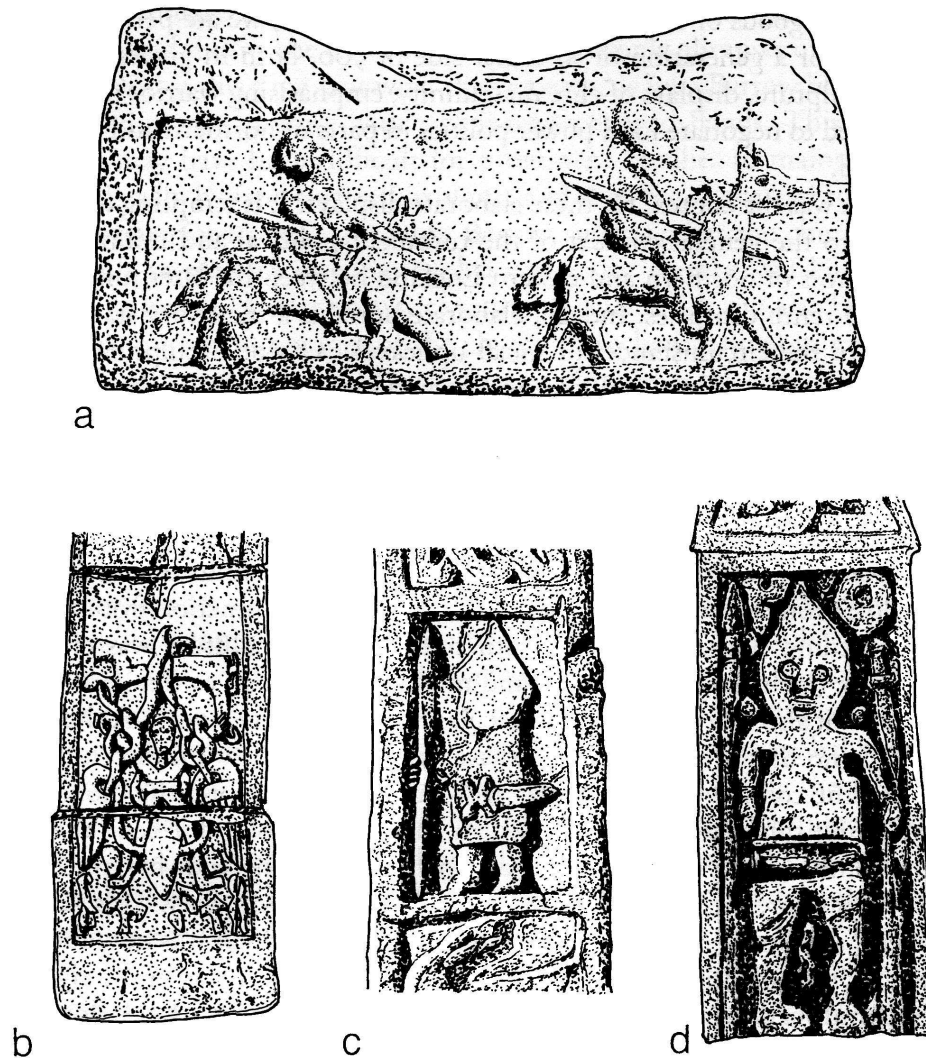


Figure 3. Sculptures with warrior and heroic images: a) mounted warriors (Sockburn, County Durham) (Length 63.5 cm); b) the flight scene from the heroic story of Wayland the Smith (Leeds, Yorkshire) (height of section shown 82.5 cm); c) an armed warrior (Sockburn, County Durham) (height 48 cm); d) an armed warrior on a sculpture from Middleton (Yorkshire) (height 56 cm)

England is especially striking.

The paucity of feminine display on sculpture is as striking as it is in the burial record, but it is unlikely to be explained by a virtual absence of female settlers. Two entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reveal that the raiders were sometimes accompanied by women and children. For example, in 893 the viking fortress at Benfleet (Essex) was captured, including ‘both goods, and women and also children’, and subsequently ‘the *wif* [variously translated as ‘wife’ or ‘woman’] and two sons’ of the leader of the viking army, Hæsten, were taken to King Alfred, while the *Chronicle* entry for 895 reports that ‘the Danes had placed their women in safety in East Anglia’.<sup>97</sup> Continental chronicles convey a similar impression. For example, when converting to Christianity under the sponsorship of a Frankish king, both Harald Klak in 826, and Weland in

862, were said by contemporary chroniclers to have been accompanied by their wives, while the early tenth-century chronicler Regino of Prüm records that in 873 a band of raiders arrived in the deserted city of Angers ‘with women and children’.<sup>98</sup> Scandinavian women were, then, clearly present during the period of raiding and settlement. Their role in the acculturation process, and doubtless also that of their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, has also recently been highlighted in analyses of the burgeoning corpus of metalwork recovered (mainly by metal-detectorists) from eastern England, which reveals innovative combinations of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian styles and forms, especially on female dress-accessories.<sup>99</sup>

Whatever the roles that women played during the Viking Age, the burial and sculptural evidence suggests that in the turbulent circumstances of conquest and assimilation

to a new culture, emphasis was placed on masculine display and on conveying the masculine attributes and appeal of Christianity. There are grounds for suggesting that a major dynamic in the settlement context was the incorporation of elite men into the new social and religious order. Indeed, there are hints in the written record of the importance, if not always the success, of marriage of Scandinavian men with indigenous women. Most famously, negotiations at Tamworth (Staffordshire) in 926 between King Athelstan of Wessex and King Sihtric of York were sealed by the marriage of the latter to Athelstan's sister.<sup>100</sup> A later medieval source records that prior to the battle of *Brunanburh* in 937, an alliance between Olaf Guthfrithson, from the Norse ruling dynasty in Dublin, and King Constantine of the Scots, was sealed by the marriage of Olaf to Constantine's daughter, and it would be unsurprising if there were many more examples of inter-marriage between Scandinavian men and indigenous women than the chronicles record.<sup>101</sup> The contracting of political marriages between members of rival groups was standard fare in early medieval Europe, and in the eleventh century the followers of both Cnut and William the Conqueror employed the strategy of marriage with indigenous women as a means of legitimizing claims to land.<sup>102</sup> Does this dynamic offer another explanation for the overwhelmingly masculine emphasis of the figural imagery? Roughly contemporary slate sculptures from the Isle of Man incorporate runic inscriptions that offer tantalizing evidence for their production within the context of inter-marriage between Norse men and local women. Examples include the inscription on Kirk Michael III in which the commemorated is a woman with a Celtic name with a Norse-named husband.<sup>103</sup> Despite the frequency with which women are mentioned on these sculptures, the iconography remains resolutely masculine: for example, on Kirk Andreas II the inscription commemorates a woman, yet the associated imagery relates to hunting.<sup>104</sup> In the absence of comparable inscriptions on the English sculptures it is difficult to take this argument further, and the sculptures were probably not commissioned solely by those of Scandinavian origins. The stone sculptures of diverse form and decoration were evidently produced in the context of cultural and ethnic assimilation, changing religious affiliations, and the emergence of new types of local lordship, and given the evidence, admittedly limited, of the importance of marriage strategies among the Scandinavian settlers, it can be hypothesized that sculptures were also commissioned within the context of marriages and families.

The proliferation of stone sculptures in the tenth century derives from secular lords exercising a novel form of conspicuous display at what were frequently newly founded churches. Sculptures were probably sometimes, perhaps often, intended to serve as markers of the status of the whole family, and not simply of the individual over whose grave they were placed. At rural churches, in particular, it is rare to find more than one or two such monuments,



*Figure 4. A tenth-century sculpture from Weston (Yorkshire) depicting a warrior with his sword in one hand, while with the other hand he grabs, pushes or perhaps protects a woman. On the reverse of this sculpture the warrior is depicted alone with his sword and battle-axe (height of section shown 22 cm)*

even among churches extensively excavated or renovated.<sup>105</sup> The so-called hogback monuments of the tenth century, which were possibly grave covers, are typically house-shaped monuments, often depicting a roof or even a door, and while there has been debate about possible prototypes of this monument among early shrines it would surely not be too great a leap to believe that these house-shaped monuments also symbolised, and were created within the context of, the family.<sup>106</sup> Later Anglo-Saxon wills indicate that the prospect of death typically focussed attention on the family, including disposal of family property, provision for heirs, obligations of future generations with regards to property and commemoration, and the property and welfare of the souls of already-deceased family members, and it is consequently plausible that stone monuments were also part of a family-oriented response to death.<sup>107</sup> In this context, we should acknowledge the historically-attested role of aristocratic women in commemorating the dead and in the preservation of dynastic memory in the early medieval period, and the part they played in the transmission of cultural and artistic traditions through their marriages into new families.<sup>108</sup> It is a moot point whether such women commissioned sculptures, but their role in reinforcing claims to status through support of their

male kin is perhaps hinted at occasionally on sculptures; for example, a fragmentary stone from Sockburn depicts a woman proffering a horn to a man, in a scene that is reminiscent of depictions of Valkyries welcoming dead heroes into Valhalla on picture-stones from Gotland.<sup>109</sup> The role that women played, or at least were valorized for, in the society of northern England following the Scandinavian settlements is perhaps best demonstrated by the imagery on one of the most complex stone monuments of all. On the great cross at Gosforth, a female figure from Norse mythology identified as Sigyn tends to her husband, the god Loki, holding a vessel to catch the snake venom as it drips onto him; on the other side of the monument a female figure depicted in typically Scandinavian fashion with pigtail and trailing dress tends to the crucified Christ, and she has been identified as Mary Magdalen, a symbol of the converted heathen.<sup>110</sup> Here for once we see acknowledgement of the role of women in religious observation, the family and the conversion process, but it is a role that was normally hidden behind the masculine display that was more normally utilized to represent lordship, constrained as it doubtless was by expectations of the symbolic qualities of lordship. The career of Æthelæd of the Mercians is the best-documented reminder of the fact that women undertook many more roles in the Viking Age than they were acknowledged for in the medium of stone sculpture.

## Conclusions

This paper has suggested a new reading of the funerary practices that emerged in the wake of the Scandinavian conquests and settlements of the later ninth and tenth centuries. This evidence suggests that Scandinavian modes of behaviour were transformed in the wake of contact with, and acculturation to, Anglo-Saxon society, and, in the case of the sculptural evidence, indigenous lords and the Church appear to have been flexible and innovative in their responses to the newcomers. Expressions of Scandinavian

identity in a funerary context were constructed with an emphasis on masculine display. Weapon burials were constructed for a select group of elite Scandinavian men who conquered and settled in parts of northern and eastern England; but they should no longer be presented as wholly representative of Scandinavian funerary strategies. To do so, as the recent proliferation of studies of medieval masculinities have observed, is to permit the manifestation of elite masculinity to stand for the experiences of all men. As in many other circumstances of conquest and social change in the early medieval period, a renegotiation of elite masculine status occurred, prompting the display of new forms of masculine symbolism, as part of the processes of ameliorating social disruption and staking claims to land and status.<sup>111</sup> Ultimately, however, it was to be within the context of families, marriage and conversion to Christianity that Anglo-Scandinavian acculturation occurred, and it is thus not surprising that secular images of masculine prowess were sporadic and short-lived, since they represent innovative responses to abnormal circumstances.

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9. Reviewed in Halsall 2000, 259–61
10. Biddle and Kjølbbye-Biddle 2001, 60–85
11. Richards 2001, 101
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14. Richards 2002, 157–9; Griffiths 2004, 131–8
15. This was first noted in Halsall 2000, 270; see also Hadley 2004, 214
16. Richards 2002, 160; Edwards 1998, 8–10
17. *Ibid.*, 14–16, 19; for other examples see Richards 2002; Graham-Campbell 2001; Hadley 2006, 239–46
18. Edwards 1998, 17–18, 21–2; Graham-Campbell 2001, 106–8
19. Speed and Walton Rogers 2004; Graham-Campbell 2001, 114
20. Pitts 2004
21. Graham-Campbell 2001, 110–11
22. Biddle and Kjølbbye-Biddle 2001, 65; Hadley 2006, 246–53
23. Svanberg 2003, 22
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26. Dommasnes 1991, 67 citing an unpublished survey by M. Høgestøl
27. Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 113–42
28. *Ibid.*, 118–22, 135–8; Bersu and Wilson 1966
29. The significance of this contrast is discussed in Hadley in press a

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34. Nelson 1997b, 37–8
35. Pedersen 1997, 182
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37. Blackburn 2001, 136
38. Hadley 2006, 29–34
39. *Ibid.*, 246–53
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41. Hadley and Buckberry 2005, 141–2, 145; Hadley in press b
42. Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 60–5
43. As suggested in Richards 2003, 388
44. Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 65
45. Hadley 2006, 248
46. Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 60
47. Budd, Millard, Chenery, Lucy and Roberts 2004, 127–41
48. Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 60, 65
49. *Ibid.*, 65
50. *Ibid.*, 61; Richards 2003, 388
51. *Ibid.*
52. Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 65–6
53. Budd *et al.* 2004, 137–8
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55. Hadley in press c
56. Jesch 2001, 187–94, 216–35
57. James 1989, 29
58. Stoodley 1999, 101–06
59. *Ibid.*, 104–05
60. Bailey and Cramp 1988, 28–31; Lang 1991, 28–43; Lang 2001, 66–8; Everson and Stocker 1999, 147–51
61. Cramp 1984, 53–4, 81–2, 93, 138, 140–1; Everson and Stocker 1999, 147–51
62. Bailey 1997, 93–4; Lang 1991, 181–6, 189–93
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64. Cramp 1984, 140–1; Bailey 1997, 85, 9304; Lang 1991, 182–4
65. Bailey 1980, 242–9, 254–5
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78. *Ibid.*, 90–3
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82. Cramp 1984, 20; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1985; Bailey and Cramp 1988, 61–72, 125; Lang 1991, 83–4; Bailey 1997, 66–9. On Scandinavian art in this period see Wicker 2003
83. Nelson 1999, at 138 for the quotation
84. ASC 939, Whitelock 1979, 219
85. Blackburn 2004, 333–5
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87. Lang 1976; Bailey 1980, 103–4, 116–17
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89. Lang 1991, 189–93
90. Bailey 1980, 116–25
91. Lang 1976, 90–1; Bailey 1980, 104
92. Thompson 2004, 163–8
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111. Hadley 2004, 323; Smith 2004, 19

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