

Invasion of the Viking women unearthed

So much for *Hagar the Horrible*, with his stay-at-home wife, Helga. Viking women may have equaled men moving to England in medieval invasions, suggests a look at ancient burials.

Vikings famously invaded Eastern England around 900 A.D., notes Shane McLeod of the Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies at the University of Western Australia in the *Early Medieval Europe* journal, starting with two army invasions in the 800's, recounted in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*. The Viking invaders founded their own medieval kingdom, 'the *Danelaw*', in Eastern England.



"There is some archaeological evidence for early Norse female settlement, most obviously oval brooches, but this evidence is minimal. The more difficult to date evidence of place names, personal names, and DNA samples derived from the modern population suggests that Norse women did migrate to England at some stage, but probably in far fewer numbers than Norse men," begins the study.

However, McLeod notes that recently, burials of female Norse immigrants have started to turn up in Eastern England. "An increase in the number of finds of Norse-style jewellery in the last two decades has led some scholars to suggest a larger number of female settlers. Indeed, it has been noted that

there are more Norse female dress items than those worn by men," says the study.

So, the study looked at 14 Viking burials from the era, definable by the Norse grave goods found with them and isotopes found in their bones that reveal their birthplace. The bones were sorted for telltale osteological signs of which gender they belonged to, rather than assuming that burial with a sword or knife denoted a male burial.

Overall, McLeod reports that six of the 14 burials were of women, seven were men, and one was indeterminable. Warlike grave goods may have misled earlier researchers about the gender of Viking invaders, the study suggests. At a mass burial site called Repton Woods, "(d)espite the remains of three swords being recovered from the site, all three burials that could be sexed osteologically were thought to be female, including one with a sword and shield," says the study.

"These results, six female Norse migrants and seven male, should caution against assuming that the great majority of Norse migrants were male, despite the other forms of evidence suggesting the contrary. This result of almost a fifty-fifty ratio of Norse female migrants to Norse males is particularly significant when some of the problems with osteological sexing of skeletons are taken into account," says the study.

Women may have accompanied male Vikings in those early invasions of England, in much greater numbers than scholars earlier supposed, McLeod concludes. Rather than the ravaging rovers of legend, the Vikings arrived as

marriage-minded colonists. "Although the results presented here cannot be used to determine the number of female settlers, they do suggest that the ratio of females to males may have been somewhere between a third to roughly equal," the study concludes.

See photos of: [Vikings, archeology](#)