New research on the causes of the Viking Age
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The Viking hit-and-run raids on monastic communities such as Lindisfarne and Iona were the most infamous result of burgeoning Scandinavian maritime prowess in the closing years of the Eighth Century.

These skirmishes led to more expansive military campaigns, settlement, and ultimately conquest of large swathes of the British Isles. But Dr Steve Ashby, of the Department of Archaeology at the University of York, wanted to explore the social justifications for this spike in aggressive activity.

Previous research has considered environmental, demographic, technological and political drivers, as well as the palpable lure of silver and slave and why these forms of wealth became important at this stage.

Dr Ashby said: "I wanted to try to discover what would make a young chieftain invest in the time and resources for such a risky venture. And what were the motives of his crew?"

In research published in *Archaeological Dialogues*, Dr Ashby argues that focusing on the spoils of raiding is to ignore half the picture as the rewards of such voyages consisted of much more than portable wealth.

Dr Ashby says: "The lure of the exotic, of the world beyond the horizon, was an important factor. Classic anthropology has shown that the mystique of the exotic is a powerful force, and something that leaders and people of influence often use to prop up their power base. It is not difficult to see how this would have worked in the Viking Age."

"The lure of the raid was thus more than booty; it was about winning and preserving power through the enchantment of travel and the doing of deeds. This provides an important correction to models that focus on the need for portable wealth; the act of acquiring silver was as important as the silver itself," Dr Ashby adds.


Provided by University of York

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