

AmS-Skrifter 29
Arkeologisk museum, Universitetet i Stavanger
Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

Ingunn M. Røstad, Elna Siv Kristoffersen, Håkon Reiersen, Unn
Pedersen, Marie Dave Amundsen and Sigmund Oehrl (eds)

Technologies – Knowledges – Sustainability Crafting societies in the first millennium CE

*Proceedings of the 74th International Sachsensymposium
in Stavanger, Norway*

Stavanger 2025

Editorial office:

Arkeologisk museum, Universitetet i Stavanger

Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

Editor of the series: Anja Mansrud

Editors of this volume: Ingunn M. Røstad, Elna Siv Kristoffersen, Håkon Reiersen, Unn Pedersen,

Marie Dave Amundsen and Sigmund Oehrl

Layout: Ingund Svendsen

Editorial board:

Anja Mansrud (chief editor)

Marie Ødegaard

Grethe Moéll Pedersen

Ingund Svendsen

Linn Eikje Ramberg

Dawn Elise Mooney

Torbjørg Bjelland

Håkon Reiersen

Publisher:

Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

N-4036 Stavanger

Norway

Tel.: (+47) 51 83 26 00

E-mail: post-am@uis.no

Stavanger 2025

Font: Warnock Pro/Conduit

Printed edition: 100

ISSN 0800-0816

ISBN 978-82-7760-205-9

© Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover photo:

The front page: Amber nuggets and semi-finished amber beads and pendants from pit-house 7/91 in Biskupice, Poland.

Photo: Marcin Woźniak.

The back page: Suspension loop for gold bracteate S12625, from Hå on Jæren, Rogaland. Photo: Annette G. Øvreliid.

Cover design: Ingund Svendsen, AM, UiS.

Viking Man, Viking women: the IoM 2018 oval brooches and the end of the myth of men-only warrior groups settling in the Isle of Man

DIRK H. STEINFORTH

*This paper is dedicated to the memory of
Ryan Foster, a colleague and a friend,
and one of the nicest blokes one could ever hope to meet.*

Dirk H. Steinforth 2025. **Viking Man, Viking women: the IoM 2018 oval brooches and the end of the myth of men-only warrior groups settling in the Isle of Man.** *AmS-Skrifter* 29, 181–190, Stavanger, ISSN 0800-0816, ISBN 978-82-7760-205-9.

Oval brooches are considered one of the most diagnostic elements of female Viking costume, and they frequently are used to indicate that Scandinavian women accompanied their seafaring menfolk when settling new lands. But while they were known in virtually every other area of Scandinavian settlement in the British Isles, they were missing entirely in the Isle of Man, which presumably was conquered and settled by Hiberno-Vikings after about 870. Their conspicuous absence – and general lack of securely sexed female burials among the Viking graves in Man – gave rise to the assumption that those settlers were all-male groups of warriors, who subsequently married local Christian women, and this formed the basis for far-reaching conclusions regarding the early Viking Age in the Island. This long-lived notion was challenged in 2015, and in December 2018, the discovery of two oval brooches in the Isle of Man confirmed the doubts about the previous conclusions regarding the nature of interethnic social contact on late 9th-century Man. This paper presents the currently unpublished Manx oval brooches, considers the now-obsolete former interpretations and the objections to them, and discusses the impact of this single new discovery on the scholarly perception of early Viking-age Manx history.

Dirk H. Steinforth, Göttingen. Independent Researcher. E-mail: dirk.steinforth@gmx.net

Key words: burials, Isle of Man, oval brooches, settlement, sex and gender, Vikings, women

Introduction

Viking-age objects that are considered to belong characteristically to the female sphere (“female objects”) frequently were and are used to identify the burials of Scandinavian women, both at home and abroad – oval brooches in particular. But while known in virtually every other Scandinavian settlement area in the British Isles, oval brooches and other reliable indicators of the presence of women were lacking entirely in the graves in the Isle of Man, a little island in the middle of the Irish Sea that was settled by Hiberno-Vikings after about 870 (Steinforth 2015b, 2018) and that is famous for its rich Viking-age archaeology.¹ By way of an explanation for this vexing discrepancy, the absence of female burials in the archaeo-

logical record gave rise to the hypothesis that in Man, the Viking settlers did not bring their womenfolk along from their Scandinavian homelands. Instead, it was supposed that they were men-only warrior groups, who subsequently married local Christian women, who eventually were buried according to Christian traditions, without identifying objects. This assumption in turn formed the basis for far-reaching conclusions regarding the early Viking settlement in the Island, particularly concerning continuity of burial customs, conversion by the pagan Vikings to Manx Christianity, social coexistence of the two ethnic groups, and even the date of the Vikings’ initial arrival in Man (e.g. Graham-Campbell 1995, 76–78, 1998, 177 (see below); cf. Steinforth 2015b, 307–14, 345–49, 2015c).

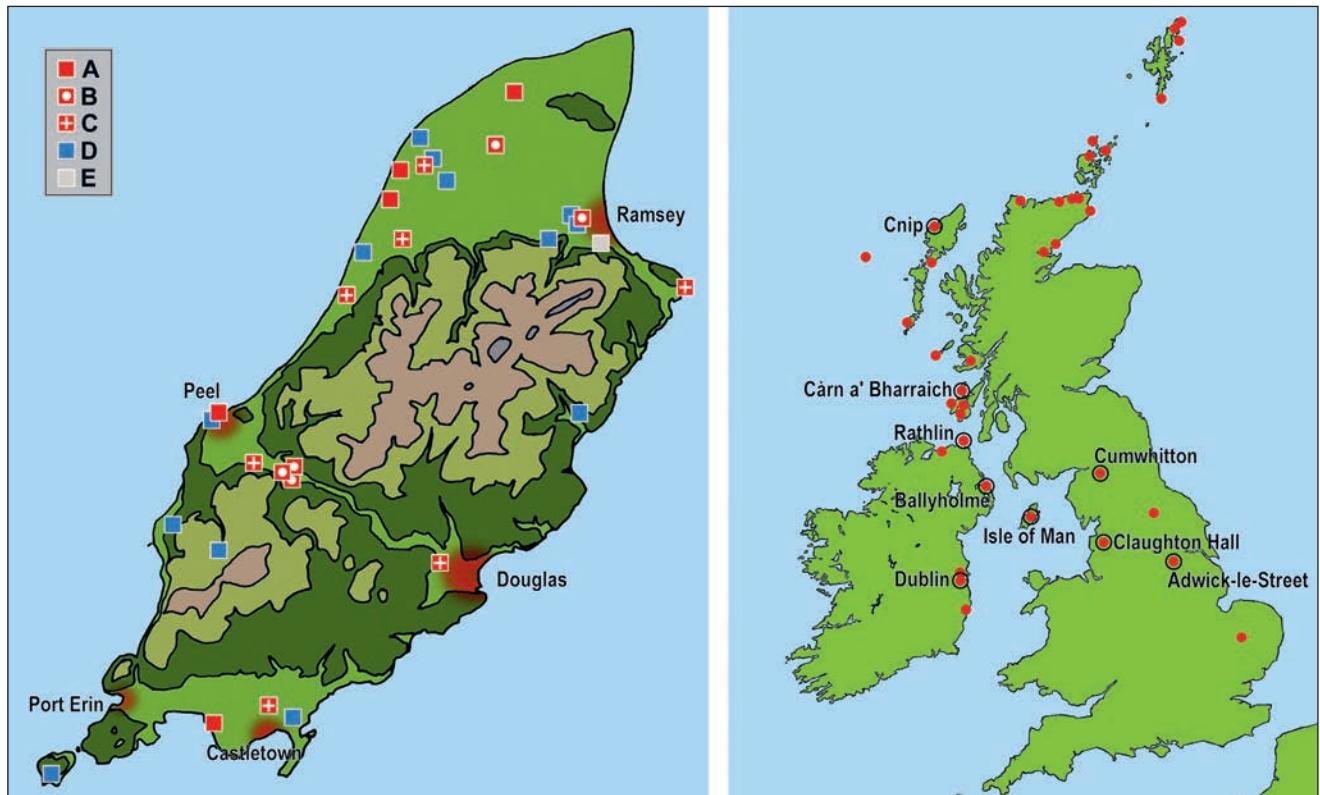


Figure 1. (1) Sites with Viking burials in the Isle of Man: A: verified; B: probable; C: plausible/possible; D: questionable; E: cenotaph. Graphics by the author. (2) Sites with oval brooches in Britain and Ireland, with places mentioned in the text. Graphics by the author; after Norstein 2020, figs. 38, 40–41.

This notion and many of the arguments based on it were challenged in 2015 on methodological grounds (Steinforth 2015b), before the discovery of two oval brooches in the Isle of Man in late 2018 changed the situation profoundly, rendered the myth of the all-men bands of settlers obsolete, and put former inferences into question.

The Manx oval brooches are as yet unpublished. While they clearly demonstrate why negative proof is a shaky ground to found hypotheses on, it needs to be investigated how deep the impact of this single new discovery really is on early Viking-age Manx history and how reliable their evidence actually can be for answering the question for the presence of Scandinavian women in the Island. This paper considers earlier research, interpretations, and conclusions and takes a look at other sites with oval brooches to evaluate the actual significance of the assembly of objects found in 2018.

Conventions and conclusions: grave-goods and sexing of the Manx Viking burials

Traditionally, there are about 37 established – and ostensibly – Viking graves in the Isle of Man (cf. Redmond

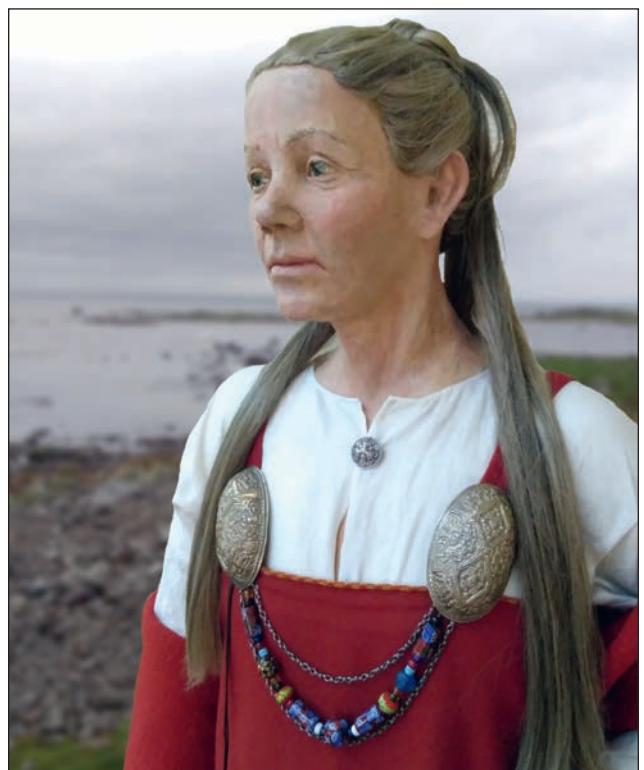


Figure 2. Reconstruction of a Viking woman wearing oval brooches. Photo by the author; reproduced courtesy of Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger.

2007, 86–91; Steinforth 2015a; 2015b, 157–207; Figure 1.1), which contained a remarkably rich assemblage of grave goods, including weapons, riding equipment, tools, knives, everyday items, buckles, mounts, coins, and jewellery, such as beads, dress pins, or silver ornaments. Among these finds are swords and spears, which identify almost twenty contexts as the graves of men – according to the conventional method of artefact-based gendering.

In stark contrast, objects that were regarded as typically female were missing entirely, such as spindle whorls, and jewellery exclusively associated with women: as most significant was regarded the absence of oval brooches, which are very specific, easily recognisable, characteristically Scandinavian, and diagnostically female.

Oval brooches are dome-shaped pieces of jewellery commonly made of copper-alloy, often decorated with a variety of depictions of stylised animals, sometimes gilded and with silver wire and ornamental bosses (cf. e.g. Norstein 2020; Petersen 1928). Some are single-shelled, others have a plain inner shell, over which another shell with openwork decoration was placed. The earliest, simple forms were in use as early as the 6th century. They usually were worn in pairs to fasten a woman's strap-dress, often with a string of beads and/or pendants between them (Figure 2). Their exact social significance is not entirely clear, but they certainly were not for everyone: it has been claimed that they were status symbols of well-to-do women, that they were worn by married women only, and/or that they were part of a woman's "best" dress for festivals and other social events (cf. e.g. Jesch 1991, 15; Kershaw 2013, 96; Paterson 2021, 318; contra: Speed et al. 2004, 86). They were quite common in Scandinavia and also brought to other territories of Scandinavian settlement: whether in Eastern Europe, the Danelag, Orkney, or Ireland, oval brooches were found wherever Vikings settled (Figure 1.2) – with the vexing exception of the Isle of Man, even though that small island is particularly rich in Viking-age archaeology.

In the absence of any other specifically female objects in Man, there remained only the possibility of beads indicating the burials of three Viking-age women (cf. Wilson 2008, 50). By far most of the Island's beads are concentrated in the magnificent necklace of the so-called Pagan Lady of Peel and two more mid 10th-century graves on St Patrick's Isle, German parish (Freke 2002, 339–62), with only few more found at St John's, German parish (excavated ca. 1848: Barnwell 1868, 103, table 22) and Cronk yn Howe, Lezayre parish (excavated 1928: Bruce and Cubbon 1930, 277, 305–06). But while there can be no doubt that the Pagan Lady was a woman, the beads from the other contexts were not associated with human

remains and very few other items (if any), so the characterisation as female burials was not founded on reliable evidence from the beginning.

In the face of the remarkably numerous (male) Viking graves for such a small island as Man, the intriguing shortage of female burials required an explanation. It was explained by researchers by the conclusion that the absence of female objects must have been caused by the complete absence of Scandinavian women themselves and that the Vikings, when they arrived in the Isle of Man in the later 9th century, were exclusively male groups of settlers, who married local Christian women (e.g. Cubbon 1983, 19; Graham-Campbell 1995, 76; Graham-Campbell and Batey 2002, 111; Ritchie 1996, 27, 42; Wilson 2008, 87; Manx National Heritage 2021).

The idea of intermarriage between the groups rather than Scandinavian women coming to Man seemingly was suggested and supported by the evidence of the mid-/late 10th-century Manx Crosses: several of their inscriptions record direct family relationships and marriages between persons with Celtic and Norse names, respectively; this process of ethnic merging could have begun in the early 900s (e.g. Steinforth 2015b, 287–89; Wilson 2008, 77).

The reasoning, its various aspects, and the far-reaching inferences drawn from it are best summarised by James Graham-Campbell (1998, 117; my italics):

It is a striking fact that among the relatively numerous pagan Norse graves in Man, there is no burial of a woman with Scandinavian oval brooches. This has inevitably given rise to the hypothesis that the Norse settlement of Man was accompanied by intermarriage with the native Christian women, which would also account for there being persons with Celtic names mentioned in the Norse runic inscriptions on some of the tenth-century Christian memorial stones. But if intermarriage is also to be taken as the explanation of the conversion of the pagan Norse in Man, then one would expect it to have been the second generation who would have been brought up as Christians. The implication is, therefore, that the main period of pagan burial in Man was confined to the first third of the tenth century, with memorial stones being commissioned to commemorate the Christian dead from the 930s onwards, leading to the conclusion that the initial settlement cannot have taken place much before about 900.

Despite the well-founded cautionary "if" in this elaborate chain of arguments – a caveat that was widely ignored in later research – the assumption of the "men-only parties" of early Vikings in Man became a silently accepted scholarly consensus. There are, however, several reasons to disagree with this, both regarding the supposedly atypical ratio of female furnished burials against male ones and the absence of the evidential oval brooches in

Man, when they are found in virtually every other Viking colony. As the notion of “all-male” groups of Viking settlers in Man relied on an inadmissible generalisation, it was flawed from the beginning.

Recalculating the numbers, reassessing the evidence

Of the postulated thirty-seven Viking burials in Man, no fewer than twelve sites and contexts are so poorly documented or indeed as yet unexcavated that it is unwise to classify them as “burials” and/or “Viking” in the first place, let alone speculate about the sex or gender of anyone presumably interred there. Of the remaining twenty-five more-or-less firmly established Viking graves, five more cases were so badly preserved that neither sexing nor gendering was possible; therefore, these also cannot be counted either way (Steinforth 2015b, 345–46). In fact, anthropological and/or genetic sexing was successfully conducted in only two cases – the male warrior at Balladoole and the Pagan Lady of Peel (Symonds et al. 2014).

After this elimination, there remain 17 Viking-age burials and contexts in Man that reasonably can be classified as male. And if, for the sake of argument, we accepted beads as reliable indicators of a woman’s grave and take their number as a hypothetical “two”, the ratio of male and female burials in the Island is 8:1.² In Dublin, for example, the ratio of male and female Viking burials is about 10:1 (cf. Ó Floinn 1998, 142), and in north-western England (Cumbria and Lancashire), only three graves containing oval brooches are known against thirteen male burials (cf. Edwards 1998, 8–22; Redmond 2007, 91–121; Richards 2004, 192–212). These comparative figures show that the situation in Man was not at all unusual and did not, in fact, require a special explanation.³

Additionally, it is difficult to see why an imbalance between the numbers of male and female Vikings in the archaeological records of Britain and Ireland should be surprising in the first place. It has been pointed out by Dawn Hadley (2006, 261; cf. MacLeod 2011, 339–40), for example, that the members of Viking raiding parties and groups of settlers probably were indeed predominantly male and that this is rather to be expected. In fact, she proceeded, there is no reason to assume that there were no women at all present on such occasions just because positive proof of them is lacking in any given area. Looked at from another angle, it would have been a good idea for young Vikings on the lookout for dynastically and economically advantageous matches to marry local heiresses, which “would greatly facilitate the peaceful acquisition of land and wealth” (Freke 1990, 111).

Marriage policies like this would surely have integrated them quickly into local power structures and enabled them to take part in politics. But again, this by no way means that *everyone* of the settlers followed this strategy.

As regards the oval brooches, it should have been quite obvious that the absence in Man of any supposedly diagnostic group of objects ought not to be overrated. Despite the Island’s richness in Viking-age archaeological material, hardly any group is represented in statistically relevant numbers, so the shortage or absence of any other could easily be attributed to the “accident of discovery and excavation” before using this rarity as the basis of consequential conclusions.

And finding oval brooches by no means is a common occurrence in the British Isles (Figure 1.2): there are currently only five sites featuring oval brooches in England, for example, and the brooches found in 2004 by metal detectorists in Cumwhitton, Cumbria, were the first to be discovered in England since 1867 (e.g. Norstein 2020, 177–83; Watson et al. 2011, 46–51). After this, a very early example of Type Rygh 640 came to light on the island of Rathlin, Northern Ireland, in 2018 (Gilmore and Alexander 2022, 170–71). Obviously, a rarity of oval brooches in any of the Viking colonies in the British Isles is quite a common feature, not an exception (cf. e.g. MacLeod 2011; Steinforth 2015b, 307–09, 346–47).

A single new discovery as game-changer: oval brooches found in the Isle of Man

In December 2018, the question about the significance of the lack of oval brooches in the Isle of Man suddenly became moot, when metal detectorists John Crowe and Craig Evans found the Island’s first oval brooches at an as-yet-undisclosed place, along with a glass bead and a bronze buckle.

A follow-up excavation of the site commissioned by Manx National Heritage (MNH) and carried out by York Archaeological Trust (YAT) added a bronze strap-end (possibly belonging to the same belt as the buckle found earlier) and what could be a bronze needle-case to the roster of objects. No human remains and no grave context were discovered. In July 2020, the assemblage was declared Treasure, and after cleaning, x-ray photography, and conservation by MNH and YAT, it is now on display in the Viking Gallery of the Manx Museum in Douglas (Figure 3). As of September 2025, the brooches and other objects are unpublished, and publicly available information is scarce about the details of their discovery, their background, and indeed even their exact dimensions. Any particulars given here were obtained from online sites reporting on the brooches (cf. e.g. Manx National



Figure 3. The IoM 2018 oval brooches found in the Isle of Man, on display in the Manx Museum, Douglas. © Ben Harding, Altringham; reproduced with kind permission.

Heritage 2021; Artnet News 2021; The i Paper 2021) and information very kindly provided by Manx National Heritage. There is no official designation of the brooches yet; so for want of anything better, they are going to be called the “IoM 2018 oval brooches” here.

The bronze buckle (with its grooved bow) and the strap-end (with its ring-and-dot decoration) probably are part of a belt made in Britain and are of common-enough Insular design, possibly of early/mid 10th-century date (cf. e.g. Steinforth 2015a, 52, fig. 59.4–6). Less is known yet about the bead – other than that it is of dark blue glass with white and yellow decorations and regarded as Irish-made – and the supposed bronze needle-case.

In contrast, the two richly decorated oval brooches are very Scandinavian in character. They measure 103 x 78 x 37mm and 104 x 65 x 45mm, respectively, are made of bronze, decorated with silver wire, and possibly were gilded originally. On each of the Manx brooches, there are five fixed bosses, as is common for this type of brooch and four free decorative bosses, the latter of which are now missing, with only their rivets remaining. The open-work outer shell features images of antithetical birds and channels along which double strands of silver wire were running (only remnants of which survive). These characteristics classify both brooches as of types Petersen 51, Jansson 51F, and Rygh 652 (Jansson 1985, 67–83; Petersen 1928, 59–67, fig. 51; Rygh 1885), which is the most common type of oval brooches in Scandinavia and dates to the late 9th and particularly the 10th centuries. There are very similar brooches from both Scandinavia and Britain (e.g. Kershaw 2013, 96–100).



Figure 4. Head and shoulder section of the female burial at Adwick-le-Street, South Yorkshire, England, with the oval brooches found in functionally correct position. © Greg Speed, Ecus Ltd.; reproduced with kind permission.

In the absence of academic publication, short Internet articles mention the discovery of the brooches in the Isle of Man, with one very originally now dubbing it the “Isle of Wo-Man” and proclaiming that the brooches “suggest the presence of female Vikings” and that they “have historians question the long-held beliefs that only male Vikings settled on the island” (Artnet News 2021).

As pointed out above, the oval brooches were, in fact, not absolutely necessary to challenge the belief in all-men groups of Viking settlers and to assume, despite a lack of positive evidence, the presence of Viking women as well. But now that there are oval brooches in Man, what is the real significance of this fact? Are they really unequivocal evidence of Scandinavian Viking women in the Island? A look at other sites with oval brooches in the British Isles provides answers to these questions.

The evidence of other burials with oval brooches

At Adwick-le-Street in South Yorkshire, England, the assemblage of objects in a grave uncovered in 2001 – two Petersen 37 oval brooches, knife, key, and bronze bowl – might be described as having a somewhat feminine character (Speed et al. 2004; cf. Norstein 2020, 51–52, 219–22); particularly, as the brooches were found lying on the skeleton’s collar bones, which strongly indicates that they were worn at burial in a functionally accurate position as part of a woman’s dress (Figure 4). Osteological examination shows that the buried person likely was female, and isotope analysis suggests that she probably grew up in Norway (Speed et al. 2004, 59–75, figs. 4–7). Thus here, there is a true example of a Scandinavian Viking woman and her oval brooches buried in Britain.

Another example of this appears to be represented by the skeleton with a Rygh 640 oval brooch (and an Irish-made mount) excavated in 2018 on Rathlin, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland. Studies show that the buried person was an elderly woman, and isotope analyses indicate that she was raised in a cold, non-coastal area in Scandinavia. The ¹⁴C values of her bones cover the mid 7th- to late 8th-century range and overlap the date of the specifically Norwegian oval brooch in the late eighth century (Gilmore and Alexander 2022, 11–21, 44–45). If this dating can be accepted, this might be the burial of a pre-Viking-age Scandinavian woman in Ireland, possibly pre-dating the earliest recorded Viking raid on Rathlin in 795 (cf. *Annals of Ulster*: MacAirt and MacNiocail 1983, 250–51).

Another burial context was encountered in 1979 at Cnip in the Isle of Lewis in Scotland, where a Viking-age burial contained two Petersen 51 oval brooches and a

rich variety of other objects, among them a great number of coloured glass beads, a comb, a knife, a needle case, a whetstone, a sickle, and a ring-headed pin, but no weapons; again, the brooches were found in a functionally correct position. Examination of the bones indicates that the buried person was a woman, and the overtly Scandinavian character of the burial (which included textile remains of worsted diamond twill, which was very common in Viking-age Scandinavia) makes it tempting to think of her as Norwegian, too (Welander et al. 1987; cf. Norstein 2020, 263–66). Strontium and oxygen isotope analyses show, however, that she was not born in Norway, nor in the Western and Northern Islands or western seaboard of Britain; instead, she probably had her origins in the “eastern or upland regions of Scotland [or] northern England” (Montgomery et al. 2014, 64). Thus, she might have been the daughter of a Scandinavian who lived in those parts at the time of her birth, before they (or she) relocated to the Outer Hebrides. Alternatively, she could have been a native of northeast Britain who married a Viking, followed him to Lewis, and eventually was buried according to her husband’s traditions – being turned into, as it were, a Viking woman in the archaeological record. Either way, whether she was Viking by birth or by marriage, we shall never know (on oval brooches as indicators of Scandinavian identity, cf. e.g. Kershaw 2013, 156, 177–78; Norstein 2020, 199–201).

In a burial excavated as early as 1913 at Càrn a’ Bharraich on the island of Oronsay, Scotland, a pair of Berdal-Style oval brooches were found associated with shears, a bone needle-case, and an Irish-made knobbed ring-pin (Grieve 1914, 275–77; cf. Grieg 1940, 42–44; Norstein 2020, 273–74). Again, this looks like a female burial, but there are no scientific analyses that could confirm this assumption, and there also is no indication of the (?) woman’s geographical origins. The oval brooches seem to point towards Scandinavia just as the pin points towards Ireland. While due to the distinctly Scandinavian character of the oval brooches it might be reasonable and justifiable to think of the buried person as a Viking woman, it should be kept in mind that there can be no certainty about her ethnic background and biography without a well-documented and well-analysed context.

And then there are the two brooches amateurishly dug up by roadmen clearing a low mound near Claughton Hall in Lancashire, England, in 1822, in unclear association with other objects that included, among other things, a sword, a spear-head, a Bronze-age stone axe-head, and a now-lost ceramic pot of cremated remains. The Petersen 51 brooches were placed back-to-back, “joined together and forming a kind of oval box [...] containing a small



Figure 5. The “brooch box” found in a burrow at Claughton Hall, Lancashire, England, and its contents. After Jones 1849.

ornamented fibula, two beads, one of blue, the other of red-coloured paste, and molar tooth” (Jones 1849, 74; cf. Edwards 1969; 1989, 14–17; Norstein 2020, 93–94, 218–19; Figure 5). As no human remains were analysed, the assembly is highly ambivalent – and it might appear reasonable to assume that the objects could constitute the double burial of a man, represented by the weapons, and a woman, represented by the brooches. Either way, the latter obviously had not been worn at burial, but were arranged with a distinct purpose in mind.

That oval brooches were positioned in graves in a way that was not functionally accurate, but nonetheless deliberate, and even the function as a container is not at all unique: the two brooches discovered in 1903 at Ballyholme, Co. Down, Northern Ireland, lay in the ground with “the hollow sides face to face” (Cochrane and Smith 1906, 74; cf. Norstein 2020, 94–95, 224–25), but there is no report that this “box” also contained any objects. Ashes and burnt bones were placed in one of the two Rygh 652 oval brooches in Barrow 77 in Kaupang, Vestfold, Norway, which thus was utilised as an urn, but a box-like construction is not mentioned here (Blindheim et al. 1981, 75, 205). Finally, there is one context in Langeid, Setesdal, Norway, that – just as the Claughton Hall grave – is interpreted as the (inhumation) burial of a man and the (cremation) burial of a woman, since it contained, among other objects, both a sword and two oval brooches (Wenn 2016, 94–104).

While an independent secondary burial of a woman next to an earlier male grave possibly could be a solution

for the Claughton Hall complex, Ben Edwards (1998, 15) rather convincingly explained the “brooch box” and its contents in the immediate context of the weapons grave and as a token of a lost wife buried in a man’s grave. He surmises that the assemblage represented “some kind of memento if [the lady to whom they belonged] had been buried elsewhere”, and adds that “if such an interpretation seems to conjure up the figure of an unexpectedly sentimental Viking, then perhaps we are getting a little nearer to remembering that the subjects of archaeology were people like ourselves, variable in character and behaviour”.

And this is a profound statement that research tends to forget when looking for patterns and connections in ancient behaviour; that individuals and even small groups of people certainly did not always act and react in the same manner as their neighbours near and far. Archaeology is dealing with humans, who may have followed laws, requirements, customs, or fashions, but just as often acted as individuals – particularly on foreign shores – and dressed the way they liked, independent of their homeland’s traditions. People acted according to necessity and used easily available local wares rather than waiting for imported ones, or even adopted the styles of their Insular spouses and in-laws entirely, out of merely aesthetic reasons or to pander to a Scandinavian-dominated elite, or possibly for various other reasons. Neither ethnic identity nor sex is *always* expressed in material culture and burial custom, much less in a way that we may unambiguously understand and identify today.

Conclusion

Some of the examples presented here have demonstrated that state-of-the-art scientific analyses have established that in fact there have been Scandinavian-born women living in the Viking colonies in the British Isles, who were then buried there accompanied by their oval brooches. Without such modern verification techniques, research traditionally has to be quite content with designating burials as “male” or “female” by the characteristics of the objects in them as well as, albeit more reluctantly, assigning ethnic affiliations due to the objects’ typological classification. Both methods have serious flaws that call for some caution. In the case of the IoM 2018 finds, not even the character as a grave is certain.

Given the lack of details known and published to date, however, we need to keep an open mind to the fact that the IoM 2018 assemblage might represent various circumstances other than the burial of a Scandinavian-born woman, such as the grave of a local woman buried with the Scandinavian jewellery of her Viking husband’s traditions, or a deposit by a husband in memory of a wife buried far away. Even the old hypothesis of Viking settlers marrying local women is not refuted by the new find.

Having said this, however, it cannot be gainsaid that this type of brooches was as exclusively and diagnostically female as Scandinavian and that the assemblage – even in the absence of human remains to be analysed for the sex and origin of their owner – distinctly has the feel of the late-pagan burial custom of Insular Vikings, which puts the find neatly in the same context as the late 9th-/ early 10th- century male (and unsexed) burials known not only in Man, but in Insular Britain and Ireland as well. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to accept the brooches and other objects – as a working hypothesis and subject to further, specialised research – as indicators of Viking women in the Isle of Man.

Even without final certainty, the fact that at last, oval brooches have been found in Man is of great importance for the study of the Island’s Viking Age. The complete lack of evidence for the presence of Scandinavian women has led to the idea that the Viking settlement in the Isle of Man was different: in contrast to other colonies in the Irish Sea area, this thesis concluded, Viking settlers came to Man as men-only groups and married local women instead of bringing their own. This difference could not be explained satisfactorily, but nevertheless was used as basis for far-reaching conclusions.

After the discovery of the IoM 2018 assemblage, this myth should firmly be buried with all the consequences this has regarding the varying conclusions drawn from it. The presence of the oval brooches supports the objec-

tions outlined above that were based on a critical evaluation of the current sexing and gendering of the Manx Viking burials and their ostensibly unusual gender ratio and which affect the conception of both the date and manner of Vikings’ initial presence in the Island.

While intermarriage no doubt took place, the evidence all the more now suggests that both Scandinavian men and women settled in the Island and that there is no reason to assume that the lack of Scandinavian women and the intermarriage between Manx women and Viking settlers can be taken as having facilitated pagan Vikings’ conversion. Instead of a comparatively late date of arrival around the year 900 and a smooth social and cultural merging between the two ethnic groups as hinted at by Graham-Campbell above, an earlier date around 870 and a more warlike manner now appear more probable (cf. Steinforth 2015b, 300–80; 2015c). Rather than setting the Island apart by their absence, the Manx oval brooches serve as a reminder that the Viking settlements in the Irish Sea area – in Ireland, particularly Dublin, in the Isle of Man, and along the north-western coast of England and possibly beyond – in all probability were connected and even related (cf. Steinforth 2018).

At this time, it must be hoped that the brooches and other objects of the IoM 2018 assembly are going to be studied intensively and that in the future, the results of these analyses may shed some more light and detail on this extraordinary find as well as on the question of Viking women on Viking Man.

Acknowledgements

The author is very grateful to the organisers of the Sachsen-symposion 2023 in Stavanger and to the editors of this volume; as well as to Zanette Tsigardas Glørstad and Unn Pedersen for their helpful remarks on Norwegian oval brooches; Stephen Gilmore of Northern Archaeological Consultancy Ltd., Belfast, Northern Ireland, for extensive materials on the Rathlin excavations; Greg Speed of Ecus Ltd., Barnard Castle, England, for his photo of the Adwick skeleton; Ben Harding, Altrincham, England, for his photos of the Manx brooches and objects; and Allison Fox and Manx National Heritage, Douglas, Isle of Man, for information on the unpublished Manx oval brooches.

Bibliography:

Artnet News. 2021. “Isle of Wo-Man? Two 1,000 Year-Old Brooches Discovered on the U.K. Island Suggest the Presence of Female Vikings.” 20 December, 2021. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/isle-of-man-settled-by-female-vikings-along-with-the-men-2052230> (accessed 05 September, 2025).

Barnwell, Edward L. 1868. “Notes on the Stone Monuments of the Isle of Man.” *Manx Society* 15: 92–106.

Blindheim, Charlotte, Birgit Heyerdahl-Larsen and Roar L.

Tollnes. 1981. *Kaupang-funnene I*. Oslo: Universitetets Oldsaksamling.

Bruce, J. Ronald and William Cubbon. 1930. "Cronk yn How. An Early Christian and Viking Site, at Lezayre, Isle of Man." *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 85: 267–308.

Cochrane, Robert, with Reginald Smith. 1906. "Two Viking brooches and a bowl found in a hillock on a portion of the raised beach at Ballyholme between Bangor and Groomsport, county Down." *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London* 21 (1905–07): 72–79.

Cubbon, A. Marshall 1983. "The Archaeology of the Vikings in the Isle of Man." In *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man. Select Papers from the Ninth Viking Congress, Isle of Man, 4–14 July 1981*, edited by Christine Fell, Peter Foote, James Graham-Campbell and Robert Thompson, 13–26. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

Downham, Clare. 2009. "'Hiberno-Norwegians' and 'Anglo-Danes': anachronistic ethnicities and Viking Age England." *Medieval Scandinavia* 19: 139–69.

Edwards, Ben J. N. 1969. "The Claughton Viking Burial." *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 121: 109–16.

Edwards, Ben J. N. 1998. *Vikings in North West England. The Artifacts*. Lancaster: University of Lancaster.

Freke, David. 1990. "History." In *The Isle of Man. Celebrating a Sense of Place*, edited by Vaughan Robertson and Danny McCarroll, 103–22. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Freke, David, ed. 2002. *Excavations on St Patrick's Isle, Peel, Isle of Man, 1982–88. Prehistoric, Viking, Medieval and later*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Gilmore, Stephen and Stuart Alexander. 2022. *Results of Archaeological Excavation. 10 Church Bay, Rathlin Island, County Antrim*. Unpublished Excavation Report, Northern Archaeological Consultancy Ltd., Belfast.

Graham-Campbell, James. 1995. "The Irish Sea Vikings: Raiders and Settlers." In *The Middle Ages in the North-West*, edited by Tom Scott and Pat Starkey, 59–83. Oxford: Leopard Head Press.

Graham-Campbell, James. 1998. "The Early Viking Age in the Irish Sea Area." In *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, edited by Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Raghnall Ó Floinn, 104–30. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Graham-Campbell, James and Colleen E. Batey. 2002. *Vikings in Scotland. An Archaeological Survey*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Grieg, Sigurd. 1940. *Viking Antiquities in Scotland*. Oslo: Aschehoug.

Grieve, Symington. 1914. "Note upon Carn nan Bharraich, or Cairn of the Men of Barra, a Burial Mound of the Viking Time on the Island of Oronsay, Argyllshire, with an Outline of the Political History of the Western Isles during the latter Half of the Ninth Century." *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 48: 272–91.

Hadley, Dawn M. 2006. *The Vikings in England. Settlement, Society and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

The i Paper. 2021. "Discovery of brooches over 1,000 years old reveal that female Vikings settled on Isle of Man." 18 December, 2021; <https://inews.co.uk/news/vikings-female-settled-isle-of-man-discovery-historic-brooches-1358498> (accessed 05 September, 2025).

Jansson, Ingmar. 1985. *Ovala spännbucklor. En studie av vikingatida standardsmycken med utgångspunkt från Björkö-fynden*. Uppsala: Uppsala Institutionen för arkeologi.

Jesch, Judith. 1991. *Women in the Viking Age*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

Jones, Michael. 1849. "Proceedings at the Meetings of the Archaeological Institute – February 2, 1849." *Archaeological Journal* 6: 74–75.

Kershaw, Jane F. 2013. *Viking Identities: Scandinavian Jewellery in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mac Airt, Seán and Gearóid Mac Niocail, eds. 1983. *The Annals of Ulster, I: Text and Translation*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

MacLeod, Shane. 2011. "Warriors and women: the sex ratio of Norse migrants to eastern England up to 900 AD." *Early Medieval Europe* 19: 332–53.

Manx National Heritage. 2021. "Stunning Isle of Man Viking Brooches go on Display at the Manx Museum." 17 December, 2021; <https://manxnationalheritage.im/news/stunning-isle-of-man-viking-brooches-go-on-display-at-the-manx-museum/> (accessed 05 September, 2025).

Montgomery, Janet, Vaughan Grimes, Jo Buckberry, Jane A. Evans, Michael P. Richards and James H. Barrett. 2014. "Finding Vikings with Isotope Analysis: The View from Wet and Windy Islands." *Journal of the North Atlantic, Special Volume* 7: 54–70.

Norstein, Frida Espolin. 2020. *Processing Death. Oval Brooches and Viking graves in Britain, Ireland, and Iceland*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

Ó Floinn, Raghnall. 1998. "The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Ireland." In *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, edited by Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Raghnall Ó Floinn, 131–65. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Paterson, Caroline. 2021. "Dress and Dress Fasteners from the Pagan Norse Graves of Scotland: Origins and Identity." *Scottish Historical Review* 100(3): 314–34.

Petersen, Jan. 1928. *Vikingetidens smykker i Norge*. Stavanger: Stavanger museum.

Redmond, Angela Z. 2007. *Viking Burial in the North of England. A Study of Contact, Interaction and Reaction between Scandinavian Migrants with resident Groups, and the Effects of Immigration on Aspects of Cultural Continuity*. Oxford: BAR.

Richards, Julian D. 2004. *Viking Age England*. Stroud: History Press.

Ritchie, Anna, 1996. *Viking Scotland*. London: Historic Scotland.

Rygh, Oluf. 1885. *Norske Oldsager, ordnede og forklarede*. Christiania: Cammermeyer.

Speed, Greg and Penelope Walton Rogers, with Paul Budd,

Phil Clogg, Joy Langston and Erica Paterson. 2004. "A Burial of a Viking Woman at Adwick-le-Street, South Yorkshire." *Medieval Archaeology* 48: 51–90.

Steinforth, Dirk H. 2015a. *Die Wikingergräber auf der Isle of Man*. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Steinforth, Dirk H. 2015b. *Die skandinavische Besiedlung auf der Isle of Man. Überlegungen zur frühen Wikingerzeit im Raum der Irischen See*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Steinforth, Dirk H. 2015c. "Early Vikings in the Isle of Man. Old Paradigms and New Perspectives." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 11: 203–29.

Steinforth, Dirk H. 2018. "That stepping-stone in the middle of the Irish Sea: the Dublin Vikings and the Isle of Man in the late ninth century." *Journal of Irish Archaeology* 27: 81–97.

Stylegar, Frans-Arne. 2007. "The Kaupang Cemeteries Revisited." In *Kaupang in Skiringssal*, edited by Dagfinn Skre, 65–128. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press. <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/44083> (accessed 10 June 2025)

Symonds, Leigh, T. Douglas Price, Anne Keenleyside and James Burton. 2014. "Medieval Migrations: Isotope Analysis of Early Medieval Skeletons on the Isle of Man." *Medieval Archaeology* 58: 1–20.

Watson, Jacqui, Karla Graham, Angela Karsten, Lucy Skinner, Ulrike Schaefer, Sharon Penton, Jie Gao, Vanessa Fell and Jennifer Jones. 2011. *Townfoot Farm, Cumwhitton, Cumbria: Investigative Conservation of Material from the Viking Cemetery*. Portsmouth: English Heritage.

Welander, Richard D. E., Colleen Batey and Trevor G. Cowie, with Lise Bender Jørgensen, Mary Harman and C. Scott Mackenzie. 1987. "A Viking burial from Kneep, Uig, Isle of Lewis." *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 117: 149–74.

Wenn, Camilla Cecilie. 2016. *Rapport arkeologisk utgraving RV.9 Krokå – Langeid, II: Gravfelt fra vikingtid, Langeid Øvre, 2/1, Bygland k., Aust-Agder*. Oslo: Kulturhistorisk museum, arkeologisk seksjon. <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/50217> (accessed 10 June, 2025).

Wilson, David M. 2008. *The Vikings in the Isle of Man*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

Endnotes

¹ Considering the ongoing discussion whether the "correct" usage of the word "Viking" limits it to Early-medieval raiders or traders outside their native Scandinavia, this paper uses the term as a generalising label for all aspects regarding these Scandinavians' origin, culture, and activities, both at home and abroad, and particularly for the presumably heterogeneous Viking group that conquered and settled the Isle of Man (cf. Downham 2009, esp. 140, n. 4; Steinforth 2015b, 11–14). This paper also differentiates between "sex(ing)" and "gender(ing)", as the former referring to a person's biological sex as assigned at birth (male or female), which archaeologically is determined by anthropological, osteological, or genetic analyses of the skeleton; the latter is defined as the cultural, social, and/or psychological aspects of being of a sex that are attributed to a dead person by their grave goods that are considered gender-specific, by regarding weapons, for example, as indicating male burials, jewellery and domestic tools (e.g. spindle-whorls) as suggesting female burials (e.g. Jesch 1991, 13–14).

² These numbers include the seven burials of St Patrick's Isle, which date to the mid 10th-century and thus are too late to inform about the gender composition of the initial settlers in Man. If they are removed from the calculation, the ratio among late 9th-/early 10th-century Viking graves is 7:1.

³ In Scandinavia, women account for a larger part in the gender ratio than in the British Isles: in Vestfold in Norway, for example, they on average made up about 34% in 9th-century and 13% in 10th-century cemeteries (Stylegar 2007, 82, fig. 5.12). Given the difference in general living conditions, in the impact of foreign influences, and in the availability of Scandinavian-made wares at home and in the British and Irish colonies, this variation is no surprise (cf. Kershaw 2013, 97).