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## **A Varangian in Kiev – reflections on identity in the eastern Viking world**

In the 970s CE, a man was placed in a chamber grave in Jaroslav's town, now one of the oldest parts of the city of Kiev. The grave was furnished in a way comparable with other chamber graves in Scandinavia and the east, and contained an individual – whose skeleton bore signs of severe trauma – accompanied by an array of finds including Scandinavian type weaponry. The grave was interpreted as that of a Varangian warrior and thus implicitly linked to the expansion of Scandinavian cultural influence into what is now modern-day Russia and Ukraine during the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

To what extent, however, is this a valid interpretation? Certainly there is nothing new in stating that the concept of identity encompasses many different things, and that one individual may hold many different identities at any given time. Despite this, archaeology can still be viewed as something of a 'blunt tool' when it comes to addressing issues of identity. Even today, certain materials – such as swords and oval brooches – are widely used by researchers to ascribe an individual with a 'Scandinavian' or 'Viking' identity, but these interpretations are becoming increasingly confounded by genetic and isotopic analyses that point towards much more complex processes of creolization and acculturation in the archaeological record. While material culture will always constitute a useful and perhaps even necessary starting point for discussing the distinctive historical trajectories of different groups, there is clearly a need to refine current frameworks in order to better understand important issues such as cultural and ethnic affiliation, and their implications. In this paper, I will explore these themes through a discussion of the Varangian buried in the chamber grave in Kiev.