

# Beyond War



# Beyond War:

## *Archaeological Approaches to Violence*

Edited by

Albert García-Piquer  
and Assumpció Vila-Mitjà

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Beyond War: Archaeological Approaches to Violence

Edited by Albert García-Piquer and Assumpció Vila-Mitjà

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2016 by Albert García-Piquer, Assumpció Vila-Mitjà  
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9080-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9080-9

# CONTENTS

List of Figures and Charts .....	vii
Preface .....	ix
Albert García Piquer and Assumpció Vila-Mitjà	
Chapter One.....	1
Sacrifice and Execution: Ritual Killings in Viking Age Scandinavian Society	
Bo Jensen	
Chapter Two .....	23
Violence in Northern Chile during the Late Intermediate Period (AD 1000-1450) revisited utilizing Three Archaeological Indicators	
Aryel Pacheco, Rodrigo Retamal and Pablo Méndez-Quirós	
Chapter Three .....	49
Violence as an Ideological-Political Practice and Social Archaeology: Evidence of Prehistoric Settlements of the Nasca Valley	
Pedro V. Castro-Martínez and Trinidad Escoriza-Mateu	
Chapter Four.....	69
Archaeological Approaches to Violence in Uruguay	
José M. López-Mazz	
Chapter Five .....	93
A Marxist Approach to Violence: Iberian Southeast in Late Prehistory	
Juan Antonio Cámara Serrano, José Andrés Afonso Marrero and Fernando Molina González	
Chapter Six.....	115
Evidences of Violence in the Neolithic Period in the North East of the Iberian Peninsula	
Stéphanie Duboscq and Juan Gibaja	

Chapter Seven.....	141
Silent Violence: A Feminist Approach to Early Structural Violence against Women	
Assumpció Vila-Mitjà, Albert García-Piquer and Robert Carracedo	
Chapter Eight.....	161
The Sexual Division of Labour in the Origins of Male Domination: A Marxist Perspective	
Christophe Darmangeat	
Epilogue.....	181
Assumpció Vila-Mitjà and Albert García-Piquer	

## LIST OF FIGURES AND CHARTS

- Figure 0-1: Detail of “Dance of the Women of the Friendly Islands in Presence of Queen Tiné”, drawn by French biologist Labillardière in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Figure 0-2: “The anthropophagi of New Caledonia”, detail of the front page of the French journal *Journal des voyages*, 1878.
- Figure 2-1: Map of Northern Chile with sites and places mentioned in the text
- Figure 2-2: Sea lion leather helmets a) recovered from Bajo Molle (Photo P. Méndez-Quirós), b) recovered from Chacance (Drawing based on Fig 17a of Agüero 2007)
- Figure 2-3: Coiled helmets from Northern Chile. The site of recovery is indicated below, along with the reference from which the drawings were based on in parenthesis. a) AZ 6 (Lámina 3.C of Focacci 1990, 112); b) Playa Brava (Photo P. Méndez-Quirós); c) Pica (Fig 24 of Nielsen 2007); d) Pica 8 cemetery (Zlatar 1984); e) Attributed to “Pica-Tarapacá” (References on Table 2); f) lacks information recovery (Fig 17b of Agüero 2007); g) Chunchurí (Fig. 20 of Durán, Kangisern, and Acevedo 2000)
- Figure 2-4: Breastplates from Northern Chile. The site of recovery is indicated below, along with the reference from which the drawings were based on in parenthesis. a) Section A, Tomb 1 of Pica 8 (0014 based on Berenguer 1998, 41; half 0015 based on Catalan 206, 51); b) Chunchurí (Aldunate 1997, 51); c) Chiu Chiu (Exhibition Arica Cultura Milenaria, Palacio de la Moneda, 2008); d) Lasana (Fig 19 on Nielsen 2007); e) unknown provenance (Fig 3.c of Berenguer 2009)
- Figure 2-5: Representations of combat in rock art from Northern Chile. a) Ausípar, b) Ofragía, c) Huancarane, d) Suca 13
- Figure 2-6: Human figures wearing both helmets and breastplates carrying lamas from Santa Bárbara (SBa-144 UR VIII, Berenguer et al., 1985 Figura 8)
- Figure 2-7: Motifs most frequent found in coiled helmets and breastplates. a) *Chacanas* or Andean crosses; b) Symmetrical crosses; c) Breastplates emblem

- Figure 2-8: VRIs found in Pica 8 skeletal collection. a) head-face VRIs of females and males, b) arrow point embedded in the first right rib of a male
- Figure 3-1: Man head. Tabular oblique cranial deformation. (Burial 3, El Trigal III. Excavations 2006).
- Figure 3-2: Defensive Wall and Sling Bullets (Cerro de El Trigal. Excavations 2011).
- Figure 3-3: Obsidian Darts Tips (Cerro de El Trigal. Excavations 2005).
- Figure 3-4: Severed Head, in Painted Pottery Nasca Style (El Trigal III. Excavations 2007).
- Figure 4-1. Bones with scalping traces.
- Figure 4-2. Burial from San Miguel Hills.
- Figure 4-3. Prehistoric weapon.
- Figure 4-4. Stone structure.
- Figure 4-5. Wooden stock with shackles (18<sup>th</sup> / 19<sup>th</sup> century).
- Figure 4-6. Stone wall of ancient slaves settlement “Oratorio” at Rocha.
- Figure 4-7. Burial of political prisoner.
- Figure 5-1. A: Los Millares settlement. B: The Pasillo de Tabernas survey area. C: El Castellón Alto settlement.
- Figure 5-2. Areas surveyed in the Pasillo de Tabernas. © A.M. Montufo.
- Figure 5-3. The Castellón Alto settlement map.
- Figure 5-4. Grave number 101. © GEPRAN.
- Figure 5-5. Jewels from tomb 101’s grave goods. © GEPRAN.
- Figures 6-1 and 6-2: Map of Catalonia (courtesy of Gerard Remolins).
- Figure 6-2: Map of the Provinces of Catalonia (courtesy of Gerard Remolins).
- Figure 6-3: Location of the sites (courtesy of Gerard Remolins).
- Chart 6-1: Chart showing the distribution of the grave goods by categories of materials, according to the sex of the individuals (including immature individuals).
- Chart 6-2: Chart showing the distribution of some specific materials, according to the sex of the individuals (including the immature individuals).
- Chart 6-3: Chart showing the information from the functional analysis of some of the instruments (lithic industry mostly).
- Chart 6-4: The special case of the projectiles.
- Chart 6-5: Chart showing the distribution of the projectiles with men.

## PREFACE

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY *VIOLENCE IN PREHISTORY*?

ALBERT GARCIA PIQUER<sup>1</sup>  
AND ASSUMPCIO VILA-MITJA<sup>2</sup>

It is common practice to begin archaeological or anthropological studies of violence by mentioning two conflicting philosophical positions which have traditionally characterised the debate. In one corner of the ring are the scholars who argue that humans (usually referred to as “men”) are instinctively aggressive creatures, and that it is this innate propensity to violence that explains individual or group aggression in our species. *Homo homini lupus est*. This view may even predate the doctrine of original sin, but its main reference point is the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who proposed that the State and civilised life had allowed humankind to abandon a situation of continuous and confrontational “war of all against all” in which lives were “nasty, brutish and short”. In the opposite corner are those who hold a romantic Rousseauian vision of the “noble savage” living in a peaceful, harmonious past, a “Golden Age” corrupted by the emergence of civilisation and the State.

Of course, philosophical ideas are not created in a vacuum. There is a close connection between the philosophical debate on “human nature” – that is, in its original state – and the ethnographic narratives and descriptions that began to flourish in sixteenth-century Europe and then spread across the globe. For example, in *Leviathan* Hobbes writes that “the

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Prehistory, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), Bellaterra (Cerdanyola del Vallès). AGREST Research Group, Barcelona, Spain. [alberto.garcia.piquer@uab.cat](mailto:alberto.garcia.piquer@uab.cat)

<sup>2</sup> Institució Milà i Fontanals, (IMF-CSIC), Barcelona-Spain. AGREST Research Group, Barcelona. [avila@imf.csic.es](mailto:avila@imf.csic.es)

savage people of many places in America have no government at all (except the government of small families, the concord thereof dependeth on the natural lust) and live at this day in that brutish manner as I said before.” A century later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau took the stories of travellers who had met the island Caribs of Venezuela and the African Hottentots to demonstrate the existence of a happy, self-sufficient and morally innocent humanity. However, in the case of Hobbes and Rousseau it would be difficult to establish how many of their ideas were influenced by the stories of “savages” and to what extent these accounts were selected and made to support their historical speculation about the “natural, original state” of humankind (Rubiés 2011).



Figure 0-1. Detail of “Dance of the Women of the Friendly Islands in Presence of Queen Tiné”, drawn by French biologist Labillardière in the late 18th century.

Neither of these philosophical positions is totally alien to the other; nor do they represent two immutable, perennial extremes. Their relative influence has varied from era to era. In the late eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth, the idea that dominated was that of the “noble savage”, as illustrated by Labillardière’s engravings of life in Tasmania (Figure 0-1), but this fine, beautiful image of the savage became increasingly brutalised as the nineteenth century advanced. Hobbes replaced Rousseau; biological Darwinism, and its later creation, social Darwinism, held sway. The reasons for this change of vision are complex, but there is no doubt that at this point in history a triangle of influence

involving philosophy and politics, ethnography and archaeology begins to emerge. Indeed, starting with the recognition of a prehistoric humanity in 1865, analogies begin to be used in order to recreate a “human face for the Palaeolithic”. Its physical appearance and behaviour are inferred from great apes, gorillas and chimpanzees, but also from the “savage races”:

“The analogy may be pursued even further than this... in the same manner, if we wish clearly to understand the antiquities of Europe, we must compare them with rude implements still, or until lately, used by savage races in other parts of the world”(Lubbock 1865, 336-7).

In this way, the circle of ethnographic analogy is closed. By inferring social and cultural attributes from observations about technology and subsistence, and vice versa, evolutionary anthropologists and prehistorians in the nineteenth and early twentieth century created the image of the violent and warlike “prehistoric man”. The “theory of migration”, which dates from 1880, posited that the succession of populations was the result of the violent replacement of certain human groups by others, strengthening the conviction that warfare and conquest had always existed. But more than scientific studies it was the universal exhibitions, the first museums and the works of artists and writers that established in the popular imagination the figure of the anthropomorphic cannibal ape wielding primitive weapons, or the archetype of the virile, heroic cave-dweller forced to fend off ferocious animals (Figure 0-2).

In the second half of the twentieth century, in response to earlier racist doctrines and the decline of cultural relativism, Rousseau's vision began to prevail once more. The ingenuousness, ecological sustainability and intergroup harmony of traditional non-Western societies were all emphasised. The Kalahari bushmen, the “harmless people” (Thomas 1959) became the reference point for a school of thought which saw violence and warfare as recent phenomena; in societies where violence was evident, it was considered to have been ritual rather than harmful. Later, in the 1980s, with the emergence of evidence of warfare and fortifications in the societies of the Pacific north-west coast, Central America and the Amazon, the “tribal-zone theory” was developed, which regarded war as a direct result of European colonisation (Ferguson 1992).

In the last two decades the debate has resurfaced and seems once again to have changed focus. The catalyst for this change was Lawrence Keeley's *War Before Civilisation: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*, published in 1996. After analysing various societies considered to be pre-state, Keeley concluded that:

The facts recovered by ethnographers and archaeologists indicate unequivocally that primitive and prehistoric warfare was just as terrible and effective as the historic and civilised version. Peaceful pre-state societies were very rare; warfare between them was very frequent and most adult men in such groups saw combat repeatedly in a lifetime (1996, 174).



Figure 0-2. “The anthropophagi of New Caledonia”, detail of the front page of the French journal *Journal des voyages*, 1878.

Since then, we have witnessed the proliferation of studies on violence, both from a cross-cultural and ethnographic perspective (Allen and Jones 2014; Chacon and Mendoza 2007; Lambert 2002; Hill 2007) and from a prehistoric one based on a reading of the archaeological and bioarchaeological record in a variety of territories and chronologies (Arkush 2011; Dye 2009; Knüsel and Smith 2014; LeBlanc, 1999; Martin et al 2012; Milner et al 1991; Ralph 2012; Rice and LeBlanc 2001; Walker 2001).

Generally speaking, the archaeological record that has been constructed in recent years represents a break with the account that preceded it, which held that warfare and violence emerged only 5000 years ago with the development of the first states and the figure of the “warrior” (Guilaine and Zammit 2005). The vast body of osteoarchaeological and architectural evidence seems to reflect the presence of interpersonal violence already among the first farmer groups throughout Europe (Schulting 2013; Schulting and Fibiger 2012). Early Neolithic deposits like Talheim and Asparn/Scheltz, in Germany and Austria respectively, offer clear evidence of lethal violence and inter-group conflict (Teschler-Nicola 2012; Wahl and Trautmann 2012). Indeed, excavations at these sites suggest that entire communities were slaughtered here; victims were left unburied or were thrown into a common grave. These are not isolated cases. The work at the recently described Schöneck-Kilianstädten deposit, also in Germany and from the same chronological era revealed a mass grave containing 26 male individuals whose lower limbs had been systematically broken, either before or after death (Meyer et al. 2015). Moreover, buried upper limbs with marks of mutilation have been found in the Late Neolithic site of Bergheim, France, and interpreted as war trophies (Chenal et al. 2015).

To a lesser extent, we also have evidence of violence during the Mesolithic, that is, in contexts related to the last hunter-gatherer groups (Roksandic 2004; Thorpe 2003). There are several examples of selective deposition of human remains, especially skulls (Schulting 2015). The most controversial site is Ofnet Cave in Germany, where two deposits of skulls corresponding to 35 individuals of both sexes and all ages were found, with clear evidence of perimortem wounds and cut marks (Frayer 1997; Hofmann 2005; Orschiedt 2005). Unlike the proposed Neolithic massacres, the Ofnet skulls were deposited carefully, all facing west, covered with ochre and bearing ornaments made of animal teeth. More recently, at the site of Kanaljorden in Sweden several human skulls were found stuck on pikes in a stone platform submerged in a small lake (Hallgren 2011).

With regard to Pleistocene societies, there is no clear archaeological evidence of violence, although some tentative interpretations have been

proposed especially for the Upper Palaeolithic (e.g. Mirazón Lahr 2016). This absence of evidence has been used to deny the existence of war or systematic violence until about 10,000 to 12,000 years BP (Fry 2006; Kelly 2000; Patou-Mathis 2013). Thus, it is accepted that “complex” hunter-gatherer societies – that is, the more sedentary ones, with higher population density, organisation and storage capacity – present a considerable degree of violence and warfare, while in nomadic forager societies there are only a few isolated cases (Fry 2006). It has even been argued that the evidence of Palaeolithic violence actually reflects hunting accidents (Patou-Mathieu 2013), and that before the technological invention of the “thrown spear” warfare was not feasible (Kelly 2005).

### Purpose of this Volume

As we have seen, the emergence of violence has been dated ever earlier in recent decades, and is now situated in the Palaeolithic. Incidences of violence have been suggested as early as the Middle Pleistocene period (Sala et al. 2015). Shortly after the publication of Keeley’s book, Otterbein warned of the danger that “the myth of the peaceful savage” would be replaced (once again) by “the myth of the warlike savage” (1999, 251).

Since the 1960s, in the field of sociobiology and in ethological comparisons with other species, the figure of the “killer ape” has become firmly lodged in the popular imagination. Robert Ardrey was one of the exponents of this discourse with bestsellers such as *African Genesis* (1961) and *The Territorial Imperative* (1966), which took on the theories put forward by Ramon Dart in “The Predatory Transition from Ape to Man” (1953) according to which humans descended from a carnivorous, predatory and cannibalistic ancestor and possess a “killer instinct.” In the final book in his trilogy, *The Social Contract*, Ardrey is critical of Rousseau’s vision, even though he is aware of the limitations in which Rousseau worked:

How could he know in the days before Dart that man was descended from predatory primates who killed for a living? Not even Darwin knew that (1970, 81).

Despite Ardrey’s arguments having been confronted with incontrovertible evidence (e.g. about the uncritical use of ethological analogies: Barnett 1968), *The Naked ape: a Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal* (Morris 1967) and *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (Wrangham and Peterson 1996) are two more examples of highly successful general-audience books which have helped spread the

evolutionary view that violence has been inherent in our species for more than two million years. In the recent bestseller *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011) Steven Pinker defends the thesis that “in much of the living world, violence is simply the default”:

Hobbes considered competition to be an unavoidable consequence of agents’ pursuing their interests. Today we see that it is built into the evolutionary process. Survival machines that can elbow their competitors away from finite resources like food, water, and desirable territory will out-reproduce those competitors, leaving the world with the survival machines that are best suited for such competition.

Pinker argues that, in fact, over the last few millennia violence has been decreasing thanks to what he calls the “civilising process”, “the pacification process”, or the “new peace” since 1989. The violence of the past not only explains the violence of the present but also minimises it: we are living in the best of all possible worlds. And yet, in the four years since 2011 (when Pinker’s book was published) more than 300,000 people have been killed in Syria alone and millions have had to flee the country.

The truth is that in the general debate on the origins of violence, the two visions of the past have always shared one essential aspect: the attempt to naturalise ethnographic societies, in order to demonstrate what human nature is. Neither those who underestimate the importance of violence in these societies nor those who exaggerate it usually ask whether it was *always* like this or whether the reality they are observing is the result of a historical process.

As Robert L. Kelly suggests (2013, 158), the question is not “to ask whether hunter-gatherers (inclusive of egalitarian and non-egalitarian types) are peaceful or warlike; we find evidence for both among them. . . . [T]he better question is: when do foragers resort to war?” In other words, what are the causes of violence and war? To be able to answer this question, we need precise definitions of concepts which are widely used in this debate but not well defined, such as “violence” and “war” themselves, or “territory” and “resources”. Until we have these definitions, scholars will continue to use the same evidence to claim that in the Palaeolithic there was “violence” but not “war” (Kelly 2000) or that there was “aggression” but not “violence” (Patou-Mathieu 2013) – or the exact opposite. Moreover, archaeological research and hunter-gatherer studies have tended to focus on warfare and physical violence, but there are other dimensions of violence. Violence against women is an important one (Martin et al. 1997, Martin et al. 2010, Tung 2014).

The desire to achieve a clearer definition of these concepts was one of the main motivations of the session entitled “Archaeological Approaches to Violence in Prehistory” organised as part of the Theoretical Archaeology Conference held in Manchester in December 2014. This book is mainly the result of that session, collecting together the work of a dozen researchers from Europe and America and describing several archaeological experiences and theoretical perspectives which share a common thread: the necessity of rethinking the concept of “violence” in archaeology. This approach overcomes the old conception that limits violence to its most evident expression (war or intra- or extra-group conflict), and attempts to reach an agreement on an objective definition of violence that can help us to further our knowledge of the life and organisation of prehistoric societies.

The following papers try to overcome the weakness of certain explanations that researchers have traditionally taken as valid (or “least bad”) archaeological responses. The main focus is on the types or dimensions of violence, and on its social function: is violence inherent to human nature, or is it rather an instrument that allows society to assimilate and accept situations of social dissymmetry?

The study of ethnographic hunter-gatherer societies may be especially revealing. Transcending the western preconceptions of the “good savage” or “native cannibalism”, what type of violent social relationships do we observe in these societies? Why is structural violence against women more the rule than the exception? Finally, the authors of all the papers in this volume stress the vital importance of determining archaeological indicators that are able to identify the types of violent practices mentioned and to analyse their origin and causes. In fact, this is the only way to establish when, and under what historical conditions, prehistoric societies began to organise themselves by exercising structural violence.

## References

- Allen, Mark W., and Jones, Terry L. eds. 2014. *Violence and Warfare Among Hunter-Gatherers*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Ardrey, Robert. 1961. *African Genesis. A personal Investigation into the Animal Origins and Nature of Man*. Atheneum: New York.
- . 1966. *The territorial imperative: a personal inquiry into the animal origins of property and nations*. Atheneum: New York.
- . 1970. *The Social Contract: A Personal Inquiry into the Evolutionary Sources of Order and Disorder*. London: Collins.

- Arkush, Elizabeth N. 2011. *Hillforts of the Ancient Andes: Colla Warfare, Society, and Landscape*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Barnett, S. A. 1968. "On the Hazards of Analogies". In *Man and aggression*, edited by Ashley Montagu, 18-26. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chacon, Richard J., and Rubén G. Mendoza. 2007. *North American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Chenal, Fanny, Bertrand Perrin, Hélène Barrand-Emam, Bruno Boulestin. 2015. "A farewell to arms: a deposit of human limbs and bodies at Bergheim, France, c. 4000 BC". *Antiquity*, 89(348): 1313-1330. DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2015.180
- Dart, Raymon. 1953. "The Predatory Transition from Ape to Man." *International Anthropological and Linguistic Review*, 1: 201–217.
- Dye, David H. 2009. *War Paths, Peace Paths: An Archaeology of Cooperation and Conflict in Native Eastern North America*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- Ferguson, R. Brian. 1992. "Tribal Warfare." *Scientific American*, 266: 108–16.
- Freyer, David W. 1997. "Ofnet: Evidence for a Mesolithic Massacre". In *Troubled times: violence and warfare in the past*, edited by Debra L. Martin, and David W. Freyer, 181-216. Oxford: Gordon and Breach.
- Fry, Douglas P. 2006. *The Human Potential for Peace: An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guilaine J, Zammit J. 2005. *The Origins of War. Violence in Prehistory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hallgren, Fredrik. 2011. "Mesolithic skull depositions at Kanaljorden, Motala, Sweden". *Current Swedish Archaeology*, 19: 244–246.
- Hill, K., Magdalena A. Hurtado, Robert S. Walker. 2007. High adult mortality among Hiwi hunter-gatherers: Implications for human evolution. *Journal of Human Evolution*, 52(4), 443–454. DOI: 10.1016/j.jhevol.2006.11.003
- Keeley, Lawrence H. 1996. *War before Civilization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kelly, Raymond C. 2000. *Warless Societies and the Origin of War*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- . 2005. "The Evolution of Lethal Intergroup Violence". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 102: 15294–8.

- Kelly, Robert L. 2013. "From the Peaceful to the Warlike: Ethnographies and Archaeological Insights into Hunter-Gatherer Warfare and Homicide". In *War, Peace, and Human Nature*, edited by Douglas P. Fry, 151–67. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Knüsel, Christophe, and Martin J. Smith, eds. 2014. *The Routledge Handbook of the Bioarchaeology of Human Conflict*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mirazón Lahr, Marta, F. Rivera, R. K. Power, A. Mounier, B. Copsey, F. Crivellaro, J. E. Edung, J. M. Maillo Fernandez, C. Kiarie, J. Lawrence, A. Leajey, E. Mbua, H. Miller, A. Muigai, D. M. Mukhongo, A. Van Baelen, R. Wood, J.-L. Schwenninger, R. Grün, H. Achyuthan, A. Wilshaw, and R. A. Foley. 2016. "Inter-group violence among early Holocene hunter-gatherers of West Turkana, Kenya". *Nature*, 529(7586): 394-398. DOI: 10.1038/nature16477
- Lambert, Patricia M. 2002. "The Archaeology of War: A North American Perspective". *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 10:207–41.
- LeBlanc, Steven A. 1999. *Prehistoric Warfare in the American Southwest*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Lubbock, John 1865. *Pre-historic Times*. London: Williams and Norgate.
- Martin, Debra L., and David W. Frayer, eds. 1997. *Troubled times : violence and warfare in the past*. Australia: Gordon and Breach.
- Martin, Debra L., Ryan P. Harrod, and Ventura R. Pérez, eds. 2012. *The Bioarchaeology of Violence*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Martin, Debra L., Ryan P. Harrod, and Misty Fields. 2010. "Beaten Down and Worked to the Bone : Bioarchaeological Investigations of Women and Violence in the Ancient Southwest". *Landscapes of Violence*, 1(1), Article 3.
- Meyer, Christian, Christian Lohr, Detlef Gronenborn, and Kurt W. Alt. 2015. "The massacre mass grave of Schöneck-Kilianstädten reveals new insights into collective violence in Early Neolithic Central Europe". *PNAS*, 112(36): 11217-11222. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1504365112
- Milner, George R., Eve Anderson, and Virginia G. Smith. 1991. "Warfare in Late Prehistoric West-Central Illinois". *American Antiquity*, 56: 581–603.
- Morris, Desmond. 1967. *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Orschiedt, Jörg. 2005. "The head burials from Ofnet cave: An example of warlike conflict in the Mesolithic". In *Warfare, Violence and Slavery in Prehistory*, edited by Mike Parker Pearson, and I. J. N. Thorpe, 67-73. Oxford: Archaeopress BAR International Series 1374.

- Otterbein, Keith F. 1999. "A History of Research on Warfare in Anthropology". *American Anthropologist*, 101: 794–805.
- Patou-Mathis, Marylène. 2013. *Préhistoire de la violence et de la guerre*. Paris: Odile Jacob.
- Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Viking Press.
- Ralph, Sarah, ed. 2012. *The Archaeology of Violence: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Rice, Glen E., and Steven A. LeBlanc, eds. 2001. *Deadly Landscapes: Case Studies in Prehistoric Southwestern Warfare*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Roksandic, Mirjana (2004). *Violent interactions in the Mesolithic: evidence and meaning*. Oxford: Archaeopress, BAR International Series 1237
- Rubiés, Joan-Pau. 2011. "Ethnography, philosophy and the rise of natural man 1500-1750". In *Encountering Otherness. Diversities and Transcultural Experiences in Early Modern European Culture*, edited by Guido Abbattista. Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste.
- Sala, Nohemi, Juan Luis Arsuaga, Ana Pantoja-Pérez, Adrián Pablos, Ignacio Martínez, Rolf M. Quam, Asier Gómez-Olivencia, José María Bermúdez de Castro, Eudald Carbonell. 2015. "Lethal Interpersonal Violence in the Middle Pleistocene". *PLoS ONE*, 10(5): e0126589. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0126589
- Schulting, Rick J. 2013. "War Without Warriors? The Nature of Interpersonal Conflict before the Emergence of Formalized Warrior Elites". In *The Archaeology of Violence: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Sarah Ralph, 15–36. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- . 2015. "Mesolithic skull cults?". In *Ancient Death Ways: Proceedings of the workshop on archaeology and mortuary practices*, edited by Kim von Hackwitz, and Rita Peyroteo-Stjerna, 19-46. Uppsala: Institutionen för arkeologi och antik historia, Uppsala University.
- Schulting, Rick J., and Linda Fibiger, eds. 2012. *Sticks, Stones, and Broken Bones: Neolithic Violence in a European Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Teschler-Nicola, Maria. 2012. "The Early Neolithic site Asparn/Schletz (Lower Austria): Anthropological evidence of interpersonal violence." In *Sticks, Stones, and Broken Bones: Neolithic Violence in a European Perspective*, edited by Rick J. Schulting, and Linda Fibiger, 101-120. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Thomas, Elizabeth Marshall. 1959. *The harmless people*. New York: Knopf.
- Thorpe, I. J. N. 2003. "Death and violence: The Later Mesolithic of Southern Scandinavia". In *Peopling the Mesolithic in a northern environment*, edited by L. Bevan, and J. Moore, 171–180. Oxford: Archaeopress, BAR International Series 1157.
- Tung, Tiffany A. 2014. "Gender-based Violence in the Wari and Post-Wari Era of the Andes". In *The Routledge Handbook of the Bioarchaeology of Human Conflict*, edited by Knüsel, Christophe, and Martin J. Smith, 333–354. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wahl, Joachim, and Iris Trautmann. 2012. "The Neolithic massacre at Talheim: A pivotal find in conflict archaeology". In *Sticks, Stones, and Broken Bones: Neolithic Violence in a European Perspective*, edited by Rick J. Schulting, and Linda Fibiger, 77-100. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walker, Phillip L. 2001. "A bioarchaeological perspective on the history of violence". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30: 573–96.
- Wrangham, Richard, and Dale Peterson. 1996. *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

## CHAPTER ONE

# SACRIFICE AND EXECUTION: RITUAL KILLINGS IN VIKING AGE SCANDINAVIAN SOCIETY

BO JENSEN<sup>1</sup>

Viking Age Scandinavian pagans practiced human sacrifice. This is one of the best-attested facts about their religion. They also decapitated people and sometimes buried them alongside other, intact bodies. Conventionally, archaeologists have conflated sacrifice and decapitation. Here, I aim to challenge that conflation: in written sources, sacrifice is overwhelmingly by hanging, not by decapitation, and decades of research on sacrifice have produced few new insights in archaeology. Instead, I compare Scandinavian burials to burials from Viking Age Christian England, interpreted as evidence for secular executions. I explore Viking Age decapitations in the light of characteristics equally germane to religious sacrifice and secular justice. I argue that pagan and Christian elites alike used public occasions to demonstrate their power to kill, and that the victims of these killings were denied basic recognition as human beings. In Agamben's (1998) vocabulary, victims had *zoē*, bare life, but were denied *bios*, politically recognized citizenship. In Butler's (2003) terminology, these were not grievable lives.

### **The Viking Age and the written sources**

The Viking Age is a scholarly invention. No sudden break sets this period apart from earlier or later periods, nor was the period itself homogenous. The dates assigned vary between research traditions, but for this paper, 750 CE to 1100 CE will do.

---

<sup>1</sup> Archaeologist and independent researcher from Copenhagen, Denmark.

During this period, communities from Scandinavia expanded overseas and established themselves as far away as Kiev and Greenland. This expansion involved violent conquests (in England), possibly genocide (the Orkneys), and more peaceful settlement in largely uninhabited territories (Iceland).

In Scandinavia, the Viking Age coincides with state-formation, urbanization and Christianization. Christian missions began in the early 800s, and Christianity probably became dominant between 950 and 1050 CE. The church introduced manuscript technologies, and Icelanders were producing vernacular, secular manuscripts by the late 1200s. Relevant written sources can be divided into three groups: contemporary rune-stones, contemporary descriptions by outsiders (mostly Christian clergy and Arabic travellers), and Old Norse texts written after 1200 or so. No rune-stones are relevant to the present discussion. Contemporary descriptions generally rely on second-hand information and may be misinformed, while Old Norse manuscripts were created 200 or more years after Christianization, and show literary inventions and borrowings from other literatures. The entire corpus of texts is so small that it is rare to find two independent sources for the same fact.

### Sacrifice in the written sources

Most of the relevant written sources explicitly label sacrifices as such, either in Latin (*sacrificum*) or in Old Norse (usually *blót*). However, the Arabic writers use very generic terms.

Few texts provide clear, clinical information, but at least three may describe a combined ritual of strangulation and stabbing (*Gautreks saga* 7, *Hávamál* 138 and Ibn Fadlan, see Montgomery 2003, 19). Adam of Bremen (chapter 27) describes hanged victims, but mentions blood, implying that these victims, too, were wounded. This seems unnecessarily elaborate for purely practical purposes (contra Näsström 2001, 55). A few sources suggest other ways of killing: a later gloss in Adam of Bremen mentions drowned victims (chapter 27, gloss 1; cf. Näsström 2001, 51). The very late and untrustworthy *Egils saga ok Asmunds* chapter 9 describes sacrifice to Odin by decapitation, and *Landnámabók* chapter 85 claims that victims' backs were broken over a boulder. The description, repeated verbatim in *Eyrbrygja saga* chapter 1, is widely refuted (cf. Page 1995, 30; Näsström 2001, 41). Late romances describe an incoherent, but ornately sadistic ritual of mutilation called the blood-eagle. Critics suggest that this is based on a misread metaphor (Sawyer 1982, 95; but cf.

Näsström 2001, 41; Wormald 1982, 140, with references). Thus, in texts, sacrifice is typically by asphyxiation, not decapitation.

Some texts describe regular sacrifices, performed repeatedly on the same spot and on a large scale: Thietmar of Merseburg claims that 99 men, and as many dogs, horses and cockerels, were sacrificed every nine years in Lejre, Denmark (chapter 17). Adam of Bremen claims that animals and nine men were sacrificed every nine years in Old Uppsala, Sweden. A later gloss counts 72 sacrifices, perhaps eight species, nine individuals each (chapter 27, gloss 4). Other texts describe much smaller sacrifices in response to specific crises, often at arbitrary places: *Ynglinga saga* 18 describes the sacrifice of one king at Old Uppsala in response to years of bad harvests; *Gautreks saga* (chapter 7) describes the sacrifice of one king on the first island the fleet reached after misfortune struck; Ibn Fadlan describes the ritualized killing of one woman at the funeral of a chieftain, apparently on the island where he happened to die (Montgomery 2003, 14ff).

Most victims are anonymous. Despite gothic fantasies, there is little evidence that many were slaves (contra Näsström 2001). More often, they are described vaguely as "men" (*Ynglinga saga* chapter 18, *Eyrbrygja saga* chapter 1), and in two sources, some sort of lottery is used (*Gautreks saga* chapter 7; *Vita Willibrordi*; see Talbot 1981, 10; details are so similar that the *saga* may have borrowed from the *Vita*). *Landnámabók* chapter 85 and *Eyrbrygja saga* chapter 1 may or may not describe sacrifice as capital punishment (discussed in Näsström 2001, 41). Several sources claim or imply that some chieftains' widows were killed at their husband's funerals. One source, Ibn Rustah, claims that these women were buried alive (see Näsström 2001, 37ff for sources and discussion).

### Archaeology and text

Most of the phenomena described in the written sources have left no archaeological evidence.

Hanging is invisible in osteoarchaeology. This likely reflects methodological limits (see Reynolds 2009, 39). Hangings appear in iconography, on the Garde Bota and Lärbro St. Hammars picture stones and the Oseberg tapestry (Gotland, Sweden; Gotland, Sweden; Vestfold, Norway; Lindqvist 1941, Fig. 141 and 81; Zachrisson 2003, fig. 4). Garde Bota shows seven women hanged, Oseberg shows nine men, similar to Adam of Bremen's description. One of three small, phallic figurines from Lunda (Södermanland, Sweden) may also portray a hanged man. The figurines were found when excavating a hall next to a possible sacred

grove (Anderson 2003, 125, figurine C). A similar figurine, from Kymbo (Västergötland, Sweden) probably antedates the Viking Age by a few centuries (Zachrisson 2003). A Buddha figurine was deposited in a posthole in a Viking Age building on Helgö (Uppland, Sweden), in a context very similar to that of the Lunda finds. It was found with remains of a leather strand around its neck and left wrist (Gyllensvärd 2004, fig. 4). This may be a clumsy suspension, but might also give the impression that the figurine had been hanged. More generally, Torun Zachrisson (2003) has interpreted a recurrent motif in iconography in the centuries before the Viking Age as showing hanged men. All the small, Scandinavian figurines lack details that might reveal their sacred or juridical association, while the Lärbro and Oseberg images combine hangings with a lot of poorly understood detail. Any interpretations are at best hermeneutic.

Viking Age animal sacrifice is most obvious in graves. Horses, dogs and birds are often represented by more or less complete bodies, interpreted as sacrifices killed at the funeral, while pigs and cows are represented only by body parts, interpreted as food offerings. More than a hundred examples are recorded, and I shall not catalogue them here. This material closely resembles Ibn Fadlan's description.

Outside burials, animal sacrifice is much less visible. A few sites have produced peculiar depositions of articulated animals in pits, notably Trelleborg (Slagelse amt, Denmark), Halleby Å (Holbæk Amt, Denmark) and Jyllandsvej (Middelfart Amt, Denmark; see Jørgensen 2014, 129 & 138; Henriksen 2015). These sites are among the best candidates for non-funeral animal sacrifice yet discovered (but cf. Broderick 2012). At Hofstaðir, Iceland, McGovern and Lucas (2007, 13f & 23) describe a very unusual bone-assembly, full of large, young animals, killed by decapitation. They argue that these observations make little economic sense, and hint at a dramatically wasteful and bloody ritual. So far, this material is unique. Animal bone has been recovered from a few other supposed cult sites, but Magnell (2021) reports that the bones from one of these, at Uppåkra (Scania, Sweden), resemble contemporary household waste. Similar conclusions may warranted for Borg (Östergötland, Sweden) and Pollista (Uppland, Sweden; Nielsen 1997; Hållands and Svensson 1998; cf. Jensen 2010, 125-129). Not incidentally, written sources imply that many sacrificed animals were butchered and eaten. The resulting bone assemblage might well be indistinguishable from household waste. Certainly, much of the animal sacrifice mentioned in the written sources is archaeologically invisible.

Sacred groves may have been excavated at Lunda (Södermanland, Sweden) and Frösö (Värmland, Sweden). A few human bones were

recovered at each site, but show no evidence of violence, let alone sacrifice (see Andersson 2006, 195 with references; Jørgensen 2014, 134 & 143).

Isolated Viking Age graves are fairly common, but none have been identified as sacrifices.

The evidence for wives killed at funerals is generally unconvincing or ambiguous: multiple graves are frequent, but some contain three or more people, and some include same-sex combinations that fit poorly with descriptions of Viking Age marriage. Most of these graves show no evidence of violence (but see below), and some appear to have been reopened for the second burial (Gräslund 1984, 36). This would suggest that the burials were not simultaneous, and that the second person was not killed at the first person's funeral.

### **Archaeology without supporting text evidence**

Archaeology provides much better evidence for actions rarely mentioned in written sources, notably decapitation: 16 graves contain 18 decapitated bodies and three sites have produced twenty isolated skulls, of which six were found in closed contexts, and seem to have been deposited without their bodies. Decapitation also appears in Viking Age iconography, identified as legendary killings, not sacrifices (Ramsundsberget, Östergötland, Sweden, Ardre VIII, Gotland, Sweden; see Jensen in prep.).

At least eleven double inhumations contain one intact and one decapitated body. Only two of these had clear, observed cut-marks (Lejre 55, Bollstanäs). In three cases, the skull was moved so far from its anatomical position that the head must have been severed before burial (Næstved, Lockarp 1, Fjälkinge 3). In five cases, skulls were missing (Grydehøj, Birka A129, three graves on Flakstad), and in one case the skull was almost in situ (Stengade II FF). It is possible but unlikely that a few of these last six cases may represent post-mortem disturbance rather than decapitation. Other double inhumations contained a woman whose skull was cut open (Ballyteare), and a man with a probable broken neck (Gjerdrup). In a few cases, the date is uncertain: the Næstved site contains Viking Age burials and medieval mass graves, but the decapitation is most likely Viking Age. The Danish national database (F&F) claims that "some" Viking Age decapitations were found on Skt. Alberts Kirkegård, Ærø, but this seems to be a mistake: the publication of that site only mentions medieval graves, including that of two decapitated men (the relevant graves are: Lejre grave 55, Kornerup parish, Denmark: Sellevold, Lund Hansen and Jørgensen 1984, 77; Gardela 2013, 111f, cat. 8;

Andersen 1960, 26; Grydehøj, Roskilde amt, Denmark, Ulricksen 2011, 196; Gjerdrup, Lejre, Kornerup parish, Denmark: Christensen and Bennikke, 9ff, Stengade II, Langeland, Denmark, grave FII: Sellevold, Lund Hansen and Jørgensen 1984, 116; Gardela 2013, 108ff; Næstved Kasernes Plads: F&F database; Skt. Alberts Kirkegård: F&F database and Skaarup 1997, 35f; Lockarp grave 1, Lockarp parish, Scania, Sweden: Svanberg 2003b, 290, cat. 227:1 - 1976 excavation; Gardela 2013, 116 and cat. 10; Fjälkinge grave 3 RAÄ 18-19, Fjälkinge parish, Scania: Svanberg 2003b, 301, cat. 254:3; Gardela 2013, 115 and cat. 4; Bollstanäs, Uppland, Sweden: Hemmendorff 1984, 4ff; Birka, Uppland, Sweden, grave Bj. A129: Gardela 2013, 116f and cat. 1., Holmquist Olauson 1990; Ballateare, Isle of Man: Gardela 2013, 127f, Williams 2008, 175ff, with further references; and Flakstad, Nordland, Norway: Nauman et al. 2014).

Another five graves only contained decapitated bodies. Two were double graves, three were single graves. Both double decapitations have been interpreted as executed criminals, and this may also be relevant for some of the single graves. A single grave at Rantauzsminde contained a person whose skull was dislocated. Brønsted suggested that this was due to post-mortem disturbance, though Gardela is unconvinced (double decapitations: Kumle Høje, Langeland, Denmark, grave F: Gardela 2013, 113, cat. 7; Kalmargården, Store Fuglede parish, Ars herred, Holbæk amt, Denmark: Sellevold, Bennike and Hanse 1984, 70; Gardela 2013, 114, and cat. 5; single decapitations: Birka, Uppland, grave Bj. 959; Gardela 2013, 116f and cat. 1; Bogøvej 21, Langeland, Denmark: Gardela 2013, 123f, cat. 3; Ljungbacka, Scania, grave 23, Gardela 2013, 115 and cat. 9; Rauntsausminde, Svendborg Parish, Svendborg Amt, Denmark: Gardela 2013, 108).

Lezsek Gardela (2013, 123f) suggests that some decapitations may be post-mortem, a practice used in later sagas to stop the restless dead from haunting the living. He mentions Bogøvej and Ballyteare as possible examples (above; Gardela 2013, 127f).

Unsurprisingly, all this evidence comes from inhumation graves. Relevant evidence has not survived cremation. The scarcity of decapitation graves from Sweden and Norway may reflect the frequency of cremations there. In southwest Denmark the local soil conditions may affect bone preservation and thus evidence. However, the lack of Icelandic examples is striking.

Excavations in Early Viking Dublin revealed 17 skulls isolated from their bodies, of which at least four showed evidence of decapitation and one of these had apparently been impaled on a spike. Three of these skulls were found in pits. Barra Ó Donnabhain suggests death in conflict rather

than formal execution, based on perimortem trauma, but I cannot follow his argument. An isolated skull from a well in Aarhus, Denmark, showed clear decapitation cut-marks. Two children's skulls were found buried together with no postcranial bones on Fjälkinge grave-field, a site otherwise characterized by excellent preservation and recovery of bone. These are likely to have been buried as isolated heads (references: Dublin, Co. Dublin, Ireland: Ó Donnabhain 2010, 274f; Rosensgade 17-19, Aarhus, Aarhus Amt, Denmark: Gardela 2013, 128; and Fjälkinge RAA 18-19, Fjälkinge parish, Scania, Sweden, grave 776, Svanberg 2003, 305, cat. 255:776; Gardela 2013, 117f).

This catalogue is unlikely to be exhaustive. Notably, it has benefited from recent, excellent overviews of relevant material from South Sweden, Denmark and Dublin (Svandberg 2003; Gardela 2013; Ó Donnabhain 2010). No similar surveys are currently available for central Sweden or Norway. It is also highly likely that isolated skulls are common outside Dublin, but unless they are found in dating contexts they may not be recognized as Viking Age.

### **Ambiguous archaeology**

There are many more multiple internments in the material than catalogued above, but they contain no evidence that anyone was killed for the funeral (cf., e.g. grave from Dråby, Ramskou 1965, 84ff). It seems clear that some monuments were reused over several generations, perhaps as family or lineage graves. In other cases, collective burial in the same pit or chamber may reflect epidemics, accidents or battles (e.g. grave 23 and 43 at Trelleborg fortress, with 5 and 12 bodies with weapons; see Sellevold, Lund Hansen and Jørgensen 1984; cf. also Ridgeway Hill, above; and Ó Donnabhain 2010, 273f). Better arguments for funeral killings have been made for Balladoole, Man, Oseberg, and the ship-chamber grave at Haithabu. All are high-status graves. Interestingly, Naumann et al. (2014) argue that on Flakstad (above), people in primary burials accompanied by decapitations ate differently from decapitated individuals and individuals buried alone, suggesting that the well-fed elite were buried intact with decapitated slaves. In contrast, most decapitation graves discussed above are poorly equipped, and graves with multiple bodies cannot be systematically connected to the elite (Balladoole, Man: Williams 2008, 173ff; Haithabu, Schleswig, Germany: Wamers 1994; Oseberg, Vestfold, Norway: Arwill-Nordbladh 2000, all with references).

More generally, Viking Age graves occasionally contain dislocated bones from other individuals than the primary incipient of burial. Some of

these bones likely come from disturbed graves, but in other cases, careful excavation has revealed infill containing human bone unlikely to originate in disturbed primary burials, including cremated bone on inhumation grave-fields (see Ulrichsen 2011, 189). This phenomenon is poorly understood, but there is no evidence that it involved violence.

Sacrifice has also been suggested for the human and animal remains found in shafts excavated at Trelleborg, dated to the 9th or 10th century, with no evidence of violence (see Jørgensen 2014, 129; Sellevold, Lund Hansen and Jørgensen 1984, 131; Trelleborg is in Slagelse Amt, Denmark). The shaft from Rosengade, Aarhus, with a severed head, may also be relevant here (see above). Clearly, these are ritual depositions, but the evidence for ritual killing is ambiguous. Thus, the bulk of the evidence for ritualized killings in Viking Age Scandinavia comes from inhumations of decapitated bodies.

## Overview

Decapitation is evident in eastern and northern Denmark and adjacent south Sweden; in central Sweden; in northern Norway; in Dublin; and on the Isle of Man. It may have been far more widespread. Hangings left no bone-evidence, but text sources describe them in eastern Denmark and central Sweden, and iconography implies that they were familiar on Gotland and in central Sweden.

Available dates span the whole Viking Age: Bollstanäs was radiocarbon dated on human bone to 760±100 years CE (Hemmendorff 1984, 4ff); Birka A129 was dated to around 800 CE (Holmquist Olauson 1990); Fjälkinge grave 776 contained beads, dated to 800-1000 CE (Svanberg 2003, 305, cat. 255:776); Lejre grave 55 contained a Borre-style buckle (Andersen 1960, 26), probably 850-950 CE; Birka 959 contained oval brooches of type JP 55:1A, which Gardela date to 850-975 CE (Gardela 2013, 116f and cat. 1); Fjälkinge grave 3 overlies grave 4, with a comb of type Ambrosiani B and dated to after 900 CE (Svanberg 2003, 301, cat. 254:3); Rosengade 17-19, Aarhus, dates to the 900s CE; Svanberg dates Lockarp grave 1 to 950-1050 CE (Svanberg 2003, 290, cat. 227:1 - 1976 excavation); the Dublin skulls date to the 900s and 1000s CE (Ó Donnabhain 2010, 274f); the Kalmargården bodies are radiocarbon dated to 1015 and 1040 CE, calibrated (Sellevold, Bennike and Hansen 1984, 70). Thus, decapitation is evident throughout the Viking Age, but decapitation burials on grave-fields cease around the time of Christian conversion, and isolated skulls may cluster in the late Viking Age.

Not all relevant skeletons have been sexed, but the two graves with two decapitations each only contain males (Kalmargården, Kumle Høje). The isolated, decapitated bodies include two females (Birka 959, Bogøvej) and one male (Lungbacka 23). In six double graves, victims were male (Lejre, Gjerdrup, Grydehøj, Stengade II, Lockarp 1 and Birka A129), in one female (Ballyteare), while the intact bodies in Lejre, Stengade, Lockarp 1, Fjälkinge 3, Birka A129 and Ballyteare (and the central body in Balladoole) were male, in Gjerdrup and Grydehøj female, so that two women were buried with male victims, one man with a female victim, and four men with male victims. The Dublin skulls include 11 males and one female, the Aarhus skull is male, and the remaining finds have not been sexed (see references above). Thus, the vast majority of the decapitated individuals are adult males. In the written sources, all texts on burial sacrifice describe women sacrificed at men's funerals (Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah and see above), while victims outside burial contexts are described as male or not identified (Adam of Bremen, *Gautreks saga*, *Ynglinga saga*, *Egils saga ok Asmunds*, *Hávamál*, *Lándnamabok*, *Vita Willibrordi*).

Several decapitated individuals may have been buried with tied feet (Stengade, Kumle Høje, Lejre 55, Bollstanäs), and one apparently had his lower legs cut off before burial (Fjälkinge 3). Tied hands are less evident (Lejre 55, possibly Stengade II). The raised hands of the Ballyteare woman suggest that her hands were not tied. Most of these bodies were buried supine, but in Lejre 55, Kumle Høje and Bollstanäs, the upper (decapitated) bodies were prone. In Ballateare and Birka A129, the upper (mutilated and decapitated) bodies were placed in unusual positions (for references, see above).

The Dublin skull shows that some remains were displayed. Other sources are less than clear on this, but written sources imply that hanged victims were left to hang for some time, although only the *Hávamál 138* is very clear on this (nine nights). Decapitated bodies in graves show no obvious signs of decomposition before burial, and seem to have been buried soon after death. More generally, enduring memories of killings could be anchored on existing groves or grave-fields or new images and monumental graves (Oseberg, Haithabu, Ballateare, Balladoole; cf. also Ibn Fadlan). Such efforts to create enduring memories are common in public killings elsewhere: victims of Late Medieval executions were usually left hanging, the cut-off heads of Aztec sacrifices were exhibited on special racks and Reynolds argues that Anglo-Saxon authorities created even more enduring landscapes of memory by building or reusing monumental earthworks for judgment and punishment (2009, 248). More recently, executions have been published in text and image, from

woodcuts to newspaper notices and online video footage (i.e. recent ISIS executions).

## **Historical perspectives on decapitation**

Archaeological evidence for decapitation and unusual burial abounds in contemporary Christian England (Reynolds 2009). These graves are convincingly explained as evidence for secular executions, not religious sacrifices.

Startling evidence of this was found at Ridgeway Hill, Dorset, England: a mass grave of thirty-odd decapitated men, apparently of Scandinavian origin, and radiocarbon dated to the Viking Age. Five skulls are missing, and the excavators suggest that the heads were removed as trophies for display elsewhere. This mass grave was probably created by local Anglo-Saxons, and has been tentatively connected to the St. Brice's day massacre (Loe et al. 2014).

Less dramatically, Anglo-Saxon laws demanded death for a range of crimes, including both secular and spiritual offences (theft, witchcraft, sexual deviance). Convicts were variously hanged, decapitated, drowned and immolated. In Christian times, executed convicts were refused burial in consecrated ground and buried instead in specialized execution cemeteries. Interestingly, pre-Christian and conversion period Anglo-Saxon grave-fields contain unusual graves that resemble Scandinavian examples even more closely: in those periods, a few Anglo-Saxons were buried prone (face down) and/or included as secondary burials in primary graves made for other people (Reynolds 2009, 68ff).

The English material is not quite parallel to the Scandinavian examples. Yet it does raise the question of whether paganism is the best frame of reference for understanding unusual graves: Scandinavians were pagans; Scandinavian pagans sacrificed humans; but it does not follow that all organized killings in Scandinavia were therefore pagan sacrifices. Contemporary Christians decapitated people for political reasons and secular crimes, and pagans might also have done so. Secular executions earn little mention in written sources, but they do occur (i.e. in *Jómsvíkinga saga* chapter 35), and their scarcity may reveal more about the written sources than about past realities.

## **Sacrifice as a mark of the other**

Post-colonial critiques highlight the importance of human sacrifice in western discourses on otherness: notably, colonial period English antiquarians