



University  
of Victoria

# GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM

## DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

### Male-Biased Operational Sex Ratios and the Origins of Viking Raiding

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11:30 am – 12:50 pm  
Cornett Building, Room A229



In this paper I will present the results of a recent study that has sought to address a pervasive and fundamental question within Viking studies: what caused the initial Viking raids of the late eighth century? Though the factors that might have triggered this have been repeatedly debated, no hypothesis has thus far provided a convincing explanation for this important historical phenomenon. Utilising a combination of evolutionary theory, ethnographic data, written sources, and archaeological evidence, the study explored a promising line of enquiry that situates the origins of Viking raiding within the long durée of socio-political development in late Iron Age Scandinavia.

The study focuses primarily on the Operational Sex Ratio (OSR)—the ratio of men to women in a society who are ready to form partnerships at any given time. It is suggested that the mutually reinforcing practices of polygyny and concubinage intersected with increasing social stratification in Scandinavia during the first millennium in order to create male-biased OSRs. This would have created a pool of unmarried men who required wealth and status in order to enter into elite-dominated marriage markets. The intensification of polygyny and concubinage (combined, of course, with other factors) may therefore have encouraged individuals to engage in high-risk strategies such as piracy, thus contributing to the formation of Viking raiding parties.

**EVERYONE WELCOME.**