

Gender Mainstreaming in the Viking Age

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In 2020, I have spent six months in Iraq with NATO as the Gender Advisor to the Commander, tasked with gender mainstreaming throughout the mission and providing advice as to how to include and integrate women within the defence and security of Iraq.

I had grand ideas of how I was to spend my time off. I thought I would be in the Iraq Museum to search for traces of Viking-Age material culture in the Abbasid collections. However, due to challenges of COVID and security, we were restricted in our movements. Instead, I found my perspective turning inwards, towards the work I was doing for NATO.

October 31, 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: Women, Peace, and Security. This resolution and the ten which follow all promote the participation of women in decision-making and leadership processes; the prevention and protection of vulnerable populations against conflict/crisis-related sexual and gender-based violence; and the reporting and recovery post-crisis or post-conflict. We consider how men, women, boys, and girls have agency, and have the potential to be agents, victims, radicalists, bystanders, financiers, every position on the spectrum of conflict, so as to understand conflict and crisis, and mitigate security threats.

In the course of analyzing the situation in Iraq and how gender biases have been normalized and accepted in an unequal gendered Iraqi society, I could not escape the obvious parallels with how we approach, or do not approach, gender equality in post-conflict/crisis situations within Viking-Age society.

The questions I pose to the Congress are these: have we REALLY approached Viking-Age society from a modern gender perspective? What, if anything, can a careful study of the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda over the past 20 years contribute to academic and popular gender interpretations of the Viking Age?

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