

Vikings not purely Scandinavian and many were dark-haired, claims genetic study

Vikings were far from a single group of flaxen-haired, sea-faring Scandinavians.

A genetic study of Viking-age human remains has not only confirmed that Vikings from different parts of Scandinavia set sail for different parts of the world, but has revealed that dark hair was more common among Vikings than Danes today.

What's more, while some were born Vikings, others adopted the culture – or perhaps had it thrust upon them.

“Vikings were not restricted to blond Scandinavians,” said Prof Eske Willerslev, a co-author of the research from the University of Cambridge and the University of Copenhagen.

[Writing in the journal Nature](#), Willerslev and colleagues report how they sequenced the genomes of 442 humans who lived across Europe between about 2,400BC and 1,600AD, with the majority from the Viking age – a period that stretched from around 750AD to 1050AD.

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Among their results the team found that from the iron age, southern European genes entered Denmark and then spread north, while – to a lesser extent – genes from Asia entered Sweden.

“Vikings are, genetically, not purely Scandinavian,” said Willerslev.

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“[Being a Viking] is not a pure ethnic phenomenon, it is a lifestyle that you can adopt whether you are non-Scandinavian or Scandinavian,” said Willerslev, adding that genetic influences from abroad both before and during the Viking age might help explain why genetic variants for dark hair were relatively common among Vikings.

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