Byzantine and Islamic Artefacts in Scandinavian Burial Contexts

by © Elsa A. Simms a Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of

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Abstract

Islamic literary sources that describe the funerals of the people of Rus' only describe male burial rites. Viking Age commemoration through Eastern objects did not conform to a gender binary in the burial record. However, archaeological evidence at Birka indicates that trade, movement, and association with the "East" were also important elements of women's and non-binary individual identities at Birka. It can be argued that the community made a point to represent and commemorate ethnically and gender diverse people in the burials with foreign artefacts. These artefacts are often ones from the Islamic World and the Byzantine Empire. This indicates that, despite a lack of representation of female and non-binary representations in the Islamic literary sources which focus on Viking Age burials, at Birka they were commemorated in similar ways to warriors and important men from the literary records. This indicates that women and non-binary people were equally as important in the conduct of trade and travel with Byzantium, the Islamic Caliphates, and the populations in between and this is indicated through the burial record.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: The In-Between

Viking age diaspora groups used gender and cultural identities to present themselves in life and death.[1] Specifically, Viking Rus' and Viking Age people in Eastern Sweden (specifically the Scandinavians at Birka) used foreign artefacts to define socially constructed attributes and commemorate the dead.[2] Women, men, and gender non-conforming individuals were commemorated by their communities through the lavish Eastern material culture from modern Russia, Byzantium, and the Islamic Caliphates artefacts which created a number of impressions on the living. We know of this diversity in the burial record because of previous efforts to identify burials that limited gender identities to a gender binary, if we examine the burials from a perspective outside of the gender binary, we can identify a greater number of identities of gender and ethnicity. These gendered and geographical categories identify gaps in the historical record, on that I will call the 'in-between'. These 'in-between' people and cultures consist of peoples overlooked by much of the modern study of history and include peoples along the Volga River and gender non-conforming individuals. Furthermore, the issue of death and ritual illustrates an 'in-between' instance between life and death where one transitions out of life and into death during the funeral. This theme of 'in-between' will be relevant throughout this thesis.

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[1] The Viking Age refers to the late Iron Age and early medieval period in Scandinavia. The dates roughly range from the 7th to 11th centuries AD.
Birka was a Viking Age trading town located in Sweden that existed from the mid eighth century to the early tenth century AD.

[2] The Viking Age is a time period that included diverse groups of people in Scandinavia, Europe, and the Near East. The Viking Rus' were a diaspora group present during the Viking Age who travelled the Volga river and traded and raided along the way to Byzantium and the Islamic Caliphates.

This thesis discusses the dynamics between Eastern societies, primarily Islamic cultures, and how the material culture of these 'in-between' societies influenced death and ritual among the Viking Age diaspora from Sweden to Russia. I will also examine the disconnect between the literary Islamic sources on Viking Age funeral ceremonies, which only describe male ritual burials, and the actual burial record in Sweden that includes many gender diverse burials which include Eastern material culture. To further this idea, I will use the burials at Birka, in modern Sweden, as a case study in order to examine graves containing Eastern material culture to determine how and why communities connected gender perceptions and foreign objects to the dead. This will prove that this is a distinct connection between gender and ethnic diversity in the burial record at Birka, and therefore illustrate that the Islamic texts omitted details about women and non-binary people in the textual records on death and dying in the Viking. These artefacts are primarily from the Russian river trade routes spanning from Byzantium to the Islamic Caliphates. Traditional categories like "Byzantine" and "Islamic" are not suitable for defining the diversity of international artefacts in these burials, or their use. Furthermore, these categories are also not entirely accurate and do not compensate for that 'in-between' mentioned above. To corroborate these claims, an analysis of Islamic primary texts of geographers and diplomats by writers such as Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah, and Ibn Miskawayh concerning Viking Age diaspora groups is necessary in order to compare and contrast how cultural groups used gender and material culture to define the dead with Eastern influences. Byzantine and Islamic objects in Iron Age and medieval Scandinavian burials

are among the most intriguing objects found in the Birka burials.[3] Ultimately, comparing the use of Eastern artefacts in Islamic sources and graves from Birka illuminates a comprehensive data set that illustrates the artefacts in the burials represent a complex relationship and dispels the notion that there were no significant interactions between Birka and Viking Age diaspora groups and the trading networks.

Commemoration in Scandinavia employed material culture from the Islamic and Byzantine worlds, and these artefacts are found in a wide variety of graves across various classes and genders. This may indicate that, despite a lack of representation in the Islamic literary sources, women and non-binary people at Birka were considered to be important in the conduct of trade and travel with the East. It should be noted that terms referring to gender and sexuality are difficult to define, as definitions of gender identities vary in time and by culture. Here I refer to non-binary people as individuals who do not identify with dichotomies of "man" or "woman". This identity has nothing to do with biological sex, similar to those who identify as trans. Trans gender people's identities also do not have to correspond to their birth sex.

The artefacts end up in the graves for a variety of reason, but culturally, regardless of the mode of inheritance or procurement of the objects, the people putting these goods in graves knew the significance of material culture belonging to peoples east of Scandinavia. Obviously, Scandinavians were drawn to the beauty of these objects, but there is a clear indication of status attached to the ownership of these goods. Graves do not only illustrate a masculinized account of Viking-Age society and we can use the

[3] The Iron Age in Scandinavia starts around 500 BC and ends around AD 800, so this period overlaps with the medieval period in Europe and the Viking Age in Scandinavia.

foreign objects in the burials at Birka to prove the gender diversity, particularly in relation to things like trade and travel.

The Scandinavian societies referenced in this paper refer to late Iron Age and early medieval culture in Scandinavia. We must define Rus', Viking Rus', and Varangians to grasp the complexity of the relationships and dynamics of this geographic area and the trade relationships involved with Scandinavia and the peoples east of them. Furthermore, the Viking Rus' were always taking part in the Viking Age, but Viking Age peoples were not always Viking Rus' people. There was a lot of cultural diversity during the Viking Age, but the Scandinavians taking part were not the only people able to contribute to the cultural identities of the time. The Rus' societies are harder to navigate, as we mostly know them from Islamic sources about travelling groups of people trading and raiding on the fringes of the Abbasid Islamic Caliphate.[4]

The literary commemoration of Viking Rus' funerals, found particularly in Islamic sources, seem to correlate with burial contexts and material culture found in the burials in Scandinavia, most specifically at Birka in Eastern Sweden. This is problematic because the literature only describes ritual surrounding male funerary ceremonies and does not mention when women and non-binary people are the primary recipient of the ritual, unlike the burial record. While there has been some discussion of these material resources in Scandinavian burials and Islamic literary sources on Viking Rus' funerary rituals, this parallel evidence has not yet been fully explored in relation to understanding the role of these "foreign" artefacts in defining the relationship the interred person had to

[4] As opposed to the settled Rus' people living in modern Ukraine and Russia.

the community and gender in these burials.[5] Thus, I will focus on burial rites and artefacts at sites in Scandinavia and the impact and meanings of Islamic, Rus', and Byzantine goods in these burials. While the significance of foreign goods in burials generally indicate high-status or wealthy burials, some artefacts included in this project belonged to lower-status and poorer burials as well as some which do not conform to expected gender norms. This indicates that artefacts from the East were clearly important in funerary ritual in Viking Age burial practices, regardless of gender or status.

The presence of foreign artefacts in these Scandinavian graves at Birka defies the normal conventions of burial context and of individual identity in a way that disregards some indications of status and instead indicates that Eastern artefacts were significant in many burial contexts. Generally, scholars recognized warrior artefacts as masculine and household-related goods as feminine. However, in reality these communities defined the dead as they saw fit sometimes crossing both class and gender lines. They defined new ways to identify the "warrior", or raiding and trading classes, which were previously associated almost entirely with Scandinavian masculine identity.[6] We must consider that our modern concepts of gender are almost irrelevant when studying the placement of burial items and the deceased. We will never fully understand the definitions of gender identity present during the Viking Age but in examining the archaeological evidence of Byzantine, Rus', and Islamic cultural artefacts we can determine that these artefacts were not limited to male burials. We do however see more binary interpretation in the literary

[5] "Foreign" here refers to all material culture that is not expressly Scandinavian material culture.
[6] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Kjellstrom, Zachrisson, Krzewinska, Sobrado, Price, Gunther, Jakobsson, Gotherstrom, Stora "A Female Warrior Confirmed by Genomics", *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164, no. 4 (September 2017): 857.

sources though it is important to remember that the privilege of commemoration was only granted to high status men in Viking Age communities.[7]

This thesis will concentrate on three cultural groups mentioned above: the Viking Rus', and the Viking Age Scandinavian people at Birka. The Viking Rus' are one of the groups of medieval people living in what is now modern western Russian and North-Eastern Europe.[8] The Viking Rus' are a people who appear later in the Viking Age around the 9th Century. They can be defined as a group of people who lived and traded in East Scandinavia and modern Estonia, Latvia and Eastern Russia during the Viking Age. Culturally, they identified as Scandinavian, but this was not a necessity to be considered part of the diaspora. Furthermore, it is not known what language they spoke or the inevitable cultural diversity of the Viking Rus' who travelled through Russia and the Near East. The identities and ethnicities of these people are contentious, with many questions unanswered despite the rich historiography of these people. Some like to define them as ethnically and culturally Scandinavian, while others say they are ethnically and culturally Slavic and likely included people from other cultures along the Volga river.[9] Ultimately, they are much more complicated and diverse than being solely Scandinavian or Slavic. Instead, it is likely that they are a mixture of both, with the addition of Turkic cultural

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[7] Sources for this come from an Islamic perspective. The foremost scholar explaining this is Þorir Jonsson Hraundal.
Þorir Jonsson Hraundal, *The Rus' in Arabic Sources: Cultural Contacts and Identity* (University of Bergen, 2013).
[8] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson "Magyar – Rus – Scandinavia: Cultural Exchange in the Early Medieval Period," *Situne Dei: årsskrift för Sigtunaforskning*, 2006: 51.
[9] Fedir Androshchuk, *Vikings in the East: Essays on Contacts along the Road to Byzantium (800-1100)*, (Uppsala University, 2013), 38-43.
Fedir Androshchuk, "The Vikings in the East" In *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 223-225.

elements.[10] The Viking Rus' shared many cultural similarities with Eastern Scandinavians yet were distinct in many ways as will be discussed in this thesis. However, the geography and close analysis of the texts and artefacts suggest that they were influenced by Scandinavian culture but were not entirely Scandinavian.

To avoid confusion, the term 'Rus'' will be used to describe a later offshoot of Scandinavians and Slavs in Russia as known by their connections with the Byzantine Empire for this thesis. Varangians were characterised by the Byzantine Empire as mercenaries who became ingrained in the Byzantine court, primarily as bodyguards for emperors. Descriptions of Varangians can be found in literary evidence such as writings by John Skylitzes's *Synopsis*.[11] Thus, Varangians were a warrior class who developed distinct characteristics and culture that included people from Scandinavians to Viking Rus', to Rus'. They were most prominent in the 11th C and later.[12] Separate from the Rus' and Varangians, Iron Age and medieval Scandinavians were located in what is now modern Scandinavia with some early settlements on the Baltic Islands and the Western Baltic.[13] These people were defined by their trading, raiding, Odinic religion, Old Norse language, and their great seafaring abilities. Birka is one of these early Iron Age/medieval Scandinavian settlements in Scandinavia with the above characteristics.

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[10] Hedenstierna-Jonson "Magyar – Rus – Scandinavia: Cultural Exchange in the Early Medieval Period," 51.
[11] John Scylitzes, John Wortley, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057* (Cambridge, 2010).
[12] Leo S. Kleĭn "The Russian Controversy over the Varangians" In *From Goths to Varangians: Communication and Cultural Exchange Between the Baltic and the Black Sea*, ed. Line Bjerg, John H. Link and Soren M. Sindbaek (Aarhus University, 2013), 30.
[13] Movements into the Baltic began as early as the Vendel period.
Ibid, 517-519.

Birka is a pre-Christian Viking Age settlement on Lake Malaren on the modern island of Björkö in Sweden. Excavations at Birka began in the 1870s, headed by Hjalmar Stolpe.[14] In Birka, there are around 2000 burials, of which 1100 have been excavated.[15] There is a large diversity of burials including: inhumations, burnt burials, chamber graves, burials mounds, and coffin burials.[16] These excavations provided extensive evidence of far-reaching trade with Byzantium, the Abbasid Islamic Caliphate, Russia, the modern Baltic region, and Eastern Europe.[17] Birka's material culture also demonstrated deep connections with Rus' trade because of the Rus' material culture present at the site. There was also Rus' influence on Scandinavian material culture at the site, though Birka is not a Rus' site because of their location in Scandinavia and the overwhelming amount of Scandinavian material culture at the site. This does not mean that they did not take part in Rus' material culture, but they did participate in their own unique Viking-Age culture around the eighth century at Birka. The people at Birka were likely diverse traders and were a distinct culture of their own.

The discussion begins with an introduction to the historiographical studies about the Viking Age and the Viking Rus' conducted surrounding modern Russia, The Islamic worlds, the Byzantine Empire, and Scandinavia. The historiography chapter will focus on a theme of 'in-betweens' by looking at the cultures and studies 'in-between' the mainstream ideas of raiding and pillaging Viking Age cultures and diverse genders. This

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[14] Ibid, 94.
[15] Ibid, 97.
Appendix 1, Fig. 1 Birka Burial grounds.
[16] Neil Price, "Dying and the Dead: Viking Age Behaviour", in *The Viking World,* ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 257.
[17] Bjorn Ambrosiani,,"Birka", in *The Viking World,* ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 98.

illustrates that Eastern material culture has been a point of discussion in the secondary literature for decades and illustrates how important trade routes and people other than high-status males were for the development of commemoration practices during the Viking Age. This proves that a fluid 'in-between' can exist as a middle ground, where the study of the Viking Age can be advanced past Scandinavia and warriors. The historiography chapter will also cover gender archaeology, Viking-Age gender archaeology, and Rus' historiography. The historiography of the Rus' has been influenced by a number of debates, including the Normanist and anti-Normanist debates, as well as deeply problematic appropriations by Nazi and Soviet scholars, which still manage to influence modern approaches to the questions of ethnicity. The historiography chapter also traces the history and methodological differences between American and European gender archaeology, and the archaeological differences that arise in Scandinavia.

Chapter Three covers three literary sources concerning death, dying, burial, and commemoration in relation to Viking Rus' cultures. I examine Islamic sources by Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah, and Ibn Miskawayh to see how the literary evidence presented in these texts treats accounts of death and funerals by Viking Rus' cultural groups outside of Scandinavia. The sources primarily describe male burials alone, but they do discuss burials and death for both lower and upper status individuals and mention women in indirect ways and how they assist in male burials. All three accounts describe human sacrifice, of free women, an enslaved woman, or an enslaved man. Here, we see parallels within these Islamic sources about Viking Rus' death rituals, but there is little to no mention of death and burial for women and non-binary people. Therefore, for women and gender-nonconforming burials we must rely on the archaeological record.

Chapter Four uses Birka as a case study to look at death and burials in Scandinavia, which were associated with Byzantine and Islamic artefacts. I examine jewelry, weapons, and clothing within burial contexts at Birka to consider the gendered nuances of material culture from outside of Birka acquired goods in Scandinavian burials. Unlike the Islamic literary sources, which focus primarily on military male burials, the archaeological remains present a far more complicated picture. Furthermore, we see that 'foreign' items are not limited to the mobile warrior Viking class. Women and possible non-binary people were also the recipients of these foreign grave goods, which were used in their burials to show status by the community that buried them.

In the conclusion, I will compare the Islamic literary evidence and archaeological evidence to reiterate that Birka was taking part in a form of commemoration that involved the celebration of the dead via Eastern motifs of commemoration through material culture much like the Viking Rus' in the Islamic literary sources, and that these Islamic and Byzantine artefacts were used in female and possible non-binary burials as well to celebrate the dead. This differs from the Islamic literature that has led us to believe that they were only used in male burials. It is clear that the use of Byzantine and Islamic influenced goods were important in rituals of commemoration, and that they were not just used in rites reserved for travelling, raiding, and trading masculine classes. Rather, women and non-binary probable people were mobile and aware of the status implications of associating with foreign objects. This indicates that commemoration through foreign artefacts was important across the gender spectrum, and that it is important to theorize about people beyond the masculine elite based on the archaeological material.

Chapter 2 Historiography, Theories and Methods

2.1 Introduction to Viking Rus' Historiography

An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to fully comprehend Viking Age interactions with the Islamic and Byzantine worlds. It is also necessary to understand the racist roots underlying this field, and how it still affects and influences modern scholarship. Ultimately, we must recognize the roots of the field to create clear interpretations of the past. By looking at Soviet and Nazi historiography of Viking Rus', alongside modern Viking Rus' interpretations in burial archaeology with gender and queer studies, I will illustrate that the progression of Viking Rus' studies benefitted from the development of gender and burial archaeology. The benefits are evident through the acknowledgment of the problems of Soviet and Nazi studies in Viking Rus' history, along with the consideration of diverse genders in trade and travel during the Viking Age.

This historiography begins with the historiography of the Viking Rus' and Rus' and the effects of fascist ideologies on the field. The Rus', Viking Rus', and Viking Age people were largely initially defined by foreign observers who did not speak their languages or only knew the cultures through the works of other foreign observers. This is because the Islamic writers never indicate what language these people are speaking, and the Byzantine texts were written long after the initial reference texts and oral history were created. They were defined in such a way because of the nature of their livelihood trading along the coast of the Baltic and into the rivers in Modern Russia. Early Viking Age scholars defined the Rus' and Viking Rus' as ethnically and culturally Scandinavian, while others said they were ethnically and culturally Slavic. Ultimately, each group is

much more complicated and diverse than being only Scandinavian or Slavic.[18] This is because the Viking Rus' travelled through later Rus' territory from Scandinavia and the East Baltic and comingled with the peoples in western Europe. The only thing separating these groups in the cultural elements that evolved and differed over time.

Much like the medieval scholars studying the Viking Rus' peoples through geographical, historical, and diplomatic lenses, modern scholars have attempted to investigate the interactions of the Viking Rus' through interdisciplinary approaches.[19] Studies of the Rus' and Viking Rus' have frequently conflated them with Scandinavians. This is because of Rus' and Viking Rus' cultural similarities, and it frequently ignores the divergence of the Viking Rus' diaspora with medieval peoples in Eurasia from the literary evidence in Islamic and Byzantine literature and archaeological evidence scattering the Eastern Baltic and the Volga river. [20] Not only is there a conflation of identities, but other problems of eugenics and racism stem from nationalistic academic ventures during the Second World War and subsequently in the Soviet Union. These nationalistic concerns are ripe with racism, nordicism, the erasure of the Slavs and Turkic peoples in the scholarly record, and false insular histories promoting fascism through romantic and

[18] Hedenstierna-Jonson "Magyar – Rus – Scandinavia: Cultural Exchange in the Early Medieval Period" 51.
[19] Tonicha Upham *Equal Rites: Parsing Rus' Gender Values Through and Arabic Lens*, (Háskóli Íslands, 2019).
Jonsson Hraundal, *The Rus' in Arabic Sources: Cultural Contacts and Identity*.
Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, "The Birka Warrior: The Material Culture of a Martial Society," *Theses and Papers in Scientific Archaeology* 2006.
[20] One harmful example of this is when Nazi scholars conflated these identities.
Bernard Mees, "Germanische Sturmflut: From the Old Norse Twilight to the Fascist New Dawn," *Studia Neophololog*ica, 2006.

racialised fantasies of the past.[21] These romanticised histories were pushed by the Soviets and Nazis to promote fascism.

This historiography begins with Vilhelm Thomsen of Sweden (1842-1927) who argued that the origin of the Russian state was Swedish due to the presence of certain female dress accessories such as oval brooches. This was a continuation of Hans Hildebrand's work that used archaeology and history to promote Swedish nationalism as a claim to Russia in 1882. [22] By extension, Thomsen argued, Sweden had claim over some Western parts of Russia on the Baltic.[23] Thomsen acquired a following of academics, and the next generation of Swedish scholars continued to study Western Russia because of this tenuous land-claim. Scholars like Ture Arne expanded the list of culturally Scandinavian material objects in 1914 to further extend the notion of Swedish nationalism.[24] This trend of using Viking Rus' history and erasure of the Slavic origins continued well into the 1960s, and remnants of this type of nationalism are still encountered in scholarship today. Scholarship promoting the Scandinavian origins of western Russia became part of the Normanist and Anti-Normanist debate.[25]

2.2 The Soviet Union and the Study of the Viking Rus'

The Anti/Normanist debate pinned Russian and Slavic scholars against German Nationalist scholars because of nationalistic studies concerning the Viking Rus. The Normanists argued that the founders of Russia were Scandinavian and Germanic peoples,

[21] Ibid, 186.
[22] Androshchuk, *Vikings in the East: Essays on Contacts along the Road to Byzantium (800-1100)*, 33.
[23] Ibid, 33.
[24] Kleĭn, *Soviet Archaeology: Schools, Trends, and History*, 116.
[25] Hedenstierna-Jonson. "The Birka Warrior: The Material Culture of a Martial Society," 19.

who colonised modern day western Russia.[26] The Anti-Normanists, who were mostly Soviets, claimed little to no colonisation or assimilation by the Scandinavians, meaning that they saw the foundations of the Russian state as purely of Slavic origin.[27] Therefore, we must consider both Norman and Anti-Norman rhetoric because of the locations of the study and case study. This is because both sides hold grains of legitimacy but refuse to see the merits in admitting that the Viking Rus' were more diverse than just Slavic or Scandinavian. The Germans took the Norman side, promoting ethnogenesis and Nordicism through claiming that Viking Age people were the Aryan race and therefore the Viking Rus' were Aryan and that meant that they had greater land claims in Russia.[28] The Germans believed that the Viking Rus' were solely Scandinavian and thus, by extension, Germanic.[29] The Soviets, on the other hand, tried to promote the Slavic origins of the USSR and the Rus' as their direct Slavic ancestors.

Leo S. Kleĭn's 1993 book *Soviet Archaeology: Schools, Trends and History* examines the trends in Soviet archaeology from the revolution to the fall. [30] Kleĭn is a Russian archaeologist who lived through and adapted to Soviet archaeological theories and methods of Marxist Nationalism. His methods continue to be informed by Marxist archaeology, but he understands the problematic nature and nationalism of Soviet Marxism in archaeology. Soviet archaeology was characterised by Marxism and carrying out the state's historic agenda of Nationalism. This was characterised by erasure of the

[26] Leo Kleĭn, *Soviet Archaeology: Schools, Trends, and History*, (Oxford, 2012) 115.
[27] Ibid, 116.
[28] Mees, "Germanische Sturmflut: From the Old Norse Twilight to the Fascist New Dawn," 185.
[29] Kleĭn, *Soviet Archaeology: Schools, Trends, and History*, 115.
[30] edited in 2012 and translated into English.

bourgeoisie in scholarship and promoting Slavic working class history. Some suffered the consequences of this when they tried to publish about diversity outside of Slavic and working-class identities and these scholars were blacklisted.[31] Kleĭn's book describes Soviet archaeology before and after the revolution in 1989, and how it impacted scholars in the production of archaeological scholarship through harsh censorship by the state. While being informative about Soviet archaeology, Kleĭn's book is mostly a personal account. He recalls that:

> Only now has a time of sober self-recognition arrived. Any recognition is made easier by comparison. That includes self-recognition. And when one tries to describe our conditions to Western colleagues, to translate our idioms and explain our problems to them, one begins to understand better the exotic nature of our academic life.[32]

Despite his self-awareness, the book was too forgiving of Soviet studies in archaeology and history, though he was a controversial and rebellious figure in Soviet archaeology.

Two examples of the above types of insular and nationalistic studies are "On the History of Games in Rus'" by G.F. Korzunkhina from 1963[33] and "The Christianization of Russian Peasants" by V.G. Vlasov in 1990.[34] Both were published in English and promoted a Russian Anti-Normanist perspective for English speaking archaeologists and historians in Western Europe and North America. Korzunkhina described ancient and medieval gaming pieces found in the western part of the Soviet Union and Scandinavia and paid special attention to the gaming pieces, which he called checkers, in Gotland, Birka, Ladoga, and settlements along the Dnieper. The paper took an anti-Normanist

[31] Kleĭn, *Soviet Archaeology: Schools, Trends, and History*, 11.
[32] Ibid.
[33] G. F. Korzukhina, "On History of Games in Rus'" *Soviet Anthropology and Archaeology* no. 7, 1964.
[34] V.G. Vlasov, "The Christianization of the Russian Peasants." *Soviet Anthropology and Archaeology 29,* no.3, 1990.

view, stating that the Slavs produced many of the glass gaming pieces.[35] By implying that Slavs were the sole creators of the gaming pieces, Korzunkhina was erasing the possibility of Scandinavian influence and therefore promoting an Anti-Normanist perspective. Vlasov was even more nationally inclined than Korzunkhina and argued that early Christianity was not Christianity to distance themselves from Christian bourgeoisie. Vlasov used the shift to the Gregorian calendar as his main evidence and showed that pagan traditions lasted through conversion through saints' days and Christian holidays.[36] The Soviet Union was secular and did not promote Christianity or any religion for that matter. Christianity was seen as a foreign bourgeoisie religion of excess that discriminated against the working class.

The case of Soviet archaeologists juxtaposes well against the efforts of Nazi scholars. Bernard Mees' 2006 article, "Germanische Sturmflut: From the Old Norse Twilight to the Fascist New Dawn", described the historiography of the misuse and abuse of Old Norse literature and material culture in Nazi scholarship.[37] The misuse and abuse stems from ethnogenesis and nationalism from German an Austrian Scholars to promote white Germanic nationalism. Kossina claimed that the Urnfield culture in Poland descended from the Celts. For Kossina, being descended from Celts or Illyrians was culturally acceptable for the Germans, but being descended from the Lausitz culture (Palaeo-Slavic) was unacceptable. This ethnic debate ran deeper than the Scandinavian Iron Age. There was an active erasure of Slavic society and hatred toward Eastern Europe

[35] G. F. Korzukhina, "On the History of Games in Rus'" 32.
[36] V.G. Vlasov, "The Christianization of the Russian Peasants." 26.
[37] Mees, "Germanische Sturmflut: From the Old Norse Twilight to the Fascist New Dawn."

and Russia early on in antisemitic and white nationalist scholarship[38]. Kossinna was at the centre of the promotion of Nordicism, prioritising ethnogenesis and racist arguments within Nazi archaeology and history. This Nordicism was eventually used to promote the Nazi regime, placing history and archaeology firmly at the centre of propaganda in Nazi Germany and occupied countries such as Norway. This led to programs like the Lebensborn program,[39] along with much propaganda produced depicting Vikings and Nazis together.[40] By manipulating the historical and archaeological records, the Nazis forced the idea that Germans had claim to more land through racist ideas that descendants of German people were superior to all others.

2.3 Viking Rus' Modern interpretations

Modern interpretations of Viking-Age interactions with the Viking Rus', and the Islamic and Byzantine worlds aim to foster the clear cultural diversity of the Viking Age, rather than supress it, as Nazi and Soviet interpretations did through Nationalism and ethnogenesis. Ultimately, modern scholars use a global perspective to the study of the Viking Rus' and their exploits through Russia, Byzantium, and the Islamic World. These scholars treat the 'in-between' cultures of people such as the Bulghars, as actual cultures instead of studying them under the guise of eurocentrism and orientalism. In doing do, modern scholars pave the way for diversity within Viking Age diasporas rather than limit

[38] Ibid, 184.
[39] The Lebensborn program was created by the Nazis to create 'racially pure' children during the Second World War. This program was peddled in other countries, such as Norway, where Nazi soldiers would have children with Scandinavian women to create more people that the Nazis thought were racially superior. The program was based in pseudoscience and eugenics and was propagated to the people through "traditional" German/Celtic/Scandinavian imagery. For example, women dressed in Viking Age tunics with blonde children.
[40] Paul R. Bartrop and Michael Dickerman. *The Holocaust an Encyclopedia and Document Collection*. (Santa Barbara, 2017), 394.

identities to purely Scandinavian or Slavic. Wladyslaw Duczko is one of the most influential scholars for archaeology, and Jonsson Hraundal is one of the most important literary scholars of the Viking Rus'.[41] Furthermore, scholarship produced in Scandinavia by academics like Fedir Androshchuk stresses cultural contact by looking at the archaeological record.[42]

Duczko's 1997 article "Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden: Archaeological Finds and their Interpretation," stressed the importance of studying cultural contacts. He says:

> It is essential that scholars should use their archaeological finds to trace inter-regional contacts. This is difficult because it demands detailed knowledge of both local and foreign material and scholars seldom possess all the necessary information to carry out their work. In most cases, the lack of basic research is the reason for this, but sometimes the surviving material is insufficient for the studies to be effective.[43]

He acknowledges that there is not enough knowledge of Byzantine archaeology among Scandinavian scholarship, and pushes the importance of the Russian Viking Age to identify Byzantine goods in Sweden.[44] He writes about the important cultural closeness between Byzantium and Eastern Europe, and thus provides a closed context for reinterpreting these artefacts through a gendered lens.[45] This gendered lense continues to focus on a gender binary that categorises artefacts in male and female categories.

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[41] Wladyslaw Duczko, "Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden Archaeological Finds and their Interpretation" in *Rom und Byzanz im Norden*, ed. Michael Müller-Wille, (Kiel, Academie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1997).
Jonsson Hraundal, "New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/Rus in Arabic Sources," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia 10*, 2014.
[42] Androshchuk, *Vikings in the East: Essays on Contacts along the Road to Byzantium (800-1100).*
[43] Duczko, "Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden Archaeological Finds and their Interpretation" in *Rom und Byzanz im Norden*, Michael Müller-Wille, (Kiel, Academie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1997), 291.
[44] Ibid, 292.
[45] Ibid, 291

Focusing on artefacts from Gotland and Uppland, he looks at artefacts from Byzantium and artefacts made locally which were influenced by Byzantine styles. He concludes that, though many of the artefacts were Orthodox or influenced by Orthodox Christianity, the Swedish nobility saw them as status items with little to no religious significance. Androshchuk's book, *Vikings in the East*, illustrates how the vast trade and travel networks between the Viking Rus' and Varangians that led through Russia to Byzantium.[46] Androshchuk uses historical archaeology, literary sources from Byzantium, and archaeological records from Scandinavia, Russia, and the trade routes with Byzantium to bridge the gap between Scandinavians and Byzantines. He bridges the gap by also looking at cultures along the Volga river between Scandinavia and Byzantium. Not only does he acknowledge the important role played by the Rus', but he adds that they were a group that included a diversity of people from all over Scandinavia, the Baltic, the Russian trade routes, and more. He reinforces that the Rus' had their own distinct culture by showing that they were equally as distinct as the empires around them. Androshuk saw the Rus' to be more than messengers and mercenaries and views the Rus' as people who experienced much cultural diffusion greater than just Byzantine and Scandinavian.

French scholars take a global history approach that compares Norman France to the Rus'. Bauduin and Musin's *Vers l'Orient et vers l'Occident: regards croisés sur les dynamiques et les transferts culturels des Vikings à la Rous ancienne* looked at the similarities between the cultural assimilation of the Viking Rus' in Kiev and the Norse in

[46] Androshchuk, *Vikings in the East: Essays on Contacts along the Road to Byzantium (800-1100).*

Normandy. They argue that the Norse in Normandy assimilated to Frankish culture rather quickly, leaving behind many Viking Age cultural attributes and taking on many Frankish ones.[47] Some of the Viking Age attributes present in Norman culture were such things as weapons that appear on the Bayeux Tapestry. The collection of articles is an example of comparative histories of the Rus' and the Normans. Musin's other collection of essays, *Russie viking, vers une autre Normandie?: Novgorod et la Russie du Nord, des migrations scandinaves à la fin du Moyen Âge* similarly explores the connections between the frameworks used to study the Rus' and Normans. The Rus' and the Normans are similar subsects of Viking Age cultures that diverged into other cultures, creating new and diverse groups of people. Both books use diverse methods in historical archaeology, comparative history, art history, and literary histories to compare the Normans and Rus'. This is a successful use of comparative history where both books link frameworks to similar forms of acculturation by two formerly Viking Age cultural groups.[48] The Rus' are comparable to the Normans because they became distinct from their lineage, but like the Hiberno-Norse in Ireland, the Viking Rus' held onto more Viking Age identifiers than the examples above.

Ultimately, global comparative histories are an effective way to research cultural diffusion and evolution. Furthermore, by defining 'in-between' cultures we can step away from grand assumptions about large groups of undefined peoples surrounding the Viking

[47] Pierre Bauduin, Aleksandr E. Musin, et al., *Vers l'Orient et vers l'Occident: regards croisés sur les dynamiques et les transferts culturels des Vikings à la Rous ancienne*, (Caen: Caen Presses universitaires de Caen, 2014), 1.
[48] Pierre Bauduin and Elena Melnikova, "L'Acculturation Des Scandinaves en Europe Orientale: Quelques Jalons Pour Une Comparaison" in *Vers l'Orient et vers l'Occident: regards croisés sur les dynamiques et les transferts culturels des Vikings à la Rous ancienne*, ed. Pierre Bauduin, Aleksandr E. Musin, et al (Caen: Caen Presses universitaires de Caen, 2014), 27.

Age. Critical studies of the Viking Rus' can lead to interpretations of the past without nationalising or romanticising histories.

2.4 'In-between' Gender Archaeology

Gender is important to consider when employing burial archaeology, as gender expression of the burial is a form of commemoration on behalf of a community rather than reflecting the gender expression and agency of the person in the burial. 'In-between' genders are prevalent throughout this thesis. Therefore, the historiography of gender archaeology will illuminate how scholars interpret and include diverse genders in their studies through history, archaeology, gender studies, queer theory, and burial archaeology. Specifically, 'in-between' genders pair well with 'in-between' cultures, and we see a direct connection between diverse genders and cultural inclusion. Gender diversity is represented in the burial record at Birka, for example, furthering the necessity for understanding gendered representation and commemoration in the burial record. Gender expression is visible at Birka through the artefacts left in burials by the community, therefore, the community is expressing a gender on behalf of the dead. Gender archaeology, then, is the study of the construction of gender identity in particular societies, seen through the archaeological landscape and the material culture of the past. Broadly speaking, gender archaeology began with the rise of the feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s, although there has been a long development of the field starting with scholars such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. Nowadays, archaeology includes the use of queer theories and studies in masculinities.[49] Archaeologists such as

[49] Studies in masculinities here refers to studies separate from cis-heteropatriarchal studies. This does not reinforce the patriarchy and in fact aids in diversifying the field of gender and queer studies.

Margret Conkey and Janet Spector scrutinised this in the 1980s and introduced the critical pursuit of gender archaeology for future scholars by arguing for 'complex systems of meaning' surrounding gender and women's studies.[50] Conkey and Spector incorporated theories and methods from outside of archaeology, from fields such as anthropology, women's studies, and gender studies in order to provide new ways of theorizing gender in archaeology. They incorporate these fields to broaden the study of archaeology and utilise theories and methods used in anthropology and women's studies on modern people and appropriate them to use them on the past.

Conkey and Spector's "Archaeology and the Study of Gender" warns archaeologists that gendering archaeology is equally as dangerous as nationalising it. Gendering imposes the societal construct of gender onto something or someone. Before Conkey and Spector, gendering was based on modern gender roles rather than the gender roles of the society that an archaeologist was studying. They argue that by looking at the theoretical work of anthropologists and other feminist scholars, archaeologists can forge "complex systems of meaning" around gender.[51] They continue by explaining that until 1984 much of archaeology overtly excluded women from the record and this was why archaeologists in the past omitted diverse genders from the archaeological record. [52] Conkey and Spector said that this trivialisation of "feminine" work ignores the diverse spectra of gender identities that existed in the past.[53] Ultimately, 'feminine' does not have

[50] Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector, "Archaeology and the Study of Gender," *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 7, 1984.
[51] Ibid, 25.
[52] Ibid, 2.
[53] Ibid, 23.

to equate to 'female' or 'woman' and the category exists among a wider spectra of gender expressions and identities. Furthermore, they illustrate that since gender is culture and time specific, there is a need to rely on social theories of archaeology to parse out the gender of a specific people. Looking at cultural elements and how they interact in a society serves to create a more diverse and in depth understanding of gender presentation and performance in past societies. This is why gender theory is a social theory, because society defines gender. Conkey and Spector's work continues to be a valuable source for women's archaeology, but ultimately, they never pushed past the gender binary enough to study diverse gender identities.

Gender focused archaeological conferences occurred with more frequency after 1985.[54] These conferences inspired archaeologists like Conkey and Gero to further pursue archaeological gender theory and its application to ancient women further.[55] They argue that: "The tailoring of gender and feminist theories and insights to prehistory has the potential to radically alter extant notions about prehistoric humans and human evolution, notions that underlie *all* of anthropology."[56] Iterations of this occur later in Gilchrist's redefinition of space in the medieval castle and Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson's interpretation of the Birka warrior in 2017.[57] These interpretations insert women into the historic narrative in spaces where they were previously believed not to exist. Such authors stress the need to deny theories like biological determinism because gender roles and

[54] Joan M. Gero and Margaret Wright Conkey, *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) XII.
[55] Ibid, 3.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Roberta Gilchrist. *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past,* (Routledge, 1999). Hedenstierna-Jonson, et. al "A Female Warrior Confirmed by Genomics."

divisions of labour are not that simple.[58] Instead, they suggest that we weave societal and cultural norms with gender seamlessly to define perceptions of gender and agency when creating identity.

Roberta Gilchrist, for example, is another influential archaeologist who began writing about women and gender in the 1990s. Starting with her 1991 publication, "Women's Archaeology? Political Feminism, Gender Theory and Historical Revision," Gilchrist offered one of the first historiographies of gender archaeology. She stresses the importance of political feminism on the development of archaeology and advocates for equal opportunities for men and women in archaeological employment. Gilchrist marks important moments in the archaeological historiography by identifying where the differentiation of men and women has been studied from processualism to post-processualism.[59]

Gilchrist brings forward gender archaeology by making room for masculine spaces in feminine places and *vice versa*. Furthermore, she explains that despite DNA and osteological testing, people may not represent the sexes revealed in these tests.[60] Her

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[58] Gero and Conkey, *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, 8.
Biological Determinism: This argues that human behaviour is caused by a person's genes. This totally ignores external influences of societal constructs on a person's identity. Biological determinism is extremely dismissive and exclusionary of diverse gender identities and diverse cultural identities.
Division of labour: The division of labour is the gendered division of work between genders and the disparity of different types of work among different genders. Here I am referring to the pragmatic use of person power. It is unreasonable to assume that women did not help with day-to-day tasks in history. Realistically, women aided in every task, especially outside of the upper-class.
[59] Roberta Gilchrist "Women's Archaeology? Political feminism, Gender Theory and Historical Revision." *Antiquity* 65, no. 248, 1991: 53.
Processualism was a movement in archaeology that aimed to make archaeology more scientific. Processualism gained popularity in the 1960s. Ultimately, it was more problematic because it did not consider social aspects of culture and left researchers unable to make any kind of firm claims about archaeology. Post-processualism is the movement that happened after processualism that still included science but moved towards more anthropological and social methods to make assumptions about the past.
[60] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the past*, 36.

definition of gender states that gender is "the cultural interpretation of sexual difference that results in the categorisation of individuals, artefacts, spaces, and bodies."[61] Gilchrist's model is applied in Bonnie Effros's 2000 article, "Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages," which shows how Merovingian burials do not exist on a gender binary. Until recently, Merovingian archaeologists depended on a gender binary to identify male and female burials.[62] Scholars formerly said that the presence of jewellery could be used to identify the graves of Merovingian women, and male graves could be identified by the lack thereof.[63] However, this only genders those who were materially wealthy at the time of their death. Here, DNA and genomic testing is invaluable because of the gendered implications pressed upon Merovingian burials before Effros, although we must remember that science is open to criticism as well and we cannot simply gender individuals in burials based on their grave goods.

American and British archaeology are not the only important source for gender studies in archaeology. The movement in Scandinavia is equally as important for studying the Viking Age. One of the Scandinavian theorists of the 2000s, was Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, who, most notably, wrote *Gender Archaeology* in the 2000s provided an alternative perspective to the American and British perspectives outlined above. She acknowledged the instability of gender as a societal and individual construct, its increasing importance in all works of history and archaeology, and its links to material

[61] Ibid, XV.
[62] Bonnie Effros, "Skeletal Sex and Gender in Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology," *Antiquity* 74, no. 285 2000: 632.
[63] Ibid, 633.

culture.[64] In contrast to Gilchrist's definition, however, Stig Sørensen defined gender as "…an essential identity… the outcome of how individuals are made to understand their differences and similarities from others and how this involved material culture."[65] This definition was a little broader and more archaeological than the American and British political definitions previously encountered in this paper, which are mostly concerned with binary gender, previously encountered in this paper.

Ing-Marie Back Danielsson and Susanne Thedéen offer a Scandinavian perspective with *To Tender Gender: The Pasts and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology* which explores the modern state of gender and queer archaeology.[66] This book stresses how we must use both gender and queer theories to manufacture creative and innovative ways of analysing the past. One of the articles in the collection, "Box Brooches Beyond the Border: The Female Viking Age Identities of Intersectionality" by Susanne Thedéen stresses the interdisciplinarity and intersectionality needed to interpret gender in the Viking Age context. Thedéen illustrates how material culture in diverse places can be seen differently by different cultures in different spaces and time. Here, she used gender and queer theory to explore the intersections between gender, ethnicity, and social status by looking at the Gotland Box Brooches in places other than Gotland.[67] Thedéen provides a good example of Viking-Age gender and queer archaeology in the twenty-first century.

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[64] Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, *Gender Archaeology*, (Malden, Polity Press, 2000), 7.
[65] Ibid, 203.
[66] Ing-Marie Back Danielsson and Susanne Thedéen, *To Tender Gender*: *The Pasts and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology*. (Stockholm University, 2012).
[67] Susanne Thedéen "Box Brooches Beyond the Border: Female Viking Age Identities of Intersectionality" in *To Tender Gender*: *The Pasts and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology*, ed. Ing-Marie Back Danielsson and Susanne Thedéen (Stockholm University, 2012), 63.

2.5 Viking Age Gender Archaeology and History

As seen above, gender is a key societal construct and can tell us a lot about how individuals and communities defined gender presentation and gender performance. Within the Viking Age, we see examples of gender diversity through the assemblages left behind in places such as burials or in homes, and we use them to interpret how communities understood their neighbours. Furthermore, historical scholarship illustrated that the more women became involved with Viking Age archaeology, the more the focus switched from masculine narratives to feminine ones.

Shortly after the discovery of Birka, Hanna Rydh was a pioneering archaeological figure who wrote in early twentieth century Sweden when the presence of women in the field conducting archaeological research encouraged critical thought on the presence of women in the ground. She began her doctoral research at Uppsala in 1919 and her most notable research compared the Oseberg ship queen to Hatshepsut. [68] Her research brought an early global women's perspective to Scandinavian archaeology. Rydh was a particularly prominent figure in Swedish archaeology because of her focus on women's history which paved the way for further inclusion of women in the field. Today, Viking Age studies are becoming increasingly concerned with the diversity of gender in the archaeological and literary records. Interdisciplinarity is a priority in Viking-Age studies because of the vast time and space in which it occurred. Scholars in Viking-Age studies are tackling issues of non-binary identities during the Viking Age, and connecting power

[68] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the past*, 3.
Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh "The Swedish Image of Viking Age Women: Stereotype, Generalisation, and Beyond" in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. Rose Samson (Glasgow: Cruithne Press), 62.

and social class to mobility in society. Concerns of toxic masculinity in Viking Age archaeology stem from antiquarianism and processualism. The tales of Viking men pillaging and dominating Europe are no longer the only stories of concern for Viking Age scholars.

Within the scope of Viking Age archaeology, runology is of great importance because runestones were contemporary texts in the proto-historic period.[69] Many runestones were created during the syncretic period during the conversion to Christianity in Scandinavia.[70] They can address gender, class, commemoration, and land ownership in the public sphere among many other topics and function as both literary and archaeological evidence. Anne Sofie Gräslund is an archaeologist who uses gender theory in landscape archaeology, specifically to discuss the use of runestones. Gräslund has published on the subject of runes and archaeology since the 1980s, starting with her dissertation, *Birka IV: A Study of Graves at Bjorko*.[71] Gräslund was one of the first to study runestones with a gendered lense because of her ability to interpret the gender identification of the people who wrote and who are written about on runestones. In doing so, she was able to indicate that runestones were not purely masculine monuments, and

[69] Runology is the study of the Younger Futhark and the Elder Futhark and their uses in Iron Age Scandinavia and beyond. The Younger and Elder Futhark are runic alphabets consisting of symbols put together to create words. The study of runology is dedicated to runic inscriptions present during Iron Age and Viking Age Scandinavia and their cultural contacts. Runology is particularly important to the study of the Viking Age because it is a system of writing and communication that did not exist elsewhere in European Middle Ages.

[70] Anne Sofie Gräslund "Late Viking Age Runestones in Uppland: Some Gender Aspects" in *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West: Papers from the Proceedings of the fifteenth Viking Congress*, ed. John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2010) 113.
The Syncretic period refers to a time in Scandinavia before and during the conversion to Christianity at the end of the Viking Age.

[71] Anne Sofie Gräslund, *Birka IV: The Burial Customs: A Study of Graves at Bjorko* (Uppsala University, 1981).

that many women commissioned and identified themselves on runestones for various reasons throughout Scandinavia. [72]

Gräslund's research became increasingly concerned with gender, leading up to her article "Late Viking-Age Runestones in Uppland: Some Gender Aspects" in 2010. [73] The article looks at several runestones that mention women or commemorate women. This, however, is problematic today because she only equates feminine to women, when realistically, we know that this is not the case and we only see gender expression on runestones and never sex identification. Gräslund argues that the erection of monumental runestones was an act where women crossed the boundary of the private sphere into the public sphere and how they chose to represent themselves on these monuments exhibited the agency of women in the Viking Age.[74] She showed that women owned property and participated in commemoration in a similar capacity to men. Her work demonstrates the fluidity between the public and private spheres, and continuations of this type of work will hopefully lead to the reconsideration and increasing fluidity between the binary of spheres of private/public or woman/man.

Gender studies is not limited to archaeology and we see many literary scholars such as Carol Clover, Jenny Jochens, Judith Jesch, and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen further incorporated gender theory in their research in the 1980s and 1990s.[75] Jochens

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[72] Gräslund "Late Viking Age Runestones in Uppland: Some Gender Aspects," in *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West: Papers from the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress*, ed. John Sheehan, Donnchadh O Corrain (Dublin, 2010), 114-115.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid, 122.
[75] Carol Clover, "Maiden Warriors and Other Sons", *The English and Germaic Journal of Philology*, 1986.
Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Suffolk, Boydell, 1991).
Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*, (Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
Jenny Jochens, "Feminist Scholarship in Old Norse Studies," *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 19, 1995.

studies texts and the representations of women in the Viking Age in textual evidence. [76] In 1995 Jochens published a short historiography about the women working in Old Norse studies. Her historiography begins with the women who studied Old Norse texts as early as the late 18th century.[77] One important literary scholar is Meulengracht Sørensen, who dissects complex themes of masculinity and homophobia in insults in Old Norse literature.[78] Meulengracht Sørensen's 1983 book, *The Unmanly Man*, researched the roots of insecure masculinity, homophobia, and binary fluidity in the Viking Age. Literary studies are effective, but the reliance on literary sources alone, which were written 200 years after the height of the Viking Age can often be problematic. The stories came out of an oral tradition and were not written down until the conversion to Christianity in Scandinavia. This means that the stories that come down to us are likely influenced by contemporary Christian ideology, and therefore, are not entirely reliable when relating them back to pre-Christian times.

Carol Clover's work is equally as influential and similarly problematic. Clover wrote literary critiques of shield-maidens and female warriors in 1986.[79] Her 1993 article "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe", explores literary devices in Old Norse literature used to symbolise gender binaries. Furthermore, in this article, she assumed that many people in the Viking Age had the privilege to change gender characteristics as they pleased. However, Clover is not source critical of medieval

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Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, (Odense, 1983).
[76] Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*, 1-3.
[77] Jenny Jochens, "Feminist Scholarship in Old Norse Studies," 29.
[78] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*.
[79] Carol Clover, "Maiden Warriors and Other Sons," 35.

literature written about the Viking Age after the conversion to Christianity in Scandinavia and applies her argument to periods long before the sources were written. Thus, her methodology is problematic, and other scholars have made jarring assumptions based on her work.[80]

Judith Jesch's 1991 *Women in the Viking Age* marked a notable change in the field by describing the diversity of women in the sagas and other literary sources written in the thirteenth-century and compares them with older archaeological data.[81] Jesch aims to expand the private sphere for Viking Age women by looking at their daily lives and the equipment they carried regularly, but ultimately sticks to a gender binary in line with ideas from the 1990s (and earlier). However, life for women in the Viking Age was not that simple. She acknowledges that women travelled to new settlements with their partners but she relies on archaeological evidence of gendered items like spindle whorls or weaving tools to make her identifications of men or women.[82] Based on the evidence of contemporary literary sources, particularly poetry and runic inscriptions, Jesch is cautious about the possibility of Viking Age women warriors but suggests there was more literary evidence for tradeswomen participating in business activities at economic centres like Birka, among others.[83] Jesch's ideas about women's labour during the Viking Age expanded the private sphere for Viking Age women and distanced previous colonial and

[80] Kathleen Self "The Valkyrie's Gender: Old Norse Shield-Maidens and Valkyries as a Third Gender," *Feminist Formations*, 2014: 144.
Self argues that Valkyries and Shield-Maidens exist as a third gender. She conflates Valkyrie with shield-maiden uncritically by assuming all Valkyries are warriors, when this is not the case in the literary evidence.
[81] Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age.*
[82] Ibid, 14.
[83] Ibid, 39.

patriarchal notions of women solely working in the home. At the time Jesch wrote this book, she was filling a void in Viking Age women's history and using an interdisciplinary approach to find what women were capable of during the Viking Age. Her interdisciplinary approach used literary and archaeological methods along with theories of gender and anthropology. Viking Age archaeology quickly took up Jesch's interdisciplinary innovations and scholars like Leszek Gardeła , Neil Price, and Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson began to use runes, later literary evidence from sagas and histories, and archaeology to make arguments about the past.[84]

Foremost among modern Viking Age scholars is Neil Price, a British archaeologist working at Uppsala University in Sweden. His 2002 dissertation, *The Viking Way* focused on the burial archaeology of sorceresses called *seiðrkonurr*. He uses gender and queer theory to examine the commonalities between the contents of the burials mostly at Birka and some elsewhere in Scandinavia. The most important artefacts in these contexts are magical staffs that indicate a connection between literary and archaeological resources that connect women to violent magics and warfare.[85] The staffs were usually placed on the lap of the person in the burial. Price exhibited how warfare and violence were not strictly masculine traits in the Viking Age. He includes anthropological and ethnographical accounts of Indigenous shaman of the circumpolar regions to compare the use of the staff in the Viking Age burials to rituals connected to

[84] Leszek Gardeła, *Bad Death in the Early Middle Ages. Atypical Burials from Poland in a Comparative Perspective,* (Rzeszów: Rzeszów University, 2017).
Neil Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala, 2002).
Hedenstierna-Jonson, et. al "A Female Viking Warrior Confirmed by Genomics."
[85] "Violent magics" are explained in detail in Neil Price's *The Viking Way*, and in this context, refers to Odinnic magics associated with women during the Viking Age. These magics required violent rituals and were likely a form of civic duty, similar to how warriors would be expected to go to war.

violence and war. This expansion into ethnographic and geographic research allows for more comparisons of cultures and genders when searching for trade tools in ancient burials. For Price, cognitive archaeology is "…the archaeology of the intangible as inferred from the material."[86] Price looks at the few hundred years of transition in the Viking Age from the early Iron Age to, which is a much smaller period than the original iteration of cognitive archaeology in prehistory that looked at thousands of years of humanoid transition rather than a few hundred during the Viking Age. Furthermore, it effectively pairs cognitive and historical archaeology with gender and queer theories, and that makes *The Viking Way* a broadened study of Viking Age identity. His book argues that there was an overarching theme of power in the Viking Age involving gender and magic where violent magic used to forward a kind of civic duty in warfare for its Viking Age practitioners.[87]

Price's inclusion of historical literary sources such as sagas and runestones aids in creating a cohesive interdisciplinary analysis. It is cohesive because he combines an interdisciplinary approach with a global approach looking at a number of different types of resources to broaden the study of gender and masculinities. Price addresses the material culture in the archaeological record to determine the meanings behind tools of sorcery, and how these tools in burials exist in their native contexts.[88] He examines tools in context to discuss their role in commemoration. For example, *Seiðr* burials generally placed the staff over the deceased's lap, indicating the importance of the tool in collective

[86] Neil Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala, 2002), 38.
[87] Ibid, 27.
[88] Ibid, 128.

cognition of the Viking Age. The placement of the staff in the lap of the deceased could be connected to other types of warrior burials and the importance of where a weapon might be placed. Lastly, he looks at ethnography of indigenous cultures of the Arctic, specifically circum-polar religion, for evidence of shamanistic rituals, and the violence associated with them to compare to the shamanistic rituals described in Sagas that were performed by magical women and the material culture in burials that follows those descriptions. Through these three investigations, Price is viewed as successfully using cognitive archaeology to place ritual violence and *seiðr* at the core of Viking Age cultural cognition.[89]

More recent scholarship has begun to employ Price's ideas of queer theory and most scholars now acknowledge queer and lower status people lost to the historical record. For example, Leszek Gardeła is an archaeologist using gender theory to find non-binary instances in the archaeological record, specifically working with Scandinavian evidence in non-Scandinavian contexts. He looks at Viking Age contexts in Poland,[90] armed women, and religion. He argues that despite weapons in feminine burials, there is not enough evidence to say for certain that shield-maidens existed. Furthermore, his work illustrates that feminine people had their own uses for objects previously viewed as weapons, such as axes, for work in their communities and everyday tasks. Gardeła's 2013 article "'Warrior-Women' in Viking Age Scandinavia? A Preliminary Archaeological Study" precedes Hedenstierna-Jonson's research on BJ 581. Gardeła calls for better

[89] Matthew Townend, "Review of The Viking Way: War and Religion in Late Iron Age Scandinavia" *Antiquity* 777, no. 296, 2003: 430.
[90] Leszek Gardeła, *Bad Death in the Early Middle Ages. Atypical Burials from Poland in a Comparative Perspective,* 36.

scrutiny of community contexts of burials of feminine burials with weapons when revisiting previously poorly excavated burial contexts.[91] He notes that many of the burials were only examined in binary ways and categorized into burials that were traditionally "masculine" warrior burials, and therefore male, or "feminine" burials full of household items and therefore "must" be female. He examined weapons in female burial contexts and then compared these findings to mentions of armed women in the literary sources.[92] Price concludes that the archaeological and literary records do not always show cohesive results, primarily because the literary sources are not contemporary. Furthermore, the "weapons" in the surveyed graves were generally dual-purpose tools like axes and knives, which had everyday uses as well as battle uses. Along with the dual nature of the artefacts, he argues that burials do not always mirror the individual's real life, and he brings into question the performativity of the act of burial itself.[93] He then suggests further work to be done on osteological analysis and genetic testing of burials to work towards better identifications of individuals in burials.

The intersections of gender, queer, and postcolonial theories are beginning to flourish in Viking Age archaeology. Outlets for intersectional and interdisciplinary studies are useful, making the field more accessible in a multiplicity of ways.[94] Queer theorists and feminist archaeologists alike looked to theorists like Michel Foucault to

[91] Leszek Gardeła, "'Warrior Women' in Viking Age Scandinavia? A Preliminary Archaeological Study," in *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia: Funerary Archaeology*, ed. Sławomir Kadrow, Magdalena Rzucek, Sylwester Czopek, Katarzyna Trybała-Zawiślak (Rzeszów: Rzeszów University, 2013), 276.
[92] Ibid, 277, 305.
[93] Ibid, 306.
[94] One such important outlet is the newer journal called *Kyngervi*. *Kyngervi* is a Viking Age journal that promotes queer and critical race interdisciplinary studies about a variety of topics surrounding the Viking Age.

inform their assumptions about gender in the archaeological record. Foucault is commonly sourced by the researchers mentioned in this paper, allowing for commonality and easy transition and use of queer archaeology in the 1990s and 2000s.

Queer theory further stresses a fluidity in space and time as it does and does not relate to gender. Theorists like Halperin, Berlant, and Warner in the 1990s theorised and contextualised queer theory within society.[95] They cited theorists like Judith Butler and Michel Foucault and examined queer agency in heterosexual society. Thomas A. Dowson states that:

> Queering archaeology is actively engaged in moving away from essentialist and normative constructions of presumed and compulsory heterosexuality (male: female – deviant third sex), but also the normative character of archaeological discourse. It necessarily has to confront and disrupt the presumption of heterosexuality as the norm inherent in archaeological interpretation.[96]

Thinking of queer theory in this way, we can see how cultures created heteronormative constraints, but how possible queer people and expression still must exist in the archaeological record and we must be cognisant of how gender can exist differently in space and time. This means that we need to think in spectra rather than binaries and look at material culture through the lense of Foucault's famous signified and signifier analogies.[97] This includes spectra of power, masculinity, femininity, privilege, ethnicity, gender expression, among many other aspects that create one's cultural identity. Gender

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[95] David M. Halperin, "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality." *Representations*, 1998: 93-120.
Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner. "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 110, no. 3, 1995: 343.
[96] Thomas A. Dowson, "Queer Theory Meets Archaeology: Disrupting Epistemological Privilege and Heteronormativity in Constructing the Past." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke (Ashgate, 2018), 290.
[97] Michel Foucault. *The Birth of the Clinic; an Archaeology of Medical Perception*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973) 115-122.

can exist in pragmatic formats, creating queer identities where only binaries formerly existed. An example could be women taking on classically male roles, or vice versa.

2.6 Burial Archaeology

Burial archaeology is used to study cultural and societal contexts of death and burial. Burial archaeology does not define an individual as the sum of their material parts in a burial, rather, it evaluates the material evidence in a burial to define how a community viewed an individual. We can use the grave assemblages to evaluate how a community viewed a person from a number of different societal constructs including gender, ethnicity, and status. In every source above there is an element of uncertainty when identifying individuals in the archaeological and historical records. Ultimately, graves are a better representation of community commemoration than they are of the individual being buried. This is a difficult concept, and it frequently gets sensationalised by the media. Some examples include what has happened with female warrior burials and the identification of royalty and lack of evidence for lower classes in the burial record.

Howard Williams and Duncan Sayer's 2009 *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages* is a key collection that expresses community agency in the theoretical practices of burial archaeology.[98] Williams states that:

> … burial evidence must be understood within a social context. All elements of the burial ritual may have roles in the construction of identities; the manner in which a body is treated and displayed will affect contemporary perceptions of the identities of survivors and the deceased. The grave and the body may have been regarded as special, thus the medieval burial place was not simply an acquired collection of memorials. In this way, cemeteries affected by the living through their links to the past. This approach sees cemeteries and landscapes not just as spaces within which funerals are performed and the bodies of the dead reside.

[98] Duncan Sayer and Howard Williams, *Mortuary Practice and Social Identities in the Middle Ages* (University of Exeter Press, 2009).

> They are regarded as fields of interaction between the living, and the dead in social and symbolic landscapes of medieval people.[99]

This shows how burial artefacts, landscapes, and public perceptions all impact how someone is represented in death. Furthermore, this quote shows how burials say more about a community than they say about an individual. Whether that is authentic for the person buried or not, we can never know, so it is safer and more ethical to assess burials based on collective community ideals of the dead, burial rituals, and social status.

2.7 Birka

Birka was a Viking Age town and trading centre first excavated by Knut Hjalmar Stolpe in the 1870s.[100] It was incredibly important during the Viking Age, as it was a safe centre for trading for traders entering Sweden from the Baltic region. There are at least 2000 burials at Birka and about 1100 of them have been excavated. [101] The diversity of the burials is massive and include inhumations, burnt burials, chamber graves, burials mounds, coffin burials to name a few.[102] A significant problem with such early excavated sites is the lack modern method available to Stolpe in the 19th Century. Hjalmar Stolpe and his team used only basic methodology in the excavations at Birka, as was common for many other sites from the ancient world excavated in the nineteenth century.

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[99] Howard Williams, "'Halls of Mirrors': Death and Identity in Medieval Archaeology", in *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages*, ed. Duncan Sayer and Howard Williams (University of Exeter Press 2009), 3-4.

[100] Bjorn Ambrosiani,,"Birka", in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 94.

When refererring to burials, I am referring to a variety of ways in which an individual is placed in the ground after they die. Burials can include inhumations and burnt burials among many other methods of burials. Burials can include material culture to accompany the dead and this would indicate that there was a burial accompanied by a ritual rather than just an individual put in the ground after they died.

[101] Ibid, 97.

[102] Neil Price, "Dying and the Dead: Viking Age Behaviour" in in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 257.

Therefore, many of the grave goods and skeletons were catalogued incorrectly, and there was no precedent for any sort of gendered analysis. The mismanagement of the site may present problems for other burials, but this does not seem to be an issue for Bj. 581.[103] This historiography is fraught with misogyny and nationalism, and this plagues the whole field. Bj. 581 is a chamber grave initially excavated in the nineteenth century by Stolpe.[104] The original excavators of Birka did not have the same means to catalogue and store the artefacts as we do today, but there is little question that the skeleton in Bj. 581 is the original Skelton from Stolpe's initial excavation.[105] The initial excavation assumed that the skeleton was male because of the burial items found with the remains. In the 1970s the skeleton was re-examined, producing an osteological report stating that the skeleton was biologically female.[106] The osteological analysis was ignored for many years until recent genomic testing. This testing further proved that the skeleton is biologically female.[107] Not only is the skeleton female, but the person in Bj. 581 comes from a diverse geographic background and does not seem to be from Birka or Sweden at all. Instead, the genetic analysis of the skeleton shows that the Birka warrior had genetic similarities to people in the British Isles and Norway.[108] This suggests that this person or their parents were mobile and participated in trade and interaction with other Viking Age settlements even further away to the East and West.

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Anna Kjellstrom, "People in Transition: Life in the Mälaren Valley from an Osteological Perspective", in *Shetland and the Viking World. Papers from the Proceedings of the 17th Viking Congress* (2017), 198.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Hedenstierna-Jonson et. al, "A Female Warrior Confirmed," 857.

The identities and ethnicities of the Rus', Viking Rus', and who the people were of Birka is a little contentious. There is a lack of early literary sources written by the people themselves that leaves many questions about these populations unanswered. The Rus', Viking Rus', and Viking Age people were initially defined by foreign observers who did not speak their languages or by those who only knew their cultures through the works of those foreign observers. The historiography of the Viking Rus' and Birka is ripe with problematic historic assessments. One example, in particular, is the mistreatment of Bj. 581, a highly controversial burial, that I believe is of a probable non-binary person.[109] What is interesting about this burial, is that previous assessments misgendered the skeletal remains for so long because of the warrior burial assemblage that were present in the grave. This burial has many connections to places East of Birka, but the belts and mounts in particular are an indication of cultural interactions. Belts of this type were found all over Sweden and Gotland,[110] and likely originate from the Black Sea area with Steppe culture or from Saltovo-Majaki belonging to the Khazarian culture.[111] The person buried here may have been a non-binary warrior, with a burial chamber featuring a number of foreign characteristics.[112] I believe this person is probably non-binary because there is very little evidence for women being so highly decorated in military garb in burials or in the literary record. In this instance, warrior is a social definition and women

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ingmar Jansson, 'Wikingerzeitlicher Orientalischer Import in Skandinavien', in *Oldenburg - Wolin - Staraja Ladoga - Novgorod - Kiev: Handel und Handelsverbindungen in südlichen und östlichen Ostseeraum während des frühen Mittelalters, Internationale Fachkonfenerenz der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft vom 5–9 Oktober 1987* in Kiel, (*Römisch-Germanische Kommission des Deutcshen Archäeologischen Instituts,* 1988) 611.
[111] Duczko, *Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe* (Brill, 2004), 54.
[112] Hedenstierna-Jonson et. al, "A Female Warrior Confirmed," 857.

is gendered. This is why it is more likely that this person passed and presented socially as a warrior and their gendered expression remains unclear. Ultimately, the people at Birka were not Viking Rus' but had many cultural connections with the Viking Rus'. The people at Birka were part of what can be understood as a Viking Age city state in Scandinavia that depended greatly on trade and seafaring and cultural contacts indicate that it is likely that the people at Birka and the Viking Rus' shared common ancestors.

Hedenstierna-Jonson also deconstructs the typical Viking Age warrior burial, specifically Bj. 581, in Sweden to prove that modern binaries cannot apply to ancient people. Her 2017 publication on the Birka Warrior (Bj. 581) is still relatively recent, so there are not many peer-reviewed critiques published as of yet. Furthermore, I was frustrated by the overt gendering of the burial and lack of critical application of queer theory. The warrior may have presented themselves in life as non-binary, but without opening up the field to more fluid gender analyses, we will continually impress modern binary gender notions on the bodies of the past.[113] My own article, "Beating a Dead Horse… Or Two: Bj. 581," questions the ethics of gendering someone who cannot speak for themself, with a particular focus on the Bj. 581 case.[114] With creation of new queer journals that focus on queering and postcolonial theory, such as *Kyngervi* out of Iceland, we can further incorporate the deconstruction of ethnicity and identity within archaeology. Burial archaeology is key to studying the burials at Birka because the community ultimately made the decisions about the person being buried. So, we can use burial archaeology and queer theory in conjunction to evaluate how the living at Birka

[113] Elsa Simms, "Beating a Dead Horse… Or two: Bj 581" *Kyngervi* 1, 2019.
[114] Ibid.

viewed the dead. Birka and Bj. 581 showcases the necessity and dangers of an interdisciplinary approach. We must critically evaluate popular, problematic, and academic studies to evaluate the interconnectedness of the Viking Age with the cultures surrounding it.

2.8 Conclusion

Finally, reflecting on Conkey and Spector's warnings about nationalism and gender, and the promotion of ethnogenesis by the Soviets and Nazis, we can hope that future studies of the Viking Rus' will heed these warnings. In this historiography, I note trends in the field and attempts to rectify past misinterpretations in the study of the Viking Rus' and their cultural contacts. In doing so, I want to acknowledge the problematic nature of the study of identity and gender which comes down to us via the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, where many of the sources used were originally found. Nazi and Soviet archaeology exhibited that nationalistic agendas and ethnocentrism that lead to dangerous and racist histories. These histories only pushed a political agenda and limited the scope of knowledge gleaned from a more academically inclined approach to archaeology (i.e., one that deviates from nationalistic, political, and racist biases). These nationalistic agendas limited the study of the Viking Rus' for decades by forcing German or Slavic ethnicity onto a group of people without a uniform ethnic identity. Following this, early gender archaeology of Britain and America followed political movements and focused on women's histories and binary gender. This further showcased how politics and sociocultural elements influenced the study of gender archaeology. By politicising the past, Nazis and Soviets forced a modern European gender binary onto Viking Age people to influence modern people.

Scandinavian gender theorists broadened the scope of their gender studies to include diverse genders outside of a modern gender binary. Lastly, we see all of the above elements come together in modern Viking Age studies. Contemporary Viking Age scholars such as Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, and Gardeła include interdisciplinary methods in history and archaeology. By using interdisciplinary techniques and acknowledging the problematic past of Viking Rus' studies, modern scholars can better study social theories in Viking Age archaeology.

It is clear through the above evidence that studies surrounding the Viking Rus' benefitted from the progressions of gender and queer studies. Along with this, it benefited from critical race theory and allowed later scholars to acknowledge the colonialism and racism behind early expeditions into Viking Rus' archaeology in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. I will rectify and acknowledge these shortcomings by studying the Viking Rus' from an Islamic perspective and acknowledging the gender diversity of commemoration and mobility during the Viking Age. This is exceptionally clear at Birka where many of the above themes intersected.

Chapter 3 Islamic perspectives

3.1 Introduction

Literary sources describing the Viking Rus' were largely produced by Islamic writers. Among the most reliable are the primary sources left by Arabic geographers between the ninth and twelfth centuries. These sources largely consisted of travel and writings by Islamic diplomats on their travels for personal and public reasons. The texts are more reliable than others because many of these resources are contemporary with the Viking Rus'and represents first hand witnesses to Viking Rus' culture. Islamic writers were some of the first to interact with and subsequently define these groups of travelling Viking Rus'. This was because the Abbasid Caliphate had business with the Bulghars as they had converted to Islam, and the Bulghars did business with the Viking Rus' when they came by the rivers.

These texts are not, however, complete. The narratives of these sources do not fully address the women of these cultures because of cultural tendencies to focus on masculine identities. Therefore, the women mentioned in these narratives are secondary characters and only used as a means to promote masculine burial ritual. In this chapter I will focus on accounts of dying and commemoration among the Rus' in the Islamic sources and explore the Islamic perspective to illustrate that Eastern elements were clearly important in burials despite Islamic resources leaving out feminine elements in commemoration practices.[115] To do this, I will employ a form of 'reverse excavation' because we are dealing with primary sources mentioning material culture and landscapes.

[115] Williams and Sayer, *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages.* 402.

Reverse excavation will be used to look at archaeological elements of the Islamic sources. In this case, the sources illustrate the ritual that leads to the burial, and this gives us further insight into the archaeological elements found in more diverse burials.

Furthermore, at least one of the sources offers actual insight to an ancient excavation of a Viking Age burials. Therefore, an archaeological framework is used for examining the Islamic sources. The archaeological framework is applicable because the resources are explaining the rituals involved in creating burials, and therefore, the burials at Birka are somewhat comparable to this literary evidence of a culturally similar group. The archaeological framework means that I will consider the material culture mentioned in the accounts to assess how a community interpreted an individual. Furthermore, this framework will highlight the material culture mentioned in the accounts. Despite the differences between the Islamic writers themselves and the times and spaces which they were writing in, they were all able to identify Byzantine and other material culture in relation to the Viking Rus' populations they were describing or witnessing.

While considering the Islamic sources we must remember that there are inherent cultural biases surrounding death, burial, and gender that differ depending on the Caliphates and the motives of the writer.[116] This is important when considering the archaeological aspects of the Islamic account because of the geographical differences between each writer. Along with these biases, there is no evidence that the Viking Rus' in any of the literary sources were culturally or ethnically homogeneous. Though they are

[116] There were many medieval Islamic Caliphates with distinct cultural differences, and this also impacts how different Islamic writers relate to distant cultures.

Viking Rus', the Viking Rus' were travellers that came together because of trade and raiding. They encompass diverse groups of peoples from Scandinavia and along the Volga and they all brought unique cultural elements to the passages below.[117] We also see many of these cultural elements of dress and other material items at trading hubs, such as Birka.[118]

3.2 Ibn Fadlan CE 879-960

The most widely known reference to a Viking Rus' burial is Ahmed Ibn Fadlan's *Risala*. As such, Ibn Fadlan's works have been extensively studied by scholars interested in the Rus' or Viking Rus'.[119] Ibn Fadlan was a member of an Abbasid embassy sent from Baghdad to visit the Bulghars in 921 CE where he served as a religious advisor on a mission along the Volga.[120] Aside from this, little is known about his background or about the embassy's journey, other than that, he was sent by the Caliph al-Muqtadir on a diplomatic mission in response to a request for aid from the Bulghars, a newly established Islamic society, where he travelled along the Volga.[121] Ibn Fadlan met the Viking Rus' in Bulghar territory and scholars such as Upham, Montgomery, and Hraundal agree that he is a reliable eyewitness for Viking Age funerals even goes as far to mention several types

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[117] Upham *Equal Rites: Parsing Rus' Gender Values Through and Arabic Lens*.
Jonsson Hraundal, "New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/Rus in Arabic Sources."
James E. Montgomery, James E. "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1, 2017.
[118] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, "Rus', Varangians and Birka Warriors" in *The Martial Society: Aspects of Warriors, Fortifications and Social Change from the Bronze Age to the 18th Century*, (Stockholm University, 2009) 164.
[119] Upham *Equal Rites: Parsing Rus' Gender Values Through and Arabic Lens*.
Jonsson Hraundal, "New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/Rus in Arabic Sources."
James E. Montgomery, James E. "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah."
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

of death and dying in his accounts. The mention of several types of death and dying is particularly important because there are some instances where we see the sacrifice of women during a masculine burial. This is one of the only times, aside from his description of feminine dress and other writers describing feminine sacrifice, in the Islamic writings that we witness feminine death of Viking Rus' peoples.

Ibn Fadlan's account has several sections describing different attributes of the people he encountered on his travels, but his largest section of writing is on the Viking Rus'. This illustrates his acute interest in the Viking Rus' and his account of them opens with a section praising their beauty and hardiness.[122] Here he describes their clothing and looks, saying that they do not mind the cold and that they are covered in dark green tattoos.[123] The next section describes the dress of the women in the group. The women wear expensive jewelry that Ibn Fadlan says was purchased for them by the men with dirhams. He also mentions that the men buy the women beads from their travels.[124] Then he describes the uncleanliness of the Viking Rus' and how they do not wash after defecating, eating, or having sex. Ibn Fadlan is surprised by their uncleanliness and is further appalled that they have sex with enslaved girls in public.[125] He says that it is perfectly normal for onlookers to watch as people have sex in public at slave sales and when one man is finished with the enslaved girl, he passes her onto the next man.[126] He then notes that the Viking Rus' have bad hygienic habits. He says that they all wash in the

[122] Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, (Penguin Books, 2012) 45.
[123] Ibid, 46.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid, 47.

same washing basin filled with filthy water filled with each other's snot and spit.[127] The above illustrates that Ibn Fadlan was fascinated and disgusted by the Viking Rus' because of what he chose to describe. In describing their cleanliness, sexual behaviour, and hygienic habits, he is illustrating his societal frame of reference, and that these behaviours are incredibly different from what he is used to in his life and society.

After discussing their hygiene again, he discusses the rituals of their religion. He says that they make offerings of food and other gifts to a wooden post in the ground that looks like a man.[128] After this he begins describing the sick and abandoned before delving into descriptions of funerary and death rituals. This is significant because Ibn Fadlan is interested in their rituals, as they are very different from what he is used to, and this helps to illustrate his fascination with cultural behaviour deviant to his own. He says that the sick stay in a tent away from the rest of the community, and if they are healed, they get to return to regular life. If the sick die however, they will be burnt. Enslaved people who fall ill are treated differently in death as they are left for the elements to devour.[129] He then mentions that the community hangs criminals in a visible location to die, leaving the corpse until there is nothing left.[130] This is clearly intentional, and criminal deaths are used as an example for others to also not commit crimes. This is starkly different from what Ibn Fadlan is used to back home, and he describes these behaviours in great detail because he must have been shocked at the cultural differences. Furthermore, he is

[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid, 47-48.
[129] Ibid, 48-49.
[130] Ibid, 49.

unknowingly expressing his Islamic perspective when he passes judgement on these abnormal burials and this is also evident in his exclusion of feminine abnormal death.

After mentions of alternative death and ritual, Ibn Fadlan discusses the rituals associated with the death of a great man and the death of a poor man. His descriptions of these dual types of deaths illustrates, again, that Ibn Fadlan has little concern with feminine death and that he chooses to solely describe masculine death. This is likely because of his cultural perspective and the omission of women from masculine ritual in Islamic culture. Rich men are burnt and receive lavish ceremonies to escort them to the afterlife, as he discusses in greater detail later, while poorer men are put in a small boat and burned, and his belongings are given to the family. From the archaeological record at Birka, we also see females having lavish burials despite Ibn Fadlan's omission of these types of burials. If the rich man has one enslaved girl, she has to kill herself to go with him.[131] He then describes the funeral of a chieftain which was a ritual that took several days and much money.[132] Ibn Fadlan was forced to confront his gender biases because the funeral director was a woman. The director was called "The Angel of Death" and an enslaved girl was sacrificed for the ritual along with numerous animals. The ritual also includes sexual displays of rape with the drugged enslaved girl before she is murdered for the chieftain's funeral.[133] Lastly, a pyre with a boat was set up for viewing that would last several days, lavish goods were placed within the boat to go with the deceased into the afterlife. After the viewing the boat was burnt and several days later a mound was raised

[131] Ibid, 49.
[132] Ibid, 50-55.
[133] Ibid, 51.

and marked around the burnt remains.[134] Grave mounds are extremely common in Viking Age burial culture, and we see many of them at Birka. But at Birka, masculine burials are not the only burial type to receive grave mounds and boat burials.

Ibn Fadlan illustrates that there is a diversity in the burial rites for the Viking Rus' that he observed, and that is common in other Viking Age societies. He omits or does not witness high-status feminine death rituals. Ibn Fadlan says:

> When one of them falls ill, they erect a tent away from them and cast him into it, giving him some bread and water. They do not come near him or speak to him; indeed, they have no contact with him for the duration of his illness, especially if he is socially inferior or is a slave. If he recovers and gets back to his feet, he rejoins them. If he dies, they bury him, though if he was a slave they leave him there as food for the dogs and the birds.[135]

This is the only instance where he says that the Viking Rus' bury their male dead. This passage also provides a possible indication of the lack of community commemoration of lower status and enslaved people.[136] In fact, the archaeological record shows that many people buried with "odd deposits" are not rich burials and this is illustrated by Gilchrist in her research about ritual deposits.[137] "Odd deposits" are not limited to class or gender and that gender diverse burials actually hold quite a few odd ritual items.[138] However, burial rites in early Baltic Scandinavian settlements are extremely diverse and this could simply be a case of Ibn Fadlan writing down his encounters as fact, rather than having a deeper knowledge of the culture that he is experiencing.

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[134] Ibid, 52-54.
[135] Montgomery, "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah" 11.
[136] Neil Price "Dying and the Dead: Viking Age Mortuary Behaviour" In *The Viking Way*. Stefan Brink and Neil Price. London (New York: Routledge, 2008), 257.
[137] Roberta Gilchrist "Magic and Archaeology: Ritual Residues and "Odd" Deposits," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. S. Page and C. Rider, (Routledge, 2019) 383-384.
[138] Ibid.

There are also many people lost to the burial record, as can be seen in the case of the slaves in this passage. This is because remains do not last for long periods of time when they are simply exposed to the elements. Furthermore, there is another layer of potential variance in deviant or criminal burials and burials of enslaved peoples and how they are presented in the written and archaeological records. Although many people are completely lost to the burial record, we do know of several burials where there is evidence of possible human sacrifice of enslaved people.[139] This is relevant because there are even burials of noble feminine people buried with people who seem to have been enslaved feminine people.[140] Ibn Fadlan gives us a glimpse at women in Viking Rus' society, but he does not indulge fully in their roles in society outside of serving their masculine peers. Ultimately, this ritual and burial "grey area" or "in-between" in Ibn Fadlan's work open up the possibility for gender diverse burials existing in the archaeological record, which we have much evidence for. There are two options for why he omits women from his records: 1) because he is expressing his Islamic perspective and is omitting women because there is no interest in what regular Viking Age women were doing, or 2) because he simply did not witness culturally Viking Rus' women other than witnessing their dress styles and decided that this was the only thing worth noting other than the women who deviated greatly from the cultural norms of women that he was accustomed to. Again, burials occur in diverse ways, and there is no way of knowing the status of the people who were not the primary person in the burials.[141] Given the

[139] Appendix 2, Table 1.
[140] Kirsten Ruffoni, *Viking Age Queens: The Example of Oseberg*, (University of Oslo, 2011) 40.
[141] Howard Williams, "'Halls of Mirrors': Death and Identity in Medieval Archaeology," 9.

communities he is witnessing, it seems likely that he is only part of status male burials. This does not negate the presence of other people or other burials – it only negates his presence at them. Therefore, Ibn Fadlan is likely only presenting what he witnessed.

Another example of commemoration in Ibn Fadlan's account is what he is told about criminals and their punishments. He says

> If they catch a thief or a bandit, they bring him to a large tree and tie a strong rope around his neck. They tie it to the tree and leave him hanging there until <the rope> breaks, by exposure to the rain and the wind[142]

This is a dehumanizing death, where the victim is left hanging for the community, or passers-by, to see until they die, after which they become a spectacle. This is a negative form of commemoration lost to the burial record. Thus, the kind of negative commemoration noted in Ibn Fadlan's account is meant to illustrate that the community intends to forget a person, while commemoration runestones and burial mounds are meant for remembrance. This relates back to the omission of feminine people because Ibn Fadlan thought it more important to speak of deviant deaths than it was to talk about Viking Rus' feminine deaths. Without the burial record, we are left to make assumptions about people who were allowed the opportunity of commemoration.

Nevertheless, there are also differences in burial and death rituals depending on the type of death suffered by an individual such as how death by illness differs from a burial ritual for a great warrior. We can garner the status differences in who is afforded commemoration. The people who were afforded the most commemoration are higher status individuals. This also points to the diversity in burial, and perhaps also the diversity

[142] Montgomery, "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah," 12.

in information given to Ibn Fadlan by the translator, who could be receiving information from a culturally diverse groups of people. Despite the translator knowing Arabic and the language of the Viking Rus', we do not know of the background of the translator and this further complicates the information of the account because we are unaware of the translator's cultural biases.

Ibn Fadlan noted the higher status individuals prior to his exposure to the chieftain's funeral:

> In the case of a rich man, they gather together his possessions and divide them into three, one third for his family, one third to use for garments, and one third with which they purchase alcohol which they drink on the day when his slave-girl kills herself and is cremated together with her master. (They are addicted to alcohol, which they drink night and day. Sometimes one of them dies with the cup still in his hand.)[143]

This passage gives us the sense of the costs of a high-status funeral. The largest cost is the death of an enslaved girl. Not all of the Islamic accounts report the death of an enslaved girl during Viking Rus' funerals, and this particular account suggests that there is, in fact, thought put into sacrificing a person from the community. As we will see, Ibn Rustah and Ibn Miskawayh also write about the sacrifice of Viking Rus' women from the communities and enslaved men as well. This illustrates that it is not just enslaved women who die at their master's funerals but also other people in society who are not viewed as significant members. A whole third of the value of the chieftain's possessions are used for burial garments and furnishings. We also see the community element in the funerary ritual when Ibn Fadlan states the amount they use for drink, assuming that this amount also includes the cost of the celebrations that the community take part in. This offering is

[143] Ibid.

a goodwill gesture from the family for the community in commemoration of the chieftain. Therefore, it is likely that the lavish burials full of foreign goods were meant to be seen before they were buried.[144] This means that the communities in Ibn Fadlan's account and at Birka would know the association with Eastern material goods in burials and death when viewing the rituals.

Here, we can use reverse excavation. Ibn Fadlan explains the intentions of the community when someone dies and how they want to commemorate them. He explains how the community defines the chieftain through ritual and material goods. This is the part of burials that we do not see when doing archaeology, but this section and the section below explicitly describe the goods and the significance of the ritual in plain detail. This gives scholars a glance at the time just before the burial was completed. We can plainly see that Byzantine and Islamic material culture were used in the furnishing of the chieftain's burial, but again, it is important to remember that this is only one burial and we cannot generalize for all populations. We are lacking evidence of feminine burials and instances of feminine people owning Byzantine and Islamic items. Though this is the case, we do see that The Angel of Death is responsible for the funeral direction, and she must have a large amount of entitlement in the community to be able to do so, which indicates a female presence in the ritual. Therefore, death and ritual with belongings and commemoration from the East is not a solely masculine task or rite and we will see that in the burial record at Birka.

[144] Ruffoni, *Viking Age Queens: The Example of Oseberg*, 19.

Furthermore, we are told that "They placed him in his grave and erected a canopy over it for ten days, until they had finished making and sewing his <funeral garments>."[145] Ten days is a long time for a funeral, so this must also be a period for mourning outside of the preparations that needed to be made for the funeral itself. This ten-day mourning period would be lost in the archaeological record, and is impossible to connect with other known burials, but we can see from inhumations, and some cremations, that it must have taken the community a long time to prepare to bury a community member. Though, high-status seems to be the key to the availability of such a commemorative ritual.

Ibn Fadlan's most in depth section is on the funerary ritual for the chieftain and the murder and rape of the enslaved women. The account starts as such:

> I was told that when their chieftains die, the least they do is to cremate them. I was very keen to verify this, when I learned of the death of one of their great men.[146]

Already we can see differences between the above descriptions of the treatment of those that have died from illness, but the amount of time invested in the ritual is clearly an important element of the burial. This is an extremely well-furnished burial and in the archaeological record, we see well finished burials but never see how the items ended up in the burials. This is a glimpse at the community commemoration of the chieftain and how they decided to celebrate his life and represent him in death. There is again also an element of community participation, and especially for the chieftain, this is an elaborate affair. Altogether, this is a performance created by the community surrounding the

[145] Montgomery, "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah,", 13.
[146] Ibid, 12-13.

chieftain to commemorate his life. Much like the other accounts below, social currency in life can afford different types of commemoration in death. Furthermore, the type of commemoration performance expressed to the community can create further social currency for those close to the deceased, like family and associates. This social currency connected to material culture and the cultural performances. Here, the social currency is connected to the personal goods of and donations to the chieftain's burial. The community would recognize these material items at the funeral ritual and would associate them with social and material wealth. Ultimately, the later placement and descriptions of Byzantine goods specifically indicates an importance understood by the community for Viking Rus' commemoration with foreign objects that would indicate high social wealth.

In this passage, to begin with, we see a description of the minimum requirement of the ritual for a chieftain. He says that: "…the least they do is cremate them"[147] This suggests that even if physical or monetary means to a funeral were not accessible, the Viking Rus' would cremate high status males. Clearly, cremation is a common ritual across the spectrum of social strata, but Ibn Fadlan only talks about men receiving this rite. Burnt burials are extremely common in Scandinavia and they certainly burnt feminine burials in the archaeological record which are problematically gendered based upon the surviving goods that were burnt.[148]

Along with the lux goods, the funeral itself takes ten days, and is orchestrated by a woman known to Ibn Fadlan as the "Angel of Death". The Angel of Death is the most interesting part of this ritual, as she is the only other woman noted in such detail other

[147] Ibid, 12.
[148] Neil Price, "Dying and the Dead: Viking Age Behaviour", 257.

than the enslaved girl and, we can see here that this person was the architect of the chieftain's funerary ritual.[149] Furthermore, the name that the translator decides to use when telling Ibn Fadlan about the Angel of Death is curious, as there is no knowledge of such a title for a magical woman in Old Norse rhetoric. The closest association we have may be *seiðr*. The angel of death may be comparable to the possible *seiðr* burials mentioned in Neil Price's *The Viking Way* or to Leszek Gardeła's research on staffs and *seiðr*.[150] Nevertheless, the women in Ibn Fadlan's account may have been connected to similar violent ritual magics.[151] This is evident from the burial record and the artefacts left behind in *seiðr* burials. Some of these artefacts include staffs, sacrificed people, and other magical implements.[152] For the purposes of this thesis, we can see the Angel of Death as an instance of feminine violent power and a voice of authority.[153]

The status of goods and services provided before the final ritual were of the utmost quality. We know from this quote: "Then they produced a couch and placed it on the ship, covering it with quilts <made of> Byzantine silk brocade and cushions <made of> Byzantine silk brocade."[154] Byzantine silk indicates important cultural contacts that are also evident in burials in Scandinavia.[155] Archaeological evidence along trade routes frequented by the Viking Rus' indicate that Byzantine trade was important to their

[149] Upham, *Equal Rites: Parsing Rus' Gender Values Through and Arabic Lens*, 15.
[150] Leszek Gardela, "Biography of the Seiðr-Staffs. Towards an Archaeology of Emotions," in *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North* (Rzeszów University, 2009), 190-192.
Price, *The Viking Way*, 128.
[151] Price, *The Viking Way*, 128.
[152] Ibid.
[153] A.R. Gatrad, "Muslim Customs Surrounding Death, Bereavement, Postmotem Examinations, and Organ Transplants." *BMJ* 309, no. 6953 (1994): 552.
[154] Montgomery, "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah," 15.
[155] Appendix 2, Table 1.

economy, and many of the items imported from Byzantium wound up in Scandinavia. Furthermore, this shows existing associations with different cultural goods associated with death, burial, and commemoration. Byzantine silk and other pieces of East-of-Scandinavia material culture are important commemorative offerings in Scandinavian burials, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. This includes Kufic coins and Islamic jewelry among many other pieces of material culture.

We can also see from this account that family input is important in the sacrificing of an enslaved person. Ibn Fadlan states:

> When their chieftain dies, his family ask his slave-girls and slave-boys, "Who among you will die with him?" and some of them reply, "I shall." Having said this, it becomes incumbent upon the person and it is impossible to ever turn back. Should the person try to, he is not permitted to do so. It is usually slave-girls who make this offer.[156]

Sacrificing a person, regardless of social status, seems wasteful and like a loss of labour. Ibn Fadlan gives a graphic example of someone who was coerced into non-consensually volunteering to be sacrificed. There is a power dynamic that is evident between enslaved people and their slaveholder, and regardless of if the enslaved people were asked if they wanted to be sacrificed, they were still in a compromised position as enslaved people. There is much we do not know about these rituals. Later we see that consent and agency are ignored in the ritual, when the enslaved girl is drugged and raped. Furthermore, we see that it is "…usually slave-girls who make this offer." This shows a bias towards women, and especially enslaved women, in Viking Rus' culture. Perhaps this bias illustrates that women were not valued in the same way as men were and enslaved women

[156] Montgomery, "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah," 14.

were valued even less. What we can see is that the women in the account are closely associated with the act of commemoration and the parts of the ceremony that are not overtly of Viking Rus' origin. For example, the Angel of Death furnishes the burial with Byzantine goods and clothing and the enslaved girl is not originally Viking Rus' and her ethnic origins are unknown. We can assume here that the garments are culturally ritualised tapestries, because the Angel of Death is responsible for making them.[157] Whether the materials are culturally Viking Rus' or not is a bigger question, but we do see culturally Scandinavian garments made out of foreign material in the burial records at Scandinavian settlements in the western Baltic and in Scandinavia itself.[158] An example of this is at Oseberg, where there is evidence of silks from the East.[159] It is particularly important that we note the Byzantine silks as an important aspect of Viking Rus' funerary culture and is a practice in commemoration.[160]

It has been noted by several scholars that Ibn Fadlan's account of the Viking Rus' people is notably different than his interactions with other cultures along his journey. Johnsson Hraundal, for example, notes that Ibn Fadlan spends the most time on this account, with far more ethnographical evidence (in a modern sense) than is found in the rest of his writing.[161] Perhaps this is connected to his intimacy and involvement with the funerary ritual, especially because of the whole Viking Rus' community's sense of

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[157] Ulla Mannering, *Iconic Costumes: Scandinavian Late Iron Age Costume Iconography*, (Oxbow Books, 2017).
[158] Appendix 2, Table 1.
[159] Mannering, *Iconic Costumes: Scandinavian Late Iron Age Costume Iconography*.
The only remark I will make on the enslaved girl, is that the slave trade was massive in this area of the world during the Viking Age, and we can assume that she was not originally a Viking Rus' woman.
[160] Upham, *Equal Rites: Parsing Rus' Gender Values Through and Arabic Lens*, 25.
[161] Jonsson Hraundal, *The Rus' in Arabic Sources: Cultural Contacts and Identity*, 107.

togetherness in the brutal rape and sacrifice of an enslaved girl.[162] His interest is also perhaps because he has never seen such a spectacle, even though earlier resources hint at this ceremony, but never explain in this type of detail the rituals of human sacrifice.[163] Nevertheless, despite the descriptions of the ceremony and the brutality, Ibn Fadlan never decides to enlighten the reader with information about other aspects of these people, including their language. It is unknown why he did not include this information, and without it, scholars will never be able to fully place the cultural identity of this group of people.[164] Furthermore, despite his physical presence at the event, Ibn Fadlan's information is mediated through an unknown interpreter. This further complicates the account, because it is being explained to him through a singular person. Nevertheless, reverse excavating the ceremony can still bring important cultural elements to life.

Ultimately, we can garner some useful information from Ibn Fadlan's account. The most useful for my argument is that women orchestrated the funeral, and they were the people who acquired the foreign wealth for the funerary ritual of the chieftain. This indicates that women had a relationship to community commemoration and the commemoration of community members using high-status Eastern material culture. This is illustrated through the use of Byzantine silks in Ibn Fadlan's account. Byzantine and Islamic material culture is also common in burials at Birka, but the goods are not limited to masculine burials. Furthermore, we see evidence of potential human sacrifice at Birka,

[162] Ibid, 107.
[163] Earlier writers such as Ibn Rustah and Al Masudi describe Viking Rus' funerary practices, but not in the detail that Ibn Fadlan does. Perhaps, this is because Ibn Fadlan was fascinated by the earlier sources and revelled in the ritual because of his previous research.
[164] Jonsson Hraundal, "New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/Rus in Arabic Sources," 82-83.

but not all the cases are male and female burials and in some instances the burials indicate a double feminine burial. Despite the fact that Ibn Fadlan did witness women at the funeral of the chieftain, we are still left wondering what he may have described if he witnessed a high-status feminine burial.

3.3 Ibn Rustah CE 903 – (?)

Ahmad Ibn 'Umar Rustah was a Persian Muslim geographer during the Abassid period, and wrote between 903 and 913. Despite travelling in 903, scholars do not believe he witnessed a Viking Rus' funeral; rather he is believed to have referenced other Islamic writers for much of the information presented in his seven-volume work.[165] This is because of the lack of information on locations and similarities in writings between his and other Islamic travel and geography writers but it is unknown exactly where he got his information. Ibn Rustah's writings represent a different context than that of Ibn Fadlan's because it seems that Ibn Rustah's Viking Rus' were residing in their homeland and were not travelling at the time. I decided to use Ibn Rustah's account because it is an alternative to the other accounts where the Viking Rus' are travelling. Perhaps this account can give better insight into what was happening at Birka rather than focusing on more maverick burials scattered along trade routes as described by Ibn Fadlan.

His account describes Viking Rus' funeral rituals on an unknown island on an unnamed lake. There is no evidence that Ibn Rustah travelled past Russia, nor is there

[165] Ibn Rustah. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, (Penguin Books, 2012) 116.

enough information in the account to locate the island. Ibn Rustah states in his writing that he travelled with the Viking Rus' to Novgorod:

> When a leading man dies, they dig a hole as big as a house in which they bury him dressed in his clothes and wearing his gold bracelet, accompanying the corpse with food, jars of wine and coins. They bury his favourite woman with him while she is still alive, shutting her inside the tomb and there she dies.[166]

First, we see that the dead are buried as opposed to burnt and then buried. It is clear enough in Ibn Rustah's sources that the Viking Rus' hounoured their dead in elaborate funerals with rich goods. This could mean that this is either a different group within the many Viking Age cultures that existed during the Viking Age, or it is just representative of the diversity of burials. In many instances in the archaeological record, we see both cremation and inhumation burials within the same burial grounds.[167] This is evident at Birka, where we see cremations and inhumations both associated with Byzantine and Islamic material culture.

An example in this account that could reference foreign objects is the mention of coins. We know coins in Scandinavia were largely from the Abbasid Caliphate and that they were so popular that we even find copies of Islamic coins made locally in Scandinavia.[168] These Kufic coins were seen as a status item and would have been recognized as such by Viking Age peoples. When we see Kufic coins in burials, we can assume that there is a communal association with Islamic material culture and social or

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[166] Ibid, 127.
[167] Price, "Dying and the Dead: Viking Age Behaviour", 257.
[168] Gert Rispling, "Catalogue and Comments on the Islamic Coins from the Excavations 1990-1995", in *Birka Studies Volume 6, Eastern Connections Part Two: Numismatics and Metrology* (Stockholm, 2004) 26.

material wealth. Aside from the coins, we can see the common theme of human sacrifice. This is another common theme among Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah, and Ibn Miskawayh and another theme we see in the burials at Birka. The theme of foreign material culture is also expressed in Ibn Rustah's writings and illustrates that Viking Age people were aware of the significance of Eastern material culture.

Both the Islamic writings and the archaeological evidence illustrate that human sacrifice or at least doubly occupied burials were common during the Viking Age. Here, our only description of women is that the man's favourite dies with him, and she could thus be either free or enslaved. Ibn Rustah also fails to mention burial rites for feminine people, and the lack of such information might indicate that he either did not witness any feminine death, or his resources for his writings also did not mention any feminine death. Furthermore, It is likely that the cultural group described in Ibn Rustah's writings are a different group than the group described by Ibn Fadlan, but they would all fall under the category of Viking Age Viking Rus' diaspora cultures.

3.4 Ibn Miskawayh CE 932-1030

Ibn Miskawayh wrote his account, *Tajarib al-umam* (Experiences of Nations) in 943, which includes an account of the Rus'. He was a Persian historian and philosopher during the Buyid dynasty.[169] We know that this text is based on eyewitness accounts, but there is a small possibility that he witnessed the events himself.[170] His section on the Rus' chronicles a Viking Rus' attack on Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea. Raids on the Caspian

[169] Ibn Miskawayh. *Tajarib al-umam (Experiences of the Nations) on the Rus raid on Bardha'a 943* in *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North* (Penguin, 2012) 145.
[170] Ibid, 145.

Sea were not uncommon in the mid-tenth century, and this account illustrates the resilience of the Viking Rus' in their raiding, among many other things.

This account illustrates transient Viking Rus' burials and is similar to Ibn Fadlan's account. But unlike Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Miskawayh does not seem to be an active participant in the types of funerals described. Therefore, there are some clear differences between the writings, namely that the active ritual elements of the community were missing from this account. The reason the Viking Rus' are burying their dead is attributed to an illness plaguing the raiding party:

> In addition, the epidemic became even more severe. When one of them died they buried him with his arms, clothes and equipment, along with his wife or another of his women, and his slave, if he happened to be fond of him, as was their custom. After they left, the Muslims dug up the graves and found a number of swords, which are in great demand to this day for their sharpness and excellence. When their numbers were reduced, they left the fortress in which they had established their quarters by night, carrying all the loot they could on their backs, including gems and fine raiment, and burning the rest.[171]

The account itself is short, but full of useful information about commemoration among this particular group. We see, again, that material culture is a significant aspect of Viking Rus' funerary ritual from the mention that individuals were buried fully clothed and with material goods. However, Ibn Miskawyh omits feminine burials and does not mention the types of burial furnishings outside of mentioning culturally Viking Rus' or Viking Age material culture. This does not mean that Muslim material culture was not significant for the Viking Rus', rather, the raids and battles themselves indicate how significant acquiring Islamic material culture was for the Viking Rus'. This indicate motive for raiding and trading in such distant places rather than just waiting for trade routes to

[171] Ibid, 151.

deliver Islamic and Byzantine material culture to the Western Baltic or Scandinavia. Furthermore, Ibn Miskawayh describes some of the more common artefacts in the burials through an almost archaeological lense. The Muslims in the account actually dig up the burials to loot them.

Along with this, we see a difference in the selection of sacrificed persons for the burial. In these burials, it seems like it was not uncommon for someone to be accompanied by two other people in the afterlife. Furthermore, he suggests that women were a key component to this sacrificial ritual, while the male enslaved person was a bonus if their owner was particularly fond of them. Upham explains the gender dynamics in the account:

> Miskawayh's discussion of the gendered component of Rus' funerary sacrifice presents some interesting distinctions. It is noteworthy that he distinguishes between female sacrifices and the favoured male slaves, as this raises questions about the potential purposes of each sacrifice. Did the Rus', or Miskawayh at least, draw a firm line between the uses of a wife in the afterlife and the uses of a male slave?[172]

Upham raises an interesting question about burial dynamics and the hierarchy of sacrificed people in burials.

Perhaps the most interesting thing is that there is a different type of consideration made when deciding if an enslaved masculine person will accompany his master in the afterlife. It seems like the obvious decision from the literary record to sacrifice a wife or concubine for this ceremony, but there is some community thought and consideration put into the sacrifice of an unfree male. This is parallel in the burial record for women, as we see women buried with possible sacrificed men, and women buried with possible

[172] Upham, *Equal Rites: Parsing Rus' Gender Values Through and Arabic Lens*, 22.

sacrificed women as well. The literary record again complicates the archaeological record. Ibn Miskawayh's writing states that "When one of them died they buried him with his arms, clothes and equipment, along with his wife or another of his women, and his slave, if he happened to be fond of him, as was their custom."[173] This hints at the diversity of choices in burial and who could accompany whom in the afterlife. Again, we also do not know of the cultural origins of the enslaved people accompanying this group of Viking Rus' and this could be another element of diversity present in Viking Rus' burials.

Imaginably, the diversity of the enslaved people accompanied by the act of trading and raiding is one of the reasons why foreign objects became so important in Viking Age burials. The most fascinating part of this account is the unintended archaeological confirmation of what existed in these burials. This is because we do not often get a glimpse at these rituals or these rituals during raiding activities. Based on the Islamic accounts, we know that the dead were buried with material culture such as Byzantine silk and Kufic coins. These artefacts were recycled by the Muslims who looted the burials, but these artefacts were meant to accompany these dead Viking Rus' into the afterlife. Ibn Miskawayh's account was documented from eyewitnesses who saw violent acts of raiding, providing a different context to Ibn Fadlan's work who was a guest among the Viking Rus', participating fully in their rituals and customs. This gives Ibn Miskawayh's account a wholly different tone than that of Ibn Fadlan. Nevertheless, we still see fascination with international high-status objects in Ibn Miskawayh's account.

[173] Ibn Rustah. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, 151.

This account also lists some of the burial objects. Of course, swords are common in Viking Age, Viking Rus', and Rus' burials. Furthermore, we see a vague statement about "…gems and fine raiment…" demonstrating the importance of foreign objects in high-status male burials. [174] For this group of Viking Rus', the use of foreign objects is perhaps out of convenience due to their proximity to Islamic peoples, but the trend of connecting Byzantine and Islamic artefacts to Scandinavian and Rus' burials is undeniably fairly prevalent.

It is hard to compare Ibn Rustah to Ibn Miskawayh or either of them to Ibn Fadlan because of the reliability and accuracy of the sources. I think that we can gather that early interest from Islamic writers about Rus' funerary rituals came out of curiosity because of the cultural differences. The Viking Rus' people were also relatively easy to study for the Islamic writers because of the Viking Rus' proximity to the Caliphate through trade and through territories influenced by Islam through Russia and North Eastern Europe. It was important for the Caliphate to know the people they were trading with to facilitate good trading relations. These trading relations were received well enough because of the presence of Islamic material culture in the burials at Birka.

3.5 Islamic Sources Discussion

Although there has been extensive research on the Viking Rus' people travelling the Russian rivers, very few scholars have analysed in any depth the acts of commemoration carried out during Viking Rus' funerary rituals and recorded by these

[174] Ibn Miskawayh. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, 151.

Islamic writers.[175] The biggest issues with the writings of Ibn Rustah and Ibn Miskawayh is that we are uncertain if they were contemporary witnesses. Ibn Rustah and Ibn Miskawayh are important and reliable resources, but they used other Islamic sources to complete their histories. Regardless, these accounts are important because they reference similar funeral practices as the funeral mentioned above in Ibn Fadlan's account. Ibn Rustah's writing is earlier than Ibn Fadlan's, which shows the early interest in Islamic society towards "barbaric" funeral accounts.

Aziz Al-Azmeh makes some interesting points on the difference between interactions with other Europeans and the Viking Rus':

> So, while the Frankish, Slavic (among whom the Germanic peoples were counted) and Turkic (which were thought to include the Russians and the Volga Bulgars) peoples and other inhabitants of the sixth zone were generally melancholic and splenetic folk, given to savagery and the cultivation of the arts of war and the chase to the exclusion of properly civilized pursuits, they were merely barbarous, and not consummately barbarian. They lived in a condition of distemper which did not prevent them from acquiring a number of features associated with civilized society, especially large-scale territorial states and organized religion, preferably monotheistic - according to medieval Arabic social and political thought, it was the state which imposed culture upon the natural condition of men. Thus, social and political considerations mitigated ecological determinism in the case of some northern peoples, while physical factors mitigated it in other cases. Yet among these peoples there were decided manifestations of barbarousness, as measured through three indices. The first was filth, the inverse of refinement and urbanity, perhaps most vividly described in Ibn Fadlan's account of his visit to the Russ in c. 921. Equally indexical were profligate sexuality and the lack of jealousy ascribed to all Europeans. Finally, a particularly spectacular manifestation of barbarousness concerned funerary rites, replete with fire, violence and dark eroticism, most lavishly described by Ibn Fadlan.[176]

[175] Some of the most thorough and recent works regarding the Viking Rus' from an Islamic perspective are Þorir Jonsson Hraundal's PhD dissertation, *The Rus in Arabic Sources*[175] and the MA dissertation of his student Tonicha Upham, on gender in Ibn Fadlan's account of a Viking Rus' funeral.
[176] Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past & Present*, 1992: 8.

Al-Azmeh notes specifically how Muslim writers did not necessarily believe that all Europeans were barbarians, but rather that barbarism existed on a cultural spectrum. "Barbarousness" for the Muslim writers is a way to elevate their own culture, and to criticize another. Despite different concepts of race during the Viking Age, we certainly encounter instances of prejudice. This is an important note before assessing the evidence, because this is the filter in which we are conducting our reverse excavation of these funerary rituals. We must note that this lense was filtered through upper-class literate Muslim society. Equally, we cannot treat Muslim society as homogeneous, just as we cannot treat Viking Age cultures as a uniform group.

As we will see later in the archaeology, Islamic and Byzantine artefacts are not necessarily from where we think the Caliphate or Byzantium was. Rather, through cultural diffusion, we find a plethora of intricate instances of cultural and community commemoration through diverse material culture. The many groups in this "in-between" place express diverse culture, including pagans, Jews, Christians, and Muslims among others. Furthermore, none of these groups lived in a vacuum, and many lived among each other and interacted with people of different backgrounds on a daily basis.

3.6 Archaeology in the Texts

Though Ibn Rustah's account may not be an eyewitness account, we can still assume that the Islamic sources above exhibit how important foreign material culture was in Viking Rus' funeral rituals. This is also abundantly evident in the archaeological record. The sources fill in gaps for us by filling in living ritual elements of a formerly unknown ritual. It is also clear that there was no secrecy in sharing funerary rituals with

people from other cultures. This cultural filter provides us with possible descriptions of missing pieces and helps us to reverse engineer the "stage set" for what we find in the ground. Price says when referring to Ibn Fadlan's work:

> The central importance of this text for our understanding of Viking Age burials can hardly be overstated, especially in its implication that what we see in the archaeological remains is merely the 'stage set' at the close of a 'play', leaving only hints of the possible days of activity that precede and contextualise the actual interment or cremation. We should also consider the 'afterlife' of burials in terms of their continued active use within the community.[177]

If anything, these sources inform us of the cross-cultural interest between the Viking Rus' and Islamic people. The Islamic Caliphate was interested in the Viking Rus' from anthropological and trade perspectives, while the Viking Rus' were interested from a trade perspective, as is evident from the archaeological record.[178] It is hard to tell if the Viking Rus' had an academic interest in Islamic observers because of the one-sidedness of the Islamic accounts.[179] Furthermore, medieval Islamic gender, social, and economic expectations are superimposed upon these accounts which are recorded in such detail because the Islamic writers wished to create shocking detail to invoke interest in these writings. This means that the Islamic writers were "Othering" by describing the Viking Rus' graphically with the purpose of creating a sense of cultural superiority that their readers back home would understand. The Viking Rus' were participating in systems of commemoration witnessed by Islamic writers and serviced by the East, whether they

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[177] Neil Price "Dying and the Dead: Viking Age Mortuary Behaviour" 267.
[178] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, "Rus', Varangians and Birka Warriors" in *The Martial Society: Aspects of Warriors, Fortifications and Social Change from the Bronze Age to the 18th Century*, (Stockholm University, 2009) 166.
[179] We see this interest in the abundance of Kufic coins, copy Kufic coins, and Islamic material culture present in the archaeological record. This evidence comes from burials, hoards, and settlement sites among many other places. We also see the influence in trade from Islamic traders because of the weight and scale systems used by Viking Age traders who must have acquired the tradition from Islamic traders.

realized it or not. The Viking Rus' were also likely participating in the commemoration of elite women, but we do not see that in the literary evidence.

3.7 Conclusion

Reverse excavation of the literary source illustrates there were long and extravagant ceremonies of commemoration among the Viking Rus', which included a diversity of material culture prior to the actual burial of the dead. Furthermore, these accounts show us who is missing from the burial record. This is known because the archaeological record indicates that there were feminine burials, lower-status burials, and deviant criminal burials. We can presume that the missing deaths were deliberately forgotten, and that the communities decided that these people did not warrant a place in history. Despite their best efforts at prolonged commemoration, Ibn Fadlan's explanation of the criminal deviant dead depicts scenarios where these people were briefly afforded commemoration in a negative fashion. Ultimately, the forms of commemoration in the Islamic accounts were not limited to the male elite, as is indicated in the archaeological record. We can also consider that perhaps burials were misgendered by the Islamic observers. This could easily happen as is evident with Bj. 581 and many other burials where high status feminine people are the primary person in the burial. Clearly, we see evidence of Byzantine and Islamic material culture in Viking Age burials other than high-status masculine burials, so misgendering is a real possibility. An example of this again is Bj. 581. It is completely unknown how the community at Birka gendered this person, and they could have easily had a burial ritual comparable to the chieftain's in Ibn Fadlan's account. Furthermore, the masculine burials described are helpful in analyzing feminine

burials in the actual archaeological record because we see similar or related material culture placed in feminine burials as well.

The best direct link we have to this phenomenon of Islamic writers researching and witnessing the Viking Rus' are the writings from Ibn Fadlan. Otherwise, the other Islamic sources only serve to amplify Ibn Fadlan's writings and to reaffirm the Islamic obsession with death and burial practices in other cultures, especially the Viking-Age Rus' cultures. Furthermore, the literary record shows the agency of the writer of the source, while the archaeological burial record shows the agency of a community, a family, or both. We can garner ideas of the funerary rituals from writers like Ibn Fadlan, but ultimately it is being filtered through his Islamic perspective and we are left with what he is the most fascinated by. We have little idea about the pragmatic nature of these rituals to the community themselves, and that's why comparing the rituals in the Islamic written sources to the archaeological resource can then serve to amplify the reverse archaeology of the burials. We see this through the indications the Islamic writers give us about the events before the burials at places such as Birka became archaeology. Ultimately, we cannot know the agency of the dead, but we can learn how communities viewed some of the Eastern aspects of Viking Age burials such as the Kufic coins or the Byzantine silks or even that the Viking Rus' communities were comfortable with foreign observers to their funerary rituals. This is helpful in figuring out how communities treated diverse genders and how they may have viewed the dead and associated them with gendered items and items from foreign places. The dead do not have worldly agency, so we are left to speculate about the culture surrounding them rather than the dead

themselves. Therefore, from the Islamic accounts, we can tell that the Viking Rus' communities were comfortable with Islamic observers and incorporated many aspects of foreign cultures into their funerary rituals. This is important for my argument because we see in the archaeological record that foreign artefacts were not only important for high-status masculine burials and that we find high-status Islamic and Byzantine material culture in feminine and possible non-binary burials as well.

Chapter 4 Archaeology

4.1 Introduction

As seen above, literary sources can lend themselves to the contextual understanding of Viking Rus' funerary rituals and their association with Eastern finds, but the archaeological record is also a viable resource. Furthermore, the Viking Rus' are an offshoot cultural group of other Viking Age populations, and therefore, the Islamic writings about the Viking Rus' can connect us to the significance of Eastern finds in Viking Age burials in Scandinavia. Material culture complicates things when studying death and burial because of the problematic nature of associating burial objects with the buried person. Every artefact in this section needs to be thought of as an expression of community rather than of the individual in a burial. Birka will act as a case study to determine the significance of cultural exchange between Birka and cultures to the East. I chose Birka because it has some of the most significant Islamic material culture in several burials and it was an important trading hub with easy access to the Baltic. The significance of foreign objects in the Birka burials illustrates the cultural significance of trade and commemoration for the people at Birka.

Furthermore, the community placement of foreign artefacts in burials illuminates that community commemoration practices were not limited to the male elite. Rather, these rites were also allowed to women and probable non-binary people in the archaeological record. This section will further illustrate how Scandinavians commemorated the dead in connection with cultures East of Sweden. Ultimately, the graves at Birka offer a more nuanced view of Viking Age society that was more inclusive of women and possible non-

binary people than scholars previously thought. Graves do not only show a masculinized narrative of Viking Age society and we can use the foreign objects in the burials at Birka to prove this. We also see foreign objects, specifically Byzantine and Islamic material culture, associated with feminine and possible non-binary burials, and this illustrates a greater connection travel and trade for people other than masculine ones. Therefore, women and probably non-binary people were commemorated by their communities alongside masculine burials with Byzantine and Islamic material culture.

Evidence of Byzantine and Islamic artefacts in burials litters the Western Baltic, Scandinavia, and even the British Isles. Outside of Birka in other Scandinavian contexts, there is evidence of commemoration through Byzantine and Islamic material culture at other sites like Sigtuna and Gotland.[180] Furthermore, the material culture has different meanings before and after the Christianisation of Scandinavia. Wladyslaw Duczko's article "Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden: Archaeological Finds and Their Evidence" exhibits this deep-rooted connection between material culture and Orthodox Christianity. This connection to Orthodox Christianity was inevitable because of the trade relations between Byzantium, the Volga trade routes, and the trade route connections to the Baltic and Scandinavia. This connection was well established before the Scandinavia's conversion to Christianity, as is evident from sites like Birka and the Byzantine and Islamic artefacts present at the settlement. Duczko also warns of the complexities of studying foreign objects from a Scandinavian perspective, saying that "…

[180] Duczko, "Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden Archaeological Finds and their Interpretation," 291.

it demands detailed knowledge of both local and foreign material…"[181] because of the numerous factors for which the material culture arrived in Sweden.[182] Specifically, having a knowledge of Byzantine and Islamic material culture is an asset along with having some knowledge in Old Norse, Runology, Greek, and Arabic for textual translations.

Another issue brought up by Duczko is how the Byzantine and Islamic material culture wound up in Sweden in the first place.[183] This concern goes outside of Uppland and into the Rus', Byzantine, and Islamic territories because culture does not exist in a vacuum. Viking Rus' styles, for example, were highly influenced by Byzantine styles.[184] Duczko also notes that some artefacts may have been created by foreign artisans from Byzantium, especially in Viking Rus' territories.[185] So we must consider the possibility for copies, influences, trade, and raids when considering both Byzantine and Islamic artefacts in Scandinavian burial contexts. Furthermore, many of the early artefacts found through Russia came from the Mälaren region in Sweden, where Birka lies, and this indicates the cultural connections with the Viking Rus' and the regions where Birka is.[186] Therefore, we know that trade existed between these regions from both directions and the

[181] Ibid, 291.
[182] Some of the means by which material culture ended up at Birka is through trading or raiding. The most relevant to this case is the Volga trade routes and Viking Age people travelling those routes and bringing goods and people from other cultures back to Scandinavia.
[183] Duczko, "Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden Archaeological Finds and their Interpretation," 292.
[184] Uppland is the modern name for the area where Viking Age towns like Birka and Sigtuna existed. Outside of Uppland, we also see evidence of Islamic and Byzantine material culture in other Viking Age towns. One of the furthest places we see Islamic material culture is Ireland, illustrating how far-reaching Viking Age trade was among Viking Age diaspora groups.
[185] Ibid, 292
[186] Hedenstierna-Jonson "Rus', Varangians, and Birka Warriors," 159-178.

Islamic accounts on Viking Rus' funerals are therefore relevant, despite the geographical and possibly cultural differences.

For a culturally Viking Rus' understanding of burial archaeology and dress styles we can defer to Iullia Stepanova. Stepanova illustrates some of the staples in dress of female Christian Rus' burials at sites with early Scandinavian settlement.[187] She lists clothing details such buttons, belt buckles, belt rings, knives, whetstones, flints, purses, bracelets and finger rings as some of the standard dress items for Christian female Rus' burials. However, it is much harder to create a cohesive list of similarities among pagan Viking Age burials within Scandinavia, let alone at Birka because of the diversity of burial styles and furnishings. Furthermore, the Rus' in Stepanova's research are not the Viking Rus' in the Islamic accounts. This is because Stepanova's research concerns later Christian burials, where female fashion is one of the only things comparable in the burials. The dress style was still reminiscent of Viking Age dress. These burials include silks and caftans like many other Eastern influenced Birka burials, but otherwise have far more consistency than the burials at Birka. Stepanova's research may be more comparable to sites like Sigtuna because it was founded as a Christian settlement. However, this example is important for figuring out some guidelines for gendering burials. Perhaps, Stepanova's research on feminine dress should be interpreted as feminine instead of female or women's dress, and then we can apply some of the similar styles at Birka to Stepanova's examples.

[187] Iullia Stepanova, *The Burial Dress of the Rus' in the Upper Volga Region (Late 10th-13th Centuries)*, (Brill, 2017).

Stepanova's research suggests that dress styles were not necessarily universal, and time and space play a significant role in examining the literary and material resources. Despite the time and geographical distances between the literary evidence and the Scandinavians at Birka, the rituals at Birka appear to be Odinic by nature and involve similar material cultures.[188] Odinic religion is Germanic and refers to the worship of the head god in the Norse pantheon, Odin. Many of the sorcerer burials at Birka are linked to the worship of Odin because of his epithet as a sorcerer himself.[189] Furthermore, Odin was thought to be associated with a chaotic and violent queer magic, where he swaps genders among other things such as age and different walks of life and where his followers tended to be women or possibly non-binary people. This is important because of the possible association with this type of magic in the burials to the Angel of Death (as seen in Ibn Fadlan) and how she curated the ritual funeral process.

As stated in chapter three, we have to approach burials carefully and with the idea that the community was responsible for assembling the burial and the objects surrounding the deceased person may not indicate their exact purposes from life. This illustrates that the community connected gender to objects and assigned burial items based on how they perceived an individual during life or how they thought an individual might need those objects in the afterlife. Therefore, Byzantine and Islamic artefacts helped the community to define the social, political, or even gendered status of the dead during the funerary ritual to illustrate to other community members how they viewed a certain individual. Furthermore, we know that many of the foreign items arrived in Scandinavia through

[188] Price, *The Viking Way*, 19.
[189] Ibid.

either trade, raid, gifts, or stolen, but how they were obtained is unknown. We can assume that they came through Viking Rus' trade routes, but the methods they were obtained by are unknown. This is important because many of the items probably got to Birka through trade routes facilitated by the group that Ibn Fadlan witnessed.

4.2 Material Commemorative Categories

The burials that I looked at in Birka that had connections to the East include those in Table 1.[190] There are more burials that contain other items with connection to the East, but I have chosen to focus on dress accessories and jewelry in these burials to focus the study and to assess binary and non-binary probable burials with high status goods.[191] These burials were chosen because they provide a wide variety of burials, genders, and statuses of individuals buried. I physically went to Birka to survey the layout of the burial grounds and went to the *Historiska Museet* (National History Museum) in Stockholm, Sweden to view the previously excavated burial items associated with the burials listen in Table 1. Several of the following categories of material culture were evident in the literary reverse excavation and are comparable because of the relevance in the burials. This relevance is evident in the types of burials and in connecting goods such as Eastern styles of dress and materials to the literary record. Furthermore, we see these categories also applying to women and possible non-binary burials. Rings and clothing commonly associated with masculine burials also appear in feminine burials and *vice versa.* This

[190] Appendix 2, Table 1.
[191] Those who present as a certain gender because of dress and those who can afford to present their gender are different representations that are unclear in the burial record.

illustrates that community commemoration did not operate only on a gender binary, and the community furnished burials according to how they saw the person in the grave.

At Birka, three Islamic finger rings were found in burials. These Islamic finger rings belonged to burials Bj. 526 (AD 732), Bj. 791 (c. AD 10th C.), and Bj. 515 (c. AD 8th C.). They were all found in (supposedly) feminine contexts of both middle and upper status burials. The rings are not uniform by any stretch and come from different geographic locations and caliphates. The rings are some of the most direct links we have to material culture from Islamic caliphates. We also find other kinds of jewelry, with the largest find of mixed Eastern and Scandinavian material culture being the necklace from Bj. 632 (c. AD 10th C.). This shows the importance of trade and copies even among poorer burials. This also means that luxury items were not limited to the wealthy elite and poorer families or community members owned goods imported from Byzantine and Islamic territories, illustrating that the community saw value in imported items and felt positive with associating these items with the dead regardless of gender. Luxury items in burials may be an attempt to amplify the status of a dead individual.

In terms of identifying foreign clothing, belt mounts are one of the best surviving pieces of clothing in the burial record and can indicate if a person was wearing a full foreign or native outfit in their burial. In Bj. 632 and Bj. 581 we see examples of what were formerly called, “oriental” belts. Now, we must aim to identify the belt mounts with the culture they are associated with or name them as copies by people participating in Viking Age cultures. There were private and public sphere items that appear attached to belts, with warrior burials holding weapons and personal grooming tools, and more

household related burials having keys in addition to personal grooming tools. Despite the lack of textiles, we can link gold threads, and hat decorations to Rus' sites, where the threads have connections to even more Eastern locations. Rus' dress styles, however, are usually found in masculine burials, but this is not limited to men, as opposed to imported dress styles. This is evident with Bj. 581 and the possibility of this person being non-binary. This elevates my argument because Eastern motifs were not limited to sexed male burials, and the community likely viewed Bj. 581 as not female. Rather than only using evidence of dress styles from these burials to inform of an individual's gender and cultural identity, we can identify how a community viewed an individual and how they chose to represent someone in the afterlife. Most of the textiles from these burials no longer exist due to acidic soils, but some burials exhibit evidence of Eastern types dress styles, specifically Rus' styles influenced by Byzantium.

4.3 The Burials

Bj. 526 is a relatively sparse wooden coffin burial from the mid eighth century. It is located north of Birka's rampart. This burial contains items that are generally associated with feminine assemblages, such as keys, a small knife, and a container for needles. This is likely a feminine person with some trading and travel experience. Aside from the Islamic finger ring (fig. 2)[192], the other notable artefact is the Hedeby coin, which is a coin with a ship on it that was likely minted at Hedeby in Denmark. This coin, along with the beads and Islamic finger ring would suggest that this person was relatively worldly or at least aware of the status significance of foreign goods, and the community

[192] Appendix 1, Figure 2.

or the deceased would have understood the significance of these artefacts. The ring itself, is made of silver and the stone is a piece of yellow glass. Furthermore, this burial contained beads which are a clear status indicator for women during the Viking Age, and another indication that the community was aware that this woman was at the very least aware of Eastern and western travel.[193]

Bj. 791 is a late tenth century chamber grave to the East of the main town centre. The burial is thought to be female and contains items such as beads, a small knife, and a pair of scissors. The burial consists of a number of high-status items, most notably (for my purposes) we see beads, gold threads (fig. 3)[194], and the Islamic finger ring (fig. 4) and 5).[195] This Islamic finger ring is particularly interesting because it was altered into what was likely a pendent with added silver coils to attach to a necklace or string. This ring was identified as being Seljuk in origin because of the floral ornamentation adorning the outside of the ring.[196] The other interesting thing about this ring is that the bead is carnelian, a stone that is not native to Scandinavia. This stone could only have come from places like India or Yemen.[197] Bj. 791, again, illustrates the vast spread of goods acquired by feminine people during the Viking Age. Whether this person know who the Seljuks were or not, they and the community were aware of the significance of beads and travel for women. Furthermore, if the finger ring was turned into a pendant, perhaps it was worn

[193] Elin Hreiðarsdóttir, "Icelandic Viking Age Beads: Their Origin and Characteristics" *Ornament* 33, no. 10, 2010: 64-65.
[194] Appendix 1, Figure 3.
[195] Appendix 1, Figure 4 and 5.
[196] Sebastian KTS Warmlander, Linda Wahlander, Ragnar Saage, Khodadad Rezakhani, Saied A. Hamid Hassan, and Michael Neith, "Analysis and Interpretation of a Unique Arabic Finger Ring from the Viking Age town of Birka," *Scanning*, 37, 2015: 2.
[197] Ibid.

on a necklace before the person died. This ring is a very unique piece unlike other items at Birka, and community individuals would have seen the ring as added or special. Therefore, they would have realized that the ring was foreign and significant in the commemoration of the individual in Bj. 791.

The last ring is the finger ring from Bj. 515. The burial is an early eighth century grave and the individual is wearing traditionally feminine adornments. There were two large and two small bronze oval brooches, along with two other bronze low arm brooches, presumably all connected with the many beads in this burial. The beads vary in shape, size, colour, and material, with some beads of glass and others made from pearls meaning that many of the beads were likely acquired outside of Birka. The burial also contained several everyday items like a pair of iron scissors, a container for needles, and a small iron knife. The finger ring in the burial is a silver ring with a coloured glass inlay with Arabic characters carved into the stone spelling out "Allah" (fig. 6). This type of ring is not uncommon in Bulgar and Khazar territories and were gifts in these areas to women.[198] Though we do not know the circumstances of how this particular ring was acquired, we can assume it was a status item and the person in the burial, as well as the townspeople who buried them, would be fully aware of the social contexts of this ring as a foreign object. One study suggests that the ring was lightly worn.[199] This would maybe indicate that the ring was freshly made and given to the person wearing it relatively shortly after

[198] Appendix 1, Figure 6.
Egil Mikkelsen "The Vikings and Islam" in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink, Neil Price (London, New York: Routledge), 547.
[199] Wahlander, Saage, Rezakhani, Hamid Hassan, and Neith, "Analysis and Interpretation of a Unique Arabic Finger Ring from the Viking Age town of Birka," 131.

its production. The study proves this by looking at mould markings and scientifically testing the ring to show how common Muslim craftspeople were in the Baltic area. It is concluded that it is likely that Muslim and other foreign craftspeople were relatively common in the Viking worlds to produce popular foreign items locally in Scandinavia and the Western Baltic.[200] Furthermore, this illustrates that Eastern styles were so popular that the East was coming to or being brough to Birka in the form of craftspeople of Bulghar descent among many others.[201] This further shows the spectrum of usages and knowledge of objects influenced by Islam and Byzantium. Though we cannot speak to the popularity in this region with only three rings in question, the popularity of other Eastern influenced goods was prevalent.

However, we do know of other burials along the Volga with similar carvings on rings and of similar styles of jewelry.[202] Wladyslaw Duczko points out that:

> Thanks to this fortunate find we are able to point out the starting point of movements of this kind of rings. Close to Bulghar on the Volga, in a cemetery near Tankeevka, a grave (nr 999) with a collective burial was discovered. The grave contained weapons and a finger ring with a stone engraved with the inscription *in the name of allah*. The stone is practically identical to the one belonging to the ring from Timerevo.[203]

The two rings mentioned above are very similar to the *Allah* ring at Birka. The major similarity is the Arabic inscription. Furthermore, we can assume that the ring travelled the Volga, or similar routes, until it met its terminus in Bj. 515. Duczko points out further

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[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Iullia Stepanova, *The Burial Dress of the Rus' in the Upper Volga Region (Late 10th-13th Centuries).*
[203] Duczko "Viking Age Scandinavia and Islam" in *Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia: Acts of a Symposium at Uppsala University June 15-16 1996* edited by Elizabeth Piltz (Stockholm, 1996), 111.

similarities and connections with these rings through a seemingly Scandinavian burial in the Timerevo cemetery. He states:

> The Tankeevka-burial is identified as Bulgarian, from "pagan" time before the Volga Bulghars converted to Islam. In the Timerevo cemetery was found another female Scandinavian grave (nr 459) furnished with jewellery of a type usually found in the graves in Birka. This grave contained one rather rare object – a cross cut out from a dirham of the year 969/70. Cross-pendants appear in Russia in several Scandinavian female graves and the Christian faith of the deceased is further emphasized by the presence of wax candles.[204]

This quote further illustrates the cross-cultural exchange occurring along the Volga and ending up in Scandinavia.

Ultimately, it is slightly problematic to compare the three rings in Bj. 515, Bj. 791 and Bj. 526. They come from very different time periods and originate from different regions of the caliphate and adjacent regions. The foreign artefacts do offer substantial information on how the people at Birka parallel burial rites for men and women. It is curious, however, that the three rings appear in feminine burials that are associated with great numbers of foreign beads. This certainly indicates the importance of foreign artefacts in feminine burials and illustrates that high-status foreign items in burials were not limited to masculine burials. Furthermore, the burials above illustrate that Islamic items became important in the community funeral ritual, just as the Byzantine and Islamic items were important for the funerals described in the Islamic descriptions of Viking Rus' funerals. This suggests that communities could see that women were well connected to travel routes and trade and this is something that is clear from Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah, and Ibn Miskawayh's writing on Viking Rus' funerary rituals. Despite the few mentions of

[204] Ibid, 111.

women aside from the ones used in ritual, it was made abundantly clear by these writers that women travelled with the Viking Rus' because of the mentions of them being buried in masculine graves. Birka was well known for its trade status, and clearly this was not a status limited to masculine people. Very clearly, women were trading and understood the importance of foreign goods, regardless of the foreign culture, and even though the graves described in the Islamic literature were male, women appeared in the sidelines. This indicates that women were travelling, and we see this paralleled in the burial record. We also see this in other items of jewelry present in other Birka burials.

Other than the foreign objects, the burial contains some vessels and other household objects like knives. Bj. 632 is a particularly interesting chamber grave because it is considered to be a female burial accompanied by another individual at her feet. This should sound somewhat familiar to the Islamic burial accounts, though this might indicate that women were also capable of being accompanied to the afterlife by another individual. Bj. 632 is a chamber grave that contains an interesting necklace with a special coin pendant from Byzantium (fig. 7).[205] The necklace has several pendants, but the altered coin of Theophilus illustrates the significance of Byzantine items in burials. None of the other pendants on the necklace appear to be from outside of Scandinavia and the Theophilus coin pendant hangs visibly from the pendant which would make it a statement piece on the whole necklace. Turning a coin into a pendant would indicate that the individual who owned it was aware of the social currency behind exhibiting such a

[205] Appendix 1, Figure 7.

pendant to the public. Therefore, the individual buried with the necklace would have been viewed by their community as associated with the Byzantine coin.

Furthermore, this burial contains a belt of Eastern origin. The belt in Bj. 632 is a silver belt fitting possibly gold plated with an ornate floral design (fig. 8 and 9).[206] This design is reminiscent of other belt designs found in other contexts in Gotland outside of burials and on settlement sites. This belt is likely Khazarian based on the ornamentation of the belt, but it is unknown how the belt made it to this burial.[207] It is likely that it was made at Saltovo-Majaki, or in similar territories, and brought to Birka by the many travellers conducting trade there.[208]

We see other instances of belts like the one in Bj. 632 in Bj. 550. Hedenstierna-Jonson remarked this about Bj. 550:

> I have claimed in my research that the inhabitants of tenth century Birka considered themselves part of an urban culture set apart from the surrounding regional culture of the Lake Mälar region. This urban culture was polyethnic, formed by the assimilation of different people joined together by common enterprise in trade, craft and warfare. Stylistic traits from various cultural expressions were combined in new ways and crafted using techniques borrowed from the expert craftsmen of other cultures. An example of this can be seen in the context of burial Bj 550 in Birka. This was the grave of a distinguished female and the grave gifts include an elaborate belt buckle in gilded silver. The buckle is adorned with an animal in a style reminiscent of Scandinavian Viking-Age art. The overall fashion of the buckle and the technique with which it was produced is, however, not Scandinavian. An equivalent to the buckle has been found in a Magyar burial in Ladánybene-Benepuszta in present day Hungary. The origins of the two buckles should probably be sought in the Byzantine border zones.[209]

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[206] Appendix 1, Figure 8 and 9.
[207] Duczko "Viking Age Scandinavia and Islam," 113.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, "Close Encounters with the Byzantine Border Zones: On the Eastern Connections of the Birka Warrior" in *Scandinavia and the Balkans*, ed. Oksana Minaeva and Lena Holmquist (Stockholm, 2015) 158.

This observation emphasizes the internationality of the area, and furthermore illustrates the cultural importance of international goods. This can also apply to the Byzantine and Islamic artefacts found in these burials which show that international goods were significant in burials for people in the community other than male warriors. These interactions with foreign material culture were highly influential on burial practices at Birka and in the Islamic literary accounts, and here we see a clear indication of the archaeological record turning regular foreign items into ritual goods presented to the dead, on behalf of the community for feminine and masculine burials.

Bj. 496 is a rich, possibly royal, burial as is evident from the lavish furnishing in the grave. The burial is an early tenth century masculine burial. It contains a number of high-status weapons and goods, but most importantly, the dress style is comparable to Byzantine court styles and it contains an Islamic coin. Isotopic testing by Anna Linderholm, Charlotte Hedenstierna Jonson, Olle Svensk & Kerstin Liden indicated that the person in Bj. 496 spent most of their life outside of Birka or the area. This illustrates the diversity at Birka and the importance for high-status individuals to travel. Byzantine court dress is not the only type of high-status clothing presented in burials at Birka and other burials include the caftan and/or gold and silver threaded dress decorations that can be linked back to Byzantine influence. These are mostly warrior burials and include burials 329, 520, 561, and 944. Furthermore, there are similarities to these artefacts found at Gnezdovo in eight burials.[210] The connection to Gnezdovo indicates a connection to

[210] Natalia Eniosova and Tamara Puskina, "Finds of Byzantine Origin from the Early Urban Centre Gnezdovo in the light of the contacts between Rus' and Constantinople (10th- early 11th centuries AD)" in *From Goths to Varangians: Communication and Cultural Exchange Between the Baltic and the Black Sea*, ed. Line Bjerg, John H. Lind, and Soren M. Sindbaek, (Aarhus, 2013), 231-232.

trade routes heading out of the Baltic and the connections that these routes had to Byzantine material culture.

Bj. 496 is comparable to the burial mentioned in Ibn Fadlan's writings. This person was clearly well travelled or at least was aware of travel, and the community decided to commemorate them this way. It is not surprising that isotopic analysis was done on such a lavish burial, as opposed to some of the less furnished more feminine burials. Perhaps, if more isotopic analysis on a wider variety of burials was done, we could make better assumptions about more feminine burials and their associations with the foreign goods in their burials. Otherwise, this burial is extremely well furnished and tells us that the community was aware of the significance of the burial furnishings. Perhaps, this burial involved a ritual like the one in Ibn Fadlan's account, and if that's the case, women and possible non-binary people were certainly aware of the connections to the dead and the East.

The above connection is abundantly clear in Bj. 581. The area in which Bj. 581 exists suggests military importance because of the proximity to Birka's garrison. The burial contains a variety of weapons such as a sword (fig. 10),[211] an axe (fig. 11),[212] shields (fig. 12),[213] spear and arrow points (fig. 13).[214] Among these weapons, is an impressive scabbard (fig. 14 and 15).[215] It also contains two horses at the foot of the burial along with a number of horse dressings (fig. 16, 17, and 18).[216] The burial is highly

[211] Appendix 1, Figure 10.
[212] Appendix 1, Figure 11.
[213] Appendix 1, Figure 12.
[214] Appendix 1, Figure 13.
[215] Appendix 1, Figure 14 and 15.
[216] Appendix 1, Figures 16, 17, and 18.

decorated with jewelry and high-status clothing decorations and indicates that the person in the burial is presented as masculine by the community. The dress style in the burial is reminiscent of Rus' styles of dress.[217] One major indicator of this is the silver fur cap tip and associated silver decorations hanging from it (fig. 19 and 20).[218] The cap tip is similar to a double burial accompanied by a horse at Sestovica in modern Ukraine.[219] The Sestovica burial has many Scandinavian elements and similarities to other double burials at Birka. Furthermore, the scabbard in Bj. 581 has similarities to the design of a silver rhyton in the Sestovica burial as well. [220] The connection with material culture from Sestovica is an indication that Bj. 581 is a burial that is aware of the trade and raiding routes and that the community wanted to represent them as someone who travelled and participated in battle. This is significant because Bj. 581 is a possible non-binary burial and thus represents a person who may have been participating in travel and battle as a person who may have not identified with their birth sex. This opens for even more possibilities in burial status and gender with regards to association with Byzantine and Islamic material culture, as this individual is represented as masculine, but genomic testing proved that their sex is female.

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[217] Stepanova, *The Burial Dress of the Rus' in the Upper Volga Region (Late 10th-13th Centuries)*.
[218] Appendix 1, Figures 19 and 20.
[219] Eniosova and Puskina, "Finds of Byzantine Origin from the Early Urban Centre Gnezdovo in the light of the contacts between Rus' and Constantinople (10th- early 11th centuries AD)" 281-284.
A rhyton is probably a drinking vessel.
[220] A rhyton is probably a drinking vessel.
Ibid, 284
In another article, I suggest that we should be able to "…interpret the occupations separate of and simultaneously with gender to understand the professional and societal functions of the buried people of Birka." That also means that we should look at societal factors and modes of upward mobility simultaneously with gender in the same way with these case studies.
Simms, "Beating a Dead Horse… Or Two: Bj. 581."

Warrior and elite dress style itself are another important element in the importation and commodification of foreign objects. Burials such as Bj. 496 and Bj. 581 are burials that were dressed in foreign clothing for their funerals which shows the significance of foreign dress in Viking Age burials. Most of the feminine burials are wearing standard feminine dress, but dress decorations have varying degrees of international elements incorporated within their own styles. The elements that indicate that a feminine person was aware of travel are beads and the variety that they may have collected throughout their lives. As for the elite or warrior dress styles, we know that the possible non-binary warrior burial, Bj. 581, was wearing Rus' style clothing. We also have evidence that many male burials at Birka wore Khazarian Kaftans, which are also of Jewish origin though it is unknown if the people at Birka would have recognized this connection.[221] If we consider the evidence of dress styles, there are also many textile fragments in inhumations, but many of them were burnt, so it is difficult to reconstruct the outfits that the dead wore. Much of the silk was imported from the East, but was likely used to make Scandinavian style clothing in Scandinavia. Furthermore, some trends, such as gold and silver threads, travelled to Scandinavia through the Eastern trade routes. This is not to say that Eastern styles did not infiltrate Viking Age fashion, and this is seen in the gold and silver thread trend noted above. This would have been incredibly chic, and this is evident from the presence of gold and silver threads in the burial record. Natalia Eniosova and Tamara Puskina states:

> Byzantine influence is also discernible in certain elements of dress. Despite the poor preservation of organic materials in the mounds constructed of alluvial sand, six rich male and female inhumation graves with silk remains have been found in

[221] Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) 75.

> Gnezdovo. Eight graves with gold and silver threads and gold-thread buttons were found among the other inhumation and cremation burials. They have clear parallels in the rich Birka graves 329, 520, 561, and 944. Burned silk and tiny remains of gold threads were also found in the excavations in the central hillfort.[222]

Gold threads are in burials such as Bj. 561 and Bj. 791. Bj. 561 is a masculine burial and Bj. 791 is a feminine burial. These threads became popular in both feminine and masculine dress style, and this indicates that people other than masculine people were also influenced by Byzantine fashion.

Belts were created in Scandinavian styles, but often influenced or made by crafts people from the East. Duczko says:

> The most numerous category of finds representing the Post-Sassanian art are metal mounts for the belt, an item with ideological and symbolic values, which was employed in all nomadic warrior cultures of Asia. The mounts were produced everywhere where the warrior ideology was existing, as well in Russia as in Sweden. That behind the production of such ornaments sometimes were Moslem craftsmen working in the environment of the Rus' can be seen on one casting mould (for belt mounts) signed by *Yazid*, the Turk, in Arabic. This stone mould was found in the remains of an early 10th century workshop in Kiev.[223]

A possible example of the belts noted in the above quote is in Bj. 581, where the style is Scandinavian, but the technique is Persian. Despite this, people in Eastern Sweden and at Birka would directly consider these objects as having Eastern influence. Furthermore, they would associate warrior culture and trade culture with these artefacts, because foreign crafts people were likely common at Birka because of the status of the site. Charlotte Hedinstierna-Jonson talks about these connections to Steppe cultures with

[222] Eniosova and Puskina "Finds of Byzantine Origin from the Early Urban centre Gnezdovo" 230.
[223] Duczko "Viking Age Scandinavia and Islam." 113.

Birka's garrison and the weapons found there, specifically the archery.[224] Furthermore, foreigners were creating East-influenced objects locally in Scandinavian and Rus' towns, ultimately creating an environment of deep cultural contacts, where these objects were status items to local Scandinavians.

4.4 Conclusion

Birka was a prime example of a pre-Christian Viking-Age trading town because of its status as a trading hub and the multiculturism present at the site. We can easily see the diversity of grave goods at the site along with the significance of international connections within burial customs. Furthermore, we can see from the evidence above that cross-cultural items were important for burial customs for possible non-binary people, women, and men's burials. This is especially apparent with Bj. 581 and Bj. 632 and proves that women and non-binary probable people were mobile and aware of international signifiers for status. This is made apparent through Bj. 581's dress style and connections to Baltic trade cultures, and Bj. 632's modified Byzantine coin and the burial housing two individuals. Therefore, the community also saw these connections with Byzantine and Islamic material cultures and presented the individual in the burials accordingly. The community was a key element in creating burial identity, and from the burials we can see that the community at Birka represented the dead through artefacts from Islamic and Byzantine material cultures and this representation was not necessarily interpreted through a gendered lense. This is evident through burial items such as Islamic

[224] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, "Rus', Varangians and Birka Warriors" in *The Martial Society: Aspects of Warriors, Fortifications and Social Change from the Bronze Age to the 18th Century*, 164.

finger rings in feminine burials, or Byzantine influenced dress style in warrior type burials. Though we cannot directly speak to the agency of the deceased people in the burials, we can tell that the communities that buried them cared that they were buried with significant international items from East of the Baltic.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

Comparison of Byzantine and Islamic material culture in burials at Birka to the written resources of Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah, and Ibn Miskawayh have provided a comprehensive data-set that illustrates the complexities of Viking Age burials at Birka. Ultimately, the presence of Byzantine and Islamic artefacts in the burials at Birka exhibits that men, women, and possible non-binary people had equally important connections to Eastern trade initiatives. This connection to Eastern material culture became clear to the communities long before they decided to furnish the burials at Birka with Byzantine and Islamic material culture. Viking Age commemoration through Eastern objects did not conform to a gender binary in the burial record. This is represented through community commemoration, specifically at Birka. At Birka, the community decided to represent ethnically and gender diverse people in the burial record with foreign artefacts, specifically ones from the Islamic caliphates and Byzantine Empire. This indicates that women and non-binary probable people at Birka were considered to be important in trade and travel to the East.

The historiography of this topic illustrates the fraught history of nationalism and ethnocentrism imposed on the Viking Rus'. The early historiography also favored male narratives. Through acknowledging the pitfalls in the Soviet and the Nazi historiography of the Viking Rus', we can pursue diverse histories that are socially inclusive and not ethnocentric. Furthermore, gender historiography helps to advance the diversity and offers inclusive methods that are wary of nationalistic narratives. Instead, gender and queer theory permits the representation of all people in the archaeological record. This

allows other theories of burial archaeology to show how a community thought of diverse people within a community. The literary evidence provides an Islamic perspective on Viking Age community commemoration. This perspective is exclusionary of women in the literary burial record, but illustrates that women were clearly important in acting out burial rites, despite women and non-binary people being present in the archaeological record. On the other hand, women are represented in the Islamic evidence, but women are never the primary people interred, and therefore, the community was not commemorating them the same way as the high-status male.

The archaeological evidence shows that Scandinavians commodified foreign artefacts from the East in a way we cannot fully understand today. Objects from the East were just as important as status objects from the places south and west of Sweden. Furthermore, the status of foreign objects benefits all genders of buried people within the study. We can now firmly say that Viking Age people at Birka commemorated the dead with connection to cultures east of Scandinavia. This is evident because of both literary and material sources. The literary evidence exhibits an Islamic fascination with Viking Age funeral ritual, and although there are many biases present in the text, we see primary sources detailing the cultural elements present in the rituals. This includes descriptions of Byzantine and Islamic material culture alongside Viking Age material culture. Furthermore, we see some physical evidence of the importance of Eastern artefacts in Viking Age funeral rituals at Birka. This firmly establishes the popularity of Eastern influence on funeral rituals across different Viking Age diasporas, social status, and gender.

The above methods could be applied to other Swedish towns in the Lake Malaren region or on the Baltic to further emphasize the connections between cultures to the East and death and commemoration practices in Sweden. We could apply the above methods to towns like Sigtuna which was founded in 980 and is the oldest extant town in Sweden.[225] Despite Sigtuna's placement deeper north on Lake Malaren, it still held deep relationships with Eastern material culture. Some scholars believe that the town's foundations are directly linked to the abandonment of Birka and other believe that this answer is not complex enough to describe the foundation of the town.[226] Most modern scholars would agree that the abandonment of Birka cannot be the only reason for the foundation of Sigtuna, but many do agree that it was one of the main factors in the Christianisation of the Lake Malaren region in Sweden and beyond.[227] This makes it difficult to assess burials, as Christian burials are far different from the burials we previously saw in Birka and Gotland. Despite this difference, it is clear that Sigtuna had a deep relationship with a Christianity that was influenced by Eastern practices.

Other locations that would likely yield similar results would be Gotland, Gnezdovo, Novgorod, Saaremaa, and other places in Viking-Age Estonia and Western Russia. Some of these locations existed alongside the use of Birka as a major trading location and others developed later and have more links to Sigtuna and Christianity than the burials at Birka. Furthermore, the complexity of how these artefacts ended up in

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[225] Sten Tesch "Sigtuna: Royal Site and Christian Town and the Reginal Perspective, c. 980-1100" in *New Aspects on Viking-Age Urbanism c. AD 750-1100. Proceedings of the International Symposium at the Swedish History Museum, April 17-20th 2013*, ed. Lena Holmquist, Sven Kalmring, and Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, (Stockholm, 2016) 115.
[226] Ibid, 117.
[227] Ibid, 125.

Scandinavia is a whole other problem for a whole other project. But the variety of methods could include raiding, trading, gifting, and looting among many other reasons. The artefacts from any of these places could either be indicative of trade or foreign crafts people moving to these places because of the demand for the status goods. Studying the grave goods after conversion to Christianity is difficult because of different burial customs, but culturally we could still link commemoration and status to travelling East.

Appendix 1

Figure 1

Figure 2

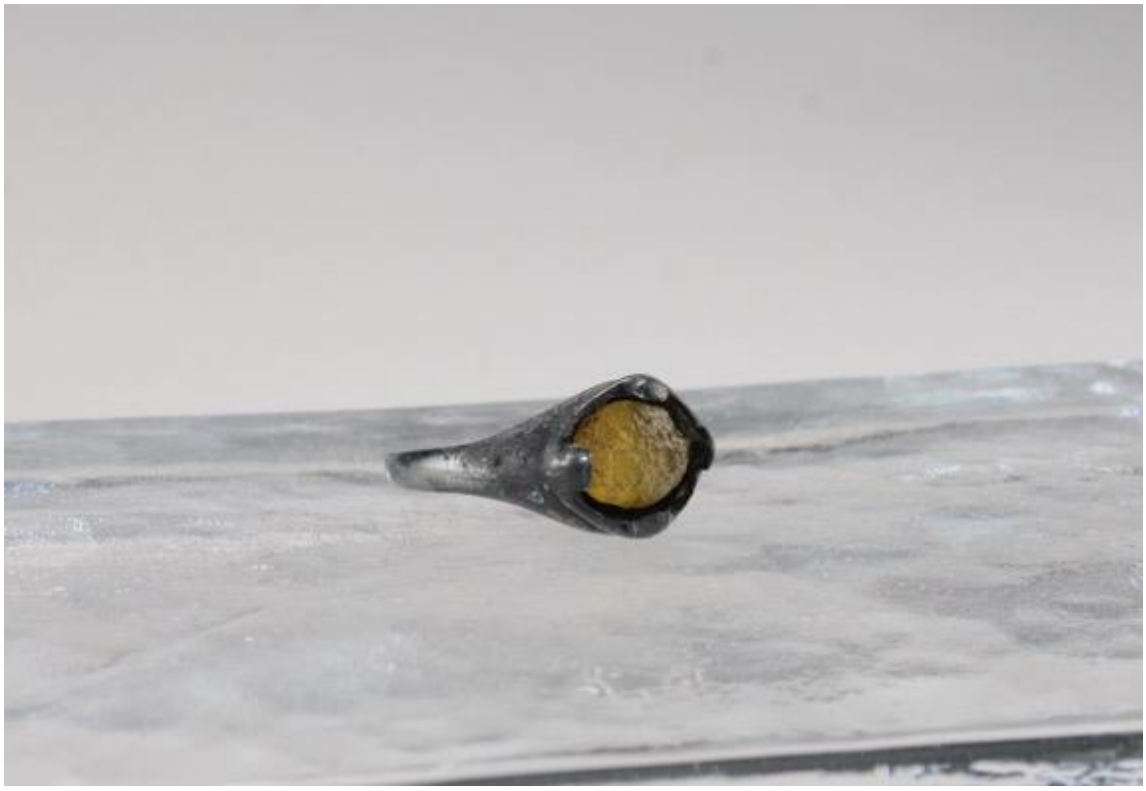

Figure 3

Figure 4

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Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

Appendix 2

Table 1: Defining objects in Birka Burials

Table 1	Gender	Finger Rings	Belts/ Buckles	Tools	Weapons	Coins	Jewelry	Beads	Horse	Dress
Bj. 557	Female						Assorted Pendants	Carnelian and other assorted beads	Bridle in Burial	Presumably feminine dress
Bj. 526	Female	Silver and Glass Arabic	Assorted Scandinavian Buckles	Needles, Knife, Scissors		Hedeby coin pendant		Beads of varying origins		Presumably feminine dress
Bj. 791	Female	Seljuk pendant ring	Assorted Scandinavian Buckles	Needle, Knife, Scissors				Beads of varying origins		Gold thread textile fragments. Presumably feminine dress
Bj. 632	Female with secondary burial of unknown gender			Knife, Vessels		Coin of Theophilus altered into a pendant, Abbasid coin	Charm/ bead necklace with coin pendants			Presumably feminine dress
Bj. 581	Non-binary/ Warrior presenting burial		Gold gilded buckle	Whetstone, comb	Varying weapons				Two horses and horse dressings	Rus' style hat dressings, presumably in eastern influenced warrior clothing
Bj. 944	Male			Whetstone		Dirham	Amulet		Horse and horse dressings	Silk from Tang Dynasty, presumably masculine dress
Bj. 660	Female			Scissors, needles, vessels, iron staff, weights, knife	Arrowhead		Pendant of Scandinavian origin, silver crucifix/ person pendant	Beads of varying origins		Presumably feminine dress
Bj. 515	Female	Allah ring		Knife, needle housing, scissors				Beads of varying origins		Oval brooches and beads may indicate feminine dress style
Bj. 550	Female		Gilded silver Scandinavian styles buckle made with Magyar techniques	Needle housing, Knife				Beads of varying origin		Oval brooches indicate possible feminine dress
Bj. 496	Male			Comb, Whetstone	Varying weapons	Arabic coin	Silver wire pendant		Horse fittings	Byzantine court dress
Bj. 520	Male				Varying weapons					Posamet textile decoration remains
Bj. 561	Male?			Knife, bone comb, vessels, whetstone	Varying weapons					Gold textile thread, posamet gold/silver textile decorations

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