South Station Hoard: Imagining, Creating and Empowering Violent Remains

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Warrior Heroes or Warrior Bullies?

Debra Lustig and Carlee A. Bradbury
Ritual consistency of conflict during the early Middle Ages forced young men to conform to an image of heroism based almost entirely on deeds performed in battle. In this chapter, we will broadly outline and discuss key, and often conflicting, elements of the medieval warrior hero’s identity and the visual culture it required and inspired. Our primary role model is Beowulf. This will lead to a discussion of key pieces from the Staffordshire Hoard and how they (and their mutilations) make these ideas of warriorness manifest. Ultimately, we see the warrior hero as a potential monster figure, just as a young girl can devolve into a bully in our own contemporary culture.

Physical violence often defined manhood for early medieval warriors who sought to assert themselves by defeating powerful foes, elevating themselves as leaders, and acquiring resources to gain prestige. Opportunities for self-aggrandizement in battle proved powerful tools for increasing social status. But as the political atmosphere of the period changed and small, local chiefdoms consolidated into larger, regional seats of power, the nature of war changed as well, demanding new skills from warriors across the board, changing the definition of manhood.

Self-control was essential to success in early medieval warfare, to the extent that warriors sought to rid themselves of emotions that could hinder action in
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Deborah Shepherd calls this ‘dehumanization’ – the shedding of human qualities to attain greater value as a warrior. Dehumanization by purging fear, guilt, and anger delivered the necessary regulation of self warriors needed in order to maintain battle lines in a time when group discipline meant the difference between winning and losing.¹ As J.J. Cohen summarized, “Society requires heroes, so it constructs them; construction is a dangerous process, producing both embodied subjects and monsters. Society needs heroes, but it must fear them with the deepest kind of love.”²

This extended into early medieval literature, wherein the perfect man is Beowulf, the Hero of Heroes, the ultimate warrior. He leads the Geats as both their prince and their brother in arms, constructing the perfect warband. As a warrior, Beowulf is courageous, noble, and physically powerful; throughout in the epic, he proves he is willing to die fighting for an ideal, demonstrating a rare depth of character. He represents the most complete image of a warrior’s personality that we have today, typifying physical and emotional traits that would have been upheld in warrior societies of that time.

While Beowulf exemplifies warrior behavior, his tragic flaw – his irrational and emotional judgment – leads to his ultimate destruction: a descent into
monstrosity. This dehumanization trends in the opposite direction of Shepherd’s meaning; instead of losing touch with emotions during battle, Beowulf lost his sensibility, his masculinity, and his ability to relate to the other members of his warrior band. As he devolved further away from humanity, rather than becoming more heroic, he became villainous.

Beowulf enters the epic as the greatest of heroes among men. By his clothes and weapons alone, the coastguard recognized Beowulf as a warrior beyond compare and asked of his origins:

Where do you come from, carrying these decorated shields and shirts of mail, these cheek-hinged helmets and javelins? I am Hrothgar’s herald and officer. I have never seen so impressive or large an assembly of strangers. Stoutness of heart, bravery not banishment, must have brought you to Hrothgar.

Later, however, in preparing for the fight against Grendel, he chose not to fight in accordance with warrior code, removing his weapons to lower himself to Grendel’s level. Instead of thinking rationally, he made an emotional decision that critically altered his behavior from that point on. This is the first step in the dehumanization of Beowulf.
While he returns with the hand of his foe as a trophy, he continues to devolve. Beowulf slowly loses touch with his human connection to the rest of the warband; even though he returns victorious, he fails to exploit this by bragging. While some believe his removal from the sport of boasting expresses a level of piety, in truth, he is suffering the consequences of his irrational behavior by experiencing an inability to reinforce the bonds that were vital to success in early medieval warbands. Communal activities – feasting, storytelling, drinking, and boasting – appear frequently in Anglo-Saxon epics. This is in great part due to the nature of early medieval warfare, wherein bonds between warrior-brothers were paramount to victory.\(^5\)

The effects of his key, pivotal decision are reinforced again and again as he follows that path of irrationality. His emotional behavior has degraded his performance as a warrior; he stands at the edge of the monstrous.

In the following segments of the epic, Grendel’s mother steals the hand-trophy – metaphorically stealing Beowulf’s manhood. In his fight to regain his triumph, Beowulf dons his armor again to symbolically affirm his humanity before the battle, but it is a false façade, as seen by the rejection from Hrunting, the sword that had never failed a man in battle. As the
narrator relates,

...the shining blade refused to bite. It spared her and failed the man in his need. It had gone through many hand-to-hand fights, had hewed the armor and helmets of the doomed, but here at last the fabulous powers of that heirloom failed.⁶

Hrunting is a man’s weapon; its betrayal of Beowulf clearly marks him as something unworthy. His irrational decisions continue to impact him. Here, the sword is the equivalent to society; the sword has judged him and condemned his status as a warrior, leading to dire consequences. He is then forced to take up the sword of Grendel’s mother. Using a female’s weapon effectively castrates Beowulf as a man, dismantling his manhood completely. At the end of the epic, as Beowulf faces down the dragon, his weakness fractures the confidence and loyalties of his men and, as a result, they flee, abandoning him to his death.

Beowulf began as the ultimate hero and, indeed, the descriptions of his bravery and resolve to serve his people demonstrate the narrator’s unfaltering confidence in Beowulf as the epitome of warriorhood despite his obvious flaws.⁷ Even as Beowulf fell into
the throes of anti-heroism, repeatedly committing transgressions against the tenets of societal morality, he continued to represent the ideal in a highly war-oriented society. This development illustrates that perceptions of early medieval heroes were not black and white, even within their own communities. Regardless of the internal and external transformations that take place, there is a persistent need, in every culture, to believe in the excellence and supremacy of heroes; we propose that, within societies that are driven by violence and a need to assert identity, there is even a closeted desire to indulge in perversions of heroism and pursue the twisted susceptibilities of human nature into the depths of monstrosity. Even the narrator, who remained faithful to Beowulf’s image throughout the epic, referred to him as aglaecan, a word that can mean both ‘monster’ and ‘fierce warrior.’ The word is also used to describe Grendel and the dragon. Despite this blurring of lines, the narrator upheld the warrior as an archetype until the very end. Moreover, perhaps it is because of Beowulf’s vulnerability, his depth of character, that his story is so compelling and represents a truer image of early medieval heroism.

As demonstrated at the beginning of the epic, Beowulf’s heroism was immediately apparent by means of his armor and weapons and the way he presented himself. For example, take the sword Hrunting, given
to Beowulf by Unferth as he prepared for battle:

At that moment was of no small importance: the brehon handed him a hilted weapon, a rare and ancient sword named Hrunting. The iron blade with its ill-boding patterns had been tempered in blood. It had never failed the hand of anyone who had hefted it in battle, anyone who had fought and faced the worst in the gap of danger. This was not the first time it had been called to perform heroic feats.9

Swords like Hrunting were generally worn at the waist, easily accessed and proudly displayed. The gold and garnet hilt collars, gilded pommels, and filigree pommel caps with interlace found in the Staffordshire Hoard speak of a culture that relied, in large part, on visual display for control and influence. A pair of gold hilt plates exemplifies this nicely.10 The surface of each plate is delicately patterned with curving lines of filigree that almost seem to dance and move. Each plate is set with two discs of polished garnet that twinkle in the right light. Presented importantly at the waist, the complete sword would have been a magnificent sight.

Swordsmen, with their expensively crafted weapons, were likely elites in society from families of high status. Like the fictional hero Beowulf, they
would have been brought up in a lifestyle prepared at all times for war, wherein battle itself could be used as a way to prove individual worth.\textsuperscript{11}

Good quality helmets – or any helmets period – were generally reserved for those who fought enemy swordsmen, which implies that warriors who wore helmets were swordsmen themselves.\textsuperscript{12}

Beowulf’s helmet was equipped with a ‘wale’ or wala, a wire ridge across the cap designed to deflect sword blows from above; given that most strikes would come down at an angle, the ridge’s placement deterred the blade, making it slide off. The presence of a wale implies that the wearer intended to see intense sword combat, suggesting some amount of proficiency on the part of the wearer. The Sutton Hoo helmet bore a wale and while it clearly would not have been used in battle, its presence indicates the owner of the helmet as one worthy of the title of hero.

The crossband style, seen in both the Benty Grange helmet and the Coppergate helmet, was a common type in the Early Middle Ages. The Coppergate helmet also has a wale. Two highly decorated bands of copper-alloy cross the Coppergate helmet front-to-back and ear-to-ear, hence the name ‘crossband.’ The nose guard is brass, as are the eyebrows, all of which have been meticulously engraved with elaborate lines and interlace so delicate, they almost seem out of place.
on such a hefty piece of armor. The copper bands across the top contain Latin inscriptions, including the name ‘Oshere.’ If Oshere was the owner, he was indeed a very important man to have owned such a helmet.

Similarly, a cheekpiece\textsuperscript{13} from the Staffordshire Hoard demonstrates the extreme wealth and status of the possessor of the helmet. Made of gold and niello, the cheekpiece contains four registers of Anglo-Saxon zoomorphic interlace sweeping up around the warrior’s jaw in a curved diagonal line to where the fittings\textsuperscript{14} once attached. It is a beautiful piece. Conservationists

14. Drawings of: Top, K1509; Middle, K772; Above, K288; © Debra Lustig.
have cleared away the dirt so the edges of the golden interlace catch the light and gleam. The nooks and crannies of the panel are crisp and well-defined; even the image seems to have mass and texture. Given the incredible detail of this one piece, the helmet in its entirety must have been an impressive sight, especially since it would have been a part of a full set of similarly remarkable armor.

Unlike helmets and swords, shields were used rather widely. Unlike helmets and swords, shields were used rather widely.15 With the development of group formation tactics like the shield-castle, wielding a shield on the frontline required bravery and strong bonds of loyalty. In order to hold up larger shields – which other warriors would sometimes clamber over – shield-castle men needed to be incredibly strong and they often forewent armor, which could be heavy, leading to great loss of life on the forward line. In spite of the fact that these frontline warriors would have been disposable (compared to an elite swordsman, for example), a piece from the Staffordshire Hoard suggests that the shield played an important role in signifying the status of the warrior who bore it.

At first glance, K652 doesn’t look like much more than a twisted bit of scrap metal (for all that gold can be called ‘scrap’). Upon closer inspection, beyond the frayed edges and crumpled parts, shapes begin to emerge: the heads of birds and scales of fish, curving...
rows of lines and sharp, linear angles. Early speculation from the team conducting conservation and research on the hoard suggests the piece might have been a shield mount.¹⁶ The curved tip of the eagles’ beaks, the perfectly circular eyes, and strong legs, bent as if the animal is perched, echo the style of the raven shield-mount from Sutton Hoo. Each bird is separated by fish with elongated bodies and symmetric rows of scales. A great deal of time was taken to ensure this shield appeared worthy of high regard.

Behind the proud displays of weapons and armor, the duality of medieval warriors returns us
to Shepherd’s concept of dehumanization and we expand it to investigate the development of warbands and retinues. As early medieval war changed to reflect large-scale, institutionalized battle structures, warriors increasingly fought as cohesive units. Nonetheless, the growing importance of units did not downgrade the weight of single individuals. In other words, the individual warrior was still a critical component on the battlefield. Like a machine, the group required each cog – each member – to function appropriately. Even though battles were won or lost as units, the vital decisions of each single person to act as a group or not could turn the tide of a conflict.

The shield-castle, a war tactic used widely across Britain and continental Europe throughout the Early Middle Ages, required strong unity to be effective. Breaking the formation led to holes in the defensive line that could be exploited by the enemy.

At the Battle of Stamford Bridge, 1066 CE, King Harald Sigutharson of Norway used the shield-castle against his foe, King Harold Godwinson of England. Stirred into a battle rage and tricked into the offensive, the king of Norway broke his battle-line to launch into the midst of his enemies, fighting in a frenzy without armor. His actions disrupted the ranks of his men, causing the machine to fall apart. As Snorri Sturluson recounted of the battle, “...but when they [the English]
had broken their [the Norwegians’] shield-rampart the Englishmen rode up from all sides, and threw arrows and spears on them.” The king of Norway went down with an arrow to the throat, leaving his men leaderless and scattered.

The contribution of individuals to the group appeared similarly at the Battle of Maldon in 991. The poem compares heroes to cowards to exemplify virtuous character in the face of unfavorable circumstances, again highlighting dehumanization as a key to group success. It begins with the battle’s staging:

Then Byrhtnoth marshaled his soldiers, riding and instructing, directing his warriors how they should stand and the positions they should keep, and ordering that their shields properly stand firm with steady hands and not be afraid.

Despite this excellent preparation, the English lost to the Vikings. The loss was suffered, for the most part, due to the flight of a large portion of the English army. Some stood and died valiantly, maintaining the line and winning glory and honor for their homeland. Other warriors fled in terror, breaking from their positions and abandoning their brothers to their deaths. In this case, as we saw in the end of Beowulf
as he fights the dragon, the war machine broke down, leaving a scattered few individuals to be crushed by the invading menace.

Based on these military accounts, it is plain to see how definitively actions in battle could paint a man’s image as heroic or otherwise. It would seem that those who fell on the field, having performed admirably in the service of the king and society, would receive burials fitting of their conduct. And while it is common to look to a society’s burial practices to determine aspects of culture in life, Heinrich Härke has shown that for Anglo-Saxon warrior culture, that simply cannot be done. In his studies of warrior graves, Härke discovered men with disabilities, genetic anomalies, and even some children (ages 12 months to 14 years) were buried with weapons. Yet there were men who had clearly received injuries in battle who went to the grave without any weapons. In addition, men with weapons were twice as likely to have been placed in coffins, which correlated with a demonstration of wealth. In conclusion, Härke summarized:

The Anglo-Saxon weapon burial rite was independent of the intensity of warfare; it did not always reflect functional fighting equipment; it was not determined by the individual’s ability to fight nor by the actual participation in combat.
Weapon burial was positively correlated with burial wealth, with labor investment into the burial, and with stature; and it was, in some places at least, determined by descent.\(^{19}\)

Thus, it seems that (as in many complex societies) the individual male’s military rank or physical fitness did not reflect his right to be buried with weapons so much as his family’s status.

A possible explanation for this behavior is that warriors as a group, while highly regarded for their honorable deeds, did not begin as social elites. Early warring bands of men would have been pushed out of society as functional outcasts, serving no other purpose but to fight.\(^{20}\) While swordsmen like Beowulf in the epic might have risen from an elite class, not all warriors possessed such a high status in society.

Indeed, for all their control, warriors seemed to have been fringe-characters, at least up through the 5th century. Roving around and waging war on enemy groups kept the warbands occupied enough to separate them from the rest of society, a twofold benefit. Despite their ability to dehumanize, the violence capable of warriors was something most civilians did not trust.\(^{21}\)

At one point, not long before, the epitome of warriorhood could be summarized in word: berserk. Snorri Sturluson in the 13th century recounted,
“[Odin’s] men rushed forwards without armour, were as mad as dogs or wolves, bit their shields, and were strong as bears or wild bulls, and killed people at a blow, but neither fire nor iron told upon themselves. These were called Berserker.”\(^{22}\) For certain, the role of the berserk was solitary, not team-based, which explains why berserk warriors quickly went out of fashion as newer battle tactics favoring group unity came to the fore. Berserks, once heroes of Sagas, became outcasts and marauders as the demands of warfare changed, lowered to harassing peasants and townsfolk.\(^{23}\) The lingering remnants of the potential for warriors to fall into this kind of behavior were likely what terrified normal citizens so much.

The Anglo-Saxon poem “Wulf and Eadwacer” illuminates an early society that seemed to have found a way to segregate, and yet tolerate, its warband. The narrator is a young woman who has given birth to a child or will soon and the father is a young man living nearby, “on a separate island in the fens inhabited by men ‘fierce in slaughter.’” The woman mourns because she cannot marry her lover; if he approaches with a group of his men, the community will try to trap him.\(^{24}\) This poem could be a reflection of an earlier anthropological time when Anglo-Saxon tribal societies lived in fear of the capabilities of their warriors and best handled that fear by sending them
away.\textsuperscript{25} As time progressed, these warbands would have been integrated as thanes and further stratified in the later medieval eras.\textsuperscript{26}

If we take the data gathered by Härke and the changing structure of community during the Early Middle Ages, it is reasonable to assume that warriors were becoming integrated closer into the heart of society. A man with battle wounds, buried with a sword, inside a coffin, very well could have been both a warrior and an elite. Into the 7th century, Anglo-Saxon Britain saw a climate of peace. Warriors – perhaps entire families of warriors, if we believe the role was hereditary – hung up their shields for more prosperous work to benefit their tribes. It is entirely plausible that during this time, social outcasts could have transformed into functioning members of a community. During the time of integration, the warband would have still been singled out as a subculture.\textsuperscript{27} By the 7th century, individuals would have been recognized as having inherent, hereditary rights to leadership – such as affiliation with a powerful god and prestige from acts in battle. Härke’s studies of weapons graves up through the 5th and 6th centuries indicate changes in the sociopolitical atmosphere might have been leading in this direction.

The early medieval warrior had one goal: to provide for and protect his society by fighting and
controlling resources. In the end, dying in battle represented the ultimate triumph. Excellent progress towards this goal strengthened a warrior’s manhood by granting him prestige among his fellows. His deeds in war had to reflect the highest standard of honorable conduct, as warriors acted as an arm of society. During the Early Middle Ages, groups identified more with regional strongholds than national seats of power. Each group developed its own definition of virtuous conduct and when those groups clashed, their differences sparked moral conflicts.

The combination of diverse power systems and regional cultures led to a highly structured Home v. Outside perception. A warrior’s strict duty to his warrior-brothers, his king, and his society pressurized this antagonistic way of thinking, allowing for intense conflicts to begin when the homeland was threatened:

Sea-thieves messenger, deliver back in reply, tell your people this spiteful message, that here stand undaunted an Earl with his band of men who will defend our homeland, Aethelred’s country, the lord of my people and land... To us it would be shameful that you with our coin to your ships should get away without a fight, now you thus far into our homeland have come."28
This excerpt from the Battle of Maldon demonstrates the sweeping disconnectedness and shared hostility of groups in the early medieval north.

According to Shepherd’s understanding, “Since resources on the Outside by definition belong to no human, the claims of the possessors of such resources have no validity.” The pressure to acquire war goods was so strong in society that a man’s inability to loot and plunder tarnished his image as a warrior. Indeed, “a hero who [did] not win treasure [did] not deserve to be called a hero, a king who [did] not distribute treasure scarcely deserve[d] the title of king.”

This line of thought allowed for pillaging, raiding of livestock, ambushing, pirating, and other previously ‘dishonorable’ behaviors to be seen as honorable and even heroic as long as such actions provided for the good of the Home and to the detriment of the Outside. Julius Caesar explained a similar phenomenon in The Gallic Wars:

Robberies which are committed beyond the boundaries of each state bear no infamy, and they avow that these are committed for the purpose of disciplining their youth and of preventing sloth.

Roving bands of young Irishmen in tales connected with Finn MacCumaill were said to have
robbed and snatched women in the winter. Their behaviors were expected – even tolerated – because their presence ensured the continued success of the community as a whole. In addition, the bands saw fit to attack the community’s rivals – a benefit worth the sacrifice, no doubt.32

The Vikings had a distinct advantage when they came into contact with insular warriors, as their morals and codes of ethics reflected a vastly different society. As such, the Anglo-Saxons saw their tactics as despicable: “…and so began to use guile, the hateful strangers…”33

Ironically, had the Anglo-Saxons been the ones to employ such tactics, they would have seen the schemes as incredibly clever and heroic.

Endemic warfare demanded a unified and highly prejudiced front against the Outside, cultivating strong bonds of loyalty within warbands to get the job done. Warriors were naturally reliant on social engagements to build connections that would serve them on the battlefield. Storytelling and boasting poured the foundations of epics like Beowulf, emphasizing the importance of recitation in communal atmospheres. Exaltation of one’s own actions in battle reinforced ‘martial reliability’ and encouraged camaraderie.34

In addition to boasting and feasting, warriors depended on plunder for prestige. Loot served a strong
purpose in affirming a man’s warrior status and his ability as a hero to supply resources for his community. As seen in Beowulf, a system of reciprocity became the norm, wherein the leader gave weapons and armor and in return, the thanes collected and brought back war plunder “as proof of glory.”35 Gathering prestige was, as previously mentioned, a key aspect of a warrior’s main goal; loot from the Outside helped to facilitate elevation in status amongst warrior peers. As gathering resources was such a strong part of the definition of being a warrior at this time, it is possible to equate the ownership of prestige goods with more intangible concepts of warrior heroism.36

Because of his nature, the trends of the time, and his society, a warrior’s identity was wrought in part by what happened when he was challenged. Under the threat of being challenged, a warrior would go out of his way to demonstrate his own superiority and strength by destroying the relics of other warriors and cultures. In order to elevate and prove themselves, warriors needed to tear down others.

Aside from boasting and acquiring prestige through loot, warriors turned to visual demonstrations of power to dominate others and assert status. A warrior’s weapons were as much a canvas to show wealth and standing, as they were functional martial tools. Evidence exists within the Staffordshire Hoard
to suggest the purposeful mutilation of beautifully crafted martial and religious metalwork. Instead of presenting a catalogue of objects from the hoard, we analyze a small selection in which we see examples of the epitome of early medieval craftsmanship that have been torn, broken, bent, and defaced. These objects are marked by a horrible need to injure the identity of their former owners.

The seax, a single-edged blade used widely during this time, was often decorated with grooves, lines, and inlays and sometimes inscriptions, which occurred far less frequently. Several seax parts were found in the Staffordshire Hoard. One, an oblong hilt fitting, was produced with stunning craftsmanship. The entire piece is made of gold, with garnet inlays that were perfectly cut to fit into the decorative animal interlace that forms a band around the exterior. On three sides, the edges and lines appear perfectly clean, seeming to have defied age and burial conditions. But on the fourth side, a massive dent has caved in the base, as if some massive force had crushed it at one point. Some garnet pieces are missing, knocked from their fittings by some brutal strength. Early medieval sculptures reveal that seaxes were generally worn across the stomach, with the pommel positioned diagonally near the right hand. Given the blade and hilt ornamentations, it is unlikely the seaxe was a
major weapon; a single blow and the inlays would have been ruined. Both the Repton rider and Middleton B, sculptures of early medieval warriors, display the seax as part of a noble’s complete image. It is likely these blades were used to demonstrate status as well as skill in war and the mutilated remnants found in the Staffordshire Hoard paint a very clear picture of the ways in which the defilers (for lack of a better term) wished to destroy those exact qualities in their enemies.

In addition to seaxes, warriors were often equipped with a combination of barbed spears, which
were most useful against unarmored foes and horses, and smooth spears, which were used in close-quarters combat. Spears were the most common offensive weapon to accompany men to the grave, occurring in four out of five cases. Other weapons occurred with an average frequency of one in ten. Long spears remained in use up through the 6th century, but as shield-formations developed further, frontline-men switched to shorter spears, which were easier to use as thrusting weapons from behind a shield-wall. The development of the hauberk led to a change in spear-types; injuring a mounted warrior wearing a chainmail hauberk required stronger equipment. Sturdier, heavier spears designed specifically for this purpose were limited – they could only by thrown or thrust once.

While there were no spears or spear parts found in the Staffordshire Hoard – and certainly, no functional spear would be glitzed up in gold and garnet inlays if it were to be used in battle – a variety of mystery objects from the Hoard more clearly exemplify the aggressive manifestations of early medieval warrior prejudices against one another. For all its fine craftsmanship, one of these mystery objects truly does define the word ‘scrap.’ At one point, it might have been some kind of circular disk, with garnet inlays and alternating sections of interlace, as we have seen in other objects
from the Hoard. What remains of it now, however, is almost hard to look at. The disk has been crumpled into a misshapen mockery of what clearly was once quite beautiful. The edges are so badly torn that the gold almost looks like jagged aluminum foil. Entire sections of gem-and-interlace patterns have been removed in such a brutal fashion that the contours
surrounding these voids are bent back and ripped. In truth, this is only one portion of the object. The other two segments – a cylindrical fitting similarly outfitted with garnet inlays and a small, wheel-shaped top boasting a millefiori glass stud\textsuperscript{44} – were likely twisted until they came apart.

Guy Halsall proposes that Anglo-Saxon England was shaped by the dynamic flux of violence exhibited by the warrior cultures of that age, an ebb and flow of ritual and non-ritual warfare. Ritual wars, or endemic wars, would have served to ease intra-societal pressures by isolating an outside source against which the society can justify conflict, reasserting group unity. Marvin Harris has pointed out, warfare in this style was more like ‘overenthusiastic football,’ wherein both sides engaged with enthusiasm, not needing to fear severe injury or death so long as precautions were taken.\textsuperscript{45} Most notably, this led to more focused veneration of the warrior, like modern sports heroes.\textsuperscript{46} Non-ritual warfare occurred on a larger scale when ritual war failed to re-establish balance between groups. These were wars of conquest, signified by times of social stress wherein the rules of ritual warfare were typically not followed, people were slaughtered, and politics played an important role in the transfer of land.\textsuperscript{47}

If the Home felt its identity was threatened and endemic warfare failed to return internal equilibrium,
the need to reassert personhood could drive warriors to commit acts of dominance, or – put simply – bullying. Heroism, like monstrosity, is simply a garment to be donned; despite its invulnerable appearance, heroism – and masculinity, as far as they are synonymous – can be deconstructed and fractured as easily as any façade. When the cultural appearance that is the armor of heroism is broken, the individual wearing it would do almost anything to rebuild the artifice; at this level, when an entire livelihood is threatened, unheroic behavior emerges. In the case of the Staffordshire Hoard, sumptuously crafted martial objects were purposefully defaced and mutilated. The destruction of property to rebuild self-assurance exists as a common element of bullying behavior event today. Given the aggressively expansionistic climate of 7th century Anglo-Saxon England – approximately when the Staffordshire Hoard was buried – it is well within the realm of reasonable to consider this as an extension of non-ritual warfare as political boundaries were pushed and tested and the Home was pitted again and again against the ever-strengthening and unsettling Outside.

The Early Middle Ages have been categorized as a time of change. Politically, local chiefdoms amalgamated into larger, regional seats of power while still remaining separate and diverse enough to provoke
conflict. The need for more standardized warfare tactics led to a new breed of warrior: the professional. Men in battle were expected to wield both their weapons and their bodies with strict discipline and control, enforced by new strategies on the field that favored team solidarity over individual strengths. Warfare became somewhat of a ritual to regulate societal pressures, providing opportunities for young men to prove their heroism. Warriors formed warbands, acting as an arm of society to protect the Home from outsiders and collect resources. Acquiring prestige goods and self-exaltation were important facets of warfare, ultimately leading to the glorification of the warrior as a hero. When endemic warfare failed to bring about societal equilibrium, wars of conquest emerged to fill the gap, pushing warriors into new situations. Facing threats to their masculine identities, warriors resorted to bullying tactics, leading to the purposeful destruction evidenced in the Staffordshire Hoard.