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Men in Black: Performing masculinity in 17th- and 18th-century Iceland

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Abstract

Studies in masculinity have lagged behind in the field of gender studies though recent scholarship is making up for this disparity. In this paper, we tackle the question of masculinity and modernity in early modern Iceland through an analysis of archaeological material relating to dress from the site of an Icelandic bishopric and school, Skálholt, during the late 17th and 18th centuries. We explore both the symbolic and performative dimensions of dress in relation to masculinity as it is traversed by other facets of identity including status, nationalism, and calling. An important focus of our study is to unravel the subtle negotiations that are evident in dress and linked to the performative construction of different and sometimes competing masculinities. Tensions between Lutheran ideals, nationalistic pride in homespun and elite status, and more generally between clerical and nonclerical masculinities can all be seen in the way dress and dress accessories are made to work.

Keywords

Masculinity, dress, identity, modernity, Iceland

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Archaeology and the study of dress

Clothing and dress¹ constitute one of the most important categories of material culture and yet their study has often been marginalized in academic circles, including archaeology. Although there are preservation issues, the more significant reasons almost certainly relate to deeper prejudices in western culture to materiality and consumption, of which dress is often regarded as a paradigmatic case (Miller, 2010). Underlining this neglect is the fact that scholarly interest in dress and textiles in archaeology has been delegated largely to women scholars who have taken it upon themselves to justify and promote this important expression of social identity (e.g. for historical archaeology, see the important work by Carolyn White (2005) and Lorren (2010); on dress in general, see the key works of Joanne Eicher (2000), Tranberg Hansen (2004), and Wilson (2003)).

As a “second skin,” clothing mediates between our body and the rest of the world and thus plays a major role in relation to identity, including dimensions such as gender, sexuality, status, ethnicity, and religious and magical affiliation, to name but a few. It is, in short, a key site for the articulation of the social (Cordwell and Schwarz, 1979; Eicher, 2000; Eicher and Roach Higgens, 1992; Entwistle, 2000; Hayeur Smith, 2004; Schwarz, 1979; Turner, 1980). At the same time, one must be careful not to reduce clothing to a purely symbolic or representative role; the agency of dress needs to be acknowledged in light of theoretical developments over the last couple of decades. Clothing does not simply symbolize identity such as gender, etc., it actually co-constitutes it through its performative possibilities, including in the sensual realms of sound, smell, touch, and visual display, a relationship clearly exemplified, for example, in Miller and Banerjee’s (2008) study of the Indian sari, among others. The issue is how the performative aspects of dress are interwoven with the performative aspects of people’s bodies and thus how more generally, agency, embodiment, and identity intersect. Our aim in this paper is to contribute to this growing literature on dress to explore how clothing articulates the identity–body–agency nexus, using both archaeological and documentary sources based around a single case study. Our material comes from recent archaeological excavations of the 17th- and 18th-century levels at the settlement of Skálholt, one of two episcopal seats in Iceland which was an elite, predominantly male institutional setting. Consequently, our study focuses on male dress, rather than female, and in particular on the complex nature of masculine identity and agency in relation to clothing. We want to examine the specific ways in which clothing was mobilized to enact the masculine: how did dress both articulate individual identity and work to mediate interpersonal relations among a largely male, elite community in the North Atlantic? In short, *what did dress do?*

The site and its data

Bishops and boys: The episcopal community at Skálholt, Iceland. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Skálholt was one of two episcopal seats in Iceland, the other lying on the

north coast (Hólar) while Skálholt is sited in the south. The seat was established in the mid-11th century and remained the residence of the southern Bishop until the end of the 18th century. The bishopric was also a major landowner with properties all over the country and led the Lutheran Reformation in Iceland against the resistant, Catholic bishopric in the North. It was around the mid-16th century that a school was formally opened through which sons of the elite were educated, most of whom went on to become priests or government officials. In effect, Skálholt was a training ground for public servants but more generally, an institution for the social and cultural reproduction of the Icelandic male elite. Indeed, it was a predominantly male environment where c. 70 percent of the population were boys or men. Besides the Bishop and the schoolboys (who ranged in age from around 15 to 22 years old), there was a bailiff, bursar, schoolteacher, and priest, not to mention male estate workers. The women in the community were either part of the Bishop's household (e.g. wife, daughters) or domestic servants, although some also were estate workers (Lucas, *in prep.*). In all, the population was around 100 for the period under study, which by Icelandic standards makes it one of the largest in the country.

Large-scale archaeological investigations at Skálholt were undertaken between 2002 and 2007, which uncovered the majority of the core of the settlement, i.e. the Bishops manor and school with associated service buildings (Figure 1). The areas that remained unexcavated included various agricultural buildings, store rooms,

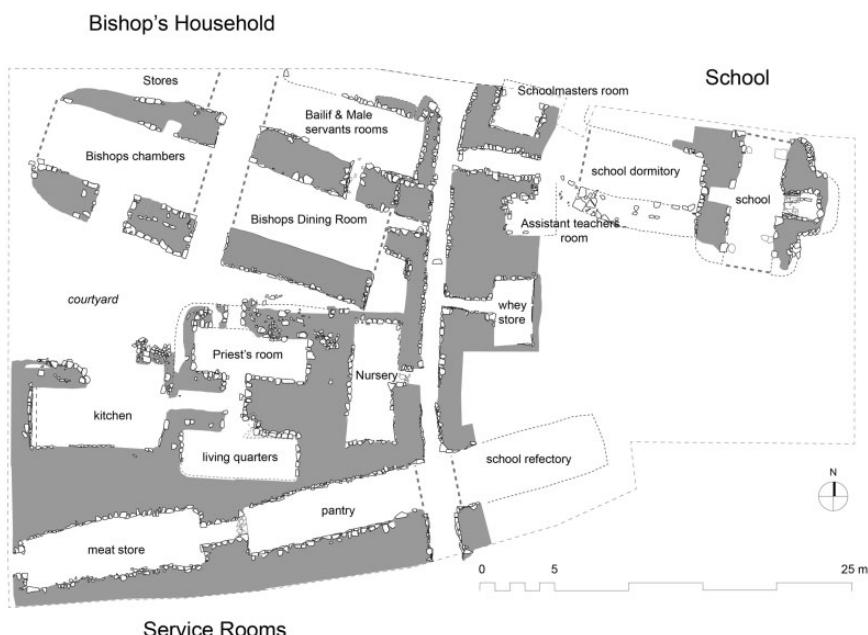


Figure 1. Bishops manor and school with associated service buildings during the early 18th century.

and male and female estate laborers' quarters. The excavations uncovered three centuries of occupation, from c. 1650 to 1950, although in this paper, we focus only on the first half of that period, from c. 1650 to 1800, which includes the very last phase of the site as an episcopal seat. The site generally exhibited very good preservation, including both textiles and leather, and the recovery of finds was extremely high. The range of material culture was diverse but dominated by items associated with food and drink (e.g. ceramics, glassware, treen, and stave vessels), dress (textiles, leather, metal fittings, and accessories), and building material (e.g. nails, hinges, wood, brick, tiles) as well as much else including the ubiquitous white clay tobacco pipes. Much of the material displays important indications of the good connections that the Icelandic elite had with mainland Europe in terms of access to the rise in consumer goods and luxuries.

Although a portion of this rich material came from excavated middens associated with the settlement, the greater part by far was recovered from floor layers and associated features inside buildings. Given the nature of vernacular architecture in Iceland, which uses turf and undressed stone as building material and trampled ash and flagstone floors, the incorporation of portable items from buttons to potsherds into occupation surfaces was very high (a feature itself worthy of separate study: the floors were studded with rubbish). This, coupled with an extensive documentary archive that permitted us to identify the function of each room, has allowed us a rare opportunity to explore the connections between male spaces and material culture.

Given the male dominance of the Skálholt community, our analysis will focus on male dress; although we acknowledge the importance of contextualizing this against female clothing, to maintain a sharp focus in this paper our emphasis is on masculinity. In particular, we will stress different subsections of the male community, especially that between the school and the Bishops household, but also different ideals of masculinity, especially the clerical and nonclerical. Before we address these themes though, in the following section we summarize the key aspects about the material culture of clothing from the excavations at Skálholt, focusing on three groups: textiles, leather, and dress fittings/accessories.

The dress assemblage from Skálholt

Textiles. From the excavations at Skálholt, textiles are a significant category with 3462 fragments of cloth, though only a minority can be attributed to any particular garment. Most garments are unrecognizable except for a select few, such as a collar with facing, two possible hat fragments, mittens, and spun cords. The textiles are scraps of cloth and spinners waste (raw wool, spun yarns, etc.), suggesting on-site textile production. Two leather panels from hand carders were also recovered along with several wooden spindle shafts providing direct evidence that wool was being prepared for spinning at the site. These textiles were used in a household context, possibly starting out as garments and making their way down to household rags.

Table 1. Distribution of textiles from Skálholt.

Ribbons/bands (often made of silk)	Textile waste	Basket weave	Felt	Knits	Twills	Plain weave
70	384	5	374	238	1876	347

Woolen textiles dominate the assemblage with 3236 fragments (93.5%). This is probably an inaccurate representation of what textile consumption really looked like, as linens and cellulose-based fibers do not survive and tend to degrade much more rapidly than woolens. Table 1 shows the distribution of woven textiles, ribbons, and bands which are often made of wool but this category includes silks as well. Felts include both heavily fulled woven textiles (this can also signal professional finish and hence imported textiles), as well as those felts that are made without weaving by pounding the wool, knits, twills (mostly 2/2 twills which are by far the most common weave in Iceland's history and account for the majority of medieval finds), and plain weaves—also more common in earlier periods. The twills are the largest category in the assemblage at Skálholt, and as with other early modern sites, it is difficult to determine if they are locally produced “homespun,” industrially imported twills, or the professional worsted twills produced in industrial workshops of Reykjavik established in 1750.

Given the nature of this assemblage and the scope of this paper, the key focus of our discussion will be on the relationship between traditional homespun and “modernizing” textiles made on horizontal looms. Icelandic textiles from the early modern period are among the more complex. For over 800 years, women were the weavers and textile producers of society, and during the medieval period were responsible for the making of cloth currency using archaic tools (see Hayeur-Smith, 2014, 2016, 2018). By the early 17th century, the Danish monarchy established a trade monopoly in the North Atlantic ensuring that all trade took place between Denmark and its colonies. This primarily impacted knitting as Icelanders started knitting for export: stockings, hats, and gloves for the Danish markets. The Danish colonial authorities also took a growing interest in Icelandic textile production and introduced in 1700 new tools such as the treadle loom and the spinning wheel, both of which became widespread by 1750 (Róbertsdóttir, 2008: 30).

By 1750 textile workshops were set up in Reykjavik with facilities for shearers, a fulling and stamping mill, and dye works (Róbertsdóttir, 2008). In 1764 a large fire swept through Reykjavik, reducing the workshops to one and by the end of the century the production eventually stopped. Although short lived, these innovations reflect changing tastes in the appearance of cloth and a continental preference for more refined textiles against the coarser homespun or *vaðmál* (for similar developments in England related to cotton, see Styles, 2016, 2017). Icelandic *vaðmál* was perceived in Europe as cheap and coarse and one obvious question is whether Icelanders, especially the Icelandic elite, also began to see it this way. At Skálholt, looking at thread counts² over several centuries is quite revealing of

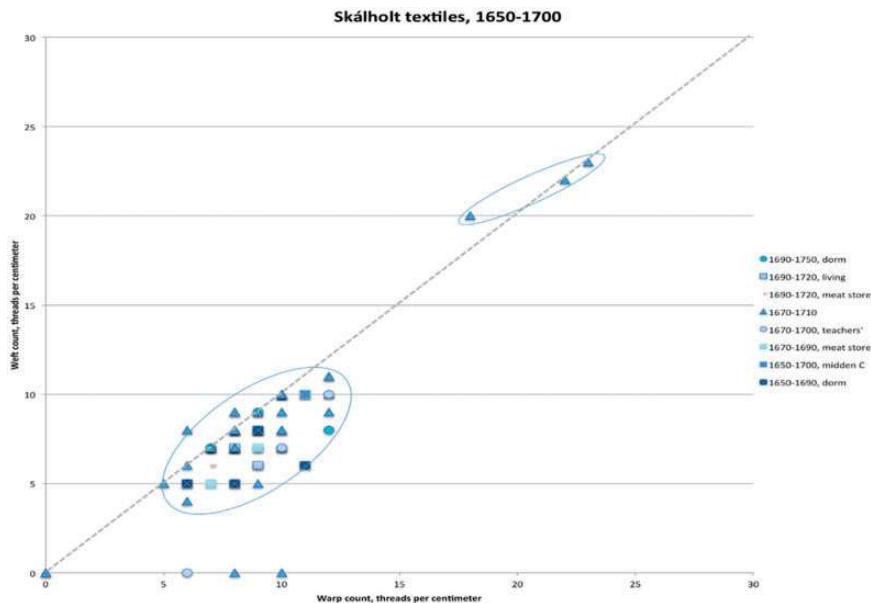


Figure 2. Distribution of textiles at Skálholt from 1650 to 1700.

how textiles were used on the site. The division of centuries is based on archaeological phasing with material from 1650 to 1700, from 1700 to 1750, and from the post-1750 phase.

From 1650 to 1700 thread counts on twills suggest a pattern consistent with medieval Icelandic homespun. Textiles are warp-dominant twills with warp thread counts similar to earlier medieval ones (4–14 warp threads per centimeter) which, during the medieval era, is reflective of high standardization and the use of textiles as a form of currency (see Hayeur-Smith, 2014, 2018). Textiles from this period cluster around these values but at Skálholt additional pieces with higher thread counts are also present suggesting possible imports (Figure 2). It would seem that between 1650 and 1700 coarse homespun cloth was the dominant textile used at Skálholt and not the lavish imported textiles.

Between 1700 and 1750 thread counts (Figure 3) change with the inclusion of a greater number of textiles with higher thread counts as well as more balanced weaves suggesting the use of the new treadle loom that produces more regular, balanced cloth. The cluster identified above—4–14 warp threads—is still present, but with more diversity in thread counts reflecting different textile types other than homespun. Period 1700–1750 seems to reflect the biggest import years at Skálholt, while post-1750 things change again. By 1750 the twills destabilize around the core group (of 4–14) but in a slightly different manner. Textiles are more numerous and also display more balanced weaves resembling European imports. One might wonder if the post-1750 materials are textiles produced in workshops of Reykjavík?

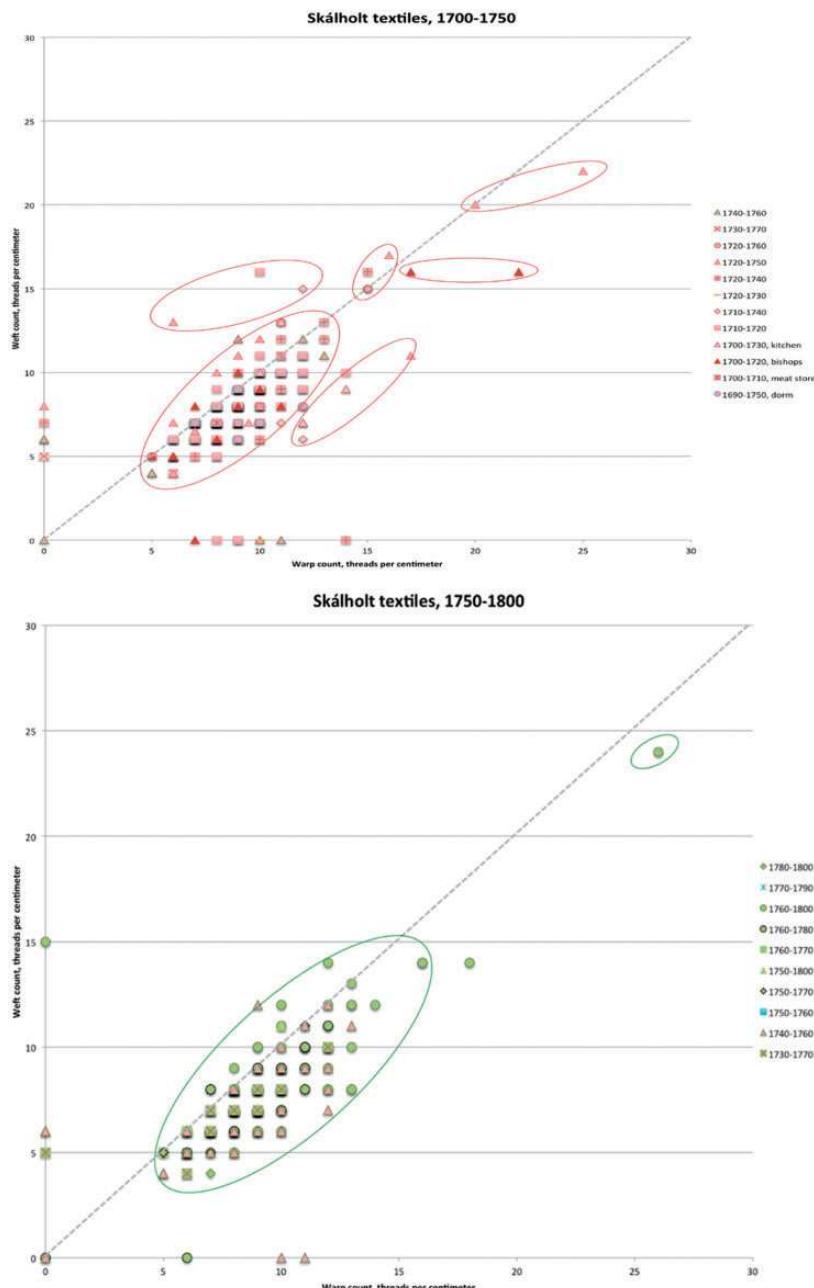


Figure 3. Distribution of textiles from 1700 to 1750 (above) and from 1750 to 1800 (below).

While thread counts help to track the movement of cloth imports and consumption patterns at Skálholt with imports and “modernizing” textiles clearly having a presence in the 18th century, homespun cloth continued to be a staple throughout the centuries. Of woven textiles recovered at Skálholt, potential imports represent just over one-third (37.4%) of the assemblage, while nearly two-thirds (62.6%) of the textiles used and consumed at the site were homespun. We can only assume that these remains constitute part of male clothing given the high number of males on the site (70% of the population, possibly more given the focus of excavation). This suggests that the modernization efforts and attempts at abolishing the old looms were not as successful as hoped. The workshops were short lived lasting only 50 years, but it would seem that the revolution in domestic production was resisted by consumers.

The textile data from Skálholt suggest that the majority of elites were not clothed in modern textiles but continued to wear items made from the same homespun that had been in use for centuries. Luxury goods had limited circulation restricted to certain people for specific occasions. Knitting is also surprisingly sparse with only 238 knits in the entire corpus. It has often been argued that knitting became widespread during the 18th century (Róbertsdóttir, 2008). More likely is that most knits made their way to Copenhagen as export products and that complete knitted garments only became common after the 18th century when the textile mills in Reykjavik shut down and fewer people knew how to weave using the old warp-weighted loom while the flat looms required specialized knowledge.

Leather. Leather excavated from Skálholt accounted for a minimum of 468 “items,” each item often including several individual fragments or components. The leather recovered is vegetable-tanned leather, as skins and hides treated by other methods do not survive in the archaeological record, except under exceptional circumstances. From what little information is available on the history of processing skin-based products in Iceland, oil-tanned and pseudo-leathers (Thomson, 2011: 3–7) were traditionally used to make shoes and clothing, while vegetable-tanned leathers (with birch bark) were reserved for saddlery and bookbindings (Ólafsson and Pálsson, 1805: 79–80; Porkelsson, 1943: 121–134). There appears to be little direct evidence for the local production and use of vegetable-tanned leather during our period of study. In the second half of the 18th century, small workshops were set up along the main street in Reykjavik, where textile processing (mentioned above), rope making, and tanning hides took place. It is not clear what form the tanning took, but “the skin industry” was unsuccessful (Karlsson, 2000: 175). Records show however that vegetable-tanned leather was being imported into the country at the end of the 18th century (Róbertsdóttir, 2012), and one may assume that most, if not all, of the vegetable-tanned leather from Skálholt was imported. Most of this leather, as we discuss below, came from footwear which immediately flags the role of imported tanned leather footwear, for elites as set against the oiled hide or fishskin shoes worn by commoners.

The majority of the leather items were of clothing, overwhelmingly footwear, with a possible spur leather, scraps from gloves, buttons, and fragments of small buckled straps (i.e. clothing or fastenings from other accessories). Gloves were of fine sheepskin and worn as fashion items, not practical work wear. As with the textiles, most of the leather found represents items discarded at the very end of the chain of use and recycling. Much of the shoe leather had been cut up to salvage reusable leather, which together with the types of shoe parts recovered suggests it to be cobblering waste from the repair and refurbishment of footwear. Leather was found across the site and throughout all phases of the Bishopric and school, but just over half (54%) came from a single building: the male servants quarters, dated to the late 17th and first quarter of the 18th century. Given the nature of the material, its concentration here probably relates to the building as a locus of secondary leather working rather than a prevalence of leather wearing among male servants.

While the shoes are likely to have been imported readymade, the few pieces of hide edge present indicate that some new leather in the form of complete hides was also available; indeed, both skins and hides as well as finished leather goods were among the luxury and specially ordered imports into the country in 1784 (Róbertsdóttir, 2012: 94–95). No complete or near complete shoes were recovered from Skálholt and many of the shoe parts found lacked any diagnostic features, so stylistically only the broadest impressions can be suggested. All were heeled, thick-soled footwear made using northern European technology, constructions, and styles. Shoe parts from two general styles of shoe were present: latchet tie shoes and buckled shoes. Latchet tie shoes were popular throughout northern Europe in the 17th century, superseded by buckled shoes for men's wear that became the dominant shoe style of the 18th century. Tall boots were also a feature of elite male footwear during the 17th and 18th centuries. Pieces cut from the leg of a tall boot were found in a context dated 1710–1720, and a possible spur leather, used to attach a spur and protect a boot from wear when riding, in a context dated to c. 1720.

Shoes with square toes and shoes with blunt oval toes were found in the same deposits, those with blunt oval toes being the most popular (Table 2). During the second half of the 17th and the early years of the 18th century, the square toe was highly fashionable for men's footwear in northern Europe, though surviving examples of rounded toes provide evidence of the working-man's footwear (c.f. Swann, 1982: 19, Figure 15). The pointed toe became the fashion for the rest of the 18th century (Swann, 1982: 26). The predominance of blunt oval-toed shoes and the relative paucity of fully square-toed shoes at Skálholt may suggest a more conservative and practical attitude.

One of the most notable features of the footwear was the heel, most being of stacked leather, the lowest being c. 11 mm, the highest 44 mm (c. 1 1/2–2 in.). The only heel made of wood found came from a pointed woman's shoe that may have been made in Denmark (Mould in Lucas (ed), in prep). A small amount of evidence for the use of bark, a feature from the Baltic region, was present both for heel lifts and as a filling material in shoe bottoms from 18th century deposits at Skálholt.

Table 2. Toe shapes of Skálholt shoes (in context date order).

Date	Location	Context	Toe shape	Item
1670–1690	S18.1	2530	Oval	Insole
1670–1710	S25.1	2799	Oval	Sole
1670–1710	S25.1	2800	Square	Insole
1670–1710	S25.1	2811	Pointed	Vamp
1670–1710	S25.1	2820	Oval	Insole/midsole
1670–1710	S25.1	2821	Pointed	Sole
1670–1710	S25.1	2829	Oval	Sole
1670–1710	S25.1	2832	Oval	Sole
1710–1720	S25.2	2521	Oval	Sole
1710–1720	S25.2	2521	Oval	Insole
1710–1720	S25.2	2521	Oval	Insole
1710–1720	S25.2	2521	Oval	Toe puff
1710–1720	S25.2	2641	Oval	Insole
1710–1720	S25.2	2649	Oval	Sole
1710–1720	S25.2	2650	Oval	Sole
1710–1720	S25.2	2652	Oval	Sole
1710–1720	S25.2	2672	Square	Midsole
1710–1720	S25.2	2676	Oval	Tread (half) sole
1710–1720	S17.4	2712	Square	Sole/midsole
1720	S25.3	2341	Oval	Toe puff
1720–1740	S30.2	902	Square	Toe puff
1740–1760	S5.2	2185	Square	Insole

The wearers of these imported shoes with their high heels and thick soles would be instantly recognizable to onlookers, having a different stance and a noticeable “strut” when walking compared with those in the softly structured, flat-soled traditional Icelandic footwear.

Dress fittings and accessories. The most common dress fittings recovered from Skálholt were buttons, almost all of which can be assumed to have been fastened to male dress, as female clothing did not employ buttons until the 19th century, instead using laces or hooked clasps (Egan and Pritchard, 1991; White, 2005). Male clothing also occasionally used the latter as well, so it can be very difficult to assign these items to male or female dress, although context of association will be used here.

The buttons are a diverse group and include two main types: textile-covered buttons and metal buttons (Table 3). The textile-covered buttons generally only survived as wooden cores, although there were a few instances of such with the

Table 3. Summary of button types from Skálholt.

	c. 1650–1720	c. 1720–1750	c. 1750–1780
Metal			
Copper alloy	44	51	9
Pewter	66	67	19
Silver	4	7	1
Iron	2	1	0
Wooden cores			
Wooden cores	77	67	5
Copper sheet covered	0	2	1
Textile covered	2	2	0
Other			
Bone	0	4	1
Glass	15	35	7
Jet	2	1	1

textile jacket still on. One should note that wooden cores could also have been covered with metal sheet, although based on size and context most wooden button cores from Skálholt were probably textile covered. The metal buttons were either in pewter (or similar white metal) or copper alloy (probably brass), most being solid cast, though about a third to a quarter were sheet buttons composed of one or two sheet pieces, crimped together around a wooden core (or hollow). Almost all the metal buttons were shanked, with wire loops attached to the back for sewing to the garment. Only two examples of sew-through buttons were recorded in the whole assemblage. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the metal buttons had decorated surfaces (often floral motifs) and a few had signs of silvered or gilt surfaces.

A detailed analysis of typological variation was conducted on the buttons, in terms of their shape, size, and method of manufacture, but little strong patterning emerged, chronologically or spatially. The buttons occur all over the site, but concentrate in the rooms associated with the school or Bishops living quarters and are generally rare in service rooms. This is perhaps unsurprising and given the size of buttons and the relative darkness of the rooms. The concentration nonetheless confirms the association between button use and the elite, male spaces within the settlement. One of the more relevant results relates to the material used for buttons: copper alloy replaces pewter and textile-covered (wooden) buttons as a dominant material by the mid-18th century, consistent with general European fashion. In terms of function, size offers the most reliable indicator, and while buttons of all types showed no strong association with any specific size range, there was a general tendency for textile-covered buttons to be more common at the larger size (15 mm) and these may have been used on jackets rather than waistcoats or breeches.

Metal buttons represent very different sensual properties than textile-covered buttons; being hard but especially shiny, they have the ability to catch the eye and contrast with the cloth on the garment, especially if monotone. In that sense, the difference between textile-covered buttons that blend into the fabric and metal buttons that announce themselves in a more attention-seeking attitude, is interesting, in both the use variation and the chronological trend in button material. This shift toward button accentuation is also registered in the subtle increase in size of metal buttons over the same time; in the late 17th and early 18th century, the most common metal button size was 11 mm in diameter, but by the mid-18th century it ranged between 12 and 14 mm, and by the end of the century there were two common sizes at 14/15 and 20 mm. The trend for increasing button size is not unique to Skálholt but a common trend of European male clothing over the 18th century (White, 2005). As a tentative guide, one might suggest that breech and waistcoat buttons increased from 10 to 15 mm over the 18th century while jacket buttons increased from 15 to 20 mm. Accompanying this shift was a related preference for the migrating use of bolder buttons from being solely on the inner garment (waistcoats) to also the outer garment (jacket), replacing the use of textile-covered buttons. We argue that these signal important shifts in how elite males were articulating their interpersonal relations and sense of masculinity.

Although buttons dominate the assemblage of dress accessories, other items recovered from Skálholt ought to be mentioned: metal hook and eye fasteners, lace chapes or aglets, and embroidery beads. In the final category are the buckles used on a variety of dress items including shoes, hats, breeches, and gloves. In most cases it remains hard to associate a buckle with a specific item of dress, as with buttons. Nonetheless, of the 49 buckles recovered from Skálholt, most are probably associated with shoes; half had the curved profile common to shoe buckles and these were made in both copper alloy and iron, though some rare examples were in silver and a white metal. Shoe buckles were treated as items of jewelry, being easily detachable and not sewn to the shoes themselves; buckles could be transferred from one pair of shoes to another, or indeed another item of clothing (Swann, 1982: 20).

Having outlined the nature of the assemblage at Skálholt we now want to offer an interpretation which relates dress to masculinity. In the next section, we sketch out the theoretical background as a prelude to this interpretation.

Situating the Skálholt assemblage within concepts of dress and masculinity

Theoretical perspectives. Studies of masculinity developed more or less alongside the related rise in feminism during the 1970s and 1980s, although it has often remained a more marginal aspect of gender research. In archaeology, studies on masculinity certainly exist (e.g. see Knüsel, 2015) including important studies within historical archaeology (e.g. Beranek, 2012; Wilkie, 2010; Williams, 2008), although the discipline has perhaps yet to reach the level of interest and research attained in history (e.g. Hitchcock and Cohen, 1999; Karras, 2003) or even anthropology (Gutmann, 1997; Kimmel, 2007). Theoretically, much of the work around masculinity initially

worked off or against the seminal writings of Connell, especially his key concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995). Developed as a way of acknowledging the fact that multiple masculine ideals or norms will operate within any society, the notion of a hegemonic masculinity captures the idea that one of the ideals will offer the dominant model for expressing the essentially patriarchal structure of society. Although Connell has defended and modified this concept against criticisms (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), many scholars today have moved away from the idea of a hegemonic masculinity, focusing on exploring the multiplicity and contradictions involved between different aspects of how masculinity is perceived and articulated in different times and places.

Indeed, one of the flaws with much historical work on masculinity in the 1990s and early 2000s was the way it tended to offer coarse periodization for these hegemonic masculinities (e.g. see Connell, 1993 for an early example; for critiques, see Harvey, 2005; Harvey and Shepard, 2005; Shepard, 2005; Tosh, 1994, 2004). Thus, for our period of analysis, i.e. late 17th to end of the 18th century, the typical narrative was of a shift from a masculinity based on the patriarch as head of a household to one of the refined or polite gentleman, with the shift accompanying a transformation of the arena of masculinity from the home to the public sphere (Harvey, 2005, 2012a). Although there may still be some purchase to this broad shift, it ignores not only the continuities but also the existence of contradictory and alternative masculinities, and more importantly does not take into account different cultural contexts where such expressions may be irrelevant. Nonetheless, for our purposes, this work within history offers the most useful contextualization for our material, and even though there is a great deal of variation, we are particularly drawn to the work of historians like Karen Harvey (see especially Harvey, 2012b for the intersection of masculinity and materiality and Harvey, 2015 on dress).

Studies on the relation between male dress and masculinity are helpful here, though some tensions need to be noted. One issue concerns the distinction between male and female dress, as one of the traditional views is that such distinctions only really emerged in the late 18th century in Europe, when male dress started to become less flamboyant; this is not to imply there were no differences prior, but the important aspects of dress have been argued to revolve around status difference rather than gender difference throughout most of the late medieval and early modern period (Wilson, 2003: 22). However, this narrative has been questioned and one of the most important and detailed studies in this regard is Kutchta's historical analysis of the three-piece suit, which explores the relation between this standard male attire and notions of masculinity in Europe since the late 17th century (Kuchta, 2002). His basic argument is that the new dress acted to reverse the previous focus on ostentatious display in male clothing and, for him, the narrative of the suit is one which exemplifies a form of inconspicuous consumption and masculine renunciation (also see Harvey, 2015). Wilson (2003: 27) also discusses this new male attire – somber, severe, differing from the flamboyant dress of the French courts of the 18th century – attributes the renunciation of conspicuous consumption for men to progressive urbanization and ultimately to the industrial

revolution and industrial capitalism. Clearly emerging urbanization had something to do with European models of masculinity and, as mentioned, these may not fit exactly with the Icelandic context. Further, one of the important points to acknowledge is that most of this scholarship pertains to England.

While scholars fully acknowledge the existence of male display in the later 18th century (e.g. McNeil, 1999, 2000; McNeil and Riello, 2005), these are the exceptions that prove the rule: male dress from the late 18th century was increasingly unostentatious. What is perhaps more at stake here is the inherently ambivalent nature of polite masculinity in the 18th century in relation to the notion of effeminacy (Cohen, 1996; Harvey, 2005). This ambiguity has been explored through male dress by Claro (2005) who accentuates the subtle dividing line between refinement and foppishness. Effeminacy was essentially excessive refinement.

So how do we situate our male dress at Skálholt in relation to this work? There is of course much work on masculinity in other countries such as Sweden (Katajala-Peltomaa, 2013; Liliequist, 2007), Germany (Karras, 2003), and the Netherlands (Dudink, 2012), but little in Iceland and what has been written tends to focus either on settlement and the medieval periods or more contemporary times (Asplund, 2011; Björnsson, 2005; Egilsdóttir, 2015; Jakobsson, 2014; Loftsdóttir, 2009; Loftsdóttir et al., 2017). Moreover even this work outside England still tends to focus on urban masculinities, whereas for an essentially rural, farming society like Iceland, constructions of masculinity and gender relations in general will inevitably diverge from urban norms (Hastrup, 1985; Katajala-Peltomaa, 2013: 266). Undoubtedly the male community at Skálholt will have resided somewhere between urban sensibilities and rural values, but as we will argue, even within this community there probably existed multiple masculinities.

Indeed the idea that masculinity is multiple and something which is not so much fixed and given as it is performed, adapted, and modified remains an important guiding thread though most current work on masculinity, one which is of course also common to contemporary studies on gender and other aspects of identity. In order to approach our Skálholt assemblage, it is important to consider the local social and historical context with which it is associated and triangulate our material within that and the more general scholarship just outlined.

European male dress in the North Atlantic in the post-Reformation period

The documentary and visual evidence suggests that European dress styles, tailoring, and fashions during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries were reproduced in Iceland among the elite (Sigurjónsdóttir, 1985).³ In the context of the site of Skálholt, the more specific dress of clerics, priests, or ministers appears to have followed the dress guidelines prescribed during the Reformation. Sumptuary laws were a part of the Reformation and the new religious authorities were motivated to control dress for both religious and economic reasons, feeling that people impoverished themselves with lavish apparel (Cox, 2006). Morality and religion were in opposition to earlier extravagances and ostentatious clothing associated with

Catholicism and the authorities felt compelled to dictate what should be worn by the clergy, advocating for a moderate decency, “a decorum in appearance which pleased God” (Murdock, 2000: 182–188). They promoted well covered bodies and the wearing of long dark gowns (Murdock, 2000: 182–188).

Portraits of Iceland’s 16th-century officials and ministers show them wearing the characteristic dress of North European clerics. This comprised black or somber colors that displayed behavior appropriate to their position: self-control, discipline, and moral authority (Murdock, 2000: 184, 186). The Sheriff Magnús Jónsson, (d. 1591) depicted with his family in a commemorative painting (c. 1580–1600) from Bæ á Rauðasandi at the National Museum of Iceland (bjms 2060), is clearly wearing cloth imports in the form of silk damask black floral patterned cloak and the infamous ruff collar, clearly violating European Lutheran ideals in choice of textiles.

Secular dress in the 16th century was influenced by Spanish style, succeeded in the 17th century by English and Dutch fashions. From these developments emerged the three-piece suit, spreading across northern Europe and to Iceland. It remained at the core of the male wardrobe for the next three centuries, albeit undergoing multiple changes in style and cut (Kuchta, 2002; Ribeiro, 2003). Icelandic paintings for this period, however, suggest that the older styles were not abandoned. The ruff collar, a 16th century accoutrement and vastly popular in Northern Europe, did not disappear immediately in the early 17th century. In a painting from 1685, Gísli Þorláksson accompanied by his three wives (bjms 3111/1888-118) is still wearing the ruff collar as are the three wives (Figure 4).

Bishop of Skálholt, Brýnjolfur Sveinsson (1639–1674) was adamantly opposed to the new styles and gave strict dress codes for his priests (Sigurjónsdóttir, 1985: 37). It is also said that his own clothing was simple and promoted the idea that God had given the Icelanders wool from their sheep and so clothing should be made of homespun (Halldórsson, 1903–1910). It is difficult to know how much he would have influenced the dress code of other males at Skálholt but the next bishop Þorður Þorláksson (1674–1697) seems to have followed Brýnjolfur’s example, based on a contemporary portrait (Mms-4677; Sigurjónsdóttir, 1985: 44). However, Þorður also hired a foreign chef to cook for him and was responsible for bringing musical instruments back to Iceland (Halldórsson, 1903–1910). One might suppose that while he himself may have dressed according to the religious requirements, he may not have been as doctrinaire with his students and household given his openness to foreign things.

However, the late 17th century resistance to changes in dress was not universal, especially among the secular officials in Iceland. Sheriff Jón Þorláksson, the district commissioner of Berunes 1688, is shown as a man who adopted the new style (French) with a buttoned jacket from fine fabric (possibly silk), long hair, and lace neck-cloth (Sigurjónsdóttir, 1985: 43) (Figure 5). His garments are still dark while elites in England and France opted for lighter colors. Black and dark colors were more commonly retained in Northern Europe (Ribeiro, 2003: 676) and Iceland.



Figure 4. Painting of Gísli Þorláksson, Bishop of Hólar, and his three wives Gróa Þorleifsdóttir d. 1660, Ingibjörg Benediktsdóttir d. 1673, and Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir who survived her husband. 1685, Copenhagen. Source: National Museum of Iceland, þjms 3111/1888-118.

By the turn of the 18th century, French fashions dominated Europe as they did with Iceland's elite, the wearing of wigs being a particular innovation (Ribeiro, 2003). The 18th century Bishop of Skálholt, Jón Viðalin (1698–1720) wore such a wig and although the subsequent bishop Jón Árason (1722–1743) was rather more austere in his tastes, his complaints about the students wearing of wigs reveal that this was a fashion that swept many of the young elite men in Iceland



Figure 5. Jón Þorláksson of Berunes and his wife Sesselía Hallgrímsdóttir. Source: National Museum of Iceland, Þíms 708/1869-33/Mms-4.

(Sigurjónsdóttir, 1985: 52). Even if the formal ecclesiastical dress remained somewhat conservative, secular attire clearly followed mainland trends: long jackets with long structured waistcoats and large cuffs, though by the end of the century the three-piece suit had become more narrow and shorter in cut (Ribeiro, 2003: 684). In Iceland, elite males followed these trends, although dark gray and black remained the dominant color.

Throughout the period, footwear for the wealthy in Iceland would have meant imported shoes and boots with vegetable-tanned leather soles and uppers, the most elegant shoes and slippers with fine textile uppers. The majority of Icelanders, however, would have worn homemade shoes of thin, supple, pseudo-leathers (Thomson, 2011: 6–7) of sheep, cow, or even fishskin, even into the early 19th century (Hald, 1972: 168–170; Sigurjónsdóttir, 1985). Contemporary portraiture shows that local footwear of prepared skins was used as depicted in the 17th-century Church benches from Stóra Laugardalskirkja (þjms 10570-71). Conversely, a portrait of wealthy Icelanders on the memorial plaque of the district Commissioner Pétur Þorsteinsson of Ketilstaðir, Vellir painted in 1768 (National Museum of Iceland þjms 12044/1936-146; Eldjárn, 1962) shows two men and a boy in buckled shoes with oval/pointed toes and low heels of typical 18th-century style.

From boys to men: Understanding the role of dress in the reproduction of a male elite

The data pertaining to dress at Skálholt during the 17th and 18th centuries as summarized from excavated material presented above are inevitably partial; whole garments or even recognizable parts of garments are rare. Nonetheless some significant patterns were noted and our aim in this concluding section is to connect these patterns to the previous discussions on masculinity and dress. It is clear we cannot approach the idea of masculinity as if it were a simple, uniform phenomenon. Our goal here is to understand the construction of masculinity as a layered concept incorporating multiple dimensions. In this study, we explore how dress worked to constitute the very specific masculinity inflected by the dimensions of ethnicity, status, and occupation. One salient dimension to this study is the institutional setting, especially the school and thus elements of this work also intersect with the archaeology of institutional life (e.g. see Beisaw and Gibb, 2009) and the tensions often manifest between institutional and individual agencies (e.g. see Hodge, 2013). We will begin with the issue of ethnicity, specifically in relation to nationalism and a sense of being Icelandic.

One of the clearest findings on the analysis of the textiles is an overt ambivalence and ultimately a resistance (particularly on the part of the Bishops) to the modernizing methods of weaving and the resultant appearance of its finished fabric. Such modernizing fabrics were being used at Skálholt, especially during the early 18th century, but traditional homespun maintained a presence and its preferential position as the fabric of choice by this elite community. One would have thought that the coarseness and lack of finish of homespun Icelandic woolen cloth would have been a deterrent particularly to elites, and yet this does not seem to be the case despite the increase in imports from 1700 onwards and the establishment of the weaving workshop in Reykjavik in 1750, capable of producing cloth as fine as the European counterparts.

This does appear to have been a conscious and deliberate choice and may suggest an incipient nationalism in the face of Danish proscriptions. The colonial dimension of Iceland's position within the Danish state has been a topic of much discussion and while the attribution of Iceland as a colony is certainly debatable (e.g. see Lucas and Parigoris, 2013), it does seem clear that the tension between Danish and Icelandic tastes over textiles needs to be read within this larger discourse of nationalism. How explicit this may have been is of course a matter for further research, but one of the basic points about material culture is its ability to articulate such tensions in a nondiscursive way (e.g. Hall, 2000). Certainly an Icelander in the 17th or 18th century would have been very recognizable by their clothing and if foreigners might have perceived such attire as a sign of low civility, for Icelanders it would have carried very different connotations.

However, this incipient nationalism vehicled through the use of homespun may have equally come from women responsible for making the cloth and the garments. For 900 years textile work was a gendered activity; women produced all cloth,

which certainly provided them with a sense of power (see Hayeur-Smith, 2014, 2018). The introduction of Danish, male-run centralized workshops and new technology could have been met with both awe and anger. Women were losing a fundamental aspect of their social selves. This might also explain the contradictory messages being conveyed through paintings which run counter to the archaeological finds. Who were the painters? Who was the targeted audience? The painters were presumably male, working within a given artistic tradition and simply reproducing Icelandic officials as if they were in Europe. The reality was other, if women were reluctant to give up their role as weavers they may have enforced the idea of using homespun but tailored it according to contemporary styles resulting in a distinctly Icelandic “look.” The use of homespun pushed by women may have rung true to many of the bishops who saw in this a way to promote nationalistic pursuits.

Male dress at Skálholt and masculinity itself then seems in part to have been connected to a sense of being Icelandic. However, the extent to which “being Icelandic” was a prominent factor in the day-to-day life for the boys and men living at Skálholt is questionable; such dimensions of identity are most likely to come to the fore in contexts where foreign presence was more immediate and pressing, e.g. by visits of foreigners to Iceland or of Icelanders abroad, though Danish colonial oversight may have been felt in certain details and evidently was prevalent enough to have altered completely the production of cloth.

The same issue of salience also relates to the second dimension of identity: status. This was an elite community composed of a bishop, priest, administrative officials, and sons of the same. Much of their daily interaction would have been with their peers, although there was a sizeable male labor force on the estate and so the question of their elite status would have been at least more evident than that of ethnicity. How was this elite dimension of masculinity articulated through dress? Certainly the imported and modernizing textiles along with contemporary tailoring would have played a role here and despite the overall preference for homespun, it is possible that the ambivalence over modernizing fabrics may testify to some tension between a sense of elite masculinity on the one hand, and an incipient nationalist consciousness on the other hand. One obvious means of circumventing this tension, however, was through the use of imported leather shoes and dress fittings and accessories such as buttons; one could still wear clothing made from homespun, thus upholding traditional values, yet adorn such garments with imported leather footwear and brass and pewter buttons, which subtly yet still openly proclaimed access and means to acquire costly imported items out of reach to the mass of the population. Although more comparative work is needed to see how common metal buttons are on sites of different status in Iceland during this period, the sense is they were rare, at least in the 17th and early 18th century. But it was not simply the visual appearance of metal buttons and buckles on elite dress that would distinguish them; the wearing of heeled shoes would have also affected their gait and therefore the whole way an elite male would have walked would have been strikingly different to a commoner. Heeled shoes are in fact a very clear

example of how the agency of dress and body intersect (also see McNeill and Riello, 2005).

Yet in using dress fittings to resolve one tension, the male population at Skálholt would have now found themselves entangled in another: the Lutheran and clerical prohibitions or restrictions on unnecessary adornment. This brings us to the third and final dimension of masculinity and arguably, the most important in this particular context: occupation. Skálholt was an ecclesiastical institution with the cathedral, the Bishop's residence, and a school which involved a strong element of religious education. At the same time, there were nonclerics there—the bailiff, the schoolteachers, and a large part of the pupils did not aspire to be priests but administrative officials. In many ways, the question of occupation or occupational calling was perhaps the most salient aspect of identity for the male population at Skálholt; in this particular context, it was perhaps the distinction between clerical and nonclerical masculinities that was uppermost, and therefore it is here that we might see the locus of greatest differentiation.

The favoring of dark colors and simple textiles by the clerics certainly meshed well with the nationalist preferences for homespun and catered to the northern European propensity for the lack of lavish attire; yet the glittering and shiny buttons and buckles used to signal day-to-day status and worn as a concession to maintaining the use of homespun simultaneously clashed with the demands of a clerical appearance. The use of buttons at Skálholt testifies to the tensions between two different dimensions of masculinity among this community: status and calling. In a sense, one could see buttons as occupying the battle ground between two divergent masculinities: the clerical and nonclerical. For elite males, certainly articulating status mattered and may even have signaled rebellion, but for the cleric, that obvious material dimension to status display was at odds with the humility and material detachment expected of a servant of God (although their clerical vestments during religious ceremony were anything but austere as noted by Guðjónsson (1982) – clearly another division must be drawn for clerics whose daily attire was inconspicuous but during religious ritual was anything but). If we think about this tension expressed spatially and organizationally on the site, then one might expect to see a greater use of metal, “eye-catching” buttons in the school as opposed to the Bishops' residence, assuming that a large portion of the school boys would aspire to a nonclerical masculinity. And this is indeed what we see, specifically during the 18th century, where the ratio of wood (i.e. textile covered) to metal buttons in the bishops wing is roughly 1:1, while in the school, metal buttons outnumber wooden buttons by 4:1 (Figure 6).

Although small objects, buttons clearly had great agency and their role in articulating and constructing different versions of masculinity combined with other systems of dress such as cloth and leather, specifically in relation to an individual's calling or aspired occupation, should not be overlooked. As archaeologists, we rarely find whole garments, but from scraps we can still discern the way clothing was caught up in wider discourses and networks around the constitution of social identity: how the preference for homespun connects to incipient

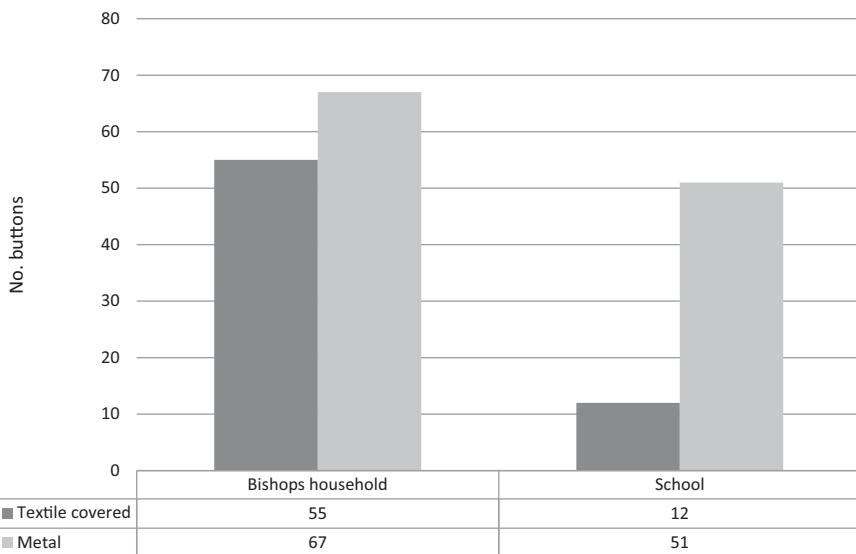


Figure 6. Comparison of button types between school and bishops residence.

nationalism, and how the wearing of shiny buttons and heeled shoes is linked to mediating status and calling among a predominantly male community in the North Atlantic during the early modern period.

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Notes

1. In this paper we use the term “dress” in its broad sense as stipulated by Eicher and Roach Higgins (1992), as an “assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body,” this includes garments/clothing, jewelry, accessories, as well as permanent body modification and changes color, textile, smell, and shapes made to the body directly.
2. Thread counts reflecting the quality of textiles are useful archaeologically for tracking changes in textile production strategies, assemblage variability, cloth standardization, industrialization, and more (Hayeur-Smith, 2012, 2018). In the medieval period, they are important attributes for identifying legal cloth (along with spin direction and weave type) (Hayeur-Smith, 2012, 2018).
3. No comprehensive study exists on the everyday dress of male Icelanders during this period other than Sigurjónsdóttir (1985). Icelandic paintings depict elite attire and aspirations pertaining to dress, while the data from the site itself are indicative of its occupants who themselves were from the elite and largely male.

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