

## Abstract submission for the 2021 Viking Congress

### *Objects of adaptation: the role of play objects in adaptation to environmental change in the North Atlantic islands.*

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In this paper, we present the findings of a comparative analysis between objects of play (i.e. toys and games) in the North Atlantic islands, incorporating Norse, Thule and Pictish materials to differentiate between cultural adaptive knowledges. We focus on the role of child material culture in the process of enculturation to understand the fidelity of information transmission between generations. Such information has potential to offer insights into the processes of cultural path dependence and limits to adaptation when considered together with environmental records. Focusing on objects of play from Norse sites in Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, and the Northern Isles in Scotland, we attempt to elucidate key differences in the adaptive toolkits of the Norse, Pict and Thule cultures.

Within the broader context of social archaeology, we make the case for increasing emphasis on the significant quantities of material culture that have to date received limited attention, including childhood and women's objects. Grete Lillehammer first drew attention to the connection between child material culture and cultural transmission of knowledge in 1989. But the potential for this to contribute to our wider understanding of human adaptive strategies has yet to be fully realised in archaeology. In recent years, however, attention has been drawn to the limited academic attention paid to the formative years of human development and the insights childhood learning and innovation can bring to understanding human adaptation and cultural evolution (Riede et al. 2018; Fuentes, 2017). A limited but steady growth of publications have drawn attention to the formative years in Viking society, where toys played delivered vital information for surviving in environment and society alike (Jackson et al., 2018; Raffield, 2019).

Thus, in this paper we consider the role of toys as progenitors of cultural and environmental knowledges for the Norse, Pict and Thule culture. By comparing and contrasting the style and symbolism of these artefacts, and using historical and ethnographic analogies, it is possible to explore the divergence and synthesis of adaptive strategies in the changing environments of the Medieval North Atlantic.

#### *References*

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