The Viking Age from a bioarchaeological perspective: What have we learnt?

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In the past two decades, bioarchaeological methods - in particular isotope analysis and ancient DNA - have gone from being novel and niche techniques to standard applications on Viking Age material. Now, we have acquired a wealth of data on diet, mobility, ancestry, and increasingly also on the spread of disease. But what have we *really* learnt about the Vikings in this process?

Although new methods have shown considerable promise in adding to our knowledge on issues like migration, diversity, social differences, and gender, there are also considerable pitfalls both relating to the methods themselves and to our interpretation of results. While some research projects have attempted to bring together larger datasets, most studies have focused on single sites with results only partially extrapolated to form broader conclusions. With new contributions appearing at a rapid pace, however, such generalised studies can quickly become outdated. A further complication arises from interdisciplinary differences, especially where the demands of publication in scientific journals prevent a full, nuanced discussion of results and their historical contexts.

In this paper, I will present an overview of the most significant recent results from bioarchaeological methods and discuss how these have - or haven't - contributed to a better understanding of the Viking Age. Using my own research from Repton and Norway as case studies, I will further highlight ways in which datasets can be combined and used in innovative ways to gain a better understanding of diversity, gender, and social differences among a burial population. In addition, I will point out some pitfalls in the application of methods like strontium and oxygen analysis in determining geographical origins, especially where care is not taken to fully understand the methods' limitations and the ways in which different datasets have been obtained. Finally, I will discuss the vast potential we now have for bringing together large datasets to elucidate both theoretical issues as well as to untangle the stories of unique individuals from those broader, historical narratives.