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Sailing Home: Boat-graves, migrant identities and funerary practices on the Viking Frontier*

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Abstract

Boat-burial is a well-known feature of Viking-Age funerary ritual. The boat-graves from Scar (Sanday, Orkney) and Kaldárhöfði (Árnessýsla, Iceland), each draw on powerful symbolism to link the deceased and their survivors to the Scandinavian homeland. Scar represents Scotland's richest Viking-Age grave excavated under modern conditions; it was a multiple burial of a surprisingly elderly woman, a young child and mature man. The boat-burial at Kaldárhöfði, which held the remains of two individuals, demonstrates a combination of religious and secular messages that is at home within the Viking diaspora. Using the boat-burial of a woman from Vinjum (Sogn og Fjordane, Norway) for a basis of comparison, this paper will examine these two graves in order to understand how the emigrants used funerary ritual and material culture to display, construct and define new identities on the Viking frontier. It also considers how they adapted existing funerary rituals to new physical and social environments.

Key words: Viking, identity, boat-burial, migration, gender, migrant identity, mortuary practices

1. Introduction

The Viking Age marked a period of dramatic change in the North Sea and North Atlantic regions. In this period spanning the 8th through 11th centuries, Norse raiders, traders and settlers began expanding into new territories in the British Isles and as far west as the coast of North America, settling the islands of the Faeroes (ca. AD 825), Iceland (ca. AD 875), and Greenland (ca. AD 985). Although the settlements in North America and Greenland were lost before the end of the Middle Ages, the rest of the Viking expansion was to have a long-term impact on the North Atlantic region.

The consequences of migration affected the settlers and their families as well as the broader scope of Scandinavian and western European society. Research on modern population movements has demonstrated that migration-induced stresses change the lives of immigrants, shaping how they adapt to their new homes.¹ Migration affects societies and people in a number of ways: it changes family and household organisation; gender relations and roles shift; and general socio-cultural structures are altered through the integration of different practices and beliefs.² While the identification of

these migration-induced societal changes has been the focus of research in a number of fields, it is still a new territory for archaeologists.

Viking Age burial remains in Scotland and Iceland demonstrate increased flexibility in gender relations and roles and reveal that some migrant families were seeking new ways to display their identities and connections to their homelands. This paper examines some of the impacts on gender roles and migrant identities during the *landnám* (literally land-claiming) period, within the Viking diaspora. Coming out of a broader research project, it offers a glimpse of the bigger picture that is emerging.³ Three case studies form the centre of the current analysis: one from Western Norway, representing the point of origin for the migrants, and one each from the emigrant communities in Scotland and Iceland. The case-studies selected are all boat-burials. Although this was a relatively infrequent mode of burial in the Viking-Age, it was a key practice in Western Norway, and continued at a lesser frequency in the emigrant communities of the North Atlantic. Boat-burial is selected for analysis in this instance partly because of the many layers of meaning that may be embedded in the ritual.

2. Theoretical background

It is the responsibility of an archaeologist not just to present data, but to interpret it. Behind any interpretation there inevitably exists a series of ideas that influence the interpretive approach. For the purposes of this paper, it is important that two aspects of this theoretical background are made explicit: migrant identities and mortuary archaeology.

Migrant communities develop distinct identities.⁴ These migrant identities play active roles in the funerary rituals of their respective communities. Funerals, in addition to expressing respect for the dead and addressing the needs of the survivors, can be “tools for the construction of individual and collective identity,” particularly in the context of emigration.⁵ E. Reimers proposes that mortuary rituals not only display migrant identities, but create them.⁶ New identities emerge through the interplay of funerary ritual and mnemonic symbolism, linking the migrant to both the homeland and the new (possibly hybridised) community. Because they contain elements of both the home society and the new one, these new identities and the associated rituals become hybridised.⁷ Moreover, migrant women frequently have access to roles and opportunities in settler communities that were unavailable to them in their homelands.⁸ It seems likely that these new opportunities would also lead to new types of identity in a migrant context.

Some archaeologists have come to see funerary remains and practices as texts, even poetry.⁹ The grave holds multiple meanings, nuanced by the experiences and knowledge of the observers, and subject to dialectal variation. One development from this approach is that burial ritual is now, more than ever, seen to be a tool for the creation of memory within a society.

The symbolism embedded in grave-goods (and other aspects of a funeral) is not limited to the identity of the deceased during life, but rather can serve as a tool for the creation of idealised identities of individuals, families and communities.¹⁰

3. Scandinavian boat-burial

Boats and ships have played a role in Scandinavian death rituals from the Mesolithic through to the beginning of the 12th century.¹¹ The numbers of boat- and ship-burials from Viking-Age Norway has been suggested to exceed 500 based on the presence of rivets in graves, although T. Sjøvold has argued for a more conservative estimate.¹² Incorporating the work done by M. Müller-Wille with recent finds, O. Owen and M. Dalland have estimated that over 250 clinker-built boats dating to AD 800-1100 have been found in Northern Europe.¹³ Boat-graves will contain the remains of one or more people, in or under a boat. Typically, individuals in boat-graves are accompanied by a large number and variety of grave-goods.

The meaning behind the boat and ship funerary rituals has been much discussed. Three principal interpretations have been identified, and many scholars have suggested that multiple meanings/purposes may have existed simultaneously.¹⁴ The first possibility is that the boat served a functional purpose: the vessel acted as a convenient container to hold/transport the deceased, or as a source of fuel for the pyre.¹⁵ However, although boats may have been practical in some instances, boats were probably not the most convenient or efficient sources of wood for a pyre. Furthermore, if a coffin was needed, there were probably other options available; the decision to use a boat must have been a deliberate one.

Secondly, scholars have also argued that ships and boats may have been secular symbols of power, authority and/or status. As part of a grave assemblage, boats may be seen to reflect social status, roles and even property ownership.¹⁶ Although connected to certain male-dominated activities (trading, raiding, warfare, *etc*), the symbol of the boat could be extended to some women who achieved status by other means. The presence of a boat in a woman's grave does not tell us that she was a trader or that she liked fishing, but rather that she held a position of some importance in her society. The richer and more elaborate the burial, the bigger the boat, the higher the status may have been – they become examples of conspicuous consumption. Thus, rich ship-burials such as Oseberg and Valsgärde are typically connected with royalty. E. Wamers argues that the ship-burials at Hedeby and Ladby must be seen in the context of state formation and not as being part of a religious practice,¹⁷ but in doing so, he is viewing the ship-graves in isolation from what appears to be a much more widely-ranging funerary rite and neglecting the role that religion may have played in politics at the time.

Finally, boat- and ship-burials may have had embedded religious symbolism. The nature of this symbolism has also been widely debated. In its most basic form, the boat is seen to be a means of transport to the afterlife.¹⁸ Some scholars have chosen to see the boat as a semiotic link to one of the Norse gods, connecting the deceased to *Freyr*, *Óðinn* or *Njörðr*, depending upon the chosen interpretation. Furthermore, rather than being simply a passive symbol of faith, the use of a boat in funerary ritual can be understood to be an act of sacrifice or votive offering.¹⁹

The following sections will consider three examples of boat-graves from Norway, Scotland and Iceland (figure 1). Each grave will be described before the overall discussion of how they fit in to the general practice of boat-burial in the Viking world.

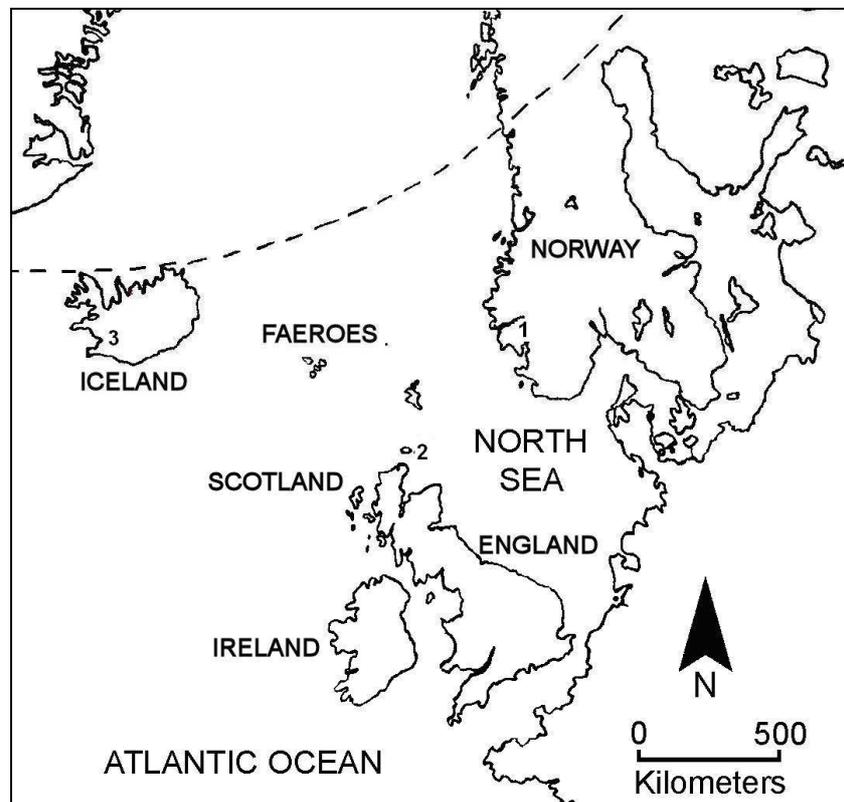


Figure 1: Locations of the case studies. 1: Vinjum, Norway; 2: Scar, Scotland; 3: Kaldárhöfði, Iceland. (Map courtesy of E. Pierce.)

4. Vinjum, Aurland, Sogn og Fjordane (Norway)

The Vinjum boat-grave was excavated prior to 1925. Although mostly undisturbed, the human remains were poorly preserved.²⁰ The grave, which was covered by a round cairn, lay on a steep hillside, overlooking the fjord. The small boat was oriented north-south, roughly parallel to the water (figure 2). The body was laid out on its back, possibly on bedding consisting of woollen textiles and birch bark. Based on an analysis of tooth wear, Dommasnes claims that the individual was an older adult. While the sex of the individual must remain uncertain, the oval brooches, which formed a fundamental clothing element for many Viking women, suggest that she may have been female.

The body was accompanied by a range of grave-goods, including 38 beads, possibly worn as a double strand between an ornate pair of bronze oval brooches. A third brooch, found at the neck line, was a re-used fragment of Irish religious metalwork. The rest of the jewellery included an Irish silver pendant, two bronze bracelets and a bronze piece for suspending the beads from the brooches. A final element of Insular material consisted of a high quality bronze holy water sprinkler.²¹ The amount of imports in the woman's grave is indicative of some form of contact between her region and that of Ireland. However, the presence of an ecclesiastical object might suggest that this contact was not peaceful, as objects used in Christian church rituals are unlikely to have been acquired by non-Christians or even Christian laymen through trade or gift-exchange.

The tools in the assemblage were rather mundane, but what is striking is the quantity and variety of them in a single grave. The textile tools ranged from loom weights to spindle whorls; but the grave also included an iron sickle and an adze. Her keys suggest possession of items kept locked away, and may be seen as indicative of social power within the home.²² There was a cooking pan and two iron rods identified as roasting spits.²³ Spits are rare finds in graves and N. Price has raised the possibility that they may not have been cooking spits at all, but rather tools used by *vǫlur* (sorceresses).²⁴ This raises the possibility that the woman buried in this grave was a religious leader, as well as an important land-/house-holder in the area. Clearly, the Vinjum woman held a position of some status within her community as is suggested by her burial in a prominent location, within a boat and richly accompanied. Her death must have had an impact on her community and her funeral would have served to address this.

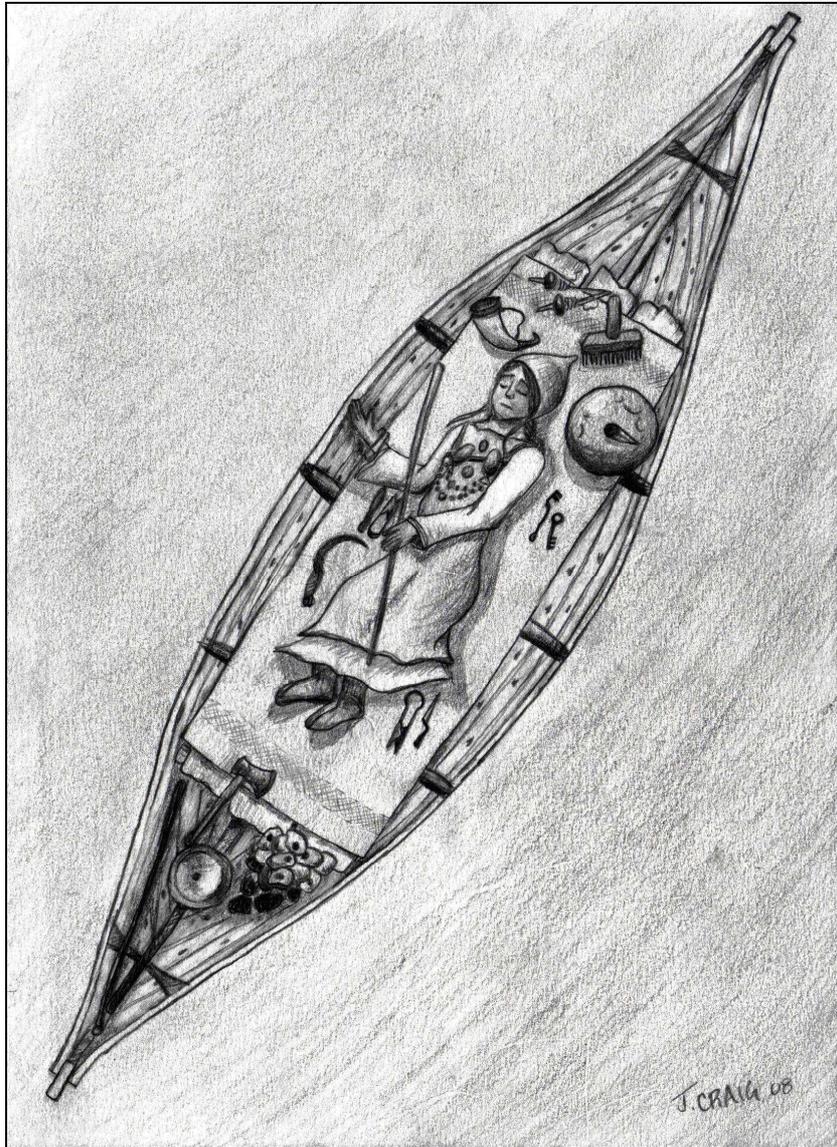


Figure 2: Hypothetical reconstruction of the Vinjum grave, Aurland, Sogn og Fjordane, Norway (J. Craig)

5. Scar, Sanday (Scotland)

Located on the north end of Burness in Sanday, the Scar boat-burial is one of few modernly excavated boat-graves in Scotland. Discovered in

1991, it is one of the most remarkable Viking graves found in the United Kingdom.²⁵ A small clinker-built rowing boat (ca 7.15 m long), was set into the sand, with large flagstones holding the boat in place. A chamber had been created in the western two thirds of the boat by the placement of an upright stone slab across the width. The remainder of the boat was filled with stones. An elderly woman, approximately 70 years old, lay on her back in the centre of the chamber. On her left was a child, about ten years old. At her head, in the prow of the boat, an adult male was placed on his side with his legs tightly flexed (figure 3).

The woman had the majority of the grave-goods, although much of the man's equipment may have been lost to coastal erosion. The woman's sole piece of jewellery was an ornate equal-armed brooch of the Troms type that was old prior to its deposition within the grave. A virtually complete whalebone plaque had been placed near the woman's feet, and on her right-hand side lay a weaving sword, an iron sickle and a locked maple-wood box containing other textile equipment. The whalebone plaque is an intriguing object; its function is uncertain, although it may have served as a sort of ironing board for special textiles, and is sometimes associated with the cult of the goddess *Freyja*.²⁶ The man was accompanied by a sword and a quiver with arrows. He had 22 gaming pieces, an antler comb, and possibly a shield and lead weights. Because this section of the grave was heavily affected by erosion, more artefacts may have been present in the grave, but are now lost. The man's sword was a Petersen type H sword, a common Viking Age type frequently bearing ornamental inlay in the hilt.²⁷ Weapons burials, particularly those including swords, are generally believed to be associated with high-status males, perhaps indicative of a warrior elite.²⁸ It is impossible to know if the child had any grave-goods. Although children are sometimes buried with objects (for example, at Cnip, on Lewis, and Straumur, in eastern Iceland), it is not uncommon for them to be unaccompanied in the grave.²⁹

The Scar boat-grave has strong connections with north-western Norway. Small boat-burial was a common feature of the region, although it existed elsewhere as well. Whalebone plaques are primarily found in western and northern Norway. Virtually identical examples of the rare Troms-type brooch have been found in the far north of Norway. The rest of the grave-goods could have come from anywhere in the Scandinavian world, but in occurring together, they form a package with a distinctly north-western character. The dating is also curious - although the grave-goods suggest earlier dates (the grave was initially dated to c. AD 850), radiocarbon dates have produced later results. The published date for the site is c. AD 875-950, that is to say, it is not a grave of early, first-wave settlers in Scotland. The excavators have suggested that it was a "late gesture to the old gods and old customs of the homelands."³⁰

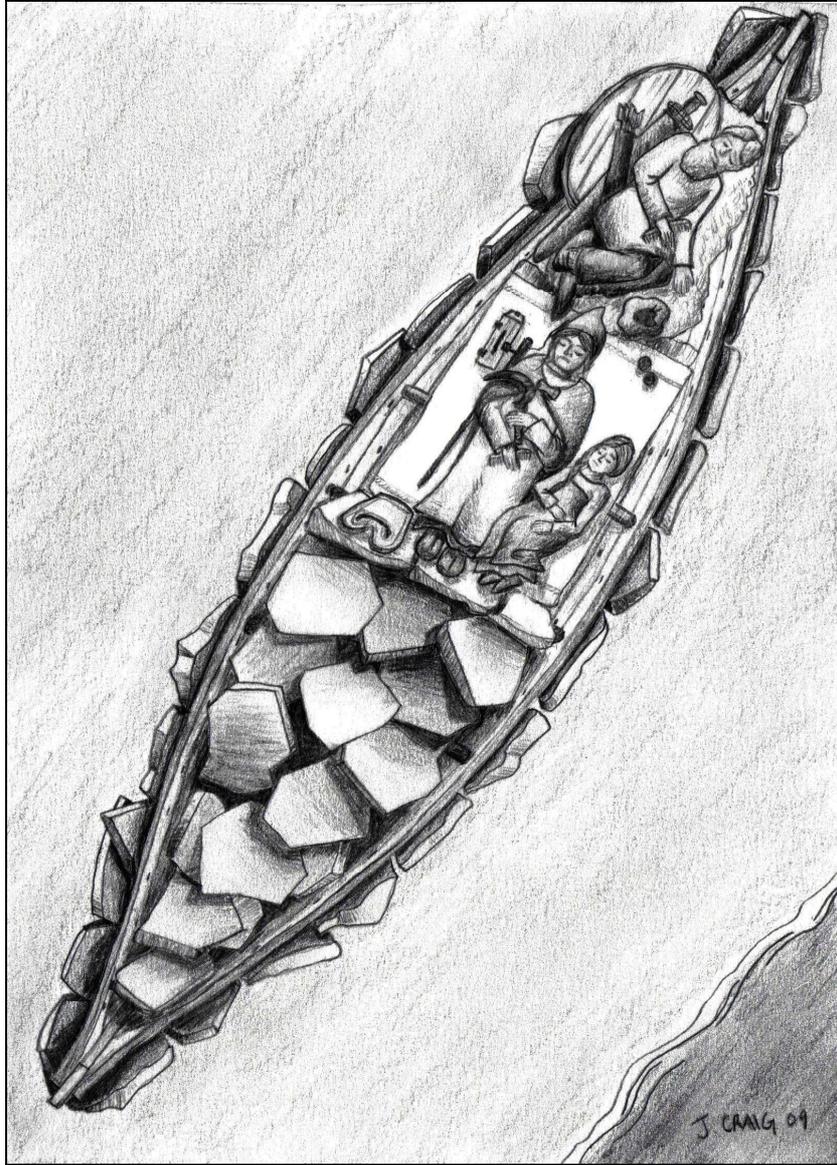


Figure 3: Hypothetical reconstruction of the Scar grave, Sanday, Orkney, Scotland (J. Craig)

6. Kaldárhöfði, Árnessýsla, Iceland

In 1946, erosion in the region of Lake Úlfjótuvatn exposed a grave on a small island. The grave, excavated by Kristján Eldjárn, takes its name from the nearby farm of Kaldárhöfði. The grave was in the form of a low stone and earth mound covering a small boat. The boat was oriented W-E, with the prow of the boat pointing towards the water. Within the boat were the poorly preserved remains of an adult male, with his head to the west and probably a young child; the only preserved remains of the child, however, were two teeth (figure 4).³¹

To the adult's right lay a sword, a large spearhead (blade alongside the feet), six arrowheads and a broken axe. The Kaldárhöfði sword was a Petersen type O sword, a Hiberno-Norse form that is rare in Scandinavia and even more so Iceland, where this is the only example.³² His weapons could not have come from Iceland, but had to have been brought to the country, either by the deceased, or by someone with whom he had contact. This type of sword belongs to the tenth century, and unfortunately, the only dating for the grave as a whole is based on the typology of the grave goods. It would have been useful to know if the sword could have been an heirloom. As with the Scar sword, the presence of the weapon suggests that the man was a high-status individual whose funeral linked him to Scandinavia and a Nordic identity. We cannot know for certain if he was a warrior, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the weapons may have been his.

A bronze Borre-style buckle, Frankish strap end with acanthus motifs and a small bundle of silver wire were found near the man's waist. Two shield bosses were located at opposite ends of the boat as though they had once leaned up against the prow and stern. A much smaller spearhead and axe were discovered under the right-hand side of the boat (beyond the individual's left side) and Eldjárn has interpreted them as belonging to the child.³³ Although this is one explanation for their unusual placement, it is not certain that it is the only interpretation. An examination of the published plan raises the possibility that several of the artefacts were found outside the boat and it is feasible that this occurred because the available space in the small boat was limited.³⁴ Among some of the more everyday artefacts included in the grave were some items of fishing equipment, including a fish hook, a possible boat hook and a line sinker.

The Kaldárhöfði grave is unusual not because of what is present in the grave but rather what is not; there is neither evidence of a horse nor horse equipment. While in Norway or Scotland this would not seem noteworthy, in the context of Iceland, with its dramatic number of horse burials in this period, it is worth considering. In both Norway and Scotland, only 20% of boat-burials include horse equipment or horses. Of the entire collection of graves from these regions, horse or horse equipment are included in 18%

(Norway) and 10% (Scotland) of the graves. This is in contrast to the situation in Iceland where approximately 40% of graves had some horse-type component.³⁵

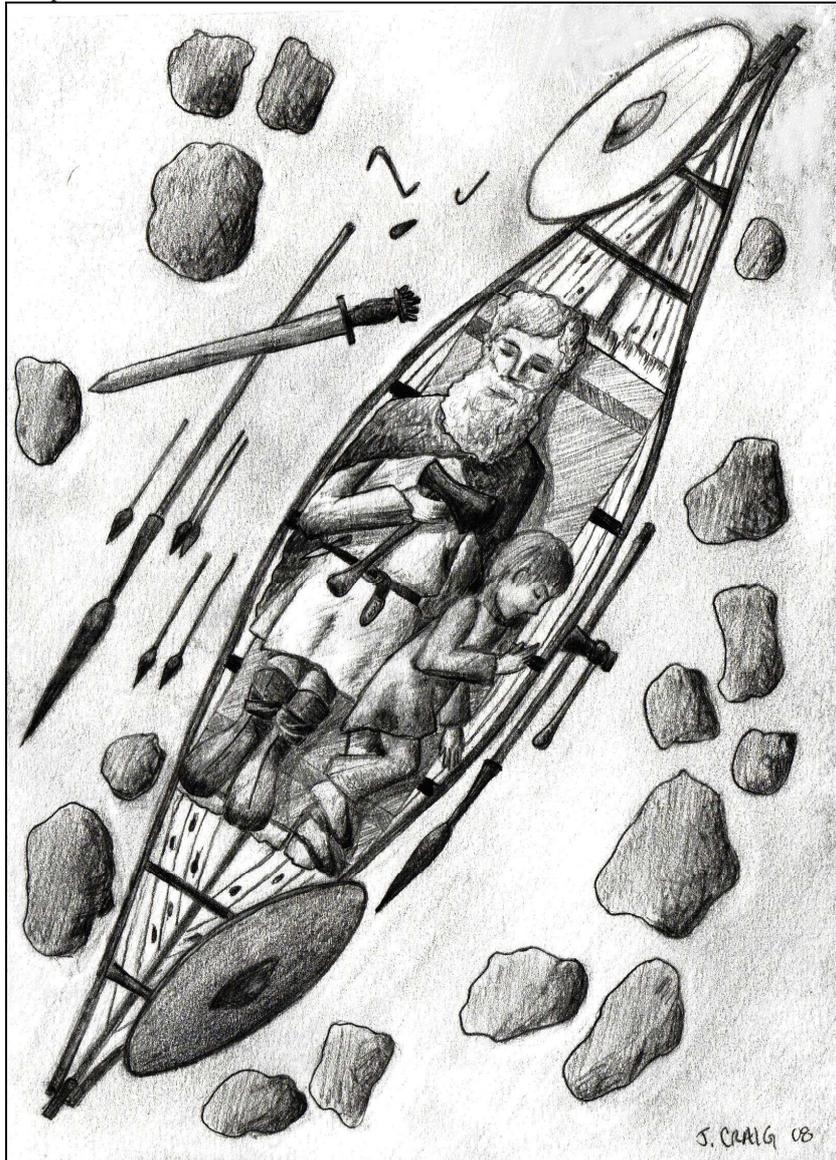


Figure 4: Hypothetical reconstruction of the Kaldárhöfði grave, Árnassýsla, Iceland (J. Craig)

7. Discussion

The previous sections have described three important boat-graves. The first, a Norwegian woman's grave from Vinjum in Sogn og Fjordane, was found to contain a large number of artefacts, many of which might be seen as high-status. The Scottish grave from Scar, Orkney, held the remains of three individuals and a variety of Scandinavian artefacts. The final example was a double burial found in south-western Iceland, at Kaldárhöfði, containing weapons and subsistence tools, but little else. The question that inevitably arises is thus: what do these graves tell us about migrant identities and changes to society? To answer this question, the remainder of the paper focuses on the deployment of the boat-burial ritual and its interpretation within the context of the Viking diaspora.

It has been argued that the boat was a commonly accepted symbol that may have changed meaning over time.³⁶ To this statement, we can add that the symbolic meaning behind boats and boat-burial likely changed over distance as well. As noted above, although boats and ships may be traditionally identified with men's activities, women were not infrequently accorded burial in boats or ships. To fully understand the significance of these female boat-burials, it is necessary to briefly consider the famous female ship-grave from Oseberg, Norway.³⁷ An extraordinarily rich grave, it has been the subject of interpretation and reinterpretation for over a century.³⁸ The ship was filled with an enormous array of grave-goods, including furniture, sleds, a wagon, tents, textile and cooking equipment. Moreover, a number of horses, dogs and oxen were sacrificed and buried in and around the boat. A. Ingstad argues that the horses were votive offerings because there was a dearth of harness and fittings for them; without this equipment, the animals could not have served a practical purpose for the deceased.³⁹ She also claims that many of the grave-goods (such as the tapestry, the wagon and the rattles) had connections to the cult of *Freyja*. While there have been some strong criticisms of Ingstad's association of the burial with *Freyja*,⁴⁰ it is apparent that the burial assemblage indicates the presence of a complex set of funerary rituals that exceed simple functionality.

Two of the case studies presented here also had women at the heart of them. The individual interred at Vinjum was probably an older woman of some status in her community. Her cairn sat high on a steep hill, overlooking the fjord and may have once been a monument within the landscape. Among her grave-goods were an Insular ecclesiastical object and an iron rod, which might have been a ritual staff.⁴¹ These items hint at wealth, power, and a social position that was outside of the ordinary. Likewise, at Scar, an older woman lay in a boat by the sea, also bearing rich grave-goods. In this case, she was not alone, but accompanied in death by two others. Looking out over the North Atlantic, it is difficult to say if this grave was particularly visible within the landscape in the Viking Age, although the prow and stern of the

ship may have originally remained above ground for a short time. The grave's impact on the landscape was ephemeral, and it is possible that the performance of the funerary ritual created a social memory that did not require the long-term visual connection of the funerary monument itself. This pattern reflects that seen elsewhere: while most of the Norwegian boat-graves had large cairns or mounds, the Scottish and Icelandic ones were largely flat or dug into existing features, such as sand dunes.⁴² It is possible that the investment of time and energy required for the building of large mounds was too much for the settler communities.

Only one boat-grave from Iceland is known to have held the remains of a woman - Vatnsdalur, in Patr ksfj rd - once again over-looking the water. Although seven bodies were found in the grave, it has been suggested that one of the women was the primary burial.⁴³ Even though it is not clear which of the two female skeletons may have belonged to the primary interment, it is interesting to note that neither is elderly (18-25 and 36-45), in contrast to the previous cases. And unlike at Scar, it seems that the secondary inhumations were not simultaneous, but rather the result of later activity at the site. While it is tempting to draw on this grave as a comparison for the Vinjum and Scar burials, the confusion with regards to the nature of the grave and its disturbance complicates the issues too much.

Multiple burials where individuals were buried simultaneously occurred infrequently in the Viking Age. The Kald rh f i grave apparently included the remains of an adult and a child who had been buried at the same time. The presence of three individuals buried simultaneously, as at Scar, is even rarer. While the woman and child seem to have been the main focus of the Scar burial, the man presents an interesting dilemma. Because of his cramped position at the prow of the boat, the awkward way in which his legs have been folded, and the single-sidedness of the stone burial chamber, he seems almost like a last minute addition to the burial. Owen and Dalland examine the possible reasons for this in some detail.⁴⁴ They raise and dismiss explanations involving human sacrifice and secondary burial and instead propose that the three people all died at the same time. They do not, however, explain why the man's burial seems almost like an afterthought. Perhaps the woman was of higher status than the man, and the child was somehow directly associated with her, thereby leaving the man to a lesser position within the grave. Conceivably, the man could have died shortly after the burial for the woman and child had begun - we do not know how long a funeral took in this period - and so was added to the grave because it provided a convenient and sufficiently high-status means to satisfy the needs of both the dead and the living community. Although the man had high-quality grave-goods and was apparently deemed worthy of a status-bound burial, he was not given one of his own, in spite of the difficulties associated with including him in the boat. If resources were limited in the settler

community, it would make sense to use what was currently and conveniently available. By finding a way to fit the man into the grave, there would be no need to sacrifice another boat or to invest in the building of another grave.

What do these boat-burials mean? The possible explanations for boat-based funerary rituals described above were that the boat was a convenient container for burial, a secular symbol of power/status, or a religious symbol for transportation or devotion/sacrifice. The boats in the case studies could have served the purely functional role of a coffin. If function were the main reason for using the boats, it would be expected that they were no longer useful in their original capacity. Unfortunately, the poor levels of preservation render it impossible to determine if the boats had still been sound at the time of their placement disposal.

As secular symbols, the boats offer little to us. All three graves are relatively rich in terms of their other grave-goods. They contain valuable items, such as swords and brooches and all three graves have a large quantity of artefacts. But other graves in each of the regions are comparable, in spite of lacking boats. For example, Baldursheimar, in Iceland is a particularly noteworthy grave, containing a number of weapons, a horse and riding gear and game pieces similar to those found at Scar, among other items.⁴⁵ Balnakeil, Durness is a rich grave from Scotland, again containing a selection of weapons, game pieces and personal items.⁴⁶ If the meaning behind the boat-burials in the Viking diaspora was purely secular and tied to power, then we might expect to see a greater frequency for the ritual than we actually do, instead boat-burial becomes increasingly rare.⁴⁷ Furthermore, we might expect that the boat-burials would be somewhat richer in terms of their contents, but the grave-goods decline in Scotland and further still in Iceland (Table 1). Still, if the boat itself is a form of conspicuous consumption, it is possible that in areas such as Iceland, where wood suitable for ship-building was lacking, that the boat itself was sufficient to indicate status and other grave-goods were less necessary.

Table 1: Average number of artefact types in boat-graves, based on data collected for 33 graves from Western Norway, Scotland and Iceland.

Study area	# of types
Norway	8.27
Scotland	7.00
Iceland	6.43

There is yet one final explanation that might be considered for Scar, Kaldárhöfði and even Vatnsdalur: if boat-burial was perceived to be a significant practice in the homeland, then it is conceivable that the ritual was a means to reconnect with and emphasise the migrants' identities as well as a

tool by which people could be connected to particular lineages or kin groups. As previously discussed, migrant funerals are used to both display and create identities. Frequently, they exaggerate aspects of funerary rituals from the homeland, sometimes emerging as hybrids of several different traditions. Owen and Dalland believe that the people from Scar emigrated from north-western Norway, and may have lived for in Orkney for a while.⁴⁸ As such, it would not be unexpected for them to practice a recognisably western Norwegian burial rite. Stable isotope analysis of the remains from Kaldárhöfði and Vatnsdalur failed to identify any migrants, although results were not possible for all of the individuals.⁴⁹ However, research in modern contexts has noted that migrant funerary practices change very slowly, persisting through several generations; although they are frequently refreshed by the arrival of new immigrants. It may be the case that the boat-burials at Kaldárhöfði and Vatnsdalur represent a traditional funerary ritual, linking the deceased and their survivors to Norwegian roots through the use of hard-to-come-by resources (the boats and the metalwork), in spite of being second or third generation Icelanders.

According to Dommasnes, women achieved high status by managing their family farms while their husbands were away.⁵⁰ She sees the increase in high-status female burials as being connected to men's raiding and trading activities in the Viking Age. This explanation could apply to the Vinjum grave, but how can it relate to Scar and Vatnsdalur? Perhaps the migrant men took their families to new homes and then left them while they raided and traded elsewhere. It is feasible that the women emigrating from Norway already had high status and were therefore accorded a similar burial rite to what they might have expected at home. Alternatively, they may have attained personal status in their new homes through their spouses or their own efforts, as for example, Auðr the Deep-Minded (*Auðr inn djúpúðga*), a widow who came to be a powerful Icelandic landowner in her own right.⁵¹ At the beginning of this paper, it was suggested that women in historical settler societies had access to roles, and therefore status, that were inaccessible in their more conventional homelands. If this was the case in the Viking diaspora, then it may explain why women are able to appear central to these particular boat-graves. It is notable, however, that they remain in the minority overall.

8. Conclusion

The Vinjum woman was likely to have been a *vǫlva*, and would have held high-status within her community. Is it possible, on the basis of the evidence for the funerary ritual, to suggest that the woman from the Scar boat held a similar position to that suggested for the woman from Vinjum and other *vǫlur*? Probably not. Of her grave-goods, only the whalebone plaque appears to have any connection to the ritual sphere and as a link to *Freyja*

rather than to any aspect of *seiðr* (magic). It is perhaps more likely to see her as an influential figure in her community. J. Jesch, in her study of Viking women, wrote:

In the more settled societies of the Norway they came from and Iceland as it became, women probably had fewer opportunities to play any role other than those of wife, mother and housekeeper. But in the brief interval between leaving Norway and arriving in Iceland, some women clearly had to be more.⁵²

The Scar woman's knowledge of the homeland, her connections to old ways of believing, and her life experiences would have made her a valuable resource within a nascent settler society. The funerary ritual practiced at Scar may have been a means for the survivors (family or community) to reconnect to the ideal of the homeland, memorialising the dead and proclaiming their migrant identities.

The grave at Kaldárhöfði presents an image more rooted in masculine identities. Here are the symbols of a warrior and a provider. The grave-goods bring to mind the image of a man who could hold his own territory and look after those who were in his care, the kind of man who would have been of considerable value in the potentially unstable social climate of *landnám*-period Iceland. These symbolic messages were likely conveyed by the man's grave assemblage at Scar, but were complicated by the presence of the old woman.

All of the case studies presented have an aristocratic character. The men and women were richly accompanied by many of the artefacts we expect from a Viking-Age grave, with the notable exception of the missing oval brooches at Scar. The men have impressive weapon kits and other artefacts, while the women have jewellery, an array of tools and other valuable objects. Moreover, their boats represent a significant investment of resources and energy. In Scandinavia, at this time, elaborate funerary rituals were likely fundamental for maintaining high social positions.⁵³ It seems likely, that in a newly developing settler community, the establishment of authority and power would be crucial. The funerary rituals seen here, embedded in tradition though altered by the circumstances of migration, are fragmentary records of the attempts by some families to find their places in their new homes.

Notes

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- ¹⁸ JP Schjødt, 1995, p. 24; Kobyliński, 1995, p. 15.
- ¹⁹ For a variety of approaches to boats as symbols and sacrifices, see papers in Crumlin-Pedersen and Munch Thye (eds), *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia: Papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen (5th-7th May 1994)*; and Owen and Dalland, 1999, p. 49.
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- ²³ Dommasnes, 1976, p. 239.
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- ³¹ K Eldjárn, *Gengið Á Reka. Tölf Fornleifathaettir*, Norðri, Akureyri, 1948, pp. 28-31; K Eldjárn and A Friðriksson, *Kuml Og Haugfé: Úr Heiðnum Sið Á Íslandi* 2nd edn, Fornleifastofnun Íslands, Reykjavík, 2000, p. 88.
- ³² There are five Pet. O swords in the data-set, all from the Sogn og Fjordane and Lofoten Islands regions. McGuire, forthcoming. See also Petersen, 1919, p. 129.
- ³³ Eldjárn and Friðriksson, 2004, p. 91.
- ³⁴ The boat's approximate dimensions were 2.8m in length, and 0.8m across the widest point. This makes it significantly smaller than either of the other two boats examined here. It is possible that the size of the boat has been under-estimated; it may be feasible to add up to one metre to the overall length, but even so, the boat remains 2-3m smaller than the other case studies. McGuire, forthcoming, p. 150

- ³⁵ McGuire, forthcoming.
- ³⁶ e.g. Kobyliński, 1995, p. 12.
- ³⁷ Brøgger, Falk, and Shetelig (eds), 1917.
- ³⁸ See Ingstad, 1995; and Shenk, 2004, pp. 30-45 for recent descriptions and interpretations of this grave.
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- ⁴⁰ Shenk, 2004, pp. 32-43.
- ⁴¹ See Price, 2002, p. 187 for a discussion of ritual staves.
- ⁴² McGuire, forthcoming.
- ⁴³ Eldjárn and Friðriksson, 2004, p. 118.
- ⁴⁴ Owen and Dalland, 1999, pp. 153-157.
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- ⁴⁶ CE Batey and C Paterson, 'A Viking Burial at Balnakeil, Sutherland', in *Festschrift for James Graham-Campbell*, A. Reynolds and L. Webster (eds), Brepols, Turnhout, forthcoming.
- ⁴⁷ McGuire, forthcoming.
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- ⁴⁹ Stable isotope analysis is a relatively recent scientific process by which isotopes in human teeth are analysed to determine where an individual spent his/her childhood. The Icelandic material has been extensively studied and is under-going several phases of publication. The data used here has been supplied by H Gestsdóttir (pers. comm.). Further details on Icelandic isotopic studies have been published by TD Price and H Gestsdóttir, 'The First Settlers of Iceland: An Isotopic Approach to Colonisation', *Antiquity*, vol. 80, no. 307, 2006, pp. 130–144.
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- ⁵² J Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1991, p. 83.
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