

European Science Foundation
Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

ESF SCH EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

Migration And Transcultural Identities In The Viking Age

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Nottingham, United Kingdom, 29 - 31 March 2006

Convened by:
Judith Jesch and Christina Lee

Contents

- P. 3 Executive summary
- P. 5 Scientific content
- P. 9 Assessment of results
- P. 16 Final programme
- P. 19 Statistical information
- P. 20 Final list of participants

Executive Summary

Despite some practical hitches (one participant was hindered from coming by personal reasons, another by the weather in Newfoundland), the organisation of the workshop went smoothly and participants were agreed that it had been a success. It was also arranged in an economical fashion, coming in significantly under budget. The participants endured with great cheerfulness the privations of both low-cost airlines and rather basic accommodation, partially relieved by the general excellence of the food and drink offered (a surprise to some of the non-British participants), and the opportunity to see something of the locality (for quite a number of participants it was their first visit to England, let alone Nottingham). We also aimed to look after all the participants by meeting them at and returning them to their airports or other points of entry. The workshop itself provided a balance of plenary lectures, discussions and an excursion, all of which contributed to a clearer understanding of the topic of Viking identities.

Although the workshop did not exactly realise its ambitious aim of 'defining Viking identity', it managed to cover the question of identity in a very thorough way. The variety of participants enabled the discussion of many different aspects of identity, and brought out the variety and diversity of Viking identities on both the chronological and regional levels. In fact, it very soon became apparent that there is no such thing as a monolithic 'Viking' identity, but that varieties of identity that can be labelled 'Viking' caused some major social and cultural shifts across a wide swathe of eastern and northern Europe in the early Middle Ages. The concept of 'transculturalism' was less thoroughly covered, partly because many participants were still struggling with theories and concepts of identity in their own research area. But it was fascinating to observe that many of the discussions of hybrid, created, and other evolving identities ultimately came back to questions of transnationalism or transculturalism. The geographical range of the Viking Age movements, and the diasporic settlements to a huge range of host societies at different stages of development, as well as to some uninhabited areas, provide an ideal laboratory for continuing study of the processes and effects of human migrations.

Scientific Content

The main focus of the workshop was to explore, discuss, and attempt to define 'Viking' identities, both in the Scandinavian homelands, and in many of the different areas of Europe in which people of Scandinavian origin settled during the Viking Age. A further aim was to discuss the contribution these settlers had made to identities of the areas in which they settled. A framework for the discussion was provided with concepts such as 'migration', 'diaspora', 'transnationalism' and 'transculturalism', borrowed from the academic study of more recent immigrations/emigrations. The organisers were conscious of the fact that concepts of migration and diasporic societies may be defined differently by various scholarly communities, for example, archaeologists may look at the presence of material culture to identify identities, whereas the absence of a large influx of Norse words in Irish does not necessarily mean that no settlement took place. Definitions of 'otherness' may come from the host nation, but also from those who have emigrated into another territory. The explicit aim of the workshop, as outlined by Christina Lee in her introductory remarks, was to highlight these differences and to ask members of various scholarly communities to consider methodologies and approaches towards studying identity in other fields.

Participants were chosen to reflect a spread of disciplines, including archaeology, history, language history, onomastics, literature, philology and history of religion. Both junior scholars (including some who have not yet completed their PhD) and more senior scholars were represented. The participants were also chosen to represent a range of research on not only the Scandinavian homelands, but also areas of significant Viking settlement, such as the Baltic countries, Russia, France, England, Scotland, Ireland and Iceland. Unfortunately, a participant from Newfoundland (the westernmost Viking colony) was prevented from attending by bad weather. Not all participants were primarily 'Viking' scholars, as we deliberately included participants from neighbouring or related disciplines, such as English place-names, or later Icelandic literature, or Estonian archaeology, to provide their own perspectives on the topic.

Two plenary lectures provided broad overviews of the Scandinavian contribution to identity in two different regions: James Barrett introduced 'Scandinavian identities in Scotland' and Ingmar Jansson summarised 'Scandinavian identities in the east'.

The other part of the workshop was devoted to discussions which were organised around the theme of 'identity', as it related to five broad topics: language, material culture, religion, society, and myths and memory. In each section, presenters summarised the *Stand Der Forschung* in their particular discipline and/or their particular area or region of interest, especially in relation to the question of 'Viking identity'. To stimulate discussion, respondents to these presentations were chosen from different disciplines and/or with research interests in different geographical areas or time periods. Some participants found this aspect challenging, and would have preferred their contributions to be responded to by an expert in the same field, but the organisers were adamant that truly interdisciplinary dialogue would only emerge if participants engaged with disciplines other than their own. In general, the expectations of the organisers were fully met. The respondents brought new perspectives and there was lively discussion after each set of presentations.

The concluding session was used to summarise the discussions, to reflect on the workshop, and to discuss possible ways forward. It was felt that the lack of a coherent methodology and common language needs to be addressed further. Especially the contact with the various host nations, and the question of whether migrants are different from their home communities must be further explored. Future research needs to focus on the relations between the Norse communities and their hosts as well as with their Scandinavian homelands. The role of women in this transfer is still underexplored. Did migration affect life in Scandinavia? Contacts with other areas through trade and mercenaries resulted in an influx of goods, but how about language and culture? Migrant communities often maintain an identity through highlighting visible aspects of their culture (adherence to customs and dressing conservatively). A good analogy is modern Turkey: after Atatürk's innovations women had more or less given up wearing a head-scarf in urban areas, whereas women in diasporic settlements in Western Europe consciously chose to wear the hijab as a marker of cultural difference. It has been observed that of late this attitude has affected sentiments at home, so that young urban women in Turkey have reverted to the hijab.

The intensity of the discussions was relieved with a half-day excursion on Friday 31 March. Introductory comments by Judith Jesch on the first evening had prepared participants by outlining the evidence, or in some cases the lack of it,

for Viking identities in Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands. The excursion itself passed through a number of villages with Scandinavian or hybrid names, and participants were able to examine Viking-period or Viking-influenced sculpture in both Rolleston and Southwell. We also pointed out the locations of possible Viking warrior burials in Nottingham and Farndon. The excursion followed the River Trent, an important Viking route into the Midlands, and went as far as Gainsborough (in Lincolnshire), where the Danish king Svein Forkbeard died in 1014. In Gainsborough there are also several examples of the interesting phenomenon of modern appropriations of Viking identity at a local level, both from the Victorian period, and very recently. The excursion provided a useful case-study for contrasting different types of 'Viking' identities – that which is 'hidden' in historical sources, that which is still visible, though requiring training to see it (such as place-names), and that which is a modern recreation of an apparently 'lost' Viking identity.

Assessment of the Results

The workshop was very much an exploratory one – to find out to what extent questions of identity, hybridity, migration and transculturalism were being addressed in Viking Age studies, and discover how these concepts were understood and defined by the scholars using them. It also had the ambition of encouraging more discussion of these topics in the subject. Our rather ambitious aim of 'defining Viking identity' was not realised, but the workshop made very clear that there is no such monolithic entity. There are multiple Viking identities, many of them hybrid (such as those of settlers in England), or created (such as Iceland's recreation of its Viking past), or oppositional (e.g. runes as a response to Roman culture). It also became clear that 'Viking' identity is very much a result of the Scandinavian diaspora, and the connections between the colonies and the homelands, and indeed between the colonies. In Viking Age Scandinavia, identities tend to be ethnic, personal, religious, linguistic or social, but even these are influenced by diasporic identities, as can be seen in the process of the introduction of the Christian religion, or linguistic developments such as loan words.

An important result of the workshop was to encourage scholars to make their assumptions about Scandinavian identities explicit, rather than implicit, especially in studying the Viking diaspora. The need for this was outlined by James Barrett in his excellent plenary lecture which set out the issues very clearly at the start of the workshop. He also urged a closer attention to chronology and recognition of the diversity of diasporic experience within Scotland. Both of these also have wide applicability in the study of the whole Viking world.

An exciting development was the identification of a variety of 'identities' which could be traced to the Viking Age but which in many cases outlived it. Thus, the **linguistic** commonality of the *dönsk tunga* was a major factor in creating an identity which encompassed most of Scandinavia and its colonies (Eldar Heide). This was mirrored in the use of runes to express a literate identity influenced by, but distinct from, Roman literacy (Terje Spurkland). Toponymic evidence suggests a maritime identity in Normandy (Elisabeth Ridel), but also much more widely in Europe, which owes its origins to the Viking seafarers, and Woolf drew an important distinction between Old Norse as a language of seafarers and Old Norse as a language of settlers.

Several participants addressed the relationships between **material culture** and identity. Objects may change their meaning in different contexts. They are in many cases used to communicate identity in a situation of cultural contact (Anne Pedersen), but such objects can also complicate identities when they cross cultural or gender boundaries, as pointed out by Staecker. Close study of both artefacts and house-types is needed to distinguish between hybrid or acculturated forms, slowly-evolving local forms determined by the region in which they occur, and 'intrusive' or 'alien' cultural elements (Stephen Harrison). Burials are an important source of evidence for Viking identities outside Scandinavia, and Harrison stressed that they represent more than just 'religious' identity, they also have group, individual and symbolic aspects. It is also important to recognise regional variation rather than assuming a broad and consistent 'Scandinavian' identity throughout Britain and Ireland. While this latter identity has long been known and much studied, the extent of Scandinavian contribution to the cultures of the south shores of the Baltic is only just being recognised. Władysław Duczko stressed the richness of the evidence and claimed that 'the whole of eastern Europe' was a part of the Scandinavian world.

While **religion** is only one element of Scandinavian identity, it is a significant one in the Viking Age, and the conversion to Christianity can be seen as an aspect of both assimilation and acculturation to local identities (Lesley Abrams). Swift pointed out that there was a close connection between migration processes (i.e. number and nature of migrants) and the process of conversion. The study of the pagan religion of Scandinavia has not yet grappled with issues of identity, but there are many interesting aspects of religious mentality, and ideas of theological, ritual and social space, which could help to distinguish religion from other aspects of cultural identity (Jens Peter Schjødt). Sigurðsson wondered whether pagan identities only emerged in the contact with other religions. But identifying pagan iconography and distinguishing it from Christian iconography is still a problem, and a study of religious representations in art reveals many complex negotiations of identity (Jörn Staecker). This session provoked some of the liveliest discussions, and many further ideas were thrown into the ring: the importance of distinguishing the religion of the 'people' from that of their leaders; the significance, or identification, of syncretism; the idea that language and cosmology are closely related; the religious significance of names; and paganism as a set of beliefs, not an institutionalised 'religion'.

The session on **society**, potentially so fruitful for the topic, was somewhat reduced by the absence of one of the presenters, but the two remaining presenters provided useful case-studies from different ends of the Viking world. In Ireland, the Vikings are still ignored or dismissed in the study of the Middle Ages, but Catherine Swift outlined a number of areas that would reward further study with respect to the Viking contribution, especially the geography and administration of Ireland, and its social classes and their distribution in relation to settlements. The hybrid culture of 11th- and 12-century Ireland also raised questions of how long particular identities survive, as pointed out by Schjødt. Heiki Valk presented a case study of the eastern Baltic, especially Estonia, as an example of an area in the geographical vicinity, or hinterland, of the Viking world, and the influence of Scandinavian activities on local societies. He provided exciting evidence of 'trans-societal' identities, in which the local populations imitated and adapted status symbols and material culture of the Vikings, and 'transcultural' identities, such as those of smiths around the Baltic, were created.

The second plenary lecture, by Ingmar Jansson, focused on the fascinating but complicated question of Viking identities in the east, and particularly Russia.

While the contemporary evidence is wide-ranging in type, its interpretation is complicated by the changing fortunes of contemporary Russian identities, and their shifting attitudes to the past. The fact that the very name of 'Russia' came about because of Viking activities in the region illustrates the dilemma in a nutshell.

Much of our understanding of Viking identities is mediated through **myths and memory**, or the medieval Icelandic understanding of the pagan past. In this context, the concept of 'transculturalism' was very useful in a chronological sense – the conversion to Christianity completed the transformation of Icelandic identity, and the texts through which we read the pagan past were written in a 'transcultural' milieu (Annette Lassen). This active use of the past had potential for comparison with the Viking Age use of the past, as pointed out by Pedersen. The act of travelling was important in constituting Viking identity, and Kristel Zilmer saw the period as the Golden Age for the formation of identities, which could be expressed on many levels. Her presentation provided a very useful and full definition of aspects of identity which would have been even more useful earlier in the workshop! The final presentation provided a very neat case-study of the creation of Icelandic identity by the 12th-century author Ari Þorgilsson, demonstrating 12 aspects of identity that he used to define Iceland and the Icelanders (Gísli Sigurðsson). It was noted by several participants that Ari had no room for a 'transcultural' identity for Iceland, but that this could be discerned in other sources. Urbanczyk concluded that Iceland was a good example of the creation of a single identity from multiple traditions.

The final plenary discussion was somewhat curtailed as a result of cumulative time pressures and a certain exhaustion in the participants. First the session chairs summarised the results of their sessions. The summarisers highlighted the following potential developments suggested by the discussions:

- the importance of understanding the relationship between language(s) and common identity
- the possibility of refocusing the study of material culture and identity on houses, rather than smaller objects which move
- the usefulness of islands (e.g. Greenland, Iceland) as laboratories for studying how (ethnic) identity functions
- the opportunity to make identity a part of the discourse of the history of religion

- the need to move from defining Viking identity to explore the influence/impact of Vikings on other societies
- the further exploration of how oppositional relations lead to transcultural/transnational links

The chair identified the following issues from the two plenary lectures that would deserve further discussion:

- the consideration of time and process in understanding how identities change
- the importance of power relations between hosts and incomers
- the central role of women in creating and maintaining identities

Participants were then invited to reflect on the value or otherwise of the workshop, and to suggest future collaborations or avenues of research. In general, the participants felt the workshop had been very valuable and several expressed a new optimism in the value of 'identity' studies for their scholarly community. Many participants admitted they had been provoked by new perspectives, and forced to think in new ways. Some participants felt that the time for discussion had been too short. A few participants felt the interdisciplinarity of the event contained a danger of superficiality, and expressed a desire for a stage of more specialist meetings, before reconvening as the broader group. Other participants, on the other hand, felt the need for broader discussions, opening them up more in areas not sufficiently covered, such as non-contemporary texts. Yet other participants wanted the discussions to develop from 'multidisciplinarity' to 'transdisciplinarity', and to concentrate on themes rather than disciplines.

The following suggested themes seemed the most promising for further meetings and inter-/multi-/transdisciplinary research collaboration:

- maritime identities and transculturalism in the Baltic, North and Irish seas
- migration vs. diaspora - further definitions and case studies in the continuance of contact
- Viking and transcultural identities in the North Atlantic islands - Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland

Various subgroups of the workshop will be exploring the possibilities of developing these themes as high-quality multi-national research projects which will also provide training possibilities for younger researchers, which is a particular need in

this subject area. The development of these ideas will take some time, and is a medium-term aim.

For the moment, further discussions and collaborations are ensured by the existence (since 1 April 2006) of the AHRC-funded **Viking Identities Network** (see <http://www.heritage.bham.ac.uk/vikings.htm>), which will be an appropriate forum in which to take many of the above issues further. The ESF workshop has provided the organisers with useful ideas about what gaps need addressing and we aim to take up the discussions about a coherent definition of identity in a number of network events. The need to highlight possible clashes between gender identity and cultural identity, for example, will be explored in two VIN network events (one to be organised by Christina Lee) and will also be part of a special session at the 42nd International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo. The organisers wish to continue to include participants of the ESF workshop in this discussion (information was passed around at the meeting), so that a sustained discussion will take place. We envisage that sections of the workshop (such as language or material culture) will continue the discussion towards a tighter definition of identity in their fields, but we stress the need for interdisciplinary exchanges. We are hoping that a future follow-up event will harvest the outcome of such activities.

Final Programme

Wednesday 29 March 2006

- Afternoon *Arrival*
- 17.00 **Introductions, purpose of the workshop, preparation for the excursion, Judith Jesch, Christina Lee**
- Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)**
Przemysław Urbanczyk (Standing Committee for the Humanities)
- 19.00 *Reception and Welcome by Christine Humfrey, Director of the University's International Office*
- 19.30 *Dinner*

Thursday 30 March 2006

- 09.00 **Plenary Lecture 1 - James Barrett, Scandinavian Identities in Scotland**
Chair: **Christina Lee**
- 09.45 **Session 1 - Language and Identity**
Chair and summariser: **Jan Ragnar Hagland**
15-minute presentations by: **Terje Spurkland, Eldar Heide, Elisabeth Ridel**
Respondents: **Annette Lassen, Heiki Valk, Alex Woolf**
- 11.15 *Coffee*
- 11.30 **Session 2 - Material Culture and Identity**
Chair and summariser: **Przemysław Urbanczyk**
15-minute presentations by: **Anne Pedersen, Stephen Harrison, Władysław Duczko**
Respondents: **Jörn Staecker, Lesley Abrams, Jan Ragnar Hagland**
- 13.00 *Lunch*
- 14.15 **Session 3 - Religion and Identity**

Chair and summariser: **Peder Gammeltoft**
15-minute presentations by: **Lesley Abrams, Jens Peter Schjødt, Jörn Staecker**
Respondents: **Catherine Swift, Gísli Sigurðsson, Władysław Duczko**

15.45 *Tea*

16.00 **Session 4 - Society and Identity**

Chair and summariser: **Anne Pedersen**

15-minute presentations by: **Catherine Swift, Heiki Valk**

Respondents: **Jens Peter Schjødt, Terje Spurkland**

17.00 **Plenary Lecture 2** - **Ingmar Jansson**, *Scandinavian Identities in the East*

Chair: **Judith Jesch**

18.00 *Break*

19.30 *Dinner*

Friday 31 March 2006

8.00 *Excursion to Viking Age Nottinghamshire, including lunch*

15.00 **Session 5 - Myths and Memory of Identity**

Chair and summariser: **Alex Woolf**

15-minute presentations by: **Annette Lassen, Kristel Zilmer, Gísli Sigurðsson**

Respondents: **Anne Pedersen, Stephen Harrison, Eldar Heide**

16.45 *Tea*

17.00 **Plenary Discussion**

Chair: **Judith Jesch**

Summaries of Sessions 1-5

Planning of follow-up research activities, collaborations and/or collaborative actions, or other specific outputs

18.30 *Break*

19.00 *Dinner*

Saturday 1 April 2006

Morning *Departure*

Statistical Information

Country	No. of participants originating from	No. of participants working in
Canada	2	
Denmark	4	3
Estonia	2	2
France	1	1
Germany	2	
Hungary	1	
Iceland	1	2
Ireland	2	2
Norway	3	3
Poland	2	1
Spain	1	
Sweden	1	3
United Kingdom	2	7

Age Range	Female	Male	Total
25-35	4	1	5
35-45	3	4	7
45-55	2	6	8
55+		4	4
Total	9	15	24

Final List of Participants

Convenors

Judith Jesch
Centre for the Study of the Viking Age
School of English Studies
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 115 951 5925
Fax: +44 115 951 5924
judith.jesch@nottingham.ac.uk

Christina Lee
Centre for the Study of the Viking Age
School of English Studies
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 115 846 7194
Fax: +44 115 951 5924
christina.lee@nottingham.ac.uk

ESF Representative

Przemysław Urbanczyk
Polish Academy of Sciences
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology
Al. Solidarnosci 105
00-140 Warszawa
Poland
uprzemek@iaepan.edu.pl

Participants:

Lesley Abrams
Balliol College
Oxford OX1 3BJ
United Kingdom
lesley.abrams@balliol.ox.ac.uk

James Barrett
Department of Archaeology
University of York
The King's Manor
York YO1 7EP
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 1904 433 938

Władysław Duczko
Instytut Antropologii i Archeologii
Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna im Aleksandra
al. Polonii 1/3
06-100 Pultusk

Poland
Tel: +48 23692 11 73
Fax: +48 23692 11 74
wladyslaw.duczko@arkeologi.uu.se

Peder Gammeltoft
Nordisk forskningsinstitut
Afdeling for navneforskning
Njalsgade 136
2300 København S
Denmark
gammelt@hum.ku.dk

Jan Ragnar Hagland
Department of Scandinavian Studies and Comparative Literature
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)
7491 Trondheim
Norway
Tel: +47 73 59 64 07
Fax: +47 73 59 64 11
jan.ragnar.hagland@hf.ntnu.no

Stephen Harrison
School of Archaeology
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Ireland
Tel: +353 1 716 8252
Fax: +353 1 716 1184
stephen.harrison@ucd.ie

Eldar Heide
Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Bergen
P.O.Box 7800
5020 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47 555 82487
Fax: +47 55 58 80
eldar.heide@nor.uib.no

Ingmar Jansson
Institutionen för nordisk arkeologi och antikens kultur
University of Stockholm
Lilla Frescativägen 7
106 91 Stockholm
Sweden
ingmar.jansson@ark.su.se

Annette Lassen
Skor þýsku og Norðurlandamála
University of Iceland
Suðurgötu 1
101 Reykjavík
Iceland

al@hi.is

Anne Pedersen
Nationalmuseet
Danmarks Middelalder og Renæssance
Forsknings- og formidlingsafdelingen
Frederiksholms Kanal 12
1220 København K
Denmark
Tel: +45 33 47 31 52
Fax: +45 33 47 33 12
anne.pedersen@natmus.dk

David Parsons
Institute for Name-Studies
School of English Studies
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD
Tel: +44 115 951 5898
Fax: +44 115 951 5925
david.parsons@nottingham.ac.uk

Sara Pons-Sanz
School of English Studies
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD
Tel: +44 115 846 8192
Fax: +44 115 951 5925
sara.pons-sanz@nottingham.ac.uk

Elisabeth Ridel
CNRS-CRHQ
Université de Caen
14032 Caen Cedex
France
Tel: +33 2 31 56 66 38
Fax: +33 2 56 56 12
elisabeth.ridel@unicaen.fr

Jens Peter Schjødt
Department for the Study of Religion
Aarhus University
Taasingegade 3
8000 Århus C
Denmark
Tel: +45 89 67 15
Fax: +45 86 13 04 90
jps@teo.au.dk

Gísli Sigurðsson
The Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland
Árnagarður v/Suðurgötu
101 Reykjavík
Iceland
gislisi@hi.is

Terje Spurkland

Department of Archaeology, Conservation and Historical Studies
University of Oslo
Boks 1008 Blindern
0315 Oslo
Norway
terje.spurkland@iakh.uio.no

Jörn Staecker
Department of Archaeology and Osteology
Gotland University
Cramérgatan 8
62157 Visby
Sweden
jorn.staecker@ark.lu.se

Catherine Swift
Irish Studies Department
Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road
Limerick
Ireland
catherine.swift@mic.ul.ie

Heiki Valk
Chair of Archaeology
University of Tartu
Lossi 3
51003 Tartu
Estonia
Tel: +372 7 375 653
Fax: +372 7 375 345
heiki.valk@ut.ee

Alex Woolf
Department of Scottish History
School of History
University of St Andrews
St Katharine's Lodge
The Scores
St Andrews
Fife KY16 9AL
Tel: +44 1334 462 880
Fax: +44 1334 462 927
aw40@st-andrews.ac.uk

Kristel Zilmer
Section of Scandinavian Studies
University of Tartu
Üllikooli 17
51014 Tartu
Estonia
Tel: +3727 376 252
Fax: +3727 375 212
kristel.zilmer@ut.ee