

# First genetic proof that women were Viking warriors

8 September 2017, by David Naylor

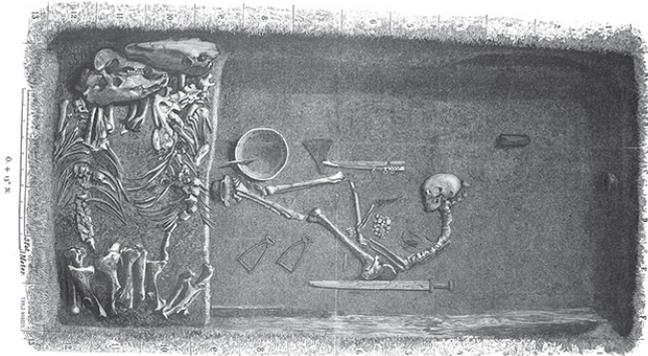


Illustration by Evald Hansen based on the original plan of the grave by excavator Hjalmar Stolpe, published in 1889. Credit: Uppsala University

New DNA evidence uncovered by researchers at Uppsala University and Stockholm University shows that there were in fact female Viking warriors. The remains of an iconic Swedish Viking Age grave now reveal that war was not an activity exclusive to males – women could be found in the higher ranks at the battlefield.

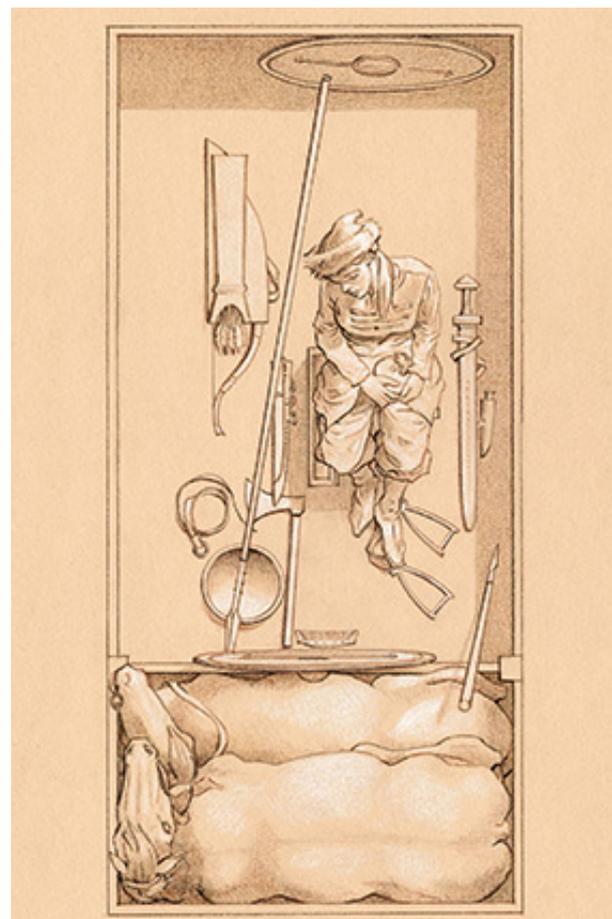
The study was conducted on one of the most well-known graves from the Viking Age, a mid-10th century grave in Swedish Viking town Birka. The burial was excavated in the 1880s, revealing remains of a warrior surrounded by weapons, including a sword, armour-piercing arrows, and two horses. There was also a full set of gaming pieces and a gaming board.

The morphology of some skeletal traits have long suggested that she was a woman, but since this grave has been the type specimen for a Viking warrior for over a century, it has always been assumed to have belonged to a male Viking. Now, geneticists, archaeogeneticists and archaeologists have worked together and solved the mystery. DNA retrieved from the skeleton demonstrates that

the individual carried two X chromosomes and no Y chromosome.

"This is the first formal and genetic confirmation of a female Viking warrior," says Professor Mattias Jakobsson at Uppsala University's Department of Organismal Biology.

Isotope analyses confirm a travelling life style, well in tune with the martial society that dominated 8th to 10th century Northern Europe.



Reconstruction of what the grave may have looked like to begin with. Credit: Uppsala University

"The gaming set indicates that she was an officer, someone who worked with tactics and strategy and could lead troops in battle. What we have studied was not a Valkyrie from the sagas but a real life military leader, that happens to have been a woman," says Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Stockholm University, who led the study.

"Written sources mention female warriors occasionally, but this is the first time that we've really found convincing archaeological evidence for their existence," says Neil Price, Professor at Uppsala University's Department of Archaeology and Ancient History.

**More information:** Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* (2017). DOI: [10.1002/ajpa.23308](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.23308)

Provided by Uppsala University

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