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Ben Raffield, Claire Greenlow, Neil Price and Mark Collard

Abstract

The *lið*, a retinue of warriors sworn to a leader, has long been considered one of the basic armed groups of the Viking Age. However, in recent years the study of *lið* has been eclipsed by the discussion of larger Viking armies. In this paper, we focus on the key question of how loyalty to the *lið* was achieved. We argue that two processes that have been intensively studied by psychologists and anthropologists – ingroup identification and identity fusion – would have been important in the formation and operation of *lið*. In support of this hypothesis, we outline archaeological, historical and literary evidence pertaining to material and psychological identities. The construction of such identities, we contend, would have facilitated the formation of cohesive fighting groups and contributed to their success while operating in the field.

Keywords

Viking Age; war band; *lið*; ingroup; identification; identity fusion; group cohesion.

Introduction

Although the Viking Age (c. AD 750–1050) is often regarded as synonymous with violence, a number of important issues regarding conflict during this period have yet to be adequately researched. One of these is the nature of the Viking groups that engaged in warfare and raiding. The large Viking armies that were active in north-western Europe during the mid to late ninth century have been discussed in recent years (e.g. Halsall 2003; McLeod 2014; N. Price 2014a; Raffield *in press*). So far, however, relatively little attention has been paid to the groups that came together to form the armies and that were also responsible for the raids for which the Vikings are famous. One of the most important of these was the *lið*.

There is some uncertainty about the precise meaning of the term *lið*, but it is usually taken to refer to an independent ship-borne host or troop (Jesch 2001). A more detailed definition has

been offered by Lund (1985). He suggests that a *lið* was a retinue of warriors sworn to a leader who was responsible for feeding, equipping and rewarding the warriors for their service. Hedenstierna-Jonson (2009) has also emphasized the importance of reciprocal relationships between leaders and their followers in connection with *lið*. The size of *lið* was not fixed and likely depended on a leader's reputation and wealth. As such, it is probable that some *lið* comprised no more than a couple of ships' crews while others were much larger (Lund 1985; Jesch 2001; Brink 2008). The *lið*'s autonomous nature is indicated in the ninth-century *Annals of St. Bertin*, which describes Viking groups operating on the continent as part of a fleet in 861. It refers to these groups as 'brotherhoods' (Lat. *sodalitates*) and explains that they dispersed from the main force to overwinter in various ports along the river Seine (Nelson 1991, 95–6).

There is reason to think that *lið* operated throughout the Viking Age. Two recently discovered ship burials at Salme, Estonia, indicate that raiding parties with the characteristics of *lið* operated out of Scandinavia as early as the 750s (Peets, Allmäe, and Maldre 2012; Peets 2013). As we noted earlier, *lið* formed the core of the large Viking armies of the mid to late ninth century, which were coalitions rather than unitary entities (Raffield *in press*). Large Viking forces may have been temporary coalitions of *lið* even as late as the eleventh century. An excerpt from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is suggestive in this regard. It states that in 1012 the remnants of a fleet that had campaigned in England under the command of Porkell inn hávi 'dispersed as widely as it had been gathered earlier' (Swanton 2000, 143).

One of the most important questions concerning *lið* that remains unanswered is: how was loyalty to the group achieved? Over the last few decades psychologists and anthropologists interested in group dynamics have identified two processes that we think may be helpful in this regard – ingroup identification and identity fusion. The goal of this article is to provide an overview of these processes and to demonstrate that there is some evidence they played a role in the formation and operation of *lið*. We begin by explaining ingroup identification and identity fusion. Next, we discuss what we know about the composition of *lið*, because the composition of a group can affect its cohesiveness. Thereafter, we review some archaeological, historical and literary evidence that we believe supports the idea that ingroup identification and identity fusion may be pertinent to *lið*. Some of this evidence relates to material markers of group identity. The rest concerns two more intangible parts of the sociocultural system – oath-taking and group-specific ideologies.

In developing our argument we draw on archaeological data and both Viking Age and later written sources. The problems with archaeological evidence are well known, but it is important to keep in mind that the written sources have limitations too. The written sources we used include ninth-century insular and continental annals, thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas, skaldic poetry and quasi-historical sources such as Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*. The later medieval sources have been critiqued with regard to their historical validity (e.g. Sawyer 1985; Jochens 1995; Lönnroth 2008). The contemporaneous annals are also problematic, because the indigenous scribes describing Viking activities almost certainly incorporated biases into their accounts. To counter these shortcomings, we utilize a range of texts and look for agreement among them, and between them and archaeological data. We contend that this 'consilience among multiple lines of evidence' approach allows reasonably reliable insights into the beliefs and practices of Viking Age Scandinavians to be obtained.

Ingroup identification and identity fusion

The process of ingroup identification has been investigated by researchers interested in the behavioural and psychological relationships within and between groups, for over forty years (e.g. Tajfel et al. 1971). In this context, an ingroup is a social group that is distinguished by a trait or set of traits. An ingroup is defined in opposition to an outgroup, which comprises the people who do not share the ingroup's defining traits. The traits that distinguish an ingroup can be genetically inherited or socially learned, and can include dialect, clothing, diet, skin colour, music, values, beliefs and attitudes (Korostelina 2007). The nature and size of ingroups vary (Rhee, Uleman and Lee 1996). They range from large groups based on occupation, socio-economic position and/or gender, to smaller groups like military units, religious sects and street gangs. Individuals often belong to multiple ingroups simultaneously.

Ingroup identification is a process of social categorization in which a particular ingroup is included in an individual's concept of self (Tropp and Wright 2001; Jans et al. 2015). This involves the individual recognizing the ingroup's defining traits as part of him/herself (Tropp and Wright 2001). Ingroup identification is not a binary, 'individual X does/does not identify with ingroup Y' phenomenon. Rather, individuals vary in the extent to which they include an ingroup in their self-concept. Importantly for present purposes, a high level of ingroup identification can have a significant effect on group cohesion and performance. There is evidence that when individuals identify strongly with an ingroup they are more likely to regard themselves as a members of the ingroup, to view themselves as similar to the other members of the ingroup and to feel connected to the ingroup's other members (Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears 1995). Individuals who identify strongly with an ingroup are also more likely to pay attention to the manner in which their group is dealt with compared to other groups, to incur a personal cost to benefit their group and to stay faithful to their group when it is imperilled (Petta and Walker 1992; Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 1997; Smith and Tyler 1997; Tropp and Wright 1999, 2001).

In certain circumstances, visceral and emotional relationships can develop among ingroup members, leading them to identify with one another as if they were kin. Known as 'identity fusion', this process has been explored in a number of recent studies (e.g. Kinzer Stewart 1991; Swann et al. 2009, 2012; Whitehouse et al. 2014). While identity fusion can happen as a result of a similar worldview within the group, it can also occur through shared experiences, especially if these are traumatic. Challenging experiences can be highly influential in fostering attachments among group members (Swann et al. 2009; Whitehouse and Lanman 2014), and as such it is not surprising that identity fusion can occur in groups participating in conflict and warfare. In some cases, the resulting bonds can be stronger than those between kin. In a study of identity fusion among revolutionary battalions taking part in the Libyan Civil War during 2011, for example, Whitehouse et al. (2014) found that 97 per cent of participants felt fused to their battalion and that 45 per cent of frontline fighters felt more fused to their battalion than to their own family. The idea that identity fusion can be caused by the shared experience of challenging or traumatic events is further supported by the fact that only 28 per cent of non-combatants attached to revolutionary battalions reported feeling more fused to their battalion than their family (Whitehouse et al. 2014).

Identity fusion can have a number of consequences. One is that members of a group can develop a strong sense of obligation and commitment to the group, leading them to act

altruistically, sometimes to the point of sacrificing their lives for other members. Another potential consequence is that individuals can come to perceive the ingroup as not only superior to others but also as invulnerable, motivating them to engage in extreme pro-group behaviour (Swann et al. 2009). This can have repercussions. Most notably, members of groups can become less trusting of, and even hostile to, non-members (Lindeman 1997; McDonald, Navarrete, and Van Vugt 2012; Whitehouse 2012).

Ingroup identification and identity fusion need not both be involved in the creation of group cohesion. Because the circumstances in which identity fusion can occur are situation specific, it is possible for an individual to feel fused to others who went through the same experiences but not to identify with them (Whitehouse and Lanman 2014). Nevertheless, we think it is probable that both ingroup identification and identity fusion played a role in the case of Viking *lið*. The reason for this is that members of *lið* would have spent extended periods of time living, travelling and fighting together, and this can be expected to have contributed to the development of group identity through shared experiences.

The composition of *lið*

The composition of *lið* is an important issue to consider next because, as we mentioned earlier, the composition of a group can affect its cohesiveness. The results of a range of studies carried out over the last twenty-five years indicate that, in the short term at least, increasing sociocultural diversity has a negative impact on trust and solidarity within communities, and that this leads to a reduction in the willingness of community members to support public projects (e.g. Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Putnam 2007; Coffé and Geys 2006; Eger 2010). Similar effects have been documented on smaller scales. For example, in a psychological experiment Thomas (1999) found that socioculturally homogeneous groups out-performed socioculturally heterogeneous ones in a series of tasks. Likewise, Maderer, Holtbrügge, and Schuster (2014) investigated the impact of sociocultural heterogeneity on the performance of European professional football teams. They discovered that sociocultural heterogeneity had a significant negative impact on performance, and they argued that this was probably due to the former's impact on group cohesion. Taken together, these findings suggest that the challenge of fostering group cohesion within *lið*, and therefore the importance of ingroup identification and identity fusion, can be expected to have been greater if *lið* were socioculturally heterogeneous than if they were socioculturally homogeneous.

There is reason to believe that kinship links and pre-existing social relationships would have been important in the formation of *lið*. Kinship groups were highly influential within Scandinavian social structures, both as economic units and in their ability to manipulate networks of allegiance and obligation for their own ends (Dommasnes 1991; Magnúsdóttir 2008). Although the DNA testing of skeletal assemblages has yet to be exploited in order to investigate potential genetic links among Viking raiding groups, there is other evidence to support this hypothesis. For example, inscriptions on some rune-stones such as U 209 and Sö 338 from Sweden, which date to the mid-eleventh century, are interpreted as referring to family members who served in the same retinue (Pritsak 1981). A role for pre-existing social

relationships in the formation of *lið* is supported by *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (ch. 1; Scudder 2000). When Þórólfr goes raiding, he is joined by the sons of his father's friend, Kari of Berdla.

While it seems likely that members of *lið* would often have been relatives and social companions, it is clear that membership was not necessarily dependent on pre-existing kinship or social ties. This is indicated by isotopic analyses of what appear to be members of Viking war bands, as in the case of four young males excavated in Dublin, Ireland. Dating from AD 670–882, these individuals are thought to represent Vikings operating in the vicinity of Dublin prior to or during the foundation of a permanent base for ships in the mid-ninth century (Simpson 2005). The isotope values have been interpreted as indicating that two of the individuals came from northern Scandinavia, while the other two probably originated in the Northern or Western Isles of Scotland (Montgomery et al. 2014). Isotopic analyses of a mass grave in Dorset yielded similar results. The grave contained up to fifty-two individuals, who were most likely Vikings killed while raiding the south coast of England during the late tenth century (Loe et al. 2014). The analyses indicated that at least thirty-eight of the individuals originated from outside the UK, and it has been proposed that they came from multiple regions, including northern Iceland, the Baltic States and Belarus (Chenery et al. 2014).

Isotopic data pertaining to the larger Viking armies also suggest that it was not unusual for *lið* to include individuals from different regions who did not have pre-existing links. Budd et al. (2004) have reported the results of isotope analyses of burials from Repton, Derbyshire, that are associated with the mid-ninth-century 'Great Army'. Two males buried adjacent to one another in the churchyard (graves 511 and 295) yielded isotopic values that are consistent with the men having originated in western Denmark, whereas the isotope values of another male buried nearby (grave 529) are consistent with the individual having grown up in south-eastern Sweden, the Baltic or south-western Russia. Interestingly, analyses conducted on individuals buried at the late-tenth-century Trelleborg fortress, Denmark, yielded similar results (T. D. Price et al. 2011). Thirty-two of the forty-eight skeletons sampled were found to have strontium values that exceeded those in Denmark and southern Sweden. The authors of the study suggested that these individuals most likely originated from Norway, central or northern Sweden or the eastern Baltic. So it appears that even a Danish army in its home territory could include individuals from multiple regions.

The evidence that it was not unusual for individuals to join *lið* in the absence of pre-existing links goes beyond isotopic data. Historical sources also suggest that, in some cases, members of *lið* could have originated from territories subject to Viking attack. Wulfstan's eleventh-century homily *Sermo lupi ad anglos* indicates that slaves in England escaped their masters to join Viking war bands (Whitelock 1976; N. Price 2014a). Additionally, one of us has recently proposed that textual evidence for specific dialects being associated with particular Viking forces might indicate the use of lingua franca (N. Price 2014a). If this is the case, it implies that at least some Viking forces comprised individuals who were raised in regions with different languages.

Other evidence suggests that *lið* were socially heterogeneous. Scandinavian societies were highly structured in the Viking Age. 'Kings', *jarls* and their retainers formed the elite classes, while the lower social classes comprised freemen and thralls (Roedahl 1998). It seems that the composition of the *lið* transcended these boundaries. Wulfstan's reference to slaves escaping their masters in order to join Viking war bands, for example, implies that these groups would accept individuals from even the lowest social classes. In *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (ch. 72),

furthermore, we are told that a high-born male named Arinbjörn furnished three ships for a raiding expedition, and took with him not only members of his own household but also many local farmers' sons (Scudder 2000). Thus, there is reason to think that members of *lið* were often diverse with respect to social class as well as being heterogeneous with respect to geographic origin and perhaps language.

It is possible that the composition of *lið* transcended traditional gender boundaries too. Although travel and warfare were activities largely associated with men during the Viking Age (Clover 1993), there is evidence that women sometimes participated in warfare. For example, the Byzantine historian John Skylitzes reports women fighting as part of 'Rus forces in the 970s (Bekker 1838–9), while the Irish source *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* records a 'fleet of the *Inghen Ruaidh*' (Red Girl) operating against Munster during the tenth century (Todd 1867, 41). Although archaeological evidence for female warriors remains ambiguous, a growing number of so-called 'Valkyrie' brooches and pendants depicting females bearing weapons and shields, such as those from Wickham Market, England (DCMS 2004, 54–6), and Hårby, Denmark, demonstrate that the concept of armed females was familiar to Viking Age Scandinavians. While the available evidence does not yet allow us to conclude that women routinely participated in raiding and warfare, the presence of even a few women in a *lið* would have increased its heterogeneity.

There is, then, reason to believe that *lið* were often heterogeneous. While kinship ties and pre-existing social relationships were probably important in the formation and operation of *lið*, it was also probably relatively common for *lið* to include individuals of diverse origins, and it is possible that it was not unusual for them to include women. As discussed earlier, this heterogeneity would most likely have impacted trust and solidarity, and increased the potential importance of ingroup identification and identity fusion.

Some evidence for ingroup identification and identity fusion in Viking *lið*

Having outlined the processes of ingroup identification and identity fusion and demonstrated that there is reason to believe *lið* were often socioculturally heterogeneous, we will now outline archaeological and textual evidence that suggests ingroup identification and identity fusion operated in connection with *lið*. We will begin by discussing evidence for the creation and use of material markers of group identity. We will then outline evidence for oath-taking and for ideologies that we think can be plausibly connected with group cohesion in the context of *lið*.

Material markers of group identity

A common aspect of ingroup identity formation is the creation or adoption of group-specific material culture. This can be seen in the colour schemes adopted by sports teams, the uniforms and regimental insignia of military units and the clothing styles adopted by modern sub-cultures such as punks, goths and mods. Potential evidence for material markers of group identity among Viking *lið* can be found in the archaeological and written records. Instead of comprising a ragtag mix of individuals providing their own equipment, *lið* may have had a relatively homogeneous material identity, especially if equipment was provided by elites. When combined with other identifiers such as dress styles, the use of visually distinctive clothing and equipment could have

formed part of a unique ingroup material identity that allowed disparate Viking groups to be distinguished in the field (N. Price 2014a), as well as promoting ingroup cohesion and unity.

Flags can be used to express ingroup identities, as present-day armies and sports teams demonstrate. The use of standards in battle during the Viking Age is attested by documentary and literary evidence. For example, the *Annals of St. Bertin* records the capture of Viking standards following a battle at Poitiers in 865 (Nelson 1991), while a standard-bearer named Thorgils Boomer is mentioned in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (ch. 13; Scudder 2000). Suggestions of the use of group-specific banners can be found in manuscript E of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which tells us that a banner called ‘Raven’ was taken after the defeat of a Viking force in 878 (Swanton 2000). Similarly, in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* (ch. 22), Haraldr Sigurðarson is recorded as possessing a white banner named ‘Land Waster’, which featured a raven insignia (Monsen 1932), while in *Óláfs saga Helga* (ch. 49), St. Olaf possesses a white banner emblazoned with a dragon (Monsen 1932). Currently, archaeological evidence for standards and banners is lacking, but in her discussion of martial material from early tenth-century contexts at Birka, Sweden, Hedenstierna-Jonson (2006) draws attention to a dragon-head dress pin found during excavations of what is interpreted as a ‘warriors’ hall’ adjacent to the settlement’s hill fort. She suggests that the pin parallels the *dracones*-type banner portrayed on the ninth-century Golden Salter of Saint-Gall and the eleventh-century Bayeaux Tapestry, and may have been worn to identify an individual as a standard-bearer (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006). It is possible that standards and the devices employed on them were perceived as talismans that brought success to the ingroup. For example, Haraldr Sigurðarson’s ‘Land Waster’ was said to bring victory to those carrying it (Monsen 1932). Such beliefs would not only have contributed to ingroup identification and cooperation but might have also promoted pro-group behaviours during conflict.

It is also possible that certain clothing styles were adopted in order to foster a shared identity. Larsson (2007, 2008) has suggested that, rather than being purely functional, Viking Age clothing was often ostentatious, featuring heavily layered fabrics and elaborate decorations fastened by bulky jewellery. An extreme example of this is the early-tenth-century penannular ‘thistle’ brooch from Penrith, which measures over 50cm in length (Graham-Campbell 1980). Such impractical items may have been employed only in certain situations, such as during negotiations with outgroups (N. Price 2014a). Alternatively, they could have been costly signals of group solidarity that were worn on a daily basis (Sosis 2006).

The employment of visually distinctive equipment could have acted as a means of creating an ingroup identity too. Significantly in this regard, we have evidence of the customization of otherwise generic equipment such as shields. Rune-stone DR 202 from Rønninge, Denmark, mentions an ‘Asgot of the red shield’ (Moltke 1976), while shields recovered from graves at Ballateare and Cronk Moar on the Isle of Man were noted as being decorated in various colours and patterns (Bersu and Wilson 1966). *Óláfs saga helga* (ch. 49) notes that St. Olaf’s men possessed white shields painted with red, blue or gold crosses (Monsen 1932), while black and yellow shields were recovered from the Gokstad ship (Nicolaysen 1882). In addition, it has been argued that star-shaped shield bosses found at l’Île Lavret and Île de Groix in Brittany were manufactured by Vikings operating in and around the Loire region (N. Price 1989, 2013).

Ingroup identity could have also been signalled through the painting of ships themselves. *Grettis saga* (ch. 19), for example, describes a ship belonging to a band of *berserkir* as being painted above the waterline (Fox and Pálsson 1974). *Haraldskvæði* (v. 5) similarly describes

king Haraldr as possessing ‘war-ships with reddish ribs and with reddened war-shields’ (Hollander 1936). While this may represent a poetic allusion – the colour red being associated with violence and bloodshed – the possibility that Haraldr’s ship and its shields really *were* red should not be discounted. In support of this possibility it is worth noting that *Haraldskvæði* (v. 19) describes Haraldr as rewarding skalds with red fur cloaks (Hollander 1936).

The adoption and use of exotic equipment could have served a similar function. This suggestion is supported by finds from the ‘warriors’ hall’ at Birka, where a number of fragmentary sets of lamellar armour have been recovered, a discovery made all the more remarkable by the recovery of eastern-style archery equipment. These finds are without parallel in the region during the period (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006). Although they may simply suggest that a non-Scandinavian group was active in garrisoning Birka during the tenth century, it is also possible that the individuals occupying the ‘warriors’ hall’ adopted an overtly exotic material identity (Hedenstierna-Jonson and Holmquist Olausson 2006). This could have contributed to the creation of an exclusive ingroup identity and a highly visible dichotomy between ingroup and outgroup members.

Oath-taking and shared ideologies

It is likely that, in order for individuals to join a *lið*, certain conditions had to be met. One of these may have been the taking of an oath. Because the structure of the *lið* was determined by direct relationships of patronage between retainers and their lords (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009), it is likely that oath-taking would have occurred during both the group formation process and the initiation of new members. Oaths might have been sworn on an object such as a ring or the hilt of a leader’s sword. Davidson (1962) suggests that the sword rings of the Migration Period played a symbolic role in oath-taking, while Eriksen (2015) has recently emphasized the judicial and cultural role of rings during the Viking Age, including their role in the sealing of oaths. It is also worth noting in connection with this that the leaders of the Viking ‘Great Army’ are recorded in 876 as swearing peace with Alfred of Wessex on a ‘sacred ring’ (Swanton 2000, 74). Other types of oath could have also been demanded. References to blood oaths, for example, can be found in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ch. 6; Regal 2000) and Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* (bk 1; Fisher 1979).

Because oaths served to create strong ties of obligation and loyalty among otherwise unrelated individuals, they would have reduced barriers to ingroup cohesion. The links created by oath-taking also had the potential to become more visceral through identity fusion. This is reflected on Scandinavian rune-stones erected by individuals and groups to commemorate the death of comrades. For example, D295 from Hällestad, Denmark, was erected by a group of *drengjar* (young men employed in a retinue) to their lord and ‘*bróðir*’ (brother) Tóki, who died in battle at Uppsala (Jesch 2001). This is indicative not only of identity fusion given that the group identified with their lord as kin, but also that these intense intra-group relationships traversed social boundaries and served to bind the group.

Although oaths would probably have created and maintained powerful links among the members of *lið*, other factors would also have been influential. For example, it is possible that group members would have had to adhere to certain ideologies, including religious or ritual beliefs. For example, it has been suggested that the cult of Oðinn, a god closely associated with shape-shifting, shamanic abilities and warfare, was interwoven with the identity of certain warrior groups during

the Viking Age. At least some of these groups seem to have belonged to a class of warriors that are represented in written sources by the berserkers (ON *berserkir* and *ulfheðnar* – ‘bare shirts’ and ‘wolf hides’). As noted in *Haraldskvæði* (v. 8), *Grettis saga* (ch. 19), *Örvar-Odds saga* (ch. 14) and *Ynglinga saga* (ch. 6) (Hollander 1936; Fox and Pálsson 1974; Pálsson and Edwards 1986; Finlay and Faulkes 2011), berserkers were characterized by uncontrollable rages and exhibited animalistic traits during combat, such as howling and screeching. Significantly, descriptions of these traits are not confined to the sagas. Tenth-century accounts of conflict between Byzantine and ‘Rus’ forces by Leo Diaconus and John Skylitzes note how the Scandinavian warriors were consumed by a madness and howled like animals (Bekker 1838–9; Ellis Davidson 1976; N. Price 2002). The wild-eyed, shield-gnawing berserkers among the twelfth-century Lewis chessmen, which actually predate the prose sources (N. Price 2014b), embody these characteristics perfectly (Williams 2014).

It is possible that groups such as the *berserkir* and *ulfheðnar* were perceived as possessing therianthropic abilities, taking on the strength and characteristics of animals during combat. This belief might have been strengthened if such groups wore animal skins or furs during battle, as suggested by the term ‘*ulfheðnar*’ in *Haraldskvæði* (v. 8; Hollander 1936). Although debate continues as to the existence of actual berserkers, archaeological evidence suggests that the concept of therianthropic warriors formed part of Scandinavian ideologies even before the Viking Age (Schjødt 2011). The fifth-century horns from Gallehus, Denmark, for example, depict what appear to be humans with the heads of animals wielding weapons, while a seventh-century helmet plate matrix from Torslunda, Sweden, shows a figure clad in a wolf skin holding a spear and drawing a sword (Arent 1969; N. Price 2002). From the Viking Age we have possible depictions of berserkers on rune-stones such as that from Källbyås in Västergötland, Sweden, which appears to show a warrior wearing an animal skin (Jansson 1987). It is also worth noting that the felt animal masks discovered in the tenth-century longship at Hedeby, Jutland, have been linked to berserkers (Hägg 1984). Also of interest is an account of the Byzantine Varangian guard wearing animal skins and masks while performing a ceremonial dance and song for the imperial court (N. Price 2002). This suggests that some warrior groups deliberately adopted an animalistic identity. Some might have developed group-specific rituals related to this. For example, *Haraldskvæði* (v. 20; Hollander 1936) describes the *ulfheðnar* as drinking blood, a motif also seen in *Hrólfs saga kraka* (ch. 23; Byock 1998) and Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* (bk 1). This may have been perceived to provide the drinker with strength, in addition to embodying the animalistic traits of those participating in the ritual. It is possible that such rituals formed an integral part of ingroup identities.

The case of the *berserkir* and *ulfheðnar* suggests that identifying with a warrior ingroup may have been dependent on specific physical and/or psychological traits. Whether or not they were specifically associated with Óðinn, we should not rule out the possibility that these groups actually believed themselves to possess shape-shifting abilities or the possibility that others perceived them visually as undergoing some kind of transformation on the battlefield. If this was the case, then possessing this ‘ability’ would probably have contributed to a well-defined ingroup identity and, presumably, strict limits on group membership. Any ideological or ritual aspects of ingroup identity could well have contributed to the greater potential for identity fusion, which in turn would have been strengthened by shared experiences of combat and participation in communal rituals. If so, then these mutually strengthening norms may have fostered perceptions of invulnerability and pro-group attitudes and behaviours (Swann et al. 2012). This might have accounted for the fearsome and reckless traits exhibited by certain Viking groups during conflict.

Conclusions

In this article we have attempted to shed some light on the formation and operation of one of the key social groups of the Viking Age – the *lið*. Specifically, we have discussed two processes that psychologists and anthropologists have proposed are important in the behavioural and psychological relationships within and between groups – ingroup identification and identity fusion – and we have highlighted historical, textual, archaeological and linguistic data indicating that both processes operated in connection with *lið*. In such a short article, we have not been able to present the evidence in as much detail as we would like, but we think it is still reasonably compelling. At the very least, it suggests the hypothesis that ingroup identification and identity fusion played a role in the formation and operation of *lið* is worth exploring further.

In addition to seeking additional evidence for the operation of ingroup identification and identity fusion in connection with *lið*, there are a number of possibilities for further research. One concerns other types of ingroup. The largely Scandinavian agents who played such a major role in the development of trade networks in north-western Russia were known to their contemporaries as the *'Rus* (Androshchuk 2008). The derivation of this term that has found widest acceptance is from the Old Norse *róðr*, meaning a ‘team of oarsmen’ (N. Price 1998). In effect, the word *'Rus* may mean something like ‘the crew’, a self-assigned moniker suited to situations that required solidarity. Other Old Norse terms such as *félag* (a fellowship or partnership) similarly suggest close-knit groups (Jesch 2001). Since the problem of fostering loyalty can be expected to apply to these other groups too, it would be interesting to investigate whether there is evidence for the operation of ingroup identification and identity fusion in connection with them as well.

Another possibility is to consider how ingroup psychology may have influenced relationships among Viking groups, as well as those between Scandinavian colonists and indigenous societies. For example, ingroup identification and identity fusion might allow us to better understand the complex diplomatic and political relationships between Viking war bands and armies operating in England and the Frankish Empire during the ninth century. Similarly, a re-analysis of Viking-Age coins, such as the raven pennies struck for Óláfr Guðfriðarson in York in the mid-tenth century (Hall 1994), could shed interesting light on the use of ingroup-specific symbols during a time of conflict and political turmoil in England. Analyses of burial practices, grave goods and jewellery in the wider context of Scandinavian settlement could also shed light on how ritual and mortuary acts were used to create and reaffirm ingroup identities.

We will end by encouraging archaeologists dealing with all periods and regions, not just those focusing on Viking Age Scandinavia, to give consideration to the anthropological and psychological literature on ingroup identification and identity fusion. We suspect the concepts and examples discussed in that literature will shed light on at least a few long-standing archaeological puzzles.

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