Mitochondrial DNA variation in the Viking age population of Norway

Maja Krzewinska1,5,6, Gro Bjørnstad2,7, Pontus Skoglund3,8, Pall Iolfur Olason4,8, Jan Bill6, Anders Götterström1,8 and Erika Hagelberg5

1Archaeological Research Laboratory, Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden
2Department of Forensic Biology, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, 0403 Oslo, Norway
3Department of Genetics, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA 02115, USA
4Department of Cell and Molecular Biology, Uppsala University, 751 24 Uppsala, Sweden
5Department of Biosciences, University of Oslo, 0316 Oslo, Norway
6Department of Cultural History, University of Oslo, 0130 Oslo, Norway
7Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo, 0315 Oslo, Norway
8Department of Evolutionary Biology, Uppsala University, 752 36 Uppsala, Sweden

The medieval Norsemen or Vikings had an important biological and cultural impact on many parts of Europe through raids, colonization and trade, from about AD 793 to 1066. To help understand the genetic affinities of the ancient Norsemen, and their genetic contribution to the gene pool of other Europeans, we analysed DNA markers in Late Iron Age skeletal remains from Norway. DNA was extracted from 80 individuals, and mitochondrial DNA polymorphisms were detected by next-generation sequencing. The sequences of 45 ancient Norwegians were verified as genuine through the identification of damage patterns characteristic of ancient DNA. The ancient Norwegians were genetically similar to previously analysed ancient Icelanders, and to present-day Shetland and Orkney Islanders, Norwegians, Swedes, Scots, English, German and French. The Viking Age population had higher frequencies of K*, U*, V* and I* haplogroups than their modern counterparts, but a lower proportion of T* and H* haplogroups. Three individuals carried haplotypes that are rare in Norway today (U5b1b1, Hg A* and an uncommon variant of H*). Our combined analyses indicate that Norse women were important agents in the overseas expansion and settlement of the Vikings, and that women from the Orkneys and Western Isles contributed to the colonization of Iceland.

1. Introduction

The Viking Age, from the eighth to the mid-eleventh century of our era, was the phase between the Prehistory and Middle Ages in Scandinavia. It was characterized by the gradual economic and cultural integration of Scandinavia into Christian Europe, and human expansion in three main directions: (i) from Norway north and westwards to the North Atlantic Islands, Scotland, Ireland and even North America; (ii) from Denmark west to England, Ireland and Normandy; and (iii) from Sweden east and southwards to central Russia and the Black Sea (figure 1). There is extensive archaeological, historical and linguistic evidence of Viking activities in Russia and Byzantium, the North Atlantic, Britain, The Netherlands and France [3–6]. In recent years, genetic analyses have contributed additional information on the nature of the Viking migrations [7–9]. Population genetic studies on present-day people reveal a large excess of Norse male over female lineages in Iceland and the Faroes, suggesting that the early male Norse settlers brought with them Gaelic women [7,10–12]. By contrast, it appears that islands closer to Scandinavia, including Orkney and Shetland, were settled by an almost equal proportion of Norse men and women [8]. Archaeological and historical sources show that Viking women and children accompanied Viking armies and were important agents in the processes of migration and assimilation [13]. The Norse migrants contributed to the...
gene pools of the inhabitants of their new homelands, and their descendants eventually carried their respective genes to other lands [9,14].

Frequencies of genes in populations change over time owing to genetic drift, migration and admixture, resulting in major shifts of genetic lineages [15]. Using maternally inherited mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) data from archaeological bones, Helgason et al. [16] showed that the composition of maternal lineages changed considerably in Iceland in the past millennium, with some lineages vanishing completely. This is consistent with the demographic history of Iceland, whose small population was subjected to repeated genetic bottlenecks [16]. Norway’s Iron Age population was also small, and the number of inhabitants could shift markedly over short times. In the Viking Age (late ninth century), the population was about 150 000–200 000, but it grew to approximately half a million by AD 1300, and is thought to have collapsed to half that number during the Black Death of 1349 [17–19]. By the mid-seventeenth century, Norway’s population was probably just 440 000, but increased to two million in the late-nineteenth century, as many as 900 000 Norwegians had emigrated overseas. These demographic changes and associated random genetic drift would undoubtedly have affected gene frequencies, and cause the extinction of lineages. Such processes are ideally suited to ancient DNA techniques, which allow the genes of past populations to be investigated directly, rather than having to extrapolate information from studies on present-day populations.

The primary goal of this study was to characterize the maternal lineages of ancient Norwegians by analysis of mtDNA polymorphisms in DNA recovered from skeletal remains of the Late Iron Age population of Norway (AD 550–1050). Our data provide a picture of the genetic variation and movements of the Norse people in the North Atlantic region during the Viking era. The results reveal that the ancient inhabitants of Norway were genetically similar, but not identical to modern Norwegians, and they carried lineages now extinct in Norway as well as lineages characteristic of distant geographical regions.

2. Material and methods

(a) Bone samples

The human skeletal remains used in this study were part of the Schreiner Collection, Department of Anatomy, University of Oslo. Eighty bone and teeth samples in different states of preservation [21] and of wide geographical distribution were chosen for DNA analysis. Most skeletons were from burial sites in northern and central Norway, where preservation is more favourable, and were excavated between 1880 and the mid-1980s [22]. The associated documentation was poor in most cases, and 15 of the individuals were from accidental finds. At least six burials contained more than one person (for additional information on the skeletal samples, see the electronic supplementary material, table S1).

Small samples of bone, or single teeth, were removed with care to avoid excessive damage. When possible, wedges of long bone (up to 3 g) were cut using a hacksaw, or a single tooth was removed manually. Sampling was carried out by one of us (M.K.), wearing a laboratory coat, face mask, hair net and disposable gloves. The study complied with the relevant guidelines for the analysis of human skeletal remains.

(b) Ancient DNA extraction and amplification

The surface of the bone samples was cleaned by sandblasting with fine alumina grit (Airbrasive 6500 System 2, S. S. White Technologies Inc., Piscataway, NJ), followed by ultraviolet exposure (254 nm) for 15–30 min on each side. Bone pieces were ground to powder using a freezer mill refrigerated with liquid nitrogen (Glen Creston Ltd., Stanmore, UK). Six teeth were prepared according to the method of Malmström et al. [23]. Some extractions were performed at Oslo University and some at the Evolutionary Biology Centre, Uppsala University, to increase the dataset. In Oslo, DNA was extracted using the Qiagen Investigator Kit, following the manufacturer’s instructions, with an additional 200 μl 0.5 M EDTA in the digestion step, or by the silica-based method of Rohland & Hofreiter [24]. In all extraction methods,
the bone powder (150–250 mg) was washed with 2.5% sodium hypochlorite to remove potential contaminating DNA [23], rinsed twice with dH2O and twice with 0.5 M EDTA, pH 8.0. Thirty eight samples underwent extractions in Oslo using both methods. Forty two bone samples were extracted in Uppsala using previously described methods [26,27]. Blank extractions were carried out on average every third sample in both laboratories to screen for contamination.

The first hypervariable region of mtDNA (HVR1), from position 16051 to 16391 (electronic supplementary material, table S2), was amplified in five overlapping fragments as described previously [26]. Amplification primers (electronic supplementary material, table S3) were labelled using different combinations of 14 base-pair (bp) tags [28], to aid the subsequent identification of the individual amplicons. Each sample was amplified twice using two different combinations of tagged primers, resulting in 10 amplicons per individual. The amplicons were sequenced on a 454 GS FLX platform (454 Life Sciences) with two emulsion PCRs. The overall coverage differed significantly depending on the preservation of the samples, from 0 to 1200 sequences in particularly well-preserved samples. The amplicons were sorted and aligned as described previously [29]. In brief, to avoid sequencing errors and chimaeric sequences, only reads of appropriate fragment length and both-end tag combination were selected for further analyses.

Sequence motifs were assigned to mtDNA haplogroups following the suggestions of Vincent Macaulay (University of Glasgow) (http://www.stats.gla.ac.uk/~vincton/mt92000/motif.html) and using the mtDNA manager at Yonsei University [30] as well as the Genographic Project [31] and GHEP-EMPOP [32] databases.

(c) Reference population data
Ancient DNA sequences were compared with a database of 5191 present-day mtDNA sequences, including 838 Norwegians: 515 individuals from the west and north (our unpublished data) and 323 from Oslo [7]. The additional 4353 mtDNA sequences were collected from published data, as listed in the electronic supplementary material, table S4. Only those present-day sequences which overlapped with the mtDNA fragment from our ancient samples (16051–16391) were included in the comparison. European populations are relatively poorly resolved using mtDNA HVRI sequences, and these differences would be almost entirely erased when compared with geographically distant populations. Thus, to enhance the resolution of our analyses, we restricted our comparisons to within the North Atlantic region.

(d) Statistical analyses and population structure
The sequences were sorted and aligned using R v. 2.8.1 [33]. Ancient sequences were identified with the help of the PyroNet v. 5 program, which was used to calculate χ-statistics [34] from over 600 000 synthetic clones. The χ-statistic exploits the characteristic patterns caused by cytosine deamination lesions to identify the oldest template molecules. For each sequence type in each of the amplicon sets, a χ-statistic value (Cmax) and its significance as a p-value was calculated. For each set of amplicons, sequences with a p-value < 0.001 and highest Cmax score were selected for further analyses [34]. Using these criteria, the HVRI sequences were assembled from five overlapping fragments, and mutations were recorded by comparing with the revised Cambridge reference sequence (rCRS) [35,36]. Consensus sequences were assembled in BeEDIT v. 7.1.3.0 [37] and aligned using the DNA Alignment v. 1.3.1.1 package (www.fluxus-engineering.com). Haplotype frequencies and population comparisons were calculated using ARequin v. 3.1 [38]. Pairwise population differentiation values (FST) were calculated for all sample pairs assuming a Tamura–Nei model, with a gamma distribution α = 0.26, and 10 000 iterations. The values were analysed using non-metric multi-dimensional scaling (NMDS) as implemented in the R MASS package [39]. Haplotype sharing was assessed in two ways, using a previously described haplotype-sharing permutation test (HP) [16] and as a proportion by normalizing the number of identical haplotype matches between pairs of populations with the total number of pairwise comparisons (HS). These calculations were used to compare ancient DNA sequences from Norway and Iceland, respectively, to the present-day sequences of the North Atlantic region (figure 2). In the HP, the probability of obtaining an equal or smaller number of haplotype matches is expressed as a p-value. The smaller the p-value, the less likely the tested ancient sample can be considered a random subsample of the modern reference population, meaning the two samples originate from different mtDNA pools. Permutation settings included 10 000 iterations. Because the haplotype permutation match test implements a subsampling strategy, populations smaller or similar in size to the ancient Norwegian sample, such as the Swedish Saami and the population of Skye, were collapsed with related populations (Norwegian Saami and Western Isles, respectively) for the purpose of the analyses. The results of HS were visualized using R v. 2.8.1 [33].

3. Results
We obtained mtDNA sequences from 69 of the 80 skeletons sampled. The sequences of the five short mtDNA amplicons were assembled into 341 bp fragments spanning nucleotide positions 16051–16391. Of the 69 individual sequences, 13 produced inconsistent amplicons, whereas a further 11 were not supported by the χ-statistic, and were therefore excluded from further analyses (even though several had a recognizable mtDNA haplogroup, see the electronic supplementary material). The remaining 45 sequences were accepted as genuine ancient sequences based on the patterns of cytosine deamination damage, and the application of the χ-statistic. The ‘successful’ bone samples had been excavated on average 10 years more recently than the ‘unsuccessful’ ones, indicating that length of storage is an important factor for the ability to recover useful DNA from archival bone samples.

After haplogroup (Hg) assignment, the 45 ancient Norwegians were shown to carry all major mtDNA haplogroups present in Norway today at frequencies higher than 1%, with the exception of Hg W*. A comparison of the haplogroup frequencies of the ancient and modern Norway datasets using a two-tailed t-test with unequal variance showed no statistically significant difference (p = 0.99) in the overall frequency distribution of haplogroups. However, we observed lower frequencies of Hg H* and T* in the ancient Norwegians, compared with the present-day Norwegians, as well as higher frequencies of Hg K*, Hg I*, Hg V* and Hg U* (table 1).

Haplotype-sharing analysis revealed that the ancient Norwegians shared the largest number of haplotypes with modern Norway, Shetland, Orkney, France and England (table 2 and figure 2). Conversely, the haplotype-sharing permutation test yielded statistically significant p-values (p ≤ 0.01) for the matching probability between ancient Norwegians and present-day individuals from England, Scotland, Germany, France and Sweden, but not Norway, Shetland or Orkney (table 2). The haplotype match test revealed that ancient Norwegians and Icelanders were closer to each other than to their respective descendant populations.

The pairwise FST values (table 2) show that the ancient Norwegians are closest to the modern inhabitants of Norway,
Germany, England, Orkney and France. The NMDS plot (stress value = 0.1438) of the \( F_{ST} \) values for 15 pairs of populations placed ancient Norway at the centre, closest to ancient Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Scotland, England and France (figure 3). The Saami were outliers in the initial NMDS analyses, and were therefore removed from the final analysis.

We identified two cases of possible maternal kinship in multiple and neighbouring burials. The first case involved two individuals (A5864A and A5864B) with the reference sequence (rCRS) buried in the same grave at Flakstad, Lofoten, Nordland. The second case involved two skeletons from Herøy, Sandnessjøen, Nordland (A5316 and A5317), carriers of Hg J* (possibly Hg J1d or J2b). Less than 0.1% of people worldwide are known to belong to this haplotype, suggesting the two individuals were related [31]. Interestingly, isotope analyses of the two Flakstad individuals (A5864A and A5864B) suggested they were unrelated, as they consumed different diets and were probably from different social strata [47]. For the purposes of the statistical analyses, to avoid overrepresentation of lineages owing to potential family relationship, the duplicate sequences were removed. This left 43 individual sequences, representing 34 mtDNA haplotypes. Twenty-four of these were detected in our modern mtDNA database (5191 Europeans). Nine matches were identified in two larger worldwide databases [31,32]. Only one

---

**Table 1.** Mitochondrial DNA haplotype frequencies (frequency, % and number of observed instances, \( N \), in italics) in ancient and present-day Norwegians.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sample</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>HV</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>838</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aNorway</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Figure 2.** Haplotype sharing (HS) between ancient Norway and Iceland and 15 populations from the North Atlantic region. (a) Heat map of haplotype-sharing values for ancient Norway and the comparison dataset. (b) Heat map of haplotype sharing for ancient Iceland and the comparison dataset. (c) Scatter plot of haplotype-sharing values for ancient Iceland/ancient Norway and the comparison dataset. (d) Heat map of haplotype sharing for ancient Iceland with the value for sharing with ancient Norway subtracted for each population. The legend colours represent the observed HS value of haplotype sharing for each population.
Table 2. Mitochondrial DNA diversity and haplotype match probabilities in ancient Norwegians and North European populations. (N, number of individuals; k, number of haplotypes observed; HP, haplotype-sharing permutation p-value; HS, exact haplotype sharing; Nm, number of exact haplotype matches between the ancient Norwegians (aNorway) and the comparison dataset.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample ID</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>k/N</th>
<th>Nm</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>HS</th>
<th>Fst</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basque</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0351</td>
<td>0.0089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0.669</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.5485</td>
<td>0.0417</td>
<td>0.0021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>0.251</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0299</td>
<td>0.0114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>0.426</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.0498</td>
<td>0.0405</td>
<td>0.0018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.642</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.1940</td>
<td>0.0390</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0280</td>
<td>0.0067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0.706</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.5009</td>
<td>0.0376</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>0.337</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.0031</td>
<td>0.0438</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aNorway</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orkney</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.0067</td>
<td>0.0426</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saami</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.0027</td>
<td>0.0165</td>
<td>0.2180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.0267</td>
<td>0.0379</td>
<td>0.0036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shetland</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>0.349</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
<td>0.0459</td>
<td>0.0022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0.564</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.0136</td>
<td>0.0320</td>
<td>0.0025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Isles and Skye</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0.435</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
<td>0.0304</td>
<td>0.0068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. NMDS plot of interpopulation pairwise $F_{ST}$ values calculated from mtDNA HVR1 control-region sequence data (stress value = 0.1438). The $F_{ST}$ values were calculated according to the Tamura–Nei model, with a gamma distribution of 0.26. Reference data were from previously published studies [7,8,16,40–46].
haplotype (individual A5863B: 16 153A–16 189C-16 304C) was not found among living individuals.

Two female skeletons, from Nordland and Nord–Trendelag, respectively, carried rare haplotypes, namely 16 144C–16 148T–16 189C–16 270T–16 335G (Hg U5b1b1) and 16 188T–16 189C–16 223T–16 290T–16 319A–16 356C–16 362C (possibly Hg A4b). The polymorphisms detected in the former are sometimes referred to as the ‘Saami motif’, so far only described in Saami [48], whereas the latter sequence is a Central Asian lineage present in Europe at a frequency of less than 0.2% [7,49].

4. Discussion

In this study, we recovered informative DNA sequences from a relatively large number of skeletal remains of considerable antiquity (about 1000 years old), excavated several decades ago, and handled by anthropologists without precautions to avoid contamination, such as gloves or facial masks. By examining the extent of damage in the ancient sequences, we were able to discriminate between genuine ancient DNA sequences and more recent contamination. Starting with 80 skeletal samples, we recovered authentic mtDNA sequences from 45 Norwegians from the Late Iron Age, contemporary with the Viking expansion. While it is important to remember that the individuals did not necessarily live at the same time, and could have been separated by several centuries, this is the single largest ancient DNA sample-set representing the past population of Norway. For the purposes of this study, we have regarded the individuals as a single population to help understand the affinities of the ancient Norwegians to present-day peoples of the North Atlantic region.

There was little difference between our Late Iron Age Norway and the reference North Atlantic populations, and no clear variation patterns were detected. Despite this, some of our analyses, such as the haplotype-sharing permutation test and to some extent the pairwise test, indicated close affinities between ancient Norwegians and Icelanders, the former are sometimes referred to as the ‘Saami motif’, so far only described in Saami [48], whereas the latter sequence is a Central Asian lineage present in Europe at a frequency of less than 0.2% [7,49].

Mutual affinities were illustrated by the NMDS plot of pairwise ST values, which shows that the ancient Norwegians are close to the modern Norwegians, Swedes, English, French, Scots and Germans as well as the ancient Icelanders (figure 3). However, it should be noted that the p-values for these ST estimates were rarely significant (electronic supplementary material, table S5). Previous studies have demonstrated close affinities between Norwegian and German mtDNAs [7,52], but we are the first, to the best of our knowledge, to show a close relationship between ancient Norwegians and ancient Icelanders. Our exact haplotype-sharing analyses revealed signals of Norse female ancestry in Iceland, whereas the haplotype-sharing permutation test indicated a high probability that the two groups shared a source population (table 2). To identify other contributions of female lineages to the ancient Icelandic gene pool, the ancient Norway haplotype-sharing values were subtracted from those of ancient Iceland (figure 2d). This revealed Orkney and the Western Isles as important outliers, with more haplotypes shared with the ancient Icelanders than expected from their sharing with ancient Norwegians, unsurprisingly perhaps, as both locations have a history of Viking colonization and settlement.

Iceland was settled mainly from Norway and the British Isles after AD 870. While a large proportion of the settlers from Britain and Ireland were Gaelic, others were probably Scandinavians raised in Viking colonies [1]. Close affinities between ancient Norwegians and living Britons suggest that a proportion of present-day British mtDNA lineages are of Norse origin. Close affinities between ancient Icelanders and the inhabitants of Orkney and the Western Isles could potentially reflect genetic influences from Norse colonists (figure 2). A recent reanalysis of historical data suggested that Norse males often married in Scandinavia [53]. Our findings suggest Norse women may have been involved in the colonization of new territories during the Early Middle Ages, and made contributions to the genetic makeup of the populations of the North Atlantic region.

Comparisons between the ancient and present-day Norwegians revealed several genetic differences, such as changes in haplogroup frequencies (Hg: H1*, H2*, K1*, T1*, V1 and U1*), in agreement with previously published findings in other parts of Scandinavia. Although the sample size was smaller than several modern datasets, and the skeletal material was undoubtedly subjected to unequal taphonomic processes, the dataset is large enough to broadly reflect the situation in Late Iron Age Norway. A comparison of ancient and modern Norwegian datasets using a two-tailed test with unequal variances showed no statistically significant difference (p = 0.99) in the overall frequency distribution of haplogroups. Nevertheless, the change in the frequency of haplogroups I1* and K1* is noteworthy. Previous analyses of ancient Scandinavians suggested the Hg I1* was an ‘ancient Scandinavian’ haplogroup into the gene pool of the British Isles [51]. Our findings suggest that while the haplotype-sharing estimate may pick up signals of human dispersals in the North Atlantic region (e.g. the close relationships between ancient Norwegians and Icelanders, modern Shetlanders, Orkney Islanders, English, French and Norwegians), the haplotype-sharing permutation test is better suited to understand post-colonization population changes, and highlights the affinities between ancient Norwegians and Icelanders to the present-day populations of England, France and Germany [16].
One ancient haplotype (A5863B: 16 153A–16 189C–16 304C) belonging to Hg H* was not found among modern individuals, although a number of close haplotype matches, differing at one polymorphic site, were identified in the comparison databases. A5863B may be an extinct or rare mtDNA lineage. Another individual, an adult female discovered in 1942 in Vevelstad, Helgeland, Nordland (A4448), had a sequence characteristic of Hg U5b1b1, sometimes referred to as the ‘Saami motif’ (16 144C–16 148T–16 189C–16 270T–16 335G) [48]. The skeleton was classified as Norse based on the associated archaeological findings, namely a burial mound and an axe. The skeleton could represent a secondary burial in the barrow. Mound and cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, were characteristic of the Norse tradition, whereas Saami burials, cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, could represent a secondary burial in the barrow. Mound and cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, were characteristic of the Norse tradition, whereas Saami burials, cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, could represent a secondary burial in the barrow. Mound and cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, were characteristic of the Norse tradition, whereas Saami burials, cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, could represent a secondary burial in the barrow. Mound and cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, were characteristic of the Norse tradition, whereas Saami burials, cairn burials with grave goods, often including weapons, could represent a secondary burial in the barrow.

The project was approved by the Norwegian National Committee for Evaluation of Scientific Investigations on Human Remains (ref.: 2008/85), and was carried out with permission of the museums housing the skeletal samples (Museum of Cultural History and Department of Biosciences, University of Science and Technology and The Arctic University of Norway). Human Remains (ref.: 2008/85), and was carried out with permission of the museums housing the skeletal samples (Museum of Cultural History and Department of Biosciences, University of Science and Technology and The Arctic University of Norway). Human Remains (ref.: 2008/85), and was carried out with permission of the museums housing the skeletal samples (Museum of Cultural History and Department of Biosciences, University of Science and Technology and The Arctic University of Norway).

Acknowledgements. We thank Aagnar Helgason for the Pycelnt program, Visual Basic script for haplotype-sharing permutation and helpful comments on the manuscript. Havard Kauserud provided feedback on the data analyses and comments on the manuscript. We are grateful to Per Holck for help with the sampling of skeletal material, Koji Tominaga for the Python script and Marcin Wojewodzic for help in implementing R Graphics solutions.

Funding statement. The project was approved by the Norwegian National Committee for Evaluation of Scientific Investigations on Human Remains (ref.: 2008/85), and was carried out with permission of the museums housing the skeletal samples (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; University Museum of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and The Arctic University of Norway). This work was part of a PhD project by M.K., supported by the Museum of Cultural History and Department of Biosciences, University of Oslo, Norway. The S. G. Sonnerland Foundation provided additional financial assistance (grant number 18971 to M.K.).


57. Melchior L, Kivisild T, Lynnerup N, Dissing J. 2008 Evidence of authentic DNA from Danish Viking Age skeletons untouched by humans for 1,000 years. *PLoS ONE* 3, e2214. (doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0002214)


